Assessment to Inform Learning in Virginia

Background: In 2013, leaders at the Virginia Department of Education wanted to reduce how many state tests students take. At the same time, new state rules required that teachers use data to understand how their students are struggling with learning and to deal with problems immediately. As a result, Virginia education leaders sought to help teachers use *formative assessment* in their classrooms. Unfortunately, only two staff were assigned to the project.

> Q: What is *formative assessment*?
> A: Formative assessment is a combination of strategies teachers and students use every day to monitor learning.

The challenge: To help teachers across the state learn about how to use formative assessment at little or no cost, and in a way that schools can easily replicate later.

What we did: Staff at the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC) helped the state to

- find free learning materials for teachers,
- choose and learn how to run a no-cost online learning community,
- develop effective ways to help teachers learn how to use formative assessment, and
- plan for self-sufficiency so that, eventually, schools could be in charge of their own learning about formative assessment.

What happened: As a result of ARCC help, by 2016:

- principals and teachers from more than 40 school divisions learned about formative assessment and use it in their classrooms,
- participating principals say they now have the knowledge and skill to facilitate online learning communities at their own schools,
- leaders of the program earned Google+ certification,
- the state created 17 videos of Virginia teachers using and talking about formative assessment,
- leaders at VDOE run the online learning community without ARCC assistance, and
- all schools across the state can use the state's online learning community to learn about formative assessment.

> Formative assessment is "an approach to providing instruction that meets the needs of all students. Period. The end."
> --*Raegan Rangel, Assistant Principal, Millbrook High School, Frederick County Public Schools, Virginia*

> "It's always bothered me that we spent so much time testing and robbing children of instructional time. And the more I learned about formative assessment, the more I thought, this is great because you're combining your instruction with your assessment. So you know as you go along that they're learning, or not, and you can correct it as you go along."
> --*Marjorie Tankersley, Principal of Hugh Mercer Elementary School, Fredericksburg City Schools, Virginia*