



## **Longing for a return to routine days Some teachers opt to work, but they're ready for students to return**

Originally published in:  
**Chapel Hill Herald**  
Friday, January 30, 2004  
Edition: Final  
Page: 1

BY KARA EIDE [chh@heraldsun.com](mailto:chh@heraldsun.com); 918-1035

CHAPEL HILL -- Some teachers played basketball in the school gym, others gave their own children free reign in the classroom and others intensely organized their materials.

While Thursday was the second consecutive optional teacher workday for the city school district and the fourth day without students, a majority of teachers opted to work.

The rambunctious young daughters of Jodi Wise, a kindergarten teacher at Frank Porter Graham Elementary School, ran around with mom's lipstick smeared awry on their faces.

"They needed a change of scenery," Wise explained. Even though she had the additional job of keeping her kids in line, she said she still had been able to get work done.

That work, for Wise and other teachers who came in Wednesday and Thursday, has been mostly planning and organizing. "There's always something we could be doing," Wise said. "There's no such thing really as 'caught up.'"

After two days when the system was completely closed down and then the two optional teacher workdays, there was a restless atmosphere at some local schools. "I think we're all kind of ready for the kids to get here," said Suzanne Leonard, a first-grade teacher at FPG. "There's only so much you can do without them."

While the workdays are categorized as optional, not all teachers can take advantage of them. Teachers who have vacation can take annual leave on that day. Teachers who don't have that option lose a day of annual leave if they don't come in. Leonard said that meant new teachers must come to school on optional days, and tenured teachers can choose to stay home.

Most teachers went to work at least for part of the days.

"I've seen everybody [who works] in this building," said Leonard, who works in the K-2 facility.

Teacher presence at the school was about 75 to 80 percent Thursday, said clerical assistant Julie Bryan.

Over at Smith Middle School, teachers were equally impatient for students to return.

"We all like routine, and we are out of our routine," said Ed Craver, a physical education teacher and the school's athletic director, who was playing pick-up basketball with three other teachers in the school gym.

Another player, Mackenzie Denniston, who teaches physical education and health, said she didn't want all these days off to prolong the school year.

The city schools are scheduled to be open on a regular schedule today, while Orange County Schools will open on a two-hour delay and Chatham County Schools will remain closed.

The city teachers said they couldn't be more ready to return to normalcy.

"I sure hope [the students] come back..." said Sharon Goldman, who teaches writing electives to students in sixth through eighth grade at Smith. "They've gotta be going crazy by now."

Other teachers commented on the "cabin fever" factor as well. "I would imagine by now they're a little stir-crazy and ready to get back to school," Leonard said.

FPG third-grade teacher Tamra Schuch said her own kids also were going "stir-crazy."

"I need to get out of here as soon as I can so I can take them to the mall," she said.

The elementary teachers said they'd kept busy by filing, working on lesson plans, creating homework packets, setting up for a theme change -- now that February is near -- and preparing report cards, which go out today.

Leonard also said she's been able to plan special activities for some holidays, including the Chinese New Year, Valentine's Day and the 100th day of school.

At Smith, Goldman has been organizing. Lots of organizing.

"I'm an organizational freak," she said. "I re-labeled my travel cart and got new grade books. I can always use extra time!"

But she's prepared for a little mayhem as the students return from their unexpected vacation days: "Now they're going to be crazy," she said. "It's a Friday."

Photo Outline::

**THEY'RE BACK!**

After four days without classes, the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools are back open for business this morning, on their regular schedule. The Orange County Schools are open, but operating on a two-hour delay.

Meanwhile, the Chatham County Schools are closed, for the fifth day in a row.