



— PRACTITIONER TOOLKIT

Supporting Student Career & Education Planning

for Florida's High-Value Careers and Credentials

Equipping practitioners to guide students toward high-demand careers, valuable credentials and postsecondary success.

2026-2027

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Background

This toolkit was developed by the Florida College Access Network (FCAN), a statewide nonprofit organization working to help more Floridians earn education and training beyond high school. FCAN leads collaborative efforts across education, business and community organizations to support the state's attainment goal and ensure students have clear pathways to postsecondary success.

Florida continues to prioritize increasing the number of residents who complete education and training beyond high school, as most jobs in the state increasingly require some form of postsecondary credential. Individuals who earn college degrees or high-value credentials typically experience stronger employment prospects and higher earnings than those with only a high school diploma.

To better align education and workforce needs, the state has launched several initiatives that identify and promote credentials linked to high-demand careers. For example, the Florida Department of Education maintains the [Master Credentials List](#), which highlights credentials aligned with labor-market demand, while the State University System of Florida tracks degree programs in strategic fields that support the state's economy. Building on these efforts, there is an opportunity to make information about high-value credentials and career pathways even more digestible for students and families so they can more easily navigate their options and connect education decisions to future career opportunities.

WHY THIS TOOLKIT EXISTS

Counselors, educators and community partners guide students toward postsecondary success every day. This toolkit gives practitioners from across that network practical resources to make those conversations more informed.

Purpose

This toolkit equips educators, counselors, and community partners with resources to help students explore their interests, identify their strengths, and connect those insights to meaningful education and career pathways. It provides tools that practitioners can use to guide students and families through career exploration—helping them understand the opportunities available through high-value degree programs, industry certifications, and other postsecondary credentials.

The toolkit includes practical resources for classrooms, advising sessions, and family engagement activities. These materials are designed to help practitioners support students in discovering potential career interests, learning about related fields of study and training programs, and accessing the academic, financial, and support resources that can help them succeed after high school.

Explore

Interest inventories and career planning tools that surface students' strengths.

Prepare

Florida's degree, certificate, and work-based learning pathways, side by side.

Support

Financial aid, advising practices, and targeted supports for every learner.

- **A living document.** As new data, resources and promising practices emerge, these materials will continue to be updated and refined. Feedback from educators, students, and community partners will help inform future updates to ensure the toolkit remains practical, relevant, and responsive to the needs of those supporting students in planning for their futures.

02

Connecting Interests to Careers

Helping students plan for life after high school starts with understanding their interests, strengths, and goals, then connecting that self-knowledge to real opportunities in high-demand fields.



Early career exploration helps students connect their passions to real opportunities in high-demand fields. Labor market conditions vary by region: a career in high demand in one area may be less available, or have different wage outcomes, elsewhere.

Practitioners can support students by considering local workforce trends and helping them identify opportunities that align with both their interests and the realities of their communities.

The resources below are designed to help you guide students in discovering their strengths, exploring career clusters and in-demand occupations and learning about education and training pathways that lead to meaningful careers. These tools can be used in classrooms, advising sessions and family engagement activities to help students begin planning for their futures.

Helping Students Discover Their Interests and Strengths

Xello

An interactive career planning system that helps practitioners guide students from elementary through high school in exploring their interests, identifying strengths and setting career and education goals. As Florida's official statewide provider for career planning and work-based learning coordination, Xello is available at no cost to Florida public school districts. Practitioners can use it to help students complete career interest inventories, explore career clusters, research education pathways and build personalized academic and career plans.

→ xello.world/en/florida-college-career-ready

FloridaShines

Florida's central online hub of free tools and resources supporting student college and career planning, operated by the Florida Virtual Campus. FloridaShines brings together information from public colleges, universities and technical colleges statewide, making it easier for practitioners to help students and families research options and plan next steps, including program search, college profiles, readiness tools and Career Cluster activities.

