

A Community-Grown Teacher Pipeline



Pathways for Future Educators

Declining enrollment in teacher education programs has become a critical challenge nationwide, with interest in the field decreasing over the past decade. In Marion County, the need is especially urgent: approximately 500 teachers are needed each year to fill projected vacancies. In 2025, the Public Education Foundation of Marion County received a Career Catalyst grant to significantly expand its “grow your own” model, creating a direct and supported pathway into the teaching profession.

The Pathways for Future Educators (PFE) program is designed around intentional talent development. Rather than waiting for prospective teachers to emerge later in college, PFE begins in 9th grade and supports interested students at every stage as they build the skills, confidence, qualifications and certifications needed to become effective teachers.

Research shows that teachers who are trained and supported within their own communities are more likely to remain in the profession long term. (Learning Policy Institute, 2020) PFE builds on the Marion County School District’s focus on internal recruitment, an existing high school program and the education foundation’s broader continuum of investment in educators.

The foundation already supports aspiring teachers through its “Para to Pro” program, which helps current school paraprofessionals complete their degrees and become

teachers. PFE also leverages the foundation’s acclaimed Golden Apple Academy, where top teachers serve as mentors to future educators, as well as its robust college scholarship program.

Program Goals and Expansion

A central goal of PFE is to build a dynamic teaching workforce with deep ties to Marion County and a strong connection to the communities served by these future educators. While the pathway is open to all students, the program places special emphasis on supporting students from underrepresented and underserved communities, including aspiring first-generation college students and students from low-income households who may not traditionally see a clear path into teaching.

Grant funds support stipends for teachers who step into a curriculum development, facilitation or mentorship role. Materials, professional development and student transportation for classroom observations, career panels and college visits are also provided through grant funds. The grant strengthened the existing program at one high school and expanded the full PFE pathway to five additional schools, including the new South Marion High School.

“This grant has opened doors to unique opportunities for future educators, beginning with student engagement at the Teacher Education Career Summit at the College of Central Florida. It is increasing students’ exposure to the different pathways we offer, including early childhood and exceptional student education, and inspired our first-ever scholarship partnership program with the education foundation.” – *Renee Robinson, Ed.D., College of Central Florida Dean, Teacher Education Center*

Student Experience and Outcomes

During the 2025-26 school year, 412 students at four high schools were enrolled in the program. The curriculum is aligned with Florida Department of Education Career and Technical Education Standards and includes a comprehensive four-year sequence of classes and experiences.

- In 9th grade, students begin education-focused coursework and explore the teaching profession.
- Throughout high school, they gain hands-on classroom experience, mentoring and college/career coaching.
- By 12th grade, they are prepared for paraprofessional certification, the teacher educator certification program and college teacher preparation programs.

A highlight of the first full year of the expanded initiative was recognizing the fifteen seniors who completed the program in 2025-26 at the black-tie Golden Apple Gala, attended by more than 650 teachers and community leaders. The students were brought on stage for a standing ovation, underscoring how strongly the community values their commitment to becoming teachers.

During the Gala, students were surprised with college scholarships from local community partners, with matching funds provided by Central Florida College—an additional encouragement to remain in Marion County. The event also inspired more Golden Apple Academy teachers to mentor PFE students.

Takeaways and Tips

- **Build a strong leadership team.** Include district Career and Technical Education leaders, principals, curriculum staff and college partners working alongside education foundation leaders to guide program development and provide ongoing support.
- **Add certifications that strengthen sustainability.** Consider complementary credentials that are valuable for future teachers and may support long-term funding

through the Florida CAPE Act. For example, the PFE program is incorporating WordPress certification, which helps future teachers build class websites.

- **Engage higher education partners early.** Look for frequent opportunities to collaborate with local colleges. A PFE program can help colleges build enrollment pipelines for teacher preparation programs, while higher education partners may also provide scholarship support for students[MC1.1]. (Resource: [CAPE Industry Certification Funding List](#))



“This program is an investment in both our future educators and the long-term strength of Marion County Public Schools. It allows us to intentionally grow our own teachers —individuals who know our students, our families, and our community. It also strengthens the connection between our schools and the communities we serve. Through efforts like this, we are taking meaningful steps to ensure a strong, stable, and locally rooted educator pipeline for years to come.” – *Dr. Danielle Brewer, Superintendent, Marion County Public Schools*

About the Career Catalyst Program



The Frederick A. DeLuca Foundation believes in the power of education and removing barriers to economic mobility. Through partnering with the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations, they offer a \$100,000 Career Catalyst grant annually to a local education foundation in a competitive process. Consortium members develop an initiative to create or expand a career pathway program in their school district that exposes and launches students on an in-demand career path that is relevant to their community's workforce needs.

