



PARENT PROGRAM

The Primary School

The Parent Program is a series of individual and group coaching experiences that addresses the needs of two generations—parents and their children—to strengthen their lives together.

OVERVIEW

The Parent Program impacts two generations —parent and child—through a coaching approach. It is parent-centered, relationship-based wellness programming that connects families to concrete supports, increases social connections, and elevates self-efficacy. The program’s approach aims to increase parent agency and mitigate the impacts of toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences on parents and their children in the long term. This is done by meeting parents where they are, both on their well-being journey and where their capacity is to support their children’s health and education.

The program is a partnership with parents to strengthen protective factors for children and families as a whole. These protective factors include parental resilience, social connections, concrete supports in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. The Parent Program achieves this by assigning a dedicated Parent Wellness Coach to each family. The Parent Wellness Coach is trained to apply two coaching frameworks in individual and group settings. [▶Parent Wellness Coaching Program](#)

Scan QR code with your phone’s camera to access this content online.



The Primary School implements the Parent Program at its East Palo Alto and East Bay sites. [East Palo Alto](#) [East Bay](#) While the Parent Program can be run from birth until middle school, they are currently piloting iterations of the program from grade 3 onward. The Primary School is looking to support other schools and community settings interested in piloting the Parent Program.



What Makes This Model Innovative?



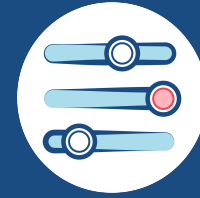
Connection & Community

The Parent Program is a true partnership with parents that places their well-being as the central focus. The entire first phase of the program is dedicated to relationship building among staff and parents to support them in accomplishing their goals.



Whole-Child Focus

The Parent Program layers parents with protective factors. Parents strengthen their capacity for agency over their physical and social wellness and self-efficacy so that they may in turn support the healthy development of their children.



Customization

The Parent Program was intentionally designed to meet parents where they are. Programming is a universal experience, but individualized to be responsive to the needs, values, and motivation of each family and community involved with the program.

DESIGN

Goals

The Parent Program is designed to support the well-being of parents as well as their children's health and education through the expansion of protective factors in their lives. [Protective factors](#) Learn more about how the Parent Program strengthens protective factors. [Learning Goals Within The Parent Program](#)

Healthy Individuals

Parents are resilient adults who are successful, healthy, and happy in their own right.

Safe and Stable Homes

Families and homes are stable and safe for children. Concrete needs such as financial, food, and housing security are met.

Involved Parents

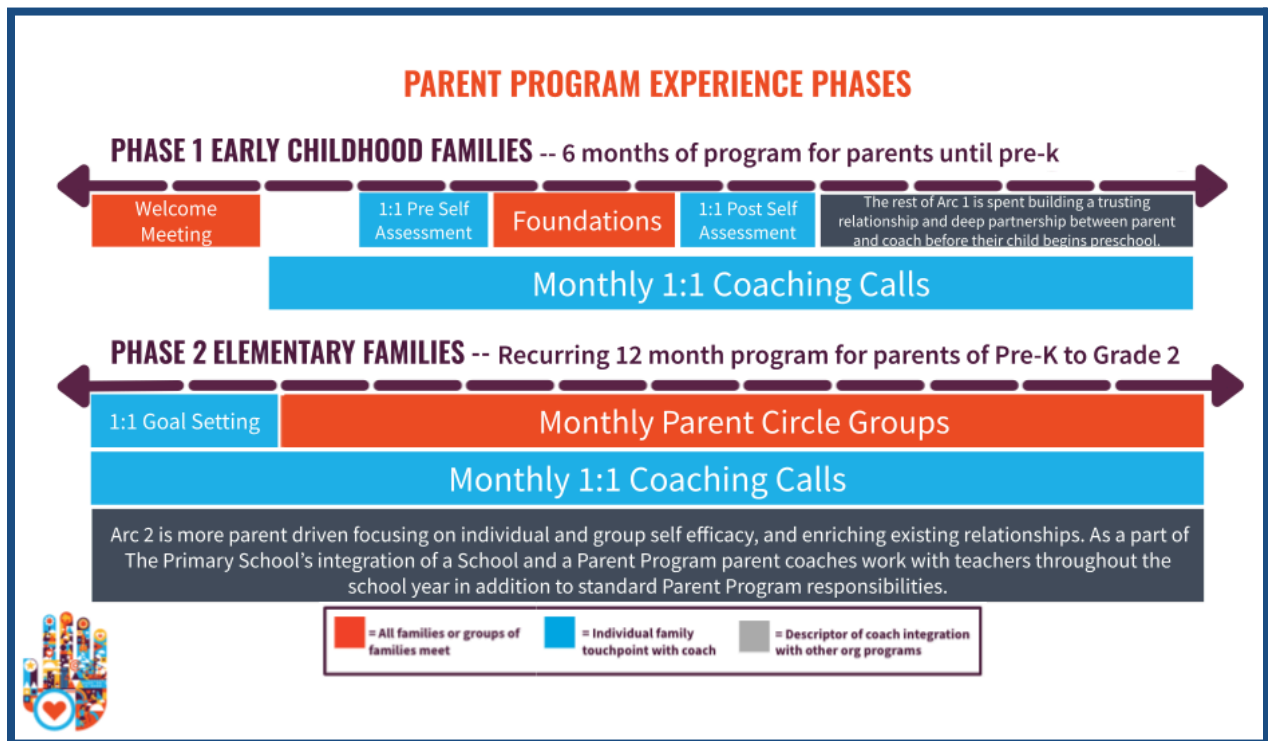
Parents embrace skills they value to reach their vision of effective support for the health, development, and education of their children.

