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Letter from the Editor: The Mis-Education of Sonya Abrams

By Sonya Abrams

Raising children is a constant reminder of what I know nothing, and not just in the parenting department. They plumb the depths of my ignorance daily, lobbing innocent questions from the backseat of the car. “Mom,” my 4-year-old asks, “is electricity made up of chemicals?” I answer weekly, locking eyes with my 6-year-old as if he must have the answer. I can see pity and disappointment in his eyes. On another occasion, one of them trots out the old standard “Why is the sky blue?” I throw up my hands. “Why isn’t your father here for this kind of thing? This is his department!” Frequently, I rely on a contemporary cop-out and hand them the question. “Why isn’t your father here for this kind of thing? This is his department!” I stall, I sputter, I lock eyes with my 6-year-old as if he must have the answer. I can see pity and disappointment in his eyes. On another occasion, one of them trots out the old standard “Why is the sky blue?” I throw up my hands. “Why isn’t your father here for this kind of thing? This is his department!” Frequently, I rely on a contemporary cop-out and hand them the question.

How do I gauge what’s important in a curriculum and what’s useless information that my kids will never invoke again?

And Anna Gracia, on page 24, tells us what our kids will not—exactly why the sky is blue. Because I’m counting on my kids to one day explain to me the curriculum and what’s useless information that’s important in a curriculum

How do I gauge what’s important in a curriculum and what’s useless information that my kids will never invoke again?

THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: vacation at Thomasland, visiting the Museum of the Crow, dressing already about kindergarten and already missing preschool though school just started; recovering from an epic ghostbuster-themed 3-year-old birthday party; the new season of “The Great British Baking Show” on Netflix; reupping my photography business; completing my first marathon warm—14K/9.7 miles in the River Thames; crying unexpectedly at Crazy Rich Asians; and truth! The Boys I’ve Loved Before!

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COMING NEXT: December/January: Caring for Others, Caring for Ourselves

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

Letter from the Board: A Fond Farewell

By Sasha Fahimi

It’s hard to believe we are midway through the fall and heading straight into the holidays. Time certainly flies when you’re focused on the littles, and I hope by now you have all settled into your schools and daycare routines (or are mastering the sleep schedule with your infants, as the case may be). Yet another year will soon be drawing to a close, and I want to thank all of our volunteers for a job well done on so many events and activities this year, including the Spring Fling, the Fall Fest, and Preschool Preview Night, which I hope many of you attended. I’m proud to note that the Diversity and Inclusion Committee has continued to evolve and has gained a firm foothold in the organization as one of our more active teams; similarly, our online forums have shown strong participation. I encourage you all to spend time on the ggmg.org forums getting tips on everything from sleep training to the SFUSD lottery and/or private school process, and everything in between. Personally, some of my best non-kid-related tips have come from GGMG’s forums!

On a final note, I will be rolling off as board chair within the next month, and our amazing co-chair Karen Brein will be stepping in to fill my (very small) shoes. Karen is truly amazing and devoted to this organization, and I know she will not miss a beat. GGMG will continue to grow and improve with her at the helm. I am so glad that I have been able to give back to this community, which has given me so much over the past four years.

I am so glad that I have been able to give back to this community, which has given me so much over the past four years.

Only one shot can make it to the cover. Here are some of our other favorites.

Cover Outtakes

Cover Photo by Anna Psalmond Photography

Cover models: Daphne (3), Oliver (7), Meelaud (9)

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Sasha Fahimi

Sasha is a senior associate at the family law firm of Sucherman Insalaco, LLP, in San Francisco. She is mom to one rambunctious little girl, Mila, and to her rescue pup, Norman Joe Fahimi. In her free time, she is constantly reading and keeping nights in with bad TV and falling asleep to YouTube makeup tutorials that she can never hope to replicate. She has been volunteering for GGMG since May 2015.
Free Halloween Activities

By Christine Chen

Clancy’s Pumpkin Patch
1620 7th Ave.
October 1 to October 31 from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day
Crawl through the hay maze or take a hayride (small fee) amidst the best assortment of pumpkins in San Francisco. Kids love walking through the pumpkin patch while parents love the photo ops.

Sugar Skulls Craft for Kids
Golden Gate Valley Meeting Rm., 1801 Green St.
October 27 from 1 to 3:30 p.m.
Full of family-friendly activities such as creepy crafts, spider crawl, little squeaks corner, witch’s brew, and much more. Open to the community and appropriate for children ages 5 to 10.

Sacramento Street Shop Trick-or-Treat
3001 to 3693 Sacramento St.
October 31 from 5 to 6 p.m.
Sacramento Street shops provide treats for kids dressed up in costumes.

Li’l Kid, Big City: Hidden Gems of the Embarcadero
By Christine Chen
Beyond the Embarcadero’s well-known sites are some hidden gems worth a visit. For the train-obsessed, the San Francisco Railway Museum celebrates the city’s rich rail transit history with a focus on the streetcars and cable cars unique to SF. There is a full-sized, exact replica of the motorman’s platform of a 1911 streetcar, where kids can experience what it was like to be at the controls. Art lovers should visit Gap headquarters (2 Folsom St.) during the weekdays to see the 60-foot high Richard Serra sculpture—four pieces of thick steel that spiral up, offering excellent echoes as you walk inside. For denim lovers, Levi’s Plaza Park is usually a sunny outdoor space to have lunch after learning the history of the original blue jeans—patented in 1873—before or after you mosey through the visitor center, company store, and brand headquarters. Magowan’s Infinite Mirror Maze (Pier 39) is free for kids ages 5 and under. With 77 mirrors in a 2,000-square-foot maze lit with black lights that make the columns and archways glow, Mirror Maze is a fun, psychedelic experience of perplexing hallways, twists, and dead ends. The SF Giants Children’s Play Area (or Coca-Cola Fan Lot) has no entrance fee on non-game days and is much less crowded! Christine is mother to a 4-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter who are most disappointed that Tyler’s Chocolate tasting tour is an hiatus as they expend their faculty on the Embarcadero.

Night Lantern Ghost Walk and Concert
MainPost in the Presidio
October 25 to October 27 from 7 to 9 p.m.
Enjoy a walk at night in the Presidio and learn an interesting historical spin on the park. Musical storyteller Jill Tracy lends the lantern-lit stroll to some of the most fascinating and supposedly haunted locations in the Presidio.

What to Do With Leftover Halloween Candy

By Catherine Symon
Whether your kids are allowed to eat a little Halloween candy or a lot, sometimes there is just too much corn syrup and red dye 40 for anyone to handle. Here are a few ideas for turning your surplus of Snickers and truckload of Twizzlers into useful teaching moments:

Bring in the Switch Witch
Even preschoolers can learn to understand the value of things as they decide how much candy to “spend” on books, art supplies, or other parent-picked alternatives to their Halloween loot. Set the prices or let your kids practice their negotiation skills by making you an offer. Not sure if your child will trade any candy away? Occasionally the Switch Witch swaps everything in the middle of the night without asking...

