

# FEA Survey on Substitute Teachers

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## Executive summary

In the fall of 2016, a large number of FEA members expressed to FEA leadership and staff their frustration with the shortage of qualified substitute teachers – both the number of substitutes and their qualifications to provide classroom instruction. FEA conducted a survey in order to learn how widespread the problems are.

We found that:

- Overall, there is a shortage of substitutes. Positions go unfilled on a frequent basis.
- Many substitutes are incapable of providing instruction. Some don't speak English. Some can't – or won't – follow the lesson plans left for them. Many do not have adequate subject matter expertise.
- When schools find themselves short of substitutes, other personnel are reassigned from their normal duties. This results in certain services not being delivered (reading help, special education, etc.), staff losing their planning time and classes being split up or doubled up. This impacts instruction and staff morale.
- Up until the 2016-17 school year, retired FCPS teachers were paid a higher rate for substitute teaching than others. When their pay was scaled back to equal the pay of substitutes who have little or no experience in the classroom, many retirees quit substituting for FCPS. Others scaled back the amount that they work, sometimes only substituting as a favor to former colleagues. This has had two effects: reducing the overall substitute pool, and greatly reducing the number of substitutes who can maintain discipline, follow a lesson plan, and provide students with instruction.
- Special Education teachers and Elementary Specialists have the greatest difficulty finding qualified substitutes.
- A number of comments indicated that it is also difficult to get good substitutes for Instructional Assistants.

Respondents had a number of suggestions for improving the situation:

- Increase the pay rate for all substitutes
- Restore the higher pay rate for retiree substitutes
- Improve screening of applicants to the substitute pool
- Ensure that all substitutes have language skills that are adequate to communicate with students and staff
- Provide additional training to substitutes on classroom management, how to follow lesson plans, and how to use classroom technology
- Reducing the number of Professional Development sessions and meetings held during the students' school day would reduce the need for substitutes

FEA recommends that FCPS take these actions:

- Restore retiree pay rate and increase pay rate for all substitutes
- Improve substitute quality by ensuring all have requisite language skills, classroom management skills, and training to follow lesson plans
- Ability to give feedback on substitutes
- Reduce the number of regional and county based school days used for training
- Prevent substitutes from hopping to another job after accepting one
- Pay anyone that is covering a class like an IA pulled from a class or a teacher on their planning period
- Give a financial incentive to not use sick leave at the end of a career or the ability to make a leave bank for employees in need

## Introduction

"2016 has been awful with getting substitutes and especially getting qualified ones."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Subbing is NOT an easy job. FCPS should quit treating it like it is. Subs need to be paid and trained appropriately. Doing this is beneficial for the students, but it also says FCPS values their teachers who should be able to take time off knowing qualified persons are filling in for the day."

High School General education teacher

"The subs this year have been TERRIBLE. Most have been clueless, shouldn't be anywhere near elementary school students."

Elementary School General education teacher

"The situation is desperate. It is creating a bad experience for the students. Thank you for asking about this!"

High School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Each school board member ought to come into a classroom to see the subs we get... recently we have had one who could only walk with a walker, can't speak English well enough to ask about the lunch schedule, one who spread out her scrapbooking materials on the teacher desk and did nothing even when asked by the team teacher. HELP!"

High School Special education teacher

"There seems to be no middle ground for subs. Either they are great (usually former teachers themselves), or it seems they are doing this in lieu of dog walking between jobs (usually I get a diatribe from one such sub at the end of their day detailing how each class was uncontrollable)."

High School General education teacher

Over the past year, members of the Fairfax Education Association have reported that it is increasingly difficult to get qualified substitute teachers to cover classes when teachers are out sick, caring for sick family members (often their own children) or attending professional development classes that are held during the school day. In order to learn more about the extent of the problem, FEA conducted a survey in December 2016.

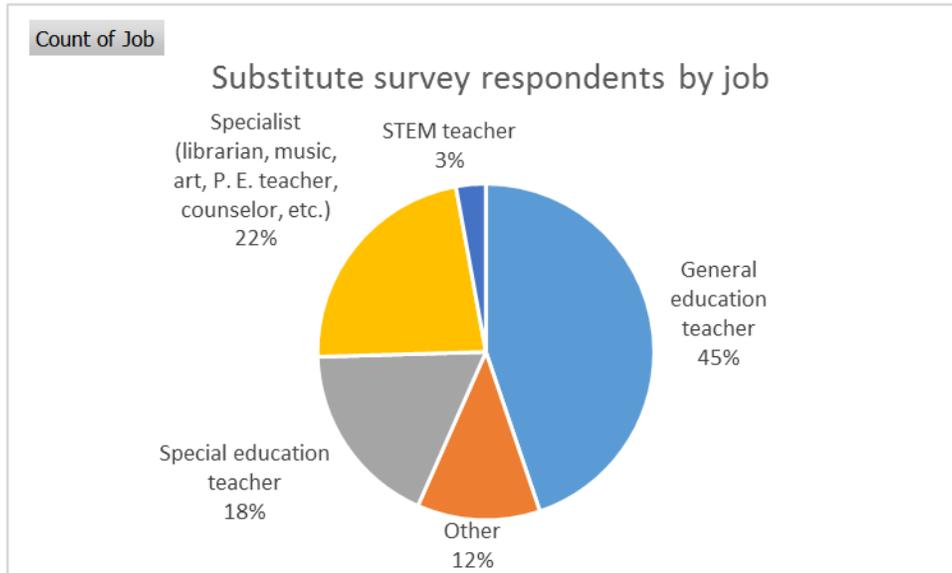
We directly invited our teacher members (including counselors and other teacher-scale employees) to take the survey, and we told our members that it would be fine to extend the invitation to non-member colleagues who might want to give their view of the situation. A total of 1,049 people responded to the survey.

## Survey results

At the end of the survey we asked open ended questions about what factors might contribute to the problem of getting enough qualified substitutes, what might be done about it, and any other thoughts. Many of the comments related directly to our quantitative survey questions, and a few samples are included with those results below. Comments that do not tie directly to a particular quantitative survey question are discussed at the end of this results section.