Parent Experience

The Parent Program experience addresses the needs of two generations—children and their parents—through direct work with parents to strengthen their lives together. (The term “parent” is defined broadly and includes all adult family members and caregivers that have roles in the upbringing of students.) Success is achieved through deep partnership that invites reflection and increases protective factors as well as self-efficacy in pursuit of parents’ self-actualization.

The Parent Program supports families from early childhood through grade two. Each family is assigned a dedicated Parent Wellness Coach who facilitates the overall experience for parents using two frameworks for coaching—Wellness Coaching and Family Success Coaching. Wellness Coaching is utilized with all parents and is focused on self-actualization and elevating parents’ own capacity to increase protective factors, manage stress, and self-actualize in every interaction with the program. Family Success Coaching is a more tailored partnership—one that families access if and when their needs require it—focused on addressing security of concrete needs such as housing, jobs, education, health care, and food. Across these two frameworks for coaching, two coaching styles are also used: group-based coaching and individual coaching. Check out this one-pager to learn more about coaching frameworks and styles: [Coaching Frameworks and Styles Overview](#)

The Parent Program entails two phases: the first being ~6 months of individual and group programming coinciding with the early part of parents’ 18-month experience in The Primary School’s Birth to Three Program. The second phase transitions to recurring annual programming when parents transition from the Birth to Three Program to The Primary School’s Pre-K, K-5, and Elementary School. The individual and group experiences described previously are scaffolded across the program in order to build increasing relationships and self-efficacy.



The program entails various components that occur across the different program phases. These components include Foundations, Self-Assessment, Annual Goal Setting, Parent Circles, and 1:1 Coaching Calls. Each is described in more detail below.

Foundations

Foundations is one of two group-based coaching experiences within the Parent Program, and it occurs in the first phase of programming. It was created to help parents reflect through the lens of their relationships with themselves, their child, and their child’s development. [▶Early Family Foundations Overview](#) Foundations is facilitated weekly over eight weeks covering eight topics:



Though it is led by a Parent Wellness Coach who shares information, it is *not* meant to be a space for teaching parents what to do. Instead, weekly topics are used as a starting point and Parent Wellness Coaches invite conversation, connections to lived experiences, and relationship building among parents. This view of each participant as a knowledgeable contributor supports a safe space for families to reflect, share, and learn. Parents are challenged through empathetic connections which allow for the organic adoption of new personal wellness or parenting tools and perspectives that they find value in along the way, rather than hearing wrong versus right they hear differences, similarities, and respect. This changes the paradigm from “We know what will make the best version of you” to “How do you feel you can become the best version of you?”

