WITH PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT, ALL ROADS LEAD TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools

An APQC Education Case Study   *Nash-Rocky Mount, North Carolina*
Member of APQC's North Star Community since 2012   www.nrms.k12.nc.us

- 16,000+ students
- 26 school sites and centers: 16 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 4 high schools, 1 early college high school, 1 alternative school
- 591 square-mile area
- One of the largest employers in Nash and Edgecombe County with more 1,800 employees, over half of them teachers

"If you want to become better, you have to work differently. That's one of the things about schools: We tend to do the same thing over and over, expecting something different. With APQC, we now have something that allows us to do things differently, to get a better result. Isn't that our ultimate goal?"
— Dr. Eric Cunningham, Associate Superintendent of Administration and Operations, Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools

Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools engaged APQC Education to begin a districtwide improvement initiative aimed at attaining its vision:

> **Ensuring bright and prosperous futures for all students by deliberately and intentionally providing rigorous and relevant instruction in every classroom, every day.**

Nash-Rocky Mount kicked off its effort with a process and performance management (PPM) overview in Fall 2012. They created an "Impact and Effort Matrix" to identify and prioritize improvement projects.

District leaders representing curriculum and instruction/instructional technology, public information, student services, human resources, transportation, and maintenance attended four days of training for project action teams. This was followed by implementation assistance and monthly calls with APQC. Each team developed a Strategic Plan Editing Committee to review operations within its department.

The teams adapted APQC's **Process Classification Framework®**, a process taxonomy, to create their own district- and department-specific frameworks, using these to gauge current performance, establish goals, create action plans, and measure progress. When problem areas were identified, teams deployed the D.M.A.I.C. process learned during the APQC training. *(See Figure 1.)*

Figure 1: D.M.A.I.C example

YEAR 1: 2013

With Dr. Cunningham leading the districtwide PPM initiative, the school system focused on three projects expected to achieve the highest impact with the least effort:

♦ **Contracting**: Vendor relationships and pricing were suffering because the district took anywhere from seven to 45 days to pay bills. Applying process mapping techniques, the team streamlined the contract approval process, reducing approval time to five to 10 days. They designed and implemented software to further improve the process. Faster payment eliminated contract holds and ensured materials were available when needed.

- **Professional Development**: Staff needed prior approval to attend continuing education unit (CEU) workshops, a process that could take up to four weeks. The team created pre-approved "fast track" courses, vendors, and budgets, shortening approval time to 14 days or less. The result was easier access to CEU credit, fewer forms, increased productivity, and a time savings of eight additional hours a month for the coordinator.

- **Technology Asset Control**: With a 13 percent "unaccounted for" rate for technology assets, the district needed an inventory system to allocate, track, and collect district-issued technology. After bringing multiple departments together for PPM, the team located lost equipment, removed obsolete technology, created forms, and streamlined processes to assign and track assets. The district can now account for 100 percent of technology assets, potentially saving millions in replacement dollars as well as 500 hours a year conducting inventory assessments.

Nash-Rocky Mount used its D.M.A.I.C tools to tackle "emergency" projects, such as:

- Making schools safer by creating consistent, districtwide discipline procedures based on analysis of existing school discipline data
- Taking wireless connectivity from a 50 percent failure rate to 100 percent functionality within 30 days
- Reducing records management expenses from close to $6,000 to just over $3,000, while growing earnings by $1,000

> *"When you understand and embrace D.M.A.I.C., you can complete many activities with less time expended. People were suddenly excited about coming to meetings because they knew we were focused on a specific agenda.*
>
> *They felt like they got something done, because everyone would go off and tackle projects effectively."*

YEAR 2: 2014

APQC assisted Nash-Rocky Mount in tackling its next set of issues:

- **Parent Complaints – "Handle with Care"**: Nash-Rocky Mount analyzed existing processes for handling parent concerns and found that it took five to 10 days to respond. The district created a routing process and chart. After training staff on how to route concerns, the district reduced response time to two days. It has begun expanding this process to the school level, virtually eliminating parent complaints about delays.

