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MCC virtually succeeds with early childhood lab

TRIBUNE NEWS STAFF

Mesa Community College has adapted its Evelyn H. Warren Child Development Lab for virtual early childhood teaching and learning.

The lab school, accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children, aims to provide educational developmentally-appropriate activities for toddlers and preschoolers while training MCC's early childhood education interns.

With the onset of the pandemic, lab school supervisor and lead teacher Rochelle Ramirez-Clark said she "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



Rochelle Ramirez-Clark holds up a flash card with the letter O printed on it. (Courtesy of MCC)

and engaging experience for the children."

Dawn Wilkinson, the coordinator for the early childhood program, provided the technical guidance and support need-

ed for the summer virtual programs.

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

dren remotely.

Ramirez-Clark focused on developing learning plans and activities for the children and interns while Wilkinson focused on training and providing tech support.

"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 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

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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," Tayman said.

The interns experienced a seamless learning experience as well, MCC officials said.

"Overall, the internship exceeded my expectations. I learned a lot about early childhood education and had the opportunity to teach sessions," said intern Lyn Coulthard, adding:

"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."

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

"We were ecstatic with the progress our young children made with the virtual

program during the spring and summer sessions," said Early Childhood Education Program Director Annapurna Ganesh. "The word got out, our colleagues from higher education and center directors in the Valley 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."

MCC's Child Development Lab will offer virtual enrichment programs this fall,

From September to November, three themed, four-week sessions are available for children 18 months to 5 years old. ■

Information: mesacc.edu/departments/education-studies/child-development-lab.