How Much is Enough:
What is Needed for a District to Take on
the Formative Assessment Challenge?

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Abstract

The broad focus of the symposium is on what teachers need to know to get started with formative assessment. In this paper we argue that not possible to focus just on what teachers need to know, but also there needs to be consideration regarding what needs to be shared within the larger system in which those teachers find themselves. This paper will draw on lessons learned in the context of the *Keeping Learning on Track*® (KLT) program regarding the support that district and school level administrators must provide in order for teacher professional development to be effective, and what they need to know in order to provide that support. KLT is a school-based teacher professional development program that supports teachers to use formative assessment in their everyday teaching via sustained, school-based teacher learning communities. However, previous experience has shown that, even with a strong advocate for the program, it can be difficult to ensure a coherent message at various levels across the district. As a result, teachers fail to receive adequate support and, as a consequence, implementation quality is weakened. We will examine what we have learned about necessary district and administrative support for the implementation of formative assessment in the context of implementing the KLT program and by outlining of a body of knowledge that school and district administrators need to know in order to support formative assessment in their schools.
Introduction

John Donne (1572-1631) was certainly not talking about teachers or educational systems when he wrote in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII* that “no man is an island.” However that notion has some applicability in an educational context. Thus, while teachers in classrooms often feel isolated from their colleagues, from school administrators, or from district administrators, it is also the case that what happens at one level of the system impacts other actors within that system.

While the focus of this symposium is on what teachers need to know to get started with formative assessment, it is the authors’ contention that it is not possible to focus just on what teachers need to know, but also there needs to be consideration regarding what needs to be shared within the larger system in which those teachers find themselves. This paper will draw on lessons learned in the context of the *Keeping Learning on Track*® (KLT) program regarding the support that district and school level administrators must provide in order for teacher professional development to be effective, and what they need to know in order to provide that support.

Developed at the Educational Testing Service (ETS), KLT is a school-based teacher professional development program that supports teachers to use formative assessment in their everyday teaching via sustained, school-based teacher learning communities. There is strong evidence that assessment used with the primary goal of supporting learning can result in significant learning gains (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brookhart, 2005).

However, previous experience (Wylie, Thompson, Lyon & Snodgrass, 2007) has shown that, even with a strong advocate for the program, it can be difficult to ensure a coherent message at various levels across the district. As a result, teachers fail to receive adequate support and, as a consequence, implementation quality is weakened. Thus, regardless of how concisely or compactly formative assessment can be communicated, if there is insufficient support for the teachers within the school or district system, it is unlikely that they will be able to make significant progress, which in turn limits the impact on student learning.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment has been defined in various ways. One definition comes from the work of Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam, (2003) who described it as occurring when “information about learning is evoked and then used to modify the teaching and learning activities in which teachers and students are engaged [emphasis in the original]” (page 122). The Council of Chief School Officers (CCSSO, 2008) have defined formative assessment as “a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and
learning to improve students’ achievement of intended instructional outcomes.” As we have engaged teachers in thinking about formative assessment along with our colleagues in the Learning and Teaching Research Center, we define the overarching principle of formative assessment as “Students and teachers using evidence of learning to adapt teaching and learning to meet immediate learning needs minute-to-minute and day-by-day” (ETS, 2007).

There is significant agreement across the three definitions of formative assessment proffered, in large part due to the fact that each one was developed with the same research basis for formative assessment in mind. The extensive literature review conducted by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (Black & Wiliam, 1998) along with other work such as that of Brookhart (2005) and Nyquist (2003) illustrate that there is a strong and positive connection between teachers’ use of formative assessment in everyday teaching and improved student learning. From a review of the research supporting formative assessment, and more cursorily from the definitions presented above, formative assessment is tightly connected to what happens “in the moment” of teaching. Based on the Black and Wiliam research, the ETS definition of formative assessment is broken down into five key strategies (ETS, 2007), which are as follows:

- Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success
- Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning
- Providing feedback that moves learning forward
- Activating students as owners of their own learning
- Activating students as instructional resources for one another

The purpose of breaking apart or expanding on a definition of formative assessment is to help practitioners think about the scope of what it is, and also to identify what it is not. For example, learning intentions, or learning goals form a critical map for teachers: to illustrate what kinds of learning are important prerequisites for new knowledge and skills, to measure against to determine where learning is currently located, and to indicate where learning should be headed. Discussions, questions, learning tasks all provide opportunities to collect evidence of student learning, and it is critical that teachers have enough time and supporting resources as they work to engineer these events to ensure that they get the precise information they need. In order to impact instruction, teachers often have to make instructional adjustments. This can take the form of feedback to students to help them see both where they are in their learning and to nudge them along to the next stage. Students have critical roles: both learning to be self-reflective of their own
learning and to be supportive of the learning of their peers. Engaging students in this way can increase the number of learning and feedback opportunities.

