

Recruiting Strategies for Substitute Teachers

By Andrae Ferguson

With the increasing need and decreasing availability of substitute teachers, school personnel are assuming the role of creative and aggressive marketers in effort to recruit substitute teachers. They are forming subcommittees of administrators, teachers, substitutes, parents, students, union members, and lawyers to address the shortage and develop action plans to find a balance between the supply and demand (Elizabeth, 2001d).

Pay increases, lower standards, and job fairs are among the innovative methods being used to recruit substitutes. Increased advertisement, pay incentives, and active recruiting measures are all being used to find the adequate substitute pool. Many administrators have sought the assistance of temporary agencies in order to meet their substitute staffing needs.

Pay Increases

While salary is generally not the major factor in recruiting substitutes, some schools have found it necessary to increase their pay in order to remain competitive with other schools in the area (Kievra, 1998). Innovative pay increases are being offered across the country, including state mandated, incentive, commuters, and extended employee pay scales. Some districts also offer employment benefits to substitutes.

State Mandated Pay

Pennsylvania Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, introduced House Bill 406 that would increase the pay for substitutes to 60 to 90 percent of the district's starting salary. With the tremendous impact that substitutes have on today's students, he is concerned that many of them are earning less than minimum wage and that they should be paid similar to regular teachers in order to eliminate the perception that substitutes are just baby sitters (Elizabeth, 2001c).

Incentive Pay

About 30 schools in Florida's Orange County School District are considered "high needs." Many substitute teachers do not want to work in these schools. As an incentive to place substitutes in these schools, the district implemented a pay scale that is up to \$40 a day more than other schools. The fill rate increased from 75-80 percent last year to 96-99 percent this year (Elizabeth, 2001b).

Commuters Pay

Brighton County School District (CO) instituted a pay increase in order to draw commuting substitutes to their district. Located in a more remote area of the state and with rising gas prices nationwide, Brighton finds it more challenging to entice substitute teachers. Daily pay in the district increased to \$106 from \$95 in December 2000 (Ednalino, 2001).

Extended Employment Pay Increases

Another creative means of offering increased pay is to reward substitutes for extended periods of service, either within the district, or a specific position.

New Kensington-Arnold School District (PA) recommended a program to their board intended to attract more substitutes by increasing pay based on the number of days worked. In June of 1998, the board approved a plan that created a graduated pay scale, compensating those working more days in the district with increased pay. The plan was implemented at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year, however by mid-October they had seen little increase in the number of substitutes available and continue to have difficulties finding enough substitutes. Another option being explored by the district is to guarantee subs 10 to 20 days of consecutive work, says Superintendent Tom Wilczek (Everett, 1998).

Several districts in Colorado have adjusted their pay rates to compensate those with extended employment times, as outlined in the chart below (Ednalino, 2001).

Colorado Extended Service Pay Rates (Ednalino, 2001)			
School District	Normal Daily Rate	Extended Rate	Requirements
Brighton	\$106	\$125	30 days or more on the same assignment
Cherry Creek	\$80	\$134	Beginning on the 61 st day taught in the district during any one school year
Denver	\$111	\$139	Assignments lasting more than 16 days; retroactive to the first day of the assignment; limited to 89 days.
Douglas County	\$80	\$91 \$96 \$140	11-40 days in the same position if agreed in advance to work 41-60 days 61-89 days
Jefferson County	\$80	\$95	Increases on the 60 th day taught in the district in any one school year
Littleton	\$80	\$125 \$125	Beginning on the 86 th day of instruction in any one school year After the 14 th day on the same assignment
Weld County	\$73	\$76 \$129	When attending 10 or more training modules in the district When an assignment lasts more than 15 consecutive days

Employment Benefits

Districts have also considered offering employment benefits such as health insurance, professional development training, and tuition reimbursement to attract substitutes.

- In additional attempts to recruit and retain substitutes, Valley Middle School in New Kensington-Arnold School District (PA) proposed that the district offer special professional development opportunities to substitutes that pledged to be available whenever needed (Everett, 1998).
- A survey conducted by Covington School District (KY) to determine teacher recruitment recommendations suggested that the district provide tuition assistance for teachers who chose to continue their education. They also recommended that the district pay a portion of student teachers' tuition when they commit to teach in the district after graduation (Tortora, 2000).

