

2006 Readers' Choice Awards:

Best Math Software



At a time when skilled workers with high-tech knowledge are at a premium, the need for effective math instruction in U.S. classrooms has never been greater. To ensure the global competitiveness of U.S. students, educators are increasingly turning to software and other computer-based options to make certain even the toughest of math lessons are sinking in. Designed to keep students engaged while drilling home important, often hard-to-teach concepts, these products incorporate everything from on-demand video to self-paced learning modules to test banks aligned with state standards.

To help educators better sift through the dizzying array of options on the market today, *eSchool News* presents its 2006 Readers' Choice Awards for Best Math Software. For the second straight year, we asked readers to choose what they think are the best software products for delivering math instruction. More than 1,000 readers cast their votes in the survey, which ran at **eSchool News Online** in June. Here are the results.

Best Overall Solution for Teaching Mathematics:

Discovery Education's **unitedstreaming**

Basic Math Literacy	17.4 percent
Fractions/Decimals/Percents	18 percent
Pre-algebra	16.7 percent
Algebra	16.4 percent
Geometry	18.7 percent
Trigonometry and Pre-calculus	21.4 percent
Calculus	26.1 percent

Remarkably, Discovery Education's subscription-based, video-on-demand service, **unitedstreaming**, was the top choice of our readers in every single category—a nod, no doubt, to the increasing usefulness of video to enhance instruction. Rather than feature **unitedstreaming**, which allows educators to choose and stream thousands of age- and content-appropriate video clips directly to students' desktops, as the leader in each category throughout our analysis, we opted instead to give the product its own write-up. The categories that follow will feature the second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-place honorees.

In making **unitedstreaming** the No. 1 choice in each category, readers noted its usefulness in helping to illustrate a variety of tough math concepts. "**unitedstreaming** gives my students the visual aspect that is vital for their understanding of math concepts," wrote one elementary-school educator. "It helps me build upon their prior learning, and I am able to move them quickly through various levels." Another wrote, "You can freeze-frame concepts and use the video again and again. It's like having teachers with several teaching styles available to instruct our students." Wrote a third educator: "I am currently teaching summer school seventh-grade math and have found the **unitedstreaming** pre-algebra videos useful. It is nice to be able to view just a clip, as opposed to an entire video. The company does an excellent job of linking the math to the everyday world."

Best Software for Teaching Basic Math Literacy

2. Academy of Math (Autoskill International Inc.)	11.3 percent
3. Odyssey Math (CompassLearning Inc.)	10.2 percent
4. Accelerated Math (Renaissance Learning Inc.)	4.8 percent
5. Math Blaster (Knowledge Adventure)	4.2 percent

Autoskill's Academy of Math finished second to **unitedstreaming** in the category of Basic Math Literacy. "I have seen wonderful growth while my students have been using Academy of Math," wrote one respondent whose school recently integrated the product into its classrooms. "Some students went up by three grade levels, while most went up by one or two grade levels." Another Academy of Math user had this to say: "The tutorials are informative, appropriate in length, and interspersed properly. Placement is accurate. Progress is constantly monitored and reported to students and teachers and is truly individualized with interventions as required ... Built-in motivations are on target, too."

Coming in just behind Academy of Math in this year's survey was CompassLearning's Odyssey Math offering. One educator praised the Odyssey product, saying, "It has many features that a teacher needs, such as flexibility, reinforcement, off-line resources, and data." Another called it "interactive and engaging."

One product that didn't crack the top five in this category, but was repeatedly praised by respondents who did vote for it, was Skills Tutor from Achievement Technologies. One customer called Skills Tutor "easy to use" and said the software "remediated (sic) right away for students ... unlike other programs that are geared toward assessing only." Other solutions receiving votes included Pearson Digital Learning's SuccessMaker, Riverdeep's Destination Math Series, and BrainPOP (another video service, this one featuring animated shorts).

Best Software for Teaching Fractions/Decimals/Percents

2. Odyssey Math (CompassLearning Inc.)	11.4 percent
3. Academy of Math (Autoskill International Inc.)	10.9 percent
4. Destination Math Series (Riverdeep Interactive Learning)	4.9 percent
5. (tie) Skills Tutor (Achievement Technologies)	4.1 percent
Bridge to Algebra (Carnegie Learning Inc.)	
SuccessMaker (Pearson Digital Learning)	

In an immediate reversal of the previous category, Odyssey Math from CompassLearning edged out Autoskill's Academy of Math as the second most popular choice for teaching fractions, decimals, and percents. Readers said they liked the product because it was engaging, inexpensive, and relatively easy to install. "Students are eager to go to [the] lab and have increased scores as a whole," wrote one Odyssey user. "The content matches what our teachers are teaching. Odyssey is excellent."

Academy of Math also received high praise from readers in this category. "I deal with sixth, seventh, and eighth graders that are behind by more than two years," wrote one Autoskill customer. "With Academy of Math, the ability to individualize [students'] instruction to exactly their needs is the best."

Riverdeep's Destination Math Series also proved a favorite among this year's voters. One educator praised the product for its "great illustrations and explanations." Skills Tutor from Achievement Technologies received high marks for helping students prepare for state tests. "The teachers love it," wrote one respondent.

Best Software for Teaching Pre-algebra

2. Odyssey Math (CompassLearning Inc.)	11.7 percent
3. Academy of Math (Autoskill International Inc.)	10.2 percent
4. Bridge to Algebra (Carnegie Learning Inc.)	5.9 percent
5. (tie) PLATO Interactive Mathematics (PLATO Learning Inc.); Destination Math Series (Riverdeep Interactive Learning)	4.6 percent

In the Pre-algebra category, Odyssey Math and Academy of Math again were the top choices behind unitedstreaming. Said one educator in favor of Odyssey: "The software has great tutorial lessons with embedded manipulatives and online tools, including graphing calculators. The 'animated' lessons are relational to students with off-line materials that follow along, giving the teacher multiple learning styles to choose from."

