

# Is the Three-Hour Rule Living Up to Its Potential?

An Analysis of Educational Television for Children in the 1999/2000 Broadcast Season

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The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Lorie Slass  
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## **ABOUT THE ANNEBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER**

The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania that would address public policy issues at the local, state, and federal levels. Consistent with the mission of the Annenberg School for Communication, the Center has four ongoing foci: Information and Society; Media and the Developing Mind; Media and the Dialogue of Democracy; and Health Communication. The Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas. This series of publications disseminates the work of the Center.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annenberg Public Policy Center's evaluation of the past three years' implementation of the FCC processing guideline known as the Three-Hour Rule indicates that broadcasters have been fairly consistent in their response to the regulations.

- **Since 1997, local broadcast stations have chosen to air a minimum of three hours a week of educational programming in order to qualify for expedited license review.** In the 1999/2000 season, each of the ten commercial broadcast stations serving Philadelphia offered an average of 3.4 hours of "core educational programs" during a typical week, a figure that is not markedly different from the offerings of the previous two seasons.
- **Though educational programming is readily available to children, it is not necessarily easy to find.** Since the early days of the Three-Hour Rule, the symbols used by the networks to identify their educational offerings have been generally unclear and idiosyncratic. As a result, parents have little understanding of what they mean (Schmitt, 2000) and have no obvious place to look for the broadcasters' E/I lineups.
- **The larger networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) have consistently opted to provide their affiliates with programs that focus on prosocial rather than academic lessons.** Prosocial programs tend to explore themes about friendship, cooperation and honesty rather than science, math or literature. Nevertheless, traditional academic shows have been available through syndication and often fill out the E/I schedules of independent stations and smaller network affiliates.

APPC's evaluation of the Philadelphia commercial broadcasters' 1999/2000 E/I shows indicates the 10 local stations provide 41 different program titles and 34 hours a week of educational programming.

- **Preschoolers are the most neglected audience for E/I programs (only 7 percent of programs are targeted to this group).** E/I programs focus primarily on elementary school age children (57 percent) and teens (36 percent).
- **Children's educational programs tend to be clustered around Saturday morning (33 percent) and weekday mornings (35 percent).** Though there are many children in the audience during the after-school hours, only 7 percent of the broadcasters' offerings are available then. No E/I programming is slated for the most lucrative time slot: primetime.
- **FCC filings indicate that though most E/I programs aired regularly, several were commonly preempted.** Programs airing in the late morning/early afternoon dayparts of Saturday were the most likely to be pushed aside for sports programming.
- **The educational programs in this year's sample contain very little violence (only 16 percent).** This is a refreshing departure from much of the non-E/I children's programming that is generally available (Woodard, 1999).
- **Using APPC's criteria for evaluating the educational strength of the commercial broadcasters' offerings, 77 percent of the E/I episodes in the sample were judged to meet the letter (and sometimes the spirit) of the FCC guidelines.**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTINUED

Highly and moderately educational programs provided children with clear, well-integrated and relevant lessons that were appropriate and involving for the target audience. Both prosocial and traditionally academic programs were enriching and useful for the developing child. The more highly educational programs this season came from ABC and from syndication.

- **Unfortunately, nearly one quarter (23 percent) were judged to be “minimally educational” – that is, they failed to meet the APPC educational benchmarks and were unlikely to provide substantive lessons for the audience.** Minimally educational programs often centered on sports or had weak or vague lessons. These programs were significantly more likely to be directed at the teen audience. Those that fell into this category were provided by networks (CBS, NBC and FOX), as well as syndicators.

As the Three-Hour Rule moves into its fourth year, there are three key areas of concern that remain to be addressed in the implementation of the policy.

**First, each year one fifth to one quarter of the programs labeled E/I are judged to have little educational value.** Sometimes these programs are new (and perhaps in need of development) while others return year after year. Broadcasters and producers can benefit from the input of parents, scholars and advocacy groups as they consider the best ways to serve the child audience.

**Second, children (and parents) need to have a sense that the educational programs they want to watch will consistently be there.** The frequent preemption of educational shows by at least one station illustrates a lack of interest in addressing the needs of the less lucrative child audience. It is worrisome that so many of the E/I programs are knocked out of the Saturday lineups since this is the only time set aside for children’s programming on the “big three” networks.

**Finally, parents need to be made more aware of the Three-Hour Rule and the programming that has resulted from it.** A recent national survey (Woodard, 2000) and series of focus group discussions with parents and children (Schmitt, 2000) reveal that parents are unaware of the existence or educational intent of established E/I programs. Promotion and outreach are necessary if the programming is to effectively reach and educate the audience the policy is designed to serve.

## INTRODUCTION

This report is the latest of the Annenberg Public Policy Center's annual evaluations of the commercial broadcasters' implementation of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) processing guideline known as The Three-Hour Rule. This 1997 policy mandates that commercial broadcast stations air a minimum of three hours a week of educational and informational (E/I) programming in order to qualify for expedited license renewal. Broadcasters that opt to air less than three hours a week of E/I programs must then undergo a full evaluation by the FCC to show evidence that they have served the child audience in other significant ways (FCC, 1996).

The Three-Hour Rule processing guideline is an outgrowth of the 1990 Children's Television Act (CTA) – a Congressional law stipulating that broadcasters must serve the child audience as part of their public interest obligations (CTA, 1990). Evaluations of the CTA by scholars and advocates indicated that broadcasters were sometimes offering ludicrous schedules and dubious programs to fulfill their obligations to the child audience. One study found many programs scheduled to air before children were likely to be awake and in the audience (Jordan, 1996). Other evaluations of the CTA found a large percentage of programs listed by the local broadcaster as educational that likely had little enriching content (for example, *Biker Mice from Mars*, *Power Rangers* and *The Jetsons*) (Kunkel & Canepa, 1994; Center for Media Education, 1992).

The Three-Hour Rule was therefore put in place in order to provide broadcasters with clearer guidelines for what could qualify as children's educational programming – called "core" programming in the policy. First, core programs must air between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Second, these programs must have education as a significant purpose and be specifically designed for children. Third, they must be regularly scheduled (air at least once a week) and be of regular program length (at least 30 minutes). Finally, core programs must be identified as educational on the air and in documents filed with the FCC (Form 398) as well as in station files that are publicly available. Programs can be considered educational if they contribute to children's healthy development by addressing their cognitive/intellectual or social/emotional needs (FCC, 1996).

Since the 1997/98 television season (when the Three-Hour Rule formally went into effect), The Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) has evaluated the broadcasters' implementation of the Three-Hour Rule,<sup>1</sup> and the public's knowledge, awareness and use

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<sup>1</sup> See Jordan and Sullivan (1997), Jordan and Woodard (1997), Jordan (1998), Schmitt (1999), and Jordan (1999).

of the information and programming available as a result of the Three-Hour Rule.<sup>2</sup> This report represents an assessment of the programming available in one large market, Philadelphia, in the third season under the educational program mandate. In addition, it reviews trends in program content and scheduling practices that have emerged in the three years during which the APPC has conducted its evaluation.

APPC reports released concurrently with *Is the Three-Hour Rule Living Up to Its Potential?* provide an assessment of the public's response to the Three-Hour Rule (see Schmitt, 2000 and Woodard, 2000). This report focuses on three-year trends that are observed in the broadcasters' response: their identification and scheduling practices as well as the types and quality of the educational programs they offer. Examining the broadcasters' response over a period of three years provides an opportunity to assess the impact of the Three-Hour Rule over time and plot the trajectory of the quality and availability of educational programming on the nation's free airwaves. In addition to examining year-to-year trends, we focus on the E/I programming airing in one market during the 1999/2000 season.

