

ANNUAL REPORT

2026

Spark
Pasco Hernando



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Who We Are

Spark Pasco Hernando is a cross-sector network with 18 organizations representing the business, education, government, and philanthropic sectors. Spark is focused on igniting collaboration across our communities where everyone naturally discovers and connects with resources and opportunities to foster the ideal place where we all live, work, and grow.

Established in 2022, Spark Pasco Hernando is connecting students to educational and career opportunities to nurture individual prosperity as well as expand a dynamic workforce and elevate our thriving community.

Utilizing our collective power to make connections to educational and career opportunities, expand a dynamic workforce, and elevate our thriving community.



Who We Are



*Spark Impact Goal: **Two out of every three people** in the working population will have a degree and/or credential of value that leads to a livable wage by **2034**.*

Spark is the 18th Local College Access Network (LCAN) in Florida, officially founded in 2024. It is within the Florida College Access Network (FCAN). Local College Access Networks (LCANs) are community-based coordinating bodies supported by a team of community and education leaders.

Our Values

Everyone deserves an opportunity to reach their full potential through access to quality education and skills building impacting generations to come.

- All voices in the community are necessary for identifying needs and working towards solutions for advancing economic prosperity.
 - Working together with integrity and transparency ensures the mutual respect and trust necessary to increase the success of our community.
 - Achieving lasting impact requires intentional action informed by data and accountability.
 - The commitment to seek innovative ways to proactively prepare the workforce of tomorrow is critical.
- 

Demographic Data

818,000 people

reside in Pasco and Hernando Counties, combined.

56.1%

labor force participation

1 in 2 households*

are below the ALICE threshold

Pasco: 52% Hernando: 50% Florida: 47%

35.1%

of children are in single-parent families.

19.8%

of the region is under age 18.

13.8%

of working-age adults have a disability

Demographic Data

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS⁵



2.3%

2-year degree and certificate occupations are projected to grow 2.3% annually, emphasizing the value of technical education and workforce credentials.



29.8%

of adults ages 25–64 hold a bachelor's degree or higher (below the U.S. average of 37.3%).



11.1%

of adults ages 25–64 hold an associate degree.



20.5%

of adults ages 25–64 have some college but no degree.



FAFSA Completion Results:

The latest FAFSA completion data provided by the Florida College Access Network shows encouraging progress:

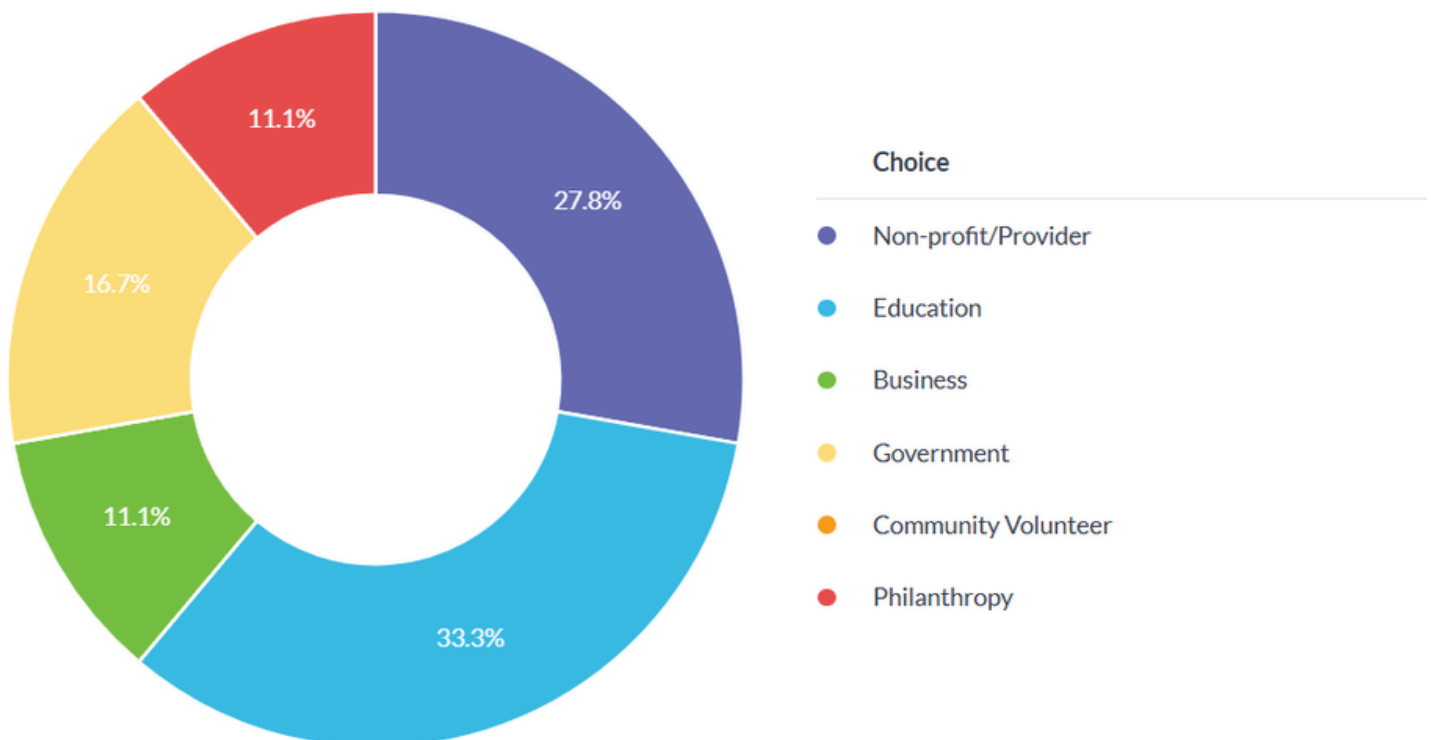
- o **Hernando County** increased from 42.2% in the 2024–25 school year to 53.3% in 2025–26—a 25.7% growth rate.
- o **Pasco County** increased from 49.1% to 53.1% during the same period—an 8.1% growth rate.



