

## Board increases pay for teaching assistants in attempt to recruit more applicants

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RANTOUL — Rantoul City Schools board is getting serious in its attempt to lure more people willing to work as teaching assistants.

Superintendent Scott Woods said RCS is experiencing what many districts are throughout the state.

"All over, finding subs is a challenge," he said. "I think it's related to the overall labor market. You've heard lots of places are having trouble finding people to work."

The school board approved an attendance incentive for support staff, which includes teaching assistants. They will now be able to earn up to an additional \$2.35 per hour beginning Nov. 11.

Teaching assistants now earn from \$15 to \$25 an hour, depending on their level of education and years of experience.

By meeting individual attendance targets, TAs can earn an additional \$750 per trimester. Wood said they will also be able to exchange unused personal time for up to \$475 in additional compensation.

Woods said the district's educational support professionals, which includes teaching assistants as well as custodians, backs the change.

"They recognize the need for us to have all our positions filled every day," he said.

Required to be a teaching assistant: For a short-term license, a person must be at least 19 years old and at least possess a high school diploma. After three years, a TA must have a long-term license, which requires college credits of at least 60 hours or pass an aca-

demic test of math, reading and writing.

Of the district's 350 employees, 67 are teaching assistant positions, but four of them are vacant.

"On any given day we have absences because people get sick or children get sick," Woods said. "It's really hard to fill those vacancies."

A teaching assistant provides instruction support under the direction of a teacher, Woods said. At the junior high level, the TA might work with a small group of students to study for a test.

Other jobs might include working with students with special needs, managing school libraries and providing behavioral and instructional support to students.

Woods said it is becoming increasingly difficult for schools to find substitute staff for those times when an employee is absent, forcing schools to fill teacher vacancies with substitutes first, which results in a high rate of uncovered positions when a teaching assistant is absent.

Woods said TAs serve a critical role, "and their absences from school create a hardship to providing educational services when we are unable to find trained substitutes."

Northview Elementary Principal Kelly Mahoney said her school has 16 teaching assistants, "and we depend on them the same as we do a teacher."

"Anything we can do to make sure we are not short staffed is needed," she said.

Rantoul City Schools District is a pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade school district with an enrollment of 1,700 students.