To support teachers develop and employ formative assessment practices and processes, the KLT program begins with an initial learning opportunity that presents a framework for formative assessment and learning around a small number of key ideas. At the end, practitioners choose the one or two formative assessment techniques that they could easily begin to implement and that will impact their instruction and student learning. Beginning small provides an entry point; however, supporting the sustained incorporation of formative assessment into daily instruction must go beyond the initial presentation of the framework and a few specific techniques. Rather the nature of the learning and the changes to practice mean that teachers require ongoing support to learn about new formative assessment practices, reflect upon their implementation, and further revise their practice. Thus, some form of professional development that provides new learning as well as supportive accountability for making changes to practice is necessary. The brief literature review that follows lays out some of what we know about effective professional development and how the KLT Program employs that knowledge.

Effective Professional Development

Discussions about teacher professional development, more recently called professional learning (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009) have been ongoing for the last twenty five years. McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) described the field of staff development as having moved to “center stage.” Regrettably, concerns that McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) expressed about the ineffectiveness of professional development, having “benefited neither teachers nor students (p. 69)” is echoed in more current writing (for example, Kennedy, 1999)

Some progress has been made however in identifying what is effective professional development (for example, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001). Their study with a national probability sample of over 1000 math and science teachers provided empirical support for much of what had been described as “best practices” in professional development. Their research provided supporting evidence for the ineffectiveness of one-day workshops, showing that “sustained and intensive professional development is more likely to have an impact, as reported by teachers, than shorter professional development” (Garet et al., 2001, p.935). Furthermore, their study provided information about the content, format, and scope of professional development. They noted, for example, “Professional development that focuses on subject matter (content), gives teachers opportunities for “hands-on” work (active learning), and is integrated into the daily life of the school (coherence) is more likely to produce enhanced knowledge and skills” (Garet et al.,
Although they examined “reform” versus “traditional” professional development, they concluded, “It is more important to focus on the duration, collective participation, and the core features (i.e., content, active learning, and coherence) than type” (Garet et al., 2001, p.936).

Finally, these researchers also brought the importance of engaging teachers collectively to the forefront of the conversation about professional development, noting “The collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, subject, or grade is related both to coherence and active learning opportunities, which in turn are related to improvements in teacher knowledge and skill and changes in classroom practice” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 936).

More recently, the National Staff Development Council’s report on Professional Learning (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009) reviewed experimental studies on professional development. While the number of well-designed studies is few, and causal relationships are not fully established, some principles can be inferred from the literature. Four principles are supplied. The report recommends that professional development should: be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice (p. 9); focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific curriculum content (p.10); align with school improvement priorities and goals (p.10); and finally build strong working relationships among teachers (p.11).

However, it is one thing to know about the features of quality professional development, it is a different thing to see it put into practice. Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet and Yoon (2002) examined the relationship between district management and implementation strategies and the quality of district-provided professional development. For this study they administered a survey with over 350 school districts across the US, focusing on aspects of professional development such as the degree to which it was aligned with state or district standards and assessments, the extent to which districts engaged in continuous improvement efforts, and ways in which teachers were involved in the planning of professional development. Teacher involvement with the planning was found to be associated with positive aspects of professional development (Desimone et al., 2002, p. 1296). The positive impact can come about by teachers ensuring that the professional development is relevant, it is coherent with other professional development activities, and a critical mass of teachers are participating.

