

SEPTEMBER 2015



GGMG | GOLDEN GATE
MOTHERS GROUP®

magazine

A young girl with dark skin and braided hair is smiling and looking at the camera. She is wearing a grey hoodie with a colorful pattern. She is holding a large blue sign in front of her. The background is a blurred classroom or playroom with wooden furniture and colorful toys.

Back to School



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Letter from the Editor: Keeping the Passion Alive

By Kirsten Pflieger



Kirsten lives in the Castro with her husband, Karl, and their daughters, Serenity (4) and Sierra (2). When not spending too much money on art supplies at Cliff's Variety, she can be found biking around the neighborhood with the kids.

I have always loved the start of a new school year, primarily for the brand-new school supplies that it brought. To this day, there is nothing like a supply of pencils with perfect tips and unused erasers, pens that haven't begun to drip, uncreased folders waiting patiently to be filled, and notebooks with crisp, unindented pages.

When I was young, the joy of being in school lasted well

into the year. Much of learning was done through play and there were plenty of breaks in the day. As I grew older, the novelty of the new year would wear off quickly. The pristine supplies

As my children grow, paying attention to how they learn best can help ensure that they are in a nurturing educational environment.

became well used, and sitting for hours on end made each day drag.

With Serenity entering her second year of preschool and Sierra her first, I see how excited they are to be with their friends,

learning through new experiences. I want that joy to remain as they enter grade school and beyond. It is this wish that makes the idea of choosing a grade school for next fall feel like one of the most important decisions that I will have made as a parent. Gail's thorough primer on the San Francisco Unified School District lottery on page 16 quelled my anxiety about that system. As I worked through the steps that she suggests, I realized that all of my questions about how to choose a public school were answered. I still have plenty of work to do this fall, but at least I know how and where to start.

As my children grow, paying attention to how they learn best can help ensure that they are in a nurturing educational environment. Catherine gives us an introduction to this concept on page 22. On page 25, Tara explains different preschool philosophies, and on page 21, Stef looks at some of the schools in SF that are considered "progressive." Thinking of going a different route altogether? Lydia describes her journey to unschooling her daughter on page 43. If more information is what you are looking

for, on page 26 Anna reviews three books with very different takes on how to educate our children for a stronger future.

Wherever you are on your journey to educate your children, we hope that this issue gets you excited about the possibilities. If you see me on the school tours, please say hello!

Housekeeping

Opinions expressed in this issue are those of the contributors. Acceptance of advertising does not constitute endorsement by GGGM of any products or services. The editors reserve the right to accept, edit, or reject any content submitted to the magazine.

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THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: summer camps, long awaited dinners, smartphone apps—thank God for smartphones, PPS-SF, NPG, supportive husbands, 4-day fevers, cross-country trips, kindle books, Captain Sparrow.

COMING NEXT: October—Safety; November—Art and Music

CONTEST: Congratulations to Rebecca McEfee, winner of the June Chirp contest.

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email editor@ggmg.org.

Letter from the Board: Cherishing Our Time

By Cathy Tran

I can't believe it's already time to go back to school. I am reminded of something my husband's aunt once said to me: "when it comes to raising children, the days are long but the years are short." Now that I have kids, the saying really hits home. The years seem to be flying by and I don't know how I could have gotten through it without GGGM. I started volunteering with GGGM in 2012 and I can unequivocally say that it has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. It has been such a pleasure to give back to an organization that has given me so much; on top of that, I made many wonderful friends through volunteering.

One of the friends I was fortunate enough to make was a woman named Caitlin Mullinix. I first met Caitlin when I was going through a personal crisis; she immediately just listened and supported me. I later found out that Caitlin is a true hero and had handled a much larger crisis with more grace and courage than most people could ever muster. Four weeks after Caitlin had her son in 2011, she was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. She fought the disease with everything she had and won. During her battle and when she was in remission, Caitlin became a supporter of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and was named one of their Honored Heroes in 2013. She also volunteered with GGGM and worked tirelessly on the Operations committee to keep things running smoothly. You may not have realized it, but each GGGM member has been touched by Caitlin and her efforts for GGGM. She truly loved the GGGM community

and found a lot of comfort and support among her fellow moms. Unfortunately, the disease came back, and this time Caitlin lost her battle and passed away in June of this year. She leaves behind her 4-year-old, Nicholas, and her husband, Jonathan.

Even if you were not fortunate enough to have known Caitlin personally, I am sure as a mom, you can empathize with how she must have felt watching her son grow up as she fought this disease. She was the most amazing person, so kind and giving, and she was a wonderful mother. Caitlin was the finest example of GGGM's spirit. I feel fortunate to



Cathy Tran is mom to 3-year-old Charlie and 7-month-old James. She has been volunteering with GGGM since 2012 and enjoys helping and supporting the wonderful GGGM community. She lives in the Parkside with her husband Pete and her two little troublemakers.

I feel fortunate to have known her, and even though she is no longer with us, I hope she can be an inspiration to all of us to take GGGM's mission statement to heart.

have known her, and even though she is no longer with us, I hope she can be an inspiration to all of us to take GGGM's mission statement to heart:

- Nurture ourselves, our children, our partners and our community.
- Create an environment of support, information sharing and connection.
- Learn, teach, create, have fun and provide balance in the lives of our growing families.

If you would like to help honor Caitlin's memory please join GGGM's Light the Night Team. For more information see 37.



Historical Places to Visit in San Francisco

By Allison Zulawski

You can find many places around town to experience San Francisco's rich history; some are big draws for tourists, while others are quieter gems for locals.

Alcatraz

Ferry departs from Pier 33

Open daily, Children \$18; adults \$30 (includes ferry and audio tour)

See and hear the amazing history of this notorious island and enjoy a gorgeous ferry ride on the Bay.

Castro Theater

429 Castro St.

Showtimes vary, Children \$11; adults \$16

This almost century-old theater has an organ player that performs before shows and monthly sing-alongs of classic children's films.

Chinese Historical Society

965 Clay St.

Open Tue to Fri noon to 5 p.m., Sat 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Free admission

Located in the heart of Chinatown, this museum highlights the experiences of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco.

City Lights Bookstore

261 Columbus Ave.

Open daily 10 a.m. to midnight

Take a leisurely browse through this historic bookstore and enjoy the extensive children's collection.

Fort Point

Marine Dr.

Open Thu to Tue 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Free admission

A Civil War-era fortress situated at the opening of the Golden Gate with docent-led and self-guided tours available.

Golden Gate Park Windmills

1691 John F Kennedy Dr.

Open daily, Free admission

Enjoy the majesty of two Dutch windmills (one north of the Beach Chalet and one south) and their surrounding gardens.

Maritime Museum Visitor center at 499

Jefferson St.; ships docked at Hyde Street Pier

Open daily 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., \$5 per person to enter historic vessels

The Balclutha, a fully restored clipper ship, is the shining star, but the entire complex is full of fascinating San Francisco maritime history.

Mission Dolores

3321 16th St.

Open daily 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., \$5 suggested donation for adults

Established in 1776, it is the oldest intact building in San Francisco and home to the only cemetery within city limits.

Point Bonita Lighthouse

Fort Barry, Building 948, Sausalito

Open Sat to Mon 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.

Take in stunning views of the Golden Gate from the last manned lighthouse on the California coast.

Sutro Historic District

680 Point Lobos Ave.

Open daily, Free admission

Hike down to the ruins of the once-magnificent Sutro Baths, enjoy the Pacific views, and visit the historic Cliff House next door.

Allison Zulawski is the owner of Allison Busch Photography and lives in the Outer Richmond with her husband and two spirited little boys. When she's not out adventuring with her boys, she can be found photographing cute kiddos and sweet, tiny babies. You can contact her through her website: allisonbusch.com.

Fun Classes for Busy Grown-ups

By Jessica Bernstein-Wax

Take a break from ferrying your kid to activities and sign up for a fun class of your own!

9:20 SPECIAL, 2460 Sutter St.

Get into the swing of things at these Thursday night Lindy Hop dance classes. \$55 to \$60 for a four-session series, \$20 drop-in.

www.920special.com

BATS SCHOOL OF IMPROV, Usually at Fort Mason Center

Classes cater to improv students of all levels—there's even a session for shy people! Prices vary; see website.

www.improv.org/school/

THE CHEESE SCHOOL OF SAN FRANCISCO, 2124 Folsom St.

Learn all about cheese (while eating it) at this one-of-a-kind school in the Mission District. Prices vary; see website.

www.thecheeseschool.com

CIRCUS CENTER, 755 Frederick St.

Master the flying trapeze, Chinese pole, or trampoline at this center for the circus arts. Prices vary; see website.

www.circuscenter.org

GARDEN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, 7th Avenue and Lawton Street

Get your hands dirty at an organic gardening or sustainable landscaping workshop. Many classes are free.

www.gardenfortheenvironment.org

HALBERSTADT FENCERS' CLUB, 621 South Van Ness Ave.

Have a blast learning to wield a sword at "the birthplace of Bay Area fencing." Prices vary; see website.

www.halberstadtfc.com

SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE, 800 Chestnut St.

Get creative at an evening or weekend art class. Friday night drawing studio is free. Prices vary; see website

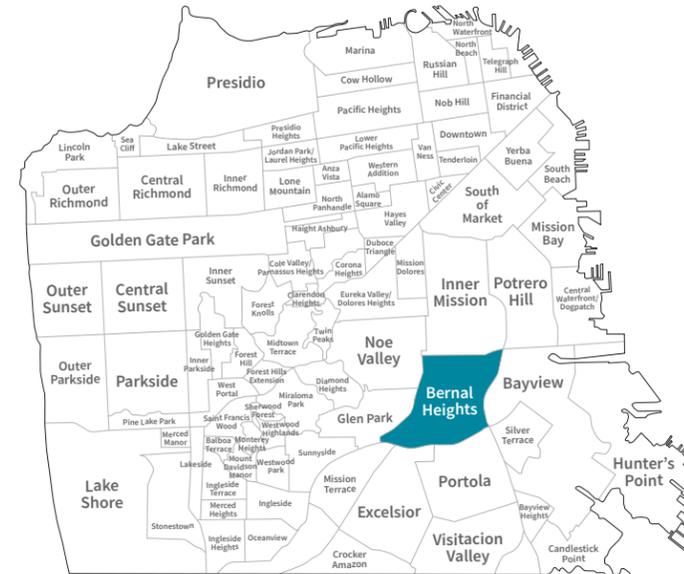
www.sfai.edu

SAN FRANCISCO COOKING SCHOOL, 690 Van Ness Ave.

Forget baby purees and learn to make everything from ramen to gluten-free desserts. Prices vary; see website.

www.sfcooking.com

Jessica Bernstein-Wax is a native San Franciscan and former newspaper reporter who works as a web editor for UCSF Medical Center and UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital.



Li'l Kid, Big City: Bernal Heights

By Sandy Woo

Bernal Heights abounds with natural wonders and urban delights. Start at bustling Cortland Avenue. **Chloe's Closet** carries used children's everything, so be forewarned if you weren't in the market for a hot pink two-wheeler with streamers. The **331 Cortland Cafe** tempts passersby with six kiosks offering piroshkis, pickles, gluten-free/vegan pastries, and other treats. Grab a delicious sandwich or freshly cut meat from female-owned butchery **Avedano Meats**. Check out **Heartfelt** for whimsical and hard-to-find gifts for all ages. **Bernal Branch Library** regularly offers sing-alongs, baby rhyme and playtime, and LEGO nights, plus an enclosed playground to boot.

Craving the outdoors? Hike up **Bernal Hill** (off Bernal Heights Boulevard) and enjoy a breathtaking panoramic view of the city, Golden Gate Bridge, the East Bay, and San Bruno Mountain. Bounded by Folsom Street, Alabama Street, and Precita Avenue, **Precita Park** is the perfect place to stretch out on a sunny day; don't miss the annual "Under the Stars" film/entertainment in September.

On weekends, linger at **Alemanys Farmers' Market** (Alemany/Hwy 101), where ethnic and organic produce and tchotchkes tempt your palate and pocketbook. If the crowds intimidate, come another day to admire (and hop up and down) the beautiful stalls painted by Precita Eyes Muralists. ❖

Sandy Woo is a genetics geek by day and mom to a 2.5-year-old son on the cusp of preschool.

Ask the Expert **Developmental Issues**

By Jessica Hegedus, PsyD



What advice do you have for parents who are worried their child has a developmental or learning delay?

The earlier parents intervene with developmental disabilities, the better the outcome. However, parents often feel overwhelmed, frightened, and isolated when questioning if their child is

developmentally off-track. Know that there is a community of professionals and a wealth of information about how to support you, your child, and your family.

Concerned parents should first talk to their pediatrician to rule out any medical issues. They can also consult a developmental pediatrician or make an appointment with a child development program, such as the clinic at California Pacific Medical Center. If autism is a concern, both Kaiser and UCSF have autism-specific clinics where parents can request a developmental evaluation.

What do parents need to know about early intervention?

At Golden Gate Regional Center (GGRC) and other regional centers that provide state-funded services for individuals with developmental disabilities, 3 years is the cutoff between early start (broad early intervention) and ongoing (lifelong support for severe impairment) services. A referral for early start at 2 years and 10 months is too late because the assessment and paperwork takes about a month to complete.

Eligibility for early start services is based on a 33 percent delay in a certain area. Medical insurance is requested first. Then GGRC,

Know that there is a community of professionals and a wealth of information about how to support you, your child, and your family.

through contracted agencies, provides services such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy, social skills therapy, and applied behavior analysis (ABA therapy). The services provided are based on recommendations by the assessment team, rather than selected by parents.

