

My name is Desiree Culhane and I am the Center Director at New Horizon Academy-East Apple Valley. I have been with the company for over 16 years. This year has without a doubt been the hardest year I have ever spent in the Early Childhood field.

This year I saw so many teachers struggle- they were terrified, as we all have been and continue to be. The ones that stayed and worked so that we could remain open and take care of doctor, police, and other essential workers, were so brave and tried so hard to keep a sense of normalcy for their children.

They dealt with constantly changing Covid-19 Safety policies on a daily, sometimes hourly basis. My teachers worked tirelessly to continue giving the children the best education possible and to help them feel safe and still connected.

In this field we cannot social distance- it's not developmentally appropriate or even comprehensible. In one day I might have physically held at least 200 different children being the director. I remember going home each night and not letting my own child or husband hug me until I had been able to shower and get every germ off of me to keep them safe.

I have lupus and a few other auto-immune diseases and was considered very at risk, but I couldn't do the "safe and recommended" thing and stay home. I needed to be here to be the leader for my teachers, I had to be brave and put on a smile for them. I had to be the one that kept our school from going under.

I did anything and everything to keep this school afloat. Including taking a pay cut to help the company stay open. A few other schools near us closed down during the height of the pandemic and I had doctor and nurse parents calling desperate for care so that they could do their jobs to keep everyone healthy and safe.

And we showed up.

The school districts closed- it wasn't considered safe enough for the teachers and children to be there... But we took the kids so those parents could work and provide the essential fields with workers.

Again we showed up.

My teachers were so brave in the face of all of this and they deserve to be thanked time and time again. We all stayed and worked even though we would have been safer and better paid if we had stayed home. But what would have happened? Doctors and nurses wouldn't have been able to care for patients. Our police, firemen, and National Guard would not have been there to help protect the city during the unrest. A lot would have fallen apart if our Early Childcare heroes did not show up.

Thank you for your time.