

FROM CRADLE TO CAREER

*The 2017 Collier County Community Needs and Assets Assessment reveals two priorities
in education for boosting student success: kindergarten and career readiness.*

By the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation



Two ends of the educational spectrum — our littlest ones entering school and those embarking on the next chapter of their lives — are vital to the future of local students' success and Collier County's economic well being.

These two areas of focus came out of the 2017 Collier County Community

Needs and Assets Assessment, funded by the Richard M. Schulze

Family Foundation to identify and quantify the community's positive assets and most pressing issues. The Community Assessment brought together almost 4,000 experts, residents, stakeholders and nonprofit leaders, combined with analysis of existing data and studies. "An integral part of the Community Assessment was having a good team, and we did," said Mary Beth Geier, Florida Director of the Schulze Family Foundation. "Our advisory committee consisted of a strong group of dedicated and knowledgeable partners from throughout Collier County," added Geier.

"This was an amazing project. We've had studies done, but this community has never had a Community Assessment. It's very comprehensive," said Community Foundation of Collier County President/CEO Eileen Connolly-Keesler. "It's meaningful in how we move forward in this community with needs and assets. It absolutely will help us lay down a pathway in many of these areas, education being one of them."



Leslie Salazar and Alice Lucas at the Grace Place for Children and Families' Bright Beginnings
Photo: Hilda Champion

The First Five Years

The top two priorities in the Collier County Public Schools (CCPS) strategic plan are kindergarten and college and career readiness.

The first five years of life is the crucial developmental period for forming social and emotional connections and neural pathways, laying the foundation for future learning. During these formative years, a child's brain grows 90 percent.

Parents are their child's first teacher, speaking, cooing, cuddling, reading, emoting and pointing out objects in their environment. For decades, research has drawn strong connections between the first few years, kindergarten-readiness and specific risk factors that can set a student back: poverty; a non-English-speaking household; parents with little education; a migratory or transient household that forces several school changes; and undetected developmental delays that aren't receiving early intervention.

According to a 1992 study referred to as "The Thirty-Million Word Gap," children from lower-income families hear 30 million fewer words than children from higher-income households by the time they are 4 years old. Studies such as these have shaped the way that policymakers, educators and parents think about early impacts on neural pathways and language fluency, which may ultimately have long-term effects on education, career and family. And even health.

Pre-schoolers in Head Start experienced "reduced obesity at ages 12 and 13, depression and obesity at ages 16 and 17, and crime at ages 20 and 21," according to a 2016 study by James J. Heckman, a distinguished professor of economics at the University of Chicago, a Nobel laureate in economics and a leading expert in the economics of human development.



Guadalupe Center early learning programs and a graduating class of future learners





Making the First Day Easier *Back-to-School Tips for Students of all Ages*

- ▶ Get a jumpstart on preparing your child for kindergarten. Visit **FutureReadyCollier.org** for its Kindergarten Readiness Toolkit.
- ▶ Make sure your child is registered for school. To register, go to **CollierSchools.com**
- ▶ Visit the new school or classroom before the first day of school.
- ▶ Find out if your child's school has a uniform or dress code.
- ▶ Review the list of recommended supplies and have your child bring them to school.
- ▶ Ease back into a healthy bedtime routine. Start your child's school sleep/wake routine a week or so before the first day of school. Young children need between 10-12 hours of sleep per night and teens need 8-10 hours.
- ▶ Decide if your child will be a car-rider, walker/biker or bus-rider, go over safety rules with your child, and practice new routes.
- ▶ Make sure your child eats a healthy breakfast and lunch to keep hunger from affecting performance in class.
- ▶ If your child plans to eat the school lunch, make sure you deposit money into your child's account.
- ▶ Have an after-school plan. Children approaching adolescence (11- and 12-year-olds) should not come home to an empty house unless they show unusual maturity for their age.
- ▶ Create an environment that is conducive to doing homework. Children need a consistent work space that is quiet and without distractions. Be available to answer questions and offer assistance, but never do a child's homework for them.
- ▶ Make family dinners a priority. Research links family dinners with better academic performance, higher self-esteem and resiliency.
- ▶ Set goals and discuss expectations for your older child regarding their classwork, extracurricular activities and home life.
- ▶ Help your teen plan for their future. Grade-appropriate checklists and resources to help students prepare for college or a career can be found at **ChampionsForLearning.org**.
- ▶ Have a graduating senior? If so, you will want to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid at **FAFSA.gov**. It provides access to the largest source of financial aid to pay for college or technical school and is also used to determine eligibility for state aid and institutional scholarships. Many schools have FAFSA deadlines prior to Nov. 1.
- ▶ Visit the Scholarship Connector—the most complete online source for scholarships available to students in Collier County. **SWFLScholarships.org**

