

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a *process* used by teachers and students *during* instruction.



Formative assessment is different from other kinds of assessment because it doesn't occur at the end of the learning process. Instead, it is integrated into instruction and takes place as ideas and concepts are developing within a lesson or unit. As such, it provides important feedback for both teachers and students.

Formative assessment is a distinct strategy that supports teaching and learning during the instructional process. **Teachers** gain information that helps them know how to adjust instruction to advance student learning. **Students** have opportunities to gauge their own learning, ask questions, and advance their understanding.

Using formative assessment to check student learning throughout instruction can yield powerful results. Educators can use this type of assessment to ensure that students are “on track” and ready for end-of-program benchmark or summative testing. If students aren't acquiring the skills and knowledge required, formative assessments provide information that will help teachers fine-tune instruction to student needs. It is expected that formative assessment will be integrated into the new state assessment system planned for 2014-15.

For schools interested in exploring the role and purpose of formative assessment, a good first step is to survey the staff to ascertain what practices are already in place and how knowledgeable teachers are about the process. You can begin this task by using the *Self-Study Survey: Formative Assessment* developed by SCOE. This survey is designed to be completed by individual staff members, then reviewed and discussed as a group. From these discussions, the staff can move to identifying priorities and determining next steps for advancing the school's use of formative assessment.



Online resources

This Self-Study Activity Guide is presented as a professional development resource related to the April 2011 issue of the SCOE Bulletin highlighting formative assessment and the role it can play in improving teaching and advancing student learning.

You can download the SCOE Bulletin and this activity guide, view video clips of teachers using formative assessment, and access the Self-Study Survey at www.scoe.org/publications.



Background ... To develop a common frame of reference prior to a group discussion, ask staff to read the SCOE Bulletin from April 2011 on Formative Assessment, then view the online videos of teachers using in-process assessments. You can find these resources online at www.scoe.org/publications.

Activity ...

- Distribute the *Self-Study Survey: Formative Assessment* (also available on the SCOE website) to all staff as a group, or in department or grade-level teams.
- Prior to discussion, participants should complete the survey individually.
- After selecting a group recorder, review and record the responses of the group. Identify common understandings, interests, or trends in the group's responses.

Discussion ... Consider using one or more of these discussion questions as a way of identifying commonalities and delving deeper into the topic.

- How do formative assessments fit into the learning cycle?
- How is the information gained from formative assessments different from that of other kinds of assessments?
- What impact would in-process assessments have on our teaching? On student learning?
- How can we engage students in assessing their own learning? What impact would that have?
- Are there practices already in place in our classrooms that would support implementation of formative assessment? Where are there gaps?

Next Steps ... Beginning with the most common responses and/or concerns of the group, prioritize the issues that would need to be addressed to expand schoolwide use of formative assessment. (All responses are important, but prioritizing identifies the key items in order of concern and/or need.) Based on the group's prioritization, determine the next steps for continuing the discussion or moving toward implementation.

- What actions can we take to expand our skills and increase our use of formative assessment?
- What do we need in terms of support and resources?
- How will we determine if what we are doing is effective?