

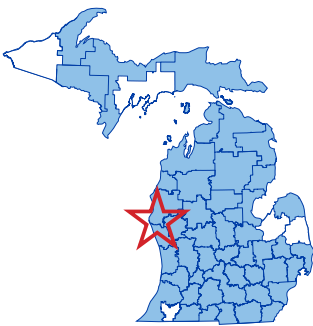


## The Hesperia Story: The Focus is on the Students

Hesperia Community  
Schools

Enrollment: approx. 900

[www.hesp.net](http://www.hesp.net)



**School administrators face a number of different and often conflicting challenges. On one hand, they must be managers of budgets and supervisors of personnel. These responsibilities often make it difficult for an administrator to be an instructional leader and a catalyst for change. On the other hand, principals are responsible for providing instructional leadership and improving teaching and learning in their buildings.**

**This is the ongoing story of an administrator who is committed to overcoming the challenges associated with the principalship by helping teachers maximize their efforts and meeting the needs of an ever-changing and ever-challenging student population.**

In 2016, Vaughn White became the Superintendent of Hesperia Community Schools in Hesperia, Michigan. Hesperia is a small community in Newaygo and Oceana Counties located 30 miles northeast of Muskegon. The school district includes a high school, a middle school, and an elementary school. It serves a total student population of just over 900 students and employs about 50 faculty and support staff. The district's prominently posted mission statement is this: *"The mission of Hesperia Community Schools is to provide quality educational opportunities that empower all students to become responsible, enlightened and productive citizens today and in the future."* The mission's emphasis is on students, and this commitment requires the faculty to continually evaluate their practices and look for ways to be even more effective.

### Coach Background

White brought 28 years of experience as an educator to Hesperia, along with awareness about FAME (Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators), a school initiative proven to be effective in improving teacher instruction and student performance. White first recognized the value of FAME when he was principal at Shelby Middle School in West Michigan. He participated in FAME training at that time and found the program to be well-received by teachers and beneficial to students.

Later, White became the principal of Kingsley Middle School in Kingsley, Michigan where he introduced FAME to a group of teachers. After the first year, the program expanded to include all middle school teachers. He combined FAME with other school-wide initiatives, most



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specifically Spencer Kagan's cooperative learning structures and Robert Marzano's teacher evaluation and instructional essentials models. Dr. Kagan's work is designed to increase student motivation and engagement by the effective, structured use of cooperative learning. Dr. Marzano's research has identified ways in which teacher assessment is connected with student performance. These three initiatives actually support and reinforce each other in Kingsley, where they are becoming part of a normal routine rather than viewed as three distinct initiatives.

**NOTE:** To learn more about Vaughn White's experience at Kingsley Middle School and the role played by an administrator, read "The Kingsley Story: A Principal Embraces Instructional Leadership" at [famemichigan.org](http://famemichigan.org).



When White moved to Hesperia, he saw many similarities and a few differences between the two school districts. These similarities led him to believe FAME could be successful at Hesperia. Like in so many schools across the nation, the district faced a definite need to address achievement gaps between student groups. He also saw a faculty that was looking for direction and a meaningful approach to address this need. White's initial focus would start at the middle school; depending on the reception there, he recognized an opportunity for the FAME initiative to be implemented district-wide.

### Administrative Support

Hesperia benefits from a close working relationship between school principals Bryan Mey and David LaPrairie. Bryan Mey, an educator with 13 years' experience, leads the Patricia St. Clair Elementary School, which serves students in grades K through 5. David LaPrairie, a 34-year education veteran, leads Hesperia Middle School and Hesperia High School, which serves grades 6 through 12. Grade 5 is housed in the middle-school building and is often included in the middle school structure.

When White, Mey, and LaPrairie met, much of their discussion addressed Hesperia Community Schools as a whole and not the usual differentiation that exists between an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. Adding even more to the unity is the physical location of all three schools, which are located next to each other. Some faculty members even teach both middle-school and high-school classes.

As with any change in leadership, White as the new leader had to assess the entire program and culture as it existed at Hesperia and decide where changes needed to be made. One area identified was to change instructional practice.

