

# First-day jitters go bye-bye

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By Bethany A. Monk ([bmonk@ledger-dispatch.com](mailto:bmonk@ledger-dispatch.com))

They got a special breakfast - the new "Boo-Hoo, He-Haw" breakfast - a handful of forget-me-not seeds scattered on tissue paper before they peered longingly through the classroom window for a while.

The first day of kindergarten can be just as challenging for parents, according to veteran kindergarten teacher Sue Jackson, who teaches at Mokelumne Hill Elementary in Calaveras County, where school started last week. Schools in Amador County begin next Wednesday, Aug. 13.

Jackson, who has been teaching for 32 years, and the school's Parent Teacher Organization, put together the "Boo-Hoo, He-Haw" breakfast this year to help assuage parents' concerns over their little ones and their big day. It went well, she said, adding that it helped parents give each other support.

The big day can also be challenging for the newly minted kindergartner; he or she may be away from home for the first time, or away for longer periods of time than in preschool or day care. Local childhood experts chimed in on ways parents and caregivers can help their children transition into kindergarten. Some also provided tips on how to help the first day go over more smoothly.

Tears on the first day are completely normal, according to Denise Moreno, assistant director of Monarch Montessori Pre-School in Plymouth. "Everybody will get past it," she said of the first day nervousness. One thing parents can do to encourage their new kindergartners is to "tell them it's like a job.

"Mommies and daddies go to work," Moreno said. "Reassure them that you're coming back at the end of the day - that's the big thing."

"Have them on a schedule and teach them to wait and stay where they're told to stay," Jackson added.

Other first day tips, according to the National Head Start Foundation, include:

- Waking up in plenty of time to get ready for school so that neither parents nor children feel rushed.
- Eating breakfast at home or ensuring the child has money and time for breakfast at school.
- Reviewing drop-off and pick-up procedures with the child.
- Arrive before school starts, but not so early that there is no supervision available.
- Leave your child promptly, with a positive attitude, after you have completed your planned separation routine.
- Make sure your child knows his full name, address, phone number, and the name and number of an emergency contact. If he does not know this, write it down and put it with his personal belongings. Review the drop-off and pick-up procedures with your child.

"We encourage our parents to sit down with their kids 10 minutes a day and let the kids color, have them learn their address and phone number, and practice writing their names," said Terry Scott, lead center teacher for the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency Head Start Preschool in Jackson. In the weeks leading up to the first day of kindergarten, "Make sure conversation (about school) is there on a daily basis," she added.

On the first day of school, Scott said she and the other teachers take pictures of their preschool students with their parents "so they can have the picture with them" throughout the day.

Sometimes, though, separation anxiety for both preschoolers and kindergartners can be pretty intense in the beginning of the school year, Moreno said. To help with the anxiety, Moreno encourages parents to drive by their child's new school, and possibly walk around campus and meet the new teacher.

"They can maybe connect up with other children (in class) so they can get familiar with them. They might also help shop for school supplies," Moreno said.



Top right, Kay Westphal, voted best elementary school teacher by Amador County in 2008, taught kindergarten at Lone Elementary School for more than 30 years before retiring this summer. Educators throughout the county have shared ideas and tips with the Ledger Dispatch to help parents and caregivers and their new kindergartners transition into the first days of school more easily.

Photo by: [Bethany A. Monk](#)

"A lot of teachers are in their classrooms getting the rooms set up the week before school," said Cheri Garamendi, First 5 Amador school readiness coordinator, who echoed Moreno's idea to visit the campus before school starts.

Scott said that if new kindergartners are having a hard time separating from their parents on the first day, it could be a good idea for the parent to "stay in class and do some activities."

Moreno cautioned that that may not always be the best idea. It depends on each individual situation, she said. "We want parents to feel comfortable, but sometimes lingering makes it harder."

"Some of them will walk right into that class and not look back," said Ellen MacDonald, director of the Pioneer Montessori Pre-School and Kindergarten, noting how each child handles the first day differently. "It's nice if parents write little notes, like 'Mommy loves you' with a happy face, and put them in their lunch box," she said, adding that the teacher can read the note to the child.

Parents should talk to their kids and role play any problems they may have, MacDonald said. "You want it to be a successful thing."

Some good first day books parents can read to their children include, "David Goes to School," "The Kissing Hand," and "The First Day of Kindergarten," MacDonald said.

Amador First 5 just finished up its three-week Bridge program, Garamendi added, noting that the summer program is designed to help preschool-age children transition into kindergarten. Bridge, a free program, is held each summer. For more information or for an application for next year's program, call 257-1092.

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