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ABSTRACT

The implementation and impacts of the Quality Program Assurance System (QPAS) within the Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia were studied. QPAS is a system of shared accountability for educational programs, with multiple levels of reporting. The primary goal of QPAS is to provide decision makers with quality accountability information on instructional programs and services in the school system. The study examined the successes and challenges of QPAS after the first 2-year cycle, at which point program managers completed formal review reports in their programs. Data were collected from program managers, evaluators, and high-level decision makers. Results indicate that QPAS has had an impact on program manager attitudes, the organizational culture of the school system, and decision-making about programs. An appendix contains a brochure describing QPAS. (SLD)

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The Quality Programs Assurance System (QPAS):

Sharing Responsibility for Educational Program Accountability

Jennifer Coyne Cassata

Fairfax County Public Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a study of the implementation and impacts of the Quality Programs Assurance System (QPAS) within Virginia's Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS). QPAS is a system of shared accountability for educational programs, with multiple levels of reporting. The primary goal of QPAS is to provide decision-makers with quality accountability information on instructional programs and services in the school system. The study examined the successes and challenges of QPAS after the first two-year cycle, at which point program managers completed formal review reports on their programs. Data were collected from program managers, evaluators, and high-level decision-makers. Results indicate that QPAS has impacted program manager attitudes, the organizational culture of the school system, and decision-making about programs.

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Introduction

In response to local and national interest in educational program accountability, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), located in Northern Virginia, developed a shared accountability system, the Quality Programs Assurance System (QPAS). QPAS is a system of shared accountability for educational programs, with multiple levels of reporting. The responsibility for program accountability is shared across departments within the school system, including the people who manage educational programs as well as trained internal program evaluators. The primary goal of QPAS is to provide decision-makers with quality accountability information on all instructional programs and services in the school system. See Appendix A for a summary brochure that describes QPAS.

QPAS was developed as part of the larger FCPS commitment to accountability, for students, schools, staff, and programs. Over the past several years, FCPS, a large, affluent and academically successful school district in Northern Virginia, has been transitioning to a client-centered model for education as well as making a commitment to data based decision-making at all levels. In keeping with the current nationwide commitment to accountability as manifested by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the Fairfax County School Board became interested in evaluation information for all instructional programs to help facilitate informed decision-making.

However, due to the small number of trained evaluators in the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) and the large numbers of educational programs (over 100) in FCPS, comprehensive evaluation of all instructional programs was not feasible. Therefore, OPE developed a multi-level system of shared accountability. The resulting system, QPAS, shares the responsibility for program accountability across FCPS departments, and represents district-level policy. Over the first two years, 75 programs were phased into QPAS.

The goal of QPAS is to provide quality accountability information on all FCPS instructional programs. QPAS consists of three levels of program accountability, with shared responsibility for data collection, analysis, and reporting between program managers and OPE (Table 1). The three levels, from basic to most complex, are documentation, review, and evaluation, and all levels must address a specific set of data elements about programs (e.g., purpose, goals, and objectives; groups targeted for impact; implementation; impact, and budget). Program managers have responsibility for documentation and review. In documentation, program managers maintain ongoing records of information about a program over the course of the school year that can be used for program improvement as well as to respond to questions about the status of the program (Horsch, 1996). After each two-year period, program managers complete formal written reviews of their programs, in which they compare documentation data across two years, as well as draw conclusions about the program and its future direction. As part of QPAS, OPE conducts program evaluations for programs selected by the Superintendent. Evaluations represent the most complex level of QPAS in terms of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Thus, program managers have responsibility for providing accurate information about their programs. One of the most critical components of QPAS is the requirement for clearly defined goals and objectives for all programs that can be understood by decision-makers as well as the public (Schilder, 1997). These goals and objectives then define the areas of impact measured for the program, as with results- or outcomes-based accountability systems (Horsch, 1996; Schilder, 1997). However, QPAS represents a step beyond a pure outcomes-based accountability system because it was designed to provide information specifically for use in organizational decision-making (Horsch, 2002). QPAS incorporates the notions of an outcomes-

based accountability system and adds the requirements that data be provided about program implementation, training and staff development, etc. It is the intention of QPAS that program managers will develop increased capacity and comfort with monitoring and evaluating their own programs so that they can use the information to make program improvement decisions (King, 2002).

