

New education building at USU mixes science and design



Posted: Wednesday, September 15, 2010 12:15 am

By Kim Burgess , Staff Writer // Herald Journal

Left: Daytime view of the south-facing portion of the Emma Eccles Jones Early Childhood Education and Research Center

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You could still smell the new carpet at Utah State University's Emma Eccles Jones Early Childhood Education and Research Center on Tuesday as philanthropists, administrators and professors toured the building's colorful halls for the first time.

Several hundred people gathered to see the unveiling of the 650,000-square-foot facility, which mixes cutting-edge science with whimsical design.

Housed inside are a number of research projects and programs, including USU's first infant and toddler care site, part of the Dolores Dore' Eccles Center for Early Care and Education. Funded by \$1 million from the George S. and Dolores Dore' Eccles Foundation, the center also has two other classrooms serving kids up to age 6. Internship opportunities for USU students and parent workshops are planned.

On the other end of the first floor, children who use cochlear implants or digital hearing aids are gaining communication skills at the Sound Beginnings program. Speech therapy and audiology rooms are on site, while a studio apartment provides a place for families to learn how to help their child work on language during everyday activities.

One floor up are research labs in language and literacy; offices for faculty are on the third floor.

"It's better than I could have ever imagined," said former College of Education and Human Services dean Carol Strong, who was instrumental in securing \$25 million in funding from the Emma Eccles Jones Foundation.

Lisa Boyce, interim executive director of the center, commented that the new facility is sparking important collaboration among departments that were previously located in separate buildings.

"The energy that this is creating is phenomenal," she said. "People want to be here."

According to speech language pathology graduate student Jeanette Smoot, the kids are also thrilled with their new classrooms.

Since Sound Beginnings moved into the building a few weeks ago, Smoot said she has heard several children proudly call the center "my school."

"It's so fun to see their reactions," she added.

Architect Joe Jacoby said that he had children in mind as he created his design, basing its angular exterior on the shape of cliffs. A twisting hallway and the vibrant colors throughout were inspired by canyon walls.

Construction on the building took two-and-a-half years and caused USU to relocate its tennis courts.