

How Yakima School District Transformed Timesheet Approvals and Unlocked Hidden Capacity

A Washington district eliminated days of manual payroll work per month, recovered \$170,000+ in duplicate payments and eliminated 40+ hours of work each pay period.

1,100

Timesheets per month

\$170K+

Saved from duplicate payment

100%

Digital timesheet adoption

At a glance

CHALLENGE

Paper timesheets, manual data entry, no visibility into approval status, and duplicate payments slipping through

SOLUTION

Informed K12 work management platform with flexible routing, automated approvals, and custom duplicate-detection scripts for timesheets

The Breaking Point

Payroll might be the most critical process a district manages. When it works smoothly, staff get paid accurately and on time. When it breaks down, the consequences ripple across the entire organization—delayed payments, burned-out approvers, eroded trust, and budget overruns that compound with every pay cycle.

Yakima School District faced a familiar challenge. Like many districts using Skyward for their ERP, the team knew their financial data lived in a powerful system. But getting timesheets into that system required manual processes that consumed hours of staff time every pay period.

The district had piloted Skyward's TrueTime for select employee groups, hoping to streamline the approval process. Instead, approving timesheets and converting them into worksheets for payment became even more time-consuming for payroll staff. The system lacked the flexibility needed to handle Yakima's varied workflows—particularly the dynamic routing required for a district with multiple funding sources, categorical programs, and cross-departmental approvals.

"It's rigid. It works well when you have a well-defined org structure where every timesheet goes to the same person. But we don't always know ahead of time where things need to go—and that became tricky."

—Sergio Abundiz, Skyward Fiscal/HR Supervisor

What "Good Enough" Actually Costs

Manual and semi-automated payroll processes create costs that don't always show up on budget reports. Staff capacity disappears into approval queues. Errors slip through because systems can't catch them before payment. Departments point fingers when delays occur. And the business office absorbs the burden of keeping everything moving.

Before Informed K12, Yakima was processing everything on paper. Paper timesheets had to be hand-keyed into Skyward. Forms got lost between desks. And in a district of 14,000 students, there was no reliable way to check whether a timesheet submitted in August had already been paid back in May.

"I can, at any time, look at a timesheet, see where it's sitting, see when it got paid, see who hasn't responded to it. I can direct an employee to their own file folder where they can go in and look at their own timesheet. That is invaluable to a district when you're so busy."

—Shari Chapman, Director of Payroll

Why ERPs Alone Can't Solve It

Skyward and other enterprise systems excel as systems of record. But they weren't designed to serve as the interface layer between school sites, employees, approvers, and central office staff.

Yakima's maintenance department needed to break out granular pay codes—snow removal versus grounds work versus extra bus routes. Transportation needed different routing for different activities. And the district's extensive categorical funding meant multiple approvers needed to sign off on the same timesheet across departments. Skyward's org-chart-bound workflows simply couldn't accommodate that complexity.

A Different Approach to Timesheet Workflows

When Yakima decided to implement Informed K12, the team started conservatively—rolling out digital timesheets to teachers first to test whether the system could handle real-world complexity.

The results were immediate. Within months, the district was ready to expand to the rest of the staff. The process was fundamentally different, not just faster.

With Informed K12, approvers could review timesheets, identify errors, and send them back to employees with notes explaining what needed to be fixed. If something looked incorrect—a duplicate entry, an unapproved activity—approvers could deny it before it ever reached the payment queue. The system stopped problems upstream instead of forcing payroll staff to clean them up downstream. Shari Chapman, Director of Payroll, says, "I had two employees spending probably at least four days a month inputting those timesheets by hand and also checking them before we would pay them. And I suspected that we had duplicate timesheets that we could never actually have the opportunity or the information to find."

Catching What Paper Couldn't

One of the most impactful innovations came from Yakima's own team. Sergio Abundiz worked with the IT department to build a custom script that cross-references every incoming timesheet against historical payment data, flagging potential duplicates before they're processed.

The results were staggering. Looking back at just the first months after implementation—March through August—the team identified approximately \$70,000 in duplicate timesheets. Then from September to December, they found another \$100,000. The district recovered the money from employees who had been overpaid, and the duplicate-checking script now runs monthly as a standard part of the payroll cycle.

\$170,000+

In duplicate payments recovered in the first year—money the district would have never found with paper timesheets

1,100/mo

Timesheets processed monthly across certified and classified staff—700 certified and 400 classified

The Operational Leverage Hidden in Workflows

The improvements extended beyond time and dollar savings. The district gained visibility into approval bottlenecks, clearer audit trails, and the ability to move work forward even when key staff were out of the office.

When the Washington state auditors reviewed Yakima's payroll processes, they were impressed by the level of visibility the new system provided. For the first time, the district could prove which timesheets had been submitted, when they were approved, and whether duplicates existed—something that was impossible with paper.

Implementation That Moved at District Speed

Yakima's team worked cross-functionally to define what the district needed. Sergio leveraged Informed K12's user API to sync with the district's Active Directory, automating adding all employees into the system. This eliminated the burden of individually managing user permissions and reduced the ongoing maintenance.

The Informed K12 implementation team responded to feedback and made changes within hours—allowing the district to test, refine, and confirm that workflows were working as intended without waiting weeks for updates. The speed of iteration meant the district could implement with confidence.

Expanding Beyond Timesheets

What started with 10 timesheet workflows has grown into a district-wide digital transformation, bringing mileage claims, student accident reports, employee accident reports, and more onto the platform.

Every form now lives in a centralized place where employees can track their submissions and see exactly where things stand. Attachments travel with the form through the entire approval chain, so that nothing gets lost between desks.

We've been looking for a product like Informed K12 for years. We had looked at several different products and never found one that could do what we needed it to do. From the first meeting, I was intrigued and excited because I felt like we had finally found a solution."

—Shari Chapman, Director of Payroll

The Path Forward

Most districts aren't struggling because staff aren't capable. They're struggling because the systems in place weren't designed for the demands of today's operations.

Yakima's experience demonstrates that improving payroll workflows doesn't require replacing core systems or embarking on massive transformation projects. It requires connecting the systems already in place with tools that make them more accessible, more visible, and more effective.

The hidden costs of "good enough" payroll processes are real. And for districts navigating budget pressures and staffing shortages, eliminating those costs isn't optional—it's essential.

"In today's world with the way school financing is, you can't do business the way you've always done it. You've got to make some changes to move forward."

—Susan Fate, Director of Fiscal Services