



Formative Assessment

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What Is the Topic

In this brief, we define [formative assessment](#) as a practice implemented by educators, in collaboration with their students. The essential purpose of formative assessment as a practice is to move students' learning forward while their learning is still in the process of developing. This stands in contrast to other forms of assessment (e.g., summative), which evaluates learning after a period of teaching. Formative assessment practices provide immediate, continuous, specific, and action-oriented feedback (Andrade, 2019). They are ongoing throughout a class or course, aiming to enhance student achievement by addressing individual needs (Theal & Franklin, 2010). This type of assessment encompasses strategies to shape learning and empower students to take ownership of their progress, emphasizing improvement over final grades (Heritage, 2012). Methods include self-assessment, peer assessment, and instructor feedback through various means such as writing, quizzes, and class discussions.

[Equity-centered formative assessment](#) as a practice is crucial for ensuring that English learners (ELs) receive equitable opportunities for academic success. By focusing on inclusivity, relevance, rigor, and transparency, formative assessments help to mitigate the potential language barriers that ELs may face in accessing educational content (Artze-Vega et al., 2023). Through ongoing feedback and support, formative assessments ensure that ELs have the necessary resources and scaffolding to thrive academically, regardless of their language background. Throughout the instructional process, formative assessments serve as guideposts for educators in effectively supporting ELs' language development. Whether conducted before, during, or after lessons, these assessments inform instructional decisions, allowing educators to tailor their teaching strategies to meet the [evolving needs of ELs](#). By [supporting ELs with formative assessments](#), educators and school leaders can create a supportive and responsive learning environment that empowers ELs to achieve academic excellence.



What Is the Evidence Base

[Research](#) indicates that formative assessments can help English Learners (ELs) as they work on mastering academic subjects and improving their English skills. Based on solid evidence of best practices and accurate assessment of ELs, Acosta et al. (2008) contend that formative assessments offer even greater benefits for ELs compared to their non-EL peers. This is due to the ongoing process of assessing learning and adapting instruction as this is crucial for addressing any gaps or misunderstandings that might hinder these students from achieving proficiency in English and effectively engaging with and learning the content.

[Research](#) also underscores the significance of providing students, including English Learners (ELs), with opportunities to express their thoughts through various productive modes for language development such as the creation of oral presentations and written texts.

Furthermore, subject matter expertise doesn't develop in isolation. It is crucial, especially for ELs, to have opportunities to refine, amend, and explore different ways of discussing subjects like "science," "history," or "math" in collaborative settings (Walqui & Heritage, 2018). Encouraging ELs to participate in [writing and speaking activities](#) during lessons enhances the likelihood of inclusive participation for all students, not just a select few, in classroom discussions and projects (Zwiers, 2007).

