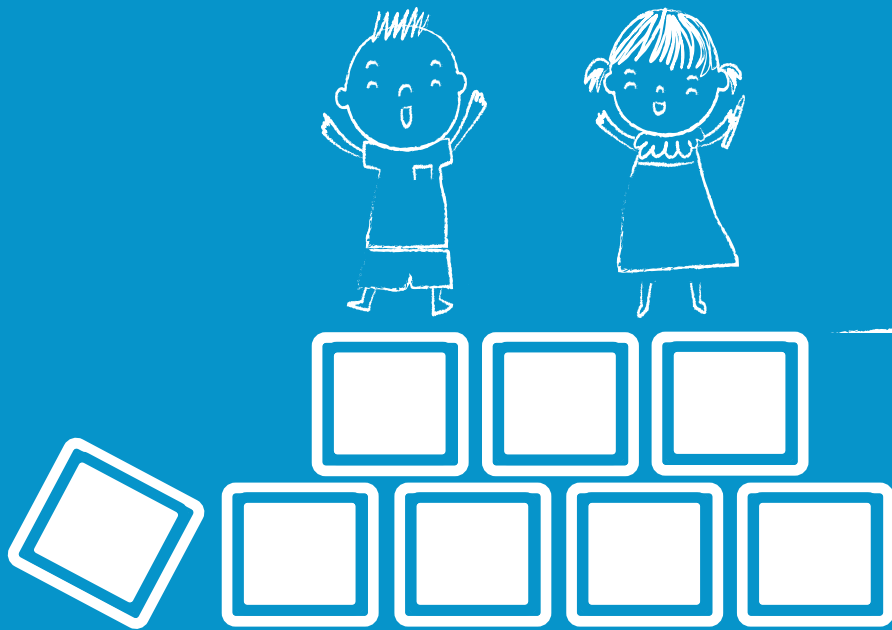


SANTA MONICA CRADLE TO CAREER PRESENTS

Building Blocks for KINDERGARTEN

Nurturing Children for Success



“What makes America exceptional isn’t just the size of our economy or our influence around the globe. [It’s] the promise we make to our children; the idea that no matter who they are, what they look like, where they start, how much their parents earn, they can make it if they try. It’s the essential promise of America -- that where you start should not and will not determine how far you can go.”

*- President Obama, December 10, 2014
White House Summit On Early Education*

Transitioning to Kindergarten

Starting kindergarten is an exciting adventure for children and families. It's a new beginning for learning, making friends, building confidence, and gaining independence.

However, it's totally normal for both children and parents to be nervous about starting kindergarten as well.

Children may worry about what it will be like to go to the "big kids" school.

- *Will I make friends?*
- *Who will help me tie my shoes?*
- *Who will be my teacher?*

Parents often have concerns too.

- *I won't be able to protect my child at school.*
- *What happens if my child is teased on the playground?*
- *What if my child doesn't understand the teacher?*
- *Will I like my child's teacher?*

It's important that children are excited and proud to start school. We want them to walk through the classroom door on their first day confident and ready to take their place in the "big kids" school.

This guide introduces tips and information for parents and caregivers to help your child get ready for school.

We are grateful to FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, First 5 San Mateo County, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation for their permission to use adapt these materials.

When can my child start kindergarten?

Your child will be eligible for kindergarten if he/she turns five by September 1 of the school year. If your child has missed the eligibility date but will turn five by December 1 of the school year, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) offers Transitional Kindergarten. A two year program, Transitional Kindergarten offers a modified curriculum that is developmentally appropriate for younger children.

It is the responsibility of schools to be ready to meet the individual needs of every age-eligible child. However, some parents still wonder if their child is ready. To help you decide what is right for your child:

- Read this guide! Consider how your child is doing in the Building Blocks of Kindergarten Readiness found in this handbook.
- Talk to your family doctor or your child's current preschool teacher
- Visit the kindergarten where your child will be attending - Watch what the children are doing and imagine your child in that classroom
- Talk to parents who have kindergartners or children in elementary school and trust your instincts



There is not just one thing, nor a list of skills, that makes a child ready for school. In fact, there are many opinions and much research about what it means to be ready. It is important to understand your child's strengths and build a balance of skills to help your child succeed in kindergarten and for lifelong learning. Santa Monica is dedicated to helping every family support their child's success in school.

