



Testimony
Joint Hearing of House and Senate Education Committees
Pedro A. Rivera, Secretary of Education
October 26, 2015

Chairman Smucker, Chairman Dinniman, Chairman Saylor, Chairman Roebuck and distinguished members of the education committees from both chambers of the General Assembly, thank you for the opportunity to join you this morning. The stakeholders you have convened here today are well qualified to discuss the issues surrounding substitute teaching in the Commonwealth, and I am very pleased to provide an overview of the trends the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has observed across the commonwealth and in other states.

Overview: Role and Availability of Qualified Substitute Teachers

Substitute teachers play a vital role in maintaining momentum and continuity in the classroom. When students' regularly assigned teachers are unavailable due to illness, hiring shortages, or professional development needs, substitute teachers help fill in the gaps so student learning is not interrupted.

When substitutes are not available, many schools rely on other teachers to fill in during their prep periods – time that should be dedicated to thoughtful planning, professional collaboration or other academic preparation. When neither substitutes nor a teacher on a prep period are available, students must do without a teacher in their classroom for a day, a week or even longer. Without a pool of consistently available, qualified substitutes, schools can become caught in a frenetic – and expensive – game of catch-up throughout the year and students pay the price.

For many school districts, career and technical centers, and schools in Pennsylvania, finding – and keeping – qualified substitute teachers presents significant challenges.

Generally speaking, experts and practitioners agree that the ratio of substitutes to the overall teacher pool in a district should be less than one to five.¹ As you can see in the enclosed materials, only eight counties in Pennsylvania currently meet that standard (Venango, Jefferson, Blair, Clinton, Union, Fayette, Wayne, and Washington).²

Across Pennsylvania's counties, only one in 15 regions (organized by PSBA) meet this recommendation, as is evidenced in the attached appendices.

Data available to PDE regarding the state's current levels of substitute teachers is limited, living primarily within local districts. Without a clear picture of the current landscape, it is difficult to

¹ Substitute Teaching Division, University of Utah.

² Based on data from PA Department of Labor and Industry. Substitute and teacher workforce data are inclusive of all school types, including public, charter, and private schools.

identify real-time issues related to substitute teachers, such as teacher absences, unmet hiring needs, etc.

Looking long-term, one of the most significant challenges districts face is a declining supply of qualified candidates. Over the past decade, the number of qualified teachers in Pennsylvania has dwindled. Between 2005 and 2014, the number of undergraduate education majors at Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) universities declined by 44 percent, while the number of certifications dropped by 42 percent. The *New York Times* recently reported that many other states face similar challenging scenarios³; nationally, enrollment in teacher preparation programs dropped 30 percent between 2010 and 2014.⁴ PDE is working collaboratively with districts as well as postsecondary institutions across the state to monitor and proactively address this challenge, where possible.

Emergency Permits for Day to Day Substitute Teachers

One strategy PDE has utilized to address this issue is maximizing the availability of emergency permits for day-to-day substitute teachers. These permits allow substitutes to quickly fill educator absences for up to 20 days based on the needs of the school district or educational entity. The two most commonly issued emergency permits in Pennsylvania both allow day-to-day substitution up to 20 days, and are as follows:⁵

- **Locally Issued Permits:** Authorized in chapter 49 of the school code, these allow school districts to directly issue day to day permits to those with the standard Instructional Level One teaching certification in a given subject. An educator operating with one of these permits can serve in a single substitute assignment outside of their certified subject for twenty days and then be moved to another assignment within the school district. PDE does not review or track these permits as the records are maintained at the local level. This type of certification permit allows school districts to place highly qualified substitutes into classrooms as quickly as possible, but requires a new permit for each assignment, in each new subject.
- **Type 06 Emergency Permits:** These permits are valid for the entire academic year in which they are issued (up until July 31), and allow greater flexibility for school districts who cannot find certified educators on a short timeframe. They allow individuals who may not have a teaching certification, but who are considered qualified by the school district and hold a bachelor's degree, to act as day to day substitutes. To obtain a type 06 emergency permit, school districts must apply through the Teacher Information Management System (TIMS) at PDE. These permits are automatically prioritized by the system to ensure swift processing and approval. Many school districts obtain these permits to allow a substitute to work within a district for the duration of an academic year without needing to issue multiple local permits.

³ Motoko Rich, "Teacher Shortages Spur a Nationwide Hiring Scramble (Credentials Optional)," *New York Times*, August 9, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/10/us/teacher-shortages-spur-a-nationwide-hiring-scramble-credentials-optional.html?_r=0.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, *Title II Higher Education Act – Data Tools*, <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/DataTools/Tables.aspx>.

