



How Technology Transforms K-12 Workforce Management

Modern Solutions Save Time & Reduce Wasteful Spending

Executive Summary

Technology has become deeply embedded in K-12 education as teachers increasingly use a wide range of websites and educational apps to supplement instruction. But behind the scenes, schools' back-office operations are less state of the art. Many schools continue to rely on the same time-consuming and inaccurate manual processes that they've used for the last hundred years to track time and attendance, leave and substitutes. Or they may combine automated time tracking for standard contracted hours with manual systems for supplemental overtime tasks.

These manual processes leave school districts open to litigation and regulatory penalties while increasing costs since schools end up paying wages for time that was not worked or at higher rates than necessary. Payroll operations are also less efficient than they could be since payroll must telephone or email administrators to resolve timecard discrepancies. These costs and inefficiencies leave cash-strapped districts with fewer resources to devote to their primary mission—serving students.

This article details the current state of workforce management in K-12 schools and how modern workforce management software can help schools improve compliance, enhance efficiency and reduce costs—while delivering a high-quality experience to teachers, staff and administrators alike. Better still, because many of these solutions are now available in the cloud, they eliminate the barriers to entry that prevent smaller districts from implementing on-premises systems, such as the need to purchase, configure and maintain costly hardware and software.

The Current State of Workforce Management in K-12 Schools

Many K-12 schools today rely on antiquated processes for time and attendance, leave tracking and substitute management. Up to half of the schools we encounter use paper-based timecards on the honor system. For example, one school district with more than 10,000 employees uses green paper to designate timesheets, yellow for supplemental tasks and pink for leave requests. A courier collects these timesheets every week and brings them to the central office, which separates them by color for processing and reconciliation. Administrators then key the data into the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that handles payroll.

When it comes to tracking leave, teachers and staff often email their administrators to request time off. Many districts have no automated way to track how much time staff has accrued or taken, nor is there a digital method for characterizing the type of leave requested or taken, whether it's comp time, sick leave, vacation time, or FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act) leave.

When schools have to find substitute teacher, many rely on a campus secretary or administrator to take a list of subs, call them on the phone and leave voice mail messages until they can find someone to cover the opening. Not only is the process time consuming and inefficient, the administrator rarely has visibility into who is the best substitute for each class. These deficiencies are particularly problematic for districts with large numbers of teacher vacancies and rely heavily on substitutes to fill the gaps. Between antiquated, time-consuming processes for leave and time tracking or inefficient and inferior substitute management, modern workforce management tools can help administrators optimize their workforce and help employees focus on their primary duties.



Manual Processes Lead to Challenges

Manual, inefficient processes limit school districts' ability to comply with regulatory demands, lead to inaccuracies and highlight a lack of transparency that unnecessarily increases payroll costs.

Regulatory Compliance

Manual processes make it difficult to comply with regulatory demands, including the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Among its requirements, the FLSA legislates overtime pay when someone works more than 40 hours in a work week. The ACA requires employers to track employee hours and give anyone working 30 or more hours per week full-time benefits. And the FMLA allows employees to take up to 12 work weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period to care for a new child, care for a seriously ill family member, or recover from a serious illness. To be eligible for FMLA leave, an employee must have worked for an employer with at least 50 employees for at least 1,250 hours over the previous 12 months.

When schools do not accurately track, review and approve hours worked, as well as require employees to sign off on their hours, they can be subject to litigation and penalties for violations of FLSA, ACA or FMLA.

Inaccuracies

When school districts use paper timesheets and track leave manually, the information they collect may be inaccurate, leading to unnecessary payroll costs.

The following are some scenarios of how inaccuracies can increase costs.

- If after initially submitting a paper timesheet, an employee comes back with a different handwritten timesheet that contests the original, a judge will likely side with the employee and force the school to pay for the revised hours.
- Many staff and teachers are paid different rates for different types of supplemental tasks. A teacher receiving a salary might be paid one overtime rate for tutoring and another for coaching. Manual systems make it difficult to accurately account for hours paid at different pay rates. When schools can't track these different types of overtime properly, they often simply pay the highest rate to avoid litigation and penalties.
- When teachers and other staff are on contract, they may be paid a steady salary throughout the year, even when they are on summer break, as long as they fulfill the hours specified in their contract. That said, schools must accurately track hours worked to ensure teachers are fulfilling their contract. If their tracking is inaccurate, they end up paying for the full contracted amount regardless of whether teachers fulfilled their contracted hours.

