



Keynote Speakers Gear Up for NQEC 2011

[Three keynote speakers](#) are on tap to present at this year's [National Quality Education Conference](#) (NQEC). The speakers— Michael Perich, Jay Marino and Jan Polderman—recently provided insight into what they'll discuss at the event, quality in education and what attendees can gain from attending the conference. NQEC will be held Nov. 6-8 in Indianapolis.

Michael Perich, consultant, systemwide continuous improvement, Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland:

Can you tell us some of what you'll be talking about at the conference? I will be discussing how we are closing the achievement gap using the *Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence*. In addition, I will present how we used process management and improvement strategies to make significant changes in student achievement and in operations.

Why is quality in education important? Quality is important because we should strive to make every child's experience a positive and successful one, filled with many opportunities to excel and achieve his or her goals and dreams. The *Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence* are the most rigorous set of criteria any organization can measure themselves against. That is why we chose Baldrige as our performance excellence model for continuous improvement.

What do you think attendees should get out of the conference? The attendees should leave with an understanding of the criteria and how any organization can succeed using this model. We have 22,000 employees and 145,000 students who represent 164 countries speaking 184 different languages. We have 200 schools plus 30 additional facilities covering 500 square miles. We serve 13 million meals each year. I could go on, but I think you can see that we are an extremely large and diverse organization. Any organization willing to work hard can achieve what we have done.

Any other advice or insight to share with readers? Any organization willing to work hard can achieve what we have done.

Jay Marino, superintendent of schools, Dunlap Community Unit School District 323, Dunlap, IL, and Jan Polderman, director of Magistrum (Dutch Center for Educational Leadership), Netherlands:

Can you tell us some of what you'll be talking about at the conference? The



keynote presentation titled “Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement for 21st Century Learning and Leadership in a Global Community” will focus on how continuous improvement has no geographic or cultural barriers. We’ll compare and contrast the Dutch and U.S. systems of education, define 21st century leadership in educational organizations, demonstrate 21st century learning in Dutch and American schools, and recommend ways to create a culture of continuous improvement.

Why is quality in education important? Embracing a philosophy of quality sets educational organizations on a path of continuous improvement. Quality in education is important because it encompasses many best practices of organizational change. Key concepts embraced by quality school systems include: setting and communicating direction throughout the system; alignment of goals at all levels; stakeholder participation in improvement efforts through teamwork, collaboration and shared leadership; using data to guide decision making; and and measuring customer satisfaction. Quality in education is designed to empower students, staff and stakeholders to drive improvements that bring about organizational results—the mission of most school systems.

What do you think attendees should get out of the conference? In short, participants at the conference should return to their systems different than when they left. They should expect to experience firsthand how educators around the country were improving student achievement and creating 21st century educational learning environments. Networking with other educators on a continuous improvement journey, participants should have the contacts, resources and examples to take their own improvement efforts to the next level. Participants should leave the conference inspired to transform their own school systems.

Any other advice or insight to share with readers? Continuous improvement is a journey, not a program. The pace of the journey is a marathon, not a sprint. One of the most important insights is to create a culture of change within the system. Until stakeholders have a sense of urgency to do anything different, they’re not likely to embrace a continuous improvement approach.