



Family Listening Session

Hearing from Parents About Their Child Care Needs

OCDC Gresham

In January 2020, a listening session with parents was held in Gresham, 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 sessions was to hear family voices that have not yet been captured in understanding families' early learning needs and experiences. This session was co-designed, planned and hosted by Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC) and by researchers from AB Cultural Drivers, OSLC Developments, Inc., and Portland State University. Eight mothers and three fathers currently living in Gresham attended the session. Eight of the parents came to Oregon from Mexico, and four of these parents specified that they were from Oaxaca. The remaining three parents were born in Texas, Arizona, and California. Two mothers self-identified as American Indian. The listening session was primarily conducted in Spanish, with English translation available for the two participants who did not speak 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?

All parents in the listening session had children currently attending, or soon to be attending, care at OCDC. In addition to this care, four parents shared that they relied on family members and friends for child care support. One mother described trading care with other families with small children and relying on teen babysitters. One parenting pair reported that the mother managed all of the child care before their child attended OCDC. This parenting pair did not rely on babysitters, friends, or family for care.



If you had a magic wand, what would help you be the best mom or dad you can be?

These parents talked about the value of time, patience, and curiosity. They expressed the desire to spend more time with their children, including one who said she wished she did not have to work.

Many parents agreed that, while with friends and family, their children spend time watching TV or a tablet. In more formal care settings, the parents described that their children play with other children (e.g., play tag, sing, dance), practice social skills, and learn to read and write. Multiple parents emphasized that their children have learned to make friends in care settings. One mother said, “Daycare is where you learn how not to be a jerk.” These parents shared that their children are learning social-emotional skills, like recognizing emotions and empathy for others, at OCDC.

Many parents described the cultural and linguistic supports that exist at OCDC. The teachers serve Latin/Mexican food, there is native art throughout the classroom, and the classrooms are bilingual in Spanish and English. One mother shared why having bilingual classrooms is important:

“Sometimes when you have a language barrier, and you start in a school, when they don’t talk to you in your language that can be somewhat intimidating... When my father in law came to pick up the child, he was excited because they speak Spanish here. Those little things that are not big, but they have an impact in our community.”

“A veces cuando entras a una escuela donde no te hablan en tu idioma a veces se siente intimidante. Y hay situaciones, por ejemplo, cuando mi suegro vino por mi niño, él dice ‘wow hablan español’. Son cosas chiquitas pero tienen impacto en nuestra comunidad.”

Later, this mother described that her son, who speaks Spanish, is helping another child at OCDC learn to speak Spanish. This other child is helping her son learn new words in English. “It is an exchange of words.”

“En vez de decir ‘good’, él dice ‘excelente’. O cosas que han resaltado. ‘Mi amigo me enseñó’. Es un intercambio de palabras.”

One parenting pair mentioned that OCDC cannot fully celebrate their culture, because OCDC cannot celebrate religious events. Some parents mentioned sending their children to Mexico, where they can absorb Mexican culture (including religious events) and language. A few parents shared that it is important for their children to be exposed to other cultures so they can learn to understand others:

A father said, “Every state in Mexico has different cultures, so I like it when he participates in different cultures, along with the one he’s going to grow up with.”

“Cada estado tiene diferentes culturas y me gusta que él participe con diferentes culturas igual con la cultura que a lo mejor ellos van a crecer, ya que ellos son estadounidenses, me gustaría que practique todas las culturas que pueda, para que así pueda entender a cada una de las personas, ya que no todos somos de la misma cultura.”

Another father said, “I feel that I would like him to learn all those cultures so he could understand other people the same way he understands his friends.”

“Yo siento que me gustaría que aprendiera todas esas culturas para que pudiera entender a la demás gente como a sus amigos.”



Early Learning Programs Helped Identify Children with Special Needs

One mother was thankful to OCDC for their help in identifying her child's Autism.

"When I started bringing [my son] here is when we realized that he had autism. And that's something if I had not brought him here I wouldn't have found out. They told me where I needed to go. They said that now he was talking much more than before. Before he didn't talk at all. Last year and this year he has been [at OCDC], and he has learned a lot."

