

Effective Substitute Teaching 1

A Sequential and Comprehensive Method for Effective Substitute Teaching

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Abstract

This article dealt with methods for making substitute teaching more effective. The purpose was to articulate a sequential method for maximizing the effectiveness of substitute teaching while providing substitutes with a comprehensive method for diligently and flexibly earning respect and using reflection to continually improve substitute teaching. Sources included personal observation, recent substitute teaching publications, and books by John Dewey. Conclusions were that substitutes who systematically work professionally by diligently and flexibly adapting to any assignment earn respect while substantially contributing to improved education. Administrators and teachers letting students know that substitutes have authority and deserve respect, teachers leaving substitutes with adequate lesson plans, and substitutes getting classroom management training were additional factors found to increase substitute teaching effectiveness.

The purpose of this paper is to articulate a sequential method for effective substitute teaching which sequentially progresses from preparing to start an instructional day to concluding an instructional day. Comprehensive methods that promote effective substitute teaching will then be integrated into the sequential method for effective substitute teaching. Tangibly useful methods for effective substitute teaching are especially vital in today's accountability-charged school environments where improving academic achievement is a top priority. Darling-Hammond and Berry (2006) pointed out the need for school districts to ensure that substitute teachers are highly qualified in the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act's recommendations. Henderson, Protheroe, and Porch (2002) provided evidence that training substitute teachers how to use effective classroom management techniques and how to use effective instructional strategies has improved students' academic achievement. After reviewing a high-quality body of literature about effective substitute teaching which emphasizes major obstacles to effective substitute teaching and methods for overcoming these obstacles, I will articulate obstacles to effective substitute teaching and methods for overcoming these obstacles according to my experience as a substitute teacher. Next, I will set forth a sequential method for effective substitute teaching from the beginning to the conclusion of each school day. Finally, I will integrate some of the broad and comprehensive approaches for improving the effectiveness of substitute teaching into the sequential method and I will then conclude by making recommendations for improving the effectiveness of substitute teaching.

### The Review of the Literature

Problems with classroom management have been identified by published authors as being among the greatest obstacles to effective substitute teaching. Referring to a wide body of literature indicating that the perceived effectiveness of substitute teachers is worse than perceived effectiveness of student and first year teachers, Ostapczuk (1994) quoted from numerous studies that identify poor classroom management skills as being the single greatest problem experienced by substitute teachers. Recommendations included increased inservice training geared toward helping substitutes become more effective classroom managers. (Ostapczuk,1994). After extensively surveying teachers and substitute teachers about the perceived effectiveness of substitute teaching in Allen County, Ohio, Galvez-Martin and Elena (1997) found that both groups identified classroom discipline as being the major problem faced by substitute teachers. Tomlinson (1997) reported survey research conducted in a Florida middle school indicating that: (1) teachers preparing students in advance for substitutes; (2) teachers making substitutes feel like part of their team; (3) substitutes arriving early to get ready for the school day were factors positively associated with improving substitutes' classroom management skills. Developing a theme that substitute teachers often do not get enough respect to effectively manage classes and facilitate instruction, McHugh (2001) recommended that (1) principals make sure that substitutes feel welcome and make sure that teachers leave seating charts and lesson plans; (2) teachers tell students in advance that substitutes deserve respect and have authority; (3) substitutes demonstrate to all stakeholders that they work as professionally as professional teachers.

Tangibly linking improvements in substitute teaching with improvements in student achievement, Henderson, Protheroe, and Porch (2002) examined support provided for substitute teachers by numerous school districts. These researchers found that school districts which provide substitutes with classroom management and lesson plan implementation training, and classroom teachers who provide substitutes with information about their classes and detailed lesson plans increased both substitute teachers' effectiveness and students' academic achievement.

After documenting the fact that American public school children are in classes led by substitute teachers for approximately one year during their grades k-12 public school experience, Glatfelter (2006) developed a research study which found that teachers rate substitute teachers as lacking the competence to effectively manage classrooms and to effectively teach the curriculum and use instructional strategies. Finding that substitutes rated themselves as being weak in these vital components of effective substitute teaching, Glatfelter's research also found that substitutes were enthusiastically ready to increase their competencies. In addition to professional development classes and workshops, the substitutes who were surveyed and/or interviewed in this study expressed interest in classroom observations along with networking with and mentoring by classroom teachers as methods for increasing their substitute teaching competencies to the point of their becoming the effective classroom instructors that students need during their teachers' absences.