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics, Champions For Learning

High-quality early childhood programs can lead to a 65 percent reduction in lifetime violent crime, 40 percent reduction in lifetime arrests and 20 percent reduction in unemployment, Heckman said. His 2016 report "The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program" states that high-quality, birth-to-5 programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13 percent per year return on investment.

"The No. 1 need is for the recognition of the importance of a high-quality early childhood experience—to start school with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful. Pre-K should be funded at the same level as K-12 is funded," said Grace Place for Children and Families Chief Executive Officer Tim Ferguson, Ph.D. Children in formal programs are also developing their social, behavioral, fine motor and gross motor skills, artistic expression, and receive balanced meals. "There is very

strong evidence if a child starts school behind their peers, for whatever reason, and they're not caught up in third grade in reading, their probability of graduation is limited."

Funding early childhood education has been "one of our biggest initiatives since we started our organization 17 years ago," said Naples Children & Education Foundation CEO Maria Jimenez-Lara, noting that other foundations have also been generous, but "it's still not enough."

Jimenez-Lara said data from counties—there are five in Florida—where a nominal portion of property taxes support these services report impressive outcomes. "We are a community that doesn't have a dedicated funding source toward early learning," she said. "I'm not advocating for increased taxes but there are communities that have found ways to pool together their resources and leverage funding."



Mothers and their children board the bus after participating in Bright Beginnings at Grace Place for Children and Families.
Photo: Alexis Horn Photography

Half of Students Not Ready for Kindergarten

There are about 17,000 children under the age of 5 in Collier, and about 5,000—30 percent—of these children are in poverty. Fewer than 1,000 low-income children are accessing subsidized preschool programs, which means that there are at least 4,000 low-income children not enrolled in formal or accredited programs. The Community Assessment found that more than 55 percent of CCPS students in grades K-3 are living in homes in which English is not the primary language spoken. Across the demographic board, approximately one-half of children are not developmentally or academically ready for kindergarten in Collier County, according to the Florida Department of Education.

Future Ready Collier is on the frontlines of addressing this wide gap. It is a network of more than 60 organizations, businesses, schools and community members working to ensure every child in Collier County is ready for kindergarten, and every young person is college- or career-ready when they graduate high school. (Learn more at **FutureReadyCollier.org**.)

A host of providers is working to provide our littlest residents with a high-quality education—and the results they tout are impressive. At Guadalupe Center in Immokalee, 95 percent of Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) graduates are at kindergarten level and 100 percent are on target in vocabulary assessments. "If you can get them past the language barrier, they'll become leaders in the classroom," said Guadalupe Center President Dawn Montecalvo. "Their confidence level increases and learning becomes fun, not a fear."

The socialization shows, too. "Teachers can tell a child that is coming from our program on the first day of school," said Montecalvo. "If a teacher has to deal with behavioral or social-emotional issues, they can't get to learning. The biggest challenge is that people don't understand it's not babysitting. We have developmental milestones, even in that first year."

