



Systemic Quality in Charter Schools: How the Baldrige Model Influenced The Texas Charter Schools Association's Quality Framework



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Eighteen months ago, the Texas Charter Schools Association (TCSA) had a vision that at best seemed optimistic and at worst nearly impossible. TCSA's vision was to develop a framework and an evaluation process by which charter leaders could evaluate Texas' diverse charter schools. TCSA sought to create a continuous improvement tool that would enable charter leaders to perform a comprehensive analysis of their school's academic and operational performance. The framework would codify what defined quality in Texas charter schools and the evaluation would enable TCSA to better assist and train school leaders in their areas of greatest need.

To achieve this objective, TCSA hired The Institute for Public School Initiatives (IPSI). IPSI then compiled a team consisting of IPSI management and project staff, Texas charter experts and a Malcolm Baldrige examiner to engage a diverse committee of charter operators and leaders in developing a quality framework.

The team began by researching other states' charter school quality standards and best practices, as well as national business and education quality improvement models, one of which was the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence. In January of 2009, the committee was presented with extensive information from over twenty different sources. Ultimately, over the course of the project, forty-six different sources were referenced for guidance in creating The TCSA Quality Framework and Progress Evaluation.

From the initially divergent opinions regarding what elements and indicators should be used in The Quality Framework one unifying opinion arose – that of creating a systemic quality model similar to Baldrige.

As the committee members decided on key indicators of quality, themes arose which helped identify crucial areas of focus for the schools. These areas then evolved into the interdependent systems of The Quality Framework. Inspired by the Baldrige graphic, the committee members chose to create their own graphic representation of the key academic and operational systems of the Quality Framework. The Student Success portion of the TCSA Quality Framework graphic, shown below, is similar to the Results category of the Baldrige system graphic. All of the systems within The Framework ultimately drive the results found in the area of Student Success.



Once the systems were established, the team and committee worked to clarify the key elements needed to ensure the functionality and health of each system. Listed below are the elements that give support to the various systems.

From here, the team and committee sought to identify what processes, methods, and tools would be present within a school or network of schools that produced consistent results. After further research and debate, the committee members crafted and refined 97 indicators which they felt were necessary to drive achievement and sustainability within a school.

The final and most daunting phase of the project was the creation of the Quality Framework Progress Evaluation. For months the team and committee members poured over review rubrics, measures and metrics laboring to clarify the various levels of effectiveness for each of the indicators. The end product of that endeavor was a comprehensive evaluation comprised of both quantitative and qualitative metrics and measures.



The Quality Framework was finalized and the Progress Evaluation Pilot Program was launched mid-May of this year. The initial responses have been overwhelmingly positive. A common statement from participants is that the evaluation has helped them to realize what areas need more focused attention and consistent data capture. Charter school leaders are reporting that the framework and evaluation have been tremendously helpful in mapping out their campus improvement plans for the upcoming year. Additionally, several schools have celebrated the fact that the data that was previously tracked in numerous disjointed and disparate reports is now at their fingertips and contained in one tool.

TCSA and IPSI remain optimistic that the Quality Framework and Progress Evaluation will help to improve the academic achievement and operational sustainability of charter schools throughout Texas for years to come.