The child is evaluated again at age 3 by the GGRC to see if significant delays persist. If so, the school district is then responsible for services from ages 3 to 18 (22 if the child is in special education). The GGRC acts as an advocate and can provide case management and referrals to day treatment, independent living skills, and home care.

If your child is evaluated before the age of 3, can you opt out of

having those records turned over to the school system?

Parents have a say in how all medical records are used and can withhold them at any time. A consent form must be signed for the school district to access these records.

What can parents do if they are concerned about their school-age child? How do policies differ for private versus public schools?

After age 3, GGRC assessment and treatment is only available if a child has an eligible diagnosis and a "substantial disability." This means that the child is in the 5th percentile of functioning in three of the following areas: self-care, self-direction, learning, motor skills, and communication. For older teens, financial self-sufficiency and independent living are also considered.

Therefore, most of the assessment and support comes from the school district after age 3. Once a parent makes a request for an evaluation in writing, the district has 50 days to do an evaluation. After evaluation and diagnosis, the school works with parents to create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and provides on-site or off-site speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychotherapy, and ABA therapy. They can even provide paraprofessionals in the classroom and transportation, depending on the disability.

The main difference between the San Francisco Unified School District and private school is cost. Parents can opt to pay for specialized private schools or services. Some insurance plans even cover ABA therapy. But, if a family chooses not to use the public school system, they cannot defer to the regional center. Also, a child who does not return to public school by age 17 is ineligible for the district's transition program for young adults ages 18 to 22.

What other support is available for children with delays? Is psychological support and family therapy also available?

San Francisco's own Community Behavioral Health Service offers free individual and family mental health care for those with MediCal. Support for Families of

Children with Disabilities is a free, parent-run support network available for all parents. While paid out-of-pocket, social workers, psychologists, and therapists specialize in helping parents cope with grief and anxiety about a new diagnosis or find adaptive coping skills for accommodating their child's disability. Sliding-scale clinics like Jewish Family and Children's Services is a helpful resource for parents needing more emotional support, validation, and encouragement. ♦

Jessica Hegedus is a clinical psychologist in San Francisco's Mission District. She works with children of all ages as well as parents on issues ranging from postpartum depression to empty nest syndrome. More information about her practice is at www.modernfamilysf.com.

Community Support

Help Homeless Children Feel Secure, Cozy, and Ready to Learn

Do you have any new blankets, like-new books, or stuffed animals you'd like to donate? GGMG is partnering with Project Night Night (www.projectnightnight.org) to host a drive from September 8 to October 31.

Project Night Night distributes Night Night Packages to homeless children ages newborn to 10. Each Night Night Package



includes an age-appropriate book, a baby blanket which can be cuddled, and a stuffed animal which can become a cherished friend, all nestled inside of a new canvas tote bag.

By donating much needed blankets, books, and stuffed animals to Project Night Night, we can truly make a difference to these children in need.

Purchasing guidelines for the items are as follows:

- Blankets should be new or newly handmade. We appreciate quilted, fleece, knit, crochet, "no-sew," and store-bought blankets. The ideal size is 50 by 60 inches or smaller.
- Books appropriate for ages newborn to pre-teen. Books must be new or like-new.
- Stuffed animals smaller than 20 inches. Stuffed animals must be new or like-new.

Please consider joining us in support of Project Night Night in one of four ways:

1. Purchasing blankets or books from the Project Night Night Amazon wish list
2. Ordering online from your preferred retailer
3. Donating funds directly to Project Night Night
4. Neighborhood drop-off

Thank you so much for your support of this drive! For more information, please visit the GGMG homepage or contact Cori at drives@gmg.org.

Contest

Parenting Consult with Kasey Balin, MFT

Helping You Work Through the Tough Times

Kasey Balin, MFT, is offering two sessions of parent consulting, 50 minutes each, valued at \$320. You can consult about issues such as feeding, sensory issues, tantrums, biting, sibling rivalry, separation anxiety, or anything else that may be coming up for you. These sessions can be one-on-one or can include your partner.

Kasey has over 15 years of experience working with parents, and she offers an exclusive discount to GGMG moms.

kaseybalin.com
1833 Fillmore Street, Suite 102
San Francisco, CA 94115
415.820.1411



TO ENTER THE CONTEST, SEND AN EMAIL WITH "KASEY BALIN" IN THE SUBJECT LINE TO CONTEST@GGMG.ORG BY SEPTEMBER 30.

DADLANDS

Knowing Success

By Shuja Khan

Will runs a hand through his short-cropped hair and raps his knuckles against the table between us. He sits with his father, Bill, and talks reluctantly to me about his struggles in English class. “She never explains what the assignments are...” Bill raises an eyebrow and the sounds freeze in Will’s throat. “No, you’re right. She works hard, meets with me at lunch and everything. I just feel like I need a little more direction sometimes. For me.”

Bill nods his approval. “He works in that class. He’s at his desk every night writing papers. I think more direction would be helpful.”

Zeke’s father is all sunshine and smiles. He exudes warmth—a simple grasp of his giant hand seems to hug my entire body. Zeke wrote a poem entitled “I know a man who can fly.” He invited his father to school and then surprised him by reading it aloud. People cried. I see the two of them eating dinner together all the time: two men—one grown, one nearly there—talking over a pizza. No cellphones, no eyes glancing at the TV. Just focused attention and genuine listening.

I’ve worked in education for 12 years as a teacher, coach, and administrator, and Will and Zeke are two of the most amazing kids I have met. Not because of an SAT score or a game-winning double in the league championship, but in all the ways that matter. When my daughter was born, I got congratulatory presents from a lot of kids. Or rather, from their parents. From Zeke I got a clear plastic baggie full of “It’s a girl!” hard-candies that Zeke had chosen on his own. Will has been the student-body president for two years in a row — a feat never before

Their parents didn’t choose schools based on political feelings or what worked when they were young—they chose for their kids.

accomplished at our school. When Naia is old enough to date, the day she comes home with a guy or girl like Will is the day I get my first good night of sleep.

Primary amongst the many reasons why those two boys are successful is the fact that they have parents who know them in and out and make good choices for them. As an admissions director, I know a lot about choosing the right school for your kid, but even so, it’s hard to feel like I really know my kids and harder still to trust that knowledge.

Two years ago, when my wife and I sat down to think through school options for our son, many forces compelled us in different

directions. I’d gone to public schools all my life. My wife had experienced a medley of educational options, even being home-schooled for a period. We both worked at private schools, and knew firsthand about the unbelievable teachers and opportunities that resided there. As we pored over our options, my wife reminded me about Zeke and Will. Their parents didn’t choose schools based on political feelings or what worked when they were young—they chose for their kids.

So that’s what we did. We thought about our son. Four-year-old Nas was a normal kid; he hit all the appropriate developmental benchmarks. He was polite and respectful, a rule-follower to a fault. He was the kid who saw a table full of cookies with nary an adult in sight, and wouldn’t eat one unless someone told him he could. But he was an anxious kid too. He was hard on himself; if he didn’t get things right away, his frustration overwhelmed him. Risk-taking was not his forté. He depended on people, needing their approval.

When I took Nas to my own school, all my co-workers came out to say hello. A different kid might have beamed in that spotlight. Nas wilted, the pressure to please these friends of Dad was too much for him. When they took him to a room to be “examined” on his own by an elderly lady he didn’t know, he refused to talk. I’ve seen many kids flourish in that environment, but it wasn’t right for Nas.

Sutro Elementary was right. It’s down the street from where we live, and I’ve seen how much that has helped Nas feel confident about his place in the world and what he can accomplish. If we’d gone somewhere far away, the endless rides to school and playdates would have only driven home his feeling of dependence and insecurity. Instead, he has grown up. He asks to walk to school on his own, claiming he doesn’t need us. He has friends he sees at the park all the time, and I see him beginning to dip a toe into the water of disobedience. Part of me is frustrated by that behavior, but a larger part thinks, “Take the cookie; nobody’s looking!” ❖

Shuja grew up in New York but moved to San Francisco in 2003. He’s worked in Bay Area schools for 12 years and lives in the Inner Richmond with his wife, Emily, and their two kids, Nas and Naia.



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3200 California Street • San Francisco, California 94118
jccsf.org/ece • 415.292.1283



GGMG members enjoy exclusive discounts at the JCCSF on programs and activities for families, including swim lessons, Kinder Fun Klub, Fitness Center Membership and more. Learn more at jccsf.org/ggmg.

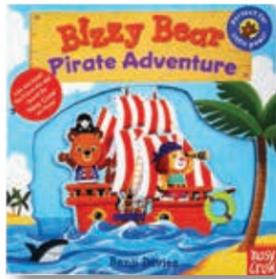


GGMG members save 50% on the application fee.



By Laure Latham

Shiver me timbers, the pirate's life's for kids of all ages! With a bottle of rum, great fashion tastes, and a knack for looting treasures, pirates are the most exciting villains we love to love. In fact, few 18th century literary characters have become as popular as Long John Silver and Captain Jack Sparrow. Fortunately for kids, pirates are also amazing fodder for children's books authors. May these books inspire all young rebels at heart and from the comfort of a book's pages, make them navigate all Seven Seas with great courage and greater humor.



Bizzy Bear Pirate Adventure

By Benji Davies and Nosy Crow

Yo ho ho, pirates! With interactive features on every page, this book is just perfect for little busy hands who like listening to a story while moving. Boat steering wheel, treasure chest, boat sails—the moving pieces can be part of the story as you tell it, just as much as the cute illustrations. Who wouldn't dream of a beach trip with sand-digging and gold coins to boot? Fortunately for babies and toddlers, Bizzy Bear also stars in a

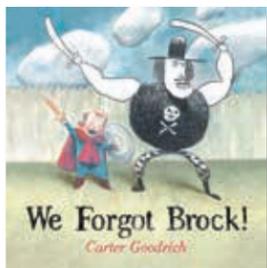
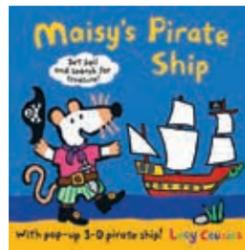
few other books. *Ages: 0 to 2 years*

Maisy's Pirate Ship: A Pop-up-and-Play Book

By Lucy Cousins

Ahoy, me hearties! Maisy and her friends are sailing away on a treasure hunt and all young hands are required on deck to join the fun. Thanks to movable pieces and a real pop-up 3-D pirate ship, this book will provide hours of play and Jolly Roger storytime. Of course, young buccaneers will find all the essentials of a pirate adventure in the book—treasure map, buried treasure, and swords aplenty.

Ages: 2 to 5 years



We Forgot Brock

Written and illustrated by Carter Goodrich

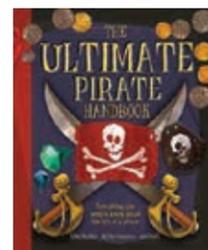
Philip and Brock are best friends, but only Philip can see his sword-yielding black-and-white pirate imaginary friend. After Philip forgets Brock at the fair, he misses his friend sorely and cries his heart out. Back at the fair, Brock meets Anne and Princess Sparkle Dust who will help reunite him with Philip. Surprisingly, even invisible friends can be forgotten at the fair. Let your kids' imagination enjoy this unique, if slightly

nostalgic, book for young dreamers. *Ages: 3 to 5 years*

The Ultimate Pirate Handbook

Written by Libby Hamilton, illustrated by Mathieu Leysenne and Jason Kraft

Don't know where to start to become a pirate? Fear not. This book has all the basics covered—slang, pirate lifestyle, job descriptions, legendary ghost ships, horrible diseases, and more. For instance, a good carpenter can chop off a gangreney leg and carve a nice wooden one. Also, if your hardtack is full of worms, try eating it in the dark! With more irreverent practical advice and a pirate hall-of-fame, this handbook is all fun for seaworthy beginners. *Ages: 5 to 8 years*

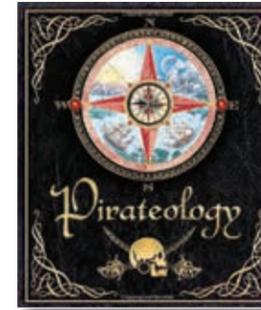


Shivers! The Pirate Who's Afraid of Everything

Written by Annabeth Bondor-Stone and Connor White, illustrated by Anthony Holden

At age 11, Shivers is the youngest in a family of pirates and he's afraid of everything. His pirate boat is docked on dry land, he lives in a pillow fort and his first mate is Albee the goldfish. When his parents go missing, Shivers is reluctantly drawn into seriously hilariously scary adventures by his best friend Margo. It's silly, absurd and terribly funny! With cartoonish illustrations, this book will appeal to primary grade children who can read it alone or with their parents—using goofy voices.