→ floridashines.org/careers-middle-high-school

Helping Students Discover High-Value Career Pathways

Career Interest Survey

Guides students in exploring interests, strengths and potential pathways by introducing Career Clusters, or groupings of related careers and industries. Based on Advance CTE's National Career Clusters® Framework, widely used in schools and CTE programs, responses highlight clusters that may serve as a strong starting point for further exploration, education and training.

→ [careertech.org /resource/cluster-by-cluster-edition-career-interest-survey](https://careertech.org/resource/cluster-by-cluster-edition-career-interest-survey)

MyNextMove

A free career exploration tool with detailed information on over 900 careers, including typical tasks, required skills, salaries, job outlook and education or training needed. Practitioners can guide students to search by keyword, browse by industry, or take the O*NET Interest Profiler, a self-assessment that suggests careers based on activities students enjoy. Grounded in U.S. Department of Labor occupational data.

→ mynextmove.org

MyFloridaFuture

A free, interactive planning tool from the State University System of Florida with data on graduate earnings, employment outcomes, and student loan amounts from Florida's 12 public universities. Users can compare median wages at one, five and 10 years after graduation and view outcomes by major or institution, connecting academic choices to real workforce outcomes.

→ flbog.edu/myfloridafuture

Florida's Master Credentials List (MCL)

Identifies degree and non-degree credentials aligned with high-demand occupations that lead to middle- to high-wage employment. While not a student-facing resource, the MCL is valuable for practitioners advising students and families. It helps practitioners identify programs that align with in-demand occupations, strong wage outcomes and stackable pathways into higher-level degrees.

→ careersourceflorida.com/master-credentials-list

Considering Local Workforce Needs

Labor market conditions can vary across regions. Understanding these local trends can help students make more informed career decisions. Practitioners can use regional data to identify which occupations are growing, which skills are in-demand, and what wage outcomes are typical in their community. This helps ensure that students' career exploration is grounded in the realities of the local job market.

FloridaCommerce

Provides data and tools to help practitioners connect students' career interests to regional opportunities. Two key resources include:

Employment Projections

Expected job growth by industry and occupation for the state and each workforce region, helping identify high-growth fields.

Regional Demand Occupations List

Occupations in-demand in each workforce region, including typical wages and educational requirements.

PRACTITIONERS CAN USE THESE RESOURCES TO ...

Identify growing industries and occupations in their region, compare wages and employment trends across areas and support students in planning education and training pathways that match local demand.

FLORIDA CREDENTIAL BASICS

What makes a credential “high-value” in Florida?

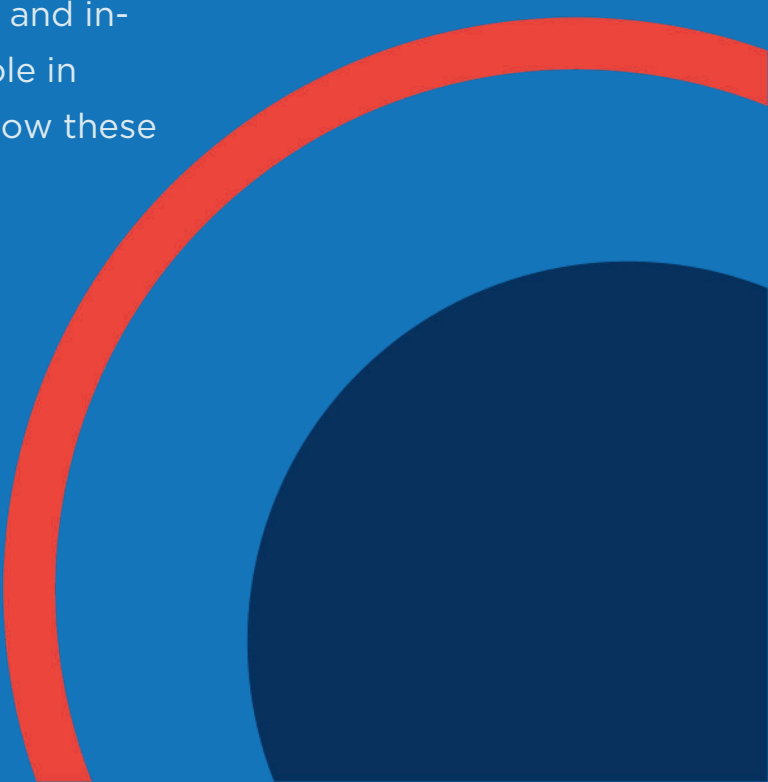
A high-value credential helps students move into meaningful careers with strong growth and earnings. In Florida, this means it:

