

Staffing partnership helps Iowa district navigate and recover from pandemic challenges.



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After seeing fill rate improvements, Council Bluffs extends contract with Teachers On Call®.

For years, the Council Bluffs Community School District substitute teacher fill rates had been trending downward. So, when COVID-19 made matters even worse, the Iowa school system needed a solution. "Before the pandemic, human resources did all of the management of our substitute teachers in-house and sometimes had to push these duties aside, depending on the daily amount of work," says Garry Milbourn, chief human resources officer for the district. "The pandemic only made the situation more difficult."

In August 2020, Council Bluffs began a partnership with Teachers On Call. Now, Teachers On Call successfully covers about 40 to 50 vacancies per day for the over 680 teachers across the district's two high schools, two middle schools, and 11 elementary schools.

An "extension of HR" solely dedicated to substitute teachers.

What initially attracted Milbourn to Teachers On Call was that, in addition to taking over substitute educator recruiting, they would provide a manager to work onsite in the district. "That person is an integral part of our daily operations," says Milbourn. "Now, when a morning substitute teacher doesn't show up or someone calls in sick an hour before school, those calls go to that manager to handle."

"It's like I have an extension of my own department that is dedicated to substitute teachers," he says. "It frees up time for my staff to focus on other work. We never had a staff member that was solely dedicated to substitute educators."

Improving fill rates and wages.

When the pandemic hit, Council Bluffs' average fill rate first fell from where it normally sat, in the mid-80s, then began rising steadily with the help of Teachers On Call. Last year, the fill rate for teachers in classrooms reached 91%. The results helped Milbourn convince the superintendent and district board to extend its two-year contract with Teachers On Call. "We showed them our recent successes and that our data was trending in the right direction," he says.

Teachers On Call also conducted a thorough market analysis for Council Bluffs, so the district could increase substitute teacher wages. "In the past, my department tried to see what other school districts in our city were paying their substitute teachers, but that information wasn't always readily available," says Milbourn. "With the support of an onsite manager, we could analyze data and see what our wages were in comparison to others in the metro area." With this new information, Council Bluffs increased wages two years ago, and then again slightly last year, to stay competitive with other districts and employers in the area.

Substitute educators who know the building culture.

Teachers On Call leverages data to determine if it makes sense for employees to serve as building substitutes, who are assigned to a specific school each day and fill whichever position opens. "Building substitutes have been so integral to increasing our fill rates," says Milbourn. "They provide peace of mind for school administrators knowing that they have employees who show up every day who can address last-minute absences. The fact that these people also know the building culture, know the kids, and know the staff has been a real positive for us."

He concludes, "Teachers On Call started working with us at a very difficult time. They had to transfer our substitute teachers from our system to theirs, and then convert them from our employees to theirs, on a very truncated timeline. They did a great job."



For more information, visit [teachersoncall.com](https://www.teachersoncall.com).