

**Formative Assessment Pilot Implementation:  
Final Report**

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## INTRODUCTION

Between February and June 2004, Education Matters studied the implementation of the Formative Assessment Pilot (FAP) in a sample of eight of 21 Effective Practice (EP) schools that had volunteered to pilot the formative assessments.<sup>1</sup> Our sample included one high school, one middle school, and six elementary or K-8 schools. The formative assessments were designed to provide teachers with timely, usable data that could inform their reading instruction with respect to finding evidence and drawing inferences. The idea for developing the assessments grew out of the EP principals' knowledge that a) students needed help in some areas of reading comprehension as represented on the MCAS, b) the district's formative assessments were not useful for instructional purposes and, therefore, c) teachers did not have access to appropriate assessments that could guide their instruction. These principals, through the work of a sub-group of the EP Principals' Network urged the Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE) to take the lead in developing useful formative assessments that would meet their needs. The schools' desire to have data that could be readily linked to instruction, the second Essential of school reform in Boston, was at the heart of the FAP.

The assessments themselves were developed during the 2003-2004 school year by the BPE in collaboration with the EP principals and Ethan Mintz and John Yun. They were designed to be used by students in grades three, four, seven, and ten, the grades assessed by MCAS. The BPE provided teachers at the targeted grade levels with three question sets, over time, that included one or more reading passages, a set of questions, an answer sheet, scoring guide, scoring form and teacher tips. EP principals provided feedback to the BPE on sample question sets and answer sheet designs during the development process. In addition, they offered suggestions for the form of feedback they and their teachers would receive.

When students at a grade-level completed each question set, the answer sheets were sent to the BPE where the data were entered into a spreadsheet program and analyzed so that schools received reports that included analyses of individuals as well as grade-levels. The reports were developed and returned to the schools quickly and included information about the kinds of mistakes students had made, their frequency, and explanations for why students might have made those choices. (See Appendices for a question set, scoring guide, and data explanation page.) The BPE hoped that with this kind of information, teachers would be better able to analyze students' learning needs and then direct instruction to those needs. The data reports were for the sole use of the schools. They were not part of the district's formative assessment program.

The FAP had another important implementation feature: the BPE did not set out guidelines for when schools should use the question sets, how much time to leave between implementation of the first, second and third question sets, how to implement them, or any other aspect of the pilot.

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<sup>1</sup>The Effective Practice Schools are a set of Boston Public Schools that have demonstrated a) high levels of implementation of the Essentials of whole-school improvement, b) strong principal leadership for instruction, and c) better than average improvement on MCAS, the state's high stakes assessment.

The BPE left these decisions to the schools because of its theory of change which posited that teacher and principal decisions about the use of the FAP would lead to ownership of the data and high quality use. Toward this end, the FAP was designed to provide teachers with usable data about *each* of their students. Armed with such data, and in consultation with their colleagues and a high quality facilitator, teachers would learn how to target instruction for each of the students. Out of such a focus on each and every student, the BPE posited that teachers' own accountability for all of their students' learning would increase. In contrast, if the FAP were seen as a requirement, or if it came with strict guidelines, the BPE felt that teachers would not make it their own and would not develop greater internal accountability for their students' achievement.

Finally, the BPE's effort with the FAP included one other key component: support for implementation and data analysis. Kristan Singleton, Assistant Director, and Lisa Lineweaver, Senior Program Officer, along with Ethan Mintz, one of the developers of the question sets, worked collaboratively and in consultation with Ellen Guiney, Executive Director, on the development and implementation of the question sets and on the analyses.

In addition, Ethan Mintz facilitated most of the school-based technical assistance to the piloting schools in light of the goals of the project. For example, he was available to meet with teachers and principals at their schools at the outset to describe the assessments and their potential value of the FAP. Second, he was available to help teachers and principals learn how to interpret and make the most use of the data returned to them. And, third, he was available if schools had questions or concerns at any point during the process of implementing and/or using the assessments and their associated data. Other members of the FAP team were also available and answered principals' questions, when they arose, throughout the year. In addition, they led the segments of the EP Principals' Network meetings that focused on the FAP. Finally, this leadership team for the project met weekly throughout the school year to review the process of the FAP and make any mid-course corrections that might be needed.

**Design of the Evaluation.** Education Matters' evaluation of the FAP was designed to address the following questions:

- **How was the formative assessment pilot implemented?**
- **To what extent and in what ways were the assessments linked to CCL cycles?<sup>2</sup>**
- **How did using the formative assessments affect the way teachers think, structure, and practice their teaching?**

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<sup>2</sup>Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) is intensive ongoing staff development that aims to reduce professional isolation and to encourage a more collaborative culture. In each eight-week cycle, a small group of teachers in a school studies together a strategy from Readers' Workshop or Writers' Workshop, observes the content coach demonstrate the strategy with students, takes turns with colleagues teaching the strategy, participates in a debrief after each demonstration, and gets support in their own classrooms. The BPE, at the beginning of the FAP thought that some schools might use it within the context of a CCL cycle. However, none of the schools in our sample linked participation in the FAP with a CCL cycle. We will return to the question of whether the Formative Assessments might constitute the focus of a CCL cycle later in the report.

To this end, Education Matters a) visited the eight schools in order to interview six principals, one director of instruction, 28 teachers, and five coaches, b) interviewed Ethan Mintz, and c) observed nine meetings in which teachers and principals discussed the FAP with Ethan Mintz present. All of the data collected were analyzed with regard to the evaluation questions and with the knowledge that other issues might arise that we had not anticipated.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the process, teachers, principals and coaches were generous with their time. They appreciated being part of a pilot and were pleased to learn that the BPE wanted their feedback in order to assess the value of the question sets and make changes where necessary. Without these educators' willing participation in providing feedback to us and through us to the BPE, we would not have been able to learn as much as we did about the implementation and results of the FAP.

**Major Findings.** Teachers, principals, and coaches at all the schools reported overwhelmingly positive experiences with the FAP. With rare exception, they found the FAP enabled them to better understand their students' thought processes. Teachers and principals appreciated the fact that the BPE formative assessments were authentic formative assessments that provided them with data they could use immediately. They contrasted the question sets with a) formative assessments that are done for the district and do not inform instruction, and b) school-based assessments, for example the SRI, that do not provide information that can be used to significantly guide instruction. Although teachers and principals understood that the goal of the FAP was to inform instruction, they were glad that the format matched MCAS. They came to understand that MCAS readings could be considered a genre and that the FAP, therefore, could alert teachers and, thereby, students to what it takes to read in this genre and answer questions about it.

Teachers, principals and coaches made a number of valuable suggestions designed to improve the FAP. These related to a) the timing of the assessments, b) the number of assessments available in each genre, c) the possibility of including open response items, d) information about teaching resources, and e) the role of the coach. We will address these suggestions after presenting the detailed findings. In addition, we will consider some of the issues that may arise if the decision is made to make the question sets available to many more schools.

Overall, the data lead us to conclude that:

1. Implementation strategies varied across the eight schools with respect to how principals introduced the FAP to their teachers, how teachers decided to organize the timing and spacing of the question sets, and the extent to which principal and coaches were involved in the implementation and consideration of the assessment data.
2. BPE technical and on-site facilitation support was essential to successful implementation.
3. Teachers and principals liked the design of the question sets and the scoring guides, and

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<sup>3</sup>In light of budget constraints, only 28 of the 39 interviews were transcribed. However, in conducting the analysis, we included all 39 interviews. With respect to those not transcribed, we relied on our field notes and, when necessary, listened to the tapes of the interviews as part of the analysis process.

- the information that accompanied the question sets.
4. The data prepared by the BPE was returned to the schools quickly and presented in a useful format.
  5. As a result of discussing the data with the BPE facilitator and with each other, teachers, principals, and coaches were able to talk in detail about what the FAP data told them about their students' learning needs as they related to the skills embedded in the reading passages and questions.
  6. The emphasis on analyzing the results of the assessments for instructional implications seems to have kept the focus of the FAP on instruction rather than on merely practicing for the MCAS.

## **CONSIDERATION OF THE FINDINGS.**

We turn now to a further discussion of each of the findings. Then, we provide the BPE with some recommendations and thoughts about extending the use of the question sets to a larger set of schools.

**1. Implementation strategies varied across the eight schools with respect to how principals introduced the FAP to their teachers, how teachers decided to organize the timing and spacing of the question sets, and the extent to which principal and coaches were involved in the implementation and consideration of the assessment data.** When principals clearly explained the FAP and gained teachers' support for it, teachers' comments about the FAP and their actual participation in meetings about its use were more positive than when the pilot was introduced and led in other ways.

A small group of EP principals had initiated the development of the FAP and they, along with most of their colleague principals volunteered to participate in the FAP. From the outset, these principals had ideas about how they thought the pilot could benefit their schools. Most introduced the pilot to their teachers as an opportunity to do important work. They strove to gain teacher understanding and agreement using strategies that reflected their schools' overall collaborative approach to instructional decision making.

So, for example, as we were pushed by all the reform things, time wise, human resources things, at times you feel that, "Ooh, I would like to think about this some more, I would like to do something about it some more. But, I don't know how to do it or I don't have the time to do it." So what the BPE seemed to be suggesting was that we were going to get test items that already align with the MCAS and they were going to give us a tool that will take us through the process. It seemed to be a very natural thinking process that aligned with what I had wanted my teachers – the way I wanted my teachers to think anyway. So I felt like it was an easy sell to them – which it was, indeed. I said, you don't have to go into this at all, but I want to jump on it, because they seemed to be talking about the same things we keep complaining about and never having the time to do

anything about, or we're doing it in a hit or miss fashion. I said, "What fabulous luck! The BPE has some of the same issues we have." We'll take a look at it ourselves and see, but it seems that they're talking about taking MCAS items and it was a different kind of test prep, a test prep that's not test prep, that's just a part of moving things along to instruction. [I spoke to grade four first.] On the one hand they were a little leery, on the other hand, they said, "You've got to tell grade 3 and let them do what they want." Grade 3 said, "We want in." And then I went to the SPED teacher and said, "Grade 3 and grade 4 are doing XYZ, and she said, I'm in." At that point they weren't into the project, they were into having a meeting to figure out whether they wanted to do it. So I set a date for the first meeting [with Ethan] for them to just find out. And then they decided, this looks like it might be a good thing. Principal A<sup>4</sup>

We had an ILT meeting first, and I presented it to them in ILT. Then I presented it to the grade levels.... So I did talk to the grade levels, and then I followed up with the memos, because I want them to commit to it. I have to say that... these people are really professionals. They're always looking to do work that is going to move their kids forward. Principal B

Teachers in these schools were able to articulate when and what they learned about the FAP.

