

**PROCEDURES FOR HIRING
IN THE
YSLETA INDEPENDENT
SCHOOL DISTRICT,
EL PASO, TEXAS:
ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Prepared by Students
in the Fall Semester 1998 Class in

Systems Analysis and Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings and recommendations from a study of problems in the employee-hiring processes of the Ysleta Independent School District (YISD), El Paso, Texas.

On September 18, 1998, YISD elementary and secondary personnel representatives discussed problems concerning employee-hiring processes with a systems-analysis team of El Paso-area-based students in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), The University of Texas at Austin. YISD is experiencing difficulties in streamlining employment procedures in order to reduce the amount of time it takes to hire applicants for various positions within the district. The school district is constrained by local, state, and federal hiring regulations and must abide by these stipulations.

For example, for administrative positions, a two-week period is currently the average length of time for hiring someone already with the district for a different position within the district. The average length of time for a new employee to the district is ten days. The YISD recognizes that in its hiring processes, it suffers from deficiencies in speed, efficiency, and process delivery. The repeated question is "What can be implemented or corrected to make the hiring of individuals more efficient?"

The team carried out a systems analysis of pertinent aspects of the current YISD employee-hiring processes during September, October, and November 1998. The team's detailed analysis of these processes is presented in Section 2 of this report.

Section 3 of the report presents the team's recommendations for changes in the employee-hiring processes that the team believes will speed up these processes and make them more efficient.

The team's principal recommendations include the following:

- , Assure that necessary funds exist before posting or advertising positions (if new positions)
- , Require applicants to fully complete application before being considered for employment
- , Require applicants to supply certified document from the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) concerning any criminal record
- , Impose a two-week window for return of reference form
- , Provide timely delivery of papers among campuses, departments, and administration
- , Consolidate or eliminate money funds within district
- , Provide training or safeguards for system in order to improve quality of personnel application packages
- , Use a Web-based system (i.e., an intranet) to improve communication among departments, applicants, references, and other agencies
- , Decrease length of time that jobs remain posted
- , Select a standing committee to interview prospective employees on scheduled dates to eliminate delays in hiring process
- , Restructure Personnel Department

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background of the Study*

The study began in August 1998 with conversations among Mr. Gerald Whitman, Director of Elementary Personnel, and Ms. Martha Dominguez, Director of Secondary Personnel, both of the Personnel Department of the Ysleta Independent School District (YISD), and Professor Ronald E. Wyllys, of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), The University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin). At that time Prof. Wyllys was preparing to teach once again a class in *Systems Analysis and Evaluation* at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) during the Fall Semester 1998. The class was part of a series of graduate-level classes that have been offered regularly since 1991 by UT-Austin with the generous cooperation of UTEP, and that enable El Paso-area students to earn the degree of Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) from UT-Austin.

In those conversations Mr. Whitman and Ms. Dominguez indicated that they felt it could be useful to the Personnel Department if students in Prof. Wyllys's class studied the employee-hiring processes of YISD in order to explore possibilities of speeding up the hiring processes and making them more efficient. As a result, Mr. Whitman and Ms. Dominguez met with the systems-analysis class on September 18, 1998, presented an overview of the YISD employee-hiring processes, and invited the students to undertake a study of these processes. On October 2, at the next meeting of the class, Ms. Cheryl Davis, Director of Budget for YISD, provided the students with additional understanding of how the Budget Office is involved in the hiring process and how it interfaces with the Personnel Department in accomplishing hiring for the YISD.

1.2 *The Systems-Analysis Team and the Task Groups*

As the students began to plan their study of the YISD employee-hiring processes, they soon decided that the substantial differences in the hiring processes for various categories of personnel warranted a multifaceted approach to the study. Accordingly, the students organized themselves into four subteams, or task groups, to study in detail the hiring processes for administrative, ancillary, paraprofessional, and professional personnel.

The Administrative Personnel Task Group was composed of Ms. Martha Blair, Ms. Sarah Boling, Ms. Myra Brown, Ms. Lilia Herrera, and Ms. Rebecca Quiroz.

The Professional Personnel Task Group was composed of Mr. Salvador Anchondo, Ms. Marcia Fullman, Ms. Margarita Gutiérrez, Ms. Santa Peña, and Ms. Brenda Young.

The Paraprofessional Personnel Task Group was composed of Ms. Martha Andrade, Ms. Lourdes Garcia, Ms. Anna Hernandez, Ms. Kelly Higgins, and Ms. Rebecca Jackson.

The Ancillary Personnel Task Group was composed of Ms. Jeny Breard, Mr. Daniel G. Cruz, Mr. Hector Escobar, Ms. Cynthia Schulze, and Mr. Mike Yeager.

2 FINDINGS

2.1 General Findings

2.1.1 *Job Classifications*

YISD classifies positions into four categories: administrative, professional, paraprofessional, and ancillary. The administrative category includes principals, assistant principals, and counselors. The professional group consists of teachers, coaches, librarians, and nurses. Clerks, secretaries, and aides constitute the paraprofessional category, and the ancillary category is defined as custodial staff, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and like support personnel.

2.1.2 *Current Employment Process*

Job vacancies occur for two basic reasons: as a replacement for someone who retires or resigns, or as the result of a newly created position within a department or on a particular campus. Before a position is advertised, it must be funded and approved by the Budget Office. A Personnel Action Form (PAF) is created by the Personnel Department, the job is advertised, and applications are received and reviewed for completeness. Demographic information is entered into the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) in order to gain pertinent background information on the applicant, viz., educational and work experience, and criminal history background (if any).

References are obtained via the United States mail, or through telephone interviews. Once the applicant has been cleared with respect to criminal history, a contract is offered. An assignment form is created by the Personnel Director, and copies of the form are distributed to the Employment Office, payroll data entry clerk, and campus or department in which that position is located. A more detailed description of the current employment process is presented below.

Currently, the Personnel Department seeks to improve the efficiency and time involved in each application it processes. The department continues to do the majority of the process on paper, by hand, and hierarchically from person to person. The steps, and the sequence in which the steps take place, delay the application process as well.

2.1.3 *Interviews*

The Director of the Budget, the Personnel Specialists for the various types of positions, and the secondary and elementary personnel representatives provided valuable facts and details for this report. These individuals targeted various areas in the process as causes for delays and lack of expediency. According to these directors and specialists, the bases for the delays in the process are that the process is now very sequential, and that lack of communication and organization between the Budget and Personnel depart-

ments exists. Problems mentioned by both the Personnel Department and the Budget Office are presented and detailed below.

The task groups also conducted interviews with personnel directors from other school districts in order to obtain further information for the purposes of background and comparison.

2.1.4 *Other Research Methods*

The systems-analysis team also conducted telephone calls and World-Wide Web searches to obtain information concerning techniques used for hiring in other school districts in Texas, software tools for personnel management and fingerprint analysis, and other related matters.

2.1.5 *Definitions*

The following definitions are, in part, adapted from the Ysleta Independent School District **Budgeting Instruction Manual** 1998-99

Applicant tracking system: A system that will allow for tracking applications and applicants through the hiring process, with Web-page development, résumé and cover-letter builder, and scanners to provide for keyword searches of applications and résumés. This will help in the hiring process by having the information easily accessible to all administrators involved in the hiring process.

Daily Rate: Amount of money *prorated* each day based on the number of workdays during the year.

Decision memorandum: If a new position is requested the organization requesting the position must submit a decision memorandum through the appropriate cabinet member to the Associate Superintendent of Human Resources. **All new positions must be advertised.** The decision memorandum must include the identification of a funding source and an appropriate job description. All positions will be assigned to pay grades based on the job-description appropriations and competitive market rates. The Human Resources Department submits the decision memorandum and proposed job description to the Superintendent, or designee, for approval. The organization's supervisor is later notified of the decision through the Human Personnel Department.

Feeders: Feeder schools are the elementary and middle schools in the immediate attendance area of a high school. Students that attend these elementary and middle schools go on to a designated high school.

Job Analyst (also personnel analyst): Defined by the **Dictionary of Occupational Titles**, originally published by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration 1991. Collects, analyzes, and prepares occupational information to facilitate personnel, administration, and management functions of an organization. Consults with management to determine type, scope and purpose of study. Studies current organizational occupational data and compiles distribution reports, organization and flow charts, and other background information required for study. Observes jobs and interviews workers and

supervisory personnel to determine job and worker requirements. Analyzes occupational data, such as physical, mental, and training requirements of jobs and workers and develops written summaries, such as job descriptions, job specifications, and lines of career movement. Utilizes developed occupational data to evaluate or improve methods and techniques for recruiting, selecting, promoting, evaluating and training workers, and administration of related personnel programs. May specialize in classifying positions according to regulated guidelines to meet job classification requirements of civil service system and be known as Position Classifier (government service.)

Paraprofessional Testing Procedure: A pre-applicant testing procedure offered to potential paraprofessional applicants. (This is a mandatory testing procedure for all potential applicants not yet certified for desired-posted position.) Each test is administered by one of two designated facilitators. There are two types of tests. One test is for clerical placement. The other test is for instructional-aide placement. Clerical testing: 1) is offered three times a week, 2) consists of typing, editing, spelling, math, and grammar, and 3) takes approximately one hour and fifteen minutes to complete. Fifteen people are allowed to take the test at any one time. Instructor-aide testing: 1) is offered three times a week 2) consists of handwritten exercises in math, spelling and grammar, and 3) takes approximately thirty-five minutes to complete. Forty people are allowed to take the test. According to the **Texas Education Code (TEC), 21.041(b)(2)**, the test is required by State Board of Educator Certification: All paraprofessional certificates shall be permanent.*

Paraprofessional: A person trained to assist a professional. The following terms are defined by the Texas Education Code:

230.560 Role Description (1) The *Educational Aide/Instructor Aide* is assigned and performs routine tasks under the and supervision of a certified teacher or teaching team; releases the teacher from routine tasks and participates in selecting, planning, organizing and evaluating; helps the teacher with clerical operations; helps the teacher supervise students in routine movement from one recreational activity to another; helps supervise the playground, bus, lunchroom; helps the teacher prepare and use instructional media; duplicates instructional materials for teachers; performs classroom clerical operations under the supervision of a certified teacher; or performs equivalent activities determined by the local school district.

