

## MEMORANDUM

To: Faculty Senate

From: PCC

Re: NKU Early Childhood Center — Voting Item; Passed

Date: May 5, 2017

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The NKU Early Childhood Center (ECC) operates on-campus as “a direct extension of the campus atmosphere -- student-centered and quality driven.” ECC is a not-for-profit organization whose “sole purpose is to provide an excellent child care program and environment for NKU students, staff, faculty, alumni and community members.”

To its detriment, in recent years the NKU Early Childhood Center has operated under conditions of financial and existential uncertainty. As a result, the Center has seen high turnover in staff, delays in filling vacant positions, increased fees, increased student-teacher ratios, loss of NAEYC accreditation due to lack of permission to renew, reduced flexibility, changes to admission policies, and the threat of closure. In addition, the process through which some changes were made was not inclusive or transparent.

Recently, NKU announced that it is once again reevaluating the future of ECC. In principal part, the stated reason for this decision is that the “university has subsidized the operations of the Center over the past five years, but that may no longer be possible in the future.” Accordingly, in connection with the present reevaluation, NKU has issued an RFP to seek an external partner for the ECC. While users have been assured that changes would not affect spring 2017 or summer programming, the future of ECC remains uncertain.

The ongoing uncertainty surrounding the ECC undermines the value of providing on-campus child care and does not support the stated mission, goals, and strategic plan of NKU. Specifically, such tumult undermines student success. It thereby creates tension with NKU’s stated goal to “provide a supportive, student-centered educational environment that promotes academic success, global awareness, and timely graduation” as well as other stated goals to “recruit, retain, and develop outstanding faculty and staff” and “expand and maintain facilities to meet the growing needs of the campus.” In explaining its decision, NKU has framed its support of the ECC as a burden to the university, rather than as a benefit that promotes student success, faculty and staff excellence, and gender equity. This perspective is shortsighted and sends the message that supporting students, staff, and faculty who are parents is not a priority for NKU.

As NKU evaluates the future of the ECC, we request that the process be inclusive and transparent, directly involving stakeholders (including current and past ECC families) in the decision making process. Specifically, we request the:

- (1) continuation of a child care facility on-campus that serves, at least, faculty and staff members and NKU students;
- (2) maintenance of a high standard of quality (e.g. NAEYC accreditation or equivalent);
- (3) continuation of placement opportunities for early childhood education program teacher candidates for field work and course projects;
- (4) continuation of student employment opportunities; and
- (5) maintenance of subsidies for NKU students who use the facility.

We also encourage NKU to explore options that increase child care options on campus (*e.g.* by accepting students younger than one year of age). Moreover, in calculating the true cost to NKU of ECC's operation, the university should take account of (and seek to quantify) the corresponding and off-setting benefits that may accrue from staff and faculty retention and job satisfaction, as well as from student retention.

NKU's enthusiastic support of the ECC is an opportunity for NKU to demonstrate its commitment to student success, gender equity, and a more progressive work-family environment for faculty and staff.