Josh Adams thought he was as prepared as a first-year teacher could be on Monday.

Before his first day in front of students at Green Valley High School, he attended orientations and staff meetings, set up his grade book, completed his first week’s lesson plans and learned how to properly pronounce "Nevada."
What he wasn't ready for was the group of girls sitting in the front row of Room 312 throwing him sideways glances and giggling.

"Hi, are you new? Where are you from? Kansas? I can tell," they said, openly flirting with their new math teacher.

After a slight blush and a pause, Adams responded with a calm smile and resumed the day’s task: registering his students.

"We’ll be getting a seating chart," he said after the bell, implying the girls would be split up in future classes.

Adams, 25, is among 1,176 teachers newly hired in the Clark County School District this year, and among 16 fresh faces at Green Valley. Before school starts, new teachers are assigned an on-site mentor, a position held by an experienced teacher, to help them get adjusted. They also start a yearlong training class to keep them on the right track.

Adams is teaching computer science, algebra 2 and applied algebra 1 at Green Valley.

During the last five minutes of his third period class, he offered a brief introduction of himself for the students.

"I know I’m from Kansas. I know that you're dying to say something about the yellow brick road or a munchkin or something like that — please don't. Please don't," he said as students chuckled.

"What else is there to say about Kansas?" one student retorted.

With Adams, there’s a lot more.

While he can go on about how most large airplanes are manufactured in Kansas, along with other key Kansas facts, his slight smile tells a bigger picture of how the state has helped shaped him.

Bob Nellis, Adams' former high school teacher and a colleague during Adams' student teaching, has high expectations. He considered Adams to be one of the leaders of what he called "the golden class" during high school.

"His talents were very evident at a very young age," Nellis said. “I think the students will go to Josh because he's young enough to have that energy but he’s got the maturity of middle age already … I wish all our new teachers had that.”

Adams attended a small high school in El Dorado (pronounced with a long "a"), just outside Wichita, where the school had fewer than 700 students. At Green Valley, the average grade is about that big, with the total student body topping out at more than 2,800.

Despite the school's size, Adams said, Green Valley was his first choice. The school consistently makes adequate yearly progress, is in suburban Henderson rather than urban Las Vegas and has an excellent baseball program (he's a big fan).

As a child, Adams didn't picture himself being a teacher. His father and grandfather were engineers, and he planned to follow in their footsteps. He majored in computer engineering at Kansas State University. In his third year of the five-year program, Adams realized it wasn’t for him.

"It wasn't all that interesting, and I didn't like what I was doing," he said.
That's when Adams, who had enjoyed tutoring, decided to try substitute teaching. In Kansas, college students can substitute teach once they have 60 credit hours.

The experience confirmed that he wanted to be a teacher, and that he would do best in a high school, where wiping noses and drying tears are no longer part of the job.

Adams completed his teaching degree online through Western Governors University in Salt Lake City while he continued working as a substitute. During his student teaching, he knew he had chosen the right field.

"I realized, yeah, this is what I'm supposed to do," he said.

Nellis was initially disappointed to hear about Adams’ change in major, until Adams told him he wanted to be a teacher.

"If we keep getting young people like Josh into education, the system will succeed," Nellis said.

Teacher Tammy Fellers, Adams' supervising teacher during his 12 weeks of student teaching, said she was able to spot three things that would make him successful: his desire to teach, his ability to relate to students and his passion for math.

Fellers said during his student teaching she tried to help him learn from some of her mistakes, but she knows he will have to make his own.

Nellis agreed.

"I think he'll have a great deal of frustration some days, going home at night, pulling his hair out, wondering what else he can do when you bend over backwards to help (certain students) and they still don’t want help," he said.

There's only one thing to do in those situations, Nellis said: Be patient.

Adams has shown so far he has patience to spare. Beyond dealing with giggly girls, he's had to find a way to teach a computer science class that combines several levels of students, from beginning to advanced, and no information on what computer programming skills the advanced students have learned. He also had to figure out a way to teach two algebra 2 classes with only 10 algebra 2 books on his shelf. He had expected to have a class set plus enough for every student to take one home.

Other teachers have helped, providing him with 65 books, enough for every student to check out on homework nights.

He shrugged the issues off.

"This is part of what is making my first semester interesting," he said.

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Discussion: 2 comments so far...

By ZeddyBear
8/27/08 at 8:29 a.m.
Suggest removal
Mr. Adams will be back in Kansas by Christmas. CCSD does that to newbies... eats them up, and then spits them out. Follow the Yellow Brick Road back to the wheat fields......

By dktrmat
8/27/08 at 7:31 p.m.
Suggest removal
Excellent article. Thanks for the positive report.