

REPORTS

OSCEOLA CAMPUS REPORT

got college?

A community effort to increase the college-going rate in Osceola County
June 25, 2013

Organized by:



VALENCIA COLLEGE

Background

Osceola County ranks 57th (out of 67 counties) in the state of Florida with respect to the percentage of students that enroll in a public postsecondary institution after graduating from high school. In 2011, 41.3% of previous year high school graduates were enrolled in a public postsecondary institution,¹ far below the state average (52.6%) or the college-going rate of neighboring counties in Central Florida (see Figure 1).

Unfortunately, Osceola County's college-going rate has lagged behind the state average for several years. Since 2004, Osceola County's college-going rate has been about 10% below the state average each year (see Figure 2).

Percentage of high school graduates entering college

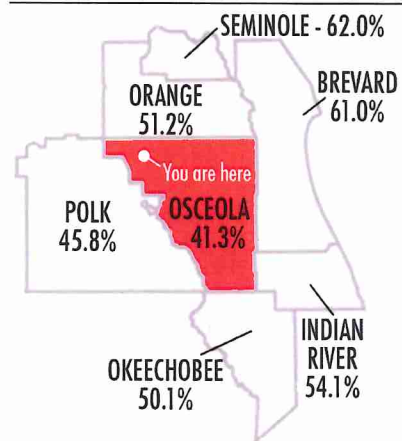


Figure 1. College-going rates in Central Florida

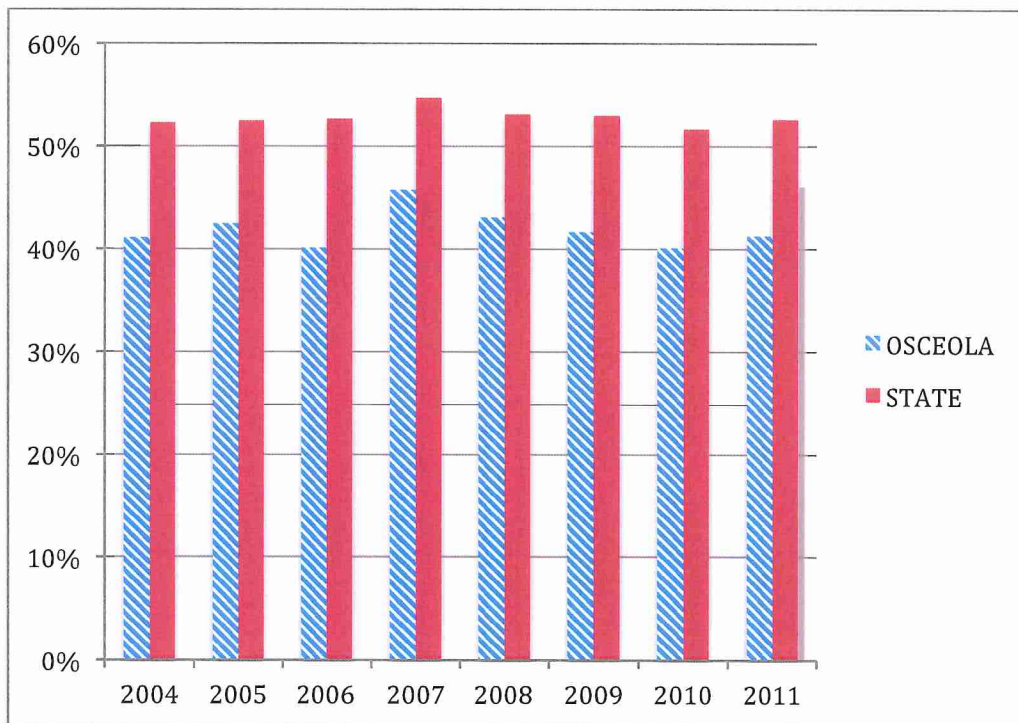


Figure 2. Percentage of high school graduates enrolling in a public postsecondary institution in Osceola County and the State of Florida

