

Accomplishments of the Assessment for Learning Community 2024-2025

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In the 2024-2025 school year, the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) organized and underwrote a series of four virtual meetings for the Assessment for Learning Community (AflC). In collaboration with assessment experts from the MAC, the AflC was led by Kathy Dewsbury-White, Margaret Heritage, Independent Consultant, and Caroline Wylie, Senior Associate, the Center for Assessment. This brief documents the AflC's accomplishments for its inaugural year.

PURPOSE

The AflC offers a dedicated space to support the collaboration of state- and local-level leaders for sustained learning about what it takes to leverage and scale the implementation of the formative assessment process and policies that promote its implementation in the nation's classrooms.

AflC MEMBERS

Individuals who were known to the MAC as being interested in formative assessment were invited to join the AflC. Participants included several representatives from state departments of education, representatives from a county office of education and several from a large school district. A list of core participants can be found in Appendix A.¹

GUIDING DEFINITION

The AflC used a definition from the Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers Collaborative of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) as a guide and a reference point for thinking and discussion.

AflC Goals

- Promoting a common understanding of the formative assessment process
- Establishing structures and processes that support shared learning
- Sharing efforts and strategies to support educators in using the process
- Defining clear outcomes and success criteria for collaborative work
- Identifying mutual areas of interest and need
- Raising awareness of national and international efforts in advancing the formative assessment process

Formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become self-directed learners.

- Clarifying learning goals and success criteria within a broader progression of learning;
- Eliciting and analyzing evidence of student thinking;
- Engaging in self-assessment and peer feedback;
- Providing actionable feedback; and
- Using evidence and feedback to move learning forward by adjusting learning strategies, goals, or next instructional steps

CCSSO, 2018

¹ The AflC planning team decided to keep the membership small for the first year to get the group off the ground.

Table 2: Member prioritization of potential meeting topics

Options	TOTAL SCORE
How to develop sustainable systemic change around formative assessment	9
Different entry points to educating the field about formative assessment	7
Assessment culture	5
Support for data literacy	5
3 or 4 groups have 15 minutes each to share out, so that we hear from everyone over four meetings	4
Assessment literacy – designing assessment tasks for different purposes	4
Resource/examples for how to integrate assessment innovation into CIP/implementation science	4
Role of observation protocols to help make the practice visible for a community of practice	3
Everyone has 3-4 minutes for a short share out in January	2
What does local assessment policy look like to support/build/maintain balanced assessment systems?	2
How to present convergent/divergent assessment to a teacher without overwhelming them	0

The topic of sustainable change, which rated highest in this survey, became the focus of the January meeting. Although the topic of observation protocols was not rated very highly in this survey, the topic came up again organically at the January meeting and so was the focus of the March meeting.

A third survey was administered in February, 2025 and asked participants to consider both the success of meeting the AfLC goals (recognizing we were only halfway through the year) and to note their relative importance moving forward into the second year of the group. Table 3 shows participants’ responses.

Table 3: Participant responses to the third survey.

Goals	Relative success of addressing them in 2024-25	Relative importance moving forward
Promote a common understanding of the formative assessment process	#1	Joint #3
Share current efforts in supporting educators in use of the formative assessment process	#2	#5
Identify and support areas of mutual needs and interests	#3	#6
Learn about models of successful state-district collaborations around formative assessment or other aspects of classroom practice	#4	#1
Establish regular outcomes and success criteria for collaborative work	#5	Joint #7
Develop awareness of national/ international status of efforts to promote the learning about and implementation of the formative assessment process in the service of a balanced assessment system	#6	Joint #7
Develop state and district collaborations to forward this shared understanding	#7	Joint #3
Develop state and Education Preparation Programs (EPP) collaborations to improve pre-service learning about classroom assessment practices	#8 (vast majority said not addressed)	#2

Comparing results in Table1 and 3, it is worth noting some shifts in the group’s prioritization of topics. For example, promoting a common understanding of the formative assessment process dropped from being the most important goal to the third most important. Conversely, educator

preparation program collaborations rose from fifth to the second most important. All the survey results were used for planning meetings to ensure that members were engaging in content that they thought was worthwhile for their needs.

