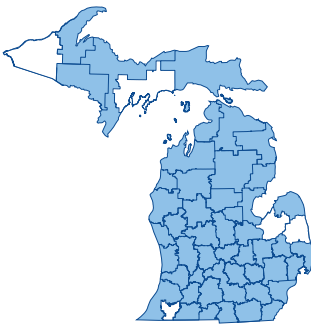
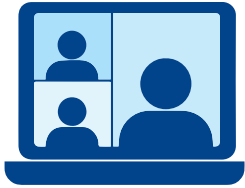




Enacting Formative Assessment Practices with Students in the Virtual Environment



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

The COVID pandemic caused major disruptions to almost every aspect of life. Businesses closed, places of worship moved their services online, and schools, which closed for in-person instruction, scrambled to provide students opportunities to learn virtually. Despite the many obstacles, people developed creative solutions to the problems and challenges COVID presented. In this case study, we examine how educators enacted formative assessment practices with students in the virtual environment.

More specifically, we frame this case study in the work of Susan Brookhart's (2020) five strategies for using formative assessment in virtual environments with students with disabilities. These strategies include the following:

- **Strategy 1.** Establish and communicate clear learning targets.
- **Strategy 2.** Establish and communicate clear criteria for success.
- **Strategy 3.** Build in opportunities for students to self-assess or ask questions, based on criteria.
- **Strategy 4.** Give brief, clear, actionable feedback based on the criteria.
- **Strategy 5.** Give students opportunities to revise assignments or re-do similar assignments.

Table 1. Alignment of Brookhart's Strategies and FAME Components and Elements

Brookhart Strategies	FAME Components and Elements
Strategy 1. Establish and communicate clear learning targets	2.1: Designing Learning Targets
Strategy 2. Establish and communicate clear criteria for success.	2.1: Designing Learning Targets
Strategy 3. Build in opportunities for students to self-assess or ask questions, based on criteria.	4.3: Student Self-Assessment
Strategy 4. Give brief, clear, actionable feedback based on the criteria.	4.1: Feedback from the Teacher
Strategy 5. Give students opportunities to revise assignments or re-do similar assignments.	5.2: Adjustments to Learning



Enacting Formative Assessment Practices in the Virtual Environment

While we also include students with disabilities, our case study provides a broader consideration for how four educators employed these same strategies with all students from early elementary to high school in virtual environments.

Introduction to the educators

This case study features four educators (one classroom teacher, one interventionist, and two instructional coaches) and details how each implemented the five highlighted formative assessment strategies in the virtual environment. Two of the educators (Lindsey and Stefanie) were teaching in a virtual academy before the pandemic disrupted schooling. The other two educators (Aimee and Kristy) worked in traditional public schools and had to transition to online instruction in March of 2020. On the next page we provide a brief introduction to each of the four educators.

Lindsey Howe lhowe@k12.com was in her 15th year as an educator. She started teaching English in a “brick and mortar” school (as she calls it) in Michigan where she worked for eight years before making the jump to virtual teaching at the Michigan Great Lakes Virtual Academy (MGLVA). More recently, Lindsey transitioned into a role of a literacy coach at MGLVA, and at the time of the case study, worked with teachers to strengthen literacy development across content areas.



Aimee Schwartz Aimee.Schwartz@hask12.org worked as a reading interventionist for primary-grade students who fell behind in reading and who were in danger of being retained because of Michigan's third grade reading law. Before assuming her current role six years ago, Aimee worked for 19 years as a classroom teacher teaching second, third, and fourth grade.



Stefanie Tschirhart-Baldwin stschirhart-baldwin@k12.com



had a wide range of professional career experiences, teaching both general education and students with disabilities in face-to-face and virtual environments. From 2008-2017, Stefanie worked as an elementary school teacher, learning specialist, and private tutor. In March 2017, Stefanie began teaching math and English with high school students with cognitive impairments at MGLVA. Stefanie's caseload in 2020 included students with severe learning disabilities, students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disabilities, students with cognitive disabilities, and students with health impairments.

Kristy Walters kwalters@corunna.k12.mi.us had



spent most of her professional career as a special education teacher in Corunna Public Schools, but more recently she assumed duties outside the classroom. At the time COVID arrived, she was working with teachers in her district to help them reflect upon and improve classroom instruction, particularly in regard to the formative assessment process.