Send a military care package
Boost a soldier’s morale while teaching your kids about service and sacrifice. Enlist friends and schoolmates to donate their candy, too. The Department of Defense maintains a list of care package nonprofits that coordinate deliveries, though do your own due diligence in choosing a legitimate provider (scammers want candy, too).

Do science experiments
Why would you eat that Laffy Taffy when you can learn about its physical properties instead? Have your kids hypothesize what candy will do under different conditions and then try it out. Will it float? How long does it take to melt? Can it dissolve in water? Will it break if you drop it from high up?

Make art
Get out the glue and make a Mike and like mosaic, a Twix tower, or a cardboard box house fit for Hansel and Gretel (crochet the figures in your spare time for a complete project). Once the glue goes on, give plenty of reminders: this art is not edible.

Catherine is a medical writer. Last Halloween, she learned heavily on the “it must have expired” response when her then 5-year-old asked where all her candy went.
Public Education

Jennifer Kruh Butterfoss has worked as a school leader for 15 years. She writes for Edutopia and School Leaders Now and has a book coming out called Entering the Lion’s Den: A School Leader’s Guide to Earning Trust, Inspiring Others and Not Getting Eaten in Year One. Find out more at jenniferkuhrbutterfoss.com.

How has public education changed in the past decade?

The adoption of state Common Core learning standards has shifted the dialogue regarding what students should be learning to be successful in the 21st century and how teaching can accommodate this. Students no longer come to school to receive information; with a quick internet search, they can find the answers to any of their questions. Websites offering video lessons like Khan Academy have flipped learning on its head—students don’t need to rely on their teacher to deliver the explicit instruction to solve a complex algebra equation, for example. They can instead watch an expert explain it on the internet at home and then head to school guided towards mastery by teachers. Instead of learning to search the internet in a computer lab, school is where students should be learning, in teams and on laptops, how to use technology to create content for others as opposed to simply consuming content themselves in isolation.

How do you foresee it changing in the next decade?

Innovation in technology keeps occurring at such a fast rate that schools, in general, are struggling to keep up. For students to remain competitive with their peers, and for traditional public schools to keep pace with independent and public charter schools, we should expect to see more focus, training, and support for educators to access and fully integrate technology into their practice. On the flipside, as we begin to gain greater support for educators to access and fully integrate technology into their practice, on the flipside, as we begin to gain greater support for students across classrooms. With less human capital to support time for professionals to meet, implementing school-wide initiatives can be more challenging.

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What can you tell us about IEPs?

It is critically important that parents understand that Individualized Education Plans are legal documents meant to ensure that proper supports and instruction are in place for students with learning disabilities who are having trouble accessing the core curriculum. They are not for every challenge a child might be experiencing. If there isn’t a demonstrated inability to access the curriculum (i.e., the student is performing at or above grade level), assessment and implementing an IEP is not the most appropriate route. The true goal of an IEP is for a student to eventually perform at grade level and therefore no longer need the IEP. Parents confuse getting assessed in school for their child’s learning or behavior can ask the teacher for a Student Assistance Program (SAP) meeting, which may lead to a Student Success Team (SST) meeting. These are both mechanisms to take a hard look at the child’s needs and ensure proper supports are in place without the complexities of a traditional IEP.

What can you tell us about SAPs?

If you would like to know more about HPP, read on. There is also a great opportunity to learn more about HPP in person on October 25. See page 32 for details.

HPP has three major goals:

- Healthy Babies: ensure that parents give birth to healthy babies and successfully bond with their infants.
- Safe, Nurturing Families Where Children Thrive: ensure that parents are knowledgeable, motivated, and empowered to support their children’s success and healthy development.
- Economically Stable Families: ensure that families have access to information and resources that move them towards permanent, stable housing and economic self-sufficiency.

Please join us in continuing this incredible tradition of moms helping moms and make a donation to HPP this holiday season. Any amount is greatly appreciated and will be put to good use supporting HPP families.

How is public education different in California compared to other states? Or is it?

California is ranked 45 out of the 50 states in per-pupil spending. In San Francisco, we are fortunate to have the Public Education Enrichment Fund (PEEF) that ensures our kids have access to the arts, school libraries, and physical education instruction. However, these important staff members are not necessarily full-time. Not only do these classes provide enrichment for students, but they also allow teachers to participate in common planning time to ensure a more consistent education experience for students across classrooms. With less human capital to support time for professionals to meet, implementing school-wide initiatives can be more challenging.

Do you have a room that screams “make me over!” every time you walk through? Bring your ideas and questions to a 90-minute consultation with Lexie Saine—master’s degree in interior architecture and her experience working for numerous San Francisco mom. Her beautiful design aesthetic was also informed by her master’s degree in interior architecture and her experience working for numerous high-end interior design and millwork firms before starting her own firm.

Check out her website at www.lexiesaine.com for stunning examples of her work. Then enter the contest for a chance to consult with her about your own home.

Do you have a room that screams “make me over!” every time you walk through?
I am a preschool teacher with the privilege of working with over 400 families over the course of 25-plus years. Part of my job is reassessing parents that it is OK that their 5-year-old can’t read yet even if his 3-year-old cousin can. I often advocate patience when a child is slowly evolving out of a bitting phase. Most difficult to comprehend is the uneven development in young children. The kid can write 0 to 100 but has bathroom accidents. She can focus on a classroom pet for 30 minutes but can barely sit through a 32-page story. Most parents are pleased to focus on the positives, as they should.

One common refrain when conferencing with parents was, “Wait until you have your own…” It took another 15 years to fully appreciate what they meant.

San Francisco’s cost of living, our profession’s pay scale, and the Midwestern need for stability postponed my family life enough to learn about “geriatric pregnancy.” I, and the incredibly talented kindergarten teacher who married me, felt confident that our combined years of experience in child development and parenting had come naturally. And it did. We committed to best practices we’d learned. Our children would have a routine so predictability would lend confidence. There would be generous allocations of play, sleep, books, “educational” toys, nature, and social interactions. We would not watch any movie until we’d read or heard the original book. Part of my job is reassuring parents that it is okay that their 5-year-old can’t read yet even if his 3-year-old cousin can.

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He lacked one thing all my “teacher-parenting” could not provide: real-world context. All that amazing early learning occurred within an “educational” framework. Protected well at home and at my preschool, he never had to overcome the discomfort that motivates change and practical learning. In structured games and play where inclusion is compulsory, he was exceptional. In the wild west of the recess playground where you compete and compromise for attention, he was excluded because he had little practice navigating negative feelings. All that academic ability meant little to a mind preoccupied with the confusion of being ignored.

Back in the classroom, this experience was the impetus to completely revamp my outlook and curriculum. We now emphasize social-emotional learning and community-building. Social skills are taught with puppets, photos, and real-life anecdotes. We explicitly teach skills like introducing and calming yourself, identifying feelings, inviting or entering into play, respectful assertiveness, and restorative practices. A common vocabulary is used so the children understand one another and can adopt their own social norms. The ABCs and 123s are taught at their speed, but no time is wasted in learning how to be their wonderful, vibrant selves within a community.