Lack of visibility

Because paper timecards limit visibility, schools find themselves subject to unnecessary expenses and employees may face unpleasant surprises when their paychecks arrive.

For example, manual time tracking limits administrators' ability to see when staff is accruing unplanned overtime, which increases costs and can have regulatory implications.

Schools can also be on the hook for overpayments for paid time off. When teachers or staff onboard at the beginning of the year, they get a specified amount of vacation time, usually two to three weeks. If an employee takes that leave early in the year, then leaves the school after having worked just a few months, the district cannot recoup the costs. Schools with paper-based leave tracking systems do not have visibility into when staff request unaccrued leave and therefore cannot prevent them from taking that leave.

At the same time, paper timecards limit employee's visibility into how they will be paid for supplemental work and overtime, or into whether their manager changed their total hours worked. This lack of visibility can leave them surprised about their paychecks and lead to potential litigation.

Inefficient Payroll Workflows

Using manual processes is time consuming, cumbersome and error prone. For example, when the central payroll department gets paper timesheets and has a question, they must call or email the on-campus administrator, who then tracks down the employee, asks for the correct information, and goes back to the district office to reconcile the issue. This occurs every time a payroll question arises and can slow down the entire payroll process.

Existing Workforce Management Solutions Are Often Inadequate

While many schools continue to use manual workforce management processes, some have made the transition to automated time and attendance, leave tracking and substitute management systems. But some of these solutions leave gaps that expose districts to risks and costs. Many automated time keeping solutions do not automate all of a school's timekeeping activities. Instead, they use a combination of automated timekeeping for clocking workers in and out of contracted activities, and paper timesheets—with all of their inadequacies—to record extra duty time that involves supplemental pay.

Additionally, some solutions may require high startup costs if they are deployed on-premises with a client/server setup, making them unrealistic for smaller districts. On-premises solutions often involve expensive hardware, software licenses and an IT staff to install, manage, update and maintain.



The Future of Workforce Management for K-12

While many workforce management processes are manual, and existing workforce management solutions leave gaps, modern solutions have begun to emerge that provide flexible, automated tracking for all standard and supplemental hours, accurate accrual and absence management, and simplified substitute management. These solutions include capabilities that simplify the user experience for employees, managers and payroll alike—all at a price point that's affordable for even the smallest district because they are available in the cloud.

Automated Time and Attendance

State-of-the-art workforce management solutions now provide sophisticated capabilities that make it easy to accurately monitor time worked, which helps ensure regulatory compliance, transparency and efficiency. These solutions contract hours for a diverse K-12 workforce that includes classified employees, paraprofessional employees, part-time employees and substitutes and have the flexibility to manage both contracted time and supplemental activities. Specifically, these solutions track:

- **Contracted hours vs. accrual hours** and adjust pay rates accordingly.
- **Supplemental pay** for duties such as tutoring, professional development, before/after school programs, field trips and much more.
- **Split hours**, allowing employees to redistribute hours work between multiple cost codes, such as project, task and work order.
- **Overtime/comp time**, enabling schools to choose how to compensate employees for extra hours, whether by overtime or comp time and providing the flexibility to apply different comp time or overtime models such as 1.5x, 2x, holidays, forced overtime and more.
- **Shift differentials**. Managers can modify employee rates of pay for different shifts, for example, to accommodate day shifts, overnight and weekends.
- **Weighted/blended overtime**. When hourly rates are different for different supplemental tasks, the system can blend the rates proportionally into a single hourly rate.

While tracking various types of hours, these solutions can also require an employee attestation statement in which employees verify that hours are a 100% accurate representation of the time worked. They then keep historical records of hours and rates in an objective manner to protect districts from employee litigation. Audit logs store each action that affects an employee timesheet to mitigate any hint of impropriety when managing employee hours and wages.