I heard about them in our English department meeting. [The principal] explained that [the BPE] was going to do some studies using older MCAS readings and that students would complete them and we would grade them and we could analyze the incorrect answers. And, that's where we would actually learn a lot and see where kids were falling for the same trick answer repeatedly. There would be a lot of information we could gather. Also, we would get the feedback quicker than we would with MCAS. Teacher A<sup>5</sup>

Given teacher agreement, these principals invited Ethan to an initial meeting where he further described the project and answered teachers' questions prior to their making a final commitment. This process appeared effective in that a) teachers were reasonably well-informed about the FAP at the outset and, b) they chose to participate.

However, a few principals did not follow this procedure. Either they asked someone else on the faculty to engage teachers in the work, or they designed the implementation themselves and did

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<sup>4</sup>To preserve confidentiality, all principals, teachers, and coaches are referred to by letters. When two teachers were interviewed together and their comments intertwined, we used two initials to indicate this fact. In addition, when using pronouns, we refer to all participants, regardless of their actual gender, as "she."

<sup>5</sup>The teachers we have chosen to quote represent all of the schools in our sample. We have not, however, included many quotes from teachers who had little involvement with the FAP as a result of the way it was introduced and implemented at their schools. These teachers had less to say about the FAP and, needless to say, could not be as positive about it as those teachers who were more involved.

not involve teachers. In these schools, teachers reported having had little conversation about the FAP prior to its first implementation and little follow-up conversation about how they might use the data. In one school, this likely occurred because the individual put in charge did not seem to understand the FAP well-enough to explain it to teachers. In another, teachers were not told that the FAP was primarily for their use as teachers but rather that it was an assessment that would give students practice with MCAS-like reading passages implemented under testing conditions. Teachers were told that the data could be useful to them, in addition to its major test-prep purpose. This presentation set a very different context for the FAP than did presentations in which principals fully engaged their teachers.

At least for myself, I didn't know what the test was, I didn't know what it was for. Communication is not really a strong point in the school, it's not uncommon for us teachers not to know in advance what's going on. So I would say that the day of the first test, I didn't know what to expect as far as what the kids would be doing, the format of the test, how long it would be – I knew nothing. ...It was basically the same thing [with the second question set]. I said, "You remember a couple of months ago, we went downstairs, took a test?" They went, "Oh yeah." Well, we're going to do that again." I actually haven't even really seen the data.  
Teacher B

The on-site facilitator<sup>6</sup> did not have an initial meeting with these teachers. His first meeting was not until after the implementation of the first question set, when he was bringing the data to the schools. As a result, these data discussion meetings were teachers' first inkling of what the FAP could provide in terms of data and links to instruction. Observations of these meetings confirmed teachers' comments about their lack of knowledge: teachers listened intently and asked few questions. They were not ready to consider how they might use the data feedback.

Such meetings contrasted dramatically with the liveliness of meetings in which principals had engaged teachers in the FAP from the outset and teachers had met with the facilitator to learn about the FAP. During what was now the second meeting with the facilitator, teachers asked many questions and they considered what the data might mean for their classes and for individual students. They engaged with each other about how they might use the data. They discussed students they knew across classes and grades and what might explain their answer choices. They sought ideas from the facilitator about how to learn more from the data and how to use it with students. In these schools, we were also more likely to hear of the data being discussed by the ILT, in team meetings, or in Looking at Student Work (LASW) sessions, particularly at the elementary schools. Teachers in these schools might even discuss what they had learned from entering the data onto the paper forms prior to getting it back from the BPE. In schools where teachers were not integral to the implementation, such discussions were unlikely

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<sup>6</sup>The FAP had only one on-site facilitator, Ethan Mintz, whose work was essential to the successful implementation of this project. However, in order to indicate that it was the facilitator role, and not solely the person, who was important to this project's implementation, in most instances we will use "facilitator" to refer to Ethan and his work.

to happen.<sup>7</sup>

Just as principals varied in how they introduced the FAP to teachers, they varied in their involvement with the data when it came back to the school or even before it was sent to BPE. Some shared all of the classroom data with all of the teachers. Their goal was to engage teachers in figuring out what was working at a grade level and what needed attention. In addition, one pointed out that it would be valuable to know which teachers seemed to be succeeding in teaching particular strategies to students so that others could learn how that teacher was developing instructional strategies. Some reported that the ILT considered the data while others did not share the data with this group.

Teachers, for their part, varied in how they introduced the FAP to their students. Many stressed the formative nature of the data and how it would help them help the students. A few told the students that the test wouldn't affect their grades but they should do their best because of the FAP's formative nature.

I told my kids it is an assessment, but it would not affect what I put on their report card, but they should answer it the best way they know, because it's going to help me to figure out what guided reading or literacy groups they should be in, what kind of books they may need to read more of, and also going to help me to be a better teacher because I'll know exactly what things I need to teach them and what things I might just need to practice a little more, and I told them, it's in your best interest that you be honest with it, because you don't want me to teach you things you already know because you're going to be bored in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Teacher D

I didn't really tell them anything. I just wanted to give it to them, see how they were doing it, take it back and – it's for me so that I can better guide their instruction, see what areas they need help in. Teacher C

I explained to the kids what they were and what we were going to do with the question sets. I put it in the context of this is going to help us figure out what to work on together as a class, and that they were very important, and would be analyzed so they would tell us what to work on as a class, as a community.  
Teacher A

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<sup>7</sup>In one sample school, teachers were well-informed about the FAP but seemed not to be fully engaged in its implementation. They reported that although the question sets were useful, they were not a significant addition to the MCAS prep work they were already doing in which they were trying to understand how students chose particular multiple choice responses.

Other teachers said little to the students other than introducing the FAP as MCAS prep. As noted above, a few teachers had no knowledge of the FAP until the principal announced its first administration.

Teachers also varied in how they implemented the questions sets and used the data.

- Most asked students to complete each question set during class time after explaining its purpose and importance.
- A small number of teachers gave the question sets as homework, asking students to explain all of the answer choices thereby making visible their thinking about right and wrong choices. The question sets, used in this way, formed the basis of classroom discussions.
- A few had a substitute or student teacher implement the FAP. In retrospect, they realized this was not an appropriate way to use the question sets in a serious manner.
- One or two seemed to have used them as a fill-in activity prior to school vacation days.

Regardless of implementation strategy, some teachers, after scoring the assessments themselves, went over the questions and responses with the students. Others waited until the data were returned by BPE. Still others did not engage their students in conversations about the assessments.<sup>8</sup>

In many respects, the BPE gave the FAP schools an opportunity and a challenge when it did not specify how schools were to use the question sets. In the spirit of an experiment, the BPE wanted to learn about the ways in which the assessments might be used and, perhaps, which might have the most merit with regard to targeting instruction toward students' needs. However, this open-ended approach was also a challenge with respect to *when* and *how frequently* to use the question sets.

First, schools had not planned for the FAP when developing their WSIPs.

Second, they did not know what the assessments would look like before they arrived at the school so they had difficulty planning ahead for the appropriate timing of their implementation.

Third, the schools needed to implement other testing/assessment requirements which had a fixed schedule and included the district's formative assessments and MCAS.

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<sup>8</sup>One teacher reported that she did not discuss the question sets with her special education class or return the papers to her students because they had done poorly. She felt that any mention of them would discourage the students from further effort. This was an atypical response. The other special education teachers in our sample did not exclude their students from learning about their responses and how to approach the assessments with new strategies.

Fourth, the three question sets for each grade-level were not completed at the same time. As a result, teachers might get the first question set at one time, but not have the second or third set until several weeks or months later. While this roll-out was unavoidable in the pilot year, when coupled with the first, second, and third issues, the result was a somewhat idiosyncratic implementation at all of the schools.

As a result of all of these factors, at some schools, implementation was accomplished when teachers could fit it into their crowded schedules. With one exception and as far as we know, teachers in our sample of schools did not give the first question set, consider the results, teach something, and then give the next question set.<sup>9</sup> One teacher noted, with respect to the first two question sets:

They were spaced out over a couple of weeks, two weeks, but that was done by how we got them. Teacher A

Reflecting back on the implementation, another teacher said:

I think maybe as a school we needed to spend more time talking about when to implement it and for what purpose. I don't feel like we really gave enough time to that. . . . We did it [talk as a group about it] during grade cluster [meetings]. But we have grade cluster once a week and there have been so many topics. Maybe it's something we could have done in ILT. Teacher E

Given the developmental nature of the pilot, coupled with the fact that teachers were involved in "Work to Fairness," and that the schools had to figure out how best to implement the FAP in their contexts, we think that they did an outstanding job. Teachers followed through and learned from the processes they used. Not one suggested an aversion to using the question sets again. Rather, they realized that there were better ways to implement them and that they would redesign their implementation plans for the next school year so that the question sets would be better spaced over time for maximal use.

Principals, too, felt that the investment of their time and their teachers' had been worthwhile and that they had learned a great deal about how to use the question sets in the coming year. Most important, though, principals seemed convinced that the FAP provided them with the kinds of data they could not generate on their own. One principal recalled why she had involved her school in the first place.