Systems like QPAS necessitate changes to the role definition for many program managers. The push toward data based decision-making requires program managers to collect, analyze and understand data about how their programs are functioning. In order for the system to be successful, program managers must take ownership, which requires that high-level administrators commit to the process as well and loan their positional "clout" to the system (King, 2002). Program managers need to be motivated to view this type of program monitoring as part of their daily responsibilities and as important in the accountability realm. However, those purposes are often viewed by program managers as oppositional in nature (King, 2002; Schilder, 1997).

Evaluators in OPE coordinate QPAS for the school system and also work collaboratively with program managers to provide them technical assistance as they document and review their programs. As part of the commitment to the shared accountability process, a study of the implementation and initial impacts of QPAS was designed, so that modifications and improvements could be made. In addition, the study was designed to help OPE understand how QPAS was influencing the system in terms of building evaluation capacity and holding programs accountable.

In an attempt to investigate how QPAS is functioning and its current impacts, this study addresses the following major research questions:

1) What are program managers' attitudes about QPAS at the outset, during the second year, and after the first reporting cycle?

2) How does QPAS impact the organizational culture of FCPS?

3) How does QPAS impact decision-making about program improvement and program budgets?

Method

This study was designed to investigate how QPAS is functioning and its impacts on programs and the school system. The case study method was used as the overall research approach, with an embedded, single-case design (Yin, 1994), which considers multiple subunits of analysis as well as an analysis of the case as a whole. Multiple units of analysis included program managers, decision-makers and the entire school system. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses examined how QPAS was implemented, reactions of program managers and decision-makers, and impacts of QPAS on the school system.

The researcher conducting the study is in the role of participant and observer. The researcher functions as a participant who works as a program evaluator in OPE and helps coordinate QPAS across the school system. The researcher functions as an observer, in that she collects data on QPAS from offices and departments throughout the school system. By using evidence including documentation, interview results, survey results, and other physical artifacts, the researcher triangulates the evidence gained through participant-observation.

Participants in this study included the 63 program managers responsible for the 75 programs phased into QPAS in the first two years, two high-level decision-makers in the school system (assistant superintendents), and two departmental liaisons, who had the major responsibility for overseeing QPAS and ensuring the quality of reports for programs in their

respective departments. Finally, OPE staff that have provided training and technical assistance to program managers also participated in the study.

Data Sources

A variety of data sources were used to address the research questions, including documents, survey results and interview results, as well as observations and reflections of OPE staff. To answer the first research question about program manager attitudes, program managers were surveyed at three points in time (November 2000, Spring 2002, Spring 2003). To answer the second research question about the impact of QPAS on the organizational culture of FCPS, multiple data sources were used. Documents created to explain QPAS to various audiences were reviewed and analyzed. Feedback from participants, including program manager surveys and interviews and meetings with high-level decision-makers and OPE staff, also provided evidence of the organizational culture. Finally, the first set of formal review reports were analyzed.

To answer the third research question about the impact of QPAS on decision-making, multiple data sources were used. The Spring 2003 program manager survey provided evidence of program manager decisions about program improvement. Interviews with the assistant superintendents revealed how they have used the Review reports to make program decisions. An analysis of the first set of review reports provides evidence of the recommendations made related to both budget and program improvement.

Findings

Program Manager Attitudes About QPAS

To address the first research question, program managers were surveyed at three points in time. The purpose of these surveys was to gather information about program managers' attitudes about the QPAS process, including their level of understanding, the perceived usefulness of

QPAS reports as well as the training they had received, and their suggestions about modifications to the process.

