Columbus City Schools Streamlines Their Payroll Management Systems for Extra Duty Coverage

Columbus City Schools

- The largest district in the state of Ohio
- **40,000+** students
- **113** schools
- **9,000** employees

Problem: The Payroll department at Columbus City Schools (CCS) faced rising numbers of classroom reassignments ("extra duty" coverage) and the increasing amount of time required to process them.

Solution: Red Rover's absence management and time tracking systems streamlined the process for CCS, dramatically reducing the number of hours required to manage reassignments.

During the 2021–2022 school year, Elizabeth Turley, the former administrator for the payroll department of Ohio's Columbus City Schools, was faced with a task that was rapidly becoming unmanageable: handling the district's increasing volume of staff reassignments. Also referred to as "extra duty" coverage, reassignment occurs when a teacher is called upon to temporarily cover the classroom of another teacher who is absent.

"Ideally, we would have a substitute teacher fill an absent teacher's spot," said Turley. "But we have both a substitute shortage and a teacher shortage, which has drastically impacted how many reassignments we have to process each payroll."

"We're in a time, post-COVID, when you simply can't come to work when you're sick," she added. This reality, of course, further spiked the number of reassignments that became necessary for this large urban district, which serves more than 40,000 students across 113 schools.

"We can have up to 17 teachers who are covering extra classrooms for the day," said Turley. "It really depends on the teacher and how many students they feel comfortable taking for that period of time. We currently process, on average, 2,000 reassignments every two weeks. This is higher than it has been in the past."

Reassignment isn't always ideal, but it's necessary. There may be differences in teaching styles that can affect student engagement and learning outcomes, and juggling multiple classrooms and larger groups of students can be challenging for teachers who are reassigned. However, reassignment is a better option than leaving classrooms without coverage, which is even more disruptive to students.

Keeping Up With the Flood

Keeping up with the flood of reassignment needs proved to be onerous and time-consuming for the district—from managing the inflow of requests, dispersing them to a pool of teachers for reassignment, and then handling payroll on the back end. In CCS, reassignment is a contracted item through the teacher's union, which ensures that teachers get paid for their extra time and labor. And, as with all matters involving payment, the payroll department has to be meticulous about their records.

CCS had come up with an interim fix that seemed to work at first: They transitioned from paper forms to Excel spreadsheets to track and manage classroom reassignments. However, the process was manual, time-intensive, and prone to errors, which resulted in payroll having to reach out to affected teachers to collect and correct information. The data within the Excel sheets needed to be updated each year as teachers moved to different locations or as they left the district. Payroll was the only department with access to the "master" Excel sheets, and a sole individual was responsible for managing them.

The entire process had, in fact, become so overwhelming that Turley was unable to keep up with the email box dedicated to reassignments, which became overloaded with approximately 80-100 emails every day. The payroll department knew they had to seek out a new process to address their reassignment challenges.

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A Light at the End of the Tunnel

Halfway through the school year, Turley approached her administrator, Mike Burns, and said, "something has to give." Together, they approached the district's process improvement team.

"Our process improvement team works to find ways to make our jobs more efficient and to find a smoother process," said Turley. "They helped connect us to Red Rover to begin our journey of creating a new process with reassignment pay."

Red Rover's automated absence management solution tracks reassignment time for staff and provides seamless online payroll integration, which was a boon for a district struggling to manage its outdated and cumbersome systems.

CCS met with Larry Foxx, a subject-matter expert from Red Rover, who introduced the team to the software. "It was a light at the end of a tunnel that we'd be trying to get through for a very long time," said Turley.

While CCS was initially skeptical about implementing a new process in a large district, they knew that change was necessary, and they were eager to improve the efficiency and accuracy of payroll processing. In May of 2022, CCS introduced a pilot program in one elementary, one middle, and one high school. "Once we saw that it worked, and the simplicity of it, we said: 'We need to roll this out.' So [by August], we rolled it out completely across the district," said Turley.

Red Rover works in harmony with other existing software systems the district has in place for payroll processing: Munis and Kronos. "These systems all talk to one another. Each night, there is an update to Red Rover and Kronos," Turley explained. "Munis feeds information to Red Rover about employee location, status, and accrual balances. Red Rover then communicates with our Kronos system about employee absences, and updates accrual balances there as well."

The New Process

At CCS, the process for requesting a reassignment is initiated by the school principal or a designee. They will submit the request through an online system, indicating the teacher who needs coverage, the date and time of the absence, and any other relevant details.

The request is then reviewed and approved by the central office before being sent out to available teachers who can potentially take on the reassignment. Teachers can then submit their interest through the online system, and the central office will assign the coverage to the most appropriate teacher based on availability and qualifications.

Once the reassignment is verified, the designated person creates the timesheet for each reassignment occurrence during the payroll period and submits them for pay. At the end of the two-week period, the payroll administrator locks the timecards in Red Rover, and then imports the file into Munis for payment.

Adoption of the new system was seamless for most in the CCS community. The secretaries did need to learn a new way of handling data; rather than waiting to submit timesheets in large batches, they now entered hours as soon as they received them.

For those who needed some extra support during the transition, "I prepared a video and a PowerPoint to help train and guide employees on the new process," said Turley. And, if any technical snags ever arose, she would contact Red Rover's Larry Foxx, who quickly resolved the issue.

Conclusion

Turley has found Red Rover to be a tremendous time-saver. Her emails dropped from as many as 100 a day to 5 in one week, and she spends about one-quarter of the time than she used to on processing classroom reassignment pay. "We have had a lot of positive comments on the ease of use for this new way," she said.

The system also offers transparency to stakeholders, including the teachers who are being reassigned. "With the previous process that we were using, it didn't allow them to see the breakdown of what they were being paid for," said Turley. "With Red Rover, they can go into their timesheet and view the details of what they are being paid for, and they have the opportunity to view that before it's processed."

Overall, having Red Rover in place gives the CCS payroll team great peace of mind. "[Payroll] is a process that needs to be perfect," said Turley. "It needs to be right."

About Red Rover

Red Rover's modern, intuitive absence management and time tracking solutions simplify and improve life for administrators, employees, substitutes, and students.

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