Ages: 6 to 10 years



Pirateology: The Pirate Hunter's Companion

Written by Captain William Lubber, edited by Dugald A. Steer

The sea journal of Captain William Lubber Esq, pirate hunter, is serious pirate stuff. Mixing historical facts and the quest of Captain Lubber to find "that especially Germinous female pirate Arabella Drummond," *Pirateology* is pure gold (no pun intended) for young pirate fans. Chasing Drummond's ship around the world, Lubber keeps a log interspersed with navigational charts, maps of islands, pirate flags, and more. A must for the library of every serious buccaneer. *Ages: 9 to 12 years*

Black Heart of Jamaica (Cat Royal) Kindle Edition

By Julia Golding

Cat Royal, an 18th century orphan raised in a theater in London, is a fearless quick-witted teenage girl whose life is nothing short of extraordinary. After she joins a traveling theater troupe bound for the Caribbean, the plucky Cat Royal gets involved in swashbuckling adventures, turns pirate to survive and fights her archenemy London-street-thug-turned-dubious-plantation-owner Billy. The story is told on a background of slave revolt for some interesting historical flavor. This fifth book in the Cat Royal series will delight adventure-hungry tweens. *Ages: 9 to 12 years*



The Jupiter Pirates: Hunt for the Hydra

By Jason Fry

Star Wars meets *The Curse of the Black Pearl* in this book with pirates located on the moons of Jupiter. Three siblings want to become the next captain of the Shadow Comet family ship, a former group of pirates now privateers for the renegade Jovian Union. To fight off the pirate Mox, long thought dead, and a mysterious ally jeopardizing the union, the Hashoone siblings

need to learn team work in order to succeed. With a strong-willed Captain mother, a cyborg grandpa, laser guns and nautical terms in space, this sci-fi pirate book takes tweens on a fun ride through intergalactic drama. *Ages: 9 to 12 years*

Laure is the author of the mommy blog Frog Mom (www.frogmom.com), as well as the book Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She writes for several parenting websites and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her husband and two daughters with compulsory cream tea stops. You can reach her at info@frogmom.com.



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From Womb to World

The Mom Instinct

By Emily deGrassi

How often should my baby be eating? How much should he be sleeping? What if he just won't stop crying—does that mean he is colicky? What if he keeps spitting up—does he have reflux? Being a new mom often comes with feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. Trying to take care of not just yourself but another human being who relies solely on you for survival is no easy feat. As a new mom, I often found myself questioning various stages of infancy and turning to—what else?—the Internet for answers. I would sometimes think to myself, 'What did my mom do? She didn't have the Internet when my brother and I were born. How could she have possibly done this?' The answer is, you're a mom and you figure it out.

I can vividly remember when my now 2-year-old first started screaming inconsolably every night from about 6 to 9 p.m. She was 3 weeks old and had been a relatively quiet baby until one night when she just would not stop screaming. I tried everything—pacifier, rocking, burping, nursing, walking the hallway, going outside for fresh air. Nothing worked. I went through the checklist: she didn't have a fever, no wet diaper, didn't appear to be hungry. I should have just let it go at that point and figured, she's a baby; she's going to cry. But of course, as a somewhat paranoid first-time mom, I thought something must be wrong and must be a solution, so I started googling babies who scream inconsolably at night. Apparently, a plethora of things could be wrong with my child: she could have reflux; she could have a milk allergy (though I was not about to give up cheese and ice cream); she could have colic; she might be starving. In the end, after another six weeks of wilful screaming (some nights, on both our parts)—including one night when her antics didn't begin until 7:30 but then her episode lasted until almost midnight—she just stopped. As it turns out, babies cry. She was fine. I would have been better off just going with my

maternal instinct that she seemed okay and not reading about what could be wrong. As I've learned, some babies cry as a way of winding down at the end of the day, and granted, three hours seems like a very long time to wind down, but she is a strong-willed child with wicked determination. To this day, she does not give in to sleep without a real fight.

You would have thought that my unnecessary Internet-fueled worry would have taught me a lesson about how to approach future issues with my child. But, the temptation to seek answers online proved too tempting and I fell into the black hole of the Internet yet again. When my daughter was very young, her pediatrician told us "Your baby doesn't want to turn her head to the left." He went on to explain that she may end up with a flat

The temptation to seek answers online proved too tempting and I fell into the black hole of the Internet yet again.

head from resting in one position so much. I didn't think it was that bad; it's not like she wouldn't turn her head—she just preferred to turn her head more to one side (don't we all favor one side more?). Nonetheless, I went online. I learned about people whose kids had to wear helmets, and those who even had to go through physical therapy. Even the worst case scenario wouldn't have been that bad, but to a new mom, putting an infant through physical therapy or making her wear a helmet didn't seem all that enjoyable. The pediatrician made us paranoid, and perhaps it was a good thing, because we then made every effort to help our baby turn her head in the direction she had been avoiding. But, did the Internet make me feel any better? Not really. I should have just gone with my initial gut instinct that her lack of head turning didn't seem that dire and it would work itself out.

People always told me that no one knows my baby better than I do. This statement is no more true than in those first few weeks or months. Sometimes I found it therapeutic to surf the internet to research what ailed my baby and to (hopefully) find a solution. More importantly, it helped me to learn that other moms had experienced the same things. But in the end, it was best to try not to let myself get carried away with the Internet. While some helpful and relatively reliable sources such as www.webmd.com, and www.aap.org were somewhat worthwhile at times, relying on my mom instinct was far more helpful than entering the Internet's black hole. ❖

Emily deGrassi is a mom passionate about fitness and leading a healthy lifestyle, and spends her days trying to keep her highly energetic and physical 2-year-old girl as happy as possible.



New Arrivals



- | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| Cindy C. | Baby Andrew Michael | Claire P. | Baby Serafina Elizabeth | Kate C. | Baby Lily Anne |
| Jasmine S. | Baby Charlotte Stirling | Talia W. | Baby Chase Alexander | Alana S. | Baby Christian Edward |
| Sara C. | Baby Clark Irving | Leah D. | Baby Maya | Julie Z. | Baby Lydia Zsuzsanna |
| Caitlin R. | Baby CJ | Stacy J. | Baby Lucy Helen | Allison R. | Baby James Dennis |
| Laurel A. | Baby Saoirse Lux | Lehua S. | Baby Reza Ho'opai | Terry L. | Baby Asher Tobias |
| Ivy C. | Baby Ellery Harper | Elizabeth C. | Baby Zadie Elizabeth | Lidiya L. | Baby Nina |
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GROW BOLDLY





Our Strange and Wonderful Public Schools

By Gail Cornwall
Photographs by Carmen Dunham Photography

It happens all the time. A mom and I bond over our desire to explore this gorgeous, vibrant city with our budding urbanites in tow. I envision the friendship blossoming over the years. Then she says, “We’re looking in the East Bay.”

“Why? Your place is perfect. You love San Francisco!”

“Yeah, but Mabel will be ready for kindergarten soon so...”

Or, just as often, a mom brings up the topic of the public school lottery at a GGMG Neighborhood Meetup, fretting over the limited number of “good” schools, the extremely low odds of getting assigned to one of them, and the nightmare that is the

lottery. “What if my kid gets the lowest number in the city? Then he’ll be at the very end of every school’s list!” Anxiety spreads through the room like peanut butter on hot toast. I intervene, asking the speaker about her experience with the process. “Oh, Henry’s only three, but I hear...”

It’s natural to worry, especially about a system that’s more complex and less predictable than most. Yet much of the discussion among parents of young kids in San Francisco features a dearth of accurate information and an abundance of apprehension. The truth about our public schools may surprise you.

Assessing school quality and character

As a parent setting out to evaluate the 72 public elementary schools in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), several sources of information are available: test scores, lottery demand rankings, school tours, the annual Enrollment Fair, the Enrollment Guide, and word of mouth—which includes websites and blogs, as well as guidance from the nonprofit Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco (PPS-SF).

The most quantitative and easily obtained of these are test scores and demand rankings.

The Academic Performance Index (API) attempts to measure schools’ performance using standardized testing. Under the old system, parents could access each school’s raw API, a three-digit number, as well as a statewide rank on a 1 to 10 scale, with 10 correlating to the highest scores. Since the California Department of Education (CDE) is currently revamping the API, the 2012 (statewide rank) and 2013 (raw scores) data are the most recent available at press time.¹

Unfortunately, test scores are not a reliable proxy for school quality. Students grouped as “Socioeconomically Disadvantaged,” “English

¹The raw results of the new CAASPP test administered last year should become available in the coming months, but they won’t yet be accompanied by a framework for statewide comparison. A brand-new metric, the School Quality Improvement Index, is also scheduled to be released this fall in conjunction with federal funding, giving schools point-based scores in the academic, social-emotional, and culture-climate domains; but it will be entirely untested, pun intended.

Learners,” and “Students with Disabilities” tend to score lower. Therefore, a school with a higher percentage of these students will have a lower API, even if it is making tremendous strides educating them. The phenomenon has led many to assert that the numbers say more about incoming students than school quality, and to refer to the stat as the “Affluent Parent Index.”

Plus, all standardized testing fails to capture educational success—actual learning—to some degree. As Albert Einstein said, “Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.” Michelle Obama adds, “If my future were determined just by my performance on a standardized test, I wouldn’t be here.” In other words, using test scores to evaluate SF public schools currently means using old data that serves as a proxy for a proxy.

That doesn’t mean the numbers are worthless, however. In a school with a statewide rank in the 2012 data of 1, 2, or 3, the majority of students probably still

struggle to meet state standards for one reason or another. Conversely, at a school with a rank of 8, 9, or 10, most students—whether because of background or school quality—likely exceed the standards.

Demand rankings should also be used

Different parents want different educational environments. Luckily for all of us, SFUSD is incredibly diverse.

circumspectly. SFUSD releases a list of the top 15 most requested schools in the prior year’s lottery as well as the supporting data, which enables a parent to fairly easily put the remaining schools in order of popularity. Yet factors unrelated to school quality—such as start time, availability of after school care, geographical location, school size, and bussing availability—play into parental preference. Also, demand rank can function as a self-fulfilling prophecy for two reasons. First, parents assume that the most in-demand schools from last year must be the best ones and rank them high on their list of

desired schools. Second, many people slap high-demand schools at the end of their list because of a possible lottery advantage. Since the metric is calculated using the total number of requests, the result is a demand-rank that doesn’t accurately reflect either

eagerness to enroll or school quality.

Moreover, both sets of numbers are unreliable indicators of personal desirability thanks to differing instructional *character*. Different parents want different educational environments. Luckily for all of us, SFUSD is incredibly diverse.

Although all public schools use the Common Core State Standards, quite a bit of pedagogical variation remains; some schools feature project-based learning or have a science focus, and SF Public Montessori follows the Montessori philosophy. I walked into one classroom where the children sat



SFUSD buses 2100 General Education students as well as 1600 Special Education students each day. Visit www.tinyurl.com/SFUSD-Bus-Request for more information.

rigidly around a long table, their hands tightly clasped in front of them. A teacher stood at the front of the room and used a wooden pointer to tap an overhead transparency displaying the letter “B.” She stated, “B, B, B says buh.” The children repeated in chorus, “B, B, B says buh.” At another school, instruction seemed predominantly child-led. One school I toured places a premium on discipline, requiring uniformed students to walk in silent, single-file lines down the hallways, while others allow more bodily freedom. Though the maximum number of students per class is set at the state level (22 for kindergarten), schools have two, three, or four classes. A school with 44 kindergarteners will be different than one with 88, in a way that cannot objectively be called good or bad.

I found myself looking for a mid-range school in terms of both size and structure. I wanted an environment where not everyone knew my child’s name, but most recognized her face. I liked seeing kids smiling and skipping through the halls, but didn’t want chaos. An extremely high-demand school with some of the best test scores in the city felt too rigid for me. I valued diversity, rejecting homogenous schools, whereas others want their children to feel comfortable, surrounded by those of a similar background. A lot of parents prefer language instruction of some sort²; we had no interest, which drove us toward the confusingly labeled “General Education” track. Arts and movement during some part of the day were must-haves for me, but a friend couldn’t have cared less. I was ready to rally the troops; others want to know the PTA/PTO is already well-established.

All this is to say, what one parent considers a “good” school is very different from what her neighbor seeks.

Though the SFUSD website contains quite a bit of qualitative information, tours and the Enrollment Fair³ are the best way to learn about school culture as well as things like classroom feel, the presence of play structures, the principal, field trips,

²SFUSD offers several pathways, ranging from “Newcomer” instruction for those with very little English through “Biliteracy,” “Immersion,” and “FLES,” the least intensive.

³The Enrollment Fair is being held this year on Saturday, October 24, at City College of San Francisco.



Much of the discussion among parents of young kids in San Francisco features a dearth of accurate information and an abundance of apprehension. The truth about our public schools may surprise you.

collaboration with businesses, sports teams, and parent involvement.

Word of mouth can be invaluable *if* from a primary source, not the rumor mill. The hype schools receive is often both overblown and outdated, as schools change quickly. One source described Miraloma and McKinley as “dumping grounds” just a few years ago; now they’re two of the most in-demand schools in the city. Also, keep in mind that every school will have at least one disgruntled family. One way to get to the bottom of things is to attend a school event open to the public.

Midway through my search, I thought I’d be competing for a handful of slots. Then I toured 16 schools. I found five that had everything we desired within walking distance. An additional five schools would require a longer commute but were still exciting in terms of quality and character. Here’s the part that shocks most people: half of those ten schools sat low enough in the demand ranking that we could safely rely upon getting a seat.

How the lottery works

The SFUSD enrollment lottery is infamous for being confusing, but it’s a quick study.

Parents can apply to as many of SFUSD’s kindergarten programs as they like; that’s 110 options, counting language programs separately. There are “attendance area” (AA) schools for which residing near the school may come into play in the enrollment process, and “city-wide” schools and programs for which it won’t. Each school that is not “city-wide” has an area of neighboring streets delineated on a map, but the school doesn’t always sit right in the geographical center; as a result, your AA elementary school may not be the one closest to you.

