



CAASPP in Action

Sharing Practices
in Implementing
the CAASPP System
to Improve Teaching
and Learning



California Assessment of
Student Performance and Progress

Implementing Formative Assessment Practices
Alhambra Unified School District



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School District



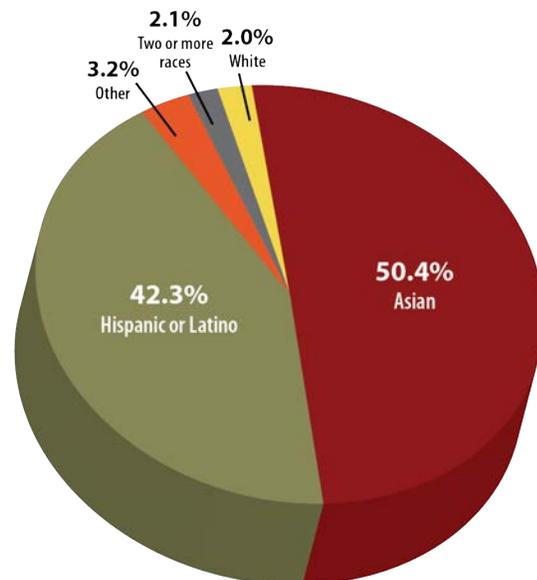
Mission Statement

The mission of the Alhambra Unified School District is to ensure the educational success of all students by having a comprehensive educational program where students can learn and become productive members of a diverse society.

DISTRICT PROFILE

GRADES SERVED	K-12
SCHOOLS	17
TEACHERS	628
ENROLLMENT	17,617
ENGLISH LEARNERS	28%
LOW INCOME	68%
SPECIAL EDUCATION	8%

ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS



GOAL

Help teachers better understand formative assessment and implement effective formative assessment practices districtwide. As the Director (retired) of Accountability and Assessment, Grace Love, stated, “There is not a consistent understanding out there about the term *formative assessment* and what it means. Some think it’s a test, or test results, or a quiz, or a ticket out the door. We need to make sure we are all on the same page about what it looks and sounds like in a classroom, and we want to do this so that it’s really helping teachers to see it as a part of effective professional practice.”

Formative assessment is “at the heart of instruction—the heart of improving teaching and learning.”

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

The Alhambra Unified School District team consisted of six district-level instructional specialists: one K-8 English-language arts (ELA), one high school ELA, one K-8 mathematics, one high school mathematics, one English Language Development (ELD), and one data and assessment along with the Director of Accountability and Assessment, and the other directors in Education Services. The district also used its site instructional specialists who provided additional site-level support for teachers.

Text and images provided by Alhambra Unified School District

APPROACH

To start, the instructional specialists felt they needed to have a thorough understanding of formative assessment before leading the teachers. They built their expertise in formative assessment by doing the following:

- Two of the instructional specialists participated in an intensive on-line course, Formative Assessment Insights, provided through a partnership between WestEd and the California Department of Education (CDE) and a grant from the Hewlett Foundation. The course was facilitated by Margaret Heritage, one of the nation's foremost authorities on formative assessment. The Instructional Specialists felt the course was valuable, and are using the content in their work with teachers.
- The K-8 math instructional specialist attended two days of the CDE's hand-scoring training, based on Smarter Balanced Assessment performance tasks. The knowledge gained from the hand-scoring training resulted in the team's decision to create two performance tasks to be used before and after each Unit of Study.
- A few instructional specialists engaged with the Smarter Balanced formative assessment literacy and training modules housed in the Digital Library and explored ELA and mathematics content and grade level specific resources.

All of this research into effective formative assessment practices is being used to embed new learning into the district's Units of Study work, to model the use of formative assessment practice with teachers, and to build capacity with district administrators.

Embed Formative Assessment into Units of Study Work

Teachers (especially K-8) have actively implemented the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for the past four years. Teachers engage in professional learning initiatives such as Units of Study, Lesson Study, Cognitive Coaching, educational technology, Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), and Dual Immersion professional learning. "We started on this journey not knowing exactly what we were going to do. We had Understanding by Design training, Depth of Knowledge (DOK) training, and formative assessment training. They were isolated trainings, and we struggled amongst ourselves to find a way to coherently implement these in our district." The team made a decision to embed the use of formative assessment practices into existing professional learning activities and instructional planning to reduce the perception of teachers being asked to do "one more thing." The team selected the district's Units of Study process as the best way to support teachers learning more about the practice of formative assessment, and to leverage work started in the summer of 2014 to implement Units of Study in all K-8 schools.

One instructional specialist reported, "Before I took the course [Formative Assessment Insights], I did not think of formative assessment as a process—as a mindset—and I think this is a very common misperception." Correcting that misperception is front and center in the team's work.