Several organizations are focused on working directly with low-income parents and caregivers, such as Fun Time Early Childhood Academy, Grace Place for Children and other partners in the Future Ready Collier network. Grace Place serves a four-square-mile



Four-year-old Bright Beginnings graduates

radius in Golden Gate City. Children up to age 5 from families at poverty level can attend for free; 98 percent are from non-English households, said Ferguson.

Grace Place emphasizes comprehensive family literacy up through college and adults. A parent or caregiver is required to participate independently and with their child in programs, or they will be asked to make room for the next family on the waiting list. "I think that's critical, especially for those who come from limited or at-risk backgrounds. If they can't offer support at home, we don't have the impact," Ferguson said. "We are way too compartmentalized all the way through school. We need more of a seamless system working with families."

The cross-sector approach to leveraging resources to support children 0-4 years and their families is a priority for the Future Ready Collier network. Next year, it is planning to launch Parent Cafés based on the Be Strong Families parent-to-parent educational and support model. Future Ready Collier partners are also providing books to low-income parents who take their little ones for wellness check-ups to Healthcare Network of SWFL to help them build home libraries; more than 5,000 have been distributed. This helps with efforts to get information out to families about the importance of keeping their children's medical check-ups and vaccinations on track so they won't be delayed in registering for kindergarten. Currently, 92 percent are registered on time.

"We're going to get stronger at knowing what we need to do to ensure our children are ready on time," said Lisa Church, vice president of the nonprofit Champions For Learning, which is facilitating the Future Ready Collier collaboration. "When access to early learning showed up in the Community Assessment, we weren't surprised. It really is a challenging issue," Church noted. "There's no public-school system when talking



Guadalupe Center Tutor Corps graduates gain a paid work experience, college preparatory support and scholarships.



High school seniors participate in a college and career prep course at Champions For Learning.

Ferguson said American education standards have increased in the past two decades: What was once taught in middle school is now being taught in elementary schools. “We, as a society, have to understand our world has changed,” he said. “We’ve increased expectations.”

Children become eligible for state-funded VPK programs when they turn 4, though it is voluntary. About 2,000 are enrolled in the Head Start pre-K and VPK programs.

Experts say there is a storm of issues impacting early childhood education in Collier: lack of infant-care and toddler slots; wage disparity between early childhood and public school teachers; the high cost of private care; lack of transportation; insufficient awareness of local resources; and a scarcity of funding.

Attracting and retaining early learning teachers is a challenge due to insufficient wages and benefits without summers off, like public teachers. Nationally, there is a 44 to 45 percent turnover annually, said Susan E. Block, M.Ed., chief executive officer of the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida.

State funding for at-risk and low-income children

has lacked since the Great Recession, when funding was cut but not fully restored. And there simply aren’t enough providers in Collier County, Block said. The Coalition is a legislatively designated nonprofit working in Collier, Glades, Hendry and Lee counties to distribute federal and state childcare subsidies to local providers, match families with vouchers and facilities, provide a quality rating program, and contract with VPK providers. “We also do a fair amount of work trying to engage the community in early learning and getting families engaged,” Block said. “For families who are stressed or working three jobs, it’s a tall task.”

Collier County receives \$5 million for school readiness and \$5 million for VPK placement. A parent or caregiver who is attending school or working a minimum of 20 hours a week, and is living at 150 percent of the federal poverty level, is eligible for early learning vouchers. But there aren’t enough places that accept infants and toddlers due to state regulations that set higher teacher-to-infant ratios, which drives up operational costs. This summer, there was a wait list of about 200 in Collier County hoping to be matched with a provider, Block said.

Local organizations are working to accommodate increasing demand where funds allow. The Guadalupe Center, for instance, is planning to expand in the next three years. The nonprofit center has 307 enrolled in its early learning program for children ages six weeks to 5. The wait list is 540. There were 300 children in the summer program, with 150 on the wait list. There is definitely a need for more high-quality early learning centers in the Immokalee area, particularly near Lake Trafford or Eden Park elementary schools, Montecalvo said. The Community Assessment reports that “many residents in these areas turn to unlicensed providers for this care if quality programs are unavailable.”

