

AT&T Aspire: United Way of North Central Florida

Graduating Students, One Community at a Time

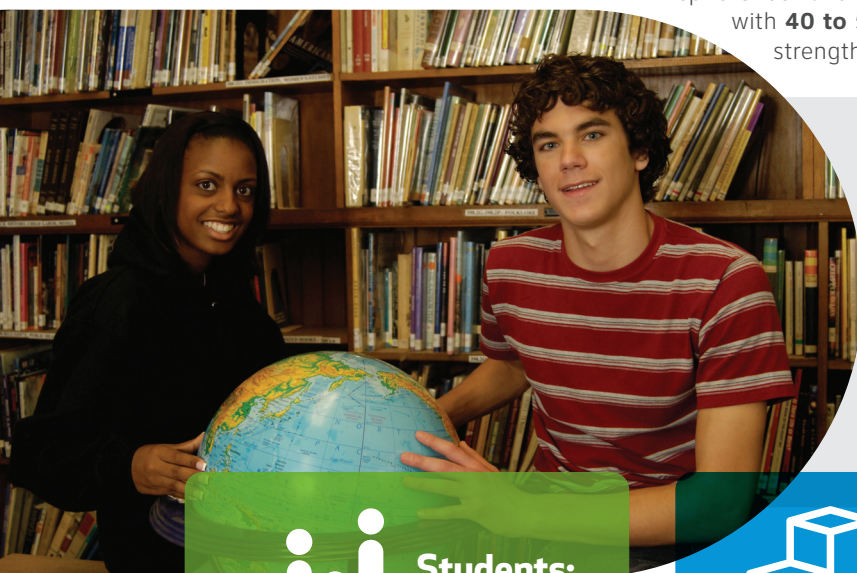


Program Description:

Based in Gainesville, Florida the United Way of North Central Florida has served Alachua and the five surrounding counties since 1957, with a mission to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities. The economic seat of the region is Gainesville, Florida, which is home to both the University of Florida and Santa Fe College. Gainesville is a unique community, in that it has a bi-model economic segmentation. While it has a highly educated and well-paid professional segment, it also encompasses a staggering segment of poverty, which is nearly twice the state average. Almost **30 percent** of the children and youth in Alachua County live in families facing significant poverty-rooted issues. Of the general population of school children, **50 percent** are eligible for free and reduced school meals. Of those living in poverty, African-Americans are disproportionately represented.

Alachua County's high school **graduation rate has risen significantly** in recent years, **from about 68 percent in 2007 to about 78 percent in 2011**. However, graduation and dropout rates among students from families in poverty continue to be lower than the average, and this gap has the potential to grow as the state of Florida introduces rigorous new graduation standards. Students from poverty face significant family and cultural barriers to learning that include such practical issues as a lack of adequate food, shelter, transportation and even clothing.

The United Way of North Central Florida has a strong partnership with the Alachua County Public Schools and will use its AT&T Aspire funding to deepen that relationship by funding the Check and Connect program. This evidence-based program places drop-out prevention specialists within the three high schools with the greatest population of youth at risk of dropping out. Each of the AT&T Aspire Check and Connect specialists will connect as mentors and counselors with **40 to 50 students** and provide social service referral and family strengthening assistance to the families of enrolled students.



"The AT&T Aspire contribution is a wonderful validation of the evidence-based work we are doing in partnership with our Alachua County Public Schools. The program will reach the most vulnerable of our youth and guide them to a path of success, through the thoughtful support of the Check and Connect specialists."

United Way President & CEO Debbie Mason.



Students:
120



Funding:
\$300,000