

Leaning into the Power of Formative Assessment Practice

Quality Education Commission Best
Practices White Paper Series

ODE Assessment Team

March 2026



Contents

Executive Summary	2
The Case for Formative Assessment.....	2
Oregon’s Framework: The Four-Leaf Clover Model	2
System Strengths and Needs	3
Scaling Formative Assessment Statewide.....	3
Conclusion.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Background and Literature Review	6
The Four-Leaf Clover Model of Formative Assessment in Oregon	8
Opportunity Analysis: System Strengths and Needs.....	9
Proposed Solutions: Benefits and Impact	12
Benefits for Students	13
Benefits for Teachers	13
Evaluation and Impact Assessment.....	14
Needed Resources.....	15
Policy and Resource Alignment.....	16
Key Investments for Scaling Formative Assessment.....	17
Conclusion	18

Executive Summary

The formative assessment process is one of the most powerful, research-affirmed levers available to improve student learning. Unlike tests, often high-stake events, formative assessment is a continuous, student-centered practice that is embedded in daily instruction. It enables teachers and students to use evidence of learning in real time to adjust actions, promote agency and accelerate learning. This white paper outlines why formative assessment is essential to Oregon’s vision for equitable, ambitious instruction. It identifies the system strengths and challenges that shape its implementation and presents a statewide strategy to scale high quality formative assessment as a central component in every classroom.

The Case for Formative Assessment

Decades of research demonstrate that formative assessment yields the greatest positive impact of any documented instructional practice on student learning. It works by transforming the learning experience from traditional one-way instruction into a more dynamic partnership between students and teachers. Students are clearer about what they are learning, where they are in their progress and what actions they will need to take to help them grow. Teachers gain insight into student thinking and can respond immediately with targeted feedback, in the moment adjustments to produce deeper engagement.

Oregon’s balanced assessment system positions formative assessment as the key component to student achievement. Yet misunderstandings persist. Too often, “formative assessment” is mistaken for events like quizzes or exit tickets. This narrow view does not fully capture the real purpose or power of formative assessment. It is a process, not an event. It relies on instructional practices, student discourse, meaningful feedback and tasks aligned to the full depth of the standards.

Oregon’s Framework: The Four-Leaf Clover Model

Oregon uses the Smarter Balanced Four-Leaf Clover model to illustrate formative assessment as an interconnected cycle:

- 1. Clarify learning goals and success criteria:** Students and teachers share a vision of what success looks like, grounded in high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and grade-level standards.
- 2. Elicit evidence of student learning:** Evidence emerges through questioning, discussion, tasks, demonstrations and dialogue. Not for evaluation but for understanding.
- 3. Interpret evidence:** Teachers and students analyze what the evidence reveals about strengths, opportunities for growth and potential next steps.

- 4. Act:** Feedback, instructional adjustments, self-assessment and peer feedback accelerate learning.

When consistently used, formative assessment promotes partnership between educators and students, builds student agency, promotes equity and promotes rigor across all classrooms. It positions assessment as a process that honors student identity, experiences and assets as essential components of learning.

System Strengths and Needs

Oregon has foundational strengths that support high-quality formative assessment, including adoption of HQIM, clear academic standards and an emerging culture of ambitious teaching and statewide expertise in balanced assessment. Still, there are challenges.

Challenges

- **Misalignment between standards and assessment rigor:** Evidence gathered in classrooms does not always reach the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels required by the standards, limiting its usefulness.
- **Inconsistent coherence across the system:** At times, curriculum, instruction and assessment operate in silos, leading to mixed expectations for rigor and uneven student experiences.
- **Insufficient time, tools and professional learning:** Teachers need protected collaboration time, modeling, coaching and shared frameworks to implement formative assessment deeply and consistently.
- **Uneven understanding of asset-based practice:** When misunderstood, asset-based instruction can result in lowered expectations rather than strengthened rigor that builds on student knowledge and strengths.

