

What You Can Do in 5 minutes, 5 days, 5 months, 5 years . . .

Special Options

The School of the Future (SOF) is a unique place. Its dedication to teaching through real-world tasks, checking on student progress often, and adjusting lessons based on a wide variety of assessments is delivering big dividends with increased student engagement and performance. And although these accomplishments did not occur overnight, we believe that other schools can see similar progress, even if they start small and build slowly.

Below are some creative tips for teachers, administrators, and other educators to help your school begin this journey. After you read the tips, we encourage you to use the comment field below to offer suggestions and to start a dialogue with educators from SOF about this topic and their work.

In 5 minutes, you can determine what students are thinking and achieve any one, perhaps two, of the following:

- Make sure that the teaching objective for the day is assessable.
- Create a question that captures the learning target for the day.
- Pass out and collect entrance/exit cards to get a quick snapshot of progress and needs.
- Sort entrance/exit cards by those who are getting it, those who are almost there, and those who aren't getting the lesson. You can use this information to plan tiered groups.
- Take quick notes on a clipboard about student work -- check, check-plus, check-minus will do.
- Remember to call on students randomly.
- Hold up white boards with student work to point out exemplary samples.
- Look over a student's shoulder to see what he is writing in his notebook. You can then take your own notes about what you saw or talk to the student right then about what he is doing well and what he could be doing better.
- Ask students to turn and talk to each other in response to a directed question. You can then listen in on those responses and take notes or join the talk to offer suggestions.

In 5 days, you can determine what students know and prove it:

- Read over conference notes and checklists for the week to look for trends and then group students by readiness and understanding.
- Be open to the fact that students are moving at a different pace than you may be. You need to be willing to respond by slowing a lesson or moving more quickly.
- Look at your formative assessment notes to identify the students whom you have not yet assessed. For example, record notes on a seating chart and look for empty spaces and try to assess those students by the end of the week.
- Review a diagnostic such as entrance cards or tasks on demand and make adjustments to a unit plan based on the results.
- Encourage special education teachers and general education teachers to co-plan using formative notes so they can develop flexible groupings and responsive lessons for the next week. Ideas include group work, partner work, independent reading/writing/problem solving, or rubric-based accountable talks that clearly measure if students understand the material.
- Conduct targeted, small-group work based on the results of the five-minute assessments.
- Start to find out what interests your students so you can incorporate more of what appeals to them in your lessons and requirements for assessments.

In 5 weeks, you can assess if students are making progress toward mastery of the subject matter.

- Look for frequency of competency to gauge independence. You can use a clipboard, a checklist, or notes.

- Look for improvement in competencies as students practice more. You can then note these observations in your tracking forms.
- Begin to have a sense of the levels (basic, competent, mastery) for the skills and content you are teaching. Look for depth in students' application of the material.
- Give students more opportunities for practice while gradually removing instructional supports.
- Continue and refine small-group work based on daily assessments.
- Collaborate with students to generate the criteria for some assessments. This approach helps to improve student self-awareness.
- Encourage students to reflect on their own growth.
- Teach students to collect and organize samples of their work in portfolios for reflection and goal setting.
- Challenge students to independently put all the pieces together (synthesize) by requiring tasks on demand, in which students demonstrate mastery without any instructional supports from the unit of content.
- Look ahead to the next unit and revamp for alignment based on curriculum goals. Start with what you have and tweak it to create a more purposeful alignment of lessons with assessments.

In 5 months, you can reflect and refine your curriculum with guidance from an administrator or curriculum coach.

- Encourage experimentation while celebrating and sharing best practices.
- Reflect on school-wide summative data such as test scores, parent surveys, and external reviews.
- Read an assessment book together and discuss it during regular meetings. Consider publications by researchers Doug Reeves and Robert Marzano.
- Name common practices to ensure common goals across departments, teams, and the entire school.
- Incorporate more real-world tasks into your lessons.
- Be prepared for slowdowns as you pare down what matters and what works in terms of assessment.
- Transform grade books from a simple list of assignments completed to a record of skills and content mastery. Assignments become indicators of mastery.
- Base at least 80 percent of students' semester grades on their demonstration of skill and content mastery.
- Try to insert more planning time into the school day to foster subject-area and grade-level collaboration between teachers.

In 5 years, you can complete the realignment of your vertical curricula.

- Ensure teacher teams are comfortable with inquiry-based meetings grounded in cycles of analysis of student data, action planning, goal setting, and reflection.
- Personalize the curriculum by no longer asking, "How can I impose my curriculum on students?" Instead ask, "How can we teach students to make choices that will lead them to achieve standards?"
- Transition to a grading system that is based more on the demonstration of mastery than simply on work habits.
- Engineer a paradigm shift from student engagement as the end goal to student engagement as the first step they take in making individual progress towards independent mastery.
- Trust and embrace the use of data to drive decision making rather than relying on a more superficial look at how things are going.
- Build a school-wide bank of formative assessment practices, theories of action, and shared habits of learning.
- Establish a tone of professional development, growth, and reflection. For example, create action research teams that encourage teachers to assess their practice through the lens of educational research and to make modifications based on the results.

Editor's note: Special thanks to School of the Future teachers Whitney Lukens, Michael Zitolo, and Adam Kinory and directors Stacy Goldstein (middle school) and John Fanning (high school) for their input in developing this list.