

ED TECH 12: 2017 E-Learning Platforms for K-12

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Click on the site's name to go to that spot in this paper or on the address to go to the Web site.

[K-12 Inc. \(http://www.k12.com\)](http://www.k12.com)

[Schoolology \(https://www.schoolology.com/k-12\)](https://www.schoolology.com/k-12).

[D2L: Brightspace \(https://www.d2l.com/k-12\)](https://www.d2l.com/k-12)

[Edgenuity \(https://www.edgenuity.com\)](https://www.edgenuity.com)

[Edmentum \(http://www.edmentum.com\)](http://www.edmentum.com)

[My Personal Recommendations](#)

K-12 E-learning Platform Summaries and Reviews

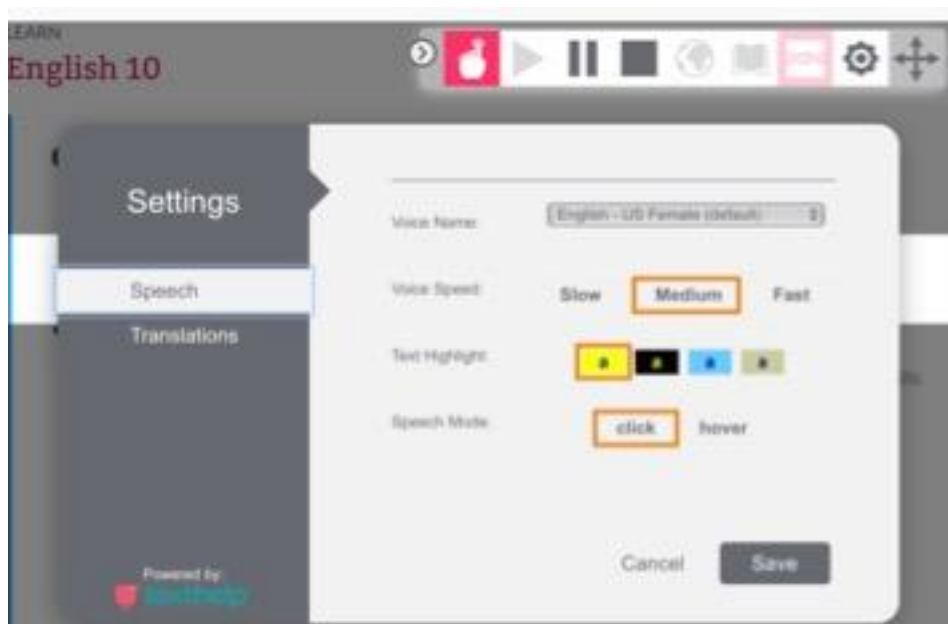
K-12 Inc. (<http://www.k12.com>)

The K-12 Inc. (K12, 2017) landing page looks like a polished advertisement aimed at parents who want to give their children an on-line learning experience. I could find nothing telling schools why they should purchase the K-12 Inc. platform. There was information aimed at parents who want to purchase individual courses or who want to enroll their children in on-line public (free) or private schools that utilize the K12 Inc. learning platform.

I found a few high school level sample lessons at <http://www.k12.com/virtual-school-offerings/free-online-public-schools/high-school-program-courses/sample-lessons.html>. I enjoyed chemistry class when I was younger, so I decided to take the chemistry sample lesson. In general, it seemed to me that a teacher or other knowledgeable person would still be needed to help the students comprehend the material, but it is difficult to judge based on a stand-alone sample. It could be that the pacing, scope, and sequence are designed specifically for the independent learner. I do think that the students need to be highly motivated. This motivation could be their own desire to learn and succeed or the parents may have to provide external motivation. The one thing that impressed me was that K12.com attempts to reach a wide variety of students by offering extension activities on different levels. Middle and elementary school sample lessons are located at <http://www.k12.com/virtual-school-offerings/free-online-public-schools/k-8-program-courses/sample-lessons.html>.