Five formative assessment practices in the virtual environment

We now consider how these four educators from widely varying backgrounds and in differing roles either directly enacted or supported the use of Brookhart's (2020) five featured formative assessment strategies for ensuring learning opportunities for students in the virtual environment (listed on page 1).

Furthermore, while this case study builds on Brookhart's strategies, it also connects to the Components and Elements of the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) program, as shown in Table 1. Please note that these five strategies do not capture the entire depth and breadth of the formative assessment process as described in the FAME program, which organizes the formative assessment process into five Components with 13 embedded Elements.

Enacting Formative Assessment Practices in the Virtual Environment

The following sections of this case study are organized by Brookhart's five strategies. Each section details the efforts of the four featured educators and how they establish learning targets and success criteria, build in opportunities for student self-assessment, provide descriptive and actionable feedback, and give students the opportunity to revise assignments.

Strategy 1. Establish and communicate clear learning targets.

Learning targets are a foundational component of the formative assessment process. A learning target is a written statement that clearly outlines what students will be learning, how they will demonstrate this learning, and what qualities of the work will be essential (Brookhart, 2020). Furthermore, learning targets anchor the class in the academic content at hand, with teachers referring to them often throughout the learning (*Fame Learning Guide*, 2018).

Of the five formative assessment practices featured here, learning targets were the most easily translatable to the virtual environment. For instance, when students were forced online, Aimee Schwartz maintained a consistent focus on learning targets during her reading intervention instruction. She embedded learning targets into each online lesson and discussed the learning target with the students before and during instruction. Even when younger students encountered some difficulty understanding the learning target at first, Aimee persisted with learning targets until students could restate them in their own words and demonstrate an understanding of both the content and rationale of what would be learned.

Of the five formative assessment practices featured here, learning targets were the most easily translatable to the virtual environment.

Already teaching in the virtual environment, Stefanie Tschirhart-Baldwin had considerable experience incorporating learning targets into her instruction in creative and productive ways. In her English Foundations class, Stefanie translated the Michigan Essential Elements standards (a modified version of the state standards) into learning targets to embed in her lessons. In her general resource class, Stefanie “cut and pasted” goals from each special education student’s IEP to create a personalized learning target for each student to work on independently and with her during one-on-one sessions. She also grouped students by common goals and created a common learning target similar to their IEPs to work on as a group.

Like Aimee, Lindsey has also seen the value in “repeating the learning target often” as a point of reference through lessons and activities. In her role as a literacy and FAME coach, Lindsey is the “go-to” person at her school that other educators come to when they want to know more about learning targets and how they can guide student learning.

As an instructional coach, Kristy Walter’s role resembled that of Lindsey’s. Kristy worked most recently with teachers on their enactment of learning targets in their classroom. She found this work challenging because, as she says, “the teachers already think that they know what it is” and this presumed competence can prevent developing and using learning targets that really impact student learning. In response to this attitude, Kristy works hard to clarify the key features of learning targets, particularly clarity about end goals and understanding the progressions of developing understanding.

A learning target is a written statement that clearly outlines what students will be learning, how they will demonstrate this learning, and what qualities of the work will be essential.

(Brookhart, 2020; FLG, DATE)

Enacting Formative Assessment Practices in the Virtual Environment

Strategy 2. Establish and communicate clear criteria for success

Success criteria “give the student specific things to strive and look for in their work. They also embody the learning target in a way that helps clarify for students what exactly it means” (Brookhart, 2020, p. 4). The teachers in this case study worked diligently to establish success criteria and connect them to the learning targets.

As she did with learning targets, Aimee embedded success criteria into each of her lessons. At the end of each lesson, Aimee asked students to reflect on the learning target and on how they know whether they mastered the target for that lesson. Stephanie also established success criteria to let students know what mastery of the learning target looks like.

Stefanie, for example, provided students with an exemplar for the Martin Luther King, Jr. presentation project they were working on, and she provided students the opportunity to discuss the qualities that make the exemplar of high quality.

For Lindsey, linking learning targets and success criteria established the necessary foundation for all other formative assessment practices. In her role as instructional coach, Lindsey worked with teachers to make it clear to students what mastery looked like through exemplars, rubrics, or demonstrations of performance. Teachers also needed to help students see the desired qualities in their own work. This process set students up well to peer-assess, self-assess, understand teacher feedback, and take the next steps in their learning.

Kristy also emphasized the close relationship between success criteria and learning targets in her work with teachers. She worked with teachers to simultaneously develop learning targets and success criteria. For instance, in a recent opinion

In order to self-assess effectively, students must have a clear understanding of the learning target and the success criteria.

