



**House Pensions and Benefits Committee  
Representative Johnson, Chair**

**Working After Retirement**

*Submitted by Diane Gjerstad  
Wichita Public Schools*

May 8, 2013

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share with the committee the critical role retired school employees play in our schools each and every day. Appropriate staffing is key for the success of any business -- including schools.

Yet schools are unlike many businesses in one respect. Whereas some businesses may be able to work around absences and extended leaves, a school district has to preserve the safety and academic learning within the classroom. While a business might be able to reassign a job, in a school job duties are not interchangeable and classrooms of students must be covered. When a regular teacher is absent, students in the classroom deserve a certified professional who is able to maintain classroom discipline and move students forward academically.

Wichita Public Schools educates over 50,000 students in 82 schools and 15 special programs. This year the district has budgeted for 3,333 classroom teachers, 740 paraprofessionals, and 89 principals. The size and scope of the district lends itself to a different set of staffing challenges.

To continue academic growth and maintain the safety of the school, the ability to hire people on a temporary basis who have retired from the district is an important human resources tool. Retired personnel are familiar with the policies, safety procedures, student rights and privacy (FERPA), and federal laws in place for the protection of our students.

Last year in the Wichita Public Schools 19,458 substitute teachers were requested, of which 17,589 were filled. The ability to fill classrooms from kindergarten to high school physics with qualified teachers is important. Student learning should not grind to a halt because the teacher has an illness or a death in the family. Wichita Public Schools has 202 teachers, who are retired under KPERS, in the substitute pool.

In classified positions (examples include paraprofessionals, clerical, custodial) similar safety issues can arise. Special education para's regularly work with medically fragile students who have critical health issues and may be tube fed. These para's are specially trained. When one is absent for an extended period of time the replacement must meet the needs of this special group of students.

Substitute school secretaries touch everything in a school. Secretaries interact with parents and non-custodial parents, dispense medications, do building bookkeeping, receive lunch payments, and have knowledge of student privacy rights. When the school secretary is gone for a month we must have a knowledgeable replacement, who is familiar with the district's accounting and student information systems. Wichita Public Schools had 64 former employees, who have retired under KPERS, temporary classified positions last year.

When the principal is absent for an extended period of time, it is important to have a steady hand at the lead. Substitute principals have a unique and critical knowledge basis fundamental to running the school. Substitute principals need to be able to effectively work with parents, participate in special education staffings, conduct classroom walk throughs, deal with a wide range of behavior issues, coach teachers, and in general maintain a positive learning environment. The district has used 4 retired substitute administrators this past year.

The KPERS system is increasingly complex. School districts who hire retirees incur additional administrative costs to enroll, monitor hours worked, and report. The district's KPERS agent is kept extremely busy with annual retirements of 150-200, plus more than 500 who are considering retirement, and those who work after retirement.

The ability to selectively use retired personnel to fill professional roles is critical for schools. While the regular classroom teacher, paraprofessional or principal are absent, learning needs to continue while maintaining the health and safety of the students.

Schools are complex organizations. The ability to hire retired personnel allows schools to advance the academic learning of students in a safe environment

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing us to express our thanks for the working after retirement provision in statute.