



# AN ASSESSMENT OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Collier County, situated along Florida’s southwest coast, is geographically sprawling, encompassing 2,300 square miles, and compartmentally diverse, with considerable need throughout its nearly 50,000-strong public school student population. It is a community with a meaningful nonprofit and philanthropic base, and strong leadership, in recent years, at the public school district. At the intersection of these factors lies **Future Ready Collier**, a collective impact network representing the shared priorities of over 60 participating organizations, pursuing a mindset of inclusivity based in an all-means-all commitment to Collier County children and families.



## **Future Ready Collier’s goals are two-fold:**

- Ensure all children are kindergarten-ready.
- Ensure all young people graduate high school with a plan.

## **Across the educational continuum are crucial interests in:**

- Early learning that begins at infancy.
- Supports for students during their elementary and middle school years.
- Awareness among future workers about education or career opportunities.

Collective impact is an appealing concept that is challenging to apply. Through the structure of its backbone organization, the school district, funding agencies and foundations, its committed membership, and alignment with regional efforts like the FutureMakers Coalition and state-level objectives such as the legislatively determined SAIL to 60 goal, Future Ready Collier is distinguishing itself as a collaborative model with measurable impact. Major obstacles—2017’s Hurricane Irma, and the COVID pandemic—solidified in-network partnerships and coordinated community responses.

This case study explores Future Ready Collier’s foundations and reasons for success. Themes include strategic partnership, trust and cooperation, sustainability, the importance of metrics alongside the myriad ways in which success can be quantified, innovation and adaptation, balancing infrastructure with mutual ownership, and the necessity of long-term, jointly held purpose.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### *The Mission and Partners*

Future Ready Collier (FRC) encompasses over 60 Collier County entities with either a focus on or core interest in education. From the outset, FRC's goals have been to inclusively address the spectrum of the educational experience by increasing the number of children who are kindergarten-ready and the number of high school seniors who graduate on track to pursue a degree, credential, or employment.



Leading the way operationally is Champions For Learning, The Education Foundation of Collier County, which operates as the backbone organization for FRC. As is common in collective impact, FRC is not its own legal entity. Strategically, this structure permits engagement among the partners with shared intellectual ownership. Logistically, however, a backbone organization is identified to carry out day-to-day execution. Key duties include hosting and facilitating meetings, maintaining the website, producing annual reports, and managing the membership roster.

Champions For Learning (CFL) was an early participant in the conversations that culminated in Future Ready Collier's origination, and emerged as the logical and tactical choice to assume the backbone role. CFL is long-established in Collier County, founded in 1990, with existing credibility, a robust internal structure, and sufficient staffing to take on the charge of shepherding FRC. As a trusted neutral convener with extensive community engagement experience, CFL could catalyze FRC's early-stage framework. Moreover, their leadership understood that this partnership was around a common aspiration and that their true responsibility, above and beyond administrative assistance, was to facilitate the connections that would grow into a functioning network.

It's an intentionally diverse partnership. While the majority have education as a key component of their missions, others are community stakeholders

whose work meaningfully overlaps with education. FRC respects that education happens in many settings and contexts. Healthcare providers and representatives of the business community, for example, are active in the network. Membership shifts over time and participation is voluntary. However, year-over-year consistency among the most active participants is strong, and new members are welcome. Generally, those who wish to have a voice can and do.

It has been vital to solicit involvement from a range of education providers, including the Collier County Public School District (CCPS), early childhood educators, and universities. In the most recent CCPS strategic plan, alignment with community-wide goals was included, which is a significant evolution in how educational interests in Collier County have joined. Priorities are identified within academic as well as socioemotional development. Counting CCPS as a named FRC partner creates opportunities for network members to collaborate, access and share data, and work in tandem towards alleviating regional need.

The depth of need across Collier County is a unifying force that tends to make FRC's membership functionally self-selective. Members derive sufficient value to justify their continued involvement. The corollary effect is that impact and reach can be magnified. The result is a positive feedback cycle. Active participation leads to benefit, which engenders further active participation.

