

"The merit system of making appointments is in its essence as democratic and American as the common school system itself."

Theodore Roosevelt
U.S. Civil Service Commissioner and
26th President of the United States of America

◆WHAT IS THE MERIT SYSTEM

Very simply, a merit system is a method of personnel management designed to promote the efficiency and economy of the service and the good of the public by providing for the selection and retention of employees, in-service promotional opportunities and other related matters, on the basis of merit and the fitness. (The merit principle defined.)

WHO STARTED IT?

- ◆ The merit (civil service) system is not new. Early in the 1800's "spoils" patronage was the accepted method of filling government jobs. It took the tragedy of President Garfield's assassination by a disgruntled office seeker in 1881 to focus enough attention on the practice to spark a legislative reform. Two years later Congress passed the Civil Service Act of 1883 (The Pendleton Act), which set up the first civil service system for federal employees, to guard against patronage appointments.

In subsequent years state and local civil service systems flourished, but it was not until 1936 that the first merit system law for school districts was established. California was the leader when, as a result of a disgraceful patronage system in one of our largest districts, more than 700 employees were fired the day after an election to make room for political "spoilsmen."

WHO USES IT?

- ◆ There are over 100 merit system school districts in California, employing almost 60% of the total classified (non-teaching) school employees in the state. A merit system may be voted into a district by local board of education action, by a majority vote of the district's classified employees or by a majority vote of the district's voting electors. Hayward Unified School District established its merit system in 1942.

WHO ADMINISTERS IT?

- ◆ The Personnel Commission is the mainstay of the merit system. It is an independent body composed of three persons appointed alternately by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Executive Office of the State Personnel Board for staggered three-year terms. Commissioners are lay persons who must be known adherents of the merit principle. The Personnel Commission is responsible for maintaining a merit system for classified employees of the school system and for fostering the advancement of a career service for such employees. To execute these responsibilities the State Education Code provides that personnel commissioners shall classify positions, hear appeals of disciplinary and dismissal matters, hear protests involving examination, selection or appointment procedures, and prescribe rules related to a variety of personnel practices. Authority for Personnel Commission functions is provided by Sections 45220 to 45320, inclusive, of the State Education Code.

WHO NEEDS IT?

- ◆ With the advent of collective bargaining in the public education field, functions performed by personnel commissions take on added significance. The necessity for objective information and classification decisions unaltered by labor or management pressures, protection of the rights of non-represented employees, and an independent body that can hear employee appeals in an impartial manner are all vital to the efficient and economic operations of a school district and to the benefit of the general public.

PRINCIPLES

Merit system principles require the following personnel practices and actions:

- ◆ Recruitment from all segments of the community, and selection and advancement on the basis of ability, knowledge and skills under fair and open competition.
- ◆ Fair and equitable treatment in all personnel management matters without regard to politics, religion, race, color, national origin, sex, age, handicapping condition or sexual orientation, and with proper regard for individual privacy and constitutional rights.
- ◆ Retention of employees who perform well, correcting those whose work is inadequate and separation of those who cannot or will not meet required standards.
- ◆ Equal pay for work of equal value
- ◆ Efficient and effective use of the district work force.
- ◆ Improved performance through effective education and training.
- ◆ Protection of employees from arbitrary action, personal favoritism or political coercion.
- ◆ Protection of employees against reprisal for lawful disclosures of information.

WHAT ABOUT COMMUNICATIONS?

Material intended for the Personnel Commission should be so addressed and directed to the Personnel Division office ten days before scheduled meetings. Sensitive personnel issues may be discussed in closed session upon request. Informal communications maybe conveyed to the Administrative Director of Classified Personnel.