Parents submit an application with supporting paperwork (like a birth certificate) that lists the programs they wish to apply to in order of preference. This one form effectively functions as a separate application to each program listed. Each program then runs a lottery and randomly assigns each student in its pool of applicants a number. In

other words, your child will have a separate lottery number at each school, meaning the common fear of being at the end of every school’s list is misplaced.

When there are more applicants than available seats, seats are not filled strictly in lottery order. Each school first pulls out students that have “tie-break” statuses.

Tie-break One: Younger siblings of enrolled students receive seats first. That means if your son was assigned lottery number 11, but a girl assigned number 135 has an older sibling attending your first choice school, she will get a seat first.

Tie-break Two: Students who live in the attendance area of an AA school *and* are already attending its pre-K or transitional kindergarten program get preference next. A very small number of children qualify for this tie-break.

Tie-break Three: The “Open Enrollment” tie-break enables students who already attend a “low-achieving” school to attempt to transfer into one with a higher API, but it doesn’t apply to kindergarten seats.

Tie-break Four: The “test score area” or “CTIP-1” (Census Tract Integration Preference-First Percentile) category attempts to give disadvantaged students access to the city’s most in-demand schools. Applicants who reside in census tracts (basically chunks of neighborhoods) with the bottom 20 percent of test scores get pulled out next. That means if your son has lottery number 11, but a girl assigned number 135 lives on Treasure Island, she will get a seat first. Since location is an inaccurate proxy for need, some children of means benefit from this preference, especially in rapidly gentrifying areas like the Mission and Bernal. For this and other reasons, the CTIP-1 tie-break is the most controversial part of the lottery process; some recently sought to reorder the tie-breaks, but the Board of Education rejected the proposal.

Tie-break Five: Finally, students who live in the attendance area of an AA school will receive seats.

Only after offering these groups placement will each school tick down its remaining applicants in the order assigned by its lottery. That means your child could draw lottery number 11 at your first choice kindergarten,

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Demand Rankings: Top 15

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Demographics/Diversity

[sfusd.edu](#) > Schools > Elementary Schools > School name > Highlights

Enrollment Guide (the 2015-16 guide will be released in October)

[sfusd.edu](#) > Enroll in SFUSD Schools > Getting Started > Enrollment Guide (pdf)

Enrollment Workshops

PPS-SF: [www.ppsf.org/Events_calendar.html](#) AND SFUSD: Enrollment Guide, page 14¹

GATE (Gifted & Talented Education)

Enrollment Guide, page 100¹

Geographical Location

[www.tinyurl.com/SF-School-Map](#) AND Enrollment Guide, page 25¹

Language Offerings

[sfusd.edu](#) > Programs & Services > English Learners & Language Pathways > Overview > EL Program Guide AND Enrollment Guide, page 110¹

One-on-one Guidance

PPS-SF: [info@ppsf.org](#) AND SFUSD Educational Placement Center: Enrollment Guide, page 11¹

Placement/Lottery Stats

[sfusd.edu](#) > Enroll in SFUSD Schools > How Student Assignment Works > Student Assignment and Enrollment Reports > Enrollment 2015 Highlights (to the right in orange) > Placements (pdf)

School Quality Improvement Index

[coredistricts.org/school-quality-improvement-system-waiver/](#)

School Size and Number of Classes Per Grade

[sfusd.edu](#) > Schools > Elementary Schools > School name > School Accountability Report Card

Special Education Services

Enrollment Guide, page 88¹

Test Scores, All Schools

[www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ar/](#) > District Level API Reports > “San Francisco” > 2012 Base API Report - List of Schools in the District > API County List of Schools

Test Scores, School-by-School

[sfusd.edu](#) > Schools > Elementary Schools > School name > Highlights

Before and After School Care, Middle School Feeder, Start and End Times, Tours (Scheduling), Uniforms

Enrollment Guide > Discover the Elementary Schools > Elementary Schools at a Glance

¹All page numbers refer to the 2015-2016 Enrollment Guide and may change with the 2016-2017 guide due out in October.

there could be 66 seats available, and you still might not get a seat in the first round of the lottery. The highest odds of this happening are for applicants living outside the attendance area of a high-demand AA school.

You will always be given your highest ranked choice that is available. If your second, fourth, and tenth choice schools have a seat for your child, you will simply be assigned your second choice school. There is also an automated swap feature meant to optimize the outcome for all families. If your tenth choice school has a seat for your son, and my eighth choice school has a seat for my daughter, but your tenth choice school is my first choice and my eighth choice school is your third choice, the computer will automatically switch our assignments. Because of this “trading up” step, it can be advantageous to list additional schools after your legitimate preferences, and the longer the list the better.

If the computer runs through this whole process and a seat is not available at any of your listed programs, your child will be

offered a seat at your AA school if any seats remain, or, if they don't, at the school closest to your street address that has a seat available.

If you're unhappy with your child's school assignment, there are subsequent rounds. In the second round, you list only those schools you would prefer to the one your child was first assigned. In the third, fourth, and fifth rounds—known as “waitpool”—you list only one school. The process continues through the first two weeks of school. Then a “no transfer” period is imposed for current SFUSD students with an opportunity to submit a transfer request for January's spring transfer period. Seats that open up during the fall will be held open at schools with pending transfer requests; when there are no transfer requests, non-SFUSD students, such as kids attending private school or those who have recently moved to town, are eligible to fill open seats.

The city's two SFUSD charter schools and three state public charters do not participate in the SFUSD lottery; they use a separate application and admissions process.

Your odds and the bird's eye view

Of the 30-plus families with whom we navigated the enrollment process for our daughter, about 25 got their first choice in the first round. Every single family who stuck with the process eventually obtained a seat in their *first choice* program. Some put down a private school deposit in order to quell the fear of an unacceptable option come August, ready to walk away from a seemingly big chunk of change knowing that it actually pales in comparison to saving an average of \$8,549 per child per year. One can even recoup a deposit or tuition payment through careful navigation of the contract termination process or by purchasing tuition reimbursement insurance.

SFUSD statistics support this anecdotal evidence. In last year's lottery, 70 percent of kindergarten applicants received their first or second choice placement in the first round of the lottery. More than half (60 percent) got assigned to their first choice school right off

CONTINUED ON PAGE 41



Progressive Elementary Schools in San Francisco

By Stef Tousignant

For each of the past three years, at least one new alternative school has opened in San Francisco. The term “progressive” carries many meanings (some conflicting), but the focus of this list is elementary schools that challenge the status quo, offer more flexible classroom environments, have a strong focus on individual learning styles, and feature small class sizes. Some schools are less traditional than others, varying in style from multi-age classrooms to complete language immersion.

Alta Vista School (Portola) TK-6—This school offers a hands-on, experience-based approach, grounded in the scientific method and a curriculum that emphasizes Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM). The school opened in 2010 and will eventually grow to a full TK-8 program in the coming years. www.altavistaschools.org

AltSchool (locations throughout San Francisco) TK-8—Boasting individual learning tracks that adjust based on your child's input and progress, AltSchool also offers a new, more streamlined approach to parent support and typical school administration, as well as how they support their teachers. AltSchool has six “micro-schools” in the city, making it San Francisco's fastest growing progressive school. www.altschool.com

Brightworks (Mission) K-12—Started in 2011, Brightworks' school year is grouped into three main arcs, or curriculum themes, that help to structure the learning of their multi-age “bands,” or groups of kids. They also strive to break down walls of traditional schooling by including family and community in new and innovative ways, from family lunch each week to active urban citizenship. www.sfbrightworks.org

Katherine Michiels School (Mission) Inf-5—Started in 1976, KMS is a small school with a strong focus on the child's point of view and interests. 100% inspired by Reggio Emilia, KMS is one of the few elementary schools committed to this Italian philosophy, which values the child as a fully competent and equal partner in his or her educational journey. www.kmsosf.org

La Scuola (Bayview & Hayes Valley) P-8—This international school offers a mix of Reggio Emilia-inspired research and documentation styles, which support a curriculum based on the International Baccalaureate. Classroom communication with elementary students is 80% Italian and 20% English. www.lascuolasf.org

The New School (Mission) K-1—This public charter school is the first of its kind in SF, and will feature “hands on, minds on” learning, plus free tuition, of course! Opening this fall with first grade and kindergarten classes, the school has plans to eventually expand to K-12. www.newschoolsf.org

Presidio Hill School (Presidio) K-8—Opened in 1918, this is the oldest continually operating progressive school west of the Mississippi. It offers an integrated project-based learning approach, with a focus on the arts and environment, and a strong commitment to diversity. www.presidiohill.org

Presidio Knolls (SOMA) K-3—This school is adding one grade per year, and provides a topic-based approach to its curriculum. It encourages hands-on learning, guided by the child's interest within a topic. This school is 80/20 Mandarin immersion and it is strongly encouraged that your child have Mandarin experience before entering Kindergarten. www.presidioknolls.org

San Francisco Public Montessori (Pacific Heights) Pre-K-5—This unique public-supported Montessori school is the first of its kind in San Francisco. Offering an authentic Montessori education in a public school setting, SFPM offers students a diverse community of multi-age classrooms, child-selected work, and an annual school-wide theme. www.sfpublicmontessori.org

San Francisco Schoolhouse (Outer Richmond) K-5—This school's approach to project-based curriculum supports a child's opinion and input via small groups. The curriculum also focuses on incorporating the arts into everyday learning. A fairly new school, it grows one grade each year, and the tuition is kept relatively low. The school days are also shorter than average to encourage further exploration at home. www.sfschoolhouse.org

Synergy School (Mission) K-8—Synergy School is the only school on our list that has a stated “commitment to social justice.” This progressive school boasts the common focus of hands-on learning, but also emphasizes global awareness and volunteering. Each student is part of the “Agreement System,” which is the school's unique way of addressing behavior expectations in a cooperative, collaborative, and honest way. www.synergyschool.org

Stef Tousignant is the Head of Marketing for the free mobile app Mommy Nearest. She lives in the Inner Richmond with her high school sweetheart and two boys (3 and 6), who love to play air guitar and explore Golden Gate Park. mommynearest.com/bay-area



Look, Listen, Talk, Move, Learn

By Catherine Symon
Photographs by Whitney Cooley Photography

My 3-year-old is in the “why?” stage. “Why is this street curvy?” “Why is my sticker not sticky anymore?” “Why does it get windy?” I can never get away with deflecting her questions; she asks repeatedly until she gets a satisfactory answer. She’s not trying to drive me crazy; she’s just insatiably curious (as we all were at that age), and learning makes her happy.

I don’t remember being 3, but in many pictures of me at that age, I was buried in a book, inspecting a leaf, or climbing up my parents’ headboard to get a closer look at the ceiling fan. No doubt, I asked thousands of my own “why?” questions. But that passion started to fade around middle school. I wanted to be a good student but found myself glazing over during lecture classes. Eleventh grade history class was a particular struggle. I pored over my textbook until it was saturated with yellow and pink highlights, but as soon as I closed the book, all the information faded away. I

remember thinking, “I just can’t see who these people are.” As it turns out, there is a good reason for that: I happen to learn best when I look at images and videos and graphs. Today I might be called a visual learner. Without videos, diagrams, or maps to give me mental pictures to store in my head, I had trouble processing and retaining new concepts like “Etruscans” and “mercantilism.” By the end of the year, I was convinced that I was bad at history. How many other students have felt the same way? Is my 3-year-old

doomed to become as disengaged in school as I was? What can we do to keep our kids avid and motivated learners?

Learning is a full-body experience

Each of us has our own learning style. Researchers are still trying to understand why we learn in different ways. There are many theories, yet no broad consensus on what determines our ability to process, retain, and access information. However, we do know that learning involves a lot more than our brain.

The human brain is truly awesome. With one quadrillion (that’s 1 followed by 15 zeros) nerve connections, it is the most complex object in the universe. But because the brain is physically sequestered from the outside world, no learning can take place without input from the rest of the body. Everything we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch (our “sensory” input) is transmitted along a network of nerves to the brain, where it is interpreted, acted upon when necessary, and then either filed away for later use or forgotten. Body and brain work together to understand the world.

The quality of the body’s sensory input influences the quality of our learning. Just as there are variations from person to person with respect to height and eye color, there is variation in the sensory pathways within our bodies. Each of us has different visual abilities, sensitivities to sound, and physical dexterity. Not only is there variety from person to person, but within each individual, there are differences from one side of the body to the other. We may be right-handed, left-eyed, right-eared, and right-footed. In her book, *The Dominance Factor*, author Carla Hannaford, Ph.D., explains that people with dominant left eyes tend to track information from right to left, which may lead them to reverse letters while reading or writing more often than right-eyed people, who track information from left to right. In effect, our bodies’ imperfect symmetry can affect how we learn.

Hannaford traces the development of these dominant pathways to the in utero development of our first survival mechanisms. From birth, we instinctively rely

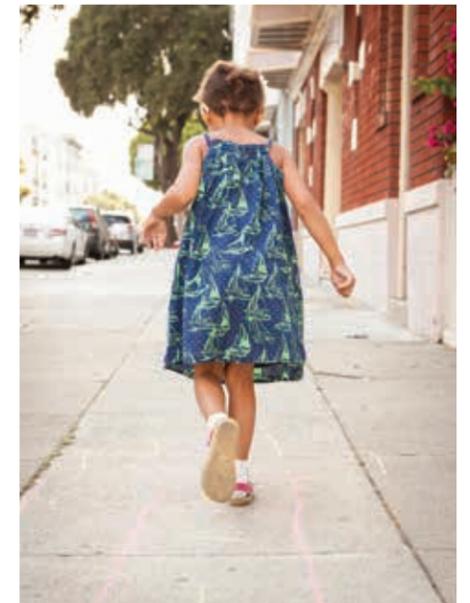
on our dominant pathways to detect potential dangers. For example, infants lying on their backs or tummies tend to keep their dominant ear up to help them listen for danger. As we develop and grow, these pathways that were originally important for survival become our preferred pathways for learning. Of course, our preferred pathways

Body and brain work together to understand the world.

are not our only routes for learning: we all learn with all of our senses. But, according to Hannaford, information processing is always more efficient through our preferred pathways. And during times of stress our non-dominant pathways effectively shut down, so our preferred pathways become the only clear channel for absorbing information.

