



MALCOLM BALDRIGE NATIONAL QUALITY AWARD

A Class Act

by **Dave Nelsen, QP manuscript coordinator**

A few years ago, Motorola handed out a brochure to all its employees challenging the American education system. According to Motorola, America's winning position in the global marketplace was at risk unless its K-12 education system shaped up. Today's students were tomorrow's employees, and if they weren't trained to compete in world-class global competition, the future looked bleak for Motorola and other American companies.

In 50 Words Or Less

- **Community Consolidated School District 15 in Palatine, IL, was the only recipient of the 2003 Baldrige Award in the education category.**
- **The continuous improvement efforts the district put forth to earn the award resulted in increased learning and parent, student and teacher satisfaction.**

John Conyers, then superintendent of Community Consolidated School District 15 (D15) in Palatine, IL, happened to read a copy of the brochure and was both greatly alarmed and intrigued. He thought he had a pretty good school district, but he was always looking for ways to improve it. He contacted Robert Galvin, then chairman and CEO of Motorola, and they had a chat about implementing quality improvement in schools.

Conyers was so inspired by the conversation that he immediately began spreading the word about quality among the leaders of D15. This talk soon turned to action, and in 2003, D15 was rewarded for its effort with a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. It was the only Baldrige Award given in the education category last year.

The efforts of the K-8 school district, which serves nearly 13,000 students in 20 schools across seven municipalities, were recently chronicled in a book, *Charting Your Course: Lessons Learned During the Journey Toward Performance Excellence*. Conyers and D15 director of planning Robert Ewy, co-authors, state in the book: "The passion that drives us as educators—disciplined with criteria for pursuing excellence—is what we owe our children, our communities, our economy, our future."

And so began their Baldrige journey.



One of the products of D15's Baldrige efforts—satisfied students.

Leadership

As Conyers and Ewy say in *Charting Your Course*: "It is not by chance that category one of the Baldrige criteria is focused on leadership. The criteria do not tell you what to do. What Baldrige does is give you a systematic framework for organizational excellence. How you bring it about is dependent on your leadership."

The leader and chief executive officer of D15 is now superintendent Robert A. McKanna. Other leadership includes the board of education, McKanna's cabinet and principals of the 20 schools.

These senior leaders developed the D15 mission, organizational values, key goals and performance expectations through a strategic planning process in 1998 (Figure 1, p. 68).

All of this is reviewed and monitored each year by the district advisory committee for educational excellence (DACEE), another element of D15's leadership.

It's the leaders' job to keep everyone updated on the progress of the mission, values, goals and expectations.

Using two-way communication, they inform a number of groups, including the curriculum advisory council (CAC), classroom teachers' council (CTC), Service Employees International

Union (SEIU), parent-teacher association, staff and students. It is also their job to connect with key external communities.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning, just as important in education as it is in business, proved to produce sweeping changes for D15. As its Baldrige application stated, D15's old planning process "didn't clearly set objectives or direction, didn't plan actions and made little or no connection to enhanced organizational performance."

So leadership came up with a new, nine-step process (Figure 2, p. 69) that D15 proudly considers stakeholder driven, the main goal being to determine what stakeholders require and expect of D15. The leadership believes it cannot improve the systems that support achievement of goals if the result in mind is not clearly aligned to what stakeholders want.

The nine-phase strategic planning process was developed and assessed using the Baldrige criteria. DACEE members benchmarked strategic planning processes used in highly successful school districts, the University of Wisconsin-Madison strategic planning process self-evaluation questions and a best practice report from the American Productivity

FIGURE 1 D15's Strategic Vision

Mission
Produce world-class learners by building a connected learning community.
Core values
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student and constituent driven quality. 2. Public responsibility and citizenship. 3. Management by fact. 4. Continuous improvement and learning. 5. Results focus.
Key goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students and the community acquire 21st century skills. 2. World-class achievement. 3. Connected learning community. 4. Caring, safe and orderly learning environment. 5. High-performing staff. 6. Aligned and integrated management system.
Student performance targets
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students acquire the 21st century skills of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing and understanding information. • Oral and written communication. • Comprehensive reading and understanding. • Reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking. • Human relations. • Life skills. 2. Every student entering kindergarten in District 15 reads at or above grade level when completing second grade. 3. At least 90% of the student population who have been in the district for one year meets or exceeds all limits. 4. There is no significant difference between student groups in meeting or exceeding all Illinois Learning Standards for students who have been in the district for one year. 5. Student satisfaction is at or above "best-in-class" benchmark standards. 6. Student enthusiasm is at or above "best-in-class" benchmark standards.
Key quality measures
District scorecard
Action plans
Department Plan-Do-Study-Act and school improvement plan

and Quality Center titled "The Changing Role of Strategic Planners." From these sources, the D15 strategic planning process was born.

