



Testimony on Substitute Teacher Challenges and Solutions

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Good morning, Chairman Smucker, Chairman Dinniman, Chairman Saylor, Chairman Roebuck and members of the committees. Thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting the state's intermediate units to testify. My name is Dr. Wayde Killmeyer, and I am the Executive Director of Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV. My intermediate unit, as the name implies, is on the western end of the state, about halfway between the north and the south, encompassing Butler, Lawrence, and Mercer Counties. These three counties contain 27 school districts and three Career and Technical Centers or Vocational Technical Schools. Counting the intermediate unit itself and the Keystone Charter School, which we also serve, that makes 32 entities just in my three counties, all of which are seeking substitute teachers every workday of the school year.

As you may know, the 29 intermediate units ("IUs") are service agencies that provide a variety of services to schools within their jurisdictions. We were created by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 1971 to serve as the liaison between local schools and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. While we initially focused primarily on special education services, we have evolved into innovative, entrepreneurial entities that provide a vast variety of services. Some examples include technology, professional development, assistance with obtaining background clearances, mandated services to non-public schools, cost-saving healthcare and energy consortia, and anything else that school districts request of us.

Today, my colleagues and I will:

- Describe the challenge of the substitute teacher shortage as it impacts the classrooms of intermediate units;
- Share with you the innovative Guest Teacher Program facilitated by many intermediate units as a strategy to address the challenge faced by school districts; and,
- Review some barriers facing IUs and school districts and solutions for your consideration.

Substitute Teacher Issues at Midwestern IU #4, Encompassing Butler, Lawrence and Mercer Counties

While IUs are here to serve partner school districts and support them however we can, IUs also have to solve their own substitute teacher challenge. Intermediate units, too, employ substitute teachers. Although we provide all of those other services that I mentioned, many intermediate units provide direct classroom instruction to students with special needs. School district problems in finding substitutes are exacerbated at an IU by two things: our larger size, and the special needs of the students that we serve.

Covering three large, rural counties as we do, it becomes difficult to fill our substitute needs in the far-flung corners of our territory, which can be close to 100 miles from one end to the other. Seeing this desperate need, and knowing that some districts are turning to outside agencies to provide their substitutes, IU 4 initiated a public-private partnership with Kelly Services this year, so that they could call upon our Guest-Teacher-Trained substitutes to help fill the need for districts who are members of our consortium, but who also contract with Kelly to provide substitutes. There is no cost to us for this. We provide the information about our substitutes to Kelly, and they, in turn, promote our program when they get calls from people who are interested in becoming a substitute teacher. We also allow Kelly to take part in the training, giving them time to distribute their materials, thus making it possible for our Guest Teachers to be placed individually, or by Kelly. It's a true win-win, in that Kelly gets a larger pool of substitutes and the substitutes get a double chance of being called to substitute classrooms. The result has been a 50% increase in the number of participants of the Guest Teacher Training Program.

The key to the Guest Teacher Program is that it ensures that they are trained bodies, not just bodies, leading classrooms. Through this training, anyone with a bachelor's degree can take an accelerated course in what it means to substitute teach, classroom management strategies, and expectations from schools. We form a consortium of schools that need substitutes, and when candidates have completed our training program, we apply for an emergency certificate for them that is usable in any member of the consortium.

Having surveyed the 27 superintendents of the districts within my IU region for ways that they could foresee solutions to this crisis, they came up with a good idea. They would all like to use their own retirees to substitute more, but the number of days that they can substitute is limited. Retirees make great substitutes, especially in the districts from which they retired. They usually live nearby, they know the building and the systems, and if recently retired, still know the students. Many of them would like to substitute more, but of course they don't want to jeopardize their pensions. If the restriction on their use could be eased, we could get much more productivity out of people who are willing, and very able.

Now, I would like to introduce Mr. Flip Steinour, Director of Human Resources Services at Lancaster-Lebanon IU 13.

