

Kindergarten Readiness Parent Focus Group Summary

Baker City, Baker County

Focus Group Snapshot



11 participants



Have lived in the community from less than 6 months to over 20 years



Have children ages birth to 21



Live in a frontier community¹, population 9,757²

“People remember your name here and watch your kids grow up.”

What does it mean for you and your child to be ready for school?

Ready Children

Although parents discussed literacy and numeracy skills, they emphasized the importance of social, emotional, and executive functioning skills of children. Social-emotional and executive functioning skills of children were described as more important to school readiness, over learning pre-academic skills such as letters, numbers, shapes, and colors. Participants also talked about the importance of their children being able to develop fine motor skills in order to participate in classroom activities, like writing, coloring, and cutting.

Social-emotional skills such as sharing, being able to identify and verbalize their feelings, caring for others, and enjoying playing with other children.

“Social skills are a big thing. [Daughter] will just walk up to another child and take their toys and

they will be sitting there crying and she could care less. Hopefully before school I want her to be very well socialized to understand other kids’ emotions and how to interact appropriately so she’s not getting in trouble all the time.”

Executive functioning skills such as being able to focus attention, remember instructions, and self-regulate.

“That my children are able to listen to and receive instructions from their teachers, so teaching them to have listening skills is, for some of my children, a challenge.”

Pre-academic skills such as knowing letters, numbers, shapes, and colors.

Fine motor skills such as being able to use scissors, pencils, and crayons.

Ready Families

Parents wanted to be able to offer concrete supports such as establishing routines, reading regularly, and building relationships with their child’s teacher or early learning provider and described these as important skills and activities for improving school readiness

Establish routines and communicate expectations to prepare children for full-day school schedules and transitions between activities throughout the day.

“I think you should definitely prepare your child... They are going to be away from you the whole day. Make sure your child understands what is going to happen.”

¹ Oregon Office of Rural Health designation file, www.ohsu.edu/xd/outreach/oregon-rural-health/data/rural-definitions/index.cfm

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year population estimate factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts

Develop ways to support their child's learning at home, especially related to being comfortable with reading with their child and doing so regularly

Build relationships with early learning providers and teachers in order to gain comfort talking with preschool and elementary teachers. This was described as important to both seeking out information and support for parents and children to connect learning in the classroom with learning at home, as well as to support teachers in the classroom.

"Communication with the school, with the teacher, is important. The school will be teaching them things that we should also be teaching them at home."

What are trusted sources of information about school readiness?

Parents identified a range of people and resources that serve as trusted sources of information about school readiness.

People in professional roles such as early learning providers, teachers, health care providers, home visitors, and parent educators.

Faith communities, including spiritual leaders and children's program staff.

Personal connections, including family members, friends, and peers.

Additional resources included **Apps** such as Vroom and Parent Cue.

"Vroom is free and is pretty cool because they can target your child's age group and send you age-appropriate resources, activities, ideas for just making moments with your child most impactful."

What kind of early learning supports have you participated in and how do they support school readiness?

Parents have participated in a wide range of early learning programs or services for families with children ages birth to 5.

Parent-child groups include playgroups and library story times.

Home visits through Early Head Start, Healthy Families Oregon, and Early Intervention.

Parenting education series through Building Healthy Families and through local churches.

Preschool programs include Head Start, YMCA, faith-based programs, and other private centers.

Nutrition supports through the Women, Infants & Children (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Peer support and **social groups** such as Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPs) and Hike it Baby.

The **literacy coalition** was noted as providing reading supports for children and families, including in the schools as well as book giveaways and general reading promotion in the community more broadly.

Other family fun and learning activities include YMCA recreation activities, art center activities, and community sports.

How do these early learning programs help you and your child be ready for school?

Ready Children

Executive functioning and social-emotional skills development through opportunities for children to interact and play with other children in a group setting, and practice listening to an instructor.

“We go to music class or story time. It’s getting used to almost like a classroom environment. It just kind of gets them used to the idea that there is one person you are supposed to listen to and have to deal with all these other children.”

Pre-academic skills development. This was described as largely happening through parents reading regularly with their child, and extending beyond letter names and sounds, including opportunities to incorporate math skills development.

“We are not just reading, but we are incorporating math and number recognition. Some books are about color recognition.”

Ready Families

Opportunities to build relationships through play groups, parent education, and home visiting programs. Families emphasized the value they put on being able to spend time with and get to know one another, reducing social isolation.

“All those programs have helped a lot with me actually getting connections with people and being able to build friendships.”

Parenting education and support from both providers and other parents was important for families to be able to problem-solve, share strategies for addressing their child’s challenging behavior, and reduce social isolation.

Tangible supports help promote participation and access, such as having free or low-cost options for most early learning activities in the community. Participants felt that scholarships helped address financial barriers to access for their families.