By expanding access and awareness, we empower individuals, strengthen our workforce, and invest in a brighter future for all.

Partnership Engagement Survey

A survey was distributed to Spark Pasco Hernando participants, including members of the Leadership Council, Vision Council, and workgroups. The survey received a 40% response rate. The following summarizes the results.



Partnership Engagement Survey

A STRONG FOUNDATION

100% feel Spark fosters a trusting environment

94% feel more connected to partners through Spark

94% would recommend the Network to others doing similar work

94% see clear vision, common values, and shared objectives

89% see value in being part of Spark and believe Spark will positively impact the community

Partnership Engagement Survey

OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENT

53% consider themselves active members of Spark

61% believe the work is sustainable and will last long-term

While partners overwhelmingly value the Network, survey results indicate an opportunity to increase active participation across workgroups and councils. Respondents identified clearer objectives, defined time commitments, consistent communication, orientation for new members, and opportunities to see measurable outcomes as ways to encourage greater involvement.

College & Career Center

The College & Career Center at Pasco High School in Dade City officially opened in November 2025 as a partnership between SPARK Pasco Hernando, Pasco High School, Pasco County Schools, and the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay. The center was created as a dedicated space where students can receive individualized support for planning their futures—whether that means college, technical education, military service, apprenticeships, or entering the workforce.



College & Career Center

The center was intentionally designed as a scalable model that can be replicated in other Pasco County high schools, supporting SPARK's long-term vision of improving college and career access throughout the region.



*During the first month in the expanded center, the Career Resource Specialist served approximately **370 students**, and the school reported a **5% increase** in FAFSA completion, demonstrating early success in increasing postsecondary readiness.*

Workgroups

Spark Pasco Hernando's work is driven by collaborative partnerships. Our workgroups bring together representatives from education, business and industry, workforce development, government, nonprofit organizations, and community partners to address shared priorities and create meaningful opportunities for students and residents.

Each workgroup is composed of partners who contribute their expertise, identify community needs, develop strategies, and implement initiatives that align with Spark's mission. By working collaboratively, these groups transform ideas into coordinated action, ensuring that efforts are informed by diverse perspectives and focused on measurable impact.

Workgroups:

Career Exploration

The Career Exploration Workgroup focuses on helping students discover career pathways, connect classroom learning to real-world opportunities, and prepare for successful futures. Through partnerships with local employers, educators, and workforce organizations, the workgroup expands career awareness, work-based learning opportunities, and industry engagement.

Healthcare Pipeline Initiative

As a subdivision of the Career Exploration Workgroup, the Healthcare Pipeline Initiative brings together healthcare providers, educational institutions, and workforce partners to strengthen the region's future healthcare workforce. The initiative identifies workforce needs, promotes healthcare careers, and supports pathways that help students and aspiring professionals enter high-demand healthcare occupations.

