

A VOICE FOR QUALITY

Gillian Brune, Director

Mentor Graphics Child Development Center



ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Name of host organization

Mentor Graphics

Name of center

Mentor Graphics Child Development Center

Year opened

1992

Populations served

Children and grandchildren of Mentor Graphics' employees; limited community spaces

Number of children enrolled at last count

100

Number of children on waiting list at last count

25

Operating philosophy

To support work/life balance for working parents; to provide an innovative/creative environment for young children that nurtures and respects the individual developmental needs of each child.

Favorite design feature

Our "good bye windows" are a place where children and their parents can exchange final waves and kisses while the parent is headed out the door and their child is in their classroom. It gives children the ability to see their parent do exactly what they said they were going to do— go to work. And then the children can stay as long as they want at the window watching the comings and goings of the school. Not surprisingly, the windows also help with reunions at the end of the day. Children can see their parent coming before they enter the classroom. Thus the windows make the very important transitions of home to school and school to home visible.

Capital funding sources

Mentor Graphics Corp.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why does Mentor Graphics provide early care and education services and who is eligible for these services?

Mentor Graphics believes in supporting the needs of families so that employees can focus on their careers. Initially the center was open only to employees, but we opened a small number of spaces to the community in 2009.

2. In what ways were stakeholders involved in the design and development processes for your center?

Mentor's CEO at the time and the center's first director were very hands on in the design and development process. The CEO provided the vision, and the center director provided the technical expertise. Families of Mentor Graphics employees provided the impetus and need.

3. The working title of this piece – “What Money Can Buy” – suggests that money is necessary for a high-quality early education? How do you respond?

Initial investments are important and needed to create sustainable high-quality programs. Once the program is established, you can work on balancing the budget in ways that are fiscally responsible for all stakeholders, parents, subsidy providers, and the needs of the program. The single best investment from a program standpoint is in teachers — keeping their salaries and benefits competitive thus minimizing the cost of turnover and maximizing program quality.

4. What evidence is available to back up claims that learning environments matter for infants, toddlers and preschoolers?

Leaders in the field that present a body of evidence include: Thelma Harms; Project Zero and ZERO TO THREE. Recently science, especially neuroscience, has presented a substantial body of research as well. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* is one of the better known ground-breaking publications.

5. Explain the importance of facility design in your program. Please give examples of how your facility *facilitates* learning.

First and foremost I think the facility was designed with the idea of promoting sound teaching practices by being flexible with space, encouraging lots of flow-through space for teacher-to-teacher and child-to-child encounters, taking advantage of the natural world and designing spaces for the learning community to be together and also paying attention to spaces where children can be alone or in small groups. Nothing can compare to the great outdoor space we have. We not only have a large yard, but also a forested nature loop and

a soccer field. This space allows so much room for children's spontaneous play and ongoing investigations of the world around them. The outdoor environment is loved by children, teachers and parents alike. Equally important is the center's location in the larger community — close to parents' work, close to opportunities for learning, such as the library, city parks and a grocery store.

6. What is your understanding of the situation in Oregon when it comes to access to high-quality early education programs?

We have very few high-quality centers in our area. The biggest need I see is increasing the number of quality infant-toddler centers and teachers to staff them.

7. Make your best case for why Oregon should do more to increase access to high-quality early care and education programs. How can this be achieved?

Increasingly children are living their childhoods in places outside of the home that were not designed for them. These places seem to be based not on best practices, innovative thinking or creativity, but rather on a need for care. They require too much of the child and often pay far too much attention to cognitive needs and pleasing a parent population than to childhood, developmental needs and the individual children. Community and business partnerships, in my opinion, seem to be the best way to achieve the quality we need.

8. Many individuals and organizations look to your program as a model of what is possible, perhaps even as a model of what should be available to every child. Where do you look for inspiration?

I find inspiration in the leading research in the field; among colleagues who are working hard on behalf of young children; the programs in Reggio Emilia, Italy that have set the industry standard; innovative thinkers, which include parents, children and fellow teachers; and my staff.