

# La Crosse - Winona

## Section Newsletter

October, 2008

### October Meeting: Holmen School District's Journey in Continuous Improvement

Location: Holmen District Office, 1019 McHugh Rd, Holmen, WI  
 When: Tuesday, October 21, 5:30pm  
 Phone: 608.526.6610

Excerpt from the article *Wisconsin School District Captures State Quality Awards by Collaborating for Continuous Improvement* by Janet Jacobsen, published August 2008 by ASQ ([www.asq.org](http://www.asq.org)):

When Dr. Lisa Snyder became principal at Viking Elementary in 2002, the school was the lowest performer in the district and there were real concerns about achievement gaps and systems alignment. While random acts of excellence were evident in the school, the staff wasn't working collaboratively to serve its students. With 38 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunches, Viking was eligible for a comprehensive school reform grant from the state of Wisconsin. Perhaps equally significant to the grant's three-year \$150,000 annual award was the requirement to implement a research-based continuous improvement framework, which continues to fuel a culture of excellence throughout the district.

#### About the School District of Holmen, WI:

The School District of Holmen, located in southwestern Wisconsin, is composed of six municipalities just north of La Crosse near the Mississippi River. Approximately 335 certified staff members serve nearly 3,600 students, with another 240 people employed in full- or part-time support services roles. An ASQ K-12 Organizational member, Holmen is a generous leader in sharing its continuous improvement experiences with other school districts both near and far.

If you would like to read the entire article, it is attached to the October 2008 La Crosse – Winona Section newsletter, or it is available here: <http://www.asq.org/2008/08/baldrige-national-quality-program/district-captures-state-awards-by-collaborating.pdf>

Change agents Sandy Richert, Lisa Snyder, Teri Staloch, and Rick Johnson will present an interactive storyboard on the Holmen School District's journey in continuous improvement, and what that journey looks like in education. We will meet in the Holmen District Office Boardroom at 5:30. The District Office is located at the corner of McHugh Road and Briggs Road, just off Highway 53 and next to the HS. There is a parking lot on the lower level where the Boardroom is located. Dinner at Features Sports Bar and Grill to follow the meeting, 504 N. Holmen Dr. (map on page 2).

Cost: \$15.00 for members and guests, \$8.00 for students with ID. Please RSVP by replying to the Evite, or contact Shannon Hunt directly at: [shannon.hunt@bench.com](mailto:shannon.hunt@bench.com)

Pay for this meeting and other events with **PayPal™**  
 on the section website: <http://asq1216.homestead.com/SectMtgs.html>

### Note from the Editor

Hello fellow members of the La Crosse – Winona ASQ section! If you have comments or suggestions regarding newsletter content, please do not hesitate to contact me. I'm always looking for content, so if you have a submission you would like to make please forward it to [lynn.keller@bench.com](mailto:lynn.keller@bench.com).

Best Regards,  
 Lynn Keller, Newsletter Editor

#### Quotes:

I've learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not on our circumstances.

— Martha Washington

When you make a mistake, don't look back at it long. Take the reason of the thing into your mind, and then look forward. Mistakes are lessons of wisdom. The past cannot be changed. The future is yet in your power.

— Phyllis Bottome

To the man who only has a hammer, everything he encounters begins to look like a nail.

— Abraham H. Maslow

#### Quality Link of the Month:

<http://www.holmen.k12.wi.us/se3bin/clientgenie.cgi>



## Map of October Section Meeting Location



## Save the Date for These 2009 Wisconsin Forward Award Events!



**January 21 & 22 OR January 27 & 28:**

WFA Examiner Preparation Course - Download an application for the 2009 Board of Examiners at <http://www.forwardaward.org/materials/2009%20Examiner%20Application.doc>