"Cuando empecé a traerlo aquí es cuando nos dimos cuenta que tenía autismo y es algo que yo pienso que si no lo hubiera traído aquí no lo hubiera sabido. Me dijeron dónde tenía que ir. Ya habla mucho más que antes, antes no hablaba nada. ya tiene el año pasado y este año que tiene aquí, ha aprendido mucho."

Their Ideal Child Care Situation

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

As might be expected, different families had different needs: One mother, jokingly, said 24/7. Five parents said full day care, from 7:30 or 8:00am to 4:00 or 5:00pm, 4 or 5 days a week would be ideal for them. However, one father shared that he felt that that would be hard on the children: *"If they were here all afternoon, it would be the same as us working all day."*

"Si estuvieran toda la tarde sería lo mismo que cuando uno está trabajando y no los ve aunque estén en la casa."

Other parents said the current OCDC half-day schedule, 9:00am to 12:30pm, works well for their needs, though a couple parents said that a small extension would be helpful. One mother said that 12:30pm is sometimes a challenging pickup time to manage with her work schedule: "I don't even eat because I have to go and pick him up." One mother suggested an evening of care at OCDC, once a month, would be a special opportunity for parents to go out. Other parents agreed with this idea. The parents in this session were aware that a care situation that works well for them may not be ideal for other parents with different needs.

What kinds of educational, artistic, and other activities would you like your children to receive to help them prepare for kindergarten?

One mother shared her dream of mixed age groups starting at birth in early learning programs:

"I would love to see a multicultural, multigenerational, multiage setting. The way we set up school, it's the 1 year olds, 2 year olds...all the way until they're 18...That's actually not normal for a functioning society, we only do that because it's easy. Little kids could benefit [from] being in a classroom setting...with older kids. The older kids could then be supported by adults. Then everybody could learn from having some elders in the room. Everyone could share the load of raising up the babies...We are not saying, okay now, one teacher needs to teach all the grades...but everybody is helping."

Parents also described enrichment activities they would like to see added to their child's childcare experiences, such as music, cooking, construction, recycling, nature studies, life skills, and exposure to different careers. Two parents wanted their children to learn self-care techniques, such as how to calm themselves when overwhelmed using meditation or yoga.

Finding Appropriate Care

Many parents relied on references from friends, family, and coworkers to find care. One parent said that they found OCDC through a flyer. The father said that he wished OCDC advertised more, with more flyers in more places, or perhaps on some Spanish music radio stations. A mother shared that many years ago, it was more challenging to find care, and also described her use of social media to find care:

"20 years ago when I had to find daycare...Facebook didn't exist. MySpace didn't exist. So I would ask at their school, 'who's the babysitter in the neighborhood?'...Somebody referred me to her...but my oldest son's personality and her didn't get along. She called me at work and said when you pick up your kid this is your last day. I had work, I had classes, so I got some people to cover my shifts for two days, but I needed to find somebody. So I went to Craigslist...I didn't have time to really get to know [them]...I had to get to work."

She described other piecemeal solutions, including asking another parent who had a child in her son's kindergarten class for afternoon care, saying **"I had to really patch it together for many years. It was difficult."** Now, she uses Facebook parenting groups as a resource to find care quickly.

Two parents emphasized the difficulty of finding trusted caregivers:

"It's difficult, especially when you don't know the person, and you give that person the most valuable [piece of your life]. It was difficult to trust somebody...At some point I even thought that I didn't need to work, why am I going to leave my children? Then I found out that [my child was] fine, [the babysitter] had experience, we checked the criminal record, she's only two blocks away from my work...Now my youngest child, I go to get him and he doesn't want to leave, and I think that's good."

"Es difícil más cuando no conoces a la persona y darle como lo más valioso que tengas a esa persona, sin saber lo que en realidad está pasando debajo de su techo, fue un proceso difícil...Fue hasta momentos donde pensé que no necesitaba trabajar, me estresaba hasta que procesaba que ellos están bien, ellos tienen experiencia, tienen criminal record, está a dos cuadras de mi trabajo... hasta la fecha mi niño más chiquito voy por él y no se quiere venir, entonces creo que es algo bueno."

