



# Kindergarten Readiness Parent Focus Group Project

Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services

February 28, 2018



Children's Institute contracted with the Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services at Portland State University to conduct 8 focus groups with parents and caregivers statewide to inform the Health Aspects of Kindergarten Readiness Technical Workgroup.

## THE PSU RESEARCH TEAM



**Callie Lambarth**  
Project Director  
& Analyst



**Heidi McGowan**  
Lead Facilitator &  
Analyst



**Diane Reid**  
Co-Facilitator &  
Analyst



**Ron Joseph**  
Translator &  
Co-Facilitator



**Beth Green**  
Consultant



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Purpose of project

2

Participants

3

Findings

What was the  
purpose  
of the  
project?



# Parent focus groups were designed to explore specific questions

- What does school readiness mean to you?
- Who are your trusted sources of information about school readiness?
- What early learning supports and health services have you participated in?
- How have these helped you and your child be ready for school?
- What do you wish early learning supports and health services would do differently to better support you and your child to be ready for school?

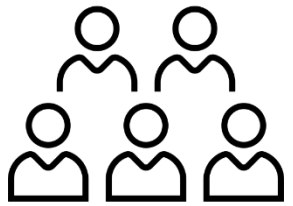
# The project goals are to:

- Ensure that family voice is informing discussions about how to measure the health sector's role in kindergarten readiness.
- Collect a range of family perspectives to inform the development of a state-level early learning strategic plan.

Who  
participated  
in the  
project?



# Communities and participants were identified with purpose



87 total parents/caregivers with children ages 0-8 through 8 focus groups across the state



18 participated in Spanish with simultaneous English translation  
69 participated in English



Identified communities had primary local contacts with existing relationships with Children's Institute, PSU, or stakeholder partners, in order to convene parent focus groups on a short timeline

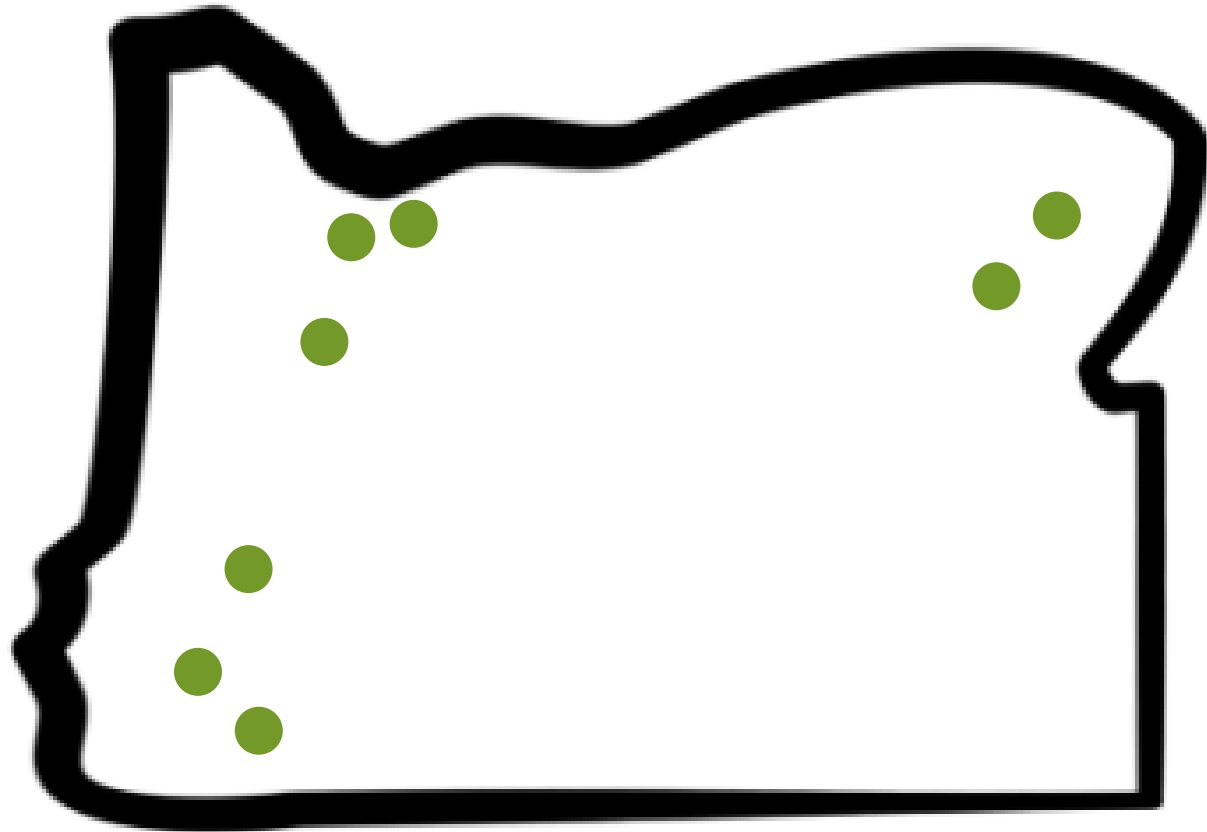


# PSU provided tangible supports to focus group coordinators and participants

- \$50 stipends to focus group participants
- Child care stipends, either directly to participants or to coordinating organizations/providers
- Reimbursement for coordinating organizations to provide refreshments for participants and their children
- Honorarium for coordinating organizations to convene groups

