

UMKC surveys childcare needs among students and employees

Yes, the need is there, but who's going to pay for it?

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It has been more than one year since the UMKC division of Student Affairs has designated a Child Care Task Force comprised of faculty, students, and staff to assess child care needs for the UMKC community in February 2003.

This week the Child Care Task Force sent out emails asking UMKC students, faculty and staff to fill out an online survey that will help them assess the need for child care services and figure out whether it is mostly students or employees who have the need for this service.

The Child Care Task Force is expected to submit its final report to Deborah Lewis (Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Student Development) either later this summer or in the early fall semester. The Task Force will make recommendations on possible funding for UMKC child care services, said Dr. Lewis.

Questions five and six in the survey alluded to the possibility of using Student Activity Fees (SAF) to help students obtain affordable child care on campus.

"I would have to see very detailed budgeting for how SAF would be used in this program before I could be supportive of it," said Tom Kernan, Executive Vice President of the UMKC Student Government Association (SGA). "This is an important service to have on an urban campus with a large non-traditional population."

In case there is substantial support from students, staff, and faculty for this type of service, Tom Kernan told the *KC Aurora* that he would be very willing to look at the budget implications. However, he added that his major concern is that the SAF that would be used to finance child care services must be decided on by an all student committee. "That is something we do not have yet," Tom said.

The use of SAF has been a controversial issue over the last couple of years at UMKC, and SGA has been pushing for a substantial reform that gives students (through SGA) greater control over the way SAF are spent.

"I think it's absolutely necessary to increase the level of access, affordability, and quality of childcare available to the entire campus community," said Shawn Gebhardt, Student Representative to the University of Missouri Board of Curators. He added that his only reservations are based solely on the fact that UMKC students "currently have an unacceptably low level of input into and control over how student activity fees are spent."

A recent audit of the SAF that was carried out at the request of the Inter-campus Student Council (ISC) showed that UMKC students exercise direct control over only 25% of student activity fee dollars. "This makes us the most disempowered students in the UM System in terms of controlling how our own activity fees are spent," said Shawn Gebhardt. "That's just not acceptable."

After explaining that child care is vital at an urban campus with skyrocketing tuition and fees, Shawn affirmed that he would not support any use SAF not approved by and supervised by SGA.

UMKC currently offers child care services through the Berkley Child and Family Development Center at the School of Education. "Berkley is ridiculously overpriced, and has a huge waiting list (years long)," said Jennifer Harris, a UMKC employee. "They require that you be there at a certain time and stay for a certain length of time each day."

Berkley is also open to the public and is not exclusively for faculty, staff and students. There is a huge need for an on-campus program that offers flexible hours to accommodate everyone's schedule, but be reasonably priced, said Jennifer. "Also we need a quality summer program, and after-school care," She added.

"It would be wonderful to have such a place here," said Sara Ballew, a UMKC employee working at the Center for Economic Information, and a mother of a two-year old boy.

Sara explained that worksite childcare is not only convenient, but it also provides employees with "a greater level of security because they are closer to their child which is very comforting."

By providing child care services, UMKC will benefit as well "because it shows it as being progressive and sensitive to the needs of its faculty, staff and students," said Sara.

Major concerns that go beyond financial support for the program remain important, especially with regards to quality of the service. Most parents want their children to be in a nurturing, learning environment and I don't believe that always happens, said Sara. "If UMKC were to provide such a service I would hope that they would take the time to create such an environment."

Survey for Students:

<http://www.umkc.edu/ir/surveys/childcare/student.asp>

Survey for Faculty/Staff:

<http://www.umkc.edu/ir/surveys/childcare/facultystaff.asp>

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