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PRESS RELEASE

NEW POLL: PARENTS CONFLICTED ABOUT ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN KIDS' LIVES

**Vast Majority of Parents Say Digital Media Skills
Are as Important as Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic –
But Also Express Skepticism About Educational Potential of Digital Media**

**Results of the New Poll from Common Sense Media and Joan Ganz Cooney Center
to Be Unveiled at First Joan Ganz Cooney Center Symposium in New York on May 9**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA and **NEW YORK**, May 8, 2008 – In a new, nationally representative poll from Common Sense Media and the Joan Ganz Cooney Center (JGCC), American parents agreed by a wide margin that digital media skills are important to kids' success in the 21st century, but they also expressed skepticism about whether digital media could contribute to the development of skills like communicating, working with others, and establishing civic responsibility.

The full results of the poll, the first of its kind, will be unveiled at the first-ever Joan Ganz Cooney Center Symposium in New York City on May 9. The symposium, sponsored by Electronic Arts, McGraw-Hill Education, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and PBS, will convene thought leaders from the fields of research, communications, and policy to address how best to use digital media to improve children's learning and development.

Three out of four parents in the survey (75 percent) agreed that knowing how to use digital media is as beneficial for kids as traditional skills like reading and math, and 83 percent of parents said that digital media gives their children the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century.

But parents expressed skepticism about the value of many digital media platforms, particularly when it came to whether digital media could teach kids how to communicate and collaborate, skills that are essential in a 21st-century workforce. For example:

- 67 percent of parents said they did not think the Web helped teach their kids how to communicate.
- 87 percent of parents said they did not believe the Web helped their kids learn how to work with others.
- Three out of four parents do not believe the Web can teach kids to be responsible in their communities.

"When it comes to digital media in kids' lives, it's a confusing time to be a parent," said Jim Steyer, CEO and founder of Common Sense Media. "Clearly, parents seem to understand that the world has fundamentally changed and that kids need digital media to be successful in the 21st century. But the results also suggest that parents have reservations about how their kids engage with each other using digital media. That's why it's important that we help parents understand both the potential and the risks of digital media, so we can make sure kids get the best of this new world."

Michael Levine, executive director of the JGCC, said the poll represented a significant step toward understanding how digital media can best be used to improve kids' lives.

"The media landscape has been fundamentally transformed in the past decade," Levine said. "Our kids are adapting to change at breakneck speed. Adults who nurture children are trying to catch up to ensure that the new,

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ubiquitous digital diet is balanced and educational. The scarcity of quality research on how these new tools can be used best is an urgent national priority, especially in meeting the needs of children who are traditionally underserved. Everyone must be prepared to compete and cooperate in our global economy today, so skills like learning to read and think critically, solving problems, and collaborating with children from other cultures are now more critical than ever. Policy makers, researchers, industry leaders, schools, and parents all must better understand and invest in the potential of digital media.”

The poll included a nationally representative sample of 695 parents, as well as an illustrative sample of 245 teachers. The results from the teachers surveyed indicate that, generally speaking, educators have more favorable views about the educational potential of digital media than parents do. A majority of teachers (59 percent) reported that parents underestimate the educational value of digital media.

"When you consider the context in which parents and teachers typically experience kids' media use, these results seem to make sense," Steyer said. "Teachers are more likely to see kids using technology in formal, or at least semi-formal, educational settings, while parents tend to see kids using media in a more casual way."

Even though teachers seemed to see more educational potential in digital media than parents, they did agree that some "educational" digital media products are overselling themselves: 63 percent of parents and 61 percent of teachers said they were skeptical about the educational claims that some digital media products make.

Teachers in the poll also indicated that they don't see educational potential in all digital media platforms. Only 15 percent of teachers said that video games had a lot of educational potential, and only 14 percent of teachers said MP3 players had a lot of educational potential. Additionally, only three percent of teachers felt that cell phones can help kids learn important skills.

"By and large, American educators don't utilize mobile technology as a creative way to teach," said Levine. "This is in stark contrast to other cultures. While the Japanese deliver English lessons to students using the Nintendo DS, American teachers don't currently see a place in the classroom for mobile innovations."

Based on the results of the poll, Common Sense Media and the JGCC recommend that:

- Policy makers support a nationally coordinated effort to fund research on the learning potential of digital media as well as its integration into classrooms via professional development for teachers and education for parents. This research should focus on the added value of digital media to teach both traditional and 21st-century skills in formal and extended learning settings, as well as the critical role that adults can play in scaffolding learning for students who are at academic and social risk.
- Additionally, policy makers in both the public and private sectors need to create evidentiary standards to help consumers make sense of products marketed as "educational."
- A national public engagement effort should be mounted to help parents understand that the range of 21st-century skills goes far beyond the "3 Rs" they learned. Parents should be provided with tools and information to help facilitate their comfort, acceptance, and usage of digital media to promote skills that will be essential for their children's success today.

Common Sense Media and the JGCC also announced plans to release this state-of-the-state report on an annual basis to help drive further research in this category. The poll was funded by a generous grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Additional support was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS.

More detailed recommendations will be offered at the symposium on May 9.

Common Sense Media is the nation's leading nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving the media lives of children and families. Today, millions of parents, educators, and young people will turn to the Common Sense Media Guide for the trustworthy information, easy-to-use tools, and practical guidance they need to raise a generation of media-savvy kids and families. To become a member, please visit us at www.common sense media.org.

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center is an independent, not for profit research and development organization that examines the role of new technologies in learning and literacy development both in and out of school. The center conducts and supports research, creates educational models and interactive media properties, and builds partnerships to scale-up best practices. The center is named for Sesame Workshop's visionary 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.