***Working together can be a challenge, but it can also be a tremendous benefit when introducing a program that could ultimately impact all of the teachers and students.***



**Bryan Mey**  
is principal at Hesperia Middle School (grade 5) and Patricia St. Clair Elementary School.



**David LaPrairie**  
is principal at Hesperia Middle School (grades 6-8) and Hesperia High School.



**Vaughn White,**  
superintendent, Hesperia Community Schools.

### CONTACTS

available at: [www.hesp.net](http://www.hesp.net)

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When looking at various school initiatives, some key factors drove his decision.

White, Mey, and LaPrairie focused heavily on what research says about what works, what doesn't work, best practices, and what would be a good fit for Hesperia. Often the introduction of a new initiative means the end of other programs. This can lead to frustration as educators feel like they are in situation of continuous flux. In Hesperia, the leaders wanted an initiative that would fit and support some of the good work already taking place. They wanted to avoid adding another layer of work, and instead design an initiative that would become part of the existing fabric of professional development, positively impacting teacher instruction and student achievement.

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***“Research and data have started this process. We’ve looked at Hattie and Marzano, and we have identified our challenges. The question is ‘What is the one thing which will have the greatest impact on our student’s learning?’”***

— Vaughn White, Hesperia Community Schools superintendent

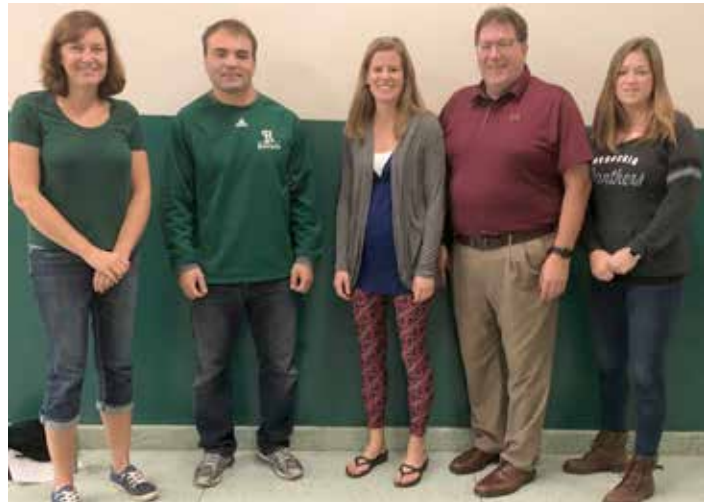
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Based on his prior experiences, White felt FAME would be an excellent fit. FAME’s research base and its emphasis on allowing teachers to learn about the formative assessment process and engaging students as responsible participants in their learning all were important factors in his decision.

“FAME itself sets up the structure,” White said. “You have the kick-off to get everybody on board. You set up your teams, and you develop your leadership. You have the Adaptive School and Cognitive Coaching to support the leadership and it propels you through...it’s an inclusive learning process.”

### District Approach

The first year, the administrators decided to take small steps by establishing only one Learning Team. Over time, FAME researchers have found



L-R: **Deb Claeys**, middle-school social studies teacher (25 years in education); **Justin Zeerip**, middle-school mathematics teacher, (7 years in education); **Audrey Fosburg**, middle-school special education teacher (23 years in education); **Vince Grodus**, high-school ELA teacher (35 years in education); **Melissa Baker**, high-school math teacher (10 years in education). Even though they teach different disciplines, these FAME Coaches deal with many of the same students and have an opportunity to work closely with each other at Hesperia Community Schools.

many schools/districts start modestly. They form one Learning Team and use it as a gauge to measure how it might be received throughout the school or district. What often happens is the local FAME participants, the students, and FAME program leaders encourage others to be involved. This is the approach that was used in Kingsley, and it would be the approach used in Hesperia.

The very first FAME Learning Team at Hesperia included the two principals, three middle-school classroom teachers and one high-school classroom teacher. Teachers Deb Claeys, Audrey Fosburg, Melissa Baker, and Justin Zeerip brought to the team many years of education experience; by the 2018-2019 school year, they were three-year veterans of FAME.

### How it works

One important feature of FAME is the training provided by the Michigan Department of Education. White and his team attended a FAME Launching into Learning session, which annually offers Learning Teams the opportunity to collaborate and share with each other. The Coach is part of the Learning Team, and all are considered “students” who are learning about the formative assessment process together.

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At a Launch, educators are encouraged to share their ideas and their experiences with each other. The desire is to create an environment of trust. Participants are encouraged to become comfortable sharing their thoughts and practices with other members of the team. They are also encouraged to offer and receive feedback, for it is only through reflection and discussion that teachers can make meaningful changes in their classrooms. This process is to be continued through the rest of the school year during Learning Team meetings.

For many first-year teams, most work focuses on becoming familiar with the FAME Components and Elements. The FAME Components and Elements form the foundation of the program, introducing the formative assessment as a process with five distinct components further divided into 13 elements. For many, this can be somewhat overwhelming; however, the FAME Learning Team, as facilitated by the Coach, determines how they will proceed.

At the Launch, many Learning Team members come to realize they have some familiarity with the Components and/or Elements. The major difference, however, is understanding how the Components and Elements work together and support each other, creating the formative assessment process. Participants also realize that, while they may refer to some of the Components or Elements, they are not taking a pre-planned and intentional approach. By establishing a base of understanding and exploring each Component and Element, teachers are able to incorporate the process so that it becomes a seamless and integrated part of their instruction and student learning. They truly adopt the formative assessment *process*.

Decisions about which initiatives and programs to incorporate in Hesperia are made by the administrators with input from teachers. As previously noted, looking at the research and data is an important first step. They also consider how new elements fit into their school and faculty and with other ongoing initiatives.

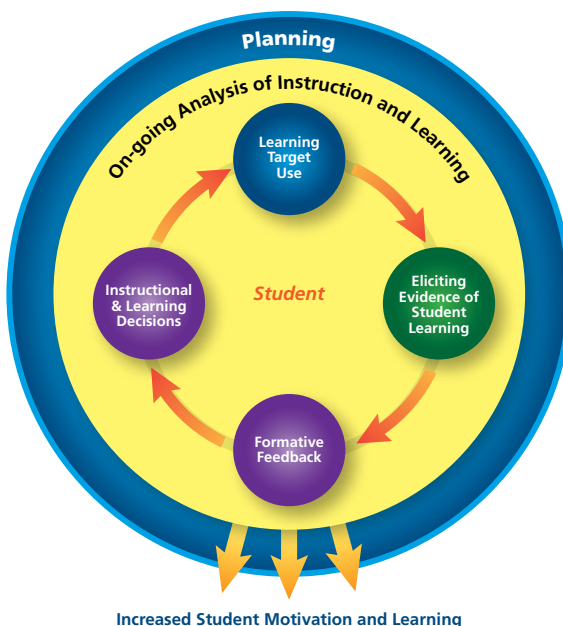
"Staff buy-in is important," David LaPrairie said. "So much of having staff buy-in is how you do it, how you roll or lay things out. We take strategic steps, not just to go slow, but to do them in step with instructional staff. We're sharing with them...so we ask, 'How is it going? Do you feel this would be a good thing to take on?' There have been green lights on all."

It was important for the first year of FAME implementation to be a success, and for that success to become the driving force to expand to the rest of the middle school. While sustaining and expanding FAME was important, the most critical consideration would be the impact of using the formative assessment process in participants' classrooms. Teachers needed to believe their hard work and study would have the intended outcomes.

At the conclusion of their first year of study and practice, the decision was made to expand FAME at the middle school. The first-year Learning Team members would become the Coaches for the new Learning Teams, which would be led by pairs of Coaches who would

### The Formative Assessment Process

- Formative Assessment Guiding Questions:
- Where are we going?
  - What does the student understand now?
  - How do we get to the learning target?





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Each year, new Learning Teams attended the FAME Launching into Learning along with their Coaches.

co-facilitate the new teams. This additional level of support for Coaches would help them share the load of facilitation as they continued to learn about formative assessment with their new Learning Teams.

The FAME participants' second year (first as a Coach) was similar to their first year on the Team. They began by looking at formative assessment as a process. The new Coaches were brought together to share their experiences being a new Coach of a new Learning Team.