## 2

# TRUST AND COMMUNICATION



A collegial, rather than competitive approach, has been at FRC's core since its founding. FRC operates almost like a trade association, through which organizations that may otherwise be vying for the same resources can transparently explore overlapping interests. As an independent third party, FRC has no fiduciary stake or responsibility, other than fostering the conditions for collaboration. Organizational leaders consistently express their appreciation for the spirit of respect. When members come to the table, they know individual agendas are temporarily set aside, and it's a peer-to-peer culture. There are distinct examples of how trust and communication are observable within the FRC framework.

Notably, as previously referenced, CCPS' recent three-year strategic plan affirmatively included FRC. The CCPS strategic plan



Even anecdotally, it is common for FRC partners to identify communication and trust as what make their participation valuable. The mutual benefit of information-sharing, knowing who to call with a question, and the amplification of effort are all key motivators.

underscores the importance of a holistic view of education. Broken into categories, specific areas of alignment between FRC and the district encompass Academic, Cultural, and Leadership Imperatives.

Intersection around academic goals is straightforward. All recognize the need to improve student achievement, early learning progression, uptake of technology resources, STEAM education, and technical college access. Interestingly, and covered more thoroughly in later discussion, digital innovation was immediately expedited with the onset of COVID-19 and the closing of school buildings. FRC partners were instrumental in rapidly assessing need and deploying resources across Collier County.

Cultural and leadership objectives are more intangible but equally critical. CCPS has stipulated that FRC is well-positioned to help students achieve better social emotional learning, parent and family engagement, study skills, empowerment and communication, pathways to future academic and career outcomes, and better overall cohesion from early learning through high school.

When surveyed about FRC’s inclusion in the CCPS strategic plan, respondents are overwhelming supportive. Better than 83 percent believe it is clear how their organization fits with the stated aims.

Considering what they hope it leads to, answers frequently cite community, resources, coordination and collaboration, and concrete results. As to where they envision the greatest likelihood for accomplishment, themes include communication, information-sharing, and empowerment.

Invariably, these results testify to FRC’s collective mindset. Stakeholders understand, and are acting towards, a multi-factorial, solutions-oriented methodology. Trust and communication among the partners are both cause and effect of this groundwork.

Before delving into the specifics of how FRC operates and how it is generating collective impact, it is important to consider the significant extent to which the trust shared within the network is more than an outcome, it was a part of the early process. Before Future Ready Collier had a name and formal objectives, preliminary conversations were productive towards establishing the comfort level now shared among participants. Any conversation around replicating such a model should consider the reality of the time spent in open conversation, during which founding organizations addressed the essential data-sharing, scale, and co-ownership that would give rise to the larger network. Identifying trust as its own outcome will be difficult without first committing to the process.

# 3

## DATA AND INFORMATION-SHARING

It is difficult, verging on impossible, to effect broad-scale social change without a thorough, quantitative understanding of current circumstances, problems presented, demographic factors, and incremental assessment. Prior to the inception of FRC, there was no structure for systematic information-sharing within education-based and -interested organizations. FRC made data collection and sharing a preeminent focus.



**48,000**

**students** are served by the Collier County Public School District (CCPS) which spans 2,300 square miles.



**65%**

of students qualify as **economically needy** in this diverse school district.



**55%**

of students come from homes in which **English is not the first language spoken**.



This collective impact network has, in only a few years, and spanning significant challenges, established itself as a meaningful voice for education interests.

Related to early childhood, there are several goals and associated indicators. To ascertain incoming kindergarten readiness, FRC uses the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screening (FLKRS) – Star Early Learning Assessment, and tracks the number of on-time kindergarten registrations on day one of the school year. Early Steps referrals inform increases in the number of Collier County children ages 0–4 who receive needed developmental support. The number of accredited, highly rated early learning centers is assessed as a proxy for the quality of early childhood education.

As pertaining to college and career readiness, those figures start in middle school, inquiring after student success based on ratings including course failure, math and reading attainment, attendance, and the number of suspensions. High school graduation rates and FAFSA completions are

recorded, followed by the percentage of post-secondary students who persist in moving towards credit completion and ultimately degree or credential attainment. With the Greater Naples Chamber, work-based learning is appraised.

The practical upsides are myriad. Organizations feel empowered to share best practices, reaping benefit from consideration of other viewpoints, and implementing ideas where they fit. FRC can be—and has been—a resource for data for grant applications. Funders generally respond well to seeing evidence of existing coordination and impact. This evidence-based model is related to the continuing direct involvement of grant-makers with FRC. In addition, transparency around where improvement is needed can be galvanizing, and help mitigate duplication of effort while telling the story of overall student wellbeing in Collier County.



