



Polk Vision brings partners together to identify priorities, create solutions, align resources, and take action to achieve the Community Vision for Polk County.

Polk Vision was established in 2003 to bring residents together with public, private, and civic leaders to examine and address critical issues facing Polk County. Following months of research and collaboration, the countywide Community Vision was adopted in August of 2004.

Over the years, Polk Vision has continued to serve at the forefront of identifying and building awareness of both current and emerging issues, prioritizing resource gaps, coordinating inter-entity alignment, and encouraging accountability.

In 2023, amidst unprecedented growth, it was evident the time had come to embark upon a thorough and rigorous update to the Community Vision that was both responsive to the current dynamics and addressed the needs for the future.

Thousands of residents were engaged from across the county through oneon-one interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Through this process, an updated long-term Community Vision emerged which identified strategies and measurable outcomes towards achieving our desired future.

In June 2024, research results were reviewed, and the updated Community Vision was approved during a joint session of the Polk Vision Board of Directors and its Operating Board.

On August 20, 2024, during a duly noticed regular meeting of the Polk County Board of County Commissioners, the updated Community Vision was unanimously endorsed.

Polk Vision continues to provide central coordination to align the work of hundreds of volunteers working to achieve the shared Vision for Polk County.

Access the Community Vision at www.polkvision.com

Polk Vision Report 2025

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Angela Falconetti, Ph.D. Immediate Past Chair President Polk State College



Teresa MartinezSecretary
President
Institute of Spanish Communication



Danielle DrummondTreasurer
President & CEO
Lakeland Regional Health



Kim Long Executive Director Polk Vision, Inc.



Sean Malott Chair President/CEO Central Florida Development Council

Polk Vision offers a broad perspective in its service to all of Polk County, leading collaborative initiatives focused on strengthening key areas of the community. The organization's staff and alignment teams demonstrate an unwavering

commitment to enhancing the overall quality of life for all

residents. It is a privilege to serve as a board member and to

contribute, in a small way, to advancing Polk County toward





Bill Beasley County Manager Polk County BoCC



Ashley Bell Barnett Community Volunteer



Stacy Butterfield
Clerk of the Circuit Court and
County Comptroller, Polk County



Christina Criser Jackson
President & CEO
United Way of Central Florida



Brad DantzlerDantzler & Stroud
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Frederick HeidSuperintendent
Polk County Public Schools



Dr. Joy JacksonFlorida Department of
Health in Polk County



Grady JuddSheriff
Polk County Sheriff's Office



Greg LittletonCEO & President
Citizens Bank & Trust



Lisa Miller
Polk County School Board
Member, District 7
Polk County Public Schools



Alex Nikdel President CNP



Sean ParkerAttorney
Boswell & Dunlap LLP



Christine Samuel Community Volunteer



Martha Santiago, Ed.D. Commissioner Polk County BoCC



Shawn SherrouseCity Manager
City of Lakeland



Marc Zimmerman Senior Economic Development Manager Visit Central Florida

Polk Vision brings people together to solve problems and improve life in our community. By working as a team and forming strong partnerships, we make real progress in important areas that benefit everyone in Polk County. As Chair-Elect, I'm proud to help continue this important work, creating a future where everyone has a chance to succeed.



Nick Plott Chair-Elect Manager of Government Advocacy AdventHealth



Message from the **Executive Director**

Over the years, we have worked continuously to preserve the fidelity of a shared Vision for Polk County. We intentionally bring together individuals from across the county – each bringing their unique perspective, knowledge, and resources to serve on action focused LEADS Teams. These Teams are powerful cross-sector collaborations working towards systemic solutions to Polk County's most pressing challenges. Sustainable change takes time; short-term fixes do not address long-term problems.

The Polk County community has proven that it is willing to do what it takes to change the trajectory for today's citizens as well as future generations. We are actively addressing persistent issues like literacy, college and career readiness, community health, and public safety. But we are also celebrating the rise in high school graduation rates; the increase in the district school grade; the formation of a new collaborative council dedicated to improving the health and well-being of our students; and the widespread expansion of broadband services to underserved areas of the county.

All of this is made possible through the support and generosity of our funders; the guidance of our Board of Directors; the tenacity of our Operating Board and LEADS Teams; the willingness of community stakeholders to join together; and the dedication of our staff.

On the following pages you will find a high-level report on the contributions of hundreds of volunteers and dozens of businesses and organizations working in alignment toward a shared Vision of our County. Let us continue to do the important work in achieving a brighter future for residents - with an excellent education for our children, a vibrant economy, and a safe and healthy future for generations to come.

Thank you for your support of our stewardship.

Kim N LongExecutive Director
Polk Vision

I can do things you cannot, You can do things
I cannot; Together we can do great things.

-Mother Theresa

Our Staff



Kim LongExecutive Director



Tara Watson, M.Ed. Operations Manager



Amy NickersonEducation Coordinator



Ana SaavedraProgram Manager

Steve Bissonnette

President VISTE

Naomi Boyer, Ph.D.

Senior Vice President, Digital Transformation Education Design Lab

Amy Bratten, Ed.D.

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Director, Family and Community Engagement Polk County Public Schools

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Community Liaison, Central Region Polk County Public Schools

Betsy Cleveland

President & CEO Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce

Community Liaison, South Lakeland Region Polk County Public Schools

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Rebekah Hurd

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Joy Johnson

Administrator, Health and Human Services Division Polk County BoCC

Ryan Kordek

Executive Director Polk TPO

Jenna Levine

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

Nelson Marquez, Ed.D.

President & CEO Webber International University

Lori Martini

Vice President & Chief Philanthropic Officer GiveWell Community Foundation

Erica Morse

Community Liaison, South Region Polk County Public Schools



As Chair of the Polk Vision Operating Board, I am truly enthusiastic about the opportunities that lie ahead for our community. While Polk County continues to face challenges, what sets us apart is the way our leaders, residents, and partners come together with determination and a shared commitment to progress.

Through Polk Vision, we have seen the power of collaboration between the public and private sectors, and the meaningful impact it can have on our community. The recently adopted core values and tactical plans, developed over the past two years, are now being put into action with the goal of elevating Polk County and shaping a stronger future.

To those who have supported this work in the past, your continued involvement is more important than ever. Whether by rejoining one of our Operating Board teams or participating in our Leadership programs, your insight, passion, and leadership are essential to our shared success. Polk County holds tremendous potential. By working together, we can transform that potential into lasting progress for everyone who calls this place home.



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





It is an honor to serve as the newly appointed Chair-Elect of Polk Vision's Operating Board. Polk Vision is an organization that exemplifies what can be accomplished when a community comes together with shared purpose and direction. I am inspired by the collective commitment of our partners—from local government and businesses to nonprofits and individual citizens—all working in unison to positively improve the overall quality of life in Polk County. As we move forward, I am dedicated to fostering collaboration, strengthening accountability, and championing the priorities that matter most to our community. Together, we will ensure that Polk County not only meets its aspirations but exceeds them.



Lindsay Zimmerman, MPA, CFREOperating Board Chair-Elect
Senior VP & Chief Operating Officer
Central Florida Development Council



Jessica Napoleon

Public Health Planner 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 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

Lindsav Persohn, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Literacy Studies University of South Florida

Brittanie Ramsey, Ed.D.

Community Liaison, Northeast Region Polk County Public Schools

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Lauren Springfield

Director, Community Health Lakeland Regional Health

Kim Stenger

Courts Division Director
Office of Polk County Clerk of the
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Chad Tagtow

Senior Vice President & Chief Innovation Officer Citizens Bank & Trust

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 & Executive Director Polk State College Foundation

Linda Williams, Ph.D.

Director Learning & Organizational Development Lakeland Regional Health

Julie Womble

Community Development Director City of Auburndale

Sara Beth Wyatt

Polk County School Board Member, District 4 Polk County Public Schools



Operating Board Strategic Operations

Organizational Structure

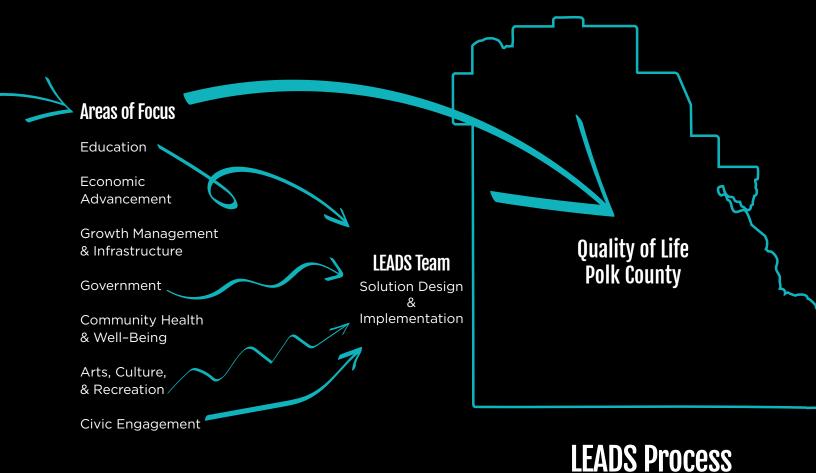
Polk Vision is governed by a Board of Directors which oversees the Operating Board in its leadership of Teams working collaboratively on a range of complex issues within designated Areas of Focus.

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 Vision 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.





As facilitators of a countywide 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 countywide 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.



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.



Fconomic 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.



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.



Government

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



Community Health & 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.



