

Students returning to school get the red-carpet treatment

Erie Elementary School makes first day of school fun and safe, with exciting themes and updates to its building.

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Wearing a big smile and a pilot's uniform is Erie Elementary School Principal Jerry Evanski, who, along with his staff, rolled out the red carpet for students returning to school Tuesday including third-grader Tatum Tannahill. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

Students arriving for the first day of school Tuesday at Erie Elementary in Clinton Township were given the red-carpet treatment.



Queon Walker of Sterling Heights takes a photo of his daughter, Layla Walker, on her first day as a first grader at Erie Elementary School in Clinton Township. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

And we're not talking idioms.

Below a big blue sign informing children that they were NOW BOARDING what will be a great experience was a red carpet that quickly became crowded with parents taking photos and videos of their little celebrities. Standing at the end of the runway and greeting the new arrivals in a pilot's uniform was their school principal, Jerry Evanski. Next to him were members of his crew – dressed as flight attendants -- and a gigantic display of cutouts showing students a few of the places they might wish to see, including New York's Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel Tower in Paris.



Students arriving at Erie Elementary School on the first day of school Tuesday were greeted by a red carpet. Standing at the end of the runway was their principal and pilot Jerry Evanski and a giant display of cutouts celebrating this year's theme of travel. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

It was all part of the student's introduction to a new year and a new adventure.

"Every year the kids pick a theme. Last year it was 'Under the Sea.' So, we had bubbles, lots and lots of bubbles. This year it's travel," said Evanski, who was having a wonderful time shaking hands and posing for photos.

"We want our kids to feel special," Evanski added. "They're the reason we're all here."

It's also the reason Erie teacher Rob Heumann and his wife, Danielle, of Madison Heights chose to enroll their children in the Chippewa Valley School District.

"I teach kindergarten at Erie. Even before my kids went to school I loved it so much I brought them here," said Danielle Heumann, who arrived at the school early along with her sons, Jack, 9, Alex, 6 and 2-year-old twins Max and Cam.

Matt Kadrovach whose son Alex, 5, was among the kindergarten students, concurred.



Dressed for a flight to someplace exciting and in keeping with the school's theme of travel are Erie Elementary Principal Jerry Evanski, far right, and members of his staff. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

"I love Erie. They really do it up, here," said Kadrovach, adding he does not remember any of his first days being quite like the experience at Erie. "I don't remember too much about those days except that my mom used to drop us off. I'm sure it was something like, 'OK, get out of the car and go to school.'"

Once inside the school students were greeted by lots of new additions – to make them feel welcome and excited to be back at school. Also new at Erie and other buildings throughout the Chippewa Valley School District are new security improvements that will include new cameras, door locks and possibly a new emergency alert system that will communicate with the police.

Voters in the CVS district approved a \$97 million bond proposal last November to support security improvements along with other upgrades to infrastructure and technology.

"Chippewa Valley has always taken a pro-active stand on school safety," said Evanski, who has been a principal at the school for the past 21 years.



Students make their way to the end of a red-carpet runway on their first day of school Tuesday, where they are greeted by their principal and pilot Jerry Evanski. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

"The bond has made a difference and will continue to make a difference," said Ron Roberts, superintendent of Chippewa Valley Schools.

A new wireless network in all school buildings, new security cameras, upgraded background checks for all volunteers and school visitors are among some of the improvements in the works. Work has also begun on new parking lot designs for several buildings that ensure entry into the school is only through the front/office entrance.

Other schools adapting the practice include Romeo High School -- where students were greeted Tuesday by a newer, bigger facility.

"It's been a long time coming," said Todd Robinson, superintendent of Romeo Community Schools. "When you talk about planning these things and then getting the bond passed to do it – it's exciting to finally see it happen."

The new high school – which is essentially an addition to the engineering and technology center – features more collaborative space for the students who will be following an eight-class college-type schedule with an upgraded surveillance system on site.

"When you build something new you get all of the new technology available," Robinson said.



Dylan Scott poses on his first day of school at Erie Elementary School in Clinton Township. Last year he was a kindergartner. This year, he's a first-grader on his way to becoming a zoologist. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

"My goal as a kindergarten teacher is to make sure my class becomes a happy family learning together," Heumann said.

New security measures and all of the upgrades are part of making that happen.

"There's a fine line you walk on in providing measures to ensure school safety," Roberts said. "We need to have them, but we need to do it in a way that doesn't negatively impact the outcome for our students."