**50%**

of incoming kindergarteners meet readiness standards as shown in annual statistics.



**58.3%**

percentage of Florida students who completed the FAFSA for the 2019-2020 school year / 2020-2021 application cycle\*.



**<40%**

of working adults in Collier County have a degree or credential.

\* According to data from the Florida College Access Network, FAFSA completion tracking by state.

# 4

## OPTIMIZATION AND REDUCED DUPLICATION OF SERVICES



Duplication is a concern throughout the social services sector, where dollars and material resources are highly allocated. Frequently, multiple organizations may serve overlapping missions and demographics, complicated by Collier County’s large size. With effective collaboration, aid can be more efficiently circulated, optimizing time, supplies, and money, and contributing to equitable support for all students and families.



The collaborative effort that enabled such a rapid transition from traditional in-school learning to virtual education also contributed to ongoing assessment of effect and lessons learned.

Already adept at responding to crisis, demonstrated following 2017's Hurricane Irma, FRC members called on the resilience of the network as COVID-19 quickly accelerated.

As learning shifted online, an immediate need was determining how many students had devices at home capable of linking to the internet, and equally importantly how many had access to a reliable internet connection. While CCPS worked around the clock to gather the 17,000 required devices, help was needed to accommodate all children, especially in the time presented.

FRC participants stepped in. Some had devices, including tablets or laptops, to share. Others were simply, but critically, supportive of ascertaining additional sources and evaluating demand. Trusted by local community members, agencies communicated directly with families to navigate the distribution of technology along with finding out where the gaps were most significant in internet access. Information was compiled and shared about how in-need families could obtain at-home internet connections.

Remarkably, this happened within days. While CCPS pivoted all curricula, elementary through high school, to an online learning management system, community partners rallied to help. There was a clear,

unified understanding that disruptions to students' academic progress must be minimized. With swirling stress, family schedules and dynamics affected, and the hope that full-time virtual learning would translate, one priority ruled: do everything possible to help.

The collaborative effort that enabled such a rapid transition from traditional in-school learning to virtual education also contributed to ongoing assessment of effect and lessons learned. And it allowed for complementary support systems to be set up. For instance, while CCPS committed to upholding meal service for all Collier County children Monday through Friday, there was an evident need for weekend help. The Boys & Girls Club of Collier County, which has a full commercial kitchen on-site and is familiar with large-scale meal preparation, helped meet that requirement. Countless others began home delivery of donated food and supplies, as well as serving as convening sites for area food pantries.

With true collaboration, it becomes viable to accurately weigh who is already handling what, where more is required, and who is best adept at fulfillment. Equally key, and as previously addressed, none of this would have been possible without free-flowing communication. Stakeholders had to trust in their ability to pick up the phone and call whomever needed to ask for help. With common goals, mutuality of trust, and a pressing crisis, FRC played a principal role.

# FRC TIMELINE

2005

The Naples Children & Education Foundation conducts a study on the needs of children and well-being in Collier County and brings beneficiary organizations together to work collaboratively around strategic initiatives.

2007

Champions For Learning initiates a community-wide engagement effort, supported by Alan and Beverley Horton and Mrs. Lavern Gaynor, called Connect Now. This initiative produced a Community Statement about the aspirations for education published in the *Naples Daily News* in 2009.

2012

Champions For Learning learns about the Florida College Access Network through the Consortium of FL Education Foundations and Florida College Access Network (FCAN) shares Collier County data. This inspires college access models led by Champions For Learning, with Collier County Public Schools and others.

2013

Southwest Florida Community Foundation launches the FutureMakers Coalition to address degree attainment challenges. Champions For Learning named as Collier's lead partner.

The Community Foundation of Collier County, Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce, and Champions For Learning begin informal discussions around collaborative opportunities in Collier.

2014

Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce releases the Opportunity Naples study with "building an education pipeline" for talent as a key component.



2015

The ongoing informal conversations between the Community Foundation of Collier County, Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce, and Champions For Learning, become more formal and add Collier County Public Schools, Naples Children & Education Foundation, and United Way of Collier and the Keys.

