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CONTACT: Lorie Slass  
202-879-6701

## **Despite Significant Changes to Media Home Environment, Parents Still Most Concerned about Kids' TV Watching**

### **V-Chip Ratings and Three-Hour Rule, Not Doing Job In Helping Parents Guide Children's Viewing Habits**

(Washington, DC) Family Internet subscriptions are outpacing newspaper subscriptions, and almost half of all families with children ages 2-17 have a television, a VCR, a computer, and a video game player in the home. Still parents are more concerned about children's television use than any other medium, according to a series of studies released today by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. Despite this concern, Annenberg researchers found that parents are not using the tools available to them to find educational television for children or to limit content they deem inappropriate.

The three new studies, *Media in the Home 2000*, *Is the Three-Hour Rule Living Up to Its Potential?* and *Public Policy, Family Rules and Children's Media Use in the Home*, examine how families use media and explore the implications of two major public policy initiatives established to help parents better supervise their children's television viewing: the Three-Hour Rule and the V-Chip ratings.

"The V-Chip ratings and the Three-Hour Rule are not living up to their potential. Most TV programs now have ratings and many families have blocking technology. There is also more educational programming out there for families. But parents are not using these tools to guide their children's television use," said Amy Jordan, Ph.D., Senior Researcher, the Annenberg Public Policy Center. "Year after year, parents report being concerned about their children's television viewing habits, yet they don't feel they can make reasoned, educated choices about what their children should watch on TV."

Although the V-Chip is in its infancy, two in five parents have it or some other content-blocking device on their television and half of those with the devices actually use them. However, Annenberg researchers found that awareness of the Parental Rating Guidelines (age and content related labels) established through the V-Chip legislation has dropped twenty percent, from 70 percent in 1997 to 50 percent in 2000. In addition, nine out of ten parents could not accurately identify the age ratings for a sample of programs their children watched.

The Three-Hour Rule requires broadcasters seeking expedited license renewals to provide three hours a week of educational and informative (E/I) television for children. These programs must be labeled as such on the air and specifically meet the educational needs of the child audience. While the networks are doing an adequate job of living up to their responsibility to provide the programming, parents still don't know which programs carry educational labels. On average, parents were able to accurately identify the E/I designation for one in three programs their children watched. (See Appendix 1 for more findings on E/I programming.)

Part of the reason parents are doing so poorly in identifying the educational fare is that the networks are doing a scatter-shot job of highlighting and publicizing their E/I programs. Symbols used to identify their educational offerings vary from network to network and they are generally unclear. The majority of mothers in the *Public Policy, Family Rules and Children's Media Use* focus groups report never having seen the E/I labels. Parents also have no obvious place to look for the programs, *TV Guide* has stopped carrying the E/I designations in their program descriptions, most newspapers don't use the labels and networks do little to advertise the existence of educational programming.

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The majority of parents (85 percent) are concerned about the content of television or the time their children spend watching TV. But, according to the Annenberg researchers, because parents aren't getting information about how they can guide their kids' TV habits, they are often unaware of and misinformed about the educational fare available:

- The majority of parents (70 percent) incorrectly identified *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?* as labeled educational for children.
- While 91 percent of parents report watching television with their children as a way to mediate what their kids watch, many mothers reported watching sports and game shows, not programming labeled as E/I. Families were more likely to watch *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?* and *7<sup>th</sup> Heaven* than programming labeled E/I.
- 43 percent of families could not name one program they encourage their children to watch.
- Although parents are concerned about their children's TV viewing, over half of the children surveyed (57 percent) had a television in their bedroom.

"We now have more families with online subscriptions than newspaper subscriptions. If we have these difficulties helping parents guide their children's television use, imagine the problems we will have with new media technologies that are entering the home," added Emory Woodard, Ph.D., researcher for the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

For the first time in the five years that the Policy Center has been tracking media in the home, online subscriptions have surpassed newspaper subscriptions by 10 percent. The number of families with Internet access has more than tripled, going from 15% in 1996 to 52% in 2000. Across all media, use among children is growing (see Appendix 2 for more findings about media in the home).

The Annenberg researchers found that despite the fact that children are likely to spend 4.5 hours per day in front of some form of video screen – television, computer or video game – parents are more concerned about media content than they are about the time children spend using media.

