

**THE EDWARD J. COLLINS, JR.
CENTER FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT**

**MCCORMACK GRADUATE SCHOOL
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**TOWN OF EASTON
HUMAN RESOURCES ORGANIZATIONAL STUDY
OF
GENERAL GOVERNMENT AND SCHOOL DEPARTMENT
JANUARY 2017**

COLLINS CENTER FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT



INTRODUCTION

The Town of Easton engaged the Collins Center for Public Management as a result of applying for and being awarded a Commonwealth Community Compact Award to evaluate potential collaborative efficiencies between the general government and school administration. The Collins Center was asked to conduct an organizational review of human resources functions for the general government and the school with the understanding that human resources functions may overlap, be shared or duplicated. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the current human resources systems and make recommendations for efficiencies and improvement.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management, human resource management is the formal structure within an organization responsible for all the decisions, strategies, factors, principles, operations practices, functions, activities and methods related to the management of people (SHRM).

A human resources audit or review is wise in order to take an objective look at policies, practices, procedures, staffing and systems to identify opportunities for improvement and adopt best practices. An audit can also help an organization know if they are on the right track in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. Oftentimes, it is not what an organization is doing with human resources, but what it is not doing.

METHODOLOGY

In order to evaluate the current human resources systems for both the general government and the schools, extensive interviews were conducted. The Collins Center team conducted interviews with key staff included the Town Administrator, School Superintendent, Assistant Town Administrator, Human Resources Coordinator/Assistant to the Town Administrator, Town Accountant/Budget Director, Collector/Treasurer, Assistant Collector/Treasurer, School Business Manager, School Director of Operations, School Principals, School Data Specialist, Town Payroll Coordinator, School Payroll Supervisor and others. Numerous documents were also reviewed, including collective bargaining agreements, budgets, personnel policies and the

Department of Revenue Division of Local Services report on the Town’s financial management structure.

DISCUSSION OF EXISTING STAFFING AND SYSTEMS

The general government departments have approximately 175 full time and part time employees the school employs more than 500 full time and part time employees.

The general government has the position of Human Resources Coordinator/ Assistant to the Town Administrator as the human resources professional, however many human resource functions are performed in other departments. In the School Department, there is not one person who has responsibility for human resources. A number of human resources functions are the responsibility of the general government, such as processing payroll, insurances, work place injuries and benefit administration. The following table summarizes the core human resources functions and the employees responsible for them.

Function	General Government	School Department
Recruitment	Town Administrator HR Coordinator Department Heads	Superintendent Admin. Asst Principals Director of Operations Asst. Superintendent
Orientation	HR Coordinator Assistant Collector/Treasurer	Payroll Supervisor Superintendent Admin Asst. Assistant Superintendent
Personnel Files	HR Coordinator	Superintendent Admin Asst.
Equal Opportunity, ADA, Civil Rights	Town Administrator HR Coordinator	Director of Operations
Employee Database Records	Payroll Coordinator	Payroll Supervisor Data Specialist
Position Descriptions	Town Administrator HR Coordinator	Superintendent Principals Superintendent Admin Asst.
Payroll	Payroll Coordinator	Payroll Supervisor
Benefits	Assistant Collector/Treasurer	Payroll Supervisor coordinates with Collector/Treasurer’s Office

Function	General Government	School Department
Personnel Policy Administration	Town Administrator HR Coordinator	Superintendent Superintendent Admin Asst. Principals
Leave Accruals and Tracking	Department Heads	Payroll Supervisor Data Specialist
Family Medical Leave Act	HR Coordinator	Director of Operations
Workers' Compensation	HR Coordinator	Director of Operations Superintendent Admin Asst.
Employee Relations	HR Coordinator	Superintendent Director of Operations
Collective Bargaining	Town Administrator	Superintendent Asst Superintendent
Teacher Certification & Licensure		Superintendent Data Specialist Director of Operations
Teacher Mentor and Professional Development Coordination		Asst Superintendent
Performance Appraisal	Town Administrator HR Coordinator	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent Principals

