



The front entrance to the library on the Southern and Dobson campus of Mesa Community College on Feb. 22, 2023. (Photo by Jordan Bell).

NEWS

Early College Academy ends with new outlooks

Rey Covarrubias Jr. 09/26/2023

Mesa Community College has decided to end their Early College Academy at the conclusion of the 2023-2024 academic year to better accommodate existing high school to community college transfer programs, according to a student affairs announcement on Aug. 31.

The Early College Academy started in 2019 as a pilot program designed to fill demand from east Mesa high school students that wanted to transition to community college, according to MCC associate dean Kathleen Perales, who was foundational throughout the program's lifespan.

Perales told the Mesa Legend that the ECA found success in its early days during fall 2019, but that was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

Up to this point, the program has served more than 60 students transitioning to MCC, and created two college associate degree graduates, according to the announcement.

A portion of an ECA student's tuition at MCC was paid for by Mesa Public Schools, part of a first of its kind collaboration between the public school system and MCC, something Perales was especially proud of.

Tools implemented in the program allowed Perales and her staff to understand how to retain students who may be struggling with their classes by use of "Dropout Detective," a faculty based online system that reviews a student's progress, and can quickly identify a student who may be struggling, allowing instructors to offer prompt and personalized support.

The program also allowed Perales and her staff to form strategic pathways and curriculum that made it easier for long standing MCC wide programs that already reach public school students, such as [“Achieving a College Education,”](#) and [“Hoop of Learning.”](#)

Additional MCC dual enrollment classes are also already in place that offer opportunities for Mesa high school students to enter the community college system.

“I wouldn’t describe it [ECA] as a long standing program, it was really for us to see if there was a way to create a concurrent enrollment opportunity that took a little of the best of the best,” said Perales in reference to the pilot program designation.

However Perales still believes there will be a demand at the Red Mountain campus for another program that allows for easy college enrollment for specific demographics in the east valley.

“ I think that community would appreciate a program offering that would allow [east Mesa] high school students to have a concurrent enrollment experience,” said Perales.

Perales said the creation of a new early college program once the ECA has ended is reliant on MCC hiring a new Vice President of Student Affairs and Vice President of Academic Affairs, two roles that the college continues to search for candidates.

“Any program that I create involves instructional collaboration, those are two positions that I think need to be filled,” said Perales.

In order to put the students’ best interest first, Perales said she and her staff had to have “tough conversations.”

“We needed to make a decision because we were putting high school students at risk of not fulfilling their high school graduation requirement, for me that was first and foremost a driving factor, being a mom of mom of students who just graduated high school,” said Perales.

Students still part of the ECA will be automatically admitted into the “Achieving a College Education,” and “Hoop of Learning,” programs, according to the announcement, with MCC staff working closely with existing Mesa Public School advisors to find future MCC students.

This story was edited on 9/26/2023 to correct an error made at the time of publication. The two roles being searched for at the time of publication were the Vice President of Student Affairs and Vice President of Academic Affairs.

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