



What's all the buzz about formative assessment?

When most people hear the word assessment in reference to schools and classrooms, they typically think about a test or exam used to measure what a student knows about specific topic. That test is often followed with a grade and/or ranking.

In classrooms throughout the Snohomish School District, teachers are using another means of gathering real-time information about student learning in order to guide instruction. This is called **formative assessment**. For example, rather than waiting until the end of a chapter or unit, formative assessment techniques are used by the teacher and students to get immediate feedback of student understanding. This is used on a regular basis, so that instruction and activities can be quickly changed to meet the learning needs of students long before the final test, exam or assessment. Formative assessment gives teachers immediate feedback from students about learning. Teachers, in turn, respond to meet the immediate needs of students.

There are a number of techniques our teachers may be using to use to help them assess student learning. For example:

- **“No hands-up”** - Instead of asking for volunteers to answer questions, teachers randomly call students in the class (some use popsicle sticks or a random student name generator on their computer) to answer questions. Typically, when students raise their hands, only those who know the answer do so. Students who do not know the answer may feel embarrassed or intimidated, causing them to tune out. “No hands up” helps each student engage in his/her learning and helps students learn from each other.
- **Mini whiteboards** – Some teachers may have students write their answers on mini whiteboards. These are powerful tools that allow teachers to ask questions and get answers from the entire class at a quick glance. In some classes, teachers use low-cost whiteboards such as letter-sized white card stock inside clear page protectors. When teaching math, the paper can be replaced with graph paper. Or when teaching geography, the paper could be replaced with maps.
- **ABCD cards** – Each student has a number of cards. On each card is a single letter (some may be ABCD while others could include TF for true/false questions). During discussion, students display the cards indicating their views of the answer. In some cases, multiple cards could be used to support the possibility of multiple correct answers. Students who change their minds during discussion are encouraged to change the letters they are displaying. Based on student responses, teachers may also use the cards to help organize smaller group discussions.
- **Exit pass/ticket** – At the end of a day or when there is a break in instruction, the teacher may ask students to answer a question or respond in a way that will show whether students understood the learning concept. The teacher can look at the answers of the class individually or as a whole to adjust the instruction.

Throughout this school year we will continue to share how we are using formative assessment in our schools and classrooms. If you have any immediate questions or concerns, we encourage you to discuss them with your child's teacher or principal.

