

Press Release



Battle Ground Public Schools

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New School Board member Idsinga reflects on his visits to every classroom in the district

The three new members of the Battle Ground School Board do get around.

Steve Pagel, Monty Anderson and John Idsinga got around the 271 square-mile-district plenty this past spring and winter as they tackled the duo tasks of helping govern the district while also learning as much about it as possible as quickly as possible — up close and in person.

Since they were sworn in on Dec. 5, 2009, Pagel, Anderson and Idsinga have toured the schools (There are 20 total), led by Superintendent Shonny Bria and the respective principals. They visited dozens of individual classrooms and talked with scores of teachers and other school employees.

Over the course of the visits, there were rare occasions when one of them couldn't make it. Idsinga, however, managed to make it to all 20 schools. And that's not all. The former Battle Ground mayor -- a grandfather of a student in the district and more to follow -- has visited *every classroom* in the district since his election. The school district's principals association this spring presented Idsinga with a plaque commemorating his achievement and his dedication to the job of School Board member.

In a recent interview with Gregg Herrington, the district's communications director, Idsinga shared some observations based on those tours and other input in his first seven months as one of five directors of the Battle Ground School District.

Question: What's the most dominant single impression you gained as a result of the school and classroom tours and your talks with teachers and other employees?

Answer: This answer sounds too easy, but it's true: Teachers love to teach and they are there for the kids. On the outside, we might look at teachers as simply part of the labor force – people doing a job. But to them, it's a 'calling.' Teachers love what they do, and that's why they do it. I saw this in the classrooms, where they interact with students, but also when they collaborate with other teachers. They are always looking for better ways to teach – to have a positive impact on the students.

Q: Was there any one classroom visit that rose above the others as especially memorable or significant?

A: I can't give you just one. There were too many. They included the class at Maple Grove

Middle School where the students were brainstorming ways to raise money for a project to beautify the school and plant trees. Also at Maple Grove Middle was our visit to Karl Johnson's class. (He pioneered the district's first alternative core class at the middle school level.) The students in his class will tell you that they appreciate him and the core class opportunity.

At Yacolt Primary, Allison Tucharth started a program to monitor and help students with their reading skills (our very own "No Child Left Behind" program). That program now is being used at Maple Grove and Glenwood primaries. And there was Patty Alway's government class at Prairie High School. That was really impressive.

Q: Changing the subject from the school visits, what are your impressions thus far about the actual work and the dynamics of the School Board and its meetings?

A: I am impressed at how well the Board members work together. We listen and discuss and seek ideas and solutions, all in a positive spirit. That certainly was the case at the meeting in December – our first meeting as a new Board – when we discussed and approved the district's strategic plan to guide us in improving education for our kids. Then we agreed that we would ask voters to approve a new three-year school levy. That was a landmark day for the Board and for the district.

Q: Things can't be all ducky, can they? What are the problems or downsides you've learned about since taking office?

A: The needs of the district at a time of tight money. We might seek partnerships with the private sector or other government agencies. Maybe there's a way to partner with Clark College in some way that would be beneficial to the college and Battle Ground schools. But there are lots of needs, including technology upgrades, new curriculum adoptions, and significant physical needs. Examples of those are the aging Glenwood Heights Primary and Laurin Middle School, the lack of a cafeteria at the Pleasant Valley campus and the need for a new roof at Yacolt Primary. And we have those old, dilapidated buildings downtown that we no longer use, such as the old Central School.

Q: Any final thoughts?

A: Overall, I was amazed at what the schools look like and how they feel from the inside. When people question our schools, they should spend time in them.

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