¹ "High School Feedback Report - 2011 Florida Public High School Graduates," Florida Department of Education, accessed March 3, 2013, http://data.fldoe.org/readiness/default.cfm?action=view_report_allschools&district=42103&DisplayYear=2011&CFID=6000174&CFTOKEN=2a423a7acd3135ac-5FFDD781-5056-8C3F-161D64C32D343EEF

Economic Impact

Osceola County would benefit from a higher percentage of its residents pursuing higher education. First of all, a recent study by *emsi* found that over the course of a working lifetime, individuals in Central Florida who have completed an associate's degree will earn an average of \$470,400 more than someone with only a high school diploma.² The difference in average lifetime earnings grows with increased levels of education; in other words, individuals who have completed a bachelor's degree will, on average, earn even more over the course of their lifetime than those who have completed an associate's degree.

Higher average earnings would support increased buying power and generate higher tax revenues, helping to support the local economy. Moreover, higher educational levels tend to result in avoided social costs, such as fewer unemployment and welfare claims, fewer incidences of alcohol abuse and smoking, and reduced costs associated with law enforcement.³

Overview of "Got College?"

On April 30, 2013, a group of more than 150 community members attended "Got College?," an event hosted by the Education Foundation of Osceola County (Education Foundation), the School District of Osceola County (SDOC), and Valencia College (Valencia). Participants included board members of the SDOC and Valencia, Education Foundation employees and board members, SDOC employees, Valencia employees and students, and community leaders (see Appendix for a list of participants). The event was organized to accomplish several goals:

- Inform the community about the relatively low percentage of high school graduates in Osceola County that attend college
- Explore what Osceola County currently does well to support students who wish to attend college
- Identify the barriers that exist in Osceola County that prevent students from attending college
- Generate a list of strategies and tactics that Osceola County should explore to make it possible for more students to enroll in college

² "Economic impact of Valencia College – Student perspective," *emsi*, March 2012, <http://news.valenciacollege.edu//wp-content/plugins//download-monitor/download.php?id=4>

³ "Economic contribution of Valencia College: Analysis of investment effectiveness and economic growth," *emsi*, March 2012, <http://news.valenciacollege.edu//wp-content/plugins//download-monitor/download.php?id=7>, 38-40.

What's Working Well in Osceola County

Osceola County currently has many strategies and programs in place to encourage students to attend college. Some of the most frequently identified strategies and programs by "Got College?" participants include:⁴

- AVID programs in middle and high schools
- Career pathway options at TECO
- Celebration Foundation Bus Tours of TECO and Valencia
- DirectConnect to UCF – guaranteed admission to UCF with an A.A. from Valencia
- Dual enrollment – high school students taking courses at Valencia
- Education Foundation Programs (Bookmark Buddies, Kids' Closet, Medical Pipeline, Scholarship Counseling, Scholarships, Take Stock in Children)
- High school guidance counselors and career specialists
- Special programs for K-12 students and families (College Goal Sunday, College Night, Education in the Park, FAFSA Frenzy, Valencia Open House)

What Barriers Exist in Osceola County

It comes as no surprise that there is a significant number of barriers or challenges that students in Osceola County must overcome in order to attend college. Some of the most frequently identified barriers by "Got College?" participants include:

- Lack of efficient public transportation options to TECO and Valencia
- Lack of information about college admissions process for parents and families, particularly in Spanish
- Many families require financial aid; application process for aid is complicated
- Many parents did not attend college and may not value higher education; expectation for students to support family financially after high school
- Many students lack a stable home environment, high transient population
- Need to improve curriculum alignment to better prepare students for college
- Students don't see a career path nor understand value of higher education
- Too few counselors/career specialists in high schools to provide support

⁴ For a full list of ideas generated, visit www.foundationosceola.org/gotcollege/results.pdf

Ideas to Overcome Barriers

The “Got College?” participants identified a significant number of ideas that should be explored in an effort to increase the college-going rate in Osceola County. The results reveal that three components must be addressed in order to support students in their quest for higher education: aspiration, preparation, and destination. First, we must work to ensure that more students aspire to attend college, and that these aspirations are supported by their families. Second, we must work to ensure that students are well-prepared to apply for college and find success once enrolled. And finally, we must work to ensure that all students have access to a postsecondary destination that will support them to achieve their goals.

