



Navigating K-12 Teacher Shortages With the Help of Absence and Substitute Management Software



Navigating K-12 teacher shortages with the help of absence and substitute management software

Relying on substitute teachers is nothing new. But in today's K-12 schools, finding and keeping them has become more challenging than ever before. At the same time that teachers are leaving the profession in higher numbers, schools also must grapple with a dwindling supply of substitute teachers and higher competition for those who are available.

To improve fill rates and keep student learning on track, K-12 districts need better solutions for finding, assigning, and retaining substitute teachers. And as you'll discover in this eBook, today's substitute management software streamlines teacher absence management and allows schools to place substitutes where and when they're needed most.



K-12 teacher shortages: the current landscape

K-12 school administrators, superintendents, and principals see firsthand the challenge of teacher shortages, especially on student learning. [Research has found](#) that even one school day without a qualified teacher can have a negative effect on student learning outcomes, including lower test scores and higher student absences.

State education department data reveals that [teacher shortages are so widespread](#) that in 2023, only four states (New Mexico, Florida, New Hampshire, and Louisiana) report having no shortages for the current school year. Across the country, the following factors contribute to the ongoing teacher shortage:



Teachers leaving the profession

A Horace Mann Educators Corp. survey found that [63% of K-12 teachers were considering leaving](#) the education profession within the next three years. Many said they planned to retire, while others said they were considering a move to the private sector or another role in the public sector.

Teacher burnout

It's not uncommon for teachers to have to sacrifice curriculum planning time or take on a heavier workload to make up for staffing shortages and teacher absences. Working at this level for an extended period of time increases the chances of burnout. In a recent RAND Corporation survey, 74% of teachers reported [frequent job-related stress](#) and 59% said they were burned out.

Low teacher pay

At the same time that many teachers are being asked to do more, their pay doesn't always increase with their workload. Research from the Economic Policy Institute revealed that K-12 public school teachers [earn 20% less in weekly wages](#) than college graduates in other professions. For many, pay is a key reason to leave teaching. A McKinsey survey revealed that, among K-12 educators who left teaching or are planning to leave, [compensation is the number one reason why](#).

Unfortunately, all of these factors combine to make schools even more reliant on substitute teachers to keep classroom learning on track. At a time when [many students remain behind](#) in core math and reading scores, substitutes limit disruptions to learning and help students make up for what they lost during the pandemic. Substitutes also prevent

schools from having to tap into other less desirable sources, such as others with no teaching experience or even [National Guard troops](#) in extreme cases.



For many schools, finding substitutes doesn't line up with the ongoing need. US Department of Education research revealed that [more than three-quarters of K-12 public schools](#) reported having more difficulty finding substitutes than before the pandemic, with most being forced to rely on administrators, non-teaching staff members, and teachers on free periods to cover classes. As one Connecticut school superintendent [described](#), "On a day-to-day basis, we do not have enough substitutes to cover our classes. Our faculty and staff are stepping up, taking additional roles and responsibilities to ensure that we have coverage and can remain open."



Tips for attracting substitute teachers

Given how difficult it can be to find replacements for absent or departing teachers, K-12 school districts must take a fresh approach to attracting substitutes who possess the qualifications, experience, and availability to fill the gaps.

Here are four strategies districts are using to help expand substitute pools and become a school district of choice for substitute teachers in an increasingly competitive job market:



