

Kindergarten Readiness Parent Focus Group Summary

Grants Pass, Josephine County

Focus Group Snapshot



7 participants



Have lived in the community from 7 years to over 20 years



Have children ages 3 to 14



Live in a rural community¹, population 36,776²

“It’s a very multi-generational community... We have four generations living here. So you might have a community that caters to one generation or not others, but there is so much to offer when you get to be with family.”

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

Ready Children

While parents talked about children being academically ready for kindergarten, such as “writing your name and counting to 20”, social-emotional and executive functioning skills were described as more important to school readiness.

Social-emotional skills such as sharing and being able to identify and verbalize their feelings.

“We’re working with son right now about talking about how he feels, rather than resorting to letting his emotions take over.”

Executive functioning skills such as being able to focus attention and self-regulate. While these skills were mentioned as important, participants also had

differing feelings about how developmentally appropriate these expectations are.

“It seemed like [teachers] wanted them to be second grade ready in terms of how control their bodies. [Daughter] was ready for the environment, but then what that environment had to offer wasn’t ready for her.”

Discovering interests and joy for learning was described by some parents as a key to their child’s school readiness.

“[Son] wants to learn where he wants to learn. He’s great at problem-solving and at the things he wants to be great at.”

Ready Families

Parents needed to be able to offer concrete supports such as establishing routines and ways to support children’s learning as well as greater clarity about what kindergarten readiness means.

Establish routines, such as regular bedtimes and limits on screen time, e.g., TV, smart phones, video games.

Develop ways to support their child’s learning at home, such as being attuned and reflexive to support their individual child’s needs and strengths, and support growth in academic skills.

Obtain information about kindergarten readiness and expectations, including from public, charter, or private school options to find the best fit for their child. Some parents felt strongly that the public school kindergarten classroom was too focused on

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, 2010-Total Population factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts

academics, and explored other options for their child.

“When I went to the kindergarten round-up, I walked out of there scared. Kindergarten has become the new first grade and they need to have a comfort zone with the learning.”

Other parents felt differently about the kindergarten classroom, while also calling out that other limitations prevent them from being able to consider charter or private schools, such as their work schedules or having lower income.

“I’m a single mom. I don’t really have the options with home schooling or flexible hours. I will need the public school.”

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 teachers, early intervention specialists, early learning providers, home visitors, and doctors.

Personal connections, including family members, friends, and other parents.

Additional resources included **Apps** such as Vroom, and specific **websites** such as ABCmouse.com, and other **media** such as Public Broadcasting Service.

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.

Parenting education series including Positive Parenting through Goodwill Industries and Head Start classes.

Home visits through Early Intervention, Healthy Start, and CaCoon.

Preschool programs including Head Start and private preschool.

Nutrition supports through the Women, Infants & Children (WIC).

Kindergarten round-ups to register children for school and learn about kindergarten.

Family fun community activities including library programming, community events such as Frog O’Faire children’s festival, the Science Works hands-on museum, and YMCA groups and classes such as Baby Massage and parent-child yoga.

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.

“The biggest thing for us is [child’s] opportunity to have other adults in charge of them.”

Opportunities to gain independence through preschool or other early learning experiences and get used to having time apart from their parents.

Ready Families

Parenting education and support was important for families to be able to identify developmental milestones and prevent or respond to challenging behaviors.

“I learned a lot about development of my child and where some of my blinders are. I think I learned almost as much about myself as I did caring for my child.”

Understand child's needs and strengths in the classroom through regular updates and communication from the child's early learning providers. Parents felt more informed about how their child was doing during their time apart.

Information about kindergarten readiness and expectations was provided by some early learning providers to parents. This was valuable because those parents felt that they had a better sense of what to work on at home with their children over the summer before kindergarten.

"[Providers] gave us a checklist...We got it two or three months before [daughter] went into kindergarten."

Parent leadership and advocacy was key for some parents who felt encouraged by their early learning program to speak up for the needs of their child, and that staff would be able to respond and guide families to other supports if needed.

"Teach us to advocate. To know our kid and what is okay to ask for and what is okay to demand. If you're not getting it, what is the next place to go? How do you escalate that concern?"

Some parents also described this as an extension of **partnership between early learning providers and families**. Parents felt that when they and their child's providers are all working toward the same goal of their child's optimal development, they were in an even stronger position to support their child.

"[Providers] treat you like you are a team, like you are a team for the betterment of the child. Every single one of those [early learning] programs wants your child to grow and be the healthiest child you can have."