Substitute Teacher Issues at Lancaster-Lebanon IU #13

Thank you, Dr. Killmeyer. Good morning, Chairmen and Honorable Members of the Committees. My name is Philip "Flip" Steinour and I am the Director of Human Resources for Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13. I have worked as the Director of Human Resources for three intermediate units over the past 21 years. I've had the pleasure of working for Lincoln Intermediate Unit (Adams, Franklin, and York counties), Capital Area Intermediate Unit (Cumberland, Dauphin, and Perry counties), and Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit (Lancaster and Lebanon counties). During this time, I have seen the ebb and flow of the substitute teacher shortage. It is my opinion that the shortage of available substitutes is at the greatest level it has ever been during my tenure.

While all school districts serve students with special needs within their local school district, intermediate units often provide the educational services to students who have the more involved and severe special needs. These students may have extreme and sometimes violent behaviors. Substitute teachers at intermediate units are often required to wear personal protective equipment to help prevent physical injury, may be required to provide personal care for students up to age 21, and are often subject to verbal abuse and aggressive behavior from students with significant emotional needs.

When a substitute has a choice of substituting at a school district in a general education classroom or at an intermediate unit program with any of the significant challenges mentioned above, substitutes typically opt to work with less demanding students. That makes the substitute shortage, experienced by all school entities, even more significant for intermediate units.

Additionally, substitutes often desire to work where their children attend school. With intermediate units sometimes running classes in segregated settings, most parents will again opt to work in general education in their local school district buildings before accepting assignments at an intermediate unit.

As Dr. Killmeyer has shared previously, intermediate units have provided a service for our school districts for over 15 years called the "Guest Teacher Training Program." This program provides individuals possessing a Bachelor's Degree but lacking teacher certification, with intense classroom

substitute teacher training. Some of the areas in which guest teachers are trained include: reading/understanding lesson plans, working with students with special needs in a regular education classroom, managing behavior, recognizing and reporting child abuse, and acknowledging general expectations of substitute teachers. Over the past few years, we have had 100% participation from the entities within my IU. Everyone wants and needs more substitutes.

The trainers for this program are often former teachers who know and understand the challenges that are faced daily by substitute teachers. Once the training has been successfully completed, the intermediate unit applies for and procures an emergency permit from the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the guest teacher. This permit will allow guest teachers to substitute in a classroom for up to 20 days. This permit is valid for one school year, and intermediate units will continue to work annually with the guest teacher to renew their emergency permit for as long as the guest teacher wishes to remain substitute teaching. Guest teachers are also required to complete all Pennsylvania mandated certifications, background checks, and school health requirements. Most intermediate units offer the Guest Teacher Training Program two or three times per year.

One of the biggest benefits of the Guest Teacher Training Program is that often the candidates of the program present with exceptional backgrounds and real-life experiences. For example, a chemist from Hershey Foods completed the training and was able to substitute in chemistry and physics classrooms. One of his work experiences that he shared with students was how he and a team of chemists worked for a decade to develop an almond that would last six months rather than three months. This is just one example of how people without a teaching degree and certification can enter public schools and have a positive impact on the students of our Commonwealth.

In an attempt to ensure we are meeting the needs of our districts and addressing our own substitute teacher shortage, Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit is now offering two options with the Guest Teacher Training Program. Guest teachers may attend live sessions two times per year or virtual sessions at times of their convenience. By making this training available virtually, our districts will have access to trained guest teachers throughout the year without delay, rather than two to three times per year as we had done previously. We also make this virtual training available to a third-party substitute provider, Substitute Teacher Service.

A new endeavor created by Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13, on behalf of our school districts, is the creation of a substitute teacher job fair. In February 2015, Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 advertised on television, radio, and print media to search for additional certified and non-certified substitutes who may have interest in helping fill the shortage of teacher substitutes. Our media blitz resulted in over 150 new candidates who could assist our districts immediately if they were certified or could begin substituting after the completion of our Guest Teacher Training Program.

This school year, Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit is working with our neighboring intermediate units to run joint, simultaneous job fairs that will hopefully produce additional candidates to help fill the substitute teacher void. This effort to coordinate our resources will allow us to attract candidates that may have never considered substituting previously or bring individuals back to education that have certification but have gone into another line of work. These prospective substitutes would complete our respective intermediate units' guest teacher training and be available to substitute for our districts and the intermediate units.

Now I would like to introduce my colleague, Attorney Rebecca Roberts-Malamis of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit.

