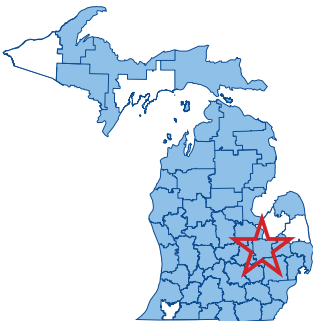




**Genesee Intermediate
School District (ISD)**
Enrollment: approx. 60,500
2413 West Maple Avenue
Flint, MI 48507-3493
www.geneseeisd.org

**Carman-Ainsworth
Community Schools**
Enrollment: approx. 4020
G-3475 W. Court Street
Flint, MI 48532
www.carman.k12.mi.us



The Genesee Three: How Three Educators in Genesee County Helped Strengthen Formative Assessment Practices and the FAME Program

This case study demonstrates how a team of dedicated professionals can build on their experiences in the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) program and expand professional learning opportunities while at the same time remaining faithful to the FAME program's vision of formative assessment.

The FAME program has affected the lives of thousands of Michigan educators since 2008. Most of the program's impact has resulted from FAME's unique blend of central support for professional learning and resources and its design for situating most educator learning in local FAME Learning Teams. Many FAME case studies have chronicled the success of this design and how it has cultivated expertise in using the formative assessment process and promoted formative assessment practices in classrooms statewide.

This case study takes a different course. In this case study, we describe how a group of three educators from Genesee County — Paul Robinson, Roy Sovis, and Melissa Wing — became involved in the FAME program. Although their particular circumstances prevented them from participating in the program in the more traditional way described above, all three

came alongside the FAME program to promote the formative assessment process in their region.

A brief history of the FAME program

The FAME program emerged at a critical time in 2008 during the height of the *No Child Left Behind* era when the focus for school accountability had pressed educators to concentrate primarily, even exclusively, on summative assessment of learning. Knowing that a single-minded focus on assessment of learning was unlikely to actually improve student achievement, two administrators in the Michigan Department of Education, Edward Roeber and Kim Young, launched the FAME program to promote formative assessment practices through state-provided annual learning sessions; materials resources; and a commitment to support local Learning Teams of educators who

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would meet regularly to learn together, try formative assessment practices in their classrooms, and reflect on successes and setbacks.

The role of ISD educators in Genesee County in promoting FAME and the spread of the formative assessment process

Paul Robinson, Roy Sovis, and Melissa Wing became involved in the FAME program in 2008. At the time, Paul was working as the director for research and assessment in Carman-Ainsworth Community Schools in Genesee County. FAME director, Kim Young, sent out a call for applicants, and Paul's interest was piqued, even though he did not know much about what FAME participation would entail. He completed the application and was accepted into the program.

"I was looking for something other than these large-scale summative assessments," Paul recalls. "I certainly was getting more than my fill on that, but I really wanted to branch out and find balance, so I signed up for [the FAME program]."

In 2008, Roy was a Coordinator for Instruction working at Genesee Intermediate School District (Genesee ISD). In this position, Roy provided curriculum, instruction, and assessment services for social studies educators throughout the county. When Roy first heard about FAME, he was instantly eager to participate. He had been reading and learning about formative assessment for some time and had become increasingly excited about the potential of formative assessment to establish balance in assessment in Michigan.

Roy explains that in 2008, he had been part

"I was looking for something other than these large-scale summative assessments. I certainly was getting more than my fill on that, but I really wanted to branch out and find balance, so I signed up for [the FAME program]."

— Paul Robinson

Macomb Intermediate School District

of ASCD and reading a lot of what they had to offer and taking advantage of opportunities for additional training.

"When this whole idea of formative assessment came about, and I read Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam's work, I'm like, 'Oh, my gosh, this all makes sense. Let's pursue this,'" Roy says. "And then Michigan, you know, came along with the FAME project, I'm like, 'Oh we're on board.'"

At the time she first became involved in FAME during the program's second year, Melissa Wing was an early literacy and math coordinator working at Genesee ISD. Melissa's boss at the time suggested that she attend a FAME learning session, and she willingly obliged. Soon after the first session, a serendipitous partnership was born among professionals who shared similar circumstances and interests.

Paul, Roy, and Melissa were each interested in participating in FAME and wanted to support the work being done in Michigan and promote formative assessment throughout Genesee County and Lapeer County. Yet, they had no set of classroom teachers with whom they could form a FAME Learning Team. So, Paul, Roy, and Melissa left that first session feeling excited about formative assessment and FAME, but lacking a clear idea of what to do next.

