

Hiring An Administrator in One School District

"Personnel decisions are the most important decisions we make" was the opening remark recently made by superintendent to a northwest school district committee. The committee's charge was to recommend three people to fill an administrative position similar to an area superintendent. From these three, the district superintendent would select one candidate to recommend to the school board. Like many large school districts, this school district is decentralized, so the area administrator is an important position.

Although personnel decisions are critical to school district operations, little information exists about how administrative selection actually happens in districts. For this reason, one research activity of the SEEL Project was an attempt to document the processes of a screening committee. Elizabeth Boyington, an associate for research, was hired to attend all meetings of the committee and to interview committee members and final candidates. This article describes the process she observed and makes some recommendations about the hiring of an administrator.

The particular school district described was chosen for a case study because an opening existed in the district at an opportune time and because district policies regarding administrative selection seemed clear. Also, this district had previously demonstrated a high commitment to affirmative action goals. The committee's charge from the superintendent was to purposefully seek and recruit people not well represented in the district's administrative ranks, with the understanding that they should then select the best candidate. SEEL hoped that a critical study of the district's policies and procedures might produce some recommendations for other school districts. This article summarizes five steps in the screening committee's process: selection of the screening committee, recruitment strategies, review of applications, conducting the interviews, and final selection.

Step 1

Selection of screening committee. According to several studies, the selection of a screening committee is a critical task. For example, screening committees made up predomi-

nately of white males tend to choose the candidates "most like themselves"—other white males. The inclusion of people with varied experiences and points of view on a screening committee tends to increase the potential for serious consideration of many types of applicants.

In the district studied, the screening committee represented just such a broad range of people; a parent, two principals, two teachers, three central office personnel, and a community member were selected and chaired by the affirmative action officer. Four women and six men (two of whom were minorities) were represented on the committee. The heterogeneity of the group composition became an important resource in the committee's deliberations. The member's different orientations fostered critical thinking and discussion about candidates. Some people believed a strong curriculum orientation was important, whereas others valued a broad range of administrative experience. Some valued research activity, while others sought experiences in schools. Despite these differences, the committee members eventually came to firm agreements about who should be the finalists for the position.

Screening committees take time and commitment. This committee met for approximately 20 hours in addition to the time individuals spent reading applications. Although teachers were provided with released time, no other members had time remunerations. Despite the heavy time demands, most people on this committee reported, "It was worth it."

Step 2

Recruitment. In the initial pool of 125 applicants, 37 were rejected because they did not meet minimum requirements. Of the 88 qualified candidates there were 77 white males, six white females, and five minority males. Compared to a similar opening the year before in the same district, there was an increased representation of minorities and women in the applicant pool. A district representative had visited several cities and universities around the country and had sent the job description to journals and programs reaching minorities and women.

Recruitment is an important step in broadening the range of people who apply for administrative positions. All school districts do recruiting of some sort. The process may be as simple as calling a colleague in another town for recommendations; it may occur in conversations at statewide administrative meetings or on the golf course. However, school district recruitment, like screening committee selection, often represents a small world. If school districts seriously wish to broaden their applicant pool, they must conscientiously attempt to tap sources that have access to a wider variety of people.

Step 3

Application review. The narrowing of potential applicants is an increasingly difficult problem because so many applications are received for any opening, as indicated by the 125 applications received in the field site. Of the total applicants, four were in-district people. Of these four, three were selected to be interviewed.

To ensure that all applicants were given equal consideration, a rating form was completed for each of the candidates by each member of the screening committee. The form used in the first screening listed 12 criteria taken from the job description. For each of these criteria, the candidate was evaluated on a five-point scale. Each committee member then presented his/her ten highest choices. Thirty-one candidates remained after the first screening; 24 white men, three white women and four minority men. Screening committee members had individually taken affirmative action guidelines into account. In the narrowing processes, however, there was open discussion about what principles should be adhered to in the selection of candidates to be interviewed. "Do we bring in all women and minority applicants who meet minimum qualifications and just bring in others who qualify over them?" This question became central because women and minority applicants often tend to have different experiences than their white male counterparts. The issue was openly discussed and left to the individual members to determine in their ratings. Although this committee left the issue up to individual's discretion, we recommend screening committees discuss the issue early in their deliberations and make some agreements about how they will apply their affirmative action guidelines. Phone calls were made to references of a few candidates about whom there were questions or disagreements. Through open discussion and several rank orderings, six out-of-district and three in-district applicants were selected to be interviewed. They included two white women, five white men, and two minority men.

