



Cultivating Change in K-12 Schools

Best-practice recommendations for successful implementation and adoption of workforce management technology.

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Introduction

K-12 school districts across the U.S. strive to excel in the educational community. Because student success is their No. 1 goal, educators are always looking for innovative ideas, approaches, and solutions that will drive better outcomes. Many districts are investing in technology — from smart boards to tablets to apps — to support differentiated instruction and create an engaging classroom experience. Research indicates that these investments are yielding positive results. According to a report from the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), technology can produce significant gains in student achievement and increase engagement when implemented properly.¹

As demand for classroom technology grows, however, administrative systems often get left behind. Tight K-12 budgets force districts to be selective about their technology investments. A recent study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that most states now provide less support per student for elementary and secondary schools — in some cases, much less — than they did before the Great Recession.² Just as classroom technology can positively affect student outcomes, administrative systems can have a significant impact on day-to-day operations, resulting in improved efficiency, productivity, and visibility district-wide. Early adopters of K-12 back-office automation solutions are demonstrating that software is a core competency of high-performing school systems now and in the future.³

Workforce management technology helps create time and attendance efficiencies so administrators, teachers, and staff spend less time on administrative processes and more time on academics and programs. These solutions help administrators manage critical workforce issues with tools that simplify extra-duty time, minimize compliance risk, improve visibility into sub time, and enable data-driven decisions. In addition, automated time and absence management drives engagement by helping to ensure that employees are paid accurately and receive time off in accordance with labor laws, union agreements, and district policies.

A roadmap for cultivating change

While workforce management solutions offer measurable benefits, integrating this technology into the daily lives of school district employees can be a significant cultural change. Moving from paper-based processes to an automated system can provoke anxiety, be met with resistance, and throw employees into a tailspin. With effective change management, however, you can speed and ease the transition and dramatically increase the likelihood of success.

This paper presents best-practice recommendations for managing change, driving a smooth implementation, and maximizing user adoption of workforce management technology within your K-12 district.



While moving from paper-based processes to an automated system can provoke anxiety among school district employees, effective change management can help speed and ease the transition.

1. Connect the workforce management technology initiative to your district's mission and goals

Every K-12 school district develops a strategic plan that outlines its mission, vision, and goals for improvement efforts across key areas such as academic excellence and learning, staff development and recruitment, budget and infrastructure, governance, and communications. Because everything the school district does faces intense scrutiny from parents, the school board, and taxpayers, tying your workforce management technology initiative to the strategic plan helps garner community support and sets proper expectations. This alignment also keeps key stakeholders informed about project status, since administrators are required to report on progress against the district's strategic plan.

2. Assemble the right project team from across the district

Once your district makes the decision to purchase workforce management technology, it is critical that everyone feel a sense of responsibility for making the project successful. Your chosen vendor should be there as a partner and a guide throughout the implementation — and beyond — but it is also important to have the right team in place to move the project forward and drive success from within the district.

When assembling your project team, make sure you involve the superintendent, key administrators, and school principals — all of whom can champion the project and lead the charge for change. It is also vital to include representatives from information technology (IT), human resources (HR), finance, and payroll who can bring specific knowledge and experience to the table. By aligning the right resources from the project's outset, your district can more effectively address the requirements of each functional area and avoid unwelcome surprises and setbacks.

3. Promote transparency right from the start

Resistance to change in a school district is common — and it is nothing new. There are numerous reasons why employees have learned to resist change, but a primary reason is ineffective change management. Keeping employees in the dark only creates uncertainty as to what the future holds and fuels skepticism about the reasons for the change. To alleviate these concerns, take steps up front to foster transparency, communicate the goals of the project, and let employees know how the change will affect them.



Some districts have kicked off their project with an informational video designed to educate employees and communicate a consistent message about the workforce management technology initiative. When creating the video, it can be helpful to:

- Include statements from the superintendent and school principals to demonstrate top-level support and sponsorship
- Highlight managers and staff sharing their perspectives on how the technology will change their work lives for the better and free up more time to focus on student success
- Feature finance and HR personnel to explain the who, what, when, where, and why of the project as well as the expected efficiency and engagement benefits

You should also consider building a website using an existing internal platform like SharePoint to provide a trusted source of up-to-date project information. You can leverage the website to:

- Provide access to the informational video
- Post Q&As to address common inquiries and issues
- Share deployment plans so principals, staff, and community members know when the solution is coming to their school
- Share continual updates on the project status to promote transparency and create anticipation

Easy and affordable to build and manage, a project website can go a long way toward calming anxieties, overcoming resistance, and getting the employee population on board.

1. Give employees an opportunity to contribute

Since employees will be using the technology on a daily basis, it is imperative to include them in discussions about deploying a workforce management solution in your unique K-12 environment. By giving employees with various perspectives a voice in the process, you will get a better sense of what to consider — approvals, workflows, policies, reporting, self-service, and more — as you configure and roll out the solution.

