

The Formative Assessment Framework



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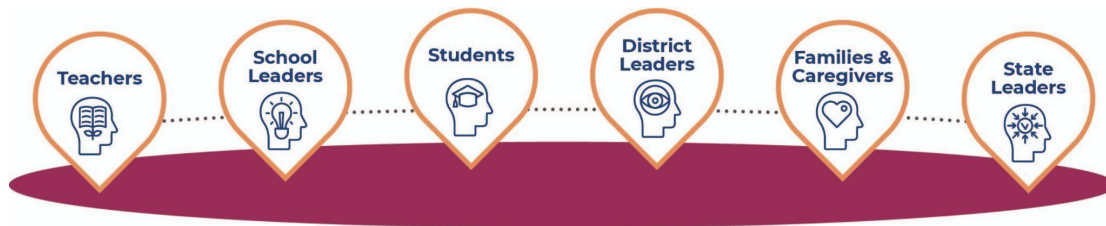
Introduction

What Is the Formative Assessment Framework?

The formative assessment framework guides Arizona educators and leaders to better understand what formative assessment is and is not, how learners use it to manage their learning, and what it looks like when practiced by various role groups.

The framework shares principles and practices that can be utilized as a common language for educators, leaders, and others to discuss and enact formative assessment. Each framework section demonstrates how a group (e.g., students, teachers, leaders, and families) can act with agency, collaboratively support others in this work, and promote achievement for all students. It also articulates a vision for systemically shifting toward greater collaboration and coordination across the educational system to enhance students' experiences and create lifelong learners. Figure 1 shows each of these role groups.

Figure 1. Role Groups in the Formative Assessment Framework



Why Use Formative Assessment?

Formative assessment is a core element of several Arizona educational initiatives because it grounds decision-making in evidence to support teaching, learning, and leading. In the classroom, evidence of student learning is generated from paying ongoing attention to what students say, do, make, or write during lessons. This practice provides the foundation of success for students to meet state standards. Teachers have the information they need to provide targeted, appropriate instruction, and students have the opportunity to showcase what they have learned. Formative assessment shifts the paradigm from the teacher as a dispenser of knowledge and students as ready sponges to teachers and students co-constructing meaning and moving learning forward together.

Many state education agency (SEA) leaders have also described formative assessment as fundamental to their leadership practices, enabling them to pivot as needed with flexibility and engage colleagues effectively in joint reflection and planning.

Why Develop a Formative Assessment Framework?

In recognition of the power of formative assessment to support ambitious learning goals for all students and the important role that the state agency can play in supporting instruction and raising student achievement, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) engaged a cross-program team in an ongoing effort to build a coherent shared vision for formative assessment, increase the capacity of ADE staff to support formative assessment, and expand opportunities for Arizona educators and leaders to advance their implementation of formative assessment. As part of this process, ADE took a systemwide perspective, developing this framework that articulates how different role groups across the educational system can support others and enact formative assessment in their own work.

How Was the Framework Developed?

ADE¹ cross-program staff committed to scaling formative assessment across the state developed this framework. Staff met monthly to discuss the work of formative assessment scholars and practitioners, integrate formative assessment into their program work with local education agencies (LEAs), and share their experiences engaging in formative assessment with colleagues, schools, and districts. With the shared definitions and mental models developed through this process, ADE staff articulated their understanding of an educational system based on the formative assessment values and practices in this framework, providing a vision of what this could look like in Arizona.

Who Benefits From the Framework?

This framework is for everyone: site leaders, coaches, lead teachers, classroom educators, special education and language learning specialists, higher education agencies, families and caregivers, students, governing boards, and state education agencies. With the goal of everyone pursuing a shared vision for student learning and assessment, sustained improvements in student achievement in Arizona are a likely outcome of this effort.

To realize this vision, site-, district-, and state-level leaders move to a learner stance as they work to make sense of evidence—from the classroom to the statehouse. Families come to see the learning process as a key outcome instead of scores, points, and grades. And teachers and students recognize themselves as both classroom leaders and learners. At all levels in a formative assessment system, individuals and groups ask themselves

- What structures and practices support our vision for student learning?
- What is getting in the way?
- Are there systems in place that no longer support our end goals?
- Who do I need to work with, and what do I need to learn to realize the change I want to see?

¹ In this effort, ADE was supported by the Region 15 Comprehensive Center, a federally funded technical assistance center supporting Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah.

How Can the Framework Be Used?

This framework can support educational processes at all levels. Teachers can use it in the classroom to collaboratively plan student lessons, including for Exceptional Students and English language development. It can set a clear leadership focus at the school level, including guiding staff professional learning. Coaches can use the framework to guide teacher feedback and ground their conversations in support of teachers' professional practice. At the district and state levels, the framework can help develop a vision for the student role in learning and provide an overview of classroom formative assessment practices. For families and caregivers, it can support their understanding of evidence of learning and illustrate how to help their students demonstrate what they know and can do.