Fast forward a few years. My son has a slightly younger brother who is completely different in almost every way, though their upbringing was nearly identical. One is stoic, moody, and feels things deeply. The other is shallower but wears his feelings. One is adventurous with food; the other won’t tolerate cucumber. Both are avid readers and, despite the anti-commercial bias in our house, are into Pokemon and Nintendo as much as any kid. We are, however, holding fast to the “read it before you see it” movie rule. Do I regret the decision to send my son to kindergarten when I did? Yes, but not for the aforementioned reasons. My regret is selfish. I may have inadvertently cheated myself out of a year with this wonderful person.

He is adventurous with food; the other won’t tolerate cucumber. Both are avid readers and, despite the anti-commercial bias in our house, are into Pokemon and Nintendo as much as any kid.

Teacher Andy is an artist, mechanic, and preschool teacher in San Francisco.
**Don't Push the Button! (A Halloween Treat)**

Written and illustrated by Bill Cotter

On Halloween night, most trick-or-treaters will find themselves ringing doorbells, on the hunt for treats. What if a house looks scary; do you ring the doorbell? Here's a fun book that you can easily play-act with your little one with every single button, switch, and bell you have around the home. With easy words and a simple yet engaging plot, this book is a winner for toddlers.

*Ages: 0 to 2 years*

**Little Blue Truck’s Halloween**

Written by Alice Schertle, illustrated by Kenard Pak

On its way to trick-or-treating, the Little Blue Truck picks up animal friends for a Halloween party down the road. What costumes will they wear? Who's hiding under that mask? Children will lift flaps to reveal the truck’s friends in Halloween costumes, focusing on the fun part of Halloween. Looking carefully at the vintage-style illustrations, young ones will love finding elements of traditional Halloween parties: apple bobbing, jack-o’-lanterns, punch, and treats.

*Ages: 3 to 6 years*

**Goodbye Autumn, Hello Winter**

Written and illustrated by Natalia Pérez

From Dark to Light

Written by Isabella Murphy, illustrated by Natalia Pérez

After a near-death experience, young Cassidy Blake enters the spirit world and is able to lift the veil that separates the dead from the living. Her parents, TV hosts for a “most haunted places” show, take her to Edinburgh, Scotland, where things spiral out of control. First, she discovers that she’s not the only person with the “gift” to lift the veil. Second, Edinburgh is where Harry Potter was written, and for good reason. This city is teeming with ghosts and spirits.

*Ages: 6 to 10 years*

**City of Ghosts**

Written by Victoria Schwab

Looking at the city’s haunting history, a brother and sister walk through the woods and a town, noticing signs of the fall season and welcoming winter. Along their journey, they exchange greetings with trees, birds, wind, snow, and other members of the natural world, hearing how they are welcoming winter. This quiet bedtime read will delight younger readers, and as a bonus, it is ethnically and culturally diverse.

*Ages: 3 to 6 years*

**Hello Winter**

Written and illustrated by Jill McElmurry

Hello Winter

Sight

Written by Jessie Greengrass

I had to accord Jessie Greengrass’s *Sight*: A Novel the same treatment. Like Heti, Greengrass wraps existential questions in language that can be as cumbersome as it is beautiful. She too tries to break up her protagonist’s intense rumination. (For Greengrass it’s dalliances into 17th-century scientific breakthroughs and the birth of psychoanalysis, rather than Heti’s coin tossing, and descriptions of grief, as opposed to depression.) And Sight is also far from a page-turner, though it includes breathtaking passages like the following: “She was at birth a half-size model of herself; her blueish skin stretched tight across her skull, the line of her vertebrae showing like threaded pearls beneath a cotton sheet.”

Since Greengrass’s narrator decides to have children, we get vivid descriptions of what that’s actually like—“I hold my daughter close and sing to her as though I might with such tendernesses obliterate her recollection of all the times I haven’t come quite up to scratch”—rather than Heti’s necessarily less precise imaginings of what having children would mean: “On the one hand, the joy of children. On the other hand, the misery of them.” And yet, it is Heti’s book I must recommend to those who have chosen the path she left untrod. Her parents, TV hosts for a “most haunted places” show, take her to Edinburgh, Scotland, where things spiral out of control. First, she discovers that she’s not the only person with the “gift” to lift the veil. Second, Edinburgh is where Harry Potter was written, and for good reason. This city is teeming with ghosts and spirits.

*Ages: 8 to 12 years*
Prenatal Classes
By Jennifer Kuh Butterfoss

Preparing for the arrival of a baby can bring upon a host of key tasks for expectant parents, including participation in prenatal classes. Between getting the nursery ready, making it to various appointments, a busy work schedule—it can be hard to discern which classes and which formats are worth the time. Fortunately, there are a variety of options across San Francisco and online.

Labor and delivery

Often taught in either a one-day intensive format or through a six- to eight-week evening schedule, couples walk away understanding the labor process, the use of birth plans, interventions, effective pain coping practices, birth partner support skills, massage techniques, and much more. Go through the newborn care classes at their new location in the Outer Sunset (recesscollective.org). Or check out classes inspired by the late Sarah McMoyler, RN, BSN, who, saw over 25,000 expectant parents come through her doors for her signature McMoyler Method course. Offered both online and in-person at Kinspace in San Francisco for a more hands on approach, the McMoyler Method has an array of coursework including the ins and outs of newborn care and even a class specifically designed for parents preparing for a second child. Find out more at thebestbirth.com.

Infant first aid and CPR

There is no better course to head off some of the ramped up anxieties that come with first time parenthood like infant first aid and CPR. Being prepared is the best line of defense for new parents and there are numerous courses in the Bay Area. Bay Area CPR (bayareacpr.org) has a popular five-hour course offered on Tuesdays and Saturdays that teaches CPR for all ages, AED, choke saving, bleeding control, seizures, poisoning, and other first aid emergencies. Ouch! CPR (ouchcpr.com) is another organization located in the Outer Sunset that offers a blended learning format for busy professionals. This means participants can learn the content online and then schedule an in-person skills check.

Breastfeeding

Taught by certified lactation consultants, these classes are generally a one-time, 2- to 3-hour event that covers the benefits and basic techniques of breastfeeding, how to prevent, recognize and manage potential difficulties, and considerations for partners. While offered at institutions like CPMC and UCSF, moms in search of a more personalized format can get one-on-one support via a lactation consultant like Katie Howser (katiehowser.com) or Caroline Kerherve (carolinekerherve.com) after baby is born. You can also find peer support from fellow moms through the SF chapter of La Leche League with monthly meetings offered on weekday mornings, evenings, and weekends.

Caring for an infant

Eager to master swaddling your newborn into the cutest burrito ever? Want to overcome your anxiety about diaper changing? Recess has a host of newborn care classes at their new location in the Outer Sunset (recesscollective.org). Or check out classes inspired by the late Sarah McMoyler, RN, BSN, who, saw over 25,000 expectant parents come through her doors for her signature McMoyler Method course. Offered both online and in-person at Kinspace in San Francisco for a more hands on approach, the McMoyler Method has an array of coursework including the ins and outs of newborn care and even a class specifically designed for parents preparing for a second child. Find out more at thebestbirth.com.

