

# Archived Information

---

## **Objective 4.5: The Department's employees are highly skilled and high-performing.**

### **National Need.**

**National Concerns.** The Department of Education is committed to ensuring that its employees are highly skilled and performing at optimal levels. Research of best practices in government and industry indicates that high organizational performance is a result of hiring and retaining good people and ensuring that those people have the training and tools they need to perform. Employees also need a physical work environment conducive to productivity, e.g., free from workplace hazards and threats and equipped with proper lighting and air quality. In addition, high-performing organizations create a positive work climate built on the strengths of a workforce that is diverse in skills and personal experiences.

**Our Role.** Several key trends influenced the development of specific ED strategies to ensure that our workforce is highly skilled and high-performing. One trend indicates an expected short supply of excellent, highly skilled workers over the next several years. One of our responses has been to improve the quality of training and development services available to ED employees. ED will also have to compete with the private sector to attract and retain the best and brightest employees and managers.

Within ED, responsibility for ensuring that employees are highly skilled and high-performing is shared by the entire leadership team of the Department.

The Department is promoting high performance for organizational components within ED. ED has introduced a broad range of new training and development programs in a variety of formats. Management training in the Department has been overhauled, partnerships have been formed with local colleges and universities, career counseling services are offered to employees, courses are available online, and program-specific training is available. Employees are encouraged to pursue developmental opportunities through a new lateral "mobility assignment program," mentoring program, and other special programs. The Department's employees continue to have full access to government-wide programs, including the Women's Executive Leadership Program and executive development programs sponsored by the Federal Executive Institute, the Council for Excellence in Government, and Harvard University.

ED is ensuring a healthy, safe, and secure workplace for all employees. ED facilities have been upgraded, and improvements continue to be made. Changes have been made to improve the health, safety, and productivity of ED's employees.

In 1997, the agency redesigned its complaint resolution process and officially opened an Informal Dispute Resolution Center (IDR Center). Employees are required to use the IDR Center as a first stop for any employment concerns. The IDR Center's mediators provide information and other services in an attempt to resolve matters informally. The Department strives to hear and respond to employee concerns through a variety of other venues, including the recently redesigned employee suggestions system and dialogue sessions conducted as part of the President's Race Initiative.

---

## **Our Performance**

**How We Measure.** The three performance indicators for Objective 4.5 reflect an emphasis on the strategies in place to ensure that ED employees are highly skilled and high-performing. We want to ensure that our people and our organizations have the necessary skills to carry out the work of the Department, and we have included a performance indicator to measure the progress in this area. In addition, the Department wants to

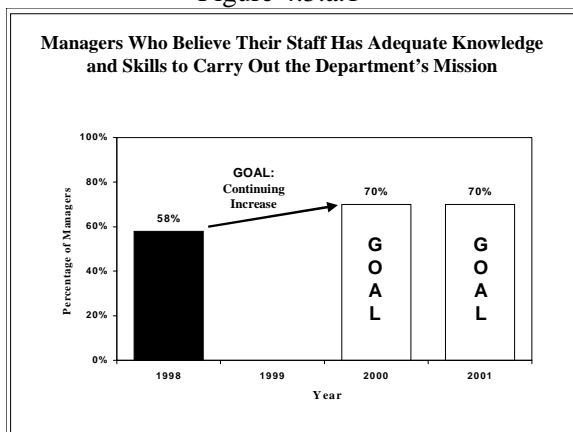
ensure that its support services are adequate so that employees can perform to fullest capacity in an environment free from workplace hazards and distractions that affect morale or create down time. To this end, the Department has established two performance indicators to track satisfaction with the quality of the work environment and with assistance attained from the Department to resolve disputes, balance work and life responsibilities, and address organizational or employee performance problems.

