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THE RAPPAPORT REVIEW

An Anthology
On Topics of Interest
To Greater Boston

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THE MISSING LINK

Substitute teachers remain a forgotten part of public education. Often viewed as glorified babysitters, subs actually play a critical role in holding together the educational process – especially in schools with high teacher absenteeism rates. Boston schools are developing a new strategy to recruit and train subs.

BY RACHEL KLEIN

At 5 a.m. on a typical school day, Vita Daley walks into her office as assistant principal at the Curley Middle School in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood. She checks her voice mail and finds that two teachers will be sick today, on top of the one who told her yesterday that he would be on vacation and another who is on extended medical leave. Thankfully, she has one substitute teacher who comes every day and another long-term sub who has been filling in for the teacher on extended leave, and she lined up a third sub at the end of the day yesterday. "He was a new referral but he did a good job," she says. "I knew I'd need at least one more so I just asked him to come in and I would find a place for him."¹ That leaves Vita just one more sub to find, so she goes to her personal list and to the phones.

Daley is not alone. All across the city administrators emerge in the dark hours of the morning to make telephone calls to find substitute teachers for the day. Almost every school in the district has a dedicated sub caller – a noteworthy fact considering that the Boston Public Schools (BPS) has a centralized substitute teacher calling system that is designed to arrange for all substitute teacher assignments in the city. Under the centralized system, substitutes sign up for duty by listing the schools where they are willing to teach, the subjects they are willing to teach, and the days they are willing to work. Although school policies differ on how teachers communicate their absence to the school leadership, the BPS administration requires that teachers call the central office system when they are going to be absent. The system then locates and calls a sub who meets the criteria for the request. So, if teachers phone their absences in ahead of time, substitutes all over the city know their assignments in advance. Why, then, do Daley and her compatriots still get to school at 5 a.m. every day to call the subs? Charles Skidmore, the headmaster at Brighton High School, says: "I call the [central office] system, but it has failed so many times that I no longer expect anyone to come. I just do that to follow procedure, but I do my own networking and recruiting to find subs, and I do my own calling to place them at my school."²

The problem with the BPS assignment system is just one of many that plague the world of substitute teaching. Problems include a shortage of substitutes, little or no training for subs, inadequate treatment by administrators and permanent teachers, high teacher absenteeism, and a prevailing stereotype that they are more “substitute” than “teacher.” These factors, combined with a very low rate of pay in some districts – locally, as low as \$60 per day in Somerville – make substitute teaching a difficult profession. The problem is not just in Boston. As interviewed substitute teacher from California explained, “I got tired of breaking up fights and yelling at kids. I wanted to be a teacher, not a policeman.”³

As schools fight to meet new performance standards, they cannot afford to waste classroom days. Unless schools eliminate teacher absenteeism, substitute teachers will play a crucial role in meeting standards and preparing young minds for the future. This essay looks at the critical shortage of substitutes, the ways schools deal with the need for fill-in teachers, why people take to substitute teaching, and how the problem impacts learning.

Problems related to substitute teaching are not new. Researchers documented complaints of substitute shortages, untrained substitutes, and the use of substitutes as “warm bodies” as long as 50 years ago.⁴ However, new themes are emerging as current researchers document disparities between urban and suburban schools, and reframe the problems related to substitute teachers as student-achievement, rather than staffing, issues.

DIMENSIONS OF THE SHORTAGE PROBLEM

American students spend approximately 5 to 10 percent of their classroom time with substitute teachers; 10 percent of the nation’s classrooms have substitute teachers on any given day.⁵ For at-risk youth, this percentage is even higher – 13.5 percent of each school year, or approximately two years worth of their kindergarten through 12th-grade education.⁶ Past studies have shown that central-city schools have greater teacher shortages than suburban or rural districts,⁷ and that urban schools also have higher rates of teacher absenteeism and turnover, and a higher percentage of substitute teachers than other schools.⁸ Since those studies, the problem appears to be growing, partly because teacher absenteeism is increasing due to school reform efforts that encourage out-of-class professional development, collective bargaining, and nationwide family leave policies.⁹

