

Student Parent Profile: Monserrat Soriano



Monserrat Soriano's daughter, Melody, says goodbye to her through the window at Clark College's Child & Family Studies. *Photo courtesy of Monserrat Soriano.*

Monserrat Soriano is a full-time Clark College student on track to complete the Administrative Assistant and Management program in Spring 2021. She's also a single mom to daughter, Melody, 7, in first grade at Martin Luther King Elementary; and son, Emmett, 4, who attends the college's Child and Family Studies child care program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, both kids have attended CFS so that Soriano can study at home. Soriano and her children live with her mother, uncle and brother, but none can help with childcare.

This story is part of a series of interviews with Clark College student parents about how they are balancing school, life, and work, during quarantine.

Q: How has CFS helped you focus on your schoolwork?

MS: After my daughter completes two hours of online school via Zoom each day, I take both kids to the childcare center at Clark. Then I come home and do my schoolwork. I'm grateful that the state has paid for childcare during COVID. Fall quarter was the first quarter I've had childcare, because my daughter's previous childcare center shut down during COVID.

Q: How are your children coping with doing remote school at home?

MS: When we pick up my daughter's school work packets at King Elementary, she doesn't understand why she can't be in school with her teacher and other kids. She asked me why she is in daycare instead of school.

Q: What are some challenges you've faced during COVID?

MS: I'm a first-generation college student. Sometimes it feels like I'm breaking through walls. When I'm working at home, my family sees me struggling. My mom wants to help with the kids, but she's working two jobs. We all need compassion right now. And grace! When I'm home with my kids, I want to distract myself. I've been sober for almost a year. My testimony is of struggle. Clark needs students like me. I am resilient.

Before COVID, my degree was part of a teach-out program [a process in which a program that is being discontinued teaches the students who are part-way through the degree program]. Then because of COVID, our labs were removed. It adds so much anxiety and pressure. It's been hard to stay motivated. With COVID, I can't plan. I don't know what my next step is. Sometimes I feel that I can't make it. I come into the childcare center crying. I leave crying. That's how I'm coping. I'm going week by week with the kids.

Q: What's one particularly challenging story of taking remote classes while juggling parenting?

MS: Last quarter I thought I was going to give up. When I was taking my final via Zoom, my three-year old burst in and shouted, "I have to poop, Mom!" My instructor heard him and gave me more time to complete my final. This is not the way it's supposed to happen, but that's all we got. We have to keep going. We have to keep our sanity.

Q: How are you coping?

MS: I attend Zoom counseling workshops with other parents, so I don't feel like I'm not alone. I learned to give myself some slack. Be gentle with myself as a parent. It's OK to cry in front of my children sometimes. This is not normal times. I'm trying to relax when I can, but I don't even know what that looks like.