MEETING TOPICS AND KEY POINTS

Meeting 1 (October 10, 2024)

- We reviewed some [foundational agreements](#): (1) the intention of the AfLC: Learn together and support one another in the implementation of the formative assessment process and (2) our why: To support the collaboration of state- and local-level leaders to further the implementation of formative assessment in the nation's classrooms.
- We reflected on the [responses from the first survey administered to members](#). There was agreement on the need for this community to serve as thought partners for each other in some key ways: by promoting a common research-based understanding of the formative assessment process, learning about current national and international research, and learning about models of successful state-district collaborations to support educators use of formative assessment both at the in-service and preservice levels.
- We also discussed the ways in [district partnerships](#) are useful both in terms of giving state leaders an opportunity to try out ideas before attempting to scale them, and having a closer relationship with a small number of districts to really understand the kinds of supports that are needed on the ground.
- Caroline and Margaret highlighted some of the [recent moves in the assessment field](#) that indicate a continued focus on formative assessment: (1) NCME has had a Classroom Assessment Committee since 2016 and has held five classroom assessment conferences since then; (2) the National Academy of Education published a volume in 2024, *Reimagining Balanced Assessment Systems*, that centers classroom/formative assessment as the most critical component that other parts of the system should cohere with, rather than the other way around. https://naeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Full-Report_Reimagining-Balanced-Assessment-Systems.pdf
- [Margaret and Caroline discussed their upcoming book](#) in which they have framed classroom assessment in terms of convergent (finding out if the student knows, understands or can do a predetermined thing) and divergent (finding out what the students know, understand or can do in order to tailor instructional responses to where students are in their learning) assessment. Heritage, M. & Wylie, E.C. (forthcoming). *Fair and Justice-Oriented Assessment Literacy: Developing Teachers' Knowledge and Skills*. Harvard Education Press.
- In a [round robin](#) at the end of the meeting members shared their thoughts about the meeting and the group going forward. Some of their comments were:
 - I think it's going to be great and I'm just so excited to be working with this community of learners to move this work forward.
 - It's just very exciting to be part of this larger learning community and I know that our impact will be greater if we can all work together.

- I'm excited about this so thanks for putting it together... and the number of post-its I wrote and stuck all over, like on my different computer screens, as I listened.

Meeting 2 (January 23, 2025)

- We reviewed the [responses from the second survey](#) administered after the October meeting about the content preferences that members had identified.
- Based on the survey responses, which indicated an interest in members sharing their own experiences, prior to the meeting, each member had been asked to prepare a short presentation on the status of formative assessment in their particular context. [Each member shared about formative assessment in their state, county or district](#) and some of the factors that had provided traction for the work. There were variations in the degree to which formative assessment was both understood and currently implemented across members' contexts.
- [Members commented on commonalities among the different contexts](#). For example, one person noted the importance of meeting people where they are and the necessity for different entry points into formative assessment to accommodate a range of levels of readiness. Another pointed to the different ways that people are partnering to plan for formative assessment implementation and the value of leadership in this regard. Also noted was the need to insert formative assessment into new priorities when priorities change.
- Some [themes emerged](#) from the member presentations:
 - The use of classroom observations (which arose sufficiently to motivate a topic for the March agenda).
 - The role of central office (at state or district levels), acting as a partner, providing funding and other resources.
 - Sustainability in terms of concrete actions: building professional learning requirements into statewide contracts, weaving formative assessment into curriculum innovations, developing and communicating a shared common language, supporting new cohorts of teachers.
- Margaret made a presentation about [research on moving innovations to scale and sustaining them](#). Members broke into groups to discuss the question: How do the dimensions of scalability and sustainability either help you think differently, or reinforce your current thinking, about the work related to scaling and sustaining formative assessment in your context? Each group took notes of their discussion (see Appendix B).
- In a quick [round robin](#) at the end of the meeting (time ran out) members shared their thoughts, which included, "change takes time and we've got to be committed for the long haul" and "how do we transfer that sense of responsibility [for implementing formative assessment] to the districts so that they feel the same motivation, urgency?"

