



ESSER Reduced Class Size: SEA End of Year Survey Report Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

June 2022

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ESSER Reduced Class Sizes Program Outcome Goals

- Outcome 1: Increase student mastery
- Outcome 2: Decrease K-2 teacher vacancies
- Outcome 3: Improved culture and climate
- Outcome 4: Increase graduate rates

Evaluation Overview Statement

The Research and Performance Management office disseminated three surveys to gather data on how well Kindergarten-second grade Specialized Educational Assistants (K-2 SEAs/SEAs) are leveraged throughout the District. These surveys are sent to principals of schools with K-2 classrooms, K-2 teachers, and SEAs at the end of every quarter. This report synthesizes the perspectives of SEAs, teachers, and principals about how the SEAs are utilized in the classroom, as well as barriers that are hindering schools and classrooms from leveraging their SEAs in the best way possible. This end of year report compares the results of the four quarterly surveys administered in 2021-22 and provides overarching themes seen throughout.

Key Findings of the Q4 Surveys:

- 52% of principals report that SEAs are only providing instructional support (rather than doing non-instructional [NI] tasks) when the classroom teacher is giving instruction.
- Teachers and SEAs report the above figure to be 77% and 80%, respectively. This figure, among all roles, showed a decline from Q3.
- Of the principals that indicate turnover in the SEA position, 73% report that SEAs are leaving for a better job, mostly to fill teacher vacancies either in their own school or at other schools (down 2 percentage points from Q3).
- Of teachers with SEAs, 56% report that their SEA is providing whole group instructional support every day (10 percentage point decrease from Q3), and 52% report that their SEA is helping with small groups daily (9 percentage point decrease from Q3).
- 85% of teachers report that their SEA's support during whole group instruction is valuable; 88% indicated their SEA's small group support was valuable.
- Just under 60% of SEAs have been in the same classroom the entire time they have been employed as a SEA.
- When SEAs can be in their assigned classroom and help with instruction, the written comments from teachers, principals, and SEAs are overwhelmingly positive.

Response Rates by Role for Q4

The fourth quarter survey was sent out starting on May 5, 2022 to all principals of elementary or K-8 schools, K-2 teachers, and SEAs. Sixty-nine principals responded to the survey. Eight principals were removed from the survey dataset because they indicated they either do not have SEAs at their school (4 schools; alternative schools do not have SEAs assigned to them) or do not have enough SEAs for every K-2 classroom (4 schools). This left the survey pool with 61 principals who responded to questions about how well they understand the SEA position as well as how they believe the position is being implemented in their school. Of the 971 District-managed teachers receiving the survey, 345



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responded (36%). The SEA survey was sent out to 572 SEAs and 291 SEAs completed the survey, resulting in a 51% response rate. Table 1 below shows the response rate over the three quarters.

Table 1.

Response Rate by Role & Quarter				
Role	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Principals	78%	80%	95%	70%
Teachers	43%	31%	33%	36%
SEAs	45%	44%	54%	51%

Principal Responses Overview

Principals reported how many SEAs are in their school; the median response was 6 positions. Ninety-eight percent of principals either agree or strongly agree that they have a clear understanding of the role of an SEA. Around 93% of principals agree or strongly agree that SEAs provide students with valuable instructional support, and 95% agree or strongly agree that SEAs are an integral part of their classrooms.

Non-Instructional Tasks

Principals were asked, “When their classroom teachers are providing instruction, which of the following tasks are being done by SEAs?” as well as who assigns the non-instructional (NI) tasks. Figures 1 and 2 below show these results. Figure 1 shows principals’ responses from each quarter. Of note, 92% answered that their SEAs provide instructional support, along with other tasks, when their classroom teacher is giving instruction. This is down five percentage points from Q3 but 21 points up from Q1. More than half (52%) of principals reported that their SEAs only provide instructional support, excluding all other listed tasks. The next highest response is subbing for another classroom at 33% (because principals could check multiple boxes, the percentages given will exceed 100%). This was consistent with the third survey’s responses. Many principals mentioned this issue in the open-ended responses. Most of the NI tasks increased between Q3 and Q4 when previously these tasks had gone down from Q2.



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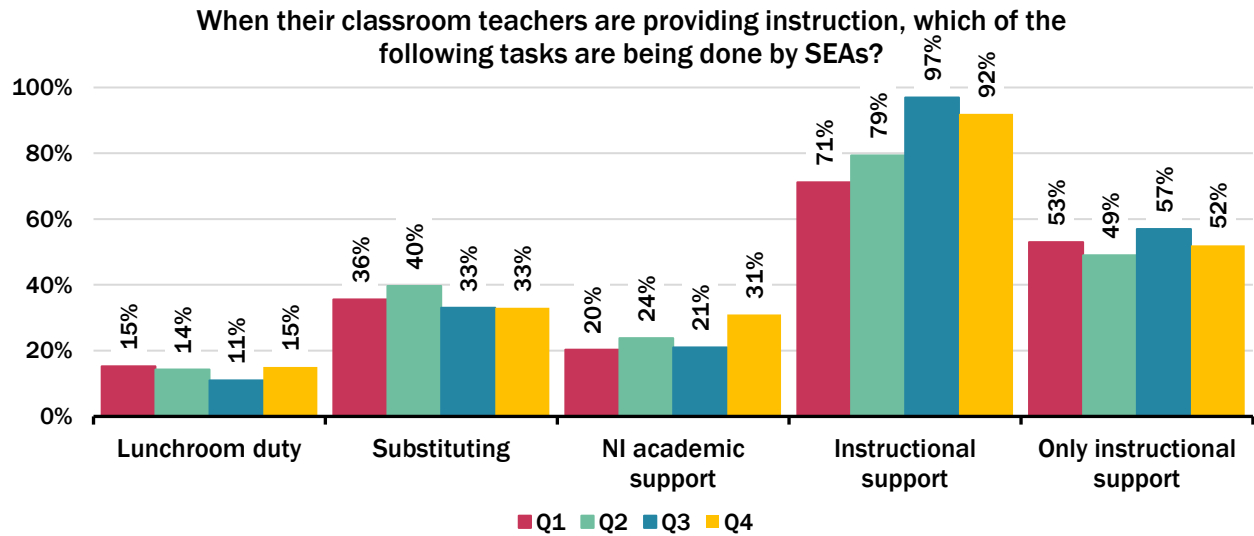


Figure 1.

Figure 2 breaks down who assigns each of the tasks that apply from Figure 1; Figure 2 only contains the responses from the Q4 survey. Monitoring the lunchroom, subbing for other classrooms, NI academic support (such as monitoring testing or labs/computers), and transportation duty are almost entirely assigned by the principal or by school administration. Monitoring bathroom breaks and/or hallways was reported as being entirely assigned by the classroom teacher.

