

Inside CSUF

NEWS INSIDE CSUF SPOTLIGHT TITAN MAG ATHLETICS NEWS ARCHIVE MEDIA RESOURCES RSS CONTACTS



Paige swings on the "choo-choo" train in one of the play areas of the new Children's Center, which opened in January. Photo by Karen Tapia [Download Photo](#)



Master teacher Kathleen Olmstead says the new center is comfortable and nurturing. Photo by Karen Tapia

Growing Gains

New Children's Center: A Place to Call Home

By [Debra Cano Ramos](#)

Two-year-old Ellie McGill is so excited about all the fun things inside her new child care center — especially the child-size red potty seats in the Butterfly classroom.



Teacher's aide Jennie Imatomi likes the larger classrooms and expansive play yards where children can socialize and have a ton of fun playing in the sand or on the slide.

Cathy Higa, a master teacher who has been at the center 23 years, exclaimed, "What's not to love about the new center? Our new environment is esthetically beautiful, spread out and welcoming."

After months of anticipation, the campus' youngest students and their teachers have moved into the new \$8.7 million Children's Center, an Associated Students, Inc. program.

Master teacher Kathleen Olmstead, known as "Omie" to the children, agreed that the new quarters are not only built and designed for young children in mind, but that the new center offers a safe, comfortable and nurturing surrounding.

"Not only do I have the best job in the world, now we have a wonderful environment for our children to learn, explore and grow," said Olmstead, who has worked at the center for 24

Children's Center Stats

- The center has eight master teachers, a cook, maintenance and administrative staff, 60 student assistants/teacher's aides and 25 student interns.
- New furnishings and equipment include classroom lofts, interlocking shelving, writing centers, child-size play kitchens and new wagons for field trips.
- Classrooms are named the Nest, Turtle Room, Rainbow Room, Butterfly Room, Sunshine Room and Bunny Room.
- Building designed by Carde Ten Architects of Santa Monica
- Offers [National Association for the Education of Young Children-accredited program](#) – the nation's leading organization in early childhood professionals.



Little Alondra plays on the slide at the new Children's Center on campus. Photo by Karen Tapia

years.

Student fees, enacted through a 1996 student referendum, funded the new center, which serves newborns, toddlers and pre-kindergarten-age children of the university's students. Faculty and staff members also may utilize the center through an agreement between ASI and the university.

The complex is licensed for 122 children at any one time, which translates into about 180 individual children per week — accommodating one-third more children than the former center,

said Betsy Gibbs, center director.

The new center is located adjacent to West Campus Drive, near the stadium. An open house is planned March 24.

Center Beginnings

When the center first opened in 1974, it was located off-campus at a nearby church. For the last three decades, it has been housed in temporary buildings on the southwest side of campus. In 2009, [construction began](#) on the permanent center.

With natural lighting from skylights and windows — including windows at a child's level — earthy color schemes, play areas with cushioned surfaces, high-tech security system, outdoor pet habitats for turtles, tortoises, birds, and rabbits Dexter and Sugar, the new center is an idyllic learning environment for young children, Gibbs explained.

"I'm very grateful that our teaching staff has such a high-quality environment to provide the best possible care and educational program for young children," said Gibbs, who has served as director since 1974 and helped plan and design every detail of the new center, including the children's garden beds, diaper chutes and sandbox area with a water spout made in Denmark especially for children.

"We have so much more space and a lot of extra special amenities. It's a beautiful center."

The 16,300-square-foot gated and secure complex consists of three one-story buildings with 10 classrooms and connected outdoor play yards; two larger play areas with play equipment; a central courtyard with drought-tolerant plants; administrative offices; high-ceilinged lobby area with natural light; a full-service kitchen, as well as classroom kitchenettes.

The facility also has a parent study rooms, a private nursing area, a children's library and a grove of apple, apricot, lemon and peach trees.

As the number of children at the center increases, so does the number of student staff to maintain a ratio of one adult for three infants; one adult for four toddlers; and one adult for eight preschoolers, Gibbs said.

"We will add lead teaching staff to supervise two of the new spaces. In anticipation of this expansion, we have already added an education coordinator through a federal grant," she added.



Student assistant Leslie Ochoa cares for her young students in the Nest room at the new Children's Center. From left are Juliette and Makayo, as little Braiden sits in the foreground. Photo by Karen Tapia

“
When I think about the center, I can only describe it by saying ‘out of this world!’

Crisanta Aguilar
Ethnic studies and business administration major

”

A “Green” Children's Place

Some of the highlights to create a “green” environment include:

- Instantaneous hot water heaters
- Outstanding day natural lighting
- Recycled building materials used
- Decomposed granite pathways
- Low-flow plumbing fixtures
- Light-colored roof to reflect heat
- Light shelves at windows that send daylight to ceilings
- Lighting controls and motion sensors control interior lighting
- Drought-tolerant landscape materials
- High-efficiency heating, ventilation and air



Teachers assistant Tammy Lam hands out goldfish snacks in the new Children's Center. Photo by Karen Tapia

Parents' Perspective

Full-time student Crisanta Aguilar, whose 3-year-old daughter, Shayla, spends four days and up to six hours each day at the center, called the new facility an "amazing" place for the children.

"It's very modern and well designed. When I think about the center, I can only describe it by saying 'out of this world!'"

Aguilar's daughter loves her new classroom because it is so "big" and enjoys playing in the new sandbox with running water.

"I love the new center too," said Aguilar, a single mother who is a double major in ethnic studies and business administration. "The teachers take care of my daughter with much care and love and treat her as if she was their own child. If it wasn't for this center on campus, I wouldn't be able to attend college and further my education. I am so blessed that this center and staff exists."

Staff member Katie McGill of Alumni Relations said her daughter Ellie's favorite things at the new center are the playgrounds and sinks at her height. The colored potty seats also have enticed Ellie to work on her toilet training, her mother said.

"Ellie was happy to see that they moved the big tortoise statue to their new home and that the birds and bunnies have come too. Talking to other parents, they love the new center, but it will take a little while to break it in and make it a cozy place like the old center," McGill said.

Going Green

The center was built to meet the equivalent of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design silver certification standards. These standards tie in with the university's goal to build sustainable buildings, using "green-friendly" building materials.

The university's design and construction, telecom and physical plant teams, played vital roles in the planning of the new center.

"We're all excited to move in," Olmstead said. "We were sad when we left our old center; we all have a lot of memories there. But it's time to build new memories. It's going to be a big adventure for all of us."

Feb. 3, 2011

conditioning

- Renewable materials used in building products, such as eco-friendly Marmoleum flooring
- Low-emission glass in windows (Dual-pane with thin metal coating that reflects heat)

Related

- [Spotlight: New Children's Center](#)
- [Construction photos](#)

[Top of Story](#)



This site is maintained by Public Affairs of California State University, Fullerton.
To report problems or comments, please contact pmclaren@fullerton.edu.
California State University, Fullerton ©2012 All Rights Reserved.