

Are You Ready?

A Family's Guide to Starting Kindergarten



Center for Early Learning



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Launching into an adventure!

Starting kindergarten is an exciting adventure for kids and their families. It is a new beginning for learning and for developing friendships, confidence and independence.

However, it is normal for children and parents to have questions, and even to feel anxious about starting kindergarten.

Children often worry about what it will be like to go to the “big kids’ ” school.

- *Who will be my teacher?*
- *Will I make friends?*

As parents, we often have concerns too.

- *I won't be able to protect my child at school.*
- *Who will help my child tie his or her shoes?*
- *What happens if he or she is teased on the playground?*
- *What if my child doesn't understand the teacher?*

It is important that our children are excited and proud on their first day of school. We want them to walk through the classroom door ready to take their place in the “big kids’ ” school.

First 5 San Mateo County, First 5 Santa Clara County, the Heising-Simons Foundation and Silicon Valley Community Foundation are pleased to provide this handbook to help parents and caregivers prepare children for a successful launch into the kindergarten adventure.

This handbook contains information about:

- 1) The steps to enrolling in kindergarten
- 2) What is expected in kindergarten and transitional kindergarten
- 3) The school readiness “building blocks” – skills and that will ensure your child’s success
- 4) How to prepare yourself and your child for a successful kindergarten adventure
- 5) Resources, including afterschool child care, and tips on building successful routines



*If I turn 5 on or **before September 1** of the school year,
I'm eligible to enroll in kindergarten*



What is the right age for kindergarten?

Children who turn 5 on or before September 1 of the school year* are eligible to enroll in kindergarten.

Children who turn 5 between **September 2 and December 2** of the school year are eligible to enroll in *transitional kindergarten*.

Some parents wonder if they should wait an extra year before enrolling their child in kindergarten – especially if their child has a birthday that is in late summer.

Some districts may allow a child with a late summer birthday to enroll in transitional kindergarten. Check with your district.

Once your child is old enough to register for transitional kindergarten or kindergarten, he or she may no longer be eligible to receive services from some publicly funded preschools. Check with your provider if you have questions.



What is transitional kindergarten?

Transitional kindergarten is a new school grade in California for children who turn 5 years old between September 2 and December 2. Transitional kindergarten serves as a bridge between *preschool* and *kindergarten*, providing students with time to develop fundamental skills needed for success in school in a setting appropriate to their age and development.

*The school year for which you are registering your child.

How do I register my child for kindergarten or transitional kindergarten?

Whether your child is going to kindergarten or transitional kindergarten, you will follow the same process. You will need to register – complete some paperwork and turn it in – for the appropriate school. Here's how to do it:

Timeline to kindergarten or transitional kindergarten

December/January/February

- 1) **Find out from your local school, preschool, district webpage or district office:**
 - What school is your child supposed to go to, based on where you live? Do you have a choice of schools?
 - When does kindergarten registration start? It may be any time between December and March of the year before your child enters kindergarten.
 - Does your district offer any upcoming transitional kindergarten or kindergarten information events?
- 2) **Find out from your local school district what documents are necessary to enroll your child.** Here's what you will typically need:
 - Proof of residency (e.g., utility bill, land/cell phone bill)
 - Copy of your child's birth certificate
 - Your child's immunization record

February/March

- 3) **Take your child to the dentist and doctor.** California requires check-ups before your child enters school. Before you can register, you will need to show that your child has recently had:
 - A dental check-up
 - A health check-up
 - A tuberculosis skin test
 - Up-to-date immunizations for polio, DPT (diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus), MMR (measles, mumps, rubella), hepatitis B and chicken pox

Your local school district may be able to provide you with a list of free and low-cost immunization and dental clinics. The district will also have the forms you need for the doctor or dentist.

Helpful hint: School districts sometimes require that the medical check-up take place **after** a certain date, such as March 1. Check with your district before making the appointment.

- 4) **Research your options for afterschool care early!** Almost all school districts have some afterschool programs for children. These programs tend to fill up, so you should register or get on the waiting list early.¹

March/April

- 5) **Go** to kindergarten information events offered by your district or school.
- 6) **Register early!** Waiting to register could mean your child will be bumped from your local school or school of choice. Early registration means the process will go more smoothly for your child. School offices are often closed in the summer.

April/May

- 7) **Visit** the school with your child and meet the teachers. Most schools will have open houses, "sneak-a-peeks," kindergarten information orientations or other opportunities to visit before the school year starts.

May/June

- 8) **For his or her safety, make sure your child knows the following basic information:**
 - His or her first and last names
 - Full names of parents
 - Who will pick him or her up after school
 - Whether he or she has any food allergies or food restrictions
 - To walk away and find an adult he or she knows if he or she is approached by strangers
 - Your phone number

¹See Resources for more information on afterschool programs.

July

- 9) **Talk** to your child about what a typical school day will look like.
- 10) **Walk or drive** to school during the time you would normally have to once school starts– see how long it takes.
- 11) **Practice** the routines that help get your child to school on time.
 - Getting to bed early
 - Getting up early
 - Gathering supplies and clothes
 - Preparing lunches the night before
 - Eating breakfast

All of these routines are powerful practices that promote learning.

- 12) **Help your child choose** his or her own backpack to bring on the first day of school. Some schools provide a list of supplies needed on the first day.
- 13) **Make sure** you have completed all necessary paperwork.

August

- 14) **Check** with the school to find out your child's classroom and teacher. Some schools post this information right before school starts, while others tell you ahead of time.
- 15) **Fill out** the "All about Me" Form in the Resources section of this booklet and give it to your child's teacher when school starts.

It's normal to be nervous

You may be excited about your child going to school. You may be worried about your child going to school. Both are normal.

It is also normal for children to be nervous about school. They may cry, or it may be hard for them to separate from you for the first few days. After a few days or a week, though, they should feel excited about school and want to go. School should feel like a welcoming and comfortable place.

