



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

# A Summary of Family Listening Sessions

*July 2022*

## Overview

As a first step in the “Early Learning Transition Check-In” project to redesign Oregon’s Kindergarten Assessment (OKA), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Oregon Early Learning Division (ELD) worked together to create a family interview. Ultimately, ODE and ELD intend for this interview to be conducted annually by kindergarten educators with the families entering their classes each fall.

The purpose of the interviews is: 1) to provide ELD with information about families’ early learning experiences, and 2) to promote relationship building among educators, children, and families. This interview is one tool in a set of new tools that ODE, ELD, and the project’s Advisory Panel are working to develop as part of the [Early Learning Transition Check-In project](#).

In May and June of 2022, ODE and ELD staff conducted Family Listening Sessions with a small number of families to gain initial feedback on the interview questions and process (*see documents in Appendix A*). The purpose of these family listening sessions was to ask families if the questions created were clear and meaningful, if the process was welcoming and easy to conduct, and if they would recommend any changes to improve the questions or the experience. In June of 2022, ODE and ELD staff also consulted on the family interview with the project’s Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel includes early educators, kindergarten educators, early learning system partners, and researchers. ODE and ELD is revising the family interview design based on feedback from the family listening sessions and from the Advisory Panel. The revised version will be used during a Fall 2022 Pilot to try out the new tool with a larger number of kindergarten educators and families.

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## Participating Families

ODE and ELD prioritized inviting parents, guardians, and primary caregivers from communities that are racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally marginalized by Oregon’s education system to participate in the Family Listening Sessions. Centering and elevating the voices of families in these communities is one intentional approach to advancing racial equity as part of this redesign process.

Outreach and recruitment efforts also aimed to include families from diverse regions across Oregon. A total of six listening sessions were held: three in English, one in Spanish, one with a Spanish interpreter, and one with a Russian interpreter. Across the six sessions, a total of six parents/caregivers participated<sup>1</sup>. Participants received Target gift cards for \$25 to thank them for their time and feedback in these listening sessions.

Since the listening sessions were conducted during the spring, kindergarten educators were not able to interview children and their parents/caregivers as they entered the school year. Therefore, listening session participants included families with children who were still in early learning settings and children who were already in kindergarten. Interviews were also conducted by a variety of people, including preschool educators, Advisory Panelists, ELD or ODE staff members.

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## Family Perspectives on the Family Interview

All of the parents/caregivers in the listening sessions completed the family interview, and most answered the interview questions thoroughly. Half of the families reported that they believe they would have shared the same amount or more information if they had completed the interview during the fall with their children's kindergarten educators. One participant stated that the interview felt conversational and allowed them to share openly. Another participant specifically liked how family-centered the interview questions were.

## Suggestions for Improvement

Participating parents/caregivers made multiple recommendations for improving both the interview process and the interview questions. Their comments were largely consistent with the feedback that the project's Advisory Panel provided. A summary of family and Advisory Panel feedback is provided below:

### Revise the process.

Several families and Advisory Panelists recommended sharing the questions with families in advance of the interviews, so that parents/caregivers would have time to think about the answers before discussing them with their kindergarten educators. Some families also asked which questions would be required and whether educators, schools, and/or districts could modify the questions for children and families in their communities. One parent/caregiver suggested having a set of questions that educators could review during a training and then select from this list for their interviews.

### Build in clarifying prompts and examples.

Advisory Panelists who conducted interviews during the listening sessions noted that for two of the questions in particular (3 and 4), they had to provide examples and additional prompts for parents/caregivers. These examples helped parents/caregivers determine what the questions were asking and what kinds of answers interviewers were hoping families would share. Parents/caregivers agreed that Question 4 was especially confusing. Families and interviewers agreed that it would be helpful to revise the wording of these questions, and build in examples, prompts, and follow-up

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<sup>1</sup>An additional five parents/caregivers participated in a focus group. However, they did not directly conduct or review the family interview questions and process, so their responses and feedback are not included in this summary.

questions to the interview process.

### **Improve the translations.**

Several parents/caregivers noted that questions that had been translated from English into their home language were confusing to them. They recommended working with native speakers to revise the wording of these questions. Advisory Panelists suggested that additional tools (e.g., video recordings of someone speaking the questions aloud in multiple languages) could be helpful for families.

### **Add more questions.**

Interviewers asked parents/caregivers about what they wish they had been asked during the family interview. Families recommended adding questions about three topics: 1) the relationships of educators, children, and families, 2) children's strengths and needs, and 3) early learning and care programs that families would recommend. Advisory Panelists also recommended asking directly about children's strengths and interests.

