



Audacious
foundation

2025 ECE BEST PRACTICES HANDBOOK

• LIGHTING THE WAY WITH FOOD AND PLAY •

Lompoc Valley Children's Center Lab School AT ALLAN HANCOCK COLLEGE



Director: Dr. Maria (Maggie) Suarez

Email: maria.suarez@hancockcollege.edu

Number of Children: 26 Number of Staff: 9

The Allan Hancock College Early Childhood Studies

Children's Center Lab School programs, support students and families within the college and community by providing high-quality early care and education services through innovative and developmentally appropriate teaching practices, respectful relationship building, and providing meaningful experiences and environments that honor the child in the context of their family, community, and society.





Bright Start Child Development Center

1617 Anacapa St. Santa Barbara CA 93101

Founder & Director: Marcela Caceres-Gelinas.

Phone: (805) 963-2024 E-mail: mail@brightstartonline.com

Bright Start is a private preschool inspired by a socio-constructivist philosophy serving 78 children & has 14 staff members. At the start of each school year, our staff shares with parents the core beliefs and values that guide our educational approach. We strive to illustrate how these principles are woven into our daily interactions and activities with the children and throughout our entire learning community.

Our Annual Community Garden Day Purpose: Bring families, children, and staff together for a full-day community gardening event that strengthens relationships, deepens children's connection to nature and food, and creates welcoming outdoor spaces at the school.

Objectives

- Foster a sense of community and belonging among families, children, and staff.
- Create and maintain edible and ornamental garden areas.
- Teach children practical gardening skills and food literacy.
- Encourage family volunteering and shared stewardship of school grounds.
- Celebrate with a shared pancake breakfast to welcome participants.

Sustainability & Follow-up

- Use donated or locally sourced plants and compost.
- Label plants with care instructions and child/ family names when possible.
- Share a short post-event report with photos, what was completed, and a calendar of follow-up tasks.

Community Building

- Name garden beds after classes or family groups.
- Create a "Garden Journal" with children's drawings and planting notes.
- Host seasonal mini-events (harvest day, seed swap, cooking with garden produce)

Garden Day brings families and children together to beautify school grounds, create edible gardens, learn gardening skills, and strengthen community ties — cultivating both green spaces and a lasting sense of belonging.



TK Teachers: Morgan Casey, Nora Zepeda, Jody Carmichael

Oak Valley
Elementary School
Buellton, CA.
Principal: Lisa Melby
lmelby@bueliltonusd.org



Gross Motor
Outdoor Time



Hands-on
exploration &
learning

Supporting
the Whole
Child



Individualized
Support

Best Practice: Providing a Healthy Balance of Work & Play in Small Class Learning Environments.

Our small class sizes promote creativity, expression, social skills, early literacy, and math. They provide safe, supportive, and stimulating environments that nurture growth in every area of development.

**3 TK classrooms
14 students in each class
3 Full-Time Instructional Assistants**





PARENT EDUCATION



EARLY EDUCATION



**GRANDPARENT
EDUCATION**

To support family learning and strengthen community connections, all CCP families are required to:

- ☒ Attend at least two (2) parent education classes or workshops per school year
- ☒ Schedule and attend at least one meeting with our Family Resource Center to learn about available supports and community resources.

We believe this shared learning supports not just the child—but the **whole family**.

3

Generational Approach



By connecting families to **quality care, diverse resources, and support services**, we provide a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment that supports each child to develop their fullest potential and to become lifelong learners and members of a world community.



Celebrating Creativity: Our Annual Student Art Show

We take great pride in hosting our annual Student Art Show. Friends and family are warmly invited to attend this gallery event, where our schools are transformed into vibrant art spaces. Throughout the year, our Student Artists have drawn inspiration from renowned professional artists across the globe.

Each artist views the world through their unique lens, and our aim is to share that perspective, allowing us to see the world through the eyes of our children.

Exhibition Details

- **Participants:** Each child, aged 1 to 5, will showcase five pieces of art plus a collaborative piece.
- **Mediums:** The artworks will feature a variety of materials, including clay, paint, and wire.
- **Artist Insights:** Each young artist will share their inspiration, creative process, and the medium they used.

This special event is dedicated to celebrating the diverse expressive languages of children. While the artwork of our one-year-olds will differ significantly from that of our five-year-olds, each piece will be beautiful and developmentally appropriate for their age group.

**We are Reggio Emilia inspired preschools,
emphasizing the importance of nature and children.**

Cathedral Oaks Children's Center

COCC - 805-967-8013

Location - Santa Barbara

✦ Taundra Pitchford - taundra@cathedraloakscs.com

Teachers: 13 Children: 70

• We serve children ages 2 - 5 years.

More Mesa Children's Center

MMCC - 805-679-5435

Location - Santa Barbara

Loida Mesa - loida@catoakscs.com

Teachers: 12 Children: 54

We serve children ages 1 - 5 years.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT[®]
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Santa Barbara Family YMCA Preschool
36 Hitchcock Way Santa Barbara CA 93105
Channing Silva
Currently Enrolled: 38
Licensed For: 60
Staff: 6 Teachers



Preschool at the YMCA

Each day at our YMCA centers, preschoolers are exploring, building confidence, enhancing their creativity, and growing their critical thinking skills. At the YMCA, we believe in purposeful play as the tool for early education. The classroom and outdoor spaces are structured to provide the tools and educational support that children need to succeed in kindergarten and life. Our program supports cognitive, social-emotional, physical, language, and literacy development for all children in care. From the screening of staff to the playground to nap time, we maintain a safe environment where teachers can give attention to each child. We are licensed by the State of California to ensure the quality of care.

Outdoor Classroom

Studies show the importance of students being outside and interacting with the natural world. The YMCA promotes 3 ½ hours a day of outdoor learning in full-day programs. The outdoor classroom lends itself to students working on motor skills, socialization, and cognitive development. The natural landscape and planned activities help children learn through play and exploration.

Creative Curriculum

At the Santa Barbara YMCA Preschool, we just recently introduced The Creative Curriculum, which is a research-based early childhood education framework that uses play and hands-on investigations to foster children's confidence, creativity, and critical thinking skills. It emphasizes the whole child, focusing on social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development by balancing child-initiated and teacher-directed learning within a structured environment. The curriculum also incorporates an observation-based assessment system and encourages strong partnerships between teachers and families to support each child's unique learning progression.



Cliff Drive Care Center Best Practice

Cliff Drive Care Center's best practice for 2025 is *Pizza and Play*. Pizza and Play was created with our families in mind. Our Pre-K teacher, Mr Miguel, realized that parents had questions about how to engage with their kids, how to read to their kids, how to play with them, etc. We wanted to offer a time after school where parents could come and gain helpful insight and resources from our teachers on how to do those things. Though we still think this is true, we found after our first gathering that the parents really seemed to enjoy time in community; time to talk with other parents who may relate with what they are through. Once every few months we provide a pizza dinner where families can come and gather on campus. Their children get to play and they get to be in community with one another. Teachers help out by serving the families food, setting up and running activity stations, and talking with the families. We have received positive feedback from families that they appreciate the time together as it is hard to find in the business of life. We may change up the structure of Pizza and Play in the future, but for now it's been a great time of gathering where we can get to know our CDCC community better.

Total Students: 207
Director: Delanie Sabac



Alvin Center- Santa Maria California

Jeniffer Macdonald- Children Services Director Jmacdonald@communifysb.org

Preschool classroom- 18 children and 2 teachers and 1 teacher assistant

Toddler classroom- 8 children and 2 teachers

Infant classroom- 4 children and 2 teachers

The Alvin center is a Blended Head Start and Early Head Start that operates year-round from 6:30 am to 5:30 pm. Head Start and California State preschool programs are for children 3-5 years old and Early Head Start with infants and toddlers up to age 3 and programs for pregnant women. Available to qualified low-income families, these services are sensitive to each family's linguistic, ethnic, and cultural heritage. A strong emphasis is placed on the valuable role of parents as the first and most important teacher of their child. With focus on the whole child's development in academic, social, emotional and physical growth, combined with a safe, caring environment created by skilled teachers

All children are engaged in our garden area, they love to plant different vegetables, fruits, and herbs. They help water them, pull out weeds and most importantly is that they get to eat all the fruit and vegetables they harvest. We have watermelons, pumpkins, squash, corn, lettuce, orange tree, and sunflowers. Please see pictures!





CommUnify Betty Sanchez Center and Carpinteria Infant and Toddler Centers
4849 Foothill Rd. Carpinteria, CA 93013

Site Supervisor: Lucia Torres
(805) 318 9355

Preschool Capacity: 16 Children; Enrolled 16, Toddler Capacity: 8 Children; Enrolled, 8
Infant Capacity: 4 Infants Enrolled 3

We are a Head Start and Early Head Start center located in South Santa Barbara County. Our programs are administrated under the Children's Service umbrella of CommUnify, a Community Action Commission.

