



## **Using ASQ's ImpaQT for Leaders**

*by Ann Haggerty Raines*

During the last 17 years, I have watched districts work to get the best results and have the strongest processes in place for students and all stakeholders. Most districts on their journey to excellence have embraced best practice and current best knowledge in most areas but have missed some aspects of a more comprehensive approach to operations that ensures success today and in the future.

ASQ's ImpaQT training acknowledges the notion the best leaders in education become the best through different paths, but all share common knowledge and practices to become the best. ImpaQT Training for the District was created to address the complex operation of a school district for optimal results. Based on the criteria established by the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the training is an overview of the key processes, bodies of knowledge and actions that help a district succeed.

### **The role of leaders**

As part of a four-part suite of training materials and processes, the district-level course focuses on the role of leaders in setting the organizational culture, developing employees, engaging stakeholders, managing data and improvement, creating sustainability, closing the achievement gap and improving the metrics that matter to students, parents and stakeholders.

The six modules can be covered in as little as two days if a district chooses to commit to self-driven action and "homework" after the training, or as many as six days over a period of time, if the district chooses to take a learn-and-do approach by using an ImpaQT facilitator. The training is easily customized to a district's needs, experiences and areas of competence, building on strengths and supporting developmental areas as needed.

The thinking behind the Baldrige model is that leadership is the mechanism that generates results through conscientious application of the three pathways to accomplish the results the district seeks. Within the six modules, both ends and each pathway are examined.

ImpaQT Training for the District is the course that serves as the overarching means to achieving all that needs to be accomplished within the framework. Participants



have the opportunity to intentionally shape the culture and make the necessary changes. Sustainability and true cultural change can only be realized when leaders are on board and working toward closing the gap and improving operations.

Leaders also have the opportunity to examine their own behaviors and determine how they can best align actions with cultural expectations. A portion of the course also looks at engaging stakeholders and the challenges inherent in asking stakeholders to change. Once the culture is aligned for results, changes in personnel and standards have a minimal impact on district personnel and results.

A module on stakeholder focus explores the potential to get input from all stakeholders in an attempt to balance needs and satisfy expectations to the greatest extent possible. Pairing the stakeholder input with the strategic planning module, the district emerges with key performance indicators and an actionable plan to accomplish the results they seek. Planning tools are integrated, including the use of specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely (SMART) goals, facilitates planning and working the plan beyond the training.

Using data and managing/improving processes covers the work of taking information that is useful from piles of data and monitoring and managing key processes within the district. At the core of this module are the body of knowledge and content materials for plan-do-study-act (PDSA) and improvement that is ASQ's strength. PDSA with integrated tools is the mechanism for understanding what is working, what is not and why the district is or is not getting the results it seeks. It's also used for working with process teams and generating improvement.

### **Using PLCs**

Building capability and developing staff are combined into one module that focuses on sustainability through the district's commitment to engaging employees through professional learning communities (PLCs) and strategic staff development. Every employee in a district with a PLC has the potential to engage and improve his or her knowledge, skills and performance to the benefit of all stakeholders. If it desires, a district can emerge from this module with a training plan, and an evaluation of how PLCs might be used to improve results and stakeholder engagement.



The results module looks at the ongoing efforts required to keep key processes monitored and understand the results the district is getting to proactively face changes coming from inside and outside the district. The strategic planning module is revisited as a means to work long term on all key metrics for the district.

District leadership teams working on this component of ImpaQT have discovered they have made assumptions about shared understanding and intentions, and that much of their culture has been haphazard in its creation. Stepping back from the daily work of the district has provided some clarity about goals, leveled the playing field and encouraged introspection.

The district-level course has generated thought about what leaders want to have instead of accepting what they currently have. The training provides vocabulary to talk about their critical work and permission to examine current practices. The subsequent modules provide the how-to for understanding stakeholders, planning for results, using data to manage and improve processes, building capability and developing staff to help their students succeed.

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