Building Blocks to Kindergarten Readiness

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

At age five, no two children are alike, but they all have lots of energy and they love to learn. Some focus on running and climbing at the playground. Others might have physical challenges that make running difficult. Some like to draw pictures, play with blocks, or sing songs. Others might find it hard to hold a pencil or listen to music. Every child is unique in their own way. Most children will be strong in some skills, and struggle with others.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF SUCCESS

There are four key areas that lead to a child's success in kindergarten:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Self-Care, Physical Well-Being and Motor Skills
- Language Development
- Early Learning

Parents can be ready to support their children during this time by:

- Preparing for new routines
- Planning for their role in supporting their child, teacher and school
- Being positive and enthusiastic about starting kindergarten

Social and Emotional Development

Sharing and Caring!

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

When children have confidence in their own abilities to work and play in a group, they are more successful in school. Some children may struggle with the new expectations for behavior that teachers call self-regulation (sometimes also called executive function). Your child should be working on moving smoothly between activities - like playing outside to activities that require focussed attention - such as chores or drawing.

It is important to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities to help your child experience how to control their thoughts, emotions and own behavior. Helping your child consider alternatives for actions is critical for their success in school, work, and life. Learning self-regulation skills is not to be confused with obedience or compliance.

I'M READY WHEN...

- o I talk to adults and ask for help.
- o I take turns, share and help others.
- o I try new activities and ask questions.
- o I stay focused and pay attention for 10–15 minutes at a time.
- o I follow one and two-step directions.
- o I work and play both independently and in a group.
- o I use imagination games to practice resolving conflicts or to prepare for new activities.
- o I have coping strategies for when I am frustrated, or angry or sad.

Tips for parents

Social and Emotional development

- Set a good example for your child. They will imitate you. If you speak with an “inside voice,” your child learns to speak with one too.
- Use positive statements to help your child know when he or she is on track. For example, “I like how you shared your toy with your sister.”
- Teach your child that all feelings are “okay,” but not all actions are okay. For example, it is okay to be upset, but not to hit.
- Help your child talk about his/her feelings and to imagine what others are feeling.
- Make time for playing with friends—When children play together, they learn to take turns, share and respect each others’ feelings.
- Make time for playing with your child. When you and your child play together, your child learns that they are loved and important.
- Set limits for your child—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.
- Set routines and be predictable—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 them think about what to do better next time.
- Help your child find ways to calm down when frustrated, such as deep breathing and relaxing his or her shoulders.

Self care, physical wellbeing and motor skills - fuel for school!

A good night's sleep will help your child grow and be ready to pay attention during the day. A five year old should get between 10-12 hours of sleep every day.

Your child is ready to learn in the classroom when he/she can take care of personal needs, like going to the bathroom, washing hands and dressing.

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, lunches and 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 WHEN...

- o I am healthy and my immunizations are up to date.
- o I have good oral health and I have visited the dentist.
- o I can use crayons, pencils and paint brushes.
- o I can button, zip, and tie or Velcro shoes.
- o I can kick balls, hop on one foot and climb a ladder at the park.
- o I can use the toilet, eat, wash hands and blow my nose by myself.

Tips for parents

Self care, Physical Wellbeing and motor skills

- Provide healthy meals and snacks in child size proportions including whole grains, protein, fresh fruits and vegetables. Limit fats, sugars, juices and sodas.
- Make time for your child to play 30–60 minutes every day. Go outside, walk a straight line, climb on a jungle gym, toss a ball.
- Set a schedule that includes early bedtime.
- Go outside with your child, walk a straight line and climb on a jungle gym at the park.
- Use home objects for activities like a “kitchen band” using kitchen utensils, pots and pans.
- Turn off the TV and talk with your child.
- Visit your child’s pediatrician and dentist at least once a year.
- Involve your child in making healthy choices when grocery shopping.

