



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## PNC FOUNDATION, WEBSTER UNIVERSITY, ANNOUNCE \$1 MILLION GRANT TO CLOSE WORD GAP IN ST. LOUIS NEIGHBORHOODS

*“Mind Full of Words” will serve hundreds of families in two St. Louis communities*

**ST. LOUIS, April 12, 2016** – The PNC Foundation and Webster University today announced a \$1 million, two-year collaboration to build preschool children’s vocabularies in two St. Louis neighborhoods. *Mind Full of Words* will infuse vocabulary and literacy strategies and family service learning into a powerful educational model for families in the University City and South St. Louis City neighborhoods.

Vocabulary skills advance children’s cognitive and social learning, and are important in predicting reading development over time. However, research shows that by age 3, children from low-income families are hearing 30 million fewer words than those from higher-income families, creating a lag in vocabulary development that puts children at an academic disadvantage before they start kindergarten.

“Words unlock success for children,” said Michael Scully, PNC regional president for St. Louis. “The more words they hear before kindergarten, the more success they often achieve. The link between ‘words’ and learning motivated PNC to emphasize developing children’s vocabularies as part of *PNC Grow Up Great*, our early childhood education initiative.”

St. Louis is one of 10 cities PNC has selected for its \$10.75 million pilot program to raise awareness and improve vocabulary for low- and moderate-income children.

Webster University is leading the project programming with community partners and providing its expertise in literacy and family service learning. SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital, Gateway Media Literacy Partners, Julia Goldstein Early Childhood Education Center/University City Public Schools, St. Louis Public Library and St. Louis Teachers’ Recycle Center will serve several hundred young children and families with programming and support of the overall initiative.

“We know that our conversations with our children make a difference in their vocabulary development,” said Elizabeth (Beth) J. Stroble, president of Webster University. “PNC’s support brings into focus a fundamental element of early learning that directly affects a child’s future success in school and in life.”





Program components will include:

- **“Mind Full of Words” Cafés:** These events will be hosted at the Cabanne and Carpenter branches of St. Louis Public Library.
- **Reach Out and Read Program:** This program builds vocabulary and language skills among young children by distributing new, developmentally-appropriate books to parents during regular pediatric care and by encouraging them to read to their children daily.
- **Play Workshops and VanGo Traveling Re-Use Center:** The St. Louis Teachers’ traveling Recycle Center’s mobile arts and treasure center will provide a walk-on center ready to fill bags of “unburied treasures.”
- **Take-Home Learning Resources:** Families will receive supplies and resources to encourage family engagement through learning at home. Children will also receive “Words Are Here, There and Everywhere,” a new, bilingual multimedia educational kit created by Sesame Workshop™, the nonprofit educational organization behind Sesame Street, as part of a continuing partnership with PNC.
- **Media Literacy-Education Workshops:** Educators and caregivers of young children targeted in the project will receive inquiry-based instruction, expanding the traditional “three Rs” to include reasoning and reflection to help young children master and grow vocabulary.

“Our goal is to improve the wellbeing of St. Louis’ young children,” said Patty Carleton, SLPL’s Director of Youth Services. “In St. Louis, young children should receive every opportunity to grow their natural talents with programs such as this one. All kids matter.”

Throughout all aspects of *Mind Full of Words*, parents and community leaders will be engaged in the design and implementation of program elements, including the awareness campaign and community events, to support the efforts of neighborhood residents as they work to transform learning for their children and improve their neighborhoods.

“Words matter,” said Dr. Ken Haller, a pediatrician at SSM Health Cardinal Glennon. “We know that investing in early literacy positively impacts not only the young children, but also bolsters their families, neighborhoods and our region. This program will both pay long-term economic dividends and begin to close the opportunity gap in St. Louis.”

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## About the Organizations

### PNC Foundation

The PNC Foundation, which receives its principal funding from The PNC Financial Services Group (NYSE: PNC), 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 Grow Up Great, its signature cause that began in 2004, PNC has created a bilingual \$350 million, multi-year initiative to help prepare children from birth to age 5 for success in school and life.

### Webster University

With its home campus in St. Louis, Missouri, USA, Webster University ([www.webster.edu](http://www.webster.edu)) comprises an action-oriented global network of faculty, staff, students and alumni who forge powerful bonds with each other and with their communities around the globe. Founded in 1915, Webster is a private non-profit university with more than 17,000 students studying at campus locations in North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa and in a robust learning environment online. The university is committed to delivering high-quality learning experiences that transform students for global citizenship and individual excellence.

