

Monthly District 25 school tours broaden board members' perspectives

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Paul Vitale, a Pocatello-Chubbuck School District 25 board member, tours Edahow Elementary School Tuesday morning. District board members each tour a different school every month to see the results of their policies in action.

By John O'Connell



POCATELLO — Megan Bullock's fifth-grade students at Edahow Elementary School quietly attempted to solve math problems the teacher acknowledged were more advanced than anything she'd covered in class.

Bullock explained to visiting Pocatello-Chubbuck School District 25 board member Paul Vitale Tuesday morning that the intent of her ambitious arithmetic exam was to provide a lesson in the "power of yet."

Each of the district's five school board members visits a different local school or program on a monthly basis to get a first-hand glimpse of their decisions at work, as well as the innovative approaches being used to educate local children. The board member's will cover every district school and program by the school year's end.

As Vitale learned, "the power of yet" is the concept that students can eventually master the toughest content if they don't give up.

"This morning, I gave them a really hard (problem) that had subtraction with an improper fraction, and they had to figure it out," Bullock said. "There were a lot of (students) who said, 'We don't know how to do that yet,' and I said, 'Yes, we don't know how to do that yet. Let's figure it out.'"

In another classroom, students played online math games using the district's new Istation software. Lori Craney, the district's director of elementary education, explained the state bought Istation as a replacement for its Idaho Reading Indicator, which has long been used as a diagnostic tool to measure the reading proficiency of students from kindergarten through third grade. While the IRI tested reading speed, Craney said Istation evaluates all facets of reading, including comprehension, vocabulary, spelling and phonics.

Craney said School District 25 also opted to purchase supplemental "intervention" software from Istation that provides each student with an individualized "path," offering online coursework chosen based on a student's test performances. The intervention software also includes math programming.

"When we talk about technology, (board members) know what technology we have," Craney said. "We talk all the time about the IRI and Istation. Paul (Vitale) is going to have a really good idea of what that looks like and how the kids are on it."

Vitale, a former school social worker and counselor, has served on District 25's board for seven years. From his many school tours, he's been especially impressed by the district's focus on "visible learning," which entails students learning by doing and seeking answers on their own, rather than being "taught or preached to."

"Where these kids are now compared to 10 years ago is incredible -- the way they learn," Vitale said, adding students are taking greater "responsibility for their education." "Their experience at school is so much different than it has been. They're being challenged, and the expectations for them are high."

Prior to the tour, Edahow Principal Nick Muckerman gave Vitale a slide presentation detailing his school's accomplishments and challenges. Muckerman said his school's classrooms are "pretty full," and he believes the district will have to keep a close eye on space issues that may come with anticipated growth in northeast Pocatello.

Muckerman said he was pleased for the opportunity to show off Edahow's teachers and students to a school board member.

"I think it's great the (school board) wants to come and see what's going on and see the kids in the classes learning," Muckerman said.



Tags

Education Paul Vitale School Student Classroom Lori Craney Megan Bullock Edahow Principal Nick Muckerman