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## **Too many teacher absences. Not enough substitutes.\*** **May, 2012 REVISED**

### **Issue 1. Teachers are absent from their classroom too many days**

**Teachers miss 12 days without children and an estimated 16 days during school.**

**Classroom teachers are paid for 187 days of work. During some of them, they don't teach children.**

Texas law allows us to use seven of these days for staff development. The FWISD board annually has applied for an additional five days of staff development. Teachers are paid for five days before school begins and one after it ends, plus six additional days during the year. Students are not in attendance during these days.

In addition to these 12 days, during which children are not in attendance at all, teachers are absent numerous days during the school year for many purposes. (A list of these is provided in the appendix.) Teachers are allowed five sick days per year, plus five personal leave days. They are absent during the academic year for several other purposes, including additional staff development, travel, and for reasons decided by local school staff. During these activities, substitutes are hired.

District staff have provided us with information regarding the numbers of teachers absent for these other purposes. Using data provided for 2010-11 and 2011-12, we learn that teachers were absent a total of 77,659 days during 2010-11. Based on this and data available so far for 2011-12, we estimate that teachers will miss 79,935 days of teaching in 2011-12, **an average of 16 days per teacher.**

Taken together, then, teachers miss 28 days of school per year, which is more than one month of education of our children.

The total number of absences is approximately the same for 2011-12 as for 2010-11 when the increase in the number of children is considered, as is the number of **personal days** (1.5 through

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\* This analysis is the latest in a series of reports begun to describe possible causes for Fort Worth ISD's declining test scores, when compared to other major Texas cities [[http://www.sutherlandforschools.org/How\\_do\\_FWISD\\_Children\\_Score\\_on\\_Standardized\\_Tests\\_REVISED\\_JAn\\_2011.pdf](http://www.sutherlandforschools.org/How_do_FWISD_Children_Score_on_Standardized_Tests_REVISED_JAn_2011.pdf)]. A 2011 statement to the FWISD Board suggested that two of the causes could be (1) reliance on Lead Content Teachers and (2) the requirement that all classrooms follow a prescribed curriculum, regardless of the needs of the students.

April) and **sick leave** (5.8 through April). **However, the number of staff development days has increased by 6% over the previous year.**

Researchers know that time on task is central to increased student learning. The FWISD board must reduce this time out of class.

### **Issue 2: The cost is too high.**

**\$28 million is spent for teacher salaries while they attend staff development activities.**

Teachers need time away from the classroom to plan and learn. District staff needs to convey the rules and changes. Yet rules and changes can be conveyed to principals rather than presenting information directly to teachers in workshops. I believe we must employ more efficient methods in conveying necessary information to teachers.

The cost of teacher absences for staff development is staggering. FWISD is spending **\$21 million** for teacher training during the 12 days where children are at home. Do we need all this training? Should the FWISD board approve the additional five days?

The additional cost for staff development, school-level pull-out and trips is also huge. A 12-month estimate for these three purposes is 4088.4 days for professional trips, 4599.9 days for school pull-out activities, and 11,137.2 days for staff development, a total of 19,825.5 days—an average of 4 more days per teacher and **\$7 million in additional costs.**

### **Issue 3: There aren't enough substitutes.**

**During February, 1/6 requests for substitutes went unfilled**

February, which had 20 teaching days, had 10,045 requests for absences for all purposes. We did not have enough substitutes, and 1,583 requests could not be filled, about half of which were elementary and half secondary.

Unfilled absences are troublesome at the elementary level, not only because this is where children begin their educational journeys, but because typically these unfilled absences are resolved by splitting the teacher-less classroom among two others of the same grade. In this way, **three** classes are impacted. During February, 864 elementary classrooms were left without substitutes. Multiplied by 3, this is 2,592 classrooms (we have about 100 elementary schools). Added to the secondary classrooms without teachers, the total impact is **3,311 classrooms just in February.**

At the secondary level, students are placed in other teachers' classes. One teacher wrote that a possible reason for the large number of Friday absences was students being placed in the remaining teachers' classes, and subs are shifted from electives to core classes. Since teachers are not paid for these extra students, the district "makes" money when there aren't enough substitutes. On May 18, two weeks from the end of school, there were 700 teacher absences. I heard informally from one poster that there were 40 teachers absent at Paschal High School—about one in four.

