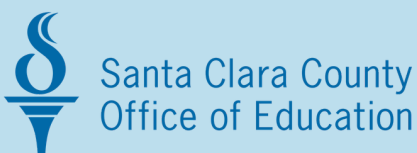


I'M ON MY WAY TO K!

A Parent Guide to a Successful Kindergarten Journey





Hi! I'm Potter the Otter™, your Kinder Guide!

I'm getting ready for kindergarten and I heard your child is, too! I'm super excited (and maybe just a tiny bit nervous). It's a big deal! There's going to be so much to learn, new friends to meet, and lots of big kid stuff to try.

But guess what? It's not just kids who feel antsy about starting school—grown-ups do, too! You might be thinking things like:

- Who's going to help with shoes and snacks?
- Will my little one make friends?
- What if they miss me—or don't understand the teacher?

It's okay to feel that way. My Otter parents had those worries, too! That's why FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara County Office of Education made this awesome guide to help YOU get ready, just like they're helping me get ready.

Because when they cheer me on, I feel brave. When they believe in me, I believe in myself. And when we practice together—things like routines, listening, and being kind—I feel excited to walk through that kindergarten door like a superstar!

Ready, set ... go! Our path to kindergarten starts here ...



Steps On My Kindergarten Path

Kindergarteners are still growing and learning in their own unique ways. At age five, some kids love to run and climb, while others prefer drawing, building, or singing.

Some may find certain tasks harder than others, and that's okay! Every child has their own strengths and challenges. In Santa Clara County, we're committed to helping every child get ready for school success. When parents and teachers work together, we can support each child in building a strong foundation in all four *Steps On My Kindergarten Path!*



Social & Emotional
Development

Self-Care, Physical
Well-Being &
Motor Skills

Language
Development

Early Academics

What is the right age for Kindergarten?

In California, your child will be eligible for kindergarten if they **turn five on or before September 1** of the current school year. Parents have many different options for their preschool-aged kids.

To help you decide what is right for you and your child:

- Compare your child's skills with those outlined in the Steps On My Kindergarten Path found in this handbook.
- Talk to your family doctor or your family childcare provider.
- Arrange a time to visit the school with your child. Explore the playground, walk around, help your child become familiar with the classroom, and say hi to school staff.
- Talk to parents who have kindergarteners or children in elementary school and trust your instincts.





Countdown to Kindergarten Calendar

MONTH	ACTIVITY
JANUARY	Find out about kindergarten registration and enroll your child.
FEBRUARY	Read a new book at your local public library and explore other community resources.
MARCH	Vaccinate before it's too late. Check with your school and pediatrician.
APRIL	Practice basic skills: holding crayons, using scissors, counting, etc.
MAY	Give your child the chance to make decisions and smart choices.
JUNE	Talk to your child about what a typical school day will look like.
JULY	Set a schedule at home and aim for 10-12 hours of sleep every night.
AUGUST	Visit the school, meet the teacher, and discuss what school supplies are needed.
SEPTEMBER & BEYOND!	Keep checking in with your child, teacher, and school. Ask questions, and be a listening ear! Consider joining the school's PTA.

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. It's normal for children to take time to adjust to the new expectations for behavior that teachers call self-regulation, or the ability to control their own behavior and emotional responses.

Your child should be practicing how to transition smoothly between activities—such as going from outdoor play to tasks that require focused attention, like putting away toys or drawing. Parents and teachers might notice extra tears, trouble moving to the next activity when it is time or following the classroom rules.

I'm building strong foundations when ...

I talk to adults and ask for help.

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 can follow one and two-step directions.

I work and play both independently and in a group.

I use imagination games to practice resolving conflicts or to prepare for new activities.

I know what to do when I feel frustrated, angry, or sad.



Tips for Parents

- Set a good example for your child—they will imitate what you do. If you speak with an “inside voice,” your child is learning to speak with one, too.
- Use positive statements to help your child know when they’re 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. For example, “It is okay to be upset, but not okay to hit someone.”
- Help your child talk about their feelings and imagine what others are feeling.
- Set limits for your child. Your child will feel safer and more self-confident if they know you are paying attention and helping them respond to different situations.
- Make time for playing with friends. When children play together, they learn to take turns, share, and respect each other’s feelings.
- Set routines and be predictable. Children have an easier time cooperating when they know what to expect.
- Help your child feel proud of their 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 they are frustrated.

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 day. Also, your child is better equipped to learn in the classroom when they 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, lunch, 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 on my way when ...

I am healthy and my immunizations are up to date.

I have good oral health and I have visited the dentist.

I get 10-12 hours of sleep every night.

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 use the toilet, eat, wash my hands, and blow my nose by myself.