Initial Survey. The first survey was conducted after the initial training in November 2000. This initial training provided an overview of QPAS for the program managers in the first phase of programs, including their roles and responsibilities. The survey specifically addressed the training and program managers' understanding of QPAS. The majority of program managers in attendance, 26 out of 36, returned surveys, for a response rate of 72 percent. See Table 2 for a summary of responses to the first survey. Program managers reported very high levels of understanding of their roles (96 percent indicating full or some understanding) and responsibilities for documentation (100 percent indicating full or some understanding) and Review reports (96 percent indicating full or some understanding). Program managers also reported high levels of comfort with these roles and responsibilities at this initial stage (at least 85 percent indicating very or somewhat comfortable). In addition, program managers reported being pleased with the clarity and usefulness of the training. At this initial stage, program managers' major concerns were related to data collection and access, as well as the time required to complete QPAS requirements and how this influenced or interfered with their jobs. Many program managers indicated their beliefs that QPAS was an additional responsibility, rather than part of their job as program manager.

Second Survey. During the second year of QPAS, OPE conducted a variety of training sessions designed to facilitate data collection and reporting by program managers. At the end of the year, program managers were surveyed about their level of understanding of QPAS, the usefulness of QPAS, any assistance they had received, and any barriers they faced as they tried to complete QPAS requirements. Since many program managers had responsibility for multiple

programs, the survey was sent to 57 people (representing 75 programs), with 28 returning surveys (for a response rate of 49 percent). See Table 3 for a summary of responses to the second survey. Again, nearly all program managers (97 percent) indicated at least some understanding of QPAS at this point. However, only a slim majority (53 percent) indicated that QPAS had been at least somewhat useful to their program management.

Additional questions were asked about the usefulness of specific assistance and support received related to QPAS. Program managers rated both the formal training and the informal technical assistance quite highly, with 90 percent responding that the training had been at least somewhat useful and 82 percent indicating that the technical assistance had been at least somewhat useful. High numbers (75 percent) reported receiving at least somewhat useful support from their supervisors. A slight majority (54 percent) reported receiving useful support in terms of data and assistance from other departments within the school system.

Although program managers were positive about their level of understanding related to QPAS, they also indicated that they faced barriers and challenges as they tried to integrate QPAS into their work. Seventy-five percent indicated they lacked the time to dedicate to QPAS. In addition, 39 percent mentioned difficulties accessing the necessary data to address their program goals and objectives. Finally, 30 percent reported experiencing difficulties coordinating QPAS and budget information. The time barrier echoes the concern raised by program managers at the outset of implementation.

Third Survey. The third survey was conducted in Spring 2003, after the first formal Review report cycle covering the first two years had been completed. The program managers whose programs were reviewed in the first cycle were surveyed (total of 30 program managers). Twenty program managers completed the survey, for a response rate of 67 percent. See Table 4

for a summary of responses to the third survey. This survey focused specifically on the Review report process. Program managers were asked about the usefulness of technical assistance received from OPE during the Review report process. The majority of program managers indicated that specific types of technical assistance were either somewhat or very useful, including individual (85 percent) and group meetings (90 percent), as well as email exchanges (80 percent). In addition, 85 percent of program managers agreed or strongly agreed that the formal Review report training was useful, 75 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they felt well prepared to complete the Review reports, and 80 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good understanding of the QPAS requirements.

OPE was interested in how program managers viewed the importance of QPAS to three groups: themselves, the Superintendent and Leadership Team (group comprised of assistant superintendents and directors of the regional clusters), and the School Board. Higher percentages of program managers felt that the Review reports were important to the Leadership Team (65 percent) and School Board (65 percent), than found the reports useful in their own work (45 percent). This finding is not surprising, given that the Review reports are submitted to the Superintendent, Leadership Team, and School Board as part of program accountability. Even after two years, many program managers continued to separate work for QPAS with work for their program management. In fact, a few program managers expressed concern about the value of QPAS in response to open-ended questions.

Program managers were asked to describe challenges and barriers they were unable to resolve that they felt impacted the quality of their reports. Difficulties accessing data (35 percent), confusion and frustration about the QPAS requirements (20 percent) and a lack of time (15 percent) were mentioned as significant barriers. Program managers were also given the

opportunity to suggest modifications to QPAS. The most frequent suggestions (each mentioned by 15 percent of respondents) were to provide program managers with quality examples of completed reports and to reduce the repetition in the report generation and editing process that resulted from multiple layers of review.