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2008**

**January 27 & 28:**

2009 Criteria Seminar with Dr. Mark Blazey

**February 26 & 27:**

2009 Excellence at Work Conference

**Wisconsin Forward Award**  
2909 Landmark Place, Suite 110  
Madison, WI 53713

<http://www.forwardaward.org>

## National Quality Month Reinforces Critical Role of Quality in Every Industry

### ASQ President Encourages Reflection on Current Quality Systems

Milwaukee, Wis., September 25, 2008 –Twenty-four years may have passed since National Quality Month was first proclaimed by President Ronald Reagan in 1984, yet there are still many quality-related issues we face on a daily basis— food safety, toy recalls, the mortgage industry crisis and the subsequent current financial turmoil. As a reminder of the critical role that quality can play in solving many cross-industry problems, it is important to recognize and celebrate the United States' commitment to quality during National Quality Month this October.

“One only needs to read the headlines we've seen over the past year to understand and acknowledge the critical importance that quality concepts and processes can play in today's business landscape,” said Roberto Saco, president of ASQ. “I applaud the commitment of companies everywhere that are reaping the rewards of their quality systems, and encourage others to reflect on their current quality strategies to ensure they are optimized for future success.”

National Quality Month focuses on the strategic importance of quality and continuous improvement. It also strengthens the commitment to quality and performance excellence by organizations across the country. Many organizations have created their own special events, and recognition programs, in an effort to convey the strategic impact of quality on every industry for National Quality Month.

Started by the American Society for Quality (ASQ) in 1984, October became National Quality Month with a joint resolution by Congress and a proclamation by President Ronald Reagan. In 1989, Congress and President George Bush reaffirmed the original legislation and recognized quality as a national priority. President Bill Clinton continued the tradition of presidential support with yearly letters that applaud ASQ's efforts in promoting quality awareness.

The American Society for Quality, [www.asq.org](http://www.asq.org), has been the world's leading authority on quality for more than 60 years. With more than 90,000 individual and organizational members, the professional association advances learning, quality improvement and knowledge exchange to improve business results, and to create better workplaces and communities worldwide. As a champion of the quality movement, ASQ offers technologies, concepts, tools and training to quality professionals, quality practitioners and everyday consumers, encouraging all to Make Good Great®. ASQ has been the sole administrator of the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award since 1991. Headquartered in Milwaukee, Wis., ASQ is a founding partner of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), a prominent quarterly economic indicator, and also produces the Quarterly Quality Report.

## Writing at Work: E-mail Ethics

We tend to assume that the Internet is a place where rules of right and wrong can be temporarily relaxed. This is wrong, Wrong, WRONG! If it's unethical in our daily lives, it's unethical in e-mail messages.

### Unethical E-Mail Behaviors

- Purposely embarrass someone. You broadcast an e-mail that you know will embarrass or damage the reputation of another person. You plan to claim it was an unfortunate accident.
- Purposely mislead someone. You write an e-mail message with a lot of ambiguity to mislead someone or delay their reaction. You plan to claim you actually thought your wording was clear.
- Purposely omit someone. You send an e-mail to a group of people, but omit someone to get him in trouble. You plan to claim it was a simple mistake.
- Don't respond right away. You know you should respond right away to an e-mail, but you delay responding to deprive the sender of timely information.
- Don't respond at all. You know you should respond to an e-mail, but you choose not to, just to offend the sender.
- Alter the header of a previous e-mail. You change something in the header of a forwarded e-mail to misrepresent the date, sender, or subject of the original message.
- Alter the message of a previous e-mail. You change the words in the text of a forwarded or excerpted e-mail to mislead the recipient.

As an employee, you have a duty to avoid doing things that could get your employer in trouble. You even have the duty to avoid behaviors that give the appearance of company wrongdoing.

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### **Dereliction of Duties via E-Mail**

- Send or forward nudge-nudge, wink-wink e-mails. Your employer can get clobbered with harassment lawsuits if you send messages that joke about race, gender, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation.
- Share confidential information with an outsider. Your employer could lose its legal rights to control that information. Also, if the recipient does something unethical with that information, your employer could wind up in the middle of an expensive investigation.
- Suddenly change how you save or delete e-mails. If your employer's e-mail server is ever seized as part of a lawsuit, your sudden change will be flagged and could spawn a whole new investigation. For example, if you suddenly delete all your e-mail from a friend you think might be in trouble, all you're doing is making things look worse.

