



Building Belonging, Strengthening Learning, and Knowledge with K–2 Interims

As you read/listen to this story, think about these questions:

What did you hear/read that affirms best practice?

What did you hear/read that may contradict best practice?

What is your plan to support students and their families?

The Family Conversation

The week before school starts, Ms. Taylor welcomes a recently arrived family from Ukraine for a Family Conversation. Supported by an interpreter, the family shares that their kindergartener, the oldest of three, Olena loves drawing, singing, and dancing, knows many letters in their native language, and is very curious, though shy in new settings. Because the family was unfamiliar with Oregon’s early learning system when they immigrated, Olena did not attend preschool. They also shared that they did not know about any of the transitional activities the school had prior to kindergarten. The parents, who work alternating shifts to care for their children, ask practical questions about schedules, lunch procedures, pickup and drop-off routines, and communication, hoping to understand how school in Oregon compares to their own experiences in Ukraine.

Building Belonging Through Family Insight

The information gathered during the conversation becomes essential for shaping a supportive classroom environment. Research shows that strong family involvement boosts children’s academic and social-emotional development and strengthens home-school connections. When children feel known and valued, their engagement and confidence increase.^{1 2 3} Understanding Olena is shy, Ms. Taylor plans gentle routines, warm greetings, and gradual peer interactions. To affirm Olena’s identity and interests, Ms. Taylor incorporates music, movement, and art early in the year, signaling that the strengths the child brings from home are recognized and celebrated. Because the parents work alternating shifts, Ms. Taylor offers flexible communication options such as translated messages, varied meeting times, messaging apps, or weekly visual schedules, ensuring the family can remain engaged despite time constraints.

¹ National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement. (n.d.). *Family engagement defined*. <https://nafsce.org/general/custom.asp?page=definition>.

² Institute of Education Sciences. (2025). *The importance of student sense of belonging*. <https://ies.ed.gov/rel-midwest/2025/01/student-sense-belonging>.

³ Oregon Department of Education. (2023). *Oregon literacy framework* (2023). https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator/resources/standards/ELA/Documents/Literacy%20Framework_2023.pdf

Connecting Family Knowledge with K–2 Interims

During the first weeks of school, Ms. Taylor notices several things about Olena. She is beginning to interact with her English-speaking peers through play. She sings and dances during recess, and the music teacher reports that Olena is an active participant in music class. She is also learning school routines and has started initiating interactions with her classroom teacher. Also, during this time, Ms. Taylor begins implementing routines for literacy aligned to the science of reading and notices Olena participates by making sounds and completing corresponding hand motions.

In October, Ms. Taylor begins to administer the K–2 language arts and math interim tests in English, which provide early, actionable insight into Olena’s strengths and areas for growth in academic areas. Because Ms. Taylor has spent the first weeks of school building trusting relationships with her Olena through positive family encounters, supportive associations with school, learning routines, and helping her become more comfortable in her new environment, the assessment experience feels far less intimidating for her. In addition, because Olena has letter knowledge in Ukrainian, the teacher interprets the test data through a culturally responsive lens. If the test indicates early challenges, she understands these may reflect language transition rather than literacy concerns. Ms. Taylor intentionally selects high interest literacy and math activities that align with the Olena’s curiosity and background and makes note to learn common sounds that Ukrainian and English share.

Interims administered throughout the year offer multiple data points that will also help measure progress and guide instructional adjustments throughout the year. Research shows that using multiple data points, including formative assessment practices and progress monitors, supports early intervention in both literacy and math and helps prevent learning gaps from widening, while also offering opportunities to reflect on student progress and make any needed adjustments to instruction for acceleration. (reference progress monitoring guidance here).

Family Engagement as a Foundation for Success

The Family Conversation builds trust and opens channels for ongoing communication, especially important for families new to Oregon’s K–12 system. Research shows that continuous, two-way communication improves achievement, strengthens relationships, and supports a positive school environment.^{4 5} School events such as Math and Literacy Nights are a good start to help families feel welcomed. Additionally, schools should work alongside families and culturally specific community partners to co-design authentic engagement activities that reflect and honor the community’s diversity. With established relationships, the educator can share interim results throughout the year using clear, accessible language and supported by collaboration with an interpreter when needed. Ms. Taylor grounds her work in the guiding principles of

⁴ Youth.gov. (n.d.). *Impact of family engagement*. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/family-engagement/impact>.

⁵ National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement. (n.d.). *Family engagement defined*. <https://nafsce.org/general/custom.asp?page=definition>.

Oregon's Early Literacy Framework: literacy begins at birth, families and communities strengthen school-based learning, every child is full of literacy promise, foundational skills matter, every child must be taught to read and write, multilingualism benefits everyone, and educator knowledge and classroom practices are essential.

Conclusion

By integrating the family's insights with K–2 academic test data, the educator can:

- create a classroom where the child feels safe, known, and connected;
- tailor early literacy and math instruction using both family knowledge and interim data;
- partner with the family throughout the year to support the child's learning trajectory.

This integrated approach of fostering belonging, expanding opportunities for family engagement, and using early assessment, provides a holistic understanding of each child's strengths and needs, creating a strong foundation for academic success throughout the critical K–2 years and beyond.

Supportive Transition into Kindergarten Timeline

