

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS (FAST) STATE COLLABORATIVE ON ASSESSMENT AND STUDENT STANDARDS (SCASS)

FUNDAMENTAL INSIGHTS ABOUT FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Purpose: This document is intended for chief state school officers, district leaders, and school administrators to provide them with fundamental insights about formative assessment. It lays out why formative assessment is important and the kinds of supports that will be needed to lead and scale its effective implementation. The FAST SCASS members define formative assessment as:

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. Effective use of the formative assessment process requires students and teachers to integrate and embed the following practices in a collaborative and respectful classroom environment:

- clarify learning goals and success criteria within a broader progression of learning;
- elicit and analyze evidence of student thinking;
- engage in self-assessment and peer feedback;
- provide actionable feedback; and
- use evidence and feedback to move learning forward by adjusting learning strategies, goals, or next instructional steps.

The FAST SCASS members have developed more extensive documents relating to formative assessment implementation, including (1) [Revising the Definition of Formative Assessment](#) and (2) [An Integrated Approach to Defining a System-Level Theory of Action for Formative Assessment](#).

The three fundamental insights focus on formative assessment as:

- 1) a critical lever to improve student learning;
- 2) a fundamental professional skill for teachers; and
- 3) central to equitable learning.

INSIGHTS FOR THE STATES AND DISTRICT LEADERS

1. Formative assessment is a critical evidence-based lever to positively impact teaching and learning.

- The purpose of the formative assessment process is to inform ongoing learning, not measure it or sum it up.
- In a coherent and balanced assessment system, the formative assessment process provides actionable evidence of learning for teachers and students minute by minute, day by day to advance learning.

- There is ample evidence from research and practice¹ that the formative assessment process, when implemented effectively, has a positive impact on student learning and achievement.

INSIGHTS TO PREPARE AND DEVELOP TEACHERS

2. Formative assessment is a fundamental professional skill for all teachers.

- Skills and knowledge to integrate the formative assessment process into daily planning and classroom practice must be developed systematically through a coherent system of pre-service, induction, and in-service teacher learning.
- Effective formative assessment is dependent on strong content knowledge, and teachers should be supported to develop expertise in the content area(s) they teach.
- Formative assessment allows teachers to intentionally and systematically maximize opportunities for individual students to demonstrate their understanding as it evolves and respond instructionally to secure progress toward standards.
- Teachers need consistent opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues to plan responsively based on current evidence of student learning.

INSIGHTS TO SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING

3. Formative assessment is central to equitable learning.

- “Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, or family income.”²
- Effective formative assessment practices support teachers in the process of identifying where students are in their learning to support the provision of the right resources at the right time.
- Formative assessment enables students to become active agents in advancing their own learning.
 - The formative assessment process provides regular opportunities for feedback, created by teachers, so students can understand learning goals, how to gauge progress against these goals, and determine next learning steps toward meeting the goal.
- Formative assessment enables students to develop lifelong learning skills by engaging them as agents in their own learning and as intellectual resources for each other.
 - Students take responsibility for their own learning in partnership with their teacher and peers.
 - Students learn the skills of collaboration, negotiation, communication, and joint decision-making.
 - Students become metacognitive and are able to set and monitor their own goals.
 - Students develop a sense of personal identity as capable learners with the skills needed to positively affect their own futures.

¹ For example, evidence to support the impact of formative assessment comes from studies such as: (1) Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 5, 7-73. (2) Andrade, H. L., & Heritage, M. (2017). *Using formative assessment to enhance learning, achievement, and academic self-regulation*. New York: Routledge. (3) Andersson, C., & Palm, T. (2017). The impact of formative assessment on student achievement: A study of the effects of changes to classroom practice after a comprehensive professional development programme. *Learning and Instruction*, 49, 92-102. (4) Brown, G. T., & Harris, L. R. (2013). Student self-assessment. In J. McMillan (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of research on classroom assessment* (pp. 367-393). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

² The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (Revised November 2017). *Leading for change: Opportunities for state education chiefs*. Washington, DC: Authors.