

# State of Scholarships Regional Assessment

June 2022



WILLIAM G. & MARIE  
SELBY FOUNDATION

*Est. 1955*



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

of Sarasota County



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# Executive Summary:

## Project Overview

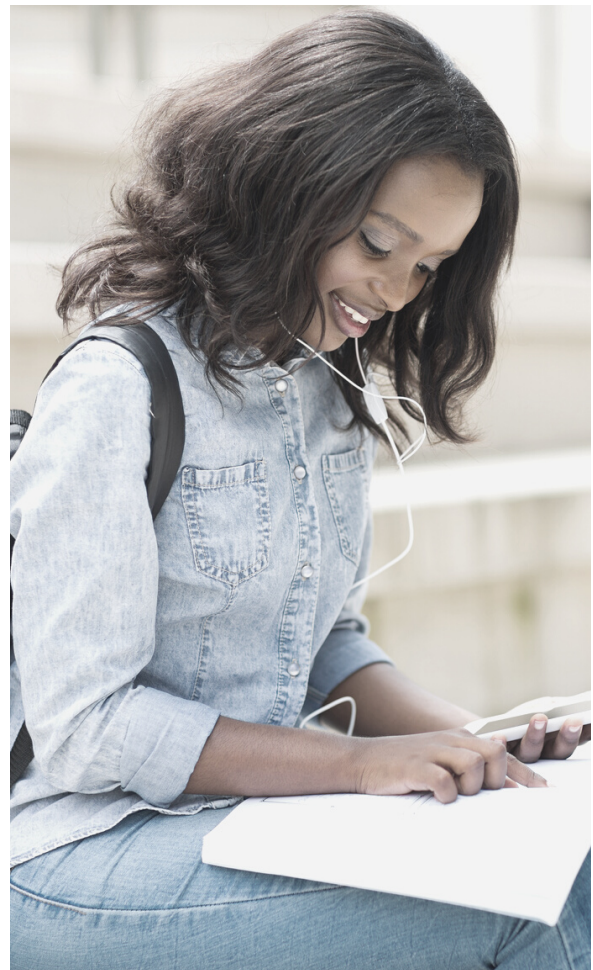
This study was commissioned in the fall of 2021 by the William G. & Marie Selby Foundation and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County to gather community feedback and conduct secondary data analysis regarding opportunities for reducing inequities in college attainment rates across the four-county region of Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota.

"College" is used throughout the report to refer to any accredited postsecondary institution, including technical colleges.

The data gathering process included one-on-one interviews, online surveys, analyses of local, state, and national college-related metrics, and a literature review identifying best practices and evidence-based strategies.

The research focused on the variables impacting college preparation, college funding, and college persistence, which includes progression in and completion of a postsecondary program. The goal was to determine any barriers, as well as opportunities, for helping community members (including both traditional high school graduates and older adults) to access postsecondary pathways, fund their college journey, and ultimately earn credentials, including degrees and industry-recognized certifications.

This report includes background information on the project, details about the methodology used, and an overview of the the relevant population statistics for the four counties.



Findings are organized by the three research areas of **College Preparation**, **College Funding**, and **College Persistence**, with key metrics, community feedback, and best practices summarized for each area. The report ends with a conclusion page, as well as an appendix which lists the organizations that participated in the study. An executive summary of core findings can be found on the following page.

# Executive Summary:

## Core Findings

The regional study identified many opportunities for addressing inequities in postsecondary preparation, funding, and persistence. Core findings are summarized below, along with collaboration suggestions from community members.



### College Preparation

- **Underserved populations for college preparation include low-income; Black & Hispanic, especially first generation; academically average; undocumented/ Dreamers.**
- **Service gaps are found in college & career planning; guidance counselor ratios; parent engagement; financial education; technical & trades focus; mentoring.**
- **Inequities exist in access to college & career acceleration programs and test prep; and in high school graduation and college enrollment gaps between Black or Hispanic students and White students.**



### College Funding

- **Underfunded populations include middle income; non-traditional (age 24 or older); academically average; undocumented/ Dreamers.**
- **Recommendations include renewable scholarships; emergency funds; financial aid navigation; college mentoring.**
- **Inequities exist in access to ACT/SAT prep for Bright Futures eligibility; and the imbalance of student debt, especially for women of color.**



### College Persistence

- **Service gaps are found in resource navigation; college mentoring; mental health services; business connections; emergency funds.**
- **Inequities exist in college graduation and dropout rates, especially between Black and White students.**



### Collaboration Suggestions

- **Community-Level Data Tracking**
- **Funders Forum for Sharing**
- **Regional Scholarship Database**
- **ACT/SAT Test Prep**
- **Employer Connections**
- **Professional Development**
- **Marketing & Outreach**
- **Common or Aligned Scholarship Application**
- **Policy Advocacy**



# Background

In 2019, the William G. & Marie Selby Foundation ('Selby Foundation') began an internal review of its scholarship programs, engaging local consultant Dr. Laurey Stryker who recommended that the Foundation work with the regional funder community to identify gaps and innovative ways to leverage postsecondary award strategies.

This led to a 2021-2022 Selby workplan that defined a goal of conducting a "state of scholarships in the region assessment and conversation with other scholarship and financial aid funders" in order to identify gaps in scholarship funding, as well as in college access and support services. This assessment includes the counties of Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota. Consultant Deborah Chapman was commissioned to conduct the assessment and to develop this report.

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County (CFSC) was also implementing a scholarship program review during 2021-2022, so the two foundations decided to partner on this project. Combined, they award over \$3 million in scholarships each year across the four counties.

The primary objective of the State of Scholarships Regional Assessment is:

- To identify the best use of scholarship resources in order to reduce inequities and maximize impact in postsecondary attainment rates across the four-county region.



Additional project objectives include:

- To better understand and document the regional landscape of educational stakeholders and services in the areas of:
  - College Preparation
  - College Scholarships & Funding
  - College Persistence
- To determine any gaps in these services, assessed through an equity lens, particularly for historically underserved populations.
- To encourage community partners to collaboratively track, and ultimately decrease, inequities in local post-secondary attainment rates for the region.

# Methodology

The following sources of input were used in the development of the regional assessment.

**Stakeholder Interviews:** One-on-one interviews were conducted with 49 individuals, representing 38 organizations from the sectors of philanthropy, K-12 education, higher education, as well as youth and adult-serving nonprofits, across the four counties of Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee and Sarasota. An inductive approach was used to analyze the qualitative interview responses in order to code the information and identify themes and core findings.

**College Preparation Survey:** An online survey with both quantitative and qualitative questions was sent to 88 individuals working in the college preparation space, with 44 respondents, representing a 50% response rate. These include high school guidance counselors, career & college advisers, education foundations, youth-serving nonprofits, as well as organizations offering adult career & college services. Participant contact information was provided by the scholarship managers at CFSC and the Selby Foundation.

**Scholarship Recipient Survey:** Data were also pulled from recent surveys of scholarship recipients from both CFSC and the Selby Foundation.

**Literature Review:** Best practices were derived from a review of literature summarizing evidence-based strategies for improving college enrollment and completion rates.

**Secondary Research:** Data were also gleaned using existing sources from entities such as the U.S. Census Bureau, Florida Department of Education, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, the Florida College Access Network, National Student Clearinghouse, etc.

Primary stakeholders for this study are captured in the diagram to the right and include the general population and current college students, for whom the focus is on increasing credential attainment rates, as well as those supporting this goal in the higher education, K-12, philanthropy, and nonprofit sectors. The data are summarized in the following pages, organized by these four categories:

- Regional Population
- College Preparation
- College Funding
- College Persistence



# Regional Population Data

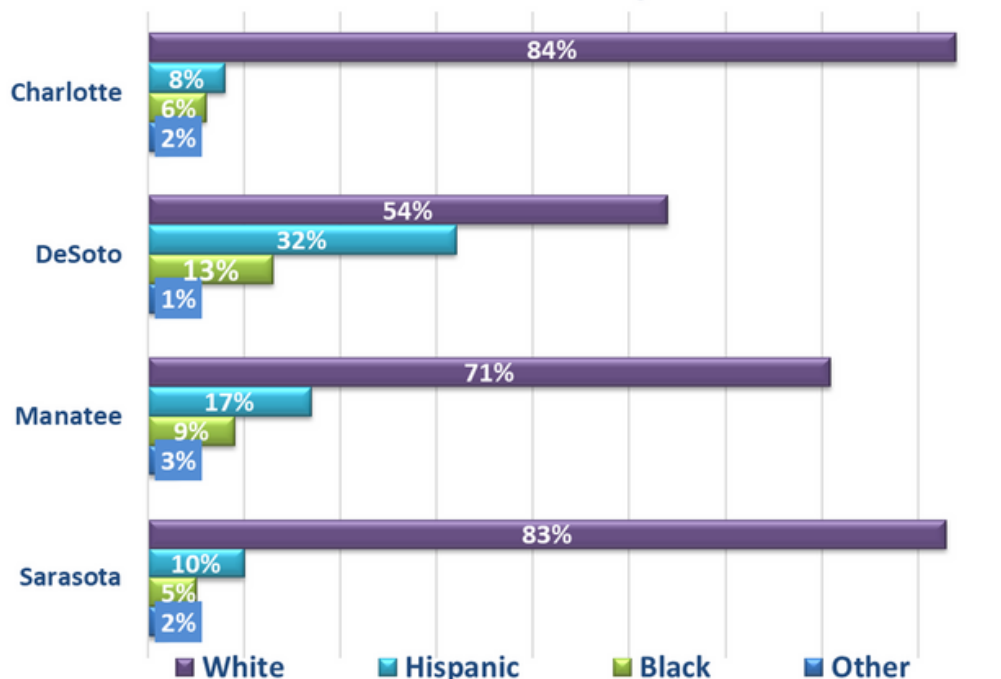
Understanding population data can help put project findings into perspective. For instance, there are approximately 1.1 million people living in the four-county region, with 100,000 of those below the federal poverty level and an additional 320,000+ categorized by United Way as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) or the "working poor." This means 42% of residents are struggling to meet basic needs. Note that the current rate of inflation will increase this percentage, which is based on 2020 data, given rising costs across all spending categories. DeSoto County has the highest level of poverty; Sarasota the least. The county-level demographic profiles below can provide context for some of the outcomes comparisons within the report.

## Percent of Population Living in Poverty

Region	Total Population	% Below Federal Poverty Level	% ALICE Population	% ALICE or Below
Charlotte County	191,000	10%	30%	<b>40%</b>
Desoto County	34,000	21%	46%	<b>67%</b>
Manatee County	411,000	11%	36%	<b>47%</b>
Sarasota County	441,000	9%	28%	<b>37%</b>
4-County Region	1,077,000	10%	32%	<b>42%</b>
Florida	21,500,000	13%	33%	<b>46%</b>
U.S.A.	328,000,000	11%	42%	<b>53%</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2020 & United Way Florida Alice Report, 2020

## Percent of Total Population by Race/Ethnicity for Each County



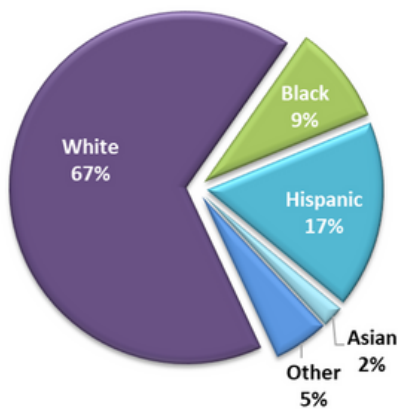
Source: 2021 BEBR Quick Fact 2020 U.S. Census

# Regional Population Data

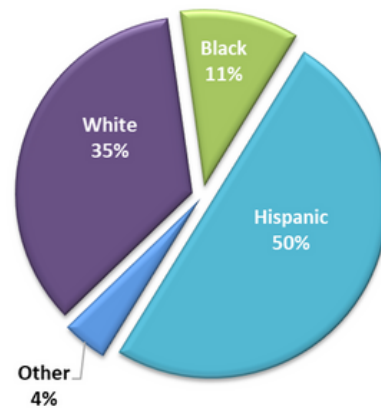
Race/ethnicity percentages for each of the four school districts reflect the demographics of the young adult pipeline possibly headed for a college path. It also shows the growing diversity of the younger population. Trend data reveal that the local Hispanic community (also referred to as Latinx by some) is growing at the fastest rate in the region.

## School District Student Profiles

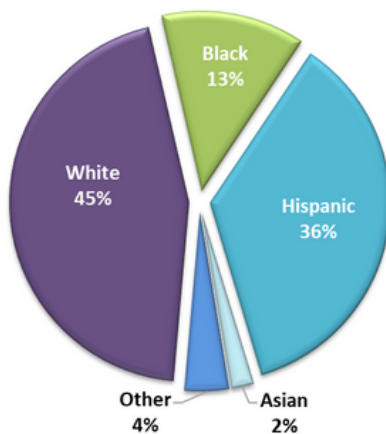
Charlotte County K-12 Student Population  
Race/Ethnicity



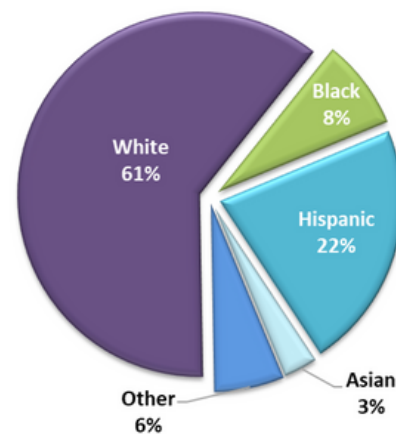
DeSoto County K-12 Student Population  
Race/Ethnicity



Manatee County K-12 Student Population  
Race/Ethnicity



Sarasota County K-12 Student Population  
Race/Ethnicity



Source: FL DOE <https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards>



# College Preparation: Key Metrics

The first category of findings centers on an assessment of the readiness of students to enter a postsecondary pathway. Data collected by the Florida Department of Education (DOE) at the high school level provides insights into this question of college preparation, especially in terms of equitable access for marginalized populations. While the data focus on the high school population, college preparation supports are also provided for non-traditional, older adults entering college. However, there are no compiled metrics from which to glean the impact of these efforts.