230.560 Role Description (4) The *Educational secretary* performs assigned routine clerical tasks under the direction and supervision of professional staff; performs general office tasks such as routine filing; as directed, maintains records, such as attendance, student transcripts, reports, stencils, letters, and documents; operates office equipment; issues consumable teaching and office supplies; maintains supply inventory; performs other duties as assigned at the file clerk level; or performs equivalent activities determined by the school district.

Personnel Action Form (PAF): Form that is to be prepared and submitted for approval of the following: filling of a new position, deletion of a position, replacement of a position, pay level or assignment change or other changes such as, a change in funding source. The budget administrator of the specific organiza-

tion or the administrator's supervisor must authorize Personnel Action Forms. Personnel Action Forms should be prepared and submitted as soon as a program is starting. It is submitted to the Budget Office for validation of budget.

2.2 Findings Concerning the Hiring of Administrative Personnel

From the moment a campus proposes the need for a position to be filled, the first step, to the final step--approval made by the Superintendent--the process is accomplished mainly by hand. A computerized method or methods of processing applications would greatly improve the efficiency and time of each application process.

The flowchart created to map out the administrative application process indicates each hierarchical step that is taken from the first step of the process to the final step. Often the delay, according to the Personnel Department, exists with the applicants who submit incomplete and/or incorrect application information. This initially begins the application process, and without a complete and/or correctly filled out application, it delays the entire application process.

Currently, according to the Budget Office, the final department involved in the application process, the incorrect and/or incomplete information from the Personnel Department delays the processes that must take place in the Budget Office before the entire application process is complete. The Budget Office has acquired a computerized system, and is working on improving it.

2.3 Findings Concerning the Hiring of Professional Personnel

In this section, we report our findings from an analysis of the hiring process for the Professional category of personnel in the Ysleta ISD. The process was replicated in a physical model through a flowchart. The flowchart provided a visual format in which to detect and reflect upon causes for delays. Research, interviews with other members of the Ysleta ISD system, interviews with personnel directors from other school districts, and discussions with other teams in the Systems Analysis course were other sources of information.

2.3.1 *The Personnel Action Form*

Of critical importance is the process involving the Personnel Action Form (PAF). The PAF documents both a request for personnel and the corresponding confirmation from the Budget Office that funds are available for that position. Therefore, it is a vital and necessary document. However, the PAF process is redundant in nature.

In an interview with Mrs. Celia Salazar, principal at Ysleta Pre-K Center, Mrs. Salazar stated that the PAF is sent to the cabinet representative (team leader) more as a courtesy than as a means of information. In a phone interview with Ms. Aurora Lackey, secretary for the personnel directors, the task group

learned that "the PAF keeps their immediate supervisor informed." Also, the team leader acts as a clearinghouse for new positions that are created or for existing positions that need to be filled.

General observations by the task group are that:

- ! The PAF is handled by too many people.
- ! Administrators have delegated the task of completing the PAF to staff members.
- ! Training of staff is needed to ensure forms are completed correctly.
- ! There is a question as to whether the signature of the cabinet representative is necessary. It appears to serve as a formality rather than a requirement.
- ! The PAF is usually routed through campus mail.
- ! Time delays are caused by the present system.

Because of difficulties with the PAF process, personnel are not placed in a timely manner. Once a need and funds for personnel are confirmed, job announcement and recruitment is initiated. The issue of timeliness arises especially when a position needs to be filled immediately.

2.3.2 Challenges in Obtaining References

Once the need and funds for personnel are confirmed, a job announcement and recruitment are initiated. The Personnel Department also faces challenges with the five references an applicant is required to provide.

- ! The reference letters are mailed out.
- ! Responses to the reference letters are awaited.
- ! In some cases, responses are never received.

After an application is submitted, reference forms are mailed out to the references listed on the application. Personnel employees must then wait while references are en route, received by the person designated on the application, completed, mailed, and received back in the administration office.

2.3.3 Problems with the Criminal-History Check

Another major area of concern in the application process is the criminal-history check. This process alone may take up to a month.

The criminal-record-check procedure of a potential employee of the Ysleta ISD is a particularly difficult time restraint in the hiring process. Overall, the criminal-record-inquiry procedure is time-consuming. This is due to the nature of the investigative procedure and the absence of local agencies that could provide this type of record investigation. According to the Records Manager of the YISD, Ms. Olga Burrola, the present procedure is to hold all criminal record investigation requests until a total of 10 to 12 requests are gathered, and then the group of requests are sent to Austin for a preliminary "sounds-like

query” search. This procedural restraint, the bunching of requests, results from expressed preferences of the Department of Public Safety in Austin.

If any of the investigation requests are returned with possible matches to the name issued in the request, further information, in the form of a fingerprint card, is sent to Austin for complete verification. In Austin each possible match is examined and compared to the original inquiry’s fingerprint card by a technician in order to eliminate all possible records that matched the initial investigation’s “sounds-like query” name. Communications with the Texas DPS confirmed that the individual examination of each request is sometimes more time-consuming than is usual. The Texas DPS is the only agency that provides criminal-record checks for the school districts of Texas. During certain times of the year the numbers of requests submitted are substantial, and this causes longer processing times for all criminal-records requests. This is not to say that something could not be done locally by the YISD to reduce the procedural time for criminal-record requests.

At the request of Austin’s criminal investigative services, the YISD is obligated to hold criminal-record requests until the required minimum number of requests have accumulated. During peak hiring times for the YISD, accumulating records requests is not a problem, because of the high volume of requests collected. But there are times throughout the year when hiring is done less frequently by the YISD. During slow periods of hiring, criminal-record requests can be held for undetermined amounts of time till the prescribed number of requests have been collected. The need to accumulate records is the culprit in this procedural time lag.

The second procedural time lag is the actual method of investigation used by the DPS for these criminal-record requests.

2.3.3.1 *Redundant Entry of Data.* In the current application process, the applicant’s demographics are entered as many as four times into four separate systems. This replication of the demographics is due to the lack of an overall networked system. The more instances of input of the data, the greater the likelihood of errors, which cause further time delay. Accurate data entry is essential to keeping precise records. Also, the replication of data is another area which causes time delays.

2.3.3.2 *Staff Training and Its Effect on Delays.* A lack of understanding by the staff of the variables involved in the hiring process exists.

- ! Administrators delegate authority to staff not knowledgeable in the process.
- ! Staff in different departments do not understand their role as it relates to the whole process.
- ! Clerical staff are left out of staff development.

Lack of understanding by individuals involved in the process is costly in terms of resources. Some members of the YISD staff expressed a desire to be informed of and understand the whole process from beginning to end, not just their particular portion of the procedure. They felt that training in the overall process would be beneficial. The staff doing the actual inputting need to be empowered with knowledge

of the complete process. If someone does not recognize the importance of a correct code on a PAF in the comprehensive sequence of the hiring process, he or she will be less likely to ensure the meticulous completion of those seemingly inconsequential data.

2.3.4 Time Needed to Acquire and Complete an Application

The time required for an applicant to physically come to the Ysleta ISD offices, pick up an application, take it home, fill it out, and return it to the administrative offices is cumbersome. Applicants do not currently have an option to complete a job application online. Also out-of-state applicants are unable to physically come to the administrative office and pick up an application. They must wait for the application to be mailed or for a recruiter to come to their area, causing further delay.

2.4 Findings Concerning the Hiring of Paraprofessional Personnel

2.4.1 Introduction

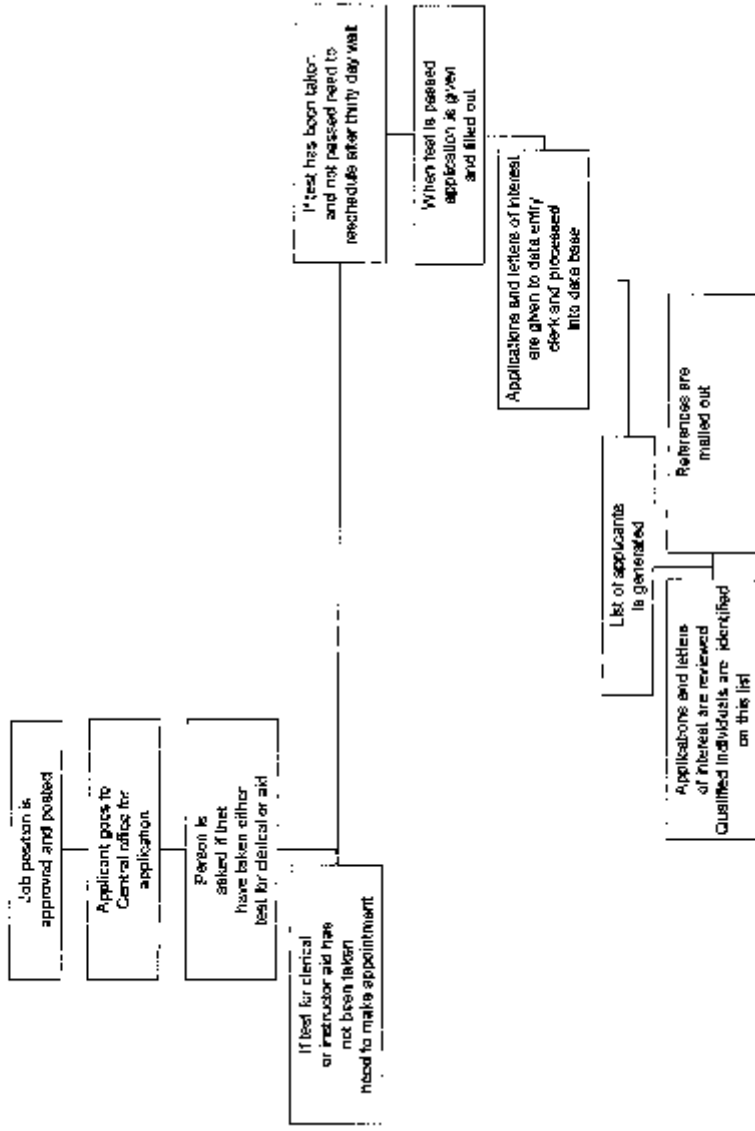
The paraprofessional task group identified several problems in the hiring process for the Ysleta Independent School District. It was our objective, as active participants in the analysis procedure, to offer suggestions and recommendations in each of the targeted problem areas that could be successfully utilized by the Ysleta Independent School District to perhaps create an improved work environment conducive to a more efficient flow process. Recommendations are described later in this report. Administrators were interviewed and surveys were conducted initially, in order to familiarize the task group members with the hiring process.

