



Students and parents use the crosswalk to get to California Elementary School in Orange August 20 - the first day of school.

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Schools reopen to excitement, anxiety

First two of O.C.'s 27 school districts begin classes today.

By **FERMIN LEAL**

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Some couldn't hide their excitement, others appeared quite nervous, and handful looked like they were about to cry.

That was the range of emotions among many students – and their proud parents – this morning at California Elementary in Orange on the first day of school.

"I can't believe summer is over," said Mirabel Hernandez, a parent of two students at the school. "It's time for them to start learning again."

California Elementary is among dozens of schools in Orange Unified and Anaheim City school district beginning the 2009-10 school year today, the first two districts in the county. More than 50,000 students returned to school today.

Thronges of parents arrived at California Elementary throughout the morning to drop off their children, right up until the 8 a.m. bell.

Principal Cyndi Paik greeted parents and students throughout the morning.

"I can tell this is going to be a good year," she said.

Many students hugged teachers and other friends they hadn't seen all summer, while some kindergartners clung tightly to their parents arms, somewhat afraid of the new journey they were set to embark upon.

"I think we're all pretty much ready for the start of school," said Victoria Munoz, a parent of a second and third-grader at the school. "My kids were starting to get anxious with so much time off."

Orange Unified is starting two weeks earlier than normal this year after officials adopted a one-track calendar for all campuses. With the earlier start, students will be able to take three weeks off for winter break and two weeks off for spring break. Anaheim City typically starts the new school year around the same time each year.

Across Orange County, some districts have a handful of schools operating on year-round calendars that started in July. Most districts will begin classes the week of Aug.31 or the following week.