

Promising Practices: A Guide for Library Staff

Aligned with *Reimagining School Readiness: A Position Paper with Key Findings*



Bay Area
Discovery
Museum



This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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We would like to thank the following libraries for participating in the original pilot project with us. Your contributions shaped and strengthened this toolkit. We hope that you feel proud of the results and recognize the ripple effect that your efforts will have on children and families throughout the country.

- Alpine Branch, San Diego County Library
- Biblioteca Latinoamericana Branch, San Jose Public Library
- Eastmont Branch, Oakland Public Library
- Fowler Branch, Fresno County Library
- Marin County Free Library, County of Marin
- Ovitt Family Community Library, City of Ontario



Introduction

There are families in every community who cannot afford preschool, do not know how to fill out the appropriate paperwork to get their child into a subsidized preschool or are rejected because all programs are full. No matter their economic or educational background, all parents want their children to be successful and research shows that between the ages of 0 to 8 are critical to develop the skills that predict future success in life.

This book is intended to accompany and complement *Reimagining School Readiness: A Position Paper with Key Findings*. Based on that paper, the Bay Area Discovery Museum worked with a pilot group of six libraries throughout California to collaboratively develop a set of promising practices aimed at making the research actionable for library staff.

These tips and strategies are not intended to be exhaustive. It remains essential, for example, for adults to read frequently to children and for children to be able to identify letters and numbers. However, emphasizing a narrow skill set in early childhood as a panacea for school readiness ignores the complexity and remarkable capabilities of young children. Early childhood is the time when children's brains are being wired for conceptual thinking and creative problem-solving. Research shows us how to take advantage of this window of opportunity and the *Promising Practices* guide puts that research into action.

For easy reference, in addition to general strategies for library staff, we have divided the tips by age: working with Babies 0-18 months, Toddlers 18-36 months, Preschoolers 3-5 years, and Early Elementary 5-8 years. However, keep in mind that an individual child may or may not be developmentally aligned with the typical child their age and variance in developmental patterns is normal. Additionally, many tips apply to more than one age range and should only be used as a guide. Many families come to the library with children of multiple ages. Try using these tips to support your thoughtful planning about how to adapt activities so that children of different ages are all welcomed and included.

Every library is in a different place along a spectrum of delivering school readiness programming. Many have a suite of programs already in place, while others may just be scratching the surface. Wherever you are, we hope this guide as well as the associated [online toolkit](#) provide a place to start or extend your efforts. You don't have to use everything provided all at once. Feel free to pick and choose the pieces that are most useful to you and most relevant to your community members. You may want to tackle one tip per month or focus on revamping one of your storytimes before moving onto another program. We hope you will keep coming back to these resources over the years and find new nuggets that will extend the boundaries of what's possible in your community.

“Toolkits are great, but you can't just expect it to do the work. You have to get in there and you have to get your hands dirty and you have to sit with it.”

- Staff at Ovitt Family Community Library



Mindset

Research on *mindset*—an individual’s core beliefs about the nature of intelligence and intellectual growth—has had one of the biggest impacts on education in decades. Some believe that intelligence is a malleable quality that can be cultivated and developed with hard work and persistence (a *growth mindset*), while others think of intelligence as unchangeable and static (a *fixed mindset*). The implications of these mindsets are profound. When faced with challenging situations, individuals with a growth mindset display resilience and use effort to overcome difficulty, whereas those with a fixed mindset give up easily and avoid future challenges.

The concept of mindset is as important for adults as it is for children. It can be helpful to examine our own mindset as we approach various aspects of our life and work. Often we have a fixed mindset in one area (e.g., math) and a growth mindset in another area of our life (e.g., cooking). With a fixed mindset, we think of ourselves as someone who is just fundamentally not good at math, rather than seeing a challenging math problem as an opportunity to work hard, learn new strategies, and improve our skills. With a growth mindset, we are more willing to take risks such as cooking a new, complicated recipe, and we attribute our success to our efforts rather than to innate talent or ability.

