

# Early Learning Transition Check In

## 2023-2024 Family Conversation Technical Report

March 2025



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## Executive Summary

The Family Conversation is a meeting that is held between kindergarten educators and families of entering kindergarteners at the beginning of the academic year. It is a holistic approach to gathering contextual information about children and families while fostering meaningful relationships between educators, families, and children. In the conversation, educators ask families to share about their experiences prior to kindergarten, what brings their child joy, and their hopes and dreams for the child's kindergarten year. Both quantitative and qualitative information are collected, and the data can be used to support a smooth transition into kindergarten by identifying how systems can better recognize children's and families' strengths as well as better meet their needs. The 2023-2024 pilot of the Family Conversation included over 1,000 participating families. These families were situated within 30 schools, representing 9 districts across Oregon. Both rural and urban areas were represented.

Key findings from this pilot year about **accessing early learning program resources** include:

### **Positive experiences with early learning supports, services, and systems**

- Families shared that early childhood education helped build their child's academic skills.
- Families felt that non-academic programming (e.g., swim classes, dance classes) supported children's social skills and boosted their confidence and independence.
- Families appreciated services that were geared toward parents (e.g., parenting classes) and / or were meant to buffer against income inequality (e.g., SNAP, WIC).

### **Negative experiences with early learning supports, services, and systems**

- Some families had difficulties with accessing early learning supports and services for reasons such as: lack of supports or services available, cost barriers, long waitlists.
- A few families shared that the early learning supports and services they accessed negatively impacted their children (e.g., their child getting bullied at preschool).

Key findings from this pilot year about **children and families** include:

### **Children's strengths and needs**

- Families described children's strengths and needs, which varied greatly and concerned the following areas: social and emotional skills, academics and learning, connection to animals and nature, creativity and play, health and disability, belonging and comfort.

### **Families' strengths and needs**

- Families shared about who children's caregivers were (e.g., biological parents, grandparents and extended family, foster or adoptive parents).
- Many children were described as having positive and loving family connections.
- Some families shared challenges and needs they faced such as financial difficulties, housing instability, lack of access to transportation, and recent shifts in family dynamics.

**Families' aspirations for their children's development**

- Families wanted their children to build upon existing academic strengths and develop new academic strengths.
- Families wanted their children to develop more social skills (e.g., becoming more comfortable in social settings, being less shy) and more emotional regulation skills.

**Families' aspirations for the K-12 System**

- Families shared that they hoped their children will be treated with respect and care at school.
- Families wanted their children to have access to a high-quality education.

## Introduction

The Early Learning Transition Check-In (ELTC) is a collaborative initiative between the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). The purpose of the ELTC is to redesign Oregon's Kindergarten Assessment (OKA) and one of the key components of this redesign is the Family Conversation. The Family Conversation occurs between kindergarten educators and families of entering kindergarteners at the beginning of the academic year.<sup>1</sup> The goal of this conversation is two-fold: 1) help educators connect with and learn about the children and families entering their class, and 2) inform DELIC and ODE about the experiences, strengths, and needs of entering kindergarteners. This technical report provides a description of the research findings from the 2023-2024 Family Conversation.

## Background

Prior to the ELTC initiative, ODE and DELIC collected data about entering kindergarteners via the OKA. The OKA was administered each fall and assessed students' early literacy, math, and interpersonal/self-regulation skills. While collecting this information about entering kindergarteners is essential to understanding how to best serve students in Oregon, ODE and DELIC received critical feedback regarding the OKA. Concerns were raised about its implementation, lack of cultural responsiveness, and other potential biases that seemed to be inherent in the assessment. In response, the Oregon State Board of Education suspended the OKA and asked ODE and DELIC to work together collaboratively on the ELTC as a way to address these concerns.

The ELTC moves away from OKA's focus on assessing children's academic skills and the concept of students being "ready" for kindergarten. Instead, it shifts the focus to how schools and systems need to be ready to welcome and support all students, regardless of their experiences or skills before kindergarten. In this way, the ELTC centers around supporting all children and families in experiencing a smooth transition into kindergarten. The main component of the ELTC, the Family Conversation:

- Takes place between educators and the families of entering kindergarteners in the fall of each school year,
- Asks families to share about their experiences prior to kindergarten, what brings their child joy, and their hopes and dreams for their child's kindergarten year, and

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<sup>1</sup> Family is defined broadly in the ELTC project as anyone that serves a caregiving role for the child, as well as family members, relatives, and guardians supporting the child.

- Takes about 20 minutes to complete<sup>2</sup>.

The Family Conversation was initially developed in the 2021-2022 school year and the first pilot administration occurred during the 2022-2023 school year. The 2023-2024 school year represents the Family Conversation's second pilot administration. The design of the Family Conversation is still in progress and is iteratively informed by lessons learned in the pilot administrations, past research, community engagements with educators and families, and in collaboration with an advisory panel.<sup>3</sup>

## A Smooth Transition to Kindergarten

Research suggests that school transitions can lay the foundation for the rest of a child's time in school. Key reasons why the transition into kindergarten matters include:

1. **Emotional and Social Development:** A positive transition reduces separation anxiety and helps children develop social skills like communication and cooperation.<sup>4</sup>
2. **Academic Success:** A strong start prepares children for school structure, enhancing skills such as following instructions, time management, and confidence in learning.<sup>5</sup>
3. **Familiarity and Comfort:** Preparing children through visits and introducing routines eases uncertainty and helps them adjust to the school environment.<sup>6</sup>
4. **Family Involvement:** Active communication between caregivers and educators supports children's emotional and academic growth, building trust and confidence.<sup>7</sup>
5. **Long-Term Impact:** A smooth transition fosters a positive attitude toward school, preventing future challenges and ensuring lasting academic success.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This time estimate does not include preparation and training time. The Family Conversation may take longer than 20 minutes if interpretation is occurring.

<sup>3</sup> The ELTC advisory panel is composed of kindergarten and preschool educators, early learning directors, and researchers with expertise in early learning assessment practices. ODE's selection process ensured that panel members have: 1) a strong equity lens, 2) represent Oregon's diverse communities, including those who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x and other people of color, 3) represent different regions around the state, and 4) have experience delivering OKA and/or have used OKA data to inform classroom practices and educational systems.

<sup>4</sup> Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). "An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21(5), 491-511. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0193-3973\(00\)00051-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0193-3973(00)00051-4)

<sup>5</sup> Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2002). "The development of children's competence in the early school years." In *Handbook of child psychology* (Vol. 4). Wiley.

<sup>6</sup> Head Start. (2025). *The importance of schedules and routines*. Head Start. <https://headstart.gov/about-us/article/importance-schedules-routines>

<sup>7</sup> Sheridan, S. M., & Kratochwill, T. R. (2007). "Conjoint behavioral consultation: Promoting family-school connections and interventions." *Springer Science & Business Media*.

<sup>8</sup> Phillips, E.C., & Scrinzi A. (2024). *Focus on developmentally appropriate practice: Equitable and joyful learning in kindergarten*. NAEYC.

Taken together, healthy transitions into kindergarten are crucial, as they are linked to improved academic, social, and emotional outcomes. Supportive transitions rely on strong partnership and collaboration between early learning and K-12 systems to ensure continuity in children's educational experiences. Robust family engagement is equally essential, as families provide critical insights into children's strengths, needs, and cultural contexts. When educators and families work together, they create a shared foundation that helps children feel supported and confident as they begin school. These effective transitions not only enhance learning and emotional health but also help children build confidence in navigating change, setting a positive trajectory for their entire educational journey.

The Family Conversation supports a smooth transition by creating dedicated time for educators to listen to and learn from children's first and life-long educators, their families. This process helps educators build relationships with families, gain insights into children's early learning experiences, and better understand the unique context each child brings to the classroom. Additionally, the Family Conversation fosters connections and creates opportunities to share resources. Though important, it is not meant to function as the sole support for a successful kindergarten transition. Instead, it is designed to be offered as a part of an intentional and comprehensive approach to welcoming families and students.