Arts, Culture, & Recreation

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

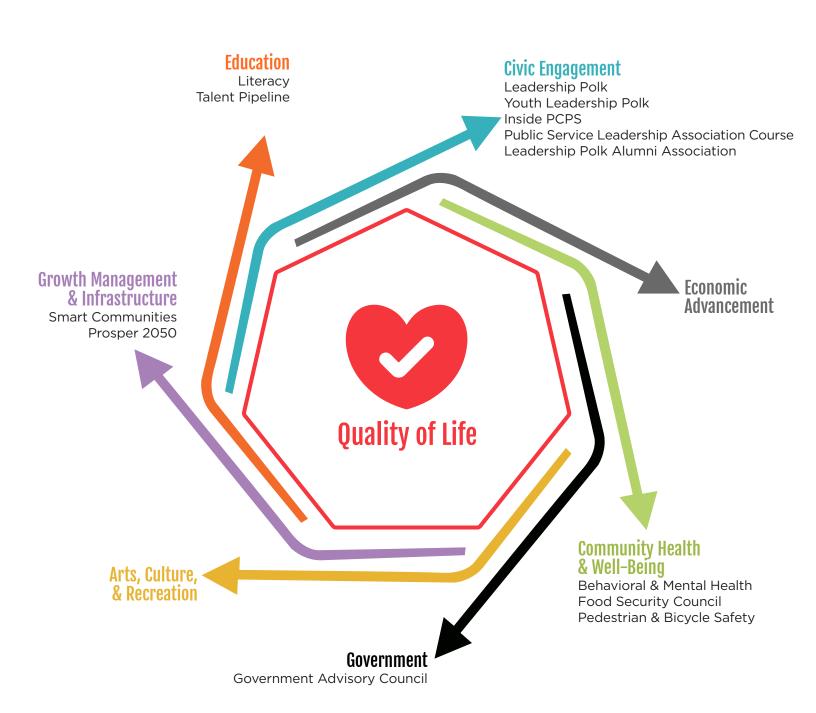


Civic Engagement

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

2024 - 2025 Leads Team Progress Reports

Every LEADS Team is focused on achieving long-term outcomes as identified within the Community Vision. Team members are assigned an issue, select relevant strategies, and develop tactics to achieve measurable improvements.





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 Quality of Life LEADS Team is a collaborative group of leaders and organizations working together to improve the well-being of everyone in Polk County. Representing diverse sectors ranging from healthcare and education to faith-based and nonprofit services, this Team is committed to creating a more connected and thriving community.

The Team explored a wide range of topics throughout the year with the goal to raise awareness of existing resources, identify gaps, and support efforts that move our community forward. Through this ongoing exploration, the Team continues to strengthen connections and champion alignment to enhance the Quality of Life for all Polk County residents.

Disaster Recovery

In the aftermath of Hurricane Milton, the Team supported organizations leading efforts to provide both disaster relief and the development of long-term Disaster

LEFT: (L-R) Kim Long, Executive Director, Polk Vision; Guy Lalonde Jr., Commissioner, City of Lakeland; and Christina Criser Jackson, President and CEO with Dr. Rod Crowley, COO of United Way of Central Florida



Steve Bissonnette

Team Co-Chair VISTE

Joy Johnson

Team Co-Chair Polk County BoCC

Ben Abbott

Multiply Christian Church

Tonva Akwetev

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

Andrea Anderson

Polk for Recovery

Marcia Andresen

Polk County BoCC

Cauney Bamburg

ROAR Florida

Katherine Bates

Nutrition Reset

Leon Battle

One More Child

Brad Beatty

Heart for Winter Haven

Caroline Benitez

Polk County BoCC

Samuel Berrien, Mayor City of Fort Meade

Donna Bledsoe

Multiply

Christian Church

Whittney Borem Dream Center

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Alice Brown

Polk County BoCC

Kylia Carswell

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Jennifer Codo-Salisbury

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

Pam Craven, Ph.D.

Learning Resource Center

Liz Craven

Pro-Ad Media

Jack Guffey

ROAR Florida

Hannah Hardin

Parker Street Ministries

Bettie Harrell Jones

The Way at Inwood **Baptist Church**

Claudine Humber

Florida Children's Museum

Recovery solutions.

Social Services

In December of 2024 Team members gathered for an event in Eloise held at the Johnny & Freda Brooks Resource Center. Access to a broad range of free services were available, including health screenings. Attendees were provided a box of groceries and selected from a variety of household and personal care items, books, games, and toys.

We are excited to engage community stakeholders to put quality of life at the forefront of everything we do and foster collaboration among diverse perspectives that will lead to new insights and approaches.

Steve Bissonnette

President Volunteers in Service to the Elderly (VISTE) Quality of Life Team Co-Chair

Joy Johnson

Administrator Health and Human Services Division Polk County BoCC, Quality of Life Team Co-Chair





ABOVE: (L-R) Bobby Williams, Founder & President, The Freedom Tour; Caroline Benitez, Community Health Care Planner, Polk County BoCC; Kim Long Executive Director, Polk Vision; Terry Saltzman, Grants & Community Investment Manager, Polk County BoCC.



During the 2024-2025 school year, the PCPS Hearth Project identified

nearly 4,850 students experiencing homelessness

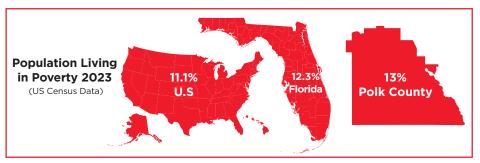
down from nearly 5,100 homeless students identified in the previous school year

(Polk County Public Schools' Hearth Project)

Youth and Community



ABOVE: Team members were given an exclusive tour of the Cleveland Heights campus of the YMCA of West Central Florida by CEO, TJ Wright (L). Each year the Y assists more than 200,000 youth, adults, and seniors improve their health and learn new skills.



Taylor Freeman

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

Sonia Glisson

Lakeland Volunteers in Medicine

Merissa Green

City of Haines City

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

Piece of Zen Holistic **Health Services**

Lake Wales

Emilie Quam

Care Center

Rob Quam Lake Wales

Care Center

Brittanie Ramsey, Ed.D

Polk County

Public Schools

Katie Roders Turner Family Healthcare

Foundation

Ben Ruch

Polk County Public Schools

Terri Saltzman

Polk County BoCC

Stephen Savarimuthu

Lake Wales Care Center

Michelle Thurner

Office of Polk County Tobacco Free Florida Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

Brenda Torres

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Ismary Vento

Health Council of West Central Florida

Holly Vida

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Nicole Walker

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Steve Warner, Ed.D.

Polk State College Foundation

Kai Jenkins Live Tampa Bay

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

Brenda Luna Family Healthcare

Foundation

June May

United Way of

Central Florida

Tim Mitchell

Parker Street Ministries

Rene Montgomery Golden Light

Trauma Recovery

Maria Cruz

Talbot House Ministries

Barbara Erickson Harrison School for the

Arts Parents' Association

Autumn Fenton

Polk County BoCC



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** focuses 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 Team continues to publish the **Literacy Resource Directory**[^] which is the only comprehensive listing of literacy service providers in Polk County. The publication includes quality learning experiences that span tutoring, municipal recreation programs, after-school activities, libraries, and performing arts programs. Each year, the Literacy Team updates content, always seeking to expand the list of providers and range of available resources.

Annual Literacy Summit

The 2nd **Annual Literacy Summit** featured presentations from Polk County Public Schools Superintendent Frederick Heid, and Dr. Marc Hutek of the Early Learning Coalition, who updated attendees about their priorities in serving our youngest learners. USF Professor, Dr. Liz Hadley, was the keynote speaker who shared evidence-based practices for developing oral language.

For the coming year, the Literacy Team will continue to place emphasis on family literacy and early learning supports.



ABOVE: The 2nd Annual Literacy Summit was hosted by the City of Haines City at the Lake Eva Event Center. Attendees connected and worked together to organize community events aimed at sharing literacy and language resources with families across Polk County.

Check Out Polk
Community
Resources Inside!

Information
Activities
Tutoring

View the Literacy Rescource
Directory online at

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

Only 36% of Polk County children entering Kindergarten came to school meeting the expected developmental learning standards.

(Florida Department of Education)



The single most important thing you can do to help a child become a strong reader is to talk with them and read to them every day. These early conversations and stories build the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

directory

Liz Hadley, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Literacy Studies, University of South Florida



[^] **The Literacy Resource Directory** is funded in part by a grant from the George W. Jenkins Fund within GiveWell Community Foundation and through the generosity of Intense Ink Printing.

Early Learning Bridge Pilot

The Early Learning Bridge pilot facilitates collaborations between VPK teachers and Kindergarten teachers to address the complicated gap in kindergarten readiness. Polk Vision, in collaboration with the Early Learning Coalition of Polk County and Polk County Public Schools' Early Childhood Education, is exploring ways to bridge the wide disparity of skills and knowledge among children entering kindergarten, with some arriving well-prepared and others significantly behind.

With support from PCPS school administrators, in-person observations were arranged for private VPK teachers to spend a day with selected highly effective PCPS Kindergarten teachers. While in the classroom, VPK teachers witnessed first-hand the social-emotional milestones that should be met for a successful kindergarten student. These include selfregulation, clear communication of needs, the ability to take direction, and effective peer interaction.

The Early Learning Bridge Pilot results will be presented during the 3rd Annual Literacy Summit in November of 2025.



This project revealed a truly insightful and eye-opening understanding of kindergarten teacher expectations regarding kindergarten readiness. At a time when quantifiable assessment data drives educational performance, this project exposed a tremendous relevance to how social and emotional learning impacts pre-kindergarten children and the necessity of developing a formal vertical articulation between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms.

Marc Hutek, Ed.D.

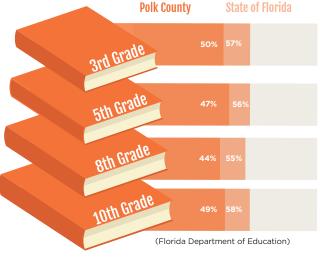
Chief Executive Officer, Early Learning Coalition



LEFT: Literacy Summit attendees received undates from Polk County Public Schools Superintendent, Frederick Heid, and Early Learning Coalition Chief Executive Officer, Marc Hutek, pictured here with Kim Long, Executive Director of Polk Vision.

