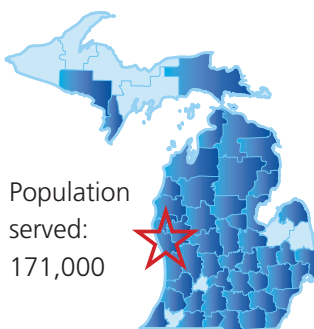




The Muskegon Story: Building Trust, Raising Expectations

Muskegon Intermediate School District (MAISD)



When an entire county works together to learn and apply formative assessment practices, the FAME model of professional learning can be shared with more educators. The ongoing support they receive leads to early success that generates excitement and increases the probability of continued practice of the FAME professional learning model and sustained formative assessment practices.

Today’s headlines are filled with stories about how our schools may not be meeting the needs of students. The lack of a quality education often leads to limited employment opportunities or no employment at all. In some instances, students who graduate are not prepared for the real world as adults. While it is easy to place blame on educators or “the system,” in reality, there is enough blame to go around for everyone.

While there is some truth in these headlines, there are other stories that often go untold. These are the stories of educators who spend countless hours trying to improve their practice — educators who work with each and every student, challenging them to do their best.

One place where this story is unfolding is Muskegon County, Michigan. This county, with a population of over 171,000, is located on the eastern shores of Lake Michigan. While the economic picture has changed, the people of Muskegon have always viewed their schools as a valuable asset to their community.

The Muskegon Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) is a regional education service agency providing administrative and instructional support to public schools in Muskegon County and parts of surrounding counties. One of the MAISD’s Instructional Services Department’s special initiatives is participation in Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) across the county (see *About FAME* on page 6).

Coach background

The MAISD began their formative assessment journey in the fall of 2009. During the following year, Barb Gowell, then MAISD Director of Instructional Services, led her department in an action research project around formative assessment. Among the articles studied by the group was “Inside the Black Box,” written in 1998 by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam to provide their meta-analysis of research on formative assessment. This article was key to providing information that helped the authors to understand that formative assessment is not a “thing,”



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but rather a process that teachers and students engaged in together. The Muskegon educators also discovered and explored all aspects of the FAME project. Barb and her team were very impressed with the professional development model of using Coaches and Learning Teams to learn about the formative assessment process and its practice, and to encourage professional growth. She believed this needed to be shared with educators in Muskegon County.

District approach

A key step for the MAISD Instructional Services Department during that year was to share findings and develop a common understanding of formative assessment with the county curriculum specialists. The role and unique relationship with classroom teachers these specialists had could be used to introduce the formative assessment process via Coaches and Learning Teams. The curriculum specialists were very impressed with FAME, for they saw it as “good teaching practice” and a way to support professional growth. Schools in Muskegon County began participating in FAME in Fall 2010 with 11 learning teams, representing all but one district in the county.

From the beginning, the MAISD goal was for every teacher to be a practitioner of the formative assessment process; however, they understood that financial restraints would prevent all from being on a Fame Learning Team. The Muskegon educators also understood that mandating participation on a Learning Team would not produce the desired results. Instead, enthusiastic

teachers having success with formative assessment would undoubtedly cause the practice to spread in their buildings and districts. This implementation model still dominates in Muskegon County, and FAME remains a regular agenda item at curriculum specialists’ meetings.

“Our original purpose was to implement a vision for assessment literacy and skillful use of the formative assessment process in every classroom in Muskegon County. It is important to note that five years later, classroom implementation of FAME exists in nearly every school in the county and is a consequence of the strong partnership we enjoy with our local districts and The Michigan Department of Education. Furthermore, we have had to revise our Coaches Training Series because new coaches now come to us with a much better foundational understanding of formative assessment”

— **Dave Krebs, current Director of Instructional Services for MAISD.**

Most of the new schools or districts in Michigan involved in FAME start in a similar manner. Someone hears about the program from a presentation at a conference, reads a publication about the program, or talks to an individual already involved in FAME. This information is shared with others, and a group of educators’ desire to become involved in FAME and are willing to form a Learning Team (see FAME Professional Learning Model on page xx).

