

In LI's public school

Some 430,000 students kicking off a new year

Shane Cassidy, 8, of East Yaphank, looks forward to learning multiplication in third grade this year at Charles E. Walters Elementary School in the Longwood district.

Grace Harris, 10, of Freeport, plans to use her new district-issued Chromebook as a sixth-grader to research information on gaming technology.

And Matthew Sharin, 12, an accelerated eighth-grader at Lawrence Middle School, is confident he can handle a course in Regents Geometry despite the fact that the subject is generally reserved for 10th-graders.

"I had algebra last year," Matthew said as he went through his first day of classes. "And my older sister can help me."

Shane, Grace and Matthew are among about 150,000 students in 47 districts across Long Island who began the 2018-19 academic year Tuesday under hot and sunny skies. They will be followed by additional waves of pupils on Wednesday, when 64 systems begin, and Thursday, when another dozen start instruction.

Altogether, 430,000-plus students will resume classes in public schools this week. Private and parochial schools are opening their doors to thousands of students as well.

Corey Benzing, 5, of East Yaphank, eagerly awaited what he called the "big bus" to take him to his first day of kindergarten at Charles E. Walters School.

Corey, with his green sunglasses and "Paw Patrol" backpack, said he was excited, particularly for the bus ride. "I can't wait to see my friends!" he yelled. "It's going to be so fun."

For his mother, Samantha Sweeney, it was a bittersweet morning, waiting at the same bus stop she did as a child. "I'm happy, but I'm sad," she said.

Sweeney was especially anxious because Corey is legally blind and this is his first time at-



Sixth-graders Jomalfri Aracena and Grace Harris receive their Chromebooks at Atkinson Intermediate School in Freeport Tuesday.

This story was reported and written by John Hildebrand, Keshia Clukey and Janelle Griffith.

tending school in a regular classroom setting. He will work with an occupational therapist and vision teacher, she said.

Meanwhile, Ava Lafler, 5, of East Yaphank, was prepared for her first day of kindergarten at Charles E. Walters with her unicorn backpack, unicorn dress and new rainbow water bottle. She and her mom, Meridith Lafler, got up early to braid her hair and make her lunch.

"It's much more comfortable knowing where your child is going," said Lafler, whose 10-year-old twin sons, David and Cole, are entering sixth grade.

It's still difficult though, said Lafler, who works as a child-support magistrate for Suffolk County Family Court. "We give them our babies," she said.

At Freeport's Caroline G. Atkinson Intermediate School, excitement rippled through the auditorium as sixth-graders received Google Chromebooks first thing Tuesday morning.

The school's principal, Consuelo Velez, said the intent of the laptops' use in the curriculum is to allow teachers to track students' reading habits and check their homework.

Each student who received a device was given instruction on

FIRST DAYS

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safe practices — including not sharing passwords. The students will be able to take the Chromebooks home each night and must bring the devices to school each day.

Freeport Superintendent Kishore Kuncham was on hand for the laptops' rollout, which is the second phase of the district's Chromebook program. The devices already have been in use by students at Freeport High School and John W. Dodd Middle School.

"It's a great tool to provide to our students," Kuncham said. "It's an extension of the classroom."

Suri Rashid, 11, of Freeport, used a Chromebook last year, in fifth grade, for a project, when the school had a handful of Chromebooks that were shared by different classrooms.

Suri said she has a computer at home, but she shares it with her siblings. This will be the



Dana Thomas leads kindergartners Tuesday at Charles E. Walters

first time she will have her own, she said, adding it will make researching much easier.

At Lawrence Middle School, math teacher Mary Karvelas wrapped up her first geometry class Tuesday morning with a group of eighth-graders selected for the advanced instruction. The 12- and 13-year-olds will be pointed toward taking the Regents Geometry exam in June, two years ahead of the usual schedule.

"Starting tomorrow, it's full force," Karvelas told her students. "We have homework every single day. Lucky!"

