
[Formative assessment in the classroom and school](#)

BRIEF 5

[Educational measurement](#)

Teachers and schools need to check for learning throughout the school year, not just wait for final examinations.

Formative assessment can improve student outcomes if part of a [fair, valid, and reliable](#) process of gathering, interpreting, and using information generated from methods used throughout the student learning process. Formative assessment methods include a combination of the following: student observations, class assignments, projects and presentations, performances, peer reviews, conversations and interviews with students, **learning logs**, and quizzes and tests. The formative assessment process is effective when part of a school-wide **assessment system** that ensures teachers are using multiple assessment paths, assessment plans, and high quality assessment standards. Teachers' assessment practices should also be supported by an evidenced-based school-wide assessment policy.

Issues and Discussion

The use of multiple assessment paths: Learning can be checked throughout the year through the use of multiple assessment paths—multiple methodologies and [approaches](#) that can extend the evaluation to different student skills and capabilities, and consequently, to a more comprehensive understanding of the learning process of the students.(1)(2)(3)(4)(6) Summative assessment is widely used to measure student performance. (3)(4)(6)(5) However, [summative assessments can be insufficient](#) in measuring a student's actual level of performance if not coupled with other forms of assessment, since performance on examinations can be impacted by unrelated factors such as student emotional state and tiredness, or other conditions in the environment.(1)(6) Formative assessment, or assessment for learning, reduces the systematic impact of these factors by assessing students over the course of the school year.(1)(4)

Improving teaching methods through assessment plans: An assessment plan outlines the teacher's strategy to use various assessment methods in conjunction with each lesson, in order to keep track of the learning outcomes of classroom activities.(5) Assessment plans allow teachers to identify learning needs of students, adapt lesson materials and resources, and differentiate instruction to broaden learning opportunities.(1)(5)(6) Students should be engaged through the assessment process with teachers providing timely feedback to student performance that is tied to learning-based outcomes.(4)(5) Feedback should also consist of specific suggestions for students to improve on their current performance levels.(1)(4)(6) Teachers also need decision-making power in their classrooms to adapt and integrate formative assessment methods that are based on the unique set of students

they teach. (1)(4)(5)

Standards for quality formative assessment: To be effective, assessment should be valid, reliable, and fair.(3)(4)(5)(6) Without ensuring assessment quality, decision-making regarding student learning can be poor and affect learning outcomes.(3)(5)(6) To ensure validity, teachers need to evaluate whether selected methods for gathering data appropriately assesses student learning on targeted learning outcomes.(3)(4)(5)(6) Reliable and consistent results can be enhanced by employing multiple assessment methods including rating scales, rubrics, and having multiple teachers review student work.(4)(5)(6) Fair assessments take into account student ability and learning preferences, are free from teacher bias, and are connected to learning outcomes clearly articulated to students.(4)(5) Quality assessments also use reference points, including student performance in relation to themselves (self-referenced), to their peers (norm-referenced), and to school-based standards (criterion-referenced).(1)(4)(5)(6)

School-wide assessment policies: The quality of teachers' assessment abilities should be supported through a flexible school-wide assessment system with mechanisms in place to allow in-service training, observations from administrators and teacher colleagues, and ongoing feedback concerning teachers' use of formative assessment. (3)(4)(5)(6) Schools need proper policies and funding in place and an assessment system facilitated by school leaders who are engaged with teachers and the community.(5)(6) School assessment systems function best within a research-validated framework of best practises to assessment and when there is a shared vocabulary of what constitutes formative and summative assessments.(3) Schools can build up the capacity of the assessment system through audits of assessment plans which support teacher reflection on the quality of their selected methods and how information is used to support learning over time.(5)

Inclusiveness and Equity

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities may require alternative forms of assessment in addition to maintaining quality standards of validity, reliability, and fairness.(5) Students with disabilities are more likely to access the curriculum in inclusive environments when teachers use a **universal design** approach and are already capable and competent to modify, adapt, or accommodate the needs of students within their assessment plans.(5)(6) Accommodations may include more time to complete assignments, assistive technology to aid in communication, being assessed in a quieter area or in a different room with less distractions, larger text or different coloured paper for readability, oral instruction, or the use of scribes.(5)(6)

Policy Examples

- Canada [[PDF](#)]
- Lesotho [[PDF](#)]
- Tasmania [[PDF](#)]
- United States [[PDF](#)]

References and sources

-
1. Bennett, R.E. 2011. [Formative assessment: A critical review](#). *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 18, 5-25.
 2. Clarke, M. 2012. [What matters most for student assessment systems: A framework paper](#). Washington DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank
 3. Dunn, K. E., and Mulvenon, S. W. 2009. [A critical review of research on formative assessment: Limited scientific evidence of the impact of formative assessment in education](#). *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, 14(7), 1-11.
 4. Looney, J. W. 2011. [Integrating formative and summative assessment: Progress toward a seamless system?](#) *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 58. OECD Publishing.
 5. Province of Manitoba. 2006. [Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind: Assessment for Learning, Assessment as Learning, Assessment of Learning](#). Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth, School Programs Division.
 6. Wagner, D. A. 2011. *Smaller, Quicker, Cheaper: Improving Learning Assessment for Developing Countries*. Paris: UNESCO-IIEP.

[print](#)