The reason I felt comfortable is, [FAP] seemed to be aligning with a lot of the conversations in this building. We had had some teachers, for example, do a similar thing, in which they went back to the released items, cut out questions, put similar questions together for us to try to figure out what our kids weren't doing

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<sup>9</sup>We understand from the BPE that a few schools that were not in our sample used the assessments to form hypotheses and used the data to inform their CCL cycles.

right, and then go out and try to align instructional materials to it, just talk to anybody about anything, but we never got to the next level because that was time intensive. Principal A

The FAP enabled teachers to get to this next level. In addition, due to the BPE taking responsibility for rapid and useful data analysis, it provided schools with information they could not get from other assessments.

We got different kinds of information [from the FAP]. I've heard really good things from the teachers in terms of the data they were able to pull because you can look at that data, and look at which kids are doing pretty well with inference, which kids are not, which kids are just way off course. We can't do this with our MCAS data when it comes back. So we're getting different information from the FAP. Principal B

The BPE took a chance in providing schools with an opportunity to develop their own strategies for using the FAP. After analyzing the data, we think this was a good idea. The strategy provided schools with a genuine opportunity to make the assessments and the process their own. It enabled them to consider the strengths and weaknesses of what they did and suggest changes for the next school year. In addition, it helped the BPE gain information that will be important if the assessments are made available to a wider range of schools. On this point, we note that principals, as always, played a critical role in making the FAP a success. However, even among the EP principals there was variation in their commitment and approach to implementation and, therefore, in its effectiveness. This finding can alert the BPE and, if appropriate, the BPS to the importance of principals in making the FAP a useful tool that can improve instruction.

**2. Skillful facilitation support was essential to successful implementation.** It goes without saying, that skillful, on-site facilitation was essential to the implementation of the question sets. There were numerous ways in which the facilitator provided the schools with crucial technical support as they went through the process of administering the assessments, scoring the students' responses, grappling with the data provided by the BPE, making links between what they learned from the data, and connecting that learning to instructional practices.

At the outset, he offered to help introduce the FAP to the participating schools. Some schools took him up on this offer, others did not. Within our sample, the schools that had the facilitator introduce the FAP reported that his contribution was valuable to their understanding of the purpose of the pilot and how participating would be useful to them. Although all of the teachers appreciated having a facilitator help introduce the pilot, those whose principals took a limited role in explaining it had no other source of information.

For example, at one of the piloting schools, teachers administered the FAP without knowing much about it and, as a result, without much enthusiasm. The facilitator visited these teachers after they had administered the first question set and while they were entering the students' answers on the scoring sheets. As one teacher noted:

At first we weren't given a clear purpose. We were just told we needed to get it to the students. The kids had things [assessments] that came from downtown before [the FAP] that we had to turn in, so we thought it was just something else coming from downtown. We just gave it. We were griping at first, because we said, "You want us to grade all of these by what time?" And we had another thing we had to grade, and [the administrator] said, "Well, someone's coming in [implying that they had to complete the FAP]." So when Ethan came in, he put us at ease and made us see the tool was useful...he went over the scoring, and how we should look at the questions, and things that we should consider when looking at the student answers. Just took us a little deeper than we would normally look at students' responses. And the blue sheet [Scoring Guide] he gave us with the explanations was so clear for us, we didn't mind just sitting there and going through it, just tallying the scores. We all kind of mellowed out after that.

Teacher F

Although the lack of strong leadership for the FAP continued to influence its implementation and use at this school, without question, the facilitator was a much-needed source of knowledge for the teachers.

From the perspective of principals who actively engaged their teachers and explicitly supported their use of the assessments, the facilitator's impact was still important and it was more than informational and/or soothing.

What happens is, after he leaves, teachers catch me in the building for the next few days, filling me in on the latest things they talked about. I think there's a pride in having a structured reflection time [with Ethan] where they're presenting in some ways. There's a quality of presenting at the same time as collaborating. I don't know if that was meant to be a part of it, but that's what I'm feeling. The reason I say it is this. A couple of times, it's been, "Hey, when Ethan comes, we're going to point this out to him. This is an incorrect answer," or, "When they come, we're going to show this or that." It's an engagement. Principal A

The facilitator had an energizing influence on the teachers because he engaged them as a) users of the question sets and as, b) informants to the BPE. Most teachers reported that they were rarely, if ever, asked to provide genuine feedback – formative or summative – on any new program or policy implemented in the district.

Once teachers had administered the FAP, the facilitator was present when they first viewed the data arrayed in a number of formats. On these occasions, the facilitator walked teachers and principals through the data so that they could begin to do their own analyses and consider the implications of the data. For the most part, teachers were excited during these meetings and offered comments about what surprised them in the data.

The facilitator also helped teachers consider how they might use the data with their students. For

example, on a number of occasions, when teachers were puzzled by students' answer choices, the facilitator suggested that they talk to the children about what they were thinking when they made those choices, noting that by talking to the students, teachers could learn which students needed help with the skills represented by the questions and which needed help understanding the format of the assessment. They could learn about problems students might have with questions because they did not understand the vocabulary, for example, if they did not know that the word "tongue" was used to refer to a language. He pointed out that some surprises in the scores might come from students who were good readers but did not have test taking skills. The facilitator stressed the importance of teaching the students how to read the test as a genre.

For example, one teacher reported that the facilitator's presentation and discussion had a significant impact on her thinking.

We discussed why students may answer a question a certain way. It's just nice for teachers to sit down and actually talk together about the students' answers. One other thing he gave us [was information about] an answer that was totally off the wall. It might have been in the text, but was not the correct answer. I would not have even considered that in looking at why the students did not do well, but that was useful, just seeing some of the confusion in the students. Teacher F

Principals, as well as teachers, valued the facilitator's ability to help teachers think about the data and how it might be useful to them and their students.

After Ethan left, the teachers were kind of hyped. The discussion was deep, their questions were being answered. They can get very reflective, and so thinking ahead and thinking back and having somebody other than me or the coach to bounce all those things off of, I think, was really helpful. They really enjoyed that conversation with him.... He just answered some questions. When the first question sets were coming out, I really had as little knowledge of them as they did at that point. I think if we're going to expand this to other schools, [there should be], initially, a time when Ethan can meet with those groups that are going to do this to answer their questions. Principal B

Throughout the conversations, the facilitator stressed the pilot nature of the FAP and the importance of having teachers figure out how to use it to their advantage. He offered suggestions, when asked, but he was never prescriptive in his recommendations. For example, some teachers of ELL students wondered whether they should have used the assessments with their students given their students' very limited proficiency with English and, therefore, their large number of wrong answers. The facilitator repeatedly reminded teachers that they should use the question sets in ways that made sense for them and their students. In a situation where most of the students were not proficient in English, for example, he suggested they might use the question sets only as an oral exercise to familiarize the students with the reading and the kinds of

questions they will face later.<sup>10</sup>

When asked what to do, the facilitator frequently replied: “Use your judgment. Don’t use [the question set] if you won’t get useful data on the students. Figure out how to make it useful. We want you and your students to learn from it.” Then he reminded the teachers: “If you use it differently, just let us know what you did.” After all, the BPE wanted to learn from the teachers. By responding in these ways, the facilitator established teachers’ authority over the use of the FAP and he encouraged them to share their knowledge with the BPE.

Principals who attended the meetings with the facilitator and the teachers appreciated having his expertise available to them. They understood that conversations with the facilitator extended teachers’ opportunities to discuss the data and deepened the quality of their reflections on those data. These principals told teachers to take maximum advantage of the facilitator’s presence.

**3. Teachers liked the design of the question sets and the scoring guides, and the information that accompanied the question sets. The data prepared by the BPE was returned to the schools quickly and presented in a useful format.**

Teachers appreciated that the question sets were modeled on or actually used previous years’ MCAS passages and questions. They also valued the BPE’s efforts to design new questions so that students had focused opportunities to demonstrate what they knew and did not know concerning finding evidence and drawing inferences.<sup>11</sup> As teacher put it, “The whole thing was teacher friendly. It was not more work.” Teacher G

Teachers applauded the use of different genres (i.e., fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama) in the formative assessments. During meetings with Ethan, teachers commented that it was excellent to have different genres to give students practice and remind teachers what to teach. At the elementary level, in particular, the range of genres led teachers to realize that they were omitting a number of genres from the curriculum. For example, some reported that they had not taught poetry and/or drama to their students. As a result, their students were stymied when faced with those genres on the question set. Other teachers said their students were unfamiliar with how dialogue is indicated in texts. Again, such students were confused when required to read passages that included dialogue. Although the issue of genres arose most frequently at the elementary school level, there were some secondary teachers who reported omitting genres from

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<sup>10</sup>Many of the suggestions made by the facilitator, and his stance toward teachers’ using their judgment about how to use the FAP, were hammered out in weekly meetings among the project staff at the BPE. By discussing the ongoing work and the issues that were arising, staff came to agreement on the kinds of responses and advice to provide to teachers and principals so that there would be coherence a) within the BPE staff so that they provided the same message to schools and, b) across the schools and, therefore, the project. The emphasis was on urging teachers to inquire about their students’ thinking in order to get at the reasons for the answers they chose on the question sets.

<sup>11</sup>A few teachers offered ideas for improving the question sets. We include their suggestions later in this report.

the curriculum. One such teacher mentioned she was pleased with the question set related to “The Miracle Worker” because she did not have her students read plays. The question set gave them some familiarity with the genre prior to MCAS.

Although teachers’ comments about the genres they taught and skipped were made in the context of a positive feature of the FAP, they raise serious issues about the extent to which there is a K-12 literacy curriculum in place and in use in the district. We were told that such a curriculum exists and that the district is in the process of developing curriculum units to accompany it. However, the teachers with whom we spoke were not familiar with the guides and, in fact, seemed unaware of their existence. According to a coach that we interviewed on this topic, teachers’ lack of knowledge may come from the way in which the curriculum guides were introduced to the teachers. According to the coach, the guides were given to teachers without any associated professional development on how to use them. We did not pursue the roll-out of the curriculum guides or their potential value. However, we think it would be useful for the district and the schools to consider the curriculum that is being taught with respect to genres and how that aligns with the standards, and therefore, with what MCAS requires of students.

