



# Setting the Stage for Formative Assessment

# The School's Role

Webinar user's guide

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

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# 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.

	BEFORE THE WEBINAR		AFTER THE WEBINAR
	Of great interest	Of some interest	Did you make progress?
Definition of formative assessment			
Formative assessment in a comprehensive assessment system			
Elements of the formative assessment process			

## #2 ►► Learn how school leaders can support formative assessment.

	BEFORE THE WEBINAR		AFTER THE WEBINAR
	Of great interest	Of some interest	Did you make progress?
Self-assessment of current formative assessment practices			
School leadership roles			
Formative assessment resources			

# 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 rewrite 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.

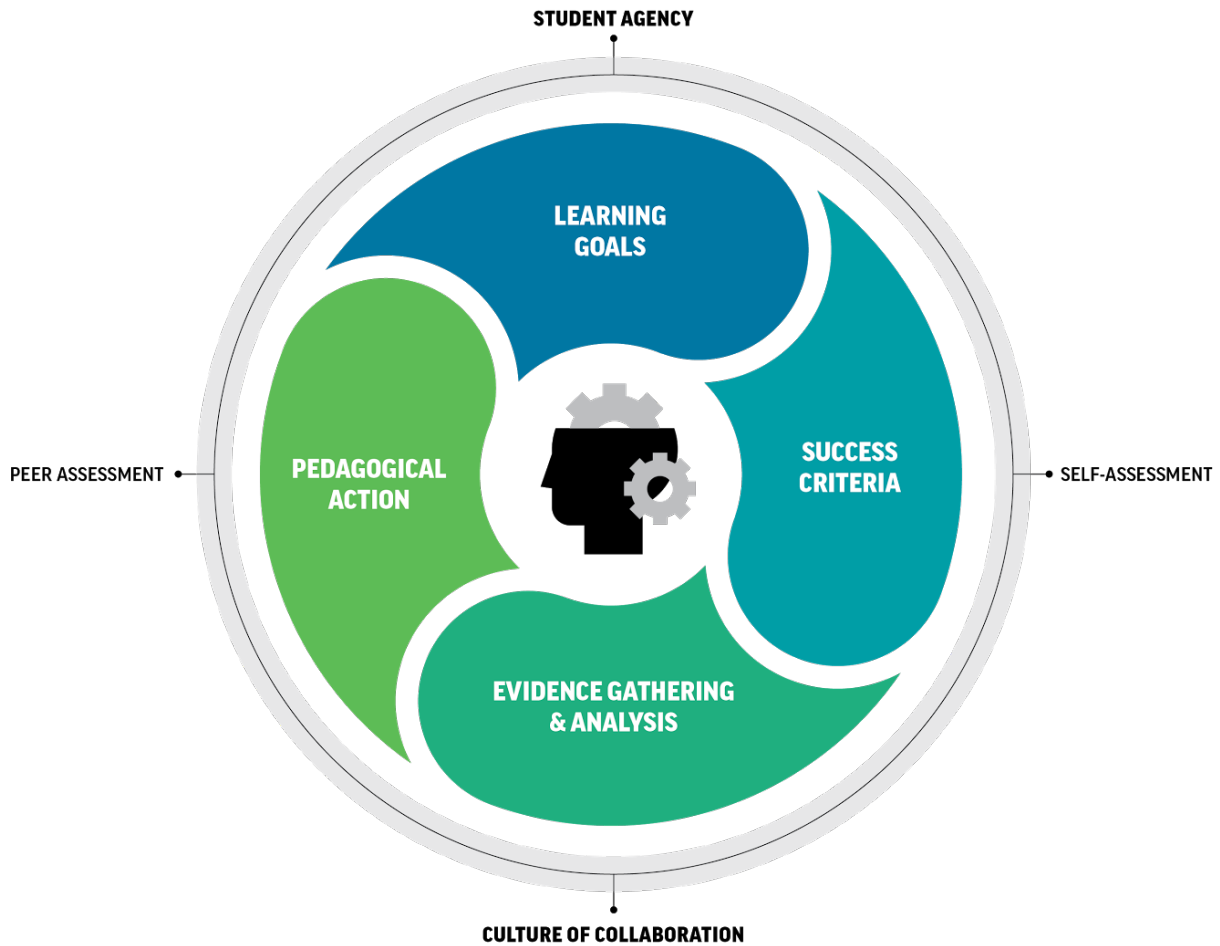
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\* The Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST)  
State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)

# Clarify KEY TERMS

**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.

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)  
 Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST)  
 State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)



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**Learning Goals** describe what students will learn in a lesson, stating clearly what learning the student will understand or be able to do by the end of the lesson. Learning Goals are written in language that students can understand so that they can monitor, assess, and reflect on their own learning.

**Success Criteria** describe what students will say, make, do, or write to indicate achievement of the Learning Goals. Success Criteria are derived from – and aligned to – Learning Goals, but they are more specific. With Success Criteria, teachers should be able to complete this following statement: If students have learned *x* [Learning Goal], then they will be able to do *a, b, c* [Success Criteria]. Success Criteria are written in language students can understand.

