



**Testimony on Issues Related to Substitute Teachers**  
**presented by the**  
**Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators**  
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Thank you, Chairman Smucker, Chairman Dinniman, Chairman Saylor, Chairman Roebuck and members of the Senate and House Education Committees, for providing the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) the opportunity to share our perspective on the challenges that face schools as they struggle to identify and employ sufficient numbers of substitute teachers. My name is Dr. Eric Eshbach and today I am here to provide testimony on behalf of PASA. I serve as superintendent of the Northern York County School District.

When we talk about substitutes, we normally think about substitutes for classroom teachers. But substitutes are also needed in other vital school functions as well, which would include any job that directly provides services to students. These include bus drivers, cafeteria workers, classroom aides and school nurses. These are vital functions that someone must cover or students will be directly impacted.

While the focus of my testimony will be on substitute classroom teachers, keep in mind that each of these other areas also present employment challenges to school districts.

There are two types of substitute teachers: day-to-day substitutes and long-term substitutes. A day-to-day substitute is someone who covers for a brief period of time (less than 21 days) due to a temporary illness or other reasons, such as participation at a meeting to develop or update a student's Individualized Education Plan or Gifted Individualized Education Plan, attendance in a professional development program, or participation in district curriculum review and development activities. The minimum qualifications for day-to-day substitutes is that they hold a Bachelor's degree, complete a "Guest Teacher" training program and have all required criminal and child abuse clearances, employment verifications and medical information.

A long-term substitute fills in during an extended absence, such as when a teacher is on maternity leave, dealing with a serious illness or injury or is on a sabbatical. An individual must hold a valid PA teaching certificate in order to serve as a long-term substitute.

When a school is unable find a substitute teacher to cover a classroom due to the temporary absence of a classroom teacher, the building principal may need to temporarily cancel instruction in special subjects like music, art, or physical education so that teachers of those subjects must instead cover for the regular classroom teacher who is absent. This means students throughout the school may not receive instruction in those subjects during that day or week. In middle and high schools, other teachers may need to use their prep time to cover a class instead of preparing instructional activities for their own students. In some instances, this is in violation of collective bargaining agreements and often times requires the school district to pay its teachers extra when planning time is missed. In some extreme

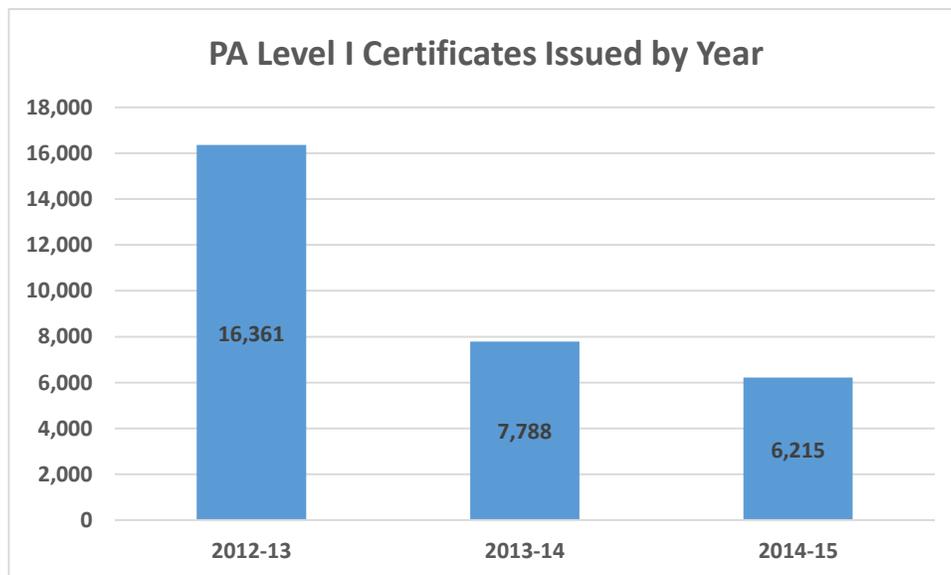
cases, teachers may need to double up their students with another class or send students to a study hall. Obviously, in all of these examples, the quality of instruction is impacted.

Each of us remember from our own school experience how difficult a job it is for a substitute teacher to walk into a classroom, see students for the first time and strive to have students make productive use of their time together.

