

# Boosting Employee Engagement in K-12 Schools



A Universal Dilemma

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Reversing the Trend



## Boosting Employee Engagement in K-12 Schools

*Automated workforce management solutions can help school districts motivate employees and drive student performance*

### A Universal Dilemma

Employee engagement in the K-12 space is an issue that every school and district must grapple with.

Simply put, engagement encompasses the commitment, involvement and passion that an employee brings to their work. It touches everyone—teachers, custodians, bus drivers, food service workers, front-office personnel—and the consequences directly affect the performance and achievement of students.

For example, students intuitively know when a teacher is just going through the motions, without caring about them or their progress. Students will steadily lose interest in learning, become discouraged and unmotivated. But this danger is not restricted only to classrooms. It can flare up anywhere in the school:

- custodians who don't take pride in their job
- administrators who become careless about their responsibilities
- bus drivers who call in sick repeatedly

Such employee behavior has a negative impact on students, too. Eric Hall & Associates, a facilities services firm for district administrators, says: "As a facility manager, business operations professional, custodian, or building engineer, you play a critical part in ensuring student health, happiness, and high academic performance."<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> "How K-12 Facilities Impact Student Health and Learning." Eric Hall & Associates. September 6, 2017. <https://www.ericHallassociates.com/5340-2/>



On the other hand, when each employee brings enthusiasm to their work, students become eager to learn, feel more connected to educators and fellow students, and part of a thriving community dedicated to their mutual well-being. A Gallup survey found that 88% of superintendents believed that student engagement was critical in measuring school effectiveness.<sup>2</sup>

It's crucial, therefore, for districts and schools to boost employee engagement—not just to improve student performance, but also to minimize the impact on their own operations.

Different reasons for employee disengagement exist, but a driving force behind this problem is policies and procedures that have not been updated and modernized to take advantage of technological solutions. Working with antiquated systems has been shown to depress employee motivation and sap desire to excel at their jobs.

This paper will explore how workforce management automation can be the key to reversing this trend, provide a supportive work environment for employees, and instill an atmosphere where students thrive.

## The Impact on Student Achievement

The issue of employee engagement is widespread, with practical consequences.

According to Gallup:

- just over 30% of teachers said they were highly engaged<sup>3</sup>
- unengaged or disengaged K-12 teachers miss around 2.3 million more workdays than engaged teachers<sup>4</sup>

To put it in perspective: According to one source, it costs an organization \$3,400 for every \$10,000 a disengaged employee makes in salary.<sup>5</sup>

School districts need to address these concerns to fulfill their educational mission and responsibility to students, parents, their local communities—and for their own survival. Keeping employees engaged should be as important and natural as ordering supplies, taking attendance or maintaining the physical condition of classrooms and buildings.

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<sup>2</sup> "Build Engaged & Thriving Schools." Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/education/227657/improve-k-12.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> "School Engagement Is More Than Just Talk," by Tim Hodges. Gallup. October 25, 2018. <https://www.gallup.com/education/244022/school-engagement-talk.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> "Lack of Teacher Engagement Linked to 2.3 Million Missed Workdays," by Matt Hastings and Sangeeta Agrawal. Gallup. January 9, 2015. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/180455/lack-teacher-engagement-linked-million-missed-workdays.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> "How Much Are Your Disengaged Employees Costing You?" by Karlyn Borysenko. Forbes. May 2, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karlynborysenko/2019/05/02/how-much-are-your-disengaged-employees-costing-you/#4673addb3437>



The effect of employee engagement on student attitudes and outlook is well documented. According to a Gallup survey, engaged students are:

- 2.5 times more likely to say they get excellent grades and do well in school
- 4.5 times more likely to be hopeful about their future than their disengaged peers<sup>6</sup>

As many districts have discovered, a key factor in employee engagement is the level of workforce management automation solutions in place.

Districts that take advantage of the incredible efficiencies that these new automated systems provide send a clear message to employees that the district is behind them by helping them discharge their responsibilities through time- and labor-saving solutions.

But there's more.

Workforce management automation can help districts meet the needs of an evolving labor force that uses and understands technology in their own personal lives and looks for their work environment to offer the same advantages and benefits.