Taken together, the results from the three surveys suggest that although program managers understand the QPAS requirements and see some usefulness, many continue to struggle with the accountability aspects of QPAS and have not incorporated the accountability role into their understanding of program management. Analyzing and reporting data on their programs is still seen by many as something that is done for other people, rather than for formative uses. Data access and availability continue to represent challenges for program managers, who experience frustrations when they cannot access the data they need to understand and report on their programs (King, 2002). QPAS is requiring collaboration among departments to facilitate data access, as well as the commitment to the evaluation of programs and program impacts.

Organizational Culture

The second research question addresses the impact of QPAS on the organizational culture of the school system. At a basic level, QPAS is changing and systematizing how accountability information is maintained and shared about instructional programs. Analyses of QPAS documents show that clear expectations have been established for the content and format of accountability reports. For the Review report, program managers were provided with a template to use that included guiding questions for them to answer about each of the data elements. Over time, the expectations have been clarified based on feedback from program managers and others.

However, each department has created some internal expectations for programs, expectations that vary across departments, which has led to confusion and occasional frustration.

At the end of the initial Review report cycle, interviews were conducted with high-level decision-makers as well as with the departmental liaisons for QPAS. Almost all of the programs included in QPAS are located in two central departments and for the initial Review report cycle, the majority of programs included in QPAS were located in one department. The assistant superintendent for this department (AS1) was interviewed about the process. In response to a question about the benefits of QPAS, AS1 felt that QPAS has provided benefits to herself and her staff, particularly in forcing people to become more data-driven and focused on developing clear goals and objectives for their programs. The greatest long-term benefit, she felt, was in the regular, cyclical reporting of data for programs. She stressed the need for a continued shift in organizational thinking, "QPAS needs to become a way of doing business – rather than being seen as something that is just done every two years for the School Board (AS1 interview, 3/7/2003)."

The departmental liaison for this same department (DL1) indicated that one major benefit of QPAS was that program managers now understand that "they are in fact responsible for reporting data." She added that she hoped consistent and quality reporting would reduce the "recreation of the wheel" in response to questions from the School Board (DL1 interview, 3/10/2003). One of her major concerns was that program managers have tended to focus on QPAS only when they have reports due, cautioning that, "if it remains a living, breathing thing, it has more potential benefits" (DL1 interview, 3/10/2003).

DL1 felt that one of her primary roles related to QPAS was to communicate its importance within her department on a consistent basis. She agreed that AS1 is dedicated to the

process, but that point was not communicated well enough to department staff from the beginning. In response to several questions, she reiterated the need for departments to emphasize the importance and usefulness of QPAS on an ongoing basis, so that it becomes part of peoples' normal routines. She added that "institutionalizing QPAS is important – it requires a culture shift that hasn't completely happened yet" (DL1 interview, 3/10/2003). Her comments echo the responses of this department's program managers to the survey questions, since many of them continue to indicate that QPAS is something they do in addition to their jobs, rather as part of their jobs. In order for QPAS to remain viable, it must remain feasible for all involved (Joint Committee, 1994; King, 2002).

The assistant superintendent (AS2) and departmental liaison (DL2) from the second department were also interviewed. AS2 said that she is very thankful to have QPAS in place and was amazed at how much was accomplished in only the first two years. She acknowledges that QPAS represents a learning process for her staff and that she is seeing growth: "People are starting to ask the right questions and hopefully people will find it useful to them over the years." She views QPAS as an "analytic tool for program improvement" (AS2 interview, 4/2/2003).

DL2 was not assigned until just before the Reviews were due, but was involved with the report approval process. Her comments were very similar in spirit to those of DL1. In response to the question about benefits, she said that "QPAS has made people look at what they do, analyze what they do, and develop goals and objectives. It has forced them to look at data collection and determine what they need to do to meet goals" (DL2 interview, 3/25/2003). She anticipates that QPAS will also help in the long-term with program planning.