Aspiration

- **Celebrate success of local graduates to create a culture of completion** – *a number of community leaders grew up in Osceola County, went to college, and have gone on to have very successful careers. As a community, we should highlight these local leaders so that current students may view them as role models.*
- **Develop thermometers to measure college-going rates** – *to foster friendly competition and build awareness of our college-going rate, each high school should have a “thermometer” to publicly display its college-going rate.*
- **Every child should have a college t-shirt** – *as part of the uniform dress code, students have the option of wearing college shirts on special days. As a community, we should ensure that every child has his/her own college t-shirt.*
- **Expand the number of “pipeline projects” available in Osceola County** – *with the energy and excitement surrounding the “Medical Pipeline” project, perhaps more similarly-structured summer opportunities to prepare students for other careers could be created.*
- **Increase the number of college information sessions for parents** – *many families do not understand the value of higher education nor the process for applying to college. More information sessions should be offered for families, both in English and Spanish, and at various locations throughout the county.*
- **Increase the number of college tours and visits to Valencia** – *every student should visit a college campus before graduating from high school.*
- **Invite Valencia “ambassadors” to visit K-12 classrooms** – *peers can serve as powerful role models, and current Valencia students may be the most successful at convincing K-12 students that college is within reach.*
- **Offer job shadowing opportunities and internships in high school** – *an important aspect that encourages students to attend college is a clear reason for doing so, often a specific career pathway. Job shadowing opportunities and internships may allow students to identify their chosen career pathway earlier.*

Preparation

- **Consider the expansion of AVID** – *AVID was consistently cited as a program that works in Osceola County. It would be worth exploring the possibility to see if the AVID program could be expanded to serve more students or if similar curriculum opportunities could be made available to more students.*
- **Continue efforts to improve curriculum alignment** – *approximately 75% of students who enroll at Valencia require developmental coursework. Opportunities should be made available for elementary, middle, and high school teachers to work together with college professors to improve curriculum alignment and help ensure that students are prepared to be successful in college.*
- **Expand meaningful dual enrollment opportunities** – *dual enrollment is often cited as a successful program, and research suggests that students who are exposed to a college-level course while in high school are more likely to attend college. Opportunities for dual enrollment should be made available at more high schools within the county to create meaningful pathways to college.*
- **Provide college transition mentors** – *the Take Stock in Children program was identified as a successful practice in Osceola County, particularly given the individualized mentoring that each student in the program receives. While the dollars associated with the Take Stock in Children scholarships are quite limited, perhaps the mentoring component could be expanded to serve more students in Osceola County.*
- **Provide opportunities for families to receive assistance with financial aid** – *college would not be possible for many families in Osceola County without financial aid. However, the application process can be intimidating and confusing. While FAFSA Frenzy and other similar events offered at the high schools are highly successful, they aren't sufficient to meet the community's needs. Sessions should be offered in more locations, on evenings and weekends, and in Spanish.*
- **Provide test preparation programs free of cost** – *standardized test scores can impact students' ability to access scholarship and financial aid dollars. More opportunities should be made available to high school students so that they can learn test-taking strategies to maximize their standardized test scores.*
- **Research and benchmark the counselor/career specialist to student ratio** – *while counselors and career specialists are key players in helping high school students prepare for college, concerns were revealed regarding the number of students each counselor/career specialist is required to serve. We should consider benchmarking the ratio of counselors/career specialists at each high school, and identify ways to work with the SDOC to improve the ratio, if warranted.*

