CHEAT SHEET: CHECKS FOR UNDERSTANDING

Formative assessment is an instructional practice in which teachers use a variety of methods to evaluate student comprehension and needs throughout the learning experience. Teachers identify concepts or skills students are struggling with, make adjustments to their instruction, and personalize learning for students.

What is it?

It's hard to be a mind reader, but you'd probably love to know what your students are thinking as they learn, right? That's where formative assessment strategies come in. While summative assessments are a test of the learning, formative assessments are a test for the learning (while it is happening). From a thumbs-up to a pop quiz, there are many quick checks for understanding that you can use to assess and evaluate students' progress during an activity or lesson. These checks for understanding are often called "dipsticks" as they measure the level of understanding. Check out how today's digital tools allow you to capture a snapshot of students' learning. You then can analyze the data and share the feedback with your students the next minute, the next day, or the next week.

How do I get started?

1. **Determine what and when.** What is your goal in using formative assessment for this activity or lesson? Do you want to assess pre-lesson, mid-activity, or at the end of the lesson?

2. **Consider your go-to's.** Which are your current favorite quick checks for understanding? How could a digital version give you more insight into students' understanding?

3. **Get familiar.** There are lots of tools out there! So get comfortable with one at a time. Introduce it through a low-stakes activity and then practice as a class.

4. **Analyze the data.** What does the data tell you, and how can it inform modifications that you may need to make in your teaching?

5. **Expand the possibilities.** How else could you use this tool? How could you redefine your teaching strategies and further motivate students?

A-ha's!

Don't let the tool rule. Make sure you have routines and procedures in place so that kids don't get caught up in playing with devices.

Encourage peer-to-peer learning. Have students create quizzes or surveys for each other as a way to introduce new concepts or prep for a test.

Change it up! Make sure you're getting a complete picture by using a variety of assessment strategies to meet different learning styles.

Share the data. Make the assessment itself a means of learning. Many tools allow you to share group results anonymously, so you can help students reflect on their own level of understanding.

My notes:

Did you try these tips? Let us know how it went. We may even incorporate your ideas into future resources. Email us at: edurequests@commonsense.org