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Bombeck Center a Model of Quality

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The University of Dayton's Bombeck Family Learning Center will be featured in a statewide public service announcement for Step Up to Quality, Ohio's voluntary quality rating system, after receiving the program's highest rating.

Step Up to Quality is Ohio's voluntary rating system for childcare programs licensed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Step Up to Quality recognizes early care and education programs that exceed quality benchmarks over and above Ohio's licensing standards.

More than 4,200 licensed childcare centers operate in Ohio. Of those, 960 participate in the rating system, and the Bombeck Center is one of 109 to achieve the highest distinction of three stars.

"Achieving a 3-star rating and maintaining it is very difficult," said Jamie Gottesman, assistant chief with the department's Bureau of Child Care and Development. "The highest level in our system is aligned with national standards. The Bombeck Center got a 3-star rating in its first application, while many of our programs start out as a 1- or 2-star and work their way up."

Gottesman said her department was so impressed with the Bombeck Center that they selected the center to highlight in its first public service announcement promoting the rating system. A film crew visited the Bombeck Center last month, and the PSA is expected to begin airing later this month.

"It's very easy to be taken with the environment, the design of the building," Gottesman said. "The engagement of the children is also really quite remarkable, and the skills of the teachers in my estimation are just flawless."

University of Dayton education faculty designed the curriculum for the Bombeck Center, which is supported by research and is child-centered. Teachers are encouraged to construct their education plans around student interests.

"We are committed to serving the community, providing a foundation for future teachers, and respecting our children's needs and interests as the basis for the care and education they receive," said Diana Smith, director of the Bombeck Center. "As part of the University of Dayton, we strive to live out the Marianist ideals of community and respect. And we're honored to be recognized by the state for exceeding standard expectations of childcare and education."

Smith said the center will also submit an application to the accreditation program of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The Step Up to Quality rating program went statewide three years ago, and participation continues to grow. To receive a 3-star rating, centers must meet the following standards:

- The facility must maintain smaller group sizes in the infant room, birth to 18 months old, and lower ratios in the infant, toddler, preschool and school-age classrooms.
- The administrator and all lead teachers must have credentials and/or degrees in early childhood education, and at least 50 percent of assistant teachers have a Child Development Associate credential.
- The administrator, all lead teachers and assistant teachers must complete 10 hours of specialized training annually.
- The center must provide annual performance evaluations, professional development planning and at least three benefits to employees and a commitment to continuous improvement.
- Teachers must screen children upon entry to the program, assess their progress on an ongoing basis and utilize Ohio's Infant Toddler Guidelines, Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards and K-12 Standards in curriculum planning.

The Bombeck Center has its roots on the University of Dayton campus, where it began as a childcare facility for the children of faculty and staff. It moved to its current location on the corner of Alberta and Stewart streets in 1974.

A $3.8 million renovation in 2002 helped transform the center into an early childhood demonstration school for the University's School of Education and Allied Professions. The renovation was spurred by a $1 million gift by the family of columnist Erma Bombeck.

The Bombeck Center is operated by the University of Dayton's School of Education and Allied Professions and is open to the general public.
Bombeck, a 1949 University of Dayton graduate.

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