

We have designed each “White Paper” to explore a fundamental educational principle and key issues engaging the education community we serve. It is our goal to partner with our readers as they meet the challenges they face.



Student Review, Testing & Assessment
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Formative Assessment & Castle Learning Online

The efforts of state education agencies and local school districts to ensure that all students meet academic proficiency goals and all schools make adequate yearly progress in closing the achievement gap have led to an increased focus on **formative assessment**. **Formative assessment** has recently emerged as one of the more promising strategies for improving student learning. (NYSDOE, 2008)

In the effort to demystify **formative assessment**, researchers have explained how the term should and should not be used. First, it is not simply testing at periodic intervals, such as twice each year or even once each week. Instead, researchers define **formative assessment** as a shift in classroom teaching and student learning, using research-based instructional procedures to increase student academic performance.

In order to improve this instruction, the teacher uses any tool that can provide feedback that will direct his/her lessons or adjust daily teaching methods in order to improve student achievement. **Formative assessment** is therefore not an “event,” but a “process” that is embedded in instruction to redirect teaching and learning in ways that help students master learning goals. (*Attributes of Effective Formative Assessment*, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC, 2008) States including Pennsylvania and New York have adopted the CCSSO definition of **formative assessment**.

Castle Learning Online directly addresses the formative assessment model. As a Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM), *Castle Learning Online* provides a web-based review, testing, and assessment tool for teachers, students and their parents. By using *Castle Learning*, with its extensive database of questions, hints, defined vocabulary and reasons, teachers can provide assignments that are current and can gain week-by-week information on the progress students are making toward learning the content for the academic year. As a result, teachers can monitor the success of the instruction students receive. If a child’s performance is not meeting expectations, the teacher can adopt new or different ways of teaching or provide remedial assignments to contribute to that student’s ultimate success in meeting academic goals.

Educators shared these first-hand experiences about their use of *Castle Learning*.

- One educator wrote, “It allows me to view student weaknesses, as well as trends of weakness for an entire class, allowing me to self-check my own effectiveness.”
- Another educator wrote, “it allows me to instantly (in less than 24 hours) see if students understand the lesson.”
- Finally, a Chemistry teacher described the fact that “This course is packed in and requires a constant change of content each day,” but by using *Castle Learning*, the results were instantaneous as compared with a paper grading procedure he used to use, so that “by the next day, the instant feedback allows me to focus on a 20-minute review as compared with a five-minute ‘Do Now.’”

Teachers now have an educationally sound tool in *Castle Learning* that improves instruction, addresses student academic improvement, and meets the **formative assessment** definition by being “embedded into the instruction process.”