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Preparing for baby’s arrival doesn’t have to be all seriousness and hard work. Use this special time for a date night by scheduling dinner out before or after the class. See if the instructor is willing to share an email list of class participants to make connections with other expectant parents in the city. Snap a few photos of you and your partner swaddling a doll and use these as keepsakes for the baby book.

With the right attitude, taking a few useful classes will be part of your new family’s memories.
Our Strange and Wonderful Public Schools

SFUSD’s school selection process isn’t as scary as it seems. Here’s a freshly updated version of our hugely popular article from 2015

By Gail Cornwall Photographs by Carmen Durfam Photography

I t happens all the time. A mom and I bond over our desire to explore this vibrant city with our budding urbanites in tow. I envision a friendship that blossoms over the years. Then she says, “We’re looking in Marin.” “Why? Your place is perfect. You love San Francisco!” “Yeah, but Mabel will be ready for kindergarten soon…”

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.

Getting started assessing schools

To a parent hoping to evaluate the 72 public elementary schools in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), several sources of information are available, including state test results, past years’ demand rankings, school tours, the Enrollment Fair, the Enrollment Guide, demographics (as well as other data) from SFUSD’s website, and word of mouth—which includes websites, blogs, and guidance from the nonprofit Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco (PPS-SF).

Parents looking for quantitative analysis usually turn first to test scores and demand rankings. When my oldest applied to kindergarten in 2013, the Academic Performance Index (API), allowed parents to access each school’s raw standardized test scores as well as a statewide rank on a 1-to-10 scale. The California Department of Education (CDE) has since revamped the system and now releases the California School Dashboard (www.ccsd.ca.gov/SchoolBoard/#!/Home). By pulling up SFUSD on the dashboard and then clicking on the link that says “list all schools in this district,” you can see a colored pie chart representing each school in the “English Language Arts” and “Mathematics” columns. That color is meant to represent both last year’s scores and where that school is trending over time. Clicking on an individual school and then the “Status and Change Report” column provides more specific information. My kid’s school, Rooftop Elementary, is listed as “High” for English scores at “17.9 points above level 3,” for example, while Bessie Carmichael comes up as “Low” at “41.2 points below level 3.”

If it sounds like the state is making test scores more difficult to find, that’s because it is. The CDE’s website says “reducing the multiple measures to a single number would leave out information that is important.” Indeed, test scores are not, and never have been, a reliable proxy for school quality. Schools are described as “Socioeconomically Disadvantaged,” “English Learners,” and “Students with Disabilities” tend to score lower. A school with a higher percentage of these students will therefore have lower test scores, even if it is making tremendous strides educating them. The phenomenon has led many to assert that the numbers say more about incoming student quality and to refer to the old statistic as the “Affluent Parent Index.” And it’s why the new report shows Bessie Carmichael as green and “High” in the column marked “English learner progress” while Rooftop is yellow and “Medium” in that regard.

What’s more, all standardized testing fails to capture educational success—actual learning—to some degree. As Albert Einstein said, “Everything that counts cannot be counted; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.” That doesn’t mean the numbers are worthless, however. Back in 2013, I figured at a school with a statewide rank of 1, 2, or 3, the majority of students struggled 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 exceeded the standards. The same inference can likely be drawn using the new “High,” “Medium,” and “Low” labels (though I personally wouldn’t rule out all “Low” scoring schools).

Demand rankings should also be used circumspectly. SFUSD releases a list of the top 25 most requested schools in the prior year’s lottery as well as supporting data that enables a parent to 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 busing 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, for many years, including this past one, it was advantageous to slap high-demand schools at the end of one’s list (because of the lottery “swap” or “transfer” feature that has now been disabled). Since the metric is calculated using the total number of requests, the result is a demand-rank that doesn’t accurately reflect actual eagerness to enroll.

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.

Beyond test scores and popularity

Although all public schools use the Common Core State Standards, quite a bit of pedagogical variation remains. There’s SF Public Montessori, which focuses on the Montessori method, and other schools feature project-based learning or have a science focus. Back in 2013, I walked into one classroom where the children sat 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 predominately child-led. One school I toured placed a premium on discipline, requiring uniformed students to walk in silent, single-file lines down the hallways, while others allowed 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 84 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 I 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 homogeneous schools, whereas others want their children to be surrounded by those of a similar background. A lot of
parents prefer language instruction of some sort, we had no interest, which drove us toward the confusingly labeled “General Education” track. A lack of either arts or movement during some part of the day was a deal-breaker for me, but a friend couldn’t care less. I was ready to rally the troops; others want to know the PTA is already well-established. All this is to say, what one parent considers a school that no one can be very different from what her neighbor seeks. Though the SFUSD website contains quite a bit of qualitative information, tours and the Enrollment Fair (generally held in October) are the best way to learn about school culture as well as things like classroom feel, the presence of play structures, field trips, collaboration with businesses, sports teams, parent involvement, and the quality of the principal (which, by the way, should be judged based on what teachers and parents at the school think about leadership not whether their touring their pre-tour spiel makes you want to hire or grab a beer together). 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 each school tick down its remaining pool of applicants a number. In other words, your child will have a separate lottery number at each school, meaning the common fear of ending up at the end of every school’s list is misplaced. When there are more applicants than available seats, some children of means benefit from this preference, especially in rapidly gentrifying areas like the Mission. (For this and other reasons, the CTP-1 tie-breaker is the most controversial aspect of the lottery process. Some parents who think it’s unfair try to give this tie-breaker less sway, but the Board of Education has thus far rejected these proposals, noting that public school choice in San Francisco is intended “to help create diverse learning environments.”)

### Tie-breaker Four

**Tie-breaker Four:** Finally, students who live in the attendance area of an AA school will receive seats first. 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, there could be 65 seats available, and you still might not get a seat. 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 the computer runs through this whole process and school right off the bat. It’s true that these

The lottery works

The SFUSD enrollment lottery is infamous for being confusing, and it is in many ways a terribly outdated, overly cumbersome disappointment. But it’s also a quick study. Parents can apply to as many of SFUSD’s kindergarten programs as they like; that’s more than 100 options, counting language programs separately. There are “attendance area” (AA) schools for which residing near the school may play into your child’s enrollment process and “city-wide” schools for program which it won’t. Each school that is not “city-wide” has an area of In the 2018 lottery, 73 percent of kindergarten applicants received their first or second choice placement in the first round of the lottery. How do you maximize for walkability, to contemplate the confusingly labeled “General Education” track, something SFUSD’s Educational Placement Center (EPC), PPS-SF, and the Enrollment Guide provide more information about.

