



Virginia Association of Counties

# ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Chesterfield

Program Title: Substitute Teacher Hiring and Engagement Initiative

Program Category: Community Service and Community Outreach

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Lisa High

Title: Chesterfield Co Public Schools Deputy Superintendent

Signature:

**Executive Summary:**

Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) began a recruitment initiative in 2021 to increase the amount of available substitute teachers so that the daily total fill rate - a percentage reflecting the amount of assignments covered by substitutes - would increase. CCPS is the 67th largest school system in the country with over 60,000 students and over 4,000 teachers; due to these numbers, CCPS should have held a substitute teacher pool of approximately 3,000-3,500 substitutes to adequately cover teacher absences. However, CCPS only had 702 substitutes in the Fall of 2021, well below the 1.57 teacher to substitute ratio recommended by Johns Hopkins University<sup>1</sup>. It was determined that focusing on recruitment, the hiring process, and compensation could make the most direct impact on the fill rate - by increasing the amount of available substitutes in the pool and paying more per assignment, each vacant assignment has a greater likelihood of being covered. This multi-year initiative was complicated by the unprecedented global pandemic, resulting in absences, quarantines, resignations, and retirements. Through a focused recruitment campaign, addition of staff to refine the hiring and onboarding process, and collaboration between the School Board and Chesterfield County Government to create additional financial incentives, CCPS has both been able to substantially increase the total amount of available substitute teachers as well as the daily total fill rate percentage. This increase also has laid the foundation for a long term teacher recruitment strategy with the growing sub-to-teacher pipeline.

**Problem or need addressed by the Program:**

CCPS has always had a need to recruit and maintain a pool of substitute teachers, but the pool of available substitute teachers began to dwindle due to many factors including wages that did

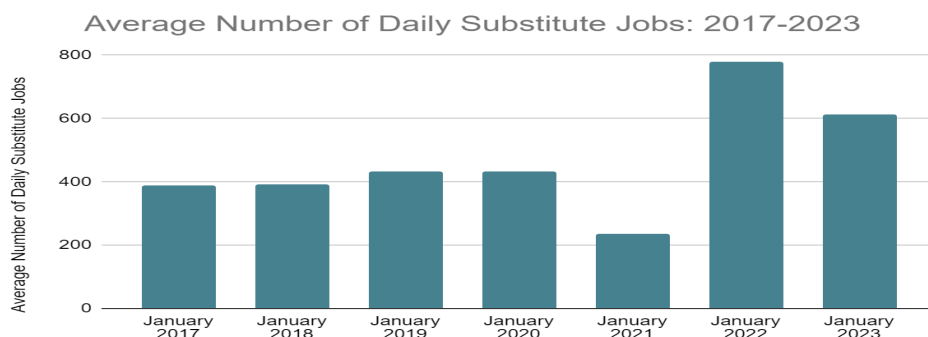
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<sup>1</sup> 1.57 teachers per substitute to achieve a 90% daily average fill rate.

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not match market rates and more employment options through the emerging gig-economy<sup>2</sup>.

Substitute staffing numbers, particularly the fill rate, were also declining due to the worsening national teacher shortage and the pandemic. The average student will spend two-thirds of a school year with a substitute teacher throughout the course of their K-12 education<sup>3</sup>, which both indicates not only the importance of recruiting enough substitutes but also focusing on the efficiency of substitute-led instruction. To make matters even more complicated, the national average daily fill rate for school systems prior to the pandemic was 80%, but as school systems attempted to return to in-person learning during the pandemic, the rate dropped to 50%-65% as quarantines and other variables created unique challenges to adequately staff schools<sup>4</sup> - for some school systems, one out of every two vacant classrooms did not have a qualified adult available to teach the class every day. The consequences for a school when they do not have enough substitutes are immediate and cascading - classroom sizes inflate, administrators need to find teachers to cover classes, those teachers can then miss their lesson planning time, impacting instructional quality and potentially leading to more callouts. This chart shows how a return to in-person learning in January 2022 nearly doubled the need for substitutes for CCPS from the previous five years:



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<sup>2</sup> Open Colleges 2017

<sup>3</sup> Brookings Institute 2020

<sup>4</sup> EdWeek 2021

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Chesterfield County School Board and Government recognized the impact that low substitute numbers were having on the schools, and they sought to both recruit more subs as well make substituting a more lucrative option so that more assignments would be covered.

