

Breastfeeding Support in the Child Care and Educational Setting

East Creek Family Center provides parents with resources and support to continue breastfeeding

East Creek Child Care and New Beginnings are programs of SouthWest Metro Intermediate District 288. Both programs operate within the East Creek Family Center building in Chaska. New Beginnings is an alternative high school program, helping pregnant and parenting students complete graduation. East Creek Child Care is a small, nationally accredited, four-star Parent Aware awarded child care center and parenting lab. The child care center serves about 50 percent high school student parents and 50 percent parents from the general public.

The teachers and the child care staff members are very supportive in helping the young mothers with choices about feeding their infants. Despite knowing the health benefits of breastfeeding, many of the families have complicated situations: PTSD, sexual violence experiences, substance abuse, poverty, and homelessness, making the choice to exclusively breastfeed a difficult choice. Mothers who choose breastfeeding have the freedom to feed their infant in the classroom (with teacher permission), in the child care center, or in a lactation area. During the 2015-2016 school year, East Creek Child Care had eight students and two staff members who regularly breastfed their children on site.

Through the partnership with Carver County Public Health and the SHIP program, East Creek Family Center was able to create three more private lactation areas, add appropriate signage for the designated areas, provide safe storage and handling of expressed breast milk, and offer educational material to interested mothers. In addition, child care staff attended training to increase their awareness and knowledge of accommodating breastfeeding in the child care setting.

For many parenting students in the New Beginnings program, breastfeeding ends before they return to school from maternity leave, or shortly after. The supportive atmosphere at school and child care helped these eight students breastfeed their infants for six months to one year, and beyond. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that infants are breastfed exclusively for about the first six months and then breastfed along with baby food and table food to 12 months of age, and thereafter for as long as the mother and baby see fit.

East Creek Child Care Center is continuing to support the infant feeding choices mothers make, including the support needed to make breastfeeding successful. This year they will be working towards applying for the Minnesota Department of Health Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care Center Recognition.

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