You are definitely crossing the line if you hint at or do something illegal via e-mail. A solid clue that you are heading in this direction is finding yourself typing sentences like:

..... Can we get away with it? .....

..... They'll never find out. ....

..... Do NOT tell Bob. ....

..... This might not be legal. ....

And try to avoid the shady e-mails about e-mails, such as this warning to a colleague from a prominent banker on Wall Street:

..... Shut up and delete this e-mail. ....

If you have even the smallest concern about the legality of an e-mail you're writing, consider that lawyers have a new name for e-mail: evidence mail.

Always remember that e-mail is like any other written communication: subject to subpoena. If there is a golden rule for e-mail use at work it is this:

*Before sending an e-mail, ask yourself, "How would my boss feel if this message appeared on the front page of a newspaper?"*

You'd be surprised how often this actually happens.

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*The author, Joseph Judge, teaches business writing and licenses his training material at [Proofread.com](http://Proofread.com). This series of articles is published with permission from the author.*

## **ASQ Section 1216 Tour of S&S<sup>®</sup> Cycle in La Crosse, Wisconsin September 18, 2008**

By Eric Derbyshire, Internet Liaison, ASQ Section 1216

25 Section members toured S&S<sup>®</sup> Cycle in La Crosse, Wisconsin, on September 18, 2008. The tour was a revving success that was enjoyed by all!

S&S<sup>®</sup> Cycle was started by George and Marjorie Smith in Blue Island (Chicago), Illinois, in 1958. George Smith had a clear and simple vision: "I want to make all bikes go faster." The company still shares that vision and has grown to be the world's most respected manufacturer of high-performance engines and components for v-twin motorcycles. S&S<sup>®</sup> leads the industry in designing, developing, producing, marketing, and selling high-performance products and assemblies by understanding and exceeding their customers' expectations. S&S<sup>®</sup> Cycle celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008.

In 1969 S&S<sup>®</sup> was relocated to Viola, Wisconsin, a location chosen by George and Marjorie Smith for its scenic beauty and farming/ranching potential, another passion of theirs. S&S<sup>®</sup> Cycle's main research, development, and manufacturing facilities are still located at "The Ranch" in Viola, with 135,000 square feet of space. The La Crosse facilities, with 166,000 square feet of space, opened in 2004 to better serve S&S<sup>®</sup> customers by increasing manufacturing capacity, reducing order leadtime with strategic stock additions, and providing expert product training to S&S<sup>®</sup> independent dealers.

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S&S® Cycle is a privately-held business with approximately 200 employees. S&S® does business around the globe, reaching consumer markets through independent dealers and distributors and selling direct to OEMs, such as Big Dog Motorcycle®, Big Bear Choppers®, Orange County Choppers®, West Coat Choppers®, and Arlen Ness Motorcycles®.

The ASQ tour was led by Michael Scaletta, S&S® Director of Business Development, and grandson of George and Marjorie Smith. Scaletta, accompanied by Steve Gregoire, Quality Manager, and Jan Smith, Emissions Engineer, motored through a lot of ground on the tour, showcasing the manufacturing, warehousing, shipping, emissions laboratory, returns, dealer training, and customer service areas. The emissions lab was a special treat; Section members were exposed to the equipment, processes, and procedures used by S&S® to achieve EPA and State of California Air Resources Board certifications for their motors and systems. Smith explained how the S&S® emissions lab is used by their R&D and Operations teams in the design, development, and testing of new and sustaining power plants.