Collaboration with Garden Explorers. Teachers are offered a variety of educational opportunities through the Audacious Foundation. Teachers are learning about gardening, pollinators and bugs! Gardening Education has been essential and a turning point in the way the teachers approach the garden in our school. Sharing herbs with families and using them in our own kitchen, using flowers to beautify our environment and create studies in our curriculum are some of the ways this collaboration has enriched our school. **I would like to highlight how children have learned about the butterfly cycle and how children have learned to observe, compare and appreciate live science that develops in their own backyard and literally, in front of their own eyes.**



CommUnify: Goleta Early Head Start and Head Start Programs

Site Supervisor: Susy Del Toro

E-mail: sdeltoro@communifysb.org

Early Head Start Program:

Enrollment: 8 children & 2 Teachers

Head Start Program:

Enrollment: 17 children & 3 Teachers

Program Description:

CommUnify Children's Services Program is more than a preschool or childcare program; it is a place for the whole family. We see parents as their child's most important teacher. Through play, children learn about themselves and the world around them. Play enables us to achieve the key goals of our early childhood curriculum. Play is the work of young children. At CommUnify, we adopt the viewpoint that nature, and being outdoors, enhances development and learning in all areas. We believe each child brings something unique and special to the world. We will help children to develop their potential by believing in them as capable individuals. CommUnify Children's Services uses developmentally appropriate practices to provide safe, supportive, and nurturing environments where children develop physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively. We value the diversity of cultures, languages, abilities, and strengths of every participant in our program.

Best Practice:

One of the expectations/rules for our classroom is "We Are Safe". With this concept in mind, before we play a large group activity such as tag, hide and go seek, duck, duck, goose, etc. we always do a group cheer. Everyone involved will place their hands in the middle, and the teacher will chant 1,2,3. When the teacher says 3, the teacher and children will all shout out "Be Safe" as we all raise our hands together. This helps to emphasize the importance of being safe while we play group games together. It can also help the children to incorporate and expand on ideas such as community, teamwork, friendship, and togetherness.



Community Little Village EHS – Santa Maria, CA

Director - Maribel Rios

Children Enrolled: 16 Toddlers & 4 Infants



CommUnify
Empowering people. Transforming lives.

Best Practice Idea: Family Partnership & Home Connection

This past year, Community Little Village EHS strengthened family engagement by creating a consistent bridge between classroom learning and home life. Our teachers and home educators collaborated with families to extend classroom activities into the home, helping children build skills in language, social-emotional development, and independence.



How We Did It

- Teachers shared weekly activities with families that could be continued at home with simple, everyday materials.
- Home educators visited families regularly to model activities, answer questions, and support parents as their child's first teacher.
- Staff provided photos, videos, and communication in learning genie to keep parents connected to their child's learning.

Impact

- Families felt more empowered and confident in supporting their child's development.
- Children showed stronger communication and social-emotional growth.
- Staff built stronger relationships with families, creating a true partnership

Why it Works

This practice works because it creates a strong home-school connection, honoring parents as partners while ensuring children have consistent learning experiences in both settings.





COMMUNIFY HEAD START

1 Street Center, Lompoc, CA

805-735-8392

Jennifer Macdonald-
jmacdonald@communiheadstart.org

We provide education and supportive services in partnership with the community so Santa Barbara County residents can improve their economic security, become self-sufficient, and retain their dignity.

We are a nonprofit organization.

We aim to improve and maintain our community's health, resilience, and financial security.



"WE SERVE SANTA BARBARA COUNTY'S VULNERABLE POPULATIONS THROUGH EDUCATION AND COORDINATED SERVICES SO THEY MAY ACHIEVE ECONOMIC STABILITY, IMPROVE OVERALL WELL-BEING AND THRIVE."



I CENTER TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN:30 TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS: 6 OTHER FABULOUS STAFF: 3

Last school year, I Center collaborated with the parents, specifically the parent committee, to help fundraise for a field trip for the children of our center. Parents did donations, bake sales, raffles, infused water sales, and food sales. Parents were able to collect around \$2,700 to cover the costs for the bus and entrance for the children and one family member to join them for the day. The key to making all of this happen was having consistent, reliable communication between staff and families. We kept parents engaged through parent activities and meetings, which helped improve parent participation, involvement, and communication. This was the first successful field trip that I Center experienced since COVID. It was a testament to the ability of the center as a whole to work together and partner with families to support new experiences for the children of I Center.



Los Padres Child Care Center
530 E. Enos Drive Santa Maria, California
Deborah Thornburg
We have Full day & Extended Part day
36 students

One of the most rewarding practices our center participates in is the philosophy of the Outdoor Classroom. We began a few years ago by spending as much time as we could outside. Some of our outdoor activities include, an art center, library area, playhouse area, water play, a quiet area, lots of space for climbing, running, riding bikes.

We also have an outdoor garden, which we encourage the children to help take care of, they take turns watering the plants, picking the fruits and vegetables, deciding which plants need more water, and which plants change color. The children have made choices about what they would like to grow in their garden with watermelons and strawberries being their favorite.





CommUnify
A Community Action Agency,



Children's Services Program

Communify Children's
Services
602 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara CA
93101

Director Jennifer MacDonald
JMacDonald@communifysb.org
Program Manager South County
Region
Miriam Angel
mangel@communifysb.org

Communify Children's
Services – Head Start &
Early Head Start in South
County

Communify Children's
Services offers high-
quality early education
programs for children
from infancy through
preschool in South
County. Our goal is to
support the healthy
growth and development
of children while
providing families with
the resources and tools
they need to thrive

**Our Centers and Program
in south County have a**
Total: 68 children



Children's Service Institute

Each year, our Children's Services Institute brings together all our programs across Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, and Lompoc. It is a special day where our staff gathers to learn, grow, and celebrate the work we do for children and families.

This year, our theme was Joy – reflected not only in our logo, but also in the energy, activities, and connections shared throughout the day. The Institute is designed to support every role in our programs, from family service advocates to office managers, teachers, site supervisors, and cooks.

The day is filled with:

- Guest Speakers who inspire and challenge us with fresh perspectives.
- Professional Development Sessions on topics that strengthen our practice and enrich our service to families.
- Workshops and Trainings that cover emotional well-being, leadership, family engagement, classroom strategies, and more.

A highlight this year was an outstanding session on The Courage to Listen, exploring emotional intelligence, joy, and the path to longevity in leadership.

The Institute is more than a training course. It is a day of renewal, connection, and encouragement, reminding us of the impact we make and the joy that comes from serving our communities.



Before



WESTGATE CENTER

Best Practices

The Westgate Center is all about helping low-income families with Head Start and Early Head Start services. Right now, we've got 38 kids enrolled, and we're still adding more! Our awesome team includes 9 teachers, 3 office staff, and a cook who whips up delicious meals for everyone.

I recently made the move to this center at the start of the new year, and it's been a great experience. Thanks to the Audacious Foundation and the Garden Explorers from Explore Ecology, we were able to set up a fantastic garden! It has a fun mud box, a wooden kitchen, and plenty of planters for growing plants.

This year, our class project is all about cooking with the kids, which has been a blast. The teachers have also started to include gardening in their daily activities, letting the kids get their hands dirty and learn about caring for plants and each other. It's been a great way to build community and encourage responsibility among everyone involved.

Learning



Harvesting



Trying zucchinis and blossoms



Cooking with fresh veggies



**Cuyama Elementary School
TK/Kindergarten Growing in
Nature**

**Nicole Furstenfeld Head Teacher
Alfonso Gamino Superintendent**



**22 Students
1 Teacher
2 Assistant Teachers**



We have been very busy in our TK/Kinder-Garden World at Cuyama Elementary School where we are Growing in Nature. As you enter our playground through the redwood gate you will be enchanted with our majestic Rose Cedar, a truly beautiful tree, that is the center of our outdoor classroom. Our 4–6-year-old children are very curious and enthusiastic learners. In our indoor and outdoor classrooms our natural world is celebrated and an inspiration for classroom layout, plants, and our lessons. We spend time out in nature providing our students with hands-on activities to build a sense of love and wonder for the natural world around us. A learning experience that brings a smile to my face and a full heart is “Nature Finders”. Our students were learning about weather; clouds so we created “Cloud Finders” for them to go on a “Cloud Hunt”. On the Cloud Hunt they identify different types of clouds: Stratus, Cirrus and Cumulus. Observing the students' joy and excitement to find the variety of clouds sparked the idea to make more “Finders”, for our natural world. We created “Insect Finders”, “Plant Finders”, and “Bird Finders”. Following our students' interests creates great meaning to their learning. The children showed a particularly incredible interest in the bird finders. Following their interest, we sat outside to listen to the birds that were singing around us. We utilized the bird identification app Merlin Bird ID to identify what birds were singing. The children were so excited to learn the names of each bird. Coincidentally, we received a bird feeder from Explore Ecology's (Garden Explorers Program) that we keep filled to welcome birds into our community. Through open-ended conversations, exploration, and play our children are able to discover and foster a love of the natural world around them.





♥ Our Approach

- *Family-Centered Care – We get to know families individually and honor their perspectives.
- *Knowing the Whole Child – We consider family roles to support identity and belonging.
- *Genuine Connections – Warm greetings, shared stories, and milestones strengthen home-school ties.
- *Creating Community – Families are active partners in classrooms and celebrations.



- CONNECTION BEFORE DIRECTION – GREET WARMLY, USE NAMES, SHOW GENUINE INTEREST.
- BE CONSISTENT & CALM – RELIABILITY BUILDS TRUST.
- LISTEN DEEPLY – VALIDATE FEELINGS AND REFLECT BACK THEIR IDEAS.
- CELEBRATE INDIVIDUALITY – NOTICE STRENGTHS, INTERESTS, AND MILESTONES.
- ENGAGE JOYFULLY – PLAY, LAUGH, AND EXPLORE TOGETHER.

