

Many Substitute Teachers Are Going Without Pay During School Closures

By [Madeline Will](#) on March 24, 2020 5:10 PM



As school districts close down for weeks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, substitute teachers are left without the opportunity to earn money.

For districts, paying school employees during extended school closures [has been a major dilemma](#). Officials have scrambled to find alternative jobs for staffers like cafeteria workers and bus drivers, many of whom work hourly rather than on salary or on contract. But some places such as [Highline Public Schools near Seattle](#), [Fulton County Schools in Atlanta](#), and [Clark County School District in Las Vegas](#) have stopped paying their day-to-day substitutes.

"We're just thrown under the bus here," Lisa Roe, a substitute teacher in Clark County [told KTNV Las Vegas](#). "We do the best job as we can, and it's just really frustrating that they're forgetting about us."

In Sacramento, Calif., the Sacramento City Teachers Association is urging the Sacramento City Unified School District to continue paying substitutes during school closures. Right now, only long-term substitutes—who have filled in for a permanent vacancy or a teacher on leave—are being paid. The day-to-day substitutes, who are tapped to fill in when needed, are not.

There are about 600 substitute teachers represented by the city's teachers' union, and officials estimate that about 200 of them work every single day. Not getting paid during school closures could mean losing their sole source of income, said David Fisher, the SCTA president.

"Everybody's stressed out now, but at least our permanent classroom teachers have the comfort of knowing their next check is going to come," he said. "For many career substitutes, it's still very unclear if they'll get any continuing pay. ... They're quite naturally very anxious about the situation."

[In an executive order](#), Calif. Gov. Gavin Newsom told school districts that if they close temporarily due to the threat of COVID-19, they will still get state funding to continue to pay their employees, among other things. Other California school districts, [including Los Angeles Unified](#), have committed to paying their substitutes a daily wage as long as the shutdown persists.

Fisher said the Sacramento district is hanging on to state money that should be going to employees to weather difficult times. He said the union has been asking the district every day about this issue, but has not yet gotten a response.

Tara Gallegos, a spokeswoman for the Sacramento school district, said in an email that the district has received the union's proposal and will be responding through the negotiations process.

"It is our understanding that no other school district in Sacramento County is paying its day-to-day substitutes during the school closures," she said.

'No Guarantee'

Francisco Negrón, the chief legal officer for the National School Boards Association, said whether substitutes have to get paid comes down to a question of state law, the district's collective bargaining agreement, and any executive order from the governor. But in most cases, he said, day-to-day substitutes are not included in collective bargaining agreements.

"For most day-to-day substitutes, the agreement is clear from the employer's perspective and the employees' perspective that there's no guarantee of employment," Negrón said. "There's no guarantee that the district will use you, it's based on the district's need."

For the districts that have agreed to continue paying their substitutes, they now have to figure out how much to pay them.

In Sacramento, for example, substitute teachers are paid about \$222 a day. The SCTA has proposed that for each substitute, the district calculate a pay rate based on the number of instructional days worked from Jan. 6 to March 12. For example, a substitute who worked every day during that time period would continue to get paid \$222 a day. A substitute who only worked 25 days during that time period would be paid \$123 a day.

But many substitute teachers are still waiting for answers about what will happen to them as the school closures stretch on, possibly to the end of the school year. Glenn Bryant, who works in four different school districts in Georgia, said he hasn't received any communication about pay.

His schedule was booked through March, most of April, and some of May—and now he's unsure whether he'll end up with any paychecks during this time period. (Georgia schools are mostly closed through the end of the month, but Bryant suspects the closures will last longer.)

"Hey, I've been doing this every day for you all," Bryant said, in reference to his district. "This wasn't my choice, am I going to get compensated?"

His wife works full-time, and Bryant said he'll be OK financially—but the uncertainty is frustrating.

"I'm just hoping that somewhere down the line, we can find a solution," he said. But "my gut says we probably won't, and I probably won't get compensated."

Image: Empty classrooms at the Forest Hills Elementary School in Lake Oswego, Ore., which closed due to the coronavirus outbreak. ⚠Ken Hawkins/ZUMA Wire (File)