### **Train educators on how to conduct the family interviews.**

The Advisory Panelists in particular shared multiple ideas for how to design training materials and processes that would support kindergarten educators with the family interviews. They suggested including tips and guidance for educators on how to make families feel welcome and comfortable, how to make the interview feel conversational, and how to focus on relationship building in the interviews. They also recommended including more information about how the data and information gathered during the interviews would be used, not only by individual kindergarten educators, but also by schools, districts, and the state (ELD and ODE). They suggested supporting educators with access to information about local resources to share with families. Finally, Advisory Panelists suggested the training should include logistical information, such as who will schedule the interviews, what to do if a parent/caregiver cannot attend in person, how to support families using the translated interview questions, how to work with interpreters, and whether educators are allowed to ask additional, optional questions that are tailored to their families and school.

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## **Conclusion**

Overall, the majority of the participants in the Family Listening Sessions expressed gratitude for the questions being asked. Families and Advisory Panelists reported that the questions would support kindergarten educators to connect with children and parents/caregivers, as well as inform both ELD and ODE. One parent/caregiver mentioned that while they were nervous in the beginning, the questions were mostly clear and made them think more deeply about what they wanted for their child.

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This report was developed by the Oregon Department of Education and Oregon Early Learning Division. For more information, visit [oregonearlylearning.com/PreKCheckin](https://oregonearlylearning.com/PreKCheckin) or email [PreKCheckin@ode.oregon.gov](mailto:PreKCheckin@ode.oregon.gov).

# Appendices

The following documents were given to the people conducting the family interviews during the Spring 2022 listening sessions. Families did not have access to this information.

- A. The instructions gave interviewers background information about the purpose of the family interviews and concrete information about what they should do before and during the interview.
- B. The sample script provided interviewers with guidance about what they should say to families while they conducted the interviews. This section also included the interview questions along with two columns: one column was where interviewers recorded notes about families' responses. For three questions, this column included a structured list interviews could use to code or categorize what families mentioned in their answers. The other column shows connections between the questions asked and Oregon's strategic plan for early learning, *Raise Up Oregon*.
- C. The feedback questions gave interviewers a set of questions to ask families in order to get their feedback about what worked well and what could be improved about the family interview questions and process.

## Appendix A: LISTENING SESSION INSTRUCTIONS

Please take a few moments to review these pieces of information before you meet with the caregiver.

### Background of Kindergarten Assessment:

ODE and ELD took the suspension as an opportunity to redesign the assessment to better address the concerns that were shared by community members. Some of the concerns were procedural but also were related to biases of the assessment. Here are a few that were noted:

- Confusion about the purpose of the Kindergarten Assessment which lead to inconsistent buy in from proctors and users of the information
- Concerns about the timing of the administration in relation to children’s first encounters with school
- Concerns about the interpretation and reporting of results and their utility to serve the purposes of the assessment
- Concerns about the cultural responsiveness of the assessment, including, but not limited to, assessing students who speak a language other than English and the risk of implicit bias on the Approaches to Learning measure
- Concerns about how schools engage students and their families regarding the assessment purpose, interpreting individual student results, and how the results are used
- Concerns about not assessing the whole child

### Purpose of the Redesign:

The redesigned “Kindergarten Assessment” will collect a statewide snapshot of data about children and families as they begin kindergarten.

The primary purpose of this data will be to inform local-, regional-, and state-level decisions about Oregon’s Early Learning and Care sector.

The redesigned components will also meaningfully support families in building relationships with their kindergarten educators by inviting them to share about their experiences prior to kindergarten.

### Prior to the Interview:

Determine the primary language spoken by the caregiver. If the primary language is not English or Spanish, contact [...] to request that specific language translation service.

Familiarize yourself with the Smartsheet tool. Review the choices for easy documentation.

### Confidentiality:

We want to ensure families that during this interview, we will keep their identities confidential. The information they share will help us develop appropriate questions to ask families during our Fall 2022 pilot.

### During the interview:

- Give space, pay attention to how the interviewee is feeling and responding. Try not to force any answers.
- Stay neutral, be careful not to imply there is a right answer.

- Be aware of your own biases.
- Follow up if necessary
- Enjoy this unique opportunity to get to know your students and families better!

### **Information Collection:**

There are three ways you can collect information:

1. Record the discussion and enjoy getting to know the time with the caregiver. A transcription will be taken afterwards.
2. Record directly into Smartsheet.
3. Use a notetaking form that you could then upload into the Smartsheet at a later date. Please ensure that all notes are destroyed after data has been entered into the Smartsheet.

# Appendix B: LISTENING SESSION SAMPLE SCRIPT

## Introduction:

Good afternoon (morning, evening). (If you are meeting for the first time, complete introductions. If not, check in briefly and then move onto building rapport.)

## Building Rapport:

I want to spend a few minutes talking with you about your child’s experience before they entered kindergarten. I will be taking some notes while we talk. My notes will be shared with the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Early Learning Division. Your answers to these first questions will help our state make changes to our state’s early learning and care system. Our hope is that your responses will help the different agencies across the state improve future families’ early learning and care experiences.

It should only take about 10-15 minutes. If there are questions you do not want to answer, please just let me know. I want to assure you that your name will be kept confidential. The information you provide will help us determine the appropriateness of the questions we are asking and the best way to collect information. Based on your feedback, we will make edits to the questions for the Fall 2022 pilot. After we are finished with the questions, I’ll ask you for your feedback about the questions.