**As we've seen, engaged employees drive student performance. When districts invest in workforce management automation, they are really investing in their students.**



<sup>6</sup> "School Engagement Is More Than Just Talk," by Tim Hodges. Gallup. October 25, 2018  
<https://www.gallup.com/education/244022/school-engagement-talk.aspx>



Further, it's an investment in the long-term health of the districts. Districts that offer these automated management solutions will find it easier to recruit and retain talent—a major concern in a booming economy, when skilled school employees are in demand everywhere. According to Gallup, teachers are 62% less likely than unengaged or disengaged teachers to leave the district.<sup>7</sup>

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Now, let's consider the reasons behind disengagement to see the benefits of workforce management automation solutions in clearer terms.

## Disengagement Warning Signs

Organizations with an unmotivated workforce can get stung in multiple ways. For example, according to Gallup, disengaged employees account for:

- 37% higher absenteeism
- 18% lower productivity<sup>8</sup>

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account for:

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By the time student performance shows a marked decline, it's likely that employee disengagement has taken root. To minimize the effects, districts should look for common warning signs like these:

**Monotony.** Work that doesn't challenge employees or requires that they perform the same low-level tasks over and over again deplete their enthusiasm. Too much uninspired work can have equally bad consequences. A survey by Udemy found that 25% of employees who complained about having a heavy load lost motivation.<sup>9</sup>

**No recognition.** Employees who feel that their efforts go unrecognized or under-appreciated can steadily lose interest in their job. Without consistent encouragement and support from their supervisors, employees can become defensive or isolated. As a piece on engagement from Gallup revealed, "When asked whether their opinions count, K-12 teachers' positive responses are consistently lower than those of employees in other professions."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Build Engaged & Thriving Schools." Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/education/227657/improve-k-12.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> "How Much Are Your Disengaged Employees Costing You?" by Karlyn Borysenko. Forbes. May 2, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karlynborysenko/2019/05/02/how-much-are-your-disengaged-employees-costing-you/#4673addb3437>

<sup>9</sup> "5 Causes of Employee Boredom and How to Combat Them." Fisher Investments. <https://www.fisher401k.com/blog/combating-causes-of-employee-boredom>

<sup>10</sup> "School Engagement Is More Than Just Talk," by Tim Hodges. Gallup. October 25, 2018. <https://www.gallup.com/education/244022/school-engagement-talk.aspx>



**Boring administrative tasks.** Jobs in the K-12 space that detract from an employee's core responsibilities and training can lead to resentment and disengagement. Research in the *International Journal of Business Reviews* found that around 44% of employees "claimed that their boredom was because their work was unchallenging or didn't require them to make use of their education."<sup>11</sup>

**Antiquated procedures.** Districts that have not upgraded their procedures to take advantage of modern workforce management automation turn off employees, particularly as employees do almost everything else in their lives through smart phones and other mobile devices. Having a pile of work to do with old-fashioned tools is a recipe for disengagement.

**Talent drain.** Districts that don't actively and intentionally find multiple ways to support their staff can lose talented people. For example, the National Education Association reports that "School districts across the nation are reporting difficulties in recruiting and retaining school bus drivers,"<sup>12</sup> and Gallup says that "when talented, high-performing employees are not engaged in their job, they are just as likely as disengaged, low performers to quit their job."<sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt that employee engagement is a growing problem for school districts. The risks—to student achievement, district solvency, and future growth—are urgent. That said, workforce management automation solutions can help turn things around. Now, let's explore how it played out in one school district.



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<sup>11</sup> "5 Causes of Employee Boredom and How to Combat Them." Fisher Investments. <https://www.fisher401k.com/blog/combating-causes-of-employee-boredom>

<sup>12</sup> "School District Looks to Teachers to Fill Bus Driver Shortage," John Rosales. *neaToday*. January 29, 2019. <http://neatoday.org/2019/01/29/teachers-fill-bus-driver-shortage/>

<sup>13</sup> "Why Your Best Teachers Are Leaving and 4 Ways to Keep Them," by Shane McFeely. Gallup. March 27, 2018. <https://www.gallup.com/education/237275/why-best-teachers-leaving-ways-keep.aspx>



## Crushing Paperwork and Missing Forms

Baldwin County Public Schools, situated on the Gulf of Mexico in Alabama, is the fastest-growing district in the state. With forty-five schools, it serves approximately 31,000 students enrolled in pre-K through 12th grade.

Their commitment to students by each member of the school community is enshrined in their official Strategic Plan:

"Every employee within the school system has the responsibility—regardless of job title—to provide exceptional instructional and support services. Our employees, through collaborative efforts, ensure that all students are provided a high-quality education in a safe and comfortable environment."