Student, Stakeholder And Market Focus

This is the first of the seven criteria that differs from the Baldrige business criteria. Traditionally known as customer and market focus, when the Baldrige award was expanded to include an education category in 1999, this criterion became student, stakeholder and market focus. D15 made student and stakeholder driven quality one of its core values.

It's interesting to note what a diverse group the students alone represent. About 37% are minorities, 32.5% are considered low-income, and 32% are from non-English speaking backgrounds, representing 72 different languages.

D15 identified seven groups as key stakeholders, including students. Figure 3 shows these stakeholders and what each expects of D15. The DACEE was in charge of identifying these groups in 1999 and has formal processes for continually asking and verifying their needs, expectations and requirements to determine if they remain stable or change over time.

The key to stakeholder focus in D15 is two-way communication. The DACEE communicates through stakeholder surveys; staff focus groups; monthly meetings with the CTC, educational support personnel association, SEIU, PTA presidents and CAC; quarterly meetings with the superintendent's communication council (SCC); and twice monthly meetings of the leadership team. Category champion teams meet twice a year. The superintendent or his cabinet designee attends all meetings.

The DACEE also facilitates communication between the stakeholder groups—for instance, teachers discussing expectations and satisfaction with students and parents and feeder high schools interviewing prospective students to discuss their educational experiences. This keeps the different stakeholder groups knowing what the others are thinking, an important element of keeping them all happy.

Measurement, Analysis And Knowledge Management

One of D15's mottos is "feedback is our friend." Judging by the amount of data it collects, this would appear to be true.



D15 bases its data collection on six key goals and measures more than 50 success indicators, established and maintained mainly through discussions with key stakeholders. Table 1 (p. 70) shows some examples of data collected, how they align with key goals and measurement methods.

Some standard data management practices D15 has established over the years include:

- Combining data collection methods whenever

possible to simplify the process while still satisfying all needs.

- Requesting comparative data from local school districts with similar sizes and student demographic variables.
- Wherever possible, reporting data by high, low and average performer so the consumers know the variation within the data.
- Using only trend data when making decisions