### Putting Equity at the Forefront

The Family Conversation is being developed as a tool that is meant to support educational equity. Equity is essential because children enter kindergarten with varied experiences that are shaped by differences in access to early childhood care and education as well as by differences due to culture, family context, and systems of privilege and oppression. Many children from historically underserved communities face barriers to accessing high-quality early learning opportunities.<sup>9</sup> [ODE](#) and [DELIC](#) are drawing on the following equity values when developing the Family Conversation:

1. **Cultural Responsiveness:** The Family Conversation is meant to enable kindergarten educators to foster an inclusive classroom environment that respects and reflects the diverse cultural and social identities of families and children. Through the conversation, educators learn about the unique needs, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences of each student. Following the conversation, educators should be better equipped to adapt their teaching approach and classroom to their specific students.

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<sup>9</sup> Chaudry, A., Morrissey, T., Weiland, C., & Yoshikawa, H. (2021). *Cradle to kindergarten: A new plan to combat inequality*. Russell Sage Foundation.

2. **Expanding Access:** Data from the Family Conversation is meant to be used by DELC and ODE to identify how to expand access to early learning services for all families and children in order to support better outcomes.
3. **Addressing Disparities:** Data from the Family Conversation is meant to be used by DELC and ODE to identify the ways in which families from marginalized and underserved communities (e.g., communities of color, rural communities) experience disparities in early learning supports and services.
4. **Anti-Racism:** The Family Conversation disrupts traditional assessment models that are deficit-based, racially biased, and decontextualized. It is an assessment approach that centers student strengths and actively includes family knowledge to better understand and support student learning.
5. **Meaningful Representation and Power Sharing:** The Family Conversation stresses the importance of community representation and sharing power with communities when making decisions. It is being developed in collaboration with the community. Additionally, it is intentionally designed to position families as partners, acknowledging and addressing the power dynamics inherent in educational settings. It is a two-way conversation between families and educators. It creates a space for families to ask questions and share their knowledge and skills.

## Connections to Other Initiatives

The ELTC is not a standalone initiative but instead operates in support of and in alignment with a number of interconnected initiatives promoted by both DELC and ODE. For instance, the ELTC supports Oregon's [Student Success Plans](#), which focus on improving access and opportunities for students who have been historically underserved in the education system. These plans emphasize the use of culturally responsive pedagogy, practices, and authentic family engagement.

The ELTC is also in alignment with two of the key objectives in [Oregon's Early Literacy Framework](#):

1. **Student Belonging:** Creating learning environments where children's cultures, languages, and identities are celebrated, fostering a deep sense of connection and inclusion.
2. **Family and Community Partnerships:** Recognizing families as the first and most important educators, ensuring their voices and insights are integral to the educational process.

The two other major initiatives the ELTC links to are:

- [Department of Early Learning and Care's Strategic Plan](#) which focuses on providing families with access to high-quality, affordable early learning opportunities, ensuring a strong foundation for every child.
- [Raise Up Oregon](#) which offers a comprehensive state plan for early childhood, spanning prenatal to age 5, and brings together leaders spanning birth to higher education, health, housing, and human services to address systemic challenges collaboratively.

## Family Conversation Method

### Who Participated?

In total, 1,013 families of entering kindergarteners participated in the 2023-2024 Family Conversation pilot. These families were situated in 30 schools and nine districts. Participation spanned various regions of Oregon, including urban and rural communities.

Table 1 presents participation by race/ethnicity, gender, special education status, and English learner status. The numbers show that most students were white (56%), followed by Hispanic/Latino/a/x (32%), and Multiracial (8%). For gender, more families with male children (53%) participated than female children (47%). English learners were about 14% of the total participants. Students who have been identified as receiving special education services were about 9% of the total participants.

**Table 1. Family Conversation Participation, by Demographics of the Entering Kindergartener**

	Participation (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	47%
Male	53%
Non-Binary	<5%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian/Alaska Native	<5%
Asian	<5%
Black/African American	<5%
Hispanic/Latino/a/x	32%
Multiracial	8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<5%
White	56%
<b>English Learner</b>	14%
<b>Receiving Special Education Services</b>	9%

*Note.* Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Cells with <5% or >95% are suppressed.

Table 2 presents how the districts were represented in the pilot sample for the 2023-2024 Family Conversation. The nine districts that participated were Beaverton School District 48J, Colton School District 53, Eugene School District 4J, Grants Pass School District 7, Klamath County School District, Lincoln County School District, Ontario School District 8C, Portland Public Schools, and Reynolds School District. School districts had flexibility on how many schools they selected to participate in the pilot. Some school districts chose to have only one

school participate and others chose to have all their schools participate. Among participating districts, Klamath accounted for the most participation (38% of the participant families), followed by Grants Pass (20% of the participant families), and Lincoln County (14%). Less than 5% of the families participating came from Reynolds, Eugene, and Colton school districts.

**Table 2. District Representation**

	<b>Participation (%)</b>
Beaverton School District 48J	6%
Colton School District 53	<5%
Eugene School District 4J	<5%
Grants Pass School District 7	20%
Klamath County School District	38%
Lincoln County School District	14%
Ontario School District 8C	7%
Portland Public Schools	<5%
Reynolds School District	<5%

*Note.* Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Cells with <5% or >95% are suppressed.

## Family Conversation Administration

### Family Conversation Recruitment, Trainings, and Resources

Schools were recruited for the 2023-2024 Family Conversation pilot through two different listservs. The first was the Superintendent Listserv, which reached superintendents in all 197 school districts in Oregon and charter school leaders. The second was ODE's weekly Assessment and Accountability Update (A&A) which is the primary communication channel for a broader range of district staff, including district test coordinators. Interested individuals were instructed to complete a contact form to join the pilot. Once enrolled, they received information about a mandatory information meeting for administrators. After the meeting outlining the requirements, district leaders submitted a confirmation form acknowledging their role in the pilot.

To ensure successful and effective administration of the 2023-2024 Family Conversation, DELC and ODE provided a number of training opportunities and support materials to pilot schools prior to administration. First, ODE and DELC invited school leaders of all participating pilot schools to an onboarding session. At this session, school leaders received resources for community communication, sample schedules that had proven successful in other districts, and

guidance on culturally responsive scheduling. Additionally, they were given a one-page document outlining the pilot process and information about community feedback sessions hosted by Oregon's Kitchen Table.

ODE and DELC also distributed training materials to participating schools, including a facilitation guide and two webinars that can be found in Appendix A of this document. Educators were required to review the official facilitation guide, which included information about how to conduct two-way conversations, the use of assurance techniques and guidance on effective ways to work with an interpreter.<sup>10</sup> Educators also were required to watch both webinars. The first explained the reasoning behind the move from the OKA to the ETLC and included ODE's implicit bias training. The second webinar demonstrated the "how" of the Family Conversation process, including an example conversation and instructions for inputting data into Smartsheet. After reviewing the facilitation guide and completing the webinars, educators were invited to participate in a live Q&A session hosted by ODE and DELC prior to facilitating any Family Conversations.

### **Administration and Data Collection Process**

Participating pilot schools were responsible for ensuring that the Family Conversations took place and for communicating necessary information about the Family Conversation to parents/guardians. More specifically, kindergarten educators contacted their students' families and offered them an opportunity to participate in the Family Conversation. Educators explained the purpose of the conversation to families and families could decline to participate, participate but decline to have their information shared with DELC and ODE, or participate and consent to share their information with DELC and ODE. The conversations took place during the first six weeks of school. The conversations took about 20 minutes to complete and were done either in-person, over the phone, or via video chat. Translation and interpretation services were provided to families who did not speak English. During the conversations, educators took notes about families' responses.<sup>11</sup> Schools then imputed families' responses into a Smartsheet form that was sent to ODE.

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<sup>10</sup> Based on The Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice, Title V school districts are required to provide families who do not speak English with free and effective language assistance (e.g., competent translators and interpreters). Guidance was provided to educators in the facilitator's guide outlining steps for success such as sending information to interpreters in advance so that they can adequately prepare and meeting with them to answer any questions before the Family Conversation. In addition, simple prompts were provided to the educator outlining how to introduce the interpreter to the family.

<sup>11</sup> DELC and ODE provided schools with an optional note-taking form that they could use during the Family Conversation.

## Family Conversation Questions

In the Family Conversation, educators asked families eight questions. These eight questions can be broadly categorized into two formats:

1. **Closed-ended questions:** These questions had predetermined response options. Educators listened to what families shared and selected from a list of common responses that best fit their experiences.<sup>12</sup>
2. **Open-ended questions:** These questions did not have predetermined response options and allowed for families to share their thoughts and experiences in their own words.