**Program Description:**

In order to increase the fill rate, the School Board of Chesterfield County and Chesterfield County Government identified three areas of focus: a recruitment campaign to market substitute teaching, the addition of staff to improve the efficiency of the hiring and onboarding process, and financial support to maintain and grow the substitute teaching program. This three-pronged approach made an immediate impact as schools quickly noticed more substitutes showing up to their buildings, but it also addressed the shortage from a holistic perspective: we were building a large pool of qualified substitutes who were more incentivized to cover assignments, providing them with important experience and a more tangible connection to our schools. Likewise, a byproduct of building a substitute teacher pool is the sub-to-teacher pipeline as some substitutes will eventually pursue a Virginia teaching license. CCPS was transforming the role of the substitute teacher - often stereotyped as a babysitter - into a vital asset crucial for the success of the school system. Employees become more engaged when they feel valued, and CCPS began to market the role of the substitute teacher through the lens of a value proposition: earn competitive wages, contribute to your community, and potentially discover a long-term career path as a licensed teacher.

The first step CCPS took to increase the substitute fill rate was to hire a Substitute Specialist to focus on interviewing and hiring substitute teachers. This grant-funded position was created in August of 2021 with the primary duties of reviewing applications, interviewing substitute teacher candidates, and overall serving as a resource for applicants as they navigate the application and onboarding

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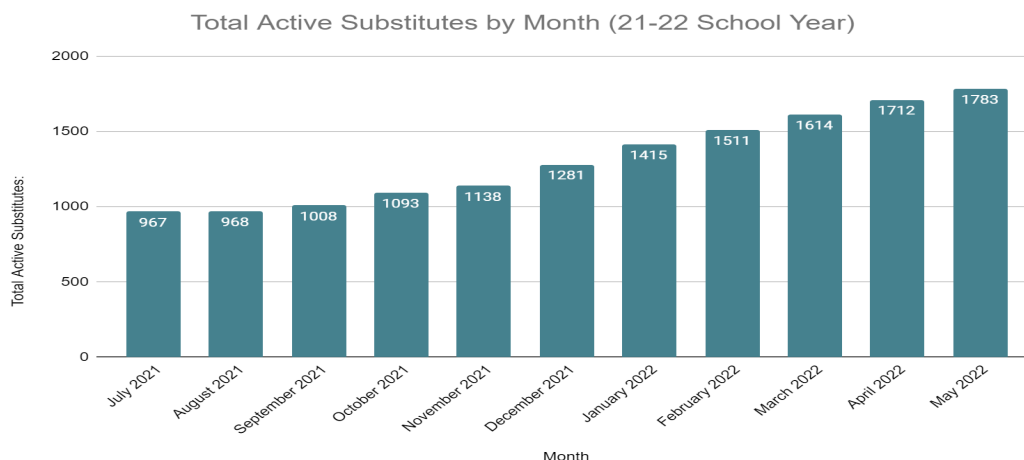
processes. Applicants are more likely to accept a job and perform well at that job if they are contacted shortly after application and have a clear path forward to starting work, and the Substitute Specialist was instrumental in refining the hiring process for substitutes. First, all substitute applications began to be reviewed on a daily basis with successful candidates being moved into the interview phase of the hiring process the same day they applied. Once moved into the interview phase, the applicant would then be given the option to self-schedule their interview within the same applicant tracking system they applied into, simplifying the process for the candidate and automating the process for the Substitute team who no longer needed to coordinate calendars for interviews. If the candidate successfully passed the interview, the Substitute Specialist would then walk them through the next steps with their fully digital onboarding and assign them a list of tasks they would need to complete prior to beginning work. This process was a drastic change from the in-person orientation and onboarding that was occurring previously as substitute candidates now had a streamlined, automated step-by-step guide to complete onboarding.

The Substitute Specialist's impact was immediately noticeable for both the HR team as well as our applicants - by separating the interview function, recruiters and administrators were able to focus on more recruitment-related activities to create more interviews, and candidates were able to have a faster and more personalized hiring experience, leading to more substitute teachers who are more likely to pick up vacant jobs. During the 2021-2022 school year, the Substitute Specialist interviewed 1,086 substitute teachers, and the substitute pool increased from a low of 702 to 1,831 at the end of the school year, indicating the position's strong impact. This role would also not have been possible without the financial backing of Chesterfield County government since the position was initially funded through federal ESSER funds; observing the success of CCPS's substitute teacher program, Chesterfield County Government moved the position under the umbrella of general operating funds

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once the federal money expired.