As you read the strategies that follow, and as you examine the entire [Reimagining School Readiness Toolkit](#), it will be helpful to approach these ideas with a growth mindset. Undoubtedly, you have already been doing some of these practices consistently and confidently for many months or years; other ideas may be new and perhaps seem a bit uncomfortable. We acknowledge that any change in approach is risky, time-consuming, and effortful. However, we invite you to take a risk: read, reflect, and grow in your practice. The impact on the children and families you serve will be well worth the effort.

For more information on mindset, refer to books by author and researcher Carol Dweck.

“... it can be overwhelming for staff members who have been doing their storytimes for a long time, and now it’s like ‘Now what do you want me to add to it?’ It’s more like, ‘This is the perspective that we’re taking, try something new.’ That doesn’t mean that you have to completely change your storytime, just try one new thing a month.”

—Staff at Alpine Branch

“What I did is I just really looked at these best-practices... How can I incorporate this best-practice into something that I know will be fun to do?... Can I get out of my comfort zone?”

—Staff at Eastmont Branch

Partnerships & Relationships

No one can do it alone. Throughout the pilot, all of the participating libraries utilized partnerships and patron relationships to make their programs successful. Change is made through people and no amount of resources will overcome the value of listening, learning and helping one another.

Take a moment to reflect on the resources in your community. This could be local school districts, child care centers, museums, a public television station, community center, or many other types of organizations. How do you already connect or partner with them? Here are some ideas to begin or deepen these partnerships:

- Work with food banks or other community organizations to see if they can provide free snacks and/or offer summer meals at the library.
- Consider programs, initiatives, and resources that equip families with the tools they need to tackle challenges around housing, stress, safety, or hunger.
- Invite experts from other disciplines to partner for a program or event: a yoga teacher, biologist, or a first responder. Or, venture into your community and take storytime to local schools, community centers, or parks.
- Cultivate a diverse network of community resources including pediatricians, social workers and schools who can visit the library to offer families and children resources and support directly.

Below are a few examples from the pilot libraries that illustrate different ways to partner with community organizations and to build relationships.

The Biblioteca Latinoamericana Branch developed a partnership with a neighboring community center when they realized they serve many of the same families. Staff from the library took their programs to the community center, and they in turn brought arts and crafts to the library. By working together and talking to one another, they were able to build deeper relationships and better meet the needs of their community.

Marin County Free Library also developed a working partnership with a neighboring preschool. Through a long term program, the library and the preschool were able to support one another and gain the trust of their children, families, and teachers. Library staff shared:

“I had been going to the preschool that’s right above our library, once a month and doing a storytime plus an activity based on whatever curriculum that they were working on. We also have kids from a five-week summer bridge program come to the library. These are kids who are transitioning from preschool to kindergarten in the fall, and we do storytime and an activity based on their theme. We also incorporate materials into our collection that support learning and school readiness.”

- Staff at Marin County Free Library

As yet another model, the Eastmont Branch partnered with a local nonprofit called Bananas bananasbunch.org so that an individual trained in early childhood education would come into the library to facilitate a storytime.

The Eastmont Branch also demonstrated their strong commitment to building relationships with the families they serve. They recognized that parents/caregivers don’t want to be preached at or told they are not doing a good job. Instead, they have found that when building the relationship and caring about a family becomes more important than dispensing information, then the parents/caregivers will become much more receptive to learning and growing.

“...traditionally the relationship between librarians and patrons has been very transactional. You see someone once, and you don’t pry into their business, and you exchange goods, and you give them a piece of information...Whereas the content here is really only as effective as the relationship on which it stands.”