- 1 Is listed on the Master Credentials List (MCL)
- 2 Aligns with a regional or statewide in-demand occupation
- 3 Leads to measurable middle- to high-wage outcomes

03

Preparing for Postsecondary Education

Florida offers multiple education and training pathways leading to high-value credentials and in-demand careers. Practitioners play a key role in helping students and families understand how these options connect to their goals.



Use the information below to guide students in exploring Florida's postsecondary pathways, including transfer-focused degrees, workforce-aligned programs and career and technical education options. These overviews can help you explain how different programs work, what they are designed for and how they connect to long-term education and career opportunities.

Florida Public Postsecondary Institutions

School District Technical Colleges

Also called technical centers or career centers, these provide career and technical education programs designed for immediate employment in high-demand fields: health care, construction trades, information technology, manufacturing, transportation, public safety and cosmetology. Most programs lead to a career certificate or applied technology diploma completed in less than two years, with many connected to broader pathways through additional certificates or associate degrees.

→ [fldoe.org /academics/career-adult-edu/dist-ps-instit.shtml](https://fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/dist-ps-instit.shtml)

Florida College System (FCS)

28 public state colleges operating more than 70 campuses statewide, with an open-access mission. That means programs are accessible regardless of test scores or GPA. FCS institutions offer career certificates, associate degrees and bachelor's degrees aligned with regional and statewide workforce needs, plus adult education, English language learning and GED® preparation.

→ [fldoe.org /schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/about-us/colleges.shtml](https://fldoe.org/schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/about-us/colleges.shtml)

State University System (SUS)

12 public universities offering more than 1,600 undergraduate, graduate and professional degree programs. Some majors are part of [Programs of Strategic Emphasis \(PSEs\)](#), designed to align with high-demand fields and the state's economic priorities. Students in PSE majors may access financial incentives such as tuition waivers.

→ flbog.edu/universities

Workforce Programs

Baccalaureate Degrees (BS or BAS)

Bachelor's degree programs designed to meet statewide, regional and local workforce needs across nursing, education, business, information technology and other high-demand fields.

Associate in Science (AS) / Applied Science (AAS)

Two-year degrees preparing students for direct entry into high-demand, fast-growing careers. Many offer transfer pathways into related bachelor's programs. Students must complete a 15-credit general education core.

Career & Technical Education (CTE) Non-Degree Programs

Offered primarily through Florida's state colleges and technical centers, these programs lead to certificates or specialized credentials that prepare students for employment in high-demand fields.

Career Certificate

Ranges from about 40 to more than 1,500 clock hours, preparing students for entry-level careers such as cosmetology, firefighter or practical nursing. Many articulate into AS degrees.

College Credit Certificate (CCC)

Short-term, college-credit programs typically completed in one year or less, often embedded within AS or AAS programs as building blocks toward a degree.

Applied Technology Diploma (ATD)

Short-term, non-college-credit programs (fewer than 60 credit hours) leading directly to employment, such as dental assisting or EMT.

Advanced Technical Certificate (ATC)

Specialized training for individuals who already hold an Associate in Science degree and want advanced preparation in a specific field.

Apprenticeships

Combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction. Completers may earn a nationally recognized FLDOE certificate; each program sets its own requirements.

BASIC SKILLS REQUIREMENTS FOR CTE PROGRAMS

Florida requires students in certain postsecondary CTE programs (450+ hours) to demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing and math within the first six weeks. Students who don't meet benchmarks receive applied academics or other structured support; some students may be exempt, and accommodations are available for documented disabilities.