What Is Formative Assessment?

At its core, formative assessment is a daily process of inquiry that individuals, including leaders, teachers, and students, engage in to better understand the status of learning in the moment. It is not just a set of standalone tools, strategies, or tests. In 2000, Bell and Cowie defined formative assessment as "the process used by teachers and students to recognize and respond to student learning and to enhance that learning, during the learning."² In 2018, the Formative Assessment State Collaborative of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) offered a description of formative assessment that states

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 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:

- *Clarifying learning goals and success criteria within a broader progression of learning;*
- *Eliciting and analyzing evidence of student thinking;*
- *Engaging in self-assessment and peer feedback;*
- *Providing actionable feedback; and*
- *Using evidence and feedback to move learning forward by adjusting learning strategies, goals, or next instructional steps.*³

When students use this process (also depicted in Figure 2 below), they come to hold a vision for their own learning, determining where they are on the path to get there and then carrying out the

² Bell, B., & Cowie, B. (2000). The characteristics of formative assessment in science education. *Science Education*, 85(5), 536–53. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.1022>

³ Council of Chief State School Officers. (2018). Revising the definition of formative assessment. <https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Revising%20the%20Definition%20of%20Formative%20Assessment.pdf>

sequential steps to achieve their goal. Students act with agency when they make informed decisions about their learning based on

- where their current learning is along a progression,
- their own assessment of the quality of their work based on success criteria, and
- an understanding of how their knowledge and skills fit into larger contexts (i.e., disciplinary knowledge and analytical practices).

With these formative assessment skills, students can analyze evidence, give and receive peer feedback, and engage their metacognition to sense where they are in their learning. When this occurs, students have powerful tools to help them reach their full potential.

Figure 2. Formative Assessment Process



Formative assessment in the classroom is significant in two ways. It helps shift the student role toward greater ownership of learning and helps teachers effectively target instruction and feedback to match where students are in their learning. In most classrooms, this involves a dramatic shift for teachers and students.

This framework envisions a system that utilizes these formative assessment practices for collaborative teams at all levels, informing leading, teaching, and learning based on evidence-centered principles. Teachers can participate in professional learning communities to support one another through cycles of reflection on teaching and learning. School-, district-, and state-level leadership teams can also engage in focused reflection and planning through an inquiry lens, using formative assessment to shift to a learning stance in support of students and staff.

The outcome of this work is the creation of a learning culture that supports everyone to reach positive achievement outcomes.

What Are the Core Values of Formative Assessment?

The list below reflects values that guide formative assessment practices. Whether in the classroom, home, school, district, or SEA, enacting these values often requires shifting from traditional ways of working and learning. They also provide the context for practitioners to engage in all the dimensions of formative assessment. These values include

- learning in partnership,
- developing personal and collective responsibility,
- making decisions grounded in evidence,
- valuing individual learning progressions,
- targeting learning so that it is not too hard or too easy,
- building momentum through feedback loops,
- creating opportunities for all to have a voice in the learning process, and
- forming a culture of trust.

These values support positive relationships, behaviors, and outcomes. They also help learners at every level understand the drivers of their educational and professional experiences and the intended outcomes of their work and learning efforts. The remaining sections of the framework elaborate on the particular ways formative assessment can be enacted by the various role groups in Arizona's educational system.

Teachers' Role in Formative Assessment

The teacher is a perspective shifter, an agency builder and advocate, a communicator of vision and practice, a modeler of transparency and the learning journey.

~ ADE Formative Assessment Working Group

A Picture of Practice

Teachers use the formative assessment process to implement learning tasks that are designed to engage students at the edge of what they know and can do, align with their interests, and leverage what they bring with them from their homes and their communities. Teachers gather evidence of students' daily learning, then reflect and respond to it in the moment to advance learning. They do this by paying close attention to student dialogue and demonstrations of learning *during the flow of learning*. In this way, teachers meet students where they are to help them progress toward grade-level standards. Teachers also support students to conduct this inquiry process themselves via self-assessment and peer feedback by providing explicit instruction, practice opportunities, and regular feedback.

During lesson planning, teachers attend to current evidence of learning to design meaningful activities, discussion prompts, and quality questions. These engagements further students' learning and make their thinking visible for evidence collection. Teachers develop specific lesson-sized learning goals, identify possible student misconceptions, and conceptualize a "picture" of what success looks like. In sharing this information with students, students also gain clarity about what they are expected to know and be able to do when they meet learning goals. As teachers advance their own formative assessment practice, they begin to co-construct success criteria with students and support them in setting their own personal learning targets, both of which support students' self-regulation.

By engaging in these processes, teachers and students are well-equipped to respond in the moment to further learning. This responsiveness and feedback nudge student learning forward incrementally. Bronwen Cowie states, "A teacher's response frames what counts as valued learning."⁴ With this in mind, teachers using formative assessment notice and respond to

⁴ Cowie, B. & Harrison, C. & Willis, I. (2018). Supporting teacher responsiveness in assessment for learning through disciplined noticing. *The Curriculum Journal*, 29, 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2018.1481442>

student learning in relation to the intended curriculum (the learning goals) and individual students' sensemaking processes. This dual lens informs teachers' in-the-moment responses, so they are both aspirational and asset-oriented.

Developing a strong collaborative classroom learning culture is key to formative assessment success for teachers and students. Teachers facilitate this culture by prioritizing internal accountability and authenticity. They normalize being an emergent learner by sharing their own learning journey with students. They provide opportunities for students to practice, get feedback, and try again. They explicitly instruct students on how to make sense of and respond to evidence, aiming to *even the playing field* between students who know how to “do school” and those who do not. They focus on switching between leader and learner roles to encourage students to do the same while developing accountability and collective efficacy.

How Does the Teacher Role Shift?

Shifting the teacher role promotes a learning culture founded on teacher responsiveness and student-driven learning. The focus on transparency in learning goals, processes, and criteria for student success builds student agency. It also creates deep, long-term change in student learning as students internalize the learning expectations and develop greater agency over how and what they learn. Teacher openness about their own learning process supports collaboration and creates a connection between the teacher and students. It also models for students what self-evaluation, planning, adjusting, and moving knowledge-acquisition forward (i.e., the learning process) looks like. With these skills and knowledge, students become better equipped to succeed in their immediate endeavors *and* become lifelong learners.

How Does This Shift Support Learning for All Students?

In classrooms that use formative assessment practices to inform teaching and learning decisions, students' capacities and knowledge are honored and used by the teacher to determine instructional next steps. If students also understand the structures (goals, criteria, etc.) defining expectations for their learning, it promotes positive learning outcomes for all students and the exercise of student agency. It also allows students to advocate for their own learning. When students can voice what they need, they move closer to meeting their learning goals.

How Does a Classroom Grounded in Formative Assessment Look and Sound?

You would see teachers moving around the classroom, gathering evidence of student learning through listening and observing. Teachers would sit with small groups, co-constructing and assessing knowledge with their students through discourse.

You would hear teachers asking powerful questions, addressing misconceptions, and providing feedback throughout the lesson. Teachers would model the language of learning, though teacher talk would not outweigh student talk.

Teacher Success Criteria

- Plan for learning, getting clear on learning goals and success criteria.
- Continually collect evidence through listening and observing to gauge the status of learning.
- Provide accurate and actionable feedback that drives learning forward.
- Share responsibility for learning with students by supporting them to conduct formative assessment processes themselves.
- Work with leaders to set expectations for fair and appropriate support, observation, and formative evaluation practices.

Discussion Questions

- How do you work on developing your own metacognition as a way to reflect on your teaching practice?
- How can you develop your capacity to respond more deeply to and engage with student reasoning?
- How do you center innovation in your work and become a knowledge producer with your students? What tools and supports do you need?
- What systems need to be put in place so you feel supported in engaging in daily formative assessment practices?
- What supports or systems do you need to put in place to get to know students and families in meaningful ways?

Students' Role in Formative Assessment

The key question that drives the class is not “What are you doing?” It is “What are you learning, and how do you know?”

~ ADE Formative Assessment Working Group

A Picture of Practice

Students and teachers are jointly responsible for learning in classrooms that use formative assessment principles and practices to inform daily instruction. They work to understand and internalize the lesson-learning goals and success criteria and then actively engage in learning activities. Students analyze evidence (what they say, do, make, or write) to advance their own and their peer’s learning through self-assessment, peer feedback, and discourse practices. They build individual and group agency by understanding their own progress and setting next steps. Students appreciate the shared knowledge and feedback they get from their peers, which prompts them to seek out and give support to others. Students willingly demonstrate what they know using multiple modalities, including in real-world settings.

How Does the Student Role Shift?

Shifting the student role changes teachers’ and students’ beliefs about what is possible for students. As students build their capacity to self-regulate, act with agency, and hold a vision for their own learning, they navigate uncharted territory for both themselves and their teachers. Teachers and students work at the edge of their learning through this process. For students, this relates to working at the edge of their content knowledge and analytic practices. For teachers, this relates to staying abreast of what students know and can do, as well as the mental models they bring to school with them to make sense of new learning. This inquiry process supports students to excel both academically and socially.

How Does This Shift Support Learning for All Students?

Formative assessment has a powerful capacity to increase learning for every student, including multilingual students, students with disabilities, students of diverse backgrounds, students from rural and urban settings, and students from low-income areas. This power comes from formative

assessment's ability to (1) equip teachers with the skills to appropriately target instruction and (2) empower students to drive their own learning. It also is an inquiry model that can be used to build a bridge between home and school. Classroom lessons that use the dimensions of formative assessment and leverage students' unique strengths support every student to reach the Arizona State Standards within the general education curriculum. This shift in the student role supports a vision for every student to succeed.

How Does a Classroom Grounded in Formative Assessment Look and Sound?

You would see students engaged in intentional discourse with their peers and their teacher to gauge where they are in their learning and determine what they have to do to progress. You would see students and teachers working together to build success criteria. Students would notice, recognize, and respond to each other's learning using these criteria while also seeking out specific feedback in the moment to promote their learning.

You would hear an acceptable level of noise and movement. There would be a pleasant hum in the room that parallels students learning together. You would hear students asking questions and making connections. Students would engage in friendly disagreements about their learning, expressing arguments and claims while supporting and defending ideas.

You would sense that this is a safe place to take risks and grow, where every student feels respected and sees that their contribution to the learning community is valued. You would sense high energy as well as calm and productive learning. The culture would be collaborative, supportive, and feel like a community. Students would act as confident risk-takers and problem-solvers who are excited about learning. You would feel a culture of intellectual and emotional trust, evident through conversation, observation, and shared learning moments. Students would support each other, value each other's strengths, and leverage the group to achieve their goals.

Student Success Criteria

- Act as leaders of their own learning by taking ownership of the learning goals and success criteria, understanding their own progress, and taking action to move learning forward.
- Notice, recognize, and respond to each other's learning using the success criteria.
- Give and receive feedback, seeking out specific feedback in the moment to promote their learning.
- Support each other, value each other's strengths, and leverage the group to achieve goals at the next level.
- Engage with each other through collaborative discussion, including participating in friendly disagreements about their learning, expressing arguments and claims, and supporting and defending ideas.

Discussion Questions

- What instructional routines do you put in place to support students to practice formative assessment?

- What are the “non-negotiable” contexts in which students need to act with individual agency and collective efficacy?
- Are there culturally specific ways students can more effectively be supported to enact formative assessment practices?

Families' and Caregivers' Role in Formative Assessment

This is so important for community building and student success. How do we engage cross-agency to support this?

~ **ADE Formative Assessment Working Group**

A Picture of Practice

In an educational system based on formative assessment principles, families and caregivers are partners in their students' daily assessment of learning. They contribute input and knowledge about what their students know and can do, as well as provide background information about their home lives to support new learning. This partnership enables school staff to better understand the status of student learning, where families are coming from, and what they value. It also informs teachers' communication modes, instruction, and next steps.

This partnership includes caregivers, parents, siblings, and other extended family members so that all can collectively contribute knowledge and receive input about students' learning and development. This inclusive lens is especially important in homes where parents may be unable to take as active of a role as they would like in their students' learning. It also supports building a community at home to support students' education, enabling families and caregivers to contribute through sharing local resources and experiences. For this partnership to flourish, teachers and leaders attend to creating trusting relationships with caregivers, which serves as an entry point for engagement.

To participate in this way, families and caregivers need a variety of opportunities to access information about their student's learning and provide feedback. Since this "sharing of information relies on a shared understanding of the purposes for learning ... and the roles each participant is expected to play",⁵ teachers and leaders help families and caregivers understand what students are learning, why they are learning it, and what progress looks like. They also communicate about what their role is in supporting students to advance. Families and

⁵ Cowie, B. & Mitchell, L. (2015). Equity as family/whānau opportunities for participation in formative assessment. *Assessment Matters*. 8, 119–141. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18296/am.0007>

caregivers can then engage their students in meaningful dialogue and share interpretations and ideas with students to cultivate their understanding. This also creates space for student reflection, self-assessment, and building learner agency.

How Does the Family and Caregiver Role Shift?

Shifting the family and caregiver role in this way is to engage more deeply in family–school partnerships for the benefit of students. School practices can expand beyond simply communicating plans, expectations, and experiences to caregivers to more inclusively implement systems and processes by which families can engage with the school in designing, implementing, and evaluating instructional plans and student development. This engagement facilitates school accountability and provides a pathway for families to have meaningful conversations with their students about learning (e.g., including through student-led conferences).

How Does This Shift Support Learning for All Students?

This shift helps families and caregivers understand “the why” of the intended learning, what the process of learning looks like, and what to expect when students reach their learning goals. Caregiver input about their student’s learning supports school staff to also understand where students and their families are coming from and what works for them. This approach communicates that “we are all on the same team, and we all want and expect the best for students.”

Seeking and incorporating family contributions informs and defines what is valued and the roles of school system personnel, families, and students. Including families’ diverse perspectives and knowledge helps shape understandings and expectations. This, in turn, supports access and equal opportunities for families and students.

How Does a Home Grounded in Formative Assessment Look and Sound?

