

Readers' Choice Awards: Supplemental Educational Services



The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools that have failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for any subgroup of students at least three years in a row to use between 5 percent and 20 percent of their Title I funding to pay for supplemental educational services (SES)—that is, out-of-school tutoring—for students whose parents request them.

Each state is required to establish a list of approved SES providers. But the new education law has spurred a host of start-up tutoring companies in the past few years, each vying for their share of millions of dollars in federal funding. (For an in-depth look at the SES requirements and how some schools are struggling to meet them, see our Special Report on page 18 of this issue.)

To help states and school districts choose SES providers with proven records of success, *eSchool News* asked readers to weigh in with their own top picks for SES providers in each of four categories: K-8 Math, K-8 Language Arts, 9-12 Math, and 9-12 Language Arts. More than 1,200 unique readers voted on the *eSchool News* web site in February, and the results appear on the next two pages.

Interpreting the results

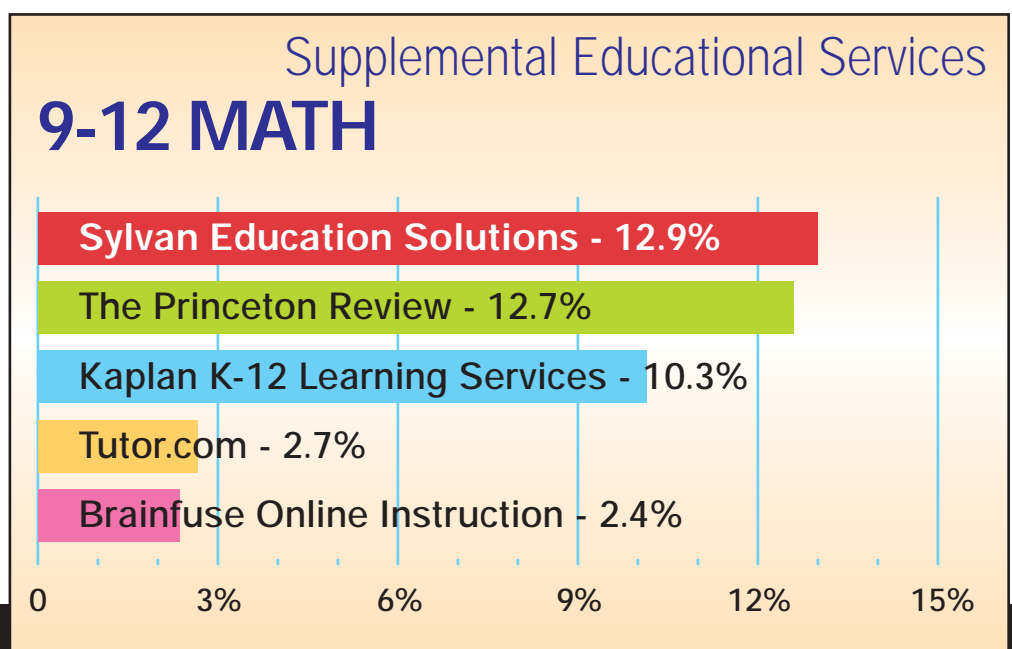
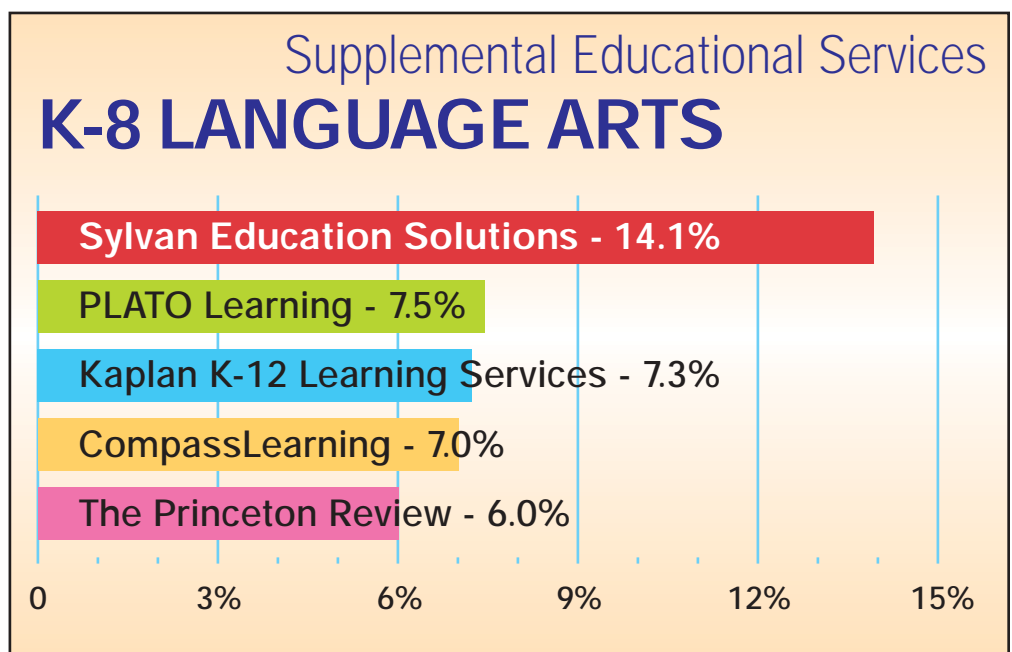
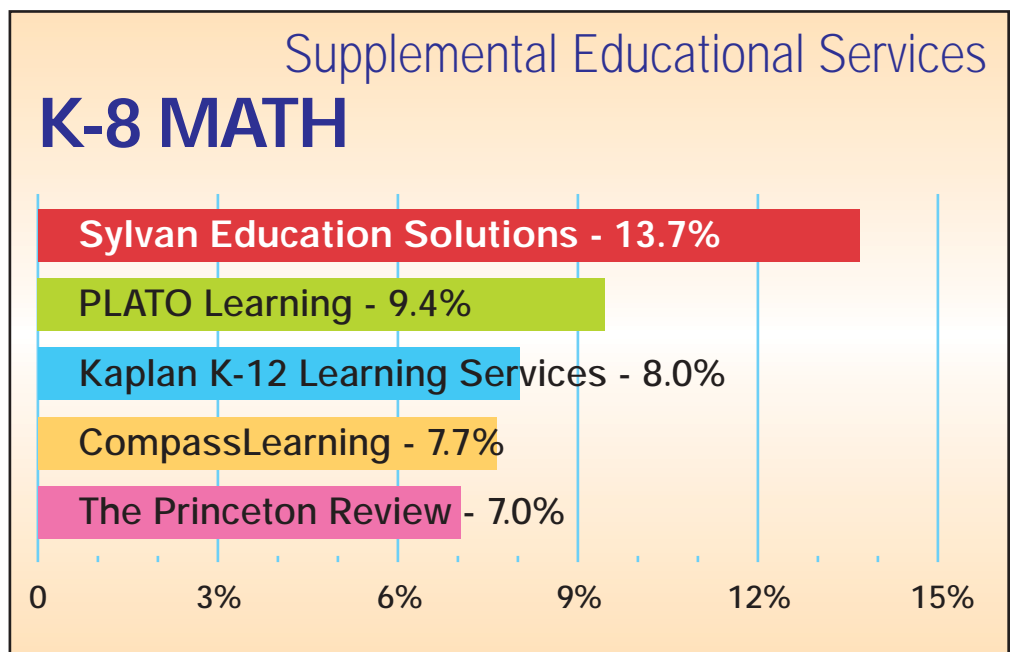
When evaluating these results, keep in mind that the needs of each student are unique, and what might be the best solution for one school or student might not work well for another. Nevertheless, some clear winners emerged in nearly all categories.

