Inclement Weather Day
Did you have any snow to play with on February 4, 2011? The weather forecasts leading up to that day indicated 1-5" of snow and winter flurries including ice and sleet. Most of us experienced some or all of the above so luckily school was cancelled. As you know, two inclement weather days are built into every school calendar and utilized when school is cancelled. For Stafford MSD, the make-up day for all staff is April 22, 2011. All part-time and full-time employees should plan to report work on this originally planned non-work day. In regards to any absences originally reported in AESOP for February 4, 2011, they were cancelled by the Personnel Services Department. If you have any questions related to this topic, please contact Teresa Sazedj, Coordinator for Personnel Services.

Recording Absences / Finding Substitutes
As you know, the District implemented an automated, online absence reporting and substitute finding system for 2010/11. Positive feedback has been received by all staff levels (especially those requiring a substitute when absent). It is very important that all employees report any leave requested or taken so their supervisor is aware of the absence. This includes absences related to school business. A couple of employees have mentioned to Business and Personnel Department employees that they were under the impression that personal and sick leave absences were the only ones that should be reported in AESOP. That is a myth. All leaves of absence (personal, sick, comp time, bereavement, school business, etc.) must be reported in AESOP in accordance with the provisions outlined in Local Board Policy DEC - Leaves and Absences. Thanks in advance for your cooperation.

Future Newsletters
The Business and Personnel Services Departments began issuing The Main Thing newsletter in December 2009 to keep employees informed of key topics within our area of responsibility. As our teams have evolved, so has our need to modify the format of The Main Thing. Beginning with this newsletter, we will begin preparing informational segments by each Business and Personnel Department employee so a face can be associated with a name. The information segment covered will be specific to their employment area (budget, payroll, benefits, etc.). As usual, please share this newsletter with any staff who do not have access to electronic mail.
District Policies - Sick Leave Bank

In one week, the Board of Trustees may be taking action to approve the modification of local Board Policy DEC - Leaves and Absences. The key change that the District administration may be recommending to the Board is the addition of a sick leave bank. If approved, employees can voluntarily contribute two days to the sick leave bank and, thus, become a member of it. Members of the sick leave bank that have a catastrophic illness or injury, as defined in the policy, may apply for up to 30 days of sick leave bank after all other paid leave has been exhausted. There are a number of details that are being finalized on the administration of the sick leave bank but, if approved, this could be an additional leave benefit SMSD is making available to full-time and part-time employees. If a sick leave bank does become available for employees to voluntarily contribute to, I will serve as the liason for this benefit.

Transfer Requests

One of the key changes I am making in regards to personnel management is providing employees with a formal opportunity to request a transfer. Transfer requests can be for a change of campus, grade level, content area, etc. Transfer requests must be submitted on the district Transfer Request Form (will be within HR documents on the Personnel Services website shortly). Transfer requests will be accepted by Personnel Services from February 28, 2011 to April 29, 2011. As requests are made, I will work with the appropriate administrators to see if the request can be accepted. All requests are subject to position vacancies, certification(s) needed - if any, etc. All transfer requests will be held on file through September 30, 2011. If you have any questions related to this topic, please feel free to contact me by e-mail or phone and I will assist you as best as possible.

Insurance and Benefits

Last month, Teresa Sazedj and I led a benefits meeting that included participation from representatives of employees in all employment areas. In my opinion, this was a successful event that has given the Personnel Services Department the necessary feedback needed as we decide on what benefits to offer employees later this Spring. Outside of health insurance, which cannot be changed from TRS Active Care under current State law, all current benefits were discussed. Specifics related to premiums, deductible amounts, co-pays, etc. were discussed for benefits such as dental, vision, cancer, life, etc. Based on the feedback received, the Personnel Services Department is working very close with our Cafeteria 125 Third Party Administrator, TCG, to obtain pricing for all suggested changes. We are optimistic that we will be able to offer a very competitive benefits plan this Spring for employees. Currently, SMSD plans to continue offering all benefits including FSAs and Prepaid Legal.
403b Limits for 2011

Annually, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) analyzes all relative data in determining if the contributions limits associated with 403b accounts should be adjusted. For the 2011 calendar year, no change has been made to the contribution limits of 403b accounts.