---

**Indicator 4.5.a. Seventy percent of survey respondents will agree that manager and employee knowledge and skills are adequate to carry out the Department’s mission.**

**Assessment of Progress.** Although no 1999 data exist for this indicator, progress is expected in 2000 and 2001 because significant effort was made in 1999 to expand and improve training and development opportunities for ED employees. As described elsewhere in this report, the Department’s Training and Development Center (TDC) has introduced a broad range of new training and development programs in a variety of formats, including customized training for intact departmental teams and online training. During 1999, the entire approach to management development training in the Department was overhauled. Historically, survey and focus-group data and information from the Government Accounting Office (GAO) indicate that agency managers lack confidence in staff knowledge and skills to manage employee performance and large system adequately. Figure 4.5.a.1 shows that an April 1998 survey of managers revealed that only 58 percent of ED managers agree that staff possesses knowledge and skills adequate to carry out the Department’s mission. The 2000 and 2001 targets have been revised from 75 percent to 70 percent, based on historical improvement rates for this activity. An extensive employee survey effort is planned for 2000 to assess overall progress in meeting performance targets related to improving employee satisfaction with training opportunities and readiness to perform the work of the Department.

Figure 4.5.a.1



**Source:** April 1998 Training and Development Center Survey of Managers. **Frequency:** No regular schedule established. **Next Update:** Data will be collected through the Department’s 2000 Employee Survey. **Validation procedures:** Data supplied by the Department’s Training and Development Group. No formal verification or attestation procedure applied. **Limitations of data:** Training and Development Center staff conducted the April 1998 survey of 566 managers and manually tabulated the results. The survey was sent via e-mail, and a 60 percent response rate was achieved.

---

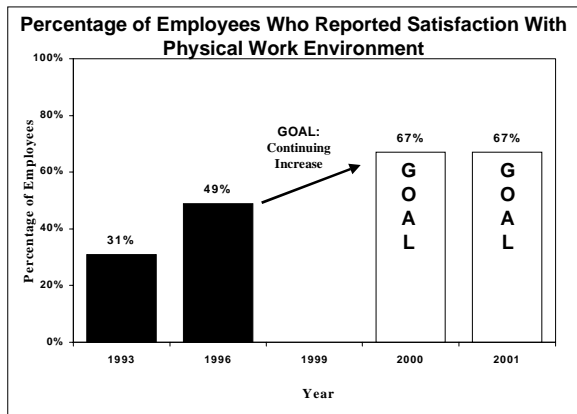
**Indicator 4.5.b. Most employees will indicate satisfaction with their work environment (e.g., physical surroundings, noise level, and air quality), security, and accessibility.**

**Assessment of Progress.** No 1999 data are available, but progress toward target is likely. Since 1993, the Department has tracked employee satisfaction with the physical work environment, security arrangements,

and accommodations for persons with disabilities. This plan reflects revised targets for satisfaction with the physical work environment based on a review of results of the 1996 government-wide Organizational Assessment Survey(OAS). This is a survey developed and administered by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to various Federal agencies and other organizations. A review of OPM data showed that government employee satisfaction with the physical environment averaged 60 percent. ED has set its targets at 67 percent, which is slightly higher than this average satisfaction level. This target is based on the expectation that recent emphasis on ED facilities improvements should yield slightly higher satisfaction levels than the average for Federal agencies that have been surveyed.

As shown in Figure 4.5.b.1, between 1993 and 1996, employee satisfaction with the work environment improved from 31 percent to 49 percent, an increase of 18 percentage points. The performance indicator also focuses on satisfaction with security arrangements and accommodations for persons with disabilities. ED’s employee survey data presented in Figure 4.5.b.2 indicate that between 1993 and 1996, employee satisfaction with security arrangements changed from 39 percent to 50 percent, an increase of 11 percentage points. Figure 4.5.b.3 shows that between 1993 and 1996, employee satisfaction with accommodations for persons with disabilities changed from 48 percent to 62 percent, an increase of 14 percentage points.

Figure 4.5.b.1



**Source:** 1993 and 1996 Employee Survey. **Frequency:** No regular schedule established. **Next Update:** Data will be collected through the Department’s 2000 Employee Survey. **Validation procedure:** Data supplied by independent contractor. No formal verification or attestation procedure applied. **Limitations of data.** The major data source to measure employee satisfaction levels will not be available until the 2000 Employee Survey. ED is working on developing additional indicators such as measures of air and water quality and using customer help desk reports to track work environment quality improvements.

