



Creating Technology to Promote Learning

6700 E. Speedway Blvd. • Tucson, Arizona 85710

1.800.367.4762 • 520.323.9033 • fax 520.323.9139

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Galileoinfo@ati-online.com

www.ati-online.com

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CONTACT: Heidi Kirkland (heidi@ati-online.com)

or Jody Jepson (jody@ati-online.com)

Arizona Department of Education Awards "Spotlight on Success Award for Excellence" to Mesquite Elementary

TUCSON, AZ/May 4, 2005 – The Arizona Department of Education chose Mesquite Elementary for a Spotlight on School Success Award for their efforts in the areas of AIMS, yearly progress, and the use of data to improve educational programs. According to Oran Tkatchov, Director of Academic and Instructional Support for the Arizona Department of Education, "Mesquite Elementary School's 8th grade Math AIMS scores rose 34 percent and 84 percent of 8th graders passed the Writing AIMS assessment. Fifth grade AIMS Math scores rose 31 percent and over 83 percent of their 3rd grade students passed the Math, Reading, and Writing AIMS assessments. Mesquite Elementary School has consecutively made AYP, and has incorporated research-based practices within their own vision in a fluent and skillful manner."

Mesquite joins 14 other Arizona schools in receiving Department of Education awards on May 4th at a formal awards dinner in Phoenix. The 2003-04 Arizona School Report Card for Mesquite Elementary indicates that Mesquite advanced from "Performing" to "Excelling" in just one year (2004). The school's successes in the past two years include:

- Mesquite Elementary was one of 3 Schools recognized by the State of Arizona for their *Best Practices* as part of the Spotlight on School Success for 2004-05.
- Mesquite student achievement on AIMS increased substantially in 2 year period in all three tested areas, (Reading, Math and Writing).
- Mesquite Elementary was designated as an Arizona Educational Foundation A+ School in 2005.
- Mesquite Elementary Principal, Connie Erickson, was named a National Distinguished Principal of the Year for the State of Arizona.
- Mesquite Elementary was the 1st Place K-8 Winner of the 2004 ASBA Golden Bell Award for their program "Bell to Bell Learning."

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Arizona-based educational technology company, Assessment Technology, Inc. is proud to be involved in the research-based programs implemented by Mesquite to raise student achievement. In just two years, Mesquite revamped their approach to goal setting and planning, administering assessments, curriculum implementation and instruction and evaluation/monitoring. A district-wide contribution to improving student performance included implementing the Galileo K-12 Online Educational Management System developed by Assessment Technology, Inc. As a result of these strategies, teachers were able to continuously gauge the level of student mastery, adjust instructional efforts to meet the needs of students, offer re-teach/enrichment activities, and enhance student achievement. Their approach demonstrates that when student improvement is the ultimate purpose of testing, it can be a positive educational component.

Challenges Lead to a Vision of Excellence

In 2002-03 Mesquite Elementary was labeled by the Arizona Department of Education as a "Performing School." Established in 1999, Mesquite started with a new mix of students, teachers and leadership and has been subject to fluctuating enrollment as new schools open in the rapidly growing district. Mesquite Elementary principal, Connie Erickson and her staff were able to positively impact student achievement in a short time frame due to the concerted effort of all Mesquite Elementary stakeholders leveraged through several programs:

Essential Standards - a district-wide accountability system including the identification of "Essential Standards" for the district at each grade level through the LAPDS from WestEd, and the development of district benchmark assessments administered three times each year to measure progress towards standards.

Educational Management System –access to Galileo K-12 Online reporting tools to evaluate student accomplishments at Mesquite, and to provide the information on student learning necessary to modify instruction to increase student achievement. Online technology provides instant access to assessment information at student, class, grade, school and district levels.

Achievement Teacher – a dedicated person responsible for compiling and preparing student assessment data for use by teaching teams and administrators to inform instructional practices. From this information, the teachers create a plan for what they call "re-teaching" to ensure that every student has an opportunity to learn.

Comprehensive System of Student Support (CSSS) - a daily Math Re-teach/Enrich class that Erickson credits with significantly increasing math test scores. Over a three year period the percentage of 5th grade children at the level of "Exceeds Standard" for Math rose from 45% to 51% to 69%. Other grades experienced similar gains.

Bell to Bell Learning - award-winning time-on-task/student engagement program based on research that classroom instructional practices and student active participation have the biggest impact on student achievement drive this. Mesquite teachers and students commit to using every minute of teaching time every day.

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These research-based programs implemented in the past few years at Mesquite show how fast a school can achieve excellence. Joe Sassone, Vail Assistant Superintendent remarks that "With information on how many students succeed in the essentials standards, Mesquite educators are quickly able to develop strategies to improve instruction and intervention."

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For further information:

Arizona Department of Education Spotlight on Success <http://www.ade.az.gov/>

Assessment Technology, Inc. and Galileo www.ati-online.com

Vail Unified School District and Mesquite Elementary School www.vail.k12.az.us/

WestEd's Local Accountability Professional Development Series www.WestEd.org/lapds