Gresham, Donihoo, and Cox (2007) articulated five strategies designed to improve the effectiveness of substitute teaching. Strategy one (survey the land-

scape) recommends that substitutes who are new to a school district familiarize themselves with the district's schools and directions to those schools' locations. Strategy two (set the stage for success) involves: (1) arriving for work early; (2) locating your classroom for the day; (3) making sure you have the attendance rolls and lesson plans; (4) post the day's assignments to convey the impression that another business-as usual day will occur. Strategy two continues with courteously greeting students as they arrive at the classroom. Strategy three (set high behavioral expectations) starts with being dressed in clean, pressed, but appropriately comfortable clothes. If the classroom rules are already established then enforce those rules, and if not post a set of five or fewer classroom rules along with consequences and rewards. Strategy four (manage with confidence) means giving clear and specific directions for students to follow as the lesson progresses. Strategy five (prepare for the unexpected) advises substitutes to have ready numerous age and grade-appropriate lesson ideas such as fill-in activities that will keep students productively occupied under all substitute teaching situations.

This literature review has reviewed a high quality body of literature that has identified obstacles to effective substitute teaching followed by suggested methods for overcoming these obstacles. This literature review has continued by summarizing an excellent article that sets forth a sequential method for effective substitute teaching that goes from the preparation for to the conclusion of each substitute teaching day.

Referring to the substitute teaching literature, and referring to my experience as a professor, as a teacher, and as a substitute teacher, I will articulate obstacles to effective substitute teaching and I will propose methods for overcoming these

obstacles.

### Obstacles to Effective Substitute Teaching and Remedies

Evidence provided by Henderson, Protheroe, and Porch (2002) indicated that training substitute teachers how effectively manage classes improved students' academic achievement. This focuses attention on the need to promote substitute teachers' abilities to manage classrooms effectively. Ostapczuk (1994) recommended increased in service training designed to help substitute teachers be more effective classroom managers. This has been developed by a Texas school district where I am employed. In service training for substitutes involved an experienced teacher and presenter using demeanor and body language to demonstrate an appropriately authoritative method for starting class as a substitute. Projecting her authority through her posture (erect but not stiff), her demeanor and voice (both appropriately authoritative), and by walking around the room, this presenter demonstrated a method for proactively overcoming potential classroom management problems before they may occur during the first minutes of class. Using ideas from this classroom management demonstration, I have improved my classroom management by promptly checking the roll, stating the rules, and stating the learning activities assertively, using body language, voice, and movement about the room to assertively establish my authority. With the base for effective classroom management being initially set, the substitute teacher is ready to use effective instruction as a method for effectively implementing the teacher's lesson plans.

Evidence provided by Henderson, Protheroe, and Porche (2002) indicated that training substitute teachers in methods for using instructional strategies has improved

students' academic achievement. This focuses attention on the need to promote substitute teachers' abilities to use instructional strategies effectively. Glatfelter (2006) cumulatively developed these authors' findings by presenting classroom observations, mentoring by classroom teachers, and professional development workshops as methods for improving substitute teachers' instructional effectiveness. While substitute teaching in a suburban school district in southeastern Texas, I have used classroom observations to increase my instructional effectiveness by noticing teaching techniques used by accomplished teachers such as: effective questioning techniques, clear presentation of the lesson's essential elements, efficient distribution of materials to students, and unobtrusive distribution of modified materials to mainstreamed special education students. Substitute teachers can use their many opportunities to observe effective classroom instruction as methods for becoming more effective substitute teachers. While subbing in the previously mentioned Texas school district, I have been mentored by teachers who emphasize the importance of continued reading of books and current professional journal articles in order to be knowledgeable and to stay on the cutting edge of your subject area.

