

# Special Needs Tech News

A newsletter celebrating enabling technology, the people who use it, and the developers that make it possible.

## EDITOR'S CORNER

This issue of *Special Needs Tech News* takes a look at the upcoming Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA) 2003 CODIE Awards. The 40 software category winners will be announced on May 6, 2003 in San Francisco at the CODIE Awards Gala to be held at the Palace Hotel. This year, I was a preliminary round judge for the **Best K-16 Special Needs Solution** category. The preliminary judging round determines the five finalists and counts for 30% of the final result. The SIIA member votes will count for 70% of the final outcome. I've provided an overview of the seven special needs nominees and how I ranked them. Naturally, I was interested in their accessibility features and AT compatibility. You'll also find some information in this issue about the Failure Free Reading Program.

Please feel free to make complete copies of this publication to share with others.

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## Join the ATCanada Listserv

The ATCanada Listserv was initiated on Dec. 30, 2001. Educators and others can join this free discussion group to learn and exchange information on assistive technology issues. Join at:  
<http://ca.groups.yahoo.com/group/ATCanada> or  
<http://ca.geocities.com/janethopkinsbc/>

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## MOUSE TRACKS

### Software and Information Industry Association

<http://www.siiia.net>

The SIIA site has lots of information for members and non-members. Check out the 2003 CODIE Awards link to see the list of this year's software finalists in 40 categories. Winners will be announced in San Francisco later this year. If you're looking for information about software copyright and anti-piracy issues, you'll find it here. SIIA sells anti-piracy posters and an educational video for school use called "Don't Copy That Floppy." Questions on software copyright issues can be e-mailed to SIIA's anti-piracy contacts.

### **2003 CODIE Awards Software and Information Industry Association Best K-16 Special Needs Solution**

From October to November 2002, I had the opportunity to review the nominated products for the *Best K-16 Special Needs Solution* category for the 2003 CODIE Awards. The products were designed for different purposes, which made it challenging to compare them against each other. I thought all of the nominees had some great features. As one of three preliminary round judges, I was asked to rank the software nominees and send in my decisions. I've summarized my rankings below. If you want to see which of these products actually became the five finalists for this year's award, go to <http://www.siiia.net/codies2003/finalists.asp>

### TIENet

SEECorporation

<http://www.tienet.ws/>

Platform – Win, Mac, Linux  
(Any) Web-based software.

This product is designed to facilitate school and district-wide management of special needs student data from K-16. It is Web-based software and can be run on any platform – Windows, Mac, Linux, etc. which gives it even wider value. After going through the on-line and live demos of the product, I was impressed by the flexibility of the software as it could be customized to meet the needs of various educational jurisdictions and environments. The reporting capabilities allow educators to track information and generate reports on student groups or individuals. It's a good solution for a district looking to standardize its approach to special education services and management.

\* Overall impression:  
Flexibility, intuitive design, Web-based multi-platform capabilities make this product my top choice. ASP model allows districts to subscribe on an annual basis for the service through the company server, or the less expensive option of running it from the district's own server. It's a tool that would remain applicable and useful to staff for all special needs students all the way through K-16 service delivery.

**\*RANK: FIRST**

### The Digital Field Trip to The Rainforest AT

Digital Frog International, Inc.

<http://www.digitalfrog.com>

Platform – Windows, Mac

A very flexible multimedia instructional program. The built-in accessibility features make the product usable for a wide range of abilities and learning styles. There are printable resources included on the CD for students and teachers. I like the fact that these materials can be modified for individualized learning opportunities. Navigation is simplified through the help resources built into the program. I also like the ability to easily move around through the materials to accommodate students with different areas of interest and attention spans.

\*Overall impression:  
Accessible design makes this a superior instructional product. Compatibility with screen magnification products also noted as a strength.

**\*RANK: SECOND**

### English For Success

DynEd International, Inc.

<http://www.dynded.com>

Platform – Windows, Mac

This product could be helpful for students who are learning English as a second language, as well as students who need practice

with listening, comprehension and verbal expression. I liked the selection of 10 levels of difficulty and the ability to move quickly from one exercise to the next. The speech recognition practice is a great feature. I tried using a number of different accents and pitches while speaking to the program. The program could pick up the correct responses even when I changed my voice.

\*Overall impression: Multi-level and multi-activity selections. Speech recognition capabilities. Multimedia features. The verbal feedback provided to voice input responses is a unique component of this program and makes this product a top choice.