Meeting 3 (March 17, 2025)

- We reviewed the [rankings on the survey about meeting goals](#) (Table 3) and members were invited to give their reactions to them. The issue of teacher preparation for formative assessment emerged as a strong priority for further discussion.

- From the outset of the AfLC the [possibility of an in-person meeting](#) to coincide with the Building a Better Assessment Future Conference had been on the table and discussed at each of the meetings. However, based on some questions included in the third survey about whether members thought realistically that they could obtain approvals and funding to attend, it was decided that the group would continue to meet virtually.
- The [survey](#) had also asked about members' level of comfort with requesting sponsorship for the group from vendors to cover the costs that the MAC had underwritten this first year. Levels of comfort varied but did not prohibit asking for sponsorship from external groups.
- The formative assessment focus for the meeting was on [classroom observation](#), a topic that had emerged from the individual members' presentations in January. Three members were invited to give presentations about their use of [classroom observation to support professional learning for formative assessment](#): Melissa Spadin and John Spiegel from San Diego County Office of Education; Jenna Fisher, Anna Mackinnon, and Jeremy Zuniga from Chicago Public Schools; Mary Helen Diegel from the MI FAME program. (See complementary brief for this meeting for more details).
- Caroline Wylie made a follow-up [presentation on what research](#) tells us about using classroom observations to support teacher professional learning related to formative assessment. (See complementary brief for this meeting for more details). Caroline noted that there were a lot of examples from the research that were playing out in the members' presentations. Members engaged in an extended discussion about classroom observation as a tool and how best to use it for teacher professional learning.

Meeting 4 (May 21, 2025)

- In response to the identified priority, the final meeting of the year focused on teacher preparation in Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs). We began with [participants sharing knowledge](#) about what is happening in their contexts in terms of IHEs' teacher preparation for formative assessment. The general picture was that preparation for formative assessment was patchy and there was little time allocated for work in assessment.
- At a previous meeting, Trudy Clark from Nebraska Department of Education had made comments about her [efforts to engage with IHEs](#) in her state. She was invited to give more details of her efforts and her wish list for moving forward to ground the group's conversation.
- Drs. Bent Duckor and Carrie Holmberg from San Jose State University, two trailblazers in IHE courses on formative assessment, made a presentation on how [they infuse formative assessment practices in their courses](#) and how their [accreditation](#) fit or did not fit into their work. This was followed by a very lively discussion. Resources from Brent and Carrie are available in MemberClicks (see Resources section).
- Dr. Mark Lacelle Peterson, the founding president of the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP), [discussed AAQEP's four standards](#): two concern what educators are expected to be able to do when they complete their pre-service program; and two concern program practices. He noted that unlike San Jose State, for the most part, educator pre-service programs tie their treatment of assessment

to methods courses and as such become a “sub-routine in a larger routine.” While methods courses are generally very strong, the question was raised about the depth of assessment knowledge that methods faculty has. A Q& A followed the presentation raising issues such as the evidence that IHEs need to provide for accreditation, and the role and quality of the mentoring, cooperating teachers. Members broke briefly into small groups to discuss what they had heard.

- It was agreed that members would [conduct some investigations in their own states](#) to ascertain the status of formative assessment in their IHEs and share at the next meeting in August. At the August meeting there will be time allocated for group planning for Year 2.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- While there were some changes in the group throughout the year (for example, one member had to drop out because they moved positions in their organization), there was a core membership that remained consistent and attended each meeting.
- Participant engagement and communication was a hallmark of each meeting. Members were very open about raising challenging issues in their own context and listened carefully and respectfully to each other.
- There was enthusiasm about continuing the group for next year.
- Funding for next year remains a challenge and members will likely need to make a contribution to sustain the group. Funding is also being solicited from external sources.
- At the end of the May meeting, Kathy Dewsbury-White raised the issue of expanding group membership, possibly by current members inviting a district, state or IHE partner to attend.

RESOURCES

AfLC materials from each meeting, including agendas, slide decks, and meeting recordings are housed on MemberClicks:

<https://mac.memberclicks.net/assessment-for-learning-community>

You will need to log in to access the page.

