

Kirsten Stewart:

[crosstalk 00:00:09]

Kirsten Stewart:

It's the first day of school. Midvalley Elementary Principal Tamara Baker arrived hours ago to prepare to welcome the return of her students after a five-month hiatus to stem the spread of COVID-19. It's also the first day in a shiny new school building, completed just in time for classes to start. The usual first day jitters felt by students all across Canyons District are compounded by the fact that Midvalley Elementary students have never before set foot in their new building. And they have only been able to greet their teachers via online meetings.

Kirsten Stewart:

Principal Baker's mission is to extend students a warm welcome and help them orient themselves and find their classrooms. And she has a small army of administrators and staff from the District's Central Office who have volunteered to help.

Kirsten Stewart:

[crosstalk 00:01:06]

Tamara Baker:

So we did a virtual teacher greeting where they showed them the room. But also knew this would still be difficult for parents to be able to say goodbye to their student at the door, having never walked through this building. Not even the older siblings. So we set up this process, and feel so grateful that all of these experienced District people would come over and help us. And the parents felt calm today because they knew good people would be in the building taking care of their kids when they walk through that door.

Kirsten Stewart:

Midvalley's previous building, built in 1957, was once the oldest in the District. The new elementary school is the fifth Midvale area school to be rebuilt with proceeds from two voter-approved bonds since the inception of Canyons on July 1st, 2009. The new building is seismically safe and better able to support today's teaching technologies.

Kirsten Stewart:

When students arrived on the first day, they marveled at the high ceilings, large rooms, and spacious hallways. Parent Sarah Peck said, despite the uniqueness of the school year, she's optimistic.

Sara Peck:

I'm excited. I think it's going to turn out well. I think my kids have never been so excited to go back to school. So we're just hoping that things go smoothly and that we keep going back to school.

Kirsten Stewart:

Volunteers like Tori Gillett not only guided students to class but watched to ensure each student was properly wearing their face coverings and washing their hands.

Tori Gillett:

As adults, we need to be examples to the students so the students know what the proper protocol is. Oh, I'm just excited to get everything back in. I'm just excited to have the kids back and see their faces and feel their energy.

Kirsten Stewart:

And teachers like Emily Stringham, who teaches first grade at Midvalley, excitedly and nervously await the students' arrival into their classrooms for the first time since March.

Emily Stringham:

Today will be the true test of everything. I ... I'm excited to see the kids. That's the whole point of this. But I'm nervous for all the masks and cleaning and all those new routines that we're starting. But I'm so excited to see all the kids.

Kirsten Stewart:

For Tamara Baker, who watched proudly as the first day of school in a brand new school building began without a hitch, the new normal is here, and it's newer than ever.

Tamara Baker:

We want school to feel safe and happy and as normal as possible for these kids. And what a beautiful space to do it in.

Kirsten Stewart:

Join us again for the next episode of Connect Canyons, a podcast sponsored by Utah's Canyons School District. If you have any comments for us, questions, or ideas for topics you'd like to explore, email us at Communications@CanyonsDistrict.org. Today's show was recorded and edited by Andrew [Reeser 00:03:47]. If you liked this episode, please be sure to share it with a friend. I'm Kirsten Stewart, and this is Canyons School District.