After considering classroom management and instructional effectiveness as two major obstacles to effective substitute teaching, and after considering remedies to these obstacles, substitute teachers need a step-by-step, or sequential method, to organize their effective substitute teaching from starting a substitute teaching day to concluding a substitute teaching day. Gresham, Donihoo, and Cox (2007) authored an excellent article that set forth five strategies for effective substitute teaching which the following section will build upon by articulating a detailed and step-by-step, or sequential method, for



effective substitute teaching from the beginning to the end of each school day. These authors recommended that substitute teachers sequentially: (1) arrive for work early and well-prepared, (2) greet arriving students, (3) set high behavioral expectations, (4) manage with confidence and (5) prepare for the unexpected. I will integrate these authors' and other high-quality authors' recommendations for effective substitute teaching with my extensive experience as a substitute teacher and as a teacher in order to set forth a well-articulated and detailed method for sequentially insuring that each substitute teaching day provides students with effective education.

#### A Sequential Method for Effective Substitute Teaching

Step one is to prepare for the day. Familiarize yourself with the school and its location. Know when you are to report for work and know the directions and the drive time to the school. Check the website for lesson plans and your instructions. Arrive for work early, be appropriately well-dressed and well-groomed, and have a clipboard, paper, and a pen.

Step two is report to the substitute coordinating office. Sign in and make sure you are wearing the proper school identification. Make sure that you have the teacher's folder and the teacher's attendance rosters before you walk to the teacher's room.

Step three (a decisively important and multifaceted step) is to organize classroom materials upon arrival at the classroom of the teacher for whom you are subbing. Find the teacher's lesson plans, teaching materials, and student work assignments. Arrange the teaching materials and student work assignments for efficient use. Write the assignment and student work expectations and the board. Student work expectations may include a

content related warm-up exercise which you ask students to begin work on as soon as they enter the room and are seated at their desks. Write your name and the date on the board. If posted classroom rules exist be ready to briefly summarize those rules to students, and if not post your own set of five or fewer classroom rules which may include rules such as: (1) be seated at your desk with classroom materials ready when the tardy bell rings, (2) follow directions, (3) raise your hand and be recognized before speaking, (4) keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself, and (5) respect school property. Next, on paper clipped to your clipboard, make a list of each class period you will teach which includes each periods' tardy bell time and dismissal bell time. Make sure that your watch is synchronized with school time. Orient yourself to the school's emergency management plan and procedures for fire drills, severe weather emergencies, etc. Check for duty assignments. Making sure that you have the attendance roll, teaching materials, and student work materials ready, go to the classroom door to greet your arriving students.

Step four involves orienting your students to your classroom by making clear your behavior and work expectations. Greet your students at the classroom door in a positive and businesslike way which may include asking them to get their classroom materials ready, and begin working on the warm up exercise. About thirty seconds (or slightly less) before the tardy bell rings walk to your instructional organizing point and make sure that all students are seated at their desks and ready with classroom materials. When the tardy bell rings, (1) introduce yourself as the guest teacher for today, pointing to your name written on the board, (2) check the roll, and (3) in a crisp and time-efficient manner state the classroom rules and (4) state the objective and the work

expectations. Point to the rules and work expectations on the board as you succinctly orient students to the lesson. Then promptly, without undue delay on housekeeping tasks, academically involve students by starting the lesson.

Step five involves keeping students on task by immediately involving all of them in the lesson. As the guest teacher, show a high level of with-it-ness, i.e., be very observant to the extent of all students' on task behavior and be ready to immediately redirect any student's off-task behavior toward being on-task behavior. Occasionally walking around the classroom past students' desks helps you, as the guest teacher, monitor students' work while insuring that all students are on task and learning in accordance with the teacher's lesson plan. When possible and when appropriate, the guest teacher should familiarize himself or herself with the work students are doing to increase the likelihood that they will diligently do a thoughtful and thorough job of their work. Step five demands more flexibility from the guest teacher than any other sequential step because step five insists that the guest teacher be instructionally effective with administering a wide range of learning activities which may range from administering worksheets, to showing a film, to giving a test, in addition to many other possible learning activities. Step five should conclude with ensuring that students have progressed well with their work and step five can involve asking students some questions about the work they have done ranging from questions about: art they developed in art class, to answers they wrote during social studies class, to writing they wrote during a language arts class, in addition to questions about any work they have done during any class. Flexibly developing the most effective "feel" for effectively administering the teacher's lesson plans during the bulk of class

