

# School News & Notes

## An Assessment System That Tracks Students' Skills

(NAPSA)—How is your child doing at school?

That is a question the states and the nation are trying to answer as schools strive to meet the No Child Left Behind Act's strict accountability mandates. To answer it, teachers need more accurate and timely methods of tracking students' discrete skills and academic progress. They seek better strategies for bridging the inevitable learning gaps. Administrators are looking for ways to lessen the academic disparities between disadvantaged students and their peers. And they all need hard data to handle the comprehensive reporting required by No Child Left Behind.

These are tall orders to fill, especially in times of shrinking budgets and teacher shortages. Increasingly, schools and districts are turning to state-of-the-art data collection and assessment systems. Those, such as Curriculum Designer™, Skills Connection™, Classroom Wizard™ ParSYSTEM 5.0 and PERFORMANCE Series™, all developed by Scantron Corporation, are reported to work together or in various combinations to update or realign curricula with national and state standards, evaluate skills, measure academic gains, aggregate data and report results with a minimum of time and effort.

In some cases, even a single solution can make a huge difference. One Florida principal says the use of PERFORMANCE Series alone has provided his school invaluable data. Teachers use it to pinpoint the academic strengths and weaknesses of each student and then tailor instruction to ensure that each and every child makes academic gains in their class.

"It's very down-to-earth and shows real, irrefutable data," says Larry Bolinger, principal of Merritt Brown Middle School in Panama City. "The computer-adaptive assessment program ensures that every one of Merritt's



**STATE OF THE ART ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS ARE helping many schools evaluate skills and measure academic gains.**

1,000 students are on a definable path to solid academic gains."

Merritt teachers administer PERFORMANCE Series' online assessments at the beginning of the year to diagnose precisely where each student stands academically. Those at risk of failing a subject or falling behind are identified before classes start. Teachers have the specific data on hand to help their students bridge any gaps in proficiency.

There's no waiting for standardized testing results, which can take many months and may not address all grade levels or every student. Moreover, by administering the assessments at the end of the school year, Bolinger has hard data on his school's "adequate yearly progress," the yardstick by which No Child Left Behind measures a school's success.

"Finally, since the criterion-reference test adapts to each student's level of knowledge, our slower students aren't faced with a mountain of questions they don't understand while our most advanced students remain challenged," explains Bolinger. "That's a little gem."