

POLK
VISION

LEADS
LEARN ENGAGE ALIGN DEVELOP SUSTAIN

ANNUAL REPORT

CELEBRATING
20
YEARS





Our Mission

The Community Vision for Polk County adopted on August 2, 2004, was developed over an intense nine-month period by cross-sector leaders from all areas of the county. Polk Vision, Inc., (hereinafter referred to as Polk Vision) was established to actively facilitate processes through which Polk County could achieve this shared Vision.

Over the past two decades, Polk Vision has ensured the Community Vision remains vital and relevant by closely monitoring local conditions, identifying and building awareness of emerging priorities, promoting the alignment of programs and systems, and encouraging mutual accountability.

Through aligned stakeholder collaborations, considerable progress has been made towards achieving the shared Community Vision. However, amid unprecedented growth and its impact on our rapidly evolving community, it was evident the time had come to establish an updated Community Vision that is both responsive to the current dynamics and addresses the needs for the future.

To gain contemporary opinions from Polk County citizens, Polk Vision embarked upon a thorough and rigorous update to the Community Vision. To establish the methodology and to assist in performing the research and analysis, Polk Vision secured the services of a qualified consulting firm, Crescendo Consulting Group.

Updating the Vision began in January of 2023 when the Polk Vision Board of Directors tapped its Operating Board to serve as the Steering Committee for the project. This group of leaders spent months in deep discussion regarding the complexities impacting overall Quality of Life for the citizens of Polk County.

Following ten months of preparation, a countywide outreach launched in November of 2023 with seventy-two one-on-one interviews held with public, private, and civic leaders to discuss both current and emerging challenges. Throughout March and April of 2024, a series of thirteen focus groups were convened to gather the valuable insights and diverse perspectives of 215 residents. Following the Focus Groups, Polk Vision sought widespread input through an online survey which was open from May 1, 2024, through June 12, 2024, and garnered the opinions of 3,622 unique respondents.

The issues identified by this research are documented and organized within seven interdependent Areas of Focus. Priorities within each Area of Focus are tied to identified Strategies and data for Benchmarking. This provides a proven framework within which Polk Vision will continue aligning partners from the public and private sectors to make the Community Vision a reality.

During a joint session of the Polk Vision Board of Directors and its Operating Board on June 20, 2024, the research results were reviewed and related strategies for improving outcomes were approved. On August 20, 2024, during a duly noticed regular Polk County Board of County Commissioners meeting, the updated Community Vision was unanimously endorsed.

The updated Community Vision document may be found at www.polkvision.com

Board of Directors



ANGELA **FALCONETTI, Ph.D.**

Chair

"It is an honor to serve on Polk Vision's Board of Directors and to play a role in enhancing the quality of life for all citizens of Polk County. Through fundamental areas of focus including education, economic advancement, infrastructure, government, and civic engagement, Polk Vision's dedicated volunteers and alignment teams continue to transform lives and elevate our community. Together, we are propelling Polk County into a prosperous future. I am grateful for and proud of all involved in making "Polk's vision" a reality."

Angela Falconetti, Ph.D., President, Polk State College
Board of Directors Chair



SEAN **MALOTT**

Chair-Elect

"Polk Vision has a unique perspective as an organization serving all of Polk County through a variety of initiatives related to education, economic advancement, infrastructure, government, and civic engagement. The Polk Vision staff and the alignment teams work tirelessly to positively impact quality of life within the community. I appreciate playing a small role as a board member to help Polk County achieve its fullest potential."

Sean Malott, CEO, Central Florida Development Council
Board of Directors Chair-Elect



NAOMI **BOYER, Ph.D.**

Operating Board Chair

"Polk Vision does an excellent job bringing together leaders from across the county, both public and private, to focus on the issues, opportunities, and challenges facing Polk County. It is through these collaborative efforts that we align in the common goal of making Polk County the best it can be. The hard work of the staff and the diligent efforts of the numerous volunteers on the various Teams is to be commended. It is in these Teams that candid discussions turn into real plans that are then executed to produce progress for the county. I am impressed with the accomplishments that came about as a direct result of volunteers and the organizations they belong to. We are able to accomplish so much more working together than we could individually. I encourage you to get involved to help make a difference in our community."

Naomi Boyer, Ph.D., Senior Vice-President, Digital Transformation, Education Design Lab
Operating Board Chair



MARC **ZIMMERMAN**

Operating Board
Chair-Elect

"I'm excited to step into the role of Chair for the Polk Vision Operating Board following the exemplary leadership provided by outgoing Chair Dr. Naomi Boyer. Polk County is facing numerous challenges, but our community leaders are tackling these issues head-on through Polk Vision. The collaboration between the public and private sectors, guided by the Operating Board, has provided significant benefits to Polk County and its residents. In the coming year, we begin implementing the new vision and strategies that will guide our future. If you've never been involved with Polk Vision, now is the perfect time to join one of our teams or participate in our Leadership Polk programs. For those who have participated in the past, I urge you to re-engage. We need your input, leadership, and passion to elevate Polk County to new heights."

Marc Zimmerman, Senior Economic Development Manager, Visit Central Florida
Operating Board Chair-Elect

Board of Directors



STACY BUTTERFIELD
Immediate Past Chair
Clerk of the Circuit Court and
County Comptroller, Polk County



NICK PLOTT
Treasurer
Regional Manager External Affairs
TECO Energy



TERESA MARTINEZ
Secretary
President
Institute of Spanish Communication



KIM LONG
Executive Director
Polk Vision, Inc.



BILL BEASLEY
Director
County Manager
Polk County BoCC



BRAD DANTZLER
Director
Managing Director & Senior VP
Raymond James & Associates



DANIELLE DRUMMOND
Director
President & CEO
Lakeland Regional Health



GENE FULTZ
Director
CEO
Greater Grace Outreach
Ministries of Florida



FREDERICK HEID
Director
Superintendent
Polk County Public Schools



CHRISTINA CRISER JACKSON
Director
President & CEO
United Way of Central Florida



DR. JOY JACKSON
Director
Director
Florida Department of Health
in Polk County



GRADY JUDD
Director
Sheriff
Polk County Sheriff's Office



GREG LITTLETON
Director
CEO & President
Citizens Bank & Trust



ALEX NIKDEL
Director
President
CNP



SEAN PARKER
Director
Attorney
Boswell & Dunlap LLP



CHRISTINE SAMUEL
Director
Director of Diversity & Inclusivity
City of Winter Haven



MARTHA SANTIAGO, Ed.D.
Director
Commissioner
Polk County BoCC



SHAWN SHERROUSE
Director
City Manager
City of Lakland



SARA BETH WYATT
Director
Board Member, District 4
Polk County Public Schools

A message from the Director

As we reflect on the past year, it is clear that Polk County is experiencing a period of unprecedented growth and transformation. This momentum is both exciting and challenging, prompting us to revisit and refresh our Community Vision to ensure it aligns with the evolving needs and aspirations of our residents.

Over the past two decades, Polk Vision and our Vision Partners have operated within a proven framework to drive significant progress. While we “look in the rearview mirror” and celebrate all that has been accomplished, it is evident that we need to focus our sights on the future and drive efforts to achieve a new, refreshed vision—one that is responsive to the current dynamics while positioning us to address emerging needs.

Over the past year, we have engaged in a comprehensive revisioning process, building on the solid foundation of our previous Vision while strategically planning for what lies ahead. This updated Vision is not a departure from our past but an evolution—one that reflects the current realities of Polk County and provides a map for continued success. It recognizes the rapid growth of Polk County—now one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation—and seeks to guide our path forward, ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of our community while planning strategically for the future.

As you review this annual report, you will see the work of hundreds of volunteers whose efforts honor the past while embracing the future with renewed energy and purpose. This document captures their efforts at a pivotal point in time—a snapshot of a community in motion, poised to build on its successes and step confidently into the future.

We remain committed to leading and leaning forward, always with the community’s desires and needs at the forefront of our work. Polk Vision is, and always will be, a reflection of the community it serves. As we step into this next chapter, we invite you to join us in this journey, confident that together, there is nothing we cannot achieve.



KIM LONG

Executive Director



TARA WATSON, M.Ed.

Operations Manager



AMY NICKERSON

Education Coordinator



ANA SAAVEDRA

Program Manager

Operating Board

STEVE BISSONNETTE

President
VISTE

AMY BRATTEN, Ed.D.

Provost, Academic Affairs & Workforce Education, Academics
Polk State College

KYLIA CARSWELL

Director, Family and Community Engagement
Polk County Public Schools

ASHLEY CERJAN

Director, Community Liaison, Central Area
Polk County Public Schools

BETSY CLEVELAND

President & CEO
Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce

REBA COIL

Director, Community Liaison, South Lakeland Area
Polk County Public Schools

JEANETTE CROWLEY

Director, Strategic Planning & Partnerships
Polk County Public Schools

ROD CROWLEY, Ed.D.

Chief Operating Officer
United Way of Central Florida

JULIA DAVIS

Senior Transportation Planner
Polk TPO

DEENA DRUMGO

Assistant City Manager
City of Lake Wales

REBEKAH HURD

Director of Government Advocacy
AdventHealth

JOY JOHNSON

Administrator, Health and Human Services Division
Polk County BoCC

RYAN KORDEK

Executive Director
Polk TPO

JENNA LEVINE

Director of Public Health Planning, Public Health Planning Division
Florida Department of Health in Polk County

NELSON MARQUEZ, Ed.D.

President & CEO
Webber University

LORI MARTINI

Vice President & Chief Philanthropic Officer
GiveWell Community Foundation

ERICA MORSE

Director, Community Liaison, South Area
Polk County Public Schools

JESSICA NAPOLEON

Public Health Planner, Public Health Planning Division
Florida Department of Health in Polk County

ANDREA NIKOLAI

Family and Consumer Science Agent
UF/IFAS Extension Polk County

ORATHAI NORTHERN, Ph.D.

Enrichment Director
SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo & Aerospace Center for Excellence

ALICE NUTTALL

Associate Vice President, Behavioral Health Services
Lakeland Regional Health

DAVID PALMER

Director of Information Technology
Polk County BoCC

LINDSAY PERSOHN, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Literacy Studies
University of South Florida

JUSTIN SHARPLESS

Board Member, District 6
Polk County Public Schools

MARYBETH SODERSTROM

Transportation Director
Central Florida Regional Planning Council

LAUREN SPRINGFIELD

Director, Community Health
Lakeland Regional Health

CHAD TAGTOW

Senior Vice President & Chief Innovation Officer
Citizens Bank & Trust

KATIE TAYLOR

Director, School Nutrition
Polk County Public Schools

HOLLY VIDA

Behavioral Health Program Manager
Polk County BoCC

NICOLE WALKER

Cooperative Extension Director
UF/IFAS Extension Polk County

DARYL WARD, Ph.D.

Executive Director
Polk Arts & Cultural Alliance

STEVE WARNER, Ed.D.

Vice President, Resource Development & Executive Director
Polk State College Foundation

LINDA WILLIAMS, Ph.D.

