

OREGON PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Birth Through Age 5 Needs Assessment

Experiences and Needs for Early Care and Education Service

**Key Findings from the *Phase 2 Household
Survey & Family Listening Sessions***

February 2020

Project Team

The Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Needs Assessment was a collaboration between Portland State University (PSU) and OSLC Developments Inc. (ODI). The research team included (in alphabetical order): Mackenzie Burton (PSU), Beth Green (PSU), Alicia Miao (ODI), Katherine Pears (ODI), Deena Scheidt (ODI); and Elizabeth Tremaine (PSU).

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Introduction

Project Overview

In January 2019, Oregon's Early Learning Division (ELD) received a 1-year Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 (PDG B-5) from the Administration for Children and Families, in coordination with the Department of Education. The PDG B-5 grant supported several state-level planning activities, with a primary emphasis on conducting a comprehensive statewide needs assessment. The goal of the needs assessment was to identify the current strengths and challenges of the existing landscape of services and supports for families with children from birth through age 5 years. In February 2019, the ELD contracted with Portland State University's Center for the Improvement of Child and Family Services to conduct the *PDG B-5 Needs Assessment*. Phase 1 of the project provided a county- and state-level compilation of 53 key indicators related to understanding the Birth through age 5 early learning system, including services provided, child care access and availability, early childhood workforce characteristics, and community, family, and child-level risk and resiliency factors. The detailed Phase 1 report was completed in October 2019, and is [available here](#). These data are also now available in the [Early Learning Map of Oregon \(ELMO\)](#), an interactive planning tool created as a part of this project.

A key goal of Phase 2 of the *PDG Needs Assessment* was to better understand the early care and education system experiences, challenges, and hopes of Oregon families with young children. In particular, the project aimed to surface family identified barriers to and gaps in access to high-quality, affordable, and culturally responsive early childhood care and education opportunities. Data collection focused on ensuring that the perspectives of families who may face the most significant challenges in accessing high-quality early care and education services were prioritized. These families included: low income and "working poor" families; families living in geographically isolated rural and frontier communities; families whose children have developmental or health needs; families who identify as Black, Indigenous, or Other Persons of Color (BIPOC), and families whose primary language is not English.

This report summarizes findings from Phase 2 of the project that included a statewide household telephone survey of families with young children and a series of family listening sessions conducted with families across the state. Separate, more detailed reports for both of these components are available at www.oregonearlylearning.com/PDGAssessment.

PDG B-5 Household Survey Purpose and Sample

The purpose of the *PDG B-5 Household Survey* was to collect information from a statewide representative sample of Oregonians with children ages 0-5. Surveys included questions focused on:

- 1. Current experiences in early childhood care and education.** The types, frequencies, and hours of early childhood care and education services utilized by families in the past year.
- 2. Satisfaction and challenges with finding and using early childhood care and education.** Families' satisfaction with and challenges with finding early childhood care and education services for their child as well as whether the services obtained were culturally responsive to the family's background and/or home language.
- 3. Rates of suspension and expulsions from early childhood care** experienced by families and reasons for these experiences.
- 4. Developmental supports for children at home.** The frequency and types of learning activities that families engaged in at home with the children aged 0 to 5 years.

The *PDG B-5 Household Survey* was a telephone and on-line survey conducted with a representative sample of Oregon households with at least one child between the ages of 0 and 5. Oversampling ensured that survey results could be disaggregated for analyses focused on lower income (<200% Federal Poverty Level); Latino/a/x families; geographically isolated (rural and frontier) families; and Spanish-speaking families. The final sample included a representative sample of 2,395 participants. About one half (54%) were female, on average between 25 to 29 years of age; 40% of respondents were fathers (including father figures), and about two-thirds (64%) were married. Participants represented the state in terms of racial/ethnic background, with 60% White, 17% Latino/a/x, 7% African American/Black, 5% Asian, 4% American Indian/Alaska Native, and the remainder identifying as "other" or multiracial. English was the language spoken at home for 78% of the sample, 16% of the sample spoke Spanish at home, and the remainder reported speaking another language at home. Approximately one in four respondents had an annual income that was 200% or less than the federal poverty level (\$50,200 for a family

of four). 63% lived in urban regions, 34% in rural areas, and 3% in frontier regions—roughly comparable to statewide population distributions.