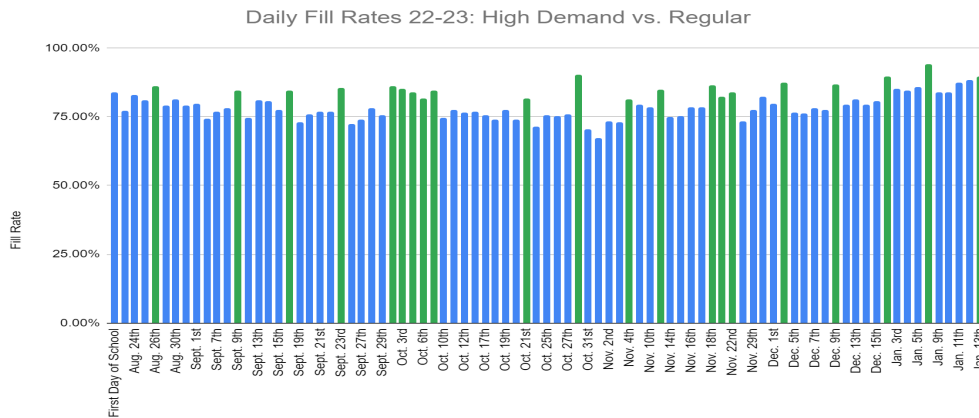
In addition to providing the funding to hire adequate staff, CCPS and Chesterfield County Government were able to collaborate on a compensation study in order to bring the daily rate of pay for substitutes up to market average. Chesterfield County is a fast-growing suburban community, bordering school systems such as Richmond City, Petersburg City, and Henrico County, and it's not uncommon for substitutes and full time staff to travel across county lines for a greater rate of pay. In November 2021, the School Board of Chesterfield County approved increasing the substitute rate of pay from \$87.55 per day to \$101.50 per day and introduced High Demand Days at \$203 per day - days when schools experience increased callouts such as every Friday and the Monday following the Superbowl. These financial incentives created a sudden boost with substitute recruitment as well as engagement. The below chart exemplifies how the amount of substitutes began an incline in November of 2021, almost immediately following the rate of pay increase:



Substitute engagement improved too as the fill rate increased considerably on any days that were deemed high demand:

## Chesterfield County, VA

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	21-22 Average Friday Fill Rate	22-23 Average Friday Fill Rate	23-24 Average Friday Fill Rate
August	61.44%	86.19%	90.00%
September	58.67%	85.13%	90.10%
October	59.99%	84.43%	88.77%
November	71.91% (*implementation of high demand days)	84.18%	88.26%
December	78.81%	88.00%	89.14%
Average	66.16%	85.59%	89.04%

Chesterfield County Government and School board have continued to advocate for higher substitute wages and the continuance of high demand days, and the current daily rate of pay for a substitute teacher is \$136 which is one of the highest rates of pay for substituting in the area.

Equipped with an improved hiring process and better pay, CCPS needed to market the role of the substitute teacher through a focused recruitment campaign, and the substitute teacher function was moved under the purview of the newly formed CCPS Recruitment Department. CCPS advertised substitute teaching heavily through flyer distribution, TV, Radio, social media, online job boards, and collaborating with community partners such as Fort Gregg-Adams and the Virginia Hispanic

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Chamber. Not all marketing was done virtually either; recruiters also attended many hiring events at popular community locations such as public libraries, art galleries, military bases, and community colleges. Chesterfield County Government frequently provided venues and points of contact within the community who could assist in promoting substituting. In addition to attending job fairs, CCPS also hosted various substitute teacher job fairs which proved to be an invaluable resource for fast and effective hiring.

CCPS's Substitute Teacher Job Fairs, held at various schools throughout the county, are similar to one-stop-shopping for candidates: a successful job fair candidate will be able to interview, receive an offer, and conduct a background check in under an hour, all while having immediate interactions with school-based and central office administrators who are able to answer questions and offer guidance. Candidates, having experienced the impersonal and oftentimes silent void of applying for jobs during a pandemic, responded positively to having a guaranteed, in-person interview shortly after applying. As the employer, we are able to have direct access to these candidates for a specific period of time under one roof, saving valuable time and effort compared to the traditional recruitment process. This streamlined, expedited hiring proved to be successful with over 100 candidates hired at our first Substitute Teacher Job Fair in 2021 as well as at our second job fair in 2022. To present day, we have held 5 Substitute Teacher Job Fairs with more scheduled in the near future, and we average 98 substitutes hired per event.