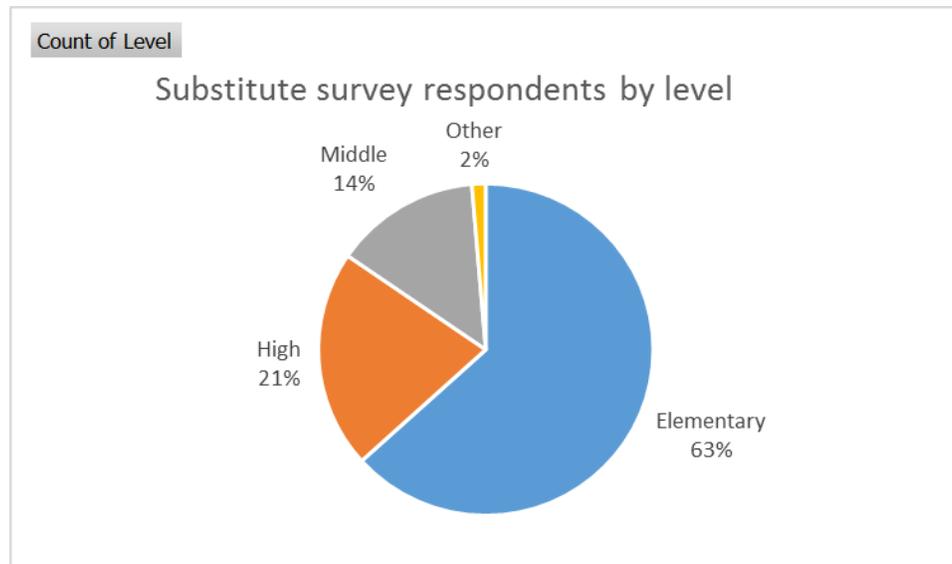
## Respondent demographics

1049 people took our survey; of these, 76% were FEA members and 24% were not members. Most respondents were teachers, but there were also a few administrators, office staff, instructional assistants and others.



Most of the 12% of respondents that indicated that their job description was “Other” were teachers who did not identify with one of the delineated categories. These included ESOL, AAP and AAR teachers, SBTS and a few others.

We asked the respondents the level of school taught, with these results:

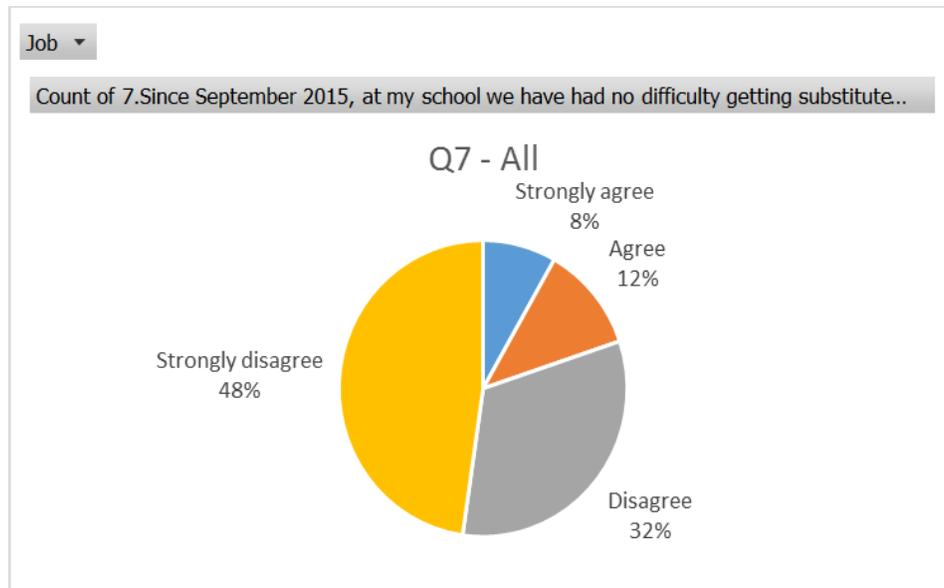


In analyzing the responses, we made separate analyses by job and also by level. While the variations in responses were not significant, there were a few questions in which the responses varied significantly. These are noted in the discussions below.

## Respondents’ experience with substitutes

The main part of the survey was a series of questions asking respondents about their experience with substitute teachers. Most of the survey questions were positive statements with response choices on a Likert scale of agreement.

Q7 - Since September 2015, at my school we have had no difficulty getting substitute teachers.



Fully 80% indicated that it has been difficult to get substitute teachers. The problem is more acute in elementary schools, where 83% indicated difficulty, while the numbers for middle and high school were 78% and 73%, respectively. We also found that the problem is worst for Specialists (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.), among whom 86% indicated difficulty. In comments, respondents reported problems both with getting substitutes arranged and with substitutes canceling at the last minute.

#### *Availability of substitutes*

"My concern is more about the availability of ANY substitute, let alone a good one. I have stayed up writing sub plans while vomiting only to find out my class had to be divided among my teammates because there was no sub."

Elementary School General education teacher

"At this point, I can't get anyone to cover my class. I'd be happy with any subs, even if they weren't qualified."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Every time I have requested a substitute, either no one has picked up the assignment, or it is picked up and then dropped. I have not had a substitute yet this year!"

Elementary School ESOL teacher

#### *Last minute cancellations by substitutes*

"Subs never show up; in one night I had 6 subs pick up and drop the same job multiple times in one night and then the next morning I had no sub that day and had to cancel my Professional Development."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Substitute teachers who cancel their jobs the morning of the assignment should be blocked from the system."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

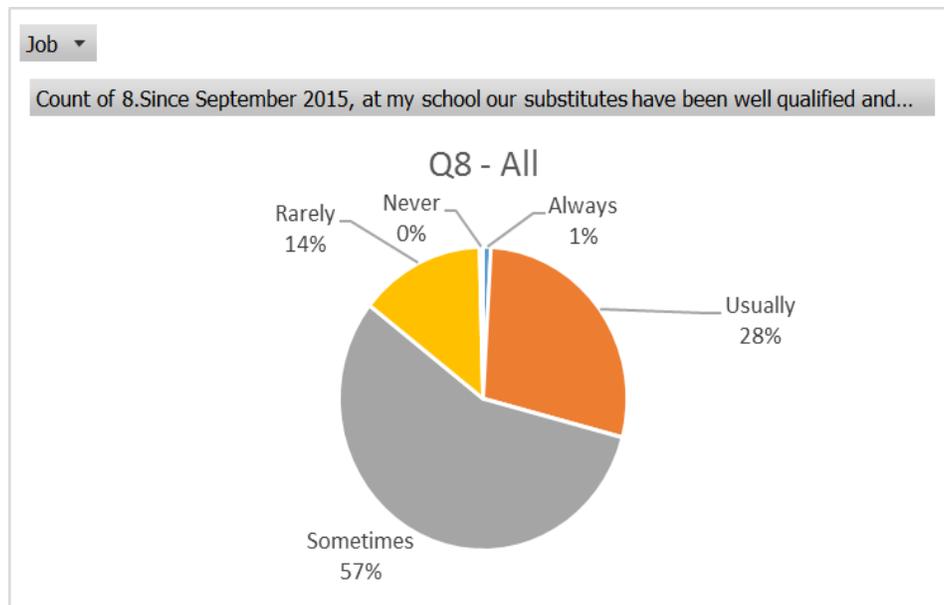
"The biggest problem at my school is that substitutes pick up a job and then cancel the night before if they get a better offer. This has happened to me twice last week."