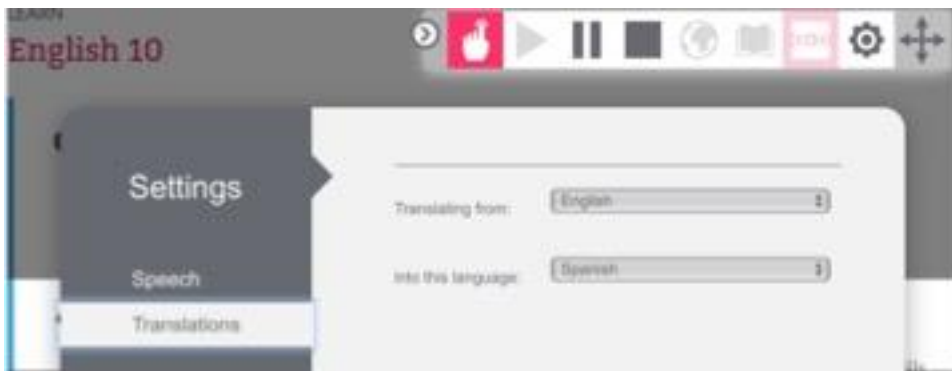
I was only able to find reviews from parents when I searched for reviews from teachers, schools, or districts that use K12. The reviews at Consumer Affairs (Consumers Unified, 2017) were very mixed, with an overall average rating of 2.5 stars on a five-star scale. I looked at a video review from a mother (Ann, 2013); while she was positive, the comments below from other parents and students were a mixture of positive and negative reports. Both of these sites had some satisfied parents and some who experienced difficulties with customer support, registration and the actual courses themselves. I found the lack of information and reviews for and from school systems using K12 Inc. to be indicative of a general trend within K12 Inc. to advertise directly to parents.

Last, I looked at a sample lesson for a high school English class. The material was presented in an orderly fashion with visual aids. The particular reading assignment was not included in this sample, but that could be a copyright issue. Both a multiple-choice question and an open-ended short answer question were represented in the sample along with an extension writing assignment in which students could more fully demonstrate their understanding of the concepts in the lesson. In general, I found K-12 to be most appropriate for students who are working on or above grade level, but many of the pages did have on-line tools to assist students who have special access needs. Some of the tools, such as a text highlighter, may help everyone.



Students with vision and print disabilities can use the screen reader and text highlighter settings to help them access the text. The text highlighter may also benefit any

student who learns better when actively involved with highlighting key concepts.



Students for whom English is a second language can read the assignment in English and/or in their home language by using the included translator.

EnglishCast: Words and a Picture

M.L. Smoker and John Gast address similar subjects in their work, but they do so in vastly different ways. Play the video to learn more.



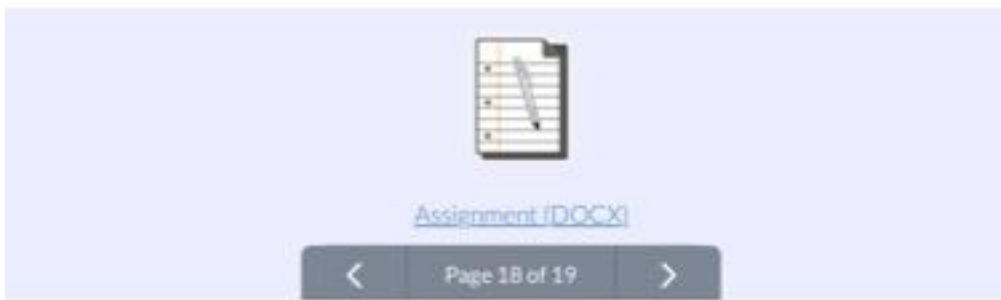
Honors Project: Write a Literary Essay

You have read a model literary analysis essay about a poem—"The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" by Ezra Pound. Soon you will choose a poem and write your own literary analysis essay in response to this prompt:

A virtual tutor explains key concepts via short videos. Together with the online reading materials, this approach engages a variety of learning modalities (reading, listening, looking).

Prompt: Write a Literary Analysis Essay about a poem of your choice.

Review these documents to learn about the details of this assignment.



An "honors project" is available after the assignments that are

required by everyone. This is required work for high school honors students. There is an additional extension project that may be a requirement for advanced placement students.