- Staff at Eastmont Branch

Key findings

Based on a comprehensive review of cognitive and developmental psychology research ([Reimagining School Readiness: A literature review](#)), the six key findings from the paper [Reimagining School Readiness: A position paper with key findings](#) aim to surface the skills and conditions that matter most for a child’s success in school and life. The skills that follow have been divided into three categories that align with the six key findings from the research: **Talk & Play**; **Science & Math**; and **Body & Brain**. **Talk & Play** (aligned with key findings 1 and 5) focuses on supporting children’s developing linguistic abilities as well as their social-emotional skills. **Science & Math** (aligned with key findings 2 and 3) support foundational mindsets and content understanding for those disciplines, often ignored in the early childhood years. **Body & Brain** (aligned with key findings 4 and 6) support developing executive function skills, reducing stress, and meeting basic needs.

Skills

Key findings



Talk & Play

1. Quality adult-child interactions shape children’s thinking skills. The conversations we have, the questions we ask, and the experiences we provide matter. Simple shifts in our approach and language boost children’s learning and cognitive development.
5. Children with stronger social skills do better in school, in the workplace, and in life. Child-directed play is key to the development of social skills and needs to be prioritized in early education.



Science & Math

2. Science learning is critical for the development of higher-order thinking but is missing from most early school experiences.
3. Demonstrating strong math skills at an early age is a strong indicator of developing conceptual thinking skills and predicts long-term success in school, not just in later math learning but also in later reading proficiency.



Body & Brain

4. Planning, self-awareness, and self-control – what psychologists refer to as *executive functions* – predict positive school and life outcomes. Studies show that children develop executive functions through experience.
6. Higher-order thinking, retention of information, and creativity flourish when children experience minimized stress and when their basic needs are met. While persistent stress can impede brain development, caring relationships with adults as well as programs that teach emotion regulation provide protection from risk.



Promising Practices for Library Staff

Much of the research on school readiness emphasizes the way adults interact with children, as well as how they set up their learning environment and materials, has a direct impact on children's development. Children most often go to libraries with many different ages represented in their family groups. The strategies listed below are intended to serve as a guide for library staff working with children across the span of ages 0 to 8.



Talk & Play:

- **Use complex words freely with children.** Read non-fiction books that introduce unusual words. Use the words in context and also present them formally (e.g., on a dry erase board), checking for understanding.
- **Provide avenues for collaborative play.** Have free time after storytime and bring out toys and games that require working together towards a common goal (e.g., 3-legged race, trains with only one track). Try prompting children by suggesting activities or asking questions: *Let's create the tallest free-standing tower! How are you going to carry that block by yourself when it is so big and heavy?* See conflict in play as a critical opportunity to build social skills.
- **Ask children open-ended questions and provide ample wait time.** Throughout your program, circulate through the room and ask questions: *How could you make your bridge more stable? What do you think would happen if a gust of wind came by? What other materials could you use?* Then, let children talk and listen without judgment. Allow them time to formulate ideas and refrain from filling in the blanks or correcting too quickly.
- **Help children recognize emotions in themselves and others.** Choose books for storytime that have examples of characters dealing with emotions, such as, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* or Kevin Henke's *A Good Day*. Ask children what the characters are feeling and whether they have ever felt that way. Point out the physical manifestations of a character or a child's feelings: *I can see that your shoulders are really tight and that this is hard for you. Let's take a break.*



Science & Math:

- **Point out surprising things and strive to instill a sense of wonder.** We learn best when our brains need to work through things that may challenge our initial assumptions. Incorporate activities where children have time to play and experiment after encountering a surprising occurrence.
- **Adopt a “love of mistakes” mentality and see failure as an opportunity for learning.** Model your reaction to mistakes for children. When you make a mistake, call it out and celebrate it. Be explicit that you are going to learn from that mistake and make changes moving forward.
- **Support children in making predictions.** Preview books at storytime and ask children to make predictions about the characters or what will happen next. Ask questions that help children articulate how and why they are making inferences: *What makes you think that? How did you come up with that idea?*
- **Showcase math in everyday life.** Use the signs and notecards provided in this toolkit or other resources to show how math can be used when checking out books, sorting and organizing toys, playing with puzzles, etc.
- **Encourage children to use their fingers when counting.** Try finger recognition activities from sources like [YouCubed.org](https://www.youcubed.org). Research shows it makes a difference!



