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Districts who work with the service pay for the sub's daily wages, as well as a fee of about 28 percent to cover payroll taxes, administrative fees and recruiting costs.

St. Cloud has an average fill rate of about 85 percent — but that can vary wildly the day of the week and by school. Bowe attributes the lower fill rates to the size and demographics of the district.

"I think in St. Cloud, our challenge is a little steeper just because we look a little more urban and - real or imagined there's a perception that it's more challenging to sub in St. Cloud than it is in one of our neighboring districts," Bowe said

Sauk Rapids-Rice, however, still manages its subs internally.

'Teachers On Call only work for a half a day or a full day, and in our district teachers can be out for an hour - that's negotiated," said Eva White, director of human resources for the district.

But because all the area school districts are pulling from the same pool of subs and many use Teachers On Call, Sauk Rapids-Rice can be at a disadvantage

The week that Claassen hustled to fill in for other classes, Sauk Rapids-Rice had an average fill rate of just 69 percent.

On Jan. 23, Sauk Rapids-Rice had 15 teachers absent and was able to find only eight subs — for a fill rate of about 53 percent.

On that same day in St. Cloud school district, there were 57 substitutes needed and they were able to fill 48 of them for a fill rate of about 84 percent.

Scrambling to fill classrooms

"The buildings really have to scramble. It's creating, I think for everybody, that anxiety of coming in in the morning and saying, 'Shoot, we're down three subs,' and then the buildings have to scramble internally to figure that out." - Tracy Bowe St. Cloud school district

human resources director

Each school has its own system for managing a lack of subs - and that "scramble" is often handled differently

at elementary and secondary levels,



Michele Claassen, a long-time substitute, is now a full-time special education teacher at Sauk **Rapids-Rice** Middle School. JASON WACHTER, JWACHTER@ STCLOUDTIMES. COM

How to become a substitute

People interested in being a substitute are not always required to have a teaching license to teach in the state of Minnesota.

State statute allows those who didn't go to school to be a teacher to become a short-call sub as long as they have a four-year degree and obtain a short-call license from the Minnesota Department of Education. Applicants must also undergo a full criminal background check.

Short-call subs are only eligible to substitute for the same teacher for 15 consecutive days. A sub with a teaching license can sub in long-term assignments in the grades and subject areas listed on their license. In many districts, retired teachers often come back and fill in as long-term subs

Individual districts may require additional training. Substitutes for support staff positions such as food service workers, clerical works, custodians or bus drivers do not need to meet the same licensing requirements.

Bowe said.

Some needs are just never filled. Bowe said positions like school counselors, social workers, academic coaches and media specialists often do not get substitutes.

At junior and senior high levels, teachers are often pulled from their prep hours when there's a classroom in need of a sub.

Claassen said at the middle school, teachers often bump to another class during prep time, which they are paid extra to make up for at the end of the

school day.

"We call that, 'selling their prep," White said. This means multiple teachers could jump in to cover class sections throughout the day.

But elementary schools don't function on a block schedule. Instead, schools will pull instructional coaches or specialized program leaders and administrators. Sometimes they split up classes.

"You might take those 20 kids that are there, and put five in each of those (other) classes," White said.

To help fill sub vacancies at schools with the lowest fill rates, St. Cloud implemented "permanent subs" at Talahi, Madison, Lincoln and Discovery elementary schools and North and South junior highs. Talahi and Madison have two permanent subs; the other schools all have one.

Those schools post all of their sub openings through Teacher On Call just as the other schools. But if there is a position not filled, a permanent sub can help where needed.

"Those schools are the toughest because ... substitute teachers pick schools where they have the highest comfort level and they pick districts where they have the highest comfort level," Bowe said.

St. Cloud also implemented a fourhour training for substitutes that focuses on culture and diversity, technology, instruction, special education and behavior management. After completing the paid training, the substitutes see a bump in their daily wage.

"We really try to prepare subs for the jobs so when they come in, they feel like they've got a tool kit and they don't get discouraged," Bowe said.

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