

Question Time

1. The university administration expressed a long-term commitment to a high-quality, full-time, *on-campus* center. The proposed arrangement does not meet this goal. Is the TLC arrangement seen as temporary? Is the university still committed to the long-term goal of a high-quality, on-campus center which is an integral part of the university community?
2. If the arrangement is not seen as temporary, how will the university proceed if the arrangement is not found to be financially viable for TLC, and it must again close?
3. Why was this decision made with no consultation with affected constituencies?
4. This arrangement has been described as a “cooperation to pursue mutual goals.” How is that “cooperation” to be demonstrated as we move forward? At the very least, we would like to see a university staff member, such as Lynda Place, in the role of liaison between the campus and TLC, as well as a board of directors with members from among the faculty, staff, and students.
5. How can we be assured that the quality of the care provided at TLC will equal that of the current IPFW Child Care Center? It is rare that privately-owned day-care centers operated for profit can offer care that approaches the quality of nonprofit centers, especially those operated by universities.
6. Why were the child care needs of faculty not part of the arrangement? As noted above, the fee structure puts those seeking part-time care, and care that is matched to the university’s schedule, at a significant disadvantage relative to the current center.
7. What will happen to funds that were set aside for the on-campus center, and to the cost savings from “outsourcing” the child care?

We, the undersigned IPFW faculty, wish to express our strong disagreement with the decision to close the IPFW Child Care Center and to enter into an arrangement with TLC as the preferred child care provider for IPFW. We respectfully disagree that this is a desirable arrangement for the university community.

Background:

First, we are outraged at the undemocratic manner in which this decision was made. That the constituencies involved were never consulted about this arrangement is inconsistent with the shared decision making that we expect to see in a university. There has been a Child Care Advisory Committee for several years, but their input was not sought during the negotiations to set up this arrangement. Many of the university staff who might have been consulted were informed about the negotiations so late in the process so as to have no real opportunity to provide input.

Over the past several years, faculty members serving on the Child Care Advisory Committee conducted various surveys investigating the need for a model child care center to be located *on*

the IPFW campus. These surveys provided strong evidence of child care needs for members of the IPFW community: students, faculty, and staff. It was certainly a goal to expand child care services to infants, and to be able to provide full-time care, as the surveys suggested that these were important unmet needs. Recent press releases have suggested that these were the major goals, but they were not. We also expected the center to continue to provide convenient part-time care as it does currently. But overall, the primary goal, and the vision we heard expressed by the university administration on numerous occasions, was to have a child care center of outstanding quality located *on campus.*

The current IPFW child care center provides excellent care in large part because of the qualifications and commitment of the current staff, including the director, Lynda Place. Had the administration chosen to expand the current center to a new facility on or very near campus, with the capacity for full-time and infant care but with the current staff and programs, we would have enthusiastically supported this transition. This is what we fully expected. The proposed arrangement with TLC is a huge disappointment and a betrayal of the goal we believed that the administration shared with us.

A university should be a model to the community in providing child care of exceptional quality to the children of students, faculty, and staff. To provide this kind of high quality care is expensive. Thus, when a university makes a commitment to provide high quality child care, those making the decision must understand the requisite financial commitment. We see such a commitment as a moral responsibility to the university community. By providing such a center, the university demonstrates how it values children and families.

A high-quality child care center is also a resource for academic programs on campus, especially those in early childhood education and developmental psychology and, to some extent, other disciplines such as nursing and speech sciences. The current center, with its part-time operation and no provision for infants and toddlers, had some challenges in meeting some of those needs, but the high quality, full-time center we all envisioned for the future would be an incredible resource to support the academic mission of the university. The proposed arrangement with TLC will not serve those needs.

Furthermore, and very importantly to us, the proposed arrangement with TLC is for students only. Faculty and staff may use the facility, but at no particular benefit. Faculty members, women in particular, are concerned about what child care is available *on campus,* with their needs in mind. They want to know that the university is committed to a family-friendly workplace. Having a high-quality university child care center moves beyond symbolic gestures and provides tangible evidence that the university values them and their families. This is a recruiting tool to increase the percentage of women faculty members, an affirmative-action goal this university has publicly stated it holds. Recently-hired faculty were aware of this resource at the time of their hire, and many use it or planned to. That the administration of this campus would take away the university child care center without consulting the faculty and providing for their particular needs is unacceptable.

Although we fully support the need for full-time care, many faculty members prefer part-time arrangements such as those provided by the current center. Part-time care allows faculty to take advantage of their flexible schedules, spend some additional time with their children while the children are awake, and shift some of their faculty work and writing to evenings. The proposed arrangement with TLC makes part-time care less affordable – and perhaps even unavailable – for faculty, and doesn't take into account the schedule needs that are most suitable for faculty. A university center is typically committed to working around the changing schedules of faculty (and students) during such times as exam week and mid-semester breaks. A community center is far less likely to meet such needs.

While our concern here is largely with faculty, we understand that many student parents are equally outraged about this decision. Faculty hiring and retention are potentially impacted by this decision, but we also point out that student parents' ability to return to school and persist until graduation is affected by *on campus*, convenient, safe, affordable, high quality care. Thus, the proposed arrangement with TLC may jeopardize our ability to retain students to graduation.

Student parents are served more effectively by an on-campus center in other ways. As university employees, the child care center staff take part in regular meetings concerning university life and services to students. They prepare annual reports, as do all campus units. They understand the life of a university. As student parents come to know the staff as valued collaborators in the care and education of their young children, they often turn to them for information about university services, which as IPFW staff, they are able to provide. This will no longer be the case with the arrangement with TLC.

We also believe that the treatment of the current child care center staff was extremely inappropriate. We understand that most of them will probably be hired by TLC in comparable roles, but they will no longer be part of the university community, nor will they be Purdue University employees with associated benefits. That is a huge loss to them. Furthermore, the high quality of the current center has been shaped by its current director, Lynda Place. To our knowledge, there is no role for her in the proposed arrangement with TLC, which is disgraceful. How could the university treat a high-performing employee in this fashion?

Finally, we note that the current center receives ancillary services from the university (janitorial services, printing services, etc.), as does any university department or program. The current building is to be sold, funds from which will return to the university. Faculty on the Child Care Advisory Committee were told that these funds would be part of a financial commitment to a new, *on campus* center. We ask what will be the current disposition of those funds and of the cost savings from not supporting the current center?

IPFW faculty and others; signatories follow on the next page

IPFW Faculty Members

Stevens Amidon
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Troy Bassett
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Lesa Vartanian
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Sara Webb-Sunderhaus
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IPFW graduate students,
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Katie Beck
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