

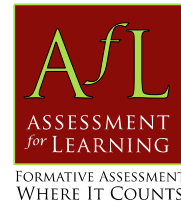


# WORKING DRAFT

JULY 14, 2006

## DEFINITION OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

*CCSSO FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT INITIATIVE*



We assess to draw inferences about student achievement to inform instructional decisions. To be effective, local assessment systems must provide evidence that serves the information needs of all relevant instructional decisions makers. They must balance annual accountability testing with interim benchmark assessment and day-to-day classroom assessment in ways that inform a variety of important users. In the ideal, effective systems arise from a common overarching set of high-quality achievement standards, rely on accurate assessments throughout to gather dependable evidence, and serve assessment users who know how to use the assessment process and its results to benefit student learning.

Society wants and needs evidence of the performance of its educational systems for purposes of accountability, institutional resource allocation, and effective policy setting. These needs can be met by annual national and state assessments. In addition, school leaders need meaningful information about student achievement to make productive program evaluation and improvement decisions. This can be the purview of interim benchmark assessments conducted every few weeks or months during the school year. The value of these *summative* and *program evaluation* functions of assessment must be considered in the context of the social role that educational institutions serve.

In contrast, the value of the *formative* assessment resides in their ability to improve student achievement, confidence, and motivation while they are learning. Historically, we have invested far less in refining our understanding of the complexities of formative assessments. Recently, however, researchers have deepened our understanding of those complexities, thus permitting a clear definition of sound formative assessment practices.

### Formative Assessment Defined

*Formative assessment describes the formal and informal processes used by teachers and students during instruction to gather information about learning so as to directly improve that learning.*

It intends to inform students and teachers as they make immediate instructional adjustment decisions. As a result, formative evidence is gathered continuously using any of a variety of assessment methods to determine the instructional needs of students as they progress toward each learning goal. Thus, formative assessment happens during the learning and reveals what comes next in that learning.

### Effective Formative Assessment Defined

The probability that any formative assessment will have its desired impact on student learning will increase to the extent that the following conditions are satisfied in assessment development and use:

1. The intended formative purpose of the assessment is implicitly clear to the user(s) up front. There is a logical and theoretically sound reason why decisions made based on results will feed into instruction in ways that impact learning positively.
2. The achievement to be assessed is articulated in the form of relevant state, or local standards or is derived directly from them. Ideally, intermediate steps toward those goals are laid out in well-developed learning progressions or learning trajectories.
3. The assessment is of sufficient quality to yield accurate results and warranted inferences about student mastery of the intended learning target(s).
4. Communication of results contributes to the formative productivity of the assessment by describing (versus judging) in teacher- and student-friendly terms how the student can do better the next time.
5. Students are involved in the assessment process in ways that inform them of the learning target and then help them understand, track, feel in control of, and take responsibility for their own success at learning.

*This evolving description of high-quality formative assessment marks the first step in defining a process that should be used on a daily basis by every teacher in every classroom. The definition is a collaborative effort of the CCSSO Advisory Group for the Classroom-Based Formative Assessment Initiative with Rick Stiggins and Dylan William of Educational Testing Service starting the process and input and suggestions from the rest of the group which includes: Henry Johnson, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, US Department of Education; Valerie Woodruff, Secretary of Education, Delaware; Doug Christensen, Commissioner of Education, Nebraska; State Testing Directors Scott Norton, from Louisiana, Wendy Roberts from Delaware, and Sara McManus of North Carolina; Bob Nielsen, Superintendent, Bloomington, IL, Stuart Kahl, President of Measured Progress, Jim Popham, University of California Los Angeles, Lorrie Shepard, University of Colorado, Gerunda Hughes, Howard University, and Doris Redfield, President/CEO of Edvantia.*