Solving Complex Problems: A 4-Step Approach

The leadership team for the York County schools in Virginia used this approach to get students back to school after a fire damaged an educational complex, and then to make decisions during the pandemic.

- See the issues
- Clarify the issues
- Assess priorities
- Name the next steps

- State the decision
- Establish and classify criteria
- List & evaluate alternatives
- Consider risks
- Think about the best balanced choice

- Predict what could go wrong
- List likely causes
- Agree on preventive actions
- Note contingent actions

- State the problem
- Organize relevant information
- Look for possible causes
- Vet possible causes
- Ensure we’ve found true cause

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