

Kindergarten Readiness Parent Focus Group Summary

Medford, Jackson County

Focus Group Snapshot



16 participants



Have lived in the community from 1 year to over 20 years



Have children ages birth to 14



12 participated in English, and 4 participated in Spanish



Live in a urban community¹, population 78,856²

“Ever since my daughter started going to preschool, she has more confidence. They help her develop her personality and be more confident in talking with other kids.”

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

Ready Children

Parents emphasized the importance of social-emotional, and executive functioning skills of children, over learning pre-academic skills such as “the ABCs and 123s.”

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

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

“[Children] know how to go to circle time, how to stand in a line, where to sit, how to share and use

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

their words when they come into a frustrating situation.”

Be independent and feel comfortable being away from their parents for the day in a classroom setting.

Developing a love for learning was something that some parents felt was important for children to cultivate before starting school.

“My hope for my kids is that they have a love of learning and understanding that if you don’t know all your letters by the first day of kindergarten, that’s okay.”

While **pre-academic skills** such as early literacy, early numeracy, shapes and colors were mentioned, it was generally in the context of them not being as important as the other school readiness skills parents discussed.

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.

“I should have listened to our pediatrician. I already know that screen time is not the best, but my son really liked [video game] and he was really good at it and we could play it together. But he has had a hard time adjusting to paying attention at school. Once I started restricting [screen time] he

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 total population factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts

did a lot better. We replace it with board games and outside time.”

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 academic skills development.

Obtain information about kindergarten readiness and expectations from the schools. Parents felt it was important to know or find out when kindergarten registration happens and when immunization records are due, for example.

“As parents, we need to know when to show up, when do we register our kids for kindergarten.”

Put health and safety supports in place for families with children with special health needs.

“I think a big one for our family is having a safety plan with the teacher and whoever our kiddo is going to be interacting with because two years ago he was diagnosed. [Do teachers know] what to do?”

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, school administrators, Early Intervention specialists, librarians, and health care providers.

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

Additional resources including specific **websites** such as the Centers for Disease Control.

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 library story times.

Parenting education series through Family Connections.

Home visits through Early Intervention and Early Head Starts.

Preschool programs including Head Start, Early Head Start, and Family Nurturing Center.

Family fun community activities through Kid Time, Family Nurturing Center, the YMCA, and church programs.

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.

“As a first-time parent, you are just learning things like this is normal, this is not normal. But when you put them in a different [early learning] environment, you see the other kids are nice and calm but your kid is freaking out. That is really embarrassing. [Children] are in preschool now and that is helping them but we still have a lot of things to work through so I am a little nervous for the future.”

Opportunities to have time away from parents was seen as helpful so children can learn to experience and develop comfort with increased independence.

“If you go through those first five years [of child’s life] and don’t have any child care of any size or preschool, then it is harder for the separation anxiety.”

Ready Families

Opportunities to build relationships with both early learning providers, teachers, and other parents was important for families to know who to talk with about questions or concerns about their child’s learning.

“Talk to the teacher, communicate with the teacher, and ask the teacher, ‘What is my child like?’ or ‘What areas does my child need more support?’”

Parenting education and support from both early learning providers and other parents was important for families to be able to problem-solve and share strategies for raising their children.

“Parenting classes have helped me talk to my child on her level. Finding ways to talk to her in a positive way to encourage her engagement.”

Support to promote child’s learning at home by modeling strategies and providing information so parents can best meet their child’s developmental and learning needs.

“[Early learning providers] provide resources and tools for parents. They give us ideas, they guide us, they support us. Therefore we are doing better for our own children.”

Seeing **home language and culture reflected in staff and programming** was important to parents. Participants felt that, on the whole, staff and programs were welcoming, inclusive, and reflective of their home language and culture.

“[Head Start] expects to be bilingual [English-Spanish], they are ready for it, and I appreciate that.”

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

Parents largely had positive experiences with early learning programs, but also had suggestions to make it easier for parents to participate, and ways to help parents integrate supports at home.

More information for parents on things they can do with their child at home to support school readiness across age birth to 5, especially for parents with children with special health needs. Although Early Intervention was described by some parents as helpful and necessary, other parents were seeking additional supports for special needs such as autism

“One of the biggest deficiencies in the community when it comes to [kindergarten] transition and what that looks like, is not having many support services for families that have [children with special needs].”

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.

“Do they have to be able to write their name and count to 100 before they enter? How is the school getting ready for us?”

Improve the transition to kindergarten. Parents wanted more opportunities to meet kindergarten teachers and school staff, and for children to get used to the school building and classroom.

