

LEADERSHIP UPDATE

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Duties of Substitute Teachers

Substitute teachers are key team members of every school and school division staff.

Substitute teachers have the same certification requirements as other teachers, and they are full active members of the Alberta Teachers' Association from their first day of service.

They have the same roles and responsibilities as any other classroom teacher as defined by the *School Act* and the *Teaching Profession Act*. The only difference is that they are day-to-day employees who do not have regular teacher contracts.

Duties

The duties of substitute teachers are no different from those defined by section 18 of the *School Act*—that is, to teach, evaluate, maintain order and discipline, and so on. Substitute teachers should be given the same respect and consideration given to any other colleague. Generally speaking, substitute teachers should follow the same timetable as the absent teacher. This allows them to adequately prepare for classes, mark assignments, become familiar with the routines and expectations of the school, and write notes for the absent teacher.

The expectation that substitute teachers follow the schedule of the absent teacher is codified in at least one collective agreement in Alberta as follows:

A substitute teacher shall normally follow the schedule of the teacher who is absent from duties. Any alteration to the regular schedule will be explained to the substitute by school administration upon request and must comply to adjustments which might normally occur if the absent teacher was in attendance.

However, this clause should not be required in order to give substitute teachers the professional courtesy they should expect from their colleagues. Like most teachers, substitute teachers are often willing to volunteer to provide support beyond the schedule of the absent teacher if they have completed their other professional obligations.

Supervision and Rest Periods

Substitute teachers should be assigned supervision duties that are reasonable and appropriate. Some school divisions have policies that stipulate that substitute teachers not be assigned supervision duties in the first half day of a teaching assignment or duties beyond those normally assigned to the teacher being replaced.

In addition, careful thought should be given to the duty of care whenever substitute teachers are assigned supervision. Has the substitute teacher been adequately informed about

- the school rules and procedures;
- discipline policy and procedures;
- safety procedures and emergency contacts;
- inherent risks in the school or on the playground;
- special needs students; and
- other potential risks?

An inadequately prepared substitute could put students, the teacher, the school and the school division at risk. Some school divisions have put policies in place that stipulate that field trips must be cancelled if the teacher in charge is replaced by a substitute teacher. Principals should give all substitute teachers the information they need to supervise effectively and ensure that they have sufficient

**Great
leadership
usually starts
with a willing
heart, a
positive
attitude and a
desire to make
a difference.**

—Mac Anderson



Staff Relations Service— Resolving Interpersonal Differences Can Make Solutions Happen

Being a principal in today's educational society requires a multitude of skills—not only school administrative skills but also human resources and relationship building skills. It is not enough to run a good school—more and more principals are finding that trying to resolve staff conflict is taking up more and more of their time and energy. Rapid change and new expectations for teachers have led to a growing number of adversarial relationships and an increasing breakdown of positive collegiality,

often to a point of hindering school operations. Often the conflict results in an administrative decision made either at the school level or at the central office level to resolve it. Such decisions are sometimes viewed as punitive or heavy-handed and lead to more conflict and resentment.

The creation of the Staff Relations Service (SRS) is strong, public recognition by Association leadership that positive staff relations lead to a satisfying and productive workplace. When workplace disputes arise, a collaborative approach is often a more effective and efficient means of dispute resolution than an adversarial approach. The SRS program calls for Association members to act professionally and collegially in resolving conflict with other members.

The SRS uses as its foundation the Staff Relations Mediation Program originally developed in 1998 by the Association, the Alberta School Boards Association and the College of Alberta School Superintendents. Like the other programs, the SRS is an independent operation, supervised and paid for by the Alberta Teachers' Association.

The Staff Relations Service works by making available positive, efficient and effective skills for dispute resolution at the school level through education, facilitation and limited mediation. Disputes may range from interpersonal difficulties with coworkers to problems with supervisors. The SRS provides support in reaching resolutions to

conflicts within a community of teachers.

