Ensuring College Access and Success

Palm Beach County students face challenges with accessing and completing an education beyond high school. While experts have determined that 60% of Palm Beach County’s working-age adults need an education beyond high school to meet workforce demands, only 44% of Palm Beach County high school graduates actually complete an education beyond high school. For students from low income families, fewer than 32% do so. In addition to meeting local workforce demand, an education beyond high school provides students with the means to secure a life-sustaining wage and realize their career dreams.

Preparing Palm Beach County Students for Success

Our Approach

In May 2015, a broad group of community leaders came together to discuss this issue. A working group was formed to create a strategic plan that now serves as a blueprint for Achieve Palm Beach County’s work, focused on improving access to and completion of an education beyond high school in Palm Beach County.

Our vision is that every Palm Beach County high school graduate completes a post-secondary credential within six-years of high school graduation that prepares them for a meaningful career with a sustainable wage.

Our mission is to collectively ensure an integrated and effective system of supports from middle school through post-secondary that empowers students for career success.

In designing and implementing this work, this initiative is committed to the following guiding principles:

- An education beyond high school means any form of post-secondary credential, including professional certificates and licenses as well as college degrees (e.g., Associate’s and Bachelor’s degrees).
- The voices of students and parents are essential in designing approaches to increase access and completion of educational programs and supports.
- The initiative must intentionally consider all types of students and be inclusive of the many diverse communities within Palm Beach County.
- The route to and through an education beyond high school may be different for each student, requiring individualized options and supports that meet students’ unique needs and interests.
- Collective impact provides a framework for collaboration, alignment and synergy that will most efficiently maximize community efforts to improve post-high school access and completion outcomes.

Our Work

In order to understand how we can best improve access to and completion of an education beyond high school, the initiative’s partners commissioned a research study of the needs of Palm Beach County students. This study included the review of performance data for Palm Beach County, a scan of current programs and services, and in-depth stakeholder conversations with:

- students engaged in a high school or post-high school education,
- advisors to high school and post-high school students,
- parents,
- community leaders,
- and providers of post-high school access and completion support.

Equipped with this research and effective practices in other communities, the partners determined the most promising areas to initially address through our collective efforts.

After two years of experience working collaboratively on these focus areas, the partners further refined their efforts for even greater collective impact. In the fall of 2019, our areas of focus were refined to include: Middle and High School Advising and Guidance, Post-High School Advising and Guidance, Financial Supports, and Career Pathways.
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL ADVISING AND GUIDANCE

Helping middle and high school students chart an education path through high school and beyond is a big job. While teachers and school counselors play a significant role in ensuring students select the right courses and programs, other community resources offer much-needed social, emotional and academic supports that can prepare students for educational success beyond high school. The Middle and High School Advising and Guidance Team focuses on aligning professional staff, mentors, community leaders, peers and online resources to provide students with individualized advising and post-high school and career exploration.

CAREER PATHWAYS

In Florida and across the nation, completing an education beyond high school is critical to landing a career that pays a living wage. However, many students don’t fully connect their education and career paths. The Career Pathways Team focuses on helping students align their education and career interests through exposure to various industries, career paths, and direct career experiences, while supporting them in identifying local job opportunities and transitioning seamlessly into the workforce.

POST-HIGH SCHOOL ADVISING AND GUIDANCE

Results in Palm Beach County and across the nation show that getting to an education beyond high school is much easier than getting through that education. Student success isn’t just about passing classes - it’s often about choosing the right classes, navigating complicated processes, overcoming financial hardship, and receiving social and emotional support when it matters most. The Post-High School Advising and Guidance Team focuses on aligning community resources so that students have the support they need to attain their educational credentials.

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

For many students, cost is a significant barrier to obtaining an education beyond high school, and as education costs rise across the nation, a post-high school education can seem further out of reach. The Financial Supports Team is focused on providing students and their families with the resources they need to make sound financial plans, empowering students to complete the post-high school education that prepares them for career success. This includes financial wellness and planning, successfully completing the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), and accessing and maintaining scholarship opportunities and other types of financial aid.

Join the Movement

More than 50 community partners, such as government, education, corporate, nonprofit, philanthropic, faith-based, and other organizations, as well as parents, guardians, and individuals are actively involved in this effort and committed to supporting its success. We invite you or your organization to join us in improving access to and completion of an education beyond high school for Palm Beach County students. Please consider one or more of the following opportunities:

- Join a Strategy Team and actively engage in the collective work occurring within one of our focus areas.
- Join a Support Team to assist with communications, data or family and community engagement.
- Provide a financial contribution to support the work.
- Create an opportunity for Achieve Palm Beach County to present to a civic, professional, or community group.

To connect with us, visit AchievePBC.org, email info@AchievePBC.org, or follow @AchievePBC on social media.