

## District Profile

Region: Arlington, VA

Enrollment: 27,800

Schools: 33

### IMPROVING SUBSTITUTE TEACHING IN

# Arlington Public Schools

Substantial provides tools and supports that help districts like Arlington develop leadership capacity and data-driven solutions to their substitute teacher needs.

## Meet Erin and Tomika

Erin and Tomika were both new to Arlington Public Schools' substitute system. Tomika transferred from payroll to become the new district-wide sub coordinator, and Erin was the new director of talent acquisition and management on the HR team—with subs as just one part of her portfolio.

Both believe in making the most of every school day, but they inherited challenges: a lower-than-expected fill rate, no training for subs or school office managers, and a need for fresh sub recruitment ideas. Redesigning the system felt out of reach when running at 120 percent to keep the current system going. Erin and Tomika decided to partner with Substantial to help break out of patterns, get an extra set of hands, and improve the substitute teaching experience for everyone.

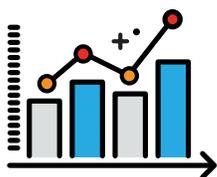
## What Erin and Tomika Did



### SET A VISION

Erin and Tomika worked with Substantial to think beyond “the way it’s always been” and articulate their dream substitute-teaching ecosystem.

- A robust, highly qualified and diverse pool of subs
- Meaningful experiences for students
- Subs who feel appreciated and valued
- Proactive growth of a full-time teaching pipeline
- Efficient data tracking enabling leaders to monitor progress



### DOVE INTO DATA

Substantial crunched district data and learned that more subs were needed in the pool. The data also showed challenges with sub requests filled at the last minute or for special education, ELL or Montessori classrooms. Using design-thinking strategies, Erin and Tomika went on a listening tour to gather qualitative data from students, subs, and school and district staff. The interviews uncovered important insights about where to make change.

“The hardest days come when we don’t have enough subs to cover and we’re calling department chairs to cover.

— SCHOOL OFFICE MANAGER

## DEBUNKING MYTHS WITH DATA

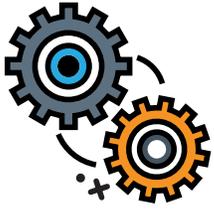
Data showed that sub requests were consistent throughout the week, not particularly heavy on Fridays as originally believed.

“Being able to get a clear understanding of our data regarding our current sub pool and sub needs had huge impact.

— ERIN



# Substantial



## DESIGNED & IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

Substantial was embedded in the team and acted as the battery that powered Erin and Tomika's innovative thinking. Together, they decided to:

- Launch a new-and-improved sub orientation and include classroom management training,
- Set a data-informed, achievable strategic plan to meet the district's sub needs and address challenges raised in the listening tour, and
- Establish new practices for using data to track progress and manage to goals.



## GREW THROUGH COACHING

Substantial helped build Erin and Tomika's capacity through regular leadership coaching. Sessions focused on goal setting, time management and process improvement. Coaching also served as extra cheerleading for this ambitious team.

## Getting Substantial Results

Erin, Tomika and Substantial worked together for just three months. Here's what happened:

- **The new orientation helped subs feel better prepared.** The data also show additional content areas in which new subs want professional learning, including special education and ESOL/HILT. Tomika plans to add the content to future orientations.
- **The district has a strong, data-driven strategic plan for substitute teaching.** The plan breaks out of patterns by prototyping new programs and supports over the summer. Tomika is launching school office manager trainings and discontinuing practices that don't work.
- **The team built their leadership.** Erin and Tomika both play major leadership roles, but do not have many leadership development opportunities. Both cited the coaching as very helpful for guiding their work.
- **They look at data differently, with a designer's mindset.** Instead of relying on hunches and bits of data, Erin and Tomika feel empowered to collect and use quantitative and qualitative data to ensure they're meeting the district's needs—and improving the substitute teaching experience.



**Substantial**

[substantialclassrooms.org](https://substantialclassrooms.org)

380 Washington St. Oakland, CA 94607

(510) 761-7550

[info@substantialclassrooms.org](mailto:info@substantialclassrooms.org)

## LISTENING TO INFORM SOLUTIONS

School office managers wanted more tools and templates to set up subs for success. Similarly, subs noted inconsistent processes among schools as a barrier.

“It is hard in our work to see the forest from the trees. Having us make time to just sit and reflect while Substantial guided the discussion was essential.

— ERIN

## THOUGHT PARTNERSHIP

District human capital offices are incredibly busy, and those responsible for substitute teaching often lack thought partners to provide another perspective on how districts might think and work differently.

## SETTING UP SUBS FOR SUCCESS

100 percent of orientation participants strongly agreed or agreed that, after attending the orientation session, they felt prepared to sub.

“There has been a substantial change in our orientation process that has led to much success and positive feedback.

— TOMIKA

## HELP FOR NOW AND LATER

Sub system leaders manage the day-to-day requirements for securing subs for classrooms. Support must solve problems they face right now while also pushing toward longer-term strategic work.