You say tomato, I see tomato

With recent advances in neuroscience, theories about learning styles have become increasingly nuanced. Whereas people were once branded “right-brained” or “left-brained” (terms that are now outmoded), some current theories describe dozens of types of learners. What is becoming clear is that each of us has a unique learning style influenced by our physical makeup, natural talents, disposition, sensitivity to our environment, and more. This range of



learning abilities presents a real challenge to today’s schools.

Many teachers are committed to diversifying their lessons to accommodate this mosaic of styles. Whitney Miller, an 8-year veteran of California public elementary schools, conducts small-group reading lessons where some students work with magnetic letters, some manipulate letters on an iPad, and others listen to a parent volunteer reading. But as parents and our children’s first teachers, we are in a unique position to see our kids at work and at play, and really understand how they comprehend



the world around them. We have the ability to help them thrive, both in and out of the classroom.

Discover each child's style

Imagine if a right-handed child attended a school where all students were expected to write with their left hand. This scenario is not unlike being a hands-on learner in a class where all the material is taught using lectures and workbooks. It's a recipe for frustration, and the student will surely perform below his or her ability. Once we recognize a child's innate style, we can help him use his natural strengths to learn. This recognition can give a much-needed confidence boost: learning will be easier, and he'll be more likely to keep up with his peers.

Identifying individual learning styles has the added benefit of reducing frustration at home if a child's style differs from that of the parent. For example, if a mother needs complete silence in order to be productive, it may be hard to see how her child could possibly study with background music. Or if a child can never remember the list of things her mother asks her to do, it may appear she's not listening. However, if this child's strengths are in auditory/speaker learning, she may need to repeat the instructions out loud in order to remember them.

There are a number of online questionnaires that can help a parent start identifying his child's style (search for "learning styles questionnaire" to get a sampling). San Francisco-based educational

Once you recognize your child's innate style you can help him use his natural strengths to learn.

therapist Johanna Wallace Villanueva, M. Ed, ET/P, warns that most questionnaires, when used alone, are too simplistic to capture a child's behavior. She urges parents to avoid using the results as a diagnosis as it unfairly pigeonholes children. Villanueva says we'll get a fuller picture by observing our children in different situations. It's also helpful to ask questions: What did you think of that assignment? Did you have trouble? Keeping our eyes and ears open helps in recognition of a child's natural inclinations. For more

detailed guidance, try the assessment in Willis and Hodson's *Discover Your Child's Learning Style*.

No student left behind

Once you have a sense for your child's innate preferences, it's time to get creative. If your hands-on son is learning to tell time, create a clock face on the floor and have him lie down and use his body as the clock hands. If your daughter has strong auditory/musical skills, have her sing the multiplication tables. Bake or cook with kids who are learning fractions—

have them triple or halve the recipe. For dozens more practical ideas, read Carol Barnier's *The Big What Now Book of Learning Styles*. But whatever you do, make it fun, and remember to incorporate all the senses.

Don't hesitate to approach your child's school if you think changes in the classroom can help. Most teachers are happy to make simple accommodations (e.g., change of seating, allowing earplugs or headphones) if it means helping a student learn better.

You may also be able to accommodate your child's unique style by choosing a school that has the resources for highly personalized instruction. At AltSchool, a private school in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 41

SELECTED LEARNING PREFERENCES AND PRACTICAL TIPS

MODE	LEARNS BY	HOMEWORK HELP TIPS
Visual-spatial (pictures)	Looking at images, videos, or diagrams	Draw concept maps. Watch videos.
Visual (print)	Looking at words	Take notes. Highlight or underline text.
Auditory (listener)	Listening to words or music	Listen to or read along with audio books. Have background noise or music on while studying.
Auditory (talker)	Speaking	Read out loud.
Tactile-Kinesthetic (hands on)	Touching or manipulating objects	Build clay models. Take objects apart.
Tactile-Kinesthetic (whole body)	Moving her body	Act out a scene. Get up frequently to move around.
Interpersonal	Working with others	Go over assignments with a homework buddy several times per week.
Intrapersonal	Working alone	Have a quiet, separate area for homework and hobbies.

Adapted from: *Discover Your Child's Learning Style* by Mariaemma Willis & Victoria Kindle Hodson; *Talkers, Watchers & Doers* by Cheri Fuller; *In Their Own Way* by Thomas Armstrong.

Preschool Philosophies: An Overview

By Tara Hardesty

Choosing a preschool can become overwhelming. Sending your child to school is an emotional transition, and preparing for this decision is mind-numbing. There are a multitude of options and many different preschool philosophies.

Cooperative

www.ccppns.org

- Cooperative programs are a way of structuring and managing a school and are typically child-centered and play-based.
- The key to the cooperative preschool is active parent involvement, with parents serving on the board and committees and in the classroom.
- The director and teachers plan the program for both the children and the adults, using the interests of both as a guide.
- Cooperative preschools have a strong sense of community and collaboration.

Community & Religious

- These groups may follow one or a combination of the other preschool philosophies.
- Religious preschools may incorporate their doctrine into the curriculum. They may also require the child's family to be members or actively practice with the associated faith/church.

Montessori

www.amshq.org

- The Montessori philosophy aims to develop self-motivated, independent learners and instill a sense of curiosity.
- The classroom is set up in an accessible manner, with materials and shelving reachable by the children. This encourages independence as children learn. Materials are organized by curriculum, and the classroom is kept clean and uncluttered to instill calm.
- The teacher is a director, guide, and resource for the students. Teachers carefully observe children's behavior and use observations to choose materials

that capture their interests and help them learn.

- The teacher/student ratio is often higher because children work independently.

Reggio Emilia

www.reggiochildren.com

- Reggio-based preschools view children as strong, active, competent learners and center around the idea that students take the lead in learning.
- The teacher is considered a partner and a guide to the children and their families.
- Curriculum is based on observation of the children and what they choose to explore. As a result, the curriculum constantly evolves.
- The teacher creates detailed records of the child observations and uses these to understand their learning strategies.
- Reggio schools have a strong sense of community and collaboration.

Waldorf

www.awsna.org

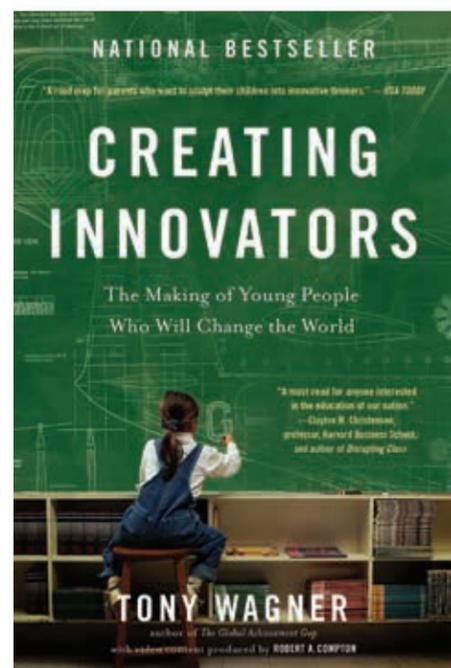
- The Waldorf philosophy follows a creative and artistic approach to education. It is highly experiential and emphasizes building a child's relationship with the natural world.
- The environment of a Waldorf school focuses on an open-ended experience for the child, and natural and wood toys and spaces that encourage imaginative play.
- Teachers support and encourage the natural rhythms of childhood, and the child's feelings and responses to what they learn are highly valued.
- Waldorf preschools do not endorse a child's exposure to or use of electronics or television.

Tara Hardesty is a freelance writer and marketing professional who specializes in commercial real estate ventures. At TheDailyWrites.com, she blogs about the things she is passionate about: the hairy underbelly of life, motherhood, and entrepreneurship in downtown San Francisco.

Learning to Teach to Learn

By Anna Gracia

We've heard the phrase over and over again: Our school system is "broken." But why is it that way, and what can we do to change it? Three authors tackle these questions in unique ways.



Creating Innovators

By Tony Wagner

In *Creating Innovators*, Tony Wagner interviews a number of young innovative entrepreneurs (ages 21 to 32) and their parents, teachers, and mentors to find out what helped them become the leaders they are today. He asserts these individuals are the face of our future economy, where the only jobs not outsourced to lower wage countries will be in the service industry or those created by innovators.

Wagner contends that cultivating innovation in children boils down to three key points: play, passion, and purpose. Innovative skills like curiosity, collaboration, associative thinking, and experimentation can be nurtured and taught—it is just a matter of encouraging these skills and allowing kids to explore different avenues

until something sparks. It is then that play can develop into passion.

All of the parents interviewed for this book noted their commitment to respecting their child's choices and decisions regarding education and activities. For example, Jodie Wu, a graduate of MIT, turned down a full scholarship to UC Berkeley to start her own business in Tanzania. Instead of resisting the idea, Jodie's parents supported her, quite literally: her father even borrowed \$50,000 to invest in her company. When asked, he replied, "I think trying to do business in Tanzania is not good idea [but] she needs support. She needs to know her family is behind her—and that she is not alone. She's young, has to learn her own lessons. I won't make any money. I didn't invest in her business to make money, just to support her."

Written more as an anecdotal teaching manual rather than an engaging nonfiction read, Wagner follows the old Aristotle adage: "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them." The book is extremely repetitive with its constant summaries, forcing

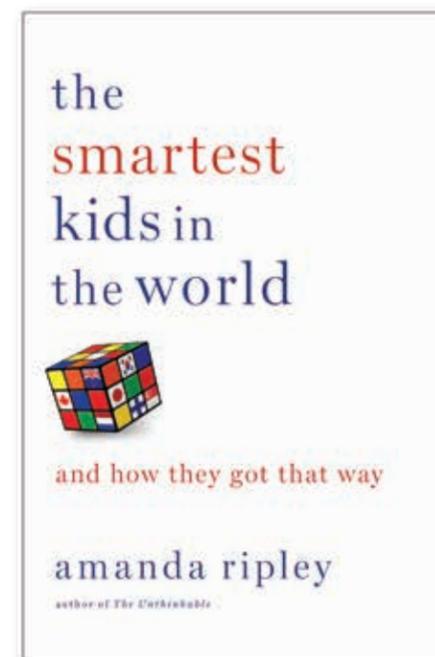
the reader to retain its message. The format of the book is also unorthodox, in that the middle of each chapter refers the reader to an accompanying video on the subject. So unless you are reading the book on an internet-ready tablet, it is unlikely you would stop reading and use a computer to watch the supplemental "video clues," as Wagner calls them.

Wagner's theories on education and what our system lacks closely resemble Ken Robinson's, a renowned educationalist, who argues our schools don't allow for creativity. Instead, kids are processed through a factory mill of education, standardizing a product for consumption by a wide variety of unique individuals. To prove his point, Wagner showcases the individuals credited with helping the innovators harness their talent—teachers or mentors who were outliers of the system by developing collaborative, hands-on learning environments for their students to apply their previous knowledge to practical problems and become inspired to create change. He asserts more of these outliers are needed to change our system.

The issue at the heart of *Creating*

"[Either] you are very good at value creation or you're really good at capturing the value that others create...we really teach people how to squeeze oranges—how to manage for greater efficiency and economies of scale—not how to grow new and better oranges."

Innovators is best summed up by Joel Podolny, vice president of human resources at Apple and dean of Apple University, when he says, "[Either] you are very good at value creation or you're really good at capturing the value that others create...we really teach people how to squeeze oranges—how to manage for greater efficiency and economies of scale—not how to grow new and better oranges." Wagner's book is about how to encourage kids to want to figure out a way to grow new and better oranges. ❖



The Smartest Kids in the World

By Amanda Ripley

Amanda Ripley continues the assault on our systemic educational problems in *The Smartest Kids in the World*. By interviewing and surveying foreign exchange students who came to study in the US, and vice versa, Ripley is able to gain a fuller picture of the contrasts between school systems from the students themselves, instead of administrators or politicians.

The book highlights three "top" countries according to their PISA* scores: Finland, South Korea, and Poland. While weaving between the three, Ripley underscores what she believes are the major problems plaguing the US system.

First are our teacher preparation programs. Ripley argues that Finland's

school system, considered the best in the world, is able to produce more effective teachers due to a stringent selection process, required lengthy apprenticeships, and dedication to professional development. Stara, the Finnish language teacher profiled in the book, spent three years studying Finnish literature and a full year student teaching with three mentors who gave her written feedback each day—all this, in addition to her regular college coursework and her Master's thesis, which is required of all Finnish teachers.