Another positive feature of the question sets was related to their widespread usability. Teachers found they could be used with all populations: regular education students; students with disabilities; and English language learners.

It’s important that people understand you can use [the FAP] with all student populations. It gives us information about Special Education and about ELL, who would obviously have some problems with it because of the language. So it’s been very good data. I like it a lot. Principal B

A very small number of teachers reported that they did not share the findings with their students. As noted earlier, in one case, a special education teacher reported that her students did so poorly, she thought they would feel terrible if they saw their scores. Unfortunately, she did not engage her students in an active process of identifying and then learning what they did not yet know.

For the most part, teachers found the scoring guides helpful in understanding the answer choices students made. They gave teachers insights into why the students chose what they chose. Some teachers even found it helpful to give older students copies of the scoring guides when going over the FAP. Teachers commented that the FAP was “very useful, because it gave us an insight into why the kids would select A as opposed to B, it would tell us a lot more about their thinking.” Teacher D and Teacher C

I liked that the questions were identified, which ones were inference and that's really valuable if you want to pull a group of kids together. And I liked being able to look at the language and say, "How do you know this is an inference question versus a fact question?" Teachers I

I really like the way they have identified what type of questions are being asked, and I also really like the way they have the scoring guide telling you why someone might answer this question. Because that way you can actually teach the kid some really quick tips on how to take the MCAS. It's like, "I noticed you answered this, and you probably did because it looks like this word, but actually it isn't," or "I noticed you answered this but this is nowhere in the passage, so what did you do?" I liked how it told you what each question sort of represented. That was really helpful. Teacher E

Understanding students' thought process allowed coaches to help teachers begin to introduce instruction that was tailored to student needs.<sup>12</sup>

[The Scoring Guide] gave [teachers] the framework for what to look for and how to even begin the conversation with the individual students. Because that was one area that I suggested teachers really kind of focus on in their conferences with students. So I think that became a useful tool to at least know how to go about having the conversations. Coach A

Teachers also found the data presented in spreadsheets, graphs, and charts useful in understanding student and class strengths and weaknesses. As one of many teachers noted:

I love the visual graphing and the spreadsheet [that showed] where the kids were. It just really helped with grouping. I know who to pull. I looked at it and I was like, "OK, these are the kids I'm going to pull and talk to." Teachers K

We reiterate that teachers' understanding during this pilot test depended on high quality facilitation of the data feedback meetings. The facilitator's presence was appropriate as well as necessary given how new this kind of feedback was for teachers as well as principals.

Providing a collaborative context for the data feedback sessions was useful not only because it was efficient and teachers enjoyed it, but because the collaborative structure facilitated discussion about students' strengths and weaknesses across classes and grade-levels. For example, at one such meeting, the teachers were combing the data to try and figure out whether

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<sup>12</sup>Coaches did not have a direct role in the implementation of the FAP in most of the schools in our sample. Some, however, sat in on the meetings with Ethan and offered support to teachers as they examined their students answer sheets.

the same children were picking Out of Place (OOP) and/or Out of Bounds (OOB) answers.<sup>13</sup> One teacher noted with surprise that one of his students picked all OOB answers. He wanted to know whether this ELL child was not reading or was not comprehending. The group went on to discuss several other ELL children and what was puzzling about their answers. Ethan suggested that they might use the data disk provided by the BPE to sort the students so that they could identify those who had been ELL and were now mainstreamed in order to see whether they were making the same kinds of errors and, if so, whether they might reflect problems in comprehension.

These types of conversations were not possible prior to the FAP because teachers lacked the requisite data with which to work or the potential to sort and re-sort it according to their needs. Once teachers looked at the data as a group, they reported feeling better prepared to bring the results back to the students.

I would even tell the kids, “For you to answer this, it means you’re out of place. It means: did you even read this? Did you understand it?” It just gives me a better understanding as to where the kid was. Teachers J and K

It was good [OOB and OOP], it gave it a label. Out of bounds - I was using some other terms to go with it, some wacky kind of terms. But out of bounds, out of place, I think if you start right away in the earlier grades, using that terminology so there’s a common terminology across the grade levels – because terminology is a problem, if I don’t use the same terminology all the time, the kids get confused. So I like the terminology and I like the examples. It was good to be able to go back – the sheets to learn from the wrong answers, are excellent, very valuable.  
Teacher L

The data and associated analyses provided a starting point from which teachers could talk to their students in order to understand the thinking they used to select their answers. As one put it, they could try “to get inside their brains.” We do not know how many teachers actually went back and talked to their students. However, we know that they left these data feedback meetings with a better idea of how to have such conversations and why they might be helpful.

Teachers and principals praised the BPE for the speed of the data analysis process. Because the BPE returned the data to the schools soon after it was submitted, the question sets were fresh in

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<sup>13</sup>According to the materials provided with the FAP, if students do not fully understand a question, they are likely to choose OOP answers that are mentioned somewhere in the text but not in connection with the question. Students who are having difficulty comprehending the passage or who do not read carefully, may be distracted by OOB answers, answers that sound familiar or plausible but are not mentioned in the text. (Adapted from the Scoring Guide that accompanies the reading passages.)

everyone's minds and teachers could envision using the findings.<sup>14</sup>

I'm pleased about getting the data early. I think that's very beneficial for the kids at this stage in their lives. To be able to say to them, you did this. This is your data. I think they are going to take that more seriously. Teacher A

The BPE was communicating with us about whether they could come to the Looking At Student Work session to review the data and I [gave them a date]. So someone at BPE inputted everything and got it to us for that day. As soon as they knew that our teachers would need it, they immediately responded. Principal B

Although we are evaluating the FAP for its own merits, we think it is worth mentioning that teachers as well as principals felt that the FAP had a comparative advantage because it gave them more usable data than most other formative assessments.

And the whole point, as I understood this sort of different approach to the formative assessment was to give teachers information that they may not be able to gather themselves, from the answers that kids gave to their questions. I see this all the time – we correct assessments and don't do anything with it because, quite honestly, they don't know what to do with it; they don't know how to interpret a wrong answer. So when I saw this project coming, I was very excited, because I can see it being so useful – it's the piece that's missing. We're churning out those formative assessments, we're churning them out, and we're not doing anything with them for teacher instruction. That's really where I see the system falling apart. If it doesn't inform instruction, what's the point. Coach B

Well, basically, with the SRI, because it mostly tests vocabulary skills, it gives us some kind of insight on the vocabulary level of our students, but most importantly it tells us who are the good test takers, who are the kids that really have a good grasp on the process of elimination. Who are able to pick a word and substitute it in the reading. But we've never sat down after administering the test and actually looked at [them and discussed them]. We just look at the scores." Teacher D and Teacher C

I do a lot of data analysis, things of that sort, and it takes forever. I've been asking for something like this for years, so this a dream come true for me. Teacher L

The fact that teachers emphasized the FAP's usefulness in terms of informing classroom instruction is encouraging. Overwhelmingly, teachers found the question sets and scoring guides

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<sup>14</sup>Some teachers reported not having received data in a timely matter. We found that the delay was usually due to the fact that teachers had implemented the same question set over an extended period of time and that the school had waited to send the data to the BPE until all teachers had administered and scored a question set.

user-friendly and conducive to use. This finding suggests that they can be used to better align teaching practice with students' needs.

**4. As a result of implementing the FAP and analyzing the findings with the facilitator, teachers and principals were able to talk in detail about what the FAP data told them about their students' learning needs as they related to the skills embedded in the reading passages and questions.** Without question, they were enthusiastic about the opportunities to learn and about the learning itself. In this section of the report, we highlight important learnings that developed as a result of participation in the FAP.

- ***Some teachers realized that students might understand the reading passage but not the related questions.*** Therefore, they realized that they had to focus on ways to determine what was standing in the way of students' comprehension of the questions.
- ***Other teachers concluded that their students, particularly at the secondary level, were intimidated by the question sets in the same way they would be intimidated by MCAS.*** Their fear, teachers felt, led them to read less carefully than they might in other settings.
- ***Teachers and principals learned that some of their English language learners and/or students with disabilities read the passages more slowly and so were able to get more answers correct than the so-called "good readers."*** Neither teachers nor principals would have predicted this.

So looking at who was on the sheet, looking at kids – and then there being an occasional surprise, someone who I think is a very good reader, who was careless or whatever, and there they are on that list – I was surprised by that, and others who were not, and I wouldn't have thought they were able to determine those things, but they were obviously careful and able to do it. I thought those were particularly interesting, the questions that were connected.  
Principal C

During a meeting with Ethan, a teacher reported that her lowest reader scored high on the test and her highest reader scored the lowest. Needless to say, she was confused by this. Another teacher suggested that, perhaps, the lowest reader really focused on the test and the better reader was over-confident. Still another said: "That could be a good lesson for the students." This remark was followed by a discussion about how some kids think it is "demeaning" to reread the passage to find the answer. They feel they should be smart enough to "get" what they need to know the first time.