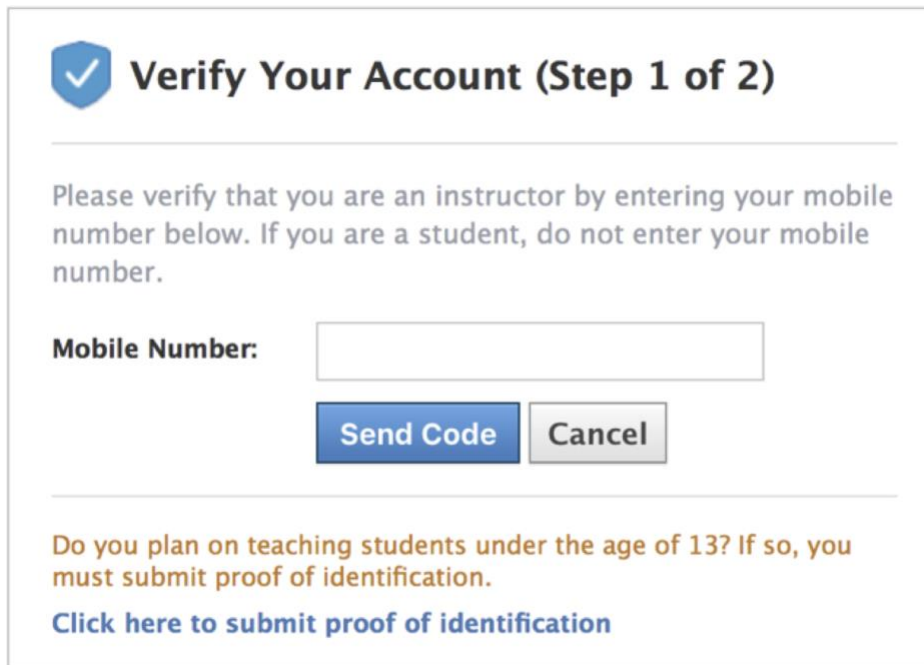
Schoology (<https://www.schoology.com/k-12>).

The Schoology Web site (Schoology, 2017) is aimed at schools who may be looking to include a learning management system or to change their current system. The home page has many helpful links, including a link to the free demo for schools. Individual teacher, student, and parent accounts are free, so these people are directed to register for an account instead of signing up for the free demonstration. According to their Web site, Schoology incorporates “instructional tools;” “communication and collaboration;” a “mobile app;” “data, analytics and personalized learning;” “interoperability;” and “assessment management” in their learning management system. Schoology has a free “Basic” account that is aimed at teachers, parents and students (<https://app.schoology.com/register.php>) with a large variety of tools that teachers can use in the classroom and that students and parents can access at home. Some of the basic subscription’s functions include a grade/attendance “gradebook,” the ability for teachers to develop and manage their own content and create self-grading quizzes, student collaboration tools, and parent involvement resources. From what I saw as I looked at the Basic site, the basic subscription looks like it will meet the needs of many teachers who want to add an on-line aspect to their lessons.

The “Enterprise” version is designed for schools and includes tools to facilitate communication and cooperation amongst teachers and administrators within the school along with all of the classroom, student, and parent tools in the free Basic subscription. Prices for the Enterprise subscription are not posted, but a free demonstration of the Enterprise version of Schoology can be requested at <https://www.schoology.com/request-a-demo>.

The reviews that I found for Schoology were very positive. Both PCMag.com (Fenton, 2017b) and Common Sense Education (Common Sense, 2017) highly recommend Schoology. Common Sense Education suggested that teachers start small then add to their courses as they and their students become more comfortable with using Schoology; this sounds like good advice to me based on my brief time with the platform. Jeromie Whalen, the technology teacher at North Hampton High School in Massachusetts, posted a video review in which he states that Schoology has improved student management, assessments, and student interactions in his classes (NHS Tech, 2016). Schoology appears to me to be a worthwhile addition to the modern classroom. It is a bit complicated in the beginning; there is much that teachers and students are able to do within Schoology, so there is a definite learning curve, but teachers can start slow and only use the aspects that best align with their instructional objectives.

Below are some screenshots of my Schoology practice session.



The screenshot shows a verification screen with a blue checkmark icon and the title "Verify Your Account (Step 1 of 2)". Below the title is a horizontal line, followed by the instruction: "Please verify that you are an instructor by entering your mobile number below. If you are a student, do not enter your mobile number." There is a text input field labeled "Mobile Number:" with a blue "Send Code" button and a grey "Cancel" button below it. At the bottom, there is a warning in orange text: "Do you plan on teaching students under the age of 13? If so, you must submit proof of identification." and a blue link: "Click here to submit proof of identification".

Schoology requires instructors to verify their email accounts. In addition, instructors of students under the age of thirteen must "submit proof of identification."

