

Preparing Successful Substitute Teachers

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On an April day with a touch of spring fever in the air, some students sit around discussing with glee what happens when they have a substitute teacher. Every day school administrators must make sure that there is a qualified teacher in every classroom. But since regular teachers are often away because of illness or training, that task can be formidable. Good substitute teachers are difficult to find, and the good ones tend to get worked to death. One such sub told me that on some days she just has to take her phone off the hook. *Education Week* reported on January 30, 2002, that on any given school day, one in every ten classrooms in America is assigned to a substitute (Smith). A *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* survey found that the average American twelfth grader has spent the equivalent of one full school year with a substitute teacher (Elizabeth 2001).

These findings show why Christian schools must provide the best possible substitutes. They cannot allow their students to miss learning opportunities or waste time. A major task of Christian school teachers is to create a class climate that promotes the success of substitutes. Too often subs get little respect and low salaries but find double the usual student mischief. When teachers support the sub, treat the sub as a professional, and provide detailed lesson plans, administrators will find substitutes more easily.

If they have learned certain skills, techniques, and methods, subs can be successful teachers. Students will see them in the hall and ask when they are coming to their class, and parents will be calling the office to request they be hired full-time.

Surveys indicate that administrators and regular teachers expect substitutes to be professional. Beginning well before the bell rings, then, time will have to be spent with subs in order to communicate the school's expectations.

No learning takes place in out-of-control classrooms, so substitutes need training in managing a classroom. They need ideas for starting the day, skills in behavior management, and suggestions for handling challenging situations. Substitutes also need activities both for those extra five minutes that occur throughout the day when "it isn't time to go yet" and for students who finish assignments early.

Most classroom management problems are solved by a sub who knows a variety of methods for presenting lessons. Students who are on task are less likely to misbehave. Those methods include using audiovisuals, creating questions for higher-level thinking, and implementing cooperative learning.

There ought to be a checklist of other information pertinent to the substitute as well. Sometimes teachers do not communicate procedures to assure safety and to deal with emergencies, first aid, evacuations, and other out-of-classroom activities. Even if a school

offers an orientation for substitute teachers before the school year begins, classroom teachers should make sure that subs have appropriate information.

To help build long-term relationships with substitutes, schools can give feedback about their teaching so that goals can be set and improvements made for future experiences. It is worth the time and effort to encourage spiritual and educational growth in substitute teachers. They can, for example, attend faculty in-services for training in biblical integration. After all, they serve as role models for students too.

Reference List

Elizabeth, Jane. 2001. A substitute for education: When the teacher's away. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 7 January.

Smith, Geoffrey. 2002. Quick to criticize, slow to train. *Education Week*, 30 January.