



ABCA

ACHIEVING BALANCE IN CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT

CASE STUDY | Global Educational Excellence (GEE)

Global charter network strengthens schools' commitment to balanced assessment



ABCA

Michigan Assessment Consortium

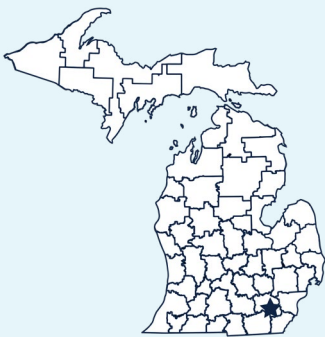
Global Educational Excellence (GEE) is a network of 14 charter schools that work to provide excellent educational opportunities and also to build safe and caring cultures that support strong character development and safe and caring learning environments. This case study details how educators at GEE built on this strong foundation to strengthen GEE schools' commitment to balanced assessment.

Global Educational Excellence (GEE)



GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Enrollment data = **4,500 network wide**



Key Players

Marisa Monroe

Marisa Monroe serves as the Instructional Coaching Coordinator for Global Educational Excellence, overseeing and supervising approximately 20 instructional coaches across GEE academies. In this role, she coordinates systemwide coaching efforts, facilitates professional learning for coaches, supports implementation fidelity, and evaluates coaching practice to ensure alignment with district instructional priorities. Marisa has held instructional leadership roles within GEE since 2018 and has brought in more than two decades of experience in education.

Marisa began her teaching career in 2002, teaching English language arts and social science in grades 6–12 for 13 years. She joined Global Educational Excellence in 2015 as a middle school ELA teacher in Detroit. During this time, Marisa identified a need for stronger curricular coherence at her school and

worked collaboratively with her principal to pilot curriculum resources she had used successfully earlier in her career. The positive instructional impact of this work contributed to broader curriculum adoption and ultimately to Marisa's transition into instructional coaching, where she is able to support teachers in implementing curriculum with depth and fidelity.

Kristen Nagle

Kristen Nagle first started working as a math teacher at Central Academy in Ann Arbor. After teaching for nine years, she became an assessment coordinator/assistant principal, a role in which she gained a wide range of experiences and insight into how a school is run. At the end of three years in the position and 12 years in education overall, she took a job at GEE as the Central Academy's service provider in 2019. She ultimately became the Curriculum and Instruction Director at GEE, a position she held at the time of the case study.

As part of her responsibilities in that role, Kristen leads 20 coaches in GEE's 14 schools. The work of leading coaches involves facilitating monthly meetings, connecting coaches with material resources, and working with coaches to come alongside teachers to plan, gather and analyze data, and work with teachers to enact new instructional practices. Kristen also helps prepare coaches to lead professional development for teachers in their building, including leading data teams and promoting the MTSS process in the district. In their interactions with teachers through coaching and the facilitation of professional learning sessions, coaches focus on student-centered coaching with teachers that highlighted the importance of coaching to promote student wellbeing rather than on teacher evaluation. Over time, the work of Kristen and the instructional coaches has recast coaching as something *done with* teachers rather than something *done to* them.

Early efforts to use assessment to improve teaching and learning

Marisa eventually has moved into a district instructional coaching role, working closely with teachers to implement effective instructional strategies, particularly in underserved settings. She has developed a strong interest in strengthening her instructional "toolbox" and supporting diverse student populations.

The work of student-centered coaching feeds nicely in the concern for more balanced assessment. While Marisa and Kristen had long known of the importance of assessment, their journey to realizing the power of assessment had a few stops and starts. For years, educators at GEE had been focused on collecting, analyzing, and responding to student data; this focus led to many substantive conversations about the role of assessment in school improvement. GEE educators had worked implementing teacher-made pre- and post-assessments that helped track student growth but were less useful instructionally. Specifically, because they asked students about content that they knew little or nothing about, most pre-assessments needed to be strengthened to provide clearer guidance about how students should be grouped and how to best instruct them. Marisa, Kristen, and the GEE teachers also experimented with common assessments, but the different pacing across teachers made administering these assessments at particular time points tricky.

GEE educators also experimented with using summative assessment results to improve student outcomes. They created extended learning blocks for students who scored poorly on the MSTEP in English language arts or mathematics. While many of the GEE educators liked the idea in theory, in practice the additional learning blocks complicated

scheduling and it soon became apparent that teachers would benefit from greater clarity and alignment around expectations. Furthermore, Kristen noted that the middle- and high-school teachers needed additional support and training in small group remedial teaching.

A relationship Marisa had established before coming to GEE provided a fortuitous opportunity for GEE to unlock the power of assessment. While attending a conference, Marisa connected with Kim Young, then Director of the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) program at the Michigan Department of Education, who introduced Marisa to the Achieving Balance in Classroom Assessment (ABCA) framework. Marisa remained active in ABCA even after coming to GEE and one day she and Kristen talked about the potential of assessment, prompting Marisa to tell Kristen about the potential of the ABCA project. After this conversation, Marisa and Kristen decided to form a team of GEE coaches and participate. They hoped that participating in the ABCA program would propel GEE to further enhance its use of assessment and further its commitment to providing excellent educative experiences of all students.

Getting started with Achieving Balance in Classroom Assessment (ABCA)

Participating in ABCA has helped deepen the organization's understanding of balanced assessment systems and formative assessment practices. Together with the district assessment coordinator, Marisa and Kristen engaged in intensive professional learning through ABCA and additional MTSS-focused collaboratives. This work prompted a shift from an over-reliance on summative assessment toward a more balanced system emphasizing formative assessment as a driver of instructional improvement.