California requires health check-ups

Before you can register your child for school you will need to show that your child has recently had a:

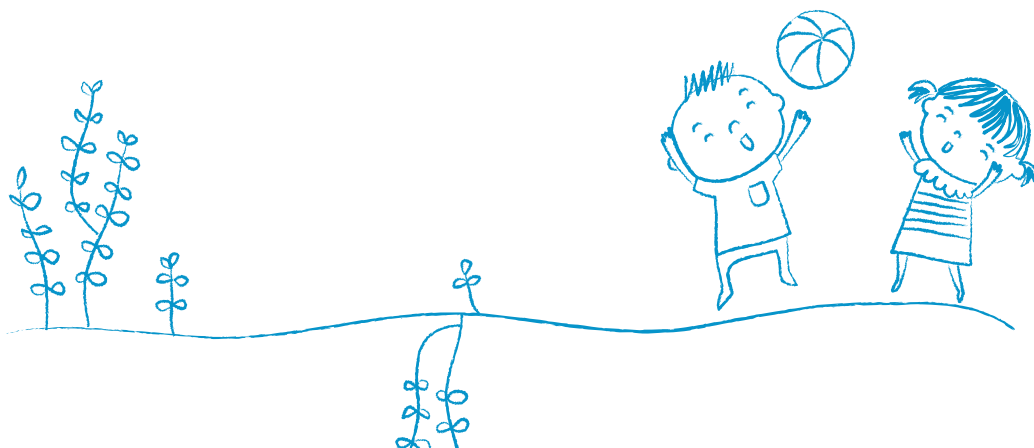
- A recent dental check-up
- A recent health check-up
- All required immunizations for Polio, DPT (Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus), MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella), Hepatitis B and Chicken Pox

Limiting media & screen time

Your child's best learning experience is from play and interactions taking place in the "real" three-dimensional world with parents, caregivers and friends. But we all live in a world of technology. Young children grow up in a world of screens, from TV to tablets to cell phones to electronic toys, and see parents using screens so they are naturally drawn to them.

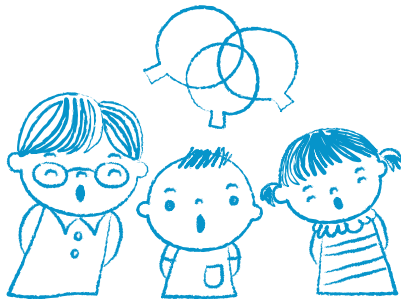
There is clear evidence that **too much screen time is detrimental to children's learning**. Background TV and media can interfere with children developing good sleep habits. Spending excessive time in front of the television is linked to obesity in children.

However, the research also shows that when parents make screen use an interactive, shared experience, it can be a tool for learning, and the potential negative effects can be reduced.



Tips for parents limiting media & screen time

- Be a role model for your child. Put down the cellphone or close the computer and engage in conversations over meals or storytelling at bedtimes. Children learn from what they see.
- Set limits on screen time to be sure that your child has plenty of time exploring the real, 3-D world with family and friends.
- Participate and make TV or computer use interactive, talking with your child about what he or she is seeing.
- Be sure that the program or game you select is designed to promote learning appropriate to your child's age. They should engage your child's minds and bodies.
- Avoid having the TV on in the background. Turn the TV off when no one is watching. Let them see you turn off the TV.
- Avoid using screens as part of your child's bedtime routine.
- Don't worry if your child says "I'm Bored!" For children, being bored often leads to creativity. It is hard and may take a while, but they will find ways to entertain themselves.



Language development

use your words!

Language skills are thinking skills. The more children hear words and practice using them, the better they will be at learning in school.

In kindergarten, teachers will use words to describe things, to think about math (e.g., bigger, smaller, add together, subtract from) and to learn about 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 are all great ways to build language skills.

I'M READY WHEN...

- I hear and understand the meaning of words, stories and songs.
- I use words to talk about thoughts, wants and needs.
- 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 nursery rhymes and familiar songs.

