

By the time you read this, school will have opened and been in session for four days. The shine from the freshly waxed floors will have already dulled and it will feel like we never left. Summer break will be but a distant memory as the normal routine many have known for years, will occupy center stage of our existence.

People often ask, "what's new for this year?" Each year brings new faces, new programs, and new materials. I feel blessed to work in a profession where each year you feel like there is a fresh start, a chance to begin again. This week, I'd like to share a few of the new things about the year.

We're beginning the year with the Growing and Learning Center renting the basement of Edinboro Elementary. This preschool program came to us in a pinch last spring when the building they were occupying developed a structural issue after a bad wind storm. Our maintenance and cleaning staff hurriedly readied the basement classrooms of Edinboro Elementary which we had abandoned in 2011 for financial reasons. The arrangement was found to be mutually beneficial so an agreement was struck to have the Growing and Learning program continue to operate in Edinboro Elementary. It makes life simpler for many parents and for us. (Note: Some parking lot improvements will be made to assist with this new arrangement; however, the wet spring has delayed the availability of the contractor until next spring.)

Speaking of pre-schools and day care, we are also making a policy change this year that should help parents. Previously, when late starts were used, programs operating in our buildings were also asked to delay their operations for two hours. Now, the YMCA program at McKean and the Growing and Learning Program will operate their normal hours so that parents may still drop off their children at the normal time. Snow removal may be an issue but the organizations have graciously agreed to work with us on that issue.

At the other end of the age spectrum, we are expanding our activity bus routes for middle and high school students so that it is easier for them to participate in after-school activities. One bus heads north to McKean and the other south to Edinboro. They are not intended to get students to their homes, but get them closer so parents can pick them up a little closer to home. The busses leave the school at 5:15. Routes are posted on our website.

Another new item this year is the roll-out of a 1:1 iPad project at the high school. The middle school has been doing this for two years and are entering their third year. The program will look different at the high school because of the age of the students and the needs of the high school level. The high school technology vanguard (teachers with techno-acumen) have been working all summer to plan training for teachers and to create a method for distributing the tablets on the first day.

Part of technology changes this year include the adoption of a Learning Management System known as Schoology. This product will be a portal where teachers will post assignments and students will complete them online. The system will provide for communication by students and teachers. The system totally integrates with our school information system, PowerSchool. Eventually, parents will be able to look at Schoology to see what work their children should be doing. (Yes, technology is making it more and more difficult for kids to dupe their techno-saavy parents.)

We continue this year to take action to promote literacy programs in the district. The long project of creating literacy curriculum in grades K-6 will wrap up this year as all the materials for writing, word study and reading are pulled together. We've also made a commitment to helping students in grades 7-12 become better readers as well. A new position this year, a reading specialist, will make it possible for struggling readers in grades 7-9 to get extra help and instruction. This combined with the continuation of the writing project we began last year should continue to improve literacy for our older students.

Besides some new faces in the teaching ranks, we have some new leaders on the non-instructional side. Bill Fendya replaces Jeff Fox as business manager. Bill is a GM grad, lives in the community and has 10 years of business manager experience with the Penncrest School District as well as experience in business. Bill began on July 6 and has been working hard to get familiar with the GM accounts and procedures.

Nancy Ekstrom will serve as our transportation coordinator. Nancy comes to us with 19 years of experience in the school bus business, starting as a part-time driver. Nancy joined us July 6 and stepped into quite a challenge with the policies and routes developed for this coming year.

Finally, on August 3, Nicole Heller took over the position of food service coordinator. Nicole joins us following her recent retirement from the U.S. Army where she gained food service experience feeding soldiers. Nicole shares our district's goal of providing food for our students that is both nutritious and appealing.

Those are just some of the new things happening in the district. After writing all this, I realize why the summer was so busy!