

## Substitute teachers plagued by problems

### From administrators...

**SHELLEY EICHENHORN**

Schools are a microcosm of society. They reflect today's drug problems, racial conflict and attack on traditional authority figures.

It is becoming more and more difficult for teachers on a school staff to contend with the impact of these social changes.

For the substitute teacher, today's school walk-outs, drug traffic and vandalism present almost overwhelming problems.

The substitute is at a considerable disadvantage, lacking even the weakening authority of the regular teacher to control and discipline student behavior.

A teacher with a master's degree in guidance and counseling, but who can't find a counseling position, has substituted in Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills' junior and senior high schools. One of her experiences illustrates that the substitute's role is unclear and often questioned.

"I asked a boy in a high school English class to take his seat. He yelled back, 'Who do you think you are?'"

Substitutes interviewed explained that they are often treated with less than professional respect, even though a substitute must have the same state certification as a regular instructor.

"In some systems, we are made to do secretarial work on our conference hour. We are not paid for the work even though a regular teacher would be compensated for the extra time," a substitute teacher, who wishes her name withheld, stated.

"At some schools, the staff members are cold, unfriendly and uncooperative," she continued.

**ALTHOUGH THERE** is often a great deal of problems in being a substitute teacher (often referred to as a "Sub"), most school districts have an overflow of applicants.

There are 107,236 certified teachers in Michigan, according to the State Department of Education. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in other fields, many of the state's surplus teachers become substitutes.

The Southfield Public School System actively employs more than 400 substitutes a year. It also has more than 1,000 inactive applicants, according to

personnel records. In Southfield, a substitute is paid a base \$26 a day.

Birmingham also uses 400 substitutes actively and personnel records show more than 700 applicants on file. The basic rate per day in Birmingham is \$28.

**IN CONTRAST** to most suburban districts, the Detroit Public School System employs almost 3,000 substitutes throughout the school year and between 700-900 in any given day.

Although Detroit pays more than most suburbs - \$33 to \$40 a day, depending on classification and experience - there is no backlog of inactive substitutes.

"We employ a substitute immediately upon acceptance of his application," said Fred Martin, executive director of the office of personnel for the Detroit Public Schools.

"Our need is greater than the supply."

In all school districts, a substitute must live with the uncertainty of whether or not he will be called each day and where he will be sent.

"You are called as late as 9 p.m.

the night before or as early as 6 a.m. the day you are to report for an assignment," said a Birmingham School District substitute.

**IN MOST** suburban schools, a teacher can refuse to accept an assignment.

"Subs talk among themselves and tell each other what schools to avoid at all cost," said a male teacher, a suburban resident who substituted in Detroit for four years.

"A six-foot tall male physical education teacher I know would refuse to go to some of these schools," he said.

However, if substitutes refuse an assignment too often, he may chance not being called as frequently as he might like.

Another concern of substitutes is being placed in classes they are not qualified to teach.

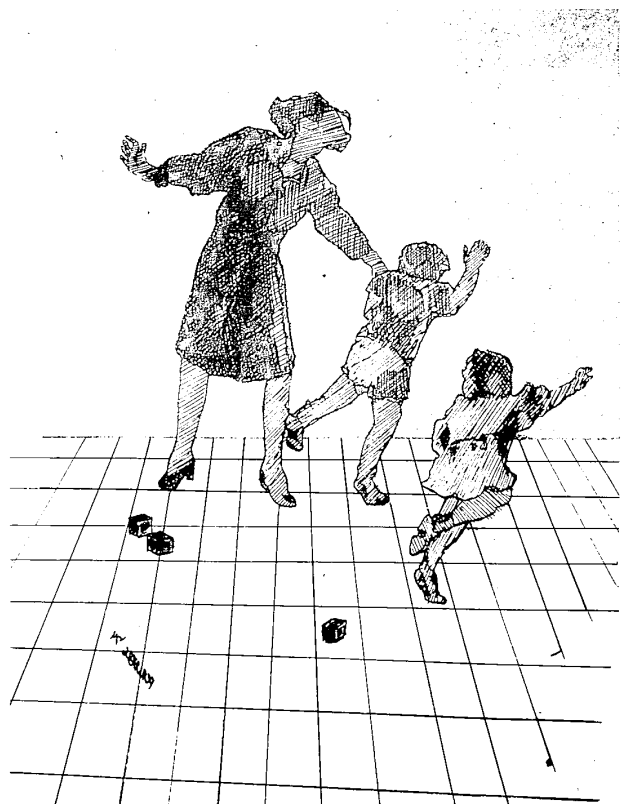
"I have taught sewing, girl's gym and cooking, as well as science and math," said one male teacher.

However, according to Martin, approximately 60-75 percent of the time, a substitute is placed where he is qualified in the subject area.



"We were hired as substitute teachers but for three months, 10 of us actually were hall guards--a substitute teacher."

### ... and from students



Temper must be controlled starting in nursery schools

Substitute teachers in every school district and on every level of the educational ladder face the same problems in varying degrees.

Starting in nursery school, things don't always go smoothly. Often a lack of structure causes difficulty.

Mrs. Lois Kaplow, a nursery school substitute at a private religious school in Farmington Hills, said, "From age three to five, children are just beginning to socialize. But still, they are like infants, all going their own way."

This caused quite a problem for her when a school assembly occurred.

"There was no seating plan for 150 toddlers, and many of them could not pronounce their own names," Mrs. Kaplow said.

"I couldn't recognize my children, let alone locate them all. Fortunately, at the end, I only lost one."

In spite of problems, Mrs. Kaplow found it rewarding to watch the children grow.

"They come like separate islands and gradually socialize."

At this age Mrs. Kaplow said children love their teachers and often invite them to come home. But, she thinks this attitude quickly vanishes.

**SUBSTITUTES ALSO** often find themselves the target of pranks when dealing with students.

"There are many problems when working with 5-to-14-year-old age group," said an area substitute. In one particularly bad contact, students in a ninth grade class threw dictionaries out the window.

"I asked them what the teacher did when they misbehaved. They claimed she put her head down and wished she wasn't there."

In another incident, the movie projector was sabotaged.

"The movie was needed for each class of the day. Between periods, someone pulled the outlet out of the wall, wrapped the cord around the desk 31 times, put the controls on reverse, the volume on loud and switch-

ed the reels so that they were backwards."

Her most unusual incident was when she was invited to smoke marijuana with some junior high students.

"It was right before the bell rang. They asked me to go outside with them to smoke in my car. The students said they did this all the time with their regular teacher, which I'm sure was ridiculous."

However despite these experiences, she describes most classes as generally cooperative and responsive.

A SUBURBAN resident, who substituted in junior and senior high schools in Detroit from 1969-74, experienced many of the same problems of those who "subbed" in suburban schools but to a greater degree.

"If I made it through a whole day in the junior high without physical harm to students or myself, I felt a sense of accomplishment," he said.

In 1963, he worked at a high school experiencing racial transition.

"We were hired as substitute teachers, but for three months 10 of us actually were hall guards."

He tells of another experience when he was called to take a special education class. "It was in a very rough junior high, but because there were only seven kids in the class, I went."

"When I reported to the office, they told me that the shop teacher had to leave unexpectedly and asked if I would take his class. I was told he turned his back on the students and was hit in the head with a book. He was rushed to the hospital."

Fortunately for him, he was able to control the group. "I got the kids into a rap session, and they really related to me because of my long hair. I was lucky."

In spite of all his problems, he said these experiences built confidence. "I knew if I could teach in those situations, I could teach anywhere," he said.

"In a few contacts, I felt a great deal of fulfillment."