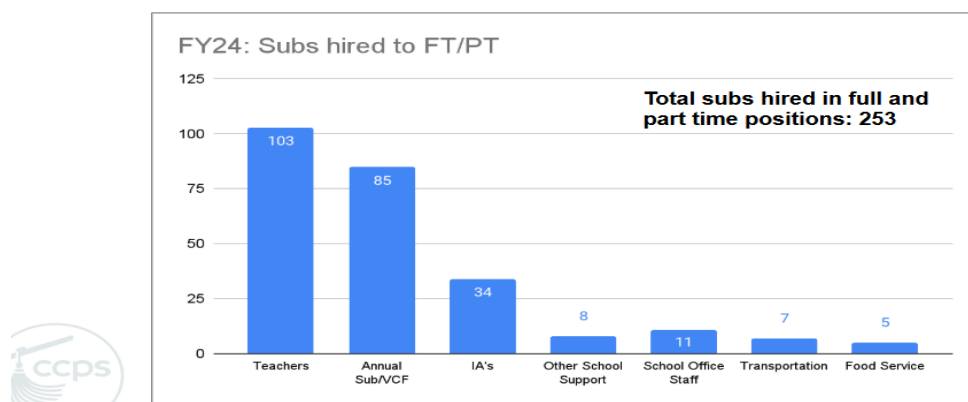
Finally, the most effective way to improve the fill rate is to hire more licensed teachers for vacant positions, and CCPS was able to take advantage of its growing substitute teacher pool by promoting the sub-to-teacher pipeline. Teaching is one of the few professions that allows a candidate to test the waters, for pay, prior to taking the dive; if a substitute wanted to become a licensed teacher, CCPS needed to be there to encourage and support that journey as much as possible. We partnered with



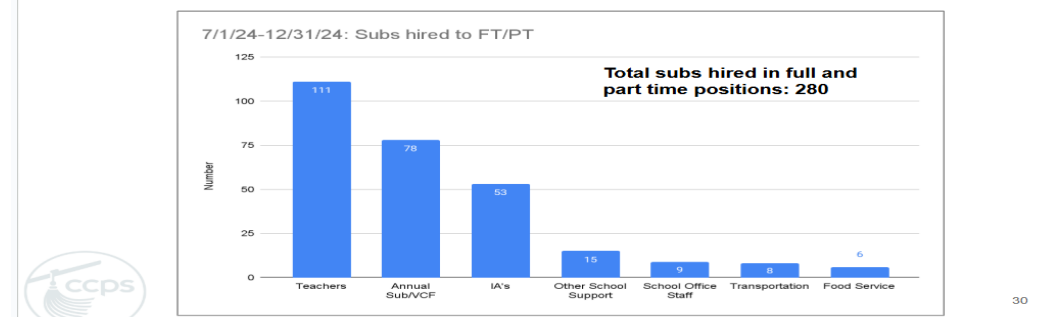
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organizations such as Brightpoint Community College, VCU, and iTeach to host “career-switcher” informational sessions to promote pathways to obtaining a Virginia Teaching License - these events were marketed extensively to our substitute teacher pool. Principals encouraged their substitutes to pursue a teaching license, and CCPS sent out many communications highlighting the benefits of earning a teaching license and teaching with CCPS. These efforts have been effective with 415 substitute teachers accepting licensed teaching positions since the Fall of 2021, with 111 of those hires occurring during the latter half of 2024 - it’s important to note that annual substitutes are full-time, benefitted employees that are often on a career pathway to obtaining a teaching license:

**Substitutes Hired into Full and Part-Time Roles 2023-2024**



**Substitutes Hired into Full and Part-Time Roles July-December 2024**



Chesterfield County Government and Schools continue to promote career switcher pathways to further strengthen the sub-to-teacher pipeline.

### **Responding to Economic Downturn:**

Substitute teaching can be an excellent option during a bad economy. Substitute teaching offers a flexible and accessible opportunity for those in need of income. It can be an ideal job for those looking for part-time work, including retirees, stay-at-home parents, or individuals looking to transition careers. The ease of entry into substitute teaching, often without the need for an extensive background in education, allows many to begin working relatively quickly, which is especially valuable when other job markets may be tight.

Furthermore, substitute teaching plays a crucial role in maintaining the stability of the educational system during times of economic uncertainty. When teachers are absent, substitutes ensure that classrooms remain operational and students continue to learn. This helps reduce disruption and ensures that educational outcomes remain as stable as possible during difficult times.