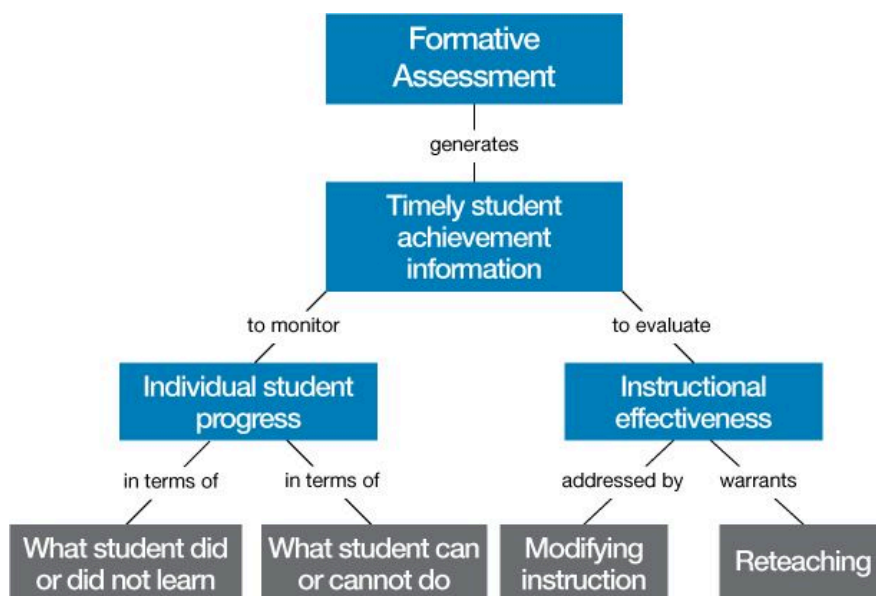


Figure 1. Formative Assessment Components



Given that acquiring a second language, even among young children, is a gradual process (Valdés et al., 2010), it is crucial for educators to observe both the conceptual understanding and the linguistic abilities of ELs (Figure 1). This is because a student might grasp the concepts effectively, but struggle to articulate their understanding using standard academic English. Therefore, teachers should tailor their feedback and subsequent instruction to align with the learning objectives, accommodating both the conceptual and linguistic aspects of students' learning (Linguanti, 2014). Thus, the more a teacher carefully considers the learning objective and the evidence required, the more effectively they can provide feedback that contributes to achieving the learning goal. To accurately interpret the performance of English Learners, teachers should grasp the linguistic and cognitive demands of the task (Durán, 2008). Based on evidence-based best practices, [this document](#) includes examples (p. 30) that demonstrate the efficacy of formative assessment in linking student learning and instruction and the capacities required of teachers to enact effective formative assessment with ELs.

The models and frameworks below provide knowledge and perspectives for educators and school leaders to promote more equity-centered assessment practices and thus better support English learners and their academic success.

1. **[The SIOP \(Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol\) Model](#)**: This is a research-based instructional framework designed to make content comprehensible and accessible to English Learners (ELs) while promoting their language development across content areas. The SIOP model consists of eight components that educators can integrate into their lesson planning and delivery to support ELs' learning effectively (Echevarria et al., 2008). These components include preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, application, lesson delivery, and review/assessment. Each component of the SIOP Model offers specific strategies and techniques for scaffolding instruction and providing language support for ELs.
 - [Research studies](#) have demonstrated the effectiveness of the SIOP Model in improving ELs' academic achievement and language proficiency. For instance, Short et al. (2012) conducted a study examining the impact of implementing the SIOP Model on ELs' comprehension of content material and language development. The researchers found that schools using the SIOP Model showed significant improvements in ELs' academic performance compared to schools without SIOP instruction.
 - Echevarria et al. (2009) investigated the effects of SIOP-based professional development on teachers' instructional practices and ELs' learning outcomes. Their findings indicated that teachers who received SIOP training implemented more effective language support strategies and observed greater gains in ELs' academic performance and language skills.
2. **[Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#)**: This is a framework aimed at making instructional materials, activities, and assessments accessible to diverse learners, including English learners (ELs), by offering multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. Empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of UDL in improving learning outcomes for English learners, including increased engagement, comprehension, and academic achievement. Formative assessment practices within the UDL framework focus on providing flexible and varied



assessment options that accommodate diverse learning styles and linguistic backgrounds, allowing English learners to demonstrate their understanding and progress in ways that are meaningful and accessible to them. Although the concept of universal design for learning (UDL) is well understood in the area of special education, it has been widely used in recent years to increase the academic performance of English learners (Lopes-Murphy, 2012). The core tenet of UDL is that accessibility to the general curriculum by all students be considered from the very beginning stages of instructional and assessment design by factoring in all of the diversities students bring into the learning context (e.g., ability, language, culture, religion, socioeconomic status) and the expected needs of each population. Incorporating everyone's needs from the beginning prevents or minimizes the need for later accommodations once the curriculum has been implemented (Edyburn, 2010).

- Eichhorn et al. (2019) and Rao and Torres (2017) provide examples of [Utilizing UDL to Enhance Engagement of English Learners](#):
 1. Affective Engagement (The Why):
 - Offer choices in learning activities to empower students.
 - Identify and nurture students' interests and passions.
 - Foster peer interaction and collaborative learning opportunities.
 - Connect learning experiences to students' real-life experiences and cultural backgrounds.
 - Encourage students to engage with and contribute to setting learning goals.
 2. Recognition (The What):
 - Enhance comprehension by adapting texts, visuals, videos, and gestures to match students' language proficiency levels.
 - Teach the use of graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams, webs, and tables to support understanding.
 - Provide scaffolding by building on students' existing knowledge and experiences.
 - Support language development by incorporating primary language resources like bilingual dictionaries.
 3. Strategic Engagement (The How):
 - Utilize total physical response techniques to assess understanding and reinforce learning.
 - Incorporate role-playing, songs, and physical movement into instructional activities.
 - Integrate technology tools to facilitate language acquisition and enhance content learning experiences.
- [This study](#) examines the rising population of English learners (ELs) in K-12 education and the risk of mislabeling them with learning disabilities due to slower response to instruction. It explores how implementing universal design for learning (UDL) engagement guidelines can anticipate barriers and enhance ELs' academic engagement.



