



College & Career Readiness and Access: A Top Focus for Florida's Local Education Foundations

The Case for College

While a high school diploma was once the ticket to the middle class, that is clearly no longer the case. Since the 2008 recession, growth in jobs requiring post-high school education - which includes credentials as well as two and four-year degrees - has increased. Research from the Brookings Institution shows that individuals with a high school degree or less have yet to fully recover from the impacts of the Great Recession.

Labor economists estimate the percentage of working-age adults with a high-value postsecondary credential, training or degree needed for Florida's economy to thrive in the coming decade is 60%. We are currently at just under 50% statewide and will likely only climb to 54% in the next five years unless there are concerted, coordinated efforts by local communities to encourage and support more students – particularly those from underserved backgrounds – in preparing and planning to continue their education beyond high school.

Florida's employers are already challenged to find qualified job candidates, and too many Florida families are struggling to make ends meet. When communities increase the proportion of residents with a postsecondary credential or degree, the whole community benefits through a higher tax base, lower crime rates and healthier citizens. The ability to earn a family-sustaining wage is a multi-generational gamechanger for each individual student who has the opportunity to earn a college degree or postsecondary credential.

The economic urgency and moral imperative are evident with state leaders. Florida is currently ranked 22nd in postsecondary attainment and has set a goal to become first in workforce education. In June 2019, Governor Ron DeSantis signed HB 7071, a comprehensive workforce education package which passed by unanimous vote of the House and Senate and establishes the SAIL to 60 Initiative. SAIL stands for "Strengthening Alignment between Industry and Learning" and formally establishes the goal of 60% of working-age Floridians with a degree or high-value credential by 2030. Having the goal firmly in place is accelerating efforts by the Florida College Access Network to catalyze and support communities in ensuring all Floridians have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond high school. The Florida Chamber Foundation, which has long had "Talent" as the first of their six pillars for building Florida's economy, is getting the word out that employers and site selectors are increasingly ranking talent as the most important asset when considering a move to a state or region.

What Does College & Career Readiness and Access Work Look Like?

Student readiness for postsecondary success after high school is multi-faceted with numerous opportunities for community partners and individual advocates to impact outcomes at every level, school district-wide, in individual schools or neighborhoods, with groups of students and on a one-on-one student basis.

On the academic side, access to rigorous coursework and attainment of college credit (AP, IB or AICE) or industry certifications in addition to a regular high school diploma are indicators of college readiness. Teachers, counselors and school leaders who have high expectations and encourage aspirations and awareness of postsecondary pathways for their students make a difference by creating a college-going culture.

The American School Counselor Association recommends schools maintain a student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1 to ensure the full benefit of all school counseling programs – including monitoring academic performance and college counseling. The reality is only a few states maintain that ratio and the counselor ratio in Florida is generally double that recommended number of students per counselor. School counselors are also tasked with other duties, may spend most of their time on emergent student needs and may lack access to market-relative information for students to make informed decisions about their path after high school.

What Does College & Career Readiness and Access Work Look Like? (continued)

Students from backgrounds where college is either not in the family vocabulary or is a vague concept are clearly at a disadvantage at many levels. Equity gaps in postsecondary attainment will persist without strong, intentional and coordinated school and community efforts. Information and support at every step of the college-going process are every bit as important as eliminating financial barriers through scholarship and aid programs.

The array of activities involved in college and career readiness work can include:

- Career Exposure and Exploration Activities
- College Tours and Presentations
- Application and Essay Help
- ACT/SAT and PERT Test Preparation
- Interest, Aptitude and Skill Assessment
- One-on-One and Small Group Mentoring
- FAFSA (Federal Application for Financial Student Aid) Assistance
- Internships, Job Shadowing and Other Work-related Learning Opportunities
- “Soft Skills” Development including Employability, Communication and Problem-Solving Skills
- School Culture Activities – College Decision and Career Signing Days, College and Career Fairs

In terms of career exposure and preparation, themed career and technical education academies have long been part of Florida’s public education landscape. Approximately 30% of Florida’s students leave high school with one or more industry certifications in a variety of in-demand fields including health sciences and information technology according to the [Florida Department of Education](#). With this success and experience along with a high school degree, these students are well-positioned to continue “stacking” credentials in their chosen field through technical school or to pursue a related college degree.