One aspect of the “Create Course” function is setting the grade level. If a grade is chosen that would generally include students under thirteen years old, then a message is displayed that again asks for the instructor to submit proof of identification.

Practice: Section 3

The “Add Materials” link is used to add content to the course. The content could be reading passages, writing work, discussions, quizzes, homework, or several other types of assignments.

Create Discussion [X]

Title: Practice

Description: Practice

Due Date: 12/15/17 11:59PM

Grading: Enable Grading

Options: [Icons for visibility, lock, etc.]

Create **Cancel**

Here, I added a basic ungraded discussion.

There is an option to include the material or assignment in my resources library so that I can use it again in the future. This is helpful if specific materials will be used in multiple aspects of the course or in more than one course.

Practice: Section 3

Practice
Due Friday, December 15, 2017 at 11:59 pm

Upcoming
Friday, December 15, 2017
Practice 11:59 pm

In general, the Schoology instructor interface is easy to view and to navigate.

D2L: Brightspace (<https://www.d2l.com/k-12>)

Brightspace by D2L (D2L, 2017) claims to make integration of on-line learning easier for teachers and students. Additional selling points listed at

<https://www.d2l.com/products/package/core/> are “learner engagement ... personalization ... built in analytics ... [and] mobile friendly.” One important aspect that caught my attention was a student interface with icons for non-readers. While this was designed for younger students and may not look age-appropriate for older non-readers, it is at least an attempt to open up on-line education to children who are not yet reading. Brightspace is sold as three different levels: Brightspace Core, Engagement Plus, and Performance Plus. There is a free thirty-day trial at <https://www.d2l.com/trial/>, but I was unable to obtain pricing information from the Web site. Schools who want additional information can find the contact number and online contact form at <https://www.d2l.com/contact/>. Unlike Schoology, Brightspace does not appear to have a free teacher account. My investigations only yielded information that would be appropriate for schools that want to purchase Brightspace, but as more schools embrace on-line learning, school-wide use of a single learning management system makes sense to me.

The once major complaint that William Fenton, of PCMag.com, has about Brightspace is that the student e-portfolio is complicated (Fenton, 2017a). Fenton rated Brightspace four stars out of five compared to his 4.5-star rating for Schoology. I was unable to find any full-length teacher-created reviews, but three additional sites that allow people to post personal reviews have four-star rating averages (Capterra, 2017; GT Crowd, 2017; and Software Advice, 2006-2017). Although I found a variety of videos describing how to use Brightspace’s tools, I was unable to locate a comprehensive video review. Dalhousie Library’s video interested me because it is directed toward their instructors and discusses options for using Brightspace at Dalhousie University (Dalhousie Library, 2015). Dalhousie University did not require their professors to utilize Brightspace in 2015, but the video did strongly encourage Brightspace’s use. Dalhousie University appears to have continued success with Brightspace because it is expanding

Brightspace within the university (Dalhousie University, 2017a and 2017b).

There are a wide variety of tutorial courses and videos to assist new teachers with getting started once the trial has been activated. I watched some of the videos and took the courses. Sample screenshots of these beginning steps of my trial are below. The first photograph shows the introductory courses: Welcome, Content Creation, Assessments, Course Management, and Collaboration. All of this information is designed to allow teachers to independently learn to use Brightspace through a self-guided tutorial while engaging in the actual platform. There are even badges to be earned, demonstrating a function that teachers may want to include in their own courses. The second photograph shows the steps in the Content Creation course. This course consists of a series of videos followed by a link to additional documentation. While I do not believe that these courses will turn a teacher into a Brightspace expert, the courses do appear to provide teachers with the information that they need to get started while providing hands-on course samples.