Only eight Finnish universities even offer teacher preparation programs, and an average of 20 percent of applicants are accepted. Ripley compares getting into one of these institutions as prestigious as acceptance to medical school in the United States. In contrast, the US produces nearly 2 1/2 times the number of teachers it needs each year. And it only requires an average of 12 to 15 weeks of student teaching, with the quality varying widely depending on the location. One student explained it like this: "My Finnish school fostered a great deal of respect for the institution and faculty in the students. This can be partly explained by the academic rigors that teachers had to endure in their journeys to becoming educators. The students were well aware of how accomplished their teachers were."

Another problem Ripley highlights is US students' lack of buy-in to the education system. In contrast, South Korean junior and senior students typically attend hagwons (private tutoring academies) after school each day until curfew—11 p.m. or midnight, depending on the city. They are all studying for the college entrance exam, the "bright line" many students across the world work toward. The exam is such a big deal that the stock market opens an hour late on

test day to keep the roads free for students, and airplanes are grounded during the English language portion of the test to reduce unnecessary noise. Korea's education minister believes his country's success on the PISA test is a result of the student's efforts. "Motivation more than curriculum," Ripley surmises.

Poland recently joined the ranks of the world's education superpowers through a series of sweeping reforms, including delayed tracking and a core curriculum. In exchange

The message in these high-performing countries is clear: education is important. That education needs to be rigorous. And everyone needs to believe it.

for their agreement, schools were given more autonomy for their methods of teaching. As a result, students' PISA scores skyrocketed from twenty-first in reading, before the reforms, to thirteenth just 3 years later—above the U.S. All achieved without the use of any modern technology in the classroom.

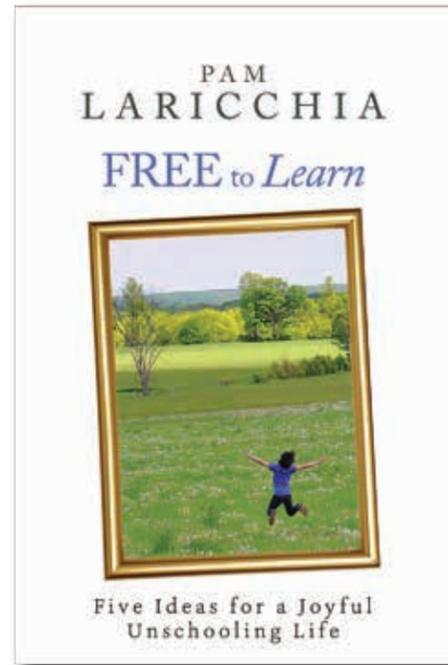
The message in these high-performing countries is clear: education is important. That education needs to be rigorous. And everyone needs to believe it.

Finally, Ripley illustrates that autonomy—especially teacher autonomy—leads to better results. In both Finland and Poland, teachers can choose their own textbooks and craft their own curriculum. South Korea's hagwon

*PISA stands for Programme of International Student Assessment, a test administered every 3 years to 15-year-old students in 79 participating countries.

teachers operate in a free market—they can do anything they'd like, since they are paid according to the demand for their skills.

However, it must be pointed out (as Ripley herself does in the appendix), that there are some real limitations to her research—specifically, the sample size. Though 1,346 students were invited to take the survey, only 202, or 15 percent, responded. Additionally, some locations had more responses than others, so although Ripley provides insight directly from students, their bias in experience must be noted. ❖



Free to Learn

By Pam Laricchia

In *Free to Learn*, Pam Laricchia gives a different perspective. Instead of a research-based book, Laricchia uses her personal experience of homeschooling—or “unschooling,” as she calls it—her three children as a basis for arguing against traditional school programs.

She believes, like Wagner, that learning can take place anywhere, everywhere, and most certainly outside of school hours. Taking a step further, however, Laricchia argues that all learning should take place from the learner’s point of view. So instead of saying “no,” parents should analyze how to say “yes” to situations because it helps children hone their decision-making process. By respecting children as individuals and allowing them to make decisions often and early, parents can help their kids live confidently.

Free to Learn raises several important issues about the purpose of rules and pushing learning too quickly: “if the environment for learning is negative it often casts a pall over the topic itself.” Laricchia also asks readers to question why they value one method of learning over another, such as visiting an exhibition on a topic as opposed to simply reading about it or participating in a group discussion about it. She argues that learning can happen in all kinds of mediums and that parents need to be sensitive to the types of learning to which their child responds.

Her approach is, however, at times, a bit heavy handed. Take, for example, this imaginary scenario used as an introduction to what she calls “real learning.”

“Natalie wakes up early, excited to grab a few minutes to continue building her fort in the backyard before she has to leave for school. As she quickly eats breakfast, you remind her she has a quiz this morning at school and she needs to study instead. You know she’s disappointed so you remind her she can get back to it after school. Natalie shakes her head sadly, ‘No, I’ve got band practice after school today. I guess it’ll have to wait until after dinner.’ You have more bad news for her. ‘No, you have to finish your science homework tonight. Maybe tomorrow.’”

One could argue that many of the “advantages” of unschooling Laricchia names are simply representative of a supportive learning environment, which are not exclusive to homeschooling. For example, Montessori schools already take a learner-directed approach, and the Waldorf method eliminates competitive testing, academic placement, and focuses on cultivating intrinsic motivation. Even regular public school classes, especially at the elementary level, generally have few stand-and-lecture-type lessons that Laricchia warns against. So if

parents simply give their children the latitude to explore their passions, as Wagner recommends, much of this learning can take place outside of school hours, supplementing their overall knowledge.

All three authors agree that our current school system isn’t working for many of our nation’s children. Whether the solution is Ripley’s call for sweeping reforms to teacher preparation programs, or Wagner’s push for more project-based classes, or Laricchia’s full-fledged learner-directed approach, parents can be armed with the knowledge that change to the status quo is both possible and necessary.

By respecting children as individuals and allowing them to make decisions often and early, parents can help their kids live confidently.

But in the meantime, one of the best things you can do for your children is to instill in them a respect for education and a love of learning. Ensure they have the time and space to explore the world around them. But don’t be afraid to advocate for change too. ❖

Anna is a former teacher who hopes she can still propel people into action with her words. You can read more from her at SnarkyMovieReviews.blogspot.com.

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- Stuttering disorders
- Reading disorders

About GGMG Events: Events listed on these pages are either exclusive to GGMG members or are offered to GGMG members at a discount. Generally, registration is required and can be completed by following the REGISTRATION instructions listed under the event details or at www.gmg.org/events.html (BigTent). Rules and policies vary. GGMG members and their families only.

GGMG volunteers may occasionally take photos during our events for use in this publication or on the GGMG/BigTent website. Please understand these photographs may include images of all attendees (including children).

Vendors who would like to partner with GGMG, please contact feedback@gmg.org.

 Indicates events appropriate for infants (0 to 12 months). Many also welcome toddlers and preschoolers (see registration rules for more details).

KIDS ACTIVITIES

Unless otherwise noted, parent participation is required for all Kids Activities events.

Little Bundles class at MyGym

Baby exercises, songs, dances, infant-safe rides, unique swings, and many other adventures await the infant-parent team! This fun movement class also includes a brief parent discussion.

DATE: Fridays
TIME: 2:15 to 3 p.m.
PLACE: 901 Minnesota St.
COST: FREE with membership fee of \$75

REGISTRATION: Ages 6 weeks to 6 months. Contact Marci Briskin at mygym_sf@sbcglobal.net.

Mazel Tots, Bagels, and Babies at Congregation Emanu-El

A weekly playdate to enjoy music, stories, and puppets as we prepare to welcome Shabbat on Fridays and celebrate Havdalah on Mondays.

DATE: Mondays and Fridays in September (no session September 14)
TIME: 9:30 to 11 a.m.
PLACE: 2 Lake St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: Drop in. All ages are welcome.

Baby Food Cooking Class at Carmel Blue

Join nutritionist Virginia Watkins and Cristina Serafyn, from Fresh Baby Bites, in a live and interactive cooking class all about making the best, easiest, and most nutrient-rich foods for your little ones.

DATE: Friday, September 4
TIME: Noon to 1:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1418 Grant Ave.
COST: GGMG special rate \$40

REGISTRATION: Ages 3 to 10 months. Register at www.carmelblue.com/event-registration/?ee=3097.

Yoga, Baby + Massage at It's Yoga Kids

Enrich your baby's development with songs, yoga, and infant massage.

DATE: Friday, September 4
TIME: 11 to 11:50 a.m.
PLACE: 569 Ruger St.
COST: \$15 cash; \$18 credit card

REGISTRATION: Ages newborn to pre-crawlers. Introductory rate. Register by emailing info@itsyogakids.com.

Understanding Your Toddler's Development at Carmel Blue

Learn all about your child's rapidly developing brain and positive parenting approaches to navigate tantrums, the "No!" stage, and other toddler behaviors. Our parent/child groups are led by early childhood educators. Playgroup series of six meetings.

DATE: Tuesdays, September 8 to October 13
TIME: 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1418 Grant Ave.
COST: Six weeks for \$180 per parent. Limited to 9 attendees.

REGISTRATION: Ages 14 to 30 months (walkers). Register at www.carmelblue.com/event-registration/?ee=3274.

Parent Tot Music & Movement at JAMaROO Kids

Parents and children will dance and sing to music from around the world and play with a variety of simple instruments.

DATE: Thursday, September 10
TIME: 9 to 9:30 a.m.
PLACE: 388 4th Ave.
COST: \$10

REGISTRATION: Ages infant to 3 years. Introductory rate. Register at www.jamarookids.com or call 415.614.2001.

ChouChou French at seesaw

Join experienced French teacher Nathalie for a multi-sensory exploration of numbers, colors, feelings, animals, foods, shapes, and more.

DATE: Thursday, September 10
TIME: 10 to 11 a.m.
PLACE: 600 Octavia St., Suite A
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: Ages 6 months to 3 years. Introductory rate. Register at www.seesawsf.com or email info@seesawsf.com.

It's Yoga, Movers at It's Yoga Kids

Developmentally appropriate yoga movement with song and play for young movers with adult participation.

DATE: Friday, September 11
TIME: 9:30 to 10 a.m. or noon to 12:30 p.m.
PLACE: 569 Ruger St.
COST: \$15 cash; \$18 credit card

REGISTRATION: Ages crawling to 2 years. Call 415.750.9990.

Baby Boot Camp at Crissy Field

Try this innovative stroller fitness program to help regain or enhance pre-pregnancy fitness levels.

DATE: Friday, September 11
TIME: 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.
PLACE: 99 Yacht Rd. (meet at the landing to the west of the parking lot)
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: Participants must be at least 6 weeks postpartum. Register by emailing kathleen.laipply@babybootcamp.com.



Music Class for Newborns with SF Music Together

Quality, fun, research-based, and award-winning Music Together classes. Jamming, dancing, singing, and community! This is for families interested in the Haight/Ashbury and Inner Sunset locations only.

DATE: Friday, September 11
TIME: 12:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1350 Waller St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: Ages infant to 9 months. All caregivers welcome. No drop-ins, please. Register either by visiting www.sfmusictogether.com or emailing info@sfmusictogether.com with your contact info.

Storytime Art at JAMaROO Kids

This class combines the joys of reading and art.

DATE: Wednesday, September 16
TIME: 10:15 to 10:45 a.m.
PLACE: 388 4th Ave.
COST: \$10

REGISTRATION: Ages 3 to 5 years. Introductory rate. Register at www.jamarookids.com or call 415.614.2001.

Baby Boot Camp at Noe Basketball Courts

Try this innovative stroller fitness program to help regain or enhance pre-pregnancy fitness levels.

DATE: Wednesday, September 16
TIME: 10:15 to 11:15 a.m.
PLACE: 24th and Douglass streets
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: Participants must be at least 6 weeks postpartum. Register by emailing kathleen.laipply@babybootcamp.com.

Ichi Ni San Music at seesaw

Children will sing, dance, and play a variety of musical instruments. Taught in Japanese and English.

DATE: Thursday, September 17
TIME: 11 a.m. to noon
PLACE: 600 Octavia St., Suite A
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: Ages 6 months to 3 years. Introductory rate. Register at www.seesawsf.com or email info@seesawsf.com.



Introduction to Baby Sign Language with Bill White at Carmel Blue

Baby Sign Language gives babies the opportunity to communicate long before they can verbalize their wants and needs. Signing with babies accelerates language acquisition, reduces frustration, enhances a child's self-esteem, and deepens the bond between parent and child.

DATE: Friday, September 18
TIME: 11 a.m. to noon
PLACE: 1418 Grant Ave.
COST: GGMG special rate: \$35 for one parent; \$65 for both (grandparents also welcome!)

REGISTRATION: Ages infant to 2 years (preverbal). Register at www.carmelblue.com/event-registration/?ee=2877.

Baby Sleep Solutions with Angelique Millette at Carmel Blue

This in-depth workshop by Sleep Expert Angelique Millette will help parents understand how to establish good sleep habits and a healthy schedule for their babies and for themselves. Angelique reviews several different baby-friendly sleep methods and helps parents tailor their approach by their own needs and abilities.

DATE: Saturday, September 19
TIME: 2 to 4 p.m.
PLACE: 1418 Grant Ave.
COST: GGMG special rate \$50

REGISTRATION: Ages 3 to 12 months. Register at www.carmelblue.com/event-registration/?ee=2556.

Parent Tot Music & Movement at JAMaROO Kids

Parents and children will dance and sing to music from around the world and play with a variety of simple instruments.

DATE: Wednesday, September 23
TIME: 11:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.
PLACE: 388 4th Ave.
COST: \$10

REGISTRATION: Ages infant to 3 years. Introductory rate. Register at www.jamarookids.com or call 415.614.2001.

