

The Spartan Sentinel

...inspiring and equipping...

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Team,

Good morning and Happy Valentine's Day! Without getting too mushy, I hope that you all feel loved and appreciated this Valentine's Day. We make a great team here at Jefferson and I really do appreciate each of you.

A couple of weeks ago I shared this quote with you:

"When you have a strong formative assessment program, your summative assessments give you expected outcomes." --Kristen Beck

I've been spending a lot of time thinking about this quote and what it means for us here at Jefferson. We know that **effective teams maximize the tools they have to accomplish the goals they've set**. We've spent a lot of time talking about the goals we've set and the mission we're seeking to accomplish. We're blessed that at Jefferson we have a lot of tools to help us reach those goals and accomplish that mission. Probably the most effective tool that we have is **formative assessments**.

I wanted to spend some time going in depth with this discussion of formative assessments at our last staff meeting, but we just ran out of time. I'm sure it'll be a topic of conversation as we move forward.

One question that is important for us to think about in order to fully understand the value of formative assessments is, *"How do I get better at anything?"* I've always found that finding a "real life" example to relate this too makes it easier for me to understand (That works well with kids too!).

A couple of years ago, at the school I was working at, our nurse was hosting a staff weight-loss competition. The great thing about this challenge was there was money involved! Every week you had to weigh in and if you gained or maintained your weight, you had to put a dollar in, and if you had lost weight, you just put \$.50 in. Since there were about 20 staff

members who did it, the purse for winning was a pretty good chunk of change. I decided to try it. So the question was, “How do I get better at losing weight?”

When I started doing the competition, I usually just did my best to work out regularly and tried to eat better, but every Thursday morning when we weighed in, I just hoped things looked good. I really had no idea if I had lost weight or not. Some weeks, things went well, and others, well, let’s just say I had to pay a dollar!

Soon I figured out that I needed more information, so I started weighing myself every day at home. *I couldn’t believe how the increased frequency of feedback helped me!* Instead of waiting a week to find out if what I had been doing was working, I was able to figure things out every day. I knew which workouts were paying off, and which ones may have actually been making me gain muscle weight. The frequent, formative feedback helped me to better plan and make decisions that ultimately resulted in more lost weight.

I ended up coming in 3rd place, which meant I was out of the money! Fortunately, I was much healthier and I learned a valuable lesson about formative assessment. You see, those weekly weigh-ins felt Summative. They were just a declaration about my current weight. I couldn’t do much about it at that point. They were like our statewide tests. By the time we take them, it’s too late to do something about it. I needed more frequent, formative feedback in order to be able to make the changes I needed to in order to gain the outcome I desired. After I started giving myself more feedback; weighing myself every day, I could pretty much predict exactly what would happen on my weigh in days. Just like the quote above, I had strong formative assessment, so the summative assessment just told me what I already knew.

I remember years as a teacher just hoping and praying that my students’ ISTEP scores looked good. I really had no idea how they would do and I felt factors like their home life, their mood on test day, etc. were the biggest issues going in to testing. I didn’t have a strong formative assessment system. I knew I had done some good things, but I didn’t know if they worked. More importantly, because I didn’t know if they worked, I didn’t know if my students had mastered the objectives, and sadly, I couldn’t do anything if they had not. We can’t operate that way anymore. It’s wrong. We have a moral imperative to do better than that. ***Formative assessment is something we must be good at because it’s what’s right for our students.***

So my question for us is how do we feel about the upcoming summative assessments? Are we riding on a hope and a prayer, or do we have a pretty good idea of how they’ll turn out based on our formative assessments? I for one feel the best I’ve ever felt about the upcoming summative tests. We’ll continue this conversation about formative assessment. I think it’s

important we understand the difference between formative assessment and common formative assessments. We'll discuss that more later...

Dave