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CONTACT: JENNIFER FENNEL OR
CATHY SCHROEDER
(850) 245-0413

**FLORIDA COMMUNITY COLLEGES RECEIVE
NURSING AND ALLIED HEALTH SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS**

~ Nearly \$250,000 in scholarship funds to address a critical workforce need in Florida ~

ORLANDO – Measures to increase the number of nursing graduates from Florida’s community colleges were in the spotlight today as Community College and Workforce Education Chancellor David Armstrong announced the distribution of nearly \$250,000 in scholarship funds aimed at relieving a statewide critical nursing shortage. The announcement was made during a Foundation for Florida’s Community Colleges board meeting in Orlando.

The scholarships, seeded by a \$2.5 million endowment established by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida (BCBSF) and matched by the Florida Legislature, will be awarded to students pursuing degrees in nursing and allied health professions. By establishing a sustained funding source for student scholarships in nursing and allied health programs at Florida’s community colleges, the state will be better positioned to meet its growing need for skilled nurses and allied health professionals. The BCBSF scholarship is projected to fund 200 students annually. In 2004-05, the number of community college students enrolled in nursing and allied health courses statewide was 80,423.

“The endowed scholarships lay a foundation for educational opportunities in nursing statewide,” said BCBSF Vice President for Public Affairs Catherine Kelly. “Ultimately, increasing the number of nurses and allied health professionals in the state will help promote a healthy future for all Floridians.”

The amount of funds awarded to each community college was based on three criteria: 1) an equal minimum award to each school regardless of program size or performance; 2) the number of full-time students the school had enrolled in their nursing program in 2003-04; and 3) the percentage of students from each school who passed the Board of Nursing exam in 2003-04. In order to receive these funds, each community college must agree to match the funds dollar for dollar through private donors at the local level. A list of community colleges and award amounts is attached.

“Access to quality education is vital to creating skilled nursing and allied health professionals,” said Chairman of the Foundation for Florida’s Community Colleges Patrick Byrne. “The scholarship endowment provides an opportunity for community college students in nursing and allied health programs to complete their educations. That ultimately helps us meet the essential health care workforce need in Florida.”

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Currently, the State of Florida is experiencing a severe shortage of nurses, and workforce studies project the need for nearly 45,000 more nurses statewide by the year 2012. Nursing programs are among the most expensive degrees for students to pursue given the cost of laboratory courses, books, national board exam fees, uniform fees, and equipment needed to complete their education.

“This generous donation is a remarkable example of corporate citizenship,” said Chancellor Armstrong. “BCBSF has focused their corporate giving on one of Florida’s most critical workforce needs, and in so doing is creating opportunities for students to succeed in a nursing career. It’s truly a win-win situation for all involved.”

The number of scholarships available at each community college will be determined by the number of nursing students enrolled full-time and the amount of dollars raised from local private-sector companies and individuals to match the endowment. The scholarships will be awarded to students who will be selected by the individual community colleges.

Florida residents who are accepted and enrolled in a nursing or allied health program at an accredited Florida community college may be eligible to apply for the BCBSF Endowed Scholarship. Colleges are encouraged to recruit scholarship students who are from culturally diverse populations underrepresented in the nursing and allied health workforces today.

BCBSF seeks to have a sustained impact in health care areas of significant need. Its program, Generation RN, is a public-private partnership initiated by BCBSF to build an expanded, stable and culturally diverse nurse workforce in Florida. Combined with state matching dollars and other private support, BCBSF-endowed scholarships fund the education of more than 200 nursing students every year. Endowed professorships, graduate student scholarships, and support for innovative programs help ensure sustained growth in nursing.

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Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida is a leader in Florida's health industry. BCBSF and its subsidiaries serve more than 8.3 million people. Since 1944, the company has been dedicated to meeting the diverse needs of all those it serves by offering an array of choices. BCBSF is a not-for-profit, policyholder-owned, tax-paying mutual company. Headquartered in Jacksonville, Fla., BCBSF is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies. For more information concerning BCBSF, please see its Web site at www.bcbsfl.com.

The Tallahassee-based Foundation for Florida’s Community Colleges is a 501 (C) 3 not-for-profit organization. Its primary purpose is to develop resources that will advance the mission of Florida’s Community College System.