Proposal for a Central Office Coverage Model

SY 26-27 Budget Strategy

Executive Summary

This proposal recommends a divisionwide coverage model under which every certified central-office employee completes one classroom substitute day per month, and every non-certified central-office employee completes one school-based, non-instructional coverage day per month, across the 10-month school year. Based on the best public data available, RPS employs 1,762.8 classroom teachers, serves nearly 22,000 students with roughly 4,000 staff, and operates across 52 school sites and programs. Using a conservative, budget-based estimate of 382.1 central-office FTEs that are clearly housed in the School Board, Superintendent, Academic, Talent, and Engagement areas, this model would create about 3,821 coverage days per year. Depending on how those days are deployed, the direct annual savings opportunity is roughly $0.49 million to $1.15 million, with a reasonable working estimate of about $0.7 million to $0.75 million. [2]

This recommendation is not only financial. Research has long shown that teacher absences matter for student outcomes; one influential study in an urban district found that every 10 additional teacher absences reduced student math achievement by 3.3% of a standard deviation. In that context, a stronger internal coverage system is not simply an operational fix. It is also an academic and organizational strategy. [3]

Evidence Base and Assumptions

For the staffing base, the most current publicly available district staffing file from the National Center for Education Statistics[4] reports 1,762.8 classroom teachers in Richmond City Public Schools for the 2024–25 school year. RPS's own FY27 budget page separately says the division has about 4,000 staff serving nearly 22,000 students across 52 school sites and programs. [5]

For absence rates, the best urban benchmark is a range rather than a single universal figure. The National Council on Teacher Quality[6] reported that teachers in 40 large metropolitan districts missed nearly 11 days in a 186-day school year, while its later "Roll Call 2020" work found an average of 9.4 absences in a 187-day contract year across a 30-district sample. At the same time, local reporting by The Richmonder[7]—based on a FOIA request—found that RPS teachers averaged 17.3 absences in the 2023–24 school year. For a formal proposal, the most credible presentation is to show both a conservative urban benchmark and a Richmond-specific recent actual. [8]

For substitute compensation, current RPS job postings list daily substitute teachers at $17 to $19 per hour and long-term substitute teachers at $28.13 per hour. Because I did not find a separate publicly posted "permanent substitute" annual salary schedule in the budget book or on the public collective-bargaining portal, I annualized the currently posted long-term substitute rate over a 190-day school year and a 7.5-hour day. That yields an approximate annual cost of $40,085 per full-time building substitute. [9]

For the "one full-time sub in every building" assumption, RPS's recruiting materials describe the division as consisting of 5 preschool centers, 25 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 5 comprehensive high schools, and 3 specialty schools—a practical planning proxy of 45 schools/programs. If the division instead applies the policy to all 52 school sites and programs referenced in the FY27 budget page, the permanent-sub line would be higher. [10]

For internal teacher coverage when no substitute is available, the currently posted licensed-personnel agreement on the RPS bargaining page still shows $30/hour for "additional planning or grading" when there is no substitute or long-term substitute. Because your requested model expressly directs use of $40/hour x 7.5 hours = $300 per day, the calculations below adopt $300/day as a policy-planning assumption, while noting that the publicly posted agreement still shows $30/hour. [11]

For central-office staffing, RPS does not publish one clean, divisionwide "central office headcount" table. The most defensible conservative public estimate comes from the FY26 budget areas that are plainly central-office functions: School Board 4.0 FTE, Superintendent Office 37.0 FTE, Academic Office 249.4 FTE, Talent Office 42.6 FTE, and Engagement Office 49.1 FTE. Those categories total 382.1 FTE. I exclude the published Operations and Student Wellness area totals from the core estimate because those areas include many mixed field- and school-based roles such as transportation, facilities, nutrition, and nursing. That makes 382.1 FTE a conservative planning number, not an inflated one. [12]

Current Cost Estimate

Using the inputs above, the current annual substitute-cost model can be expressed as:

Annual substitute ecosystem cost
= (teacher absences × 2/3 × daily sub rate)

- (teacher absences × 1/3 × $300 internal coverage)
- (45 permanent subs × $40,085 annualized cost). [13]

With that structure, the annual cost picture looks like this:

Scenario	Teacher absence days	Daily sub spend	Uncovered-class teacher coverage	45 permanent subs	Estimated annual total
Urban benchmark using 11 days	19,390.8	$1.65M–$1.84M	$1.94M	$1.80M	$5.39M–$5.59M
Recent Richmond actual using 17.3 days	30,496.4	$2.59M–$2.90M	$3.05M	$1.80M	$7.45M–$7.75M

Those figures are approximate, but they are directionally strong. Even under the more conservative 11-day urban benchmark, the division is likely operating in a substitute-and-coverage cost environment of roughly **$5.5 million per year**. Using the recent local 17.3-day actual pushes the estimate closer to **$7.6 million per year**. [14]

If RPS were to count **52 sites/programs** instead of the 45-school proxy for full-time building substitutes, the permanent-sub line would rise by about **$281,000** annually. That would move the total cost range to about **$5.67M–$5.87M** under the 11-day benchmark and about **$7.73M–$8.03M** under the 17.3-day Richmond scenario. [15]

Savings Estimate

Using the conservative central-office estimate of **382.1 FTE**, the proposed requirement would generate approximately **3,821 building coverage days** per year. That is calculated as 382.1 employees × 10 coverage days each. Importantly, even the conservative 11-day absence scenario produces **6,463.6 days** that would otherwise require internal teacher coverage under your one-third-uncovered assumption, so there is enough "high-cost" demand to absorb a meaningful share of certified central-office classroom days if scheduling is done strategically. [16]

That yields three useful savings views.