Workgroups:

Career Exploration

The Career Exploration workgroup expanded opportunities for students to explore careers and connect education to workforce pathways across Pasco and Hernando counties. The workgroup supported the refresh and launch of the College & Career Center at Pasco High School, helped establish an advisory committee to guide its growth, and developed a scalable model now being replicated across the district, including expansion to Weeki Wachee High School.

The workgroup also established a regional Healthcare Workforce Task Force, bringing together education, workforce, healthcare, and industry partners to strengthen the local healthcare talent pipeline. In partnership with Pasco-Hernando State College, the workgroup supported two regional Healthcare Career Fairs, connecting students directly with healthcare employers, career opportunities, and postsecondary pathways.

Workgroups:

Community Outreach & Awareness

The Community Outreach & Awareness Workgroup increases public understanding of Spark's mission, programs, and opportunities. Through strategic communication, community engagement, and collaborative events, the workgroup builds awareness among students, families, employers, and community stakeholders while fostering stronger connections across Pasco and Hernando counties.



The new website,
www.SparkPascoHernando.com.

Workgroups:

Community Outreach & Awareness

A major accomplishment of the Community Outreach & Awareness Workgroup was the launch of SparkPascoHernando.com, a centralized resource hub designed to support job seekers, students, and community members throughout the region.

The website provides easy access to education and training opportunities, scholarship resources, career planning tools, and workforce development information, with new resources added regularly to meet evolving community needs.

One of the site's cornerstone features is the Regional Inventory Map, an interactive tool that brings together resources from across the Tampa Bay region in one convenient location. The map helps users connect with local training providers, career services, interview preparation resources, and other organizations that support educational and career success.

Workgroups: Postsecondary Affordability

The Postsecondary Affordability Workgroup is dedicated to improving access to education and training beyond high school. By bringing together education, financial aid, and community partners, the workgroup identifies barriers to affordability, promotes available resources, and develops strategies that help students and families navigate the financial aspects of postsecondary education.



Workgroups:

Postsecondary

Affordability

The Postsecondary Affordability workgroup strengthened collaboration among postsecondary institutions, workforce partners, and community organizations to address barriers to the affordability of college and career training across Pasco and Hernando counties. The workgroup increased awareness of financial aid resources, scholarships, grants, and workforce funding opportunities, while improving coordination and sharing of information to help students and families better understand the costs associated with postsecondary education and the resources available to them.

The group also supported efforts to simplify financial aid messaging and make affordability information more accessible and student-friendly, while promoting FAFSA completion and increasing understanding of federal, state, institutional, and community-based financial assistance.

Vision Council

Tammy Brinker
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Braulio Colon
Bill Cronin
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Eric Hall
Laura Knight
Dr. John Legg
Hannah Mae Marten
Ray Pinder
Jeff Rogers
Jerome Salatino
Marlene Spalten
Kathryn Starkey
Angie Walasek
Nanette Wilcox

Hernando County Education Foundation
Pasco County Education Foundation
Florida College Access Network
Pasco EDC
University of South Florida
Pasco Hernando State College
United Way Pasco County
Pasco County Schools
Moffit Speros
Hernando County Schools
Hernando County
CareerSource Pasco Hernando
Community Foundation Tampa Bay
Pasco County
United Way Hernando County
BayCare Health

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Tonia Shook
Chuck Tiernan
Angie Walasek
John Walsh
Carrie Wilson

Pasco County Schools
Pasco Hernando State College
Pasco Economic Development Council
Pasco County Schools
Hernando County Schools
Pasco Education Foundation
University of South Florida
Wilton Simpson Technical College
Hernando Education Foundation
Moffitt Cancer Center
CareerSource Pasco Hernando
HCA- Bayonet Point
Hernando County Government
BayCare Health System
Marchman Technical College
Community Foundation Tampa Bay
United Way Hernando County
Hernando County Government
Hernando County Schools

Thank You to Our Funders!



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
TAMPA BAY



H.C.E.F.
Hernando County Education Foundation



HCA Florida
Oak Hill Hospital

Thank You

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Thank you to our dedicated partners, educators, employers, community leaders, volunteers, and supporters for making this work possible. Your commitment, collaboration, and shared vision continue to create meaningful opportunities for students and strengthen the workforce across Pasco and Hernando counties.

Together, we are building stronger pathways to education, careers, and economic prosperity. As we look to the future, we remain committed to working side by side with our partners to inspire students, connect communities, and create opportunities that empower every individual to succeed. Together, we can continue building a brighter future for our region—one partnership, one student, and one success story at a time.

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