

Better Pay and Benefits for Substitute Teachers

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Abstract

The shortage of substitute teachers is a national crisis. Many school and district leaders are finding it difficult meeting the demands of the substitute crisis. Some students sit in class for almost the entire day without doing anything or having any kind of formal instruction or assignment. State and district education leaders along with proponents of education should be concerned about the impact the substitute shortage can have on the education of students. States have to revisit their statutes on the pay and benefits of substitute teachers. The unattractiveness of the pay for substitute teachers and lack of benefits have driven many good substitute teachers from the profession. Most of the data used for this brief were on-line sources. Few of the recommendations made to remedy the crisis were to increase the pay, provide both short- and long-term benefits, and increase the morale of substitute teachers. Until educators and educational stakeholders do something about the shortage crisis, the problem will continue to exist and become worse.

Keywords: Policy, substitute teacher, benefits, incentives

Statement of Issue

The education of many students across the country is in jeopardy due to the lack of substitute teachers. School districts are in a crisis because there is a shortage of substitute teachers in the United States. School and district leaders nation-wide are scrambling to get substitute teachers to resolve the dilemma but to no avail. Educators in Michigan like other states acknowledge the substitute shortage and deemed it as an alarming situation that is rapidly spreading throughout the country. Students sit in class for days without receiving any content-related instruction.

What is the cause of the shortage? In an article by Marvin Goetz of The News-Press, he highlighted some key reasons given by Dr. Angela Pruitt of Lee County School District as to why there is and will always be a substitute shortage. Referring to a release by the Lee County Association of Professional Substitute Teachers (LCAPST), she points out the reasons as follows: The lack of adequate compensation which has not kept up with the cost of living, no benefits and Affordable Care is ignored, lack of social security coverage for those approaching retirement, application process is neither transparent nor user friendly, lack of career ladder for advancement, no pay differentiation for experience, higher degrees, or in-service work, lack of adequate training program for new substitute teachers, the lack of equality between permanent teachers and substitutes, and lack of ethical respect and considerations for substitutes (The News-Press, 2016). Usually when a teacher is out due to health, vacation, or personal reasons, a substitute is hired to take over that teacher's class until that teacher gets back. There are two categories of substituting. One of the categories is licensed and the other is unlicensed.

A licensed substitute teacher is a person who currently holds a license credential to teach the grade level for which he or she is licensed. A teacher who has an expired license can also be considered as licensed for substitution purposes by his or her home state. On the contrary, an unlicensed substitute teacher is a person who does not hold any licensed credentials to teach. That person does not have to be a former teacher or have any educational experiences. There are short term and long term substitute positions. A short term substituting position could range from two or three days to one or two months. While a long term substituting position could range from three to six months or the entire school year.

A substitute assignment could be instructional, that is, the substitute teacher will have to instruct the students to do their work or teach the lesson for that day or while the teacher is out until that teacher gets back. A non-instructional substituting assignment is one that does not require the substitute teacher to provide any instruction. The substitute teacher is to hand the assignment out that the teacher may have left for them to do in class. Usually, the teacher will leave written instructions on the desk for the substitute teacher to follow. Sometimes, the assignment is written on the board, on a certain website, in a book, or some source.

According to Indeed.com, the average salary for licensed substitute teachers before tax is \$101 per day, after taxes it could be few dollars lower depending on the tax rate of the state. According to National Education Association (NEA), non-licensed substitute teachers receive anywhere between \$60 to \$65 per day in the classroom before or after taxes, it should be few dollars less based on the tax rate of the state. Therefore, on an hourly pay scale, licensed substitute teachers are making about \$13 per hour (ziptecruiter.com, Table 1 of the Appendix)

while non-licensed substitute teachers receive an hourly rate of \$8. Data on the website of Indeed.com reveals that some fast food restaurant employees make few dollars more than a substitute teacher plus benefits. Substitute teachers, both licensed and non-licensed receive no health benefits

As teachers begin to leave the profession due to less pay, incentives/ immunities, or stress, school leaders should be able to staff their schools with licensed or trained professionals who can take the place of teachers whenever a vacancy exists. School leaders have maneuver proactively by recruiting substitute teachers to fill the empty classrooms. Due to the alarming crisis of substitute teacher shortage, it may be difficult for school leaders to fill those vacant positions in a timely fashion. They may have to be creative to find ways to attract substitute teachers.

