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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Polk State College receives Chancellor's Best Practice Award for Establishing Leaders in Teacher Education (ELITE)

Winter Haven, Fla., November 20, 2018 — Polk State College recently received the [Chancellor's Best Practice Award](#) for the Establishing Leaders in Teacher Education (ELITE) Program – a partnership with Polk County Public Schools to address the local need for teachers by providing a seamless pathway from high school, to college, to employment for aspiring educators.

Polk State is one of four colleges recognized this year by Florida College System Chancellor Madeline Pumariega, who presented the awards during the Association of Florida Colleges' 69th Annual Meeting and Conference Nov. 7 in Orlando.

"I applaud our colleges for their commitment to excellence and innovation in our system," Pumariega stated in a press release. "It is this commitment that keeps the Florida College System in the forefront as a national leader in higher education."

[The ELITE Program](#) launched this year and [received national attention](#) for its innovative approach to filling not only a local workforce need, but also a demand for teachers across the country.

ELITE allows students at Bartow, Haines City, and Ridge Community high schools to complete teacher preparation courses and Polk State Associate in Arts degrees through dual enrollment and early admission at no cost to them.

Students will then transition to the [Polk State Education](#) baccalaureate program, making them eligible to teach only two years after completing high school. ELITE participants will be immediately employable with Polk County Public Schools upon successful completion of the program, which requires students to maintain an unweighted grade-point average of 3.0.

"What is truly innovative about this program is its ability to identify the interest to teach in young students; to cultivate that interest through rigorous coursework and multiple field experiences in a variety of classroom settings; and to create a direct pipeline of quality teachers to fill our local workforce needs," said Polk State Director of Education Patricia Linder.

The creation of ELITE builds upon a longtime partnership between Polk State and Polk County Public Schools.

Polk State launched its Education baccalaureate program in August 2016 with the Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education and Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education to meet the need for qualified educators in Polk County.

The program was developed in collaboration with Polk County Public Schools – Polk County's largest employer – to create graduates who are ready to immediately and successfully lead local classrooms.

The program has built-in measurements for state-mandated standards and professional competencies for certification endorsements in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and

Reading. The curricula also integrate a variety of objectives for teacher preparation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) and strategies appropriate for students with disabilities. Paired with valuable field experiences in Polk County Public Schools, Polk State's Education baccalaureate students are prepared to fill the increasing demand for qualified educators.

The program will graduate its first class in December 2018 and has already seen great success with students excelling in their courses and field experiences. The program's first class has maintained an average grade-point average of 3.94, and each student has passed all certification exams for Florida Professional Educator Certificates.

The College boasts a 96.93 percent job placement and continuing education rate. And with 70 percent of Polk State graduates staying in Polk County after graduation, the Education baccalaureate program is confident that it will see success in placing teachers in Polk County Public Schools classrooms.

"I am extraordinarily proud of Polk State Education's faculty and staff, who continue to take innovative approaches to meeting the need for quality educators locally, across the state, and nationwide," said Polk State President Angela Garcia Falconetti. "Polk State is thrilled to receive the Chancellor's Best Practice Award for the ELITE Program, and the College is proud of its strong partnership with Polk County Public Schools to ensure students are on a seamless pathway to rewarding careers in education."

About Polk State College

Located in Winter Haven, Florida, and established in 1964, Polk State College is a multi-campus institution serving more than 16,000 students with Bachelor of Applied Science, Bachelor of Science, Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees, as well as a wide range of certificate and workforce training options. The College also operates three charter high schools.

Polk State's advantages include small class sizes; hands-on learning; dedicated faculty; day and night classes; online options; affordable tuition; excellent financial aid; and a diverse community and vibrant student life, including fine arts opportunities, clubs, and intercollegiate athletics.

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