Substitute Teacher Issues at Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22

My name is Rebecca Roberts-Malamis, and I serve as the Assistant to the Executive Director and In-House Legal Counsel for the Bucks County Intermediate Unit # 22 (BCIU), located in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. My remarks will provide a brief background on the substitute shortage in Bucks County and will then focus specifically on the barriers facing school entities trying to hire substitute teachers, as well as possible solutions to provide school entities with more flexibility to hire and retain quality substitutes.

Similar to Midwestern Intermediate Unit and Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit, the BCIU provides a service to our local public school districts organizing and facilitating a guest teacher training program on their behalf. In order to help our local school districts, the BCIU offers a two day guest teacher training program four or five times a year that provides instruction to individuals who have a college degree from an accredited university in order to help prepare and train them for what it is like to be in a classroom, working with students. The topics covered in our training include, among others:

- Classroom Management;
- Student Engagement;
- School District Policy and Safety;
- Behavioral Management;
- Individual Education Plans;
- Tips and Tricks To Teaching;
- How to Design Effective Substitute Lesson Plans and/or Successfully Implement the Lesson Plan Left By the Regular Teacher;
- Working in Special Education Classrooms;
- Special Education Labels and Acronyms;
- Working with Autistic, Multiple Disability, and Emotional Support Students;
- School District and/or Intermediate Unit Practices and Procedures;
- Following a Lesson Plan;
- Time Management;
- Classroom and School Organization and Hierarchy;
- Child Abuse Recognition and Reporting.

In addition to attending the training, every teacher substitute in the county needs to also demonstrate that they have completed the necessary background certifications to work in a school setting including:

- Act 34, Pennsylvania State Police Certifications;
- Act 151 Child Abuse Certification;
- Act 114 FBI Fingerprint Report;
- School Health Form (includes physical and TB Test results);
- PDE Form 6004 (regarding arrests and convictions);
- Act 168, Sexual Misconduct and Child Abuse Release and Disclosure Form

On behalf of our school districts and any third party contracting company they may use, the BCIU confirms that all background certifications are updated and completed prior to applying for any emergency permit for an individual to substitute in the county.

As the economy has improved, the number of applicants for BCIU's guest teacher training program has significantly declined. In 2009-2010, just six short years ago, the Pennsylvania Department of Education granted 810 permits to the BCIU on behalf of guest teachers. As the economy has increasingly improved, we have noticed that the demand for our training program has steadily decreased. Despite partnering with a third party vendor, which has more than quadrupled the marketing budget to recruit and attract substitutes and has allowed for the addition of three full time staff recruiters, we are not able to fill all of our substitute jobs, either at the Intermediate Unit or from our thirteen local school districts. This past school year, in 2014-2015, we only issued 309 permits, down almost 500 permits from a few years ago. The chart on the following page shows the number of Guest Teacher Permits issued to the BCIU over the past seven school years.

School Year	Number of Guest Teacher Permits Issued to the BCIU
2008-2009	727
2009-2010	810
2010-2011	760
2011-2012	642
2012-2013	413
2013-2014	413
2014-2015	309

Our daily fill rates across the county are also down significantly. In 2009-2010, it was not uncommon for our IU to fill nearly 85 to 90% of all available substitute jobs in our own IU classrooms. Most of our school districts during that time had 100% fill rates for their own district classrooms. As Flip Steinour mentioned, it is generally known that most regular education classrooms are more appealing for substitutes to work in than the Intermediate Unit special education classrooms, which can be very demanding based upon the needs of our students. In the past year, our BCIU fill rates have dropped significantly with rates of less than 70%. Having this many open positions and not enough people to fill them requires that Supervisors, Program Coordinators, and other staff change their normal daily schedules to serve in our classrooms. In addition to Supervisors, our inability to fill some substitute positions require us to pull other professional staff such as behavior analysts, psychologists, and social workers from their normal schedules to spend the day substituting in our classrooms, ensuring student safety and adequate staff to student ratios.

Three years ago, the BCIU stopped employing substitutes as BCIU employees and instead formed a partnership with one of our local educational staffing companies to provide substitutes. Besides the obvious advantages of having a large marketing and recruiting presence in the county whose only job is to recruit and assign substitutes, there was a significant budgetary need driving our decision to use a third party agency to help relieve burdensome staffing costs.

