



Are you Ready?

A Parent's Guide
to Starting Kindergarten

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SERVING SAN MATEO AND SANTA CLARA COUNTIES



"As their first teachers, parents play a vital role in preparing their children for kindergarten. Some important things they can do are to make sure their children know that they are loved and supported and that kindergarten is a safe and happy place; if at all possible provide them with a preschool experience; and use community resources designed to help promote their child's success. *Are you Ready? A Parent's Guide to Starting Kindergarten* is an excellent resource for parents in San Mateo County."

Jean Holbrook, Ed.D.

County Superintendent of Schools

San Mateo County Office of Education



Launching into an Adventure!

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

However, it is also normal for children and parents 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/her shoes?
- ◆ What happens if he/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 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.



“I need a balance of skills in the four building blocks.”

What is Kindergarten Readiness?

Kindergarteners are still growing and developing. At age 5, children have lots of energy. Some are focused on running and climbing in the playground. Others like to draw pictures or play with blocks or toys.

Very few children have mastered all the readiness skills they will need when they enter kindergarten. To be most successful, children need a balance of skills in each of the four building blocks of kindergarten readiness:

- ◆ Social and emotional development
- ◆ Self care, physical well-being and motor skills
- ◆ Language development
- ◆ Early academics

While readiness is different for every child, getting ready for school isn't only for the children. Families need to get ready too by:

- ◆ Preparing for new routines
- ◆ Planning for their role supporting their child, teacher, classroom and school
- ◆ Having a positive and enthusiastic attitude about starting kindergarten

This handbook will help you understand the kindergarten readiness skills found in each of the building blocks and provide you with tips to best prepare you and your child for a successful kindergarten adventure.



“If I turn 5 on
or before
Dec. 2 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 December 2 of the school year are eligible to enroll in kindergarten.

The youngest children will be 4 years 9 months old and there will be some children who are approaching their 6th birthday.

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 or autumn. To help you decide what is right for your child:

- ◆ Be aware of your child's skills and see how they align with the building blocks of kindergarten readiness in this handbook.
- ◆ Talk to your child's preschool teacher and your family doctor.
- ◆ Visit the kindergarten your child will be attending. Watch what the children are doing and imagine your child in that classroom.
- ◆ Talk to parents who have kindergarteners or children in elementary school.
- ◆ Trust your instincts.

Once your child is old enough to register for kindergarten, some publicly-funded preschools may no longer continue to provide services to your child. Check with your provider if you have questions.



“Ask me to
imagine how
someone else
feels.”



Research

Children’s success in school can depend on whether they have learned certain emotional and behavioral skills before they enter school, such as expressing their own feelings and those of others, cooperating with peers and adults, resolving conflicts successfully and controlling their own behavior.

Set for Success: Build a Strong Foundation for School Readiness Based on the Social-Emotional Development of Young Children. Kauffman Foundation, 2002.

Social and Emotional Development

Sharing and Caring!

Children who can share their ideas and feelings are able to solve problems.

Being ready for school also means learning how to be part of a group and follow directions.

Children who have a strong sense of self-esteem are more likely to have positive learning experiences in school.

Healthy social and emotional skills in young children include:

- ◆ Expressing empathy
- ◆ Relating well to adults
- ◆ Engaging in cooperative play with their peers
- ◆ Having the ability to recognize and label emotions
- ◆ Being curious and eager to learn
- ◆ Expressing needs and wants
- ◆ Engaging in pretend play



I'm ready for school when...

- I talk to adults and ask for help if I need it.
- I take turns, share and help others.
- I try new activities and ask questions.
- I stay focused and pay attention for 10-15 minutes at a time.
- I follow one- and two-step directions such as "Please put away your crayons and then bring me your paper."
- I work and play both independently and in a group.
- I feel good about myself and my culture.
- I can calm myself down when I get frustrated.



Tips for Parents

- ☐ Teach your child that all feelings are okay but not all actions are okay. For example, it's okay to be upset but not okay to hit someone.
- ☐ Set a good example for your child.
- ☐ Help your child to identify and talk about his or her feelings and to imagine what others are feeling.
- ☐ Set consistent limits. Your child will feel safer and more self-confident if he or she knows you are paying attention and helping him or her to behave appropriately.
- ☐ Make time for playing with friends. When children play together, they learn to take turns, share and respect one another's feelings.
- ☐ Set routines. Children have an easier time cooperating when they know what to expect.
- ☐ Help your child to feel proud of his or her efforts and accomplishments.
- ☐ Help your child learn from mistakes. When things go wrong, help him or her think about what to do differently next time.
- ☐ Model appropriate manners. Remember to say "please" and "thank you" and your child will too.
- ☐ Use positive statements to teach your child appropriate behavior. 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.



