

A moving ceremony: Drive-thru procession to officially end preschoolers' year at BC3

“We never got to say goodbye,” children’s center administrator says

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(Butler, PA) A multicolored handmade sign will read “We Wish You Well in Kindergarten!”

Another, “Have Fun this Summer!”

Blue, orange, purple, red and yellow balloons will float above 27 gift buckets topped off with bottles of bubbles, boxes of sidewalk chalk and packets of planting seeds.

Four staff members of the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center on Butler County Community College’s main campus in Butler Township on Wednesday, May 6, will wear facemasks and gloves as they wave hello – and goodbye – to 3- to 5-year-olds they haven’t seen since March 11 and during a makeshift drive-thru ceremony celebrating the official end of the preschoolers’ year.

Parents or guardians and the preschoolers have been invited to attend the ceremony, scheduled from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. in a drop-off circle near the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center, which is among all buildings on BC3’s main campus and at its additional locations that have been closed since mid-March with regard to COVID-19.

“It’s going to be hard,” said Gina Rajchel, interim director of the center. “I think we really have such a bond with them ... we really get close with them. And it’s difficult when they graduate and move on. But especially this year, because we never got the closure. We never got to say goodbye. We never had an ending.”

One staff member of the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center, to be selected from among Rajchel, Eva Lowerre, Tavia Sinicki and Kelly Marra, will maintain social distancing while placing a gift bucket into the trunk or hatch of each vehicle. Occupants will remain in their vehicles, Rajchel said.

A crowd of between 150 and 200 in May 2019 attended the Amy Wise Children’s Creative Learning Center’s year-end ceremony, held in Founders Hall on BC3’s main campus and featuring the preschoolers singing songs such as “We Are the Dinosaurs,” “Icky Sticky Bubbegum” and “Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue.”

Sinicki suggested the idea of a drive-thru celebration last week, Rajchel said.

Eleven of the 27 students who will enter kindergarten this fall will receive a graduation diploma from the preschool May 6, Rajchel said, and the other 16, a certificate.

Instructors since early April have used a remote instruction platform to interact each weekday with students, Rajchel said. Many parents appreciated a video in which she read “Shubert and Sophie Stay Home,” Rajchel added.

“It is a social story about what is going on in the world right now,” Rajchel said, “and why we have to stay home. The parents responded well to that. They said the children loved it.”

The story is about a family that at first enjoyed staying at home, Rajchel said, “and then another week went by and another week went by. The children started getting antsy and the parents started getting upset. The book talks about how to handle your emotions.”

Which, Rajchel said, may resurface in a different way on May 6.

“We will be very happy to see them,” Rajchel said, “and wish them well wherever the world takes them.”