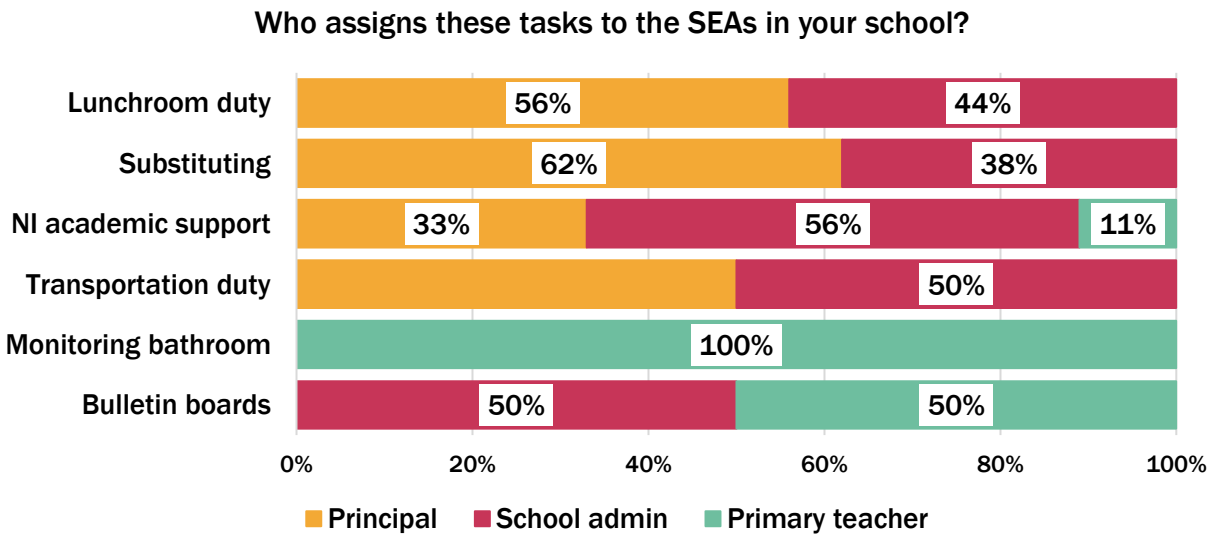


Figure 2.

Turnover in the SEA Position

Principals were asked if there was turnover in the SEA position at their school. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of principals indicated that their school has experienced turnover. Figure 3 and 4 show the



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turnover breakdown; Figure 3 showing those who mentioned having turnover in the pink as ‘yes’ ($n = 41$), and Figure 4 showing the reasons given for said turnover (principals were able to give more than one answer so Figure 4 shows 58 reasons). Of those that reported turnover, 73% said that their SEAs have gotten a better job; most mentioned that these SEAs have been promoted to full time teachers either at a different school or within the school they were initially hired.

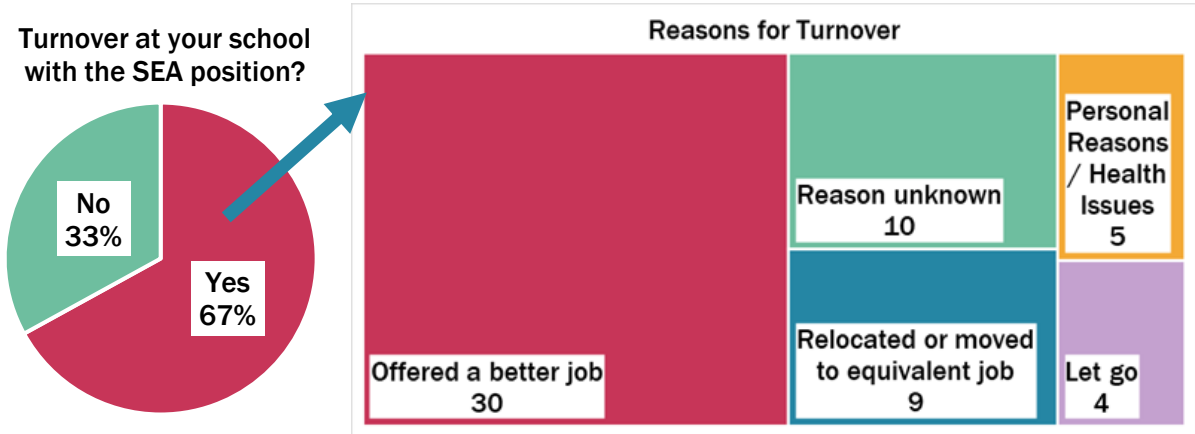


Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Teacher Responses Overview

The median class size of the teachers who responded was 21 students, and 71% of teachers (239) reported that they have an SEA assigned to their classroom currently. Of those 239 who have an SEA, 35% reported that they have had an SEA for the entire year. Seventy-six percent (67%) of teachers indicated that they teach all core subjects; the other 24% of teachers reported that their class rotates to another room for certain core subjects. Seventy-seven percent of teachers who reported teaching all subjects have an SEA in their classroom. Seven-one percent (71%) of teachers who rotate classes and teach ELA reported having an SEA in their class. However, only 30% of teachers who only teach math have an SEA in their classroom. Teachers indicating that they do not have an SEA in their classroom were asked a few follow up questions and then excluded from the rest of the questions pertaining to how SEAs worked in the classroom. Ninety-seven teachers (28%) said they do not have an SEA in their classroom currently; of those 97, 42% of them said that they have not had an SEA at all this year.

Teachers were asked how often their SEA supports small group (RTI2-A and pull out) and whole group instruction in their classroom within a week. Fifty-two percent (52%) of teachers indicated that their SEA supports small group instruction daily, and 56% reported whole group support daily as well. These are nine and ten percentage points below last quarter, respectively. Figure 5 shows how often SEAs provide support per week. The percentages of the daily category have increased each quarter, until this last quarter.



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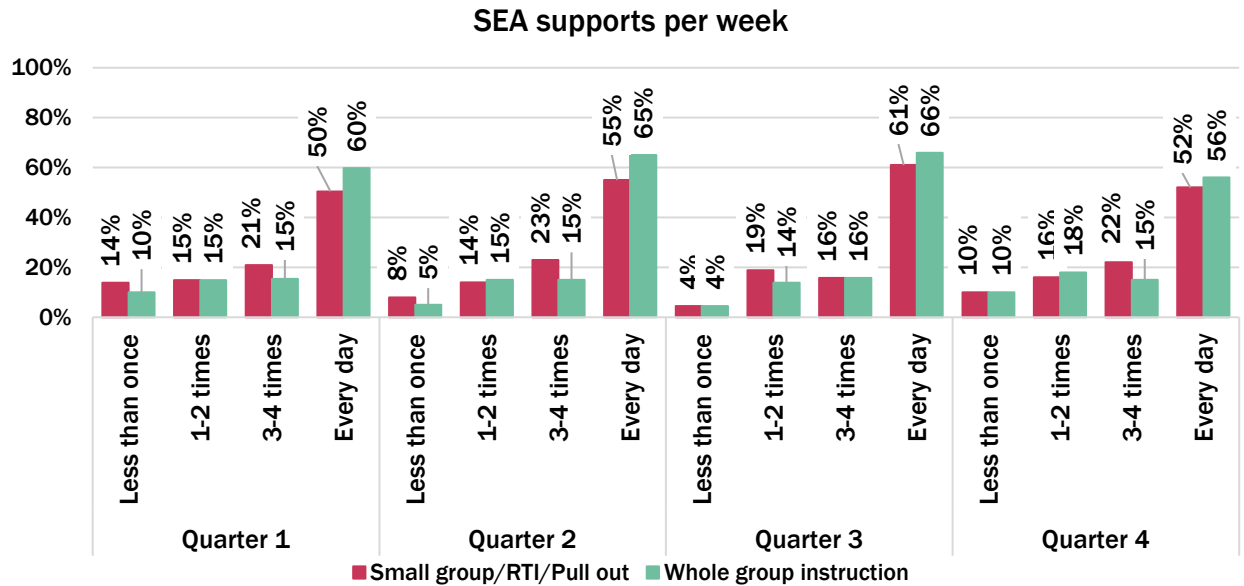


Figure 5.

