

Tulsa Public Schools

Customer Profile

Kronos Solution Helps District Achieve Better FLSA Compliance

Tulsa Public Schools, the largest public school district in Oklahoma, serves more than 40,000 students in the City of Tulsa. The district spends in excess of \$230 million on payroll for a staff of 7,100, including 3,400 nonexempt employees. When Tulsa Public Schools recognized the need to improve its time and attendance processes and better define its compensation policies, the district turned to Kronos® and its Workforce Timekeeper™ solution for assistance. In addition to helping Tulsa improve its payroll process and better track and control overtime, implementing Workforce Timekeeper also helped the district successfully respond to a Department of Labor (DOL) investigation with timely and accurate timekeeping data.

Lack of consistent policies causes numerous problems.

As in many understaffed districts, Tulsa Public Schools' hourly employees have traditionally filled multiple roles. A school custodian keeping score at a basketball game or a secretary working after school as a tutor are not uncommon occurrences. While these practices support a low-key, family atmosphere that many value, the schools' compensation policies were loosely defined and time tracking was honor-based. This lack of clear, consistent time and labor policies made Tulsa Public Schools a potential target for Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) compliance claims.

Anne Elfrink, director of accounting for Tulsa Public Schools, was aware of this issue, and knew that the time and attendance records at the school could be subject to further scrutiny. For nonexempt employees, the district used paper timesheets that were prepared by site secretaries at Tulsa's 100 locations and signed by school principals who often had no knowledge of employees' actual schedules. Because of redundant data entry and an inherent lack of accountability, the system generated problems such as lost or unsigned timesheets, which required manual intervention.

In 2003, the School Litigation Group, a Mississippi-based group of plaintiffs' attorneys, approached Tulsa's nonexempt employees to invoke FLSA regulations and challenge the district on uncompensated overtime. When a handful of Tulsa employees responded to the group's advertising, the Department of Labor initiated a preliminary investigation — a potential first step toward enforcement. Elfrink was concerned about this DOL investigation, which had the potential to lead to further action by the School Litigation Group.

Elfrink was already seeking an automated solution to improve and consolidate time and attendance and the district's processing of over 10,000 paychecks each month. The threat of an investigation, combined with the efficiency goals Elfrink had identified, spurred Tulsa Public Schools to implement Kronos' time and attendance solution, Workforce Timekeeper.

Tulsa successfully responds to DOL investigation

As part of its investigation, the Department of Labor requested a "pre-audit" meeting in the fall of 2004, which coincided with Tulsa's Workforce Timekeeper implementation. By the time the investigation began the following summer, most of the district's nonexempt employees were using Workforce Timekeeper.

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Anne Elfrink
Director of Accounting
Tulsa Public Schools

Tulsa Public Schools

Employees: 7,100

Locations: 100

Industry: Education

Product: Workforce Timekeeper

As a result, when the Department of Labor asked to see the recent hours and overtime of specific employees, Tulsa Public Schools simply printed the relevant information from Workforce Timekeeper and its internal payroll systems. “The two exactly coincided,” Elfrink says. Next, the auditors interviewed employees to clarify an issue about clocking in early. The employees verified that they had been informed that they could clock in as many as 20 minutes before their scheduled time, but would not be paid for the unscheduled time.

The investigation turned up no findings, and Anne Elfrink attributes the clean investigation to the record keeping that Workforce Timekeeper provides. As a result of Tulsa’s successful proof of compliance, no further investigations have been initiated.

Payroll process efficiency achieved

Tulsa’s Kronos solution provides an array of workforce management benefits in addition to supporting FLSA compliance. “We have cut employee wait time for pay from twelve to five days after a pay period ends,” remarks Elfrink. “And the number of manually issued checks is down from several hundred to fewer than thirty each month.” Due to the job transfer capabilities in Workforce Timekeeper, an employee who works two assignments no longer has to fill out separate timecards, as the system consolidates an employee’s time and attendance data to provide a single paycheck. Additionally, managers receive valuable, detailed visibility into how hours and dollars are spent.

The beginning of each school year poses its own challenge, when as many as 100 new employees may start their jobs before HR staff can update the payroll system. “Now we have records for new hires in our Kronos system. They can start clocking in from day one,” Elfrink explains. Workforce Timekeeper has also made the payroll process easier for vendors who work with Tulsa Public Schools. For example, the contractor that provides security guards to Tulsa’s middle and high schools now receives reports showing when and where guards were on duty, enabling the contractor to validate its employees’ pay.

Helping managers control labor spending

Most nonexempt employees ultimately report to a school principal for whom monitoring overtime can easily slip behind other priorities. Now, checkpoints embedded in Tulsa’s Workforce Timekeeper system support budget management. More than 250 school secretaries or department supervisors close to the “front lines” review electronic timecards for their groups on a daily basis.

When a 40-hour employee works beyond scheduled time, the hours automatically accrue as compensation time, not overtime pay. “To authorize additional hours, a manager has to put them into the schedule,” Elfrink notes. “Managers can convert the comp time back into hours, if they prefer to spend the money rather than lose those resources.”

Recently, Elfrink tailored the system so the district superintendent can approve all overtime in pupil transportation, where 75 percent of Tulsa’s overtime is incurred. Employees review their own data each week, including dates, assignments, and comp time accrued. “The employee provides reasons for overtime. Within a few hours the transportation director and the superintendent can decide on approval,” says Elfrink.

Elfrink plans to leverage Tulsa’s Kronos solution even further. For example, Workforce Timekeeper can help Tulsa better manage the supplemental hours employees work under state and federal grants, endowments, and special activity funds. In the future, teachers will use the system to track grant-funded tutoring, coaching, or other work performed outside of contracted time.

Tulsa Public Schools is happy with the efficiencies Kronos has helped it attain. “Streamlining processes, eliminating redundancy, and using products like our Kronos solution to keep funds focused on our mission — that’s what I’m interested in,” Elfrink says. And with Kronos as its partner, the school system is achieving its goals.



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