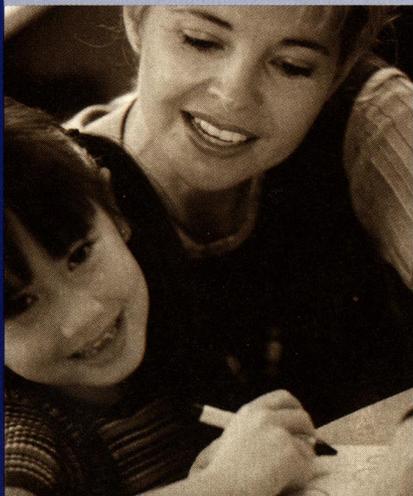


*Education and
business leaders
making a difference
in North Carolina
through a focus on
continuous
improvement*



Ramping UP Reform

Aligning Education Rhetoric, Resolve, and Results
Lessons from North Carolina



SERVE
*Improving Learning through
Research & Development*

Ramping UP Reform

Aligning Education Rhetoric, Resolve, and Results

Lessons from North Carolina

This story of reform in North Carolina was commissioned by



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through a collaboration with



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SERVE is a federally funded Regional Educational Laboratory serving the six southeastern states. Its mission is to promote and support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. Through its staff located in offices throughout the Southeast, SERVE supports educational improvement through development and applied research projects, publications, technical assistance, conferences, and other services.

The North Carolina Partnership for Excellence (NCPE) is a nonprofit, public-private partnership created to support systemic partnerships involving business, higher education, school systems, and local communities. NCPE also partners with state policy-making organizations to assist them in the work of improving education in North Carolina. The mission of NCPE is (1) to support and coach education systems to meet or exceed customer requirements and (2) to support and coach organizations that have responsibility for the alignment of education in North Carolina.

The **National Alliance of Business** (NAB), a nonprofit organization, advances business leadership at the national, state, and local levels to improve workforce quality through enhanced education and training. The key to success for American business is a quality workforce—a workforce for which all citizens are educated and trained to world-class standards, beginning in school and continuing throughout their careers.

Peggy Siegel is Director of Business/Education Leadership Initiatives at the National Alliance of Business. She has over 25 years of experience working in, consulting for, and analyzing state and local education systems. A former management consultant, Siegel earned her doctorate in education administration from Ohio State University. She co-authored the book, *Using Quality to Redesign School Systems: The Cutting Edge of Common Sense* (1995), and served as a Baldrige Examiner for three years. Her area of expertise is engaging business leadership and management experience in the transformation of education systems.

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Preface by SERVE

What does it mean to be a good leader and manager in today's schools and districts? In answering this question, some schools, districts, and states have looked to the business community and explored their use of Total Quality Management (TQM). In a prior publication entitled, *Going to Scale with TQM: The Pinellas County Schools' Journey Toward Quality*, SERVE described how one Florida district used training in TQM as a foundation for its reform efforts. Interestingly, over the last few years, leaders from Pinellas County have been sharing their experiences with a coalition of North Carolina educators, business leaders, and policymakers. To support educators in the Southeast in their pursuit of quality leadership and management, SERVE encouraged the North Carolina Total Quality in Education (TQE) Initiative to tell its story. This SERVE publication represents the reflections of those involved in the North Carolina Initiative. The publication is intended for business and education leaders interested in exploring a model of how they might work together to create "high-performing" educational organizations.

Total Quality Management is a management philosophy or approach that includes

- A focus on customer satisfaction
- Constant dedication to a philosophy and cycle of continuous improvement through examination of data and other analytical tools (flow charts, etc.)
- Understanding of the organization as a system
- Effective use of teams and employee involvement
- Emphasis on analysis of the quality of processes

In thinking about the meaning of quality management, the North Carolina TQE Initiative depended heavily on ideas from the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award program, which is a rigorous organizational assessment tool that includes a set of core values reflective of high-performing organizations. The seven categories used to assess educational organizations are 1) leadership, 2) strategic planning, 3) student and stakeholder focus, 4) information and analysis, 5) faculty and staff focus, 6) educational and support process management, and 7) school performance results. Through training and other strategies, the TQE Initiative has developed a common vision and language for what *quality management* means.

The seeds of the North Carolina TQE Initiative came from a conversation between the governor and state business leaders interested in the applicability of TQM (an approach that had helped them transform their organizations) to education. This Initiative

- Was funded initially by the business community as a four-year research and development project
- Was developed in concept and directed by a steering committee of business and education leaders
- Had strong support from the governor
- Had as its home base the North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE is housed in the governor's office)
- Identified seven districts who volunteered to participate in the application of TQM
- Provided resources to these pilot districts and some structure and guidance but essentially left the districts to forge their own way with TQM

This Initiative represented a loose association of seven (six in 1995) districts who "signed a contract" with NCBCE to involve a business and higher education partner in thinking about how they could apply TQM principles of quality in their districts. As part of this contract, they received resources and support from NCBCE. The TQE Initiative in North Carolina is currently in its fifth year and continues to grow. Currently, 41 districts (out of 117 in the state) are participating. Business, legislative, and state department support and involvement remain strong. Thus, the experiences described in this publication may be helpful to other states interested in developing a strong coalition of business and education leaders.

For more information about the North Carolina TQE Initiative, contact

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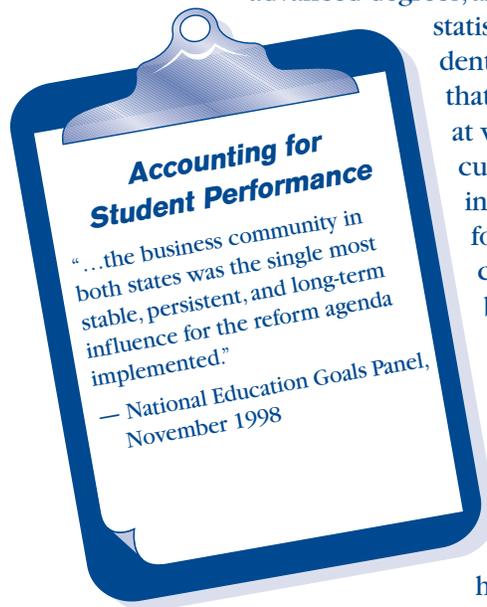
Executive Summary

In 1997, the National Education Goals Panel reported that students from two states—North Carolina and Texas—had posted the greatest average gains in test scores, measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and state assessments, from 1990 to 1997. Disadvantaged pupils within the general student population, moreover, had made the fastest strides in improving their test scores.

In 1998, the Goals Panel commissioned a study of the two states to “identify the factors that could and could not account for their progress.”¹

In this study, several input variables commonly associated with raising student achievement—per-pupil expenditures, student/teacher ratios, advanced degrees, and faculty experience levels—did not

statistically explain the increases in student performance. The authors suggested that more systemic factors appeared to be at work—an aligned system of standards, curriculum, and assessments; state initiatives that held schools accountable for the progress of all students; and critical and sustained support from business leaders.



This publication tells a piece of the North Carolina story. That is, *Ramping-Up Reform in North Carolina* tells the story of how a major Total Quality in Education (TQE) Initiative unfolded in North Carolina, highlighting the role played by the

business community. SERVE, a federally funded Regional Educational Laboratory serving the Southeast, provided funding to the leaders of this TQE Initiative to tell their story for what their experiences might contribute to discussions of educational reform. This report is the story of the TQE Initiative in their own words.

Creating the Partnership

During 1992, business leaders from North Carolina’s largest companies approached Governor Jim Hunt with an innovative offer of assistance. They

agreed to sponsor a research and development project based on customizing and implementing the concepts and practices of Total Quality Management (TQM) for education. The intent: to help state policymakers and local educators align the multitude of existing reforms into a systemic improvement strategy capable of raising student achievement over time.

A number of North Carolina business leaders had been using TQM to transform their own companies. Their success stemmed from building organizational capacity to understand and meet customer needs, address higher performance goals, and provide employees with the requisite information, resources, and decision-making responsibility needed to meet even more rigorous expectations over time. Based on their own performance gains and a growing concern for the future of North Carolina's public school system, business leaders were willing to make a comparable commitment to help support reform in K-12 education.

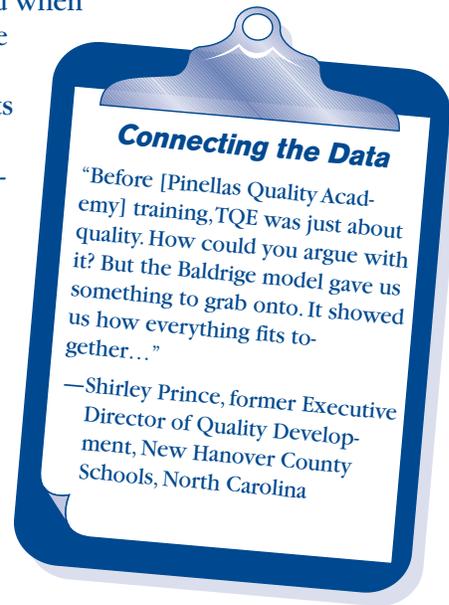
The application of TQM in North Carolina districts was called the Total Quality in Education (TQE) Initiative. The North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE), a nonpartisan, nonprofit, state business organization housed in the governor's office, served as the launch pad. State education leaders recruited seven diverse school districts from across the state that, with a local higher education and business partner, agreed to pilot the implementation of quality practices over four years and annually record their impressions and results. The pilot sites signed a formal contract with NCBCE, which called on them to create local leadership councils to guide their efforts.

A TQE Steering Committee of business, government, and education leaders met monthly to oversee development and implementation of the R&D project and offer encouragement and advice. The pilot sites used TQE training resources at their own discretion to access quality experts from business and education. They also took advantage of networking opportunities, hosted by the TQE Steering Committee, to move forward.

Providing a Framework for Continuous Improvement

TQE began to gain momentum during the first year of the partnership. The various training and networking activities were having a positive impact on leadership at the pilot sites, by reinforcing collaborative decision making at all levels. What was missing, however, was a conceptual framework to align activities and track improvements over time.

Fortunately, a breakthrough occurred when the TQE district pilots discovered the Quality Academy created by Pinellas County Schools in Florida to foster its own districtwide transformation process. Quality Academy administrators shared with North Carolina's TQE participants how they were using a customized version of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria as an organizational assessment tool to align and focus their improvement efforts. The North Carolina pilot sites now had a framework to drive their own continuous improvement efforts over time and provide continuity in the face of inevitable leadership transitions.

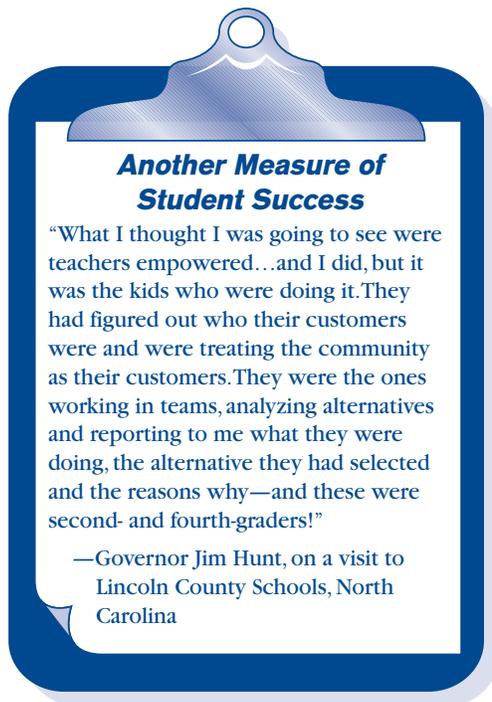


Rollout—from Six to 26 Sites

Midway into the four-year R&D effort, North Carolina leaders were sufficiently convinced of its merits to take additional action. In July 1995 at Governor Hunt's request, the General Assembly began to allocate funds to expand the TQE Initiative to additional school districts. Forty-two of 117 superintendents contacted by NCBCE expressed an interest in learning more. Of these, 20 districts submitted formal applications and became part of the reform effort in 1996. And the Legislature has continued its funding commitment each year since.

Results

The North Carolina Business Committee for Excellence (NCBCE) tracked results from the original six district sites. All six districts showed continuous improvement in their test score results on the SAT (between 1993 and 1996), as well as on state reading, mathematics, and writing tests. These early success indicators convinced business, education, and government leaders in North Carolina to “ramp-up” the TQE Initiative. In 1998, the first year that three-year trend data became available for the 20 additional district sites, state test scores rose across all 26 school districts.



In addition to the quantitative data, there was qualitative evidence indicating changes in student behavior as well. Anecdotal and other evidence suggested that many students from districts engaged in the quality reform initiative were taking increasing responsibility for their own education—not only for what they were learning but for how they chose to learn it. This lesson has not been lost on state business, education, and government leaders who have spent time visiting classrooms.

Continuing the TQE Initiative

The original four-year TQE Initiative officially ended in July 1997. Based on the positive feedback and performance results from the local districts, NCBCCE and its business leader trustees voted to spin off a separate, non-profit organization, the North Carolina Partnership for Excellence (NCPE), to sustain and expand the R&D effort.

As of December 1998, 41 school districts—representing 65 percent of the students statewide—had signed on, each with a local business and higher education partner. Their participation is strictly voluntary, but a formal memorandum of agreement between NCPE and the local partners spells out everyone’s roles and responsibilities.

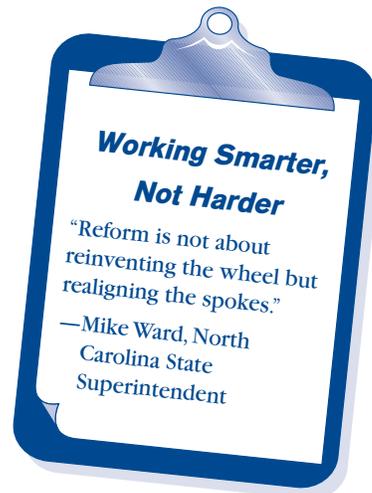
NCPE has given itself a challenging goal: by the year 2002, every school district willing to complete a Baldrige-based self-assessment to drive their improvement efforts will have the opportunity and resources to do so.

Is the TQE Initiative and the subsequent rollout responsible for North Carolina’s success in raising student achievement? Not even the most avid proponents would take sole credit. However, a Baldrige-based improvement strategy is helping North Carolina’s business, education, and government leaders focus their actions and resources on improving student performance. To date, the results are clearly positive.

A Strategic Priority: Bringing State and Local Districts Closer Together

In 1995, the same year that the General Assembly began to fund TQE, North Carolina lawmakers enacted the ABCs Plan, which focused on three key elements: (1) school-based accountability, (2) demonstrated student mastery of basic skills, and (3) local control in implementing improvement strategies. The first two elements heightened the pressure on districts and schools for improving educational outcomes. The ABCs articulated more rigorous student performance expectations and instituted high-stakes consequences that made schools responsible for demonstrating progress. The third element—a reaffirmation of local control—enabled school districts to decide how best to meet such expectations. This flexibility, in turn, fueled interest among growing numbers of communities in the activities undertaken and results being produced by the TQE partner sites.

Participation in North Carolina’s quality reform initiative was not limited to local school districts and their higher education and business partners, however. The State Board of Education and State Superintendent have also used a Baldrige-based framework to align their own strategic objectives—and the TQE Initiative’s partners are helping facilitate their efforts by providing training to all employees of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.



Advice to Business Partners

State and local business partners played a significant role in North Carolina’s TQE Initiative. Their experiences can help reform efforts in other states as well. Consequently, this publication offers advice for business leaders interested in becoming involved in or already involved with education reform. The suggestions below were developed by Dr. Peggy Siegel in reflecting on interviews conducted leading up to this report and on her experience as Director of Business/Education Leadership with the National Alliance of Business.

1. Treat your business/education partnership like a supplier/customer relationship.

Normally, employers think of school systems as their suppliers (providing them with a prepared workforce). In this case, however, the roles are reversed: educators are your customers for a viable improvement strategy. Just like any successful supplier, you need to understand your customers' "requirements" by gaining a clear understanding of education. Visit classrooms, observe school teams, and attend school board meetings. Combine problem-solving experiences honed in business with your firsthand knowledge of school systems to help educators overcome barriers to change.

One note of caution: Improvement strategies developed in one setting are rarely accepted at face value in another. Educators must be able to design and own a reform strategy that reflects their specific needs. But your actions can help expedite the process. As educators implement new initiatives, support them by advocating for compatible policy and procedural changes at the local and state levels and by encouraging continuous reflection and evaluation. Given the nature of systemic change, prepare your company to be patient and allow time for change to happen.

2. Customize your expertise to meet site-specific needs.

Business leaders should seek out educators who already understand that the education system has to change in fundamental ways and have moved into an action mode. These change agents need access to promising implementation strategies. You can help by encouraging educators to use the Baldrige Criteria as a powerful assessment framework—to accomplish what they are required to do and what they want to do to enhance student achievement. Business leaders can also expedite implementation by matching a particular leadership or management competency (e.g., operating under a decentralized system) to a critical education need (e.g., supporting school-based decision making).

3. Support educators and policymakers in aligning the pieces of the education system.

Use of a quality improvement framework makes it possible to align the education system, from the classroom to the capitol. Business leaders can help educators apply the Baldrige Criteria to merge the multiple requirements and reform agendas that now confront them. You can help the various pieces of the education system connect around the shared goal of raising student achievement—particularly in situations where stakeholders have not yet forged common ground around how best to move ahead.

4. Participate in creating and sustaining the local leadership infrastructure.

Based on the experiences of the TQE pilots, the North Carolina Partnership for Excellence requires its district partners to create local leadership councils charged with overseeing school district reform efforts. Business and higher education partners serve on the councils, which provide a vehicle for building common understanding, as well as trusting relationships, among the partners. Business leaders who have championed successful restructuring efforts within their own companies understand that massive change requires “infrastructure” with a long-term perspective. Therefore, support educators by participating on leadership councils where they exist and by encouraging their creation where they do not.

5. Support educators in using data and benchmarking in decision making.

Most education systems suffer simultaneously from data overload and information deprivation. Business partners can perform a valuable public service by assisting educators in using data proactively to meet the educational needs of each child and evaluate progress. Key challenges confronting educators include what data to collect, as well as how to analyze and use the results in making, communicating, and evaluating decisions. Help with the design of effective management information systems. Demonstrate how to benchmark best practices to improve education processes and results.

6. Be creative in defining, looking for, and encouraging positive results.

Traditional student performance measures, such as state test scores, are an important indicator of progress. But they are not the only measure. To determine how students are progressing, you can also visit classrooms to determine if students are learning the skills that will serve them well as adults and that align with state performance standards. Reinforce the importance of such skills in today’s workforce and society with parents, community leaders, and policymakers.

7. Use the Baldrige Criteria to evaluate and improve the partnership.

In addition to serving as the basis of a school or district’s improvement strategy, the Baldrige Criteria can help business and education partners to take the pulse of the partnership itself. Use the self-assessment periodically to determine whether the partnership is staying true to its goals. The results

should help business and education leaders continuously improve the nature of their partnership over time.

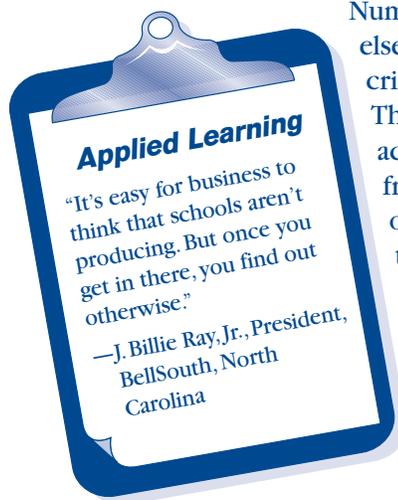
8. Align business-sponsored education improvement efforts.

Business leaders who are eager to support education reform may be inclined to encourage new programs without thinking to acknowledge initiatives already in place. And educators eager for business support may be equally hesitant to turn down such offers of assistance. Rather than establish new programs, however, individual business leaders can be far more productive if they align their resources with existing programs whose objectives are compatible. Without this alignment, business partners may be contributing unintentionally to the fragmentation of education reform. School districts will continue to be caught in the middle and will be forced to invest their most precious commodity—the time of their people—in complying with multiple, often competing, activities.

9. Engage your own employees as parents and school partners.

In a tight labor market, employers are eager to identify any competitive advantage that will attract and retain valuable employees. One such “fringe benefit” is the opportunity for employees to succeed as partners in their children’s education. Therefore, provide opportunities for employees to participate on local leadership councils, offer training to their education partners, engage at work and in the classroom with students, and, if possible, help their local schools and school districts conduct Baldrige-based self-assessments.

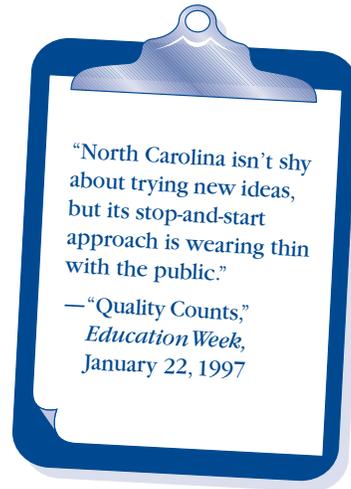
10. Maximize the human connection.



Numerous educators in North Carolina and elsewhere identify their business partners as a critical resource in the improvement process. The benefits flow both ways. Educators gain access to a supportive partner and critical friend, and business participants gain the opportunity to make a significant contribution to their own communities. In the process, business also gains valuable insights by learning firsthand about the diversity inherent in the emerging workforce. Reinforcing the personal relationships between business and education partners should yield benefits to both parties many times over.

Introduction: Crafting An Aligned Management System

“Random Acts of Reform” was how *Education Week* characterized North Carolina when reporting on the condition of public education in 1997. The 50-state report card praised the numerous North Carolina groups and interests that had made education improvement a top priority. At the same time, it chided the state for the “zigzag nature” of its reform efforts: “North Carolina isn’t shy about trying new ideas,” noted *Education Week*, “but its stop-and-start approach is wearing thin with the public.”



A number of North Carolina business, education, and political leaders had reached the same conclusion several years earlier. Consequently, in 1993, they embarked on a new course of action. These leaders designed a research and development project and recruited a small number of school districts as pilot sites. Their goal: to determine whether Total Quality Management (TQM), an accepted transformational strategy in business, could have a comparable positive impact on education. TQM in North Carolina was renamed the Total Quality in Education (TQE) Initiative. The North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE), a nonpartisan, non-profit state business organization housed in the governor’s office, served as the launch pad. Today, after five years of hard work, there are indications from both quantitative data (test score results) and qualitative data (anecdotal evidence, site visits) that significant progress has been made by the districts participating.

Since 1993, the quality reform initiative has grown significantly in terms of district participation. The initiative began in 1993 with seven pilot districts. Out of a total of 117 North Carolina school districts, 41 districts serving more than 65 percent of North Carolina’s students had joined the TQE Initiative by the end of 1998 and were actively pursuing quality efforts.

The architects of North Carolina’s “quality” (TQE) reform strategy are also the key beneficiaries—students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, business leaders, higher education partners, and state

policymakers who, working together, are connecting the individual building blocks of their education system. Their blueprint is an aligned management system based on the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award *Criteria for Performance Excellence*.²

What is Baldrige?