While attracting qualified individuals to serve in these on-call, day-to-day, temporary jobs without benefits has always been a challenge, it is harder now. An improving employment picture in most other sectors of the economy, combined with a dramatic reduction in the number of students graduating from college with teaching certificates, has greatly reduced the number of qualified individuals who accepted these jobs in the past as a way to get an inside track to a permanent teaching position.

In addition, with the average student loan debt of Pennsylvania college graduates now exceeding \$27,000, aspiring teachers do not have the luxury of living off the unpredictable salary that substitute positions provide, opting instead to take a job outside their desired field simply so that they can afford to pay back their student loans.

Recent college graduates with teaching certificates have been an ongoing source to serve as day-to-day substitutes. For several decades Pennsylvania's 93 college and university teacher preparation programs graduated from 12,000 to 17,000 newly certified teachers each year. Over the past three years we have seen the bottom fall out of the number of new Level 1 certificates issued by PDE, greatly reducing one of the primary sources of substitute teachers.



Source: PA Department of Education

The pool of teachers who are searching for employment has dried up following several years where districts across the state furloughed teachers and abolished vacant positions. The June 2015 PASA-PASBO Report on School District budgets, which is based on survey responses from 69 percent of school districts across the state, found that 41 percent of school districts planned to reduce staff in the current school year, 2015-16. Twenty-five percent of those planned to furlough staff and 89 percent planned to

abolish vacant positions. While the school employment picture for teachers has slightly improved in some districts, others continue to cut staff, creating an employment picture that is driving many of our best and brightest high school graduates who have an interest in pursuing a career in education to pursue other career options.

Based upon our review of school district practices across the state, it appears that up to half have contracted with a private contractor to provide day-to-day substitute coverage. Another 10 to 20 percent of school districts are participating in a substitute service consortium operated through their intermediate unit or in partnership with other school districts. The balance directly hire and employ their own day-to-day substitutes.

Daily base compensation for day-to-day substitutes can range anywhere from \$75 per day up to \$110 per day, depending upon the labor market. Many districts offer longevity supplements that increase the daily rate retroactive to their start date if the substitute serves more than 21 days in the district. We also noted several districts located within the Philadelphia labor market that provides an additional \$10 for substitutes who work on a Monday or Friday.

Recent changes to criminal background checks, child abuse clearance and employment verifications make quick, short-term placements difficult, if not impossible. Depending on the time of the year, a one-month to two-month lead-time is required to obtain the necessary clearances and employment verifications for candidates for any staff position that has direct contact with students, including substitutes.

We offer the following suggestions as strategies that can increase the pool of available substitute teachers and other substitute positions.

1. Currently retired teachers who receive pension payments from the Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) will have their payments cease and retirement account frozen should they return to work for a public school entity unless they return in a bonafide staffing emergency or service in an extracurricular position that is separate from the established academic course structure. We suggest expanding the exception for extracurricular positions to permit PSERS annuitants who hold a valid teaching certificate to work up to 95 days each year as a day-to-day substitute without impacting their pension benefit. They should not be entitled to earn additional service credit, and no contributions or deductions should be made to their account by the annuitant, school or Commonwealth. The state retirement code (SERS) currently permits state agencies to hire retired state employees for up to 95 days annually without impacting their state pension. Why shouldn't schools be permitted to do the same? This is a pool of talent that is already credentialed, trained and ready to go – and is grossly underutilized. When there was a huge surplus of aspiring teachers seeking employment, the prohibition made sense. Given the shortages districts are now experiencing, it no longer makes sense.
2. Permit education majors who have completed their student teaching experience in a satisfactory manner to serve as day-to-day substitutes, even before they have graduated. They already have their clearances and background checks together with actual classroom instructional experience.

3. Exempt day-to-day substitutes who work fewer than 400 hours in any given school year from eligibility for PSERS during that year. This was the case prior to Act 120 of 2010. As you know, with the employer contribution rate approaching 30 percent of payroll, this additional cost adds nearly one-third to the cost of substitutes, and the employee contribution rate also reduces the take-home pay in an already low and inconsistent paycheck. By exempting this group from PSERS, districts could increase their daily rate paid to substitutes without increasing the cost to the district. And the substitute would benefit by not having to contribute 7.5 percent or more of their paycheck to PSERS.

I would be pleased to answer any questions.