

## **Start Filling Your Quality Toolbox**

*By Nicole Adrian*

Understanding quality—and the tools, methods and applications that come with it—can be difficult at first for educators. Many have preconceived notions that quality can be implemented only in manufacturing and service industries and that the tools and methods don't apply to educators and students.

As most of you know, however, that isn't true. Quality can—and should—be used in district, school and classroom settings. Basic tools, including educator favorites such as the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle, cause-and-effect diagram and flow chart, can be used to chart student progress, study a process for improvement or identify possible causes for a problem.

Everyone has different levels of understanding or knowledge of quality tools. With this issue of *Primary and Secondary Education Brief*, we hope to introduce those new to quality to the basic tools and methods. For those who already know about them, we hope to reinforce why these tools are important and useful. We hope everyone takes something away from the personal stories and examples given in this issue.

The author of *The Quality Toolbox*, Nancy R. Tague, provides detail on an easy and popular tool: brainstorming. Tague describes how brainstorming, in all its forms, has variations that make it more useful. She explains the fundamentals of brainstorming, including the basic five-step procedure, and then moves into its other variations, such as round-robin and brainwriting.

In another article, Sharon Frys of Community Consolidated School District 93 in Illinois describes how the district identified process improvement as a critical component in its continuous improvement efforts and used quality tools to reach its goals. Frys includes a handy example of an electronic template that employees used to record and represent all key work processes.

Ann Haggerty Raines writes about how ASQ's three-module education training program, ImpaQT, has exposed trainees to basic quality tools, including the PDSA cycle and a model for sustainable school improvement. Raines, an ImpaQT trainer, also touches on how other quality tools, such as decision-making matrixes and Pareto diagrams, are highly beneficial for instructors.

In the last article, Patrick Murphy and Teressa Caldwell of Fairfax County Public School in Falls Church, VA, describe how the district has used quality tools in its school improvement planning document and resource guide. To start, the district's office of

educational planning offered a series of workshops and seminars on quality tools to assist schools in analyzing data and information, facilitating group decision making and understanding relationships between variables.

Tague was right when she said, “Brainstorming has only five simple steps, but when we study this tool, we discover layers of sophistication and variation that can lead to brilliant brainstorming sessions. The same is true for all the ‘simple’ quality tools. Study and practice them, and you will discover how powerful and flexible they are.”