

Child care eases college students' burden: On-campus centers let many parents pursue their education without worries about high costs or full schedules [US-CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

It's not easy parenting two young kids while nurturing a dream to become a nurse.

Arata, 26, started her second semester on Monday. She's taking a full load of classes in anatomy, math and speech. While she's in class, her 3-year-old son Anthony and 15-month-old son Isaac are only a short walk away at the college's child development center.

"I can come into class any time and check on them," Arata said. "If there's a problem, they can page me or go to my classroom."

Without the on-campus center, she would be forced to take night classes, she said.

But even then it would tough to find some place where the kids could be watched because her husband works nights, Arata said.

Mount SAC's child development center monitors 175 to 200 kids each semester, center director Janette Henry said.

Fees range from \$4.25 per hour for infants to \$3.25 for children ages 3 and 4.

The program's main revenue comes from the \$500,000 it gets annually from the state.

Many poorer parents can qualify for reduced fees or free child care.

Mount SAC also gets \$50,000 per year from the federal government to serve free breakfasts, lunches and snacks to the children in child care.

Many of the children at the center have single parents who have returned to school.

"As a single mom, it's been a real struggle to further my education," Mount SAC student Jessie Ortega said.

Ortega, 29, has four children, three of whom are in Mount SAC's child development center.

"They see this as our school," Ortega said. "They think they're going to college."

Ortega and Arata were lucky.

Mount SAC's center rejected about 100 applications from parents this semester, Henry said.

Other colleges have the same problem.

The child development center at Citrus College in Glendora will see 350 to 400 children each week when school is in session.

It has a capacity for 265 children, but still has a waiting list of nearly 400 parents who want to enroll their kids, center director Diane Hinds said.

Between 70% and 75% of the center's parents rely on welfare with the majority being single moms, Hinds said. "Many of them have unreliable transportation," Hinds said.

Sometimes those students get to school by taking the bus or relying on friends for a ride, she said.

Having day-care and preschool on the campus saves parents time because they don't have to make an extra stop at a private day-care program away from the college, Hinds said.

Chaffey College is planning to build a new child development center, Chaffey spokeswoman Peggy Cartwright said.

Mount SAC will build a 27,000-square-foot center if voters approve a \$221-million bond in the Nov. 6 election.

- reprinted from the Los Angeles Times.

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