



MALCOLM BALDRIGE NATIONAL QUALITY AWARD

# Oklahoma School District Goes Over the Top

by **Susan E. Daniels, editor at large**

**H**ow do you ensure continuous improvement when, by most indications, you're already at the top of the heap?

One route to consider might be the one taken by the Jenks Public Schools (JPS) in Oklahoma—one of

## In 50 Words Or Less

- **The Jenks public school district was already ranked among the best in Oklahoma when it started its continuous improvement journey and decided to compare its practices and results nationally.**
- **The district became one of two education organizations to receive the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 2005.**

five recipients, two in the education category, of Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards for 2005. Only seven organizations have received Baldrige awards for education since the category was instituted in 2001.

With its data revealing test scores, advanced placement course offerings, curriculum development and a systems approach to professional development the best or among the best in the state, JPS had nowhere to go but down. So, to ensure continuous improvement, the district took a quality journey that bypassed state quality awards and leaped right into implementing the Baldrige criteria and trying to earn national recognition.

Notably, JPS was the 100th organization to apply for a Baldrige since the award program's inception. More significantly, JPS received the Baldrige award on its first try.

### Jenks' Quality Journey

JPS has nine schools on five campuses covering 93 square miles of both suburban and urban areas

in the city of Jenks and portions of south and west Tulsa. Its quality journey began in 1997 with an introduction to quality principles. It accelerated the next year with the development of a continuous improvement model based on the work of quality guru W. Edwards Deming and of two educational consultants and authors, John Jay Bostingl and James Leonard.

Diane Bosworth, assistant superintendent, curriculum and school improvement, says all of the model's components support Baldrige principles and keep

JPS focused on the development and implementation of efficacious systems and processes. This model also helps the district make decisions based on data, as opposed to "I think" or "I feel."

Thanks to Lee Jenkins, a consultant who has worked with the district on collecting, tracking and analyzing data for improved student learning since 2002, JPS was quite aware that if it was not satisfied with complacency and resting on its laurels, it would need to strive to exceed its all-time best.

"We knew the time had arrived for us to develop and implement districtwide systems and processes in the areas of curriculum, professional development, assessment, finance, HR, operations, transportation, child nutrition, maintenance and all functions under the bailiwick of each," Bosworth explains.

Currently, all staff members participate in the goal setting process and incorporate Deming's plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle into their plans for achieving all established goals. Continuous improvement is inherent in the systematic approach and deployment as a result of developing goals, implementing action plans, reviewing results and undergoing subsequent cycles of refinement.

For readers unfamiliar with the Baldrige criteria for education excellence, there are seven categories:

1. Leadership.
2. Strategic planning.
3. Student, stakeholder and market focus.
4. Information and analysis.
5. Faculty and staff focus.
6. Process management.
7. Organizational performance results.

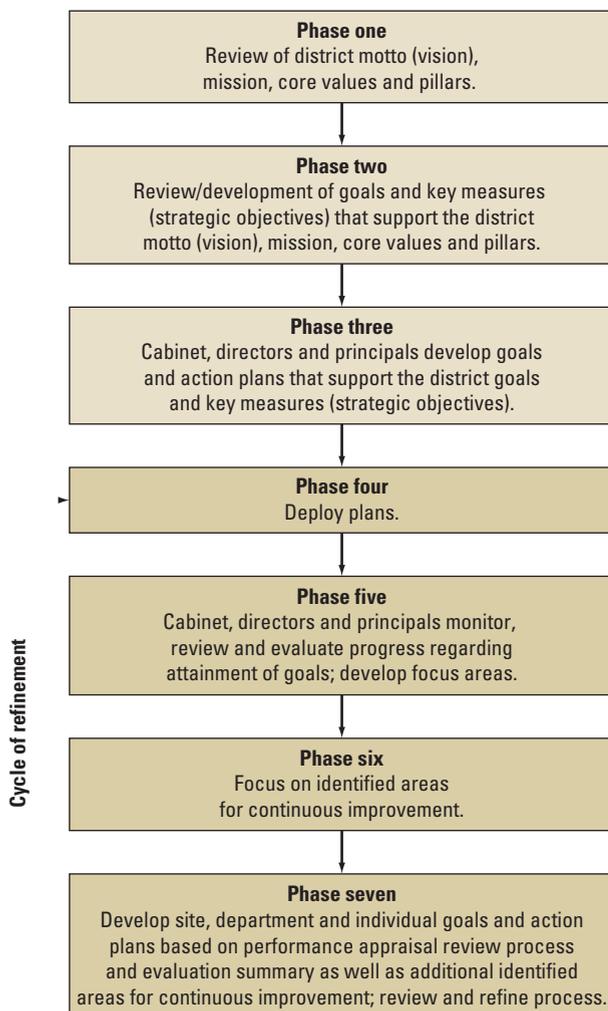
## Leadership

Among highlights of the JPS efforts in the leadership category are the encouragement—lauding, in fact—of creativity and innovation. This district recognizes outstanding teachers and other staff and gives mini-grants for classroom projects that support the district curriculum.

