“Daddy, where are you?” echoes a 5:45 a.m. reso-
nation across our house in a manner that only a
2-year-old could successfully manage.

“Good morning, sweetheart. I’m right here,” is
Daddy’s favored reply. “I love you,” I whisper. “Let’s get
back to sleep. Daddy needs to get up and go to school.
It’s very important for you to help Daddy help the kids.”

And then the day begins: A morning prayer, a quick
breakfast, and a big glass of water to kick-
start the day. Picking out a favorite tie
that the students have not seen for
a few weeks will likely render
again the question of “How
many ties do you have?” later
in the day.

I look over a checklist
of the day’s events and a
folder of last evening’s
work and reports, and
I’m out the door. Twenty
minutes of drive-time
thinking later, I have
the first chance to greet
my early-bird students
and staff members busily
preparing for the day. Our
breakfast crowd arrives short-
ly thereafter, followed by a line
of yellow buses and a stream of
parent drop-offs.

Arrival time marks the excitement of
a new school day, with high fives and “Good
mornings” accentuating this part of the day. After chas-
ing in a wandering tardy, I walk the halls like it was the
first day of school all over again. The excitement of a
new day remains even after 20 years. Following a cup of
coffee, the usual day unfolds with a packed assortment
of meetings, phone calls, and various-sized fires.

Every day brings something new. An occasional child
stops by to have his thinking reordered; a grade-level
meeting requires a review of assessment results or
an explanation of a new initiative; detective work is
needed to determine how a fight started; a conference
is held to discuss accelerating a student with high math
abilities.

Lunchtime brings a welcome midday break, when I
pretend to barter for a neatly packed sushi roll or some
Cheetos from student lunches. (On the very rare occa-
sion that a student actually says, “Sure, go ahead and
have some,” I reply, “Thanks, but I’m on a diet.”) A
knock-knock joke or two later, and the next
group files into their seats for a repeat
performance.

As the school day winds to an
end and the buses file into their
usual order, I again have an
opportunity to exchange stu-
dent debriefings. “How was
your day?” “Have a great
night.” “Smile.” “See you
in the morning.”

By the time a slew of
e-mails are answered,
phone calls returned, fires
extinguished, and ques-
tions answered, I make
another regular “I’m run-
ning late again” call to my
thankfully understanding
wife. On nights when evening
activities do not prevail, home for
the evening entails welcomed hugs
and news of the day’s events. But on this
particular night, a PTA function marks the
13th and 14th hours of the school day. Upon arriving
home, my son is asleep.

“Goodnight, my dear, and I’ll see you when the sun
comes up,” I whisper. “It’s very important for you to
sleep well. That’s how you help Daddy help the kids.”

Christopher J. Peal, Principal
Meadowbrook Elementary School
Novi, Michigan
pealc@walledlake.k12.mi.us.