Self-Assessment

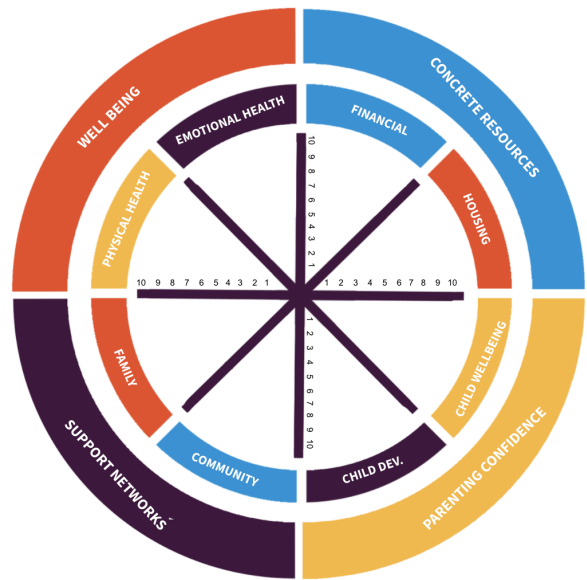
Self-Assessment is an individual coaching experience held twice during the first phase, bookending the Foundations course—a Pre-Self-Assessment is held at the very beginning and a Post-Self-Assessment at the end. These are NOT meant to measure pre-post progress; rather, they’re a tool to invite reflection and self-awareness. Parents and Parent Wellness Coaches begin the process of establishing trust, building a deep relationship, identifying personal goals, and inviting reflection in a 1:1 meeting. Parent Wellness Coaches then follow up monthly to discuss and partner with parents on their personal progress in achieving their goals. See more about our goal-setting approach in the Annual Goal Setting section.

Annual Goal Setting

When parents transition to the second phase of the Parent Program, they hold a goal-setting meeting with their Parent Wellness Coach. This is an individual coaching experience where the two partner together to set goal(s) aligned with parent's visions for the optimal life of themselves and their family. Parent Wellness Coaches apply motivational interviewing strategies when partnering with parents as they reflect on four areas of their lives:

- Health & Well-being
- Networks of Support
 - Security of housing, finances, food, etc.
- Concrete Supports
- Knowledge of Child Development & Health

The goal-setting practice aims to support the building blocks for sustainable behavior change year over year, adapting to family capacity and motivation. It is also driven by liberatory principles such as asking "what do you feel is best for you?" rather than telling "we know what is best for you." This contributes to self-efficacy and reduces barriers to behavior change and self-actualization. The result is a practice that creates space for parents to set goals that are manageable for their life, driven by what they value most, and chosen rather than required. Parents can set goals in all four areas mentioned above, select focus areas, or even create a goal that addresses multiple areas.



Parent Circles

Once annual goals are set in the second phase, parents begin to participate in a group coaching experience called Parent Circles. These Circles pair with continued monthly coaching calls to form the core of the parent's ongoing experience in the Parent Program. These groups meet monthly and are intended to be a space for parents to support each other, explore and learn new concepts, and share skills and resources that have been valuable for their goals. Parent Circles also provide a regular touch point for parents with each other, deepening a sense of community. The social connections and relationships are still centerpieces to the program. A small difference here is more focus in Parent Circles on content parents find valuable than there is in Foundations, which primarily targets community and connection. Each group meets ten times per year, and the topics are rotated monthly. All groups have the same topics and experiential activities, but individual experiences differ based on group composition, age of children, and length of time in the program. These topics are derived from common interests that parents express and/or common topics that parent coaches notice are arising for many families. The group facilitation style will vary depending on group dynamics and time in the program. [Parent Circles Snapshot](#)

Monthly 1:1 Coaching Calls

During both phases of programming, Parent Wellness Coaches follow up individually with parents a minimum of once a month, for at least 30 minutes, either by phone or in person (however, coaches will meet with parents as often as they need, particularly if a concrete need such as financial, housing, or food insecurity arises). Each family's needs and level of engagement will be inherently different so there is no checklist or guide for these calls. The obligation of our coaches is to hold the space in these calls in a trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and strengths-based mindset of mutual respect. In this time, Parent Wellness Coaches support parents as they reflect on their personal progress, problem-solve around barriers, and connect them to additional resources as a means of addressing and removing barriers to achieving their goals and self-actualization. Parents are also invited to practice mindfulness based on stress management techniques. These elevate self-efficacy and self-regulation, ultimately supporting the big-picture outcome of expanding protective factors.

Supporting Structures

The Parent Program dramatically changes the parent-school relationship. Though the model can be implemented across various learning environments, it requires significant shifts in the way most schools approach culture, adult roles, partnerships, and more, as described below.