Permanent Substitutes

One short-term solution to the substitute teacher shortage is the use of permanent substitutes. Several school districts hire permanent substitutes that report to the same school each day and fill in wherever they are needed. In most cases, the pay is still low with minimal or no benefits, and candidates are difficult to find (Elizabeth, 2001b). A benefit to this approach is the relationships built between students, faculty, and substitutes. Permanent substitutes within a school also provide a greater level of continuity in the learning experience of the students (Ford, 2001).

Several schools in the Washington, DC area hire permanent substitutes that are kept on staff to fill in for regular teachers when they are absent. These substitutes are paid salaries comparable to their regular teacher counterparts and must complete the same pre-hiring process (Hernandez, 2001).

Lower Standards

In addition to increasing pay and providing employment benefits, many districts have opted to reduce the hiring standards for substitute teachers. Schools in Auburn, WA, boosted substitute pay from \$92 to \$100 per day and dropped the requirements for substitute teachers. Where a teacher's certificate was once required to substitute in their district, a bachelor's degree is all they now require (de Pommereau, 1997).

The Colorado Department of Education began issuing one-year substitute authorizations in 1994, requiring substitutes to have a high school diploma or equivalent and "evidence of successful experience working with children." The goal is to provide qualified teachers for every class, whether it is a regular day or a substitute day, says Deborah Fallin, spokeswoman for the Colorado Education Association. Jeff

Gomez, assistant superintendent for the Jefferson County School District, says the one-year authorizations have been beneficial in building the substitute pool in his county. They experience a high volume of substitute jobs, with over 60,000 requests last year (Ednalino, 2001).

Flexibility

Many districts promote the job's flexibility as a key selling point in enticing new candidates. Flexibility offers additional rewards to individuals seeking full-time teaching positions. Teacher candidates can scout the various school systems while earning a modest living. They also experience first-hand what a career in the classroom will be like (Perry, 2001).

- Individuals like Dorothy Hearn of Montgomery County (MD) work as substitute teachers for the simple reason that they "like kids and want kids to have a good teacher when their teacher has to leave" (Elizabeth, 2001c).
- Bernice Wonderly, a substitute in Fairfax County (VA), held a retail job for five years that paid \$2 per hour more than her substitute job. She has chosen to substitute because the hours correspond to the hours her children are in school. In addition, she loves working with children (Bernice Wonderly, personal communication, June 14, 2001).

Part-Time Substitutes

Maureen Bergren, a detective corporal with the Peachtree City (GA) police department and 1989 graduate of McIntosh High School in Peachtree City, once feared that being approached by a cop meant trouble. She hopes to change that perception of cops in her volunteer role of substitute teacher at Peachtree City's middle and high school. With more than a dozen officers signed up in 1996, Bergren is one of five McIntosh High graduates shedding their police uniforms and donning civilian clothes to return to the school as teachers on their days off. Students will see officers as people, not law enforcement figures, and the officer will view them as students and individuals, rather than troublemakers (Ellis, 1996).

Chicago Public Schools struggle with the issue of how to fill the 1,500 daily requests for substitute teachers. Typically only two-thirds of the requests are filled, leading them to turn to off-duty firemen and policemen. While substitutes have been hired from these ranks in the past, CEO Paul Vallas began the formal push for recruiting in January 1999 by placing advertisements in the fire and police department employee newsletters. Fire and police officers must have at least a bachelor's degree, but it can be in any field. As of September 1999, twenty-four policemen and eight firemen have enrolled in the program (Rodgers, 1999).

John O'Mally, a policeman from Chicago's 18th District, experienced some challenges when the students found out that he is a cop, however, once they realized that he was there not to discipline, but to teach, their attitudes changed. O'Mally used his experience substituting at Roosevelt High School as a means to gain hands-on experience while working on a master's degree in education (Rodgers, 1999).

James Litland, a fireman from Engine 82, minored in education in college, and began substituting before the formal recruitment efforts began. He enjoys having "the best of both worlds," where he can continue to work as a fireman, a job that he loves, while fulfilling his dream of teaching. He is considering returning to college for a master's degree in education (Rodgers, 1999).

