

The First 5 years



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WELCOME



By the Reading by 9 team

All of us have a favorite story. Whether it be the underdog superhero, dragon-slaying fantasy, an adventurous journey to the center of the earth or a classic tale of a frog prince and princess, these childhood stories have enchanted past generations for years.

If you ask, a majority of us can recall being read these fairy tales within the first five years of our childhood. This period for any developing mind is most crucial. Whether we were cognizant of it or not, we began building and enhancing our early learning abilities. Through these fairy tales, young minds are pushed to think creatively about sequences of events, vernacular, interpersonal dynamics, emotions and actions. As we continue to pass these stories down, we continue to promote early childhood literacy while advancing academic preparation for children.

The Los Angeles Times [Reading by 9](#) team aims to continue fostering this mission. This annual guidebook offers parents tools and resources to support at-home actions to aid early education and literacy. “The First 5 Years,” supported by the [Ballmer Group](#), is structured to support English and Spanish bilingual development. Resources such as expert advice, at-home learning activities, book recommendations and in an ever-evolving digital world, app recommendations are included to equip parents who do not know where to begin this journey.

Together, we hope these resources begin the fairy tale of your child's educational journey and introduce them to the enchanting world of literacy.



WHAT IS TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN?

By Kelly Reynolds | Senior Policy Analyst, Early Edge California

Universal TK provides a free, high-quality preschool option for all California families with 4-year-olds. This is critical in terms of access and affordability and ensures that more families can enroll their children in a preschool program and receive at least one year of preschool prior to starting kindergarten.

As a universal program, it provides an opportunity for more economic diversity within the classroom and creates environments that are inclusive. [Recent studies](#) have also shown that expanding TK benefits dual language learners and increases their math and literacy skills, compared with those who do not attend TK. This is important to note in a state where nearly 60% of children from birth through age 5 [speak a language other than English](#) at home.

TK serves as a bridge between preschool and kindergarten, providing more structure and routine for children, yet is still grounded in play-based activities to support their development and learning. TK is aligned with the [California Preschool Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations](#), which were recently revised to more intentionally align and bridge the learnings across preschool, TK and kindergarten, and will begin to be implemented this summer. TK also helps expose children to a school-based environment and eases them into the transition to kindergarten.



WHAT IS TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN?

In a TK classroom, you will likely see children participating in activities that allow their creativity and imagination to run wild, such as painting, building and storytelling. Children laugh, sing songs and explore, while teachers guide their learning through play.

This play-based learning supports their early math and literacy skills and social-emotional development, setting the foundation for children to thrive. By the [end of their year spent in TK](#), children will have stronger social-emotional skills, such as experiences forming stronger friendships and learning to share and cooperate. They will have stronger fine motor skills and can begin to draw shapes, write letters and use scissors. They will be able to follow increasingly complicated directions with stronger engagement and persistence in completing tasks and activities.

A 2017 [study by the American Institute of Research](#) found that children who participated in TK enter kindergarten with stronger math and literacy skills and teachers report them being more engaged than peers who had not been in a TK program.



HOW CRAYONS, PAINT AND PLAY ARE FOUNDATIONAL TO LEARNING IN TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN



By Donna Dragich | Transitional Kindergarten Teacher

In California, by 2025-26 all 4-year-olds will be eligible for universal TK. Many districts have already enacted the program, including the Los Angeles school system. Many parents are unsure if they should send their 4-year-old to a full day school program and are wondering, “What will my child do at school? What are they actually learning?”

All students must be 4 by September 1 to be eligible for universal TK, which means they can actually start in August as a 3-year-old! Not all schools are offering a program for the younger students, but there are many available throughout LAUSD. The traditional TK program is for children turning 5 between September 2 through June 2. The new addition is the younger children who turn 5 between June 3-Sept. 1.

This is what my UTK students will be doing and learning in the upcoming school year. They will learn foundational skills for school, such as how to stand and walk in a line, how to hold a pencil or scissors, how to use materials properly, such as glue, crayons, markers, etc.

