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## **Oregon Early Childhood Inclusion (OECI) Mid-Year Celebration Report**

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## Overview

On February 23, 2024 the Early Learning System Initiative (ELSI) Inclusion Initiative assisted in co-hosting the mid-year celebration for the five Community Inclusion Teams (CIT) and State Leadership Team members at Oregon State University. Sixty people registered and 55 attended this event. The activities (see agenda in Figure 1) focused on celebrations, learnings, and next steps for the CITs, as well as breakout sessions for CITs (i.e., *Financing for Preschool Inclusion* and *Gathering Implementation Perspectives from CIT members*). The day ended with group closing.

In addition to hosting, ELSI Inclusion Initiative was tasked with taking notes at the event and analyzing the evaluation data. This report first provides a summary of the key takeaways from each session followed by a conclusion that brings together key ideas. Finally, it ends with an analysis of the mid-year celebration evaluation data (Appendix).

## Celebrations from Community Inclusion Teams

Each CIT (i.e., Multnomah, Clackamas, Lincoln, Linn Benton, and High Desert) was provided 20 minutes for a presentation and questions to celebrate and discuss.

### *Multnomah*

The Multnomah CIT presentation focused on improving cohesion in their early learning systems. They discussed strategies to build capacity and strategies to prepare the current and incoming staff by creating access to high quality trainings facilitated by certified professionals.

The two themes that emerged were providing professional development opportunities to support the engagement and deeper learning specific to the assessment tools provided for implementation and data collection. For professional development the CIT discussed successes collaborating locally to create increased professional development opportunities, also creating more access to professional development materials and experiences by providing asynchronous and in person sessions and coordinating professional development experiences to maximize local access and participation by creating a clear potential pathway for professional development. Mt Hood Community College provided all staff with the Pyramid Model emodules and the Give me Five training, and was successful in creating an opportunity for the early education and care professionals to engage with the TPOT, surveys, and [Benchmarks of Quality tools](#) in meaningful ways. Coaching was also provided to support a deeper understanding of the implementation tools.

The second theme was data. The CIT discussed which data to collect, how to collect these data, how to share these data appropriately, and ideas to create a pathway or mechanism for sharing and tracking data. Their goal is to use these data to identify, develop, and track program goals. An area to note is that severe weather caused some of the programs to close for a period and were not able resume implementation work as the needs of the families had changed. An educator strike in one of the school districts closed schools and students missed two months of instruction; this event also disrupted the implementation work. Transition at the leadership level has also started in two programs.

### *Clackamas*

The presentation from Clackamas CIT focused on their ability to now have solutions-focused discussion and that conversations and partnerships are shifting to concrete, actionable steps; they are getting positive feedback from their communities (e.g., districts, partners). Two themes emerged from their presentation: *growth and new practices* and *resources*. For growth and new practices, the CIT discussed their restructuring of CIT meetings this year that utilizes specific workgroups focused on a topic (e.g., [Inclusion Indicator](#)<sup>4</sup>). These workgroups have helped to facilitate the work in meaningful ways (e.g., includes individual assignments as well before a CIT meeting). This has afforded increased engagement in the meetings, which have been more productive and focused on goals and actions. Additionally, a program, Sunshine Early Learning Child Care center added a new site, and Clackamas CIT engaged in outreach to a new possible program, which ultimately was not a good fit as there was not a shared understanding of inclusive practices. They note that onboarding new programs is a challenge, and they have found going forward they may need customized plans for each site about where they are in their journey for inclusion and how to best support them in starting this work.

The second theme is focused on new resources which include a new website (<https://clackamasinclusion.org>) and a Pyramid Model family newsletter. The new website has resources, messaging, training schedules (including point persons for professional development opportunities) and contact information for families and practitioners. The family side of the website is coming so families who have not taken steps to get supports and resources can be supported. Finally, they are creating a newsletter to all families that is rooted in Pyramid Practices and are beginning to connect with partner organizations (e.g., northwest disability support network) to support resources.

While they celebrated these achievements, the CIT also continues to note areas of growth and possible challenges including: increasing diverse representation on CIT (in particular families), increasing (and continued) buy-in from the community, additional supports for the work (including support in data management and analyses), as well as increasing public awareness in understanding that inclusion will benefit everyone. Finally, a workforce barrier was noted as preschools are still

struggling with staffing and resources; and families are struggling to get the specific support they need.