Lastly, substitute teaching provides an opportunity for individuals to gain experience in education, which can lead to further opportunities. Some may find the job rewarding enough to pursue a long-term career in teaching, especially with alternative pathways like career switcher programs or teacher certification.

### **Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:**

A diverse pool of substitute teachers can help reflect the student body, particularly in schools with diverse populations. When students see teachers who share similar cultural, ethnic, or racial backgrounds, it can create a stronger sense of belonging and foster a more inclusive environment. Likewise, a diverse group of substitutes can bring a variety of perspectives and teaching styles that are more attuned to the unique needs of students. This can improve engagement and outcomes for all students.

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Increasing the substitute pool has also created more equitable access to education and a more inclusive school culture. Having more substitutes available ensures that there is less disruption to students' learning when a teacher is absent. This consistency helps all students, regardless of background, continue to receive equitable access to quality education. A larger substitute pool and higher fill rate help ensure that fill rates rise at schools that are more geographically isolated or a farther commute for the majority of substitutes. This is particularly important in a large, heterogeneous county. Additionally, a more diverse staff can help cultivate a culture where inclusivity is celebrated. Substitutes who come from a variety of backgrounds can contribute to discussions, model inclusive behaviors, and reinforce the importance of respect and understanding among students.

Finally, expanding the number of substitutes also opens up more opportunities for individuals from underrepresented groups to enter the teaching profession. Career switcher programs, in particular, can help attract diverse candidates who may not have initially considered teaching but want to make a meaningful impact in their communities.

**Program Cost:**

Beyond the regular cost for paying a substitute teacher, there is a marketing expense to this program. Both the general substitute teacher posting as well as the various substitute teacher job fairs hosted by the school system involved paid marketing through various avenues such as radio, TV, job boards such as Indeed, and social media. We are continuously refining our marketing strategy to make it as impactful and cost effective as possible. The addition of a Substitute Specialist also incurred standard FTE costs. Below is an approximation of the annual costs incurred:

**Substitute Specialist** - \$90,00-\$100,000 inclusive of benefits using the midpoint to estimate.

**Advertising (External job boards, media, social media, print media)** ~ \$13,300-\$19,500

**Job Fair Registrations for Local Colleges and Community Colleges - \$500**

**Total \$103,800-\$120,000**

**Program Results/Success:**

The lowest recorded point for the fill rate was in Fall of 2021 when the school system returned to in-person learning during the pandemic, and CCPS's efforts paid off as nearly every facet of the substitute base experienced acute growth:

- **Low Point (Fall 2021):**
  - **Fill Rate:** 62%
  - **Active Subs:** 702
- **End of 2021/2022 School Year:**
  - **Fill Rate:** 70% (increase from 62%)
  - **Active Subs:** 1,831 (increase of 1,129)
  - **Assignments Covered:** No data available
  - **Substitute hired as full time teachers:** 96
- **End of 2022/2023 School Year:**
  - **Fill Rate:** 84% (increase from 70%)
  - **Active Subs:** 2,480 (increase of 649)
  - **Assignments Covered:** 32,594
  - **Substitute hired as full time teachers:** 107
- **End of 2023/2024 School Year:**
  - **Fill Rate:** 87% (increase from 84%)

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- **Active Subs:** 3,088 (increase of 608)
- **Assignments Covered:** 68,820
- **Substitute hired as full time teachers:** 109
  
- **As of February 2025:**
  - **Fill Rate:** 88% (increase from 87%)
  - **Active Subs:** 3,228 (increase of 140)
  - **Assignments Covered:** 41,244
  - **Substitute hired as full time teachers:** 103

**Worthiness of Award:**

Since launching this initiative, CCPS has significantly strengthened its substitute teacher program, increasing the substitute pool by an impressive 233%. This expansion has had a direct impact on the school system's ability to maintain continuity in the classroom, resulting in a 26% increase in the fill rate for substitute positions. Similarly, the growing substitute to teacher pipeline signals long term success and stability for the school system with 214 substitutes hired into full time teaching positions over the past 17 months. Consistency in education is key to a child's development and academic success, and this progress ensures that students continue to receive quality education. CCPS deserves to be recognized for its commitment to providing a stable learning environment for all students, even during periods of teacher absence.

**Supplemental Materials:**

[Substitute Teacher Job Fair Flyer](#)

[Facebook Ad](#)

[Radio Ad](#)

[TV Ad](#)

[Pay Rate and High Demand Days Announcement](#)

[Sources](#)