

# Good Stewardship: Repurposing Sims

December 11, 2024 | 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

## Topic:

Early Childhood Education

## Presenter(s):

Cathy McHorse, Early Childhood Consultant

Christina Collazo, Founder & Executive Director - Todos Juntos

Yesenia Prieto, ECE Director - Todos Juntos

## Number of Attendees:

12

## Meeting Notes:

- Former Sims Elementary School campus is part of the district's repurposing process to identify future uses for underutilized sites that are responsive to community needs
  - Background information can be found on the district website >> [Site Repurposing | Austin ISD](#)
  - Community has expressed interest in keeping the existing building and finding ways to honor the history and legacy of the school
- Community members toured the facility in October; group activity revealed affordable childcare to be one of the most desired uses
- Cathy McHorse is an early childhood consultant and advocate with over 30 years of experience in and out of the classroom working in this field
- State of childcare in Austin / Travis County:
  - Biggest challenges:
    - Access
    - Affordability
    - Quality
  - Travis County has highest cost for child care in the state, especially for infants and toddlers due to ratios
    - Contributing factors:
      - Labor
      - Facilities (rent, utilities)
      - Materials & food
      - Cost of living

- Expansion of public Pre-K is moving children out of the childcare model
  - Pre-K tuition historically has subsidized infant/toddlers
- Quality costs more!
  - Lower ratio of students to caregiver
  - Qualifications, training and experience of teacher and staff
  - Policies and procedures
- Deeper dive: [Why Does Child Care Cost So Much?](#) video
- Texas Workforce Commission provides scholarships for child care for children under 13 years old utilizing federal funding (state does not contribute any additional dollars)
  - Payment rates from the state do not match the cost of high quality
  - Subsidy systems is not meeting the needs of the community
- Deeper dive: [How to Find More Room for Child Care by Repurposing Public Schools](#) article
- Co-location at Sims:
  - Opportunities
    - Maintain educational purpose
    - Increase child care supply
    - Reduced costs for child care operators
  - Challenges
    - Requires some investment for conversion of space
    - Need clear security plan / background checks if there are additional operations
- Impact of Travis County Prop A?
  - Increase number of contracted slots
  - Expanded child care workforce
  - Option for funding expanded hours (i.e. evenings, weekends)
  - Does not include funding for capital investments
- [Todos Juntos](#) (Operator)
  - Todos Juntos Learning Center is a non-profit organization that serves primarily Latino, Spanish-speaking families in Austin and surrounding areas.
  - We use a four-pronged approach to combat intergenerational poverty among Central Texas' parents and children.
    - Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) and workforce readiness
    - Culturally responsive parenting and life skills education
    - High quality early childhood education (ECE)
    - Case management, resource referrals, and access to professional mental health support

- Todos is a no-cost learning center; dependent on fundraising and state funding
- Space is the largest constraint as it is difficult to identify due to high rental costs in Austin area
- Licensing requirements is a contributing factor (amount of square footage required per student), along with costs of inspections
- Staff recruitment/retention is another challenge, especially when requiring higher certification requirements to deliver high quality care
  - Todos is addressing issue by hiring within and providing livable wages and comprehensive health benefits
- Families are competing for seats  
Lack of access to affordable care can cause barriers for parent to re-enter the workforce
  - Deeper dive: [Escalating Child Care Costs Force Women Out of the Work Force](#) article
- Questions
  - How would it be feasible to use Sims as a child care space?
    - There is demand for space but challenge is delivering high quality care, which translates to ability to staffing
    - Child care providers that have over 100 students can more afford the central administrative costs
  - Is Todos Juntos open to African-American families?
    - Yes, absolutely, though historically the organization has primarily served native Spanish speaking families, especially in their ESL program
    - Eager to explore ways to expand their outreach
  - Has AISD explored monetizing real estate to subsidize child care?
    - Yes, but we are unable to currently offer more seats due to lack of dedicated space and staffing constraints
  - What uses would complement child care?
    - Pediatric clinic
    - Organizations that support children special needs
    - Senior daycare
    - Workforce development

**Action Items:**

- District to schedule additional conversations for January / February
- Participate in the survey regarding potential reuses of the Sims School building before December 30th > <https://tejoin.com/scroll/245594289>