



From the Editor: A Framework for Excellence

by Amanda Hankel, editor

In this issue of *Primary and Secondary Education Brief*, we focus on the use of the Baldrige criteria in K-12 education. The issue features articles about two schools that presented on their Baldrige journey at the 2012 National Quality Education Conference (NQEC) earlier this month in Louisville, KY.

The Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence provide a systems perspective for understanding performance management and are the basis for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award process. The *Education Criteria for Performance Excellence* is currently used by educational institutions throughout the United States and its territories as a tool for continuous improvement.¹

In writing the stories for the issue, I had the privilege of interviewing some leaders of the schools and districts to learn the details of their respective journeys. What is interesting about their stories is how different the schools are, particularly with the students they serve and the challenges they face, yet the Baldrige criteria worked as a framework for continuous improvement for both.

In the article [“A Journey Guided by Baldrige.”](#) Susan Muentner, HR director for the Pewaukee School District in Wisconsin, discusses the district’s use of the Baldrige criteria as a way to align its entire organization and think more systematically about its processes.

Muentner said the district originally adopted the criteria because it felt it could aid in continuous improvement on what it already believed it was doing well and provide a means of measurement to help compare its performance with other school districts. Read how Muentner specifically uses the principles of the Baldrige process—namely workforce development—to guide efforts for improving employee engagement and satisfaction.



The article [“Culture Shift”](#) also examines the use of the Baldrige criteria as a framework for continuous improvement at Ackerman School in Missouri. The school has faced unique challenges in its journey, though, because the school serves a K-8 population of students with a variety of challenges. Some students have significant behavior and emotional needs, while others are medically fragile, severely physically impaired or have limited cognition.

The school used the Baldrige criteria as the framework to not only boost its instructional quality, but also completely change its culture. Students and their families have an active voice in the changes that have taken place at the school, and as a result, achievement scores are higher, student attendance is up and teachers are seeing a higher level of family involvement in student learning.

This issue also provides some additional resources on Baldrige as it relates to K-12 education. Don't miss a [webcast with Jay Marino](#), superintendent of the Dunlap Community Unit School District #323 in Peoria, IL, that provides an overview of the Baldrige system for K-12 school systems.

The article [“Measuring What Matters Most”](#) looks at the importance of performance measures as an alignment tool for schools and districts to gain a systems perspective to its processes. Meanwhile, the article [“Intensify Your Focus on Student Learning: Use Baldrige”](#) discusses the advantages of using the Baldrige criteria to improve student outcomes.

The lesson in this issue is that the Baldrige process is about more than the award. It's a framework schools can live by and integrate into their day-to-day work to align the organization and its processes, hold everyone in the organization accountable for improvement and continue to measure progress to work toward success.

Does your school or district use the Baldrige criteria for continuous improvement? What's your journey been like? E-mail ahankel@asq.org.



Reference

1. "Education Criteria for Performance Excellence," Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/education_criteria.cfm.