Building Relationships



Evergreen at a Glance

- Director: Keri Bowie
- 12 teachers
- 85 children served
- Play-based learning center



At Evergreen, we are more than a preschool – we are a family center.

Children, parents, and staff are all part of the

Forevergreen Family. We believe that relationships are the foundation of learning, belonging, and growth.

We are not 'just child care.'

We are partners in your child's journey, companions in your family's story,

and a community that celebrates together, supports one another, and grows side by side.



First Presbyterian Church Early Childhood Center

21 E. Constance Ave, Santa Barbara

Difficult Corner Transformed into Exploration Garden

The area was difficult to supervise. Children could get behind the tree and they wanted to climb but we couldn't make it a fall surface. Traditional shelves and play materials didn't quite fit. It became a "No" area.



Before Picture of the corner.

We decided to add some fencing and a gate to define the area and give it the feeling of a special place. Teachers take their groups into the area for special garden time. The materials that are available are attractive to the children because they have limited access and supervision is no longer a concern. Now that our preschool is younger children, the teachers can setup and prepare materials in advance because it is separate.



We consulted with Explore Ecology on what plants would thrive in the shade of a large pine tree and we propagated some of the many succulents we already had on our campus to get us started. We decided to start with some tried and true materials like the sound wall and collections of nature materials. We have a small area for story time.

We used premade fencing panels, gates, and stakes. With volunteer labor the total for the project was less than \$500.



Serving 64 children from 3 months to 5 years old

Director Beth Hassenplug 805 687-6362

bhassenplug@fpcsb.org

**First Pres serving children for over 40 years. Faith based
with strong foundations in continuity of care and outdoor
classroom.**



Garden Preschool, Santa Barbara

Devon Bolitho

gardenpreschoolsb@gmail.com

48 Children, 10 Staff

Private non-profit preschool located in downtown
Santa Barbara!

Our Best Practice is our annual Halloween 5k Event

Every year we have a fundraiser where parents and community members come run a 5k in support of the school the weekend before Halloween. Parents run in their Halloween costumes and compete for a medal. There is also a silent auction with various prizes.

**Over 45 families
participated!**

**We raised more than
\$2k!**

This past year, we upped the cost to \$40 per registered adult runner, cost included a special Garden Preschool Halloween 5k shirt, childcare during the race, an entry into the raffles and light refreshments after the race. It became an event people look forward to all year!





Guadalupe Early Learning Center
Guadalupe, CA 93434
Director of Early Education & Support: Dr. Mari Garcia

At our current site, we have 5 TK classrooms. 4 classes are taught in English and 1 DLI class (Spanish). Our students have the opportunity to learn about gardening, Art, Music and the different cultures that are represented in our community. We have several family planned events throughout the school year with the support of parents, community, admins, teachers and PTO. The children attend local and out of town field trips to see the things they have learned in their curriculum.



Día de los Niños



Guadalupe
Fire Station

garden



Pumpkin Patch

Chinese New Year





Table Time in TK

Foothill Elementary School
Goleta Union School District
Dani Martinazzi and Ashley Switzer
Two Classrooms of 15 Students

Each morning the students freely explore 5 different tables that focus on the letter or theme we are studying. Table activities change at the beginning of each new week so students are always engaged.

LETTER TABLES



SENSORY



ART/ FINE MOTOR



CONSTRUCTION



Hollister School TK

4950 Anita Lane, Santa Barbara, CA

Best Practices: Developing our TK Garden



TK Teachers:

Loriann Mastromarino,

Phoebe Ball & Alexia Vance

Principal: Jesus Campos

(jcampos@gusd.us)

3 TK Teachers, 3 TK Paras

47 TK students (3 classes)

Hollister School is a public elementary school located
in Santa Barbara, close to San Marcos HS.
We are part of the Goleta Union School District.

Gardening in TK is all about...

- Building community - Connecting with friends and families
- Developing gross and fine motor skills
- Connecting with nature
- Exploring and discovering (science)
- Communication and language skills
- Problem solving and social skills
- Building relationships
- Self-regulation
- Self-esteem and confidence
- Finding joy
- and so MUCH MORE!



Thank you Garden Explorers!



Goleta Unified School District Ellwood & La Patera



401 North Fairview Avenue
Goleta, CA 93117
(805) 681-1200

Director: Regina Davis

RDavis@gusd.us

Our School

The Goleta School District operates two state-funded preschool classrooms and inclusion classes at Ellwood and La Patera, in Goleta, CA. Each classroom accommodates up to 24 students, maintaining a student-to-teacher ratio of 1:8. Our curriculum is guided by the California Preschool Learning Foundations and Frameworks, ensuring alignment with state educational standards.

Best Practice

OUR PRESCHOOL'S BEST PRACTICES CENTER ON NURTURING CHILDREN'S INTERESTS THROUGH FREE-CHOICE ACTIVITIES. WE PROVIDE A DIVERSE ARRAY OF OPTIONS, BOTH INDOORS AND OUTDOORS, TO SUPPORT THEIR HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT. INDOORS, WE HAVE A WRITING CENTER, A DAILY-THEMED BLOCK AREA, A SENSORY TABLE, A DRAMATIC PLAY AREA, AND A WELL-STOCKED LIBRARY. OUTDOORS, CHILDREN CAN ENJOY A GROSS MOTOR AREA, A WATER TABLE, AND A SANDBOX, ALONG WITH ENGAGING IN ACTIVITIES SUCH AS PAINTING, BUILDING, AND IMAGINATIVE PLAY IN BOTH THE BLOCK AND DRAMATIC PLAY AREAS. OUR BEST PRACTICES ALSO INVOLVE FAMILIES, AS WE OFFER EDUCATIONAL PARENTING WORKSHOPS THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR.

Preschools in elementary school gain from a variety of learning experiences and school activities beyond just the playground. They can use the school library, participate in gardening, and join Big Buddy and Little Buddy programs. Engaging in school events broadens their learning and promotes growth, fostering a strong sense of community and belonging. Taking part in activities with older students helps them develop social-emotional skills, preparing them for a smooth transition to elementary school.





GOAL: Help students build emotional resilience and use problem solving skills. They will learn to identify and express their feelings and use communication with peers to work through challenges and manage their emotions.

We are learning TO: Name our feelings and tell others how we feel.

We are learning THROUGH: Partner discussions related to the book The Way I Feel by Janan Cain.

- Pick one feeling per day from the book
- Model how to ask a partner: When do you feel sad? I feel sad when...
- When conflicts arise, remind students how to use their "I feel" statements

Sarah Kono TK Teacher skono@hopeschooldistrict.org



MONTE VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

730 N. Hope Ave • Santa Barbara, CA 93110
Principal: Hans Rheinschild • hrheinschild@hopeschooldistrict.org

Animals!!!

As a whole school - Our 6th grade class incubated and raised chicks. The adult chickens now reside in the TK/Kindergarten Yard. Students learn how to feed and care them. They can hold and pet the chickens. Students collect eggs. Families sign up to be "Chicken Tenders" and come care for the chickens on the weekends and holidays.

TK and K students eat lunch near the chickens, choose to watch and talk to them during recess. For some students chicken time is a reward for meeting classroom goals. Some students have used time with the chickens to calm down and self regulate.



In our TK classroom

More Hands on Animals - We have Bernadette our class bunny. Caring and feeding her is a class job. Students learn responsibility, empathy and how to be gentle and careful. Students can pet her when they are feeling sad. Eventually we will learn to be calm enough that she can roam the classroom.

Caterpillars and Butterflies - We have a number of native food plants on campus that has enabled us to raise Monarch, Sulphur, Question Mark, and Mourning Cloak caterpillars and watch them change into butterflies.



Tadpoles and Frogs - In the spring we have raised local tree frog tadpoles and watched them change into frogs. One year my kinder class raised over 400 tadpoles and they were given to the Natural History Museum for students to release on a family day.

Beth Russell • TK Teacher • erussell@hopeschooldistrict.org



Roots & Wings:

Creating Outdoor Classrooms That Inspire Wonder

Lynn Seigel-Boettner
Camp TK: Teaching Kindness
Vieja Valley School/Hope School District



Scan here to view my best practices.



LUNCH

with the Littles

SIMPLE CONCEPT • POWERFUL IMPACT

- Parents bring their lunch and join their child on an early-release day for a relaxed, picnic-style meal -- offered a few times a year so the event stays special
- Families connect as parents meet one another, put names to faces, and build a stronger school community.
- Teachers join the picnic, fostering casual, trust-building conversations with families.

Results:

Families feel connected, attend more events, and challenging conversations become easier because relationships already exist.



DIRECTOR: KALEIGH WILLIAMS

KINDERKIRKDIRECTOR@GMAIL.COM

1111 VALLECITO RD, CARPINTERIA (805) 684-4070

The Learningden Preschool

Santa Barbara, CA



Director:
Stephanie

stephanie@thelearningden.com
Teachers: 27 Children: 96



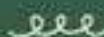
LEARNINGDEN PRESCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

AT LEARNINGDEN PRESCHOOL, WE EMBRACE A BLEND OF REGGIO EMILIA, MONTESSORI, AND THE CURIOSITY APPROACH. WE BELIEVE THAT EVERY CHILD IS UNIQUE AND LEARNS BEST THROUGH PLAY AND REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES.