Participants came from communities across the state, including rural and urban locales

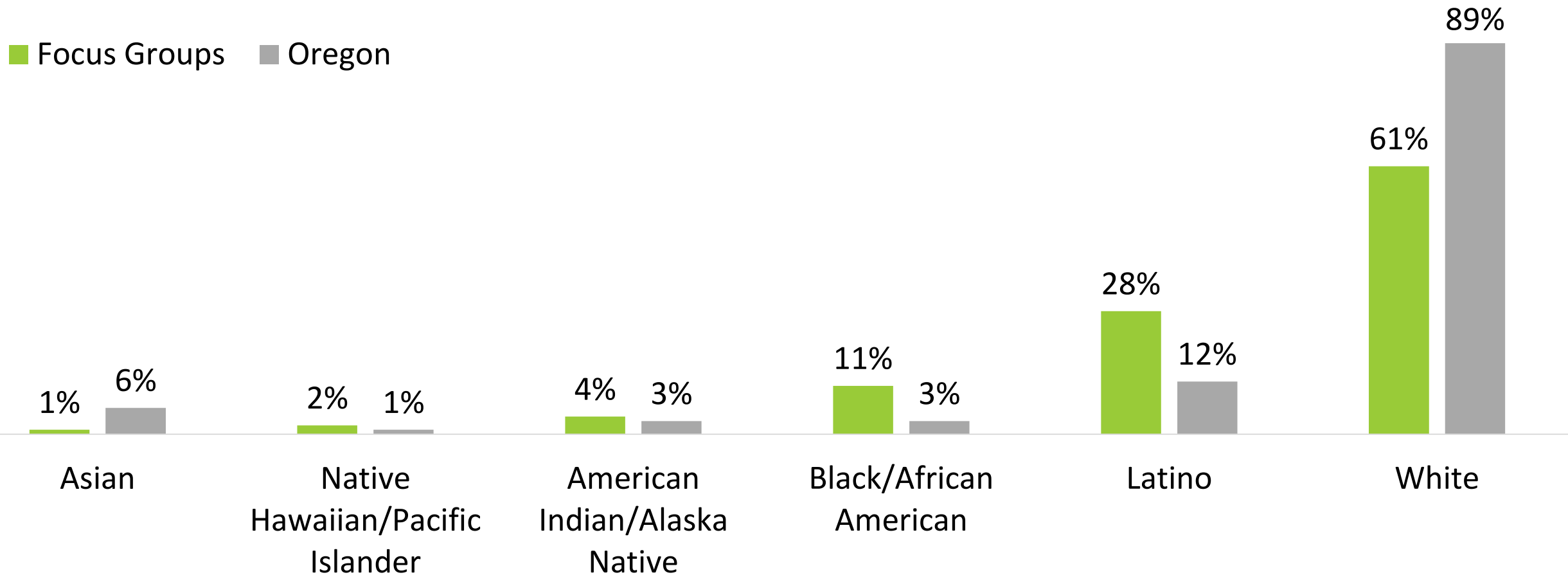
- 11 Baker City
- 9 Enterprise
- 5 Eugene
- 8 Grants Pass
- 16 Gresham-Fairview
- 16 Medford
- 14 Portland
- 8 Yoncalla



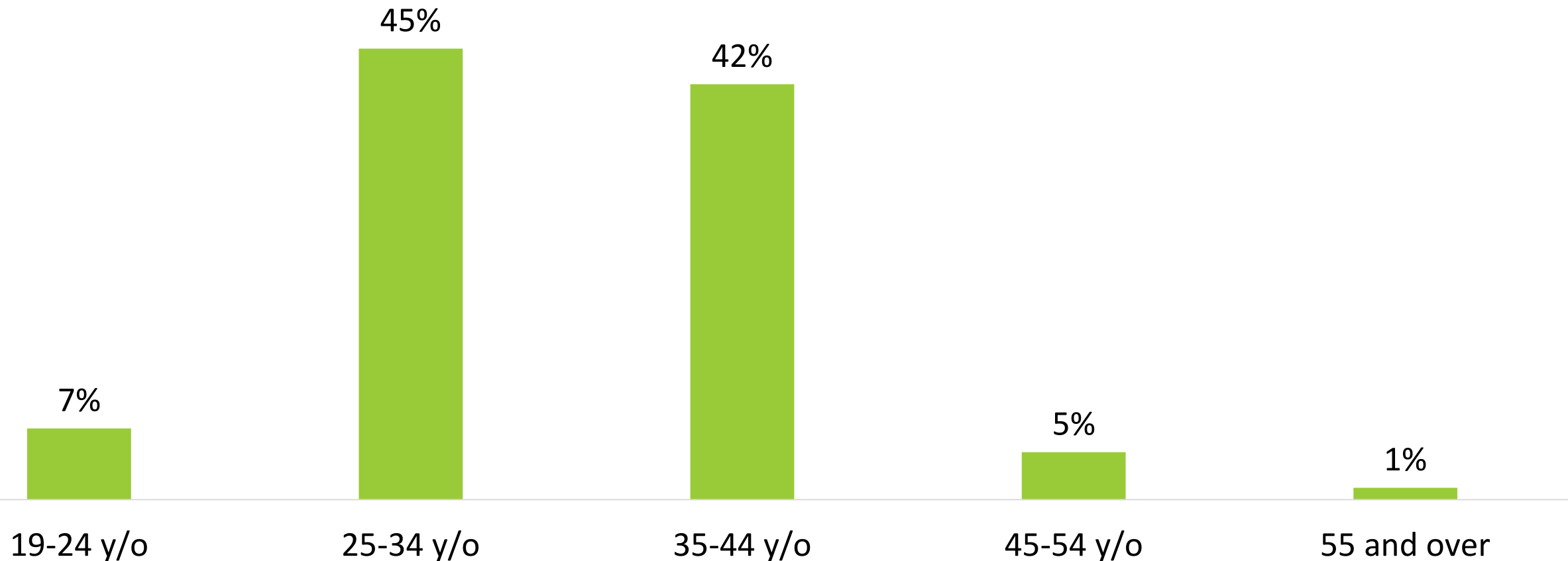
# PSU convened 6 “traditional” focus groups, and 2 with adapted formats