General Government Human Resources

The Town utilizes the position of HR Coordinator/Assistant to the Town Administrator. The position is responsible for assisting the Town Administrator with human resource functions and has primary responsibility for personnel records, personnel policies, FMLA leave, workplace injuries, insurance claims and policy renewals, recruitment, CORI and background checks, orientation, collective bargaining agreement adherence, employee relations, position descriptions and classification, and staff assistance to the Human Resource Board. In addition to the human resources functions, the position is responsible for administrative support for both the Town Administrator and the Board of Selectmen. The responsibilities include preparing agendas and packets for Board of Selectmen meetings, attending meetings, taking minutes and conducting follow up to items decided at the Board of Selectmen meetings.

The Collector/Treasurer's office shares in human resource administration with the responsibility for payroll, benefits and insurance. The Collector/Treasurer, Assistant Collector/Treasurer and the Payroll Coordinator work closely with the HR Coordinator on issues that may overlap departmental lines. In the past, payroll functions were performed in the Accounting department, but have been moved to the Collector/Treasurer's office which has streamlined the process and centralized much of the record keeping. The Payroll Coordinator is responsible for creating employee records in the Softright Financial Management Software System which is a logical extension of the new hire paperwork needed for verifying eligibility for employment, preparation of necessary tax withholding forms and enrolling in all benefit and insurance programs. The Collector/Treasurer's office is responsible for all school department payroll and benefits as well. While the School department Payroll Supervisor is involved in many aspects of human resources, the functions of payroll, benefits and insurance rest with the Collector/Treasurer's office.

While not all human resources functions in the general government are centralized, the structure works well. Financial human resource functions are centralized in the Collector/Treasurer's office and the employee/labor relations, policy and administrative functions are centralized in the Town Administrator's office.

School Department Human Resources

The School Department does not have a designated human resources professional. Human resource responsibilities are dispersed amongst many departments and positions. As noted in the Table above, the Superintendent, Principals, Business Manager, Director of Operations, Data Specialist and Payroll Supervisor are all involved in aspects of human resource management. The School Department's Payroll Supervisor creates the school employee records in the Softright Financial Management Software system and the Data Specialist creates the record in AESOP (the attendance management system). The Payroll Supervisor meets with new employees to complete onboarding paperwork. The paperwork is submitted to the Collector/Treasurer's office. On a weekly basis the school department updates deductions, enters hours and creates the warrant

and submits it to the Treasurer Collector's office. The ultimate responsibility for benefits, insurances and payroll rests with the Collector/Treasurer's office.

HUMAN RESOURCE COMPLIANCE

Both the general government and the school department are in compliance with the majority of human resource standards. However, improvements could be made. The following sections discuss the areas that may need adjustment.

Employment Application. The general government employment application was recently updated and is in compliance with state and federal laws. The School Department uses the School Spring website to collect applications for all professional positions and some non-professional positions, this application is compliant with state and federal laws. The application used for non-professional positions is not in compliance and needs to be replaced. Both the professional and non-professional applications ask for social security number and does not include required language relating to lie detector tests and should be discontinued immediately. The general government application has an excellent applicant statement and signature page which should be the model for the School Department.

Classification and Compensation. The general government has an up-to-date classification and compensation structure, having had all position descriptions reviewed and updated in recent years and has uniform compensation structure. The School Department, like the general government, has employees under individual contracts, collective bargaining agreements and non-union status. While the collective bargaining agreements dictate a classification structure, it is important to have accurate position descriptions for all positions. Changes in duties and compensation must be collectively bargained for union positions but an effort should be made to review all position descriptions to ensure they are up-to-date. If changes are made to positions in response to the DLS report, the Human Resources Board should review the classification and compensation of those positions.

Employee Onboarding and Orientation. Both the general government and the School Department have recently improved the procedures for new hires. Check lists and orientation materials have been created making it a smoother process for new employees. Because of the volume of hiring at the beginning of the school year, the process can be challenging all new regular school employees meet with the Payroll Supervisor to go over their onboarding packet. Newly selected substitutes require minimal documentation and are instructed to visit the web page to obtain the necessary tax forms and then drop their paperwork off with the Director of Operations or the Payroll Supervisor. While it is acceptable to have the forms available on line, a letter of welcome and explanation of what is needed should be given to the new employee, rather than simply directing them to the website.

