

## Milpitas educators enthusiastic about start of school year despite big changes

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Experiences associated with the beginning of a new school year went on as usual before bells rang on campuses throughout the 9,700-student Milpitas Unified School District on Monday morning.

Around 7:30 a.m. city streets began to fill with traffic as residents headed to one of 13 nearby public schools to drop off students for the first day. Crossing guards directed traffic as cars inched ever closer, pulling into school loading zones and parking lots. A parent gave her son one last kiss on the

top of his head for the morning after walking alongside him to the front of Alexander Rose Elementary School, before he dashed onto the campus without her. Other guardians filed into the school's front office seeking answers to their questions, a popular inquiry being where their child will be placed.

"He's in our overflow class right now," an administrative assistant responded to one parent. Just minutes later, she shared the same response with another set of parents.

A short time after the school bell pealed, parents and students began to take note that not everything will proceed like previous years.

As children took their place in line for Rose third-grade teacher Ramon Vijil's class, he said many students looked back observing how long it was getting. And as they shuffled into classroom 402 and took a seat at their desks, Vijil said the districtwide increase in classroom size at the third-grade level, which was implemented beginning this year, was just as obvious.

According to Vijil, last year he taught 20 children but it is now at 30. He voiced his concern with the increase.

When Vijil was setting up his classroom for this year, he said it was difficult to fit all the desks and also space them out in order to "give (students) enough room."

"That right there is the main change," he said of the new school year.

He believes the impact will continue to be evident as the school year progresses, he said. Not only will there be an increase in the basic supplies, like paper, necessary to implement lesson plans. But more importantly, Vijil said, he expects it will be challenging to accommodate the need of every student in his class.

After Vijil's students cozied up at their desks, they were led in the flag salute and **PeaceBuilders** pledge while watching the Monday morning announcements on their room television.

When the routines were completed, Principal Mindy Bolar came on the telecast to announce her enthusiasm for the upcoming year.

"Happy first day," she said. "At long last it's here and the teachers and I have planned a wonderful year for all of us. ... The first day of school is one of my favorite days because the great thing about it is no matter how school has gone for you in the past ... every first day of school is a fresh start."

### **Changes this year**

Large class sizes are just one solution among many the district approved earlier this year as a cost-cutting response to the state's grip on educational funding.

-Milpitas is also continuing to sheer away from supporting athletic programs. The effects of this were seen on Vijil's class as they headed out to Rose's blacktop Monday, after he announced they will have physical education twice instead of three times a week this year.

-In addition, the district is now charging \$2 a day per student for busing kindergarten to third-graders, with the exception of Special Education students and Title I children, which includes those who are enrolled in the Federal Free or Reduced Lunch Program.

-The elementary school music program is now an outside, fee-based program that will cost \$35 per month.