

Children's Creative Learning Centers, Inc.

Nationwide

A LEADER IN: CREATING NONTOXIC PLAY SPACES

"Babies spend most of their time on floors," says Jacques Sell from the national daycare chain Children's Creative Learning Centers, Inc. (CCLC). That's why it's crucial those floors be safe, and why Sell is in charge of overseeing CCLC's commitment to eco-friendly, healthy surroundings, from the floors to the air quality to the toys.

The company's interest in greener centers came directly from the staff. Fran Durekas, CCLC's founder and chief development officer, says that she and many of her colleagues were embracing a holistic, nontoxic lifestyle for their own families at home. So they asked themselves: Could they offer the same for children in the daycare facilities?

After a year of intensive work, CCLC can now boast that every single one of



its centers meets the Eco-Healthy Child Care Initiative criteria (see Grading Green, below). The company's corporate office educated regional directors, who then spread the eco-information among center directors and staff nationwide.

Among the changes: The facilities switched to low-VOC paints and implemented an integrated pest management system (less toxic than traditional methods), and staffers never microwave food in plastic containers.

Now Durekas—and parents—can breathe easier, knowing that's exactly what the kids are doing, too.

Bright Star Academy

Cedar Park, Texas

A LEADER IN: SAVING ENERGY

The newly built Bright Star Academy preschool is a model of sustainable building, as well as utterly kid-friendly. Owner Tonya Stump's 15 years of experience running other centers led her to create her dream childcare facility (with the

help of green builder Celmark). Rimmed with large windows, Bright Star's 17,000-square-foot space requires fewer lights than most buildings of its size. The light fixtures that do exist use compact fluorescent bulbs, and smart sensors flick them off when no one's in the room. Energy Star appliances keep energy use (and costs) low.

But all this conservation doesn't mean the school's skimping on fun. The preschool room's low-VOC-paint murals cheerfully remind kids of the Earth's fellow residents; playground equipment is made from recycled plastic. Shelves of lead-safe toys and books come from consignment stores, after Stump vets them against recall lists. That perennial kid favorite, a water-play table, recirculates and reuses water to avoid waste.

"With age comes wisdom," Stump says. "As a mother of four, I realize how important it is to preserve as much as we can for future generations."



GRADING GREEN

Childcare facilities can become more eco-friendly—and show off their results—thanks to certification programs designed just for daycares and preschools.

Eco-Healthy Child Care (EHCC) is a project of the nonprofit Oregon Environmental Council, but works with childcare providers nationwide. To earn the group's "Eco-Healthy" rating, a childcare facility must meet 24 out of 30 items on a checklist created by EHCC. There are a few nonnegotiable items on the list, like using nontoxic pesticides and herbicides and forbidding on-site smoking.

Because EHCC is still a small program, the rating is self-policing, though centers must recertify after two years to stay enrolled, says Hester Paul, EHCC's national program manager. Today, over 1,400 childcare facilities have earned the Eco-Healthy rating, up from only 200 in 2006.

Greenguard Environmental Institute focuses on an invisible hazard: air quality. Greenguard has strict certification requirements for products used in daycares and preschools to ensure that kids, who are more sensitive to environmental toxins than adults, are as safe as possible. To learn more about air quality in daycares and schools, visit Kiwi's sister site, myhealthyschool.com/airquality.

If you're inspired by the profiles here, Paul suggests gathering interested parents to form a volunteer committee to help your daycare provider go greener. Try to make a few improvements per month: Change takes education, initiative, and time.

Imagine Early Learning Centers

New York City

A LEADER IN: HELPING FAMILIES MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES

In a city so big it's easy to get lost in the shuffle, Imagine makes sure its families are a part of a community—a healthy, eco-minded community at that.

Imagine's 11 centers offer a program for kids and parents called Learning Healthy Early; it is embraced by the wide variety of parents the facilities serve, from Wall Street workers to hospital janitors. Workshops teach parents how to read food labels and cook affordable, healthy meals. Imagine also educates parents