



MENTOR GRAPHICS FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

A brightly colored building with a whimsical roofline is the first stop each morning for parents of young children working at Mentor Graphics Corporation. The Child Development Center is a model full day early childhood and family support program. The program and facility have been designed to meet the special needs of working parents with young children in a full-day program. Mentor Graphics is a leading designer of electronic design automation systems.

In the early 1990's Mentor Graphics implemented a new vision for supporting working families. Plans to provide very high quality childcare and family support programs were put into action. The first on-site childcare center opened in 1992. A second Center opened in San Jose in 1998. The benefits to the company include the ability to attract highly skilled employees, increased productivity and lower rates of absenteeism and turnover.

One hundred and fifty four children are enrolled at the Center located at the company's headquarters in Wilsonville, Oregon. Both full and part time spots are available. Tuition rates are competitive with the market place. Families are encouraged to take advantage of dependant care spending accounts. Scholarships are available. The company provides a subsidy of approximately 40% that bridges the gap between tuition and the cost of providing high quality care. The mission of the CDC is to make a difference in the lives of children by being a leader in the implementation and modeling of a high quality, innovative and creative early childhood program; and to respond to the broader, contemporary family needs of our employees.

Successful implementation of high quality childcare and family support requires dedicated early childhood teachers who have sufficient resources and support systems. Early childhood teachers at the Center are challenged to be innovative and think outside the box. This mandate has resulted in the design of unique program models, best practices and family friendly policies. The CDC recruits teachers with degrees in Early Childhood Education or a closely related field. Support systems that contribute to the teachers' professional development and retention in the program include a full

benefit package, tuition reimbursement, and professional development opportunities that are tied to a professional development plan. There are no aides or assistant teachers at the Center. Recently the CDC has opened a limited number of positions to individuals who are experienced caregivers but do not have a degree. These teachers receive mentoring while they work towards a degree. The Center's design also helps to support high quality care. The building, just over 15,600 square feet, is homelike with alcoves and spaces that help to support teachers working with small groups of children. The yard is over an acre and is designed to take advantage of the natural wooded setting. In Oregon's rainy climate, barns with large sliding doors provide opportunities for outdoor play all year long.

Teachers work closely together on teams. Each teaching team is responsible for constructing developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant curriculum, creating and maintaining a healthy and safe learning environment and establishing partnerships with parents. Program Coordinators work as leaders on teaching teams and are part of the management team at the Center. Programs for infants and toddlers are based on primary caregiving and continuity of care. This model has been supported by findings from recent brain research, which indicates the importance of consistent relationships with nurturing adults in the lives of young children and the development of cognitive functions. A modified primary caregiving system supports families and meets the developmental needs of older children in preschool and kindergarten classrooms.

A developmentally appropriate early childhood program fosters the development of emotionally healthy children. The caregiving climate at the CDC emphasizes caring for children as individuals and encourages positive interactions between children. Teachers use every opportunity to foster empathy and help children to learn about their own feelings and how these feelings relate to others. Cooperation, problem solving and anger management are skills that are supported daily throughout the Center. Name-calling and other emotional hurting is always addressed and stopped. Children are supported as they develop a positive sense of their own self-identity

and a respect for other people whose perspectives and experiences may be different from their own.

The program is designed to be inclusive of all children, including those with disabilities, and other learning and developmental needs. Teachers work with families to find the most appropriate resources and ways to support children. Depending on the needs of a child this support could include working with therapists and other outside support professionals, special equipment, and extra staff. Therapists are asked to work with children in the classrooms. This approach helps the child receiving therapy as well as other children and teachers. The goal is to for everyone to learn empathy and acceptance. Teachers have found that professionals bring expertise and ways of looking at a child's needs that benefit all children and teachers. The teaching staff has been instrumental in early detection, referral and ongoing support of children with special needs.

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