The **conservative floor** assumes every central-office day prevents only an externally paid daily substitute assignment. At $17–$19/hour for a 7.5-hour day, that is **$127.50 to $142.50 per day**, or annual savings of roughly **$487,000 to $544,000**. [17]

The **working estimate** assumes central-office coverage offsets the current mix you described: about two-thirds regular sub coverage and one-third internal teacher coverage at $300/day. On that blended basis, the avoided cost per day is about **$185 to $195**, producing annual savings of about **$707,000 to $745,000**. That is the savings figure I would present as the main planning estimate because it is more realistic than the floor and less aggressive than the upper bound. [17]

The **high-return classroom-priority scenario** assumes certified central-office staff are first assigned to classes that would otherwise trigger the $300/day internal teacher-coverage payout. In that case, 3,821 covered days would avoid about **$1.146 million** annually. I would not present that as the guaranteed savings number, but it is a reasonable upper-bound planning case if the division prioritizes hard-to-fill, same-day teacher absences. [12]

Operational Design

The proposed policy should be framed as a division support obligation, not a symbolic volunteer effort. Certified central-office staff should be rostered into a monthly classroom-substitute calendar. Non-certified central-office staff should be rostered into school-based non-instructional coverage assignments such as front-office support, lunch/recess coverage, arrival and dismissal support, in-school support rooms, family contact support, or other building functions that free school-based personnel to remain in their core roles.

To make the policy succeed, implementation should include a standing credential inventory, principal request windows, a same-day emergency fill protocol, and a clear priority order. The priority order should be: first, classes that would otherwise require $300/day internal teacher coverage; second, same-day substitute teacher vacancies; third, school-based non-instructional vacancies that disrupt school operations; and fourth, pre-scheduled school support assignments tied to high-need campuses.

The policy should also include a short annual school-readiness orientation for all central-office participants, a building handbook, and a lightweight feedback loop after each coverage day. That keeps the program from becoming punitive or chaotic and instead turns it into a predictable operational system.

Organizational Benefits and Conclusion

The financial case is strong, but the organizational case may ultimately be stronger. A recurring concern in many school systems is that school-based employees experience central office as distant from the day-to-day realities of classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, parent communication, and student behavior management. A consistent "boots on the ground" presence changes that dynamic. It signals that central office is willing to share operational strain rather than merely manage it from afar.

That matters for morale. When school-based staff see central-office employees showing up regularly, not only during launches or crises but throughout the year, the relationship becomes less transactional and more collaborative. It also creates grassroots lines of communication: central-office staff see firsthand what staffing shortages, transition times, attendance disruptions, and coverage gaps look like in practice; school-based staff see decision-makers and support staff working beside them in real conditions.

For that reason, I would recommend presenting this proposal as a **dual-value initiative**. The first value is direct savings—most credibly **about $0.7 million to $0.75 million annually**, with a conservative floor near **$0.5 million** and a stretch case above **$1.1 million**. The second value is organizational trust: a deliberate, repeated system for central office to roll up its sleeves, strengthen morale, and improve the quality of communication between the classroom and the people who shape division decisions. That combination makes the proposal materially stronger than a budget-cut measure alone. [18]

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[1] [15] FY27 Budget - Richmond Public Schools

https://www.rvaschools.net/chief-of-staff/budget/fy27-budget?u

[2] [5] [7] [13] [14] https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?ID2=5103240&Search=2

https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?ID2=5103240&Search=2

[3] https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED502027

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED502027

[4] [10] https://www.rvaschools.net/talent-office/talent-acquisition

https://www.rvaschools.net/talent-office/talent-acquisition

[6] [12] [16] [18] https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/richmond/Board.nsf/files/DHASUL744F2F/%24file/FY26%20SCHOOL%20BOARD%20ADOPTED%20BUDGET%20REVISED%206.3.2025.pdf

https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/richmond/Board.nsf/files/DHASUL744F2F/%24file/FY26%20SCHOOL%20BOARD%20ADOPTED%20BUDGET%20REVISED%206.3.2025.pdf

[8] https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED556249.pdf

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED556249.pdf

[9] [17] Substitute Teachers (Daily to cover Absences) - Richmond, VA 23219 - Indeed.com

https://www.indeed.com/viewjob?jk=3e4ab8295741986f&utm

[11] Collective Bargaining Agreements - Richmond Public Schools

https://www.rvaschools.net/talent-office/employee-relations/collective-bargaining-agreements