

Improving Public Education System is Critical To County's Economic Future, Alliance Report Says

LARGO, MD (April 21, 2005) – Prince George's County is positioned to be an economic dynamo in the next 25 years, but its promise can be fulfilled only if it significantly improves its public education system, says a report released today by a group of business and education leaders.

The report, *Investing in Our Future: Education and the Economy in Prince George's County*, calls for a countywide commitment to making the public schools and Prince George's Community College "among the best in the nation" and in the Washington, DC region. Creating a top-flight system of public education, from kindergarten through college, makes good business sense, the report says, and is needed "to ensure that our children have every chance to fulfill their potential."

The report was prepared by the Prince George's Business-Education Alliance, a nonprofit research and policy analysis organization whose membership includes more than three dozen leading county businesses. It is based on presentations and discussions at the Prince George's Business-Education Summit, which was conducted by the Alliance in December. The Summit brought together business and education leaders, academic experts, public officials, community activists, and other invited guests for a daylong meeting.

The report examines the potential for economic growth in Prince George's and the challenges facing the public schools and the community college. It also outlines trends in public education funding and explores and explains the sources of money used to finance the public school and community college budgets. In addition, it recommends steps that policy makers and business leaders can take to ensure that the county's children receive an excellent education.

Among the findings in the report:

- Prince George's County's economy will grow substantially and its quality of life will improve over the next 25 years -- but only if it develops the required infrastructure, including a strong public school system. Businesses now go where the workforce is, not vice versa. Prince George's' biggest competition for new business development is its neighboring counties.

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- The county's economy is expected to grow by 173 percent between 2004 and 2030, compared with region-wide growth of 101 percent.
- In the last 24 years – since 1981 – only one Board of Education budget request has been fully funded. Class size, repairs to buildings, curriculum development, teacher recruitment and retention, books, supplies, the pre-K program – all of these and much more have been affected negatively by the underfunding of education for almost two generations of schoolchildren.
- Federal, state, and local governments share the responsibility for funding public education adequately. Currently, none is meeting that responsibility.
- Prince George's Community College is the first choice for postsecondary education for many county high school graduates, but it, too, is grossly underfunded. Recent tuition increases have made PGCC unaffordable for many students.
- Workforce training at the postsecondary level is critical to growing the high-end service sector (accountants, teachers, etc.) that will provide most of the projected 140,000 new jobs the county will add by 2030.
- The University of Maryland's College Park campus is the county's third-largest employer and an economic force, but Prince George's residents have not directly benefited from this "jewel in plain sight" to the extent possible. The lack of quality housing and good public schools impedes the university's efforts to hire employees who also will live in the county.
- The business community has an important role to play in advocating for increased support for education – especially full funding of the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002, which adopted the Thornton Commission recommendations. This includes the Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI), which would target additional resources to Prince George's County but has not been funded for the past two years. The Bridge to Excellence Act, which was designed to eliminate educational inequities by significantly increasing state aid to every county in Maryland, calls for a total of \$1.3 billion in additional annual spending on public education by 2008.

Copies of *Investing in Our Future* are available for \$10, plus \$3 for postage and handling, from the Alliance at P.O. Box 73, College Park, MD 20741-0073. A PDF version of the report can be downloaded for free from the Alliance's website, www.pgbea.org.