- ***Others reported learning that there were skills they were not teaching but that students needed to know.*** For example, one principal reported:

I learned that kids didn't have a clear understanding of what inference was....I think that most of them got the open-ended question....When our kids are able to respond in their own words to a text item, they don't appear to have difficulty. And that's because we practiced that skill a lot. They appear to have difficulty with multiple choice and the fact that it's a specific skill. If we don't focus on specific skill teaching, within the context of Readers' Workshop and Writers' Workshop, we're going to have a problem. So specific skills teaching has to be a part of whatever we're doing, and it has to be emphasized within the context of a mini-lesson, which is not really a mini-lesson, it's longer than a mini-lesson. Principal D

- ***Many teachers reported a growing awareness that students lacked the vocabulary they needed to understand the passages and questions.*** Across grade levels, teachers reported that students did not have the vocabulary they needed to adequately comprehend the texts. At the secondary level, teachers reported that students had difficulty with the words “architecture,” “demeanor,” or “finance,” words that were used in the question sets. Furthermore, they did not understand that the word “cake” could be used to refer to a cake of salt. At the elementary level, students did not know “dab” nor did they know that England was a country where English was spoken. Although they could not readily resolve the students' vocabulary weaknesses, the FAP made them more fully aware of which kinds of problems were leading to incorrect answer choices. And, they knew that without understanding the vocabulary, students would be unable to draw correct inferences even if they had mastered the skill of drawing inferences.
- ***Teachers learned that some students did not pay attention to some of the informational parts of the reading passages, for example definitions of terms that might precede the title of a passage or stage directions that might accompany a selection from a play.*** As a result, students were unable to fully comprehend the passage. Teachers now knew that they needed to teach students how to make use of all of the words and information on the pages.
- ***Analysis of the data revealed to teachers how children sometimes chose an incorrect answer as a result of using their background knowledge to make sense of the reading passage rather than returning to the text to find the answer.*** There was some irony in this finding given that many elementary teachers had been stressing the importance of using background knowledge to make sense of texts. Clearly, making such connections is important in developing comprehension. Teachers learned that they had to teach students when to rely on their own background knowledge and when to return to the text to determine what the author said.

- **Teachers learned things about their own teaching style and approach to student work.** They commented that the FAP enabled them to be more reflective on their own practice and meet the students where they were.

I just learned that I've become stagnant - you know, if it's wrong it's wrong, if it's right it's right! Looking at the data just allowed me to go back to where I was when I first started teaching, looking at the *why*. Teacher F (emphasis added)

Analyzing not just the correct answers but the incorrect answers. I thought that made a lot of sense. I correct them quickly and put them on that sheet and I can see a lot of what they did. Teacher A

This list of what teachers and principals learned is remarkable for its length and specificity. As a result of implementing the FAP, teachers have increased their knowledge of the many ways in which students may be mis-reading texts – whether on the MCAS, when reading for pleasure or for gaining new knowledge – and, therefore, failing to comprehend what they read. This new knowledge can be useful to them in a wide range of reading and/or reading related instruction. Teachers are excited by what they have learned and most realize that they now can have focused conversations with their students. Such conversations, in many respects, will be akin to the conferences recommended as part of Workshop instruction. Some teachers have, in fact, begun to have such conferences.

We [two teachers working together] sat them on the rug after we corrected the tests, and we gave them back the tests and we went over it to see where they went wrong. And it was OK, you know, [we said], “You got it wrong, don't worry. This is what it meant. And you could see them go, Ohhhh!” Teachers G and H

Although learning how to conduct conferences within the framework of Readers' Workshop has been difficult for teachers, it may be that learning how to conduct conferences based on the data provided by the FAP will give teachers some insight into how to conference with students about their independent reading books.

At this point in the report, we have described how the FAP was implemented in the schools we studied, the facilitator's role in supporting implementation, teachers' and principals' views of the assessments, and what they learned from the implementation process and the data. We turn now to some preliminary indicators of how the focus on analyzing the data has helped teachers keep their attention in instruction.

**5. The emphasis on analyzing the results of the assessments seems to have kept the focus on instruction rather than on merely practicing for the tests.** Teachers have taken small but significant steps in transferring what they have learned from the FAP to their classroom instruction. That they are not reporting major changes in their instruction is not a sign of the failure of the FAP or of those implementing it. Teachers and principals had just begun to learn

about the power of using these formative assessments late in the school year and they did not have time to work with their colleagues, principals, and coaches to consider the ways in which they might broadly apply their new knowledge.

Some teachers, however, had begun to use what they learned with their students. Some, as the following teachers report, created mini-lessons that targeted skills their students needed.

After I did the first data set, I did a unit of study on finding evidence, because they had difficulty finding evidence. I spent that time kind of teaching them and then practicing how to look back in the book [for the evidence]. I'm interested to see how they scored on the next question set, to see if that made any difference.

Teacher E

We spent a month and I did different mini-lessons on it everyday, using selections from novels that showed inferencing. Then the students went back to their independent reading, using their think marks for inferencing for whatever they were reading, and then we went into the sharing part. It started off real slowly. Maybe one out of every four inferences the students made in their independent reading was really an inference. Then we'd share and I'd go back and make overheads of those [that they shared] and that would be the mini-lesson for the next day: What's right with this? What's wrong with this? What were you thinking about when you made that inference? We did that for a month. After about a month, from conferencing with my students I felt that the kids were starting to nail it, because instead of 25 percent [of their inferences being inferences] they were getting 90 percent. Teacher L

Coaches, too, saw the potential for the knowledge gained from the FAP to inform instruction.

The FAP can inform teaching practice, daily mini-lessons, short and long-term planning, and even different kinds of units of study that we decide [during] our curriculum planning, or mapping, for both reading and writing. Coach A

Other teachers, having learned that they needed to help students read and re-read the passages in order to "find evidence" to support their answer choices, created lessons that required students to go back to the text.

So we did a lot of activities talking about the reading of nonfiction,...the beauty with nonfiction, you always have to go back, no one assumes you've memorized it. They were so accustomed to reading short passages and having to remember [because] that's what you do when you read fiction, you keep it in your head. With nonfiction it's a reteaching, you've got to go back. Teachers G and H

Without question, these examples highlight the fact that the focus of the question sets on MCAS skills need not limit what teachers can do with what they learn from the data. These teachers

were teaching important reading skills that students would use whenever they read. And, they were aware of how the FAP had influenced their overall instruction while attending to skills that the students would need for MCAS.

Rather than doing things in isolation with the MCAS for prep, it becomes part of instruction. And I've always said – I know some schools take a month before the MCAS and all they do is MCAS instruction. That, to me, is not the way to do it. I think the way to do it is to have this as part of daily instruction, and this [FAP] moves it. Teacher L

Teachers gained other insights, as well from the students' responses to the FAP. As we mentioned earlier in the report, teachers learned that their students were not familiar with dialogue and how it is expressed in writing. When they examined the text more closely, however, they learned even more.

There was a, read between the lines, with a “twinkle in somebody's eye” [in the text]. So we had to talk about a play on words in literature and in their own lives. We did a little unit on idiom and talked about play speech and how you're getting older now and you've got to kind of get a funny bone when you're reading. They hadn't really thought about the fact that you can kind of loosen up with your reading – They said, a twinkle in somebody's eye, what's a twinkle in – And then they said, “Oh, like that weird look?” And I said, you know, “He was ticked off because his uncle was laughing at him,” and the kids said, “oh, I knew that that twinkle meant that he knew something, because I know that I don't like when people laugh at me. Usually, adults, when they're laughing at you, you know that they know something else is going down. So it kind of gave the kids a view on what their relationships are at home and brought that into [their reading].... I thought that the packets of work that Ethan gave as samples kind of clued me in that kids are moving in their own reading lives. Because I had not really thought about a little read between the lines being so clever. Reading between the lines. Nobody thinks that you really have to think about teaching that. Teachers G and H

Teachers reported that, as a result of the FAP and the instructional activities that followed, students were giving more thought to *why* they had chosen certain answers and they were, to varying degrees, interested in gaining insight into their own thinking.

It is somewhat of a [MCAS] practice, but it's a way that both myself and the students can look at a reading and the response and actually think about our answers and be better able to understand some of our weaknesses, or pay closer attention to some of the things we're missing on....and the students were excited to get the score sheet to see what they had problems with. I went over the test with the students, and they were actually saying, “Well, I can see this.” I just read some of the explanation as to why they may have chosen certain answers, and

they gave me some feedback as to some things they were thinking. So they started thinking about the answers that they wrote. . . And some of them, they did admit they were guessing. The students are now taking it seriously because they see a clear feedback coming - clear and detailed feedback coming back from their answers. So I felt that was very helpful. Teacher F

Some teachers also used what they learned to construct explicit lessons on test-taking skills. Given the importance of the MCAS and other standardized tests, it seems quite reasonable for teachers to spend time teaching students how to deal with the genre of reading that appears on these assessments. Students can be taught to be more strategic in selecting answers to multiple choice questions, as this teacher suggests.

And also based on this looking at, for example, the out of bounds and the “mentioned but not part of the answer” [OOP] – we did a number of mini-lessons based on making sure the students look at all the answers. Part of the problem in the discussion was, if the answer is, say, D, and the students think B is the answer, they stop at B, bubble in B, and don’t even look at C or D. Teacher L

And, they can be taught to look for clues that appear in the texts.

Another thing I did with my group, we went over the questions, and I said, what does the question start out with? A lot of times, it starts out with, “According to the passage, according to paragraph” I asked, “What do you think that means? Do you see? When you do a test, they’re not asking about what you think or what background knowledge you have. That doesn’t matter. Everything you should know should come from the reading or is suggested.” The finding evidence piece, yes, they did okay, but for the inferential piece, they were putting in their own background knowledge, and I’m saying, “This is not your reader’s notebook. In your reader’s notebook that would be appropriate.” Teacher D and Teacher C

I decided to use it as a teaching tool, and we went back and really studied the kinds of questions, we talked a lot about the different kinds of questions, finding evidence and making inferences, and they filled out this tally chart so as to see what their strength was, and a lot of them are still OK with main idea, they’re not OK with inferencing.” Teacher M

As principals noted, too, teaching students to master the skills that FAP data showed they lacked served two purposes, both of them, as principals note, instructional.

It clearly is instructional, because those are the two main concepts [finding evidence and drawing inferences] that are tested in MCAS, but those are the things that good readers need to do, and those are the things that, obviously, students struggle with. Principal C

This [FAP] I see more for instruction than just for test taking. The way it has been geared, it is exactly based on instruction strategies, based on the standards - on what is the standard that we're now meeting with our children. Principal E

Keeping the data analysis discussion focused on instruction, especially on what good readers do, will further help to align the FAP with the district's approach to reading instruction. The finding bolsters our conclusion that the FAP can be test-prep for MCAS but that it is much more than test-prep.