S&S® Cycle uses a formal quality system but does not currently have industry certifications or registrations. According to Gregoire, S&S® will pursue industry quality certifications, such as ISO 9000, if their customers find value in the certifications and drive the need. S&S® leverages its suppliers heavily for the delivery of quality components and assemblies. Minimal inspection is done at Receiving but S&S® trains its line workers to understand quality requirements and isolate and communicate any problems they encounter.

S&S® Cycle has a unique warranty return department. It is a profit center that generates sufficient earnings to offset warranty return costs. This is achieved by generating sales revenue and profits from the repair and rebuilding of non-warranty engine returns. Given the nature of S&S® Cycle's business, consumers sometimes perform their own work without the proper knowledge and equipment and inadvertently damage their S&S® engine. In those cases, the consumer returns his engine to S&S® through his dealer for non-warranty repair. S&S® has capitalized on this situation to their advantage, an example of their resourcefulness and commitment to the customer.



Left to Right:  
Steve Gregoire, Quality Manager  
Michael Scaletta, Director of Business Development  
Jan Smith, Emissions Engineer



At Left: A custom motorcycle on display at S&S® Cycle in La Crosse, Wisconsin. This motorcycle was built by West Coat Choppers® with an S&S® Cycle engine and other S&S® performance parts.

For more information on S&S® Cycle visit <http://www.sscycle.com/>.

After the tour of S&S® Cycle, the Section members adjourned to Ardie's Restaurant, family-owned and operated in La Crosse since 1970, for dinner and networking. The food was good and so was the company.

## All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten

Last week was a big transformation for my family, as my five-year old began his multi-decade journey of formal education. As my wife and I dropped him off on his first day of Kindergarten, I watched him for awhile, and some of his behaviors -- believe it or not -- made me think about leadership and change. He is naturally outgoing and extraverted, but the way in which he immediately adjusted to the new environment – new building, new figures of authority, new rules, new playmates, new everything – demonstrated some characteristics that we would desire to see in leaders and other professionals. Traits like courage, taking risks, being flexible, listening, getting along. And it got me thinking about the essay some 20 years ago (Fulghum's "All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten") and how it applies to leadership and business in general...

I guess kids are different than adults. Not just in the obvious ways, but in many instructive ways regarding social behavior and personality. Let me provide an example. I took my other child (she just turned four) to a birthday party with a bunch of her 3, 4, and 5-year old friends. They all were congregating, doing what kids do – laughing, chasing, having fun (ok, I'll stop there: that behavior in and of itself was different than most business meetings that I've attended). But I noticed several other things in the 5-10 brief minutes I spent dropping her off:

- The kids didn't have prejudices – they all played with everyone.
- They weren't afraid of new kids – they eagerly absorbed new playmates into the group.
- They weren't afraid of taking risks – when the formal games were starting, everyone was eager to participate even though the experience was new and unfamiliar. One example was particularly telling for me. As I was leaving and the host parents were beginning to start an organized game, I heard them ask for a volunteer from the 10 kids in the room. Guess how many hands shot up – yes, all 10. How many times does this happen in a business meeting?
- They communicated very effectively – even if somewhat in their own language and vernacular, there appeared to be no disagreements or misunderstandings. They did have some trouble listening to one another, but amazingly, they communicated really well...without hidden agendas, subtle innuendos, or sarcasm.
- They had fun – they laughed and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

All of these behaviors seem to come natural for kids, and all of them are important skills for business. But somewhere along the way we lose some of our social skills – our ability to communicate, our capacity to take risks, our skills of inclusion, and our ability to laugh and have fun (at least as frequently as kids do). It's a shame really, because these skills would serve us all well during meetings, during projects, and during day-to-day interactions with colleagues, customers, and partners. But I believe some of those skills can be re-honed later in life.

Last week in our Minneapolis Performance Improvement Network session, Karen Ford, a partner at Pecos Consulting, shared some insights on what's required (for adults) to succeed. Her talk was entitled "Playing to Win! Go as far as you can, given all you've been given," and it focused on many of the skills that seem to come natural in kids – like positive thinking and taking risks (copies of her slides are at [http://www.councilforquality.org/performance\\_archive.cfm](http://www.councilforquality.org/performance_archive.cfm)).