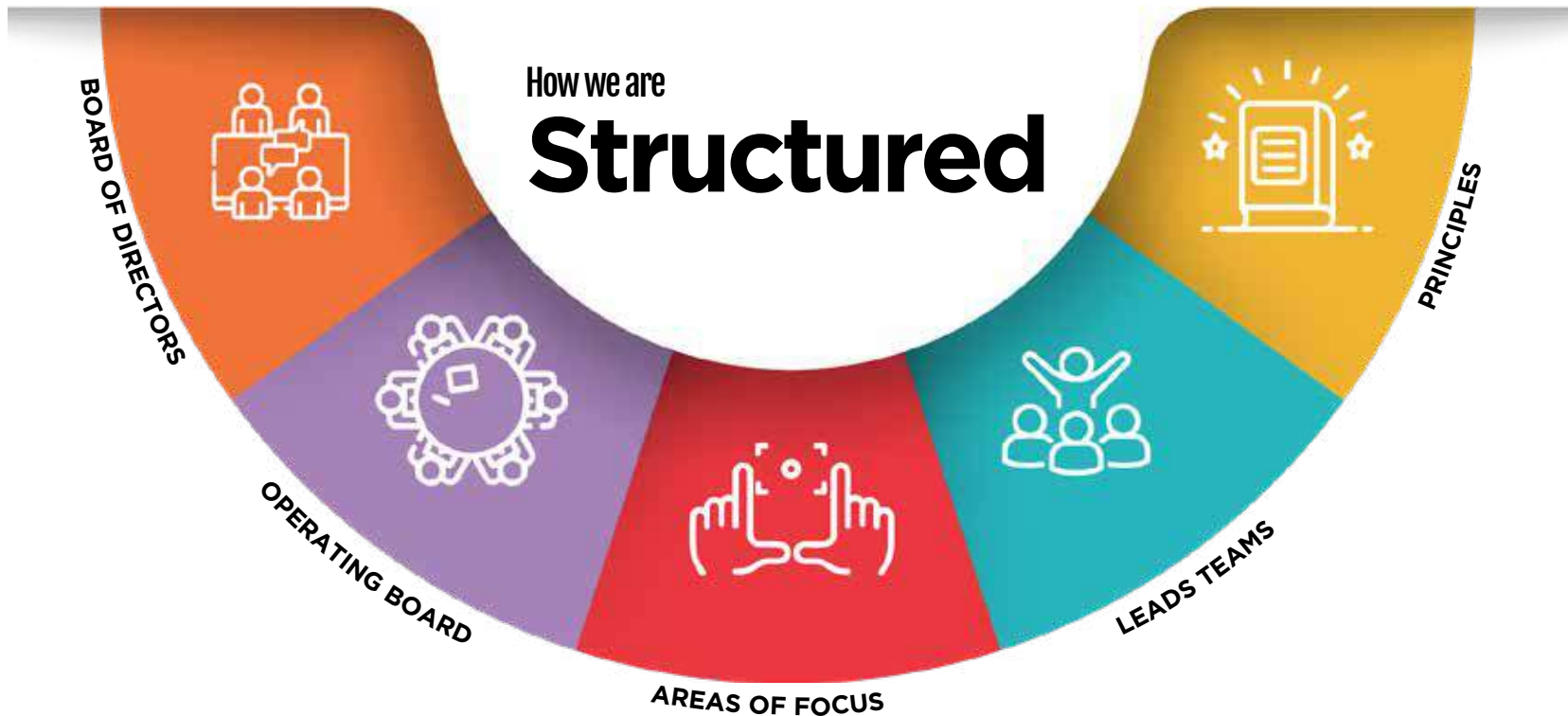
Director, Learning & Organizational Development
Lakeland Regional Health

KATHLEEN WRIGHT

Curriculum Specialist
Florida Virtual School

LINDSAY ZIMMERMAN

Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
Central Florida Development Council



How we are Structured

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Governance

OPERATING BOARD

Strategic Operations

AREAS OF FOCUS

Education
Economic Advancement
Growth Management & Infrastructure
Government
Community Health & Well-being
Arts, Culture, & Recreation
Civic Engagement

LEADS TEAMS

Solution Design &
Implementation

PRINCIPLES

Polk Vision is governed by a Board of Directors which oversees the Operating Board in its leadership of Teams working collaboratively on a range of complex issues designated areas of focus.

PRINCIPLES

These principles ensure our work is targeting systemic change or new ways of aligning resources to address underlying causes. Systemic change occurs when an outcome or goal has been attained. This achievement is either through the elimination of the problem or through permanently aligning programs, policies, funding streams or services to reduce the impact of the problem on a long term basis.

Polk Visions strives to:

- Align and engage all stakeholders throughout the county to achieve strategic outcomes.
- Cultivate an environment of mutual trust and collaboration while working with transparency and a high level of accountability.
- Unify initiatives across the county through a comprehensive, collaborative, multi-faceted process that is recognized as generational, requiring significant time to achieve change and maximum impact.

Our Process

As facilitators of a county-wide collaboration among schools, non-profits, businesses, and the public sector, Polk Vision offers a framework for achieving sustained improvement.

The work is dynamic and requires continuous learning and adaptive solutions in addressing a range of complex issues. Polk Vision refers to this as our LEADS process: **Learn** all we can about an issue, **Engage** community partners knowledgeable and passionate about the issue, **Align** resources to address the issue, **Develop** plans that will result in systemic change and **Sustain** achieved outcomes through continuous monitoring.

This county-wide collaborative process provides the following advantages:

- **Greater returns on investment** - by working together toward common goals, resources are leveraged, duplication is avoided, and efficiency is greatly increased.
- **Higher quality services** - utilizing expertise from multiple organizations guarantees a broader perspective and a wiser approach.
- **Enhanced capacity** - a collective effort enhances the impact of each organization while generating a much greater overall outcome.



LEARN



ENGAGE



ALIGN



DEVELOP



SUSTAIN

Areas of Focus

The Community Vision for improved Quality of Life is defined within seven Areas of Focus.

Before 2044 Polk County will have:



Education

A collaborative educational network that connects students, families, academic institutions, community members and local businesses in support of holistic, inclusive and dynamic learning opportunities.



Community Health and Well-Being

A culture that prioritizes community health, wellness, and safety with equitable access to a range of high-quality, holistic resources enabling everyone to lead productive fulfilling lives.



Economic Advancement

An economic environment that attracts and retains industry-diverse businesses with high-paying careers and educates and retains qualified talent to align with targeted industry workforce needs.



Arts, Culture, and Recreation

An environment that promotes arts, cultural, and recreational opportunities that celebrate our diverse creative, historic, and natural resources.



Growth Management & Infrastructure

Strategic growth management and resilient infrastructure that protects the environment and quality of life, supports the unique characteristics of distinct communities, enhances education opportunities, and promotes sustainable economic development.



Civic Engagement

Citizens who actively learn, collaborate, and engage across both public and private sectors to ensure that Polk County continues to advance and prosper.



Government

Collaboration among all levels of government that is efficient, customer-focused, and effective in serving the essential needs of its citizens.

2023 – 2024 Leads Team

Progress Reports



Every LEADS Team is working to achieve long-term outcomes that directly tie to one or more foundational area of focus. Yet, each Team has selected a different strategy and devised different tactics to achieve the desired outcome.

“

A collaborative educational network that connects students, families, academic institutions, community members and local businesses in support of holistic, inclusive and dynamic learning opportunities.

”

Education

Education

Literacy



Vision

A collaborative educational network that connects students, families, academic institutions, community members and local businesses in support of holistic, inclusive and dynamic learning opportunities.

- The Literacy LEADS Team's newly adopted, four-pronged Tactical Plan is focused on promoting early literacy (birth to age 5) to impact kindergarten readiness, which lays the foundation for reading on grade level, graduation rates and college and career readiness.
- The Literacy Resource Directory provides families in Polk County with an index of local resources, specifically early literacy service providers.
- The Annual Literacy Summit is a convening of service providers indexed in the Directory for the purpose of networking, education and community needs assessment.
- Early literacy service providers work together to offer their communities a Family Literacy Fair, showcasing available literacy resources and including wrap-around services such as mobile dental and public transportation.
- Team members join other community efforts and events to support the promotion of early literacy services across Polk County.



November 2023

Literacy Resource Directory 7th Edition
500 Printed magazines
1,500 QR posters
80,000 QR bookmarks

View the Literacy Directory online at

<https://polkvision.com/our-impact/polk-county-literacy-resource-directory/>

This project is funded through a grant from the George W. Jenkins fund within Givewell Community Foundation.

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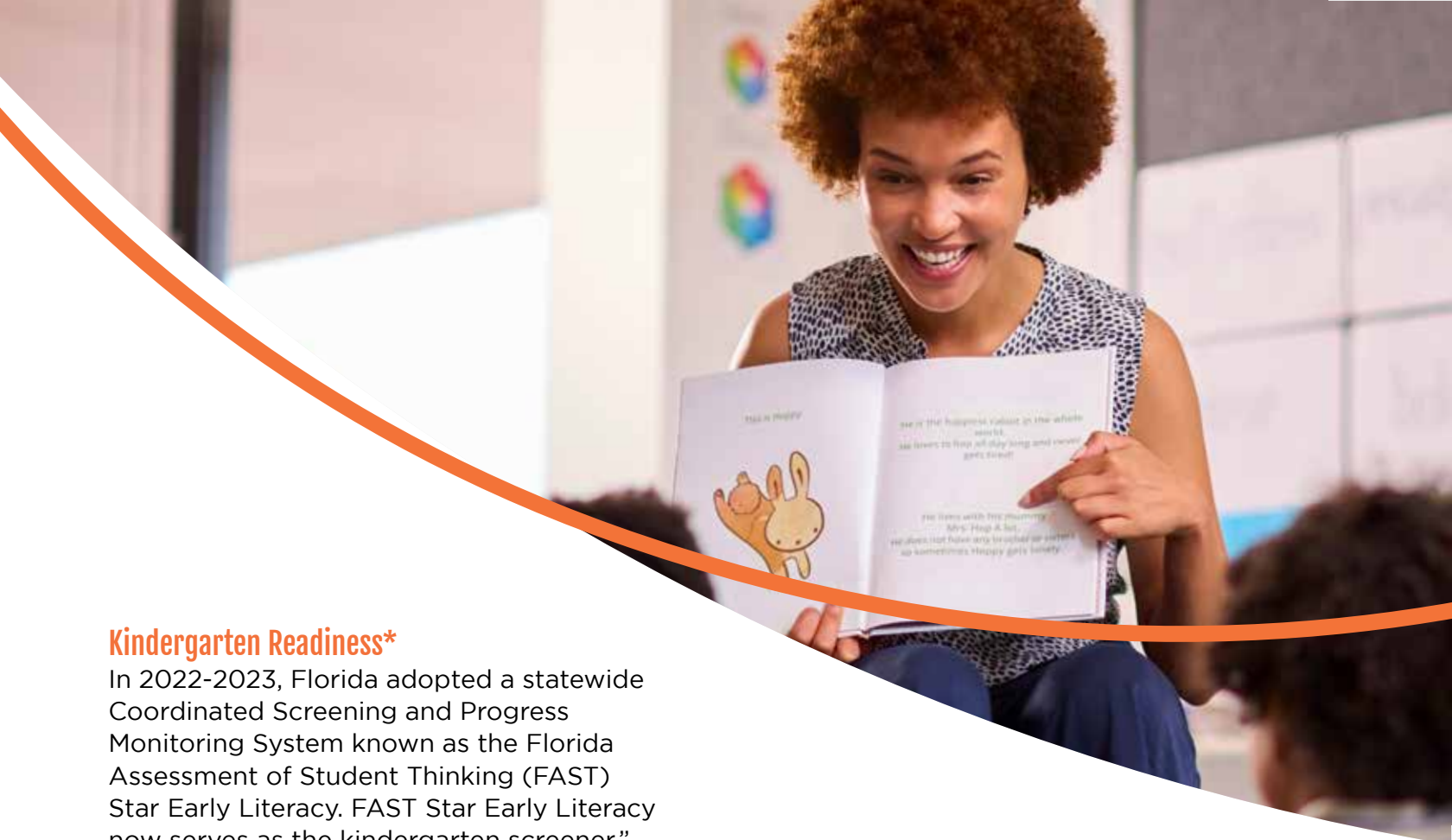
The Literacy Team has made great strides on our tactical plan in the past year, as we hosted our first Annual Literacy Summit focusing on early learning, saw our 7th Edition of the Literacy Resource Directory with print copies of the Directory available for the first time, and continued to build our team and our partnerships with stakeholders across the county.