(Brookhart, 2020; FLG, DATE)

writing unit, Kristy provided her teachers with exemplars for writing that the team considered carefully. This helped all the teachers understand the criteria needed for successful mastery so that they were then able to take this understanding with them in their work with students.

Strategy 3. Build in opportunities for students to self-assess or ask questions, based on criteria

In order to self-assess effectively, students must have a clear understanding of the learning target and the success criteria (Brookhart, 2020; FLG, DATE). Furthermore, educators must provide students opportunities to engage in self-assessment effectively.

In her work with students both face-to-face and online, Aimee spent a lot of time introducing learning targets and success criteria and then having students reflect on their progress. As a result, she found that students could self-assess as readers, show what they learned, and reflect on the progress they made.

Self-assessment had also become a vital part of Stefanie’s virtual classroom. She incorporated several technological tools for students to use to gauge their progress based on the success criteria. For instance, she recently had students consult a specially-prepared rubric to gauge the quality of their paragraph writing. As the focus changed from one lesson to the next, students continued to assess the quality of their written work with the standards for good writing in mind. Stefanie also introduced peer assessment as she set up “gallery walks” for students to consider their peers’ writing in reference to the success criteria.

The teachers in this case study worked diligently to establish success criteria and connect them to the learning targets.

Enacting Formative Assessment Practices in the Virtual Environment

Frequent self-assessment was a common feature of Lindsey's own instruction that extended to her work with teachers. She believes strongly in the importance of keeping the learning target and success criteria at the forefront of teachers' and students' minds, and then having students assess themselves in reference to the learning target, success criteria, and their current level of mastery. As a teacher, Lindsey used a variety of strategies including having students upload a brief self-assessment questionnaire to DropBox or Google Form, or having students use the survey tool to indicate their level of mastery.

According to Kristy, a major part of the challenge with self-assessment emerges if teachers have not laid a solid foundation with learning targets and success criteria. Without this strong base, students have no reference for assessing their progress or the quality of their academic work or understanding. Consequently, it is easy for students to say to themselves, "I'll just give myself an A." or "I'll just give myself whatever grade" or "I'll check off everything on the checklist that I haven't done." To help encourage successful student self-assessment, Kristy continued to work with teachers in the strategies by having teachers involve students in developing success criteria so that students knew exactly what was expected of them. She encouraged teachers to have students point to concrete elements of their work to demonstrate how their work compared to the success criteria.

Strategy 4: Give brief, clear, actionable feedback based on the criteria

In any environment, feedback is critical to learning if it describes the quality of the work in the context of the learning target and the success criteria and gives students a clear path to move their learning forward (Brookhart, 2020; FLG, DATE). The importance of feedback in the online environment is heightened, as students are more likely to feel isolated and disconnected from the learning.

As she worked with students online, Aimee continued to provide students with timely and actionable feedback in each of her lessons to

The importance of feedback in the online environment is heightened, as students are more likely to feel isolated and disconnected from the learning.

help students reflect on their work and prepare them for next steps in their learning. If ever she found herself slipping into the more expedient and unhelpful evaluative feedback (e.g., "good job!"), she uttered a gentle self-reminder to provide students with descriptive, timely, and actionable feedback instead.

Likewise, Stefanie concentrated on providing quality feedback to her students with disabilities. Most notably, she provided brief, clear, and actionable feedback on the Martin Luther King, Jr. presentation project her students were working on. Her feedback reflected the standards demonstrated in the exemplar she provided for a clear success criterion.

Of the five strategies featured here, Lindsey believed that feedback use is most affected by the availability of technological tools during online instruction. Specifically, as a teacher, Lindsey provided written feedback to students using the "ClassKick" app that allowed her to communicate with students directly about their work. She has also encouraged the teachers at MGLVA to take advantage of the opportunity to record oral feedback for students to watch and then re-watch as needed.

Like the other educators featured here, Kristy knew teacher-provided feedback in reference to learning targets and success criteria is a critical element of student learning. She worked with her teachers to use learning targets and success criteria to keep their feedback focused on the goals for the learning in ways that would accelerate their progress. Kristy also found that focusing on the characteristics of feedback in this way helped her have conversations with teachers about evaluative or irrelevant feedback that teachers sometimes gave.

Enacting Formative Assessment Practices in the Virtual Environment

Strategy 5. Give students opportunities to revise assignments or re-do similar assignments.

