Focus on FAME

Virtual FAME Learning Team meetings—not the enemy, just a different way to meet!

At the heart of every Formative Assessment for Michigan Educator (FAME) initiative is the FAME Coach and Learning Team. This is the **formative assessment process "headquarters"**—the place where educators can learn new ideas, discuss what this will look and sound like in a classroom, share their experiences from their classrooms, and support each other's commitment to continue learning. For most of us, this means in-person meetings, where educators gather during school, after school, or in the evenings. It is a time for learning, and it is a time for socializing.

Events during the COVID 19 health crisis, however, have forced many teams to make adjustments. As a Coach shared in a recent survey, *"I have had a very hard time keeping my team together and meeting. All of our meetings have to be after school and that has been very hard when everyone is busy. Would like a "refresher" on ways to still have these meetings in our new pandemic environment."*

Some FAME Coaches and Learning Teams have moved their learning to a virtual setting. Fortunately, this

has been common practice for some FAME participants, and we can learn from them. Some work at an online-only school, and this is just the way they work—with students and colleagues. Other teams use virtual meetings because of difficulties in scheduling in-person meetings due to logistics or weather. Whatever the reason, virtual meetings can be viewed as another option, another way to continue the important work of educating Michigan students.

First steps, first clicks

For many of us, the idea of talking to a monitor and a visual image of a team member is not particularly appealing. We like the idea of

interacting with them in-person. However, this is not always possible, so get over it! Meeting with colleagues can still be a valuable learning experience, whether you are in the same room or not.

We have all attended in-person meetings that were not necessarily productive. Chances are we have also participated in virtual meetings that left us wanting. It is not whether we meet together in-person or remotely that makes a meeting beneficial. It is how we conduct ourselves in a planned agenda of learning and sharing. A virtual team meeting is not necessarily bad or a substitute; it is just another way of learning—period.

Paramount in starting is selecting an online meeting platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting, Zoom) and acquiring the proper equipment (e.g., webcam, microphone/headset, proper lighting). There are many software providers, and the most important consideration is choosing one you and your team will be comfortable using. If your school or district has an IT department, take advantage of their expertise. If not, ask your kids!

Unless your team includes techies, the selection needs to either fit the existing skill sets or provide tutoring for improved skills. You want to be able to navigate cleanly between images of participants and materials. There may be a technical glitch or two, since these happen, just as we have experienced disruptions in our in-person meetings. We just need to remain calm and adapt.

> **QUICK SUGGESTION**
> Try a test run before your first live meeting.

Re-visit meeting norms

Effective team meetings and classrooms, for that matter, often include the development and use of agreed-upon norms. These are the ways in which the business of the meeting or classroom will take place. It is a decision to have an environment that is conducive to learning, is inclusive, and safe.

Most of the norms that apply to in-person meetings apply to the virtual ones as well, but there might need to be some adjustments. **Wait-time** is important in meetings to give people sufficient time to process information and collect their thoughts. It is a skill that can be difficult to master and can be even more of a challenge in the virtual world. Wait-times may need to be extended to allow for the gap in technology and the loss of immediate reinforcement one often uses when meeting in-person. Proper wait-time provides the opportunity for all to be heard and to not interrupt others when they are speaking.

Another adjustment might be more frequent stops to **check for understanding**. This could be after an assignment has been given or at different times during the meeting. It is important for everyone to have the chance to ask questions and to be clear about expectations and tasks. The "chat box" function makes checking for understanding quite easy to do—easier to do than in in-person meetings!

Planning virtually

Planning for a virtual Learning Team meeting is not much different from an in-person meeting, with some obvious exceptions. A Coach must make sure the agenda and support materials (such as print and video resources) have been sent or easily accessible. As with an in-person meeting, some work, such as readying an article or viewing a classroom recording, might be done prior to the virtual meeting. The sample agendas in the *FAME Learning Guide – Coach Edition* are very useful. We suggest creating a PowerPoint or finding a template to use for your meetings. It could include the agenda, main points, activities, and areas for input.

