

**For Immediate Release**

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**Sarasota County Wins State FAFSA Completion Award**

**SARASOTA, Fla. (April 20, 2017)** — The Talent4Tomorrow Partnership is proud to announce that Sarasota County Schools has won the top award for FAFSA completion rate amongst large school districts in the state of Florida. The award is presented based on results of the *2017 Florida FAFSA Challenge*, a campaign to increase the proportion of high school seniors completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Through focused community efforts, many having been led by Talent4Tomorrow partners, 45.5% of Sarasota County high school seniors have completed the FAFSA. This is a **9.1% increase** over the previous application year, which equates to an estimated **additional \$513,180** in Pell grants awarded to Sarasota County students. In total, the Florida College Access Network (Florida CAN) has awarded Sarasota with the following honors:

- Sarasota County Schools--*“MVP for Large School District”* (Having the highest FAFSA completion rate through March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017)
- Riverview High School--*“Biggest Boost for Large Schools”* (Largest week-to-week change in percentage of students completing the FAFSA)
- *“All-Stars”*—(Achieving an increase of FAFSA completion by at least 5% over last year):
  - Sarasota County School district
  - Suncoast Polytechnical High School
  - Sarasota Military Academy
  - Booker High School
  - Venice Senior High School
  - Sarasota High School
  - North Port High School
  - Riverview High School

The Talent4Tomorrow Partnership is a broad community collaborative known as a “Local College Access Network”. Lead agencies in the partnership include: CareerEdge Funders Collaborative, Education Foundation of Sarasota County, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Sarasota County Schools, The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, UnidosNow, and United Way Suncoast. The Talent4Tomorrow Partnership seeks to increase career awareness and postsecondary attainment through increased college and career awareness, aspiration, and affordability initiatives. “Every dollar counts when it comes to accessing post-secondary

education,” Chamber President | CEO Kevin Cooper noted, “when we come together, focus together, and lead together, it’s gratifying to see results getting our students one step closer to where they and we want them to be. This is a truly great example of leadership through collaboration.”

The Talent4Tomorrow Partnership spent several months planning and executing FAFSA awareness and support activities, including FAFSA completion assistance during community- and school-based events. Community volunteers as well as financial aid officers from Ringling College of Art & Design, State College of Florida, University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, and Keiser University assisted families of high school seniors in completing the FAFSA form at North Port High School, Booker High School, and Sarasota High School, as well as at community-based FAFSA events and United Way Suncoast VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) programs.

According to the Florida College Access Network, less than half of all eligible Sarasota County high school students in 2012-2013 completed the FAFSA form, thus leaving over \$2 million in Pell Grant dollars untapped. 59% of Florida students in 2013 were eligible to receive a Pell grant, which awards up to \$5,815 a year per student.

For more information regarding the Talent4Tomorrow partnership, contact Mimi Cirbusova at [mcirbusova@sarasotachamber.com](mailto:mcirbusova@sarasotachamber.com) or (941) 556-4038.

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