In our center at ETS our goal has been to support teachers’ increased use of formative assessment and so we have been attentive to the literature cited above. We have been engaged in a research and development process centered on professional development that supports teachers’ exploration of formative assessment. The Keeping Learning on Track program, developed over a five-year time period, adheres to the principles of effective professional development suggested by Darling-Hammond et al. (2009). The first principle addressed the need for professional
development to be intensive, ongoing and connected to practice. The primary vehicle for the KLT professional development takes the form of teacher learning communities which are supported by a “curriculum” of materials that sustain meetings for two years or more. A teacher who was fully engaged in the process would have at least twenty four hours of KLT professional development in each year. This time is devoted to learning new aspects of formative assessment, planning for their use in the classroom, and supportive reflection on their implementation and impact on student engagement, student ownership of learning, and student achievement. This ongoing cycle of learning, implementation, reflection, and revision provides the support and accountability needed for teachers to continuously refine their classroom practice.

Regarding the second principle (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 10), the KLT program provides a direct focus on student learning (and indirectly will impact how a teacher addresses the teaching of specific curriculum content) since teachers are continually provided with opportunities to think about their own practice and that of their peers as they grapple with issues of identifying student learning needs. As Wiliam (2004) noted “in order for assessment to function formatively, it needs to identify where learners are in their learning, where they are going, and how to get there. (p.5). Although roles and responsibilities differ, teachers and students alike need to know where learning is intended to go, have ways of identifying current position with respect to those goals, and most importantly, when there is a gap between current position and desired goals, make use of the assessment information to help close the gap. Thus teachers’ discussion around the daily use of formative assessment will necessarily have to deal with student learning.

The third principle of alignment with school improvement priorities and goals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 10) is somewhat out of the hands of the developers of the professional development, but rather within the control of the school, district or state which is initiating the professional development. As described by Bruccoli, Taylor and Wylde (2008) the Vermont Department of Education adopted the KLT Program as part of its focus on comprehensive local assessment systems:

As the DOE began to widen its audience for formative assessment, it was necessary to dispel any perceptions that this was just the latest in a long line of initiatives from the DOE that confused, diffused, or otherwise further extended teachers and principals who had far too much on their plates already. To accomplish that the DOE had to articulate a unified vision of Communities of Practice and Local Assessment that was both compelling and inclusive — compelling in the sense that attending to each of the key components of the system was a matter of irrefutable logic and inclusive in the sense that
initiatives previously perceived as competing were integrated into a larger picture with both formative assessment and learning communities. (Bruccoli, Taylor & Wylde, 2008, p.3-4)

Supporting states, districts or schools think about ways of incorporating a new professional development program into existing structures is an important part of ensuring its success.

Finally, the fourth principle focuses on building strong working relationships among teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 11). With respect to this principle, the KLT program was designed to support teacher learning that occurs in small learning communities of five to eight teachers. The structure of these teacher learning communities (TLCs) facilitates the development of support, feedback, and sounding board opportunities for participating teachers. And when a system is successful in the implementation of KLT teachers will begin to discuss their practice with their peers outside the formal meeting structure (Thompson, in press).

The above sections outline how KLT introduces and sustains learning about formative assessment as well as how the overall program adheres to what we know about successful professional development. It is the authors’ opinion that this approach includes the critical components for not only getting teachers started with formative assessment but also for sustaining the program. However, as stated in the introduction, it is not sufficient to focus just on what teachers need to know. Since teaching occurs within a larger system there also needs to be consideration of this larger system in which those teachers are found. The following sections will examine what we have learned about necessary district and administrative support for the implementation of formative assessment in the context of implementing the KLT program. We will conclude the paper by outlining of a body of knowledge that school and district administrators need to know in order to support formative assessment in their schools.

**What We Learned From KLT Implementations**

As detailed above the KLT program was developed to provide strong foundational knowledge of formative assessment and to provide opportunities to deepen initial learning by engaging teachers in a learn-practice-reflect-refine cycle through structures that are consistent with research on effective professional development. However, without sufficient planning, communication, and on-going support within the larger system the implementation of the program may suffer. Analysis of previous KLT implementations has provided some insight into successful and not so successful implementations (Wylie (Ed.), 2008). One KLT implementation described by Wylie, Thompson, Lyon, and Snodgrass (2007) illustrated the gap that can develop between the initial implementation plans and the on-the-ground reality. In this instance, the KLT program had
support that extended from the district CEO all the way to day-to-day support of a prominent assessment director within the district who had a strong understanding of formative assessment. In the initial agreement there were funds for stipends, substitute cover for teacher leaders to meet together to plan their TLC meetings, and additional substitute cover so that groups of teachers could meet together beyond the TLC meetings. However, while districts may ambitiously plan for the roll out of any new professional development program, success is only achieved when those plans become reality.

