



Hayden Patterson, 3½, laughs as her father, Tony Patterson, shows her how to get through the mud crawl during the Eastern Connecticut State University Child and Family Development Center's annual Fun Mud Day on Monday. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

Sometimes it's OK to get a little muddy

EKATERINE TCHELIDZE
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

WILLIMANTIC — Local 3-year-old Armando Gallegos was willing to do anything — even wash windows — to avoid his pet peeve — mud.

"It's disgusting," he said Monday outside Eastern Connecticut State University's Child and Family Development Center, both a preschool and education tool for young students.

Most of his classmates and their families disagreed, enjoying a nice roll in a thick, wet mixture of dirt and water Monday morning for ECSU's annual Fun Mud Day.

The growing tradition gathered about 50 preschool kids, their families and teachers for a variety of muddy and wet challenge



Armando Gallegos, 3, wasn't too thrilled with the idea of getting muddy, so he washed windows instead with the help of ECSU senior Tara Phillips. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

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courses.

There was everything from mud crawls to ice buckets, sprinklers and slippery slopes, piles of muddy leaves and soapy slides.

In lieu of getting down and dirty, it even featured the chance for kids to clean the facility's windows with buckets of soap and water.

Armando took them up on the offer.

The event was held in the playground area outside of the ECSU preschool.

It's hard to say who had more fun — the kids or adults — but there was lots of laughter, cheer and music.

In fact, some adults were more eager to roll in the mud than their children were.

"The kids in us come out, you know," said Eastern physical education major Haley Kolesnik, a junior.

Eastern students majoring in physical education spent the mud day with children helping them navigate through challenge courses and cheering them on.

"This is my first year doing it and this is super awesome," said Savannah Johnson, a junior and a physical education student. "I never had anything like this when I was a kid."

Event organizer Darren Robert, a kinesiology and



Preschool teacher Leisha Flynn and 4-year-old Quinn Jones laugh as they go down a water slide during the Eastern Connecticut State University Child and Family Development Center's annual Fun Mud Day on Monday. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

physical education professor at Eastern, said the Fun Mud Day is the culmination of a physical education class for the year.

He said Eastern physical education students and teachers show preschool kids all about "risk-taking challenges in the outdoors."

Robert said the Fun Mud Day has been around for five years now.

"The children never get a chance to get muddy, dirty and wet anymore, so, today, everything's allowed," Robert said.

He was encouraging kids to try all the challenge courses

and not be afraid of the mud.

"Don't worry, the mud tastes just like strawberry Jell-O," he joked to preschoolers ready to tackle the challenges.

He said a group of E.O. Smith High School students were also at the event.

Preschool student Karagan Sherman, 4, said she loved the Fun Mud Day, especially riding a bicycle with her friends.

"I think it's so fun because it promotes exercise and being physically healthy and it also takes the kids out of their comfort zone," Karagan's preschool teacher, Leisha Flynn, said. "We are so proud of them that they are doing things that they would never have imagined they could do."

Flynn said Eastern physical education students work with preschool kids a lot in the classroom and Fun Mud Day is their own "graduation."

Little Avaleigh Diaz, 4, who was playing in the mud with her mother, Sarah Diaz, said she liked most of the challenge courses, although she preferred playing in the water rather than the mud.

After the muddy morning, the kids continued on with their day and, hopefully, their parents had plenty of laundry detergent at home.

Follow Ekaterine Tchelidze on Twitter - @ktchelidzetc.