Elementary School General education teacher

"I missed my daughters First Grade Performance this year due to a sub cancellation on a Friday"

Elementary School General education teacher

Q8 - Since September 2015, at my school our substitutes have been well qualified and done a good job.



Only 29% think that substitutes have always or even usually been well qualified and done a good job. 71% said that the subs were only rarely or sometimes well qualified and had done a good job.

Respondents made many comments about the qualifications and job performance of substitutes. Here is a sampling of comments broken out by theme:

*English proficiency (mentioned in comments from 155 respondents)*

"The issue is not only lack of substitute teachers, but the quality of subs in the system. We had a sub hired for one of our LD teachers who spoke NO English!! She could not only not communicate with the students, she couldn't communicate with the grade level teachers or other staff. The hiring of unqualified subs needs to be reviewed...."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"We need substitutes that can speak English clearly, be able to read and write in English proficiently! Some substitutes are unable to read and write."

Elementary School General education teacher

"I had one, the worst one I ever had, who not only couldn't speak English, did not execute my lesson plan, lost control of the class to the point that other teachers had to come over, and, most incredibly, ate all the chocolate I had in my desk. You don't mess with a man's chocolate!"

High School General education teacher

"One factor is hiring too many individuals who are not FLUENT English speakers. (There is no problem with non-native speakers of English who have command of English.) As an ESOL teacher I am very sympathetic to the plight of ELLs. However, I do not think these individuals are qualified to be substitutes."

Elementary School ESOL teacher

*Substitutes need more training (mentioned in comments from 130 respondents)*

"Please clarify expectations to them and have consequences when they do not meet them. I once was sick on finals week and had to get a last minute sub. He had to give my final and the next day a colleague told me that they found him in the hallway looking for a bathroom while my kids took their final!! And behavior such as this is NOT uncommon. It's insanity. Which is why I will come in sick and dying from now on hopped up on Tylenol rather than take my chances on a random sub."

Middle School General education teacher

"I have seen subs sleeping, I have seen them reading novels, knitting, and wandering the building. I have never in all my 20+ years teaching art ever had time to squeeze any of those in. (nor would I want to!) I think too many just show up for a pay check. We have a handful of amazing subs, unfortunately they get hired as teachers very quickly, leaving us with slim pickings! (especially as specialists!) No one ever wants our hectic schedules! Thanks for the support! Good luck!"

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"I think to make sure we have quality substitutes there should be some sort of training or workshop. I have gotten substitutes that cannot use a tv, dvd player, or stereo. I have also had subs completely disregard my plans and do what they want. Maybe we should train subs to look at some example lesson plans so they can be more prepared."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"I have 1 that threw a water bottle at the kids- 1 student almost hit- kids complained about to other teachers & sub STILL comes to our bldg??? Some are nasty & mean when they first show up - students not allowed to use bouncing chairs or sand because sub is irritated. No wonder kids push to a limit w/ someone when they are treated like that!!"

Middle School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

*Substitutes are not familiar with lesson content*

"Very hard to find subs who know how to teach Specials subjects. Have to leave worksheets or other activities."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

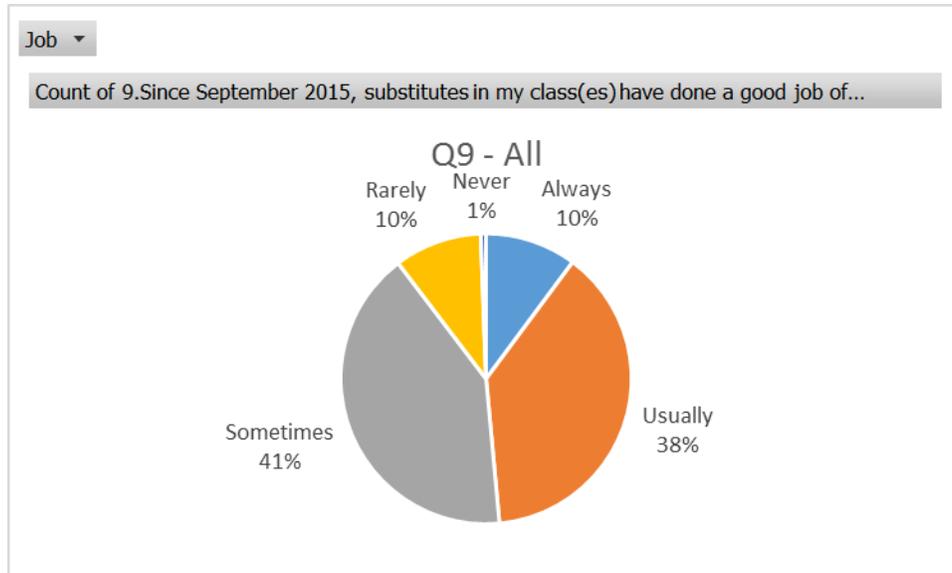
"some are not familiar with math that is currently being taught in ES"

Elementary School Math Resource Teacher

"It is especially difficult to get substitutes for special education. There should be a special category for this."

Elementary School Special education teacher

Q9 - Since September 2015, substitutes in my class(es) have done a good job of following the lesson plans that I have left.



We asked for respondents' personal experience with subs and whether lesson plans had been followed. Only 48% said that lesson plans had usually or always been followed. The problem is more acute among special education teachers and specialists (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.). 43% of these groups reported that their lesson plans were always or usually followed.

