

# HELIOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION THEORY OF CHANGE:

## *Postsecondary Scholarships*

**Helios Education Foundation** believes education improves lives and strengthens communities. Our work in Postsecondary Scholarships is inspired by our vision of ensuring individuals across Arizona and Florida have the opportunity to attend and are prepared to succeed in postsecondary education.

Established through the sale of a student loan products and services company, the Foundation has a long history in creating opportunities for postsecondary success by removing financial barriers for students of all backgrounds. A rapidly changing global economy continues to elevate the importance of postsecondary education including college and career and technical education. In fact, 2/3 of the jobs of the future are anticipated to require a college degree or some level of advanced training, with an emphasis in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 23.5% of Arizona's and 22.3% of Florida's population over 25 have attained a bachelor's degree, compared to 24.4% nationally. Arizona is ranked 43<sup>rd</sup> in the nation for individuals graduating from high school and going directly to college whereas Florida is ranked 31<sup>st</sup> in the nation. Only half of Arizona and Florida students who enter college will complete a four-year degree within six years. Additionally, a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report states that 90% of all high school graduates in the United States have taken at least one career and technical education course. Of those students, two-thirds go on to community college or university programs but only 25% graduate with a 4-year degree.

Arizona and Florida each have significant minority populations including Hispanic, Native American and Black, which traditionally trail their white and Asian counterparts in academic performance, high school graduation rates and postsecondary degree attainment. On average, white and Asian students score 20-40 percentage points higher on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests than their Black, Hispanic and Native American peers. Only 50% of U.S. minority students graduate from high school. And nationally, white Americans are twice as likely as Black Americans and three times as likely as Hispanic Americans to have earned a bachelor's degree by the age of 29.

Helios Education Foundation recognizes that there are significant financial, personal and/or social barriers which limit the ability of individuals to succeed in postsecondary education. Financially, tuition at major universities within Arizona and Florida rises between 3-9% annually. The percentage of annual income spent on tuition for 2-year and 4-year programs ranges from 38%-47% for low-income and middle class families within the two states. Although Florida offers more advanced financial aid programs, both states make little or no state investment in need-based assistance, and neither offers low-tuition college opportunities. Other financial aid programs have not kept pace with rising tuition either. For example, in 1974, the maximum Pell Grant covered approximately 84% of the cost of attending public college and universities compared to 34% of costs today, making postsecondary education even more cost prohibitive.

Postsecondary education barriers are even greater for underserved populations including first-generation, minority, and rural students. Such populations are often less exposed to information, provided insufficient support and mentoring, and as a result, fail to adequately plan and prepare for postsecondary education. Consequently, one third of high school graduates nationwide require remedial coursework upon entering postsecondary programs contributing to the expense of attaining a degree and extending graduation.

First-generation students, many of which are minority and rural students, are a priority population for the Foundation. Research indicates that students whose parents did not attend college are generally less academically prepared, have limited knowledge about how to apply for postsecondary programs and financial assistance, and have greater difficulty in adjusting to college once they are enrolled. They are also much more likely to not complete their postsecondary degree than their non-first generation peers, making family support and personal confidence key contributors to long-term student success.

Increasing postsecondary degree attainment amongst all students within Arizona and Florida has both individual and societal impact. People who graduate with a bachelor's degree earn on average 45% more annually than their high

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school graduate counterparts, allowing for a higher standard of living and overall quality of life. Average earnings increase to nearly 65% more annually for individuals with an advanced degree. In addition, individuals graduating from postsecondary programs are more likely to work in settings that provide benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans.

From a societal benefit standpoint, communities with a more highly educated population are better able to attract lucrative business opportunities, sustain economic growth and effectively compete in a global marketplace. They tend to have greater quality of life amenities such as arts, culture and entertainment—increasing their appeal and ability to attract and retain a more highly-skilled and civic-minded population. In addition, they are less dependent on public assistance programs due to lower unemployment rates and fewer individuals and families living in poverty.

### OUR FOCUS

The Foundation aspires to create a “college-going culture” within Arizona and Florida which is supportive of increased attendance and successful completion of postsecondary education including universities, community colleges, and career and technical education. We believe that any individual with the desire to attend and the ability to succeed should have access to postsecondary opportunities. Our investments in this area will also be used to support and leverage our priorities in Early Childhood Education and the Transition Years. As a result, Helios Education Foundation will contribute our leadership, expertise, partnership and resources within Postsecondary Scholarships in the following areas:

- **Increasing Access to Postsecondary Education for Underserved Populations** – We will support the postsecondary success of underserved populations including first-generation, minority and rural students by removing barriers and increasing access through financial scholarships and other supportive services.
- **Creating a Pipeline of Students and Educators Focused on STEM Education** – We will support students, including underserved populations, in their pursuit of degrees or career and technical education in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Special emphasis will be placed on cultivating a pipeline of middle and high school educators, specialized in STEM, and interested in pursuing careers within Arizona and Florida.
- **Cultivating Early Childhood Education Teachers and Practitioners** – We will support students in their pursuit of degrees or training within Early Childhood Education who are interested in careers within Arizona and Florida. Special emphasis will be placed on increasing knowledge and education as it relates to emergent literacy and language acquisition.

### MEASURING OUR IMPACT

The impact of Helios Education Foundation's investment in Postsecondary Scholarships will be measured through methods which capture changes in demographics, individual and social outcomes, and qualitative and quantitative information. Successful outcomes will reflect positive change, improved quality and leveraging of resources. Secondary research and evaluation methodologies will be utilized strategically to guide our efforts and to advance our understanding of key trends or opportunities within the Postsecondary Scholarships impact area. In addition, the Foundation will strive to be a trusted partner, knowledge source, thought leader and innovator, providing a legacy of learning for generations to come.

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Helios will measure its short- and long-term success and progress within the Postsecondary Scholarships programs and initiatives it funds in Arizona and Florida based on the following indicators:

Helios Priority	Indicators
<b>Increasing Access to Postsecondary Education for Underserved Populations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase the percentage of first-generation, minority and rural students enrolling in postsecondary education</li><li>• Increase the percentage of first-generation, minority and rural students successfully completing postsecondary education</li></ul>
<b>Creating a Pipeline of Students and Educators Focused on STEM Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase the percentage of students graduating with degrees in the STEM areas</li><li>• Increase the percentage of middle and high school educators specialized in STEM education</li></ul>
<b>Cultivating Early Childhood Education Teachers and Practitioners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase the percentage of students graduating with Early Childhood Education degrees, certification or training</li><li>• Increase the percentage of Early Childhood Education teachers and practitioners with degrees or certification teaching within Arizona and Florida</li></ul>

For a list of statistical, demographic and research sources used in this statement, contact Linda Thompson at [lthompson@helios.org](mailto:lthompson@helios.org).