**Table 3. Family Conversation Questions**

Question	Format
What kinds of child care did your family have for your child?	Close-ended.  Response options were: Child was cared for in a center or school; Child was cared for in someone else's home; Child was cared for in their own home; Child was only cared for by parent or legal guardian; Other; None of the above
What experiences, programs or services did your child receive or participate in to help them learn and grow?	Close-ended.  Response options were: Childcare or preschool program; Early educator who spoke family's home language; Early educator who reflected family's race or culture; Parent-child classes or play groups; Special education services; Non-traditional hours for care; Home visitor; Relief nursery; Therapist; Other; None of the above
Of the experiences, programs and/or services you just mentioned, which one would you say was the most helpful to your child and your family?	Open-ended
Which experiences, programs and/or services do you wish your child had received?	Close-ended.  Response options were: Childcare or preschool program; Early educator who spoke family's home language; Early educator who reflected family's race or culture; Parent-child classes or play groups; Special education services; Non-

<sup>12</sup> The options for the close-ended questions were informed by previous pilot years.

	traditional hours for care; Home visitor; Relief nursery; Therapist; Other; None of the above
What are your hopes and dreams for your child?	Open-ended
What brings your child joy?	Open-ended
What else would you like for me to know and understand about your child or your family?	Open-ended
What questions do you have for me?	Open-ended

## Research Aims

The research aims for the 2023-2024 Family Conversation pilot were as follows:

1. Understand families' experiences with early learning supports, services, and systems
2. Understand the strengths and needs of entering kindergarteners
3. Understand families' aspirations for their child's kindergarten year

## Analytic Approach

To address the three aims, ODE and DELC implemented a mixed methods approach. In a mixed methods approach, researchers analyze both quantitative data (e.g., data from close-ended items) and qualitative data (e.g., data from open-ended items). Findings from both kinds of data are shared next to one another and offer deeper insight and nuance. In our mixed methods approach, we first ran descriptive statistics for each of the close-ended questions. We then conducted a thematic analysis using data from the open-ended questions, following six steps:<sup>13</sup>

1. **Becoming familiar with the data:** A team of three analysts sampled a set of Family Conversations that were diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, English learner status, and special education status. They read through this sample to get a general idea about what families were sharing.
2. **Coding:** The analysts then each inductively developed an initial set of labels or "codes" which were meant to capture pieces of families' responses that represented the same underlying idea or concept. The analysts met to discuss their codes and come to a consensus on an initial codebook (i.e., a list of codes, code definitions, and example quotes). To refine the codebook, each analyst coded a new sample of data and took notes on potential adjustments that might need to be made (e.g., removing a code, adding a code, altering a code definition). Analysts met to come to a consensus on a final codebook, which included seven code categories (i.e.: developmental areas;

<sup>13</sup> Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

learning and school; language, culture, and identity; activities and interests; family and child; hopes, concerns, and recommendations; and early childhood services and experiences) and 61 codes. After finalizing the codebook, they then “coded” the rest of the data (i.e., applied the codes to all the Family Conversations). During the coding process, analysts met regularly to discuss any questions about the codebook or difficult coding decisions.

3. **Generating initial themes:** The analysts identified a potential list of themes based on the coded material. To do so, they looked for patterns across codes and ran coding queries which identified the frequency of each code as well as the co-occurrence of codes (e.g., overall, by question).
4. **Reviewing themes:** The analysts sought input from the ELTC advisory board on the themes. They also went back through all the coded material to assess how well the themes fit the data. A number of edits were made to the provisional themes based on this process (e.g., collapsing of subthemes) so that they were clear, fully reflected the coded material, and addressed the research aims.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** The analysts developed names and definitions for each theme.
6. **Writing up themes:** The analysts wrote up the findings, using quotes of the coded material to illustrate the themes (i.e., the findings section of this technical report).

## Findings

### Families' Experiences with Early Learning Supports, Services, and Systems

Descriptive statistics for families' responses to the close-ended question “What kinds of child care did your family have for your child?” is provided in Tables 4. These findings are different than the findings from DELC’s 2022 statewide Household Survey<sup>14</sup>. In the 2022 survey, higher proportions of families with children aged between 3 and 5 years reported utilizing care in a center or school (49%), in someone else’s home (40%), and by only parent and legal guardian (39%) than those in the Family Conversation (29%, 11%, and 28%, respectively)<sup>15</sup>. Differences may be due to differences in the sample and methodology. The Family Conversation was being piloted among a small number of districts, whereas the Household Survey was conducted statewide. Additionally, families who chose to participate in Household Survey may have been motivated to respond due to their connection to Oregon’s Child Care System (e.g., utilizing care or searching for care), whereas all families of entering kindergarteners were given the opportunity to participate in Family Conversations, regardless of their connection to the Oregon’s Child Care System. Finally, the question about child care was posed differently in the two collections. In the Household Survey, families read all of the care options and selected the ones that applied. In the Family Conversation, educators verbally asked families about the kind of child care they accessed, and then selected the categories that best fit families’ responses. Families were not read out all of the possible categories of child care. The responses captured in the Family Conversation may represent the type of care that was most top-of-mind to families (e.g., most recent care, most commonly used care), whereas the Household Survey might represent a comprehensive look into all the care solutions a family utilized.

**Table 4. Response Patterns for “What kinds of child care did your family have for your child?”**

Child care option	%
Child was cared for in a center or school	29%
Child was cared for in someone else’s home	11%
Child was cared for in their own home	22%
Child was only cared for by parent or legal guardian	28%
Other	10%
None of the above	<5%

<sup>14</sup> Pears, K.C., Bruce, J., & Scheidt, D. (2022). *Oregon Preschool Development Grant: 2022 Statewide Household Survey Results*. Department of Early Learning and Care. <https://www.oregon.gov/delc/Documents/pdg-household-survey-2022-full%20report-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Percentage estimates from the 2022 Household Survey were calculated by the authors of this report to align with the type of care options in the Family Conversation. This process included combining the subpopulations of families with children who reported receiving care and not receiving care in the last calendar year and collapsing care categories to match those in the Family Conversation.

*Note.* Cells with <5% or >95% are suppressed.

The findings for the other two close-ended questions from the Family Conversation and offered in Table 5. The program or service that families most frequently accessed was childcare or a preschool program (42%). The program or service that families most frequently wished they had accessed was ‘Other’ (16%), then childcare or a preschool program (14%) and parent-child classes or play groups (14%).

**Table 5. Response Patterns for “What experiences, programs or services did your child receive or participate in to help them learn and grow?” and “Which experiences, programs and/or services do you wish your child had received?”**

Experience, program or service	% Received	% Wished For
Childcare or preschool program	42%	14%
Early educator who spoke family’s home language	6%	<5%
Early educator who reflected family’s race or culture	<5%	<5%
Parent-child classes or play groups	11%	14%
Special education services	<5%	<5%
Non-traditional hours for care	<5%	<5%
Home visitor	<5%	<5%
Relief nursery	<5%	<5%
Therapist	8%	7%
Other	15%	16%
None of the above	11%	36%

*Note.* Cells with <5% or >95% are suppressed.

In addition to the above-mentioned quantitative findings, we also identified two themes that pertained to families’ experiences with early learning supports, services, and systems: 1) Positive experiences with accessing services, and 2) Negative experiences with accessing services.

### **Positive experiences with accessing services**

Families who accessed early childhood resources shared about the types of experiences and services that they and / or their child participated in prior to kindergarten. One of the main services that families accessed was early childhood education, such as preschool and daycare. Preschool and daycare types ranged from Head Start, to Montessori schools, to home-based programs. Some families shared that they were only able to access early childhood education sporadically and for a short period of time, whereas others had more consistent and sustained access. Another form of early childhood education that families accessed was resources to

support academic learning at home. Families read to their children, had private tutors, and gave their children educational packets or games. Multilingual families and / or those who largely spoke a non-English language especially highlighted how they utilized early childhood education services that were linguistically responsive. For example, they shared about accessing “learning programs in Spanish”, “educational games to help with dual language”, and how they worked with an “early educator that spoke [our] home language.” Most often, families said early childhood education positively impacted their child’s development. Positive impacts included social and academic skill development. For instance, one family said, “preschool was very helpful because she really enjoyed playing with other kids and she has been more confident around other children [since].” Another family shared, “preschool really helped her advance academically - she can write more neatly, count to 40, and she learned her numbers and letters.” Past research on early childhood education corroborates families’ reflections, finding positive associations with social and cognitive skills. This work also finds that spending more time in early childhood education is associated with greater skill development.<sup>16</sup>

Families who accessed early learning resources also talked about utilizing programming and resources that were not explicitly connected to academics. For example, families took their children to swim lessons, gymnastics and dance classes, play groups, museums, and church groups. These kinds of programs and resources were seen as supporting children’s social skills and boosting their confidence and independence. Some families who had children experiencing disabilities or developmental delays shared about accessing specialized services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and early intervention. Families often felt that these services were helpful to their child. For instance, one family said, “speech [therapy] was the most helpful [because] he learned about tools that help[ed] him express himself.”