If you or your child is anxious, try:

- **Visiting** the classroom before school starts. Some schools have special times to visit.
- **Planning** for friends, siblings or cousins to be dropped off together.
- **Picking up and dropping off** your child yourself the first few days.
- **Reassuring** your child that school is a great place and you feel good about it.
- **Making** sure your child understands that you will be back.
- **Saying goodbye** to your child with a smile.
- **Allowing** your child to make choices about what to wear and what to bring for lunch.
- **Letting** your child help get ready for school.
- **Going to school every day.** Missing school will just make it worse.
- **Talking** to your child and your child's teacher when there are worries or anxiety.

Take care of yourself by:

- Keeping your schedule as simple as possible the first weeks of school, especially on the first day.
- Meeting teachers and other parents.

Attendance: How to get to school every day on time

Sometimes it can feel challenging to get to school on time. Even the most organized families can feel stress at trying to get out the door! It takes a lot of practice for most of us.

Sometimes families think that getting to school every day in kindergarten isn't important.

But it is. Part of school success is learning to go to school every day. Children who miss a lot of school have a harder time learning. They will not feel part of the classroom community. Missing school may cause your child to get behind. Missing a lot of school in the early years can affect your child's future.

Tips

- Decide to make school a priority, right from the beginning.
- Think of attendance as a good habit. The more you do it, the easier it gets.
- Have a routine and let the routine be the boss.
- Trick your mind. Think about the time you need to leave, rather than the time you need to be there. Allow 15 more minutes than you think you need.

I've registered my child. Am I finished?

No, you are just beginning your exciting journey. Getting ready for elementary school is an important time. Your involvement during your child's school years makes a big difference in your child's success. The most important involvement starts at home.

Here is your first day of school checklist!

The night before:

- ☐ Help your child lay out his or her clothes.
- ☐ Pack lunch if your child will have lunch at school.
- ☐ Help your child pack his or her backpack and put it by the front door.
- ☐ Fill out any last forms the school requires and put them where you won't forget them.
- ☐ Plan breakfast.
- ☐ Go over plans with your child.
- ☐ Get your child to bed on time.
- ☐ Set an alarm.

On the big day:

- ☐ Start the day with a smile and a hug.
- ☐ Leave the television and other electronics off.
- ☐ Use simple commands – Shirt! Shoes! Backpack!
- ☐ Help your child eat a good breakfast.
- ☐ Drive or walk to school, allowing extra time to get there.
- ☐ Walk your child to his or her classroom.
- ☐ Say goodbye at the door with a smile.
- ☐ Smile and relax, so that your child will feel more relaxed.
- ☐ Be at the door waiting at pick-up time. Your child will be looking for you!
- ☐ Talk about the day with your child.





What happens in kindergarten?

The expectations in kindergarten have changed over the years. If you go into a kindergarten classroom, it might seem more like your own first grade class when you were young.

Near the beginning of kindergarten, children:

- can sit at a table and write with a pencil.
- can listen to and follow one- or two-step instructions.
- can learn to recognize the sounds of the alphabet and words (phonological awareness).
- can begin to write the letters of the alphabet.
- can manage their behavior, with help from adults.

By the end of kindergarten, children:

- know the sounds of the alphabet and can sound out words.
- recognize all of the upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.
- can read many short "sight words."
- can tell what words rhyme and make a rhyme.
- can ask and answer complex questions about books.
- can speak their thoughts, feelings and ideas clearly.
- can write numbers from 0 to 20 in order.
- can retell a story.
- can write about something they like or don't like.
- know how to hold a pencil and crayon correctly.
- are good at taking turns and following classroom rules.
- can pay attention to the teacher for 15 to 20 minutes.

What happens in transitional kindergarten?

Transitional kindergarten is intended to be a positive, language-rich, hands-on, active and enriched environment full of learning experiences that prepare children's minds for kindergarten and beyond.

In transitional kindergarten children will learn:

- to use language through drama, song, story and rhyme
- to recognize letters of the alphabet and alphabet sounds
- to rhyme words and blend words
- to play and work cooperatively in a group
- to find solutions to conflicts
- to be persistent in challenging tasks
- to do lots of hands-on math
- to count objects to 30
- to develop their strength and abilities
- to practice writing the alphabet

Building blocks of school readiness

What are the building blocks of school readiness?

“School readiness” means that your child is emotionally and physically healthy. School readiness means that your child has the *social, emotional, physical* and *thinking* skills to be successful in school. While readiness is different for every child, all children need to be ready to develop these skills. It’s okay if your child doesn’t have all of the skills described in the following pages. Children learn quickly, especially when their parents are involved.

Here are the building blocks:

- Health and well-being
- Social and emotional development
- Language skills
- Mathematical thinking

These building blocks are built on a foundation that is created by your family and through partnerships between teachers, school and community.

Building the foundation: *Family treasures*

Just as a house needs a foundation to support its rooms, your child needs a foundation on which to build his or her brain and body. Families create this foundation by surrounding the child with a warm, positive, loving home filled with family treasures. This is how you make your child’s brain strong.

But you might say, “*I don’t have any treasures!*”

You may think that what you know or what you have is not enough to help your child be successful. But this is not true. You have everything you need. You have many treasures to share with your child.

Here are just a few examples of treasures to share:

- **Playing** simple games together
- **Talking** about family history and family stories
- **Sharing** your special skills like carpentry, mechanics or housekeeping
- **Enjoying** favorite sports or other activities
- **Cooking** treasured recipes together
- **Singing** family folk songs and nursery rhymes
- **Remembering** special events like weddings, birthdays and births
- **Collecting** rocks, coins or other favorite items
- **Gardening** and sharing your knowledge of plants
- **Crafting** and teaching your child your favorite arts and crafts
- **Celebrating** religious and family holidays together

You help create your child’s future when you spend time with him or her. This is what makes your child’s mind rich with culture and language. This makes your child feel special. Nothing is more important, and no one can take it away. You are creating the future by what you share now.