## **THE MARKET UNDER STUDY: PHILADELPHIA**

The analysis of the third season of the implementation of the Three-Hour Rule provides an in-depth look at the educational offerings for children in one large market: Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup> Though Philadelphia is only one of 22 large markets<sup>4</sup> in the country, it offers what may be the best case scenario for children. Every major broadcast network has an owned and operated or affiliated station in this city (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, WB, UPN, HSN (Home Shopping Network) and PAX). In addition, there are two independent or unaffiliated stations (WGTW and WFMZ) available over the free airwaves to Philadelphia-area viewers.

These ten commercial broadcast stations air syndicated and/or network-provided programs to fulfill their children's educational programming requirements. Though there are no programs produced and aired by the local broadcast stations (referred to as "local programs"), this is not unusual as the prevalence of local programming has been on the decline since the introduction of the Three-Hour Rule (Schmitt, 1999) and the increasing trend toward vertical integration (Jordan, 1999). What airs in Philadelphia is not specific to the community, but is generally available to children around the country.

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<sup>2</sup> See Stanger (1997); Stanger, (1998); Stanger & Gridina (1999).

<sup>3</sup> The Philadelphia-area broadcast stations have been the focus of the analysis since the 1997/98 season, although the 1999 report also examined the programs available nationwide.

In 1997, the major broadcast networks made a commitment to provide most or all of the three hours' worth of children's educational programming. This commitment alleviated local broadcasters' concerns that they would need to allocate additional resources to create new programs or secure syndicated programs on the open market (Moonves, 1996; McConnell, 1996; Rice, 1997; Rice & Littleton, 1996). Today, every network, with the exception of UPN, offers its broadcast affiliates all or most of the three hours' worth of educational programming. FCC files indicate that the vast majority of local broadcasters choose to air these network programs as their core E/I programs (Schmitt, 1999; Sullivan & Jordan, 1999). Thus, ABC's *One Saturday Morning* lineup will be seen each week by children from Worcester, Massachusetts to Seattle, Washington.

The syndicated programs that air on network-affiliated stations (generally as a supplement to network programs) or on independent stations (generally comprising the full three hours) tend to have wide "clearance" on commercial broadcast stations in the U.S. (though the air days and times are less consistent) (Jordan, 1999). Thus, children in Philadelphia are likely to have network and syndicated program choices that are similar to those available to children nationwide.<sup>5</sup>

The core program offerings of the ten commercial broadcast stations were identified in three ways:

First, calls were made to the local stations requesting a list of the core educational programs for children airing during the fall of 1999. Under the Three-Hour Rule's reporting requirements, stations must identify a children's television liaison – usually a station staff member who has other duties (such as public affairs) but is available to provide parents and researchers with information about educational programming. Our calls to the children's television liaison typically provoked confusion on the part of the operator. (This does not appear to be a personnel label that is used much within the stations.) In addition, several stations provided incomplete information. We were able to identify some E/I programs only after the quarterly reports to the FCC (Form 398)<sup>6</sup> were submitted (since the liaison had neglected to inform us of the existence of the program).

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<sup>4</sup> The top 22 television broadcast markets serve one million or more households (Hamilton, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> The 1999 APPC study of a national sample of programs included local programs that aired on only one station as well as religious-oriented programs that aired on religious-oriented stations. Though these programs are interesting and important to recognize, they are neither widely available nor do they contribute significantly to the core programming of the majority of stations.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see [www.fcc.gov/parents\\_information](http://www.fcc.gov/parents_information), and visit the Children's Television page.

Next, we scrutinized the TV Guide for the listing of educational children's programs. Using the initial list provided by the station representatives, we cross-checked programs with those listed in the fall issues. Unfortunately, TV Guide no longer carries the E/I symbol identifying the broadcasters' educational offerings.<sup>7</sup> Thus we were only able to validate already-identified programs.

Finally, in January 2000 we were able to access the broadcasters' reports to the FCC listing the E/I programs, their target audiences and educational goals, and their preemption practices. These files reported on programs that aired during the fourth quarter of 1999 (October - December, 1999) at each of the 10 broadcast stations.

Compiling a list of educational programs presented some challenges. One difficulty lay in the fluidity of programming across the season (see Table Three: Preemption Practices). Several stations altered their lineups during the course of the 1999/2000 television season. The local FOX affiliate, for example, began airing *The Magic School Bus* – a highly educational program (Schmitt, 1999) – only after the fourth quarter of 1999. The independent station WGTW also moved *Bloopy's Buddies* to a later morning time slot when it realized the 6:00am airing did not qualify it as core programming. In addition, it proved difficult to obtain a complete set of FCC filings in a timely way. Though many stations do file quarterly, the FCC only requires an end-of-the-year report from local broadcasters (many of which came in late). Thus, we determined that the analysis would focus solely on the fall quarter of 1999 in order to provide a valid and comprehensive snapshot of one week of E/I of programming in a representative quarter of this season. (An outcome of using this time frame for analysis is that core programs that air later in the season – such as *The Magic School Bus* and *Bloopy's Buddies* – are not included as part of the sample.)

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<sup>7</sup> Though TV Guide ran the symbol for several months, we were informed that when the E/I icon was placed alongside the ratings there was too little room and the symbols were seen as cluttering the magazine.



### *Program Episodes Used in the Evaluation*

Since 1998, the analysis of the commercial broadcasters' E/I programs has been based on three episodes of each program identified as a core educational program airing on a commercial broadcast station during the current broadcast year. The episodes were acquired in two ways: either producers or networks submitted three episodes of their show(s) or, when producers did not respond to repeated requests, three episodes of the program were taped off the air.<sup>8</sup> Thirty-eight program titles were submitted by the producer or network and three programs were taped off the air (*Pressure 1*, *Pressure 2* and *Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures*).

A total of 41 different program titles was included in this analysis (see Appendix A).<sup>9</sup> Several of these programs – *Disney's Doug*, *Critter Gitters*, *Field Trip* and *Young America Outdoors* – are in syndication and air as core educational programming on multiple stations.<sup>10</sup> *Disney's Doug*, for example, airs as network programming on the ABC station on Saturday mornings and as syndicated programming on the UPN affiliate on weekday afternoons and Sunday mornings.<sup>11</sup>

Table One indicates the programs airing on the Philadelphia-area commercial broadcast stations during the fall of 1999.

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<sup>8</sup> We use three episodes in order to create a more valid assessment of the content and educational strength of the program. Indeed, some variability is observed from episode to episode (see Appendix A).

<sup>9</sup> Coder error and inadequate submission resulted in the collection of only two episodes of *Pressure Two* and *Musical Encounter*.

<sup>10</sup> These programs were weighted in the data according to the number of stations on which they aired.

<sup>11</sup> In cases where the same program airs on multiple stations, only three episodes were evaluated and the data were replicated in the analyses.