Feedback is of little use if it is not descriptive and actionable in the context of learning targets and success criteria (Brookhart, 2020; FLG, DATE). With this in mind, each of the featured educators worked diligently to provide students opportunities to act on self-assessment and the feedback they received from teachers.

For example, in her work as an interventionist, Aimee gave students multiple opportunities to practice and refine their skills as readers. Her entire approach focused on mastery of key literacy competencies and she continued to revisit these competencies until students mastered them.

Revision was a regular part of Stefanie's virtual classroom as well. For instance, when completing the recent paragraph writing assignment, Stefanie had students revise their writing several times, based on her feedback and in reference to the learning target and success criteria.

In recent years, Lindsey became even more convinced about the importance of mastery which required students "re-do and re-do and re-do" until learning targets were achieved. Thus, she encouraged teachers at MGLVA to provide students the opportunity to continue to revise an assignment or to move on to another similar assignment in which they could continue to push to advance their learning.

In her conversations with teachers, Kristy continually emphasized that teachers must provide students with the quality feedback that gets them to think about the status of their understanding in reference to learning targets and success criteria. Only then could students' understanding of academic content be improved as students take the teachers' feedback with the learning target and success criteria to revise or re-do their work in a way that demonstrates their increase in understanding.

Feedback is of little use if it is not descriptive and actionable in the context of learning targets and success criteria.

(Brookhart, 2020; FLG, DATE)

Themes from across the cases

We close with three observations that these studies bring to light. **First, the five formative assessment practices highlighted here are highly interdependent.** Learning targets, success criteria, self-assessment, feedback from the teacher, and opportunities to re-do or revise assignments all work in interconnected ways, and each is significantly weakened if practiced in isolation. Educators must remember that formative assessment is a process of connected practices that work together to promote student learning.

Second, enacting the formative assessment process well requires diligence and resolve. Formative assessment is a highly impactful instructional process, but it is also very challenging to do well. The educators featured here have had considerable experience with the formative assessment process through the FAME program. During this experience, they tried to enact formative assessment in their own classes or support other educators in this process (or both).

Finally, formative assessment is a group endeavor. These case studies provide examples of the support for formative assessment that extends across instructional coaches, teachers, and students. Although not highlighted here, it could be asserted that administrators and others who work at the school site, district, regional, and state levels must also be involved and each level must do its part to promote and support the learning about and learning to use the formative assessment process in Michigan classrooms.

Enacting Formative Assessment Practices in the Virtual Environment

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How might the formative assessment process be particularly impactful for students with special needs?
- How might the formative assessment process enhance the virtual learning experience?
- If you were going to add a sixth strategy from the FAME Components and Elements that might help students with special needs in a virtual environment, what Component/Element would it be and why?

RELATED LINKS

- Brookhart, S. (2020). *Five formative assessment strategies to improve distance learning outcomes for students with disabilities*. National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Kintz, et al. (2018). *FAME Learning Guide: Developing and Implementing the Formative Assessment Process*. Mason, MI: Michigan Assessment Consortium.

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.**

Editor: Linda Wacyk, Communications Management – Michigan Assessment Consortium; 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 several Guiding Principles in [Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan](#).

“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)

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 2021, more than 900 FAME Coaches from across Michigan had been trained to lead FAME Learning Teams. In 2020-2021, 200 FAME Coaches were supporting teams of educators in a variety of learning modalities.

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.

“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

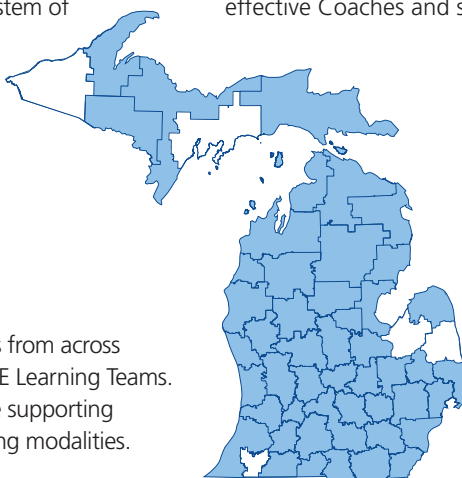
New FAME teams start in a similar manner. An individual learns about the FAME program from a conference presentation, a publication, or current FAME participant, and then shares it with others. A group of educators decides to become involved in FAME. One person agrees to take on the additional responsibilities 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.



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