Constructive discourse among employees is a critical component of effective change management. Think about creating an online forum, such as a discussion board or social media group, which allows members to communicate, provide feedback, and share ideas. To avoid potential problems, assign a group moderator who will be responsible for keeping the online conversation civil and productive.

Consider rolling out the solution to a model group that includes participants from elementary, middle, and high school levels to test the waters.



Employee contributions to the project can extend beyond input and discussion. As you develop your deployment plan, consider rolling out the solution to a model group that includes participants from elementary, middle, and high school levels to test the waters. This approach will enable you to see how the system works across various areas of the school district — from after-school care programs to middle school clubs to high school athletics — and work out any issues before rolling it out to the rest of the district’s employee population.

1. Make training a top priority

Training is fundamental for driving widespread adoption of your workforce management solution. Every employee needs to understand how to use the system’s features and functions based on his or her role within the school system. The more comfortable and familiar employees are with the technology, the more likely they are to adopt it enthusiastically, use it consistently, and encourage their peers to do the same.

Effective training caters to multiple audiences based on their role and learning style. Principals, managers, and payroll and HR staff will all be using different features — with minimal overlap — so it makes sense to train them separately. You can opt for instructor-led training provided by your vendor or you can involve district personnel as training leaders to bring their coworkers up to speed.

- **Instructor-led training:** Face-to-face training classes engage participants, encourage interaction with the instructor, and provide ample hands-on practice with the software.
- **Peer training:** A principal, paraprofessional, or administrative employee can effectively train peers by bringing a unique understanding of the role and how to integrate technology into a “typical” workday, and by providing reassurance to overcome potential resistance to the system.
- **Train the trainer:** District personnel from the model group can train a team that includes a representative from each school; those representatives can then leverage what they learned, along with associated course materials, to train the rest of the staff at their schools.

2. Provide access to helpful resources

Even if you have conducted comprehensive role-based training, employees may need a little help once they start using the workforce management technology on a daily basis. In addition to comprehensive user guides, most vendors can provide handy step-by-step job aids and brief how-to videos that employees can reference as needed. Keep in mind that some users may be interactive learners and others may prefer to read a manual, so it is always helpful to make a variety of training resources available.

Effective training

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When an employee is trying to adopt new technology, nothing is more frustrating than having a question or getting stuck and not knowing where to turn for help. Consider setting up a project email that routes questions to knowledgeable resources at the district level who can respond to user inquiries. Alternatively, you can establish a phone Q&A hotline that routes calls to district power users so employees can get answers to their questions — and get back to their core responsibilities.

It can be beneficial to put experienced users from the model group on-site at each school and at administrative headquarters during go-live to provide assistance, answer questions, and reassure employees as they start using the system. Ready access to support resources can accelerate user adoption for faster time to value.

1. Keep communicating — even after go-live

Communication is key at all phases of system implementation — planning, requirements definition, configuration, testing, training, model group rollout, and full-scale go-live. Once your system is in full production, however, it doesn’t mean your change management journey is over. Keeping the lines of communication open once the system is up and running is crucial for maximizing user adoption and return on your technology investment.

There are proven steps you can take to share information and encourage continued dialog — even after system go-live — for better results districtwide.

- **Schedule follow-up meetings** with principals, school office staff, and payroll as they begin to close out their first pay period to make sure everything is going as planned
- **Set up routine phone calls** with principals and other school leaders to check whether the new system is running smoothly at their location
- **Conduct webinars** to review answers to common questions or reiterate new policies and procedures reflected in the system
- **Continually update the website** with the latest Q&A and new learning resources and support materials to provide ongoing assistance as employees use the system
- **Hold tips-and-tricks calls** on a biweekly, monthly, or quarterly basis to help employees use system features, functions, and reporting tools more effectively

Keeping the lines of communication open once the system is up and running is **crucial** for maximizing user adoption and return on your technology investment.



Conclusion

Your K-12 district will realize a strong return from your investment in workforce management technology only if employees adopt the system and use it consistently as part of their daily work routine. While changing the way you capture, manage, and report on time and attendance may initially make some employees uncomfortable — or even anxious — you can help ensure a smooth transition and high user adoption through effective change management.

Take the time up front to develop a comprehensive change management plan that addresses project transparency, key stakeholder involvement, employee input, and role-based user training, as well as ongoing communication and support. Give employees a voice in the process and make it easy for them to access the resources they need to become proficient users. In addition, make sure project team leaders have the authority and bandwidth to initiate communications, drive collaboration, and keep momentum going — even once the new system is in place.

Change doesn't have to be difficult. By taking the necessary steps to nurture employees through the rollout of workforce management technology, your K-12 district will reap the benefits of increased efficiency and productivity, while freeing resources to focus on student outcomes.