64 respondents mentioned in their comments that substitutes do not reliably follow lesson plans. Teachers expressed dismay at returning to find that students' time was not spent on the lessons that they prepared. These comments are typical:

"There are low standards asked of substitutes. Many subs sign up to work with what looks like zero work experience. Many subs take attendance and consider that the end of their job requirement."

Middle School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"We have many subs that not only do not follow the lesson plan, but intentionally make decisions against it. (For example, once a sub chose not to show Romeo and Juliet because she thought it was inappropriate.)"

High School General education teacher

"There is a handful of substitutes that we try to schedule and stay in our building. Those substitutes are great! However, there are days when something unexpected happens and you don't have time to contact individual subs. I have had substitutes show Christmas videos and completely ignore sub plans. Others have decided to let students vote on if they want to take the test. We have actually had subs fall asleep while on the job."

Elementary School General education teacher

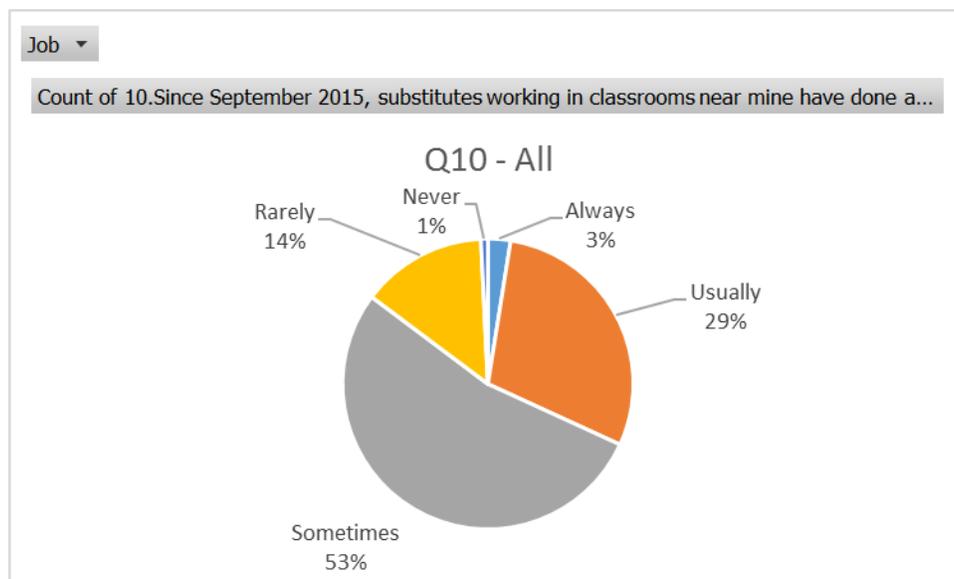
"The substitutes we do get just sit at the desk and play on their laptop / phone / tablet and leave the students up to their own devices. At least this doesn't disrupt my planning, but when I walk by these classrooms, there is no learning being accomplished whatsoever."

High School General education teacher

"It takes more time to prepare sub plans than my own plans. When I take that time, I want to know that I'm leaving the lessons in the hands of someone capable of following them. Too frequently, I return to school after an absence to discover that the sub has not followed the plans I left."

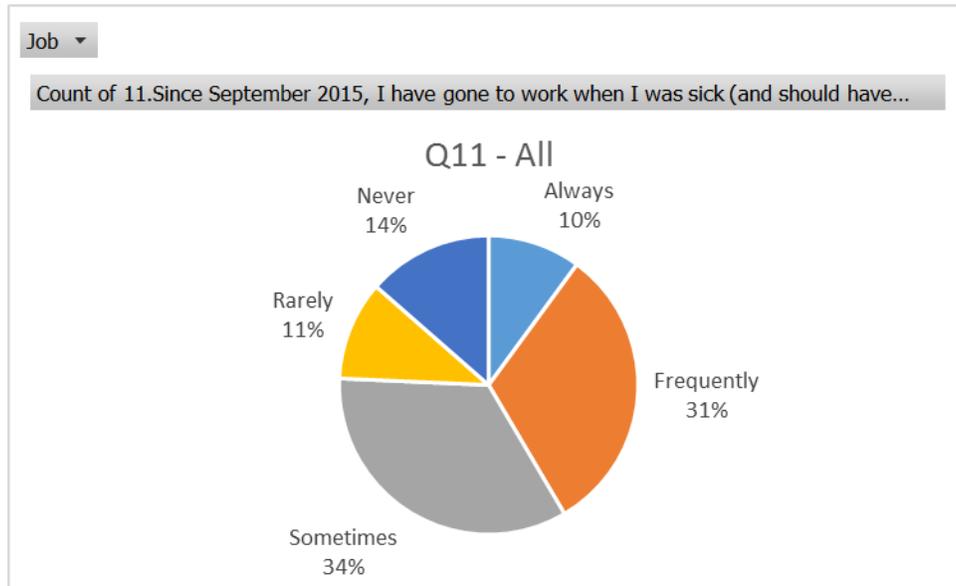
High School General education teacher

Q10 - Since September 2015, substitutes working in classrooms near mine have done a good job of maintaining order and following class routines.



Only 32% report that the substitutes in nearby classrooms usually or always maintain order and follow classroom routines.

Q11 - Since September 2015, I have gone to work when I was sick (and should have stayed home) because I was worried that my class(es) would not have a capable substitute teacher.



Most teachers reported going to work sick because they could not be sure that a reliable substitute could be found; 41% said that they always or frequently go to work when they are sick; the problem is worse among special education teachers – 47% of them reported that they always or frequently go to work sick. A few respondents reported being required by administrators to work when sick. This situation affects teacher morale. Typical comments include:

"My administration has informed staff that if a substitute has not been placed to cover an absence, we must come into school barring a serious emergency."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"I have come to school with the flu. I was told I had to stay due to the fact they had no coverage for me. Someone did come in eventually. I was told I needed to come back the next day. No coverage. How can one recover from the flu when you can't rest? Most importantly, I DON'T WANT TO EXPOSE MY STUDENTS TO ILLNESS!"