The three key DOE statistics reviewed for each county include:

- **College and Career Acceleration**
- **High School Graduation Rate**
- **Postsecondary Enrollment**



**College and Career Acceleration** is a measurement of college preparation in high school calculated as the percent of graduates who, during the four years of high school, earned at least one or more of the following:

- A score of 3 or > on an Advanced Placement (AP) exam
- A score of 4 or > on an International Baccalaureate (IB) exam
- A score of 3 or > on an Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) exam
- A grade of C- or better in an approved dual enrollment course
- An industry certification identified in the DOE Industry Certification Funding List

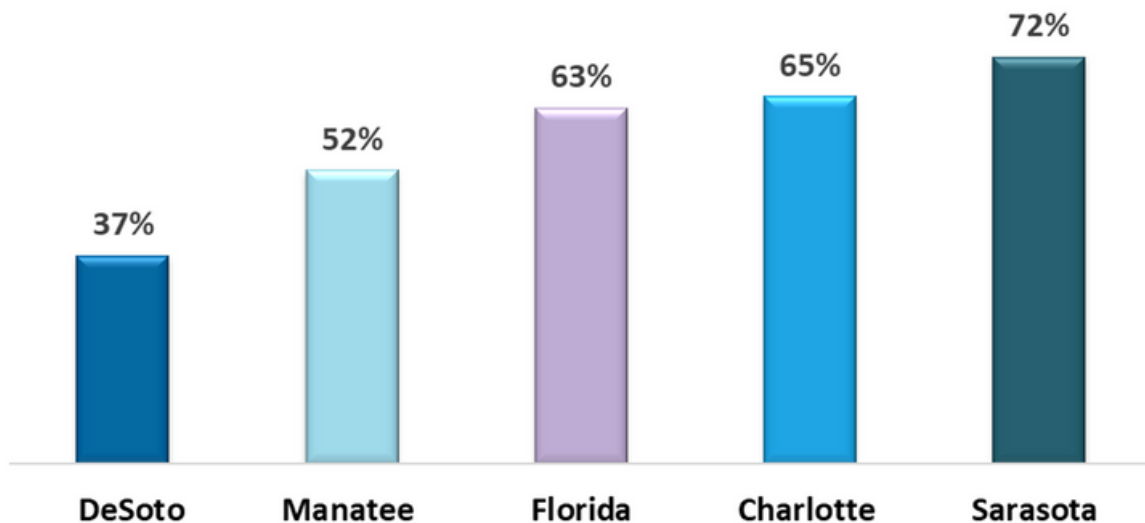


# College Preparation: Key Metrics

## College and Career Acceleration

A myriad of research shows that students who take college acceleration opportunities in high school are more likely to graduate high school, go on to college, and complete a credential. For example, a 2018 University of Texas study found that dual enrollment students were twice as likely to continue through the first and second years of college, and AP and IB students were three times more likely. Data from the Florida Department of Education provide the following information on College and Career Acceleration outcomes for each county, starting with the percent of students who participated in one of the acceleration programs listed on the previous page.

**Percent of Students Who Participated in a College & Career Acceleration Program in 2019-2020, by County**



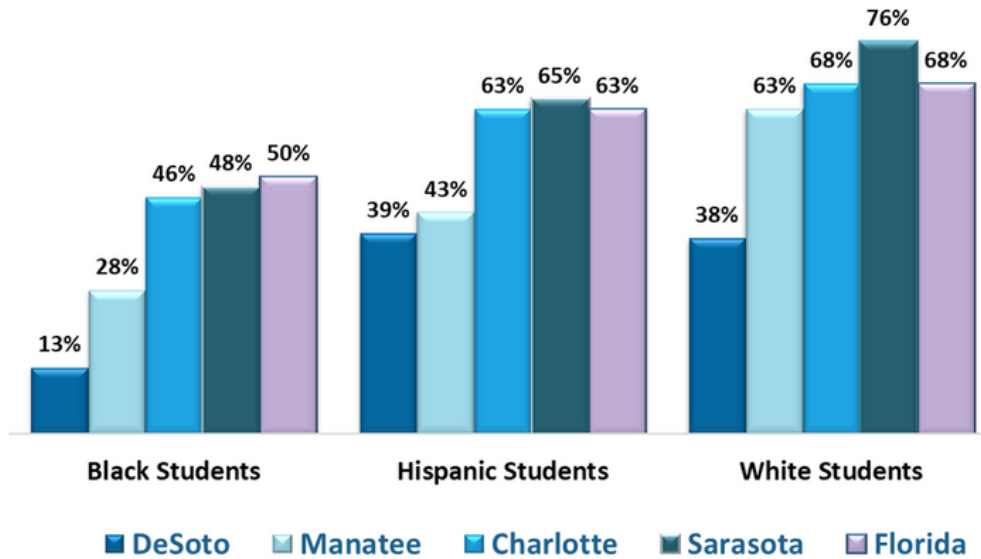
Source: FL DOE <https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards>

The Center for American Progress recommends that school districts *"analyze data to reduce opportunities for bias in systems used to identify students for advanced courses, and implement policies that automatically place students with demonstrated proficiency in the highest available course."*

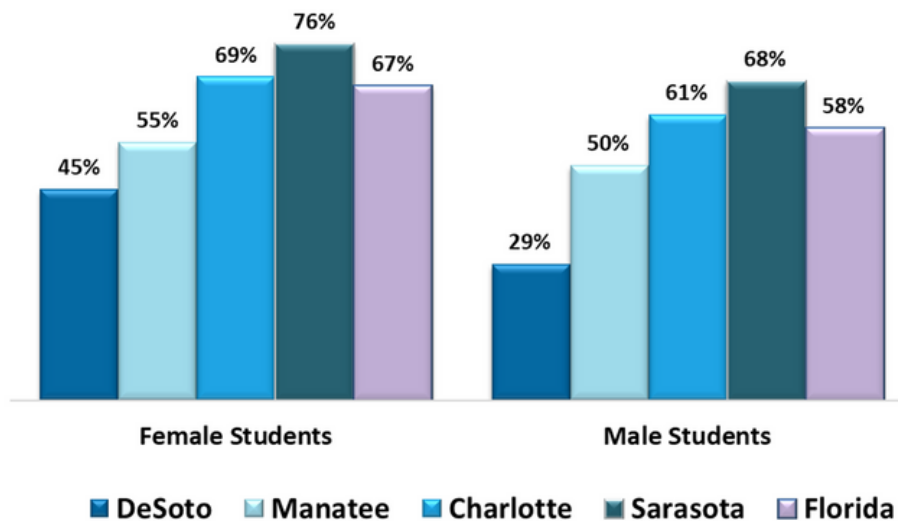
# College Preparation: Key Metrics

## College and Career Acceleration

Percent of Students Who Participated in a College & Career Acceleration Program in 2019-2020, by Race/Ethnicity for Each County



Percent of Students Who Participated in a College & Career Acceleration Program in 2019-2020, by Gender for Each County



Source: FL DOE <https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards>. Note: Given the small percentage of Asian students and the lack of any data in DeSoto for this demographic, these numbers were not included in the above charts.

# College Preparation: Key Metrics

## College and Career Acceleration Summary



- DeSoto and Manatee County are **below the state average** for college and career acceleration participation for all students, with DeSoto significantly lower.

- All four counties report Black student participation rates **below the state average**.



- While Manatee County has the largest percentage of Black students in its overall student population, at 13% of total enrollment, it has a significantly **lower college and career acceleration participation rate** for this demographic compared to Charlotte and Sarasota counties.

- **Female participation rates** exceed those of males across all counties, reflecting a statewide trend, with the largest gap seen in DeSoto.



- **Hispanic students were at or above the state average** in both Charlotte and Sarasota counties.

These findings point to the opportunity for community-based strategies to address inequities in access to quality college acceleration programs. This can include addressing the availability of such programs, as well as increasing the awareness and aspirations of students to enroll in them. Studies show that some students doubt they can handle college-level work, when in fact they are capable of the challenge. In 2019, Florida ranked first in the nation in AP class participation and became the first state to erase the equity gap in AP between Hispanic and White students. The College Board attributed the success to a focused strategy of identifying students capable of college-level work and supporting those who may need some extra help.



# College Preparation: Key Metrics

The second metric assessed as an indicator of college preparation is the graduation rate for each county, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender, as summarized in the table below.

## High School Graduation Rates

County	Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students 2021-22	High School Graduation Rate 2020-21	Total Number of High School Graduates (rounded)	Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity	Graduation Rate by Gender
Charlotte	71%	91%	1,200	95% B 90% H 94% A 90% W	94% F 88% M
DeSoto	96%	82%	300	74% B 87% H 77% W	88% F 77% M
Manatee	58%	85%	3,000	82% B 82% H 99% A 88% W	90% F 82% M
Sarasota	46%	91%	3,100	80% B 89% H 98% A 93% W	95% F 91% M

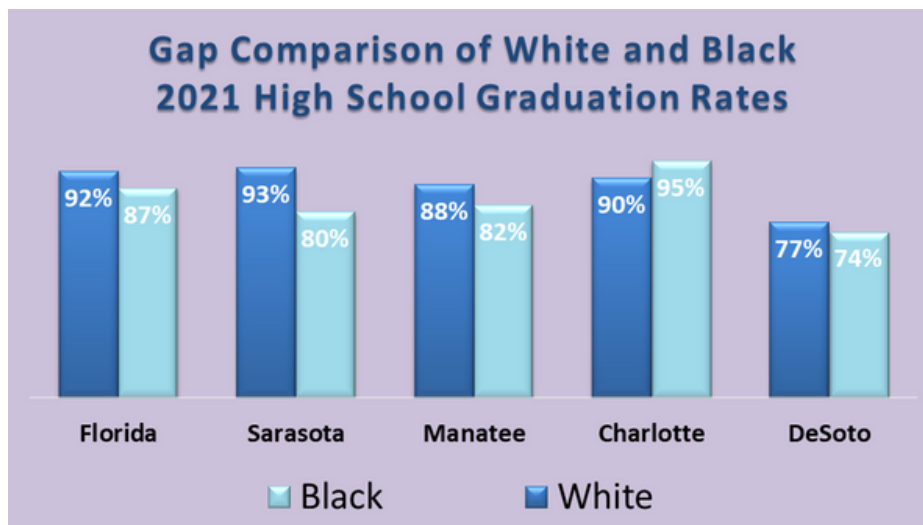
Source: FL DOE [https:// edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards](https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards). Note that percentages are rounded and B = Black, H = Hispanic, A = Asian, W = White, F = Female, M = Male. Economically disadvantaged is defined using the percentage eligible for free and reduced breakfast and lunch. Asian students make up only 2-3% of graduating students in all counties, except DeSoto, which had less than 10 students, therefore it has an unreportable graduation rate for this demographic.



# College Preparation: Key Metrics

## High School Graduation Rates Summary

- There were ~ 7,600 high school graduates last year in the four-county region, with a weighted regional graduation rate of 88%.
- Except for Sarasota, more than half of the school district students in the other three counties are considered economically disadvantaged.
- While Charlotte has a large percentage of low-income students, at 71%, it still saw a high graduation rate at 91% — the same as Sarasota — and its graduation rate for Black and Hispanic students is higher than for White students.
- DeSoto has increased its graduation rate significantly over the last five years, rising more than 20 percentage points over the last three years.
- Hispanic students in DeSoto County, which represent 50% of the student population, have higher graduation rates than both Black and White students.
- Males in general have significantly lower high school graduation rates than females across all counties, with the greatest gaps seen in Manatee and DeSoto counties.
- The largest achievement gap is seen between White and Black students in Sarasota County, with a 13 percentage point difference.