Training to differentiate instruction based on student readiness levels, interests and learning preferences for teachers and administration is funded by the Jenks Public School Foundation (JPSF). Each year district leadership recognizes site teachers of the year and one district teacher of the year.

The continuous improvement philosophy is

**FIGURE 1** Jenks' Strategic Planning Process





**WHERE ARE THE WORMS?** Eric VanZee, curriculum coordinator, helps second graders Dunya El-Sabbagh and Dylan Young look for worms in their compost bags during a hands-on science lesson.

integrated into formal and informal leadership communication about everything from student achievement to meeting customers' needs, professional development opportunities, decision making strategies, programs, policies and procedures.

JPS administrators also believe it's both an obligation and privilege to share the talents, skills and work of its staff with other districts in Oklahoma and the nation.

### **Strategic Planning**

Strategic planning takes place at the administrative, site and classroom levels at JPS. For example, after receiving state mandated tests scores each year, teachers analyze the results and develop goals and specific strategies describing how the goals will be attained.

These goals and planned strategies become part of goals each site principal submits to the superintendent and appropriate assistant superintendent.

Figure 1 show the JPS strategic planning process.

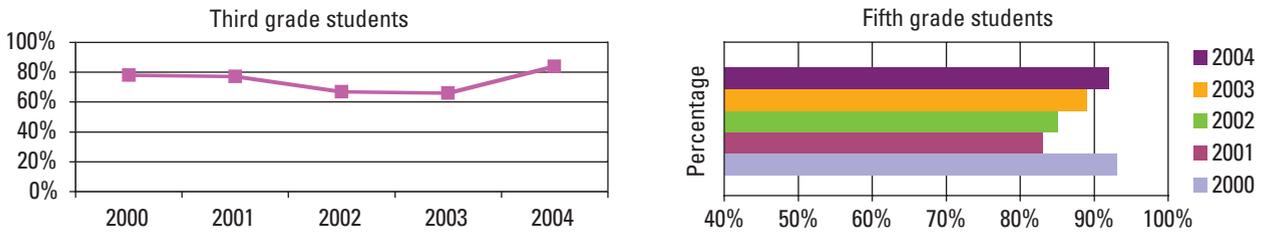
At the classroom level, one result of strategic planning is that students are no longer given "permission to forget." Beginning with mathematics in the 2004-2005 school year, the district implemented an essential elements process.

After the essential elements at each grade level were identified by a district team, students now take weekly quizzes compiled of randomly selected math information including 70% from the current grade level and 30% from the curriculum of the two previous grade levels.

