

JIM SHIPLEY & ASSOCIATES

Integrated Systems Solutions

Public School System Trying Business Model in Education

By JAMICÁ C. ASHLEY
STAFF WRITER

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Edgecombe County Public Schools are setting out to prove that a school can be run like a business and be successful at it.

"We were looking for a model that would allow children to become owners of their own educations and keep them up with state testing," said Susan Hughes, the ECPS director of strategic planning and grants.

The Baldrige Model was developed by former U.S. Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige and was originally applied to business. It was later modified in the mid-1990s for educational use. The Baldrige Model uses self-assessment to help students achieve.

Hughes is responsible for securing funding for the implementation of the model. State Farm Insurance Agencies awarded ECPS with \$48,000 in June of this year to help implement this program. Hughes is currently in the process of writing a grant to secure a \$100,000 grant from State Farm Insurance Agencies

for the 2006-07 year.

"It makes the kids work harder than the teachers," Hughes said. "It puts processes into place that push high performing schools higher.

"Pattillo had pretty much leveled off as far as achievement goes and they wanted to try something new," said Hughes. "They were interested because of the results from other schools like theirs and other schools that had used the model."

W.A. Pattillo A+ School is undergoing its second year using this model for teaching. Since it was introduced two years ago, students' have shown continually improvement and enthusiasm about learning.

"Once the students started getting involved, in knowing their assessments and knowing how to improve their own reading they started to improve," said Cheryl Olmsted, principal of Pattillo.

School officials visited Olmsted and her staff last month from Granville County Public Schools who wanted to see Baldrige in action. It was reported that they liked what they saw and are working on implementing the Model within their system. Pattillo participated in site visits in

New Bern prior to using Baldrige and her staff came back "on fire". "There were truly excited," Olmsted said. "Nearly the entire staff went. I can't remember seeing them that excited."

Olmsted said that she has also seen a difference in her students now that they have a better understanding of their learning.

"They see why they're doing what we've been asking them to do," she said. "We're teaching them how to know when they've learned something. Once you teach them how to learn, other subjects will come easier to them."

Goals are set on a system wide, school wide and on the classroom levels. Students then set their own goals, which are in line with previous goals. Students maintain data folders, which they update, that track their progress. Graphs are used to show where a student is in comparison to their goal so they can easily identify areas that need improvement.

The walls of Pattillo are dotted with graphs depicting the school's progress against other schools within Edgecombe County and classes

against other classes in areas such as the Accelerated Reader program and end-of-grade math scores.

“Success is not a mystery any more. Students start with the end in mind, knowing what is expected at the end of the lesson,” Hughes said. “Teachers are given more flexibility to look at data to regroup children to help them get where they need to be.”

ECPS is focusing on creating an environment of continuous improvement by systematically introducing the Baldrige Model into all 16 of its schools. The goal is to have all Edgecombe County schools using this model by 2008.

Faculty at Tarboro High School and West Edgecombe Middle School are undergoing Baldrige training and some have been working closely with staff from Pattillo to learn how it’s done.

“We’ve broken the barrier that was between Tarboro city and Edgecombe County schools,” said Olmsted. “They really do call each other and talk and share with each other. We’ve even begun working together on things like staff development and training sessions.”

West Edgecombe Principal Kathy Bradley admits that she was not initially impressed with the proposition that to her sounded a lot like total quality management, but after hearing the testimonials of staff and administrators she quickly changed her mind. “At first I thought a business model had nothing to do with teaching a 12 year old how to read, but now I know its all about teaching a 12 year old how to read,” Bradley said. “After listening to experienced teachers and administrators talk about how it works, I believe that this is the one thing to push us to excellence.”

Sixteen teachers at West have been piloting Baldrige in their classrooms – either fully or partially. Marie Mullins, a seventh grade teacher, recently started using the program and is excited about the opportunities for success it may bring.

“I expect the students to be able to see the data and make them aware of their performance,” said Mullins. “But I am excited about it. I felt a little overwhelmed at first with the tracking, but it’s falling into place more now.”

Mullins and most of her students are pleased with the model. Over half of Mullins’s class believes that Baldrige will make a difference in their grades by the end of the year.

Darlene Manley, 13 and Anika Manning, 13 are both students in Mullins’s class and

have been using the model. They agree that this has made a difference in their learning.

“It’s helped me a lot,” Manley said. “Its an easier way to see my grades.”

“It shows me if I need help in some things and what I need to pull my grades up in,” said Manning.

“It’s not criticism, its looking at ways to make everything that is being done be done more efficiently,” said Bradley. “It’s the most student-centered program I’ve seen in education. Having to put their progress in graphic form with pencil and paper helps drive it home. The students understand how they are doing.”

Olmsted hopes to have her students within the mid-90s percentile range for end-of-grade performance within the next three to four years.

“Baldrige forces the school to meet the student, not the student meet the school,” said Olmsted.