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Program aids students' writing efforts Six schools plan to use the online software BY RASHA ALY • CATHEDRAL CITY SUN • APRIL 4, 2008

Middle school students in the Palm Springs Unified School District will soon be able to submit their essays through the MY Access! online program. And within 30 seconds, they will receive an automated score with suggestions on how to revise their work.

"I think (MY Access!) is something exciting, something new for the kids," said Mardi Hagar, who teaches exploratory writing at Nellie N. Coffman Middle School in Cathedral City.

Hagar is among a group of teachers receiving training this week on how to use the program.

District officials decided to invest about \$800,000 to use the program.

By the next few weeks, students in four middle schools -Nellie N. Coffman, Raymond Cree, James Workman and Desert Hot Springs - will use the program, said Frank Tinney, senior director of elementary education. Students from Two Bunch Palm and Bubbling Wells elementary schools, in Desert Hot Springs, will use it too.

Students using the program receive writing assignments for different subjects from teachers, and they complete their assignments through the program, said Tina Hamilton, a regional sales representative for Vantage Learning, the company which develops and sells MY Access!

With its automated score and suggested revisions, the program places the responsibility of writing more on the student than the teacher, said Madeline Pan, a literacy specialist with Vantage Learning.

The teacher spends less time revising and motivating students to work. It is up to the students to take the initiative, because the revisions are already supplied by the computer, Pan said.



Raymond Cree Middle School site coach **Terri Green** (left) assists teacher **Jaclin Willingham** during MY Access! technology training for the district's middle school English Language Arts teachers held Wednesday at Nellie N. Coffman Middle School in Cathedral City. PSUSD purchased a three-year license for use of the program, which enables students to submit written work online and receive immediate feedback and scoring. (Crystal Chatham Cathedral City Sun)

Besides the immediate feedback, there are other features students can use - such as the prewriting tool "Narrative Wizard," Hamilton said. The wizard helps students organize their thoughts by having them give brief descriptions of each of the characters in the story.

And teachers find the feedback provided by MY Access! "pretty much mirrors what they are teaching," Pan said.

Tinney said they hope to add high schools to the mix of schools using the program next year.

The district's six schools are among 500 California schools using the program, said John Zoccola, spokesman for Vantage Learning.