-Lindsay Persohn, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor Literacy Studies, University of South Florida
Literacy LEADS Team Chair

”

“Third grade is an important pivot point in a child’s education, the time when students shift from learning to read and begin reading to learn. Students who fail to reach this critical milestone often falter in the later grades and drop out before earning a high school diploma.”

(Hernandez, 2011)



Kindergarten Readiness*

In 2022-2023, Florida adopted a statewide Coordinated Screening and Progress Monitoring System known as the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) Star Early Literacy. FAST Star Early Literacy now serves as the kindergarten screener.”

In the fall of 2023, the number of students “Ready for Kindergarten” in Polk County was **44%**, compared to Florida’s statewide success rate of **51%**.
(Florida Department of Education)

Reading on Grade Level**

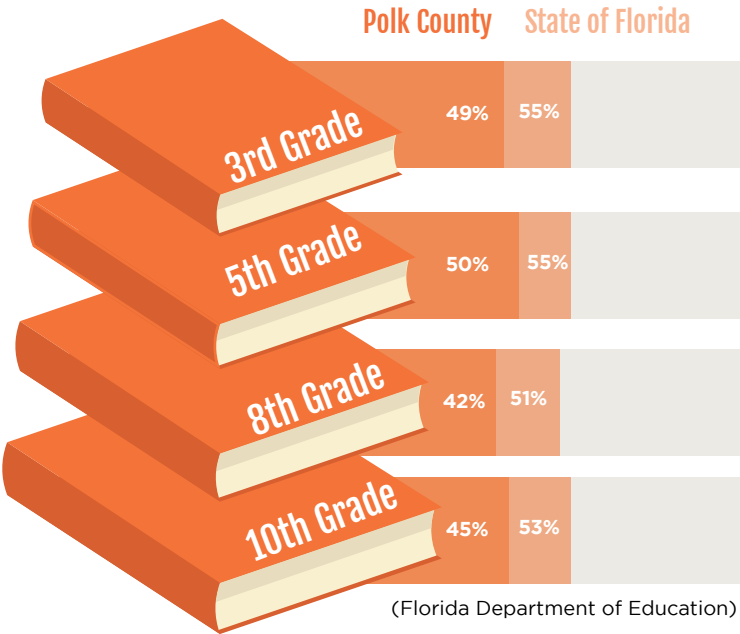
“The Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) was administered for the first time during the 2022-2023 school year. Achievement Level 3 indicates grade level performance across all assessments.”

*<https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/best/k-ready.shtml>

**<https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/20102/urlt/2324FASTGrd310FS.pdf>

2022- 2023

**English Language Arts FAST assessment rate
Students achieving Level 3 or above**



1st Annual

Literacy Summit



Polk County Public Schools
Superintendent Fred Heid
1st Annual Literacy Summit



Speed Leads Networking
1st Annual Literacy Summit

**1st Annual Literacy Summit, November 13, 2023,
hosted at Florida Children's Museum, Lakeland FL**

This fast-paced networking activity was an opportunity for those who work in the community to meet others and raise awareness of the services provided across Polk County. Superintendent of Polk County Public Schools Frederick Heid and Dr. Marc Hutek of the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County updated guests with information about strategic early literacy efforts in the local education system. Keynote speaker Dr. Lori Allen detailed the multi-faceted early learning programs in Polk County Public Schools.

Literacy Team Roster

LINDSAY PERSOHN, Ph.D.

Team Chair
University of South Florida

DENISE ATWELL

Community Member

GRETCHEN CERANIC

United Way of Central Florida

REBA COIL

Polk County Public Schools

EMILY COPPOLO

Heartland for Children

STACY DAVIS

Polk County Public Schools

SHERI GEIGER

Paper Pie

ANDREA HAGAN

Heartland for Children

JESSICA HART

UF/ IFAS Extension Polk County

CRAIG HOSKING

Maximize Digital Media

CLAUDINE HUMBER

Florida Children's Museum

LORI HUTTO, Ph.D.

Warner University

JENNIFER KOVAC

Polk County Library Cooperative

KRIS NEWMAN-LAKE, Ed.D.

Cypress Junction Montessori

ANGIE PATTISON

P.E.A.C.E.

AMBER GURESHI

United Way of Central Florida

ED SMITH

Polk State College

RUTH TEETS

United Way of Central Florida

KATE WALLACE

Charter Communications

Talent Pipeline

The Talent Pipeline LEADS Team is convened in partnership with the Central Florida Development Council and is focused on filling the gap of high skill-high wage jobs necessary to meet Polk County's current and emerging industry workforce needs.

The Polk County economy requires a pipeline of qualified workers to meet the demands of local employers. This pipeline is highly dependent upon high school graduation, post-secondary enrollment, and college completion rates. The end-game is to increase educational attainment - substantially altering local conditions, improving quality of life, and serving as an economic catalyst for increased productivity.

As the Local College Access Network (LCAN), Polk Vision recognizes that the Florida College Access Network's (FCAN) guiding values align with the work of the Talent Pipeline Team. Increasing educational achievement beyond high school—especially for low-income students, adult learners, and other students outside the mold of the “traditional” college student—holds the greatest promise for expanding economic prosperity for all Floridians and building the talent pool needed to fuel Florida's dynamic economy.

The Middle School Career Exploration project invited thirty unique guest presenters to talk about education pathways and career opportunities with eighth grade students. Speakers represented government, business, and education industries. Students participated in hands-on activities with tools of the trade and real world solutions.

Funding provided by the College Access and Success Initiative 2.0 (CASI), a program of the Florida Philanthropic Network, made possible through funding from the Helios Education Foundation and the Kresge Foundation, administered through the Givewell Foundation; the Local College Access Network Fund within the Givewell Community Foundation. Partial funding is received for programming by the City of Lakeland Community Services Grant Funds.



Vision

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Polk Vision continues to support high school seniors with FAFSA completion events at high schools across the county. Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is one of the best predictors of whether a high school senior will go on to college. Seniors who complete the FAFSA are 84% more likely to immediately enroll in postsecondary education. For students in the lowest socioeconomic quintile, FAFSA completion is associated with a 127% increase in immediate college enrollment.

“Webber International University is pleased to announce its corporate workforce initiative. The institution will offer non-degree asynchronous online career training programs in healthcare and information technology powered by MedCerts. The collaboration aims to enhance educational opportunities for Webber students and residents across Polk County.

Webber International University carefully selected training programs in healthcare and IT, based on the results of Polk Vision's exploration of employer needs in the healthcare industry. Career Source Polk's 2023-2024 Regional Demand Occupations List, which is based on the need and gap in workforce talents, was also the basis for Webber's program offering selections.”
(Webber International University press release, July 2024)

Talent Pipeline

By making a concerted effort to boost FAFSA completion rates, states are investing in today's students and tomorrow's workforce. In other words: When students succeed, we all benefit.

Let's get to work!

(National College Attainment Network, Why Invest in Increasing FAFSA Completion?)

“

The value I find in Polk Vision's Talent Pipeline and CHEW is the active participation and engagement to make Polk County a better place for everyone. The networking and connection with peers and industry leaders from across the county is unmatched in any other group that I have been a part of. I have been very fortunate to be a part of something that will help the community and change the future of the county.

-Dr. Yovan Reyes
Florida Southern College South Florida
Literacy LEADS Team Chair

”



College and Career Fair
Davenport High School, Davenport FL



Dr. Nelson Marquez facilitating a round-table discussion between healthcare employers and post-secondary educators regarding the current and future talent needs. Hosted by the City of Lakeland at Lakeland Electric.



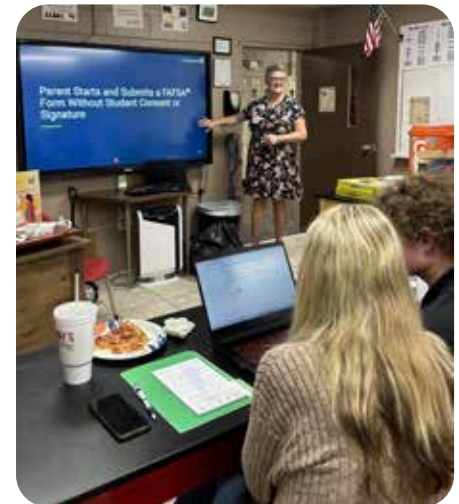
Jeffrey Johnson, Branch Manager Chalet Suzanne, Citizens Bank & Trust sharing financial literacy and budgeting tips with eighth grade students.



Edward Barreto Acosta, Academic Fieldwork Coordinator, College of Health Professional and Sciences, Webber International University presenting Occupational Therapy career options and education pathways to eighth grade students.



City of Lake Wales Public Works
Middle School Career Exploration Field Trip hosted by the City of Lake Wales



Amy Nickerson, Education Coordinator for Polk Vision, presenting FAFSA information for 12th grade students and their parents.

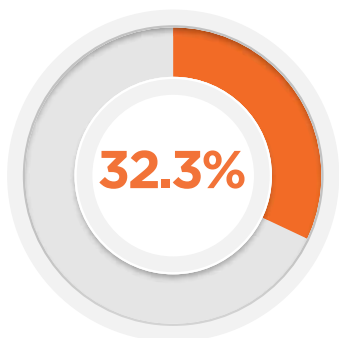
FAFSA Completion Event
Oasis Christian Academy, Winter Haven FL



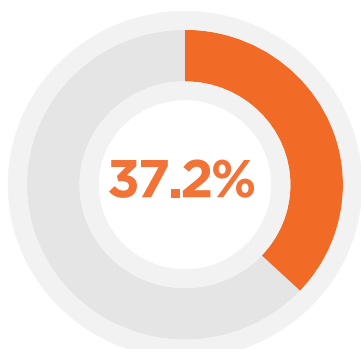
Did you know?