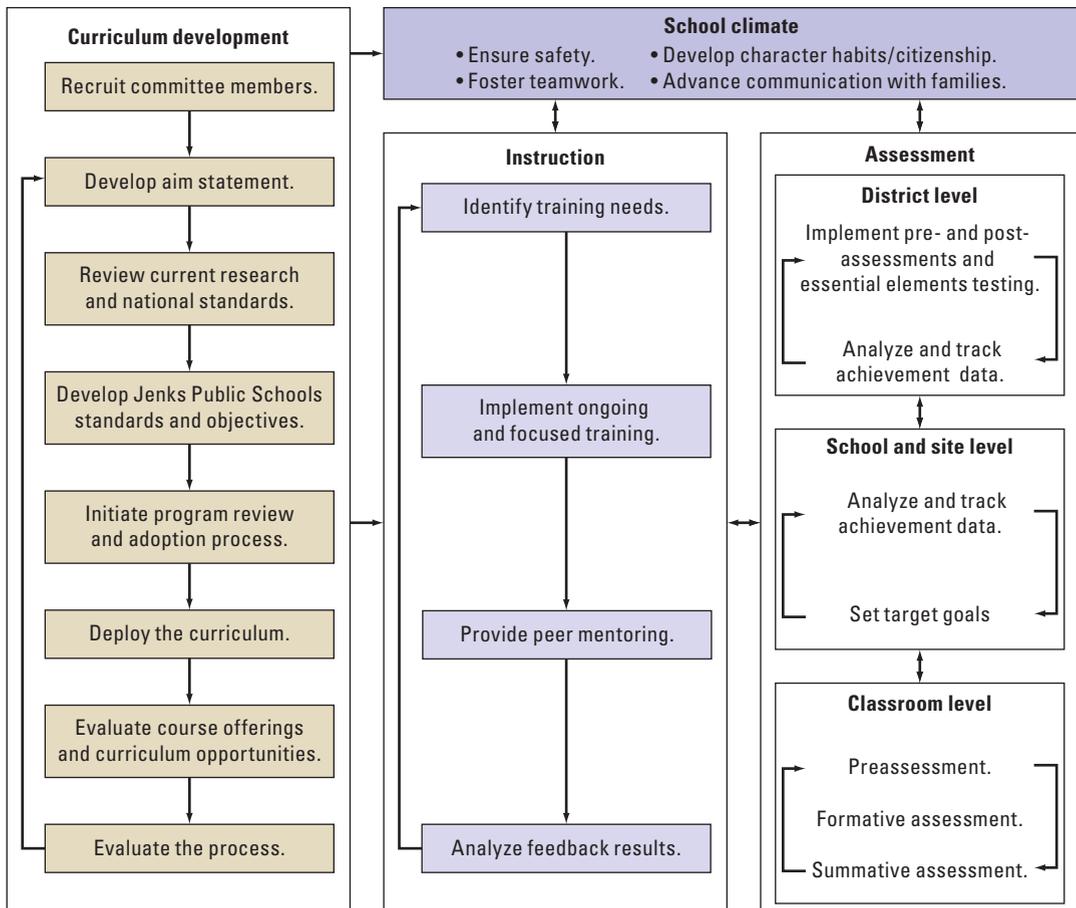
### **Student, Stakeholder And Market Focus**

To keep the district's listening and learning methods current with needs and directions, JPS senior leaders and other staff attend the National Quality Education Conference (NQEC), actively participate in legislative discussion and lobbying

**FIGURE 2** Progress in Mathematics Proficiency



**FIGURE 3** Curriculum Development Instruction Assessment and School Climate Systems



on issues affecting education, and study local, state and national publications. To monitor changes in the district's education community, data such as population shifts and demographic changes are continuously reviewed.

The district's communications and stakeholder relations process employs a variety of tools to listen and learn from the stakeholders in each segment, including:

- Periodic surveys.
- Advisory boards.
- Evaluations.
- Regularly scheduled parent and teacher meetings.
- Parent-teacher groups.
- Booster clubs.
- Curriculum committees.
- Electronic communication tools.

The curriculum development process cleans direction from 50 to 60 stakeholders in a year-long process. Another method for building relationships with stakeholders is JPSF, which facilitates financial support to assist the district.

Complaints are viewed as a possible tool for improvement, so the board of education established procedural steps for handling complaints.

## Information and Knowledge Management

The JPS curriculum and instruction team is responsible for rapidly identifying, sharing and implementing research based instructional strategies, or best practices.

This team, composed of teachers, principals and parents, meets monthly to identify, plan and further develop a comprehensive method to educate and support teachers regarding these best practices and refine current programs and practices.

Data from assessments and essential elements quizzes are assimilated, tracked and analyzed, and instruction is then modified if necessary for increased learning.

The process for remaining current with IT includes asking multiple faculty and staff who have training and experience to view supplier



**APPLICATION WRITERS: Debbie Tice and Dana Ezell (standing, l to r) and Shan Glandon and Diane Bosworth (seated) collaborated and capitalized on individual talents to write the Jenks Baldrige application.**

demonstrations and then make product recommendations to the IT department.

As early as 1999, JPS adopted a hands-on, inquiry based science program for kindergarten through sixth grade. "This program ensured our students would learn science in a way that reflects how science actually works and would learn to think and solve problems as real scientists," says Bosworth.

The district selected a similar program in mathematics for the same grades in 2003, and assessments verify student learning of math and science concepts at the elementary and intermediate levels is increasing (see Figure 2).

Placement offerings at the secondary level have

also opened up opportunities for more rigorous math and science curricula for some students.