**Table 1: Philadelphia Commercial Broadcasters' Core Educational Programming 1999/2000**

Network/Channel	Core Educational Programs	Target Age	Air Time*	Program Source
<b>Independent</b> (Channel 48) <b>2.5 hours/week</b>	Young America Outdoors	13-16	8-8:30 Mon	Syndicated
	Critter Gitters	9-14	8-8:30 Tues	Syndicated
	Field Trip	6-11	8-8:30 Wed	Syndicated
	Wild About Animals	13-16	8-8:30 Thur	Syndicated
	Awesome Adventures	13-16	8-8:30 Fri	Syndicated
<b>CBS</b> (KYW-3) <b>3.5 hours/week</b>	Inquirer High School Sports	13-16	9:30-10 Sat	Syndicated
	Anatole	5-9	10-10:30 Sat	CBS
	Blaster's Universe	7-11	10:30-11 Sat	CBS
	Rescue Heroes	7-11	11-11:30 Sat	CBS
	Flying Rhino Junior High	7-11	11:30-12pm Sat	CBS
	New Tales from the Cryptkeeper	7-11	12-12:30pm Sat	CBS
<b>ABC</b> (WPVI-6) <b>3.5 hours/week</b>	Mythic Warriors: Guardians of the Legend	7-11	12:30-1pm Sat	CBS
	Disney's Pepper Ann	8-12	8:00-8:30 Sat	ABC
	One Saturday Morning			
	(Disney's Pepper Ann, Doug, & Recess)**	8-12	8:30-10:30 Sat	ABC
	Sabrina, The Animated Series	8-11	10:30-11 Sat	ABC
<b>NBC</b> (WCAU-10) <b>3 hours/week</b>	Squigglevision	7-11	11-11:30 Sat	ABC
	New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh	3-6	11:30-12pm Sat	ABC
	Saved by the Bell: The New Class	12-18	10-10:30 Sat	NBC
	Hang Time	12-18	10:30-11 Sat	NBC
	City Guys	12-18	11-11:30 Sat	NBC
<b>WB</b> (WPHL-17) <b>4 hours/week</b>	City Guys	12-18	12:30-1pm Sat	NBC
	One World	12-18	11:30-12pm Sat	NBC
	NBA Inside Stuff	13-16	1-1:30pm Sat	NBC
	Histeria	6-12	7:30-8 M-F	WB
<b>FOX</b> (WTFX-29) <b>3 hours/week</b>	Detention	6-11	11-11:30 Sat	WB
	Pressure 1	13-16	7-7:30 Sat	Syndicated
	Pressure 2	13-16	8-8:30 Sat	Syndicated
	Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century	9-12	8-8:30 Sat	FOX
	Popular Mechanics	6-14	7-7:30 Sat	Syndicated
	Popular Mechanics	6-14	8:30-9 Sun	Syndicated
<b>UPN</b> (WPSG-57) <b>3 hours/week</b>	Disney Presents Bill Nye the Science Guy	9-10	7:30-8 Sat	Syndicated
	Disney Presents Bill Nye the Science Guy	9-10	7-7:30 Sun	Syndicated
	NFL Under the Helmet	13-16	12-12:30pm Sat	FOX
<b>PAX</b> (WPPX-6) <b>3 hours/week</b>	Disney's Doug	8-12	3-3:30 p.m. M-F	UPN
	Disney's Doug	8-12	10-10:30 Sun	UPN
<b>HSN</b> (WHSP-65) <b>3.5 hours/week</b>	Archie's Weird Mysteries	6-12	8-8:30 Sat	PAX
	Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego?	6-12	8-8:30 M-F	PAX
	Vegetable Soup	5-12	7-7:30 Sun	Syndicated
	New Zoo Review	4-9	7:30-8 Sun	Syndicated
	Jack Houston's Imagineland	3-5	8-8:30 Sun	Syndicated
	Musical Encounter	6-12	8:30-9 Sun	Syndicated
	Musical Encounter	6-12	9-9:30 Sun	Syndicated
<b>Independent</b> (WFMZ-69) <b>5 hours/week</b>	Young America Outdoors	13-16	9:30-10 Sun	Syndicated
	Young America Outdoors	13-16	7-7:30 Mon	Syndicated
	Bloopy's Buddies	2-6	7:30-8 M-F	Syndicated
	Field Trip	6-11	7-7:30 Tues	Syndicated
	More Than a Game	8-18	5-5:30pm Sat	Syndicated
<b>Independent</b> (WFMZ-69) <b>5 hours/week</b>	Critter Gitters	9-14	7-7:30 Thur	Syndicated
	Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures	12-16	7-7:30 Wed	Syndicated
	Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures	12-16	5:30-6pm Sat	Syndicated

\*All airtimes are a.m. unless otherwise noted

\*\*Only an hour and one-half is considered "core" programming.

**PART ONE: E/I PROGRAM SCHEDULES**

*Are Philadelphia-area broadcasters airing three hour of E/I shows each week?*

The evaluation of this year’s programming indicates that, as in previous years, the broadcasters list at least three hours a week of E/I programming during the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Only one station – the independent WGTW – aired less than three hours during the fall of 1999.<sup>12</sup>

Our analysis indicates that, in the three years since the Three-Hour Rule’s programming guidelines have been in effect, stations have typically aired the minimum three hours a week. During the 1997/98 season, broadcasters programmed an average of 3.3 hours a week of E/I programming (for a total of 30 hours across seven stations).<sup>13</sup> During the 1998/99 season, broadcasters averaged slightly more than four (4.25) hours a week of E/I programming (for a total of 42 ½ hours a week across the ten stations). This season’s average has dropped back to less than three and a half (3.4) hours a week per station (for a total of 34 hours a week across the ten stations). This year’s decline is primarily the result of a drop in E/I programming on stations affiliated with smaller networks (WB, UPN, and FOX).

**Table 2: Average Hours a Week over Three Years**

	1997/98 (based on 7 stations)	1998/99 (based on 10 stations)	1999/2000 (based on 10 stations)
Total Hours	30	42.5	34
Average Hrs/Wk	3.3	4.25	3.4

*How established are the programs?*

ABC and NBC affiliated stations have seen very little turnover in the types of programs provided by their respective networks. ABC has consistently provided its *One Saturday Morning* lineup (*Doug*, *Recess* and *Pepper Ann*), *Squigglevision* (known as *Science Court* in its first year) and *Winnie the Pooh*. Similarly, NBC has offered its stations *Hang Time*, *Saved by the Bell*, *City Guys* and *NBA Inside Stuff* for the past three years. Though other

<sup>12</sup> A station representative indicated that, later in the season, programmers adjusted the airtime of their 6:00 a.m. program *Bloopy’s Buddies* in order to have it qualify as a core program (bringing the total to 3 hours a week).

programs have come and gone on these affiliates, the network is producing a recognizable core of programs.

The syndicated programming on the independent stations has also seen little change. Core programs on both independent stations have included *Critter Gitters*, *Field Trip*, *Bloopy's Buddies* and a variety of animal shows several years in a row. The Home Shopping Network has also consistently offered a mixed bag of Sunday morning shows from the teen-oriented *Young America Outdoors* to the preschool-targeted *Imagineland*.

Other stations have seen more movement in their program schedules. This season, CBS kept only half of the shows from its *Kids' Show* lineup of the previous year (*Anatole*, *Flying Rhino Jr. High*, and *Mythic Warriors* are back in 2000). Between 1998 and 1999, CBS stations experienced a complete turnover of programming. PAX also originated an entirely new lineup of network-provided programming in the 1999/2000 season.

The local FOX affiliate has always offered children a mix of network and syndicated shows – with only *Bill Nye, the Science Guy* (syndicated) consistently programmed across the years. Programs provided by the network itself have varied from year to year. *The Magic School Bus* from the FOX network took a hiatus in the fall and returned in the spring. The WB affiliate has consistently aired the network-provided *Histeria!*, supplementing it with this year's *Detention*.

#### *Where do programs come from?*

Local broadcast stations affiliated with the three major networks – ABC, NBC, CBS – are acquiring virtually all of their educational programming from the networks. The one exception is CBS, which included an additional program from syndication (*The Inquirer High School Sports Show*). Affiliates of smaller networks – FOX and WB – use a mix of network-provided and syndicated programming whereas UPN, HSN and the independent station air only shows acquired through syndication. Overall, roughly half of the programs in the sample were provided by the networks (51.1 percent) and half were syndicated fare (48.9 percent).