Prospective Substitutes

With schools often perceived as "scraping the bottom of the barrel" to fill vacant positions, administrators are looking to unconventional candidates to substitute teach. Retired teachers, teacher applicants, teachers in training, community members, and those seeking mid-life career changes are all being targeted as prospective substitute teachers. Many states are even implementing alternative routes to obtain the certification necessary to substitute in various districts.

Retired Teachers

In *The Christian Science Monitor* (1997), Isabelle de Pommereau cites the recruitment of retired teachers in Broward County (FL) as a method of increasing the number of substitutes in their sub pool. After sending letters to hundreds of retired teachers, they ended up with over 100 willing teachers. Others, like Debbie Trombold of Ohio Township (PA) are experienced certified teachers that enjoy the flexibility of substituting so they can focus their attention on their children (Elizabeth, 2001a).

The Louisiana State legislature has approved a bill that allows retired teachers to work as substitute teachers without it affecting their retirement benefits. Individual school boards in Pennsylvania must approve changes such as this, however, Rep. Stephen Stetler, D-York, sponsored a bill in the Pennsylvania legislature that would allow retired teachers statewide to work more hours without docking their retirement pay (Elizabeth, 2001b).

Teacher Applicants

Marsha Turner, a first-year teacher in McCandless, PA, substitutes in Pittsburgh's northern suburban schools while seeking a permanent teaching position (Elizabeth, 2001a).

Teachers in Training

Dumas School District (TX) implemented a unique plan to recruit

what the district hopes will result in better-trained substitutes as well as more full-time teachers. The plan was to sign up 20 local college students who would receive tuition help from the district for working in the school district as substitutes three days a week. The students have also agreed to spend five years teaching in the 4,200-student district upon graduation. This program benefits both the district and the college students, as the prospective teachers are able to experience what it is like to be a teacher before they enter the profession. These “permanent substitutes” receive \$50 per day, health insurance, sick days, and personal days in addition to their tuition assistance (Elizabeth, 2001b).

Louisiana and Pennsylvania have also implemented programs that bring education students into the classroom as substitutes. Patrick O’Malley, human resources director for the St. Charles (LA) Parish Public Schools, feels that every education major should experience substitute teaching. This win-win situation gives students the opportunity to practice the skills they are learning in an ideally flexible job (Elizabeth, 2001b).

Montgomery County School District in Washington, DC constantly advertises for substitutes. They have recently interviewed student teachers who are applying for full-time positions to work as substitutes after they graduate in May until the end of school in June, says Linda Walker, the system’s substitute teacher coordinator (Ford, 2001).

Schools in Leominster, MA, are considering hiring college seniors during winter break (Kievra, 1998). Briston (CT) School Superintendent Ann Clark has found that “students make excellent substitutes because they are trying to line up work after they graduate, and are energetic, creative, and dedicated” (Weizel, 1998).

Community Members

Community members in Warren County (KY) that are at least 25 years old have the opportunity to attend a one-day training program, receive training materials, and “shadow” a permanent teacher for two days, in order to have the state’s 64-hour college credit requirement waived. According to Superintendent Dale Brown, the program has been successful in providing substitute teachers that are focused on teaching (Elizabeth, 2001b). Dick Poe, director of personnel for Kentucky’s Covington Independent School District, is in charge of his district’s participation in this program. He says that they are “looking to recruit people from individualized schools – parents and volunteers” with the purpose of having “folks who know the school and would be a substitute in that school” (Vance, 1998).

Individuals recruited for substitute positions through this program must attend a 20-hour seminar provided by the Mayerson Academy in Cincinnati, OH. They learn about district policies and procedures, safety issues, classroom management, and enhancing the learning process (Vance, 1998).

Mid-Life Career Changers

By providing the means for mid-career changers to move into the field of professional teacher, the demand for substitute teachers decreases. Early data indicates that retention rates are higher for those entering the profession through alternative routes than those from traditional college-based programs (Feistritzer, 2001). Schools in Fairfax County (VA) are seeing an increase in retired professionals that are seeking employment as substitute teachers. Being in the nation's capitol provides the area with the advantage of highly skilled and highly educated individuals to fill the gap. Among the many retirees substituting in the area schools are lawyers and former federal government workers. Kevin North, the director of employment for the district, indicates that while having a substitute at the front of the classroom is not the ideal situation, having these high-caliber individuals in place offers a unique perspective in the classroom (Seymour & Trejos, 2001).