Florida's 17 Career Clusters

Florida's career and technical education system is organized around 17 career clusters that align education and training with the state's workforce needs. Within each cluster, students can pursue multiple pathways and earn high-value credentials, including associate and bachelor's degrees, college credit and career certificate programs and industry certifications.

These programs are typically offered through Florida's state colleges and technical colleges and are designed to prepare students for in-demand careers while also providing opportunities to continue their education and advance within a career pathway.

17

CAREER CLUSTERS

450+

BASIC SKILLS

6WEEKS TO
DEMONSTRATE
PROFICIENCY

Agriculture, Food, & Natural Resources

Agritechnology, animal and plant science, food processing and environmental science.

Architecture & Construction

Designing, planning, building and maintaining the built environment.

Arts, A/V Technology, & Communication

Multimedia production, broadcasting, journalism and telecommunications.

Business Management & Administration

Planning, organizing and managing business operations across every sector.

Education & Training

Teaching, administration and educational support services.

Energy

Planning, management, generation, transmission and distribution of energy sources.

Engineering & Technology Education

Foundational problem-solving and engineering design using math, science, and technology.

Finance

Banking, insurance, investment planning and financial management.

Government & Public Administration

Governance, planning, public management, security and regulatory services.

Health Science

Medical assisting, patient care, biomedical sciences, and nursing support services.

Hospitality & Tourism

Restaurant, lodging, travel, tourism, recreation and amusement services.

Human Services

Counseling, family and community support and consumer services.

Information Technology

Design, development and management of computer systems and software.

Law, Public Safety & Security

Law enforcement, legal services, emergency response, fire management and security.

Manufacturing

Production, process development, repair, logistics and quality control of goods.

Marketing, Sales, & Service

Marketing management, sales, merchandising and public relations.

Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

Planning and managing movement of goods and people by air, land and sea.

Work-Based Learning (WBL)

Work-based learning gives students hands-on experience in a career field through interactions with industry or community professionals, either at a workplace or in a simulated setting. WBL is aligned with curriculum, helps students build workplace skills, explore multiple aspects of an industry, link to next steps in career planning and includes reflection and performance assessment. Experiences must be developmentally appropriate, provided fairly and equitably and documented in compliance with state and federal labor laws.

Tools like Xello support WBL by allowing students and educators to track progress, plan experiences, and connect with employers.

Work-Based Learning Continuum

1 Career Exploration	2 Career Engagement	3 Career Exposure	4 Career Experience
Activities that raise awareness of various careers and help students identify interests. Examples include career fairs and interest inventories.	Entry-level work-based learning that builds foundational skills. Examples include service learning, capstone projects and virtual simulations.	Introduces students to industries and occupations without full work-based learning. Examples include job shadowing, mentoring and company tours.	In-depth and occupation-specific work-based learning that builds job-ready skills. Examples include on-the-job training (OJT), clinicals and apprenticeships.

Types of Career Experience

Five ways exist for students to gain real-world experience.

01

Clinical / Practicum

Supervised, structured experiences where students apply career-related skills to meet program or credentialing requirements.

02

Internship

Time-limited, structured training providing real-world work experience; may be paid or unpaid, including short-term micro-internships.

03

On-the-Job Training

Paid career preparation combining structured work experience with classroom instruction, coordinated by educators and employers.

04

Pre-Apprenticeship Programs

Build foundational skills for entry into registered apprenticeships through hands-on training, career counseling and credential attainment.

05

Registered Apprenticeships

Employer-led, earn-while-you-learn programs combining paid on-the-job training with related instruction, leading to industry-recognized credentials.

Associate in Arts (AA) and Florida's 2+2 System

The Associate in Arts (AA) degree provides students with foundational skills for a bachelor's program while preparing them for high-demand careers that may require further education. Many students begin at a Florida College System (FCS) institution and later transfer through Florida's 2+2 system, which guarantees admission to at least one public university or bachelor's-granting state college. The AA requires 60 credit hours — 36 in general education and 24 in electives — and students are encouraged to select electives that align with their intended major and career goals.