In many school districts, plans and their enactment can be quite different. The KLT implementation in this example suffered because of a dearth of substitute teachers to provide coverage both for the TLC leaders to meet as a group, and for teachers to meet during school for observations or other reasons connected to their work around formative assessment. Problems coordinating across levels in the system resulted in a scheduling misstep so that an attempt to have principals attend a one-day training to help them understand the program, how it fit within the district goals, and how they could support their teachers, failed. As a result, principals were not as supportive as they otherwise might have been. Early in the program implementation, a new CEO joined the district, and as a result there were some shifts in district priorities. Because the principals had not had the opportunity to understand the program as deeply as they might, when faced with competing pressures the KLT program was not prioritized.

Overall, this particular KLT implementation reinforced for us the importance of two levels of support. First, the high level district sponsor – the program in the district would never have gotten as far as it did without that key person. However, the role of the principals was also critical – the program might have gotten further had the teachers and the program had their support.

The KLT Program continues to be implemented in additional schools and districts. As a result of funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation we have been working with four high-needs districts, focusing in particular on their high school mathematics and science teachers. The funding has allowed us to support both the initial implementation in the district while collecting data from teachers, students and district administrators throughout the duration of the project. We approached the recruitment of schools and districts with the lessons from previous implementations in mind.

Districts were approached as potential sites and ETS staff held a webinar for relevant district staff. The webinar focused on both the content and process of the KLT program, that is, the research-based formative assessment framework that we want teachers to apply to their own instruction, and the research around teacher learning communities as a vehicle to support that
learning and implementation. District staff had to complete a district application in which they described current district level professional development, how they intended to support the program, and how they planned to identify teachers to participate. They had to provide specific details about which schools in the district would participate, and who the primary contacts within each school would be. Additionally, while the funding covered all costs for the initial workshops (trainers, materials, etc.), each district had to determine how they would fund and support the teachers as they met in their school-based teacher learning communities. ETS staff worked with each district to help district educators develop an implementation plan which seemed reasonable. Some information about the districts (pseudonyms are used) selected to participate is provided in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of US</th>
<th>Apple</th>
<th>Lilac</th>
<th>Wisteria</th>
<th>Forsythia</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students in district</td>
<td>18,504</td>
<td>12,301</td>
<td>31,412</td>
<td>51,325</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged (%)</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners (%)</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities (%)</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity breakdowns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American students</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All information in the table is for school year 06-07, except for the Lilac school district which is from 07-08.

The four districts range in terms of geographical location, size of student population, racial/ethnic diversity, economics, and proportions of students with disabilities or who are English language learners. Furthermore, each school district approached the task of supporting and scheduling the TLC meetings in different ways. In the Apple school district, both high schools are involved, each with three TLC groups. Approximately two thirds of the districts math and science teachers are involved. The district has early release days once a month and planned to use that time in conjunction with scheduled in-service days for the TLCs to meet on a monthly basis for two hours each month. In the Lilac school district, the smallest of the participating districts, there is a
single campus serving grades 9-12 students that houses six small schools with various foci and specialties. All six schools have one TLC group each participating this year. TLCs were planned to meet once a month for either 90 minutes or two hours. In the Wisteria school district there are three participating schools out of 12 high schools. The district planned for teachers to meet on a monthly basis after school and they would be paid for that meeting time. Interestingly in this district, there were very strong statements of district support for the project: the superintendent stated that the principals in the participating schools would have the successful implementation of the KLT program as one of their performance indicators for this school year. However, school principals were never brought into any of the discussions with ETS staff so it unclear how well this job requirement was communicated to those involved. An initial indication of potential communication issues occurred at the first introductory workshop when less than a quarter of the participants showed up. A second set of training dates had to be negotiated with the district, which they had to pay for. Attendance was markedly improved second time around. Finally, in the Forsythia school district, the largest of the four districts, four of the 16 high schools volunteered to participate after a presentation to interested school and district staff. Scheduling for TLCs was left to the discretion of each school using a combination of common planning periods, before-school meetings and common lunch-times. The frequency of meeting times varied considerably across the groups, from monthly to weekly, with a total amount of monthly planned time for TLC meetings ranging from 90 minutes to four hours. ETS consultants worked with each of the four districts to ensure that the KLT program and its support needs were understood by the decision makers, coordinated training dates, and provided sample communications. For each district between 12-16 hours of time were spent on telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings.

