



Family Listening Session

Hearing from Parents About Their Child Care Needs

Bienestar Scappoose

In January 2020, a listening session with parents was held in Scappoose, Oregon to learn about their needs for, and experiences with, child care in their community. This listening session was part of a series of family listening sessions funded by the Preschool Development Grant as a part of a statewide early learning needs assessment. The goal of the listening session was to hear family voices that have not yet been reflected in ongoing work to better understand families' early learning needs and experiences. This session was co-designed, planned, and hosted by Bienestar and by researchers from AB Cultural Drivers, OSLC Developments, Inc., and Portland State University. Seven caregivers (six mothers, one grandmother) who currently live in Scappoose attended the session. The session was held at an apartment complex, and the participants were residents of the complex. The listening session was conducted in Spanish.

Current Child Care Experiences and Building School Readiness

Who currently takes care of your children ages 0-5 years and what activities do they do?

Most caregivers in this listening session took care of their children themselves. One parent relied on friends and neighbors, and one parent had a child in Head Start. The caregivers described a number of activities that the children do with their care providers, such as exercising, going to the park, singing, learning colors and letters, learning to write their name, and practicing being respectful to other children and adults.

Reflecting Family and Cultural Values and Traditions

The parents and caregivers speak Spanish with their children at home, as do their friends and neighbors that care for their children. However, the family with a child in Head Start shared, "There is only one teacher there that speaks Spanish. She is only there once a week, sometimes just for a little while, sometimes all day... Sometimes it is difficult for my son to communicate because he doesn't speak much English but now that he is going to school he is learning a lot."

One caregiver shared that their providers celebrated cultural traditions with their children: "...they taught them a lot about the Christmas celebration."

"Nada más hay una maestra que habla español. Está con ellos un día de la semana. A veces solo un rato, y a veces todo el día los martes... A veces es difícil para mi niño comunicarse porque él no habla mucho inglés. Ahorita que está yendo a la escuelita está aprendiendo bastante."

"...les enseñaron mucho lo que se celebra en la Navidad."



Where would you like your care to be?

All caregivers wanted care that was close to their home in Scappoose, with providers who speak Spanish. These caregivers wanted their children to arrive to care using bus transportation. A couple of caregivers shared that they do not drive or do not always have access to a car, so without transportation included in the care program, it is not possible for these families to send their children to care.

What time or days of the week would you like your child to be in care?

All caregivers indicated a preference for full day care, 8-10 hours per day, Monday through Friday, or at least through Thursday. Having weekend care options would also be ideal. Most of these families needed this care to be able to do field agriculture work. One caregiver described the schedule that would be needed to cover the work hours.

"If you work in the field, you start at 7:30am. So you would drop [your children] off at 6:30am and would pick them up at 4:00pm."

"Trabajando en el campo, entras a las 7:30 am y dejas a el niño a las 6:30 am y los vas a recoger a las 4:00 pm."

Another caregiver who has a child in care had not seen Mexican traditions being taught. However, the apartment complex offers summer classes, and one caregiver said, *"When they attend summer classes they teach them about traditions like Day of the Dead, and they also show them traditional Mexican dances."*

"Cuando están en clases de verano también los enseñan tradiciones como el día de los muertos, y también les enseñan bailes típicos de México."

Their Ideal Child Care Situation

Why is it important for your children to have educational, artistic, and other activities to help them prepare for kindergarten?

All caregivers agreed that these activities are important. One caregiver shared these activities are important *"so that they can have more self-confidence, [and] so they can get along with other kids because they often start out very shy and don't want to interact with other kids."*

"Que estén más seguros de ellos mismos [y] puedan convivir con otros niños porque a veces son muy tímidos y no quieren convivir con otros niños."

Another caregiver highlighted the importance of learning social skills and routines.

"I think that it's mostly about helping them learn to share and being prepared for that. It was very difficult for my oldest when they started kinder without knowing this...It would be helpful to prepare them to learn how rules are different [than at home]... At home they are used to different routines, for example they are used to eating at a certain time and if they take, say, longer than 20 minutes, it's fine, and they can eat until they are full. In school they might only have 15 minutes and if they don't finish in that time then, oh well."