You would see caregivers act as partners in the formative assessment process by paying attention to and responding to students’ expressions of learning. They would provide feedback that supports students to take next steps and deepen their curiosity. Families and caregivers would share with educators what they notice about their student’s learning and provide context. They would also share how their student learns best, how they are comfortable communicating, and the ways in which they prefer to demonstrate what they have learned.

You would hear families and caregivers use common language grounded in formative assessment principles to focus students’ efforts. They would reflect with their student by asking what they have learned, where they are in their learning, and about the next steps.

Family and Caregiver Success Criteria

- Engage with staff at school events to learn about formative assessment principles and practices.
- Reflect with their student, asking what they have learned, where they are in their learning, and what the next steps are.
- Share with educators what they notice about their student's current learning and provide context.
- Advocate for their student and be empowered to take on roles on campus and in classrooms.

Discussion Questions

- What support would the field need in order to build and maintain this partnership systemically?
- What is each group's role in supporting this partnership with families and caregivers?

Site Leaders' Role in Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a general approach of using evidence while learning is underway and a culture that repositions who is responsible for the learning. ... Every one of us is responsible for leading some level of this work.

~ ADE Formative Assessment Working Group

A Picture of Practice

Site leaders in a formative assessment system are lead learners, developing formative assessment knowledge alongside their staff. They communicate a vision to teachers, students, and families describing why this work is essential, including clear and consistent messaging that connects formative assessment and enhanced student agency and achievement. Site leaders are committed to developing their own deep understanding of formative assessment principles and practices and then using this knowledge to develop staff expertise. They support others by engaging in observation and feedback, tailoring professional development to the needs of teachers and other educators, and removing implementation barriers (e.g., conflicting schedules, divergent expectations, differing program requirements). Site leaders create leadership teams to support their staff in doing this work, beginning with defining the student role in learning. They model transparency in their own learning journey, from emergent to mature understanding of formative assessment. They eschew being a “lone hero” who has all the answers but commit instead to building relationships that lead to collective responsibility and action. Site leaders support formative assessment by fostering a learning culture that honors authenticity in learning and personal and collective accountability.

How Does the Site Leader Role Shift?

Shifting the site leader role models best practices, facilitates a shift in educators' practices, and, ultimately, shifts students' learning dynamics. They create opportunities for all learners to be thought partners, reflectors, and knowledge producers, enabling continuous improvement in teaching and learning for entire school communities. Through these efforts, site leaders change their schools' cultures so that formative assessment practices are adopted and implemented at all levels.

How Does This Shift Support Learning for All Students?

This shift in site leadership practices empowers teachers to make evidence-based instructional decisions, equipping them to make informed teaching decisions. When site leaders, teachers, and students build their capacity to lead the learning, they create meaningful relationships, increase their own agency, and build collective efficacy. They rely less on standardized practices and solutions and, instead, adapt practices based on identified learning needs. By centering distributed leadership and respecting diverse voices, students can get what they need when they need it.

How Does a School Grounded in Formative Assessment Look and Sound?

You would see site leaders creating the time and space for teachers to learn, practice, and implement formative assessment practices. There would be evidence of shared learning and collaboration during professional development sessions where teachers and site leaders could be seen problem-solving and planning together based on evidence of student learning. Formative conversations would be on view between site leaders and teachers in hallways and staff rooms, and the vision for the work would be communicated through bulletin boards and other visual means throughout the school. Site leaders would support the creation of data walls that show student strengths instead of weaknesses and include student input.

You would hear site leaders engaged in asset-based conversations about student learning. Teams would work collaboratively, building on each other's knowledge as they participate in leadership opportunities. It would sound like decisions being shared with others and rationales given based on evidence of student learning from a variety of formative sources. Site leaders would be heard speaking the same formative assessment language as others, sharing their learning journeys, and focusing on their student-centered communities.

Site Leader Success Criteria

- Provide a systems-level perspective by creating the time, resources, and funding for formative assessment to be understood and practiced by all.
- Promote collective responsibility and ownership for everyone at the school (i.e., staff, students, and families).
- Share a vision and common language for what it means to implement formative assessment practices.
- Create a culture of collaborative inquiry and reflection as a learner among learners.

Discussion Questions

- Who needs to be at the table to plan teaching, learning, and assessment to support all students to achieve?
- How can you shift systems to allow for more time for teachers to meaningfully get to know students and families?



- How can you individualize formative assessment for people with different roles, requirements, and responsibilities?
- How do you communicate about and advocate for your unique learners?

District and Charter Leaders' Role in Formative Assessment

Stepping back into a learning role also makes leadership more fun. It's about growth and empowering others—and in a time when there's administrative turnover as well as teacher turnover, it helps sustain people because they know you believe in them and have a vested interest in their growth.

~ **ADE Formative Assessment Working Group**

A Picture of Practice

District and charter leaders strengthen their knowledge and commitment to formative assessment by collectively engaging others in learning and reflection, garnering enthusiasm, and supporting all school staff. They communicate the global perspective and vision of student-centered learning and assessment to all district staff and education partners. District and charter leaders work closely with other leaders to connect their current practices to formative assessment.