Tips for Parents

- Provide healthy meals and snacks including whole grains, protein, fresh fruits, and vegetables. Limit fats, sugars, and sodas.
- Make sure your child has 30-60 minutes of physical activity every day.
- Set a schedule that aims for 10-12 hours of sleep per night.
- 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.
- Limit screentime and spend time talking with your child.
- Visit your child’s pediatrician and dentist at least once a year. Need help with Medicare or Medi-Cal? Find out what you qualify for, how to apply, and get the support you need. Visit [BenefitsCal.com](https://www.BenefitsCal.com) to learn more.



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, the 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 building strong foundations 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 can connect ideas together to make longer sentences.

I can say or sing nursery rhymes and familiar songs.



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 clothes in the laundry, or the colors of the vegetables in the grocery store.
- Make reading part of the daily routine. Try to find 10-15 minutes every day to sit down, read, and talk about a book.
- Get a library card and visit your local public library weekly so you will have lots of books to choose from.
- Ask your child questions that encourage them to 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 they're saying.
- Try to speak clearly so your child can hear how the words are meant to sound and be pronounced.

Early Academics

ABCs and 123s! Kindergarten is a year of much growth and development. During the kindergarten school year, children will be well on their way to reading and will start to write their own sentences. They will learn to tell time, 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.



Together we're growing these skills ...

I know the letters of the alphabet and can write my own first name.

I can count 10 objects correctly.

I know rhyming words like pat, hat, cat, bat.

I know how to use a book: where to start, which way to turn pages.

I know colors and shapes: red, yellow, blue, a circle, square, triangle.



Tips for Parents

- Children learn through play—look for ways to learn while playing games together.
- Play memory games that help children practice storing and organizing information. Draw five sets of matching pictures on separate pieces of paper, turn them face down and mix them up. Have your child turn them over one by one to find the matching pairs.
- Look for shapes. “The windows are rectangles. Tracing a penny makes a circle.”
- 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. You can talk about colors, textures and sizes.
- Teach your child to count. How many places at the table, how many steps to the bedroom.
- Offer your child lots of encouragement. Children who are self-confident learn to read and write more easily.



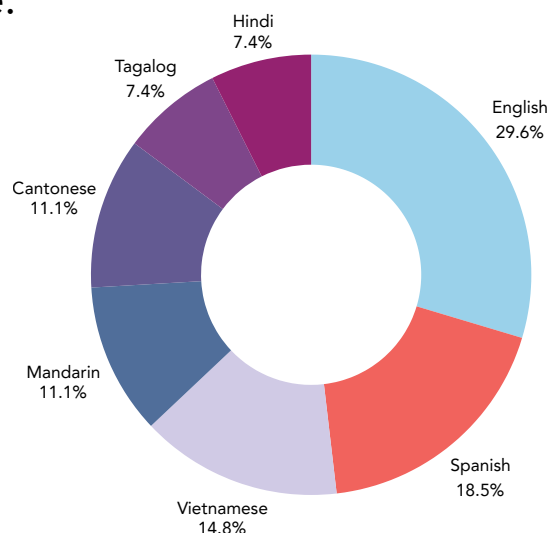
Building Bridges for Dual Language Learners

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 or other languages as well.

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.

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.

Kindergarteners in Santa Clara County speak many languages!



Hola!

Xin chào!

こんにちは

안녕하세요



Tips for Parents

- 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 dual language learners!

Your Family-School Partnership



Tips for Parents at Home

- Ask your child questions about their 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?
- Continue to read aloud with your child each day.
- 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 notes from teachers, complete all paperwork required of parents 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. If communicating in English is uncomfortable, ask if the school can provide you with an interpreter. In Santa Clara County, almost half of all kindergarteners speak a language other than English at home.
- Parents can help make the schools more welcoming for all children. Find the parent advisory groups at your school and join them. Attend school activities and volunteer to help when you can.

