

Students want daycare

By LETA PARKS

News Herald Staff Writer

The critical need for on-campus daycare at Western Piedmont Community College sparked a demonstration of sorts Friday.

More than 400 students, faculty and staff members at Western Piedmont showed their support for on-campus daycare by signing petitions.

Some 357 students and 84 faculty and staff members signed their names voicing a desire to see daycare available on the college's campus.

Mothers carried pink and blue balloons reading "Make child care a priority at WPCC" around the campus, representing the number of girls and boys they had.

"A lot of students have had to drop out because of child care problems," said student Penny Mitchell, adding four of her friends in a pre-nursing program have dropped out because of a lack of daycare.

Mitchell, who has one daughter, takes the child to class with her, she said. "She sits and does her school work."

Snow days can be a big problem, too, since WPCC does not always close down when the public schools close, she said.

★ Please turn to page 7A

Students petition for daycare

★ From page one

On snow days, "You'll see people not coming because they can't or you'll see children," she said.

When a community college that addresses the needs of adults does not provide daycare for student mothers, "you've shut the doors to them," said Mitchell.

Another student Sue Bumgarner said she has had a difficult time finding affordable childcare for her son.

Her alternative has been to bring the child to school with her. "He's real good in class, but I don't want him to have to sit in school all summer," she said.

"I think it's a great thing to get started here at Western Piedmont," said Linda Chester, a student-mother also. "It would be good for everybody."

Chester, who is in the automotive program, said she could not bring her son to class with her.

"He'd have tools everywhere," she said.

Another student, Ilona Blevins, pointed out a daycare problem that has made it difficult for her to find daycare anywhere for her four-year-old daughter, who is deaf.

"They don't know what to do with her," she said, adding she has searched for a daycare center where someone knew sign language.

Now, the child goes to daycare, to the North Carolina School for the Deaf, back to daycare and then to a babysitter all in one day, Blevins said.

"It would be much easier on her and much easier on me if I could just bring her here," said Blevins.

Daycare at WPCC is in the planning and development stage, said Grady Pitts, dean of development and community relations. "We've toured several daycare facilities on other campuses."



Penny Mitchell, a nursing student at WPCC

....signs petition with daughter, Rebecca, 5.

The school's board of trustees has also asked the Burke County Board of Commissioners for funds to build a daycare facility in a 5-year budget request, Pitts said.

Problems the school faces in establishing an on-campus daycare facility are the wide range of the children's ages and the large number of hours daycare would be required, said Pitts.

Daycare would need to be available from 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., and would have to be for infants to 12-year-olds, he said.

Pat Gorman, coordinator of the Sex Equity project at the college, said despite a goodly number of petition signers, there would have

probably been more response if the petitions had been circulated in the evening.

The students, faculty and staff signed the petitions during the morning and early afternoon on Friday.

The balloons and petitions were sponsored by the WPCC Student Government Association, the Association of Women Students and the Black Students Association.

"I think what the students are doing is a good, positive response," Pitts said.

The college tried to survey the students during registration to find out what the daycare needs were, but there was not as much response as officials had expected, Pitts said.