



# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

**March 26, 2004**

## **INSPECTION MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Phillip Maestri, Director  
Management Improvement Team

**From:** Cathy H. Lewis  
Assistant Inspector General  
Evaluation, Inspection and Management Services

**Subject:** Review of MIT ACTION Item # 179 (ED/OIG I13D0022)

This memorandum provides the results of our inspection of one Action Plan item from the Department of Education's (Department's) Blueprint for Management Excellence. The EIMS group is examining several Action Plan items related to Human Capital. Our objective is two-fold: 1) were the items completed as described; and, 2) as completed, does the action taken help the Department towards its stated Blueprint objective (to improve the strategic management of the Department's human capital). In this report, we examined item #179 (completed on 9/30/02), which calls for the implementation of a new employee entrance survey process.

### **Background:**

In 2002, the Department implemented an entrance survey to gain information about new employees' expectations and experiences with the employment process. This survey was to target why people chose to work at the Department, what benefits influenced their decision, and other employment process concerns, in order to improve the recruitment process. Phase I (Startup) of the implementation started with the Office of Management (OM) drafting a survey instrument, approved by the Assistant Secretary for Management and the Union, which was then made web accessible. After OM sent out the initial survey via email on September 30, 2002 to those employees who joined ED between August 1 and September 30, 2002, Phase II (Data Collection and Reporting) was to continue. The entire process included the following steps: 1) obtain the names of new employees for each pay period; 2) send an email request to each new employee to take the survey; 3) collect the responses and import them into Survey Tracker; 4) generate a quarterly report of the most important reasons for choosing ED and the most important benefits; and 5)

distribute the report to the Executive Management Team (EMT), OM, and other interested organizations.<sup>1</sup>

### **Objective 1: Did OM complete the actions needed to complete this item?**

The action required by item #179 was to:

#### **“Implement the entrance survey process.”**

The comments field on this item states, “Completed 9/30/02. Survey issued to employees hired between 8/1/02 and 9/30/02. Subsequent surveys will be issued each quarter.” This item was considered completed on this date because the first email was sent to new employees to complete the survey.

#### **Findings:**

- According to an email sent from Heather Noiwan on September 30, 2002, OM issued the first entrance survey to 38 new employees (those hired between August 1 and September 30, 2002) via email, with participants linking to the online survey. Through July 26, 2003, OM has requested that 303 employees complete the survey with 202 employees replying. OM employed an Entrance Survey Implementation Process and this action item is considered “complete.”
- OM only completed steps one through three in its process.
- OM never used the information gathered for any discernable purpose and has not, to date, issued a formal quarterly report. According to the Entrance Survey Implementation Process, information gathered and analyzed would be presented to the EMT, OM, and other interested organizations. Thus far, OM has not completed steps four or five—to generate a quarterly report and distribute its findings. In an interview with the OM staff person responsible for this project, she indicated that, at this point there has not been “enough” data gathered, it has not revealed anything “shocking,” and the information has only “validated” the anecdotal data it already possesses. While OM does have plans to release the data at the end of Fiscal Year 2003, it will be for “informational purposes” only.

### **Objective 2: As completed, does the action taken help the Department towards its stated Blueprint objective?**

#### **Findings:**

- OM has not fully completed its entrance survey process and the Department has not used or distributed the results of the completed surveys. This partial

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<sup>1</sup> From the Survey Implementation Process Chart.

implementation of the action step does not help the Department towards its objective of improving the strategic management of human capital.

**Recommendations:**

In order for Action item #179 to be “complete,” we recommend that the EMT direct the MIT to address the above issues in the following manner:

1. Until such time as OM completes these actions, Action item #179 should be designated as “open.” Alternatively, if OM believes this survey is not providing useful information, it should be discontinued and designated as “closed.”
2. Require OM to prepare and distribute a report on the findings to the EMT, OM and other interested organizations on a quarterly basis; or,
3. OM should discontinue the survey if the information gathered is not yielding any data important enough for OM to use or to distribute to other organizations.

**Department Response**

In commenting on a draft of this report, the MIT did not concur with Recommendation No.1, that the MIT should reclassify this action item as “Open” or “Closed.” However, since OM has decided to follow Recommendation No.3 and discontinue use of the survey after sharing the results with the EMT (which was done after the draft of this report was issued), the MIT should designate this item as “Completed” on the date OM decided to discontinue its use.

A copy of the Department response is included with this report.

January 7, 2004

To: Cathy H. Lewis  
Assistant Inspector General  
Evaluation, Inspection and Management Services

From: Phillip Maestri, Director  
Management Improvement Team

Subject: Draft Inspection Memorandum (December 3, 2003)  
Review of MIT Action Item Number 179 (ED/OIG I13D0022)  
“Implement entrance survey process”

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on a draft version of this inspection memorandum.

Response to findings

OM offers the following additional information that should be useful in describing the entrance survey. The entrance survey process was undertaken for valid reasons. First of all, research on strategic human capital management indicated that the use of entrance surveys was a good way to collect information from new employees about why they want to work in a particular place, and that information can be useful in targeting recruitment efforts, as well as training and workplace services resources. In addition, the survey was undertaken as a way to clarify how the hiring process was viewed by new hires. Anecdotal information from managers doing the hiring indicated concerns with this process. Both perspectives were deemed important in making process improvements.

During the first year that this survey was administered, OM sent 361 surveys, and 234 surveys were returned for a response rate of 65 percent. OM Performance and Process Improvement Services staff generated reports of results, which OM shared with OIG for this investigation. As noted in the draft memo, the usefulness of the survey was limited; that is, the analysis of the survey results did not reveal anything new, or anything from which OM identified any new actionable issues. The results were useful to ED’s human capital management in so far as they confirmed the need for action already underway, including improving recruitment outreach efforts and streamlining the hiring process.

The draft memo indicates that the entrance survey results were not compiled, distributed or shared with the EMT. The survey results for a one-year period were compiled by the Director, Performance and Process Improvement Services and presented to the Assistant Secretary for Management and the Director of Human Resources Services. In addition, OM presented the relevant findings to the EMT during its December 16 meeting, as part of a briefing on the results of the *Best Places to Work Survey*. The EMT did not direct OM to take any action on the *Best Places to Work Survey* because ED is currently addressing findings of that survey through ongoing efforts.

## Response to recommendations

Recommendation 1: Designate item as “open” or “closed” (rather than complete). The MIT does not concur. The action required the implementation of the survey. It was implemented and the results analyzed.

- Although OM did not complete all the steps it initially planned for this action, the MIT designated it as “complete” when the action--as worded in the Blueprint--was substantially complete. As occurred here, the “action owner” may change the strategy and steps from an initial work plan and still complete the item as worded.
- The MIT has not used the Blueprint action plan to follow ongoing work related to the actions. Actions that require continued involvement by senior leadership have been recorded as new items in the strategic plan and Blueprint action plan. This action has been superseded by new human capital management activities.

Recommendation 2: Report on the findings on a quarterly basis (and/or)

Recommendation 3: Discontinue the survey.

OM has already completed activities consistent with these recommendations. OM shared some results of the entrance survey with the EMT on December 16, 2003. Because of the limited usefulness of the entrance survey and to conserve limited resources, OM will discontinue the survey, consistent with Recommendation 3.