



Time Tracking & Union Negotiations

How to Approach Your Bargaining Unit to Implement Electronic Time Tracking

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In the last 24 hours, robots helped to build electric cars. Individuals completed transactions using digital money. Algorithms executed a majority of the trades on Wall Street. It seems like a foregone conclusion that employees would have used technology more sophisticated than pen and paper to record their working hours.

Manual time tracking methods are prone to payroll errors; they're an inefficient use of time and paper; and they make reporting on trends and proving compliance unnecessarily difficult. And yet, a surprising number of school districts still use paper time records to capture employee time.

This could be due to a number of factors: restrictive budgets, resistance to change, complicated reporting processes for groups of employees with variable schedules. Fortunately, technology has adapted to overcome most of these obstacles. However, for many districts, one hurdle to implementation remains — the bargaining unit.

Broadly speaking, labor unions are well-intentioned. They exist to protect the vulnerable, and any public servant working in a school can appreciate that sentiment. However, many district leaders who have tried to implement new processes into the daily routines of unionized employees know the formidable furor bargaining units can create in the face of a “change in working conditions.”

That's why it's so important to proactively nurture the bargaining process. School districts can save time and improve compliance by adopting web-based technology. However, working with bargaining units will have to be an inextricable part of that process. Here are three steps districts should take to open negotiations about implementing an electronic time tracking system.

1. Start with Solidarity

As a district leader, the tone you set with your bargaining unit is critical. One way to start on the right foot is to be upfront with unit representatives about the change you plan to implement.

Rolling out new procedures without informing your bargaining unit will appear subversive, incur resentment among unit leaders and give them a reason to stall the implementation. Further, by acting unilaterally without giving unit representatives an opportunity to negotiate, you could be in violation of your legal agreement. Finally, starting out with an overly aggressive or shy tone could lead to an imbalanced relationship throughout the process.

By alerting your bargaining unit well ahead of the change and confidently laying out the clear benefits of an electronic time keeping system, you can lead the conversation while making your unit leaders feel like a valued part of the process.

Explain Your Motivation

It's worth mentioning at this point in the negotiation that the legal need for accurate timekeeping in school districts is driven by the Fair Labor Standards Act — a legislative initiative led by labor unions. The unions that constituted the grassroots of the FLSA were fighting for ideals such as fair pay, the 40-hour work week and overtime pay for eligible workers. It is in this same spirit that the FLSA continues today, demanding strict compliance from American employers.

Fortunately, technology now exists to precisely capture and report employee time. Time tracking systems allow districts to easily report on variable schedules, overtime, comp time, holiday pay, employees who work in different locations and leave time accrued. This means more accurate pay for district

employees, and increased FLSA compliance for the school district as an employer.

In the 21st century, it is sensible for both school districts and their employees to take advantage of electronic timekeeping to guarantee accurate pay for workers.

Districts hoping to undergo amicable negotiations with their bargaining units should lead the conversation on that note — compliance and accurate pay for workers are in everybody's interest.

2. Hit the Pavement

A little footwork can go a long way in presenting a change to your bargaining unit. Talk to managers and their employees working under the current system and ask them what they dislike about the process. How might they benefit under an automated electronic system? If it's inefficient for you, there's a great chance it's inefficient for employees, too.

You can debate about rules all day, but explaining how a new process will tangibly affect a real unionized employee is far more compelling.

Discover their pain points with the current workflow, how a digital timekeeping system could solve those issues and how likely those workers are to support the change. If you can, try to gather a few quotes from them about their current struggles, what they envision a better system looking like and the benefits they think a new system could provide.

Take these insights and present them to your unit, along with an explanation of your own pain points, to show that a new process is better for everybody involved.

3. Emphasize That the Rules Aren't Changing

The biggest concern of the unit and the biggest liability of the district is that existing work rules might change. Assuming this is not true, you should emphasize to the bargaining unit early and

often that the existing work rules will remain intact.

Of course, some aspects of your employees' daily process may change. They'll need to remember their ID card or PIN to clock in each day; they'll have to record their hours as they work, not just at the end of the day or week. Or, if you'd like, employees could conveniently enter their time via a mobile app. However, these changes should work to further enforce existing rules, not hinder them, and for any employee faithfully following existing rules, the changes should be inconsequential.

One district, Cedar Falls Community School District, managed this transition by migrating its smallest bargaining unit onto an electronic time tracking system first and working its way up to larger groups of employees later. By taking this gradual approach, the district was able to test and improve its transition process before involving large groups of employees. In districts where large bargaining units have voiced concerns over electronic time tracking systems, taking this gradual approach to implementation could create real-life case studies to prove the versatility of such a program.

"I particularly like the different entry methods that allow the user to access their time cards," said Jana Speck, a payroll specialist at Cedar Falls. "We currently have four different bargaining agreements and we have all different units entering their times different ways. Some of our employees enter their leaves with the actual time sheets. Some of them scan. And some of them use the desktop kiosk. So, we are able to customize the system specifically to our employee groups for our district."

Clarify that implementing time clocks does not mean an employee's raw "in" and "out" times are what will be reported — unless, of course, that's what the rules require. A web-based system can accommodate a range of sophisticated clock rules, so that any necessary rounding of time or difference in rates will be recorded automatically.

Conclusion

In the age of technology, human error is a greater risk to employee rights than an electronic system. Payroll managers can

misread a timestamp, or workers can forget the exact times they worked when filling out a timesheet at the end of the week. Fortunately, these problems can be solved with an automated system.

However, as sensible as implementing that system may be, it's not a step districts should take without involving their bargaining unit.

Review your bargaining unit agreements, the advantages of a time and attendance system and the ways it could improve the health of the district. Then, work with your bargaining unit to implement this change with the interest of employees at the heart of the transition. If it's good for the employees and it's good for the district, districts and bargaining units can collaborate to make it happen.



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