Opportunities

- Strengthen coherence from classroom to system level.
- Link HQIM, formative assessment practices, and ambitious teaching as a unified approach to equity.
- Use evidence to support continuous improvement at classroom, school and district levels.
- Collaborative professionalism: Professional learning communities, observation protocols (such as FARROP) and shared frameworks improve consistency and expertise statewide.

Scaling Formative Assessment Statewide

To implement formative assessment as an equitable, high-impact practice across Oregon, the state must invest in:

Leaning into the Power of Formative Assessment Practice

- Clear frameworks linking standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment.
- Practical tools and protocols including FARROP to observe, refine and scale strong practice.
- Professional learning communities that analyze evidence of learning and plan responsive instruction.
- Coaching and leadership structures that model effective formative assessment.
- Time for teacher collaboration embedded into schedules.

System-wide coherence, supported by aligned policies, resources and evaluation will ensure that formative assessment becomes not a compliance task, but a routine or powerful practice that drives student learning.

Conclusion

The formative assessment process is essential to Oregon’s vision of rigorous, equitable, student-centered learning. When embedded into daily instruction, it empowers students as active learners and equips educators with actionable insight to meet every student’s learning needs. With strategic investment in tools, time and professional learning that includes alignment across standard, instructional materials and assessment, Oregon can ensure that every student experiences learning that is responsive, challenging and meaningful. By scaling formative assessment as a statewide practice, Oregon strengthens its commitment to education equity and sets the conditions for all students to learn and grow.

Introduction

Assessment is often thought of as a series of big, high-stakes events such as standardized tests or final exams that educators have little control over because instruction must be paused to create time and space to practice how to engage with it and then time to administer it. Yet this narrow view overlooks the form of assessment that students and teachers engage with most frequently: the formative assessment process. Unlike one-time measures, the formative assessment process is woven into daily instruction, providing ongoing opportunities for feedback, adjustment, and growth. When practiced effectively, it has the potential to be truly transformational, shifting learning from a static evaluation to a dynamic process. More than any other type of assessment, formative practices can profoundly shape student learning experiences, fostering deeper understanding, greater ownership, and lasting impact.¹

Formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning, is a cornerstone of effective classroom practice. High-quality formative assessment depends on a respectful, collaborative classroom environment where teachers and students work in partnership. When implemented well, students become active partners in their learning, and teachers have many opportunities to respond to students' needs. It is one of the most flexible and powerful tools educators can use to make meaningful differences for students. The formative assessment process functions as a process of educator-to-student and, more importantly, student-to-student interactions and behaviors that increase student ownership of the learning process. The goal is to improve understanding of intended learning outcomes while fostering students' growth as self-directed learners.

In 2021, the Michigan Assessment Consortium updated the definition originally developed in 2006 by the Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) group of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

“Formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and educators 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 self-directed learners. Effective use of the formative assessment process requires students and educators to integrate and embed the following practices in a collaborative and respectful classroom environment:

- *Clarifying learning goals and success criteria within a broader progression of learning;*
- *Eliciting and analyzing evidence of student thinking;*

¹ Michigan Department of Education & Michigan Assessment Consortium. Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME). Retrieved from FAME Michigan.

- *Engaging in self-assessment and peer feedback;*
- *Providing actionable feedback; and*
- *Using evidence and feedback to move learning forward by adjusting learning strategies, goals, or next instructional steps.”²*

This paper reviews the transformative power of the formative assessment process, how it contrasts with formative assessments and traditional testing, analyzes its core components: rigor, feedback and self-assessment, and proposes the necessary resources and system alignment needed to establish it as universal practice. In addition, the paper will detail the practice’s proven impact on student learning, examine the critical alignment needed between academic standards and assessment practices, and outline the distinct yet interconnected roles of educators and students in the process. Finally, it will propose a strategy for shifting from a culture of compliance where assessment is viewed as an external requirement, to one of genuine commitment, where the formative assessment process is embraced as a central driver of equity, engagement, and instructional excellence.