Personnel Files. Personnel files should be kept in a central location. The official personnel file for the general government are kept by the HR Coordinator. In the school department, while the Administrative Assistant in the Superintendent's office maintains the official personnel files, principals also maintain files for employees at the individual schools. Having duplicate files can lead to confusion and the practice should be discontinued.

Leave Administration. It is important for leave to be administered centrally to ensure that policies and benefits are being administered consistently to all employees, in accordance with policies, collective bargaining agreements and state and federal laws. It is important that individual department heads, Principals and supervisors are applying the rules consistently. Even though there may be different appointing authorities, the collective bargaining agreements and policies must be applied uniformly across departments and divisions.

Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The FMLA can be a challenge to administer. The FMLA was created to provide a safety net to employees when they had a child, their own illness or an ill family member. Because municipalities are relatively good employers and provide various types of leave, it often seems like the FMLA is redundant or an added responsibility to manage leave. It is important to have an effective policy. The employer

may designate leave as FMLA leave if it meets the guidelines of the FMLA. A review of the procedures followed by the general government revealed that extraordinary time and effort has been spent on obtaining and requiring documentation from employees regarding FMLA leave, particularly when the Town is exercising the right to designate the leave being taken as FMLA leave. We understand that the town is following procedures recommended by its labor counsel. It may be less burdensome for the Town to designate the leave and require the employees to provide the necessary documentation. If the employee is able to provide evidence the leave they are taking should not be designated as FMLA, an administrative adjustment to leave balances can be made. We recommend that the town seek a second opinion from Town Counsel relative to procedures necessary to comply with FMLA.

Leave Accrual Tracking and Balances. Leave tracking, accruals and usage are performed by the payroll personnel for both the general government and the School Department. The leave balances are reflected on the pay checks. However, because of the way leave and pay weeks are recorded, the balances are not always accurate or up to date. For example, the Police Department and School Department track pay and leave on a different week than other departments. Oftentimes, time is spent back checking and verifying the accuracy of balances, as well as lack of faith in the procedures. It is recommended the Town adopt a policy designating all departments follow the same definition of the pay week which may require collective bargaining with collective bargaining units. The School department is in the process of moving away from Softright for this process and will be replacing it with their AESOP program where the balances will be up to date in real time. Instead of getting the information on paychecks the employees will find the accruals and balance online in their account. While migrating to a new system will help the school department in tracking leave, it does not address the duplication of effort in entering payroll and leave in a uniform way.

Human Resources Information Systems. Easton uses Softright Financial Management software for employee records and payroll. The system is integrated but outdated which has caused issues with capability and support. The Division of Local

Services (DLS) report recommends the finance department conduct a technology needs assessment and develop a long term plan. The Collins Center concurs.

Payroll Period and Budgeting. The payroll week is not consistent across departments which causes a variety of issues, such as overtime not being paid consistently, leave balances not being accurately reflected and more concerning, salary budgets not being accurate. The general government budget is based on 52 weeks and does not reflect the actual number of weeks and days in a fiscal year which can cause a shortfall in the salary line items each year, thus requiring a special article at Town Meeting. Additionally, the rate of pay due at the beginning of the fiscal year is not adjusted until the first full week in the fiscal year. The Collector/Treasurer should review this practice with the auditors to determine how best to address the issue.

School Department Professional Contract Letter. Each year, the School Business Manager prepares and issues a letter to each of the professional staff on behalf of the School Committee. The letter notifies the teacher of his or her step and level, corresponding annual base salary, additional compensation, and assignment. Information is included on how pay will be calculated if the employee separates from service prior to the completion of the annual period, and directs the employee to sign the form and return it to the Department. By accepting the indicated salary rate the employee agrees to give at least thirty (30) days written notice of resignation and commits not to resign during the 30-day period prior to the opening of school. The letter pre-dates the changes resulting from education reform that gave principals the authority to hire staff, subject to the approval of the Superintendent. It is recommended the School Department review this form letter with labor counsel and determine whether it should be modified or discontinued.