“I need 10 to
12 hours of
sleep each
night!”

Self-care, Physical Well-Being and Motor Skills

Fuel for School!

A good night's sleep will help your child grow and be ready to pay attention during the school day. When your child can take care of his or her personal needs, such as going to the bathroom, washing hands and dressing himself or herself, he or she is ready to learn in school.

Now is also a great time to 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.

Make time for active play and exercise. Exercise will help your child cope with the new structure and expectations of school.



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 button, zip and tie or Velcro shoes.
- 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.



Tips for Parents

- ☐ Provide your child healthy meals and snacks including whole grains, protein, fresh fruits and vegetables. Limit the use of fats and sugars.
- ☐ Engage your child in 30 minutes or more of physical activity each day.
- ☐ Join your child in active play such as going to the park.
- ☐ Limit TV watching. Get outside to play.
- ☐ Help your child get enough rest every night.
- ☐ Visit your child's pediatrician and dentist at least once a year.



Language Development

Use your Words!

Language skills are thinking skills. The more children hear words and practice using them, the more ready they will be to learn at school.

In kindergarten the teachers will use words to describe things (smooth, red, fast), to introduce math concepts (big, bigger, biggest) and to explain ideas like telling time and rules in the classroom.

Family conversations during dinner, telling stories about your day, playing imagination games with friends and reading books to your child are all great ways to build language skills.



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 so that other people understand.
- I use complete sentences and connect ideas together 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.



“Read to me.”



Research

Children who were read to by their parents three to six times a week had greater vocabulary gains from fall to spring than children who were read to less frequently. Daily parent-child book reading resulted in even larger gains.

Reading to Very Young Children Improves Language & Cognitive Development.
Raikes & Raikes, et al., 2006.



Tips for Parents

- ☐ Talk to your child as often as possible. Use the time during daily activities to engage your child in conversations. For example, talk about the textures of the fruits and vegetables while grocery shopping or the colors of the clothes while folding laundry.
- ☐ Read to your child for at least 10 to 15 minutes every day.
- ☐ Get a library card and visit the library weekly so you will have lots of books to choose from.
- ☐ Ask your child questions that encourage him or her to describe things, events or feelings.
- ☐ 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 a language role-model for your child. Talk with your child about many different ideas so they learn new words.
- ☐ Listen carefully when your child is talking. Ask questions and show you care about what he or she is saying.
- ☐ Try to speak clearly so your child can hear how the words are meant to sound.
- ☐ Be careful about use of slang or swear words that your child may repeat.
- ☐ Sing songs and read rhyming stories with your child.
- ☐ Continue to use your home language while engaging in these activities.



“Talk to me
often.”



Research

Children who hear many words beginning at birth do significantly better in school. The most important aspect of parent talk is its amount. Parents who talk frequently to their children expose them to 1,000 to 2,000 words every hour. Children from talkative families have heard 30 million more words and half a million more positive encouragements by the time they are 3 years old than children whose families primarily talk to their children to tell them what to do.

Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children. Betty Hart & Todd R. Risley, 2005.

Early Academics

ABCs and 123s!

Kindergarten is a year of much growth and development.

You can help your child to be a student by playing games. It is easy and fun to use games to learn about letters, numbers, colors, shapes, patterns and solving problems.



I'm ready for school when...