Strategies include teaching self-regulation, guided practice, and providing diverse pathways to achievement. The findings emphasize UDL's efficacy in supporting ELs and offer practical strategies for educators based on classroom experiences.

- Rao and Torres (2017) studied how UDL could benefit English learners. The authors found that UDL supported not only the academic learning needs of ELs but also their social/emotional, affective aspects of learning. The authors concluded that as educators design lessons for students with varied backgrounds, experiences, and needs, they can integrate connections to students' cultures, varied levels of language, and leverage students' personal interests and motivations by building in options aligned with UDL guidelines.

Summary

Review of relevant literature: Theoretical basis	Review of relevant literature: Support of identified research and practice	Empirical evidence on how it serves students and promotes systemic change
<p>The SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) Model: This model helps educators make content comprehensible and accessible to ELs while promoting their language development across content areas (Echevarria et al., 2008).</p>	<p>Short et al. (2012) studied the effects of the SIOP Model on ELs' understanding of content and language development. They discovered that schools using SIOP had notably better academic outcomes for ELs compared to those without SIOP instruction.</p>	<p>This model drives systemic change by integrating formative assessment into lesson planning and delivery, educators can gauge ELs' understanding and adapt instruction accordingly, ensuring equitable learning opportunities. This model also fosters a culture of data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement within educational systems, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for ELs across content areas (Echevarria et al., 2008; Short et al., 2012).</p>
<p>Universal Design for Learning (UDL): This is a framework that supports educators in creating instructional materials, activities, and assessments accessible to diverse learners, including English learners (ELs),</p>	<p>Empirical research supports the use of UDL in inclusive K-12 settings to improve academic outcomes for ELs across content areas (Rao, Ok, & Bryant, 2017).</p>	<p>By offering multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression, UDL ensures equitable access to the curriculum, reducing the need for later accommodations. This proactive approach fosters</p>



by offering multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression.	Researchers also highlight the importance of integrating multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement to address ELs' cultural contexts and learning needs (Lopes-Murphy, 2012).	inclusivity and supports ELs' academic and socio-emotional needs. Studies, like those by Rao and Torres (2017), highlight UDL's pivotal role in promoting equity and transformative outcomes for ELs.
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Equity Considerations

Formative assessment tasks typically involve less intricate language compared to formal tests, as they are designed to focus more on gauging students' understanding and progress in a less formal setting (Bailey, 2007). Nevertheless, if teachers heavily depend on language to explain problems, ask questions, provide feedback, and involve students in discussions, formative assessment faces the same risk of validity as large-scale tests—it could test language abilities as much as it does subject knowledge. Given the intrinsic link between [language and culture](#), variations in language usage often reflect socio-cultural disparities (Gee, 2007). As a result, students bring specific cultural frameworks for language communication and learning to school. For example, some students may be accustomed to listening more than speaking. Engaging in robust formative assessment practices, which involve asking questions, seeking elaboration, and encouraging ongoing language interaction between teachers and students, as well as among peers, can pose barriers for ELs compared to other students. Therefore, we recommend integrating [scaffolding materials and activities](#) to better accommodate the learning needs of ELs.

Developing equitable formative assessments for English learners requires strategies that consider language barriers and cultural diversity. By implementing inclusive practices, educators can ensure that English learners have equal opportunities for learning and growth. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2007) and Walqui and Heritage (2018), offer a set of recommendations tailored to help educators ensure equitable formative assessments for English learners:

1. **Set Clear Performance Criteria**: Clearly articulate grading criteria in language accessible to students, providing examples and scaffolding to aid understanding. Encourage peer discussions and reflection to enhance comprehension and promote language acquisition.
2. **Foster Student Self-Reflection**: Prompt students to evaluate their own progress using visual aids, language supports, and structured reflection tools. Encourage the use of native language when appropriate to facilitate deeper understanding and expression.
3. **Provide Detailed, Actionable Feedback**: Offer specific feedback using simple language and linking feedback to learning objectives. Allow opportunities for revision and clarification, providing language support and scaffolding as needed.
4. **Encourage Dialogue**: Create a supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable participating in discussions and sharing their perspectives. Use culturally relevant



examples and encourage peer collaboration to promote language development and cultural exchange.