Despite researchers’ concerns over the vast discrepancies among school districts, one quarter of states – including Massachusetts – sets no minimum standard requirements for substitutes. Only a handful of states even require a bachelor’s degree.¹⁰ For many states, because the operations of school districts vary greatly, departments of education prefer to allow local districts to set levels according to local needs. The Massachusetts Department of Education allows school districts to set minimum standards locally. In many districts in Greater Boston, the minimum requirement is a bachelor’s degree. But many administrators say a simple degree requirement does not ensure that a person has the skills necessary to teach. As Val Shelley, an administrator at Boston’s Charlestown High School said, “I’ve seen doctors come in here and read the newspaper while people with just a bachelor’s degree go straight to the lesson and start teaching. All that matters is how seriously they take the job.”¹¹

DEALING WITH THE SHORTAGE: THE IMPACT

In the spring of 2001, Ray Shurtleff, director of human resources for the Boston Public Schools concluded that the substitute teacher crisis had reached dangerous levels. The BPS was only filling 60 percent of its need for substitute teachers each day, putting undue pressure on principals to track down substitutes to keep classes operating.¹² To deal with these shortages, building administrators like Val Shelley reach out to the community to recruit their own pool of subs. They started with their list of favored substitutes each morning in an attempt to fill the building's vacancies. If they could not find subs for each of the positions, they would fill in with administrators, other teachers during their free periods, paraprofessionals, or student teachers in the building. If none of these solutions were possible, classes would double-up.

These methods tax the day-to-day functioning of the building and put undue strain on personnel. Teachers need their free periods to plan for other courses, grade papers, and regain energy for the next class. Administrators need to be free to deal with discipline problems, evaluate and support teachers, and organize outreach to parents. The need to shift paraprofessionals assigned to large classes, or those with special-needs children, into teacher-less classroom undermines their role in the school.

One other option, "doubling-up," occurs only about 5 percent of the time; but it can have serious consequences for several classes. When one class moves in with another studying a similar subject or grade level, two classrooms are disrupted by one teacher's absence. In many cases, the class with the missing teacher is split into two and then placed in two other classrooms, which puts undue strain on three classrooms of children. As one program coordinator at the Kenney Elementary School put it, "the real horror isn't the quality of the subs, it's when there is no sub."¹³

Neglecting the business of substitute teaching has significant negative impacts on student achievement. All students in Massachusetts are required to pass the 10th-grade standardized test – the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, or MCAS – before graduating from high school. But if a student has spent a cumulative two years of his academic career with substitute teacher who are often unable to conduct lessons, then students are more likely to perform below grade level. The effects on MCAS performance are still conjecture; the test requirements only went into effect this year, and solid research is lacking. Despite the controversy surrounding the MCAS graduation requirement, the issue of substitute teaching has been strikingly absent.

Few researchers directly study the effect of substitute teachers, but some have pinpointed the effect of teacher absenteeism on student achievement as measured by test scores. Teacher absenteeism is highest in districts with the lowest test scores, but it is unclear which way the causal arrows point. In a study of 17 high schools in Brooklyn in 1986-87 Pitkoff used school demographic information and personnel records of almost 3,000 school employees to find that the percentage of students reading below grade level and the percentage of students eligible for free lunch were the greatest predictors of teacher absenteeism.¹⁴

However, studies that have examined teacher absenteeism as a predictor of low test scores have not been as conclusive. Ehrenberg et al. found, in a series of surveys of New York state principals in the late 1980s, that higher student absenteeism was associated with poorer performance on standardized tests, but that teacher absence from class was not associated with student's academic performance.¹⁵ The study notes, however, that student achievement in their sample is based on the percentage of students who pass a standardized test, and that while teacher absenteeism may not affect a student's chances of passing, it may have deleterious effects for students who are above the

