

School

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Elementary School first grade teacher Don Mueller. "You do your lesson plans, but know that kids might not be at the level you are expecting."

Summertime is full of outdoor activities. When the year transitions from outdoor play to structured learning, kids can have a hard time adjusting.

To compensate for the leftover summer energy, teachers accommodate their schedules to help their students both learn and play. This is achieved by incorporating more movement, shorter activities and lots of breaks.

"A lot of them are nervous the first day or two," Mueller said. "But if they feel like it's a positive environment and they have friends that care about them, they are excited to come back."

That friendship is a big part of any child attending school. Yankton teachers use that relationship toward class-time learning.

All of Yankton's elementary schools have a "buddy system" that allows different students from different grades to pair up and help each other. Partnering up

with a peer is a practical shortcut to helping a child feel more at home.

"Many times, just seeing one familiar face and a hug is all a young student needs," Ryken said.

One of the ways teachers increase that comfort level is getting to know their students. Yankton schools host open houses before school starts in order to get students familiar with their teachers.

"The first day, they won't remember what they learned but they will remember how you made them feel," said Beadle Elementary school first grade teacher Linda Stevens. "That relationship is crucial."

Safety is also a big factor of incorporating that comfort level. Students learn better in a safe environment. Making them feel like they are at home can cut down on the anxiety they can feel after leaving the summer behind.

"We try to make sure to have adults outside during drop-off and pick-up times," said Beadle Elementary principal Carey Mitzel. "That way, they get to know our faces and feel safe with us, and we can keep track of them."

Teachers spend weeks planning and preparing for the new pack of students, and the anticipation covers the schools.

"I personally don't sleep

the night before," said Stewart Elementary School principal Jerome Klimisch. "In 27 years, I do not sleep the night before the first day of school."

Students may not be getting much sleep either. Teachers agree that the "sleep factor" is a huge contributor to a student's willingness to learn. After a summer of longer days and shorter "to do" lists, most kids struggle to set their alarms for the school year.

"In the summertime, kids get up late, they eat late; everything is off," said Stewart Elementary School kindergarten teacher Kris Binde.

Most of these problems can be fixed by parents preparing their kids even before the school year begins. Yankton teachers use a variety of techniques to help students feel comfortable and ready for the new routine.

Another way teachers help students with the transition is by introducing the new schedule right away and rehearsing it to make students comfortable.

"Once they have an understanding of what is coming next, it is easier for them to acclimate to the school setting," Stevens said. "My job is to get them to know what happens next."

Elementary teachers make a point to practice the little things that make a big impact on behavior and learning effectiveness. Kids aren't use

to that kind of structure on a summer time schedule. The structure that they crave comes with added attention to detail.

"My first day I came here, I said, 'OK everyone line up, I walk down the hall, turn around and they were scattered everywhere,'" said Beadle Elementary school kindergarten teacher Tiffany Mueller. "Just going over all those little things is really important."

Administrators set expectations for their classrooms early on. Students are shown the daily tasks at hand for their learning. Educators want to encourage less of a dependence on the parents and more independence when it comes to the child.

"The first day, we start out having the kids in their home-rooms and cover some of our expectations as a school," said Yankton Middle School principal Todd Dvoracek.

"Then they go through each of their classes and the teachers discuss their expectations."

"The second day back, we have an assembly," said Lincoln Elementary school principal Paul Struck. "We talk about 'Lincoln Leaders' (the upper classman) and how their actions and words should be helpful in and outside the classroom."

Another big part of making students comfortable with the school schedule

is motivation. Teachers use praise and rewards to help children practice good behavior.

Whether it's the "Stewart Stars" program at Stewart Elementary or the iPad learning apps at Beadle Elementary, that kind of reassurance shows kids to associate learning with fun.

"One of the great things about kindergarten is that they could just be folding a piece of paper and be excited about it," Mueller said. "That makes my job really fun."

"Attitudes towards school are learned here so we need to do our job and make sure that children love to learn," Stevens said. "It is a huge responsibility, the impression you make on the kids."

While the transition from summertime to school time might put a strain on start-of-the-year learning, Yankton teachers are prepared to make each new year successful and get students back on track.

"It just takes time and patience – we have a lot of that in a school year," Ryken said.

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Driver Accused Of Hitting 2 Construction Workers

PAXTON, Neb. (AP) — An 18-year-old driver from Colorado has been accused of hitting two construction workers on Interstate 80 in western Nebraska.

The Nebraska State Patrol says Joe Marcos O'Connor Zubaite, of Hesperus, Colorado, was taken to Lincoln County Jail following the Wednesday afternoon crash near Paxton. He faces charges of reckless driving and leaving the scene of an accident. Court records do not list an attorney.



Authorities say after they received a report of a hit and run involving two construction workers, a trooper stopped a vehicle matching the description reported at the crash. The vehicle had damage to its front.

The two construction workers were taken to a hospital in North Platte with serious but non-life-threatening injuries. Their names have not been released.

The crash is under investigation.

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