Requests for the Staff Relations Service can come from any member or group of members, including school superintendents, and are made to the Coordinator of Member Services of the Alberta Teachers' Association. A staff officer from the ATA is assigned to do a preliminary assessment/preparation. Once the decision has been made to use the Staff Relations Service, it is important that time be spent ensuring that the necessary conditions for success are in place. With the assistance of an ATA staff officer, the parties confirm that the following expectations are clear:

- Members will focus their efforts on interest and positive resolution-oriented action.
- Senior administrative decision-makers will be made aware of the process being entered into.
- Active participants will be involved in decision making, and establishing and agreeing to the ground rules.
- SRS panel members (facilitators) will remain neutral and accessible to all parties.

Once the preparation and assessment are completed, the Director of Staff Relations Service, in consultation with the Coordinator of Member Services, establishes a panel. Ten retired teachers, some of whom are retired administrators, nominated and approved through Provincial Executive

Duties of Substitute Teachers

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time to become familiar with the procedures. If instructional time and assignable time are not covered in the collective agreement, then substitute teachers are entitled to at least one half-hour break during the day.

If these simple guidelines regarding professional courtesy and respect are followed, substitute teachers can make a professional contribution to the school that will benefit everyone. They will indeed feel like key team members. For further information on the Association's position on substitute teachers please contact Kurt Moench at 1-800-332-1280.

For further information, visit www.teachers.ab.ca or contact Member Services at the Alberta Teachers' Association, 447-9400 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (from elsewhere in Alberta).

Council, form the teacher corps of the SRS. Ten retired school superintendents, nominated and approved by CASS, form the superintendent corps of the SRS. The director of SRS uses the pool of panel members to make up the panel to assist the school staff in the dispute resolution. The director takes into consideration factors such as experience with rural/urban schools, grade levels of the school, the nature of the dispute

and prior experience with the district. Proximity to and prior experience with the district will excuse panel members from taking part in a particular SRS.

Once the panel is in place, the parties are convened and a meeting is called to finalize the facilitation framework and begin the process that is acceptable to the parties. This meeting also confirms

- the timeframe available,
- the agreement to participate,
- who the facilitators will be,

- rules of behaviour and
- the willingness of all parties to have facilitators mediate.

In the next step participants identify all the issues that need to be addressed to reach a final solution. The issues identified make up the agenda. At this stage, the participants describe their issues and listen to the issues of the others.

It is important to realize that at this time if an issue exists for someone else it becomes an issue for all.

After data has been collected and interests identified the final step is to identify solutions. By brainstorming, the group can be creative, allowing for a maximum number of options to surface. Once the list of options has been generated, participants prepare an implementation plan.

Implementation is the crucial component of the package. How and when the various items are implemented can be deal breakers. Careful consideration must be given to the design of the subsequent dispute-resolution process, should roadblocks emerge.

Principals and other educational leaders are often bogged down with dispute resolution. The Staff Relations Service provides a dispute-resolution process that is tough on the problem but soft on the people. It is, however, not a substitute for legitimate decision making by those responsible for making the decisions.

More information about the Staff Relations Service is available on the Association website (www.teachers.ab.ca) or from Member Services at Barnett House (1-800-232-7208) or SARO (1-800-332-1280).

Upcoming Sessions

You are invited to attend

Teacher Growth Supervision and Evaluation Workshop

January 11 in Calgary

January 17 in Edmonton

If you are interested in attending, please e-mail Marilyn Terlaan in Member Services at marilyn.terlaan@ata.ab.ca.

Banff Leadership Seminar: Teaching for Tomorrow, with Ian Jukes

March 18–20, 2007

Banff Park Lodge, Banff, Alberta

For information on registration, please contact Margaret Patterson at margaret.patterson@cssd.ab.ca.

ELA Change in Date and Location

ELA—the Educational Leadership Academy—has been moved to the Banff Centre and will be held from July 8–12. More information regarding registration will follow in the new year.