

# Formative Assessment and the Every Student Succeeds Act

## 1) Formative assessment is a key component of a balanced assessment system.

A balanced assessment system provides teachers, administrators, and parents with the information they need to prepare students for college and careers. Such a system involves multiple types of assessment (e.g., summative, interim, formative) that generate complementary information about student learning (Herman, 2016). Summative and interim assessments provide a broad overview of students' achievement in relation to state standards. To help students achieve grade-level expectations, teachers use formative assessment to know where students are in relation to lesson learning goals and to plan instruction. Formative assessment involves gathering evidence of student progress, providing students with immediate feedback, and adjusting teaching to close students' learning gaps. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) have important roles in helping districts and schools develop and implement well-coordinated, balanced assessment systems. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) highlights these roles:

- Title I, Part B outlines a State Assessment Grant that SEAs can use to develop or improve balanced assessment systems, as well as to support LEAs in developing or improving assessments that are part of these systems (§ 1201).
- Title II, Part A identifies training, technical assistance, and building local capacity in formative assessment as possible uses for the subgrant funds to LEAs (§ 2103).
- Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 names formative assessment processes as part of the definition of high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction. This definition impacts state comprehensive literacy instruction plans, as well as targeted subgrants to early childhood education programs and LEAs (§ 2221).

## 2) Formative assessment is an evidence-based instructional practice.

Research supports effectiveness of formative assessment as a practice to improve classroom teaching and learning (see reference list). Studies examining effective teaching show that formative assessment is a means achieving student academic success because it's rooted in purposeful and clear instruction and gives students an active role in their learning (Black & William, 1998; Hattie, 2009). ESSA regulations emphasize that SEAs and LEAs should focus on evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions in their school improvement and local capacity-building efforts. Below are some examples of how the regulations emphasize evidence-based activities:

- Title I, Part A outlines that school improvement activities and targeted support and improvement plans should include evidence-based interventions (§§ 1003, 1005).
- Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 states that the Secretary of Education will prioritize funding Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grants for SEAs that propose evidence-based activities, and that SEAs should prioritize the literacy subgrants for eligible LEAs that propose evidence-based activities (§§ 2221-2224).

### 3) The formative assessment process, as an evidence-based component of a balanced assessment system, is also part of a multi-tier system of support.

Multi-tier systems of support are a “comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decisionmaking” (ESSA, 2015, Title VIII, § 8101, Item 33). Formative assessment is a systemic, instructional process that allows for close, ongoing observation of student learning and provides immediate data related to student progress on lesson learning goals. As can be seen below, ESSA regulations provide specific guidance related to multi-tier systems of support:

- Title II, Part A states that subgrants may be used to develop programs that support teachers’ ability to teach children with disabilities and English learners, which can include multi-tier systems of support (§ 2103).
- Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 states that subgrants under this section may be used to provide a “multi-tier system of supports for literacy services” for students in kindergarten through grade 12 (§ 2224).

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## Formative Assessment and ESSA Regulations Reference Guide

This table provides an overview of how formative assessment aligns with the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). Specific references to ESSA regulations and definitions can be found in the right-hand column.

Title	Alignment of Formative Assessment and ESSA Regulations	Specific References in ESSA
Title I	Formative assessment is both an evidence-based practice and an essential component of a balanced assessment system. SEAs and LEAs could decide to address formative assessment through school improvement activities and plans, as well as through the state assessment grants outlined in Title I.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Title I, Part A, §§ 1003, 1111</li> <li>• Title I, Part B, §§ 2221-2224</li> </ul>
Title II	SEAs and LEAs could decide to use subgrant funds to train, provide technical assistance, and build local capacity in formative assessment. Formative assessment could also be part of efforts to develop multi-tier systems of support to effectively teach English learners and children with disabilities, as well as multi-tier systems of support that focus on high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Title I, Part A, § 2103</li> <li>• Title II, Part A, § 2103</li> <li>• Title II, Part B, § 2221</li> <li>• Title II, Part B, § 2224</li> <li>• Title II, Part B, §§ 2221-2224</li> </ul>



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