This is probably their first school experience and they will need these skills and many more! They will learn through play, by singing songs about colors, numbers, letters, etc. We use a variety of materials, such as Play-Doh, clay, paint, beads, etc., to build fine motor skills and hand strength, as well as lots of PE activities to work on gross motor development. We focus on social-emotional learning, articulating their wants and needs and cooperative play. Learning to take turns, share and play fair are crucial skills for future success. And yes, your child will learn to read, recognize and write their name, learn colors, shapes, numbers, letters and much more! By the end of the year, they should be well prepared for kindergarten!

HOW DO YOU TEACH PHONICS?

By the Reading by 9 team

Phonics is a method that teaches children how to read by linking letters together based on sound groups. Together, these alphabetical combinations can aid children to easily begin pairing them by blending the sounds and words when learning how to read.

Letters and sounds is a systematically applied approach that can be easily taught at home when introducing phonics. Cumulatively, phonetic skills are gradually introduced and grown to develop literary fluency.

Letter-sound pairings activity:

Through sets of letters, children can begin to sound out and blend words. This can be taught by having your child touch a symbol under each letter while making the sound of each letter.

Creating symbols under the words that you use to teach your child to read allows them to use kinesthetic, visual and auditory learning strategies. The type of symbol is not important, but we recommend using something that can be stationary and moving for consistency. We'll use shooting stars in our examples, but dinosaurs, favorite characters, or dots work just as well.



HOW DO YOU TEACH PHONICS?

Start with the following letters:

S, A, T, P → Words include: at, a, sat, pat, tap, snap, as

Have your child touch the star under each letter and make the sound associated with the letter (not name the letter). This should sound like “s.” “a.” “t.” As your child is saying the sounds of the letters and NOT the letter names, it should NOT sound like “Ess” “Ay” “Tee.”



Now, have your child keep saying the letter sound along the shooting star as they move from one letter to the next.



This should sound like “ssssssaaaaaaaattttttt”. Now, have your child read the words “slow” and “fast.”

Say the word slowly first, the slow version of the word should sound like the above, “ssssssaaaaaaaattttttt.” Having your child make the letter sounds longer than you would usually say them, aids with blending.

Next, have them say the word quicker to make it “fast.” The “fast” version will sound like “sat.” If they have trouble saying the word fast, ask them to say the word quicker and quicker until they have it.

Practice combining the letters above until your child can read two and three letter words that are formed from these letters. Sat, at, pat, sap, tap. Beginner words alternate consonants and vowels and do not include silent letters. “Past” may be too difficult for your child to blend when they first start to read. “Say” would also not be a beginner word because the “y” affects the “a” sound, but does not make its own sound. Do not be discouraged if young children cannot combine two consonants in a row at this point.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS:



[We Are All Connected / Todos estamos conectados](#)

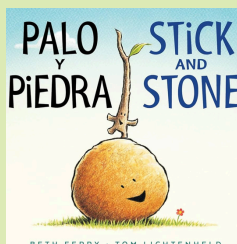
Gabi Garcia, Natalia Jimenez Osorio

With vibrant and modern images, this book is a celebration of differences. It teaches children that what they do can have a positive impact on those around them and the earth at large.



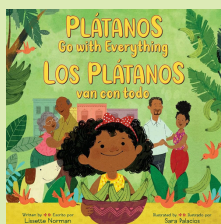
[I Love You When You're Angry / Te amo cuando estás enojado](#) | *Erin Winters, Kaitin Bucher*

This book is an affirmation for children who are quick to anger. It shows young children that they aren't alone in their reactions and that all parents love their children, no matter what emotions they show.