The partners secure funding for capacity to collaboratively develop collective goals for Collier County in alignment with the regional FutureMakers Coalition. Champions For Learning coordinates. Organizations across Collier County are invited to be part of the conversations.

Regional FutureMakers Coalition becomes part of the Lumina Foundation's Community Partnership for Attainment.

2016

More than 35 organizations convene monthly for a year to engage in deep discussion about the shared goals and strategies that will move community results in Collier. The group decides to call the Collier-based network Future Ready Collier.

2017

Priority strategies for both the Early Learning goal and the College and Career Readiness goal are determined with priority teams focusing on those efforts; baseline indicators for Future Ready Collier are established.

Hurricane Irma made landfall in Collier County, and post-storm the groups quickly reconvene to reprioritize to stay on track.

The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation funds and conducts, in partnership with the Community Foundation of Collier County, a county-wide Community Assessment.

2018

Community Assessment for Collier County released, identifying key opportunities in education that provide more alignment and information for Future Ready Collier.

Future Ready Collier partners increase to more than 60 aligning with and contributing to the priority strategies.

2020

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 forces operational adjustments and shifts to remote learning and working. FRC members begin virtual conversations to ensure efficient allocation of resource and support to community members. Throughout 2020 and into 2021, the FRC network regularly assesses shifting priorities and collaborates for maximum impact.

# 5

## REACH TO FAMILIES

Throughout Collier County, FRC partners have meaningful reach, encompassing all child ages. The size and breadth of FRC's membership is an asset. The range of voices and sectors involved increases opportunities to reach people in the community where they are. For in-need populations, barriers to access commonly include transportation, inability to take time from work, limited technology in the home, and language fluencies. To be optimally inclusive, it's advantageous to have an existing and trusted connection to their immediate community.

There are various ways this can be accomplished. For example, Healthcare Network, which operates community health centers county-wide, has TV screens in its waiting rooms, which could be a useful medium to communicate to families. Short videos with information for parents and children could loop on the screens. Content could easily be customized, co-branded, and offered in multiple languages.

Several FRC partners offer meal distributions, opportune times for distribution of flyers and other information. During COVID-related shutdowns, some agencies were in regular contact with families using texting platforms like WhatsApp. Consistent communication with other providers and stakeholders means partners can circulate materials through social media, email, message boards, or other channels.

Sharing best practices enables service providers to assess how they might evolve and expand their reach. Recognizing that one strategy may not perfectly map onto another's set of prerequisites, having that transparency within the network is helpful for partners to learn from each other in a supportive context. This fosters better longitudinal thinking, as well.

The aspiration, of course, is creating the best possible chances for families and children to thrive. Collaboration through FRC advances that outcome by, first, creating a cohesive and multi-directional web of contact points and, second, fostering the necessary relationships among the partners so that programs, materials, and other resources can be most extensively and favorably deployed.

# 6

## LONG-TERM THINKING FOR COMMUNITY AND INNOVATION

An essential hope is that the work undertaken by and through FRC transforms regional thinking around education. Simply put, if FRC achieves making itself obsolete over time, that will have been an impressive success. In the shorter term, it creates accountability and encourages regular assessment of mission.

Relatable challenges precipitated FRC's origination. One, there had historically been considerable turnover in leadership within local agencies, diminishing continuity and threatening public faith. Two, a lack of coordination among parties with common interests made it impossible to appraise gaps in service. Three, there was—not uncommon within the nonprofit sector—a pervasive perception of competition for resources. These factors couldn't be conducive to collaborative impact. Coming at an old problem with a new, collective approach has been significant.

Each year, FRC surveys its members using the Wilder Collaboration Inventory, a tool designed to ascertain collaborative success. Results, even following COVID, are consistently positive. Approximately 74 percent of

respondents report that their organizations' involvement in FRC has generated opportunities. Better than 93 percent agree that FRC is making a difference for students and families. And 93 percent are committed to continuing with FRC.

The infrastructure established by FRC founders has proven viable. Overarching goals, broken down into more granular priorities, enable participants to self-assign based on their interest or subject matter expertise, helping to ensure the right attention is paid to the problem.

Disruptions have occurred, such as if a leadership change or pressing community concern arises, but there has inevitably been a return to focus.



