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ABSTRACT

This news brief presents information on managing substitute teaching. The information is based on issues discussed at a summit meeting which included public school administrators and personnel directors from around the nation. The main topics of concern focused around four core components related to the management of substitute teaching: recruiting and retaining, screening, training, and evaluating. Regarding recruitment and retention, non-monetary incentives tend to be more effective than monetary incentives. Screening involves prescreening, paper and pencil screening, interviewing, and background checks. Training is the backbone of a viable substitute teaching program and will alleviate many, if not most, problems associated with substitute teaching. Training falls into two categories: preservice and inservice. Evaluation serves to assess the substitute teacher's performance and to determine the efficacy of a school's or district's recruiting, screening, and training programs. Evaluation typically focuses on professionalism, classroom skills, and interpersonal skills. (SM)

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Managing Substitute Teaching

Kevin R. Jones

Liberal contracts for teachers, provisions of the Family and Medical Leave Act, and mandatory inservice training have all led to teachers spending less time in their classrooms and to a greater need for substitute teachers. This comes at a time when the robust economy is luring many would-be substitutes into other fields. In short, this supply-and-demand cycle is fueling an unprecedented crisis in substitute teaching.

To address this issue, 22 public school administrators and personnel directors gathered recently in Park City, Utah, for a first-of-its-kind summit meeting on substitute teaching. Hosted by the Substitute Teaching Institute at Utah State University, the diverse group represented schools and districts from Alaska to Florida,

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with student enrollments ranging from a few hundred in rural settings to over 150,000 in urban districts.

Topics of concern ultimately centered around four core components related to the management of substitute teaching—recruiting and retaining, screening, training, and evaluating—each of which will be discussed here.

Recruiting and Retaining

As grandpa used to say when it came to fishing, "The better the bait, the better the catch." And so it is with assembling a viable substitute teaching pool. Since substitute teachers are "at will" employees, not governed by contract, they are free to accept or reject requests to substitute at a particular school or for a particular assignment. When several schools are competing for the same substitutes, a principal must use "better bait" to fill vacancies created when regular teachers are absent.

Better bait is not necessarily

better pay. Districts that have increased wages, but not provided other incentives, have shown little if any improvement of their substitute teaching pools. While principals typically have little voice in what substitutes are paid, what they can provide are non-monetary incentives. Professional acceptance and social inclusion often play a larger role in substitute teachers' job satisfaction than monetary compensation.

Among substitute teachers, word quickly spreads as to which schools provide the best environment. Often, the actions and attitudes of the principal can influence a substitute teacher's decision to work at one school rather than another. Consider this sampling of measures that a principal can employ to create a "happy camper" attitude for substitute teachers:

- Personally greet each substitute when she or he comes to your school.
- Personally thank each substitute following each assignment.
- Look in on classes; let the substitute know you are there to assist if needed.
- Use positive body language: a smile, a nod, a handshake, a thumbs-up.
- Assign a neighboring teacher as

a mentor or resource contact.

- Send thank-you notes.

Screening

Assessing potential substitutes as competent and effective educators can be a costly and complicated process. However, a timely, well-designed applicant screening procedure can ultimately save untold amounts of time, money, and headaches by precluding the employment of undesirable or unqualified applicants.

Four common aspects of screening include: *prescreening*, *paper/pencil screening*, *interviewing*, and *background checks*. While there is no guarantee that successful applicants will be risk-free, thorough screening can significantly reduce the odds that any but caring and qualified substitute teachers are admitted to your classrooms.

Prescreening. A simple prescreening form, designed to determine employment liabilities, not teaching capabilities, can eliminate undesirable candidates without wasting time and resources on additional screening. Some sample prescreening questions:

- Can you provide transcripts of your education?
- Will you submit to a drug/alcohol test?
- Do you have a criminal history?
- Are you related to anyone working in the school or district?
- May we contact your previous employer(s)?

Paper/Pencil Screening. For

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY

This article is in support of the following standard from *Standards for Quality Elementary & Middle Schools, Third Edition (NAESP 1996)*:

Organization. Sufficient numbers of well-qualified personnel are provided to fulfill the school's goals.

The Problem of Teacher Absenteeism

Teacher absenteeism is the major reason behind the demand for substitute teachers, and its true cost may exceed immediate monetary considerations. Because there is a close correlation between teacher attendance and student achievement, high teacher absenteeism negatively impacts both individual and classroom performance.

Unlike substitutes, who are "at will" employees, permanent teachers' employment is stringently governed by contracts and policies. For principals, addressing the issue of teacher absenteeism can be complex and volatile.

What can be done to reduce teacher absenteeism? School boards, district administrators, and building administrators must work together in negotiating contracts, establishing policies, and creating work environments that will encourage teachers to remain in their classrooms. The principal can play a key role by:

- Monitoring teachers' call-ins for absences;
- Regularly reviewing data on teacher absences;
- Promoting schoolwide enrichment activities;
- Counseling teachers who are feeling isolated or depressed;
- Welcoming back returning teachers; and
- Encouraging teachers to build a reserve of sick days.

applicants who satisfactorily complete the prescreening process, paper/pencil screening is the first step in determining their potential effectiveness as substitute teachers. This screening may determine qualities and limitations which can aid administrators in evaluating and/or ranking applicants. The results will also help determine whether or not an applicant should proceed further in the screening process. Here are some considerations for paper/pencil screening:

- It should be short and simple, no more than 20 questions.
- It may be grade- and/or subject-specific.
- It should have a predetermined pass/fail score.