[Stick and Stone / Palo y Piedra](#) | *Beth Ferry, Tom Lichtenheld*

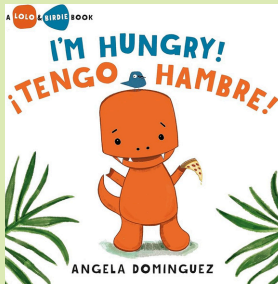
This sweet story about sticking up for your friends features only a few words per page, making it perfect for early readers. The simplistic artwork is charming. The text rhymes in English, making it easy to emphasize initial sounds.



[Plátanos go with Everything / Los plátanos van con todo](#) | *Lissette Norman, Sara Palacios*

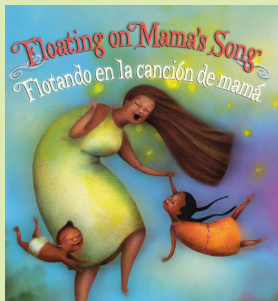
Food is love. Food is comfort. Food is a celebration. Food is everything and *plátanos* fit all occasions. Feel a sense of belonging from *plátanos* and a family from the Dominican Republic.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS:



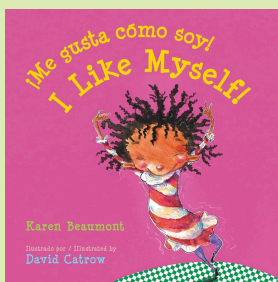
[I'm hungry! / ¡Tengo Hambre!](#) | *Angela Dominguez*

What could the baby dinosaur want to eat? An English speaking bird suggests everything he can think of until the Spanish-speaking dinosaur suggests a bird ... a *blue* bird. What should our narrator suggest then?



[Floating on Mama's Song / Flotando en la canción de mamá](#) | *Laura Lacámara, Yuyi Morales*

When Mama sings, the world floats. Her song lifts the people and animals around her not only emotionally but physically.



[I Like Myself! / ¡Me gusta cómo soy!](#)

Karen Beaumont, David Catrow

This little girl likes herself no matter what anyone else says. Her confidence lets her shrug off anyone who may dislike her unique ways. This self-affirming book with fun illustrations is sure to be a favorite.



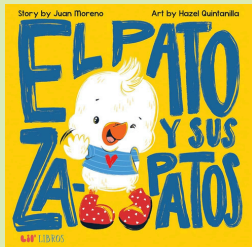
[Goodnight, Good Dog / Buenas noches, perrito bueno](#) *Mary Lyn Ray, Rebecca Malone*

The good dog isn't sleepy. He remembers playing in the sun. But he does like his bed. He likes the quiet night sounds. If he just closed his eyes, what might come next?

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS:



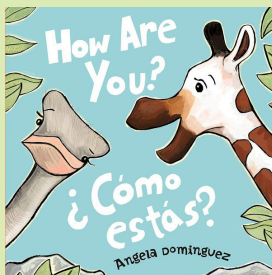
[Rain! / ¡Lluvia!](#) | *Linda Ashman, Christian Robinson*
 Perspective is everything. When an older man who hates the rain runs into a young girl dressed as a frog, her happiness rubs off on him.



[El pato y sus zapatos](#) | *Juan Moreno, Hazel Quintanilla*
 Duckie loves his shoes! Each pair has a different use. Learn to read color words with this cute book filled with animals.



[Sing with Me / Canta conmigo](#) | *José-Luis Orozco, Sara Palacios*
 Classic preschool songs fill this bilingual book. Sing the ABCs, Wheels on the Bus, Old MacDonald and more. Notice the differences and similarities in the Spanish and English versions together.



[How are you? / ¿Cómo estás?](#) | *Angela Dominguez*
 Two giraffes meet a baby ostrich in this bilingual book about feelings. See the funny illustrations of the giraffes as they act out the emotions to try to figure out how the ostrich feels.

