

# Hurricane Irene dampens start to school

It was a day Chris Leavens had been anticipating with enthusiasm all summer.

The 22-year-old first-time teacher was all set for the Aug. 29 opening of Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Baynesville before Hurricane Irene intervened and delayed his debut.

"It was a bit of a disappointment to find out it was canceled," said Leavens, who is enrolled in the archdiocesan Operation TEACH program that provides post-graduate education at Notre Dame University of Maryland for students who teach in archdiocesan schools while enrolled in the program.

"I've been preparing all through the summer," he said, "I've been imagining my first day - praying for my students, going into the classroom, getting it ready, doing a lot of practical lesson planning. It was exciting."

Leavens wasn't alone in having his opening-day excitement dampened. Hurricane Irene forced many schools in the archdiocese to delay opening for several days. At least three schools were closed the entire week - St. Mary's School in Annapolis, Loyola Blakefield in Towson and the Institute of Notre Dame in Baltimore.

Plans for a first-ever collective opening for the archdiocesan elementary schools were also squelched by the punishing weather that knocked out power in several counties.

Leavens, a Harrisburg native who teaches eighth-grade American history and language arts and seventh-grade world cultures, said things "went smoothly" when classes finally started Aug. 31.

"All the teachers have been very supportive," said Leavens, who lives in community with other Operation TEACH students at the former convent of Sacred Heart of Mary in Graceland Park. "They've given me a wonderful sense of calm."