She drew the stark contrast between playing NOT to lose versus playing to win. Playing not to lose involves playing it safe, avoiding risks, focusing on looking good (we call that "CYA" in business), competing internally (there are win/lose relationships between departments, between people, etc.), having a mindset of scarcity, and having a prevailing emotion of fear. Obviously, these tendencies are not healthy, serve to sub-optimize resources, and create an environment of mediocrity – or at least sub-optimal performance. Karen also admits that the reason why we do this (ironically enough) is school! Think about those hungry, enthusiastic kids...when the teacher asks the class a question and someone takes a risk with the answer but gets it wrong, what happens? Sure: the class laughs and teases. Over time, risk-taking is stifled and we get ourselves into the pattern of playing not to lose.

Contrast that with a philosophy of playing to win. Playing to win means:

- Getting out of your comfort zone. Imagine a five-year-old on the first day of school. What could be absolutely terrifying seems to be a relatively easy transition for most Kindergartners.

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- Take calculated risks. Of course, don't be foolish – data, instinct, and experience still play major roles in calculated risk-taking. But if you “always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten.”
- Feed your opportunities and starve your problems. Put yourself in a position of positive opportunities and work to eliminate (or reduce) your negative challenges.
- Celebrate mistakes. Mistakes are indeed gifts, so long as you learn from them and move forward.
- Offer support instead of “Zingers.” In the language of a Kindergartner, “play nice.”
- Assume abundance. Rather than believing there are winners and losers in business, strive for the “and” rather than the “or.” In other words, seek the path that everyone wins.

What great advice. As individuals, if we were to all follow those suggestions, we'd have a much stronger chance of frequent success. As leaders, if we were to create an environment that fosters those suggestions above, think about how much more successful our employees (and organizations) would be!

By the way, at the end of my Kindergartner's first day of school, my wife and I were waiting for him at the bus stop. He came bouncing off the bus, backpack and lunchbox in tow and declared: “this was the best day of my life.” I wish we all could adjust to change and take risks like five year olds!

Yours in Improvement,

Brian S. Lassiter  
President, Minnesota Council for Quality  
<http://www.councilforquality.org>

### **Post Script**

For those of you interested in the essay “All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten,” it was written by Robert Fulghum in 1989. It spent all of that year and much of 1990 on the New York Times Bestseller list (it was the second longest #1 bestseller in 23 years). I've reprinted it below for your enjoyment.

*Most of what I really need to know about how to live, and what to do, and how to be, I learned in Kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sandbox at nursery school.*

*These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work some every day.*

*Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the plastic cup. The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.*

*Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the plastic cup - they all die. So do we.*

*And then remember the book about Dick and Jane and the first word you learned, the biggest word of all: LOOK . Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation, ecology and politics and sane living.*

*Think of what a better world it would be if we all - the whole world - had cookies and milk about 3 o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other nations to always put things back where we found them and clean up our own messes. And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.*

## 2008-2009 LA CROSSE - WINONA SECTION BOARD ASQ SECTION 1216

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[HTTP://WWW.ASQ1216.HOMESTEAD.COM/](http://www.asq1216.homestead.com/)

### Parting Thoughts:

A Native American elder once described his own inner struggles in this manner:

"Inside of me there are two dogs. One of the dogs is mean and evil. The other dog is good. The mean dog fights the good dog all the time."

When asked which dog wins, he reflected for a moment and replied, "The one I feed the most."