THESE TWO APPS WILL HELP YOUR CHILD START READING LIKE A PRO

Check out these phonics-based apps for independent and accompanied learning



Pricing:

Free: 3 missions daily
 \$5.99: monthly access to 10 apps
 \$35.99: yearly access to 10 Kahoot! apps

INDEPENDENT LEARNING: Kahoot! Learn to read by Poio

Pros:

- polished animation and imagery
- clear articulation and repetition
- multiple languages offered
- the phonics learning naturally builds toward a story

Cons:

- crashed repeatedly on the iPad (using a 10th generation on 17.5.1)
- audio continuously dropped
- only one child profile is available for free

reading.com



Pricing:

Monthly: \$12.49
 Yearly: \$74.99

ACCOMPANIED LEARNING: Reading.com

Pros:

- provides dialogue for you to read aloud for your child
- based on traditional literacy approaches
- early lessons are call and response, promoting interaction between child and parent
- songs and smooth graphics

Cons:

- must watch videos before setting the program
- lessons are not gamified and cannot be done independently



CHILDREN'S DESK

Questions from parents , answers from experts



What if my child doesn't want to go to school?

When young children go to school for the first time, it's [normal](#) for them to refuse. Treatment for first-time jitters involves helping children understand how anxiety is making their body feel, talking to them about these feelings to help calm them, and making sure they attend school consistently and don't avoid it with trips to the nurse. They may ask to visit the nurse because of stomach pains which are actually a [symptom of anxiety](#).

You can find many books about school anxiety (check out our [August newsletter](#) for some of our favorites) if you need help talking to your child about it. However, you should first talk to your child about their underlying concern to make sure the book is appropriate (i.e. you wouldn't want a book about parental separation if the issue is really that they are afraid of their teacher).





CHILDREN'S DESK

Questions from parents , answers from experts



How can I best prepare them?

Goals prior to schooling should be to solely set your child up for success, not teach them everything before arrival. The best preparation is aligned with what you usually do as a parent.

- **Make sure they get enough sleep:** Children in preschool should be getting [10-13 hours](#) of sleep each night.
- **Communication and language:** Make sure that your child can communicate effectively with their teacher. [Talk to them](#) about your day, give them step-by-step directions and help them express their own wants and needs.
- **Motor skills:** Help them become independent in the classroom. They will work on tracing and drawing in class, but give them the experience of holding a crayon or pencil and using safety scissors at home. You can also work on expected [age-appropriate motor skills](#) through play – completing puzzles, making cereal or macaroni necklaces, and basic coloring or painting.

What kind of books should I get them?

All books are good books. What are you trying to target? Do you think your child needs help with phonics? Try looking for “decodable books.” These texts are intended to focus on specific vowel and consonant patterns. With easily recognizable graphics, they function to help your child read as they build on prior knowledge. For example, there could be a focus on -at, with pictures of a cat, bat, rat, etc. A popular brand of these is the “Bob” books, but you can also find them themed with popular characters that your child loves.

Does your child need help with comprehension? To build these skills, we recommend starting with picture books with straightforward story lines. It is important to note that the type of book is less important than how you read with your child. Pause and let them predict what happens next, retell parts of the story and relate the story to their life to [foster comprehension](#). When you chose books, consider their current interests to foster attention.

HOW CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE PREPARES CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOR A LEGACY OF SUCCESS



By Justine Lawrence | Senior Vice President of Prenatal to Five at Children's Institute

In the ever-changing world of early childhood education and development, ensuring children are ready to embark on their academic journey is key. The concept of school readiness encompasses the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for success in school, development and beyond. What this means is that children are well-prepared for school, families are equipped to support their children's learning and schools are ready to educate young learners.

A comprehensive approach to early education

It's critical that comprehensive early care education services are rooted in strong family engagement. Our priorities at Children's Institute are designed to foster school readiness for both children and their families and we use the following goals and guidance to assess our progress:



1. **Approach to learning:** Encourage children to learn and engage by providing developmentally appropriate activities.
2. **Social and emotional development:** Help children learn how to manage their behaviors and emotions to develop the skills needed to form healthy relationships.
3. **Language and literacy:** Enable children to understand and respond to language by laying the necessary groundwork for speaking and reading in both English and their home language.
4. **Cognitive development and general knowledge:** Expand children's knowledge in critical subject matters including math and science.
5. **Physical well-being and motor skills development:** Enhance children's health, safety and fine motor skills.