### *Lincoln*

Lincoln CIT also celebrated some growth and progress during their presentation, and also noted a few barriers. Growth and progress was evident in their CIT processes, indicators, and professional development. For the CIT processes, meetings are now in person and this has substantially increased engagement. Further, they have created a CIT new member orientation checklist that includes items to review and resources (e.g., ECTA member roles and responsibilities, articles on inclusion, and copy of Preschool Inclusion Toolbox Manual). For professional development opportunities, they are holding an Inclusive Practice Summit focusing on topics like addressing challenging behavior and building peer-to-peer support through routines. And, they have placed increased attention on the following [Inclusion Indicators](#): Public Awareness, Recruitment, Reviewing Policies, and Data Keeping.

Their short-term goals include: (1) disseminating an interest form to families to gather input on joining a Parent Advisory Board, (2): storing their data securely in one place to aid in communication, and (3): increasing the supports for inclusion training and awareness for home-based child care providers. Barriers the CIT team noted included staff retention, inequitable access to mental health resources (in that the resources are not local and families must travel to Portland), and continuous professional development and resources for coaches and educators.

### *Linn Benton*

Linn Benton CIT presentation focused on growth in two indicators and also continually provide individualized professional development to programs. The two [Inclusion Indicators](#) of focus are: Community Provider Awareness and Inclusion Vision Attainment. For Provider Awareness, they are planning a celebration to highlight inclusion with providers this summer/next year, and are also exploring new partnerships and sites (including a demonstration site) over the next year. For the Vision attainment, there is work happening within the CIT and also clear goals related to their vision ('...make all of their sites inclusive, culturally responsive and identity affirming'). Their goal is to increase the percentage of children with disabilities in inclusive services by 2024-25 report card. Specifically, to provide 60% of services in Benton County and 35% of services in Linn County within community-based settings.

Further, they continue to provide support and professional development to teams. To help scaffold and support local community teams, assessment tools were identified and then used; afterwards goals were set (with an action plan). Teams have been working all year on items in the action plan (e.g., completion of first three Pyramid modules), and are realizing progress. The Linn Benton CIT also developed checklist to support action items for local programs and the use of

tools/data gathering; they also hosted an Inclusion Partner Summer Training by going directly to 48 sites! The results show that participants (preschool teachers) demonstrated growth in increased knowledge of daily schedule use, routines, transitions, and inclusive preschool circle routines. They aim to host a second Inclusion Partner Summer Training again this summer. Finally, as with other CITs, they note barriers and challenges in staff turnover and closures of programs.

### *High Desert*

The High Desert CIT presentation focused on collaboration opportunities and professional development to get a deeper understanding of the tools that support implementation. Alignment and collaboration across their early learning system and data were the themes that emerged.

The CIT discussion about the alignment and collaboration theme discussed reviewing the [Local Program Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion to identify the Inclusion Indicators](#) that are aligned or are consistent with the program's established goals. Interested in creating additional professional learning opportunities for inclusive practices, their staff collaborated with a local Head Start to facilitate the trainings for both early care professional groups. The impact of this collaboration will also support alignment of the early education and care professional language spoken across their system. To further support alignment efforts, this early care system has extended the continuity of care for the children and families they are both serving by partnering with a local organization to support the transition of children and families from a pre-kindergarten learning environment to the new kindergarten learning environment. The collaboration created time and space for the early education and care professionals to have meaningful connections about the children and provided organizational tools for families of the children to support the management and organization of paperwork and information related to the IEP/IFSP processes.

Regarding data, the CIT discussed reviewing the [Inclusion Indicators](#) and [Benchmarks of Quality tools](#) to develop a deeper understanding of how they connect to their programs. They plan to use the [Inclusion Indicators](#) and [Benchmarks of Quality tools](#) to identify the specific inclusive practices that are already in place and use that data to focus on those specific Inclusion Indicators. They plan to use that same data to support the identification of professional learning opportunities for future planning. The CIT discussion around data encompassed identifying which data to collect, which tools to use to collect data, how data would be collected, and using the data to inform intentionality during the implementation process. A barrier to note was they were not familiar about how to use the tools shared for implementation such as the Inclusion Indicators for High Quality Inclusion and this resulted in a reluctance to engage with the implementation tools.

## Afternoon Breakout Sessions

The mid-year celebration included two breakout sessions for CITs and were organized so that members attended both sessions. One session, *Financing for Preschool Inclusion*, was focused on the various financing options communities can leverage to establish and sustain inclusive preschool programming, including both federal and state funding, public-private partnerships, and community collaborations. The other session, *Gathering Implementation Perspectives from CIT members*, focused on gathering of survey and small group qualitative data on the implementation of Community Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion.