2024-2025

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



Lindsay Persohn, Ph.D.

Team Chair University of South Florida

Gretchen Ceranic

United Way of Central Florida

Reba Coil

Polk County **Public Schools**

Stacy Davis

Polk County **Public Schools**

Sheri Geiger Paper Pie

Andrea Hagan

Heartland for Children

Jessica Hart

UF/IFAS Extension Polk County

Terri Hubberd

Polk State College

Craig Hosking Maximize Digital Media

Claudine Humber

Florida Children's Museum

Marc Hutek, Ed.D.

Early Learning Coalition of Polk County

Lori Hutto, Ph.D.

Warner University

Cheryl Kelly Early Learning Coalition of Polk County

Jennifer Kovac

Polk County Library Cooperative

Debra Metcalfe

Polk State College

Kris Newman-Lake, Ed.D.

Cypress Junction Montessori

Aleah Pratt

Grace Lutheran School

Gladys Roberts

Polk County Library Cooperative

Ed Smith

Polk State College

Ruth Teets

United Way of Central Florida

Angela Wolowic

Polk County Public Schools

Denice Wright

UF/IFAS Extension Polk County

Workforce Readiness

As one of the fastest-growing areas in the Nation, the Polk County economy requires a pipeline of qualified workers possessing the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the demands of current and emerging industry needs.

Convened in partnership with the **Central Florida Development Council**, the Polk Vision Talent Pipeline Team is committed to creating a pool of well-trained, highly skilled, and credentialed individuals prepared to meet the needs of local employers. This requires collaboration among secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, together with area business and industry leaders.

Polk County is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. Over the next decade it is projected that 65,866 new jobs will be needed to accommodate the expanding population.

Reimagining Educational Career Help

The REACH Act was unanimously approved by the Florida Legislature and signed into law by Governor DeSantis in 2021. In 2023, Senate Bill 240, also known as REACH Act 2.0, became law and expanded opportunities for work-based learning as well as career and technical education. These laws position Florida as the number one state for higher education and advance Florida's goal of leading the nation in workforce education by 2030.

https://careersourceflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/REACH-Act-and-SB240-Overview.pdf

In 2025 the Talent Pipeline Team partnered with CareerSource Polk to advance and align local initiatives by co-convening an Education and Industry Consortium. This Consortium reviews and prioritizes skills needed in key industry sectors, analyzes existing educational training programs for prioritized skills, defines skills training gaps, and approves credentials for inclusion on the State's Master Credentials list.

https://careersourceflorida.com/2023/12/28/2023-workforce-development-accomplishments/



ABOVE: Hosted by Polk State College in March 2025, members of the Education and Industry Consortium attended the first co-convening with the Polk Vision Talent Pipeline Team.

CareerSource Polk's partnership with Polk Vision strengthens workforce development by aligning education with industry needs, enhancing talent pipelines, and fostering innovation. This collaboration drives economic growth, creates student career pathways, and promotes long-term community prosperity - building a stronger, more connected Polk County.

> Stacy Campbell-Domineck President, CareerSource Polk

Amy Bratten, Ed.D.

Team Chair Polk State College

Ana Avala

Southeastern University

Julia Beemer Elite Staffing Partners

Leann Bennett

Polk County **Public Schools**

Kaley Black Polk County Public Schools

Caleb Bloodworth Southeastern University

Dorothea Bogert, Ph.D. Mayor

City of Auburndale

Warren Brown

Polk State College Stacy Campbell-

Domineck CareerSource Polk

Belkis Capeles, Ph.D. Polk State College

> Reba Coil Polk County Public Schools

Patricia Collins, Ed.D. Polk State College

> **Christina Criser-Jackson** United Way of

Central Florida

Takiyah Dixon, Ph.D. Lakeland Chamber of Commerce

Shauna Dykes Junior Achievement of Polk County

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

Lisa Harder Tax Collector's Office for Polk County

> Melissa Konkol Polk County **Public Schools**

Tranice McGriff City of Lakeland



As Chair, I am proud of the Talent Pipeline Team's focus and follow-through over this past year. We met consistently, collaborated intentionally, and delivered meaningful tools to better connect Polk County employers with local talent—advancing outcomes aligned with Polk Vision's goals and building momentum for the future.

Amy Bratten, Ed.D.

Provost, Academic Affairs, Polk State College





Be The Future Be U is a resource created by Polk Vision to support students in identifying and achieving their career goals and also providing parents with helpful information and resources.

https://bethefuturebeu.com/career-insight

Middle School Career Exploration

Polk Vision's **Middle School Career Exploration** project aligns with the school district's Career, Technical and Adult Education and the Office of Acceleration and Innovation. It leverages Polk Vision's vast professional connections in the community to engage students in impactful career exploration. The program supports College and Career Readiness in Polk County Public Schools by exposing 8th graders to career pathways <u>before</u> they enter high school, so they can be more specific when completing a four-year course plan with middle school counselors.

What is Florida College Access Network (FCAN)?

Florida College Access Network partners with leaders from communities across the state to ensure more students achieve an education beyond high school, paving the path to prosperity for Florida families and our state.





ABOVE: Polk Vision Education Coordinator and LCAN Leader, Amy Nickerson, shares college and career readiness resources with Davenport High School students during a College & Career Fair.

Local College Access Network (LCAN)

Local College Access
Networks (LCANs) are
coordinating bodies
committed to furthering
the efforts of the Florida
Access Network (FCAN) at
a community level. These
collaborative networks
work in alignment to
increase college and career
readiness, improve postsecondary access, and
boost completion rates
within their local area.

https://floridacollegeaccess.org

Polk Vision is the designated Local College Access Network for Polk County

Through its Talent Pipeline Team, Polk Vision is concentrating on creating and deepening partnerships between post-secondary advisors and high school college and career counselors. This includes establishing an inventory of opportunities for students to participate in apprenticeships, mentoring, and internships. These activities are aimed at aligning the needs of students and industry, promoting a broad community understanding of the steps leading to career and college readiness, and communicating to businesses and members of the community the educational opportunities in Polk County.

Connie Minich

F.O.R.T.E. Services

Erica Morse Polk County Public Schools

Nikki Morse

Polk County Public Schools

Rusty Mouton

SouthState Bank

Samantha Linder Polk County

Polk County Public Schools

Megan Morrow

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SUN n' FUN Expo & Aerospace Center for Excellence

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Nola Quintanilla

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Carley Regan

Rita Staffing

Ryan Reis Webber International University

Yovan Reyes, Ph.D. Polk State College

Martha Seney Florida Polytechnic University

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Lana Stripling

Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce

Chad Tagtow

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Monique Tubbs Polk County

Polk County Public Schools

Yvonne Velez Polk State College

Laura Webster Polk County Public Schools

Susan Willcockson

Polk County Public Schools

Linda Williams, Ph.D. Lakeland

Lakeland Regional Health

Sara Beth Wyatt

Polk County School Board

Michelle Zamora

Central Florida Development Council

Lindsay Zimmerman

Central Florida Development Council



Working with Polk Vision has been a tremendous asset to our school and our graduating seniors. Their support helped prepare our students with realistic expectations and important knowledge for life after high school. As a result of their involvement, we saw a noticeable increase in the number of students completing the FAFSA, as well as a deeper understanding of the college application and selection process. Polk Vision's dedication and resources have truly made a difference in equipping our seniors for success beyond graduation.

Tammy Albritton

Fort Meade Middle-Senior High School Student Success Coach



High School Graduation Rate						
Year	Polk County	Florida				
2023-2024	82.2%	89.7%				
2022-2023	78.3%	88%				

Why is FAFSA Important?

Students who complete the FAFSA are more likely to enroll in college and complete their degree.

The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is a form needed to access federal, state, and local financial aid, including grants – especially Pell and Florida Student Assistance Grants, institutional aid, work-study, private scholarships, and subsidized loans. FAFSA can help unlock aid for students attending a variety of postsecondary institutions, including technical colleges and career programs.

Year Polk County Florida 2022-2023 40.9% 54.2%

(Florida Department of Education)

37.1%



2023-2024 School Year

12th graders: **8,106**

FAFSAs Submitted: 2,363 FAFSAs Completed: 2,148



2021-2022

2024-2025 School Year 12th graders: **8,084**

FAFSAs Submitted: **3,195** FAFSAs Completed: **3,035**

53.7%



ABOVE: Polk County representatives from Polk State College, Polk County Public Schools and Polk Vision at the Florida College Access Network Talent Strong Summit held in Orlando in May 2025. (L to R): Leann Bennett, PCPS, Patricia Collins, PSC, Cathryn Smith-Goble, PSC, Belkis Capeles, PSC, Monique Tubbs, PCPS, Amy Nickerson, PV, Laura Webster, PCPS

Post-High School College Enrollment

Through targeted, evidence-based, and scalable interventions, the **Post-High School College Enrollment** Innovation Grant Program supports the ultimate goal is to boost year-over-year college enrollment from high schools or communities with the greatest disparities in access compared to their peers.

Polk Vision's College Enrollment Pilot Project[^] for the Class of 2025, offered monthly family workshops on topics such as budgeting, financial aid, and college applications along with a simulation of a student's first semester in college. Forty high school seniors and their parents participated in the workshops held at Fort Meade Middle-Senior High School, Mulberry High School, and Ridge Community High School. Presenters included representatives from Ridge Technical College, Florida Southern College, and Southeastern University. The pilot continues to serve the Class of 2026, aligning family workshops with College and Career programming at each of the pilot schools.

https://floridacollegeaccess.org/research-and-data/2023-24-florida-fafsa-challenge-dashboard



LEFT: January 21, 2025, Featured are Ft. Meade Senior High School students who attended the Polk Vision Post High School College Enrollment series and were winners of the gift card drawing incentive for attending the workshops.

In 2019, Governor DeSantis signed HB 7071 into law an ambitious goal for Florida to increase the percentage of adults holding high-value post-secondary degrees, technical trade certifications, or training experiences to 60% by 2030.

