

Grant will improve student access to college

FROM GULF COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

A network of organizations that aims to help more Sarasota County students pursue education and training beyond high school has combined \$62,500 in matching funds to secure a \$50,000 grant from Florida Philanthropic Network (FPN) for their efforts.

The local initiative, known as Talent4Tomorrow (T4T), will use the new funding to improve college access and completion rates for Sarasota area youth.

The grant will expand programs that help students access federal

and state financial aid for which they qualify.

It will also fund new efforts to inform students about high-demand local jobs and the education pathways to reach them, and help students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education see college as a realistic and achievable opportunity.

The grant was awarded through the College Access and Success Initiative, an FPN initiative made possible through funding from The Helios Education Foundation and The Kresge Foundation.

“Our regional economy requires a pipeline of skilled workers to

meet the demands of local employers,” said Mark Pritchett, president and CEO of Gulf Coast Community Foundation, which applied for the grant on behalf of the T4T partnership. “Increasingly, that means college completion, which includes two-year degrees and technical certifications.”

The Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County joined Gulf Coast in committing the local matching funds required by FPN’s challenge grant.

“The Barancik Foundation and the

Community Foundation really made this grant award possible,” Pritchett said.

T4T leaders say the grant validates and rewards collaborative

work that has already garnered Sarasota County statewide recognition. Last year, Sarasota County Schools earned eight of 15 awards in the Florida

FAFSA Challenge, a campaign to increase the rate of high school seniors completing the Free Application for

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Federal Student Aid.

The FAFSA qualifies students for Pell

Grants and other aid. Completion rates are a critical indicator of access to postsecondary education.

According to the Florida College Access Network (Florida CAN),

last year's increase resulted in more than \$280,000 in additional Pell Grant funding for Sarasota County students.

T4T's leadership includes representatives

of the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Gulf Coast Community

Foundation, CareerEdge and United Way Suncoast.

Other key partners are the Education Foundation of Sarasota County, Sarasota County Schools and

UnidosNow, while more than 30 nonprofits, businesses and schools serve as implementation partners delivering programs and services to students and their families.