Tips for parents

Language development

- 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 clothes in the laundry, or the colors of the vegetables in the grocery store.
- Make reading part of the daily routine. Sing, play and find 10–15 minutes every day to sit down, read and talk about a book.
- Get a library card and visit the library weekly so you will have lots of books to choose from. While reading, help your child make connections between the story and pictures.
- Ask your child questions that make them describe things, events or feelings.
- Play storytelling games with your child and encourage your child 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/she is saying.
- Try to speak clearly so your child can hear how the words are meant to sound.



Building bridges for dual language learners

The ability to speak more than one language will help your child throughout life. As your child learns more English, encourage their growth in your home language as well.

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

Use the parent tips from the Language Building Blocks on page 13 to help your child build skills in the language you use at home. In any language, more words are better. Children will learn new languages quickly— especially if they already have strong speaking and listening skills in their home language.

Find a language buddy/Be a language buddy

- ◊ Try to find your child a “buddy” who speaks your home language and English—this may be an older child or a friend. It can be especially helpful if your child can learn some of the English words used in common playground games, such as jumping rope or playing tag.
- ◊ If your child is a strong English speaker, encourage him or her to be a Language Buddy for a child who is just learning.

Tips for parents

Building Bridges for dual language learners

- Speak frequently in your home language—Children learn by hearing both languages.
- Find out what your child will be doing in the classroom—If they are going to be talking about animals, you can read stories, or talk about animals at home in your language.
- Learning a new language in kindergarten can be fun but it can also be tiring—Allow your child time each day to relax, think and talk in your home language.
- Don't be surprised if your child mixes and matches words from the two languages—It is part of the learning process.
- Encourage your child to feel proud of your home language and culture. Chances are there will be other children in their class who are also learning English as a second language.



Early learning - abcs and 123s!

Kindergarten is a year of much growth and development.

In preschool, your child is learning every day through play and a variety of interesting activities. You may be curious about what early learning looks like in Kindergarten.

During the kindergarten school year, children will be well on their way to reading and starting to write their own sentences. Kindergarten teachers understand each child has their own strengths. By providing multiple learning activities, teachers differentiate the instruction for the individual child while ensuring all children learn to read, write, add and subtract.

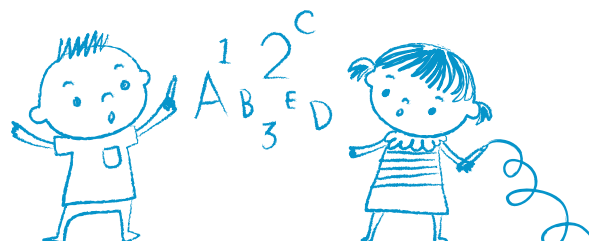
You can help your child be ready to become a student by playing games. It is easy and fun to use games to learn about letters, numbers, colors, shapes, and solving problems.

I'M READY WHEN...

- o I hear and understand the meaning of words, stories and songs.
- o I use words to talk about thoughts, wants and needs.
- o I speak clearly enough so that other people understand.
- o I use complete sentences and connect ideas together to make longer sentences.
- o I can say or sing nursery rhymes and familiar songs.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Children learn through play - look for ways to learn while playing games together.
- Look for shapes - The windows are rectangles, tracing a penny makes a circle.
- Sing songs and play rhyming games. Nursery rhymes are a valuable way to explore math skills, learn new vocabulary and improve memorization.
- 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 - You can talk about colors, textures and sizes.
- Teach your child to count at home and when shopping - How many places at the table, how many steps to the bedroom, find five red apples, six yellow onions.
- Count the items in the shopping cart. Ask - Can we go to the checkout for *less than* eight items or do we have *more than* that?
- Offer your child lots of encouragement. Children who are self-confident learn to read and write more easily.



Building Family - School Partnerships

Remember that helping your child prepare for school is just the beginning of the adventure! Parents are a child's first and always most important teachers. You play a key role in the success of your child at school.

Education is a partnership between parents, teachers and the child. There are many ways you can help your child.



