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## NEW HEAD START EARLY LEARNING PLAY AREA PROVIDES INNOVATIVE OPPORTUNITY FOR ALACHUA PRESCHOOLERS

**JACKSONVILLE, Fla.**, April 26, 2024 – Episcopal Children's Services (ECS) with the support of PNC Foundation, celebrated the opening of a new outdoor play area at the Gainesville Head Start/Early Head Start Center yesterday. The "STEAM Ahead with Outdoor Learning" area, supported by a \$56,000 grant from PNC Foundation, provides a learning environment specifically designed to build skills for STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) and provide a hands-on learning experience with opportunities and materials that support exploration, discovery and creativity. Attended by community members, regional leadership and one very special guest, the playground dedication event proved to be a significant milestone in the partnership between the two organizations.

One of the highlights of the event was special guest, Elmo, greeting everyone and enjoying the new play area alongside the children. The interactivity fostered meaningful outdoor play in a learning environment specifically designed to build skills for STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) and provide a hands-on learning experience with opportunities and materials that support exploration, discovery and creativity.

The "STEAM Ahead with Outdoor Learning" area is supported by a \$56,000 grant from PNC Foundation. Funding for this project was made possible through PNC's signature philanthropic initiative, PNC Grow Up Great®, a \$500 million bilingual initiative that helps prepare children from birth through age 5 for success in school and in life, with a particular emphasis on underserved

communities. The new playground will serve over 65 of the community's most vulnerable preschoolers in one of the most challenged areas in Alachua County.

The \$56,000 grant awarded to Episcopal Children's Services is one of many PNC investments in the ECS community. In 2024, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PNC Grow Up Great, PNC is focused on outdoor play and learning, including a dedicated grant pool to help build or refresh nature-based play and learning spaces across PNC markets coast to coast.

ECS extends its heartfelt gratitude to all participants, especially PNC Foundation for their contribution to the success of this event. Their unwavering support and dedication were instrumental in making the event a memorable experience for everyone involved.

Highlights and key takeaways are available on ECS' social media channels. Access all event photos [here](#).

### **About PNC Foundation**

The PNC Foundation, which receives its principal funding from The PNC Financial Services Group ([www.pnc.com](http://www.pnc.com)), actively supports organizations that provide services for the benefit of communities in which it has a significant presence. The foundation focuses its philanthropic mission on early childhood education and community and economic development, which includes the arts and culture. Through PNC Grow Up Great®, its signature cause that began in 2004, PNC has created a bilingual \$500 million, multi-year initiative to help prepare children from birth to age 5 for success in school and life. For more information, visit <http://www.pncgrowupgreat.com>.

### **About Episcopal Children's Services**

Offering early childhood education and holistic family services, Episcopal Children's Services provides School Readiness, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs to more than 27,000 children and their families in 14 counties in Florida, including Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Citrus, Clay, Dixie, Duval, Gilchrist, Lake, Levy, Marion, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns counties.

ECS uses research and best practices to help families ensure their children enter school ready to learn. Talented, dedicated teachers and staff work proactively with children from birth to age five and their families to build a strong educational foundation.

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