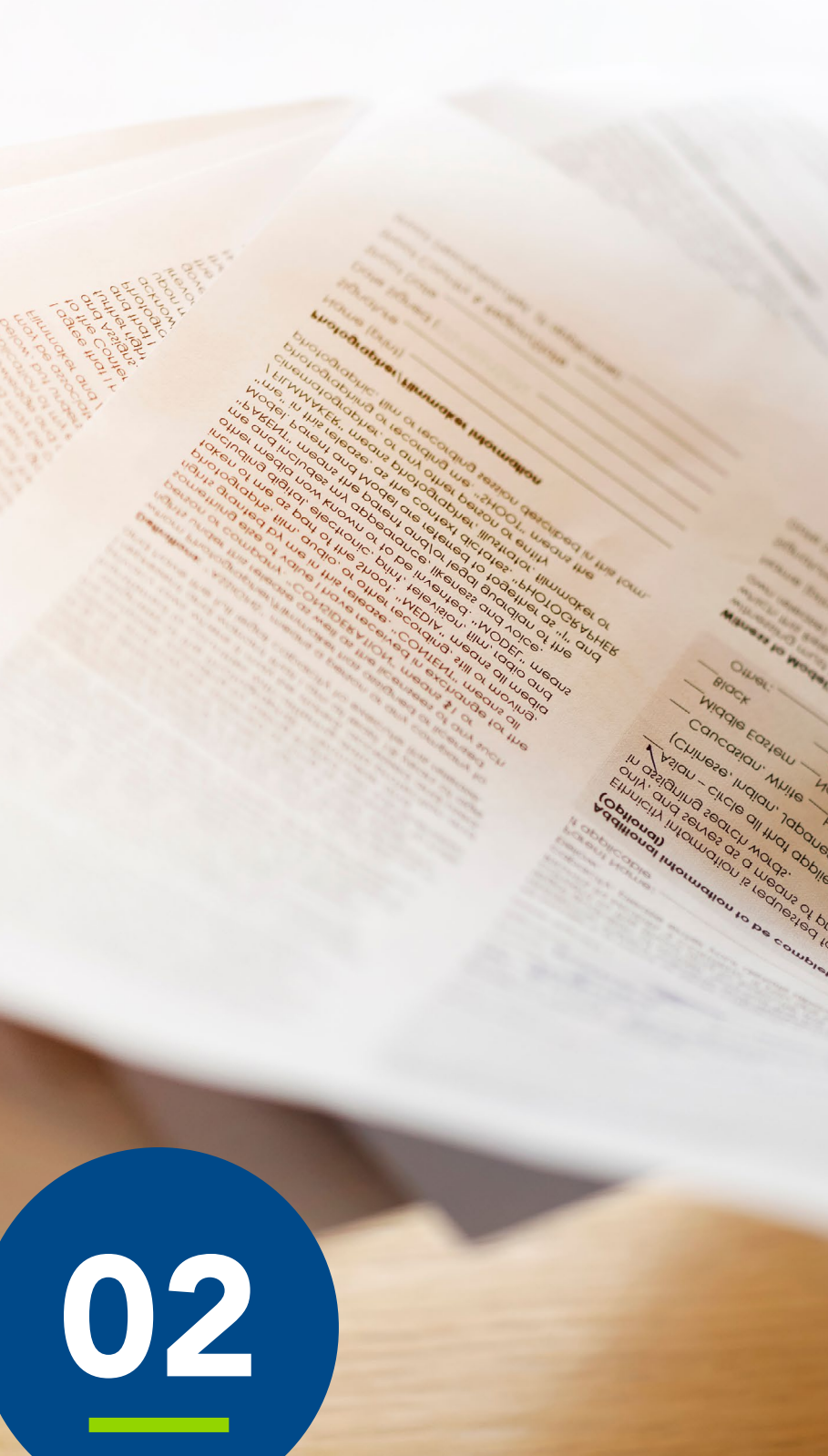
1. Offer better pay

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the [median hourly wage for substitute teachers](#) in 2022 was \$16.95, with wages in some states falling below \$10 per hour. However, as recommended in a report by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), [increasing substitute teacher pay is one of the first steps](#) schools can take to attract them.

NCTQ's report also revealed that K-12 schools increased starting pay for substitute teachers by an average of 20% between 2020 and 2022. Some of the other ways schools are increasing substitute pay include:

- Hiring bonuses
- Bonuses payable after a specific number of days worked
- Minimum pay rates for substitutes who work half-days
- Bonuses for referring new substitutes to your district
- Benefits with financial value, such as health insurance and free lunch vouchers





02

2. Assess substitute teacher requirements for competitiveness

Just as substitute teacher pay varies from one location to another, states and school districts vary in the requirements they set for adults to substitute teach. To remain competitive for substitutes in your area, take a look at how your requirements compare to nearby districts, and make adjustments that will allow you to attract the enough substitute candidates to meet your needs, while still offering quality instruction for learners.

K-12 Dive reports that some states, including [Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Kansas](#), have already changed their requirements for substitute teachers.

While this is a last resort for many districts, the expert opinion is that the long-term effects of not having a substitute at all are far worse than having a less qualified substitute in the classroom. As Matthew Kraft, an associate professor of education and economics at Brown University states, “When schools don’t have enough substitute teachers, students, school culture, and staff morale are all hurt.” To address ongoing teacher shortages, Kraft adds that “raising pay is key for most districts, as is lowering the bar for hiring to at least an associate’s degree.”

But absent a state-wide change, you may decide to set different requirements depending on the type of substitute role. For example, some districts may choose to allow substitutes with different qualifications to fill in for certain grade levels or subject areas. Someone with an extensive background in art could be an excellent substitute for an art teacher, regardless of if they hold a teaching certificate or college degree.

3. Hire full-time substitutes

Not all substitute teachers fill in for just a day or a week. Given that, on average, teachers are absent about [nine and a half days each academic year](#), your district likely has a consistent need for substitutes every week. As a result, it may be sensible to employ full-time substitutes, similar to how [one Washington school district](#) did beginning in 2022. The district hired over two dozen substitutes as full-time employees, and also offered them health benefits. Such an arrangement provides more flexibility in filling last-minute teacher absences and helps substitutes become more familiar with your school and students. Moreover, it may be easier to recruit and retain full-time vs. short-term substitutes, as you can offer the same benefits available to other full-time employees.



