

Proposal for a Child Care Building at MTU

Vision: The MTU Childcare Center will be a place in which children are safe and happy and in which each child will flourish. The center will provide numerous opportunities for children to experience wonder, pleasure, and delight. The rooms and playground will facilitate children “doing for themselves.” Parents will feel confident and secure leaving their children in the center. Although, knowledgeable and loving staff is primary to achieving such a center, a well-planned facility can go a long way to help.

Building Site: The ideal site for the Childcare Center will have three main characteristics. 1) First and foremost, the site should be safe. The site should be away from busy streets and have safe vehicle access with easy in and out. The play area will be dedicated to the Childcare Center. It will have no steep hills nearby and will be away from busy streets. 2) Location is also a major concern. The location close to or on campus will ease stress on parents because students can walk their children to the center from Daniell Heights and parents can visit during the day. Such a site will make the center an integral part of campus. 3) The last important criteria is that the site should be large enough for building, play area, parking and bus and car access.

The site chosen for the center fulfills these criteria. It lies east of Fairview Dr. just north of Houghton Cemetery and is within three blocks of the main campus. The Student Development Complex is only two blocks to the south-west and the students apartments, Daniell Heights, are just north and east. The site has easy, safe access from Macinnes Dr. via Fairview Avenue, a quiet residential street. The site is flat near the cemetery (200 ft on the road side by 350 ft deep) and the north portion slopes to the north for about 150 ft toward Daniell Heights. There is sufficient room for the building, parking, and play area.

Building Characteristics: The Childcare building should have a warm and cozy atmosphere and cannot feel institutional. The center should look smaller than it is. Parents will avoid childcare facilities that look large and institutional. The building will be bright and airy with windows and mirrors at child level. Wood furniture and partial wood walls will add to the home-like environment. Modular separate play areas in the rooms will also help.

The approach and lobby to the building should give a good first-impression to both parents and children. A large circular drive with a covered drop-off area will help protect the children from rain and the 200+ inches of snow. The covered area must be high enough so that buses can pass under it. The lobby must welcome both parents and children. The secretary and director’s offices (with internal windows to entrance) and the conference room should be adjacent to the lobby.

The building and spaces need to be flexible; some areas may be used by infants and toddlers one year and pre-school children the next. If, in the unlikely possibility, that the demand for childcare decreases, rooms may be converted easily to other uses.

Quality heating and ventilation systems are very important. Floor heating will provide radiant heat for little feet. With radiant heat, drafts will be reduced and the temperature can be set lower. Radiant heat is cleaner than hot air heat as dust and allergens do not get blown around. A good filtration, ventilation and humidity system will further reduce dust, allergens, and germs and help keep kids healthy.

Safety: Safety is a major consideration when planning the childcare center. The Center should have public access limited to the front door. The exception is the room for the half-day preschool which should have its own entrance. The director's office near the entrance should have an internal window from which the front entryway is easily visible. A fire sprinkler system and smoke alarms are necessary. Fire alarms and light switches should be above toddler height. Doorknobs should be either difficult for children to open or be above toddler height.

Rooms: Large rooms divided by temporary walls into smaller homey rooms would increase flexibility. These smaller rooms (classrooms) will house small groups of children. Small groups are better because they facilitate learning and lead to better care. Small groups also keep the germ pool down lessening risk of upper respiratory infection.. The youngest children do better in smaller groups. For infants and toddlers, areas should be planned for groups of eight or less. Two of these groups can share some spaces, but the smaller individual areas will give the babies and caregivers the feeling of separate spaces. Preschool group sizes should be less than 15, although 20 may be in each room for short periods of time. Rooms should have multiple doors. Ceilings and some walls should absorb sound. Incandescent lighting where possible will add to a homey feeling. Sleeping and quiet areas need variable lighting.

Classrooms will be divided by low bookshelves and room-dividers into different play areas. These usually include a dramatic or dress-up area, a quiet or reading area, and play kitchen, and an art area. Rooms should be a neutral color with children, their toys, and artwork to provide color. Floor should be resilient and easy to clean. In some areas, large, non-skid rugs that can be cleaned and changed easily will add variety and comfort in the reading and quiet areas of the rooms. Each room should have two small sinks for children to wash their hands. Rooms where caregivers will be changing diapers need one adult sink for wash up after diaper changing. Children's bathrooms should be located in the rooms and be visible by adults. They may be positioned between rooms. Openings to other areas should be able to be gated off. Children's cubbies should be at their height. In other words, the whole room should facilitate the children "doing it themselves."

The large muscle room should be conducive to riding tricycles and running. In this room, windows must be at least three feet above the floor or well protected to avoid breakage. An area with large gymnastic mats would encourage tumbling. Walls may be padded below three feet. This room may do double duty as a meeting area for larger groups.

Kitchen: The ideal kitchen area can be watched and smelled by the children. Even if the kitchen is only used for prep of brought-in food, it is important for it to be a part of the children's day. Food is a part of life and having the kitchen be an integral part of the center will give it a homey feeling. Plans are to contract with university cafeteria to supply child friendly meals.

Storage: The Childcare Center will need ample storage space. In addition to a central storage facility, space needs to be provided adjacent to or in each room. An outside storage area (not heated) can provide storage for outside toys, garden tools, and play equipment. Almost all child care providers complain that, when designing their building, they did not plan enough storage area in their facility.

Half-day Preschool: The MTU half-day preschool (Daniell Heights pre-school) will be run by a different organization and therefore the room should have its own entrance, access to the outside play area, and small office and storage space. The door between the Daniell Heights preschool room and the rest of the Childcare Center needs a lock to limit access to the Center on evenings and weekends.

Outside Play Area: The outside play areas must be dedicated to the Childcare Center with no foot traffic through the area. The play area should have trees and grass with wood chips in the heavily used areas. The entire area should be fenced. Smaller fenced off areas should be provided for toddlers/infants and pre-schoolers. Small hills should allow sledding in the winter. An area with sand for play and an area for a garden will help broaden the children's experiences. Of course, the outside play area will contain large gymnastic type equipment to encourage large motor development. An outside storage area is needed to store seasonal toys and gardening and lawn tools.