

However, studies have shown that students tend to fall back into their old sleep habits unless the information is emphasized continuously.

“Any type of social media campaigns and things that just let people know that teenagers should be getting nine to ten hours of sleep would be helpful,” Haynes told Spark. “The announcements, and any other kind of PSA that gets that information out would be helpful. I’ll preach it in my class, but it’s part of the content so it’s easy for me to just be like get more sleep.”

Jones said that this assignment has been helpful in educating her about the importance of good sleep.

“The value of this assignment is that it really forces you to think about your own personal sleep schedule and try to see if there is anything that you can do to improve the amount of sleep you get,” Jones said. “The mental health of students should be one of the topmost priorities and I think that a later start could help a lot of people.”

Macfarlane instead of the members of Lakota Central Office who would ultimately make the decision to change school start times.

“I had them addressed to our own school administrators just because that’s who’s going to be around us and with our kids,” Haynes said. “Those are the people who are familiar with us. We could have easily gone in, jumped past the school administrators, and written to the school board instead. But, I think it’s important in kind of letting the people in charge of the building know how we’re feeling.”

Miller said that while a change in start times for East might have positive effects for East students, there would need to be an extensive evaluation of how that change could impact the district as a whole.

“For some students, it might make them more willing and excited to come to school, but I’m not sure that it would help all students. If we start the day later, we’re going to have to go to school longer which could impact the home lives of some of our students and those of our students with after-school jobs,” Miller told Spark. “We’d have to look at what happens to the middle school, elementary, and early childhood students. Are they going to go later too? I’m certainly not opposed to taking a look at the change; I just think we have to think about how it impacts the whole district.”

Mack explains what her role would be in first exploring this change for the high schools on an organizational (building) level.

“Lakota is a little bit different from the other two districts I’ve been in because this district has two high schools,” Mack said. “When you only have one high school, it’s a lot easier to make decisions that are best for grades 9-12, as opposed to K-12. We have two high schools so typically what [the high school principals] have to do first is to agree that a certain decision would be best for us, as a Lakota East and a Lakota West. From there, we can make some decisions as to how we can move forward.”

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), schools can play a role in encouraging students to get adequate sleep through educational programs.

“[The assignment] is more or less to self reflect and to analyze why we are always so tired,” Haynes said. “If it has something to do with school start times, then let’s look at that, but the assignment is also meant to entail healthy sleep habits and to take a look at what we do before we go to bed and when we wake up.”

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Substitute Bradley Stuart (right) and East student Nicholas Breidenbach have a conversation in the food prep lab.

RISKS OF RETURNING

One repercussion of the COVID-19 virus is a substitute teacher shortage throughout Ohio and in Lakota. Fewer subs returned to school this year in the face of an increase in teacher absences. • story **megan miranda** | photography **ianni acapulco** | infographic and art **cassandra mueller**

After 35 years of teaching and five years of subbing Larry Duff is left contemplating a decision he didn’t see coming: should he return to substitute teaching in the midst of a pandemic? The seemingly simple question is layered with pros and cons from health concerns to losing his source of community connectivity, but one must outweigh the other. For the 76 year-old, long term sub at East, the risks of returning were too heavy.

East substitute teachers were never vast in supply; however, in this 2020 school year a substitute teacher shortage has become more prevalent than ever. As there could be many reasons linked to the diminished number of subs, Lakota Local Schools Superintendent Matt Miller views the issue in direct relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In your normal times, it’s really hard to get substitutes, [and] it’s been harder now since COVID,” Miller said. “I think people are a bit fearful of going into buildings where there are

people gathering, challenged with their own issues at home [if] they have kids in a virtual learning environment, or maybe they also have family that might be compromised.”

While Lakota is dealing with the sub shortage first hand, the processing and contracting of subs is entirely through the Butler County Educational Service Center (Butler County ESC).

“We funnel [subs] through the Butler County ESC, and that’s the agreement that we have [with] them, that they are the third party contractor for our substitutes,” Miller said. “Once [substitutes] are hired through the Butler County ESC, our own building will reach out to subs that are on the list.”

Substitutes are organized through a program Lakota uses known as the Automated Educational Substitute Operator Placement (AESOP) system. Within this system teachers can mark if they will be absent, allowing substitutes to know the date and time a teacher

is out.

Every morning at 6:45 substitutes are scheduled to fill the teacher absences that are present that day. The East Office Manager Susanne Linder is in charge of regulating substitute scheduling and assigning subs to their classroom in the morning.