**The infrastructure established by FRC founders has proven viable. Overarching goals, broken down into more granular priorities, enable participants to self-assign based on their interest or subject matter expertise, helping to ensure the right attention is paid to the problem.**

Moreover, the sense of urgency, and desire to be involved, seems to organically derive. Stakeholders do not come back to the table because they feel pressured to; they come because they appreciate the necessity of the work, and the value of the collective approach.

Communication during FRC meetings carries over into inter-organizational rapport, fostering a rolling recognition of need. A tangible illustration is the effort given to increasing the number of Child Development Associate-certified teachers in Southwest Florida, identified as a key step to expand availability of early learning, which united pilot funding support from the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida and an initial cohort of educators from the Guadalupe Center for proof of concept. Now rolling into its second round, the initiative has benefited from the insights of multiple additional FRC participants, including CCPS, Florida SouthWestern State College, and Pathways Early Education Center. COVID-specific acknowledgements of need included a more nuanced awareness of the percussive effects of the pandemic's practical and logistical stressors on mental wellness and socioemotional resilience.

Another added area of focus has been volunteering. While organizations closed to non-staff, FRC proactively gathered its participants and non-member nonprofits and agencies to discuss best practices for virtual volunteer opportunities. This willingness to pivot thinking is possible, in part, because of the

trust within the group. Rather than a competitive push for attention, there is space for adaptation. Rather than reticence to speak up because of perceived rivalry or judgment, there is joint disposition towards what is most important for the community.

This equally applies in FRC's steady evolution and capacity-building efforts. A new workgroup focused on the continuum and milestones between early learning and high school is being phased in. While FRC's guiding objectives remain to ensure all kindergarteners enter school ready, and all high school students graduate with a plan, the group is aware of the needs in between.

Equally, there is a move towards greater leadership empowerment within existing teams. Appreciating the value of engagement at all levels, FRC is more intentionally and consistently communicating with executive and board leadership, and likewise creating opportunities for staff to feel they have ownership of their involvement. While Champions For Learning provides able administrative support, there is ongoing desire for individual members to contribute towards goal- and agenda-setting, meeting facilitation, and related tasks, concurrently building capacity through collaborative leadership skills.

These factors are all functionally attributable to existing, effective collaboration, and relevant to the collaboration's enduring capacity to iterate and act over the long term.

# 7

## CRISIS RESPONSE

Commonly, if not fully established or possessing meaningful inter-connection, partnerships can be strained by unexpected difficulty.

When Hurricane Irma struck Southwest Florida in September 2017, the devastation was immediate and extensive. Right away, FRC, which was still very much finding its collaborative footing, served as a clearinghouse for community leaders to coordinate assessment and distribution. Organizational missions about-faced to ensure families had shelter, food, and access to care and services. It was a terrible event that had the benefit of helping to crystallize FRC as an operational collaborative.

The historic impact of COVID-19 created a whole new definition of crisis response, upending much of the 2019-2020 school year and through the 2020-2021 school year. Parents were first forced to multi-task as part-time educators and part-time employees from home, and subsequently grapple with returning to their jobs while learning remained in flux. The economy was thrust into recession, changing circumstances for many.

However, there are benefits, both pragmatic and intangible, to these circumstances. If crisis can be a jumping-off point for innovation, this was certainly that, and accentuated the timeliness of FRC's interest in capacity-building.

The turn to virtual programming has long-term importance. Demonstrating that students can engage electronically could mean that those who have to be out of the classroom can still participate meaningfully. This has implications for minimizing learning disruptions, and for shaping out-of-school-time activities to be more inclusive. CCPS adopted an online school registration system that allows parents to submit their documents digitally and receive electronic approval, introducing greater efficiency and accessibility.

Perhaps even more telling than these administrative advances, COVID further solidified FRC as a cohesive network. A year of only virtual interactions possibly

dampened more informal communications, but overall participants report strongly on their faith in the group, and gratitude for the relationships in place. Far from creating any sense of insufficiency, whereby individual organizations may have felt a need to compete for attention or dollars, the response has been collegial.

Examples include regular conversations among grant-making FRC partners, to best coordinate and allocate support in the community. As mental health needs became more acute, the network identified that this topic continues to require careful, attentive thinking. Understanding of the importance of early education has been further heightened, along with closing learning loss and gaps, and supporting metrics like FAFSA completions.