**Faculty and Staff Focus**

The curriculum, instruction, assessment and school climate systems depicted in Figure 3 (p. 54) result in improved communication among teachers, administrators and parents while setting high standards for students and staff.

The instrument used for teacher evaluation was

tion with colleges and universities, job fair attendance, newspaper advertising, cultivation of intern teachers and plentiful professional development opportunities to recruit and retain qualified math and science teachers.

**Process Management**

The JPS PDSA process provides a systematic approach for continuous improvement in teaching, learning, student achievement, student and faculty well being and support process efficiency and effectiveness. Table 1 (p. 58), for example, illustrates requirements, control strategies and key measures for support processes.

Among learning centered processes, curriculum development is designed to bring coherence across school sites and ensures equal access to knowledge for all students. A systematic approach organizes decision making around the entire period of a child’s education, creating a sequential body of knowledge and skills that supports teachers in providing a logical progression of learning experiences.

The district’s focus on instruction enhances the learning capacity of all students because it strengthens the ability of teachers to implement classroom management structures that promote both student ownership for learning and teacher skills in planning engaging lessons, assessing learning and differentiating instruction for various groups of students.

**Organizational Performance Results**

The JPS Baldrige application ([www.jenksp.org](http://www.jenksp.org)) contains pages of text and illustrations of improved student learning results, comparing it with other schools in the state, other recipients of Baldrige awards in education and national results.

Some significant results include:

- JPS is well on its way to being the first school district in Oklahoma to achieve the maximum academic performance index score of 1,500, the target for excellence set by the state to meet accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation (see Figure 4).
- The percentage of students enrolling in at least one advanced placement (AP) course is growing.
- The increased enrollment in AP courses has not diminished excellence, as 37% of the class

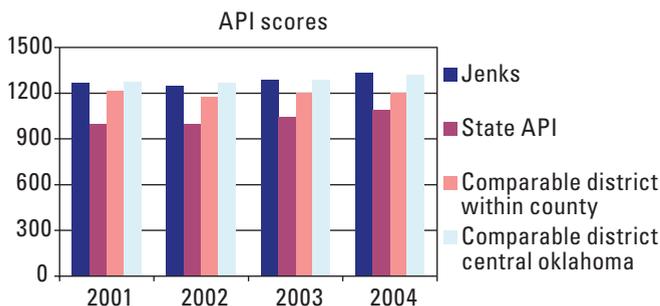
Complaints are viewed as a possible tool for improvement.

developed by a committee of teachers and administrators. A critical component of the performance appraisal review process for administrators involves reporting on the status of department or site goals and action plans that are aligned to district goals and key measures (strategic objectives).

To meet the demands made of staff members by rapidly evolving technology, the district is a member of a professional development consortium called the Eighth Floor. Eighth Floor training is technology based and provides all staff the opportunity to learn new computer skills.

JPS uses various practices such as communica-

**FIGURE 4** Academic Performance Index (API) Scores





**HANDS-ON LEARNING:** Ben Ferem, executive administrator of construction, looks on as second graders Michala Martinez, Ever Lopez and Amy Kliever open compost bags for their hands-on science lesson.

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**TABLE 1** Requirements, Strategies and Measures for Support Processes