A final category of services that families accessed were those geared toward parents. These services were meant to buffer against income inequality, support healthy family dynamics, and increase parents’ capacity to care for their children. For instance, families experiencing poverty shared about how they accessed resources that helped to meet their basic needs, such as SNAP, WIC, and OHP. Parents also talked about accessing individual and family therapy, addiction recovery services, and parenting classes. One parent shared about the benefits of therapy saying, “[it was very helpful] during postpartum depression.”

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<sup>16</sup> Schoch, A.D., Gerson, C.S., Halle, T., & Bredeson, M. (2023, August). *Children’s learning and development benefits from high-quality early care and education: A summary of evidence*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/childrens-learning-and-development-benefits-high-quality-early-care-and-education>

### **Negative experiences with accessing services**

Though families largely mentioned positive experiences with early learning supports and resources, occasionally they described challenges or negative experiences with service utilization. Some families shared that they were not able to access the resources they needed or wanted due to scarce or limited availability. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic caused many preschools and community programs to close down for an extended period of time. Families also talked about there being a lack of childcare or preschool options that were affordable. A few families expressed a desire for the state to better address barriers related to income inequality in early childhood education. For example, one parent said that they wished there had been a “state funded preschool option” and another explained how they would have liked for there to be a “government grant program to pay for preschool, [and] access to someone to help with confusing state/government paperwork.” Affordable or government-funded preschool can be particularly vital for low-income families, who persistently experience disparities in access to high-quality early learning programs.<sup>17</sup> Families also talked about facing long waitlists due to there being too few programs and services, especially for children with disabilities and high needs. In addition to a lack of service availability, another barrier that families shared was how the structure of existing services did not meet their needs. For example, some services were only offered during times when parents were working, and other services did not offer bussing or transportation options and therefore were inaccessible to families without their own means of transportation.

A small portion of parents likewise shared about how the early learning supports and resources they accessed negatively impacted them or their child. Parents talked about poor social and relational dynamics, such as their child getting bullied or having an unsatisfactory teacher-student relationship. For instance, one family said “[my son] felt like the teacher didn’t care about him and that she doesn’t keep him safe.” Families also shared negative experiences related to their child’s behavior, how adults responded to that behavior, and the impacts that those responses had on the family’s feelings about school. One parent shared, “He had a hard experience last year because he didn’t do his homework and would miss recess and wanted to go home.” Another family said, “In the past we have been made to feel like she is a problem child.” Experiences such as these have the potential to negatively impact children’s and families’ orientation to, and trust in, the education system overall.

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<sup>17</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2023). *Closing the opportunity gap for young children*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26743>

## Strengths and Needs of Entering Kindergarteners

We identified two themes which addressed the strengths and needs of entering kindergarteners: 1) Children's strengths and needs, 2) Families strengths and needs. The first theme includes six subthemes: 1) social and emotional skills, 2) academics and learning, 3) animals and nature, 4) creativity and play, 5) health and disability, and 6) belonging and comfort.

### Children's strengths and needs

**Social and emotional skills.** Families shared about their children's development in social and emotional spheres. Social strengths enabled children to effectively interact and build positive relationships with others.<sup>18</sup> Some of the social strengths that families mentioned included being friendly, caring, and conscientious. For instance, one family described their daughter by saying, "I love her sweet considerate side [and] how she puts others first and [is] compassionate." In this same vein, many families explained how their children already had developed positive and meaningful friendships thus far in life. In contrast, other families shared about the ways in which their child might need support in developing social skills or making friends. Social support needs ranged from generally having a lack of familiarity with other kids their age, to feeling shy or anxious in social situations, to having challenges with sharing or understanding others' boundaries.

Families also shared about the complexities of their child's emotional landscape. One aspect of children's emotional landscape was their overall temperament, such as being happy, sensitive, or cautious. Parents talked about the challenging emotions that their children experienced and the context surrounding such emotions. Often these emotions and context pertained to routine life. For example, one family said that their son "gets sad sometimes when [we] leave for work," and another said that their child gets "frustrated when feeling overlooked." However, a small number of families shared about significantly challenging or traumatic events in the child's life that impacted them emotionally, including the death of a parent or grandparent, parental incarceration, and experiencing homelessness. One family shared about the impact of these kinds of events, saying "he presents as calm and collected but has internalized a lot and as he becomes more comfortable it is possible that more trauma will become apparent." Research finds that experiencing these kinds of traumatic events in childhood can have ramifications on cognitive development and physiological functioning.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For more information about social and emotional learning, refer to the [CASEL Framework](#) and [Oregon's Transformative Social and Emotional Framework](#).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.) *Adverse childhood experiences*. <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>

Another aspect of children's emotional landscape was the skills they had developed regarding how to understand, express, and regulate challenging emotions. Parents talked about specific emotional regulation techniques their child knew how to use, such as "stepping away" from a situation that was stressful or doing "breathing techniques." They also explained what their child needed from the educator in order to feel regulated. For instance, one family said that their daughter "can get angry quickly, [but] talking to her about why she is getting angry will help bring her back."

**Academics and learning.** Families also shared about their children's development in the realm of academics and learning. Academic strengths included those that would support children's engagement in school and their mastery of content areas. One strength that many families brought up was their child's positive orientation to learning. Children were described as "inquisitive," "excited for school," "lov[ing] to learn," "lov[ing] to read," and "lov[ing] numbers and math." A number of families conversely shared about how their child had reservations about school or had a challenging mindset when it came to learning. These children would benefit from explicit targeted support from their teacher to engage with school and learning in a positive way. Challenges included feeling nervous or anxious to start kindergarten as well as being easily discouraged, embarrassed, or shutting down if they didn't understand what they were learning right away. It also included not wanting to ask for help or make any mistakes. Another academic strength families shared about pertained to the skills their children had in specific content areas, such as language, reading, and math. For instance, some families highlighted how their children were learning multiple languages. In this respect, one family said that their child "understands [both] Spanish and English." Dual language skills such as these support children in effectively communicating with a wide range of people and effectively navigating multicultural and multilingual contexts. Other skills ranged from knowing letter names and sounds, to having a large vocabulary, to being able to count from 1-10. Occasionally, families expressed concerns about their child being "behind" in particular content areas or feeling like their child was not ready for the "rigor" of kindergarten.

**Animals and nature.** A third developmental area that families talked about was children's connection to nature. Connection to nature refers to an interest in and appreciation for animals as well as the outdoors. Many parents shared that their children had pets that they loved and enjoyed playing with. Some families likewise described their child's interest in collecting or catching small insects and reptiles. For instance, one family said, "He likes to catch grasshoppers and put them in a jar." Families also talked about how their children enjoyed spending time at various different outdoor spaces such as local parks, the coast, and lakes or

rivers. When in the outdoor spaces, children enjoyed participating in a host of activities including camping, hiking, gardening, hunting, and fishing. This kind of connection has been conceptualized as a developmental asset in research and is associated with many positive individual outcomes such as mental and emotional wellbeing.<sup>20</sup>

**Creativity and play.** Families’ also discussed children’s strengths in terms of creativity and play. Creativity and play provide children with venues to explore their own self-expression, make sense of the world around them, and experience joy and fulfillment. Additionally, studies find that it supports social, emotional, and cognitive development.<sup>21</sup> Some creative strengths related to how children engaged with music and art. Families shared about their child’s love for dancing, singing, drawing, art projects, and crafts. Other creative strengths centered around storytelling and role playing. For instance, one family said that their daughter often “is very imaginative and creates stories in her head and acts them out,” and another shared that their daughter “pretends to go on vacations and play[s] house.” Families also talked about their children’s love for other forms of play, including board games, video games, sports, and toys. Sometimes children enjoyed independent play, but often it was a social activity that enabled children to build relationships and connect with others.