Three well-established tutoring firms in particular—Sylvan, Kaplan, and The Princeton Review—stood apart from the competition. They were the top three choices in each of the categories for grades 9-12, and they all placed among the top five picks in the two K-8 categories as well.

Name recognition, reputation, and national reach most likely had something to do with this; for example, one reader explained his choice by saying that Sylvan offers “an established, proven program.”

Sylvan distinguished itself slightly from the other companies in the two K-8 categories, but the results from the two categories in grades 9-12 suggest that readers believe there is not much difference between the three at the high-school level. Readers who chose Sylvan repeatedly cited the company’s “one-on-one” approach to tutoring as the main reason, though one reader said the company’s cost per pupil is a “problem.”

In the lower grades, PLATO Learning (which now owns Lightspan and its Achieve software) and CompassLearning also placed among the top five choices. Both companies are established providers of instructional software that have applied for inclusion on states’ lists of eligible SES providers. They typically contract with districts to hire local tutors (usually teachers or paraprofessionals within the district) who provide after-school

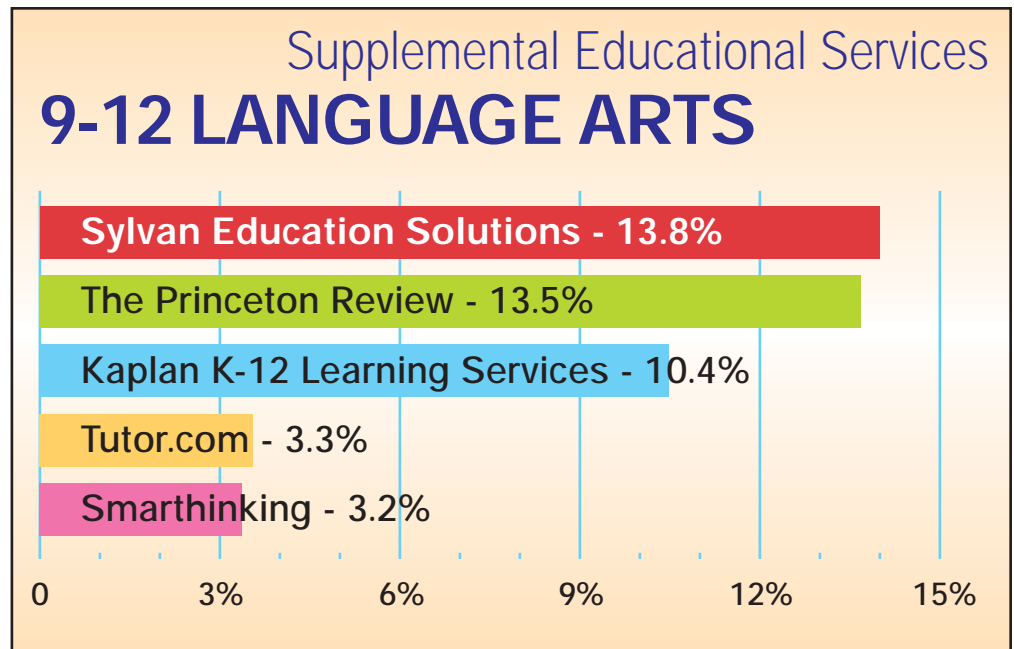


instruction on site using the companies' own software.

One reader wrote of PLATO's software: "(It) provides the ability to quickly and easily create, manage, view scores, and analyze data on your students' practice tests. You can customize and demonstrate test-taking strategies, too." Another simply wrote that it "makes learning fun."

Rounding out the top five choices in 9-12 Math were Tutor.com and Brainfuse Online Instruction, though after the top three it was a toss-up for readers who voted. Of Brainfuse—a good option for schools in remote areas—one reader wrote, "Students enjoy working on the computer. Instruction is more individualized and provides feedback."