"Yo siento que, sí es más para ayudarlos o enseñarlos a compartir, para prepararlos. Fue muy frustrante para el más grande entrar a kínder sin saber...Nos ayudaría mucho para prepararlos a enseñarlos pues en casa hay reglas diferentes... En la casa ellos están acostumbrados a rutinas distintas, por ejemplo en la hora de comer, si se demoran más de 20 minutos está bien que coma cuando él pueda. En la escuela no, solamente tiene los 15min y si no come, pues ya."

Some parents shared concern about their child being familiar with English.



What would you like your children to learn?

Caregivers wanted their children to learn basic academic skills like colors and letters, games to play with other children (“other than tablet or phone games”), art, painting, music, and sports like volleyball, soccer, swimming, and basketball.

A few caregivers also wanted their children to learn emotional regulation strategies, “ways to calm down when frustrated or stressed.” These caregivers shared that their children have difficult drop offs, where they get very sad.

“They always have it in their heads that we will leave them and never return for them. We can start [with the strategies] to help them calm down and feel safe.”

“Siempre ellos tienen en la mente que uno los va dejar y no regresar por ellos. Pues de ahí, ayudarlos a calmarse y sentirse seguros.”

One caregiver shared that simply reassuring their children is not enough. “All this time that I have taken him has been very difficult for both of us. He still tells me ‘No, I don’t want to be there because you’re not going to be with me.’...One can talk to them, and I always talked to him before taking him in. We can talk to them, but it’s very different from the lived experience.”

“Todo este tiempo que le llevo es bien difícil para los dos. Él todavía me dice que ‘No, no quiero estar ahí porque tu no vas a estar conmigo.’...Aunque uno les platicue, y yo siempre le platicaba antes de que fuera. Pero es diferente, una cosa es que les platicamos y a parte es lo que viven.”

Why is it important for your children to have educational, artistic, and other activities to help them prepare for kindergarten? *(continued)*

“[My son’s] primary language is Spanish because that is what we speak at home. I have observed that before going to school, he already needs to be familiar with English.”

“Como él tiene el idioma español primero porque nosotros lo hablamos en casa; y veo que en la escuela tiene que ya estar con el inglés.”

When referring to an older son, a caregiver shared, “In high school they spoke more in Spanish than in English and it was very difficult for him, [because the elementary] schools here are all in English.”

“Allá en el Head Start hablaban más español que el inglés y le costó mucho [porque en la escuela] es todo en inglés.”

Why is it important to find providers that speak Spanish? Is it difficult to find providers who speak Spanish?

The caregivers agreed that it is important to have providers that speak Spanish, but options are limited. In addition to their concern about their children being able to communicate with teachers in the classroom, caregivers were also concerned about their own ability to communicate with school staff.

“To tell you the truth, in order to know how my girl is doing in school, I talk to the teacher who speaks Spanish, and she comes in on Tuesdays. She is the one I have the most communication with. I have no communication with those who only speak English.”

“Pues la verdad, ahorita, yo para saber cómo le va a mi niña en la escuela, hablo con la maestra que habla español; viene los martes. Ella es con la que más tengo comunicación. No tengo comunicación con las que solo hablan inglés.”

“[My 9-year-old] speaks English already so they help me. I don’t understand much, but I know how to express myself in the basic sense.”

“Tengo uno de 9 años en la escuela. Ya habla bien el inglés entonces me ayuda. No entiendo mucho, pero sé cómo expresarme en lo más básico.”

“In fact, you can get an interpreter at the school if you can’t communicate with the teacher. Just tell them ‘I don’t speak English, I want to interpret’ and they connect you with one.”

“Incluso en la escuela te dan intérprete por si no puedes comunicarte con la maestra. Nada más decir que ‘no hablas inglés; quiero interprete’ y si se lo dan.”

Challenges to Access Care

Many caregivers shared that it is very hard to find someone to care for their children.

"It is a very small community in these apartments...For example, if I want to go to work, it would be very hard for me to find someone to take care of my children here. There is no babysitter or anything."

"Es una comunidad muy pequeña en estos apartamentos... Por ejemplo, si yo me quiero ir a trabajar se me haría difícil encontrar quien me cuide a mis hijos aquí. No hay babysitter o nada que nos cuide a los niños."

All of these caregivers used to live in different cities where care was more accessible.