**Health and disability.** Some families shared their children’s health needs as well as any disabilities that their child experienced. Health needs refer to children’s specific medical care requirements and included but were not limited to food allergies, health conditions, and medication management. Disabilities refer to impairments that substantially limit a child’s life activities.<sup>22</sup> In Oregon, 4,971 children who were a part of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) transitioned into kindergarten in fall 2024. In the Family Conversation, parents noted disabilities related to communication, learning, motor skills, emotional regulation, and attention.

Another aspect of health and disability that families discussed centered around how educators could best support their child’s learning and overall experience at school. In this regard, families

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<sup>20</sup> Taylor, A. F., & Kuo, F. E. (2006). Is contact with nature important for healthy child development? State of the evidence. In C. Spencer & M. Blades (Eds.), *Children and their environments: Learning, using and designing spaces* (pp. 124–158). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511521232.009>

<sup>21</sup> Kushnir, T. (2022). Imagination and social cognition in childhood. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 13(4), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1603>

National Institute for Play. (2025). *Play science: What we know so far*. National Institute for Play. <https://nifplay.org/play-science/summary-of-key-findings/>

<sup>22</sup> ADA National Network (2025). *What is the definition of disability under the ADA?* ADA National Network. <https://adata.org/faq/what-definition-disability-under-ada#:~:text=The%20ADA%20defines%20a%20person,not%20currently%20have%20a%20disability>

shared about how their children's health needs and disabilities showed up in daily life as well as the accommodations or strategies that worked well for their child. For example, families said that their children were "sensitive to loud noises like toilets and fire alarms," had "trouble eating certain textures of food," and "use headphones to block noise." Research finds that when students who experience disabilities are able to use and receive appropriate services, supports, and accommodations they have better academic and life outcomes.<sup>23</sup>

**Belonging and comfort.** A final area families shared about was what their children needed in order to have a sense of belonging and comfort at school. Belonging refers to children feeling welcomed, valued, cared for, and respected while comfort refers to a feeling of ease and relaxation. A large body of research finds that a sense of belonging and comfort at school is associated with academic achievement and attendance, as well as better social-emotional health.<sup>24</sup> Families explained how educators could support children by making an effort to include them in activities, games, and discussions. This effort could help to ensure that children didn't feel left out or isolated as they entered into a new and unfamiliar classroom environment. Some families also emphasized the importance of praise and validation, noting that their children "lov[ed] to be complimented by adults and peers," and "need[ed] affirmation for confidence to thrive."

Another factor that families felt would contribute to how comfortable their children were at school was educators' approach to behavior management (i.e., how educators ran their classroom and how they responded to student behavior). Parents emphasized that their children needed non-punitive and developmentally appropriate approaches to behavior management. One approach that multiple families brought up was offering structure and routine with plenty of warning time before transitioning to a new activity. When children were provided with this kind of environment, parents felt that they thrived and were able to engage with their surroundings in a healthy manner. Another behavior management approach that a number of parents talked about was reward systems and positive reinforcement. For example,

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<sup>23</sup> Secretary of State Oregon Audits Division. (2020). *ODE can better support students experiencing disabilities through improved coordination and monitoring of services*.  
<https://sos.oregon.gov/audits/Documents/2020-24.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Korpershoek, H., Canrinus, E. T., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & de Boer, H. (2019). The relationships between school belonging and students' motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: a meta-analytic review. *Research Papers in Education*, 35(6), 641–680.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2019.1615116>

Jacoby, I. (2023). *Student sense of belonging in schools: Connection to outcomes*. Oregon Department of Education.  
<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Documents/SenseofBelongingOutcomes.pdf>

one family said that their child “[loved] being recognized for doing something good,” and another shared that their daughter “likes to be helpful and be acknowledged for it.”

### **Families’ strengths and needs**

Parents shared about their children's family life and context. One aspect of family life related to who was raising entering kindergarteners and how they were being raised. Caregivers included but were not limited to children’s biological parents, their grandparents and other extended family, and foster or adoptive parents. This wide span of caregivers is reflective of the growing diversity of family systems and structures in the U.S.<sup>25</sup> The relationships between children and caregivers were often described as positive and supportive. These relationships were built and maintained through play, shared activities, and spending time together. For example, one family shared, “we are very family oriented [and] spend a lot of time together playing games and sports...we are very close.” Families also explained how caregivers taught children important skills and values. For example, one family talked about teaching their child “cooking [and] sewing,” and a number of multilingual families shared how they taught their children about their language and culture.

Parents also shared about challenges or needs that related to family life. Some needs that families mentioned were centered around work. For instance, one family shared that their child’s dad “works long hours,” which could have an impact on his availability. Other challenges related to income inequality and having limited access to resources such as money, transportation, and housing. These kinds of challenges are associated with higher stress levels which can have deleterious effects on physical health.<sup>26</sup> Families also talked about needs related to recent changes to the family dynamic. Commonly mentioned changes were moving to a new city and going through a divorce. A small number of families shared about particularly traumatic or challenging changes to family life including the death of a parent or grandparent.

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<sup>25</sup> Walsh, F. (2015). *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity*. The Guilford Press.

<sup>26</sup> Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (n.d.). *Poverty*. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/poverty#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20lasting%20effects,substance%20use%2C%20and%20chronic%20stress.&text=Finally%2C%20older%20adults%20with%20lower,rates%20of%20disability%20and%20mortality>.

## Families' Aspirations for their Child's Kindergarten Year

We identified two themes about families' aspirations: 1) Families aspirations for their children's development, and 2) Families' aspirations for the K-12 system. The first theme contains three subthemes: 1) academics and learning, 2) social and emotional, and 3) additional areas.

### Families' aspirations for their children's development

**Academics and learning.** One aspiration that parents brought up often was children's relationship to academics and learning. Families wanted their child to build upon existing academic strengths and develop new academic strengths. For instance, families said that they hoped their children would "develop an interest in learning" and "fall in love with school." Additionally, families who previously mentioned that their child had a challenging mindset about learning explained that they hoped this mindset would shift. To this point, one family said that they hoped their child would "learn [that] making mistakes is normal and is [the] way that you learn." Past studies indicate that children who hold these kinds of positive beliefs about learning also have higher school engagement and wellbeing.<sup>27</sup>

Another academic growth area that parents hoped for related to children's skills in specific content areas like reading, writing, and math (e.g., "learn[ing] how to read," and "to learn numbers and how to count"). Multilingual families and families with children entering into dual-language or immersion schools specifically shared about the hopes they had for their children's language skills and acquisition, such as "understand[ing] more Spanish and be[ing] able to speak it," and "continu[ing] to learn [her] tribal language." Occasionally, families situated their hopes about children's academic and linguistic skills in the context of challenging experiences their child faced due to their current skills. For instance, one multilingual family shared that they wanted their son to "learn English, because he is sad that he does not understand his friends." Other families expressed their concerns about how their children compared to other children or grade-level standards. These families did not want their children to fall "behind" and emphasized the importance of "catching up" with other children and being "on track."

**Social and emotional.** Families had many aspirations for their children's social and emotional development. Parents' social aspirations pertained to skills that would enable children to more positively engage with those around them.<sup>28</sup> One area of social development was about children becoming more comfortable in social settings and less shy. Another social

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<sup>27</sup> Lam, W. C., King, R. B., Yeung, S. S. S., & Zhoc, C. H. (2022). Mind-sets in early childhood: The relations among growth mindset, engagement and well-being among first grade students. *Early Education and Development*, 34(6), 1325–1340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2022.2126656>

<sup>28</sup> For more information about social and emotional learning, refer to the [CASEL Framework](#) and [Oregon's Transformative Social and Emotional Framework](#).

area that many families discussed was children internalizing social rules and growing in conscientiousness. For instance, families hoped that children would learn more about “social boundaries”, how to “take turns while speaking”, and how to “work through differences [with friends].”

