

School Days 2015

When Bill wakes up around 10 AM., he knows he's late; his first instructional session begins in just an hour. Bill is 16 and full of energy after nine hours of sleep, but he's got to grab something to eat and go over the math he finished just before hitting the hay. This morning's distance learning session on advanced calculus will be led by a teacher from Kent County who is considered the best in the state on this subject. Bill wants to get as much as he can out of the session in preparation for an online conference tomorrow with e-classmates in India, Ireland, and the UK.

His home in suburban Wilmington is empty, yet he is connected virtually to school, teachers and classmates. Both his parents went to work hours ago, and his little nine-year-old sister has been at the local public community school four blocks away since her mother dropped her off at 7:30 AM for breakfast and a pre-class exercise session in the school's multi-purpose room.

In Selbyville, Maria, also 16, decides to get to school early today. Her first class isn't until 11:30 AM, but she has a science project she's working on in the school lab that needs some attention. With her school-issued digital web-pad, she checked on the progress of her water quality experiment just before going to bed at 11:30 PM, and needs to compare her results to those of students in Melbourne, Australia, who are working in a similar environment. So she caught the second morning bus at 9 AM. With any luck, she'll do what she has to do in the lab with plenty of time to get set for the Spanish language discussion group that she is scheduled lead from 10 to 11 AM. Maria has been teaching other students Spanish for the last two years.

Earlier, her mother had taken Maria's twin brothers to the health clinic at the public community school in their neighborhood. After the boys' checkup, she went to her job as an engineer supervising the chicken processing plant; the twins would have breakfast and then go to their language arts class, the first of the day.

Bill goes to one of one of three "early-college high schools" in New Castle County. His school is a magnet school linked to the local university; it concentrates on math and science education yet also requires students to be proficient in all other areas of learning. It's now late March and Bill is putting the final touches on a creative writing project that is due in the middle of May. He's been researching and writing since late November. The project requires him to write a work of fiction that demonstrates his understanding of the geography, history, and music of East Asia.

Maria's Spanish language conversation class enables her to earn some money and gain some experience as a teacher. She intends to become an early learning specialist after she completes high school. She works under the guidance of Mr.

Guillermo, who lectures in Spanish grammar and literature for most Delaware students, from her base at Sussex County High School, which concentrates on languages and social studies. Maria's senior project is the laboratory experiment she came to check on earlier today. Although she spends considerable time with her Chinese studies and classes on world political and economic structures, she has a deep interest in science and the environment.

Jose and Juan, Maria's 10-year-old brothers, love to read and write. Spanish is the language spoken most frequently at home, but both boys are proficient in both English and Spanish since they've been listening and studying both since the age of three when they first went to the early learning center at the Selbyville Community School. Unlike their sister, the boys have difficulty with mathematics and science, so they receive an extra hour of instruction in these subjects three days a week at 3:30 PM when classes end. At 4:30 PM, they can go home for dinner or they can stay at school for a light meal, some required study time, and an evening recreation program that ends at 8:30 PM or 9 PM, depending on the program. The late bus will then take them home.

Bill's little sister, like her brother, is a math whiz, but her first love is music. So she's receiving fiddle lessons at the community school. Classes are offered each morning and each afternoon. Students are permitted to attend either or both lessons. The teacher is a member of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra who is math educator at the school.

The teaching teams at all Delaware schools are made up of subject specialists, a special education teacher, a guidance specialist, and a mentoring teacher-leader. Most teams have five or six members and, in most teams, the teachers are certified in more than one subject. Teachers are paid based on their instructional skills, education, and the progress of the students for which they are responsible. Assessments that include prescriptive directions for both teachers and pupils are made on an ongoing basis. Students who need extra time in a given subject or on a specific unit of instruction are directly tutored during "regular" school hours by a member of the team while the rest of the class carries on. Teachers are given an hour-and-a-half each day to collaborate with other educators on instruction, assessment tools, and other areas of professional development.

Since schools operate 11 months a year, this team approach enables each member to get a month off in addition to the month that all formal classroom activity is closed. Teachers can vacation or attend special free classes provided by a consortium of all the higher education institutions in the state. Like other professionals, educators are required to keep their skill levels high by completing prescribed and elective short courses each year. Courses are provided through an on-demand distance learning system.

All students who are 12-years-old and older are required to do some form of community service; the extent and complexity of the service depends on the

student's age and abilities. One aspect of a teacher's duties is to guide students into an appropriate community service experience, one in which the student can apply some aspect of learning. Bill is tutoring recent immigrant parents in math after his school day ends; Maria is still considering her focus but thinking about volunteering on Sundays at the local hospital.

Maria is active in school sports programs; she's a member of the varsity tennis, volley ball, and field hockey teams. Bill is the news editor of his neighborhood community school's listserv which is available to everyone at the school, including students, and to everyone in the area served by the community school. While Maria spends a lot of time on practice and playing fields, Bill spends a lot of time in the community in which he lives, gathering information for the listserv. He also "blogs" two or three times a day.

The statewide public community school system is a hub for education, recreation, and health and social services. There are 75 such schools throughout the state. Each has a medical component, a state service center, substantial recreational facilities, and meeting areas, as well as learning labs and classrooms. They operate about 14 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition to the teaching corps, there are physical education specialists, social service workers, and an array of adjunct faculty members who teach courses the community selects. There is an instructional leader or principal at each location and a community school director who takes care of the administration of the building and supervision of the non-instructional staff.