FIGURE 2 D15's Stakeholders

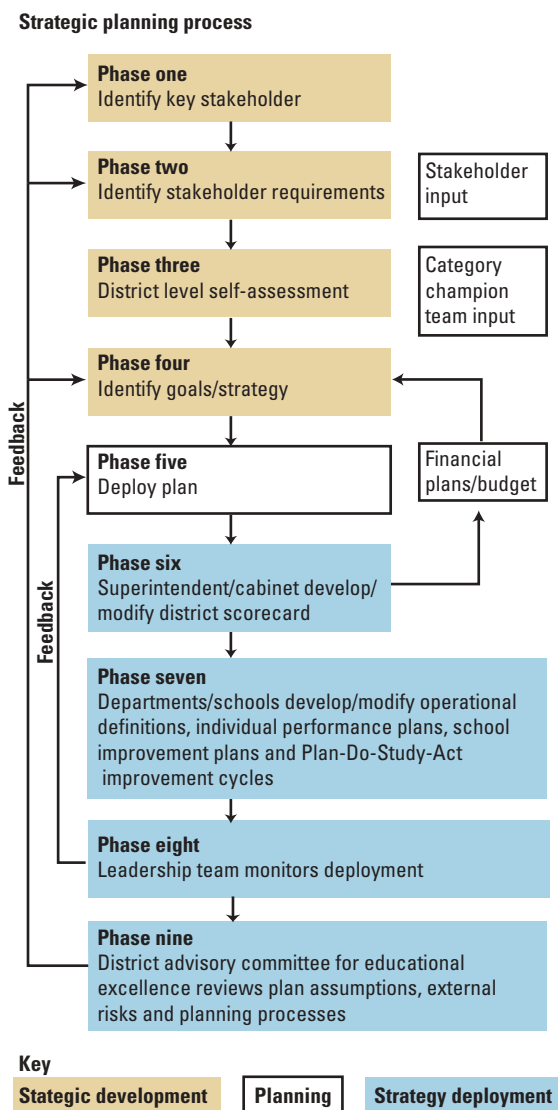


FIGURE 3 D15's Strategic Planning Process

Stakeholder groups	Key requirements
Community members	To provide a world-class education, support the development of good community citizens, enhance property values, use property taxes efficiently and maintain fiscal integrity.
Parents and PTA	To ensure a caring, safe and orderly learning environment, provide well-qualified teachers in every classroom, provide a world-class education for every student, be informed about issues, events, programs and practices in a timely manner, and learn in a respectful, cooperative environment.
Certified staff	To feel safe and secure in a caring workplace, participate in decisions that directly affect their work, work in a healthy school climate, receive help and support when needed, be provided staff development that is relevant and of high quality, be informed in a timely manner and receive recognition.
Support staff	To feel safe and secure in the workplace, be treated with dignity and respect and feel supported by supervisors and peers, understand how job performance is measured and rewarded, be part of decision making that relates to how performance is measured and rewarded, be a part of decision making that relates to performance of duties, be provided staff development that is relevant and of high quality, work together as a team and receive recognition.
Students	To learn in a caring, safe and orderly environment, be treated by adults and peers respectfully and fairly, receive help when needed, behave according to expectations, do their best work, be satisfied with school, and be enthusiastic about what is learned and how it is learned.
Feeder high schools	To have students well prepared for high school and help determine high school preparation standards and expectations.
Businesses	To have employees who are well prepared for the workplace of the 21st century and have a voice in the standards and goals set for education students.

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about priorities, standardizing programs and practices, allocating resources and considering other significant issues. Single points of data are never used for decision making purposes.

Data and information are made available to all administrators and staff.

Faculty and Staff Focus

In another change from the Baldrige business criteria, human resource focus becomes faculty and staff focus for the education criteria. When managing and organizing work for its staff, D15 stays focused on the contribution each employee makes to the district mission. As its Baldrige application stated: "D15 cannot produce world-class learners by building a connected learning community if all work systems are not aligned and contributing to that mission."

To clarify how they contribute to accomplishing

the D15 mission, the nearly 2,000 staff members answer a series of audit questions:

- Who are your department/school customers, and what do they want? How do you know?
- What are the short- and long-term (two to three year) goals for your department/school?
- How is leadership defined in your department/school?
- Do you have the right information at the right time to make effective decisions?
- Is your (department/school) staff skilled and motivated to achieve what its customers want? How do you know?
- Are your department/school processes efficient and effective? What data do you analyze to know if processes are efficient and effective?
- Where are your department/school current results? How do you know?

TABLE 1 Examples of Data Collected and Aligned With Key Goals

Key goals	Success measures	Type	Frequency	Collection method
21st century skills	Student-to-student respect	Leading	Quarterly	School Improvement Plan data
	Healthy fitness scale	Lagging	Yearly	Fitnessgram
	Book circulation	Leading	Monthly	Follet System
World-class achievement	Illinois Standards Achievement Test	Lagging	Yearly	Student tests, spring
	Iowa Test of Basic Skills	Lagging	Yearly	Student tests, fall
	Soar to Success, Read 180 tests	Leading	Monthly	Reading fluency
Connected learning community	Parent satisfaction	Lagging	Yearly	Scantron survey
	Parent satisfaction	Leading	Monthly	Telephone survey
	Number of website visits	Leading	Monthly	Website software
Caring, safe and orderly learning environment	Student perceptions of safety, caring and orderliness	Lagging	Yearly	Student satisfaction survey
	Teacher perception of safety and support	Lagging	Yearly	Teacher satisfaction survey
	Bus maintenance	Leading	Daily	Maintenance records
High performing workforce	Teacher perception of working conditions	Lagging	Yearly	Teacher satisfaction survey
	New employee orientation	Leading	Periodically	Orientation survey
	Number absent by category	Leading	Daily	Staff absenteeism
Aligned and integrated management system	Revenues and expenditures	Leading	Monthly	Board budget report
	Network reliability	Leading	Daily	Software tracking glitches
	Lunch program effectiveness	Lagging	Yearly	National School Food Service survey



The answers to these questions drive the development of department operational definitions and school improvement plans (SIPs). Operational definitions are then used by individual staff members to determine the work to be done and the level of quality to be reached. To help faculty and staff accomplish their work, D15 encourages continual improvement through education, training and development.

And of course, an evaluation and reward process that stresses growth and improvement is needed to keep staff members at the top of their game. The teacher evaluation process, which was developed by benchmarking eight schools and businesses, has been called one of the best in the state by the Illinois Education Association (IEA). The process begins with teacher self-assessment and includes different approaches, options of multiple year growth goals and the ability to create an individual plan or work with a group of peers on a common plan.

Administrators undergo a separate evaluation process, which focuses on the degree to which the administrator's school meets or exceeds student performance targets. This process begins with a self-assessment describing the SIP goals, the results or summative data, and the strengths and opportunities for improvement related to each goal. This is shared with the assistant superintendent and is used for discussions regarding job responsibilities, results, areas for improvement and growth, new skills or knowledge development and job targets for the next year.

Both evaluation processes are continually improved through staff and administrator feedback. And faculty and staff are recognized in several ways, such as:

- For becoming a national Board of Education (BOE) certified teacher, teachers receive a \$2,500 bonus each year for 10 years, a plaque, and BOE and state recognition.
- Any teacher, administrative staff, support staff or senior exchange member can be nominated as employee of the month.
- All staff are honored with service awards, a thank-you celebration, employee recognition and a picnic every other year.