5. Promote Motivation and Self-Esteem: Recognize and celebrate the progress of English learners, acknowledging their linguistic and cultural assets. Provide opportunities for choice and autonomy in learning tasks, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment.

Considerations for Local Context: Strategy Selection

As we consider the optimal next steps for supporting educators and school leaders in establishing equitable formative assessment strategies, a valuable source of information lies in the local context of the district and/or school. In this brief, by local context, we refer to the specific factors within the community that may impact the development and effectiveness of equitable assessment practices. As stated in the Oregon Department of Education's [integrated guidance for student success](#), formative assessment should be informed and collaborated on with communities, as well as inform how communities are being engaged more broadly.

We recommend checking the following resources:

- The Oregon Department of Education [formative assessment guideline](#) and the [student educational equity development survey](#) (SEED).

We encourage educators and school leaders to also familiarize themselves with the characteristics of their school communities, districts, and programs offered within their schools, as school districts may offer different resources like programs or other initiatives aimed at fostering equitable assessment practices. For example, consider reviewing the following school assessment resources: [Marcola School District](#), [Lincoln County School District](#), and [North Wasco County School District](#).

Example from the Field

Formative assessment is a promising strategy for helping EL students experiencing barriers to learning rigorous academic content at the same time they are learning English.

[https://www.linco.ed.gov/sites/default/files/3 TEAL Self%20Reg%20Learning.pdf](https://www.linco.ed.gov/sites/default/files/3%20TEAL%20Self%20Reg%20Learning.pdf)

What Can Educators and School Leaders Do: Strategies for Success

Constructing formative assessment strategies and activities and interpreting the responses of English Learners requires care. Assessment experts remind us that poorly constructed prompts can confuse students. Since educators cannot always anticipate the language demands of course assignments or activities in relation to every students' current English proficiency, they should instead use class time to explore the extent to which academic language influences the assessment process (Nortvedt, 2020). One way of doing this is to make sure to develop [rubrics](#) that can effectively guide the formative assessment practices and the implementation of strategies.



The following questions can serve as a guide as educators and school leaders explore and implement strategies to foster more equitable formative assessments strategies:

1. What language domains need assessment (speaking, listening, reading, writing)?
2. What language aspects are essential for task completion (phonetics, semantics, grammar, pragmatics)?
3. What is the relevant context that aligns with learning goals, content skills, and student development?
4. What is the intended purpose, audience, and success criteria for the task?
5. What language supports might students require based on their English proficiency levels?

The strategies below serve as examples of potential options for assessment rather than a definitive set of recommendations. Suitable approaches could support and key in on various factors associated with the school or district, such as the level of engagement the district already has with families of ELs and what programs or initiatives are already in place. The resources below can provide educators with a better understanding of how to identify, adapt, and implement assessment strategies according to the demographics and backgrounds of their families and students.

Strategy 1: [Dialogue Journals](#)

Primary audience: educators

Description: An interactive formative assessment technique where students and teachers engage in an ongoing written exchange. For example, students may start by writing about their thoughts on a recent lesson or their experiences outside of school, and teachers respond with questions, comments, or encouragement. This communication fosters a personal connection, allowing students to express themselves freely while receiving guidance and feedback from their teachers. Through dialogue journals, students have the opportunity to share their ideas, interests, and beliefs, promoting self-confidence and language development in a supportive environment (Shaaban, 2001). Teachers can utilize these journals to gain insights into students' perspectives, attitudes, and motivation towards learning, thus enhancing their understanding of individual student needs (Brown, 1998).

How to use it? Suggested steps:

1. Initiate the Journal: Introduce dialogue journals to students, explaining their purpose and how they will be used as a formative assessment tool.
2. Establish Guidelines: Set clear expectations for journal entries regarding frequency, length, and content, while encouraging students to express themselves freely and respectfully.
3. Provide Prompts: Offer thought-provoking prompts or questions to guide students' reflections and encourage meaningful dialogue.
4. Regular Feedback: Respond promptly and thoughtfully to students' journal entries, providing constructive feedback, encouragement, and guidance.
5. Reflect and Adjust: Periodically review the journal entries to identify trends, challenges, and areas for improvement in teaching and learning. Use this feedback to adapt instructional strategies and support students' individual needs effectively.