Like many other districts, however, Baldwin County Public School employees were mired in endless paperwork that took time away from connecting and interacting with students. Paperwork that was incomplete or inaccurate compounded the problem. For example:



- "Teachers have been overly burdened with accountability paperwork. They have lesson plans, of course, that they're expected to do, but mandates from other governmental levels have really created a situation for teachers where they spent a lot of time not on students," says Jennifer Sinclair, director of HR at Baldwin County Public Schools.
- Classified or nonexempt employees were basically submitting a copy of their schedule every month, giving an unrealistic picture of their activities and their time on campus
- Without a reliable checks and balances system in place, some employees were not submitting leave requests
- Bookkeepers had to track down employees to collect necessary paperwork, such as leave forms and time sheets

Their old system was destroying morale and robbing students of time, attention, and care. Recognizing that technology could increase the efficiency of their processes and the accuracy of their recordkeeping, the Baldwin County Public School District chose a Kronos workforce management automation solution to address their problems.



## A Turning Point

Replacing their cumbersome paper-based system with a modern operating system produced changes quickly apparent:

- Teachers could now submit leave requests through the Kronos system to record when they were on campus, in the classroom or absent—without a harried bookkeeper tracking them down
- Administrators could generate up-to-the-minute reports of personnel attendance to make sure that all students and classes were covered
- Employees who put in extra-duty hours could use the Kronos job transfer option to clock in, automate the process and have the records calculated automatically
- Substitute teachers could also use the Kronos kiosks to check in, have their hours tracked more accurately and get paid faster—letting districts retain good substitutes more easily
- Administrators were able to create comprehensive reports on staffing needs, helping them make informed decisions about when to hire additional personnel and how to cut down on unnecessary overtime expenses
- A valuable tool in special or emergency situations. A few years ago, they had an active shooter situation. Fortunately, it resolved without serious incident, but the district was able to provide law enforcement authorities with a report within seconds about who was on campus. "When you're on [a paper-based system], there is no way you would ever be able to generate a report like that with that accuracy and certainly not in as fast a timeframe as we did on that day," Sinclair says.
- Principals were able to minimize compliance issues when it came to wage and hour, keep up with employee overtime and keep up with applicable laws. "For our finance department, our CFO is able to have a report of overtime or comp time at his fingertips. In terms of budgeting and being aware of what you need to plan for in terms of salary and comp time payout, [it was a] useful tool for him to pull that information instead of having to rely on the schools to report that in a paper format," Sinclair says.
- Using Kronos, the district was able to identify over \$275,000 in savings related to leave liability
- Replacing the Microsoft Access database management system with the Kronos Workforce Ready for Onboarding software to handle its human resources information, the district was able to collect and update information on employees digitally—and boost loyalty. According to the Society For Human Resources Management, 54% of companies with onboarding programs reported higher employee engagement.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> "Onboarding Key to Retaining, Engaging Talent," by Roy Maurer. Society of Human Resources Management. April 16, 2015. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/onboarding-key-retaining-engaging-talent.aspx>





Beyond modernizing their day-to-day processes, Kronos also helped the Baldwin County Public School District fulfill its core mission. As Sinclair puts it:

"I think technology improves employee engagement by really allowing an employee to spend less time on paper and pencil tasks. Employee engagement means people are there and they are interested in doing what's right for kids. Because really that's the reason all of us are there."

## Reversing the Trend

Student performance in K-12 districts hinge in part on every employee doing their job with enthusiasm and commitment, by being engaged.

It falls on district leaders to make the school environment as supportive for custodians, cafeteria workers, front-office personnel, teachers—indeed, all members of the school community—as possible. Cutting down or eliminating antiquated procedures and replacing them with workforce management automation solutions can:

- dramatically boost employee morale
- save time and money
- make better use of limited district resources
- lead to improved student achievement
- increase the efficiency of school operations

For more information on how Kronos can help districts transform their operations, put workforce management automation solutions in place, and solve problems connected with employee engagement, call (800) 225-1561 or go to [www.kronos.com/k12](http://www.kronos.com/k12).





## About Kronos

Kronos is a leading provider of workforce management and human capital management cloud solutions. Tens of thousands of organizations in more than 100 countries—including half of the Fortune 1000® and over 600 K-12 and Higher Education customers—use Kronos every day. Learn more about Kronos industry-specific time and attendance, scheduling, absence management, HR and payroll, hiring, and labor analytics applications at [www.kronos.com/k12](http://www.kronos.com/k12).

**Kronos: Workforce Innovation That Works™.**

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