- 6 focus groups had 8 to 16 participants each
- 1 group was convened with 8 participants via videoconference to engage families across the state through the Oregon Center for Children & Youth with Special Health Needs (OCCYSHN) program
- 1 group of 16 participants integrated focus group questions and process with a Parent Café format
- All participants were also asked to complete a short, anonymous Family Survey

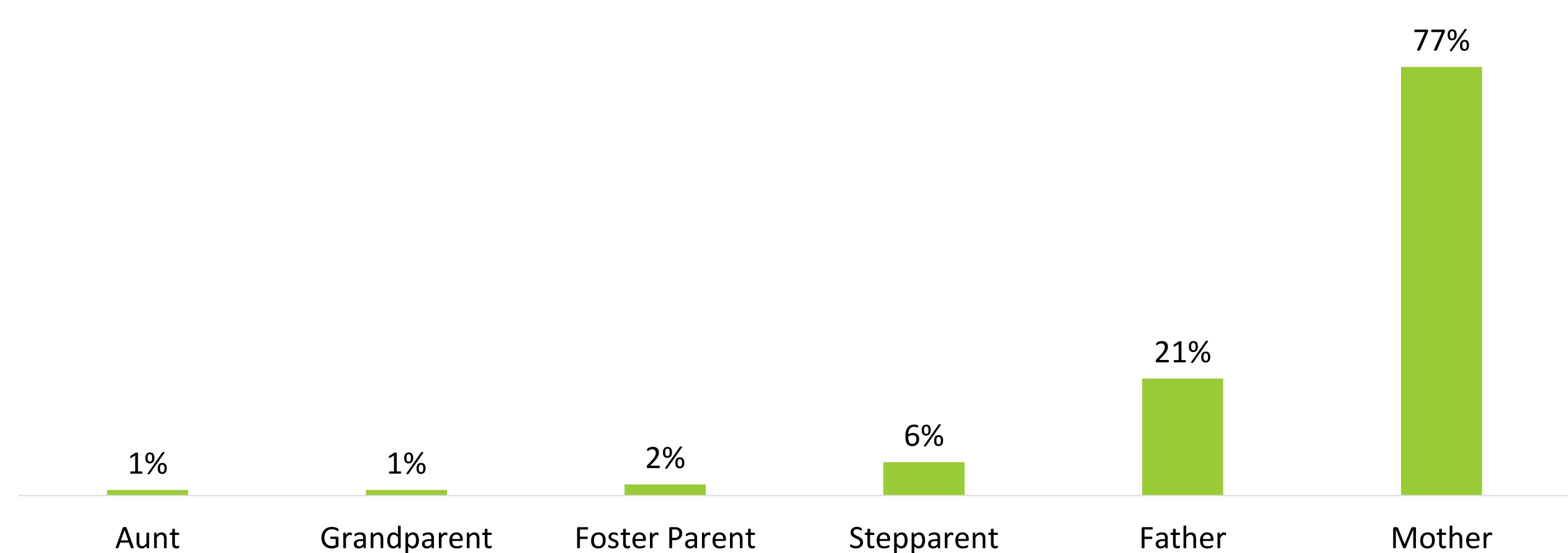
Although the majority of participants identified as White, the project actively sought participation of Black/African American and Latino parents/caregivers