DEGREE ATTAINMENT PROFILE



Polk

Residents aged 25-64 with a high-quality degree¹

33.1%

County Rank: 35 of 67



County-by-county comparisons based on selected criteria 1,2,3

Attainment Rate					
Rank	County	Rate			
33	Charlotte	35.5%			
34	Sumter	34.0%			
35	Polk	33.1%			
36	Hernando	33.0%			
37	Marion	32.8%			

Attainment Rate by Population					
County	Total Pop.	Rate			
Pinellas	960,565	49.0%			
Lee	792,692	39.2%			
Polk	760,961	33.1%			
Brevard	620,533	48.4%			
Pasco	588,758	41.6%			
	County Pinellas Lee Polk Brevard	County Total Pop. Pinellas 960,565 Lee 792,692 Polk 760,961 Brevard 620,533			

Percent Living Below Poverty Level					
Rank	County	% Below	Rate		
38	Marion	14.6%	32.8%		
39	Duval	14.6%	44.3%		
40	Polk	14.7%	33.1%		
41	Miami-Dade	14.9%	45.9%		
42	Highlands	15.4%	30.6%		

Teacher Externships



ABOVE: During a visit to the Polk County Sheriff's Office, teachers learned of the education requirements and skills needed for a successful career in forensics.

In June 2025, Polk Vision in partnership with the **Central Florida Development Council** facilitated tours of area businesses and government agencies which immersed Career, Technical and Adult Education teachers and District staff in real workplace environments. Teachers had the opportunity to discuss with industry professionals the wide variety of career opportunities available for students following high school graduation.





ABOVE: Lakeland Regional Health hosted teachers for an immersive tour of their main facility including the surgical unit.

Country Country Control Contro

Polk County Comprehensive Plan

The Polk County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1991, is a long-range document that sets the tone for growth and development and helps guide the actions of the Polk County Board of County Commissioners through clearly stated goals, objectives and policies.

Per Section 163 Florida Statutes, local governments are required to create, adopt and maintain a Comprehensive Plan that addresses where residential and non-residential uses are located. Polk County addresses the location of uses within unincorporated Polk County.



ABOVE: Chanda Bennett, Comprehensive Planning Administrator for the Polk County Board of County Commissioners' Office of Planning and Development, engaging a group of citizens at a Prosper 2050 community workshop held at the City of Bartow Civic Center.

In 2024, the Board of County Commissioners Planning Division called upon Polk Vision to assist with engaging the community and coordinating public input on the development of an updated Comprehensive Plan.

On April 1, 2025, Polk County adopted a resolution to establish the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC). This CPAC will assist the Planning Commission and **Board of County Commissioners** with ensuring that the land development policies adopted in the County's Comprehensive Plan align with the best interests of County residents, the public, and the BoCC's Vision for growth and development through 2050. The recommendations and proposed policy language for the full Comprehensive Plan are scheduled to be presented for transmittal and adoption in early to mid-2026.

Polk Vision is included in the Polk County Comprehensive Plan

POLICY 2.102-A14: COMMUNITY VISION - The Polk Vision was adopted on August 2, 2004, by Polk Vision, Inc., following extensive and inclusive public participation.

The Polk Vision Document, as adopted on August 2, 2004, is incorporated by reference in Polk County Comprehensive Plan to meet the requirements of Section 163.3177(13), F.S., for a community vision.

The Long-Term Vision and Mid-Term Strategies outlined in the Polk Vision shall be used as a guide in the implementation, evaluation, and amendment of the Plan.

 $https://library.municode.com/fl/polk_county/codes/comprehensive_plan?nodeld=CH2DEPO_DIV2.100FULAUSEL$



Polk Vision's partnership in completing the update to Polk County's Comprehensive Plan, Polk Prosper 2025, has been vital to securing valuable public participation to obtain an understanding of the growth concerns of Polk residents and businesses. Polk County's Comprehensive Plan has been aligned with Polk Vision since 2010. The Polk County and Polk Vision partnership has been pivotal in guiding the direction and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Chanda Bennett

Comprehensive Planning Administrator, Office of Planning and Development Polk County Board of County Commissioners





Vision

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.

David Palmer Team Co-Chair Polk County BoCC

Chad Tagtow Team Co-Chair Citizens Bank & Trust

Mustapha Achoubane Florida Polytechnic University

> Samuel Berrien, Mayor City of Fort Meade

Ty Brauch New-Tech Construction Corporation

> Frank Canovaca City of Bartow

Mike Chiavuzzi
Polk County Public Schools

Neil Cleveland City of Lakeland

Patricia Collins Polk State College

Nancy Daley, Commissioner City of Lake Alfred

Mike Dieckmann
Florida Polytechnic University

Meesha Downing-Townsend Polk State College

> Steven Elias Pennoni

Allison Ellis
Frontier Communications

Grant Ewert Polk County BoCC

Beneshea Frazier Central Florida Regional Planning Council

> David Fuller Learning Alliance Corporation

Richard Hesse City of Lakeland

HB Holmes RHEMAFi, LLC

Rebekah Hurd AdventHealth

Jee Hoon Kim City of Auburndale

Charrisse Kissenberth Summit Broadband

> Bill Lean Summit Broadband

> > **Derek Leffert** Gateway Fiber

David Little Cross Wired Electrical Services

Bruce Lyon Winter Haven Economic Development Council

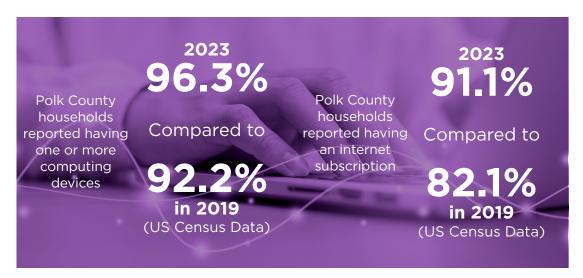
> Stephanie Madden, Commissioner City of Lakeland

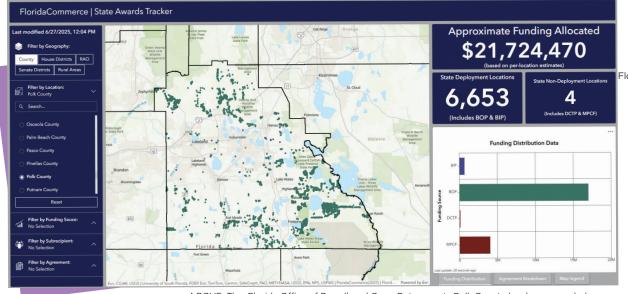
The **Smart Communities LEADS Team** is focused on building meaningful connections that support economic development, innovation, and quality of life through affordable, high-speed internet access.



ABOVE: Team Co-chair Chad Tagtow, during a strategic planning session held at the Lake Myrtle Sports Complex in Auburndale, leading a discussion regarding the importance of aligning broadband expansion projects in Polk County.

Recognizing that broadband is essential for modern living and impacts everything from education and healthcare to public safety and small business development, the Smart Communities Team is committed to ensuring that Polk County's infrastructure is equipped to meet the growing demands of a digital world.





ABOVE: The Florida Office of Broadband Open Data reports Polk County has been awarded over twenty million dollars in funding, which has served over 6,500 locations.

-66

Serving as Co-Chairs of the Smart Communities Team has been an incredibly rewarding experience for both of us. This year, we've seen real momentum as long-standing broadband commitments from our Internet Service Provider partners have begun to take shape across Polk County. It's been powerful to witness the shift from planning to implementation, and soon, to meaningful digital adoption and everyday use. The support and collaboration among our team and stakeholders have made this progress possible, and it's only the beginning. We're proud to be part of a forward-thinking group dedicated to using technology as a bridge that connects people, enriches lives, and strengthens our communities. The momentum is real, and the future is smart.

David Palmer

Director of Information Technology, Polk County Board of County Commissioners, Smart Communities Team Co-Chair

Chad Tagtow

Senior Vice President & Chief Innovation Officer, Citizens Bank and Trust, Smart Communities Team Co-Chair



Sean Malott

Central Florida

Sadie Molinet

Rick Montney

ProPak Software

for Polk County

Summit Broadband

Development Council

Local Technology Planning

Designated by the Florida Commerce Office of Broadband as Polk County's Local Technology Planning Team, this cross-sector group of leaders is advancing efforts to expand connectivity, especially for unserved and underserved communities.

Over the past year, the Team prioritized the connection of Anchor Institutions to enhance access to the following essential resources:

• Healthcare: Expansion of telehealth services

Economic Advancement: Job creation and workforce development

Government: Public utilities and resources

Public Safety: Emergency response and disaster preparedness and recovery

Education: Distance learning

Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD)

These local efforts are critical in contributing to Florida's goal of achieving 100% connectivity using the \$971 million in BEAD funding. This investment not only expands high-speed internet access but also provides digital literacy tools to education users on how to safely and effectively engage with technology.

