



## Advancing a College- Going and Completing Culture

As a gateway to intellectual growth and diverse careers, a postsecondary education — including certificates, licenses and college degrees — opens the door to opportunities for individuals, families and communities. A postsecondary education also provides the skills and knowledge that are vital to success in an economy that is looking for creators, innovators and critical thinkers who can solve complex challenges.

Despite the clear benefits of a postsecondary education, many full-time Arizona and Florida students fail to earn a credential. Currently, only 36 percent of working age adults in both states have an associate's degree or higher<sup>5</sup>.

Helios believes advancing a college- going and completing culture is a key component postsecondary success. The concept of a college-going culture refers to the environment and attitudes in schools and communities that encourage students to obtain the college knowledge and access to resources that lead to success in postsecondary education.

College for Every Student (CFES), a nonprofit organization committed to raising the academic aspirations and performance of underserved youth so that they can prepare for, gain access to and succeed in college, has been working for 22 years, helping low-income youth move toward college by emphasizing three core practices: mentoring, leadership through service and pathways to college. The partnership with Helios has expanded the pathways to college practice to include a specific focus on STEM careers.

Through an \$800,000 investment from the Foundation, CFES is exposing students in four schools in Tampa Bay to the opportunities available in the STEM areas. The participants are involved in ongoing college exposure, regular service projects with a STEM focus, interaction with professionals working in STEM fields and are receiving leadership training.

CFES was recently evaluated by the University of Michigan and researchers found that the strategies employed, including early exposure to college, mentoring and community-service leadership, have a substantial impact on the college-going attitudes of disadvantaged students.

The Foundation's partnership with CFES is helping raise the academic aspirations and performance of underserved youth, better preparing them for and helping them gain access to a postsecondary education.