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## **PNC FOUNDATION PROVIDES \$56K IN FUNDING FOR EARLY LEARNING PLAY INITIATIVE AT ALACHUA COUNTY HEAD START CENTER**

**JACKSONVILLE, Fla.**, April 24, 2024 – Episcopal Children's Services (ECS) will celebrate the opening of a new outdoor play area at the ECS Gainesville Head Start/Early Head Start Center, 530 NE Waldo Road, Gainesville, FL 32641, on Thursday, April 25, 2024, at 10 a.m. 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.

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.

"We're proud to join Episcopal Children's Services in providing this important resource to Gainesville families," said Chris Kalin, PNC regional president for North Florida. "Through PNC Grow Up Great, we look for innovative opportunities to enhance learning and development for children in our community. With projects like the STEAM Ahead play area, we can help them establish a lifelong love of learning and create a foundation for future success."

Studies show that outdoor physical activity involving play on a regular basis is crucial for child development. When children have opportunities to explore and learn outdoors, they learn collaboration, problem-solving and social skills. Physical activity helps children be more attentive and engaged during non-play hours.

Features of the STEAM Ahead play area include five primary areas that address the emergence of STEAM learning, including: a building area with shapes and ramps to strengthen mathematical learning, a gardening area to help develop a sense of wonder and learn how plants grow, an art and music area designed to develop creativity and imagination, a water and sand area to provide experiences for the flow of the two, and a trike path to help children build physical skills as they navigate around the play area.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our Gainesville Head Start/Early Head Start center where learning takes place daily," said ECS President & CEO Dr. Natalya Roby. "Our children are loved and safe and making great strides in literacy and math. This new STEAM playground truly

enhances our holistic services for our children and families. This type of support is critical in shaping future generations. We are grateful for the generosity of community champions like PNC.”

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.

### **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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