Hiep NguyenCity of Winter Haven

Nick Nicholas DSM

David Palmer Florida Southern College

> Anne Pasco Polk County Public Schools

> > Allison Penn Comcast

Jack Phillips Frontier Communications

Jerry Rains Central Florida Health Care

> Mary Richardson, Commissioner Town of Dundee

Gladys Roberts Polk County Library Cooperative

> David Robinson DSM

Brian RossCity of Haines City

Richard Ruck Lakeland Regional Health

Cesar Ruiz Learning Alliance Corporation

Terri Saltzman Polk County BoCC

Gay SharpePolk County BoCC

David Skidmore

Marybeth Soderstrom Central Florida Regional Planning Council

> **Stephen Sowards** Alternative Choice Wireless

Kevin Sunderland City of Lake Wales

> John Terry KwiKom

Tracy Mercer,
Commissioner
City of Winter Haven

Tracy Mercer,
Central Florida Regional
Planning Council

Oscar Torres City of Lakeland

Kurt Van Wagenen Summit Broadband

Kate Wallace Charter Communications

> Amy Wiggins Lakeland Chamber of Commerce

Paul Womble Polk County BoCC

Tineshia Morris Tax Collector's Office

Matt Mucci

Ward Murphy Unifiber

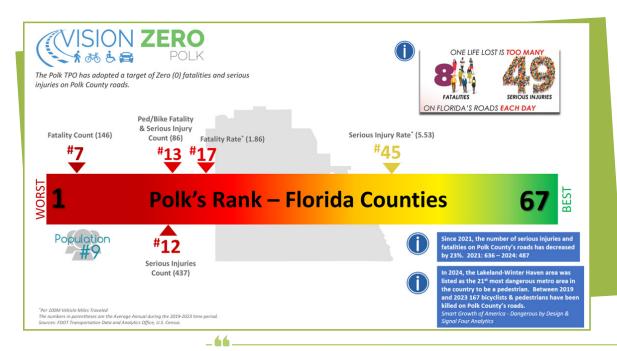


Vision

everyone to lead productive, fulfilling lives.

Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety LEADS Team

Dedicated to supporting the Polk Transportation Planning Organization's (TPO) Vision Zero Plan, the Team strives to eliminate all fatalities and serious injuries that occur during the everyday business of transportation. A Vision Zero approach assumes that human users (i.e., drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists) will make mistakes as they move from place to place and that the cost of these mistakes should not be death or serious injury. Efforts include setting policies and planning for safer roads, identifying safer routes to schools, and providing educational materials for school children of all ages on how to be a safer pedestrian or bicyclist.



Over the past 7 years, Polk County has funded approximately 33 miles of new concrete sidewalk or asphalt multi-use paths with direct linkage to schools.

\$19.3 million Estimated total expenditures

\$535k per mile The average cost approximately

\$102 per foot

The average cost approaching

Source: Polk TPO

Unfortunately, far too many people are severely injured or killed on Polk County's roadways every year. The numbers are a reminder that more must be done. The Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Team is focused on improving the safety of our roadways and has a goal of zero injuries and fatalities. Vision Zero is a holistic strategy aimed at eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries suffered by all road users while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. It has been an honor to work with the Team over the last year on the initiatives that have improved the safety for bicyclists and pedestrians in Polk County. I look forward to continuing to work with the Team and our many partners through Polk Vision to make a difference towards achieving Vision Zero.

> Rvan Kordek, CPM, GISP Executive Director, Polk TPO Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Team Chair



LEFT: Polk Vision **Board Members** Sheriff Grady Judd and Superintendent Frederick Heid addressed the Polk Transportation Planning Organization about shared concerns regarding transportation safety at the December meeting

Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Education Program

Online Resource for School Programs and Classroom Instruction

- Instructor Kits with Links to Lesson Plans
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Videos
- Print Materials Including Posters and Bookmarks
- Best Practice and Teacher Resource Library
- · Directional Signs
- Safety Campaign Materials

The Plan for Safety Education in PCPS

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety is a priority for Polk County Public Schools
- All schools will provide Bicycle/Pedestrian Safety lessons on 3 Early Release Days
- PE Teachers will have access to Bicycle/Pedestrian lessons



www.polksafetv.or

Polksafety.org is a free website with Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety lessons for K-8 students. These lesson plans have been fully integrated into Polk County Public Schools' online learning platform. This past school year, students were given lessons on pedestrian & bicycle safety on early release days. Although these lessons are now fully integrated into the public school system, they are also available

Ryan Kordek Team Chair

Polk TPO

Aimee Bailey GeoPlanning Solutions

_

Marisa Barmby Central Florida Regional Planning Council

Chuck BarmbyCity of Lakeland

Mark Bennett

Polk County BoCC

Clifton Bernard City of Haines City

Chief Art Bodenheimer
Lake Alfred Police
Department

Colette Boggs

BayCare Health Systems

Courtney BranchPolk County Sheriff's Office

Isai Chavez

Polk TPO

Jennifer Cipriano Lakeland Regional Health

Mary Crowe, Ph.D.

Florida Southern College

Julia Davis Polk TPO

POIK TPC

Taylor Freeman
Florida Department of
Health in Polk County

Captain Luke Hauser Bartow Police Department

> Patricia Jackson City of Polk City

Angela Kaufman

Polk TPO

Nathan Kautz Kittelson & Associates, Inc.

ittelson & Associates, inc.

James Keene City of Haines City

Tiffany Kitchens

Polk County Public Schools

Jason Lewis Kimley-Horn

Joshua McLemore

Polk County Public Schools

Tanya Merkle

Florida Department of Transportation

Caitlin Mildrum

BayCare Health Systems

Tracy Mullins
Polk County BoCC

on county book

Andy Palmer City of Winter Haven

Sherrie Pratt

Central Florida Health Care

Captain Kristina Quenneville

Florida Highway Patrol

school system, they are also availated online for families in Polk County.

Best Foot Forward in Polk County: Evaluation and Enforcement

Operation Best Foot Forward, is part of a comprehensive effort to educate drivers about Florida's right-of-way laws and curb the pattern of aggressive behavior towards pedestrians.

Enforcement

Operation-Wide:

- 9 Central Florida Counties
 20 Law Enforcement Agencies
- 26 Crosswalk Details
 23 Media Placements reaching an audience over 380,000 people,
- and Positively Osceola

 365 Crosswalk Warnings & Citations

including ABC Gainesville, Channel 9,

 12 Partners and in attendance at crosswalk locations

Polk County:

Date	Time	Location	Warnings	Citations		
Lakeland Police Department						
Wednesday, April 23	8:00 – 10:00 AM	W. 4 th St. & MLK Jr Ave.	7	17		





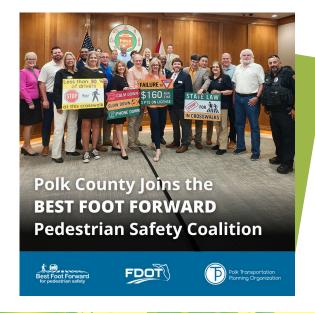
Evaluation

Crosswalks	FY25 DYR	Number of Lanes	Speed Limit	# of Pedestrians	# of Cyclists	
artowPD						
Schumate Dr & E Clower St	77%	4	30	8	1	
keland PD						
.ake HollingsworthDr. & Ingraham Ave	89%	2	30	36	14	
W 4th St & MLK Jr Ave	29%	2	25	7	6	Drivers often
olk County Sheriff						
BerkleyRd & Luna Rd	4%	5	45	3	0	School crossin
ella Citta Blvd & Tierradel sol Blvd	51%	4	40	33	1	
BartowRd & Central Ave	97%	6	50	7	19	Pedestrian co
Vinter Haven PD						
Ave. MNW & Unity Way NW	32%	2	25	17	9	
N. Lake Howard Dr & Avenue D NW	51%	3	30	8	5	

Back To School Awareness



ABOVE: Polk Vision staff members Amy Nickerson and Tara Watson joined City of Bartow Mayor, Trish Pfeiffer, and members of the Bartow Police Department to emphasize safe driving practices particularly near schools.



In June 2025, the Polk Transportation Planning Organization Board passed a resolution of support for the *Best Foot Forward* program encouraging collaboration across Polk County - including municipalities, law enforcement, educational institutions, civic organizations, and the broader community.

Sheila Rainey

Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital

Heather Reuter

City of Winter Haven

Jeff Schmucker

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

Scott Sjoblom

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

Bill Skelton Polk County BoCC

Folk County Bock

Cynthia Sharp

Lakeland Police Department

Heather Strafford

Polk County Sheriff's Office

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.

Julie Womble City of Auburndale

City of Auburndale

Ben Ziskal

Polk County BoCC

Annual Severe Crash Outcomes For Pedestrians & Cyclists on Polk Roadways

2022

2023

2024

624 crashes

656 crashes

631 crashes

58 serious injuries

56 serious injuries

55 serious injuries

30 fatalities

39 fatalities

26 fatalities

As of July 2025, there have been 14 serious injuries and 6 fatalities reported this year.

Source: Signal 4 Analytics

Alice Nuttall

Team Co-Chair Lakeland Regional Health

Holly Vida

Team Co-Chair Polk County BoCC

Christy Apisa

United Way of Central Florida

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

Kylia Carswell

Polk County Public Schools

Dr. Sairah Chachad

Lakeside Pediatrics

Wendy Clark

Central Florida Health Care

Andrea Clontz

Polk County BoCC

Latasha Cohen

Central Florida Behavioral Health Network

Deborah Cozzetti

Talbot House Ministries

Crystal Davis, DHS

Polk County Public Schools

Captain Larry Davis

Polk County Sheriff's Office

Renee Davis, Ed.D.

BayCare Health Systems

Kathy Dobson

Planned Parenthood

Danica Joan Dockery

Kids Need Both, Inc.

Amy Dukes

Central Florida Health Care

Courtney Durden

Office of the State Attorney 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

Tracy Grey

Heartland for Children

Antoinette Hagley

Cove Behavioral Health

Robin Haight

Polk County Public Schools

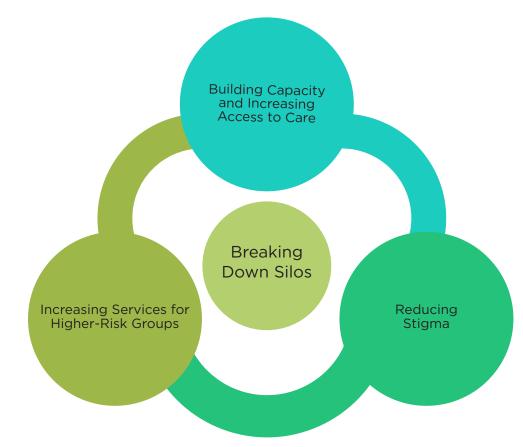
Deborah Hix, Ph.D.