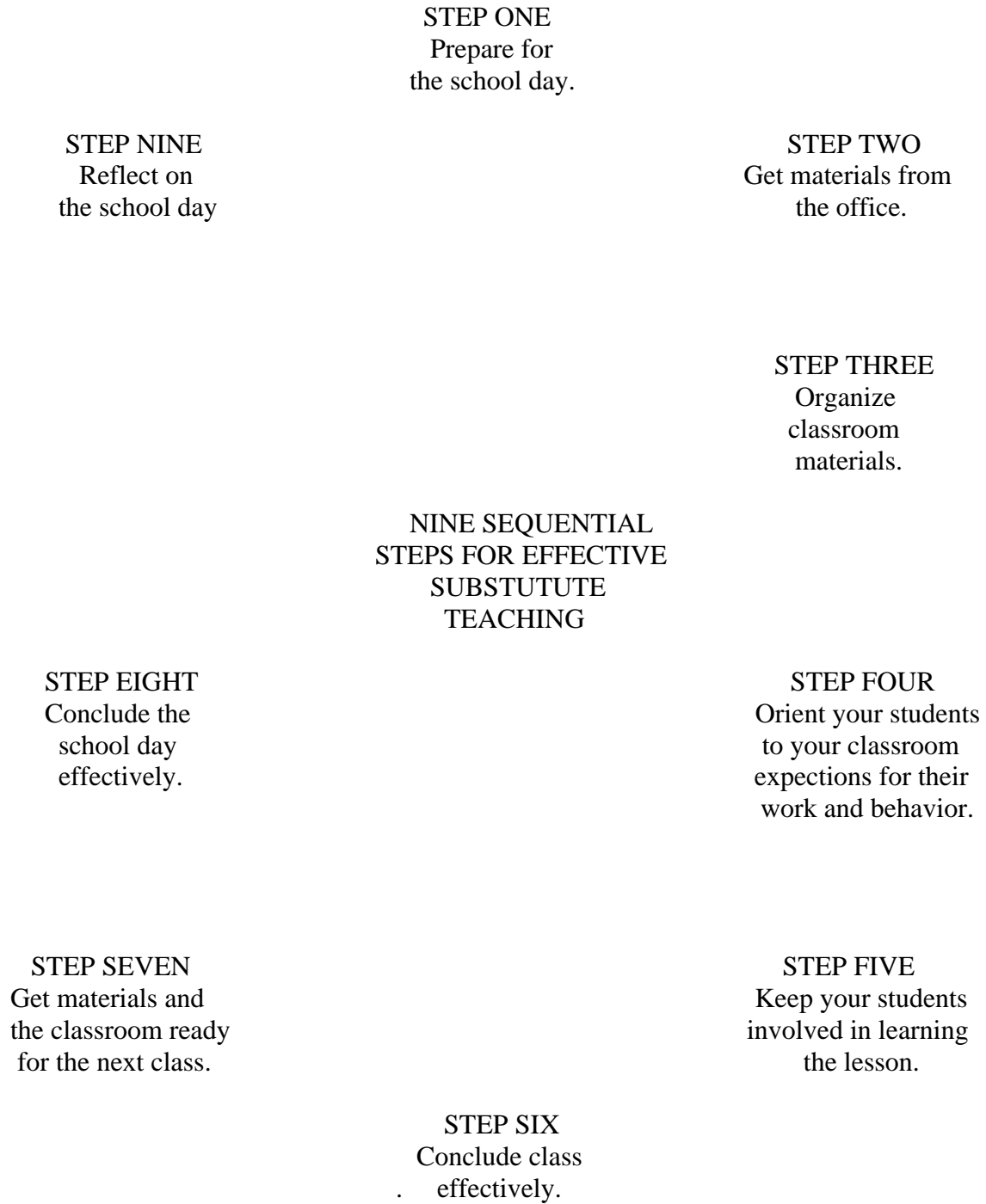
time is central to promoting the substitute teacher's effectiveness.