Kidshop: The City by the Bay at Peekadoodle Kidsclub

Celebrate all things San Francisco this afternoon! We will make some famous Ghirardelli Chocolate Brownies, create art worthy of a spot in a museum, and paint a bridge just like the real red one we see each day!

DATE: Monday, September 28
TIME: 3 to 3:45 p.m.
PLACE: 900 North Point St., Suite F100
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: AGES 3 to 5 years. Call 415.440.7335 to reserve your spot. Space is limited. No parent participation, drop-off class.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

CPR Training at Sports Basement

Back by popular demand! Join us for an evening with a trained CPR expert from NewboRN Solutions. They will provide the latest CPR techniques and answer all your questions. Free Wondersitter childcare provided.

DATE: Thursday, September 17
TIME: 6 to 8 p.m.
PLACE: 610 Old Mason St.
COST: \$45 (includes certification)

REGISTRATION: Bigtent.com

Family-Friendly Volunteer Project: Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly Luncheon

Volunteers host a fun luncheon for seniors at Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly. Activities include set-up, seating, preparing food, socializing, entertaining, and clean-up. Co-hosted with Neighborhood Playgroups.

DATE: Saturday, September 26
TIME: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., shifts available
PLACE: 909 Hyde St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: Bigtent.com

PARENT EDUCATION

Real Estate and Schools in the East Bay and Marin County at Sports Basement

Join us for a discussion about the best schools and communities and the cost of housing in the East Bay and Marin County.

DATE: Wednesday, September 9
TIME: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1590 Bryant St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: shumate.julie@gmail.com

Swim Safety Talk at Recess

Learn how to keep your child safe around water with La Petite Baleen in this fun, interactive class for grown-ups with their kids.

DATE: Saturday, September 12
TIME: 10 to 11:30 a.m.
PLACE: 470 Carolina St.
COST: \$15 per individual (Save \$5 with promo code GGMG15)

REGISTRATION: recess-sf.com/workshops

Babyproofing Your Relationship at Natural Resources

Whether you're a new parent or about to become one, come learn some proven, simple techniques that will allow your relationship to continue to grow alongside your growing family.

DATE: Saturday, September 12
TIME: 2 to 4 p.m.
PLACE: 1367 Valencia St.
COST: \$10 per couple (use code NRGGMG10 for additional 10% discount)

REGISTRATION: tinyurl.com/Babyproofing-Relationship-NR

Real Estate and Schools in San Francisco and the Peninsula at Sports Basement

Join us for a discussion about the best schools and communities and the cost of living in San Francisco and the Peninsula.

DATE: Tuesday, September 15
TIME: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1590 Bryant St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: shumate.julie@gmail.com



Helping Toddlers (and Their Parents!) Sleep at Recess

Sleep expert Angelique Millette will share some common sleep trouble spots for 12 to 36 month olds.

DATE: Tuesday, September 15
TIME: 7:30 to 9 p.m.
PLACE: 470 Carolina St.
COST: \$38 per individual; \$58 per couple (Save \$5 with promo code GGMG15)

REGISTRATION: recess-sf.com/workshops

New Mother's Group at Carmel Blue

New moms—come share the highs, lows, and stuff in between. Topics include sleeping issues, traveling with babies, developmental stages, communications with your partner, and much more.

DATE: Wednesday, September 16
TIME: 1 to 2:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1418 Grant Ave.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: carmelblue.com/event-registration/?ee=2977

Expectant Moms Meet Up at Carmel Blue

Do you feel like you are the only one you know who is pregnant? You are not alone! Join us and meet a great group of expectant SF moms.

DATE: Saturday September 19
TIME: 4:15 to 5:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1418 Grant Ave.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: carmelblue.com/event-registration/?ee=3212

The "Toddler Transition"—When Your Baby is No Longer a Baby at Carmel Blue

This class will help you learn positive discipline strategies to respond in loving ways that encourage connection, communication, and cooperation while planting the seeds for emotional intelligence. Parents only.

DATE: Tuesday, September 22
TIME: 7:30 to 9 p.m.
PLACE: 1418 Grant Ave.
COST: \$35

RSVP: carmelblue.com/event-registration/?ee=3107

Date Night Drop-Off! at Recess

Drop your little ones off for some after-hours fun while you enjoy some grown up time! Pizza and snacks will be provided, as well as free play in the playspace and an art activity to take home. Ages 2.5 to 6 years.

DATE: Friday, September 25
TIME: 6 to 9 p.m.
PLACE: 470 Carolina St.
COST: \$55 per child + \$15 per sibling

REGISTRATION: recess-sf.com/classes

Solving the Preschool Puzzle at Recess

Aki Raymer, MA (www.parentingpaths.com), will present different philosophies in education to give you a clearer idea of what to look for when touring schools, and will discuss what to expect once you begin the application process.

DATE: Tuesday, September 29
TIME: 7:30 to 9 p.m.
PLACE: 470 Carolina St.
COST: \$38 per individual; \$58 per couple (Save \$5 with promo code GGMG15)

REGISTRATION: recess-sf.com/classes

Getting Prepared for Fall's Kindergarten Process with Little & Molligan

Join educational consultants Betsy Little and Paula Molligan of Little & Molligan as they discuss the challenging private school kindergarten process in SF! They will provide an overview of the admissions process and discuss important considerations when choosing a school. Little & Molligan have extensive experience assisting parents with school selection and have authored two books on the topic.

DATE: Tuesday, September 15
TIME: 6:30 to 8 p.m.
PLACE: 1111 Gough St.
COST: FREE

The Ins and Outs of the SF Public School Lottery

Rachel Nip of Parents for Public School, San Francisco will provide an update on the latest developments with the SF public school lottery, and discuss how to go about finding the ideal public school for your child. Bring your questions.

DATE: Tuesday, September 29
TIME: 6:30 to 8 p.m.
PLACE: St Mary's Cathedral
COST: FREE

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

GGMG sponsors Neighborhood Meetups as a gateway for moms to build a community with other moms in their neighborhood. In addition to special events, each neighborhood hosts weekly playdates for moms and kids, as well as moms-only events such as wine nights and book clubs at local venues. Meetups are usually free to attend and always open to all members.

To join your local Neighborhood Meetup group, log into www.BigTent.com and select the "Subgroups" tab to find your neighborhood. Then for a complete and up-to-date list of all your local meetups, including playdates, check the "Events" tab on your Neighborhood Meetups group homepage.

RSVPs are required for moms' nights out and special/themed playdates. For regularly scheduled playdates, simply show up and look for the person wearing a GGMG-branded item. Below is a sampling of events in September.

Bernal Heights/Glen Park

Bernal/Glen Moms' Night Out at Dark Horse Inn

Come get to know other moms in the area over food and drinks. GGMG will cover appetizers and dessert! Megan will be there with an orange GGMG lanyard/name tag.

DATE: Friday, September 4
TIME: 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.
PLACE: 942 Geneva Ave.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/93216004

Marina

Stroller Run/Walk Along the Marina Green

Meet fellow GGMG moms while getting a little exercise along the Marina Green. Run or walk, with or without your stroller, and all abilities welcome (you pick the pace and distance, two to five miles).

DATE: Wednesdays, September 2, 9, and 16
TIME: 9 to 10 a.m.
PLACE: Meet at the Blue Fitness Court at the corner of Marina Blvd. & Webster St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/93129746

Playgroup at Julius Kahn Playground

Join our Friday playgroup at the Helen Diller Family Children's Play Area at Julius Kahn Playground. Look for Carla with mylar balloons.

DATE: Fridays, September 11, 18, and 25
TIME: 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.
PLACE: West Pacific Ave. & Maple St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: No registration needed. Email any questions to Carla Negri at carlanegri@hotmail.com.

Mission/Castro

Moms' Night Out at West of Pecos

Join our fab group of moms for chatting in complete sentences! We love meeting new people over appetizers (subsidized by GGMG) and margaritas.

DATE: Tuesday, September 1
TIME: 6 to 8 p.m.
PLACE: 550 Valencia St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/93263331

NOPA/Haight/Cole Valley

Moms' Night Out at Green Chile Kitchen

Join our group of fun and friendly moms for a relaxing evening. Appetizers/desserts will be provided by GGMG. Hope to see you there!

DATE: Tuesday, September 15
TIME: 8 to 9:30 p.m.
PLACE: 1801 McAllister St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/93342677

North Beach

Playgroup at Washington Square Park

Announcing a weekly playgroup for North Beach, Nob Hill, and Russian Hill mamas and babies. Come meet us by the playground!

DATE: Wednesdays in September
TIME: 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.
PLACE: Filbert & Stockton Streets
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: No registration needed. Email any questions to Tracy Andreassen at andreassen.tracy@gmail.com.

Moms' Night In—Movie Night

Need some good girl time but too tired from the week to go out on the town? Join us for movie night and snacks, where PJs and sweatpants will not be frowned upon!

DATE: Friday, September 25
TIME: 8 to 9:30 p.m.
PLACE: Tracy's home (RSVP for Address)
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: Email Tracy Andreassen at andreassen.tracy@gmail.com. Visit the Nob Hill/North Beach subgroup on BigTent to cast your movie vote!

Playgroup Formation Event at Gymboree

Connect with other moms to form a playgroup for your little one (newborn to 12 months). Bagels and coffee included.

DATE: Sunday, September 20
TIME: 9 to 11 a.m.
PLACE: 1503A Sloat Blvd.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/93343054



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 Angela Jia Kim | Founder & CEO of The Savor Lifestyle Brands - Savor Spa, Om Aroma & Co., Savor the Success

The New Face of American Education: Cultivating Creative, Entrepreneurial and Global Talents — Feb 23, 2016
 Yong Zhao, Ph.D. | World-renowned thought leader and scholar, educational expert and award-winning author of "World Class Learners" and "Catching Up or Leading The Way"

Women Empowering Change: Using Your Talents For Good — May 3, 2016
 Jennifer Dulski | President & CEO of Change.org, entrepreneur and leader at Yahoo & Google

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Committee Spotlight: *Parent Education*

Describe the personality of your committee.

GGMG's Parent Education Committee, formerly Education Series, is a six-person committee responsible for nearly a dozen GGMG member events, ranging in topics from estate planning to gender identity in preschoolers.

Why do you do what you do?

The people in the committee and community and mission of the organization are what draw many of our committee members. Some of us have been working on the committee for several years and have created great bonds. Many past committee members have transferred to other leadership roles at GGMG.

What types of projects to you undertake?

The committee's primary seminar offerings address the challenges of parenting young children, such as discipline, language development, lactation, sleep, potty training, child care, preschool, and kindergarten.

How do you know when you are making a difference?

When fellow moms mention a class or event they attended and found helpful, and you realize that you organized it!

Who are your current volunteers?

Co-chairs Ming Ming Liu and Shirley Ling along with Angela Cheung, Belen Jimenez-Aguayo, Jingjing Chen, and Samanata Naik Le are our get-it-done moms.

What's next for your team?

A new event we are hosting is with Diane Flynn Keith (www.homefires.com) on October 6. Diane will be giving an introduction to homeschooling. We hope to continue with similar programming for the year. Popular topics include preschool, kindergarten, and public schooling. The committee can anticipate that these seminars will typically draw more than 50 attendees. However, many other events are designed for more intimate groups.

How can interested GGMG members get involved in your committee?

Contact education@gmg.org

Light the Night in Memory of Caitlin

In June our GGMG family lost one of our own when Caitlin Mullinix ended her hard fought battle with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. In addition to her role on the GGMG Operations Committee, Caitlin was a committed volunteer and top fundraiser with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (LLS), the largest voluntary health organization dedicated to finding cures for blood cancers and improving the quality of life for patients and their families. Caitlin served on the leadership team for the San Francisco Light the Night Walk and served as their Honored Hero in 2013.

Light the Night Walk is an LLS annual fundraiser where walkers symbolically light the dark world of cancer by carrying illuminated lanterns: white for survivors, red for supporters, and gold for those walking in memory of a loved one. These unique evening walks are marked by celebration, remembrance, and hope.

Join the GGMG team and light a gold lantern in memory of Caitlin.

The San Francisco Light the Night Walk will be on **Thursday, November 12**. Food and family-friendly festivities will begin at 5 p.m. in Lot A of AT&T Park. At 7 p.m., we will turn on our lanterns to light the night with hope along a 1.8-mile stroller accessible route that goes through AT&T Park. We invite you to celebrate Caitlin's life and efforts by joining us or making a donation to the fight against blood cancers.

Please visit www.tinyurl.com/p5bqpy4 to register, donate, or learn more.

Authored in conjunction with Jennifer Shah, campaign specialist for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Greater Bay Area Chapter.



GGMG HALLOWEEN SPOOKTACULAR

Join us for a fun morning filled with activities, entertainment, a costume parade, and more.

This event is not to be missed!
Get it on your calendar now!