# Clarify

## KEY TERMS

**Evidence Gathering & Analysis** refer to teachers' intentional planning of opportunities to elicit evidence of student learning and using that evidence to adjust instruction during or shortly after the lesson. **Evidence-Gathering Opportunities** are aligned to the Learning Goals and Success Criteria. Evidence-gathering opportunities include examining student work, listening to and participating in classroom discussions, observing student peer and self-assessment, and questioning students.

**Pedagogical Action** is the teacher's response to evidence of student learning; they are intended to nudge student learning closer to the Learning Goals and Success Criteria. Pedagogical Action is based on teachers' interpretation of real-time (or as close to real-time) evidence collected during the lesson, and respond to students' immediate learning needs. Pedagogical Action can include reviewing, modeling, providing examples, prompting, giving feedback, telling, explaining, directing, or continuing, stopping, or adjusting the planned lesson. To be effective, these moves must be related to the Learning Goals and Success Criteria; be specific and clear; provide suggestions, hints, or cues rather than correct answers; and engage students in the task.

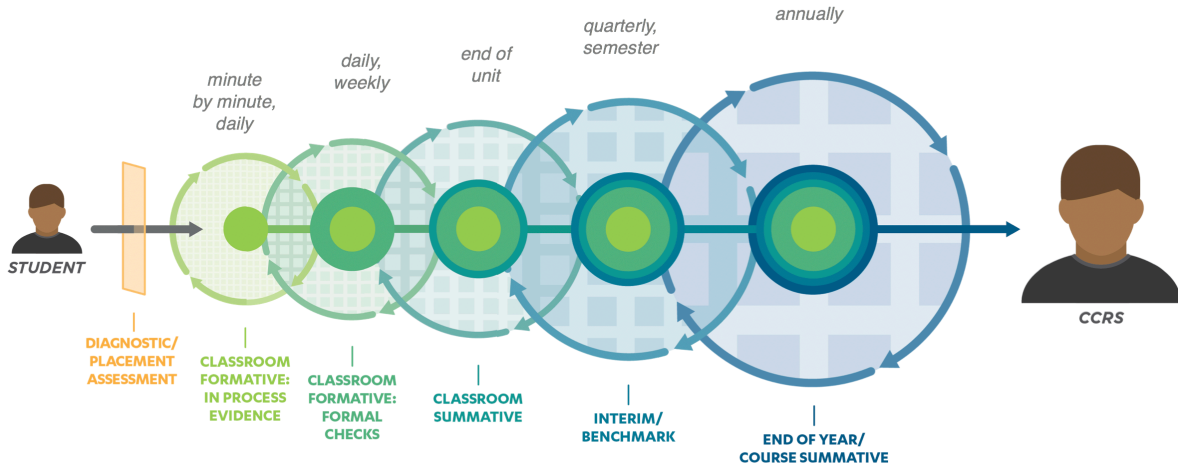
**Peer & Self-Assessment** are specific types of Evidence-Gathering Opportunity that engage students in the learning and are a crucial element of the formative assessment process. Students share responsibility for monitoring their progress toward the lesson's Learning Goals. Students understand and use Learning Goals and Success Criteria to evaluate their own learning and achievement. Teachers support and guide students in Peer and Self-Assessment. For Peer Assessment, students need to be taught to evaluate the work of others and offer constructive advice to their peers. Teachers plan opportunities for Peer and Self-Assessment to regularly occur during lessons.

**Student Agency** is the ultimate goal of formative assessment, in which students become active agents in the learning process, rather than passive recipients of information. It is promoted in the classroom by providing learning tasks that stimulate opportunities for students to proactively evaluate their own progress toward a clear learning target and its observable criteria. Students generate feedback for themselves and others and make decisions about their own learning.

**Culture of Collaboration** describes an environment in which students and teachers share responsibility for learning, students choose to learn together, student participation is spontaneous and respectful, student contributions inspire deeper engagement, multiple perspectives are actively sought, and all learners demonstrate a willingness to take risks, learn from mistakes, and support each other.

# Clarify KEY TERMS

**Comprehensive assessment system** presents a framework for a balanced assessment system, as described in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The comprehensive assessment system outlines how states, districts, and schools can align different types of assessments to propel students toward college and career readiness. The framework incorporates different types of assessment to serve the distinct information needs of different stakeholders, from the very detailed evidence that teachers and students need for on-going instruction, to the gross indicators that stakeholders outside the classroom need to support accountability and improvement.



