

An Endorsement of Common Formative Assessments 2.0

Tommy Thompson is the principal of New London High School in New London, Connecticut, named by *U.S. News & World Report* in 2014 as one of *America's Best High Schools*. In December 2015, Mr. Thompson was officially recognized by the Connecticut State Department of Education for "turning around" NLHS and was asked to share those best practices that have resulted in NLHS producing gains in every metric currently used to assess school effectiveness.

Mr. Thompson is a contributing author to *Real Time Decisions: Educators Using Formative Assessment to Change Lives NOW!* He is featured in Larry Ainsworth's 2010 best-selling book, *Rigorous Curriculum Design*, and is currently a CFA 2.0 certified author consultant.

In describing the professional practices he has implemented with his staff to achieve dramatic results in student improvement, Mr. Thompson recently wrote:

"I have implemented the Common Formative Assessment (CFA) system in both a middle school and in my current high school with phenomenal results in student achievement. Equally important is the impact this process has had on the educators.

"CFA provides a lens that allows educators to intentionally align standards, instruction, and assessment while bringing simplicity and clarity to the complex process of improving teaching and learning.

"The CFA system is a truly 'evergreen' process. It is just as relevant today as it was in 2006 when the original model was published and I first began implementing it at the middle school level.

"*Common Formative Assessments 2.0* outlines a straightforward, linear process that provides practical 'how-to' steps for bringing to life and simplifying the academic content standards. Beginning with the standards, educators prioritize what is to be learned and then design assessments and the instructional pathways necessary for students to traverse the journey needed to reach the goal. What is often considered a daunting task is now streamlined into a manageable and logical sequence of steps.

Moreover, the professional learning journey it offers educators has proved priceless in developing their capacity.

"The CFA 2.0 process promotes clarity, challenge, collaboration, and uses evidence to drive decisions. Emphasizing teacher efficacy and the need for evidence of impact, the CFA 2.0 system yields credible and convincing evidence of student learning.

"One of my more memorable experiences as a school administrator happens whenever I see educators change their practice, not because of a mandate or policy change, but as a result of professional learning. I have seen this occur repeatedly as my teachers have learned how to design a quality assessment using the CFA 2.0 framework.

"I have always believed that students should get more than one chance at taking an assessment and have encouraged my staff for years to allow students *multiple opportunities* to show what they know and can do. As within any organization, there have been those that resisted and philosophically could not support the idea of allowing students 'retakes.'

"Then came the CFA 2.0 professional learning experience! After implementing the process in their own classrooms, department teams met to review their first post-unit assessment results. Now armed with the knowledge and experience of *how to design quality formative assessments*, the very people that once balked at retakes now champion the practice! Not only do they advocate giving kids another assessment opportunity, but they have changed their instructional planning discussions and action plans in order to *prepare* students for these retakes. Only through the teachers' firsthand knowledge and experience gained from the CFA 2.0 way of intentional alignment of standards, instruction, and assessment—and using feedback to make instructional adjustments—could such an important change in practice take place.

This process unlocks a door, which once opened, has the ability to take any school to the next level, as evidenced by the following reactions of educators:

- *This process has made me a better teacher!*
- *This will change the way I teach and assess students!*
- *Prioritizing standards provides direction for teachers.*
- *CFA 2.0 revealed the true method of curriculum planning.*
- *This model for creating assessments was awesome!*
- *The most valuable things I learned were "unwrapping" standards and that the most valuable feedback originates with the students.*
- *The CFA 2.0 process will encourage educators to target priority skills and provide direction to better assist students.*
- *I have a better understanding of how to create an assessment.*
- *I enjoy the collaborative nature of this process.*
- *The resources provided during this professional learning experience were phenomenal.*
- *It's beginning to click; we can see how we have been doing things backwards all this time.*
- *Great framework to follow!*
- *The concrete examples and visuals help a lot.*
- *Very useful...helps us become extremely clear on what is to be taught and how we plan instruction.*
- *The process creates a road map to student achievement.*
- *It has narrowed my focus in teaching.*
- *I have a better understanding of standards and what I'm being asked to teach.*
- *Implementing this process will provide rigorous instruction.*

- *Clarifies expectations for teachers and students.*
 - *A very intentional process.*
 - *Gives teachers greater control and recognizes them as professionals.*
 - *This IS best practice!*
 - *Educators cannot control the composition of assessments they did not create.*
 - *CFAs give educators ownership of what they teach and how it should be presented.*
 - *This process sets students up for success!*
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"In conclusion, speaking now not as a school leader but as a consultant, I have never witnessed a more widely accepted practice/idea/process than CFA 2.0. After each professional development experience I've conducted, many educators often comment, 'This just makes sense, and I don't know why we haven't been doing this all along!'

"The effective practices represented in CFA 2.0 are based on a body of defensible research gathered from decades of work by renowned educational researchers—and they have been communicated through a doable set of steps that are accessible to everyone!"

Tommy Thompson

Principal, New London High School
490 Jefferson Ave.
New London, CT
860-437-6400
THOMPSONT@newlondon.org