A chance conversation provided an unforeseen opportunity. After the session, Roy and Melissa asked Paul what he was planning to do with formative assessment in his role at Carman-Ainsworth. When he responded that he was not sure, they asked Paul if he would be able to get a few educators from his district to attend a

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workshop session that the three of them would prepare at Genesee ISD.

Paul agreed and the planning for these sessions began almost immediately. The team wanted to remain faithful to the FAME program's vision of formative assessment and cover all aspects of the formative assessment process, but they did not know quite where to start. The most pressing challenge was that, despite their enthusiasm, Paul, Roy, and Melissa were still learning themselves about the elements of the FAME formative assessment process. To further complicate matters, at the time, FAME had only a few resources on which Paul, Roy, and Melissa could rely to analyze the FAME elements of formative assessment in depth. In other words, enthusiasm was high, but expertise and resources were low.

"So, we got together — unsure about where we wanted to go, what steps we wanted to take, what our direction was," Paul explains. "And we just found stuff that maybe was either readable and/or we received from the [FAME] training... and then from that we'd spin off what we read, and [include] anything from conferences we went to relative to formative assessment. I mean, you want to talk about starting at ground zero? That's really where we started."

The group started small, holding district-specific, half-day sessions on formative assessment in Genesee ISD with a dozen or so educators. Ultimately, the group moved the sessions county-wide. They developed modules that focused on particular formative assessment FAME elements delivered over 3-to 4-day sessions with large groups of Genesee-county educators.

While the team recognized the value of situating learning about formative assessment, Paul, Roy, and Melissa faced the challenge of adequately preparing local educators to engage in this work productively.

"If you really want to move this forward, you've got to have somebody with a strong background in formative assessment," Roy reflects. "So our thought was, we've got to equip people with formative assessment and let's train them in their understanding of it and classroom

"We modeled lots of protocols and we would say, 'This is how you can use this protocol with your students in your classroom for formative assessment.' Teachers like that. They want something that they can go back and use tomorrow."

— **Melissa Wing**
Genesee Intermediate School District

application and implementation."

The team would later refer to these training days as "institutes" in which they led participants through the FAME definition of formative assessment. Paul, Roy, and Melissa were determined to provide principled, relevant, active, and applicable opportunities to learn.

"We really tried to get the excitement going," Melissa explains. "We were showing 'How do you do this in your own classroom?' So we modeled lots of protocols and we would say, 'This is how you can use this protocol with your students in your classroom for formative assessment.' Teachers like that. They want something that they can go back and use tomorrow."

Since the second year of the FAME program, Paul, Roy, and Melissa have run parallel professional development opportunities for educators in their county who wanted to learn about formative assessment and analyze the FAME Components and Elements of the formative assessment process in depth.

Ensuring fidelity to the FAME formative assessment process

For over ten years, Paul, Roy, and Melissa became increasingly adept at remaining faithful to FAME program principles while simultaneously integrating research from other sources as they crafted learning modules and created materials for local educators that would promote formative assessment practices. Melissa explains that she, Paul, and Roy would attend all the professional learning that FAME offered and would do some

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of their own research and module creation.

“So we had [modules] for all the Components, and we kept adapting those based on things that came from the FAME Learning Guide. Things like that were very helpful.” Melissa says.

The team did more than just attend FAME sessions. They branched out and attended other program trainings such as Cognitive CoachingSM and Adaptive Schools (offered by the Thinking CollaborativeTM) that are integral to the FAME program. They also routinely contacted FAME program officials to check in about their progress, ask questions about formative assessment to further their understanding, and seek out helpful resources that they could integrate into their institutes. They continued to work diligently to infuse the FAME program principles and resources with the growing set of resources they either created or curated.

Kim Young has been instrumental in helping the team come alongside the FAME program, even if the team’s participation has been mostly indirect. According to Paul, Roy, and Melissa, Kim has provided them consistent encouragement and the support of the FAME resources for them to use in their institutes. Over time, Kim and the team have built a strong relationship built on trust and a mutual commitment to spreading a common vision of formative assessment practices in classrooms throughout Michigan.

Finally, while the team has always encouraged participants in their institutes to become engaged in the FAME program as well, in the past five years they have become increasingly insistent about promoting the connection between their institutes and FAME participation.

“We have started to really push heavy and encourage those that attended, ‘Look, you’ve got to become part of the FAME project, you got to,’” Roy says.