Ward your odds and the child’s-eye view

Of the 30-plus families with whom we navigated the enrollment process for our daughter in 2013, 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 upwards of $10K per child per year, the state average for private school tuition. (One can even get a deposit or tuition payment through careful navigation of the contract termination process or by purchasing tuition reimbursement insurance.) SFUSD statistics support anecdotes and anecdotal evidence. In the 2018 lottery, 73 percent of kindergarten applicants received their first or second choice placement in the first round of the lottery. More than half (63 percent) got assigned to their first choice school off the bat. It’s true that these statistics include the younger siblings of already enrolled students, but they’re impressive nonetheless. It’s unclear exactly how many families obtain their first choice school assignment by hanging in there through the summer, but Rachel Nip, formerly of PPS-SF, reported in 2015, “Last year about 700 kindergarten families received a seat at their waitpool school.”

A small number of families inevitably receive the short end of the stick, but the odds are in their favor. The notion that SFUSD has very few good schools that are impossible to get into is just plain wrong. The more families 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 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, flip through the Enrollment Guide, attend the Enrollment Fair, tour the handful of schools that seem like they might work well, and add on any others you’d be willing to give a try. 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. 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 optimize walkability, to contemplate whether our child would thrive in a larger or smaller school, to seek out a disciplinary ethos that fit us well. 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 is a former public school teacher and reviewer (who now works as a stay-at-home mother and freelance writer in San Francisco. You can follow her on Facebook (@gailkimmerviet) or Twitter (@gailcornwall), or read more at gailcornwall.com.)
Finding the perfect preschool doesn’t have to be overwhelming if you know what to look for

Did you know that preschool is not required for your child? The state of California does not actually require formal instruction for children until first grade, yet many parents opt to send their children to preschool for developmental benefits and/or for child care reasons. But among the myriad preschool options out there, how do you figure out what’s what?

Preschools by funding type
When selecting a preschool for your child, start by evaluating their sources of funding. Public programs are free to those who qualify using primarily income criteria. Subsidized programs have a third-party sponsor paying all or part of the tuition, again usually for families who qualify primarily on an income basis. Private programs are fee-based, where each family pays tuition. A private program may be nonprofit or for profit, religious or secular. A school may also have a combination of programs; for example, a private program may have a certain number of slots set aside for children receiving scholarship funds to cover tuition costs.

Preschools by organizational type
A second way of sorting preschools for your search is by organization, each offering pros and cons. Large, center-based child care takes place in a commercial building and often has larger classrooms, outdoor play spaces, organized training for staff, and multiple teachers to serve larger groups of children. Family child care takes place in the provider’s home and offers enrollment restricted by the facility’s license. Small centers can accept 6 to 8 children, and large family centers can accept 12 to 14 children. The state of California does not require specific educational training for family child caregivers; however, many facilities are operated by experienced parents and hired assistants. A co-operative nursery school (or co-op) relies heavily on parent participation, usually in exchange for reduced tuition rate. Co-ops have a combination of paid teachers and parent volunteers teaching on any given day. Lastly, SFUSD offers school district preschool programs at a limited number of their schools. Once enrolled in these programs, children may have a chance to progress into kindergarten at the same school, offering consistency and minimizing transitions.

Timing and transitions
Another factor to consider is how long your child will be at each care location before starting kindergarten. For example, if your child is with a parent, grandparent, or nanny until age 2 before entering group care, you may wish to select a preschool where your child can remain until they leave for pre-kindergarten or transitional kindergarten at an SFUSD school, rather than change schools at age 4 for pre-kindergarten (pre-K, which is different than preschool) or transitional kindergarten (TK), and then change schools again for kindergarten. As another example, if your child enters an infant–toddler family child care, and you later choose to move your child to a larger preschool to experience a larger peer group, you may plan for your child to “graduate” from that preschool directly into pre-K/TK/kindergarten.

Preschools by curriculum
Preschools of all types generally fall into one of several curriculum categories. Academic programs often provide direct instruction that is didactic in nature and teacher-centered, meaning that the teachers prepare and present materials for the children to learn. Developmental curricula, such as Bank Street or High Scope approaches, are often packaged by companies for teachers to execute. Rather than being entirely teacher-centered, they rely on interaction between teachers and children as fundamental to the learning process. Emergent programs are child centered, meaning that the curriculum themes and learning spring from the children’s demonstrated interests. This is sometimes also called project-based or project–approach curriculum.

In the end, trust your instincts
Once you’ve considered the funding type, organizational type, and curriculum, you can start narrowing down your search for schools. But what should you look for when touring preschools?

First, go with your gut. Carefully consider whether that super highly regarded school is worth the extra expense or the inconvenient
Parents sometimes ask, what is my child learning in preschool? Children develop across four developmental domains: physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and creative. Ideally, preschool programs, regardless of type, should seek to meet children’s needs across all four domains.

The important work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) posited that children learn as they play. By World War II, when women were working in factories where child care was provided, Vygotsky’s theories had ample opportunity to be evaluated and developed. Play became understood as a key way to foster children’s development across the four developmental domains.

Many preschools provide free play time, recognizing that when children play with open-ended materials such as blocks, sand, water, and paint, they build foundational skills that they will use in kindergarten and beyond. For example, repeated exploration with painting allows children to learn to express ideas on paper and out into the world, while using paint and paintbrush serves as a type of writing tool. Sensory play with water allows children to explore movement as well as scientific concepts such as gravity, flow, and measurement. Playing with blocks provides children with opportunities to make discoveries, act out their ideas, work with variables such as weight and balance, and to consider spatial relations and measurement. Fostering a love of learning and discovery is ideal preparation for kindergarten and life in general.

Most importantly, play stimulates children’s social and emotional learning as they work together on a project and navigate failures such as when their blocks fall down. They participate in collaborative conversations and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas. “A child who has the opportunity for self-directed play builds social and emotional health, confidence, creativity, self-discipline and problem-solving skills,” says Amanda Riccetti, director of Big City Montessori School in San Francisco. “To support this, we must learn the art of observation, so not to interrupt their ideas, goals, and motive of activity.”

Although preschool isn’t required by the state, it can be a time of rich development for your child. Says Erica Almaguer, director, Early Childhood Education Center, Associated Students of San Francisco State University: “A high-quality play-based program will develop and enhance children’s soft skills. These early experiences truly set the foundation for them in having a positive sense of self and successful human interactions.”

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After completing the application process, the next step is to schedule a tour of the preschool. Tours begin soon. Each family will receive a tour date and time via email. GGMG members receive a 50% discount on the application fee.

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Growing up, my friends and I thought sex was a bad word. Our rebel eight-year-old selves would wait until all adults were out of earshot then whisper it amongst ourselves, cackling at our bravado. It wasn’t our fault; really; sex was one of those words adults only used when they thought we weren’t listening. Sex was a grown-up word.

Many years later, long past the point at which “the talk” would have been either helpful or informative, my dad avoided the topic altogether, trusting the backs up these observations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that young people ages 15 to 24 represent 26 percent of the sexually active population. Unfortunately, a 2012 survey conducted by Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Family Circle magazine, with support from Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health at New York University, also found that one in six teens ages 15 to 18 said their parents had never spoken with them about anything related to sex, educational or otherwise. With so much of the heavy lifting relegated to parents, it’s no wonder that the information be medically accurate.

