

Multimedia Creation Tools

Used to be, when teachers sent their students home to work on projects, kids often returned to class the next day toting large sheets of poster board decorated with construction paper and stuck together haphazardly with Elmer's glue. But technology is rapidly changing the way both students and teachers approach such assignments.

Gone are the days of glitter and construction paper. In many cases, these crafty, seemingly antiquated endeavors have been replaced by a new form of creative expression: multimedia projects. Where students once used drawings and diagrams to express themselves, these days they're increasingly turning to video and



animation as a means to get the point across. Documents once written by hand are now typed on computer and turned in electronically; drawings once traced in lead and colored in with crayon are now being created on the computer with the help of powerful software.

To help educators learn which multimedia creation tools their colleagues prefer, *eSchool News* has created its first-ever Readers' Choice Awards on Multimedia Creation Tools. More than 500 educators responded to our online survey, which asked voters to choose their favorite multimedia authoring products in several categories—some based on age appropriateness and others on price. [Here are the results.](#)

Best desktop publishing software...

LOW END (under \$200):

1. Microsoft Word	56.6%
2. AppleWorks (Apple Computer Inc.)	14.2%
3. The Print Shop (Riverdeep Interactive Learning/Software MacKiev)	9.1%
4. Macromedia Freehand MX	7.1%
5. Print Master (Riverdeep Interactive Learning)	3.3%

HIGH END (\$200 and up):

1. Microsoft Publisher	47.6%
2. Adobe Pagemaker	23%
3. Adobe InDesign CS2	19.1%
4. QuarkXPress (Quark Inc.)	5.3%

In desktop publishing, Microsoft was the clear winner in both the high- and low-end categories—a result influenced, no doubt, by the pervasiveness of Windows-based PCs in schools.

In the low-end category, more than 56 percent of respondents cited Microsoft Word as their document creation tool of choice. One respondent called Microsoft's flagship word processor and document creator "easy to teach, yet extremely powerful," saying it is used "in every discipline at every grade level." Another called it "fast" and "cheap," owing to the fact that it comes bundled with nearly every Windows machine. Some Mac users, however, preferred AppleWorks, the desktop publishing suite that includes tools for manipulating graphics, drawing, and writing. One respondent who uses both Apple and Microsoft products gave AppleWorks the nod over Microsoft Word for its "drawing and painting capabilities." Another said images are easier to manipulate, adding that "MS Word has a tendency to freeze on our school's computers."

Other products receiving votes in the \$200-and-under category included Macromedia's Freehand MX (7.1 percent) and The Print Shop (9.1 percent), which one respondent lauded for its "great clipart and ready-made projects." Riverdeep publishes the Windows version of the program and licensed Software MacKiev to create a Macintosh version, though Riverdeep later created its own distinct Mac version of the software.

On the high end (desktop publishing titles that sell for more than \$200), Microsoft again beat the competition, bringing in nearly 48 percent of the vote with its Publisher tool. "Publisher is consistently easy to use, even for students, and offers a wide range of options," wrote one satisfied customer. Adobe Pagemaker took second in the high-end category, with 23 percent of the vote. One educator called Pagemaker "one of the industry standards" for layout and praised the product for its ability to integrate plug-ins and work well with other applications. Also receiving support in the high-end category were Adobe InDesign CS2 (19.1 percent) and QuarkXpress (5.3 percent). Voting for InDesign, one educator called the product "a full-blown powerhouse" and pegged it as the eventual replacement for Adobe's older-generation Pagemaker tool.

Best photo manipulation or digital imaging software...

ELEMENTARY GRADES:

1. Adobe Photoshop Elements	40.5%
2. Microsoft Photo Editor	17.9%
3. ImageBlender (Tech4Learning)	8.7%
4. Macromedia Studio MX 2004	7.7%
4. (tie) Microsoft Picture It! Premium	7.7%
6. iPhoto (Apple Computer)	4.8%

UPPER GRADES:

1. Adobe Photoshop CS2	32%
2. Adobe Photoshop Elements	27%
3. Macromedia Studio MX 2004	17.8%
4. Print Shop Deluxe (Riverdeep Interactive Learning/Software MacKiev)	9.2%
5. Paint Shop Pro 9 (Corel Corp.)	3.6%

Respondents using digital imaging software in the elementary grades chose Adobe Photoshop Elements as their strong favorite. Adobe has long been considered the industry leader in image manipulation software and is available for both Mac and Windows platforms. One respondent called Photoshop Elements "a very powerful software designed especially for educators and students," stating that the Elements version of Photoshop "introduces students to the tools and menus they will encounter if they pursue [further training in] graphic design." Another chose Elements because "other programs either lack focus or are insufficient to the task of photo and digital imaging."

There were, however, critics of Photoshop Elements. One respondent said ImageBlender, which placed third with 8.7 percent of the vote, was "simple. Easy to learn. Easy to teach," and added that ImageBlender can perform tasks "in an instant, where it would take me hours and hours in Photoshop."

Adobe Photoshop products commanded the top two slots in the upper-grades category. One enthusiastic respondent called CS2 "a tool for the ages!" That respondent said students who learn CS2 can "create high-end products and pave their way into a career." Others said they chose CS2 because "it's perfect to work with Macromedia [products]" or because CS2 is "easy to learn the basics" and "has much room for manipulation and creativity." Other products cited in the upper grades included Macromedia Studio MX 2004 (17.8 percent), Print Shop Deluxe (9.2 percent), and Paint Shop Pro 9 by Corel Corp. (3.6 percent).

Best video editing software...

LOW END:

1. iMovie (Apple Computer)	40.2%
2. Microsoft Movie Maker 2.1	18.1%
3. Adobe Premier Elements	7.6%
4. Macromedia Video Kit for Dreamweaver	7.4%
5. Camtasia Studio (TechSmith Corp.)	6.1%
6. Studio Plus Version 9 (Pinnacle Systems)	4.8%

HIGH END:

1. Macromedia Studio MX 2004	20.6%
2. Adobe Premier Pro	20.4%
3. Final Cut Pro (Apple Computer)	15.9%
4. Final Cut Express HD (Apple Computer)	9.7%
5. Final Cut Studio (Apple Computer)	6.5%
6. Liquid Edition Version 6 (Pinnacle Systems)	5.3%

Well-known for its line of user-friendly video editing products, Apple Computer performed strong in both the high- and low-end categories. The company's free iMovie software, which comes bundled on new Macintosh machines, took top honors in the low-end category, and three of its professional-grade Final Cut products—Pro, Express, and Studio—placed among the top six on the high end. "iMovie provides seamless integration with slide show, image editing, DVD production, and sound editing software," wrote one respondent. "It's easy enough for all school-age kids and adults without investing lots of time in technical minutiae." Another proclaimed, "You can't beat [iMovie] for basic videography ... even second-graders can learn it."

Microsoft Movie Maker 2.1 (18.1 percent) finished a distant second in the under-\$200 category. Among its many benefits, Movie Maker comes bundled with newer versions of the Windows operating system, which means—as with iMovie—districts needn't incur additional expenses to use it. "For the price (free with the OS I use), it's hard to beat for the editing that I do," noted one respondent.

On the high end, Macromedia's popular Studio MX 2004 (20.6 percent) barely beat out Adobe Premier Pro (20.4 percent), followed by the three Apple products. "The Studio MX programs run smoothly and seem to be fairly easy to learn, at least the basics," wrote one educator in support of Macromedia's product. Adobe's Premier was praised not only for its usefulness in the classroom, but also for its versatility. While the Apple products only work on a Macintosh platform, Adobe's product runs on different operating systems, making it available for use on several platforms.

The high-end Apple products received praise, but also mixed emotions from respondents. Final Cut Pro "provides real-world experience and works well with both television production and web-based video production classes," wrote one supporter. Another complimented it for its "superb feature set, exceptional audio and titling software, and great interface," but cautioned that the program is "expensive" and might not be affordable in all districts.

Best painting, drawing, or creativity software...