Another interesting trend in the scheduling of this year's E/I programs is the willingness of stations in the same market to air the same core E/I program. The popular children's

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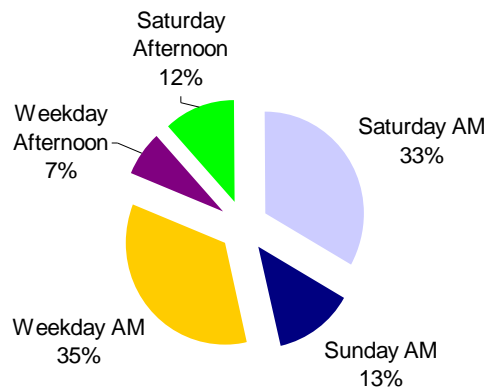
<sup>13</sup> The analysis of the 1997/98 season did not include the PAX network, which did not exist at the time, the Home Shopping Network, which was erroneously not recognized as being held to the guidelines of the Three-Hour Rule, or

show *Disney's Doug* now airs on both ABC and on the local UPN affiliate.<sup>14</sup> *Young America Outdoors* airs within the same block (Monday morning) on the Home Shopping Network and the independent station WGTW. Though there are no guidelines regarding overlap in programming, there are two potential consequences of this trend. On the one hand, it could reduce the overall amount and diversity of educational programming available for children. On the other hand, it may boost the potential for children to watch and learn if highly educational programs are more widely available.

#### *When do programs air?*

As in previous years, the educational programs airing in the Philadelphia market are available throughout the week. Though the “big three” networks have concentrated their offerings on Saturday morning, programs are also available in the before and after school hours and on Saturday afternoon. Figure One illustrates the distribution of the 34 hours of programs across the week. One can see from Figure One that E/I shows are clustered in dayparts with few adult viewers-- Saturday morning (33 percent) and weekday mornings (35 percent). Surprisingly, though there are many children in the audience in the after school hours, only 7 percent of the broadcasters' offerings were available then. No E/I programming was slated for the most lucrative time slot: primetime.

**Figure 1: E/I Programming Schedule**



WFMZ, an Allentown station that is received by most Philadelphia-area households.

<sup>14</sup> Another version of *Doug* airs on Nickelodeon as well. However, cable stations do not fall within the purview of the FCC's E/I programming mandate.

*How often are programs preempted?*

Table Three illustrates the extent to which programs are preempted – cancelled or moved to another time slot in order to air a non-E/I program (such as sports programming or breaking news). The Three-Hour Rule mandates that core educational programming be regularly scheduled (at least once a week). Though the guidelines stipulate that programs air in the same slot for at least 13 consecutive weeks, they also allow “some episodes be preempted for programs such as breaking news or live sports events.” (FCC, 1999). Advocates argued that without strict guidelines mandating regular scheduling, educational children’s shows might be pushed aside for more lucrative paid programming or sports programming and thus would be unable to gain the attention of parents or build an audience of loyal viewers (FCC, 1996). A compromise allows networks to make arrangements with the FCC for “flexibility” in rescheduling core programming.

Preemption rates for the 10 Philadelphia-area broadcasters -- as indicated by the fall, 1999 and winter 2000 Children’s Educational Programming Reports (Form 398) -- reveal that over the 26 week period the majority of programs were not preempted or were preempted only once. (As Table Three illustrates, efforts to examine on-line filings for the winter of 2000 (January-March) were only partially successful, since several of the stations had not filed by May 26<sup>th</sup>.)

Table 3: Broadcaster Preemption Practices October, 1999 to March, 2000

Network/ Channel	Core Educational Programs	Air Time (airtimes are a.m. unless otherwise noted)	4th Quarter 1999 Preemptions (Oct. – Dec.)	1st Quarter 2000 Preemptions (Jan. – Mar.)
<b>Independent</b> (Channel 48) <b>2.5 hours/week</b>	Young America Outdoors	8-8:30 Mon	0	0
	Critter Gitters	8-8:30 Tues	0	0
	Field Trip	8-8:30 Wed	0	0
	Wild About Animals	8-8:30 Thur	0	0
	Awesome Adventures	8-8:30 Fri	0	0
<b>CBS</b> (KYW-3) <b>3.5 hours/week</b>	Inquirer High School Sports	9:30-10 Sat	0	0
	Anatole	10-10:30 Sat	0	1
	Blaster's Universe	10:30-11 Sat	0	1
	Rescue Heroes	11-11:30 Sat	0	1
	Flying Rhino Junior High	11:30-12pm Sat	0	1
	New Tales from the Cryptkeeper	12-12:30pm Sat	5	11
<b>ABC</b> (WPVI-6) <b>3.5 hours/week</b>	Mythic Warriors: Guardians of the Legend	12:30-1pm Sat	5	11
	Pepper Ann	8:00-8:30 Sat	0	1
	One Saturday Morning	8:30-10:30 Sat	0	1
	Disney's Doug, Recess, & Pepper Ann			
	Sabrina, The Animated Series	10:30-11 Sat	0	1
<b>NBC</b> (WCAU-10) <b>3 hours/week</b>	Squigglevision	11-11:30 Sat	0	1
	New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh	11:30-12pm Sat	0	1
	Saved by the Bell: The New Class	10-10:30 Sat	3	1
	Hang Time	10:30-11 Sat	3	1
	City Guys	11-11:30 Sat	2	1
	City Guys	12:30-1pm Sat	3	1
<b>WB</b> (WPHL-17) <b>4 hours/week</b>	One World	11:30-12pm Sat	2	1
	NBA Inside Stuff	1-1:30pm Sat	3	1
	Histeria	7:30-8 M-F	0	not available
	Detention	11-11:30 Sat	0	not available
<b>FOX</b> (WTFX-29) <b>3 hours/week</b>	Pressure 1	7-7:30 Sat	0	not available
	Pressure 2	8-8:30 Sat	0	not available
	Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century	8-8:30 Sat	1	0**
	Popular Mechanics	7-7:30 Sat	0	0
	Popular Mechanics	8:30-9 Sun	0	0
	Disney Presents Bill Nye the Science Guy	7:30-8 Sat	0	0
<b>UPN</b> (WPSG-57) <b>3 hours/week</b>	Disney Presents Bill Nye the Science Guy	7-7:30 Sun	0	0*
	NFL Under the Helmet	12-12:30pm Sat	1	2 ***
<b>PAX</b> (WPPX-6) <b>3 hours/week</b>	Disney's Doug	3-3:30pm M-F	0	0
	Disney's Doug	10-10:30 Sun	0	0
<b>HSN</b> (WHSP-65) <b>3.5 hours/week</b>	Archie's Weird Mysteries	8-8:30 Sat	0	0 ****
	Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego?	8-8:30 M-F	0	0
	Vegetable Soup	7-7:30 Sun	0	not available
	New Zoo Review	7:30-8 Sun	0	not available
	Jack Houston's Imagineland	8-8:30 Sun	0	not available
	Musical Encounter	8:30-9 Sun	0	not available
<b>Independent</b> (WFMZ-69) <b>5 hours/week</b>	Musical Encounter	9-9:30 Sun	0	not available
	Young America Outdoors	9:30-10 Sun	0	not available
	Young America Outdoors	7-7:30 Mon	0	not available
	Bloopy's Buddies	7:30-8 M-F	0	0
	Field Trip	7-7:30 Tues	0	0
	More Than a Game	5-5:30pm Sat	1	1
	Critter Gitters	7-7:30 Thur	0	0
	Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures	7-7:30 Wed	1	1
	Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures	5:30pm Sat	0	0

\* Times for 1st quarter 2000 change to Sunday 8:30 and 10:00 a.m.

\*\* Times for 1st quarter 2000 change to Monday 4:00pm

\*\*\* Times for 1st quarter 2000 change to Sun 10 a.m., then dropped after 2/6

\*\*\*\* *Archie's Mysteries* and *Carmen Sandiego* switch time slots in 1st Quarter 2000  
Quarterly filings cover a 13-week period.

