

# On the first day

## The adventures of a brand new high school teacher

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The electronic school bell beeps just as Tina Stringer arrives at the double doors of the auditorium stage. She's met by a group of about 15 teenagers who can't figure out how to get in.

Stringer jiggles the lock and opens a door. The students follow her across a dark stage as she heads straight for the lighting controls.

"Are any of the house lights

### WALLED LAKE SCHOOLS

coming on?" Stringer shouts while flipping each switch up and down.

The auditorium lights up. The students sit in the audience seats.

Class begins. "Hello, I'm Mrs. Stringer," said the new Walled Lake Western High School teacher. "Welcome to Acting One. Anyone in the wrong place?"

Stringer was one of some 83 new teachers hired this school year by a district expected to grow by several hundred students this fall. Classes began Thursday in the Walled Lake Consolidated school district with

■ 'There's so many opportunities here I can't believe I landed in this place where everybody's nice to you and helpful and is happy you're here.'

Tina Stringer  
—New teacher

a flurry of pink class schedule forms and P.A. announcements. "I'm still new at the whole form thing," Stringer said with a smile.

She just earned her teacher's certificate last spring, but Stringer is no stranger to the classroom. After earning bachelor's and master's degrees from Eastern Michigan University, she went on to get a teaching certificate.

The Birmingham native has logged plenty of hours as a student teacher and substitute teacher. She's spent even more time in the theater as an actor, director and producer for high school, college and community productions.

At Western, she's teaching communications, mythology and performing arts.

"There's something really exciting about sharing a subject matter that you value," said the self-proclaimed idealist. She's taught elementary and middle school kids, but she's especially fond of high school students. "The opportunity you have to

be an advocate and have more of a sophisticated dialogue with a high school student is so important," she said.

"High school takes a different kind of thinking. You have to be very quick," she said. "They can smell fear and they can smell insincerity."

On Thursday, her students seemed to smell neither.

"I know first hour is hard because you're still waking up," she said to a class of sleepy teenagers as she explained the importance of breakfast. "How many of you didn't eat?"

An ocean of hands went in the air. Stringer rolled her eyes, then started taking attendance.

A half day of school means short classes and quick introductions. "Today is 'Who are you, this is kind of what to expect, and then the bell rings,'" she explained.

It also means a mid-morning sprint between classes to her room in the building's B Wing. Rushing through the maze of bustling hallways to arrive at her second hour communications class on time, she wove through gangs of cheerleaders, tie-wearing football players and embracing adolescent couples.

She had the same problem as a student teacher. "You just figure it out and you sprint," she explained.

Stringer raced into the next classroom just as another bell beeped.

"Is that it? Is that the bell? Is there some kind of warning bell or something?" she asked a group of students already seated in the classroom.

"That's the two-minute bell," answered one boy. "There will be another one."

Stringer exhaled with relief. The second bell rang. Students chattered as she took attendance again. She explained the importance of having the course textbook. A few kids didn't have one yet.

"There's some tricky procedure. I can't just give you a book," she said. Apparently textbooks are distributed during class registration. "You have to go somewhere and get a book."

The class ended a few minutes later. Another communications class came and went.

With more than half of the day's classes out of the way, Stringer said she wasn't nervous anymore. She said she's looking forward to working in the district, and her first impressions were good.

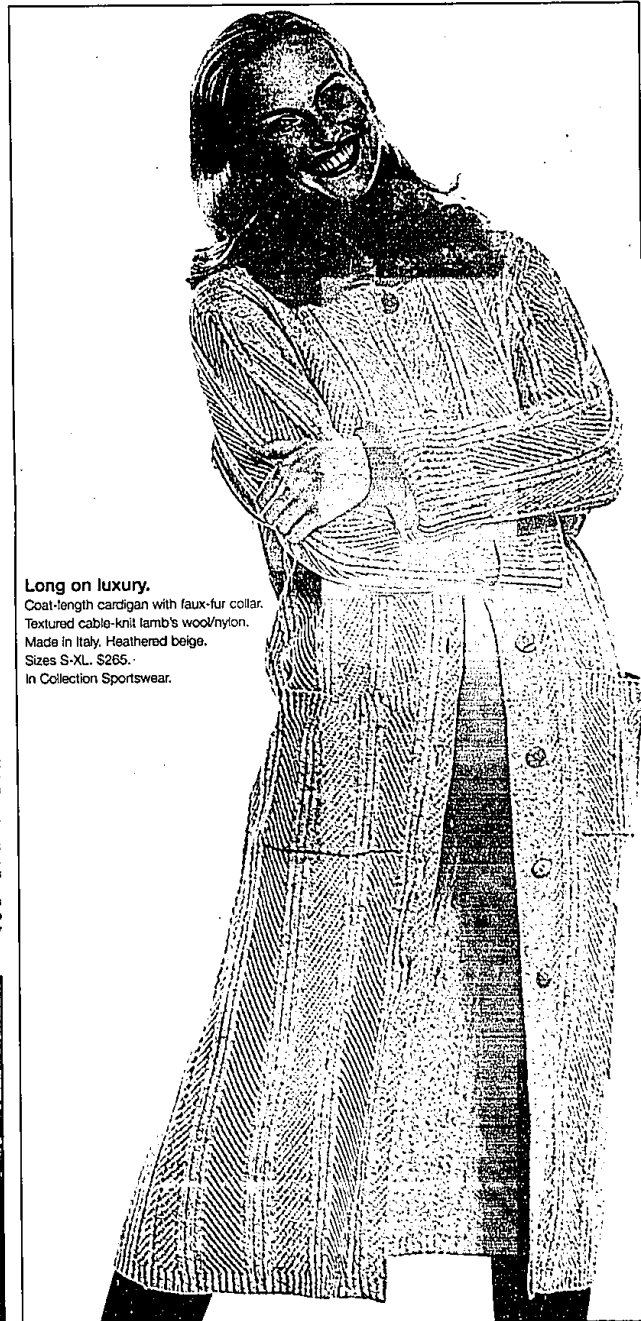
Sometimes, she admits, it seems to good to be true. "This is a school system that supports the arts so much. There's so many opportunities here," she said.

"I can't believe I landed in this place where everybody's nice to you and helpful and is happy you're here."



STAFF PHOTOS BY TOM HOFFMEYER

A teacher's hello: Walled Lake Western High School teacher Tina Stringer talks to her second hour communications class during the first day of school Thursday. Stringer was one of 83 new teachers hired this school year by a district expected to grow by several hundred students this fall. A longtime substitute teacher, she just received her certificate.



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Post-class chat: Tina Stringer talks with a student after class.



Taking a break: Tina Stringer waits for students outside her classroom on Thursday, the first day of school and Stringer's first day on the job.

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