Formative
BY NEWSELA

newsela

How Dorchester School District 02 built a district-wide common assessment strategy to increase student achievement

District
DORCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT 02

Location
SUMMERVILLE, SC

Student Population
26,500

Classroom Use Case
COMMON ASSESSMENT

THE CHALLENGE

Find a platform for assessment across every subject that enables collaboration and data analysis, district wide

Educators and administrators need to be able to understand student performance throughout the school year and adjust instruction accordingly. The team at Dorchester School District 02—a large K-12 district outside of Charleston, South Carolina—was focused on establishing a data-driven environment that enabled teacher collaboration and student achievement.

Administrators wanted a single platform for common assessment across all grade levels and all subject areas, not just a platform for math or a tool for social studies. They needed a solution that could administer assessments, and provide instant results in the classroom and at the school or district level. Teachers wanted a tool they could use independently with their students and that allowed them to work collaboratively with other teachers in their building.

THE PLAN

Use formative data at the classroom, department, and district levels to inform instructional strategies

Formative offered a single solution for all grade levels and subjects in the K-12 district. Curriculum leaders rolled out a variety of common assessments, from benchmark tests and common unit questions to end-of-unit assessments and final exams. After each assessment, professional learning communities (PLCs) gathered to review the data at the school level, with district support for next steps.

"We'd look at the data by standard, by question type, and by classroom so we could identify where students need more support," said Katie Barker, Assistant Director of Elementary. "There was always some level of data debrief at the end of every common assessment."

Formative's 20+ activity types provided opportunities for teachers to help students practice a variety of questions they'd see on their end-of-year exams in a single platform. Regular practice ensured students could use the tool, and more easily show what they knew. "Simplifying tools was a big win for classrooms and the student experience," said Ms. Barker.

Formative made it easy for teachers to track student progress, collaborate on effective teaching strategies, and make informed decisions to best support their students. "I saw many teachers across the district sharing assessments. More PLCs were helping one another because Formative is a district-wide platform. It's just so much easier to work as a whole entity rather than everyone working in their own silos," shared Ann Sanderson, Professional Development Coach.

Teachers loved the platform's accessibility and ability to share with their colleagues. "There's a lot of flexibility for teachers to customize assessments for students—like being able to set extended time for students with accommodations for an individualized education plan," said Kristi Selander, Assistant Director for High Schools.

> "A lot of teachers are finding Formative is a time-saver... That flexibility and simplicity in collaborating has been really useful."

Ann Sanderson
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COACH

> "Simplifying tools was a big win for classrooms and the student experience."

Katie Barker
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ELEMENTARY

newsela

THE IMPACT

Data for real-time intervention and collaboration drove an increase in overall student achievement

Today, Dorchester School District 02 is one of the top-performing districts in the state. When they received their school report cards, the elementary schools that used Formative consistently saw a significant increase in overall student achievement.

Student achievement extended to high school as well, with Formative as a central strategy in helping students prepare for their final exams. "The schools that used Formative for consistent practice and instructional guidance outperformed the state in end-of-course scores by over four points, putting us in the top 8% of schools. Formative is a strategy my teachers use to help decide where to take their lessons each day," shared Ms. Sanderson.

"A lot of teachers are finding Formative is a time-saver," shared Lisa West, Professional Development Coach. "Teachers can build their questions, work on them together, share them with the team, and pass them along to district leadership and other schools. That flexibility and simplicity in collaborating has been really useful."

"In talking with our schools, a lot will credit common assessments and the data they had at their fingertips—thanks to Formative—in their success. Throughout the entire common assessment process, Formative has been a huge strategy in increasing overall student achievement," said Ms. Barker.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Use timely insights to empower PLCs and inform instructional strategies across the district.

- Administer common assessments consistently throughout the year to help students practice and show their knowledge in preparation for summative assessments.

- Enable teachers with real-time data and flexible common assessments to drive significant student outcomes.

newsela