| Support process                                    | Key requirements  | Control strategies   | Key measures   |
|--|---|--|--|
| Goal: focus on finances                            |   |  |  |
| Finance  | To meet federal, state and local mandates, demonstrate fiscal responsibility and maintain a 6% fund balance and stakeholder trust.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal process controls.</li> <li>Upgrades in financial software.</li> <li>Monthly reports to board of education.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of positive audit reports.</li> <li>Maintenance of 6% fund balance.</li> <li>Dollars of new revenues.</li> <li>Number of successful bond elections.</li> </ul> |
| Maintenance  | To comply with federal, state and local laws and codes, and Americans with Disabilities Act standards; provide accessible well-maintained buildings; decrease energy costs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal and external inspection processes.</li> <li>Ongoing energy cost analysis.</li> <li>Monitoring/tracking work requests.</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of positive inspections.</li> <li>Level of stakeholder satisfaction.</li> <li>Data indicating reduced energy costs.</li> </ul>                                 |
| IT   | To comply with federal and state mandates and deadlines; increase standardization; reduce incidence of malfunction; meet curriculum objectives.                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of approval levels.</li> <li>Daily monitoring.</li> <li>Systematic process for review of new technologies.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compliance levels.</li> <li>Downtime.</li> <li>New technologies reviews.</li> <li>Tech team requests.</li> </ul>  |
| Printing/warehouse services                        | To provide high quality, low cost products and maintain accurate inventories.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of personal communication.</li> <li>Ongoing cost analysis.</li> <li>Setting daily priorities.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accurate inventory information.</li> <li>Cost reductions.</li> <li>Meeting priority lists.</li> </ul>   |
| Goal: focus on students                            |   |  |  |
| Health and nutrition                               | To comply with federal and state laws, health and safety codes, U.S. Department of Agriculture meal requirements; maintain stakeholder satisfaction.                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily, weekly and monthly monitoring.</li> <li>Ongoing review of visitor feedback cards.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive inspection ratings.</li> <li>Cost reductions.</li> <li>Level of stakeholder satisfaction.</li> </ul>   |
| Transportation                                     | To meet state mandates, maintain effective policies and ontime delivery, reduce accidents and meet stakeholder expectations.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal and external reviews.</li> <li>Systematic routines, maintenance, delivery time and accident occurrence.</li> <li>Monthly review of conduct notices.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compliance levels.</li> <li>Accident rate trends.</li> </ul>  |
| Goal: focus on safety                              |   |  |  |
| Campus police                                      | To maintain a safe and secure school environment and increase visibility of campus police.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly review of reports and school site visits schedule.</li> <li>Annual survey of principals.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of monitoring systems.</li> <li>Stakeholder satisfaction levels.</li> </ul>  |
| Goal: focus on curriculum                          |   |  |  |
| HR   | To comply with federal and state laws and board of education policies; ensure an effective hiring/performance appraisal system.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing monitoring communications and training.</li> <li>Systematic process for continuous improvement.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of highly qualified personnel.</li> <li>Level of policy adherence.</li> </ul>  |
| Communication                                      | To meet stakeholder expectations and lobby for supportive legislation.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily communications.</li> <li>Weekly update of lobbying efforts.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder satisfaction levels.</li> <li>Results of lobbying efforts.</li> </ul>   |
| Community education/Jenks Public School Foundation | To meet stakeholder expectations and demonstrate fiscal responsibility.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily monitoring of programs.</li> <li>Monthly and quarterly meetings.</li> <li>Review of the grant process.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of stakeholders served.</li> <li>Dollars invested in JPS.</li> <li>Number of programs and grants funded.</li> </ul>  |

of 2004 demonstrated a mastery level of three or better compared to a national percentage of 13% and the next highest state percentage of 21.2% (see Figure 5).

- Students participating in 2004 remediation for pre-algebra and algebra I concepts and skills saw an average 42% increase in test scores.
- A project in one elementary school resulted in significantly improved writing skills among a group of third graders.
- The dropout rate has dramatically decreased from 6.3% in 199 to 1.2% at the close of the 2004 school year.
- JPS consistently designates 82-83% of its operating budget for instruction and instructional support.
- There were 26 transfers into the district in 2004-2005 because of its special education services.

The Jenks Baldrige application also demonstrates improvements in nonacademic areas, including financial management.

## Lessons Learned

For other educational institutions or organizations thinking of starting the Baldrige journey, Bosworth says the following were necessary for Jenks:

- Understanding the meaning of “this is a process” as it became apparent that without assiduous efforts toward continuous improvement over 10 years, JPS would not have been prepared to apply for the Baldrige award.
- Learning the value of systems, processes, alignment, consistency and coherency across the district.
- Knowing the value of teamwork.
- Expanding benchmarking and comparative data beyond the state to the nation and the world.

In addition to Bosworth, the authors of the application were Shan Glandon, director of curriculum and instruction; Dana Ezell, director of personnel; and Debbie Tice, director of professional development. They offered four tips to future Baldrige applicants:

1. By collaborating and sharing a common direction, you can accomplish a great feat much more easily than by flying solo.
2. It works best to divide the hard tasks and cap-

**FIGURE 5** Advanced Placement Exam Results



italize on individual talents in areas such as organization, technology (formatting), editing and assimilating data while being interdependent.

3. Celebrating is important.
4. Having the mentorship of a seasoned consultant who can guide, encourage, push and celebrate with you is invaluable.

“Vision, perseverance and patience are paramount in a continuous improvement journey,” says Bosworth.

“The journey will include some bumps in the road, and it is sometimes easy to become frustrated and disillusioned with what may at times appear to be a lack of progress. At that point, it is important to review how far you have traveled, celebrate a bit and then continue moving forward.”

## Please comment

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