

MCC Child Development Lab excels in online learning environment

By **Dawn Zimmer** - 08/20/2020

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The Mesa Community College Evelyn H. Warren Child Development Lab (CDL) sets a new standard in virtual early childhood teaching and learning.

The lab school is an accredited program through the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Providing enriching, developmentally-appropriate activities for young children, toddlers and preschoolers, the CDL simultaneously serves as a training environment for MCC early childhood education interns. When education began to shift online in spring 2020, the CDL team quickly adapted to virtual learning.

With the onset of the pandemic, Rochelle Ramirez-Clark, CDL supervisor and lead teacher, embraced technology as a tool for a meaningful education experience for young children and their families.

“The mindset for the program was not to replace the value of a face-to-face experience, but rather to provide an enriching experience for the children and fill a need for the families and interns,” said Ramirez-Clark. “We wanted to create a welcoming, fun and engaging experience for the children.”

Dawn Wilkinson, MCC faculty serving as the coordinator for the early childhood program, provided the technical guidance and support needed for the success of the

summer virtual programs. While Ramirez-Clark focused on developing learning plans and activities for the young children and interns, Wilkinson focused on training and providing support in the technical arena.



Rochelle Ramirez-Clark, CDL supervisor and lead teacher, adapted learning plans and activities to engage young children remotely.

“Just as we would encourage young children to play with new items, we as adults had to play with the platforms and programs that we would be using,” Wilkinson said. “In a safe environment among colleagues, we gave ourselves time to press buttons to see what would happen and took turns being the presenter. This time truly gave us the confidence to launch this new virtual program with the families.”

The overwhelming success of the virtual spring classes led to the development of eight-week virtual parent-toddler and preschool programs over the summer.

Matt Rayman, a father of twin girls who attended the summer toddler program, said, “They have never done anything like this before and I have been so proud with how engaged they are with the content. The program has shown me that it is time to start learning some things that I didn’t know they were ready for yet, like using utensils and learning some new dance moves.”

The interns experienced a seamless learning experience as well.

“Overall, the internship exceeded my expectations. I learned a lot about early childhood education and had the opportunity to teach sessions,” said early childhood intern Lyn Coulthard. “I was surprised at how engaged the younger students were, and I was curious to observe them and watch how the teacher engaged with them and held their attention.”

“We were ecstatic with the progress our young children made with the virtual program during the spring and summer sessions,” said Faculty & Program Director of the MCC Early Childhood Education Program Annapurna Ganesh. “The word got out, our colleagues from higher education and center directors in the Valley

Students learned letters of the alphabet by recognizing the first letter of each other’s names.

asked us to share how we adapted to the virtual environment.

There were more than 50 participants in our virtual how-to meeting and many others who have reached out. I am incredibly proud of the MCC early childhood education team, the go-getter attitudes of the interns and the adaptations they made to make sure each of the young children was personally recognized, praised and engaged during each virtual class session."

The tremendous success of the summer program paved the way for the MCC Child Development Lab to offer virtual enrichment programs for Fall 2020. [From September to November, three themed, four-week sessions are available for children 18 months to 5 years old.](#) Visit mesacc.edu to learn more about the college's virtual [early childhood enrichment programs](#).

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