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

Parents largely had positive experiences with early learning programs, but also had concerns around

expectations of their children and how the current K-12 system could be more responsive.

Increase availability and affordability of early learning supports. The income threshold for Head Start was one specific example where families reported losing access to high quality early learning programs and additional resources, even as they gained higher income, it was often described as just enough to make them ineligible for eservices, but not enough to pay for other early learning programming.

"We did Head Start with our youngest, but now we are over income and still don't have enough money to send our kid to preschool. We are just stuck."

Improve community awareness and outreach of existing programs. Some participants whose children were not currently enrolled in a preschool program or school felt unsure about what supports are available to them, and did not feel confident knowing where to go to learn more.

"The help is great if you know it's there. If you're not one to go out there and advocate for yourself, and if you don't have friends and family, then it can be very isolating."

Improve 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. Even parents who reported receiving information from their early learning programs reported wanting information about kindergarten expectations earlier, as well as what the different options for schooling are in the community.

Improve continuity and connection between early learning and K-12 systems. Families who had participated in early learning programs and had positive experiences with provider-family communication, described more negative experiences with the K-12 system and the transition to kindergarten. They felt that the school had developmentally inappropriate expectations for

their child's behavior and were unresponsive to families' concerns for their child

"I found support at the 0 to 5 level being very strong. I think that is why it was such a shock going into the public school setting. I'm a big advocate for putting my kid where my money is, which is public schools. But there are big gaps in the elementary school system for getting equivalent support. I couldn't talk to the kindergarten teacher and get as in-depth of a response that I could with [preschool teachers]."

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

Parents described a range of health care services and support they have accessed in the area. Some participants described accessing private payer health care services, but most utilized Oregon Health Plan (OHP).

Participants accessed **in-office** health care services including well-child checks, family care, and dental services both locally, as well as in Medford (30 miles away), at the following locations:

- "A" Street Dental
- Children & Adolescents Clinic
- Family Practice Group
- Mountainview Family Practice
- Pregnancy Care Center
- Providence Medical Center
- Siskiyou Pediatric Clinic
- Urgent care clinics

Home visiting was utilized by some participants through Early Intervention, Healthy Start, and CaCoon.

Nutrition supports through Women, Infants & children (WIC) and events through AllCare.

Specialty care services were described as play therapy and mental health services.

Integrated supports in early learning settings, such providing training and assistance to staff for children requiring insulin injections.

"I have been working really closely with [early learning providers] to get the medical trainings done [in early learning setting], making [child] comfortable with other people taking care of the medicine. When he was comfortable with that, it has been just amazing."

Some participants also attended **community health fairs** where available services are highlighted through resource booths staffed by programs.

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

Parents shared how the health system supported their child's healthy development through monitoring developmental milestones, making referrals to additional supports if needed, and supporting families to build a foundation of health for their family.

"You have to be healthy to be ready for school."

Building a foundation of health for their family including parent education around pregnancy and infant care.

"When I found out I was pregnant, I started classes right away with [health care provider]. They did pregnancy care, then infant care. They work with you on any issue."

Tracking developmental milestones through Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) was seen as helpful to some parents. Some parents also felt that tracking concerns was seen critical to early diagnosis and intervention for their child. Participants talked about completing ASQs most commonly with health care providers and home visitors.

Related, some parents felt that their health care provider **knows, recommends, and uses referral sources** so parents can connect with additional supports for themselves or their children.

“There has been so much support from the time [child] was diagnosed until now. [Health providers and Early Intervention] communicate with each other. Without that, I don’t think I would have learned how to take care of my [child].”

Maintaining up-to-date immunizations was described by parents as a key role of health services, to ensure that children could participate in early learning supports and attend school.

Providers who take time to hear parents out were described as making the difference for many parents. When parents felt they had a relationship with their or their child’s provider and felt heard, known, and trusted, they were able to raise questions and concerns and get the information they were seeking about child development and ways they can support their child.

“It’s a really healthy mix of conversation, resources, handouts, websites, Apps. It opens doors. You establish a relationship [with health care provider] and then you know you can call and get help if you need it.”

What would help improve health services to support school readiness?

Parents largely focused on improving access to information and increasing frequency of developmental screenings as ways to improve health services and the system overall in supporting school readiness.

Improve communication between parents and providers. Parents wanted to be able to turn to their child’s health care providers with questions and concerns and be able to receive information and resources in return. For some participants, this related to feeling heard by the provider and having their concerns taken seriously. For other participants, this related to providers being more assertive with providing information about the development of their child.

