

EDUCATION 19JAN2014

Raises for subs hard to come by

Association president lobbying Lee school board for more money

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Called to teach any subject, at any grade, in any school, hundreds of substitutes are filling in for teachers whenever they need a day, a week or a few months off from work.



Marvin Goetz, president of the Lee County Association of Substitute Teachers / news-press.com file photo

Contrary to perceptions, they're not just babysitting students. But it's that mindset they believe is keeping them from better pay and training — issues they've taken to the Lee County School Board. "I think it boils down to the fact that we still have a huge divide between what's the real role of a substitute teacher," said Marvin Goetz, president of the Lee County Association of Substitute Teachers. "I've always believed a substitute teacher is a teacher, period."

For months, Goetz has appeared before Lee County school board meetings requesting an increase in pay for substitutes. The local substitute association is a non-union group and therefore doesn't collectively bargain with the school district like teachers and support staff. Lee substitutes earn at least \$12 an hour if they have at least 60 semester hours of college credit or an associate's degree. "Any increases in salary or conditions is at the whim of the board and superintendent," Goetz said. "We don't receive any benefit packaging, sick days or Social Security."

In the past, it wasn't uncommon for substitutes to receive a similar percent increase whenever teachers received an increase.

"We're there whenever a full-time teacher is absent for any excuse," he said. "We go to any building, any grade level and any subject and we're expected to do as good a job as the teachers."

But Lee school board has been hesitant with addressing substitute pay.

Compared with pay rates of other substitute teachers in the region, Lee offers one of the highest base rates, board Chairman Tom Scott said. A substitute in Lee with a bachelor's degree will make at least \$13.73 an hour or \$103 a day — more than Brevard County, which pays \$12.50 an hour for a bachelor's degree or the larger Polk County, which pays a flat \$80 a day. Collier pays substitutes with a college degree \$12.19 an hour.

"It hasn't been the urgency of the board because it's the teachers and regular support staff who have needed (their pay) to be brought up," he said. The number changes every month, but Goetz figures there are about 1,050 substitutes in Lee with about 300 working on any given school day. Many of those substitutes can receive phone calls or notices the night before or morning of a school day alerting them to a teacher's absence. Others have built relationships with schools and teachers that have allowed them to know days or weeks in advance where they are needed.

Teaching, not baby-sitting

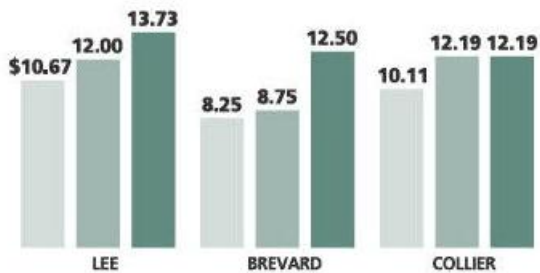
It's not unusual for Amie Bedford Peterson to receive phone calls, emails and text messages from teachers requesting she substitute in their high school classrooms. After 33 years of teaching and substituting in Lee she can go through a lesson plan and get students working on their assignments.

"And if I go into a classroom where I'm not familiar with a subject, I can find a student who has the

Hourly pay for substitutes

Substitute teachers are paid based on their credentials and the type of degree they have earned. Those substitute teachers who are working more than 30 consecutive days in Lee and Collier can receive a higher rate than for those who have a bachelor's degree. Current minimum requirements call for substitutes to have at least 60 hours of college credit or an associate's degree

■ HS Diploma ■ AA or less than BA ■ BA or greater



SOURCE: Lee, Collier and Brevard school districts

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MARVIN GOETZ, president of the Lee County Association of Substitute Teachers

knowledge. I'm good at getting other students to help other students," she said. "I don't claim to know it all, but I do have a lot of classroom management skills." Chris Baucom, of Fort Myers, has been substituting for teachers at Orange River Elementary since 2000. She began as a volunteer at the school and eventually won state recognition for her service.

"The teachers leave really good directions and they give you time schedules to follow and they'll even leave out their materials, unless there's an emergency," she said. "But we all know what to do. They will come in and have something to do, they will be working, it's not babysitting. We are teaching."

Baucom said she would like to see more training opportunities for substitutes.

For the first time, last year, Lee set aside about \$2,000 to train substitutes, Goetz said.

But similar to teachers, he would prefer substitutes receive credit for training and there be a better system of communication between principals, schools and the substitutes there.

"The rules and policies on substitutes vary," Goetz said. "Each substitute has a different experience in each building."

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