Keiser University

Behavioral Health LEADS Team

This collaborative group of cross-agency stakeholders includes all the major mental healthcare providers serving Polk County. Their work is focused on aligning resources to impact systemic change in the identification, early intervention, and treatment of mental health and substance abuse across the county.

The Behavioral Health Strategic Plan Development and Sequential Intercept Mapping[^], published in 2021, pointed to the breaking down of institutional silos as an essential step in achieving the systemic change necessary to improve outcomes.



Strategic Objectives

In 2023, Polk County was granted a Congressional Directive Spending Award. These funds, in combination with funding from Polk County BoCC, supported implementation of the Behavioral Health Team's strategic plan spanning October 2023 through September 2025. Activities included the coordination of a Polk County Public Schools Behavioral Health Services Gap Analysis, training for Polk County Public Schools staff, a Behavioral Health Summit, and a multi-media campaign #WhenYouKnow aimed at reducing stigma surrounding mental and behavioral health.

[^] Major funding for the Behavioral Health Strategic Plan Development & Sequential Intercept Mapping project was provided by Polk County Board of County Commissioners, Citizens Healthcare Oversight Committee. Financial support for the project was provided by Advent Health, BayCare Health Systems, Central Florida Health Care, and Lakeland Regional Health. The study was coordinated by Polk Vision and members of its Behavioral Health Team.

Improving Youth Mental Health

The Polk County Public Schools Gap Analysis[^] was performed by a qualified consulting firm, Crescendo Group, during the 2023-2024 School Year. The purpose of the study was ultimately to improve mental health outcomes for youth in Polk County. The project focused on school students' access to, and use of, services within the Polk County Public Schools (PCPS) district. The report contains a set of both structural and operational actionable strategies.

https://polkvision.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Final-PCPS-BH-Gap-Analysis-Report-2.25.25-1.pdf

Supporting Professional Development: Youth and Technology

In February 2025, Polk Vision partnered with the Polk County BoCC Health and Human Services Division, to coordinate a training event for over 300 Polk County Public Schools counselors and administrators. This information provided by renowned author and expert Dr. Lisa Strohman and her colleague Dana Chandler, was developed to better inform attendees about the challenges and dangers of young people being surrounded by technology.



ABOVE: Superintendent Heid sat down with Dr. Lisa Strohman for a podcast interview on the topic of the very real consequences of unhealthy digital device use by students.



ABOVE: Polk County Public Schools staff members attended a train-the-trainer session led by Dana Chandler, hosted by the Polk County Sheriff's Office.

Polk County Public Schools Behavioral and Mental Health Collaborative Council

At the request of Superintendent Heid and in direct response to the recommendations found in the 2024 PCPS Behavioral Health Gap Analysis, Polk Vision, in partnership with the Polk County School District and the Polk County BoCC Health and Human Services Division, successfully launched a Behavioral and Mental Health Collaborative Council. This initiative is designed to unite key stakeholders in identifying and implementing innovative solutions to improve student mental and behavioral health outcomes, both in the short-term and long-term.



LEFT: The
Collaborative
Council convened
in Spring 2025, with
a primary focus
on developing
actionable
strategies that can
directly impact
the well-being of
students.

^Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in response to SAMHSA's FY23 Congressional Directive Spending Projects Notice of Funding Announcement FG-23-099 (Award Number IH79FG000944-01).

Dr. Joy Jackson Florida Department of Health in Polk County

Kai Jenkins Live Tampa Bay

Joy Johnson Polk County BoCC

Heather Kauffman Tri-County Human Services

Jenna Levine Florida Department of Health in Polk County

Wayne McCarty City of Auburndale

Desiree Meaton Francisco Cove Behavioral Health

Lisa Miller

Polk County Public Schools

Marybeth Moore Polk County BoCC

Jessica Napoleon Florida Department of Health in Polk County

Ashlev Neal Live Tampa Bay

Deanna Obregon Cove Behavioral Health

Samuel Picard BayCare Health Systems

Antionette Pollard Piece of Zen Holistic Health Services

Sherrie Pratt Central Florida Health Care

Dr. Yesenia Ramos Lakeside Pediatrics

Ashley Reckord

Tri-County Human Services

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

Sharanda Sipe Intercoastal Healthcare Consulting

Amber Smith Polk County BoCC

Lauren Springfield Lakeland Regional Health

Darling St. Jean Total Life Health Center

Tori Stone Polk County Sheriff's Office

Conversations in **Behavioral Health:** The Power of Hope and Healing[^]

More than 230 attendees from across Polk County participated in the 2nd Annual Conversations in Behavioral Health Summit. Event participants had the opportunity to network with resource partners and learn about available services in between sessions.





Suicide/Abuse Survivor, TEDx Speaker, Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, Founder & CEO of Cope Notes

Johnny Crowder

Conversations in Behavioral Health: The Power of Hope & Healing will include a keynote speech from Johnny Crowder.

Other presenters include:

Polk County Public Schools Superintendent Frederick Heid, Alcohol & Drug Policy Specialist Ellen Snelling M.S., and more to be announced soon!



"Gas Station Drug Trends"

As a direct outcome of the Summit, national prevention advocate, Ellen Snelling, returned on July 24th to educate all Polk **County Public Schools** principals on emerging "Gas Station Drug Trends."



- In 2018, the U.S. federal government passed the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (AIA), also known as the 2018 Farm Bill, which created a new statutory definition of hemp and amended the definition of marijuana to exclude hemp from Schedule 1 of the CSA.
 - "Hemp is defined as the plant Cannabis sativa L. and any part of that plant, including the seeds thereof and all derivatives, extracts, cannabinoids, isomers, acids, salts, and salts of isomers, whether growing or not, with a delta-9 THC concentration of not more than 0.3 percent on a dry weight basis." ²
- In other words, this federal legislation legalized the sale and production of hemp. The legislation does not mention other cannabinoids derived from hemp which has led to the proliferation of unregulated, highly intoxicating cannabinoid proliferation or unregulated, nightly intolated by products. These products are marketed as "legal hemp" and sold in places like gas stations, smoke shops, bodegas, and online, without regard to public health and safety.
- online, without regar to public nearth and sales. These canabinoids include THC-P, THCJd, THC-H, THC-O, HHC, delta-B-THC, delta-10-THC. More variations are likely to emerge These products may have similar or much stronger effects as compared to delta-9 THC. ⁴







[^] This event was funded by the Polk County Board of County Commissioners Health and Human Services Division and a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



https://whenyouknow.org

#WhenYouKnow is a campaign to break down the wall of stigma surrounding mental illness in Polk County. Too often, people suffer in silence with struggles like anxiety, depression, the impact of trauma, violence substance abuse, or thoughts of suicide.

Real people with real stories of struggle, recovery, and resilience can shine a light on shared human experiences of mental health challenges.

Jody Streussing

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

Larry Williams

Peace River Center

Amanda Wilson Florida Department of Children and Families

> **Amber Winkis HCA Florida** Poinciana Hospital

> > **Angela Wolowic** Polk County Public Schools

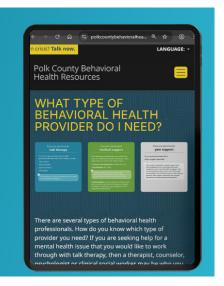
Polk County's Behavioral Health Resources website offers a directory of local providers, expert-written blog articles, and helpful guidance to support your journey toward recovery. It's a great place to start when you need mental health or substance use support.



What type of behavioral health provider do I need?

When it comes to seeking treatment for your mental health, there are several approaches you can try.

Learn more at www.pcbhr.org.





nmunity Health & Well-Being Food Se

The Polk County Food Security Council is convened by Polk Vision and the United Way of Central Florida in partnership with the Florida Department of Health in Polk County and the University of Florida Institute of

Comprised of a collaborative group of cross-sector representatives, the Council is dedicated to ensuring that everyone in Polk County has equitable access to sufficient quantities of consistently available healthy, nutritious food.

Food and Agricultural Sciences in Polk County.

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.

Food Insecurity in Polk County

Food insecurity describes a household's inability to provide enough food for every person to live an active, healthy life. Food insecurity is one way we can measure and assess the risk of hunger.



ABOVE: Summit guests participated in a simulation activity at the 3rd Annual Hunger Action Summit held at UF/IFAS Stuart Center in Bartow, February 2025

The 3rd Annual Hunger Action Summit featured keynote speaker Kiran Gaudioso, United Way of New Jersey and United for ALICE. (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), who led attendees in an eye-opening digital simulation of meeting basic needs on a limited income.

RIGHT: Food Security Council Co-Chairs Nicole Walker (R) of UF/IFAS and Rod Crowley (L) of United Way of Central Florida with Kiran Gaudioso (C) of United Way of New Jersey and United for ALICE.



Florida Department of Health in Polk County

Rod Crowley, Ed.D Team Co-Chair

United Way of

Central Florida

Nicole Walker

Team Co-Chair

Tonya Akwetey

Marcia Andresen

Bernice Bass

Polk County BoCC

UF/IFAS Extension Polk County

Healthy Start Coalition

Katherine Bates Nutrition Reset

Lori Beisner Polk County BoCC

David Berry The Mission of Winter Haven

Steve Bissonnette VISTE

Rafael Castro Creating Disciples Ministry

Deena Drumgo City of Lake Wales

Ashley Dukes Polk County **Public Schools**

Lori Friers Hardee Help Center

Alison Grooms AdventHealth

Jessica Hart UF/IFAS Extension

Polk County

Melissa Hilligoss The Freedom Tour

Claudine Humber Florida Children's Museum

Adam Lebowitz

United Way of Central Florida

Meghan Mapes

Baycare Health Systems

June Mav

United Way of Central Florida

Erica Morse

Polk County **Public Schools**

Doug McPherson

Citizens Bank & Trust

Jessica Napoleon

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

Andrea Nikolai

UF/IFAS Extension Polk County

Captain Donald Nunnery

City of Winter Haven Police Department





Polk Vision's efforts of collaboration and coordination are just an example of why Polk County is a special place. The Food Security Council helps to bring stakeholders from all sectors together from across Polk County to tackle issues that impact families every day. This effort led to a disaster response sub-committee that focused on how disasters increase the need for families to have food resources. Two years of planning efforts were put to the test during Hurricane Milton. The coordination between The United Way of Central Florida, The Freedom Tour, and One More Child was critical to the distribution of food and water across Polk County.