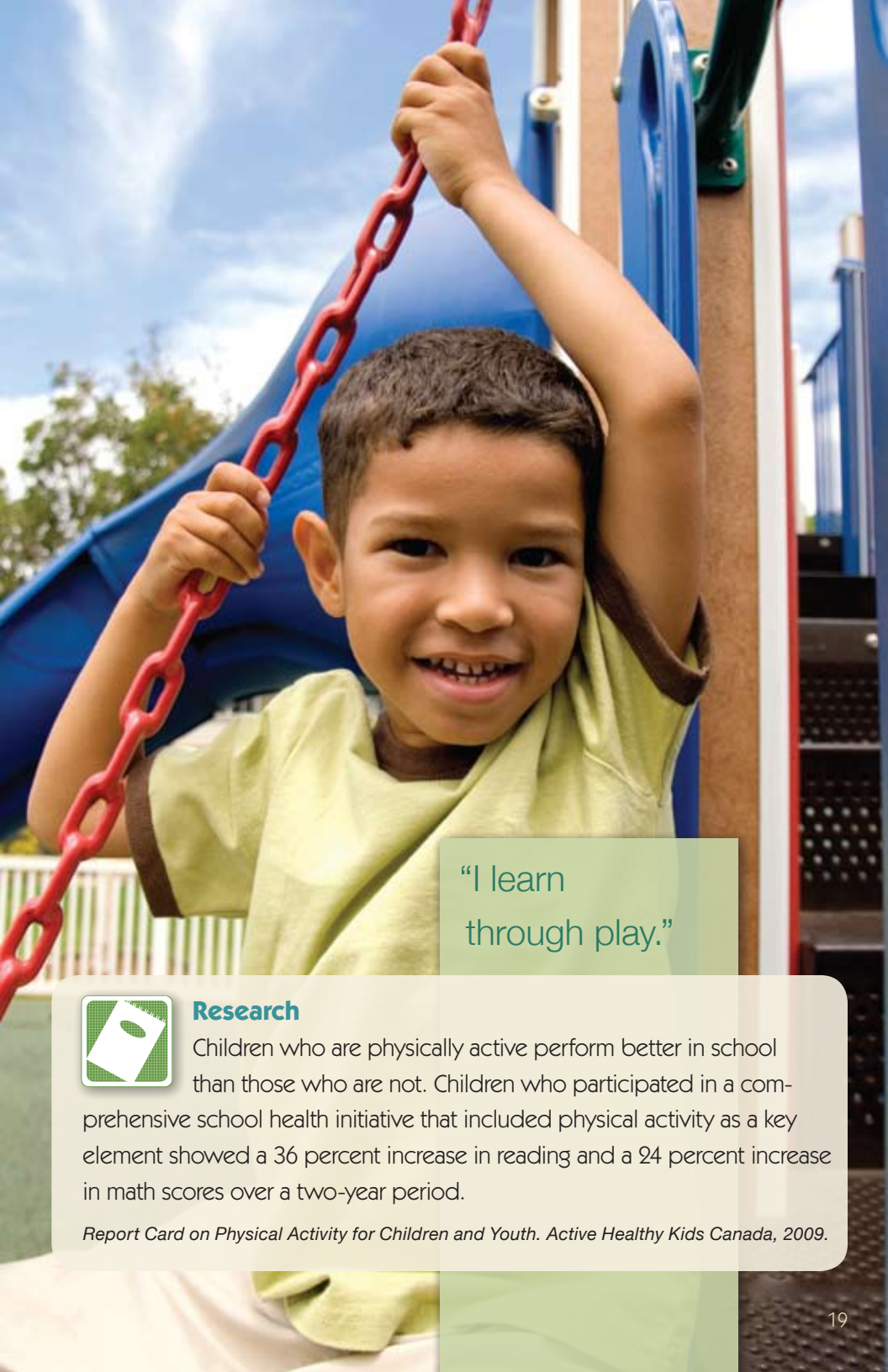
- I know how to use a book: where to start, which way to turn pages and that the pictures and printed words tell a story.
- I know the letters of the alphabet and can write some of the letters in my first name.
- I count 10 objects correctly. "Please put 10 blocks in the basket."
- I know rhyming words like pat, hat, cat, bat.
- I know primary colors and shapes, such as red, blue, green, circle, square, triangle.





Tips for Parents

- ☐ Offer your child lots of encouragement and praise. Children who are self-confident learn to read and write more easily.
- ☐ Look for shapes in everyday objects. Doors are rectangles, pennies are circles.
- ☐ Sing songs and play rhyming games.
- ☐ Keep pencils, crayons and paper where children can get to them easily.
- ☐ Point out letters and numbers in everyday places like cereal boxes, store signs and books.
- ☐ Help your child learn how to sort, match and compare. For example, you can talk about colors, textures and sizes by matching socks by color and size while folding laundry.
- ☐ Teach your child to count. “How many chairs are at the table? How many steps to the bedroom?”
- ☐ Check out many books from the library.
- ☐ Continue to use your home language while engaging in these activities.
- ☐ Remember, children learn through play.



“I learn
through play.”



Research

Children who are physically active perform better in school than those who are not. Children who participated in a comprehensive school health initiative that included physical activity as a key element showed a 36 percent increase in reading and a 24 percent increase in math scores over a two-year period.

Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2009.



“Speak to me
in our home
language.”



Research

Young children have the brain capacity and the neural flexibility for learning two or more languages without getting confused.

Challenging Common Myths About Young English Language Learners.
Linda M. Espinosa, 2008.

Bridging Home and School for English Language Learners

Language is an essential part of culture and self-identity.