Even within the participating districts, there is variation in the implementation plans. For example, in the Forsythia school district, one school had very strong principal support. The teachers who are in TLCs have been released from morning and lunch duties, along with a Monday morning faculty meeting. In the same district, in another school, KLT teachers are also engaged in multiple other initiatives, and have been provided with no release time. While we have not yet collected enough systematic data to be able to quantify how these differences in principal support impact the school-level implementation, from an early round of TLC leader interviews, it is apparent that the level of enthusiasm and support for the program is quite different between the two schools.

After the introductory workshops in either the summer or early September, TLCs began holding regularly scheduled meetings. TLC leaders were asked to complete a brief online log
documenting the TLC meeting(s) for that month. The log asked questions regarding the content
focus of the meeting, attendance of TLC members, duration and location of the meeting, and so on.
For approximately 86% of the reports that we have received the TLC did meet that month. On the
occasion that no TLC meeting took place, the TLC leader was asked to explain why. A sample of
the explanations is provided below in Table 2.

Table 2: Reasons by a TLC did not meet in a particular month.
- No meeting was scheduled on early dismissal because of 4 sight [interim assessment] planning.
- We had to focus on other concerns during in-service.
- Time was not set aside by administration
- The meeting we had scheduled for the middle of this month developed scheduling conflicts with
other required meetings.
- No time to pull teachers from classes
- There wasn't enough time in the schedule. We had snow days plus Christmas vacation.
- Not enough time in the schedule.
- We were originally to meet in January on Jan. 7 and Jan. 30 counting the Jan. 30th meeting as
our Feb. meeting but due to snow days Jan. 7th was cancelled therefore we only met on Jan. 30th
and are unable to reschedule another meeting in February.

While vacations, snow days or other unforeseen occurrences will always cause disruptions,
it seems that these TLC leaders have identified several issues that could be addressed by building
or district administration including but not limited to scheduling issues and competing time
demands. For those groups that did meet for a TLC meeting, we compared the reports from the
TLC leaders against the original plans that each group had for the total duration of meeting times
(regardless of whether it was split over more than a single occasion or not). We have reports for
TLC groups from October to February and approximately two thirds of the time the TLC meeting
did not last as long as originally planned. For the vast majority of occasions, the time difference
was more than a half hour. As we collect data for the rest of this year we will be able to explore the
cumulative effect that this loss of time will have. The original goal for most TLC groups was to
meet for two hours per month, so that teachers would have a total of sixteen hours of face-to-face
time beyond the initial professional development provided at the introductory workshop. It is too
early to know the impact that this loss of time will have on the quality of teachers’ learning but
research identifies a relationship between the duration of professional development and the impact on student learning.

“An analysis of well designed experimental studies found that a set of programs which offered substantial contact hours of professional development (ranging from 30 to 100 hours in total) spread over six to 12 months showed a positive and significant effect on student achievement gains. According to the research, these intensive professional development efforts that offered an average of 49 hours in a year boosted student achievement by approximately 21 percentile points. Other efforts that involved a limited amount of professional development (ranging from 5 to 14 hours in total) showed no statistically significant effect on student learning.” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p.9)

What we have learned to date in terms of the Gates implementation has been that some schools need additional support to ensure that implementation plans for supporting teacher learning communities are carried out, and where the plans turn out not to be feasible, reasonable alternatives are found. This may be more difficult for schools that consistently do not make adequate yearly progress. These schools are obligated to engage in various initiatives aimed at improving student achievement. In some cases the initiatives may be competing with each other, in other cases they may be supportive, but just place too much demand on teachers’ time. In these cases school and district administrators may need additional guidance for aligning school priorities and goals.

