

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Launches Inclusive Childcare Laboratory & Diagnostic Center

Education / **Published On June 24, 2019 10:36 PM /**

Staff **June 24, 2019**



© Aisha-Zakiya Boyd

The University of the Virgin Islands on Monday launched an Inclusive Childcare Laboratory and Diagnostic Center on the St. Thomas Campus. According a release the institution of higher learning issued, the new facility is intended to enhance the educational experience of preservice teachers who will be supervised by professors as part of their studies – while supporting the university’s students and employees to better manage the challenges of balancing parenthood and college life. UVI will be among the first Historically Black Colleges and Universities to provide this service.

The establishment of a research-based childcare program linked to early childhood and the School of Education has been a goal of UVI President David Hall's since 2014. "This idea has evolved over the years and it's no longer just a place to care for our students' children, but an opportunity to create a model early education center that can help enhance the quality of early childhood education throughout the Virgin Islands," Mr. Hall said. "The significance of this project is now more transformative than our students imagined."

As many as 30 children can be admitted at the center at a time. The center is open for children between ages two to eleven. Initially, the center will be operational from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. However, it is expected to evolve from an after school to full-day childcare center, according to the university.

The idea for the childcare center arose from a survey of UVI students, staff and faculty who emphasized the need for such a facility on campus. "The University's ability to address this critical need indicates that we listen to our students and we strive to address their needs," Mr. Hall said.

According to UVI, the Inclusive Childcare Lab and Diagnostic Center provides service in three priority areas: preservice teacher development, childcare for UVI students, and early care and education. It is designed to provide services that are pedagogically sound and centered around innovative research-based best practices. Of significance are the diagnostic services that will address developmental milestones through developmental screening and assessment of reading, language/communication, social and emotional behavior, cognition, and physical development.

"The faculty in the School of Education and I embrace the opportunity that the Childcare Laboratory and Diagnostic Center will afford our students (preservice teachers)," said Dean of the School of Education, Dr. Linda Thomas. "This is phenomenal because, after all, the goal of the School of Education is to ensure that our graduates impact the students that they will end up working with eventually," Dr. Thomas added. "We want that impact to be major. The center will further 'raise the bar' for preservice teacher preparation."

The facility will be managed by the School of Education with supervisory services from faculty and certified teachers. Preservice education majors enrolled in both the Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood and Elementary teacher preparation programs will be exposed to new teaching and learning approaches and best practices, UVI made known.

The facility includes a live simulation room where preservice student teachers will observe and engage in evidence-based classroom instruction in a research rich context under the guidance of certified teachers and university faculty. A debriefing room for the preservice students and a children's library will also form part of the facility.

Future phases of the center will include childcare opportunities for children in the VI community where space permits. A similar project is expected to come on stream on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix in the near future.

“This initiative displays UVI as a leader,” said Dr. Karen Harris Brown, co-activity director and visiting associate professor. “As we address issues in the Virgin Islands community regarding kindergarten readiness, we are assisting our education partners by increasing earlier identification of children with developmental delays.”

Establishing a model inclusive childcare center at the University can lead to increased enrollment, greater student retention, improved academic achievement for both UVI students and children enrolled in the center, and enhanced learning opportunities for UVI students enrolled in School of Education programs.

This initiative is supported by a Title III Grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Feature Image: From left to right: Dr. Karen Brown, Avery Lewis, Dr. Linda Thomas, Board Chairman Henry Smock, UVI President David Hall, Childcare Diagnostic Center Director Sherryl Tonge- George, Senate President Novelle Francis and Sen. Myron Jackson pose for photos in front of the Inclusive Childcare Laboratory and Diagnostic Center.