Decades of research make it clear that children and youth — in fact, all of us — learn anywhere, anytime, not just in school. Research shows that children spend only 20 percent of their waking time annually in formal classroom education, leaving 80 percent of their time to explore and enhance their learning interests in nonschool settings.

Lopez, M.E., & Caspe, M. (2014). Family engagement in anywhere, anytime learning. *Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) Newsletter*, 6(3). Retrieved from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/family-engagement-in-anywhere-anytime-learning>



"I need our family to help me learn the skills I need for school."

"A chain of positive influences initiated by large advantages in school readiness and parent involvement leads to better school performance and enrollment in higher quality schools, and ultimately to higher educational attainment and socioeconomic status."

Reynolds, A. (2011). Latest findings from Chicago Longitudinal Study. *Science Magazine*. Retrieved from Foundation for Child Development.



Building the foundation: *Partnerships*

Education is a partnership involving parents, teachers, school and community. The school and teachers need you. You are the best source of information about your child. You are important. Here are some ways you can help:

- **Letting your child know** that you have high hopes and that his or her education matters to you.
- **Dropping off and picking up** your child on time.
- **Talking** with your child's teacher – in person, on the phone or through email.
- **Sharing** information about your child – his or her temperament, habits and whether he or she has special needs.
- **Getting involved** with the classroom and school.
- **Helping** your child with homework by making a time and space for it.
- **Sharing** your home culture at school.
- **Meeting** other parents.
- **Reading** the classroom newsletters, emails and postings.
- **Using caution** when driving your child to school. There will be children walking and riding their bikes. Drive as if all the children were your own. Arriving early will help you stay calm.

Tips for parents

At school:

- You know your child best. Help your child's teacher get to know your child.
- Introduce yourself to your child's teacher and check in often.
- Ask the teacher how your child is doing and how you can help.
- If your child has special needs and an individualized education plan, communicate with your child's teacher about your child's progress on a regular basis.
- Find out how you can help out in the classroom, with activities or on field trips.
- Get to know the other children and parents in your child's class. Get involved! Attend school events and parent-teacher conferences and participate in fundraisers.
- If communicating in English is uncomfortable, find out if the school can provide you with an interpreter.

At home:

- Ask your child questions about his or her day that will encourage more than a yes or no answer. What did you talk about during circle time? Who did you play with at recess? What was the most fun thing that happened today?
- Continue to read aloud with your child each day even as he or she begins to read independently.
- Know whether your child has special needs and learn about the services available.
- Talk to your child's teacher about homework assignments if your child spends more than 10 to 15 minutes a day completing the work or is feeling stressed.
- Read notes from teachers, complete all paperwork required of parents and return it promptly to the school.
- Don't forget the important fuel for school: healthy food and early bedtimes.



"I need 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night."

Building block: Health and well-being

Fuel for school

A healthy child has energy and can concentrate. A child who doesn't feel his or her best will not be able to do as well in school.

- **Night-night.** A good night's sleep will help your child grow and be ready to pay attention during the school day. Young children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night. Without enough sleep, much learning is lost. If you struggle with getting your child to bed, enlist the whole family to help set a routine for good sleep habits.
- **Limit computers, smartphones and television.** Allow no more than one to two hours per day. Take an interactive approach with all digital media.
- **Eat good food.** Reinforce healthy eating habits. Your child needs to have energy and be alert for school. Focus on healthy choices for breakfast and school lunches or snacks.
- **Play.** Make time for active play and exercise, at least 60 minutes a day. The brain and the body are connected. Exercise is as important to brain development and learning as it is to physical and mental well-being.
- **Baby teeth matter.** If your child has not visited a dentist, now is the time. Tooth decay and pain are major causes of school absences and keep children from being able to focus. Teach your child how to take care of his or her teeth.

I can do it myself!

We all show love for our children by doing things for them. It gives us pleasure to care for them, to brush their hair, to dress them and feed them. And you can continue to do things for your child for a long time to come. *But the best way to show your children love is to teach them to do things for themselves.*

Doing things for themselves gives children confidence and makes them feel, "I am a person who knows how to do things."

When your child can take care of his or her personal needs, such as going to the bathroom, washing hands and getting dressed, he or she is ready to learn in school.

By the time children turn 10, every additional hour of television they watched as toddlers is associated with lower math and school achievement, reduced physical activity, and victimization by classmates in middle childhood. School-age children with 2 or more hours of daily screen time are more likely to have increased psychological difficulties, including hyperactivity, emotional problems, and difficulties with peers.

Linn, S., Wolfsheimer Almon, J., & Levin, D. (2012). Facing the screen dilemma. Young children, technology, and early education. Boston, MA: Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. New York, NY: Alliance for Childhood.

Building Block: Health and well-being

Parenting in the digital age

Some of us wonder about the use of computers, television and other media with our young children.

Research tells us that “screen time” — meaning time on computers, television or any device with a screen — has proven to be harmful for very young children, especially those under the age of 3. Too much screen time has been linked to many problems for children, including inability to focus, self-regulation, obesity, sleep problems and social problems.

But with more and more technology resources and interesting software, you may wonder, “Is it all bad?” As parents, you may wonder: “Should I let my child use technology? How much? What kind?”