Moving forward with the Gates-funded implementation, we are drawing heavily on the results from the Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet and Yoon (2002) study as we consider how schools and districts should support this and other sustained professional development initiatives. We noted two things that were important in terms of district support to the quality of professional development: continuous improvement efforts and teacher involvement in planning. Although that research focused on district management and implementation, it also seems to apply at a school level. To that end, we are encouraging school administrators and teachers involved in TLCs to meet together towards the end of this school year to review the TLC implementation plans and contrast them with their own school realities. The goal of the discussion is to build on what worked for TLC meetings and adjust where necessary so that time can be scheduled and perhaps better protected in the second year of implementation. In this way we hope that engaging teachers in the planning process gives them additional ownership. On the other hand, this discussion can provide principals or other administrators insight into what the teachers valued about the TLC meetings this year so that they are less likely to schedule over TLC meeting time, help district and administrators to
recognize the time spent during these TLC meetings as actual professional development and award hours accordingly, and discuss additional support mechanisms for integrating KLT and effective professional development such as peer observation and collaborative planning.

Discussion

Popham (2009) has been a strong proponent for increasing the use of the formative assessment and is concerned that the education community is not doing enough in terms of “getting the word out (p. 6)” about the power of formative assessment to improve student learning. While we agree with the premise, we argue for the need to attend both to what teachers need to understand about formative assessment in order to implement it, and also to what school and district administrators need to know. Implementing formative assessment can place very new demands on teachers, for example, causing them to think deeply about the kinds of questions they ask during a lesson, find ways to structure groups working together so that peers can provide feedback on iterative drafts of writing, develop policies for students to submit multiple versions of an assignment until they get a satisfactory grade, identify the key learning within lessons to make it apparent to students in language they can understand, to assess progress towards that learning at the end of a lesson, and to adapt future instruction when learning is not yet on target. This kind of learning requires ongoing support and for that reason teacher learning communities are a central part of the KLT program.

Therefore, supporting learning about formative assessment has to go beyond selecting a program that meets the requirements of what research suggests is effective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Districts require additional information so that they can better understand what can hinder professional development and how to best prevent or minimize those issues. The recent report from Darling-Hammond and colleagues identify one reason why the TLCs that we are working with may struggle to find the time they need to meet. They note, “In most countries, about 15 to 20 hours per week is spent on tasks related to teaching, such as preparing lessons, marking papers, meeting with students and parents, and working with colleagues. By contrast, U.S. teachers generally have from 3 to 5 hours a week for lesson planning, which is done independently” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p.15). Given the lack of non-instructional time that teachers in the US have, perhaps it is not surprising that it is difficult for schools to set time aside for professional development activities and to protect that time.

In order to respond directly to the challenge presented by the convener of the symposium, below we provide two lists of knowledge statements, first dealing with what principals and district administrations need to know about formative assessment, and second, what they administrators
need to understand in order to effectively support “school-based ongoing professional development.”

First, critical knowledge about formative assessment:

- Formative assessment is not about teachers administering more frequent tests.
- For teachers to integrate minute-to-minute and day-by-day assessment for learning into daily practice, they need more than just a quick exposure to its principles and methods.
- Teachers need sustained opportunities to consciously develop, practice, reflect upon and refine formative assessment practices so that it works within the context of their own classrooms.
- Formative assessment can impact student learning in powerful ways.
- Classrooms where formative assessment is being implemented may look different from other classrooms in the school.
- The implementation of formative assessment may result in changes to both the explicit classroom rules and implicit classroom expectations.
- Formative assessment might interrupt other classroom/school policies.
- Formative assessment has a critical student component and impacts more than just what the teacher does.

Second, critical knowledge about supporting teachers in school-based ongoing professional development.

- Research suggests that professional development with 30 to 100 contact hours has significant and positive impacts on student learning. Programs with contact ranging between five to 14 hours had not statistically significant impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009)
- Ongoing school-based professional development requires careful scheduling, planning, and monitoring.
- Protecting non-instructional and professional development time is part of the job of an instructional leader.
- Engaging teachers in the evaluation process to determine how initial implementation plans played out, what was and was not successful, and what the barriers were, in order to adjust plans and schedules may support the long-term success of the initiative.
• Multiple initiatives can pull teachers in multiple directions and therefore, school leadership needs to recognize these demands and communicate priorities.

• Changing practice is difficult. School leaders should providing positive feedback to individuals and groups of teachers to recognize their hard work and accomplishments.

• Engaging teachers in formative assessment can be a powerful way to reenergize experienced teachers.

The goal of this paper was to identify a body of knowledge for district and school administrators that will be both necessary and sufficient for districts to begin the KLT program, will reduce teachers’ isolation, and can de-privatize teaching. We propose that the two lists above provide an important starting point if schools and districts are serious about embedded professional development into the daily lives of teachers.
References