### Progress status

Based on the experiences in years one and two, participants added two new Learning Teams and Coaches, for a total of five teams in the program's third year. By the start of the 2018-19 school year, almost every middle-school and high-school teacher participated on a FAME Learning Team, and each team was proceeding at its own pace.

As the FAME Coaches reflect on their Coaching experiences, they report slow and steady progress. They describe two different audiences when they look at their work in FAME to date.

The first audience is the other teachers who make up their Learning Teams. The goal for Learning Team meetings is for participants to learn about the different Components—from the FAME resources and from their own experiences. As noted above, one advantage is

that many of the teachers already use some of the Components and Elements being studied. They do, however, come to realize they need to be more purposeful and intentional in how they plan, incorporate, and use the information provided by the students.

The second primary audience is the students. As with teachers, there are certain parts of the formative assessment process with which students are familiar; however, there are other areas in which more work is needed. Students readily understand the importance of knowing the learning targets, but they often struggle with self-assessment. They find it difficult to self-assess in a way that provides direction on how to improve. The more teachers become comfortable in using the formative assessment process, the more students will see the benefits.

Deb, Justin, Audrey, and Melissa—along with their Learning Teams—are able to focus even more on classroom practice. New Coaches and Learning Teams work on establishing a foundation of learning about the formative assessment process. Vincent Grodus, one of the new Coaches, believes that he and his Team will need to 'lean on' the existing teams for support and guidance. This is an ongoing process, as Hesperia supports the multi-year FAME commitment and the continuing support of other district initiatives on the way to making meaningful change.

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"This is a perpetual cycle of best practices," Bryan Mey said. "Schools that do those handful of things really, really well, and they continue to do them year after year, those are the schools that really move the needle."

### Future plans

White, Mey, and LaPrairie continue to provide support as instructional leaders, but they also want to give the Learning Teams space. The continuation of FAME is not their decision alone; rather it will be based on how Learning Teams determine the extent of their own learning, how it affects classroom instruction, and the impact it has on students. They know this commitment takes time and hard work. They also know it gives their students the opportunity to succeed.

White was asked by a teacher, "When do I know I'm at the top of my teaching career?" His response: "You will know you're at the top when you look at each student in your classroom and you know, before they take the summative assessment, how they are going to score."

As shared at the beginning, the mission statement of Hesperia Community Schools is to provide students an education that prepares them for the future. It is this combination of instructional leadership, dedicated teachers, and engaged students that will allow Hesperia to achieve this mission. FAME and the formative assessment process are an integral part of this commitment.

### RELATED LINKS

The following video segments help illustrate selected FAME experiences in Hesperia.

- Hesperia Administrators Talk About FAME  
<https://vimeo.com/310174069/0cd0ca6fe0>
- Hesperia Administrators Talk About FAME and Other Initiatives  
<https://vimeo.com/290740007/8463aaa8c6>
- Hesperia Coaches Reflect Back on Their First Year as FAME Coaches  
<https://vimeo.com/290743163/08a84ad0e8>
- Hesperia Coaches Share Their Expectations for This Year  
<https://vimeo.com/290744243/4095aed981>

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How might a school and/or district support the wider use of the formative assessment process by classroom teachers?
- What type of support from administrators and district offices is needed to promote such collaborative practices?
- How might faculties of school(s) work together to provide the needed support to learn about and to use formative assessment practices with their students?

### About FAME Case Studies

The FAME Research and Development Team members **Denny Chandler**, **Tara Kintz**, and **John Lane**, led by **Ed Roeber**, connect FAME participants to best practice and a growing set of formative assessment resources. They gather detailed information on FAME approaches with the potential to be replicated in districts across

Michigan. The FAME Project will share these stories through online resources, publications and media platforms. **To inquire about how your FAME Learning Team can be featured in a future case study, contact [dtchandler@fuse.net](mailto:dtchandler@fuse.net).**

Editor: Linda Wacyk, Communications Management – Michigan Assessment Consortium; [lwacyk@michiganassessmentconsortium.org](mailto:lwacyk@michiganassessmentconsortium.org)

## About FAME

[Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators \(FAME\)](#) is a joint effort by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Michigan Assessment Consortium. FAME is designed to reach all Michigan teachers and administrators with training in formative assessment. When applied to classroom instructional practice, the formative assessment process can become a vital part of improving teacher practice and positively impacting student achievement. In fact, the formative assessment process used by students and teachers in an effective and intentional manner connects to [Michigan's Top 10 in 10 Strategic Goals and Strategies](#) (Goals 2, 3, and 4).