Both Bill and Maria are active in their community schools. They attend dances and discussion sessions with friends and neighbors. They challenge themselves with courses designed to stretch their minds, to help them think creatively. Their younger siblings and their parents also make regular use of the school and its recreational and educational opportunities.

Students' parents are intimately involved with their children's education. Using their unique password, they check in regularly on information about each student's progress that is posted each day on a personal, interactive website that enables a parent to communicate not only with educators but their children as well.

When Bill and Maria finish their secondary education next year, they and most of their classmates will engage in a post-secondary education experience. They will look first for knowledge challenges, not career paths, which will come later. Their secondary education was designed not only to provide them with skills, but with an intellectual curiosity that won't soon be satisfied.

Teacher Days 2015

Ty and his wife, Liz were out late last night. Both are glad their first scheduled session with students isn't until noon today. Ty is a physical education instructor at one of the schools in northern Kent County – a school with 550 students in grades 6 through 12. Liz is an early learning specialist who works out of one of the eight regional professional development centers. Today she's scheduled to work with the teachers and students at one of the 15 early learning centers in New Castle County, this one is \ in the Claymont area.

Antoine was satisfied with his job at the DuPont Co.'s Experimental Station. His background in biophysics led him to "the station" as everyone calls it doing primary research. He enjoyed the work, but he missed interacting with other people and his teenage dream of following his parents into teaching kept gnawing at him. He retired early from DuPont and took a year of instruction in pedagogy at the University of Delaware, and now he's Delaware's premier physics and biology instructor. Antoine's web-based, interactive lectures attract not only students from all over the state, but also from other parts of the country. His lessons are clearly valuable to Delaware students in pursuit of completing the state-mandated science requirements, but they are appealing to anyone interested in the subject.

Many nights and most weekends, Marilyn is a professional violinist. Her string quartet is in regular demand and she plays second violin with the Delaware Symphony Orchestra. But her students always come first; they are her passion. It is a passion she inherited from her mentor, Stella, who started the string instruction program in the old Wilmington Public Schools in the 1940s. Marilyn works closely with other members of the instructional team at her school trying to give musical context to the math, social studies and language arts programs with which her students are involved. Four times a year Marilyn and her students present their work to parents and other community members at a gala seasonal event.

Charles likes teaching history. It was his major in college and he holds a masters' degree in international affairs. He thought of going into the Foreign Service and even took the State Department examination, but when his fiancé suggested he join her in the Teach for America program, he reluctantly applied. His assignment to work with students at a rural Sussex County school didn't appeal to him at first. But when he realized his fiancé would be teaching at a school in downtown Wilmington and they could share living space in Middletown, he accepted the job. Now, you couldn't tear him away. After repeated attempts to teach his socially and academically challenged students in the traditional approach he understood, he sought help from his principal who called in a mentoring team from one of the state's professional development centers. Soon, Charles recognized his need for some courses in teaching methodology. Meanwhile, the mentors helped him devise an instructional course in contemporary American issues based using local newspapers and Internet programs as sources of instructional materials. Both Charles and his students, many of whom were English language learners,

found themselves in hot pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the history and development of lower Delaware.

Ty's first class was with a class thirteen-year-olds, a few of whom were physically challenged. The hormonal challenges are significant in this coed class. Ty not only leads the students in regular, required daily exercise and strength-building classes, but he also teaches about nutrition and healthy lifestyles. Ty, who is classified as an advanced teacher, borrowed ideas from the "Can Do Playground" concept to make sure his physically challenged students are full participants in his classes. He tries to keep the students so busy and so interested that their natural inclination to show off is kept to a minimum. Ty meets regularly with the other members of the instructional team so that he can incorporate their academic models into his classes' work. This week, the students are studying the American Revolution, so he plans to do exercises that will exemplify the rigorous physical activity required of ordinary men and women in late 18th century America. They will drill as soldiers, haul heavy loads replicating water and firewood. Then, they will use the Internet to discover the dietary habits of our Revolutionary forebears and compare them to our current eating habits.

Liz's task today is to work with two young teachers who are struggling with their three-year-old students. The recent graduates are well trained intellectually and they interned for several months too. But, they had worked in white suburban school district in Pennsylvania. The school in Claymont has a wide ranging socio-economic and multi-racial population. The teachers are having difficulty developing lesson plans that enable the four or five talented students to progress while they work with the kids progressing at average rates and with those who present challenging instructional problems. Liz taught in a similar situation for several years. She will bring her experience as well as academic grounding in early childhood education she garnered when she completed her masters degree in the subject. It's likely she will direct the two young teachers to the regional professional development's web site where she has prepared several lessons on dealing with classes in which students have widely different needs.

Ann has just been certified as a career teacher, after just two years as an apprentice; that's a year ahead of schedule. As a language arts teacher, she has worked with two classes of students designated as gifted and talented as well as two classes of students who are progressing at an average rate. She came to her school well prepared as a reading specialist, but she didn't want to teach only reading; she wanted to be a language generalist on a team with math, social science, arts and science teachers. She was thankful that her principal's approach to elementary education was collaborative. The principal and each cluster of teachers meets on a weekly basis to plan the weeks and months ahead. Mandatory professional development sessions are held each Friday morning for two hours. Some teachers remain at the school to work with their mentor teachers; others attend distance learning sessions in the school's media-

arts pavilion; while others worked on degree programs aligned with their work. Students are occupied in extra-curricular, community school activities during this time.