Figure 4.5.b.2

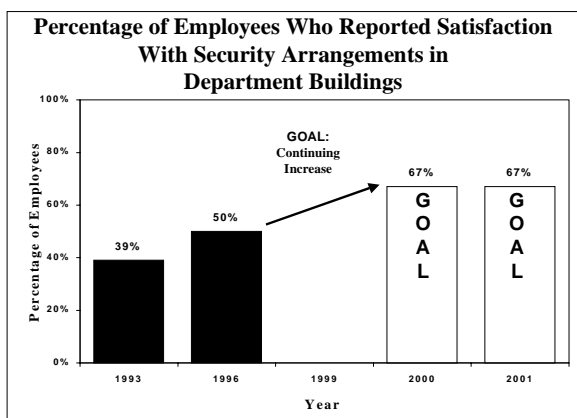
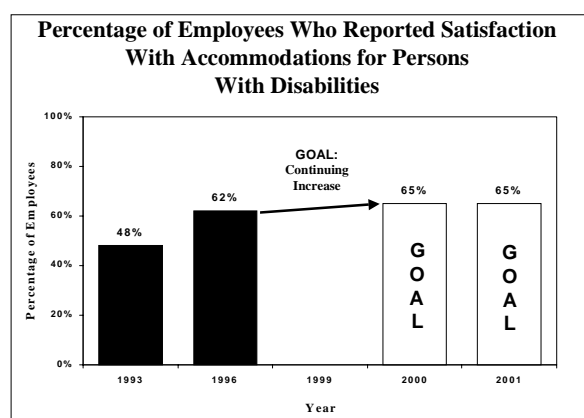


Figure 4.5.b.3

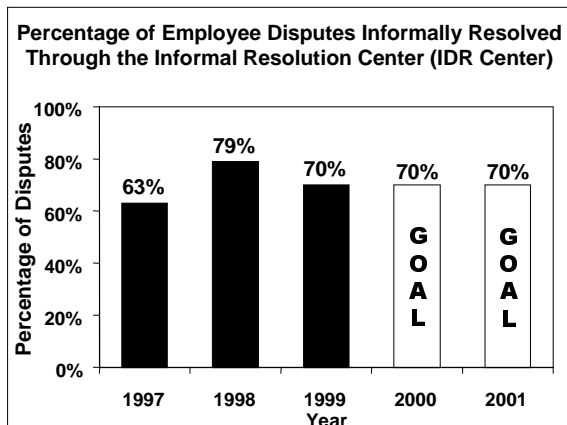


---

### **Indicator 4.5.c. Most employees and managers will express high satisfaction with assistance on resolving disputes, balancing work and life responsibilities, and addressing organizational and employee problems.**

**Assessment of Progress.** Positive trend toward target. The data in Figure 4.5.c.1 show that the Department has made measurable progress in resolving disputes permanently on an informal basis since redesigning its complaint resolution process and making its new Informal Dispute Resolution Center (IDR Center) fully operational in 1997. Further progress is likely through 2000 and 2001. The new process requires employees to use the IDR Center as a first stop for all types of concerns, including equal employment opportunity (EEO) matters, administrative grievances, and negotiated grievances. IDR Center staff provide information, mediation, and other services as needed to address matters in an informal process. Higher success rates of resolution are difficult to achieve because certain types of complaints remain difficult to resolve at the informal level. For example, for many complaints about no-selection during hiring or complaints about non-promotions, compromise remedies are difficult to identify. As a result, because they are entitled to do so, many employees continue to pursue these matters through the formal process, although it is unclear that they obtain satisfaction in this venue. Figure 4.5.c.1 shows that the percentage of complaints and grievances resolved informally increased from 63 percent in 1997 to 70 percent in 1999. The total number of informal complaints counseled decreased from 164 in 1998 to 147 in 1999.