Paul Womble

Director, Polk County Board of County Commissioners, Emergency Management





ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) represents the growing number of families who are unable to afford the basics of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology. These workers often struggle to keep their own households from financial ruin, while keeping our local communities running.

You may know ALICE as a relative, a friend, or as a co-worker. You may be ALICE. Members of our essential workforce like cashiers, waiters, child care providers, and others, earn just above the Federal Poverty Level but less than what it costs to make ends meet. These struggling households are forced to make impossible choices each day.

ALICE also represents the data that is reshaping the dialogue on financial hardship across the United States.

https://www.unitedforalice.org/home



ABOVE: Polk County Public Schools Culinary Academy students representing Fort Meade Middle-Senior High School, Lake Region Senior High School, and Winter Haven Senior High School prepared and served menu items using budget friendly and nutritious recipes.

The Food That is Insecurity Rate is reported to be 113,210 14.9% of counties with the highest food people in Polk County insecurity are in living with food the South of the population insecurity for Polk County 34,130 Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, 2023 https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/florida/county/polk

Angie Pattison

PEACE

Jessice Pease United Way of Central Florida

> Emilie Quam Lake Wales Care Center

Rob Quam Lake Wales Care Center

Brittanie Ramsey, Ed.D. Polk County Public Schools

Dale Rhodes

The Gathering Place

Michelle Shiver Polk County Public Schools

Christie Sitek

Frostproof Care Center

Latonya Smith Joules Wellness Concepts

> Justine Trezil Central Florida Health Care

Anthony Venezia

Feeding Tampa Bay

Ismary Vento Health Council of West Central Florida

> Holly Vida Polk County BoCC

Karen Webb Feeding Tampa Bay

Bobby WilliamsThe Freedom Tour

Kimberly Williams Feeding Tampa Bay

Paul Womble Polk County BoCC

Denice Wright
UF/IFAS Extension

Polk County

Rebekah Hurd

Team Co-Chair AdventHealth

Kim Stenger

Team Co-Chair Office of Polk County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

Gary Ball, Commissioner

City of Bartow

Tim Bosetti

Kimley-Horn

Gwinnell Brant, DSLBrant Strategic

Consulting Group, LLC

Sallie Brisbane-Stone, Ed.D The Well

Stacy Butterfield

Polk County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

Betsy Cleveland

Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce

Kathy Dobson Planned Parenthood

Alis Drumgo

Capital City Consulting

Chief Ian Floyd

Polk County Sheriff's Office

Leslev Green

Polk County Public Schools

Ashleigh Mills

Tax Collector's Office for Polk County

LaTrice Moore, DBA

Polk State College

Tracy Mouncey

Tracy Mouncey & Associates

Matt Mucci

Allison Penn Comcast

Heather Reuter

City of Winter Haven

Cindy Rodriguez Republic Services

republic oct vices

Chris Rudolph, Ed.D. Tax Collector's Office for Polk County

Breanna Smith

White Paper Consulting, Inc.

Chief Terry Storie

City of Auburndale Police Department

Michelle Yodonis

Office of Polk County Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

Marc Zimmerman

Visit Central Florida

Ben Ziskal

Polk County BoCC



Vision

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

Polk Vision brings together all levels of local government to increase awareness and cooperation in aligned support of the Community Vision. The **Government Advisory Council** provides guidance on both foreseen and unforeseen circumstances that potentially impact the success of a Polk Vision initiative. The council also works to effectively engage citizens from across the county by producing a series of educational offerings each year including the Mayors Roundtable, State of County, and other topically relevant workshops.

2024 Mayors Roundtable

The 14th Annual Mayors Roundtable, held in October 2024, brought together mayors from thirteen of the seventeen municipalities and the Chair of the Board of County Commissioners. This half-day session focused on managing resources in the midst of explosive growth, including stresses on infrastructure, dealing with traffic congestion, roads maintenance and expansion, and strategies to engage citizens and strengthen public trust.



ABOVE: Elected leaders from across the county convened for the 14th Annual Mayors Roundtable, held at the Polk State College Center for Public Safety and facilitated by the Regional Director of External and Governmental Affairs for AT&T, Matt Mucci (L).



ABOVE: Speakers at the 2025 State of the County (L-R) Bill Beasley, County Manager, Polk County BoCC; Taylor Freeman and Jenna Levine representing the Florida Department of Health in Polk County; Commissioner Rick Wilson, Chair, Polk County BoCC; and Frederick Heid, Superintendent, with Justin Sharpless, Vice-Chair, Polk County Public Schools.

2025 State of the County

Held in April, the 2025 State of the County included insights on both current and emerging trends impacting service levels, growth management, housing, workforce development, healthcare access, and provider shortages.

Vision

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

Leadership Polk is the area's premier leadership development program, bringing together individuals from across the county who have demonstrated a high degree of civic engagement. Since its inception in 2007, the program has cultivated a diverse network of resourceful, informed, and proactive visionaries committed to building a more vibrant future for the entire community.

Over the course of ten months, participants explore critical issues, such as growth management, education, economic advancement, and community health and safety, through immersive site visits, expert-led discussions, and experiential learning. Most importantly, Leadership Polk fosters lasting relationships and equips leaders with the insight and connections needed to achieve Polk County's shared Vision.



LEFT: Class XVIII was hosted for a tour of the Nucor Steel Florida facility while in Frostproof. Nucor is the largest steel manufacturer and recycler in North America.

RIGHT: The Winter Haven Economic Development Council arranged for the Class to tour the 1.2 million square foot Tratt Properties warehouse. It is the largest warehouse, in Polk County: if overlaid downtown it would roughly cover the size of twelve city blocks.





ABOVE: On County Government Day, Class members toured the Emergency Operations Center. Featured here is the Class Day Chair, Stacy Butterfield (C), Polk County Clerk of Courts and Comptroller, along with Sheriff Grady Judd (R).

Leadership Polk guides already strong leaders to ignite and shape stronger communities. It takes the mission of Polk Vision to a personal level and directs leaders to turn their passion into impact for Polk. It has been a privilege to serve as last year's chair of Leadership Polk, and I am inspired to continue Polk Vision's work in driving positive change throughout Polk County.

Julie Womble

Community Development Director, City of Auburndale Leadership Polk Class XVIII Chair **Kevin Albaum**

Clark, Campbell, Lancaster, Workman, & Airth, P.A.

> Omar Arroyo, Commissioner City of Haines City

Maulissa Braverman

Rubber N' Glue, LLC

Sheena Butts Lakeland Regional Health

Craig Clevenger

Junior Achievement of Polk County

> Clay Cross Ajax Paving

Industries of Florida

Major Bart Davis Polk County

Sheriff's Office

Lauren Giordano

Central Florida Speech & Hearing Center

Captain Stephanie Goreck

Lake Wales Police Department

Tiffani Gozdur Citizens Bank & Trust

Brandon Henry City of Auburndale

Stephanie HoskinsGood Intents Marketing

Curtis Knowles

Central Florida Regional Planning Council

> Ryan Kordek Polk TPO

Heidi McInteeCity of Haines City

Tim Murphy
Tax Collector's Office
for Polk County

Kris Newman-Lake, Ed.D.
Cypress Junction
Montessori

David NicholsonCity of Winter Haven

Brian Rewis City of Lakeland

Justin Sharpless,

School Board Member
District 6,
Polk County
Public Schools

Tabatha Shirah Polk County BoCC

Andrew Stroud

Dantzler & Stroud Wealth Management of Raymond James

Wendy Winchester Polk County

Public Schools



Reaganne Berrien

Fort Meade Middle-Senior High School

Alana Coombs

Polk State Lakeland Collegiate High School

Dennis Fetty

Polk State Lakeland Collegiate High School

Abigail Fife

Polk State Lakeland Collegiate High School

Galina Jean

IB at Bartow High School

Adelvn Juarez

Auburndale Senior High School

Mariano Richer

Cambridge at Winter Haven High School

Itoro-obong Solomon

IB at Bartow High School

Youth Leadership Polk is designed to cultivate and empower young leaders by providing expanded learning opportunities to strengthen their leadership and employability skills; better preparing them to make informed decisions about their futures - all while deepening their understanding of and pride in the history and culture of Polk County.

Class VII was composed of rising 11th and 12th-grade students who learned components of environmental responsibility, government and public policy, history and culture, community health, and public safety while building durable skills like conflict resolution, values and ethics, and effective communication. Dedicated business leaders from across the county volunteered as guest speakers, hosts, and instructors. Following the twoweek course, students were paired with mentors for job shadowing experiences and their capstone projects.

This year's program was sponsored in part by the LiFT Institute at Southeastern University. The Leadership Polk Alumni Association and its members financially support this program and annually award \$500.00 scholarships to four of the top performing program graduates.



ABOVE: Students visiting Coca-Cola Beverages Florida, LLC, where they had a chance to tour the facility and hear from Coke Florida leadership about their career journeys.



Through this experience I've gained confidence and the ability to clearly state my ideas, listen, and reflect. I now understand that a leader isn't the loudest voice in the room, but it's about having awareness, listening skills, and acting with integrity to help others.

Adelyn Juarez

Rising Junior, Auburndale High School







ABOVE: Class VII worked on preparing resumes and introductions in preparation for mock interviews.

To learn more about what students are saying about Youth Leadership Polk, visit https://floridacollegeaccess.org/news/polk-vision-cultivates-the-next-generation/

in Lakeland.