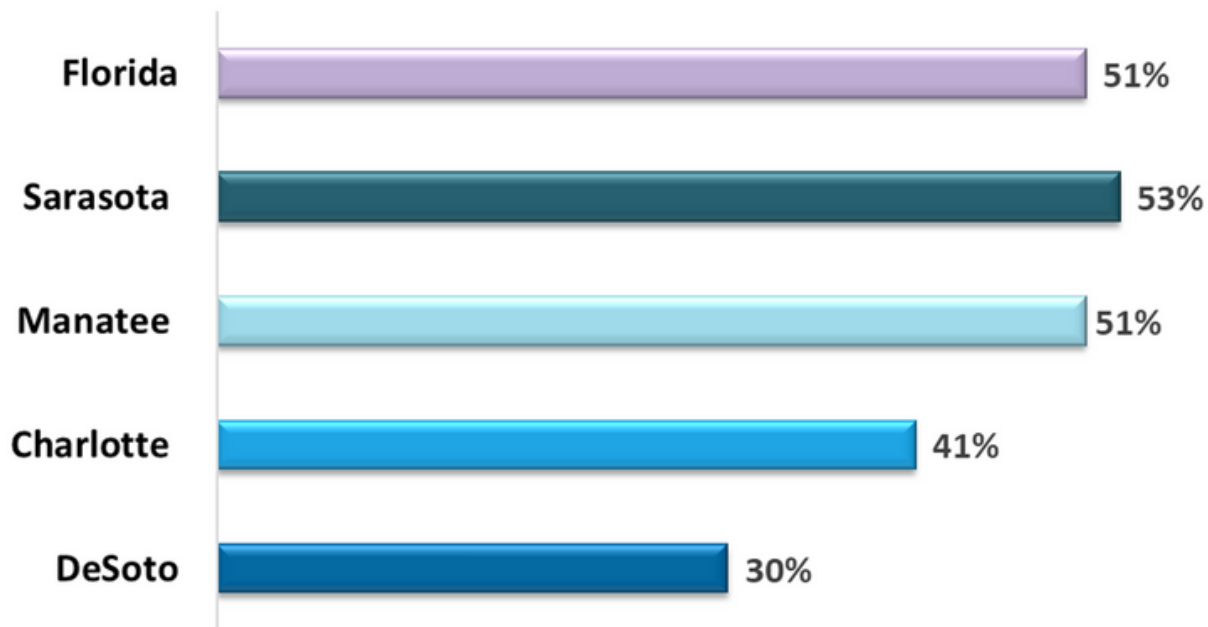
Source: FL DOE <https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards>

# College Preparation: Key Metrics

## College Enrollment

The third and final high school statistic used to evaluate college preparation is the DOE's Postsecondary Continuation Rate, which reflects college enrollment rates for students who graduate with a standard high school diploma and then enroll in a Florida postsecondary program within the first academic year following their graduation. This includes students who enroll in both Florida public and private higher education institutions, as well as technical colleges. There is a lag in college enrollment data compilation, so the figures below represent the most recent reporting from the 2019-2020 graduating high school cohorts.

**Percent of 2019-2020 High School Graduates Who Enrolled in a Florida College, by County**



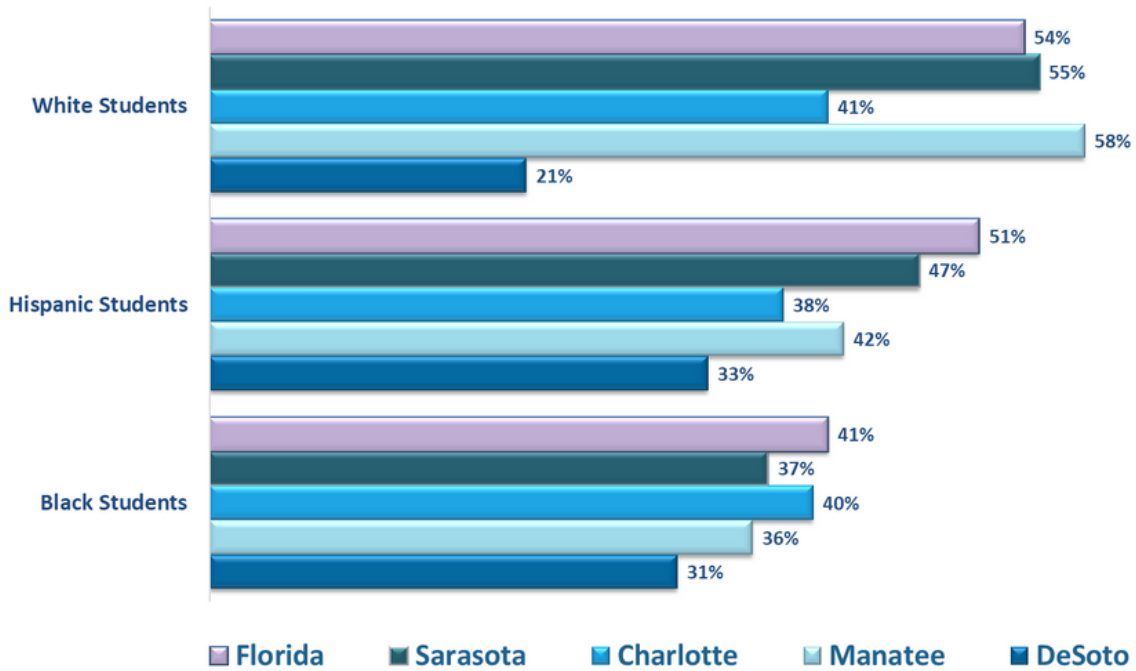
Source: FL DOE [https:// edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards](https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards). Note that all percentages are rounded.

These enrollment statistics are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender on the following page. Unfortunately, Florida no longer receives out-of-state postsecondary enrollment information from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). Therefore, while a relatively small percentage of regional students attend non-Florida colleges, the DOE report does not capture this. As a point of reference, CFSC commissioned a report from NSC on a sample of 2,000 scholarship recipients over the last several years and 91% of them attended a Florida college.

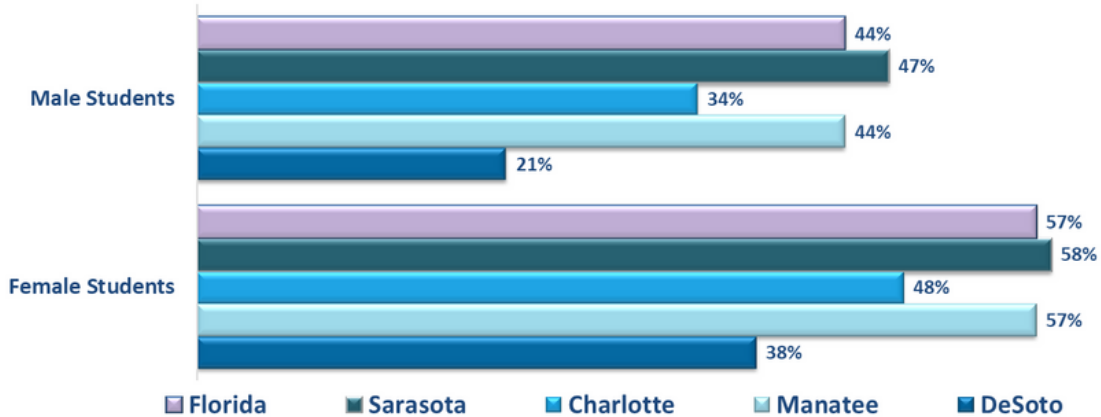
# College Preparation: Key Metrics

## College Enrollment

Percent of 2019-2020 High School Graduates Who Enrolled in a Florida College, by Race/Ethnicity for Each County



Percent of 2019-2020 High School Graduates Who Enrolled in a Florida College, by Gender for Each County



Source: FL DOE [https:// edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards](https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards). Note that all percentages are rounded.



# College Preparation: Key Metrics

## College Enrollment Summary



- Of the 7,573 regional high school graduates in the 2019-2020 cohort, 3,838 (or 51%) were college bound, as seen in the table below. This represents just over half of the graduating classes for Manatee and Sarasota, 41% of Charlotte graduates, and about a third of the DeSoto graduates.

- Black students are significantly less likely to enroll in college across the region, with all of the counties below the state average for this demographic.



- Hispanic college enrollment for the region was also below the state average and trails White student enrollment, except in DeSoto where it surpasses it.

- Male students are significantly less likely to enroll in college across all counties – a pattern seen statewide.



## Total Number of 2020 High School Graduates Who Enrolled in College, by Race/Ethnicity for Each County

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Other	ALL
Desoto	21	56	10	0	5	92
Charlotte	389	68	51	11	21	540
Manatee	934	398	148	72	52	1,604
Sarasota	1,076	286	89	64	87	1,602
REGIONAL	2,420	808	298	147	165	3,838

Source: FL DOE [https:// edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards](https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards). Note that the majority of 'Other' are multi-racial.

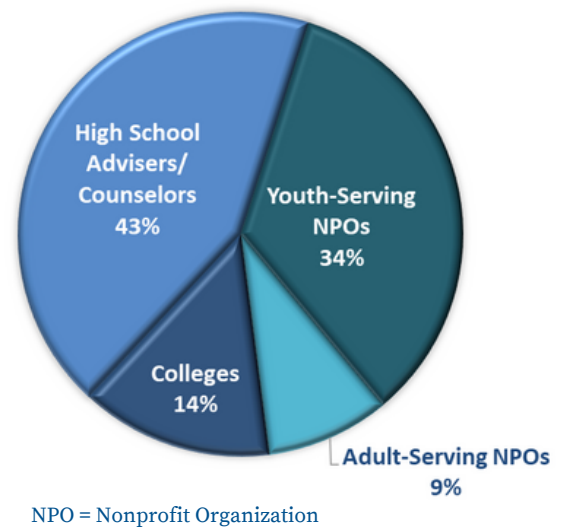
# College Preparation: Community Feedback

As part of the regional assessment, 48 people from 39 different organizations were interviewed to gather their feedback on perceived gaps in college preparation services, scholarship funding, and college persistence resources. These include representatives from local foundations, colleges, the K-12 system, and nonprofit organizations.

An online survey also was sent specifically to key providers of postsecondary support and college preparation services. These include individuals working in guidance and college advising, youth-serving organizations, and nonprofits providing adult career and college coaching services.

The survey link was emailed to a list of 88 individuals. Most of these names were provided by the scholarship managers at CFSC and Selby. Of the targeted 88 people, 44 completed the questionnaire, for a 50% response rate. The distribution of survey respondents by type of organization can be seen to the right.

**Survey Respondents  
By Type of Organization**



## Lack of Data Tracking

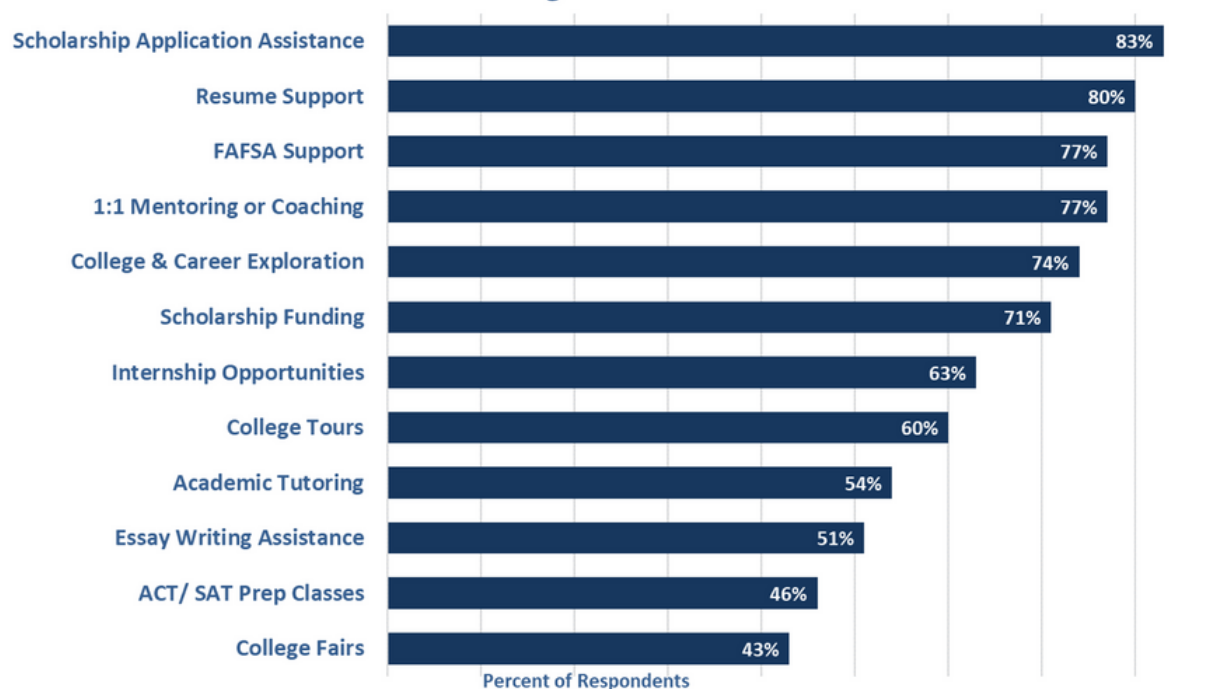
While 77% of the survey respondents indicated that they track some form of demographics for the individuals they serve, only four provided cumulative reports: two youth-serving and two adult-serving organizations. A key goal of the project was to gather data on college readiness outcomes. Unfortunately, most of the organizations across all four counties indicated that, while they would like to be able to track impact, they do not have the capacity and/or capability to do so. Sample quotes are below.

- *“We just don’t have the bandwidth to track the data.”*
- *“We only track data if it is required by a donor. It’s mostly just a capacity issue.”*
- *“We don’t report on our demographics or outcomes; it’s just too time consuming.”*

# College Preparation: Services Provided

The chart below depicts the percentage of survey respondents who reported that their organization provides the specified college preparation service listed. College fairs and ACT/SAT test preparation classes are the least offered services, while scholarship application assistance and resume support are the most commonly offered services. Note that some organizations charge a fee for some of these services.

