

Lake Oswego Review

New Beginnings



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Written by [Jillian Daley](#)

For kindergartners, sixth-graders and ninth-graders, the first day of school carries a little extra weight



REVIEW PHOTO: VERN UYETAKE - Ninth-grader Haily Oldham gives fellow freshman Lauren Joyce a big hug during the first day of school Tuesday at Lake Oswego High School.

The first day of the school year is a fresh beginning for all students and staff, but for some kids, the day also serves as a milestone.

In sixth grade and ninth grade, the day can carry more weight, because students are entering an entirely different school with new sets of rules and expectations. For the smallest students, beginning kindergarten can be a truly momentous occasion, as some may never have been in a school — or at least not for a whole day.

Lake Oswego High School Assistant Principal Ryan Rosenau says the key is to make students feel comfortable “by demonstrating that they have a place here.”

To make sure all kids feel that sense of place at local schools, sixth-graders and ninth-graders enjoyed a first day all their own on Tuesday, before the upper grades arrived Wednesday.

When Lakeridge Junior High sixth-grader Ellery Smith walked into her school for the first time, “it was really big and really scary.” She says she was incredibly nervous. Then she spent time at an assembly featuring a “Simon Says” ice breaker, and staff and older students offered guidance about how the school functions.

Ellery’s whole outlook shifted.

“It’s fun, and it’ll be a good place to be for the next three years,” she says.

At all schools, parent organizations host events in the summer and early in the school year so that teens and children can socialize and get to know their school. Sara Maletis says Westridge Elementary families participated in an ice cream social last week where students got to meet their teachers. She and husband Matt Maletis walked their daughter, kindergartner Monroe Maletis, to school for an assessment Tuesday.



REVIEW PHOTO: VERN UYETAKE - Matigan Williams (left) and Reese Dennett share something about each other during an ice breaker for ninth-graders Tuesday at Lakeridge High School.



REVIEW PHOTO: JILLIAN DALEY - Ellery Smith, left, and Sam Lamont celebrate the start of the school year.



REVIEW PHOTO: VERN UYETAKE - Sara and Matt Maletis sit outside of Westridge Elementary after daughter Monroe took her kindergarten assessment Tuesday afternoon.

REVIEW PHOTO: VERN UYETAKE - Ninth-grader Christian Hopchas give a thumbs-up on his first day at Lakeridge High School.

Monroe says she already feels “good” about her school because of her teacher

“and what we’re learning and how much we have in common.”

Kindergartners kick off their first day Sept. 2, although waves of 5- and 6-year-olds have already been on campuses throughout town this week for assessment tests and to get to know their building and its routines.

Every school is different in how it welcomes the new students. The staff at many local schools have developed a system based on Link Crew, which incorporates student leadership, ice breakers and positive inclusivity to introduce kids to their new academic homes. English teacher Kate Thomason is not only the co-coordinator of the Link Crew program at Lakeridge High School, but she also trains teachers at other schools on this national program.

“The stronger we make our freshmen, the stronger our whole school is,” Thomason says.

The program seems to be working for ninth-graders Jay Heymann and Barbara Roehm.

“I thought (Lakeridge) was warm and welcoming, to use two words to describe it,” Jay says.

Barbara says she observed an “enthusiastic energy” among teachers and staff members.

“You just got this sense they had a passion for what they are doing, and you got excited to be a part of something people were committed to doing,” she says.

At Lake Oswego High School, freshmen Connor Willihnganz and Blake Morton had just finished an assembly at their school and were ready for lunch. Connor says the older students offered reassurances that all would be well and that the teachers are friendly.

“I feel like it will be a bit easier, and I’m not as scared,” he says.

He also was glad for the chance to get another look at the layout of his school, and he’s not the only one. Blake has developed a strategy and has been studying her school since registration, when she memorized which wings of the school led to where.

“It’s something, in my family, we’ve always found important, just having a plan,” she says.

Over at Lakeridge Junior High, students begin the year with an assembly, where they’re introduced to what it means to be a Lightning Bolt. The school motto is “Respectful, Safe and Thoughtful.” Older student leaders were there to help the sixth-graders transition from elementary to middle school.

“Everything we do will be geared toward building community between students and staff,” says Kelsey Bowers, who teaches leadership.

Sixth-grader Owen Lamont is excited about the whole experience — even having a locker, because it means he has more than one class like he did in elementary school.

“It’s a new school,” Owen says, “and time to meet lots of new people.”



REVIEW PHOTO: VERN UYETAKE - Ethan Baumgartner (from left), Zach Schilling and Samuel Treasarden check out their schedules during the first day of school for ninth-graders Tuesday at Lake Oswego High.



REVIEW PHOTO: JILLIAN DALEY - Lakeridge Junior High School students enjoy a laugh during an assembly to welcome sixth-graders.



REVIEW PHOTO: JILLIAN DALEY - Sixth-grader Haven Schmitt listens to teachers and staff members at Lakeridge Junior High introduce themselves during the first day of school.