Background and Literature Review

Oregon’s approach to a balanced assessment system has focused on three essential components, starting with formative assessment practices designed to support student learning in the moment, intended to foster a stronger partnership between student and educator. In addition to the formative assessment process, Oregon also includes interim assessments, tailored to support teaching and learning throughout the year, and finally summative assessments, which serve accountability and system evaluation purposes.³ Too often, formative assessment is mistakenly associated with interim or summative assessments, as if it were an event that occurs outside of daily instruction. It is not. Formative assessment happens within the flow of teaching and learning, using classroom activities that can be applied formatively to directly support student growth. Decades of research have found that quality formative assessment has the largest positive impact of any instructional strategy on student learning and achievement that has been documented.^{4 5} In addition, John Hattie has identified nearly every

² Michigan Assessment Consortium. (2021). *Revising the definition of formative assessment* [PDF]. Michigan Assessment Consortium. <https://famemichigan.org/assets/resources/Revising-the-Definition-of-Formative-Assessment.pdf>. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International.

³ Oregon Department of Education. (2019). *The right assessment for the right purpose: Guidance document*. Oregon Department of Education. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Documents/RightAssessmentRightPurpose.pdf>

⁴ Crooks, T.J. (1988). The impacts of classroom evaluation practices on students. *Review of Educational Research*, 58(4), 438-481. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543058004438> (Original work published 1988).

⁵ Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(2), 139–144, 146–148. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20439383>

aspect of the formative assessment process as ways to have a positive impact on or even accelerating student achievement.⁶

There have often been misunderstandings about what the formative assessment process truly is and how it should be used. To address these misconceptions and support a shift in practice, it is helpful for educators to recall that the word *assessment* originates from the Latin *assidere*, meaning “to sit beside.” Assessment should be more than a way to measure learning—it is one of the essential components of ambitious teaching practices which emphasizes interactive, discourse-based practices where students actively make sense of ideas, rather than passively receiving information. It requires teachers to respond to student thinking in real time and hold students accountable to rigorous learning goals.⁷ Caroline Wylie and Margaret Heritage write in their book *Fair and Justice-Oriented Assessment: Developing Teachers’ Knowledge and Skills*,

“Formative assessment provides a steady stream of information about how student learning is progressing toward the intended longer-term outcomes. Formative assessment is conducted at the point of learning and is intended to reveal what students’ next steps might be, so that both teachers and students can take continuous action to secure progress. Its primary purpose is to keep student learning on track toward meeting the longer-term outcomes that are the focus of summative assessment.”⁸

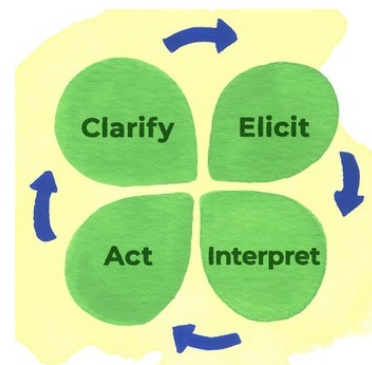
⁶ Visible Learning. (n.d.). Hattie ranking: Influences and effect sizes related to student achievement. Retrieved December 4, 2025, from <https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/>

⁷ Youngs, P., & Anagnostopoulos, D. (2025). *Teaching ambitiously in elementary school*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

⁸ Heritage, M., Wylie, C. (2026). *Fair and justice-oriented assessment: developing teachers’ knowledge and skills*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard education press.

The Four-Leaf Clover Model of Formative Assessment in Oregon

Oregon uses the four-leaf clover from Smarter Balanced to illustrate the formative assessment process with each leaf symbolizing one essential dimension of practice. This visual metaphor emphasizes that formative assessment is not a single event, but a continuous, interconnected cycle that supports student learning.⁹



- **Dimension 1: Clarify Learning Goals and Criteria for Success**

At the top left, the process begins with *clarification*. This step is directly tied to high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), where teachers establish clear learning goals and success criteria. It is also the moment when educators draw upon what they already know about their students—their cultural backgrounds and strengths—to design activities and tools that honor and build upon those assets. Learning goals are written in student-friendly language beginning with, “I understand” or “I can”. Clarification ensures that both teachers and students share a common understanding of what success looks like.

