



# PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

Spring 2022

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## Positive Pathways Analysis Indicates Dramatic Growth Among Campus Programs

Since 2014, the year that Florida’s Department of Children and Families (DCF) created and started funding Positive Pathways, more than 3,000 students with experience in foster care or adopted as wards of the state have used the DCF tuition and fee exemption waiver to graduate with postsecondary degrees.

Furthermore, since Positive Pathways began, the the number of students using the waiver and served by focused and consistent campus-based programs and/or foster care and homeless liaisons has increased from 1,241 (27%), to 2,963 (57%), a 139% increase. In 2015 there were only four programs at Florida’s colleges and universities. Today, there are 16, all active members of the Positive Pathways Program. These findings are based on data provided by the Florida College System and the State University System Board of Governors.

“This data clearly shows Positive Pathways’ ability to align partners and coordinate public and private resources to improve outcomes for students with experience in foster care,” said Maddy Day. Day is a national child welfare-higher education expert; she is

principle of Maddy Day, LLC & Associates and co-leader of Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN), a network of 17 statewide initiatives focused on improving postsecondary success among former foster youth and students

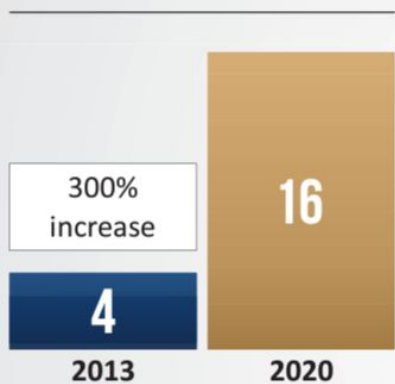


Maddy Day

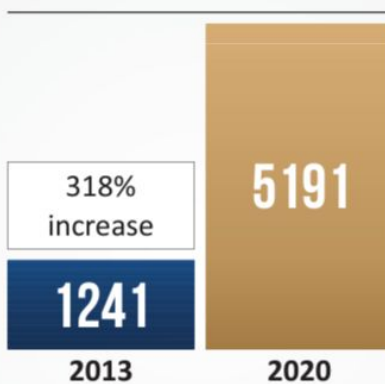
experiencing housing instability.

“Not only is Positive Pathways removing barriers to education for Florida’s students with experience in foster care, they are ensuring that systems are changed for the good and future students will have the support they deserve to thrive as they reach their postsecondary goals,” Ms. Day said.

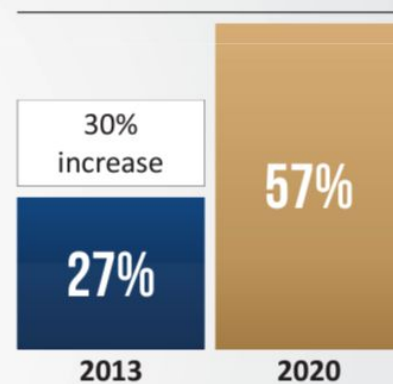
As part of the Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN) Network, Positive Pathways collaborates with other states and jurisdictions to share best practices and develop policy.



Focused and Consistent Campus-based Programs / Initiatives



Number of Students Served by Campus-based Programs / Staff



Percent of Students Using Waiver Served by Focused and Consistent Programs / Initiatives

During the February 2, 2022 quarterly webinar, Dr. Steve J. Rios, Senior Director of the Program, presented the preliminary results of two surveys related to housing-insecure students throughout. The first results were from a survey of 58 students and the second was from a survey answered by 20 campus-based professionals. The feedback from the surveys will be used to improve processes of campus-based programs.

The student survey showed that seventy-five percent (75%) of the 58 students who responded said the services they received were helpful or very helpful. However, \_\_\_% who responded indicated that their college or university has not reached out to them to offer services.

Furthermore, the students indicated that their postsecondary institution requires that they submit documentation to prove they are homeless every fall semester (41%) or every spring semester (43%). Eighteen percent (18%) said they only have to submit documentation once a year.

As part of a statewide collaboration with FCS and FDOE, Positive Pathways staff developed and administered surveys to campus-based program leaders and students throughout Florida.

Examples of valuable insights included advice to “Prepare all advocates . . . to be more well informed to assist students without confusing them.”

Another student said “Verifying homelessness every year. . . is a constant reminder of how uncomfortable our reality is.”

Regarding campus-based support initiatives, one student wrote “This program has drastically helped my goals, emotional well-being, and self-esteem. This opportunity has been exactly what I needed.” When asked about the state’s definition of homelessness, students suggested adding couch surfing to the definition and considering students who “live in an unsafe environment such as student experiencing domestic violence.”

The next Positive Pathways monthly call is scheduled for Wednesday, February 2, 2022 and will focus on this topic. Registration information is provided above. For more information about the survey, contact Positive Pathways at [Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org](mailto:Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org).