Reporting capabilities allow administrators to monitor, manage and control employee adherence to time and attendance and overtime policies, and demonstrate compliance with FLSA, ACA and FMLA demands.

Accurate time tracking means schools only pay for hours actually worked at the proper rate. They no longer pay for undocumented hours or for hours at higher rates than necessary to avoid the appearance of impropriety. By accurately tracking time worked in real time, admins can also proactively control unnecessary or unapproved time.

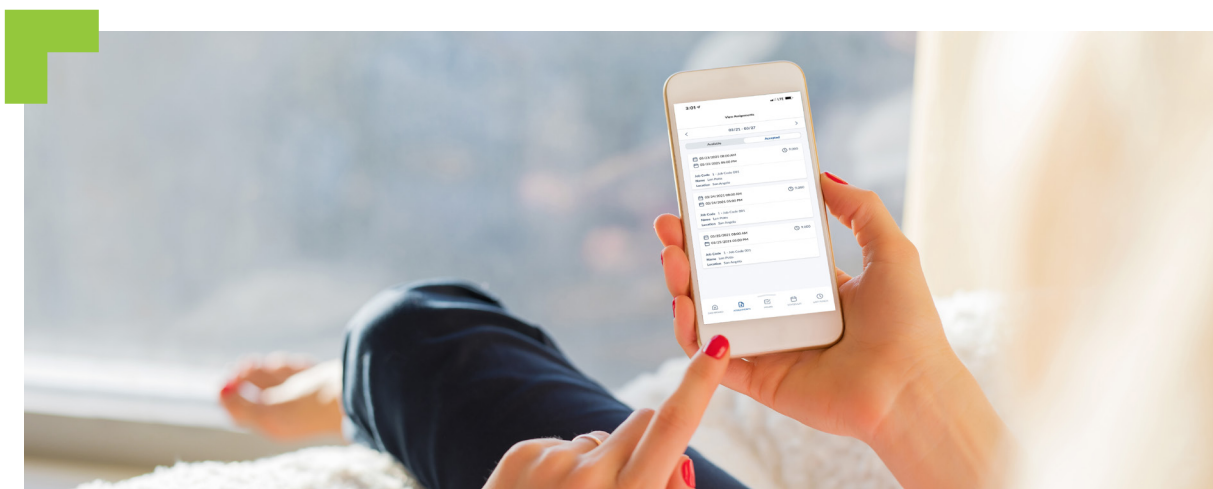
And finally, workforce management solutions enable districts to address any questions or issues with hours proactively. Formal workflows flag any issues with employee time or pay rates so that managers or administrators can address them before they get to payroll. As exceptions occur, they are dealt with in real time. For example, an alert is sent if the employee forgets to clock in or out on any given day. The administrator can track down the employee and resolve the issue immediately, rather than requiring back and forth with payroll.

Accurate Accrual and Absence Management

While paper-based processes leave schools open to negative leave balances, an automated workforce management system can easily track accruals and include rules that prevent negative accrual balances, reducing costs. These systems can automatically route time off requests to managers for approval before granting the leave request, ensuring policies are correctly followed. Workforce management also makes it simple for employees to accurately categorize time off for things like vacation time, sick leave, personal time, comp time, holidays, jury duty, FMLA and more.

Simplified Substitute Management

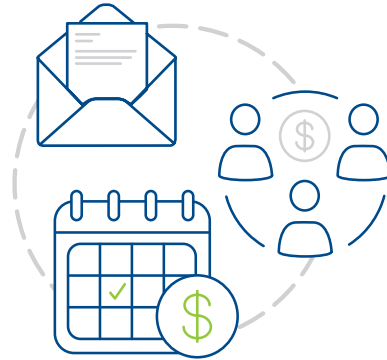
Rather than requiring an old-fashioned phone tree to line up substitutes, modern workforce management solutions can automate the process. When a teacher requests time off, the system can automatically send out requests to preferred substitutes based on factors such as qualifications or locations. Subs have the option to specify availability and accept or reject the assignment online from their mobile device. Schools can run detailed reports on subs for tracking and budgeting. Workforce management systems can even track which subs are on a campus at a given time and who they are working for, which is critical in the event of a campus lockdown or emergency.



