

November 2007

**UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS  
TANANA VALLEY CAMPUS**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:  
BUNNELL HOUSE EARLY CHILDHOOD LAB SCHOOL**

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**Mission**

The foremost mission of the TVC Bunnell House Early Childhood Lab School at the University of Alaska Fairbanks is to provide rich observation and practicum experiences in a model lab school environment for university students studying early childhood education and related disciplines. In conjunction with its academic mission, Bunnell House also provides high-quality, licensed care to children of enrolled university students, faculty, and staff.

**Background**

Tanana Valley Campus (TVC) operates Bunnell House Early Childhood Lab School on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. The lab school is licensed by the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services to serve 30 children, ages 36 months through six years. The program participates with several agencies, including Alaska Native corporations that fund childcare for some of the families enrolled.

In cooperation with the Early Childhood Education program at TVC, the lab school provides university students with observation and practicum experiences. Parental permission for children to be a part of this university learning experience is a requisite for enrollment.

**Children's Program**

The lab school's child-centered environment is rich in learning opportunities. Developmentally appropriate equipment and practices permit children to make choices within a supportive and encouraging structure. Self-selection of activities and materials allows children to learn independently at their own unique pace. Active exploration and cooperative learning foster problem-solving and critical thinking skills, communication and language skills, creativity, competence, healthy attitudes, and positive self-worth.

**Staffing**

Bunnell House currently has a staff of six including a director and a three-quarter time administrative staff member. Teachers are trained professionals in the early childhood field who complete a minimum of 20 hours of continuing education per year.

Lead teachers are required to have a minimum of two years college or vocational technical course work with an associate's degree in early childhood and one full year of formal experience working with infant, toddler or preschool children; or a bachelor's degree with a minimum of 18 credits in early childhood education and a minimum of six months formal experience working with young children.

Assistant teachers are required to have a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent plus some vocational technical course work in early childhood education or a related field and/or minimum three months of formal experience working with preschool children.

Turnover of teaching staff is low. The current teachers have an overall average length of employment at the lab school in the order of 4 years each, with the longest being 11.5 years and the shortest being six months. All employees have undergone fingerprinting and background checks as required by state licensing and are required to maintain current certification in infant-child-adult first aid and CPR as well as food handler certification.

### **University Students**

The primary purpose of the lab school is to provide rich observation and practicum experiences for university students studying early childhood education (ECE). Practicum involves 160 hours of on-site experience. Advanced practicum requires completion of 200 hours, but not all are on-site. Over the last three years, including the current semester, approximately 2800 hours of practicum have been completed at Bunnell House.

In addition to ECE students, students from other disciplines utilize the lab school to enhance their learning and understanding through observations and interactive activities with the children.

In the preceding 13 months, from September 11, 2006 through October 8, 2007, the lab school was used 109 times by students to fulfill course requirements (does not include practicum). Following are breakdowns by discipline and by semester, followed by a breakdown by semester of use by practicum students.

<b><u>Discipline</u></b>	<b><u>number of times used</u></b>	<b><u>percentage of total usage</u></b>
Early Childhood Education	69	63%
Education	8	7%
Journalism	5	5%
Paramedic	23	21%
Psychology	2	2%
Unspecified	2	2%

<b><u>Semester</u></b>	<b><u>number of times used</u></b>
Fall 2003	78
Spring 2004	63
Summer 2004	1
Fall 2004	62
Spring 2005	78
Summer 2005	8
Fall 2005	56
Spring 2006	56
Summer 2006	0
Fall 2006	36
Spring 2007	61
Summer 2007	0
Fall 2007 (thru Oct 8 <sup>th</sup> )	11

<b><u>ECE Practicum Use</u></b>	<b><u>number of students</u></b>
Summer 2004	2
Fall 2004	0
Spring 2005	1
Summer 2005	4
Fall 2005	0
Spring 2006	0
Summer 2006*	5
Fall 2006	1
Spring 2007	2
Summer 2007	2
Fall 2007	3

\*One student completed both ECE 170 and ECE 270 and is counted twice

### **Child Enrollment**

Over the last three years approximately 135 children have attended Bunnell House. Currently, 39 children representing 35 families are enrolled.

Of the 36 families enrolled, 31% are staff (11 families), 22% are student (8 families), 33% are faculty (12 families), 6% are student/staff combination (2 families), 3% are staff/faculty combination (1 family), and 3% are student/faculty combination (1 family).

### **Child Waitlist**

The lab school currently has a waitlist of 69 children representing 65 families.

### **Budget**

The FY08 budget for Bunnell House Early Childhood Lab School staff and commodities is \$334,031 (does not include facilities costs for utilities maintenance and operation). Annual revenue from fees paid by families is approximately \$130,000. Thus, fees from 12 month operation have covered approximately 39% of program operation costs. Fees charged to families have been increased twice in the past three years—each time by 10 percent. The difference annually between program operation costs and revenues is nearly \$204,031.

TVC has determined that its academic mission can be met by operating Bunnell House on the basis of nine months per year. By not operating during three summer months we expect a savings of approximately \$90,000. The savings from this change in FY08 have already been committed to hiring a new TVC faculty member.

### **Hearts for Kids Award ~ 4 out of 4 Hearts**

From October 2002 through May 2003, the lab school participated in Hearts for Kids, a voluntary program for licensed programs that was a project of the Fairbanks community public campaign “Grow Better Kids.” The purpose of Hearts for Kids was to increase the quality of childcare in the community. Trained reviewers spent many hours observing and scoring programs on every facet of the operation including health, safety, curriculum, staffing, administration, training, and furnishings.

Participating programs received free technical assistance as well as mini-grants to finance the enhancement suggestions made by the reviewers. After enhancements were completed, reviewers returned to make final evaluations of the programs. Finally, programs were awarded a score of anywhere from one to four hearts.

As a participant in Hearts for Kids the lab school received two \$1800 mini-grants that were used to purchase furnishings and toys to meet the enhancement suggestions. The lab school also achieved the highest rating – four out of four hearts.

### **Alaska Quality Child Care Enrichment Program**

In Spring 2006 Bunnell House participated in a statewide voluntary assessment program, similar to Hearts for Kids, intended to help strengthen program quality as well as provide a small amount of funding (roughly \$650 per classroom) for classroom improvement and/or staff training. One of the consultants for the enrichment program brought individuals from other participating early childhood programs to see Bunnell House as a model example.

### **Accreditation**

The goal of the lab school is to become an accredited program through the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the largest national professional early childhood organization.