



JOAN GANZ COONEY CENTER REPORT IDENTIFIES VIDEO GAMES AS A POTENTIAL ALLY IN CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Report Recommends New Tech Strategy to Address Health and Educational Needs

New York and Washington, June 23, 2009 – As the President and Congress seek to reform the health care system and address the glaring gaps in our nation's educational performance, [the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop](#) released a report today that specifies how increased national investment in research-based digital games can play a cost-effective and transformative role. The report [Game Changer: Investing in Digital Play to Advance Children's Learning and Health](#) provides recommendations for the media industry, government, philanthropy and academia to harness the appeal of digital games to improve children's health and learning. Supported by the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's](#) Pioneer Portfolio, it was unveiled today at the [Woodrow Wilson Center](#) in Washington, D.C.

Children as young as four are immersed in a new gaming culture, but many parents, educators and health professionals, concerned over violence, sexual content and reports of addiction, do not consider games to be a positive force in children's lives. Based on a synthesis of market and scientific research and interviews with industry and academic leaders, the report addresses this critique. It offers a new framework to use games to help children learn healthy behaviors, traditional skills like reading and math, and 21st century strengths such as critical thinking, global learning and programming design.

The report focuses on the vital connections that games and digital media can make in promoting children's potential. Among the promising games reviewed are *Sesame Street's* [Color Me Hungry](#), featuring the Muppet Cookie Monster and *Dance Dance Revolution*, a mass-market game used in hundreds of schools nationwide. These efforts are helping young children learn about nutrition, healthy habits and exercise. The report highlights the role that games have played in other sectors, such as in transforming military training regimens, and how academic centers like [MIT's Education Arcade](#) and non-profit labs like the [Institute of Play](#) are pioneering R&D for educational video games.

The Center outlines recommendations to inspire action across critical sectors including:

Utilize Digital Technologies Through Expanded R&D – The report calls for national leadership to coordinate new research investments to build knowledge and game development and training. It urges private investors, publishers and health insurers to form partnerships to encourage entrepreneurship in digital game technologies.

Support Teaching and Health Delivery for the Digital Age - Investments in human infrastructure are needed to make technology useful for children's learning. The report calls for a Digital Teachers Corps to help educators integrate curriculum-based games into school and afterschool settings. It also calls for new incentives for community health

providers and insurers to deploy potentially cost-saving games to prevent obesity and to promote children's healthy habits for life.

Modernize Public Media and Engage the Public – To update the Department of Education's Ready to Learn program, which reaches low-income 2-9 year-old children with television programming, the report recommends a new emphasis on digital media such as video games and mobile technologies. It calls for investment to lay the fiber cable needed to connect public media developers and education communities and proposes public engagement campaigns on the importance of 21st century skills.

“Children who are most disengaged in school are, not coincidentally, those at highest risk for poor health outcomes. The reality, like it or not, is that today's kids spend just as much time with digital media as they do in school,” said Michael Levine, executive director of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center. “The challenge for our nation is to find a modern formula for learning: to appeal to children's natural engagement with games while teaching the skills and behaviors they will need to be healthy and to compete in a global age.”

“The Pioneer Portfolio invests in ideas that we believe have the ability to be game changers. The growing field of games for health demonstrates how digital interactive games can transform how children and adults learn skills and change behaviors, ultimately to achieve better health outcomes,” said Paul Tarini, Pioneer Portfolio director and senior program officer for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “This new study points to a shortage of research efforts to scale up the most successful applications of health e-games and curriculum-based games. It charts an important path forward for policymakers and philanthropy.”

The report indexes over 30 examples of learning and health games and research projects. It includes a list of federally funded game R&D projects in which the Department of Defense, National Institutes of Health and the Department of Education have invested in.

Game Changer: Investing in Digital Play to Advance Children's Learning and Health, was co-authored by the Cooney Center's [Ann My Thai](#), [David Lowenstein](#) and [Dixie Ching](#), as well as, [David Rejeski](#) of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The report is available for download at www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/publications.

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop (www.joanganzcooneycenter.org) is an independent, non-profit research center that is fostering innovation in children's learning through digital media. The Center conducts and supports research, creates educational models and interactive media properties and builds cross-sector partnerships. The Center is named for Sesame Workshop's founder, who revolutionized television with the creation of *Sesame Street*. Core funding for the Center is provided by the generous support of Peter G. Peterson, Genius Products, Mattel, Inc. and Sesame Workshop.

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