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Alan George photo

From left to right, 11-year-olds Danielle Findlay, Danielle Steiert, and Aleisha Joly embrace each other on the last day of school at Mount Hope Elementary School Tuesday.

School year ends on tearful note

Teacher praises students for 'positive experience'

By Alan George
Staff writer

The perfume of an ammonia-based cleaning product filled the air in John Estill's fifth-grade classroom Tuesday in the waning hours of the last day of school at Mount Hope Elementary.

As students were scrubbing and cleaning out desks in their elementary haunt for the last time, the lights literally dimmed on another chapter in their lives.

"I'm proud of this class. They've accomplished a lot," Estill said. "Right now we're just cleaning things up. It would have been easier if we had some light. The power went off around 2:10 p.m."

Earlier in the day, Estill said the class

conducted an inventory of its supplies and wrote an essay evaluating the course.

"The kids wrote the essay to me," he said. "I want to know what they liked about the class. In a few minutes we're going to sit down and talk about the future. Things could get pretty heavy."

Estill then motioned for the class to sit with him on a carpet near the chalkboard. "This is going to be the last time we're going to be able to do this," he told the students. "I first noticed that this class was special at fifth-grade camp. You worked hard."

To the surprise of his students, Estill said he was going to take a year off from teaching to take care of his new baby.

"I want you to know that this has been such a positive experience that I'm going to come back in a year," he explained to the children. "Whatever you do, I want you to

come back to Mr. Estill's room and let me know what's going on."

At this moment, Danielle Steiert, 11, a student in the class, started crying, which started a tidal wave of emotions that swept over several of the girls.

"This happens every year, and it always happens with the girls first," Estill said.

When things calmed down, Estill told the children, "This is just the first step, you guys. Next year your teachers are going to ask you to do some hard things. I just want you to try your best."

When the gathering had dispersed, Steiert and her friends, Chelsea Carlton, 11, Aleisha Joly, 11, and Danielle Findlay, 11, walked despondently through the school, bidding some of their former teachers adieu.

"I've been here since kindergarten," Steiert said. "I know a bunch of people here. It's so sad."

As the group of girls left the school to find their respective buses, a two-minute cloud-burst washed their tears away.

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