“It would be helpful if [children] could meet the kindergarten teachers at the school and walk around the school a bit so it’s not so intimidating. It would be really helpful if the school or district reached out to preschools and communities and say

“We are going to have a family day to meet us and introduce ourselves.”

Establish developmental screening protocols in non-Head Start programs. Parents whose children were not in Head Start reported that they wanted their early learning providers to have similar access to supports to complete and track developmental milestones to ensure their child is school ready. One participant felt that it meant having a dedicated staff person:

“We need to have somebody who does that same thing [as the child development specialist at Head Start] available for the child care providers in our community. If [children] are not in Head Start they are left out and left behind. The better we do as a community and a start to ID issues early on, [the better].”

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

Parents described experience with a variety of health services and several expressed the importance of early identification of health needs leading to referral and supports. Most participants reported utilizing Oregon Health Plan (OHP); few had accessed private payer health care services.

Participants accessed **in-office** health care services at the following locations:

- Asante Family Medicine Clinic
- Children & Adolescents Clinic
- Creekside Clinic
- Family Practice Group
- Johnson Pediatrics
- Providence – Eagle Point Pediatrics
- Providence – Pediatrics Medford
- Providence – Swindell’s Center
- Southern Oregon Pediatrics

Home visiting through Early Intervention.

Health screening for vision and hearing health through Head Start.

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

Alternative medicine resources like acupuncture and massage.

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

Parents talked about a range of experiences with health care providers that helped support them and their child’s school readiness, ranging from monitoring development, providing concrete guidance, and connecting families with additional services.

Healthy development and nutrition supports through WIC help children be healthy and therefore more likely to be ready for school.

“WIC is really good. They give you the percentile of where your kid is at, which was interesting to watch him grow. My son was underweight for awhile.”

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

Tracking developmental milestones through Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) was seen as helpful to identify issues earlier.

“Going through the Ages & Stages, that’s how we found out that my son needed extra services. [Provider] referred him right away.”

Health care providers who take time to listen and respond to parents 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 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.

“My kid’s physician connected with me [and asked], ‘Is there anything else you need? Any concerns you have?’ And when I do, he is able to address them.”

Other parents appreciated more **direct feedback and guidance**, and rely on health providers to offer information if it seems their child is not on track:

“It is very important to have that person telling you if your child has a problem, just to guide you through what your child needs to be doing right now.”

Some parents emphasized the benefit when specialized health providers apply their expertise through **direct service**. It was seen as concrete support to help the child’s development as well as easing some of the responsibilities parents shoulder.

“In Early Intervention my son is in speech and occupational therapy. They do things we cannot do and it allows us to be just parents. They help fill in the gaps. I don’t know where my son would be without that.”

Other parents stressed the value of providers **knowing, recommending, and using referral sources**, that connected families with supplemental and necessary services.

“Last summer I was stressed out and my doctor recommended a behavioral medicine person. I tried to utilize her and talked through things. She was good at coaching me and giving advice. That was really nice.”

Some participants felt that their health care providers **communicate effectively** with other services and early learning programs or the schools.

“At Providence, my doctors will email the school, absence notes for things if I forgot to grab one at the office.”

What would help improve health services to support school readiness?

Parents largely focused on the quality of parent-provider interactions, communication and coordination among families and providers, and expanding access 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 parenting and their medical choices. One participant who felt he had a strong relationship with his child’s provider shared how he felt understood and supported:

“In my experience with our doctors and dentists, they’ve empowered me in choice. They give me the information about immunizations or medications. They give me the information, ‘You could do this or this,’ then there’s a personal connection and I can say, ‘For my family this is what I would choose.’ But they let you make that choice based on your cultural beliefs.”

Improve communication between parents, health providers, and the education system. For some parents, that meant receiving more **reminders** about when immunizations or Ages & Stages screens should happen, after receiving a notice from her child’s school that immunizations were due:

“I just expect the doctor to tell me when immunizations are going to be. It is sort of a guessing game at this point. I haven’t really been thinking, ‘So where are we with immunizations?’ because now it looks like we’re a little behind. I would ask that it be more proactive.”

Provide concrete information and coaching to parents so they know what the developmental milestones and expectations are and how to support their child's early learning to be ready for school.

"Thinking about the well-child checks I took my kids to before starting school, there wasn't a whole lot of conversation about what types of gross motor activities they should be doing or fine motor skills. I think there needs to be more conversations taking place and opportunities for parents to really understand the why and the how and the impact of the importance of those things for later in school."

