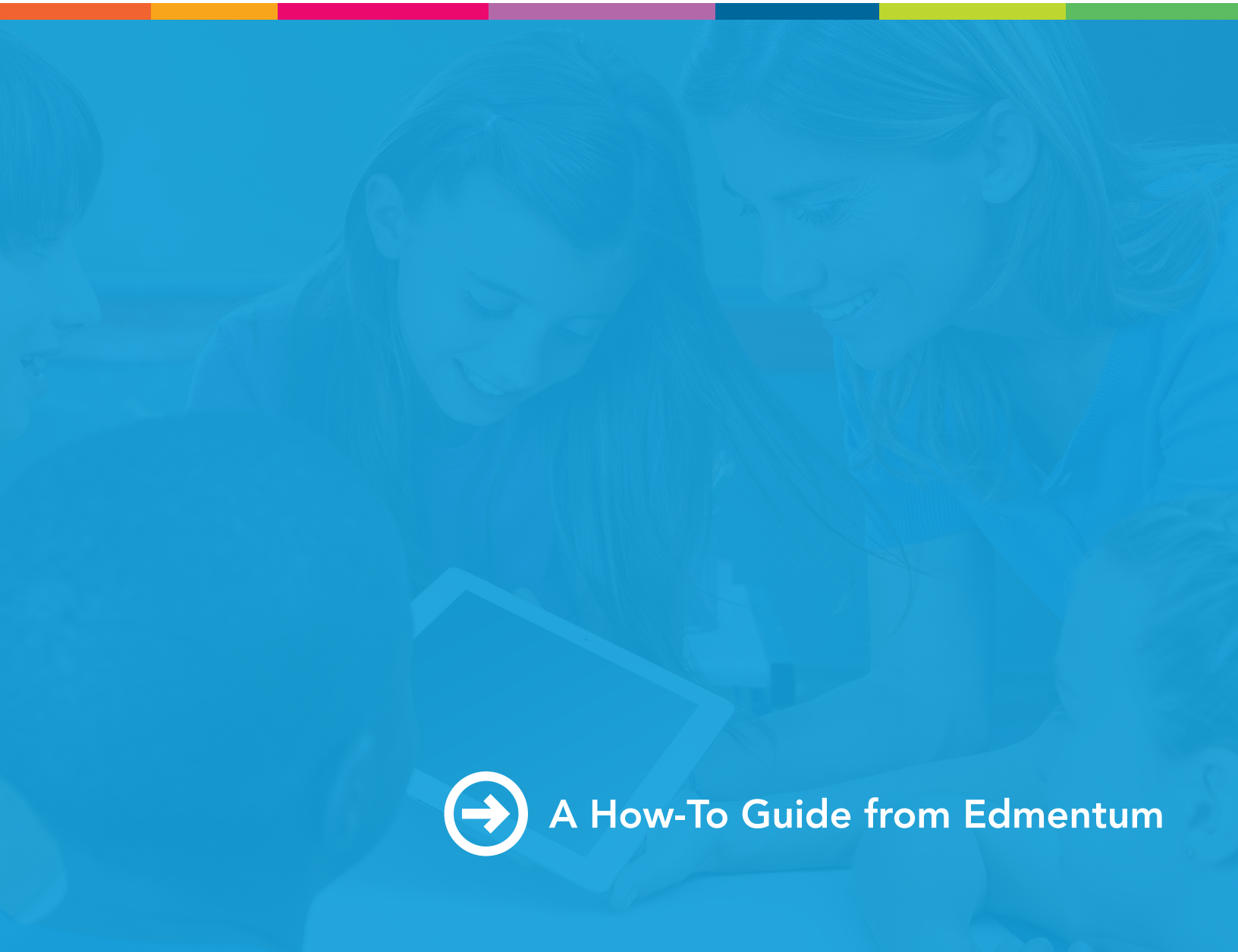
Assessment *for* Learning



A How-To Guide from Edmentum

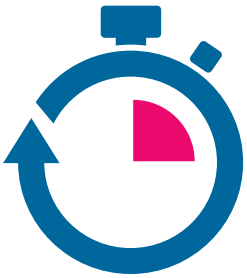
Your formative assessment partner

District administrators, principals, and teachers are responsible for making instructional decisions based on multiple forms of student evaluation, but how do you ensure that students are making progress in their learning toward end-of-year goals and objectives? This workbook will help you distinguish between various assessment types, build goals, identify best practices around your assessments, and analyze your data in an effort to make lasting instructional decisions over the school year.