The effectiveness of the committee's interaction processes came to the spotlight at this stage. While quantitative ratings were used to assess candidates' skills and capabilities, often the assessment of strengths and weaknesses is primarily a subjective reaction. An effective screening committee develops enough trust and enough skill to listen to one another, to argue, to disagree, and to agree. For example, impressions that a candidate may be a "breath of fresh air," or "someone may be trying to bail out" of a current situation, or "what constitutes a useful experience for this position," were discussed among the members. Screening committees determine, in part, the professional lives of applicants. If they take their job seriously, they will approach the task with honesty. Although there are no simple rules to follow, com-

mittees need to base their honest, careful decisions upon a delicate balance of *objective* information and *subjective* reactions.

Step 4

The interviews. The interviews for this position were arranged for three days. A list of questions was agreed upon that reflected the pluralism of the screening committee and covered a large array of issues. Although the interviews were not all the same, the same basic questions were asked of each interviewee. Each member recorded their reactions on individual rating sheets. Nine finalists were selected for interviewing. Although one selected finalist (a woman) did not make the interview, eight others were completed.

From follow-up phone calls with all interviewees, several suggestions were received that might have helped improve the interviewing process of this committee. Many applicants had wished for more time to get to know the community; opportunities to meet people other than the screening committee would have been appreciated. Also, several candidates suggested that meetings with the superintendent and other relevant people come *after* the screening committee interview. Despite attempts to make the situation as comfortable as possible, interviews are often tense and anxiety-provoking situations. Finally, several candidates expressed a wish for more follow-up information about the committee's evaluations of their qualifications and performance. They believed such feedback would be helpful to them in further job searches.

Step 5

Final selection. After the interviews were completed, the screening committee met early one morning. In less than two hours, they had agreed upon three finalists to be recommended to the superintendent. The finalists included two minority males and a white male. Subsequently, the superintendent made a recommendation to the board. The final candidate selected was a minority male.

Comments from members of the screening committee indicated enthusiasm for the screening process and the person selected. Many believed although their deliberations had taken considerable time and energy, they had forged a workable tool to select the right person for the job. Most committee members also believed they were continually cognizant of the school district's commitment to affirmative action and simultaneously believed their choices were made on the merits of individual applicants.

Personnel decisions are important; schools are organizations which depend on the effective functioning of human beings. The work of searching for and screening people to find the best match of person and role is a time-consuming and energy-draining job. But it is a necessary task to find the *best* person for the position and to make sure that equal employment opportunities exist. The screening committee observed in this SEEL study seemed able to meet the dual challenge.

A more detailed description of the selection process is in preparation and can be obtained from the SEEL office.

A Book Review

Sex Discrimination in the Selection of School District Administrators: What Can Be Done? Doris Timpano & Louise W. Knight, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, National Institute of Education, Washington, DC 20208. December 1976, 65 pp. Single copies are available at no cost from the Education and Work Group at the above address.

The story told in this booklet began on February 1, 1975 when 40 angry women met at Dr. Timpano's home. Each woman had applied for a position in educational administration for which she had thought she was well qualified but for which she had not been hired. At first, each woman had reviewed her resume, her interview behavior, her skills—looking for the flaws that had disqualified her. None suspected that she had been the victim of sex discrimination until Dr. Timpano published **A Study of Women in Administration in Nassau and Suffolk School Districts in 1974-75**.

According to New York State Education Department statistics cited in the report, women held only 9.8% of the Long Island administrative jobs available in 1974-75. Although women represented 60.5% of the certified staff, there was not one female superintendent, assistant superintendent or high school principal.

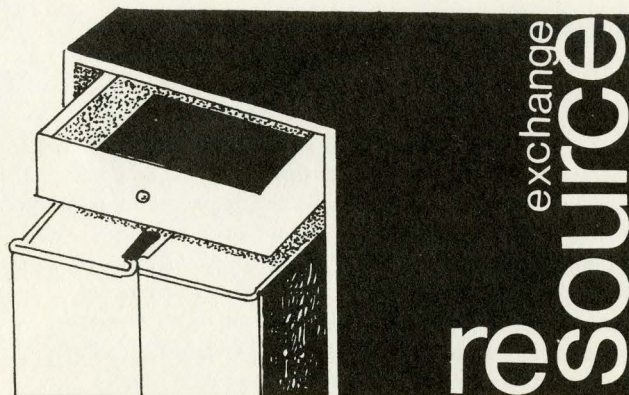
These figures gave isolated, thwarted women a new perspective on their own experiences. Out of their first meeting grew a grass roots organization called the Long Island Council for Administrative Women in Education—later renamed Career Women in Education (CWE).