**How is it beneficial? Who benefits from it?**

Through ongoing written exchanges, students have the opportunity to express themselves freely, share their thoughts, experiences, and interests, and receive personalized feedback and guidance. This process not only strengthens the educator-student relationship but also cultivates a sense of trust and mutual respect within the classroom, fostering student-centered learning.

How does it support changes in school systems?

Implementing dialogue journals supports systemic changes by prioritizing student voice and fostering inclusivity. Insights gathered from journals can inform curriculum development and even school policy decisions to better meet the needs of English learners (De la Luz Reyes, 1991).

Known or potential cautions? What not to do?

Approach the implementation of dialogue journals thoughtfully, avoiding rigidity and overwhelming students with excessive prompts or feedback. Ensure confidentiality and sensitivity when addressing personal or sensitive topics, prioritizing student well-being throughout the process.

Strategy 2: [Student Self-Assessment](#)

Primary audience: educators

Description: Self-assessment is a formative assessment strategy that empowers young learners to reflect on their learning and express their feelings about their progress. While there is limited empirical research on the use of self-assessment strategies among preschool and elementary school children, studies suggest that children aged 8 to 12 years old can develop the ability to self-assess their performance, especially in classroom tasks (Butler & Lee, 2010). Self-assessment activities such as K-W-L charts and learning logs provide opportunities for students to activate their background knowledge, track their learning progress, and engage in reflective practices (McNamara & Deane, 1995).

How to use it: Follow these steps for implementation:

1. **Introduce the Activity:** Explain the concept of self-assessment to students, emphasizing its purpose in helping them reflect on their learning progress and identify areas for improvement.
2. **Model Self-Assessment:** Demonstrate how to use self-assessment tools such as K-W-L charts and learning logs, providing examples and guidance on how to record thoughts, questions, and reflections.
3. **Provide Opportunities for Practice:** Encourage students to engage in self-assessment activities regularly, integrating them into lessons and assignments. Allow time for students to reflect on their learning independently or in pairs/groups.
4. **Facilitate Feedback and Discussion:** Create opportunities for students to share their self-assessment reflections with peers and receive feedback from teachers. Encourage open dialogue and constructive discussions about areas of strength and areas for growth.

How is it beneficial? Who benefits from it?

Self-assessment benefits young learners by promoting metacognitive skills, self-awareness, and ownership of learning. By reflecting on their progress and identifying strengths and weaknesses, students become active participants in their learning journey (Goto Butler & Lee, 2010).

Self-assessment activities such as K-W-L charts and learning logs empower students to monitor their



learning, clarify misconceptions, and set goals for improvement. While all students benefit from self-assessment, it is particularly valuable for children aged 8 to 12 years old as they develop their ability to reflect on their performance and take ownership of their learning.

How does it support changes in the systems?

Goto-Butler and Lee (2010) contend that implementing self-assessment practices supports systemic changes by fostering a culture of student-centered learning and promoting metacognitive development. By incorporating self-assessment activities into curriculum and instructional practices, educators can empower students to become self-directed learners who take responsibility for their learning progress. Additionally, self-assessment data can inform instructional decisions and curriculum development, leading to more personalized and effective learning experiences for students.

Known or potential cautions? What not to do?

Avoid over-reliance on self-assessment as the sole means of evaluation, as young learners may require guidance and support in developing self-assessment skills. Additionally, ensure that self-assessment activities are age-appropriate and accessible to all students, considering diverse learning needs and preferences.

Implementation Considerations

An important aspect of implementing formative assessment strategies, activities, and approaches is the importance of educators being mindful of the type of questions they include in the different activities or assignments. Vogler (2008) suggests avoiding yes-no questions which are often used to prompt student participation or quickly assess understanding. However, relying solely on these questions limits educators' ability to accurately gauge English learners' (and non-ELs) academic language development. Such questions, similar to fill-in-the-bubble responses, don't encourage students to apply or synthesize knowledge. To overcome this challenge, when teachers need to check understanding with "yes-no" questions, they can use a silent walkthrough approach, allowing students to write their answers instead of verbalizing them. Encouraging students to explain why they chose yes or no and discussing in pairs before sharing with the class can promote elaboration and justification of answers, enhancing questioning strategies to support English learners' language development and academic engagement.