# Wisconsin School District Captures State Quality Awards by Collaborating for Continuous Improvement

by Janet Jacobsen

### At a Glance . . .

- Six years ago significant achievement gaps at Viking Elementary School in Holmen, WI, led the school to apply for and subsequently receive a state school reform grant.
- The grant stipulated that recipients commit to a continuous improvement framework. To comply, Viking adopted the Malcolm Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence.
- The continuous improvement effort, based on the Baldrige framework, eventually spread throughout the district. The plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycle and a sharp focus on teacher collaboration to maximize student achievement were key factors in the improvement journey.
- In 2004, Viking Elementary became the first K-12 applicant for the Wisconsin Forward Award, a statewide Baldrige-based program, and in doing so earned a Proficiency Level Award.
- Then just one year later, Holmen Middle School captured a Wisconsin Forward Award at the Commitment Level.

When Dr. Lisa Snyder became principal at Viking Elementary in 2002, the school was the lowest performer in the district and there were real concerns about achievement gaps and systems alignment. While random acts of excellence were evident in the school, the staff wasn't working collaboratively to serve its students. With 38 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunches, Viking was eligible for a comprehensive school reform grant from the state of Wisconsin. Perhaps equally significant to the grant's three-year \$150,000 annual award was the requirement to implement a research-based continuous improvement framework, which continues to fuel a culture of excellence throughout the district.

### About the School District of Holmen, WI

The School District of Holmen, located in southwestern Wisconsin, is composed of six municipalities just north of La Crosse near the Mississippi River. Approximately 335 certified staff members serve nearly 3,600 students, with another 240 people employed in full- or part-time support services roles. An ASQ K-12 Organizational member, Holmen is a generous leader in sharing its continuous improvement experiences with other school districts both near and far.

### All Aboard the Baldrige Train

Faced with selecting a continuous improvement framework to meet the grant requirements, district leaders ultimately chose the Baldrige education criteria. "We felt the Baldrige framework had the most potential to help us identify the root causes of our achievement gaps and to move forward in a clear and united way," explains Snyder, who now serves as principal at Holmen Middle School.

Viking's pilot implementation was the district's first systematic approach to process improvement. Rick Johnson, the district's pupil services director, notes that earlier improvement efforts simply resulted in silos of excellence where some processes were effective but were not linked to an overall system. "It was hard to measure performance because we really didn't know our performance targets," recalls Johnson.

With the bulk of the Baldrige implementation effort taking place at Viking, bringing the district's five other schools on board took time. Superintendent Dr. Fred Frick understood that fully embracing the Baldrige framework districtwide was crucial to engaging all schools in the process. Johnson remembers a turning point four years ago when Frick announced to a district leadership team, "The Baldrige train is leaving the station and you had better be on it."

Holmen leadership believed the Baldrige framework was a good fit for the district as a whole because:

- The focus is on teaching and learning.
- It stimulates the use of learning-related research.

- The framework offers the potential to expand the body of knowledge of successful teaching and learning practices.
- Using the framework connects the district with a network of quality schools facing similar challenges.

## Utilizing the PDSA Cycle to Fuel Continuous Improvement

By the summer of 2006, Holmen teachers and administrators were familiar with quality tools and a continuous improvement philosophy, but most had little or no experience in using tools in an integrated problem-solving approach. At this point the district began working to ensure that every leader and supervisor would become confident and comfortable in facilitating the plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycle at his or her school or program level. ASQ instructor Ann Haggerty-Raines presented a week-long intensive PDSA cycle and tool introduction course to a group of teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists. Haggerty-Raines believes it was this blend of participants that created a little bit of positive pressure that helped make the training a big success. “They tried so hard [prior to this training] without PDSA and tools to make improvements. Once they became engaged with the training, I think they realized they’d found the missing piece of the puzzle,” she notes.

The PDSA cycle has worked well for schools in the Holmen district, especially in determining root causes of achievement gaps. “Through the PDSA process you can align and create an action plan that has impact because you’ve determined the cause of the problem. You aren’t guessing, but using a solution that is directly aligned to meet the needs of the root cause,” notes Snyder.

