

BYU investigates need for on-campus childcare ^[1]

Many believe on-campus childcare could help more student parents, especially mothers, reach graduation

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EXCERPTS

BYU administration is actively considering an on-campus childcare program for the first time in the university's history.

"In response to a 2019 proposal, BYU administration has approved a formal investigation by the Faculty Advisory Council into on-campus childcare options to support faculty, staff and students of BYU," said an email sent to all faculty and staff on Feb. 11. "The purpose of this survey is to understand more about the extent to which BYU may have ongoing demand among faculty and staff for on-campus childcare."

The email included a link to a survey for faculty and staff to fill out.

Portions of the survey sent to BYU faculty and staff on Tuesday, Feb. 11.

According to Eva Witesman, business professor and co-chair of the Faculty Advisory Council, the council submitted a proposal in 2019 asking the university to "conduct a one year study of the need for, potential benefits of and feasibility of on-campus child care at BYU for its students and employees."

The Faculty Advisory Council is composed of faculty members from each college that are elected by their colleagues. According to their website, the council "considers the issues that are most pertinent and after thorough research prepares recommendations to submit to the administration."

Witesman said that the council is very aware of the struggles of student families and the benefit on-campus childcare could provide to them. She also said that the Student Advisory Committee is in the process of preparing a survey for student input on the issue.

"The faculty at BYU observe tremendous commitment by our married and single-parent students, both men and women, to follow the counsel of Church leaders to pursue their education while they establish and nurture their families," Witesman quoted from the council's proposal.

Witesman said the council will report their findings to the administration at the end of the academic year.

According to a study conducted by the Utah Women and Leadership Project, BYU is one of the only four-year universities in the state without discounted, on-campus childcare. The university does run small preschool and kindergarten programs, but their intended purpose is research, not childcare.

"We are not a childcare facility, but a research lab/teacher training facility which requires we have a preschool and kindergarten to accomplish our mission," said Anne Ure, a staff member in the School of Family Life.

Student parents who heard about the survey were excited about the possibility of on-campus childcare, as it would help them financially and support their educational endeavors. However, they were also concerned that the survey was only directed toward BYU faculty and staff and excluded student input.

"I think students are the ones who need it most," said Faith Baer, a student mother and supply chain management major. "Faculty already have degrees and jobs that can pay for childcare, so they should not be priority enrollment."

Baer is the mother of a 2-year-old and is pregnant with her second child. She says she has struggled to take care of her child while attempting to attend classes. Baer's husband is ill and unable to help take care of the children.

"I have to pick classes that don't have a huge attendance requirement and hope for the best," Baer said. "If I have to go to campus, I make sure it's only one or two days a week and try to find someone to watch my kid for that time or sync up nap time and hope it works."

She said she has been looking for childcare options that are financially possible for her family, but has been unsuccessful.

"I've been on every state-funded daycare list for almost a year and I'm still not at the top, so it's not like I'm not trying other solutions as well," Baer said.

Student financial situations make childcare services largely inaccessible. According to Glassdoor.com, student employees at BYU make an average of \$10 per hour. The going rate for a nanny in the Provo area is anywhere from \$12-\$25 per hour, according to Care.com. An accredited childcare facility charges similar amounts.

Other Utah universities, however, have created affordable options for student parents. For example, the Universe has previously reported that Weber State University charges students \$3.50 per hour for daycare, and Utah State University's Brigham City campus provides childcare for \$3-4 per hour.

Finances are not the only struggle student families face. McKenna and Jaden Lindquist are the parents of a 9-month-old daughter, Kate. They juggle schedules and bring their baby girl to school with them every day.

McKenna said she has never been fond of the idea of letting someone else take care of her child but reconsidered when Jaden had to quit a job he loved because they couldn't work it in between both of their school schedules and caring for their baby. McKenna has also had to give up taking classes she was interested in because they interfered with her husband's schedule.

"It would be so nice to have someone I could trust to be there when I needed them so that I could take the classes I'm actually passionate about rather than the ones that just fit with Jaden's schedule," she said.

McKenna said nap time is a particular challenge for the family, as they have to go between home and campus numerous times each day to make sure their baby has a place to take naps.

"If there was a place on campus I could lay Kate down for a nap while I got homework done, it would change everything for us," McKenna said. "She could sleep as long as she wanted, we would always be on time to class, we wouldn't have to pay for parking passes, we'd spend way less on gas money, and life would just be so much less complicated."

Hannah Carlson, a classical studies major, is expecting her first child this semester. Carlson says the issue of childcare is an inherently female one, as women are primarily the ones expected to take care of their children in Latter-day Saint culture.

"BYU should support me because they're a church-run school and should support the same initiatives as the Church," Carlson said. "The Church emphasizes the importance of a woman's education and the importance of motherhood."

Carlson added that church leaders have counseled young married couples not to delay starting a family until after getting the perfect house, job or wealth status. This results in students juggling the role of parents. She said this leads to many women dropping out of school altogether.

"I've personally stressed out about the question of completing my degree as a young mother," Carlson said. "I feel like it's important. I'll try to graduate, but it would be nice if BYU supported me in this by providing more options for young mothers."

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