

Friday, February 19, 2010

## Teachers Get Answers Online

---

Student-testing program gives instant results

*By Victoria A.F. Camron  
© 2010 Longmont Times-Call*

LONGMONT — Altona Middle School language arts teacher Brendan Butler kept an eye on his computer monitor Thursday morning as his seventh-grade students completed an assessment in the school's computer lab.

On his screen, the boxes in a white grid turned green or red as students answered questions correctly or incorrectly.

As Butler monitored each student's progress, he also noted what percentage of students answered each question correctly, giving him an idea what topics they need to work on before next month's Colorado Student Assessment Program exams.

Butler and his colleagues at Altona are using Galileo, an assessment program being piloted at 11 schools — seven elementary schools, two middle schools and two high schools — in the St. Vrain Valley School District.

“We've had a lot of really positive feedback from principals,” said Tori Teague, executive director of curriculum and assessment for the school district.

The math assessments from Galileo are more reliable than what the district uses, she said. The program also offers online tutorials and quizzes for students who need extra help, said Lauren Eker, assessment coordinator.

Galileo costs the school district \$8 per student per year; that comes to about \$200,000 for the school district, Teague said. The program assesses students in reading, writing, math and science.

If the district adopts Galileo, next year's students will take their first assessment at the beginning of the school year, Altona principal Joe Mehsling said. That will help the teachers quickly find out where their students are academically, he said.

School officials also will be able to use Galileo to quickly assess new students; about 10 percent of Altona students come from out of state or private schools, so they don't have a history of CSAP data, he said.

With every question, Galileo shows the teacher what standard was being tested.

“(Teachers are) getting a lot of information about their students right off the bat,” Mehsling said.

Although all the students in Butler’s class answered the same 35 questions, Galileo presented the questions in random order so students sitting next to each other did not have the same question at the same time and couldn’t cheat.

Students didn’t take this assessment for a grade, so Butler offered them some advice before they finished — something he won’t be able to do when they take the CSAP.

“If a student has a lot of questions answered, but not a lot of them right, I can go tell him, ‘Hey, dude, slow down,’” Butler said.

When students finished, he told them how many questions they answered correctly and gave them a chance to improve their scores.

“Go back, take your time. See if you can find any careless mistakes,” Butler said.

Cole Howard, 13, admitted he was one of the students who rushed through the assessment.

“Maybe the first time I read something wrong,” Cole said. He accidentally chose the wrong answer a couple of times, he said.

Caitlin Wilcox, 12, did the same thing, she said.

She likes taking the Galileo assessment before she faces the CSAP, she said.

“It helps me remember things we might have learned earlier in the quarter,” Caitlin said.

After Caitlin and her classmates take the Galileo assessment, Butler has them work on topics on which many of them need help at the beginning of class, she said.

During Thursday’s assessment, Butler discovered that only 19 percent of the class correctly answered a question about run-on sentences, pointing to a shortcoming in his teaching of that subject.

“When a number’s that low, that’s on me, not you,” he told the students.

Students in an earlier class had many questions about prepositions, even asking what prepositions are, Butler said.

“We addressed that earlier this year, but clearly not enough,” Butler said.