“minimum pass” level. Finally, a recent study by the New York City Division of Assessment and Accountability examined whether varying levels of student achievement could be explained by student attendance, teacher certification, and teacher absence rates. They used administrative data from personnel databases and student attendance from school during the 1999-2000 school year. Their findings mirrored those of Ehrenberg et al. by concluding that “teacher attendance does not add to the explanation of test scores.”¹⁶

Teacher absenteeism may be correlated with student achievement through yet-untested variables. For example, high rates of teacher absenteeism may have a negative impact on student attendance, which has been shown to affect test scores. Such data are not available for districts in Greater Boston. Although student attendance is regularly reported and publicized, the Department of Education keeps no records of teacher attendance, and human resources databases were not available for this report. Especially in light of the scrutiny of the MCAS, drawing the correlations between teacher absenteeism and MCAS scores could potentially help those advocating for better policies for substitute teaching and help students studying for the test.

TEACHER ABSENTEEISM AND HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY

High rates of teacher absenteeism are obviously a major factor in the need for – and shortage of – substitute teachers. Naturally, if there are fewer teacher absences, the need for substitute teachers will decrease. In one Arizona study, 71 percent of school personnel directors reported teacher absenteeism as a major problem.¹⁷ Studies have also shown that: elementary teachers miss school more often than secondary; female teachers are increasingly absent with age, whereas male teachers are most likely to be absent in their thirties; and teachers who received low performance ratings were absent more often than those with high ratings.¹⁸ School climate and district policy considerations appear to impact teacher attendance as well. Good working conditions, including supportive leadership, good buildings and equipment, high levels of staff collegiality, and high levels of teacher control over curriculum, instruction, and school decisions, all contribute to higher teacher attendance and morale.¹⁹ Further, districts that allow for unlimited accumulation of sick leave have lower usage of sick leave than districts who have a maximum as teachers are more inclined to use their sick days than lose them altogether.

While there are no official statistics on the rate of teacher absenteeism in Greater Boston school districts, anecdotal reports among those interviewed for this report suggest that it is high in the most urban areas. This is due in large part to the difficulty of urban teaching. According to the Council of Great City Schools, urban teachers work under more constraints than suburban or rural teachers. They tend to teach more students, lack basic materials such as books and desks, and work in worse physical spaces. Moreover, students often “bring into the classroom the social problems that plague their inner-city communities,” leaving urban teachers to deal with these issues.²⁰

The sick-leave policy in Boston allows teachers to take up to 15 sick days and three personal days per year, out of the roughly 200 workdays. If a teacher retires or resigns after more than 10 years with the district, they are paid at a 40 percent rate for unused sick days and personal days. Although Boston has an unlimited accrual, not all teachers consider their pay-out if it is years away or if they intend to leave the district before 10 years. As one Boston teacher noted: “If I know that I have 15 sick days and 3 personal days during the school year, I’m going to take them. If they would pay me at the end of the year for my unused sick days at a reasonable rate, I would be less inclined to be absent.”²¹

When a teacher is out for an extended period, the room must be filled with a sub. Even though schools often do not know how long a teacher will be out, district policies prohibit schools from filling a position with a “permanent” sub unless teachers have quit, been removed, retire early, or declare a medical condition that would keep them out for an extended period of time. Often, teachers get sick but do not declare or do not know how long their illnesses will last. This forces building administrators to find day-to-day subs for the duration of the illness, which could last several weeks or months, rather than finding permanent subs for the position. Under this policy, the responsibility rests with the teacher to be up-front with her administrators about the seriousness and expected duration of her illness; open relationships between teachers and administrators can facilitate this process.

A decreased rate of teacher absenteeism would have positive effects throughout the system. Decreased demand for subs would eventually weed out the “bad” substitutes since administrators will be able to choose candidates, eliminating the need to hire “warm bodies.” To provide greater incentives for full-time teachers to come to school regularly, administrators should consider adjusting human-resources policies.