Polk students have earned an estimated **\$7,987,015 in Pell Grants!**

(Florida College Access network Data Dashboard 01/01/24 through 08/02/24)



2023-2024 School Year
12th graders: **8,106**
FAFSAs Completed: **2,618**

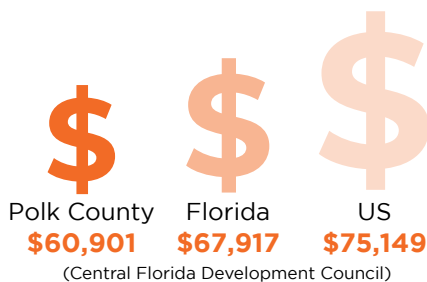


2022-2023 School Year
12th graders: **7,567**
FAFSAs Completed: **2,816**

Polk County's per capita income as a ratio of the U.S. per capita income has remained relatively steady, from **81.1% in 2002 to 83.1% in 2022.**

(Central Florida Development Council)

Polk County Median household income (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022:



High School Graduation Rate



Year	Polk County	Florida
2022-2023 REMAINED THE SAME	78.3%	88%
2021-2022	78.3%	87.3%

Postsecondary Enrollment Rate



Year	Polk County	Florida
2021-2022 INCREASED	37.1%	53.7%
2020-2021	36.8%	51%

(Florida Department of Education)

Degree Attainment

(Residents aged 25-64 with a high-quality degree)



Year	Polk County	Florida
2022 INCREASED	31.9%*	46.2% [^]
2023	31.3%	44.7%

*ranked 26 of 67 Florida counties INCREASED

[^]ranked 28 of 50 United States
(Florida Department of Education)

Sub-Committee of Talent Pipeline CHEW



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The Countywide Higher Education Workgroup (CHEW), a sub-committee of the Talent Pipeline Team, convenes post-secondary Career Services Office leaders to promote internships and employment for college students and graduates. The Internship Guide for Employers, first published by the team in 2021, is enhanced by an Internship Guide brochure, new in 2024.

<https://polkvision.com/news/2021-internship-guide/>



Jose Miguel Longo, Relationship Manager/Education Success at Handshake. Handshake presentation to employers and post-secondary educators hosted by the City of Auburndale at the Lake Myrtle Sports Complex.

Participating institutions use the dynamic Handshake hiring platform to build relationships with employers, create fresh and relevant work-place content for college students and new graduates, and facilitate the hiring process from job-post to interview to employment.

To learn more visit:

<https://joinhandshake.com>

Committee Institution Roster:

Florida Polytechnic University*
Florida Southern University*
Keiser University
Polk State College*
Ridge Technical College
Southeastern University*
Traviss Technical College
Warner University
Webber International University*

*Handshake Partner Institutions

Today, Handshake is partnered with more
partners than any other platform.



115 Higher Education partners
on Handshake in Florida



800k+ Students on
Handshake in Florida

Talent Pipeline & CHEW Team

Roster

AMY BRATTEN, Ed.D.
Talent Pipeline Team Chair
Polk State College

YOVAN REYES, Ph.D.
C.H.E.W. Committee Chair
Florida Southern College

MARCIA ANDRESEN
Polk County BoCC

ANA AYALA
Southeastern University

LEANN BENNETT
Polk County Public Schools

KALEY BLACK
Polk County Public Schools

CALEB BLOODWORTH
Southeastern University

DOROTHEA BOGERT, Ph.D.
City of Auburndale

WARREN BROWN
Polk State College

STACY CAMPBELL-DOMINECK
Career Source Polk

KYLIA CARSWELL
Polk County Public Schools

BETSY CLEVELAND
Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce

REBA COIL
Polk County Public Schools

PATRICIA COLLINS, Ph.D.
Polk State College

RYAN CREWS
Cutrale Citrus Juices USA, Inc.

CHRISTINA CRISER-JACKSON
United Way of Central Florida

MICHELLE DIX
Junior Achievement of Tampa Bay

TAKIYAH DIXON
Lakeland Chamber of Commerce

KAMALIE DODSON
Publix Super Markets, Inc.

SHAUNA DYKES
Junior Achievement of Tampa Bay

ANN EVERETT
Polk County Public Schools

JENNIFER FASKING
State Farm Insurance

CHARITY GARCIA
Polk State College

DIANE GIBBS
BayCare Health Systems

LESLEY GREEN
Polk County Public Schools

BRANDON GRIFFIN
Keiser University

HEATHER HANSSEN
Florida Polytechnic University

LISA HARDER
Tax Collector's Office for Polk County

ALLY HOGENDOBLER
Enterprise Holdings

MELISSA KONKOL
Polk County Public Schools

TRANICE MCGRUFF
City of Lakeland

LISA MILLER
Polk County School Board

CONNIE MINICH
F.O.R.T.E. Services

ERICA MORSE
Polk County Public Schools

NIKKI MORSE
Polk County Public Schools

RUSTY MOUTON
Southstate Bank

ERIN MYSZKOWSKI, Ed.D.
Florida Southern College

ORATHAI NORTHERN, Ph.D.
Sun 'n Fun Aerospace Expo & Aerospace
Center for Excellence

LAQUIERIA NOTTAGE, Ed.D.
Polk State College

CASSIE PAVY
Warner University

ALETHEA PUGH
Webber International University

NOLA QUINTANILLA
Florida Department of Transportation

KENZIE RALSTON
Ad-vance Talent Solutions

CHRIS REEDER
City of Auburndale

RYAN REIS
Webber International University

MELODY RIDER, Ed.D.
Lakeland Leads

MARTHA SENEY
Florida Polytechnic University

LANA STRIPLING
Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce

BRION SUNSERI
Ad-Vance Talent Solutions

CHAD TAGTOW
Citizens Bank & Trust

MONIQUE TUBBS
Polk County Public Schools

YVONNE VELEZ
Polk State College

MATINA WAGNER
Polk State College

KATE WALLACE
Charter Communications

STEVE WARNER, Ed.D.
Polk State College

SONYA WATTS
Lakeland FedEx IT Center

LAURA WEBSTER
Polk County Public Schools

SUSAN WILLCOCKSON
Polk County Public Schools

LINDA WILLIAMS, Ph.D.
Lakeland Regional Health

DERRICK WOODARD
Polk County Public Schools

MICHELLE ZAMORA
Central Florida Development Council

LINDSAY ZIMMERMAN
Central Florida Development Council

“

Growth management and infrastructure that protects the environment, enhances quality of life, supports education and economic development and is economically sustainable.

”

Growth Management & Infrastructure

Growth Management & Infrastructure

Smart Communities



Vision

Growth management and infrastructure that protects the environment, enhances quality of life, supports education and economic development and is economically sustainable.

The Smart Communities LEADS Team is dedicated to building meaningful connections that start locally, expand outward and ultimately enrich the lives of Polk County residents. The Team's commitment to sustainable economic development, growth, opportunity and innovation hinges on providing affordable high-speed internet access. By fostering a shared vision among all Polk County communities, the team ensures that the broadband infrastructure is aligned to meet the increasing demands of the digital age.

The Smart Communities LEADS Team continues to play a pivotal role in educating and building community consensus around the critical importance of a robust broadband network. This network is essential to supporting Polk County's economic growth and long-term prosperity. Affordable and accessible high-speed internet is a cornerstone of modern life, enabling:

- **Small businesses** to compete on a global stage
- **Safer streets and communities** through improved public safety technologies
- **Cutting-edge research and training** at colleges and universities
- **Expanded opportunities for students** across all educational levels
- **Enhanced healthcare services** through telehealth and faster, more effective care

With the state-mandated creation of Local Technology Planning Teams, the Florida Commerce Office of Broadband (formerly the Department of Economic Opportunity Office of Broadband) tasked Polk Vision's Smart Communities Team to serve as Polk County's Local Technology Planning Team. The investment in Polk Vision ensured that Polk County was prepared to step into this critical role.

This team represents a cross-section of key industry sectors, including Libraries, K-12 Education, Healthcare, Private Businesses, Tourism, Community Organizations, Agriculture, Economic Development, Local Governments, Parks and Recreation, and Local Broadband & Internet Service Providers. The team will continue collaborating with the Florida Commerce Office of Broadband to identify those who are underserved or unserved in Polk County.



Members of the Polk Vision Smart Communities Team met at Lake Myrtle Sports Complex while others joined via Zoom. The Smart Communities Team enjoyed the opportunity to offer hybrid meeting options to fit its members' busy schedules.

Growth Management & Infrastructure

Smart Communities

In June 2024, the Polk Vision Smart Communities Team hosted the Florida Commerce Office of Broadband for its Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD). Challenge Workshop Tour. FloridaCommerce hosted five in-person public workshops throughout the state to provide information on Connected Florida's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Initial Proposal Program Challenge Process. The BEAD Challenge workshops included an overview of the challenge process, timeline, rules and responsibilities for our Local Technology Planning Teams and a tutorial on submitting a challenge.

“

Working as the co-chair of our Smart Communities Team continues to be an incredible honor. We have achieved significant milestones by fostering a collaborative environment that bridges government, private enterprises, and the public sectors. Working together, this team has seen the acceleration of building a robust broadband infrastructure that lays the groundwork for a more accessible and connected future. This collective dedication and teamwork have been instrumental in making our community smarter and stronger. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a dynamic and creative group.

-David Palmer
Information Technology Division Director
Polk County Board of County Commissioners
Smart Communities Team Co-chair

”





Did you know?

In 2022



96%

of Polk County households reported having one or more computing devices. Compared to 92.2% in 2019.

(US Census Data)

The Smart Communities LEADS Team's efforts will prioritize connecting resources provided by Community Anchor Institutions, such as:

- **Healthcare:** Expanding telehealth services
- **Economic Advancement:** Promoting job creation and workforce development
- **Government Services:** Enhancing utilities and public services
- **Public Safety:** Strengthening emergency response and disaster preparedness
- **Education:** Supporting remote learning
- **Quality of Life:** Offering improved entertainment options

In 2022



91.2%

of households reported having an internet subscription. Compared to 82.1% in 2019.

(US Census Data)



Polk Vision's Smart Communities Team is honored to be recognized as a leader in local engagement for digital adoption and use. David Palmer, Polk County IT Director and Co-Chair of the Smart Communities Team, will represent the Local Technology Planning Team as a panelist at the upcoming Broadband Summit in September of 2024. His participation alongside other top innovators across the state highlights the vital role and leadership that Polk Vision plays in advancing digital adoption, access, and affordability for all.

Smart Communities Team Roster

DAVID PALMER

Team Co-Chair
Polk County BoCC

MARYBETH SODERSTROM

Team Co-Chair
Central Florida Regional Planning Council

MUSTAPHA ACHOUBANE

Florida Polytechnic University

CHRIS BAILEY

Charter Communications

SAMUEL BERRIEN, COMMISSIONER

City of Fort Meade

FRANK CANOVACA

City of Bartow

MIKE CHIAVUZZI

Polk County Public Schools

NEIL CLEVELAND

City of Lakeland

PATRICIA COLLINS, Ph.D.