Next, teachers were asked about the hours their SEA spends on specific activities in an average day. Figure 6 shows the breakdown of hours dedicated to the following tasks: whole group instruction, small group instruction, RTI2-A, and NI tasks. Sixty-one percent and 73% of teachers said that their SEA spends at least one hour a day on whole group instruction and small group instruction, respectively. This shows a twelve percentage point decrease from Q3 in whole group instruction, but a three percentage point increase in small group instruction since Q3.



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On an average day, how much of your SEA's time is spent on the following tasks?

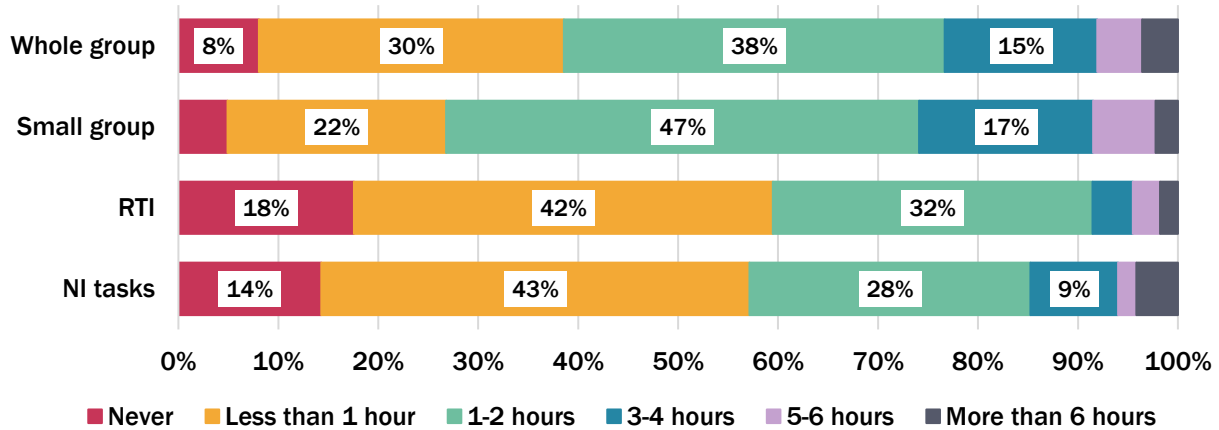


Figure 6.

Eighty-five percent (85%) of teachers agree or strongly agree that their SEA's support during whole group instruction is valuable. Similarly, 88% of teachers reported that SEAs provide valuable support during small groups. In a separate question, the majority of teachers reported that their SEA helps with small groups, whole group support, reading to the students, and one-on-one work with students. Figure 7 shows these supports below from all four quarters. According to teachers, these supports increased between Q2 and Q3, but decreased in the past quarter.

In what ways does the SEA support the students' achievement in your class (check all that apply)?

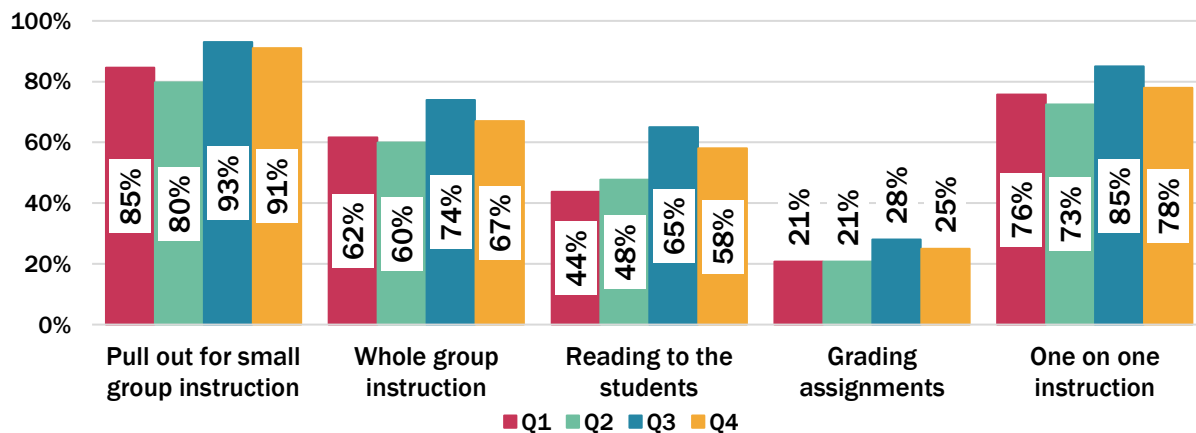


Figure 7.



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NI Tasks

Forty-four percent (44%) of teachers reported that when they are providing instruction to their class, their SEA is sometimes pulled to monitor the lunchroom; this is consistent with Q3, but eight percentage points lower than Q1. Fifty percent (50%) of teachers indicated that their SEA might be substituting for another classroom—a six percentage point increase from Q3. Almost all of the tasks were similar compared to Q3. Q4 results indicate that 77% of teachers report that their SEA helps with instructional support while they are giving instruction. However, because this question allows for multiple responses, most of these responses also show that their SEA sometimes does other tasks while teachers are giving instruction. Figure 8 shows in the last column those who only selected that their SEA helps with instructional support. This jumped considerably from Q2 to Q3 with 17 percentage points, but then fell back to 25% in Q4.