As you know, SMSD utilizes a Third Party Administrator, JEM, for the administration of employee 403b accounts. All changes (new accounts, modifications to existing accounts, etc.) must be done through JEM. The contact information for JEM can be found on the Business Services website under Retirement Plan Options. If District action is necessary for a requested change, JEM will contact me directly.

Finance Tips

This month, I am going to cover Activity Fund Management. Each year, employees and/or students work to raise funds for a particular purpose. It is important that the employees and/or students be aware of district guidelines for the management of such funds. There are two types of activity funds: student activity funds (monies raised by the students and spent back on the students) and campus activity funds (funds raised by employees and spent on students or faculty). All planned fundraisers should be requested through their supervisor and, in turn, sent to the Business Services Department for accounting purposes. The primary reason I need these requests is so that we have an accurate account of all sales. Annually, I have to submit a Sales Tax Return to the State Comptroller's office and it must include all sales (taxable and nontaxable). Please work with your supervisor to ensure the proper requests and recaps are completed for all fundraisers.

Earned Income Credit Notification from IRS

The IRS encourages employers to notify employees that have wages below $48,362 that he or she may be eligible for Earned Income Credit (EIC). So, this morning we have attached a copy of the Notice 797 from the IRS to each employee and it addresses 1) what is the EIC, 2) who may claim the EIC, 3) who is a qualifying child, 4) how do you claim the EIC, and 5) can you get advance payment of EIC in 2011.

For more information about EIC, please contact the IRS by going to their website at IRS.gov or by calling 1-800-TAX-FORM.

Please understand that SMSD cannot provide tax advice to our employees and you should consult with your tax professional or the IRS for related questions.
Translation of Significant Policies and Guidelines

Since the restructuring of the Business and Personnel Departments this last Summer, a number of local policies, administrative regulations, and district guidelines have been updated. While the primary language of most employees is English, the second most common language among SMSD employees is Spanish. Due to that fact, I have been given the task of translating significant policies and guidelines on leaves and absences, grievances, etc. This is a task that I have embraced and with any luck will complete later this Spring. In addition to the significant policies and guidelines, I have translated several forms and letters, e.g. Direct Deposit Authorization Form, into Spanish. All completed documents have been placed on the Business and Personnel Department websites. If you see any other documents that you feel should be translated into Spanish, please let me know.

Requisitions 101

Hello Stafford MSD employees!!! My name is Lisa Ku and I am the newest member of the Business Services Department. I am the Accounts Payable Clerk and I look forward to assisting campuses and departments in quickly ordering all supplies and services that support the Main Thing: Student Improvement and Development.

While most requisitions are processed by campus or departmental office staff, there are some basics that all employees should know. For starters, if you make the initial request for an item to be ordered, please understand that, sadly, it may take several days for a purchase order to be issued. Why is it that difficult? Good question. The answer is that almost all funds have legalities surrounding how they are used. For example, about 80% of all funds spent are from property tax collections. Those funds must be documented and accounted for in accordance with State standards for auditing purposes. In the end, I will do all I can to help you get your order ASAP.

Friendly Reminder

All W-2 forms have been mailed so, if you have not received yours, please review your last wage and earnings statement for address accuracy. If it is not accurate, please contact Erma Trevino with your updated address. If it is accurate, please contact Elizabeth Abrego and she will re-mail your W-2 within five business days.

Useful Links

- Business Office Website
- Personnel Services Website
- Texas Education Agency
- Department of Labor
- Teacher Retirement System
- JEM Resource Partners

Business and Personnel Offices are located in the Administration Building

Hours of Operation are 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Comments Click here to submit comments for future newsletters or feedback on this issue.