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Common Formative Assessment: A Toolkit for Professional Learning Communities

By Kim Bailey and Chris Jakicic

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Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Common Formative Assessment: A Toolkit for Professional Learning Communities at Work™* by Kim Bailey and Chris Jakicic. *Common Formative Assessment* describes how to create and incorporate common formative assessments into the practices of a professional learning community to monitor and enhance student learning. Educators who design, use, and respond to common formative assessments become more knowledgeable about their standards, more literate on assessment, and more able to develop strategies that help all students learn.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or entire teams to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to implement formative assessment practices into the culture of a PLC.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

Chapter 1

Getting Started as a Collaborative Team

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1. What are the big ideas of a professional learning community?

2. What are the seven foundational structures and processes to creating and implementing common formative assessments? Which of these has your PLC achieved?

3. What is the Plan, Do, Study, Act model? Why is it important to establish a clear picture of the collaborative process?

4. What are the seven steps to building consensus? What power does the consensus process bring to collaborative teams?

5. What are some strategies for running organized and efficient team meetings? Which of these will you try with your team?

6. What three steps do the authors suggest you take to get started in working as a collaborative team? How will these help your team function more effectively?

Chapter 2

Setting the Stage for Common Formative Assessments

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1. What four critical questions guide the work of teams in PLCs?

2. What is the difference between formative and summative assessments?

3. How does the Common Core State Standards Initiative use the term *standard*? How did states define *standard* before this?

4. Why is the concept of *unwrapping* one of the key strategies teams can use to write formative assessments to guide their instruction?

5. How do the authors define *common assessment*? What are the benefits of common assessment?

6. What does a balanced assessment system look like? What are the pieces of a balanced assessment system? Why do schools need each type of assessment?

7. Why shouldn't formative assessments be graded? What are some common formative assessments you use in your class?

8. What are some of the tools you and/or your school use to gather and collect data?

Chapter 3

Power Standards—The Essential Outcomes

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1. What is the number-one factor successful schools have in place according to Marzano (2003)?

2. What do the authors mean when they say that teachers can interpret standards in different ways? Has this ever happened in your experience?

3. What would you tell a new teacher teaching the grade or course before yours who is interested in the most important things students should know before advancing to the next grade? What is *essential learning*?

4. What are power standards according to Reeves (2002)? What are the power standards for your school? What are the three criteria to determine whether or not a standard is a power standard?

5. What is a standard? What does *standard* mean to you? How is it interpreted in your state?

6. Review Larry Ainsworth's (2004) process for identifying power standards that account for both individual interpretation as well as building a collaborative understanding. Complete figure 3.1. What power standards did you identify?

7. How well do your power standards align with what will be on your state test? How do they align with the Common Core State Standards? Are your power standards vertically aligned? How can you assure this?

8. What is the *accordion process* as Ainsworth (2004) describes? Why is this important?

Chapter 4

The Unwrapping Process—Achieving Collective Clarity on Learning Targets

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1. What is the *unwrapping* process? Why is it sometimes called the *unpacking* or *deconstructing* process?

2. What are the two distinct elements of all standards? How are these defined within cognitive psychology? How are your standards structured?

3. What are the five steps of the unwrapping process? Which of these steps do you think your school will find most difficult? The easiest?

4. What two guiding questions can teams ask themselves to ensure they've completed the unwrapping process?

Chapter 5

Designing Quality Common Formative Assessments

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1. What do the terms *valid* and *reliable* mean for common assessments? Why is it important to design quality assessments that *don't* require statistical analysis after they are administered?

2. What are the steps to designing quality common formative assessments?

3. What questions will help you decide what assessments to assess? How would you answer them?

4. What are the three categories of assessment strategies? What are the pros and cons of each? Which of these do you prefer to use? What is the fourth type of assessment? How can you be sure to use the right type of assessment with your students?

5. What should your team consider when developing an assessment plan? Review tables 5.1 and 5.2, and draft an assessment plan for your course or grade.

6. What frequency of writing and administering assessments should you use to ensure both the precision of the information you gather and efficient responses from students?

7. What guidelines do the authors give for writing assessments? Which type of assessment should be used with specific learning targets?

8. Why is it important to review the assessment closely prior to giving it to students?

9. What are the two types of rubrics to determine proficiency?

Chapter 6

The Big Picture—Pacing Guides and Unit Design

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1. What is a *pacing guide*? How will a pacing guide help to ensure high levels of learning for all students?

2. What is the first step of developing a pacing guide? Draft a graphic organizer using figs. 6.1–6.3. Why is it important to plan for intervention? How do you plan for intervention in the school day?

3. How can *backward planning* be essential in developing quality instruction? What are the steps of Wiggins and McTighe's (1992) backward planning process?

4. What are the 21st century skills students should master to succeed in work and life?

Chapter 7
Now What? Using Data to Make a Difference
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1. What is the primary goal of common formative assessments? What are the five steps the authors describe to use data to make a difference?

2. What initial steps should you take to develop a better response plan to analyzing the data? What questions will help your team effectively uncover a plan to respond to the data? How would you answer them?

3. Why is it important to review the assessments? What are some aspects to consider while reviewing them?

4. What are some specific ways schools and teams have reworked their schedules to find time to respond? How has your school responded? Has your school used any of these strategies?

5. Why are Tiers 2 and 3 responses important? How have you addressed students who haven't mastered an important learning target after initial instruction?

6. Consider the Best Hopes/Worst Fears activity (Wellman & Lipton, 2004). How can this be used to establish a trusting environment?

Chapter 8

Getting the Most Bang for Your Assessment Buck—Involving Students

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1. Why is it critical for students to play a key role in the assessment process? Review Popham's (2008b) hierarchy of assessment implementation. How does this align with your classroom and/or school?

2. How can teachers achieve a shift in student focus from grades to a true focus on learning? Why is this shift important?

3. What practices do the authors suggest for teams to become partners with students and make the most of the assessment process?

4. Why is it important for students to know what they will be learning and why? What are some strategies for achieving this? What are some steps you have taken to communicate clear learning targets to students?

5. What are two key strategies for engaging students in the examination of quality work?

6. What is *effective feedback*? What are some guidelines to ensure feedback is effective?

7. Why is it essential to structure student engagement with assessments in a stair-step or scaffolded way? What is the I do/We do/ You do approach? Do you use this with students?

8. What can you accomplish by bringing students into the assessment process?

Chapter 9

Sustaining the Work

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1. What two patterns of teams developing and using common formative assessments have emerged across the United States? What questions must teams answer to continue their patterns of success with common formative assessments?

2. Why are common formative assessments important? Why is it important to remain focused on this aspect?

3. What are some benefits of using common formative assessments? What impact have they made in your class or school from an instructional standpoint?

4. Why is support necessary in the assessment process? What support has your school provided? Why must time for collaboration be built into the contractual school day? Why must there be time to respond to the assessments you administer?

5. Why is it important for all members of the team to have a role in guiding the work of the team? What role do you have in your team? What are some of the other roles of your team?

6. What do the authors mean by *immediate* and *systemic* learning? Why is it essential to address each? How have you supported each?

7. Why is celebration important? What critical questions can you use to identify your successes with common formative assessment? How would you answer them? What successes have you had?