What would help improve early learning programs to support school readiness?

Parents largely had positive experiences with early learning programs. However, they also offered

suggestions to make it easier for families to participate.

Consolidate resources for parents to access information about the range of current types of early learning programs and activities available by going to a single website or Facebook page, for example.

More information for parents on things they can do with their child at home to support school readiness across ages birth to 5, especially if they do not participate in preschool or other early learning programs. As one participant mentioned, she had not previously been connected to many other early learning programs or families with young children and noted:

“This is the first I’m hearing about a lot of these [programs].”

Improved understanding of what kindergarten teachers expect of children when they enter school, and how parents can help prepare their child to know what to expect. Parents whose children were primarily in their care and not involved in a preschool program, worried about their child being away for a full school day, and how that transition feels difficult for both children and parents.

“That is my biggest concern with [child] starting kindergarten. I don’t know how to prepare for an 8-hour day. To be away from my child that long, and you don’t know what they are doing and how they are doing.”

More indoor activities that are free or low-cost, especially for winter months when weather makes it difficult to spend time outside. Ideas included local businesses or organizations sponsoring a family gym or Discovery Museum.

What kind of health services have you participated in and how do they support school readiness?

Although parents described being able to access **in-office services** from general medical practitioners in Baker City for their family, they also noted the lack of pediatricians and other specialists in the area. Most reported accessing health services at Eastern Oregon Medical Associates-St. Luke's Clinic in Baker City.

Home visiting through Early Intervention was mentioned as a health support, for speech, physical, and occupational therapies.

Nutrition supports through Women, Infants & Children (WIC) and cooking classes through Building Healthy Families.

Developmental screenings conducted through home visiting, WIC, and health care settings.

Vision clinics were noted to be offered periodically each year for no- or low-cost, but these were also described as difficult to access because of long wait lists.

How do these health services help you and your child be ready for school?

Parents described some negative experiences in trying to access and receive health services, while largely praising their child's medical provider. Parents focused on the parent-provider relationship, developmental screenings, and nutrition and literacy supports, that help them and their child to be ready for school.

Providers who take time to listen to parents were seen as making a difference for families. Feeling like their child's provider can take the time to listen to the family and not rush through the appointment was important to participants.

"Just listening. [Sometimes] they don't really want to listen to you...they just want to diagnose you."

Providers who show they remember their family were important to parents. They felt that they could

better raise questions and concerns and get the information they were seeking about child development and ways they can support their child.

"I do like my doctor. She remembers me, she remembers everything we have ever talked about. She will sit there and answer any questions I have."

Tracking developmental milestones through Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) was seen as helpful to some in order to support their understanding of their child's growth and development. Participants talked about completing the ASQ with health care providers, home visitors, and early learning providers.

"I love [the ASQ], because it has opened up a lot of questions for me at the doctor's appointment. Like, 'Wait, is [child] supposed to be doing this?'"

Some families felt that they understood the purpose of completing the ASQ, how to interpret the results, and where to go if additional follow-up is needed.

"I think the Ages and Stages is helpful because if there is something that needs to be monitored, or to look at further testing, you can catch it earlier. Not every parent knows what their child should or should not be doing."

Nutrition supports were described as helping child development through breastfeeding promotion, good nutrition, and healthy weight across development. Similarly, cooking classes through Building Healthy Families were seen as helping families prepare healthy, nutritious, tasty, and affordable meals.

"Nutrition and just making sure [children] are healthy [helps with school readiness]. All my kids struggled to gain weight, so just helping with that and being really supportive and encouraging [to breastfeed]."

Book giveaways were described as being offered through some participants' doctor's offices, which were seen as positive reinforcement for establishing regular, family reading times, as well as growing their home libraries.

"I went to [child's doctor] for a well-baby check and they gave him a book, a brand new book...Even in pregnancy, I'd started reading [to child] three times a day."

What would help improve health services to support school readiness?

Parents largely focused on improving the quality and content of parent-provider interactions, a stronger referral system, and improved access to pediatric and specialty care services as ways to improve health services and the system overall in supporting school readiness.

Spend more time with families to get to understand their needs, strengths, and values, especially as related to their children and parenting. One participant talked about wanting to breastfeed her child but struggling through that process early on. She valued her doctor's ability to understand her needs, link her with additional supports, and ultimately be able to successfully breastfeed her child for the time period she wanted.

"[My provider] really understood me and listened to me and...worked with me to make sure I accomplished my goal [to breastfeed]. I just needed a little bit of support...and she was able to give me resources to help."

Know, use and follow-up on referrals so parents can connect with additional supports, when needed, for themselves or their children. Some parents had received referrals to specialists but had not been able to connect with those providers, even after many months. From their perspective, the referrals had simply gotten lost amongst providers and they were left without being able to connect to needed specialists or knowing who to follow-up with to complete the referral and receive services.

