

Rock Island School District's Journey to Excellence

By Jay Morino
Assistant
Superintendent
for Instruction
and School
Improvement,
Rock Island-Milan
School District #41

In Rock Island School District #41, "Excellence Every Day" is more than just a saying, it's our way of doing business. For the past three years, RISD #41 has been utilizing quality tools and processes to continuously improve the education system. With a focus on core values including: customer satisfaction, data driven decision making, empowerment with responsibility and parent/school collaboration, the District is showing steady increases in academic achievement.

Using the National Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence as a guide, RISD has focused improvement efforts throughout the District. This "systems-based" approach encourages stakeholders to provide input to key initiatives and improvement efforts. The Baldrige criteria provide a blueprint for our District to align goals, develop direction and enhance key processes in the educational system. Organizations that utilize the Baldrige criteria attempt to align all parts of their organization to a few critical goals that everyone works toward. In RISD #41, we call this process "aligning our arrows".

In order to sustain the quality initiatives in RISD, internal support and capacity are being constructed at many levels. Several support processes have been initiated to sustain and enhance improvement efforts. For example, District administrators meet twice a month as a leadership team to share effective instructional practices and learn more about how to utilize the Baldrige model to improve their schools. School administrators have been trained as Lincoln Award examiners and are on State-wide teams that are assessing other organizations' effectiveness across Illinois. RISD administrators are utilizing quality tools and processes and providing innovative educational leadership that is bringing about positive change.

Additionally, each individual school is creating its school improvement plan to address the 7 Baldrige criteria. Building leadership and

school improvement teams consist of many different stakeholders including students, parents, community members, teachers, support staff and administrators. These teams work together to review assessment data, determine school goals, create action plans and write the school improvement plan document. In RISD, school improvement teams are beginning to use the Plan, Do, Study, Act improvement process. Each building leadership team meets at least quarterly to review the action plan, collect data and monitor progress toward goals. Each school's improvement plan contains strategies, processes and measures to enhance academic achievement for all learners.

To further support continuous improvement efforts, administrators, teachers and support staff have been trained in the Koalaty Kid approach to continuous improvement. This approach teaches staff to solve problems and improve the quality of their school using the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle. This research proven, data driven approach ensures that improvement efforts are based on fact and verified by student academic achievement data. In addition, each school possesses a trained teacher that serves as a "Quality Facilitator" who works closely with teachers and the school's improvement team to support the PDSA process. RISD also maintains a Koalaty Kid web site complete with examples of PDSA processes and tools and the necessary resources to support quality instruction. Approximately 80% of RISD staff (or about 13 out of 16 schools) have received training in the Koalaty Kid approach to continuous improvement.

Adults aren't the only ones focusing on continuous improvement. Students are also beginning to use quality tools and processes to enhance their educational experiences and take charge of their own learning. Classrooms using the Koalaty Kid approach to continuous improvement can be identified by the following components: cooperative learning instruction, PDSA as the problem solving method, personalized student data folders, student-led conference,

articulated classroom goals and mission statements aligned with school and District goals and classrooms arranged in a manner that supports team building. Through this approach, students set goals, develop a plan to accomplish their goals and collect data to gauge their own improvement efforts. In RISD, students truly are "Koalaty Kids".

RISD quality initiatives have been validated in several ways over the past few years. Under the leadership of Dr. David Markward, Superintendent of RISD, the District was awarded the 2001 Lincoln Business Foundation Commitment To Excellence Award. In 2001, RISD was the only school district in the State of Illinois to receive this prestigious award. The District was validated once again this year when the American Society for Quality asked seven RISD teachers and the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and School Improvement Jay Marino, to write and edit a book intended to teach teachers how to use quality tools with students. The book titled *The Quality Classroom; PDSA Lesson Plans for the K-5 Teacher* will be published by Quality Press and will be available in September 2003.

Excellence Every Day is not accomplished overnight or by one person. In RISD, all stakeholders including parents, students, community members, school board members, teachers, support staff and administrators are working collaboratively to provide the very best educational experience possible. Continuous improvement is our goal today, tomorrow and in the future. It's all about being better tomorrow than we are today...

Visit our website to learn more about our quality initiatives at <http://curriculum.risd41.org>

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