> **QUICK SUGGESTION**
> Use a test run of your meeting software to review your norms and make appropriate adjustments or points of emphasis. Make sure to remind participants of the norms at the start of each virtual meeting.

It is important to provide time to process, share, and provide all with an opportunity to contribute. When appropriate, a FAME Coach can include the use of virtual elbow partners, breakout rooms for small group discussion, and using the chat box for reflections and then reviewing the entries from team members. Team members could record online classroom instruction and share snippets with their Learning Team members to show status, issues, and successes in online teaching. The options are many and the work is authentic.

Trappings of the virtual world

Many of us have now experienced working from home, and its advantages and disadvantages. There is certainly a greater comfort level, from working in the most relaxing clothes possible to being able to multi-task by doing laundry while

participating online. The advantages are not limited to clothing, as there can be greater flexibility with the time and length of the meeting.

Be sure to be fully "present" during the entire meeting. Commit to meeting and helping one another, and honor that commitment. Once there is an agreed-upon time, try to ensure you can participate without being distracted or interrupted. Use a setting that is conducive not only to your learning, but also to the rest of the team. Turn on your video so all of the team can see one another; turning it off might reduce some visual distraction, but it also contributes to the isolation that can be an issue when meeting virtually. Mute your sound while not speaking to reduce background noise. Use a timer to make sure you remain on task and finish on time. Record the virtual meeting for those unable to attend, if possible.

Return to normalcy or the new normal

Even without the events of the times, many of the questions about how to use technology in education and learning were already present. One does not need to look to the past to get an idea as to how much has already changed in our lives. We do not know what the future will bring, nor do we know what are our expectations and limitations will be. We are optimistic, for the near future, that we will be able to gather—six feet and closer.

No matter the future nature of schooling, it is still comforting to know we do have options—viable options. If we need to meet virtually, we know this can be accomplished in an effective, satisfying manner. The objectives remain the same. We want to be confident users of the formative assessment process in our classrooms and encourage and support our students.

Virtual FAME learning team meetings are just another viable method to accomplish the goal of transforming teaching and learning. These meetings are another way educators can support one another in improving their instructional effectiveness.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

FAME Virtual Meeting Template— This PowerPoint, provided by FAME Coaches from the Michigan Great Lakes Virtual Academy, may be used to plan virtual Learning Team meetings. It's available on the FAME website under Coaching Resources and at https://famemichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FAME-Meeting-Template.pptx.

What is Formative Assessment?

Formative assessment is a process that occurs during teaching and learning to improve student outcomes. The following definition of formative assessment from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is used by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) in the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) professional learning program.

"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 FAST, 2017)

What is FAME?

Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME) is a professional learning program in which teams of educators work on learning teams supported by coaches working collaboratively to learn about, implement, and reflect on the formative assessment process. The program involves educators in a multi-year commitment to promote significant change in professional practice, supported by internal and external resources. Since 2006, thousands of educators have participated in the FAME program to guide student learning and teachers' instructional practices across the state.

Resources to Learn More About Formative Assessment and FAME

• Heritage, M. (2007). Formative Assessment: What Do Teachers Need to Know and Do? Kappan, http://tinyurl.com/Heritage-Kappan

• Michigan Assessment Consortium. (2016). Learning Point: What constitutes a high-quality, comprehensive, balanced assessment system? Mason, MI: Author.

• Michigan Assessment Consortium. (2017). Learning Point: What do we mean by Formative Assessment? Mason, MI: Author.

• Popham, J. (2008). Formative Assessment: Seven Stepping Stones to Success. Principal Leadership 9(1).

• Swaffield, S. (2016). Multilevel Leadership for Assessment for Learning, and the Potential of Critical Friendship. Leadership in Diverse Learning Contexts.