One participant described her experience trying to access specialty dental services for her child:

"[Provider] said they sent a couple of referrals and then the lady I talked to said the referrals were never sent. There was no record."

Other participants described that their provider simply did not know who to refer them to for additional supports, or whether services existed within the community or in their health care plan, leaving them feeling frustrated. One participant, for example, was worried about her child's refusal to eat a wider range of foods and implications that may have for the child when he starts kindergarten:

"I specifically went in to [child's provider] to ask, I need him to see a specialist because I don't know what to do at this point. I want to be able to progress. [I asked], 'Who could you refer me to?' and they said 'We don't have anyone here and I don't really know anyone in Boise.' I just didn't know what to do at that point."

Communicate concrete ways families can support their child's school readiness skills development between visits. While families appreciated how the ASQ can help them and their child's doctor monitor their child's development, participants also described wanting to know more from their doctor about what they can do to help their child in the next developmental period. For some participants, that felt like a missing link; for others, they felt they already receive that information from their child's doctor and that it is extremely valuable.

"[ASQ] is kind of after the fact to see if your child is already there, instead of saying 'Work on these things until the next appointment.'"

Increase local access to health services, especially pediatric and specialty care providers. Families expressed an implicit preference for pediatric care providers for their children, as opposed to general or even family practice providers. Additional specialty care services families want to access but

not available locally included dental surgery, vision surgery, and support to address child's extremely picky eating.

Long travel times and distances were a barrier for families, especially those with limited financial resources and smaller children. Some parents described putting off care because of the difficulty of obtaining services that were only available in La Grande (45 miles away) or Boise, Idaho (130 miles and 1 time zone away).

"I know I put things off. If I don't think it's super serious, I will just feel like 'Well, it is out of the way' and I'll put it off even though I don't really want to. If we had [services] here...I might as well get it checked and if there is a problem you would find out a lot faster."

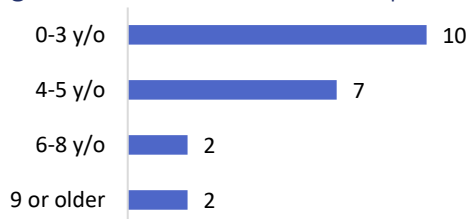
Focus Group & Community Profile

On January 29, 2018 Building Healthy Families staff in Baker City hosted a Kindergarten Readiness Parent Focus Group with 11 parents, including 10 moms and 1 dad. Seven reported parenting with a partner. Participants were recruited by Building Healthy Families program staff and were known to them through families' involvement in home visiting, preschool, or other early learning programs in the community.

The **average participant age was 31** and ranged from 23 to 38.

The **average number of children per household was 2** and ranged from 1 to 5.

Ages of Children of Focus Group Participants

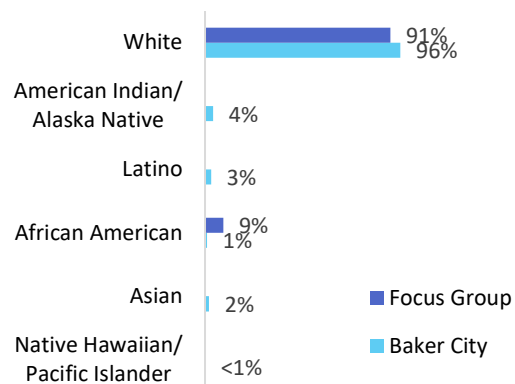


"Here, it is a slower way of life. You can go out and appreciate the outdoors, not having to be overwhelmed all the time with stuff."

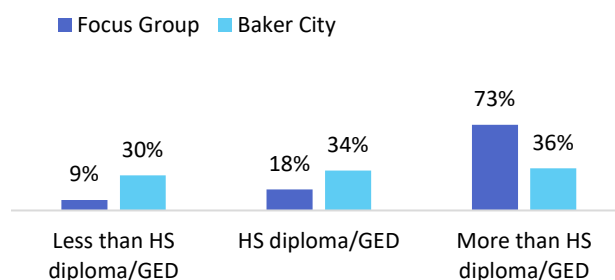
Participants reported that they like raising their children in the Baker City area because of the feeling of **being known** by others in the community, a **slower pace** of life, and **proximity to nature**. Several participants described **high quality schools**, and others described a **sense of safety**.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Race alone or in combination with one or more other races, Total may not equal 100% because individuals may endorse more than one category
factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices

Race/Ethnicity of Focus Group Participants & Baker City³



Educational Attainment of Focus Group Participants & Baker City⁴



Services Utilized by Focus Group Participants	% Yes
Public library	91%
SNAP	46%
TANF	18%
OHP	46%
WIC	64%
Early Head Start	9%
Head Start	18%
EI/ECSE	18%

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Educational Attainment among 18 to 24 year olds, factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices