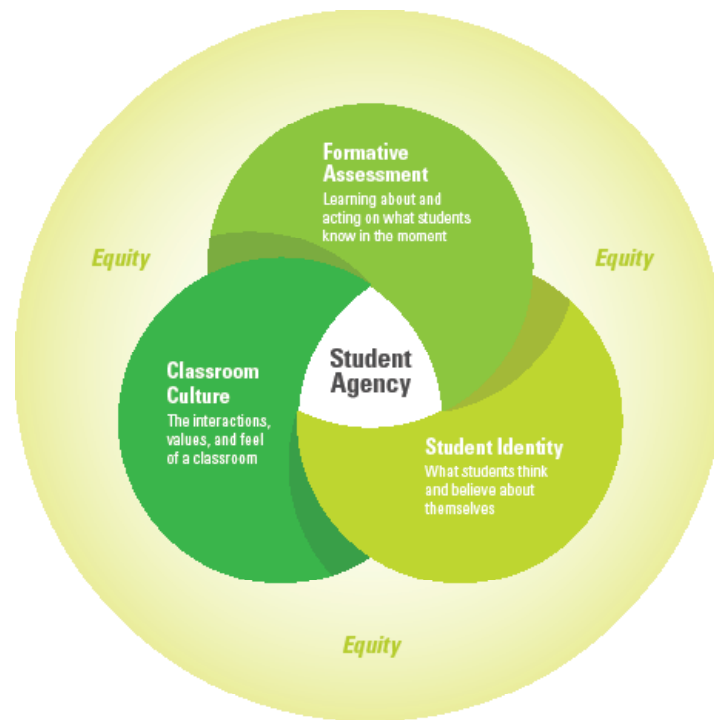


# STUDENT AGENCY AT THE CENTER OF LEARNING

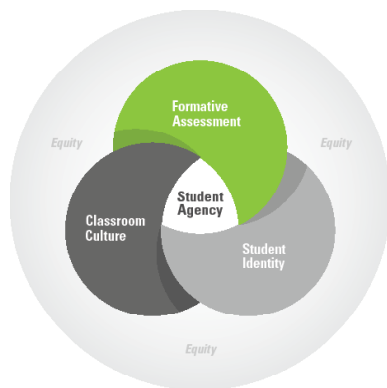
Developing student agency as the driver of student learning involves significant shifts in teaching and learning practices, shifts that move away from the traditional “teacher instructs students” model towards classrooms that reflect a collaborative learning culture.



Within this culture, students and teachers share joint responsibility for moving learning forward, and learning is recognized as a social process in which all students have equal opportunities to learn and succeed. When students share responsibility with their teachers for individual and group learning, they demonstrate agency by being able to give and respond to feedback, set goals, monitor their progress towards goals, and adapt their learning strategies to move their own learning forward. To develop agency, students first see themselves as capable learners. This identity supports students to take action and make decisions to move their own and their peers’ learning forward.

This learning model is based on the premise that teachers support the development of student agency through developing expertise and continuously attending to three interrelated constructs: formative assessment practice, classroom culture, and student identity. The goal to increase educational equity surrounds and infuses this work. Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop their full academic and social potential. To work towards equity in schools, there must be an emphasis on ensuring high outcomes for all students and creating inclusive environments in which all children have equitable access to the learning. This model asks that teachers utilize the tools of formative assessment, classroom culture, and identity to move towards all students meeting the same rigorous academic standards and the collective responsibility for learning that supports all—not just some—students.

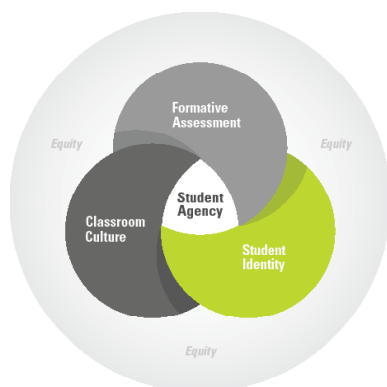
# OUTLINE OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES



## Formative Assessment

When teacher and students participate in the formative assessment process, they take on multiple, shifting roles, from expert and leader to novice and learner. Teachers often listen and observe, and let students take a more central role in the classroom. This lets teachers see students in action. If, as a teacher, you are doing all the talking, it's difficult to know much about your students' thinking. Exit slips and quizzes aren't enough. By structuring your class so that students are more active in their learning, you gain a window into their thought processes and what they can do. In tandem, students often need to take on active, expert roles in order to support their peers and share their learning. An added benefit is that this experience expands student identities as capable practitioners in a discipline (e.g., I'm a mathematician!).

Formative assessment is an ongoing process where teachers and students elicit, interpret and use evidence to guide learning. Teachers act upon assessment information to move students from where they are in learning to what they are able to do next with assistance, and ultimately independently. Teacher experts in formative assessment develop instructional routines through which students understand and use evidence of learning to move their own learning, and that of their peers', forward. Teachers explicitly model and teach metacognitive strategies to students so that students, themselves, learn how to think about how they engage in learning processes. Students engaged in formative assessment share responsibility for class learning, use lesson learning goals to guide their use of evidence, including feedback, in order to direct their own learning and support the learning of their peers.

