Michigan Assessment Consortium

Learning Point

How can the formative assessment process contribute to the Michigan Continuous Improvement Process?

This Learning Point suggests how Michigan's FAME program and the Michigan Continuous Improvement Process (MICIP) pathway can work in tandem to support instructional improvement. Together, these initiatives aim to enhance instruction, leading to improved student learning and achievement.

Continuous Improvement

The Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) defines continuous improvement as "a process that helps people in a system, such as teachers, administrators, and students—from a school building to a district—set goals, identify strategies for improvement, plan and implement changes, and evaluate the impact of the changes."

MICIP

Michigan educators and leaders use Michigan's Integrated Continuous Improvement Process (MICIP) as their pathway to improve student outcomes. This includes developing strategic plans with detailed strategies and activities supportive of the district goal. District MICIP plans are developed and aligned with funding sources to increase the likelihood of implementing the plan successfully.

The MICIP process has five components in the continuous improvement cycle: assess needs, plan, implement, monitor/adjust, and evaluate.

Formative assessment as part of a balanced assessment system

Districts will use a collection of information and data from a balanced assessment system to support key decisions throughout the continuous improvement cycle. A balanced assessment system includes assessment *for* learning (the formative assessment process) as well as assessments *of* learning (periodic and annual summative assessments), working together.

Formative assessment defined

Formative assessment, as defined by the Council of Chief State School Officers and used by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) in its Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) learning program, "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 more self-directed learners" (CCSSO, 2018).

Margaret Heritage (2007) articulated a similar definition of the formative assessment process, categorizing it into four essential elements: identifying the learning gap, providing feedback, involving students, and using learning progressions.

FAME elements

The FAME professional learning program incorporates five Components and 13 Elements of the formative assessment process, which are aligned with and reflective of current research. Research on feedback by Sadler (1989) and by Hattie and Timperley (2007), along with a review by Gotwals et al. (2018), indicate that the main formative assessment practices may be characterized into three large observable formative assessment-practice dimensions structured around three guiding questions that teachers and students should ask themselves and each other as they move through the learning process:

- **Where are we (teachers and students) going?** (Planning, Learning Target Use and Goal Setting)
- **What does the student understand now?** (Eliciting Evidence of Student Understanding)
- **How do we (teachers and students) get to the learning target?** (Formative Feedback and Instructional and Learning Decisions)

Braiding the strands

So how might a district that is using the MICIP process plan for the use of the formative assessment process as a district improvement strategy? Schools and districts have access to two MAC-developed MICIP tools to support them: Strategy Implementation Guides and Planning Tools. One set specifically supports the use of the formative assessment process, and it is aligned with the components of the FAME model.

Strategy Implementation Guides define and explain the critical components of an improvement strategy. In the context of continuous improvement, a district will go through a comprehensive needs assessment to identify strengths and challenges within their building/district.

This information is aligned with the Assessment Literacy Standards at michiganassessmentconsortium.org

From this analysis, districts will identify a strategy they would like to implement and determine that it is "the right thing to do." To implement a strategy the correct way, critical components for implementation must be identified.

The MAC-developed Strategy Implementation Guides identify not only the critical components of the strategy, but the "gold standard" for implementation. The gold standard for implementation helps districts know what the strategy would look like if it were implemented exactly as intended and identified in research.

Strategy Implementation Guides are tools that can be used to:

- communicate the expectations for implementation,
- coach and identify the needs for professional learning, and
- check for fidelity.

Planning Tools describe the activities and steps needed to successfully implement a strategy. After a district has identified the strategy to implement, confirmed it is the right thing to do, and used a Strategy Implementation Guide to communicate how it should be carried out, the next step is to plan for implementation.

The Planning Tool developed by the MAC helps identify and plan for the action steps needed during the continuous improvement cycle. When planning, it is important for districts to plan for the four different MICIP implementation phases: Installation, Implementation, Monitor & Adjust, and Evaluate.

Districts must intentionally plan for the action steps, assign individual responsibilities, develop a timeline for implementation, identify resources/tools, and plan data collection and analysis within each phase. Districts that plan strategically and intentionally will be more successful in the implementation of the strategy.

How can formative assessment information be used in MICIP?

As previously noted, student achievement data derived from assessment for learning and assessments of learning play a critical role in guiding continuous improvement through pathways like MICIP. When teachers across a school or district use assessment for learning strategies to improve instruction and advance student achievement, adopting formative assessment district-wide can provide a coherent framework to support and sustain these efforts.

Effective use of the formative assessment process advances the district's goal of improving student learning outcomes.

While summative data can inform the establishment of MICIP goals, it does not directly promote improvements in student learning to the extent that effective formative assessment can. Within a district-wide initiative, when educators collectively engage in professional learning and consistently implement the formative assessment process, measurable gains in student achievement are likely to result and these improvements can be reflected in both periodic and annual summative assessments.

> "By leveraging formative assessment data within MICIP's structured planning and implementation framework, educators can make informed decisions that lead to meaningful and sustainable change."

Conclusion

The integration of Michigan's FAME formative assessment process with the MICIP continuous improvement pathway offers districts a powerful strategy for enhancing instructional practices and improving student outcomes. By leveraging formative assessment data within MICIP's structured planning and implementation framework, educators can make informed decisions that lead to meaningful and sustainable change.

Tools such as the Strategy Implementation Guide and Planning Tool provide practical support for embedding formative assessment into district-wide improvement efforts.

When implemented effectively and consistently across classrooms, formative assessment not only strengthens teaching and learning but also is associated with measurable gains in student achievement that can be reflected in summative assessments.

This alignment empowers districts to move from isolated instructional improvements to a cohesive, system-wide culture of learning and growth.

References

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2018), Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST), State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS). (2018). *Revising the definition of formative assessment*.

Gotwals, A.W., Cisterna, D., Lane, J., Ezzo, D., Kintz, T. (2018) Characterizing Observable Formative Assessment Practices: A Literature-Based Framework. Michigan Department of Education.

Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. Review of Educational Research. 77(1): 81-112.

Heritage, M. (2007). Formative assessment: What do teachers need to know and do? Phi Delta Kappan, 89(2), 140–145.

Michigan Department of Education (2018). FAME learning guide: Developing and implementing the formative assessment process in Michigan.

Sadler, D. R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. Instructional Science, 18 (119-144)

TO LEARN MORE

Strategy Implementation Guide: Formative Assessment Process in the Classroom (MDE/MAC 2021)
bit.ly/3t3y0Ri

Planning Tool: Formative Assessment Process in the Classroom (MDE/MAC 2021)
bit.ly/3JQESML

Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME)
FAMEMichigan.org

The Michigan Assessment Consortium is a professional association of educators who believe quality education depends on accurate, balanced, and meaningful assessment. MAC's Learning Points help increase the assessment literacy of all education stakeholders.