

Equity Training Transcript

Oregon Family Voices: Impacts of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education and Care, Oregon Early Learning Division, June 2021

This is a written transcript of the spoken information in the training video.

SLIDE 1

Hello and welcome. Today, we will discuss new research findings based on Oregon family voices, about the impacts of COVID-19 on early childhood education and care. This session is designed and offered by the Oregon Early Learning Division. This training is for people who work in Oregon's Early Learning System who receive state funding from the Early Learning Division, and fulfills the 2019-2021 contract or agreement requirement to complete an equity training.

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Today's training is just one part of the work you are doing to learn about equity in early childhood education and care. It is not meant to be the beginning or the end of that work. We encourage you to think about how this training relates to what you have previously learned in other trainings, workshops, and readings. Also, think back to this training as you continue to engage in equity work in the future.

We acknowledge that this training is being made available during a unique moment in time. We are all living through a global pandemic. In the United States, we are also experiencing a racial justice and social justice reawakening. We hope this training will help early learning educators and partners understand the intersection of these issues and historical moments in the context of early childhood education and care. We encourage early learning educators and partners to seek services and supports for their own healing and well-being, as well as additional trainings, information, and resources to dig deeper into these issues.

There are three goals of this session. First, to share findings from research that involved a survey and a series of listening sessions with Oregon families to learn about their experiences with early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, to focus on findings that show evidence of disparities across different groups of families in order to prompt discussion about how we can work together in Oregon's Early Learning System to reduce those inequities. Finally, to provide you with opportunities for reflection and discussion about what these findings mean and how they could inform the work that you do.

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There are three intended outcomes that we hope you will gain from participating in this training. First, you will learn about families from across Oregon and their experiences with early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage you to think about how the experiences of the families who participated in this research are similar or different to the families you serve and support.

Second, through your reflections and discussions, you will increase your understanding of your own identity and background, as well as the diversity of your coworkers, the children and families you serve, and people in your local community. We encourage you to think about how this knowledge informs the work that you do.

Finally, we hope that thinking deeply and critically about the key findings from this research will inspire you to develop new questions about families' experiences during the pandemic. This may encourage new ideas for supporting families, given what you will learn about their experiences and challenges during this past year.

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Before we jump into the research, we want to take a moment to thank you for the work you have done as part of Oregon Early Learning System during this past year. You have navigated ever-changing community health conditions, along with changes to child care practices and procedures, all while living through a global pandemic and risking your own health and safety to meet the needs of children, families, and child care providers in your communities. You are amazing. Your work is essential, and we are deeply grateful to you all.

Families also recognized and appreciated the hard work their child care providers did to stay open and offer safe education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the survey, 88% of families reported that the health and safety procedures being used in their early education and care settings were "about right." In the listening sessions, many parents and caregivers shared positive stories of receiving support from their child care providers.

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The quote here is from a parent of a child experiencing intellectual or developmental disabilities and/or chronic health care needs, who said: "I've always felt the teachers and the specialist staff are always really welcome and open and always, even if it's just via email or setting up a quick Zoom call, are very receptive to input or if there's any concerns like, even when we had to do our parent-teacher conferences over Zoom, you know all of them just continued to echo 'just reach out anytime.' The communication lines are constantly open."

Thank you for the work you did across so many levels of the early learning system to ensure that families felt safe and supported during this difficult past year.

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This training is sharing results from recent research that involved an online survey and multiple listening sessions with Oregon families who have young children. The goal of the research was to learn about families' experiences, preferences, needs, and challenges in accessing and using early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The statewide survey included over 2,000 families and was collected during October 2020. Multiple mothers and grandmothers – referred to as parents -- participated in the listening sessions, which were conducted during Fall of 2020. The researchers summarized what they heard from parents with Native American/American Indian Indigenous heritage, Latinx parents living in rural areas of Oregon, African

American parents living in the Portland metro region, parents living in frontier or very rural areas of Oregon, and parents of children with intellectual or developmental disabilities and/or chronic health care needs.