Personnel Policies. Both the general government and the School Department have comprehensive personnel policies that are in compliance with state and federal laws. It is recommended that the all social media, acceptable use and technology policies be reviewed to ensure social media pitfalls such as posting on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

and others on and off duty whether on town-owned devices or personal devices are addressed.

DISCUSSION OF REDUNDANCY AND SHARED SERVICES

One of the reasons the Collins Center was engaged was to evaluate the human resources functions being performed in Easton and determine if efforts were the most efficient and effective and determine if it made sense to consolidate functions or share human resources personnel.

The Collins Center does not recommend sharing an employee. While some of the work is similar, creating a shared human resources professional position is not recommended. The challenges of lines of authority between the Town Administrator, School Superintendent, Board of Selectmen and School Committee complicate matters and would hinder the decision making process and would pull the incumbent in too many directions. Due to the nature of collective bargaining agreements, determining who is the employer and the appointing authority, it can be cumbersome to create a shared position. The School Committee and the Board of Selectmen have separate statutory authority to manage their organizations and creating a shared position to create personnel policies does not make sense in Easton, considering the staffing in place.

As with most municipalities the general government and school departments do in fact share services such as payroll administration, benefit administration, insurance administration, unemployment administration, injured on duty administration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Municipalities expend the majority of their budgets on personnel costs. Especially in light of the increase in compliance and documentation requirements of federal and state laws and mandates, it is important from a practical and liability perspective to have a focus on human resource management. The risks of not paying attention to human resources are great, particularly in the fast-changing human resources landscape.

It is recommended that staff performing human resource functions be adjusted. In terms of the general government, it is recommended the HR Coordinator/ Assistant to the Town Administrator be afforded more hours per week to address human resource issues. A review of the work load and time spent reveals that not enough time in the week is available to address all the core human resource functions, to research policies and initiatives and keep abreast of the industry. As such, it is recommended the Board of Selectmen administrative duties such as correspondence meeting agendas, packets, attendance, minutes be removed from the position and an Administrative Assistant position be created and filled. Doing so would help professionalize the position of HR Coordinator, enable the incumbent to participate in training and address issues not currently being performed. The creation of a position would also provide additional coverage to the Town Administrator – Board of Selectmen’s Office. As it is now, the HR Coordinator/Assistant to the Town Administrator is the sole support staff to the office. Meetings, vacations, and days off often require the phone to go to voicemail and return calls delayed and the door to be closed, hindering public access and customer service.

The DLS report indicated that Town should consider changing the Assistant Town Administrator position by adding the human resources management responsibilities to that position. While evaluating the financial departments, it may have made sense, but the Collins Center disagrees. Human resources is too vital to be a portion of a position and much of the work is already being done well by the HR Coordinator and the staff of the Collector/Treasurer’s office. We believe freeing up the HR Coordinator’s time to focus more on the human resources functions is the appropriate action at this time.

For the School Department, it is recommended the human resources functions be streamlined to the extent possible with the creation of an HR Coordinator in the Superintendent’s or Business office. The HR Coordinator description could be similar to that of the HR Coordinator/ Assistant to the Town Administrator. The volume of personnel, hiring, leave administration, collective bargaining, policy development and administration, injury administration and employee relations warrants a full time position. By creating a full time HR Coordinator, it would free up time spent by the

Superintendent's Admin Assistant Superintendent and Director of Operations, and ease some of the work of the Payroll Coordinator and provide a more cohesive structure of human resources administration. The position could either be a co-worker or a supervisor of the Payroll Supervisor, depending on how the School Department would want to structure the position.

CLOSING

Thank you for allowing the Collins Center to work with the Town of Easton under the Commonwealth Community Compact program. We appreciate all the time and effort staff have afforded us. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.