The Parent Program requires the establishment of a safe space for connection and self-exploration.

At a fundamental level, the Parent Program culture is rooted in vulnerability, universal acceptance, and a people-over-program mentality. Parent Wellness Coaches truly believe all humans want to self-actualize but that not all families come ready to be vulnerable, reflect, and work on themselves. Maintaining the culture is key to attaining both short-term and long-term success. It requires consistently demonstrating congruence so that your mindset, words, and actions align as you work to build a trusting partnership with families. To demonstrate congruence and support parents in self-actualizing, the Parent Program culture is a commitment to:



COMMUNITY & CULTURE

- Being open, vulnerable, and nonjudgmental
- Bringing your full self and accepting others as they are
- Managing coaches with the coaching stance taken with families
- Prioritizing people over the program with flexible boundaries
- Creating a warm, welcoming, and growth-focused community
- Having leadership that prioritizes culture
- Embracing parents' whole identity—as parents and people

Watch how parents describe the Parent Program ► [How Our Parents Describe The Primary School](#)

Trained Parent Wellness Coaches who partner with families are vital to the model.

Parents are asked to commit to a set of principles for how they show up in their work with the Parent Program, the school, and the broader Primary School community. In addition to logistical commitments such as regular attendance and engagement, they are asked to believe in the model, believe in the community, have an open mind toward new skills and experiences, and welcome change as they see fit for their lives. Every parent is paired with a Parent Wellness Coach (many of whom grew up in or live in the community) to partner with them on a journey toward increasing and maintaining protective factors and reaching self-actualization.



ADULT ROLES, HIRING & LEARNING

A coach's primary role is to help families build their own self-efficacy, resilience, and social connections. At The Primary School, each full-time Parent Wellness Coach serves 35 to 40 families and offers guidance across a wide variety of matters, from practical goals such as finding a job or housing to mental wellness needs around improving self-esteem and positive identity development.

While Parent Wellness Coaches come from varied backgrounds and hold a range of credentials (none specifically required), all of them engage in a 16-week Real Balance Wellness course. [Real Balance Wellness](#) They are also internally trained on mindfulness-based stress reduction, motivational interviewing, and stages of change to ensure they have the fundamental skills and responsibilities to implement the model. This involves competencies around unconditional positive regard, cultural responsiveness, empathy, active listening, and genuineness.

All work within the Parent Program relies on Parent Wellness Coaches trained in [trauma informed approaches to care](#), [mindfulness based stress reduction](#), embracing the [process of change](#), and [motivational interviewing](#) in addition to partnering with Real Balance Wellness Coaching.

Scheduling must be tailored to parent needs.



SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

All experiences in the Parent Program are planned in ways that work with parents' individual schedules and unique needs around time. We practice surveying family availability to identify the best times and the number of groups needed. Parents' primary language is also factored into the groups offered. Additionally, 1:1 or small-group makeup options are offered as needed. Any individual parent wellness coaching experiences cater to the specific times that work best for a parent during reasonable day or early evening hours. Consistent followup such as week-before and day-before reminders are also a helpful practice.

The Parent Program requires an integrated approach and serves as a connector to others and to community organizations.

The core partnership of the program is group coaching. It creates opportunities for parents to come together with others in similar and different situations and to experience connection. Group coaching leverages the collective wisdom of parents and creates social support among them, building a peer-to-peer support network that is crucial for many families.

The Parent Program takes a community-based approach to extend beyond the “walls” of the program. They work with national, regional, and local community resource providers to bring families awareness and understanding of the support available to them. These organizations help with a variety of needs such as housing, jobs, legal support, food, adult education, and more. See some of The Primary School’s national, regional, and local partners on their website. [Our partners](#)



**FAMILY & COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS**

As a part of The Primary School, the Parent Program also integrates with the two other child- and family-serving programs of the organization. Parent Wellness Coaches communicate with The Primary School’s PK-5 school and the Birth to Three Program serving families of children 3 and under. The coaches are present during school community nights and they hold foundations for Birth to Three families. Parent Wellness Coaches also participate in a whole-child practice run by the other two internal programs called Children’s Circles. This practice brings the child’s team together (parent(s), teacher(s), coach, and learning specialists if applicable) to discuss the child’s progress and create a plan for how they can best support the child’s development. While this internal integration is not focused on here, you can find out more in the Implementation section below.