Muskegon took a different approach to support Coaches and Learning Teams in its county-wide initiative. The MAISD created a FAME Leadership Team that includes Dave Krebs, current Director of Instructional Services; David Klemm, Social Studies & Special Projects Consultant; and Alecia Hoppa, Area Leader, MI Excel Statewide Field Team on loan from MAISD and MDE FAME Regional Lead. This Leadership Team begins with helping

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Coaches and Learning Teams navigate through the application and registration process. The district FAME Leadership Team assists in the recruitment of new Coaches and gets Teams registered for the launch. The district FAME Leadership Team provides an initial orientation to the program and makes connections with administrators providing structure and support to their work.

While typically Coaches and Learning Teams attend a MDE-sponsored FAME Launching into Learning, in the MAISD model, first-year Coaches attend a three-day, district sponsored, Coaches training provided by MAISD FAME Leadership Team. During the second and third year of operation, Coaches are able to participate in the additional MDE-sponsored trainings. MAISD also provides ongoing support to Coaches and Learning Teams via e-mail and phone checks, face-to-face check in, attendance at Learning Team meetings, and goal-setting conversations.

“Our program is unique. By specifically providing Coaches training for new Coaches, we help to shepherd leadership during that crucial first year. That new-Coaches group develops a community feel during the year, and everyone is more than willing to share their success and biggest barriers, leading to growth for everyone. We provide expertise when we can, but it’s the coaches themselves who talk through most of their issues. We just get to guide the discussion. It’s fun to watch”

— David Klemm

Progress status

One of the goals of FAME has been to provide a program supporting scalability and sustainability. The State’s resources are finite, so the assistance provided by districts, schools, and other resources are very important. Muskegon has provided a model that allows FAME to be shared with more educators and ongoing support that increases the probability of its continued practice.

Figure 1: Growth of FAME in Muskegon

Year	New Coaches/ Returning Coaches
2010-2011	13 (new coaches)
2011-2012	20/11
2012-2013	19/23
2013-2014	24/28
2014-2015	12/41
2015-2016	12/34
2016-2017	7/22
2017-2018	1/21

The numbers presented in Figure 1 indicate the strong commitment made by the MAISD and the positive reception by educators in the district. This district reflects the statewide commitment to both sustain and expand the program to educators throughout Michigan.

Administrative support

One of the most important factors that has contributed to the success of FAME in Muskegon is the commitment of key people. Administrators and support personnel (district and school) have seen the potential of this program and its impact. There may not be complete familiarity with the formative assessment process, but they do understand the need to “stay the course.” In 2011, the MAISD Superintendents Association, composed of all county superintendents, added formative assessment language to the following goal:

“In a focused effort to create a sense of urgency for improving student achievement, educators within the MAISD will use student achievement data analysis and formative assessment to change instructional practice to improve student learning.”

MDE realizes the formative assessment process is one that takes time to become effective in a school. Educators need to become comfortable with this working model of professional development, and both educators and students

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need time to fully comprehend the impact of the formative assessment process. It is recommended Teams make an initial commitment of three years.

How it works

As noted, this professional development process uses a Coach and Learning Team model. One of the major issues to address is the role of the Coach, since this individual is not to be viewed as the expert in the formative assessment process. While they may or may not have more experience or access to more information about formative assessment, the Coach is a member of the Team. Their primary role, especially in the beginning, is to plan and facilitate the Learning Team meetings. Many educators are not used to being in this type of leadership arrangement. Once it is accepted, and trust has been established, the model works quite well. In many instances, much of the work of planning and running of Team meetings is handled by Team members. The coach, with additional training, becomes more effective in working with individual Team Members and their work in the classroom.

As one Muskegon educator reflected, “At first, I thought the Learning Team was way too detailed and overly analytic. However, the whole focus of the team is to improve the craft of teaching. You focus more on getting students to learn rather than on getting students to simply perform a task. Being on a committee like this makes me examine what I really want in my classroom, both from my students and from myself. The concept of learning together is very appealing to many educators.”