### *Financing for Preschool Inclusion*

Dr. Marina Merrill, Ph.D., Director of Research & Strategy at the Children's Institute, gave a presentation detailing the loss of \$20 million in funding to EI/ECSE during the 2023 legislative session as part of the cuts to the "General Fund" investment. While there are plans to replenish this loss during the 2024 legislative session by allocating to Student Success Act funds, this process has sparked a larger conversation about what is needed to improve outcomes for children.

Dr. Merrill shared the work that Children's Institute has been doing to advocate for increased funding. The organization has collaborated with Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education services across Oregon to inform legislators about the impact of budget cuts. Legislators have received summaries of the struggles at specific locations in addition to invitations to visit a range of sites to view the repercussions of the funding gap firsthand.

Participants engaged in discussion around the current standards for adequate service levels for children enrolled in special education services. They were then invited to envision a better future for Oregon's early childhood systems and share these ideas via a gallery walk. The Children's Institute plans to incorporate the learnings from the gallery walk into their advocacy during the next legislative session.

### *Gathering Implementation Perspectives from CIT members*

The purpose of this breakout session was to contextualize and individualize data with the CIT from the [Community Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion](#) tool and to learn more about our communities use and understanding of that measure. CIT members were asked to first respond to a 15-minute survey about their rating of the items within the Community Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion from their perspective and experience (of note, when a CIT reports on data, it is the 'average experience of the CIT'). Then, participants engaged in a small group (2-4 people) activity to better understand their perspectives, order of operation for the Indicators and Elements, stories, and lived experience from their experience as CIT member planning, implementing, and supporting these Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion. Small groups were structured so that more than one CIT was represented by an individual in

these small groups in an effort to create and infuse different experiences and perspectives. A report from these activities will be provided separately once the information is analyzed.

## Conclusion

The programming and design of the End of Year Celebration was engineered to provide a multidimensional experience for participants. The celebratory spirit in which each team shared their updates was infectious and set the tone for the entire day, with dynamic conversations happening throughout the event. The feedback about the breakout sessions indicated that the participants found them to be informative and galvanizing for continuing their inclusion efforts. Attendees left the event with new ideas to implement, connections to explore, and confidence in their work thus far.

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## To learn more

Visit: <https://health.oregonstate.edu/elsi/oregon-inclusion-initiative>

Email: [elsi\\_inclusion@oregonstate.edu](mailto:elsi_inclusion@oregonstate.edu)



## Appendix: Participant Evaluation of Mid-Year Celebration

Of the 55 registrants, 49 were able to attend, five of which did so virtually. 100% of those who completed evaluations reported that this was a valuable event for them, primarily because of the opportunity for collaboration, connection, and learning from other communities who are also going through the implementation process (See Figure 2).

Most respondents to the evaluations reported that nothing was missing from the events, while others remarked on the absence of many community members who are engaged in this work. Some wanted time in their Community Leadership Teams (CITs) to process the information that was shared by other communities (Figure 3). At the event, most respondents reported that they encountered new solutions and ideas for moving their work forward, particularly practical strategies such as building a website or creating workplans toward concrete goal (Figure 4). Finally, communities were asked about what else they would like to share to the State Leadership Team. While some felt that the State Leadership Team needs to provide more specific, targeted supports to communities, such as funding guidelines, inclusion training and infrastructure, and barrier removal, most respondents were pleased with the progress that is being made (Figure 5).

Overall, the feedback received from participants was that the celebration was a success and a valuable experience. Community Inclusion Teams were excited to see the upcoming professional development opportunities being offered and are looking forward to continuing the vital work of ensuring inclusive access for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

## Appendix: Figures

Figure 1. Agenda for February 23<sup>rd</sup> Mid-Year Celebration

**OECI Mid-Year Celebration**  
**Oregon State University - Memorial Union**  
February 23, 2024 (9am-3pm)

**9:00am–9:45am Coffee, Swag, Greetings, Group Activity (Horizon Room 49)**

**9:45am–10:15am Welcomes, Updates, & Overview (Horizon 49)**

**10:15am -12:00pm Community Celebrations & Report (Horizon 49)**

Community Leadership Teams share updates and experiences to this point in the year regarding success, challenges, and celebrations, including action plans, implementation, number of programs/children impacted, etc.

CITs have unique experiences and valuable information to share! Teams are encouraged to elicit questions from other communities, with the goal of informing and supporting all Leadership Teams, partners, and colleagues in attendance.

