



The Springport FAME Learning Team— Support for Teachers, Growth for Students

Springport High School
Enrollment: 300

Springport Public Schools
Enrollment: 927

springportschools.net



The purpose of a FAME Learning Team is to provide educators with the opportunity, setting, and resources to learn about the formative assessment process. When applied to classroom practice, the formative assessment process can become a vital part of improving teacher practice and positively impacting student learning. FAME Learning Team members at Springport (MI) High School say their time together has become a crucial factor in their own professional growth. Their FAME Learning Team is a place where they can share and learn from their colleagues, and it serves as the catalyst to take their learning into their classroom practice with the focus on helping students achieve.

One of the most identifiable images for education is the one-room schoolhouse, where one teacher provides instruction to all students in all content areas. My, how things have changed! Today, schools often comprise multiple buildings in a campus setting with large faculties. But the image of the one-room schoolhouse is not completely dead. In many of our schools, the day begins with the teacher welcoming their students to the classroom, closing the door, and starting lessons. Often, this teacher works in isolation, only seeing other colleagues between classes, during lunch, and after school.

A group of educators in Springport, Michigan decided to symbolically open their doors, meet with colleagues, share their experiences, and think about ways in which they can be more effective with their instruction and encourage their students to

perform at a higher level. These teachers form a FAME Learning Team at Springport High School.

Springport background

The village of Springport is located 30 miles southwest of Lansing in Jackson County. The county population is over 158,000, with the village of Springport being home to 800 residents. Jackson County is primarily rural, but encompasses a number of small towns with a mixture of agricultural and industrial activities. A large number of Springport residents have lived there most of their lives, and many attended the public schools.

Springport Public Schools consists of one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school and supports an enrollment of 927 students. It employs 135 faculty members across the three schools.



The Springport FAME Learning Team—Support for Teachers, Growth for Students

The challenge facing educators in Springport is similar to that of other educators in Michigan and the United States, especially in rural school districts, where resources can be limited—“How do we provide a solid education to our students and prepare them for their career choices?”

Coach background

Educators are always looking for ways in which to challenge their faculty to improve and be more effective. There are a number of programs and initiatives in which they may invest. Springport selected FAME (Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators)—a statewide initiative to encourage and support teachers in the use of the formative assessment process in their classrooms.

As is so often the case, the introduction of FAME was initiated by one individual, who in this instance was Tanya Newland. Newland is one of two principals for Springport High School and Middle School. She has been in this position for 19 years and in education for 27 years. In 2012, she attended an educational program at a nearby school district, where she heard about FAME for the first time. As she listened to the information being shared, there were some ideas she found very compelling and appropriate for her faculty.

Newland liked the idea of teachers learning together in teams. In Springport, the faculty was already used to working in professional learning teams (PLTs). This is very similar to professional learning communities (PLCs) and

FAME Learning Teams. In the FAME Learning Team model, a Coach facilitates the Team while learning with them at the same time. Another idea she found attractive was the Learning Team working together on a common focus—the learning and implementation of the formative assessment process. She was somewhat familiar with formative assessment, but now it was being presented in a way that could be adopted by Springport.

“FAME is one initiative which provides a structure for classroom teachers to work together as a team to learn about the formative assessment process. At the same time, it allows the teacher to focus on a goal which is specifically designed for them as an individual.”

— Tanya Newland, SHS principal

District approach:

Formative assess—mints!

Newland’s next step was to approach someone she knew would be receptive to this approach to improvement—Heidi Rhodes. As Ms. Rhodes recalls, “I was very interested in the formative assessment process and the way in which it was being introduced to teachers as a Learning Team. Ms. Newland also shared something she received from the session—a box of mints called “Formative Assess-mints.” Ms. Rhodes thought this was a clever way to draw attention to the formative assessment process.

A visual arts teacher for eleven years, Ms. Rhodes has always known the value of a teaching approach that includes strategies very similar to those presented as the formative assessment process. A number of disciplines—visual arts, music, and physical education, for example—have included the use of learning in stages, providing feedback, and allowing the students to use the feedback to improve their work. These strategies are at the heart of the formative assessment process.

CONTACTS



Tanya Newland
Springport High School
Principal
tanya.newland@springportschools.net



Heidi Rhodes
Springport Public Schools
Visual arts teacher
FAME Instructional Coach
heidi.rhodes@springportschools.net

The Springport FAME Learning Team—Support for Teachers, Growth for Students

In moving forward, Ms. Newland and Ms. Rhodes decided to share this information with others at Springport. The interest led to teachers volunteering to participate and forming Springport's first FAME Learning Team. The Coach and Learning Team members attended the Launch into Learning, which is the initial FAME professional learning experience. After the Launch, they started to meet on a regular basis to learn about the formative assessment process.

