

PRODUCT REVIEWS

Compiled by Kathie Felix

Managing Editor/Product Reviews Editor

News of the latest technology products for K-12 may be sent directly to Kathie Felix at 5746 Union Mill Road, PMB 605, Clifton, VA 20124 or to kathiefelix@aol.com.

Electronic Resources for Schools

REPORT CARD

- ★★★★★ = Highly Recommended
- ★★★★ = Recommended
- ★★★ = Good
- ★★ = OK in some cases
- ★ = Don't consider

This section provides concise, original reviews of new or important hardware, software, websites, and electronic media that relate to the K-12 curriculum. All reviews are written by practicing educators who, in most cases, have used the software in a school environment. Where grouped into broad, age-appropriate categories, these categories should not be viewed as prescriptive. To facilitate "comparison shopping," these reviews are highly structured. Reviewers prepare a "report card" based on a five-star scale.

HARDWARE

Study Buddy Handheld Tutors

Company: Brainchild Corp., 2706 Horseshoe Dr. S., Suite 102, Naples, FL 34104. Phone: (800) 811-2724; internet: www.brainchild.com.

Description: The Study Buddy Handheld Tutor looks like a small handheld game. The device, which is designed for students of all ages, offers electronic multiple choice practice that allows students to learn and work with study material before testing.

Specifications: The Study Buddy unit is slightly smaller than 4"x7"x1". The device is very light and easy to hold; it looks like a small handheld electronic game with seven buttons on the front, a speaker, and a cartridge port. The 2"x3" screen displays simple animations in color with sound. The device comes with a nice carrying case and a charging plug. The unit is rechargeable, but the batteries cannot

★★★★★ | REPORT CARD

Installation	A
Content/Features	A
Ease of Use	A
Product Support	A

be removed from the device. If the batteries fail, the unit must be sent to the company for repair.

Price: The Handheld Tutor unit price is \$299.99. Program cartridges are individually priced at \$49.99. Quantity discounts are available. The purchase of at least one cartridge is required to use the Study Buddy handheld unit.

Minimum System Requirements: The Study Buddy is a handheld electronic device that requires the installation of a plug-in program cartridge to provide the study materials. The unit must be charged with a provided plug; a single charge keeps the device working for about 8 hours.

Warranty: The Study Buddy Handheld Tutor is warranted against defective materials or workmanship for 1 year after purchase. The screen, if damaged due to carelessness or misuse, costs \$100 to replace.

Reviewer Comments:

Installation: There is no real installation required. The Study Buddy may need to be charged. Other than that, a cartridge is inserted, the unit is turned on, and the device is ready for use. **Installation Rating: A**

Content/Features: Despite being a reasonably complicated electronic device, the Study Buddy Handheld Tutor unit is a pretty basic system.

A small on/off switch is located on the top of the unit next to the cartridge port. Four buttons on the left side of the screen (labeled A, B, C, and D) are pressed to answer test and study questions. Pressing a button a second time after answering a question brings up

an explanation of why an answer is wrong and how to get it right.

Three buttons (selection, menu, and volume) are lined up to the right of the Study Buddy's screen.

In this day of multiple-function electronics, this unit can seem a bit too simple; the device does nothing other than use the content of the inserted cartridges. On the other hand, the simplicity is a plus; learning how to use the Study Buddy is very easy.

To get the device working, users must purchase at least one of the nearly 30 cartridges currently available at a cost of \$49.99 each. The Achiever! study cartridge series offers seven math levels, seven reading levels, and seven science levels. These cartridges are aimed at state standards and are intended to help students prepare for state assessment tests.

The 11 Mechanics Basic Skills/ESL (English as a Second Language) cartridges address two levels of math and three levels of reading, vocabulary, and writing. These cartridges are available in English, Spanish, and Haitian/Creole.

For this review, I examined two of the cartridges: Achieve! Science and MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) Math Level 4, which specifically addresses Michigan GLCEs (Grade Level Content Expectations). Various cartridges are available to address specific state standards.

Both of the cartridges I worked with were set up basically the same way.

A menu is presented when the unit is turned on with a cartridge plugged in. The MEAP Math Level 4 menu included Algebra, Data and Probability, Geometry, Measurement, and Number Sense. Choosing one of those topics brought up a menu of three to six lessons.

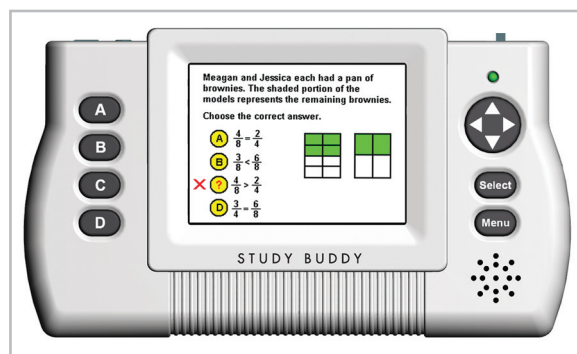
Choosing a lesson enables the user to study, test, or play. The Play feature brings up a brief audio discussion of the topic. Some of these discussions were accompanied by animation; some included illustrations or diagrams. The quality of the sound was clear and good, if a bit tinny.

The Study option brings up a multiple choice activity that enables students to get an explanation of incorrect answers by pressing the answer button a second time. The Test feature leads to a 10-question multiple choice test that keeps track of correct and incorrect answers and allows students to review an explanation of their incorrect answers. Both activities are basic and similar in nature to a PowerPoint presentation.

In general, this device offers an electronic multiple choice workbook with the advantage of self-correcting and explanatory features. Students can quickly and easily learn to use the device; a single unit can be used by individuals or small groups. The lack of any gaming or more entertainment-focused features means that students can spend more time on task. In addition, the tasks are self-paced, which is a definite advantage for some students.

Parents will like working with the Study Buddy system because they don't have to be math or science experts to help their children learn in these areas. **Content/Features Rating: A**

Ease of Use: The operation of the Study Buddy is intuitive, and operating instructions are clearly explained in the accompanying manual. The unit has a limited number of functions; the material is presented in a



Study Buddy Handheld Tutor

very basic way that makes the device very easy to learn to use. Students of any age will be able to use the Study Buddy Handheld Tutor in a very short time with a very small amount of help. **Ease of Use Rating: A**

Product Support: Basically, product support is limited to a small manual and a toll-free telephone number to call if there are problems with the unit. The good news is that little support is needed to use the Study Buddy; the device is intuitive to use and the instructions are very clear. **Product Support Rating: A**

Recommendation: The Study Buddy Handheld Tutor could be a useful addition to any school's test preparation program and some ESL situations.

The most economical school setup would be to have sets of units available that could be shared among two or more classrooms. Another possibility would be to place the content cartridges and Study Buddy devices in a school library for checkout and use at home or in the classroom. **Highly recommended.**

Reviewer: **Charles Doe**, media specialist, Hastings Area Schools, Central Elementary School, 509 S. Broadway, Hastings, MI 49058; (269) 948-4423; charliegd@sbcglobal.net.