



LEARNING POINT

What do we mean by formative assessment?

The Assessment Learning Network (ALN) will use a definition of formative assessment from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This definition is also used by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) in its Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) professional learning program. That definition is:

“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 more self-directed learners.” (CCSSO SCASS, 2017)

This definition of formative assessment comprises several key features:

- The formative assessment process is planned by teachers in advance, so teachers decide when they will check for student understanding and how they will do so; teachers also determine in advance what they will do if students have or have not learned what they have been taught.
- Both teachers and students engage in the formative assessment process.
- The formative assessment process provides immediate feedback to the teacher and to the students.
- Evidence of the students’ current level of mastery is used to adjust ongoing instruction and learning.
- The formative assessment process literally occurs during instruction – in today’s class or the next one. (MAC, 2015)

Formative assessment is a process

Black and William (2009) indicate that effective formative assessment practice includes the enactment of the following steps:

- Teachers and students establish a common understanding of a task’s learning goals.
- Teachers elicit student thinking.
- Students respond to teachers’ elicitation in ways that reveals their thinking.

- Teachers interpret students’ responses to make sense of where students are relative to goals for student learning.
- Teachers take action (e.g., trying a new strategy) to move students in the desired direction, on the basis of their interpretation.
- Teachers re-assess to measure the action’s success.

Thus, formative assessment is a process, not a “thing.” Thus, ‘common formative assessments’ (a term that actually describes

To learn more

Formative Assessment: What Do Teachers Need to Know and Do?

Margaret Heritage, Kappan, 2007
<http://tinyurl.com/Heritage-Kappan>

Formative Assessment: An Enabler of Learning

Margaret Heritage, Better: Evidence-based Education, Spring 2011
<http://tinyurl.com/Heritage-Enabler>

Re-Balancing Assessment: Placing Formative and Performance Assessment at the Heart of Learning and Accountability

Margaret Heritage, Kappan, 2007
<https://bit.ly/3Cg2bXL>

Formative Assessment: What it is and What it is Not!

Sara Bryant, February 2010
<https://bit.ly/FA-video-conf>

Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment

Paul Black and Dylan William, Kappan, 2010
<http://tinyurl.com/zt8rnuw>

interim or benchmark assessments) are not formative. Also, formative assessment is not a test, a quiz, nor an item bank.

Why use formative assessment?

Research has shown the use of formative assessment has several positive impacts. It serves to:

- Improve student learning (e.g., Black & William, 1998; Heritage, 2013)
- Increase student involvement (e.g., Brookhart, 2013)
- Help teachers to be more reflective about students' understandings (Furtak, 2012)
- Support students in identifying barriers to learning (Marshall & Drummond, 2006)

Three guiding questions in formative assessment

Research by Sadler (1989), Hattie and Timperley (2007)¹, and Gotwals, et al (forthcoming) indicate that formative assessment practices may be categorized into three large observable-practice dimensions, structured around key questions that teachers and students should ask themselves as they move through the learning process:

1. Use of learning targets and goal setting – Where are we (teacher and students) going?
2. Evidence of student understanding – What does the student understand now?
3. Closing the gap/responding to students – How do we (teacher and students) get to the learning target?

¹Sadler (1989) delineated three necessary components of feedback: (1) the standard, which is to be achieved, (2) the actual level of performance, and (3) how to go about closing the gap. Building on this, Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggested that “effective feedback must answer three major questions asked by a teacher and/or a student: Where am I going? (What are the goals?), How am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?), Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?) (p. 86).

² Source: Formative Assessment Learning Guide (forthcoming)

FAME COMPONENTS AND ELEMENTS

The components and elements to be used in the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) program in 2017 and beyond are a re-conceptualization of the components used previously in FAME². The five components and thirteen elements of the 2017 FAME program are organized by the three guiding questions described. These indicate key steps in the formative assessment process.

GUIDING QUESTIONS	FAME COMPONENTS AND ELEMENTS
Where are we (teacher and students) going?	PLANNING 1.1—Instructional Planning: planning based on knowledge of the content, standards, pedagogy, formative assessment process, and students.
	LEARNING TARGET USE 2.1—Designing Learning Targets: the use and communication of daily instructional aims with the students 2.2—Learning Progressions: connection of the learning target to past and future learning 2.3—Models of Proficient Achievement: examples of successful work for students to use as a guide.
What does the student now understand?	ELICITING EVIDENCE OF STUDENT UNDERSTANDING 3.1—Activating Prior Knowledge: the opportunity for students to self-assess or connect new ideas to their prior knowledge 3.2—Gathering Evidence of Student Understanding: use of a variety of tools and strategies to check for understanding of the learning targets from <i>all</i> students 3.3—Teacher Questioning Strategies: the intentional use of questions for students to explain their thinking or to connect their idea to another student’s response 3.4—Skillful Use of Questions: a focus on the purpose, timing, and audience for questions to deliver content and to check students’ understanding
How do we (teacher and students) get to the learning target?	FORMATIVE FEEDBACK 4.1—Feedback from the Teacher: verbal or written feedback to a student to improve his or her achievement of the learning target 4.2—Feedback from Peers: feedback from one student to another student about his or her learning in relation to a learning target 4.3—Student Self-Assessment: the process in which students gather information and reflect on their own learning in relation to the learning goal.
	INSTRUCTIONAL AND LEARNING DECISIONS 5.1—Adjustments to Teaching: teachers’ daily decisions about changes to instruction 5.2—Adjustments to Learning: students’ use of feedback for improvement

The Michigan Assessment Consortium’s Assessment Learning Network ALN, is a professional learning community consisting of members from MI’s professional education organizations; the goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan’s professional educators.