A key part of the needs assessment was to engage additional, often marginalized and underserved, families in helping to inform early learning priorities. To do this, the PDG research team used a community-based participatory research approach, providing resources to 13 different community-based organizations to help design and conduct families listening sessions, and to help interpret and share findings (see Figure 1). Twenty listening sessions and/or interviews were conducted, including 151 families reflecting the following characteristics:

1. Families living in rural or frontier areas
2. American Indian/Native American families
3. Latino/a/x families, especially those living in rural communities
4. East African refugee/immigrant families
5. Families with children with developmental and/or health care needs
6. Incarcerated mothers
7. Working families in poverty

Figure 1. Process for engaging Family Voice



Integrated Summary of Key Findings



Support for Children's Early Learning

Oregon families are clearly relying on child care and early learning programs. On average, families reported having their children in care almost full time (4.3 days per week, 7.3 hours per day). The majority of families (59%) reported having at least one child in care, although an additional 32% had looked for care in the past year. As we heard in listening sessions, many families were not able to place their children in care because of cost, availability, quality, or other concerns.

Both survey respondents and families in listening sessions clearly valued quality early childhood experiences and saw these as important opportunities for children. The majority (77.5%) of household survey respondents across all racial/ethnic, language, and income groups, as well as geographic regions, believed that preschool programs were "very important" to helping children to be ready for kindergarten.

In listening sessions, one of the most consistent themes expressed was a shared belief that school readiness matters and that participants wanted their children to have early learning experiences that could help them be ready and successful in school. Participants whose children were participating in more formal early learning programs (described as "licensed", "preschools", and/or "centers") described a number of ways that their early learning providers were helping children build school readiness skills, including education, developing social-emotional skills, and helping children learn self-care and independence.

"Because they are developing more and they're having more confidence with the teachers and with other children, they are not embarrassed, they are not insecure and so that in the future they will have a career and learn a little bit of everything."

—Spanish-speaking participant

"It is very important for our children to learn in a group... to socialize, to spend time together, to learn to share with other children...the children do not go to school scared, because they know what they are going to be taught." —Latino/a/x participant

At least one family in almost every listening session also mentioned the value of having experienced child care providers who helped to identify children with special needs prior to kindergarten entry. While families did not specifically characterize this as building "school readiness", it was clearly an important role played by early learning providers.

"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 early learning program], and he has learned a lot."

—Urban American Indian participant



Family Support for Learning at Home

While there is no doubt that early childhood care and education providers are a key support for children's early learning, the first and most important source of support for children is their family. Thus, understanding the types of early learning environments children are experiencing at home provides important context for understanding school readiness, and can inform efforts to better support parents in this important role. Several questions on the Household Survey asked about key indicators of children's early learning environment that have been associated with measures of kindergarten readiness, as well as with longer-term indicators of school success, such as achievement of 3rd-grade reading and mathematics benchmarks. Specifically, families were asked about the number of books in their home and the frequency of several other developmentally supportive activities, such as book reading, story telling, taking children on errands, and singing songs/playing music.

These results showed that Oregon's families are reading more frequently to their young children, on average, compared to parents nationwide (46% of Household Survey respondents, compared to 37% nationally). However, results also highlighted substantial disparities in access to books for families from different racial/ethnic backgrounds as well as in daily reading. When examining the frequency of the other developmentally supportive activities, which are less anchored in White, middle-class culture, there was continued evidence of cross-cultural differences. However in this case, American Indian families reported the highest level of any racial/ethnic group on these supports, with 78% of these families providing regular developmental supports three or more times per week. By contrast, 66% of White families reported frequent other supports, and 38 to 51% of other BIPOC families reported similar levels of activities with children.

