

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Laura Margoni Jan 19, 2017



Mesa Child Development Center's newly-expanded facilities feature full-time classrooms for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children. Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Mesa Child Development Center Expands Facilities and Programs

When the Mesa Child Development Center (MCDC) opened its doors more than seven years ago on UC San Diego's east campus, the goal was to offer flexible part-time child care that would help meet the unique needs of international families. Now, with newly expanded facilities, MCDC is able to offer new full-time programs that will build upon the vibrant and diverse community already flourishing at the center.

“We are incredibly excited to expand our child development program,” said Kathryn Owen, director of Early Care and Education at UC San Diego. “More families will be able to share in the unique experience of a school community that embraces all people and cultures.”

Two of the three full-time classrooms are for infants three months to two years old and toddlers two to three years old. The third full-time class is a mixed-age preschool classroom for children three- to five-years old. Owen says the new

preschool classroom is modeled after the existing part-time classroom that places children two-and-a-half to five years-old in the same setting.

“Research has shown there are many benefits to a mixed-age classroom,” said Owen. “Children can spend several years with the same teacher which helps teachers better understand a child’s strengths and needs. The children learn to support and care for one another with older children often taking on mentor or leadership roles and younger children accomplishing tasks they couldn’t do without the assistance of the older ones.”

As part of the expansion, a new outdoor area was also created for the children. The space is creative and thoughtful—a small bridge arcs gracefully over the ground in one corner—featuring many inviting spaces where children can play, explore and discover. The design was inspired by MCDC’s Reggio Emilia approach, which promotes hands-on, child-driven learning. In the Reggio philosophy, learning is led by the child with teachers guiding research and offering help when required. There is a strong emphasis on building relationships, not just with other children but with parents, teachers and the community, as well as a keen focus on the importance of the environment.



Children explore and play in the new outdoor space, thoughtfully-designed to promote hands-on learning.

MCDC Hosts Open House

Learn more about MCDC and its newly expanded facilities at an upcoming Open House.

Date: Friday, Jan. 20, 2017

Time: 2-4 p.m.

Refreshments will be provided.

“At MCDC, the child is the explorer, learning about the world through play, art and science,” said Alison Wishard Guerra, an associate professor in the Department of Education Studies whose younger daughter attended the school from the time she was two-and-a-half until she started kindergarten.

“The teachers are keen observers,” she added. “They learn what drives the children’s curiosity and help bring their questions to the next level. My daughter learned to

be an independent and creative thinker at MCDC. It's an amazing place.”

Yingchun Li agrees. A former researcher with the Department of Pathology in the School of Medicine, Li and his wife enrolled their oldest daughter at MCDC when she was two-and-a-half years old. At first, they were worried about her being in the new environment and wondered how she would adjust.

“As an international family, one of our major concerns was her English language skills,” said Li. “But, after a few months, her English was greatly improved because the teachers take great care to focus on each child. Every day, she chatted about her friends, activities and teachers.”

Li also praised the welcoming atmosphere of the school, which holds family-friendly events such as open house breakfasts, summer social night and family picnic lunches every Friday.

“It makes you feel like you are a part of the school community,” said Li, whose younger daughter attended MCDC as well before the family’s recent move to Colorado. “Sending our daughters there was the best decision we ever made.”

For more information on the Mesa Child Development Center and other early care and education options at UC San Diego, visit child.ucsd.edu.

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