



## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

**March 30, 2004**

### INSPECTION MEMORANDUM

**To:** Phil Maestri  
Director, Management Improvement Team  
Office of Deputy Secretary

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

**Subject:** Review of MIT Action Item Number 218 (ED/OIG I13E0009)

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. In this report, we examined item Number 218, concerning the communication to all employees of the Department's values, the desired outcomes of One-ED, and the desired behaviors of managers and employees.

#### **Background:**

With the issuance of the One-ED Report, the Department included a section on the One-ED Communication Plan. The purpose of the plan was to "ensure alignment at the organizational and individual levels" within the Department allowing for support and implementation of One-ED. In addition, the plan would communicate the Department's new values, the desired outcomes from the implementation of One-ED, and what would be expected of employees in order to achieve the Department's strategic goals. The plan suggested a two-pronged approach. Phase I, Awareness and Understanding, would use briefings, training, news, information, incentives, and promotional material to give employees a better foundation in the Department's new direction. Phase II, Building a Foundation for Implementation, would build on the previous phase and employ a more sustained effort to align major strategies with daily work and performance.

The action required by item number 218 was to:

**“Communicate to all employees the Department’s values, the desired outcomes of One-ED, including a Culture of Accountability and linking performance expectations/awards to the Strategic Plan; the desired behaviors of managers and employees, including recognition of training recruitment and performance management as ‘investment activities,’ not activities that interrupt so-called ‘real work.’”**

The comments field on this item states, “Completed 3/31/03 – SES monthly meetings; Assistant Secretary retreat 2/03; periodic EMT meetings include one-ED updates and discussion of strategic plan and action steps. MIT has agendas on file.”

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

The Office of Management (OM) developed a database to track all of the different actions and milestones needed to implement its Communications Plan. Among some of the items listed are the following: brief the Executive Management Team (EMT) on One-ED progress; conduct Secretary’s All Staff Meeting to communicate the One-ED vision, including its core values and desired outcomes; develop the most effective and efficient ways to increase the awareness of One-ED to ED employees; and develop criteria and guidelines for a PRIDE Award (One-ED Core Values-Plaque, Certificate, etc).

In addition to the creation and implementation of the database, OM has held briefings about One-ED for the Department’s employees, expanded the briefing of new employees during orientation, published information on ED Notebook, ConnectED and InsideED, and distributed promotional material. While the actions did not address all of the items identified as implementation milestones (such as the PRIDE Award), these actions completed the majority of the action items listed in the original Communications Plan and sufficiently addressed most of the issues addressed in the Action Item.

Throughout the One-ED implementation process, OM has sent messages to managers and employees conveying the Department’s values and the behaviors expected of all employees. For example, in addition to frequent updates that have appeared on ConnectED, the Department established a Culture of Accountability Employee team to suggest recommendations on leadership, skill gaps, trainings, communication, and other issues. Its report issued in September of 2002 addresses where each of these recommendations are in its process. OM made this report available to all employees via ConnectED at the same time.

On March 31, 2003, once the Management Improvement Team (MIT) felt it was clear that there was a system in place to complete what is always an ongoing effort, it marked this item as “completed.”

The above actions taken completed this Action Item.

**Objective 2: Did the actions completed meet the objective “To improve the strategic management of the Department’s human capital?”**

While a communication plan was developed, as required by action item 218, the Department has not formally assessed the effectiveness of its plan. This is an important step in ensuring that the actions taken help support the underlying Blueprint objective.

According to OM, it gathered some informal feedback on the survey and after listening to this informal feedback, decided that the original Communications Plan was not meeting the Department’s need. OM consulted the Public Sector Council and Booz Allen Hamilton in an effort to tailor a new, more effective Communications Plan. Currently, OM has completed a new plan that focuses more on the Culture of Accountability and its effect on staff. However, this plan does not differ much from the original communications plan and still contains the traditional top-down approach to communication, with information trickling down from upper management. OM plans to implement this plan shortly.

As noted by the Department, communication is an ongoing effort and should continually be revisited and assessed for its effectiveness. OM’s initiative to redesign the communication plan can be seen as a progressive step, however, only if it is well informed by employee feedback.

**Departmental Response**

We provided OM with a draft report. We have summarized OM's comments below and included them in their entirety as an attachment.

MIT Comments

The MIT agrees that OM should continue to assess the communications plan. According to the MIT, OM has taken some initial steps to enhance the communication plan, including seeking additional resource help, trying to change the top-down approach, and requesting input and feedback from employees. OM does not believe this action needs a separate corrective action plan.

