Atlanta Public Schools

CASE STUDY

The Challenge:

As part of their strategy to focus on strong instructional practices in the classroom, Atlanta Public Schools provides intensive, targeted professional development for their educators. District leaders discovered that supporting such a large-scale professional development initiative was taking teachers out of the classroom, potentially leaving the door open for low fill rates and substitute shortages.

> *"Our mission in the Office of Human Resources is to make sure that the teachers get the needed development that they need and that we are able to provide the substitutes for that. Not that we are scaling back our professional development, but ensuring that our classrooms are covered."*
> -Skye Duckett | *Deputy Chief Human Resources Officer, Atlanta Public Schools*

The Results:

- Average fill rates have risen from 79% with the district's prior system to 96% since switching to Frontline Absence & Time.
- 96% of the 600 absences for the first professional development series were entered into the system two weeks in advance, resulting in a 99% fill rate.
- Professional development absences decreased by 10% overall, and by 55% on Mondays and Fridays.

The Solution:
ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS IN PRACTICE

1 **Understand and manage professionally related absences.**

Atlanta Public Schools used a Frontline Research & Learning Institute toolkit to benchmark their district data against national averages and develop insight-driven absence management strategies to ensure that they could continue providing a high level of professional development.

> *"We were very fortunate to utilize Frontline's toolkit that compared our data from Atlanta Public Schools with national averages... That toolkit has been very helpful to us in understanding not only what is happening in our district with our employees, but how that compares to other districts of similar sizes across the country and what we can do with that information."*

After looking at their data, administrators at Atlanta Public Schools found that they directly caused or approved 32% of employee absences — 14% over the national average. Altogether, these professionally related absences added up to an average of 4.83 days per employee requiring a substitute, or 1.5 days per year more than the national average.

District Background

LOCATION: Atlanta, GA

ENROLLMENT: 51,046

FACILITIES:
    50 elementary schools
    11 middle schools
    12 high schools
    16 charter schools
    2 single-gender academies

STAFF:
    Teachers: 4,060

DEMOGRAPHICS:
    African-American/Black: 75.5%
    Caucasian/White: 14.7%
    Hispanic: 6.8%
    Multiracial: 1.6%
    Other: 1.2%

Solutions Used

Frontline Absence & Time

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These absences cost the district over $1.8 million in substitute wages in just one year. But the monetary costs were only part of the problem. When a teacher was out for professionally related reasons and a substitute couldn't be found, the lost instructional time totaled over 90,000 student days.

By tracking and managing employee absences with Frontline Absence & Time, Atlanta Public Schools was able to develop a strategy that allowed them to continue providing high levels of professional learning, without causing a substitute crisis.

> *"By planning ahead and coordinating our efforts in using the toolkit that was provided by Frontline, we were able to fill all of our absences for our professional development and most of the absences that were put in the morning of our events."*

2 Understand and manage absences for professional development.

On average, professional development accounts for ten percent of employee absences. But in Atlanta Public Schools, 16% of all absences requiring substitutes were aligned to professional development. District leaders decided to focus on the PD absences they could control, and created a detailed strategy to maximize their professional development and ensure substitute coverage.

- Developed a needs assessment with the Office of Academics and identify professional development that could be offered in a strategic and coordinated fashion.
- Piloted a PD plan with a "narrow and deep" focus, providing release-time for individual grade levels (K-5). Each grade would have two days in the fall and two more in the spring specifically for professional development.
  - Because each day requires up to 120 substitutes, administrators planned these dates for months with the lowest number of absences to ensure the maximum number of available substitutes.
  - The substitute office began hiring new subs and placing subs in jobs in late July, immediately upon confirming dates.
- Reviewed all PD related procedures and guidelines to identify areas to further reduce absences and increase lead time.
- Strengthened and formalized collaborative relationships between administrative personnel.

> *"We knew there would be a need for intensive professional development, but we didn't have that built into our school calendar. Instead of pulling teachers out of classrooms throughout the year randomly, we designated six professional development dates we would use to pull a grade of teachers*

> *— all kindergarten teachers from the district on one day, or all first-grade teachers on another. We could plan months in advance, have substitutes in place and minimize other absences on those days so we could focus all of our substitutes toward the targeted professional development that we needed."*

3 Increase absence reporting lead time for professionally related absences to improve fill rates.

With Frontline's absence management tool, Atlanta Public Schools discovered that 55% of professionally related absences requiring a substitute were being reported within four days — well above the national average of 29%. While their fill rates were still higher than national averages, having absences reported on short notice still led to lower fill rates, as substitutes had less time to find and accept the job.

Because of these insights, Atlanta Public Schools knew that lead times would be an important part of their strategy for maximizing instructional time without compromising on professional development. By communicating the need for longer lead times to their teachers, administrators were better equipped to coordinate substitute coverage.

> *"One of the things we can do with that information is focus on improving the leave time in our coordination with our professional development department, so that those absences get put in very far ahead of time and that our substitutes are aware of our need on those high professional development days."*

4 Support visibility into absences and greater collaboration between administrative personnel.

With Frontline Absence & Time, administrators at Atlanta Public Schools can increase fill rates and effectively support professionally related absences by customizing their visibility settings. They can also ensure accurate reporting on why staff are out of the classroom, giving them a clear window into what is happening across the district. That high level of visibility supports improved collaboration as well, as the Human Resources department can now easily send the Curriculum & Instruction team weekly reports on upcoming professional absences.

> *"Frontline's absence management solution provides us with a ton of data at our fingertips about our own district. I can get any reports that I need. I can export them, I can drill down and I can gain a lot of insights about our own district."*

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About Frontline Education

Frontline Education is an integrated insights partner serving more than **12,000 K-12 organizations** and millions of educators, administrators and support personnel in their efforts to develop the next generation of learners. With more than 20 years of experience serving the front line of education, Frontline Education provides actionable intelligence and insights that enable informed decisions and drive engagement across school systems. Bringing together the best education software solutions into one unified platform, Frontline is pioneering a human capital management approach that meets the unique needs of education. The **Frontline Insights Platform** makes it possible to efficiently and effectively manage the administrative needs of the education community with solutions including **Frontline Recruiting & Hiring**, **Frontline Absence & Time**, **Frontline Professional Growth** and **Frontline Special Ed & Interventions**.

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