\*RANK: THIRD

### **Lexia Reading S.O.S.**

**Lexia Learning Systems, Inc.**

<http://www.lexialearning.com>

Platform – Windows, Mac

Provides a selection of five levels of reading skill-building activities. Verbal prompting throughout the exercises. Auditory feedback when keyboarding is helpful for students with special needs. Offers flexibility in switching from exercise to exercise when the student or instructor wants to change activities. Individual student and class reporting capabilities with numeric and graphic display.

\*Overall impression: Good combinations of visual and auditory instruction. Easy to

use and navigate between exercises.

\*RANK: FOURTH

### **Lexia Phonics Based Reading**

**Lexia Learning Systems, Inc.**

<http://www.lexialearning.com>

Platform – Windows, Mac

This software provides repetitive exercises for sound and letter recognition. Examples are given to support the user as well as verbal feedback. Exercises can be customized and the software has reporting capabilities. My preference in the early learning of alphabet / letter recognition / reading skill development is to have students participate as much as possible in repetitively drawing the letters and learning how to print. I would only use this program to supplement that activity – not replace it. I would also use this program with alternative computer access for students who are physically unable to print to help them with letter recognition drills.

\* Overall impression: A useful supplementary tool for early literacy skill development. Students who have the ability to print, should be engaged more actively in language/reading/writing development. I find this program puts users in a more passive role than they would have doing worksheets, where they actually form the letters that they need practice printing at this stage of early written language development. While students who complete this program receive strong verbal

feedback and may be able to recognize sounds and letters, there's little support for the important task of actually learning to print. Although the program is designed to support reading skill development, I think it would be a more attractive instructional product if worksheets were included on the CD that could be completed through printing exercises to provide kinesthetic support for the recognition drills on the CD.

\*RANK - FIFTH

### **LanguEdge™ Courseware**

**Educational Testing Service**

<http://www.ets.org>

Platform – Windows

This product is designed as an ESL instructional package with listening, speaking, reading and writing components. There is also an easy to use management component to adjust assignments, monitor test results, and student/class data. The instruction is geared to college level students with an assumed level of English proficiency. There is little choice built into the course content, which means that the usefulness of this product will be limited. Students must be able to devote an hour to completion of the instructional sessions. This inflexibility limits how it can be used. I could not find a way to leave a lesson, then resume at the same place where I left off. This would be a point of frustration in using this product. I like the

fact that it has built-in voice response and playback features, but I would like to see more flexibility for the user in being able to quit and re-enter a lesson or make more choices about the activities.

\*Overall impression: It's an intuitive program that was easy to use. Language level is fairly advanced. Program inflexibility makes it difficult to customize use to learners' needs and available time. In my opinion, the target audience for this product is rather narrow. Single platform application.

**RANK: SIXTH**

### **Paragraph Punch**

#### **Merit Software**

<http://meritsoftware.com>

Platform – Windows

I like the paragraph development process this program addresses. Students are led through the stages of developing a paragraph. Tips and hints are available along the way. Students can stop then re-start at the place where they left off. The program offers a limited number of topic choices. I would like to see this software include more accessibility options. Although there is a sound button at the top of the window, I couldn't get it to work. I couldn't highlight the text to have it read by an add-on screen reading utility. I couldn't see a way that it would give enough support to students with reading challenges. It does provide class management options and allows students to export their

work to a Word document. This would then allow the student to use a screen reader to review the finished product. However, this support should be available for reading the on-screen instructions. I was running the program on Windows XP.

\*Overall impression: It's a good process for writing skill development. The ability to re-start an exercise without having to start at the beginning makes it an attractive product for continuous use. It lacked accessibility features compared to the other products in this category. Single platform application.

**RANK: SEVENTH**

## **Failure Free Reading**

School district administrators, teachers, and parents who are concerned about student reading scores may have several new reading programs under consideration.

Every reading development program has its core group of believers and loyal advocates. There are certainly more solutions out there than most busy educators would wish to spend their time evaluating.

When considering any reading program, it is important to look at costs, ease of implementation, and the program's record of

results. The **Failure Free Reading Program** may be one suitable program that educators haven't yet considered.

The **Failure Free Reading Program** has been developed by a team led by Joseph F. Lockavitch, Ed.D., president of **Failure Free Reading**. This program has been implemented at the primary to secondary levels in schools throughout the US with challenging student populations. In fact, the program is designed to reach non-readers, at risk students, ESL students, and individuals with severe reading disabilities.