Polk State College

NANCY DALEY, COMMISSIONER

City of Lake Alfred

STEVEN ELIAS

Pennoni

ALLISON ELLIS

Frontier Communications

GRANT EWERT

Polk County BoCC

BILL FERRY

Comcast - Florida Region

BENESHEA FRAZIER

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

GARY GADSON

Summit Broadband

DAN HAKKER

Summit Broadband

RICHARD HESSE

City of Lakeland

HB HOLMES

RHEMAFi, LLC

REBEKAH HURD

AdventHealth

JEE HOON KIM

City of Auburndale

ERIC LABBE

City of Winter Haven

JUSTIN LAFERRIERE

Central Florida's Polk County Tourism and
Sports Marketing

BILL LEAN

Summit Broadband

DOUG LEWIS

Polk County BoCC

DAVID LITTLE

Crosswired Electric

"LEX" RYAN LUTHER

Windtalker Innovations

BRUCE LYON

Winter Haven Economic Development
Council

STEPHANIE MADDEN, COMMISSIONER

City of Lakeland

SEAN MALOTT

Central Florida Development Council

TRACY MERCER, COMMISSIONER

City of Winter Haven

RICK MONTNEY

ProPak Software

MATT MUCCI

AT&T

HIEP NGUYEN

City of Winter Haven

NICK NICHOLAS

DSM

ANNE PASCO

Polk County Public Schools

JACK PHILLIPS

Frontier Communications

MARK RANKIN

Summit Broadband

MARY RICHARDSON, COMMISSIONER

Town of Dundee

GLADYS ROBERTS

Polk County Library Cooperative

DAVID ROBINSON

DSM

BRIAN ROSS

City of Haines City

RICHARD RUCK

Lakeland Regional Health

TERRI SALTZMAN

Polk County BoCC

GAYE SHARPE

Polk County BoCC

DAVID SKIDMORE

Summit Broadband

ED SMITH

Polk State College

DAVID SOFFER

WANRack/Quickcom

STEPHEN SOWARDS

Alternative Choice Wireless

KIM STENGER

Office of Polk County Clerk of the Circuit
Court & Comptroller

JENNIFER STUART

Summit Broadband

KEVIN SUNDERLAND

City of Lake Wales

CHAD TAGTOW

Citizens Bank & Trust

BRENDA TORRES

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

OSCAR TORRES

City of Lakeland

KURT VAN WAGENEN

Summit Broadband

KATE WALLACE

Charter Communications

DAVID WARE

Summit Broadband

AMY WIGGINS

Lakeland Chamber of Commerce

PAUL WOMBLE

Polk County BoCC

Growth Management & Infrastructure

Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety



Vision

Growth management and infrastructure that protects the environment, enhances quality of life, supports education and economic development and is economically sustainable.



During the Polk County Parks and Urban Trails Community Event, residents connected with trail experts and learned about current and planned trail systems in Winter Haven and surrounding areas.



October 2023 Jenna Levine with the Florida Dept. of Health in Polk County fitted then Mayor Brad Dantzler with a new bike helmet. Safety First!

“

The Infrastructure: Pedestrian and Bicycle Team has recently completed a number of initiatives that have enhanced safety for bicyclists, pedestrians and motorists on Polk County's transportation system. Over the course of the next two years, we look forward to working collaboratively with Polk County's communities on the Vision Zero Polk Initiative.

-Ryan Kordek
CPM, GISP, Executive Director
Polk Transportation Planning Organization (TPO)
Infrastructure: Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Team Chair

”





"Take Extra Care in Getting There."

Polk County Public Schools has launched a multi-media public awareness campaign aimed at improving safety outcomes for students traveling to and from school.



Did you know?

Over the past nine years:

Polk County funded approximately 36 miles of new concrete sidewalk or asphalt multi-use paths with direct linkage to schools

Estimated total expenditures of

\$19.3
million

The average cost is approximately

\$536_k
per mile

The average cost is approaching

\$102
per foot

"In Polk County, a pedestrian or bicyclist dies every two weeks in a traffic crash. These persons are more than a statistic - everyone has a name and loved ones for whom a traffic fatality is tragic. The Pedestrian Bicycle Safety Team is working with community partners toward a future with Zero traffic-related fatalities. Anything less than Zero is unacceptable. Success will rely on a "3-E" approach: Engineering (safer streets), Education (better safety habits) and Enforcement (everyone following the rules of the road)." (Polk TPO)

To achieve Zero fatalities or serious traffic injuries, the Vision Zero initiative grounds itself in the principles of the Safe Systems approach, which offers a proactive strategy to safety. No longer does the responsibility of roadway safety belong solely to the driver behind the wheel or solely to the pedestrian looking both ways before crossing the street.

Over the past several years, the Team has aligned efforts to prioritize increased sidewalk coverage around Polk County Public Schools. Using a range of established criteria, emphasis continues to be placed on prioritizing projects ranked as "high-need" with the worst sidewalk coverage.

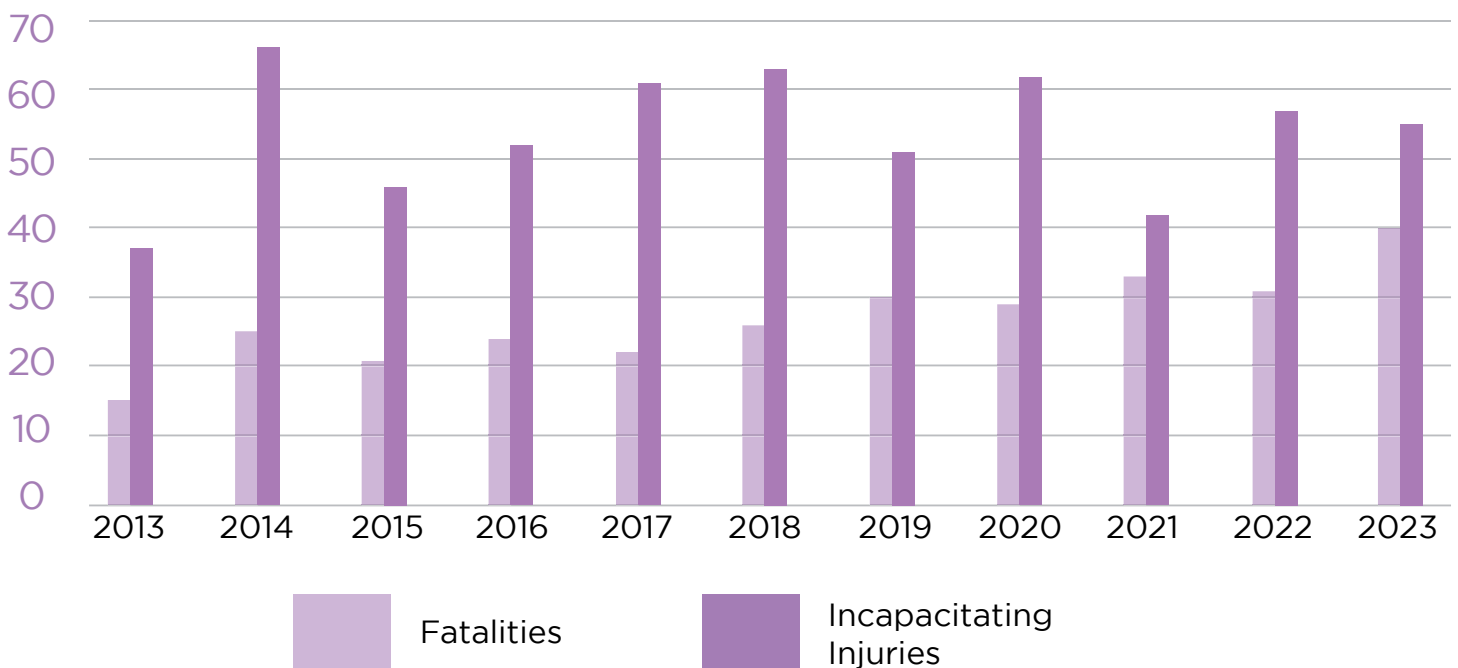
The work of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Team has forged an alignment between the Polk County TPO and Polk County Public Schools to increase educational efforts on the issue of Pedestrian and Bicycle safety. Recent work includes the development of a suite of resources, including lesson plans designed for use by elementary and middle school physical education teachers. These resources were the result of a two-year project from a Safe Routes to School grant awarded to the Polk TPO. Team members and TPO Staff worked with the consultant AE Com to develop an accessible resource site for our schools and community.

<https://www.polksafety.org>

February 2024 Polk TPO Executive Director and Team Chair, Ryan Kordek, was joined by Bill Skelton from Polk County's Roads and Drainage Division and presented to Superintendent Heid and key School District staff on the resources available and the progress being made towards improving bicycle and pedestrian safety.



Annual Severe Crash Outcomes For Pedestrians & Cyclists on Polk Roadways



Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Team

Roster

RYAN KORDEK

Team Chair
Polk TPO

DONNIE ARBEAU

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

AIMEE BAILEY

GeoPlanning Solutions

MARISA BARMBY

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

CHUCK BARMBY

City of Lakeland

RYAN BENGSCH

Polk County Utilities

MARK BENNETT

Polk County BoCC

CLIFTON BERNARD

City of Haines City

CHIEF ART BODENHEIMER

Lake Alfred Police Department

COLETTE BOGGS

BayCare Health Systems

STACY BOLTON

Lakeland Regional Health

COURTNEY BRANCH

Polk County Sheriff's Office

JENNIFER CIPRIANO

Lakeland Regional Health

BETSY CLEVELAND

Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce

MARY CROWE, Ph.D.

Florida Southern College

JULIA DAVIS

Polk TPO

HEATHER EARL

Magic Kingdom® Park and Disney's
Hollywood Studios®

TAYLOR FREEMAN

Florida Department of Health in Polk
County

GORDON GREEN

Patel, Greene, & Associates

AMANDA GREEN

The Epic Center

ERIC GREENHOW

Allen & Company

CAPTAIN LUKE HAUSER

Bartow Police Department

PATRICIA JACKSON

City of Polk City

CHRIS JARAMILLO

Tax Collector's Office for Polk County

ANGELA KAUFMAN

Polk TPO

NATHAN KAUTZ

Kittelson & Associates, Inc.

JAMES KEENE

City of Haines City

TIFFANY KITCHENS

Polk County Public Schools

ERIC LABBE

City of Winter Haven

JASON LEWIS

Kimley - Horn

JOSHUA MCLEMORE

Polk County Public Schools

TANYA MERKLE

Florida Department of Transportation

CAITLIN MILDNUM

BayCare Health Systems

KELLY MORPHY

Florida Bicycle Association

TRACY MULLINS

Polk County BoCC

ANDY PALMER

City of Winter Haven

THEO PETRITSCH

Landis Evans & Partners

SHERRIE PRATT

Central Florida Health Care

CAPTAIN KRISTINA QUENNEVILLE

Florida Highway Patrol

SHEILA RAINEY

Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital

HEATHER REUTER

City of Winter Haven

JEFF SCHMUCKER

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

SCOTT SJOBLUM

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

BILL SKELTON

Polk County BoCC

DON STEPHENSON

Polk County Public Schools

CHIEF TERRY STORIE

Auburndale Police Department

HEATHER STRAFFORD

Polk County Sheriff's Office

TOBY TILLER

Polk County Public Schools

KAREN TINER

Ameriprise Financial

JULIE TOWNSEND

Lakeland Downtown Development Authority

NELSON VEGA

City of Haines City

SERGEANT KURT WALKER

Polk County Sheriff's Office

CAPTAIN STEPHEN WALKER

Bartow Police Department

MARY WEBER

Pritchett Steinbeck Group, Inc.

KATIE WHITE

Florida Department of Environmental
Protection

JULIE WOMBLE

City of Auburndale

“

Polk County will have a Quality of Life that encourages diverse backgrounds to live in harmony while developing physically, spiritually, mentally and culturally within a healthy and safe environment.

”

Quality of Life

Quality of Life

Vision



Polk County will have a Quality of Life that encourages diverse backgrounds to live in harmony while developing physically, spiritually, mentally and culturally within a healthy and safe environment.

The Quality of Life LEADS Team is comprised of representatives from various sectors across Polk County including non-profits, social services, government, health care, education and faith-based organizations. Through this diverse membership, different perspectives are gleaned when probing the wide-ranging and complex issues contributing to the Quality of Life in Polk County.

The term “quality of life” has meaning for nearly everyone - but individuals and groups may define it differently. Although health is an important domain of quality of life, there are many other aspects — jobs, housing, schools, and natural and built environments. Intangibles such as culture, values and spirituality are also key to the overall quality of life, which adds to the complexity of its definition.