**What Postsecondary or College Preparation Services  
Does Your Organization Provide?**



## Overserved Populations

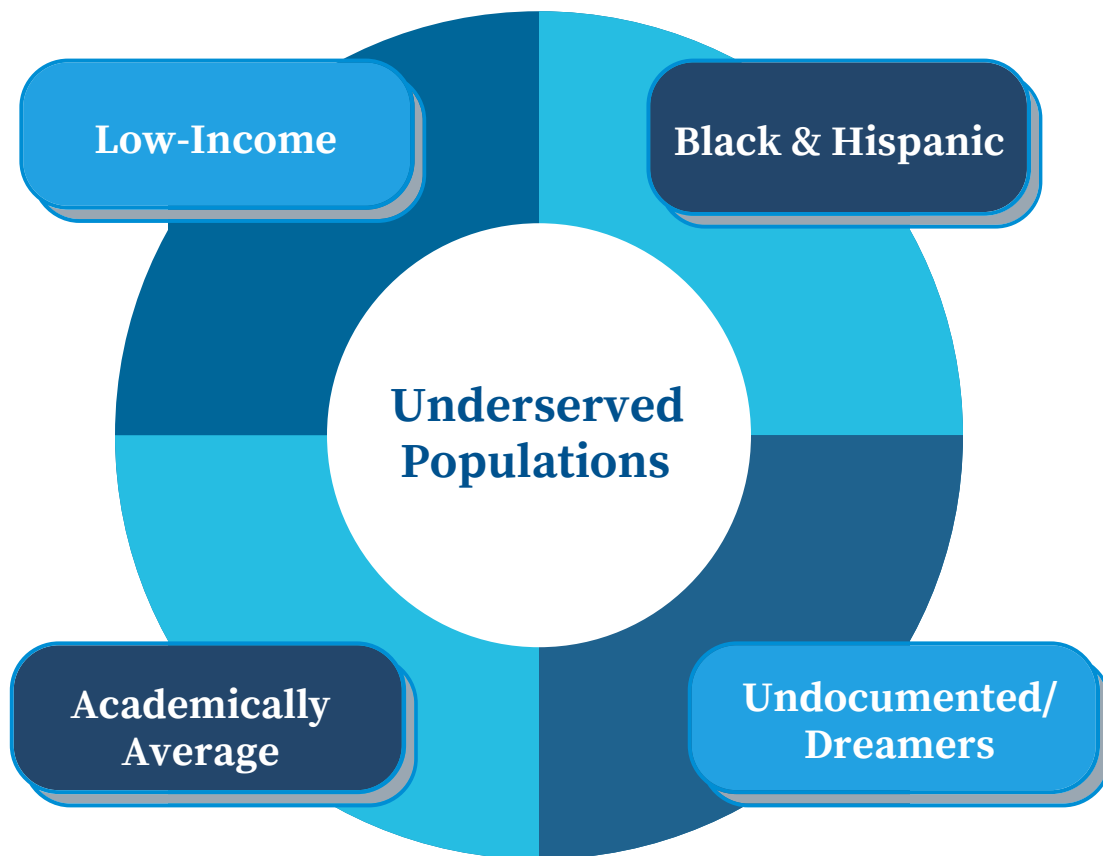
While survey participants were asked, “What specific populations do you feel are underserved in college prep services?” many included comments about those they feel are overserved. These responses focused on low-income, high achievers. Sample quotes are provided below.

- *“Overachievers are often served by multiple youth organizations and are receiving an abundance of support.”*
- *“Low-income, high achievers get the most support and funding, including Bright Futures and aid from those attending endowed schools.”*
- *“We all support the top students, but the opposite is also needed, especially those with potential.”*

The most common underserved populations they identified are summarized on the following page.

# College Preparation: Underserved Populations

The four most common populations identified as underserved in college preparation services are those that are low-income; Black and Hispanic individuals, especially those first in their families to attend college; academically average students (or middle achievers); and Dreamers – young undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children.



Respondents were particularly passionate about the academically average students, providing detailed explanations of their responses, as seen in the sample quotes below:

- *"The average performers are the ones left out, but those students often have other barriers impacting their performance."*
- *"The middle achievers can excel in college; their teenage behavior does not predict their success."*
- *"There are the students that are in the middle that don't have the one-on-one support to lead them to what they can do after high school."*



# College Preparation: Gaps in Services

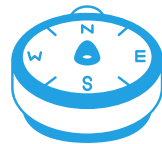
Participants were asked, "What do you believe are the key gaps in our community regarding college preparation?" Responses were analyzed and coded inductively to identify themes. Below and on the next page is a summary of the **six** most common service gaps reported. Direct quotes are provided to capture the voice of the respondents.



## College & Career Planning

*"I would love it if every school required a college readiness class where the students had time to become college-ready with a support person to help."*

*"We need a Student Life Skills (SLS) course in every high school to help students become more effective in college, introduce students to college success skills, and assist students with goal setting, stress management, study skills, career exploration, and time management."*



## Guidance Counselor Ratios

*"The shortage of guidance counselors is the biggest gap."*

*"Counselors are so overwhelmed, especially with all of the testing."*

*"The problem of equal access to college and career advising at the high school level is directly reflected in the sheer number of students in the public system vs. the number of counselors and the type of resources."*

*"The gap is the student to counselor ratio at most public schools."*



## Parent Engagement

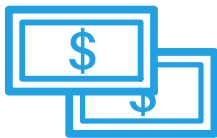
*"So many kids are ready for college, but their parents are a barrier. For example, they are unwilling to complete the FAFSA."*

*"We need to get more information to the families; connect with them more to understand options and opportunities."*

*"We also need to reach and educate parents on post-secondary opportunities and financial aid."*

# College Preparation: Gaps in Services

While the first three gaps in college preparation services summarized on the previous page relate more to youth, the three listed below describe the gaps identified by community members that impact both **youth and adult** populations.



## Financial Education

*"Key gaps include not being aware of the multiple financial aid and grant opportunities that exist. Especially those that target specific demographics."*

*"Lack of a plan to successfully apply for multiple financial aid opportunities."*

*"Financial assistance to enable low-wage workers (and, particularly, working parents) to return to school."*



## Technical & Trades Path

*"There needs to be more marketing and outreach on vocational and 2-year options."*

*"There is a lack of awareness of non-traditional career opportunities, which might match the student's aptitude and interest."*

*"We continue to address stigma related to CTE (Career and Technical Education) training and Tech schools vs. 2-yr and 4-yr colleges."*

*"Technical College is seen as a lesser choice but can be a wonderful stepping stone to many career opportunities."*



## College Access Mentoring

*"We have a proven mentoring method with a high success rate. We are only limited by the number of students we can serve because of funding, which at the moment is only a small percentage of the population."*

*"With so many first-gen students, there has to be more mentorship. The guidance counselors can't handle the level of need."*

*"We need to expand our mentoring services to reach more students and provide additional career exploration."*

# College Preparation: Collaborative Opportunities

Community members were asked to offer suggestions for how those working in the college preparation and readiness space could collaborate more. Below are the four most frequent responses, with sample quotes following.



## Forum for Sharing

Respondents would like to see more communication and affinity groups to connect organizations, and to develop a systems approach to supporting students. They don't want to work in silos, but rather collaborate and network, creating synergies where possible.

*"We need a college readiness think tank where we can talk and share ideas."*

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## Scholarship Database

Access to up-to-date financial aid resources for college-bound high schoolers as well as non-traditional adult students was described as a high need given the information is considered fragmented and hard to sort through.

*"I would love to upgrade the Rotary Futures database to make it more user-friendly and shareable."*

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## SAT/ ACT Test Prep

Many people felt that providing collective test prep services to students who are just below the Bright Futures thresholds with their SAT or ACT standardized test scores would offer a high return on investment by helping them reach eligibility for this significant funding resource.

*"Why are we all offering the same things like test help, but not collaborating?"*

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## Professional Development

Participants also felt that they and other community organizations need more expertise and training in college preparation, and that funding for professional development and education could increase their effectiveness.

*"College access and success organizations are terribly under-resourced and frankly, under-educated."*

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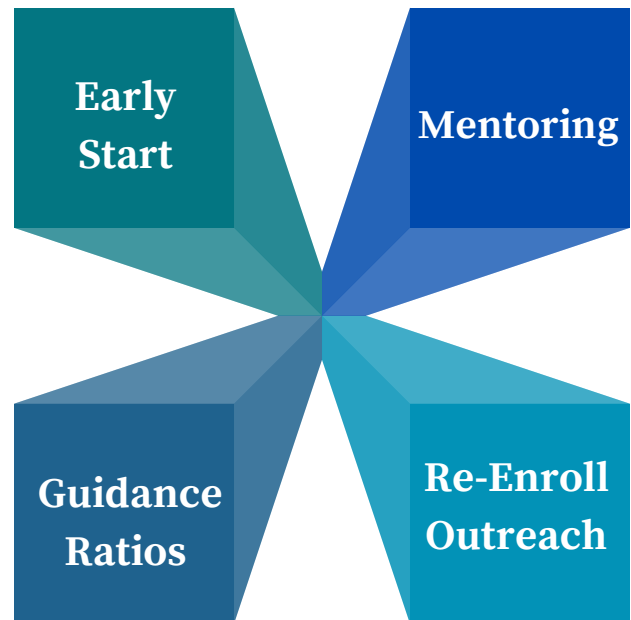
# College Preparation: Best Practices

Besides rigorous academic standards and the acceleration options mentioned in the prior metrics section, the following additional best practices regarding college preparation were identified through a review of literature.

**Early Start:** Research suggests investing in early education and culturally responsive curriculum can help all students prepare for a college pathway. In a 2019 study, Georgetown University researchers found that low-income kindergartners with good scores are less likely to graduate from college than their affluent peers with lower grades. And the outcomes are even worse for talented children from low-income minority households.

**Mentoring:** Research shows that mentoring increases a mentee's academic success and can be of significant benefit to both high-achieving and less academically successful students, whether youth or adults. "Near peer" mentoring has also gained attention as a model of mentoring that taps the connection between mentor and mentee when they are close in age and/or have the same race/ethnicity or life experiences. Studies show that near peer mentors are better able to interact with and understand the struggles of students.

**Guidance Counselor Ratios:** The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1 for maximum program effectiveness. However, the average ratio in the U.S. is 424:1 and it is 449:1 in Florida. Similarly, the average for the local four-county region is 450:1, almost double the recommended workload for counselors. According to an ASCA study, school districts with lower student-to-counselor ratios produce lower chronic absenteeism rates, higher graduation rates, and higher college entrance and persistence rates.



**Re-Enroll Outreach:** According to FCAN, Florida has more than 2 million people, or 22% of working-age adults, with some college credit but no degree. A 2015 Lumina Foundation study found that these "near-completers" are an important target population to increase postsecondary attainment rates. "Complete Tampa Bay" is an example of this outreach strategy which provides free re-enrollment coaching and support to students who have prior college or technical training experience. Another best practice example is from Nashville's chamber of commerce which successfully developed an initiative known as "Reconnect Ambassadors" that provides community members with the tools and information to re-enroll in college through trained Ambassadors who live in the same neighborhoods as potential students.

# College Funding: Key Metrics

The second category of project findings after College Preparation is College Funding. This section begins with a summary of the key metrics associated with postsecondary funding resources, including the following data:

- **Scholarship Investments by Regional Funder**
- **County FAFSA Completion Rates**
- **Estimated Pell Funding by County**
- **Local College Costs and Average Pell Grant Awards**
- **Bright Futures Awards**
- **Student Loan Debt**



In addition to key metrics, feedback from scholarship funders and financial officers provides insights into their objectives, data tracking, and perceptions regarding underfunded populations and gaps in scholarship services. They also offer suggestions for process improvements and opportunities for more collaboration. This section ends as the College Preparation one did with some evidence-based examples from a review of best practices.





# College Funding: Key Metrics



## Scholarship Investments by Regional Funder

2021 scholarship investments of the largest higher education funders in the four-county region total to approximately **\$9 million** in combined scholarship dollars to local high school graduates and adults pursuing postsecondary degrees and certifications. These include the following:

- CareerSource Suncoast : \$450,000
- Charles and Marjorie Barancik Foundation: \$1 million
- Charlotte Community Foundation: \$1.7 million
- Community Foundation of Sarasota County \$2.2 million
- Gulf Coast Community Foundation: \$600,000
- Manatee Community Foundation: \$250,000
- State College of Florida Foundation: \$1.7 million
- William G. and Marie Selby Foundation: \$1 million

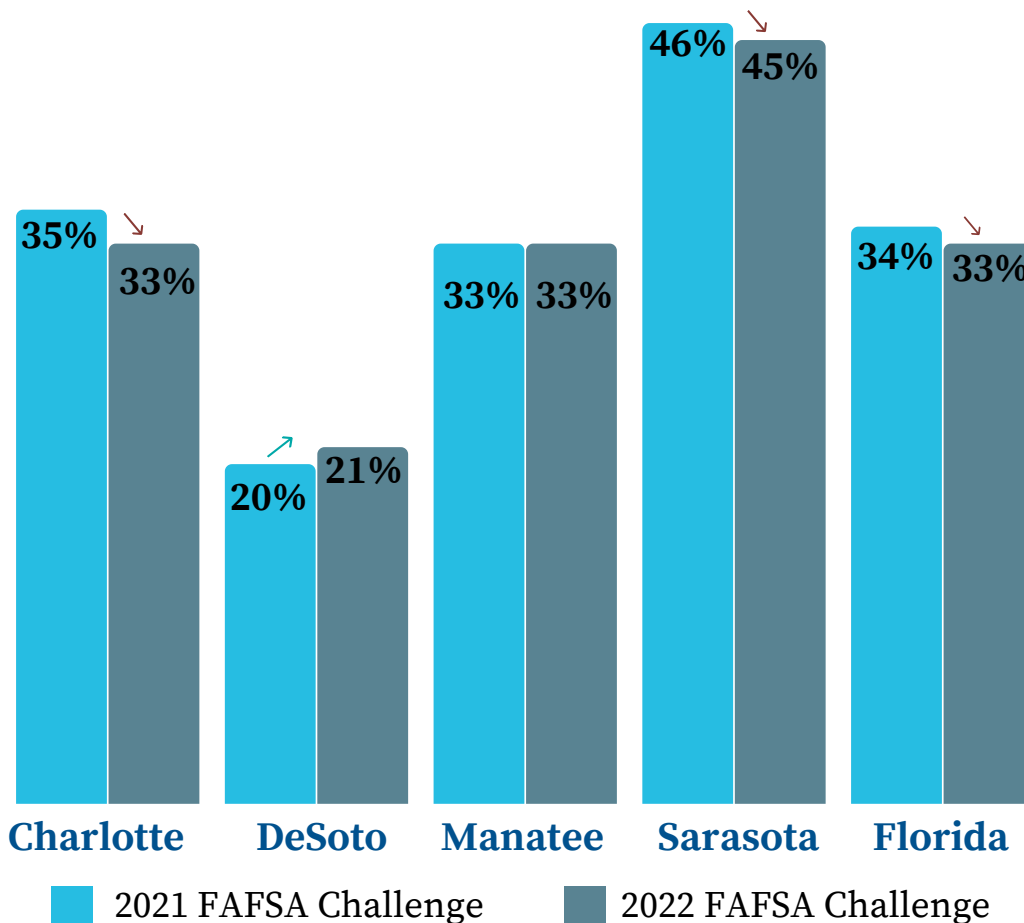
Note that SCF receives institutional scholarship funding from some of the foundations.

