

Peer Review Models In Education Taking the Baldrige Criteria to a Deeper Level

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Well into their journey to excellence, 2006 TAPE award winner, Aldine Independent School District decided they needed a method that would enable the leadership team to determine the depth of deployment throughout the district for their strategic goals, actions, and strategies, and to identify best practices throughout the district. The tool they selected to use for this assessment is a Baldrige-based assessment tool, embedded with research-based approaches for equity and literacy implementation.

The peer review model began with the selection of 10 schools to pilot the assessment. To gain a clear perspective in the range of educational practices, a striated sample of schools was selected to be the first to be assessed. The superintendent, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, and the deputy superintendent made the selection of schools. The schools selected were based on feeder systems, highest and lowest performance, and schools with special programs (magnet or academies). Within the “10”, there were elementary schools, middle schools, ninth grade campuses, academies, and comprehensive high schools.

Each school created a team, which would be assigned to assess a school other than their own. Teams were comprised of the principal, skills specialist, experienced teacher, parent, business partner, and their vertical team leader (area superintendent). To ensure consistency in assessments, a Baldrige experienced consultant and the deputy superintendent would be on every team assessment.

Teams attended a two-day Baldrige based training session to learn the process and become familiar with the tool, scoring and practices used during a site visit. Dedication to the learning process was clearly evident when parents and business leaders from the community committed to 3.5 days of learning from the process. Each school team also was presented with “draft” agendas for the peer review that could be adjusted to meet the school’s daily schedule and not disrupt the teaching/learning process. Example notebooks were shared to help the schools prepare their body of evidence.

During spring of 2006, the 10 schools were assessed. The scores helped the leadership team understand the key areas of strength in each school and where schools needed to focus their 2006-

2007 action plans (school improvement plans) to drive breakthrough improvements. Embedded in the assessment was the approach for identifying and capturing best practices witnessed during the site visit. After the district completed the first round of assessments, they worked with the technology team to develop a best practice, knowledge-sharing network. The best practices are loaded into the intranet-sharing tool to enable all schools to access these approaches. Every school receives a feedback report of key findings.

The peer review approach worked very well for Aldine and was extended to all operational departments during the summer of 2006. Departments had to have peer review teams comprised of the department leader, 2 process owners, 2 business partners, and a principal. Principals were added as a means of growing their knowledge of how operational processes worked within the district.

The peer review model is on a 3-year cycle. Every year, 25-30 schools are assessed. Schools that are not selected for the peer review cycle must complete a self-assessment and use the tool to identify areas of continuous improvement that are then written into their annual action plans. Operations are on a two-year cycle, where they must conduct a self-assessment every other year.

In 18 months, Aldine has completed 35 school and 24 operational peer reviews. The best practice database now has over 700 best practices captured. Thirty-seven schools have already received their invitations to peer review training in August.

As a result of the peer review model what has Aldine learned? These key findings are:

- Strength of administrative leaders is directly correlated to the academic success of each school or operation
- There exists a strong belief system that all students can learn, ***the Aldine Way***
- Goal deployment and action plans are implemented down to student level in many of the schools
- Instructional strategies learned during professional development sessions are being used in the classrooms and are producing increased positive academic results for students.
- Student focus, relationship building and rigorous instruction make a big difference for ***all*** students.

Many schools and departments have built strong partnerships with businesses throughout the community.