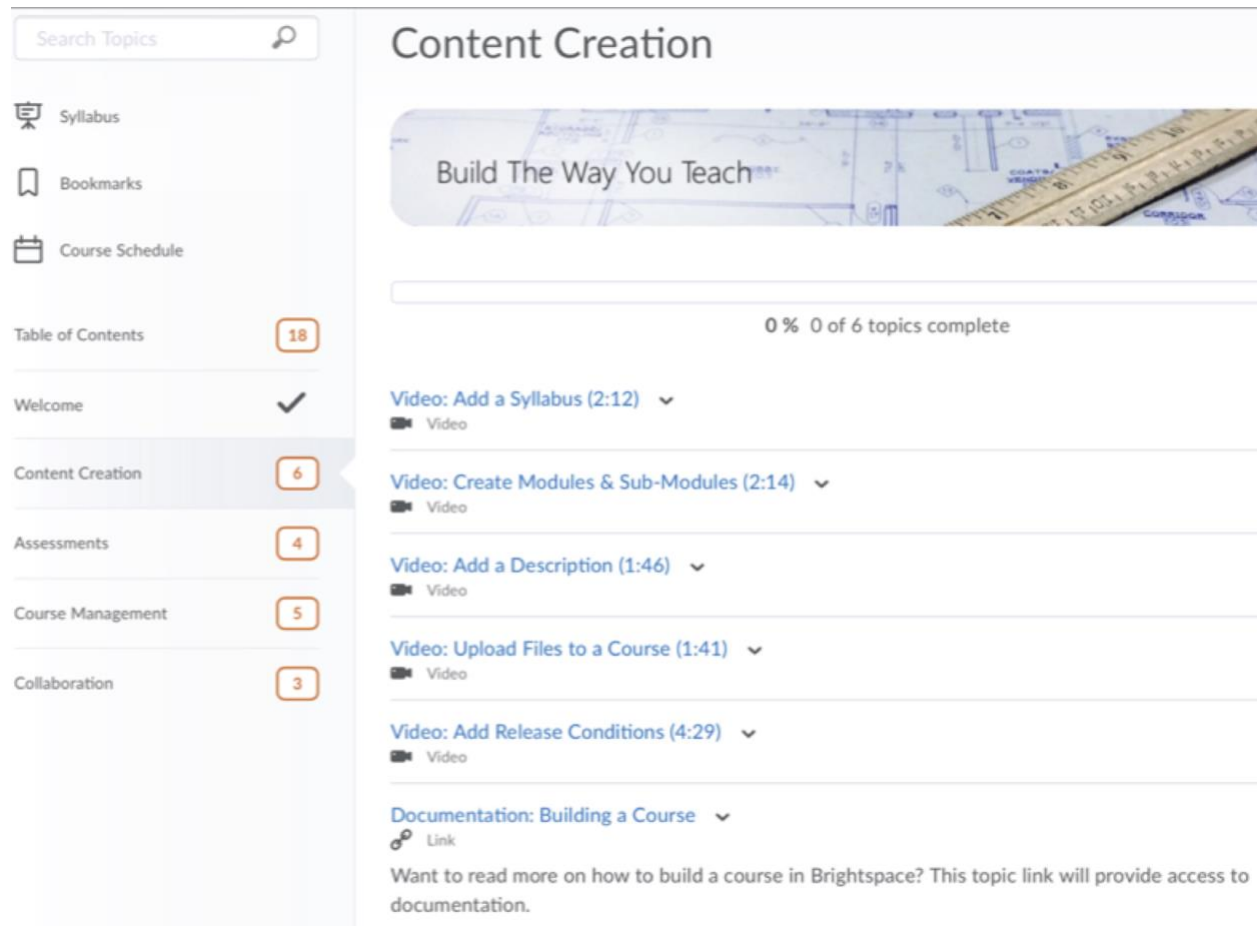
Relaunch Pop-Up

Awards

0 of 4 Badges Earned

View Course Badges

<p>Welcome</p> <p>0%</p> <p>i ▶</p>	<p>Content Creation</p> <p>i ▶</p>	<p>Assessments</p> <p>i ▶</p>	<p>Course Management</p> <p>i ▶</p>	<p>Collaboration</p> <p>i ▶</p>
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Search Topics

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Welcome ✓

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Course Management 5

Collaboration 3

Content Creation

Build The Way You Teach

0% 0 of 6 topics complete

Video: Add a Syllabus (2:12) Video

Video: Create Modules & Sub-Modules (2:14) Video

Video: Add a Description (1:46) Video

Video: Upload Files to a Course (1:41) Video

Video: Add Release Conditions (4:29) Video

Documentation: Building a Course Link

Want to read more on how to build a course in Brightspace? This topic link will provide access to documentation.