- **Enrollment and Re-entry:** When students temporarily left school due to special circumstances, such as long-term suspension, incarceration, or medical leave, re-enrollment was often delayed because procedures varied by situation and school. The district used PPM to map existing processes and pinpoint breakdowns and created a common districtwide re-entry process. As a result, returning student re-entry time was reduced to 10 days or less.

- **Receiving:** With a 40 percent receiving defect rate, unhappy vendors were placing accounts on hold and charging fees due to late payment, costing the district up to $1,000 a month in lost time while delaying delivery of instructional material. A cross-functional team identified the root causes, pointing to incomplete, inadequate documentation. The team created a process map defining new procedures for purchases, distribution, receiving, documentation, and payment. Employees slashed the time spent resolving receiving issues, reduced payment time, and increased internal customer satisfaction to 100 percent.

- **At-Risk Identification – "The At-Risk-O-Crats":** Some schools were missing targets for Communities in Schools (CIS), a dropout-prevention program, by as much as 32 percent. Process mapping found that the district lacked a clear, consistent nomination process. A survey of administrators, teachers, and counselors discovered that only 79 percent were familiar with CIS, while only about 60 percent knew the nomination and identification processes. By establishing a clear and consistent process, the district improved participation among incoming seventh graders by more than 10 percent the first year.

- **Coordination of Gifted Services – AIG**: The EVAAS (Education Value Added Assessment System) testing revealed that academically or intellectually gifted (AIG) students were not showing consistent academic growth. The district surveyed AIG facilitators and principals and determined that time and instructional models varied. A meeting identified contributing factors, while data analysis showed that professional development and increased facilitator instructional time contributed to better outcomes. The district provided specialized professional development and standardized to the "best practice" AIG instructional model.

YEAR 3: 2015

Nash-Rocky Mount established a repeatable strategic planning process, placing it among the top 10 percent of APQC's member school districts nationwide in terms of strategic planning benchmarking efforts. According to Dr. Cunningham, connecting planning to PPM efforts has created a sustainable culture that values measurement, identification of problem areas, and improvement projects.

"High-performing teams are built, not formed by chance," says Dr. Cunningham. "We are a cross-functional team, all looking at data, asking questions about data, and asking how we can improve our proficiency results. Now we start with 'why?' And we all own the question and the answer. It is on everyone's shoulders. That's the culture shift and the power."

Projects underway in 2015 included:

- **Ensuring Rigorous Instruction for All Students**: Based on state assessment results, district benchmarking, and the perception data which was gathered from administrative walk-throughs, classroom instruction was not rigorous enough. Using PPM tools, the district was working to collaboratively define "rigor" and develop a more-structured lesson planning process aligned to curriculum maps. By June 2018, 100 percent of Nash-Rocky Mount Schools will implement technologies and systems to ensure rigorous and relevant

instruction for all students, improve performance of all accountability measures to a level at or above the state, and exceed the state graduation rate.

♦ **Management of Public Information Activities:** The district's public information department received an influx of requests for the distribution of information by schools and departments. The district decided to create a toolkit of communication resources to manage internal information, implement a training program to teach rules and protocols, and develop school news coordinators and teams at all sites.

FROM SILOS TO TEAMWORK

Dr. Cunningham believes that one of the biggest "wins" of the district's PPM focus has been the breaking down of departmental silos.

"Before this initiative, we were working in isolation and people didn't see how all departments connected to student achievement," he says.

"By introducing processes and performance management, we removed the silos. When you empower teams to work together, it's amazing what can be achieved."

"When you look at the factors that impact student achievement, you realize that all activities— student-facing or not—lead to our end result. Safe and orderly schools, a viable curriculum, student support programs, paying bills on time, functional technology, getting contracts finished … these are roads to student achievement."

ABOUT APQC EDUCATION

APQC helps organizations work smarter, faster, and with greater confidence. It is the world's foremost authority in benchmarking, best practices, process and performance improvement, and knowledge management. Since 1996, APQC has been helping education leaders capture, scale, and sustain transformation to improve student outcomes through the implementation of Process and Performance Management methodologies and the identification of best practices. Among other things, we help educators redesign outdated or inefficient processes and break down functional silos to save time, money, and empower people. Learn more at www.apqc.org.