- It can be computer-based for ease in administration, scoring, and ranking.

- All questions should be yes/no, true/false, or multiple choice.

Interviewing. Having eliminated many, if not most unqualified applicants via prescreening and paper/pencil screening, principals can now focus on qualifications and/or limitations that are not easily discernable in a written format. Interviews may be one-on-one, as part of a group, or even conducted over the telephone. They should normally take no more than ten minutes and the format should be short and simple for both the applicant and the principal. The interview should look for a candidate's:

- Verbal ability;
 - Empathy and compassion;
 - Dedication and resourcefulness;
 - Enthusiasm and confidence;
- and
- Professional dress.

Background Check. To avoid unnecessary time and expense, background checks should only be conducted on applicants who have qualified on the basis of all other screening processes. A thorough background check helps ensure that information obtained from an applicant is correct and that the applicant is suitable for employment. Background checks should include:

- Character references;
- Previous employers' references;
- Medical clearance;
- Drug/alcohol test results; and
- Local, state, and FBI records.

Training

The backbone of a viable substitute teaching program is training. A good training program will alleviate many, if not most, problems associated with substitute teaching. In a nutshell, when substitute teachers or potential substitutes receive adequate training, they are more likely to accept assignments, and do a better job in those assignments. This translates into more availability and fewer problems with substitute teachers.

Training generally falls into two categories—preservice and inservice. Preservice training must go beyond, "Here are the keys, there's the bathroom, and don't hit the kids." It should include a thorough orientation of school rules, policies, and procedures. It should also include basic instruction in classroom management and teaching strategies.

Substitutes also greatly benefit by receiving substitute teaching handbooks. These should not only include a variety of lesson plans

and activities, but suggestions for preparation, dealing with classroom behavior, lesson presentation, fill-in activities, and assembling a sub pack—a portable kit containing personal supplies and teaching aids.

Inservice training for substitute teachers, analogous to that for permanent teachers, must be regularly implemented and updated. Ongoing training is essential to improving skills and keeping abreast of current school policies and recent innovations in instructional pedagogy. To facilitate this training, principals must establish and maintain a working relationship with substitute teachers and substitute teaching coordinators. This helps ensure that inservice training is meeting the present and future needs of substitutes, while taking into account their previously acquired knowledge and skills.

Schools that have implemented training programs have increased their substitute teaching pools, decreased complaints, and improved the quality and continuity of classroom instruction. Some tips for substitute training:

- Include training for special needs students.
- Discuss diversity and inclusion.
- Cover legal requirements, including confidentiality.
- Demonstrate effective teaching strategies.
- Provide a variety of classroom management techniques.

Evaluating

Evaluation serves not only to assess the performance of substitute teachers, but to determine the efficacy of a school or district's recruiting, screening, and training programs. While evaluation methods and focuses will be different for each school, topics will generally include *professionalism*, *classroom skills*, and *interpersonal skills*.

Professionalism. The apparel, actions, and attitudes of substitutes greatly influence whether they are perceived as effective educators or temporary fill-ins. Further, the dress and manner of all school personnel are major factors in influencing public opinion concerning their professionalism—and substitutes are no exception. Indicators of professionalism include dress, grooming, hygiene, promptness, and courtesy.

Classroom Skills. A defining element of substitute teaching is the ability to select and employ appropriate materials and methods for instruction, along with effective classroom management. Establishing an environment that not only allows but truly promotes learning is the hallmark of a master educator. Essential classroom skills should include:

For More Information

The Substitute Teaching Institute (STI) has published the complete results of the Park City summit meeting on substitute teaching in its *SubJournal*. STI also publishes *SubGuide*, a manual of best practices in substitute teaching, and the *Substitute Teaching Handbook*, providing more than 200 pages of professional management skills and teaching strategies.

For more information on STI publications and programs, contact Kevin Jones at Substitute Teaching Institute, 6516 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6516. 800-922-4693. Fax: 435-797-3663. E-mail: SubEd@cc.usu.edu
Web site: <http://SubEd.usu.edu>

- Following and enforcing school and classroom rules;
- Dealing appropriately with problems;
- Adhering to established school procedures;
- Avoiding coercion in maintaining classroom order; and
- Respecting school and personal property.

Interpersonal Skills. Substitutes, like other teachers, must interact with a diversity of people and settings. Getting along with coun-

selors and custodians is important, and by creating a pleasant atmosphere both inside and outside the classroom setting the substitute can help positively influence the entire school. When evaluating interpersonal skills, the principal should consider these characteristics:

- Initiates positive interactions;
- Uses nonjudgmental language;
- Listens intently and completely before responding;
- Does not engage in gossip, back-

biting, or slanderous comments; and

- Is not limited or confined in interactions with diverse people and settings.

As on-site administrators, principals can have a profound impact on establishing and maintaining adequate pools of qualified substitute teachers. They must devise and encourage innovative strategies to attract, train, and retain substitute teachers. Effective leadership is the key to a quality substitute teaching program.

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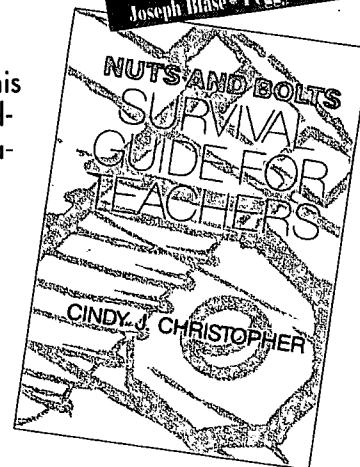
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