Body & Brain:

- **Let children choose.** Try setting up stations for activities and letting children self-select which station(s) to go to and how long to stay there. Instead of asking children to replicate a model you provide, allow children to choose from a variety of materials to make their vision a reality.
- **Make your expectations explicit.** You may need to explain: *When we are in the library and in this room, we talk with inside voices and when we are outside, we can be loud.*
- **Breathe, stretch and move!** Offer programming (e.g., stress management, yoga, mindfulness) that helps families manage their stress levels. This will, in turn, alleviate stress on their children. Use physical movement to break up stories and activities that “get the wiggles out.” Use songs that have accompanying movement (e.g., fingerplay, clapping, stomping). Teach different types of breathing exercises: Have children lay on their backs and place a beanie-baby or puppet animal on their stomachs and breathe in and out to notice the movement.
- **Create a welcoming environment for all.** Recognize that being part of an under-represented community can create stress for children. Think about the type of book displays you create. Look at the covers and languages of the books and examine which holidays you celebrate. Offer bilingual programming or invite community members of different cultures to present at storytime. Be mindful of varying family structures and try asking questions that avoid assumptions: *Where is your grown-up?* instead of *Where is your mom/dad?*
- **Acknowledge a child’s need, even if you are busy.** Take the time to say something reassuring: *I will be away for the next 15 min. but I will come back to you.* Thank the child for waiting patiently. Get down to the child’s level to speak to them so that the child knows they have your full attention.



Working with Babies (0-18 months)

Research shows that beginning in infancy, experiences, interactions and environments matter. The brains of babies are developing quickly and are shaped by the world and people around them. The tips below are intended to help make sense of and put into practice some of this recent research to prepare children for school and life, beginning in infancy.



Talk & Play:

- **Suggest families try new things together and ask questions as they go.** Asking questions prompts active learning, even when children don't verbally answer. Always express your own questions about how things work as well.
- **Encourage and equip parents and caregivers to provide their babies with alternative forms of communication.** Utilize laminated icons or sign language hand gestures for key needs (e.g., more, milk, all done, water) to alleviate frustration and allow babies to communicate earlier.
- **Foster social interactions.** Introduce games and activities that require back and forth turn taking. For instance, roll a ball back and forth or play peek-a-boo. Create opportunities and space for babies to see and/or interact with each other. Encourage parents and caregivers to help their baby play with other babies after storytime.



Science & Math:

- **Embrace the mess!** Young children learn to explore science through messy play and sensory experiences. Have sensory stations with water, kinetic sand, smelly spices and herbs, or mystery touch boxes. You can control how much mess can be made by allocating small portions on paper plates or in bowls. If feasible, take messy activities outside adjacent to the library.
- **Support emerging understanding of quantity.** Use number words as adjectives instead of nouns (e.g., *We'll read 3 books*- instead of *We'll read 3*). Stick with small numbers like 1, 2, or 3, and focus on *how many*. This helps babies begin to understand quantity as a way to describe a group of objects.
- **Provide materials that children will be able to manipulate and change.** Cause and effect is an important idea for babies to learn. Using rattles to shake, balls to roll, or blocks safe enough to bang and throw can aid in their understanding.
- **Compare and contrast objects, highlighting the similarities and differences.** Use the words "more" and "less" to describe stacks of blocks, books, or puzzle pieces. Or hold two items in your hands and try to come up with as many different words as you can to compare them (noticing color, size, weight, etc.).