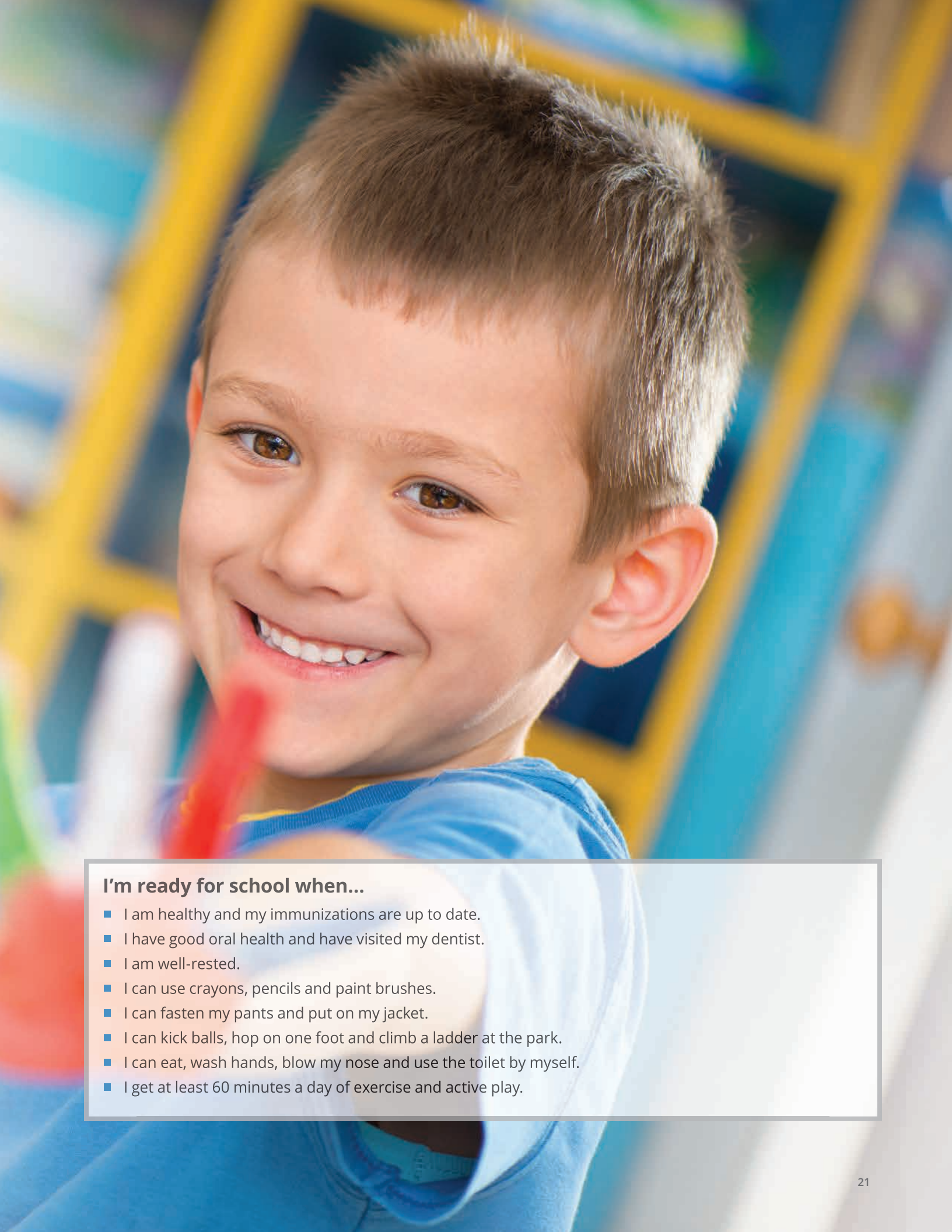
If you do choose to let your child use electronic devices, here are some guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics to follow:

- Keep screen time to 1-2 hours or less and limit it to high-quality content for all children.
- Keep televisions out of children’s bedrooms.
- Choose active, hands-on, engaging and creative digital media for your child.
- Engage in the digital media *together*; children learn best with their families.

The words “screen time,” “digital media,” “screen media,” and “screens” refer to electronic devices that include video screens. We are not referring to the use of programs such as Skype or digital photography.

Tips for parents

- Give your child healthy meals and snacks that include whole grains, protein, healthy fats, fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Limit processed food, unhealthy fats and sugars.
- Engage your child in 60 minutes or more of play and physical activity each day.
- Play simple ball games with your child. Throwing and catching a ball builds eye-hand coordination that will help your child read later on.
- Visit your child’s pediatrician and dentist at least once a year.
- Encourage your child to do lots of things with his or her hands.
- Praise your child for doing things for himself or herself. If you dress your child because you are worried about how he or she will look, offer two choices that are acceptable to you. A child who is allowed to make choices is a child who is thinking.
- Teach your child to brush his or her teeth every day. Make it part of the morning and evening routine.



I'm ready for school when...

- I am healthy and my immunizations are up to date.
- I have good oral health and have visited my dentist.
- I am well-rested.
- I can use crayons, pencils and paint brushes.
- I can fasten my pants and put on my jacket.
- I can kick balls, hop on one foot and climb a ladder at the park.
- I can eat, wash hands, blow my nose and use the toilet by myself.
- I get at least 60 minutes a day of exercise and active play.



"I am ready for school when I can focus!"

Building block:

Social and emotional development

Sharing and caring

Children who feel good about themselves are more likely to have fun learning at school. Children gain self-esteem from learning to meet challenges. Rather than telling children they are “smart,” tell them they are “hard workers,” “brave” or “persistent.”

Healthy social and emotional skills are connected to learning. They include:

- Being able to recognize and label emotions
- Understanding other people’s thoughts and feelings
- Having confidence and taking pleasure in their abilities
- Developing close relationships with adults
- Engaging in cooperative and pretend play with their peers
- Learning to solve problems
- Being curious and eager to learn
- Expressing needs and wants
- Being resilient and hardworking

Tips for parents

- Teach your child “feeling” words, like frustrated, lonely, angry and bored.
- Teach your child that all feelings are okay but not all actions are okay.
- Talk about your own feelings and express love to your child.
- Help your child to identify and talk about his or her feelings.
- Practice imagining what others are feeling.
- Make time for playing with friends.
- Help your child to feel proud of his or her efforts, even when things don’t turn out the way he or she wanted.
- Model good manners. Remember to say “please” and “thank you” and your child will too.
- Share your culture and traditions with pride.