APPROACH, continued

The district team decided to begin the work on a small scale before rolling it out across all schools. Classroom teachers were asked to volunteer for either an ELA or mathematics cadre. Both cadres received training in the Understanding by Design and backward design model before engaging in the work of developing Units of Study that include formative assessment activities and performance tasks. Both cadres developed their units using a Unit of Study template adapted from the work of Sue Beers, an educational consultant who has conducted professional development for the district. The mathematics cadre used grade-specific Math Guides developed by the K-8 math instructional specialist to support designing units using the backward design process. The guides are stored on a shared Google Drive and contain a wealth of resources (some from the Smarter Balanced Digital Library) that are hyperlinked for easy access and use by the district’s teachers.

Supported by instructional specialists, each teacher used the backward design process to develop units that include formative assessment practices. The backward design process took teachers through unpacking the standards using the ELA/ELD and mathematics frameworks; defining big ideas, learning goals, building blocks, transfer goals, success criteria; and identifying performance tasks and activities—at the appropriate DOK level—designed to elicit evidence of student learning before, during, and after each lesson.

A tool from the Formative Assessment Insights Course, the Formative Assessment Lesson Planning Template, was used to support the development of the units, and is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Lesson Planning Template from the Formative Assessment Insights Online Course



Formative Assessment Lesson Planning Template

Activity 5.8

Name : _____ Grade : _____ Year : _____

Academic Content Standard(s)

Building Block

Learning Goal(s)	Success Criteria

Misconceptions students are likely to have as they work on the lesson Learning Goals

Strategies to share or co-construct Success Criteria with students

Classroom strategies to elicit evidence

Collecting Evidence Start of Lesson	Collecting Evidence Middle of Lesson	Collecting Evidence End of Lesson

Key discussion questions I will ask during instruction

Discussion Questions Start of Lesson	Discussion Questions Middle of Lesson	Discussion Questions End of Lesson

Strategies to provide descriptive feedback to students

Classroom strategies for student peer and self-assessment

Peer and Self-Assessment Start of Lesson	Peer and Self-Assessment Middle of Lesson	Peer and Self-Assessment End of Lesson

APPROACH, continued

Model the Use of Effective Formative Assessment Practice

Using the knowledge gained from the Formative Assessment Insights course, the hand-scoring training, and the training modules in the Smarter Balanced Digital Library, the instructional specialists model effective formative assessment practice and the use of Smarter Balanced Digital Library resources as they work with teachers in grade-level teams or out at school sites. They establish learning goals and success criteria for the day, and structure time to elicit evidence of learning using performance tasks. As one of the instructional specialists said, “We immerse teachers in learning environments that mimic what we should have students doing, and ask teachers to link that learning to their work.” Grace Love added, “We are trying to help teachers see what formative assessment looks like. Really see it. When you have a student sitting in front of you, what does that look like?”

“We are trying to help teachers see what formative assessment really looks like. Really see it.

When you have a student sitting in front of you, what does that look like?”

GRACE LOVE
DIRECTOR (RETIRED), ACCOUNTABILITY & ASSESSMENT
ALHAMBRA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The team has begun to model the use of formative assessment practices with special populations: English learners, special education, and Gifted and Talented Education (GATE). “For example: we have worked with teachers over the past years to understand integrated and designated ELD. In the spirit of that we have gone into classrooms to demonstrate what a lesson sequence looks like based on ELD standards. Each lesson has a learning goal and success criteria, and we use that to develop activities for students to elicit evidence of their learning.”

Build Administrators’ Capacity to Support Formative Assessment Practice

All members of the District Cabinet perform regular site visits to all of the schools throughout the year. To ensure that administrators can recognize evidence of formative assessment practices in the classroom, the team is working to ensure common language and expectations using the assessment literacy modules from the Smarter Balanced Digital Library and content from the Formative Assessment Insights course.



LESSONS LEARNED

- **Get activities on the district and school calendars early.** Calendars are already so full with activities and training for teachers. It is important to plan as far in advance as possible so activities, trainings, and workshops can get time on the professional development calendar.
- **Embed the new learning into ongoing work.** To avoid the perception of teachers being asked to do one more thing, the district successfully embedded information about formative assessment practices into existing work on Units of Study. This way the formative assessment practices were viewed as connected with other work, and the district team was successful at integrating this priority into an already packed professional development calendar.

NEXT STEPS

There is a growing understanding of what formative assessment and summative assessment are, and we are beginning to see a shift in mindset. In the past, the focus was on “what I’m going to teach.” Now many teachers are really thinking about what the students are learning, and beginning to think about the evidence of what students are learning.

Over the next year, the district plans to

- use and refine the existing Units of Study developed by the cadres;
- continue the Units of Study process with new all K-8 teachers during district professional development;
- continue to explore the Smarter Balanced Digital Library for relevant resources to support the Units of Study;
- use and refine the Formative Assessment Lesson Template;
- continue building capacity of district administrators to observe formative assessment in classrooms;
- continue modeling effective formative assessment practices during professional learning;
- focus formative assessment efforts on special populations such as English learners, students with disabilities, and students in GATE programs;
- set up Google Drive folders and establish a blog to highlight successes and allow teachers to learn from each other.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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CDE CAASPP Web page
www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca

CAASPP Portal
www.caaspp.org