Edgenuity (<https://www.edgenuity.com>)

Edgenuity's Web site provides a long list of how they help students and the variety of students who can benefit from their services (Edgenuity, 2017). They advertise that they can assist students within these categories: "core curriculum, credit recovery, intervention, test readiness, virtual learning, personalized learning, summer school, ESL [English as a second language], [and] special education." They offer a variety of courses from the kindergarten level through twelfth grade that can be customized to meet the needs of schools and teachers. My state was highlighted in several different sections of the Web site, but that may be due to my computer's Global Positioning System (GPS) location sensor interacting with the Web site's data collection functions. The primary products that Edgenuity provides are Hybrid for

kindergarten through sixth grade (K-6), Courseware for sixth through twelfth grades (6-12), Virtual Tutor (9-12), UpSmart (6-8), and two math and reading intervention programs for struggling learners: Pathblazer (K-6) and MyPath (6-12). Here again, there is no pricing information, but there are phone numbers for both sales and support.




I looked at some of the videos at <https://www.edgenuity.com/video-library/> before signing up for the free demo. As I expected, many of the videos were specifically designed to show how great the products are and how successful the students and teachers are who use Edgenuity's products. I was able to find some interesting videos that explain how to use specific functions of the products such as managing enrollment, student assessment, and progress reporting. So far, the Edgenuity products look user-friendly from both the teacher's and the student's point-of-view.



I was able to access all of Edgenuity's products throughout my free demonstration and to read about the variety of services and content available, but I could not figure out how to engage in a sample lesson. I was very impressed by the large amount of data that is collected and then drives instruction. With the exception of UpStart, I accessed the key areas of Overview, Content, Interactive Learning Tools, [and] Data + Reports. UpStart did not have a specific Interactive Learning Tools section, but the content section does include "adaptive practice + instruction." Within the Content area, many of the courses follow the sequence of Instruction, Supported Practice, Independent Practice, and Assessment. The instruction sections that I looked at all contained a video of an instructor explaining and demonstrating the lesson's concepts and specific skills. Students then are guided through practice with supports to help them to achieve mastery. Independent practice has fewer built in supports to allow students to practice more on their own. The assessment at the end of the lesson gives the student and teacher information

about areas of success and concepts in which the student needs additional work. I have included images from the Web site that show a guided practice page, an independent practice page, and an assessment page for a high-school social studies lesson in Courseware. These are just examples and not indicative of the full scope and breadth of the material covered in each lesson.

The Basic Principles of the Preamble

Match the words of the preamble with the basic principle they **best** represent. Use each answer only once.

"Unalienable right" are		<input type="checkbox"/>	the government exists to serve the people.
The words "governments are instituted among men" describe		<input type="checkbox"/>	the idea of a social contract.
The "right of the people to alter or to abolish" government means that		<input type="checkbox"/>	the natural rights to which all people are entitled.

 Intro  Done

This guided practice page helps students to match difficult concepts from the Unites States Declaration of Independence with definitions in modern-day American English. There is a button in the lower left corner for auditory speech support on many of the pages. This function would assist students with some vision and print disabilities.

The Declaration: The First Paragraph


Entitle means "to give."

Impel means "to force."

When people "dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another," they are


The writers of the Declaration of Independence were justifying their plan to

When people break such bands, they should

DONE 

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

- The Declaration of Independence

 **Intro**

The independent practice problem gives students continued practice with learning to understand the United States Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence

Quiz **Active**


1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

TIME REMAINING
59:44

John Locke, an Enlightenment-era philosopher, influenced the American movement for independence. Locke believed that all people were entitled to natural rights. Which quotation from the preamble to the Declaration of Independence enshrines natural rights?

- "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."
- "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."
- "[I]t is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."
- "[T]hey are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

[Mark this and return](#)

Save and Exit
Next
Submit

Assessments are immediately marked by the Web site's interface so that the data can be quickly used by students and instructors. Here, a multiple-choice question within the high school United States Declaration of Independence lesson is demonstrated.

The top review on the first review site I looked at (Sightjabber, 2017) was gibberish and the next dozen reviews were also not written well, so I continued to look for other reviews. EdSurge (2017a) has a review of Edgenuity that offers little information beyond what one can find on the Edgenuity Website with two notable exceptions: pricing is available (assumedly current as of the date the article was written) and there is a caution about teachers customizing content. EdSurge states that if any of the courses' content is customized, the associated accreditation could be lost. Additional reviews of Edgenuity on the Web, including video reviews, were unavailable due to the overwhelming number of resources and videos posted directly by Edgenuity. All of the videos that I was able to find were either posted by Edgenuity or by students showing how to take (and cheat) the tests. I was interested in a video that was made by a seventh-grade student taking a math test; this is a perfect example of why a student should take tests without distractions such as using a screen recorder and narrating during test-taking (Busk, 2015). There must be more detailed reviews, but I was unable to locate them.