10:20 - 10:40 **Clackamas**      10:40 - 11:00 **Multnomah**      11:00 - 11:20 **Lincoln**  
11:20 - 11:40 **Linn-Benton**      11:40 - 12:00 **High Desert**

**12:00pm-12:45 Lunch (Horizon Lounge 50)**

**12:30pm-1:15pm State Leadership Team Structured Networking – (Horizon 49)**

- **SLT Reps:** *Connection time for communities to engage with the State Leadership Team and focus on relationship-building, communication pathways, problem-solving, feedback, and discussion of what supports are needed from state leadership. (To overlap with end of lunch)*

**1:15pm - 2:45pm Breakout Rooms (45min x 2)**

Financing for Preschool Inclusion - (Horizon 49)

**Marina Merrill & Dana Hepper**

In this session, we will delve into the various financing options communities can leverage to establish and sustain inclusive preschool programming. We will explore both federal and state funding, public-private partnerships, and community collaborations. You will have the opportunity to learn from how other states and local community are navigating the complexity of early learning funding streams to support high quality inclusive preschool programs in their communities. We will have the opportunity to share with each other lessons learned as well as current challenges to preschool finance strategies, with the goal of leaving this session better equipped with actionable steps to secure funding and build momentum to expand and/or sustain your inclusive preschool programs. We will also discuss state level policy and funding and hear from you about what is most needed to help remove barriers to support inclusion in Oregon.

Gathering Implementation Perspectives from CIT members

(*Asian/Pacific American 206 & LaRaza 208*)

**Bridget Hatfield, Sam Logan, Will Massey, & Dominic Paz**

In this session, we will gather your perspectives and experiences as community inclusion teams. Two activities will take place: 1) we will ask you to respond to some questions and 2) we will then engage in a small group activity. Both of the activities are designed to better understand implementation of the [Community Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion](#) from your experiences.

**2:45pm -3:00pm Closing (Horizon Rm. 49)**

Figure 2. Survey item: Why was this event valuable to you?

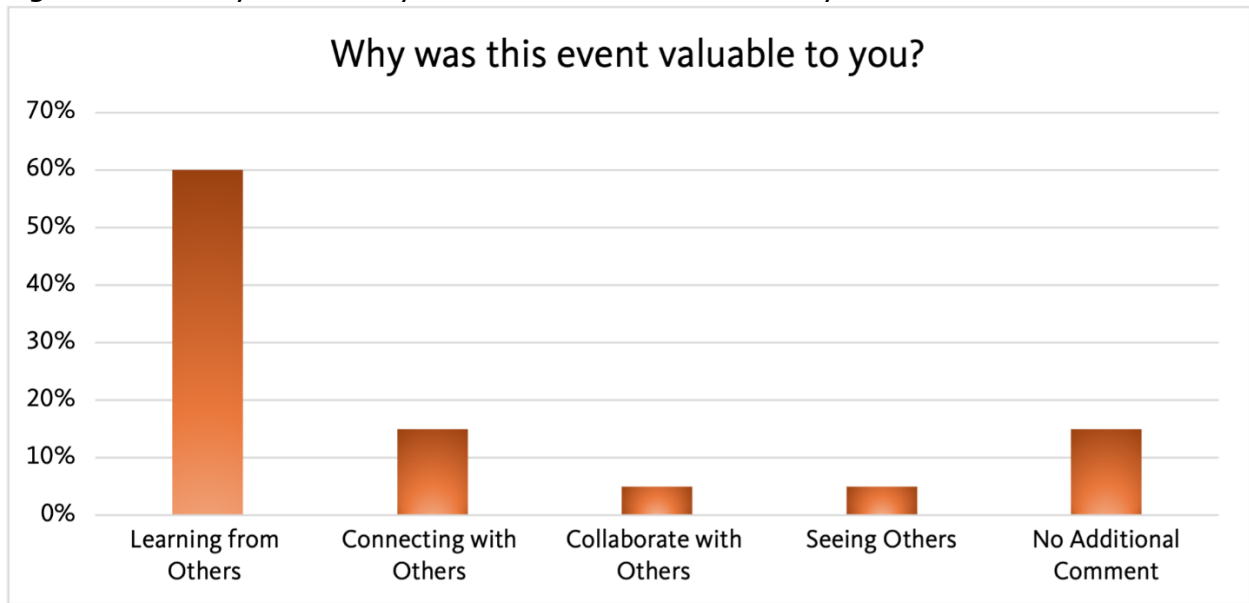


Figure 3. Survey item: What was missing from this event?