- **Dimension 2: Elicit Evidence of Student Learning**

The second dimension focuses on gathering evidence. Here, both educators and students actively elicit information about learning using multiple sources of evidence such as questioning, discussion, performance tasks, or other strategies to draw accurate conclusions about student learning. This evidence is not collected for evaluation, but to provide insight into how students are progressing toward the established goals.

- **Dimension 3: Interpret Evidence to Determine Next Steps**

Once evidence is gathered, the third dimension involves interpretation. Teachers and students work together to analyze information, often “on the fly” from multiple points of instruction, identifying patterns, strengths, and areas for growth. This step is critical because it views evidence not as one singular event, but part of an ongoing process that turns data into meaningful insights that guide instructional decisions. Educators must anticipate student thinking as part of their planning process.

- What questions might unlock a student’s thinking?
- What whole-class discussion might need to happen, and with what focus?

⁹ Smarter Tools for Teachers. (n.d.). *Understanding the formative assessment process*. Retrieved December 10, 2025 from <https://smartertoolsforteachers.org/landing/formative>.

- Are examples and artifacts of student work needed?
- **Dimension 4: Act by Providing Feedback and Adjusting Instruction**

Finally, the fourth dimension is action. Based on the interpretation, teachers adjust instruction, intentionally carve out time to provide timely feedback, establish clear protocols for students to give and receive peer feedback, and design next steps that are explicitly linked to HQIM and the success criteria. Students, in turn, use this feedback to refine their learning strategies, set goals, and take ownership of their progress. It is critical to note that meaningful feedback requires a classroom culture where students feel a sense of belonging with routines that support students on how to give and receive feedback.

The four-leaf clover model underscores the partnership between teachers and students at every stage of the formative assessment process. Each leaf is interdependent, creating a cycle of clarity, evidence, interpretation, and action. When implemented well, this process ensures that assessment is not about judgment or high-stakes events, but about continuous growth, responsiveness, and equity in learning.¹⁰

The table below provides a clear illustration of what formative assessment is—and what it is not. By contrasting the defining features of formative practices with those that fall outside its scope, the table helps clarify common misconceptions and highlights the essential qualities that make formative assessment distinct.

Formative Assessment Is...	Formative Assessment Is NOT...
A planful, intentional process	A singular event or test
Student-centered	Teacher-centered
Full of descriptive feedback	Evaluative feedback (for gradebook)
Dynamic and ongoing	Static and “one-and-done”
Built on clear criteria	The same test a teacher uses every year
Full of evidence from students	Quantity over quality

Opportunity Analysis: System Strengths and Needs

Planning for formative assessment looks different from traditional lesson planning. It is not simply an additional step. It involves making intentional choices that connect high-quality

¹⁰ Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Formative assessment*. Oregon Department of Education. Retrieved December 4, 2025, from https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/pages/formative_assessment.aspx

instructional materials with student learning. Effective planning requires teachers to consider several key elements:

- **Learning goals:** What students are expected to learn, based on standards and instructional materials.
- **Evidence of learning:** How teachers and students will know where they are in their learning journey.
- **Tools and tasks:** The materials, questions, or activities that will provide accurate evidence of student understanding.
- **Indicators of progress:** What students will say, do, make, or write to demonstrate movement toward learning targets and success criteria.
- **Feedback:** The type of descriptive feedback—delivered by teachers, peers, or self—that will help students advance.
- **Reflection:** Opportunities for students to reflect on the feedback they receive and use it to guide their next steps.

Intentional planning ensures that formative assessment and high-quality instructional materials work together to support student success.

