



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Hooked on Phonics® CEO Responds to Gary Stager's Criticism of President-elect Obama's
Choice of Arne Duncan as Secretary of Education**

Baltimore, Md. — Judy L. Harris, CEO of Smarterville Inc., the maker of Hooked on Phonics®, posted the following statement in response to Gary Stager's essay published on the Huffington Post:

"Gary Stager is entitled to his opinions regarding President-elect Obama's selection of Arne Duncan as Secretary of Education and education policy generally. However, it is unfortunate he has tried to trivialize my views by likening my company and its product – Hooked on Phonics, a product that has helped millions of children learn to read – to a sponge (with all due respect to the folks at ShamWow).

"I issued a statement in support of President-elect Obama's choice of Arne Duncan's as Secretary of Education because he has established himself as an advocate of early childhood education and he has emphasized the importance of parental involvement in education on numerous occasions. As the makers of Hooked on Phonics, we have made a strong and lasting commitment to these principles.

That's why, for example, we are encouraging parents to visit www.learntoread2009.com and make a New Year's Resolution to teach a child to read in 2009 and why we're donating 15,000 Hooked on Phonics® *Learn to Read* products to First Book, a non-profit founded in 1992 that has distributed more than 60 million new books to children in need.

"Hooked on Phonics is not a toy or a gimmick. It is a comprehensive reading education system, based on sound education theory that has produced results for millions of people. Reading is the basis for learning, and Hooked on Phonics has helped thousands of children learn to read for more than two decades.

"Sadly, we think Mr. Stager's comments actually compound America's literacy problem. People who have trouble reading suffer not only with learning challenges, but with stigma and social pressures. By casting aspersions on one of the tools parents depend on to help their children — and sometimes themselves — learn to read, we fear he's making it more difficult for people to help themselves.

"It's quite possible to have significant and substantive disagreements over President-elect Obama's choices regarding education policy without being insulting. We hope Mr. Stager will be more thoughtful in his comments in the future...and pledge to teach a child to read in 2009."

About Hooked on Phonics

Hooked on Phonics, operated by Smarterville Inc., is a leading creator of research-based educational products for families that are fun, easy to use, and effective. The company works with professional educators, interactive designers, writers, artists, and parents to develop step-by-step learning systems that help teach children critical reading, math, and study skills. Since the company was founded in 1987, more than two million families and thousands of schools have turned to Hooked on Phonics' library of award-winning programs. Hooked on Phonics products are available at major retailers worldwide and online at www.hookedonphonics.com.