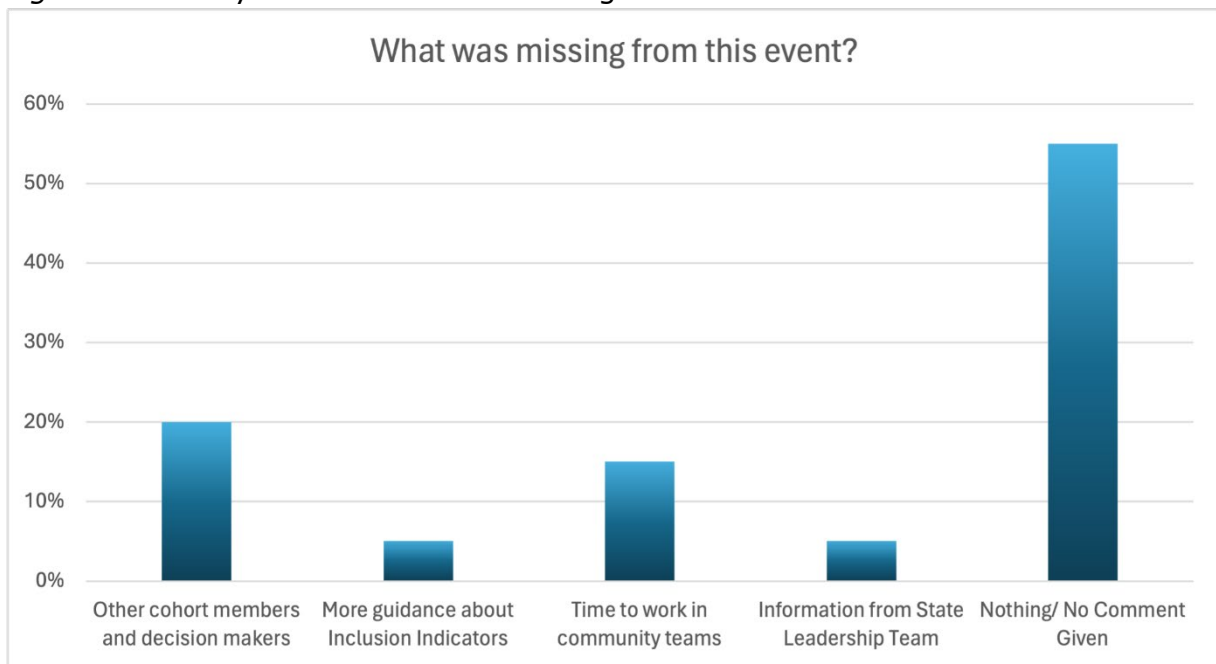


Figure 4. Survey item: What new solutions or ideas did you encounter?

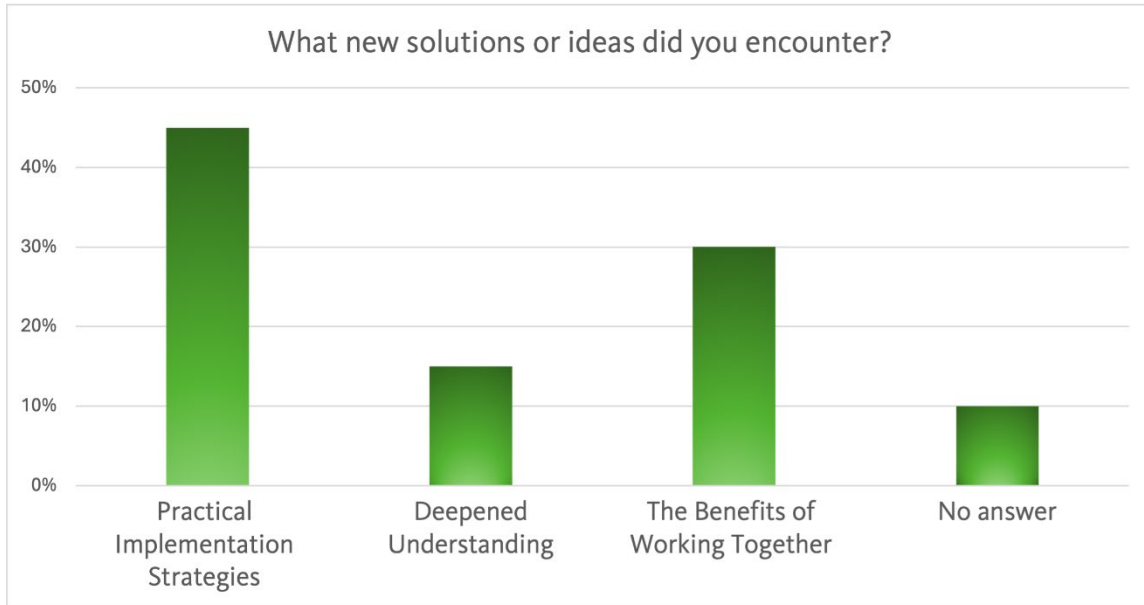


Figure 5. Survey item: What else would you like to share with the State Leadership Team?