Flowcharts have been utilized to compare the current situation with the process after recommendations are applied.

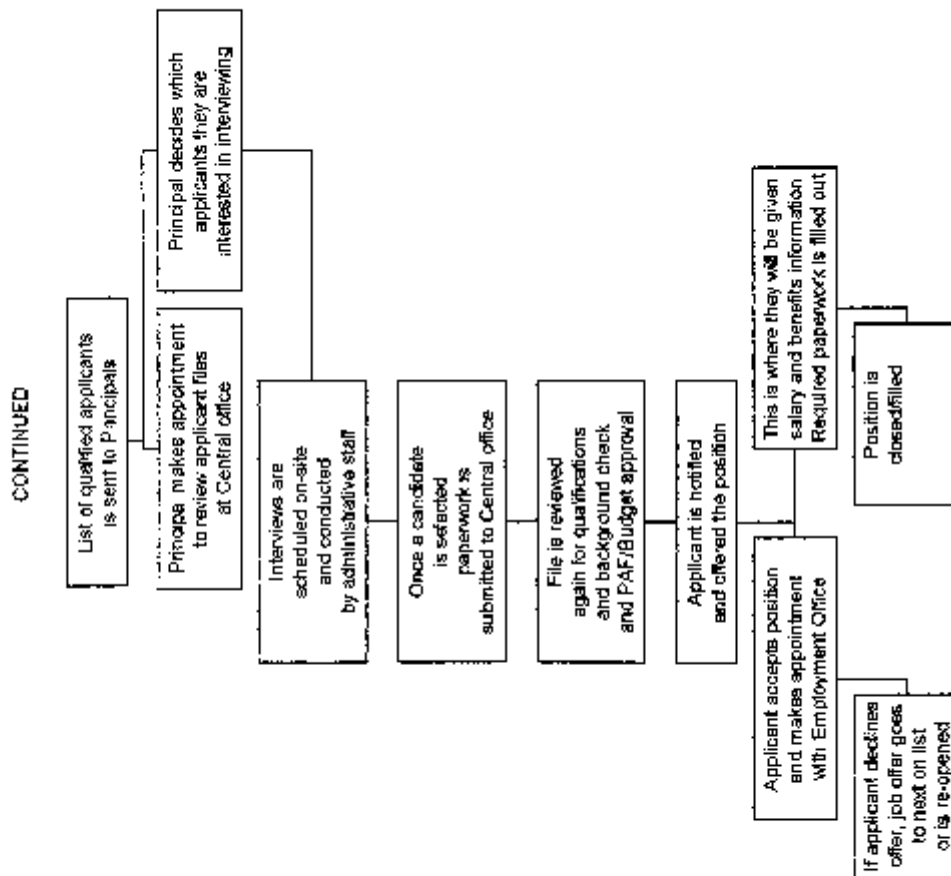
In addition, two inserts have been added to the application in response to concerns addressed in the survey, as well as in response to our personal observation as members of the paraprofessional group. One insert is labeled “Map of Ysleta Independent School District,” and the other is labeled “Salary Information.” Both inserts target the need for applicants to be more knowledgeable about the job position in order to make well-informed choices. These clarifications will benefit not only the applicant but will also expedite the entire process.

Information for recommended Applicant Tracking Systems was extracted from all sources, including survey information, interviews, and personal observations would indicate that the Ysleta Independent School District is prepared to implement one of such mentioned systems. At this time, our opinion is that the implementation of such a system would be conducive to the immediate and long-term objective of the Ysleta Independent School District to streamline the hiring process.

Current Hiring Process for Paraprofessionals

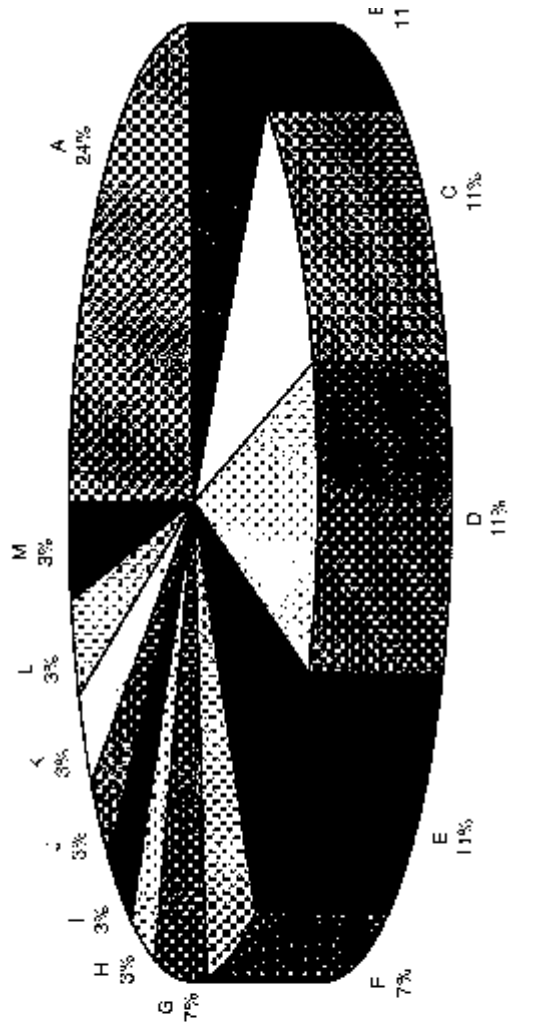


Current Hiring Process for Paraprofessionals



2.4.2 Survey Results

A survey was conducted to identify problems and concerns of the YISD personnel staff. A graph will indicate the major problem areas of the hiring process. This survey is labeled "Survey Results from YISD staff." A second graph, labeled "Paraprofessionals," shows the number of applicants for the time period between April to September 1998. It compares the large number of interested applicants to the actual number hired. This graph reflects the lack of timeliness due to a high volume of data-entry application processing.



***Survey Results from YISD Staff**

Results are from the number of responses and not the number of respondents

- A. automation system
- B. salary survey and job benefits
- C. easier lateral hiring process
- D. stricter adherence to hiring process
- E. expedite hiring process
- F. more staff cooperation/unity
- G. improved staff communication - all levels
- H. better information for potential applicants
- I. courtesy letters for applicants not hired
- J. case time frame for filling positions
- K. more Level 4 positions created
- L. increase applicant accuracy in applications
- M. quicker budget approval for all positions

The survey endeavored to pinpoint inside inside perception from the staff of related problems in the hiring process. All employees involved in the hiring process were notified by the Ysleta ISD administration about the voluntary survey.

Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality. The person filling out the survey was to identify only the department he or she worked for but not his or her name. The completed survey was to be placed in a sealed envelope. These envelopes were then placed in a larger clasp envelope marked "UT-Austin Survey". This large envelope was placed in a central location and supervised by an employee from YISD for tamper-free results. One week later, the envelope was picked up by one of the UT-Austin students.

The survey consisted of the following two open-ended questions:

1. *Please list three things you would like to see improved in the hiring process.*

This question was meant to be general and open-ended in order to allow the employees responding sufficient freedom. This would give the survey an all-around view of the processes involved and also prevented "coached" answers.

2. *Please describe what you see is working well and would like to leave as is.*

The purpose of this question was to identify aspects of the hiring system that are currently working well and should be left as is. This feedback is important because it is difficult for those who do not utilize the current system from day to day to see what actually works and could be improved upon instead of done away with. This was critical for those of us working from the position of observers.

Overall, members of the Human Resources Department generated a positive 'feel' for the department. Several employees stated that the staff felt that they worked well as a team and that there was constructive collaboration among the different departments. Some members emanated confidence in the level of their skill and training and ultimate job execution. Inclusively, a general pride was apparent in the applicant-screening process, which is a determining factor in the protection of the students that attend the Ysleta Independent School District.

However, even those who seemed most satisfied made suggestions and recommendations in areas that they felt warranted improvement. What follows is a synopsis of their responses. These responses will provide insight and direction, as people who know their job and are therefore in a unique position to make constructive and crucial observations offer them.