Logistics should remove barriers to parent participation in the program.



**BUDGET &
OPERATIONS**

The Parent Program aims to reduce barriers to parent participation when planning and running programming. The following are important for implementing the program and sustaining family engagement in the program:

- Providing childcare.
- Providing refreshments and/or snacks.
- Offering makeup sessions.
- Providing a comfortable space for programming
- Providing resources in parents’ primary language
- Providing week-before and day-before reminders
- Adapting parent engagement to their capacity and priority needs

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- Offering a certificate of completion for families if they need one
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COMMUNICATIONS

Communication is an optional but important part of sharing the work of the Parent program.

The Primary School shares stories and insights from both their school and the Parent Program on their blog [News — The Primary School](#)

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[The Primary School](#) offers support, such as training and resources, at no cost to help schools run pilots of the Parent Program. They offer the following supports to help schools with piloting:

Professional Development

Free



The Primary School offers opportunities to work with the program team to build their capacity to pilot the Parent Program at their sites. Opportunities include:

- Training from The Primary School Parent Program Team
- Online Training Supports & Resources
- Collaboration with The Primary School Learning & Data Team

[Express Interest](#)

Collaborate with program leaders

Free



The leadership and the partnership and dissemination staff at The Primary School are available to discuss more details about the program and to work with schools to support implementing pilots. Submit a general inquiry on The Primary School's website for further steps.

[Express Interest](#)

Out of respect for the safe spaces they hold for families in programming, The Primary School limits observation. This can be discussed further with the aforementioned team.

Reach

2

Sites

263

Parents

421

Children

16

Local Resource
Partnerships

Demonstration Sites

The following sites are examples of learning communities that have successfully implemented the model.

[The Primary School East Palo Alto](#)

East Palo Alto, CA

PK-8

Independent

[The Primary School East Bay](#)

San Leandro, CA

PK-2

Independent

Impact

In 2020, The Primary School celebrated its fourth year of operation and set new milestones to inform the next stage of growth. These took shape around three strategic priorities: deepening impact in East Palo Alto, extending impact through partners and through a second program site in the East Bay, and building a strong foundation of people and financial support to support these efforts. Below are some highlights, or you can read the entire 2020-2021 report. [2020-2021 annual report](#)

- 634 referrals were made to access childcare, diapers, mortgage and rent assistance, and other community resources
- 87% of parents completed a monthly coaching call on average
- 80% of parents attended a monthly peer parent group
- 86% of parents on average reported feeling less stressed after attending a Foundations parent wellness group
- 83% of parents reported a high level of resilience (compared to 77% in pre-COVID spring 2019)
- 73% of parents reported a high level of social support and connection (up from 69% in pre-COVID spring 2019)
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Furthermore, you can hear the testimonials from three parents on how the Parent Program has impacted their lives and families. [▶ David's testimonial](#) [▶ Star's testimonial](#) [▶ Esmerelda's testimonial](#)

Contact

General Inquiries

<https://www.theprimaryschool.org/contact-us>

RESOURCES



[Parent Wellness Coaching Program](#)

A short, comprehensive video overview of the Parent Program with Spanish captions.



[East Palo Alto \(EPA\) Community](#)

An overview about the community served in East Palo Alto, California.



[East Bay Community](#)

An overview about the communities served in the East Bay of California's Bay Area.



[Protective factors](#)

A description of each of the five protective factors.

[Learning Goals Within the Parent Program](#)

The Parent Program believes that all families have the strengths, capacity, and ability to overcome adversity. It utilizes a strengths-based approach to care that invites parents to expand and share their skills and knowledge. By building connections with their Parent Wellness Coach and peers the invitation is open for parents to develop new skills, knowledge, and perspectives. The program's goal for parents is to learn how to increase and maintain protective factors, elevate self-efficacy, hold agency in their involvement with the school community, and navigate barriers to their health & wellness. This is a multi-year process and partnership to: 1) evaluate their wellness, 2) envision their best selves 3) create a plan for the process of change 4) connect and check in on progress and 5) get the accountability and support needed for sustainable change. Rather than learning what NOT to do, parents should learn to explore new concepts and embrace the implicit wisdom within themselves and peers. They answer the question "how do you feel you can become the best version of yourself?" rather than being told what is best for them by others.

[Learning Goals Within The Parent Program](#)

A short description of the role goal-setting plays within the Parent Program.

