



Florida Proves that Kids Learn from PBS

Statewide program inspires kids in Southwest Florida

If you have raised children in the past 20 or 30 years, you know the value of PBS children's programming. From *Sesame Street* to *Curious George* to *Martha Speaks*, moms and dads have seen firsthand the growth in the verbal skills of their preschoolers who watch education-based programming on PBS. For years, PBS has been conducting national surveys to determine the effectiveness of children's programming. Year after year, when teachers and parents are asked "what media company is the most educational for children?" PBS is Number 1. PBS also comes in on top in areas of helping children gain reading and math skills and as the most "trusted and safe" place for children to watch TV.

Now, as a result of the work of 13 Florida public television stations working in 16 school districts with a total of 521 kindergarten and first grade students and 534 fourth and fifth grade students, Florida has data that proves the educational value of PBS children's programming.

Based on the national success of PBS educational programming utilized in the classroom, Florida public television stations chose to use the Martha Speaks Reading Buddies Program as its basis for comparison. The program is a 10-week cross-age reading program designed to develop and enhance vocabulary in elementary school students using the PBS Kids program *Martha Speaks* as a key part of the training.

Results of the study concluded that children who participated in the *Martha Speaks Reading Buddies Program*, on average, demonstrated greater gains in the acquisition and comprehension of new vocabulary words than children in the comparison group.

In Southwest Florida, WGCU implemented the Martha Speaks Reading Buddies Program at Seagate Elementary School in Collier County and Westside Elementary School in Hendry County. In both schools, fourth grade student "big buddies" were paired with kindergarten student "little buddies." Each week, for 10 weeks, the students watched a short *Martha Speaks* episode that introduced that day's four target vocabulary words. They talked about the show and played a game related to it using the target words, then read a book together and used the target words to discuss the book. At the end of each session, they wrote and drew together in a journal about something related to the show, the book they read, and/or the target words.

Seagate Elementary kindergarten teacher, Susan Soper, called the Martha Speaks Reading Buddies Program "a wonderful experience. My students learned vocabulary words and how to use them in context. I hope we can continue this program."

Lynn Cutshaw, 4th grade teacher at Westside Elementary praised the program saying, "My children loved it." In talking about the 4th grade big buddies, she said, "they inspired the kindergarten kids. I have seen such love, kindness and care. This program was life-changing."

The statewide study was conducted as a result of the 2012 Florida Legislature requiring Florida public television stations to provide information to the Florida Department of Education, the Florida Legislature, and the Executive Office of the Governor comparing if students who have school-day contact with public broadcasting educational material attain larger learning gains than students who do not. The evaluation project was overseen by Dr. Young-Suk Kim of Florida State University and the Florida Center for Reading Research and Dr. Rebecca Silverman of the University of Maryland. The report was completed on June 30. (Copies of the statewide report are available.) WGCU will provide school results to the Southwest Florida sites this month. 

WGCU's program was directed by Paula Sklodowski, outreach coordinator.