

WHERE WE STAND

Improving Post-Secondary Success in Florida

Florida Philanthropic Network's Education Funders Affinity Group will support a culture of high expectations for all students, in and out of school, from early childhood to postsecondary education, leading to career success.

Florida Philanthropic Network's Education Funders Affinity Group Supports

- Statewide goal of 60% of working-age Floridians having post-secondary degree or certification by 2025

To help achieve this goal, we also support

- Higher standards for education, as exemplified by the Florida Standards, as measured by the high quality, aligned Florida Student Assessment
- Research of merit- and need-based financial aid, including the effects of recent changes to Florida Bright Futures

INTRODUCTION

In today's global economy, competition for talent is intense. Florida Philanthropic Network (FPN) recognizes that Florida's future economic health is tied directly to the skills attained by its students in post-secondary and higher education. There is a direct correlation between high education attainment, low unemployment and higher earnings.¹ According to labor economist Anthony Carnevale,² by 2018 about two-thirds of all jobs will require some form of post-secondary education. "For most of the twentieth century, high school was enough for a shot at middle-class status and wages," Carnevale explains. "Today no one goes anywhere in the American job market without some post-secondary education or training."

During the next two to three decades, industries and companies will locate where they have access to top-quality workers. Florida is falling behind in this competition. While Florida's high school graduation rates have inched up to the recently reported 76.1%, the rate still lags the national average. Additionally, not all graduates are ready for post-secondary success: Of every 100 Florida students, 76 will graduate high school, 51 will attend college but only 32 will graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years.³ And only about half of those graduates are in the math and science fields that are needed by many industries looking for top talent.

To succeed in any post-secondary educational endeavor, a student first must graduate high school with solid

skills. Unfortunately, Florida students' performance lags when measured against international benchmarks such as the Program for International Student Assessments (PISA).⁴ The most recent PISA assessment (2012) showed the United States finished 17th in reading, 21st in science and 26th in math, placing the United States behind economic powerhouses such as China, Russia and Germany, as well as growing economies in Asia and Europe. While the average Florida student scored about the same as the average U.S. student in science and reading, math scores trailed the U.S. average. And in all three subjects tested, Florida had more low-performing students and fewer high-performing students than other states that participated in the test.



FPN considers subpar educational performance a liability in Florida’s economic future and a threat to the future quality of life in the Sunshine State.

As noted above, future job growth and industry opportunities will rely on a well-trained workforce. For decades, FPN members have invested strategically in education – more than \$200 million annually. These investments have helped improve education outcomes in Florida. But today more than ever, Florida’s philanthropic organizations want to use their full set of resources, beyond just their financial support, to help advance education in the state, including their ability to research and test new ideas, serve as neutral conveners, and provide an independent voice on critical issues. That is why FPN is focusing efforts on education policy, specifically supporting critical components of College and Career Readiness, Access and Success in order to better prepare the workforce and ensure Florida’s economic future.

SUPPORT FOR A STATE POST-SECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOAL

FPN supports establishing a statewide goal to have 60% of working-age Floridians possess post-secondary degrees

or certifications by the year 2025

as adopted and promoted by the Florida College Access Network (FCAN). The most recent data (2012) show that 38% of working-age adults in Florida have post-secondary degrees or certifications. This is an economic competitiveness issue for Florida, which ranks 29th among the states in post-secondary attainment.⁵ Educational attainment must improve if Florida is to attract more technological industries and higher-wage jobs.

The Florida Council of 100 and the Florida Chamber of Commerce have expressed concern about a shortage of highly-skilled, highly-educated workers in their report, *Closing the Talent Gap*. The report predicts that “Florida faces an emerging Talent Gap – an urgent shortage of a resource as basic as food, more valuable than gold, and in higher global demand than oil. This crisis in human capital represents a large and growing unmet need for a highly skilled and educated workforce – our state’s most important resource for developing a strong, diversified economy and spurring sustainable economic development.”⁶

Achieving a goal of 60% post-secondary attainment will not happen without stepping up our efforts. As reported in FCAN’s 2014 Data Brief, “From 2000 to 2012, Florida has increased its degree attainment rate 5.7% [percentage points], from 32.4% to 38.1%. Although this trend is positive, the slow growth – a little less than 0.5% annually on average – is well below that of most other

economically developed nations and one of the reasons why we are losing ground in the proportion of college-educated workers.”⁷ FPN believes that a focus on this goal via increased awareness, assuring higher education capacities, partnering with key stakeholders, and addressing policy issues is required to raise the level of post-secondary attainment in the state to ensure that Florida’s workforce is competitive and successful.

SUPPORT FOR FLORIDA’S STANDARDS

FPN supports higher standards for education, as exemplified by Florida’s 2014 adoption of the Florida Standards.

The Florida Standards for K-12 are part of the Common Core State Standards movement, a nationwide effort to raise standards. Higher standards were developed in recognition of the fact that the United States has slipped in its global position in education, which is impacting the nation’s ability to compete economically. The goal of these higher standards is to better prepare high school graduates for post-secondary education.

According to an analysis of college entry tests by ACT, three-fourths of young men and women entering college “were not adequately prepared academically for first-year college courses.”⁸ These students must take additional courses in math and/or English before they are prepared to



tackle college-level courses. The cost of these remedial courses in 2011 in Florida was \$168 million.

