Substitute Teacher Shortage

Key Facts:

- According to PELSB, 2021 Teacher Supply and Demand Report, a majority of districts reported being “somewhat significantly” or “very significantly” impacted by the teacher shortage (70%) and substitute teacher shortage (88%).
- One large school district testified it had a shortage of 100 subs in one month alone.
- Another district calculated 12.9% of the entire school year went without teachers or substitutes in a classroom.
- Over 30% of short call substitute spots in a Northwestern district went unfilled.
- A metro district had 300 licensed teachers out and only 150 licensed subs to fill the positions.

Issue

Minnesota is facing a substitute teacher shortage, as is much of the rest of the United States. This shortage began years before the pandemic; however, the pandemic has brought this staffing issue to a crisis level.

In the 2021 legislative session, a bill providing additional flexibility for hiring substitute teachers was heard in both the House and the Senate. Testimony from education leaders across Minnesota confirmed the shortage has reached a crisis.

In acts of desperation, school districts have scrambled and become creative in looking for solutions. For example, one district left a voicemail recruiting parents to get licensed, another district used federal relief funds to offer 11 new full-time substitute positions at $180 per day, and most districts experiencing shortages have increased substitute pay.

Schools in other states have already taken action to address shortages. Rhode Island’s education agency has launched a new substitute teacher training program. In Connecticut, substitutes no longer need a bachelor’s degree, and in New York, a teaching degree is no longer needed.

The Minnesota reality is that there are not enough subs to staff our classrooms. Administration scrambles - teachers lose their prep to cover classrooms, classrooms are split up and causing yet another disruption to student learning. Not to mention increasing costs, both financial and time.

Substitute costs can be covered by ESSER (one-time relief funding), however if there is no pool of substitutes, the money does no good. As we look at the history of the problem, as well as out into the future, it is highly likely the situation will not self-correct.

Staffing a school with teachers is a minimal expectation in an educational system. This shortage has created instability in delivering a high-quality education for all students. Our school districts have ideas for short and long-term solutions.

In addressing the short-term solutions, there are paras, coaches, parent volunteers and others who do not have the four-year degree required but are familiar with the school’s students and staff as well as its values and routines. The local school district can find the best candidates and providing the necessary training and evaluation to be an effective short-term substitute teacher. In addressing the long-term solutions, the State needs to fully fund the operating and staffing costs of the schools.

Ask

MSBA urges the legislature to work together with school districts to find and implement solutions.