In 1987, Congress created the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award to recognize U.S. companies that achieve the highest standard of performance. Business applicants complete a detailed organizational assessment and receive expert feedback intended to enhance their improvement efforts. The purpose, in addition to recognizing and celebrating world-class companies, was to share their best practices so that other U.S. companies might benefit.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) administers the Baldrige Award, which has prompted creation of comparable programs in three-fourths of the states. In October 1998, Congress approved Baldrige's extension to education and health care organizations, an action that most state quality awards had already taken. NIST also issued Baldrige Criteria designed specifically for education and health care.

The lasting “award” may well be the Baldrige Criteria document itself—a rigorous organizational assessment tool. It provides the opportunity to secure constructive feedback from state and community partners. Baldrige includes a set of core values reflective of high-performing organizations and seven general categories, each containing more detailed items. The seven education categories are (1) leadership, (2) strategic planning, (3) student and stakeholder (customer and market) focus, (4) information and analysis, (5) faculty and staff (human resource) focus, (6) educational and support process management, and (7) performance results. Applicants are scored and provided feedback on their “approach,” how well they address the item requirements; “deployment,” the extent to which the applicant’s approach is applied to all of the item requirements; and “results,” their outcomes in achieving the purpose of each item.

Increasing numbers of educators are using the Baldrige Criteria and comparable state quality programs to help them meet state standards and community/customer expectations. Focusing on the interrelationships between approach, deployment, and results—as well as among the seven categories—offers educators at all organizational levels the chance to create and sustain high performance. **The Baldrige Criteria provides a common language across all types of organizations so that educators can**

engage business partners directly in their improvement efforts, as well as capture best practices from a variety of settings, both within and outside of education.

This publication tells the story of how educators, policymakers, and business leaders began to build a statewide partnership committed to performance excellence through continuous improvement. SERVE, a federally funded Regional Educational Laboratory, provided support to the leadership of the TQE Initiative in getting their story written because of what others might learn from this state's experiences. Thus, this publication tells the story of the TQE Initiative from the perspective of those involved, whether educators, policymakers, or business partners.

Sections of This Report

This report is divided into the following six sections:

- **Part One** describes the start-up of the quality-based education reform initiative in North Carolina—how and why it came to be
- **Part Two** describes the roles played by business and higher education partners—two resources important to the TQE Initiative
- **Part Three** addresses the “so-what” issues—the impact and results of the quality initiative on behaviors and performance
- **Part Four** explains how the quality initiative moved from R&D to “rollout” status
- **Part Five** focuses on the state role—the policy context for reform, as well as actions taken by the Superintendent, State Board, and Department of Public Instruction in leading and supporting improvement efforts
- **An Addendum to the Report (Part Six)** offers advice, based on experiences in North Carolina and elsewhere, on how business partners can help educators implement needed changes. The advice is intended to focus, expand, and sustain business involvement with improving the education system

A timeline of important milestones for the TQE Initiative is included as Table I.

Table I
Timelines and Milestones

March 1993	North Carolina's largest employers and Governor Hunt commit to a quality R&D pilot initiative to determine if TQM can help improve public school performance.
October 1993	The Total Quality in Education (TQE) Initiative consisting of the North Carolina Business Committee for Education and its six pilot sites (school districts with their business and higher education partners) is officially launched.
May 1994	Leaders from Pinellas County Schools conduct a North Carolina Quality Boot Camp, introducing the TQE pilots to the Baldrige Criteria as an integrated (aligned) management system.
July 1995	The North Carolina General Assembly enacts the ABC's education reform plan and provides \$400,000 to expand the TQE Initiative to include 20 additional sites.
March 1996	The TQE Initiative inaugurates the first annual Quality Schools Networking Conference—a day of celebration, sharing, and networking.
July 1997	The original four-year TQE Initiative officially ends, showing positive student and system performance trend data.
September 1997	The North Carolina Partnership for Excellence is spun off from NCBCCE to sustain and expand the R&D Quality Schools Initiative.
December 1998	Membership in the North Carolina Partnership for Excellence—representing over 65 percent of the students across the state—expands to 41 school districts.

Comments about Report Objectives from Dr. Peggy Siegel

Individual change efforts encompass a unique confluence of events, timing, complex behaviors, and idiosyncratic relationships. The true measure of any description of change is conveying its uniqueness, while making the contents accessible to others. Accordingly, the publication has a *two-fold objective*:

- Provide a historical record of the TQE Initiative, which underscores the state's long-term commitment to continuous improvement, for **North Carolina** policymakers, business leaders, educators, parents, students, and community leaders

- Capture the North Carolina TQE Initiative’s experiences so that **other states and communities** can use the information to reflect on their own education reform efforts

Over 40 individuals consented to be interviewed for this report, which involved traveling over 950 miles across the state in March 1998.³ Onsite interviews were enriched by written materials, presentations, and follow-up phone calls. In the course of conversation, business leaders and education leaders were frequently asked for their “customer expectations,” that is, what they wanted this case study to convey and how that information should be conveyed. People were both generous and insightful with their advice. Two comments stand out because they were somewhat unexpected.

Judy Phillips and Tom Williams, former educators who initially worked with the business/education coalitions in developing/implementing the TQE Initiative, suggested, “Don’t forget to include advice for our business partners.” Because they are such a vital part of the education transformation process in North Carolina—serving as change agents, resource providers, and hands-on strategic and operational partners at all levels—this report speaks directly to business leaders. It suggests how they can focus their energies on building capacity inside education to improve student performance.

Olin Broadway, a key business leader, suggested, “Make the subject accessible to parents and the general public.” His words were interpreted as a polite admonition not to write in *research-ese* or *education-ese*. In response, the format of this report has been prepared to be user-friendly to a general audience.

Consequently, the following pages also contain a variety of anecdotes, quotes, and lessons learned from individuals who lived through the events described. We would hope that they also reflect the hearts, minds, and—above all—the dedication of the folks in North Carolina who learned the lessons.

¹ David Grissmer and Ann Flanagan, *Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas*, National Education Goals Panel, November 1998.

² For additional information, contact:

- Baldrige National Quality program, NIST, U.S. Department of Commerce, Administration Building, Room A635, 100 Breaux Drive, Stop 1020, Gaithersburg, MD, 20899-1020; 301-975-2036.
- North Carolina Quality Leadership Foundation, 4904 Professional Court, Suite 100, Raleigh, NC 27609; 919-872-8198.

³ See Appendix A for a list of individuals who were interviewed for this study.

Part One:

Creating the Partnership—An R&D Initiative



“We want to help change schools. We believe in the public schools, and we want to make them work. But we don’t want any more of these feel-good-do-nothing programs. We want real results that you can measure, where you can show the achievements and the real change.” That’s how 25 CEOs of North Carolina’s largest companies framed the conversation, recalls Governor Jim Hunt.

The North Carolina Business Council of Management and Development had requested a meeting with the governor shortly after his election in November 1992. The reason: to address workforce and economic development priorities. Early in the discussion, the CEOs and the governor concluded that education was at the very core of every one of their concerns.

It’s one thing to identify the problem. It’s quite another to provide a potential solution, but that’s exactly what North Carolina’s business leaders did. Many of these Business Council members had been using TQM principles successfully to transform their own companies, and they were willing to bet that the same approach, with comparable results, could help improve education.

The quid pro-quo: if Governor Hunt’s administration would design a long-term education reform strategy that encouraged continuous improvement, then business leaders would commit the time and resources needed to succeed.

Designing a Reform Strategy

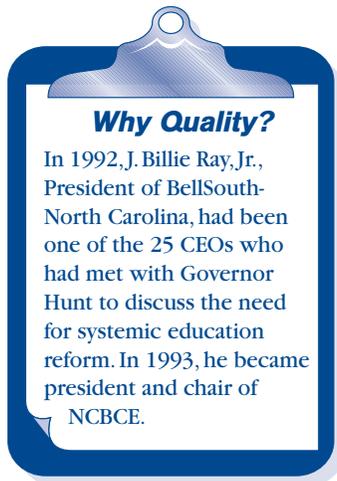
“We started with a challenge and came back with a plan,” notes Olin Broadway, one of North Carolina’s key business leaders. A former math teacher, IBM systems engineer, and college basketball star (in a state that reveres the sport), Broadway founded and now heads up BroadNet, Inc., a holding company in Charlotte for small technology and training firms. Given his eclectic background, he understands both the need to transform education and how difficult is that challenge. “The business community had some

good ideas,” explains Broadway, “but we didn’t know any school people. So we hooked up with Tom Houlihan, Governor Hunt’s senior education advisor at the time. Tom had been a quality practitioner [as a former local superintendent], and he put wheels on our efforts.”

Next, the infant reform initiative needed a home base, an organization that could forge the critical linkages between business and education leaders.

Infrastructure

The North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE) was the logical choice. Created by Governor Hunt and the Business Council in 1983 and housed in the governor’s offices, NCBCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing more than 100 businesses across the state. NCBCE’s catalytic role: to secure the participation and support of North Carolina’s business community in reforming K-12 education.



Why Quality?
In 1992, J. Billie Ray, Jr., President of BellSouth-North Carolina, had been one of the 25 CEOs who had met with Governor Hunt to discuss the need for systemic education reform. In 1993, he became president and chair of NCBCE.

“We had applied quality at Bell South as a way to involve the front-line employees in the success of the company,” explains Ray, when asked why the business community had suggested that state policymakers use TQM as the basis of their education reform strategy.

“All of the companies felt that it had worked well for us. We believed that quality had universal application, even though it would not be as easy to apply in education as it had been in business. Still, we felt that with all of the demands on the schools, they needed to be able to do something different.”

As early as 1991, NCBCE began exploring the idea of supporting school districts in their use of TQM principles. NCBCE companies, such as IBM and Nortel, were early advocates. The North Carolina Quality Leadership Foundation, the state’s Baldrige-based quality award program, encouraged such discussions across the public and private sectors and also served as a source of quality expertise. Two years later, NCBCE made implementing quality practices in education its top strategic priority.

The reform initiative now had a focus, business and government champions, funding commitments, and an organization to direct the effort. All that was needed was an action plan and several willing school districts to pilot the activities.

Governor Hunt asked his Senior Education Advisor, Tom Houlihan, to work with NCBCCE companies and education leaders to design an implementation strategy. Months of extensive planning ensued, which produced a reform strategy the participants called, Total Quality in Education, or simply, TQE.

Oversight

NCBCCE created a steering committee of business, government, and education representatives that met monthly to oversee development and implementation of the R&D project. Table II lists the committee members and their respective organizations.

Table II

Member	Organization
Olin Broadway, Chair	Egret Holdings, Inc. (now with BroadNet)
Ladd Baucom	BellSouth
Don Brannon	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Charles Coble	East Carolina University
G. Thomas Houlihan	Office of the Governor
Henry Johnson	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
R. Michael Jones	Carolina Power & Light Company
Tom Mallison	DuPont
Edgar Murphy	Nortel Networks
William Newkirk	North Carolina Association of Educators
Judy Phillips	Alamance County Schools
Lynn Robertson	BellSouth
William Smith	North Carolina Quality Leadership Foundation
Vivian Turner	RJ Reynolds Tobacco USA
Mary Jo Utley	Alamance County Schools
Thomas J. Williams	Johnston County Schools

The TQE Steering Committee adopted the following mission statement: “To coach and provide support to school systems employing quality principles so as to enable each system to realize its primary goal of meeting or exceeding its customer needs.”

The steering committee agreed on a strategy to test out their ideas and collect data on the outcomes. They made a four-year commitment to determine whether the principles of quality management could prompt significant improvements in education. North Carolina's leading companies agreed to foot the bill, raising \$3.1 million from the state's business community over the four years. Any future course of action, members agreed, would depend upon the results and increased buy-in of the participants.

Choosing the Pilot Sites

In selecting the pilots, the steering committee members looked for several pre-conditions that would help the R&D project succeed. They chose school districts that had (1) a committed, hands-on leader in the local superintendent, (2) school board stability, (3) willing local business and higher education partners, and (4) a culture receptive to change and innovation (e.g., most of the districts were already engaged in strategic planning and school-based decision making; some had even begun to explore together the use of quality concepts and principles). They also sought regional representation.

"We thought that if we invited six or seven school districts to participate, maybe two or three would agree to become pilots," recalls Broadway. Business leaders were pleasantly surprised when all seven agreed to join the TQE Initiative in 1993. Table III identifies the TQE pilot districts and their higher education and business partners and provides data on the size of their student populations. Four of the six were among those districts recognized by the state as "low wealth."⁴

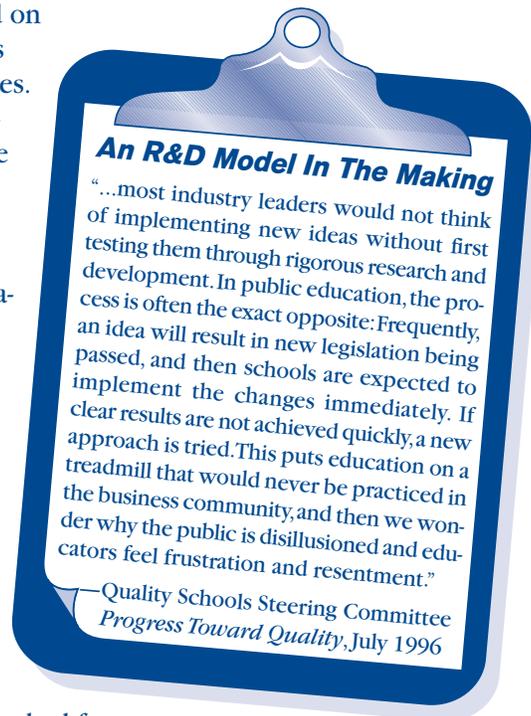
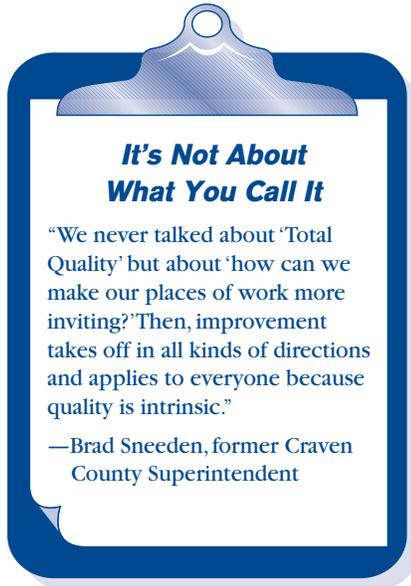


Table III

The Six TQE Pilot Sites		
School Districts & Student Population	Higher Education Partners	Business Partners
Bladen County (5,490)	UNC-Wilmington	DuPont
Craven County (14,475)	East Carolina	Weyerhaeuser
Granville County (7,028)	UNC-Chapel Hill	Lenox China and IBM
Johnston County (16,581)	East Carolina	Nortel Networks
Lincoln County (9,416)	UNC-Charlotte	Carolina Freight Carriers and Duke Power
New Hanover Co.(20,607)	UNC-Wilmington	Carolina Power & Light

Student population: Final ADM count, 1995-96

[A seventh pilot partnership with Alamance County Schools was put on hold in 1995 when the district merged with Burlington City Schools.]



It's Not About What You Call It

"We never talked about 'Total Quality' but about 'how can we make our places of work more inviting?' Then, improvement takes off in all kinds of directions and applies to everyone because quality is intrinsic."

—Brad Sneed, former Craven County Superintendent

Formalizing the Agreement

The TQE Steering Committee designed a written contract between NCBCCE, represented by TQE Chair Olin Broadway, and the pilot sites. The formal agreement was signed by each local superintendent, the dean of a school of education from a neighboring university, and a local business leader. The agreement delineated specific responsibilities for the partnership and for the individual partners. The agreement required each pilot to create a leadership council to oversee the reform effort, prepare a three-year plan outlining goals and expected outcomes, review progress annually against the plan, and provide

training to all participants. The pilots were also expected to focus on raising student performance.⁵

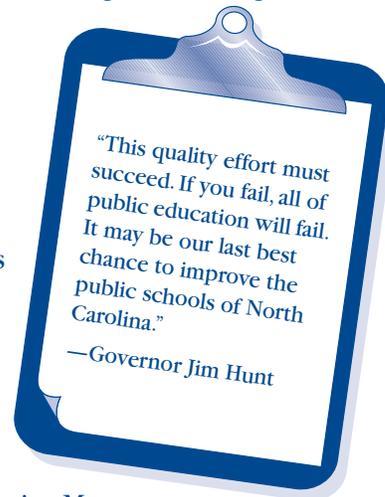
NCBCE and the pilots agreed to document their progress by producing three comprehensive annual reports. Entitled *Progress Toward Quality*, the reports were prepared as “a teaching document for the reader.” They emphasized the core values underlying a quality-based reform effort⁶ as well as lessons learned during implementation. The reports also documented each pilot site’s plan, partnership description, project activities, expenditures, anecdotal experiences, and progress, most notably improvements in student performance.

The TQE Steering Committee raised nearly \$4.4 million over the four pilot years. While the business community provided the majority of funds (\$3.1 million) other sources also contributed. Each school district pilot made an annual commitment of \$0.50 per student per year for a total of \$122,000. The university partners contributed \$22,000, plus in-kind contributions. Foundations and grants contributed another \$302,000.

During the second year of the project beginning in 1994, the North Carolina General Assembly provided \$450,000 at the governor’s request and with bipartisan support from the House and Senate education/appropriations and education committee chairs. All of the funds were dedicated to direct services to the pilots—intensive training, coaching, and networking. NCBCE contributed administrative support through its existing staff and through contract services.

The Kickoff: Hopes and Near-Misses

The TQE Initiative received its formal coming-out party in October 1993. The district leadership councils—40 business leaders, university presidents and deans, administrators, and school board members—had come to Raleigh for a three-day orientation session organized by NCBCE.



During the kickoff luncheon at the Executive Mansion, Governor Hunt rallied the troops by underscoring the importance of the pioneering reform effort and their role in it. “This quality effort must succeed,” urged Hunt. “If you fail, all of public education will fail. It may be our last best chance to improve the public schools of North Carolina.”

The governor's message was not hyperbole. During his first two terms in office, Jim Hunt had been part of the class of Southern "education-reform governors"—William Winter, Mississippi; Richard Riley, South Carolina; Bob Graham, Florida; Lamar Alexander, Tennessee; Mark White, Texas; and Bill Clinton, Arkansas—who had led the nation during the mid-80's in enacting comprehensive education reform programs. Because of his long-standing efforts to reinvigorate the teaching profession and champion rigorous state standards and assessments, Governor Hunt continued to enjoy a national reputation as an education leader. Thus, by his third term as Chief Executive of North Carolina in 1993, Hunt had earned the right to make such a bold statement about the future of public education.

Following the governor's challenge, the TQE orientation continued. The business leaders had invited a recognized quality expert from a leading company to address the group. The presenter provided a compelling conceptual explanation of quality...for a business audience. Despite the best of intentions, the business model and low-key presentation style did not translate well for an education audience, the majority of whom were receiving their first exposure to TQM.

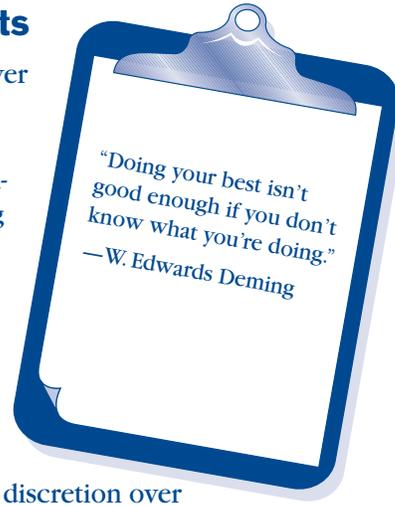
A second speaker fared even worse. In an effort to rescue the day, as well as the audience, the conference sponsors took decisive action. Thirty minutes into the presentation, they called a break. Recalls Tom Williams, who is now NCBCCE's executive director, "Instead of sitting through any more presenters, we decided to ask the pilot sites to share *their* expectations." It was a wise decision, according to one of the key participants. "The networking among the pilot sites was the day's greatest strength," observes Brad Sneed, Craven County Superintendent in 1993. After a momentary setback, the infant reform initiative had regained its balance.

Five years later, participants from the pilot school districts can still relate their first impressions. Most expressed enthusiasm for the TQE Initiative, particularly where the districts had already begun to explore quality concepts and practices. A trusting relationship with Tom Houlihan, established when he had been superintendent in Granville and Johnston Counties, was also a factor in their willingness to participate. A few participants admitted candidly that they weren't certain what they were getting into, but that the offer of additional professional development funds, always an incentive, was the deciding factor. Receiving the invitation to the governor's mansion fueled their enthusiasm. The pilots were unanimous on one count, however: all were honored to have been asked to become a pilot site.

Partnership Activities: Snapshots

The pilots needed opportunities to discover and test out new ideas. Consequently, the TQE Steering Committee targeted project resources on providing professional development activities related to implementing quality practices.

NCBCE sponsored several joint training activities so the six pilot sites could learn together about TQE and then collaborate on implementation. In addition, the pilots, within the parameters of the partnership agreement, were given broad discretion over project resources, which ranged from \$40,000 to \$200,000 per district each year. “NCBCE cut us loose. They asked us to report back our lessons learned but did not tell us what to do,” according to Sneed, now deputy superintendent of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.



The TQE funds enabled the pilot sites to use training resources more thoughtfully and intensively than the typical “drive-by staff development experience,” according to Granville Superintendent Janice Davis. The pilots used the funds to engage the expertise of external consultants who then trained and worked with district staff. They provided travel costs for staff to attend outside events. The pilots also paid the salaries of staff with primary responsibilities for implementing project activities. And they funded substitutes so that teachers could participate in the training sessions.

Local companies also contributed to pilot activities, most notably through their hands-on participation. The business partners provided ongoing advice and support by serving on the leadership councils, facilitating team decisions, and hosting their education partners at company-sponsored training sessions. University partners also served on the leadership councils and, in several cases, provided training for district faculty and hands-on support in developing employee survey instruments, as well as classroom curriculum and assessments.

In 1996, NCBCE sponsored additional activities designed to enhance communications with and among the pilot sites. It began to publish *Quality Schools Network News*, a quarterly newsletter that featured partner activities and reflections. The business community also provided funds to

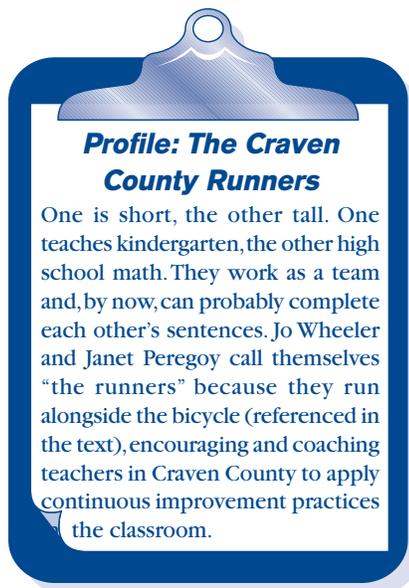
connect the sites electronically. And NCBCE inaugurated an annual networking event in March to showcase the work of the TQE Initiative. North Carolina's business, government, and education leaders highlighted TQE accomplishments, national speakers contributed their thoughts and experiences, and the pilots shared their improvement efforts, not only among each other, but with any business or education leader who wished to attend.

