The new 13,000 square foot Early Learning Center at Tacoma Community College will enable student parents to pursue their education by providing a safe, affordable, and nurturing environment for their children. This project includes classrooms for Infants, Toddlers, Waddlers, and Preschoolers (age 3-5) for a total of 108 children; nearly doubling the capacity of the facility it replaces. In addition to Early Learning programs for children, the new Center will provide a classroom for adults in the Early Childhood Education/Paraeducator programs and observation rooms adjacent to every classroom to provide practicum and field observation opportunities.

The Early Learning Center (ELC) was conceived as a part of a campus wide initiative to address the concept of Environmental Sustainability. The LEED process was utilized as a tool during the design and construction to create a building that meets the requirements for LEED Gold Certification.
LEED Measures Green Building Performance in 5 Categories

Listed below are the 5 categories with a general description and examples of points that were earned.

1) Sustainable Sites

The site of a project is the building's connection to the community and landscape. Site credits address the sustainable methods in which a site is selected, used, and developed. Some credits earned under this category were:

- Alternative Transportation - The building is within 1/4 mile of 10 bus routes providing building occupants accessible access to alternate means of transportation.
- Heat Island Effect - By using a light colored roof and plants that shade the building, the site creates less heat, reducing its contribution to high temperatures in the city.
- Light Pollution Reduction - The building utilizes site and exterior lighting that is efficient and reduced glare. As a result, excess light is not reflected into the sky, and energy is saved.

2) Water Efficiency

Water is a valuable resource and should be treated as one. Credits were awarded under this category for:

- Water Efficient Landscaping - Utilizing drought tolerant plants and mulch to reduce water needs.
- Water Use Reduction - By using dual flush toilets, low flow faucets and drought resistant planting, this building will use 55% less water.

3) Energy and Atmosphere

Energy conservation is an important part of sustainable building. It was achieved by:

- Commissioning of Building Systems - Commissioning is a process that ensures that all of the building mechanical systems are working properly. For example, if an air handler isn't properly balanced, it would affect all the other systems associated with it and ultimately waste energy.
- Optimize Energy Performance - High relief burners and low intake burners naturally ventilate the building by allowing cool air to enter the building near the floor and heated air to exit the building near the ceiling.

4) Materials and Resources

Buildings use the earth's materials and natural resources in their construction. The Early Learning Center reduced, reused, and recycled during construction and will do so in its operations.

- Storage and Collection of Recyclables - The Early Learning Center and TCC campus have organized recycling programs for paper, glass, plastics and food waste organics. The site is the first building on campus to recycle food waste organics.
- Construction Waste Management - 75% of the building's construction waste was either reused or recycled.

5) Indoor Environmental Quality

Research has proven that healthy indoor environments, including good air quality, access to daylight, and views to nature, yield better results in the classroom. Credits in this category address these important issues:

- Low-emitting Materials - Using materials that emit few volatile organic compounds (VOCs) reduces health problems.
- Daylight and Views - 95 percent of the ELC's indoor spaces allow views to the outdoors and natural daylight.

About LEED

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System is a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing sustainable buildings. LEED was created by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) to provide a framework for meeting sustainable goals and assessing building performance. Based on well-founded scientific standards, LEED emphasizes state-of-the-art strategies for sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, material selection and indoor environmental quality. LEED recognizes achievements and promotes expertise in green building through project certification, professional accreditation, and by providing training and practical resources.