Among certain responses there appears to be a generally pervasive feeling of isolation and lack of communication. There are personnel who feel out of the information loop. These staff members would like to see a shift from what is at present a formal stratified structure; to a more open, all-inclusive environment conducive to ideas, input, and information sharing from everyone. This could take the form of such simple actions as welcoming all staff members to weekly meetings.

Also, there are staff members that would like to see 'in-house' mobility facilitated and a greater ease of accessibility to jobs that need to be filled. Some of these same respondents suggest that attendance at special training classes and workshops needs to be encouraged and provided.

Other suggestions for improvements include a desire to see more of the paperwork put online. The department is working towards this end at present and the feeling is that the sooner it can be implemented the better.

Several employees would like applicants to be better informed about the position that they are applying for. There is special reference to the pro rate procedure and salary information.

A few department members would also like to see an end to principals and administrators bypassing the hiring system. It is felt that these few individuals should work more with proper procedure and the personnel department.

To conclude, the survey responses included a suggestion for a letter of notification to be sent to applicants informing them of their hiring status. Not only is this seen as an appropriate and professional act of courtesy, it would also reduce the amount of time for people applying for optional positions. A letter of notification could also eliminate time-costly actions generated by applicants, such as telephoning the personnel department to inquire about their hiring status.

(Note: In the survey, 11 surveys were returned for a total of 28 separate responses.)

2.4.3 *Identification of Problems*

2.4.3.1 *PAF Tracking and Budgetary Concerns.* Currently, there are jobs that are being posted before the Budget Office approves the funding. Ideally, school administrators should concurrently send out PAF forms required for budget approval and Decision Memorandums, a procedure for posting expected jobs. Sometimes, for any number of reasons, the required forms are not concurrently sent. If the hiring process is completed and the PAF has not gone through the Budget Office for approval, then the hiring process is put on hold. The PAF should be approved prior to the posting of a job announcement.

2.4.3.2 *Testing Procedures for Clerical and Teacher Aides.* Under the current procedure, test scores for both clerical testing and instructor-aide testing are mailed within three to five days to potential applicants, even though tests administered to potential clerical applicants are immediately graded electronically. This creates a delay by prolonging the time the potential applicant must wait to continue the application process. To speed up the process, test results should be made immediately available. We recommend an electronic formatting of the instructor-aide test. A handwritten test that has to be graded in the same manner could also be a cause for unnecessary delays.

Applicants who do not pass a test must wait at least a 30-day period before being retested. This allows a prolonged delay and causes the potential applicant's paper work to be on hold until the test is successfully re-taken. This waiting period is due to the fact that there is only one test model for each procedure. The wait for test-score results prolongs the period before a potential applicant could retake the test and

continue the application procedure, and this can contribute to delays in filling positions.. A rotation of different tests will alleviate this issue.

2.4.3.3 Job Clarification and Job Posting Accessibility. Many of the available job descriptions in the job listings and job-posting announcements are outdated and possibly misleading. It is crucial for job applicants to have precise information regarding the position in question in order to make well-informed choices.

Oftentimes job requirements change with time owing to any number of circumstances, including technology. The key to a successful hiring experience requires that any changes be recorded and continuously updated. We offer two recommendations for fulfilling this goal. First and foremost, it is vital to promote ‘in house’ accessibility. This contributes to general empowerment, mobility, and job satisfaction. Subsequently, it is important to widen the scope of where job postings are located “out-of-the-box” so that the likelihood of qualified applicants is raised.

2.4.3.4 Job Position Locators. The Ysleta Independent School District includes a wide expanse of area of many individual high school locations surrounded by their "feeder" schools. It would not be unusual for a potential applicant, especially an applicant unfamiliar with the school system, to be unfamiliar with the location of the job posted. Using a Socorro Independent School District Map Locator as a prototype, we developed a similar model for Ysleta. We hope that the availability of a map as an insert in the application, either paper copy or on-line, might assuage any doubts about actual job accessibility due to job location. Again, it is our assumption that the actions of a well-informed job applicant can only potentially serve the entire employment process.

2.4.3.5 Job Salary Information. To continue in the vein of possible application inserts, we would like to refer to a suggestion based exclusively on our survey results. With special reference to the pro-rated procedure employed by the Ysleta Independent School System, it has been brought to our attention that many applicants, especially those unfamiliar with the school system, are unaware of what this means and how it affects the deployment of wages. The addition of a Salary Information List with at least, a concise explanation of what pro-rated means could serve to benefit not only the job applicants, but also the entire employment process.

2.4.3.6 Applicant Tracking. Applications cannot be tracked, because of the absence of an efficient applicant-tracking system. Administrators must make an appointment to review potential employee files, thus prolonging the interviewing process. An applicant-tracking system would allow the administrators to obtain applicant data at their own convenience.

2.5 Findings Concerning the Hiring of Ancillary Personnel

2.5.1 Inspecting the Application

The first difficulty detected in the procedure of hiring ancillary positions in the Ysleta Independent School District (YISD) involves the inspection process of the application. First and foremost, it must be acknowledged that language barriers keep many applicants from correctly filling out the application. El Paso is located on the border of Texas and Mexico and therefore has a large Hispanic population. According to the County and City Data Book for 1991, El Paso County has a Hispanic population of 69.6 percent. Of that 69.6 percent, 64.8 percent speak only Spanish at home, indicating that over half the population of El Paso is either bilingual, communicating in both Spanish and English, or monolingual, speaking only Spanish. According to the initial processing clerks in Personnel, language barriers present the greatest problem in processing the ancillary applications. These clerks spend an inordinate amount of time reviewing and explaining applications, instead of concentrating on their primary job responsibilities.

2.5.2 Format of the Application

The second problem discovered during the inspection of the ancillary application process is the format of the application itself, which includes the level of comprehension at which it is written. As the application is currently written, the job candidate is required to answer open-ended questions in longhand. Open-ended questions often lead to inconsistencies and confusion when processing the application, as the applicant may not use universal terminology in answering. An example of this may occur when the applicant is asked to state which position he or she is applying for. The applicant may respond in one manner, and the processing clerk understand in another, causing the applicant's file to be considered with the wrong job posting. Also of noteworthy importance is the fact that the application form utilizes terminology that is beyond the realm of common understanding. For instance, when asked to list any convictions of felonies or offenses involving moral turpitude, the applicant may regard the term "moral turpitude" as ambiguous and undefined. The uncertainty of this term often leads to incorrect information. As the current format and vocabulary invite these difficulties, the processing clerks are required again and again to spend time explaining and correcting the application.

2.5.3 Reception Policy for Applications

Another impediment afflicting the hiring system of the ancillary position is the prevailing reception policy for applications. Currently, the Ysleta Independent School District reviews the application with the applicant in effort to detect any incorrect or incomplete information on the application form. Only then can the clerk begin the processing. Also, at present, applications received after the deadline are processed and entered into the database, even though the applicant will not be considered. Finally, applicants not meeting the minimum qualification requirements are likewise processed and put into the system even though they will not be considered. These problems unfortunately cause an enormous amount of time to be wasted doing unnecessary tasks.

2.5.4 Criminal-Background Check

In regard to the criminal-background check, the current system appears to be cumbersome. Application clerks do not submit fingerprints upon initial processing of the application, but wait until the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) responds with a synopsis of the applicant's criminal history to a magnetic transmission of an applicant's identification. Furthermore, application personnel submit only the name of the applicant when seeking criminal-arrest information in the "sounds like" database of the Texas Department of Public Safety. As a consequence, numerous, albeit possibly important, erroneous results are retrieved. For example, an applicant with the common name John Smith may collectively cause well over one-hundred criminal arrests to be returned for names sounding like "John Smith," which may include "Jon Smith," "J. Smithe," and "Juan Smiff," just to name a few. Finally, personnel clerks do not send letters requesting resulting dispositions of criminal arrests to the relevant courts until once again after the DPS responds to the magnetic tape transmission, even in those cases in which the applicant has affirmed a criminal arrest on the application. In effect, this causes the application to stagnate, and the processing must be put on hold until the letter is eventually returned. Thus, the entire system is unnecessarily impeded.

2.5.5 Managing the Individual Application within the Pool

A fifth delay in the processing of ancillary applications is due to the great amount of time spent managing the individual application within the application pool as a whole. The selection process begins with a status check of the "Personnel Action Form" (hereinafter referred to as the "PAF"), better known as an indicator of the whereabouts of the applicant's file amongst or within the application hierarchy. This external form begins in the Personnel Department. It is then manually passed from department to department, requiring approval by each before being handed off. This present system unnecessarily relies on human beings to initiate and continue the process of routing the form, assuming complete, correct, and timely information in the process. Unfortunately, in many instances the results are neither complete, nor correct or timely. This in turn causes additional friction within the system.

2.5.6 Checking the Applicant's Credentials

The checking of the applicant's credentials and requisite qualifications is also a concern. At present, the Personnel Department checks for credentials after the application has been processed and prior to the interview, but not--surprisingly--during initial screening. This again allows for unqualified applicants to be entered into the applicant database, which thus acquires superfluous entries.

2.5.7 Scheduling Reviews of Applicants' Files

According to an educator who sits on interview committees from time to time, one obstacle in the present system involves the contacting of the individual campuses to schedule a time to review files of applications for a position. This requires principals to schedule a time that is convenient to come to the Personnel office and physically review the files, which inevitably causes conflicts and delays.