Obviously, it would be impossible to share every activity that transpired during the four-year period. Yet, it is possible to provide a series of snapshots that capture both the substance and the spirit of project experiences.

Classroom Tools

If TQE were ever to transform the public schools of North Carolina—Governor Hunt's challenge—then it had to impact the place where most teaching and learning occurs—the classroom. Accordingly, a number of the pilots began to work with Carolyn Wicks and Elaine McClanahan, co-authors of *Future Force: A Teacher's Handbook For Using TQM in the Classroom*.⁶ Teachers from the pilot sites liked the book because it offered them a practical way, with plenty of examples, to use quality tools—such as flowcharts, fishbone diagrams, and affinity charts—with their students.

Several districts coupled this resource with a four-day interactive training session with David Langford (a teacher pioneer in using Deming principles and quality tools with students), who provided building administrators and faculty with the theoretical and practical grounding of systems thinking.



Profile: The Craven County Runners

One is short, the other tall. One teaches kindergarten, the other high school math. They work as a team and, by now, can probably complete each other's sentences. Jo Wheeler and Janet Peregoy call themselves "the runners" because they run alongside the bicycle (referenced in the text), encouraging and coaching teachers in Craven County to apply continuous improvement practices the classroom.

Building a Collaborative Culture

Several of the districts hired two quality consultants based in Columbia, South Carolina, to help them create a collaborative culture. "Bob and Glenn" as they were called (Bob Gahagan and Glenn Jacobus) used a bicycle analogy to build awareness for what they termed "the balanced approach for improving an organization." The front wheel represented continuous improvement of leadership; the back wheel represented the continuous improvement of management, based on systems thinking; and the rider represented employee

involvement. Rider and bike were headed toward a single destination, what Bob and Glenn called “obsession with a customer focus.” The analogy brought home for the pilot districts the importance of teamwork and coordination, where bike and rider become one.

Leadership

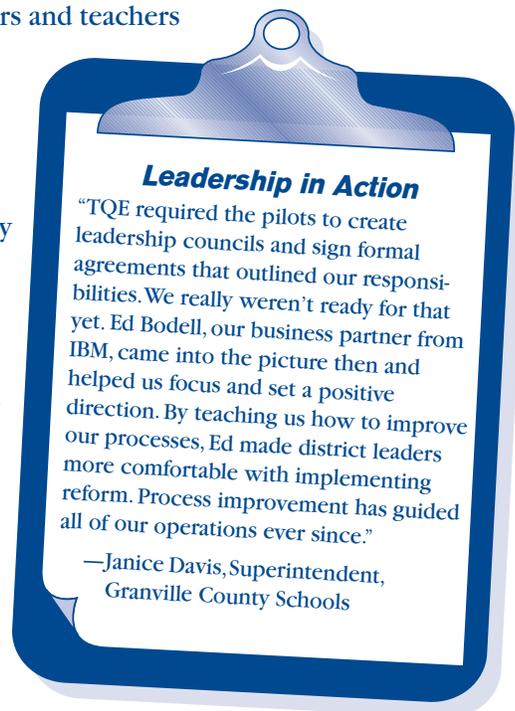
Realizing that many administrators and teachers had had limited opportunities to develop leadership skills needed in supporting a collaborative culture, a number of the pilots sought Facilitative Leadership training, a model used extensively in Florida. The training led to more efficient, collaborative, and customer-oriented meetings where all participants share responsibility for contributing to group decisions. The new skills had broad application, from the classroom to the leadership councils and school boards.

Several business partners, such as Nortel, had also been focusing on internal leadership issues, using Steven Covey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Principle-Centered Leadership* books and workshops to align individual employee and company core values. The companies shared the training with their education partners.

Local business partners also enriched the change process by facilitating team meetings and problem-solving discussions, training the pilot sites to map their work processes, and serving as coaches and collaborative problem-solvers.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

In order to focus on customer priorities—from parents and the community, as well as students and teachers—several of the pilots contracted with the Rochester, New York-based Gordon Black market research company to conduct surveys with parents, students, and school staff. The survey results



Leadership in Action

“TQE required the pilots to create leadership councils and sign formal agreements that outlined our responsibilities. We really weren’t ready for that yet. Ed Bodell, our business partner from IBM, came into the picture then and helped us focus and set a positive direction. By teaching us how to improve our processes, Ed made district leaders more comfortable with implementing reform. Process improvement has guided all of our operations ever since.”

—Janice Davis, Superintendent,
Granville County Schools

provided customer data that identified school strengths and improvement opportunities, issues that schools and their communities could address collaboratively.

North Carolina and Pinellas County, Florida, Join Forces



The TQE Initiative was beginning to gain momentum. The various training and networking activities were beginning to have a positive impact on the pilot sites, by reinforcing collaborative decision making at all levels. What the R&D effort lacked, however, was a transformational strategy embedded in the core values of education and a conceptual framework to align activities and track improvements over time. Fortunately, North Carolina soon discovered a resource that would help the pilots address these missing pieces. As early as 1991, the North Carolina Association of Educators, a group of teacher leaders throughout the state, had sponsored an

event and invited Doug Tuthill to speak. Tuthill was President of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association in the Tampa Bay area of Florida. He was also one of the leaders, with district administrators and business partners, of a districtwide reform strategy, based on the quality philosophy of W. Edwards Deming. With the goal of becoming a high-performing learning organization, Pinellas had created a district Quality Academy, with a community advisory board, to facilitate districtwide transformation. (See the SERVE publication, *Going to Scale with TQM*, p. 101)

Working with their local business community, Pinellas education leaders had customized the Baldrige Criteria (renamed the Superintendent’s Quality Challenge) as a self-assessment tool and the basis of their annual school and district improvement plans. The plans focused on meeting state academic and performance standards and community priorities. In a series of Quality Boot Camps for school and district teams, Quality Academy staff had successfully begun to merge Deming-based concepts with Baldrige-based applications.⁷

During his speech in North Carolina, Tuthill drew an important conceptual linkage for the TQE sites. He connected the core values of quality—to deliver valued products and services to customers, we need to fix the system, not the people—to the core values of education—to instill a yearn-

ing for learning, we need to provide opportunities for adults to work collaboratively with each other and their students.

The message resonated with North Carolina educators and their business partners. They invited Tuthill back in 1993, this time to an “Education: Everybody’s Business” Coalition Conference in Greensboro. The event was also the first formal meeting of the pilots, designed to share their implementation plans.

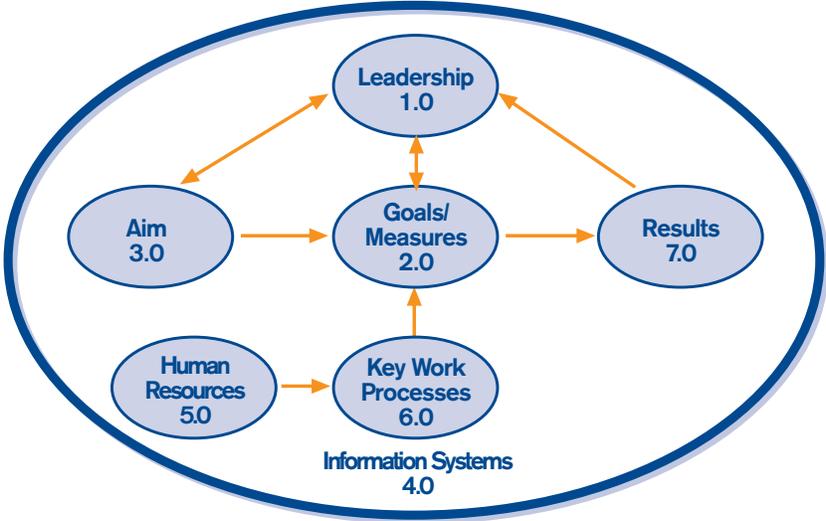
In May 1994, NCBCE asked several educators from the Pinellas Quality Academy, including Executive Director, Jim Shipley, and Quality Facilitator, Chris Collins, to conduct a three-day workshop for the pilots and their leadership councils. Pinellas County was a kindred spirit to the TQE sites. District administrators were not only “walking the talk”; they were inventing and applying the talk within their own school system.

The Integrated (Aligned) Management System

Pinellas leaders underscored the need for organizational transformation in improving performance. Shipley and Collins also shared a “linkages diagram,” the integrated management system based on the Baldrige Criteria.

Exhibit I displays North Carolina’s Aligned Management System, adapted from the Pinellas linkages model. The diagram illustrates the key relationships among and between the seven Baldrige categories.⁸

Exhibit 1
Aligned Management System



The Seven Baldrige Categories

Concentrating on the horizontal linkage among three categories—the AIM OF THE SYSTEM (3.0, Valid Customer Requirements) → GOALS and MEASURES (2.0, Strategic Plans) → RESULTS (7.0)—helps state policymakers and local school boards stay focused on strategic planning. The model helps legislative/policy bodies distinguish between their primary LEADERSHIP (1.0) responsibilities—to listen to valid customer requirements in making and then continuously assessing the impact of *strategic/policy decisions*.

Concentrating on the vertical linkage among three categories—LEADERSHIP (1.0) → GOALS and MEASURES (2.0) → KEY WORK PROCESSES (6.0)—helps administrators, teachers, and other employees stay focused on *operational issues and their alignment to the goals*. Once the district's aim and goals have been set and are found to be in alignment with the state's aim and goals, then those closest to the work can assume responsibility for selecting and implementing the strategies or *key work processes*.

Improving KEY WORK PROCESSES (6.0)—by eliminating mistakes and accelerating service delivery—is the key to improving RESULTS (7.0). Working on the work of the organization—its processes—is, in fact, the only way to improve results.

Organizations don't make improvements. People do. Therefore, the linkage between PROCESSES (6.0) and HUMAN RESOURCES (5.0)—how workers, including students, spend their time, what they do, and how they are supported in doing it—is a critical factor in organizational success.

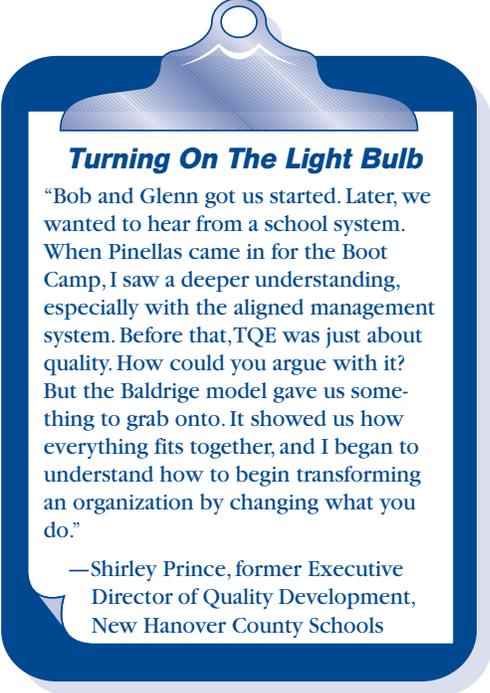
INFORMATION SYSTEMS (4.0) drive decisions at all levels in the system. Data are shared widely and used continuously by everyone to achieve the organization's goals.

The linkages model—modified and renamed the Aligned Management System in North Carolina—made concrete the relationships among the seven Baldrige categories. It also made the Baldrige Criteria, which can overwhelm all but the most hearty of non-engineering types, user-friendly for the North Carolina pilots. The pilot sites realized the potential of using Baldrige as a self-assessment tool and decision-making framework, which could guide their continuous improvement initiatives, from the classroom to the boardroom.

Following the workshop in North Carolina, a number of the pilots decided to work with Pinellas. Lincoln County sent representatives to Florida, where they participated in a Quality Boot Camp and visited schools. They returned with a vision of transformed classrooms. “Students were taking responsibility for their learning,” explains Sherry Hoyle, a Lincoln County teacher. “What we observed in the classroom was a partnership between student and teacher.”

As a result of the Pinellas visit, Lincoln County educators decided to focus their quality efforts in the classroom—sharing the learning process with their students who would then assume increasing responsibility for their academic performance and behavior.

Exhibit 2 provides an example of their efforts. Lincoln primary school teachers flowcharted the lesson planning process for their students, using achievement of North Carolina’s Standard Course of Study as their objective. The March 1996 Quality Schools Network News reported, “After our students and teachers discuss the [state] objectives, students take responsibility for determining the relevance of ‘why’ they need to study and learn each topic. Later, they brainstorm strategies for learning and meeting their objectives. Finally, based on student ideas, teachers develop their lesson plans.”

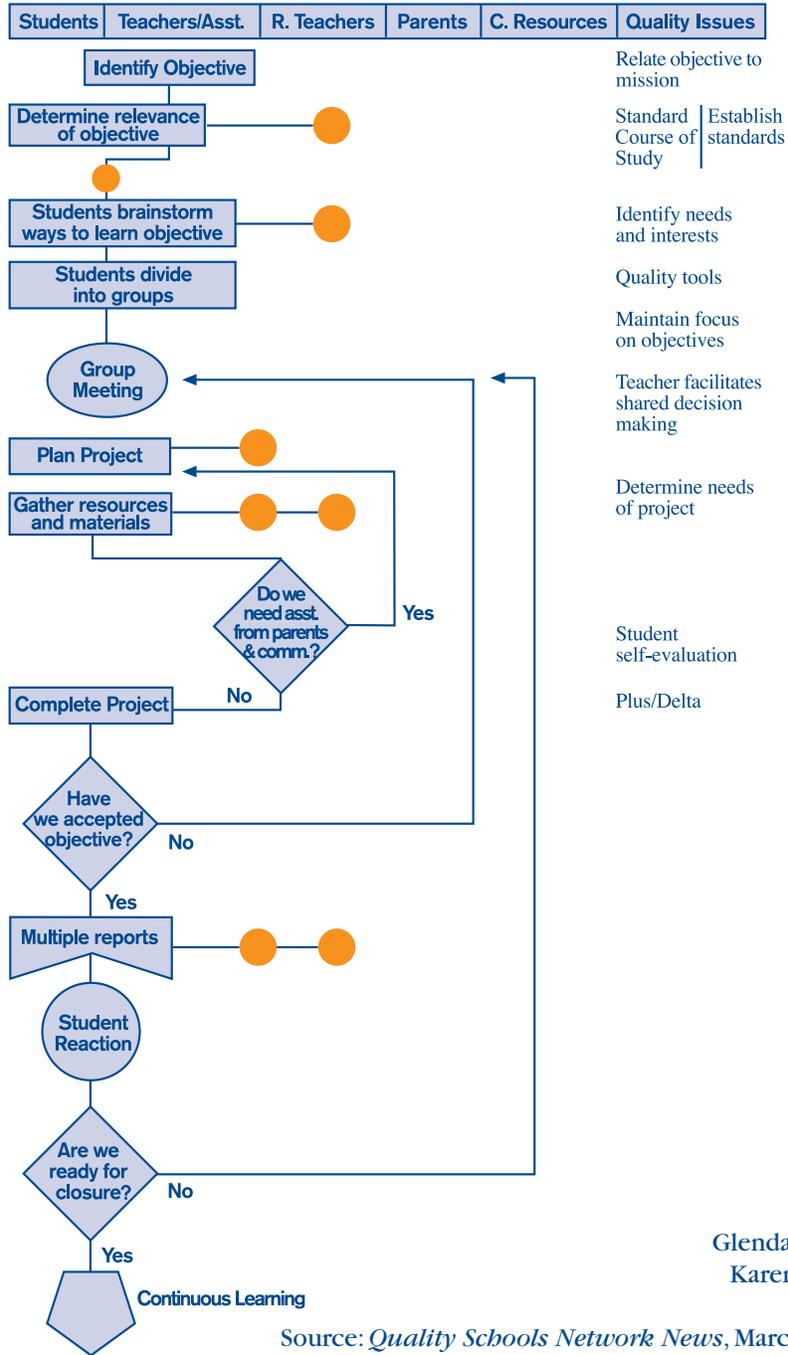


Turning On The Light Bulb

“Bob and Glenn got us started. Later, we wanted to hear from a school system. When Pinellas came in for the Boot Camp, I saw a deeper understanding, especially with the aligned management system. Before that, TQE was just about quality. How could you argue with it? But the Baldrige model gave us something to grab onto. It showed us how everything fits together, and I began to understand how to begin transforming an organization by changing what you do.”

—Shirley Prince, former Executive Director of Quality Development, New Hanover County Schools

Exhibit 2 Lincoln County Lesson Planning Process



Glenda Walker
Karen Bolick

Source: *Quality Schools Network News*, March 1996.

Thinking Ahead: Institutionalizing Capacity for Continuous Improvement

Three of the pilots—Craven, New Hanover, and Johnston Counties—began to use the Aligned Management System to focus their improvement efforts.

“Originally, our change efforts were focused on quality tools,” remembers Brad Sneed, former Craven County superintendent. “But we needed to focus on the ‘why’ and ‘so what’ issues—why are we doing this, and what are we doing it for? We redesigned our strategic plan and embedded the state standards and accountability requirements. Now people could understand where they were and where they needed to go.”

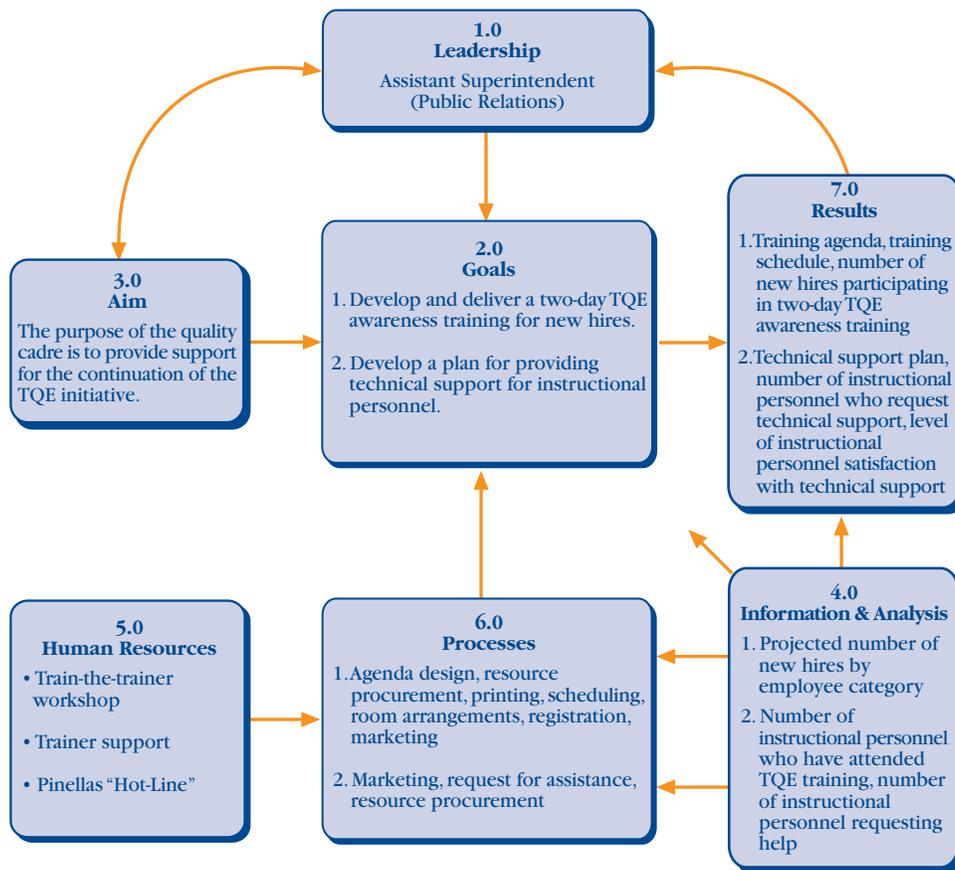
After the Pinellas briefing, Sneed continues, “We literally ran up to Jim (Shipley) and Chris (Collins). We were the first district they worked with outside of Pinellas. They were hesitant at first,” recalls Sneed, “but we knew that the TQE funds would dry up after the pilot years, and we needed to plan for the future.” As a result, Craven County asked Pinellas to help the district build a train-the-trainer capacity.⁹

Johnston County was also interested in creating its own “Quality Cadre” of trainers to sustain the long-term impact of its TQE-initiated reforms, with assistance from Pinellas, NCBCE, and TQE steering committee member, Judy Phillips. The district used the Aligned Management System diagram to determine how it would identify and develop a quality cadre of in-house trainers. Johnston County shared its diagram with the other pilots in the September 1997 edition of the *Quality Schools Network News*. The diagram is reproduced on the following page as Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3
Johnston County Quality Cadre Linkage Diagram

Mission

The Quality Cadre will collaborate to provide professional development and support in quality principles for the internal and external customers of the school system to ensure the continuation of the Total Quality in Education initiative



Source: *Quality Schools Network News*, September 1997.

Designing a Training Strategy

New Hanover County used the Pinellas experience to design its own training strategy. For the first two years, according to former executive director of quality development Shirley Prince, they focused on leadership training. Then, the district engaged 750 community participants in developing a strategic plan. After two years, it was time to roll out quality training to the rest of the district. “Your leaders have to become so knowledgeable about quality that they can teach it,” advised their business partners. New Hanover asked Pinellas to conduct a two-day, train-the-trainer session for their central office and all of their principals. Next, a three-member training cadre—the principal, a teacher, and a district administrator—trained each school: 3000 employees over ten days. Says Prince, “We were making a statement: everyone, including the non-instructional staff, gets training together and on the same things, so we can all discuss it.”

Because the principals and central office initially had trouble understanding the Baldrige Criteria, Prince developed two transitional tools: (1) an assessment questionnaire, which integrated Baldrige with school-based decision making, and (2) a school improvement plan model. New Hanover has also developed teacher performance evaluations compatible with the aligned management system.

“It’s important,” Prince advises, “that everything align to Baldrige.”

Because New Hanover and Craven County Schools had put strong strategic planning efforts in place, they were able to capitalize on their Baldrige-based training to conduct a full-blown organizational assessment, using the North Carolina Quality Leadership Foundation Criteria. The application process gave the districts an additional resource—expert external feedback to use in making continuous improvements. Now, the districts had both the knowledge and the means to drive performance excellence.

Part Two:

With A Little Help from Our Friends—Business and Higher Education Partners



“I believe that, in the future, corporations will find the schools to be excellent benchmarking partners due to the schools’ outstanding application of the quality principles.”

—Olin Broadway, Chair,
North Carolina Partnership for Excellence

Business Partner Roles: Snapshots

North Carolina business partners had generously contributed more than \$3.1 million to the four-year TQE Initiative. However, according to the pilot sites, it was their hands-on support that really made the difference.

Business partners served in various capacities. Certainly, they donated concrete resources—ranging from printing, meeting space, scholarships, computers, software, access to the Internet, and cash. Even more significantly, the

business partners provided the soft stuff—coaching, facilitating meetings, training, and moral support.