"When I lived in Hillsboro, my older girl started to go to school. I realized after moving here that I could not find [anyone] who would take care of my daughter...When I moved here, I found it very difficult, it even made me want to return to Hillsboro."

"Mi experiencia fue que cuando vivía en Hillsboro, mi niña grande empezó ir a la escuela. Me di cuenta que, ya pasándome aquí, no encontré quien me cuidara mi hija... Cuando yo me moví para acá se me hizo muy difícil, hasta me dio ganas de regresarme a Hillsboro."

"When I arrived [in Hillsboro...they talked to me about Head Start, and it was a huge help because it allowed me to work and have child care...Now with my youngest [child], I intended to enroll him [in Head Start], but I never got a call about [it] here in Scappoose. I filled out an application, but they never called me back."

"Cuando yo llegué aquí [En Hillsboro] Me platicaron de Head Start y era una gran ayuda para que yo fuera a trabajar y tener cuidado...Ahora con mi hijo pequeño intenté a meterlo a la escuela, pero no calificué aquí en Scapoose. Aquí tan poco me llamaron. Metí la aplicación y ya no me llamaron."

"If we want to work, but we have no one to take care of young children, we have to go without working."

"Sí queremos trabajar, pero no tenemos quien cuide a los niños pequeños...tenemos que quedarnos sin trabajar."

One caregiver shared that, while Bienestar has created a lounge for families with children at the apartment complex, it is still challenging to communicate with other parents in complex to turn that resource into a care opportunity.

"We as parents do not have good communication with one another...But I think that if we had good communication and said 'Well, [on] such a day you can [watch them], or I can for [a few] hours...' This way the children would not be so frustrated, because here they can draw, or play, or do activities, or other things. I... thought to communicate with everyone, but there was no opportunity. I think that communication is often what is missing."

"Pero como no tenemos comunicación con todos los padres, entonces no hacemos nada...Pero pienso que si tuviéramos una comunicación y dijéramos 'pues tal día tu puedes, o yo puedo por [unas horas]...' Y así los niños no estarían tan frustrados. Porque aquí pueden dibujar, o jugar, o hacer actividades, u otras cosas...Yo como mamá había pensado comunicarme con todas, pero no había oportunidad. Creo que los que nos falta mucho es la comunicación."

The need for trusted caregivers was also clear. One caregiver shared an example of a her son not feeling safe with a care provider:

"One can sense when they don't want to stay, they start to cry a lot. He said no and no, he would pull himself back when I took him out of his chair. There, they also took care of my other nephews, and once I asked my nephew, 'Does the lady does shout or scold you all?' He said yes. My child was smaller and could not express [himself]. I felt very bad that the lady was there and shouting at them. It was not the kind of behavior she should have with the children. She is supposed to be a babysitter, and she even had the license needed to care for kids."

"Una siente cuando ellos no se quieren quedar, se ponen a llorar demasiado. Decía que no y que no, se jalaba cuando le sacaba de la silla. ¿Ahí cuidaban a mis otros sobrinos, y una vez le dije a mi sobrinito "la señora les grita o regaña?" El me dijo que sí. Mi niño estaba más pequeño y no se podía expresar. Sentí muy feo que aquí esta señora les gritaba. No era el comportamiento que debía que tener con los niños. Se supone que es una babysitter, y hasta tenía la licencia para cuidar."

What information or help would you like to have in the future to make a good decision about child care?

Caregivers wanted the opportunity to get to meet potential care providers and get a sense of the care space. Additionally, they wanted to utilize the recommendation of other parents.

Other Challenges Experienced

One grandmother at the session shared her experience of her family being disrespected by teachers, police, and social workers. Within this community, events like the following example are somewhat common, and are very challenging situations for parents to be in, particularly if they are undocumented.

"I had an experience with my granddaughter where they [school staff] sent police officers to my daughter's house and arrested/detained her in front of her children... Because teachers will tell kids that if they are spanked they need to tell the teacher or call the police. I don't see it as a punishment that they are going to die from or anything. This leads to kids growing up with the idea that they can do or say whatever they want to their mother, or even shove them because the teachers tell them that if the parents do anything to them, they will be sent away..."

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This person went on to describe how the family needed and requested support from the school to help manage their children's behavior, and yet did not receive the support they felt they needed. Instead, this grandmother felt her family was unfairly punished by the school, rather than supported.

