

# Readers Choose Products of the Year

The 2010 winners reflect how educators and the industry responded to a challenging year.

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**D**ISTRICT ADMINISTRATION heard from more readers than ever before for the 2010 Readers' Choice Top 100 Products award. In a challenging year that saw many districts forced to make painful cuts in staff, one might assume that the purchase and overall use of education products and technology also suffered, but this does not appear to be the case. On the contrary, both administrators and classroom educators became even more dependent on products and technology as a result of the recession. Many readers described their district's limited budgets and reduced resources in their nominations, while simultaneously praising the products that helped them to maintain a high quality of instruction, offer new educational opportunities to students, streamline complex administrative tasks, and do more with less overall, particularly making up for a loss of staff.

## Individualized Learning

Increasing in number this year was a variety of winning products facilitating individualized learning—for both students and staff. Developers of online tutoring and coursework such as K12 Inc. and Apangea Learning are able to provide one-on-one instruction to students, who can learn at their own pace in school or from home. Newcomers include mobile learning tools such as smartphone applications from GoKnow, and hardware platforms such as Apple's iPad and Amazon's Kindle. Mobile technologies quickly have become the new paradigm for individualized, one-to-one computing.

Similarly, online professional development resources from PBS TeacherLine, PD 360 from School Improvement Network and courses from Knowledge Delivery Systems provide intensive professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators, who can learn online, at school or from home, at their own pace, and at a significantly reduced cost to the district than doing so in person.

## Administrative Tools

Managing a school district is complex and challenging, but many readers also highlighted the products that helped make district-level administrators' jobs easier and more efficient. Student information systems such as Aspen from X2 Development Corporation, Skyward's SMS, Tyler Technologies' SIS, and Oncourse Systems' Student Stats helped administrators efficiently track and manage vast amounts of student data, from grades and assessment scores to demographics and discipline issues, and inform their most important decisions. Many of these systems also include parent portals, allowing parents to log in at any time and from anywhere to see their child's information and become more actively involved in their education.

More technology is in schools than ever before—reader nominations included everything from laptops and projectors to interactive whiteboards and document cameras—but this positive trend can also challenge administrators, with ongoing maintenance and upgrade issues, for example. But here too, readers nominated products such as NetSupport School and Follett Software's Destiny Resource Management, which enable IT personnel or other administrators to remotely track and maintain district technology and other resources much more easily. Similarly, readers also nominated low-maintenance computing solutions from

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# TOP 100 PRODUCTS

thin- and zero-client maker Wyse Technology and the perpetual one-to-one computing initiative from CDI as having made a positive difference this year.

## Mergers and Acquisitions

Major shifts in the education technology industry occurred in 2010, as the recession and subsequently challenging business environment prodded companies to diversify and branch out into new areas, and also provided new opportunities for corporations to acquire, merge with, or partner with other companies.

SMART Technologies acquired touchscreen technology maker NextWindow in April. Blackboard acquired Saf-T-Net, maker of the AlertNow notification system, in March, and went on to acquire collaborative software makers Elluminate and Wimba in July. The month of July also saw online learning provider K12 Inc. purchase KC Distance Learning, Scantron acquire Rti software developer Spectrum K12, and Promethean purchase assessment developer SynapticMash. Follett Software acquired student information system maker X2 Development Corporation in October, and K12 Inc. also acquired American Education Corporation in November. Time will tell what these industry shifts will mean for educators and the marketplace, but stronger, more stable corporations with ever more resources to provide for the needs of customers can only improve the quality of options available to school administrators.

*District Administration* is proud to present its **2010 Readers' Choice Top 100 Products** in the following pages, in random order and including portions of many of the insightful comments from the hundreds of nominations we received. We hope that they provide valuable information to you as we enter 2011.

## EBOOKS

*Sylvan Dell Publishing*  
\$7.95 for one-year, one-title license

Sylvan Dell Publishing offers e-book versions of its 50 titles of picture books written to teach science and math to students through illustrated literature. Each e-book features auto-read and auto-flip capabilities, a choice of English or Spanish text and audio, and free teacher resources.

[www.sylvandellpublishing.com](http://www.sylvandellpublishing.com)



**"A great resource for literature and learning that holds the attention of students and provides a great way to utilize interactive whiteboards."**

*Susan Bartle, library system director at the Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus (N.Y.) BOCES.*

## EASE SYSTEM

*Optimum Solutions Corporation, Pricing varies*

The Educational Assessment Scoring Environment (EASE) System from Optimum Solutions Corporation is a newly developed on-site electronic scoring system that enables districts to score and input data from standardized tests directly into computers, streamlining state reporting and making scores immediately available to



**Optimum Solutions Corp.**  
All The Right Answers

administrators. The EASE suite of seventeen applications is customizable to the needs of users and includes components such as Scoring Environment and Workflow Interface to manage every aspect of the scoring process.

[www.oscworld.com](http://www.oscworld.com)

## CENTRICITY2

*Schoolwires, Contact Schoolwires for pricing*

Centricity2 provides tools for districts to create and manage Web sites and social media systems, integrate third-party applications, or develop software applications specific to their own needs. Additional functions enable the creation of podcasts, videocasts, online image galleries, parental notification systems and more. [www.schoolwires.com](http://www.schoolwires.com)



**"Schoolwires has made a huge impact on student and parent communication in our district this year."**

*Leslie Raffelson, technology director of the Plateau (Colo.) School District RE-5.*