TIPS FOR PARENTS 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 today? Who did you play with at recess? What was the most fun thing that happened today?
- Structure family routines to support homework. Talk to your child's teacher about homework assignments if your child spends more than 10–15 minutes/day completing the work, or if it is causing a lot of stress and frustration.
- Read aloud with your child each day.
- Read notes from teachers, complete all paperwork required of you and return promptly to the school.
- Enforce the rules of the classroom and school—If there is a rule you don't understand, ask the teacher about it.
- Don't forget the important fuel for school: healthy food, early bedtimes and plenty of playtime.

TIPS FOR PARENTS AT SCHOOL

- 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 or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), make sure the school and teacher know about them and are prepared to help your child succeed.
- Talk to your child's teacher about ways you can share your home culture at school.
- Get to know the other children in your child's class and their parents.
- Attend parent- teacher conferences. The school can provide you with an interpreter if you prefer to speak in your native language.



TIPS FOR YOUR CHILD'S SAFETY AT SCHOOL

- First and last name.
- Full names of parents and childcare provider.
- Phone number and address.
- Who will be picking him/her up after school.
- Whether he/she has any food allergies and what food restrictions are required.
- To walk away and find an adult he/she knows if approached by strangers.
- How to find the classroom, bathroom, and the school office.

Is my child ready?

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone. Children develop at different rates. A delay in any kindergarten readiness skill doesn't mean your child is not ready for kindergarten. These kindergarten readiness skills are a benchmark for helping your child be better prepared for a successful school beginning.

- Make a list of things your child is best at, then make a list of the areas where you think your child needs to improve.
- If your child attends preschool, speak with your child's teacher.
- There may be simple things that you can work on at home to help.
- Other parents will also have ideas that you can try. See if your child improves.

However, trust your instincts.

- Parents are usually the first to suspect that a child is struggling. If you feel like your child's development is very different from other children the same age, discuss your list of concerns with your child's doctor.
- You can also contact your local school district and request a developmental assessment of your child any time after his/her third birthday.



TALK TO YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FOLLOWING*

- Frequent temper tantrums that seem very frequent, intense and/or long.
- Intense difficulty with normal changes in routine or when moving from play time to quiet time.
- Overly aggressive behavior with other children or caretakers.
- Your child is withdrawn or lacks interest in engaging with peers or day-to-day activities.
- Restless behavior compared to the other children and is easily distracted. If this is the case, your child may jump from activity to activity without being able to sustain their attention.
- Trouble hearing, responding to others voices or understanding when others are talking.
- Difficulty remembering sequences such as numbers, alphabet or days of the week.
- A very small vocabulary.
- Difficulty pronouncing simple words—People outside your family have difficulty understanding your child.
- Difficulty holding a crayon or pencil or copying basic shapes.

** Remember, many children have some of these behaviors and vary in terms of their familiarity with letters or numbers. Watch to see if your worries about your child's behavior happen all the time, or if there are specific situations where they are more likely to occur. If you are concerned, consult your pediatrician.*

Resources

Visit www.SantaMonicaYouth.net for additional resources in Santa Monica.

Kindergarten Enrollment

Santa Monica Malibu Unified
School District (SMMUSD)

*Contact your local elementary
school or 310-450-8338.

www.smmusd.org

Parent Resources

First 5 Los Angeles County
www.first5kidsla.org

2-1-1 Los Angeles

Dial 211

www.211la.org/children.families

Connections For Children

310-452-3302

www.connectionsforchildren.org



Health Care in Santa Monica

Venice Family Clinic

310-664-7557

www.venicefamilyclinic.org

Westside Family Health Center

310-450-4773

wwhcenter.org

Dental Care

Los Angeles Dental Society

Referral Line

213-380-3669

www.ladental.com

Special Needs Children Services

Westside Regional Center

310-258-4000

www.westsiderc.org

Westside Family Resource and
Empowerment Center

310-258-4063

www.wfrec.org

Countdown to kindergarten—a time to share excitement with your child

September

- Begin talking with your child about going to kindergarten.
- Discuss school readiness goals with your child's preschool teacher.
- Start to practice new skills at home through play and conversation.

October - January

- Talk about your child's development and any screening results with your preschool child's teacher.
- Find out about local public and private elementary schools.

