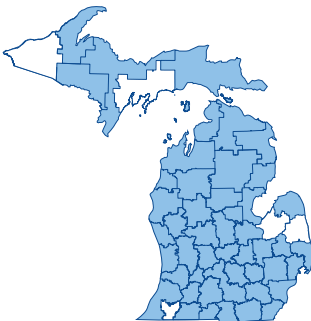




**Michigan Great Lakes
Virtual Academy**

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Michigan Great Lakes Virtual Academy: A Case Study in How Participation in FAME Cultivates Teacher Leadership

This case study looks at teacher leadership within the FAME Learning Team at the Michigan Great Lakes Virtual Academy (MGLVA). It describes how the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators — FAME — program helps to build the teacher leadership needed for the enactment of the formative assessment process, specifically, and for school improvement more broadly.

In the past few decades, the promise and potential of teacher leadership has captivated researchers, reformers, and school leaders. However, the concept of teacher leadership can be amorphous and, as a consequence, teacher leadership as an essential element of school reform has lost some of its power.

Without a more precise definition, it is difficult to explain how teacher leadership matters or how it can be promoted. With this challenge in mind, this case study — grounded in the experiences of the FAME Learning Team from Michigan Great Lakes Virtual Academy (MGLVA) — explains teacher leadership in greater clarity and describes how the FAME program helps to build the teacher leadership needed for the enactment of the formative assessment

process, specifically, and for school improvement more broadly.

Meet the MGLVA team

MGLVA has been active in the FAME program since 2017.



Lindsey Howe is the MGLVA Learning Team Coach, and has participated on the MGLVA FAME Learning Team since its start, transitioning over time in both her role on the Team and her position at MGLVA. She has served as the FAME Learning Team Coach since 2019 and since 2021 as a FAME Regional Lead. At MGLVA, Lindsey has transitioned from teaching English full time to working as an instructional coach.

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Jonathon Schreur has also been involved in FAME for some time, holding several roles within the FAME program over time. He has served as a FAME co-Coach and regular member of the MGLVA FAME Learning Team, and he has presented virtual professional learning opportunities focused on the role of technology in the formative assessment process. For MGLVA, Jonathan serves as a world history teacher.



Nicole Kantz works as an environmental and veterinary science teacher at MGLVA. She has been on the FAME Learning Team since 2018. During this time, Nicole has become increasingly active in the FAME program, both on her Learning Team and at their school more broadly. She was selected to participate with Lindsey, the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) Research & Development Team, and Michigan Department of Education (MDE) administrators in a presentation for the 2021 National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) classroom assessment conference.



Drew Cope, a world history teacher for MGLVA, has participated since 2019 on the FAME Learning Team. Drew has been an active and engaged member of the Team and has juggled these responsibilities with his other professional roles as teacher and graduate student.



Hilary Trojniak, mathematics department chair for MGLVA, has been a part of the MGLVA FAME Learning Team since 2018. She also joined a group of MGLVA teachers working hard to pilot standards-based grading in the high school.



Stefanie Tschirhart-Baldwin teaches special education at MGLVA and has been on the FAME Learning Team since 2018. Like Nicole, Stefanie has become increasingly active in the FAME program in ways that extend beyond her participation with her immediate Learning Team. Stefanie participated in presenting an Assessment Learning Network session in 2021 that focused on implementing technology to enact the formative assessment process with special education students in virtual settings.



Andrea Cannon is the newest member of the FAME Learning Team. The 2021–22 school year was Andrea's first on the Team. She currently serves as the Assistant Academic Administrator at MGLVA. Before entering administration, Andrea was a teacher at MGLVA.

What is teacher leadership?

Before considering how the FAME program helps cultivate teacher leadership at MGLVA, it is important to understand what teacher leadership means for those who experience it. After talking with the members of the MGLVA team, it is evident that teacher leadership is far more than just teachers being in elevated formal positions. Rather, teacher leadership starts informally and builds over time. In some cases, informal teacher leadership leads to formal opportunities as an instructional coach or academic administrator, but this is not always the case.