Thanks to Polk Vision, I have been able to reach milestones many of my peers cannot boast of. For example, I've been able to secure a club sponsor for my Poetry club with Coca-Cola to help our dream of being able to bring education to children in our community. I have been able to experience a job shadow within the Polk County administrative IT department, and not only meet people, but also sit in on meetings and receive priceless advice for my future. My passion for leadership has not only increased due to this program, but it has also given me the means to accomplish goals that would have been harder to accomplish otherwise.

Itoro Solomon

Rising Junior, IB Bartow High School

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 comprehensive experience designed to highlight 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 118,000 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?

Now in its fourth year, the Inside PCPS program provides community leaders with a unique behind-the-scenes look at one of the largest school districts in the nation, leaving them with a new understanding of the challenges, innovations, and impact of public education in Polk County.



ABOVE: Graduating members of Class III were honored during a School Board Work Session for their time and dedication in learning more about public education.



ABOVE: Members of Class III reporting for lunch duty at Ben Hill Griffin Jr. Elementary.



ABOVE: Class III Chair, Dr. Orathai Northern, took a steel drum lesson while visiting Davenport School of the Arts.

Tonya Akwetey

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

Christina Allen

Parker Street Ministries

Alex Cam, Comissioner

City of Auburndale

MJ Carnevale City of Winter Haven

Sarah Corona Florida Behavioral Medicine

Rod Crowley, Ed.D.

United Way of Central Florida

Ryan DelliVeniri

Leprecia Fontenot

Coca-Cola Beverages Florida

LaQuitta Ghent

Duke Energy

Tracy Grey Heartland for Children

Chantelle Hrubes

YMCA of West Central Florida

Kim Hulverson SouthState Bank

Marsha Leap, Ed.D. Lakeland Rotary Club

Erica Lupercio

CPS Investment Advisors

Kim Manning, Ph.D. Polk State College

Johnna Martinez

GiveWell Community Foundation

Mark Miller

Holland & Knight, LLP

Brenda Powers Regions Bank

Melody Rider, Ed.D. ConnectEd Polk

Trenton Rogers

Boswell & Dunlap

Kristin Salimbene

Creative Contractors,

Major Jill Seymour Polk County

Joshua Swartz IT Dynamic, LLC

Sheriff's Office

Brittanny Warren

State Farm Insurance

Joshua Borem

Borem Fire Protection

Shambria Campbell

University of South Florida

Stephanie Colon

Stephanie Colon Consulting, LLC

Danica Dockery Kids Need Both, Inc.

Skiles Jones

Patriot Legal Group

Guv LaLonde III

Lakeland Moonwalk/ Under One Tent

Rita Langdale

Hope Restored Counseling of FL, LLC

Brenda Luna

The Family Healthcare Foundation

Mario Manago

US Foods

Tim Moore

Viva Polk Magazine

Nancy Moses

Early Learning Coalition of Polk County

Tracy Mouncey

Tracy Mouncey and Associates

Judi New

Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Frank Pollard Midwestern

Midwestern Construction, Inc.

Ana Rivera

PR/Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Polk County

Angelic Sims

Dazzling Driftwood

Taylor South

Tri-County Human Services

Marcia Stanley Lakeland Housing

Authority

Katie Tinsley Tinsley Creative

Joseph West

Banner Health

Scott Woodlee

Community
Volunteer

The **Public Service Leadership Course**^ honors the legacy and outstanding tradition of civic, public, and nonprofit leadership in Polk County. The curriculum was developed to equip participants with the tools and insights needed to enhance their effectiveness as engaged citizens, whether through elected office, nonprofit leadership, or by appointment to government boards and committees.



ABOVE: (L) Facilitator, Mark Mills, President of Mills Strategic Communications with Class II members were hosted by the American Center for Public Leadership at Southeastern University.



The Public Service Leadership Course was designed to provide today's leaders with greater insight into service through elected office and local boards/committees. Through the presentations of respected local officials and others with extensive experience in their respective fields, this course is a valuable opportunity for Polk County citizens to learn firsthand from those who do it best. With the guidance of a thoughtful facilitator, the four-day commitment will help those interested in learning more about service and gain a greater understanding of how best they can contribute to advancing the growth of our municipalities, county, state, and nation.

Matt Mucci

Regional Director, External & Legislative Affairs, AT&T



Number of active registered voters in Polk County as of July 1, 2025

Republician Party of Florida Florida Democratic Party

No Party Affiliation

Other

183,037 | 125,500 | 114,204 | 12,751

Totals

426,956

2024 General Election	Registered Voters 460,251	Ballots Cast 352,176	Voter Turnout 76.52%
2024 Primary Election	Registered Voters 443,954	Ballots Cast 76,426	Voter Turnout 17.21%
2025 April Municipal Election	Registered Voters 53,073	Ballots Cast 6,538	Voter Turnout 12.32%

(Polk County Supervisor of Elections)

The Leadership Polk Alumni Association[^] (LPA) is an engaged network of Leadership Polk program graduates united by a shared commitment of leadership, service, and the advancement of the Vision for Polk County.

Guided by the Leadership Polk Alumni Advisory Council, LPA provides meaningful opportunities to stay connected, informed, and impactful, while actively supporting the work of Polk Vision.

Each year, LPA hosts a variety of networking and educational events that reinforce its role as a strong and relevant resource for its members.



ABOVE: In March, Leadership Polk Alumni members enjoyed a Detroit Tigers Spring Training Game in partnership with the Leadership Lakeland Alumni Association



The Leadership Polk Alumni Association provides numerous opportunities to remain informed on relevant countywide issues and concerns and connected to a diverse group of civic-minded professionals and passionate public servants. Working together, we are stronger leaders who can help create an even more positive impact within Polk County. It has truly been an honor to serve as Chair for the Leadership Polk Alumni Association for the past two years.

Jeanette Crowley

Chair, Leadership Polk Alumni Association Director, Strategic Planning & Partnerships Polk County Public Schools



ABOVE: Alumni members networking with members of Leadership Polk Class XVIII at Margaritaville in Auburndale.

Jeanette Crowley

Chair Polk County Public Schools Class XI

Marc Zimmerman

Vice Chair Visit Central Florida Class VII

Shawn Sherrouse

Immediate Past Chair City of Lakeland Class IV

Chad Barron Treasurer

Bartow Ford Class XV

Deena Drumgo

Programs & Events Chair City of Lake Wales Class IV

Ginny Aycock Boring Business

Systems Class XII

Stacy Campbell-**Domineck**

CareerSource Polk Class I

MJ Carnevale City of Winter Haven

Class IX

Pam 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

Doug McPherson Citizens Bank & Trust Class XVII

Cindy Rodriguez Republic Services Class XII

Donna Sheehan Community Volunteer Class IV

Brian Yates,

Mayor Pro Tem City of Winter Haven Class XVI

[^] The Leadership Polk Alumni Association is a separate and independent 501(c)(6) entity. While it holds a historical connection with Polk Vision, Inc., it now operates independently in its governance, programming, and fundraising efforts.

A Legacy of Leadership



ABOVE: Dr. Angela Falconetti, President, Polk State College, Polk Vision Chair 2022-2024; Senator Colleen Burton, 2024 Visionary Leader Award Recipient; Kim Long, Executive Director, Polk Vision; Greg Littleton, CEO, Citizens Bank & Trust, Polk Vision Board of Directors and 2023 Visionary Leader Award Recipient.

Originated by the Polk Vision Board of Directors in 2023, the Polk Visionary Leader Award is bestowed upon individuals who have made transformative contributions to improving the Quality of Life in Polk County through strategic foresight, innovation, and collaboration.

The Spirit of Leadership Polk Award

recognizes an <u>organization</u> (public or private) for their significant contributions in fostering a culture of community participation and expanding the leadership talent pool across the county.

RIGHT: (C) Paul Womble, Director, Polk County Emergency Management, Class XV, accepted the 2025 Award on behalf of the Emergency Management Division with (L) Chad Barron, CFO, Bartow Ford, Class XV, and Leadership Polk Alumni Association, Treasurer with (R) Jeanette Crowley, Director, Strategic Planning & Partnerships, Polk County Public Schools, Class XI and 2023-2025 Chair, Leadership Polk Alumni Association.





The **Distinguished Alumni Award** honors an <u>individual</u> who has contributed substantially to the development of regionally focused leaders with a demonstrated commitment to the mission of the Leadership Polk program.

LEFT: (C) 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award Recipient, Matt Mucci, Regional Director of External & Legislative Affairs, AT&T, Class VII, with (L) Frederick Heid, Superintendent of Polk County Public Schools, Class XVI, and (R) Jeanette Crowley, Director, Strategic Planning & Partnerships, Polk County Public Schools, Class XI and 2023-2025 Chair, Leadership Polk Alumni Association. **Visionary Leader Award**

Greg Littleton (2023)

Colleen Burton (2024)

Spirit of Leadership Polk Award

Polk County Board of County Commissioners (2011)

United Way of Centra Florida (2012)

Polk State College (2013)

Polk County Sheriff's Office (2014)

Polk Education Foundation (2015)

Florida Department of Health in Polk County

Citizens Bank & Trust (2017)

UF/IFAS (2018)

Polk County Public Schools - Workforce Education Department (2019)

Central Florida Health Care (2021)

GiveWell Community
Foundation (2022)

Peace River Center (2023)

Bartow Ford (2024)

Distinguished Alumni Award

Charles McPhersor

Cindy Price (2012)

Greg Littleton (2013)

Tracy Porter (2014)

Jerry Miller (2015)

Sara Roberts McCarley (2016)

Pam Craven, Ph.D. (2017)

Penny Borgia (2018)

Stacy Butterfield (2019)

Dr. Joy Jackson (2021)

Martha Santiago, Ed.D. (2022)

Joe G. Tedder (2023)

Susan Copeland (2024)