HOW CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE PREPARES CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOR A LEGACY OF SUCCESS



Preparing for successful transitions

Children's Institute's Early Childhood Education program provides the necessary resources and experiences to ensure all children in the program are prepared for successful transitions from preschool to kindergarten. This preparation is critical for all students to set the foundation for future academic success, as defined by school readiness standards.

Setting goals for lifelong learning

To achieve this, Children's Institute has established overarching school readiness goals for children from birth to age 5, spanning the five essential school readiness domains. These age-specific objectives are based on current program data, reflecting the diverse needs of all early childhood services programs. This tailored approach promotes individualized progress among children toward the birth to five school readiness goals.

Research-based methodologies

Children's Institute's approach is grounded in developmental learning objectives that utilize research-based tools such as the Desired Results Developmental Profile, the Creative Curriculum and the Early Learning Framework. These tools, combined with assessment data and trends collected from all our early childhood programs, form the foundation for establishing current school readiness goals.

In a world where early education is increasingly recognized as the cornerstone of lifelong success, Children's Institute's commitment to school readiness ensures that children, families and schools are all equally prepared to embark on the educational journey together. Through comprehensive services and a steadfast focus on essential developmental domains, Children's Institute is paving the way for a brighter future and a legacy of success, one child at a time.

HOW A SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM AIMS TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN EARLY LITERACY

By Nelly Mallo | Program Manager, Little by Little School Readiness Program

The [Little by Little Program School Readiness Program](#) is an evidence-based early literacy program for young children ages 0-5. The LBL program was developed by [PHFE WIC](#), the largest nonprofit WIC network in the U.S. WIC provides supplemental foods, breastfeeding support, healthcare referrals, and nutrition education for pregnant and parenting women, caregivers, and infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk and are living at or below 185% of the federal poverty line.

The LBL program is currently offered at 12 WIC centers in Los Angeles County and provides free, high-quality books, parental support and instruction around early literacy to visiting WIC families. Early literacy means helping children develop a rich vocabulary, self-expression and reading comprehension, important tools young children need to enter kindergarten with a love of books and a readiness to learn.

Supporting WIC families is important as young children from families facing financial instability experience fewer activities and opportunities that foster their emergent literacy skills, compared to children from families with higher, more stable income.

Children who fall behind early are also less likely to catch up, and they tend to remain behind as they move through successive grades at school. The LBL program plays an important role in helping close this achievement gap by helping WIC children become successful readers and lifelong learners.



COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS



Literacy Services:

Common Sense Media

1100 Glendon Ave. 17th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90024
commonsense.org

CSUN LA Times Literacy Center

18111 Nordhoff Street,
Northridge, CA 91330
(818) 677-7394
<https://www.csun.edu/teaching-learning-counseling-consortium/la-times-literacy-center>

Children's Institute

2121 West Temple Street Los Angeles, CA 90026
(213) 260 7600
<https://www.childrensinstitute.org/>

Raising a Reader

Sobrato Center for Nonprofits
489 Valley Way
Milpitas, CA 95035
(650) 489-0550
Raisingareader.org

Reach Out and Read

119 providers in LA County
(617) 455-0600
reachoutandread.org

Reading Is Fundamental of Southern California

7250 Bandini Blvd., Suite 209
Commerce, CA 90040
(323) 890-0876
Rifsocal.org

Reading Partners

5350 Wilshire Blvd., #36216
Los Angeles, CA 90036
(213) 399-8599
readingpartners.org/location/los-angeles

Reading to Kids

1600 Sawtelle Boulevard,
Suite 210 Los Angeles,
California 90025
(310) 479-7455
readingtokids.org

The Book Foundation

5429 W. Washington Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016
(323) 746-5800
<https://www.makegoodinc.org/the-book-foundation>