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the Team hosted a number of guest speakers and explored a variety of topics in order to raise awareness of the resources available to Polk County citizens. The Team also sought feedback and guidance from other Polk Vision LEADS Teams to determine how best to align efforts in achieving the long-term vision of the organization.

The Team discovered that, regardless of the topic, a recurring observation was the need for deeper awareness, understanding and broader community engagement. Polk County is so vast that even providers serving the same population can be unaware of the other’s range of services. Current and future community outreach strategies are geared to share information and resources through an ongoing learning network allowing cross-sector collaboration with other Polk Vision LEADS Teams. Progress is being made on improving engagement through knowledge and information sharing among Team members. Broadening community-wide involvement will further assist in linking people to services and create opportunities to connect, learn and engage in all aspects of Quality of Life.

During the past year, much time and effort has been spent trying to define Quality of Life. Through that process, we discovered that a universally accepted definition is elusive because, in the end, each of us defines Quality of Life in very personal terms. At the same time, it became clear that the overarching goal of every one of Polk Vision’s Areas of Focus is to improve the Quality of Life for all residents of our county. As a result, we are pleased that the 20-year Vision refresh now identifies improving Quality of Life as the overarching umbrella for all our collective efforts.

-Steve Bissonnette, President, VISTE
Quality of Life Team Co-Chair

Joy Johnson, Administrator, Health and Human Services
Division, Polk County Board of County Commissioners
Quality of Life Team Co-Chair

”



The Quality of Life Team visited the One More Child campus in Lakeland. One More Child improves the lives of children through Foster Care, Anti-Trafficking, Child Hunger, Single Moms and Family Support programs.



During a visit to Circle B Bar Reserve team members learned about PaRx, or “Prescription for Nature”, a program that encourages healthcare professionals to prescribe time in nature to patients to improve their health. The program is based on the idea that nature should be considered the fourth pillar of health, along with healthy eating, exercise, and sleep.

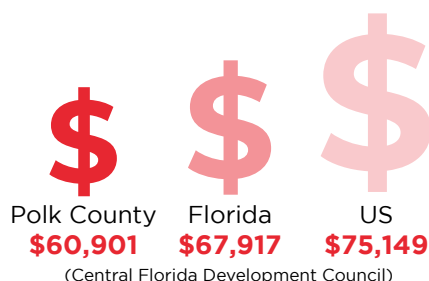
Did you know? **90%**

of people say they are happier when outdoors—and stress hormone levels drop significantly after just 15 minutes of sitting in a forest?

Polk County’s per capita income as a ratio of the U.S. per capita income has remained relatively steady, from **81.1% in 2002 to 83.1% in 2022.**

(Central Florida Development Council)

Polk County Median household income (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022:



During the 2023-2024 school year, the PCPS Hearth Project identified nearly

5,100

students experiencing homelessness.

(Polk County Public Schools’ Hearth Project)

Population Living in Poverty 2022:

14.8% Polk County **12.9%** Florida **12.5%** U.S.

(US Census Data)

Quality of Life Team Roster

STEVE BISSONNETTE

Team Co-Chair
VISTE

JOY JOHNSON

Team Co-Chair
Polk County BoCC

BEN ABBOTT

Multiply Christian Church

TONYA AKWETEY

Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands
& Polk Counties, Inc.

ANDREA ANDERSON

Polk for Recovery

MARCIA ANDRESEN

Polk County BoCC

CAUNEY BAMBURG

Noah's Ark of Central Florida

ALLIE BATES

Age-Friendly Lakeland

KATHERINE BATES

Nutrition Reset

LEON BATTLE

One More Child

BRAD BEATTY

Heart for Winter Haven

CAROLINE BENITEZ

Polk County BoCC

SAMUEL BERRIEN, COMMISSIONER

City of Fort Meade

DONNA BLEDSOE

Multiply Christian Church

WHITTNEY BOREM

Dream Center of Lakeland

CARLEY CARDEN

Peace River Center

DENNIS CHILDRESS

Lake Wales Care Center

BRUCE CLARK

Association for Inwood Community, Inc.

JENNIFER CODO-SALISBURY

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

PAM CRAVEN, Ph.D.

Learning Resource Center

LIZ CRAVEN

Pro-Ad Media

MARIA CRUZ

Talbot House Ministries

JOSEPH DAVIS

Lakeland Regional Health

BARBARA ERICKSON

Harrison School for the Arts Parents'
Association

AUTUMN FENTON

Polk County BoCC

TAYLOR FREEMAN

Florida Department of Health in Polk
County

SONIA GLISSON

Lakeland Volunteers in Medicine

MERISSA GREEN

City of Haines City

HANNAH HARDIN

Parker Street Ministries

BETTIE HARRELL JONES

The Way at Inwood Baptist Church

DEPUTY EDWIN HARVEY

Polk County Sheriff's Office

CLAUDINE HUMBER

Florida Children's Museum

LINDA KEENAN

Polk County BoCC

REBECCA KLEIN

A Woman's Choice

KERI KOZICKI

BayCare Health Systems

RITA LANGDALE

Hope Restored Counseling of Florida

JENNA LEVINE

Florida Department of Health in Polk
County

MONICA LIVINGSTONE

Tobacco Free Florida

BRENDA LUNA

Family Healthcare Foundation

JUNE MAY

United Way of Central Florida

TIM MITCHELL

Parker Street Ministries

RENE MONTGOMERY

Golden Light Trauma Recovery

JESSICA NAPOLEON

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

CAPTAIN DONALD NUNNERY

Winter Haven Police Department

ALICE NUTTALL

Lakeland Regional Health

ANDY PALMER

City of Winter Haven

CRAIG PICKOS

Polk for Recovery

ANTIONETTE POLLARD

Pieces to Peace Counseling

EMILIE QUAM

Lake Wales Care Center

ROB QUAM

Lake Wales Care Center

BOB RIHN

Tri-County Human Services

KATIE RODERS TURNER

Family Healthcare Foundation

BEN RUCH

Polk County Public Schools

TERRI SALTZMAN

Polk County BoCC

STEPHEN SAVARIMUTHU

Lake Wales Care Center

KRISTEN SPIKER-BRENNEMAN

Lakeland Chamber of Commerce

BRENDA TORRES

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

ISMARY VENTO

Health Council of West Central Florida

HOLLY VIDA

Polk County BoCC

NICOLE WALKER

UF/IFAS Extension Polk County

DARYL WARD, Ph.D.

Polk Arts & Cultural Alliance

STEVE WARNER, Ed.D.

Polk State College Foundation

Behavioral Health



Vision

Polk County will have a Quality of Life that encourages diverse backgrounds to live in harmony while developing physically, spiritually, mentally, and culturally, within a healthy and safe environment.

The Polk Vision Behavioral Health LEADS Team strives to promote total well-being through partnerships and the integration of behavioral health resources. The journey and concept for this team began after numerous community health needs assessments continued to point towards behavioral health as a leading health priority. Having access to quality mental health care, awareness of available well-being resources, and navigating an often-daunting healthcare system have been named as continued barriers surrounding behavioral health in our county. Polk Vision acted when the need was raised and initiated an exploratory Behavioral Health team in 2019. A core group of stakeholders and leaders were identified and gathered together to begin the lift.

The first need was to survey the current environment and do a deep dive into the state of behavioral health services for Polk County residents. From this in-depth survey, the Team and Polk Vision were able to present stakeholders with a Behavioral Health Strategic Plan and Sequential Intercept Map in 2021.

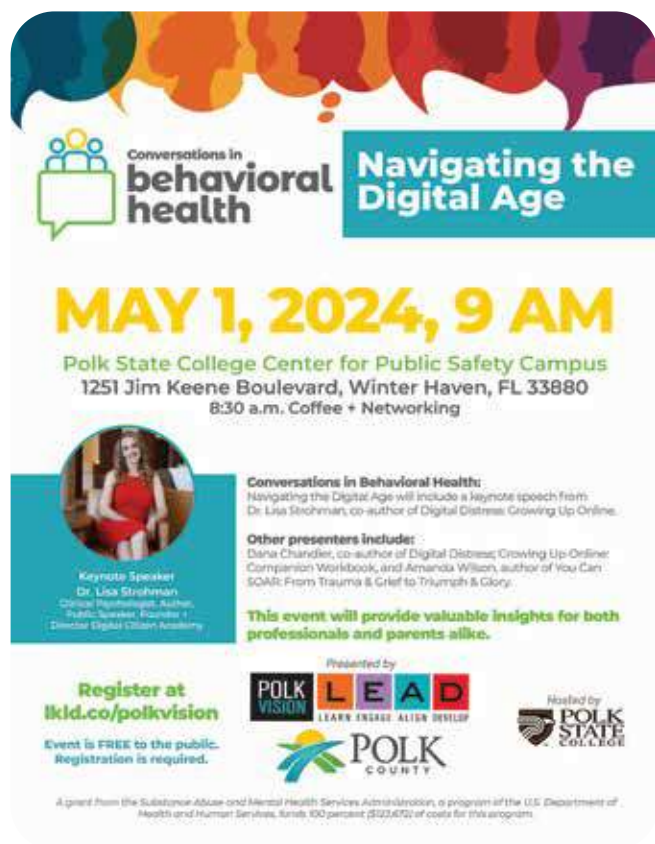
One of the foundational themes emerging from the survey was the significance of breaking down silos. As a community, it is impossible to increase capacity and access to care, increase services for higher-risk groups or reduce stigma if silos exist.

The Team expanded from a small “LEADS Team” into a very large contingent of dedicated professionals who work in behavioral health, education, institutions of faith, government and many other professions that share a concern for mental wellness in Polk County.

Together, the Team created a tactical action plan that reflects the core set of needs outlined in the Strategic Plan as well as the mission of Polk Vision to build awareness and align resources. Additionally, this document creates a point-in-time reference to compare to future goals and achievements in this arena for our residents.

With Polk Vision as the lead collaborator and continued supporter of behavioral health initiatives throughout the county, Polk County was the recipient of a Congressional Directive Spending Award. These funds support the Behavioral Health Team’s strategic plan and include items such as training opportunities for Polk County Public Schools staff, the May 1st community behavioral health symposium, a school-based behavioral health assessment, an upcoming awareness and behavioral health normalization campaign and advocacy responsiveness.

Behavioral Health



“

There is no true health without good mental health. It is a joy to work with such a diverse and engaged group of stakeholders and to move forward initiatives that are breaking down silos, improving lives, decreasing stigma and improving access to services. Our goals as the behavioral health team co-chairs will continue to be to have a positive impact on the quality of life in Polk County by improving our collective mental health and the resources our neighbors and loved ones deserve. Thank you all for being a part of the collective conversation on mental health.

-Alice Nuttall, Associate Vice President of Behavioral Health Services, Lakeland Regional Health, Behavioral Health Team Co-Chair

-Holly Vida, Behavioral Health Program Manager, Health & Human Services Division, Polk County Board of County Commissioners Behavioral Health Team Co-Chair

”

A grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, funds 100 percent (\$123,672) of costs for this program.



In the fall of 2023, Polk Vision in collaboration with Polk County BoCC produced “Shaping the Future of Opioid Abatement in Polk County. This event aided in the development of a targeted strategic plan to prioritize spending of opioid abatement funds. The plan will benefit Polk County residents by increasing behavioral health services and access to addiction treatment.

