



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

Students try hand at signing

Children at Chesterbrook Academy get chance to understand, use sign language

By [Ana Valle-Greene](#)
Star-News Correspondent

Published: Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at 3:30 a.m.

A herd of deer showed off their antlers recently in a preschool class at Chesterbrook Academy, along with a couple of owls highlighting their big eyes and skunks stinking up the place.

But instead of animals, it was a group of 4- and 5-year-olds practicing the signs they were seeing reenacted in a video designed to teach sign language to young children.

"Ooooh, that's an easy one," said Connor Jameson as his hands cut through a "trail" and he and his classmates watched, enthralled, a colorful and musical video called *Signing Time*.

For more than a year children, from babies to preschoolers, have been learning sign language at Chesterbrook, a day care center and preschool in Wilmington, through a series of videos starring children and host Rachel Coleman, a former singer.

The theme for a recent class was the great outdoors. The back yard, as Coleman showed the children, is signed by throwing a thumb over the shoulder and waving a hand in a circle in front of the chest. The sign for explore is "like you're looking through a telescope," the video continued.

The students learn either sign language or Spanish every day, said teacher Tara Solano. And just like any foreign language, the younger they are the quicker it comes to them.

"They probably know more than I do," Solano said. "They love it. I see them doing it to each other."

Five-year-old Macon Sumner was happy to learn the sign for his favorite animal - the fox, shown as the letter "F" over the nose and twisted out.

Animals are clearly popular as Emily LaBau, 4, let her fingers gnaw like teeth to conjure up the beaver. "We like the songs," she said.

"The program runs itself," Solano said. Besides the videos, the school has books and flash cards the children enjoy. In fact, when Coleman visited the class recently, "it was like she was a movie star," Solano said.

While it's become popular recently to teach sign language to babies so they can communicate before they speak, it's rarer with young children. Chesterbrook is one of the few preschools in the area that does, starting with children as young as 10 months.

The school came to it accidentally, said Director Sarah Flaherty. The parents of a

TIME WARNER CABLE
Business Class
Internet from 7Mbps x 768Kbps **\$49.95** per month & either Phone or Cable TV for **\$29.95** per month
For six months with a 3-year agreement. Includes FREE installation and six months FREE voicemail.
[Learn More](#)
Act by 7/31/10

child with dyspraxia - a disorder that makes it difficult to complete fine motor tasks - gave the center some videos because they wanted to try sign language with the 2-year-old boy.

"It worked so well, we decided to purchase the videos."

Besides being a "very attainable foreign language," Flaherty sees signing as a way to cut the frustration very young children feel when they can't communicate.

"I love to see them (signing)," Flaherty said. "In the world today where everything is so noisy, it's nice to have something quiet."

Copyright © 2010 StarNewsOnline.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.