The quality of the education being provided is of utmost importance. The Early Learning Coalition invites providers to be assessed, though it is not mandatory. In Collier County, only 9 percent—15 out of 160—of early learning centers received the Coalition’s two highest ratings. That will change next July, Block said, due to new rules that will require all school-readiness providers who receive funding to be assessed and monitored for improvement when required. Funding will be tied to quality—a significant incentive. Higher rates “could bring them closer to private pay reimbursement,” she projected.



The Diaz family reads together during a Bright Beginnings program at Grace Place for Children and Families. Photo: Alex Horn Photography

Join the Conversation at Community Forum

The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation and Community Foundation of Collier County are hosting a public forum to discuss education in Collier County. Join us to share your ideas and hear from educational professionals, community leaders and nonprofits working on the forefront of education and early childhood development.

Where:
Collier County Public Library
– Headquarters Branch,
2385 Orange Blossom Dr.
Naples, FL 34109

The Collier County Public Library does not support or endorse this program.

When:
Tuesday, August 7
5 to 6 p.m.

For more information:
239-263-9400



About the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation

The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation was created in 2004 by Best Buy founder, Dick Schulze, to give back to the communities where Dick and his family grew up—in Minnesota, where he built Best Buy to become the world’s largest consumer electronics retailer and in Florida, where he now maintains a permanent residence. The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation creates grant partnerships with organizations in the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area in Minnesota and in Lee and Collier counties that generate transformational results in human and social services, education, and health and medicine.

Find out more about the Foundation and the 2017 Collier County Community Needs and Assets Assessment:
schulzefamilyfoundation.org

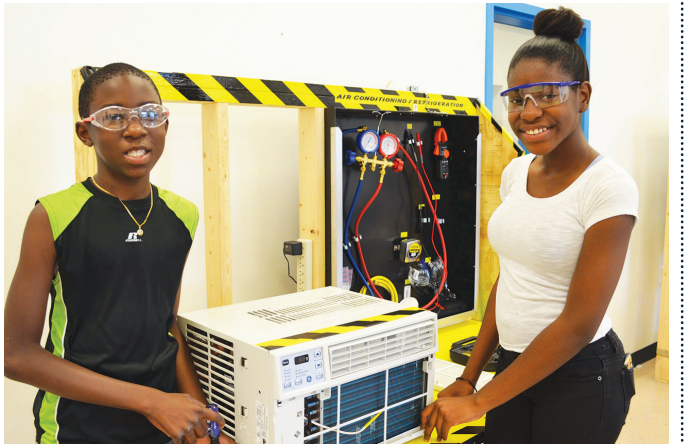


Before and After the School Bell

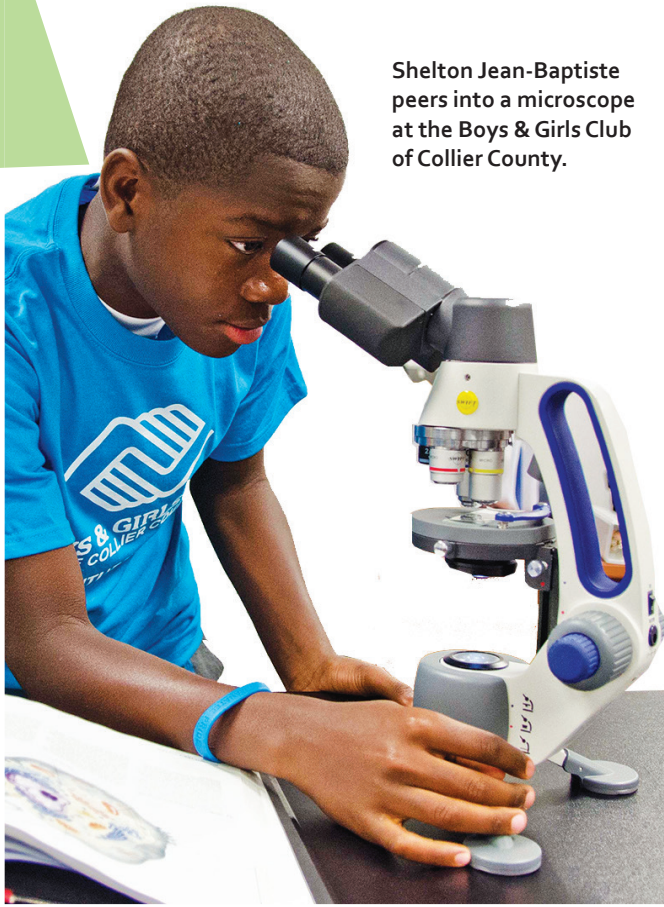
To keep the academic momentum flowing, after-school and summer programming and tutoring are key to maintaining the solid educational foundation that CCPS provides during school hours for students of all ages. Grace Place, Guadalupe Center, New Horizons, the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County, and many other nonprofits are filling in this piece of the puzzle. The growth of these programs are challenged to expand in step with the population—an estimated 13 percent annually.