“In the morning I open up AESOP and see who’s out and [the subs] will pick it up on their end, [because] they see that the teachers are going to be out,” Linder said. “If nobody picks it up, then I have to try to find somebody to cover it within the building.”

This year Linder said her job has become more challenging while dealing with the sub shortage and is finding alternative ways to cover classrooms destitute of their teachers.

“We’ve covered it a couple different ways; if the teacher is out without a sub,” Linder said, “I cover it with instructional aides that are available because their student is absent.”

This has been happening more frequently than it ever had in the past. [Also] We have two paraprofessionals in the building; they usually run copies and they cover classes often. Sometimes we pull counselors, [or] an administrator, just whoever can help.”

One of the Instructional Aids at East, Connie Jordan, started in September after a 27-year career with Hamilton County Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) came to an end because of the pandemic layoffs. She said a primary part of her job has been filling teacher absences when needed.

“I’m supposed to work in the mailroom, and if anybody needs copies or anything like that, but I don’t think there’s as many copies to be made this year because of covid precautions to alleviate touching,” Jordan said. “I’m in classrooms a lot, or whatever Mrs. Linder asks me to do, I’d say I’m [filling in for teachers] about 80% of the time.”

Bradley Stuart, a first-year substitute for Lakota, has become integrated into the East community as a consistent sub during the pandemic.

“Normally the night before I check our computer program to see what teachers are out. So then I can pick a teacher that I would be that day,” Stuart said. “I get here about seven o’clock, and really I just get a little post-it note that says you’re going to this class at this period, and I just go down the list until the end of the day.”

After getting a masters degree in chemistry at University of Cincinnati, Stuart was a teaching assistant at the college level for many semesters. He then transitioned his graduate school year, teaching freshman and sophomores in college, and within that time found a passion for teaching.

“I felt like I could make a bigger impact with students, so that’s why I’ve kind of diverted more towards high school teaching as my current career path,” Stuart said.

As this year is Stuart’s first experience as a substitute, the pandemic teaching style is his “normal,” besides what he was familiar with while serving as a student teacher in Chemistry with John Severens in January of last year. So while these new safety guidelines are unfamiliar, he quickly adapted to the biggest changes.

“I feel like I’m in a unique position that I came, [Lakota went virtual], and then I came back,” Stuart said. “All the social distancing stuff is a huge thing, [but] the biggest thing that surprised me was the wiping down of the desks. That was a very good idea; those common touch surfaces and getting teachers to help sanitize will make a big difference.”

In contrast to Stuart’s experience as a novice, Duff taught at East for 18 years and in Lakota for 35 years and following his retirement became a sub for five years.

“I retired after 35 years and got bored, well I never get bored, but I [always] enjoyed the

classroom,” Duff said. “I enjoyed the staff, all the people and the social aspect of it. So I got a subbing license, and started to have something to do, see my old colleagues and it’s fun interacting with the kids, they always ask for my old time stories and I usually have a few.”

Duff is loved by students for his uplifting presence and entertaining stories from the past.

East senior Paige Whalen has had Duff as a sub over the course of her high school career.

“He always begins off class with a story, and then he’ll sidetrack and be like ‘remind me to tell you this at the end of the class,’” Whalen said. “It’ll just keep going and he makes the classroom environment just really joyful.”

Entering the 2020 school year both subs had to ask themselves if they were willing to return to the working environment in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Because Stuart does not consider himself high risk, he saw this as an opportunity to come and teach when others might not be able to.

“I’ve reached the understanding that I can do the most I can to protect myself. But at the same time, life has to go on,” Stuart said. “So I

try to do the best I can, such as wearing masks, sanitizing, and paying attention to washing your hands and where you are putting your hands. As long as I follow those, I still need a job, I still need to move forward in my career.”

However, for Duff who is considered high risk at age 76, he had to have a different mindset about returning.