CHILDREN ARE ENCOURAGED TO EXPLORE, CREATE, AND DISCOVER THROUGH MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES SUCH AS COOKING, BAKING, DANCING, AND HANDS-ON PROJECTS. THESE EXPERIENCES ALLOW CHILDREN TO BUILD A WIDE RANGE OF SKILLS—SOCIAL, COGNITIVE, LANGUAGE, FINE MOTOR, AND GROSS MOTOR—WHILE FOSTERING CONFIDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE.

WE VIEW MISTAKES AS VALUABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH, GUIDING CHILDREN TO LEARN RESILIENCE AND PROBLEM-SOLVING IN A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT.

IN ADDITION, WE OFFER FOUR SPECIALTY CLASSES—STEAM, LIBRARY, KITCHEN, AND ART. EACH WEEK, EVERY CHILD HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN ALL OF THESE ENRICHING EXPERIENCES, PROVIDING THEM WITH A WELL-ROUNDED AND JOYFUL LEARNING JOURNEY.



Freedom to Explore and Experience: Learning Happens Everywhere

At Lou Grant, we value providing children with rich experiences and beautiful materials—but not so beautiful that we cannot use them anywhere and everywhere at school. Nobody is saving ‘the good stuff’ (ok, ok, except maybe the magna tiles which break when they go outside) for a special day. We are using it! “Stuff” isn’t precious. If it is too precious, we don’t want it!

Art Explorations don’t just have to happen at art stations....



Building with blocks doesn’t have to be limited to where the blocks live...



Time to listen, laugh, empathize, and learn with the children is what we are interested in investigating every day, offering different perspectives using all parts of the school in different ways as often as we can.



La Purísima Concepción Catholic School Little Saints PRESCHOOL

Lompoc / (805) 736-6210

48 children / 6 teachers

Director: Terese Hill/ littlesaints@lapurimaschool.org

Welcome to Little Saints Preschool, where laughter echoes, curiosity is celebrated, and every child is embraced as an individual. – We provide a safe, loving environment where our little ones can grow, learn, and flourish. We believe in encouraging each child to succeed to the best of their ability. Little Saints Preschool dedicates our time to provide not only care for every child's well-being, but also promotes a healthy, loving environment where children are free to discover new things while developing their own personal growth.



Spending time outdoors

Our newly designed outdoor patio allows easier access from the classrooms to the outdoors. The children are engaged in the activities and have the opportunity to choose whether they want to play outside or inside. We utilize the new outdoor space as an area to gather, play, and enjoy lunch. When it rains, the children love standing under the awning and listening to the raindrops. It also allows the children to play outside without getting rained on. Having our patio next to the school yard allows the preschool children to engage with the kindergarten-8th-graders with whom they have become friends. The patio provides the children with another way to use their gross motor skills daily.



Tina Wall- Director, Vicki Murray-Coordinator

Total number of TK students- 395 students



Lompoc Unified School District

Transitional Kindergarten Outdoor Classroom Initiative

Overview

Lompoc Unified School District (LUSD) has launched an innovative Outdoor Classroom initiative for Transitional Kindergarten (TK), supported by a First 5 grant. This project creates engaging, nature-based learning environments that nurture curiosity, exploration, and whole-child development.



Pilot Implementation

- Two Pilot Sites: With grant funding, LUSD is piloting Outdoor Classrooms at two schools.
- Collaborative Planning: Nature Explore worked directly with each school team—TK teachers, administrators, and Maintenance & Operations staff—to design sustainable, developmentally appropriate outdoor spaces.
- Professional Development: All TK teachers in the district participated in training led by Nature Explore. Teachers explored the research and benefits of outdoor classrooms and received immediately applicable strategies to integrate into their daily practice.



Benefits for TK Learners

- Academic & Cognitive Growth: Hands-on exploration strengthens problem-solving, inquiry, and early STEM skills.
- Social & Emotional Development: Outdoor play encourages collaboration, communication, and resilience.
- Health & Wellness: Daily access to fresh air and movement promotes physical activity, sensory growth, and mental well-being.
- School Readiness: Nature-rich environments build executive functioning skills critical for future learning success.

Looking Ahead

- Monitor and evaluate student outcomes at the two pilot sites.
- Expand professional development and share best practices across the district.
- Explore opportunities to extend Outdoor Classroom access to additional schools.

Mental Wellness

Emphasizing Mental Health in Our Community

The pandemic has taught us a valuable lesson about the significance of mental health and its impact on our lives. Many of us faced burnout during this challenging time, highlighting the necessity of caring for the mental well-being of our staff and their families.

Supporting Our Teachers

We have dedicated resources to provide reflective practice sessions for our teachers, facilitated by a mental health expert. Her extensive experience and compassionate approach create a safe space for teachers to share their experiences and explore solutions. Following these sessions, we meet with her to ensure that we are offering the necessary support to our remarkable teachers. This series takes place once a month for one hour, lasting between three to four months.

Engaging Parents

Recognizing the importance of mental health, we host a parent educational night where a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist engages with parents interested in listening, sharing, and fostering a sense of community. To make it accessible, we provide dinner and childcare at these events, which occur twice a year—once in the fall and once in the spring. During these meetings, we share resources, and we also include valuable information in our monthly newsletters for parents seeking additional support privately. We've had parents reach out for resources, and we have successfully referred them to local agencies.

Nurturing Children's Wellness

Understanding that mental health is essential for children too, we have a teacher with over 20 years of experience working with kids and a passion for yoga. Since the beginning of this year, she has been teaching yoga to our infants and toddlers, guiding them to engage their senses through activities like smelling flowers, mint, and lemons, while providing the love and nurturing they need. For children aged two to five, she teaches them how to take deep breaths, find balance, practice patience, and connect with their surroundings. They listen to calming music, observe nature, and learn foundational yoga movements that help them feel grounded.

More Mesa Children's Center

MMCC - 805-679-5435

Location - Santa Barbara

Loida Mesa - loida@catoakscscc@gmail.com

Teachers: 12 Children: 54

We are a Reggio Emilia inspired preschool, emphasizing the importance of nature and children. We serve children ages 1 - 5 years.

Cathedral Oaks Children's Center

COCC - 805-967-8013

Location - Santa Barbara

Taundra Pitchford - taundra@cathedraloakscscc.com

Teachers: 13 Children: 70

We are a private Reggio Emilia inspired preschool awarded as demonstration site for the "Outdoor School Project". We serve children ages 2 - 5 years.



NOTRE DAME SCHOOL

PRESCHOOL & PRE-K



The Saint's Program at Notre Dame School is designed for Preschool and Prekindergarten aged children. Here at the Saint's Program, we embed our learning with our core values which includes: operating with compassion and kindness, respect, integrity, appreciating diversity, and building a peaceful classroom community. We aim to enrich the Whole Child.



Collaborative Play



GAT

Our best practice is Getting Along Together, (GAT). We use these skills and strategies to foster a kind, loving, peaceful class community that actively listens to one another, cares for the environment, and builds conflict resolution and critical thinking skills.



Getting Along Together (GAT)



Outdoor Learning



Balance

We strive for a balance of indoor and outdoor learning. We believe different environments provide a wider range of learning tools and practices.

Information

Notre Dame School is a non-profit Catholic program in the same school building as Kindergarten-8th grade. Our program is licensed for 60 children.

Early Childhood Director:
Maria Gomes
mgomes@notredamesb.org

Early Education Teacher:
Jocelyn Padilla
jpadilla@notredamesb.org

33 E Micheltorena St,
Santa Barbara, CA
93101



(805) 985-1033

www.notredamesb.org



**Orfalea Children's Center at
Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital**

2205 Castillo St.

Santa Barbara, CA 93105

Capacity: 80

Director: Yukiko Irie (yirie@sbch.org)



Being an Outdoor Classroom Project Center, we spend many hours exploring outside. With the collaboration and partnership with Explore Ecology, our gardens have enriched experiences of the children, families, and staff tremendously.

Children observed, smelled, touched, tasted, and attended to the garden as flowers, fruit, and vegetables grew in front of their eyes. Families enjoyed their recipe being used in a classroom cooking project. Teachers discovered that they had a green thumb!



Joy of watching
things grow

Attending with care



Beans spilled from a sensory table one day, and it was followed by a rainy day. A few days later, children noticed that there was something happening to those beans on the ground. They were growing tails! Yes, they sprouted. We placed them in a root viewing case to see how they grew their "tails" and eventually transplanted them into a bigger pot. As a team, we harvested beans, sauteed with butter, and enjoyed them all together. The experience is much more meaningful when it is shared with friends...



The Orfalea Family and ASI Children's Center (Children's Center) is a licensed childcare facility that serves children 4 months through 5 yrs. of age. On the California Polytechnic State University campus, most program attendees are affiliated with the university. The Children's Center is also a part of Associated Students, Inc. (ASI). ASI is an inclusive, empowering, student-driven organization committed to providing programs, services, and facilities that enhance and develop the student learning experience. Therefore, the primary purpose of the Children's Center is to serve the early care and educational needs of the children of student parents. As space permits, children of faculty, staff and alumni are enrolled.

