

CAT1 Alabama Highlighted Example for 21st Century Tool

Technological Fluency Institute (TFI) delivers CAT1 – a computer assessment and tutorial program – in response to increased needs for determining the technological literacy and fluency of students and teachers.

CAT1 is a dynamic, online, diagnostic-prescriptive learning program that interacts with users to ensure they can demonstrate competence on 24 performance objectives comprising the six standards deemed most necessary for success in using computers, the Internet, and essential productivity software. CAT1 consists of four major components: an assessment program, a learning program, a management system, and certification.

- The assessment program consists of 24 performance-based items.
- The correlated learning program contains more than 100 learning activities designed to educate users in step-by-step intervals.
- The robust management system provides program administrators with access to numerous reports and forms specific to their organization.
- Successful completion of the assessment program within three attempts results in certification by TFI.

Many organizations across the United States employ CAT1 in a variety of settings. The Alabama Department of Education Career/Technical Education Section is one such organization.

In Alabama, CAT1 has had a trickle-down effect. Nancy Beggs, the State Director of Career/Technical Education (CTE) took the assessment to evaluate if the product met the needs of the state. Beggs explained, “I completed the online assessment first to have personal confidence that this was the appropriate tool.” She was specifically looking for a measurement tool that met national technology standards, and she found that tool in CAT1.

After Beggs was CAT1 certified, she realized the potential of this basic computer assessment program. Now, CAT1 certification is required for all state CTE staff members. The Section highly encourages all CT/E directors across the state to also be certified in the assessment. To date, more than 150 staff members and directors have taken CAT1 with the state picking up the cost.

“I have given the local directors of career/technical education in each local education agency the negotiated price list and encouraged them to use the assessment with their teachers and with their students,” Beggs said. Now, many of the CTE directors have begun to encourage teachers on the local levels to participate in the CAT1 learning program. At this level, the districts fund the assessment.

Beggs said that many Alabama participants expressed reluctance to take the assessment for a variety of reasons. Usually, confidence was a higher source of that reluctance than competence. That concern has been misplaced because, as Beggs states, “the CAT1 program includes a system of online tutorials that more than adequately explains how to complete the assessments.” Most participants in the CTE Section use the learning program as just-in-time learning.

Confidence is high after completing the assessment. In fact, Beggs shared that one participant said, “This program does what it is supposed to do: increase productivity and increase my knowledge in solving problems in the daily use of the computer. The standards in the program have given me more confidence in being able to manage the computer. The tech support was great.”

Future plans involve using CAT1 for all CTE students across the state. Beggs is working with state officials to implement a systemic framework for delivering core skills to CTE students. A component of that framework is ensuring the technological fluency of students prior to graduation. CAT1 certification will be the initial level of determining technological fluency. Additional intermediate and advanced levels will also be instituted.

“This assessment can be the required assessment of technology skills required for graduation from high school in Alabama,” claimed Beggs. When CAT1 becomes a certification requirement for students, it will be funded primarily by federal grants. Additionally, students’ technological fluency will be adequately assessed.