

**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA**  
**HOUSE AND SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEES**  
**Joint Informational Hearing on Substitute Teacher Issues**  
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**The School District of the City of York**  
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The task of attracting and retaining substitute teachers has become challenging over the last several years. As it relates to the School District of the City of York, it wasn't that many years ago that the District's ability to secure substitute teachers was a smooth process. In fact, there was often an abundance of substitutes, with the District routinely enjoying fill-rates in the high 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. There are several factors that have made it particularly challenging in recent years to enjoy unfettered and unencumbered access to substitutes.

As many are aware, the School District of the City of York furloughed a large number of professional and support employees in 2012 as a result of budget cuts, a story which has played out in other urban school districts throughout the state and nation. For this and other factors, District was not the first choice for many available substitute teachers, if at all, when there was a need for substitutes, especially when their end goal was to secure a full-time teaching position in the District. During the last several years, the District had a dark cloud hanging over it as a result of its designation as a Moderately Financially Distressed school district, an associated Recovery Plan, lack of a ratified teacher contract, and the looming possibility of Receivership. Sadly, not everyone understood, or took the time to mentally invest in the process, thus rumors abounded and misinformation was everywhere. Those who truly suffered were the students. Since 2012, much has happened. Receivership is off the table and the original Recovery Plan has been re-written.

Fortunately, the 2015-2016 school year has begun, absent those black clouds and a renewed sense of professional energy has taken over the District. The excitement has returned to the School District of the City of York, as many programs that were sadly cancelled in prior years have returned, along with new and exciting ways to deliver the curriculum in a meaningful way. That excitement is palpable and has been contagious!

Accepting a substitute position in an urban school district added yet another layer of trepidation, as the perception was that the York City schools were rife with all sorts of student behavioral challenges and questions relating to safety were paramount. In the minds of many substitute candidates, those concerns simply didn't exist in our neighboring suburban districts. If we can expand the cone of concern just a little further, there are those who believe that the urban settings pose a safety concern simply driving to and from work and crossing the city line. The reality was that the District responded to those concerns and established a School Police Department, ensuring that District schools maintained a safe and healthful learning environment for the students of the City of York.

A more generalized reality is that the education profession is bounded by many laws, rules, regulations, mandates, and procedures, that the nation's recent high school graduates are thinking twice about whether a career as an educator is one in which they want to drive their professional stake in the ground. Although necessary, the framework of, and the enhancements to the Professional Educator Discipline Act, along with guidelines around Child line, have attracted some and dissuaded others, knowing that even the slightest hint of professional impropriety, founded or not, is taking its toll on otherwise competent educators by bringing into question their professional integrity.

While this legislation is incredibly important, it is in some cases having a reverse effect when it comes to attracting and retaining a new generation of educators. Additionally, newer educators that have not yet secured full-time teaching positions have grown impatient after accepting substitute positions, but have not been hired by a host district.

The current regional trends suggest that teachers that are subbing are doing so in hopes of gaining a full-time teaching position, and after not achieving that goal, are growing patient and leaving the profession entirely in one to two years, opting for private sector careers.

Another segment of the professional education community include those educators that have chosen to work part time or leave the profession entirely as a result of commitments to family or for other personal reasons, resulting in an increased need for substitute positions sometimes going unfilled.

Over the last several years, a trend is developing among many school districts in the region relating to how they handle their substitute teacher programs. While this remains the case in some school districts, some districts maintain their own "pool" of substitute teachers. This simply meant that in the event a substitute teacher was needed at a particular school, that district was able to rely on, or turn to a list of certified teachers internally, without the need for a professional staffing agency. Further, while there are certainly an abundance of staffing agencies, few specialized in or knew the qualifications needed for a substitute teacher. Those agencies that specialize in education professionals deepened their market penetration, but compromised their ability to satisfy the increased number of openings in school districts that relied on them. School districts are migrating to these staffing agencies for budgetary and liability reasons. Staffing agencies that specialize in placing education professionals are being creative too, offering a unique array of compensation and benefit packages, along with training and assistance with certifications over time.

School districts in the Central Pennsylvania region respect each other's needs, as they are similar for the most part, and for that reason have not engaged in "pricing wars" and maintain similar pay rates for their substitute teachers. The School District of the City of York has felt the need to increase its daily rate for substitute teachers, citing a more challenging environment, one that doesn't often present itself in districts in a more rural or suburban setting. Sadly, the ones who ultimately suffer when substitutes are not available are the students. Stability and consistency in the classroom is paramount when providing a solid education.

How are school districts trying to close the gap? Thankfully social media, through outlets like Facebook, LinkedIn and others are taking some of the edge off, but not nearly enough to satisfy school district needs on a consistent basis. Education entities routinely attend university job fairs, but they often result in building a pool of candidates for the following semester or upcoming school year, as most who attend have not yet graduated or sat for their certification examinations. Yet others are getting the word out through community and civic organizations, even church groups. Guest speakers from school districts and educator staffing agencies have spoken to a variety of audiences with the hope of building interest with creative inducements to build interest in being a substitute teacher.

I suspect the challenge to recruit and retain substitute teachers doesn't have an easy solution. School districts will continue to search and execute creative solutions as a means to an end.

I would like to thank Representative Saylor, Senator Smucker, and the House and Senate Education Committees for inviting me to Harrisburg today to speak on such an important topic. It's constructive dialogue like this that goes a long way to evaluate creative solutions for issues plaguing the education community.