“Growth is definitely something we continue to see and work hard to accommodate. Over the past five years, we have seen a 95 percent increase in enrollment, bringing us to our current number of youth served to over 3,500 annually,” said Megan McCarthy-Beauvais, M.Ed., Chief Executive Officer, Boys & Girls Club of Collier County.

New Horizons of Southwest Florida provides tutoring, mentoring and faith building to 480 at-risk children and teens in families where English is the second language in Lee and Collier counties. It is in expansion mode, with a projected enrollment of 650 students next



Hardley Leon and Britney Joseph work on an air conditioning and refrigeration module in the Vocational-Technical Room at the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County.



Shelton Jean-Baptiste peers into a microscope at the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County.

year. Its success rate in helping them complete high school is heartening. For the 2016-2017 school year, 90 percent of its participants headed off to college with scholarships or financial aid, and 10 percent entered the workforce.

“There is a great need for more quality after-school programs, particularly for the Haitian and Hispanic population,” said New Horizons Executive Director Debra Haley, who noted that this task has fallen on the nonprofit sector. “These kids are in such need of hope and opportunity, we are compelled by our mission. They have no mentors, no outside perspective,” she said.

McCarthy-Beauvais is a firm believer that all children should have access to high-quality education, no matter their ZIP code. “The options someone has available should not be restricted due to sheer happenstance of birth,” she said.



Parents and their teens learn about applying for college. Courtesy: Champions For Learning

Community Partnerships Key to Addressing Workforce Development Needs

By Michael Dalby, President/CEO, Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce

Consider this: By 2030, Collier County will need 43,000 new jobs to meet the growing demands of our community.

Some jobs will be in the tourism and service industries. Many others will require specialized training in the fields of advanced manufacturing, health care or in skilled trades. The question becomes: How do we provide the necessary workforce?

Several years ago, the Chamber identified workforce training and development as a top public policy priority to answer that question. Through partnerships with education, business and civic leaders, we have taken up the mantle of expanding and enhancing workforce training opportunities in Collier.

We're already seeing results.

We hired a work-based learning coordinator to connect students and businesses with experiential opportunities. That decision helped us connect hundreds of students to companies, and we are about to launch a website to help students, businesses and educators connect to even more opportunities.

We still need to do more.

The manufacturing sector added about 1,000 jobs here in the past decade. Yet in 2017, a major employer announced it was creating 1,000 new jobs in South Carolina due in large part to the lack of a skilled workforce.

That shouldn't happen again.

Last year, in collaboration with Collier County Public Schools (CCPS), we applied for a Florida Job Growth Grant to expand the machining program offered at Immokalee Technical College. This \$3 million grant provides the seed money so iTech can expand and enhance the machining program at a centralized location.