Once-a-week programs were more likely to be preempted than weekday “stripped” programs. Preemptions were most likely to occur on Saturday during the late morning/early afternoon hours (when the bulk of E/I programs on the major networks air). The CBS-affiliated station’s programs airing at noon (*New Tales from the Cryptkeeper*) and 12:30 p.m. (*Mythic Warriors*) were bumped and rescheduled sixteen times in 26 weeks. Though the station rescheduled these programs to a “second home,” the second home for one of these programs (*Mythic Warriors*) was 5:00 a.m. on Saturday – a time that does not qualify as core programming and a time when few children are awake and in the audience. NBC preempted its 10:00 a.m. (*Saved by the Bell*), 10:30 a.m. (*Hang Time*), 12:30 p.m. (*City Guys*), and 1:00 p.m. (*NBA Inside Stuff*) programs four times in 26 weeks.

Though these data represent the preemption practices of the only half of the 1999/00 television season, the frequent Saturday preemption practices of CBS and NBC illustrate that the time slots populated by children’s E/I shows are also popular for preemption. According to documents filed with the FCC, CBS’s tendency to preempt *Cryptkeeper* and *Mythic Warriors* is the result of a contract to air sports. Though CBS received permission to move conflicting E/I programs to a second home, 5:00 a.m. is not an approved spot for core programming.

## **PART TWO: E/I PROGRAM CONTENT**

A team of five researchers analyzed three episodes of each of the 41 educational/informational children’s programs airing on the Philadelphia-area commercial broadcast stations (programs airing on multiple stations were appropriately weighted, resulting in a total episode sample of 135 shows).

Coders were trained over an 8-week period in the winter of 1999/2000. The coding team consisted of researchers experienced with conducting content analyses on educational programming.<sup>15</sup> Twenty-percent (n=27) of the E/I episodes in the sample were double coded to ensure the reliability of the measures. Each of the variables reported below achieved acceptable levels of reliability.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The team consisted of two senior undergraduate Communication majors, one Ph.D. student in Communications, one post-doctoral research fellow, and the author of this report.

<sup>16</sup> An assessment of inter-coder reliability was obtained using Holsti’s formula. Though this formula is sometimes criticized for not accounting for agreement that would occur by chance, the more rigorous Krippendorff’s alpha could not be used due to the small size of the sample and the bivariate nature of many of the variables. Individual reliability scores ranged from .78 to 1.0 with an overall agreement rate of .89.

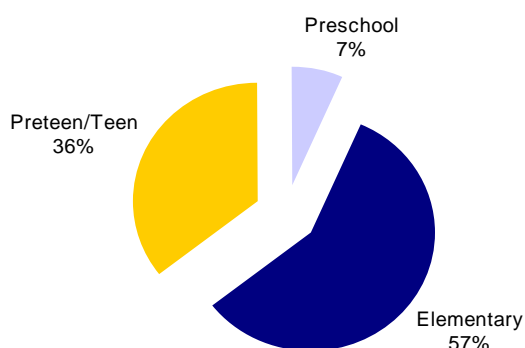


Three episodes of each program (n=135) offered as core educational programming during the 1999/2000 season in the Philadelphia-area broadcast market were considered for their target audience, primary educational goal, inclusion of violence, and overall educational strength.

*Who are the educational programs targeted to?*

Commercial broadcasters are required to make available (through station files and quarterly reports to the FCC) a profile of the target audience for each of their educational programs. The information provided by the broadcasters was used to classify the target audience of each program. Programs' target audiences were recoded as "primarily preschool" (0 - 4 years), "primarily elementary school" (5 - 11 years), and "primarily preteen/teen" (12 - 16 years). Programs spanning two or more age groupings were reclassified based on the content and/or airtime of the show.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 2: Target Age**



The majority of programs listed as E/I by the commercial broadcasters identified elementary school age children (ages 6 - 11) as the target audience. In the 1999/2000 broadcast year, 57 percent of the programs were geared to this age group. The focus on children in the primary grades is consistent with the educational programming of previous years: 61 percent and 63 percent of the 1999 and 1998 E/I schedules (respectively) targeted this age group.

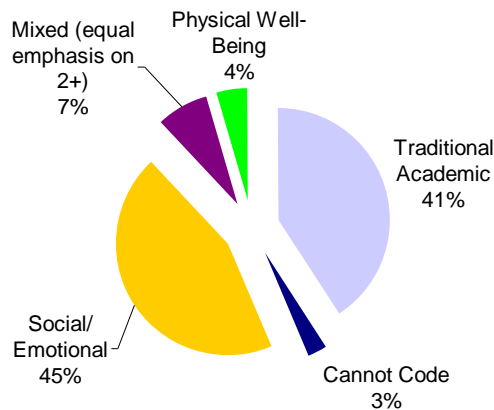
<sup>17</sup> Four programs spanned two age groupings (e.g., targeted to both preschoolers and elementary school age children). They were reclassified based on the air time (e.g., if it was on during school hours it was targeted as a preschool program) and content (e.g., if the content dealt with school-related themes it was reclassified as an elementary school age program).

As in previous years, only a small minority of E/I programs was geared to preschoolers (7 percent similar to the 7 percent in 1999 and 14.3 percent in 1998). A little more than one-third (36 percent) targeted teenagers – slightly more than 1999 (32 percent) and 1998 (23 percent).

*What are the programs teaching?*

The primary educational lesson was evaluated for each of the three episodes of the E/I programs. The predominant lessons were of a social/emotional nature; for example, lessons about sharing, time management, self-respect and acceptance of diversity. Nearly half (45 percent) of the episodes were coded as containing prosocial themes. Lessons centering on traditionally academic subjects are also quite common -- 41 percent of the evaluated episodes contained lessons about science, animal behavior, history and other school-related subjects. A small percentage (4 percent) tackled issues related to physical health and well being (for example, exercise and hygiene), or gave comparable emphasis to more than one topic area (7 percent). The remaining three percent of episodes had no identifiable lesson.

**Figure 3: Primary Lesson for E/I Programs Airing in Philadelphia**



Weblets<sup>18</sup> and independents were significantly more likely to offer traditionally academic programs while the major networks were more likely to offer prosocial fare.<sup>19</sup> Though the majority (58 percent) of the networks' program episodes were judged to have social/emotional themes driving their educational content, only 32 percent of the syndicated programs has such a focus. The networks showed a greater diversity of

<sup>18</sup> Weblets are defined here as smaller networks that provide much (but not all) of the non-news programming, have a smaller number of local affiliates and typically reach smaller audiences. They include WB, UPN, PAX and the Home Shopping Network.

educational content than in 1999, when 75 percent of the lessons were prosocial (Schmitt, 1999). What accounts for the decline is a proliferation in sports-centered programs (typically labeled as physical health) and “mixed” lesson programs. There has not been a marked increase in traditionally academic shows on networks (they remain at 24 percent).

*Do educational programs contain violent content?*

Researchers have argued that the inclusion of violence in educational programs detracts from children’s attention to educational content. There is evidence that children remember the more perceptually salient violent action more than they do the understated educational material (Rule & Ferguson, 1986; Wood, Wong & Chacere, 1991). In addition, some view the violence as inherently contradicting or countering the positive elements of educational programming (Nathanson, Jellinek & Cantor, 1997). Thus, we examined the extent to which programs contained three or more scenes with “the overt depiction of intentional and/or malicious threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings.” Twenty-two of the 135 episodes (16 percent) contained significant amounts of violence, a four percent increase from the previous year (see Appendix A). All of the episodes containing violence came from the networks.