As the Learning Team members became more familiar and comfortable with the material and each other, they brought it to their classrooms and their students. In meetings, Learning Team members shared their experiences and encouraged feedback from each other. The overarching goals were to improve their instruction and practice, and to engage students as collaborative partners in their own learning.

Admittedly, it is challenging work. It requires taking a deep look at one's existing practice and actually assessing how effective this approach has been. It also means making changes and constantly revisiting instruction to determine the impact on students. It doesn't happen overnight, but by staying the course, they started to see the dividends in their own professional growth and student understanding.

How it works

FAME Learning Teams are created in a variety of ways. Often, they are representative of a specific discipline/s or grade/s such as a mathematics and science high school team or an English and social studies middle school team. Team composition may also be based on proximity, such as an elementary school team or a middle school team. In the case of Springport High School, the decision was made to extend a welcome to high school teachers across all disciplines. The result has been a team that spans the curriculum and represents different content areas and teaching experiences.

“My teaching has been positively impacted by learning and using the formative assessment process. The community we have created has been the saving grace of my career.”

— Jason Howell, FAME Team Member and classroom teacher, Springport, MI

Over the years, there have been changes in the original team, as some teachers have moved to other schools. As vacancies occur, new volunteers take their place. Today, the members of the Springport FAME Learning Teams represent diverse content and over 32 years of educational experience. In 2019-2020, Learning Team members included Sara Marie Holderbaum (agriscience teacher; first year on a FAME team), Becky Schwartz (English/social studies/ and computer science teacher; 4 years on a FAME team), Lisa Lupini (special education teacher; first year on a FAME team), Kelsey Mecham (math/social studies teacher; 3 years on a FAME team), Kate Mooney (special education teacher; 4 years on a FAME team), Christy Sener Townsend (English teacher; 3 years on a FAME team), Jason Howell (mathematics teacher; 2 years on a FAME team), and Derek Seidl (mathematics teacher; first year on a FAME team). Rhodes has a student teacher who also attended FAME meetings.



Springport High School FAME Learning Team members (L-R): Grace Comstock, Sara Marie Holderbaum, Becky Schwartz, Lisa Lupini, Kelsey Mecham, Kate Mooney, Christy Sener Townsend, Jason Howell, Heidi Rhodes.

The Springport FAME Learning Team—Support for Teachers, Growth for Students

Progress status

When they talk about their experiences as a FAME Learning Team, members emphasize how it is such a supportive environment. Jason Howell and Christy Sener Townsend had doubts about their career choice. Their decision to be part of a Learning Team has had a remarkable impact on their commitment to be teachers.

“My teaching has been positively impacted by learning and using the formative assessment process. The community we have created has been the saving grace of my career,” says Jason Howell, math teacher.

English teacher Christy Sener Townsend agrees. “In many ways, I felt unprepared for teaching, she says. “FAME has provided me with direction and established goals to help me in developing my teaching.”

Becky Schwartz was introduced to the FAME program during her job interview at the district. She learned more and was invited to join during a back-to-school meeting. She accepted, prompted by her attraction to people who are passionate about their work. She knew formative assessment was at the foundation of good teaching as it focuses on every part of the teaching process. She also knew that, too often, teachers think they are doing formative assessment, but they still focus too much time on summative assessment. She knows differently.

One of the appealing factors of this experience, which has been shared by many of the Learning Team members, is the ability

to implement the learning right away. Special education teacher Kate Mooney says she immediately saw the value in it and was able to walk away from the first meeting with strategies she could use in her class. Teaching is challenging, and it is especially true for a new teacher.

Mathematics teacher Derek Seidel said, “Formative assessment is something we talked about in our college classes, but you are not necessarily ready to use it. It is nice to have a monthly meeting where I’m constantly reminded about the importance of the formative assessment process.”

Impact to date

It is important to have a safe environment for teachers to share and learn from each other. The same is true for their students. The atmosphere of the Learning Team meetings is very similar to what educators want to establish in the classroom. Teachers want their students to be involved, invested, and engaged in their own learning. This can be a difficult task, but Sener Townsend has seen the impact of using the formative assessment process.

“One year, I moved from an 11th grade English class to a 12th grade English class with the same students. The first year did not go well at all for me or for my students. I took the summer and restructured the curriculum and incorporated an intentional use of the formative assessment process. The key was their buy-in, but it worked. They became responsible for their own work and were obligated to learn.”

Mooney has seen the benefit in a manner not initially anticipated. By using the formative assessment process, she has been able to identify individual student needs and provide feedback along the way. Students don’t feel as lost or become disinterested. They feel more successful and are more committed to their learning.

Becky Schwartz agrees. “If you are doing formative assessment well, you are doing the little things to get to the big things,” Schwartz says. “It allows me to see the work my students are doing and identify what needs to be done next.”

“Formative assessment is something we talked about in our college classes, but you are not necessarily ready to use it. It is nice to have a monthly meeting where I’m constantly reminded about the importance of the formative assessment process.”

