

Leadership Strives to Support Early Child Development

A distinguished and diverse group of business leaders, educators and administrators,



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electd officials, researchers and not-for-profit representatives gathered at Charleston's **Clay Center for the Arts & Sciences** earlier this month to discuss the business and economic development potential of supporting early child development.

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An unprecedented event in West Virginia, the Early Child Development and Economic Development Policy Forum, was convened Oct. 9-10 by **West Virginia: A Vision Shared**. Dr. **Calvin Kent**, vice president for business and research at **Marshall University**, set the stage by presenting the results of a study recently conducted at the university that concluded "a substantial commitment to high-quality, early childhood development will give West Virginia a 12 percent return on its economic development investment."

The percentage far exceeds other return-on-investment figures rendered by the more conventional economic development strategies historically employed in West Virginia and many other states.

The necessity of fiscal support for early child development from West Virginia's private



sector — those business entities that ultimately stand to gain the most from creation of a better educated, more highly skilled workforce — became a recurring theme at the policy forum.

Thomas F. Lamb, senior vice president for government affairs at **PNC Bank**, was one of three speakers during the forum's Monday morning session to present his organization's take on the "why and how" of private-sector support of expanded and improved early child development programming.

Headquartered in Pittsburgh, PNC is a \$90 billion financial services company with 23,000 employees and a retail footprint covering eight states and the District of Columbia. Recognized for its tradition of community engagement, PNC annually contributes more than \$10 million to colleges and universities, the arts, hospitals, the **United Way** and other community projects. Its corporate culture encourages civic leadership and active volunteerism among its employees.

When PNC's top-level management team asked the firm's employees, "What could we accomplish if we focused the full power and resources of our

company on one issue?" their overwhelming response was "children and education," according to Lamb.

PNC already was familiar with the issues surrounding early childhood education from its previous involvement with the Pittsburgh Early Childhood Initiative and the **Pennsylvania Roundtable**. The firm's management delved into emerging research on the economics of early childhood education, especially its return on investment, the bottom-line concept bankers understand clearly.

Based on those earlier experiences and the new research, PNC crafted a vision, "Smarter, healthier children are the foundation from growing, thriving communities," and launched its **Grow Up Great** initiative.

A 10-year, \$100 million investment to prepare young children from birth through age 5, for school and life, **Grow Up Great** is a comprehensive, integrated program structured on PNC leadership, dollars and resources. Its leadership vehicle advocates for high quality school-readiness programs in a non-partisan fashion that encourages discussion and opens doors. Its dollars are converted to grants to fund **Early Childhood Centers of Excellence** throughout its service area. Its resources of volunteerism and communications rally the PNC team around early childhood education issues and enhance public awareness of those issues.

Grow Up Great also was con-

ceived as a sustainable program. Its considerable long-term budget is evidence of the firm's commitment to the cause over time.

PNC currently is working to design methods of measuring **Grow Up Great's** impact by talking with experts serving on its advisory council and with those available through various institutions of higher learning and the **RAND** and **Pew Charitable Trusts**. It also has conducted a baseline survey of public awareness of the campaign in its footprint states and among its own senior management. It has built questions concerning **Grow Up Great** into its own employee survey to assess the program's effect on employee satisfaction.

The PNC management team, the firm's employees (4,000 of whom have expressed interest in volunteering for **Grow Up Great** programs) and the educational communities throughout PNC's service area have worked together to move past the "what-and-why" phase of improving their children's and their communities' futures. They're actively engaged in the "how" of the process, and I'm hopeful that their West Virginia counterparts won't be far behind.

Gayle Manchin is West Virginia's First Lady and is chairman of Vision Shared's Intellectual Infrastructure in the 21st Century Steering Committee. To learn more about PNC's **Grow Up Great** program, visit www.pncgrowupgreat.com. For additional information about **A Vision Shared**, visit www.visionshared.com.