

Prismatic Perspectives

Human Resources



Paul Tate, Prismatic Consultant

Overview

School district human resource (HR) offices are essential to the success of both student achievement and school improvement efforts because the HR function can determine that qualified teachers and leadership candidates are successfully recruited and hired. All individuals working for any district must contribute to the mission and strategic plan. Teacher and principal quality are the two most important factors in ensuring that each student receives the best education, and it is the HR office or department that plays a critical role, along with the superintendent and the school board, in placing effective teachers and principals in district schools.

But the focus of a district's HR function is not exclusively on teachers and principals. A clear, research-based, and districtwide human resources plan coupled with an efficient and effective HR department will result in a higher performing workforce. A strategic HR department where all staff members know their roles and support every aspect of the personnel function is essential in addressing modern work-a-day challenges in ways that will provide long-term solutions.

Since an estimated 80 percent of a school district's annual budget is used to pay personnel costs, each operation, process, maneuver, and function conducted in the HR office or division must be carefully structured, implemented, and monitored.[1] There is no task more complex in a school division than managing human resources functions. At times this management challenges understanding because of the complexity of issues and functions that it faces.

The professional discipline of human resources management (HRM) deals with all aspects of legal compliance, compensation, classification, benefits, certification, accreditation, performance management, and collective bargaining, and therefore, monitoring for efficiency and effectiveness becomes critical. The human resources function is generally responsible for:

- recruiting employees;
- overseeing the interviewing, selection, and processing of new employees;
- retaining employees;
- processing promotions, transfers and resignations;
- determining and maintaining compensation schedules;
- planning and forecasting personnel needs;
- maintaining complete employee records;
- developing and maintaining job descriptions;
- handling employee complaints and grievances;
- developing personnel policies; and
- ensuring that related laws and regulations are followed.

[1] Digest of Education Statistics, Table 214.




The key to efficient and effective management of an HR department is organizational structure and strategic leadership, but ultimately, the HR operation is a customer service effort because its staff must deal with internal and external job applicants, current employees, and oftentimes employees who have left the organization or division. All employees throughout the district, regardless of their location or assignment, must know that if they have a question pertaining to their job, they will receive accurate and consistent information.

Effective personnel management requires compliance with equal employment opportunity (EEO) statutes and other applicable federal and state laws in addition to a comprehensive understanding of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As part of human resources management, it is essential to establish fair and workable policies, procedures, and training programs that are important to recruiting and retaining competent staff.

The most important factors in an operational and efficiency study of a school district are focused on the impact of HR management, operations, and budget. In a recently published online white paper, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) explains that while most public and private organizations and businesses budget 35 to 40 percent of their funds for personnel and benefits, the comparable number in public schools is, on average, more than double at 80 and 85 percent.[2]



[2]Noelle, E. AASA White Paper: School Budget 101. Retrieved from http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Policy_and_Advocacy/files/SchoolBudgetBriefFINAL.pdf



Funding or resources availability for school districts is becoming both less and more restrictive; therefore, HR becomes the focus of change because the fiscal impact can be significant. Since the purpose and mission of HR are employee service efforts, the staff must ensure that the personnel responsibilities of the districts are performed in the most efficient and effective manner. Employee-related costs represent the majority of any public school district expenditures.

What has Prismatic Services found when it applied this perspective to data from some of its clients? It found a potential for significant savings in some districts, such as:

- For a large school district (top 10 in the nation), Prismatic consultants identified 460 licensed positions that were excessive in non-core teaching areas for a potential savings of about \$37 million.
- For a small New England school district (8,700 students) Prismatic consultants auditing HR and staffing assignments discovered and reported that custodial/maintenance overtime pay was excessive; the number of custodians exceeded industry guidance; health insurance costs exceeded requirements; many staff assigned to central office were not needed; and elementary class sizes were too small. The potential savings of these HR-related recommendations alone were about \$2.8 million.
- For a medium-sized school district (23,000 students) in South Carolina, Prismatic consultants made recommendations on expanding its personnel/payroll employee data management system in order to capture critical employee data electronically, thereby reducing paper flow and the amount of time spent manually filing employee documents in cabinets.

**We hope you found this resource useful!
Don't forget to check out the rest of the Perspectives series.**

**If you have any questions, or if you are interested in learning more about
how Prismatic can help you, please contact us at
info@prismaticservices.com.**