Destination

- **Consider improvements to public transportation** – *limited public transportation options exist in Osceola County, particularly to/from the Poinciana area. We should explore ways to make both Valencia and TECO more accessible to students who rely on public transportation.*
- **Consider ways to make student life at Valencia more attractive** – *some potential students choose not to attend Valencia because of the perceived lack of opportunities to experience “student life.” Consider expanding co-curricular offerings at Valencia, including expanded arts programs, athletics, ROTC, and opportunities to participate in civic engagement and international experiences.*
- **Consider ways to provide childcare to students enrolled at Valencia** – *many potential students are already parents themselves, and the lack of affordable childcare is a substantial burden preventing access to higher education. Consider ways to facilitate affordable childcare to students enrolled at Valencia.*
- **Create a consistent, single source of information related to higher education** – *the college application process can be overwhelming and confusing, particularly for families who have not yet had anyone attend college. Consider the development of a “toolkit” in which families can find all of the information they need about the college admissions process, the financial aid application process, requirements to demonstrate residency for in-state tuition purposes, etc.*
- **Create a coordinated schedule for the county** – *the School District of Osceola County, the Education Foundation of Osceola County, and Valencia College, along with other community organizations, organize events designed to encourage students to attend college. A coordinated county calendar would allow for planned scheduling of events. For example, it would be helpful if the deadline for Education Foundation scholarship applications was two or three weeks after FAFSA Frenzy, to maximize the number of students aware of Education Foundation scholarships.*
- **Expand the number of programs offered at Valencia** – *the number of A.S. programs that a student can complete at the Osceola Campus is still rather limited. Consider areas such as culinary, hospitality, and medical sciences.*
- **Expand the number of scholarships available to Osceola County students** – *Osceola County is blessed to have an Education Foundation with the ability to award more than 100 college scholarships each year. However, many students do not receive scholarships or financial aid, and additional scholarship opportunities would allow more students to afford the cost of higher education.*
- **Identify ways to waive the Valencia application fee** – *the \$35 Valencia application fee is often cited as an obstacle. Some potential students don’t have a credit card and cannot pay the fee online, while for others, \$35 is simply too large of a financial burden. We should identify ways to waive the application fee for students for whom it serves as an insurmountable obstacle.*

Conclusions

On June 4, 2013, 43 “Got College?” participants reconvened at Valencia College’s Osceola Campus to review the results of the meeting held on April 30, 2013. Attendees were provided with a list of the strategies related to aspiration, preparation, and destination outlined earlier in this report, and were asked to rank each strategy in terms of its importance and feasibility.

Attendees used a three-point scale, with a value of three indicating highest importance or feasibility. The average importance score and feasibility score for each strategy was calculated, and these two average scores were added together for each strategy to calculate an overall ranking. The strategies were ranked in the following order:

- ***Increase the number of college information sessions for parents (5.40)***
- ***Increase the number of college tours and visits to Valencia (5.20)***
- ***Provide opportunities for families to receive assistance with financial aid (5.20)***
- ***Invite Valencia “ambassadors” to visit K-12 classrooms (5.10)***
- ***Develop thermometers to measure college-going rates (5.02)***
- ***Expand meaningful dual enrollment opportunities (5.02)***
- ***Continue efforts to improve curriculum alignment (5.00)***
- ***Create a coordinated schedule for the county (5.00)***
- *Consider ways to make student life at Valencia more attractive (4.90)*
- *Expand the number of “pipeline projects” available in Osceola County (4.90)*
- *Expand the number of scholarships available to Osceola County students (4.90)*
- *Provide college transition mentors (4.90)*
- *Celebrate success of local graduates to create a culture of completion (4.89)*
- *Consider the expansion of AVID (4.80)*
- *Research and benchmark the counselor/career specialist to student ratio (4.74)*
- *Consider improvements to public transportation (4.70)*
- *Expand the number of programs offered at Valencia (4.64)*
- *Create a consistent, single source of information related to higher education (4.60)*
- *Identify ways to waive the Valencia application fee (4.60)*
- *Provide test preparation programs free of cost (4.60)*
- *Offer job shadowing opportunities and internships in high school (4.50)*
- *Every child should have a college t-shirt (4.10)*
- *Consider ways to provide childcare to students enrolled at Valencia (4.00)*

While each of the strategies listed above would likely influence the college-going rate of the county, prioritization of the strategies is necessary to focus the county’s first efforts. On July 9, 2013, a meeting will be held at Valencia College’s Osceola Campus to establish work teams for the top eight strategies (identified in boldface above), as ranked by their importance and feasibility.

