

National Quality in Education Conference: Refocus, Renew, and Rev Up for Learning!

by Jay Marino and Becky Martin

Developing Global Leaders Through Quality Schools, Classrooms, and Systems Thinking is the theme of 2012 National Quality in Education Conference (NQEC). Educators from around the world will gather in Louisville, KY, to engage in the four focus areas of the conference including:

- Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and 21st Century Learning
- Strategic Planning and Systems Thinking
- Using Quality Practices to Close the Achievement Gap, Pre K-12 Through College
- Baldrige in Education for Significant Continuous Improvement

NQEC is a premier conference *by practitioners for practitioners*. NQEC focuses on continuous improvement processes that have proven results in academic growth and engagement for all students. Educators value this opportunity to network, refocus, renew, and rev up for learning.

We will be presenting a session on Monday, November 12 titled, “The Plan on a Page; Connecting all Stakeholders” in which we’ll share five key strategies that engage and empower stakeholders in the strategic plan. The plan on a page ensures that key components such as vision, mission, core values, and goals are included on a one page, easy-to-understand document that clearly sets and communicates direction in the organization. Here’s a preview of the five key strategies.

Strategy One: Shared Leadership

The foundation of any effective plan is selecting the right process and people to work on it. By establishing a community of leaders, organizations can collectively harness the talent of a diverse group of stakeholders and benefit from their multiple perspectives. The new paradigm of educational leadership calls for collaboration and involvement in leading the educational organization. When a cohesive team is empowered with leadership responsibilities, it is more likely that their decisions will be supported and acted on by colleagues. An effective team utilizes the cooperative power of the group to guide the way.

Strategy Two: Clear Focus

Leadership teams need to ensure that improvement plans incorporate explicit and agreed-upon focus. To ensure group consensus, input is essential to make certain that the values of stakeholders are represented. Only the most important or “critical few” focus areas should be included to keep the effort centered and manageable. To establish a clear and common focus, a plan on a page that contains a clear vision, concise mission, meaningful core values, and measurable goals should be explicitly shared with all staff and stakeholders.

Strategy Three: Set and Communicate Direction

It’s the responsibility of the leadership team to ensure that each person clearly understands the plan and his or her contribution to it. The plan on a page can be a powerful approach to concisely set and effectively communicate direction



to all stakeholders. Educators can post the plan on a page where it can be referenced and used in decision making. Undoubtedly, in the absence of clear direction, stakeholders will determine for themselves what is most important, an action that may be antithetical to the group. The plan on a page ensures a clear and consistent focus on the most essential components of the plan.

Strategy Four: Measurable Goals

A successful plan on a page contains clear and measurable goals. Goals written in SMART format (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time bound) focus efforts and deliver results. Leadership teams need to measure and monitor progress frequently to determine the impact and effectiveness of strategies. A concept referred to as a “dashboard,” helps educators observe results and make in-process adjustments to the plan. Like the dashboard in a car, educators can monitor key indicators of achievement and keep an eye out for “warning lights” or areas in need of further attention. Dashboard measures provide a process for early detection of progress through a public display of data in graphical formats for easy interpretation by stakeholders. Effective leadership teams know that what gets measured gets done!

Strategy Five: Ownership

The plan on a page isn’t worth the paper it’s printed on if it doesn’t produce action and generate results. One way to increase ownership,

continued on page 12

The Education Division will sponsor a meeting with Division members.

Time: Sunday, November 11, 9:45 a.m. – 11:00a.m. at the conference hotel.

NQEC Conference continued from page 11

responsibility, and accountability for the plan is to have everyone create his or her own version. Consider the following scenario:

A school district's leadership team involves stakeholders in the creation of a strategic plan that includes a vision, mission, core values, and strategic goals to guide and align the school system. To clearly set and communicate district direction in a simplistic way, the team distributes a summary document, the district plan on a page, to all employees and stakeholders within the school district.

Next, each school writes a school improvement plan that aligns to the district's strategic plan. To ensure clear and shared focus at the school level, the leadership team summarizes their work in the form of a school plan on a page. The plan is distributed to all classroom teachers and stakeholders to guide and align improvement efforts within the school.

Then, teachers post the school's plan on a page in their classrooms and talk about its meaning with students. Collaboratively, the teacher facilitates the creation of a classroom plan on a page with student input. Their plans include specific SMART goals that align to the school improvement plan. Every classroom monitors its progress toward school goals in its own dashboard or data center. The class uses this instrument to determine progress and identifies areas to pay particular attention to in the respective classroom system.

Through a collaborative process of shared leadership; the establishment of common and shared focus with input from stakeholders; the setting of clear direction at all levels; the creation of measurable SMART goals; the monitoring of goal progress in a dashboard; and the involvement of everyone creating his or her own plan on a page, school leaders can involve everyone in the process of continually improving the educational system.

About the Authors:

J. Jay Marino, Ed.D. is the Superintendent of schools in the Dunlap Community Unit School District 323 in Dunlap, IL. He also serves as an international consultant assisting American and European school organizations in their continuous improvement efforts. Learn more at <http://www.jaymarino.me> or contact Jay via email at continuous_improvement@jaymarino.me.

Becky Martin is the Professional Development Facilitator for the Cedar Rapids Community School District. She directs professional development for the district and also works in the areas of school improvement and continuous improvement. She is instrumental in the planning and implementation of the professional learning community initiative for the Cedar Rapids district. Her background includes design, delivery, and management of professional development programs. Martin is a certified data coach for *Decision-Making for Results* through the Reeves Learning and Leadership Center. She works collaboratively with local area education agency staff to coordinate professional development and school improvement opportunities.

Martin has delivered presentations at local, state and national conferences and organizations including but not limited to National School Board Association, ASCD, and NQEC and has authored articles in leading education publications. She is recognized nationally as the K-12 Quality Tools Chair for the American Society for Quality's Education Division and hosts a Quality in Education blog. Contact Becky at rmartin@cr.k12.ia.us.

Education Division's *Advancing the STEM Agenda Book*

A collection of conference papers from the 2011 Advancing the STEM Agenda Conference. Available through ASQ Quality Press.

<http://asq.org/quality-press/display-item/index.html?item=H1429>



This publication is full of collaborative models, best practices, and advice for teachers, higher education faculty, and human resources personnel on improving the student retention (and thereby increasing the supply of STEM workers.) Ideas that will work for both STEM and non-STEM fields are presented. The introduction maps out the

current landscape of STEM education and compares the United States to other countries. The last chapter is the conference chairs' summary of what was learned from the conference and working with 36 authors to develop this book. This effort is part of a grassroots effort among educators to help more students be successful in STEM majors and careers.

"Veenstra, Padró, and Furst-Bowe provide a huge contribution to the field of STEM education. We all know the statistics and of the huge need in the area of STEM students and education, but what has been missing are application and success stories backed by research and modeling. The editors have successfully contributed to our need by focusing on collaborative models, building the K-12 pipeline, showing what works at the collegiate level, connecting across gender issues, and illustrating workforce and innovative ideas."

John J. Jasinski

President, Northwest Missouri State University

"*Advancing the STEM Agenda* provides a broad set of current perspectives that will contribute in many ways to advancing the understanding and enhancement of education in science, education, and engineering. This work is packed with insights from experienced educators from K-12, regional, and research university perspectives and bridges the transition from education to workplace."

John Dew, Ed.D.

Senior Vice Chancellor, Troy University