The research was led by Dr. Beth Green of Portland State University's Center for the Improvement of Child and Family Services and Dr. Katherine Pears of Oregon Social Learning Center Developments, Inc.

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Let's quickly review a few key terms that we will use throughout this training. Many people may already be familiar with these terms and for others, these terms may be new. We want to make sure everyone understands these terms in the context of early education and care. In this training, we say "parents and caregivers" to talk about the many different kinds of people who are primary caregivers for young children. We say "culturally responsive care" to mean early education and care that recognizes and respects the diverse cultural values, beliefs, and customs of children and families. And we say "equity" or "equitable education" to refer to the idea that each and every child and family will receive the necessary support and resources they need individually to thrive in Oregon's early learning settings no matter what their background or identity is.

We now invite you to pause the video and spend a moment reflecting on what equity means to you and how it shows up in your work.

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In the survey, families answered questions about their backgrounds and identities, so the researchers could learn about the diversity among the families who participated in the study. The term "diversity" can apply to many aspects of families' backgrounds and identities. For this study, the researchers focused on 5 aspects of children's and families' identities: 1) the languages they speak at home, 2) their household income, 3) whether they live in an urban, rural, or frontier geographic region based on the population of the zip code, 4) the race and ethnicity of each parent or caregiver and of the family's focal child, meaning the oldest child who had not yet started kindergarten, and 5) the focal child's ability or disability status, based on whether the child had an Individualized Family Service Plan, or special developmental or medical needs.

Collecting information about families' diversity -- or the demographic characteristics of families -- allowed the researchers to answer the question, "To what extent did families' diversity in the data reflect the diversity of Oregon families?" It is important to answer this question for any data collection in order to determine whose voices are included and whose voices are missing. Examining this tells us how well the collected data reflect, or don't reflect, the broader community about which we are trying to learn. This is referred to as the representativeness of the sample.

The family survey data should be celebrated, because families from all 36 Oregon counties participated and the survey sample was mostly representative of Oregon's population.

For this study, the researchers compared the demographic characteristics of the families who participated in the survey to publicly available information about demographic characteristics of populations in Oregon and in the United States. Overall, the survey sample is mostly representative of families in Oregon. In some cases, the survey sample was somewhat over-representative of specific populations, meaning there was a

higher proportion of those populations in the survey data than in the state- or national-level data. The overrepresented populations included lower-income families, American Indian or Alaska Native families, African American or Black families, and families living in frontier areas. Because the survey sample was mostly representative across multiple demographic characteristics, the findings from the survey can be roughly considered to reflect the broader communities of families in Oregon.

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We'll review 5 figures that show the ways in which the diversity of families in the survey was representative of the diversity of families in Oregon. In this first figure, the red section shows that almost three-fourths of the parents and caregivers speak English as their home language, the light green section shows that 20% speak Spanish, and the darker teal section shows that almost 6% speak another language at home.

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This figure shows that more than half of the families are considered lower-income (below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level) and under half of the families are considered higher-income.

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This figure shows that two-thirds of the participants live in urban regions, 30% live in rural regions, and almost 4% live in frontier regions of Oregon.

SLIDE 12

This figure shows the percentage of focal children in each race/ethnicity group. Specifically, for the three largest groups, more than half of these children are white, more than one-fifth are Hispanic or Latinx, and about 6% are African American or Black.

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Finally, this figure shows that nearly 16% of the focal children are experiencing intellectual or developmental disabilities and/or chronic health care needs.

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Demographic characteristics about families' diversity are indicators of children' and families' identities and backgrounds. They provide insights into children's and families' unique lived experiences and perspectives. Researchers use demographic data to separate survey responses into different subgroup of families. This separation of data is called data disaggregation.

Disaggregating data by demographic characteristics allows researchers to better understand how families' experiences, needs, opportunities, and resources differ for families in different communities. In an equitable system, all children and families would have access to the same opportunities and resources, regardless of their demographic characteristics. This is why Raise Up Oregon, our state's strategic plan for early learning, aims to break the links between race, income, and zip code and the educational and life outcomes of children and families.