School administrators across the country are scrambling to find substitute teachers to fill their classrooms. The shortage has become a national issue. The severity of the situation has moved school leaders to try to implement ad hoc policies to minimize the number of days teachers could call out for. Some school leaders have designated a certain time during the calendar year teachers could take vacations or call out. Parents and other stakeholders are concerned because sometimes it takes months before students can receive any actual class lessons. Keeping students that long in the classroom without receiving any instruction is detrimental towards their learning. That could affect their performance, they may not cover every lesson or topic depicted by the curriculum, and it could affect the morale and confidence of students. While it is important to address the absenteeism of teachers before addressing the substitute shortage, school administrators have to be careful how they try to restrict teachers to

not call out when they need to because emergencies do happen. It will be unfair to teachers if such restrictions are imposed on them. There should be a better approach because this too could escalate to the level of causing teachers to decide whether to remain with the school or find another school or quit teaching. Teachers deserve a break from the classroom. In fact, one of the reasons why teachers leave the profession is stress. So if school leaders do not show some modesty in addressing teachers about their absenteeism, they may never solve the substitute crisis. Next, full health benefit should be offered to licensed substitute teachers who have long term assignments. Partial benefits, such as eye care or medical, or dental care should be offered to non-licensed substitute teachers who have long term assignments as well. The salaries of both licensed and non-licensed substitute teachers should increase to a reasonable rate. Next, teachers should enroll in professional development sessions to be trained about knowing how to respect substitute teachers. Teachers and substitute teachers need to have workshop sessions together where they can learn how to collaborate and work together as a team. Teachers should also encourage their students to respect substitute teachers.

Most of the recommendations made by Dr. Marvin A. Goetz, president of the Lee County Association of Professional Substitute Teachers in the New Press magazine seem viable and genuine. By and large, these are some of the solutions many propose could solve the substitute crisis. Dr. Goetz recommends that the pay of substitute teachers should be increased based on the cost of living and a percentage of the salary scale for full-time teachers, he also wants the pay scale for those hard-to-supply schools, specific difficult classes, and low performing schools to increase, he proposes that monetary incentives should be given to substitute teachers who take additional workshops and classes for professional development purposes, Dr. Goetz wants those

guest teachers who go beyond and above the scope of their job to be recognized by providing stipends and tuition reimbursement pay, he wants the eligibility requirements for long-term compensation to be shortened or eliminated, he proposes that guest teachers should be reimbursed for application costs if required and bonuses should be given to substitute teachers who work for over 120 days, and he wants long term substitute teachers to be provided sick days with pay. Other approaches educators are taking in few states is to switch the responsibility to private firms or recruiting companies who are responsible for training and filling vacant classrooms with substituted teachers as warranted. Even though the aforementioned recommendations may seem feasible, they could be adjusted on a state-by-state basis considering factors such as regionality and socioeconomic conditions.

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Appendix

Table 1: Hourly Pay Rate of Substitute Teachers by State

State	Hourly Rate	State	Hourly Rate
New York	\$13.64	Oregon	\$11.79
Massachusetts	\$13.55	Colorado	\$11.76
Maryland	\$12.86	South Carolina	\$11.74
California	\$12.67	Oklahoma	\$11.62
Vermont	\$12.66	Indiana	\$11.62
West Virginia	\$12.60	Ohio	\$11.60
Alaska	\$12.50	South Dakota	\$11.56
Nevada	\$12.50	Tennessee	\$11.53
Montana	\$12.50	New Jersey	\$11.52
North Dakota	\$12.50	Wisconsin	\$11.50
Wyoming	\$12.50	Kentucky	\$11.50
Idaho	\$12.50	Utah	\$11.40
Hawaii	\$12.46	Texas	\$11.38
Arizona	\$12.39	New Mexico	\$11.32
Delaware	\$12.38	Georgia	\$11.28
Washington	\$12.35	Missouri	\$11.08
Rhode Island	\$12.30	Alabama	\$11.05
Virginia	\$12.25	Mississippi	\$11.02
Connecticut	\$12.18	Michigan	\$10.90
Nebraska	\$12.16	Maine	\$10.87
Minnesota	\$12.12	Kansas	\$10.83
New Hampshire	\$12.11	Illinois	\$10.80
Louisiana	\$11.89	Arkansas	\$10.58

Pennsylvania	\$11.88	Florida	\$10.06
Iowa	\$11.81	North Carolina	\$10.04

Note. Adapted from “What is the average substitute teacher salary by state?”, by zipcruiter.com, (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/What-Is-the-Average-Substitute-Teacher-Salary-by-State>