



College of

Education

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
TRI-CITIES

## Leading Tips

*"Little moments, big impact."*

WSU Tri-Cities College of Education is committed to quality leadership during this time of uncertainty and new circumstances. "Leading Tips" is a quick resource for educational leaders.

### Overcoming the Ambiguity of School Planning in the Time of COVID-19: Developing a Schoolwide Needs Assessment Strategy by Shannon Calderone

The COVID-19 outbreak's impact on learning has yet to be fully understood - and realistically won't be for some time to come. What we do know is that many of our students will return to school with significant gaps in learning, undiagnosed trauma and anxiety, quarantine-related habits and routines requiring time for adjustment, and with parents/guardians still reeling from the economic impact of this pandemic on their livelihood and family's well being. Missed spring testing, as well as missed time with students, further hampers our ability to anticipate individual learning gaps and personalized needs.

As a result, there will be a strong inclination by school and district leaders to respond by "triage," i.e., concentrating available resources into the most pressing problems to the detriment of so-called lesser problems. Research tells us, however, that in the area of problem-solving and school improvement, *perceived* needs are often not the same as *actual* needs. Rarely do our instinctual responses address the root cause of problems or lead to impactful solutions. This is because school problem-solving is often dependent upon a school's history, demographics, prior achievement patterns, talent mix among school instructional and administrative staff, shared values/beliefs, not to mention the strengths of our local communities. This alchemy of elements contribute meaningfully to the uniqueness of a school – and to their problem-solving capabilities.

Research also tells us that in moments of organizational ambiguity, decision-making must be driven by high-quality information as it will ensure informed, intentional, well-designed, and timely planning efforts. Schoolwide needs assessments are a strategically smart first step in moving a building past anxiety-inducing ambiguity while also ensuring against "triage-thinking." How does one develop an effective needs assessment? Critical first-order questions may include the following:

**Scope:** Do I wish to engage in a comprehensive needs assessment? Segmented or targeted needs assessment? What makes the most sense under the current circumstances?

**Timing:** How does timing factor into when (and how) we might be able to generate the most critical and meaningful information about targeted areas of our work/practices?

**Stakeholders:** Who are the key stakeholders that should have a voice in this assessment process? How might the school leverage the expertise and shared wisdom of different stakeholders to address some of the critical questions of greatest concern to our school?

**Data Collection Methods:** Will surveys provide the depth of response necessary? Will focus groups ensure the honesty of response to more difficult topics? How can a mixture of different approaches strengthen the quality of information we seek?

**Resource Mapping:** What are the dedicated resources that we will need to deploy? How will we deploy them?

**Analysis:** How do I maximize the available talents and abilities of building personnel to make sense of the information produced? How might those same voices contribute to shaping a meaningful action plan to follow?

Communication: What are the meaningful ways in which to convey critical information to key stakeholders both within and outside the building? How do we celebrate our successes and regroup after disappointments?

Answering these initial questions will provide you with the basic building blocks for developing a more effective needs assessment strategy. Some additional resources include the following:

- Center for School Turnaround and Improvement: <https://csti.wested.org/resource/using-needs-assessments-for-school-and-district-improvement/>
- Council of Chief State School Officers: <https://ccsso.org/resource-library/understanding-federally-required-education-policy-needs-assessments-and-maximizing>
- State Support Network: [https://statesupportnetwork.ed.gov/system/files/needsassessmentguidebook-508\\_003.pdf](https://statesupportnetwork.ed.gov/system/files/needsassessmentguidebook-508_003.pdf)
- IDEA Partnership Stakeholder Tools: <http://www.ideapartnership.org/using-tools/learning-together/collections.html?id=1598:sisp-tools>
- NASP Assessing School and District Level Needs Resource: <https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/nasp-practice-model-implementation-guide/section-ii-nasp-practice-model-implementation-and-service-delivery/assessing-school-level-and-district-level-needs>

## Your Statewide Educational Leadership Team...



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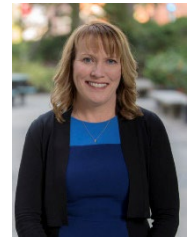
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