Tutor.com also appeared among the top five choices in 9-12 Language Arts, along with Washington, D.C.-based Smarthinking—though again, it appeared to be a toss-up after the top three companies.



Supplemental Educational Services: Complete results of our online poll

K-8 MATH:	VOTES	PERCENTAGE
Other	391	31.69%
Sylvan Education Solutions	169	13.70%
PLATO Learning	116	9.40%
Kaplan K-12 Learning Services	99	8.02%
CompassLearning	95	7.70%
The Princeton Review	86	6.97%
EdSolutions	53	4.29%
Innovative Educational Programs (IEP)	33	2.67%
Kumon North America	32	2.59%
I CAN Learn	30	2.43%
Brainfuse Online Instruction	26	2.11%
Tutor.com	20	1.62%
Edison Schools	19	1.54%
Huntington Learning Centers	13	1.05%
HOSTS Learning	13	1.05%
Progressive Learning	10	0.81%
Illuminate	8	0.65%
Babbage Net Schools	7	0.57%
Ventures Education Systems	6	0.49%
Platform Learning	4	0.32%
Club Z! In-Home Tutoring	4	0.32%
Total	1,234	100.00%

K-8 LANGUAGE ARTS:	VOTES	PERCENTAGE
Other	399	32.33%
Sylvan Education Solutions	174	14.10%
PLATO Learning	93	7.54%
Kaplan K-12 Learning Services	90	7.29%
CompassLearning	87	7.05%
The Princeton Review	74	6.00%
EdSolutions	46	3.73%
Reading in Motion	32	2.59%
Innovative Educational Programs (IEP)	30	2.43%
Evan-Moor Educational Publishers	28	2.27%
Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes	25	2.03%
Tutor.com	24	1.94%
HOSTS Learning	21	1.70%
Huntington Learning Centers	16	1.30%
Edison Schools	14	1.13%
Brainfuse Online Instruction	13	1.05%
Progressive Learning	12	0.97%
Kumon North America	11	0.89%
Illuminate	10	0.81%
Vantage Learning	10	0.81%
Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL)	8	0.65%

K-8 LANGUAGE ARTS (CON'T):	VOTES	PERCENTAGE
Headsprout	6	0.49%
Ventures Education Systems	4	0.32%
Club Z! In-Home Tutoring	4	0.32%
Babbage Net Schools	3	0.24%
TOTAL	1,234	100.00%

9-12 MATH:	VOTES	PERCENTAGE
Other	555	44.98%
Sylvan Education Solutions	159	12.88%
The Princeton Review	155	12.56%
Kaplan K-12 Learning Services	127	10.29%
Tutor.com	33	2.67%
Brainfuse Online Instruction	30	2.43%
Smarthinking	29	2.35%
Progressive Learning	24	1.94%
I CAN Learn	24	1.94%
Kumon North America	23	1.86%
Huntington Learning Centers	21	1.70%
PLATO Learning	16	1.30%
Babbage Net Schools	9	0.73%
HOSTS Learning	9	0.73%
Illuminate	9	0.73%
Platform Learning	8	0.65%
Club Z! In-Home Tutoring	3	0.24%
TOTAL	1,234	100.00%

9-12 LANGUAGE ARTS:	VOTES	PERCENTAGE
Other	503	40.76%
Sylvan Education Solutions	170	13.78%
The Princeton Review	166	13.45%
Kaplan K-12 Learning Services	128	10.37%
Tutor.com	40	3.24%
Smarthinking	39	3.16%
Huntington Learning Centers	35	2.84%
Learning Styles LLC	25	2.03%
Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes	21	1.70%
Progressive Learning	21	1.70%
HOSTS Learning	19	1.54%
Brainfuse Online Instruction	16	1.30%
Kumon North America	14	1.13%
Illuminate	13	1.05%
Babbage Net Schools	10	0.81%
Platform Learning	9	0.73%
Club Z! In-Home Tutoring	5	0.41%
TOTAL	1,234	100.00%