Elementary School General education teacher

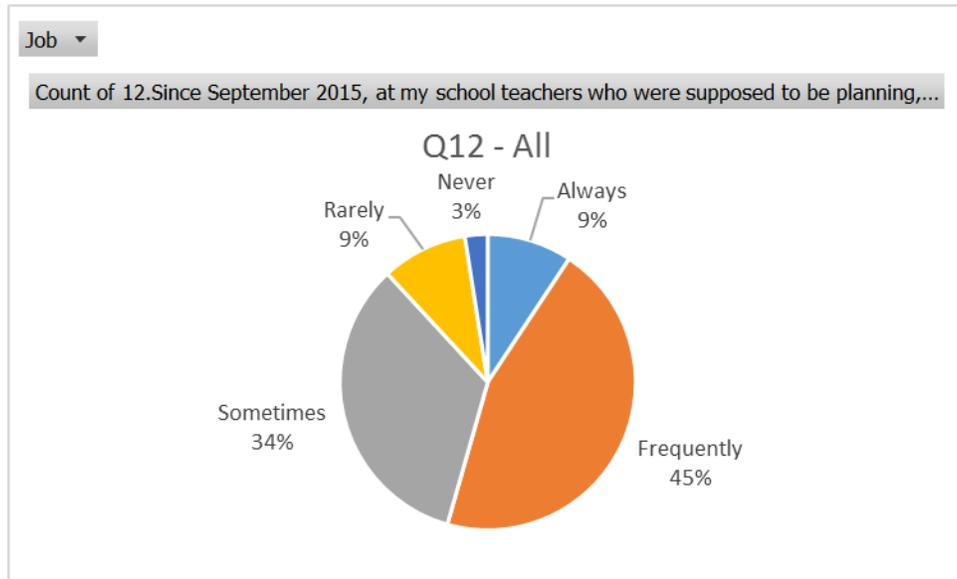
"The administration has refused leave or really questioned the leave being requested for some teachers because of the difficulty of getting substitutes. I think this is a very unprofessional way of being treated as an educator."

Elementary School Special education teacher

"Teachers are dragging themselves to school when sick. This cannot continue! The school system will burn out teachers. This practice contributes to an exhausting work environment!"

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

Q12 - Since September 2015, at my school teachers who were supposed to be planning, Instructional Assistants, SBTS and others were used to cover classes because of a lack of qualified substitutes.



Nearly all schools reported that staff are pulled from their regular assignments in order to cover classrooms left without substitutes. There were profound differences in the results based on grade level, with the problem being greatest in elementary and least in high schools. 62% of elementary respondents indicated that these in-house coverage arrangements occur always or frequently, while the numbers for middle and high schools were 47% and 38% respectively.

This practice of in-house reassignment to cover classes has a number of ramifications, including: It increases teachers' workload when they miss planning periods; it can deprive Special Education students of mandated services when teams are split up to cover classes or when Instructional Assistants are pulled from their regular assignments to cover a class.

In addition, it sometimes happens that when multiple teachers are absent, substitutes are reassigned within a building by the administrators. This can cause morale problems with teachers whose subs have been pulled and may make substitutes reluctant to work at that school: A substitute who accepts a job covering a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class and finds herself reassigned to 1<sup>st</sup> grade may not feel comfortable in that new assignment and may wish to avoid such reassignments in the future.

Respondent comments about in-house coverage through reassignments include:

"Many staff members have questioned the fact that we are made to cover classes during our planning and/or CT time because of a lack of substitutes. Elimination of our planning time has led to teachers having to take more work home which leads to our private lives being sacrificed - again."

Middle School General education teacher

"It is really unfortunate that teachers (ESOL, Tech Specialists, etc.) are getting pulled from doing their regular duties to cover classroom teachers. This is a huge problem for schools."

Elementary School General education teacher

"Other teachers frequently have to cover classes, and then leave their team teachers without the gen ed/SPED teacher in the room. A lack of subs is actually making our classrooms non-compliant with the law just so that every class has at least one adult in there."

High School General education teacher

"At our school, we've had to turn in a list which breaks our class into 2 groups (the number of other gen ed teachers at my grade level). So that if no sub can be found, my class can be split in half and "farmed out" to my teammates for the day. Definitely NOT best practice or quality instruction when our classes are already at 28-30 without extra kids from other classrooms."

Elementary School General education teacher

"For several occasion, substitutes who originally picked my class job have been removed from the class to cover other class. I was able to confirm this because when I look up SmartExpress, a different substitute's name appeared in the system than one who was actually in the classroom."

Elementary School Head Start teacher

"I don't know exactly why we are not getting substitutes. Since I am a specialist, I have had subs that were SUPPOSED to sub for me, get taken and put into general ed classrooms because those absent teachers were more of a priority to get a sub than me. Teachers on those days did not get music and were not happy about that. Due to this, I have been coming to work when I am sick because of the lack of subs."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"While I am unaware of any classes being left without supervision, there are numerous times, this school year alone, where a single teacher or IA has been assigned to a "class" of approx. 60 students. No quality learning can take place in such an environment. Further, no ill staff member wants to put that burden on a colleague. So, teachers are showing up to work when too sick to function well. They're also missing multiple plannings, and even their lunchtimes, to cover classes."

Elementary School General education teacher

"Jobs are not being picked up, so I have left my planning periods to cover classes so that I have no break at all during the day. The substitutes that are provided don't help at all, which makes it scary to take a sick day because they don't maintain classroom procedures OR ensure that students do any work. I have had several IA and co-teachers who have taken off and their job hasn't even been filled."

High School STEM teacher

"When putting in sub request and the job is not picked up- the job says covered in-house when in reality we are given no coverage."

Elementary School Special education teacher

"Often times my teammate (PE) has had a substitute pre-arranged and then the front office staff/admin will take her sub and put them in a classroom and I have to teach double PE classes all day. :("

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"When a teacher doesn't have a substitute, the principal has to pull special education IAs or special education teachers to cover classes. This causes students receiving special education services to not receive those services. It also disrupts the pull out classes for the special education teachers."

## Elementary School Special education teacher

"It has become a regular practice at my school recently to pull IA's to cover classrooms for teachers who put in for a substitute- but no one picked up the job. One of them is helping read with my struggling readers 4 times a week and she is very frequently unable to meet with them because she is sent to another classroom to cover for an absent teacher."

## Elementary School General education teacher

"My biggest concern is that ESOL teachers, IAs, and other staff that are already scheduled to be working with students, are pulled to cover classrooms needing subs. In my ESOL inclusion classroom my co-teacher is pulled often to cover unfilled sub positions."

## Elementary School General education teacher

"My administration doesn't seem to care. They use the special ed team as the sub pool they even use a sped teacher and sped IA on a daily scheduled time (illegal?) to cover two gen ed teachers so they can pump breast milk. also NO discipline follow-through from admin."