*Are the E/I programs offered by broadcasters truly educational?*

Because broadcasters have sometimes made dubious claims about the educational value of their programs, the Annenberg Public Policy Center – in conjunction with an advisory panel of educational experts – devised a measure of the educational strength of broadcasters’ core E/I programs. This coding scheme has been used since the initiation of the APPC research on the implementation of the Three-Hour Rule (Jordan & Woodard, 1997; Jordan, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). The focus of the assessment is on four criteria:

- Lesson Clarity: Is the lesson clearly and explicitly laid out so that it can easily be comprehended by children in the target audience?
- Lesson Integration: Is the lesson a salient aspect of the program and integral to the program as a whole?
- Lesson Involvement: Considering the target audience for the program, does the program contain children or child-like characters of the target audience’s age?; Are

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<sup>19</sup> Chi square (4) = 16.493, p< .01

the majority of production techniques understandable?; and, Is the lesson “on-target”?

- Lesson Applicability: Is the target audience shown carefully conveyed, realistic situations and solutions that children can apply to their own lives and situations?

Evaluations of these items provided the “objective” portion of the scale (combined score ranges from 0 to 4).<sup>20</sup>

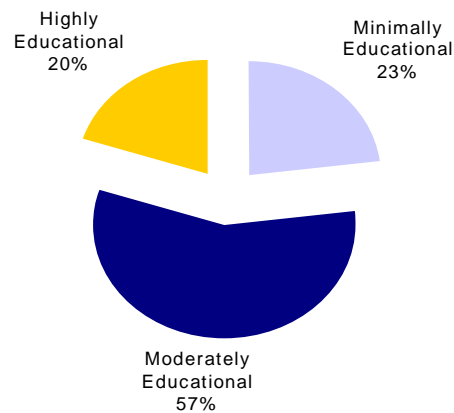
Coders also provided an overall judgement of the program’s “educational quality.” Programs were judged as either “poor” (does not appear to have education as a significant purpose and is a surprising choice for the E/I label), “acceptable” (contains educational content but has some problems), or “excellent” (engaging, challenging, and relevant to the target age group). (Subjective score ranged from 0 to 4.) Objective and subjective measures were highly correlated ( $r = .77$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The combined scores on the objective measure and subjective measures were given equal weight and summed to produce an overall numeric score for “educational strength.” Programs were then classified as “highly educational” (score of 6.66 to 8.0), “moderately educational” (score of 3.34 to 6.65) or “minimally educational” (score of 0 to 3.33).

The overall measure of educational strength for the 135 programs indicates that the majority of programs are moderately educational; 57 percent of the programs were judged to address the social/emotional or cognitive/intellectual needs of children in some significant way. Another 20 percent of the programs were judged to be highly educational. Coders felt that the episodes provided children with clear, carefully conveyed and relevant lessons. The remaining 23 percent of the episodes failed to meet the benchmarks for educational programming established by the APPC criteria.

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<sup>20</sup> Each question was scored as present (1) or absent (0) with the exception of lesson involvement, which was given a score of 0, .33, .66 or 1, depending on whether the three criteria were met.

**Figure 4: Educational Strength of E/I Programs Aired in Philadelphia**

The distribution of the educational value of programming is not markedly different from the episode analysis of previous years. Since the 1997/98 season, during which the programming requirements of the Three-Hour Rule went into effect, one fifth to one quarter of the programs have been judged to be minimally educational. This year sees an increase in the amount of moderately educational shows – from 46 percent in 1998 and 1999 to 57 percent in 2000 – and a decrease in highly educational episodes – from 28.6 percent and 33 percent in 1998 and 1999, respectively to just 20 percent in 2000. Some of the top rated educational programs from previous years have disappeared from the Philadelphia airwaves (e.g., *Nick News*) while others have slipped somewhat in our educational rating (e.g., *Saved by the Bell: The New Class*).

Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of the educational strength of the episodes evaluated for each program airing in Philadelphia as core E/I programming during the Fall of the 1999/2000 season. Table Four summarizes the best and worst performing programs according to the APPC evaluation of the educational strength of the commercial broadcasters' E/I programs in the 1999/2000 season.

**Table Four: The Best and Worst Performing E/I Programs of 2000****HIGHEST RATED PROGRAMS**

- *Bloopy's Buddies* (Syndicated)
- *Disney's Doug* (ABC and Syndicated)
- *Disney Presents Bill Nye the Science Guy* (Syndicated)
- *Popular Mechanics for Kids* (Syndicated)
- *Squigglevision* (ABC)

### LOWEST RATED PROGRAMS

- *Anatole* (CBS)
- *Inquirer High School Sports Show* (Syndicated)
- *More than a Game* (Syndicated)
- *NBA Inside Stuff* (NBC)
- *NFL Under the Helmet* (FOX)
- *Pressure 1* (Syndicated)
- *Pressure 2* (Syndicated)
- *Sherlock Holmes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (FOX)

Educational and informational programs that received the highest scores according to the APPC criteria are those that made learning integral to the program and encouraged children to see the relevance of the lesson to their own lives. In addition, these programs took into account the needs and interests of children at various ages and wove in educational content that was clear and age appropriate. All of the top rated programs have aired for two or more years and seem to have established a way to be both effective and entertaining. This list illustrates that highly educational programming need not be only traditionally educational (as *Squigglevision* is with its science focus) but can also convey effective messages that contribute to children's social and emotional development (as in *Disney's Doug*) or physical health and well-being (as in *Bloopy's Buddies*).

Eight programs in this year's lineup of E/I programs received mean scores (averaged across the three episodes) that indicate a failure to meet the APPC benchmarks for educational programming. More than half of the lowest rated programs are those that center on sports (e.g., *NFL's Under the Helmet* or *NBA Inside Stuff*). Though adolescents are interested in sports -- and there is great potential to use this interest to trigger more in-depth learning -- these programs generally fail to dedicate a significant proportion of the program to learning. One syndicated program -- *The Inquirer High School Sports Show* -- focused on the rankings, wins, and losses of local sports teams. Though the community focus is laudable, the educational content is brief and often trite. There is great opportunity in these programs to use sports scores and players' averages to convey lessons about statistics, probability or other mathematical concepts or to offer serious insight into the ways student athletes balance school and sport. Instead, when lessons are included they tend to be weak and obvious (e.g., work hard to make your dreams come true) rather than instructive (e.g., how do star athletes manage their time and attention in order to succeed in school as well?).

Other minimally educational programs are ones that have no clear, integrated lesson. *Sherlock Holmes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* was implicitly about using clues to solve a problem. However, the deductive reasoning was poorly presented and so unclear that adult coders had trouble deciphering the clues and understanding how they were supposed to fit together. Similarly, *Anatole* – based on a series of books about French mice – had storylines that were confusing and unlikely to provide a basis for learning. Finally, *Pressure 1* and *Pressure 2* are programs that have teen contestants answer a variety of questions in order to move ahead in a game. The questions, however, tended to be simplistic (How do you spell commitment?) and the theme was troubling (contestants must correctly guess what the audience will say in certain ethical situations in order to win. The dilemmas are rarely explored and inappropriate audience reactions are rarely corrected).

Most of the minimally educational programs target the teen audience. In fact, programs targeting teens were significantly more likely to be minimally educational while programs targeting elementary school children were more likely to be highly educational.<sup>21</sup>

There were no significant differences in the educational strength of programs coming from the major networks vs. the weblets and independents, nor were there significant differences in programs listing consultants and researchers in the credits.

The next section examines what parents and children are likely to encounter as they look across a week's worth of E/I programming on commercial broadcast stations. To do so, we consider the relative accessibility of program information and provide an assessment of the sample of programs weighted to reflect their relative dominance in the broadcasters' schedules.

### **PART THREE: A WEEK'S WORTH OF E/I PROGRAMS AIRING IN PHILADELPHIA**

*How easily can parents find educational programming for their children?*

Our exercise in creating a database of educational programs airing in the Philadelphia market was sometimes a frustrating one since the information about *what* shows air, *when* they air, and *who* they are designed for is not easily obtained in a timely way. The educational programs are not identified as such in TV Guide. In addition, the networks each use a different symbol to identify their educational offerings (ABC uses a lightbulb,

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<sup>21</sup> Chi square (4) = 12.731, p = .01

NBC uses a bald head with glasses, and CBS uses and E/I in circles). Appendix B illustrates the on-air symbols used by the major networks.