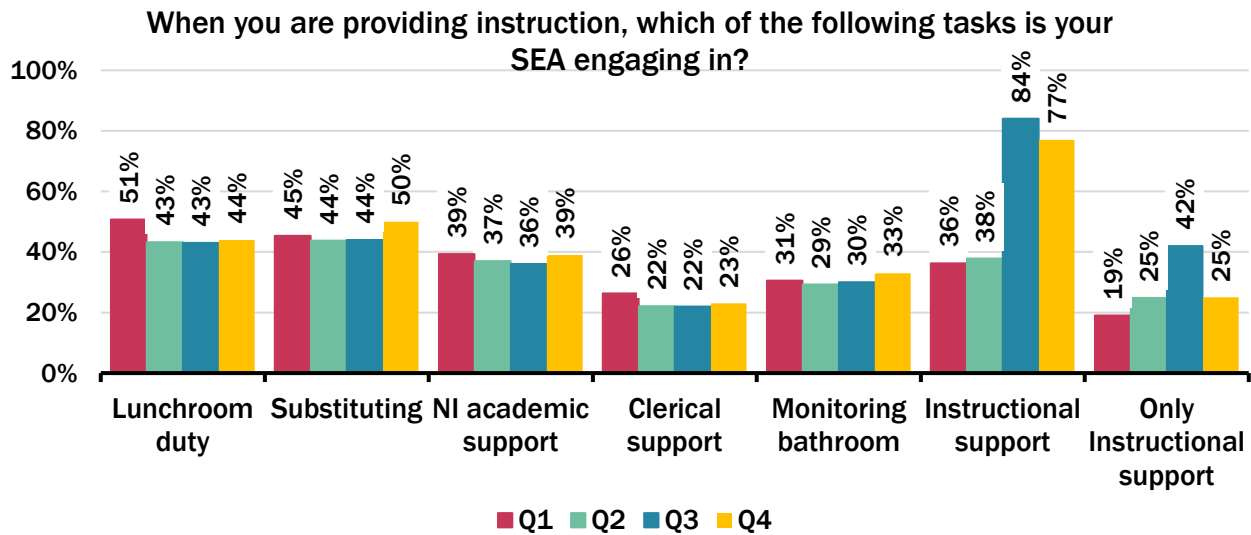


Figure 8.

Figure 9 shows the breakdown of who assigns these tasks to their SEAs from the teachers' perspective. NI academic support and creating bulletin boards seem to be tasks that staff in many roles are assigning to SEAs, while lunchroom duty, substituting for other classrooms, and transportation duty seem to be given out by the principal or school administration. Clerical support, record keeping, and monitoring bathroom breaks and hallways are tasks often assigned by the teacher.



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Who assigns these tasks to the SEAs in your school?

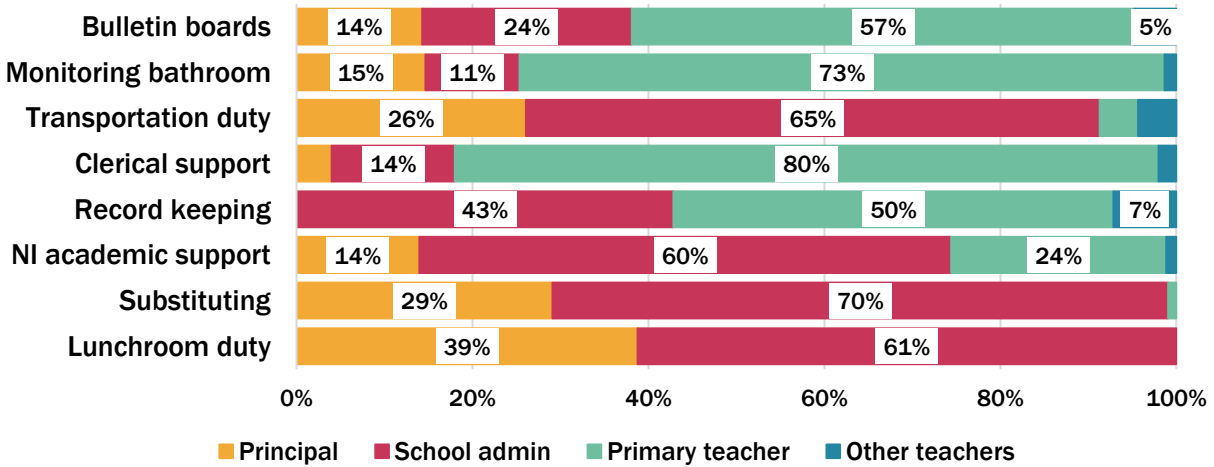


Figure 9.

SEA Responses Overview

SEAs were asked how many years (including the current year) they have been an educational assistant; the median answer was 1 year and the average was 5 years. Twenty-three percent (23%) indicated that they have a paraprofessional certification. Over half (56%) have been in the same classroom the entire time they have been employed as a SEA. When asked what subjects they provide support for, 94% reported helping with ELA and 78% reported helping with math. Table 2 shows how SEAs reported helping with these subjects over the entire year by quarters. Nearly 40% of SEAs surveyed are assigned to Kindergarten; 31% are assigned to second-grade classrooms, and 31% are in first-grade classrooms. Figure 10 shows how many hours SEAs provide instructional support to students. Forty-seven percent (47%) of SEAs indicated that they spend at least 5 hours of their day giving instructional support to students.



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Table 2.

Subjects SEAs Help Provide Instructional Support				
Subject	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
ELA	80%	92%	93%	94%
Math	69%	75%	81%	78%
Social Studies/History	28%	29%	32%	32%
Science	27%	29%	32%	31%
Non-core subjects	16%	12%	12%	13%

How many hours of your day are spent providing instructional support to students?

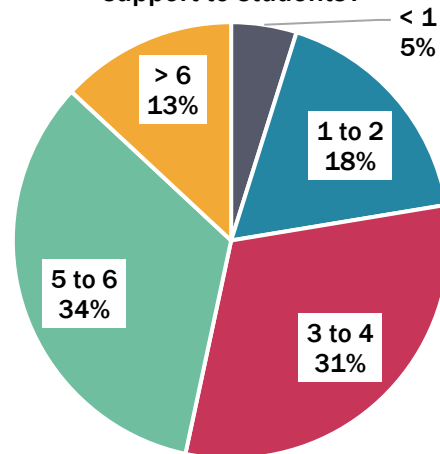


Figure 10.

Figure 11 displays how SEAs break up their time throughout their average day. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of SEAs reported that they spend two hours or less on NI tasks during an average day. Seventy-one percent of SEAs report that they help with whole group instruction at least one hour or more on an average day and 77% report the same for small groups.

On an average day, how much of your time is spent on the following tasks?

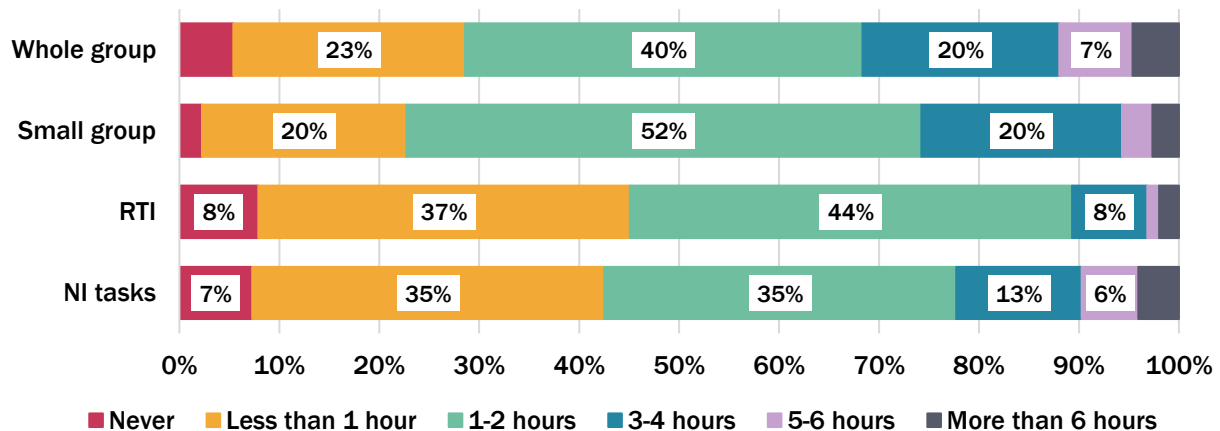


Figure 11.