DL2 also acknowledged that program managers in her department were resistant to the process, which she felt was likely due to QPAS not yet being part of the culture. She believed

that people were thinking, "Do I really have to do this?" (DL2 interview, 3/25/2003). In addition, one problem was that people were receiving conflicting messages about expectations, which led to frustrations. She felt that QPAS is requiring a culture shift for program managers, who often do not have a background in evaluation. However, AS2 thought that shared accountability should be part of the culture, given the District Superintendent's commitment to data-driven decisions (AS2 interview, 4/2/2003). She did acknowledge that it was new to program managers and that the process would get easier over time.

In addition to interviewing department staff, evaluators from OPE were surveyed about the technical assistance they provided program managers during the Review report cycle. The evaluators were asked about the greatest challenges for program managers. The most common challenges mentioned by evaluators related to difficulties program managers had connecting the discussion of program impacts to the stated goals and objectives. In addition, evaluators indicated that program managers had varied levels of understanding and comfort with the process, especially in terms of Review report requirements. Successful strategies evaluators used to help program managers generate quality reports were providing quality examples, making themselves available to program managers as early as possible, as well as while they were writing the reports.

In general, comments from program managers as well as the departmental decision-makers were quite positive about the assistance provided by OPE. In order for a system such as QPAS to survive, it has to be made feasible for those involved in the evaluation and monitoring of programs. AS2 commented on the usefulness of assistance from OPE, and that it is "critical for the departments to not feel alone for QPAS to have ongoing success" (AS2 interview,

4/2/2003). Both assistant superintendents and their departmental liaisons suggest that OPE has provided the support to make QPAS happen.

It appears from these meetings and interviews with people involved with QPAS at different levels that QPAS is beginning to impact the organizational culture and attitudes within the school system in three major ways: an increasing acceptance of the concept of shared responsibility for program accountability, a gradual shift from viewing QPAS as a burden to viewing QPAS as a useful tool for program management and decision-making, and a shift toward more interdepartmental cooperation and sharing of data, with a lessening of the "passing the buck" phenomenon when information is not readily available.

The interviews with departmental liaisons indicated that resistance to the changes necessitated by QPAS continues. While resistance to these changes still exists, acceptance at the higher levels will translate into acceptance, either forced or voluntary, for the program managers themselves. Since the Leadership Team and School Board are starting to make decisions about programs based on QPAS data and reports, program managers will have evidence of the importance of this information. However, until the program managers see the value of the process for their own program monitoring and management purposes, many will still view QPAS as an added responsibility, rather than part of their ongoing work.

QPAS and Decision-Making

The third research question addresses the impact of QPAS on decision-making. QPAS data and reports can be used to make decisions at multiple levels, from program modification and improvement decisions made by program managers themselves to policy and funding decisions made by the School Board and other high-level decision-makers. Formal updates on the QPAS

process were provided to the district superintendent, assistant superintendents, and School Board by OPE in June 2002 and March 2003.

AS1 and AS2, the assistant superintendents of the departments in which QPAS programs are located, were asked about the importance of QPAS. In interviews, they explained that they recognized the importance of using QPAS to facilitate data based decision-making. AS1 explained that QPAS is important, but only when the data and reports are used in important ways to modify and improve programs. AS1 then explicitly acknowledged her role in this shared accountability system, "My role has been to convince people that this is serious and important and to make decisions using the information (AS1 interview, 3/10/2003)." When asked how the school system will keep QPAS viable, AS1 immediately responded that QPAS data and reports must be used by staff at all levels, so that people can see the value of their efforts.

As a decision-maker, AS2 said that she has found the Review reports extremely useful, for they provide her with overview and refresher information about the many programs in her department. AS2 acknowledged the importance of using the reports to make decisions, so that people see the value in their efforts. "Program managers and their supervisors need to use QPAS to plan and ask questions about the programs" (AS2 interview, 4/2/2003).