Collier County leaders are trying to address this economic concern as part of a seven-year, one-cent infrastructure sales tax referendum on the ballot this year. If approved by voters, it would set aside \$15 million to build a career and technical training facility on the Florida SouthWestern State College-Collier Campus. FSW will work with CCPS and private-sector employers to ensure the programs offered at the new center meet the current and future needs of our community.

As the voice of business in Collier County, we want to make sure that—from cradle through career—Collier County is the doing everything it can to ensure it provides economic opportunity for this area's best and brightest.

Preparing Local Students to Join the Workforce

By many indicators, CCPS is doing an excellent job. The school district is tied for No. 3 in the state for academic performance. It's the first time no school has received a D or F ranking from the state—and more than half received an A. It's also made gains in matriculation, with 88.2 percent of students graduating in four years.

CCPS offers 33 career academies with a focus on medical, business administration, engineering, aviation and other targeted industries. The programs are designed so students graduate with an industry certification. Engineering is offered in all high schools, and will be expanded to middle schools, too. "They're wonderful skills to take with you: hands-on problem-solving, critical thinking, collaborative team work," said CCPS Director of Community Engagement and District Initiatives Lisa Morse. An entrepreneurship program offered at all high schools is also being introduced into the middle schools—insight that "any person can use in any career," noted Morse.

The school district also offers a range of industry certifications, such as Microsoft, Adobe and Autodesk information technology certifications; 4,000 students earned certifications last year. "Those are certifications that can go to work immediately," said Morse.

"Career in a Year" programs are offered at CCPS' two technical schools: Lorenzo Walker and Immokalee (called iTech). The schools provide training that matches the needs of the local economy, such as air-conditioning, medical, welding, machining and agricultural equipment mechanics. Local business leaders serve on advisory boards for each industry to provide



An adult learner works in Lorenzo Walker Technical College's new state-of-the-art welding shop.



Immokalee Technical College construction student Alejandro Garcia Rodriguez secures fascia for a community project.



Maria Loreda, iTech machining graduate, demonstrates her manual machining skills on a Bridgeport Mill.



Adult and dual-enrollment students demonstrate their diagnostic skills in the Lorenzo Walker Technical College Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Lab. The college has partnered with Conditioned Air to provide quality internship opportunities.



A dual-enrollment student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College is learning to mix compounds in the pharmacy technician lab. The college is launching multiple pharmacy technician programs next year to meet the growing demand from students interested in the field.

guidance on job skills needs and connecting students with local opportunities. The district worked with Arthrex to develop a fine machining program for the manufacturing of its medical devices. Caterpillar donated hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of equipment. A new program needs to prove itself before receiving funding, Morse said, so connecting with businesses is important in growing course offerings. "We have very high job placement rates," said Morse. "Some careers are 99 percent."

Future Ready Collier is a partner in a regional FutureMakers Coalition, which has a goal to transform the Southwest Florida workforce by increasing the number of college degrees, certificates or other credentials from 27 percent to 55 percent by 2025.

Hodges University and the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce are currently conducting a workforce skills training study supported by an \$85,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Collier County. The goal is to explore the feasibility for a new technical "school of the future" that will provide additional options in Collier County.

A goal of the study is determine the types of high-wage jobs that are in demand elsewhere which could be launched in Collier, and fields where training is lacking locally. Some possible areas include healthcare technology, construction trades, information technology and cyber security. "We know there's a demand for more from both businesses and students," said Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce President/CEO Michael Dalby. It would "help adults and youth to upgrade their skills for new tech jobs that may not necessarily exist in Collier but do in Florida—not just a job of today but for the future."

Collier County voters are being asked to vote in November on the "One Collier" 1 percent infrastructure sales surtax to fund a wide variety of local needs. One item on that list is a \$15 million career and technical training center to be built on the Florida SouthWestern College-Collier campus. The Hodges-Chamber study will likely provide a programming blueprint.

"Not every student wants or needs to get a four-year degree. An additional technical college could be beneficial to the community. This would be above and beyond what we already have," said Connolly-Keesler.