## Elementary School Special education teacher

"I planned my substitute in advance and when I took off, they pulled my sub to put her in a classroom position and my position was left unfilled. The IA's at our school are pulled all the time to fill unfilled positions.

I was sick this week but did not take off because I didn't think I could get a quality sub."

## Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

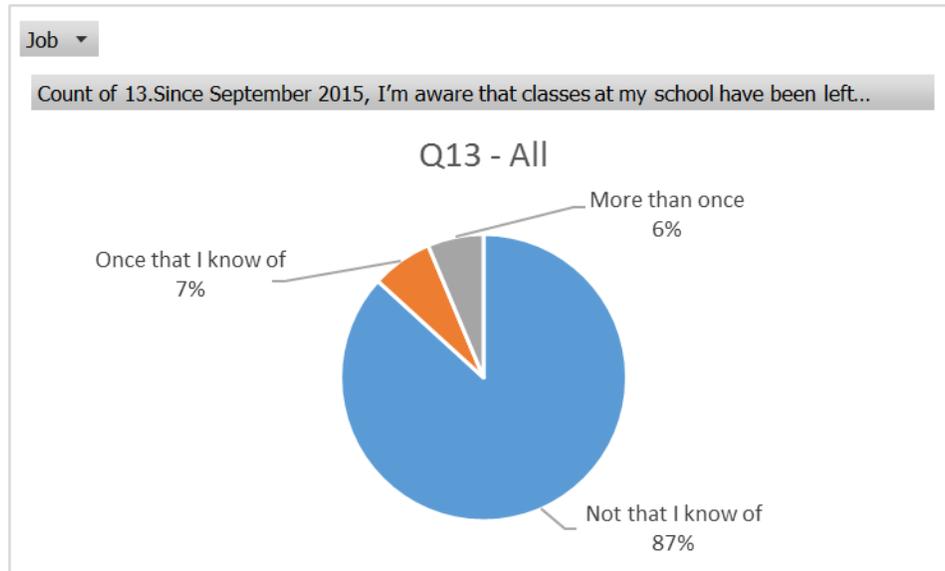
"There have been several teachers that have reported to work ill because their subs cancelled at the last minute. Subs cancelling has been the biggest problem. Now instructional assistants, ESOL, Reading Teachers, Math Resource teachers are being pulled to cover classes that do not have a sub."

## Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Jobs in our school routinely go unfilled and the general ed IAs are getting pulled to cover classes. This happens 2-3 times a week!"

## Elementary School Literacy IA

Q13 - Since September 2015, I'm aware that classes at my school have been left without adult supervision due to the lack of a substitute.

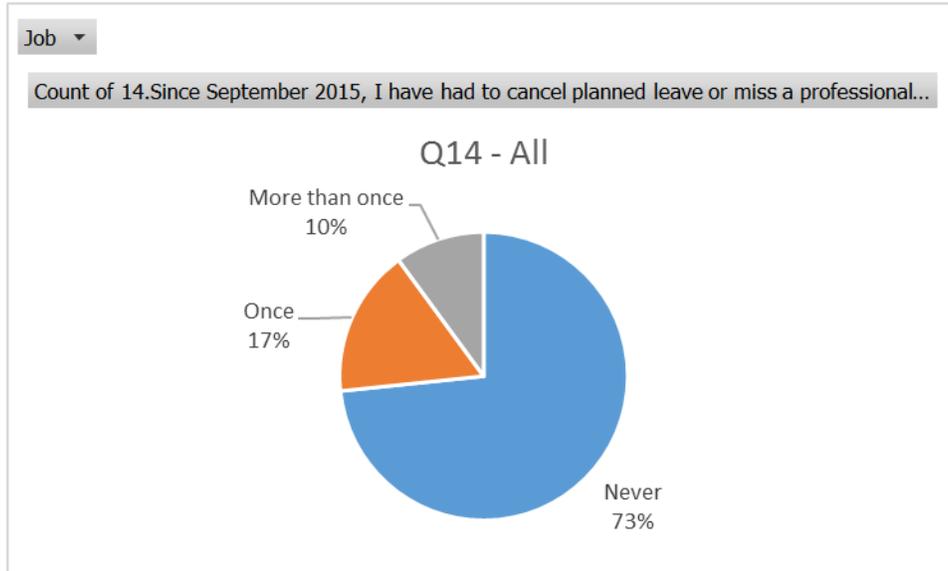


While most respondents did not know of any occasions on which a class was left without adult supervision, the number of schools from which respondents indicated knowledge of unsupervised classrooms was large. This problem is least at elementary schools and greatest at high schools: 10% of ES respondents knew of one or more occasions that students were left unattended, while the proportions were 12% at middle school and a whopping 24% at high school.

Fully 70 individual schools had reports that in the past year and a half there have been unsupervised classes. This number breaks down as follows:

- 42 Elementary Schools
- 12 Middle Schools
- 14 High Schools
- 2 Other (alternative schools & special programs)

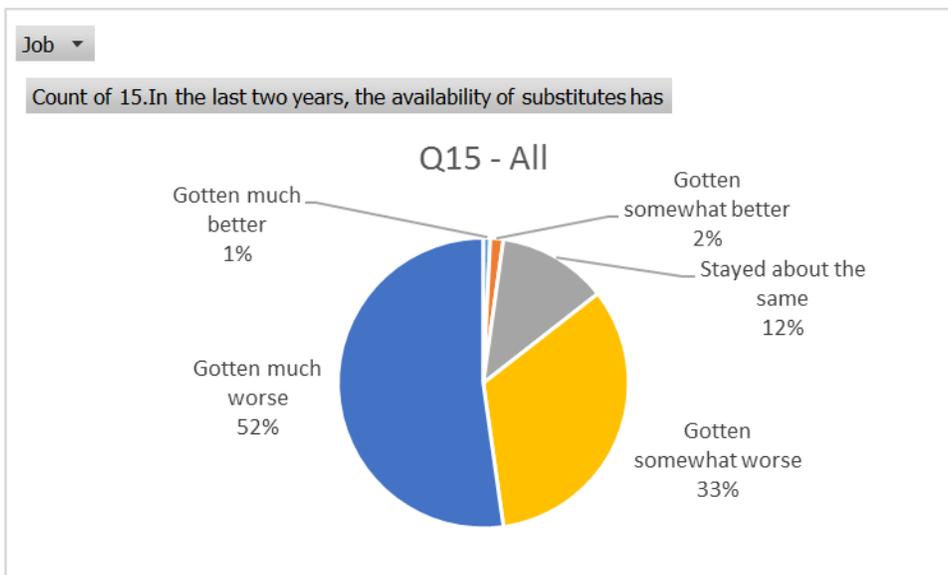
Q14 - Since September 2015, I have had to cancel planned leave or miss a professional development because of a lack of a substitute.



