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## **Students get instant feedback on writing via the Internet**

By Melody Brumble

Bryan Clark's classmates greeted his moment in the academic spotlight with mingled cheers and groans.

Bryan, a fifth-grader at University Elementary School in Shreveport, scored a perfect six on a composition he and classmates were writing Monday. Students type the short essays and stories on wireless laptop computers and submit them via the Internet to a site that critiques them instantly.

Bryan was the first among teacher Patti Roberts' 45 students to achieve a top score.

"That's bad. I was going to get a six," groused classmate Deshaun Kidd. Roberts and computer lab teacher Diana Gwinn co-authored a grant that secured nearly \$100,000 in state money to buy the computers, digital cameras for participating teachers, software and a subscription to My Access, the trademarked online program students use for writing practice. Fourth- and fifth-graders are using the computers for consistent writing practice and a variety of classroom projects. The grant will pay for the My Access subscription for three years.

"They're good," Bryan said of the computers. "You can use them without plugging them in. It's really different from a big computer. You have to plug that in and hook up a bunch of wires."

Students start their writing the old-fashioned way, roughing out ideas in a spiral notebook. Roberts goes over the handwritten rough drafts in class, then students type a finished essay into the computer.

The feedback is detailed. The program underpinning the Web site analyzes more than 300 writing characteristics and rates the organization and mechanics of a composition, among other elements.

Reuben Cheng checked his spelling, then clicked on another feature that analyzes sentence structure and variety. Roberts gives students four chances to revise compositions before they move on to another writing exercise.

"I'm going to add more detail," Cheng said as he settled in to revise his story. "It's awesome. I've never had anything grade my stories so fast. Before, we wrote them in our notebooks and the teacher graded them."

Students used to grumble when writing time arrived, Roberts said, but now they ask her in advance about the next topic.

"On the first stories we did, students were getting twos and threes. On the second one, they improved to fours and fives."

She believes the computer use will increase students' familiarity with technology.