



**NEW RESEARCH FINDS DISTRICT LEADERSHIP CAN DRIVE  
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT SUCCESS, STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

*White paper emphasizes district leaders' role in formative assessment, how to use it, its effect on student learning; reviews STI Assessment technology solution*

MOBILE, ALA. (Jan. 27, 2005) – The strategies needed to attain the nation’s goal of increased student achievement, which has eluded many schools, are uncovered in a new white paper released today. District leaders play a major role in educators’ effective use and analysis of formative assessment, integral to closing the achievement gap. This is one of the key findings in the paper, “Formative Assessment and its Uses for Improving Student Achievement,” commissioned by STI, the nation’s leading provider of education data management solutions to K-12 schools, and authored by Carmen Giebelhaus, Ph.D. and Sandra Young, Ph.D.

By reviewing several scientifically based research studies, Drs. Giebelhaus and Young identify three key points regarding formative assessment.

- They confirmed that formative assessment, when used correctly, significantly improves student learning.
- They confirmed that formative assessment produces the greatest achievement gains among the low achievers more than any other group of students, helping to reduce the achievement gap.
- District and school leaders play an important role in assisting teachers in the appropriate use of formative assessment and assessment data analysis to improve student learning.

Although the research clearly proves the importance of formative assessment, the effective design and use of it is neither widespread nor consistent in the classroom. District leaders are essential in the cultivation and implementation of formative assessment initiatives. The authors suggest that district leaders provide support to teachers by directing them to information on the correct usage of formative assessment as well as provide the training and tools necessary to carry out the process, including data management and analysis.

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Because teachers are the greatest factor in student learning, it's extremely important to help them acquire the skills and tools proven to increase student achievement, report Drs. Giebelhaus and Young, who have extensive backgrounds in teacher education. Dr. Giebelhaus is a former professor at the University of Dayton and Ohio State University and Dr. Young is a former Rutgers University instructor; both have lead research projects for a variety of educational publishers. They highlight that studies indicate teacher preparation programs have not emphasized how formative assessments should be designed and used to promote gains in student learning. Furthermore, current legislation emphasizes high-stakes or end-of-year assessments, which are different types of assessments and serve a different purpose than formative assessments.

Formative assessments—also called benchmark assessments or classroom assessments—are planned activities, including writing assignments and tests, designed to provide evidence of student learning and feedback for instructional modifications or adaptations. It is part of an ongoing, active learning process. Several studies found a key element in formative assessments is the teachers' response to identified learning needs and strengths. However, Drs. Giebelhaus and Young conclude teachers need additional support for developing or discovering tools that identify specific learning needs and how to address them.

District leaders can drive the formative assessment cycle, but technology can drive it faster so students can get they help they need at the critical time they need it. The National Education Technology Plan (NETP) outlined by the U.S. Department of Education in early January 2005 called for greater use of sophisticated data management systems that enable school leaders to make informed decisions and further tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual students.

A technology-based assessment system such as *STI Assessment* allows teachers to create reliable test items, gauge student success on specific standards from real-time reports to inform the pace and delivery of instruction. Administrators and school stakeholders have access to the assessment data to monitor school progress in meeting district goals and state standards as well as to determine the allocation of resources to school initiatives such as professional development. The white paper illustrates how *STI Assessment* measures up to formative assessment research.

“Our customers are using the data from *STI Assessment* to update curriculum pacing guides, select research-based curriculum tools and enhance professional development offerings in particular subjects areas or standards,” said Edmundo Gonzalez, vice president of product management and marketing at STI. “However, technology by itself does not necessarily create success; it lies with leadership in administrative offices and instructional changes in classrooms.”

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The number one recommended step in the NETP is to strengthen leaders at every level of the school system for public education to benefit from rapidly evolving technology and create systematic change. Similarly, the white papers states:

Ultimately, the success of this educational reform effort relies on the alignment of three aspects of the teaching and learning process: curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These, in turn, are dependent on the leadership that administrators present to the education community. Such leadership includes...providing an environment, which delivers a guaranteed and viable curriculum, accompanied by challenging learning goals and effective feedback regarding the attainment of those goals.

The white paper is available at [www.sti-k12.com](http://www.sti-k12.com) or by calling 800-844-0884. In addition, STI offers free webinars about formative assessment for educators interested in learning more.

### **About STI**

STI is a leading provider of *Education Data Management* solutions to the K-12 market. STI's fully integrated suite of products addresses attendance, scheduling, special education, assessment, discipline, grade reporting, professional development, fund accounting, health, and parent/teacher communications. Over 6,000 schools in 28 states use STI solutions. The company was founded in 1982 and is headquartered in Mobile, Alabama. For more information, phone 800-844-0884 or visit [www.sti-k12.com](http://www.sti-k12.com).

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