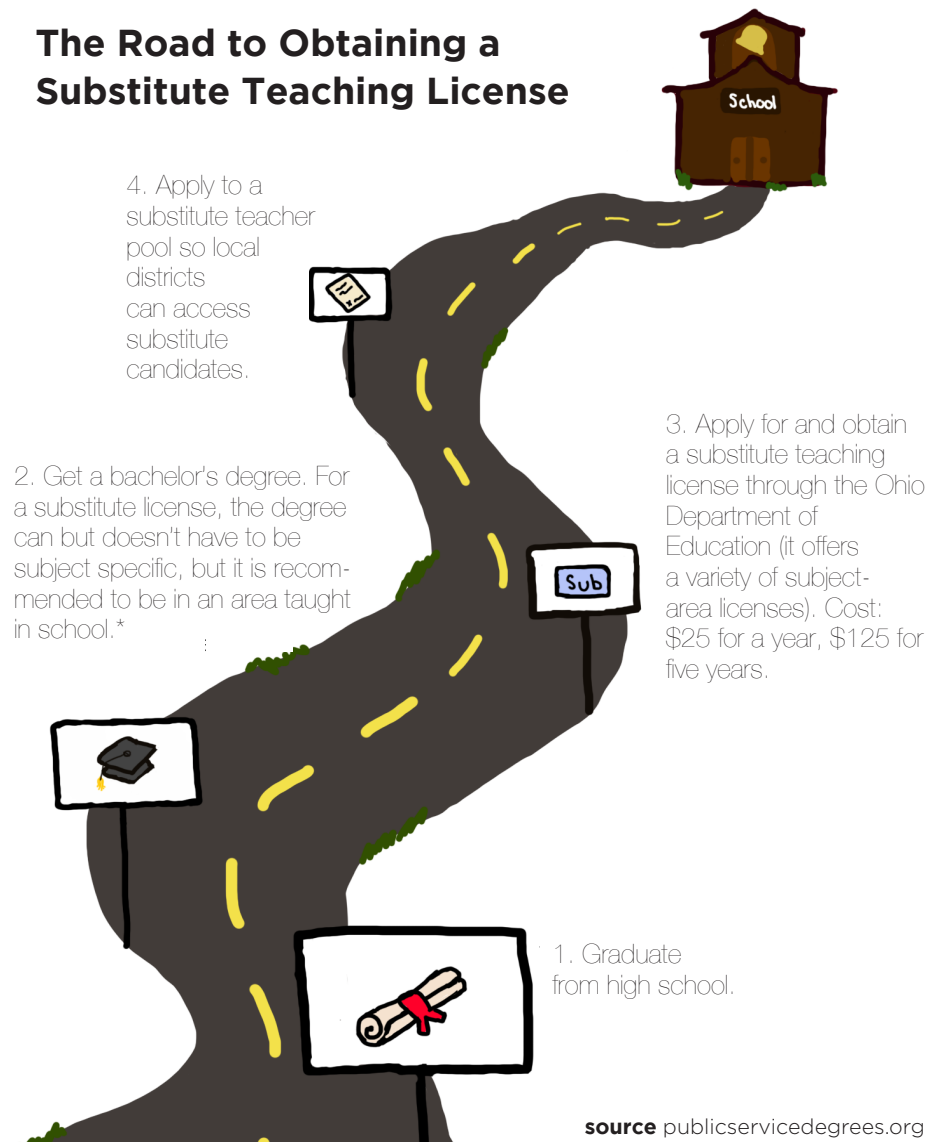
“It wasn’t easy, it was hard to make that decision,” Duff said. “I have four sons, and I sent them all an email. One of them’s a doctor, and I said ‘give me your advice, should I come back or not’ and all four said ‘no - too risky’.”

Many subs have to contemplate the same decision over returning to teach, for many different reasons, and some conclude with the same decision as Duff, to not return.

Stuart, because of his consistent role, has been adjusting to the needs of Linder and classrooms that need someone to fill the teacher vacancy.

“I feel like the office staff is very strained by the [lack of] resources, because of that I feel like as a sub we go more by the seat of pants

The Road to Obtaining a Substitute Teaching License



“[I love] interacting with the kids and interacting with staff because I taught with all those guys for years, and the social aspect of it. [Without COVID-19] I would have subbed till I die.” - retired substitute Larry Duff

and are willing to go with the flow,” Stuart said. “If a teacher has a planning period or a virtual online learning period, those periods I get assigned to other places so we can cover more teachers.”

While Linder is helping to maintain substitute fillings at East, as a district, Miller sees Lakota looking for other solutions to the ongoing problem.

“We were hopeful that because some schools were going remote that there was this sub pool [that] would increase but that’s not been the case,” Miller said. “We have taken steps when schools have decided to go remote. Our HR department is calling their HR department to see if we can get more subs from them.”

With many other districts struggling similarly to find substitutes, the solution is sought out at a state level.

