

# North Carolina students pass state technology test in greater numbers with technology assessment solution

*TechLiteracy Assessment helps Gaston County students pass state’s online test of computer skills and EasyTech helps prepare them to use technology effectively*

Gaston County Schools  
Gastonia, NC

53 schools  
33,234 students

White  
70%

African American  
20%

Hispanic  
7%

North Carolina educators are no strangers to supporting students to pass their state-mandated computer skills test. And Gaston County Schools educators have found the tools they need to help them boost the numbers of students who successfully pass that test.

The state’s new Online Test of Computer Skills, first assessed in Fall 2005, requires that districts test students for computer competency. Eighth grade students must pass the test as part of their graduation requirements. Gaston wanted to understand how ready their students would be for that state test, and so implemented TechLiteracy Assessment by Learning.com. TechLiteracy Assessment provides districts with an assessment to authentically measure and report technology proficiency for elementary and middle school students.

Gaston staff was looking for an online assessment because the state test is delivered online, “and we wanted to match format as well as content,” says Debbie Core, Chief Technology Officer for the district, one of the largest in North Carolina.

The district’s staff has been delighted with the data they receive from TechLiteracy Assessment, and best of all, they’re seeing great results.

### Implementation

Gaston, located west of Charlotte, is in Gastonia, a suburb of forested hills. Teachers here average 14 years of experience, and nearly one-third hold advanced degrees. Dedication has its rewards. Gaston consistently is one of the state’s top large districts with the highest number of its schools meeting Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind act.

With a Fall 2005 launch of the North Carolina state online test of computer skills looming, district staff were ready to give teachers information they could use to help individual students with areas in which they were specifically weak. The district first administered the assessment in November 2005 to fifth and seventh graders. The results were used to guide instruction for the spring 2006 semester, and to support students to be ready for the state’s test.

### Putting what they learned to use

Because TechLiteracy Assessment is Web-delivered, Learning.com returns results in days. Matching well to North Carolina’s technology curriculum and high-stakes test means TechLiteracy results also easily convert into information that is critical for Gaston County teachers and administrators.

“The reports are very good,” says Roxie Miller, Assistant Chief Technology Officer. Bar graphs make it easy, she says, to see where each school in the district ranks according to proficiency for each skills module. “That’s key, of course. We can also tell how we compare with other schools and other districts that have used TechLiteracy Assessment. These will all be very helpful for principals and for all of us at the district level.”

TechLiteracy Assessment’s reports are organized by district, school, class and student. Scores note whether students meet or fall below proficiency, defined as ‘what an average student should be expected to do, with technology, for his or her grade level,’” says Miller. The assessment’s content is arranged in seven modules: database, spreadsheet, word processing, multimedia and presentations, telecommunication and Internet, systems and fundamentals, and social and ethical issues.

Students demonstrate their abilities with technology tools like spreadsheets, word processing applications, Internet search engines and databases. Concepts like copyright and social and ethical issues are covered with multiple-choice items.

“TechLiteracy Assessment’s individual student reports are fabulous – really valuable,” says Miller. “They report on where a child is weak and strong in each skill area, so you can really do individualized remediation or intervention. They could also help a teacher with planning, overall, how to better integrate technology use into class work.”

### One test students like

“The kids liked it being online,” says Miller. “They’re very comfortable with clicking,” adds Core, who also observed that students were quite engaged during testing “and just a little bit frustrated by the things they did not know.”

For fifth-grade teacher Jaime Wallace, “Taking the test online was no big deal to students.” Her 22 students at Bessemer City Central School finished the assessment in less than an hour.

### What they learned

Gaston leaders found the data invaluable in helping students be more proficient technology users and be ready for the state test. Because the district administered TechLiteracy Assessment in early elementary grades, those students are well on their way to knowing what they need to work on in the years to come to be ready for the state test.

And with merely a year’s worth of data, Gaston’s technology team can already say they see a correlation among those students who passed the TechLiteracy Assessment in seventh grade, and those who then went on to pass the state test as eighth-grade students. In fact, in one cluster of schools in the district, close to 95 percent of seventh graders who passed TechLiteracy Assessment also passed the eighth-grade test.

“That’s just one year of data, but that’s what we wanted TechLiteracy Assessment to tell us,” says Miller. “The more we use TechLiteracy Assessment, the better results we are getting in eighth grade. Schools with the highest TechLiteracy assessment scores in seventh grade have the highest scores on the state test as well.”

Having the data from TechLiteracy Assessment gives the district the compass it needs to support students to improve in specific areas in which they are weak.

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Gaston County Schools, North Carolina

For example, Miller noted a curious symmetry in Gaston County’s results for its elementary school students. The students scored lowest in social and ethical issues, but high in multimedia and presentation skills. In its middle schools, however, the opposite was true. That led her team to alert middle school principals and teachers that their students needed more focused time learning presentation skills. Teachers are making an effort to use presentation technology in their core instruction.

### Teaching technology skills with EasyTech

Because Gaston also uses Learning.com’s EasyTech technology curriculum tool, teachers have immediate access to lessons and activities in the very areas in which TechLiteracy Assessment indicates weak spots. The curriculum is scoped and sequenced, so teachers immediately find what they need to integrate the technology skills into their math, science, language arts and social studies instruction. Miller says she is hearing from her teachers that they are addressing those weak spots in just this way.

“The reports make it easy for us to know what’s happening where. When we look at our reports school by school, teacher by teacher, and class by class, we know where our challenges are, and make suggestions to help our students,” Miller says.