SUBSTITUTE TEACHER APPRECIATION
“AN EVERYDAY CELEBRATION”

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SUBSTITUTE TEACHER APPRECIATION

“An Everyday Celebration”

“Flatter me and I may not believe you. Criticize me and I may not like you. Ignore me and I may not forgive you. Encourage me and I will not forget you.”

William Arthur Ward - American scholar, author, editor, pastor and teacher

Substitute teachers do not seek rewards, but rather encouragement, respect and recognition for their ability to maintain the continuity of learning during the regular classroom teacher’s absence. The fundamental need of every employee is to be appreciated and acknowledged for a job well done. Substitute teachers have said that their greatest satisfaction would be to report to school each morning to find cheerful surroundings and smiling faces!

It is important that we educate teachers and students to the fact that substitute teachers really do have something of their own to offer and that under difficult conditions, they are carrying out the wishes of the classroom teacher. Often we forget substitutes until they are needed, all but ignoring them as we hurriedly give them a passing glance while muttering under our breath, “It’s about time you showed up!” They often feel invisible and under-appreciated. They fear that they may be blamed for what they don’t know, haven’t been told, or what occurs when they’re working with students. Putting ourselves in the substitute teacher’s shoes may give us some insight into what many of them experience on a daily basis. Imagine what you would like to see when you first enter the school building. Think about what you would want to find when you walk into the classroom.

Recognition and retention are inseparable and are critical elements in managing substitute employees. All people have a basic human need to be appreciated and recognized. Lack of recognition and appreciation is the primary reason people quit their jobs. Many exit surveys confirm that employees leave their jobs not because of dissatisfaction or higher paying positions, but because of lack of appreciation. Providing a positive work environment and recognizing, rewarding and reinforcement for a job well done will motivate employees to commit to the job and return year after year. People tend to repeat actions for which they receive positive responses, such as a sense of satisfaction or a tangible form of recognition. Celebrations to reward and recognize are positive experiences that will go a long way to insure a quality pool of substitute teachers by retaining their valuable experience.

It is imperative that we provide our substitute employees with an attractive work climate where they will enjoy what they do and feel they are valued for their contributions. We must encourage the abilities of these individuals who have learned to be flexible and skillful in nurturing and inspiring children despite the challenges they face every day.
They are responsible for helping students learn essential skills not always measured in testing results, such as conflict resolution, cooperation and problem solving. They are also a guiding force in helping our students develop into mature, responsible, healthy, happy, and successful adults.

Creating opportunities for substitute employees to feel valued and respected should not be a difficult task. “An Everyday Celebration” must include greeting them at the door each morning and making them feel welcome. Meet and Greet Committee members could include designated student ambassadors, support staff members who do not have students in the morning, front office staff personnel or the assistant principal responsible for the local substitute program.

Four years ago, the Fulton County School System began celebrating SubWeek as a district-wide effort to recognize the accomplishments and dedication of our substitute teachers. The week in May is celebrated in conjunction with National Teacher Appreciation Week and is an ideal time to congratulate substitute teachers for their successes, dedication and perseverance. We strive to be generous with recognition in an effort to make them feel important, inspire them to do their best, and remind them that their job is meaningful. The knowledge that they are supported, respected and treated as professional educators is a sufficient morale booster to motivate them to effectively manage classrooms and overcome challenges.

We begin by sending the Assistant Principal, the designated Substitute Coordinator at each school, a letter in January asking them to begin making plans and preparations for SubWeek. A well administered appreciation program should be well thought out and planned for in advance. Plans do not have to be complicated, expensive, or extensive. Substitute teachers will appreciate a simple tribute as long as it is genuine and heartfelt. Another letter is sent to the Substitute Coordinators in April reminding them that SubWeek is approaching and that plans should be finalized for the occasion.

Schools administrators are encouraged to work with business partners, parent volunteers, office staff, teachers, students, PTSA members and other school clubs to help plan and implement SubWeek. It is suggested that they use school based and community resources, creative ideas and inexpensive materials. There are many creative and inexpensive ways to recognize these valuable employees for accomplishing a difficult task.

Each year, our business partners continue to donate a variety of food, merchandise, services, and free coupons. In addition, Substitute Coordinators are asked solicit the help their local PTSA’s, students, school clubs and organizations, classroom teachers, art teachers, and other school staff members.