Overall, 27% of respondents reported having to cancel a planned leave or professional development activity because of a lack of a substitute. This problem is greatest at elementary schools: 32% of elementary respondents had to cancel leave or professional development due to the lack of a substitute, while 18% of middle and high school respondents reported this problem.

Respondents' views on trends in the FCPS substitute program

Q15 - In the last two years, the availability of substitutes has

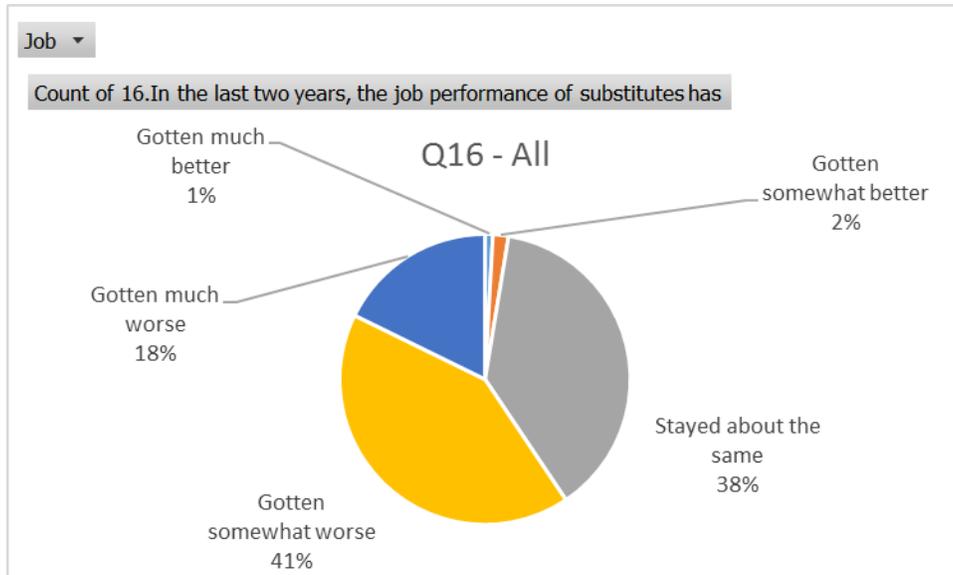


87% of respondents indicated that the availability of substitutes has gotten worse in the last two years. This also has been a somewhat greater problem at the elementary level: 88% reported that the situation has gotten worse, while

at middle and high schools 81% reported that things are worse. Among the various job categories, the problem seems greatest for special education teachers.

Commenters indicated that the biggest change was from the 2015-16 school year to the 2016-17 school year. This may be in part related to the reduced number of retired teachers who substitute teach (see below).

Q16 - In the last two years, the job performance of substitutes has



59% of respondents indicated that the job performance of substitute teachers has gotten worse in the last two years. Again, commenters said that the biggest change was from 2015-16 to 2016-17.

### Open ended questions

At the end of the survey we asked three open ended questions. 849 respondents gave feedback to at least one of those questions. A sampling of comments that relate directly to the survey's quantitative questions has been included above. A selection of the additional comments follows, grouped by theme.

Q17 - If you have noticed a change in the availability of good substitutes over the last couple of years, what factors do you think have contributed to the change?

#### *Substitute pay generally*

More than any other factor, respondents identified low pay as a factor in finding enough good substitutes. The following are typical of the 637 comments that we received:

"Substitute teachers need to be paid more, and teachers who are qualified should be paid MUCH more . . . I can't believe we put people in our classrooms who are not qualified to teach. It is not a babysitting position."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"You get what you pay for. This county is losing both good teachers and substitutes to other counties because of low wages. I have already heard several teachers talk of leaving at the end of this year. I am doing the same."

High School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Pay your substitutes. My fifteen year old son began refereeing soccer games this year as a side line referee. He makes more per hour than a substitute with a college degree. Disgraceful!"

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"As a teacher with a terminally ill parent in FL, it has been excruciating to write plans for instruction (not make-work) and plan adequate time for me to reteach if needed upon return from a multiple-day trip.

I have used up more favors than I can count. It's hard enough keeping students moving forward with capable subs--it's almost impossible with an unknown quantity. Why should my students' learning be so heavily compromised because my mother is dying? Pay the people what they are worth!"

Elementary School General education teacher

"Lower pay! One awesome sub told us it cost her more in child care than getting paid as a sub. She hasn't been able to work this year."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

#### *Retiree substitute pay reduction*

The majority (341) of the comments that spoke of low pay as being a problem more specifically said that the reduction in the pay of retired teachers has been a problem. Fewer retirees substitute now, and this has affected both the overall supply of substitutes and the number of subs that teachers trust to maintain discipline and follow a lesson plan. These comments are typical:

"I am a retired Fairfax County teacher. Since Fairfax has seen fit to drastically cut my pay, I feel as if they do not value my considerable experience and have, therefore, cut back seriously on the number of days that I sub."

Other: I am a retired teacher & substitute

"None of our retired teachers who used to sub at our school are willing to do so because of the decrease in pay for retired FCPS substitutes. Retired teachers who sub are paid less than bus drivers."

High School General education teacher

"In the past, we had quite a few retired teachers as capable and relied upon subs. Because of the substitute pay cut for these teachers, they are no longer making themselves available as they were before."

Elementary School General education teacher

"Retirees no longer accept jobs because their pay was cut."

High School General education teacher

"Reduced pay! It's not worth it! We have lost our BEST subs who were retired FCPS teachers! Why has the School Board been so short-sighted?????"

High School Department Chair

"FCPS changed the amount of money paid to retired teachers-the good subs that know what they're doing, who require little to no training, are proficient in the English language, etc."

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Specifically I have been told by retired teachers turned subs that they were no longer working in FCPS due to the decrease in pay. They moved over to Arlington Co."