The four county education foundations and Take Stock in Children programs combined provide another approximate \$1 million in scholarship support. Other scholarship providers of note include organizations such as Boys and Girls Club, ASALH, Kappa Alpha Psi, the Jewish Federation, Women's Resource Center, etc. Collectively, all of these sources total to about **\$10.2 million in college funds** for local students.

# College Funding: Key Metrics

FCAN estimates that every year Florida high school graduates leave over \$300 million in untapped Pell Grants because they do not complete the federal financial aid form called the FAFSA. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 90% of FAFSA completers enroll in college, compared to 55% of non-completers. Each year, FCAN promotes a FAFSA Challenge from October to March to try to get more high school seniors to tap these free federal dollars. The competition is aimed at incentivizing communities to support students and their families in completing the application. The graph below shows the completion rates this year compared to last. DeSoto is below the state average for both years, while Sarasota has consistently been at the top in the state over the last several years, coming in second in 2021 and first in 2022 in the large district category.

## 2021 & 2022 FAFSA Completion Rates by County



Source: Florida College Access Network

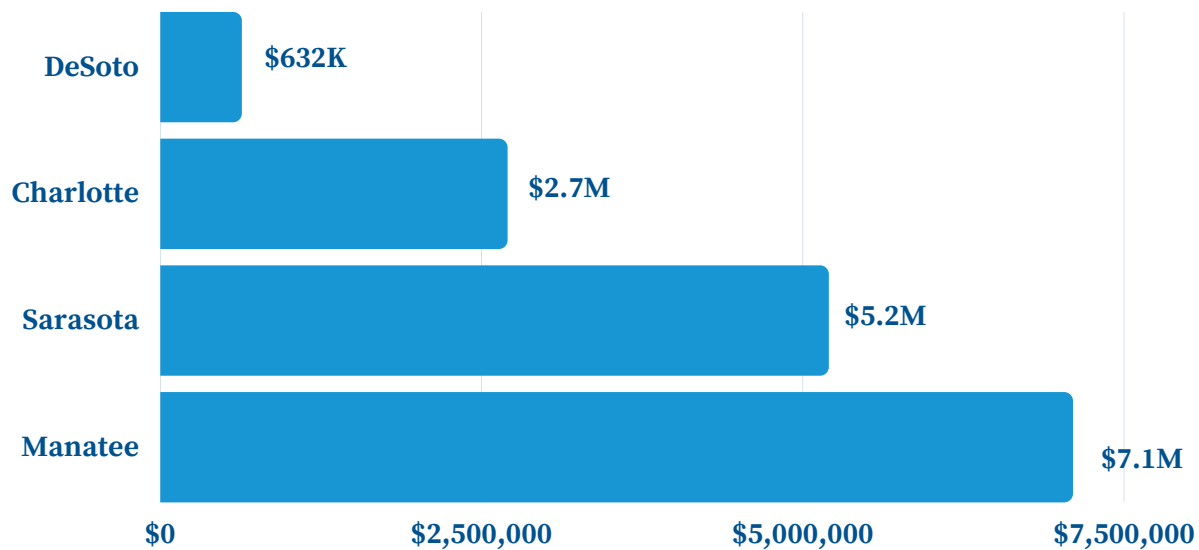
# College Funding: Key Metrics

FCAN estimates Pell Grant awards for each class of graduating seniors based on the actual FAFSA completion rates. The 2021-22 estimates for this federal funding are rounded below for each county and regionally total to **\$14.5 million**.

- Charlotte - \$2.2M
- DeSoto - \$600K
- Manatee - \$6.1M
- Sarasota - \$5.6M

In addition, FCAN calculates the amount of **untapped** Pell Grant funds based on the number of students who do NOT complete the FAFSA. For 2021, this estimate totaled to **~\$15.6 million left on the table** in the four-county region. County-level estimates are captured in the chart below.

## Estimated 2021 Untapped Pell Grant Funding by County



Source: Florida College Access Network. Note that numbers are rounded.

According to the Education Data Initiative:

- 51% of Pell Grant funds go to students whose families earn less than \$20,000 annually
- 38% of Pell Grant recipients came from families with incomes between \$20,001 to \$50,000.
- Only 5% of Pell Grant recipients come from families that earn \$60,000 or more annually.

**~\$4,500**

**Average Annual  
Pell Grant Award**

# College Funding: Key Metrics

Another college funding metric analyzed for this report is the cost of programs at the primary higher education institutions in the region. This includes a comparison of the percent of enrolled students receiving Pell Grants, and the average award amounts. Given that the state colleges serving Charlotte and DeSoto cover multiple counties and USF no longer reports data separately for the Sarasota-Manatee campus, these metrics were not included.

## Pell Grant Funding by Regional College

	Suncoast Technical	Manatee Technical	Charlotte Technical	State College of Florida
Total Student Population	1,000	1,000	600	10,000
Total # of 2019-2020 Graduates	600	900	300	2,000
Top 5 Programs (Based on 2019-2020 Completers)	1. EMT 2. LPN 3. Criminal Justice 4. Fire Science 5. CNA	1. EMT 2. LPN 3. Facial Specialist 4. Welding 5. Cosmetology	1. LPN 2. Digital Design 3. HVAC 4. Fire Science 5. EMT	1. AA General Ed 2. BS Nursing 3. AD Nursing 4. AS Business 5. AS Information Sciences
Average Annual Cost of Top 5 Programs	\$4,800	\$4,400	\$3,000	\$3,000
Percent of Students Receiving Pell Grants	25%	55%	94%	54%
Average Pell Award	\$4,500	\$3,900	\$3,800	\$5,100

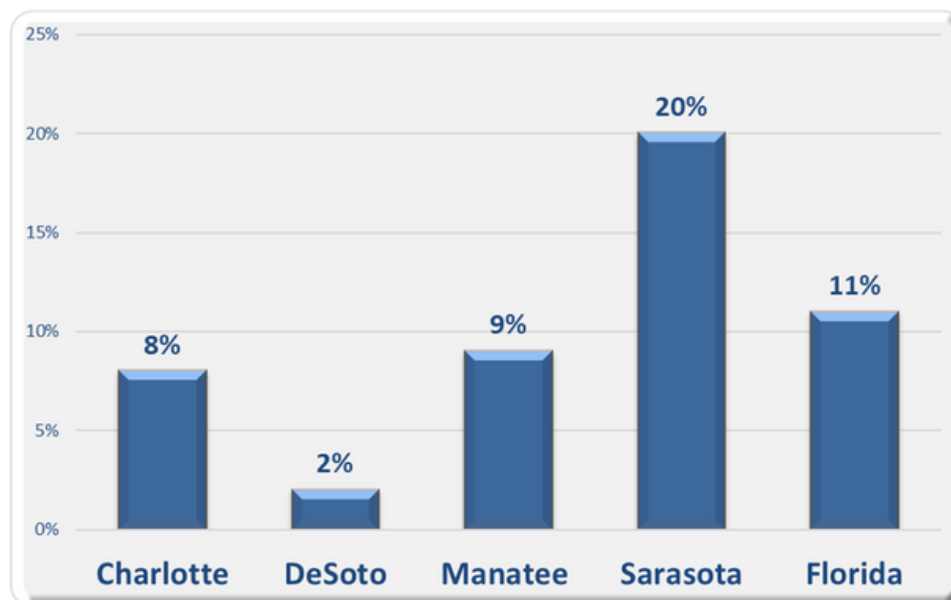
Source: IPEDS 2020 Reports <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/> Note: All figures are rounded.

Suncoast Technical College reported the highest average cost for its programs, yet it had the lowest percentage of students receiving Pell Grants, at 25%. This difference was attributed not to a lack of financial need, but rather to the fact that so many students do not complete the FAFSA and are, therefore, not tapping this resource.

# College Funding: Key Metrics

Florida Bright Futures is a merit-based scholarship program based on a student's GPA, standardized test scores (for the SAT or ACT), and either volunteer hours or a new option of paid work hours. The highest level is the Florida Academic Scholars award for which students receive up to 100% of tuition and fees at a public institution, or a comparable amount at a nonpublic institution. Below is a chart that depicts the percent of the class of 2019 high school graduates, by county, who were eligible for this scholarship award for each county.

## Percent of 2019 High School Graduates Eligible for Bright Futures Academic Scholars Award



Source: Florida Department of Education, Office of Student Financial Assistance. Note: All figures are rounded.

Academic Scholars recipients must have a 3.5 GPA, volunteer or work at least 100 hours, and score at least a 29 on the ACT, or 1330 on the SAT. One strategy to increase equitable access to Bright Futures that was suggested by study participants is to offer resources for standardized test preparation – something more affluent families have disproportionate access to. Test prep is also an area that community representatives felt organizations could potentially collaborate on.

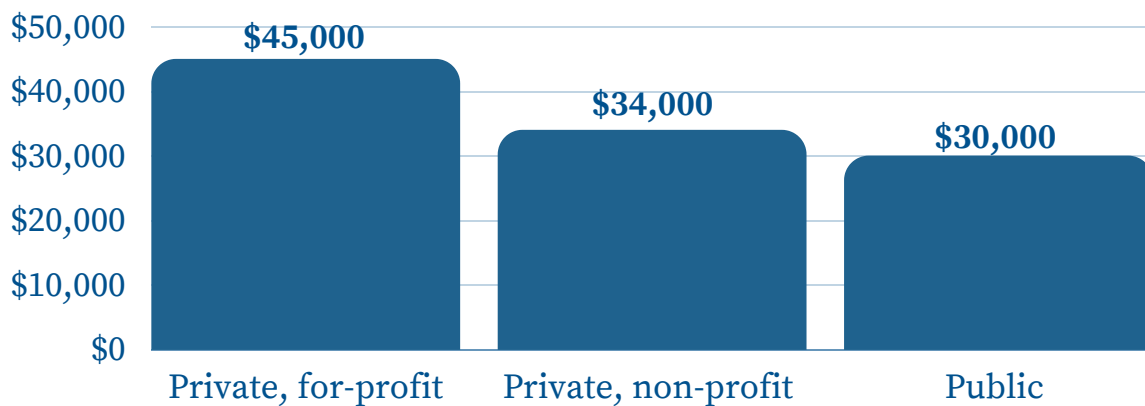


# College Funding: Key Metrics

## Student Loan Debt

The final metric considered in the assessment of college funding is student debt. A significant increase in college costs has occurred alongside a period of stagnant wages over the last 20 years. The student loan debt growth rate outpaces the rise in tuition costs by 354%, according to the Education Data Initiative. Americans now collectively owe more in outstanding student loan debt than credit card debt. According to the Institute for College Access & Success, 62% of Florida's class of 2019 graduated with student debt, with an average balance of \$24,000, placing the state as the eighth lowest nationally on this measure. Florida's average outstanding student debt balance is \$39,000.

## Florida Average Student Debt, by Type of College



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

According to a survey of 289 CFSC scholarship recipients, 42% reported taking on student loan debt with one-time awardees more likely to incur debt than those with renewable scholarships. The average loan balance for this sample was \$33,200. Non-traditional older students were also more likely than recent high school graduates to have debt. Further analysis shows that those who acquired the highest amount of student loans have an outstanding balance that exceeds the original amount, indicating growing debt. For those who have \$40,000 or more of current debt, 70% are graduates of Master's or Doctorate programs.