Families also shared about the aspirations they had for their children’s emotional landscape. A number of parents shared that they hoped that their children would not experience many challenging emotions and instead would experience a range of positive emotions (e.g., being happy, feeling confident and sure of oneself). Parents often situated these hopes in the context of current challenges their children were facing emotionally. For example, one family said that they hoped their daughter would “[learn] to love things about herself that [are] starting to cause her some self-esteem issues” and another family said that they hoped their daughter would “grow independent and sure of herself.” Some families hoped that children would gain skills related to regulating challenging emotions, including being able to recognize their emotions, and “handl[ing] big feelings by communicating in a healthy way.”

**Additional areas.** Though less frequently mentioned, a few families also expressed hopes for their children to build more safety skills (e.g., learn about “stranger danger”, “learn family address”), motor skills (e.g., “tie shoelaces”), and self-regulation skills (e.g., “improve on focus and staying on task”).

### **Families’ aspirations for the K-12 system**

Families also shared the aspirations they had for the K-12 system. One of families’ aspirations centered educators themselves. Families wanted their children to have “good teachers” and for educators to treat their children with respect and care while at school. For instance, one family explained that they wanted their daughter’s educator to recognize her “for her strengths and not just focus on the negative.” These kinds of positive and caring teacher-student relationships can have a significant impact on children’s academic, social, and emotional wellbeing.<sup>29</sup>

Another aspiration families had pertained to accessing high-quality education and services. Families wanted their children to receive a “well-rounded education” with many “learn[ing]

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<sup>29</sup> Korpershoek, H., Canrinus, E. T., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & de Boer, H. (2019). The relationships between school belonging and students’ motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: a meta-analytic review. *Research Papers in Education*, 35(6), 641–680.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2019.1615116>

Jacoby, I. (2023). *Student sense of belonging in schools: Connection to outcomes*. Oregon Department of Education.  
<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Documents/SenseofBelongingOutcomes.pdf>

opportunities” and be able to “access after-school programs/activities.” High-quality opportunities included “hands-on experiences”, those that nurture children's curiosity, and educational experiences that would “challenge” their children academically. A few parents hoped that the K-12 system would support their child “in a way that [they are] set up for success” and would offer appropriate support for their child’s individual needs.

Some parents shared aspirations related to the transition into the K-12 system. This included more structure and routines in their education experience, opportunities to gently transition and get accustomed to the classroom, good communication, and a warm introduction to the education system that “sets the tone” for their education experiences to come.

## Limitations

Though the technical report offers insight into the experiences, strengths, and needs of entering kindergarteners and their families, it is not without limitations. One limitation is related to the pilot sample. The pilot sample included only nine districts and should not be considered representative of all entering kindergarteners and their families across the state. It is possible that the findings would have been different with a different or more diverse sample. For example, we might have identified additional dimensions within the themes that spoke to the specific to the needs or strengths of gender expansive children had the sample been more representative of that student group. Additionally, with relatively small numbers of families from minoritized populations, the data were not suited to deeply explore the unique strengths and systemic barriers faced by these families. As the Family Conversation scales up to include more families across the state, it may be possible to more readily explore families' experiences prior to kindergarten within historically minoritized communities to inform DELC and ODE of ways to address systemic barriers in the Early Childhood and Education Systems.

Another limitation pertains to the close-ended questions in the Family Conversation. The language and response options for the close-ended questions in the 2023-2024 administration were slightly ambiguous, which may have caused some confusion or error. This ambiguity may have contributed to misalignment between the findings from this analysis and findings from DELC's 2022 Statewide Household Survey. To address this issue, the close-ended questions in the Family Conversation have been updated for the 2024-2025 administration. As the Family Conversation Pilot scales up to include more districts across the state, we may see the results approach those found in future iterations of the Household Survey. However, the two tools take different approaches to understanding families' experiences prior to kindergarten, and the differences in findings between the two tools may persist into the future. Future analysis of the Family Conversations could include integrating the findings of future Household Surveys to create a more complete picture of families' experiences prior to kindergarten.

## Next Steps

This technical report begins to lay a foundation for ODE and DELC's program of research with Family Conversation data. In future years, we plan to:

1. Apply, test, and continue to refine the qualitative codebook using new and larger pilot samples.
2. More deeply and systematically investigate equity-focused research questions.
3. Explore ways to report, communicate, and present Family Conversation data that support ODE, DELC, and participating schools in meaningfully responding to findings.

## Conclusion

The ELTC represents a significant shift in how Oregon approaches the transition into kindergarten. By prioritizing family engagement and cultural responsiveness, the Family Conversation fosters strong partnerships between educators and families, ensuring that educators are better equipped to support the diverse needs of their students. The insights gained through these conversations not only inform individual teaching strategies but also can help guide statewide efforts to address disparities in early learning access and outcomes. This technical report included information about the 2023-2024 pilot administration of the Family Conversation as well as a summary of the mixed-methods analysis and findings from the pilot year. Additionally, it shared descriptive statistics and discussed what topics families brought up during the conversation. As the ELTC evolves, it remains aligned with Oregon's broader educational initiatives, such as the Student Success Plans, the Early Literacy Framework, and Raise Up Oregon 2.0, all of which aim to create a more equitable, inclusive, and supportive educational system. Ultimately, the ELTC ensures that every child, regardless of their background, enters kindergarten with the support they need to succeed, setting the foundation for a positive and impactful educational journey.

To learn more about the ELTC initiative and keep up to date with the pilot process, visit the [ELTC webpage](#).

## Appendix: Fall 2023 Pilot: Family Conversation Facilitation Guide

### Introduction

Thank you for being part of the Fall 2023 Pilot of the Early Learning Transition Check-In (ELTC) project organized by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the Oregon Early Learning Division (ELD), soon to be the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC).

The process to redesign Oregon's Kindergarten Assessment is called the [Early Learning Transition Check-In: A Collaborative Engagement with Community](#) (ELTC).

The reimagined process has three distinct purposes:

- Collect a statewide snapshot of data about children and families as they begin kindergarten
- Support families in building relationships with their kindergarten educators
- Inform state-level decisions about Oregon's Early Learning System

The process honors the whole child and the assets they bring and allows for stronger relationships to be built between educators, families and children starting at the beginning of a child's K-12 career as opposed to an assessment that may ultimately serve as a barrier that has long-term impacts on the connection between school and home.

This ELTC is supported by the amended rule [OAR 581-022-2130](#), Community Informed Information Gathering Process at Kindergarten. Notable changes to the rule include:

- Language shifts that intentionally frame children and families using an asset-based approach.
- Centering equity and anti-racist practices by shifting to a culturally responsive method that allows for stronger relationships to be built beginning at a child's K-12 career as opposed to an assessment that may ultimately serve as a barrier and create long-term impact on the connection between school and home.
- Removing the word "assessment" from the title and language in order to reinforce the new approach: Community Informed Information Gathering Process.
- Allowing for flexibility to include other future culturally responsive components that are deemed necessary through our engagement process with community partners.

As part of this pilot, you will be engaging in an information gathering process called a "Family Conversation." The vision is that each fall, kindergarten educators will meet one on one with every family entering their classes. The Family Conversation is meant to provide a structure to support educators to have an initial "get to know you" conversation and an opportunity for families and educators to build relationships with one another. The information families share will immediately help educators make adjustments to instruction. It will also inform systems by collecting information about a child's and families' experience prior to kindergarten. ODE and DELC believes that the Family Conversation intentionally advances equity, by taking a more holistic view of children, by giving families an opportunity to share important contextual information about themselves, and by shifting away from focusing on children's "readiness" to systems being ready for children.

This facilitator's guide is designed to complement the webinar by offering information regarding the redesign process, best practices of implementing the Family Conversation and required training and data collection.

## **Phase 1: Purposeful Planning**

### **Setting Communities Up for Success**

In Phase I, Purposeful Planning, teams will set the groundwork for successful ELTC pilot implementation. The following are suggestions based on recommendations provided by Oregon school districts that have previously implemented a family component at the beginning of the school year.

The first critical step is forming your school planning and implementation team. These will be the people that will champion the work! They will be the people who can provide information and answer questions to parents, caregivers and community members. With any successful change management project, after a team has been formed, there will need to be thought around roles and responsibilities. Successful systems do not rely on one person and supporting the ELTC should not fall exclusively on kindergarten educators.

Along with communicating often in a variety of ways: verbally and in written form, it is also critical to involve community. Community liaison, care facilities in your area or even calling upon former kindergarten families will be key to getting the word out.