2.5.8 Problems with the J.D.Edwards System

According to Mr. Jerry Reinhart, Director of Management Information Systems (MIS), the J.D.Edwards system would best be described as being in its infancy. That is, the Personnel Department along with the Budget Office have been formalizing the implementation of the J.D.Edwards system into a fully usable operating system. This implementation has, unfortunately, been four years in the running. The reasoning for this delay: The YISD is the first school district in the state of Texas to purchase the J.D.Edwards system and attempt to use it within the non-profit public sector. In other words, J.D.Edwards is geared towards the private business sector. Other problems include: Odd calendar functions for the payroll system (payroll module), as well as problems implementing the control module. This latter external factor has left the Personnel Department dependent on the MIS department for computer services. Otherwise, they would not be able to process applicant data at all.

2.5.9 Completion of the Paperwork

The final systematic problem found in the hiring of ancillary positions is the completion of paperwork. After an applicant has been offered the job and accepts the position, the Personnel Department only then begins a pre-employment checklist. During the interim, not only is the hiring information twice documented, once within the file and again on the PAF, but the applicant is required to come back and fill out numerous other forms, including a W-4. This time-consuming and tedious task once again has deleterious effects on the timeliness of the hiring system.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Recommendations Concerning the Hiring of Administrative Personnel

The following is a list of recommendations to YISD for improving the current hiring process for administrative positions within the district.

3.1.1 *Eliminate Discrepancies between Job Vacancy Postings and Funds Available*

According to the YISD personnel specialist for administrative positions, at times there seem to be discrepancies between job-vacancy postings and the funds available for positions. This problem should be clarified, and a strict statement of policy should be issued and followed by both the Personnel and Budget Offices.

3.1.2 *Keep Applicants for Administrative Positions Informed of Openings*

Even though remaining abreast of current openings is the responsibility of the applicant, we recommend that applicants for principal, or for any of the individual positions listed on DEA-R3 of the administrative/professional positions bulletin, should be kept informed of openings and should complete applications forms thoroughly if a new position is desired. We recommend that applicants be informed if their applications are incomplete, especially if the position has not been filled, so that their applications may be entered into the applicant tracking system. The applicants must inquire about their application status within five working days after the three-week advertising window closes.

3.1.3 *Encourage Applicants to Supply Their Own Criminal History Clearances*

Applicants must supply certified documentation from the Department of Public Safety (DPS) regarding their criminal history and/or record. We recommend that YISD investigate the possibility of decreasing delay times by providing applicants the option of obtaining their own clearances of DPS or criminal history or records, instead of waiting for the YISD to initiate a request to the DPS. This would streamline the demographic data-entry process.

3.1.4 *Impose a Two-Week Limit on the Time for References to be Submitted*

When an initial application requires references, or when references need to be updated, we recommend that a "time-frame" (two-week window) be imposed on the returned references in order to avoid unnecessary delay.

3.1.5 *Expedite Mail Pick-Up and Delivery within YISD*

A strictly adhered to policy must be established for pick-up and delivery of mail, both intra-district and U.S. mail, between the Personnel Department and the Budget Office. Precise methods for stamping and

dating mail when received and when items mailed are imperative. This will not only ensure prompt and efficient mail service, but also provide better communication and cohesiveness among all departments within YISD.

3.1.6 Reduce by Consolidation the Variety of Fund Categories

The YISD personnel specialist for administrators informed our group that YISD has over 100 different money funds. These funds need to be analyzed, and decisions made either to consolidate or abolish funds. This action would possibly provide more funding for needed positions within the district. Consolidation would allow more and easier control and supervision of monies, and thereby save time for the Budget Office.

3.1.7 Provide More Training for Personnel Department Employees

To improve completion of application packets, and to educate administrative applicants concerning the hiring process, the District should provide training or safeguards to establish quality control, efficiency, and consistency at the outset of the application process. Prospective employees must be informed about the hiring steps, the documents required for employment, the education mandated for each position, and the number and criteria essential for references. This action could save time and eliminate the unnecessary step of returning applications, or voiding applications, because of improper or incomplete information, or for lack of appropriate references or for an insufficient number of references provided.

3.1.8 Establish an Intranet for YISD

A proficient method to update and improve communication within and between the Personnel Department and the Budget Office (and, indeed, among all YISD departments) would be to install a WebCT or similar Web-based system, i.e., and intranet for YISD. Employees, applicants, references, campuses, and agencies could interact with each other quickly and confidentially. Group discussions could be held in a more timely and efficient manner.

3.1.9 Establish a Two-Week Window for Applying for Advertised Positions

The Ysleta ISD Principals' Information Packet (PIP) appears weekly on Mondays and includes, among other information, the notice of available positions in the district. The deadline for inclusion is the Wednesday before the Monday the packet is issued; thus, if a job posting is not submitted by Wednesday for the following Monday, a week-long delay is incurred at the outset of the process of trying to fill the position. The job line and the Web page of the *El Paso Times* also advertise openings. The job line is updated every Monday; the Web page, weekly; and job openings are also listed in the weekend edition of the newspaper. Currently, individual job postings provide a three-week window of opportunity for applicants to apply with the YISD Personnel Department. A more expedient time limit would be a two-week window.

3.1.10 *Establish a Standing Committee to Interview Applicants*

After references have been mailed, and a supplemental application form is completed by "pool" applicants, interviews are held. We recommend that the interview selection committee be a standing committee composed of members of the campus communication committee, or some such committee. Such a standing committee would replace the present practice of forming an *ad hoc* committee. The standing committee should have advance notice of meetings and interviews to avoid any delay in the hiring process.

3.1.11 *Restructure the Personnel Department*

We recommend that the Personnel Department be restructured by consolidating various subdepartments within Personnel that duplicate tasks performed on each application. This would save money and time, and would reduce redundancy.

3.2 Recommendations Concerning the Hiring of Professional Personnel

3.2.1 *PAF Refinement*

Of crucial importance to the system is the PAF process, with stress on the necessity for correct information from the initiating individual. Until the J.D.Edwards system is utilized for the PAF, it is essential that administrators complete the PAF correctly and in its entirety. Presentations by Mr. Whitman, Ms. Dominguez, and Ms. Davis, and interviews conducted at the Ysleta ISD administration offices provided insight on a lack of understanding about the importance of the document. Employees fail to grasp the importance of the role of individual departments and their contributions to the hiring process. Delays occur when Budget staff must research information that administrators (or their appointees) include on the PAR. The cabinet representative should identify the mistakes and hold the appropriate individual accountable. There is no excuse for the PAF to arrive at the Budget Office incorrectly filled out.

3.2.2 *Expediting Return of References*

In order to accelerate the hiring process, we recommend that an applicant's references be telephoned. Ms. Rose Hamilton, of Tornillo ISD, and Ms. Alice Guerra, of San Elizario ISD, stated that their respective districts forward acceptable applications to a campus that is scheduling interviews. Each campus's site-based committee chairperson or administrator calls the references listed on the application, and the committee decides whether or not to interview that applicant. In the case of Ysleta ISD, it may be advantageous for central office personnel to call references since several campuses may wish to interview the same applicant. Phoning references will eliminate waiting on references to be mailed out, completed, and finally returned to central office. This recommendation will save Ysleta ISD approximately one to three weeks' time in the hiring process. Another advantage to calling references is that the person answering the reference questions may be more honest and frank because they are providing oral, rather than written, answers. (Oral references are less susceptible than written references to possible future

litigation.) The district or campus requesting the references will likely get a more representative picture of the applicant and will get that better picture in considerably less time.

3.2.3 *Possible Methods of Streamlining the Criminal-Record Check*

To streamline the criminal- record check procedure, there are two possible recommendations that can be explored by the YISD. Our first recommendation is a more immediate solution that the YISD can investigate for consideration. The second recommendation is long-term and may prove beneficial for the entire state; it involves possible suggestions the YISD could make to the Texas Legislature.

3.2.3.1 *Immediate Solution: Consider Joint Submission of Requests for Criminal-History Checks.*

We recommend that the YISD explore with other El Paso-area ISDs the possibility of consolidating the entire El Paso area's school district requests for criminal-history checks. Because of the particular restraints that the Texas DPS puts on the minimal number of requests that can be sent at a time, each district in the area is obligated to hold its requests. Forming one central processing point for all requests would reduce the amount of time needed to accumulate the minimal amount of records requests. It could also provide a permanent central criminal-records databank for all the districts. In a central office, records requests would accumulate more rapidly, and thus the amount of time needed to collect the required minimum number of records requests would be reduced.

An additional benefit of this procedural change would be the creation of a central databank that could be shared by all the districts. An employee that transferred from one district to another could easily be investigated through the central databank. Recent criminal record checks could be done through the local police department at the request of the applicant. Most applicants are residents of El Paso or the nearby area, and for them there would not be a need to reinitiate a new state-wide criminal-record check. The local police department can and will conduct a criminal-record check, for a small fee and with proper identification, to any person requesting their personal records. The investigative results could be sent via conventional mail directly from the police department to the YISD's Personnel Department. This would ensure against any tampering with the information. Any out-of-state criminal-record check requests could be held at this central office and would be accessible as any other records.

All school districts are accountable to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and within the TEA there exist Regional Education Service Centers as part of the Agency structure. Since all Texas school districts also answer to the TEA, a possible location of a central databank of criminal-record checks could be housed within the local Education Service Center, Region XIX. A proposal to Region XIX to create a central regional criminal-record-check databank could be submitted by the local districts, with the YISD as the initiating district of the proposal.

3.2.3.2 *Long-Term Consideration: Use New Technologies for Checking Fingerprints.*

A related recommendation involves a longer time commitment but may prove highly beneficial to all ISDs and several other agencies locally and state-wide. The examination of each individual fingerprint record by an individual technician is, to all considerations, out-dated. With our nation's remarkable improvements in

technology, one state in particular has applied technological advancements to their criminal-records searching procedure. The state of California has a very sophisticated online fingerprint-searching system. This system provides a quick examination of all fingerprints held on record in the state.

