eSCHOOL NEWS

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS:
School Management Software

AWARD
eSchool News
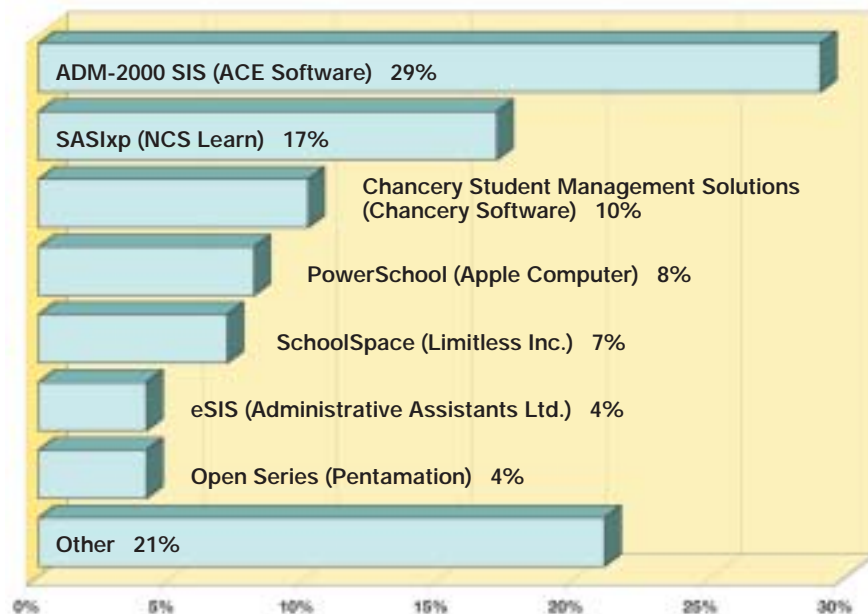Readers' Choice
WINNER

In our March 2001 issue we introduced our first-ever Readers' Choice Awards program, highlighting our readers' top picks in K-12 school management software. Nineteen months (and four additional surveys) later, we've returned to our inaugural topic to mine readers' opinions once again in categories ranging from best student information system to best curriculum management software.

Nearly 400 readers voted for their favorite choices in eight categories of school management software on the eSchool News web site in September. As in previous surveys, the results indicate that quality is subjective, and what might be the best solution for one school might be inappropriate for another. Nevertheless, the outcomes should prove informative for K-12 decision makers as they navigate the myriad of choices available.

BEST STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

ADM-2000 SIS (ACE Software) 29%
SASIxp (NCS Learn) 17%
Chancery Student Management Solutions (Chancery Software) 10%
PowerSchool (Apple Computer) 8%
SchoolSpace (Limitless Inc.) 7%
eSIS (Administrative Assistants Ltd.) 4%
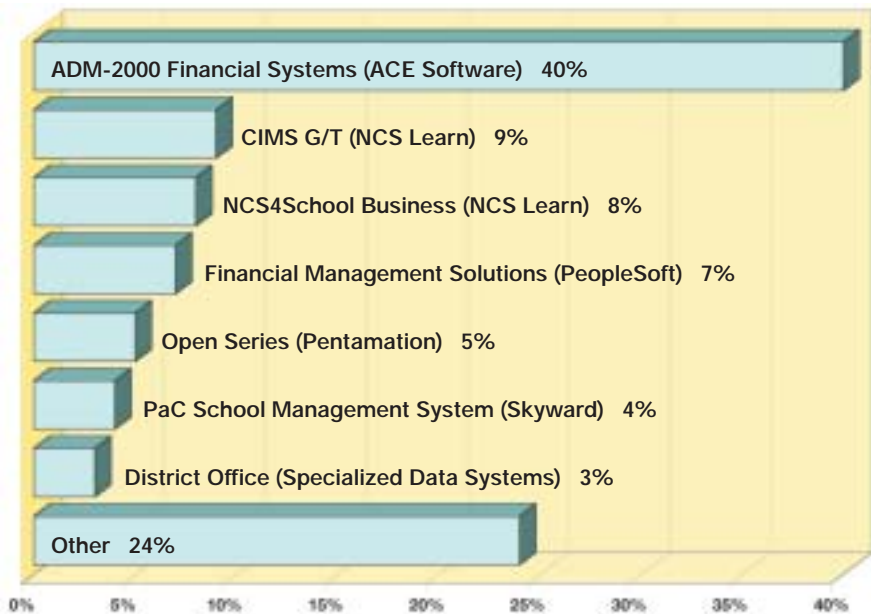Open Series (Pentamation) 4%
Other 21%

ACE Software's ADM-2000 emerged as our readers' top pick in student information systems this year, beating last year's winner, NCS Learn's SASIxp, by 12 percentage points (29 percent to 17 percent). In making ADM-2000 their No. 1 choice, one reader referred to it as "the only enterprise system that works for all schools, large and small," while another claimed it has "the only master schedule builder that really works." Readers who voted for SASIxp generally cited its comprehensiveness. One reader wrote, "The new version 5.0 is the most powerful—and flexible—package I have seen."