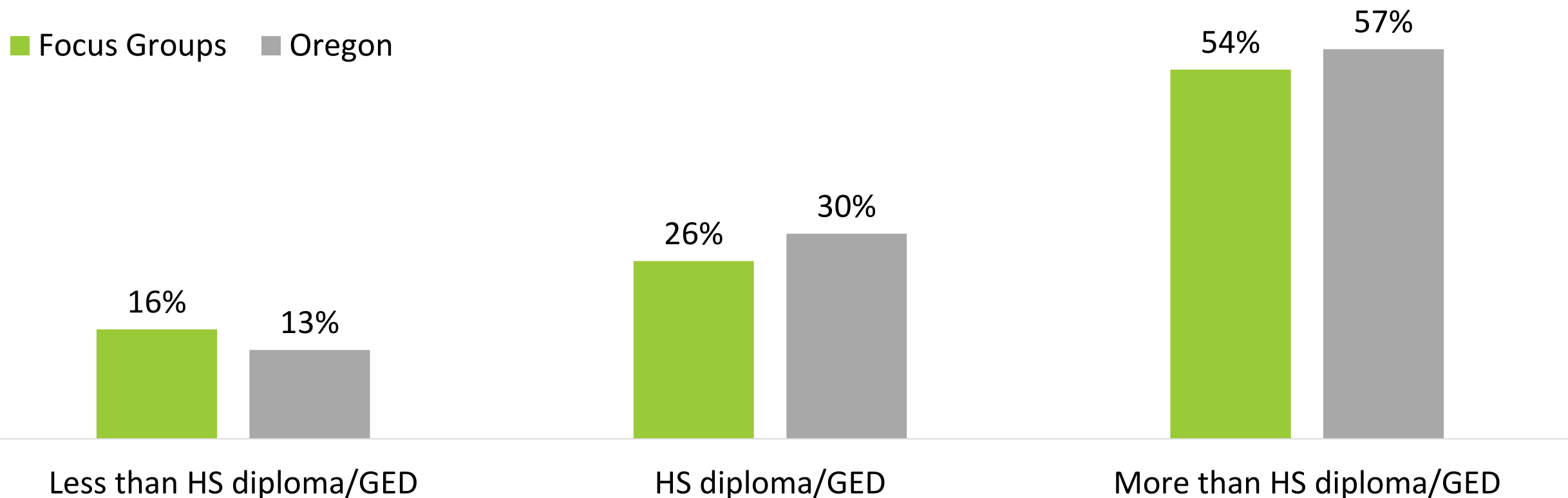
Most participants were between 25-44 years old, and ranged from 19 to 70



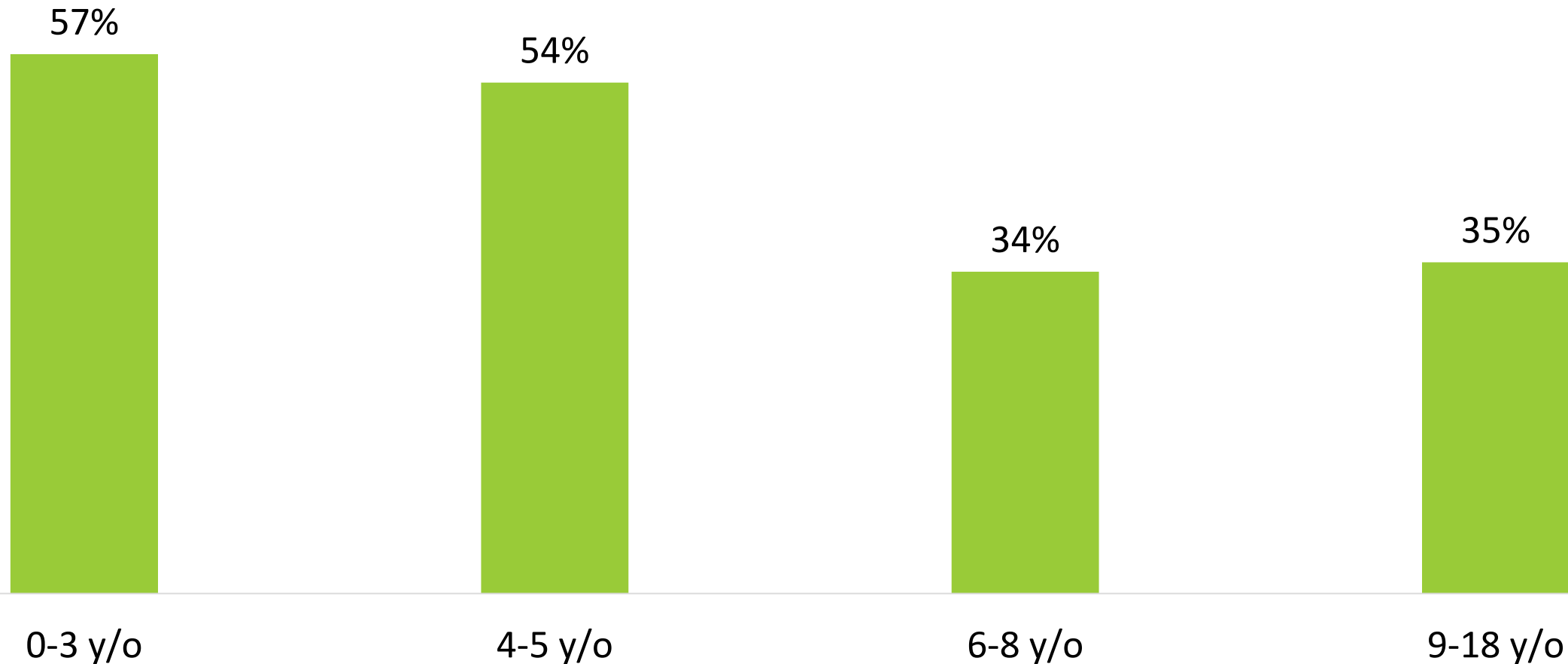
Most participants were moms, but also included dads and caregivers in other roles