Time for Root Cause Analysis

“The difference between business and education presents a logistical nightmare for training,” observes Skip Steele, Duke Energy manager and Lincoln County business partner.

Steele continues, “For business managers, much of our time is spent in meetings and on strategy. When you train someone in business, you spend the time. In education, that type of time for training and to discuss strategy is not built-in. Educators can’t easily leave their students during the day, and people’s time during the evening is their own. This difference creates a dramatically slower pace for implementing improvements in education than we would ever accept in the private sector.”

Often, their impact was felt in less tangible ways. For example, once the business partners saw for themselves the challenges confronting public education, they stopped criticizing the schools and focused instead on helping their education partners identify and then overcome the barriers to raising student and system performance.

NCBCE Executive Director Tom Williams recalls a pivotal meeting between the steering committee and the six pilots 18 months into the TQE Initiative. “The business leaders had begun to ask, ‘Does all this make sense?’ Progress,” explains Williams, “was taking longer than any of them had anticipated.”

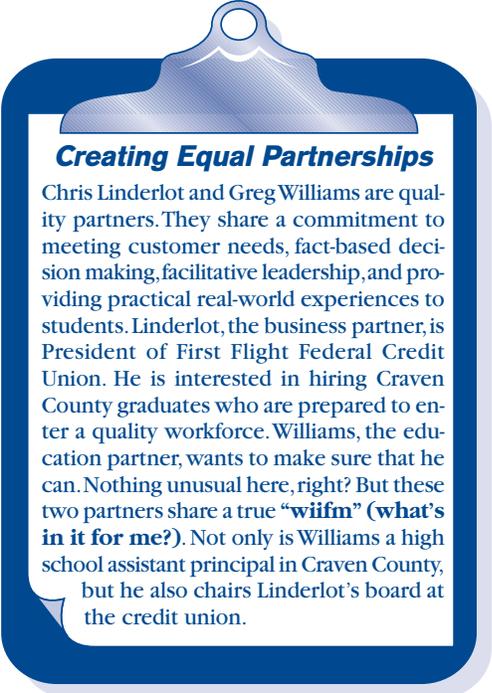
“‘Not only is TQE making a difference,’ the school districts responded, ‘but it may be our only chance to reform education. If business checks out now,’ the educators told their private-sector colleagues, ‘then we will surely wind up in our old place.’”

“Later at the NCBCE meeting,” continues Williams, “Ed Bodell [at that time, a Granville County business partner from IBM] presented the aligned management system as the basis for a sustainable reform strategy. The presentation gave rise to the idea among the business leaders and pilot sites for North Carolina to create our own independent support organization.”

The business partners also played a key role in sustaining the individual pilot initiatives. As incumbent superintendents transitioned to new positions, the business partners reinforced the selection of candidates whose leadership styles were compatible with TQE. Their role proved critical to the change process, since four of the original pilot superintendencies turned over during the first 11 months of the partnership.

Partnerships will last over time only if they build in a “**wiifm**” (“What’s in it for me?”) for the individuals that also extends to the organizations they represent. [Note: To understand “wiifm,” try substituting quality rhetoric, such as “reciprocal customer focus”; political rhetoric, such as “mutual self-interest”; or philosophical rhetoric, such as “why am I here?”]

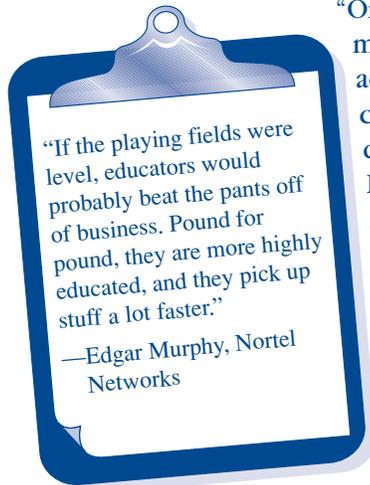
Of course, the best situation is when the partners individually and collectively share a vested interest in and a commitment to achieving common goals.



Creating Equal Partnerships

Chris Linderlot and Greg Williams are quality partners. They share a commitment to meeting customer needs, fact-based decision making, facilitative leadership, and providing practical real-world experiences to students. Linderlot, the business partner, is President of First Flight Federal Credit Union. He is interested in hiring Craven County graduates who are prepared to enter a quality workforce. Williams, the education partner, wants to make sure that he can. Nothing unusual here, right? But these two partners share a true “**wiifm**” (**what’s in it for me?**). Not only is Williams a high school assistant principal in Craven County, but he also chairs Linderlot’s board at the credit union.

Profile of a Business Partner: Edgar Murphy



“One of the first things we worked on was meeting management,” recalls Edgar Murphy, who readily admits that he had a vested interest in the outcome. “I have to drive an hour to get to the school district and an hour to get back home,” explains Nortel’s community relations manager and member of Johnston County’s local leadership council. Once he got there, the meetings usually lasted three hours. “Any time someone said something reasonably intelligent,” observed Murphy, “everyone else felt compelled to paraphrase it.”

District leaders had to demonstrate their commitment to TQE in two ways—first, by creating and implementing effective decision-making structures, thus the need for good meeting management, and second, by attending all of the leadership council meetings. If he were willing to tolerate a two-hour commute, then the educators had to do more than just show up for meetings, insists Murphy. They had to be there mentally as well as physically.

Leadership Councils: Critical Success Factors

Edgar Murphy, Nortel Networks

- Clearly define the role of the TQE Leadership Council:
 - What it is and what it is not.
- Develop a precise mission statement.
- Set clear, measurable goals in these three key categories:
 - Communication, training, and assessment.
- Establish team operating guidelines and “meeting management” expectations.
 - This is critical for people from different organizations.
 - Members must have time to participate.
 - Don’t meet just to meet.
- Establish a meeting management format.
- Establish an annual plan of work and review it with the school board.
- Conduct an annual assessment to measure progress across the system.
- Make training costs the core of your budget.

- Expect a “storming” phase (when activities get contentious), but agree to move forward, based on a common goal, accelerated improvement.

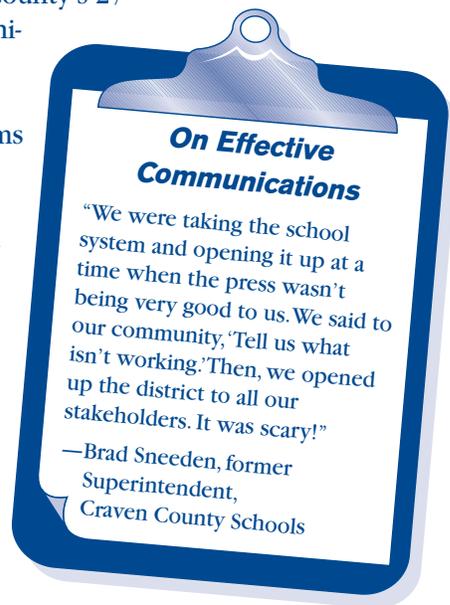
Local education leaders validated Murphy’s reflections. “I had to make a time commitment to work with the leadership council,” admits Johnston County Superintendent Jim Causby. “It wasn’t high on my priority list at first,” he readily acknowledges, “but it became high because of its importance to the school system.”

Murphy does not sugar-coat his words. However, he is just as candid about business’ foibles as he is about those in education. “Most companies got into quality,” notes Murphy, “not out of enlightenment, like most educators, but because they had to, to survive.” Consequently, he feels that business partners should share industry’s experiences—the good and bad—so their education partners don’t make the same mistakes.

Murphy’s candor, along with a sharp sense of observation and humor, are purposeful. They are intended to disarm defensiveness and establish at the outset an equal relationship—one built on mutual respect, trust, and open dialogue.

Johnston County and Nortel first created their partnership in 1992, so when the TQE Initiative began, the partners already knew with whom they were signing on the dotted line. Murphy lists a number of partnership activities: networking Johnston County’s 27 schools and the central office electronically, as well as providing Internet access, sponsoring a technology exchange, creating software that performs national scholarship searches for college-bound Johnston County students, having the district serve as a pilot site for Nortel’s teacher training, enhancing computer skills, and offering the district train-the-trainer certification.

Nortel also supported Johnston County in using its TQE leadership council strategically. Effective meeting practices produced a plan, with measurable goals, timelines,



and budgets apportioned to meet the priorities. “What’s the worst thing that could happen?” Murphy asked the educators on the leadership council when they had identified “communications” as an important strategic goal. “For people not to understand what we are doing and attack it because it is new and different,” came the response. Murphy recalls thinking, “This was the same situation in business: no matter how great your product and service, you have to advertise over and over. Everyone that you don’t tell is a potential opponent.” As a result, the leadership council built a communications component into its strategic plan, with multiple strategies and follow-up plans and activities.

“Business leaders don’t have to tell educators what to do,” contends Murphy, when asked what he has learned as a partner. “If you lead them down the right road, and a good idea comes up, the solution will emerge from the group.”

Lessons Learned from a Key Business Partner

Edgar Murphy, Nortel Networks

- Teachers make faster progress with quality tools than most business managers.
- Progress was achieved in an environment with more fiscal controls.
- The concept of “customer focus” became a key factor in all decisions after TQE was implemented.
- Training to establish new ways of thinking and behaving was critical.
- Senior leadership must change and embrace the new management style.
- It is important that all employees understand quality principles.
—Most support areas understand customer focus.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate.
—No matter how good your message, you must repeat it.
- Don’t underestimate the power of involved and committed people.
- Involve your entire community by sharing your future plans and concerns.
—Quality principles factored into Johnston County’s successful bond referendum.

Murphy has since been appointed to the State School Improvement Panel’s Executive Committee, so he has the opportunity to apply his experience,

both in business and education, in supporting state leaders to align their reform initiatives.

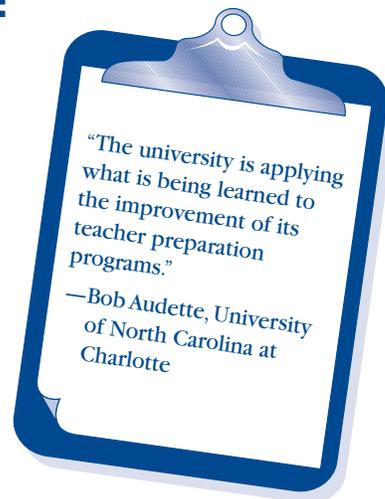
This is what success will look like in Murphy's vision:

- All state agencies involved in education will be working on the same strategic objectives: "This is what keeps successful businesses in check, rather than having everyone doing different things."
- All schools of education will prepare future teachers to use quality principles: "The day will come when a new teacher not trained in quality comes in, and the students will object because they want to learn in a certain way."
- Business partnerships will be the norm: "The obvious question will become, 'Why *don't* you have one?'"
- All students will be familiar with quality principles and will use them by the fourth grade: "And when adults, who were students of quality themselves, visit their classrooms, the students will be able to say, 'Who are these adults? They actually know what we were talking about!'"

"First and foremost, I'm a parent," Murphy explains, when asked why he is spending so much time on education. "If I help the schools improve," he continues, only half in jest, "it increases the odds that the young men coming to date my daughter will be educated—once she turns 28, of course!"

Higher Education Partner Roles: Snapshots

Consensus was widespread: relations between the pilots and their business partners were viewed positively by both groups. The business community's strong commitment to TQE reassured the educators. Conversely, the pilots' willingness to assume the responsibilities outlined in the formal agreement assured business leaders, like Olin Broadway, that the educators were seriously committed to a long-term reform agenda.



Less harmonious was the relationship between the pilots and their university partners. The first sign of concern arose over money or, more precisely, over who got it. The TQE steering committee gave the funds directly to the districts. Since the districts were responsible for implementing improvements, the committee reasoned, then they should also be able to select professional development options that would most likely meet their needs.

Several of the university partners held a different view; however, anticipating that TQE funds would go directly to them to provide the professional development. When that was not to be, some post-secondary institutions opted to play a less involved role.

There was also a credibility issue. Several pilots were openly critical of the colleges of education for not adequately preparing new teachers and for not adopting quality principles as part of their own internal operations.

“In retrospect, we might have courted the universities differently,” admits Broadway, “maybe spend more time with them up front.” Broadway emphasized the need to develop more collaboration by discussing customer/supplier relationships between K-12 and higher education. He envisioned the business community playing a catalytic role to help forge such relations in the future.

Despite general disappointment during the R&D phase over the K-12/higher education relationship, there were notable exceptions. Several individuals and their post-secondary institutions stand out for their contributions to the TQE Initiative, a fact that the pilots were quick to acknowledge. Some examples include

- East Carolina University and Johnston County—The university designed a pre- and post-survey instrument for all district employees, to measure their awareness of quality principles. ECU compiled the data and presented the results to the leadership council and school board. The pilots were particularly complimentary of former ECU College of Education Dean, Charles Coble, viewed as a real advocate of TQE and champion of forming equal partnerships between K-12 and higher education. They also complimented the college for using quality practices internally. Both education partners—ECU and Johnston County—benefited from the relationship with a third TQE partner, Nortel, whose business partners reinforced their internal quality efforts.
- Johnston County Community College and Johnston County Schools—In a true customer/supplier partnership, the partners worked to standardize

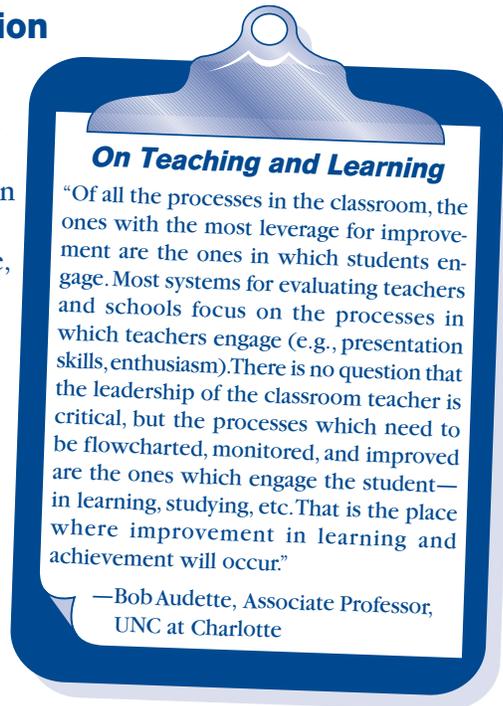
the math curriculum so that students moving from high school to the community college would be well-served instructionally. The community college also granted Johnston high school students college credit and access to its courses.

Profile of a Higher Education Partner: Bob Audette

“The state’s role is to clarify what people need to learn,” explains Bob Audette, Associate Professor in the College of Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, “but elementary school is where you learn how to learn.” If the TQE Initiative were wildly successful in North Carolina, what would he expect to see? “That all kids graduate from elementary school as good learners, literate, and able to manage their own education,” Audette answers with conviction.

Audette has been one of the more active TQE higher education partners. As coordinator of UNC-Charlotte’s elementary program, he has enjoyed a long-term relationship with Lincoln County Schools. Audette’s expertise and commitment is focused on the classroom. He admits, “I spent the first year of the TQE partnership trying to understand quality and how to get it into the classroom.” The light bulb was turned on for him after attending a Quality Boot Camp in Pinellas with a Lincoln County principal and teacher and seeing some of the classrooms and subsequent videos of elementary school kids from their pioneer schools.

“Seeing stuff in the classroom made me pay attention—quality is ingrained in the teaching process; it is just something that you do as a teacher. Plus, seeing the kids use data to manage their own learning is what convinced me,” explains Audette.



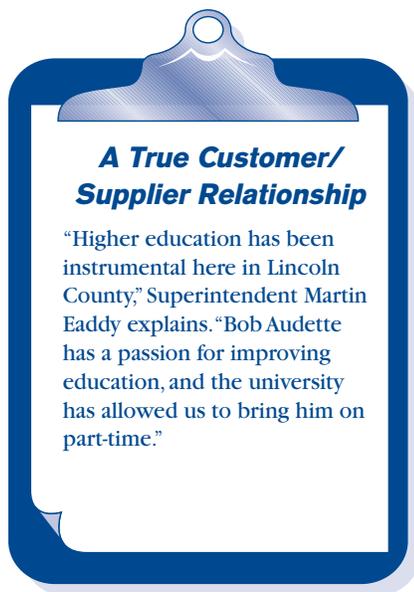
On Teaching and Learning

“Of all the processes in the classroom, the ones with the most leverage for improvement are the ones in which students engage. Most systems for evaluating teachers and schools focus on the processes in which teachers engage (e.g., presentation skills, enthusiasm). There is no question that the leadership of the classroom teacher is critical, but the processes which need to be flowcharted, monitored, and improved are the ones which engage the student—in learning, studying, etc. That is the place where improvement in learning and achievement will occur.”

—Bob Audette, Associate Professor,
UNC at Charlotte

The experience prompted the professor to change his courses at the university and also to obtain ongoing customer feedback from his students. His courses now have a mission statement, include a discussion of how the class will learn, and use assessments designed to measure what learning takes place. When it comes to teaching his own students about self-assessments, Audette goes off-campus to engage the expertise of his professional colleagues—Lincoln County second- and third-graders.

The partnership has extended in other positive ways as well. Lincoln County administrators recruit many of their teachers from UNC-Charlotte. Audette provides a special orientation for them and a follow-up teaching seminar for non-tenured teachers. They are also setting up a Web page. In business terms, the partners are creating a permanent customer/supplier relationship, with Lincoln County demonstrating a preference for hiring elementary teachers who graduate from the UNC-Charlotte program.



...Eaddy continues, “When UNC-Charlotte asked district leaders to testify before the university board of trustees and the legislative governmental oversight subcommittee, we were happy to do it. We highlighted the university’s community service during their appropriations hearing.

“Some of the other K-12/higher education partnerships never worked well,” according to Eaddy, “because it was all about who should control the money. For Bob and his dean, this was never a problem because all of us focused on the students. It’s the individuals within the institutions who want to make it work,” concludes Lincoln County’s superintendent.

Jane Carrigan, a faculty colleague of Audette’s in the leadership program at UNC-Charlotte, shares his interest in quality. As a former local school superintendent, Carrigan involved her small district, business leaders, and community in a quality-driven effort to gather customer data. Carrigan now draws on these earlier experiences in implementing quality practices at the K-12 level to work with her doctoral students. They are beginning to use the Baldrige Criteria in their internship programs.

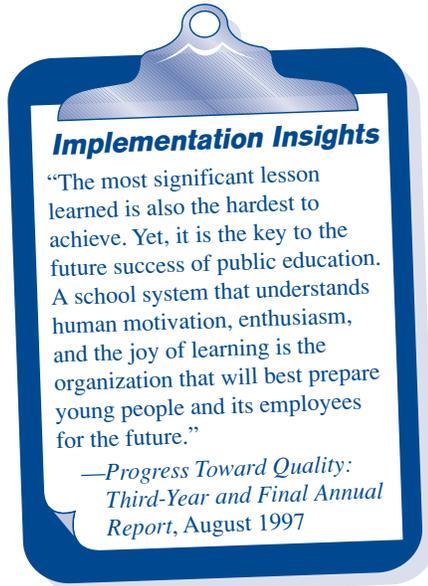
“Higher education has gained more from the partnership than we have given,” claims Audette. Given their relationship, his Lincoln County partners would probably take exception with that judgment.

A New Opportunity

Charles Coble is a champion of equal partnerships. Coble, former ECU College of Education dean and TQE steering committee member, is also optimistic. His new position as vice president of the North Carolina University system offers a real alignment opportunity. Legislation in North Carolina created a network of university/school teacher education partnership sites across the state. Coble is eager to network colleges of education and public schools statewide on a key responsibility they both share—preparing and sustaining the education workforce. The goal: to fundamentally alter the structure of teacher education in North Carolina.

Part Three:

Impact and Results



The lead article, written by Tom Williams in the September 1997 issue of the *Quality Schools Network News*, contained good news. Williams cited the following comparisons between the TQE pilots and the rest of the state:

- Four of six pilots are low-wealth school systems.
- Pilots had student achievement gain rates higher than the state average in 1997 .
- Pilots had a lower percentage of low-performing schools (three percent) than the state average (7.5 percent).

In sharing results, the TQE Initiative published both quantitative data—changes in student performance indicators—and qualitative data—anecdotes and participant reflections on lessons learned. The reports compared student outcome data compiled by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction from 1993 (the base year), 1995, and 1996.¹⁰ The data reveal the following trends:

- **SAT scores**—All six pilot districts experienced higher than the state average gains in their student SAT scores between 1993 and 1996, ranging from 95 points in Craven County to 167 points in Bladen County.
- **State basic skills tests**—Reading and math scores for grades 3 through 8 trended upward over the three years in all six pilots. Writing scores in grades 4, 6, and 8 also increased in all of the pilots over four years.
- **Attendance**—Average daily attendance rates remained relatively consistent from 1993 through 1996. Attendance increased marginally (less than one percent) in four of the pilots and decreased marginally in two.
- **Dropout rates**—Dropout rates were the only indicator that trended negatively, increasing slightly in four of the six districts from 1993

through 1996. Except for Johnston County, (where the dropout rate rose from 2.67 percent to 4.06 percent) the difference up or down was less than one percent. Concerned about this issue, the pilots were using quality tools and practices to address it, according to Tom Houlihan.

The NCBCCE progress reports attributed other positive indicators to TQE as well. On November 8, 1995, five of the initial seven pilots had placed local school bond referenda on the ballot. All were approved, signaling public confidence in the schools.

Midway into the four-year R&D effort, North Carolina leaders were sufficiently convinced of its merits to take further action. In July 1995 at Governor Hunt's request, the General Assembly allocated \$400,000 to NCBCCE to expand the improvement effort to additional school districts. Forty-two of 117 local superintendents responded to written correspondence indicating their interest in learning more. A TQE steering subcommittee recommended expanding the partnership to the 20 districts submitting formal applications in December. NCBCCE sponsored training for the expansion sites in April 1996 and contracted with Judy Phillips to work with them on an ongoing basis. The Legislature then appropriated an additional \$450,000 the following year in 1996 and another \$450,000 in 1997.

The Stories Behind the Numbers: Snapshots

Not all results are quantitative, of course. Sometimes the most important results don't have numbers attached to them at all.

A View from the High School Hallways

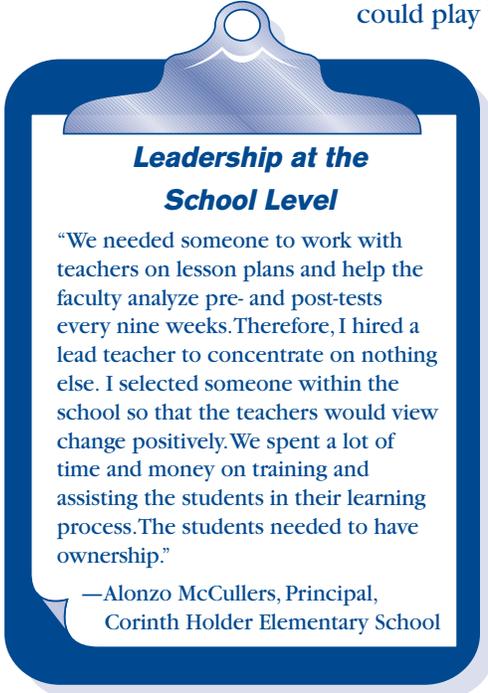
"The difference is so incredible," commented Ed Bodell, shaking his head. Bodell had just passed by two classrooms at New Bern High School in Craven County. The first classroom was hardly unusual. The teacher was at the front of the class lecturing; the students, seated in rows facing front, were in various states of listening, most awake, some listless, and one with his head on the desk, possibly asleep. In the second class, the students were all over the room, working on team assignments, occasionally consulting the teacher for advice. At one point, the teacher came out of the classroom to talk. He pointed proudly to the charts and graphs that the teams had produced, which outlined their work processes and the results. Then, the teacher began picking up paper from the floor, joking that he was looking for things to do, now that his students had assumed much of the responsibility for their own learning.