**\$39,000**  
**Average  
Outstanding  
Student Loan  
Balance for  
Florida Students**

# College Funding: Key Metrics

## Student Debt Inequities

U.S. Census data show that those ages 25-to-34 are the most likely to hold student loan debt, however, the greatest amount is owed by those 35 to 49 years old. Women borrow more for college compared to men, representing two-thirds of student debt holders in the U.S., according to 2020 data from the American Association of University Women. And Black students borrow more often and in greater amounts compared to all other races and ethnicities, according to census data, with Black women in particular carrying 20% more debt than White women. Disparities in student debt outcomes place Non-White borrowers at a greater disadvantage in terms of accumulating and maintaining wealth. According to the Aspen Institute, student debt perpetuates the racial wealth gap given that:

- **70% of Black borrowers are at risk of default.**
- **Twenty years after starting college, a typical Black student still owes 95% of their total debt, compared with 6% for White students.**
- **40% of Black borrowers drop out with outstanding debt and struggle to pay back the amount.**

Brookings Institute data indicate that the highest student loan default rates are among students who attended for-profit institutions. The research shows that the default rate within five years of leaving school for undergraduates is 41% for students who went to two-year, for-profit schools compared to 27% for those who attended community colleges.

According to research by Columbia University, Black graduates with a bachelor's degree default at five times the rate of White bachelor's graduates — 21% compared with 4%. This situation is exacerbated by the gender wage gap given women earn 82 cents for every dollar men make, according to the National Women's Law Center. For Black women, this is number is 63 cents and for Latinas it is 55 cents. Therefore, men are more financially equipped to keep up with or get ahead of their student loan payments than women are. The systemic inequities women of color face mean that they are more likely to be underpaid, under-employed, and carry student debt. Increasing access to college funding, as well as debt forgiveness (via institutional forgiveness programs and/or philanthropic 'reverse scholarships' which pay off student loans), for this population could help close the racial and gender wealth gap.

**40%** of Black students who take out student loans drop out with outstanding debt.

# College Funding: Scholarship Provider Objectives

Most of the scholarship providers interviewed for this study articulated an overarching program objective, though some of the community foundations acknowledged that this can be difficult given varying donor intentions and criteria. The core objective for many has shifted the last few years from college access to college completion — a shift echoed by many of the youth-serving organizations as well. Those working with older, non-traditional students (age 24 or >) see financial stability and workforce development as important. However, only a small number of the funders see encouraging students to remain in the local region as a priority. Selby Foundation is the only organization that considers itself a 'last dollar' funder, determining scholarship award amounts after all other financial resources are reported.

There was a strong emphasis on needs-based aid over merit-based, with several foundations mentioning the trend to shift completely away from merit-based scholarships. And the majority of funding is for traditional 4-year or 2-year degrees, with less emphasis on technical/ vocational or graduate programs. The vast majority of scholarships offered are one-time, non-renewable, even though many of the funders acknowledged that this is not considered a best practice.

State-based organizations like CareerSource and Take Stock in Children have clearly defined scholarship targets, specifically “low-income with barriers.” Other funders had broader and varied targets tied to donor interests. Some had special programs as part of their investment strategies, such as Barancik Foundation’s focus on K-12 teacher recruitment, and CFSC’s 2Gen initiative which funds higher education programs for parents with children attending Title I elementary schools.



*“The goal used to be to get students **to** college, now it is to get them **through** college.”*

# College Funding: Lack of Data Tracking

Scholarship providers were asked about any reports they have, both in terms of the demographic data they track for scholarship recipients, as well as outcomes such as credential attainment. Other than CareerSource and Take Stock, which both report to state agencies, none of the other funders produce regular reports, with most acknowledging that they have not historically tracked this information. Several organizations said that, while some demographic information is captured, they have not compiled it.

- *"This is an area we really need to improve."*
- *"We probably have the information and could pull it, but we don't do this proactively. No one is asking for it."*

Many also said their applications do not have fields like race/ethnicity or first generation status making it difficult to assess equity gaps. Several of the foundations are in the process of establishing data systems to better monitor awardees and outcomes.

All of the scholarship providers said they are working to close equity gaps. Many mentioned that they are trying to look more intentionally through a 'DEI' (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) lens. However, some feel they are not doing enough.

- *"We don't collect extensive demographics to know whether we are closing equity gaps."*
- *"We have just started cumulating data internally to see if we are meeting our DEI goals, but it is not a sophisticated system yet."*
- *"There is room for a conversation about employing more of a DEI lens to our award process."*



# College Funding: Underfunded Populations

Participants were asked, “What specific college populations do you feel are underfunded?” The most common responses were middle income individuals; older, non-traditional adult students (age 24 or >); academically average students (or middle achievers); and Dreamers — young undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children. Below are sample quotes for each.

## Middle Income

*“Those with financial need and hardship get funding from everyone. But there are so many students whose parents may make money but can’t help or don’t want to help, or they’re just getting by. They get excluded.”*

*“The biggest challenge is the number of students who do not qualify for Pell but can’t afford to pay the tuition. A family of four making \$60,000 is not eligible for Pell.”*

## Non-Traditional (Age 24 or Older)

*“There needs to be support for adult students.”*

*“There are not enough scholarship dollars and not as many services available to the older adults.”*

*“Traditional students usually have fewer responsibilities and fewer obstacles than the older college students whose needs are greater.”*

## Academically Average

*“Kids who are not high achievers is where there is the greatest opportunity. The ROI is not as easy, but the high risk can yield the highest rewards.”*

*“A good number of funders are looking for the cream of the crop, but if everyone funds these students there is not a lot of help for the 2.0 GPA student working full-time only taking 6 credits at a time, struggling to finish a degree.”*

## Undocumented/ Dreamers

*“We don’t have any funds specifically for DACA students. We do have institutional grants, but those require the FAFSA and they are hesitant to complete the form. We could use a grant just for DACA students.”*

*“With a private donor fund, I can only give DACA students up to 50% off of tuition and that doesn’t count books, fees, exams, etc. I have no one to refer them to for more help.”*



# College Funding: Gaps in Scholarship Services

Feedback from scholarship funders and financial officers regarding the current gaps in scholarship services is summarized below.



## Financial Aid Navigation

Interviewees feel that both traditional and older, non-traditional students need help connecting to all of the financial resources available, including both private and public funds.

- *“We need more navigation support regarding alternative funding sources.”*
- *“So much is left on the table, untapped.”*



## Mentors

Participants believe scholarships should be connected to mentoring programs to provide students with some form of support beyond financial resources.

- *“Mentoring is a critical piece of this work in scholarship giving.”*
- *“We need to see our investments through to the end.”*



## Emergency/ Flexible Funding

Financial aid officers reported that students need access to flexible funding sources to help them with unexpected costs.

- *“We could use a dedicated emergency needs fund, like we created with the CARES dollars, which are now depleted.”*
- *“Emergency funds do not need to run through financial aid. This would help because it doesn’t get counted towards cost of attendance.”*



## Professional Development

Stakeholders also feel that those working as college advisors could benefit from financial aid professional development so as to increase the expertise within the community.

- *“We need to offer workshops and train counselors and case managers about ALL of the financial aid available, including private dollars.”*

# College Funding: Process Improvements

Participants were asked about ways to improve the scholarship-giving process. They identified the following **six** areas as those in need of improvement.

**1. Accounting Systems:** Many of the scholarship funders expressed frustrations with local colleges regarding perceived inconsistencies in how scholarship dollars are allocated, specifically in terms of the timing or sequencing of the different forms of financial aid. They also see gaps in some college accounting systems when it comes to issuing checks directly to students, as funders intend for them to be disbursed. This is especially an issue for non-qualified educational expenses, such as for transportation, housing, childcare, computers, etc. Improved communication with these college partners was seen as a critical need.

- *“There is a huge disconnect with them not being able to comply with the rules of outside scholarships.”*
- *“They send money back to us when we want it to go to the student.”*



However, the financial aid officers also repeatedly referenced this issue and felt that the scholarship providers don't understand their processes.

- *“We can only award up to cost of attendance or we have to return the overage to the foundations or pay students directly, which generates a W9 and is taxable income.”*
- *“Scholarships for non-qualified educational expenses creates extra work for us because we have to send the overage back.”*

**2. Scholarship Award Timing:** College representatives also expressed a preference for scholarship awards to be made as early as possible to inform the financial aid package. They voiced concerns about the 'last dollar' scholarship model which calculates awards based on a review of all other resources. They feel that this increases work on their part because they must make adjustments when additional scholarships are received after the initial aid package is awarded. This can create 'displacement' or the lowering of other forms of aid (such as loans, work-study, grants, institutional aid, etc.). However, the local colleges were not consistent in how they order this displacement.

- *“Donors don't understand that we need to award in a certain order, like loans must come first.”*
- *“We can reduce loans to make room for scholarships.”*
- *“We need to know scholarship awards prior to preparing a financial aid package so we don't over award.”*
- *“The 'last dollar' is an ever-changing calculation.”*

# College Funding: Process Improvements

**3. Renewable Scholarships:** Many funders also feel that they should shift their programs to offer renewable scholarships as a best practice. And financial aid officers indicated a desire to see students get this consistent funding.

- *“Having more renewable scholarships would help with student budgeting and completion. If you don’t know from year to year how you will pay for college, you don’t have an incentive to keep going. And getting students through school faster will help our workforce.”*

**4. Donor Engagement Strategies:** Given the high administrative burden of managing scholarship programs, the funders brought up the goal of changing the way donors are engaged in the creation of scholarship funds. Charlotte Community Foundation, for example, has spent the last two years focused on understanding the postsecondary needs of its community. It has shifted its donor strategies to direct them to these gaps in areas like technical/trades and graduate programs, as well as supporting returning students. Other scholarship funders are also looking at this notion of a more flexible postsecondary education fund versus a multitude of very specific scholarship funds with disparate and restrictive criteria. Redirecting donors to broader categories of educational giving could change the historically labor-intensive model of scholarship administration.

- *“We have to be able to educate donors and change the criteria from being so narrow.”*

**5. Marketing Methods:** Many scholarship providers spoke about the need to improve their outreach to potential applicants, especially foundations with a multi-county footprint. They want to be inclusive and be sure they are reaching a diverse pool of applicants, however, some feel they are limited in their capacity to do more marketing.

- *“My concern is that we are missing populations that don’t know there is financial support.”*

**6. Scholar Connections:** Some people referenced the need for community partners to create more opportunities for funded scholars to connect back to the scholarship organizations as mentors, ambassadors, future donors, etc. and to interact with each other as a peer group. They also would like to enhance connections to local employers to help graduates learn about jobs, internships, career pathways, etc.

- *“We provide college funding, but shouldn’t we help them with launching their careers too?”*



# College Funding: Emerging Trends

The scholarship providers were asked what they see as emerging trends in college funding. Below and on the next page are their responses.

**Emergency Funds** — Flexible funds for unexpected expenses, paid as cash directly to students or via a nonprofit partner that pays the bill, are seen as a significant opportunity in college financial support. These are commonly used for housing, food, utilities, transportation, etc. CFSC employs this model, in partnership with Women's Resource Center, for its 2Gen program. According to a Scholarship America study, the average emergency award is \$750 and those who are supported are three times more likely to stay in school, with 95% completing their terms.

**529 & CSA Plans** — Some foundations have piloted 529 programs (tax-advantaged college savings accounts) or CSA's (Child Savings Accounts), especially with younger students. Some see 529's as too complex given that non-qualified distributions must be reported as part of adjusted gross income and are treated as taxable income. However, research shows that CSA's foster a college-bound identity in children, and that participation in a 529 plan can increase academic scores among low-income children, and increase parents' educational expectations for their children.



**Promise Programs** — Guaranteed scholarship programs, such as Booker High School's, is a model that some of the funders are looking at closely. These are typically 'last dollar' models covering qualified educational funds (tuition and fees) after all other financial aid resources are tapped. Studies show that the average Pell Grant award and state need-based grants usually exceed tuition and fees for state schools. Therefore, students with the lowest family incomes often receive no new funding from last dollar programs. However, this population often needs help with non-tuition costs, including living expenses, to increase their probability of degree completion. According to the Economic Opportunity Institute, 'first dollar' programs that award scholarships before determining any other funding are more likely to reduce opportunity gaps.

*"Emergency stipend support can bypass award displacement issues, where scholarships reduce other financial aid amounts."*



# College Funding: Emerging Trends



**Prepaid Scholarships** — Florida Prepaid Plans, which lock in the future tuition costs at current prices, represent another strategy some foundations are exploring. A couple of the funders noted the expanded options available through Florida's Prepaid Scholarship Foundation, which has developed several new partnership opportunities for scholarship providers to receive one-to-one matching funds.

**Reverse Scholarships** — One of the funders is exploring paying off student debt as a recruitment tool for in-demand jobs. Another version of this is institutional debt forgiveness. According to the Institute for Higher Education Policy, debt-forgiveness strategies that bring students back to higher education by offering partial or full cancellation of the past-due balances are seen as having a high return on investment.

**Outsourcing Scholarship Programs** — Paying a national firm to manage all aspects of the scholarship awarding process was a hot topic with the interviewees. Gulf Coast Community Foundation is the only large funder in the area currently employing this strategy, though CFSC tested the process and decided to maintain in-house management of its program. The other providers were not enthusiastic about the outsourcing approach, however, all of them referenced the costly, labor-intensive nature of scholarship giving. Some nonprofits and college financial aid officers also reported frustrations with working with the national scholarship administrator.