One solution that Boston and other districts have begun using is teacher “coaches” rather than take teachers out of the classroom for in-service and professional development days. The “coach” method of teacher-training relies on literacy, math, or specialists in other areas to work with teachers in their own classrooms to improve their teaching skills one-on-one. Over the course of a couple of days or a week, a coach watches the teacher and gives feedback after a lesson. Alternately, the coach conducts a lesson to demonstrate a new method of teaching.

Other ways to reduce teacher absenteeism include compensating teachers for unused sick time at higher rates, reducing the number of personal days allowed, and creating incentives for reducing teacher absenteeism at the building level. The DeKalb County school district on the eastern side of Atlanta serves as an example of this latter approach. DeKalb was the largest school district in Georgia when administrators there identified a problem with teacher absenteeism. In the 1985-86 school year, the average staff absenteeism rate was 7.63 days per year, above the national average of 7.0.²² Administrators began a campaign to reduce teacher absenteeism through competitive awards to schools that decreased absenteeism, cash prizes to teachers who had perfect or near-perfect attendance, and a cash prize to the school with the best attendance over the course of the year. One local car dealership even donated a car for the teacher with the best attendance. The district estimates savings of over \$480,000 in unspent substitute teacher payments, and the program cost \$300,000. Staff absenteeism decreased to 6.5 days in the next school year, with 90 percent of schools reporting a decrease in absenteeism. This reduction in teacher absenteeism not only produced a clear monetary savings, but also increased consistency in the classroom.

TRAINING AND STANDARDS OF SUBS

Most school districts in Massachusetts and beyond do not require substitute teachers to have any training before taking charge of a classroom. Many districts do not interview substitute candidates before they begin their first day of work. In Framingham, applicants send in a resume and cover letter with a list of references; if the references are good, the sub is added to the list. In Quincy, applicants must have a bachelor’s degree but are not interviewed. The assumption here is that if a substitute has a degree and has passed a criminal record check, he will be able to lead a classroom in the absence of a teacher. However, there are countless anecdotal examples of people who meet mini-

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mum requirements for substitute teaching but cause students more harm than good. One administrator in Boston described one sub who told students they were stupid, and another who stood by while a fight broke out after he lost control of the classroom. However, with a shortage of substitute teachers through the region, the options for many school districts are slim. Boston Public Schools recently revised its policy to require only an Associate's Degree or 60 credit hours from an accredited college or university, though BPS subs must also be at least 21 years old. This revision was designed to increase the number of people who are eligible to teach. School officials say the new policy recognizes that a college diploma is not always an indicator of teaching skill and that work or life experience can prepare substitute teaching candidates as well as formal college coursework.

In an informal survey of 13 principals and headmasters from the Boston Public Schools, all said that the most important skill for substitute teachers was classroom management. Given this, it would seem training on classroom management for substitutes would be invaluable. However, very few school districts offer it. Nationwide, only 45 percent of school districts offer any substitute training, and often, training sessions are short meetings geared only to teaching substitutes how to use a school calling system.²³ In a survey of nine districts in Greater Boston – Boston, Cambridge, Quincy, Newton, Framingham, Lawrence, Somerville, Watertown, and Wellesley – only Cambridge offered a training program for substitute teachers beyond calling-system orientations. Cambridge offers seminars on classroom management multiple times throughout the year.

The Substitute Teacher Institute at Utah State University found that offering a training program for subs increases the number of substitute-teacher applicants, and enhances the quality of both the applicants and the sub pool. Because substitute teaching can be difficult, many people who were interested in the job are otherwise too intimidated to apply. But, many of these people admitted that if they had some training in classroom management and lesson planning, they would feel more confident in front of a classroom. In fact, some training proponents argue this group may be exactly who school districts should be recruiting for the job – people who are concerned, aware of what they are getting into, and hungry for knowledge to do a better job.²⁴

In other places this tactic has been shown to work. Hillsborough County school district in Florida began implementing a substitute teacher training program in 1997 with help from a local community college. The district designed a three-day training program for substitute teachers who had completed more than 60 college credit hours and a 10-day program for those with only a high school diploma. Not only did the number of applicants rise dramatically, but the number of complaints against substitute teachers fell by half. As further proof of the benefits of training, substitutes who attended the three-day program had twice as many unsatisfactory teaching reports as those who attended the ten-day program despite the fact that they had more education.²⁵

