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Special education team fills in at West Ada so teachers can take training

(BOISE) – Six members of the Superintendent of Public Instruction’s special education team volunteered as substitute teachers at West Ada schools Tuesday morning, freeing the schools’ special ed teachers for a half day of assistive technology training.

Dr. Charlie Silva, director of Special Education, said the six stepped up when they learned substitutes were needed to enable the West Ada teachers to attend TouchChat communication technology training.

The move fits in with Superintendent Ybarra’s efforts to encourage staff and other Idahoans to help short-staffed local districts and charter schools by filling in as substitute teachers, bus drivers and other hard-to-fill positions.

“I was thrilled to see my special eds folks taking this initiative,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “It’s a big help to the schools and teachers, and also – as I learned when I substituted in elementary schools two days last month – it is a great experience for those doing the substituting to get our boots on the ground again in classrooms.”

Dr. Silva agrees. “We had a blast,” she said. “It was great to be back in the classroom, and the para-educators were amazing.”

She spent the morning at Mary McPherson Elementary School. She worked in an extended resource classroom, as did most of her team members. Their assignments:

- Debi Smith, special ed preschool, Meridian Elementary
- Shannon Dunstan, Hunter Elementary
- Randi Cole, Lewis and Clark Middle School
- Dr. Karren Streagle, Chief Joseph School of the Arts
- Kim Shaner, River Valley Elementary

Through a program launched by Gov. Brad Little with federal COVID relief funds, staff of executive branch agencies can use paid leave – separate from their existing vacation time – to serve as substitutes. They also may be eligible to receive the district’s rate for substitute pay, but neither Superintendent Ybarra nor any of the special ed professionals opted to be paid.

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