Figure 2. Respondents who keep 26 or more books at home, by race/ethnicity

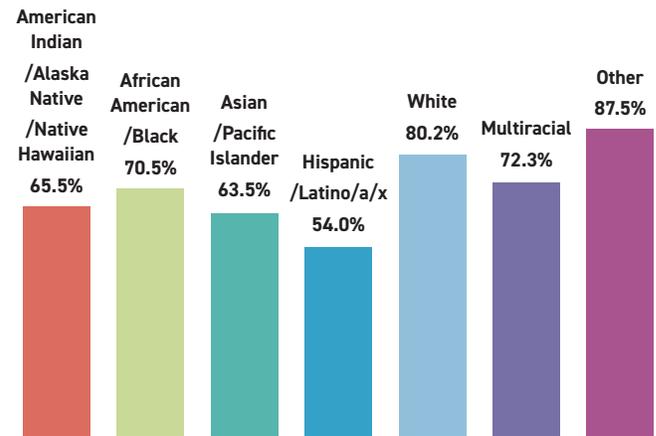
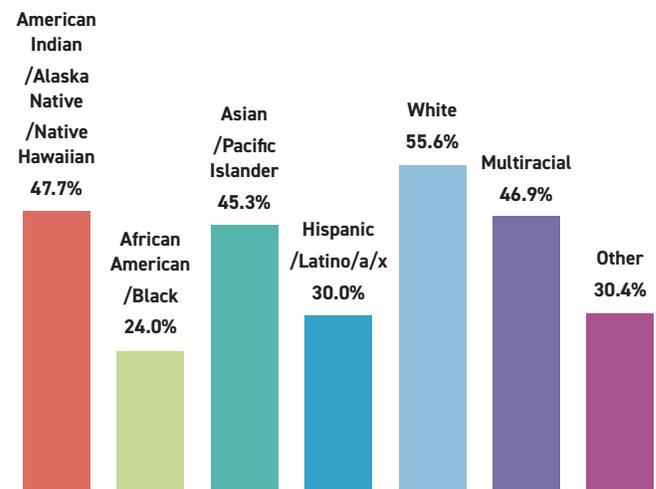


Figure 3. Respondents who read books to their child every day, by race/ethnicity





Current Experiences in Early Care and Education Services

Use of Early Care and Education Services

The majority of families responding to the survey had at least one child in early care and education services for at least 8 hours a week; over three-fourths of these families reported using care four or more times per week, for 7.3 hours per day, on average. One half (52%) of parents/caregivers who had their child in care were utilizing center-based services.

There were differences across racial/ethnic groups in terms of the types of care families were most likely to be using. White families (59%), Asian/Pacific Islander families (58%), and families who identified as from “other” racial/ethnic backgrounds (88%) were mostly likely to use center-based care, while American Indian/Native American families were most likely to report having the child cared for in their home (57.7%). Frontier families were more likely than either rural or urban families to be using non-relative, family based child care (55.9%).

These differences in care arrangements were reflected in experiences shared in family listening sessions, related to difficulties in finding trusted child care, and the desire, within some communities of color, to have someone from within their community provide child care:

“We are so starved for someone we can trust to watch our kid to get us through the day, we haven’t even thought about the rest of it...until they get to preschool.”

—Rural participant

“We mostly keep our young kids at home since we don’t trust. We would just rather have family members watch the little ones.” —East African participant

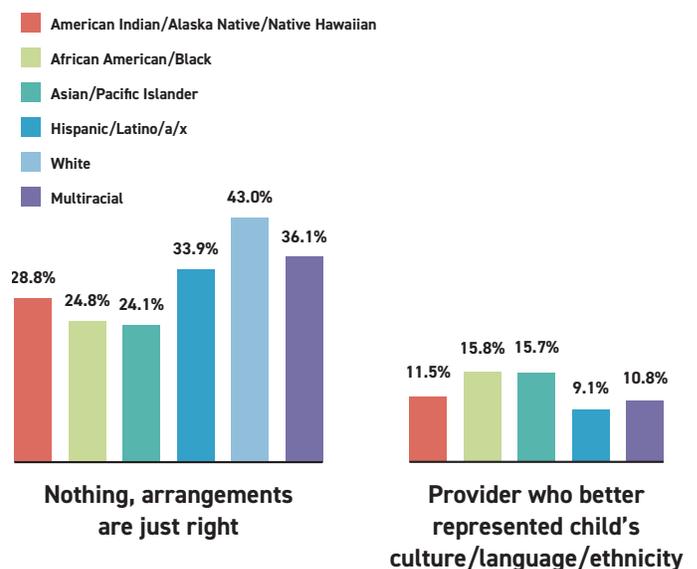
That said, in family listening sessions, Latino/a/x families as well as many rural families expressed a preference for group/center-based care, often due to concerns with the quality of less formal care providers:

“Sometimes we turn to the neighbors or a friend because we can’t afford quality of care, like a child care center. You see the difference when you take the kids to a child care center versus when they are cared for by a family member, a neighbor, or a friend.” —Rural participant

“The difficult part for me is after school, because I take her to care and I feel there is no routine or dedication there...At the moment my neighbor watches her and I sometimes come back and find them watching television” —Latino/a/x parent

When asked what the “one thing” parents would change (other than cost) about their current child care settings, most survey respondents indicated that they were generally satisfied (38%). However, the remaining families ranked the following most often (9% also indicated something else not listed): (1) More convenient location (13%); (2) better quality environment (9%); fewer children/smaller setting (8%), and more liked/trusted provider (7%). White families were significantly more likely to indicate satisfaction (43% would not change anything) than other groups.

