



# A SCHOOL SYSTEM TRANSFORMS HR TO ENABLE THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF ITS DISTRICT

A US-based school system selected Mercer to design and implement modern HR capabilities that are aligned with the district's strategic objectives and core business needs.

## CONTEXT

As one of the largest systems of public schools in its state, the "City School System" serves more than 50,000 students in 100+ learning facilities. The district previously implemented a number of targeted approaches to improve specific functions within HR but continued to experience significant barriers in providing HR services that would help achieve its goal of improved student achievement.

HR was viewed primarily as an administrative function lacking in strategic capabilities. This was further evidenced by the growing proliferation of "shadow HR" capabilities within other divisions, which grew to handle the more strategic aspects of HR, such as performance and talent management. The HR function was also plagued with an inconsistent service culture, inefficient processes, silo organization structures, and insufficient enabling technologies.

## CHALLENGE

While the business case and benefits of HR transformation were evident, the City School System was operating under extremely difficult circumstances. The performance of teachers and principals had recently been called into question, resulting in the removal of several instruction-based and HR employees, as well as selection and placement of interim staff and leadership to fill some of those positions. Further, a previous attempt at HR transformation, which did not succeed in agreeing to or implementing meaningful change, had left the HR organization in an ambiguous interim state, with little direction forward. An atmosphere of turmoil and mistrust grew almost daily.

Despite the overwhelming challenges, the City School System pressed forward and secured support and funding to proceed with a plan to transform the HR function. The goal was to refocus the HR organization to deliver services that are operationally sound, effective, and more important, aligned with the district's strategic objectives and the needs of the core business, which is instruction. Further, to meet the funding criteria, the transformation needed to be completed within eight months, which is an aggressive timeframe for meaningful change.



## CONSULTANT SELECTION

In August 2012, the City School System issued a Request for Proposal (RFP), for HR transformation services. At the close of the competitive, multi-step, three-month process, it chose Mercer as its HR transformation partner because of Mercer's deep expertise in HR function effectiveness, its responsive and thoughtful approach demonstrated during the RFP process, and its industry experience in education having led the transformation for one of the largest departments of education in the nation several years prior.

## DELIVERABLES

The HR transformation program included two phases — an assessment and a high-level design phase, followed by a detailed design and implementation phase. The City School System and Mercer team developed and implemented a new HR function strategy and scorecard, new HR operating model, new organizational structure to support the HR strategy and operating model, new roles and job descriptions, and new HR technologies. Shadow HR functions were pulled back into the HR function, processes were redesigned, and nonvalue-added tasks were eliminated or automated. Every single role in HR was redesigned, and current HR staff as well as external applicants interviewed for positions in the new organization.

Now, the City School System's HR function serves its employees and hiring managers through three core competencies:

- Strategic HR services that provide differentiated and targeted support to the business based on data-driven needs.
- HR operations, which deliver high volume, transactional services, with prompt and accurate problem resolution and customer-focused support.
- Centers of Expertise that develop and deliver recruiting, development, and retention programs that result in the best talent aligned to the organization's strategic objectives.

## OUTCOMES

Despite the difficult circumstances, the City School System succeeded in its HR transformation goals, creating an efficient and effective customer-focused HR organization, supported by deep capabilities.

The new capabilities were branded and launched with much success approximately 12 months after the RFP was issued. Employees are now able to access a one-stop HR Service Center for resolving issues and access current HR content through enhanced self-service functionality. Applicants and new hires experience a more efficient applicant and on-boarding process, with reduced cycle times and improved services. Hiring managers benefit from new talent acquisition processes and tools, as well as focused strategic services aligned by division and region that differentiate and deliver on needs specific to the school or region. The district benefits from new position-management processes and tools, which enable better budgeting and position control, as well as deeper expertise in specific HR programs, such as workforce planning, that will further enable the strategic objectives of the district.

Moving forward, the City School System will need strong, committed, and focused leadership to help sustain the transformation and pursue additional improvement opportunities.

## LEARN MORE

Mercer's Leadership and Organizational Performance practice works with clients to drive successful results through effective leaders, a proficient workforce, and a strong human resources function. For more information, please visit [www.mercer.com/talent](http://www.mercer.com/talent).