## FOSTER CARE LIAISONS' PROACTIVE EFFORTS POSITIVELY IMPACT RETENTION DURING PANDEMIC



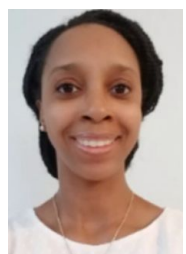
As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges and universities around the nation are faced with decreasing student enrollment. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recently reported that community college enrollment has fallen by 14% since fall of 2019. Since obtaining post-secondary credentials is so essential to students with limited financial or familial safety nets, extra efforts to help ensure they return to college are essential. Fortunately, some Florida campus-based foster care liaisons are proactively reaching out and trying innovative approaches to bring students back to campus.

At St. Petersburg College (SPC), Dr. Althea Blake, geared her retention efforts to both current and past students. During the fall semester, Dr. Blake, who’s the Program Coordinator for SPC’s Road to Independence, Success, and Excellence (RISE) program, reached out to over 100 students who had previously enrolled using the DCF tuition and fee exemption during the past several years but did not earn a degree; these students are referred to as “stop outs”. In her email, Dr. Blake provided step-by-step directions on how to re-enroll and instructions on how to meet with an advisor. Dr. Blake also invited students to reach out to her for questions or support. Upon discussing this proposition with other stop-outs who received Dr. Blake’s outreach, one student made the decision to return to SPC to finish what he started. After taking a break for three semesters, K.J., 22, is now enrolled in 4 classes and working towards earning an Associate’s degree in General Studies. “I never thought I’d have a second chance at my goals,” says K.J. “God showed me through Dr. Blake and Holly (an SPC graduate) that you never know until you try.” Dr. Blake also reached out individually by telephone to an additional 76 active fall students who had not re-enrolled for spring, and by the end of the first week of spring classes, over 30 of these students had re-enrolled, satisfying Dr. Blake’s fall-to-spring retention goal of at least 70% (compared to 66% in the previous year).

On Florida’s southeastern coast in Miami, college coaches Wendy Joseph and Sandra Obas with Educate Tomorrow at Miami Dade College also emailed all of their students using the tuition exemption. They also set up virtual office hours, which involves an open Zoom room that students can enter at any time as their schedule allowed, just as if they were on campus. “This way students can receive the help they need at a time that is convenient for them,” said Ms. Joseph, who has led the work at MDC since it began in 2013. “Throughout the Pandemic, I have been averaging about 40 students a week and I am onboarding at least three new students to the program each week.”

If you are a foster care liaison who has a story to share about how you are bringing students back to campus, please email us at [Pathways@EducateTomorrow.Org](mailto:Pathways@EducateTomorrow.Org) so we can share your story with the Network.

Dr. Althea Blake  
St. Petersburg  
College



Wendy Joseph  
Miami Dade  
College



Sandra Obas  
Miami Dade  
College

During the first Positive Pathways monthly call of the year, three Florida International University (FIU) students shared their success stories and provided insight into their lives as members of the FIU Fostering Panther Pride Program (FPP). Senior Serena Swindoll, Sophomore Kimora Miller and Sarah Dawkins, were invited to the meeting by Ana Ramos, who has lead the campus-based student support program since it was created in 2014.

Ms. Swindoll, president of the FPP student committee, has introduced a number of her peers, as well as community members, to the program since she began participating three and half years ago. The FPP student committee plans campus activities, such as game nights, ice cream socials, and networking events.

"FPP is kind of like a family at FIU, where everybody looks out for each other," Ms. Swindoll said.

Kimora Miller, who is in her third semester at FIU, and is studying Communications and Public Relations, said: "Fostering Panther Pride allowed me to get resources I didn't even think I'd need living on my own." Ms. Miller listed cleaning supplies and food from the on-campus food pantry to illustrate her point.



*From top left to bottom right: Selena Swindoll, Kimora Miller, Ana Ramos and Sarah Dawkins*

As an online student, and a transfer student from Miami-Dade Community College, Sarah Dawkins joined her peers as they praised their campus-based program, which has been embraced by university leadership and the FIU Council of 100, a major funding vehicle for campus initiatives.

A highlight of Ms. Dawkins involvement with FPP has been the Washington DC "fly in," which allows a select group of students to meet with members of Congress and participate in research internship opportunities. Ms. Dawkins, described feeling validated after meeting with government representatives.

"It felt good to be seen and heard about issues we felt needed more attention," she said.

## Guardian ad Litem / Educate Tomorrow Statewide E-GAL Program Soars into 2022

One of Positive Pathways foundational activities is the development of strong, statewide and regional partnerships. One partnership that was launched under the auspices of the Program is the Educate Tomorrow / Florida Guardian ad Litem Mentor Program, which reached a major milestone in 2021. Last year, more than 500 Guardians ad Litem, volunteers who advocate for children in abuse and neglect proceedings, participated in the Extended Guardian ad Litem (E-GAL) Program. E-GAL was established in 2020 to support GALs who wanted to continue to guide and mentor young adults after they emancipated from care or turned 18.