### *Building Capacity and Gaining Momentum Through Collaboration*

To fulfill the challenging requirements of the Baldrige criteria, administrators and teachers had to work together as a team, all pulling in the same direction with the same vision. Through negotiations with the teacher’s union, leadership team initiatives, and feedback from teachers, the district recognized a need for greater teacher collaboration and involvement. Once again Holmen called on Haggerty-Raines to lend her expertise on the topic by leading a workshop last summer to develop a vision for the collaboration process. Then in July 2007, a district collaboration council was formed to design a system of staff development to promote a high level of cross-district collaboration. The council developed a mission and purpose for this initiative: to maximize student achievement through teacher collaboration.

Sandy Richert, director of instructional services for the district, recalls that the timing for the collaboration training was perfect. The teacher calendar for 2007-08 had just been finalized and included one day per month for early release, thus providing an ideal opportunity for teachers to meet for two hours each month. As the collaborative council planned the early release sessions, members discussed these key questions:

- What is collaboration?
- What qualities make every team great?
- What are the challenges?

The council then completed a force field analysis on the driving and restraining forces for successful collaboration.

The early dismissal sessions focused on developing collaboration skills to build capacity and to better share knowledge. One after-school session focused on the steps to collaborative communication, as shown in Figure 1. “It’s been really exciting to see how the teachers are building on this. We’re moving toward common assessments and are identifying interventions to better help students progress,” explains Richert, who has worked in the Holmen district for 32 years.

Through a train-the-trainer model, teacher leaders were equipped to facilitate the collaboration sessions rather than the principals. “This really helped build capacity and buy-in,” states Snyder. During the sessions the teacher leaders used quality tools for decision making and analyzing data collaboratively. Action plans were created at the end of each session to help teachers utilize those tools with students in the classroom. This is just one of the district’s strategies for driving quality to the classroom level.

An added benefit to the collaboration focus is the opportunity to reduce fear and build trust about sharing data. “Data can be very scary for some people so we’ve worked to reduce fears about opening up in a group of colleagues,” Johnson explains. He says that a big part of collaboration involves helping educators overcome the fear of looking at data because in the past, data may have made some staff members feel like failures. Johnson believes that collaboration and the use of data in decision making have substantially reduced fears among the teaching staff and have led to more subjective discussions about student achievement.

Snyder echoes Johnson’s thoughts about the power of collaboration, especially when teachers work collaboratively on the topic of student achievement data. “That’s when the most change happens because they have a focus and come to a consensus about how to address [achievement] gaps. Coming to consensus about strategies and actions plans—that’s where the power is,” remarks Snyder.

### Capturing Statewide Honors

Just two years after adopting the Baldrige continuous improvement framework, the hours of hard work by teachers and administrators were rewarded in a very public way as Viking Elementary School captured an intermediate level Proficiency Award in the Wisconsin Forward Award (WFA) program.

### *Figure 1 Steps to Collaborative Communication*

- Coming to consensus on goals and objectives (a willingness to compromise)
- Seeking/honoring contributions (maintaining an open mind)
- Listening with respect and interest
- Reinforcing the positive, dealing openly and honestly with conflict
- Problem solving/critical inquiry
- Reflecting as a group or by individuals

Viking was the first K-12 applicant in this statewide program, which bases its criteria on the Baldrige Award education criteria. One year later it was time for another celebration as Holmen Middle School earned the beginning level Commitment Award for effectively demonstrating continuous improvement principles and practices. The rigorous WFA application process served as a valuable learning experience for the district, as Snyder explains, “Receiving that feedback was just incredible, not just to refocus our efforts and look for further opportunities for improvement, but to validate that we were on the right track.”

### Wisconsin Forward Award recognition levels

Four recognition levels in the Wisconsin Forward Award program reflect an organization's progress in achieving performance excellence:

Commitment—beginning level

Proficiency—intermediate

Mastery—advanced

Excellence—highest level

Visit [www.forwardaward.org/process.html](http://www.forwardaward.org/process.html) for more information on each level.

