



Apps in After-School

Promising Practices for Bringing PBS KIDS Resources to Expanded Learning Programs

Local public media stations have a wealth of educational resources and are pioneering the use of **transmedia**—a storytelling approach that follows characters across multiple platforms—in television episodes, apps, and online games. Stations seeking to enhance learning opportunities for young children through transmedia resources can partner with expanded learning providers, settings where children are learning before school, after school, and during the summer and school breaks.

Introduction *Every Hour Counts is an outreach partner for the Ready To Learn initiative—supported by the United States Department of Education, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and Public Broadcasting System (PBS)—which develops hands-on and engaging educational content proven to build math and literacy skills in young children, especially those living in poverty. In an effort to identify promising practices in the integration of CPB-PBS Ready To Learn transmedia resources in expanded learning programs, we conducted interviews and reviewed progress reports with staff from a selection of Ready To Learn demonstration stations. This brief offers guidance to local public media stations looking to enrich learning experiences for young people in their communities by building new partnerships with expanded learning programs, offering professional development, and sharing technology.*

Connect Transmedia Resources to Classroom Learning

In the most successful initiatives, stations identified enthusiastic partners to collaborate with in an effort to bring academically-enriching transmedia into their programs. One promising practice is for stations to position themselves as problem-solvers who understand the needs of the expanded learning field. **KLRU** in Austin found that expanded learning providers face increasing pressure to align with the school day. Providers are looking for ways to connect their content to academic standards while continuing to provide the hands-on experiences that are core to expanded learning. Stations can help fill that need by offering fun, engaging learning tools that also offer proven academic benefits. For example, KLRU uses **PBS KIDS' Electric Company Summer Learning Program** in the after-school program at **SafePlace**, one of their partners which serves families affected by domestic violence. The curriculum helps students develop school-readiness skills like vocabulary, addition and subtraction, pattern recognition, and measurement through games, video clips, and group activities.

Go Above and Beyond to Respond to Partner Needs

Stations emphasized that listening and flexibility were both pivotal to a successful partnership. **Iowa Public Television (IPTV)** takes feedback from its partners seriously.

"Expanded learning programs are under pressure to become more academic ... we try to get the word out that we understand that pressure and we're here to provide you a pathway to solid educational content that's also a lot of fun."

Benjamin Kramer

Vice President of Education, KLRU-TV

When staff at a local elementary school mentioned that students loved the literacy "buddies" program, where older students work with younger students, IPTV created a similar program for math learning. In Tacoma, **KBTC** emphasizes to their community partners that they are open to adapting their resources to local needs and that no request is too small.



Tacoma students play PBS KIDS games at a KBTC summer camp.

KBTC built a science activity curriculum connected to PBS KIDS characters for their local Boys and Girls Club, after hearing from them that engaging, ongoing STEM activities were hard to find. Their partnership deepened when they were able to connect students from the Tacoma Housing Authority to a summer program at the Boys and Girls Club. By serving their partners as a resource expert and a connector, KBTC brought their Ready To Learn transmedia resources to a wider circle of Tacoma children.

activities. Stations have identified a major challenge in high staff turnover at expanded learning programs, requiring repeat training sessions. In order to address turnover but meet programs' needs for in-depth training, stations have created multiple professional development pathways. Though hands-on trainings can be time-consuming for the small staffs of local public media stations, they have found it is the best way to ensure proper adoption of transmedia resources at the beginning of a partnership.

Build Provider Confidence Through Hands-On Trainings

Stations offer professional development to ensure that educators are well-trained in transmedia and confident in leading

"It's all about listening to the needs of the community, and finding ways to fit our resources in."

Alyssa Torres

Community Engagement Manager,
KBTC Public Television

Stations have also made training materials available online which can help to provide refresher trainings. KLRU has found that their strongest partners take ownership over the Ready To Learn content and have built it into their own staff professional development. A range of hands-on and low-touch training models can ensure that transmedia is implemented properly, even in the face of high staff turnover.

Stretch Technology Resources Further

Lack of technology and devices can be a major hurdle for expanded learning providers seeking to implement transmedia content. One promising practice is to conduct a technology assessment at the beginning of each partnership, surveying technology needs, assets, and challenges. A technology assessment, conducted early in the project, also helps stations to think through potential issues. Clear communication between the educators, the program director, and the IT director can ensure that any technology challenges are promptly addressed.

Stations reported trying a variety of strategies to connect partners to technology. In some cases, stations provided partners with new technology. Although purchasing new technology is expensive, stations agreed that providing new tablets or laptops to under-resourced nonprofits can immediately jumpstart a new partnership. For other partners, stations offered resources

to revamp existing technology or improve a Wi-Fi connection. Stations have found that there's often a lot of life to be gained in an old computer, and providers can reach more youth with the PBS KIDS resources if their existing technology is put to good use. And for some partners—like those that run programs only during the summer or school holidays—stations purchased technology for multiple partners to borrow and share, so the resources can stretch farther. In Southern California,



PBS SoCal brings tablets loaded with games and apps directly to children at local events throughout the Greater Los Angeles area.

PBS SoCal's **Mobile Lab**—outfitted with iPads and Chromebooks—visits schools, libraries, parks, and local events to provide a space for children to play Ready To Learn transmedia games and parents to learn more about PBS KIDS resources. Since PBS SoCal covers a large geographic region, the Mobile Lab has been a cost-effective way to increase excitement for digital learning tools. A mix of technology arrangements ensures that local resources are put to good use, and that new laptops and tablets serve as many children as possible.

Connect with Families to Encourage Hands-On Learning at Home

Families are often anxious about whether their children are prepared for school, but may not know how to help. Stations and providers can partner to show parents that PBS KIDS games and apps are an accessible way to engage in hands-on learning with their children in ways that look and feel like play. Local stations connect families to resources in a variety of ways, through take-home-letters or “parent nights” at summer or after-school programs. Expanded learning providers are always looking for new and innovative ways to engage families in their children’s learning and are eager to provide parents with concrete tools. Many parents feel bewildered by the increase in TV shows, apps, and games that claim to be educational, and it can be helpful to have a trusted public media source offering guidance. Stations benefit when they explain the educational value of CPB-PBS KIDS Ready To Learn content and empower parents to act as digital “gatekeepers.” For example, KLRU has developed a series of short videos in Spanish and English that provide guidance on **Smart Screen Time**. Similarly, stations can serve as a go-to expert for expanded learning providers who have questions about digital learning content.

Recommendations and Insights

Local public media stations have an incredible opportunity to boost academic achievement through their Ready To Learn transmedia resources by partnering with expanded learning providers. The stations implementing Ready To Learn in their communities have tested a range of strategies to engage with community partners, educators, and families. From their experiences, several promising practices have emerged:

1. **Align transmedia resources to school day content.**
2. **Listen carefully to partners and remain responsive to their needs.**
3. **Empower providers through hands-on trainings to build their enthusiasm for the resources.**
4. **Assess partners’ technology needs and develop a multi-pronged strategy to meet those needs.**
5. **Engage families in hands-on learning with their children.**

The resources from Ready To Learn are a natural fit for the expanded learning field, offering hands-on, informal learning opportunities using the latest tools of the digital age. With the Ready To Learn demonstration stations as a model, new communities can build genuine partnerships with the expanded learning field and offer academically-enriching experiences to more young learners.

The following Ready To Learn resources may be useful for local PBS stations, educators, and community partners. Click on a box below to learn more!

1

PBS KIDS Lab, a comprehensive collection of Ready To Learn games, activities, and research

2

Ready To Learn Research Studies

3

PBS KIDS Afterschool and Summer Adventure programs

4

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting website

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