Step six involves concluding class effectively. Making sure that his or her watch is synchronized with school time, the substitute should make sure that all student work needing to be turned in is turned in before the dismissal bell rings. Be sure that the room is clean, neat, and litter-free in addition to making sure that any learning materials used by students are stored in the appropriate places before the dismissal bell rings. Continue taking charge until the dismissal bell by telling students the importance of working diligently to accomplish learning objectives while keeping the classroom neat and orderly. Congratulate the class for the extent of their on-task behavior and their adherence to the rules and, when necessary, point out benefits students can gain from improved on-task behavior and adherence to the rules. When the dismissal bell rings, dismiss the class.

Step seven involves getting ready for the next class. Paperclip work turned in by students and write the class period and date on top paper in the stack. Have the attendance rolls ready for the next class. Quickly tidy up the classroom and then walk to the classroom door to greet the next period's students as they arrive for class. Repeat steps four, five, and six during the next class period.

Step eight involves concluding the school day. Organize work turned in by students into an orderly stack or leave this work in an inbox in which students leave their work according to class period. Make sure that all teaching and leaning materials that were used are left accessible, neat, and well organized. Leave the teacher a detailed note telling what students did and how the day went. After making sure that the classroom is tidy and well organized check out through the substitute coordinating office.

Figure 1. Sequential Method for Effective Substitute Teaching



Step nine involves reflectively thinking about the school day. Think about and reflect on things that went well and things that did not go well. Reflectively and proactively build upon things that went well as a means of becoming a more effective substitute teacher. Reflectively and proactively think up ways to improve things that did not go well as a means of becoming a more effective substitute teacher.

#### Comprehensive Approaches to Improve the Effectiveness of Substitute Teaching

While a sequential method articulating a step-by-step approach for effective substitute is useful, not all of the vital components of effective substitute teaching can be subsumed with a sequential framework. Comprehensive approaches for effective substitute teaching address broad substitute effectiveness elements including; diligence, flexibility, respect, and continuing reflection.

Diligence, as central component of effective substitute teaching, starts with substitutes enthusiastically putting a positive and diligent work effort into all their substitute teaching work. If the substitute is to administer a test then the substitute should professionally administer the test, promptly and efficiently. If the substitute is to administer worksheet work then she/he should professionally distribute the work, make sure students do the work, and then take up and organize the work for convenient accessibility by the classroom teacher when she/he returns. If the substitute is to show a film then she/he should show the film, making sure that students are learning from the film and behaving properly. Whatever the learning activities the substitute is administering in accordance with the teacher's lesson plans, it is absolutely essential that the substitute work diligently, professionally, and enthusiastically, always making it

it obvious that she/he sees their substituting work as a very important component of students' education. Dewey (1913) contended that the spirit and the disposition with which school work is carried out can positively motivate students to be willfully engaged in their education. With students spending ten percent of their grades k-12 education being taught by substitutes, it is very important for substitutes to project a positive and invigorating mental attitude into their work which encourages similar positive mindsets among students. When substitutes get assignments other than managing regular academic classes by themselves (such as helping a physical education teacher, helping a special education teacher, or helping an in school suspension monitor) the substitutes should also do this work diligently, professionally, and enthusiastically. Whatever the demands of their assignments, substitutes should always be positive and enthusiastic social facilitators who improve, invigorate, and make more positive the school atmosphere of all the schools in which they substitute teach.

Flexibly adapting to any substituting assignment at any school can greatly increase the extent to which substitutes can diligently accomplish their responsibilities. In the process of administering teachers' lesson plans, substitutes are challenged daily with the need to flexibly administer the teachers' lesson plans effectively according to exigencies posed by any classroom situation. Although substitute teaching is essentially a noninstructional position which centers on professionally administering the absent teacher's lesson plans, occasions occur when substitutes can motivate their students' involvement by familiarizing themselves with the work students are doing and by actively encouraging students put their most diligent efforts into their work.

