



## **COLLIER COUNTY FOSTER CHILDREN GRADUATION RATE SURGES PAST U.S. AVERAGE**

NAPLES, Fla. – Collier County Public Schools recently announced the graduation rate for high school seniors who were in foster care. Reaching a record-breaking 78 percent, this far exceeds the national average of 50 percent.

Of the 78 percent, the students who were in the Friends of Foster Children Forever’s tutoring program achieved a 100 percent graduation rate.

Foster children face some of the greatest challenges in our community. On any given day there are more than 300 foster children in Collier County. They have been removed from their homes due to their parents’ abuse, neglect or addiction.

One local nonprofit is trying to break the cycle through education. Friends of Foster Children Forever is a 501c3 organization that provides educational and enrichment activities to enable foster children to reach their full potential.

When a child is removed from their home, they are placed with a family member whenever possible. If this is not an option, they are placed in a foster home or in group housing. Sadly, there are not enough foster homes in Collier County to accommodate the need. When a child is moved, they most often have to go to a new school leaving behind siblings and friends. Not surprisingly this can lead to isolation and depression. Statistically each time a child is moved, they fall behind academically an average of six months which compounds the obstacles they already face.

Friends of Foster Children Forever’s Academic Mentors provide one-to-one tutoring and guidance.

“I cannot say enough good things about the quality of education through Collier County Public Schools,” said Friends of Foster Children Forever Executive Director Ann Hughes. Hughes continued, “Our Academic Mentors work closely with the schools throughout Collier County to provide excellence in education. Clearly, all our hard work has paid off. Being this much higher than the national average is outstanding.”

Reaching a 100 percent graduation rate for high school seniors in the Friends of Foster Children’s Academic Mentoring program would not have been possible without the Naples Children’s & Education Foundation’s (NCEF) support. Through the Naples Winter Wine Festival, NCEF provides funding for foster children with open dependency court cases to receive free tutoring.

Maria Jimenez-Lara, CEO of the Naples Children & Education Foundation stated, “We share in the excitement and pride of this incredible achievement!” Jimenez-Lara continued, “From the time this project was presented we knew that providing consistent and positive academic support for children in foster care would be the key to long term achievement and success. The 100 percent high school graduation rate shows that children facing difficult challenges are amazingly resilient and can succeed when given proper tools, such as educational and emotional support.”

Additional funding for students with closed court cases continuing the tutoring program is provided by the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation, Barron Collier Enterprises and the Collier Community Foundation.

Friends of Foster Children’s 41 academic mentors are contracted to work closely with teachers and tutor the foster child in school, after school, or remotely.

***About Friends of Foster Children Forever***

The Friends of Foster Children Forever provides educational and enrichment activities that enable each child to fulfill their potential. The programs include: Ready for Kindergarten which helps connect foster caregivers with funding to pay for early learning opportunities (ages 0-5); Academic Mentoring (tutoring students ages 5-18 with open and closed dependency cases); Thriving After Care and College Scholarships (for students ages 18-23 who are graduating from high school and transitioning out of the foster care system); Project Enrichment; assistance with summer camps, afterschool and sports; emergency supplies; and basic necessities. The 501(c)3 organization works to fulfill the unmet needs of children who are or were in the foster care system in Collier County. Friends of Foster Children Forever works so that each foster child has the opportunity to have a happy childhood.

For additional information visit [www.FriendsofFosterChildren.net](http://www.FriendsofFosterChildren.net) or call 239-262-1808.