⁵ Please see appendices for additional information regarding the emergency permit process at PDE.

One indicator of the need for substitutes across the state is the number of these emergency permit requests. PDE notes that last year, over half (274) of the commonwealth's 500 school districts requested at least one Type 06 Emergency Permit. These districts were joined by 233 others who made requests for emergency permits generally. In total, 477 out of 500 districts made such requests to PDE last year.

Factors Contributing to Shortages of Qualified Substitute Teachers

After exploring data trends, and discussion with stakeholders, PDE believes the following factors contribute to an inadequate supply of qualified substitute teachers at the district level:

- **Low Pay and Lack of Benefits:** Qualified candidates (those with bachelor's degrees and teacher certifications) who are exploring substitute teacher opportunities are likely deterred by low pay and lack of health and retirement benefits.⁶ Substitutes are also not afforded the same work-related protections as temporary professional employees, further discouraging otherwise qualified individuals. Outsourced staffing agencies will often provide these benefits to substitute teacher employees, and districts with permanent substitute teachers will usually include those individuals in bargaining agreements for full-time teachers. For most districts, however, the costs of outsourcing or retaining a full-time substitute are not feasible, leaving them at a competitive disadvantage.
- **Scheduling Difficulties:** The scheduling process for short-term substitutes is inherently unpredictable, and is often undesirable for otherwise qualified individuals. The uncertainty of working day-to-day – especially in an improving economy where more stable employment options are increasingly available– contributes to the small and relatively stagnant pool of interested and available candidates.
- **Increased Professional Development & Training Mandates:** District staff, including teachers, must comply with an increasing number of requirements regarding professional development and training.
- **School Climate:** While financial considerations play a big role in substitute teachers' recruitment and retention, school climate was identified in one survey of Pennsylvania substitutes as equally important. More than eight in 10 substitutes identified school discipline and other climate factors as "Very Important" to them.⁷

In most cases, these challenges are not new; substitute teaching positions have always been less attractive options for many qualified professionals who would rather secure well-paying, stable employment opportunities. But these longstanding shortages have likely been exacerbated in recent years by budget cuts and other resource constraints. The process of finding, recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified substitute teachers requires significant and ongoing coordination at the district level. For many educational entities, the capacity to execute successfully on this front – among a list of other priorities – is limited.

⁶ Robert P. Strauss, "The Market for Substitute Classroom Teachers in South West Pennsylvania in 2001-2: A Research Report to the Pittsburgh Foundation," Carnegie Mellon University, July 28, 2003.

⁷ Strauss, "The Market for Substitute Classroom Teachers in South West Pennsylvania in 2001-2."

Strategies to Address Shortages

While the shortage of qualified substitutes in Pennsylvania is concerning, the commonwealth is not alone in this challenge. Based on PDE's review of other states, several – including Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, and Nevada – have identified substitute teacher shortages as a significant and urgent problem for their schools and districts. In the face of declining budgets and increased demands, districts in other states are coming up with new approaches to try to turn the tide, including, but not limited to, the following:

- **Outsourcing:** Several states and districts have moved from an internal system of substitute recruitment, hiring, and retention practices to an outsourced model. Several urban districts in neighboring states including Baltimore, Maryland and Cleveland, Ohio, as well as Detroit, Michigan have implemented outsourced substitute teacher placement systems. While this approach may alleviate the coordination challenges that districts face, it does not address the underlying challenge of declines in the number of qualified candidates available for these positions.
- **Increased Pay & Incentives:** Several states and districts – including stakeholders PDE has met with in Pennsylvania – have identified low pay as a barrier to competitive recruitment and retention of qualified substitute teachers. To compete, many districts in other states struggling with substitute teacher recruitment and retention have recently approved increased pay for substitutes who agree to work exclusively in their district as well as other incentives like bonuses.

Dedicated, Full-Time Substitute Positions: Minnesota recently conducted a survey of administrators to evaluate teacher/substitute shortages. Many districts have resorted to hiring a full-time substitute teacher for each building who is then available every day to fill in as needed.

For our children to succeed tomorrow every child must have access to a great education today. Having and maintaining qualified teachers and substitutes is integral to delivering that great education. Although Pennsylvania faces significant challenges, we have the opportunity to act quickly and decisively to ensure those challenges are met, and a quality education is provided for every child. Thank you for your attention, and I will be happy to address any questions you may have.

