Setting the Stage for Formative Assessment

The District's Role

Webinar user's guide

May 2018

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This user's guide is intended to supplement the webinar, "Setting the Stage for Formative Assessment: The District's Role." The guide includes tools to use with your professional learning group as you develop an implementation plan for formative assessment in your district.

The Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) is a nationally renowned research center at the University of California, Los Angeles. CRESST has almost five decades of unsurpassed experience in helping states, school districts, and schools develop and align their assessment to measure increasingly rigorous standards.For more information about CREST, visit cresst.org.

Preview

The learning goals below are addressed in the webinar. We encourage you to focus only on those concepts that are relevant to you. Indicate below which goals are of most interest. Following the webinar (and, if applicable, discussion with your colleagues), indicate the goals toward which you made some progress or gained more knowledge than you had before.

#1 ▸▸ Understand what formative assessment is, its role in a comprehensive assessment system, and its relationship to student outcomes.

	Of great interest	Of some interest	Progress?
Clarifying what formative assessment is			
Definition of formative assessment			
What research says about formative assessment			
Where it fits in a comprehensive assessment system			
Elements of the formative assessment process			

#2 ▸▸ Learn how to develop a vision and long-term plan for formative assessment implementation in your district.

	Of great interest	Of some interest	Progress?
Importance of definitional clarity			
Coordinating to existing programs and initiatives			
Evaluate quality of formative assessment in curriculum and instruction			
Building partnerships			
Examples of long-term plans			

#3 ▸▸ Learn how district leaders can establish the culture, structures, and supports for effective professional learning about formative assessment.

	Of great interest	Of some interest	Progress?
Culture and community of learning			
Essential resources for professional learning			

Clarify

What is formative assessment?

Which of these **best** describes your understanding of formative assessment?

A. Formative assessments are strategies that teachers use to obtain information about students' learning. Some examples are learning logs, exit tickets, questioning and discussion, conferencing, and rubrics.

B. Formative assessment provides teachers with early warning signals about students who are falling behind and who may benefit from additional help prior to end-of-year testing. Formative assessment informs decisions about curricular adjustments and professional learning needs.

C. Formative assessment is a process used by students and teachers during instruction to elicit and use evidence to improve understanding of intended learning outcomes and support students to become more self-directed learners.

D. Formative assessments are assignments, projects, or tests that provide feedback to students about their achievement on a unit of study.

Clarify continued

What is formative assessment?

The formative assessment process includes establishing learning goals, articulating success criteria, collecting and analyzing evidence of learning, and adjusting instruction both during and immediately after the lesson.

Sometimes the term "formative assessment" is inaccurately used to describe the activities or assessment tasks that elicit evidence of student learning. These might look like quizzes or check-ins. They can range in complexity from a "thumbs up/thumbs down" to an exit slip to a rough draft of an essay. It is common to find lists of "effective formative assessments" that describe a variety of such tasks. These tasks by themselves do not constitute the formative assessment process.

Choice (A) is a partial definition of formative assessment. It describes tasks and tools that teachers can use to gather evidence about students. But without relevant, thoughtful learning goals and clear, well-communicated success criteria, pedagogically responsive changes to instruction, and active student engagement, these tasks and tools can result in irrelevant and disconnected data about student learning. ✗ This is the most common misconception about formative assessment.

Choice (B) defines interim assessments, which are given a few times a year and may result in school program decisions that typically do not have immediate effect on daily instruction. Formative assessment is immediate, continuous, classroom-based, and daily.

Choice (C) is a simplified restatement of the FAST SCASS[*] definition of formative assessment. For many educators, the concept of formative assessment as an in-depth, all-inclusive instructional practice that extends well beyond strategies and tools requires a significant shift in thinking. ✓ This is the correct answer.

Choice (D) describes classroom summative assessments. This one is a bit tricky in that these assessments *can* be formative if they are used to change instruction immediately after they are administered and if students receive feedback they can use to influence their learning of that content (e.g., if students re-write or revise their project after receiving feedback). However, if they are only receiving comments about their achievement on that unit, and the class moves on to a different set of learning goals, the assessment was not formative in function.

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[*] The Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)

Evaluate

How well do your existing programs and initiatives promote formative assessment?

Evaluate one or more of your existing programs for its formative assessment qualities. Programs can include anything that your district uses to promote learning such as textbooks, online programs, assemblies, professional learning initiatives, and so forth. For each of the 20 formative assessment elements listed below, ask: *How well does the program do this?* For example, a textbook series will likely score well on "helps teachers plan instruction" while an assembly about bullying might not, because the assembly's focus would likely not be on helping teachers plan classroom instruction. However, that same assembly might score very well on "teaches students how to direct their own learning" if it helps students to advocate for themselves.