Through a series of trainings throughout Florida, Calvin Martin, Statewide Program Director, and Racquel Perry, an attorney with Educate Tomorrow who has lived experience in foster care, conducted Zoom sessions that included information on:

- The DCF tuition and fee exemption process, as well as post-secondary resources.
- How to assist young adults to identify educational resources
- How to communicate with and support young adults as they transition from foster care.
- How to use their expertise and personal/professional experience as a potential role model.

In 2022, the GAL Program and Educate Tomorrow will launch "Phase II" of the E-GAL Program, during which volunteers will received more in-depth information about the programs and services available to post-18 youth (i.e., Postsecondary Education Services and Support, Positive Pathways, Extended Foster Care, etc.) and organize campus tours in various locations around the state.

"We want the E-GALS to see, first hand, how students are supported by high-quality campus-based programs," said Mr. Martin. "It is an ambitious undertaking but since campus-based liaisons and leaders will be hosting GALs themselves, I'm sure it is doable."

For more information, contact Mr. Martin at [Calvin.Martin@gal.fl.gov](mailto:Calvin.Martin@gal.fl.gov) or Ms. Perry at [Racquell@EducateTomorrow.org](mailto:Racquell@EducateTomorrow.org).



*Calvin Martin*



*Racquell Perry, Esq.*

# March Pathways Call Will Feature Ground-breaking Research from Chapin Hall

During the March Positive Pathways monthly call, three nationally-known researchers will emphasize the importance of providing community college students with the supports they need to succeed academically. The presentation is timely given recently proposed legislation here in Florida that calls for similar research.



From left to right. Drs. Havlicek, Dworsky, and Gitlow.

During the March meeting, scheduled for 1:30 p.m., on Wednesday, March 2, 2022, Dr. Amy Dworsky, a Senior Research Fellow with

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago of Chicago, will lead a presentation about the experiences of students in Illinois who are or were in foster care. Dworsky will be joined by fellow Chapin Hall research Dr. Elissa Gitlow, and Dr. Judy Havlicek, an associate professor the School of Social Work at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, veteran researchers in this arena. Based on their research in Illinois, the team found that “despite significant federal and state investments in programs that aim to promote postsecondary educational attainment among young people in foster care, community college students who are or were in foster care are not receiving the supports they need to succeed in school from either the child welfare or education systems,” Dr. Dworsky said.

Here in Florida, advocates for young adults in foster care have suggested similar, Florida-specific research that may be required by the Florida legislature in the form of Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) study, the research arm of the Florida Legislature.

Click [HERE](#) to register for the March 2, 2022 Positive Pathways monthly call.

## Educate Tomorrow Positive Pathways Contract Extended Through June 30, 2022

The Florida Department of of Children and Families (DCF) has extended its Positive Pathways contract with Educate Tomorrow through June 30, 2022. Educate Tomorrow has administered Positive Pathways, in close collaboration with DCF, since 2016. The Program now has more than 250 members, including students, campus-based liaisons, independent living professionals and youth and young adult advocates throughout Florida.

Positive Pathways is the only statewide public-private partnership of its kind in the country funded by a state children’s services department. The Program has two part-time staff members, including Educate Tomorrow CEO Brett McNaught and Dr. Steve J. Rios, who has served as the Program’s senior director since it began. Positive Pathways maintains and grows the Positive Pathways Network, hosts monthly professional development meetings, provides daily technical assistance to campus-based liaisons at Florida’s 28 colleges and 12 universities, produces quarterly webinars and newsletters, conducts research and hosts an annual conference that attracts hundreds of attendees and national speakers.

“We have been honored and are fortunate to continue to administer Positive Pathways for DCF,” said Mr. McNaught. “More than ever, consistent and focused support for our student population is essential.”

**JOIN POSITIVE PATHWAYS TODAY!**  
***We are your network for success.***

Positive Pathways is a Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) program funded by DCF and Educate Tomorrow, which administers the program. Our mission is to support campus-based foster care liaisons and community partners, including independent living professionals, as they provide focused and consistent support to young adults from foster care and homeless backgrounds who are pursuing post secondary education.

We provide technical assistance, networking services, and professional development. Click [HERE](#) to join the Network. We are YOUR network for success and look forward to working with you.

For more information, reach us at:

[Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org](mailto:Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org)  
[www.PositivePathwaysFlorida.org](http://www.PositivePathwaysFlorida.org)  
(786) 223-6884

Dr. Steve J. Rios, Senior Director  
Positive Pathways Program

