Using Assessment in a PLC to Increase Student Learning

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Our goals for the session

- Review the various roles that assessments play in the context of Professional Learning Communities
- Explore the process for creating and using Common Formative Assessments
- Jumpstart a rollout plan for teams/schools to enhance their systematic assessment practices
Imagine you are watching assessment practices in your school. Describe what you are seeing.

Assumption #1:

Types of Teams

- Horizontal
  - By course
  - By grade
- Vertical
  - Grade sequence
  - Course sequence
Assumption #2:

What standards do we emphasize in our
• Instruction,
• Assessment, &
• Intervention?

What is alignment?

- "ensuring that the taught curriculum is aligned to existing standards and assessments"
1. **Step 1: Identify Power Standards**
   - What do we really want students to know and be able to do?

2. **Step 2: Design/Use Assessments for Learning**
   - How will we know students are learning (before it’s too late)?

3. **Step 3: Design & Deliver Effective Instruction**
   - What are research-based practices that will lead to student learning of power standards and beyond?

4. **Step 4: Participate in ongoing data-driven decision making**
   - How do we respond when they aren’t learning, or if they already know it?

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**Myths that might mess us up...**

- The textbook is the curriculum
- The textbook is aligned to the standards
- We don’t need to clarify what students need to know and do...we have the standards
- Our assessments are already in the book.
  - To be valid, an assessment should be a quiz or test.

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**Looking at the big picture...**
A Balanced and Coherent System of Assessment

Most Formative
- Daily/Weekly
  - Ongoing teacher assessment and checks for understanding
  - Student involved
  - In-class adjustments

More Formative
- Weekly/Unit
  - Collaboratively developed and curriculum embedded
  - Frequent
  - Yield “Instructionally actionable” data
  - Tier 1 Pyramid of interventions

More Summative
- Interim/Quarterly
  - Ranks and Benchmarks of proficiency
  - Entrance and exit criteria
  - Monitor growth over time

Most Summative
- Annually
  - Ranks and Benchmarks of proficiency
  - Standardized achievement tests
  - Statewide Testing

Common Formative Assessments (CFA’s)

- Collaboratively developed and curriculum embedded
- Frequent
- Yield “Instructionally actionable” data
- Tier 1 in Pyramid/RTI

Common Formative Assessments:

- Efficient
- Equitable
- Effective
- Empowering

Adapted from “A Steadily Flowing Stream of Information Gives Teachers Much-Needed Data”
Tom Mary, JSD, Winter 2006

Kim Bailey - Solution Tree
Support for Common Assessments

1. Improves the level of student achievement.
2. Clarifies curriculum and intervention strategies.
3. Enhances communication between teachers about student learning (and students).
4. Creates opportunities for teachers to sharpen pedagogy and deepen understanding of content.

What happens when teachers don’t use formative assessments?

- “The more you teach without finding out who understands the information and who doesn’t, the greater the likelihood that only already-proficient students will succeed.”
  
What makes an assessment formative?

- Formative assessment is a planned process in which assessment-elicited evidence of students’ status is used by teachers to adjust their ongoing instructional practices or by students to adjust their current learning tactics.”
  - James Popham, Transformative Assessment p. 6

Implementation of Effective Assessment Practices

Level 1: Teachers’ Instructional Adjustments
Teachers gather evidence to adjust their teaching strategies

Level 2: Students’ Learning Tactic Adjustments
Students use results to adjust their learning strategies

Level 3: Classroom Climate Shift
Classroom shifts from comparison dominated to learning dominated

Level 4: Schoolwide Implementation
Systematic implementation through professional development
  - James Popham, Transformative Assessment, p. 49

Levels of Assessment Practices

James Popham

1. Teachers’ Instructional Adjustments
2. Student Learning Adjustments
3. Classroom Climate Shift
4. Schoolwide Implementation

Classroom Climate Shift

Students receive:

- Clear expectations about the standard they will be learning
- Instruction that prioritizes the essential/power standards and is differentiated for individual needs
- Frequent, formative assessment designed to inform both them and their teacher of their progress toward the standard
- Timely, frequent and relevant feedback
- Effective interventions that close the gap or accelerate learning

The end in mind...

- **Students receive:**
  - Clear expectations about the standard they will be learning
  - Instruction that prioritizes the essential/power standards and is differentiated for individual needs
  - Frequent, formative assessment designed to inform both them and their teacher of their progress toward the standard
  - Timely, frequent and relevant feedback
  - Effective interventions that close the gap or accelerate learning

Cultural Shifts

1. The school is focused is on attaining high levels of learning for all students
2. We accept that some students need more time and support to demonstrate proficiency
   - Faster isn’t necessarily smarter
   - Difficulties in understanding should be leveraged without penalty (Erkens, 2009)
Cultural Shifts

3. Frequent, aligned and timely assessments will help us identify specific needs in our students and do something about them.

4. We’re not the only users of assessment information.

5. Working collaboratively is more powerful than in isolation.

What do teams need in order to do this work?
Common understanding of what students should know and be able to do.
- Common picture of what success looks like (evidence)
- Common strategies for gathering that evidence.
- Collective conversations and strategies for doing something with the evidence (intervention/differentiation).

What do we want students to know and be able to do?
- Common picture of what success looks like (evidence)
- How do we know they are learning?
- How will we respond when they’re not learning
- How will we respond when they already learned it?

A Cycle of Inquiry

Act | Plan
Study | Do
Big Idea 1:

Bigger is not better.

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Big Idea 2:

More often is better.

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How often should you give common formative assessments?

Goldilocks’ approach
- Enough to gain useful information
- Not so much that it overwhelms
Big Idea 3:

You don’t need to reinvent the wheel, but you do need to kick the tires.

Big Idea 4

If you don’t use common formative assessments to make a difference in student learning, the assessments are summative.

Big Idea 5:

Common formative assessments aren’t necessarily about grading, but they are about feedback.
Letting some air out of the balloon

- Which big idea(s) supported your understanding of quality common formative assessments?
- Which big idea(s) jostled your thinking?

Stretch break