Brain & Body

- **Demonstrate and name emotions.** While reading a story or by using finger puppets and doll play, discuss basic emotions: happiness, fear, sadness, surprise and anger.
- **Exercise patience with repetition.** Children use repetitive play to build neuronal connections and test out their theories about the world. Remind parents and caregivers of the importance of repetitive play.
- **Connect parents and caregivers with one another.** Having a new child can be a challenging and stressful time for the whole family. Suggest helpful books and resources, or community organizations and practitioners to provide much needed support. Sometimes, simply providing time and space after a program for parents/caregivers to connect with each other can be extremely helpful.



“[The storytime programming] really enlightens them and makes them feel safe. It’s free and everybody is learning. Not just the children. The parents leave here learning things. Everything is easily replicated at home... with school readiness, it has to be something that’s every day... something that’s easy... it has to be consistent. And if parents learn one or two things from the library that they can repeat at home even though they don’t come back for a month, that’s going to help their child become ready for school.”

–Staff at Eastmont Branch

Activity: Mirror Play

Provide mirrors of various sizes and shapes along with flashlights and small objects like rocks and shells. Children can play with the mirrors by looking at, recognizing and manipulating their reflection. They can use the flashlight and other metal materials to see light reflected on the walls/floor. They can investigate the reflection of the rocks and shells, or choose to count and sort them. Whatever the infant chooses to do, the adult can support their lead by, for example, placing materials nearby, moving the mirror so the infant can see his/her reflection, repeating back and forth interactions, and narrating what is happening.



Working with Toddlers (18 months- 3 years)

Toddlerhood is an exciting time of growth and development, and research affirms its importance. Toddlers are capable of astounding insight, and the way that we converse with them as well as the activities we provide them can lay the foundation for a lifetime of critical and creative thinking.



Talk & Play:

- **Ask children questions, even if they cannot verbally answer:** *How do you think this works? How can we find out?* Encourage them to show or tell you their explanation and listen and respond to their verbal or nonverbal cues without judgment.
- **During free play time, find moments to play alongside with children.** Encourage them to experiment, pretend, and try new things. Support their play and suggest parents and caregivers to do the same. Show them it is ok to be silly and try new things.
- **Let children help you with everyday tasks.** Choose tasks they can meaningfully contribute to, like putting away supplies from an activity. Use the opportunity to ask questions: *Can you figure out where to put this? How did you know?*
- **Help toddlers learn that other people's thoughts and feelings differ from theirs.** One way to make this clear is by having conversations about the thoughts/feelings of puppets, dolls or book characters.



Science & Math:

- **Explore cause and effect.** During a toy exploration time, try asking questions: *What would happen if we roll this car on a piece of carpet? On a piece of cardstock? Down a ramp?*
- **Embrace the mess!** Young children learn science through messy play. Incorporate materials or experiences that children may not have the opportunity to explore at home. Allow the child to conduct their own experiments, even if they aren't following the "recipe."
- **Model and encourage spatial talk.** Utilize words like above, below, behind, and in front to boost children's math skills, particularly when playing with blocks or other building materials.
- **Practice the concepts of more/less and larger/smaller.** Arrange books, shapes, toys, or blocks according to size. Ask children to make comparisons: *Which group has more? Which has less?*



Brain & Body

- **Use a game to distribute and/or return manipulatives.** Try using bean bags or shakers and encourage children to take turns: *Everyone with a red shirt can come up and get your bean bag now! Everyone with a blue shirt can come up next!*
- **Limit instructions to one or two steps at a time.** Remember that toddlers can only handle processing a few instructions all at once, so keep the directions simple: *Please take a seat at the table and then pick out one piece of colored paper to start your project.*
- **Give children choice and control when possible.** When using art materials, allow children to create whatever they would like. For example, it's ok if their hippo has 3 eyes and 2 tails - no need to provide a model. Instead, ask for their ideas, thoughts, and suggestions: *Which material should we use? or Which song should we sing next?*

“I think for librarians we’re taught that we have to lead the program and it can be challenging to step back and not provide the solution because that’s what we do. ‘Oh, you need a book? Let me find it.’ ‘Oh you need a resource? Here you go’ ... it’s a different way of approaching something to not give the solution and to step back and allow kids to figure it out themselves.”

