



JEFFERSON COUNTY

SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE

OCTOBER 2021

GOAL

Currently Jefferson County Schools is experiencing the same significant staffing shortages that are plaguing other industries and other school systems. These shortages are forcing our existing staff to cover multiple positions daily to ensure student safety and services.

While we are proud to have kept schools open and students safely served, it is clear that the significant shortages are affecting our ability to serve children at the level we expect of ourselves. The foundation that undergirds all high performing schools is a staff that plans well and can personalize the learning to each child's level. We have many tools for ensuring we do that regularly. All of those tools require time. Unfortunately, the one thing our staff do not have right now is time.

Jefferson County Schools ranges from a daily low of 131 to a daily high of 214 empty positions (either because it is a vacancy with no one in the position or the person in it is absent) with an average of 150.5 empty positions to cover per day since the start of school. Our largest number of vacancy/absences are on Fridays with an average of 187.

Our "fill rates", meaning how many of those jobs are filled with a substitute, runs from a low of 47% to a high of 63%. Overall, the average is at 51%. This means that on any given day, 74 vacancies/absences are covered by someone already in the school in addition to their regular duties. This is unsustainable and hurting our ability to deliver the quality of services we have long prided ourselves on and that our families have come to expect.

Strong Student Support

Much like a championship football team, the greatest determinant of success on the field is what is done off the field in preparation. Strong school systems are the same. We do many things to ensure student success "off the field". Many of them unseen until the results arrive. Here are a few:

1. Reviewing student performance. Teachers review student work to determine where they are weak and need additional intervention and where they are strong and may need extension.
2. Plan ahead for quality lessons. Creating engaging and thoughtful lessons that capture children at different levels is very difficult work. It requires that the teacher check the pacing guide and curriculum and plan out 1-2 weeks in advance to break down concepts gradually allowing children to work their way up to mastery. They then embed pieces of that lesson into the next level so children don't lose skills. Scaffolding is complex work and requires planning time.
3. Grade level and content team meetings. Teachers work collaboratively to share ideas and use collective effort to create materials that are vetted through multiple professional lenses.

4. Creating materials. Very little that a teacher provides is pre-made. There are, inevitably, worksheets. Those should be minimal. Most teachers prepare materials that are catered to the level of their student's learning and that capture the information in more sophisticated ways to deepen student understanding.
5. Student Assistance Teams. More students than ever are struggling with mental health and academic deficit issues. Student Assistance Teams are multi-discipline team meetings where teachers, counselors, and administrators come to the table and meets with the parent to review their child's performance/behavior and share ideas/brainstorm to help them improve. They create an individualized plan specific to that student that is targeted to improve their success rate.
6. Social emotional support services. From mentors to social workers to counselors, we have staff dedicated to working with students who are struggling with mental health issues affecting their ability to participate in school effectively. Many of these folks are covering classrooms and teacher duties.
7. Evaluation and feedback. Principals are instructional leaders and support teachers through observation, feedback, material support, and staff development. Every principal in the district is covering multiple classes per week of direct teaching.

Strong Environmental Support

In addition to the academic and social emotional realms, there are environmental support services that ensure children get to school safely, fed nutritiously, and operate in a clean and healthy environment.

1. Children learn and focus best in an environment that is clean and orderly. Custodian shortages require focusing on children in the building and immediate sanitation needs.
2. Cooks are responsible for inventory and preparation of nutritious food items. National shortages are requiring last minute changes to menus and fewer homemade items that are time consuming.
3. Bus drivers work hard to ensure that buses are clean and children are behaving appropriately. This requires the time to clean them thoroughly and develop seating charts and rewards systems.

While there are shortages, our staff are using every minute of their time covering shortages to serve children in the building. This means that many of the "off the field" preparations that lead to success are regularly pushed aside to ensure we have sufficient adults with children. Our teachers are losing planning every day to covering other classes for colleagues. Our custodians are struggling with huge shortages in trying to keep our buildings clean.

Measures for Quality Student Support

To increase our opportunity for student success, Jefferson County Schools will add 3 hours of unencumbered time for our staff to conduct all planning, deep cleaning, class material preparation, and SAT meetings. This will require us to temporarily change our schedule to ½ days for students on Fridays beginning October 15th through November 19th. While we know this will be an inconvenience for our parents, it will serve many purposes that will enhance the quality of the time their children are in school.

- A half day gives them 3 hours per week of unencumbered planning, performance reviews, and material preparation time. All duties that lay a foundation for meaningful and engaging teaching
 - JCS would continue to be able to provide breakfast and lunch every day, including Friday for the many children who rely on us for the bulk of their food.
 - Consistency of schedule rather than sporadic closures will allow for parent planning
 - The rationale behind six weeks is that we believe some circumstances may change in that time:
 - We continue to recruit heavily for positions and substitutes. As economic conditions change, we are hopeful the job market will place more people seeking employment
 - While quarantine rates are low, in a tight staff structure every absence is difficult. Even lower quarantine rates will result in a smaller number of absences to fill
 - New teachers graduate mid-year in December and we are actively recruiting mid-year graduates
 - We are implementing new strategies for retention and recruitment that we believe will be effective in making shifts to applicant pools and attrition
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