If child is with the parent, invite them into the conversation by asking:

- What is your name?
- Tell me how you feel about going to kindergarten?
- What is something you want me to know about you?

<a href="#">Link to Raise Up Oregon</a>	Question	Possible Responses will be open ended
RUO: Objective 6	1. What are your hopes and dreams for your child this year?	
RUO: Objective 6	2. What do you most want me to know and understand about your child?	

For this next set of questions, I am interested in learning about your family’s experiences with early learning and care during the last year. So, I’d like you to think back over the period from last September to now. By “early learning and care” I mean any kinds of child care or preschool settings [child’s name] may have been in, any kinds of classes, play groups, or support groups that you or [child’s name] may have attended, and any other kinds of services your family may have received to support how [child’s name] learned and grew over the last year.

Link to <a href="#">Raise Up Oregon</a>	Question	Possible answers
RUO: Objective 2	<p>3. What kinds of child care or preschool or daycare settings did your family have for [child’s name]?</p> <p>For example, was your child only cared for by you or another parent or legal guardian? If someone else regularly cared for your child, where did that care happen? Were they cared for in your own home or in someone else’s home? Or were they cared for in a center or school that was not in someone’s private home?</p>	<p>Please select which of the following choices reflect what the family describes in their response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Child was only cared for by parent or legal guardian</li> <li>● Child was cared for in their own home</li> <li>● Child was cared for in someone else’s home</li> <li>● Child was cared for in a center or school</li> <li>● None of the above</li> <li>● Other _____</li> </ul>
RUO: Objective 2	<p>4. What services and supports did your family have to help [child’s name] learn and grow?</p> <p>We’re curious about a wide range of services and supports. For example, some families have home visitors, or attend parenting classes, or have an IEP, or have preschool teachers who speak their home language, or use food stamps, or are in a state-funded preschool program, or have evening or weekend care, among many other kinds of services and supports.</p>	<p>Please select which of the following choices reflect what the family describes in their response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Home visitor</li> <li>● Speech therapist</li> <li>● Parent-child classes</li> <li>● Play groups with this child</li> <li>● Parenting class or parent support group</li> <li>● Special education services (had an IEP or IFSP)</li> <li>● Early educator who reflected family’s race or culture</li> <li>● Early educator who spoke family’s home language</li> <li>● Transportation assistance</li> <li>● SNAP (food stamps)</li> <li>● TANF</li> <li>● State-funded early learning program (Early Childhood Equity Fund (ECEP) program, Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), Healthy Families Oregon (HFO), Oregon Prenatal-to-Kindergarten (OPK), Preschool Promise, Relief Nursery)</li> <li>● Non-traditional hours for care (i.e., evening or weekend care)</li> </ul>



Link to <a href="#">Raise Up Oregon</a>	Question	Possible answers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● None of the above</li> <li>● Other _____</li> </ul>
RUO: Objective 2	5. Of the services and supports you just mentioned, which one would you say was the most valuable to your child and your family?	
RUO: Objective 2	6. Are there services or supports that you wish your family had been able to use to help [child’s name] learn and grow?	<p>Please select which of the following choices reflect what the family describes in their response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Home visitor</li> <li>● Speech therapist</li> <li>● Parent-child classes</li> <li>● Play groups with this child</li> <li>● Parenting class or parent support group</li> <li>● Special education services (had an IEP or IFSP)</li> <li>● Early educator who reflected family’s race or culture</li> <li>● Early educator who spoke family’s home language</li> <li>● Transportation assistance</li> <li>● SNAP (food stamps)</li> <li>● TANF</li> <li>● State-funded early learning program (Early Childhood Equity Fund (ECEP) program, Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), Healthy Families Oregon (HFO), Oregon Prenatal-to-Kindergarten (OPK), Preschool Promise, Relief Nursery)</li> <li>● Non-traditional hours for care (i.e., evening or weekend care)</li> <li>● None of the above</li> <li>● Other _____</li> </ul>
RUO: Objective 6	7. As we’re starting the new school year, can you tell me a little bit about what supports you and your child might need to feel most successful?	

## Appendix C: AFTER THE INTERVIEW, FEEDBACK FOR PILOT

Thank you so much for going through this interview with us. We're doing this listening session so that we can hear from you your thoughts about these questions and this process. We want to know both what worked well, what you liked about this process, and also what didn't work well – basically anything that made you feel uncomfortable or that you didn't like or found confusing.

Question	Response
Tell me how you felt about the questions?	
What worked well for you about the questions and the process?	
What parts were confusing?	
(If you are familiar with the parent) Pretend this was the first time you met me, would you have answered them the same or different?	
What would you have liked us to ask you as part of this interview?	

### Closing:

Thank you for your time today. I appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts with me. We will be sending you an electronic gift card to the email you provided. If you have any questions, or think of anything else you would like to share, please feel free to reach out to me at this email address [...].