Figure 4. What families would change about their current child care provider, by race/ethnicity





Challenges Finding Child Care

Information About Child Care Options

Of the survey respondents who had not had a child in early care and education services in the last year, almost one-third (32%) had tried to find care. Family listening sessions identified some of the challenges faced by families in getting good information about child care options, although families used multiple strategies to find appropriate care for their children. Sources of information included calling 211, searching the internet including the state licensing website and social media websites, and conferring with DHS caseworkers. However, the source most commonly mentioned and most trusted was word-of-mouth recommendations made by friends, family members, and coworkers. Ultimately, these personal referrals were seen as more likely to result in finding a caregiver that family members felt they could trust.

More than anything else, we get information among ourselves as a community, and then [I] make a decision from there.” –Latino/a/x participant

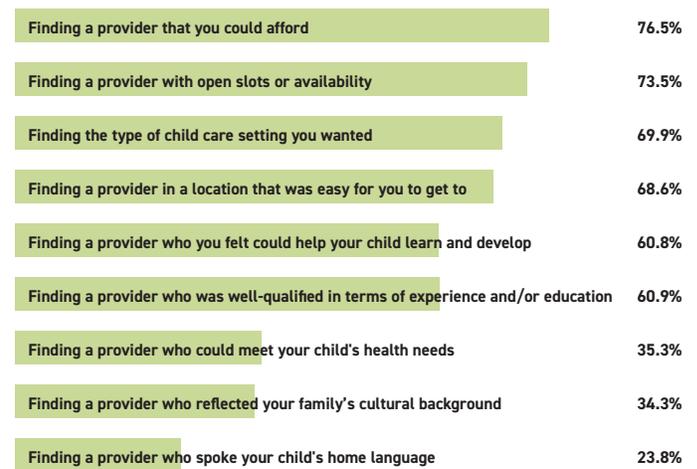
At the same time, families expressed keen interest in being able to find out other kinds of information (e.g., about quality ratings, licensure status, past families’ experiences) but had little idea how to get this information.

“At first I tried the resources they tell you to use, DHS and 211, and I asked all the questions they tell you to ask. But I realized after so many calls that I couldn’t afford those child care centers. [The information] didn’t prepare me for reality.” This mom chose an in-home child care situation for her daughter, but after talking with the provider about her concerns around her son watching television, she found that the provider no longer wanted to care for him. “So, I stopped asking those questions and when I took my last job I used references.” –Rural participant

Affordability and Availability

Parents/caregivers overwhelmingly indicated that affordability (77% statewide) and availability of slots (74% statewide) were the two greatest challenges to finding care. Further, almost one in five parents/caregivers indicated that they did not have enough days (19.6%) or hours (16.7%) of early care and education services. Lower income families reported an even larger gap in the number of hours and days of care they were able to secure for their child.

Figure 5. Percentage of families reporting various challenges to finding appropriate child care



The issue of cost came up repeatedly for families who participated in listening sessions, who spoke of the many compromises they had to make to afford care, often sacrificing their ability to work, their preferences in terms of type and quality of care, and even their personal well-being:

“I’d like to leave him at a daycare, but I started to check daycare prices and it was too expensive, even for a few hours, so I made the decision to stay home with him...I’m just going to wait for him to go to school, this next year he’s going to school.” –Latino/a/x participant

“It wasn’t worth it to miss out on my child’s growing up for a few hundred dollars after paying out [for child care].” –Rural participant

“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...Since staying home, I have been depressed, but \$1200 is way too much.” –Rural participant

Availability of care was a concern statewide, although respondents living in frontier areas of the state were significantly more likely than rural or urban families to report being unable to find a provider with available slots (83% vs. 76% for rural and 72% for urban) and/or who was well qualified (71% vs. 64%, 59%).