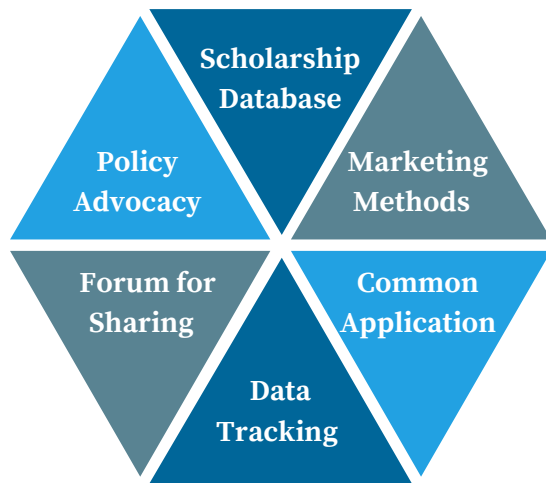
**Support Services** — Regular check-ins with awardees is seen as another emerging trend for scholarship providers. Mentor-based funders already do this, while foundations are looking at how to enhance their scholarship programs with similar models of support, including regular student contact and connecting different awardees who attend the same colleges.

**Workforce Programs** — Some foundations also invest in programs that focus on high demand jobs, such as CareerEdge and the 2Gen Initiative, which both fund cohort-based workforce training for occupations such as the construction trades or nurse assistant programs.



# College Funding: Collaborative Opportunities

Study participants provided the following suggestions for how stakeholders working in the college funding arena could collaborate more.



**Scholarship Database** —As with the college prep providers, several funders mentioned the Rotary Futures Scholarship Database and the value of a centralized source for both high schoolers as well as adults to search for college funding resources. This database is 20 years old and is considered to have an “antiquated” interface. However, the logic structure of the platform was praised as being very sound and helpful in giving students very targeted recommendations based on their profiles. So the goal is to update the system and share it broadly so that it is accessible to all.

**Marketing & Outreach** — Scholarship providers would like to find ways to collaboratively get the word out about all funding resources, as well as share each other's links and flyers.

**Common Application** — Several of the funders discussed their ‘lofty goal’ of a centralized, regional common application to help students streamline submissions and maximize their chances of receiving support. They acknowledged that this may be aspirational, but they would like to find ways to simplify the application process. Aligning questions for consistent data sharing is another recommended variation of this idea.

**Data Tracking** — Many of the scholarship providers would like to work together to better understand the disaggregated community-level college attainment rates and how they can collaborate on closing the gaps, as well as better define each of their respective funding niches. One such proposed source would be to collaboratively contract for regular data sets, such as the National Student Clearinghouse 'Student Tracker' report for each county school district.

**Forum For Sharing** — Some felt it was important to have a structured forum for all scholarship providers, including smaller organizations, to regularly connect and learn from each other, and to strengthen relationships between funders and financial aid departments. They would like to share ideas and provide a platform to be 'the best professionals' they can be.

**Policy Advocacy** — Another suggestion is for the foundations to assist the community in advocating for financial aid changes, such as expanded Pell grants, mandatory high school FAFSA completion, and changing the taxable nature of funds for non-qualified educational expenses.

# College Funding: Best Practices

Ten best practices in scholarship funding, identified through a review of literature, are summarized below.

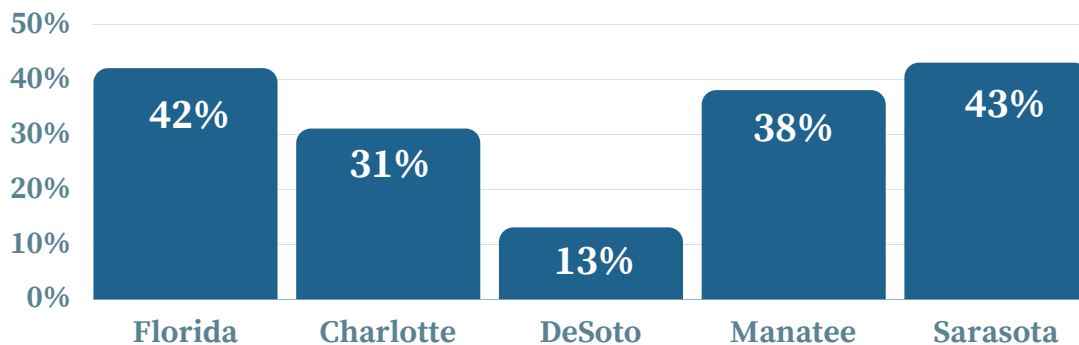
- 1. Process Mapping** of the entire scholarship system to increase efficiencies.
- 2. Marketing & Outreach** to find the students; don't wait for them to find you. Make eligibility clear and easy.
- 3. Simplified Application** - Given time constraints of students, don't ask questions that you are not using. Consider a centralized common application.
- 4. Equitable Scoring /Awarding** that levels the playing field and takes into consideration the barriers and overall journey of the student.
- 5. Renewable Scholarships** have higher impact than one-time awards, which are considered low impact and create financial instability.
- 6. Early Announcement** of award to help student assess financial aid package(s), make college choice, and receive wrap services.
- 7. Scholarship Welcome** and onboarding process to keep students motivated and engaged, especially during the summer for traditional high school graduates.
- 8. Awardee Check-Ins** or mentoring to provide some form of support, including affinity circles within the same colleges and connecting students to resources, especially social/ emotional supports.
- 9. Business Connections** throughout college and upon graduation to connect students to networking opportunities, internships, jobs, etc.
- 10. Data Tracking**, at the funder level as well as for the community, to assess impact and equity.



# College Persistence: Key Metrics

The final category of analysis centers around college persistence and completion. Over the last several years, a great deal of focus has been placed on college access in order to increase the number of students entering college. However, studies point to the need for more emphasis on actual completion. Overall college attainment rates for each of the four counties are summarized in the chart below. These represent population-level completion data for an associate degree or higher, which is the metric tracked by the U.S. Census. According to the Lumina Foundation, an estimated additional 10.5% of Florida residents hold a workforce credential, which is not reflected in this census data, nor available at the county level.

## A.S. Degree or Higher Attainment Rates by County



Source: ACS 2019 5-year estimates for age 25-64 with A.S. degree or higher.

Only four of the local funders interviewed for this report shared their current scholarship recipient graduation rates: CareerSource Suncoast, Take Stock in Children, CFSC, and the Selby Foundation. All four of these organizations significantly surpassed, by 20 percentage points or more, the Florida 42% average attainment rate for A.S. degree or higher, as well as the national college attainment benchmark of 46%.



# College Persistence: Key Metrics

## College Graduation Rates and Demographics by Regional College

	Suncoast Technical	Manatee Technical	Charlotte Technical	State College of Florida
<b>Total Student Population</b>	1,000	1,000	600	10,000
<b>Gender of Students</b>	42% F 58% M	40% F 60% M	54% F 46%M	64% F 36% M
<b>Race/Ethnicity of Students</b>	8% Black 23% Hispanic 65% White 4% Other	10% Black 33% Hispanic 51% White 6% Other	14% Black 17% Hispanic 64% White 5% Other	8% Black 22% Hispanic 57% White 13% Other
<b>Age of Students</b>	79% Age 24 or < 21% Age 25+	58% Age 24 or < 41% Age 25+	77% Age 24 or < 19% Age 25+	70% Age 24 or < 30% Age 25+
<b>Number of 2019-2020 Graduates</b>	~600	~900	~300	~2,000
<b>Overall Graduation Rate</b>	92%	91%	98%	37%, with a 10% Transfer Rate

Source IPEDS 2020 Reports <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/> All numbers are rounded.

The graduation rates above are the percentage of full-time, first-time students who graduated or transferred out within 150% of "normal time" to completion for their respective programs. With 58% of SCF's student body attending part-time, its graduation rate cannot be compared to the technical colleges where programs rarely last more than one year.

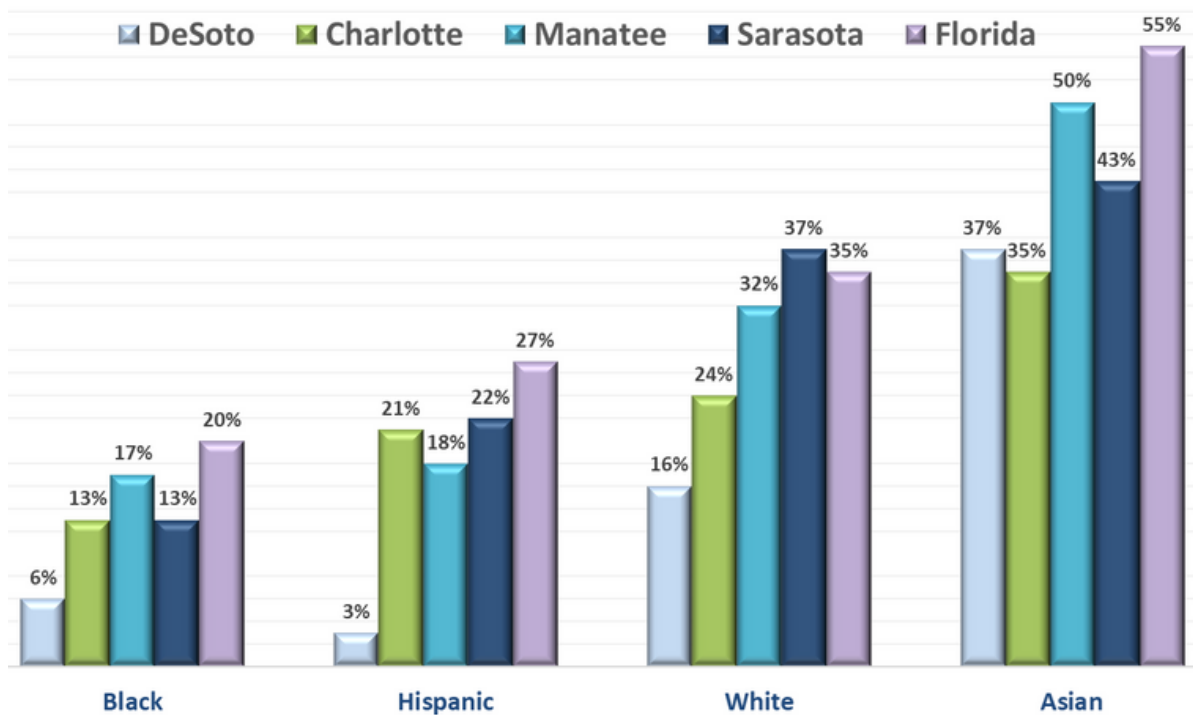




# College Persistence: Key Metrics

An analysis of the county-level bachelor's degree attainment rates by race/ethnicity show significant achievement gaps. Such disparities can impact the economic security and social mobility of underrepresented populations. Degree attainment rates lag the state averages for all groups except for the White population in Sarasota County, which exceeds the average.

## Bachelor's Degree or Higher Attainment Rates by Race/Ethnicity for Each County



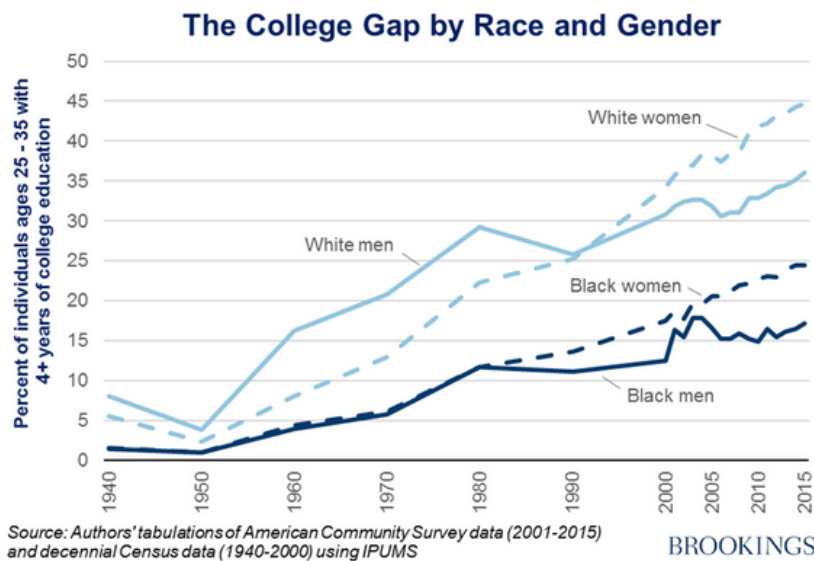
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019 5-year estimates, for adults 25 years or older.

**Black residents are least likely to have earned a bachelor's degree in all four counties and across the state.**

# College Persistence: Key Metrics

## College Dropout Rates

According to a 2021 University of Florida study, 60% of Florida students attending community colleges (also known as 'state colleges') drop out before they finish, even if they have a good academic record and are only a few credits shy of graduating. Tuition and fees, living expenses, and no longer being eligible for financial aid were the most common factors contributing to the dropout rate. Black males have the highest dropout rate nationally at 54%, according to the Brookings Institute. The chart below shows the widening gap between male and female graduates for both Black and White students.



**60%**  
of 2-year college students fail to earn a degree within 6 years.

Black males have the highest college dropout rate nationally at

**54%**

According to NSC, this high dropout rate for Black college students is partially due to the fact that 65% are independent and must work full-time to support themselves and sometimes their families. Also, Black students are most likely to grow up in poverty attending high-poverty schools with significant achievement gaps. The Institute for College Access & Success points out that Black and Hispanic Florida students attend private, for-profit colleges at higher rates, with these colleges having greater dropout rates than public institutions. And a Helios Education Foundation study showed that Black college students in Florida experience basic needs insecurity at a greater proportion (75%) than their White, Latinx, or Asian counterparts.



**38%** of those who drop out of college left for financial reasons, according to the National Scholarship Providers Association.





