

Falls City students hit the books

Scheduling quirk results in starting classes a week earlier than normal

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Students in Falls City are back to the books a week earlier than usual.

Monday marked back to school for the Mountaineers.

The early start is due to a quirk in the calendar and the district four-day school week system. With Labor Day falling so late in September this year, beginning classes after the holiday would push the end of the year to June 16.

"Everybody on the staff felt that was way too late in June to be ending school," Superintendent Jack Thompson said.

He said the four-day schedule doesn't allow for much leeway to pick up days throughout the school year, so the choice was between starting earlier or ending later. Thompson said starting the last day in August is better than releasing students in mid-June — for both staff and students.

Other school districts in



Falls City students put away supplies and settle in during the first day of school on Monday morning.

JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

the county have gone with the traditional first day of school, at least for some students, on the Tuesday after Labor Day.

Perrydale School District also runs on a four-day

week, but chose to bring students back on Sept. 8. The last day for students will be June 16, like it would have been for Falls City, according to its approved 2015-16 calendar.

Dallas School District's last day for fourth- through 12th-grade students is June 14, while K-3 students attend until June 13. In Central School District, the last day is June 10.

Thompson said students haven't been grumbling much about the early start.

"Not really, this time of year kids are ready to come back to school," he said.

That certainly was the

case for Roxi Barnhart's fifth- and sixth-grade class, which seemed ready to begin learning.

"I like it," said fifth-grader Molly Major as she stocked her desk with supplies.

That was Barnhart's first assignment of the year, having students organize their desks. Within minutes, Barnhart realized she was going to be short on storage space for all the supplies students purchased or were given through The Salvation Army's annual "Tools for School" giveaway earlier in August.

"We've never had this much," she said, looking for space to put everything.

This year, Barnhart had 22 students on the first day, a fairly typical number based on the past few years.

In line with Thompson's belief, kids were glad to be back, even if the calendar still read "August."

"I'm happy that we are back earlier rather than later," fifth-grader Kirk Davis said. "Because it (the last day) would have been really late in the summer."

Craven receives honor for climate change work

Central science teacher created YouTube video that has gotten 11 million hits

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — Eight years after "The Most Terrifying Video You'll Ever See" went live on YouTube — and some 11 million hits later — creator and Central High School teacher Greg Craven is being honored for his work in climate change education.

"It has stuck around and continued to pop up," Craven said of the video which started it all.

The 10-minute film —

just Craven and a white board — lays out what Craven believed to be an original argument on how to look at climate change, he said.

"I was tired of the real disconnect on what the science was confident of and what the public was confident of," Craven said. "There was a real disconnect. Science was quite confident about the reality of climate change and humans doing it, and the public had very little belief in it, relatively."

In his effort to "break the

deadlock and bridge the gap" between science and the general public, he asks people to think about the worst that could happen.

"I came up with a little two-by-two visual argument proposing instead of us getting hung up on the idea of whether it was true or not — for certain — instead ask, what are the chances and what do we want to do to manage those chances," Craven said. "Sort of risk assessment for the layman."

At the end of the first video, Craven invites viewers to poke holes in his theory.

"I teach that in my classes all the time," he noted. "The way science is unique and the way that it gets better over time is by trying to break ideas. The way you make an idea stronger is by inviting criticism of it."

Craven said he got plenty of criticism.

"People had lots of 'yeah, but's' and 'what ifs,' so I collected all those and did another eight hours of video answering every single rebuttal I could dredge up online," he said. "That led to a book."

For his efforts, the Nation-

al Center for Science Education awarded him the 2015 Friend of the Planet.

This is the second year the center has given out this award. The center is known for countering the push back against the teaching of evolution in schools.

Recently, the center has taken on teaching the science of climate change also.

"Climate change is sort of in the same boat as evolution," Craven said. "Teachers that teach climate change get a push back from a subgroup of parents because they see it as being political and untrue."

While Craven has published videos and books with his opinions and views on policy and personal choices surrounding the topic, when it comes to the classroom, he is careful to stick to the science when it comes to climate change.

Parents don't want science teachers giving political "shoulds" to their students, Craven said.

However, he added that he doesn't see climate change as a political, environmental nor moral issue, but as a pragmatic one.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

Central science teacher Greg Craven is being honored for his work in climate change education.

"It's not about saving the planet, it's about how do our actions come back and affect us," Craven said. "It's about the potential effects on us, and how that's going to very

pragmatically affect me and my kids. Just like if you're building a city, you don't dump raw sewage in the river upstream from your drinking water."

SCHOOL NOTES

Christian academy to host potluck

MONMOUTH — Mid-Valley Christian Academy will host an open house potluck for first- through 12th-grade students on Wednesday (today) at 6 p.m.

The event is an opportunity for parents to visit with staff and see the school's campus, located at 1483 N. 16th St., in Monmouth. Classes began Wednesday (today) and the school is open for registration 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

For more information: 503-838-2818.

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