NI Tasks

Figure 12 shows what SEAs reported they are doing when their classroom teacher is providing instruction, comparing each quarter. SEAs indicated that their NI tasks most often include monitoring



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the lunchroom, substituting for other classrooms, giving NI academic support such as helping with testing or monitoring computers, and monitoring bathroom breaks or hallways. Providing instructional support decreased by three percentage points from Q3 to Q4 but had risen by 52 percentage points between Q2 and Q3. This figure shows all who chose providing instructional support including those who chose other tasks. The indicator of those who only chose instructional support also went up notably by 21 percentage points from Q2 to Q3 but declined nearly to the Q2 level at 20% in Q4.

When their classroom teachers are providing instruction, which of the following tasks are being done by SEAs?

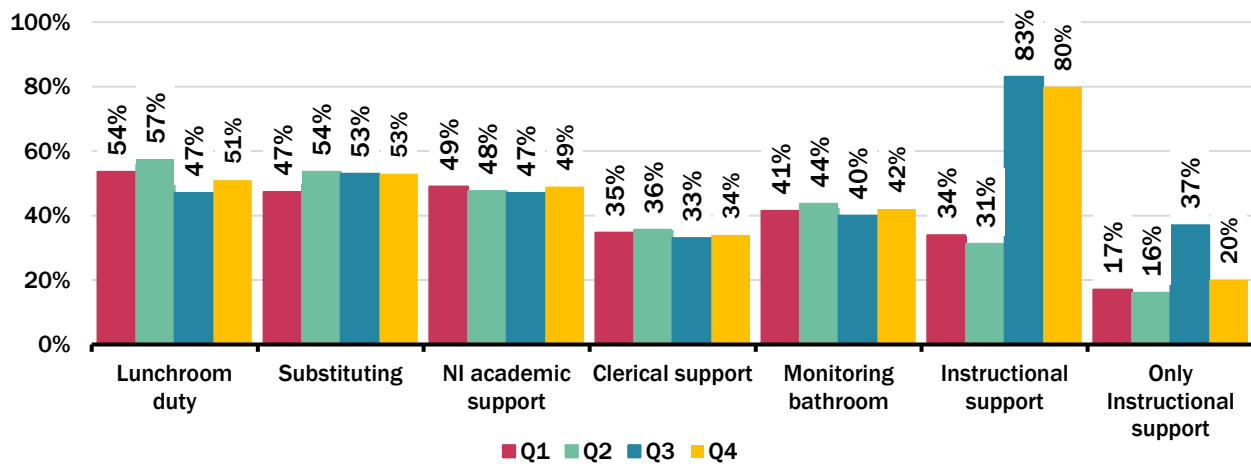


Figure 12.

SEAs reported that most often their principal or school administration ask them to monitor lunchrooms, substitute classes, and help with transportation duty, whereas their teacher is the one who mostly assigns tasks such as record keeping, clerical support, and monitoring the bathroom. The breakdown of these assignments is shown in Figure 13.



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Who assigns these tasks to the SEAs in your school?

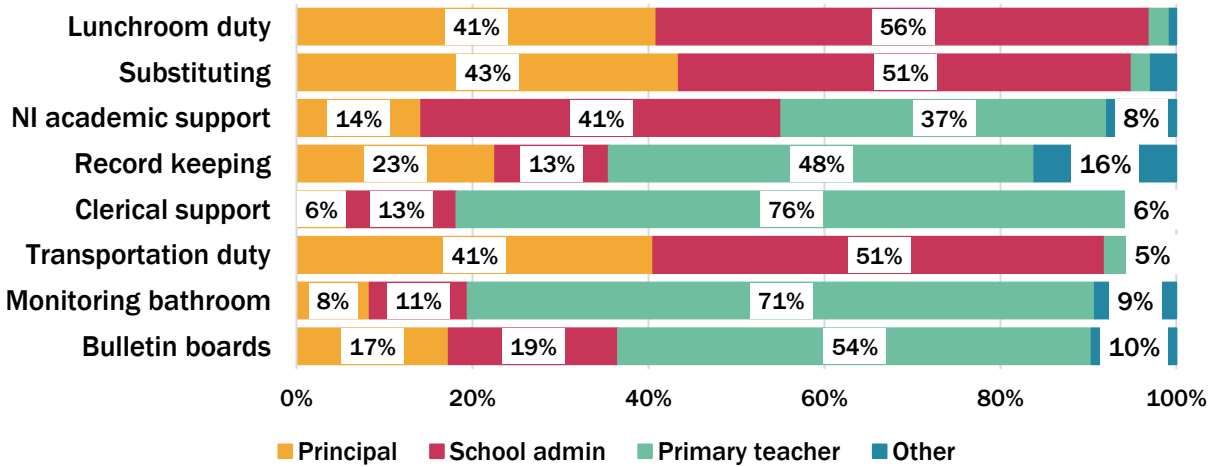


Figure 13.

Figure 14 shows the comparison of NI tasks that SEAs do, based on what SEAs, teachers, and principals reported for Q3. SEAs and teachers reported at a much higher rate that SEAs do NI tasks when their primary teacher is giving instruction. This could be because principals are considering the whole of their school, while teachers and SEAs are reporting on their own experience in the classroom. Of note, 52% of principals reported that their SEAs only help with instructional support, while 20% of SEAs and 25% of teachers reported the same. SEAs and teachers still report higher rates of NI tasks being done than principals do. All roles reported less than the previous quarter that providing instructional support was part of this time when teachers are giving instruction.



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When their classroom teachers are providing instruction, which of the following NI tasks are being done by SEAs?

