



ASQ Higher Education Brief

Editor's Note: Scientific Method

By Megan Schmidt, editor

There are more people than ever working diligently to improve education quality to establish the most effective and efficient teaching methods and to optimize student achievement. However, most quality improvement taking place in education seems to be an exercise in trial and error. There is little evidence to support which improvement projects, methods and techniques work best, making it hard for proven practices to be widely adopted and results duplicated across districts and regions.

Soon, that may change.

Education is at the forefront of an emerging field called improvement science, which is a scientifically rigorous approach to the development, evaluation and dissemination of continuous improvement methods. The healthcare field was one of the the first sectors to deploy improvement science through [hospital hygiene campaigns](#) supported by the Joint Commission. To get a closer look at improvement science in education settings I spoke to a researcher at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, an institution pioneering improvement science in education.

Chris Thorn is the managing director of analytics and program technology at the Carnegie Center and is an ASQ Education Division-sponsored presenter at this year's National Quality Education Conference taking place Nov. 17-18 in Milwaukee. In the exclusive webinar, he provided a preview of his session and his thoughts on the application of continuous improvement at both the K-12 and higher education levels. Thorn also details Carnegie's Networked Improvement Community project, which works with remedial math teachers at community colleges to learn what encourages or impedes student achievement. The organization has also formed 90-day improvement cycles modeled after an approach created by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement to facilitate rapid learning in education research.

It's difficult to improve what you don't understand. It's exciting to see that education is on the cutting edge of this emerging discipline and is taking great strides toward discovering, analyzing and solving issues systemwide.

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