As we embark on creating a plan and proceeding with implementation, it is useful to consider topic-specific aspects as well as general factors and guiding questions that can increase the likelihood for successful implementation.

Local Context

- How does the local context influence the implementation of inclusive formative assessment strategies and activities, considering factors like transportation, time constraints, family involvement, and the sociopolitical environment of the community?
- To what extent is the implementation plan sensitive to the unique local challenges and opportunities in promoting equitable formative assessment practices?



- What measures are in place to ensure the sustainability of the plan over time within schools and across the district?
- How consistent is the implementation of the plan—both within individual schools and across the entire district?
- To access more information and support, we recommend checking the Oregon Department of Education [Office of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment](#).

Consider as well:

- Geographical Factors: How do the location and size of the district/school impact the practical aspects of plan implementation?
- Learning Mode: What considerations are needed based on the learning mode (in person/remote/hybrid/other) prevalent in the local context?
- Duration: How long is the plan designed to last, and what measures are in place for its continuous effectiveness?
- Reliability: Is the implementation plan reliable and realistic given the local context, and what factors contribute to its sustainability?

Implementation Plan and Process

The following questions can further enhance clarity and provide practical guidance for educators and school leaders as they navigate the implementation process and monitor progress effectively:

- **What is our capacity for implementation?**

Consider the readiness of your team to adopt and sustain formative assessment practices that support ELs' language development and academic growth. Reflect on available resources, professional development opportunities, and existing frameworks to guide implementation effectively (Theall & Franklin, 2010). Assess the knowledge and skills of educators in designing and implementing formative assessments that are responsive to the linguistic and cultural needs of ELs (Nortvedt (2020). Provide ongoing support and training to build educators and school leaders' capacity for effectively assessing ELs' progress and providing targeted feedback. Also, consider the Oregon Department of Education [formative assessment professional learning resource](#).

- **How are families involved in the implementation of the plan?**

Provide [resources and support to empower families](#) to reinforce learning at home and advocate for their children's needs within the school community. Encourage educators to establish regular communication with families, including sharing information about formative assessment strategies, student progress, and opportunities for involvement in their child's learning journey. By involving families as active participants in the implementation of formative assessment practices, educators and school leaders can strengthen the home-school partnership and support ELs' academic success. Additionally, fostering consistent educator-family communication that is culturally responsive, as emphasized by Knight et al. (2022), creates opportunities for timely interventions and support.

- **How will we know if the implementation is successful?**

Develop clear benchmarks and assessment measures to monitor the effectiveness of formative assessment implementation. Utilize [data-driven approaches](#) to track student progress, language



development, and academic achievement over time. Regularly review and adjust implementation strategies based on evidence of student learning and feedback from stakeholders. Collaborate with colleagues to analyze assessment data, identify areas for improvement, and share promising practices for supporting ELs' language development and academic growth. By systematically monitoring the implementation of formative assessment practices, educators can ensure continuous improvement and optimize support for ELs' learning needs.

- **What resources do we need to implement the program, plan, or strategies?**

Identify and allocate resources necessary to support the implementation of formative assessment practices for ELs. This includes professional development opportunities for educators, instructional materials tailored to diverse language needs, and technology tools to facilitate assessment and feedback processes. Ensure equitable access to resources for all students, regardless of language background or proficiency level. Collaborate with stakeholders, including school administrators, district leaders, and community partners, to secure funding and support for formative assessment initiatives. Understanding these financial implications is crucial for effective resource allocation and program sustainability. While funding may not always be readily available within school budgets, educators and school leaders can explore external funding opportunities. For instance, Oregon's Department of Education offers [grants and funding opportunities](#), and organizations like [the Spencer Foundation](#) may provide additional financial support. Additionally, fostering financial stewardship and involving [District Equity Committees](#) in the budgeting process can help prioritize resources based on student and community needs. Consider reviewing the Oregon Department of Education's [Guideline](#) to spending funds responsibly.

- **Are accessibility supports in place?**

Ensure that formative assessments are accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of English Learners. Provide language supports, accommodations, and scaffolds to remove barriers to participation and understanding. Incorporate [culturally relevant materials](#) and instructional approaches to promote inclusive learning environments that honor students' linguistic and cultural assets. Collaborate with colleagues to identify and implement effective strategies for supporting ELs' language development and academic achievement. Monitor the effectiveness of accessibility supports and adjust as needed.

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Learn More

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