

○ **How has your time volunteering and observing informed your decision to be a teacher?**

I have accumulated over 600 hours of paid work in two different public school districts since January 2019. Almost all of these hours were with Walla Walla Public Schools as an emergency certified substitute teacher for middle and high school; I have been working in the same position with Tacoma Public Schools since March 2022. Though I was warned that substitute teaching can be a difficult job, I generally found that the opposite was true and have come away from these work experiences with affirmation and deeper conviction that I am meant to be a public educator.

In the dozens of different classrooms I've been responsible for, I've found that just about every student wants the same thing: to be seen as whole humans and to be treated with dignity and respect. Many students expressed to me that the substitute teachers they don't like are obsessed with controlling them. It's not a surprise to me that most students express preference to me as a sub, because I have the opposite approach with control. Over time, I developed a "spiel" that I shared at the beginning of each class period explicitly stating that I respect their choices and that I am not here to force them to do anything; I would then clearly describe my boundaries and help them to remember that there are consequences (desirable and less desirable) to be faced depending on what they decide to do with their absent teacher's instructions. Across the board, about half of the classroom will complete their teachers' requested tasks and the other half will respectfully do something else. I observed that this ratio stayed rather consistent no matter what I did or said, but in this scenario there's much more harmony and a culture of mutual respect between us and between the students' peers.

With substitute teachers, it seems to me that many students have uncommonly experienced an adult authority that prioritized them feeling dignified and respected. Practically, a way I've seen this play out is in my obsession with making sure I pronounce diverse students' names correctly; I've seen kids' eyes light up and postures change when I've called them by their given names correctly.

I know that once I have my own classroom and I am ultimately responsible for a student's education, my approach will have to change – I won't be allowed to just let students not do work in my classroom every day. Understanding this, centering dignity and respect will inform all of my decisions as I am given the responsibility to educate and influence young minds.