OIG Response

OM’s efforts should continue in order to make the communications plan as effective as possible. In addition, it is important that OM proactively acquire formal feedback from Department employees; however, given the actions undertaken by OM, we have withdrawn our recommendation for a separate corrective action plan and consider this report closed.

February 13, 2004

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

From: Phillip Maestri, Director  
Management Improvement Team

Subject: Draft Inspection Memorandum (1/6/04)  
Review of MIT Action Item Number 218 (ED/OIG I13E0009)  
“Communicate to all employees the Department’s values... the desired outcomes of One-ED... and the desired behavior of managers and employees”

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

**Comments on Background and Findings**

In response to your draft memo, the MIT reviewed the documentation on the One-ED communication plan. Consistent with the OIG findings, we found that the action was designated “completed” on March 31, 2003, based on the briefings and other information dissemination completed. The MIT also reviewed the EMT agendas for evidence that OM continues to evaluate the effectiveness of the One-ED communication strategy. As the draft memo notes, OM has completed a new plan, which was presented for review and comment by the EMT on October 28, 2003. That presentation reflected thoughtful consideration of the impact of prior communications and intention for continued assessment and improvement of the strategy.

The Office of Management provides the additional following details about the One-ED communication strategy:

As indicated by the Inspection Memorandum, the Office of Management (OM) developed and implemented a communication plan that involved numerous activities, including: briefings for current and new staff on One-ED; publication of articles in the Department’s three primary internal communication vehicles; and multiple messages to managers and employees about the Department’s values and the behaviors expected of all employees, especially those related to the Department’s performance appraisal and awards systems. The responsibility and use of various communication vehicles has, in effect, become institutionalized, with lead responsibility resting in Performance and Process Improvement Services, and oversight being provided by the Assistant Secretary for Management and the One-ED Steering Committee, as appropriate. When the action was “completed,” the MIT and OM agreed that work in the area of

communications would continue because it is a vital component of creating a “culture of accountability” in the Department.

OM is committed to an approach of “continuous improvement.” We have learned much from our first year’s efforts and have factored the lessons learned into a revised approach. For example, we have learned that to be effective, we must use a variety of communication vehicles and we must constantly seek feedback from those with whom we are trying to communicate to ensure that our message and meaning are clear. In revising our communications approach after our initial plan was implemented, we sought advice from those who are experts on communications and change management. The Inspection Memorandum cites our efforts to solicit advice from external experts at Booz Allen Hamilton and the Private Sector Council. In addition, since speaking with OIG about researching ways to make our communications efforts more effective, we have performed additional research and further improved our approach. Specifically, we reached out to our internal experts within the Department and have established a partnership with the Office of Public Affairs, the Secretary’s Chief of Staff and the Department’s Internal Communications Team Leader. Together we are focusing on improving communications and implementing a strategy focused on the following objectives:

- Clarify the vision for a “*culture of accountability*,”
- Highlight how reorganizations, re-engineering, competitive sourcing and other management initiatives support the culture of accountability,
- Indicate how changes necessary to create a culture of accountability will affect employees, and if needed,
- Let employees know how they will be supported through the various changes that they and the Department will undergo.

The result of the partnership has been to enrich the communication strategy in a number of ways, making it less of a top-down approach. Planned actions include:

- Conferring with the Chief of Staff and Assistant Secretary in each of the Principal Offices (PO) to plan an all-staff meeting where employees can discuss what is meant by a culture of accountability and actions planned or taken to strengthen such a culture within each PO.
- Scheduling periodic roundtable discussions, to which all staff are invited, to generate discussion around the Culture of Accountability. Ideas for roundtable topics and “experts” are being solicited from multiple sources.
- Publishing stories in ED Notebook and/or Inside ED that highlight success stories told by employee teams that have experienced change in a positive way and have helped improve accountability within their program area.

The Inspection Memorandum includes a recommendation that OM “assess the effectiveness of the communication plan with provision for formal, periodic employee input and make adjustments to the plan accordingly.” We plan to seek feedback to evaluate our efforts using the following approaches:

- Doing just-in-time surveys at the PO-wide meetings and roundtable sessions.
- Seeking feedback in scheduled sessions with the EMT, SES Forum, Internal Communication Team, and Chiefs of Staff by requesting time of the agenda to get their perceptions of the effectiveness of the communication strategies.

### **Response to recommendations**

The MIT agrees that OM should continue to assess the effectiveness of the One-ED communication plan. Given the work to date and OM's current plans, we do not see a need for a separate corrective action plan.