“I would like them to be more upfront about what is developmentally appropriate. I feel that is a missing link, where I don’t feel like my child is ready emotionally for school. But I would love if health care providers would either look at the situation and provide me the documentation to go [to Early Intervention], or let me know that I’m being overprotective.”

Know, recommend, and use referral sources so parents can connect with additional supports, when needed or wanted, for themselves or their children. For example, one participant talked about getting a necessary referral to mental health through her pediatrician in order to diagnose her child’s special health need. The parent felt that she had to step in to advocate for a referral since her concerns were initially dismissed by the provider. Ultimately, for this parent, the referral provided needed information about the child’s behavior that she had not previously received through the primary care provider.

“[Child had] an uptick in aggression [due to changing family situation]. We realized that he is just acting out and adjusting to the situation, versus having a serious problem.”

Communicate concrete ways families can support their child’s school readiness skills development between visits, while clarifying developmentally appropriate expectations.

“Resources, my child isn’t there yet, but I’m looking for resources to know approximately where my kid need to be. Right now, I have no clue, I’m teaching him everything I can think of. Pushing ABC mouse. We’re counting, we’re doing things that may be pushing him too hard.”

Connect the health and school systems so that there is continuity and communication between expectations and supports. Families raising children with special health needs described wanting additional support from their child's health care provider in advocating with the school to ensure that the school is prepared to handle their specific health needs.

"I wonder if there is more room for health services to make connections with the schools because my pediatrician knows about my child's allergy needs, but that doesn't mean the school is educated for it."

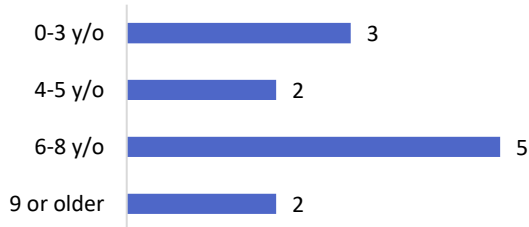
Focus Group & Community Profile

On February 12, 2018 All Care hosted a Kindergarten Readiness Parent Focus Group in Grants Pass with 7 parents, including 6 moms and 1 dad. Five reported parenting with a partner. Participants were recruited by the AllCare Health & Education Integration Coordinator and were known to her through referrals from early learning program staff who invited families.

The **average participant age was 35** and ranged from 26 to 41.

The **average number of children per household was 2** and ranged from 1 to 3.

Ages of Children of Focus Group Participants

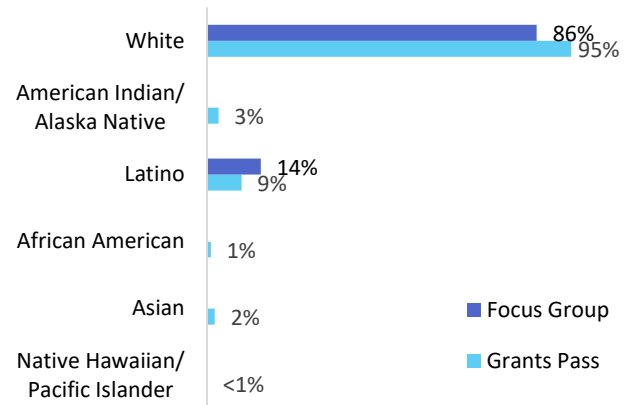


“I would have to say I really like the smallness of it, the community...Having the wonders of the world so close to you in your backyard is pretty amazing.”

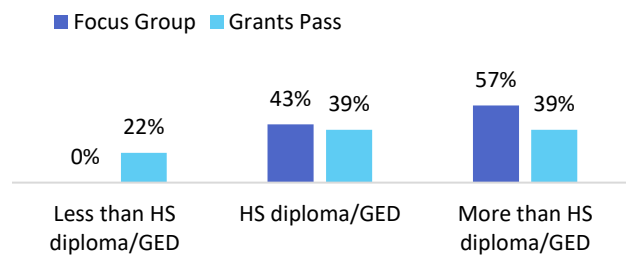
Participants reported that they like raising their children in Grants Pass because of variety of **early learning supports** including the local **library system**, that they have **family roots and connections** to the area, easy access to **nature**, and enjoy the **small size** of the community.

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 & Grants Pass³



Educational Attainment of Focus Group Participants & Grants Pass⁴



Services Utilized by Focus Group Participants	% Yes
Public library	100%
SNAP	71%
TANF	29%
OHP	71%
WIC	43%
Early Head Start	0%
Head Start	14%
EI/ECSE	14%

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