For some participants, they wanted to **shift the focus of conversations** with health providers away from child skills and development, and more towards how they can support their child as a parent.

"I think rather than focusing on outcomes, like the kid needs to be able to do these things by the time they are five, what's the process? What can I do as a parent? Should I read to my kid every night? How do I incorporate numbers in everyday plans so that my child has some number skills?"

Improve process for insurance claims and appeals. Some participants voiced frustration, particularly with navigating OHP coverage, billing, and denial of services, and feeling frustrated that their health care provider was not able to help or advocate for them.

"[Child] has health issues so I have taken her in, and we have OHP and she needed extra services. Then we got a denial, and I can ask for an appeal, but it will cost us. There is no real explanation that I understand. I called her provider and didn't get an explanation of what they are going to do, how they are going to follow-up with me, and how I can go about this."

Some parents also voiced a need for expanded availability and access to **mental health and substance abuse services for themselves**, which would help them be better parents to their children.

"Sometimes I have a hard time leaving the house, just going to the park is hard for me because of my anxiety. I already know that I'm not being the best parent I could be for my kids. I am trying to find a program to help me [but] I don't see anything that has been easy to get access to."

More communication and coordination between health and education systems. Some parents who have children with special health needs, in particular, wanted to see information flow more smoothly between their child's health providers and their early education providers or teachers.

"One of the challenges I had is the issue with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder]. You have the education ASD and then you have the medical ASD. Those two communities [of providers] don't like talking to one another. You really need to figure out a way to collaborate so educators are understanding why the medical people are saying one thing and they are making an emphasis on something else."

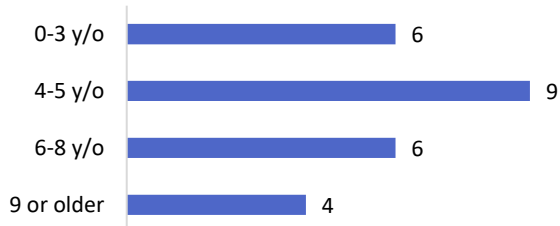
Focus Group & Community Profile

On February 13, 2018 All Care hosted a Kindergarten Readiness Parent Focus Group in Medford with 16 parents, including 13 moms and 2 dads, and 1 grandparent. Thirteen 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 36** and ranged from 24 to 70.

The **average number of children per household was 2** and ranged from 1 to 4.

Ages of Children of Focus Group Participants

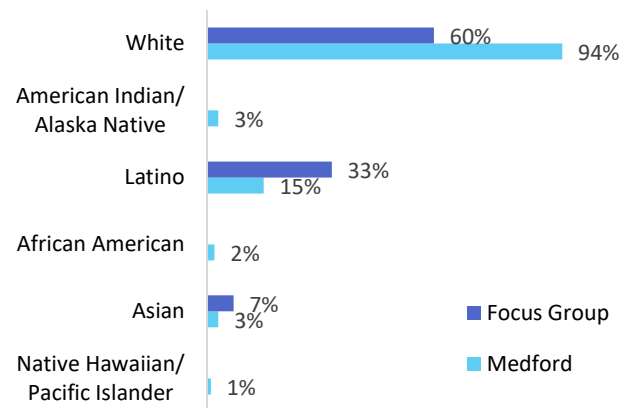


“I appreciate that we can walk to a park or into town and do something fun. We’re not just stuck at home all day.”

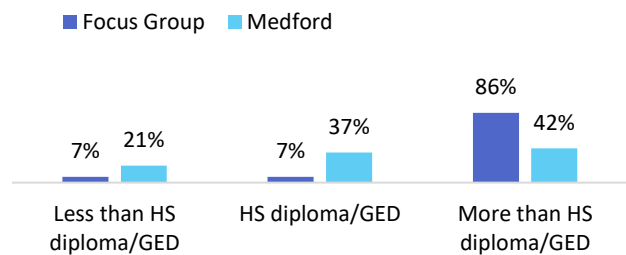
Participants reported that they like raising their children in Medford because of the **community** of genuine “down-to-earth people”, free and nearby access to **outdoor recreation** opportunities, and **early learning and enrichment activities** available in the community, for example at the library, children’s museum, and science museum.

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 & Medford³



Educational Attainment of Focus Group Participants & Medford⁴



Services Utilized by Focus Group Participants	% Yes
Public library	80%
SNAP	47%
TANF	13%
OHP	80%
WIC	60%
Early Head Start	13%
Head Start	47%
EI/ECSE	27%

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