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## education career path

BY STEPHEN MURPHY

# Educational staffing perspective



Debbie Baldwin Pearson

SEEN Magazine interviewed Debbie Baldwin Pearson, Director of Sales for Kelly Educational Staffing® (KES®), Kelly Services®.

The Kelly Educational Staffing program was rolled out in 1997 in Gulfport, Miss. From 1997 to 1999, they piloted their program in the Gulfport school district and then, in 1999, rolled it out nationally to all of their staffing services' markets.

**SEEN Magazine:** *You've been working on educational staffing for almost 15 years—what are some of the major shifts in education that you've seen over that time?*

**Pearson:** There have been several. From an educational standpoint, we are seeing a major shift in teacher performance evaluations. Evaluations used to be based on student test scores, but now schools are looking to incorporate observation and peer reviews into the process.

Also the number of superintendents coming from the private sector has increased dramatically over the past three to five years. School districts are looking for people who have experience managing large budgets and are looking to increase efficiencies.

With our business, 15 years ago unemployment was at three percent, so the big difference we are seeing now is not from a quantity standpoint but from a quality point of view.

In 1997 there weren't enough teachers and districts were experiencing tremendous

growth, now districts are having to evaluate their staff and make tough decisions based on teacher evaluations and student performance.

One very exciting shift we've seen is that districts are making more data-driven decisions which, I feel, really elevates their success with the students.

Finally, the biggest shift has been funding cutbacks and the impact that the cuts are having on education.

**SM:** *What are your opinions about that shift to more private sector people?—it can often be a sore spot for career educators.*

**Pearson:** I believe there has to be a balance. The curriculum side is obviously so important, but on the other hand having business acumen can be just as important. We work with some districts that have superintendents who have come through the teacher ranks and with several superintendents from the private sector, and from our perspective they are not that different.

**SM:** *What are some of the more recent trends?*

**Pearson:** The budget crises with education are ultimately changing the landscape. We have seen such an increase in private schools, charter schools and virtual schools.

Another big trend is social media and technology, and integrating that into classrooms. Students have so much

technology experience at such a young age That can pose a challenge in classrooms that lack technology.

As far as our business, regardless of the economy, schools are going to need substitutes. As school resources are cut and budgets slashed, Kelly Educational Staffing offers a value proposition that is more cost-effective and increases the continuity of instruction in the classroom with increased quality of substitute teachers.

**SM:** *Where are you seeing the biggest demand for education jobs right now—in terms of job function, specific regions of country, etc?*

**Pearson:** With STEM initiatives, math, science and instructional technology is in high demand. Reading and special education are always in high demand. In the Southeast, Southwest and the West, we get into some bilingual needs — bilingual instruction is becoming more and more important.

Individuals who can teach 21st century skills and individuals who are continuing to pursue professional development and teachers who are nationally certified will all continue to be in demand.

**SM:** *How do recent cuts to public education affect your business?*

**Pearson:** The effects of the recent cuts are twofold. From the district perspective they are looking to Kelly® for solutions

## Educational staffing perspective *continued*

that will help supply needed educational employees at a cost savings while reducing the administrative burden of [the human resource aspects of] employing a substitute workforce. They are also looking to increase the quality of workforce which we can help them do through our screening processes.

In 2008/2009 we saw a lot of people who are not necessarily in education, private sector people — especially in math, science, and technology, engineers and the like — who were looking to be substitute teachers to bridge a gap of employment. Several of them are now pursuing teaching degrees.

We are also seeing more [typically] full time teachers looking for work as substitutes. In some cases they were affected by “last in, first out” policies. Being a substitute is a great way for them to increase their professional development and classroom experience.

**SM:** *What certification is required to be a substitute teacher?*

**Pearson:** In most states, substitutes do not require certification. Some states, especially in the Northeast, do have certification requirements, and some states do “emergency certification.” But, the majority of states do not require the certification — which opens the door to introduce teaching to new people. Kelly mirrors state and district requirements in who we place, but in most cases, we are able to raise the minimum requirements to college experience.