## CONCLUSIONS

The data provide a compelling picture of the ways in which authentic formative assessments can lead to teacher knowledge that informs instruction. The FAP provided a way for teachers to use data to explore their students' thinking in order to understand the next steps needed in instruction. The process engendered by the FAP is consistent with the teaching/learning process explicitly promoted in the district's math and literacy programs. The FAP provides teachers and students with the opportunity to learn how to approach MCAS reading and multiple choice items in a way that stresses the development of reading skills that are essential across the curriculum. In this way, the FAP can make a strong contribution to improving teaching and learning in the district. Teachers and principals want to have the question sets and the analyses available in the coming school years. Indeed, they suggest they would like more of them in order to garner more usable information about their students' reading skills.

With the goal of nurturing and expanding the value derived from the FAP, we now offer a number of suggestions for its further development.

### ***1. Increase the number of question sets and the number of genres included. Make them available to the schools at the start of the school year.***

With respect to the number and variety of question sets, principals and teachers noted that they would like to have more in order to use them with a bit of flexibility. For example, some teachers might want to use them as pre- and post-tests when teaching units on drawing inferences in different genres. Other teachers suggested they would like to spread the assessments out over the school year to reinforce/review skills taught early in the year. And, additional assessments would be helpful when working with students who need additional assistance with these skills.

Although everyone understood why the question sets were not available at the start of the

2003-2004 year, they emphasized the importance of having copies of those currently finished as well as new ones that might be developed in time to plan for their use across the 2004-2005 year. We include this suggestion and acknowledge its validity. And, we applaud teachers for wanting to plan their year's literacy instruction so that they can obtain high quality data on what their students need to learn and are learning. However, we also know it is unlikely that the BPE could produce a large number of additional question sets by the start of the next school year.<sup>15</sup>

**2. *Include more open response questions.*** Each FAP question set included one short answer that was not multiple choice. Students were required to write a few words or a sentence to answer the question. These items, however, were not designed to be used as open response prompts.

A number of teachers were unclear about the purpose of these items and what to require of students. Some asked students to write a paragraph while others requested several paragraphs or just a sentence. They were also uncertain about how to score the responses given their uncertainty about what was required and the absence of a scoring rubric.

At the same time, the presence of the item alerted teachers to the fact that they would like to have a way to identify the skills their students have and lack with respect to responding to open response items. Although most teachers reported that they have students do open response items frequently, their desire is to have the kind of detailed feedback for this student work that they obtained for the multiple choice questions.

By including this suggestion, we are not concluding that the BPE must develop such assessments in order for the FAP to be successful. We include the suggestion because it was raised by a good number of teachers and a few principals and indicates their desire for assessments that provide them with usable data.

**3. *Provide teachers with resources/names of resources they can use once they understand what children need to learn and start to plan for focused instruction in those skill areas.***

Teachers report that they do not always know what resources to use to teach specific reading skills. They also say that they do not always have the materials with which to teach all of the genres that should be included in their grade level in light of what is tested on MCAS. And, some claim that the leveled, independent reading books they use do not include the range of vocabulary students need to learn.

These realities led teachers at three of the elementary schools in our sample to report that

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<sup>15</sup>A small number of teachers and principals noted that they would love to have the BPE develop authentic formative assessments that they could use for mathematics. They report that the formative assessments the district requires are not useful for informing their instruction.

they would like to return to using anthologies and some basal readers as part of their reading instruction. Anthologies include all of the necessary genres; basal readers, they report, especially some of the older ones, include high level vocabulary.

Returning to anthologies and basal readers might solve the problems that teacher identify, but it would not improve reading instruction. After all, the reason for the district's adoption of the workshop approach is the reality that a) all children in a classroom are not reading at the same grade level, b) reading instruction needs to be based on a careful assessment of students' needs and c) needs to engage students as active participants in their learning.

However, the teachers' concerns are real and they need access to high quality, appropriate materials if they are going to take full advantage of what they are learning from the assessment data. We suggest that teachers might make good use of their coaches' expertise when seeking such materials. And, we suggest that, for those elementary schools using a curriculum such as Making Meaning, there might be ways to connect the assessment data and students' needs to particular units in this curriculum. Might there be a way, we wonder, to make discrete units available to teachers in light of their students' learning needs? Might there be ways to identify similar materials for teachers at the secondary level? Now that teachers are aware of what they need, it will be important for the district to insure that the materials are available.

***4. Principals and teachers vary in their ability to use the information on the diskette.***

The BPE provided schools with a data disk along with the formative data tables and charts described earlier. The data on the disk is in a user-friendly format and could, in theory, allow teachers and principals to disaggregate the data and examine patterns that are important for their schools. However, we think that to make this important tool useful, teachers and principals will need some hands-on professional development that teaches them how to use it. Our discussions with teachers and principals did not reveal that any of the schools were using the data diskette by the beginning of June. Additionally, it would be helpful to insure that each teacher has access to the data.

***5. Continue to support high quality support, facilitation and technical assistance to schools using the Formative Assessments. To this end, explore the ways in which coaches and/or teacher leaders and Directors of Instruction might be involved with the FAP and its future iterations.***

Our findings make it clear that high quality facilitation and focused discussions were central to enabling teachers to have rich conversations about the data and its links to instruction. The provision of this technical assistance was essential for the success of the pilot test of the assessments. It will be critical to provide such support to teachers in these schools for at least another year, and it will be essential to provide high quality facilitation and technical assistance for any schools that are new to this project in the

coming years.

Therefore, we suggest that the BPE and, if appropriate, the BPS, consider the possibility of developing the requisite data analysis skills in coaches so that they can support teachers in implementing the assessments, examining the data, and linking it to instruction. We recognize that coaches may not always be in a school at the time of implementation of the question sets and that this will complicate our suggestion. However, we think that coaches are likely the best option available.

In some schools, principals may be able to take on this support role. However, we are reluctant to make this suggestion given principals' already heavily loaded schedules and responsibilities. It may be, however, that the principal can suggest a teacher leader or director of instruction who could be trained to facilitate the implementation of the question sets and the analysis, discussion, and applications to instruction.

It would be useful, therefore, to explore with principals and coaches what they see as the options for on-site support for continued use of these formative assessments.

**6. Consider how and whether to use the question sets as part of a coaching cycle.** We understand that the BPE considered that some schools would use the FAP to focus a CCL cycle. As far as we know, this did not happen in our sample of schools.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, even principals and coaches who are strong supporters of CCL are not sure that it would be appropriate to link directly the assessments with a CCL cycle.

Overall, the principals and coaches with whom we spoke felt that the data provided by the FAP was too narrow a focus for a CCL cycle. Of course, cycles often focus on drawing inferences, but the inquiry component of such a cycle, and, therefore, the demonstration lessons, would likely focus more broadly than a cycle focused, for example, on encouraging students to return to the text to find an answer, reading dialogue, and/or reading the informational text that accompanies a play. It seems more appropriate to think of the formative assessments as informing a set of mini-lessons or guided reading groups. However, it would be useful to bring together a group of coaches in order to explore their thinking about the links between the FAP and CCL cycles.

**7. Provide principals, teachers, and coaches with suggestions (not requirements) for effective FAP implementation and use. This will require finding the right balance between giving teachers flexibility and providing appropriate structure.**

Understandably, BPE chose to give schools and teachers a great deal of flexibility in terms of how and when they used the FAP during the pilot. This allowed teachers to engage with the tool, discover its merits, and provide useful feedback to the BPE. It will

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<sup>16</sup> See footnote 9.

be important to continue to stress the importance of schools deciding how to use the question sets to their own benefit in the future.

However, it will also be useful to draw on what was learned from the schools in the pilot when advising them and when inviting additional schools to use the question sets. For example:

- The schools have learned that they will make better use of the assessment data if they implement the question sets in ways that align them to specific instructional foci.
- We have learned that principals need to take a significant role in their implementation if teachers are to have the opportunity to learn from the assessments.
- We have concluded that it is valuable to have teachers make decisions about how and when to use the assessments so they are of maximal value.
- We also know that it would be useful for a grade level to administer the assessments at roughly the same time so that data entry and feedback can be done efficiently. However, there might be more creative ways to design data entry so that a) the analyses could be completed efficiently, and b) teachers could administer them according to their curricular schedules.

By fully introducing and explaining the assessments to teachers and coaches, creating an administration schedule that makes sense for the school, and providing teachers with time to review results and discuss future instruction, the FAP could be used more effectively than it was during the pilot year.

However, we stress that it will remain important to balance some structural guidance with flexibility so that teachers remain active in making the formative assessments most useful for them and for their students.

***8. The schools in our sample would like to continue to use the question sets and receive data entry, feedback, and analysis support from the BPE. As the use of these assessments continues and, perhaps, expands to other schools, we recommend that the original purpose of the FAP not be challenged by making it a part of the district's formative assessment data collection program.***

It is clear from reading the data in this report that teachers and principals valued the FAP and benefitted from the technical assistance offered by Ethan and the BPE. If the BPE plans to introduce the formative assessments to other schools in the district, this support needs to be continued and expanded.

We understand that it required considerable BPE resources to provide data entry and analysis for the twenty-one schools in light of BPE resources. If the sample increases, perhaps the BPE might work with the BPS to determine how to provide data entry and

analysis to a larger number of schools in a timely fashion.

However, in order to preserve the integrity of the formative assessments as a learning tool for teachers, we stress the need to keep these assessments and their analyses separate from the district's formative assessments. We highlight the importance of this separation to ensure that teachers can use the tool as it was intended – to inform their understanding of students' learning needs and their classroom instruction – without having to adapt that use in light of the district's purposes for using formative assessments.

## **Appendix A**

### Sample Question Set

# Reading Check-up

Skills tested: Finding evidence in text and making inferences

Grade 4 • Question Set 1 • Passage: Doing Away With the King's English

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/Class \_\_\_\_\_

Read this passage to learn about our American English language. Then, answer the questions that follow.

