

Youth Culture Lesson
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Changing Days: New School Year Brings New Challenges
By Paul Asay

What Happened:

With the school year in full swing, students everywhere are dealing with changes. New classes. New teachers. Sometimes new schools. Unless you're homeschooled, there's a good chance your school year's looking much different than it did last year.

Often, changes go far beyond a schedule full of new classes and a new locker combination to remember. Schools often change in order to keep up with the changing times, too. Sometimes those changes can be pretty radical.

Take Archbishop Stepinac High School in White Plains, N.Y., for instance. The private school has dumped books in favor of a digital library, accessible through apps and websites.

For students such as 15-year-old Nicholas Dadario—whose backpack last year typically weighed around 35 pounds—the change has lifted a weight from his back and his mind. “It’s not only lighter, but you’re mobile,” he says. “You can bring your computer to your friend’s house, wherever, and you’re all set.”

School officials say that for many students, the online library will be cheaper, too. Most families historically have spent about \$700 on books annually for the private school. This year, access to the full online library will run \$150—plus, of course, the cost of a tablet or laptop.

Sometimes, these changes can be a little frightening. In a controversial effort to thwart bullying and other problems, a school district in California is monitoring social media posts made by its 14,000 middle and high school students. The district is paying a company to look for posts that seem to bully, express suicidal thoughts or engaged in some sort of wrongdoing. The school will see pictures posted from the latest party and flag tweets that contain profanity.

Many students take a dim view of the district’s intrusion into their social media space. “We all know social media is not a private place, not really a safe place,” says Young Cho, 16, “but it’s not the same as being in school. It’s students’ expression of their own thoughts and feelings to their friends. For the school to intrude in that area... I understand they can do it, but I don’t think it’s right.”

District officials seem to be pleased with the \$40,500 program thus far. “We think it’s been working very well,” says District Superintendent Dick Sheehan. “It’s designed around student safety and making sure kids are protected.”

Talk About It:

Would you like for your own school to ditch books in favor of a digital library? What would be the upsides of a radical change like that? The downsides? Do you think all schools eventually will move to this or a similar model?

What do you think about a district that's checking up on its students' social media posts? Is it an invasion of privacy? Is it justified if it stops bullying or prevents a suicide? If you knew your school was systematically checking what you said and posted online, would it change how you acted on the Internet? Do you have people monitoring what you say and do online already?

Change is a part of life, of course, and even if things don't look radically different at your school, is there a chance you've changed? What's different about you since last September? Have you made some conscious decisions to change? What were they?

Change can be exciting, but it can also be hard. Have your friends changed during the past few months? Have there been changes in your family? What's changed for the better? What's changed for the worse?

What the Bible Says:

Everything changes—except God. In a world of uncertainty, the Lord remains a constant: forever loving, forever caring, forever there for us.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

Paul Asay has covered religion for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, Beliefnet.com and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book, *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and his two children. Follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.