

Substitute staffing

LI districts try variety of tactics to bring in subs

BY JOIE TYRRELL
joie.tyrrell@newsday.com

Long Island school districts face a pressing need for substitute teachers, and those doing the hiring blame a teacher shortage, fewer young people going into the profession, low unemployment and competition from city schools for the shallow pool of applicants.

District administrators, as part of their recruitment efforts, are partnering with universities to tap into recent graduates, holding job fairs and increasing pay for substitutes.

Kenneth Bossert, superintendent of the Elwood School District and president of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association, said the shortage has been a long-term challenge. The substitute position used to be viewed as a “foot in the door” for aspiring teachers, but with fewer people seeking teaching degrees, the shortage of job candidates has worsened, he said.

“This is something we have been struggling with for the last several years,” Bossert said.

In addition, many schools that have seen declining enrollment are not hiring and do not anticipate hiring — dissuading applicants who may have worked as a substitute in the district with the hope it would lead to a job.

According to the New York State United Teachers, enrollment in teacher education programs dropped roughly 47 percent to just over 41,000 students statewide from 2009-10 to 2015-16. It also has not helped school recruiters that the economy has been strong — 3.1 percent unemployment rate on Long Island in December — and graduates are seeing other career opportunities.

But there have been some recruiting success stories.

The Mineola school district partnered with Adelphi University to boost its teaching ranks. Under a residency program, an education major — usually in



Substitute teacher Jackie Jahelka leads a lesson in a third grade class at Mineola's Jackson Avenue Elementary School earlier this month.

“I come from a long line of teachers, and I always wanted to be a teacher. It is just natural for me to go into it.”

— Jackie Jahelka, 23, a recent Adelphi graduate

the fifth year and looking to earn a master's degree — is committed to the Mineola district for the year. The student teaches for four days and substitutes the fifth day. The student is under the supervision of school district staff and Adelphi professors.

“We treat them just like our teachers,” Mineola Superintendent Michael Nagler said.

Jackie Jahelka, 23, a recent Adelphi graduate, is a perma-

nent substitute at Jackson Avenue Elementary School in Mineola. Jahelka, who earned her master's in May, was placed at Jackson Avenue through the residency program.

“I come from a long line of teachers, and I always wanted to be a teacher. It is just natural for me to go into it,” she said. “Coming from student teaching in the district and being familiar with the faces of the staff and the children, I am hoping that eventu-

ally might lead to something else — an opportunity.”

The substitute shortage also extends to school nurses, teacher aides and other paraprofessionals, Bossert said, adding that there are things the state can do, such as easing restrictions on subs. Last year, the state education commissioner allowed districts to apply for a waiver to have an uncertified sub for a period of time until a certified one could be found, he said. That waiver has not been provided this year, Bossert noted.

Bossert said he is working with the State Education Department to determine qualifications for substitutes. “The concern is making sure you have a qualified person in a classroom with students,” he said.

The Education Department does not offer a certificate specifically for substitute teach-

ing, and there are rules governing employment. For example, a sub without a certificate who is not a student enrolled in a college program working toward certification may be employed by a district, but is “limited to 40 days in a given school district in a school year,” according to the department.

The typical pay range for a substitute on Long Island is \$90 to \$130 a day, according to educators. Permanent subs are usually paid more than daily, or “per-diem,” subs. For full-time, entry-level teaching positions on the Island, the annual pay range is \$55,000 to \$60,000, according to Adelphi's College of Education and Sports Science.

In Elwood, which enrolls 2,116 students, Bossert said there are unfilled substitute positions in each of the district's four buildings. Pay rates range from \$100 per day for a daily sub to \$120

struggles



DANIELLE SILVERMAN

Substitute James Bulva teaches an English class at Mineola High School on Jan. 15.

per day for a permanent.

The William Floyd district in Suffolk County has 43 permanent substitutes who come in daily and are guaranteed work in the 8,700-student district. Permanent subs are used to cover extended leaves and are also used in day-to-day coverage. In addition, the district also hires daily subs; in a recent week, they needed 38 per-diem subs.

Recently, the William Floyd district posted a substitute opening and received only eight replies, said Estelle Albertina, an administrative aide in human resources. When she started in the district about seven years ago, she would have received about 100 responses.

"We always have more openings than we have per-diem subs, and we are always looking," she said.

The district has raised its daily pay rate slightly in recent years to \$100 per day, \$110 for per-diem after 15 days of service, and \$125 per day for a permanent sub, said Janet Gilmor, the assistant superintendent for human resources. The district also has expanded its recruitment efforts.