Stakeholders embrace the power of the collective relative to the individual. Rather than diluting any one group's efficacy, the collaborative has a strongly amplifying effect. Moreover, it's not just action; it's belonging. It's more than being in the room; it's being at the table. It's respect coupled with intention, access alongside awareness, and always mutuality of purpose.

As with many components of FRC, it's necessary to consider cause and effect. While the pandemic certainly contributed to the network's sense of collaboration, that collaboration would not have been possible without the established infrastructure and relationships. Having an existing awareness of community resources and stakeholders facilitates rapid response in the face of pressing challenges.

# 8

## LESSONS LEARNED AND REPLICABILITY

**What are the takeaway observations and recommendations about how a model like this can be applied or replicated?**



Initially, to what extent is there coordinated awareness of the need presented? FRC’s founding was grounded in shared understanding and trust that coalesced over a period of years. If there is any disagreement among originating leaders about the precise nature of the problem, or even the very existence of such a problem, effective collaboration will be difficult or impossible.

Secondarily, how collegial are local funding agencies? Understanding that grant-makers have confidentiality and fiduciary responsibilities to uphold, to what extent do they share responsibility for supporting community-wide issues, and do so such that services are not duplicated, but optimized? FRC has been fortunate to enjoy strong relationships with Collier County funders. Each operates independently, fulfilling their missions, while simultaneously understanding that their contributions uplift the collective framework, amplifying and maximizing individual investments.

FRC’s historical preference to remain an opt-in network, and not to form as a separate legal entity, is also relevant. There are potential strategic preferences either way. As a network, FRC can remain nimble, with joint leadership, and is not beholden to tax revenues or other unstable public sources of money. All members are asked to contribute relative to capacity to give, either monetarily towards the operating budget, or in-kind as possible, such as offering meeting space. Alternatively, not having a 501(c)(3) or other status may hinder fundraising, as FRC may be ineligible to apply for certain grants. It also contributes to a looser structure, reliant on its members who give their time.

Those who have been involved in the business or nonprofit communities in Collier County over many years observe that, in general, the willingness to work together has increased. While silos and barriers to

access persist, there has been a gradual expansion of communication. Whether this has been expedited by, or is a contributor to, FRC’s growth, is difficult to parse out in a conclusive way. Although, it can be surmised that FRC has had a positive influence through its role as a neutral convener.

As with any mission, a combination of commitment to cause and willingness to adjust is essential. It is important to regularly assess the applicability and effect of programmatic interventions. This is greatly enhanced by access to data. FRC has benefitted from extensive data-sharing from the school district and other agencies — local, regional, and state. Lack of transparency around metrics impedes efforts to change outcomes. There must be an openness to taking on new tasks and issues as they arise, as well as consistent surveying of the group to ensure the right voices are invited and represented.

A key reflection is that needs cross sectors. While FRC’s core membership is comprised of education providers and organizations, the mission necessarily involves the input of healthcare providers, business leaders, and a range of other community stakeholders. Academic success is multifactorial, with influence from the home, social interactions, mental and physical health, socioeconomic determinants, and more. A thriving community is made possible by the strength of its schools, which feed a robust workforce. Recognition of this interconnectedness is requisite.

While surely not an exhaustive account of how the model underlying FRC could be effectuated in another context, this provides a reasonable foundational assessment of pertinent drivers. Naturally, any attempt at collective impact should be first informed by need, and then shaped by the existence of a sufficient mutual inclination to pursue the heavy work ahead.

# 9

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR FUTURE READY COLLIER

Data indicate that the work is making a difference, even if incrementally and over time. Despite challenges presented by COVID influencing 2020 and 2021 figures, the long-term trend supports more students in Collier County completing the FAFSA. More high schoolers are engaging in work-based learning. More young children are appropriately referred for interventional services. More early learning centers are accredited, and more early learning teachers are certified. The high school graduation rate goes up, and more working-age adults have a degree or certificate.

These attainments are important, even if the scope of the work feels daunting and success slow. It is likely that the eventual impact of disruptions to the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 school years, and related damage done to families through job and income loss as well as personal strain, will not be fully appreciated for some time to come. It is imperative that FRC, as a collective, stay the course with a steady focus on long-term influence.