Reading the mission statement of the school where you substitute teach and sizing up (or assessing) the prevailing teaching approaches and classroom behavior at the school can greatly increase your effectiveness as a classroom manager who professionally carries out the teacher's lesson plan according to contingencies posed by each immediate situation. If the school has a mission statement emphasizing cooperative learning and students in many of the school's classes collaborative to help each other learn, then manage the classes you teach there accordingly, always making sure that students are learning the objectives effectively in a positive and productive learning environment. If the school has a mission statement emphasizing high academic standards and strictly run classes and the classes mirror that standard, then manage the classes you substitute for at that school in tandem with that standard, making sure that students are learning the objectives effectively in a positive and productive learning environment. Appropriately flexible and effective substitute teaching also involves tweaking your classroom running style according to exigencies posed by each class. Classes loaded with disruptive and frequently off-task students necessitate unremittingly strict and firm insistence that they obey classroom rules and stay on task. Classes populated with well-behaved and on-task students allow for a more relaxed and easy-going classroom management approach which still ensures that students learn effectively and behave suitably. Socio-emotionally speaking, classes populated with students having emotional and behavioral difficulties combined with low academic performance tend to be most effectively managed by a caring but firm substitute teaching style that establishes positive relationships with students simultaneously coupled with a firm insistence that students academically stay on



task and behave properly. Socio-emotionally speaking, advanced placement classes and the “higher” academic classes tend to be effectively managed by an easy-going, yet vigilant, substitute teaching style that pleasantly lets students learn in a relaxed environment while insisting that they use any flexible leeway granted to them for increasing their competencies and not just for socializing. Socio-emotionally speaking, when substitute teaching large academic classes populated by many types of students ranging from mainstreamed special education students to high academic achievers, in addition to being populated by students with widely varying degrees of emotional and behavioral development, best substitute teaching practices call for “reading” each student to the maximum extent possible and by encouraging each student’s work effort and proper behavior according to each student’s academic and behavioral characteristics.

Substitute teachers who diligently work with positive attitudes while effectively and flexibly adapting to any classroom situation they encounter are in an excellent position to earn respect. McHugh (2001) articulated an excellent system for encouraging respect for substitute teachers which focused on (1) principals making substitutes feel welcome, (2) teachers telling students in advance that substitutes have authority and deserve respect, and (3) substitutes working as professionally as professional teachers. McHugh’s recommendations can be efficaciously built upon by: (1) principals and assistant principals setting a respectful school-wide atmosphere in addition to making substitutes feel welcome and respected, (2) teachers being friendly and treating everybody at the school with respect in addition to telling students in advance that substitutes have authority and deserve respect, and (3) substitutes being enthusiastic

and positive social facilitators and very effective classroom managers as constituent elements of working as professionally as professional teachers.

With diligence, flexibility, and respect established as comprehensive elements for improving substitute teaching, continuing reflection provides a culminating method for comprehensively bringing the substitute teaching improvement process full circle. Dewey (1939) explained reflection as looking back over what has been done and extracting net meaning to be used for more intelligently dealing with subsequent experiences. Dewey (1933) further explained reflection as remembering and reassessing important elements learned from past educative experiences and using these memories and reassessments of important elements learned from past educative experiences as a means for more effectively solving problems posed by future educative experiences. Substitutes can use Dewey's method of reflection by continuously analyzing how well their classes went on any given school day. By continuously reflecting on ways to fruitfully build upon things that went well with their classes, and by continuously reflecting on ways to fruitfully improve things that did not go well with their classes, substitutes can cumulatively keep improving their skills for the benefit of effective schools from which students will benefit greatly.

#### Recommendations for Effective Substitute Teaching

Substitute teaching can be greatly improved by substitutes diligently following a well-articulated and sequential method for effective substitute teaching, while remaining flexible enough to effectively teach the teacher's lesson plan during any classroom situation that may occur. This article's leading recommendations are for substitutes to

earn respect by working as professionally as any teacher and for administrators and teachers to facilitate school wide respect for substitutes. The concluding recommendation is for substitutes to continuously reflect upon ways to keep improving their classroom management and instructional skills, thus promoting continuing and cumulative advances in k-12 education from which students will benefit.

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