Figure 4.5.c.1



**Source:** IDR Center reports. *Frequency:* Annual. *Next Update:* 2000. **Validation procedure:** Data supplied by the IDR Center. No formal verification or attestation procedure applied. **Limitations of data.** These data focus on the Department's ability to resolve EEO, administrative grievance, and negotiated grievance cases informally. The data has been collected on a fiscal year basis since 1997. The indicator will be expanded to assess satisfaction with assistance from the Office of Management (OM) on providing services aimed at improving productivity: assistance with dispute resolution, work/life programs, and organizational and employee problems. Currently, limited data collection capability exists in these areas.

---

### **How We Plan to Achieve Our Objective**

The Department's Strategic Plan identifies three core strategies intended to ensure that staff are highly skilled and high-performing: 1) promote high staff and organizational performance; 2) ensure a healthy, safe, secure, and accessible workplace; and 3) promote a fair, efficient, responsive, and productive environment for all employees. These strategies and supporting activities were set based on input from a variety of sources, including perceptions identified through the Department's employee survey and follow-up focus groups, data from employee complaints and suggestions, and other information. Major recent accomplishments, works-in-progress, and planned accomplishments through 2001 are summarized below.

- **Promote high staff and organizational performance.**

**Management and Leadership Development:** In FY 2001, the Department will continue to support the continuing professional development of its executives, managers, and supervisors. During FY 1999, participating in 40 hours of continuing professional development became mandatory for all of the Department's executives, managers, and supervisors. In FY 2000, the Department provided this professional development for 652 leaders and managers (90 percent) and will continue to support this endeavor in FY 2001.

In addition to offering this new program for agency managers and supervisors, the Department designed and offered a special 40-hour course emphasizing performance management to new supervisors and managers. Another service, an executive coaching service, provides one-on-one support and guidance to all managers who request assistance was piloted during 1999 and will continue in FY 2000 and FY 2001. Department employees also have the opportunity to participate in executive development programs offered by other providers. During 1999, ED's managers and executives participated in the program offered by the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Executive Institute, a program sponsored by Harvard University, and a program sponsored by the Council for Excellence in Government.

**Employee Development:** During FY 2001 and beyond, the Department will continue to provide both formal and informal developmental opportunities for its employees. Employees are encouraged to participate in the mentoring, mobility assignment, and upward mobility programs to expand their knowledge, skills, and experiences.

University course offerings, access to "best-in-business" developmental programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Graduate School and other providers, and the online Learning Network are other skill-building programs commonly used by Department employees. In FY 1999, three undergraduate and seven graduate-level courses and seminars were offered to employees. During 1999, ED employees participated in the Women's Executive Leadership, New Leaders, and Aspiring Leaders Programs.

**Organizational Preparedness and Performance:** During FY 2001, the Department remains committed to attracting and retaining a diverse workforce and developing its human capital in support of its mission.

In FY 1999, the Department recognized the need to plan for tomorrow's program and management challenges by conducting workforce planning analyses. In FY 2000 and FY 2001, the Department will continue its analysis by identifying skills gaps and potential staffing shortages in critical education program areas and areas in which the Department is underrepresented according to its Affirmative Employment Plan. The Department has already determined that Hispanic employees are underrepresented in its workforce. As a result, ED has participated in an Interagency Task Force focused on this issue and is developing a targeted recruitment strategy to attract highly qualified candidates from this under-represented population. The Department's program offices will be encouraged to use workforce analysis information to develop hiring, training, and retention strategies in consultation with the Office of Management (OM).

To further ensure effective recruitment and retention strategies, the Office of Management (OM) is developing an exit interview process to collect and analyze perceptions and recommendations of employees leaving the agency.

- **Ensure a healthy, safe, secure, and accessible workplace for all employees.**

**Workplace Improvements:** In FY 2000 and beyond, workplace improvements will continue in headquarters and regional offices. In October 1998, the Department moved approximately 1,300 of its

headquarters employees into renovated quarters. The new facility is designed to maximize employee productivity and improve the quality of work/life for Department employees. In the fall of 1999, the Office of Management (OM) initiated a National environmental air- and water-testing program for Department buildings. ED has implemented the Section 504 reasonable accommodation program to ensure that the Department's programs and activities are accessible to employees and customers with disabilities.