By analyzing disaggregated data, researchers have potential to identify inequities in the early learning system. In this training, we highlight several findings where clear inequities were revealed by disaggregating the data by families' demographic characteristics.

We invite you again to pause the video and spend a moment reflecting on the ways that you already use or would like to use disaggregated data in your work.

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With knowledge about whose voices were included in the survey data, we can now turn to the key findings from the research, in order to learn about what those voices said about their early education and care experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. We highlight three key findings that are particularly relevant to those working within the Oregon early learning system. We focus on findings where disparities emerged for specific groups of families, in order to prompt reflection and discussion about inequities in the early education and care.

The remainder of this training is divided into 3 sections, highlighting quotes from parents and caregivers and results from the survey related to these three key findings: 1) Families face many challenges during the pandemic, 2) Families are worried about children's opportunities for socializing and learning, and 3) Families want their children's identities and cultures to be celebrated. After each section, there will be a slide with reflection questions.

Throughout the training, we encourage you to think about what kinds of diversity exist within the families that you directly or indirectly serve and within the your local community. Even if you don't interact with some of the specific groups of families highlighted here, the particular experiences and challenges of some groups of families may also apply to other groups of families with whom you do have contact.

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We are all experiencing many different kinds of challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Families participating in the research shared about challenges directly related to the pandemic, challenges indirectly related to the pandemic, and challenges occurring on top of the pandemic.

More than half of the families in the survey report using child care for 8 or more hours per week since March 2020. However, 60% of families had experienced disruption to their early education and care arrangements due to the pandemic. In the listening sessions, families described relying on a patchwork of relatives, friends, and neighbors to provide child care. In addition, many families are experiencing changes in their employment and uncertainty about their income, which further impacted their ability to find high-quality early education and care.

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This is illustrated by the quote here from a Native American/Indigenous parent in Klamath County who said, "I have a steady job and it does pay me fairly well... I work all year round, whereas my husband is seasonal and then he'll be on unemployment soon... And so I know how tight it can get in the winter months. I had to keep my job for as long as possible because who's to say in, you know, two months we're not all going to be in the same [position]."

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The struggle to find early childhood education and care, in addition to the many other challenges of navigating life during a global pandemic, is creating considerable stress for families. Being disconnected from their child care providers is leaving parents and caregivers feeling isolated. This is illustrated by the quote from a Native American/Indigenous parent in Coos Bay, who said "And people are really stressed...I've talked to quite a few parents who are really struggling with their own mental health right now and the daily stresses of life on top of the pandemic, on top of trying to figure out their child's school and all the details around that, on top of the constant changes with the metrics and how that's affecting their child's education and just their daily lives, really..."

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Finally, in addition to the pandemic, families of color are continuing to experience instances of racism, which has worsened during the pandemic, particularly for African American or Black communities and for Asian American communities. One African American parent shared that, "When you have to imagine if you can actually get home to your kids because you're this color that people hate, it's a hard thing. And also, I think it does tie into everything that's been going on, the pandemic, including what we're talking about right now, which is childcare. How can I get across town in order for me to be safe, in order for my children to be safe? What if there's an all Black childcare center and someone knows about that, and then they try to burn it down or something? These are things that are real life." This is one example of how experiencing racism impacts families' decisions and preferences related to finding early education and care settings where they and their children feel safe.

While this research did not directly ask families about their own health, it is likely that many Oregon children and families have had members of the immediate and/or extended families diagnosed with COVID-19 and some have had family members be hospitalized and/or die as a result of the COVID-19 virus. As the early learning system, we must be prepared to support children, parents, family members, and co-workers who are experiencing loss, processing grief, and still dealing with the trauma of this pandemic.

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The challenges that families are facing during the pandemic inform how families are starting to make decisions about their futures. When asked to consider returning to in-person early education and care settings, families' main concern is exposure to COVID-19. 82% of families in the survey selected the option, "My child and family will be more likely to be exposed to COVID-19" as one of their concerns. This is shown in this figure by the horizontal extent of the dark teal bar labeled "All children." In listening sessions, parents and caregivers specifically mentioned feeling concerned about the COVID-19 precautions of other families who all shared the same child care provider.