— *Derek Seidl, FAME Team Member and classroom teacher, Springport, MI*

The Springport FAME Learning Team—Support for Teachers, Growth for Students

Present status

Heidi Rhodes continues to coach the high school FAME Learning Team, but now she also serves as Instructional Coach. To assist in working with her Team and facilitating Team meetings, Rhodes took advantage of the additional trainings provided for Coaches by Michigan Department of Education (MDE). The Thinking Collaborative™ program helps Coaches to be better facilitators of their Team meetings and to provide a one-on-one approach to help each individual.

She uses the resources posted on the FAME website to gather ideas and materials to plan Learning Team meetings. Most of the resources on the website were developed based on the needs of FAME participants. The formative assessment training and resources and the FAME model of professional learning allow Rhodes to work with her colleagues in a positive, instructive, and supportive environment. The classroom doors, which were previously closed, are now symbolically being opened as teachers share their experiences with each other.

Rhodes' enthusiasm for learning, her commitment to improvement, and her desire to help her students exceed are all enhanced through her participation in FAME. This approach and attitude are contagious, and over the years she has shared this with others in Springport. During the hiring process, new teachers at Springport are told about FAME and encouraged to be part of a Learning Team. In the beginning-of-year meeting for staff, Heidi always talks about the value of FAME and the impact on instruction and learning.

The FAME Learning Teams at the high school and middle school continue to meet on a regular basis. They continue to delve deeper into their understanding of the formative assessment process. They share information with others and encourage them to become involved. Some take advantage of the invitation and observe the Learning Team meetings. It is hoped this will lead to the creation of more Learning Teams.

“When applied to classroom practice, the formative assessment process can become a vital part of improving teacher practice and positively impacting student learning.”

In her role as Instructional Coach, Rhodes is better equipped to assist Learning Teams. She works one-on-one with Learning Team members, visits their classrooms, and observes what is taking place. She's able to talk about the behavior she observes in teachers and students. The goal is to always look at how the teacher could be more effective.

Future plans

The plans are very straightforward—continue to support existing Learning Teams and encourage the expansion of them to the elementary school. Newland wants FAME to be a district-wide initiative for all teachers in Springport. Her desire is based on what she has seen from teachers and students. Teachers involved in the program continue to show a strong level of commitment and enthusiasm to the work. They are genuinely excited about what they are learning and how it impacts their students.

She also says she sees a change in students. One of the most apparent changes in students is their understanding of what is expected of them. They know their learning goals as a class and as individual students. Through the formative assessment process, they also know how they can achieve those goals.

FAME has changed the school culture. It has provided teachers an environment where they are encouraged to learn, challenge themselves, and honestly look at their work. They know there is much to do, and it doesn't happen overnight. When students are able to see what is expected and how they can reach their learning goals, they find success at school and become more prepared for life after graduation.

The Springport FAME Learning Team—Support for Teachers, Growth for Students

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How might an individual or small group of educators introduce the use of the formative assessment process by classroom teachers?
- How might an individual or small group of educators support the use of the formative assessment process by classroom teachers?
- How might faculties of school(s) work together to provide the needed support to learn about and to use formative assessment practices with their students?

RELATED LINKS

“Accentuate the Formative: Michigan teachers use rubrics and video to improve their practice,” by Theron Blakeslee, Denny Chandler, Edward Roeber, and Tara Kintz. *The Learning Professional*, October 2017 Vol. 38 No. 5 (Learning Forward).

Available at: <http://famemichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Reflecting-on-Practice-Oct-2017-Learning-Forward.pdf>

“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://famemichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Necessary-Conditions-for-Successful-Implementation-of-Formative-Assessment-Final-1.pdf>

About FAME Case Studies

The FAME Research and Development Team members **Denny Chandler**, **Tara Kintz**, and **John Lane**, led by **Ed Roeber**, connect 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

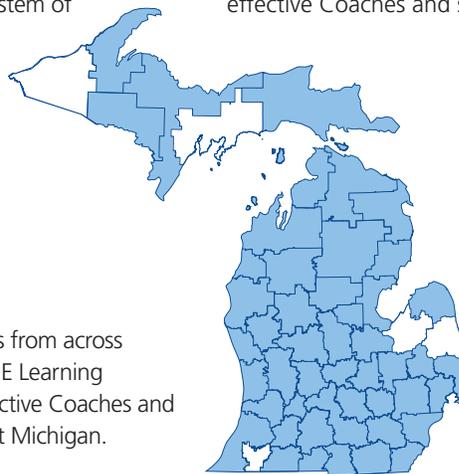
New FAME teams start in a similar manner. An individual learns about the FAME program from a conference presentation, a publication, or current FAME participant, and then shares it with others. A group of educators decides to become involved in FAME. One person agrees to take on the additional responsibilities 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.