A nationwide community organization of low- and moderate-income families has made substitute teacher training one of its major priorities, and has approached the Boston Public Schools and the University of Massachusetts-Boston to enact a training program for subs. According to the Boston chapter of ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), "even though substitutes are only temporary, they are educators, and as such need some fundamentals to succeed. It is essential to provide all substitute teachers with training so that they can effectively teach their assigned students."²⁶ Parent complaints are what drew ACORN to this issue. "Parents would say, 'my child isn't learning anything,'" said Owen Toney of Boston ACORN. "She didn't have any homework, she's supposed to have homework, and when I asked what she did in school today, she said 'nothing, we had a sub.'"²⁷ After an investigation, ACORN found that school districts were assuming substitute teachers were competent based on the fact that they had college degrees, but

“that doesn’t mean they’ve ever had training in classroom management, and classroom management is the most important thing a substitute must be able to do.” A partnership between ACORN and the College of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Boston plans to launch its first voluntary training session for substitute teachers last year. The training was to be free, covering classroom management, appropriate behavior, and how to follow and create a lesson plan.

PAY AND CAREER-TRACK ISSUES

Nationwide, the daily rate of pay for per-diem substitute teachers ranges from \$40 to \$142. Most substitute teachers are not eligible for benefits.²⁸ On the low end, this translates into less than \$8,000 for a typical school year – below the poverty line, not enough to pay for child care for the day, and less than most janitors make. In Greater Boston, the median daily rate is around \$75, with several districts paying \$70 or \$75 and a handful of districts like Boston and Cambridge paying \$100 per day. While some districts have been able to attract better candidates when they notch up their pay, those at the high end of the scale do not necessarily attract good teachers.

In Cambridge, for example, the district raised the daily rate from \$70 to \$100 during the 2000-2001 school year. According to Clare Murphy, Manager of Substitute Services of the Cambridge Public Schools, “We are now able to attract graduate students of education who have training in working with students, and a deep interest in personal success in the classroom.”²⁹ According to interviews, Charlestown High School offers the same rate, but has seen a different pool of candidates. In January 2002, one substitute arrived for five days in a row with a stack of newspapers and read in the cafeteria while students sat around talking, even though the teacher he was replacing had left a lesson plan. Half of the students in the class had left the building after seeing that they had the same sub for the fifth day in a row. He said, “They pay me \$100 per day, that’s not very much. They pay me to be a warm body, not to teach.” The pay scares some substitutes away all together. A successful sales consultant from Newton between jobs said she thought about substitute teaching, until she worked out the rate. “I could substitute and see if I like it, but they only pay \$75 per day. I make that in an hour of consulting and teaching is much harder,” she said.

It’s not usually the pay that attracts substitutes. Traditionally, substitute teaching has been a way to “get a foot in the door” and land a full-time teaching job at a desirable school. This remains one of the primary reasons that people substitute teach. According to Val Shelley at Charlestown, “if a sub does a good job here and a teaching position opens up, we will definitely hire a sub for that position if she’s qualified. We know them, we know they’ll do a good job, it’s better than taking a gamble on someone we don’t know.”

Additionally, some people just like the flexibility of only working a few days each week. A sub in Wellesley said, “I can get a full-time job if I want, but I like the flexibility of working when I want, where I want.”³⁰ Many districts report that retired teachers sometimes make the best subs because they want to keep in contact with students but don’t want to work full time or have the responsibility of planning classes. Some substitutes enjoy moving around to various schools. As a local graduate student in education policy said, “I subbed for a whole year in Los Angeles because I wanted to see how every school worked. It was the best way to know the district, and now I can go back and make some real changes because I know how things work.”³¹