Florida’s Local Education Foundations Are Invested

Florida has a 30+ year history of local education foundations (LEFs) aligned with nearly all 67 county-wide school districts. Of the 1,100 board members leading these organizations, 80% are local business and community leaders with the remaining board positions occupied by school district leaders, educators and other public-sector leaders. Poised at the “intersection” of the workforce and education worlds, LEFs have a unique opportunity to serve as a productive forum for dialogue and activities to help prepare students for life after high school.

Many LEFs were founded before the state’s popular Bright Futures scholarship program and scholarships remain a top program area with more than 70% of Florida’s LEFs facilitating community investment to help their high school graduates continue their education.

Combined, Consortium of Florida Education Foundation members raised more than \$83 million in 2019 for a variety of locally driven initiatives to advance student achievement. Scholarships, mentoring, college readiness programs and career/technical education initiatives comprise about 34% of the program work of these nonprofits.

More than 25 years ago, the Pinellas Education Foundation created Take Stock in Children which has become Florida’s exemplar statewide program for transforming lives through education. Today, most of the state’s local programs are led by LEFs with their staff and volunteer leaders charged with raising scholarship dollars, recruiting and training mentors, monitoring student performance through middle and high school and coaching these typically first-generation college students through the college-going process.

Of the \$167 million in assets held by Florida’s LEFs, \$73 million are reported to be scholarship endowments and assets, which often include matching funds appropriated by the State of Florida for Florida Prepaid College Foundation tuition scholarships to be awarded to eligible students in future years.

Several LEFs are actively involved with their Local College Access Networks (LCANs), community-based coalitions of education, local government, nonprofit, economic development and philanthropic organizations who come together to create solutions and partnerships to support local talent development and attainment.

Florida's Local Education Foundations Are Invested (continued)

Our LEFs actively champion career and technical education by supporting pilot programs in school districts, engaging local businesses in expanding programs and providing funding for required student equipment and uniforms. Career exposure and preparation can become core program work for LEFs in a number of ways. The Education Foundation of Osceola County offers middle and high school students ongoing exposure to in-demand careers in the Central Florida area through their [Medical Pipeline](#) and [Construction Pipeline](#) programs. The Hillsborough Education Foundation collaborates with technical colleges and businesses through a strategic workforce development initiative [Go2Work Tampa Bay](#). The Flagler County Education Foundation advocates for students to discover career paths while strengthening Flagship Programs at each public school through their [Classrooms to Careers](#) program.

Local Education Foundation-Led College & Career Readiness Program Models

Several Consortium members recognize that they have an important role to play in achieving Florida's "SAIL to 60" goal. The following are a few of the current comprehensive LEF-led program models throughout the state:

[Champions For Learning \(The Education Foundation of Collier County\)](#)

College and career readiness content leadership is at the core of this education foundation's work on multiple levels. Their free-standing resource lab serves as a community hub for focused, weekly support in college and career exploration, goal-setting, financial aid instruction and self-advocacy skills for 10th-12th grade students and families, including those in the "middle class gap" who cannot afford the full cost of postsecondary education without help. In addition, they leverage their resources in partnership with the school district and within the community to serve and reach students county-wide. The education foundation serves as the backbone organization for their community's Local College Access Network (LCAN), [Future Ready Collier](#). This collaborative network brings together 60 organizations to work together on ensuring every child is ready for Kindergarten, and every young person enters adulthood with a vision and plan to accomplish that vision. The effort is part of a regional [FutureMakers Coalition](#) focused on transforming Southwest Florida's workforce and economy through education.

