

Announcement

Abilene ISD has appointed the education staffing firm, ESS Substitute Solutions, to manage its substitute program beginning in April 2019. As a seasoned company with nearly two decades of experience, ESS provides trained and qualified substitute personnel to school districts throughout the country. The ESS team's record in helping schools increase their substitute fill rates has made a big difference for students.

ESS will become responsible for the hiring, training and placement of all substitute teachers, school aides and clerical positions for Abilene ISD. Nurses, custodians and transportation substitutes will still be managed by the district.

What does this partnership mean for current substitutes in AISD?

At the district's request, ESS will contact all current AISD substitutes within the next few days to offer positions with their organization. ESS will provide details for upcoming orientation sessions to meet with their staff and ask any questions. Current substitutes are under no obligation to join ESS; however, beginning in April, to continue to serve in AISD all substitutes must apply to become ESS employees.

Effective April 1, 2019, ESS will officially begin managing the AISD substitute program, and all current substitutes' last day as an employee of AISD will be March 31, 2019.

AISD cannot thank its dedicated substitutes enough for stepping in at a moment's notice to ensure our students experience continuity in academic and support services. It is our sincere hope that substitutes will continue to serve our district through ESS. We will be working very closely with ESS to ensure a smooth transition for everyone involved.

Individuals interested in becoming a substitute for the district may follow this link: ess.com/jobs/ or call ESS at 877-983-2244 for more information.

SUBSTITUTE SOLUTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What does it mean to "outsource" the substitute program?

A: When a district outsources a service, it means that the district is allowing an outside company to help run the day-to-day operations of a function of the organization (substitutes). With the substitute program, (ESS) will work in collaboration with Abilene ISD to increase the absenteeism daily fill rate so that students still receive quality instruction in the absence of their teacher of record.

Q: The district is outsourcing the critical job of selecting and placing teachers in classrooms with children. Isn't this a core responsibility of the District?

A: The district is still fulfilling its core responsibility by ensuring that the continuity of instruction continues for our students in the absence of their classroom teacher of record. Our goal is to provide a quality substitute teacher in every classroom, every day, who ensures that every student continues to learn and grow in the absence of their teacher of record. Secondly, our substitute teachers are prepared and supported both professionally and personally during their substitute experience. To this end, the district feels that it is helping to better improve and fulfill its core responsibility. The standards for substitute teachers will still be set by Abilene ISD. Even though ESS will hire the substitutes; quality management will remain with Abilene ISD. Abilene ISD will maintain the right to request removal of any substitute who does not meet our standards.

Q: There might be viable internal solutions that haven't been attempted or discovered yet. Have we done everything reasonably in our power to solve this problem internally?

A: Yes, we feel that at this point the district has done its due diligence. Human Resources (HR) has worked through the challenges of substitute fill rates without being able to find a viable solution that would truly support the continuity of instruction for our campuses. The fact is that today, substitute teaching is a tough job. This is not just an Abilene ISD concern, this is a state-wide and national concern. We have found that substitutes have choices when it comes to deciding when, where, and if they want to work, not only within the Abilene ISD community but within the surrounding communities as well, thus placing a strain on the number of substitutes who are available to substitute within our Abilene ISD community. We have also found that substitutes with a Bachelor's or Master's degree sometimes decide they would like to pursue getting a teaching license through an alternative licensure program after substituting for a while.

Q: Will current Abilene ISD substitute teachers be able to work for ESS?

A: Yes, that was a non-negotiable point between the district and ESS. Current substitute teachers will transition over to the new company without any disruptions in their employment. They will still utilize the same absence management system that is currently in place and will be able to work at their

preferred campuses. ESS offers additional benefits to substitutes including direct deposit, weekly pay, health care benefits, monetary working incentives and ongoing training.

Q: In a nutshell, what does this mean for our current substitute teachers?