## Doing Away With the King's English

Compiled by Susan Lurie • Spring 1999 Test

Noah Webster wasn't satisfied when the British went home—he wanted to get rid of their language, too.

- 1 More than 265 million people speak English. In fact, more people speak English than any other language except Mandarin Chinese. People speak English all over the world. It's spoken in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, several Pacific islands, and various parts of Africa and Asia. English is the most widely used of the world's major languages.
- 2 How did English get to be so big? English is the mother tongue of the British Isles. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the English were great explorers and colonizers, and wherever they went, they brought their language, which they called "the king's English."
- 3 Although many people speak English, they don't all pronounce it the same way or spell the words they use the same way. The United States, in particular, has its own special way of pronouncing and spelling the English language. We speak *American* English, and we owe a lot of its special character to one man: Noah Webster.
- 4 Noah Webster was born in Connecticut in 1758. He grew up during a period of great American patriotism. He graduated from Yale University when he was 20. By then, the American Revolution had begun, and young Noah joined George Washington's army and helped fight the British.
- 5 The end of the American Revolution brought independence to the United States, but the political independence didn't satisfy Webster. He wanted Americans to be independent from England intellectually, too. He wanted to do away with "the king's English" and replace it with a special American language.

- 6 In 1783, Webster published a textbook called *The American Spelling Book*. Over the years, this book was printed many times. It was used by generation after generation of American schoolchildren. Because the book had a blue back, it became famous as "the blue-backed speller."
- 7 Webster also compiled a dictionary. His was the first American dictionary. It, too, became very popular and was updated and reprinted many times. It's known as "Webster's Dictionary," and it's still with us. Chances are, when you go to look up a word, you'll look it up in a new edition of Noah Webster's book.
- 8 In his books, Webster made many changes in the English used in the United States. He suggested new ways to pronounce English words, and he added new, American words to our language. For example, one of those new words was *barbecue*.
- 9 Most of Webster's changes were in the way words should be spelled. Because we follow Webster's spellings, we spell many words differently from the way the English spell them. For instance, we write *center*, not *centre*, and *theater*, not *theatre*. We also leave the u out of words like *color*, *favor*, and *honor*. The English still spell these words *colour*, *favour*, and *honour*.
- 10 Webster made many other changes, most of which we use today. However, Webster did not go as far as his friend Benjamin Franklin wanted him to. Franklin wanted to drop all the silent letters from words. He also wanted to change the spellings of many words. Had Franklin written the dictionary instead of Webster, we would spell *give*, *giv*, and *wrong*, *rong*. Franklin really wanted to give us our own mother tongue — but he would have spelled it *tong!*



# Reading Check-up

Skills tested: Finding evidence in text and making inferences

Grade 4 • Question Set 1 • Passage: Doing Away With the King's English

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/Class \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. Why is English spoken in so many countries?**
  - A. More people are born in England than in any other country.
  - B. The English brought their languages to lands they explored or colonized.
  - C. People wanted to be like the English.
  - D. English is easier to learn than most other languages.
  
- 2. Which best describes the effect of Webster on the English language in America?**
  - A. Webster had no lasting effect on the way Americans speak English.
  - B. Webster's effect on the way Americans speak English lasted hundreds of years.
  - C. Webster's effect on English only lasted a few years.
  - D. Benjamin Franklin had a dramatic effect on the way English is spoken in America.
  
- 3. Based on information in the passage, who had the largest impact on how Americans speak English?**
  - A. George Washington
  - B. Benjamin Franklin
  - C. Noah Webster
  - D. William Shakespeare
  
- 4. According to this passage, Ben Franklin would have changed the spelling of "tongue" to**
  - A. tong.
  - B. tung.
  - C. tonge.
  - D. tongu.
  
- 5. According to this passage, Ben Franklin would have changed the spelling of "rhyme" to**
  - A. ryme.
  - B. rhym.
  - C. rym.
  - D. rhime.

6. **What people are in the ships in the cartoon drawing?**
- A. Africans
  - B. Americans
  - C. Chinese
  - D. English
7. **In paragraph 2 of the passage, what does the word “tongue” mean?**
- A. Mandarin Chinese
  - B. the part of your mouth that allows you to speak
  - C. the British Isles
  - D. a spoken language
8. **What textbook did Webster publish in 1783?**
- A. *Webster’s Dictionary*
  - B. *The Noah Webster Reader*
  - C. *The American Spelling Book*
  - D. *An American Patriot*
9. **Why did Noah Webster want to “do away with the ‘King’s English’”?**

*Please write your answer in the lined space provided on your answer sheet.*

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10. **Webster’s fighting against the British and creating an American English were attempts to**
- A. drive the British out of America.
  - B. prove Ben Franklin wrong.
  - C. help George Washington run the country.
  - D. demonstrate American independence.

# Answer Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Passage: "Doing Away with the King's English"  
(G4 QS1)

Completely fill the circle for the correct answer.

1.  a  b  c  d

2.  a  b  c  d

3.  a  b  c  d

4.  a  b  c  d

5.  a  b  c  d

6.  a  b  c  d

7.  a  b  c  d

8.  a  b  c  d

9. short answer: use lines at right

10.  a  b  c  d

Write your answer to question #9 in the lined space below.

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# Answer Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Passage: "Doing Away with the King's English"  
(G4 QS1)

Completely fill the circle for the correct answer.

1.  a  b  c  d

2.  a  b  c  d

3.  a  b  c  d

4.  a  b  c  d

5.  a  b  c  d

6.  a  b  c  d

7.  a  b  c  d

8.  a  b  c  d

9. short answer: use lines at right

10.  a  b  c  d

Write your answer to question #9 in the lined space below.

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**Appendix B**  
Sample Scoring Guide

# Scoring Guide

Finding evidence in text and making inferences

Grade 4 • Question Set 1 • Passage: Doing Away With the King's English

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

## 1 Score the Answers

Line up the student answer sheet to the left for easy scoring. Mark incorrect student answers in the column on the right.

Question number	Correct answer	Student answer
Q1	B	
Q2	B	
Q3	C	
Q4	A	
Q5	C	
Q6	D	
Q7	D	
Q8	C	
Q9	(short answer)	
Q10	D	

## 2 Identify Student Skills

Circle the questions the student missed in the skills matrix below. Then, look down each column; the check marks indicate which skill(s) each question assesses. Tally each skill to identify strengths and areas for growth.

### Finding Evidence

Students must find specific details from the text to answer questions correctly or support their interpretation of the passage. Reading for evidence is a prerequisite for making valid inferences.

Common question stems include:

- “According to the selection...”
- “According to paragraph 3...”

### Making Inferences

Students must “read between the lines,” using details from the text to draw conclusions, make deductions, or glean ideas that the author leaves implicit.

Common question types include:

- Word-in-context questions
- Main purpose questions
- Author’s intention questions

	Finding evidence	Making inferences	Special question types
Q1	✓	-	-
Q2	-	✓	-
Q3	-	✓	-
Q4	✓	-	-
Q5	-	✓	-
Q6	-	✓	-
Q7	-	✓	word-in-context
Q8	✓	-	-
Q9	✓	-	-
Q10	-	✓	-
<b>TALLY</b>	<b>/4</b>	<b>/6</b>	

## 3 Analyze Patterns to Understand Student Thinking

### Re-reading the passage with purpose

There are two common reasons students miss questions that ask them to find evidence or make inferences about a particular paragraph: Either they read and understand the passage and question but do not return to the specific paragraph to seek the correct answer, or they do not fully understand the question. These students are likely to choose “out of place” answers that are mentioned somewhere in the text but not in connection with the question.

Dramatic events, unusual names, and interesting phrases often stick in students’ memories, and students who read quickly may select a statement which is true but does not answer the question.

### Keeping focus on the text

Students who are having difficulty comprehending the passage—or who are not reading the passage carefully—will often be distracted by answer choices that sound familiar or plausible but are never mentioned in the text. This is a low level of mastery, and students who pick these “out of bounds” answers three or more times generally have low overall scores.

If a student’s responses show this pattern, pay attention to how his/her answers change from Question Set #1 to Question Set #2, since Question Set #2 has an easier reading passage. If the student chooses fewer out of bounds answers on Question Set #2, that may indicate that his or her low score on Question Set #1 was largely due to difficulty comprehending the passage.

**Circle incorrect answer choices to infer patterns of student thinking.**

**“Out of Place”**  
answer choices are mentioned in the text, but do not answer the question

- Q2 D
- Q3 A or B
- Q6 B
- Q7 A or C
- Q8 A

**“Out of Bounds”**  
answer choices are never mentioned in the text

- Q1 A, C or D
- Q2 A or C
- Q3 D
- Q6 A or C
- Q7 B
- Q8 B or D
- Q10 A, B or C

## 4 Learn from Wrong Answers

After scoring the student’s answers, take a look below for clues to his or her thinking. The annotated answer choices highlight common reasons students might choose the wrong answer, and the sidebar gives more insight into patterns of student responses. Always make time to follow up with students in conferences to ensure that the patterns you diagnose are consistent with students’ reading and thinking strategies.