January - February

- Look out for information about upcoming Kindergarten registration events i.e. SMMUSD holds Kindergarten and T-K Round-ups at every elementary school. www.smmusd.org

March - June

- Visit the local library often and share books about going to kindergarten with your child.
- Start to support your child's independence in self-care skills (going to the bathroom, washing hands, taking off and putting on coats, etc.).

June - August

- Check out free events at the local library.
- Talk to your child about what a typical school day will look like.
- Set schedule for bedtime routine.

August - **WELCOME TO KINDERGARTEN!**

12 things every child in Santa Monica should experience prior to Kindergarten

1. Get a Library Card

www.smpl.org

Visit your neighborhood public library – attend the group reading times and puppet shows, but more importantly, check out books to read together!

2. Discover marine life at

The Santa Monica Pier Aquarium

1600 Ocean Front Walk

Admission: Children under 12 – Free

Take note of what kinds of animals live in our waters – what makes them the same? What makes them different? Help your child compare and contrast.

3. Ride the Big Blue Bus

You don't have to have a destination! It's fun to play I-Spy as you tour Santa Monica.

4. Pack a Picnic and play at the Santa Monica Beach

Bring along containers of different sizes and shapes to build sand shapes. Let your imagination take over!

Ask open-ended questions:

What do you see? What does this remind you of? What story do you think the painting is telling? How do these colors (drawings, sculpture, dolls etc.) make you feel?

5. Tour Santa Monica Museums

Bergamot Station Art Center

(www.bergamotstation.com)

2525 Michigan Ave

Admission: Free

Santa Monica Museum of Art

Bergamot Station

2525 Michigan Ave

Closed Sunday, Monday and all legal holidays

Admission: \$3 children

Angels Attic

516 Colorado Ave

Admission: Children under 12 - \$5

California Heritage Museum

2612 Main Street

Admission: Children under 12 - Free

6. Splash around at the Annenberg Beach House

*Beach House Splash Pad and Tour the Marion Davies Guest House
(<http://beachhouse.smgov.net/>)*

Admission: Free

Learn about the rich history of the Beach from a Santa Monica Conservancy docent and then play in the Splash Pad

7. Visit the Santa Monica Farmer's Market

And try something new! Help your child describe how it looks, feels, smells before you even taste it! Consider drawing and coloring a picture of the fruit/veggie too!

8. Take a hike in the Santa Monica Mountains

Take a spray bottle w/water and spray different plants/flowers – notice their colors, texture, scents (to smell a plant, rub the leaves gently, then smell your fingers)

Take a note pad and count how many times you see yellow flowers, or birds, or whatever you choose to count!

9. Enjoy your favorite Santa Monica Park

*Play hide and seek, blow bubbles together, play rhyming games with things you see.
PLAY!*

10. Explore The Museum of Flying

www.museumofflying.com

3100 Airport Avenue

Admission: Children ages 3-12 \$6/2 or younger - Free

Encourage your child to tell stories and share their ideas about how airplanes fly, where the people are going, or whatever they want to invent. There is no wrong answer here, it's just important that your child tell stories and share their ideas.

11. Learn Santa Monica History

<http://santamonicahistory.org>

1350 7th Street (located in the Santa Monica Main Public Library)

Admission: Children 12 and under – Free

12. Experience a theatre production

Miles Memorial Playhouse

www.smgov.net/departments/ccs/milesplayhouse

1130 Lincoln Blvd

Morgan-Wixson Theatre

<http://morgan-wixson.org/>

2627 Pico Blvd

Edgemar Center for the Arts

<http://www.edgemarcenter.org>

2437 Main Street

Santa Monica Playhouse

<http://www.santamonicaplayhouse.com>

1211 4th Street

Santa Monica's Cradle to Career Initiative, is pleased to present this guide. Since 2010, the Cradle to Career Initiative; a collective of the City, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, Santa Monica College, and community partners has been working together to gain an understanding of what we need to do to improve youth wellbeing by addressing the social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs of youth and their families.

Children begin learning at birth, building the strengths they need to enter kindergarten eager and ready for school. The data in our Youth Wellbeing Report Card data finds that while most children are entering school ready to learn, only 1/3 in Santa Monica are emotionally "very ready."