“I’ve tried three years to get him into daycare here and there’s a waiting list and at the time I was working night shift so it didn’t even help out. So now I’m working in the mornings and I’ve been trying to get him in daycare, still.” –Rural participant

Moreover, families in both frontier and rural regions were also more likely to have difficulty finding a provider who could support the needs of a child with a physical or other disability. These survey findings were reflected in experiences of families we spoke with living in geographically isolated areas:

“I couldn’t leave him with family because nobody understood because of this invisible disability he has. They just think he’s being a bad child and he’s not. I had to go against my better judgement and have someone I didn’t know to watch my children while I was in the hospital.” –Rural parent of child with special needs

Challenges Finding Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Early Care and Education Services

Survey results found that the majority of parents/caregivers of children of color and those who spoke Spanish or a language other than English had difficulties finding a provider who reflected the family’s cultural background and/or who spoke the child’s language. For example, 56% of Asian/Pacific Islander families and 51% of Latino/a/x families indicated that this was a challenge, compared to 22% of White families. Further, these two groups were the most likely to report challenges finding a provider that spoke their home language (43% of Asian/Pacific Islander families and 45% of Latino/a/x families).

These experiences were similarly echoed among families in listening sessions, who expressed their strong preferences for early care and education providers who could support children’s home language, encourage English-language development, and provide a setting that reflected value for children’s racial, ethnic, and cultural background. Although families shared examples of providers who celebrated culturally specific holidays (e.g., Cinco de Mayo) and who sometimes offered traditional food, very few described situations that were more deeply culturally specific. One caregiver in a rural community shared:

“When he went to the last preschool (where he will never go to again), they only focused on White/Caucasian. Like the posters are only White people. A lot of the things in the classroom are focused on White. In the books: White kids.” –Multiracial participant

Spanish-speaking families shared two desires and hopes about their children’s exposure to language: First, many expressed a keen value for children retaining their native Spanish language. Second, there was a clear concern that without dual-language supports, children would not adequately learn English to be ready for school.

“We are already losing much of our culture. It’s true that we speak Spanish, but the reality is that English really is the focus...the little that we are able to teach stays at home.” –Spanish-speaking participant

One Eastern African participant described the difference it made to their family to have a teacher in her child’s class who shared their culture:

“Like right now, my [youngest child] and has someone from our community as the teacher. If he does something bad that teacher is going to come and tell me hey, this is what’s going on...She will care because she knows him personally...She’s not going to say your child is bad, she’s going to say how can we work together to settle this...We work together, we understand where we come from...” –East African participant



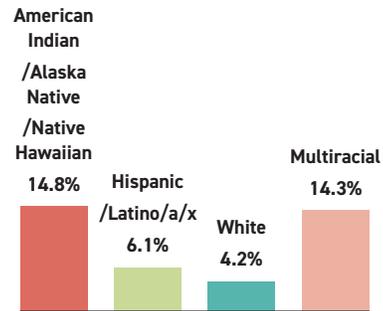
Suspension and Expulsion from Early Care and Education

Children Being Asked to Leave Care

The rate of preschool-aged children being asked to leave care either temporarily or permanently has been rising across the country. In a survey of early learning providers across Oregon completed for the *PDG B-5 Strengths and Needs Assessment*, 44% of facilities reported having asked a child to leave care at some point. In the *PDG Household Survey*, 5% of parents/caregivers reported that their child had been asked to “take a break” or leave care either temporarily or permanently. The most frequent reason for the request was that the provider could not handle the child’s behavior towards others. This was followed closely by the child being unable to adjust emotionally, crying, or having separation anxiety. Most children did not return to the same provider after they had been asked to leave care. Children of color and those from low-income backgrounds were 2 to 3 times more likely to be asked to leave care than their White and higher income peers. Further, children from lower income backgrounds were less likely to return to the same provider, and more likely to not return to care at all, suggesting that suspensions and expulsions may differentially affect those parents/caregivers who may be most likely to need care in order to be able to work and improve their families’ economic circumstances.

“They said they could no longer handle his needs and he was being removed from the program, and we were just left with no care and both of us working.” –Rural parent

Figure 6. Percentage of respondents whose child was asked to “take a break” from care, by race/ethnicity



Note: Children of Black/African American and Asian/Pacific Islander heritage are not pictured in this graph because fewer than five children in each group had been asked to leave care.



