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## Boca principals look to substitute alternatives

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by [By Nicol Jenkins](#)

Sick teachers have added an extra inconvenience for Boca principals and it has nothing to do with teachers.

Instead it's those that fill in and the lack of substitutes.

Although most principals say teacher absenteeism isn't a big problem in Boca Raton, they do admit that at times substitutes are hard to find.

"We don't generally have a hard time with substitutes. We're lucky," said Connie Tuman-Rugg, principal of Spanish River Community High School in Boca Raton. "But every school has experienced days when they can't find a substitute."

And on those days, sometimes schedules are rearranged and other teachers must pick up the slack. If that happens at Spanish River High, neighboring Florida Atlantic University (FAU) comes into play. FAU juniors and seniors majoring in education can substitute at the local school. But substitutes must have two years of college study to substitute while "freshmen and sophomores can only serve as in-class assistants," according to Tuman-Rugg.

### County-wide

Across the county, there are anywhere from 1,200 to 1,600 substitutes on hand. Although that seems like a big number, sometimes they're hard to come during non-peak seasons. Many substitutes are snowbirds, according to Sue Ann Walters, Human Resources Specialist for the School District of Palm Beach County.

"The number fluctuates when it's winter and the residents are here," said Walters.

West Boca Raton High School principal Fran Giblin has noticed fewer substitutes during this time. "A lot head North after Easter. There's not as many in the county as there once was. But we do pretty well with substitutes."

### Lower pay

Besides seasonal fluctuations, many say requirements and training could play a role in a possible shortage. To become a substitute, those interested must attend a \$20 workshop on "How To Be a Better Substitute", fingerprinting totaling \$84, a pre-employment physical, a 4-hour substitute teacher orientation, 30 hours of college credit, and pass all requirements to be employed with the School District.

More so, some believe pay is a bigger issue. Retired teachers who wish to substitute receive \$11.50 an hour, those with bachelor's degrees get \$11 an hour, those with an associate's degrees or 60 plus semester hours receive \$9.25 an hour, those with 30 to 59 semester hours cash in at \$9 an hour, and finally those with a Glades supplement get \$3 an hour additional pay.

Those wages are hardly comparable to nearby Broward County where a substitute with 60 plus credit hours gets paid to fill in at a "regular" public school for \$10.67 an hour. Those who sub at a "specialty" school meaning a D or F school and have up to a Bachelor's degree receive \$13.34 hourly. And those with a Bachelor's degree or higher subbing at a "Specialty" or "Superintendent's" school gain \$14.67 an hour.

Tuman-Rugg thinks pay could factor into a substitute shortage. "We're so close to



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Broward County and I do believe they pay substitutes more money," she said. "If you can go five miles down the road and get paid more money I think you would."

And county substitutes haven't had an increase in pay "for quite some time," according to Walters. However, the district reviews the pay and proposals made during budget development, she added.

"It's a board decision and leadership makes the recommendation to the board. If they have not accepted they felt that the budget did not have the money to increase it," Walters said.

But what happens when teachers call in sick?

Very often, school officials have a list of substitutes to call that can fill in, Walters said. If they are unavailable, many schools look to volunteers but the methods range from "school to school," according to Walters. Additionally, most substitutes are retired teachers but some are former engineers, doctors, lawyers or those who went to college to become a teacher but prefer a part-time job, she added.

Boca Raton Elementary School principal Bradley Henry said he has a list of reliable substitutes.

"We've never really had a problem getting substitutes maybe it's because we have a base of substitutes that work at our school and these substitutes have been with us for awhile," Henry said.

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