Distinguishing between different types of assessments

To better understand where and how formative assessments fit into an assessment system, it is important to first draw a clear line of distinction among the types of assessments.

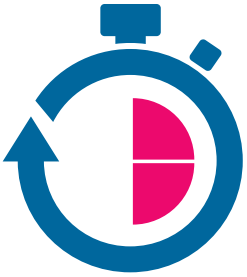
Formative, short-cycle assessments:



Formative assessments provide crucial information about student learning. They are a fluid measure of student progress that help you determine if and when you need to provide timely supports or interventions to your students. Assessments provide quick and immediate data so that teachers can adjust instruction and provide timely feedback.

Also called: *real-time assessments; diagnostic testlets; quick, informal assessments; and continuous assessments*

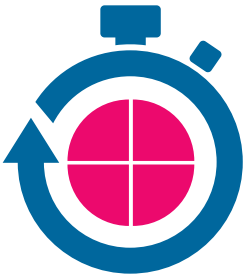
Interim, medium-cycle assessments:



Interim assessments guide learning based on performance relative to a set of very specific academic goals. Interim assessments help assess mastery over a longer period of time. These assessments can, however, be used in a formative manner if the data is used over time to guide instruction and learning.

Also called: *benchmark assessments, diagnostic assessments, unit or quarter assessments, and interval assessments*

Summative, long-cycle assessments:



Summative, or long-cycle, assessments help you determine content mastery over an even longer period of time. Typically referred to as an assessment of learning, and unlike the other two assessment types, summative assessments are often referred to as "high-stakes" due to the large amount of content covered.

Also called: *end-of-semester/end-of-year assessments, and high-stakes assessments*

Assessment goals and best practices

Your goal is to create a culture of formative assessment in your classroom. To do this, you will gather data, analyze it, and decide in the moment whether or not to change your instruction. Often, short-cycle, formative assessments are more informal in nature. For medium- and long-cycle assessments, however, evidence of student achievement will be collected relative to a longer period of instruction. Ultimately, you must identify what to improve upon for future lessons, or what you should come back to or reteach based on results.

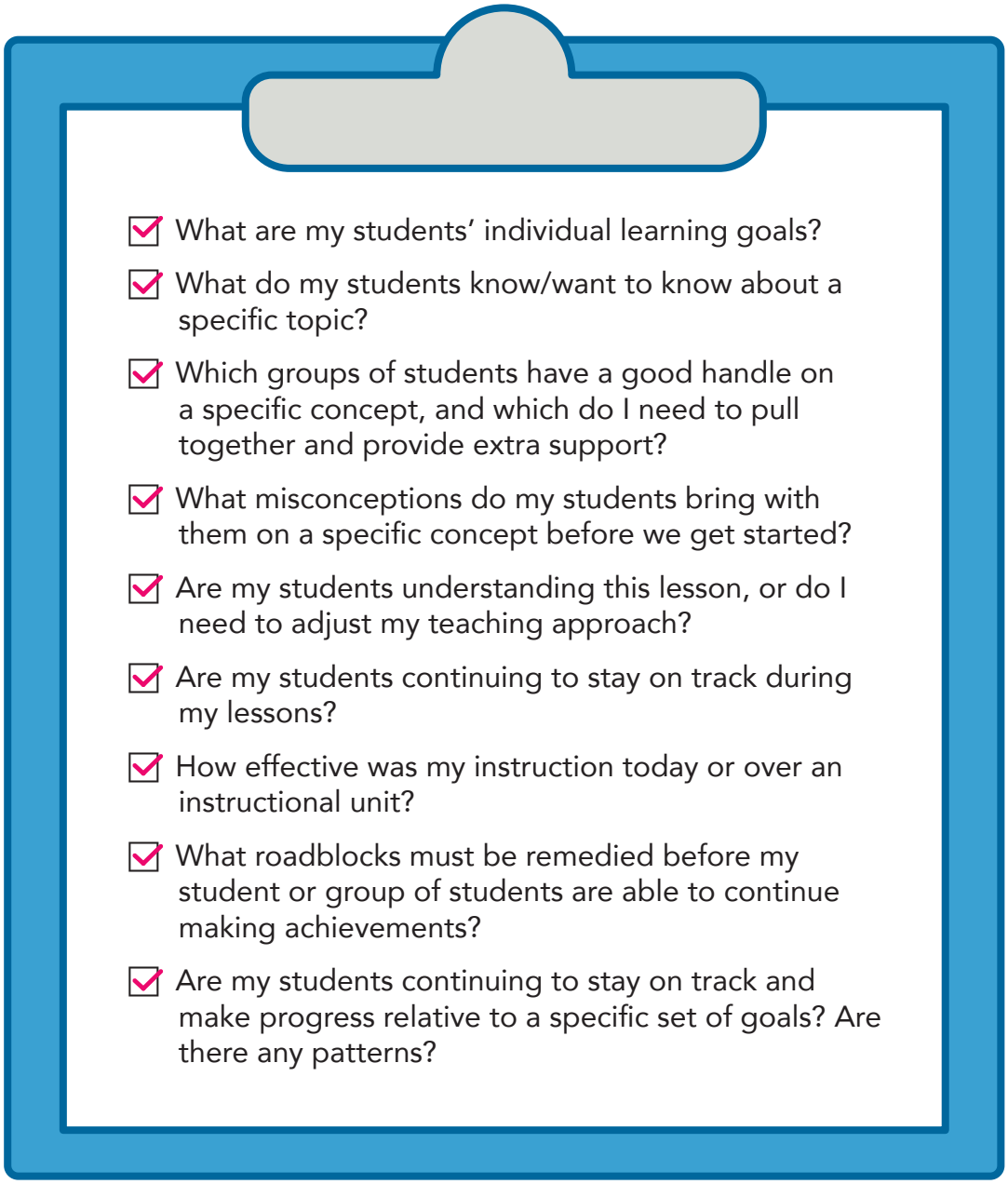
	Short-Cycle Assessments	Medium- and Long-Cycle Assessments
Timing	In the moment, during a session.	3–4 times per year, immediately following a larger instructional unit.
Examples	■ Thumbs-up/thumbs-down activity ■ Hand thermometers ■ In-class clickers ■ Twitter voting	■ Chapter tests ■ Running records ■ Cumulative presentations ■ Common assessments ■ Benchmark assessments
Best Practices	1. Reteach the skills in real time using new methods. 2. Use your data to create small groups. Then, reteach or reinforce the corresponding lessons or skills during group time. 3. Assign select students additional practice (both online and print-based) to help fill identified gaps. 4. Create small groups that can focus on specific skills or lessons.	1. Adjust your longer-range instruction based on interim assessment results. 2. Identify which content you can spiral review in your daily lessons. 3. Backfill larger content gaps using a multidisciplinary approach to instruction. 4. Give students ownership over their learning by involving them or partnering with them in scoring, criteria setting, goal setting, and progress monitoring.
Cautions	Formative assessment is not just about numbers. Many times, formative assessment data is based on informal data like observations and conversations.	