APPC's recent national survey of 1,235 parents and 416 of their children highlights parents' low awareness of the educational programming policies and the educational programs themselves. According to *Media in the Home 2000* (Woodard, 2000), less than half (45 percent) of all parents of 2 - 17 year olds know that there is information available on the screen indicating educational programming. In addition, when surveyed parents were provided with the names of the E/I programs their children regularly watched, parents could only accurately identify one third of the programs as being labeled educational. Instead, parents were likely to misidentify general audience programs as receiving such labels. For example, more than half of the surveyed parents whose children are regular viewers of *Oprah* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* mistakenly believed they were labeled as educational and informational for children (Woodard, 2000).

*How available are E/I programs throughout the week?*

Though it may be hard to recognize them, children's educational programs are airing and are available throughout the week. There are now 34 hours of core educational children's programming airing in the 1999/2000 season, and the majority of these programs meet the FCC's and APPC's criteria for educational programming. In fact, when one takes into account the average score of the three episodes and the frequency with which the programs air during a week, only 11 percent of the E/I programs broadcast during a typical week are likely to be devoid of educational content. Moderately educational and highly educational programs are more likely to air multiple times in a week, while minimally educational programs are generally confined to a single timeslot.

Children's programming on the major networks has usually been relegated to Saturday mornings, and this season's lineups are no different. The major networks only offer children's educational programs on Saturday, resulting in a simultaneous airing of the most visible network shows. Though the smaller networks and independents offer programming throughout the week, it is more likely to be at a time when children are getting ready for school. There are relatively few enriching programs that air in the popular after-school hours and no programs air during the times when children are most likely to be in the audience – primetime.



*Do children of all ages have adequate programming available?*

While there are now many hours of educational shows airing on commercial broadcast stations, parents of preschoolers and teenagers may find it difficult to find shows targeting their children. Our analysis of a week's worth of E/I offerings in Philadelphia indicates that there are only 4 hours of programs for preschoolers and 9 hours of programs for teens while there are a full 21 hours of programs for school age children. There is also a noticeable dearth of quality programming targeted to teens.

**SUMMARY**

The APPC evaluation of the implementation of the Three-Hour Rule across a three-year period indicates that broadcasters have been fairly consistent in their response to the regulations. Local broadcast stations have chosen to air a minimum of three hours a week of educational programming and, as a result, will be granted expedited review of their license renewal applications. The majority of stations air 3 to 3 1/2 hours of programs and the average number of hours available has remained relatively consistent over the years – between 3 and 4 hours a week of E/I programming.

Many of the programs airing as educational are returning season after season. WB, ABC and NBC have offered its audiences consistent lineups for the last several years, though CBS and FOX affiliates have experienced somewhat more turnover. The independent and Home Shopping stations have also offered a consistent menu of established E/I programs.

Though the programming is now more consistent, it is not necessarily easy to find. As early as 1997 the networks began labeling their educational programs with idiosyncratic symbols (Jordan & Woodard, 1997; Jordan, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Research indicates the labels remain unrecognized by parents (Schmitt, 2000). Broadcasters fear that an educational label will turn off children (that is, if they think it's good for them they won't watch). Schmitt's (2000) research with children, however, indicates that 8 - 14 year olds are much less concerned about a label and much more concerned about the title and the content. Woodard (2000) has also found that most parents of 2 - 17 year olds (92 percent) think an educational label would make no difference or would make children more likely to watch.

APPC's evaluation of this season's E/I programming on 10 Philadelphia-area commercial broadcast stations indicates that a total of 41 different program titles provide 34 hours a week of educational programs. The vast majority of programs airing on affiliates of the larger networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, and WB) are provided by the networks and typically center on prosocial themes, while the majority of programs on smaller networks and independents come from syndication and are traditionally academic. This trend has been consistent since the first season under the Three-Hour Rule.

As in years past, most programs (57 percent) target elementary school age children (5 - 11 year olds). Approximately one-third are directed at teens (12 - 16 year olds) while only a small minority (7 percent) are designed for preschoolers (0 - 4 year olds). These age trends are consistent with previous years, and perhaps understandable given the preponderance of preschool programs on PBS and cable, and teenagers' predilection for adult programming.

Since children's programming is widely viewed as less lucrative than adult programming (Jordan, 1996; 1999), it is clustered in dayparts that see few adults -- Saturday morning (33 percent) and weekday mornings (35 percent). Surprisingly, although there are many children in the audience in the after-school hours, only 7 percent of the broadcasters' offerings were available then. Additionally, no E/I programming was slated for primetime.

E/I programming in the 1999/2000 season was aired on a consistent basis (that is, it was rarely preempted), with a few notable exceptions. An assessment of quarterly FCC filings from the fall of 1999 and the winter of 2000 reveals NBC preempted several of its Saturday morning programs numerous times in each quarter. CBS, moreover, preempted its noon and 12:30 offerings far more than it aired them in their regular spots during the first half of the 1999/2000 season.

The educational lessons provided by the programs include social emotional themes (45 percent) and traditionally academic themes (41 percent). Major network affiliates were significantly more likely to offer prosocial programming while weblets and independents were more likely to focus on school-related topics. These programs, as in previous years, were mostly free of violence (only 16 percent were judged to contain numerous violent scenes).

Using APPC's criteria for evaluating the educational strength of the commercial broadcasters' offerings (that is, the program contains clear, well-integrated, involving and

relevant lessons for the target audience), we find that three quarters (77 percent) of the E/I programs meet the letter (and sometimes the spirit) of the FCC guidelines. Unfortunately, nearly one quarter of the episodes in the sample were judged to be “minimally educational.” These programs failed to meet the APPC criteria for educational strength and were judged to be unlikely to provide substantive lessons for the audience. Though highly educational programs presented a variety of lessons and targeted all audiences, minimally educational programs were most often sports programs and game shows and generally targeted the preteen/teen audience.

As in previous years, the majority of episodes evaluated (57 percent) were judged to be “moderately educational.” These programs contain lessons that are geared to a specific target audience and have education as a significant purpose. Though they do meet the FCC and APPC criteria for core educational programming, they also have problems that may hinder children’s learning. In some cases, the lesson may not be presented with depth or clarity. In others, the resolution of the problem may lack relevance for the child (for example, the character uses magic or shortcuts to get out of a difficult situation).

## CONCLUSIONS

For three years, the FCC has mandated that broadcasters wishing expedited review of their license renewal applications air a minimum of three hours a week of educational programming for children ages 16 and under. For three years, the local broadcast stations have responded by airing three hours’ worth of network-provided and syndicated programming between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Our yearly analyses reveal that the majority of these programs meet the letter (and sometimes even the spirit) of the FCC’s mandate. The programs tend to have clear, age-appropriate lessons and little, if any, violence. Though there is clearly room for improvement --most programs in this year’s sample were judged to be “moderately educational,” -- broadcasters have made a solid effort to increase the quality and availability of educational programming since the introduction of the mandate.

As the Three-Hour Rule moves into its fourth year, three key areas of concern remain to be addressed in the implementation of the policy.

**First, each year one fifth to one quarter of the programs labeled E/I have little educational value.** Sometimes these programs are new and perhaps simply in need of development. Other times we have seen the same minimally educational program

returning year after year. Though the broadcasters' dubious claims about their educational programming under the Children's Television Act of 1990 appear to have lessened, the clearer guidelines of the Three-Hour Rule have not eliminated the need for external evaluation. Broadcasters and E/I program producers need feedback from many sources about their programs in order to make them maximally effective as educational resources. Policy researchers such as those at APPC provide one voice. Advocacy groups and parental grassroots organizations can offer other useful perspectives.