Behavioral/Mental Health Professionals

(per 100,000 population)

Year	Polk County	Florida
2022-2023	77.9	121.8

(Florida Department of Health, FL Health Charts)

Involuntary Examinations/Baker Acts

(per 100,000 population)

Year	Polk County	Florida
2022-2023	660	523

(Florida Department of Health, FL Health Charts)

Suicide Deaths

(per 100,000 population)

Year	Polk County	Florida
2020-2022	13.3	13.6

(Florida Department of Health, FL Health Charts)

Behavioral Health Team Roster

ALICE NUTTALL

Team Co-Chair
Lakeland Regional Health

HOLLY VIDA

Team Co-Chair
Polk County BoCC

CHRISTY APISA

United Way of Central Florida

DR. INGRID ATILES

Central Florida Health Care

SHIRLEY BALOGH

United Way of Central Florida

LORI BEISNER

Polk County BoCC

LEANN BENNETT

Polk County Public Schools

DAVID BERRY

The Mission of Winter Haven

GWINNELL BRANT, D.S.L.

Polk County Sheriff's Office

KYLIA CARSWELL

Polk County Public Schools

DR. SAIRAH CHACHAD

Lakeside Pediatrics

DENNIS CHILDRESS

Lake Wales Care Center

ANDREA CLONTZ

Polk County BoCC

LATASHA COHEN

Central Florida Behavioral Health Network

DEBORAH COZZETTI

Talbot House Ministries

CAPTAIN LARRY DAVIS

Polk County Sheriff's Office

KATHY DOBSON

Planned Parenthood

DANICA JOAN DOCKERY

Kids Need Both, Inc.

COURTNEY DURDEN

State Attorney's Office Tenth Judicial Circuit

BARBARA ERICKSON

Harrison School for the Arts Parents' Association

DONNA EVANECKY

Polk County Sheriff's Office

BRENDA EVELYN

The Graceful Hope Foundation

TERESA EVEN

BayCare Health Systems

GENE FULTZ

Greater Grace Outreach Ministries of Florida

TRACY GREY

Heartland for Children

ANTOINETTE HAGLEY

Cove Behavioral Health

ROBIN HAIGHT

Polk County Public Schools

LISA HARDER

Tax Collector's Office for Polk County

DEBORAH HIX, PH.D.

Keiser University

DR. JOY JACKSON

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

JOY JOHNSON

Polk County BoCC

HEATHER KAUFFMAN

Tri-County Human Services

RITA LANGDALE

Hope Restored Counseling of Florida

JENNA LEVINE

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

ANNIE MARSIGLIA

Gospel, Inc.

WAYNE McCARTY

City of Auburndale

DESIREE MEATON FRANCISCO

Cove Behavioral Health

MARYBETH MOORE

Polk County BoCC

JESSICA NAPOLEON

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

DEANNA OBREGON

Cove Behavioral Health

SAMUEL PICARD

BayCare Health Systems

ANTIONETTE POLLARD

Pieces to Peace Counseling

SHERRIE PRATT

Central Florida Health Care

DR. YESENIA RAMOS

Lakeside Pediatrics

ALLISON RAPP

Tampa Bay Thrives

ASHLEY RECKORD

Tri-County Human Services

CLAIRE RICE

BayCare Health Systems

BOB RIHN

Tri-County Human Services

LUIS RIVAS

Central Florida Behavioral Health Network

JASON SAFFELS

Central Florida Behavioral Health Network

TERRI SALTZMAN

Polk County BoCC

DENISSE SANTOS

Polk County Public Schools

BRIAN SEELY

Gospel, Inc.

SHARANDA SIPE

Intercoastal Healthcare Consulting

AMBER SMITH

AdventHealth

KRISTEN SMITH

BayCare Health Systems

LAUREN SPRINGFIELD

Lakeland Regional Health

DARLING ST. JEAN

Total Life Health Center

TORI STONE

Polk County Sheriff's Office

JODY STREUSSNIG

Florida Gulf Coast Alzheimer's Association

BIANCA STRUDWICK

BayCare Health Systems

DR. YADIRA TORRES

Central Florida Health Care

CHIEF CHRIS VELASQUEZ

Lake Wales Police Department

MORGAN VOLPE

City of Winter Haven

STEVE WARNER, Ed.D.

Polk State College Foundation

JENNIFER WEBB

Live Tampa Bay

LARRY WILLIAMS

Peace River Center

MORGAN WILLIS

Lake Wales Charter School

AMANDA WILSON

Florida Department of Children and Families

AMBER WINKIS

HCA Florida Poinciana Hospital

ANGELA WOLOWIC

Polk County Public Schools

Food Security Council



Vision

Polk County will have a Quality of Life that encourages diverse backgrounds to live in harmony while developing physically, spiritually, mentally, and culturally, within a healthy and safe environment.

The **Polk County Food Security Council's** purpose is to align private, charitable and government food programs and resources to effectively ensure that everyone in our community has equitable access to sufficient quantities of consistently available, healthy, nutritious food. The Council works to achieve its mission through innovative thought leadership and the implementation of strategically aligned hunger relief activities aimed at achieving sustained improvement. The Council strengthens communication and collaboration between public and private groups working to increase food security in Polk County.

The development of sub-committees allows the Council as a whole to address issues more completely. Each Council member is asked to serve on one committee.

- **Agriculture:** The Agriculture sub-committee researches current local food systems that address food insecurity and catalogs options for residents and community-based food distributors. The committee works to connect local agriculture producers to food insecurity issues that may be addressed within Polk County and neighboring counties.



Did you know?

The 2022 Overall Food Insecurity Rate in
Polk County was 13.7%

The Child Food Insecurity Rate was 20.8%

(Map the Meal Gap, Feeding America)

- **Disaster Preparedness and Response:**
The Disaster Preparedness sub-committee educates itself on food resources and assets made available during times of disaster, researches and documents successes and challenges of past responses, identifies increased capacity of storage and transportation resources during events and is available to work closely with Polk Emergency Management in assisting where needed both pre- and post-event.

The **2nd Annual Hunger Action Summit** on September 13, 2023, was hosted at the UF/IFAS Extension Office, Stuart Center in Bartow. Attendees received reports from Feeding Tampa Bay, the Florida Department of Health in Florida, and Polk County Public Schools. Keynote speaker Dr. Karla Shelnutt is a Professor and Associate Dean of Extension Engagement in the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida. Her research focuses on addressing food insecurity, developing evaluation tools to assess the healthfulness of neighborhoods with low income, and assessing the impact of nutrition curriculum on health behaviors.

Food Security Team Roster

ROD CROWLEY, Ed.D.
Team Co-Chair
United Way of Central Florida

NICOLE WALKER
Team Co-Chair
UF/IFas Extension Polk County

BENJAMIN ABBOTT
Multiply Christian Church

JANE MURPHY
City of Haines City

TONYA AKWETHEY
Healthy Start Coalition

MARCIA ANDRESEN
Polk County BoCC

BERNICE BASS
Florida Department of Health in Polk
County

KATHERINE BATES
Nutrition Reset

LORI BEISNER
Polk County BoCC

DAVID BERRY
The Mission of Winter Haven

STEVE BISSENETTE
V.I.S.T.E.

KELLEY BRICKFIELD
Feeding Tampa Bay

LESLYN CAMPBELL DIAZ
Polk County BoCC

MICHELLE CRAWFORD
Yoga with Michelle Crawford

KATHY DOBSON
Planned Parenthood

DEENA DRUMGO
City of Lake Wales

ASHLEY DUKES
Polk County Public Schools

KATE FINCHER
Lakeland Volunteers in Medicine

LORI FRIERS
Hardee Help Center

ELIZABETH GONZALEZ
Lake Wales Care Center

ALISON GROOMS
Advent Health

FATMEH HAFER
Polk County Public Schools

MELISSA HILLIGOSS
The Freedom Tour

CLAUDINE HUMBER
Florida Children's Museum

TERESA KELLY
Health Council of West Central Florida

JENNA LEVINE
Florida Department of Health in Polk
County

ERIN MARTINEZ
Talbot House Ministries

MEGHAN MAPES
Baycare Health Systems

JUNE MAY
United Way of Central Florida

JESSICA NAPOLEON
Florida Department of Health in Polk
County

ANDREA NIKOLAI
UF/IFAS Extension Polk

KASANDRA NOEL
Central Florida Health Care

CAPTAIN DONALD NUNNERY
Winter Haven Police Department

ANGIE PATTISON
P.E.A.C.E.

JESSICA PEASE
United Way of Central Florida

EMILIE QUAM
Lake Wales Care Center

ROB QUAM
Lake Wales Care Center

DALE RHODES
The Gathering Place

AMY ROYAL
kidsPACK, Inc.

TERRI SALTZMAN
Polk County BoCC

ROSALBA SEMIDY
St. Vincent de Paul, Western District

JULIE SING
Advent Health

CHRISTIE SITEK
Frostproof Care Center

DAMARIA SMITH
Healthy Start Coalition of Hardee, Highlands
& Polk Counties, Inc

SIERRA TILL
Polk County Public Schools

JILL VAILLANCOURT
Hardee Help Center

ISMARY VENTO
Health Council of West Central Florida

HOLLY VIDA
Polk County BoCC

STEVE WARNER, Ed.D.
Polk State College Foundation

JAMES WESLEY NALL
Health Council of West Central Florida

SAMANTHA WHOLLEY
Feeding Tampa Bay

BOBBY WILLIAMS
The Freedom Tour

PAUL WOMBLE
Polk County BoCC

Polk County Food Security Council has been a tremendous asset to the Freedom Tour; it has helped to ensure that we are targeting neighborhoods that are in greatest need and helping those living in food deserts. It has also helped us identify where services are being given so we do not duplicate services. The greatest asset for us has been networking and bringing all the resources together to help the community."

- Melissa Hilligoss, The Freedom Tour

“

A comprehensive, system of government that is effective, efficient, diverse and responsive to the basic needs of its citizens.

”

Government

Government

Advisory Council



Vision

A comprehensive, system of government that is effective, efficient, diverse and responsive to the basic needs of its citizens.

The Government Advisory LEADS Team serves to bring together all levels of local government to create more awareness, cooperation and support of Polk Vision and the initiatives of its LEADS Teams. This includes providing review and guidance on foreseen and unforeseen opportunities that intersect with a strategy or tactic impacting the potential success of a goal established by a Polk Vision LEADS Team. The Government Team also works to effectively engage citizens by producing a series of educational offerings each year, such as the Mayors Roundtable, State of the County and other topically relevant workshops.

2023 Mayors Roundtable

For the 13th consecutive year, the Polk Vision Government Team hosted a half-day roundtable for the Mayors of Polk County. This unique event allows the mayors to discuss topics critical to their communities and the county as a whole. Mayors from 12 of the county's 17 municipalities and Board of County Commissioners Chair George Lindsay participated in this year's event, which was moderated by Katie Worthington Decker of the Lakeland Economic Development Council. Topics of discussion included the consequences of rapid population growth on infrastructure, including roads and transportation, and water usage and conservation. The 13th Annual Mayors Roundtable was hosted by Polk State College.

2024 State of the County

The State of the County Update, held in April of 2024, brought together residents from across Polk County to hear from the Board of County Commissioners Chair Bill Braswell and County Manager Bill Beasley. Superintendent Frederick Heid and School Board Chair Dr. William Allen gave an update on Polk County Public Schools, and Dr. Joy Jackson gave a community health update from the Florida Department of Health in Polk County.

Topics addressed included investments in infrastructure, traffic congestion (particularly the northern corridor of US Highway 27), roads expansion, public safety and the need to increase capacity in order to keep pace with a growing population. This year's State of the County was hosted by the Polk County Sheriff's Office.