# Participants' formal education was similar to adults statewide

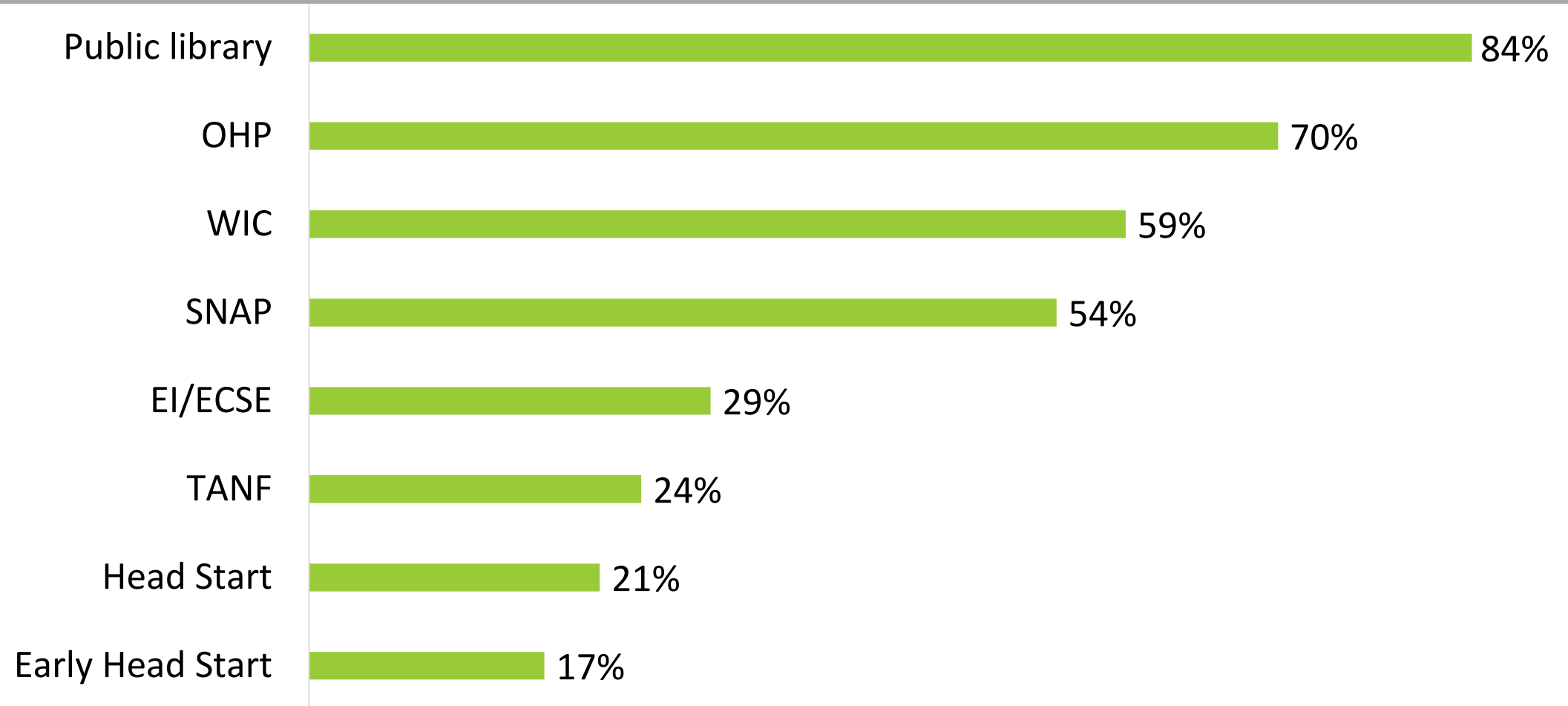


# Most families had an infant-toddler and/or preschooler in the home





# Most participants utilized publicly-funded health coverage in the past year, as well as additional early childhood, family, and community supports



What does  
school  
readiness  
mean to  
families?





What does it  
mean for  
**children** to  
be ready for  
school?

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

Having social-emotional skills were most important to most families



- Sharing
- Being able to identify and verbalize feelings
- Caring for others
- Making friends
- Enjoying playing with other children

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

Having social-emotional skills were most important to most families

“

Being able to recognize their emotions and how they feel and verbalize them to friends, and recognize people in need.