SLIDE 21

When the researchers disaggregate the data about families being concerned about exposure to COVID-19, clear disparities are revealed. The top-most bar in this figure is that same bar we just saw for the rate across all children and families. The lighter teal bars in the figure represent the percentages of families who were concerned about exposure to COVID-19 within specific groups of families. The variation in these percentages across groups of families – shown by the different horizontal extents of these lighter teal bars – reflects the unique experiences of these different groups of families. For example, 93% of families with

African American and Black children are concerned about exposure to COVID-19, which is higher than the rate of 82% across all families. In the figure, this is shown by comparing the horizontal extent of the 3rd bar from the top to the vertical dotted line representing the rate across all families. This information about the unique experiences of different groups of families would have been lost if the researchers had not disaggregated these data by race/ethnicity and geographic region.

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Overall, this figure shows that higher percentages of most groups of families of color and families living in urban regions are concerned about exposure to COVID-19 compared to the rate across all families. Greater concern about exposure to COVID-19 among families of color may relate to how COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting people of color, with higher rates of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths among Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx people across the country.

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We invite you to pause the video and take time to reflect about what you learned related to Key Finding number 1 that families faced many different kinds of challenges during the pandemic. If you work on a team or if you are connected to other folks working within Oregon's Early Learning system, then we encourage you to find time to share your reflections with your others and discuss this training together. Please carefully read each of these questions. While we encourage you to spend time reflecting on each question, we also want you to use this time in whatever way is most beneficial to you.

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While many families are worried about the health and safety of their children, they are also worried about loss of opportunities for their children's socializing and learning. Families are expressing appreciation for providers' efforts to offer remote or online services. However, they are also voicing concerns about the lower quality of virtual versus in-person early childhood education and care. They are worried about the impact of this on children's early academic skills and readiness for kindergarten.

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For example, a Native American/Indigenous parent in Coos Bay said, "And I fear my daughter will not be ready socially, emotionally or academically for kindergarten, even though... I feel like she may be more academically bright... But I do have that fear that because I can't make that choice [sending her to full-time child care] for her right now. Is that going to be damaging later on? And is she going to suffer in kindergarten?"

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Families are also worried about reduced frequency and quality of children's interactions with their peers and the impact of this on their children's social and emotional learning. For example, an African American parent said, "It's that learning and picking up from the other children, they're not going to get that. They're just going to learn and pick up from mom and dad and siblings in the home versus a variety of things that help them figure out who they are and what they like and things like that."

SLIDE 27

Parents and caregivers are also worried about how lost opportunities for social interactions are affecting their children's behavior. For example, a parent of a child experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs said, "It was getting really bad with not having the socialization and his behavior was changing like dramatically so I made the decision, you know, if he's going to go back he'll learn. He's already so far behind anyway. I think he needed it more than anything."

SLIDE 28

Families' concerns about the loss of learning opportunities and the impact on their children's school readiness are not unique to the pandemic. When children are suspended or expelled from their early childhood education and care settings, they miss out on opportunities for socializing and learning. Families in this survey provide data that are consistent with a pattern we already knew to be true: there are clear disparities in which children are asked to leave or to 'take a break,' either temporarily or permanently, from their early childhood education and care settings based on children's demographic characteristics.

In the survey, 6.3% of families report that their focal child had ever been asked to leave or 'take a break' from their early education and care setting, as shown by the horizontal extent of top-most dark teal bar. The horizontal extent of the three lighter teal bars directly underneath the top-most bar clearly show that families with children experiencing disabilities and/or chronic health care needs, Hispanic and Latinx children, and American Indian and Alaska Native children report considerably higher rates of having their children suspended or expelled compared to the rate across all families, which is shown by the vertical dotted line.