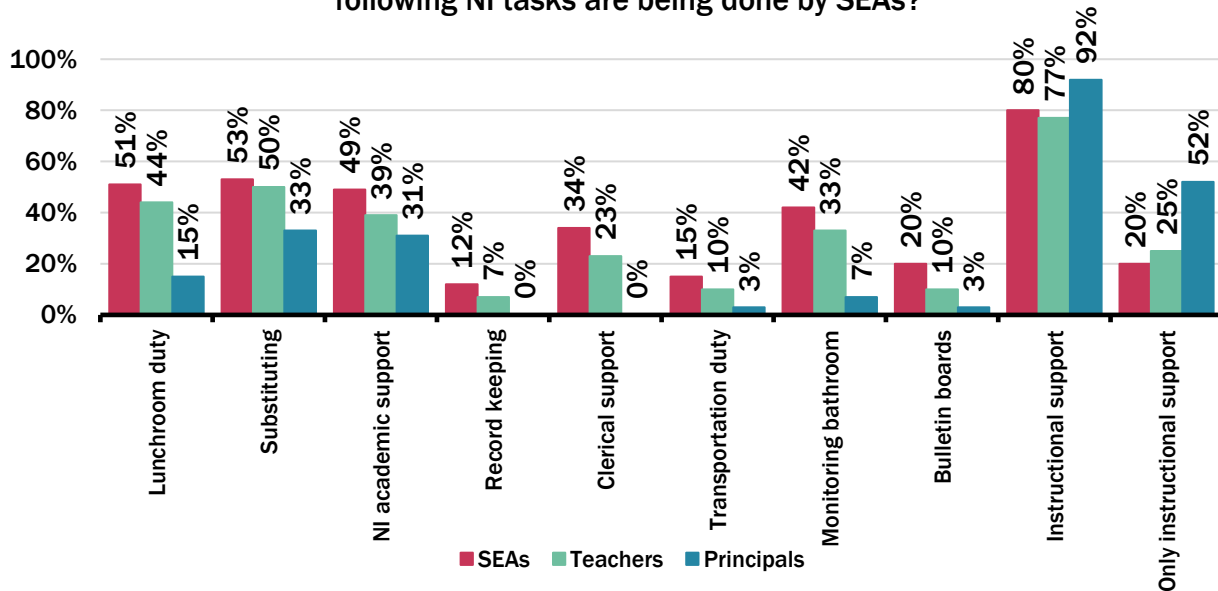


Figure 14.

Q4 Open-Ended Responses

At the end of each surveys, there were two open-ended questions; one asked what is going especially well in the SEA program and the other asked what is particularly challenging about the SEA program.

Barriers/Areas of Improvement

The following are responses from principals, teachers, and SEAs about things that are challenging in this program. For principals, a common theme was that there was turnover in the position, that it was difficult to fill the position with qualified applicants and to keep SEAs once the positions were filled, as discussed in the turnover section of the principal portion of this report. Another common theme was that principals feel as though they are put in a difficult position; wanting to respect the role and keep SEAs in their assigned classroom to help facilitate support groups and more one-on-one instruction, but also needing people to cover full classrooms without having the substitute coverage needed. Several principals stated that they do not have enough SEAs for Kindergarten to second grade teachers to each have their own. Some wished to have SEAs in all classrooms, as they have been the benefits of having them in the lower grades.

Some teachers mentioned that they are having to share their SEA with one or more teachers. These teachers noted that sometimes they only get an hour every few days with an SEA. The most common frustration expressed was that SEAs get pulled from their classrooms randomly throughout the day. This makes it extremely difficult for teachers to plan their lessons, not knowing if they will have small groups or the extra help during whole group instruction.

The most common complaint among SEAs was inconsistency with their schedule. SEAs said that they often do not know when they will get asked to do a task outside of their classroom. Like



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teachers' complaints, this causes issues within the classroom and is often outside of the scope of the intended job description of an SEA.

Principal responses:

- 46% of the open-ended responses discussed being short-staffed, having to use SEAs as subs, not having enough SEAs, or having attendance/turnover issues with SEAs.
- 29% of the open-ended responses discussed SEAs being under-trained, wanting extra PD for their SEAs, or that their SEAs are not taking the initiative that the principals believe they should.
- "Many SEAs had not worked in a school before, so having to train so many at one time on the academic needs vs what they thought they would be doing. Although, monthly support was available, it takes additional time to include them in PLCs to help support the unique needs of each grade level and school."
- "Consistency of their support is not always there due to covering classes due to having no subs."
- "SEAs starting in the middle of the year at various times. The training is not adequate as they have missed so much information/strategies from the summer and fall trainings. Next year, the trainings need to be in-person and trainings should be provided for teachers in grade K-2 to fully understand the scope of the work for SEAs."
- "The challenging aspect for me currently is that I do not have enough SEA's to have a 1 to 1 correspondence in each K-2 classroom."

Teacher responses:

- 58% of the open-ended responses were about how SEAs get pulled out of their primary classroom, often without prior notice from school administration, or having to share an SEA with one or more teachers/not having enough SEAs at their school.
- 27% of teachers described issues with SEAs being undertrained, having little initiative or difficult to work with in the classroom or being undertrained themselves in understanding what the role of an SEA is. This latter issue could be with teacher being trained one thing, but SEAs being pulled or having to do tasks that seem outside of their initial job description.
- "The lack of communication on the part of admin when it comes to when they want to use them for whatever reason."
- "She is rarely in my classroom. She is always having to fill in as a substitute. If not, she is the one SEA for all of the first grade. She is stretched very thin and is not doing the job designated from the district."
- "My SEA has to cover ALL lunches which is a 2 1/2 hour block of time so she is not available to me during Intervention. I understand the SEAs need to help out during lunch but I feel they should take shifts so they are not in the cafeteria for 2 1/2 hours a day."
- "A challenging aspect is that she is scheduled to come to my class when my students are in support class."
- "Lack of the SEA's teaching reading knowledge; feels like I have to plan extra for my SEA; lack of the SEA's desire to do the role."



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SEA responses:

- 42% of SEA open-ended responses mentioned being pulled out of their classroom to do other tasks, 45% of those comments specifically mentioned substituting for other classes and 23% cited having to do lunchroom duty.
- 6% of SEAs discussed having to assist in multiple classrooms, rather than being an assistant in just one classroom.
- 26% of SEA comments noted that student academic needs and behavior were a challenging aspect of the job.
- 13% of SEA remarks stated frustration with their contract—having to work over District breaks or feeling like they are not being compensated fairly for their work.
- “When [the] SEA has to fulfill other duties & obligations such as cafeteria monitoring, subbing, & any other duties not relative to our role as a SEA, is very challenging. Also, trying to adapt to the 12 month work schedule with very few breaks, and all the trainings and assignments online are a bit too much.”
- “‘Other duties as assigned’ can sometimes turn into doing the work of another position. I get paid for working one position, but sometimes end up doing the work of 2 or more.”
- “We currently support 2 homerooms, bouncing back and forth between them. I understand that this is because we have more teachers than assistants; however, because we have to split our time, our schedule only has us in a classroom for about 90 minutes each day. I think we would be able to provide more tangible support if we were in one class.”

Positive Aspects

The following are responses from principals, teachers and SEAs about things that are going well in this program.

Principal responses:

- “They are very consistent and work just as hard as the classroom teachers.”
- “Collaborations, Student Relationships, Knowledge, Teacher and School Support.”
- “If fully staffed and assigned to classrooms at the start of the year, this position can be a game changer. SEAs are equipped to serve our students and many are ready for the next level.”
- “The SEAs are a critical part of the classroom instruction. They assist the students with building knowledge and help the teachers work in a more intentional manner.”
- “Smaller class sizes have led to more students being provided with improved small group instruction.”