The foot-in-the-door idea also works both ways. Attracting high-quality substitute teachers could potentially help ease the looming teacher shortage in Boston, and districts across the country. Estimates posit that 50 percent of the teachers in the Boston Public Schools will become eligible for

retirement in the next 10 years. As one Human Resources specialist notes: "It would be great if our substitutes could become full-time teachers. I keep telling people who are interested to take the [teacher certification] test, especially if they have training in education."³²

SCHOOL CLIMATE ISSUES

Higher pay does not always translate into a better working environment for substitutes; even with a relatively high wage, the good ones may not stick around for long. The top two reasons that substitutes quit are difficulties with classroom management and difficulties with the way the district treats them. Rowdy students tend to make classroom management a problem. Students often mistreat subs, knowing they are not accountable to fill-in teachers. Problems with the district can include unfavorable assignments, a lack of lesson plans, and a lack of hospitality or assistance from school administrators. In many schools, substitutes and experts say that school officials assume that substitutes are "bad until proven good." Teachers and administrators have grown accustomed to substitutes who fit the "warm body" stereotype of a substitute, especially after years of substitute shortages that have left districts with more subs of this mold, so they do not pay respect to even the brightest and most energetic subs.

Until these problems are addressed directly, basic respect may be the best solution for both subs and administrators. As one substitute noted, "the way I got a teaching job was to act like a teacher. If you can't be professional in a school setting at all times, nobody is going to welcome you back into the school, especially not as a full-time teacher."³⁴ The perception of substitutes runs both ways: while subs need to act like real teachers, permanent school personnel need to encourage this attitude in the subs that work there. As one Boston headmaster argued: "If you treat them like substitutes, they will act like substitutes. If you treat them like teachers, they will act like teachers."³⁵ Many schools have begun to treat subs like teachers by inviting them to in-service days, requiring their presence at curriculum meetings in the absence of regular teachers, and asking them to prepare lesson plans when they work continuous days in one classroom.

MANAGING THE ASSIGNMENT OF SUBS

There are three primary ways that school districts manage the assignment of substitutes. The ad-hoc approach requires principals and other administrators to make their own calls to potential substitutes. The centralized approach operates with a unified calling system that assigns subs for the whole district. A newer method is to assign "permanent substitutes" to schools on a full- or part-time basis so there is constant – though occasionally more than necessary – coverage.

In many districts around the country, one person in the central office makes all of the phone calls and substitute assignments for the entire system. Locally, districts like Framingham and Cambridge use this format. This process is often automated using a computer system that accepts voice messages from teachers calling in absences, and automatically generates calls to substitutes. Automated systems allow teachers to request specific substitutes, rank order the substitutes they want the system to call, and list substitutes they absolutely do not want. But removing the human relationship from the equation also makes it easier for teachers to miss school days; they don't have to explain their absence to a principal or administrator. Some schools concerned about this require teachers to call the principal to explain their absence, then call the central system for a substitute.

Most school districts implement an automated system when call volume becomes too great for one or two people to handle. The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) took another approach. When the CPS began getting complaints about the poor quality, tardiness, missed assignments, and shortages of substitutes, they abandoned their automated system and hired one full-time substitute manager and six part-time substitute callers. One of the largest school districts in the country with 435,000 students, CPS now places 2,200 substitutes each day through personal phone calls that begin at 4:30 in the morning. The system's relentless sub manager, Nancy Slavin, spends most of her day calling schools to check up on the subs she sent them and calling subs to find out how their placements worked out.

Quality checks serve two purposes. First, if schools are reporting that substitutes are frequently late, Slavin calls and asks about the problem. She said, "This usually shapes them right up. They think, 'oh my God, someone's checking!'"³⁶ On the flipside, if subs report that they do not like a particular assignment or that the staff behaves unprofessionally to them, Slavin will call the principal and alert them to the problem. If the problem persists or gets worse, Slavin reports the principal to a regional supervisor. According to Slavin, CPS now fills 100 percent of its requests for substitute teachers. She said there has also been a dramatic rise in the quantity and quality of substitute candidates, and credits both a slumping economy and an aggressive recruiting campaign that included radio advertisements, transit ads, and mailings. "It has allowed me to knock out the bottom tier of subs from my pool," she said.