Ensuring a Good Employee Experience

Of course, teachers and staff won't be enthusiastic about using a system that's difficult to use. Self-service features make it easy for teachers and staff to keep an eye on their hours, check vacation time accruals, plan time off and manage substitutions. With self-service features, employees can:

- Review and approve timesheets
- View messages from managers
- See schedule and schedule changes
- Change withholding status or download their own historical records
- Make time-off requests



Teachers PTO requests can be connected to the workforce management system to eliminate double entry. When entering PTO, the workforce management solution prompts staff to report the correct PTO designations (such as sick leave vs. personal time). The system can also warn against insufficient balances and empower teachers to plan their own time.

Support for mobile devices frees employees from the constraints of a traditional desktop, kiosk or other device. While teachers and staff gain the freedom to enter time using a mobile device, the workforce management system allows administrators to control where and when employees are permitted to access the system. In one example, a school employee was clocking in at the school his children attended, then driving to the campus where he worked a half an hour away. By controlling mobile login, the school could ensure that the employee logged in only at his own school to maintain accurate hours.

Enabling Administrators to Become More Strategic

In a recent report about the future of workforce management, analyst firm Gartner says modern workforce management solutions can automate much of the administrator's managerial functions to allow them to manage the workforce more strategically and focus on more important priorities.

No longer do managers need to spend hours looking up information about leave or hours worked on paper timecards or spreadsheets. Dashboards give administrators an at-a-glance view so they can instantly review, edit and approve employee timesheets and exceptions. They can also receive reminders for important tasks, such as pending timesheet approvals, time-off requests, etc. Administrators can also see who is in, out, on leave or verify schedule adherence.

Schools can also set up rules, policies and alerts that automatically notify administrators of policy breaches such as missed punches, tardiness, absences, and overtime/comp time. For example, alerts can warn managers if staff are approaching or have exceeded overtime to help support regulatory compliance. This also enables administrators to take action to reduce overtime or comp time. These alerts enable administrators to manage by exception rather than constantly monitor the system.

Administrators can access the manager dashboard, review/approve timesheets, analyze employee status and exchange messages with employees via a web browser or a mobile app. This gives them real-time remote capabilities whenever and wherever they need them.

Streamlining Payroll and HR Workflows

Not only do modern workforce management solutions improve efficiency for time, leave and substitute tracking processes, they can also streamline workflows that intersect with HR and payroll departments. By providing integrations with ERPs, human resources information systems and substitute management systems, workforce management solutions eliminate the need for duplicate data entry. Such integrated solutions can automatically pull time and attendance information out of the workforce management system and import it into payroll to improve accuracy and save time. HR departments can also create schedules, authorize clock in/out locations and specify supervisors who can approve hours. That information automatically flows into the workforce management system.

Cloud Model Makes Workforce Management Solutions Accessible to More Districts

One reason many schools currently have not installed a workforce management system is the lack of an IT department and funding for on-premises solutions. Modern, cloud-based workforce management solutions enable schools and districts to take advantage of the full slate of workforce management capabilities on a pay-as-you-go basis. With the cloud model, the service provider installs, manages and maintains the necessary hardware and software, monitors for availability 24/7, updates software automatically, and manages security and business continuity. Industry leaders anticipate that almost all vendors will migrate to a cloud-native architecture by 2027.

Conclusion

K-12 schools that seek to provide the best possible services to their students need automation not only in the classroom, but behind the scenes as well. With a modern workforce management solution, schools can accurately track time and attendance for contracted hours, supplemental hours and leave, as well as better manage substitutes. The result is greater regulatory compliance, lower costs and streamlined payroll and HR processes. In addition, self-service and mobile capabilities make these solutions easy for staff to use, and management by exception helps administrators operate more strategically. And because these solutions are available cost effectively in the cloud, they are now available to any district no matter how large or small.



Want to learn more? Let's talk.

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