**Second, children (and parents) need to have a sense that the programs they want to watch will consistently be there.** The frequent preemption of educational shows on the weekend (evidenced by a visible minority of stations) illustrates a lack of sustained commitment to addressing the needs and interests of the child audience. It is worrisome when E/I programs are knocked out of the Saturday lineups. This is often the only time set aside on these networks for children's programs, a fact that reveals a minimal interest in the child audience and the programming that is supposed to be a part of their public interest obligation. It may therefore be important for the FCC to put clearer guidelines into place to limit the flexibility stations now have in their educational program scheduling.

**Third, parents remain unaware of the policy and the programming that has resulted from the implementation of the Three-Hour Rule.** A recent national survey of families (Woodard, 2000) and series of focus group discussions with parents and children (Schmitt, 2000) reveal that parents have little understanding that this policy exists and generally have no awareness of the programming that is designed to address children's educational needs. Both the representative survey and the in-depth focus group discussions indicate that parents do not view the broadcasters' E/I programs as educational in the conventional sense. Moreover, when parents suggest programs for their children to watch, they do not recommend the commercial broadcasters' E/I programs but rather general audience shows (such as *Seventh Heaven*), PBS programming (such as *Arthur*) and/or specific channels (such as PBS and the Discovery Channel).

The programs that are offered by the commercial broadcast stations to satisfy the mandates of the Three-Hour Rule offer some bright lights in children's television programming. Although the lights are neither as brilliant nor as diverse as they could be, the annual APPC analyses reveal that most broadcasters have made a significant effort to improve the quantity and availability of educational programming for children. What's more, these programs tend to be devoid of content that is generally seen as problematic

for children, namely violence. The hope remains that producers and broadcasters will strive to develop programs that address the many needs of the developing child (academic as well as social) and that they will put the best interests of the child audience at the forefront of their industry practices.

**APPENDIX A: APPC EVALUATION OF E/I PROGRAMS**

E/I Programs (List Alphabetically)	Network or Station	APPC Evaluation (3 episodes per program)	Violence in episode
Anatole	CBS	Minimal	No
Anatole	CBS	Moderate	No
Anatole	CBS	Minimal	No
Archie's Weird Mysteries	PAX	Moderate	No
Archie's Weird Mysteries	PAX	Moderate	Yes
Archie's Weird Mysteries	PAX	High	No
Awesome Adventures	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Awesome Adventures	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Awesome Adventures	Syndicated	High	No
Bill Nye The Science Guy	Syndicated	High	No
Bill Nye The Science Guy	Syndicated	High	No
Bill Nye The Science Guy	Syndicated	High	No
Blaster's Universe	CBS	Moderate	No
Blaster's Universe	CBS	Moderate	Yes
Blaster's Universe	CBS	Moderate	Yes
Bloopy's Buddies	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Bloopy's Buddies	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Bloopy's Buddies	Syndicated	High	No
Carmen Sandiego	PAX	Moderate	Yes
Carmen Sandiego	PAX	Moderate	Yes
Carmen Sandiego	PAX	Moderate	Yes
City Guys	NBC	High	No
City Guys	NBC	Moderate	No
City Guys	NBC	Moderate	No
Critter Gitters	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Critter Gitters	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Critter Gitters	Syndicated	High	No
Detention	WB	Moderate	Yes
Detention	WB	Moderate	No
Detention	WB	Minimal	Yes
Disney's Doug	ABC/UPN	High	No
Disney's Doug	ABC/UPN	High	No
Disney's Doug	ABC/UPN	Moderate	No
Field Trip	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Field Trip	Syndicated	High	No
Field Trip	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Flying Rhinos Jr. High	CBS	Moderate	Yes
Flying Rhinos Jr. High	CBS	Minimal	Yes
Flying Rhinos Jr. High	CBS	High	No
Hang Time	NBC	High	Yes
Hang Time	NBC	Moderate	No
Hang Time	NBC	Moderate	No
Histeria!	WB	Moderate	Yes
Histeria!	WB	Moderate	No
Histeria!	WB	Moderate	Yes
Inquirer High School Sports Show	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Inquirer High School Sports Show	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Inquirer High School Sports Show	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Jack Houston's Imagineland	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Jack Houston's Imagineland	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Jack Houston's Imagineland	Syndicated	Moderate	No

E/I Programs (continued)	Network or Station	APPC Evaluation (3 episodes per program)	Violence in episode
More Than A Game	Syndicated	Minimal	No
More Than A Game	Syndicated	Minimal	No
More Than A Game	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Musical Encounter	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Musical Encounter	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Musical Encounter	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Mythic Warriors II	CBS	Moderate	Yes
Mythic Warriors II	CBS	Moderate	Yes
Mythic Warriors II	CBS	Moderate	Yes
NBA Inside Stuff	NBC	Moderate	No
NBA Inside Stuff	NBC	Minimal	No
NBA Inside Stuff	NBC	Minimal	No
New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh	ABC	Moderate	No
New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh	ABC	Minimal	No
New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh	ABC	Moderate	No
New Tales from the Cryptkeeper	CBS	Moderate	Yes
New Tales from the Cryptkeeper	CBS	Moderate	Yes
New Tales from the Cryptkeeper	CBS	High	No
New Zoo Review	Syndicated	Moderate	No
New Zoo Review	Syndicated	Moderate	No
New Zoo Review	Syndicated	Minimal	No
One World	NBC	Moderate	No
One World	NBC	Moderate	No
One World	NBC	High	No
Pepper Ann	ABC	Moderate	No
Pepper Ann	ABC	Moderate	No
Pepper Ann	ABC	Moderate	No
Popular Mechanics	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Popular Mechanics	Syndicated	High	No
Popular Mechanics	Syndicated	High	No
Pressure 1	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Pressure 1	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Pressure 1	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Pressure 2	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Pressure 2	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Pressure 2	Syndicated	Minimal	No
Recess	ABC	Moderate	No
Recess	ABC	Moderate	No
Recess	ABC	Moderate	No
Rescue Heroes	CBS	Moderate	No
Rescue Heroes	CBS	Moderate	No
Rescue Heroes	CBS	Moderate	No
Sabrina (Animated)	ABC	Moderate	No
Sabrina (Animated)	ABC	Moderate	No
Sabrina (Animated)	ABC	Moderate	Yes
Saved by the Bell: The New Class	NBC	Moderate	No
Saved by the Bell: The New Class	NBC	Moderate	No
Saved by the Bell: The New Class	NBC	High	No
Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century	FOX	Minimal	Yes
Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century	FOX	Minimal	Yes
Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century	FOX	Minimal	Yes
Squigglevision	ABC	High	No
Squigglevision	ABC	High	No
Squigglevision	ABC	High	No
Under the Helmet	FOX	Minimal	No
Under the Helmet	FOX	Minimal	No
Under the Helmet	FOX	Minimal	No

Is the Three-Hour Rule Living up to Its Potential?

<b>E/I Programs (continued)</b>	<b>Network or Station</b>	<b>APPC Evaluation (3 episodes per program)</b>	<b>Violence in episode</b>
Vegetable Soup	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Vegetable Soup	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Vegetable Soup	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Wild About Animals	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Wild About Animals	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Wild About Animals	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Young America Outdoors	Syndicated	Moderate	No
Young America Outdoors	Syndicated	High	No
Young America Outdoors	Syndicated	Minimal	No



**Appendix B: Commercial Broadcasters' On-Air Symbols**



**ABC's *One Saturday Morning***  
Voiceover: Illuminating Television

**NBC's *Hang Time***



**CBS's *Mythic Warriors***

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