Features such as ease of use and top-notch customer support were important to our readers, as usual. But now, with the No Child Left Behind Act requiring schools to disaggregate and report students' test scores by race and other factors like never before, other features—such as the ability to analyze information effectively—have become just as crucial. For instance, in voting for Chancery's WinSchool software, one reader explained that it "allows us to manage all of our student information data in an efficient and effective manner. Moving data in and out of WinSchool to other programs is easy to do. This makes the disaggregation and analysis of data quick and easy."

Besides the programs mentioned in the graphic above, other solutions cited by readers included PeopleSoft's Student Administration, Rediker Software's Administrator's Plus, High Touch Inc.'s PRO/STAR, Excelsior Software's Pinnacle Plus, NCS Learn's CIMS, SchoolExtra's Campus SIS, and Specialized Data Systems' School Office.
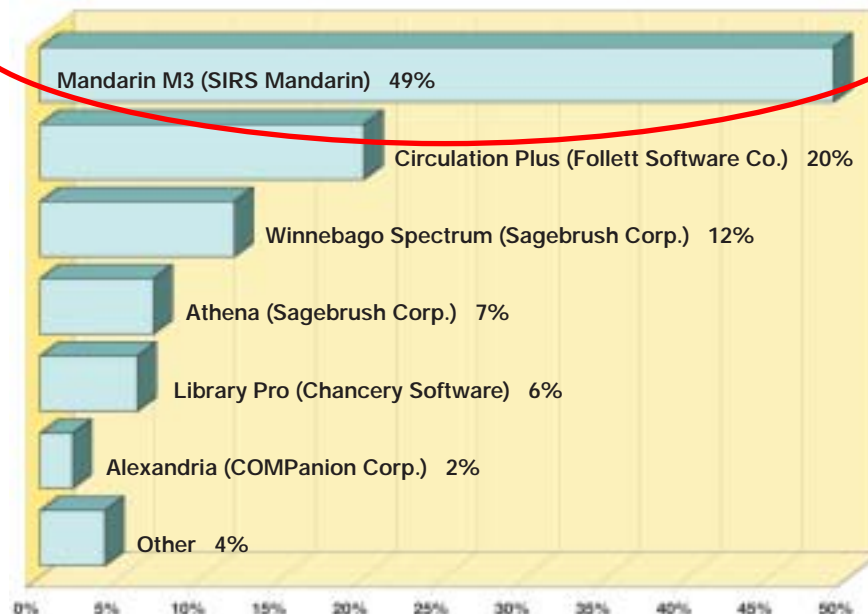
BEST BACK-OFFICE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM

ADM-2000 Financial Systems (ACE Software) 40%
CIMS G/T (NCS Learn) 9%
NCS4School Business (NCS Learn) 8%
Financial Management Solutions (PeopleSoft) 7%
Open Series (Pentamation) 5%
PaC School Management System (Skyward) 4%
District Office (Specialized Data Systems) 3%
Other 24%

Once again, ACE Software's ADM-2000 Financial Systems package (40 percent) bested last year's winner, NCS Learn's CIMS G/T (9 percent), although NCS4School Business—also by NCS Learn—finished a close third in the voting (8 percent). PeopleSoft's Financial Management Solutions ("comprehensive and flexible"), Pentamation's Open Series ("easy to use and [contains] unique analysis tools"), and Skyward's Point and Click (PaC) School Management System round out the top six choices. Although one reader called PaC an "excellent program," he added that it was "too expensive for our small district."

Other companies whose software received votes but weren't mentioned in the graphic above include SwiftKnowledge, Lawson Software, and Oracle Corp. One reader said his district chose Oracle's Financials and HR/Payroll modules because "we wanted web-enabled, industry-standard applications"—meaning software proven in the business world.

BEST LIBRARY AUTOMATION SYSTEM

Mandarin M3 (SIRS Mandarin) 49%
Circulation Plus (Follett Software Co.) 20%
Winnebago Spectrum (Sagebrush Corp.) 12%
Athena (Sagebrush Corp.) 7%
Library Pro (Chancery Software) 6%
Alexandria (COMPanion Corp.) 2%
Other 4%

In what is somewhat of a surprise, SIRS's Mandarin M3—which finished fifth in last year's voting—received more than twice as many votes this year as last year's runaway winner, Follett Software's Circulation Plus (49 percent to 20 percent). In choosing Mandarin M3, one reader said it offers the "best functionalities, best price, and best tech support" of any solution on the market.

Indeed, other people cited Mandarin's first-rate support as a key reason for their decision as well—but in a perfect example of how one person's experience can be vastly different from another's, one reader wrote, "[We] currently use Mandarin M3 and [are] migrating to Follett. M3 has too many problems, and SIRS is not responsive in addressing these."

Besides the programs mentioned in the graphic above, other solutions cited by readers included SIRSI's Unicorn and iBistro products, Innovative Interfaces' Millennium, and software from Gateway Library Management Systems.