Formative assessments are not always formal, pen-and-paper assessments. Don't be afraid to try new informal tactics like those listed above.

Questions to ask yourself

You have so much data, where do you start analyzing without feeling overwhelmed? To have the greatest impact on your class instruction, you should have a good idea of what types of information you want to learn from your students and what are the best questions to ask in order to get the response.

The following checklist list will help you get started.

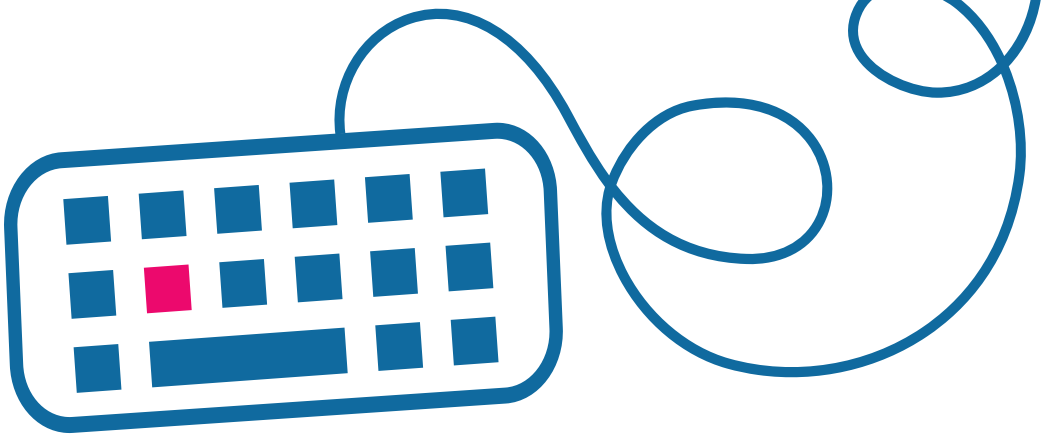


- ☑ What are my students' individual learning goals?
- ☑ What do my students know/want to know about a specific topic?
- ☑ Which groups of students have a good handle on a specific concept, and which do I need to pull together and provide extra support?
- ☑ What misconceptions do my students bring with them on a specific concept before we get started?
- ☑ Are my students understanding this lesson, or do I need to adjust my teaching approach?
- ☑ Are my students continuing to stay on track during my lessons?
- ☑ How effective was my instruction today or over an instructional unit?
- ☑ What roadblocks must be remedied before my student or group of students are able to continue making achievements?
- ☑ Are my students continuing to stay on track and make progress relative to a specific set of goals? Are there any patterns?