- DATE:** Saturday, October 10
- TIME:** 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- PLACE:** Sharon Meadow, Golden Gate Park
- COST:** Free for GGMG members, their families, and guests



Member Survey

The 2015 GGMG annual survey opens on September 15! Please help us gather feedback on our organization and how we can improve. This quick survey gives you the chance to share why you are a member and what you would like to see GGMG do in the future. You can find the survey here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2016GGMGSurvey>

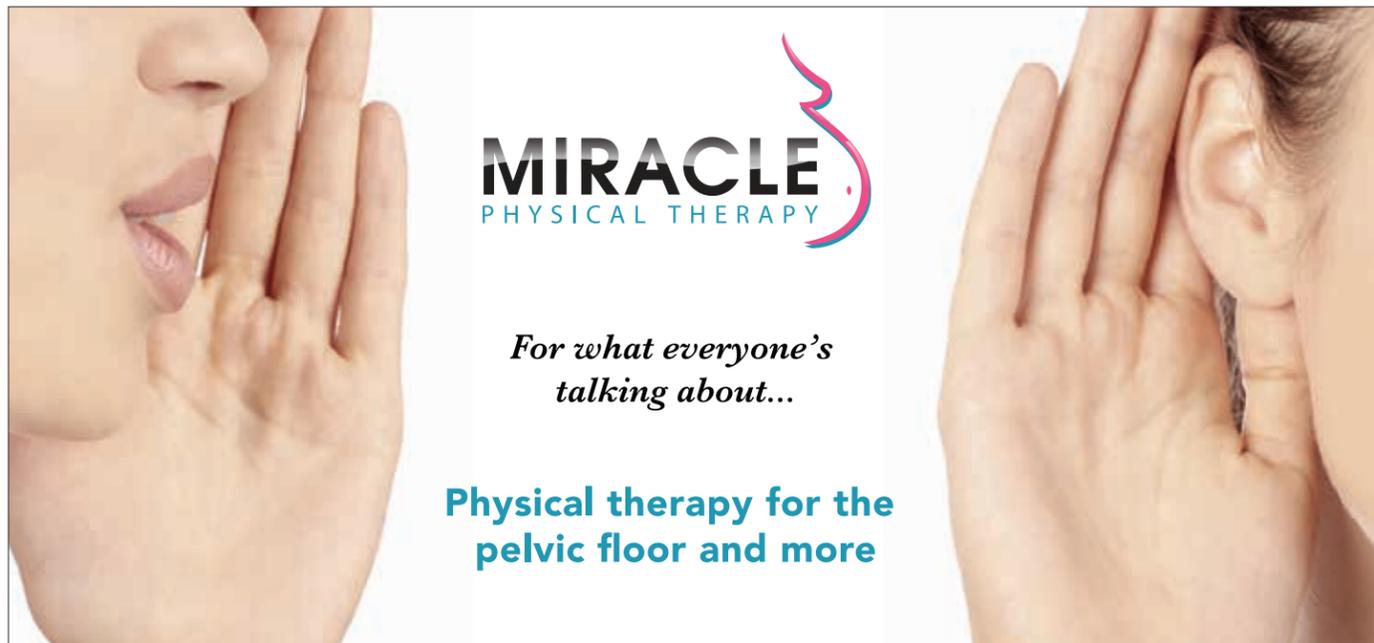
Each survey respondent will be entered in a raffle to win prizes, such as an Amazon gift card, a treatment and day at the Nob Hill Spa, an UrbanSitter gift card, and more!

Please take less than 10 minutes to share your feedback and help us create a stronger organization.

Recruiting Committee *Summer is Over, It's Back to School Time!*

Are your kids headed back into the classroom and you are finding a little more time on your hands? Come volunteer with GGMG! Volunteering with us is a good opportunity to meet other moms and make new friends. It's also a great way to build your resume, and as a volunteer, to take advantage of additional benefits that you are entitled to receive!

Email the Recruiting team at volunteer@gmg.org to learn more.



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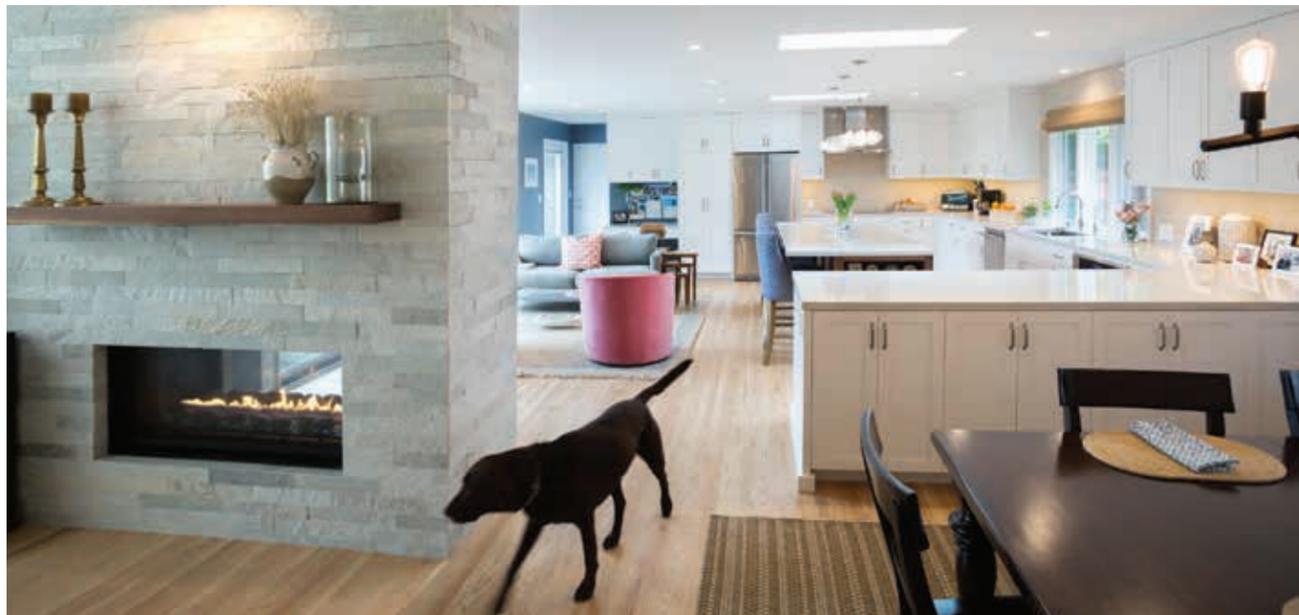
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OUR STRANGE AND WONDERFUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
 CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

the bat. These statistics include the younger siblings of already enrolled students, but all families who hang in there through the summer are quite likely to receive the seat they desire most. Rachel Nip of PPS-SF reports, “Last year about 700 kindergarten families received a seat at their waitpool school.”

That means *the odds are in your favor*. The notion that SFUSD has very few good schools that are impossible to get into is just plain wrong. The more families who trust in this fact and invest in our schools, the more wrong it will be.

When I meet parents who accept this premise but are still frustrated with the complex and time-consuming lottery process and lack of predictability, I try to provide perspective with two points.

First, the biggest time suck is in learning the system. By reading this far, you’ve done that. You don’t need to tour 16 schools. Just pull up the map of schools, consult the “at a

glance” chart in the Enrollment Guide, attend the Enrollment Fair, and tour the handful of schools that seem like they might work. Filling out and submitting the actual application takes only an hour or two, and the mechanics of the process are spelled out clearly in the Enrollment Guide (including birthdate eligibility, definition of residency, procedures for twins, and deadlines).

Second, when we lived in Downtown Seattle, our kids were zoned for a school a 25 minute bus ride away from our home. There was no ability to maximize for walkability, to contemplate whether our child would thrive in a larger or smaller school, to seek out a disciplinary ethos that felt right to us. There was no choice at all. Coming from that situation, the opportunity to engage in the SFUSD lottery felt like a blessing.

Choice and uncertainty can be overwhelming, but both breed opportunity. Ignore the hype; quell the panic. Look for the beauty in our big, multicultural, and



pedagogically-diverse school system. And then do what’s best. ❖

Gail Cornwall is a former public school teacher and recovering lawyer who now works as a stay-at-home mom of three and writes about parenthood. Born in St. Louis and raised in the Bay Area, she’s a serial monogamist of urban living who resided in Berkeley, New York, D.C., Boston, and Seattle before committing to San Francisco. You can read more at joidevivi.wordpress.com (personal musings), readymommy.wordpress.com (book reviews), and parentingwrite.wordpress.com (more serious fare).

LOOK, LISTEN, TALK, MOVE, LEARN
 CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

San Francisco, the curriculum is built around each student’s unique style. Learning preferences are assessed through close observation and feedback. Each child receives a personalized “playlist” of individual, small-group, and large-group activities. As AltSchool’s Director of Education, Carolyn Wilson, explains, “Personalization increases [students’] buy-in. When they can access their interests or their own ways of learning, they are more likely to buy in.”

Above all, simply acknowledging that your child learns in a particular way can have a long-term impact on her attitude towards school, and how she perceives her own intelligence. Let’s hope that by showing our kids how to recognize and use their innate talents that the “why” questions continue well beyond age three. ❖

Catherine is a medical writer and visually-oriented learner. Her go-to method for unraveling complex concepts is to draw a diagram.





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I ♥ Mom

From Schooling to Unschooling

By Lydia Fong Waggoner

We tour nearly 30 schools, apply to a few privates and a charter, and enter the public lottery. Although we receive an acceptance from our first choice private school, we choose to release that spot and ultimately endure a two-week stint at our number five public school pick before settling in at the charter school.

Our daughter, Taylor, excels academically and cultivates a tight network of friendships. Art, dance, and music are weekly staples in her school diet, and our morning commute takes no more than 10 minutes on foot. In theory, this is the perfect scenario for an 8-year-old and her family living in San Francisco. Why would anyone in her right mind want to change this situation, risk losing it all, and step into unfamiliar and uncertain territory?

Beginning in Taylor's toddlerhood, my intuition tugs at me until I conclude that my husband and I can offer learning experiences beyond the lessons a school system can provide. At the end of second grade, we choose not only to withdraw from the school system, but also commit to ceasing conditioned ways of teaching and of perceiving the learning process. I choose to let go of biases upheld by mainstream culture, by my upbringing, and by my training and classroom experiences as an early childhood and elementary school teacher.

For ease of labeling, we are homeschoolers; however, it is more accurate to identify us as "unschoolers," a family who forgoes curriculum in favor of learning opportunities driven by our children's interests, interests rooted in and fueled by their intrinsic motivations.

What does this look like? For starters, I am no longer the homework warden, the living alarm clock, or the human version of a cattle prod. I no longer cross-reference our daughter's food intolerances with the list of restricted snack duty items, nor pack lunches adhering to aforementioned dietary restrictions, which may or may not be consumed by day's end anyway. These small shifts alone are cause for celebration, but there's more; so much more.

Taylor sleeps until her body is fully rested. She no longer schedules her trips to the bathroom. She eats and drinks when she is hungry and thirsty and consumes these meals and refreshments at their intended temperatures. With someone else's agenda lifted, Taylor has the time and space to pursue her interests.

Stay up past midnight to read *Harry Potter*? Yes. Play Minecraft while watching YouTube videos of other miners and crafters? Absolutely. Unknowingly initiate a conversation about fractions and then ask to solve more difficult problems based on the initial

inquiry? Sure thing. Ride bikes on the valley floor of Yosemite National Park? By all means. Ponder the possibility of parallel universes? Yes, that too. We explore the known and unknown together. As with any partnership founded on trust and respect, we take turns leading and sharing our individual passions, organically influencing each other and propelling our discoveries further.

Sounds like a vacation, doesn't it? Certainly the sense of freedom we enjoy feels vacation-like, but the primary difference is that we are not escaping from anything or anyone. Learning happens at every place and at all times in contexts that are authentic and meaningful. Taylor walks into a toy store and calculates how many My Little Pony blind bags she can buy with her 20 dollar bill. Through the lens of unschooling, we approach life holistically. Life's challenges present themselves naturally and the lines between work and play blur.

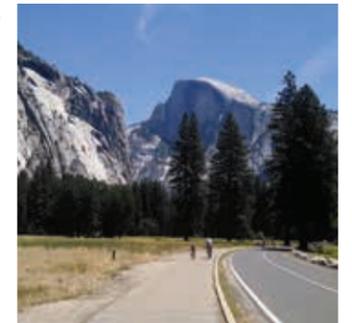
Is living an unschooling lifestyle always rainbows and unicorns? Of course not. At first, we struggled to find other homeschooled

Learning happens at every place and at all times in contexts that are authentic and meaningful.

girls, but through persistence and patience, this challenge continues to dissolve. The ultimate obstacle, however, is fear—fear of falling behind, fear of not doing what everyone else is doing, fear of paving a pioneering path.

But, is this really a pioneering path? At first glance, yes. Upon further reflection, maybe not. For the near entirety of human history, we have been a species of unschoolers. Formal education barely registers a tiny blip on this timeline. When fear arises, when I feel that irrational panic to buy a math workbook, I invite stillness to live in the present moment, not in a projection of a future self. When I consciously choose to dwell in the sweetness and ease of being internally still, clarity inevitably surfaces. Needing to master long division by fifth grade falls away. Cultivating joy and passion and continually asking "I wonder..." and "What if..." become the process and the goal. ❖

Lydia Fong Waggoner is a yoga teacher, women's circle leader, and writer who is passionate about supporting people in the process of gestation.



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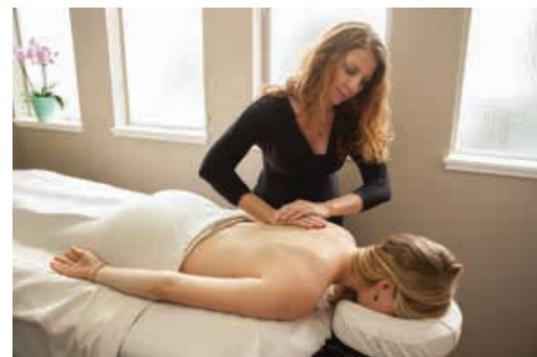


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