DL1 and DL2 were also asked about how QPAS information can inform decision-making. In order to make QPAS survive, DL2 stressed that ongoing and clear communication between all involved will be necessary, including feedback on how the reports are used in the decision-making process. "People need to know that what they did has been useful, to show that this is not a waste of time" (DL2 interview, 3/25/2003).

Everyone interviewed stressed how important it was for staff at all levels to actually use the reports. DL1 expressed the hope that the School Board could use the reports and in the

process become better informed about the programs. Having an informed School Board would then facilitate truly data-driven decisions. At the same time, she added, program managers themselves need to use the QPAS data and reports in meaningful ways (DL1 interview, 3/10/2003).

The School Board and other high-level decision-makers have made an explicit connection between program accountability information and funding for programs. As indicated by their responses during the June 2002 and March 2003 meetings at which the QPAS updates were presented, the School Board indicated they plan to use the QPAS Review reports to facilitate informed decision-making during the annual budget process. Furthermore, analyses of documents, interview and meeting notes, and program manager surveys reveal that QPAS is impacting the presentation of the program budget and how program managers connect program management to program budgeting (AS1 interview, 3/7/2003; AS2 interview, 4/2/2003; DL1 interview, 3/10/2003). QPAS timelines and reporting cycles are included in the published program budget for the school system while at the same time budget information is incorporated into QPAS reports. To that end, program managers and department staff are now beginning to view QPAS as a vehicle through which to justify their program's existence and to support their claims with evidence (AS2 interview, 4/2/2003).

Finally, QPAS has had an impact on program improvement and functioning. Program managers have indicated that they use QPAS information to help them improve how their programs function. As the QPAS process matures, department staff expect that program managers will continue to expand what they are capturing in their program goals and objectives to represent all aspects of program functioning (DL1 interview, 3/10/2003). In addition, as QPAS was initially developed, decisions were made about which programs should be included in

the first phase of QPAS, decisions that sparked discussion about how the process could be used to eliminate programs that are not meeting their goals and objectives. As a result of this discussion, program managers were asked to make explicit recommendations in the Review reports, based on the data presented. These recommendations are designed to facilitate informed decisions by high-level decision-makers about program modification, expansion, or even elimination.

Conclusions

Developing a system of shared accountability across a large educational system is a major undertaking. The findings from the study indicate that it takes time to change the culture of the system as well as the attitudes of people responsible for managing programs. QPAS has required a shift in thinking about what program management means, a shift requiring understanding and cooperation on many levels. However, once the system is in place, shared responsibility for accountability can be an effective way to improve programs. While some resistance remains, there is evidence after the first formal reporting cycle that QPAS has begun to increase the evaluation capacity of the entire system. Keeping QPAS viable will require an ongoing commitment by all involved. OPE is using the information learned in this study to improve the usefulness of the support and training provided to program managers, as well as how information about QPAS is communicated throughout the school system. Lessons learned from QPAS benefit not only FCPS in terms of making decisions about program improvement and funding, and also have implications for other educational organizations looking to develop shared accountability systems.

Appendix A

QPAS Brochure

Training and Technical Assistance

Each year, OPE provides training and technical assistance for all program managers of newly identified programs and services for QPAS.

- As part of the training, OPE provides a training handbook with activities designed to assist program managers as they begin to collect documentation data and prepare review reports.
- OPE provides technical assistance to program managers as they document and develop review reports for their programs and services.
- OPE provides technical assistance to specific Leadership Team members in the use of a checklist to monitor the quality of review reports.

Additional QPAS Resources

OPE has developed a variety of documents to assist staff in understanding and responding to QPAS expectations, including:

- the QPAS summary document, which describes the levels of accountability in terms of questions related to each data element;
- a QPAS training handbook, which contains background information and activities designed to help program managers as they begin documenting their programs; and
- a list of QPAS programs for the 2000-2001 school year.

Each year, the QPAS list is reviewed by the Leadership Team to add new programs and services or to delete defunct ones.