At the same time, one of the most significant challenges in Oregon’s assessment system is the mismatch that often happens between standards and assessment rigor. For assessment at all levels to be meaningful, the evidence gathered must align directly with the intended learning targets and skills. This requires instructional rigor across the full spectrum of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels 1–4, from recall and comprehension to strategic thinking and extended reasoning. When assessment fail to reach higher levels of rigor, they risk capturing only surface-level understanding rather than the deeper competencies that standards demand. Addressing this mismatch is essential to ensure that formative evidence is both accurate and actionable, providing teachers and students with insights that truly reflect progress toward long-term learning goals. Ambitious teaching lays the groundwork for fair and justice-oriented assessment literacy by encouraging teachers to really know ALL their students and to value the experiences, identities, and knowledge they bring from their homes and communities into the classroom. Together, rigor in assessment design and ambitious teaching practices ensure that formative assessment is both equitable and transformative, advancing student learning in ways that honor identity, experience, and achievement.¹¹

Best practice calls for a balanced approach where standards, instructional materials, and strategies work in harmony. Vertical coherence ensures that learning builds progressively across grade levels, while horizontal coherence ensures consistency within a grade or subject

¹¹ Shepard, L. A. (2021, Fall). *Ambitious teaching and equitable assessment: A vision for prioritizing learning, not testing*. *American Educator*, 45(3), 28–37, 48. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1321974.pdf>

area. Without this alignment, assessment can feel fragmented, disconnected from instruction, or even contradictory in purpose.¹²

Coherence depends on strong connections among:

- Standards (both vertical and horizontal)
- High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)
- High-Impact Instructional Strategies

An education system is coherent when:

- A teacher can explain how a lesson fits into a broader learning progression.
- Assessment data is used to shape instruction in real-time.
- Professional learning focuses on the same instructional goals as the curriculum and assessment tools.
- Students encounter consistent expectations and grade-level rigor year after year and across classrooms.
- Students, teachers, and parents share a common understanding of what constitutes rigorous grade-level work and valid evidence of student learning.

Striving for balance means creating a system where formative, interim, and summative assessments reinforce one another, offering a unified and reliable picture of student learning rather than isolated snapshots. When there isn't coherence, educators are left confused often navigating misaligned expectations, which undermines instructional planning and weakens student outcomes.

Even when rigor and coherence are addressed, resource allocation remains a major barrier to effective implementation. Formative assessment cannot be sustained in isolation; it requires dedicated resources and structural supports. Teachers need protected collaboration time through professional learning communities (PLCs) and data teams to analyze evidence and plan responsive instruction. Opportunities for peer observation allow educators to learn from one another's practices and refine their approaches.¹³ In addition, focused professional learning is essential for all staff—administrators, coaches, and teachers—to build a shared understanding of formative assessment's purpose and methods.

Yet minimal resource allocation often leaves educators without the time, training, or collaborative structures necessary to fully realize the benefits of formative assessment. In the absence of such knowledge and skills, the promise of assessment to bolster student learning is significantly reduced. Without intentional investment in these supports, formative assessment

¹² National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. (2023, March 15). *Designing for coherence*. NCIEA. <https://www.nciea.org/blog/designing-for-coherence/>

¹³ Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). Formative assessment. Oregon.gov. https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Pages/Formative_Assessment.aspx

risks being implemented unevenly or superficially, undermining its potential to transform teaching and learning.

Proposed Solutions: Benefits and Impact

Formative assessment benefits both educators and students by creating a classroom culture grounded in high expectations and mutual belief in every learner's potential. When educators work collaboratively with students and set ambitious academic goals, they foster an environment where belonging and confidence thrive. As Anthony Muhammad emphasizes, *"Students will learn more and be more successful in an environment where all educators believe they can learn at high levels and those educators work together to convince the students that they can achieve lofty academic goals teachers set out for them."*¹⁴ At the same time, the nature of the feedback matters. When feedback is done well, it instills responsibility and ownership to learning and contributes to collaboration and a culture of safety. Ron Berger writes that feedback must be descriptive to make an impact. They are distinguished by these features:

- **Individualized and growth-oriented:** Feedback should target the improvement of a specific piece of work, skill, or disposition for an individual student or small group.
- **Private and relational:** Exchanges typically occur between teacher and student or among peers, not as public commentary for the whole class.
- **Grounded in trust:** Feedback is most effective within a long-term, constructive relationship that prioritizes respect and support.
- **Positive and strategic:** Students are sensitive to personal feedback; constructive, encouraging comments lead to better outcomes than criticism.
- **Informed and tailored:** Effective feedback draws on deep knowledge of the student, their strengths, current stage of growth, and what will spark the next step forward.¹⁵

This shared commitment, paired with formative practices and commitment to improving, ensures that assessment is not merely a measure of learning but a driver of equity, engagement, and growth.