A brief history of sex education in schools

Though religious pamphlets and books on “sacred virtue” have been available since the 1830s (hint: Google the origin of the Graham cracker), it wasn’t until 1913 that sex education was first introduced to schools. Ella Flagg Young, Chicago’s superintendent and the first female head of a major urban school district, developed a “sex hygiene” course for her high school students, but thanks to heavy resistance by the Catholic Church and conservative school board members, both she and the program were ousted from the district a short time later. Sex ed resurfaced during World War I, when rampant sexually transmitted diseases among soldiers reached such a fever pitch that American society began to view it as a public health issue (estimates suggest half of all servicemen had an STD). In 1919, a White House task force on child welfare endorsed sex ed in public schools, and three years later, the U.S. Public Health Service released a manual on sex education in high schools. According to Neaveveek, between 20 and 40 percent of U.S. school systems in the 1920s had programs in social hygiene and sexuality. However, these programs still focused primarily on the risks of masturbation and intercourse outside of marriage.

Over the next three decades, sex ed exploded in both primary and secondary school campuses. The U.S. Office of Education published materials and trained teachers on the subject and the U.S. Public Health Service labeled school sexuality education an “urgent need.” Ironically, it was during the sexual revolution of the late ’60s and early ’70s that sex ed began to face fierce resistance. Religious groups like the Christian Crusade and the John Birch Society attacked sex education for promoting promiscuity and moral depravity, including encouraging students to become homosexuals. The conversation around sex education turned political and by 1975—two years after Roe v. Wade—20 state legislatures had voted to restrict or abolish sexuality education.

The HIV pandemic of the ’80s, however, brought the topic back to the forefront, and by 1993, approximately 47 states mandated some form of sex education for students—up from a mere three in 1980—and all 50 supported education about AIDS. For the first time, previously off-limits topics like anal sex were introduced into classrooms. It was at this same time that conservatives and religious groups began to gain momentum, rebranding “sex education” as “abstinence education.” In 1996, Congress directed a record $250 million toward abstinence-only education as part of the Welfare Reform Bill.

Since then, Congress has continued to appeal to both progressive and conservative causes, directing tens of millions of dollars each year toward what are now dubbed “abstinence-only until marriage programs,” or AOUMs, while simultaneously funding competing programs such as the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs (TPPP), one of a number of factors credited with slashing the teen birth rate in half between 2007 and 2017. But recent changes to the funding guidance for TPPP (following a lawsuit to halt the premature ending of the program entirely) may shift the direction of future sex ed programs in the U.S., with the current administration no longer mandating sex education as part of the Welfare Reform Bill.

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What is sex education?

The CDC has a list of 16 topics it deems critical to sex education, ranging from “how to properly use a condom” to “how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, STDs, and pregnancy.” However, it also found that as of 2014, fewer than half of all states and only 20 percent of middle schools provided instruction on all of the 16 critical topics. In fact, the Guttmacher Institute reports that as of August 1, 2018, only 24 states and the District of Columbia currently require that public schools even teach sex education, and only 13 states require that the information be medically accurate.

Some advocates believe that sex education should expand beyond the scope of anatomy and sexual intercourse. Planned Parenthood, for example, argues that sex education should cover not only sexual behavior and sexual health, but also gender roles, sexual orientation, gender identity, and relationships, among other topics. The Center for American Progress analyzed the education standards in each state and found that only 10 states and the District of Columbia mention the terms “healthy relationships,” “sexual assault,” or “consent” in their sex education programs.

LGBT-inclusiveness in sex education is even more rare. A 2013 survey of nearly 8,000 students between the ages of 13 and 21 conducted by The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that fewer than 6 percent of LGBT students reported that their health classes had included positive representations of LGBT-related topics.

Sex education in California

California has many policies in place to ensure standardized and wide-reaching access to sex ed. The California Healthy Youth Act, which took effect January 1, 2016, requires that all school districts in the state provide

Let’s talk about sex (ed) in school and why we need more of it

By Anna Gracia

Many years later, long past the point at which “the talk” would have been either helpful or informative, my dad avoided the topic altogether, trusting the backs up these observations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that young people ages 15 to 24 represent 26 percent of the sexually active population. Unfortunately, a 2012 survey conducted by Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Family Circle magazine, with support from Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health at New York University, also found that one in six teens ages 15 to 18 said their parents had never spoken with them about anything related to sex, educational or otherwise. With so much of the heavy lifting relegated to parents, it’s no wonder that the information be medically accurate.

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Over the next three decades, sex ed exploded in both primary and secondary school campuses. The U.S. Office of Education published materials and trained teachers on the subject and the U.S. Public Health Service labeled school sexuality education an “urgent need.” Ironically, it was during the sexual revolution of the late ’60s and early ’70s that sex ed began to face fierce resistance. Religious groups like the Christian Crusade and the John Birch Society attacked sex education for promoting promiscuity and moral depravity, including encouraging students to become homosexuals. The conversation around sex education turned political and by 1975—two years after Roe v. Wade—20 state legislatures had voted to restrict or abolish sexuality education.

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Sex education in California

California has many policies in place to ensure standardized and wide-reaching access to sex ed. The California Healthy Youth Act, which took effect January 1, 2016, requires that all school districts in the state provide
students with integrated, comprehensive, and accurate HIV prevention and sexual health education at least once in high school and once in middle school. Much of the education was already in place (such as HIV prevention education), but the law ensured all districts were in compliance and updated curriculum to include information about sexual harassment, sexual assault, adolescent relationship violence, intimate partner violence, and sex trafficking.

Schools are required to notify parents 14 days ahead of any sex education instruction and parents may opt their child out of it, but the law prohibits active consent, where parents must “opt-in” for their child to receive the information in the first place. Abstinence-only education is also prohibited in the state, and while the curriculum does discuss positive benefits of abstaining from sexual activity, it is required that this perspective be accompanied by “medically accurate information on other methods of preventing HIV and other STIs and pregnancy.”

[O]ne in six teens ages 15 to 18 said their parents had never spoken with them about anything related to sex, educational or otherwise.

Most notably, the California Healthy Youth Act specifies that instruction and materials should “affirmatively recognize that people have different sexual orientations and, when discussing or providing examples of relationships or couples, shall be inclusive of same-sex relationships” and “teach pupils about gender, gender expression, gender identity, and explore the harm of negative gender stereotypes.” It also expressly prohibits the teaching or promotion of religious doctrine in relation to sex education (more information about the California Healthy Youth Act can be found at www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/se/faq.asp). Additionally, California was the first state to recognize affirmative consent, otherwise known as “yes means yes”...

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The fact is a significant portion of American youth is engaging in sexual activity, though rates have dropped dramatically over the past decade—a fact many experts largely attribute to access to straightforward information about contraception and sex both in schools and online.

According to a 2017 survey by the CDC, 40 percent of high school students say they’ve had sex, while 10 percent have had sex with four or more partners. And while data is much more limited on the sexual behaviors of children before high school, a 2009 CDC survey found that 6 percent of high school students reported having sex before the age of 13.

