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Software & Video Games

By Alex Chisholm

The theme running through this year's NAPPA winners is excellence in empowering kids and unlocking their creativity. As computing technologies become more sophisticated, they're also becoming easier to use.

The past few years have seen an explosion of new software titles and electronic games that move beyond what's possible with the keyboard and joystick. These innovations invite kids of all ages to literally jump in to experiences with easy-to-use dance pads, skateboards, drawing slates and other devices that connect directly to the computer and TV. These wonderful new ways of interacting with technology enable designers to create products that go way beyond old-school "drill and thrill" activities. These NAPPA Gold Award-winners represent some of the best of what's new for families.

For Preschoolers & Elementary Students

• **Piano Wizard**, Allegro Multimedia, 2005; \$199.95; Windows 98 and later; www.allegrorainbow.com; for ages 5 and up. Pricy, yes, but a worthwhile investment for the family. Research shows that kids who develop an ability to play music benefit in a variety of ways, including demonstrating better math profi-

Family
Play



ciencies. This USB plug-in works with your PC and introduces kids to the keyboard, sheet music and many popular piano classics. Highly versatile, it provides step-by-step instruction – often through simple games and visuals – to help kids learn where to place their fingers, how to count measures, read music and progress through more advanced musical exercises and practice sessions. Kids receive support through all activities, including a proficiency meter that helps them track their progress.