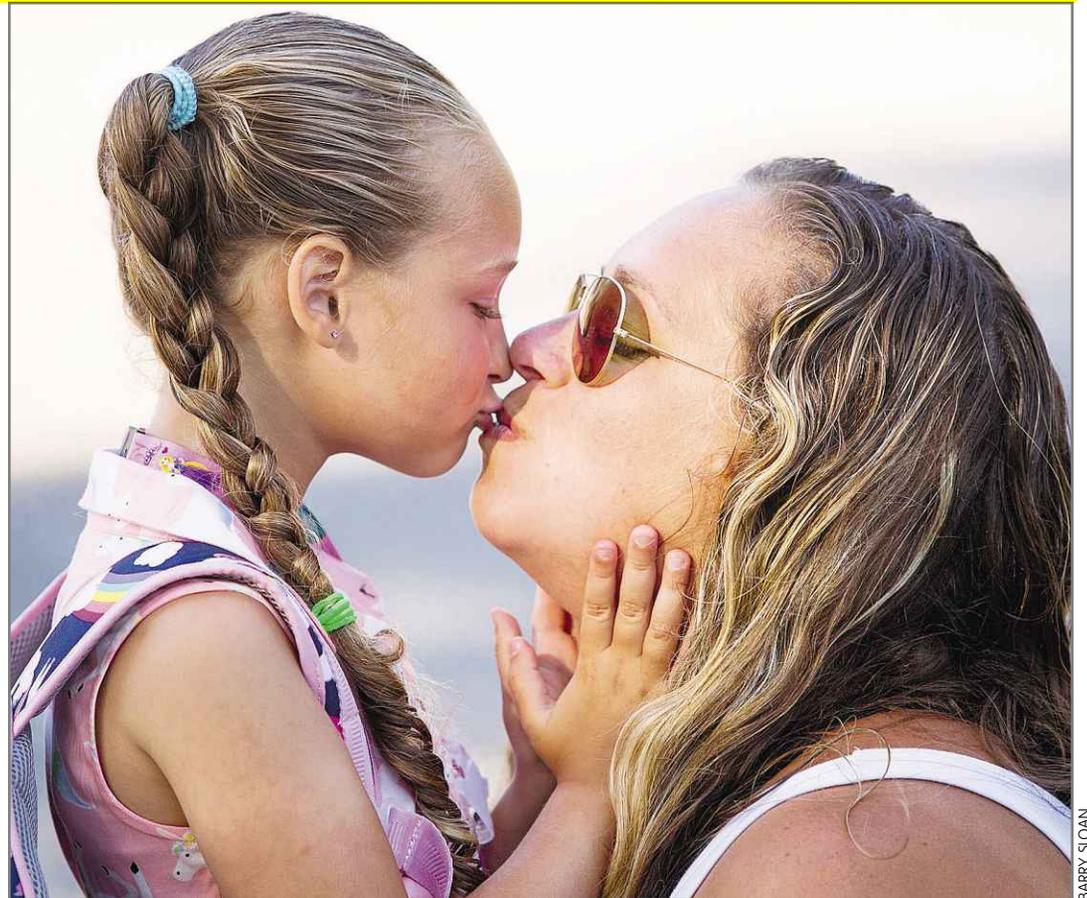
Local education leaders face a number of challenging issues, including pressures to boost security after school shootings this year in Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe, Texas. At the

same time, many districts are experiencing solid improvements in their finances that allow for building renovations, additions of advanced academic courses and greater help for struggling students.

Longwood's superintendent, Michael Lonergan, said his entire system will put greater emphasis this year on developing student advocacy and leadership. The walls of schools will be hung with slogans such as "Taking Responsibility," he said, and desks in many classrooms will be grouped together to encourage more discussion.

In the 2,700-student Lawrence district, administrators look forward this year to expanding a series of monthly seminar meetings, where teenagers with behavioral prob-

districts, a class act



Ava Lafler, 5, kisses her mom, Meridith, as she waits for the bus to kindergarten in Shirley on Tuesday.



Ed tech specialist Casey Levine gives Chromebook to Christopher Silva Jimenez in Freeport Tuesday.

Elementary School in Yaphank. ■ Video: [newsday.com/education](https://www.newsday.com/education)

lems and their parents meet with school staffers in an effort to avoid suspension from classes. One planned addition, officials said, will be offers of free online tutoring for students whose frustrations with class assignments might otherwise lead to misconduct.

Funding for the expanded student help comes from a \$250,000 "exemplary school model" grant, awarded last month by the state Education Department.

Lawrence Superintendent Ann Pedersen said she takes particular pride in providing programs for both advanced and struggling students in a district where the proportion of those rated economically disadvantaged runs more than 75 percent.

"Having been in Lawrence for many years, I'm just extremely proud of this moment in time," said Pedersen, now entering her 27th year there.

Kuncham, the Freeport schools chief, said his visit to Caroline G. Atkinson Intermediate was his fourth stop Tuesday morning. He checked in on staff and students at Freeport High, Dodd Middle School and Columbus Avenue School before 9 a.m. His goal: to visit the district's eight schools by noon.

"I've always done this. It's a very special day and it's important to welcome our students and teachers," he said. "The excitement, energy and spirit you have on the first day of school carries into the rest of the school year."

BARRY SLOAN

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