

# CPB-PBS Ready To Learn Year 4 Annual Performance Report

## Reporting Period: October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In project year 4 (FY 2024), the CPB-PBS Ready to Learn Initiative continued to pursue its four core activities to support the school readiness and early school success of all children, especially those in low-income households: (1) producing and distributing research-based children’s media, (2) supporting parents and educators in using the media effectively for learning, (3) raising awareness of the resources, and (4) using research and evaluation to continuously enhance media quality and demonstrate impact. This executive summary presents a synthesized view of FY 2024 results for the first three strategies, with research and evaluation woven in throughout.

#### **Producing and Distributing High-Quality Children’s Media**

The CPB-PBS Ready To Learn Initiative continued to realize exceptional economic value in FY 2024 with strong overall reach: **1.8 billion video streams, 27.6 million digital game plays, and 10.2 million television viewers**. This means that these resources are offered to all American children at a cost of only pennies per child.

**New multi-platform media.** CPB and PBS advanced our goals in FY 2024 for three multiplatform series, one short form video series, four podcast series, and seven digital games. The February 2024 premiere of *Lyla in the Loop* set a new-series record: 146 million video streams across PBS KIDS digital platforms. *Work It Out Wombats!* remained very popular as we released final Season 1 episodes. *Lyla* and *Wombats* center on world-of-work knowledge and skills, including critical thinking, computational thinking, and collaboration for 4-8-year-olds and 3-5-year-olds, respectively. Producers completed more than half the scripts (44 of 80) for forthcoming literacy series *Phoebe & Jay*, along with the first rough cuts. Short-form series *Tiny Time Travel*, focused on social language skills, has accrued 50 million video streams since its March 2024 launch. We realized exciting growth in children’s podcasts in FY 2024, with Season 2 of the career-awareness series “Jamming on the Job,” first seasons of a *Wombats* podcast and “The Plate Show” (in which children learn about culture and collaboration), and production of a *Lyla* podcast series. Lastly, we released 9 digital games: four *Lyla* games in English and Spanish, Spanish versions of three already-released *Wombats* games, and two *Jelly, Ben & Pogo* games.

**Digital infrastructure improvements.** As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we substantially enhanced the digital infrastructure that ensures our strong reach. We upgraded the PBS KIDS content management system and improved website monitoring capabilities, including migrating to the new version of Google Analytics. In addition, we equipped new RTL games with A/B testing capabilities and completed A/B tests involving more than 1.5 million users, enhancing learning potential by identifying and resolving barriers to extended play. We saw impressive uptake with a new accessibility panel, launched in select digital games to support children with learning differences: more than three-quarters of users offered the accessibility panel (76%) opened it; of those, nearly three-quarters (73%) used it to change at least one setting.

**Formative and context studies.** To ensure the media can effectively support learning, CPB, PBS, and producers continued to collaborate with expert advisors. We completed 26 formative studies to test that learning goals in videos and games are clear and memorable, and to test accessibility approaches. Building on the success of PBS KIDS’s first video collection with American Sign Language interpretation, which included ten *Wombats* episodes, we launched a study to explore how to better

indicate which character is speaking (for example, by outlining a speaking character or by adding a visual cue to the interpreter).

**Efficacy studies of learning from RTL media.** RTL research partners EDC and SRI International completed a randomized controlled trial involving 458 children ages 4-5 from low-income households to investigate whether and how children learn from using *Wombats* resources. The study found that children who used the resources for about an hour a week for 8 weeks demonstrated significantly greater sequencing skills than children who used other educational media. Sequencing is a foundational skill in computational thinking. Parents in the study reported their children incorporated *Wombats* concepts into their conversations and play. In addition, capitalizing on the wealth of anonymized user data generated in a large-scale study, RTL research partner CRESST planned a cost-effective secondary analysis of RCT data to examine the relationship between *Wombats* game play (reflected in back-end data from the RCT) and assessment outcomes in the RCT. This study will aim to validate game-based indicators developed to help CPB and PBS draw inferences about users' learning directly from the digital games. We also began planning an efficacy study of *Lyla* resources.