Edmentum (<http://www.edmentum.com>)

Edmentum claims to do it all: “individualized learning, data-driven instruction, course catalog expansion [and] learning reinforcement.” They advertise a wide variety of offerings from individual student supports through entire online courses (grades in brackets): Study Island (K-12), Exact Path (K-8), Courseware (6-12), Reading Eggs (PreK-6), Assessments (7-12), EdOptions Academy (6-12), Education City (PreK-6), and ESL ReadingSmart (4-12). They also have a tiered support system – the more you pay the more individualized support your school or district receives. Some institutions may already have staff development personnel trained in Edmentum or may have prior experience with Edmentum and not require the full suite of

supports. Schools can purchase the programs and service levels that meet their needs.

Both EdSurge (2017b) and Featured Customers (2017) have average user ratings of four stars on a five-star scale, but I did not gain any new information about Edmentum when I read the reviews.

I currently use Imagine Learning's prekindergarten through sixth grade reading program, Imagine Language and Literacy (Imagine Learning) and am always looking to see if there is something better that I can suggest to my school, so I decided to investigate Edmentum's Reading Eggs (PreK-2) and Reading Eggspress (2-6) combination package at <http://www.edmentum.com/products/reading-eggs-reading-eggspress>. I was unable to determine how this package handles a student who can spell on the fourth-grade level but has first grade reading comprehension because those two grades are covered by two different aspects of this reading package. I would need additional information before recommending this to my principal. Since I am facing an ordering deadline of next week, I will continue with Imagine Learning for another year. The following are screenshots of the pictures on the Reading Eggs/Reading Eggspress Web page. The photos on the Web page are very small, so much of the text cannot be read, but they do demonstrate aspects of this reading suite and the data collection.



Two activities from the Reading Eggs prekindergarten through second grade reading program.



Two activities from the Reading Eggspress second through sixth grade reading program.



This image of a sample report is too small to read on the Web site, but it does demonstrate that charts and graphs are included in the reports for teachers and schools. The image also shows that the program collects and utilizes a wide variety of information about each student's work.

My Personal Recommendations

It would be impossible to recommend one of these products to a particular school without knowing the prices for each company's product(s). It is also important to know if teacher-created content will be primarily used or if complete online courses are required. Schools who expect teachers to create their own content and to design their own units and courses would be best served by Schoology. Schoology can be used by individual teachers who want to create their own online courses or add a fully-customizable online component to face-to-face courses. There is a library of available content, and teachers can add content to their personal libraries, but teachers will need time to create courses with Schoology. Brightspace is also geared toward teacher-created content, but they do not have the free individual teacher accounts that Schoology offers. If individual teachers want personal accounts, Schoology is the answer. Brightspace may be the better solution for entire schools, but it is difficult to make that comparison.

The other three companies all offer predesigned courses with varying degrees of customization. If maintaining accreditation is a factor, then teachers and schools are advised against customizing the courses. K-12 might be a safe choice for homeschooling, if a parent or other responsible adult will be serving as a learning coach. Edgenuity and Edmentum are aimed more at schools where a teacher would be providing the coaching and additional assistance, but they could also be used by schools for their own home-schooling services. If this all sounds confusing, it is. Deciding which of these platforms would best help a school to reach their students is a difficult task. I like Edgenuity's lesson sequence of Instruction, Supported Practice, Independent Practice, and Assessment. Edgenuity may be the better solution if general, honors, and advanced placement students are expected to take the same courses, but with extensions for students in honors and advanced placement settings. Edmentum's data reports, and the fact that

they offer courses that reach prekindergarten through twelfth-grade students, is also appealing. Even after I brought up both Web sites on my browser for a more direct comparison, I was unable to determine a clear winner. I would like to know more about how each company's products adapt to learning as it is happening (not just through pretests and posttests). I would also need a better comparison of the information on each company's reports. I am tempted to recommend Edgenuity because, according to their Web site, my state's Department of Education accepts many of their courses, but it could just be that Edgenuity gave them a better financial offer.

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