While the AA is primarily a transfer-focused degree, it can also serve as a stepping stone into workforce-focused bachelor's programs, such as Bachelor of Science (BS) or Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degrees in fields like health care, education, technology and business. Limited-access programs may have additional requirements, such as higher GPAs or prerequisite courses. Working with high school counselors and college advisors helps students plan coursework, meet program requirements and align their academic choices with career pathways.

60

TOTAL CREDIT HOURS

36

GENERAL EDUCATION

24

ELECTIVES

General Education Requirements

36 credit hours including a 15-credit core accepted across all Florida public colleges and universities, building skills in communications, humanities, math, natural sciences and social sciences. Choosing a major early is important. Some general education courses also serve as prerequisites for workforce-focused bachelor's programs. Students using dual enrollment, AP, IB, or AICE credits should plan carefully with advisors to maximize credits.

College Readiness Requirements

Students entering Florida colleges must demonstrate readiness in reading, writing and math. Those who don't meet the benchmarks may take developmental courses to build foundational skills, helping ensure success in college-level coursework and postsecondary programs.

04

Student Support Resources

Planning for education and training after high school involves more than choosing a program. Students, learners and families need guidance navigating financial aid, program requirements and the supports that help them succeed.

Students, learners, and families often need guidance navigating financial aid, program requirements, academic preparation, and other supports that can help them succeed. Advisors, counselors, educators, and community partners play an important role in helping students understand these resources and use them effectively.

Best Practices for Practitioners

1

Introduce tools early and often

Share career and college planning resources (e.g., FloridaShines, Xello, Apply Yourself Florida Student Guide, and the Plan It Florida toolkit) with students and learners early to build awareness and confidence in the transition process.

2

Use checklists and planning tools

FloridaShines offers grade-level College Readiness Checklists that outline key steps students should take each year, from exploring careers to preparing college applications. The Summer Transition Checklist is another valuable tool that helps graduating seniors stay on track with important tasks.

3

Coordinate with campus services

Encourage students to connect with student transition or first-year support services at the colleges they plan to attend for academic advising, mentoring or peer support before classes begin.

4

Address barriers proactively

Identify students who may need additional supports — first-generation, economically disadvantaged, or experiencing housing instability — and help them connect to targeted programs early.

5

Engage families

Providing clear information about resources, deadlines and next steps strengthens students' support systems and improves follow-through on planning tasks.

Financial Aid Resources

College can be expensive, but financial aid helps students and learners access and complete postsecondary programs. Practitioners can guide students, learners, and families in understanding the types of aid available and the steps needed to apply.

STEPS TO GET STARTED

- 01 Talk with a high school counselor** about federal, state and other financial aid programs.
- 02 Complete the FAFSA** at <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa> as soon as it opens, typically in October. State and institutional aid is often awarded first-come, first-served with limited funds, so submitting early can matter more than the deadline itself. Even when a college doesn't require the FAFSA, submitting it can unlock institutional aid, work-study, and federal loans.
- 03 Complete the Florida Financial Aid Application (FFAA)** to be considered for state aid, including Bright Futures. Visit the Florida Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA) at www.FloridaStudentFinancialAidsg.org for fact sheets and program details.
- 04 Check each college's priority filing deadline.** Colleges set their own institutional aid deadlines, which can fall earlier than a family expects. Contact the college a student plans to attend to request a financial aid packet with school-specific forms and program information.

Types of Financial Aid

Scholarships

Awards for academic, athletic, or artistic achievement; do not need to be repaid.

Grants

Need-based awards that do not need to be repaid.

Student Loans

Low-interest loans that must be repaid, typically after graduation; FAFSA is required.

Work-Study / Part-Time Jobs

Opportunities to earn money while gaining experience; may or may not relate to the student's field of study.

