

Classroom Associates

Funding Proposal | School Year 2023-2024

Overview

To provide a more effective solution to school staff absences, MNPS created **classroom associates**: a permanent, school-based position that the **district funds for all schools**. Currently called general school assistants, the job duties for this position are flexible by design. They cover classrooms when a teacher is absent for a short-term or long-term need. When classrooms are fully staffed, they can monitor lunch duty, sit on the front desk, assist with family outreach, or support any other administrative task.

This MNPS model has set the pace for national best standards as it provides a consistent, reliable environment for student learning. Students already know our classroom associates, who, in turn, understand our teaching scope and sequence – making a seamless learning experience. Classroom associates spend time outside of the classroom learning about building operations, family relationships, and the community landscape. Though their responsibilities are flexible, the permanency of their jobs make these positions a key strategy in keeping **every student known** while we support our school staff to take the time they need for themselves and their families.

ABOUT THE ROLE

- » Full-time, permanent position
- » Receives benefits
- » Works at one school
- » Assigned a teacher-based work schedule
- » Reports to the school principal
- » Pipeline development opportunities

Enhancing the Model

MNPS is ready to enhance this model in four distinct ways:

1. Renaming the position as **classroom associate** to better represent a strategic alignment of duties
2. Increasing the pay rate from a Support Grade 3 to a Grade 5
3. Funding more than 300 additional classroom associate positions that will be directly assigned to schools
4. Including planning and professional development to the position's responsibilities

The Investment

Equipping our schools with this essential strategy is a funding priority for our district leadership. We recommend ensuring that every school has at least three classroom associates.

It is equally important to competitively compensate these employees to honor the importance of the consistency they provide to a school along with the range of duties they execute. Currently, this role is paid on Support Grade 3. MNPS recommends elevating these roles by two grades to Support Grade 5, which is about a 2% increase.

Staffing Ratios		
# of Students	Recommended # of Associates	Current # of Associates
< 500	3	1
500 – 1000	5	2
1000 – 1500	6	3
1500+	8	3
Total # District-Wide	510 <i>(Estimated)</i>	196

The overall investment to increase from 196 to **510 GSA positions**, assuming an average **annual compensation + benefits of \$34,500**, is an additional **\$10.8 million**.

Why Now

Research suggests that a **traditional substitute model hurts students' academic outcomes**. Yet, this is the model most school districts continue to use, despite the negative impacts on learning and teacher morale.

MINPS internal data indicates **teachers are absent 8% of days per year**, or about **one day every two weeks**. In a school with 25 teachers, this means two will be absent on a typical school day. Multiple teacher absences per day per school are the norm, not the exception. We need a new model.

» Substitute teachers **deliver nearly 10% of instruction** to students each year. «

A MORE EFFECTIVE MODEL

A classroom associate model incorporates research-based practices to create a consistent, reliable, and rigorous learning environment – for both students and teachers.

- » **Classroom associates offer consistency for long-term absences.** Many reasons schools need substitute teachers are for long-term leaves like FMLA or mid-year vacancies. Rather than plugging these long-term gaps with single-day contractors, a building-specific classroom associate would fill these needs as they appear during the year, building upon student relationships they have been forming all school year to deliver extended periods of instruction.
- » **The classroom associate model is built on evidence-based practices of effective teacher-student relationships.** Research indicates that substitute teacher instruction is more effective when substitute teachers build relationships with specific schools and students. Instead of hoping that happens by chance, or in an ad hoc way through a contract model, MNPS began building this proactive solution two years ago. Classroom associates are already embedded in the school, building relationships in and outside of the building, planning with teachers, and preparing and delivering instruction in alignment with the district's rigorous standards.
- » **The classroom associate model accounts for teacher residency best practices.** Research on student teaching shows that first year teachers who previously taught in the same school where they are now full-time staff are more effective than comparison teachers. A key takeaway is that teachers, including new teachers, need time to build relationships with students, other teachers, and school leaders to maximize their effectiveness in the classroom. A classroom associate model allows MNPS to develop the strengths of a potential full-time teacher, as well as ensure that when current full-time teachers are absent, the staff covering their classrooms are positioned to be successful.
- » **Classroom associates alleviate inefficiencies in classroom coverage.** School leaders spend too many hours searching for substitute teachers to fill-in for absent teachers. In many cases, school leaders pull teachers/staff to cover students. These solutions are often disruptive – not the ideal environments we want for our students and teachers.
- » **Classroom associate models are becoming the national standard.** Since MNPS began implementing and evolving this model, key conveners of large, urban school districts are urging our peers to implement similar practices. This classroom associate model is becoming the national standard of practice. MNPS has outpaced peer districts on starting to find solutions to teacher absences and plans to continue its position to lead the country in refining this solution based on research and continuous improvement practices.