– Staff at Ovitt Family Community Library



Activity: Shake, Rattle & Roll

Find complete activity instructions at BADM.org/Activities

Children learn about cause and effect as they experiment with materials and containers to design, build, and play their own unique shaker! Gather a variety of containers (plastic, metal, wooden) and materials to fill the containers (pebbles, buttons, beads, pom-poms). Ask children to pick a container to make a shaker with, and to use tweezers or scoops to fill their container with their chosen materials. Encourage children to try out different combinations of materials and containers and to compare and contrast the sounds they hear. Let children enjoy shaking their shakers and dancing to the music they make!

Working with Preschoolers (3-5 years)

Preschool has typically been thought of as the narrow window in which to work on school readiness skills. During this time, many important skills like social emotional development, habits of mind, and executive function skills are actually more important than the traditional focus on ABCs and 123s.



Talk & Play:

- **Praise persistence through challenge.** Focus on the specific strategies a child used. If children become frustrated, gently guide them to an alternate path: *What have you tried so far? Why do you think _____ happened when you did _____?*
- **Use complex language with children.** It's not just about the quantity of words, it's about the quality of words. During storytimes, use unfamiliar words to describe the setting of the book, or what a character in a story is doing, eating, etc.
- **Use play to help children recognize emotions in themselves and others.** Explicitly teach strategies to deal with these emotions. Pretend play, charades, or games that label photos of faces with feelings are all great options. Asking questions can also help: *How would you feel if someone took your toy away? What makes you feel better?*
- **Support children to understand that other people have different thoughts and feelings.** Books and imaginary play help them with this process. Ask children to talk about what the characters are thinking or feeling: *What would you do if you were character X? Would you do something different? How do you think they are feeling right now? How do you know?*



Science & Math:

- **Embrace magical thinking from children.** Don't worry that their reasoning might be wrong for why something happened. Instead of correcting their response, invite the testing of their idea: *Why do you think that? I wonder how we could find out?*
- **Model curiosity.** By "accidentally discovering" a new toy or gadget and asking children how it works, you are showing by example how to question the world around them.
- **Explore games that involve math or make up your own!** Use songs, books, and board games that feature numbers. Give children practice recognizing small numbers without having to count them (e.g., with dice). Check out the math resources included in this toolkit to spark some ideas.
- **Incorporate questions that build in simple addition and subtraction.** When using books that involve numbers and quantity, ask questions that include basic math: *You counted 5 birds on this page. If 2 birds flew away, how many would be left?*
- **Practice sequencing** (i.e., putting things in order and recognizing that the order matters). After reading during storytime, ask children to describe the events of the story in order using the words *first, next, and last*.



Brain & Body:

- **Give children opportunities to make their own plans and decisions.** Provide templates to help them write down their plans and ideas (e.g., have them sketch their design before building). After accomplishing their goal, ask them to reflect on their process: *What was easy? What was hard? What would you like to change?*
- **Help to build executive function skills.** Songs and games are a great way to improve these skills. Allowing children to fill in the blanks of missing lyrics in songs builds their working memory. Games that ask children to resist urges, like Simon Says or Red Light, Green Light, develop inhibitory control.
- **Challenge children to complete tasks with multiple steps.** Remember that preschoolers can now handle 2 to 3 simple steps at a time.
- **Provide children choices for materials during an activity.** When giving them materials, ask them why they made the choices that they did.

“I think what school readiness has specifically done is it has encouraged us and taught us the importance of using the specific language to describe the [STEM] activities... What we’ve learned is yeah, embrace the language, teach it to them early, the same way that we would read to an infant.”

