



RESEARCH PROVES SUPER WHY! HELPS CHILDREN LEARN TO READ

*Hit PBS KIDS® Series Boosts Literacy Skills for Preschoolers
Through Interactive Storybook Adventures and Unique
Educational Approach on TV, Online and in Communities*

Study Shows Greatest Skill Enhancement for Children from Low-Income Families

Arlington, VA, May 6, 2009 – Two new studies on the highly rated, award-winning PBS KIDS series Super WHY! prove that children, especially those from low-income families, are learning core early literacy skills from the TV series and its educational support materials. The studies were funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) through a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Education's Ready To Learn Grant. The first study conducted by the Annenberg School for Communication, at the University of Pennsylvania, assessed the TV series' abilities to help boost preschoolers' early literacy skills ranging from knowledge of the alphabet to letter sounds and reading comprehension. The second study evaluated how children learn from the series content via Super WHY! five day reading camps where children were invited to take a hands-on approach to applying the Super Readers reading lessons into their daily lives.

The Annenberg study, which was headed by Deborah L. Linebarger, Ph.D., Director of the Annenberg Children's Media Lab, determined whether young viewers learned the key early literacy content in the show, such as letter names and sounds, rhyming, and matching spoken words to print and whether they applied their learning in their daily lives. "Learning to read begins early on in a child's life," said Dr. Linebarger, "and children need multiple experiences with storytelling and language in which to do so. The format of Super WHY! provides them with an engaging platform that fosters literacy skills, resulting in learning the content featured in the program as well as applying that content to other contexts."

The Annenberg study included 171 preschool children living in a large Pacific Northwest city. Half the children were from low-income and working-class families. The children were randomly assigned to an experimental group or to a control group. Children in the

experimental group viewed 20 episodes of Super WHY! twice, while children in the control group viewed 20 episodes of a science program twice.

The results suggest that viewing Super WHY! can indeed play a major role in the acquisition of early literacy abilities that lead to the development of reading success. "An impressive indicator of the power of Super WHY! is that meaningful changes in preschoolers' early literacy skills were found with exposure to as few as two or three episodes," said Dr. Linebarger.

Other findings include:

- **Improved overall performance** – The most prominent finding in this project was that preschool children who watched Super WHY! across an 8 week period performed significantly better on nearly all program specific measures and most of the standardized measures of early reading achievement when compared with those preschool children who watched an alternate program.
- **High levels of engagement** – Nearly all of the children (97 percent) who rated the show and its characters gave Super WHY! high marks, so not only are young viewers learning, but they also find the content entertaining and engaging. The series has ranked in the top five television programs among children ages 2-to-5 and has been number one among moms with young children.*
- **Growth on targeted literacy skills** – Over time, kids who watched Super WHY! showed significant gains on alphabet knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, symbolic and linguistic awareness, and comprehension. For example, Super WHY! viewers' pre-test to post-test gain on tasks that measured phonological and phonemic awareness averaged 29 percent compared with an average gain of 13 percent for children in the control group.
- **Improved pre-reading skills** -- Watching Super WHY! dramatically improved preschoolers' letter and sound naming speeds, skills that are directly linked to conventional reading achievement. Children participating in the Super WHY! group were 24 percent faster at naming letters and 44 percent faster at naming sounds when compared to children in the control group.
- **Gains for low-income and working class children.** Low-income and working class children showed substantial improvement on tests measuring phonological, phonemic, and symbolic awareness:
 - Among Super WHY! viewers, low-income and working class children scored 46 percent higher than low-income and working class children in the control group on standardized tests, whereas middle class children scored 11 percent higher than middle class children in the control group.
 - Eighty-one (81) percent of low-income and working class Super WHY! viewers compared with 62 percent of low-income and working class children in the control group were able to identify at least 16 upper case

and 9 lower case letter names. Many of the middle class children had already mastered most of these skills before the study began.

“With Super WHY!, we want to give parents, caregivers and educators a reason to turn ON the television,” said Angela C. Santomero, Co-Creator and Executive Producer of the series. “The literacy-focused mission of the program is even more important and timely today than ever and we are proud to know that Super WHY! is doing its part to realize the crucial goal of ensuring that every child becomes a successful reader.”

In addition to the results from Annenberg, a separate study was conducted by the Florida State University’s Center for Reading Research, which further underscores the tremendous influence that Super WHY! has on improving early reading aptitude. In summer 2008, 454 preschoolers in 19 cities across 17 states participated in 33 Super WHY! Reading Camps. The week-long camps, built on a carefully-developed curriculum designed especially for children from low-income families, were led by local teachers at schools, day care and Head Start centers, in partnership with local PBS member stations that participate in the PBS KIDS Raising Readers initiative. Each day campers participated in activities as a different Super WHY! character and practiced the reading skills of that specific character.