District and charter leaders work with education partners to evaluate and improve their overall assessment system, eliminating unnecessary and redundant assessment tools and requirements to create space for the implementation of authentic formative assessment. They review and revise policies and practices that inhibit implementation and develop structures, like professional learning groups, that support collaboration and learning.

District and charter leaders endorse, model, and coach to support successful formative assessment implementation across schools. They leverage a shared vision to ensure safe, intellectual learning cultures for all staff and cultivate a shared model of learning and assessment to empower agile execution by educators and leaders. District and charter leaders are active members of learning communities to ensure an ongoing commitment to effective formative assessment practices that move the needle on long-term student achievement.

How Does the District or Charter Leader Role Shift?

While many district and charter leaders agree on the student-centered learning and assessment they want in schools, enacting this vision requires a shift in mindsets about what formative assessment is and is not, a belief in the possibility of success for all students, and an understanding of how to create systems that support best practices. District and charter leaders support school site leaders and teachers to attain desired educational goals by holding this vision and engaging in the practice of welcoming, empowering, and supporting the diverse academic and language needs of all students. They work to build collective will for students to have rigorous and relevant educational opportunities. To make this happen, everyone collectively and collaboratively learns together to develop the skills needed to reach all students and create a culture of teaching and learning through formative assessment.

How Does This Shift Support Learning for All Students?

This shift supports a vision for all learners by empowering district and charter leaders to engage in individual and collective reflection on how their district or charter system contributes to or hinders student learning and development. By identifying existing programs and policies that may hinder learning or negatively impact students, leaders can clear the way for formative assessment systems that provide effective learning opportunities for all students. Through their reflection and analysis, they can establish coherence among systems and align formative assessment implementation to key district goals, such as improving student learning and ensuring opportunities for site-based professional learning.

How Do Systems Grounded in Formative Assessment Look and Sound?

You would see district and charter leaders working with site leaders to define formative assessment, focusing on what it looks like in practice. They would share a clear vision about how to move it forward, including creating the time, space, and funding for formative assessment work to happen at all levels.

You would hear district and charter leaders sharing their expectation that formative assessment be *the foundational practice* of their district or charter system. They would do this by codifying, communicating, and modeling the core values of formative assessment. District and charter leaders would be learners with an equal voice and would communicate how they plan to evaluate success to ensure sustainability.

District and Charter Leader Success Criteria

- Design formative assessment systems that provide opportunities for all to participate by creating the time, resources, and funding for formative assessment to be understood, practiced, and implemented with sustained fidelity.
- Communicate the vision and purpose of formative assessment and provide clear expectations for school communities, building collective will.

- Build teacher capacity by providing professional learning and materials on formative assessment-informed instruction so all students can access a respectful and effective learning environment.
- Audit and manage district and site assessments to allow space for authentic formative assessment practices.
- Work toward implementation of formative assessment practices through ongoing and sustained efforts.

Discussion Questions

- How does your current district or charter vision align with formative assessment values and practices?
- What systems, policies, and practices do you need to implement (or eliminate) to make formative assessment successful in your district or charter system?
- What does a districtwide focus on formative assessment look, sound, and feel like for your school, district, and community?
- What supports do educators need to engage in formative assessment?

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?

Additional Resources

In Formative Assessment Classrooms ...

Teachers show responsibility to *themselves* by learning to be okay with not having every answer, taking risks, and making mistakes. They release control and share responsibility for learning with their students. Teachers are reflective in their practice and aware of their own identity. They take responsibility for being an advocate for their own voice as a professional.

Teachers show responsibility to *students* by getting clear on student strengths and celebrating their successes and thinking. They create targeted learning opportunities and cultivate student metacognition, using their own deep understanding of the standards and the progression of learning. Teachers plan for learning, getting clear on learning goals and success criteria. They give students tools to engage with these expectations and align their feedback with them. With high expectations for all students, teachers empower students to be self-directed learners. They engage with student reasoning with the mindset that there is often more than one right answer.

Teachers show responsibility to *colleagues* by collaborating and reflecting jointly on their teaching practices, much in the way they would like their students to collaborate and learn from each other. They ensure that all voices, especially the special education teacher voice, are at the table. They leverage their peers as accountability partners as they learn, clearly communicating their progress. They build collective efficacy by sharing their creative ideas and creating a common learning space.

Teachers show responsibility to *site leaders* by providing a clear message to leadership about the perspective shift they are facilitating in their classroom and cultivating with their students. They work with leaders to set expectations for fair and appropriate support, observation, and formative evaluation practices. Teachers provide feedback to leaders to help them grow. They advocate for the time they need to be collaborative and reflective with peers. They are willing to take risks as learners and share mistakes as a learning opportunity.

