



'ImpaQTing' Student Achievement Through ASQ's Training for Schools

by Jay Marino

ASQ's ImpaQT Training for Schools was created to help school leadership teams create systemic and lasting change within the school, with a focus on increasing academic achievement for all learners.

Why now?

Under the demanding challenges of the No Child Left Behind Act, the accountability for student achievement results is obvious, and demands for results are immediate. Heightened attention has been focused on improving teacher quality, closing achievement gaps, increasing quality and efficiency with fewer resources and recognizing the need for schools to produce students who can compete in the global marketplace. While the challenges of increased accountability seem clear, the actualization of systemic improvement in schools is not.

Sustaining organizational change begins with recognizing the need to do things differently. The old paradigm of school leadership called for the principal to serve as the primary decision maker, and decisions were often made in isolation according to the whim of the highest-ranking administrator. Today, at the heart of successful school leadership is a representative group of dedicated, front-line employees who are personally committed and involved in improvement efforts. Strategies for implementing change must be developed with stakeholders to accomplish systemic and lasting change.

ImpaQT training was created to provide the roadmap for teams to implement change in their schools.

Eight essential modules provide an integrated framework for continuous improvement. Each was strategically designed with three main focus areas: a presentation of core knowledge based on research and best practices; simulations and team interactions and activities; and professional reflection with application to the work setting.

Module one: effective school improvement plans

In this module, participants reflect on how people, process and product create an effective school improvement plan:

- **People:** Who creates the school improvement plan? Who carries out the plan?



- **Process:** How should the school improvement plan be created? What are the steps? What does the process look like?
- **Product:** What are the components of an effective school improvement plan? What are the parts?

The purpose of the school improvement plan is to:

1. Set and communicate direction and focus for the school (mission and vision).
2. Get everyone working together on common and shared focus areas (professional learning communities).
3. Make systemic, school wide improvements (process improvement through the plan-do-study-act cycle).
4. Focus on results (SMART goals and data-driven decisions).

Participants learn that by establishing a community of leaders, the school can collectively harness the talent of a diverse group of individuals and benefit from their multiple perspectives. Effective leadership teams participate in the establishment of group norms and collaboratively establish clear mission, vision, goals and core values that direct improvement efforts in their system. This new paradigm of school leadership calls for collaboration, teamwork, consensus building and a trusting environment that involves others in the leadership responsibilities of shared decision making.

Module two: stakeholder input

To ensure consensus and buy-in to the school improvement plan, effective leadership teams implement methods that include stakeholder input to identify clear direction and focus. In this module, participants learn that implementing a school improvement plan in which people aren't committed to the cause will likely not deliver the intended and expected results.

Obtaining input from various groups and individuals in a school community can be a daunting task, which is why it is often excluded from the process. Feedback can be collected, however, through a variety of quality tools that are designed to ensure equal voice and effective participation in the process. Participants receive hands-on experience with a variety of quality tools to seek input, identify root causes of problems and determine consensus. These tools include brainstorming, affinity diagram, nominal group technique, consensogram, lotus diagram, radar chart, gallery walk and other quality tools.



Module three: alignment throughout the school system

How do successful schools maximize their results? They align their resources, budgets and people to the vision, mission, goals and core values of the school. In this module, participants are exposed to alignment.

Effective teams incorporate a systems-thinking approach to ensure improvement efforts are aligned horizontally (within the school itself) and vertically (within the various grade levels of the school). Without an approach that incorporates systems alignment, the efforts of individuals may have little impact on the bottom line. There is nothing more daunting to people than working hard yet not producing results.

In this module, participants reflect on their current practices and provide examples of alignment and misalignment within their schools. Effective leadership teams ensure every part of the school is directly connected to the identified improvement goals of the school improvement plan.

When everyone within the school clearly understands the direction and focus identified in the school improvement plan, alignment becomes a natural occurrence. Systemwide results are experienced when all of the front-line efforts are aligned to clear and specific goals of the school improvement plan.

Module four: in-process measures to monitor progress

The cliché that the “proof is in the pudding” holds true for continuous improvement efforts. In the old paradigm of school improvement, leaders would rely on lagging “high-stakes, once-a-year” assessments to determine progress. Decisions were based on the results of these assessments and often resulted in organizations chasing a data point generated from work that occurred the previous year. This type of autopsy left educational leaders scratching their heads as they tried to determine how to change the trajectory of the next data point. In this module, participants learn the difference between leading and lagging indicators, formative assessments and in-process measures to monitor progress of the school improvement plan.