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***“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 more self-directed learners.” (CCSSO SCASS, 2017)***

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FAME began in 2008 in order to address MDE’s goal to provide different approaches to reach high school students who were low achievers. MDE partnered with Measured Progress to develop and implement the FAME program. According to Kim Young, who directs FAME for MDE, *“The formative assessment process is an essential part of a comprehensive assessment system. By financially supporting and endorsing FAME, the Michigan Department of Education is sending a strong message of the importance of formative assessment.”*

Today, this initiative continues as a collaborative endeavor of the MDE and the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC). The mission of MAC is to improve student learning and achievement through a system of coherent curriculum, balanced assessment, and effective instruction. MAC’s role in FAME is to coordinate trainings, maintain an extensive online library of resources, and conduct research on professional development using the Coach and Learning Team model and its impact on teacher practice and student achievement.

By 2018, more than 800 FAME Coaches from across Michigan had been trained to lead FAME Learning Teams. At present, approximately 250 active Coaches and Learning Teams are working throughout Michigan.

**Kimberly Young**, Michigan Department of Education Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability, has served as the FAME manager since 2006. Contact her at [youngk1@michigan.gov](mailto:youngk1@michigan.gov).

***“Working collaboratively, educators will learn, implement, and reflect on the formative assessment process in order to guide student learning and teachers’ instructional practices.”***

FAME Project Goal

## FAME professional learning model

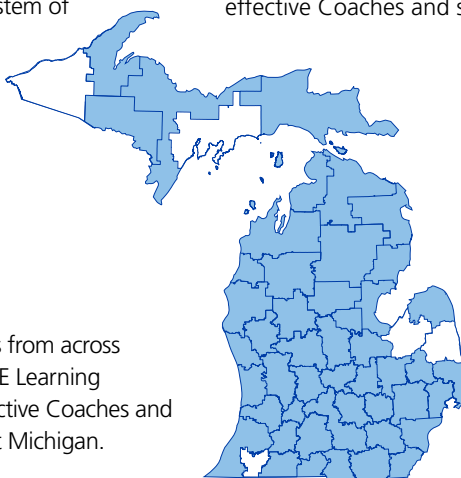
New FAME teams start in a similar manner. An individual learns about the FAME program from a conference presentation, a publication, or current FAME participant, and then shares it with others. A group of educators decides to become involved in FAME. One person agrees to take on the additional responsibilities of being a Coach, and then submits an application to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to form a new Learning Team. The number of new Learning Teams each year is influenced by available state and local finances and applicant location (MDE seeks to have active Learning Teams located throughout the state).

Once accepted, new Learning Teams are ready to start FAME training. Coaches complete their initial training via webinar and other learning sessions. In the fall, the Coach and Learning Team members participate in a session of *Formative Assessment: Launching into Learning*. This one-day training session provides information about the FAME program, the formative assessment process, and the Learning Team model. Teams complete the Launch prepared to begin their work.

Over time, Coaches have the opportunity to receive additional MDE-sponsored training — Cognitive Coaching Foundation Seminar® (Days 1-8) and Adaptive Schools Foundation Training® (Days 1-4). These trainings are critical in the development of effective Coaches and successful Learning Teams.

An additional layer of support is provided to each new and returning Coach through Regional Leads — former FAME Coaches who provide support for a group of Coaches. The Leads serve as a nearby resource person and valuable asset to Coaches, who learn — along with their Learning Teams — that they do not exist in isolation. Leads also schedule meetings with Coaches to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas.

Learn more at [www.famemichigan.org](http://www.famemichigan.org).



**Shaded areas illustrate the influence of FAME Teams and Coaches throughout Michigan.**