"The woman that took care of my children, it was the ex wife of my father. She took care of the children, but she didn't have the patience...I didn't know what would happen if I was not there...I thought I better take them to someone who will take care of the children and have the patience to take care of children."

"Es la ex esposa de mi papá cuidaba a mis niñas, pero ni siquiera tiene la paciencia de cuidar...porque ahora sí estoy aquí, y si no estoy, no sé lo que va a pasar...pero dije 'mejor la llevo a una señora que tenga paciencia.'"

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

Cost was clearly a challenge. Three mothers talked about their hardship with balancing the expense of caring for their children with going to work. Two had to leave work because the cost of childcare was not affordable for them.

"I had to leave work...I was basically just working to pay the babysitter. I didn't keep any money."

"Tuve que dejar, iba prácticamente a trabajar para la babysitter [...] y pues yo no me quedaba con nada."

"I would like to work, but I cannot apply for public care [for my youngest child], and I cannot pay for the \$1200 a month for the youngest to go to care. During those three hours I could work part time or do something productive. Since staying home, I have had anxiety and depression, but \$1200 is way too much."

"A mí me gustaría trabajar y no pude aplicar al childcare porque son \$1200 al mes por el más chiquito. (Durante esas tres horas yo pudiera agarrar un part time o hacer algo productivo.) Porque desde que empecé a estar en casa me dió lo que es ansiedad y depresión, todo se junta. Pero \$1200 es mucho dinero."

"When I had Employment-Related Day Care [ERDC], you know, the state would help pay for some of my daycare, I had to be very careful about my income. If I went over the income requirement, all of the daycare would be on me... If you want to get a better job, or a raise, or more hours, you can't just make a little more money, you better make a lot more money to cover losing the daycare [support]."

Their Needs as Parents

What do you need to help support your children as they enter kindergarten?

Parents talked about the importance of staying involved and invested in their children's education.

"We are the first teachers and we don't have to give the whole load to the teachers, so we're trying to involve ourselves more..."

"...Somos los primeros maestros, y no darle la carga a los maestros de que ellos le tienen que enseñar, o nomás porque son los maestros, entonces [nosotros nos] involucramos más en tareas..."

One father is dedicated to going to parent meetings and asking his son every day about school. He shared that he wants to have a presence in his son's education because he did not have that same support from his own father:

"I was eight years old when [my father] left [the country]. He gave me an education, but I feel that I needed more of my father's support being close by."

"Yo tenía ocho años cuando él se vino, siento que sí me dió una educación pero siento que diario me hizo falta el apoyo de mi papá, como estar cerca."

Another mother who, in addition to her preschool aged child, has adult children, shared what she has learned about the importance of partnering with teachers.

"Get into their classroom if you can... 'What are you learning?' 'What's the lesson?'... Take that home and refer back to it. Then [the teachers] learn that you do know what's going on at school, that you're working together. You and the school are working together to make [your children] adults... Some of my hardest years with my grown kids was when I couldn't be as involved in the school as I could have been."

Key Takeaways

- ▶ These parents valued activities that help prepare their children for kindergarten, particularly socio-emotional activities that help them learn to interact with other children, recognize emotions, and learn empathy; they also appreciated the cultural and linguistic supports in the OCDC classrooms. These parents want their children to learn to appreciate and understand different cultures.
- ▶ Some parents were challenged by the cost of care outside of OCDC, which often exceeds what they make at work. Two parents (both mothers) stopped working to take care of their children, while another needed to be very cautious about working more hours or accepting a better job to stay eligible for her Employment-Related Day Care subsidy.
- ▶ These parents expressed the need for extended care hours and additional care days. Some parents found it challenging to arrange care outside of school or OCDC hours and to transition between care situations.
- ▶ Most parents relied on referrals from friends, family, and coworkers to find care.
- ▶ This group of parents were very motivated to stay involved with their children's education by helping with homework, attending parent meetings, and partnering with teachers and schools, which are "parenting engagement" program components.

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Responsive Evaluation & Research

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