Now that you have a clear definition of the different types of assessments and how those assessments will provide the data you need to meet your goals, you can begin to reflect on the type of activities that will fit in your classroom with your teaching style and engage your learners.

Formative assessment has a specific goal:

Capture data to inform instruction.



Five attributes to ensure success

According to research by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), there are five attributes that render formative assessment activities most effective.

1. **Learning progressions:** Your students' learning progress should align to the ultimate goal of your lessons.
2. **Goals and criteria for success:** Communicate clearly defined goals for success with your students.
3. **Descriptive feedback:** Provide evidenced-based feedback linked to instructional outcomes for success.
4. **Self- and peer-assessment:** Engage students in feedback and review by asking them for higher-order thinking and reflection of their own learning.
5. **Collaboration:** Create a culture of partnership for learning between teachers and students.

Formative assessment strategies in practice

Knowing what you can do to adjust instruction following a formative assessment is different from being confident that you leveraged tools, activities, and your own expertise in the most effective manner. Use these case studies as examples to test your knowledge of formative assessment in action. Then, complete the self-reflection as you consider activities you have done in the past or want to deliver in the future.

Thumbs Up and Down

An English teacher is not sure the class is understanding the lesson on the difference between fiction and nonfiction stories. The teacher asks students to hold their hands under their chins and give a "thumbs up" if the story could be identified as a nonfiction story or give a "thumbs down" if the story is a fiction tale. The teacher does a quick tally of the group and notices there is a pretty even split. The teacher decides to open the classroom to a discussion with the students presenting arguments for both sides.

TIP

This teacher is using a formative assessment approach to collect evidence of learning and adjust instruction. This teacher integrates techniques like an informal tally, hand raising, and a thumbs up or down to quickly gauge understanding by the students.

Classroom Quizzes

A teacher administers a weekly quiz addressing all of the material covered for the week. The quizzes are supposed to motivate students to study for the summative unit as well as provide them with a sample of the question types they may encounter on the unit test. Following the quiz, the teacher moves on to the next lesson as planned.

TIP

This is not an example of formative assessment because the teacher does not use the evidence from the quizzes to adjust instruction, nor does the teacher provide direction to students for them to think metacognitively about their own learning. The only information the students receive is a score for the number of correct answers.

Structured Pair Work

Following a whole-class lesson, students are asked to reflect on the information and answer specific questions individually. Then, the students divide into the first of three partner groups and spend approximately 15 minutes sharing their thinking as it relates to one or two of the posed questions. They analyze each other's responses and come to a consensus. As the students work with their partners, the teacher walks around and notes common misunderstandings and gaps in understanding. At the conclusion of the first pairing, the teacher uses the information gained during the informal observations to help redirect thinking, reinforce ideas, and to provide cues that would help advance student learning.

TIP

This is an example of formative assessment where the posed questions and the peer conversations are used to elicit evidence of the students' understandings. The students are able to self-reflect and get feedback from their peers. The teacher is able to listen to the conversations between students to note the current level of understanding for the class and for individual students. The teacher uses the information immediately to assist students in their learning by redirecting thinking, reinforcing ideas, or providing cues.

Hands Up

A geography teacher has just completed a section on the topography of Spain and wants to assess whether students have an understanding of the content. The teacher asks a prepared question and watches for students to raise their hands and volunteer an answer. After calling on one of the volunteers, who gets the answer correct, the teacher is confident the class understands the lesson and is ready to move on.

TIP

While an informal poll, like a hand raise, can give you some information, it can also provide a false sense of comprehension across the entire class. The student volunteers typically are the students who understand the content clearly; the ones who need help may or may not ever engage to ask for clarification. The limited data received from this exercise makes it difficult to determine how to adjust instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Therefore, this is not a strong example of formative assessment.

A look at your progress

Based on what you have learned so far in this workbook, use the worksheet below to identify what you'd like to start, stop, and continue doing to improve data collection and inform instruction.

START	STOP	CONTINUE

What formative assessment activities have you implemented in the past? Think about the focused questions you were trying to answer. Did you use the data to adjust instruction, and did you share that data with your students? Did your assessment meet the attributes of an effective formative assessment?