“We have found that what students need the most is not self-esteem boosting or trait labeling; instead, they need mindsets that represent challenges as things that they can take on and overcome over time with effort, new strategies, learning, help from others, and patience. When we emphasize people’s potential to change, we prepare our students to face life’s challenges resiliently.”

Yeager, D.S., & Dweck, C.S. (2012). Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed. *Educational Psychologist*.

Building block: Social and emotional development

Persistence and self-regulation

Being ready to learn means being persistent. Persistent children are able to stay focused on a task, even when it is difficult. Persistent children are not afraid to “get it wrong.”

Being ready for school also means being able to “self-regulate.” Children who can self-regulate are learning how to be part of a group, manage feelings and behavior, share and follow directions.

What do children need from us to learn persistence and self-regulation?

They need to be surrounded by loving relationships. Children’s brains develop best when they are talked with and have a chance to play with others. Just as children are not born walking and talking, they are not born knowing how to behave or how to take in a lot of information. But they can learn if we give them what they need.

You help by:

- **Surrounding** your child with loving, positive, reliable relationships
- **Protecting** your child from chaos, violence and constant stress
- **Supporting** your child’s efforts and helping him or her learn to persist
- **Modeling** skills such as handling frustration and showing concern for others
- **Guiding** your child, gradually, to independence
- **Providing firm**, but kind, limits

If children have support, they will learn to:

- Remember and follow directions
- Stay focused without getting distracted
- Follow rules and adjust when rules or routines change
- Manage feelings and behavior, with support
- Persist in solving problems, even when frustrated

I'm ready for school when...

- I take turns, share and help others.
- I stay focused and pay attention for 10-15 minutes at a time.
- I can keep trying, with support, even when I don't know how to do something.
- I enjoy following the rules and helping to make the rules.
- I can work and play both independently and in a group.
- I can manage my behavior with help.
- I can calm myself down when I get frustrated.





Building block: Social and emotional development

Tips for parents

- Set a good example for your child by managing your own frustration.
- Set limits. Your child will feel safer and more self-confident.
- Make time for your child to play with friends.
- Set routines. Let the routine be the boss.
- Help your child learn from mistakes.
- Use positive statements to teach your child how to behave. For example: "I like how you shared your toy with your sister."
- Help your child find ways to calm down when he or she is frustrated.
- Help your child feel safe at school and at home.
- Reduce stress and help your child learn to cope with it.
- Encourage social, creative, open-ended play, such as dramatic dress-up play, sand box and dirt play, outside play and play with materials such as play dough, paint and constructive toys.
- Make vigorous physical exercise a part of your family's routine.
- Challenge your child's brain with games and activities that are a little bit hard.
- Help your child practice new skills.

Being able to focus, hold, and work with information in mind, filter distractions, and switch gears is like having an air traffic control system at a busy airport to manage the arrivals and departures of dozens of planes on multiple runways. In the brain, this air traffic control mechanism is called executive function....Acquiring the early building blocks of these skills is one of the most important and challenging tasks of the early childhood years, and the opportunity to build further on these rudimentary capacities is critical to healthy development through middle childhood and adolescence.

Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function: Working Paper No. 11. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu



I'm ready for school when...

- I hear and understand the meaning of words, stories and songs.
- I use words to talk about thoughts, wants, needs and feelings.
- I speak clearly enough that other people understand.
- I use complete sentences and connect ideas to make longer sentences.
- I can say or sing familiar songs and nursery rhymes.
- I have a strong foundation in my home language, which can help me learn English if I don't already know it.
- I follow one- and two-step directions such as, "Please pick up your plate and put it in the sink."

Building block: Language skills

Talk, read, sing

Children who are talked to, read to and sung to at home learn to read more quickly. Children who learn to read well can later read to learn. Language means speaking, listening, reading and writing. Let's look at the foundation of language first – speaking and listening.

Speaking and listening

Language comes from our desire to relate to each other. Language gives pleasure. Language is emotional. Using language builds your child's brain and helps him or her think. The more your child hears words and practices using them, the more ready he or she will be to learn at school and everywhere else.

Having family conversations at mealtimes, telling stories about your day, laughing, playing imagination games and reading books are all great ways to build children's language skills.

Singing and dancing, rhymes and rhythms build the language centers of the brain and are fun. Music and rhythm have a way of building patterns in our brain so we remember more.

Speaking and listening skills include:

- Expressing needs, wants and views clearly
- Making longer sentences by connecting shorter sentences
- Talking about past, present and future events
- Having back-and-forth conversations
- Understanding jokes, word play and riddles
- Following directions, starting with one- and two-step sequences and building to four-step sequences
- Recognizing favorite songs and rhymes

Tips for parents

- Talk to your child as often as possible. Talk in the grocery store, talk in the house.
- When having conversations, give your child time to answer.
- Listen carefully when your child is talking. Ask questions and show you care about what he or she is saying.
- Speak clearly so your child can hear how the words are meant to sound.
- Sing songs – start with nursery songs, folk songs and camp songs you remember from when you were young. If you can play an instrument, even better.
- Play storytelling games with your child and encourage him or her to tell you stories.
- Play listening games. Hide a small object and then give your child directions on how to find it.
- Be careful about using slang or swear words that your child may repeat.
- Continue to use your home language while engaging in these activities.

“The fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading. It isn't achieved by the book alone, nor by the child alone, nor by the adult who's reading aloud—it's the relationship winding between all three, bringing them together in easy harmony.”

Fox, M. (2008). *Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever*.

Building block: Language skills

Reading and writing

Literacy means the ability to read and write. Literacy is part of language. All of the conversations you share with your child help him or her think and later help him or her read. You can help your child become a good reader by reading to him or her.