In 2013-2014, federal mandates under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) were put in place. The ACA requires that an employer provide health benefits to any employee who works thirty or more hours per week. This requirement applies to day-to-day substitutes. Typically, the BCIU and our school districts would not provide health benefits to day-to-day substitutes. Substitutes work a flexible schedule choosing jobs when and where they want. They are generally paid in the Bucks county area about \$100 a day for a seven-hour day, or approximately \$14.00 an hour. Due to the flexible and itinerant nature of the job, this group had not previously been offered health benefits.

Once the mandates of the ACA came into effect, it necessitated a change in how we handle this group of employees. Benefits offered in the public education sector are generally comprehensive plans. In Bucks County, health plans may cost \$20,000 or more annually for family coverage. The requirement to provide this costly benefit to a group of employees that had not previously received benefits proved to be cost prohibitive.

In addition, combined with the employer benefit mandate, for any substitute who works more than 80 days in a year, school entities are also required to pay into the Pennsylvania Employees Retirement System (PSERS). PSERS contribution rates for this school year are at almost 26% of salary.

These two factors—the ACA mandated benefit requirement and high PSERS contribution rates—together make it too costly for the BCIU and most school districts in Bucks County to continue to hire day-to-day substitutes as their own employees. The BCIU chose to partner with an educational staffing company, who is able to continue to pay our substitutes the same rate of pay that they were receiving (approximately \$100 for a teacher substitute), but at a significantly less comprehensive staffing rate than we could provide.

How? Since educational staffing agencies are not school districts, they do not pay into PSERS. Similarly, while educational staffing agencies are required to provide health benefits to any employee who works thirty or more hours in a week, without the bargained for generous benefit plans offered by school districts, most educational staffing agencies are able to fulfill the requirements of the ACA by offering less costly plans meeting the Minimum Essential Coverage (MEC) requirements of the law.

While we believe that the economy directly impacts our ability to recruit and train qualified substitute employees, there are factors that could be changed to allow us more flexibility. Making day-to-day substitute teachers exempt from mandated PSERS contributions would reduce the burden on IUs and districts. In fact, most of our substitutes fall into one of four categories and do not necessarily need or rely on a funded retirement plan.

- **Recent College Graduates:** Many of our substitutes are fresh out of college and substitute while they look for full time employment. They want to be able to earn money, but still have the flexibility of going on job interviews and pursuing a career in their chosen field.
- **Retirees:** We also attract a large number of retirees who are looking for additional income. These individuals appreciate the flexibility of working when they want, accepting an assignment in their local school on days when they have nothing else planned.

- **Stay-At-Home Parents:** A lot of our substitutes are stay at home parents who are attracted to a work day that coincides with their children's school schedule. Because they are not the full time wage earners for their families, they are not necessarily looking for retirement benefits.
- **Retired Teachers:** Like you heard from my colleagues, our preferred substitutes are our retired teachers. They do not need to pay into the PSERS retirement fund, because they are generally collecting retirement from that fund. Unfortunately, however, under PSERS guidelines, retirees are only able to work in a school district in emergency situations, and then only if certain requirements are met. If the PSERS requirements specifically exempt retired teachers who are willing to serve as day-to-day substitutes from these burdensome restrictions, it would greatly help us find quality substitutes and reduce the substitute shortage we are currently facing.

Pennsylvania has very strict requirements to serve as a substitute teacher. It has been the experience of intermediate units that the most valuable preparation for becoming a substitute teacher is classroom experience, rather than the amount of education received. In order to serve as a teacher substitute, an individual must have, at a minimum, a four-year college degree from an accredited university. Some of our best substitute teachers could be aides who normally assist the teachers in the classrooms but cannot obtain an emergency certification in the event that the teacher is out for the day because they do not have a four-year degree. Exploring the option of allowing college students who are far into their education (for example, 60 or more credits) and who participate in the Guest Teacher Training Program to work as substitute teachers is something worthwhile to consider.

Intermediate Units are here to help our schools with any needs they have, including troubleshooting the substitute teacher shortage. We are proud of our Guest Teacher Training Programs and hope that it is helping to address this challenge. On behalf of the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units and my colleagues who joined me on this panel, I thank you for your time and welcome your questions and comments.