Florida's Financial Assistance Programs

Florida's state and lottery-funded aid programs help students pursue credentials that align with in-demand careers, reducing financial barriers and supporting learners in completing pathways that lead to high-value jobs.

MERIT-BASED

Gold Seal Vocational Scholars

Pays a portion per credit hour for students in an AS degree or technical certificate program; requires CTE coursework, GPA and test score minimums and volunteer or work hours.

Gold Seal CAPE Scholars

Pays a portion per credit hour of a career education or certificate program; requires five articulated CAPE credit hours and volunteer or work hours. Upon completion of an associate degree, scholars may receive an award for a maximum of 60 credit hours towards a bachelor's.

WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

Open Door Grant

For students in short-term CTE programs leading to a Master Credentials List credential.

Minority Teacher Education Scholarship

For minority students pursuing teaching careers.

Florida Work Experience Program

Offers work experience to complement education and career goals.

Florida First Responder Scholarship

For students in EMT, paramedic, firefighter or law enforcement training.

TARGETED POPULATIONS

Florida Student Assistance Grant

For undergraduates with financial need.

First Generation Matching Grant

For students whose parents did not attend college.

GATE Scholarship Program

For high school dropouts pursuing adult and career education concurrently.

Florida Farmworker Student Scholarship

For farmworkers and their children.

José Martí Scholarship

For students of Hispanic origin.

Mary McLeod Bethune Scholarship

For students with financial need attending one of Florida's four HBCUs.

Support for Students Who May Need Additional Assistance

Some students may face additional challenges as they prepare for education and training after high school. These may include limited familiarity with the college process, financial barriers, language needs, disabilities or housing instability. Practitioners play an important role in helping these students and their families understand available options and connect with resources that support college and career success.

Florida Literacy Coalition

Supports adult and family literacy programs statewide, which can benefit older students and families who need reading, language and foundational literacy skills that support continued education and career pathways.

Tuition and Fee Exemption

Florida law provides a [tuition and fee exemption](#) for eligible students who were in foster care or are experiencing homelessness, reducing the cost of postsecondary education at public colleges and universities. Many institutions also offer [targeted programs](#) and campus-based supports, such as mentoring and advocacy.

First-Year Success / Student Transition Programs

Many Florida colleges offer programs that support new students as they adjust to college expectations, often including orientation, peer mentoring, academic success workshops and family information sessions.

Disability and Accessibility Supports

Florida colleges and technical centers provide disability services for students with documented disabilities. After registering with the institution's disability services office, students may receive accommodations such as testing adjustments, assistive technology or note-taking support. The [Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System \(FDLRS\)](#) also provides guidance for families and educators working with students who have exceptional education needs.

Supporting the Transition to Postsecondary Education

Practitioners can help learners successfully navigate the transition to postsecondary education by:

- Building strong relationships and maintaining regular communication with learners and families.
- Clearly explaining college requirements, application steps and important deadlines.
- Connecting learners early to supports such as tutoring, mentoring and financial literacy resources.
- Monitoring learner progress and checking in regularly to address challenges early.
- Coordinating with colleges, community organizations and other partners to help learners access available services.