Home language helps children to value the connection to their culture, which then contributes to a strong sense of identity. Positive self-esteem and a strong sense of identity help children have more positive learning experiences in school and throughout life.

Children have meaningful learning experiences when they are related to their families' lives.

A strong foundation in the home language positively impacts the learning of a second language.



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 participate in cultural events in your community.
- ☐ Get to know your child's teacher and find out about classroom activities. If the class is going to be talking about animals, you can read stories or talk about animals at home in your language.
- ☐ 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 “early academics” and “language development” sections using your home language.



Getting Ready

Are you worried your child is not ready?

Remember that kindergarten readiness looks different for each child. However, you know your child better than anyone. 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 other children the same age, trust your instincts, make a list of your concerns and visit your child's doctor. You can also contact your local school district and request a developmental assessment of your child any time after his or her 3rd birthday.

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 play time to quiet time
- ◆ Overly aggressive behavior with other children or appearing very withdrawn
- ◆ Restless behavior compared to other children and easily distracted
- ◆ Difficulty holding a crayon or pencil or copying basic shapes
- ◆ Trouble hearing or understanding when others are talking

- ◆ Difficulty pronouncing simple words or if people outside your family have difficulty understanding your child
- ◆ 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.

My child is ready for kindergarten. What do I need to do to get my child enrolled?

Find out about kindergarten registration in your school district by visiting your neighborhood school, contacting your city's school district administration office or visiting their website*:

When do you need to enroll your child? Registration can take place any time between December and March of the year before your child enters kindergarten.

What documents will you need to enroll your child? Every school district has different requirements. Commonly requested documents include: proof of residency, proof of child's birth date and your child's immunization record.

Do you have a choice of schools (i.e., magnet schools, charter schools*)? If so, research your options.

Take your child to the dentist and doctor. California requires checkups before your child enters school. Before you can register, you will need to show that your child has recently had a:

- ◆ Dental checkup
- ◆ Health checkup
- ◆ Tuberculosis skin test

- ◆ Up-to-date immunizations for Polio, DPT (Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus,) MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella), Hepatitis B and Chicken Pox

Research after-school care options, if necessary. Almost all school districts have some after-school programs for children. Check your local parks and recreation department, YMCAs, etc.

I've enrolled my child. Now what?

Talk to your child about what a typical school day will look like.

Visit the school with your child and meet the teacher.

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.

Make sure your child knows the following basic information for safety:

- ◆ First and last name
- ◆ 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 approached by strangers
- ◆ How to find the classroom, bathroom and the school office
- ◆ If possible, teach your child your phone number

**The resource section of this guide has contact information for each city's school district office in San Mateo County.*



“Talk to my
teacher.”

Building Family-School Partnerships

Remember that helping your child be prepared and ready to enter school is just the beginning of the adventure! As parents, you play a key role in the ongoing success of your child at school. Let your child know that you have high expectations and that his or her education is important.

If your child has special needs, make sure the school and teacher know about them and are prepared to help your child succeed.

Education is a partnership between parents, teachers and the school. There are many ways you can participate in your child's education. For example:

- ◆ Talk to the teacher.
- ◆ Spend time in your child's classroom as a volunteer.
- ◆ Join a Parent Teacher Association or PTA.
- ◆ Join an English Language Advisory Committee or ELAC.
- ◆ Help your child with homework.
- ◆ Talk to your child's teacher about ways you can share your home culture at school.



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, at activities or on field trips.
- ☐ Get to know the other children and parents in your child's class. Get involved! Attend school events, 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 on his or her own.
- ☐ 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.



“Talk to me.
Ask me about
my day.”



Research

Parent involvement has a positive and significant effect on children's overall academic performance. When parents participate in academic enrichment activities with their children outside of school, children demonstrate improvement in reading and math performance.

Approaches to Parental Involvement for Improving the Academic Performance of Elementary School Children in Grades K-6. Chad Nye, Herb Turner, Jamie Schwartz, 2006.

Resources

Child Care

San Mateo County has one resource and referral agency, Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County, to help parents understand different child care options, find child care for their children and apply for child care subsidies.

Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County

2121 S. El Camino Real, Suite A-100, San Mateo, CA 94403
650.655.6770 www.sanmateo4cs.org

You can also check with your community's school district, parks and recreation department, or community center for after school child care options.

Health and Human Services

The Community Information Program database provides information on nonprofit and public health and human service agencies in San Mateo County that offer direct services to the public. The Community Information Program Handbook, a joint publication of the San Mateo County Human Services Agency and the Peninsula Library System, is a companion to the database. Printed copies in both English and Spanish are available. To receive a copy, please call and leave your name, phone number, requested number of copies and your mailing address.