– Staff at Ovitt Family Community Library



Activity: Roll on Through

Find the complete activity instructions at BADM.org/Activities

Design, build, and test a ramp using cardboard and other household materials. Start by finding a surface to build a cardboard ramp or pathway and selecting an item to test on the pathway (e.g., buttons, beads, balls). Then, have children sketch out a design plan before building their cardboard pathway. Use tubes, cardboard, different surfaces and other materials to make pathways for the selected object to move through. Feel free to cut or bend cardboard pieces to change the pathway. Test out how different objects move through the pathway, either at the end or as you build. Once children are familiar with the materials and the process, give them a more specific design challenge such as creating a pathway that curves.

Working with Early Elementary (5-8 years)

School readiness doesn't end at the first day of kindergarten. A recent review of relevant research indicates that we should think about school readiness as a robust developmental process that spans the early childhood years through age eight. Remind parents and caregivers that it is not too late to help children develop these important skills.



Talk & Play:

- **Ask children to explore and explain the world around them.** Prompt their explanations through conversation and opportunities for drawing, writing, and making models. Try taking something apart (an appliance, toy, etc.) and ask children to explain the parts. Lead them through a series of focused questions so they arrive at conclusions on their own.
- **Expose children to novel experiences so it opens the door to new vocabulary and conversation.** Create different spaces in and around the library (makerspace, garden, etc.) or provide kits and passes that encourage families to try new experiences or explore the outdoors.
- **Remind parents and caregivers to take a break from their technology.** During meals and shared activities, put away phones and tablets. Technology works best when it encourages interaction and is a way of spending time learning together. When using technology, encourage parents/caregivers to engage together using interactive apps and stories. For more tips on using technology with young children, explore [Tech Time with Purpose](#).



Science & Math:

- **Use familiar materials in unusual ways** they were not originally intended for (e.g., a fork as a back scratcher, a pot as a shovel, toilet paper rolls as building blocks, a banana as a phone). Then, distribute a familiar material and ask children to come up with as many new uses for that object as they can in five minutes.
- **Value each failed experiment.** Keep a list of what was tried but didn't work to evaluate what to do next. Encourage children to keep a record by writing and/or drawing.
- **Transform a 2D drawing into a 3D object in art or science programs.** Ask children to engage in the design process by thinking about and sketching out their ideas before building.
- **Utilize money in imaginary play.** A great way to help children understand the importance of ones, fives, and tens and to teach fractions is to encourage play with money. In play spaces, include cash registers with money. Introduce a budget and challenge children to "buy" the materials/supplies they need with pretend money.
- **Build spatial reasoning skills by reading and making maps.** Provide maps of the library and ask children to navigate to a certain area pictured. Or have treasure hunts where children use a map to find something hidden.



Brain & Body:

- **Help children organize their ideas and create a plan for an activity.** You can explain to children: *Before building your robot, think about how you want it to look and which materials you will use.* During and after their work is complete, revisit their plans, talk about what happened, what they changed and why.
- **Introduce children to more complicated emotions** (e.g. pride, embarrassment, pity). Use characters in books, movies, or games to discuss these emotions. Ask: *Why is this character feeling this way? What would you do if you were in that situation?*
- **Teach children specific strategies to respond to their own stress or difficult emotions.** Breathing exercises, yoga, tai chi, or mindfulness practices can be particularly helpful. Or share positive strategies you use when faced with similar emotions.

“I was a little surprised at how a lot of this was focused on children up to eight year olds. I never thought of it like that. It’s almost like parents think, ‘Oh, I didn’t get them ready for school by age 5, then they will always be behind.’ But there is still time for them to learn these other skills [executive function, social-emotional, etc.] that will prepare them for later success in life.”

– Staff at Fowler Branch

Activity: Inside Out Creations

Find the complete activity instructions at BADM.org/Activities

Take apart old and unusable electronics and use the pieces to make an original creation, from the inside out. Start by gathering tools (e.g. hammer, pliers, screwdriver), safety goggles, and unusable electronics (e.g. toys, keyboards, phones, radios, etc.) Make sure each device is safe to take apart. Before taking apart the device, imagine what parts will be found inside (e.g. What happens on the inside of a pencil sharpener when the crank is turned?). Wear safety goggles and use tools to carefully take apart the device. Lay all of the pieces out on a flat surface, and ask children to categorize them. Then, brainstorm a list of creations that could be made using the pieces. Perhaps the screws from the pencil sharpener could be a part of a wind chime, or the pieces of the toaster could be used to create a new room in a dollhouse? Select one of the creation ideas on the list and bring it to life. Use arts and crafts supplies to add the finishing touches.





