

DELAWARE INSTITUTE FOR Excellence in Early Childhood

Delaware State University Early Childhood Laboratory School Family Engagement: Creating a Village Through Outreach Opportunities

Like other early childhood education programs, the Delaware State University (DSU) Early Childhood Lab School, was closed during the initial period of the state quarantine. Dannaé Sewell, Lab School director, and her team responded with an alternative learning experience that included a full slate of engagement opportunities. "Creating this experience for our students and families has truly taken a team effort," said Sewell. "We could not be prouder of our DSU Laboratory educators."

Their outreach involved many options even including technology, such as daily Zoom calls for circle time, singing, dancing, yoga, cooking, and virtual field trips.

Families were involved in a variety of ways. They were sent weekly lesson plans, resources to explore developmentally appropriate activities, highlights from the week, and a preview of the following week's plan.

"It was especially important that we stay connected as a village, the same as when we were attending our center daily." said Sewell. "However, we wanted to equally balance the American Academy of Pediatrics health and safety tips regarding screen time with our new normal. The reality is the children and families are often just happy to see their teachers' faces while in the safety of their homes."

To this end, the Lab School team didn't hesitate to get out from behind their screens and visit their students in several appropriate, socially distant ways.

The entire team drove to every graduating prekindergartener's home. Wishing them congratulations while delivering boxes of sunshine and yard signs. These children and their families, who would have otherwise experienced a preschool graduation, were so elated. The staff even made special barbecue kits including hand mittens, BBQ sauce and brush along with a craft and apron donated by Home Depot for Father's Day and dropped it off in mailboxes. To honor Mom's, they held a virtual tea with prizes as well.

One of the center's most significant accomplishments during quarantine was conducting their science fair virtually. This event was the center's first annual science fair, and everyone was excited to participate. Instead of rescheduling, the staff went ahead with it by engaging families. The Lab School asked families to prepare three to five-minute presentations.

"Our educators also created videos demonstrating just how much science rocks! All in all, our Science week, ending in our Science fair, was a total blast!" said Sewell. The videos included fun and engaging topics like "Magic Milk," "Air Pressure, Anyone?" and "How to Make Jell-O Glow in the Dark?"

"Our educators created interactive experiences to ensure that parents know we are there to support them and their child fully," said Sewell. "Again, we are a village."