Process Management

Parents want a world-class education for their children, and students want to be satisfied and

enthused about school. D15 has found three key learning centered processes that best address those requirements—curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Curriculum requirements are defined in the cross functional process mapping (CFPM) curriculum development plan. The plan includes the following:

- State and local requirements that correlate with BOE goals.

The teacher evaluation process has been called one of the best in the state by the Illinois Education Association.

- Community needs, including a system for disseminating information to the community and comprehensive stakeholder input.
- Student requirements, including high interest materials and adaptability to different learning styles.
- Teacher requirements, which are based on research and best practices, meet the needs of all students, integrate technology and include extension and remediation provisions.

The D15 instructional process flowchart begins by identifying standards to be taught and then assesses students' skill levels before beginning the design of the lesson. Students—who are, of course, key stakeholders—are then brought into the process to help determine the relevance of learning this content and to suggest ways to better learn it and maintain enthusiasm.

The assessment process is based on three core beliefs—accountability, developing tests, and formative and summative testing. Accountability means D15 measures what it says is important to achieve, that data are collected only if they are useful for improving programs and practice, and that flexibility and choice are built into the system. Test development means a test should measure what it

says it will measure (validity), it consistently measures the same variables over time (reliability) and it is unbiased. Both formative and summative testing should be used for determining student progress.

Assess2Learn, an online assessment tool for education, is one approach used for formative assessment.

In a survey of community residents, 88% say they would recommend to friends that they move to D15's area so their children could attend the schools.

D15's use of Assess2Learn is an improvement based on teachers' need to know more about how well students are progressing immediately and, at the same time, reduce the data management load.

Results

Just as in manufacturing, the payoff of the hard work put into earning the Baldrige Award is results. Here are some numbers that define the improvement D15 has undergone:

- In the 2002-03 school year, results from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills showed 92% of D15's students were reading at or above grade level. This is an improvement of 10 percentage points since 2000-01 and is nearly 35 percentage points above the national average.
- D15 students read an average of 49.25 books a year. Community library patrons read an average of 17.39 books per year.
- From 2001-02 to 2002-03, eighth grade students' "enthusiasm for learning," a key performance target, increased from 42% to 82% for reading, from 50% to 80% for math and from 42% to 82% for science.
- Among D15 parents, 87% give the schools a grade of A or B.
- English as a second language students are meeting goals and exiting the program at a rate of 15%, up from 8% in 1998-99, exceeding state and local averages.
- Third and eighth grade gifted students who participated in the 2001-02 World-Class Tests, sponsored by an organization called the World-Class Arena, for math and problem solving had a higher passing percentage rate than those from all other countries participating—the United Kingdom, Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand.
- The transportation department has been recognized as one of the top 50 in America by *School Bus Fleet* magazine. Daily bus on-time delivery is at or above 98%.
- Satisfaction with custodial services is at 4.5 on a 5 point scale.
- In a survey of community residents, 88% say they would recommend to friends that they move to D15's area so their children could attend the schools.

D15 is especially proud of the results its special education students are achieving. These students are meeting goals and exiting the special education program at a rate of 14%, much higher than the national and state averages, which are both about 5%. Also, since 1996, junior high students with learning disabilities have participated in a week-long competition at the NASA Space Camp in Huntsville, AL, against nondisabled and gifted students. The students from D15 always finish first in at least one of four competition areas.

The goal of keeping its teachers qualified and satisfied is being fulfilled too. These are some of the staff related numbers:

- The number of teachers who have achieved BOE certification has increased from two in 1994-95 to 48 in 2002-03, the second highest number in the state.
 - The turnover rate for certified staff in 2002-03 was 11.7%, compared to 20% nationally.
 - Certified and support staff satisfaction has improved over the past five years to about 90%.
 - Ninety-seven percent of staff say the environment they work in is safe and secure.
- D15 has also seen its Baldrige efforts pay off in



dollars and cents. A school district's market performance is determined by calculating the dollar cost per percentage point of performance on state learning standards tests. This allows a value creation comparison with other districts in the state. At \$111.93 per percentage point, D15 has outperformed three comparison districts, which ranged from \$118.57 to \$122.36. This means D15 students are learning more at less cost. Also, with satisfied and enthusiastic volunteers logging more than 160,000 hours of service yearly, D15 saves \$1.66 million.

Firm Believers

D15 certainly has a lot to be proud of. Not only did it earn the Baldrige Award, it was the first district in the nation to receive the Reed Hundt Award for Excellence in Technology. This award is sponsored by the National School Boards Association and the Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education.

And, of course, even more important than the awards themselves is the improvement the district has experienced in striving for the awards. As Louis A. Sands, president of the D15 BOE, said, "We are firm believers that the application of the Baldrige criteria has changed our school district tremendously, and our community would endorse that conviction."

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