The network is making great strides in evolving its capacity and scope, with purposeful awareness of the importance of inclusivity and equity within its membership as well as those served in the community. This is being done thoughtfully, with a focus on need, and what is possible and relevant now rather than what could be possible or relevant later. Consistent outreach will hopefully ensure a diversity of perspectives and participation.

Additionally, FRC is endeavoring to grow in its self-assessment, and steps taken to create better external awareness. Inertia is a powerful force, and change is the harder path to take. FRC demonstrates a keen willingness to take the harder path.

The network has no intention of substantively altering its guiding priorities, though as previously indicated a new workgroup is being established to focus more considerably on the grades and milestones in between kindergarten and high school. Producing its fourth consecutive annual report, FRC is staying true to its commitment to track and publicly report on data. While it may be some time yet before pre-pandemic routine resumes, the partnership is aligned in its assurances that energies are ultimately going towards students thriving.

FRC continues to explore how to expand capacity. Representatives engaged in a fundraising workshop offered through the Florida College Access Network, a state-level collaborator to FRC. FRC is aware of the need for year-over-year sustainability. For the near term, the network will persist at cultivating support within its own members. However, there is merit in occasionally revisiting those strategies to determine if any new or expanded tactics can be incorporated.

Ultimately, of course, expectations are that the goals of meaningfully increasing kindergarten readiness and post-high school preparation will be met. In Florida, a statewide goal, referred to as SAIL to 60, was legislatively instituted that, by 2030, 60 percent of working-age Floridians should possess a high-value postsecondary certificate, degree, or training. This tracks with the Florida College Access Network’s Talent Strong Florida initiative, and the regional FutureMakers Coalition’s intentions around career attainment. In support of younger children, the regional Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida and state-administered Early Steps program maintain affiliations with FRC.

There is no anticipated time at which FRC is projected to disband. To date, the network has proven adept at reacting to shifting needs, attracting expanded support, and beginning to facilitate viable, sustained change. As long as the collaboration remains intact and productive, Collier County will benefit from this purposeful work.

The network should continue to capitalize on its role as an innovator, of which there are real examples. With the essential involvement of Healthcare Network, major inroads have been made in coordinating how developmental screenings in children are conducted and then referred to the appropriate providers. Having FRC as the umbrella convener jumpstarts conversations among participants who may have been reticent or simply unlikely to come together.

Innovations throughout the network support career and academic opportunities for future workers while leveraging meaningful interactions among students, educators, employers, and community leaders. The opportunity for community-based innovation will be expanded through the Frank and Ellen Daveler Center for Innovation in Learning launched by Champions For Learning. This collaborative hub will serve students, educators, parents, volunteers and community partners through Future Ready Collier and leverage and amplify the collective work to provide relevant experiences for young people to gain the skills and education for their future.

Expectations are high, and the goals are real. Immediate next steps are to continue along the course as set. Education, within Collier County, across Florida, and throughout the country, was immeasurably challenged by the pandemic.

***However, the work goes on.***

# 10

## CONCLUSION

It will be worthwhile to observe how FRC's framework and goals evolve. With movement towards financial security, the group can focus on outcomes. FRC itself is likely to stay on the periphery of specific programs, promoting cooperation through its role as facilitator.

Consistently produced annual updates, tracking both data and programs, solidify credibility and promote a culture of openness. Whereas, more traditionally, nonprofits and foundations may be highly proprietary with their data, FRC's work and collaboration have encouraged information-sharing, to substantial mutual benefit. The larger 'why' behind FRC remains intact. There is no shortage of good intention, or good work, in Collier County, as in countless locations nationally. However, the achievement is in the aggregation.

The engine that drives this initiative is deep mutual acknowledgement of need, and mutual respect and willingness to come together with joint purpose. Schools are the essential foundation of any community. Schools are infrastructure, allowing parents to work. Schools are support systems, enabling students to thrive. Schools are the future of a local economy, both attracting and generating talent. This is the essence of what keeps the network engaged.

It's hard to overstate the importance to FRC of the strategic alignment with the Collier County Public School District. Of similar consequence has been the long-term commitment of the primary funders. The stability of the local partnership is reinforced regionally and at the state level. Critically, as membership within the network

This collective impact network has, in only a few years, and spanning significant challenges, established itself as a meaningful voice for education interests. Importantly, a longitudinal view underscores that, while not every step has been a forward one, overall progression has been positive.

inevitably shifts, and leadership within individual organizations changes, efforts are taken to maintain the integrity of the group, and the commitment to the work.

