

RESULTS: Building College & Career Readiness Cultures in Rural Communities

Goal #1: The Consortium developed new and stronger advocates for creating career pathways for student in six Florida rural communities through training, access to expertise and research, funding for related activities, coaching and peer support.

Goal #2: Rural LEF cohort members deepened their understanding of the state and local policies and practices involved in creating career pathways for students in their communities to build their capacity to become effective active advocates and provide meaningful related support for students.



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The Building College & Career Readiness Cultures in Rural Communities project was initiated in September 2020 with an \$80,000 investment from the Gates Foundation. It aimed to enhance college and career readiness in rural areas. By fostering collaboration among Consortium members and rural education foundation leaders, the project sought to boost college enrollment rates.

Leveraging the expertise of the Florida College Access Network (FCAN), the initiative facilitated peer learning and strategic alignment with state priorities. Following successful initial efforts, the project involved more rural education foundations in advocating for enhanced post-secondary pathways. Through partnerships and shared expertise, the project strove to address the pressing need for higher post-secondary attainment rates in rural communities.

Student activities:

- FAFSA assistance and college guidance events
- Career Engagement: Interactive sessions with professionals, industry visits, and career exploration
- Holistic Preparation: Personalized success plans, financial aid support, and coaching for postsecondary planning

Community activities:

- Encourage students and families to discuss postsecondary plans at local events featuring college representatives.
- Host presentations in the community about college and career readiness for city, county, churches, and civic organizations.
- Collaborate with local colleges and LCANs on enhancing college and career readiness initiatives.



“ *A fourth grader “was the hardest working student I ever had while I taught elementary, and she brought that strong work ethic to AVID. Her family picked oranges, and she shared with me as a nine year old that she works hard at school so she doesn’t have to work outside as hard as her mom when she grows up. I’ll never forget it. When she graduated from HHS, she went on to college and earned a nursing degree. She was the first in her family to attend college. I will always count it a privilege to have been one of her teachers. The Education Foundation helped make that happen.”* -- Hardee History Teacher ”

Results: All counties experienced an increase in FAFSA completion, and several noted new scholarships and funding opportunities. This pilot project exceeded our expectations on multiple levels. While the Consortium has collaborated with FCAN throughout its ten-year history, this work has deepened and strengthened on relationship and already led to positive outcomes beyond this grant. For instance, on April 27th we collaborated on a webinar showcasing related work of the Education Design Lab -- Building Bridges to Workforce Development in Florida’s Rural Communities -- that attracted 180 registrants.

Peer education foundation leaders stepped up in support in ways we didn’t expect – including one who drove to the rural county to help with FAFSA nights. That education foundation’s efforts resulted in their school district being named a FCAN FAFSA Challenge Champion with an increase of more than 5% in seniors completing the FAFSA.