Teachers show responsibility to *families and caregivers* by clearly communicating about learning processes, helping families understand what formative assessment is and how it supports teaching and learning in the classroom and at home. They model questioning strategies and goal-setting conversations for families and caregivers focused on student strengths. Teachers engage with families and caregivers to better understand what they know and can share about their students' learning and the particular assets they bring to school with them. They change what parent events look like, with students often leading. Teachers also elevate families as learning communities.

In Formative Assessment Classrooms ...

Students show responsibility to *themselves* by reflecting on where they are in their learning and trusting their own self-assessment. They seize opportunities for corrective feedback to continue learning. When they know where they want to go, they set goals and advocate for themselves.

Students show responsibility to their *peers* by collaboratively facilitating a safe learning space in the classroom. They listen to the needs of their classmates, ask questions, and clarify their understanding. Students provide actionable feedback to one another and are receptive to feedback.

Students show responsibility to their *teachers* by co-constructing the culture of the classroom, the learning procedures, and the success criteria. They are active participants in an environment of trust, risk-taking, and participation. They show a willingness to change their mindsets to become empowered learners. They provide evidence of learning and, when needed, seek out and accept support from their teachers.

Students show responsibility to their *families and caregivers* by providing them with evidence of their own learning. They explain to their families what they are learning, what they still need to learn, and how they will acquire and evaluate that learning. They lead their own parent-teacher conferences and Individualized Learning Plan (IEP) or 504 meetings using evidence they have collected themselves.

In Homes Aligned With Formative Assessment Principles ...

Families and caregivers show responsibility to *themselves* by engaging with staff at school events to learn about formative assessment principles and practices. They reflect on learning with their student and with their teacher in both informal settings and formal contexts. They are honest and authentic, discussing their student's needs and what works best to support their learning.

Families and caregivers show responsibility for their *students'* learning by being an advocate for them and their learning. They keep the lines of communication open between home and school and support students' regular attendance. Families and caregivers utilize the formative assessment process when engaging with their student about their learning by helping them identify where they are in relation to their learning goals and determine next steps.

Families and caregivers show responsibility to *teachers* by responding to teachers in the spirit of open dialogue and what is best for students. Families and caregivers regularly give input on what they notice about student learning, including struggles and misconceptions, provide relevant contextual information, and consistently follow up on what they commit to, e.g., reviewing homework planner, reading practice, etc.

In a School Grounded In Formative Assessment ...

Site leaders show responsibility to *themselves* by committing to their own ongoing professional learning. They prioritize learning the skills of modeling, continuous inquiry, analysis of evidence, and collaboration with teachers. They embrace the role of learner, exploring their current practices against grounding rubrics and frameworks to evaluate their alignment with key formative assessment practices and a culture of learning. They invite feedback from others, including colleagues, teachers, students, families, and district leaders. With this lens of continuous improvement, they set learning goals for themselves that they reflect on through self- and peer-assessment processes.

Site leaders show responsibility to *students* by building and maintaining relationships with individual students and the larger school community. They are visible and accessible on their school campuses and available for informal conversations with students about their learning. They provide ongoing feedback when students prompt them to do so. They also create the environment and systems that allow students to consistently engage in formative assessment practices and develop learner agency.

Site leaders show responsibility to *teachers and other colleagues* by putting forth and promoting a clear student-centered vision of formative assessment. They model leading and learning with and from one another, operating in a culture where they do what they ask teachers and students to do (peer support, risk-taking, and authenticity). They create a safe space for teachers and other colleagues to learn and grow together, normalizing emergent learning. They provide effective feedback using tools that emphasize formative assessment practices. They provide professional learning experiences that support teachers to advance in their formative assessment expertise through cycles of inquiry and reflection, which teachers then model for their students. These inquiry cycles often include peer observation routines, review of model lessons, and video study sessions. Site leaders create master schedules that allow teachers to collaborate and plan. They demonstrate transparency about their own learning to support teachers to create new instructional norms and investigate their own personal beliefs about teaching, learning, and what is possible for students.

Site leaders show responsibility to *families and caregivers* by including them as part of their student's academic team. They communicate with families and caregivers about the basics of formative assessment, including what it looks like in the classroom and its impact on student learning. They engage in conversations with families and caregivers to address how this formative assessment learning model may be different from their own previous experiences in school, focusing on the way it promotes individual agency and collaborative experiences rooted in evidence. Site leaders support family and caregiver meetings steeped in formative assessment practices to illustrate the learning style and culture of the school. They also provide the structure and support to enable these meetings to be student-led, during which students articulate what and how they are learning. This is especially evident in Individual Learning Plan (ILP) meetings.

Site leaders show responsibility to *other site leaders* by helping communicate a clear vision of formative assessment to promote district or charter system growth. They share their struggles, successes, and questions and depend on their colleagues to serve as resources. They also offer themselves as resources for other site leaders, including opening their schools

so that others can observe their current formative assessment practices and get feedback on areas of growth. They use a common language and norms when it comes to formative assessment practices to support all sites being on the same page. This ensures a greater level of consistency for all students across all sites and avoids comparisons of schools within the same district.