Middle School Students Get Tough—On Themselves

“We used quality tools to make our school better,” explained Kelly Jakes and Christi Norwood, two middle school students from Granville County. “At our leadership retreat, we identified three priorities—discipline, a dress code, and how to move through the cafeteria lines more quickly.” The students then worked on alternative solutions with the adults in the school and presented their recommendations to the central office staff and their principal.

“The students couldn’t believe that we were listened to,” recalls Kelly. And they took their charge seriously, especially when it came to discipline problems. Tired of having a few students disrupt an entire class, the students at the retreat brainstormed alternatives, surveyed teachers and other students for their input, and ultimately changed the discipline policy of the school. “Now, we articulate the consequences up front,” says Christi. “Two fights, and you’re out, no matter what!” Adds Kelly, “Kids used to have fun during in-house suspensions. Now, it’s no longer fun.”

Continuous improvement efforts are everywhere, even outside the classroom. “After a softball game that we lost,” explains Christi, “our coach drew a plus/delta (a diagram that facilitates brainstorming) in the dirt so the team could analyze what we were doing right and how we could play better.”



Leadership at the School Level

“We needed someone to work with teachers on lesson plans and help the faculty analyze pre- and post-tests every nine weeks. Therefore, I hired a lead teacher to concentrate on nothing else. I selected someone within the school so that the teachers would view change positively. We spent a lot of time and money on training and assisting the students in their learning process. The students needed to have ownership.”

—Alonzo McCullers, Principal,
Corinth Holder Elementary School

All students know that their suggestions are welcome—at any time. There are “issue bins” in each classroom to collect their input. “The leadership retreat made us realize,” says Kelly, “that teachers and students share the same concerns.” Their legacy is important to them, too. As these students think about going on to high school, they’ve already begun to train the next group of student leaders to take their place.

The Right Strategy for Fourth-Grade Writing¹¹

Corinth Holder Elementary has 650 students, pre-K through grade eight.

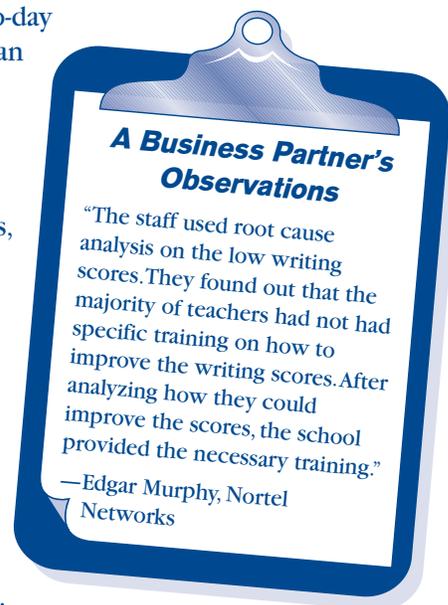
The school serves a low-income community with a predominantly minority student population. In 1995, Corinth Holder's fourth-grade writing scores were last among Johnston County's 22 elementary schools. The faculty had been involved in numerous reform initiatives, but the writing scores remained unaffected.

The school leadership team met, decided to use quality tools to address the problem, and began treating TQE as an improvement process rather than just another program. They agreed to use quality practices to coordinate and manage resources and expertise more effectively in delivering writing instruction to their students.

With the goal to continuously improve student performance in writing, the staff reviewed the data from the previous year's writing test. They used quality tools to analyze the scores and looked for common strengths and improvement opportunities.

Staff concluded that key faculty members needed professional development in writing instruction. A fourth-grade teacher received training and then shared the new innovative approaches with her colleagues. A seventh-grade language arts teacher also participated because seventh-graders were to be tested in writing beginning in 1996-97.

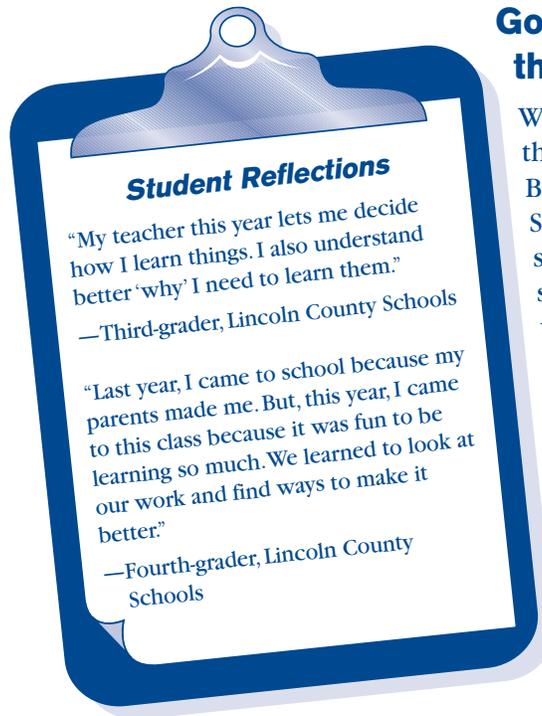
The entire school participated in a two-day writing retreat to develop an action plan that would enable staff to succeed in teaching writing. Their plan included weekly and biweekly grade-level planning sessions, use of portfolios and journals to provide data on their efforts, and daily lesson plans and curriculum units so the faculty could assess progress on a continuous basis. The effort focused heavily on providing professional development opportunities, multiple types of evaluations, external support from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and peer coaching. A plan-do-study-act cycle was used to assess continuous progress, as were affinity diagrams to organize strategies and determine the impact of various approaches.



In May 1996, with the release of state test scores, Corinth Holder Elementary students, faculty, and administrators learned the results of their efforts. Their fourth-grade writing scores had climbed from last place to first among Johnston County schools in one year.

Corinth Holder's remarkable progress has continued. "Six years ago, this school was the lowest-performing school in the county," notes principal Alonzo McCullers. "Now, we are at the top of the state exemplary schools on the ABCs (the state education reform plan)."

Often, success depends on knowing what's most important and a willingness to act on that knowledge. "Some parents may feel that as long as their kids are happy, the rest doesn't matter. They need to understand that state testing is important," asserts Jim Causby. The Johnston County Superintendent cites the following example to drive home the point. "I recommended that little league games not be held the night before state testing so that our students could get a good night's sleep," he explains. When Causby encountered resistance, the superintendent "threatened to park the school buses on the ball field." As a result, the games were cancelled. "The ABCs Plan has caused parents and students to realize that there are consequences to not learning," adds Causby.



Governor Hunt Encounters the Real Quality Experts

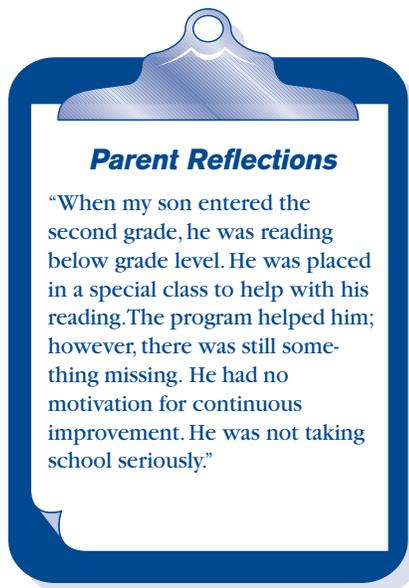
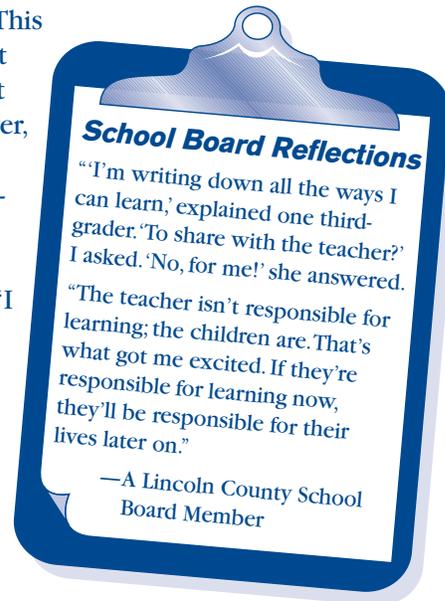
When asked to share what has been the most gratifying part of TQE, Olin Broadway relates this story. On September 26, 1996, the partners sponsored a teleconference for the six pilots. The business partners were assembled at each site, and Governor Hunt had accompanied Broadway to Lowder Elementary School in Lincoln County.

"The governor was very actively engaged in talking with the kids," recalls Broadway. "At one point, he asked one child what he had learned. The little boy kept answering him, but his response

kept going over the governor's head. This went on for a while, but then the light bulb went on. Hunt realized that what he was expecting was a content answer, and what he was really getting was a process answer. The child was demonstrating that students had taken responsibility for their own learning. At that moment," recounts Broadway, "I discovered the whole secret of what was going on."

After meeting with the elementary students, the governor shared his impressions with a group of adults during a statewide teleconference. "Kids are learning more," Hunt assured them, "and they are learning how to use what they know. Also, when you do this right, you don't have to worry about discipline. The kids are too involved to get into trouble. There's no time!"

Hunt ended his comments by sharing quantitative data with the group: "There is a marked increase in writing, reading, and math scores in the six TQE pilots. It isn't marginal; it is significant."



... "During the third grade, my son had the opportunity to be in a class that had begun implementing the principles of quality. I noticed some remarkable changes in my son. He learned to be responsible for everything he did and be accountable for the things he did not do. Reading was no longer a chore for him but a means for helping him to achieve other things that he wanted to learn. We noticed marked improvement. I also noticed that he developed skills for working in groups and being a leader. In addition, he learned how to make decisions, understand why he was learning objectives, and he was able to give input as to how to best learn the material. The class seemed to open the door to my son's interest in education..."

—A Lincoln County School Parent,
Progress Toward Quality, August 1997

Earlier in the day, the governor had praised a group of Lincoln County teachers, administrators, parents, and school board members. “Students are taking responsibility. They are understanding the process. I can’t tell you how impressed I am by what I’ve seen. The students are the workers, and the rest of you are the helpers,” observed Governor Hunt to a circle of smiles and nodding heads.

In 1998, North Carolina was one of four states recognized by the National Governors’ Association for implementing service quality.¹²

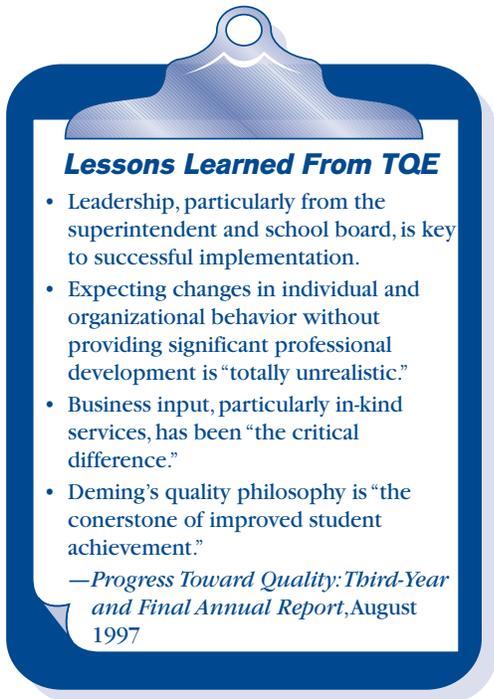
At the annual meeting of the governors in Washington, D.C., Governor Hunt decided to highlight the TQE Initiative and his 1996 visit to Lincoln County Schools. Seated at a huge table with his fellow governors and several hundred onlookers, Governor Hunt could barely contain his enthusiasm.

“What I thought I was going to see,” he confided, “were teachers empowered...and I did, but it was the kids who were doing it. They had figured out who their customers were and were treating the community as their customers. They were the ones working in teams, analyzing alternatives and reporting to me what they were doing, the alternative they had selected and the reasons why—and these were second- and fourth-graders!”

After a similar exchange with Lincoln County students, William Grigg, retired CEO of Duke Power, informed his colleagues, “We, in business, are not prepared for the kind of graduates that Lincoln County will be sending us!”

Full Steam Ahead

In 1997, the final annual *Progress Toward Quality* report to NCBCE concluded: “Based on these [student performance] trends, there is no question that the TQE project has had a profound impact on the school systems involved, varying impact



Lessons Learned From TQE

- Leadership, particularly from the superintendent and school board, is key to successful implementation.
- Expecting changes in individual and organizational behavior without providing significant professional development is “totally unrealistic.”
- Business input, particularly in-kind services, has been “the critical difference.”
- Deming’s quality philosophy is “the cornerstone of improved student achievement.”

—*Progress Toward Quality: Third-Year and Final Annual Report*, August 1997

in university schools of education, and a positive response from businesses actively involved.”

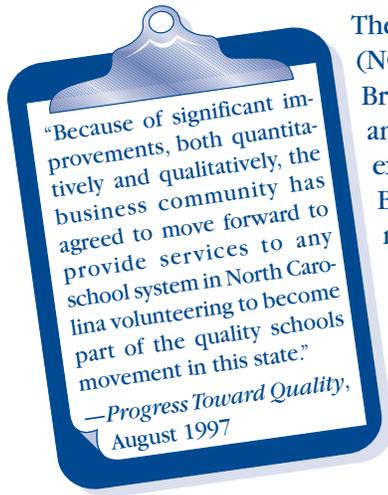
Olin Broadway attributes the TQE’s Initiatives success in increasing student achievement to two main factors: (1) the pilots’ use of quality principles, which created new customer/supplier relationships, and (2) the efforts of North Carolina’s business community to maintain its commitment to TQE rather than, in Broadway’s words, “jumping from one project to another.”

The TQE partnership was judged a success. It received a green light to move forward.

Part Four:

From R&D to Rollout—Creating the North Carolina Partnership for Excellence

The TQE Initiative ended officially in July 1997. NCBCCE and its trustees, the North Carolina Business Council of Management and Development, voted to spin off a separate entity—a non-profit organization that would sustain and expand the R&D effort.

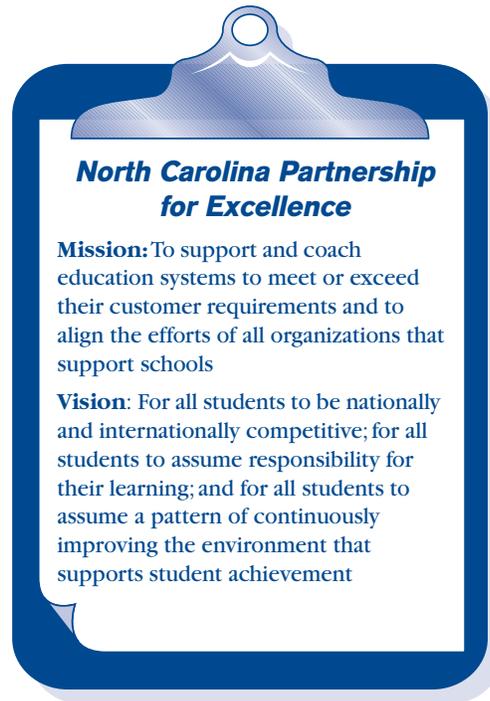


The North Carolina Partnership for Excellence (NCPE) was founded on September 1, 1997. Olin Broadway agreed to chair the new partnership, and NCBCCE remains an active partner, with executive director Tom Williams and president J. Billie Ray, Jr., from BellSouth serving on the 23-member NCPE Board of Directors. Other representatives include leaders from North Carolina's leading companies, higher education, the legislature, state agencies, local school systems, community organizations, and foundations. The governor and state superintendent of public instruction are among the ex-officio members.

The board agreed that NCPE would maintain a virtual office, purposely located outside of Raleigh and state government. The fledgling partnership also has a small staff, all of whom had been actively engaged with the TQE Initiative, officially renamed "Quality Schools." Tom Houlihan left Governor Hunt's office to become NCPE's president and CEO. He concentrates on partnership development, including fundraising and policy alignment. Judy Phillips, a former Alamance County Schools administrator, became vice president in charge of customer support. Judy manages the day-to-day responsibilities and plans activities to support customer requests. And NCPE contracted with Ed Bodell, a former Granville County business partner from IBM, and others from around the state to provide training. In order to reduce administrative overhead, NCPE operates virtually. Nortel Networks provided the technological hardware and First Union National Bank donated space for a one-person support office in Smithfield, North Carolina. Most of the money raised by NCPE is, therefore, being used to provide professional development and networking opportunities for the sites.

NCPE offers the following six key services to its partners:

- **High-Performance Seminars**—Focused on quality principles, processes, the Baldrige Criteria, and the Aligned Management System—“from the boiler room to the board room”
- **Customized Professional Development**—For local school districts, on request
- **Leadership Development**—On quality principles for leaders, including school boards, superintendents, and teachers
- **State-Level Policy Alignment**—To assist state improvement efforts to align with state goals, including a partnership with the Department of Public Instruction to train the entire department
- **Networking, Communications, and Self-Assessment**—To disseminate information about lessons learned and best practices associated with continuous improvement
- **“Virtual Learning”**—Sharing best practices and professional development electronically with other organizations



Taking a lesson from the TQE Initiative, NCPE continued the use of formal partnership agreements. The new organization also set an ambitious goal for itself. By the year 2002, the partnership would support any school district, with a business and higher education partner, volunteering to participate and willing to sign the formal agreement [contained in Appendix B], which lists specific roles and responsibilities for all of the partners. Contract provisions include

- **School District Commitments**—Each site agrees to create a Quality Leadership Council representing key stakeholders, complete a self-assessment using North Carolina’s Baldrige-based Aligned Management System, submit periodic progress reports to NCPE, and participate in

networking activities. Both the superintendent and school board chair are expected to sign the agreement.

- **Higher Education Commitments**—The higher education partner agrees to provide resources to the partnership as well as strengthen the customer/supplier relationship between K-12 and higher education.
- **Business Partner Commitments**—The business partners agree to provide resources as well as opportunities for their own employees to gain knowledge of the partnership and to participate.

In addition, both the higher education and business partners are obligated to support quality practices within their own organizations, as well as provide a senior person to serve on the district leadership councils.

TQE Lessons Learned: Highlights of “What to Do Differently”

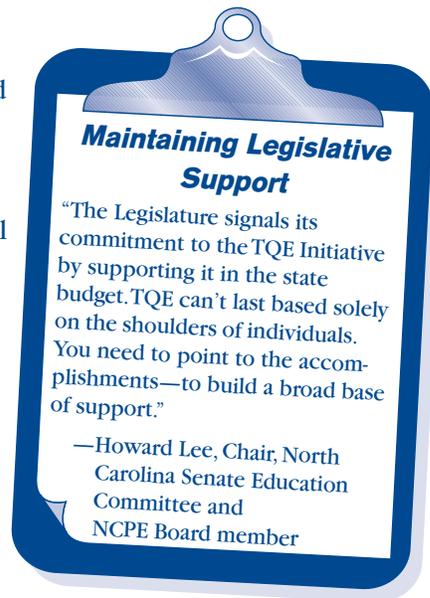
Tom Williams, Executive Director, NCBCCE

- Embrace Baldrige sooner and more deeply at all organizational levels.
- Develop or use a “leadership readiness” tool with each school system to help them assess their “organizational maturity” for high performance (Is the house on fire or relatively stable?). Internally self-assess on a regular basis twice a year.
- Develop processes to ensure sound meeting management at all organizational levels.
- Spend more time with better results with the higher education and business partners in understanding their partnership needs and interests (“wiifm” issues identified).
- Engage the business and higher education partners in the design and reporting pieces of the accountability process so they have more at stake in the partnership’s success.
- Improve processes to inform/engage the local community (chambers, county commissioners, regional quality councils, etc.) so that “It’s A Community Thing!”
- Develop an “education and training” continuum based on the experiences of individuals and groups within the school system and the knowledge/skills needed to support system transformation.
- Conduct ongoing site visits (open to as many groups as possible) for sharing, networking, capacity building, and media/public awareness.
- Enhance technology’s role in improving communications, networking, and benchmarking processes throughout the partnerships.

The North Carolina Partnership for Excellence has gone to scale. At this writing, 41 school districts have joined NCPE, including some of the largest districts in the state—Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County.¹³ In addition, all six original pilot sites are still participating. The partner communities now represent over 65 percent of the students across the state.

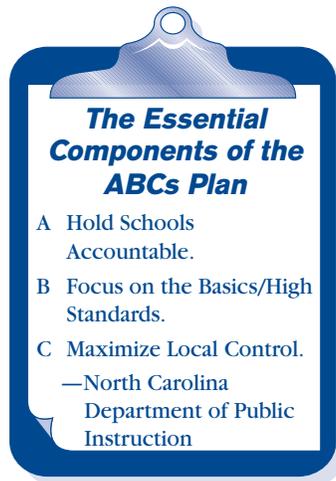
The Partnership is pursuing a diversified funding strategy. Since September 1997, NCPE has raised over \$4.5 million dollars from a variety of sources—the North Carolina business community, the General Assembly (\$900,000 in two years) and grants from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (\$900,000 over three years), and SERVE, the Regional Educational Laboratory that serves the southeastern states.

When asked what he has learned from the initial TQE effort, J. Billie Ray, Jr. offers this comment: “It’s easy for business to think that schools aren’t producing. But once you get in there, you find out otherwise. There are educators who want to produce what you want,” continues the president of BellSouth, N.C., and NCBCE chair. “People are not necessarily susceptible to change just because someone comes in and tells them they have to change. I did not realize how isolated educators feel from business [leaders]. We were welcomed; educators sincerely want to learn what we do, and they are smart. Business leaders should gain a lot of respect for the public schools once they truly understand what’s going on,” adds Ray.



Part Five:

A Strategic Priority: Bringing State and Local Districts Closer Together



Partnerships and pilots, of course, do not operate in a vacuum but within a broader, complex setting. School districts have to respond to policy and funding decisions made elsewhere, particularly at the state level. In North Carolina, state officials defined many of the priorities that the TQE pilots needed to address, as well as the working conditions and resources, both in human and financial terms, available to address them.