"We have tried a few things.

In the past, we had a future teacher academy, had about 20 to 30 high school students come in, and we exposed them to the field of education," Gilmor said. The district wants certified subs, but, "If substitutes continue to run very short, it [hiring noncertified subs] is something we might have to reconsider," she added.

Nagler, who also is president of the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents, said he budgeted 25 permanent substitutes but was only able to hire only 11 this year. The district enrolls about 2,900 students in grades K-12.

He said educators can get creative if not enough substitutes are found.

"At the high school, it is a little easier — you can do study halls or larger preps," Nagler said. "For the younger ones — you might not have a special run or have somebody else [another teacher] cover the class."

James Bulva, 25, is an alumni of the Mineola district and recently graduated with his master's degree from Adelphi. He has been working as a permanent sub in the district and is hoping for a full-time job.

"As a P.E. teacher, it is not easy to get a job," he said. "This

could be a unique opportunity to get in this way as a sub."

Edward Escobar, Mineola's assistant superintendent for Human Resources, said the district has experienced a wave of retirements. But he has to compete with other districts for subs. New York City's Department of Education, as an example, has increased salaries for substitutes, he said. According to the NYC Department of Education website, per-diem subs are paid \$185.05 per day.

Another recruitment effort under consideration involves Nassau BOCES, which wants to create a "minor league" service of potential substitute teachers, Superintendent Robert R. Dillon said. BOCES officials have met with the Mineola and Oceanside districts to discuss creating a substitute residency program. If approved, all districts in Nassau could participate.

The program would allow student teachers from local colleges and universities to substitute teach in any district that participates in the service.

"Based on my anecdotal experience, on any given day there is a need for a minimum of 1,000 substitute teachers throughout Nassau County," Dillon said.

Wreaths recycled into clean energy

BY JEAN-PAUL SALAMANCA
jeanpaul.salamanca@newsday.com

Each year during the holidays, thousands of wreaths are laid at the graves of veterans in cemeteries across Long Island. But what happens to them afterward?

One Long Island waste management company is helping a veterans nonprofit group dispose of the wreaths, which the company then turns into clean energy for local homes and businesses.

Covanta Energy, an energy-from-waste company with four Long Island facilities, Saturday helped collect wreaths from Long Island veterans cemeteries, joining volunteers from Wreaths Across America. That nonprofit also works with volunteers nationwide to place the wreaths on the veterans' headstones.

Harry Rathsam, a coordinator for the Wreaths Across America program at the Long Island National Cemetery, Pinelawn, said the number of wreaths left at the cemetery dramatically increased last year.

"Last year was a big jump for us. . . we never had the amount of wreaths that we had," said Rathsam, 45, of Seaford. Volunteers normally had to dispose of roughly 3,000 wreaths annually from the Pinelawn cemetery after they first began clearing them in 2006. In 2018, that number jumped to 45,000.

Rathsam said Covanta's assistance, since last year, helped volunteers remove thousands of discarded wreaths from the cemetery much faster. On Saturday, more than 100 volunteers

pitched in at the Pinelawn site.

"It's definitely a convenience," Rathsam said. "This year, we had people loading up Dumpsters all over the cemetery at one time."

Saturday marked the first time Covanta, which collected 40,000 wreaths from both Long Island National Cemetery and Calverton National Cemetery, delivered the wreaths to all four of its Long Island facilities, in Babylon, Hempstead, Huntington and Islip. The metal frames were separated for recycling, while the remaining wreath materials unable to be recycled were burned.

Altogether, the 40,000 wreaths the four facilities collected — which collectively weighed more than 23 tons — will generate more than 7,000 kilowatt-hours, which is enough to supply electricity to eight homes for a month, according to Covanta officials.

The company will also recycle 1,000 pounds of steel frames from the wreaths — enough to make more than 250 steel bike frames.

Edward Sandkuhl, facility manager for Covanta Hempstead Co. in Westbury, said as a veteran who served in the Marines from 1992 to 1997 in Europe, the Persian Gulf, Africa and Cuba, he can appreciate how important it is to help veterans' groups.

"It sends an important message to the people and the service members themselves that the people in the community care about them and are appreciative of the sacrifices that they've made," Sandkuhl said.



DANIELLE SILVERMAN

Wreaths from veterans' graves were collected by volunteers on Saturday and taken to Covanta Energy's four Long Island facilities.