Teacher responses:

- “[My SEA] has done amazing work supporting my students that were in danger of not earning all their points for 3GC. These students have made their points!!”
- “The SEA in my room helps me with small group instruction, progress monitoring and one on one sessions which is going extremely well.”
- “She is always ready to take on any task and does it with 100%. She has built a great relationship with the students and me and she is very well respected. She also a positive attitude everyday.”



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- “Working with the SEA, has been rewarding. There were tremendous achievement in student’s learning. The SEA was well aware of deficiencies students had and readily addressed those deficiencies until the student mastered it.”
- “I love how she can support students while I support other students at the same time. I love how she makes teaching easier for me by making sure students are on task.”

SEA responses:

- “I love working with students who need help in small group. That hour of small instruction made a ton of a difference.”
- “The role of SEAs in my school are definitely needed and appreciative by the teachers and students. We all work together as a team to make sure the students achieve.”
- “I enjoy working with the students and I have seen a progress in their learning since I have been working with them.”
- “My help in the classroom as an SEA has really been helpful in educating the whole classroom, specializing on the Tier II and III students. The teacher is able to focus on the faster learning students while keeping their learning moving.”

2021-2022 SEA Program Overview

The 2021–22 school year was the first year for Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) to implement a Specialized Educational Assistant program for all Kindergarten through second grade classrooms at District-managed schools. This allowed for a lower student to adult ratio in these grades that is vital for ensuring literacy and math skills, specifically to combat learning loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Over the year, the District maintained an average of 605 SEAs at 87 District-managed elementary/K–8 schools. Over the course of the four quarter surveys, a few themes remained constant.

- Hiring/turnover in SEA, substitute, and teacher roles made the implementation of this position more difficult.
- SEAs were often used outside of their primary classroom to cover other classrooms or cafeteria duty.
- When teachers report having SEAs in the classroom when instruction occurs, they also report being extremely happy with the SEA program.

Hiring/Turnover

While substitute and teacher turnover data were not available for this report, principals were asked about turnover in the SEA position. The percentage of principals who reported turnover increased each quarter. Figure 15 below shows that the percentage of principals reporting turnover increased 25 percentage points over the course of the year. The biggest jump was from Q2 to Q3, with a 22-percentage point increase.



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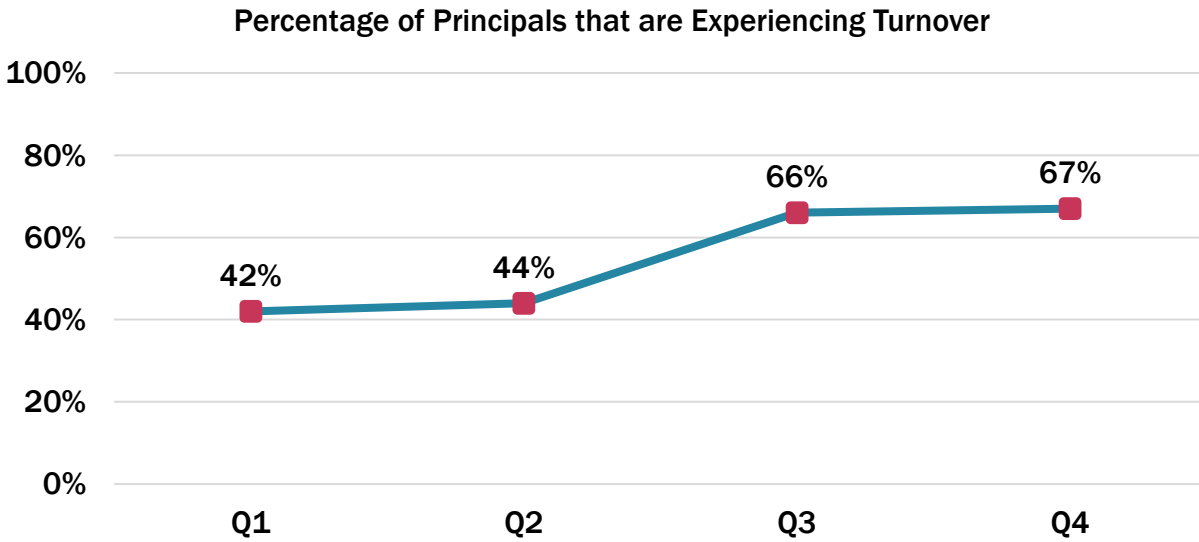


Figure 15.

Similarly, the number of SEAs that the survey was sent to decreased over the four quarters. The first quarter survey was sent to 615 SEAs and by the last quarter it was sent to 572. While this is not a huge decrease, of the 615 SEAs that were included in Q1, 433 were retained for Q4, meaning the retention rate for the role over the course of the year was 70%. Figure 16 shows the number of SEAs by quarter, along with the number of SEAs that started in each quarter and the number of SEAs that left the job by quarter. Q2 showed the most turnover but because hiring was slightly higher, there were actually more SEAs that quarter compared to all the others. Q3 showed the largest decrease in SEAs which is consistent with what principals noted in their survey responses.



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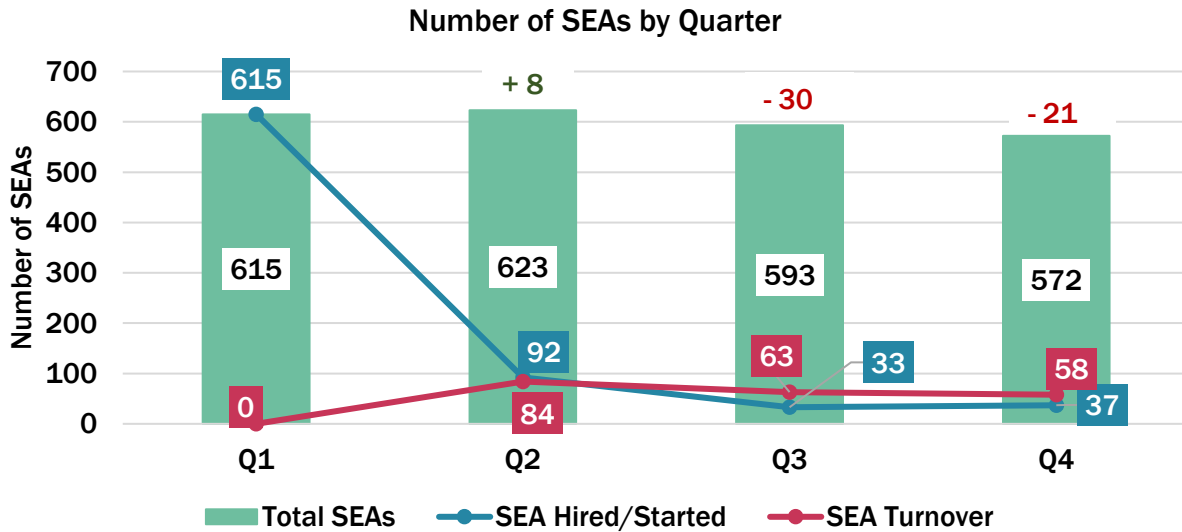


Figure 16.

