

How do educational leaders implement formative assessment to improve student learning?

**Diane Christensen
Elise Nowak
Mark Prinster
Lisa Rinke**

Diane Christensen is a teacher at L.A. Matheson Secondary in Surrey. Elise Nowak is a teacher at Semiahmoo Secondary in Surrey. Mark Prinster is a teacher at Terry Fox Secondary in Coquitlam. Lisa Rinke is a teacher at Maillard Middle School in Coquitlam.

christensen_d@sd36.bc.ca

rehnby_e@sd36.bc.ca

MPrinster@sd43.bc.ca

LRinke@sd43.bc.ca

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Electronic copies of a short article on the study and of the complete graduate paper are available from any of the authors.

Abstract

In today's educational climate there are increasing demands for accountability of student achievement. Current literature suggests that formative assessment, or assessment that promotes learning, is a viable means to do so. Also clear is that knowledge of assessment literacy and collaboration between student, teacher, parent and school principal is essential to initiating change in the classroom. With formative assessment initiatives such as Reading Assessment District 36, Quick Comprehension Assessment and the Performance Standards being introduced to improve teaching and learning in leading school districts, it is important to critically examine what factors allow for successful implementation of such educational reform.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current literature and collect relevant local data about factors that contribute to or detract from the implementation of formative assessment, with emphasis on the role the school principal plays in the process. Fourteen interviews of elementary and secondary school principals were conducted in the Coquitlam and Surrey school districts. In addition, a survey was conducted of forty educators in Coquitlam and Surrey at both the elementary and secondary levels known to the researchers as having been involved in the implementation of formative assessment in their schools. Finally, anecdotal data were gleaned from published case studies from the *Network of Performance Based Schools*. This paper reports the results of a study conducted to determine how educational leaders implement formative assessment in order to improve student learning

Conclusions and recommendations are: 1) formative assessment, which includes but is much broader than summative assessment, appears to effect a positive change in teacher practice and student learning. Consequently, we suggest educators and educational leaders be trained in the advantages and limitations of differing assessment and evaluation tools; 2) teachers' acknowledgement that formative assessment improves their practice so we suggest that all educators are able to use a common language in order to better facilitate the discussion surrounding improved teacher and student learning; 3) the perception that the principal's ability to know and understand the culture of their school is critical in beginning any implementation process and consequently, we recommend that leaders also build a common assessment language and then be able to ask key questions of their staffs that form the foundation that is required to built capacity for lifelong learning; and 4) the assertion that time, or lack thereof, is the one resource that can most impact the successful implementation of formative assessment and therefore we suggest that schools develop a common collaboration or planning time directly within a timetable in order to best facilitate this critical educational reform.