The **Failure Free Reading Program** has been acknowledged by the Education Commission of the States ([www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org)) as a "promising practice in reading." The role of this commission is to keep US policy makers aware of current and emerging educational issues, trends, and innovations. It accomplishes this goal by gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information to the community of educators and policy makers in the US.

A detailed review of the **Failure Free Reading Program** can be examined at

<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/18/83/1883.doc>

This program review provides an unbiased overview of the **Failure Free Reading Program's** components, goals, philosophy, implementation



costs, professional development, and program support. Program evaluation data can be scrutinized from both independent and developer studies that have been carried out from 1997 to 1999.

A variety of measurement tools have been used to quantify the **Failure Free Reading Program's** effectiveness. These tests include: the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT), Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R), Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement (WJ), Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) and the Likert scale for measuring reading attitudes. This program has also been featured in peer-reviewed publications such as *The Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *Special Services in the Schools*, *The Journal of At-Risk Issues* and *Proven Practices*.

The **Failure Free Reading Program** combines teacher-led instruction with diagnostic / prescriptive talking software and correlated print materials. The program is designed for small groups of up to five students or one-to-one instruction for 30 minutes each day. Materials are available to meet the needs of elementary or adolescent / adult learners. The program's diagnostic features allow individuals to commence instruction at a level appropriate to their own reading abilities. **Failure Free Reading** stresses three

important components in its program materials designed to elevate reading skills:

- Sufficient repetition
- Appropriate sentence structure
- Understandable story content

Minimal staff training and preparation are required as the materials are organized to allow certified or non-certified personnel to effectively implement the program. Pilot studies of the **Failure Free Reading Program** indicate that students have achieved success through this program. The fact that approximately 7000 classrooms in the US are using this program appears to validate **Failure Free** as a worthy program to address literacy concerns.

Program information and evaluation software is available from the Failure Free Web site.  
[www.failurefree.com](http://www.failurefree.com)

## CONFERENCES

March 19-22, 2003  
[18th Annual CSUN](#)  
[Conference: Technology and Persons with Disabilities](#)  
Los Angeles, California  
Tel: 818-885-2578  
E-mail: [ltm@csun.edu](mailto:ltm@csun.edu)  
<http://www.csun.edu/cod/>

April 3-5, 2003  
[ATAINS - Assistive Technology Application and Integration Nova Scotia](#)  
Bridgewater, Nova Scotia  
Tel: 902-543-6329 or 902-543-4702 FAX: 902-543-0190  
E-mail: [welsfobe@lunenburg.nsc.ns.ca](mailto:welsfobe@lunenburg.nsc.ns.ca)

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<http://atains.ednet.ns.ca/>

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Are you going to the

California State University, Northridge (CSUN)  
"Technology and Persons with Disabilities  
Conference"

March 19-22, 2003?

Do you want to learn about Linux / Open Source  
Accessibility?

You can attend one or more of these CSUN/LAC3 sessions to find out  
what's going on.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Linux Accessibility Conference (aka LAC3):

- **Where?** La Jolla room, LAX Marriott
- **When?** Thursday, March 20 and Friday, March 21, 2003
- **What?** (Check schedule for updates, times, and locations)
- Thursday, Mar. 20 – 8:00 am to 11:40 am

**Sun Microsystems presentations on GNOME accessibility**  
including: GNOME On-Screen Keyboard (GOK), Gnopernicus, accessible  
StarOffice on GNOME and accessible Mozilla on GNOME.

The following sessions will start after 12:00 on Thurs., Mar. 20<sup>th</sup>:

- **Short Presentations / Updates by:**

Simon Bates (U Toronto) on GNOME On-Screen Keyboard  
(GOK) (tentative)

Peter Korn (Sun Microsystems) on OpenOffice and Mozilla  
KDE Accessibility (one of the co-administrators via phone?)

Other updates? (E-mail [jpsc@stanford.edu](mailto:jpsc@stanford.edu) if you would like to  
give a brief update)

- **Roundtables, Discussions on:**

1. Regulatory Requirements
2. User Needs
3. PDF Accessibility
4. KDE Accessibility & Interoperability
5. What's missing?
6. Finding more Volunteers

Complete details and schedule will be posted online at <http://ocularis.sf.net>

Contact JP Schnapper-Casteras for information [jpsc@stanford.edu](mailto:jpsc@stanford.edu)