[Dixie Education Foundation](#)

This entirely volunteer-led education foundation in North Central Florida has a strong college scholarship program, but with 92% of their students from low-income families and a degree attainment rate that has actually declined in recent years to 14.3% (64th among all Florida counties), they knew they had work to do in encouraging students to aspire to education beyond high school. With multi-year support from a new funder in 2019, they are supporting the school district's first [AVID](#) – Advancement Via Individual Determination – program to strengthen the college-going culture in their high school and launched a "Career In a Year" program to introduce students from disadvantaged backgrounds to certification programs offered by area colleges and technical schools that require a year or less of postsecondary education, supporting them with campus visits and test-taking workshops.

[The Education Fund for Excellence in Miami-Dade Public Schools](#)

For most students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, one of the largest and poorest districts in the U.S., attending college remains a dream. The Education Fund's SmartPath initiative strives to embed a college-going culture in high schools, empowering low-income and first-generation students to graduate and successfully prepare for college and careers. Activities include college clubs and classroom lessons, paid internships, FAFSA workshops and college field trips, fairs and presentations. SmartPath is changing the lives of students in [five public senior high schools](#) in Miami-Dade. The pilot schools achieved a 34% increase in college enrollment, and since expansion to five public high schools in 2013, there has been a continued 21% increase in college enrollment rates across all SmartPath schools.

Local Education Foundation-Led College & Career Readiness Program Models (continued)

Pinellas Education Foundation

With the core belief that all students should leave high school ready for the world, the Pinellas Education Foundation is considered a national leader in engaging their business community in strengthening their school district's college and career education efforts. A key member of their LCAN – LEAP Tampa Bay – the education foundation is looked to as a thought leader in the field. Their 2018 research report [Preparing Pinellas Students for the Future: College and Career Readiness Insights](#) helped identify needs and resulted in a new collaboration with the School District – Elevating Excellence – to strengthen school-based academic counseling and support students in navigating the college-going process. Through Elevating Excellence, the foundation is supporting the creation and development of College and Career Planning Centers—driven by highly-trained volunteers to guide students through the college preparation process.

Education Foundation of Sarasota County

The Education Foundation of Sarasota County has opened three on-campus Student Success Centers in public high schools since 2018. Staffed with full-time College & Career Advisors, students in grades 9-12 have ongoing access to guidance and resources to prepare them for postsecondary college, career and life. An intentional focus on life readiness skills helps students build leadership, financial literacy skills, as well as social-emotional learning, in areas such as self-awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making. The foundation serves as backbone organization for the community's LCAN, PlanIt Sarasota, and offers a one-stop college and career resource website – [Launch Your Plan](#) – available community-wide.

Florida College Access Network A Place to Start and Support for the Journey



This is important work and we recommend local education foundations do not go it alone or embark on a program without doing some research! The Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is a statewide network that offers research, data (including per-county current attainment rates) and a wealth of resources and expertise to help LEFs be smart about developing an approach that complements other work happening in local communities and taps into leading practices. Their College Ready Florida initiative includes four campaigns that can be adapted for your context and they know what's happening with Local College Access Networks (LCANs) throughout the state. Check out their resources at floridacollegeaccess.org.

Additional Resources

[Lumina Foundation: A Stronger Nation Report](#)

[National College Attainment Network](#)

[Student Counselor Ratio Report](#)

[Florida Chamber Foundation: Florida Workforce 2030](#) and [Summary of Employer Surveys and Roundtables](#)

[Helios Education Foundation – Education Briefs](#)

[Florida Department of Education – Career and Technical Education](#)

[The Brookings Institution: Workers with Low Levels of Education Still Haven't Recovered from the Great Recession](#)
[Take Stock in Children](#)

Consortium of Florida Education Foundations
www.educationfoundationsfl.org

Our mission is to work with our members and partners to connect individuals, organizations and financial resources, building the capacity and effectiveness of local education foundations.

