

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

PRELIMINARY PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF THE Educational Broadcasting Authority

Educational Broadcasting Authority is not Adequately Assessing the Utilization of its Televised Educational Programming

Issue 1: The Educational Broadcasting Authority is not Adequately Assessing the Utilization of its Televised Educational Programming.

The EBA is charged with providing educational programs as an enhancement to primary, secondary and adult education. In order to accomplish this task, the EBA provides many different types of programming and focuses some programs towards specific age groups. In addition, the EBA airs a series called "*Ready to Learn*" which focuses on educating preschool children prior to kindergarten. **The EBA does not adequately assess the usage of its programs within the preschool, primary or secondary classrooms to determine strengths and weaknesses, and to determine where its stands against commercial programs.** A scientific statewide survey was conducted in 1993 that determined the extent of usage and how EBA programs compared to commercial programs. However, since that time the agency has relied on a voluntary survey which is not representative of the state and therefore has limited value. Furthermore, some of the information for 1997 and 1998 have not been compiled to provide information regarding the use of programs and any needed programming changes. **Essentially, the EBA does not know if commercial programs are being used more often in classrooms than EBA programs, if this is occurring in any particular grade levels and what weaknesses may exist in EBA programming.**

Results of the 1993 Survey

In 1993 the EBA partnered with the Department of Education to conduct a survey of schools in order to determine the utilization of Instructional Television programs (ITV) broadcast for primary and secondary schools. The survey's objective was to determine the number of teachers and students using ITV statewide, television usage in the classroom and also attempted to determine the percentage of ITV program usage in comparison to commercial educational programming. In addition, teachers were surveyed regarding the actual titles of ITV programs they used.

Over 2,000 classroom teachers were surveyed representing all 55 counties with a 71% return rate. One category of results indicated that two commercial companies Whittle Channel 1 along with Discovery Channel were also utilized to a great extent in West Virginia primary and secondary classrooms. According to the results, 36% of West Virginia teachers that use television in the classroom, used Channel 1. The Discovery Channel was used by 35% of the teachers. For this same category, 75% of the teachers use the EBA's ITV. This is not to say that all teachers using ITV, Whittle or Discovery use these sources exclusively. The information from the survey was useful in showing that ITV is highly utilized which suggest quality programming. Table 5 below provides some additional statistics from the 1993 survey.

TABLE 1 1993 Statewide Survey	
Percentage of West Virginia teachers that use television in the classroom.	69%
Number of West Virginia students who viewed TV in the classroom at least once during the year.	216,620
Percentage of teachers who used West Virginia Public Television service.	75%
Percentage of teachers who used Whittle Channel 1.	36%
Percentage of teachers who used Discovery Channel.	35%
Percentage of teachers who used Arts and Entertainment Channel.	15%
Percentage of teachers who used TV the Learning Channel.	10%
Percentage of teachers who used C-SPAN.	5%
Percentage of teachers who used other sources.	25%
Percentage of teachers who used television more than one time per week.	54%

Whittle Channel 1 offers free equipment to schools in return for the use of its programming, and commercials geared towards school age children are aired just as any commercial channel

viewed at home. Some teachers are not fans of Channel 1 because of the commercials directed at children. One measure that is not provided in the survey which could also be useful is usage by grade to determine if there is a lack of utilization at any particular grade levels. **Since the EBA has not conducted a statewide survey since 1993, it has no updated statewide utilization figures of its programs in comparison with commercial programming.**

Subsequent Surveys not Representative of the State and Responses not Compiled

Since the 1993 survey the EBA has conducted an annual survey of schools which mirrors somewhat the questions asked in the 1993 survey. However, this survey is voluntary and it does not capture responses from all counties. The annual surveys were conducted by the School Services department within the agency. However, this department has not maintained the survey as expected. Below are some of the specific problems found for each year the survey was conducted:

- 1994-1995 Several responses were not compiled. Only the number of teachers in the sample who used ITV and the number of students who viewed ITV programming were compiled, which provides limited usefulness for the EBA.
- 1995-1996 Only 26 counties responded.
- 1996-1997 Only 41 counties responded.
- 1997-1998 Incomplete results with 7 questions either not asked or not compiled. In particular, usage of ITV compared to commercial broadcasts was not compiled. Also only 45 counties responded.
- 1998-1999 Incomplete results with 7 questions either not asked or not compiled. In particular, usage of ITV compared to commercial broadcasts was not compiled. Also only 45 counties responded.

The Executive Director stated the following in regards to inquiries about the survey:

*One small part of the television unification was to examine the revenue and expenses of the School Services department **and the effectiveness of the department. Ultimately management became discouraged about the lack of cooperation from this department and the manner in which the department was being operated. [emphasis added]***

As a result, the EBA reduced the funding of the School Services department and redirected it towards development of an information technology department to assist the Department of Education's efforts in this area. Reviews of the agency budget and other information do indicate that the ITV programming budget has dropped from \$72,000 for the 1995-1996 year to \$18,895 for the 2000-2001 year.

The EBA is currently able to broadcast only one signal. In the future the agency will have the capability to multicast. Establishing trends through representative data now, may help begin the

multicast programming down the road. One problem the EBA faces in regards to surveys is that there is no requirement for teachers to respond or to provide other feed back regarding the programming. Survey forms are simply sent out to county ITV coordinators who attempt to get teachers to respond. The EBA should explore incentives to encourage a high response rate from all counties. The EBA recognizes the importance of monitoring the use of the television programming. This is evident from the fact that it annually conducts the survey. The EBA has continually cited old utilization numbers from the 1993 survey sometimes attributing these to the survey and other times not.

Conclusion

The agency recognizes the need for better management information and has plans to rectify the situation. A request for proposal is currently being written for educational consultants that will assist the EBA in assessing the utilization of ITV programming. Although technology may bring better methods of assessing audiences, the agency must implement a better method or instrument to assess the utilization of its programs. This may become even more crucial as commercial enterprises such as Whittle Channel 1 become more established in school systems. To accomplish the agency's mandate, useful utilization measures are important, in light of competing educational programs from commercial programs. The agency must know if the funding it expends towards educational programming is being utilized by the intended audience or if it should be redirected towards other more utilized areas of the agencies endeavors.

Recommendation 1:

The EBA should consider conducting a statewide survey annually or every two years to determine the utilization of its educational programming. Data should be timely compiled and provided by grade.

Recommendation 2:

Additional methods of utilization assessment should be explored such as internet surveys or electronic methods through digital television to enhance the management information available to the EBA.