

State Education Leaders’ Role in Formative Assessment

At ADE, we tend to think of “scale” of implementation as purely size and number; it is very interesting to redefine it as depth of impact and longevity of the positive change in behaviors.

~ ADE Formative Assessment Working Group

A Picture of Practice

State education leaders who champion formative assessment support their colleagues by creating learning cultures that elevate evidence use and create a shared vision for formative assessment in teaching and learning throughout the state. They also model how to engage in a cycle of inquiry, asking *Where are we headed? Where are we now? How will we get there?* Through this process, they nurture change conditions and create space for collective self-efficacy.

State education leaders work toward improving and sharing their knowledge, aiming to support all students to achieve academically. They lead this learning through strategic professional learning that enables site leaders, teachers, students, and community members to develop expertise in formative assessment practices.

In this way, state education leaders become a catalyst for deep shared learning. They are grounded in formative assessment, lead with courage and authenticity, and create the time, space, and commitment for people in all roles to make sense of evidence of learning and effectively engage every student. They promote an understanding of the distinction between formative assessment practices and more formal assessment tools and strategies. They communicate what formative assessment is and is not, seizing opportunities to clarify misconceptions.

As such, state education leaders center people as the agents of change and transformation in this process. They are effective stewards of the agency’s most valuable assets—people, time, energy, and resources—creating the conditions needed for educators and the students they

serve to take ownership of their learning. They do this by communicating a vision for learning and excellence for all students and engaging others collectively in ongoing cycles of goal setting, reflection, and action.

How Does the State Education Leader Role Shift?

Shifting the state education leader role in this way anchors formative assessment within the state education vision, mission, and strategic plan. It supports aligning efforts across the agency and builds a common language about collectively supporting all students. It equips state education leaders with the tools to create cohesion across all their work and provides consistent messaging about the priority of evidence to inform educational decision-making.

How Does This Shift Support Learning for All Students?

When state education leaders imbue formative assessment values and practices across the system, they develop a better understanding of the resources staff and students need to reach their full potential. The system becomes more agile in responding to their needs, including those of historically underserved and lowest-performing students. This creates space for all voices and builds a clear path to student achievement.

How Does a State System Grounded in Formative Assessment Look and Sound?

You would see state education leaders “planting a flag” for formative assessment, communicating to others with clarity about what formative assessment is and is not and conveying its value in advancing academic achievement. They would continuously gather formative assessment data to move practice and policy forward. They would set parameters for formative assessment initiatives to help establish and clarify their “why” while reducing legacy systems that no longer serve students. State education leaders would pave the way for educators to engage with formative assessment initiatives by providing resources to learn more about formative assessment values and practices.

You would hear state education leaders promoting a clear picture of formative assessment, differentiating it from other assessment types, establishing a common language and vocabulary, and clarifying the connections between formative assessment and the daily world of classrooms that serve students of all kinds. You would hear them providing feedback through an agreed-upon mechanism and supporting LEAs as they implement formative assessment.

State Education Leader Success Criteria

- Establish, codify, and use common language grounded in formative assessment principles.

- Address misconceptions about what formative assessment is and is not.
- Train leaders and teachers to increase their depth of understanding, facilitate a shift in ownership, and support them to foster formative assessment practices in their system.

Discussion Questions

- What systems, policies, and practices do you need to implement (or eliminate) to make formative assessment implementation successful?
- How can you increase the spread and depth of this work?