COACHING STYLE	FAMILY TOUCHPOINT EXAMPLES	WELLNESS COACHING FRAMEWORK	FAMILY SUCCESS COACHING FRAMEWORK
Individual Coaching	Monthly Coach Calls Self Assessment Annual Goal Setting School or Program Events	Establishing trust and inviting a parent to reflect on their wellness, hopes and dreams and their vision of success. Co-creating whichever action steps and accountability measures that align with that parent's readiness and vision for self, child, and family.	Establishing trust and inviting a parent to openly and safely share their satisfaction with the concrete needs in their life to the extent they feel comfortable. Introducing referrals and resources as a means to address barriers to self-actualization and accomplishing personal goals. Extending the invite to learn about resources rather than just offering.
Group Coaching	Foundations Groups Monthly Parent Circles School or Program Events	Intentionally connecting experiences of parents in groups to open the door for learning from one another and the formation of organic relationships. Co-creating an expanded network of support that positively impacts parent's pursuit of their vision for self, child, and family	Intentionally observing or explicitly naming needs expressed in group settings, and extending the invitation to learn more about resources. Connecting families to support each other in surfacing resources and opportunities that have been valuable for their goals and personal vision. Being mindful respect confidentiality of needs shared 1:1

[Coaching Frameworks and Styles Overview](#)

A one-pager that explains the relationships between the four coaching frameworks.



[Early Family Foundations Overview Video](#)

An overview video of the Early Family Foundations Program.

THE PROGRAM:
A monthly, facilitated group experience where participants spend half the time reflecting on personal goals together and half exploring socioemotional topics and life skills through. Parents activate agency, open to new information, and build sense of community through hands-on activities and sharing personal experiences. Circles center peer partnership to co-create community, explore new topics and perspectives, and encourage action plans for personal goals.

THE BENEFIT:

- Networks of Support
- Self Determination
- Sense of Belonging

[Parent Circles Snapshot](#)

An overview of the Parent Circles experience.



[How Our Parents Describe The Primary School](#)

Several parents share how they feel about their experience with the Parent Program.



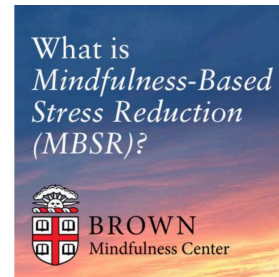
[Real Balance Wellness](#)

The webpage for Real Balance Wellness Coaching, which trains Parent Wellness Coaches.



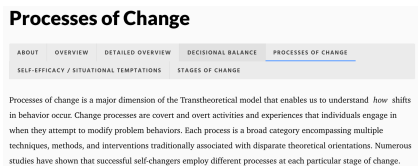
[Trauma informed approaches to care](#)

A brief description of trauma-informed approaches to care.



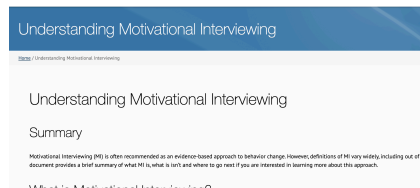
[Mindfulness-based stress reduction](#)

A video which describes mindfulness-based stress reduction and its benefits.



[Processes of change](#)

An overview of processes of change, which is a major dimension of the Transtheoretical model which underpins the Parent Program.



[Motivational interviewing](#)

A summary to help the reader understand motivational interviewing.

OUR PARTNERS

[Partners](#)

A weblink to learn about The Primary School's national, regional, and local partners.



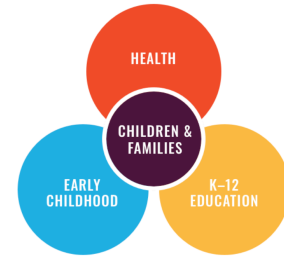
[News — The Primary School](#)

A link to view articles written by and about The Primary School on their blog and in the news.



[The Primary School](#)

A link to The Primary School's homepage.



[2020-2021 annual report](#)

A weblink to The Primary School's 2020-2021 goals, progress, and aspirations.



[Individual Parent Testimonial - David](#)

Watch David describe his experience as being part of the Parent Program.



[Individual Parent Testimonial - Star](#)

Watch Star describe her experience as being part of the Parent Program.



[Individual Parent Testimonial - Esmerelda](#)

Watch Esmerelda describe her experience as being part of the Parent Program.