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December 21, 2020

For immediate release

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MPT and PNC Foundation collaborate to offer free learning resources to support early childhood education and well-being during the pandemic

Your Digital Backpack initiative to distribute resources in communities across Maryland

OWINGS MILLS, MD – [Maryland Public Television](http://MarylandPublicTelevision.org) (MPT) today announced the launch of its Your Digital Backpack initiative to deliver free learning resources and information to support early childhood learners and their families during the ongoing pandemic. MPT's Education Division received a \$75,000 grant from the PNC Foundation to make these resources available to parents and caregivers in communities across Maryland through the summer of 2021. The focus of the initiative is children from birth to age eight.

According to program organizers, many parents and caregivers are concerned about learning loss during the pandemic due to school closings. Families, they note, are looking for high-quality, at-home learning materials and other support resources that will help them keep their young children on track for school readiness.

As Your Digital Backpack gets underway in December, MPT-HD is beginning to air a series of 30-second messages informing viewers about the program and offering activities and tips parents and caregivers can use to engage early learners. Additional on-air messages will direct viewers on where to go for additional learning and community service information.



MPT, with support from the PNC Foundation, also is creating and distributing Your Digital Backpack Learning Kits that include printed learning resources and related content for families with limited or no internet access at home. These learning kits will be distributed beginning in early 2021 in partnership with public libraries and other community organizations across the state.

Additional Your Digital Backpack program details and resources are available at mpt.org/backpack.

“As educational opportunities have been limited this year due to the pandemic, it’s more important than ever to offer children new ways to learn. In fact, a study from the [National Institute for Early Education Research](http://NationalInstituteforEarlyEducationResearch.org) (NIEER) at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, funded with support from the PNC

Foundation, found that participation in preschool education for children aged three to five dropped from 61% prior to the pandemic to only 8% as COVID-19 cases began to rise,” said Laura Gamble, PNC regional president for Greater Maryland. “There’s never been greater urgency for addressing pre-school education. Our support of MPT’s Your Digital Backpack for area children is a strategic investment in the future of our region. Children will have easy access to educational materials and the program is designed to help educators and parents create opportunities that support quality at-home learning experiences.”

Among the initiative’s statewide partners are the Maryland Division of Early Childhood Development, Maryland Judy Centers, Maryland State Department of Education Head Start Collaboration Office, Maryland State Family Child Care Association, Maryland State Library, and Ready At Five.

Your Digital Backpack is the statewide public TV network’s latest response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In April, MPT began offering its [At-Home Learning](#) program to provide age-specific weekday broadcast schedules together with related online learning resources and digital toolkits at [Thinkport.org](#) for educators, families and students.

“Families continue to experience major disruptions to school and child care routines and access to resources as the result of COVID-19 impacts,” said MPT Education Division Vice President Betsy Peisach. “The Your Digital Backpack initiative is a natural extension of both MPT’s ongoing education mission and the At-Home Learning program we launched earlier this year. We’re grateful that the PNC Foundation has come alongside us to provide funding and guidance as we work to deliver valuable learning and other important resources needed by families with young children.”

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About PNC Foundation

The PNC Foundation, which receives its principal funding from The PNC Financial Services Group (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 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 Maryland Public Television

Maryland Public Television (MPT) is a statewide, public-supported TV network and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) affiliate, offering entertaining, informative, educational, and inspiring content delivered by traditional broadcasting and streaming on TVs, computers, and mobile devices. A state agency, it operates under the auspices of the Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission. MPT creates and distributes local, regional, and national content and is a frequent winner of regional Emmy® Awards. MPT’s commitment to educators, parents, caregivers, and learners of all ages is delivered through instructional events and [Thinkport.org](#). MPT’s year-round community engagement activities connect viewers with resources on a wide range of topics. For more information visit [mpt.org](#).