Clearly, FWISD needs more substitute teachers. A recent *Star-telegram* article pointed out that unfilled absences in nearby districts are much lower. Dallas ISD has a high unfilled absence rate (12.6%), but not as high as our 15.5%.

Fort Worth's substitute assignment system is easy for substitutes to access via the internet and is cost-effective. Substitutes can look for assignments in advance and plan accordingly. Our recruitment and payment structure, however, can be improved. The pay is low (\$77 per day for a substitute with a bachelor's degree; \$130 for a full-time substitute). They are not paid for a long time when they are hired—as long as eight weeks of employment, which causes problems.

The substitute recruitment program has recently been re-vamped to improve the training of our substitutes. A summary of the requirements are presented in Appendix B. While it is thorough, it may reduce the number of individuals who wish to work for FWISD.

### **Recommendations**

Superintendent Dansby and his staff are reviewing this data, plus some of their own. The FWISD board needs to review their findings carefully in order to fulfill our responsibilities to our students, family members and community.

Of special concern is the approval of the waiver for the additional five days. Other concerns are:

- Teachers should be awarded for maintaining minimal absences, since each absence costs the district from \$73 to \$130. The bonuses can be awarded when teachers leave employment. In addition, rather than allocating absences for illness and personal business at the beginning of the year, they can be proportioned after they are actually earned.
- The number of substitutes must be increased, not only by minimizing the barriers to hire but also by showing appreciation for substitutes.
- There needs to be a reduction in the number of workshops and possibly a review of their establishment. Who decides when we hold a workshop? What controls exist to protect children from too many teacher absences? Staff should provide recommendations for reducing the number of workshops and their length.
- There were fifty teachers on leave in February, 1% of our teacher load. What, if any, costs to the district do these teachers on leave impose?
- The Board of Trustees should receive regular reports on the number of absences and their cost, including the cost of substitutes, in-service providers, and travel.

## Appendix A

### FWISD Substitute teacher wages As of 2011-2012

Substitute Teacher 60 college hours/daily \$ 73.00  
Substitute Teacher/Librarian/Counselor/Nurse Bachelor's degree/daily \$77.00  
(long term rate beginning the 11<sup>th</sup> day in same assignment) \$127.00  
Compliance Substitute Teacher Degreed/certified daily \$75.00  
Pyramid Substitute Teacher Bachelor's Degree/daily \$130.00

**Table 1**  
**Number of Teacher Absences, by day of week**  
**February, 2012**

Day of Week	Average Number of Absences
Monday	503
Tuesday	417
Wednesday	455
Thursday	505
Friday	612

**Table 2.**  
**Days where absent teachers were not replaced by substitutes, on average**  
**February, 2012**

Day of Week	Avg. Number unfilled
Monday	101
Tuesday	25
Wednesday	72
Thursday	82
Friday	155

#### What schools have the most unfilled absences?

There is enormous variation in the number of unfilled teacher absences at Fort Worth schools, ranging from less than 1 per teacher during February 2012 to over 5. Unfilled absences are greatest at our elementary schools. Table 3, next page, presents data for the schools whose percentage of unfilled absences exceeds 30%. Notice that they are all elementary schools.

**Table 3**  
**Schools with many unfilled absences**

Edward Briscoe Elem	36%
DeZavala Elementary	32%
Eastern Hills Elementary	31%
W M Green Elementary	32%
D MCRae Elementary	31%
Charles Nash Elementary	42%
Natha Howell Elementary	38%
Oaklawn Elementary	38%
Student Disc & Place	36%
Waverly Park Elem	30%

