

Eager students christen three new Manatee schools

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EAST MANATEE — Three new schools — Gullett Elementary in Lakewood Ranch, Williams Elementary in Parrish and Buffalo Creek Middle in Palmetto — welcomed students for the first time Monday.

At Gullett, the inaugural enrollment of 400 students quickly settled into a routine, said principal Kathy Hayes.

It helped, Hayes said, that staffers greeted students before they entered the building and took them where they needed to go.

The first day at Williams Elementary also went smoothly, principal Nancy

Beal said.

"Obviously we had a lot of cars backed up, but that's because all the parents take their kids the first day," Beal said.

Beal's best first day of school story?

"I told a little girl if she wanted to eat breakfast, she could go to the cafeteria," Beal said. "She replied, 'What's a cafeteria?'"

Kindergartner Emylee Hunter, 5, walked to the front door of Williams Elementary.

"At 6 a.m. she was dressed," Lynn Hunter said of her daughter. "She's never done that before."

Hunter said she would miss watching her daughter on her work computer at John Cannon Homes, as Emylee's day

care, Kids R Kids, in Lakewood Ranch, has Web cams.

At the new, two-story Buffalo Creek Middle School, roughly 740 students learned their way around the school, which has academics on one side of the building and the cafeteria, music wing and gymnasium on the other.

"We are the first middle or high school to open north of the Manatee River," said multimedia teacher Richard Platt, who energized his first-period class with plans for making a video about the new school.

As if there wasn't enough excitement.

A 2-year-old in its mother's arms pulled a fire alarm at the school, causing the campus to be evacuated for 10 minutes at

9:10 a.m.

"It was bright red," principal Scott Cooper said of the alarm that attracted the child as its mother registered a sibling.

"Hey, it's a great first-day story," Cooper said.

The North River Fire Department responded to the false alarm.

Students and staff seemed happy to be back at Nolan Middle, which principal Nancy High reported has an enrollment of 762 students.

"I'm seeing lots of smiles," High said. "That's why I like working with children."

Bradenton River Elementary, one of East Manatee's older schools, had its traditional "Boo-Hoo" breakfast for parents, and kindergarten

students.

Zack Palmer drank milk through a straw, his eyes darting around the Braden River Elementary cafetorium.

Across from Zack sat mom Amy Palmer, who was a bit emotional but put on a brave face, saying, "I'm happy for him. He's very excited about it."

The 5-year-old was so ready to get to his classroom, where he will learn new things and make new friends, that some of his breakfast of French toast sticks and a banana sat uneaten on his plate.

After Palmer took Zack to his classroom, she returned to the cafetorium, where principal Randy Mungillo and PTO President Lisa Hintze

addressed parents.

Hintze, who has three children at Braden River Elementary and one at Braden River Middle, was more than ready for her children to return to school.

"I am ecstatic," she said, adding that her kids are happy to be back in school and complimenting BRE's teachers and staff.

The school's staff gauges the success of the first day of school by how many criers there are, and Mungillo was knocking on wood that he hadn't heard of any children crying.

"It's the best to see the kids come back, and they love it," Mungillo said of the first day of school.

The Palmetto Town Center in this area is under construction.

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