

Swing, St. Paul's Team to Simplify Absence Management



Challenges

- Administrative staff was stressed managing absences
- Full-time and after-school staff had to scramble to cover unfilled openings
- More and more resources were needed to cover absences

Solution

Swing Education

Results

- Dozens of hours saved each term
- 667 substitute teacher days filled
- 92.4 percent of all requests successfully filled
- Reduced burden on administrators, teachers, and after-school staff
- More efficient process to request and place substitute teachers



ST. PAUL'S
EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

About St. Paul's Episcopal School

- Located in Oakland, California
- Independent, K-8 day school
- Serves 375 students
- Founded in 1975
- Specialist programs include K-8 Spanish, Service Learning, Music (Choral and Percussion)

In 2017, Oakland Magazine recognized St. Paul's Episcopal School in Oakland as the best private elementary and best middle school in Oakland. With an 8:1 student:teacher ratio and highly qualified faculty (55 percent of full-time staff hold advanced degrees), St. Paul's offers the sort of support students need to succeed.

But not even St. Paul's was immune to the nationwide substitute teacher shortage -- the school struggled to build and manage a pool of qualified substitute teachers.

"It was really hard," recalls Christine Fairless, St. Paul's Middle School Director. "It was difficult. It was time consuming. And it was stressful."

In March 2016, however, St. Paul's turned to Swing Education, which matches high-quality substitute teachers with schools that need them via an easy-to-use, web-based platform, for help. In the years since, St. Paul's has made significant improvements to its absence management program. Administrators now save dozens of hours each term coordinating coverage.

*"We're just super thankful," Fairless says.
"Swing takes so much stress away in terms of
finding substitute teachers."*

PIECING TOGETHER AN ABSENCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Before partnering with Swing Education, St. Paul's relied on a lengthy, involved, and unpredictable process to cover teacher absences.

"What we did was we basically posted on Craigslist and tapped into our individual networks and created a substitute teacher list," Fairless says. "We put those folks onto a spreadsheet and also included their availability and preferences for subject or grade level."

"And then when I would get a text or a call from a full-time teacher who was going to be out, I would basically just start at the top of the list and start texting people and waiting to hear back from somebody."

Unfortunately, as the nationwide substitute teacher shortage worsened, so, too did St. Paul's ability to fill teacher absences. That placed a large burden on the school's full-time teachers and after-school staff, who had to scramble to cover openings.

"There was a shortage of substitute teachers and we were starting to feel like we were having to ask teachers to fill within," Fairless says. "We were working with people in our after-school program as well; sometimes they would be our substitute teachers, and then the issue was that the school would end up having to pay them overtime if they were working during the day and also the after-school program, so we were accruing more costs because of that."

"We were getting to a place of real concern about not only the costs, but just our ability to fill absences, and that's when we started working with Swing."

GETTING STARTED WITH SWING

With the costs and stress of managing absences mounting, St. Paul's partnered with Swing Education in March, 2016. Because Swing Education charges only for absences filled (there's no subscription fee or implementation costs), St. Paul's viewed the partnership as a risk-free alternative to its existing absence management program.

"We were kind of like, 'Let's try it,'" Fairless says. "We had nothing to lose."

Fairless and her team at St. Paul's got up and running on Swing's absence management platform quickly.

"I remember it being very simple," Fairless says. "It's easy."

"It takes very little time to issue a request. It takes a couple minutes to put a request in the system."

Swing Education has also reduced St. Paul's workload because the company handles substitute teacher recruiting, screening, background checks, and training. And while St. Paul's did have some initial reservations about relying on an external pool of substitute teachers, the school has been pleased with the quality of Swing Education's substitute teachers.

"We had some questions and concerns about bringing people into our community that we hadn't vetted personally or interviewed," Fairless says. "That was a concern in moving to the Swing Education substitute pool, but we decided to give it a go."

"Based on our experiences and the people that Swing has sent our way, I would say the vast majority have been very professional and responsible guest teachers. It's been more rare to have somebody who wasn't a good match for our community for whatever reason. And whenever there is a question or a concern, Swing is very quick to respond, and that feels good as somebody who is on the school end of things."

A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Now, instead of spending anxious mornings waiting to get a return call or text from someone in its internal substitute teacher pool, St. Paul's administrators are free to help students in other ways, like supporting the school's full-time educators, managing curriculum, communicating with families, budgeting, developing after-school programs, and more.

"I don't have to engage with finding substitute teachers as much as I did before when we just had a list I had to go through," Fairless says.

Partnering with Swing has created substantial time savings for Fairless and her colleagues.

"There are definitely savings," Fairless says. "In peak times when there are a lot of teachers sick or out for different reasons, I would say we're saving a few hours a week managing substitute teachers with Swing as opposed to when we used to have to do it."

All told, it's been two-and-a-half years since St. Paul's decided to partner with Swing -- and the school continues to be very pleased with its partnership.

"I feel like Swing has always been very upfront, very transparent, very self-reflective, wanting to improve and get better consistently," Fairless says. "That's one reason why we've continued to stay with Swing and have seen the experience develop and improve over the last few years."

Visit [SwingEducation.com](https://www.swingeducation.com) for more information on how we can help your school with substitute teachers.

