



Editor's Note: Standard Definition

by Megan Schmidt, editor



The word “standard” has almost as many definitions as the word “quality.”

In the U.S. education system, standards are associated with standards-based education mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act. It’s an approach to improve instruction and learning by setting high expectations and providing clear requirements for students and teachers, designing instruction so that all students benefit from learning opportunities, and holding schools accountable for student performance.¹

In the quality world, a standard is a document that provides requirements or guidelines that ensure products and services are reliable, safe and meet stakeholder expectations. Some standards are very specific, and some are generic and non-prescriptive. In the United States, the use of an international or American national standard is voluntary, but often expected by certain stakeholder groups. There’s a standard for everything—from pasta cooking times, to credit card thickness, to how an organization should be operated.²

Even the development process is standard. International and American national standards are developed by a panel of experts and field practitioners who recognize a need for a standard. The group will meet several times to discuss and negotiate a draft. As soon as a draft is complete, it is shared with similar committees for its members to review, comment and vote. If a consensus is reached, a standard is born. If not, the technical committee goes back to work and makes appropriate revisions until the other committees agree that it’s ready for the industry to use. Standards often take several years to develop and are systematically reviewed

every five to seven years for improvement. This consensus-based and rigorous process is thought to be why standards are effective.

Quality management system (QMS) standards, the focus of this issue, provide a formalized, process-oriented approach to document and review the structure, responsibilities and procedures required to achieve effective quality management in an organization.

[ASQ/ANSI Z1.11:2011 Requirements for education organizations](#) is an American national standard for educators and school administrators. Similar to other industry-specific standards published in recent years, Z1.11 is based on the widely-adopted ISO 9001 standard, which had 1.1 million certified users worldwide at the end of 2010, the most recent data available.³

Organizations of all sizes and sectors—even those in highly-regulated industries such as food production, medical devices and aerospace—use QMSs as a tool to manage business.

I wasn't able to find much data on how many schools have implemented a QMS, but I know of a few stories that illustrate the benefits of QMSs in education organizations:

- In this month's exclusive feature "Not Your Ordinary Standard," F. Craig Johnson, a key figure in the development of a QMS model for the education sector, explains how the Z1.11 can help organizations achieve goals and meet requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.
- The case study "Continuous Improvement in Public Schools Through ISO 9001:2000," details how the Racine Unified School District used the ISO 9001 framework to close the achievement gap between demographic groups in reading and math.
- "Nevada School District Saves Millions Through Process Management" is a case study that shows how ISO 9001 enabled the Clark County School District to generate \$174 million in cost savings in an era of doing more with less.



Quality culture is at the heart of any organization-wide approach used for continuous improvement. Don't miss the ASQ TV segment ["A Culture of Quality,"](#) which features the late Brien Palmer, a thought-leader in

organizational culture who passed away shortly after the episode was created.

Do you think quality standards belong in education? Sound off to mschmidt@asq.org.

References

1. "What is Standards-based Education?" Massachusetts Parent and Information Resource Center, http://pplace.org/ed_in_ma/standards-based.php.
2. "What is a standard?" International Organization for Standardization, <http://www.iso.org/iso/home/standards.htm>
3. "ISO Survey Reveals Increase in QMS Certifications," *Journal for Quality and Participation*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 2012, <http://asq.org/quality-participation/2012/01/increase-in-qms-certifications.pdf>.