Speakers at the 2024 State of the County



Dr. William Allen
Chair
Polk County School Board



Frederick Heid
Superintendent
Polk County Public Schools



Bill Braswell
Chair
Polk County BoCC



Dr. Joy Jackson
Director
Florida Department of
Health in Polk County



Bill Beasley
County Manager
Polk County BoCC



Hosted by Polk State College Center for Public Safety, the 2023 Mayors Roundtable included Mayors from across the county as well as the Chairman of the Polk County BoCC. The discussion was moderated by Katie Worthington Decker, Lakeland Economic Development Council.

Government Team Roster

REBEKAH HURD

Chair
AdventHealth

GARY BALL, COMMISSIONER

City of Bartow

STACY BUTTERFIELD

Polk County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

BETSY CLEVELAND

Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce

KATHY DOBSON

Planned Parenthood

CHIEF IAN FLOYD

Polk County Sheriff's Office

ASHLEIGH MILLS

Tax Collector's Office for Polk County

TRACY MOUNCEY

Tracy Mouncey & Associates

MATT MUCCI

AT&T

HEATHER REUTER

City of Winter Haven

CINDY RODRIGUEZ

Southwest Florida Water Management District

CHRIS RUDOLPH

Tax Collector's Office for Polk County

BREANNA SMITH

White Paper Consulting, Inc.

KIM STENGER

Office of Polk County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

CHIEF TERRY STORIE

City of Auburndale Police Department

MICHELLE YODONIS

Office of Polk County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

“

Citizens who actively learn,
collaborate and engage across
both public and private sectors to
ensure that Polk County continues
to advance and prosper.

”

Civic Engagement

Leadership Polk

As the only countywide leadership development program in Polk County, Leadership Polk is comprised of individuals who have demonstrated a high level of civic engagement in their local community. Started in 2007, the program brings together accomplished leaders from across the county with the goal of developing a diverse network of resourceful, informed, and proactive visionaries committed to building a more vibrant future for our community.

Over the course of ten months, the program immerses participants in an inspiring and enlightening curriculum that examines critical issues that impact our region. Leadership Polk is timely, topically relevant, and dynamic and exposes participants to a broad range of perspectives through site visits, facilitated conversations, and experiential learning. Most importantly, lasting relationships are forged with engaged, cross-sector leaders from all over Polk County.

Highlights

- 461 participants have graduated from the program
- 13 of the 17 municipalities have been represented
- 41 industries have been represented
- 11% of participants represent a diverse minority population
- 47% of participants identify as female



Class XVII at Publix Field - Joker Marchant Stadium in Lakeland during Lakeland Day. The class took a behind-the-scenes tour of the Detroit Tigers training facilities before stepping out onto the field for a picture.



Class members learned about Polk County's agricultural history and future during a visit to Southern Citrus Nurseries on Northeast Polk Day.



Exploring public transportation options during a walking tour of Downtown Lake Wales on Southeast Polk Day.

Leadership Polk Alumni

The Alumni Association is committed to remaining a strong and relevant resource for its members while also advancing the work of Polk Vision. Alumni members are encouraged to uphold the purpose of Polk Vision and, through their actions, make a positive impact on the economic health, leadership, and quality of life in the community.

We truly believe:

- The Leadership Polk experience should be the beginning of a journey of intensified awareness, interest, concern and pride in our communities.
- Membership in the Alumni Association will continue to assist you in advancing your goals and objectives as an investment for professional, civic and personal development.
- Through relationships with colleagues who share similar involvement, commitment, and passion, Alumni will discover avenues for Polk County to become an even greater place to live, learn, work, and play.

“

The Leadership Polk Alumni Association provides me with numerous opportunities to remain involved, informed, and engaged in relevant countywide issues and concerns. Through this program, I am connected to a diverse group of civic-minded professionals and passionate public servants, and I am able to forge meaningful relationships with them. Working together, we are stronger leaders who can help create an even more positive impact within Polk County.

It's truly an honor to serve in a leadership capacity through the Leadership Polk Alumni Association.

-Jeanette Crowley, Director, Strategic Planning & Partnerships, Polk County Public Schools, Leadership Polk Alumni Advisory Council Chair

”



Alumni members joined Leadership Polk Class XVII for Breakfast with the School Board during County Government Day in April.



In January, the Alumni Association hosted a Leadership Lunch and Learn at Lake Crago Outdoor Recreation Complex in Lakeland. Facilitated by Emily Rogers with Emily Rogers Consulting + Coaching, the program focused on creating intelligent change in our communities.

Alumni Advisory Council

JEANETTE CROWLEY
Chair
Polk County Public Schools
Class XI

DEENA DRUMGO
Programs & Events Chair
City of Lake Wales
Class IV

MARC ZIMMERMAN
Vice-Chair
Visit Central Florida
Class VII

GINNY AYCOCK
Boring Business Systems
Class XII

SHAWN SHERROUSE
Immediate Past Chair
City of Lakeland
Class IV

STACY CAMPBELL-DOMINECK
CareerSource Polk
Class I

CHAD BARRON
Treasurer
Bartow Ford
Class XV

MJ CARNEVALE
City of Winter Haven
Class IX

PAMELA CRAVEN, Ph.D.
Learning Resource Center
Class II

LAUREN HINTON
Polk County Public Schools
Class IV

JEE HOON KIM
City of Auburndale
Class XIV

ILEANA KNISS
United Way of Central Florida
Class VIII

TERRIE LOBB
TLC Catering
Class XII

CODY MCGHEE
City of Auburndale
Class X

CINDY RODRIGUEZ
Southwest Florida Water
Management District
Class XII

DONNA SHEEHAN
Community Volunteer
Class IV

**BRIAN YATES, MAYOR
PRO TEM**
City of Winter Haven
Class XVI

Leadership Polk

Youth Leadership Polk is a dynamic, countywide leadership training program designed to cultivate and empower young leaders by providing expanded learning opportunities. Through this program, Youth Leadership Polk graduates strengthen their leadership and employability skills, better preparing them to make informed decisions about their futures and assume leadership positions of their own – all while deepening their understanding of and pride in the history and culture of Polk County.

Youth Leadership Polk Class VI was comprised of 11th and 12th-grade students who completed a rigorous curriculum throughout the 2023-2024 school year. Students learned components of environmental responsibility, government and public policy, history and culture, community health and public safety during an experiential program week, monthly soft skills lessons, job shadowing experience and capstone project.

Members of the Leadership Polk Alumni Association and other dedicated business leaders from across the county volunteered as guest speakers, hosts and instructors. At graduation, the Leadership Polk Alumni Association awarded \$500.00 scholarships to four of the graduating students.

“

Creating a long-lasting impact begins with the young people within our community and Youth Leadership Polk exemplifies this fact. Allowing our students to see the endless opportunities within Polk County while emphasizing leadership skills across all job sectors continues to prove to be a pivotal experience in students' transition into their young adulthood. As I benefit and flourish from the skills taught and connections created through Youth Leadership Polk, I am reminded how privileged and honored the students of Polk County are to have access to the remarkable Youth Leadership Polk program.

-Madalyn Vida
Youth Leadership Polk Class VI Co-Chair

”



During their experiential learning week, Class VI experienced everything from a tour of the Suntrax facility in Auburndale to a behind-the-scenes look at filming PGTV programming.



Class VI worked on building 21st Century Skills, such as resume-building and interviewing, during monthly workshops throughout the 2023-2024 school year.

Inside PCPS

Inside PCPS is a countywide leadership program developed in partnership between Polk Vision and Polk County Public Schools. Over the course of ten months, participants are immersed in a program designed to enlighten and demystify the complexities of our school district by answering critical questions, such as:

- How do you provide a high-quality education to more than 116,000 students every day?
- What does it take to balance an annual budget of nearly \$2.5 billion?
- How do you manage a bus fleet that clocks over 60,000 miles per day?
- How are schools caring for the “whole child” and addressing the social, emotional, and physical needs of students?

Fifty-eight community leaders have completed the program thus far, all of whom have gained a new appreciation for the challenges and triumphs of one of the largest school districts in the nation.

“

The Inside PCPS program provides participants unique insights to the inter-workings of our schools, the amazing things they are doing, the challenges they face in the short and long term, and the opportunities for the community to engage as partners and advocates. Knowledge is power, and the more knowledgeable we are, the more powerful we can collectively be in ensuring the brightest future for our students and school professionals.

-T. Michael Stavres, City Manager, City of Winter Haven
Inside PCPS Class II Chair

”



INSIDE PCPS

A PCPS/POLK VISION PROGRAM



During Day 5, class members had a chance to interact with Auburndale Central preschool students after learning about the District's preschool program.



Members of Class III reporting for lunch duty at Lena Vista Elementary in Auburndale.



Purcell Elementary in Mulberry hosted a group of Class III members so they could shadow the principal for the day.



Class III pauses for a photo while taking a tour of Kathleen Elementary School in Lakeland.

Leadership Course

The Public Service Leadership Course is designed to carry forward the legacy and outstanding tradition of the civic, public and non-profit leadership that has made Polk County a distinctive, prosperous and vibrant community. This course was created for leaders interested in learning more about ways to impact public policy and enhance their effectiveness as engaged citizens. Through the completion of this course, class members are equipped with the knowledge to deepen their level of public service, which may include civic, public or nonprofit leadership or serving on government boards and commissions.

Facilitated by Mark R. Mills, President of Mills Strategic Communications, participants were guided through four full-day sessions focusing on defining, communicating and implementing practical, personalized preparation and positioning strategies to accelerate the difference they can make in civic, nonprofit, or public leadership.

Funding provided by a grant from the Bell-Barnett Family Fund within the GiveWell Community Foundation.



There will always be challenges, expectations, and demands on public service, as it continues to evolve. The Public Service Leadership Course equips leaders in Polk County to meet these changing landscapes. This course is a great opportunity for Polk County leaders to engage in conversations regarding their future endeavors, by gaining wisdom, and knowledge from the professionals in those fields. The course was very informative, very well presented, plus enjoyable. I continue to utilize the strategies and tools provided to me in my workplace, and on the boards I serve on.

-Cyndi Jantomaso, MEDP, Haines City Economic Development Council Inc. 2024 Participant



Participants learned how to define their differences and address the personal, professional and political obstacles that could stand in their way during Day 1.



Participants heard from County Commissioner Martha Santiago, Ed.D., on Day 3.



The program ended with participants learning how to implement engagement plans and step up to the starting line of their leadership opportunity ready to realize results.

Civic

Engagement



Vision

Citizens who actively learn, collaborate and engage across both public and private sectors to ensure that Polk County continues to advance and prosper.

Number of active registered voters in
Polk County as of July 12, 2024:

180,076

Republican Party of Florida

133,278

Florida Democratic Party

12,751

Minor Party

114,204

No Party Affiliation

440,309

Totals

General Election

(11/3/2020)

Registered Voters

471,241

Ballots Cast

345,580

Voter Turnout: **73.33%**

(Polk County Supervisor of Elections)

2024 Presidential Preference Primary

Registered Voters

177,713

Ballots Cast

38,205

Voter Turnout: **21.5%**

(Polk County Supervisor of Elections)

2024 April Municipal Election

Registered Voters

38,549

Ballots Cast

5,739

Voter Turnout: **14.89%**

(Polk County Supervisor of Elections)

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead, American Cultural Anthropologist, Author, and Speaker (1901-1978)