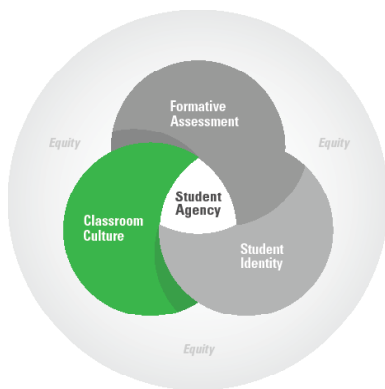


## Student Identity

Students have important knowledge, interests, and culture that are an integral part of their identities and learning communities. Teachers build on these attributes to help students make connections to new learning contexts and take on new roles as learners. Students' identities encompass who they think they are, what they think they are capable of, and what they want to do and become. Teachers have a role both to honor the identities students come to school with and to engage students in developing expanded individual and academic identities over time.

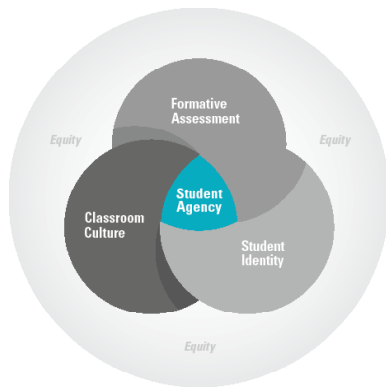
Teachers foster student identity development through formative assessment, for example, by providing opportunities for students to engage with one another in authentic tasks, giving useful feedback to peers, and trying on new academic roles as knowledgeable expert or peer helper. Further, valuing diversity by supporting students' formation and expression of individual identity, and offering multiple ways in which students can develop and demonstrate their knowledge, supports each individual student as a learner and contributes to a positive classroom learning culture.

In supporting students to develop agency, teachers' understanding of student identity is paramount. We can ask of ourselves: Are the school-related identities in the classroom interesting or achievable for my students? Is there a mismatch between students' self-image and (their or my) ideas of what is involved in participating in learning in my classroom? Do my students' worldviews resonate with the worldview conveyed in my classroom? In searching for answers to these questions and then bridging any gaps, teachers traverse a great distance towards equitably supporting all students to achieve agency in their own learning.



## Classroom Culture

The process of formative assessment depends on a classroom culture where students trust one another and the teacher to safely engage in learning. Teachers establish a classroom culture characterized by a recognition and appreciation of individual differences in which classroom norms support students to share what they understand, and don't understand, as learning develops. To implement formative assessment, teachers support students to develop an awareness of the social aspects of learning, such as students listening respectfully to one another, responding positively and constructively, appreciating the different level of skill and knowledge among peers, and valuing learning from one another. In this classroom culture, teachers reconstruct the teaching and learning contract to include the expectation that noticing, sensemaking, and responding are shared and worthwhile undertakings by both the students and the teacher. As such, students experience learning as a social and shared responsibility.

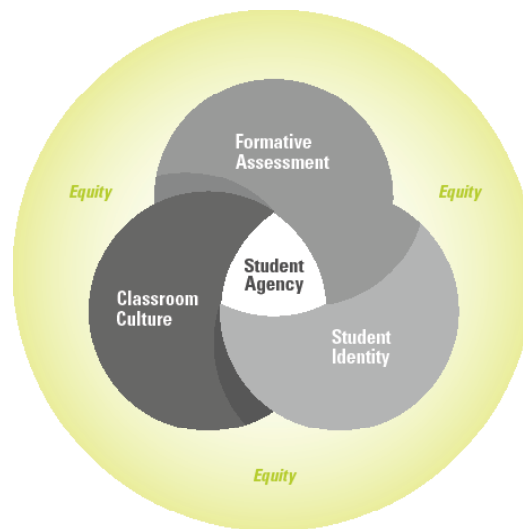


## Student Agency

Agency involves being able to act in ways that shape one’s development and experience. In the classroom, students who exhibit agency do not exclusively rely on the teacher to carry the cognitive load of learning – they regularly attempt new tasks, develop and use cognitive strategies to move learning forward, and can select from a range of tactics to address a new learning task. In formative assessment, peer feedback and self-assessment become routine instructional practices that help students develop metacognition and self-efficacy that are critical elements of agency. This sense of student agency is supported by students’ beliefs that they can positively influence events if they take an active role in determining their own choices. Developing student agency is never done “to” students by teachers; rather it requires a new model of how learning takes shape, where learning is a joint responsibility equally shared by teacher and students.

## EQUITY

The larger frame for this work is equity, which we conceptualize as every student being given the educational opportunity they need to become college, career, and community ready. Developing student agency through formative assessment practices is a starting place in that effort, zeroing in on how to conduct a classroom tuned in to teachers and students knowing what students know and can do in the moment, and responding appropriately while learning is underway to support academic progress.



Notice that we are talking about teachers and students holding and responding to this knowledge. In formative assessment, all students have the opportunity to try on new academic roles to support their identity and development as learners. Authority is distributed among the teacher and all students as they take on a shared responsibility for learning, which supports all students to develop agency. Within this context, students participate equally in the formative assessment process within the context of a classroom culture that promotes trust and accountability and where students identify as active, learning participants.