Additionally, a 2014 study published in the journal Pediatrics found that 20 percent of middle school students with text-capable cell phones had engaged in sexting (sending and receiving sexually explicit cell phone text or photo messages), which the authors of the study associate with an increased probability of risky sexual behavior.

Both the United Nations and the World Health Organization argue that young people have the right to information about sexual health and parents largely agree. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States reports the opt-out rate for sex education is low across the country, ranging from less than 1 percent to as high as 5 percent in cities where data on this issue is kept. The American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Public Health Association all agree that comprehensive sex education and HIV prevention programs are effective in reducing high-risk sexual behavior in adolescents.

But perhaps the best argument for sex education comes from Laura Lindberg, a research scientist at the Guttmacher Institute: “We tell people not to drink and drive,” she says. “We don’t teach them not to drive... We would never withhold information about seat belts because they wouldn’t know how to protect themselves.”

Anna Gracia is a former teacher who is currently working on a young adult novel that highlights the good, the bad, and the frequently awkward side of teen sex and dating.
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**NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS**

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**Neighborhood 1 and Neighborhood 3 are now combined under Neighborhood 3. Please visit our Neighborhood Group on the GGMG website for details on all of the below and more!**

**Movie Night**
- Join us for Movie Night at the Presidio Theater on Monday afternoons. At these sensory-friendly shows, the lights are low and the sound is turned down slightly. Everyone is welcome (including crying babies) and talking and noise are allowed. Check ggmg.org/Calendar and Neighborhood Groups for movie info and to RSVP.
  - **DATE:** Monday afternoons
  - **PLACE:** Presidio Theater (3340 Chestnut St.)

**Storytime with the Elderly at Providence Place Assisted Living**
- We’ll do an informal story time with songs and books at the facility, then visit with the residents after. All ages are welcome and arrive whenever works for your schedule (even feel free to stop by with a sleeping infant!). We’ll have a face painter and a variety of simple age-appropriate activities. For children under age 5, please bring blankets and pillows. Parents are welcome to attend.
  - **DATE:** Friday, October 26 from 10 a.m. to noon
  - **PLACE:** Providence Place (2456 Geary Blvd.)

**Halloween Playdate**
- Join us for a festive Halloween playdate at Presidio Heights Playground. All ages are welcome and arrive whenever works for your schedule (even feel free to stop by with a sleeping infant!). We’ll have a face painter and a table set up with some snacks and Halloween crafts. Costumes are encouraged!
  - **DATE:** Friday, October 26 from 10 a.m. to noon
  - **PLACE:** Presidio Heights Playground (3457 Clay St.)

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**COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

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**Learn About HPP over Tea**
- The Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP) works to break the cycle of childhood poverty and is our partner for our upcoming holiday funds drive. This event is a chance to get to know this wonderful organization and learn about the important work they do for the community.
  - **DATE:** Sunday, November 11
  - **TIME:** 9 a.m. to noon
  - **PLACE:** 4102 24th St.
  - **COST:** FREE

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**KIDS ACTIVITIES**

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**Thanksgiving Storytime and Crafting at Charlie’s Corner**
- Join us for music, story, craft, and snacks centered around the theme of “Thankfulness” along with extra-special GGMG activities. Drop in any time during this open house event, but please RSVP as it is sure to sell out! This activity is most suitable for kids ages 2 to 6, but younger and older kids are welcome.
  - **DATE:** Sunday, November 11
  - **TIME:** 9 a.m. to noon
  - **PLACE:** 4102 24th St.
  - **COST:** FREE

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**REGISTER FOR EVENTS AT GGMG.ORG/CALENDAR**
GGMG’s Fall Festival
Please join us for GGMG's Annual Fall Festival at a new location, SFF Soccer Field!

We’ll be kicking off the season with a day of fun! There will be bounce houses, live music for kids of all ages, pumpkin decorating, a photo booth with photo souvenirs, food trucks, a nursing lounge, and lots of other fun activities! Be sure to visit each activity booth as most sponsors organize their own raffles. The first 250 members will receive a goody bag.

Fall Festival is free to members, their partner, and child(ren). Limited tickets are available for purchase for non-member adults and children. This year we are scanning tickets for a more efficient check-in process; please download your tickets to your mobile device prior to your arrival, or present your printed tickets at check-in. Be sure to download or print a ticket for each member of your party.


Volunteers needed! All Fall Festival volunteers will receive a gift card and qualify for the volunteer-only raffle! To volunteer, fill out the form at https://tinyurl.com/y75qld5u

DATE: Saturday, October 13
TIME: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
RSVP: ggmg@lists2020.eventbrite.com

Please email any questions to rsvp@ggmg.org.

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT
Make a Connection
Whether you are a new member or a longtime veteran, the Membership Committee wants to thank you for your loyalty to GGMG. Our committee ensures that members are engaged and aware of all the benefits that membership offers. Our ever-popular Newborn Playgroup Formation event is coming up on October 20 at Presidio Sports Basement. If you are a new mom or just had another baby, this is the event for you! In addition, due to popular demand, we are holding our first Toddler Playgroup Formation event on October 23 at Alamo Square Park. This is suited for moms seeking to form a new playgroup with children ages 2 to 3 years old. Come join us at the playground and make some new friends. Don’t forget to RSVP to these events on ggmg.org.

Use GGMM to meet other moms face to face and turn online connections into real-life friendships; GGMM playgroups can be a lifesaver for expectant new moms. Find your due-date subgroup at www.ggmg.org/groups.

GGMG AT WORK: COMMITTEES

MEMBER SUPPORT
Guidelines to Live by
Work for what you believe in.
Your choices and actions have consequences. You can be someone’s hero.
Life has ups and downs. Be grateful for the ups, and rely on your friends and family to get through the tough times. We are stronger together.

Other people may try to tell you what to do. Think for yourself before you act.
Use your own judgment.
The world is filled with people, and each of us is but one small part.
Support those who feel ignored.
Strive to earn respect from others.
When someone does or says something unkind, give them the benefit of the doubt that something else going on in their life could be causing their behavior.
Do your best. Aim for better, not perfect.
Do the right thing, without the expectation of gratitude or reward.
If you encounter someone losing control, be kind to them. Those who need kindness the most are often the ones who least able to express it.
Learn well and often. Learn by observing.
And remember: we are all in this together.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
Día de los Muertos: Celebrating Those We Have Lost
Perspective from the Diversity and Inclusion Committee
By Marcie Longoria-Charbonneau
Growing up in South Texas, we were more involved in Halloween activities than Día de los Muertos. It wasn’t until my grandmother set up an altar for her deceased brother that the essence of the day hit home for me. Día de los Muertos (October 31 to November 2) originated with the Aztec belief that the deceased should be celebrated without mourning.