If the state of Texas could convert its criminal record investigation to this or a comparable type of system, the YISD and all the districts in the state would benefit. All fingerprint records could be searched online, and this could be done locally by a designated terminal at DPS facilities in the El Paso area. Agencies benefitting from this system would not only be local but also statewide. A proposal, initiated by YISD together with other ISDs and any other El Paso-area agencies that would benefit from this type of online system, could be presented, through the local state representatives, to the state legislature for consideration.

3.2.4 Broaden the Use of Network Technology

Networking eliminates the redundancy of many basic tasks. Unique technology has produced a new process which is essential to overcome obstacles to timeliness and exemplary results. With shared databases, information can be accessed simultaneously by any department needing information relating to an applicant. Information technology can eliminate the need for separate units to work in isolation and be alienated from the process as a whole.

When the system is networked, workers are more likely to see the whole process and recognize their responsibility in the total system. Employee contributions create a sense of accomplishment and work becomes more satisfying and substantive. Empowering personnel with the ability to make decisions also adds to their productivity.

3.2.5 Conduct In-House Training for Employees

We propose that Ysleta ISD conduct in-house training for employees. Seminars should be provided for all personnel dealing with the PAF and other components of the system. New staff especially need to be trained and empowered with the knowledge of the entire process. In-service training for administrators is of crucial importance to the system, with stress on the necessity of correct information. Until the J.D.Edwards system is utilized for the PAF, the administrator or his or her appointee, must be trained to process the PAF correctly.

We recommend that YISD:

- ! Provide ongoing seminars for all personnel dealing with the PAF, especially as new staff become part of the system. Training provides an opportunity to increase the number of complete, accurate PAFs sent to the Budget Office for approval. This, in turn, would decrease the time that has, up until now, been needed to “clean up” the PAFs.
- ! Schedule in-service training sessions or workshops for administrators.

- ! Utilize opportunities to provide in-service sessions and workshops during administrative retreats or the summer interim.

3.2.6 *Establish a System for Online Applications*

An online application would be a viable alternative for the professional group, and probably for other groups also. Ysleta ISD would want to hire individuals who were at least somewhat comfortable with technology. An online application would confirm the applicant's abilities with technology and greatly reduce the time involved in processing the application. It would also be advantageous to verify the completed application online before sending it to the next segment of the process. It is generally considered a mistake to try to fix a problem; rather, changing a process radically will produce better results. This concept may seem a drastic maneuver, but the results could be outstanding.

Finally, a networking system needs to be put in place by which the PAF can be filled out at the school site and sent to the Budget Office electronically.

3.3 Recommendations Concerning the Hiring of Paraprofessional Personnel

3.3.1 *PAF Tracking and Budget*

The Budget Office should approve the PAF prior to the posting of the job announcement. Because this does not always occur, we think that perhaps measures could be taken to ensure appropriate procedures. This would apply to both new and replacement positions. Our suggestion is simple, but we hope effective. Whether the Decision Memorandum is sent in paper form or electronically, the job should not be posted until the PAF has undergone proper procedure and has been officially approved. This proceeding would reduce the time involved in hiring new employees. The role of principals and administrators should be to fill positions in a timely manner.

3.3.2 *Job Analyst*

In order to better assist the hiring process, it is proposed that the district hire a job analyst. The analyst would be responsible for updating descriptions of all jobs. This position need not be full-time. However, it is imperative that updating be done on a regular basis to maintain maximum efficiency and uniformity in the hiring process. There is also electronic technology available to assist in this matter.

3.3.3 *Job Postings*

Currently there are several ways to obtain information about job openings. A person can call or visit the YISD Central Office for job postings. Often job openings are publicized in the local newspaper. Employees who are already with the Ysleta Independent School District can also receive information through a publication known as the Principal's Information Package. This publication is sent out weekly to all campuses. Usually this paper is put in a location of public access such as the faculty lounge or the

library. The difficulty in this situation is that there is only one copy available for the entire campus personnel. It is suggested that the model used by the El Paso Independent School District (EPISD) should be used. A newsletter named *The AdCom* is published and disseminated weekly to all EPISD district employees. Besides news items of interest to employees, job postings for all levels are featured. Because everyone receives individual copies of job postings, no one encounters any stigma for looking at other opportunities.

3.3.4 *Testing Procedures for Clerical and Teacher Aides*

Testing for paraprofessionals is currently computerized. However, the results take between three to five days to reach the applicant. Scoring should be done immediately, and the results should be made available the same day. The applicants will then be able to ascertain if they can proceed with the application process, or should make appointments for future testing.

Applicants who find it necessary to retest should be allowed to do so within one week. Several versions of the test should be available so that the applicant can be given a new test. The gap of 30 days between testing will be eliminated, thus making the process faster.

Persons who are applying for teacher-aide positions will still take the written-composition portion of the testing. However, with the remainder of the testing streamlined, greater overall speed will still be achieved. The greatest change proposed is that applicants will be notified of their scores the same day they test. Tests would be graded by the end of the day they were taken. If the test is passed, then the applicants can continue with the hiring procedure.

The Central Office can also post the scores at a centrally located bulletin. Applicants can also call the job line with a pre-assigned code to access their score at any time. This same-day notification would greatly speed up the application process, because applicants would know whether or not they could continue with the application or will have to reschedule a test date.

3.3.5 *Applicant Tracking*

The application process can be improved by investing time and money on an applicant-tracking system. This would help the clerical staff save time in data entry. Among the possibilities would be the implementation of one of the following software programs.

Trak-It is an applicant-tracking system with an array of features that is easy to learn and use. Screens for applicant data collection, status and history, and for online résumé information are easily accessible by clicking on an icon. Mass updates of any database file, WordPerfect merge files, Excel files, Lotus files, and ASCII files provide easy set up and changes for security purposes. Various options are offered such as the Scanner module, which scans résumés in seconds and searches for keywords that will identify the résumés with most keywords, so that these résumés can be read later by an actual person. This electronic sorting will help the personnel staff in reducing the time that is required to read one résumé at a

time. The résumé with the most keywords within its text will be the priority résumé and one of the first brought up on the screen by the administrators. The networking of this software will keep all staff informed about the status of applicants. The Web Publishing module markets the job openings world-wide, and it would also make it possible to receive applications via the Internet. Potential applicants could also email résumés and/or applications, and the applicant could also read the verification of results. A courtesy message or notice would be sent to indicate that the information has been received. The *Trak-It* vendor will provide staff support and training. The software can also be accessed on a trial basis before purchase. Starting cost is \$700 per system. The system is available to use on Netware, Windows NT, or Appleshare networks. For additional information, go to <http://www.trak-it.com/AT-Overview.html>.

HR Computing and Applicant Tracking/HR Tools system, from Jamestown Area Labor-Management Committee, is another program that is recommended to help reduce hiring time. This system tracks skills, education and referrals. User-defined input fields allow customization of the program to fit the needs of a particular institution. The applicant skills are entered manually, and this allows thorough searches for qualified applicants. The tracking status indicates where the hiring process is. Note tabs are available to leave messages and comments. System requirements are: Windows 3.1 or 95. Cost starts at approximately \$700 per system. For more information, go to <http://www.jalmc.org/wpr/a-appt.htm>.

The third software recommendation is *Applicant Smartware* from S. Reynolds & Associates, Inc. This software is compatible with other software, but its basic purpose is to improve an applicant tracking system. It tracks and reports applicant data status and developed around the concept of reducing personnel time of inputting data. Applicants can select more than one position, and the applicant tracking system will select candidates by keyword search. It will help reduce “per hiring” costs by searching for candidates by location and specific skills. It interacts with word processors and generates a résumé-acknowledgment letter automatically. Through an immediate courtesy letter, applicants learn that receipt of their applications is being acknowledged. The cost for this software starts at \$1,200 per user, or \$1,800 for 4 or more users. For further information, go to <http://www.applicantsmartware.com>.

Another recommendation is from the HR Press: the *Applicant Tracking/HR Tools* system. It tracks skills, education, departments, positions applied for, current status, and referral sources. The system is customized to specific needs. It has a built-in processor, tracks status changes, and provides unlimited record capacity. Hr Press has a “Table of Contents” which offers other software products from A to Z, for example: BackTrak for Windows. This software will automate your background verification for criminal, driving, credit reports and other search functions. Jobdescription software is also available that offers a new method for writing and maintaining job descriptions to help in the process of writing job announcements. The cost starts at approximately \$700. For more information, go to <http://www.hrpress-software.com>

3.3.6 Enhance the YISD World-Wide Web Page

The Ysleta ISD Web page is informative, but specific modifications will be needed to aid the application process. A tracking system will also provide Web-page development for résumés and cover letters. The

system will also include online Web-page development and scanner capabilities to facilitate scanning printed résumés. A software program with such features will help the application process. First, the résumé, letter of interest and application will be delivered to the central office by web or via e-mail. The application must be filled completely. An incomplete or incorrect application cannot be sent to the Personnel clerk to initiate the application process. This step will help the clerk in that all incoming applications will be completely filled out, and the process of applicant tracking will run more smoothly. Any problems will immediately be brought to the attention of the data-entry clerk who receives applications on a daily basis at the clerk's workstation. Second, the application will automatically be entered into the tracking system, which will help the application, and ultimately the hiring process, move more quickly.

