



Gearing up for back-to-school

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School Supt. Alan Beitman is looking forward to introducing parents and students to new computer systems, several building improvements and a phone system that will make parent-teacher communications far easier this school year.

The first day of school will be Aug. 29. Much work has been accomplished in the district over the summer, primarily through capital funds expenditures.

Last year, Monroe Elementary School hosted a pilot program for the Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone system.

Now, Fawn Hollow, Stepney, Chalk Hill and Jockey Hollow schools have been added to the network.

Masuk High School was not switched over because it has a serviceable phone system, installed during the recent renovations, Beitman said. He anticipates bringing Masuk online in about three years.

The VoIP system routes phone conversations over the Internet, rather than through dedicated telephone wires in the traditional fashion.

Teacher, now will be able to call parents directly from their rooms instead of waiting in line at the main office. Parents will be able to call their children's teachers directly and leave a voicemail if the teacher is unavailable.

"We hope to see a tremendous increase in parent-teacher communications," Beitman said.

Another high-tech feature in Monroe's schools this year is the Classlink networking system.

With Classlink, all software is saved on a central server, not on individual computers. The students will access the software through the network.

That change extends the useful life of the computers because the Central Processing Unit does not have to do as much work and the hard drives will not have to be upgraded as often.

It also will make it possible for students to work more effectively at home.

The program enables students to log on to the network with a password from any Internet-capable computer and access the programs they use at school.

"Software will now be available to students 24 hours per day," Beitman said.

Security is a concern, however, Beitman said, and there are several firewalls and protections in place to thwart an electronic attack on the system.

The main security concern is that a student could give his password to someone else, who then would be able to access the system.

To protect against that possibility, administrators will be able to track users' logins and compare them to the Internet addresses used to access the network. If there are discrepancies, they will investigate, Beitman said.

The schools have tied into the library software Bibliomation and made it available through Classlink. Bibliomation is a research program used at many libraries, including Monroe's Edith Wheeler Memorial Library.

Drivers take care

With the new school year beginning in less than two weeks, Beitman cautions residents to take care and watch for school busses.

"Student safety is everyone's business," he said.

The district uses more than 27 full-size busses and many mini-busses, all of which will begin traveling Monroe's streets on Aug. 29.

Beitman asked all drivers to remember to slow down at intersections, watch for signals when busses stop and use extra caution during the first few weeks as everyone becomes accustomed to the bus routes.

To voice a concern about any school safety issue, call the Safety Tips Telephone Line at 452-2977 or e-mail monroeschoolsafety@monroeps.org.

Capital improvements

Structural improvements were completed at Masuk High, Fawn Hollow, Monroe Elementary and Jockey Hollow schools.

Benedict Field at Masuk High School has had an overhaul of its bleachers. They have been sandblasted and sealed to fix pitting and crumbling problems. Beitman said the repairs would be good for at least 10 years.

Monroe Elementary School has a new boiler system, which cost about \$160,000. The boiler replaced the old one that sprung a leak during the last school year.

The sidewalks and curbs at Fawn Hollow School and the carpets in the library at Jockey Hollow were replaced because of safety concerns.

Parent involvement is to the benefit of the entire district, Beitman said. He invited parents to "please become involved in classroom and school activities."

"Your child and the students of Monroe will all benefit," he said.