Paintbrush Exploration

When beginning to explore painting, our teachers are intentional in providing opportunities for the children to explore the paintbrush as a tool. The children explore the brush and what it is made of before discussing how to care for the brush while painting. The children spend time working on gentle brush strokes, controlling pressure, and caring for the brush's "hair" by washing it between colors and lightly dabbing the brush on a cloth to remove any leftover paint.

Once brush exploration has been experienced, the children will work on different color palettes and color mixing to create different gradients. The children find this process to be magical, as they imagine what colors they will create.

As the teacher, we also use this opportunity to work on things such as fine motor, shared use of materials, and engagement in an activity. For the first few experiences, the focus is on getting to know the brush and the paint. Once there is comfort in these materials, and depending on developmental appropriateness, teachers will work to support hand placement and grip of the tool, all of which is folded into the conversations about using gentle brushstrokes and caring for the brush's "hair".

Materials Used:

- Fine and broad paintbrushes
- Water
- Primary color tempera paint
- Plexiglass or tiles to mix on
- *Depending on the age group, a guided color palette

Experience planned by Room 6 2024-2025 teachers for children 3-4 years old



Orfalea Child Dev. Center at Ventura College

Creating Our Own Farmer's Market

Children had an opportunity to engage in the garden by preparing the soil and planting seeds and starter plants. As our garden matured, children were included in harvesting by picking, washing, and organizing the flowers, fruits and vegetables for our "Farmer's Market" activity in the outdoor classroom.

Picking Seasonal Flowers

A chance to explore, touch, and taste fresh fruits and veggies for customers



Gardening and Nature-Based Learning

Making Fig JAM!!!

At the Orfalea Child Development Center, we believe in the power of nature also playing the role of teacher. In our Outdoor Classroom, children connect deeply with the natural world—gaining not only knowledge but also a sense of wonder, respect, and responsibility for their environment. We envision a world where all children in early education settings have access to the rich developmental opportunities that come from intentional and meaningful outdoor experiences. As a Lab School, our staff also has the privilege of working with college students, and we take this role seriously. The young children at our center are not the only ones who benefit from our garden and Outdoor Classroom—the college students and families who visit also experience the value of cultivating and consuming high-quality food together. These seeds of knowledge now continue to sprout in the home life of our college students and children, where they are creating meaningful gardening and nature-based experiences for themselves.



Our Lady of Guadalupe Preschool

530 N. Juanita Ave. Oxnard, Ca.

Director Betty Gallardo

At Our Lady of Guadalupe Preschool what better way of cooperative learning with success by celebrating Our Grandparents with a picnic and special thanks for all they do for us. The heat can't stop Our OLG Preschool parents and families for starting the year strong as a community! We invited all families from the Oxnard Community and Parishioners to come out and join us in prayers as we recognize and celebrate Grandparents.



Great Pacific Child Development Center

Children: 62 Teachers: 22

Manager: Jessica.Derby@Patagonia.com

Ventura, CA

Ventura River Child Development Center

Children: 42 Teachers: 13

Manager: Jenna.Janzen@Patagonia.com

Ventura, CA



Who We Are

Patagonia has offered quality on-site childcare since 1983. Great Pacific Child Development Center was founded in 1984 by Malinda Chouinard and Jennifer Ridgeway to provide childcare to employees of Patagonia. Our Cornerstones include:

- **Community:** Building strong connections with children, families, and teachers
- **Respect:** Honoring each child's individual growth
- **Risk:** Encouraging safe risk-taking and resilience
- **Nature:** Learning through long, uninterrupted outdoor play
- **Play:** Implimenting child-led curriculum and fostering creative expression

Early Childhood Best Practices: The Tuff Tray

The Tuff Tray has become one of our favorite tools for hands-on, messy play and exploration. Originally from the UK, these multipurpose durable trays can be use for everything from nature material investigations, sensory and water play, art, construction and more. Its raised edges keep materials contained while giving children the freedom to experiment, mix, sort, explore and build at their own pace. Our teachers love setting up invitations and provocations in the tray to create an open-ended workspace that encourages curiosity and creativity!





PROVIDENCE SCHOOL

Best Practice

School: Providence Preschool, Santa Barbara, CA

Director: Desiree Battle (dbattle@providencesb.org)

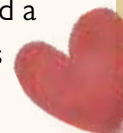
School Description:

- 84 Students and 12 teachers
- Faith-based, private preschool
- Toddler (2.5 year old) through Pre K preschool program



Our Best Practice: Cozy Corners

- Over the last school year, each of our classrooms has created a “cozy corner” in their classroom to be used by students in need of space to regulate.
- How we use them:
 - Students can choose to go into the cozy corner at any time when they need some space to emotionally regulate. Sometimes a teacher suggests they relax in the cozy corner, other times they request the space.
 - Only 1 student is allowed in a cozy corner at a time.
 - The cozy corner gives a private and cozy space for students to relax and to calm down without being disrupted by other students in the class.
- There is variety in how each teaching team made their cozy corners. Some features include:
 - Small enclosed tents
 - Cozy chairs like beanbags or small armchairs
 - Several sensory toys available inside like headphones and fidgets
 - Stuffedies and interactive books
- We have prioritized this after attending the NAEYC conference and learning about students’ various sensory needs (avoidant through seeking) and we wanted to ensure every classroom had a space to meet these diverse needs. And it has been a great addition to our classrooms!





Junior Kindergarten

2130 Mission Ridge Road
Santa Barbara, CA 93103
(805) 569-1811

Mari Quinteros
Lead Teacher/Director
mquinteros@rivieraridge.org

Best Practices:

Second Step- Social Emotional Learning

In our Junior Kindergarten Program, we use the **Second Step Program** to help children build important social-emotional skills that support learning, positive relationships and friendships. Teachers introduce concepts through engaging stories, games, songs, and puppets, and then reinforce them throughout the day during play, circle time, and transitions. With guidance from teachers, children practice recognizing their own feelings, calming their bodies, solving problems, and showing empathy toward others. By consistently modeling and supporting these skills, teachers help create a safe, caring classroom where children feel confident, connected, and ready to explore and learn every day. These lessons are woven into our daily routines, making it easy for children to apply what they learn during play and group activities. By practicing these skills in fun and meaningful ways, our preschoolers are developing confidence, empathy, and the tools they need to thrive both in the classroom and beyond.

Our JK program is part of our Independent Day School for Junior Kindergarten through 8th grade. Our mixed-age program includes 3 and 4 year olds with a maximum class size of 25 students with 4 full-time teachers. Students in the 3 year old program will have the opportunity to participate in a two-year enriched Junior Kindergarten curriculum. The 4 year-old program continues with the one year program preparing for entry into Kindergarten. Compassion and empathy, kindness and cooperation, creativity and collaboration, independence and inclusion — our youngest Riviera Ridge School students are encouraged and empowered to strengthen and develop important life-skills and personal character.

**SECOND
STEP®**





Santa Barbara City College
Orfalea Early Learning Center's
365 Loma Alta Drive, Santa Barbara

Director : Kimberly Zermeno - krbrown@sbcc.edu - 965-6883
Infant Toddler Program: 12 children: 2 full time teachers, 5 assistant teachers
Preschool: 36 children: 3 full time teachers, 5 assistant teachers

Being Present

Our program is two-fold in that we mentor and supervise adult learners through Santa Barbara City College's ECE program, while simultaneously providing excellent care and education for children ages 6 months through 5 years, and their families. We embrace a child-centered, play based philosophy that honors the uniqueness of each individual as both a teacher and a learner. The relationships we build with families, children, students, and our greater ECE community lay the foundation of all the work we do.



When we strip away all of the external "stuff" -the activities, materials, equipment, documentation, assessments, the latest toys, etc. what remains is what truly matters most to children - **US**. We bring not only knowledge and education, but also compassion, intention and play. We are nurturing, innovative, and both physically and emotionally present. We are teachers who have chosen to be a light along the path of children's development. And so are **YOU**.



Being present means the world to young children. When they "have" us - our attention, our expressions, our physical proximity - we join children in their learning and discoveries, creating a sense of safety and trust to explore further. As teachers, we ask ourselves: How am I showing up for children at this moment? Am I intentionally present today? Am I listening instead of planning my response? Am I willing to pause everything else, to be mindful and simply **BE**?



We invite you to let go of all the distractions and lay in the grass with a child to watch the clouds drift by. Engage with the environment by climbing into the tree to support a child reaching that next branch. Experience the cold sand by taking your shoes off in the sandbox and let children bury your feet. Focus with eye contact by laying on your stomach and gaze into an infant's eyes.

This is being present, and our presence is **EVERYTHING**.



STORIES ON WHEELS: A LOVE OF READING BEGINS HERE



WE ARE EXCITED TO SHARE THAT OUR SBCEO EARLY CARE & EDUCATION PROGRAM HAS THE WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO RECEIVE VISITS FROM THE CHARLOTTE'S WEB BOOKMOBILE. THE BOOKMOBILE TRAVELS TO SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS IN THE LOMPOC AREA WITH THE GREATEST NEED—BRINGING BOOKS, STORIES, AND THE JOY OF READING DIRECTLY TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. AT SBCEO, WE KNOW THAT A LOVE OF READING DOESN'T HAPPEN AUTOMATICALLY. IT IS SOMETHING THAT MUST BE NURTURED, ENCOURAGED, AND GUIDED UNTIL IT FLOURISHES. WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE CHARLOTTE'S WEB BOOKMOBILE, WE ARE ABLE TO PLACE BOOKS INTO CHILDREN'S HANDS, SPARK CURIOSITY, AND INSPIRE A LIFELONG LOVE OF LEARNING.

WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE CHARLOTTE'S WEB BOOKMOBILE, OUR STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND CLASSROOMS BENEFIT IN MANY MEANINGFUL WAYS:

- LIBRARY ACCESS FOR FAMILIES – FAMILIES RECEIVE LIBRARY CARD APPLICATIONS, MAKING IT EASIER TO CHECK OUT BOOKS AND CONTINUE READING AT HOME.**
- PARENT WORKSHOPS – OUR PRESCHOOL CLASSES PARTNER WITH CHARLOTTE'S WEB TO HOST FUN, INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS THAT GIVE PARENTS STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT READING AND LITERACY AT HOME.**
- BILINGUAL STORYTELLING – THE BOOKMOBILE ALSO PARTNERS WITH LOCAL TEEN VOLUNTEERS WHO READ TO OUR STUDENTS IN BOTH SPANISH AND ENGLISH, FOSTERING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL CONNECTION.**



Rebecca Holland, TK Teacher Adams Elementary School
Allison Quijano, Principal 20 students



Last school year, all TK teachers in our district were required to take the LETRS course. It was most helpful when we had a speaker to walk us through the developmental stages of all things language arts of the age group.

The thing that I implemented immediately upon returning to school was a writing activity. The idea was to give a prompt, and they write and draw a picture. The results gave me a much better understanding of their levels of writing. No one scribbled because it was late in the year. Some wrote lines and circles to imitate letters and others wrote random letter strings. Many wrote semi-phonetic or phonetic letter names connecting the names and sounds. No one wrote orthographically correct at that time. I was actually fascinated with the results. I regrouped a few students so I could focus on bridging the pre-alphabetic stage to better phonemic awareness. This year, as it is so early, we haven't used pencils much because we are still getting the strength built up in our hands and fine-tuning the pencil grip.





Gardening with Small Hands and Big Intentions



Harding University Partnership School & Monroe Elementary School Best Practice



Monroe Elementary School



Harding University Partnership School

Over the past 2 years, both Harding University Partnership School and Monroe Elementary in Santa Barbara Unified District have taken part in the Garden Explorers Program. This enriching program has provided us with the tools and materials to enhance our students' garden knowledge and sparked a joy for caring for plants. Some highlights have been harvesting herbs and brewing a special tea, watering plants, composting and learning about worms, and watching the excitement through the lens of our students' eyes!



Through this program students have gained:

- Hands on experiences
- Child led
- Food knowledge
- Cooking experiences
- Plant care
- Sensory learning





Peabody Charter School TK Santa Barbara, CA

**A public charter
school in the Santa
Barbara Unified
School District**

**Principal:
Demian Barnett**
demian.barnett@peabodycharter.net

**2 Teachers
2 Full Time Aides
1 Part Time Aide
40 students**

**TK hours:
8:15-2:15 Mon-Thurs
9:15-2:15 Fridays**



The TK classes at Peabody share classrooms, so all 40 students interact with all teachers and aides. This allows for more invitations and activities to be provided each day, for teachers and aides to collaborate closely in all aspects of the school day, and for all adults to cultivate a unique relationship with each student and family. The TK staff truly is a cohesive team.

This year at Peabody we advocated for a shorter day and a rolling start to the morning. Although our doors are open at 8 with the rest of the school, TK does not officially start until 8:15 and TK students are not counted as tardy until 8:30. This reduces morning stress for families, lets parents get their older children settled at school first, and eliminates the morning rush of all students arriving to school at the same time.

At Peabody, TK students enjoy a play-based program that focuses on building social and emotional skills. One of the unique things that Peabody students enjoy is the ability to choose to play inside or outside for most of the day. If the kindergarten students aren't out on the playground, you will find TK students out there, rain or shine!

SMBSD
Director: Katie Salcido
ksalcido@smbdsd.net
Children: 1,094
Teachers: 63

PTKLF & ASSESSMENTS



Santa Maria-Bonita
School District
CULTIVATING BRIGHT FUTURES

General Description

Last year, our district focused heavily on understanding the new Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations (PTKLF) and revising our student assessment and reporting system. TK teachers collaborated to transition from the DRDP to a district report card within our reporting system, Aeries. By doing so, we created a standards-aligned TK report card in Aeries, which provided a more consistent, clear, and collaborative approach to supporting TK students and families.

Implementation Process

Collaboration: TK teachers met regularly throughout the year to study the PTKLF and prioritize the standards most essential for student success. **Design:** Together, we selected the standards that best reflect TK learning goals, balancing academic readiness with social-emotional growth. **Integration:** A new report card was created in Aeries to replace the DRDP, streamlining assessment and reporting.

Unique Characteristics

- **Teacher-Led Collaboration:** Decisions were made collectively by district TK teachers.
- **Standards-Driven:** The PTKLF guided all selections and ensured developmental appropriateness.
- **Practical for Families:** Report cards were designed with clear, accessible language for parents' understanding.

Benefits/Impact

- Streamlined assessment and reporting process for teachers.
- Increased alignment of the TK curriculum and instruction with the PTKLF.
- Enhanced collaboration among TK teachers, strengthening the professional community.

Ongoing Challenge:

- We currently offer half-day TK due to limited physical space. While we are expected to implement universal full-day TK this year, we are unable to do so at this time.



400 A Puente Drive, SB, CA 93110 (805) 964-8994.

[San Marcos Parent-Child Workshop](#)

SMPCW is gratefully sponsored by SBCC's School of Extended Learning. [School of Extended Learning - Santa Barbara City College](#)

SMPCW is a non-profit organization licensed for 40 preschoolers daily. We are a co-operative preschool program for children ages 2-5 years with weekly parent education classes serving the Santa Barbara/Goleta area for over 60 years!



[Play Based Balanced Daily Curriculum & A New Family Experience Night](#)

SMPCW values and recognizes that play based learning during the preschool years is the best approach to creating life long learners. This year we are implementing a monthly family experience at night. Participants come for an hour with their whole family to learn how to implement and support play-based learning at home or at school. Staff will plan monthly experience nights that will include a rich, varied curriculum, where parents and children strengthen their bonds and are able to learn the benefits of play based learning together in a fun hands-on way. Parents will support children by becoming aware that play based learning can support holistic development by enhancing cognitive skills like problem-solving and memory, improving social-emotional abilities through interaction and conflict resolution, and fostering physical growth. This approach also nurtures creativity, curiosity, and a love for learning by allowing children and parents to explore, experiment, and make sense of the world together in a joyful way. Some of our new family night experiences will include:

- A park family potluck to build supportive relationships and to connect with all of our families.
- A field trip to the pumpkin patch to talk about where food comes and to learn about farm animals and farms.
- A S.T.E.M night to focus on the scientific process and science activities.
- Our winter light sing-along under the stars to instill a sense of wonder and to value the light/uniqueness in each of us.
- A cooking class to learn new recipes and to discuss nutrition and healthy eating choices
- An art night to teach about the benefits of process versus product art.
- A language and literature night where parents bring their favorite stories to share and use tools like puppets, felt boards etc. to extend their story-telling.
- The importance of sensory playand more!

[Our SMPCW Staff](#)

We are dedicated to sharing the adventure of early learning and parent education within a nurturing and diverse community of families.



(from left to right)

Suzy Granziera, SMPCW Director director@smpcw.org

Krista Moore, Head Teacher PM Program teacher@smpcw.org

Amanda Gilbert, Assistant Director & PM program teacher ad@smpcw.org



Young Children's Preschool
Santa Maria Valley YMCA

Power of Words and Play



"Words are seeds.. Plant the ones that make children grow." - Anonymous

We know that words shape feelings and behavior. Preschoolers are highly influenced by tone, phrasing, energy, and body language. Communicating with families and our staff and being on the same page is one of our main goals for our center.

● When is the last time you played?

During staff training we invite teachers to reflect on when the last time they played. Asking teachers to describe their experience. Remembering who your favorite person to play with was. What made the experience fun?

● Why Play Matters

Play is how preschoolers make sense of the world.
Play= Learning + Connection
Discuss which types of play offers the best opportunity for emotional growth.
Provide opportunity for children to learn through play when they are calm and alert.
Working with staff to support play.
Increase meaningful teacher-student engagement

● Positive Strategies for Social Emotional Skills

Filling Yours and the Children's Emotional Cup
5:1 Positive to Negative attention ratio
Play: 5 min. daily (parents play and or teacher to student).
Avoid using words: NO, DON'T, STOP, QUIET, and NOT



**Total # of Children
20 children NOW
Enrolling up to 36
Total Staff:
4 Teachers
1 Coordinator**

**Serving ages:
2.5 to 5 years**

**Diana Borjas
Preschool Director
dborjas@smvymca.org**



Contact Us
805-937-8521



Visit Our Website
www.smvymca.org/preschool



Our Location
**3400 Skyway Dr. Santa Maria,
CA 93455**



Brian Cogswell, Head of School
brian@southcoastmontessori.org
98 Children/27 Staff and Faculty

An AMI Montessori School serving families with children 3 months to 12 years

We have recently updated our outdoor space for our primary program and want to share!