Site leaders show responsibility to *district and charter leadership* by having a deep understanding of formative assessment and a connection to the work in the classroom. They communicate clearly to district and charter leadership about the formative assessment work at their schools. Site leaders provide a bridge between students and the district or charter system, advocating for their students at the system level. They take on leader and learner roles in both school site and district or charter settings, while keeping a growth mindset in each role. They model a culture of learning wherever they serve as a leader. They hold their staff, themselves, and supervisors accountable for formative assessment practices, navigating district or charter and state requirements with these practices and principles in mind.

In a Formative Assessment System ...

District and charter leaders show responsibility to *themselves* by setting goals and mile markers of progress for this work. They hold principals and other district and charter leaders accountable, setting high expectations for all levels to implement this work well. They share this work with school boards and the community, spending the time to make it happen.

District and charter leaders show responsibility to *schools* by providing clarity and helping formative assessment make sense to school leadership, teachers, and students. They provide the needed resources for this work. They share the purpose and vision and communicate clear expectations for formative assessment practices for entire school communities.

District and charter leaders show responsibility to *colleagues* by sharing the purpose and learning of formative assessment work happening within their district or charter system. They create space for collaboration among district or charter staff, using a common language to support collaboration and establish a true district or charter team.

District and charter leaders show responsibility to *SEA partners* by developing a global understanding of their district or charter system and how it relates to the larger community and the SEA. They develop a deep awareness of the formative assessment work occurring at their sites and can speak about it to the SEA. District and charter leaders clearly represent and communicate the goals and values of their district or charter system to the SEA so that the SEA has a clear conception of the culture and values of that district or charter system. They codify how formative assessment practices are positively impacting student achievement and communicate to the SEA how implementing formative assessment relates to metrics of success.

District and charter leaders show responsibility to *families and caregivers* by providing them with uniform messaging and intentions, consistent with communication from each school and each teacher so that everyone can understand the core formative assessment values. District and charter leaders create a climate where families and students feel like an integral part of the community and district or charter system. They also learn about the cultures that make up their system, including family values and culturally specific ideas about the roles of educators and caregivers. District and charter leaders create clear inquiry cycles to get to know their families in a meaningful way, including through surveys, family nights, social media, etc., and report on the families and cultures that make up the system. District and charter leaders also create opportunities for families to engage in a meaningful way with the educational system, using formative assessment practices as a way to gather feedback from families.

In a Formative Assessment System ...

State education leaders show responsibility to *themselves* by being learners within the system and permitting themselves to learn, make mistakes, and grow along with the entire system. They build their own understanding of formative assessment as part of their broader assessment literacy. They clarify how formative assessment practices connect to all of the agency's work—shifting ownership from siloed departments to the entire organization.

State education leaders show responsibility to *colleagues* by sharing materials and resources on formative assessment and incorporating them into shared learning experiences. They help colleagues connect other state initiatives to formative assessment, including change efforts in the School Improvement Unit, technical assistance from the Arizona Charter Schools Program, Arizona Professional Learning Series in Exceptional Student Services, and training from Academic Standards.

State education leaders show responsibility to *districts and charter schools* by listening to the field and following their lead on what they need to implement these formative assessment practices. They address misconceptions in the field about what formative assessment is and ensure that state policies and practices are supportive of formative assessment implementation. State education leaders establish the expectations, culture, and climate for this work and set a tone that allows for risk-taking, making mistakes, and growing—processes that are vital to impacting student achievement. They also provide targeted professional development and resources to districts and charter school systems to support them where they are in their learning.

State education leaders show responsibility to *school leaders* by offering them training and clear expectations, supporting school leaders to increase their depth of understanding, and facilitating a shift in ownership. They help school leaders learn about formative assessment practices, how to recognize and foster them in their system, and see their value. State education leaders also create a central location where school leaders can get needed resources, locate tools to evaluate their progress, and communicate with other leaders.

State education leaders show responsibility to *teachers* by being lead learners and learning alongside teachers. They support teachers to understand what evidence looks like in the classroom and empower them to make instructional decisions based on that evidence of learning. They help infuse this work in all that teachers do, showing them how to be flexible and reflective in their teaching and learning practices. State education leaders facilitate opportunities for teachers to engage in professional learning about formative assessment and build their capacity to lead it in the classroom.

State education leaders show responsibility to *families and caregivers* by providing them with the same common messaging, language, and framework. They provide ongoing communication about where we are now, where we are headed, and how we will get there. State education leaders support families, caregivers, and school staff to build community and collaboration. They support them to carve out the space, time, and learning opportunities to engage with evidence of learning, e.g., through student-led conferences and greater access to classrooms.