Today’s leadership teams are measuring and monitoring progress frequently to determine the impact and effectiveness of strategies being deployed by front-line employees. In-process measures can keep a focus on results. A measurement concept referred to as a “dashboard” can help educators observe real-time results using leading indicators. These measures allow teams to make in-process adjustments to their strategies and improvement



efforts. Like the dashboard of a car, educators can monitor key indicators of achievement in their system and keep an eye on areas in need of attention. Dashboard measures provide a process for early detection of progress (or lack of progress) through a public display of data in graphical formats for easy interpretation by stakeholders.

In this module, participants learn how data centers and data folders play a critical role in the use of in-process measures. The data center is intended to provide real-time data on key measures and indicators of achievement in the classroom, such as homework completion, student attendance, math computation and reading comprehension. Data centers can include:

- District vision, mission and goals.
- The school improvement plan and SMART goals.
- Classroom SMART goals aligned to the school improvement plan.
- Data charts that track progress toward classroom SMART goals.

Participants are also exposed to the concept of a data folder, which is a way for students, teachers and parents to keep track of student performance. Students take ownership, accountability and responsibility for their own learning by setting individual goals and then tracking their own performance to determine their progress. The classroom data center uses in-process measures to track progress toward classroom SMART goals. To drive school improvement efforts at the student level, students track progress toward personal SMART goals in their student data folder.

The days of waiting until the following year to determine current performance are remnants of a past and relatively ineffective paradigm of school improvement. Implementing a streamlined, in-process measurement system that connects everyone's work to expected targets and results is how organizational change occurs. Effective leadership teams know that what gets measured frequently gets done.

Module five: deploying the school improvement plan

Involving everyone in school improvement efforts is the responsibility of the leadership team. Effective teams use everyone's collective effort to achieve results. In this module, participants learn effective ways to carry out the work of the school improvement plan.

An effective action plan explains how the school improvement plan's SMART goals will be carried out and implemented. This serves as the engine of the school improvement plan. Action plans provide marching orders to the front line and are inclusive and specific to "trying



out an improvement theory.” To maximize efforts of the action plan, school leadership teams need to make sure everyone understands their contribution to the effort.

Component six: effective professional development

Often, professional development is conceived as going to a conference or a workshop. The most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning and problem solving.

In this module, participants learn how teams—often called learning communities—operate with a commitment to the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation, and engage their members in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of the school district’s and school’s goals for student learning.

Participants are exposed to the National Staff Development Standards, which must be results driven, standards based and job embedded. Six best practices of professional development are discussed:

1. Engages teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection.
2. Is grounded in inquiry, reflection and experimentation that is participant-driven.
3. Is collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.
4. Is connected to and derived from teachers’ work with students.
5. Is sustained, ongoing, intensive and supported by modeling, coaching and problem solving.
6. Is connected to other aspects of school or district change.

Module seven: engaging teams in the PDSA cycle of continuous improvement

In this module, participants learn the value of process improvement through the plan-do-study-act cycle. PDSA is a systematic, data-driven seven-step process that uses quality tools. Quality tools are visual organizers that help students with planning, decision making and problem solving in many situations: on the job, at school, during meetings, in the classroom and at home. The PDSA cycle includes quality tools to keep the process moving and productive.



Module eight: sustaining school improvement efforts

Successful schools align school improvement goals to classroom goals and to individual student goals. The power of organizational change is realized when every employee, stakeholder and student understands how their work contributes to the improvement of student learning.

In this module, participants learn how continuous quality improvement can have a tremendous impact on student achievement results when leadership teams use a systemic approach and implement key strategies such as sharing the privilege and responsibility of leadership, establishing clear vision and precise direction to guide improvements, aligning the system and its parts, measuring what's important and involving everyone in continuous improvement efforts.

Is your team ready?

ASQ's ImpaQT training was created to help schools implement effective school improvement processes through the new paradigm of educational leadership. The eight modules incorporate an interactive exchange of best practices, hands-on activities and opportunities for reflection and application intended to help schools address the educational challenges of today. Could your school benefit from this new paradigm in school improvement?

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