At present, at the time of viewing the Web page, an interested applicant will not know to go to “About Us” in order to get to the “Employment” link. Once in the employment link, Adobe Acrobat Reader has to be downloaded to view a job description. This process should be simplified or the applicant may become disinterested to apply for position. If the YISD Web page is accessible, the employment opportunities should also be available for viewing. An online application will help the hiring process. See the YISD Web site, <http://www.ysleta.isd.tenet.edu/>

3.3.6.1 *Application Inserts.*

Map Insert:

The information provided on the map is as follows: name and location of school, name and business number of administrator, and physical location of the school. The purpose of providing a geographical map showing the general location of Ysleta Independent School District schools serves many purposes. Applicants can utilize the map to focus on the area of preference for employment. Also, applicants may need to know the actual location of a work site due to transportation issues. Another advantage of providing a map is that it serves as a handy reference to applicants or anyone who needs to know the name of the administrator at a specific school or needs an address or telephone number.

The primary purpose of the map insert is for applicants to utilize it to indicate their campus preference to the personnel department. Another reason the map will be a useful tool is in the case if a position becomes available the applicant would not waste time if the job is inaccessible due to physical location or other restrictions.

Job salary insert:

Interested candidates many times are unaware or uninformed about salary rates for the different levels in the clerical positions. This insert will help the applicant better understand the pro-rate salary for a specific position.

3.3.7 *Recommendations for General Improvement of the Paraprofessional Hiring Process*

The traditional approach views an organization as a vertical structure. Recently, horizontal or team-based organizations have become increasingly popular. These types of organizations emphasize facilitation of the business process by streamlining the workload.

The vertical approach creates boundaries that discourage employee interaction and delineate and accentuate the gaps between levels in the hierarchical arrangement. These gaps help to lower the level of cooperation and communication within the structure. The lower the level in the hierarchy, the greater the gap. In resolving issues, a greater amount of time and energy is consequentially expended and there is a better chance of miscommunication and frustration. Often, an inevitable degree of ‘powerlessness’ among employees is cultivated.

The principal starting point for changing from vertical to horizontal management is a clear and efficient understanding of the entire work process. The objective is to improve flow management and work quality and increase value for clients. “The key is to align market needs, corporate strategies, and each of the core business processes; to identify the disconnects; and to ensure that each process adds value from the client’s perspective.” (Kalakota and Whinston 414) Successful implementation is achieved through employee empowerment, improved communication, and the elimination of unnecessary work.

Even if a formal plan of horizontal management is not adopted, there are strategies that can be employed that will be beneficial to everyone. Employees that feel good about their work environment will be more likely to stay longer and will offer a higher level of contribution and cooperation.

Some of the strategies offered in David Foot’s “13 Head and Heart Suggestion,” are ideas for recruiting and retention that can be applied by almost any company. These ideas begin with hiring the right people for the organization from the start.

Cultural suitability within the department environment is as important as all other qualifications. Educate everyone on what to look for in prospective employees and encourage them to recruit wherever they go! Support “in house” hiring through informal recruiting efforts. Reward referrals and subsequent hires. Comb your database for employees who rejected previous offers and former employees who may want to return. Remember the World-Wide Web!

Inform your employees that though jobs are different from one another, they are each as important. It is necessary to make staff feel that they are part of a greater mission or purpose. This action is one step closer to job contentment. Begin with new employee assimilation.

It is vital to make people feel ‘at home’ within the first two months of employment. Immerse them in company culture, structure, business processes, and skills. Spend on training and education for each employee. Establish a mentor program.

Employees will support that which they create. Encourage them to think, create, suggest, and improve. It will take time but working toward an environment where there is not a fear of repercussion, especially

when something does not work the way it was meant to, reaffirms meaningful priorities. You want everyone to work toward improvement. Each individual's input is of value.

Improve the work environment. Don't underestimate the value of a pleasant work environment. In a recent survey, eighty-nine percent of 11,000 respondents said that atmosphere mattered most to them in their work place. Bigger cubicles and offices, better lighting, better food, exercise facilities, nicer furniture, are only some of the possible considerations.

Don't let communication stop when employees leave. Treat former workers as alumni with lifetime affiliation. Send updated directories and newsletters. Everyone likes parties and events where people can eat and catch up with what people are doing.

Even if people don't respond, they are more likely to recommend candidates and act as ambassadors.

Make sure that people know how much they are appreciated. Thank staff members at meetings, post praises on bulletin boards, print compliments in newsletters. Mix heavily publicized recognition awards with useful rewards such as flextime or training. Incentive and recognition programs won't mean a thing if base salaries are below market rates. Be sure to collect market data at least twice per year.

3.3.8 Concluding Comments on the Paraprofessional Hiring Process

The current system of hiring paraprofessionals does an admirable job of handling many applicants. There are several significant steps that the Budget Office and the Human Resources Department can use to make the process move even more effectively.

The primary recommendation is to automate the system using a multi-functional tracking system. By implementing such a system, anyone in the Budget Office and the Human Resources Department can check on the status of an applicant's paperwork. By being able to track the application at its various stops delays can be avoided by making key persons more keenly aware of taking action in a timely manner.

In the interim, while waiting to implement the technology to assist in this endeavor, it is strongly suggested that a communications regrouping should be considered to better improve information dissemination for all staff regardless of position. By understanding what is occurring at different levels, staff can better serve potential applicants and others.

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3.4 Recommendations Concerning the Hiring of Ancillary Personnel

3.4.1 *Merge the Personnel Action Form into the J.D.Edwards System*

The first recommendation from the ancillary category is to merge the function of the Personnel Action Form (PAF) into the J.D.Edwards Human Resource Information System (HRIS). At its present stage, the MIS department along with the Budget office, are implementing the payroll module into the existing J.D.Edwards system. This electronic function of the PAF should eliminate the tedious paper work that has to be routed. Since this is an external activity outside of the Personnel Department, it would be well advised to keep track of this electronic flow of information when considering purchasing an applicant tracking system (ATS; discussed infra).

3.4.2 *Suggestions for a Tracking System for Personnel Applications*

According to Ms. Martha Dominguez of Personnel Management, the Personnel Department is currently considering purchasing an “automated application tracking system” (ATS). When considering purchasing such a major software system, YISD should complete an in-depth analysis of the proposed software. Rather than listing individual software packages, we are offering suggestions for the initial stage of acquiring such a new system. One of us having worked with Pat McClintock, who is an information systems consultant with RMG Consultants in Chicago, we feel the following suggestions would aid in the development process of acquiring a good application tracking system.

3.4.2.1 Depending on the complexity and cost of a new system, a request for proposal (RFP) may be needed. Ensure that the functionality of the desired system requirements are listed down in the appropriate modules. When describing the required module action, make sure that a detailed overview is given so that there is clarity of communication between YISD and the software vendor(s).

3.4.2.2 Be sure to include all technical details of the existing computer system and/or any other future computer components that may be added. Such items include communication features (e.g. 100BaseT,

network layouts, and configurations), database environment (i.e., whether or not YISD is running an object-oriented database or a relational database), and possible expansion needs for the future.

3.4.2.3 Feel free to include any desired module options in the RFP, regardless of how far-fetched the option might sound. Many software companies are continuously engaged in software development for new technology and/or options. In fact, it is not unheard-of for a computer-software development company to return an RFP with accommodation software to run desired computer options, or a projection date indicating when the option software may become available.

3.4.2.4 Insist on standardization of computer-hardware and -software compatibility. Such items include standards for all of the Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) Reference Model (ISO7498 and related standards), ANSI-compliant, data-structure platforms (i.e. records held in an Oracle compliant environment), and for structured-query language (SQL) compatibility to ensure that data will be capable of being manipulated for future needs.

3.4.2.5 When looking for vendors to whom to send an RFP, YISD may consider choosing from a State of Texas Qualified Information Service Vendors (QISV) list. This list of vendors simply means that the State of Texas has given approval to market such systems within the state. This is also a sign of software companies having a reputable sales and/or service record.

3.4.2.6 Above all, since this is an external software system outside of J.D.Edwards, ensure full compatibility with the existing J.D.Edwards system. Also inquire as to details of data conversion into and from existing operating systems.

3.4.3 *Additional Recommendations for the Employee-Hiring Process*

We also offer additional recommendations, aside from those dealing with the development stage of acquiring a new ATS.

3.4.3.1 One recommendation is to include the setting up of functionality controls that provide for the necessary flags when conducting electronic confirmations. For example, if the proper consent was not given by the originator of the position, or someone else involved in the electronic process, the system would simply not allow any further processing. This feature would prompt the user to provide fast access and prompt delivery of required actions on a pending request function.

The institution of this recommendation into the process would eliminate constantly checking the status of the external PAF form in the various departments. A quick status check on the terminal is all that would be required for proper authorization on a particular position that has been given clearance. Thus, the error of processing an application on the erroneous assumption that the Budget Office has allocated or authorized funding for that particular position would be eliminated.

3.4.3.2 Since automation is going to be a reality for both the Budget and Personnel Departments, proper

steps must be taken to make the transition as smooth as possible. A couple of recommendations exist but must be amplified to ensure an easy transition.

3.4.3.2.1 First, establishing good communication with the Management Information System (MIS) Department or other departments in charge of transition would provide clear guidelines for setting up projection dates. By doing this, it allows the Personnel Department to establish planning guidelines for a new transition. Also providing proper feedback with the MIS Department during the implementation stage of setting up a new computer system would eliminate small errors and possibly greater errors down the line.

3.4.3.2.2 Second, at present, the principals at each individual campus are required to schedule time to review applications. A recommendation would be to incorporate an ATS system for external users outside of the Personnel Department that can be accessed online for review of applicants from the individual principal's campus. An article by John E. Spirig states that an applicant-tracking system allows for both the Personnel Department as well as managers to track the status of events on an applicant. Such events include interview schedules, names of interviewers, evaluation results, contacts, and other events in the interviewing process. This would eliminate an enormous amount of time spent on scheduling conflicts. Instead of spending one day reviewing files and then scheduling the appropriate interviews, principals could review applicants' files and schedule interviews in the same day, thus shortening the hiring process at the very least by a day.