”

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

Having strong executive functioning skills was also very important



- Being able to focus attention
- Remembering instructions
- Being able to self-regulate

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

Having strong executive functioning skills was also very important

“

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

”



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

Being familiar with the school and understanding classroom and school routines



- How to sit in a circle, stand in a line
- Know where the bathroom is
- Where to go at recess
- How to ride the bus



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

**Pre-academic skills** were not as big of a concern to most families but were more important for families whose home language was Spanish



- Letters
- Numbers
- Shapes
- Colors

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

Pre-academic skills were not as big of a concern to most families but were more important for families whose home language was Spanish

“ Que sepan por lo menos algo como escribir su nombre. Sabiendo el abecedario y los números de 1 al 20 de contar.  
*[They should at least know something like how to write their name. Know the alphabet and count from 1 to 20.]* ”

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

Some parents described **additional skills**



- Be able to be independent and comfortable being away from parents
- Be able to do personal care, e.g., tie shoes, use the bathroom on their own
- Have fine motor skills, e.g., can use scissors, pencils, crayons
- Discover their interests and have a love for learning

What does it  
mean for  
**families** to be  
ready for  
school?



# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Develop ways to support children's learning at home from birth

- Being attuned and reflexive to support their child's individual needs and strengths
- Provide variety of play and learning opportunities
- Read at home regularly



# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Develop ways to support children's learning at home from birth

“

I think as a parent, it is important to understand where your child is at and what you need.

”

# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

## Establish routines

- Set regular bed and waking times
- Limit screen time





# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

## Establish routines

“ 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 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 did a lot better. ”



# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Build relationships and talk with early learning providers and teachers

- Gain comfort talking with them about child's learning at school
- Understand how to support child's learning at home and connect to learning in the classroom



# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Build relationships and talk with early learning providers and teachers

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

# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

## Obtain information about kindergarten transition and expectations

- Learn when kindergarten registration happens
- Know when immunizations are due
- Understand teacher expectations for them and their child
- Know what elementary school options exist in the community, e.g., public, charter, private schools
- Meet school staff
- Talk with child about kindergarten



# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Obtain information about kindergarten transition and expectations

“

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

”

# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

## Health supports are in place

- Monitor child development with routine screenings and get connected to needed supports
- Ensure that health and safety plans are in place in early learning and elementary school settings
- Work with health providers to address needs of children with special health needs in early learning and elementary school settings



# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Health supports are in place

“

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

”

# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Health supports are in place

“ 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 does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Health supports are in place

“ Putting together a patchwork of different medical specialists, therapists...The [health care provider] is thinking about the medical side and also about when [child] gets to school, how to learn to do [her own medical care]. The physical therapist is working on how [child] will transition in and out of a wheelchair and when to use a walker.”



# What does it mean for families to be ready for school?

Some parents described **additional needs**

- Provide tangible materials such as school supplies, uniforms
- Learn about and access existing supports and programs
- Connect with other parents to understand and accept that there is a range of parenting values, strategies, and challenges that families face



Who are  
trusted  
sources of  
information  
about school  
readiness?



# Trusted Sources of Information

## People in professional roles



- Early learning providers
- Teachers
- Principals
- Early Intervention (EI) specialists
- Home visitors
- Service coordinators & advocates
- Librarians
- Health care providers

# Trusted Sources of Information

## Personal connections



- Family members
- Friends
- Other parents

# Trusted Sources of Information

Additional resources such as books, Apps, and websites



- Vroom
- ParentCue
- ABCMouse
- ClassDojo
- *What to Expect...series*
- School websites
- Educational or enrichment television or videos

# Trusted Sources of Information

Additional resources such as books, Apps, and websites

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



What kind of  
early learning  
supports  
have you  
participated  
in?



# Types of Early Learning Supports

Families described prenatal-to-age 3 early childhood supports



- Parent-child groups including play groups and story times
- Parenting education series
- Home visiting through CaCoon, Early Head Start, Early Intervention, Healthy Birth Initiative, Healthy Families, Healthy Start, Parents as Teachers
- Bilingual programming was highly valued by Spanish-speaking families
- Culturally relevant programming was highly valued by families of color, regardless of home language



# Types of Early Learning Supports

Families described preschool supports



- Preschool programs, e.g., Head Start, private and public preK, Employment-Related Day Care subsidy settings
- Kindergarten round-ups and transition programs
- Bilingual programming was highly valued by Spanish-speaking families
- Culturally relevant programming was also highly valued by families of color, regardless of home language

# Types of Early Learning Supports

Families described additional family and community supports



- Nutrition supports through WIC, SNAP
- Peer support and social groups
- Family fun community activities
- Family activities through churches and other faith-based groups
- Bilingual programming was highly valued by Spanish-speaking families
- Culturally relevant programming was also highly valued by families of color, regardless of home language



How do  
early learning  
programs  
support  
school  
readiness?



# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

Provide **group-based** early learning experiences



- Builds children's social skills through opportunities for interacting with other children
- Helps with executive functioning, e.g., focusing attention, listening, following directions
- Supports child independence and time away from parents
- Builds confidence in a classroom setting and with academic activities like reading

# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

Provide **group-based** early learning experiences

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

# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

Provide **group-based** early learning experiences

“

It is really challenging to find [early learning programs] that are one, affordable, and two, willing to work with our children that may have different requirements than typically developing children. But our children need to be in that environment, even starting at an early age.