03



4. Offer training

The right training and development can set someone up for success in any role, and substitute teachers are no different. Unfortunately, many substitute teachers don't receive enough orientation and training to be successful in the classroom. A joint Kelly Education and Education Week survey found that [only 38% of school districts](#) offered one-time orientations for new substitute teachers. It also found that while 67% percent of districts believed classroom management training would improve substitute teaching, only 11% of districts offered it.



[An Education Week poll](#) found that some school districts include substitutes in the training they offer to full-time teachers. By providing more comprehensive training to substitutes, you can not only improve the level of teaching in schools; you can also potentially find more success in retaining substitute teachers who have many other options for where they can work, including other sectors and the “gig” economy.

While there are several recommendations here, not all are feasible for some school districts, or would least take time to implement. Districts need strategies and tools to improve fill rates and expand their sub pool today.

For this reason, many districts and schools are implementing. It’s a cost-effective and easy-to-implement solution that eases the pain of hard-to-find substitutes while helping you improve sub communications and fill rates.

How substitute management software helps you navigate teacher shortages

According to one estimate, [just over five percent of teachers](#) are absent from school on any given day. In a district with 150 teachers, that equates to 7.5 teacher absences each day, or 37.5 absences per week. Given that these absences can be spread across schools, grade levels, and locations, finding substitute teachers can easily become overwhelming for school districts. Between filling one-off teacher absences or looking for longer-term subs, schools may manage dozens of absences each week.

Thankfully, technology makes it easier to manage teacher shortages and everyday absences, so your district can find and deploy substitutes faster and with less stress.

Here are several ways a substitute management solution like InstaSub by TCP provides a better way to help you manage teacher absences and provide learning continuity.

Makes it easy for substitutes to learn about and accept jobs

No one—teachers, substitutes, or school administrators—wants to be on the phone at 5:00 am; however, the more advance notice you can provide when requesting a substitute, the greater your chances are of filling the position. Instead of using an outdated, frustrating phone chain method of handling teacher absences and finding last-minute replacements, you can rely on [substitute management software](#) that allows teachers to submit an absence and simultaneously request a sub. Substitutes then receive an automated, real-time notification via text, mobile app, or email about the assignment, where they can view details and either accept or pass on the job. As soon as the position is filled, the software notifies your administrator and anyone else you want to be notified.

Allows you to match substitutes to specific classroom needs

When a teacher calls in sick or is out for a longer period of time, you're looking for more than someone to occupy the teacher's chair in their absence. Ideally, you want a substitute with expertise of the subject matter who can maintain continuity in the classroom. Substitute management software makes that possible by allowing you to determine which substitutes are the best match for which schools, grade levels, and classes. For example, with InstaSub you can create [preferred lists](#) and filter substitutes by subject experience, skills, and certifications, sending notifications of vacancies to preferred subs first. That way, when the high school physics teacher calls in sick, you're able to quickly identify substitutes with science teaching experience.

Simplifies teacher absence tracking

With substitute management software, teachers can avoid awkward calls to administrators at odd hours to report an absence. They can easily report the absence from their smartphone and the software handles the rest for completely paperless management of teacher leave requests and approvals. The moment a teacher reports a sick day or requests time off, your substitute management system automatically records the request, tracks its approval, and sends a notification to your preferred substitutes of an assignment.

Reach substitutes via their preferred communication method

Managing teacher absences and substitutes no longer has to happen from a desktop. Modern substitute management software allows you to keep everyone informed via your choice of text message, mobile app notifications, or email. [Substitute management software with mobile tools](#) allows teachers, administrators, and substitutes to communicate using any device. At any time, day or night, teachers can request leave, subs can view and accept offers, and administrators can keep track of who's working and where each day.





Offers more comprehensive reporting

TCP's InstaSub includes a helpful dashboard that includes reporting data, providing you with better visibility of how well you're managing teacher shortages. These reports compile all of your absence and substitute data to help you plan and ensure better coverage. Examples include:

- Daily and monthly absence totals
- Employee leave balances
- Substitute availability
- Jobs worked, by substitute and time period
- Internal coverage summaries

Mitigate teacher shortages with a new approach to substitute management

When you're desperate to solve the challenge of not having enough teachers and substitutes in classrooms, you need relief—now. But despite there being some great recommendations out there, including increasing substitute pay and offering more training, those solutions aren't always easy to implement given budget restraints, school board approvals, and other potential obstacles. That's part of what makes substitute management software such an attractive solution for any K-12 school wanting to find and retain subs more reliably.

Substitute management software helps you fill absent teachers quicker and more efficiently. With automation and reporting tools that make the process easier for teachers, substitutes, and school administrators, you can navigate teacher shortages more effectively and ensure greater learning continuity for your students.

InstaSub by TCP Software simplifies the substitute management process, so it's completely automated and more accessible for everyone. To see why over school administrators nationwide trust InstaSub for their substitute management needs, contact us today to [talk to an expert](#).





Want to learn more? Let's talk.

866.783.9890 | www.tcpsoftware.com | **Get Time Right, Every Time**

©2023 TimeClock Plus, LLC (TCP Software). All rights reserved.