

# Detroit Free Press

## **Students, principals feel firstdayofschool jitters as metro Detroit returns to the classroom**

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Detroit Free Press  
September 6, 2011 ET

The night before the first day of school always has Bella Malatesta feeling nervous.

But last night -- the night before her first day as a middle schooler at West Middle School in Rochester Hills -- Bella was particularly keyed up.

She's been looking forward to today since her last day as a fifth grader.

"I was nervous and excited. I woke up three times at random hours," said Bella, 11, a newly minted sixth grader.

Even Principal Michael Dillon admitted to a bit of nervousness as he listened to Bella talk.

"It's the first day of school for me too," Dillon said.

Fortunately, less than an hour into the school day, things were running surprisingly smoothly -- both for the adults and kids.

Dillon remarked how quiet the main office was, with just a handful of parents registering their kids or asking questions.

And students like Hussein Murray, 11, were finding that the things they initially worried about -- like mastering their locker combination -- were a breeze.

"I memorized my combination," the sixth grader said proudly. "That made my life easy today."

Now comes the fun part: decorating his locker. Hussein already envisions displaying a basketball trophy, a bronze medal and an autographed baseball card from Miguel Cabrera.

Bella had a head start, decorating her locker last week with black and white striped wallpaper, a mirror and pictures of her family.

She and Hussein said they were excited about starting their middle school years.

"It's new beginnings," Hussein said.

On an unseasonably cool morning today, students stuffed light jackets and fresh school supplies into lockers, met their teachers and settled into new class-rooms at Wick Elementary School today. Nearly all of the more than 400 of the students were clad in navy or light blue, yellow and tan.

Uniforms are a requirement for the first time at the Romulus school.

The school made uniforms optional last fall, and the year began with more than half of the students participating, said Principal ShaVonna Johnson.

But the uniforms began disappearing after Christmas, she said.

"We heard that parents didn't feel comfortable sending their children in uniforms when others didn't. That peer pressure was there, even for (parents)," Johnson said.

But in surveys with parents and staff, about 80% said they supported a dress code, she added.

The board agreed in the spring to make uniforms mandatory, said Johnson, who wore a navy blue suit.

Though it wasn't mandatory, several staff members also sported the colors.

Not everyone was won over though, including second grader Tyriq Lewis, 7, who would have picked out his Transformers Tshirt to wear for the first day of school.

But Aurelia Kent was a fan. The 6yearold has shorts, pants and jumpers and different shirts, all in the appropriate colors. For her first day of first grade, she chose a light blue polo shirt with three big, sparkly buttons.

It's an important day, Aurelia explained, as she waited with her father for the morning lineup in the cafeteria: "I wanted it to be pretty."