APPENDIX A

Core AfLC Members

Name	Organization
Tyler Belanga	Hawaii Department of Education
Trudy Clark	Nebraska Department of Education
Kathy Dewsbury-White	Michigan Assessment Consortium
Mary Helen Diegel	FAME
Dan Farley	Oregon Department of Education
Jenna Fisher	Chicago Public Schools
Marie-Elena Hall	Ohio Department of Education
Margaret Heritage	Heritage Consulting
Tara Kintz	Michigan Assessment Consortium
Alexandra Klyachkina	Chicago Public Schools
Peter Leonard	Chicago Public Schools
Andrea Lockard	Oregon Department of Education
Anna Mackinnon	Chicago Public Schools
Katie Mathias	Boise State University
Ayaka Nukui	Idaho Department of Education
Ed Roeber	Michigan Assessment Consortium
Cassie Seiboldt	Nebraska Department of Education
Melissa Spadin	San Diego County Office of Education
Ellen Vorenkamp	Michigan Assessment Consortium
Megan Wonderlich	Idaho Department of Education
Caroline Wylie	Center for Assessment
Lauren Zellmer	Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Jeremy Zuniga	Chicago Public Schools

APPENDIX B

Assessment for Learning Community
 Note-Taking Guide
 January 23, 2025

Group 1	Notes
Who is in the group: Kathy Dewsbury-White, Annlyn McKenzie, Jeremy Zuniga, & Dan Farley	
<p>How do the dimensions of scalability and sustainability either help you think differently, or reinforce your current thinking, about the work related to scaling and sustaining formative assessment in your context?</p>	<p>MI: One constant has been change (e.g., shifts in teams, COVID impacts). Seeing more coaches supporting educators in the moment in classroom contexts. Thinking about how best to engage with teachers in the classroom?</p> <p>CPS: Grounding in the student experience. Engaging admin, coaches, in the actual assessments/formative tasks they're supporting. Need a through-line from content to students.</p> <p>OR: Thinking about what success looks like at the end, formative assessment fluency, and defining success as moving toward the "Extending" level on the FARROP in terms of teacher behaviors, to the point that they don't even have to think about how FA is embedded.</p>

Group 2	Notes
Who is in the group: Ellen Vorenkamp, Anna Mackinnon, Meghan Wonderlich, Kristy Walters	
<p>How do the dimensions of scalability and sustainability either help you think differently, or reinforce your current thinking, about the work related to scaling and sustaining formative assessment in your context?</p>	<p>A lot of this information was reaffirming. We are also pondering how to continue the work as this work is so dynamic and there are things within and outside of our control. Additionally, a lot of this work is being moved by groups of people who are removed from the classroom. There is also a concern about how much of this work is person-dependent and what happens when those people leave. How do we create structures that are not person dependent? Similarly, when a concept becomes too giant of an initiative there can be initiative fatigue and an overload of information which kills the passion.</p>

	<p>It is important for us to continue to envision and clarify the desired state we want for our classrooms as we continue to learn about the formative assessment process and how students learn and how they learn in different disciplines. This fight to move forward is a lot of work and we need to make sure we are clear about what we're fighting for.</p>
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Group 3	Notes
<p>Who is in the group: Lauren Zellmer (WI DPI), Mary Helen Diegel (MI), Ed Roeber (MAC, MI), Jenna Fisher (CPS)</p>	
<p>How do the dimensions of scalability and sustainability either help you think differently, or reinforce your current thinking, about the work related to scaling and sustaining formative assessment in your context?</p>	<p>Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes time (5-10 years) - Thinking about long-term relationships and support structures needed • Needs external support and guidance to sustain efforts • Can be energizing • Needs consistent, effective professional development • Needs flexibility with teachers especially with varied student populations, some of whom may be transient • How do we sustain change over a period of time? <p>-Myths & Misunderstanding of FAP paper by John Lane (MAC) may help clarify what FA is and isn't.</p> <p>-With massive retirements and new teachers, we have a real opportunity and responsibility to educate new teachers so FA becomes foundational practices. We need to train the next generation.</p> <p>-One issue common across states/districts is how to provide ongoing support (e.g., coaches)? Some states do so from the state level and others do so locally. There is a need for us to explore how to form and support coaches, regardless of how formed and supported.</p>