3.4.3.3 Another timesaving option that may be considered by YISD would be to look into a “computerized employment job screening system”. The concept of “computerized job screening” was first pioneered in 1979 by Brooks Michell, who was then a teacher at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Ysleta ISD could, amazingly, utilize this “employment computerized job screening system” before the applicant even takes an application.

This screening system would hopefully expedite the application process by eliminating applicants not qualified for employment. By requiring an applicant to answer a set of basic screening questions in his or her preferred language, determinative answers can be delivered via computer over a push-button telephonic keypad, or alternatively via the World-Wide Web, for a job compatibility analysis. In other words, the applicant responses are automatically coded (e.g. "Abnormally accepted", "Requires more information", "Raises serious concern", etc) for compatibility with the requirements of the position being applied for. Interestingly enough, the screening system also tracks how much time an applicant takes to answer a question (e.g., if the applicant hesitates before answering the question), which may indicate purposeful falsification of answers, analogous to present day polygraph capabilities. If given an overall positive score, the applicant would be eligible for further processing; otherwise, he or she would be immediately eliminated.

In addition to this job-screening system, Ysleta ISD may want also to incorporate a “criteria validity scoring module” for budget accountability. Various different companies have utilized this screening system and have had favorable outcomes in processing applications in a timely, effective, and efficient manner.

3.4.4 *Consider a Web-Based Application System*

When it comes to the acceptance of new technology by the end users, Martha Dominguez had a great suggestion. She is looking into a system that is Web-based. In other words, the end user has the option of a customized interface (with proper modification of course), considering that a Web-based interface system accepts hypertext markup language (HTML). This is a strong feature that is not available on Windows- or text-based systems; with such systems, once you purchase a package, you are basically stuck with its interface, unless the software manufacturer provides for customization. Again, with an HTML interface, if users dislike the screen arrangement, MIS could customize the screen template.

3.4.5 *Provide Training to Employees*

Lastly, when converting to a new automated system, ATS training should be definitely considered. This allows the employees to become familiar and comfortable with the new system. A series of workshops and training schedules should be established in advance to ensure a smooth transition of Personnel's current process. Follow-up training should also be arranged to ensure full knowledge of the system software. Documentation provided from the software vendor should also be included in any training programs for future referral purposes.

3.4.6 *Create a New Application Form for Ancillary Positions*

To ensure complete and correct applications, YISD should create a new application form for the ancillary positions. The first suggested improvement is to create a bilingual application in recognition of the high number of Spanish-speaking individuals applying for ancillary positions. The second improvement involves the language of the application. The book *Business Process Improvement*, by H. James Harrington, suggests that an application form should be written at a level of comprehension three grades below the education completed by the typical applicant. Accordingly, in El Paso, since only 63.7 percent of the population of individuals twenty-five years and over have completed high school, the application for ancillary positions should be written at a ninth-grade comprehension level. Therefore, wordy concepts like "moral turpitude" should instead be replaced by easier-to-understand language. The last change involves simplifying the application. The application needs to include more questions that involve checklist answers instead of lengthy written answers.

Simultaneously, if the Personnel Department would provide applicants with an laminated insert that listed all ancillary positions currently available, this might ensure greater consistency amongst applications, thereby providing for easier routing when it comes to placing the form in the proper pool of consideration. This insert, for example, would provide the applicant with a job number that corresponds to the application. In turn, this would undoubtedly also allow for faster data entry into the computer system.

3.4.7 *Create a "For Office Use Only" Section on the Application*

To facilitate the proper verification of credentials among potential applicants, we recommend that a section

be included on the application that is labeled "For Office Use Only". Within this section, verification of credentials such as a food handler's card or certification, licenses, and other pertinent information would be confirmed by the appropriate supervisor or authorized person, thereby eliminating the need to photocopy these documents in contravention of current policy. It is imperative that this application step be completed before the application will be processed any further.

3.4.8 *Stop Accepting Late, Incomplete, and Incorrect Applications*

The current system tolerates late, incomplete, and incorrect applications. Moreover, unqualified applications are accepted as well. Applications falling into these circumstances are processed into the system even though these applicants will not be legitimately considered for hiring. This is time wasted on processing futile applications. Therefore, we recommend that an unwavering policy of zero tolerance be adopted for late, incomplete, and incorrect applications.

We further recommend that this policy be instituted through a disclosure statement that conveys to applicants its importance, possibly in a conspicuous manner with large bold (or italicized) type atop the form itself. YISD may also want to include in this statement an explanation of purpose that conveys to the applicant the necessity of such a harsh policy. For example, "The sole aim of a deadline in this application process is to provide for efficiency and does not in any way interfere with the good intentions of this employment office and its inclusive policy of consideration for all without regard to immutabilities, albeit as long as the form is submitted in a timely fashion."

3.4.9 *Institute Early Fingerprinting of Applicants*

Although our Federal Constitution has only implicit substantive rights to privacy, the state of Texas has taken up express provisions to account for the lack thereof in regards to state criminal records. These provisions have been codified in "Vernon's Texas Annotated" under the dictates of Chapter 411, which states in pertinent part:

Criminal history records obtained from the [Texas] Department [of Public Safety] under this subchapter [Sub-Section .084] is for the exclusive use of the authorized recipient of the information; and may be disclosed or used by the recipient only if, and only to the extent that, disclosure or use is authorized or directed by statute[;] ...or court order.

At first glance it appears as if an individual's right to privacy concerning state criminal records is absolute. Upon closer inspection, however, the state of Texas has undoubtedly weighed the detriments versus the advantages of such a hard and fast rule, and concluded that individual privacy should not be put above preventable potential human harm. This logic has led to the adoption of a laundry list of express exceptions allowing for dissemination of criminal records.

One such exception is codified under Chapter 22 of the Texas Education Code, which *entitles* a school district to query or access an individual's criminal history. Unfortunately, Ysleta Independent School

District's current system of criminal history background checks does not seem to fully account for this stipulation of *entitlement*. Therefore, it is suggested that YISD begin a finger-printing card system upon initial reception of the application form so as to properly retrieve *all* available historical criminal information on hand at the Texas Department of Public Safety instead of the limited, and often inaccurate, information that is currently being returned. This fingerprint card would be forwarded with the original magnetic criminal check, thereby eliminating the need to resubmit this card at a later date under separate processing guidelines. In any event, this card has to be submitted if the tape returns a possible match, no matter if in error or not, so why not eliminate this superfluous resubmit step? Moreover, because the fingerprint card provides additional background information from the job candidate (i.e., the address, DOB, physical attributes, etc.), a lot of confusion with applicants with similar names could be eliminated.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that all of the school districts within El Paso should come together in a community meeting with state and local representatives with the goal of creating a system whereby applicant fingerprints could be duplicated by electronic means and forwarded via modem to a state-run database of fingerprint images in Austin, Texas. Such a system would undoubtedly be similar to the system that is currently being used by Texas to eliminate the welfare fraud that previously plagued the "Lone Star System". Such an electronic fingerprint-duplication system may possibly even allow for a same-day response to a criminal history inquiry (specifically, an arrest), hopefully eliminating the two- to four-week time lag currently slowing down Ysleta's processing of applications..

3.4.10 *Speeding Up the Processing of Applicants Who Have an Arrest Record*

Another time-saving suggestion is to immediately send off criminal-court disposition letters upon initial submission of the application by a job candidate who positively indicates that he or she was arrested for a crime involving moral turpitude (discussed supra). This would abolish unnecessary waiting until the results from the "sounds-like" query are returned from the DPS two to four weeks later.

3.4.11 *Pre-Employment Checklist*

Our final recommendation concerns the final paperwork section. The pre-employment checklist should begin with the initial application process and continue through the system in tandem with the applicant. For example, as the certification is verified, the pre-employment checklist should simultaneously reflect this step. This would get rid of the need to refer to other sources that have the information on the checklist. It would also eliminate the time that is spent verifying information that has already been processed.

3.5 General Recommendations

In re-engineering, jobs change, attitudes and efforts of empowered workers change, a sense of ownership and teamwork prevails, and the focus shifts to results. If the emphasis is on employees' exercising judgment, they must be educated to increase their insight and understanding of the overall process, not just trained to perform a particular specialized job. If the YISD employee feels he or she makes a difference, that he or she has ownership of problems, that he or she belong to a team, and that he or she must be

constantly learning, the hierarchical structure will give way to a flat organization where people take pride in the accomplishments of others. The employees in this new structure will need to have self-discipline and be motivated to work as part of the self-directing team. Continuing education is necessary over the lifetime of a job. Flexibility is essential. Technology “enables organizations to break old rules and create new ways of working, that is, to re-engineer.” (Hammer and Champy, 1994)

Re-engineering will be disruptive and those not comfortable with technology will object to these changes. Leaders and people in high positions need to be fully educated and committed to re-engineering. This transition will be difficult and should not be rushed. Persuading the people in the organization that major change will be profitable is vital.

A vision statement which focuses on operations and includes measurable objectives is critical to begin the re-engineering. This vision needs to be communicated clearly from Mr. Whitman and Ms. Dominguez. These two individuals have the credibility and clout to diplomatically articulate the vision and to gain the support of employees. Strong executive leadership will accomplish more than many other tools which would be tried. True re-engineering will change practically everything, including people, jobs, managers, and values. With the power of technology, YISD can break away from old rules and create new ways of working efficiently.

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