Community Information Program

650.802.7950 <http://cip.plsinfo.org>

Kindergarten Enrollment

Contact your local school district office for more information about your options for kindergarten enrollment. In some school districts, you may have a number of choices of schools within the district. Ask what options your local district offers.

Types of Schools

Neighborhood schools

Every district has boundaries set up for each school. Most of the time, your child will go to the school in the neighborhood where you live, unless you choose another school.

Magnet schools

A magnet school is a school with a special educational emphasis, philosophy, theme or structure (such as art or technology). You may be able to send your child to a magnet school in your district, even if it is not in your neighborhood, as long as there is space.

Charter schools

Charter schools are schools that are free from many state rules and regulations. In a charter school, teachers and parents have more input on curriculum than in other schools. In some charter schools, parents must sign a contract to help out at the school a certain number of hours.

San Mateo County Office of Education and School District Offices

Bayshore Elementary

1 Martin Street, Daly City 94014-3331
(415) 467-5443 FAX (415) 467-1542
www.bayshore.k12.ca.us

Belmont-Redwood Shores Elementary

2960 Hallmark Drive, Belmont 94002-2999
(650) 637-4800 FAX (650) 637-4811
www.belmont.k12.ca.us

Brisbane Elementary

1 Solano Street, Brisbane 94005
(415) 467-0550 FAX (415) 467-2914
www.brisbane.ca.campusgrid.net

Burlingame Elementary

1825 Trousdale Drive,
Burlingame 94010-4509
(650) 259-3800 FAX (650) 259-3820
www.bsd.k12.ca.us

Cabrillo Unified

498 Kelly Avenue, Half Moon Bay 94019
(650) 712-7100 FAX (650) 726-0279
www.cabrillo.k12.ca.us

Hillsborough City Elementary

300 El Cerrito Avenue, Hillsborough 94010
(650) 342-5193 FAX (650) 342-6964
www.hcsd.k12.ca.us

Jefferson Elementary

101 Lincoln Avenue, Daly City 94015
(650) 991-1000 FAX (650) 992-2265
www.jsd.k12.ca.us

La Honda-Pescadero Unified

620 North Street, P.O. Box 189,
Pescadero 94060
(650) 879-0286 FAX (650) 879-0816
www.lhpUSD.net

Las Lomitas Elementary

1011 Altschul Avenue, Menlo Park 94025
(650) 854-2880 FAX (650) 854-0882
www.llesd.k12.ca.us

Menlo Park City Elementary

181 Encinal Avenue, Atherton 94027
(650) 321-7140 FAX (650) 321-7184
www.mpcsd.org

Millbrae Elementary

555 Richmond Drive, Millbrae 94030-1600
(650) 697-5693 FAX (650) 697-6865
www.smcoe.k12.ca.us/msd

Pacifica

375 Reina del Mar, Pacifica 94044
(650) 738-6600 FAX (650) 557-9672
www.pacificasd.org

Portola Valley Elementary

4575 Alpine Road,
Portola Valley 94028-8040
(650) 851-1777 FAX (650) 851-3700
www.pvUSD.net

Ravenswood City Elementary

2120 Euclid Avenue, East Palo Alto 94303
(650) 329-2800 FAX (650) 323-1072
www.ravenswood.k12.ca.us

Redwood City Elementary

750 Bradford Street, Redwood City 94063
(650) 423-2200 FAX (650) 423-2204
www.rcsd.k12.ca.us

San Bruno Park Elementary

500 Acacia Avenue,
San Bruno 94066-4298
(650) 624-3100 FAX (650) 266-9626
www.sbpsd.k12.ca.us

San Carlos Elementary

826 Chestnut Street, San Carlos 94070
(650) 508-7333 FAX (650) 508-7340
www.sancarlos.k12.ca.us

San Mateo County Office of Education

101 Twin Dolphin Drive,
Redwood City 94065-1064
(650) 802-5300 FAX (650) 802-5564
www.smcoe.k12.ca.us

San Mateo-Foster City Elementary

1170 Chess Drive, Foster City 94404
(650) 312-7700 FAX (650) 312-7779
www.smfc.k12.ca.us

South San Francisco Unified

398 B Street, South San Francisco 94080
(650) 877-8700 FAX (650) 583-4717
www.ssfusd.org

Woodside Elementary

3195 Woodside Road,
Woodside 94062-2598
(650) 851-1571 FAX (650) 851-5577
www.woodside.k12.ca.us

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SILICON VALLEY | **community[®]
foundation**

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