10 award-winning math programs compared: what each does and the catch

Peabody blog · Teaching · updated 2026-11-08

IXL, MobyMax, ST Math, DreamBox, Prodigy and five more award winners, with how each practises math, what it costs where known, and the evidence behind it.

Ten math programs have won education software awards more than once between 2021 and 2026, and they fall into just four kinds: skill-ladder drills, a game with a math gate, visual puzzles, and a step-by-step tutor. This list gives each one's kind, what a child does in it, what it costs where a price is public, and the evidence. It comes from our study of 949 award wins. One limit up front: we read vendor pages, help guides and reviews, and could not log in to any of them, so every description of a screen is secondhand. Prices are from third parties and may be out of date.

1. MobyMax (kind: skill ladder). It won 23 award rows from 2021 to 2026, the most of any product we found. A placement test finds missing skills, then short animated lessons lead into practice. Price: schools buy a licence; a family plan was listed from $7.99 a month by a third party. Catch: its "53% more progress" and ESSA claims are the maker's own; we did not open the underlying papers.

2. IXL (skill ladder). A huge skill tree: about 413 grade-3 math skills, with a score from 0 to 100 that falls when a child answers wrongly. Price: limited free questions, then a subscription; third parties listed about $79 a year for one subject. Evidence: one independent study of 545 students in grades 3 to 5 found a small gain (+0.08) on the Evidence for ESSA site. Catch: reviewers call it repetitive, and the falling score upsets some children.

3. Mathletics (skill ladder). Avatar and reward system over practice; teacher reviews describe it as repetitive. We could not see its interface or find a current price.

4. Prodigy (a game with a math gate). A wizard adventure in which every battle needs a math answer. Price: free base; paid tiers from about $9.95 a month in a reviewer's listing. Catch: the National Education Policy Center criticised its repeated upgrade prompts, and reviewers say some children rush or pick the easiest skills. Its evidence rating is vendor-commissioned.

5. ST Math (visual puzzles). Wordless puzzles with a penguin mascot, JiJi, that clears a path when the child gets it right. Evidence: the strongest independent record of the group on the Evidence for ESSA site: four studies, average effect +0.07. Catch: with no words and no hints, some children struggle by trial and error; a homeschool price of $149 a child a year came from an aggregator.

6. DreamBox (visual and adaptive). Children pick an avatar and an adventure theme and use virtual blocks and ten-frames; lessons adjust within a session. Price: a family plan of $99.95 a

year in an older Common Sense listing. Catch: parents call the graphics dated.

7. My Math Academy (visual and adaptive). More than 300 game activities for early concepts, from Age of Learning. Two studies of 1,209 students are on Evidence for ESSA. We could not see its interface.

8. Beast Academy Online (visual, harder). Comic-book monsters teach, with videos, games and puzzles; reviewers call it harder than most. About $100 a year in a reviewer's listing.

9. Carnegie Learning MATHia (step-by-step tutor). For grades 6 to 12. It tracks each skill and gives tiered hints, and using a hint costs mastery. Quote-only price. The effect size for the high school solution on Evidence for ESSA is small (+0.04).

10. Mathseeds (visual and game). From the maker of Reading Eggs, for ages 3 to 9, a CODiE winner for gamification in 2026. We read little about its interface.

What the ten share

- The effect sizes are small. Even "Strong" ESSA ratings in this group run about +0.04 to +0.13.
- Reading is assumed. Skill ladders expect a child who can read the question; only ST Math is wordless, and it does not place a child.
- The parent is second. The dashboards report minutes and skills; none turns a session into something a grown-up and child do together.

How to choose

- Pre-readers: a wordless or visual one, with a grown-up beside the child.
- A child who needs practice on a skill: a ladder, with a daily limit so the score does not become the point.
- A child who needs a reason to play: a game, with the upgrade prompts switched off.

Where Peabody fits

Peabody (stories for kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up. It is not a math program, and none of its pages claim to replace one. The gap this list shows, math for children who cannot read yet, with a grown-up in the room, is one we are looking at; the library has the stories for now.

Sources

- Award winner lists: CODiE, EdTech Breakthrough, EdTech Digest, Tech & Learning, read November 2026.
- Evidence for ESSA program pages for IXL, ST Math, My Math Academy and Carnegie Learning; vendor pages; Cathy Duffy Reviews; Common Sense Media; National Education Policy Center on Prodigy.