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In her coaching and professional learning sessions, Marisa began emphasizing the importance of eliciting evidence of student learning, making sense of that evidence, and responding instructionally in real time. These principles became embedded in both coaching conversations and systemwide professional learning.

Marisa and Kristen also intentionally modeled formative assessment practices in their own leadership work by collecting evidence of educator learning and using that evidence to refine professional development and coaching supports. Marisa also joined the FAME program as a coach, initially participating independently to build capacity and understanding before scaling implementation across the GEE network. Over time, formative assessment principles were infused into coaching practice and professional learning

without mandating immediate program participation.

The commitment to balanced assessment with a focus on the formative assessment process helped facilitate Marisa's and Kristen's instructionally focused interactions with teachers, coaches, and administrators. Teachers would often come to Marisa and Kristen and tell them about the challenges they were facing and what was and was not working. They would talk through the difficulties with the teachers and help them better understand their challenges and how to address them in a manner informed by balanced assessment and the formative assessment process. In these conversations, Marisa and Kristen stressed the importance of trial-and-error experimentation that might require some calculated risks.

Expanding the conversation and focus

Kristen and the GEE coaches extended these conversations to more formal data team and teacher team meetings. They were intentional about soliciting concerns and then working through these concerns and making sure they were addressed. Formal and informal conversations elevated teacher voice and legitimized teacher concerns while at the same time Marisa, Kristen, and coaches were able to redouble their focus on instructional improvement and growth in student learning. Teachers soon began to express their appreciation. Marisa and Kristen would have teachers approach her to say, "For so many years, I just didn't understand how these work together. Now I see what's going on and it's beautiful, and my classroom is so much easier. The kids are doing the work. I'm here gathering the data. I'm here helping."

GEE's ABCA team soon began to focus on the formative assessment process in particular. In addition to the ABCA, the GEE coach team and a few GEE principals and teachers signed

up to participate in the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) program. Participating in ABCA and the FAME program provided focus and resources to concentrate on things GEE educators had long been passionate about pursuing. In her interactions with GEE educators,

Kristen stressed, "My biggest thing is trying to ensure that this is not 'another thing.' This is how you do what you do. This is what you need to do what you do." By "this" Kristen meant the integrated effort of pre-existing commitments, structural arrangements (coaching, data team meetings), and program participation that were not "separate things that we're required to do," but rather a multi-faceted integrated effort. All instructionally related activities, from coaching conversations to data team meetings to professional learning sessions to program activities would all be in service of improving teaching and learning through assessment, especially classroom assessment.

By the 2024–25 school year, every GEE academy had an active FAME learning team composed of administrators, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders. Participation was intentionally inclusive across disciplines, with opportunities extended to teachers beyond core academic subjects, including art and physical education. This broad engagement supported a shared understanding of assessment as a tool for learning rather than evaluation.

As a result of the combined leadership of Marisa, Kristen, instructional coaches, administrators, and teachers, Global Educational Excellence has made significant progress toward implementing a balanced assessment system that foregrounds formative assessment practices. While this work is ongoing, Marisa continues to guide instructional coaches and educators through a balance of support and challenge, addressing lingering concerns related to

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assessment misuse while reinforcing that effective formative assessment practices are both impactful and achievable with sustained professional learning and coaching support.

Conclusion

Despite “a long journey for the assessment piece” in improved educational opportunities and outcomes, Marisa and Kristen have remained passionate about the potential of assessment. There is an appetite to learn more about assessment and how to use it more effectively. Kristen has continued to talk with the GEE coaches about the importance of assessment and many of these coaches have been as enthusiastic about assessment as Marisa and Kristen.

GEE’s journey is filled with determination and vision despite the many challenges that often discourage concerted efforts to try something new. The case demonstrates the power of what can happen when a district’s sustained vision combines with new opportunities for learning and growth. Even so, challenges remain.

Primarily, as is common through the educational sector, stabilizing staff retention will be an important focus moving forward to bolster any initiative requiring professional learning and capacity building. One of the challenges with committing to more balanced assessment and enactment of the formative assessment process is teacher, administrator, and coach turnover. It is difficult to see the fruits of professional learning and capacity

building when people leave frequently. Nevertheless, GEE educators persist in the hope that concerted efforts over time will lead to improved teacher buy-in and commitment, both to the balanced assessment initiative, specifically, and to remaining at GEE for the long term.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What new insights about balanced assessment systems do you have after reading this case study?
2. Trial-and-error experimentation and calculated risks were a big part of the success in GEE. How might each be an important element of change? What experimentation and risk-taking would be necessary in your context?
3. How might you apply any other lessons learned in your own context?

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About the MAC

The Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) is a professional association of educators who believe quality education depends on accurate, balanced, and meaningful assessment. A nonpartisan and nonprofit organization, the MAC provides leadership and services to advance high-quality balanced assessment practices and systems.

We believe all children deserve a quality education that prepares them for success. Quality education depends on the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and balanced, meaningful assessment that advances as well as verifies learning. Educators must be assessment literate to improve educational results.

Since 2008, the MAC has worked to encourage and support schools in:

- Adopting standards and educator curriculum for assessment literacy
- Improving assessment literacy and skill among educators
- Implementing formative assessment practices to balance assessment
- Embracing assessment as a positive tool to guide teaching and learning

Learn more about us and explore all we have to offer at MichiganAssessmentConsortium.org

About MAC Case Studies

MAC's Case Studies seek to connect educators to best practices in educational assessment. Guided by the needs of education practitioners, the MAC engages in study and action research to add to the collective knowledge about effective assessment practice. We create resources and tools that support assessment literacy and the use of high quality assessment practices and implementation of high quality assessment systems.



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