Early reading and writing skills include:

- Enjoying stories and retelling them
- Describing characters and events in a book
- Understanding that words are made of letters
- Understanding that letters make sounds
- Learning how words rhyme
- Drawing pictures that tell a story
- Writing letters or letter-like shapes
- Knowing more and more letters by sight and name

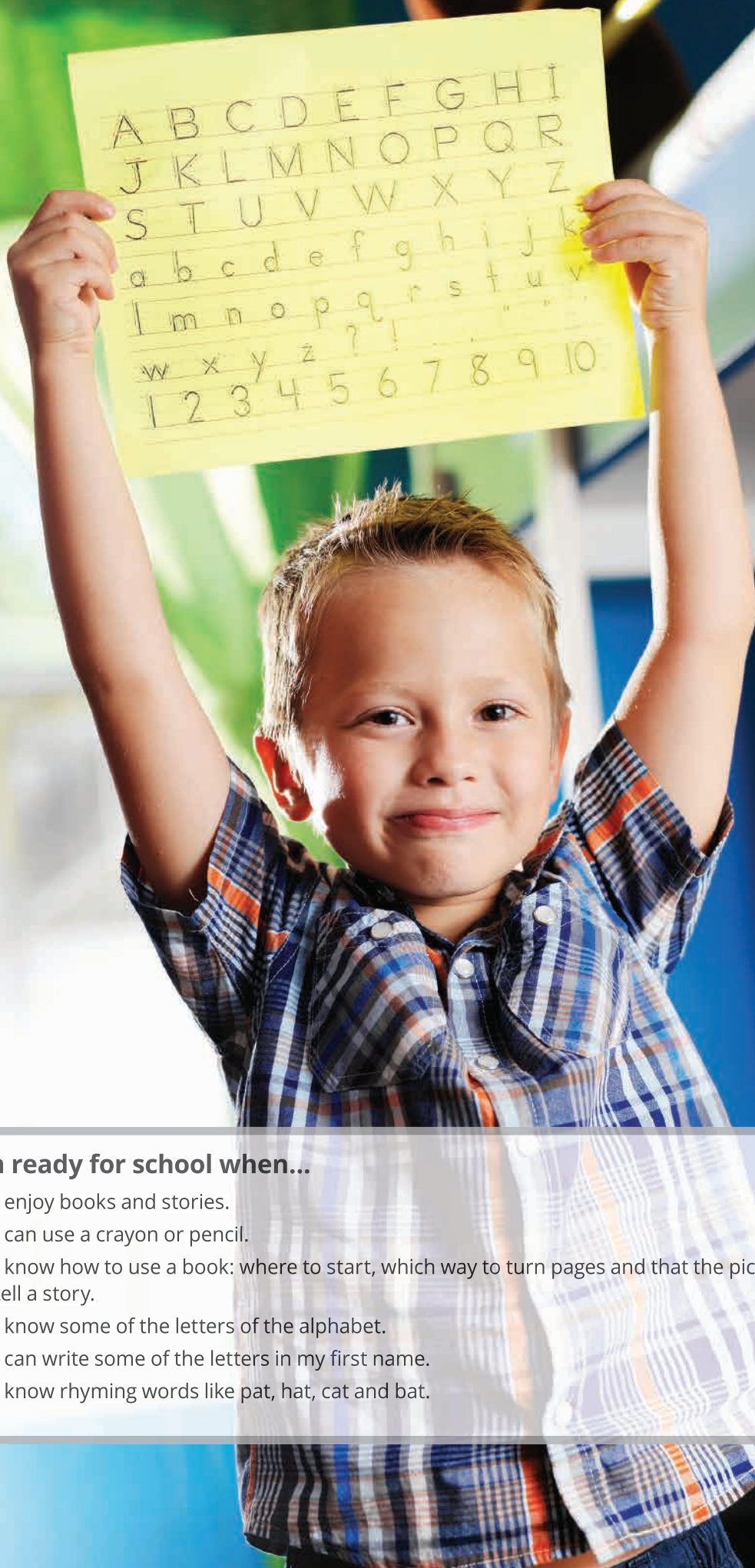
Tips for parents

You can help your child by:

- Reading to your child for at least 10 to 15 minutes every day. Before bed is a good time.
 - Read like you are having a conversation. Let your child set the pace, turn the pages, tell the story or ask questions.
 - Be expressive and enjoy yourself. If you don't like the book, find another one. Have fun.
 - Use the C.A.R. method:
 - **Comment** and wait for a response
 - Let your child **Ask** questions
 - **Respond** and wait
- Repeating books. Children love to hear the same stories.
- Getting a library card and visiting the library often.
- Using wordless books; telling a story with pictures.
- Creating a time and place for your child to look at books.
- Making shopping lists together.
- Pointing out traffic, business and street signs.
- Keeping pencils, crayons and paper available for your child.
- Taking turns telling and retelling stories.
- Offering your child lots of encouragement.

Although various approaches have been found to improve young children's language, the approach of shared book reading has gained the greatest research support thus far, particularly when such reading is carried out dialogically, that is, with much language interaction between the reader and the child.

Shanahan, T. & Lonigan, C. (2014). The Role of Early Oral Language in Literacy Development. *Language Magazine*.



I'm ready for school when...

- I enjoy books and stories.
- I can use a crayon or pencil.
- I know how to use a book: where to start, which way to turn pages and that the pictures and words tell a story.
- I know some of the letters of the alphabet.
- I can write some of the letters in my first name.
- I know rhyming words like pat, hat, cat and bat.



I'm ready for school when...

- My family spends a lot of time talking and playing with me in my home language.
- My family shares many family treasures with me, like music, stories, traditions, food and special collections.
- I am learning new English words.
- I go to the library weekly and get new picture books.



Building block: Language skills

Bridging home and school for English language learners

If you speak a language other than English, you have a treasure to share. Home language helps children to value their culture and builds a strong sense of identity. A strong sense of identity helps children feel more connected at school. Children have meaningful learning experiences when those experiences are related to their families' lives.