”



# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

Provide parent-focused time, information, and resources



- Provides time for parents and children to play and learn together
- Provides information, guidance, resources for helping children learn, both from other parents and providers
- Affirms parent's role and normalizes worries or concerns
- Helps set goals for children's learning and knowing what to do at home

# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

Provide parent-focused time, information, and resources

“ [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. ”



# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

Provide connections to providers, teachers, and other parents



- Creates connections with other parents for increasing social support and reducing isolation
- Builds relationships with early learning providers, teachers and other professionals who are supportive

# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

Provide connections to providers, teachers, and other parents

“ It helps me talk to the teacher, communicate to the teacher, and ask the teacher, ‘what is my child like?’ or ‘what areas does my child need more support?’ ”

# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

## Address needs of families



- Tangible supports help with participation (transportation, food, child care for younger/older)
- Some programs help connect families with other needed resources, like WIC, SNAP, TANF, EI
- Helps when provided in home language and when early learning settings reflect families' cultures

# Early Learning Programs help children and families be ready for school

## Address needs of families

“

Tienen como papeles e información en nuestro idioma, y eso es muy importante. Y ahora, en cuanto uno llega a la escuela, siempre hay alguien que habla nuestro idioma. Entonces nos sentimos cómodos y en confianza de hablar en nuestro idioma.

*[They have information in our language and that is very important. As soon as we get [to the school] there is always somebody who speaks our language. The songs are in Spanish and they welcome us in our own language. We feel comfortable with the trust that we can speak in our own language.]*

”

How can  
Early Learning  
Programs  
continue to  
**improve** to  
support  
school readiness?



# Early Learning Programs could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

## More services and access

- All groups noted the need for more low-cost, quality early learning programs, and those that can support children with special health needs
- Provide more options for different types of parent and child activities, groups, services, e.g., days, times, locations
- More group-based, low-cost enrichment activities like music, sports, art



# Early Learning Programs could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

More services and access

“

If you have to choose between paying for learning games and food, you'll never get the learning games.

”

# Early Learning Programs could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

More specific information about how to support child at home

- More specific parenting information and activities for parents to use at home
- More support around kindergarten expectations, what children need to know, how to support transition and readiness





# Early Learning Programs could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

More specific information about how to support child at home

“

How do we do [learning activities] on an everyday basis, and incorporate it into our lives?

”

# Early Learning Programs could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Help finding additional services and **advocating** for needs

- Consolidate information about what's available and help families learn about services
- Make referrals for families to additional supports
- Help families advocate for their needs



# Early Learning Programs could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Help finding additional services and **advocating** for needs

“

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.

”

# Early Learning Programs could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Help finding additional services and **advocating** for needs

“

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?

”

# Early Learning Programs could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Some parents described additional suggestions

- Retain staff who have established trusting relationships with families
- Support K-12 system to have better communication with families, similar to families' experiences with early learning programs
- Ensure programs are welcoming and inclusive, including attending to and reflecting families' culture, language



What kind of  
health services  
have you  
participated in?



# Types of Health Services

Families described **accessing a variety of health services**



- Health insurance means families can more easily access care
- Preventative health services such as well-child checks, dental services, and developmental screenings
- Specialized health services such as speech and language therapy
- “Alternative” medicine such as acupuncture, massage, homeopathic treatments
- Emergency medical services



# Types of Health Services

Families also described accessing health services in home, school, and community-based settings



- Home visiting through CaCoon, Early Intervention, Healthy Birth Initiative, Healthy Start
- Breastfeeding and nutrition supports through WIC, SNAP
- School-based health services
- Mobile clinics and community health fairs



How do  
health services  
support school  
readiness?



# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Most importantly, through providers who take the time to build trust and listen



- Consistently, parents shared that the parent-provider relationship is the most important and foundational aspect of accessing health services for their child
- Desired relationship qualities include providers taking the time to build relationships, hear parents' concerns, and answer questions

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Most importantly, through providers who take the time to build trust and listen

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

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Most importantly, through providers who take the time to build trust and listen

“ [My child’s pediatrician] didn’t rush through any appointment. If I had questions, she’d explain it thoroughly. She’d explain everything, even if I had a question about another kid – behavior problems, developmental problems. ”

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Most importantly, through providers who take the time to build trust and listen

“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.”

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care, and parental health services, give families a healthy and stable foundation



- Families valued timely, locally accessible, and routine prenatal and postpartum care
- Families connected their own mental and physical health to their ability to parent and meet the needs of their children

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care, and parental health services, give families a healthy and stable foundation

“ 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. ”



# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care, and parental health services, give families a healthy and stable foundation

“

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.

”

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care, and parental health services, give families a healthy and stable foundation

“

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.