**SM:** *How do you prepare someone for classroom work?*

**Pearson:** Our candidates go through detailed training and orientation process — this is for all hires, even former teachers. We review key strategies for the workforce. We focus on classroom management skills: how to maintain the classroom from behavioral standpoint, how to be prepared and professional in the classroom, teaching strategies and legal/health issues.

We partnered with Utah State University’s Substitute Teacher Training Institute and use their materials as the basis for our training. In addition, we also incorporate specific policies and procedures required for each individual district. A big key of training is to make sure that the substitute is ready to continue the educational process for the student. Kelly gathers substitute teacher performance feedback from the school.

Initial training is face-to-face and can last anywhere from three to four hours to six to eight hours. It varies according to

district specific policies and the size of the training group. We also offer professional development online once substitute teachers are in the classroom.

The initial screening process is very thorough. We conduct face-to-face interviews, ask behavioral questions — for example, how would you regain control of an out of control classroom, what would you do if you didn’t have a lesson plan for the class, etc. There may be individuals that do not pass our substitute teacher screening process, however, since Kelly is a staffing company, we might have other types of work to offer the applicant.

**SM:** *You place substitute teachers and non-instructional staff — how does that break down?*

**Pearson:** The majority of our placements are in classroom instruction — which includes substitute teachers, paraprofessionals, teacher’s assistants. Probably about 90 percent of our placements are instructional positions. In addition, we also place school nurses, food service, custodial, clerical, finance and IT professionals in school districts.

**SM:** *Do you primarily work with public schools or private?*

**Pearson:** We are seeing an increase in private and charter schools but the vast majority are still public schools. The other area of growth is virtual schools. This is just at the beginning stages because it’s newer to the K-12 market. We haven’t seen any unique differences between working with private versus public schools.

**SM:** *Do your substitutes often go on to permanent placements with your schools? Do you have plans for more of a focus on permanent teaching placements?*

**Pearson:** As far as permanent/full time services, we are an HR staffing company, so we do have plans moving forward to help with full time teacher recruiting. Due to recent cuts in district administrative office, we think the need for this will be greater in the future.

Some of our teachers do have the goal of moving to permanent roles — especially recent graduates from teaching programs. A lot of times, at the beginning of the school year, school districts will bring on staff from Kelly with intent to hire full time, they just don’t have the approval to hire those full-time teachers until they have a student body count.

**SM:** *What kind of advice would you give to someone just starting out in teaching?*

**Pearson:** To start off, make sure you have reading, math, science, technology or special education coursework as part of your curriculum because there will always be a need for teachers with these skills.

While in school [getting your teaching degree], I recommend working as a substitute in the off time. It gives you experience as you’re learning. Be open to working in different environments. Always continue your professional development — go through the national certification process; during the summer, take advantage of PD opportunities; go for a Masters, etc.

**SM:** *Describe how you work with teacher, school districts, etc.*

**Pearson:** Ultimately, when KES enters into a contract with a school district, the common denominator is that KES becomes a partner with the district. The goal is filling 100 percent of the classrooms with quality substitutes. We focus on the core issue of staffing and easing the administrative burden of administrators and principals so they can focus on the students and curriculums. Combined with Kelly Services’ 65 years in the staffing industry, we can deliver HR solutions easily. We hold ourselves accountable for the quality of our hires and our retention of customers is extremely high.

KES believes that we positively impact education: districts and schools win because they experience immediate cost savings, reduction in their administrative burden and we provide real time reporting data, teachers win with continuity of instruction because their classrooms are always filled, students win because their education process is not disrupted when teachers are absent. Finally, the community wins with both our commitment and proven success in putting quality people to work.

*Kelly Educational Staffing has a national placement rate greater than 98 percent, is servicing over 2,900 schools across 31 states, and is the largest employer of substitute teachers nationwide. Over 50 percent of this market is in the southeast region of the United States.*

For more information, go to [kellyeducationalstaffing.com](http://kellyeducationalstaffing.com).

