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The York Region District School Board is experiencing what it describes as a slight increase in supply teacher use this year with 1,295 more substitute teachers being called in to cover absences in May compared to the same month last year.

LEARNING

Boards scramble to find teachers as sick-day bank set to expire

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► Visit yorkregion.com for a comparison of the numbers of supply teachers used.

Your child might see more supply teachers in the classroom this month.

Some Ontario school boards are experiencing record numbers of teachers calling in sick and are left scrambling to fill the spaces, especially Mondays and Fridays.

Peel District School Board reported a record 1,664 teachers absent on a Friday this month and were only able to fill 1,210 of those vacancies with supply teachers. The board blames the teachers' new contract, which no longer allows sick day banking.

While the York Region District School Board is experiencing what it describes as a slight increase in supply teacher use this year with 1,295 more substitute teachers being called in to cover absences in May compared to the same month last year, board spokesperson Licinio Miguello said the numbers are not similar to Peel.

He attributes that to the board hiring more occasional teachers in the past month who are able to cover the absent teachers.

While every situation has its own context, it is usually at the discretion of the principal to reassign teachers, such as teacher librarians or English as a second language teachers, to cover absences, avoiding the need for a supply teacher.

Reported absences are not always sick days, either, as teachers sometimes require

time away from the classroom for professional development or religious purposes, making the board hesitant to provide the numbers for teacher absences for fear of it appearing to represent only sick days, Mr. Miguello said.

Information received from the board comparing teacher absenteeism this year to last does not suggest any significant change. Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario York Region president David Clegg said in an e-mail.

"There has been an acknowledged shortage of occasional teachers which seems to have heightened this sense of more teachers being absent. But over the last two weeks, this issue seems to have been brought under control in York Region."

Despite showing the overall use of supply teachers down compared to last year, the York Catholic District School Board has experienced an increase in the number of supply teachers called in Mondays and Fridays, board spokesperson May Moore said.

"Administrators have been able to manage those instances as they arise by reassigning non-classroom support staff, but we certainly have been experiencing some challenges," she said.

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