QPAS Timeline

Fall 2000: FCPS begins QPAS: Phase 1 (2000-2001 start-up) programs
- Programs identified
- Program managers assigned and trained
- Data collection begins
- Scheduled evaluation reports presented to School Board

Summer 2001: Leadership Team checks program managers' data collection progress

Leadership Team revises (reduces/ expands list of QPAS to include Phase 2 programs

Fall 2001: FCPS begins QPAS: Phase 2 programs
- Programs identified
- Program managers assigned and trained
- Data collection begins
- Scheduled evaluation reports presented to School Board

Fall 2002: Scheduled Phase 1 reviews reports completed and made available for audiences

Scheduled evaluation reports presented to School Board

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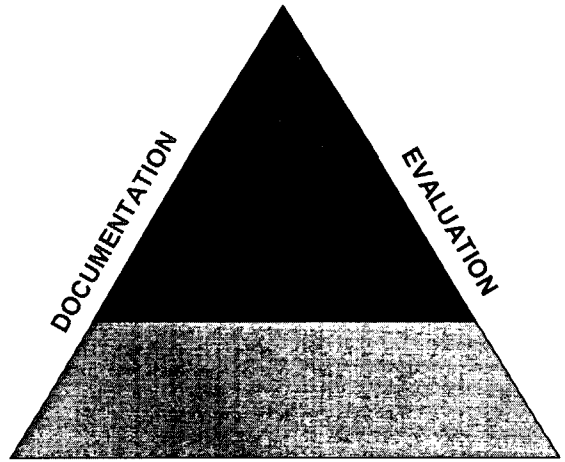
Quality Programs Assurance System

A Framework for Educational Program Accountability



Fairfax County Public Schools

Department of Educational Accountability (DEA)
Office of Program Evaluation (OPE)

2001

What is QPAS?

The Quality Programs Assurance System (QPAS) was created by the Department of Educational Accountability (DEA) in the context of a divisionwide commitment to accountability. QPAS was developed following the School Board's request for easier access to key information on all programs. As a result, QPAS was initiated by the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) in the DEA during the 2000-2001 school year.

The primary goal of QPAS is to provide quality accountability information on programs and services in the division. To achieve this goal, QPAS defines accountability reporting as a responsibility shared among departments across FCPS. The three levels of information in QPAS are: Documentation, Review, and Evaluation.

QPAS requires each program and service to have a designated program manager who is held directly responsible for maintaining basic information about the program or service in prescribed areas.

The information collected and maintained as part of QPAS will be used to inform decisions about improvement, continuation and/or funding by program staff, and the School Board.

Defining QPAS

QPAS defines a set of data elements that represent the types of information that are available about programs and services. QPAS also defines three levels of accountability for reporting on these data elements. Data for each of the following elements are available at varying levels of detail for Documentation, Review, and Evaluation reports.

Data Elements

- Program purposes, goals, and objectives
- Nature of the program/intervention(s)
- Number and location of sites
- Groups targeted for impact by program
- Program staff
- Organizational structure
- Training/staff development
- Program implementation
- Program impact
- Program budget and expenditures

Levels of Accountability

Documentation

Program managers are required to maintain ongoing and up-to-date records on key areas (data elements) for which information is commonly requested or used. The required information is defined consistently for all programs and services involved in QPAS and is collected over the course of the school year to respond to inquiries from various audiences.

Review

After every two year period, documentation data are analyzed for each of the data elements. The analysis compares implementation, impacts, resource requirements, and other areas over two years. The analysis is provided as a formal report to the appropriate Leadership Team member and made available to other interested persons upon request.

Evaluation

Each year, the Division Superintendent selects a subset of all programs and services to be involved in the most comprehensive analyses, based on the interests and needs of the division. These program evaluations are conducted by OPE and focus on the quality and impact of programs over a three to five year period. Reports are presented annually to the School Board.

Use of Data

Both review and evaluation reports yield a set of recommendations based on the data collected and analyzed annually. The recommendations are targeted at specific audiences, such as program staff, Leadership Team, or the School Board for program modification, continuation, and/or funding decisions.