"My daughter went to the school many times saying "my daughter is doing this, this, and this." [The school] never listened to her. Then the day the child came in with a slap on the wrist they had what they needed. I asked the social worker that came if she really thought that what she was doing was good? To come here and just scare the children?"

"Mi hija fue muchas veces a la escuela a hablar, 'mi hija está haciendo eso, eso y eso' [la escuela] nunca hizo caso. El día que llegó con un golpe en la mano, ya con eso tuvieron. ¡Yo le dije a la trabajadora social que si de verdad piensan que lo que están haciendo está bien... eso de venir a asustar a los niños!"

In this example, there was a disconnect between how families experienced the situation and how the school staff viewed and responded. Improving communication and understanding between schools and families could help to mitigate the potential negative impact of these experiences.

Have you ever had to leave work to take care of your children because paying to care for them is too expensive?

For this group of caregivers, price of care was not the primary barrier to care while access to trusted caregivers, is. Caregivers in the listening session have stopped working because they could not find someone to take care of their children. But if a family is lucky enough to find a spot in care, the cost of care may make it infeasible to continue working.

"People who take care of kids charge a lot. For example, if one works in the field, we know that it is the minimum wage. Paying about \$20-25 a day per kid and having them tend to two or three, it no longer makes sense to work. That's what those with a license charge, and it's even more for a baby."

"Lo que cobran las personas que cuidan a los niños es mucho. Por ejemplo, si uno trabaja en el campo, sabemos que es el mínimo. Pagar unos \$20-25 al día, y teniendo 2 o 3 pequeños ya no conviene trabajar. Eso es lo que cobran con licencia, y hasta sería más por [cuidar] un bebé."

Their Needs as Parents

What would help you be the best mom or dad you can be?

Caregivers shared some things that could help them prepare their children to be successful in kindergarten. One caregiver wanted access to a program to help parents learn English to better be able to help their children. Another wanted to know what children will be learning in kindergarten to help support their learning at home:

“For example, they will teach them numbers in school but we don’t know them. We can have them count up to the number 10, but in kinder they don’t stop at 10, they are more advanced.”

“Por ejemplo, les enseñan los números en la escuela y uno no sabe...Uno les dice que cuente de uno a diez, pero he escuchado que en el kínder ya no es solo de uno a diez, es más avanzado.”

Caregivers also emphasized how important it is to have good communication with their children’s teachers.

“I also think that as mothers we have a sense of whether or not our kids have a tendency to be shy or rebellious, we have a right to tell the teacher about how our kids compose themselves. Giving teachers an idea of how the child composes themselves can help them create strategies for managing it...We need to have good communication with our teachers, and have a good understanding of how our kids are doing in school.”

“Yo también creo que como mamás, si sabemos que nuestro hijo es rebelde o tímido, tenemos el derecho de decirle a la maestra que mi hijo es así. Porque ellos también van a saber cómo manejar su situación sabiendo como es el comportamiento de nuestros hijos...Tenemos que tener comunicación nosotros con los maestros. Y saber cómo van nuestros hijos también, porque también no es tan fácil de que diga una: ‘pues ya los llevo a la escuela y se van a quedar ahí’; uno tiene que saber también cómo están y cómo van en la escuela.”

Additionally, caregivers wished that they had more patience with their children and knowledge about how to care for them. This suggests a need for parent education classes and workshops for this population of caregivers.

Key Takeaways

- ▶ These caregivers valued activities that help prepare their children for kindergarten, particularly socio-emotional activities that help them learn to interact with other children and gain confidence in a school setting.
- ▶ The primary challenge that these families encounter is access to care. There are very few care options, either formal or informal, available to them. Lack of accessible transportation contributes to this, as many families are unable to travel outside of their own apartment complex for care. Additionally, if a family is lucky enough to find care, the cost of care may be too expensive to justify going to work. As a result, most of the caregivers who attended the session take care of their own young children and do not work.
- ▶ Many of these caregivers reported that their children struggle at drop offs with care providers. These caregivers wanted their children to learn emotional regulation strategies to help with these challenging transitions.
- ▶ These families feel that it is important to communicate with teachers about their children. However, communicating with teaching staff is challenging for these families, due to language barriers. There is only one teacher that speaks Spanish and works in this and the surrounding towns and is only available once a week.

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