The Larger Context: A Backdrop for Reform

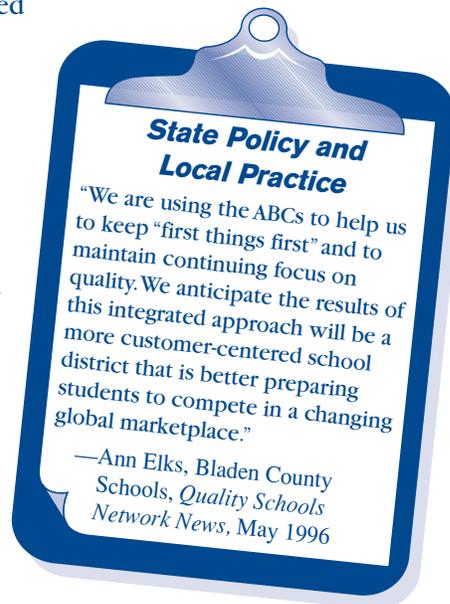
North Carolina has 117 school districts, 100 of which are countywide. They range in size from over 100,000 students to fewer than 800. The average student population is 6,100. Compared to many states, North Carolina has centralized much of the decision-making authority over education at the state level. Sixty-nine percent of school funds come from the state, as do the curriculum and the state teacher’s salary schedule. Because North Carolina is a right-to-work state, teacher unions don’t bargain with local school boards over wages and working conditions.

As the TQE pilots began their work, North Carolina was debating a major education reform bill. Accountability had emerged as a legislative priority over the past decade, ever since North Carolina first implemented legislation in 1989 requiring each school, with parent and staff input, to prepare annual school improvement plans. In 1995, the General Assembly revisited the original legislation and enacted the ABCs Plan, holding individual schools accountable for improving student performance.

In July 1996, *Progress Toward Quality*, the second TQE annual progress report, noted, “Through a bipartisan effort involving the Governor, General Assembly, and State Board of Education with support from NCBCCE, the 1995 and 1996 sessions of the North Carolina General Assembly created a series of changes in public education unprecedented in the state’s history.”

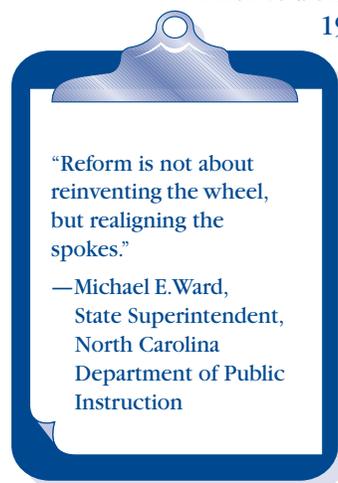
The 1995 ABCs Plan focuses on three key elements: (1) school-based accountability, (2) demonstrated mastery of basic skills, beginning in grade three in reading and math, grade four in writing, and grade eight in technology, and (3) local control in implementing improvement strategies. The law created financial incentives for schools that exceed student growth goals and provides technical support and consequences for schools that lag seriously behind. These policies framed expectations and provided an additional impetus for change as the TQE pilots were designing their reform efforts.

Two of the TQE pilots—Bladen and Lincoln Counties—were among ten districts statewide participating in an early field-test of the ABCs Plan. In 1996, Bladen County Superintendent Byron Lawson highlighted the common ground between the ABCs Plan and TQE: planning based on data collection and analysis, decentralized decision making, and obtaining key input from internal and external stakeholders.



State Policy Coordination: Lateral Alignment

Mike Ward is North Carolina’s State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Prior to being elected chief state school officer in November 1996, Ward was superintendent in Granville County, one of the TQE pilot districts. He also co-chaired the State Education Standards and Accountability Commission.



Ward assumed state office at a time when the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) was experiencing more than just a leadership transition at the top. The Department had also been downsized in staff from 1,200 to 500. In 1995, the Legislature had reduced the DPI budget by 40 percent and mandated the State Board of Education to reorganize the Department. The good

news: as a former local superintendent, Ward could speak authoritatively about local district needs. The bad news: the same time that the accountability stakes on the schools were being raised, Ward had to meet their needs with a department less than half its former size.

One of the first tasks Ward tackled was to develop a state strategic plan that would pull North Carolina's education reforms together and identify the gaps. Using their federal Goals 2000 funds, Governor Hunt and State Superintendent Ward appointed a 44-member North Carolina School Improvement Panel to oversee this task because "we know that we can't do it alone," admits Judy White, North Carolina Goals 2000 director who staffs the planning effort. This group of parents, teachers, higher education and state agency representatives, and business and community leaders produced a state plan. Their charge: to communicate the panel's work back to their respective constituencies and also align their own organization's goals to the state plan.

Using the panel's report as a starting point, Ward next moved to add a rigorous work plan with measurable outcomes, according to White. The State Superintendent decided to use the Baldrige Criteria to design the plan.

Baldrige "provides a structure and a process, plus a set of rubrics you can use to measure where you are," explains Ward. Because the DPI does not have sole jurisdiction over educational issues, Ward created a smaller executive committee with key leaders from the state board, the governor's office, and higher education—both the university and community college systems—and workforce preparation, as well as business leaders. He charged the executive committee with reframing the goals and adding measures to the plan, entitled "The ABCs Plus: North Carolina's Strategic Plan for Excellent Schools." According to Ward, the plan is based on three key principles: (1) community expectations, (2) broad involvement, and (3) the Baldrige-based quality alignment model. It builds a systemic improvement strategy around the state's ABCs initiative to improve student performance.

The Superintendent also asked Jim Shipley and Chris Collins from Pinellas County, Florida, to facilitate executive committee meetings. And Ward has brought in the directors responsible for key programs in the strategic plan. "The plans must make sense to those individuals charged with implementing the reforms," asserts Ward, so he created a DPI Coordinating Council. The executive committee will continue to provide strategic guidance as the DPI and the other state entities represented in the plan move into implementation.

How the State Board of Education Stays Above the Line

“I think you’ve got something wrong up there,” declared Jay Robinson, chair of the North Carolina Board of Education, pointing to the overhead. It was August 1997, and state board members were in the middle of their retreat. At the state superintendent’s request, Jim Shipley (from Pinellas County, Florida) had just finished introducing them to the Baldrige-based linkages model (described earlier), which encourages school boards to “stay above the line,” providing strategic and policy direction rather than delve “below the line” into administrative and program operations. Shipley remembers thinking to himself, “I’m in trouble,” but he also knew (worst-case scenario) that he could always get on an airplane and go back to Florida.

Pointing to the overhead, Robinson continued, “See that dotted line? Well, it should be a solid line because we keep falling through it!”

“And we ought to put barbed wire around it!” added another board member.

Numerous boards are accused of micro-managing, going “below the line” in Pinellas/aligned management system terminology, rather than focusing their leadership role on defining and overseeing strategic priorities, that is, agreeing on customer requirements, developing long-term plans with goals and measures, and continually assessing the results. Sometimes board members feel more comfortable honing in on single programs or concrete, operational questions. Other times, the agendas presented to them by their chief executives may not be designed to involve them strategically in making “above-the-line” decisions.

These tendencies notwithstanding, the North Carolina State Board of Education experienced a critical breakthrough at its retreat that day. Board members were able to distinguish between strategic issues, which engage them in making policy and operational issues, which are the DPI’s domain. This understanding quickly led to buy-in, which prompted a reorganization of board priorities around four key strategic goals: (1) high student performance, (2) safe and orderly schools, (3) quality teachers, administrators, and staff, and (4) effective and efficient operations. More recently, the board has built its entire strategic planning process around these goals as well as the DPI budget and its own meeting agendas. Now, board deliberations clearly “distinguish between what’s above and below the line,” notes Ward proudly.

Staying the course in a long-term improvement effort is a particular challenge in most states because policymaking is a shared responsibility. North Carolina is no exception. The Governor appoints the State Board, but the State Superintendent is elected independently. Thus, when Board Chair Jay Robinson decided to retire late in 1997, Governor Hunt had an opportunity to send a strong bipartisan message—that is, let’s keep education above the political line. Hunt, a Democrat, appointed Phil Kirk, a Republican, to fill out Robinson’s term. Kirk, a highly identifiable Republican, having served as a state senator and chief of staff to two former Republican governors, also chairs the North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry, the state chamber of commerce, so he assumed the board chair role with valuable business connections as well.

Leadership commitment must be reinforced periodically, particularly in the face of individual transitions. New participants need to discover for themselves the benefits of improvement efforts. Consequently, at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year, Superintendent Mike Ward and the State Board decided to visit Craven County, one of the original TQE pilots. New and veteran board members alike experienced the true joys of schooling when accountability is self-imposed by seven-year-olds.

Lesson learned: Capture policymakers’ imaginations with visits to the classroom in order to engage their minds in the boardroom.

Mass Training at the DPI: Vertical Alignment

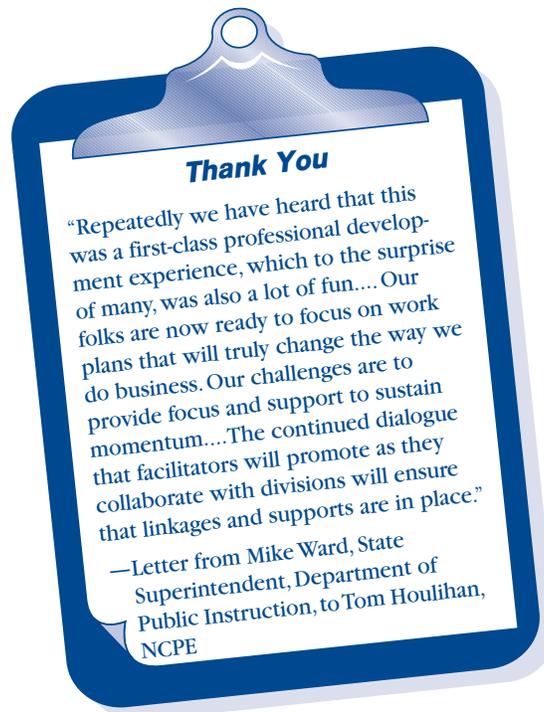
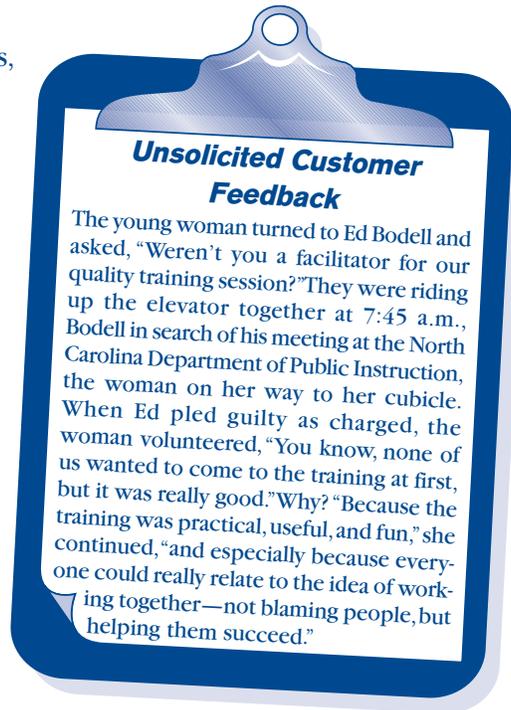
Sharing responsibility for improving student performance—no more compelling a reason exists for school districts and their departments of education to learn to work together.

Because of the ABCs Plan, accountability is now a shared responsibility in North Carolina. Schools are on the hot-seat to raise student achievement, but the DPI staff is also charged with helping the most challenged schools improve. Each year, the 15 schools identified as most at risk in the state will receive assistance from state teams.

State Superintendent Mike Ward was well aware of the need for collaboration. If accountability were truly ever to become a shared responsibility, then the principal participants—school districts and DPI staff—needed the chance to alter their existing relationship, from compliance to partnering. Consequently, in February 1998, Ward committed the entire DPI staff to

quality training. The facilitators came from NCPE, the TQE pilots, and Pinellas County.

Providing facilitators from the primary “customers” of state services, the school districts, was both a strategic and positive way to begin the dialogue. As the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction moves ahead to implement its plans, NCPE (the North Carolina Partnership for Excellence) and school district staff continue to facilitate the teams that have been created to “go below the line” and improve department operations.



Reflections of a State Leader: Ten Observations

Dr. Michael E. Ward, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

From the state perspective, what thoughts about implementing an aligned management system would be most valuable to others? That's the question that Mike Ward had to address on February 20, 1998, before several hundred educators and business leaders from across the country who were attending a conference in Pinellas County, Florida. Here are the ten observations that he shared with the group:¹⁴

1. North Carolina is making progress in an unaligned system.

North Carolina is experiencing its greatest increase over a ten-year period in student test scores. Ward went on to reference NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress) and the SAT as well as a number of research, testing, and national organizations that had recognized the state's accomplishments. "You can make progress in an unaligned system," observes Ward, "but imagine how much more progress you can make in an aligned system."

2. There are a lot of reasons for alignment not to work.

Ward highlighted three. Reason #1: governance and partisan realities. In North Carolina, the governor appoints the state board of education, but the voters elect the state superintendent. Democrats control the Senate, and Republicans, the House. Reason #2: recent state cutbacks. The Department of Public Instruction has downsized from 1,200 to 500 employees. "We are trying to do everything we've always done with much less staff," explains Ward, which has greatly affected employee morale and capacity. Reason #3: North Carolina's history of "start-and-stop reforms" and two-year reform cycles. He also cites the 1997 *Education Week* reference to "random acts of reform" in North Carolina.

3. Despite points 1 and 2, alignment can work.

Ward's reasons: Leadership and funding. Jim Hunt, elected to an historic fourth term, is an education governor. Hunt, observed Ward, had the insight to appoint a Republican former state senator (Phil Kirk), who also chairs the State Chamber of Commerce, as state board chair. The new university system president (Molly Broad) has made the public schools and K-12 education a priority. And there is a fairly strong bipartisan spirit in the General Assembly, especially around education. The legislators just funded education at the highest level in a long time. "This is important," notes Ward, "since over 70 percent of K-12 education funds come from the state."

4. Ideas to improve education are not in short supply.

Good ideas are coming from the governor, legislature, the State Board of Education, the business community, and local school district leaders. Research and high-performing schools also provide good ideas. “What we are short on,” admits Ward, “is alignment and coordination.” He adds, “Reform is not about reinventing the wheel, but realigning the spokes.”

5. Customer requirements are not hard to determine.

“We started with the voice of the customer,” explains Ward, “which is fairly consistent.” The customer wants four things: (1) schools that expect high student achievement, (2) quality professionals, (3) safe schools, and (4) education delivered in an efficient and effective manner. “Using these four strategic objectives as the springboard for the department’s long-range plan,” notes Ward, “ensures acceptance.” Translating how the department does its work to realize the objectives, he admits, is the difficult issue.

6. We know that the department cannot do it alone.

Ward mentions three other key groups: the university system, pre-school partners, and the local districts. That is why these groups are represented in the Department’s state improvement plan and on planning panels. Their role: to provide advice, activate their constituencies, and communicate back and forth to them.

7. A four-part observation

- a: What you aim for is important.
- b: What you measure is important.
- c: Heaven help you if a. and b. are different, or
- d: If they are consistent but the wrong things!

“The implication,” explains Ward, is that “we have to spend a lot of time working on goals and measures, up-front time, and with the State Board of Education.”

8. The planning and alignment model are very important.

Ward went on to outline the key components of a successful change process: (1) creative tension between “what is” and “what we want,” (2) action steps, (3) understandable rubrics and measures, and (4) alignment and communication. The Baldrige Criteria, he notes, “fulfills these needs for us.” A byproduct of their learnings: “Not only is the

planning and alignment model critical, but the folks who teach it to you are, too.” Ward referenced an external resource—the Pinellas Quality Academy—as well as Judy White inside the department, who provides ongoing strategic guidance.

9. The more you learn, the more you find you have to learn.

Ward mentioned several areas in which they “hoped to improve soon,” including (1) really discerning customer requirements, (2) making data-driven decisions, (3) implementing a more rapid response rate, (4) getting better about abandoning programs no longer needed, (5) changing their roles in a downsized mode, and (6) communicating the work plan and having it embraced by the legislature, higher education, and the local school districts.

10. It’s the walk—not the talk—that matters most.

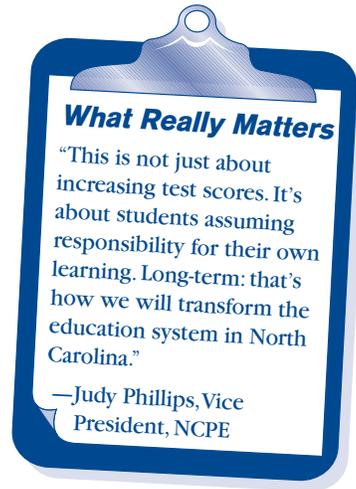
“The State Board of Education could send some real disconnects,” warns Ward, “if they don’t operate around the four state priorities” [mentioned under point 5]. That is why they have realigned their work, legislative priorities, and budget. Now, he observes, the board needs to build decision-making junctures and the right time frames into their calendar. The board continually asks itself if it’s staying above or below the line. And department staff members are positioning themselves as learners, sending a strong message by not telling others what to do, but learning from local school districts how to do their jobs. “This,” concludes Ward, “is a real role reversal.”

A Postscript

Recent reports (*North Carolina Priorities—Meeting National Goals, February 1999* and *How are North Carolina Public Schools Really Doing?, March 1999*) produced by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction describe the following accomplishments:

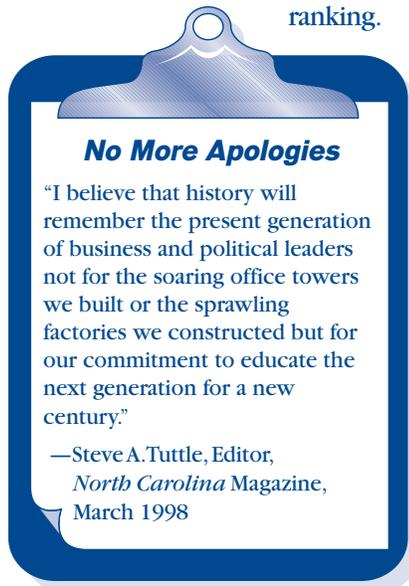
- North Carolina was one of only five states or jurisdictions that had significant gains in fourth-grade reading skills from 1992-1998, according to 1998 state reading assessment results released by NAEP
- On NAEP’s math assessment, North Carolina’s fourth-graders performed above the national average, posting the highest gain in the nation on the 1996 mathematics results (tied with Texas). Eighth-graders’ NAEP math scores for 1996 showed the highest gain in the nation since 1990.

- The National Education Goals Panel reported that North Carolina was one of only six states awarded two gold stars for improvement over time in fourth- and eighth-grade math.
- Continued improvement in the 1998 SAT scores show North Carolina continuing its ten-year trend of improvement, gaining four points to reach 982. Since 1988, North Carolina has led the nation in improvement, with SAT scores up 34 points compared to the national average of an 11-point increase.



In absolute terms, North Carolina fourth-graders are performing above the national average in math, and eighth-graders are above the average in the Southeast and near the national average for the entire country. Over ten years, North Carolina has moved from last place to 48th in state rankings on SAT scores.

State leaders are the first to acknowledge that, based on these traditional, limited measures of student performance, North Carolina has a way to go. Mike Ward, the state superintendent, recently praised North Carolina for having progressed more than any other state in improving its SAT scores in one breath and, in the next, referenced the state's 48th-place ranking.



Sobering reminders aside, North Carolina's education reform efforts are clearly accelerating the pace of student performance gains. And North Carolina residents are clearly excited about the current progress and their future prospects. Some sources are even ready to do verbal battle over the issue, and they aren't shy about explaining why.

"No More Apologies," the editorial began. This defense of North Carolina's school reform efforts did not appear in the predictable places, like a professional educa-

tion newsletter or an irate superintendent's letter to the editor of her or his hometown paper. In March 1998, this bold assertion graced the editorial pages of *North Carolina* magazine, published by the North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry.

The editorial continued: "North Carolina has made great strides in its economy and its society in the past few years, but by far the most important step forward we've taken is the commitment we made to improve our public schools....And that investment in time and money is paying off. In fact, it's now safe to say that we can—and indeed should—stop apologizing for our schools. We no longer have anything to apologize for and much that we can be proud of..."

In the recent past, North Carolina's economic development experts had portrayed the public schools as a detriment in attracting business and industry to their borders. Now, they lauded the public schools as a primary reason for North Carolina's robust economy.

Addendum

Part Six:

Advice to Business Partners: Helping Build Organizational Capacity to Improve Education¹⁵

In this section, Dr. Peggy Siegel draws on knowledge of the North Carolina TQE Initiative and her own experience with the National Alliance for Business in providing advice to business leaders working in partnership with educators to improve educational processes and results.

American Businesses Confront Their Own “Nation at Risk”

Ironically, about the same time we learned that we were a “nation at risk” educationally, American businesses encountered their own maelstrom. Growing customer dissatisfaction over lack of quality and productivity signaled that many companies could no longer compete in a global economy.

Marketplace realities, coupled with entrepreneurial creativity and perseverance, sparked a flurry of activity inside the private sector, just as education’s shortcomings had prompted action inside the public sector. Seeking to regain their competitive edge, corporate leaders literally dissected their businesses. They set rigorous performance goals aimed at meeting and exceeding customer expectations. They measured results on an ongoing basis. They sequenced discrete jobs and work tasks into cross-functional processes responsive to customer needs, guided by fact-based information, and enriched by employee empowerment and team decision making.

In reinventing their companies, these insightful business leaders discovered the means to satisfy customers and improve performance. They also developed a way to react quickly to and even anticipate changes in a world that will become even more fast-paced and complex in the future. In the process, they designed something of lasting value—a systemic improvement strategy and framework.

A Promising Framework: The Baldrige Criteria and North Carolina's Aligned Management System

Fortunately, the leadership behaviors demonstrated by these companies were codified in 1987 (and updated annually) by the National Institute of Standards and Technology as the Malcolm Baldrige National Criteria for Performance Excellence. Numerous companies now use the Baldrige Criteria (or their internal version) to baseline organizational performance and focus on continuous improvement. In July 1995, the Council on Competitiveness noted that Baldrige had created high-performance standards and improved the state of assessment practices among businesses nationwide.¹⁶

Standards and assessments have been proposed as the key drivers of education reform. Substituting the words “student achievement gains” for “increased business profits” and “educational success for *all* students and schools” for “greater market share” begins to communicate the potential to use the Baldrige Criteria as a systemic improvement strategy and framework in education. The Baldrige Criteria can lay the foundation for continuous improvement. And that is why North Carolina's business and education leaders chose Baldrige to ramp-up their reform efforts statewide.

Business Leaders Can Help Make Baldrige User-Friendly for Education

It was the business community in North Carolina that first suggested using Total Quality Management to support the improvement of education. At first, the business leaders were not certain that quality (TQM) practices could be adapted to education. Having experienced the positive results inside their own companies, however, they were willing to support comparable reform efforts for and with their education partners. Positive results validated their intuition five years later.

North Carolina's experiences underscore the essential role that business partners can play in helping to implement a Baldrige-based improvement strategy in education. Absent initial business encouragement and support, North Carolina educators readily acknowledged that they would not have thought of using quality practices to align their reforms. Absent hands-on business participation, they would not have had the leverage, resources, and expertise to maintain the momentum needed for long-term improvement. Perhaps most promising, the consistent use of the Baldrige Criteria can build the organizational capacity of the education system itself to identify and act on improvement opportunities that actually increase student and system performance over time.