The final step in Phase I, is to create a Family Conversation schedule that meets your community needs, aligns with your district/school equity statements and also follows local bargaining agreements. To support your work in creating schedules, ODE and DELC have provided some examples of schedules that districts around the state of Oregon use. Other supports we think are important to note are the following two Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs):

[OAR 581-022-0102 30b](#): Instructional time shall include: (B) Time that a student spends in statewide performance assessments

[OAR 581-022-2320 6e](#): Upon approval by the local school board, a district may include in its calculation of instructional time, up to...30 hours for parent teacher conferences.

### **Phase 2: Culturally Responsive Engagement**

This phase is called Culturally Responsive Engagement. One major shift from the previous Kindergarten Assessment (KA) to the Early Learning Transition Check-In (ELTC) is centering equity and applying antiracist practices. It is important to keep in mind that school settings are *typically* considered safe places for staff, however we cannot be sure the same sense of safety is felt by families. It is important that we create systems that support and center equity. A key part of this is acknowledging that not all people, or all communities, are starting from the same place. Providing different levels of support based on an individual's and/or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes is a central component.

A required training element of conducting the Family Conversation is to complete ODE's Engaging Equity Module 2 called [Biased- Based Beliefs and Identity](#). Educators will:

- build foundational knowledge of bias-based beliefs and how they contribute to disparate outcomes and experiences for children of color
- examine how identity and culture inform implicit bias and other bias-based beliefs

ODE and DELC have developed guidance on how to schedule your conversations, prioritizing groups that have experienced marginalization by our systems. To begin, think about scheduling interpreted conferences first. Then, families that identify as people of color and/or any other historically marginalized groups.

After conferences are scheduled, it will be important to send confirmation times and the ELTC One Pager in English and home language to families ahead of time so they have time to think about the questions. Again, it

is important that communication happens often in a variety of ways. Some suggestions of these ways are listed in Phase 1 and also in the bulleted points below.

During this phase, it will be essential to begin communication with our independent contractor, Oregon's Kitchen Table to schedule Community Feedback Sessions.

### **Phase 3: Family Conversation**

#### **Tasks to Complete Before Conducting the Family Conversation**

This section includes a list of tasks for you to complete prior to these conversations. These tasks will help you learn how to conduct the conversation and what you need to do to prepare. It is meant to be a guide to assist educators with the facilitation process. The process encourages, above all else, connecting with families in a culturally responsive way. ODE and DELC provided the suggested script to model all parts of the conversation described in the training. There is sample language to assist educators to put the questions into context.

While it is important to ask the questions verbatim, the sample script is meant to be a guide for an educator in case they are wondering how to make the time more conversational. Educators should balance a welcoming and conversational atmosphere while also incorporating all necessary elements of the Family Conversation.

#### **Required Training Before the Family Conversation**

Family Conversation Webinars

Youtube versions

<https://youtu.be/Uni2t7dDfik> - Fall 2023 Pilot ELTC Webinar 1 Video

<https://youtu.be/bGLgwMH5NLo> - Fall 2023 Pilot ELTC Webinar 2 Video

Linked documents and resources included with the webinar

Family Conversation Facilitation Guide

Attend one live Q&A session hosted by ODE and DELC in June or August

Complete the [Training Confirmation Form](#)

#### **Help Families Feel Welcome**

Set up the physical space to promote connection (if meeting in person)

Learn greetings in families' home languages and cultures

Plan an activity for the child to do while you talk with their parent/caregiver

#### **Set Everyone Up For Success**

Send interpreters this Conversation Facilitation Guide (English) and [One Pager](#) in advance (English and in their other language/s)

Meet with interpreters in advance to review Family Conversation questions and answer their questions

Choose your note-taking method (Spreadsheet or paper-and-pencil)

[Educator note-taking form](#)

Familiarize self with Family Conversation questions by reading recommended script and protocol and/or watching sample video

Practice conducting the Family Conversation and taking notes

Learn about available community resources for children and families in your area

Have [copies of the questions](#) available for families during the conversation

## Protocol and Script for Conducting the Family Conversation

### Before the Conversation

#### Materials You Will Need

Please be sure to have the following documents ready prior to starting the conversation.

- Data collection form ([Smartsheet](#) or copies of [note taking form](#))
- (\*)[Copy of questions so families can follow along \(translated when applicable\)](#)
- (\*)[Handout about the follow up feedback sessions](#)
- Any materials for an activity for the child

All efforts should be made to meet with the family in person, however if this is not possible and you are completing the conversation virtually, please email/send the documents with an asterisk (\*) to the family.

### A Deep Listening Mindset

Before you begin the Family Conversation, please keep the following strategies for deep listening in mind:

- Give space, pay attention, and respond to families' feelings and to their non-verbal cues, in addition to what they say verbally.
- Think about your perspectives and biases and how they might show up during these conversations.
- Use affirming language and assurance techniques to confirm answers families provide.
- Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions in this conversation. Do your best to be open to and appreciative of the information families choose to share.
- Enjoy this unique opportunity to get to know the children and families in your class!

### During the Conversation

If you are meeting for the first time, introduce yourself to the family and invite them to introduce themselves, too. If you already know the family, then you may skip this part of the recommended script. Instead, take time for a brief check-in to ask how the family is doing.

- Sentences in **bold** are examples of what can be said out loud to the family
- Bracketed [ ] information is for reference only for the person hosting the Family Conversation

#### ***Good afternoon (morning, evening). Welcome!***

[Greet family in their home language, if other than English].

***My name is... My pronouns are...*** [if you are comfortable; add any other information you'd like to share].

**Note:** If an interpreter is present, then also invite them to introduce themselves to the family. During the conversation, make eye contact with the child or parent/caregiver who is speaking, not the interpreter (even if you do not understand the language they are using).

[to the interpreter, if present:] ***Thank you for being here today. I'd like to invite you to introduce yourself, too, including your name and pronouns if you are comfortable, and anything else you'd like to share about yourself.***

[to the family:] ***I'm glad you are here. I invite each of you to share your names and your pronouns, if you are comfortable doing so.*** [If the child does not share, invite them directly to do so. As needed, ask the family to help you learn how to pronounce their names.]

### Conversation Overview

Explain the purpose of the conversation and set expectations for your time together.

***Thank you for meeting with me today. We are going to spend time getting to know each other better, so I can learn more about you and your family. I also have several questions for you about your child's experiences before kindergarten... It should only take about 15 to 20 minutes. If there are questions you do not want to answer, please just let me know. Did you receive the questions I sent earlier?***

[if yes] ***Great!***

[if no] ***That's ok, I can share the questions now (place note taking form in front of family so they can follow along) and give you some time to think about them as we go.***

***While we talk, I will be taking some notes. My notes will be shared with the Oregon Department of Education and the Department of Early Learning and Care. Your answers will help me get to know your child and your family better. The information you share will also help our state better understand families' experiences and needs during early childhood. The Department of Early Learning and Care will use the information from all families to inform the state's education programs, policies, and funding to our state's early learning and care system. Our hope is that your answers will help me improve the kindergarten experiences for everyone in my class, and that they will help our state improve early learning care experiences for families in the future.***

#### **Pilot**

Explain that the conversation today is part of a pilot project to try out the questions and the protocol, and that ODE and DELC will be seeking feedback about how this conversation works for families and for educators.

***We are doing this today because our class [school, district] is helping the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) try out a new conversation that they have developed. This year, a small number of families across the state are participating in this pilot project. Later, ODE and DELC will be asking for our feedback, yours and mine, about the questions and the overall experience.***

#### **Confidentiality**

Explain how you and the state will keep families' information safe. If you think something the family says needs to be shared with other school staff, then you must ask the family for permission, first. However, mandatory reporting laws apply.

***The information that you share with me today will be kept confidential, meaning that your name, your child's name, and my notes about your responses will only be available to myself and to specific staff members at ODE and DELC who are working on this project.***

***The only exception to this is if a parent/caregiver shares something that makes me worry about the child's safety. As an educator, I am a mandatory reporter, which means I am obligated to contact the proper agency***

***if I am worried about any child being abused or neglected.***

***ODE and DELC will create a summary of what we learn across all families who complete this conversation. This will include general themes and it may include direct quotes from families, but this information will not be linked with specific names.***

***Do you give me permission to share this information with ODE and DELC?***

***Do you have any questions before we get started?*** [give time for them to think]

#### **Connecting with the Child**

Follow this recommended script to connect with the child if they are also attending the conversation. This is a way to invite them into the conversation. After you ask the following questions and let the child respond, please help the child get settled into an activity - either one you provide (e.g., playdough) or their own (e.g., if they brought something from home).