As a result of collaborative effort over the past decade, Paul, Roy, and Melissa have developed an effective professional development program that strengthens the FAME program and promotes a common vision of the formative assessment process.

“If you really want to move this forward, you’ve got to have somebody with a strong background in formative assessment ... we’ve got to equip people with formative assessment and train them in their understanding of it and classroom application and implementation.”

— Roy Sovis

Genesee Intermediate School District

Next Steps

Like the FAME program itself, Paul, Roy, and Melissa remain committed to spreading the formative assessment process in Michigan classrooms. However, recent challenges have made this commitment more difficult. In the past few years, Melissa’s job demands have taken her away from her involvement with the FAME program and developing institutes with her two colleagues.

After passage of Michigan’s Read by Grade 3 law, Melissa’s boss wanted her to concentrate more of her time on English language arts and early reading, and this focus crowded out her official involvement in FAME. Despite this assignment change, however, Melissa continues to learn about formative assessment and develop her expertise. She also continues to talk about the power of the formative assessment process with educators she meets in her new role.

“I talk about formative assessment all the time in meetings and PDs, and I’m always [saying to teachers], ‘This is what you could use this for, and this is how you could use it here. Let me model the use of formative assessment strategy for you,’” Melissa says.

In this way, she continues to be an advocate for formative assessment, and she infuses her knowledge of formative assessment with her ongoing work centered on school improvement and student achievement, particularly in early literacy.

Paul and Roy are more invested in the FAME program than ever, but they have experienced

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some difficulty in conducting institutes in the past year. The two tried to launch online formative assessment learning sessions during the pandemic, but their efforts were not met with much interest. Teacher and administrator attention was pulled in another direction as these educators suddenly had to figure out the logistical, technical, and pedagogical challenges of teaching remotely.

However, both Paul and Roy look forward to continuing their work with educators in Genesee County centered on the formative assessment process. And both are increasingly active in the FAME program. In the spring of 2021, Paul presented at a Michigan Assessment Consortium Assessment Literacy Network session on the effective use of formative assessment practices with students with disabilities in virtual learning environments. At that same time, Roy was in the process of completing his certification as a trainer for Cognitive Coaching program, which is a key part of the FAME learning for participants.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates how a team of dedicated professionals can build on their experiences in the FAME program and expand professional learning opportunities while at the same time remaining faithful to the FAME program's vision of formative assessment. More specifically, from this case study, we see the importance of collaboration and commitment. Paul, Roy, and Melissa collaborated intensely both with each other and with the MDE FAME

program administrators. This collaboration allowed them to learn, grow, and stay closely connected to the FAME program. Relatedly, Paul, Roy, and Melissa remained committed to providing quality professional learning opportunities in their county that closely aligned with the principles of the FAME program. This commitment to quality and fidelity led to a stronger understanding of formative assessment and promoted broader and deeper participation in the FAME program.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Paul, Roy, and Melissa each deepened their understanding of formative assessment over time, but they did not wait until they were experts before getting started. How might this example inform your work with your Learning Team?
- How might you strengthen your collaboration around the formative assessment process? Think about the connections you might want to start or develop.
- How would you rate your and your team's commitment to FAME and the formative assessment process? How might you go about developing an even deeper commitment?
- What are some areas in which you would like to strengthen your knowledge of formative assessment? What might your "next steps" be?

About FAME Case Studies

The FAME Research and Development Team members **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 lanejoh3@msu.edu.**

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

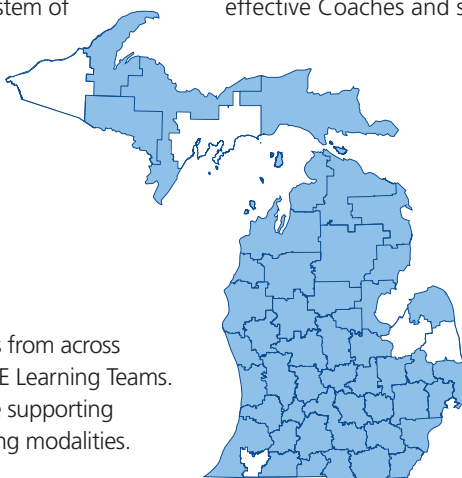
New FAME teams start in a similar manner. An individual learns about the FAME program from a conference presentation, a publication, or current FAME participant, and then shares it with others. A group of educators decides to become involved in FAME. One person agrees to take on the additional responsibilities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