**Table 4**  
**Teacher absences, 2010-11 entire year plus 9 month data for 2010-11 and 2012**

Reason	TOTAL 2010-11	9 mos 10-11	9 mos 11-12
ADM LEAVE	854	678.5	708.5
ASSAULT LEAVE	318.5	292.5	222
BRVMNT DOCK SUB P.	54	44	29.5
COMP TIME	2	1	2
DTH IMMED FAMILY 1DY	432	374	339
EXTRA HELP	80.5	68.5	97
FMLY EMRGY/ILL FMLY	5515	4685.5	4656
FULL DOCK OF PAY P/B	60.5	41.5	151
JURY DUTY	631.5	514.5	534.5
LEGAL SERVICES-must	1	1	1
MATERNITY LEAVE	4335.5	3574	3951
MILITARY LEAVE	419.5	318.5	279.5
ORIENTATION	3	3	5
PERSNL BUSINESS	9264	7172	7257
POST-MATERNITY	1406.5	1110	1650.5
PROFESSIONAL TRIP	4158.5	3502.5	3443.5
Promethean Training	382.5	382.5	395
PULL OUT (INHOUSE)	4823	3437	3278
SICK LEAVE	33868.5	28816.5	28910.5
STAFF DEV/TRAIN	10330.5	9137.5	9850.5
UNFILLED AUXILIARY	1	1	1
VACATION	290.5	89.5	41
WORKMAN COMP.	427	386	722
Grand Total	<b>77659</b>	<b>64631</b>	<b>66525</b>
<b>Number of Days: Pull Out (InHouse), Prof. Trips &amp; Staff Dev/Train</b>	<b>19312</b>	<b>16077</b>	<b>16572</b>
<b>Total Number of Teachers</b>	<b>4901</b>	<b>4901</b>	<b>4955</b>

## Appendix B

### Procedures for hiring and training substitutes

#### Substitute Teacher Training for Current Substitutes to Remain Eligible to Work as Sub.

September 8	STEDI Substitute Training: Live	8:00 – 5:00 pm	PDC
<b>Substitute Teacher Workshops</b>			
September 13	Four Types of Misbehavior: Part I	1:00 – 4:00 pm	PDC
September 21	Student Engagement	8:30 – 11:30 am	PDC
September 28	Four Types of Communication	8:30 – 11:30 am	PDC
October 18	Classroom Management	1:00 – 4:00 pm	PDC
November 15	Four Types of Misbehavior: Part II	8:30 – 11:30 am	PDC
January 25	Increasing Student Motivation	1:00 - 4:00 pm	PDC
February 29	Grammar Brush Up	8:00 - 12:00 am	PDC
March 5	Learning Styles	1:00 - 4:00 pm	PDC
April 24	Differentiated Instruction	1:00 - 4:00 pm	PDC

The Fort Worth ISD has instituted a new Substitute Teacher Training Program designed by Utah State University Substitute Teaching Institute and delivered by STEDI.org.(Fall 2010) This training program is a required part of the substitute induction process.

The application and renewal process begins with training in classroom management, teaching strategies, planning, and other instructional skills and procedures. **Substitutes are required** to complete **SubOrientation™** and **SubSkills™** training and pass the **SubAssessment™**. You must complete the online assessment at 75% or greater within six weeks of employment. Applicants with proof of certification, who possess a valid State teaching certificate or substitute teacher certification may waive the SubOrientation™ and SubSkills™ training. For applicants that cannot reach the 75% passing mark, but are recommended to remain as substitute teachers, a day-long face-to-face training is available through the HCM Department of Induction, Development, and Retention. There is no charge for this training.

All new substitute teacher have a half-day District orientation and a half-day of “basics” specific for substitutes – online jobs access, the Central Calling System, communication with the sub office and schools, etc.

All substitute teacher applicants who are required to take the online training will be charged \$39.95 by STEDI.org for the cost of this training. Payments may be made online by credit card, check, or money order. This should be completed within six weeks of employment.

#### The training fee provides applicants online access for one year to:

- The 25 minute **SubOrientation™** video.
- **SubSkills™** training material
- A variety of downloadable forms, reports, and over 75 activities that can be used in the classroom.
- The online **SubAssessment™** which is designed to “assess” or evaluate how well the **SubSkills™** material has been mastered.

The training may only be taken over the Internet and includes 6-10 hours of interactive **SubOrientation™** and **SubSkills™** training. If you prefer not to study at a computer, you **may** purchase a handbook for an additional \$19.95. It takes an average of thirty minutes to complete each of the five **Sub Assessment™** sections. Candidates may take each section of the **SubAssessment™** a maximum of four times, to obtain a passing score of at least 75%.

The **SubOrientation™** and **SubSkills Training™** is available at: [www.STEDI.org](http://www.STEDI.org).

Once training is complete, applicants should print or save a copy of their SubDiploma™ for their records. You will need to attach a copy to the completed FWISD Substitute Teacher Application.