¹⁴ Muhammad, A. (2017). *Transforming school culture: How to overcome staff division* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

¹⁵ Berger, R., Rugen, L., & Woodfin, L. (2014). *Leaders of their own learning: Transforming schools through student-engaged assessment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Benefits for Students

Inviting students to engage in self-assessment and peer feedback is one of the most powerful ways to position them as true partners in their own learning. These practices empower students to examine evidence of their progress, identify where they currently stand, and determine the next steps in their learning journey. Through reflection, students build ownership of their learning and develop critical metacognitive skills that extend beyond the classroom.

Peer feedback helps students develop a clear understanding of success criteria by analyzing peer work in relation to learning goals. When guided by strong protocols and models like the example provided through [Austin's Butterfly](#), students learn how to give and receive feedback constructively, using exemplars and structured routines to ensure their insights are meaningful and actionable. Self-assessment complements this process by empowering students to use evidence from their own learning to decide next steps. It motivates them by fostering agency and ownership, while also deepening their understanding of success criteria. Both practices are most effective when supported by clear structures that ground reflection in rigorous standards.

The outcomes of these practices extend far beyond individual assignments. Students gain empowered agency, learning to rely on evidence of their own progress to chart future learning. They experience inclusivity and belonging, as student-centered approaches honor lived experiences and integrate diverse funds of knowledge into the foundation of learning. Most importantly, they engage in high-quality learning experiences, becoming active partners in the teaching and learning process while tackling content with rigor.

Together, self-assessment and peer feedback transform classroom routines into intentional practices that drive equity, agency, and deeper learning—ensuring students are not only participants in education but co-creators of their own success.

Benefits for Teachers

Formative assessment practices support an asset-based orientation, enabling teachers to integrate students' existing knowledge and culture into the design of learning goals and tasks. An asset-based approach helps teachers build on what students already know when setting learning goals and success criteria. It also draws on students' experiences and strengths when designing learning tasks, while maintaining high expectations, so students are both challenged and supported to succeed.

At times, asset orientation is misunderstood as lowering rigor to help students feel successful. This misconception assumes that drawing on students' strengths means simplifying the work or

reducing expectations. The opposite is true. When rigor is lowered, students are denied access to challenging and meaningful learning experiences. Over time, this creates opportunity gaps, particularly for students from historically marginalized communities who too often encounter less-demanding tasks.

When educators connect formative assessment to high-quality instructional materials, they are not simply checking for understanding, they are unlocking the rich assets students bring to the learning process. Proceeding with care ensures that assessment practices honor these strengths while guiding learners toward deeper engagement with rigorous standards.

- **Clarifying learning goals** allows teachers to make expectations transparent, positioning students as capable learners who can see the pathway to success. Keeping the rigor of the standards in view ensures that every student has equitable access to challenging, meaningful learning.
- **Identifying the appropriate Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels, as outlined by Webb,** provides a framework for recognizing the diverse ways students demonstrate understanding:
 - **Level 1:** Students showcase recall skills, such as naming characters or labeling locations on a map—affirming the foundational knowledge they already possess.
 - **Level 2:** Learners highlight their ability to summarize narratives or identify patterns in events, demonstrating emerging analytical strengths.
 - **Level 3:** Students apply concepts in new contexts, revealing creativity and adaptability as assets in problem-solving.
 - **Level 4:** Learners synthesize information from multiple sources, showcasing their capacity for complex reasoning and innovation.¹⁶

By combining asset-based orientation with rigorous expectations, formative assessment becomes both equitable and transformative. It shifts the focus from what students lack to what they contribute, ensuring that their voices, experiences, and abilities are valued. Formative assessment honors students' strengths while opening doors to the depth of learning they deserve.