Newton has used a different method for more than ten years with great success. Every year, the district reviews each school to determine the average need for substitutes on an average day. Schools are then assigned "Instructional Support Staff" (ISS) according to their needs. ISS are part-time teachers who choose, at the beginning of the year, to work one, two, or three days each week, and are assigned to a particular school. If ISS are not needed at their school on a given day, they may be asked to go to another school, help in the main office, or assist regular teachers in their classrooms. ISS are paid roughly \$75 per day and are not eligible for benefits or sick time.

This structure has positive benefits for both the schools and the ISS staff. ISS may be interested in eventually moving into full-time teaching positions in Newton, or they may desire part-time jobs that fit their schedules or allow them to gain experience for future careers in teaching or working with children. The assignment system allows them to become regular staff at one school, which lets them connect with the teachers and building administrators; per-diem subs tend to travel around the city and rarely get to know people they work with. According to Jody McNeil of the Newton Public Schools, "it has eliminated our need for a sub list and raised the quality of our substitutes. It may cost a little bit more, but the reliability is worth it."

SUBSTITUTE TEACHING AND THE ECONOMY

Eight months after Shurtleff's declaration that substitute teaching is the Boston's Everest, the Boston Public Schools seems to be approaching base camp. BPS is working on a new Substitute Teacher Initiative, which includes interviewing all potential candidates, developing a training program for substitutes, and urging school-based leadership to promote substitutes as an integral part of the building. There has been a rise in substitute teacher applications and a corresponding rise in the qualifications of these applicants. According to Joelle Barrios, a recruiter for the Boston Public Schools with primary responsibility for interviewing substitutes: "I have a stack two feet high on my desk of substitute teacher applicants. Most of the people I've talked to have been great – bachelor's,

master's, Ph.D. degrees. Many had a real interest in teaching but were doing something else because the economy was so good. I'm thinking about raising my standards and only recommending candidates who are exceptional."³⁷

Unfortunately, this reality has yet to filter down to the schools. Vita Daley and her compatriots continue to make substitute teacher calls in the early hours of the morning, and do their own networking to recruit subs for their schools. Although they too are more able to find high quality subs in the current economy, there remains a gap between what is happening centrally and out at the school-level. Because school administrators are spending so much time on triage for substitute teachers, it keeps them from focusing on the other duties that administrators should be dealing with such as discipline, calling parents of troubled students, and facilitating teaching and learning.

In a recent report to the Cambridge School Committee, Lewis H. Spence, former Deputy Chancellor for Operations of the New York City Public Schools noted: "Many schools have successfully transformed individual buildings or a handful of buildings in a district. But the only way to achieve district-wide improvement is to focus on teacher professional development. But, the number one impediment to teacher professional development is scheduling."³⁸ Teacher development includes the substitute teachers who not only provide the "bench strength" of a district's teaching corps, but also the "farm system" of that corps. Attending to a school district's teaching needs requires attention to the substitutes as well as the full-time faculty.

ENDNOTES

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28. National Education Association, 1999.
29. Interview with Clare Murphy, Manager of Substitute Services, Cambridge Public Schools, September 6, 2001.
30. Interview with Thomas Jackoboice, Teacher, Wellesley Public Schools, January 15, 2002.
31. Golshani.
32. Interview with Joelle Barrios, Recruiting Specialist, Boston Public Schools, January 16, 2002.
33. Interview with Geoffrey G. Smith, Director, Substitute Teaching Institute, Utah State University, February 8, 2002.
34. Daley.
35. Interview with Bak Fun Wong, Headmaster, Quincy Upper School, Boston, June 29, 2001.
36. Interview with Nancy Slavin, Substitute Services Manager, Chicago Public Schools, February 7, 2002.
37. Barrios.
38. Lewis H. Spence, Commissioner, Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Presentation to the Cambridge Public Schools Superintendent and School Committee, Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, January 8, 2002.