### 1. Why is English spoken in so many countries?

- A. More people are born in England than in any other country. — (OOB) *though this choice doesn’t address the question, it sounds a bit like the second sentence of the passage*
- B. The English brought their languages to lands they explored or colonized.** — *found in second paragraph*
- C. People wanted to be like the English. — (OOB) *students may think this choice sounds good, but it is not in the passage*
- D. English is easier to learn than most other languages. — (OOB) *native English-speaking students may think this is true, because they learned English from birth, but it’s not in the passage*

### 2. Which best describes the effect of Webster on the English language in America?

- A. Webster had no lasting effect on the way Americans speak English. — (OOB) *has no basis in the content of the passage but is phrased the same way the question is*
- B. Webster’s effect on the way Americans speak English lasted hundreds of years.** — *inferred from paragraphs 6 and 7; spelling book used for many generations and dictionary is “still with us”*
- C. Webster’s effect on English only lasted a few years. — (OOB) *not supported by the passage*
- D. Benjamin Franklin had a dramatic effect on the way English is spoken in America. — (OOP) *students who choose this answer are not reading the question and answer choices carefully*

### 3. Based on information in the passage, who had the largest impact on how Americans speak English?

- A. George Washington — (OOP) *mentioned in the passage, briefly and in a different context*
- B. Benjamin Franklin — (OOP) *Franklin is the last person talked about in the passage; if students don’t go back to the passage, they may pick this choice based on what they remember*
- C. Noah Webster**
- D. William Shakespeare — (OOB) *not mentioned in passage, but may be familiar to students*

### 4. According to the passage, Ben Franklin would have changed the spelling of “tongue” to

- A. tong** — *last sentence of passage*
- B. tung — *students may pick this choice because it sounds right, but they didn’t go back to the passage to find the right answer*
- C. tonge
- D. tongu — *removes the silent “e” but not the silent “u”; student may have read the passage but misunderstood the rule*

**Watch For:** Students who can find the evidence in the text that helps them infer the correct answer to Q2 should also be able to find the evidence to infer the correct answer to Q3.

Students who get one right and one wrong are likely not using the information they find for one question to help them with others.

Students who get both wrong are likely not reading or understanding the passage well, as these questions get at a main point of the passage.

5. According to the passage, Ben Franklin would have changed the spelling of “rhyme” to

- A. ryme — *removes the silent “h” but not the silent “e”; student may have read the passage but misunderstood the rule*
- B. rhym — *removes the silent “e” but not the silent “h”; student may have read the passage but misunderstood the rule*
- C. **rym**
- D. rhyme

6. What people are in the ships in the cartoon drawing?

- A. Africans — (OOB)
- B. Americans — (OOP) *students are confusing who is speaking and who is on the ships; they may think that the Americans are leaving England on the ships to go to America*
- C. Chinese — (OOB)
- D. **English** — *inferred from the words of the speaker in the cartoon; the “English” are going back to England*

7. In paragraph 2 of the passage, what does the word “tongue” mean?

- A. Mandarin Chinese — (OOP) *mentioned in second sentence of passage*
- B. The part of your mouth that allows you to speak. — (OOB) *this is the definition of “tongue” with which students are familiar; they may select this choice without reading or going back to the passage*
- C. The British Isles — (OOP) *mentioned right after “mother tongue”; students may pick this if they are just scanning paragraph 2, rather than trying to infer the meaning of “tongue”*
- D. **A spoken language**

8. What textbook did Webster publish in 1783?

- A. Webster’s Dictionary — (OOP) *students may have heard of this, or read it in the passage, but didn’t look carefully enough to see which book was published in 1783*
- B. The Noah Webster Reader — (OOB) *students who didn’t read the passage may pick this one, because it has Webster’s name in it and sounds like a textbook*
- C. **The American Spelling Book** — *found in first sentence of paragraph 6*
- D. An American Patriot — (OOB) *this title is not in the passage anywhere, though a reference is made to “American patriotism”*

9. Why did Noah Webster want to “do away with the ‘King’s English’?”

Acceptable answers will cite details from paragraph five:

- He wanted America to be (intellectually) independent from England.
- He wanted to create a special American language.

Unacceptable answers will be general or be based on irrelevant details:

- He didn’t like the English way of spelling.
- He didn’t like the king.

10. Webster’s fighting against the British and creating an American English were attempts to

- A. drive the British out of America. — (OOB) *this is what the army did, not Webster; students may choose this because of their familiarity with history, not because they are making inferences based on this passage*
- B. prove Ben Franklin wrong. — (OOB)
- C. help George Washington run the country. — (OOB)
- D. **demonstrate American independence.** — *can be inferred from paragraph five*

**Watch For:** Students who answer question Q4 correctly and Q5 incorrectly may be having difficulty in making inferences based on what they read. “Tong,” the answer to Q4, is found in the same paragraph as the information students must use to infer the answer to Q5.

Students who answer both questions incorrectly may be having difficulty finding evidence, reading through to the end of the passage, or understanding the passage itself—all of which hamper their ability to make inferences based on the text.

**Teacher Tip:** A good way to solve inference questions is by eliminating wrong answer choices. Have students go through the possible answers and eliminate the statements that are not supported by clues in the text.

**Watch For:** Questions 9 and 10 are based on the same evidence in the passage. If a student found evidence for Q9, but did not use it to answer Q10, he or she needs more assistance in making inferences.

If the student missed both questions, then his or her inability to make inferences in Q10 may stem from problems finding

**Teacher Tip:** Choices A, B, and C for Q10 are all “out of bounds” answers with no basis in the text; students who get Q10 wrong may be having trouble making good inferences or ruling out incorrect

## **Appendix C**

### Spreadsheet Explanation

(For additional information on the data generated by this project, contact [assessments@bpe.org](mailto:assessments@bpe.org))

# Formative Assessment Pilot Spreadsheet User's Guide

The analysis tools in your school's data packet were created as a starting place for discussions about your students' performance on the pilot assessments. The tools were designed to:

- **Answer basic questions** such as, *How did students do overall and individually on each skill tested? What patterns of mistakes did they make? On which skills may they need more instruction?*
- **Allow you to ask and answer other questions** about the performance of various subgroups of students. These easy-to-do analyses could supplement LASW sessions, guide a CCL course of study, or be included in your Whole-School Improvement Plan.
- **Build on your prior data analysis training** in MyBPS Assessment and Excel so you can do the analyses you want in a familiar interface, using the skills you've already learned.

Remember: this data analysis process is not an end in itself. On their own, assessments and data analysis tools won't help students become better readers and thinkers; *what you do with the results will make the difference*. After using these analysis tools to gain information about patterns of student responses and insight into what those responses may tell you about students' reading skills, you and your colleagues (with the support of your literacy coach) will be better able to plan instruction to take your students' reading skills to the next level.

### Who might be part of conversations about this data?

- ✓ Grade-level teacher teams
- ✓ Principal & administrative team
- ✓ Literacy coach
- ✓ School data team members
- ✓ Ethan Mintz, FAP support
- ✓ ILT members

There are four worksheets in your Excel workbook, represented by tabs at the bottom of your screen. Each allows you to analyze your data in different ways. A description of each analysis tool follows.

## 1 School-Wide Data Summary

This tab is a repository for the raw data about each student and his or her performance. From left to right, the columns include each student's demographic data (ID, race, gender, homeroom, programmatic codes), his or her answer for each question, and the number and percentage of finding evidence and making inference questions he or she got correct. This sheet is what you'll draw data from if you want to do further analyses on your own.

### Things to do with this sheet

- Filter by homeroom, demographic characteristic, or educational program to focus on particular subgroups of students (see sidebar at right for filtering tips)
- Highlight and hide the columns of demographic data and raw answers to print a summary of the number and percentage of questions each student got right, by skill

**Note:** If you want to do your own analyses, make a copy of the School-Wide Data Summary survey and work on **that** copy so you don't inadvertently disrupt any of the existing analyses that draw from this chart.

## 2 Student Answer Choices by Question

The bar graphs on this sheet resemble the item analyses on MyBPS Assessment, showing the number of students who selected each answer choice. Green bars indicate a correct answer; yellow bars indicate an incorrect "Out of Place" answer; red bars indicate an incorrect "Out of Bounds" answer; black bars indicate that a student left the question blank. *(continued on back)*

### What do we mean by "filter"?

If you attended the OIT Excel workshops, you already know that Excel allows users to choose to view *only* entries that contain certain values, instead of the entire list.

For example, to view *only* students in a particular homeroom (instead of every student at the grade level), highlight the row with the boldface column headings, go to the "Data" menu and turn on the Auto-Filter. Small upside-down triangles will appear next to each column heading. Click on the triangle next to the "HR" column heading to pull down the menu and select the homeroom you want.

To see all students again, pull down the drop-down box on the filtered column and select "All."

### *Things to do with this sheet*

- Use the pull-down choices in the “Graph Options” table at top left to see results for a particular group of students. The default is set to show all students, but you can set it to filter by clicking on “All” and then pulling down the menu. If you set it to filter one or more characteristics, such as “Hispanic girls” or “SPED students in HR 112,” the graphs will immediately redraw to represent only those students’ answers.
- Look for patterns: Which questions did students do best on? Were they often fooled by out of place answers? Were there some questions that students left blank?
- Refer back to the question set or teacher guide to connect those patterns with the actual questions and infer more about why students may have chosen certain answers

### **③ OOP-OOB Summary**

This chart visually represents whether each answer chosen by a student was correct, an “Out Of Place” answer, or an “Out Of Bounds” answer.

### *Things to do with this sheet*

- After noticing on the question-by-question graphs that many students chose an OOB answer for, say, Q3, filter the Q3 column (or simply read down the column) to identify those students.
- Read across each row to identify students who selected a lot of OOP or OOB answer choices.

### **④ Watch-For Lists**

This sheet lists students who meet the criteria in the “Watch For...” sidebars of the teacher guide. For instance, if Q2 asks students to find evidence that they then use to make an inference in Q3, this form will list all students who missed Q2, Q3, or both.

### *Things to do with this sheet*

- Read the description carefully to understand what the paired questions can tell you about students’ reading skills.
- Differentiate students who fit the pattern (one correct and one wrong, for instance) from those who missed both questions.
- Discuss with colleagues how you could address patterns of misunderstandings through mini-lessons, guided reading groups, or one-on-one conferences with students.

#### **How can we help you help your students?**

The staff at BPE designed this spreadsheet to include analyses that schools told us they would find helpful.

If, as you and your colleagues use this data, you think of other analyses that could help guide your decisions about instruction and PD, describe them to Ethan or email your thoughts to: [ethanmintz@yahoo.com](mailto:ethanmintz@yahoo.com) or [lilineweaver@bpe.org](mailto:lilineweaver@bpe.org)