In an AMI Montessori primary program (ages 3–6), outdoor play is not mere recreation but an intentional extension of the classroom, vital for a child's holistic development. It supports key Montessori principles by providing rich, sensory experiences that refine the child's senses, build independence, and anchor abstract learning in the real world.



Amber Escamilla-Hutchinson
Email- escamilla@sasoxnard.org
Staff 3/Students 17

WATER PLAY

Every Day

Water is available outdoors every day for our preschool children to explore, regardless of the weather. This daily opportunity supports learning in fun, engaging, and developmentally meaningful ways. Children are naturally drawn to water, and through play, they engage in rich, hands-on experiences that promote growth across multiple areas of development.

Water play offers many benefits. Sensory development is supported as children explore the feel, sound, and movement of water. Fine motor skills are strengthened through pouring, scooping, squeezing, and stirring. Cognitive skills grow as children discover concepts like volume, cause and effect, and problem-solving.

Language development is encouraged as children describe what they are doing, ask questions, and interact with peers. Social skills such as sharing, turn-taking, and cooperation naturally emerge in group water play.

Additionally, the calming nature of water can help children regulate their emotions and focus their attention.

Rain or shine, water play is more than just fun—it's an important part of early learning and development.



MINDFULNESS AT MORNING CIRCLE

A daily practice at our Parent-Child Workshop



At Starr King, we believe in nurturing both heart and mind while fostering emotional intelligence. One of our core practices is concluding our morning program with meditation during Closing Morning Circle. In community, children, teachers, and workday families connect, reflect, and build essential self-regulation skills in a supportive, emotionally aware environment.

What We Do Together

- **Morning Stretches & Breathing:** We begin by moving our bodies and practicing calming breaths. "Smell your flower, blow out your candle."
- **Morning Mantra:** With hands over our hearts, children join their families and teachers in saying our daily mantra.
- **Shared Community:** This time models simple, powerful tools for mindfulness, self-regulation, and connection.

I am kind, I am loving, I am intelligent, I am brave, I am strong, I am a good friend, I believe in myself, and I can do hard things. Yay me!



Why It Matters
Children learn to pause, breathe, and regulate their nervous system. This ritual fosters emotional intelligence and a positive sense of self. Families tell us their children are practicing these tools at home. One child lovingly reminded their parent, "That's okay, Mama! You can do hard things!"



Together, we are planting seeds of resilience, compassion, and confidence—skills that will support our children for a lifetime.



*ST. MARK PRESCHOOL

Best Practices: Spotlight on Music Education

At our preschool, music is an integral part of each day. We begin with a morning meeting song for the whole preschool and weave music into the rhythm of the day during circle time, through free-movement activities, and with our twice-a-month Kindermusik sessions. Recently, we added a performance stage area and an outdoor musical instrument corner to our playground, and they have been a huge hit! We value music for its ability to bring joy, inspire language development, encourage collaboration and positive social interactions, and enrich our children's sensory experiences.

The mission of St. Mark is to provide a high-quality, age-appropriate education that nurtures each child's intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual development in a caring and supportive environment.

We currently serve 74 children and are proud of our dedicated team of 16 teachers, led by Director Ana Schmid. Our program operates Monday through Friday from 7:45 AM to 5:15 PM and welcomes families of all backgrounds, including those receiving tuition assistance through Resource and Referral and the Santa Barbara County Education Office.



Stmarkpreschool.com



805.687.4111



3942 La Colina Rd. SB 93110

Our Mission

Storyteller is a year-round therapeutic program providing high-quality early childhood education and comprehensive support services for children and their families facing adverse challenges in Santa Barbara County.

Our Vision

To empower every child and family we serve with the tools, education, and support needed to overcome adversity, thrive in our community, and build a brighter future.

Infant Center

421 E Cota Street
Santa Barbara, CA

Toddlers & Preschool Center

2115 State Street
Santa Barbara, CA

Preschool Center

2121 De La Vina Street
Santa Barbara, CA

Best Practice – Parent Volunteer Program

Storyteller has built a new program to enhance parent engagement at the Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Center by inviting one parent each week to lead an engaging activity.

These activities can include reading stories, painting, engaging in sensory play, or playing outdoor games. At the start of each month, parents sign up for their preferred weeks, which allows for organized scheduling. Before their activity, the parent meets with a teacher for an orientation to prepare for their role in the classroom during their activity.

On the day of the activity, parents arrive early to set up with the support of staff, helping to enrich the children's learning experience. After each session, teachers provide feedback to parents, highlighting the positive effects of their involvement in the classroom and on the children's development, as well as their support in fostering a strong sense of community at Storyteller.

Dr. Jacqueline McDonough
Director of Programs & Evaluation

805.730.0147

jacqueline@WeAreStoryteller.org

WeAreStoryteller.org



St. Raphael Preschool Program
 160 St. Joseph Street Santa Barbara, CA 93111-2367
 (805) 967-4435
www.straphaelschoolsb.org
 Program Director: Edna Santos
 License permit up to 27-students/ day



Our Program: St. Raphael Preschool is part of the St. Raphael School's family. We follow the same school calendar and we also seek to educate the whole child within a Catholic atmosphere. Preschool provides age-appropriate experiences for ages 2 to early 5 year olds in preparation for Transitional Kindergarten. Our program and curriculum is designed to develop social skills, to foster a positive self-concept, and to instill an appreciation of God's gifts. We encourage children to think, reason, question, and experiment. We provide opportunities for physical play and the use of imagination.



Proud of our Magical Garden: Our garden continues to be an outdoor classroom. Thank you for the support of **Explore Ecology Garden Explores and the Audacious Foundation.** Children have the opportunity to be part of an everyday garden education and learn through nature. Following a rich curriculum has given the teaching staff the tools to learn and teach the beauty of life. The garden offers a lot of opportunities for learning, ranging from exploring, tasting, planting, sharing, taking care of nature, and creativity. We work as a community to keep our garden green and healthy. Parents also volunteer and share their knowledge in gardening for a richer outcome.

At St. Raphael's Preschool, when a child walks into the outdoors with a smile, it is because the child feels comfortable and safe in their everyday environment.



INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM



4200 Calle Real
Santa Barbara, 93110
805-683-6384

Maite Estrada, Site Supervisor
mestrada@sv-sb.org

Enrollment: 38, Teachers:9,
Teacher Assistants: 2, Admin staff: 2,
Kitchen Cook: 1

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTER

The Early Childhood Education Center at St. Vincent's Santa Barbara, is a lively and spirited environment that fosters self-confidence, self-discovery, and self-discipline, while allowing children to feel safe and loved in the world God has created for them. Welcoming infants as young as three months, the ECEC is a fully licensed, NAEYC-accredited, Catholic preschool embracing children and families of all faiths.

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM

The Intergenerational Program at St. Vincent's is a unique pilot initiative designed to foster meaningful connections between the children at the Children's Center and the senior residents of Villa Caridad. Through this program, children and seniors come together twice a week for engaging activities, lasting about 20-25 minutes, in Villa Caridad's community room or in other areas on campus.

The program creates opportunities for children to learn from older generations, practice social skills, and build a sense of community, while seniors benefit from the joy, energy, and companionship of interacting with young children. Teachers and staff guide the activities and provide full supervision to ensure children's needs are met throughout the experience.

By bridging generations, this program enriches both groups' lives—enhancing the seniors' quality of life and deepening the children's learning through shared stories, activities, and connections.

By the end of 2026, the Intergenerational Program will be housed in one of our preschool classrooms. The building will be modified as needed to ensure full compliance with licensing and safety requirements.

Voices Across Generations

"I look forward to being with the children, I enjoy hearing their stories and just watching them play. It's good to see them grow up each week they come over to visit us."

-Irma (Senior Friend)

"Play and laugh with my senior friends."

- Amaiyah (4 year old)



Santa Ynez Valley Charter School
John Dewey jdewey@syvcs.org

My project is in development and not yet complete, but one I am very excited about. This is the third year of TK at Charter and the program has been growing and evolving over the years. It is my second year as the TK teacher and one of my goals since becoming the TK teacher was to create a designated outdoor area for TK. This goal has become even more important this year as the program has expanded from 13 students to 22 students. As the number of students has increased, the diverse needs have increased as well. In order to address the needs of the students and create a welcoming, safe, explorative, and engaging space, we are working on building up our outdoor space. Listed below are some of the aspects we are either currently building or are planning on building in the next year or two.

1. Gates to enclose the TK yard. The vision is for there to be more free flow between the outdoor and indoor spaces, allowing for greater freedom of movement. It will also help keep students safe in an enclosed area if they do leave the classroom.
2. Play structures. We have ordered several play structures for students to use. These structures provide gross motor movement, imaginative play and more.
3. I wrote a grant request to Village Properties for outdoor toys and equipment such as Tuff Trays to encourage open-ended outdoor play. The grant was approved and I look forward to purchasing the items.
4. Partnering with parents. Several parents have come forward with a desire to monetarily support the development of the outdoor area! The director is working with the families to align visions and budgets.
5. Explore Ecology invited us to be a part of their North County TK cohort! The kits provided will help us create an engaging educational (and edible!) garden! I am looking forward to using all of the kits to guide and deepen our outdoor experiences.



