

Just Ask Liz

Dear Liz:

I am very frustrated in my job and need to know if I will be insubordinate if I am honest with my principal. I took my job as a paraeducator because I enjoy and feel gifted in my ability to work directly with students who need a push. I am proud to say that I have developed relationships with my students and their families, and that they count on me. The problem is that I am constantly pulled to cover for teachers at my school. You gave me advice before and told me that the contract says it should be voluntary and only for a maximum of two hours at a time IF I volunteer, but I am never asked. I am always TOLD and even worse, I am given this direction from the secretary, not from my administrator, so it extremely awkward. I fear being accused of insubordination if I say that I am not "volunteering". At this point, I am considering looking for a new job outside of the school system. If I cannot make a difference and do what I love, then I may as well make more money on base.

Liz's Wisdom:

Oh no, please do not resign if this work serves you personally; let us help you seek solutions. Our students need people like you! As you accurately summarize, paragraph 4.8 of the non-certificated negotiated agreement states, "Paraeducators shall not be utilized to substitute for teachers beyond two hours except in emergencies. During such emergencies, coverage will be sought on a voluntary basis."

I recommend that you try talking to your principal about this at a time other than when they are requesting you to cover. Sit down with him/her when you can both be thoughtful. Explain what you have shared with me, your knowledge of the negotiated agreement, and your understanding that the secretary has no authority to direct your work. Certainly, your principal will appreciate your calling to serve students and figure out a way to uphold the negotiated agreement. If that does not work or if you are uncomfortable with this approach, then I am happy to meet with you and your principal to facilitate this conversation and reach a solution. Ultimately, this is a clear violation of the negotiated agreement and EASMC can grieve it, but I am confident that we can easily resolve these concerns informally if you are willing to advocate for yourself or allow me do to so.