With a general goal of "increasing the proportion of women administrators in Long Island," the Council agreed to carry out the following activities:

1. Gather data about the current status of women administrators within each school district.
2. Develop a network of "monitors" in school districts to observe, record and report all administrative job openings, to alert potential women candidates to the openings and to observe and record the district's recruitment and selection procedures and policies. This information would then be incorporated into a fact sheet on the district to be given to women applying for jobs in that district as well as placed in a general district fact folder.
3. Prepare women for administrative responsibilities through seminars where women could receive help with resumes and interviews and an information center where women could learn about certification requirements and courses available at nearby universities.
4. Publish a special weekly bulletin on job openings and quarterly newsletter to describe successful methods for applying for jobs.

Initially, the Council members assumed that the major obstacle to women's advancement was their exclusion from the informal "old boys" network through which men learned about administrative openings. The Council's research confirmed this assumption, but led the members to add, "The best qualified woman will not be hired as an administrator in a

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Center for the Sociological Study of Women at the University of Oregon, is a repository of books, articles and other materials on women. These resources are available to students and faculty at the University of Oregon and to interested community members. Regular office hours are scheduled each term when people may use the Center facilities. Faculty associated with the Center are engaged in a wide variety of research projects related to women and are willing to consult with others needing help with their research. For more information, contact:

Center for Sociological Study of Women
Department of Sociology
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403
Phone: 686-5015

Oregon Women's Political Caucus has as its goals support of feminist candidates for public office, writing, sponsoring lobbying for passage of feminist legislation and working to eliminate sexism in education. Interested persons may contact the following address for the nearest local chapter:

Oregon Women's Political Caucus
Mabel Armstrong, Chair
P.O. Box 5352
Eugene, OR 97405

Workshop for Policy Makers

Administrators and school board members are important participants in the struggle to provide equal educational and employment opportunities to males and females. The University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), under a grant from the Women's Educational Equity Act, has developed materials to address the issues of sex role stereotyping for educational policy makers. UCEA has consented to field test their materials in a workshop to be held at CEPM on Friday, May 5 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Admission will be limited to 30 participants. There are no fees. A social hour will follow the workshop.

If you are interested in attending the workshop to learn about materials for school administrators and school board members, contact the SEEL office and we will include your name on the roster.

A Book Review

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school district unless that district is already prepared to accept a woman as administrator, or for some reason finds it necessary or expedient to do so." Accordingly, CWE soon decided to make its major focus bringing local school districts into compliance with federal, state and local laws prohibiting sex discrimination. The Council's visibility, persistence and contacts with local communities made it more effective as a "compliance mechanism" than any public agency. The percentage of female administrators in Long Island's 127 school districts rose from 9.8% to 16% between the school years 1974-75 and 1975-76. Moreover, the New York State Education Department selected CWE as a model program for the state, established a state advisory council on women in education, and conducted its own study on the number of female administrators in New York State. The impact of Dr. Timpano's report has also been felt in other states. Here in Oregon, SEEL's new Oregon Network was inspired by the efforts of CWE. Dr. Timpano's report not only offers helpful tips, but evidence that people working together at the grassroots level can go a long way toward ending sex discrimination in public schools.

Affirmative Action/ Civil Rights Legislation

The following Oregon bills affecting affirmative action and/or civil rights have passed recently and have been signed by the governor:

- HJR 62—Reaffirms equal rights amendment.

- HB 2562—Prohibits government or a private organization from refusing to do business with any person because of the race, sex, religion, etc. of such person or such person's partners, members, directors, etc.
- HB 2602—Prohibits discrimination in educational and recreational programs in state penitentiaries on the basis of race, religion, sex, marital status or national origin.
- HB 2608—Job sharing bill—Provides that Budget Management Division shall utilize job sharing as it implements the biennial budget and submit a report to the Legislative Assembly; state agencies shall include in their budgets for the 1979-1981 biennium a section detailing their experience providing opportunities for job sharing pursuant to rules of Budget Management Division.
- HB 2662—Prohibits employers from refusing to hire an individual solely because another member of that individual's family works for that employer.
- SB 714—Amends ORS Ch. 659 to provide that pregnancy shall be treated the same as similarly disabling conditions for all employment-related purposes, fringe benefits, sick leave, etc.

Sex Equity in Educational Leadership Report

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