Evaluation and Impact Assessment

Oregon's commitment to student success is grounded in the belief that every learner deserves access to high-quality learning experiences. Students are consistently engaged with grade-level content and rigor through research-based instructional practices, including ambitious teaching,

¹⁶ Webb, N. (2002). *Depth-of-Knowledge Levels for Four Content Areas*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Center for Educational Research.

which challenges them to think critically and deeply. Beyond simply receiving instruction, students are empowered as active partners in their own learning journey. They play a role in shaping what comes next, ensuring that their voices and choices guide the process. This approach is supported by clear system coherence, where instruction, curriculum, and assessment are aligned to create a seamless and purposeful learning environment.

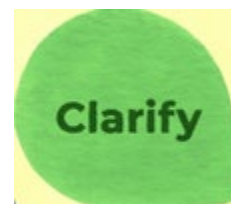
Aligned and focused educational systems further strengthen this vision. By intentionally connecting grade-level standards with high-quality curriculum and impactful instructional practices, educators provide the supports necessary for students to grow at every stage of the teaching and learning process. These systems are not static; they evolve through careful collection, analysis, and interpretation of multiple forms of data. This evidence-based approach allows schools to make informed decisions about system improvements and instructional next steps, ensuring that learning remains responsive and effective.

Equally important is the creation of engaged partnerships and safe, inclusive schools. Student-centered practices, such as formative assessment, foster a sense of belonging and affirm that every learner is valued. Instruction and assessment honor the lived experiences of students, embracing their heritage and community cultural practices as essential components of the classroom. Students' funds of knowledge, their unique skills, perspectives, and backgrounds, are recognized as foundational when developing success criteria, instructional strategies, and learning spaces. In this way, schools become places where diversity is celebrated, equity is prioritized, and every student can thrive.

Needed Resources

Clarify: Determine Learning Goals & Develop Success Criteria

Clear learning goals and success criteria help everyone know what success looks like. Success criteria should be tied directly to the learning goals and written in words students can easily understand. Because these goals connect to standards, both teachers and students know not only *what* is being learned but also *how challenging* the work will be. With this clarity, teachers can take practical steps to move learning forward.



It's important to think about the level of challenge students face. If students only work at Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels 1 and 2—where they recall facts or show basic understanding—they miss chances to grow as thinkers. When students are given opportunities to work at DOK Levels 3 and 4, they can:

- Level 3: Apply ideas in new situations, showing flexible thinking.

Leaning into the Power of Formative Assessment Practice

- Level 4: Analyze and combine information from different sources, building strong critical thinking skills.

By aiming for these higher levels, students learn to think more deeply, solve problems in new ways, and become more independent learners.

Elicit: High-Quality Tools (Assessment and HQIM)

While DOK 1 items serve a purpose, it is strongly encouraged that educators also provide opportunities at **DOK Levels 3 and 4**. These higher-level tasks allow students to demonstrate their learning at the full depth and breadth of the standards, engaging in application, analysis, and synthesis rather than stopping at recall or basic comprehension.

Act and Interpret: Clear Success Criteria for Self-Assessment

Success criteria can be shown as learning continuums that guide students in reflecting on how they are growing as learners. These continuums highlight skills that matter across all subjects and invite students to think more deeply about their work.



For example, students might reflect on:

- How well they connect their ideas to the ideas of others;
- Whether they ask questions that push thinking further; or
- How they notice and respond to different perspectives.

When students see clear examples of what these skills look like in practice, they can better recognize evidence of their own learning and decide on the next steps to take. This reflection goes beyond simply “joining in.” It helps students build on peers’ ideas, make connections between concepts, support their thinking with evidence, and consider viewpoints that may differ from their own.

Because skills like collaboration, reasoning, and critical analysis are valuable in Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies, success criteria framed in this way help students develop habits of mind that transfer across subjects. These habits strengthen learning and empower students to use their strengths in new and challenging situations.

Policy and Resource Alignment

When assessments are tied directly to the content found in approved high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), districts are encouraged to align their instruction accordingly. This creates a coherent system where teaching, learning, and assessment are all working toward the same goals.