"We know that parents are using the movie ratings system to guide their children's movie watching and video renting," added Kelly Schmitt, Ph.D., researcher for the Annenberg Public Policy Center. "But the television community has not put forth the same effort to educate parents about the TV ratings and educational programming that the movie industry has for its ratings system."

Eighty percent of parents surveyed reported using the moving ratings to determine the movies their children see (compared to 39 percent who say they use TV ratings). Mothers in the focus groups know what the movie ratings are and what they mean, but the same could not be said of their understanding of the TV ratings.

- *Media in the Home* is based on telephone interviews conducted with 1,235 parents of children between the ages of two and 17 and 416 children between the ages of eight and sixteen.
- *Is the Three-Hour Rule Living Up to Its Potential?* is based on an analysis of the core educational programs on ten commercial broadcast stations in the Philadelphia area during the 1999/2000 season.
- *Public Policy, Family Rules and Children's Media Use in the Home* is based on twenty-four focus group discussions with 87 children and 62 mothers of children in grades three, six, and nine.

All three studies are available on the Annenberg Public Policy Center website, [appcpenn.org](http://appcpenn.org).

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*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 examine the role of communications in public policy issues at the local, state and federal levels. The Center has four ongoing research foci: Information and Society; Media and the Developing Mind; Media and the Dialogue of Democracy; Health Communications. The Annenberg Public Policy Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas.*

## Appendix 1 – E/I Programming on Broadcast Television

- Networks are minimally meeting their responsibility to air three hours' worth of educational programming, offering, on average, 3.4 hours of "core educational programming" during a typical week. This figure has not changed significantly since the Three-Hour Rule went into effect in 1997.
- Only one in five of the E/I programs were highly educational, a decline from a little over one in three last year. Over half of the programs (57 percent) were rated moderately educational and almost one in four (23%) were rated minimally educational.
- Many shows that have been rated minimally educational have returned from previous years.
- Many Saturday morning E/I programs were pre-empted for sports events, taking advantage of the FCC's flexibility in allowing preemption of E/I programming.
- While mothers included in the focus groups believed educational programming would be of more benefit to younger children than teens, preschoolers are the most neglected audience for E/I programs (only 7 percent of the programming is targeted to this group). E/I programs instead focus on elementary school age children (57 percent) and teens (36 percent).
- Among the programs rated highest for educational content: *Bloopy's Buddies* (syndicated), *Disney's Doug* (ABC and Syndicated), *Disney Presents Bill Nye the Science Guy* (Syndicated), *Popular Mechanics for Kids* (Syndicated), and *Squigglevision* (ABC).
- Among the programs rated lowest for educational content: *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 21st Century* (FOX).

## Appendix 2 – Media in the Home

- For families with children 2-17 years old: 97 percent have a VCR in the home; 70 percent have a computer; 68 percent have video game equipment; 52 percent have online access; and 42 percent have a newspaper subscription.
- In the bedrooms of children between 8 and 16 years old: 57 percent have a television set; 39 percent have video game equipment; 36 percent have basic cable service; 32 percent have a telephone; 30 percent have a VCR; 20 percent have a computer; and 11 percent have access to the Internet.
- Low-income families (income of less than \$30,000 per year) are much less likely to have computers, Internet access or newspaper subscriptions compared to middle (\$30,000 - \$75,000 per year) and high income (over \$75,000) families. Interestingly, they are almost equally likely to have a video game system. Low-income families are more likely to have children with television sets in their bedroom.
- Of all media surveyed, children spend the most time with the television, over two hours per day (147 minutes). They spend the least time per day on the Internet (14 minutes per day).
- The more time children spend watching TV, the more time they spend using other media. Computer users, however, spend about 15 minutes less watching television than non-computer users.
- Family income is an indicator of media use – children from high-income families spend the least amount of time with media and children in lower income families spend the most amount of time with media.
- After television, preschoolers spend the most time watching videos, elementary school children spend the most time reading books and adolescents spend the most time on the computer and on the phone.
- While most parents (88%) report regularly supervising their children's use of television, only about half report regularly supervising their children's use of the Internet or video games (50% and 48%, respectively). Mothers in the focus groups report feeling less comfortable with Internet technology than with television and feel less able to provide adequate supervision of their children's Internet use.