

Back to class at Acton schools

By Frances Niblock

“Let’s learn” Acton educators said as school begins.

Acton students are back in their classroom routines as another school term began on Tuesday with high excitement and a few tears from parents

and students.

Character education – building good citizens – and helping students reach their potential are two key goals at McKenzie-Smith Bennett School this year, as Principal Sharon French works with staff and parents to help students exceed and excel.

“The Board (of Education) talks about being committed to every student and that’s a great philosophy. One of the things we talked about at Wednesday’s PD Day was ‘know your learner’ – really talking to the teachers about how they can do assessments to un-

derstand where their kids are academically, and focus on areas to help them grow and learn and areas of strengths,” French said last Thursday.

She said the focus would also be on boys as learners because statistics show that girls traditionally outperform boys. Early contact with parents is also a focus to make them part of the learning team.

“We will have a monthly trait – September is respect – building respectful attitudes and behaviour, and we have team of teachers who will go to the national Character Education Conference in November so we can help our kids be good citizens. Good global citizens who are connected to the world and can see beyond themselves,” French said, adding they will also go for a Gold designation in the EcoSchool environmental program.

Enrolment held steady at MSB this school year with between 670 and 700 students, and there is a staff of approximately 40 teachers and 10 educational assistants. There is a new vice-principle this year – Lisa Serebrin of Rockwood, a former Oakville French Immersion teacher and a Peel Board consultant, joins Erin Bedard as co-VP. Former co-VP Dan Albretch has returned to Stewarttown School.

French, happy with the staff consistency this year, welcomed Mike Rajczak, who will teach the eight-and-a-half-program, Kathleen Sharland and Brad DeGier will fill in for two teachers on maternity leave.

At Robert Little School, Principal Bob Tadman said they are “pretty excited” to kick off the new school year and are working on “vertical alignment” where staff, up through the grades, work to build skills.

“We’ve committed a lot of our staff professional development time talking about what each grade team is looking at, and then working with the grades above and below them and the whole school,” Tadman said on Friday.

Asked if he thinks parents are aware of all of the work done to ensure their children are ready and able learners, Tadman said he does not know, and that realization gave him the idea that he’d like to “turn the school inside out.”

“As a parent, you take them to school and you think when they go through the door that it’s going to be the same for them as it was for you. You don’t really have any idea what’s going on beyond those doors, really. You think it’s the same reading, writing and arithmetic, but you’re seeing it through your own lens, and it’s been a challenge to turn the school inside out and make it transpar-

ent so parents are really clear on what’s happening,” Tadman said.

He said the Ministry is introducing a new document province-wide called Growing Success that gathers best practices from schools across Ontario and set goals of transparency so every student and parents knows what is being taught, why students are learning it and what goals they can set for themselves to move ahead. Part of that is a new reporting system that begins with a progress report in November.

The enrolment of approximately 346 students at Robert Little is down slightly from last year. There are several new teachers including Roland McDougall, who will teach Grades one and two, Natalie Huc who will teach Grades four and five French Immersion, Susan Milne who will teach Kindergarten half-time and work half-time as a special education resource teacher and Jeff Parker who will provide part-time class coverage.

At St. Joseph Catholic School, the enrolment is down “quite a bit,” resulting in the loss of Vice-principal Claire Lanois on a full-time basis. She will split her time as vice-principal of both St. Joseph and Holy Cross School in Georgetown.

At Acton District High School, new principal Darlene White takes over from retiring Principal Bert O’Hearn to work with VP Mary Jane Farrish.



EAGER TO START: With great anticipation, students at Robert Little School gathered early Tuesday morning for the first opening ceremony of the new school year. – Frances Niblock photo



BACK TO SCHOOL: Showing attitude, these McKenzie-Smith Bennett School students posed and caught up on their summer as they waited for the first bell to ring on Tuesday morning. – Frances Niblock photo



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