Garden beds - being updated with Garden Explore



Area for sandboxes and play structure



SANTA YNEZ VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN PRESCHOOL

Joanna Hawkins (Director) Director@syvpps.org

57 Families Enrolled

5 teachers--5 aides--5 classrooms



Celebrating Learning & Connection in Chapel

Twice a month, we unite for Chapel where we celebrate birthdays, sing songs, and listen to stories highlighting our unique qualities. During this time, we emphasize the importance of caring for one another and acknowledging that we are all created through God's love. Families are always welcome and often join us for this meaningful experience. The Chapel stories are intentionally designed to meet the specific developmental and emotional needs of young children. Each story is carefully tailored to the current circumstances and themes we are exploring in the classroom. Friendships, big emotions, sharing, diversity in our community, personal space and respect for self and others and all the ways we can explore and learn about God's love!





The Oaks Parent-Child Workshop

605 W Junipero Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93105

805-682-7609

Director:

Theresa Embry director@theoakspcw.org

Assistant Director:

Andrea Uzupis assistantdirector@theoakspcw.org

Extended Day Supervisor:

Elisabeth Philabaum elisabeth.philabaum@theoakspcw.org

The Oaks is a parent-child cooperative program affiliated with Santa Barbara City College, School of Extended Learning. *Our mission is to create a joyful play-based cooperative preschool while supporting diverse families in a nurturing community.* Central to our program is the notion that parents are a child's first teachers. Under the guidance of early childhood educators, Oaks parents work and learn how to be more effective parents – from each other and the children. Our morning program is run by a director, an assistant director and an extended day supervisor. We currently serve 34 children between the ages of 2.5 years to 5 years old. We average 6 students/parents and 25 children each day.



In 2023 our best practice was about environmental education during the Morning Program and the 'Three Cares' that we use as a set of expectations for children, whether they are at school, in the community, or in wild places.

This year, our best practice dives further into the third care: **Take Care of the Earth.** We have two bunnies that live at The Oaks: Pudge and Clarence. Up until this year we have always had our parent run bunny committee take care of the bunnies each weekday morning. This year we decided to make it part of the children's curriculum. After

9:00 am, when most of the children have arrived, one of the staff and a small group of children carry the bunnies from their indoor hutch to their outside enclosure. The children help to add newspaper and hay to their hay bin, feed them their daily greens, and groom the bunnies.

Interacting and caring for an animal friend supports children's social, emotional and

cognitive development in meaningful ways and provides a hands-on relationship with the natural world and the connection of living things to each other. Integrating daily bunny care into our curriculum creates opportunities for the children to observe behaviors and strengthen relationships while building vocabulary and encouraging inquiry and problem-solving skills. Taking care of the bunnies promotes empathy, responsibility and cooperation between the children as they are guided in how to safely interact with Clarence and Pudge and share in caregiving tasks. We have also found that the bunny enclosure provides a gentle, quiet space to nurture and build connections with a smaller group of children, easing transitions and fostering connection and belonging for children and adults alike!



UCSB Children's Center · Santa Barbara, California

Director: Annette Muse · annettemuse@ucsb.edu · 805 893 3347

Preschool Program Coordinator: Michael Peterson (he/him/his) · mjp@ucsb.edu · 805 893 4904

Program Snapshot

The UCSB Children's Center, serving 165 children and 60 educators across two campuses, is a university affiliated, licensed, and NAEYC aligned program grounded in play, relationships, and inclusion.

Hallway Gallery: A Schoolwide Collaboration

This past year every classroom, infant, toddler, and preschool, contributed to a shared hallway gallery. The rotating theme turned a passing space into a living celebration of learning, elevating children's voices and sparking family conversations.



Impact

Children beamed as they found their work on display. Families stopped to talk with teachers, snapped photos, and asked about the process. Staff noted pride, connection, and stronger cross classroom ties. The gallery became a program wide learning story made visible.

Looking Ahead

We will continue seasonal and themed hallway collaborations to sustain family engagement, strengthen community identity, and document learning in public spaces. We will keep making learning visible.

Children's Resource & Referral **WINGS** Preschool at First Christian Church



At WINGS Preschool, our mission is to provide a **high-quality, Christ-centered environment** where all children feel safe, nurtured, and included—building a strong foundation for lifelong learning and a love for Jesus. We celebrate and support the **diverse strengths, abilities, backgrounds, and cultures** of every child and family. Inclusion is not just a value—it's a daily practice. Our staff is committed to creating spaces where **all children are seen, respected, and supported**, and where differences are embraced as part of a rich learning community. Each classroom is **intentionally designed** for child-led exploration, offering developmentally appropriate opportunities in **motor skills, language, cognitive growth, and social-emotional learning**. We understand that children thrive in environments that balance **freedom with structure**, and we offer consistent routines and clear boundaries to help them feel secure and confident. Our unique **Outdoor Classroom** spans over **10,000 sq. ft.**, providing space for children of all abilities to move, explore, and grow in nature. We believe that **anything you can do indoors, you can do outdoors**—with the added benefits of fresh air, movement, and discovery. As part of **Children's Resource & Referral**, WINGS Preschool connects families with vital community resources and support. We partner with parents as **equal contributors** to their child's educational journey, and we work to ensure **every family feels welcomed, valued, and empowered**. We are committed to maintaining the **highest standards of quality and inclusion**, ensuring that every child, **regardless of developmental level, learning style, or background**, has the opportunity to thrive in a supportive, loving, and faith-filled environment.

Best Practice: "Rotating Staff Schedules for Work Life Balance"

We implement a monthly rotating schedule for staff, alternating between opening, mid, and closing shifts. This ensures every team member has:

- Time for self-care and wellness
- Evening to share dinner with family and friends.
- Mornings off to attend to personal commitments or spend time with loved ones.

Why it matters:

- Promotes a healthy work-life balance
- Helps reduce burnout and fatigue
- Encourages greater engagement and positivity in the classroom
- Ensures fairness and equity in scheduling

By caring for our educators, we empower them to bring their best selves to work—creating a more supportive and thriving learning environment for all.

Licensed Capacity: 77
Children Enrolled: 57
60% in subsidized child care
37% of children with exceptional needs

Teachers: 9
On-Call Subs: 6



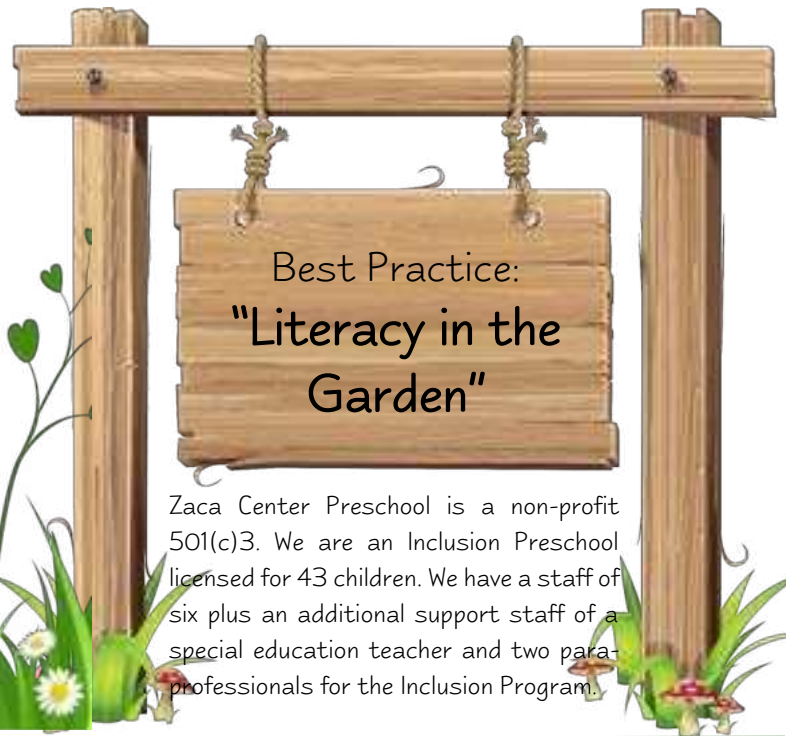
Natalia Mendez **Schuyler Mejia-Payne**
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Zaca Center PRESCHOOL

27 Six Flags Circle
Buellton, CA 93427
(805)688-0050

Director: Shelley Grand
zacacenter@verizon.net
zacacenterpreschool.org



Zaca Center Preschool is a non-profit 501(c)3. We are an Inclusion Preschool licensed for 43 children. We have a staff of six plus an additional support staff of a special education teacher and two para-professionals for the Inclusion Program.



To increase literacy in the garden...we added baskets to our garden bins. The baskets hold mini clipboards, pencils, books, word cards and magnifying glasses



We purchased books depicting real photos of the vegetables that we are growing in our garden. We took the books apart...laminated the pages and re-bound them so that they are now water and weather proof

The children can use the clipboards and pencils to write symbols, words, letters, letter strings or draw pictures of what they are seeing in and around the garden



We also laminated plant cycle cards, as well as information on aphids and other garden critters



"A bee"
-Theo (2 yrs old)

Supplies: The hanging baskets are from IKEA. The books are from Amazon. The mini clipboards are from Walmart. And the plant cycle cards are from Explore Ecology.