

Understanding Variations in Requirements for Long Term Special Education Substitute Teachers

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Special Education Teacher Shortages

- The Connecticut State Department of Education has declared special education as a teacher shortage area in the 2025-2026 school year
- As a result of these vacancies, schools may choose to employ long term substitute teachers as a way to bridge these gaps
- Substitute teachers are considered long term for any position lasting 30-60 consecutive days in a single school year (with the exact length that quantifies this position left up to the districts)

Long Term Substitute Teachers

- Long term substitute teachers offer an easy solution for districts due to lower comparative pay and the rare extension of benefits
- Schools in underprivileged areas are more likely to have unqualified teachers and higher turnover rates – and therefore more likely to hire long term substitutes or uncertified teachers (Bettini & Gilmour, 2024)
- There exists variability in the qualifications needed to be a long-term substitute teacher

Variability in Qualifications

- While some schools may require long term substitutes to meet more rigorous criteria (additional training and higher certifications), the decision is ultimately left up to the districts
- Districts can apply for a waiver for individuals without a bachelor's degree provided they have a high school diploma and experience working with children
- This variability can lead to inequitable learning environments for children with disabilities specifically

Research Question

- What are the requirements for long term special education substitute teachers in Connecticut school districts regarding past training and experience?

Rationale

- By comparing the requirements that school districts impose on their long-term substitute special education teachers, this study provides an initial understanding into how variability can have an effect on the educational outcomes of students with disabilities
 - It was predicated that schools would demonstrate low consistency in requirements
 - Districts that recruited candidates on their own were examined specifically, rather than through the use of staffing agencies

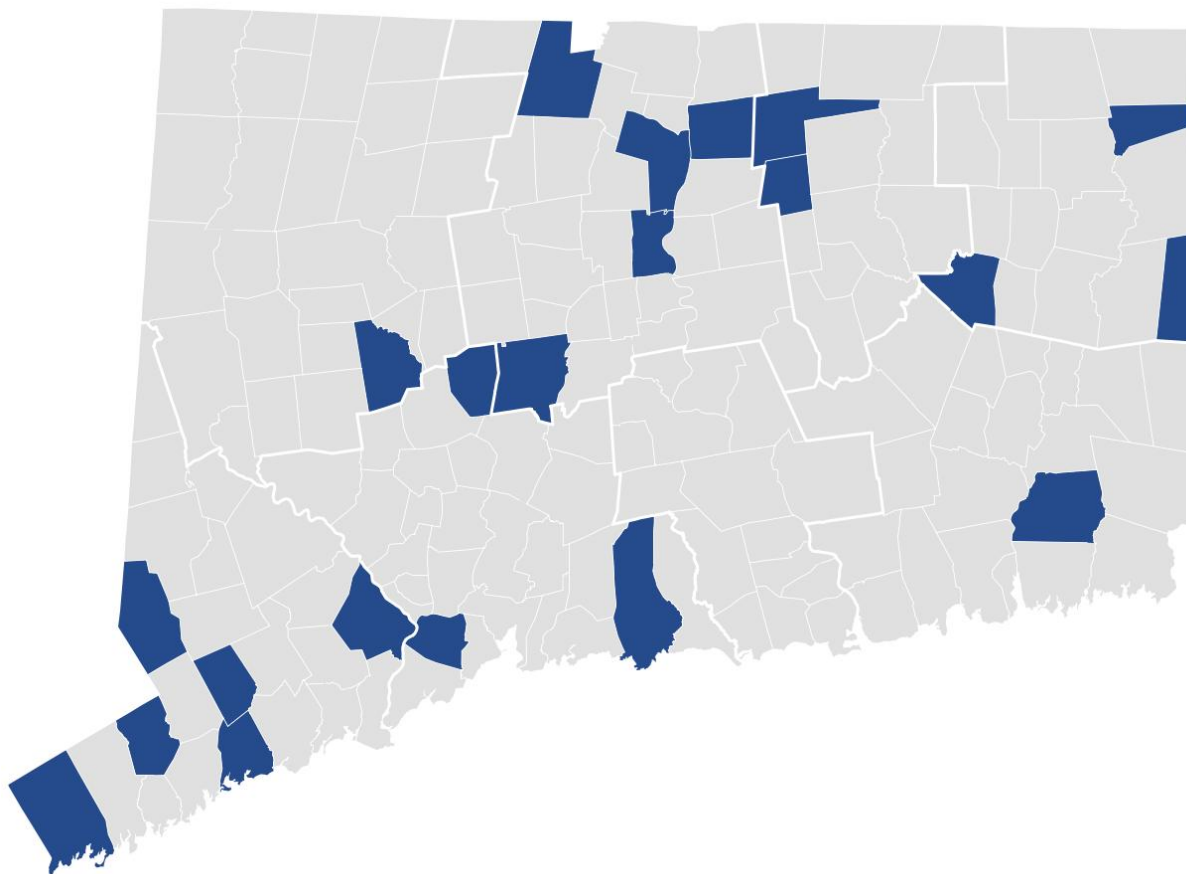
Methods

- This study employed a structured online search and review to examine available job postings for long term special education substitutes in CT
- The search was completed from January 2026-March 2026 to analyze vacancies in the middle of the academic school year
- Job listings were collected from a variety of sites including
 - CT Reap
 - Indeed
 - Top School
 - CSEES

Methods (cont.)

- Specific information was extracted from each posting including:
 - The school district and school name
 - The date the job was posted
 - The anticipated start date
 - Required certifications and qualifications
- The data collected was organized and reviewed to identify patterns and differences across the postings

Towns with vacant positions



Results

- A total of 23 long term special education substitute teacher job positions were identified between January 2026 – March 2026
- 13 of the 23 positions indicated an immediate start date, which suggests urgent staffing needs occurring in the middle of the school year
- The high number of positions that indicated an immediate start date further illustrates the ongoing staffing crisis facing special education with the need for qualified individuals steadily increasing

Results (cont.)

- The most frequently requested certificate was Connecticut special education certificate 165 (required in 16 positions; preferred for 3 additional positions)
- Four of the job postings indicated no certificate requirements – indicating variability in credentialing
- Moderate variability in qualification requirements amongst districts

Discussion

- Persistent staffing challenges were revealed as well as the variability that exists for qualifications among school districts
- Widespread emphasis on the requirement of Connecticut comprehensive special education certificate 165
 - Suggests that districts continue to prioritize higher credentials and specialized training for substitute roles which likely reflects the combined instructional, behavioral, and legal responsibilities associated with the role

Implications

- The quality of services being provided to students with disabilities
- Highlights the concerns over retention challenges reported throughout the special education field
- Results suggest that long term substitutes can serve as an important factor in how districts are managing staffing shortages

Limitations

- Data was drawn from public platforms which may not have been reflective of all open positions available
- No statistical analysis – relationships between variables cannot be established at this time
- May not have captured all encompassing qualifications that may be added or modified later on in the hiring process
- Data collected did not allude to how long the vacancy remained open or if it was successfully filled

Future Directions

- Future studies may examine how/whether variations in qualifications for long term special education substitutes affects student service delivery
- Larger scale explorations needed to track insights into special education teacher shortages and turnover rates as a systematic challenge
- Future research can help inform policy and staffing practices as well as teacher resources that can improve stability and support for students and teachers in special education settings

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