“There is House bill 756 that’s floating around in Columbus. They are trying to temporarily lessen the qualifications for subs right now in Ohio. You don’t have to have a teaching license but you do have to have a college degree,” Miller told Spark. “But housebuilders 756 is taking a look at making adjustments for that for this year. There would still be guidelines and background checks but they are trying to make it easier for school districts to get subs.”

One seemingly important factor is pay. While subs are contracted through Butler County ECS, their pay is determined by the individual districts. Lakota offers subs a flat rate of \$85 a day.

“Lakota has it as a three tiered system that is basically, are you doing a short term subbing or a long term subbing versus a day-to-day subbing. I know at Lakota it’s \$85 a day but they do not have more for [different subbing positions],” Stuart said. “But [some] other school districts do either \$95 or \$100 a day, then if you do 20 or more days it’s closer to \$110 per day and if you do more than 60 days it moves up to like \$120.”

Other schools offer a noticeably higher pay for subs, such as Mason City Schools. During November the district decided to increase pay from \$85 to \$125 a day during weeks with limited sub availability. Miller doesn’t see this as a factor Lakota needs to change in order to attract more substitutes.

“We talked about [adjusting pay], but from

our understanding with our own treasurer and HR department the pay is not really a factor to get someone to sub,” Miller said. “If there’s another district [further] from your house that might pay you five or \$10 more a day, that’s not really much of an incentive to go there. It’s pretty much localized from what we’ve figured out.”

Stuart is a prime example of a sub who specifically wants to be at Lakota. The draw comes from his positive experience and growing up as a student at Lakota West, where his brother now attends.

“I want to stay in Lakota still because my dream job is to work in Lakota, I have some feelers in [East] and I just started subbing so it just kind of snowballed from there,” Stuart said. “I really like the culture here. I like a lot of the teachers, I get along with the staff and they’re very helpful.”

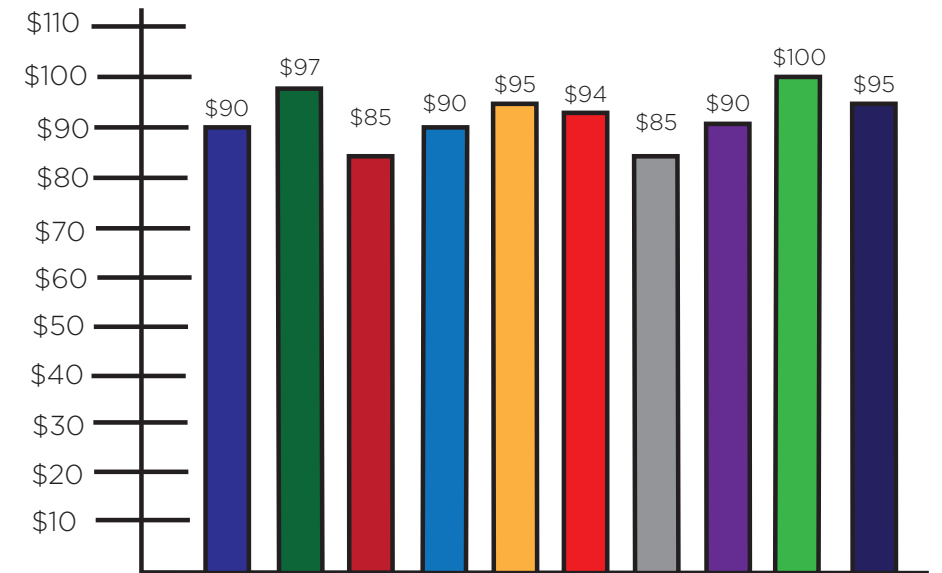
Helping out in classrooms is something Jordan has come to enjoy as well, noticing students good behavior and a decrease in stress from her past career.

“It’s totally different for me, but I love it. I can go home every day. I don’t have to worry about what I’m going to have to do the next day, I’m stress free,” Jordan said. “This school here is awesome and most students are great.”

For Duff, subbing at East has also been largely driven by the community aspect it provides.

“[I love] interacting with the kids and interacting with staff because I taught with all those guys for years, and the social aspect of it,” Duff told Spark. “[Without COVID-19] I would have subbed till I die.”•

Substitute Teacher Starting Pay for Butler County School Districts -- January, 2021



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- Hamilton City School District
- Lakota Local School District
- Madison Local School District
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