



Calcasieu Parish's Quality Site Visit Process

by Tammy Hebert and Janet Daigle, quality mentors, Calcasieu Parish Public Schools

Have you ever faced a task so daunting that you were not sure where you should even start? During the 2008-2009 school year, the two quality mentors from Calcasieu Parish Public Schools in Lake Charles, LA, faced this type of overwhelming challenge when they sought to answer this question: "How can we gather measurable data to know the level of quality implementation at every school in our district?" After exploring multiple options to obtain the answers they needed, the mentors concluded that conducting site visits at all 60 schools was the best method to gather the data they sought.

First, the quality mentors established a rubric that was aligned with the district's expectations. To do this, they turned to two of Calcasieu Parish's signature quality concepts: the dashboard and goals planning summary (GPS). The district dashboard is a stakeholder-generated, publishable version of the district's goals, mission and core values, while the GPS is a publishable action plan on a page.

At the school level, the dashboard and GPS are stakeholder-friendly versions of the school improvement plan that align with the district's four focus areas: high academic achievement, stakeholder satisfaction, safe-productive environment and operational efficiency. All 33 district-level departments and 60 schools update their dashboards and action plans annually. Alignment from the district level to the school level is guaranteed because the mentors oversee the development of these documents.

By including key focus areas from district-level dashboards and GPSs, the mentors created their first site-visit rubric. Unfortunately, creating the site-visit rubric was easy; establishing a process to use the rubric was the challenging part. Two of the biggest challenges the mentors faced with conducting the site visits were the large number of schools and the 1,071 square miles the district occupies.

To address the school district's massive size, the mentors developed a site visit calendar that clustered school visit dates based on location and outlined a step-by-step process for each site visit. Following the development of the site-visit calendar and visit procedures, the mentors commenced their site-visit marathon during the summer before the 2009-2010 school year. They provided workshops for all 60 schools' quality



leadership teams to explain the site-visit rubric, visit calendar, purpose and expectations.

In the fall, the mentors followed up on the summer workshop by providing an additional workshop and an online Blackboard course for each school's quality advisor. After laying a solid foundation of professional development to prepare each school, the mentors began the site visits in January 2011 and completed them four months later. Within one to two days following each visit, the mentors sent each school a list of commendations and one to three recommendations, along with a scored site-visit rubric that included one of the final levels of implementation: highly functional, operational, emerging or not evident.

The 2009-2010 baseline results indicated that 78% of Calcasieu Parish Schools were proficient (operational or higher) based on the site-visit rubric. Specifically, 36% were highly functional, 42% operational, 22% emerging and 0% not evident.

Overall, rubric indicators that were areas of strength included school displays reflecting school goals, student ownership and understanding of data displays, and student ownership and understanding of data folders. Rubric indicators that were opportunities for improvement were parent communication of data folder information, data folder implementation, classroom displays reflecting school goals, goals and action plans, and students' knowledge of personal strengths and weaknesses.

Data gathering

After completing the first round of site visits, the mentors began gathering stakeholder feedback to refine their visit process and rubric. Thus, the 2009-2010 year ended with the establishment of an expanded yet better-defined site-visit rubric, along with a more efficient site-visit process. Expansion of the rubric included a new stakeholder focus area with indicators related to student and parent voice. The new rubric became more refined by clearly defining how to earn each point possible.

Because the purpose of the first year of visits was to establish baseline data to measure the level of quality implementation at every school, the mentors did not require the schools to set a goal or write an action plan until the summer after the first visit.

During the 2010 summer quality leadership team workshop, the mentors explained each rubric indicator and then allowed the schools' teams to discuss whether



they wanted to check the indicator as “yes, we can” or “no, let’s wait.” After all rubric indicators were covered, the schools totaled up their “yes” points to determine their site visit level goal (highly functional, operational, emerging or not evident).

In the fall, the mentors conducted a workshop with each school’s quality advisor to review the site-visit goal and obtain input on creating the questions for the newly added quality site-visit student interviews.

The mentors gathered data from multiple resources to compile the final 2010-2011 quality site-visit exit reports and determine each school’s level. The data resources included quality advisors’ online Blackboard postings, student interviews, principal interview, teacher interview, classroom visits and school tour.

The results for the 2010-2011 site visits were astonishing: 97% of Calcasieu Parish Schools were proficient (operational or higher), even with a more rigorous rubric, 97% of the schools met or exceeded their site visit goal, the number of highly functional schools almost doubled to 66%, 31% were operational, 3% were emerging, and 0% were not evident.

All rubric indicators that were strengths from the previous year remained strengths. These indicators were joined by all but two of the previous year’s opportunities for improvement. The only two opportunities for improvement that remained for consecutive years were indicators for parent communication and students’ knowledge of their personal strengths and weaknesses.

The new stakeholder components of the 2010-2011 site-visit rubric indicated opportunities for improvement in these areas: student input on school decisions, student input on class decisions and parent input on school decisions.

Lessons learned

Overall, there are many lessons for district leaders to learn from conducting extensive school-level site visits:

1. The only way to have a true pulse on an entire school district is to visit the schools—the heart of every district.
2. School visits must include clearly defined expectations that are communicated to all stakeholders prior to being evaluated.



3. Data from site visits should be collected from multiple resources, which could include student interviews, principal interviews, teacher interviews, classroom visits and school tours.
4. The site-visit process and rubric should be refined each year, and stakeholder input should be gathered to make these improvements.

Conducting quality site visits is an excellent reminder why quality is synonymous with continuous improvement. For educators who are sprinters, looking for the finish line to conclude this site-visit process, you will be sorry to know this process does not have an ending. Sprinters who are interested in committing to the Baldrige journey may want to rethink their conditioning process and begin training for a never-ending marathon that will make their schools and school district stronger.

Tammy Hebert is a former high school English teacher who has been immersed in continuous improvement since its inception in Calcasieu Parish in 1999. She is a quality mentor for Calcasieu Parish Public Schools in Lake Charles, LA. Hebert has a bachelor's degree with certifications in secondary English and speech, a master's degree in guidance and counseling, and a master's degree in administration and supervision.

Janet Daigle is a former middle school special education and English teacher who has been involved in continuous improvement since 2003. She is a quality mentor for Calcasieu Parish Public Schools. Daigle has a bachelor's degree with a K-8 certification and special education certifications in mild/moderate, learning disabled and mentally retarded.