A strong foundation in your home language helps your child learn a second language. It may seem backwards, but if you want your child to learn English well, speak to her or him in the language you know the best. The words she or he learns from you will help him or her in English.

Tips for parents

- Encourage your child to feel proud of your home language and culture. For example, cook traditional foods together, listen to music in your home language and/or participate in cultural events in your community.
- Provide daily opportunities for your child to relax, think and talk in your home language. Learning a new language in kindergarten can be fun, but it can also be tiring.
- Don't be surprised if your child mixes and matches words from your home language with English. This is part of the learning process.
- Ask about your school district's English Learner Advisory Committee, or ELAC, and find out how you can participate.
- Have fun learning new words in English with your child. This does not mean you have to give up your home language. The ability to speak more than one language is an important skill.
- Try to find a "buddy" for your child who speaks your home language as well as English. This could be an older child or a friend.
- Remember to also use the parent tips in the other sections using your home language.

Building block: Mathematical thinking

Math is fun!

Did you know that you do math all day long? All of us use math all the time, whether or not we realize it.

The seeds of math are planted from the time your child is born. Children begin to learn about numbers, about less and more and about patterns as babies and toddlers. The more exposure your child has to everyday math, the more ready he or she will be for formal mathematics in school.

You can help your child by talking about the math you see everywhere.

Mathematical skills include:

- Understanding numbers and counting
- Understanding the idea of more and fewer
- Measuring with tools, fingers, hands or feet
- Learning shapes and how they fit together
- Recognizing and creating patterns
- Using various strategies to solve problems
- Sorting and classifying objects

Tips for parents

- Talk about math throughout your day: “Look at how many sides that stop sign has.”
- Play games, including card games, board games or active games.
- Read books. Lots of picture books have math in them.
- Clap and rhyme. For example, clap a pattern and ask your child to repeat it. Take turns.
- Clean up. You can sort, match and compare while tidying up. Or you can talk about colors, textures and sizes by matching socks while folding laundry.
- Build with blocks. Children learn geometry, fractions, engineering and other concepts from blocks.
- Look for shapes in everyday objects. Doors are rectangles, pennies are circles.
- Count together. For example: “How many chairs are at the table? How many steps to the bedroom?”
- Measure while cooking and baking.
- Set the table. Matching, counting and sequencing are all math.
- Work on puzzles of various sizes and difficulties.
- Continue to use your home language while talking about math.



I'm ready for school when...

- I can count 10 objects correctly. (For example, in response to "Please put 10 blocks in the basket.")
- I know primary colors such as red, blue and yellow, and shapes such as circle, square and triangle.
- I can sort the silverware into spoons, knives and forks.
- I can put together a puzzle through trial and error.
- I can sort beads on a necklace in a red-yellow-red-yellow pattern.
- I can organize four objects from smallest to largest.



Building block: Mathematical thinking

Children can also learn math through play. Here are examples of toys for mathematical play:

- Toys with pieces that stack from largest to smallest
- Shape-sorting toys with pegs and holes that have different sizes, shapes and colors
- Boxes, bowls, measuring cups or plastic tubs, along with different materials such as water or sand that children can use to fill and empty containers
- Felt or magnet boards with a variety of geometric shapes and sizes
- Wooden blocks
- Large beads of different colors, sizes and shapes for stringing into patterns
- Three-dimensional shapes and blocks for building
- Collections of different but related objects — such as coins, buttons, keys, plastic lids, stamps, and nuts and bolts — to sort in different ways

From www.earlymathlearning.com

Research evidence indicates that long before entering school children spontaneously explore and use mathematics – at least the intuitive beginnings – and their mathematical knowledge can be quite complex and sophisticated. In play and daily activities, children often explore mathematical ideas and process; for example, they sort and classify, compare quantities, and notice shapes and patterns

Early Childhood Mathematics: Promoting Good Beginnings. A Joint Position Statement of the NAEYC and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. 2010

Resources

Are you worried your child is not ready?

Remember, school readiness looks different for each child. However, you know your child better than anyone else does. Parents are usually the first to notice if their child needs additional support in certain areas.

If your child attends preschool, speak with your child's teacher. There may be simple things you can work on at home to support your child in getting ready for kindergarten.

If you still feel your child's development is very different from that of other children the same age, trust your instincts. Make a list of your concerns and visit your child's doctor to discuss them. You can also contact your local school district and request a developmental assessment of your child any time after he or she turns 3.

Talk to your child's doctor if you see a few of the following behaviors on a regular basis:

- Frequent temper tantrums
- Difficulty with normal changes in routine or when moving from playtime to quiet time
- Overly aggressive behavior with other children, or acting very withdrawn
- Restless behavior compared to other children; being easily distracted
- Difficulty holding a crayon or pencil or copying basic shapes
- Trouble hearing or understanding when others are talking
- Difficulty pronouncing simple words; being hard to understand by non-family members
- Difficulty walking, running or climbing

Remember, many children have some of these behaviors. Watch to see if they happen all the time, or if there are specific situations in which they are more likely to occur.



Afterschool guide

If you will need after- or before-school care for your child, start searching the year before your child enters school. Many schools have afterschool care on the school site, but spaces fill fast.

Finding high-quality afterschool care may be time-consuming, but research shows that high-quality care is as important to your child's development as high-quality teaching.

Some places to look for afterschool care:

- Your local school and school district office or website
- Your city or town's parks and recreation department
- Your local YMCA
- Your county Child Care Resource and Referral Agency

My child is a future student of:



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Translator: Maria Theresa Magana

Our thanks to these experts and partners who provided valuable input:

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Cathy Andrade, Early Care and Education Director, First 5 Santa Clara County

Maricela Armenta, Parent

Misty Belmonte, TK Teacher

Hedy Cheng, Director, Attendance Works

Justine Choy, Program Officer, Heising-Simons Foundation

Jane Danbold, TK Coordinator, San Mateo County Office of Education

Larry Drury, Executive Director, Go Kids, Inc.