During camp, the preschool participants took pre- and post- tests to assess learning gains from the five-day experience. The Florida Center for Reading Research group analyzed the resulting data to identify the benefits of watching the show and participating in the daily activities. Highlights from the study include:

- Campers showed gains in all of the literacy skills presented in the program, and developed proficiency in reading letters, sounds, and words.
- Preschoolers showed an 84 percent gain in phonics skills and a 139 percent (more than double) gain in word recognition skills.

“These findings and others underscore the educational power of television when a program has been developed using scientifically-based research and has been coupled with entertaining characters and formats. This work can help close the opportunity gap,” said Susan Zelman, SVP, CPB Education and Children’s Content.

“PBS and stations are the only enterprises dedicated to using the power of media to help all children, regardless of their circumstances have an equal possibility for success in school and in life,” said Rob Lippincott, SVP, PBS Education. “Super WHY! helps illustrate the powerful role that media and community-based engagement activities can play, by putting our research into action and in helping children learn to read.”

About Super WHY!

Reading is power and Super WHY! is the only preschool property created to help children learn the fundamentals of reading through interactive storybook adventures.

Both the animated show and the Super WHY! Reading Camps incorporate the literacy skills identified as most crucial to learning to read by the National Reading Panel Report: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension. Further, the show's characters were specifically created using the National Reading Panel's recommendation. *Alpha Pig*, for example, has alphabet power and each of his games focus on identifying letters, while *Wonder Red* has Word Power and games that focus on word-decoding. *Princess Presto* brings spelling power and games that center on letter sounds, spelling and handwriting skills into the mix, while Super WHY! has the power to read. Super WHY!, the title character, brings all of the skills together to teach reading in a sentence structure, while imparting valuable lessons on comprehension and vocabulary.

Super WHY! is a multiplatform educational property. In addition to effectively reaching preschoolers and caregivers through the award-winning PBS KIDS television program and Web site (pbskids.org/superwhy) and series-inspired, curriculum-based reading camps, the show's key literacy messages will be reinforced with immersive and learning-rich new books from Grosset & Dunlap, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, and educational toys from Learning Curve Brands that will be made available beginning this summer.

The progressive, multi-faceted program is funded in part by a Ready To Learn grant from the U.S. Department of Education, part of a cooperative agreement with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), PBS and The Ready To Learn Partnership. The Ready To Learn grant funds the PBS KIDS Raising Readers initiative, which focuses on increasing literacy skills for children ages 2-to-8, with an emphasis on children from low-income families, through the use of multiplatform content developed with scientifically-based reading research and targeted, local community engagement activities.

With a strong, research-based literacy curriculum, engaging interactive approach, and relatable superhero characters, Super WHY! works both on television and in the classroom. Preschoolers discover key reading skills from the show and then can apply those new abilities to reading in their everyday lives.

About Out of the Blue Enterprises

Out of the Blue Enterprises is dedicated to developing a groundbreaking portfolio of individually-targeted children's entertainment properties under the direction of a proven management team led by Co-Founders Angela C. Santomero, M.A. developmental Psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University and a Creator of the preschool entertainment phenomenon, *Blue's Clues*, and Samantha Freeman, MBA from Harvard Business School and former Nickelodeon entertainment executive with extensive children's marketing experience. The company creates breakthrough, interactive and curriculum-based entertainment concepts that span a variety of viable platforms, including television, video, publishing and consumer products. In doing so, Out of the Blue stimulates the minds of kids and families, involves them in fresh and original ways and elevates their educational entertainment experiences to a whole new level.

About PBS KIDS and PBS KIDS GO!

PBS KIDS, for preschoolers, and PBS KIDS GO!, for early elementary school kids, offer all children the opportunity to explore new ideas and new worlds through television, online and outreach programs. With positive character role models and content designed to nurture a child's total well-being, PBS's online and community resources – including PBS KIDS online (pbskids.org), PBS KIDS GO! online (pbskidsgo.org), PBS Parents (pbsparents.org), PBS Teachers (pbsteachers.org), PBS KIDS Raising Readers and literacy events across the country – leverage the full spectrum of media, technology and community to build knowledge, critical thinking, imagination and curiosity. Empowering children for success in school and in life, only PBS KIDS and PBS KIDS GO! have earned the unanimous endorsement of parents, children, industry leaders and teachers. PBS is a nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 356 public television stations, serving more than 115 million people on-air and online each month and reaching 99% of American homes.

About CPB

CPB, a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967, is the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting. It helps support the operations of more than 1000 locally owned and operated public television and radio stations nationwide, and is the largest single source of funding for research, technology, and program development for public radio, television, and related on-line services.

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***Soar onto Super WHY! at pbskids.org/superwhy
For art and more information visit pbs.org/pressroom***

Press contacts:

McReynolds Elek Communications

Lynn McReynolds

410-703-0250

lynn@mcreynoldselek.com

Kim Elek

410-956-0460

kim@mcreynoldselek.com

CPB

Louise Filkins

202/879-9759

lfilkins@cpb.org

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