Name of Program:

Instructional practice

0 not at all or not applicable   3 extremely well

1. Helps teachers plan instruction.	0	1	2	3
2. Has an impact on classroom instruction that is ongoing (rather than a single or limited number of events).	0	1	2	3
3. Focuses primarily on classroom instruction and interactions.	0	1	2	3
4. Elicits evidence of student learning.	0	1	2	3
5. Provides support to analyze evidence of student learning.	0	1	2	3
6. Supports teachers in using evidence to adjust instruction.	0	1	2	3
7. Supports teachers in responding effectively to individual students.	0	1	2	3

Learning goals

0 not at all or not applicable   3 extremely well

8. Uses college and career ready standards and/or other standards to determine learning goals.	0	1	2	3
9. Situates learning goals within a progression of learning.	0	1	2	3
10. Provides learning goals that can be reasonably accomplished in a lesson.	0	1	2	3

Evaluate continued

How well do your existing programs and initiatives promote formative assessment?

Student involvement

0 not at all or not applicable   3 extremely well

11. Teaches students how to direct their own learning.	0	1	2	3
12. Teaches students how to engage in self-assessment and peer feedback.	0	1	2	3
13. Teaches students how to achieve learning goals.	0	1	2	3
14. Teaches students how to identify any gaps between their understanding and the learning goals.	0	1	2	3
15. Provides students with actionable feedback from peers and teachers.	0	1	2	3

Equity and classroom culture

0 not at all or not applicable   3 extremely well

16. Benefits all students.	0	1	2	3
17. Benefits all teachers.	0	1	2	3
18. Promotes and supports a collaborative and respectful classroom culture.	0	1	2	3
19. Encourages students to take risks and learn from mistakes.	0	1	2	3
20. Provides students with multiple modes and opportunities to demonstrate their learning.	0	1	2	3

Look at the program's ratings across the four categories. How can the program be augmented or revised in order to strengthen its integration of formative assessment practice?

Act

What are the roles of district leaders?

District administrators have great influence on whether and how formative assessment is implemented. Below are some of the steps that district leaders can consider to promote formative assessment.

Vision & planning

	What do you already have in place?	What could you do next?
1. **Long-term commitment** *What is your timeline?*		
2. **Definitional clarity** *Will your district commit to formative assessment as an instructional process that shapes daily classroom learning and teaching?*		
3. **Alignment to existing initiatives and priorities** *Can you find meaningful connections between your current programs and formative assessment?*		
4. **Partnerships** *How can external partners provide additional resources and assistance?*		

Leadership

	What do you already have in place?	What could you do next?
5. **Lead learner** *Are you willing to engage in the work alongside students and teachers?*		
6. **Team builder** *Have you identified individuals who can spread formative assessment throughout schools?*		
7. **Communicator** *How will you regularly inspire and remind your community of progress toward the vision and long-term plan?*		

Act continued

What are the roles of district leaders?

Resources for professional learning	What do you already have in place?	What could you do next?
8. Standards, assessment, and curriculum *Has the district provided a yearlong scope and sequence of instruction, a clear and comprehensible articulation of your district's assessment system, and the necessary instructional resources to implement formative assessment?*		
9. Time *When will teachers, coaches, and administrators develop their formative assessment capacity?*		
10. Allocation of funding and other resources *What content and services are necessary to do this work well, and how will that be provided?*		
11. Structures *What kind of collaboration, communication, feedback, and reflection tools and structures (e.g., regular meetings) will you use to keep the work moving forward?*		

Reflect and self-assess

Did you accomplish your learning goals?

Look back at the Preview on page 3. Have you made some progress on any of your learning goals?

Write your own learning goals to continue this work. Some suggestions:

- Learn about a specific formative assessment topic in more depth. This might include a deeper dive into the nuts and bolts of formative assessment.

- Find out more about your local context: contact people who know about prior instructional initiatives in your district, talk to teachers and other stakeholders about how formative assessment can lead to improved instructional practice.

- Explore your state resources about formative assessment.

- Look for external partners and organizations that can provide assistance.

- Be able to explain the role of formative assessment in your state's comprehensive assessment system to other district leaders, coaches, administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

- Evaluate your current initiatives for their formative assessment qualities. Analyze how gaps can be addressed.

Learning goals
What knowledge or skill will you seek next?

Success criteria
What observable actions will lead to accomplishing this goal?

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