SEAs Outside the Classroom

As documented in previous reports, SEAs are often pulled out of the classroom to perform other tasks, such as substituting for other classrooms or monitoring the lunchroom. Teacher and SEA surveys reported higher instances of this than principal surveys. Principals more often reported that SEAs were providing instructional support when teachers were giving instruction. A better indicator of SEAs providing only instructional support is found when all three roles at a school only selected instructional support for that particular question. Figure 17 shows the number of schools that had all three roles agree that SEAs were only giving instructional support when their primary teacher was giving instruction. Figure 17 is broken down by how many quarters this occurred for each school. A dozen schools showed agreement across all three roles for at least one quarter (14%). Only four schools had this agreement over three of the four quarters.¹ Because many schools suffered from not having a consistent pool of substitutes available and the continuation of the pandemic causing teacher and staff absences, SEAs often had to fill other school needs outside of instructional support. Many schools, according to surveys, felt pressure to use SEAs for these other tasks, rather than having them in their primary classroom. It is something to be celebrated that this many schools were able to have agreement among roles for even a quarter of the year.

¹ Because participation in the surveys was voluntary, it could be that more schools would have had this agreement, but one of the roles did not respond.



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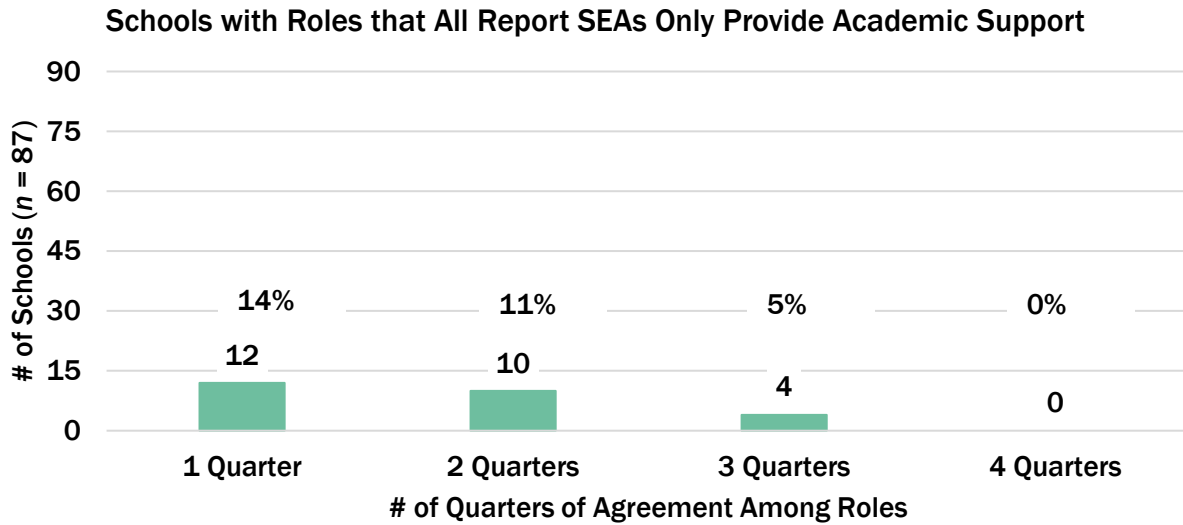


Figure 17.

Teachers Happiness with Program

Because many teachers indicated that their SEA often had to leave their classroom to perform other tasks, it was difficult to gauge if teachers found the program successful. However, there was a small group of teachers who seemed extremely happy with their SEAs. This group indicated that their SEA only provided instructional support when they (teachers) were giving instruction. For this report, these teachers will be called the Only Instructional Support group (OIS). Looking at the OIS group among each quarter showed promising anecdotal evidence. At the end of each survey, teachers were asked to write responses to the following prompts, “Please share any comments you have about aspects of the SEA role that are going especially well” and “Please share any comments you have about aspects of the SEA role that are particularly challenging.” While every response to these questions were analyzed quarterly, the OIS group’s responses will be analyzed for this portion. Figure 18 shows how this sample was pared down.



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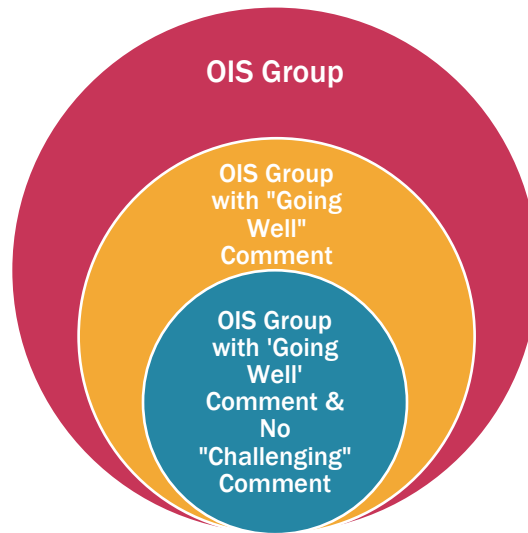


Figure 18.

Table 3 shows the total number of teachers in the OIS group in each quarter. The next row shows the number of teachers in the OIS group that left a comment for the prompt about what was going well with the SEA program. And the next row shows the number of teachers who were among this group who left a ‘going well’ comment and did not leave a comment for the ‘challenging’ prompt. For example, in quarter 1, there were 63 teachers who indicated that their SEA only provides instructional support while they are teaching. Of those 63 teachers, 48 of them (76%) left a positive comment about what is going well in the SEA program in their classroom. Among these 48 teachers, 31 of them (65% of this smaller group; 49% of total OIS group) did not include a comment about things that are challenging.

Table 3.

Teachers in OIS Group by Quarter				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Total # of OIS	63	48	61	62
# of ‘Going Well’ Comments	48	36	40	43
# of No ‘Challenging’ Comments	31	29	33	30
% of No ‘Challenging’ Comments of Total OIS	49%	60%	54%	48%

This alone may not seem impressive or concrete, but the tone of the comments themselves show an excitement for the classroom and an overall positive experience. The OIS group consistently bragged on their SEAs, usually by name, (e.g., Mrs. Johnson is an amazing addition to my classroom! She is great with the kids, and it is so helpful to have her leading small groups!!). Over the quarters, the responses often got more detailed. In quarter one, most teachers indicated that they were excited to have the extra help, but in later quarters, the responses had multiple sentences of how their specific SEA was an asset to their classroom.



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The second portion of this metric is looking at the other open-ended response about what is challenging in the program. Nearly half or over half (depending on the quarter) of the OIS group had no comments to share for what was challenging. Even more common than leaving the comment box blank was for these teachers to use that space to brag even more about their SEA or explain that nothing was challenging about the program, (e.g., “everything is going great!”, “I love having an SEA!!”, or “Nothing challenging at the moment!”).