Quality Start Los Angeles

(855) 507-4443
info@qualitystartla.org
<https://qualitystartla.org/family-resources/early-literacy/>

Access Books

(310) 284-3452
accessbooks.net

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS



Support Services:

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors

1000 N. Alameda St., No.
240
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 346-3216
ap-od.org

Families Forward Learning Center

980 N. Fair Oaks Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91103
(626) 792-2687
Familiesforwardlc.org

First 5 LA

750 N. Alameda Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 482-5902
www.first5la.org

Hands Together

201 Civic Center Drive
Santa Ana, CA 92701
(714) 479-0294
handstogether-sa.org

Little by Little

15 sites across Southern
California
lblreaders.org

Mexican American Opportunity Foundation

27 locations across Southern
California
(323) 890-1555
maof.org

Pathways LA

3325 Wilshire Blvd., Suite
1100
Los Angeles, CA 90010
(213) 427-2700
pathwaysla.org

Plaza de la Raza

3540 North Mission Road
Los Angeles, CA 90031
(323) 223-2475
www.plazadelaraza.org

Proyecto Pastoral Centro de Alegria

420 N. Soto St.
Los Angeles, CA 90033
(323) 685-8501
Proyectopastoral.org

Proyecto Pastoral Centro la Guardería

157 S. Gless St., Los Angeles,
CA 90033
(323) 881-0010
Proyectopastoral.org

Quality Start Los Angeles

815 Colorado Blvd 4th Floor,
Los Angeles, CA 90041
(855) 507-4443
qualitystartla.org

South Central LAMP

892 E. 48th St.
Los Angeles, CA 90011
(323) 234-1471
Southcentrallamp.org

Literally Healing

4650 Sunset Blvd. Los Angeles,
CA 90027
(323) 660-2450
<https://www.chla.org/literally-healing>

No Limits For Deaf Children

9801 Washington Blvd., 2nd
Floor, Culver City, CA 90232
(310) 280-0878
<https://www.nolimitsfordeafchildren.org/literacy.html>

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS



Libraries

Little Free Library

150,000 pop-ups throughout the U.S.

715-690-2488

littlefreelibrary.org

Los Angeles Public Library

72 branches

(213) 228-7000

lapl.org/branches

Los Angeles County Library

86 branches

(323) 264-7715

lacountylibrary.org/library-locator

Orange County Public Libraries

33 branches

(714) 566-3000

<http://ocpl.org/libraries>

Ventura County Public Library

14 branches

(641) 829-4410

<https://www.vencolibrary.org/>



Contributors



Donna Dragich is a National Board-Certified teacher with 27 years of experience teaching UTK-2nd grades with Los Angeles Unified School District.



Heidi Stauder has worked with the Los Angeles Times in Education program since 2012. She has previously taught in Public School Systems and holds a degree in Elementary Education.



Isabella Balandrán is a co-producer for the Los Angeles Times youth journalism program High School Insider.



Rebecca Castillo is a special projects lead for the Los Angeles Times Reading by 9 and High School Insider.



Leda Joy Abkenari is a co-producer for the Los Angeles Times youth journalism program High School Insider.



Founded in 2003, Early Edge California is a nonprofit organization working to advance policy changes and investments that will expand access to high-quality Early Learning and Care programs. Our work is guided by the vision that all children birth to age 8 should receive high-quality, racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally responsive early education, enter Kindergarten ready to learn, and thrive through 3rd grade and beyond.



The Little by Little School Readiness Program is designed to provide the knowledge and resources to families who are striving to ensure their kids have access to all opportunities. The program supports parents to foster consistent early literacy habits at home through our reading program for children.



For more details on Children's Institute's early childhood initiatives, please see our [website](#). Children's Institute, one of Los Angeles' largest and most historic nonprofits, empowers children, families, and communities through a multigenerational, community-based approach. They offer education and youth programs, counseling services, parenting resources, and workforce development, while advocating for those they serve to heal, thrive, and achieve lasting success.