

SUBSTITUTE SHORTAGE CHECKLIST

☐ **Are instructional assistants, specialists, and administrative staff already in the school building being used to fill necessary absences?**

Why it matters: A concrete system devised on fair rotation may allow for staff already familiar with the school culture to fill in where necessary, lessening the need to rely on external help.

☐ **Is there a system in place for combining classes if a teacher is absent?**

Why it matters: Combining classes, while not ideal because of increased strain on teachers, is a way for students to continue academic work with a familiar teacher while accounting for an emergency absence.

☐ **Is the school community appraised of the situation and invited to be part of the solution?**

Why it matters: Families are invested in their child's success and the school's success. If there is a local shortage of substitutes, families should be informed about the problem and be invited to help.

Jordan Cook, assistant principal of Greenbriar West Elementary in Virginia's Fairfax County Public Schools, recommends just saying, "Hey, look, if you're available please come in. We'd love the support." It's good to have people from the community who know the kids, he explained. In Greenbriar West, a few parents have already filled in as substitutes.

☐ **Does the staff know there's a substitute shortage in the school?**

Why it matters: It may seem obvious, but staff should know if there is a challenge burdening the school. Transparency on the part of the leader will make teachers more amenable to changes in schedules or routines and to find solutions to address the shortage.

☐ **Do you, as a school leader, personally greet existing substitutes with a warm welcome and incentivize their return?**

Why it matters: Building a friendly community where substitutes want to keep coming back is key to addressing the shortage. Incentivize their return by welcoming them to staff events or school activities.

"Anytime I see a sub in the building," one assistant principal noted, "I make it a point to thank them for being here. Their job can be very challenging. Showing gratitude and appreciation to the subs that come, gives us a better chance that they will return."

☐ **Is there a centralized list of reliable substitute contacts?**

Why it matters: Some schools reported success in keeping a meticulously curated list of substitute contacts, using it to reach out to subs on a regular basis.

"I think it starts with having a strong office assistant who oversees the subs," Cook said. "One who has developed strong relationships with the subs, knows who they are, and always makes sure they feel appreciated and welcomed."

☐ **Have you considered engaging college students?**

Why it matters: This is a beneficial relationship for both parties—college students earn valuable experience in a field they may be interested in, receiving an impressive addition to their resume in the process. At the same time, schools take in subs with high school diplomas under their belt (the minimum requirement at most districts).