

Findings from the Field: Key Steps to Implementing a K-3 Formative Assessment Process

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Introduction

This resource provides recommendations and considerations about how to implement a formative assessment process in states. The information in this resource was compiled from reports based on teacher and administrator surveys during a pilot and field test of an enhanced K-3 Formative Assessment Process.¹ Recommendations cover how to prepare for implementation, how to engage stakeholders, and how to support professional development. This resource is best utilized by state administrators interested in implementing a K-3 Formative Assessment Process in their own state.

Recommendations for Implementation of K-3 Formative Assessment

Preparing for Implementation

- **Determine who will drive the implementation process.** Identifying and establishing who is responsible for different parts of the implementation process ensures that implementation progresses successfully, and decisions can be made efficiently. One person can be responsible for training and responding to teachers' questions, whereas another can oversee that technology is operating smoothly across the state. These roles and responsibilities should be clearly documented (e.g., within a Terms of Reference or implementation plan).
- **Leverage existing funding streams to support the sustained use of the assessment.** Because the assessment process requires time and can be facilitated with the use of materials (e.g., iPad), there may be ways to leverage existing funding streams to support the administration of the assessment. Additionally, states may seek additional funding from private foundations that are invested in child development.



The K-3 Formative Assessment Consortium is a multi-state consortium formed by North Carolina to enhance a K-3 Formative Assessment and implement it in consortium states. The enhanced K-3 Formative Assessment is a formative assessment process that considers the whole child on five developmental domains. Information from the K-3 Formative Assessment process provides information for educators to improve instruction.

For more information on the Consortium and its efforts, visit: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/enhanced-assessment/>

¹ For more information, please see the Consortium's [administrator-](#) and [teacher-](#)specific findings from the pilot as well as findings from the [field test](#). Pilot test included participants in Arizona, Iowa, and Rhode Island. Field test included participants in Arizona, Iowa, Maine, and Rhode Island.

- **Provide information on the alignment of the K-3 Formative Assessment to existing curriculum and assessments.** States may want to build in time and resources at the beginning of such an initiative to align the assessment with current curricula, standards, or assessments. In the pilot, teachers cited that the lack of alignment between the assessment and curriculum or other assessments often posed a challenge for using the assessment. State administrators may want to consider how to communicate the extent of alignment between the assessment and other requirements. Additionally, information on alignment may increase buy-in for school-level administrators who are interested in how the assessment may impact teaching across grades.
- **Utilize existing building-level infrastructure to support educators.** Building-level resources like pre-existing meetings and professional development venues can be valuable in supporting educators' use of the assessment. District-level meetings and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) seemed to be the most helpful ways administrators and teachers, respectively, discussed the K-3 Formative Assessment process.
- **Consider a slower or tiered roll-out.** State leads can encourage stronger buy-in and more stable support when they are intentional about how they roll out the K-3 Formative Assessment across the state. Rolling out the assessment over time offers districts and schools the time they need to build the necessary support systems for successful and sustained implementation. Different roll-out options include:
 - starting with schools that are already interested in the assessment;
 - starting with teachers who have requested a formative assessment²; and
 - identifying districts that have been successful implementing new assessments in the past.
- **Understand that effective and successful implementation takes time.** The more familiar school personnel are with the K-3 Formative Assessment, the easier it is for them to use the assessment as intended. As state leads plan for implementation, it is important to remember that it may take multiple years for states to reach a place where teachers are using the assessment with ease across the state.

Engaging Stakeholders

- **Adapt messaging for specific audiences.** Stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, families, and policymakers) may vary in their understanding of formative assessment and in their openness to new assessments. Therefore, messaging about the K-3 Formative Assessment should be adapted to each audience to make sure the messaging meets stakeholders where they are. State leads may want to consider which methods have proven to be successful in disseminating relevant information in the past.
- **Gather feedback from stakeholders.** State leads should identify how they can also solicit feedback from stakeholders to understand what is working and what may be challenging. It is also important to communicate frequently and transparently about how challenges are being addressed so stakeholders know that their concerns are heard.
- **Focus on building administrator buy-in.** In both the field test and pilot, teachers often cited the lack of administrative support as a challenge to implementing the formative assessment process with fidelity. To ensure administrators understand the vision and expectations of the K-3 Formative Assessment process and their role in supporting use of the assessment, state leads may want to focus on engaging administrators from the beginning of implementation. Providing administrator-specific training and resources can build awareness and buy-in, which can lead to greater administrator support to teachers.

² Teachers who were able to collaborate with other teachers in their school or district were more successful at using the assessment, so it may be beneficial to consider how to engage at least two teachers within a school or district at the same time.

- **Involve administrators at all levels of the school system.** Administrators at the school-, district-, and state-level are critical to ensuring a successful roll-out and sustained implementation of the K-3 Formative Assessment. Teachers in the pilot and field test readily identified their principals as a valuable source of support but were not as familiar with district-level support. However, district-level leadership are often the primary decision-makers about what assessments are being used in schools. As state leads progress in the implementation process, they should consider strategies for how administrators at all levels of the school system support teachers.
- **Integrate all school personnel into the formative assessment process.** Many participants in the field test and pilot thought that having other school staff (e.g., counselors or physical education teachers) in addition to teachers trained on the assessment process eased the initial burden of using the assessment. The more individuals who can support the assessment process or provide observations, the more useful the process may be to the teacher and the school overall.
- **Find ways to reduce the burden of using the assessment, when possible.** States can consider creative ways to reduce the burden associated with using the assessment. Teachers identified competing priorities with other required assessments and unaligned curricula as a barrier to being able to effectively integrate the K-3 Formative Assessment Process into their normal classroom routines. Strategies may include reducing the number of other assessments used in the classroom, aligning the constructs with curricula, or offering teachers additional staff support or release time from non-essential tasks (i.e., recess duty) to complete assessment activities, such as data entry.

Training and Professional Development Considerations

- **Build capacity to provide high-quality training and professional development.** States can benefit from building their capacity to provide high-quality training and professional development to educators around formative assessment. This involves hiring, training, and monitoring the quality of those providing professional development to teachers and school administrators who will, in turn, use the K-3 Formative Assessment.
- **Provide resources to schools about observing children with individual differences.** Because a common challenge to using the assessment is observing a full classroom of children who may be at different developmental levels or with varying needs, training or resources could be focused on helping both administrators and teachers understand how to use the K-3 Formative Assessment with all students. Additionally, teachers and administrators suggested including trainings on how the constructs may apply differently to children with special needs and English language learners.
- **Modify trainings based on teacher feedback:** Teachers are intimately involved in the assessment process every day, so they are the most informed on how the process, materials, and constructs can be improved. In the field test, teachers noted a desire for more hands-on experiences and hearing from other, more experienced teachers. State leads should continue to gather information from teachers about how to improve professional development around the K-3 Formative Assessment process so that teachers can successfully use the tool. For more information about how to plan professional development around the K-3 Formative Assessment, see [Professional Development Planning for the K-3 Formative Assessment: A Comprehensive Guide](#).



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