

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #133 (1999-2000)

November 22, 1999

TO: SCHOOL BOARD
FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
SUBJECT: SUBSTITUTE TEACHER REPORT

PERTINENT FACTS :

Recently the Anchorage School District has had difficulty on certain days meeting the demand for substitute teachers. This problem is not unique to Anchorage, many districts across the country are experiencing substitute problems. Many of the reasons for shortages in Anchorage and across the country are the same. A strong local and national economy with low unemployment rates has reduced the pool of substitutes. In addition, hiring initiatives (such as efforts to lower class size) have drawn people from the substitute pool into employment. Since 1997 the Anchorage School District has hired more than 875 teachers who are currently employed. This significantly impacts the pool of available certificated subs. Nevertheless, we do not expect staff to come to work when they are sick.

The ASD pool of substitutes is adequate to meet District needs on most days. The pool is stressed during times of high demand, such as when extensive illness occurs at the same time as trainings during the workday. During one week this month, the sub-pool filled over 320 positions per day for two days. A large percentage of placements on those days were training related.

The Health Services department reports that it has met the need for substitute nurses this year. Substitute nurses or full time health attendants have filled in for absent nurses on 184 occasions since school began.

While there are over 800 individuals in the pool of substitute teachers, many are available during limited time frames. Also, many subs limit their interests to certain content areas, grade levels or regions of town.

The Anchorage School District's first priority is the safety and security of our students. Parents entrust their children to the District each day and we are committed to providing

a safe, supervised learning environment. In the interest of student and employee wellness, we do not expect our staff members to come to work when they are ill.

The District is implementing a variety of new strategies to address the need for substitutes. Some strategies are aimed at increasing the pool of substitutes. Managing the demand for substitutes is another component of addressing the problems. Sub-teacher preparation is also a key element. Some of the strategies are outlined below.

Strategies to increase the sub-pool:

The District is expanding its advertising for substitute teachers. This expansion includes:

- increasing the frequency of print advertisements,
- advertising in theaters across Anchorage,
- posting notices on the Channel 43 bulletin board,
- advertising on the ASD website, and
- distributing flyers to Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson employment contacts.

We are also making substitute teacher application packets more accessible by providing them at every school. Flyers and packets will be at schools in time for parent-teacher conferences.

Many of the districts we surveyed throughout the country have a minimum educational requirement of 60 college credits for substitute teachers. The District has a standing practice of employing people with bachelor's degrees as substitutes at the middle and high school levels. The minimum requirement to substitute at the elementary level has now been changed to a bachelor's degree where previously we required a certificate. We will be providing training in classroom management for these people. (See section on strategies to prepare substitutes.)

Elementary principals are now required to report unmet substitute teacher requests to the Executive Director of Elementary Education each day. The purpose of this contact is to not only help track the unmet need for subs at the elementary level but also to attempt to get additional help to a school in need if at all possible. In addition, the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, the Executive Directors of Elementary, Middle, High School, and Special Education are receiving a daily briefing on unfilled classrooms. Upon receipt, a contact is made to the school to verify the plan for that school.

We are exploring a range of compensation options designed to attract and retain substitutes. ASD substitute teachers have been paid \$100 per day since 1992. Anecdotal information the Board has heard about higher

substitute pay could be attributed to substitutes working between 1985 and 1987 when subs were paid \$104.50 per day. More likely, memories of the higher rates of pay are related to individuals that held long-term substitute positions and earned a higher rate of pay. We will be establishing an increased rate of pay to \$120.00 per day for sub-teachers who are employed as substitutes at the inception of the program and have worked for the District for more than 20 days during the current school year. The effective date of this program will be in December, 1999. We will provide more details in late November.

Strategies to manage the demand for substitutes include:

The Training and Professional Development department, the Human Resources department and the Instructional division are working together to identify, in advance, the days that training related absences strain the sub pool. Limits have been placed on the number of training related absences permitted and training calendar reviews are ongoing.

The Training and Professional Development department is expanding the master training calendar to include school scheduled training. Building-level trainings often result in unanticipated demands on the sub-dispatch system. Principals will be given in-service next week on the issues for scheduling school based needs.

We need to do a better job of coordinating the District-level and building level training sessions as they relate to the need for substitute teachers. We are exploring training-related schedule options that would help insure classroom coverage. For example, Saturday trainings would decrease the need for subs. Also, delaying the start times for school-day trainings would allow teachers to check in to their classrooms to determine if a substitute request has been filled prior to beginning training.

Strategies to prepare substitute teachers include:

Many community members, including parents, military spouses and Anchorage newcomers with bachelor's degrees have historically made excellent substitutes. We value their work and the skills they bring to the classroom. At the same time, we are committed to providing them with the information and resources necessary to have a successful classroom experience.

The Training and Professional Development department is developing a course on classroom management techniques that will be taught to sub-teacher applicants. The first training is scheduled for November 11. We believe this training will be very helpful and will encourage more people to apply for substitute teaching positions.

Teachers are expected to provide clearly written lesson plans for substitute teachers. Teacher prepared plans for substitutes should also include school policies and procedures, emergency procedures and procedures for managing their specific classroom (and the necessary equipment). Some school staff already provide a brief orientation to substitutes that are new to the building; this is a practice that will be adopted in all schools. Principals share responsibility for insuring that substitutes are aware of building procedures and successfully manage classrooms.

All teachers will be expected to "voice" themselves into the sub-finder system, recording information such as grade level, class taught, and other special scheduling instructions. This will help insure substitutes are correctly dispatched and given adequate direction (this is especially important for itinerant teachers). It also increases the likelihood that substitutes will accept and feel comfortable with assignments.

We are working to address the concerns raised about the accuracy of the substitute teacher list. Frequent changes in the availability of subs is inherent to the substitute position as many subs are working in temporary positions while they pursue regular employment. Sub-dispatch is reviewing the lists provided to teachers and contacting sub applicants to verify their information. The last update occurred in October. Prior to that the list was updated in the summer. This is an ongoing process that is not new to the District.

The Administration is very focused on addressing the need for substitute teachers. We have already begun to take action as outlined above. However, the solutions for filling the demand for substitutes and preparing them for success in the classroom, lie beyond just the administration. Staff can help encourage substitute teacher applications through their school community and personal contacts. School-based staff can assist in substitute preparation by having organized building and classroom plans and supporting substitutes that are on site. Many staff members already work within their buildings to develop contingency plans if substitute teachers are not available. Teachers need to know that if they are ill and unable to work, contacting the building principal is a failsafe measure of solving the problem. Working when one is sick is not expected.

We recognize the need and the problems. We also need help and assistance from the teachers, principals, and support staff to rectify the problems.

The above information is being put into a letter to all staff members and will be mailed next week. We will shorten the content but not the basic facts.

BC/gl

Prepared and Approved By: Bob Christal, Superintendent