

# College Students Could Help Address Substitute Teacher Shortage

by Kevin Bessler

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(The Center Square) – A substitute teacher shortage continues to affect Illinois school districts, but there may be some relief in the form of college students.

The state recently created short-term substitute teaching opportunities for college students, allowing those who are student teaching in elementary and high schools to fill in when their co-operating teachers are out for the day.

A survey of members by the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools found the teacher shortage is a major stress. The numbers are higher in Chicago and surrounding suburbs, but for downstate schools in rural areas with 100 students, a single teacher absence with no substitute available can force school officials to cancel classes.

There are several reasons being blamed on the substitute shortage, including health concerns from the pandemic, vaccination beliefs, and money. On average, subs are paid about \$100 a day, with teachers in Chicago getting \$180 a day.

There has also been discussion about making substitute teachers full-time employees. Two central Illinois school districts, Bloomington and Heyworth have proposed hiring full-time, salaried teachers whose primary job will be to teach where the absences are.

Monmouth College was the first school in the state to take part in the teacher-prep program, working with school districts in town and the surrounding area. The districts had 30 open substitute positions in November, and 28 student teachers signed up.

“It is a win-win for the community and for the educational studies students as well because they get more experience under their belt before they get their education degree,” said Duane Bonifer, associate vice president of communications at Monmouth College.

Bonifer said he expects the program to expand to other schools around the state, especially in rural areas where the teacher shortage is so profound.

The substitute teaching opportunity for Illinois college students lasts until June 2023, unless the state extends it.