A: The primary reason for researching and evaluating a solution for the persistent challenges regarding substitute fill rates is to ensure that the continuity of instruction continues for our students in the absence of their classroom teacher of record. Our goal is to help provide a quality substitute teacher in every classroom, every day, who cares that every student continues to learn and grow in the absence of their teacher of record. Secondly, our substitute teachers are prepared and supported both professionally and personally during their substitute experience.

In summary, the working relationship with the district's human resources department and campus administrators will remain the same throughout this collaborative process with the ESS Substitute Solutions team. The transitioning of current substitutes within the system should be seamless regarding the current workplace options, pay scale, and status. More information will be coming about the transition/implementation process near the end of February 2019 in preparation for orientation sessions for the Spring-Summer 2018-19, beginning in late February or early March.

Q: There has been a lot of discussion about the fill rate. The district is at a current fill rate of 74% for all vacancies, what is the ultimate goal?

A: The expectation will be a 95% to 100% fill rate with incremental increases along the way to achieve the goal of 100%. Keep in mind that the 74% is an average of all campuses and all vacancies. Some campuses continue to have daily fill rates much lower, which proves to be major challenges for students, teachers, and administrators. The ESS company will target campuses with specific challenges through intentional recruitment efforts, incentives, and permanent campus substitutes.

Q: Will current substitutes have a choice in selecting their assignments if they choose to only work on one campus? Will this be a problem if one does not choose to work as often as the ESS company requires?

A: Yes, a substitute can choose to only work in one school if they wish and can also set up their preferences as to which school or schools they want to work. ESS is committed to maintaining existing relationships between substitutes and the campuses that currently exist. In addition, ESS has their standard application process that works with the districts' current application system "TEAMS."

Regarding credentialing, ESS will follow all Texas regulations and forms. If the Board approves, ESS will hold several transitional meetings to cover the new substitute on-boarding/hiring paperwork process.

Q: Will the pay schedule change?

A: Yes, the substitute employee pay schedule will change. Currently, the district pays subs semi-monthly. With ESS, subs will be paid weekly on Fridays and operate 2 weeks in arrears.

Q: Will direct deposit be an option?

A: Yes, direct deposit is available. Unless otherwise indicated by a sub, payroll checks are direct deposited by ESS.

ESS also offers a cash card that the subs funds can be deposited into if they don't have direct deposit or don't want a physical check. The easiest and preferred way is direct deposit.

Q: If I went to an Abilene ISD substitute orientation, will I have to attend another orientation with ESS?

A: Yes. ESS must orient each active AISD sub as they transition to the new ESS service. This training will be about 90 minutes and include things like new hire paper work with ESS, specific details of the transition, and a time to answer questions. This ESS orientation will take place in AISD's facilities.

Q: Why can't the district solve the problem of teacher attendance and classroom fill rates?

A: The district's HR team has been working to ensure we have quality substitutes in our classrooms each day to solve this concern. The issue could quite possibly be an attendance problem for some employees/campuses, however, our employees have discretion pertaining to their personal absences. We cannot make employees come to school, therefore, we must find a possible solution for our classroom vacancies. Again, our HR team has worked at numerous solutions with limited progress and success. This is our attempt, willingness, and recommendation to try something different and innovative.

Q: Will working as a substitute affect my annuity from TRS?

A: Working for ESS in a substitute role will not affect your annuity payment if you are receiving one from TRS. The district is still responsible for reporting any hours worked regardless if you are employed by ESS or the district but you can work as a substitute without any limit on the number of days (provided you do not perform any other type of work for a TRS-covered employer).

Q: Will the district be able to terminate the contract if ESS does not meet expectations?

A: Yes, the district will include a clause within the contract that stipulates that the company must demonstrate increments of improved fill rates over specific periods of the contract or the contract will become null and void. The superintendent will make this determination in collaboration with the HR department and, of course, with input from our campus administration, our business office, and other district departments that are impacted by this effort. In addition, there will be periodical check points for monitoring, review, and evaluation all along the way throughout the duration of the contract.