Troops to Teachers

Hard-to-staff schools have found the Troops-to-Teachers (TTT) alternative certification program to be a viable recruiting device in effort to place substitutes in their schools (Raspberry, 1998). The Department of Defense launched TTT in 1994 as a tool to aid former military personnel in securing teaching positions (Bradley, 1998).

Advertising

Advertising for substitute teachers has not only increased, but it has also taken on a more creative flair. Administrators are turning to non-traditional places to advertise, such as movie theaters, the Internet, and their local parent-teacher groups. Where advertisements for vacancies were once only seen in newspapers, they are now also being seen posted on Web sites.

- Gilbert R. Martini, Jr., personnel director for Central Bucks School District (PA), is the brain behind an advertising campaign targeted at moviegoers. Pre-movie advertisements in his area now include an invitation to moviegoers to "*Become a substitute teacher!*" Additional strategies promoted by Martini include schools offering free lunches to their substitutes and paying a finder's fee to individuals recruiting substitutes (Elizabeth, 2001d).
- The William Floyd School District (NY) posted their need for substitutes on the Internet and ran \$400 ads in *The New York Times* to attract candidates. They are considering radio spots as a next step in their marketing campaign (de Pommereau, 1997).
- Worcester (MA) schools frequently advertise for substitute teachers. School principals have taken a verbal approach to their advertising campaign by announcing their needs at parent-teacher organization meetings. They emphasize that they are not looking

for a babysitter, but substitutes that can follow a lesson plan and maintain continuity within the educational process (Kievra, 1998).

Job Fairs and Sub Camps

Several districts across the country have implemented a recruiting strategy commonly used in the corporate world – the job fair (or, in some cases, the Sub Camp).

- The Southern California Teacher Recruitment Center hosts an annual Teacher Job Fair to provide prospective teachers and substitutes with information about opportunities at districts within the San Diego area. Approximately 25 districts participate in the fair, each sponsoring a booth manned by district personnel. Candidates are provided with employment applications and district information (including pay rates, class size, openings, etc.). Attendees are encouraged to leave their resumes, and frequently are given brief interviews onsite. Information is also provided on obtaining state teacher certification (SDCOE, 2001).
- A consortium of 13 independent school districts in the Minneapolis, MN, area joined forces in 1998 to sponsor a sub camp. The camp is used to recruit men and women of all ages and backgrounds to learn about the profession of substitute teaching. Campers learn about instructional skills, utilizing the lesson plan, classroom management, and district policies. This training is followed by a day of observation in the fall prior to leading their own class (Starr, 2000).

The program trained approximately 480 parents, community members, retirees and recent college graduates in the first four camps they offered. According to Jane Holmberg, District 287's director of teaching and learning, the program has been a great success. Over 400 of the campers that completed the training now substitute in the area. Approximately two-thirds of the camp graduates are interested in pursuing full time teaching positions in the future (Starr, 2000).

Staffing Agencies

The use of temporary staffing agencies is yet another creative effort being utilized by districts nationwide to alleviate the severe shortage of substitute teachers (Elizabeth, 2001b). Temporary agencies have an advantage over individual schools or districts with resources allowing them to be more aggressive in their recruiting and utilize a broader geographical target area. This also proves beneficial to the individual substitute in that once hired, they have the opportunity to work for more than one district. However, some substitutes are skeptical about signing on with temporary agencies. Their concerns vary from fear of losing state retirement benefits to feeling as though they are part of a “substitute mill” (Keoun, 2000).

Conclusion

No one strategy remedies the gap between supply and demand of substitute teachers. Solutions should include training combined with a variety of innovative methods. Action plans should include the formation of a subcommittee consisting of administrators, school personnel, teachers, substitutes, parents, and community members to explore specific district needs. Committees should evaluate the benefits of the individual recruiting strategies as they apply to specific sites and target populations. Inclusion of short- and long-term goals, in addition to outlining specific strategies, will ensure attainment of recruitment goals.

Andrae Ferguson recently joined the Substitute Teaching Institute staff as staff assistant. She works with other staff members to develop and produce STI publications, as well as the SubSolutions Conference.

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