### **Supporting parents and educators in using the media effectively for learning**

The CPB-PBS Initiative continued to support parents and educators both through the sustained local activities of 40 station-led community partnerships (Learning Neighborhoods) and through station collaborations with state-level entities (such as state education departments and early childhood agencies) in 20 states, together home to 65% of the US population.

**Robust partnerships serve thousands of parents and educators.** Forty-four public media stations leading Learning Neighborhoods and/or State Projects collaborated with 880 total partners to hold 2,161 family-focused events that served 73,401 children. They held 1,137 professional learning events that served 15,205 educators. Family & Community Learning Workshops (multi-session gatherings in which parents learn how to support their children's learning with media, hands-on activities, and conversation) were the most common type of family event. Participating stations used nationally developed resources in their events and developed 806 resources themselves based on local needs. Through state partnerships, stations are gaining state certification as professional learning providers in their states. These certifications enhance the value of RTL-developed offerings, since educators earn required credits for participating.

The Initiative's partnerships with Parents as Teachers and the National Association for the Education of Young Children continued to benefit stations, families, educators, and communities. CPB and PBS shared RTL resources at both organizations' annual conferences and both organizations continue to broker station connections with their state and local affiliates. For example, several stations now provide kits of learning resources for PAT home visitors to leave with every family they serve.

**Context studies and evaluation.** Insights from several context studies informed how we designed resources used in parent and educator engagement—from professional learning courses to at-home activities to social media campaigns—to meet their needs. Results from a study of 110 families' experiences with RTL podcasts have implications for how we produce, distribute, and promote podcasts. We studied how educators use social media to seek learning materials to improve where and how we distribute RTL materials. We selected and began collaborating with eight stations to explore parents' social media use to inform parent-focused strategies we will test and scale to stations. We also continued evaluating the Learning Neighborhood program to gauge impact and assess how to improve the model moving forward. Our results to date indicate that longer-running collaborations have higher indicators of strong partnerships, underscoring that sustainable collaboration takes time to establish and nurture.

## **Raising awareness and expanding use of RTL resources**

**Awareness-raising and digital engagement.** Strong metrics for new RTL media resulted from CPB and PBS’s strategic combination of content marketing on social media, public outreach, paid advertising, email outreach, station marketing support, and video promotion (both on digital channels and on-air), which led to significant gains in audience engagement and growth. In parallel with campaigns focused on new resources, we increasingly leverage digital engagement to extend the impacts of RTL resources beyond the families and educators we can reach in person, directly or through our extensive partner network. Therefore, we are pleased to report impressive growth in newsletter and social media engagement, including a 40% year-over-year gain in engagement on PBS KIDS social media.

**Improving and expanding station use of RTL resources.** CPB and PBS continued to help stations raise awareness, both locally and statewide, of how RTL resources support parents and families. RTL research partner EDC also began a series of research briefs to help stations communicate the evidence behind RTL resources for literacy and STEM learning. In addition, we continued to make available to all 350 public media stations resources developed and tested in our Initiative, and to train station staff to use them well at conferences and in webinars.

## **Looking ahead to FY 2025**

As CPB and PBS enter project year 5 (FY 2025), tasks remain on track and on budget. We look forward to releasing remaining *Lyla* content and new *Wombats* and *Lyla* podcast seasons, and to launching *Phoebe & Jay* and new digital *Lyla* and *Phoebe* digital games. We will also continue to expand access to RTL resources with new videos featuring American Sign Language interpretation. On the research front, we will submit journal articles and publish final reports for the *Wombats* RCT and family podcast study, and will launch the *Lyla* RCT, beginning with a pilot study. We will continue formative studies and learning analytics research, and publish findings from the secondary analysis of data from the *Wombats* RCT. Ongoing awareness-raising efforts will help scale use of the resources and study findings. Lastly, CPB and PBS anticipate requesting a no-cost extension to complete select work.