ASSESSMENT TYPE	GRAIN SIZE	TIMING	USES	USERS
Diagnostic/ Placement	small	as needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diagnose strengths and weakness in students' existing knowledge and skills</li> <li>Eligibility and placement for special programs</li> </ul>	students · teachers · parents · specialists · school leaders
Classroom formative: In process evidence	small	minute by minute daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect ongoing evidence of students' progress to inform immediate instruction</li> <li>Feedback to students to move them toward achieving lesson learning goals</li> </ul>	students · teachers
Classroom formative: Formal checks	small	daily weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate what students have learned</li> <li>Information on students' strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills</li> <li>Inform parents of student progress</li> </ul>	students · teachers · parents
Classroom summative	medium	end of unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chart student progress on classroom and unit goals</li> <li>Identify gaps in student learning</li> <li>Grading</li> <li>Grade-level or school-level progress checks</li> <li>Inform parents of student progress</li> </ul>	students · teachers · parents · school leaders
Interim/ Benchmark	medium	quarterly semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor student status and progress on intermediate and/or long-term learning goals</li> <li>Predict whether students are likely to test proficient on end-of-year tests</li> <li>Evaluate relative performance of classrooms, schools, programs</li> <li>Support school and district data-based decision making</li> </ul>	students · teachers · parents · school & district leaders
End of year/ course summative	large	annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad view of students' achievement on major grade-level or course expectations</li> <li>General view on student proficiency relative to grade-level college and career ready standards</li> <li>Evaluate school curricula, program effectiveness; inform improvement planning</li> </ul>	students · teachers · parents · school & district leaders · state

(Herman, 2016)



# Evaluate

*Identify elements of formative practice that your school does well and those you would like to improve.*

Self-assess your current school environment for its existing formative assessment qualities. The 20 elements listed below are adapted from the FAST SCASS definition of formative assessment. For each element, ask: *How well does our school already do this?* If you can, jot down a specific example or two for each element your school does well. For elements that are not yet observed or can be improved, write a suggestion for how it could be implemented.

## Instructional practice

0 = not at all or not applicable    3 = extremely well

1. Teachers plan instruction.	0	1	2	3
2. Professional learning supports classroom instruction that is ongoing (rather than a single or limited number of events).	0	1	2	3
3. Professional learning focuses primarily on classroom instruction and interactions.	0	1	2	3
4. Teachers regularly collect evidence of student learning.	0	1	2	3
5. Teachers regularly analyze evidence of student learning.	0	1	2	3
6. Teachers use evidence of student learning to adjust instruction.	0	1	2	3
7. Teachers respond effectively to individual students.	0	1	2	3

## Learning goals

0 = not at all or not applicable    3 = extremely well

8. College and career ready standards and/or other standards determine learning goals.	0	1	2	3
9. Learning goals are situated within a progression of learning.	0	1	2	3
10. Learning goals can be reasonably accomplished in a lesson.	0	1	2	3

# Evaluate continued

*Identify elements of formative practice that your school does well and those you would like to improve.*

## Student involvement

0 = not at all or not applicable 3 = extremely well

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

## Equity and school culture

0 = not at all or not applicable 3 = extremely well

16. School culture benefits all students.	0	1	2	3
17. School culture benefits all teachers.	0	1	2	3
18. School culture is respectful and collaborative.	0	1	2	3
19. Students are actively encouraged to take risks and learn from mistakes.	0	1	2	3
20. Students have multiple modes and opportunities to demonstrate their learning.	0	1	2	3

*Look at your self-assessment ratings across the four categories. What can you conclude about your current strengths and weaknesses? How will you use this information to develop a vision and implementation plan?*

# Act

## What are the roles of school leaders?

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

Vision & planning	What do you already have in place?	What could you do next?
1. <b>Long-term commitment</b> <i>What is your timeline?</i>		
2. <b>Definitional clarity</b> <i>Will your school commit to formative assessment as an instructional process that shapes daily classroom learning and teaching?</i>		
3. <b>Alignment to existing initiatives and priorities</b> <i>Can you find meaningful connections between your current programs and formative assessment?</i>		
4. <b>Partnerships</b> <i>How can your district and external partners provide additional resources and assistance?</i>		
Leadership	What do you already have in place?	What could you do next?
5. <b>Lead learner</b> <i>Are you willing to engage in the work alongside students and teachers?</i>		
6. <b>Team builder</b> <i>Have you identified individuals who can spread formative assessment throughout the school?</i>		
7. <b>Communicator</b> <i>How will you regularly inspire and remind your community of progress toward the vision and long-term plan?</i>		

# Act continued

*What are the roles of school 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 or school provided a yearlong scope and sequence of instruction, a clear and comprehensible articulation of your comprehensive 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, technology) 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 school's context: contact people who know about prior instructional initiatives at your school and district, talk to teachers and other stakeholders about how formative assessment can lead to improved instructional practice.
- Explore your state and district resources for formative assessment.
- Look for external partners and organizations that can provide assistance.
- Be able to explain the role of formative assessment in your comprehensive assessment system to district leaders, coaches, other administrators, teachers, parents, and students.
- Evaluate your current programs for their formative assessment qualities. Analyze how gaps can be addressed, and how formative assessment practices can be integrated with your existing initiatives.

## 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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