Business leaders who have used Baldrige-based assessments successfully in their own companies have a valuable resource to share with their education partners. Consequently, the remainder of this report speaks directly to business leaders. It suggests ways that you can make such experiences accessible to your colleagues in education.

1. Treat Your Business/Education Partnership Like a Supplier/Customer Relationship

Most business/education partnerships are defined in conventional terms: schools (the supplier) provide employers (the customer) with their future workforce. However, in this case, the traditional relationship is reversed.

- Educators are the customers for a viable improvement strategy that uses quality assessments as its focus. They, in turn, will need to customize that strategy to their own political, cultural, and organizational context.
- Business partners are the suppliers of the “raw materials”—the skills, resources, and experiences—that educators can use to develop and implement a successful improvement strategy. (The role is comparable to any manufacturer or service provider who works with individual customers in designing and delivering products to meet their specific requirements.)

As suppliers in a relationship with educators, **business partners need to**

A. Work on Supplier Quality by Gaining a Clear Understanding of Education

No insightful business leader would ever develop a product without first identifying and understanding potential markets and conducting customer research. Similarly, in supplying resources for a successful education improvement strategy, business leaders need to understand the environment in which education operates today, not when they (or, in the case of older partners, their children) attended school.

Business leaders need to see the enablers and barriers confronting educators as they implement improvements and increase their understanding of how education operates in each community, from the classroom to the boardroom. Some advice

- Spend time inside schools.
- Observe and teach classes.

- Job shadow a principal or superintendent for a day.
- Participate on school and district leadership teams.
- Attend school board meetings and legislative committee hearings.
- Work with governors and chief state school officers in crafting and assessing progress on a state education reform agenda.

B. Incorporate Business Thinking in the Partnership

Many educators welcome business partners. Hands-on business involvement validates the importance of teachers, administrators, and other education staff in helping students learn. Access to a sympathetic business partner also shores up the resolve of educators in making essential changes. Educators, however, need more than business presence and empathy. They can benefit from access to business thinking and experience. For example, educators need their business partners to

- Understand the root causes of problems in education before offering solutions.
- Work collaboratively to identify potential alternatives and remedies.
- Understand and articulate the challenges confronting education.
- Suggest ways to facilitate a continuous improvement environment and reduce barriers to change.
- Help educators define success indicators and measure progress so they can document results.

C. Engage at all Levels

Engaging at the classroom level gives a business partner the chance to see firsthand the work that kids do. Engaging at every level above the classroom, offers the chance to help redesign the organization in which students learn or influence the policy context in which schools operate so that the work given to students is worth doing. Out of these experiences comes the knowledge needed to advocate for state policy initiatives, which then enrich the context for new practices, and so on. The connections between policy and practice are—or should be—dynamic. Business partners need both types of experiences. This relationship between business and education partners has the potential to become a strategic alliance. Both partners can then employ their skills and experiences equally to serve their shared customer, their communities.

2. Customize Your Expertise to Meet Site-Specific Needs

Education is a complex system, made more complex by the unique mix of people, policies, politics, and timing inherent within each setting. Consequently, improvement strategies developed in one setting are rarely accepted at face value in another. Educators deserve the opportunity to assess the relative merits of different approaches. And they need to design and own a change process that reflects their specific needs. Here are some issues to consider in better meeting the needs of your education partners:

A. Look for a Readiness to Change

Business leaders cannot impose educational reform from the outside. Common sense suggests the need to work with and through your education partners to implement needed improvements. Change takes time, even under the best circumstances. In order to expedite change, business leaders need to seek out ready and willing education partners who already see the need to change, want to implement an improvement strategy, and are now looking for promising alternatives. Your role as supportive partner gives these risktakers compelling ammunition to drive change from within the education system. The results of their change efforts will provide leverage and lessons for other educators.

B. Link Quality Assessment to What Educators Have to Do or Want to Do

In the effort to define what students should know and be able to do, virtually all states are adopting more rigorous student academic and performance standards. Policymakers are also developing assessments to measure school and district progress in meeting the new standards. In some states, these reforms are enforced by high-stakes consequences. Students unable to pass state proficiency tests may be denied a diploma. Principals and staff in schools designated as low-performing may be reassigned or dismissed.

In promoting local control and accountability, state policymakers are also prompting school districts to decentralize their operations. Policymakers are calling on schools to create school-based teams of administrators, faculty, staff, parents, and students, as well as business and community representatives. They are charging school teams with drafting annual improvement plans to meet state education goals and student performance standards. How schools and districts accomplish these tasks, however, is left up to them.

Such initiatives, generally called *site-based management or shared decision making*, are prompting many district administrators to rethink their roles and responsibilities. The central office, in essence, must figure out how best to support school teams and staff as they make decisions regarding planning, budget, personnel, curriculum, and professional development.

Successful companies are continually assessing the appropriate balance between centralization and decentralization as they push down decisions to staff who are closest to their customers. These companies use ongoing strategic planning and customer feedback, technology, management information systems, and consistent company-wide practices to enhance decentralized decision making while simultaneously maximizing efficiency. How business leaders address their own management processes provides valuable information for their education partners who, different terminology notwithstanding, are wrestling with comparable issues.

Educators realize that they will have to invest both time and resources in implementing a reform strategy to meet higher expectations. Not surprisingly, many would rather invest in an accountability model **that can empower** individuals throughout the system to make improvements. If applied thoughtfully, the Baldrige Criteria can help alter the tenor of accountability in education from a compliance model of being held accountable by others to a self-empowering model of having the authority and resources to actually be accountable for improving education.

C. Match Specific Business Partners' Expertise to Education Needs

In implementing a long-term improvement process, educators will need to develop or refine specific functional expertise, such as analyzing customer data, process mapping, developing effective marketing strategies, and designing performance measurement systems. Educators will also need to develop expertise in managing the change effort itself. Business partners can help address both of these needs.

A suggestion: given the people-focused nature of education, business leaders should consider assigning as the primary business contact a person comfortable with change-management issues. The primary business can then pull in other business expertise as needed.

D. Realize Change Takes Time

Change takes time. Acknowledging this point up front is not a defense of the status quo. Nor does it reflect being co-opted by an intransigent system.

What it is, is a reality check. That's why business leaders in states such as North Carolina deserve praise for making a four-year R&D commitment before investing further or, under less favorable circumstances, before pulling the plug. Without a long-term commitment to improving education, business leaders risk raising false hopes among educators who may question the depth of business' dedication.

Therefore, given the extensive time commitment needed for collaboration, business leaders should take steps to protect their initial investment. For example

- Involve more than just one business person or even one company in education reform.
- Prepare contingency plans in the event that representatives are re-assigned within the company, retire, leave the partnership, and/or move away.
- Consider supporting third-party organizations or state/regional coalitions whose missions are consistent with partnership activities. The intent, after all, is to build independent capacity inside education as quickly as possible to implement a long-term improvement strategy. Turning to a third-party organization that can bridge the gap between knowledge of education's needs and business' resources can often expedite the capacity-building process.

3. Support Educators and Policymakers in Aligning the Pieces of the Education System

It should be obvious by now that there is no one correct way to implement a quality improvement strategy. Nor is there a single entry point. Businesses can offer support at almost any level in the education system or at multiple points simultaneously. What might an aligned education system focused on continuous improvement look like? The following section lists components important to consider.

- **A State-Level Business/Education Leadership Council that**
 - Forges common ground, alignment, and communications among key state education policymakers
 - Uses a formal agreement to define roles and responsibilities for local districts
 - Sponsors or provides training and technical support for implementing improvement efforts

- Furnishes an ongoing conduit for the business community to articulate its workforce development needs and other priorities
- Reviews policy, funding, and regulatory decisions to ensure, in Deming's terminology, a constancy of purpose
- **State laws or programs that**
 - Define education goals, student academic and performance standards, assessments that measure progress, and accountability systems that accelerate improvement efforts
 - Require districts and schools to create leadership teams that formulate annual improvement plans based on state goals and standards (but do not mandate how to implement improvement efforts)
 - Provide opportunities and resources (for example, competitive planning and implementation grants) that districts and schools can use to meet state and community standards
 - Provide or contract for technical assistance to schools, districts, and community partnerships
 - Support networks and consortia in sharing of best practices
- **A State-Level Quality Award Program that**
 - Includes education as an eligible category
 - "Stairsteps" its quality improvement assessments so that any interested school district, regardless of the level of its quality experience, can participate in a long-term continuous improvement process
 - Provides an ongoing training resource and business partners for schools, districts, local and state agencies, and higher-education partners to conduct quality assessments
 - Includes educators as examiners
 - Provides (or subcontracts to develop) specialized quality training for school boards and state policymakers
 - Recognizes and shares best practices among quality award recipients
- **A Community Education Foundation/Local Leadership Council that**
 - Represents key public and private sector community leaders
 - Articulates education priorities within broader economic and workforce development priorities
 - Incorporates social service agencies and institutions of higher education in the quality improvement effort

- Provides participants and resources to support educational improvement
- Oversees progress in implementing the quality initiative and provides feedback to the local school board and community
- **A (State or Local) “Quality” Academy that**
 - Reports to the state or local leadership council
 - Co-ventures training opportunities with the state Quality Award program, local postsecondary institutions, local chambers of commerce or business/education coalitions, and/or regional education service centers
 - Provides training in quality practices and management for school and district teams and potentially for other groups—businesses, civic, and community entities and business/education coalitions
 - Ultimately, becomes self-sustaining
- **A Professional Network of Quality Facilitators/Business Partners that**
 - Provides volunteer Quality Award examiners and school, district, and state partners to facilitate implementation of quality assessments
 - Meets periodically as a group to benchmark effective processes and strategies
 - Provides continuous feedback on successful practices and emerging needs to the state and local leadership councils, the Quality Academy, and the state Quality Award program
- **School Teams that**
 - Receive quality training together
 - Use data to identify and address priorities related to student and system performance
 - Maintain school portfolios or other ways to document progress
 - Meet periodically with other school teams and districts to benchmark effective processes and strategies
 - Provide continuous feedback to the school board, superintendent, and union leaders/faculty on successful classroom and school-based practices and emerging needs

Designing an education system is not only about creating a new leadership and management framework; it’s also about aligning numerous existing system requirements.

4. Participate in Creating and Sustaining the Local Leadership Infrastructure

Business partners should promote creation of a local umbrella organization to lead the change effort. Depending on the unique character of each community, the leadership entity could include school board members, the superintendent and senior administrators, union/teacher leaders, business partners, parent and community groups, representatives from higher education, and individual schools. A leadership infrastructure has several benefits. It can

- Help school boards stay focused on “above-the-line” strategic issues, as opposed to defaulting to operational issues that are the responsibility of teachers, staff, and/or administrators
- Report progress to the school board, parents, and community on a continuous basis and with a unified voice
- Keep communication channels open among key stakeholder groups, particularly when they may be fighting over other issues
- Report to and seek feedback from individual constituency groups
- Ease the transition as individuals come and go

Key education stakeholders (people or groups who can block forward progress) often need an external stimulus to bring them to the table. Business leaders can increase the odds of a successful improvement effort by involving all key stakeholders in establishing common ground.

5. Support Educators in Using Data and Benchmarking in Decision Making

Information and analysis are the fuels that drive any quality improvement initiative. Organizations need access to data about their customers. And they need to know how to use the data to enhance their ability to serve their customers. Optimally, the process of collecting, analyzing, and applying data in decision making and then evaluating the results becomes the way in which effective organizations routinely conduct business. As a business partner, you can assist your education partners in becoming more data-driven. Using data effectively has an additional payoff. If business partners support educators in using information, you will learn more about school system operations and what works to improve education. This awareness, in turn, should help your company refine and leverage its own allocation of resources in supporting reform.

Business leaders are often surprised when they discover the level of information deprivation that characterizes most school districts. There is plenty of data available. In fact, many districts are drowning in data. However, too few districts convert the data into knowledge to inform effective decision making. Instead, decisions are usually made in response to past practice (“we’ve always done it this way”), a vocal minority, professional intuition, and/or political pressures. Some examples of the current information deprivation in education include the following:

- Teachers typically receive results of how their students perform on state tests. The problem is that they often receive the data too late in the school year (or even during the summer) to use in designing appropriate instructional strategies for their current students.
- States and communities frequently rank their schools based on state student test scores. Unless the data are disaggregated to the classroom and student level, however, teachers and administrators cannot use this resource to determine how individual students are performing or even if the same students are being tested each year.

Several years ago, Charlie Newton, a former business partner in Rochester, New York, described the dilemma this way:

The traditional industrial model that most school districts base their system of measures on may not be appropriate for education. It is based on the need for control, predictability, and consistency. The measures come from the top. In the best quality strategies, measurements are used by the people who collect the data and are responsible for the decisions triggered by them.... Until teachers, principals, administrators, students, parents, and communities own and feel accountable for the success of the whole, measures will cause, at the most, transitional behavior and compliance, not the commitment required of a transformed learning community.

A. Support Educators in Using Data Proactively

Increasing numbers of communities are making the commitment that all children can and will succeed. In supporting educators’ ability to deliver on that promise, business partners familiar with quality processes can think of the challenge in this way: the need to design a system that treats each student’s 13-14 year educational experience as the first part of a continuous, lifelong learning process. That type of education system depends heavily upon a continuous flow of information throughout the organization.

Consequently, schools and districts need to develop the capacity to generate the following:

- Student and system performance data, through technology and the use of quality tools, like control charts and flow charts, as well as the skill to disaggregate and display the results
- External customer data from parents, taxpayers, employers, and institutions of higher education to ensure that the school system is meeting critical needs and priorities
- Internal customer data to identify professional development needs, redesign management processes, and develop effective communication strategies that share progress and challenges with key stakeholder groups
- Organizational supports that promote internal information sharing so that kindergarten teachers become the suppliers of first-grade teachers, who then become the suppliers of second-grade teachers, etc., as individual students progress through the education system

Knowledgeable business partners can also defend educators who take a stand against inappropriate uses of data. One common example is the treatment of SAT or ACT test scores as a collective measure of school and district performance, rather than what these tests really are—a measure of student readiness for college. This is a common practice that commands media headlines and realtors' attention nationwide.

The best long-term remedy is, of course, teachers and students who can routinely analyze not only what they are learning, but how. The ability of students to use data to improve their own learning processes is our best hope for enriching the measures selected to evaluate their performance. In the interim, business leaders can support education partners in developing and using more effective data sources, while pointing out to the business community the potential misuses of existing data sources.

B. Reinforce Educators in the Practice of Benchmarking

Benchmarking has become increasingly popular in the corporate world. The ability to baseline one's own management processes, identify "world-class" performers, backtrack into the work processes and practices that produced exemplary results, and then customize and adapt the lessons learned to one's own organization is a valuable means to accelerate improvements. Benchmarking also enables businesses to access information about successful organizational practices across industries.

Educators are beginning to gravitate toward benchmarking because they are eager to share best practices, either within their own networks or with external organizations. If you are a business partner who uses benchmarking, consider working with educators to conduct benchmarking. You can

- Train educators, using process mapping, to convert discrete job functions and programs into cross-functional processes
- Articulate how effective businesses use benchmarking to analyze successful processes for incorporation into your own change efforts
- Support educators to use benchmarking as a methodology in collecting information, making appropriate comparisons, and integrating the results into their change processes. (The items related to benchmarking in Baldrige-based assessments provide a valuable resource)
- Help educators benchmark their core “business” process—instruction—as well as their non-instructional processes with all types of public or private sector entities
- Help fund benchmarking consortia of educators and then support them as they implement process improvements and share the results

6. Be Creative in Defining, Looking for, and Encouraging Positive Results

In education circles today, system redesign issues are being addressed concurrently with defining academic and skill standards that students are expected to meet. The situation is like refitting the wings and engines of an aircraft during flight. Closer to earth, former Illinois School Superintendent Joe Spagnolo compares the challenge of restructuring education to performing a heart transplant on someone running a marathon. Whatever the preferred analogy, the message is the same. In easing this organizational transition, business partners can

A. Confirm Firsthand that Students are Progressing

Business partners need not limit their definition of results to existing quantifiable indicators, such as state test scores. Instead, seek out evidence of students meeting a new standard of learning that will serve them well in work and in life. These competencies include the ability to

- Access information from multiple sources, including the use of technology
- Work collaboratively in self-directed teams

- Understand how they, as students, learn
- Apply what they, as students, are learning to solve practical problems and perform real-world tasks

B. Reinforce Desired Learning Results

Elementary students using control charts and team decision-making tools to improve classroom performance don't know how remarkable their behavior is, but adults do. Business partners who recognize the value of these new learning approaches can do the following:

- Visit classrooms and talk with students to understand and reinforce the importance of such approaches.
- Suggest that educators use performance assessments (active demonstrations of mastery) as part of the assessment process. Use the wisdom and leadership of children to convince adults. Capitalize on the most persuasive tactic in sustaining a long-term improvement strategy: provide a forum for students themselves to demonstrate success.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to learn quality practices so they can instruct others, whether in the classroom or community.
- Convince parents, community leaders, and education policymakers of the value of a collaborative learning environment. Support new ways of learning that do not look familiar to parents and other key stakeholders. Underscore the value of students learning to work together in today's workforce. Explain that the rhetoric of "all children succeeding" does not mean diluted standards, but rather more rigorous expectations for everyone.

7. Use Baldrige Criteria to Evaluate and Improve the Partnership

If business and education partners are using a Baldrige-based quality assessment to improve student and system performance, you should also consider using Baldrige to take stock of your partnership. The seven Baldrige Criteria can serve periodically as a template to assess progress. Or they can act as a starting point for you to frame your own evaluation criteria. For example, in the leadership category, partners can ask

- Who are the leaders of the partnership?
- Are any important leaders missing?
- What roles do current leaders play in the partnership?

- How do leaders maintain a focus on customer needs and priorities?
- What goals and measures have the leaders articulated to assess the partnership?
- How do leaders spend their time, individually and collectively, in promoting quality improvement strategies, processes, and practices?
- Do leaders receive the training they need to upgrade their own leadership skills?
- How do leaders communicate issues to and seek feedback from education's key customers and stakeholders?
- Have the leaders deepened their own organization's commitment to quality practitioners, and have they made outreach efforts to align with other key individuals and entities?
- Have the partners formulated a transition strategy for the inevitability of leadership changes?

Holding up a mirror to any partnership is a healthy practice. Reflecting periodically on these or comparable questions should help business partners stay true to their goals.

8. Align Business-Sponsored Education Improvement Efforts

As suppliers of numerous reform initiatives, business partners may be contributing, unintentionally, to fragmentation of education. It is difficult for educators to refuse the offer of local business assistance. But an offer of help is also an offer of additional work. Therefore, take care not to fragment your education partners by promoting your own company's programs as if they existed in a vacuum. And guard against becoming proprietary about your company's education reform activities. Instead, business and community leaders need to work with educators and each other to align multiple programs and practices.

In the effort to determine the value of their existing partnerships, some companies are realigning their philanthropic and community service activities with their internal workforce development priorities. Companies that can measure and demonstrate the impact of reform initiatives in ways that add to their own bottom line are more likely to stay the course than if their partnerships are viewed as marginal, "nice" but not necessary activities, or "pet projects" of a CEO who may eventually leave the company.

By working collaboratively with other companies, you can

- Pool resources so you do not have to carry the entire business responsibility for the partnership
- Leverage impact more effectively over the long-term
- Encourage small company participation in cases where their business leaders are concerned about the labor-intensive nature of such partnerships

9. Engage Your Own Employees as Parents and School Partners

Business leaders can view their workforce through multiple lenses. Not only are they your employees; they are also parents and potential school partners. Therefore, consider reinforcing your company's business/education partnerships by

- Offering your employees release time to encourage participation in school-based activities
- Encouraging parents who use quality processes and decision-making tools at work to bring such expertise to their school-based decision-making teams and/or provide training to other parents
- Offering training to parent organizations (PTAs) so that their members can participate in quality improvement efforts in the school or district
- Providing opportunities for your employees, as well as other company employees, to share partnership experiences so they can learn from each other and better support school improvement initiatives

Business leaders who align their internal employee policies with corporate education improvement initiatives can achieve two critical objectives: they can expand the scope and depth of their partnership efforts, as well as garner the loyalty and gratitude of their own employees.

10. Maximize the Human Connection

All of the guidelines up to this point have had an organizational and strategic cast. But there is also a critical human dimension involved in improving education. Consequently, the last bit of advice focuses on the people side of partnerships.

Business partners' time and hands-on participation (rather than money) emerge as the key ingredients in the most successful partnerships. Within this context, business partners should make an effort to

A. Build in Opportunities for Reflection

School and district improvement initiatives are evolving works in progress. As they explore new concepts, strategies, and tactics, educators and their partners need some space to invent the future. Business partners can help create support systems to bolster the partnership, reinforce the level of trust among the partners, celebrate success, and provide a non-threatening environment in which to analyze false starts in order not to repeat them.

An informed and involved business partner might evolve into the role of friendly critic. Educators are likely to respond more positively to suggestions if both parties approach the partnership in a collaborative, problem-solving mode.

B. Understand the Intrinsic Motivators in Education

Education is a “people business.” Many individuals enter teaching for the intrinsic reward of working with and improving life opportunities for young people. Access to an empathetic, experienced business partner increases the likelihood that educators, by exploring new ideas and gaining new skills, will succeed in their chosen profession.

Superintendents and principals—education’s “CEOs” and “building managers”—need encouragement and support in developing the expertise to redesign their organizations. Most administrators during their university days were never prepared to manage large, complex organizations called schools and school districts. The capability to oversee continuous improvement cycles based on conducting organizational assessments is a skill that administrators have had to learn on the job, often by partnering with businesses. Business partners may initially perceive educators as recalcitrant, when, in reality, their “resistance” to change may be due to the lack of viable improvement options. Working closely with a business partner can help open up previously unthought-of options for educators.

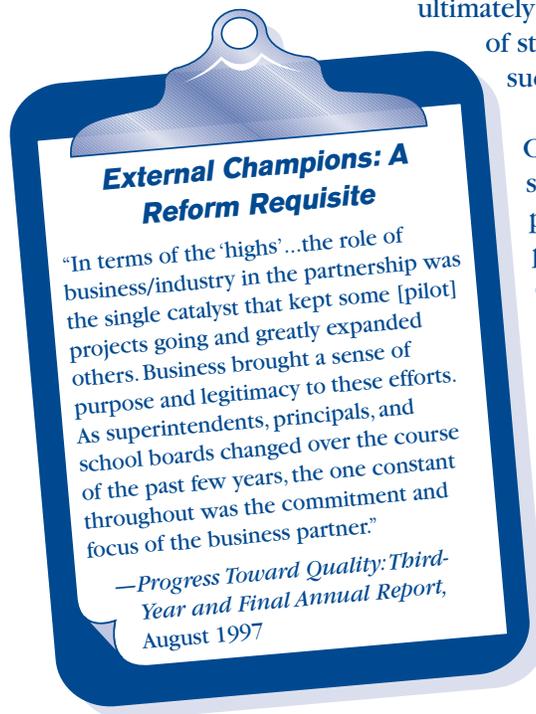
C. Reinforce Intrinsic Motivators on the Business Side

The human connection extends in both directions. Working with schools can make business leaders better at their own jobs. For example, managing diversity is a skill that many private sector managers lack because they have had limited experience. Spending time in schools increases a business

partner's understanding of and appreciation for students—their different cultures and backgrounds—the same individuals who will soon form the backbone of your entering workforce.