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manifest themselves into a teacher's actions and interactions. When asked about what comes to mind when they hear the term "teacher leadership," several terms emerged — collaboration, mentorship, respect, and trust being some of the most common. Most fundamentally, the teacher leader is someone other teachers can go to for help.

As Jonathon explained, "Teacher leaders are the people that you go to with questions and when struggling with something."

Jonathon's statement provokes the question of how teachers know which of their peers to approach when they face a challenging situation. Many qualities can draw a teacher to an informal teacher leader, but as Lindsey makes clear, being knowledgeable is one of a teacher leader's most important attributes.

"There is mutual respect, because you tend to not go to somebody that you don't respect or admire or feel like the information that they're going to provide is valuable," Lindsey said.

Teacher leaders are more than just those who provide help when their colleagues approach them. Rather, teacher leaders have a disposition to help in many ways, and opening up their classrooms for others to observe is one of the most important.

"I think our teacher leaders have such a great open-door policy," Jonathon explained. "I think just having the humility to have all of my practices be out there for everybody to see with the recognition that, of course, they're not perfect and I have plenty of things I can improve on, and same thing goes for our other teachers. But, I think teacher leaders in our school, especially, are

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— **Drew Cope**
world history teacher, MGLVA

people who have really fostered that culture and allowing for everyone else to just come and see what they're doing, just because it's the only way and the best way that we improve."

Jonathon's and Lindsey's statements illustrate the importance for teacher leaders to have some instructional expertise coupled with a willingness to help and a courage to make oneself vulnerable. However, there is even more to it than that.

As Drew explained, "I see teacher leaders as really lifting you up while still being your colleague....With teacher leaders, the dynamic can kind of get political and maybe you see it as more of a hierarchical structure instead of everyone's on the same plane. But it's more [that true teacher leaders] want to see you succeed and not just for their own ends, but for the betterment for the school."

This suggests that, in addition to the qualities of being helpful and knowledgeable, the teacher leader needs to maintain a sense of humility necessary to build collegial relations. Teacher leaders are also those committed to the greater good and they put the needs of the collective above their own personal ambitions.

The theme of collective commitment came up again and again when talking with MGLVA Learning Team members. Andrea summarizes the sentiment of many of the other Team members' comments:

"True teacher leaders don't do it just for a stipend or for a position. If someone is a true teacher leader, it's because they're so passionate about the school and our students and the success of our staff and our program. And they

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want everything to be just as successful as it possibly can be. So, anything that they get they share, and if they can help someone else be elevated and to grow stronger, it makes us all stronger. So, it's really self-less and it's about the greater good; and we have so many people at our school like that."

In sum, then, a teacher leader is a humble, gracious, helpful, knowledgeable, courageous colleague committed to the common good of the school. Importantly, at MGLVA teacher leaders often develop these qualities before they assume formal teacher leadership roles. The following section describes how participation in the FAME program plays a vital role in this development.

Participation in FAME and the development of teacher leadership

The FAME program is an important vehicle for building teacher leadership at MGLVA. First, FAME is a program in which teacher learning is situated in local contexts. This means that participating teachers are building their expertise through interaction with both their peers and with the FAME-provided resources and professional learning opportunities. In the FAME model, the Learning Team Coach learns alongside the Learning Team through discussion and experimentation rather than strictly presenting information and "training" Learning Team members. FAME also provides the opportunity to invest deeply in colleagues and learn from them. In other words, FAME cultivates the expertise, collaboration, confidence, helpfulness, and humility required for teacher leadership.

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— **Andrea Cannon**

MGLVA Assistant Academic Administrator

Looking within the specific case of the MGLVA FAME Learning Team clarifies how participation in FAME cultivates teacher leadership. Lindsey provides a prime example of how FAME can foster informal teacher leadership that ultimately results in more formal opportunities. Lindsey first began participating in FAME in 2017 when the Learning Team's former Coach approached her. Lindsey participated on the Team for a few years before the opportunity presented itself for her to Coach a FAME Learning Team of her own. She jumped at the chance, even though she was uncertain about whether she was knowledgeable enough for the task. The FAME program design that focuses on collective learning rather than superior Coach knowledge helped Lindsey get beyond this initial uncertainty.