Program Planning

Use a template (such as the [Program Planning Template](#) included in this toolkit) to organize your thoughts and think through program set-up and questioning strategies. Keep in mind that you will never be able to address all of the promising practices in every program. However, there are some key questions you can ask as you are planning, to keep these tips at the top of your mind.

- How will everyone feel welcome at your program? Have you considered your verbal greeting as well as signage, topic, time of day, etc.?
- How will families be able to adapt activities to the age and developmental level of their children?
- How will parents/caregivers engage with their children during the activity? Will you prompt them through signs? Handouts? Modeling as you walk around and ask questions during an activity?
- Have you explored opportunities to sort, sequence, notice patterns/shapes, develop spatial skills, or showcase math in everyday life?
- Do children have opportunities to help set-up, clean-up, pass out supplies, etc.?
- How are you setting up your materials and instructions? How much choice do the children have?
- Is their time for children to practice taking turns or come up with a plan before diving into the activity?
- Are there any opportunities for children to collaborate and work together?
- Are you incorporating time for physical movement or mindfulness?
- For families that are ready for more, are there opportunities to continue exploring concepts at home? Through handouts? Bookmarks? Social media? Blogs? Text messages? Topic-focused book bags or activity kits for check-out?

“The [Reimagining School Readiness] paper... actually gave me a bag of tricks...in my professional development. If a parent’s like ‘Oh, why are we doing red light green light now?’ ...to have just a really quick ‘Oh, it’s helping the kids work on this skill’ was super helpful. I think it does also help us feel more professional.”

—Staff at Alpine Branch

Program Reflection

As an important step towards embracing a growth mindset even in areas that felt risky for you, it's important to take time and reflect on what went well and what you can improve on after each program. Document the program by taking photos. If you cannot get parent or guardian permission, take photos of the materials and set-up before and after the program. Then, ask yourself questions like the ones below.

- Did families interact with their children during the program? If so, how?
- Think about the questions you asked. Was there more than one answer? Did you wait for a response? Did you acknowledge all responses, even if they were non-verbal?
- Did you model your own enjoyment for the subject (math and science, in particular) to combat negative stereotypes?
- Can you name a moment where you held back from telling a child the answer? How did you guide them to discover on their own?
- If children were making something, did all of their designs turn out differently? What did you do to support that creativity?
- Were there any moments of conflict among children? If so, how did you use these as a learning opportunities?
- Were there any instances where you noticed children were stressed or could not mentally engage? How did you handle the situation?
- How did you engage the children's adult caregivers to show that their involvement was valued by library staff and important to the children in their care?

Try leaving a notebook out to jot down thoughts immediately after a program, or use a tracking document like the [Program Reflection Template](#) included in this toolkit. The important take-away is to make time for reflection and continued learning.

Conclusion

We hope that you have seen through this guide and the other pieces of the [Reimagining School Readiness Toolkit](#) that offering school readiness programming in libraries not only provides opportunities for children, but also their parents, grandparents and caregivers to learn and become aware of other services the library provides. Library staff do not need to be experts in early childhood education to play an important role in the lives of families in their community. We hope that you will embrace the role of the library in helping your youngest patrons and come back to this guide throughout the years.

**“I think to not be interested in school readiness is to
be closing our eyes to what our community needs.”**

– Staff at Ovitt Family Community Library

The entire *Reimagining School Readiness Toolkit* is available free of charge online at this web address:
<https://BayAreaDiscoveryMuseum.org/librarytoolkit>



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This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.