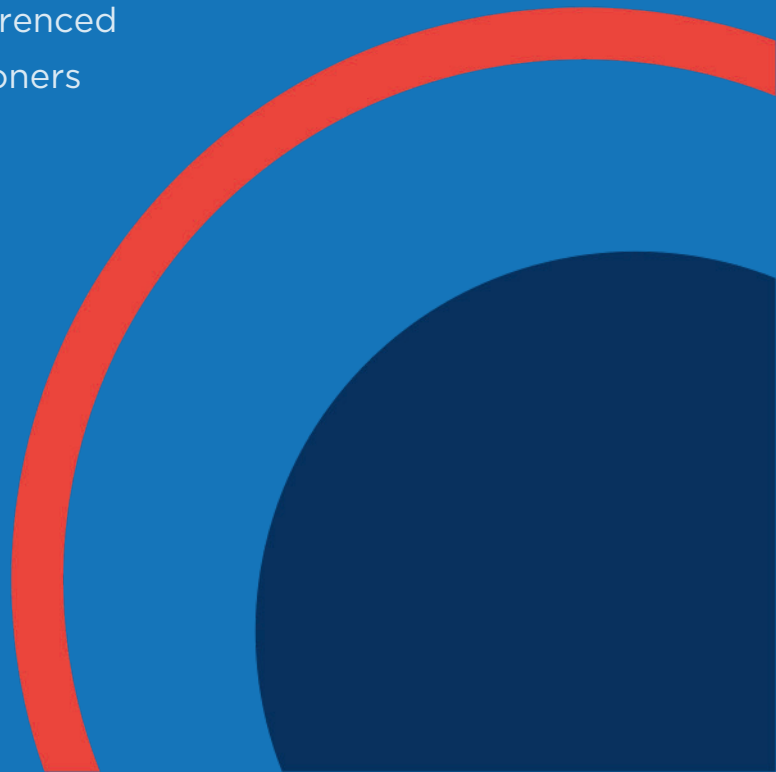
THE BOTTOM LINE

By helping learners understand their options and connecting them with appropriate supports, practitioners can reduce barriers and help more students stay on track toward their education and career goals.

05

Links, Tools & Citations

Every tool, program and data source referenced in this toolkit with direct links for practitioners who want to go deeper.



AdvanceCTE. National Career Clusters Framework Career Interest Survey.
<https://careertech.org/resource/cluster-by-cluster-edition-career-interest-survey>

CareerSource. Florida's Master Credentials List.
<https://careersourceflorida.com/master-credentials-list>

Federal Student Aid. FAFSA form.
<https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>

Florida Department of Children and Families. Postsecondary Tuition and Fee Exemption.
<https://www.myflfamilies.com/youth-young-adults/postsecondary-tuition-and-fee-exemption>

Florida Department of Education. Division of Career & Adult Education, District Technical Colleges.
<https://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/dist-ps-instit.stml>

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<https://www.fldoe.org/schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/about-us/colleges.stml>

Florida Department of Education. Florida Counseling for Future Education Handbook (2021-22).
<https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5421/urlt/FCFFEH.pdf>

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<https://www.fdlrs.org/>

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<https://floridaliteracy.org/>

FloridaShines. Explore Careers: Middle & High School.
<https://www.floridashines.org/careers-middle-high-school>

Florida College Access Network. Apply Yourself Florida.

<https://floridacollegeaccess.org/initiatives/apply-yourself-florida/>

Florida College Access Network. Plan It Florida.

<https://floridacollegeaccess.org/initiatives/plan-it-florida/>

Florida College Access Network. FAFSA Challenge.

<https://floridacollegeaccess.org/initiatives/florida-fafsa-challenge/>

Office of Student Financial Assistance. Florida Student Scholarship & Grant Programs.

<https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org/SAPHome/SAPHome?url=home>

Positive Pathways. Campus-Based Programs.

<https://www.positivepathwaysflorida.org/campusbased-programs>

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<https://www.flbog.edu/myfloridafuture>

State University System of Florida. Programs of Strategic Emphasis.

<https://www.flbog.edu/resources/academic/programs-of-strategic-emphasis/>

State University System of Florida. Universities

<https://www.flbog.edu/universities/>

United States Department of Labor. My Next Move.

<https://www.mynextmove.org>

Xello in Florida

<https://xello.world/en/florida-college-career-ready>

Florida College Access Network

This resource was produced by the Florida College Access Network (FCAN). FCAN is Florida's collaborative network committed to ensuring all Floridians have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond high school toward a rewarding career. FCAN strives to expand knowledge of research, data, policies, and practices that impact postsecondary access and attainment in Florida.

Facebook.com/FloridaCollegeAccessNetwork 

Twitter.com/FLCollegeAccess 

Linkedin.com/company/Florida-College-Access-Network 

Instagram.com/FLCollegeAccess 

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