Elementary School front office admin, sub coordinator

"FCPS' decision to cut the sub pay for retired teachers is the direct cause of a dizzying lack of subs of late. Some subs no longer come to this school because it is too far away at the current pay rate. One colleague was unable to get one sub (for a last minute job) she has always been able to get in the past. The sub in question flat out refused because of the pay issue--EVEN THOUGH HE IS HER HUSBAND AND THEY LIVE ACROSS THE STREET. That is a perfect sign of how bad things have gotten."

High School General education teacher

Q18 - What, if anything, might be done to improve the availability of good substitutes?

"Better pay, and more training. Particularly in classroom management and communication skills."

Middle School General education teacher

"Increase the pay for retired FCPS teachers! Also, increase the pay for those subs that work steadily in a school and have proven their capability."

High School General education teacher

"You would get good subs if you paid them more."

Elementary School Itinerant Band

"More incentives for them. Some sort of qualifications. Speaking, reading, writing, understanding English required."

Middle School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Can the system be set up so that a sub who cancels a job may not contract another job for the same day?"

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

"Additional training, hire pay, ability to specialize in certain areas."

High School General education teacher

"Raise the pay, possibly have a pool of salaried subs who get benefits."

Middle School Sped Dept Chair

"Improve training, improve pay, have 1 permanent sub placed at the schools with the highest need."

Middle School General education teacher

"Specialized training/requirements for individuals substituting in an ID/IDS Special Education classroom; change of job description for PHA/PHTA/IA/Teacher in ID/IDS Special Education classroom - e.g. substitutes are NOT required to toilet/diaper students"

Elementary School Special education teacher

“More pay for subs and training as it related to dealing w/ behavior. Also maybe a rating system (like Yelp for subs) so that good subs are rewarded and recognized for their hard work.”

Elementary School STEM teacher

“Better screening of candidates. So many of our substitutes do not speak English enough to work in a classroom. More training of substitutes to prepare them for what to expect at all levels.”

Elementary School General education teacher

“The substitutes need to be screened. It students can't understand them, they should not be in the schools. They should also know how to read. They should also be taught how to do a fire drill and lock down. Even though everything is written down for them in a sub folder, they don't know what to do.”

Elementary School General education teacher

“Give retired teacher substitutes the money they deserve. Many live in our neighborhood. They are ABLE to follow plans, maintain order and provide "on the spot" assistance. They have not chosen not to.”

Elementary School General education teacher

“We need substitutes that can follow lesson plans and speak English proficiently. Who is screening these people???”

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

“Require them to know how to use the technology that is 'standard' in FCPS; SMART Board, laptops, internet, etc. Train them in classroom management and disciplinary tactics.”

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

Q19 - If you have other comments about substitutes, please write them below.

“Substitute teachers who cancel their jobs the morning of the assignment should be blocked from the system.”

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

“We have some intellectually delayed students at my school and subs do not like to pick up those jobs.”

Elementary School Speech/Language Pathologist

“Is there some kind of evaluation system for substitutes? If not, might be helpful. Also, FCPS (paid) training. Please note: many substitutes do a great job!”

Elementary School ESOL teacher

“This is a symptom of a larger problem. It needs to be acknowledged that this problem is occurring because of the obliteration of the Monday early closing. Staff used to schedule appointments for themselves and their kids on Monday afternoon, therefore not requiring a sub. In addition, new staff who were forced into the master to provide teacher planning time, now have to get subs (ES SBTS), who never had to get subs or write sub plans before.”

Elementary School SBTS

“This is a big issue at my school!”

Elementary School General education teacher

“We are also needing more substitutes due to grade level planning days and teacher training days. Some of our teachers are out of the classroom a significant amount of time for trainings and instructional rounds and planning and data days, etc.”

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

“School psychologists do not have substitutes as do teachers. However, laws mandate their presence at many types of committee meetings. There is no uniform method of coverage and Psychs often need to attend meetings when they are ill or they are reprimanded by supervisors. It's a major problem.”

Itinerant - All levels - School psychologist

“For SL, OT, and PT we don't have subs because of a licensing issue. If we miss a day, we are required to make up the therapy however there is nowhere in a schedule to make up 1 or more missed days. We are forced to come to work sick and are stressed over trying to manage family member illnesses. When a colleague is out for an extended period of time (maternity leave, illness), neighboring therapist are required to take on extra caseload duties.”

Speech-Language Special education teacher

“This is a terrible problem in our school which has a big impact on student learning. Children with self-control issues have some terrible days with subs. The consequent behavior difficulties are really the responsibility of the adults in the building who leave them for days at a time with inadequate supervision.

We had one class this year that had a series of substitutes for the first quarter before a classroom teacher was hired.”

Elementary School Specialist (librarian, music, art, P. E. teacher, counselor, etc.)

## Conclusions

The problem of finding qualified substitute teachers is getting worse. It has been exacerbated by the reduction in pay of FCPS retirees who substitute – the reduced number of retirees who substitute has affected the size of the substitute pool and in particular has reduced the number of available substitutes who have the experience and expertise to maintain order in the classroom and follow the lesson plans left by the regular teacher.

Many substitutes are under-qualified. Some do not speak English well enough to communicate with students. Many do not attempt to follow lesson plans.

The scarcity of substitutes has led to schools “covering” by reassigning Instructional Assistants, pulling special education team teachers to cover classes, requiring teachers to substitute during their planning periods, doubling up classes and splitting classes between other grade level/subject teachers. This increases staff workloads, harms students’ instruction, and in the case of special education students, may deny legally mandated services.

When a need for a substitute is known far in advance, the pool from which to choose is greater and teachers have fewer problems arranging for a sub. In contrast, a teacher who gets sick and needs a substitute on short notice will have greater difficulty arranging a substitute. The result is that many ill teachers go to work because they are unable to arrange a reliable sub. This is demoralizing to teachers and may result in contagious teachers working with students.

## Recommendations

There are several actions that FCPS should take to increase the pool of well-qualified substitute teachers:

- Restore retiree pay rate and increase pay rate for all substitutes
- Improve substitute quality by ensuring all have requisite English skills, classroom management skills, and training to follow lesson plans
- Ability to give feedback on substitutes
- Reduce the number of regional and county based school days used for training
- Prevent substitutes from hopping to another job after accepting one
- Pay anyone that is covering a class like an IA pulled from a class or a teacher on their planning period
- Give a financial incentive to not use sick leave at the end of a career or the ability to make a leave bank for employees in need