



School District of
West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.
EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION CENTER

September 25, 2013

Dear Assembly Education Committee Members,

On behalf of Kurt Wachholz, the Superintendent of Schools in the West Allis-West Milwaukee School District, I am providing testimony on Assembly Bill 348.

We are in support of the proposal to authorize a school district, county, and CESA to contract for substitute teaching and paraprofessional staffing services as long as there are additional funds made available for this purpose. In the West Allis-West Milwaukee School District, we hire our own substitute teachers and currently utilize these funds. Without additional funding, the finite amount of funding available in this area will decrease due to the fact that everyone will take funds out of the same pool of money. This could have a potential negative effect on districts like ours.

In addition, we are proposing an addition to AB-348 which would exempt long-term substitutes, in regular and special education, from the hour requirements enacted upon retirees in Act 20, who return for part-time work. It is our belief that in some cases the need for a long-term substitute teacher is in the best interest of the students and the continuity they bring to a classroom is invaluable. The hour requirements as established through Act 20 would disrupt the learning process for students in these situations.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of this matter. Please contact my office with any questions.

Kurt Wachholz,
Superintendent of Schools



**Wisconsin State Assembly
Committee on Education**

Public Hearing - Wednesday, September 25, 2013

TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL 348

Submitted by Thomas E. Wohlleber

Good morning. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Representative Kestell and members of the Assembly Education Committee for this opportunity to address AB 348 which would amend Wisconsin Statute 115.88 (1) to allow school districts to be eligible for special education categorical aid when utilizing contracted substitute teaching and paraprofessional services.

To help educate its 6,300 students, the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District employs 555 teachers and 133 para-educators. During the 2012-13 school year, the school district employed 277 substitute teachers and 89 substitute para-educators to fulfill the duties or responsibilities of regular staff when they are away from their classroom or supporting and supervising students. Last school year, our district experienced 11,330 absences for teachers and para-educators. Of those, 330 (almost 3%) were not able to be filled. Numerous others required significant staff intervention to make sure that classes were covered.

As a process improvement initiative, our district implemented an automated substitute placement and absence management system 7 years ago. While this change provided a more efficient means of assigning substitutes in our schools, it did not address the critical issue of a lack of an adequate pool of qualified substitutes. Despite our diligent efforts to recruit substitutes, we experience shortages that result in a number of unfilled assignments. This situation is not only disruptive to student learning, but often results in increased costs as regular teachers are utilized to fill-in during their prep periods at a higher hourly rate.

The employer mandates included in the Affordable Health Care Act are anticipated to increase employer costs by providing health eligibility to substitute employees (who work the required number of hours) that have previously been ineligible. Using 2012-13 data, 10 of our substitutes would become eligible for health insurance and another 20 substitutes were very near this eligibility threshold.

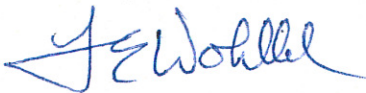
Last year, our leadership team researched the option of utilizing contracted substitute employment services to provide an effective and sustainable solution to fulfill our district's substitute needs. In reviewing this option, it became apparent that the contracted substitute solution not only addressed many or all of the issues just discussed, provided potential for future cost avoidance, and allowed us to utilize many or all of the same individuals who have been previously substituting for us.

Contracting by school districts for staffing a wide range of special education services is a viable and accepted practice in our state. The legislature has endorsed this practice and established a precedent by allowing the cost of these contracted staff to be eligible for categorical aid. The inclusion of qualified substitute teachers and paraprofessionals provided by private or public agencies to be aid eligible is consistent with this precedent. With no or minimal difference in aid eligible costs expected from the change to contracted substitute services, special education categorical aid availability and distribution should not be negatively impacted.

Not only is this proposal to include qualified substitute teachers and paraprofessionals contracted from public and private agencies for categorical aid eligibility good public policy, it helps remove a barrier from school districts to utilize a creative, cost-effective solution to address staffing needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T E Wohlleber', written in a cursive style.

Thomas E. Wohlleber
Assistant Superintendent of Business Services



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

STEVE KESTELL

27TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony Assembly Bill 348

Historically, coordinating the placement of substitute teachers for any given school day has been a time-consuming, labor-intensive process for public school districts. In recent years, increasing numbers of school districts have turned to contracting for substitute teachers with private service firms.

These firms have evolved to handle all aspects of district substitute staffing needs including recruitment, background checks, substitute placement on a daily basis, and processing substitute payroll and benefits. Many districts find these firms to be efficient, cost-effective staffing solutions that free up district staff for other more pressing administrative duties.

However, there is a problem as it relates to special education substitute teachers and paraprofessionals. Currently a school district will not receive state special education aid for the costs of contracting with a substitute staffing service.

Under current law if school district personnel coordinate the placement of special education substitute teachers and paraprofessionals, the district will receive state special education aid for those substitute staffing costs. But, if the district contracts with a substitute staffing service for the placement, they will not receive state special education aid for those costs.

Therefore, school districts that utilize cost-effective substitute staffing services are being penalized under current law for using those services for their special education substitute staffing needs. This bill solves this problem by explicitly authorizing a school district to contract with substitute teaching staffing services and makes the costs of such a contract eligible for special education aid.