



Three Small Steps ... One Giant Leap

by Mark Miles and Jeff Klein, Park Hill School District

The Park Hill School District's quality journey began with an initial exploration of organizational improvement models and an organizational self-assessment using the Missouri Quality Award's criteria for performance excellence, the same criteria used for the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program.

Three small steps provided the foundation for the Park Hill School District's quest for quality:

1. The deployment of vision, mission and values throughout the organization.
2. The development of key performance indicators (KPI) monitored through district and building balanced scorecards.
3. The alignment of building school improvement plans with the district's comprehensive school improvement plan.

As a result of these three small steps, the Park Hill School District made one giant leap and continues its continuous improvement journey today.

Vision, mission and values deployment

The organizational self-assessment, conducted from October to December 2006 using the *Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence*, identified several improvement opportunities. The district reassessed its vision, mission and values, and rearticulated these statements, considering the needs and expectations of its primary stakeholders: students, parents and taxpayers.

These needs and expectations were gathered from survey instruments, focus-group meetings and relevant research. Following the analysis of this information, senior leaders involved the board of education members in the assessment and revision of the Park Hill School District's vision, mission and values to reflect the future, key purpose and guiding principles of the district.

 <h2 style="text-align: center;">Park Hill School District</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">Building Successful Futures • Each Student • Every Day</p>	
VISION	
Building successful futures • Each student • Every day	
MISSION	
Through the expertise of a motivated staff, the Park Hill School District provides a meaningful education in a safe, caring environment to prepare each student for success in life.	
VALUES	
Student focus Integrity High expectations Continuous improvement Visionary leadership	

Senior leaders systematically deploy vision, mission and values throughout the administrative team and board of education by using a colored-belt ranking system. Based on individual assessment scores, administrators may earn a vision, mission and values “belt” (wristband) signifying their rank: white, yellow, green, brown and black. The vision-mission-values wristband, worn daily, serves as a tangible and visual reminder of the Park Hill School District’s foundational elements. All administrators, numerous staff members and even students have obtained black-belt status.

Senior leaders deploy vision, mission and values to the workforce by distributing and monitoring the placement of the district’s comprehensive school improvement plan (CSIP) on a page in each classroom and work area. This deployment approach was borrowed from the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) School District and serves as a colorful reminder of the district’s direction.

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Senior leaders also communicate these foundational elements during interviews with potential employees, employee orientation and employee convocation at the beginning of each academic year, as well as in *Park Hill Happenings*—the district’s employee newsletter—and other informal and formal collaborative meetings. Moreover, senior leaders use written correspondence and publications such as *Park Hill Progress*—a quarterly newsletter distributed to all district residents—to communicate and deploy vision, mission and values to students, parents and stakeholders. Senior leaders also reference the vision, mission and values during speaking engagements throughout the community.

Using KPIs

During the 2006-07 academic year, the Park Hill School District used survey instruments, focus-group meetings and relevant research to identify several key student and stakeholder needs and expectations. Following their identification, the superintendent’s cabinet articulated KPIs to track and trend improvement related to these key requirements. The Park Hill School District’s balanced scorecard tracks these KPIs and related measures in five strategic focus areas: financial, academic, customer (students and parents), employee and supervision (FACES).

The establishment of these five strategic focus areas provided the foundation for the district’s 2008-2013 strategic plan:

Strategic focus area	Key requirements
Financial	Financial responsibility and integrity
Academic	Accreditation High student achievement Preparing students for college/career Interesting or engaging instruction
Customer (students and parents)	Focus on individual student needs Parent involvement
Employee	Quality teachers Competitive teacher compensation



Supervision	Safe and orderly environment Respectful or caring environment Extracurricular involvement Good food Small class size
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The strategic planning process incorporated the examination of the key influences, risks, challenges and other requirements that might affect the Park Hill School District’s future opportunities and directions, considering the needs and expectations of internal and external stakeholders. These stakeholders include students, parents, staff, community members, taxpayers, business community members, and colleges and universities.

This approach provided a thorough and realistic context for the development of a student, stakeholder and market-focused strategy. This strategy guides ongoing decision making, resource allocation and overall management within the district’s five strategic focus areas. In essence, the aim of the strategic planning process is to strengthen the performance of the Park Hill School District and support its vision.

Strategic focus area champions were identified to facilitate the development of strategic goals and objectives, as well as district action plans for each objective identified. Champions used a systematic and repeatable process in focus area collaborative teams (FACTs) to establish goals and objectives.

Strategic goals and objectives refer to the Park Hill School District’s efforts to address major change or improvement, competitiveness or social issues, and district advantages. Strategic goals and objectives generally are focused internally and externally, and relate to significant student, stakeholder, market, program, service or technological opportunities and challenges (strategic challenges). Broadly stated, strategic goals and objectives are what the Park Hill School District must achieve to remain competitive and ensure long-term sustainability. The established strategic goals and objectives set the Park Hill School District’s longer-term directions and guide resource allocations in an effort to delight students, parents and taxpayers.

The district’s measurement system is linked to the key performance measures for each of the strategic focus areas. As part of the strategic planning process, stakeholder feedback was used to develop KPIs for each strategic focus area. For these KPIs, performance measures



have been identified and are reviewed biannually to ensure the effectiveness of the measures and to improve the measurement system.

The district and building balanced scorecards are used to monitor and manage performance throughout the school year. Measures on the scorecards balance short and long-term time horizons, as well as academic and nonacademic performance indicators. In addition to the scorecard measures, short and long-term budgetary and financial measures, including performance to budget and revenues versus expenditures, are tracked regularly. Because the development of these measures is integrated with strategic planning, these measures also allow the Park Hill School District to track progress relative to strategic objectives and action plans. The balanced scorecards have been through several cycles of improvement, which resulted enhanced the design and measures used.

System alignment

The district's comprehensive school improvement plan outlines goals and objectives with identified annual targets. The regular review of these annual targets and the associated short and long-term action plans allows the district to determine when action-plan modifications are necessary.

To enhance the alignment of processes throughout the district, building school improvement plans articulate the same goals and objectives for each strategic focus area. Each school's annual targets were established based on current levels of school performance with articulated annual targets to guide improvement efforts. Most importantly, individual schools are considered laboratories of innovation as staff members establish school-based action plans. Successful innovations are shared with other sites for deployment consideration.

One giant leap

While these three steps have been fundamental to district success, they are only a few of the many steps taken by staff members throughout the Park Hill School District to ensure continuous improvement in all strategic focus areas. Due to these foundational steps and system alignment, the Park Hill School District has realized improved outcomes in each strategic focus area:



- Significant energy cost avoidance through the deployment of energy education processes.
- Enhanced long-term debt management through strategic management of general obligation debt ratio.
- Sustained improvements in ACT scores since 1997.
- Significant increase in students earning passing scores on Advanced Placement exams.
- Continual added value in student academic outcomes as students progress through the Park Hill School District.
- Increased parental involvement.
- Increased numbers of students with learning goals.
- Increased teacher participation in district-based professional development.
- High employee satisfaction in the midst of financial challenges.
- Decrease in unsafe incidents at school.
- Increased perceptions of students that teachers in their school really care about them.

Overall, these three small steps have allowed the Park Hill School District to make one giant leap to excellence as it strives to continue realizing the district's vision: Building successful futures, each student, every day.

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The Park Hill School District received the Missouri Quality Award in 2009. For more information about the Park Hill School District, visit www.parkhill.k12.mo.us.