“***TEACH FRESH***”… ‘A SUB’s WAY: The ‘Footlong’ Substitute Teacher Shortage in Ward 8.

*Lindsey R. Nelson, Special Ed. Resource Teacher*

“DCPS agrees to review and revise, in collaboration with the WTU, the recruitment, training, and evaluation of substitute teachers with the goal of ensuring a highly effective substitute pool of sufficient size to support Teachers.”

2016-2019 *Collective Bargaining Agreement between The Washington Teachers’ Union (WTU) Local #6 of American Federation of Teachers and The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)*

**Rationale**

Ward 8 is a geographic political division of the Washington D.C. Ward 8 has the highest per capita of students confronting poverty. Most ET-15 teachers in Ward 8 know that if they have to request leave, then, there probably won’t be an outside substitute teacher to cover their absence. Instead, DCPS relies on the other building ET-15 teachers to perform essentially ‘in-house’ substitute teaching for that teacher. This shortage of available substitute teachers for elementary schools in Ward 8 exhausts ET-15 teachers, making them less vital in their regularly contracted teaching position.

Hence, teaching fresh is the imperative for DCPS to review and revise the recruitment of substitutes to employ enough to support teachers in their time of absence. Practices related to substitute staff ultimately effect instruction. If a teacher’s exhausted for their regular position because of a lack of substitute personnel then that’s like using day-old bread on their sub sandwich. It gets the job done, but it’s rough going down.

Think of ET-15 teachers as NBA players set to take the court. Teachers, like players, hone their craft and strive to make efficient the steps between their words (directions) and the final work (assignment). Before each class, they maintain an inner dialog to reflect on what makes an effective lesson for their class.

However, in some elementary schools the lack of substitutes and their accompanying personnel choices have left teachers feeling like NBA players subbed-out before the tip off. If teachers are repeatedly shifted from their regular position of teaching into a new, in-house substitute teaching position, then there is a loss to quality instruction.

**Literature Review**

The Collective Bargaining Agreement Between The Washington Teachers’ Union Local #6 of American Federation of Teachers & The District of Columbia Public Schools (Contract) addresses the need for schools to maintain class coverage. There is guidance in the Contract for placing ET-15 staff into classrooms that are not part of their regular contracted position. The criterion for selecting in-house subs according to the Contract, centers on the *grade level, the* *availability of substitutes*, and *the time of the requested absence.*

The Contract states a teacher may be asked to cover a class in an emergency if the administration can’t fill the vacancy or if the absent teacher requests leave with less than 24-hours notice. Even when a teacher calls in their absence on time, if the school cannot find a substitute, then that is an emergency for which all other teachers can be used as substitutes.

A *Washington Post* staff writer, Jay Matthews (October 2019), reported that the practice of regularly using building professionals to fill substitute vacancies is common. The article, ‘There’s No Substitute for a Regular Teacher’, describes that even in an affluent county, like Montgomery County, Maryland—where there are more subs than positions to fill—if a substitute can’t be available from outside the building, then other school professionals fill in. He says that 15 % of the time a place like Montgomery County can’t find guest teachers and then other educators are tapped to fill in. The effects, he writes, on educators’ stamina can be summed by saying that when a teacher is pulled to cover a class, it takes them away from what they are doing. He concludes that, if teachers are doing this multiple times per month, then it can be a strain on the teachers who deliver instruction.

According to *The Leader-Telegram*, if a guest substitute teacher isn’t available, then students of the class with no guest substitute teacher get placed in the rooms of the other regular teachers, thus increasing their own workload and area of supervision (2019).

**Data Analysis Tools & Methodology**

Data was collected through a survey given to over 30 ET-15 teachers at three elementary schools in Ward 8—all along a mile stretch of Alabama Avenue. Questions were designed to measure if the ET-15 teachers are asked to sub, if so, how often? Then, what effects, if any, the in-house subbing has on those teachers’ ‘contracted’ position. Finally, the questions centered on the process for coordinating substitute coverage in their own school. For example, does your school have a building substitute?

The data collected shows that over 90% of contracted, ET-15 teachers are repeatedly tapped to cover in-house, emergency substitute positions for other building personnel. In addition, that same 90% said they felt that could not say no to the principal. A Ward 8, DCPS Spanish teacher said that when she is asked to sub, “I just do what the Principal tells me to do”.

Furthermore, almost 70% of the ET-15 responded that they have to perform this ‘emergency’ in-house substitute teaching over 10 times a year. This repetitive over use of a commodity like a contracted teacher, has effects on their contracted position and its ultimate outcomes.

Over 70% of the ET-15 teachers who perform these in-house substitute teaching duties say that this in-house subbing reduces their regular position’s planning.

In the section of the survey titled, ‘*Suggestions*,’ teachers overwhelmingly reported

that they get exhausted from the repetitive in-house subbing. Others said that it reduces their planning time and takes away their energy for the ‘real’ classes they teach. One respondent said it makes it impossible to accomplish their actual job on those days of substitute duty.

The data affirms that even though this emergency practice occurs, and that it can’t be turned down—at least those ET-15 teachers get paid for the extra work. Respondents reported that over 80% of the time, they are paid to do in-house substitute teaching.

To measure whether a school is strategically planning for these frequent emergency subbing needs, questions about staff positions were included in the survey. Strategic planning occurs when schools include in their budgets a person hired to be a full-time building substitute. A building substitute is a person hired as a regular teacher but their primary role is to be the first substitute line-of-defense against emergency coverage for regular teachers. Yet, the survey shows that over 70% of the respondents said that their school had no designated building substitute teacher. No respondent reported that there was a ‘point-person/team’ for acquiring substitutes—other than the building administration.

**Recommendations**

\* Schools in Ward 8 need several ‘*Building Substitute*’ positions in the budget.

\* Teachers required to perform emergency coverage get immediate compensation.

\* Uphold the Contract’s commitment to build a pool of well trained substitutes.

\* Schools expanding substitute coordination with committees and teachers.

**References**

Matthews, J. (2019). There’s no substitute for a Regular Teacher. The Washington Post.

Seifert, S. (2019). Filling in: Local school districts short on substitute teachers, support staff. Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The Leader-Telegram.

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