”

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

## Conducting developmental screenings and monitoring child development



- Doing the ASQ with health care providers, home visitors, and in early learning settings
- Going beyond doing the ASQ, to talking about it and learning how to help child reach milestones was most important. This was described by many parents as a missing step.
- Parents liked when ASQs were shared between providers, e.g., health and early learning settings

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

## Conducting developmental screenings and monitoring child development

“ 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. ”

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Conducting developmental screenings and monitoring child development

“

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

”

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Provide additional kinds of developmental supports



- Timely immunizations
- Nutrition supports, such as those offered through WIC, were frequently mentioned as important for child development and readiness
- Encouraging literacy, book giveaways

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Provide additional kinds of developmental supports

“ [WIC] makes sure they have proper nutrition and will be able to think and be physically able to participate in activities. ”



# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Make referrals to other health, early learning, and family supports



- Being knowledgeable about additional supports and making referrals
- Warm-hand offs are more effective, either directly through the health care provider, or someone in a service coordination role, e.g., nurse, social worker

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Make referrals to other health, early learning, and family supports

“ One thing we have benefitted from in the clinical environment...clinics include a social worker, so having someone there to say have you tried this, have you tried this and they can name off all the different resources available. That care coordinator, or nurse who specializes in making referrals to the community. Someone who can orient you and point you in the right direction. ”

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Make referrals to other health, early learning, and family supports

“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 ABCmouse. We're counting, we're doing things that may be pushing him too hard.”

How can  
Health Services  
continue to  
**improve**  
to support  
school readiness?



# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Spend more time with families and **develop trusting** relationships

- Develop relationships over time
- Continuity of providers was important to building trust
- Help families feel comfortable asking questions
- Approach families nonjudgmentally



# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Spend more time with families and **develop trusting** relationships

“

I feel that [health care providers] haven't necessarily made it a safe environment for parents to ask. If I don't feel I'm accepted that is not someone I would go to and ask [about parenting], because that takes a relationship.

”

# Health services help children and families be ready for school

In the context of a trusting relationship, share expertise, information, and guidance

- Provide concrete information, tools, and resources for families to support their child's development





# Health services help children and families be ready for school

In the context of a trusting relationship, share expertise, information, and guidance

“ 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. ”

# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Identify and communicate developmental concerns earlier

- Families with children with special health needs wished health care providers had been more direct with communicating concerns earlier
- In the absence of that encouragement, some families delayed further evaluation



# Health services help children and families be ready for school

Identify and communicate developmental concerns earlier

“ I would like them to be more upfront about what is developmentally appropriate. I feel that is the 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. ”

# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

## Follow-up on referrals

- Be better able to connect parents to other resources, including, but also beyond, medical services
- Do a better job following up on referrals and checking in after visits to ensure families connect with referrals



# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Follow-up on referrals

“

I got a really gentle referral to [Early Intervention], gentle enough that I ignored it for another 6 months.

”

# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

## Follow-up on referrals

“ [Health care provider] made sure to get on the phone, either her or her assistant, and they called back and forth and back and forth [with insurance and pharmacy] until they figured out what was going on. If [my child] doesn't have that medication, he can't go to school or community events. So [health care providers] are very much on top of making sure that phone calls get made and I'm not so stressed out and the family is good. ”

# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Some communities had additional suggestions to meet their needs

- Diversify health care providers to reflect communities
- Reflect families' home language in health care settings either through providers and/or translation services, and translated materials
- Increase local access, especially in rural areas and including specialty providers
- Approach health care holistically and across the life span, starting peri/prenatally, and including parent mental and behavioral health





# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Some communities had additional suggestions to meet their needs

“

No hablamos inglés, por lo que tratamos de ir a la cita y no ofrecen un intérprete en español. No hablan español y en la clínica no ofrecen. Eso es algo que es difícil, porque no podemos obtener detalles, por lo que podemos entender lo que está sucediendo.

*[We don't speak English, so we try and go to the appointment, and they don't provide a Spanish interpreter. They don't speak Spanish, and at the clinic, they don't provide translators. That is something that is difficult, because we cannot get details, so we can understand what is going on.]*

”

# Health services could continue to improve to help children and families be ready for school

Some communities had additional suggestions to meet their needs

“

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

”

What are  
**best practices**  
for the  
health sector  
to support  
school  
readiness?



# The health sector can strengthen best practices to support school readiness

Providers can meet child and family needs to help prepare children for school



- Provide referral coordination and case management support
- Coordinate services across health, early learning, schools, and specialty care providers
- Promote early literacy by encouraging reading at home
- Provide anticipatory guidance on what milestones are coming up and how parents can support future development
- Have up-to-date information about early learning and developmentally supportive activities, and provide opportunities to enroll while families are in-office

# The health sector can strengthen best practices to support school readiness

Providers can meet child and family needs to help prepare children for school

“

I know that with the home nurse it's nice because she can go in your environment and see how things are going and be helpful in different ways. [Offering] 'This is what you need to do with the now-stages and the later-on-stages.' She prepares me more and more for what I need to do as a parent.

”

# The health sector can strengthen best practices to support school readiness

Providers can meet child and family needs to help prepare children for school

“

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

”

# The health sector can strengthen best practices to support school readiness

Providers can meet child and family needs to help prepare children for school

“

A mí en la clínica me daban tiempo de leer desde pequeños. Yo pienso que eso les ayudó a mis hijas porque a la más grande le gusta mucho leer.

*[The clinic also taught me to read to them starting when they were young. I think this helped them a lot because my oldest loves to read.]*

”



# The health sector can strengthen best practices to support school readiness

Providers can meet child and family needs to help prepare children for school

“

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].

”



# Kindergarten Readiness Parent Focus Group Project

Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services