The Florida Standards will prepare students to be successful in post-secondary education and their careers. These more rigorous standards will make implementation of the Florida Standards challenging, but the change is necessary if Florida is to be competitive in a global economy.

It is important to note that Florida's new standards still allow teachers flexibility in how they teach. The standards define the minimum that should be learned, but teachers can develop their own approaches and teaching plans. Teachers across the state have been working for more than two years to prepare for these changes,

which were being fully implemented in the 2014-15 school year.

Considerable effort and resources have been dedicated to establishing the Florida Standards. Essential to reaching the full potential of these college and career readiness standards is a high-quality, aligned assessment. The Florida Student Assessments (FSA), to be administered in 2015, will measure student learning related to the Florida Standards. FPN believes that the introduction of new standards and the initial assessment provides a unique opportunity to ensure the results of this revised approach meets expectations for students to reach college and career readiness. We advocate that close attention be paid to technical quality; alignment to the standards;

and valid tracking of student progress and performance.

SUPPORT FOR EVALUATION OF STATE FINANCIAL AID PROGRAM POLICIES

FPN believes that a key factor in increasing post-secondary educational attainment is affordability.

Historically, affordability has been augmented for many high school graduates by Florida's Bright Futures Program, which includes the Florida Academic Scholars award, the Florida Medallion Scholars (FMS) award, and the Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars award. This program has helped more than 660,000 Florida students attend a post-secondary institution. However, fiscal belt tightening during the Great Recession caused the Florida Legislature to increase eligibility requirements for these awards in order to reduce program costs. For example, the FMS (the most popular award level) has had minimum SAT test scores raised from 970 (in 2008) to 1170 (in 2014); ACT test score requirements have also increased during that time from 20 (2008) to 26 (2014). As a result, in the next four years more than \$347 million in awards will be cut from the program. At its peak, the program provided college scholarships to one in three high school graduates; today, estimates show only one in eight high school graduates will benefit from

ABOUT FLORIDA PHILANTHROPIC NETWORK & ITS EDUCATION FUNDERS AFFINITY GROUP

Florida Philanthropic Network is a statewide association of more than 115 grantmakers working to build philanthropy to build a better Florida. FPN's members are private independent, corporate and family foundations, community foundations, public charity grantmakers and corporate giving programs - from Miami to Jacksonville; Naples to Pensacola - who hold over \$6.5 billion in assets and invest over \$430 million annually (excluding members located outside Florida) to improve the quality of life for our citizens. Our members share a commitment to promoting philanthropy, fostering collaboration and advancing public policy by Florida, in Florida.

FPN's Education Funders Affinity Group (EAG) is comprised of FPN members who share an interest in supporting education issues, organizations and needs in Florida. The EAG offers Florida's education funders a space to learn and share together on improving the state's education outcomes, and to be a voice for Florida philanthropy on key education policy issues. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of any member of Florida Philanthropic Network or its Education Funders Affinity Group.

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the program.⁹ The new eligibility requirements also have the potential to change the profile of the program recipients by discriminating against students on the basis of national origin and race. Moreover this move perpetuates a situation in which the students most likely to benefit from the scholarship program are the least likely to need the additional financial help.

Florida State University’s Center for Postsecondary Success in the College of Education is evaluating the efficacy of Florida’s Bright Futures Program. Through a series of

studies, researchers are attempting to determine the effectiveness of Bright Futures in increasing the number of Florida high school graduates entering and successfully completing college in the state. FPN supports the continuation and expansion of this research in order to inform the consequences of recent policy changes in the program on student post-secondary attainment and success. Initial results have been released with more aspects of the study anticipated. FPN recommends that these results be widely disseminated publicly

and supports the Florida College Access Network’s recommendation to establish an independent advisory board with the charge of evaluating the full spectrum of current state aid programs, studying their demonstrated and projected economic impact, and recommending research-informed policy changes to better leverage student financial aid dollars. FPN believes this is critically important in order to maximize the considerable investment the state puts into the program.

REFERENCES

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²Anthony P. Carnevale, Jeff Strohl, Nicole Smith, “Help Wanted: Postsecondary Education and Training Required,” New Directions for Community Colleges, Volume 2009, Issue 146, P. 21.

³Based on statistics from Executive Office of the Governor, Florida’s Graduation Rate Hits Highest Point Ever, December 4, 2009; Dr. Willis N. Holcombe, The Future of Florida Imagining a World of Talent, October 12, 2009; and Florida Board of Governors, State University System of Florida 2008 Accountability Report, March 1, 2009.

⁴Organisation (sic) for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013. Full results available at www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/

⁵The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, www.higheredinfo.org/internationalcomparisons.php

⁶“Closing the Talent Gap: A Business Perspective,” Florida Council of 100 and the Florida Chamber of Commerce, January 2010, available at www.fc100.org.

⁷“Data Brief: Recent Gains, Future Challenges: A Closer Look at Degree Attainment in Florida.” FCAN, July, 2014 Vol. VIII, Issue 2, available at <http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/>

⁸The Condition of College & Career Readiness, 2014. Full results available at <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/cccr14/>

⁹“Policy Brief: College Affordability Adrift: Florida’s Bright Futures Program Faces \$347 Million in Cuts by 2017-18.” April, 2014 Vol. VIII, Issue 1, available at <http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/>

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