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## **BACK TO SCHOOL: TEACHERS EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM THIS SUMMER**

(BOISE) – When children are let out in late spring to enjoy their summer vacation, that’s when teachers go back to school -- and some of the hottest of all the professional development courses, seminars and workshops available have involved integrating technology into the classroom.

“Technology will never replace good teachers, but the way we teach is going to change,” said Kevin Bushman, who among other things is the director of instructional technology for the Cassia School District and one of the organizers of the upcoming “Cassia Professional Responding – Daily” (CPR-D) conference at Burley High School on August 24<sup>th</sup>.

That conference features a number of professional development opportunities for teachers but is one of three in Idaho this summer, all put together by either local school districts or teachers themselves that have focused on technology in the classroom.

“I think educators realize now, overwhelmingly, that technology is not a fad. It changes the way we do business and to a certain extent our professional culture as a whole,” Bushman said. “Even teachers that weren’t trained with technology as they went through the teacher prep programs in college know that students are no longer motivated or satisfied with a worksheet. Digital natives, as almost all of our students are now, demand access via technology, and it’s our job to monitor that access as well as to shape and direct it.”

Organizers of the CPR-D conference, the Connected in Idaho technology conference, organized by the Minidoka School district and held this June at Minco High in Rupert, and the unique “un-conference” Ed Camp held in Boise this year, all agree that there is a huge demand by teachers to find better, more innovative ways to incorporate technology as a key supplement to their curriculum.

“It’s not just young teachers embracing technology in the classroom,” said Marita Diffenbaugh, one of several volunteer organizers of Ed Camp. More experienced teachers many years of experience also are now using tech as a tool to teach their content, she said. From the newest to the oldest, teachers are embracing the trend toward increasing technology in the classroom.

Ed Camp, which meets in different cities in Idaho each year and this June, was held in Boise, is a unique set of workshops, put together by teacher volunteers with the agenda set on the opening day by participating teachers, who also serve as workshop presenters and facilitators. “Every session this year talked about instructional technology,” Diffenbaugh said.

“Academics and instructional technology are new. We got a little off kilter a few years ago when we just grabbed the tools. The principal said, ‘here’s some iPads, use them to teach the kids’.” But now, she said, it’s about matching the new technology and teaching techniques with the



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content.

“Teachers are eager to learn how to use technology to enhance their classrooms,” said Heather Hepworth, one of the organizers of the Connected in Idaho conference, which drew educators, both “young and old” from throughout southeastern Idaho. Using both outside speakers and teachers from within the district that had been using technology for years, at the end of the conference “teachers left with ideas of how to apply their (technology) learning in their classrooms.”

She noted that “even though young teachers know how to use technology, they still need training in how to use that technology effectively in the classroom. Technology should not be used for the sake of technology; rather it must enhance the learning, or take it to the next level.”

Diffenbaugh agreed. “I see tech growing in the classroom as an integrated piece of curriculum. But I think we’ll do a good job when we can balance everything and provide access to all the different tools (for teaching), some of which could be as simple as a paper and pencil.”

Teachers also shouldn’t stop at just the curriculum use of technology, but use the opportunity to teach about digital literacy and digital citizenship as well, she said. “How do I know it’s a safe website? When I put something on the web, it’s available to the world, so we need to talk about our digital footprint. It’s wonderful, but it can also be dangerous.”

Bushman noted that “we have to be careful on the ways we introduce and implement technology into the classroom. Things are so different now (because of technology), not just in the classroom. It’s a reflection of how things are changing everywhere.”

“Nobody can tell where technology is going to go in the future,” he added, “but if I had to guess it would be in some sort of personalized learning plan (for students).”

“Learning management systems will take care of a lot of the heavy lifting in terms of tracking student progress on mastering content, but there is going to be more emphasis placed on production,” Bushman said.

“We’re going to let technology assure us that our students have all those skills, but we’re also going to have students that can problem solve and create. Technology will allow teachers to be those ‘guides on the sides’ and not necessarily the ‘sage on the stage,’ and that’s a good thing.” The strong turnout at conferences such as Ed Camp, Connected in Idaho and CPR-D, and the networking of skills and expertise that they promote, demonstrate that Idaho teachers are embracing technology as a tool to begin a revolution in education, and have begun the crucial peer-to-peer discussions about how to shape the framework of that revolution.

“Technology is bringing education into the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” Diffenbaugh said, “all the while empowering both students and teachers.”

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