Another teacher said, “The Learning Team allows you to hear and see others’ ideas, share your own, learn from each other’s success and mistakes. This allows growth to all involved in the process.” A culture of trust can be created which encourages the flow of information and ideas.

Impact to date

The changes brought about by the practice of formative assessment in instruction, practice, and student expectations are dramatic. The impact

of formative assessment practice is evident in all schools, but the depth of the practice varies from school to school. It seems that the more committed the faculty and staff are to formative assessment as a process, the greater the impact. In many instances, the culture of the school has been changed—educators and students have higher expectations.

Educators are making an investment of their time and energy to learn more about the formative assessment practice. Classroom teachers are using it in their classrooms to such a degree that it becomes part of the normal, everyday routine. Students are taking ownership for their learning and experiencing more and more success.

“FAME is a staff-led opportunity that allows our professionals a safe space to examine assumptions about student learning and develop a clearer picture of learning before a unit assessment. It has allowed us to explore our learning goals/targets and success criteria, and communicate those in a way that helps students understand their learning and take ownership for it.”

—Simeon Frang, Reeths-Puffer Middle School Principal.

Obviously, the most important winners in FAME are the students. As explained by one classroom teacher, “When I use the formative assessment process, students have more ownership of their learning. It eliminates the passivity in the classroom when students have to reflect upon how and why they learn. Students must examine what they know and how they are learning. It also gives them opportunities to seek help.”

When asked what educators should think about if they are considering participating in FAME, the MAISD FAME Leadership Team responded, “They should learn, explore, and think about what is involved. Do your homework!”

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Future plans

As Muskegon moves forward, Coaches are becoming more and more prepared and buildings are adding more and more Teams. Discussion is taking place about where these additions will take place and how they will be supported. Through this model, the educators involved in FAME have made the formative assessment process an important and integral part contributing to teacher improvement and student learning.

In 2016, the district welcomed Annlyn McKenzie (Curriculum Consultant at the MAISD Career Tech Center) as FAME Area Lead. Many returning coaches are in districts looking to make FAME part of their district-wide structures. Much of the ISD's support now is district-specific and contextualized. Leads meet with and support all coaches in specific districts rather than county-wide. Where numbers are declining, districts have turned FAME principles into a part of their regular PLC structure; so while they did not continue in the program, they are still supporting formative assessment practices.

This FAME case study references project activities and school/district staffing from 2009 through 2015.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How might the school districts in other ISDs/RESAs work together to promote the wider use of the formative assessment process by classroom teachers?
- What types of support from the ISD/RESA is needed to promote such collaborative practices within the ISD/RESA?
- How might the staffs of ISDs/RESAs work together to provide the needed support to local educators to learn about and learn to use the formative assessment process with their students?

RELATED LINKS

"Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment," by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. Phi Delta Kappan Vol. 80 (2) pp.139-148 October 1998.

Available at <http://formative-assessment.com/?p=111>

"Necessary Conditions for Successful Implementation of Formative Assessment," by Margaret Heritage, Nancy Gerzon and Marie Mancuso. Prepared for the Dell Foundation Formative Assessment Project.

Available at <http://www.gettingsmart.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Necessary-Conditions-for-successful-implementation-of-Formative-Assessment-June-18-DRAFT.pdf>

About FAME Case Studies

The FAME Research and Development Team members **Denny Chandler**, **Tara Kintz**, and **John Lane**, led by **Ed Roeber**, connects FAME participants to best practice and a growing set of formative assessment resources. They gather detailed information on FAME approaches with the potential to be replicated in districts across

Michigan. The FAME Project will share these stories through online resources, publications and media platforms. **To inquire about how your FAME Learning Team can be featured in a future case study, contact dtchandler@fuse.net.**

Editor: Linda Wacyk, Communications Management – Michigan Assessment Consortium; lwacyk@michiganassessmentconsortium.org

About FAME

[Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators \(FAME\)](#) is a joint effort by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Michigan Assessment Consortium. FAME is designed to reach all Michigan teachers and administrators with training in formative assessment. When applied to classroom instructional practice, the formative assessment process can become a vital part of improving teacher practice and positively impacting student achievement. In fact, the formative assessment process used by students and teachers in an effective and intentional manner connects to [Michigan's Top 10 in 10 Strategic Goals and Strategies](#) (Goals 2, 3, and 4).

“Formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become more self-directed learners.” (CCSSO SCASS, 2017)

FAME began in 2008 in order to address MDE’s goal to provide different approaches to reach high school students who were low achievers. MDE partnered with Measured Progress to develop and implement the FAME program. According to Kim Young, who directs FAME for MDE, *“The formative assessment process is an essential part of a comprehensive assessment system. By financially supporting and endorsing FAME, the Michigan Department of Education is sending a strong message of the importance of formative assessment.”*

Today, this initiative continues as a collaborative endeavor of the MDE and the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC). The mission of MAC is to improve student learning and achievement through a system of coherent curriculum, balanced assessment, and effective instruction. MAC’s role in FAME is to coordinate trainings, maintain an extensive online library of resources, and conduct research on professional development using the Coach and Learning Team model and its impact on teacher practice and student achievement.

By 2018, more than 800 FAME Coaches from across Michigan had been trained to lead FAME Learning Teams. At present, approximately 250 active Coaches and Learning Teams are working throughout Michigan.

Kimberly Young, Michigan Department of Education Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability, has served as the FAME manager since 2006. Contact her at youngk1@michigan.gov.

“Working collaboratively, educators will learn, implement, and reflect on the formative assessment process in order to guide student learning and teachers’ instructional practices.”

FAME Project Goal

FAME professional learning model

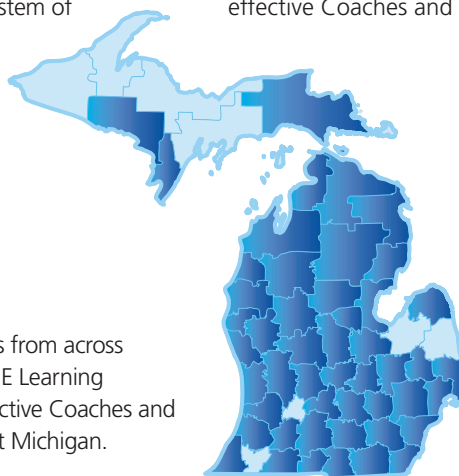
New FAME teams start in a similar manner. An individual learns about the FAME program from a conference presentation, a publication, or current FAME participant, and then shares it with others. A group of educators decides to become involved in FAME. One person agrees to take on the additional responsibilities of being a Coach, and then submits an application to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to form a new Learning Team. The number of new Learning Teams each year is influenced by available state and local finances and applicant location (MDE seeks to have active Learning Teams located throughout the state).

Once accepted, new Learning Teams are ready to start FAME training. Coaches complete their initial training via webinar and other learning sessions. In the fall, the Coach and Learning Team members participate in a session of *Formative Assessment: Launching into Learning*. This one-day training session provides information about the FAME program, the formative assessment process, and the Learning Team model. Teams complete the Launch prepared to begin their work.

Over time, Coaches have the opportunity to receive additional MDE-sponsored training — Cognitive Coaching Foundation Seminar® (Days 1-8) and Adaptive Schools Foundation Training® (Days 1-4). These trainings are critical in the development of effective Coaches and successful Learning Teams.

An additional layer of support is provided to each new and returning Coach through Regional Leads — former FAME Coaches who provide support for a group of Coaches. The Leads serve as a nearby resource person and valuable asset to Coaches, who learn — along with their Learning Teams — that they do not exist in isolation. Leads also schedule meetings with Coaches to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas.

Learn more at www.famemichigan.org.



Shaded areas illustrate the influence of FAME Teams and Coaches throughout Michigan.