The Día de los Muertos altar starts with a photo of the person you’re honoring. Place the photo on a tiered altar, which can represent heaven, earth, the underworld, or even the seven sins. Light a candle to guide the spirit home and leave out a glass of water and the person’s favorite foods as an offering. Add marigolds (mariposas) and cempasúchil (cempasúchil) flowers, which represent death in Mesoamerican culture. Other ofrendas (offerings) include mariposas (butterflies), which embody the spirits migrating home for a visit, or skulls and cempasúchil (skeletons) made with bread, sugar, or chocolate. Whether an altar is a simple photo with a candle or an elaborate multilevel showpiece, remember the spirit of celebration. Día de los Muertos is for those we have lost and carry forever in our hearts.

Join our team! diversity@ggmg.org

CAREERS AND ENTREPRENEURS
The Mom Network at Work
Are you thinking about changing companies or careers? Or just hoping to network with other moms? The Careers and Entrepreneurs Committee has lots of opportunities for you to do just that in October and November!
Back by popular demand, we are hosting our second tech mixer of the year on Thursday, October 18 from 4 to 7 p.m. Whether you work in the tech world or are interested in learning more about it, we hope you will join us for some wine, cheese, and networking.
If you’ve ever considered working at a nonprofit or joining a nonprofit board, we hope you’ll join us on Friday, October 26 from noon to 1 p.m. We’ll be hosting a nonprofit panel where moms who work in the nonprofit world will share their experiences and answer your questions.
We will also be hosting our regular monthly networking lunches in October and November, which—like all of our events—are open to all GGGM members. We hope to see you there! Check out the GGGM calendar at www.ggmg.org/calendar to learn more and sign up for these events.

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Volunteers of the Month

Congratulations to Esha Dash, Semmantha Chie, Kyra Jablonsky, and Jenny Shaw, our volunteers of the month! Esha is co-chair of the Social Media Committee; Semmantha is an ambassador for Neighborhood Meetups in Neighborhood 6 and co-chair of the Kids Activities Committee; Kyra is a volunteer with the Diversity & Inclusion Committee; and Jenny is senior editor of GGMG Magazine.

ESHA, WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...
Parenting Advice: Keep an open mind and listen to the advice everyone has to offer, but decide for yourself which advice you want to take.

SEM-MANTHA, WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...
Book: Any epic fantasy, preferably with dragons; Destination: Any tropical location with a beach and a cocktail with my name on it.

KYRA, WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...
Book: Housekeeping by Marilynne Robinson; Film: M. in America; Restaurant: Garibaldi’s.

JENNY, WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...
Restaurant: Any place with Northern Chinese food. It’s what I grew up on, so it’s my “chicken soup for the soul.” Or boba tea.

Taking care of your child’s hearing starts early. Mention this ad for a free hearing screening for your child!

At Sound Speech & Hearing Clinic, our Doctors of Audiology celebrate communication! Visit us at 251 Rhode Island Street in San Francisco. Call 415-580-7604 or email info@soundshc.com to schedule your free screening.

Our winners will enjoy gift cards to International Orange Spa (2044 Fillmore St.). Book yourself a massage today at www.internationalorange.com.

New Arrivals

Brittany Lasky
Kathleen M
Sara Isaacs
Chandav P. T

Baby Marlowe Jean
Baby Nora Josephine
Baby Talia Hannah
Baby Aurora Ray

Congratulations to Brittany Lasky! She will be pampering her little one with products from Babyganics. These plant-based, tear-free, hypoallergenic cleansers and lotions clean and protect skin from head to toe.

To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a Babyganics gift set, fill out the form at http://tinyurl/ggmgNewArrivals.
Day two of kindergarten, my son surprised me by proudly writing numbers one through five. In Chinese. He can barely write his numbers in English, so this development was indeed unexpected, considering it was the first day of a twice weekly Mandarin Chinese after-school program. Wary of drilling, I had specifically asked the teachers about curriculum; they assured me that learning Chinese would be fun via games and songs. As I watched him practice writing numbers four and five with correct pen strokes on special one-inch square grid paper, I cringed. Was I turning into my parents?

My parents, educated until high school in China, had decided it would be genius to homeschool me for the Mandarin language. Neither had any teaching credentials or experience with children before me. But they had passion and dogged determination that I would learn to speak, read, and write Chinese. They also had a curriculum, if you could call advice cobbled from Chinese Reader’s Digest and their own recollection of their education a formal plan.

My “formal” language education started at age 3 when mom started teaching me rhymes from children’s books on tapes. At my best, I might have memorized 20 or so songs on par with “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” My family’s favorite rhyme was one that essentially made fun of my generous head circumference: Big head. Big head. Rain no fear. You have umbrella. I have big head. It is far more endearing in Mandarin, I promise.

By age 4, I had memorized and written the bopomofo, a transliteration of pinyin invented in Taiwan. It had 26 symbols, each representing a sound in Mandarin that allows you to recognize and “read” a Chinese character, which can have up to 57 strokes! You could sing the bopomofo much like the ABCs, and it is the closest equivalent to the English alphabet. In Chinese, you really can’t spell or sound out a word; rather, you have to learn the parts and maybe have half a chance at being literate. Chinese has approximately 80,000 characters combined to create 370,000 words. English has about 173,000 words in use. However, an educated person need only know 8,000 characters; to read a newspaper, just 3,000.

Written Chinese is a collection of hieroglyphs evolved from pictures. Children learn to read by rote memorization of characters made of radicals, which are graphical components of a Chinese character. For example, the radical for female and the radical for male placed together forms the word “good.” The female radical combined with the horse radical creates the word “mother.” Horse sounds like mother, only in a different tone, so adding the female radical creates a new word (and meaning) altogether. These occasional tidbits at least made my lessons interesting. Unfortunately, most lessons involved writing pages of Chinese stories or whatever words my parents decided I needed to practice (380 daily characters to be precise). My favorite uncle, an engineer, designed special paper for this endeavor. This paper had nine columns of 20 squares that fit perfectly on standard A4 paper. I hated it. The tedious repetition, the rote memorization, the weirdness of it all. My classmates played ball after school. I had boring parent-imposed Chinese lessons.

After college, I decided to go overseas to take a Chinese language program. Prior to that, I wanted nothing to do with learning the language on my own, feeling that speaking it fluently was enough. Without bopomofo, I read at the first grade level, if that. With knowledge of bopomofo, I deciphered the official English pinyin system and learned how to use a Chinese dictionary (before Google Translate).

Today, I marvel at the beauty of the written language, the internal logic of how the radicals are combined, and lament the simplified characters adopted by mainland China to increase its abysmal literacy rate. To me, this simplification comes at the expense of losing some of the language’s rich history. With this backstory in mind, I embark on a new language journey with my son. It’s time for some formal education in Chinese for just a few hours a week; perhaps he will even have some fun. I expect he will, like me, resent the language and its complicated beauty. Perhaps, though, his chest will continue to puff with pride as he shows me his newfound skills.

Sandy is a reluctant but stubborn Chinese “teacher” (at her German husband’s urging) to her son, who would rather speak English except when he needs something.
statement of purpose:
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 our lives and in the lives of our growing families.

Are you a Bay Area mom? Want to receive this magazine? Join GGMG today at www.ggmg.org.