

Centennial seeks contract changes to guarantee availability of substitute teachers

By Gary Weckselblatt, staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, August 17, 2016 2:00 pm

The Centennial School District, seeking to ensure it has "a highly qualified teacher in every classroom," is modifying its contract with the firm that provides substitute teachers.

"The national shortage of teachers leads to a national shortage of substitute teachers," Superintendent David Baugh said.

As recently as six years ago, area districts had about a 100 percent fill rate when substitutes were needed; last year the rate dropped to less than 70 percent.

Rather than extend its deal with Source4Teachers for a full year, the school board agreed this week to a contract through December with some modifications. Baugh said dedicating subs to one specific building, for example, will provide more certainty that the district's needs will be filled.

"They'll show up to a school each morning and they will be utilized," he said.

To avoid the cost of benefits for retirement and health insurance, many area school systems have partnered with Source4Teachers, which doesn't have to abide by state regulations for public entities. The arrangement with Source4Teachers allows districts to pay a substitute about \$100 a day, which amounts to about \$12.50 per hour for an eight-hour day.

During the 2014-15 school year, the New Jersey-based agency provided substitute coverage for 59,963 teacher absences. Besides sick days and personal days, teachers also can be out of the classroom for varying amounts of paid professional development days, as determined by administrators.

Baugh said this week that Centennial originally agreed to a deal with Source4Teachers to avoid additional expenses related to the Affordable Care Act.

Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, the ACA mandated an employer pay medical benefits for anyone who works 30 hours or more per week. A single work week of at least 30 hours can trigger the requirement or penalties for the employer.

The agency also provides employees with worker compensation and retirement benefits, which are less extensive than what is offered by the school districts.



(File) The Centennial School District administration building

Last year Rebecca Roberts-Malamis, assistant to the executive director of the Bucks County Schools Intermediate Unit, told state Senate and House members during a joint education committee hearing that the ACA and pension costs contributed to the growing substitute shortage.

Centennial director Mark Miller said fewer people also are taking the Pennsylvania Department of Education's certification tests. During the 2010-11 school year, 21,294 certifications were awarded. Miller said the number dropped to 6,000 last year.

Baugh said Source4Teachers has been aggressively recruiting to attract "reasonably competent substitutes."

The district plans to re-evaluate its contract in December.

In other Centennial news, board member Andrew Pollock asked the administration to study whether using propane buses would save the district money.

"They use less oil, it's better for the atmosphere," he said. "I'd just like to see us at least examine what it would take to do it next year or the following year."

Business administrator Christopher Berdnik said the district currently is paying \$1.70 for gas and diesel.

Board member Kati Driban said "I would support anything that's alternative or saves us money."