Classroom teachers assist by having their students create notes, cards and decorations on rainy days when outdoor activities are limited. Art teachers work with students to make banners, bulletin boards, and other creative artwork ideas used around the school. PTSA’s generously contribute by funding luncheons, receptions, or teas to honor
substitute teachers. At the high school level, student organizations such as the Debate Club, Anchor Club, Booster Club, Student Council, etc. may be willing to decorate and stuff goodie bags or prepare and serve breakfast to subs.

Teamwork and a commitment from the entire school community resulted in an outstanding celebration last May. Here are just a few of the special projects engineered and implemented by students, faculty and staff:

1. Student Council members at four of our high schools prepared and served “Subs for Subs”.
2. Office staff members at several schools prepared and served homemade goodies and coffee to substitutes before school.
3. Teachers provided donuts, juice and coffee in the teacher’s lounge one morning.
4. School administrators prepared a tub of iced bottled water and juices and placed the tub near the substitute sign-in sheet.
5. Teachers signed commitment cards pledging to keep their substitute teacher folders up-to-date, including adequate, current lesson plans.
6. Students in the Vocational Ed horticultural classes grew plants to be given to substitutes as gifts.
7. Students made tablecloths and paper flowers to decorate tables in teacher’s lounge.
8. Members of the Debate Club invited subs to an after school “Sundae’s for Subs” party.

Because this was the fourth year the Fulton County School System has celebrated Substitute Appreciation Week, local school administrators engaged in a spirit of friendly competition as they tried to out-do neighboring schools. Listed below are some of the many ways our schools made substitute teachers feel honored, welcome and appreciated.

1. Coffee mug with single serving of coffee or tea with a note saying “Take a coffee break on us.”
2. Coupon for free school lunch.
3. Soup bowl with packaged soup mix.
4. Small bucket filled with school supplies.
5. School logo merchandise – T shirts, pencils, tumblers, bookmarks, etc.
6. Food coupons for Chick fil A, Burger King, McDonald’s, Ruby Tuesdays.
7. Coupons for Starbucks and Seattle’s Best Coffee.
8. Small plants.
9. Goodie bags filled with candy, water, hand lotion, hand wipes, etc.
10. Coupons for ice cream.
12. Serve coffee and cinnamon rolls and other breakfast foods.
13. Coupon for merchandise at the school store.
14. Gift certificates provided by business partners.
15. Handmade thank you notes from students.
16. After school sundae’s for Sub’s party.
17. Subs for subs luncheon.
18. Large Hershey’s candy bar with a note “We want to thank you in a big way for all you do for our students”.
19. Invitation at sub sign-in sheet to go to the teacher’s lounge for coffee and muffins.
20. Permanent, personalized name tags.
22. Breakfast, luncheon, tea, reception.
24. Message to all staff members to greet every employee, especially substitute teachers, with a warm greeting, big smile, and helpful attitude.
25. Table of treats in administrator’s office (left all day) for substitutes to enjoy.
26. Insulated tumbler filled with trail mix, mints, and other goodies.
27. Insulated lunch bags.
28. Recipe booklet of “Special Recipes for Special Substitute Teachers” made by faculty and staff members.
29. Cut flowers and corsages.
30. Recognition over the intercom each morning during SubWeek.
31. Banners in hallway and cafeteria.
32. Roll of Lifesavers with note, “You’re a Lifesaver”.
33. Passes to school sporting events, concerts, plays, etc.

There are many other ways to promote the important contribution of substitute teachers. The ten things they requested most from administrators and school staff members are:
1. Smiles, smiles, smiles.
2. Helpful attitudes.
3. Treat me as a professional.
4. Extend everyday courtesies.
5. Have an up-to-date substitute folder, including current lesson plans.
6. Classroom visit from administrator.
7. Positive working environment.
8. Invitation to have lunch in the teacher’s lounge.
9. Invitation to faculty meetings.
10. Support when discipline concerns arise.

We have a personal responsibility to encourage and inspire them to do their very best. SubWeek is one way to acknowledge the fact that their work is something to celebrate and that they have earned the respect of other educational professionals. During the school year, continue to “stay connected” to substitute employees via newsletters written especially for them. Send cards to those you learn are hospitalized, injured on the job, or have experienced the death of a loved one. Place a bowl of peppermints or lifesavers by the morning sign-in sheet.

Substitute teachers are an important link in every student’s K-12 education and a vital part of every school system’s total education program. Their success means that our students are receiving the continued learning opportunities they deserve. When Substitute Services, school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and business partners work together as a committed team to train, retain and recognize valued
employees, we provide the most important benefit of all...a quality education that will prepare our students for the changing future.

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