You may notice that families with African American and Black children report a lower rate of suspension and expulsion compared to the rate across all families. This is not consistent with previous findings from national research about suspension and expulsion in early childhood, that shows higher rates of these exclusionary practices for African American and Black children. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that in the survey data shown here, only a small number of families with African American and Black children responded to this question. So, the reported rate should be interpreted with caution, as it may not accurately or completely represent the experiences of African American and Black children and families in Oregon.

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It is clear from prior research that changes in structural policies and practices, reduced explicit and implicit bias, and increased understanding of root causes of behavior – across all levels of the early learning system – are all necessary components to reduce the rates of suspension and expulsion in early childhood education and care. Therefore, the reflection opportunity questions are designed to prompt you to think about structural or systems-level policies and practices.

We invite you to pause the video and take time to reflect about what you learned related to Key Finding number 2 that families worried about children's opportunities for socializing and learning. Once again, please carefully read each of these questions. We do hope that you'll spend time reflecting on each question, but we also understand if one of these calls to you more than the others and you spend your time on only that one.

SLIDE 30

Families of color voice unique preferences for and challenges with finding an early education and care setting where their children's identities and cultures would be celebrated and their child care provider would reflect their own families' cultural background. These preferences and challenges are also not new but have been heightened by the pandemic.

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Parents and caregivers express the importance of having their families' cultural traditions and home languages incorporated into their children's early childhood education and care curricula. A parent from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde shared, "Yeah, it's a tribal school. So there is singing and dancing. Our cultural department comes to the tribe, and they rotate the classrooms. I wish there was more of it. They're doing the best they can. They're doing a great job... They bring traditional songs, they speak the language... They do have the tribal library books that are translated into ancient language and then they hold events in the evening in collaboration with culture [department] to provide story time."

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Families of color also appreciate having opportunities for open communication with their child care providers about how to incorporate their cultures and identities into their children's learning. A parent of Hispanic children in rural/frontier Oregon shared this about their child's providers, saying, "Yes, they would ask about that kind of stuff. My children are Hispanic and so they, they ask, oh, is there any specific way that you celebrate holidays differently? Are there different meals that you guys have or languages that are spoken?"

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Families of color recognize the importance of their children developing a positive racial identity, and the role that their children's early childhood education and care providers could play in promoting this. As one Native American/American Indian parent in the Portland metro area shared, "So long story short, [my child] needs to know who he is, so that he can better integrate in the world, so that he can be okay with being all three races, being predominantly African American. With what society standards are for tri-racial babies, you know, and the difficulties he will have in that, but also the positives that will come from it."

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While it is clearly important to families of color to have their children in early education and care settings where their families' identities and traditions are valued and celebrated, these families disproportionately report struggling to find child care providers who reflect their families' cultural backgrounds. When asked about challenges to finding high-quality early childhood education and care, 31% of all families report finding a provider who reflected their families' cultural background as a challenge. In the figure, this is shown by the horizontal extent of the top-most, dark teal bar. In each group of families with children of color, parents and caregivers report this challenge at considerably higher rates compared to the rate across all families. This is shown by the horizontal extent of the six lighter teal bars directly below the top-most bar in comparison to the vertical dotted line. This is in contrast to families with White children who report this challenge at a considerably lower rate than that of all families, shown by the horizontal extent of the bottom-most lighter teal bar in comparison to the vertical dotted line.

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We invite you to pause the video one last time to reflect about what you learned related to Key Finding number 3 that families want their children’s identities and cultures to be celebrated.

As before, please carefully read each of these questions. We may spend time on all three or you may focus on just one or two – we encourage you to do whatever is most helpful and meaningful to you.

There is one final slide after this one, so please do return to see the very end of the video.

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We at the Oregon Early Learning Division are deeply grateful to the families who participated in this research. We also recognize the significant and valuable work by the research teams at Portland State University’s Center for the Improvement of Child and Family Services and Oregon Social Learning Center Developments, Inc.

The full set of reports are posted on the Early Learning Division website. Please visit this link to learn more about Oregon families’ experiences with early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have questions about this training, please contact your program manager.

Thank you for your ongoing work as part of Oregon’s early learning system to support Oregon’s young children and their families, and for your active participation in this training!