

Data is Foundational to Implementing MTSS

Gina Yonts, AWSP, Associate Director.

School Improvement is an ongoing process; and the pandemic, although challenging, has not stopped districts and school leadership from continuing their improvement efforts. The pandemic has shown a light on the many historical inequities at play in our P-16 system—making the need for data literacy even more imperative. Districts across Washington state have taken advantage of remote learning experiences for their school leaders by providing professional learning to build data literacy skills through participation in the AWSP Data Literate School Leader series. The series, leaning heavily on the AWSP Leadership Framework, Theory of Action, and Cycles of Inquiry using the AWSP Evidence of Impact Tool has helped to build a leader's skill set to effectively tackle school improvement based on their school's data.

The focus on implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in Washington also calls out that data is foundational if such a system is to be effective. Data literacy is a skill set critical, then, not only to improvement efforts but in realizing equity. However, we rarely take time to allow for the learning and curiosity needed to gain deep understanding among our school leaders. According to the AWSP Leadership Framework, to be proficient in data literacy, school leaders need to be able to analyze multiple data sets and build capacity among their staff, students, and stakeholders around access to data and its usage. Providing time and energy to build collective efficacy among school leaders is helpful in two ways: it builds leadership confidence in being able to reveal inequities in the system they are leading and develops leaders who can build capacity with data literacy among their staff and students.

Shelby Lockhart, a director in the Yakima School District, has been a key player in advocating for all building and district leadership to participate in the AWSP Data series. Providing a safe and positive learning environment for school leaders to learn and grow in their data literacy skills has impacted their instructional leadership teams in partnership with their school leaders to create the structures necessary to move the dial in school improvement efforts. Each live PD session operated like small data literacy PLCs, which provided the time and space to dig into OSPI public and protected resources—building skills and really digging in. Collaboratively, school leaders, district support staff, and other key players began to implement Plan-Implement-Assess-Reflect Cycles of Inquiry using their school's data. As a result, they uncovered that their Tier 1 systems were the weak link in improvement due to lack of standards alignment and student access. Therefore, the #1 district initiative for 2021–22 is to provide professional

learning and implementation of standards-based unit planning, which was informed by the AWSP data literacy series.

Intentionally creating learning and teaching spaces for school leaders is essential. The importance of treating leaders as learners is critical if we expect them to leave a professional development experience and actually do something with what they have learned. Learning takes time, intentionality, focused dialogue, and discussion with a healthy dose of reflection. If we were to dream big about re-engagement, what if we placed a high importance for every leader in the system to be supported in becoming data literate and equipped with the skills to build collective efficacy among their staff? Could we re-engage our students as assessment partners and call them to the learning table, let their voices be heard, and begin to realize equity throughout the Washington school system?