Appendix A: Types of Emergency Permits

Locally Issued Permits

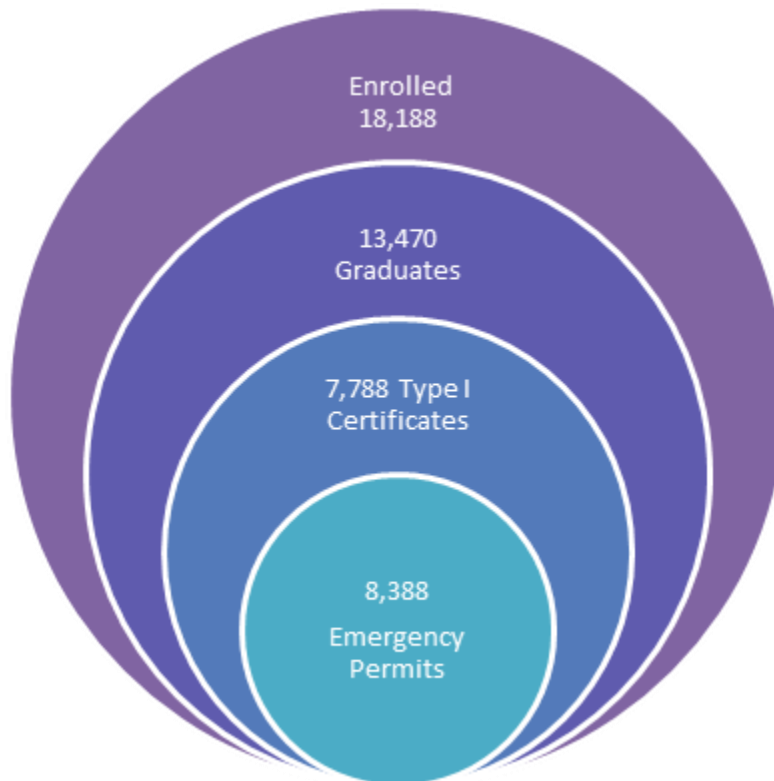
- The chief school officer of a Local Education Agency (LEA) is authorized in Chapter 49 (49.34) to issue Day to Day substitute permits under the following conditions:
 - Individual holds a valid PA or out-of-state certificate.
 - The individual consents to serve as a substitute outside their area of certification.
 - The permit is valid for 20 cumulative school days of service in each certificate area. (Extensions are available through the Type 06 permits)
- PDE does not review or track locally issued permits. The records are maintained at the local level and are only reviewed if there is an audit by the auditor general's office.

Type 06 – PDE Issued Day to Day Substitute Permit

- Eligibility Criteria:
 - Graduate of a 4 year college or university.
 - Vacant position must be advertised for 10 days on the LEA website and no applicant found who is certified and qualified by local standards in addition to certified) applicant was found.
- Teacher Information Management System (TIMS) Process:
 - Educator requests permit through TIMS.
 - LEA requests type and subject through TIMS.
 - Day to Day (06) permits are auto approved by TIMS unless audited.
 - PDE performs the following audits of 06 permits:
 - Random audits every 100 applications to verify system is working.
 - Audit individuals who respond to a Good Moral Character issue.
 - Audit non-citizen applications to verify that LEA has seen appropriate visa or green card.
 - Emergency permit audits are automatically moved to priority for the next day and performed immediately.
- General facts:
 - A Type 06 emergency permit can be for all subjects.
 - The individual can serve in a single assignment on a day to day permit for 20 cumulative days and may then be assigned to a different assignment.
 - Permit is valid for one school year ending July 31 or when summer school ends if the person is assigned to summer school. The individual can be granted additional day to day permits.
 - The permit is only valid for the district that requested it in the process above as prescribed in Chapter 49. The individual can be on permits from multiple districts.
 - Some Intermediate Units offer guest teacher programs that manage substitutes for multiple districts.
 - Type 06 permit application fees:
 - \$5.00 fee for one year permit for all subjects.
 - PDE bill is sent to LEA each year for all permits obtained by LEA in that year.
 - LEA can pay by check, credit card or debit from subsidy payment.
 - New teacher graduates can substitute in the spring if they have a letter from their college or university that they will be receiving a bachelor's degree.

Enrollment in PA Teacher Preparation Programs

Enrollment in PA Teacher Preparation Programs	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Traditional Prep Programs Enrollment PA	34,806	39,028	36,862	33,704	23,494	18,188	N/A
Alternative Prep Programs Enrollment PA	1,340	1,711	1,744	1,440	598	442	N/A
Education Graduates in PA	15,991	16,313	16,761	17,301	15,847	13,470	N/A
Instructional Certificates Type I Issued (In-State)	14,613	15,247	15,114	13,503	16,361	7,788	6,215
Add-On	3,859	4,041	4,083	4,939	6,622	1,230	1,435
Out-of-State	1,800	1,929	2,097	1,396	2,229	909	965



Enrollment in Traditional and Alternative Teacher Preparation Programs