David Fleishman, Program Specialist, First 5 San Mateo County

Elia Garcia, TK Specialist, Santa Clara County Office of Education

Lara Heisler, Parent

Laura Keeley-Saldana, Manager, Head Start Program, Santa Clara County Office of Education

Sharon Keplinger, PreK Principal

Elena Lopez, Associate Director, Harvard Family Research Project

Nancy Markowitz, Professor, Elementary Education, Director, Center for Reaching and Teaching the Whole Child, San Jose State University

Jessica Mihaly, Early Learning Officer, Center for Early Learning, Silicon Valley Community Foundation

Annielka Perez, Parent

Robert Pianta, Dean, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia

Ruth Pinkus Resnik, Education Coordinator, Family Connections

Linda Platas, Lecturer, Graduate School of Education, University of California Berkeley

Maria Rivera, Parent

Juan Valdez, Parent

Serna Valdez, Parent

Ana Valdillez, Parent

Jana Weaver, Parent

Amy Wilson, Kindergarten Teacher

Kristine Yee, Kindergarten Teacher

Natalie Zisko, Principal

Routine guide

It can be hard to get into the routine of school. So much needs to be done in a short time each day. Getting children up, dressed and fed, getting teeth brushed and lunches and backpacks together, getting ready for work. It can be hectic.

One of the easiest ways to have a more peaceful family life, and to get to school on time, is to use consistent routines. Clear, predictable routines also help reduce misbehaviors. Routines help children feel a sense of belonging and responsibility.

Tips for planning routines

- 1) Be consistent.
- 2) Encourage the child's participation in setting up routines.
- 3) Use charts, checklists or picture cards as visual reminders.
- 4) Avoid nagging – let the routine be the boss.

Step 1 – Pick one area of your daily life in which you feel a routine would make life easier, or pick a routine you would like to improve or alter. Start with just one. Examples: bedtime routine, morning routine, dinner routine.

Step 2 – What are the steps that need to take place in the routine? Examples: Bedtime routine – bath, pajamas, teeth brushing, story. List them.

Step 3 – Look at your steps. Which steps can be done ahead of time? Which steps might not be necessary?

Step 4 – Are there difficult parts in this routine? If so, what are they? Examples: Does your child resist a bath? Teeth-brushing? Try to delay bed? Brainstorm with your child about how to solve these problems. Add some fun steps to the routine as a reward for the steps the child doesn't like much. For example, put story time after brushing teeth.

Step 5 – Create a chart that shows each of the steps in words and pictures. Your child can check off the steps or put stickers on the steps to mark off when he or she has completed each step. (See page 43.)

Step 6 – Enjoy your new routine and try your best to do it every day.



All About Me

A form to fill out and give your child's teacher



My name is/ the name I want to be called at school is: _____

The names and ages of my brothers and sisters _____

Other people I live with _____

I went to/did not go to preschool (circle one). The name of my preschool is _____

I am really good at _____

Here are some ways I help out at home _____

I watch television/play video games/other electronics _____ hours per day

I listen to stories/look at books _____ minutes a day.

Here are some things I can do by myself: (circle all that apply):

Tie my shoes	Buckle my belt	Tell my address	Other:
Button my clothes	Go to the bathroom	Tell my phone number	
Zip my clothes	Make my bed	Count to _____	
Brush my teeth	Say my name	Sing the alphabet song	

Here are places I have been: (circle all that apply):

A bus	City buildings	Restaurant	San Francisco
On BART	Parades	Zoo	Another state
On an airplane	Library	Museum	Another country
Park	Firehouse	Aquarium	Other:
Beach	Airport	Lake	
Mountains	Train/train station	Farm	
Forest	A play or concert	Picnic	

I have experience with (circle all that apply):

Pencils	Playdough/clay	Slides	Wagons
Crayons	Glue	Climbing structures	Scooters
Scissors	Paint	Playgrounds	Doll houses
Puzzles	Books	Tricycles	Dress up
Blocks	Balls	Bicycles	

When I go to kindergarten, this is what I want to learn _____



Routine chart pictures

You can cut out these pictures and use them to create your own routine chart.

**Put clothes in
laundry basket**



Storytime



Put toys on shelves



Wash hands



Make bed



Eat breakfast



Put books on shelves



Get dressed



Brush teeth



Put on shoes



Take a bath



Lunch



Put on pajamas



Get backpack





Based on research demonstrating that the capacity of a child's brain grows more during the first five years of life, in 1998, California voters passed Proposition 10, a \$.50 tax on cigarettes and tobacco products, to fund programs for expectant parents and children prenatally to age 5. First 5 San Mateo County invests Prop. 10 revenues in local programs and services supporting early learning, child health and development and family support and engagement.



FIRST 5 Santa Clara County is a local public agency that distributes funding from California's Proposition 10 Tobacco Tax to early childhood programs and services in Santa Clara County. For more information about FIRST 5 and its programs, please visit www.first5kids.org.



The Heising-Simons Foundation is dedicated to advancing sustainable solutions in the environment, supporting groundbreaking research in science, and enhancing the education of our youngest learners.



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About Silicon Valley Community Foundation

Silicon Valley Community Foundation makes all forms of philanthropy more powerful. We serve as a catalyst and leader for innovative solutions to our region's most challenging problems, and through our donors we award more money to charities than any other community foundation in the United States. SVCF has more than \$6 billion in assets under management. As Silicon Valley's center of philanthropy, we provide thousands of individuals, families and corporations with simple and effective ways to give locally and around the world. Find out more at **www.siliconvalleycf.org**.

The mission of the Center for Early Learning is to ensure that Silicon Valley's young children and their families have access to high-quality early learning opportunities and healthy development through promotion of research, strategic initiatives, advocacy and systems change.