ELEMENTARY GRADES (K-6):

1. Kid Pix Deluxe (Riverdeep Interactive Learning/Software MacKiev)	32%
2. Kidspiration (Inspiration Software)	27.9%
3. Macromedia Studio MX 2004	9.2%
4. HyperStudio 4.5 (Sunburst Technology)	7.6%
5. MediaBlender (Tech4Learning)	3.8%

UPPER GRADES (7-12):

1. Macromedia Studio MX 2004	39.3%
2. Inspiration (Inspiration Software)	24.6%
3. Adobe Illustrator CS2	9.3%
4. The Print Shop (Riverdeep Interactive Learning/Software MacKiev)	7.4%
5. Macromedia Director MX	2.8%
6. MediaBlender (Tech4Learning)	2.5%

In the lower grades (K-6), the award for best painting, drawing, and creativity software goes to Kid Pix Deluxe (32 percent), which, like The Print Shop, is published by both Riverdeep and Software MacKiev. "Kid Pix is easy to teach to the teachers, and the kids really like its ease [of use]," noted one satisfied customer. Another added: "The children find it very intuitive and love the easy animation effects."

Finishing a close second (27.9 percent) was Kidspiration, Inspiration Software's tool for building graphic organizers by combining pictures, text, and spoken words to represent thoughts and information. "Kidspiration is such a great curriculum tool," wrote one educator. "It makes mapping and webbing such an easy task ... and does things that can't be done easily in other programs." In classrooms, educators said, students use Kidspiration to perform a variety of tasks, including outlining, story mapping, certificate creation and design, research presentations, and web page development, to name a few.

After finishing third in the category for younger learners, Macromedia Studio MX 2004 vaulted to the top of the pack in the higher grades (7-12) with an impressive 39.3 percent of the vote. One educator called it "a powerful, do-anything program" and said that while the technology is sometimes difficult to learn, its mastery gives students a sense for the skills required to make it as real-life graphic designers—a benefit that should help secondary-school students "move into jobs with high-level requirements in technical skills."

Kidspiration's more advanced older sibling, Inspiration, finished second in the upper-grades category, with 24.6 percent of the vote. Adobe Illustrator CS2 (9.3 percent) placed a distant third, followed closely by The Print Shop (7.4 percent). One educator called The Print Shop, now in its 20th edition, "My personal favorite!" Over the years, this respondent said, the program "has grown up, become more sophisticated and more versatile ... [The Print Shop] is now so professional-looking that there is no need to look anywhere else for a graphics program."

Best sound editing and mixing software....

LOW END:

1. Garage Band (Apple Computer)	41.3%
2. Macromedia Captivate	21.5%
3. SoundForge Audio Studio (Sony Corp.)	7.4%
4. Sound Companion 2.0 (FTC Publishing)	5.8%
5. ACID Music Studio (Sony Corp.)	5.1%
6. Audacity	2.2%

HIGH END:

1. Macromedia Breeze	31.9%
2. Logic Pro (Apple Computer)	12.9%
3. SoundForge 8 (Sony Corp.)	10.3%
4. Logic Express 7 (Apple Computer)	7.6%
5. Cakewalk Home Studio Version 2	5.3%
6. ACID Pro 5 (Sony Corp.)	4.9%

By a nearly two-to-one margin, users of low-end sound editing and mixing software tapped Apple's Garage Band program as their top pick. One reader exclaimed, "Good heavens! Garage Band is incredible." This respondent touted the ability to use Garage Band to "teach vocabulary, mood, rhythm, and a million other curriculum objectives that have nothing to do with music." He also said it's "incredible to have a first-grader create his own song using tracks, mood and all, then print out the sheet music to show his parents." Another said the "great driver support, easy interface, [and] powerful capabilities" were his reasons for choosing Garage Band. Among the other software placing in the top six was an open-source program called Audacity, which garnered 2.2 percent of the votes.

Macromedia "breezed" to the top finish in the high-end category with its Breeze software, capturing nearly 32 percent of the vote; readers who chose Breeze called it "easy to use" and "interactive." Of the second-place winner, Apple's Logic Pro (12.9 percent), one reader said it is "preferred by musicians for good reason," adding that the program comes with an "utterly great interface and feature set." SoundForge 8 by Sony Corp. (10.3 percent), Apple's Logic Express 7 (7.6 percent), Cakewalk Home Studio Version 2 (5.3 percent), and Sony's ACID Pro 5 (4.9 percent) rounded out the top six.