Appendix: "Got College?" Participants

Matthew Abalos, Valencia College
Grace Acevedo, Valencia College
Irene Acevedo, Valencia College
Bob Alexander, Mary Alice Memorial Fund
Michael Allen, Assistant Superintendent, Middle School Curriculum and Instruction
Chris Arrington, Osceola County School for the Arts
Kirsys Asenjo, Valencia College
Denise Asselta, Financial Aid Officer at TECO
Devyani Ballandin, Poinciana High School
Yanelys Ballard, District Office
Linda S. Beaty, Valencia College
Casey Beckles, Education Foundation
David Berelsman, Education Foundation
Mackenzie Bertram, SDOC Secondary Curriculum and Instruction
Sarita Betts, Harmony K-8 School
Laura Blasi, Valencia College
Karen Borglum, Valencia College
Mike Bosley, Valencia College
John Boyd, Director, Student Success and Prg Acct
Jenni Campbell, Valencia College
Kathy Carr, Education Foundation of Osceola County
Toni Castillo, Stetson University
Anthony Cook, Poinciana High School
Ilia Cordero, Valencia College
Jamie Domres, Education Foundation
Kathy Donato, Career Specialist, Gateway High School
Sandra Drummer, Discovery Intermediate
Kurt Ewen, Valencia College
Debbie Fahmie, Secondary Resource Teacher (Arts)
Matthew Farrell, Denn John Middle School
Karen Gill, Highlands Elementary
Lisa Grego, Secondary Resource Teacher (Math)
Maria Grulich, Valencia College Board of Trustees
Guillermo Hansen, Valencia College Board of Trustees
Donna Hart, Osceola School for the Arts
Kiawania Heard, Valencia College
Nasser Hedayat, Valencia College
Kathy Helms, St. Cloud Middle School
Celeste Henry, Valencia College
Barbara Horn, School Board
Bernard Huggins, Valencia College
Dale Husbands, Valencia College
Laura Jonassaint, Valencia College
Danielle Jones, Denn John Middle School
Sonya Joseph, Valencia College
Gladys Justiniano, SDOC, Secondary Education

Brad Kibbe, STEM Resource Specialist, School District of Osceola County
Paul Kinser, Education Foundation
Amy Kleeman, Valencia College
Natalie Leblanc, Liberty High School
Felisa Lewis, Chesnut Elementary
Phillip Lowry, SunTrust and Parent Advisory Council
Melba Luciano, Superintendent, SDOC
Susan McKay, K-12 Resource Teacher, PE/Health/Wellness
Dalia Medina, SDOC
Courtney Murray, Liberty High School
Robert Noll, TECO
Deysi A. Ortiz, Guidance Counselor, Neptune Middle School
Maria Ortiz, SDOC
Melissa Pedone, Valencia College
Susan Petrek, Middle School SDOC
Kathleen Plinske, Valencia College
Bart Roberts, TECO
Lizzette Roman, OSCA
Joyce Romano, Valencia College
Mary Sanchez, Liberty High School
Michelle Sandage, Secondary Resource Teacher (Science)
Racquel Schroeder, Parent Advisory Council
Nelson Sepulveda, Valencia College
Landon Shephard, Valencia College
Cynthia Smith, St. Cloud High School
Ken Smith, Education Foundation
Jackie Starren, Valencia College
Robert Studly, Liberty High School
Magda Suriel, Osceola Education Finance Assistant
Jill Szentmiklosi, Valencia College
Noraida Velez, Valencia College
Jay Wheeler, Osceola County School Board

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