**Security:** During 2001 and beyond, the Department will continue to take actions to ensure employment and workplace security. In June 1998, the Department heightened building security in all of its occupied buildings. In 2000, the Department will develop and implement a Workplace Violence Prevention Awareness Program.

■ **Promote a fair, efficient, responsive, and productive environment for all employees.**

**Work/Life Programs:** New work/life programs and seminars available to Department employees have been well received. The ED Employee Survey includes questions to assess perceptions of employees on the impact these programs have on productivity; during 2000, the results will be analyzed for continuous improvement efforts. In 1999, the Department established the Work/Life Programs Group to provide a focal point for researching, developing, and implementing initiatives designed to help employees become more productive in their work, family, and personal lives.

**Informal Dispute Resolution:** During 2001, progress will continue on implementing monitoring and continuous improvement efforts of ED's informal dispute resolution efforts. The Informal Dispute Resolution Center (IDR Center) was created to assist employees and managers avoid or promptly resolve EEO complaints or other matters of dispute. During September 1998, an independent evaluation was issued covering the effectiveness and efficiency of the informal dispute resolution process. Recommendations were made to gain management support in the alternative dispute resolution process, to develop training programs to enhance management knowledge and skills in the dispute resolution process, and to develop a plan to increase the knowledge and skills of the IDR Center's employees. The IDR Center has initiated training in "conflict communication" with representatives from various principal offices; conducted individual briefing with senior officers; participated in new managers' and employees' orientation sessions; and distributed the status of informal complaints on a quarterly basis to senior officers, union representatives, and executive officers.

**Race Relations:** The Department is continuing the dialogue regarding race relations started in 1998 under the President's Initiative on Race. In 1999, the Department continued a full agenda to implement the Initiative and improve working relationships among ED employees. ED continued to hold facilitated dialogue sessions, sponsored a cultural fair using the theme "United We Are One," and convened a panel of employee authors of articles on racial issues for the employee newsletter.

---

## **How We Coordinate with Other Federal Agencies**

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) provides programs and resources affecting the entire Federal workforce. For example, OPM has developed core competencies for the entire Senior Executive Service, and the premier training program for Federal executives is run by OPM's Federal Executive Institute (FEI). During 1999, ED's Training and Development Center (TDC) entered into a contractual arrangement with FEI to redesign and run the core curriculum of its leadership development program for all ED managers, supervisors, and other key personnel.

In addition to working with OPM, OM staff participate in a range of interagency activities to explore cutting-edge management practices and to address common challenges that affect the performance of the workforce. The Department actively participates in two important interagency forums sponsored by the National Academy of Public Administration. One forum, the Human Resources Consortium, provides a venue for Federal agencies to explore best practices on issues such as workforce planning and managing human capital. The other forum, the Performance Consortium, brings representatives together from Federal agencies to explore the use and development of strategic plans and performance measures to help government programs and agencies attain high performance.

---

## **Challenges to Achieving Our Objective**

ED's work and workforce are changing in ways that create challenges for the leadership team of the Department. In recent years, the introduction of new programs combined with the limited authority to hire new personnel has forced the Department to be more creative in the way it manages its human resources. One response currently being evaluated is the introduction of a mobility assignment program, which allows employees to work in new areas within the Department on a temporary basis. In addition, the Department has begun some preliminary workforce planning efforts to identify retirement eligibility and other factors that could indicate current or potential skills gaps for the Department. In turn, both Department-wide and program-specific strategies need to be developed to ensure proper staffing and skills levels in the Department's vital areas.

Another challenge facing employees because of changes in the nature of their work has been the need to develop more proficiency with technology. Increasingly, employees must strive to keep current in their knowledge of and adeptness with new kinds of software that can expedite analysis and improve customer service. The Department has identified basic computer competencies for all employees and has expanded its training program in this area.