Table 1

Levels of the Quality Programs Assurance System

	Documentation	Review	Evaluation
Includes:	All instructional programs	All instructional programs	Selected programs (new, pilot, targeted)
Responsible Party:	Program Managers	Program Managers	OPE Evaluators
Provides:	Ongoing, current data upon request	Biennial review of the program	Annual interim report or final report
Uses:	Modifications for improved efficiency and effectiveness	Modifications for improved efficiency and effectiveness Decisions for funding reallocation, expansion, or elimination	Modifications for improved efficiency and effectiveness Decisions for funding reallocation, expansion, or elimination Policy decisions about program continuation or participation

Table 2

Results from Initial Survey of Program Managers – November 2000

Area	Level of Understanding				Level of Comfort			
	Full Understanding	Some Understanding	Limited Understanding	No Understanding	Very Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Slightly Comfortable	Not at All Comfortable
My role as program manager for QPAS	58%	38%	0%	0%	38%	54%	0%	0%
My responsibilities for documentation	58%	42%	0%	0%	42%	46%	8%	0%
My responsibilities for Review reports	42%	54%	4%	0%	31%	54%	12%	0%
QPAS timelines	62%	38%	0%	0%	38%	58%	0%	0%
QPAS Data Elements	54%	46%	0%	0%	42%	46%	8%	0%

Table 3

Summary of Responses from Second Survey of Program Managers – Spring 2002

Item	Responses	Percent
At this point, at what level is your understanding of the QPAS process?	Full Understanding	43%
	Some Understanding	54%
	Limited Understanding	4%
	No Understanding	0%
At this point, how useful has the QPAS process been to your program management?	Very Useful	21%
	Somewhat Useful	32%
	Slightly Useful	21%
	Not at All Useful	21%
Workshop training from OPE	Very Useful	54%
	Somewhat Useful	36%
	Slightly Useful	7%
	Not at All Useful	4%
Follow-up technical assistance from OPE	Very Useful	57%
	Somewhat Useful	25%
	Slightly Useful	7%
	Not at All Useful	0%
	Not Applicable	11%
Tools for QPAS (Training Handbook, Excel Workbook for maintaining data elements)	Very Useful	32%
	Somewhat Useful	46%
	Slightly Useful	11%
	Not at All Useful	7%
	Not Applicable	4%
Support from other departments	Very Useful	25%
	Somewhat Useful	29%
	Slightly Useful	21%
	Not at All Useful	4%
	Not Applicable	18%
Support from supervisors within your department	Very Useful	54%
	Somewhat Useful	21%
	Slightly Useful	14%
	Not at All Useful	4%
	Not Applicable	7%

Note. Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Table 4

Summary of Responses from Third Survey of Program Managers – March 2003

Item	Response Choices				
Value of technical assistance beyond formal training:	**Very Useful**	**Somewhat Useful**	**Slightly Useful**	**Not Useful**	**Not Applicable**
Email exchanges	50%	30%	5%	0%	15%
Individual meetings	70%	15%	0%	0%	10%
Group meetings	20%	70%	0%	0%	10%
	Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Not Applicable**
The QPAS Review report training was useful to me as I completed the Review report.	10%	75%	5%	0%	10%
I was well prepared to complete the QPAS Review report for my program.	5%	70%	20%	0%	5%
I have a good understanding of the QPAS requirements.	10%	70%	15%	0%	5%
I received the necessary support (data, assistance, etc.) from OPE staff to complete the Review report.	25%	60%	0%	0%	15%
I received the necessary support (data, assistance, etc.) from within my department to complete the Review report.	20%	70%	5%	0%	5%
I received the necessary support (data, assistance, etc.) from other departments to complete the Review report.	5%	30%	20%	5%	40%
The QPAS Review report for my program accurately captures how my program worked during the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years.	10%	60%	15%	5%	10%
QPAS Review reports are important to my work.	0%	40%	40%	5%	15%
QPAS Review reports are important to the Superintendent and Leadership Team.	10%	55%	20%	0%	15%
QPAS Review reports are important to the School Board.	5%	60%	15%	0%	20%

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