# College Persistence: Key Metrics

## Leaks in the Talent Pipeline



Below is an explanation of why the current system of college credential attainment for the young adult population fails to meet the workforce demands of the region. These leaks in the talent pipeline add to the historic labor market shortages local employers are experiencing across all sectors.

For every 100 local students entering 9th grade within the four-county area, on average, 88% of them will graduate from high school four years later.



According to DOE data for the region, approximately 51% of those 88 high school graduates will then enroll in a postsecondary institution, including 4-year, 2-year, and technical colleges.



This means that ~45 of the 88 high school graduates will start college after high school. With an overall average college completion rate of 50% in the state of Florida, half of the 45 students who enter a college program will graduate within 150% of the standard time for completion.



This results in only ~23 of the original 100 high schoolers earning a college credential. Even with the higher than average college completion rate of 70% seen with mentored students, there would only be 32 of the original high schoolers entering the workforce with a degree or industry-recognized certification.

If the community goal is to increase postsecondary attainment rates, there needs to be an increase in the pipeline of students entering college, or improved college completion rates, or both.

# College Persistence: Key Metrics

Below is a table depicting the occupations in our region requiring a postsecondary credential that are projected to grow the fastest over the next seven years, through 2029, as calculated by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. They are organized by their anticipated percent growth for this period. For scholarship funders interested in meeting regional workforce needs, one strategy is to prioritize applicants who are earning credentials in these high-demand fields.

## High Growth Jobs in the Region

Occupation	Anticipated Percent Growth	2020 Median Hourly Wage	Education Level
Nurse Practitioners	55.8	\$52.64	M+
Fiberglass Laminators and Fabricators	35.2	\$18.29	PS
Massage Therapists	34.4	\$21.03	PS
Physician Assistants	33.7	\$61.30	B
Medical and Health Services Managers	32.0	\$45.89	B
Market Research Analysts & Marketing Specialists	31.7	\$26.93	B
Occupational Therapy Assistants	30.2	\$34.70	A
Software Developers and Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers	28.9	\$48.32	B
Industrial Machinery Mechanics	28.8	\$22.30	PS
Lodging Managers	27.6	\$18.76	A
Physical Therapist Assistants	27.2	\$28.62	A
Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	26.4	\$24.16	B
Speech-Language Pathologists	25.2	\$44.83	M+
Respiratory Therapists	24.7	\$29.51	A
Management Analysts	24.5	\$35.47	B
Financial and Investment Analysts, Risk Specialists	24.0	\$30.51	PS
Construction Managers	23.8	\$42.22	A
Financial Managers	23.6	\$44.66	B
Veterinarians	23.4	\$50.90	M+
Industrial Engineers	23.4	\$35.73	B
Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	23.4	\$18.90	A
Instructional Coordinators	23.1	\$23.62	M+
Medical Assistants	22.0	\$18.02	PS
Training and Development Specialists	22.0	\$28.19	B

Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity Employment Projections Data 2021-29, Workforce Development Area 18.  
Education codes: A= Associate Degree; B= Bachelor's Degree; M+= Master's Degree or higher; PS= Postsecondary non-degree award.

# College Persistence: Key Metrics

## Graduate Mobility

Feedback from many of the funders indicate that the majority of scholarship recipients stay or return to the region after college graduation. National Student Clearinghouse data from a sample of 2,000 CFSC scholarship recipients showed that 91% attended a Florida college. And 81% of current Selby Scholars attend Florida colleges.

In a follow-up survey of 300 CFSC awardees of both the traditional (65%) and non-traditional/age 24 or older (35%) scholarships, respondents were asked where they lived after receiving their scholarships. Results are as follows:

- 77%** of respondents indicated they lived or worked in the Sarasota/Manatee region after receiving their scholarship.
- 17%** chose "Outside Florida," as well as the Sarasota/Manatee region, indicating that they returned or had lived in the area.
- 6%** selected "Outside Florida" as their sole choice.

In a survey of 67 current Selby Foundation scholarship recipients, when asked about where they would like to work after graduation, **76%** of the respondents said they would be willing to return to the local area "in their field with a competitive salary." Only 7% chose "Outside Florida."

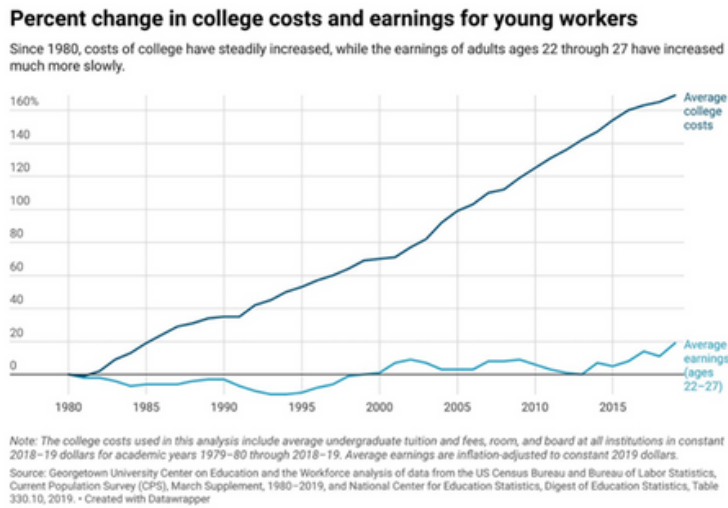
This input has implications for the alignment of college preparation, funding, and persistence strategies with workforce development objectives. And it reinforces the feedback from community partners around the opportunity to better connect scholarship recipients to employers in the region through job shadowing, internships, networking, etc.



# College Persistence: Key Metrics

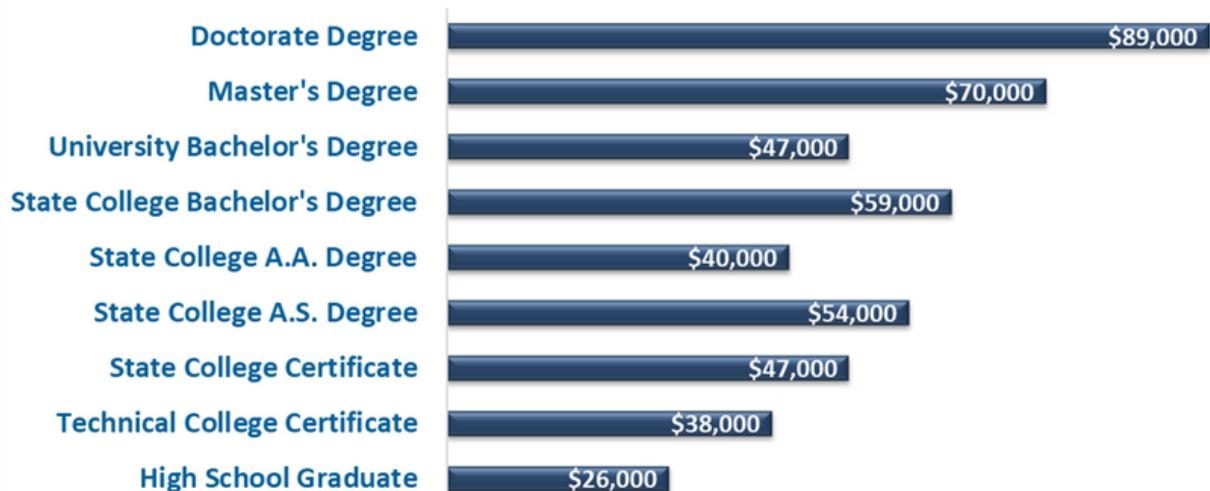
## Graduate Wage Data

According to FCAN, 65% of Florida jobs will require a college degree or industry-recognized certification by 2025. Comparatively, 75% of jobs in the 1970's required a high school diploma or less. And while this need for a postsecondary credential has increased significantly, a Georgetown University analysis shows that the cost of college has increased by 169% over the past 40 years, while earnings for workers between the ages of 22 and 27 have increased by just 19%, as seen in the chart below.



Even with this unprecedented wage stagnation, college graduates typically earn significantly more than those with only a high school diploma. According to the Florida DOE, the earnings differentials from a high school diploma range from 43% more for a technical college certification, to 242% for a doctorate degree. On average, a postsecondary credential will more than double annualized earnings.

## Average Annualized Earnings by Education Level for 2019-2020 College Graduates in Florida



Source: Florida Education Training and Placement Information Program (FETPIP). Note that numbers are rounded and include only full-time employed.

# College Persistence: Best Practices

Feedback from interviewees aligned with the secondary research on core strategies to increase college persistence and completion rates. These include the following five best practices.



**Emergency Funds** — In addition to the renewable and consistent funding mentioned in the last section, flexible as-needed funding can have a significant impact on keeping a student enrolled. An unexpected financial roadblock is often what derails a student.

**Resource Navigation** — College students benefit greatly from connections to other supportive resources in the community, whether for direct funding (such as for childcare subsidies) or tangible resources (like food pantries and free clothing). This includes both private and public assistance programs.

**Mentoring** — Studies show that some form of a check-in with scholarship recipients has high returns in helping students remain on track and complete their programs. Peer support systems and alumni programs can provide high quality engagements. And ‘near peer’ mentors, those who have similar life experiences, can be particularly effective.

**Mental Health Services** — A myriad of research has shown that mental health and academic performance are interrelated. Local colleges report that pre-pandemic they had alarming rates of depression and anxiety which have now grown exponentially, so they are overwhelmed with this surging demand for mental health supports. Both the CDC and American College Health Association recommended that higher education find ways to offer both in-person and virtual counseling services to support student well-being.

**Business Connections** — Students are more likely to graduate if they have an opportunity to connect to employers through internships, job shadowing, networking, etc. This best practice aligns with survey responses from CFSC scholarship recipients who reported the top three support services that would have been helpful along their education journey as: Internship Opportunities, Career-Specific Mentorship, Local Career Networking Connections. Given the historically tight labor market, many of the interviewees would like to implement strategies to better connect scholarship recipients to local employers in order to help students explore their options, as well as drive economic growth.



# Conclusion

This analysis was undertaken by the William G. & Marie Selby Foundation and Community Foundation of Sarasota County with the expectation that the information could be a force for community change by impacting systemic issues well beyond the confines of both foundations' specific scholarship programs. The goal is to deepen awareness of gaps in local resources and put a spotlight on barriers to equitable educational attainment, thereby catalyzing collective actions to close these gaps and advance equity in our region. The report provides many opportunities for local scholarship providers, colleges, and those providing college preparation services to collaborate on high impact strategies to increase college completion rates. And it offers suggestions on ways to improve processes, enhance communication, and implement programs. Below is a summary of these actionable items.



## Collaboration Areas

- Data Tracking
- Funders Forum
- Regional Scholarship Database
- SAT/ACT Test Prep
- FAFSA Completion
- Professional Development
- Marketing & Outreach Strategies
- Policy Advocacy (e.g., Guidance Ratios)
- Common or Aligned Application
- Employer Connections

## Equity Gaps to Address

- Equal Access to College & Career Acceleration Programs
- Black High School Graduation Rates, especially for Males
- Black & Hispanic College Enrollment Rates
- Equal Access to ACT/SAT Test Preparation
- College Prep Services for Low-Income; Black & Hispanic; First Gen; Academically Average; Dreamers
- College Funding for Middle Income; Adult/ Non-Traditional; Academically Average; Dreamers
- Black Student Debt

## Investment Opportunities

- Renewable Scholarships
- Emergency Funds
- Resource Navigation
- Financial Education
- Mentoring Programs
- College & Career Prep Services
- Technical & Trades Programs
- College Mental Health Services
- Re-Enroll Outreach



# Appendix

Below is an alphabetical list of the organizations that provided input for this report via interviews and/or the online survey.

## Study Participants

- Academic Empowerment Group
- ASALH
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Sun Coast
- Booker High School
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Manatee County
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota and DeSoto Counties
- Cardinal Mooney
- CareerEdge
- CareerSource Suncoast
- Charles and Margery Barancik Foundation
- Charlotte Technical College
- Charlotte Community Foundation
- Charlotte County Schools
- Charlotte Local Education Foundation
- Children's Network of Southwest Florida
- Community Foundation of Sarasota County
- Consortium of Florida Education Foundations
- DeSoto County Schools
- DeSoto Education Foundation
- DeSoto High School
- Education Foundation of Sarasota County
- Florida College Access Network
- Florida Southwestern Collegiate High School
- Gamma Xi Boule
- Girls Inc.
- Goodwill Manasota
- Gulf Coast Community Foundation
- Manatee Community Foundation
- Manatee County Schools
- Manatee Education Foundation
- Jewish Family & Children's Services
- Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee
- Kappa Alpha Psi
- Leaven
- Links2Success
- Manatee School of the Arts
- Manatee Technical College
- PLANit Sarasota
- Rotary Futures
- Sarasota Christian School
- Sarasota County Schools
- Sarasota Teen Court
- Schoolhouse Link
- South Florida State College Foundation
- State College of Florida
- State College of Florida Collegiate School
- State College of Florida CROP Program
- State College of Florida Foundation
- Suncoast Technical College
- Sunrise Scholars
- Take Stock in Children Charlotte
- Take Stock in Children DeSoto
- Take Stock in Children Manatee
- Take Stock in Children Sarasota
- UnidosNow
- University of South Florida
- William G. and Marie Selby Foundation
- Women's Resource Center

This report was developed by Consultant Deborah Chapman in May 2022 for the William G. & Marie Selby Foundation and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.



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