

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Reduction of Services at the OCC Harry & Grace Steele Children's Center

Effective July 1, 2025

1. Will the Children's Center close completely?

No. The College remains committed to keeping the Center open and honoring the intent of its donors by continuing to provide childcare services, primarily to student-parents. The Center will transition from operating five classrooms to two, focusing exclusively on the childcare needs of students and as a second priority, those of District/college employees on a year-round basis.

2. Why is the College reducing services at the Children's Center?

The College is focusing its resources to serve its students. The Children's Center has been operating at a significant financial loss, requiring the College to subsidize over \$500,000 annually. Despite tuition increases, cost-saving efforts, and exploring partnerships, the deficit has continued to grow, with a projected shortfall of over \$600,000 for the current 2024–25 Fiscal Year. The reduction of services will decrease the financial shortfall ensuring the College can better align resources with its **core mission: supporting student success**.

3. Who will have priority for enrollment at the Children's Center?

Priority will be given to the children of student-parents. After meeting student-parent needs, the second priority will be the children of district/college employees. And if space allows, the third priority will be the children of community members.

4. How many families will be impacted by this reduction?

Based on a preliminary assessment, the Center currently enrolls:

- 19 student-parents with 20 children (with 2–3 student-parents potentially impacted by the reduction because of age eligibility; once eligible, they will have the option to re-enroll)
- 15 employees with 17 children (none will be impacted)
- 69 children from community families, who will likely be impacted. The Center will assist in providing information on other childcare providers in the community.

5. What options were considered before making this decision?

The College explored multiple alternatives, including:

- Potential partnerships with several community-based organizations.
- Analyzing tuition increase models, which would have positioned the Center among the higher-cost centers, deviating from our commitment to student support and our core mission.

6. Can parents fundraise to keep their children at the OCC Children's Center?

All fundraising efforts on behalf of Orange Coast College are conducted through the OCC Foundation and must align with the College's core mission. While we deeply appreciate the community's dedication and desire to support the Children's Center, any funds raised on behalf of the College are designated to support educational programs and services for students.

7. How will this decision affect Children's Center employees?

The classified union contract has negotiated strict parameters regarding changes in employment for the benefit of their members. The District and College are working closely with our union partners and employees to address and minimize impact to the extent possible.

8. What is the new classroom structure under the two-classroom model?

The revised Model will include two preschool classrooms for children between the ages 2 – 5.

9. Will the College revisit expanding services in the future?

Yes. The College will continue to explore partnerships and funding opportunities that may expand services for students.

10. Is it common for community colleges to operate a Children's Center?

Children's Centers and lab schools are designed differently across colleges, depending on institutional factors. These variations can be influenced by factors such as the needs of students and collaborations with child development academic departments. For example, some neighboring community colleges have combined their lab schools/children's center, with the primary focus on supporting the needs of students and their educational program.

11. What childcare-related services are typically provided by community colleges?

While full-service childcare centers are uncommon, it is typical for community colleges to operate Early Childhood Education (ECE) Labs. These labs are connected to Child Development instructional programs and serve as hands-on learning environments for students pursuing careers in early childhood education. OCC operates an Early Childhood Education Lab as part of its Child Development instructional program.

12. How does an ECE Lab differ from a Children's Center ?

An ECE Lab primarily serves as an educational component, offering students practical experience in early childhood education. For example, at OCC, the ECE Lab provides part-time childcare as an experiential component of the instructional program. In contrast, a Children's Center focuses on providing comprehensive childcare services for children of students and employees. The Children's Center is an approved center that accommodates student placement in support of their required coursework.

13. Why Don't Most Community Colleges Operate Child Care Centers?

- **High Operational Costs** — Operating a childcare center requires significant financial resources. For community colleges working within limited budgets, these operational costs can be difficult to sustain.

- **Mission-Driven Resource Allocation** — Community colleges prioritize resources that most directly support student learning and achievement. Investments typically focus on academic programs, student services, and support systems that have a direct impact on educational outcomes.
- **Instructionally Connected Models Are Common** — It is more typical for community colleges to operate Early Childhood Education Labs connected to Child Development instructional programs.
- **Community Partnerships** — Instead of operating their own centers, some community colleges collaborate with local childcare providers or community organizations to meet the childcare needs of their students and employees. This approach reduces operational costs while still supporting access to affordable childcare.

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