Recommendations

Results from both the Household Survey and the Family Listening Sessions converge on several priority recommendations for improving the early care and education system. As Oregon makes critical investments in expanding availability of preschool, improving and ensuring quality and increasing the size, diversity, and quality of the early learning workforce, it will be important to consider both the overall needs of Oregonians statewide, as well as the diverse needs of specific priority populations. Across the state, there is a clear lack of affordable early care and education services; families statewide shared their challenges in accessing care that met their families' needs. At the same time, these challenges are being experienced disproportionately by lower income families; families living in rural and frontier areas; Black, Indigenous, and other families of color; and families with children who face health or behavioral challenges. Clearly a "one size fits all" approach will not meet the complex and varied needs of Oregon's families with young children. Priority recommendations include:

- 1. Build on Families' Shared Value for Supporting Children's Early Learning.** Families in all of the groups we spoke with had a common shared interest in ensuring that their children received high-quality early learning that could support the child's ability to successfully transition to and succeed in school. All families want a child care provider that they can trust, where their children will be safe, that is affordable, accessible, and open during the days and times that families need care. Further, families see a critical role for early care and education providers in supporting children's development and school readiness.
- 2. Recognize that Ideal Care Needs and Desires Vary.** Reflecting families' diverse cultures, languages, geographic locations, work schedules, and other complexities, "ideal" child care looks different for different families. The message for the early learning system from these sessions is clearly that there

is no "one size fits all" approach and that an effective system includes diverse providers, settings, and strategies. That said, the majority of families in the household survey reported using care that reflects the need for full-time care for working parents.

- 3. Reduce Family Needs to Compromise for Affordability.** Families shared multiple examples of how they have made compromises because of the lack of available, affordable care. Households compromised on the type and quality of care they used, often placing children with family or neighbors, despite concerns about quality. Other parents sacrificed working at all because of the cost of care, or described complex patchworks of care that were clearly stressful at best and at worst harmful to relationships and adult and child well-being. *With over three-fourths of the parents in our statewide sample reporting challenges finding affordable, available child care, it is critical for Oregon to increase child care and early learning capacity.*
- 4. Support More Culturally Specific and Responsive Care Options.** The ability of early learning settings to provide programs that reflect children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds and facilitate quality partnerships with adult family members is critical to addressing noted disparities in school readiness and success for these children. As Oregon's population becomes increasingly diverse, it will continue to be important to proactively recruit and support providers from a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as those who speak languages other than English. This may mean reaching out to in-home providers to help them secure additional training and professional skills, as children from a number of racial/ethnic groups were more likely to be in non-center-based care. Culturally specific and responsive programs should continue to be a core part of Oregon's early learning system. In addition to language and cultural barriers, these families face the additional burden of systemic racism, day-to-day experiences of discrimination, and both explicit and implicit bias on the part of early learning providers, teachers, and others. Overcoming families' mistrust of school and early learning systems based in White dominant culture will take proactive work to build capacity for early learning from within these communities themselves.

5. Develop and Fund More Quality Child Care Options for Frontier and Geographically Isolated Families.

More than any other families, families living in rural and frontier areas had challenges finding available care, let alone care that they felt was high quality and affordable. These families shared a sense of desperation and frustration with the lack of early learning options and described the compromises they were making to secure care of any type. More resources to increase availability as well as accessibility (e.g., ensuring transportation supports) is paramount for meeting these families' needs. There is a clear priority need to expand the early childhood workforce in these areas and build system capacity for quality, affordable care. Further, additional professional development is paramount to strengthen the capacity of the current early learning workforce in these remote areas especially around providing quality early learning environments and increasing providers' abilities to meet children's behavioral and health care needs.

6. Strengthen the Skills and Supports for Providers to Work Effectively with Children Who Have Challenging Behaviors.

Given that the most often cited reasons for being asked to leave care was providers not being able to handle the child's behavior towards others or the child's reactions to being in care (e.g., crying, separation anxiety), providing more professional development opportunities around developmental stages, teaching social emotional skills, and classroom behavior management could increase providers' capacities to serve children with a range of behaviors and needs.

Oregon parents and caregivers clearly want and value early care and education opportunities. The state recently passed historic legislation to increase those opportunities for all Oregon families. Policy makers, program planners, and other decision makers are urged to consider the voices of the many parents and caregivers reflected in these studies as they plan for the use of these funds for strengthening Oregon's early childhood care and education system moving forward.