It is gratifying to learn that some business partners, even after changing jobs or moving away, choose to stay engaged with their education partners. The reason: their commitment is personal, based on exposure to educators who are willing to devote their own lives to improving opportunities for children.

In crafting partnerships with educators, business leaders should take these human factors into account. Personal relationships—and what they can ultimately accomplish in improving the lives of students—are a critical ingredient in successful reform initiatives.



Consequently, business leaders should do everything in their power to sustain meaningful partnerships with educators. In the end, such a course of action could prove to be your wisest long-term business investment.

A Final Thought

Many business leaders have devoted substantial time and resources to their business/education partnerships. And many are beginning to express increasing frustration at the lack of positive, tangible results. Their frustration is justified, as is the frustration of many educators. What business leaders do next, however, is critical. They can walk away. Or, they can bring to their partnerships the same kind of thinking and practice that revitalized their own companies. For business partners who choose to stay engaged with educators, this report offers evidence of a proven strategy, positive outcomes, and the hope of a promising future.

- ⁴ Appendix B shows the location of the six TQE pilot sites across North Carolina.
- ⁵ Appendix C includes the updated, current version of the formal partnership agreement.
- ⁶ All three annual *Progress Towards Quality* reports contain a discussion of the “principles of quality” that together comprise what W. Edwards Deming called “profound knowledge.” The four principles are (1) systems thinking (independence and interdependence), (2) theory of knowledge (how people learn), (3) theory of psychology (how people think/ behave), and (4) the theory of variation (common and special causes). The three reports also contain detailed information prepared by each pilot site. The reports are a valuable source of information for anyone interested in a detailed account of the three-year R&D effort and can be obtained from the North Carolina Business Committee on Education, Office of the Governor, Administration Building, 116 West Jones Street, Raleigh, North Carolina 27603-8001, (919) 715-3535.
- ⁷ For an intensive treatment of this subject, the reader is directed to Jim Shipley and Chris Collins’ book, *Going to Scale with TQM: The Pinellas County Schools’ Journey Toward Quality*, 1997, SERVE, Publications Department, 1203 Governor’s Square Boulevard, Suite 400, Tallahassee, FL 32301, (800) 352-6001.
- ⁸ The numbers (1.0 through 7.0) refer to the seven Baldrige categories. Each category contains several detailed items requesting organizations to describe how they actually implement improvement efforts and their results. Organizations completing the Baldrige (or their state quality award) application receive a feedback report from external quality experts identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement. This process provides a formal means whereby organizations can evaluate the effectiveness of their long-term improvement efforts. In addition to customizing the Baldrige Criteria for their schools, Pinellas also turned the application scoring guide used by the external examiners into an internal self-assessment continuum for schools and district units to use in baselining their current operations and tracking performance over time.
- ⁹ Interestingly, the Craven County request for assistance from Pinellas County was the first time that the Florida district had been asked to work with staff from another site. The invitation prompted the Quality Academy to provide training to numerous districts, first in North Carolina, then elsewhere across the country, and eventually to state-based organizations, including the Florida and North Carolina state education agencies.
- ¹⁰ Appendix D contains student performance results from the six original sites during the pilot years, as well as more recent data from 1997 and 1998.
- ¹¹ For a more complete account, see “Quality Processes and Tools Improve Writing Scores,” *Quality Schools Network News*, March 1997.
- ¹² National Governors’ Association, *Improving Service Quality: Profiles of Four Governors Who Have Pioneered Major Quality Initiatives*, February 1998. Source: Doug Champion, Director, Office of Management Services, (202) 624-7872.
- ¹³ Appendix B contains a map showing where each of the NCPE partners (as of December 1998) is located.
- ¹⁴ Compiled from the combined notes of Judy White, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and Peggy Siegel.
- ¹⁵ Portions of this section were originally prepared with support from the National Center for Manufacturing Sciences, as part of field research sponsored by the U.S. Air Force.
- ¹⁶ Council on Competitiveness, *Building on Baldrige: American Quality for the 21st Century*, Washington, DC, July 1995. (The Council is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of chief executives from business, higher education, and organized labor committed to improving U.S. economic advantage and standard of living.)

Appendix A:

List of Individuals Interviewed

Olin Broadway Chairman BroadNet, Inc.	Neill McDonald Assistant Superintendent Granville County Schools	Judy S. Phillips Vice President North Carolina Partnership for Excellence
Bob Audette Department of Reading and Elementary Education UNC-Charlotte	Anne Fitz Teacher Mary Potter Elementary School Granville County Schools	Tom McNeel Superintendent Caldwell County Schools
Jane Carrigan UNC-Charlotte	Boyce Falls Lenox China Granville County Schools	Byron R. Lawson Superintendent Bladen County Schools
Shirley Prince Gaston County Schools	Bobby Kanoy UNC-Chapel Hill Granville County Schools	Ann P. Elks Assistant Superintendent Bladen County Schools
Martin A. Eaddy Superintendent Lincoln County Schools	Paul Keene TQE Program Coordinator Granville County Schools	Colette Kennedy Principal Intern Bladen County Schools
Jim Watson Assistant Superintendent Lincoln County Schools	Kelly Jakes & Christi Norwood Students Northern Granville Middle School	Laurie Smith Media Coordinator Bladen County Schools
Virginia Dellinger Board Member Lincoln County Schools	J. Billie Ray, Jr. President-North Carolina Bell South	Patricia Johnson Teacher Bladen County Schools
Skip Steele Business & Planning Manager Duke Energy Lincoln County Schools	Tom Williams Executive Director Office of the Governor— North Carolina Business Committee for Education	Senator Howard N. Lee North Carolina Senate
Sherry A. Hoyle Director of Curriculum and Instruction Lincoln County Schools	G. Thomas Houlihan President & CEO North Carolina Partnership for Excellence	Charles R. Coble University-School Programs Division UNC General Administration
Janice O. Davis Superintendent Granville County Schools		James S. Causby Superintendent Johnston County Schools

Alonzo McCullers
Principal
Corinth Holders Elementary
School
Johnston County Schools

D. Cathy Truitt
Principal
Four Oaks Elementary School
Johnston County Schools

William B. Rivenbark
Superintendent
Craven County Schools

Linda Thomas
Vice Chair
Craven County Board of
Education
Craven County Schools

Janet Furman
Director
Craven County Schools

Janet Peregoy
"Runner"
Craven County Schools

Jo Wheeler
"Runner"
Craven County Schools

Valeria Barrow
Principal
New Bern High School
Craven County Schools

Larry Moser
Principal
Brinson Memorial Elemen-
tary School
Craven County Schools

Brad Sneeden
East Carolina University
Craven County Schools

Greg Williams
Chairman of the Board
First Flight Credit Union
Craven County Schools

Chris Lindelof
Manager
First Flight Credit Union
Craven County Schools

Judy White
Director
Office of Education Reform
North Carolina Department
of Public Instruction

William Smith
Founder
North Carolina Quality
Leadership Foundation

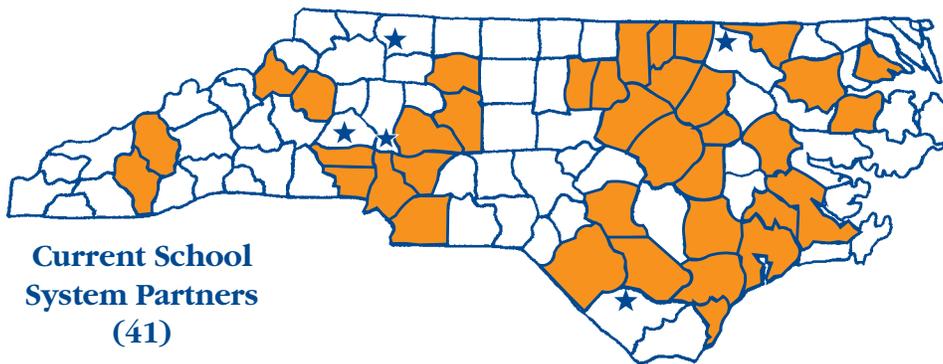
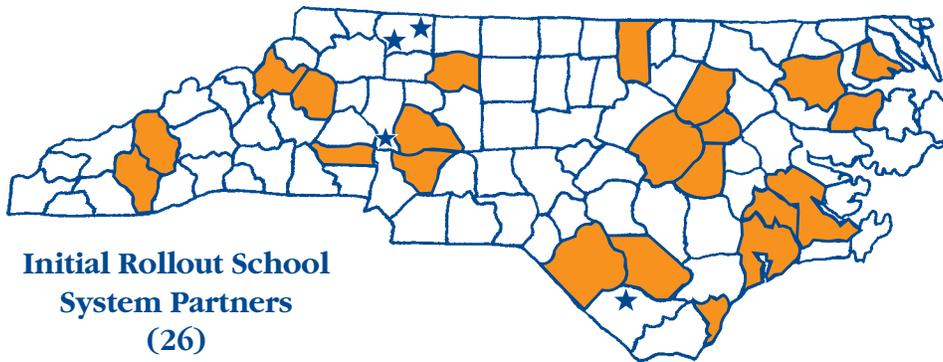
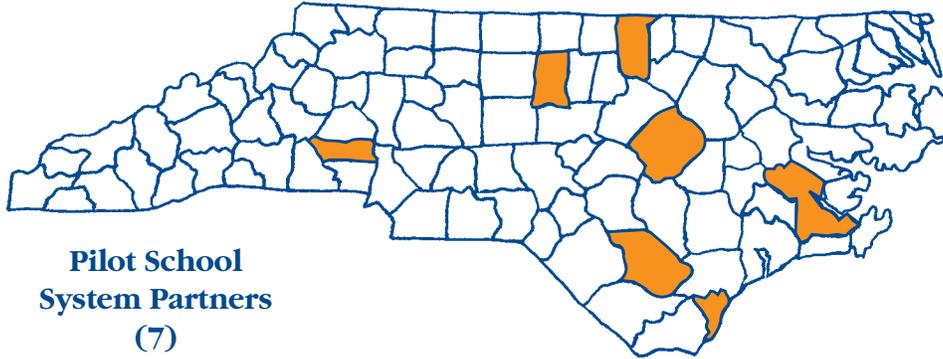
Edgar Murphy
NORTEL Networks
Johnston County Schools

Dale F. Martin
Superintendent
New Hanover Schools

Doug Tuthill
Former President
Pinellas Classroom Teachers
Association
Pinellas County Schools

Jim Shipley
Former Executive Director
Pinellas Quality Academy

Appendix B: Rollout of the NCPE Partner Sites



- counties
- city school systems within a county

Appendix C:

NCPE Quality Schools Partnership Agreement

NORTH CAROLINA PARTNERSHIP FOR EXCELLENCE Quality Schools Partnership Agreement

Whereas, the parties to this agreement recognize and desire to promote continuous improvement as a means to achievement of high performance in the (LEA) so as to ensure that each student:

1. realizes the skills necessary to pursue a life path of their choosing;
2. is capable of pursuing a high-skilled career;
3. possesses learning skills to insure her/his abilities to negotiate changes in career or other life interests;
4. can pursue, as desired, higher levels of education for a lifetime;
5. will play a responsible role as a citizen in her/his community.

Whereas each party will realize significant benefits by such achievement of high performance, each pledges support to the Quality Schools Partnership being established in said local school district. Without the total support of all parties, each realizes the Quality Schools Partnership will likely produce results that will not achieve the intended outcomes.

Whereas, the (LEA) School Board Chairman, the (LEA) Superintendent, the institution of higher education, all pledge their dedicated efforts.

The following requirements are established for the (LEA):

1. Superintendents and board will demonstrate a strong commitment to the partnership through active leadership and participation in the quality planning and training efforts.
2. Procedures will be identified and established to maintain an effective Quality Leadership Council representing the key stakeholders of the system.
3. The system will actively participate in the networking activities of the overall partnership network.
4. Based on the locally developed strategic plan, the system will commit the necessary human and financial resources from all available sources to support the plan.
5. The LEA will complete a system-based self-assessment utilizing the Aligned Management System approach based on the Malcolm Baldrige National Performance Excellence criteria.
6. Periodic updates will be submitted to NCPE on key activities and results as required by the data tracking system developed for annual reporting, including but not limited to work plans, financial reports, and other data.

The following requirements are established for NCPE:

1. Provide leadership for the overall development and coordination of the statewide Quality Schools Partnership efforts with local school systems, businesses, and the higher education community.
2. Assist local school systems, businesses, and communities in developing effective business/education partnership(s) for their quality initiative.
3. Continue to work with statewide leadership in the business, education, and policy-making communities to advance the quality initiative.
4. Continue to assist in identifying and securing human and financial resources to assist with the implementation of the statewide and local plans for quality schools.

The following requirements are established for the (Higher Education) partner:

1. Commit a senior level member of the faculty or administration to serve on the Quality Leadership Council.
2. Identify and commit available resources within the institution to assist the partnership in meeting its strategic plan.
3. Commit to continuing or initiating the application of quality principles in its own organization.
4. Work to identify ways to strengthen and improve the customer—supplier relationship between higher education and local school system communities.

The following requirements are established for the business partner:

1. Commit a senior level officer to serve on the Quality Leadership Council.
2. Identify and provide available resources, expertise, and training opportunities to advance the strategic plan for the LEA.
3. Provide opportunities for its employees and other community members to become knowledgeable of the quality schools partnership and how they can support this effort.
4. Maintain and reinforce its corporate commitment to pursuing quality with its own employees, customers, and suppliers.

All parties agree to accept and enthusiastically exercise their roles by complying with the foregoing requirements. These requirements are enforceable only in spirit of pursuing a high performance environment for our public school system. Copies of this agreement and amendments thereto will remain on file in the office of the North Carolina Partnership for Excellence as well as each of the parties.

School System: _____

LEA Board Chairman: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix D:

School Performance Results for the TQE Pilot Sites, 1993-1998

Progress Toward Quality Results 1998 Trend Analysis—NCBCE-Sponsored Pilot School Systems

Bladen County Schools	1993	1996	1997	1998
Reading* (3-8) =>	55.5	56.3	60.1	63.7
Writing* (4) =>			58.7	
Writing* (7) =>			35.6	
Math* (3-8) =>	52.4	57.2	61.4	69.2
Average Daily Attendance	93.95	94.1	94.5	94.6
SAT Test Scores ^{Note 1}	753	920	896	885
Dropout Rate	3.18	3.84	3.58	

Granville County Schools	1993	1996	1997	1998
Reading* (3-8) =>	61.0	67.5	71.9	73.0
Writing* (4) =>			47.3	
Writing* (7) =>			56.7	
Math* (3-8) =>	53.4	70.0	74.1	77.4
Average Daily Attendance	94.5	94.2	94.1	94.3
SAT Test Scores ^{Note 1}	847	949	963	974
Dropout Rate	1.67	2.58	2.61	

Lincoln County Schools	1993	1996	1997	1998
Reading* (3-8) =>	61.91	66.9	67.1	69.6
Writing* (4) =>			51.5	
Writing* (7) =>			60.4	
Math* (3-8) =>	60.2	69.6	71.0	73.2
Average Daily Attendance	94.75	95.17	95.2	95.5
SAT Test Scores ^{Note 1}	851	965	953	963
Dropout Rate	3.97	3.08	3.2	

continued on next page

* Percent proficient: Trends displayed only when three years of data are available. Due to change in testing procedures, 1998 writing data are not included.

SAT Note 1: SAT scores re-centered in 1995 and first reported in 1996. Dropout rate information for 1998 is available in January 1999.

Data Source, Performance Data, State Report Cards: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Craven County Schools	1993	1996	1997	1998
Reading* (3-8) =>	65.8	74.1	76.6	80.5
Writing* (4) =>			52.4	
Writing* (7) =>			53.2	
Math* (3-8) =>	61.3	73.4	75.6	79.2
Average Daily Attendance	94.58	95.0	95.1	94.8
SAT Test Scores ^{Note 1}	856	951	986	996
Dropout Rate	2.31	2.50	2.40	

Johnston County Schools	1993	1996	1997	1998
Reading* (3-8) =>	65.2	72.2	76.2	81.3
Writing* (4) =>			42.1	
Writing* (7) =>			40.2	
Math* (3-8) =>	52.4	57.2	80.1	85.1
Average Daily Attendance	95.19	94.7	94.7	94.9
SAT Test Scores ^{Note 1}	836	950	960	963
Dropout Rate	2.67	4.06	3.53	

New Hanover County Schools	1993	1996	1997	1998
Reading* (3-8) =>	70.5	73.0	75.7	78.6
Writing* (4) =>			53.1	
Writing* (7) =>			65.3	
Math* (3-8) =>	69.3	74.8	79.0	81.5
Average Daily Attendance	93.7	94.8	94.1	94.1
SAT Test Scores ^{Note 1}	863	1,001	1,004	1,011
Dropout Rate	4.06	3.41	3.69	

Appendix E:

The ABCs Plus: North Carolina's Strategic Plan for Excellent Schools, Mission, and Priorities

Mission

North Carolina's public schools will create a system that will be customer-driven with local flexibility to achieve mastery of core skills with high levels of accountability in areas of student achievement.

—North Carolina Board of Education, April 10, 1996

<p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Priority <i>High Student Performance</i></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Goals</p> <hr/> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1 Every child ready to learn1.2 Rigorous and relevant academic standards and assessment systems1.3 Mastery of essential knowledge and skills by every student1.4 Every student prepared for continuous learning and career readiness	<p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Priority <i>Safe and Orderly Schools</i></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Goals</p> <hr/> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1 Learning environments inviting and supportive of high student performance2.2 Schools free of controlled and illegal substances and all harmful behavior2.3 Mutual respect of students, teachers, administrators, and parents2.4 Adequate, safe education facilities that support high student performance
<p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Priority <i>Quality Teachers, Administrators, and Staff</i></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Goals</p> <hr/> <ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1 Professional preparation aligned with state priorities3.2 A system to recruit, retain, and compensate a diverse corps of quality teachers, administrators, and staff3.3 A system to ensure high performance of teachers, administrators, and staff3.4 A system of continuous learning and professional development to support high performance of all employees3.5 High ethical and professional standards for all employees	<p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Priority <i>Effective and Efficient Operation</i></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Goals</p> <hr/> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4.1 Components of the education system aligned to achieve high performance4.2 Decision-making authority and control at the most appropriate level closest to the classroom4.3 Internal and external partnerships promoted and aligned to state goals4.4 Information and accountability systems capable of reporting strategic and operational results4.5 A funding system to provide adequate and aligned financial and personnel resources to maximize educational achievement

Note: Applications of technology and information management systems will be integral to strategies undertaken in support of the strategic goals.

Appendix F:

Resource List

North Carolina Partnership for Excellence

P.O. Box 2383
Smithfield, NC 27577
(919) 989-7978
www.ncpe-online.org

North Carolina Business Commit- tee for Education

Office of the Governor
116 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27603-8001
(919) 715-3535

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Communications Services
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601
(919) 615-1246

North Carolina Quality Leadership Foundation

4904 Professional Court
Suite 100
Raleigh, NC 27609
(919) 872-8198
(800) 207-5485

Pinellas Quality Academy

Pinellas County Schools
301 4th Street, SW
Largo, FL 33770
(727) 588-6295

Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award

National Institute of Standards
and Technology
100 Bureau Drive, Stop 1020
Administration Building
Room A635
Gaithersburg, MD 20899-1020
(301) 975-2036

National Alliance of Business

Member Service Center
1201 New York Avenue, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005
(800) 787-2848

About SERVE

SERVE is an education organization with the mission to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. To further this mission, SERVE engages in research and development that address education issues of critical importance to educators in the region and provides technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs that are striving for comprehensive school improvement. This critical research-to-practice linkage is supported by an experienced staff strategically located throughout the region. This staff is highly skilled in providing needs assessment services, conducting applied research in schools, and developing processes, products, and programs that inform educators and increase student achievement.

As the new millennium approaches, SERVE is preparing to address emerging 21st-century issues, such as persistent achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, massive teacher training needs, a rising numbers of limited English proficient students. Committed to a shared vision of the future of education in the region, the SERVE organization is governed by a board of directors that includes the governors, chief state school officers, and key legislators from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and representative teachers and private sector leaders. SERVE's core component is the Regional Educational Laboratory program. SERVE is one of ten organizations, funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, that provide the services of the Regional Educational Laboratory program to all 50 states and territories. These Laboratories form a knowledge network, building a bank of information and resources shared nationally and disseminated regionally to improve student achievement locally. SERVE has additional funding from the Department in the areas of Migrant Education and School Leadership and is the lead agency in the Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Consortium for the Southeast and the Southeast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium.

Based on these funded efforts, SERVE has developed a portfolio of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding to local, regional, and national needs. Program areas include

- Assessment, Accountability, and Standards
- Children, Families, and Communities

- Education Policy
- Improvement of Science and Mathematics Education
- The Initiative on Teachers and Teaching
- School Development and Reform
- Technology in Learning

SERVE's National Speciality Area is Early Childhood Education, and the staff of SERVE's Program for Children, Families, and Communities has developed the expertise and the ability to provide leadership and support to the early childhood community nationwide for children from birth to age eight.

In addition to the program areas, the SERVE Evaluation Department supports the evaluation activities of the major grants and contracts and provides evaluation services to SEAs and LEAs in the region. Through its Publishing and Quality Assurance Department, SERVE publishes a variety of studies, training materials, policy briefs, and program products. These informative and low-cost publications include guides to available resources, summaries of current issues in education policy, and examples of exemplary educational programs. Through its programmatic, evaluation, and publishing activities, SERVE also provides contracted staff development and technical assistance in many areas of expertise to assist education agencies in achieving their school improvement goals.

SERVE's main office is at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, with major staff groups located in Tallahassee, Florida, and Atlanta, Georgia. Policy advisors are assigned to each state department of education in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Current and detailed information on any of the program and service areas noted here may be found on SERVE's site on the World Wide Web at www.serve.org.

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Assessment HotSpots (Volume 1, Number 1)	MAAHS	\$8.00
Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Status of the Issue	ECESI	\$1.00
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Ed Talk: What We Know About Reading Teaching and Learning	EDRTL	\$7.00
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Aligning Education Rhetoric, Resolve, and Results

Lessons from North Carolina

What does it mean to be a good leader and manager in today's schools and districts? In answering this question, some schools, districts, and states have looked to the business community and explored their use of Total Quality Management (TQM). In a prior publication entitled, *Going to Scale with TQM: The Pinellas County Schools' Journey Toward Quality*, SERVE described how one Florida district used training in TQM as a foundation for its reform efforts. Interestingly, over the last few years, leaders from Pinellas County have been sharing their experiences with a coalition of North Carolina educators, business leaders, and policymakers. To support educators in the Southeast in their pursuit of quality leadership and management, SERVE encouraged the North Carolina Total Quality in Education (TQE) Initiative to tell its story. This SERVE publication represents the reflections of those involved in the North Carolina Initiative, and it is intended for business and education leaders interested in exploring a model of how they might work together to create "high-performing" educational organizations.