She has led her MGLVA Learning Team since 2019, during which time she has continued to develop as a teacher leader who facilitates the learning of others while she also has learned about the formative assessment process more deeply. Her accumulated expertise has become more broadly recognized as well.

In 2021, Lindsey became a Regional Lead for the FAME program. In this position, she provides guidance to Coaches at MGLVA and elsewhere, while remaining a Coach of her Learning Team at MGLVA. She has also been afforded the opportunity to move into a formal teacher leadership role at MGLVA. Lindsey is now an instructional coach who works with teachers to elevate their collective instructional quality.

While Lindsey's experience provides the clearest example of how participation in FAME

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can cultivate informal teacher leadership that can lead to more formal opportunities, teacher leadership is emerging across the Team. Participating in FAME is an activity where all Team members can learn about formative assessment and, in the process, develop as instructional leaders who consult with others about instructional practices, open their practices to outsiders, develop expertise, and maintain a sense of humility in the work of teaching and learning.

For instance, Jonathon dabbled in formal teacher leadership while co-Coaching the FAME Learning Team for a year. FAME has also provided Jonathon a chance to lead professional development about technology use for instructional purposes. While Jonathon has taken a break from his Coaching role, he is still an active FAME Learning Team Member who continues to evolve as an informal teacher leader who is open to formal opportunities in the future.

Drew is also well on his way to becoming a teacher leader and, like the others, has found that participating in FAME has helped him on this journey. He began graduate school and FAME simultaneously, and he soon realized that the content of his graduate program coincided with what he was learning as a member of the FAME Team. Thus, he is developing the expertise and collective commitment that will position him for formal teacher leadership if he so chooses.

Stefanie and Nicole are also emerging teacher leaders who have honed their skills as members of the FAME Learning Team. They have each seized the opportunities that participating in FAME provides teachers who want to

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understand formative assessment more deeply through sustained interaction with their peers. Furthermore, each has offered to share her expertise by presenting at regional, state, and national conferences.

In total, the MGLVA Learning Team is filled with members who are committed to developing the skills and dispositions of instructional leadership. The members have also been participating on the FAME team for many years, and the fruits of these labors have become evident both within the Team itself, and more broadly to the school, region, state, and even the nation.

Conclusion

Teacher leadership consists of a complex and ambitious set of skills and dispositions including expertise, care and concern for others, helpfulness, humility, vulnerability, and confidence. Participating in the FAME program is an especially effective means of developing these skills and dispositions, as the case of the MGLVA Learning Team makes abundantly clear. It is also clear from the case study that teacher leadership is not something that teachers achieve once they have assumed a formal leadership position. Rather, teacher leadership evolves from the informal to the formal, and the FAME program is an ideal avenue for this journey.

About FAME Case Studies

The FAME Research and Development Team members **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 lanejoh3@msu.edu.**

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 several Guiding Principles in [Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan](#).

“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 2021, more than 900 FAME Coaches from across Michigan had been trained to lead FAME Learning Teams. In 2020-2021, 200 FAME Coaches were supporting teams of educators in a variety of learning modalities.

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

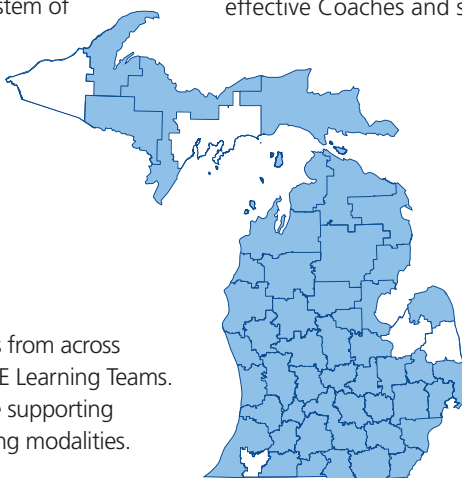
New FAME teams start in a similar manner. An individual learns about the FAME program from a conference presentation, a publication, or current FAME participant, and then shares it with others. A group of educators decides to become involved in FAME. One person agrees to take on the additional responsibilities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



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