

CONCLUSION: A review of the human resources programs and expenditures for 50 Mississippi school districts in FY 2023 showed opportunities for districts to strengthen their programs and increase efficiency. For example, 48% of districts do not track staff absenteeism rates, and 78% do not track daily substitute teacher fill rates. Three districts lack a documented employee handbook. The median overall employee separation rate across districts was 16.3% and the median teacher separation rate was 13.7%, both of which were better than (below) the regional peer average. However, some districts exceeded state, regional, and national separation rates. Among reporting districts, there were 110 employee misconduct investigations and 9 employee discrimination investigations. This review was inhibited by some districts being unable to provide the requested HR data and some districts providing questionable HR data.

BACKGROUND

In FY 2023, PEER received funding to contract with Glimpse K12 (an education technology company headquartered in Huntsville, Alabama) to conduct a comparative review of 30 school districts. This report focuses on one of six areas of review—human resources (Volume II). Other reports include:

- Finance and Supply Chain (Volume I);
- Information Technology (Volume III);
- Nutrition (Volume IV);
- Operations (Volume V); and,
- Transportation (Volume VI).

- **The median HR costs per \$100,000 of revenue was \$218. The range was from approximately \$48 in Picayune to approximately \$873 in Baldwin. A closer examination of these districts' costs finds anomalies that affect each district's reported figures.**

These anomalies emphasize the importance of proper accounting of district finances to provide district administration officials with accurate information by which to make decisions.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Of the districts reporting, 22 (48%) do not track staff absenteeism rates.** Reasons to track staff absenteeism rates are provided in the blue box below.
- **36 districts (78%) do not track daily substitute teacher fill rates.** Tracking these rates is essential to ensure the smooth operation of schools in the event of teacher absences.
- **Three reporting districts lack a documented employee handbook.** A handbook promotes consistency, legal compliance, and communication across the district.
- **All but four of the 46 districts reporting have invested in software to support human resources activities.** The majority of districts reported using automated time and attendance management software and applicant posting and tracking software.

Reasons to Track Staff Absenteeism Rates

- *Cost-savings:* Staff absenteeism can drive up costs. By tracking absenteeism, districts can identify patterns and trends that may help reduce costs by implementing preventive measures or better managing leave requests.
- *Adequate staffing:* When a staff member is absent, it can be challenging to maintain appropriate staffing levels, which may impact student learning. By tracking absences, school districts can identify areas where additional support may be needed and plan accordingly to ensure adequate staffing.
- *Employee health and wellness:* Frequent absences can indicate underlying health or wellness issues among staff members. By tracking staff absences, a district can identify trends that may signal a need for wellness interventions or resources, such as stress management or mental health support.
- *Teacher performance and student achievement:* Staff absenteeism can negatively affect student achievement, particularly if substitute teachers are less effective than regular classroom teachers. By tracking absences, a school district can identify areas where teacher performance may suffer and take steps to address the issue (e.g., providing additional professional development).

A Look at Employee and Teacher Separations

- The median *overall employee separation rate* was 16.3%.
 - Overall separation rates ranged from 0.3% in Prentiss to 24.8% in Holly Springs. Four districts reported overall employee separations higher than state, regional, and national peers.
- The median teacher separation rate was 13.7%.
 - Teacher separation rates ranged from 0% in Lincoln to 33.6% in Marshall. Nine districts reported teacher separation rates above those of state, regional, and national peers.

A Look at Employee Misconduct and Discrimination Complaints

- 19 districts reported a total of 110 employee misconduct investigations in FY 2023. (24 districts reported no investigations.)
 - Because each district has discretion in whether to classify an issue as “misconduct,” the number of investigations reported by district ranged from 0 to 40 and a wide range of issues were reported (e.g., breach of contract, falsifying reasons for taking leave time).
- 6 districts reported nine employee discrimination investigations in FY 2023. (37 districts reported no investigations.)

HR Cost Data Not Collected

Some districts did not provide all information requested for this report, which inhibited the assessment team’s ability to conduct a complete analysis of human resources functions in the selected districts. Further, some districts reported anomalous data, which indicates a lack of precision in capturing HR costs, in turn inhibiting the districts’ abilities to use information to manage HR functions effectively. Several districts encountered difficulties in obtaining accurate information due to the distribution of HR functions among several district personnel, instead of having personnel dedicated to HR functions.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICTS:

1. In FY 2025, each district superintendent, in consultation with the district’s human resources personnel, should review the information from this report and implement each of the relevant district recommendations to increase efficiency, improve service levels, and/or achieve cost-savings. Such recommendations include but are not limited to:
 - a. tracking staff absenteeism;
 - b. tracking daily substitute fill rates;
 - c. keeping a documented employee handbook;
 - d. assessing the use of more electronic processing and other technological tools; and,
 - e. assessing causes of separation rates for teachers and staff.
2. District administrators should also use the information in this report to compare their performance to that of their peers in Mississippi, as well as regionally and nationally, to identify areas for potential improvement, and take action to improve.
3. For districts unable to provide benchmarking/performance information during this review pertaining to their human resources, relevant district personnel should take action to begin collecting and monitoring precise data on an ongoing basis.
4. District personnel should provide an annual performance report to the district superintendent regarding the status of the human resources programs using the measures included in this review.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MDE):

5. MDE should review its *Accounting Manual for Districts* to determine whether it should make revisions that would assist districts in providing greater detail, clarity, and accuracy of district revenue and expenses.
6. MDE should set parameters for districts as to what constitutes an employee misconduct investigation so that comparisons between districts can be made.