What's more, the nature and effects of this collaboration are attracting attention from outside the region. The Collier County Public School District has been recognized as a leader in how quickly schools adapted to pandemic circumstances. These results are possible through the structure and trust within FRC. For long-term success, it will be essential to maintain that mindset, and prevent competitive, siloed perspectives from overtaking. Comments from the Guadalupe Center, Greater Naples Chamber, and Pathways Early Education Center of Immokalee, among others, about how

engagement with FRC has furthered their own internal work and strategic planning suggests strong ongoing coherence.

FRC's uniqueness should not be interpreted as a conclusive barrier to its replicability, or even more so to its utility as a model for study. Collective impact is inherently about tackling the largest and most entrenched societal questions. Expectations of total and rapid change would be misplaced. However, with patience, transparency, and focus, targets can arrive within reach. Perhaps even more consequentially, FRC has shown Collier County what its community is capable of achieving. That self-awareness may yet prove the ultimate lesson, giving subsequent leaders and visionaries the confidence to make a difference.



# COLLABORATIVE FUNDING MODEL

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At the outset, the key donors in Collier County who had been investing in programs and services of many organizations saw an opportunity to invest in a community-based framework of collaboration. The Community Foundation of Collier County, the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation, Mrs. Lavern Gaynor, and Naples Children & Education Foundation invested in the operations of the backbone functions with the goal of leveraging their existing investments. In addition, start-up investments were made by the Southwest Florida Community Foundation to ensure alignment with Future Makers, the regional coalition, and a matching investment through Florida Philanthropic Network, which encouraged endowment.

This collaborative funding model emerged thanks to tremendous leadership from these four Collier-based funders, who have met regularly to have open communication and conversations to ensure there is no duplication and that their investments are maximized. They have also encouraged monetary and in-kind contributions from throughout FRC's membership.

This willing commitment, however, comes with the shared understanding that, ultimately, sustainability is necessary to ensure large-scale, community-wide impact—because it takes time.

Moving forward, the Community Foundation of Collier County has taken the lead through the "Your *Passion. Your Collier.*" campaign to raise \$1 million to support Future Ready Collier operations. The Community Foundation of Collier County in partnership with Champions For Learning as the backbone organization were grateful for the support of Mrs. Lavern Gaynor and the Larsen Fund, who made a five-year pledge to ensure this important work continues alongside the goals of a sustainable funding source. These gifts are unprecedented in Collier County, reflecting a philanthropic



recognition of the relevance and impact of collective work. Additionally, partner organizations continue to invest in the capacity of the network for the value they gain.

This commitment represents an important shift in thinking to share in the financial support of such a diffuse, long-term community effort and the network infrastructure to support it.

Infrastructure is essential to collective achievement. Consider a local electrical grid, which enables the work of cities to function without interruption. An extended power outage can be calamitous to the basics of day-to-day life. Future Ready Collier is analogous in its ability to link education stakeholders around shared goals. That connectivity creates better economies of scale.

These funders believe in Future Ready Collier's capacity to generate the power of community-wide change. Indeed, each was integrally involved in the meetings and needs assessments that predated FRC's formation. Rather than work solely independently, they have stipulated, through their open collaboration, how collective work like that of FRC amplifies and leverages opportunities.

Collier County students have surely been the primary beneficiaries of this forward-looking perspective. And with the necessary resources, the FRC network can continue pursuing its ultimate aims.

## MOVING FORWARD



### Funding Future Ready Collier

**"Your Passion. Your Collier."**

campaign through The  
Community Foundation



### Thank You

for the vision, leadership,  
and investment:

The Community Foundation  
of Collier County

Mrs. Lavern Gaynor

The Larsen Fund

Naples Children &  
Education Foundation

Richard M. Schulze  
Family Foundation

Future Ready Collier Partners

To view the annual updates and a complete list  
of Future Ready Collier partners, visit  
[www.FutureReadyCollier.org](http://www.FutureReadyCollier.org).



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Please visit [www.FutureReadyCollier.org](http://www.FutureReadyCollier.org) for a complete list of partners, and to view annual updates and resources.