Bridge to Algebra, from Carnegie Learning, also received considerable support. One reader said she liked the product because it employed a "proven method" in helping students master pre-algebraic lessons. Other solutions receiving votes included Accelerated Math from Renaissance Learning; Pearson Digital Learning's SuccessMaker; Larson's Pre-algebra from Larson Learning Inc.; Math for the Real World from Knowledge Adventure; BrainPOP; and Cornerstone Mathematics from Achievement Technologies. "The step-by-step procedure used to explain how to solve various problems is so easy to understand," wrote one educator in support of the Cornerstone product.

Best Software for Teaching Algebra

2. Odyssey Math (CompassLearning Inc.)	12.6 percent
3. Cognitive Tutor Algebra (Carnegie Learning Inc.)	9.7 percent
4. Destination Math Series (Riverdeep Interactive Learning)	4.5 percent
5. Accelerated Math (Renaissance Learning)	4.3 percent

Odyssey Math again finished second to unitedstreaming in the Algebra category. Wrote one user: "[The software] leads students through instructional step-by-step activities, practice, and provides re-teaching whenever necessary." Another Odyssey user praised the product for its "great tutorial[s]."

Coming in just behind Odyssey Math, Cognitive Tutor was championed by *eSchool News* readers as "a fantastic program for kids who struggle with learning algebra the 'traditional' way." Said another reader in favor of Carnegie Learning's popular Algebra product: "The software models student thinking, leading to a higher-order learning. Too much software drills on low-level behaviors. This is different."

Other solutions receiving votes included PLATO Algebra from PLATO Learning Inc.; SuccessMaker; and Larson's Algebra 1 from Larson Learning.

Best Software for Teaching Geometry

2. The Geometer's Sketchpad (Key Curriculum Press)	14.2 percent
3. Odyssey Math (CompassLearning Inc.)	11.5 percent
4. Academy of Math (Autoskill International Inc.)	8.5 percent
5. Cognitive Tutor Geometry (Carnegie Learning Inc.)	6.5 percent

For the second year in a row, The Geometer's Sketchpad from Key Curriculum Press proved a favorite among tech-savvy educators for helping to illustrate important geometric concepts. Bested only by Discovery Education's unitedstreaming tool in the voting, The Geometer's Sketchpad was dubbed by one educator "the best geometry program out there." Another called it "a powerful visualization tool for concept development," while a third respondent said Sketchpad was "unsurpassed in showing students the dynamic nature of the universality of geometric concepts and theorems."

Cognitive Tutor Geometry also earned our readers' praise. Said one respondent of the product: "It is well-aligned with our standards, and our assessment scores have improved." Other products garnering praise included SAS inSchool's multi-disciplinary Curriculum Pathways product, which one reader said enables "students [to] explore the relationships between equations and graphs in ways that graphing calculator[s] cannot," and Riverdeep's Mighty Math Series, which another respondent chose for "giving students the ability to manipulate one-, two-, or three-dimensional objects and turn them to look at [from] different positions."

Other solutions receiving votes included PLATO Geometry and Measurement; Accelerated Math; and Pearson Digital Learning's NovaNET.

Best Software for Teaching Trigonometry and Pre-calculus

2. TI Interactive! (Texas Instruments Inc.)	10.7 percent
3. Accelerated Math (Renaissance Learning)	7.1 percent
4. Pre-calculus: A Multimedia Course (HRW Inc.)	6.4 percent
5. (tie) A+nywhere Learning System (American Education Corp.) NovaNET (Pearson Digital Learning)	5.4 percent

Making its first appearance on this year's survey in the Trigonometry and Pre-calculus category was TI Interactive! from Texas Instruments. Though many educators said their schools have been slow to embrace software built specifically for teaching higher-level math concepts, they said TI Interactive!—which works with the company's suite of advanced graphing calculators—is among the best products available in this emerging area. One educator said he preferred the TI product over other alternatives because it enables educators "to continue the theme of exploration and to test ideas in a highly interactive way." Another said she liked the product simply for its "interfacing" with the company's calculators.

One reader lauded NovaNET for its "complete coverage of the concepts." Other solutions receiving votes included Curriculum Pathways from SAS inSchool; Riverdeep's Tangible Math Series; online math tutorial service Hotmath Inc.; and BoxerMath from Boxer Learning Inc.

Best Software for Teaching Calculus

2. Calculus: A Multimedia Course (HRW Inc.)	12.7 percent
3. Tangible Math Series (Riverdeep Interactive Learning)	8.7 percent
4. NovaNET (Pearson Digital Learning)	8.2 percent
5. A+nywhere Learning System (American Education Corp.)	7.9 percent

When it comes to calculus, educators responsible for teaching higher-level math concepts voted in favor of a multimedia approach, choosing "Calculus: A Multimedia Course" from educational publisher Holt, Rinehart and Winston as their No. 2 choice behind unitedstreaming. One reader said he liked the product for its "convenience," while another called it simply a "great resource"—a huge compliment in a category often maligned by educators for its poor selection of texts and other ancillary teaching materials.

Rounding out the top five in this category were Riverdeep's Tangible Math Series for teaching advanced mathematics, Pearson's NovaNET, and the A+nywhere Learning System from American Education Corp., which one respondent praised for "doing an excellent job covering all of the skills." Other products receiving votes included Hotmath Inc. and the Advanced Mathematics Software Series from MathMedia Educational Software Inc. 