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Web-based tool measures Arizona teachers' tech proficiency

**By Elizabeth B. Guerard, Associate Editor, eSchool News
June 25, 2001**

An agreement between Arizona education officials and a Utah-based company will enable all 40,000 of Arizona's teachers to use an online assessment program to help them determine their level of technology proficiency.

Officials say the iAssessment program will allow Arizona teachers to develop individual professional development plans to improve their use of technology as an instructional tool. It also will help the state's schools target their professional development resources more appropriately by giving them data about teachers' skill levels in aggregate form.

iAssessment, an application service provider specifically tailored to the education market, was awarded the contract by Arizona School Services through Educational Technology (ASSET).

ASSET is a membership-based association for school districts, but according to the group's executive director, Kathryn Kilroy, the state School Facilities Board selected ASSET to make the iAssessment tool available to every district in the state.

Beginning in June, Arizona educators were given the chance to gauge their technology aptitude and determine what measures they should take to improve their skills, Kilroy said. The tool, still in its beta-testing phase in Arizona, is expected to be rolled out across the state by August.

The project is funded through the Arizona Schools Facilities Board's computer deployment program and has been named "MyCompass."

Its goal is to fill in the gaps so teachers can better integrate technology to support learning and improve student achievement, said Dan Cookson, co-founder of iAssessment.

Experts agree that training works best if it's targeted to the specific skill level of teachers.

"With iAssessment, [school administrators] can use this to give them a picture of where their teachers are with technology proficiency," Kilroy said. "That way, they can apply their professional development resources at the appropriate level."

The educator assessment portion is completely confidential for the educator.

"Administrators do not receive reports on teachers, but we do provide administrators with a site analysis that is made up of aggregate data,"

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Cookson said. "We can lump that data by school, district, region, or county, and then the administration can tell where there are larger gaps in the understanding of technology."

The program works on two fronts, he explained: "One front is that it provides the personalized data to the teacher about their professional development plan. On the other front, it provides that cumulative data to the decision-makers so they can make informed decisions."

Under the direction of ASSET, iAssessment customized its Diagnostic Learning System program for Arizona teachers. MyCompass is based on criteria that align with Arizona's academic standards and the International Society for Technology in Education's National Educational Technology Standards.

Users gauge their aptitude in five categories: basic concepts and skills, professional and personal productivity skills, communication and information skills, classroom instruction skills, and integration of technology into the curriculum.

Within each category, there are a variety of subjects that educators can test themselves on.

"Specific topics under those categories might include items like the ethical use of intellectual property, presentation skills like PowerPoint, or how to work with others on the World Wide Web," said Cookson.

Teachers can access MyCompass from any computer with a 56K modem, using a username, password, and a four-digit identification number to ensure privacy.

"The tool primarily consists of multiple-choice, true-false type questions. The teacher reads the questions and answers immediately by clicking [his or her] response," said Cookson.

As soon as the assessment is completed, the program instantly calculates the teacher's score and immediately presents proficiency charts and recommendations on what type of professional development is needed.

According to Kilroy, the Arizona test takes teachers about 45 minutes to complete, though they don't have to complete the assessment in one sitting.

"It is totally flexible. They could do one category per day for a week if they wanted," said Cookson.

Once teachers receive their personalized recommendations for professional development—selected from the pre-determined list of available state and local resources—they are encouraged to take the classes and attempt to improve their technology skills. At any time, users can reassess themselves to monitor their progress, growth, and response to their prescribed training.

The professional development content for Arizona educators using MyCompass was hand-selected by ASSET, but varies from state to state.

"For instance, we've worked with some school groups that want to deliver online professional development through Classroom Connect," said Cookson.

Kilroy explained that local districts will be able to modify MyCompass to create a district-specific professional development resource list, if desired. "Districts often want to do their own professional development, and this way they can populate the database with their own offerings as well," she said.

As of now, the iAssessment testing is entirely voluntary for Arizona's teachers.

"There are no plans to mandate this type of thing at the state level," said

Kilroy. "But I know there are districts that have already incorporated this as a requirement for receiving [federal] Technology Literacy Challenge grants."

According to Cookson, the cost for iAssessment's diagnostic tool varies, depending on the number of users.

"Per educator, the range is usually between \$4 and \$7, depending on the site. Each one is a little different," he said. "Usually we can have [a new customer] up and rolling in about 21 days or so, depending on the complexity of how the district wants its information configured."

According to the company, the online tool is already used by some 300,000 educators in California and Indiana.

Links:

iAssessment

<http://www.iassessment.com>

ASSET's MyCompass

<http://mycompass.asset.asu.edu>

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