Every year, hundreds of educators attend the National Quality Education Conference, which is hosted by ASQ and supported by the Education Division. For the past 12 years, I’ve had the fortunate opportunity to attend the conference as both a participant and a presenter. There hasn’t been a year that I’ve questioned the return on investment for me as a professional or for the educational organization that I was representing.

As the new superintendent of the Dunlap Community Unit School District No. 323 in my first year (2009), I was looking for a strategy to expose teachers and administrators to the world of quality in education. A key initiative in the district strategic plan was to embed continuous improvement practices throughout the organization from the boardroom to the classroom. I found myself reflecting on the key question any leader asks: “How do I take the system from where it is today to where we want it to be tomorrow?”

Rather than discuss the concept or have employees read about quality in education, I chose to bring 15 people—including central office personnel, building administrators, frontline teachers, and the teacher’s union leadership—to the premier conference focusing on quality in education. Our group had a dynamic experience at NQEC. Enthusiasm was high and much synergy was generated by people attending the conference, which is hosted by ASQ. I was fortunate to attend the conference as a representative of the Dunlap Community Unit School District No. 323 in Peoria, IL, at http://www.dunlapcusd.net/.

About the Author
Jay Marino is the superintendent of the Dunlap Community Unit School District in Peoria, IL. He has delivered keynote presentations at local, state, national, and international conferences. Marino also serves as an international consultant, assisting government and educational organizations in their continuous improvement efforts. He is the coauthor of Quality Across the Curriculum: Integrating Quality Tools and PDSA With Standards (Quality Press 2004) and serves as the K-12 systems chair for the Education Division.

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Editor’s note: The 19th NQEC will be held in Indianapolis, IN, November 6–8, 2011.