Make your data actionable

Once the assessments have been given and the data have been analyzed, you are faced with the challenge of making use of the data in front of you. Many studies have attempted to tap into the reasoning behind this difficult phase in the formative assessment cycle. Often, more than half of teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the amount of data coming in and still remain unsure of how to effectively adapt their instructional practices in their classroom to better reflect what the data suggest. Putting a protocol into place for data analysis can really help maximize the process of implementing data-driven instruction in the classroom.

When applied to the classroom, many factors can be responsible for skill gaps. These include any dynamics from challenging content or ineffective teaching methods and the learning processes and learning environments utilized that could influence student achievement and learning. To accurately determine what the problem is, integrate an inquiry-based, problem-solving approach using what you have learned so far in this workbook.

? Questions to Ask

Do your assessments align to your overarching instructional goals and how have your goals been communicated?

☐ YES
☐ NO

What types of data have you collected? Are they all actionable?

☐ YES
☐ NO

What standards need improvement and why?

What types of interventions can you implement using the student data that you have collected?

How are you using your data to support learning challenges continuously over time?

Organizing your data to identify gaps

As the inquiry-approach model showed, you can collect data all day long, but those data points are no use to you or your students if you do not know how to uncover the root cause of achievement gaps. First, you need to be able to organize the data you have; then, you can begin the more important stage of interpretation.

1. Try removing data from the raw form into separate tables and charts.

2. Incorporate color-coding. Highlight areas of need, groups of students, standards, and mastery all in different color combinations to allow for quick insights.

3. Layer different forms of data. Break down data into separate tables for standards, student groupings, and missed items so that it's much easier to focus on key data sets without getting too overwhelmed.

4. Consider using digital tools to make data analysis instantaneous. Many digital tools provide technology that can do the sorting and analysis for you, saving you time and energy better spent on planning and instruction. Look for data dashboards that quickly break down data in real time and provide useful color-coded, graphic depictions of data.

For additional support, take a look at the Tracking Your Data worksheet on page 14.

TIP

Tip: Effective interpretation of data begins with analyzing student data for commonly missed items, common wrong answer choices, and patterns in both student groups and individual student work.

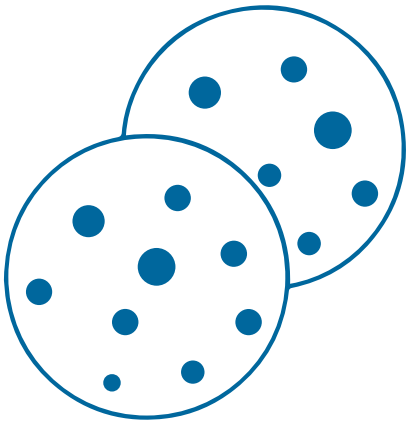
Once data trends and skill gaps have been identified, brainstorm potential causes for varied skill gaps. This process, known as a root cause analysis, is often the most difficult because it requires several attempts at trial and error. Root cause analysis is a common methodology often used to describe the process of identifying an underlying problem to be addressed in order to remediate an issue. Below is a real-world example of root cause analysis:

Problem:

You just baked a new batch of cookies, and they did not turn out well.

Possible cause:

1. The oven temperature was incorrect.
   (Test: Adjust your oven temperature)
2. You missed an ingredient.
   (Test: Adjust your ingredients one by one until you find the culprit.)



Problem:	
Possible Causes	Tests
1.	
2.	
3.	

Tracking your data

Data analysis is both a powerful driver and crucial element of formative assessment practices in the classroom. The appropriate collection of and use of data can help make lasting impacts on student achievement over the course of a school year. This worksheet will help you collect and organize your data in an effort to build out a meaningful action plan for your students.

Assessment Name:

Administration Date:

Assessment Tool:

Subject Area/Grade Level:

Reporting Category Area of Focus	Reporting Category Areas of Strength

Standards Proficiency:

Standards Needing Improvement - High Priority	Correct/Total	Correct %
Standards Needing Improvement - High Priority	Correct/Total	Correct %
Standards Needing Improvement - High Priority	Correct/Total	Correct %
Standards Needing Improvement - High Priority	Correct/Total	Correct %

Student Performance:

Far Below	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeding
Percentage:	Percentage:	Percentage:	Percentage:
Student Names:	Student Names:	Student Names:	Student Names:

Action Plan:

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edmentum

edmentum.com
800.447.5286
info@edmentum.com
AC044-08 120716

5600 W 83rd Street
Suite 300, 8200 Tower
Bloomington, MN 55437