Another key accomplishment in the district's continuous improvement journey was the creation of a leadership team and the use of a shared leadership decision-making model. About two years into

this process at Viking, Frick requested funding from the school board so that all schools in the district could form leadership teams to work collaboratively with principals on improvement efforts. Now these teams are well established in every school in the district. Each school conducts summer data retreats where staff members analyze student achievement data. To promote systems alignment, every school has a strategic plan, sets goals in the same format, and utilizes quality tools.

### Looking Ahead

Having gained valuable experience in preparing a WFA application, the district is planning to submit a more comprehensive, district-wide application in the next year or two. “We believe that [a district-wide application] is one of the important next steps in getting the feedback to take us to another level of performance,” Johnson remarks.

While the district prepares its next WFA application, teachers and administrators will also focus on moving continuous improvement activities to the student level in all schools. The idea is to offer students a variety of tools to help them achieve self-learning by working responsibly and managing their learning process.

Both Johnson and Snyder highly recommend the Baldrige framework to other school districts. Johnson notes the importance of celebrating success and encourages leaders in other districts to share results and acknowledge people for their effort and commitment. Snyder offers this advice: “Don't give up, because it's worth it. It's worth the time, money, and effort to achieve at a higher level and to have an excellent organization that delights both your students and parents.”

### For more information:

- A wide variety of quality tools and templates, as well as school improvement plans, presentations, and information about systems alignment, is available through the District of Holmen Web site: [www.holmen.k12.wi.us](http://www.holmen.k12.wi.us).
- Information on implementing a Baldrige-based continuous improvement framework is available from the Community Consolidated School District 15 in Palatine, IL. This 2003 Baldrige Award winning school district's Web site is found at [www.ccsd15.net/baldrige/html/publicity.html](http://www.ccsd15.net/baldrige/html/publicity.html).
- Leaders in the Holmen district recommend visiting the Cedar Rapids Community School District's Web site at [www.cr.k12.ia.us/](http://www.cr.k12.ia.us/). This site contains a section devoted to continuous improvement and provides a wealth of information, including quality tools, templates, best practice research, and more.
- The School District of Holmen has partnered with David Langford International; visit the organization's Web site at [www.langfordlearning.com/](http://www.langfordlearning.com/).
- Learn about Wisconsin's state quality award based on the Baldrige criteria, the Wisconsin Forward Award, at [www.forwardaward.org/](http://www.forwardaward.org/).
- To learn about training opportunities in quality tools and techniques designed for schools and classrooms, visit [www.asq.org/courses/impact-training-classroom.html](http://www.asq.org/courses/impact-training-classroom.html) or [www.asq.org/courses/impact-training-school.html](http://www.asq.org/courses/impact-training-school.html).

### Recommended Reading

*Charting Your Course: Lessons Learned During the Journey Toward Performance Excellence*, by John G. Conyers and Robert Ewy, tells the story of 2003 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award winner Community Consolidated School District 15 of Palatine, IL. The book is available through ASQ Quality Press at [www.asq.org/quality-press/display-item/index.html?item=H1200](http://www.asq.org/quality-press/display-item/index.html?item=H1200).

*There is Another Way!: Launch a Baldrige-Based Quality Classroom*, by Margaret A. Byrnes with Jeanne C. Baxter, represents a way to use the Baldrige criteria to improve classroom systems. This training guide is designed for classroom teachers at all levels, as well as teachers in training. The book is available through ASQ Quality Press at [www.asq.org/quality-press/display-item/index.html?item=H1249](http://www.asq.org/quality-press/display-item/index.html?item=H1249).

*Future Force: Kids That Want To, Can, and Do! A Teacher's Handbook for Using TQM in the Classroom*, by Elaine McClanahan and Carolyn Wicks, provides details on educating and training children to deal with and contribute to the ever-changing demands of the future with continuous improvement. ASQ Quality Press offers this handbook at [www.asq.org/quality-press/display-item/index.html?item=P518](http://www.asq.org/quality-press/display-item/index.html?item=P518).

### About the Author

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