- **Connection to Standards and HQIM:** Aligning assessments with HQIM ensures that the questions and tasks students encounter are rooted in the same standards and content they experience during instruction. This reduces the disconnect between classroom learning and state testing, making assessments more authentic and instructionally relevant.
- **Instructional Coherence:** When districts know that assessment practices are aligned to HQIM, they are more likely to adopt and implement those materials with fidelity. This alignment supports teachers in planning lessons that prepare students for both daily learning and larger accountability measures, reinforcing consistent expectations across classrooms and grade levels.
- **Equity and Access:** Tying assessment practices to HQIM helps ensure that all students, regardless of district or school, are assessed on content that reflects rigorous, standards-aligned instruction. This reduces opportunity gaps by holding all systems accountable to the same high expectations.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Assessment alignment also provides districts with actionable data that is directly connected to the curriculum. This makes it easier for educators to analyze results, identify areas of strength and need, and adjust instruction in ways that are immediately relevant to what students are learning.

Alignment ensures that these assessments are not stand-alone events but integral parts of a cycle of teaching and learning in the classroom that supports student success and the formative assessment process.¹⁷

Key Investments for Scaling Formative Assessment

To make this vision real, Oregon must invest in both people and tools that support formative assessment.¹⁸ This includes:

- **Clear frameworks** that connect standards, curriculum, and instruction.
- **Practical tools and protocols** that make formative assessment consistent and scalable across classrooms.

¹⁷ Evans, C. M., Wylie, E. C., Landl, E., & Marion, S. F. (2025). *Implementing Balanced Assessment Systems: A Practical Guidebook for Districts and Schools*. The National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment & The National Academy of Education. <https://doi.org/10.31094/2025/3>

¹⁸ Marion, S. F., Pellegrino, J. W., & Berman, A. I. (Eds.). (2024). *Reimagining Balanced Assessment Systems*. National Academy of Education. 10.31094/2024/1

- **Time for collaboration**, so teachers can review evidence and plan next steps together.
- **Professional learning communities (PLCs)** that build shared expertise across schools and districts.
- **Coaches and leaders** who model and sustain strong formative assessment practices.

Oregon's commitment to formative assessment goes beyond aligning to high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). The greatest impact occurs when resource investments and tools like the Formative Assessment Rubric, Resources, and Observation Protocol (FARROP) work in concert to strengthen practice. Clear frameworks that connect standards, curriculum, and instruction provide the foundation for coherence. FARROP builds on this by offering practical tools and protocols, rubrics and observation guides, that make formative assessment consistent and scalable across classrooms. These tools come to life when educators have time for collaboration, using FARROP protocols in PLCs to review evidence and plan next steps together. Professional learning communities (PLCs) deepen shared expertise, while coaches and leaders model and sustain strong formative practices, using FARROP observations to guide reflective dialogue. Together, these investments create a system where formative assessment is not a compliance task but a high-leverage practice that drives equity, engagement, and continuous improvement statewide.

Conclusion

The Formative Assessment process is more than a classroom strategy. It is a powerful practice that helps students and teachers grow together. By using the formative assessment process, educators gain daily insights into student learning and can adjust instruction in real time. At the same time, students' voices and ideas are elevated, giving them greater ownership of their learning. When the formative assessment process is at the center of teaching, instruction becomes responsive, equitable, and aligned with high standards.

This process empowers students to engage more deeply, think critically, and take charge of their progress. For educators, it provides clear evidence to guide decisions and ensure that every learner has access to rigorous opportunities.

Without these supports, formative assessment may be uneven or surface-level. With them, it can become a universal practice across the state, a foundation for coherence in teaching and a driver of equity and excellence in student learning.

Oregon has the chance to lead by example. By funding and building the structures needed to scale formative assessment, the state can ensure that every student experiences learning that

Leaning into the Power of Formative Assessment Practice

is rigorous, responsive, and empowering. This is not just a small change, it is a transformative shift toward a system where assessment is used *for learning*, not just *of learning*.