**Hi** [child's name]!

***Thank you for being here today. I'm excited to be your teacher. I have two questions for you today.***

***How do you feel about going to kindergarten?***

***What is something you want me to know about you?***

### **Connecting with the Parents(s)/Caregiver(s)**

Follow this recommended script to go through the questions of the Family Conversation with the parent(s)/caregiver(s) who are joining. After asking each question, pause to let the family answer. This is meant to be conversational, so please reply to what families share with affirmations (e.g., *"that's so interesting"*, *"I love that idea"*, *"thank you for sharing that with me"*, etc.). Use Assurance Techniques to summarize and clarify a family's answer. (see optional prompts below).

### **Assurance Techniques**

This part of the conversation will help to confirm that the summary is as accurate as possible in capturing the most important points that the family intended to share. Examples of assurance phrases in the script include, *"I heard you say...Is this accurate...May I summarize..."* The family will have an opportunity to correct and/or clarify if there are any places where what was captured does not align with the family's thinking, which will help to increase the quality of the data.

Take notes, either directly in the spreadsheet or on the Note Taking form provided by ODE and DELC and enter into the spreadsheet later.

***Now, I'm excited to ask you the questions that I sent ahead of time. I'll just quickly remind you that I'll be taking some notes while we talk. After each question we'll review what I wrote together to make sure it's accurate. The first two questions are to help me get to know you and your child.***

***What are your hopes and dreams for your child this year?*** Respond with affirmation, followed by, *I heard you say...is this correct?*

***What brings your child joy?*** Respond with affirmation, followed by *Can I summarize your answer by saying...*

***For the next few questions, I'll be asking about your family's experiences with early learning and care before kindergarten. By "early learning and care," I mean any kinds of child care or preschool settings your child may have been in. I'd also like you to think about any kinds of classes, play groups, home visiting programs or support groups that you or your child may have attended and any other kinds of services your family may have received to support your child's learning and development during the last year.***

***What kinds of child care did your family have for your child? For example, were they cared for only by you or another parent or guardian? Or was your child cared for by other people, like friends, other relatives, or teachers?***

[optional follow-up prompts]

- ***Was your child in a Head Start program or another kind of preschool program?***
- ***Was your child cared for in a home or a school/center?***
- ***Did your child have multiple kinds of child care?***

Respond with affirmation, followed by *I marked...is this correct?*

***What experiences, programs and/or services did your child receive or participate in to help them learn and grow?***

Respond with affirmation, followed by, ***May I repeat what I heard you say to make sure I recorded your words accurately?***

If they provide an answer to the question above, then ask, ***Of the experiences, programs and/or services you just mentioned, which one would you say was the most helpful to your child and your family?***

***Which experiences, programs and/or services do you wish your child had received?***

Respond with affirmation, followed by, ***I marked....is that right?***

***Thank you for sharing all of this with me. I have just two more questions.***

***What else would you like for me to know and understand about your child or your family? What questions do you have for me?***

### **Closing and Gratitude**

Please thank the families for their time and let them know what the next steps are.

***Thank you so much for your time today and for all of the information you shared with me. It was good to meet you and your child. I look forward to seeing them on the first day of kindergarten. [Here](#) [Hand information about the feedback session] is information about the feedback session that will be led by Oregon's Kitchen Table. During the feedback session, you will be able to share your thoughts about the questions I asked today and any feedback you have about the process. ODE and DELC want to know both what you liked and what you didn't like about this. They are especially interested to hear if there was anything that made you feel welcome and respected or if there was anything that was confusing or that made you feel uncomfortable.***

***If you have any questions, or think of anything else you would like to share, please feel free to reach out to me at [provide family with best way to contact you]. If you would like more information on the project, you can also contact the ODE and DELC team directly at: [PreKCheckIn@ode.oregon.org](mailto:PreKCheckIn@ode.oregon.org).***

### **Phase 4: Data Collection/Reporting**

This is the time to have the most fun connecting and collaborating with families and children! As stated before, above all else, ODE and DELC encourages building relationships with children and families. It is important to capture the information well, but, as much as possible, keep it conversational. ODE will be providing a video recording of a teacher who is using deep listening and assurance techniques while also building relationships with families and children at the same time.

#### **Tasks to be completed in Phase 4:**

Complete Family Conversations

[Distribute information about Family Feedback Session\(s\)](#)

Obtain 8-digit State Student Identification (SSID) Number

Input Data on into [Data Collection Form](#)

Attend and provide input for Educator Feedback Session\*

\*More details to come during Q & A Sessions.

### **Data Collection and Reporting**

There are two options for taking notes. One way is by directly entering notes into the online [Smartsheet Data Collection Form](#). The other way to take notes is by using the physical notetaking form called the [Family Conversation Note Taking Form](#). If you choose to use the Educator Family Conversation Note Taking Form, you would then enter these notes into the Smartsheet Data Collection Form after the Family Conversation is complete. We have developed this note taking form to help guide your conversation to keep the feeling of the meeting casual and open-ended, while still highlighting the key points and required questions. Remember, you are required to obtain an **8-digit State Student Identification number (SSID)** prior to entering data into the Smartsheet form.

### Security of Testing Materials

There may be a gap in time between completing the Family Conversation and entering information into the data collection form. A common reason for this is that SSIDs for incoming kindergarteners have not been issued yet. To ensure confidentiality of student information, please make sure the note taking form is kept in a secure location. To ensure the security of Oregon's test items and student confidentiality, all printed testing materials (e.g., note taking form and materials with individual student information) must be kept secure.

Collect and inventory the notes at the end of each Family Conversation, store securely in between test sessions. Materials retained between conversations must be securely destroyed immediately upon the completion of data entry for the Family Conversation.

### Data Entry

- Before entering any data please confirm if the family has given consent for their information to be shared with the state.
- You must have each student's **8-digit SSID** prior to being able to submit the data collection form
- As you are entering family's responses please be mindful to not include any sensitive or identifiable information such as names of children or family members
- For the open-ended questions, ODE and DELC suggest that educators type a few summary sentences that capture the family/caregiver's response to each question.

Enter data from each Family Conversation into the Smartsheet Data Collection form. Each conversation is entered as a separate submission. ODE and DELC are currently working on developing a batch entry and/or bulk upload data entry option, but it is not yet available at this time.

### Family Conversation and Data Entry window

To the extent possible all family conversations should take place prior to the start of the school year. We recognize this may not be possible, but we encourage you to meet with each family prior to their child beginning school. You can begin entering data from your Family Conversation as soon as it has been completed and have acquired an 8-digit State Student ID, you can choose to enter data as the conversations happen, or enter it all at once when you have completed all the conversations.

**All Family Conversations must be completed by September 25, 2023**

**All data must be entered in the Smartsheet Data Collection Form by October 6, 2023**

## Early Learning Transition Check In

We would like educators to make every effort to reach all families/caregivers and provide an opportunity to meet, preferably in-person. However, we acknowledge that there may be cases outside everyone's control that may not allow for 100% participation.

As a best practice we encourage you to schedule the Family Conversation with any family who registers at your school, even if it is outside the pilot window. Taking time to meet one on one with all new families supports connection and relationship building for the teacher, family, and child.

### Gratitude

Thank you for participating in the Early Learning Transition Check-In Fall 2023 Pilot: Family Conversation. We hope you find this guide useful as you work to develop and refine your systems to support the Family Conversation component of the Early Learning Transition Check-In. Please contact us by [email](#) if you have questions or visit the [Early Learning Transition Check-In website](#) if you would like to learn more. We look forward to future conversations through live office hours and during the live Q&A sessions in June, August, and September.

#### Live Question & Answer Session Date and times

- Session #1- June 12th, 3:00-4:00
- Session #2- June 16th, 8:00-9:00
- Session #3- August 16th, 2:00-3:00
- Session #4- August 21st, 9:00-10:00
- Session #5- August 24th, 4:00-5:00
- Session #6- August 29th, 8:00-9:00
- Session #7- September 1st, 1:00-2:00

#### Zoom Link for Q&A Sessions