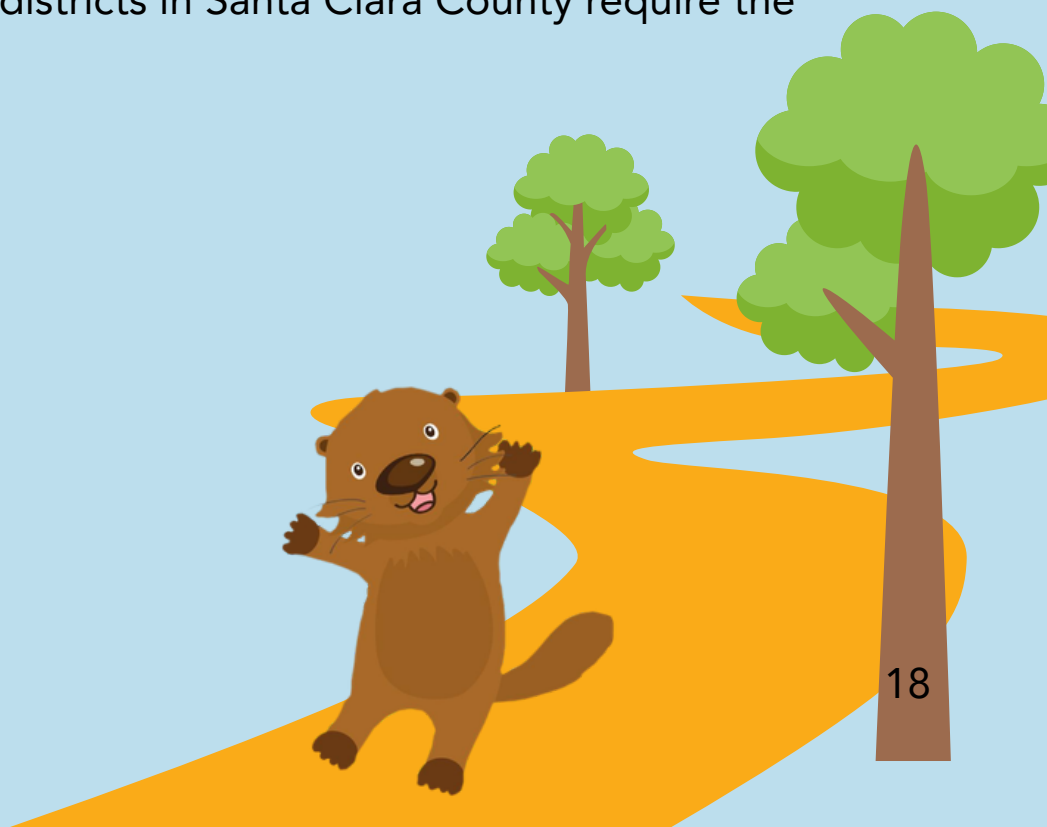
Find a Language Buddy

- 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 them to be a Language Buddy for a child who is just learning.

Next Stop: Kindergarten!

Remember, that readiness looks different for each child. You know your child better than anyone. Make a list of things your child is best at. Then make a list of the areas where you think your child can 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.

Then, trust your instincts. Parents are usually the first to suspect that a child is struggling. If you still 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 their 3rd birthday. Some districts in Santa Clara County require the request to be in writing.



“I’m worried my child needs more time ...”

You know your child best. Every child develops at their own pace, but talk with your child’s doctor about:

- Frequent big emotions or temper tantrums
- Struggles with most transitions, like moving from playtime to quiet time
- Has a hard time getting along with or being gentle with other children
- Tends to be more quiet, shy, or withdrawn
- Seems extra energetic or easily distracted compared to peers
- Has trouble holding crayons or pencils, or copying simple shapes
- May not always respond when spoken to, or seems to have trouble understanding
- Finds it hard to remember familiar sequences like numbers, the alphabet, or days of the week
- Is still developing their vocabulary and may not use many words yet
- Has trouble pronouncing certain words—others outside the family might have difficulty understanding them

It’s important to remember: many children show some of these behaviors at different times. Try to notice if they happen consistently or only in certain situations.

On Your Way to K Checklist

For your safety, your child should know ...

- Their first and last name
- Full names of parents and childcare providers
- Phone number and address
- Who will be picking them up from school
- Whether they have any food allergies or food restrictions
- Stranger danger: they know to walk away and find a safe adult
- How to find the bathroom, classroom, and the school office

California requires check-ups:

- Dental check-up
- Health check-up
- Tuberculosis skin test
- Up-to-date immunizations for Polio, DPT (Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus), MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella), Hepatitis B and Chicken Pox

Need help with Medicare or Medi-Cal? Find out what you qualify for, how to apply, and get the support you need. Visit [BenefitsCal.com](https://www.BenefitsCal.com) to learn more.

Your Notes



What is my child best at?

What skills should we be working on at home?

What questions do I have for my doctor?

My School:

Principal's Name:

Registration Date:

Registration Location:



Hooray! Now you're on your way to K!

Starting kindergarten is a big step—and you're doing a great job. Keep cheering your child on, asking questions, and celebrating every little success. You are your child's first and most important teacher. Every time you read together, talk together, sing songs, play, draw, or go on walks, you are helping your child learn and grow. Good job, grown-ups!

There are even more fun ways to get excited for kindergarten. You can read *Potter the Otter Gets Ready for Kindergarten* and find free activities, games, and more at **FIRST5kids.org/PotterTheOtter**.

I'm so proud of you and your family. I can't wait to see all the great things your child will do.

With a big otter hug, your friend,

Potter the Otter

P.S. For more resources, please visit FIRST5kids.org and EnrollSantaClara.org.

