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PRESS RELEASE  
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## **Tampa Bay and Southwest Florida become first Florida communities to be recognized as Talent Hubs**

*Each designation includes a \$125,000 grant to increase education attainment beyond high school*

Lumina Foundation, in partnership with The Kresge Foundation, has recognized Tampa Bay and Southwest Florida as Talent Hubs for their efforts in attracting, retaining, and cultivating the talent necessary to ensure Florida's future prosperity and the economic mobility of Florida families.

"Talent Hubs are not just trying to be some of the best places to live, work, and learn," said Jamie Merisotis, Lumina's president and CEO, in a statement. "These communities also are taking today's students and transforming them into tomorrow's talent."

The designation comes less than a year since the Florida legislature unanimously passed HB 7071, which established the SAIL to 60 Initiative to increase the percentage of working-age Floridians with a high-value postsecondary certificate, degree, or training experience to 60% by 2030. Currently, 49% of Floridians hold such degrees or credentials.

"These Talent Hub designations are well-deserved recognition of the transformational work happening in Tampa Bay and Southwest Florida," said Laurie Meggesin, executive director of the Florida College Access Network. "LEAP Tampa Bay and the FutureMakers Coalition exemplify what's possible when leaders from different sectors work together to improve education and workforce opportunities in their communities."

LEAP Tampa Bay and the FutureMakers Coalition are two of 17 local college access networks across Florida that are working across sectors to lower the barriers preventing students from completing their educations beyond high school. Collectively, local college access networks serve 30 Florida counties and about 82% of the state's population.

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Tampa Bay and Southwest Florida are the first Talent Hubs in Florida and were among four U.S. communities who earned the designation this month, [joining 22 others selected in 2017 and 2018](#). Each new Talent Hub earned a \$125,000 grant to bolster education attainment beyond high school.

In Tampa Bay, LEAP Tampa Bay College Access Network, a cross-sector network working to increase college access and attainment in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, represents the organizations working together on Lumina Foundation's Talent Hub grant.

Grant funds are earmarked for efforts to re-engage the over 300,000 adult learners in the region who started postsecondary education or training, but did not complete it. The grant will support re-enrolling those who already have credits, as well as efforts to create new opportunities and remove barriers for the region's African American, Hispanic and low-income populations, which have historically experienced gaps in educational success.

"LEAP and its regional partners have done a phenomenal job laying the groundwork that resulted in this national designation," said Tampa Mayor Jane Castor. The City of Tampa is a LEAP founding partner. "Our administration is committed to increasing our workforce development, and the Talent Hub designation and grant will certainly support our efforts in helping our residents attain the education and skills they need, which will in turn increase social and economic mobility for our entire community."

In Southwest Florida, FutureMakers Coalition, a collective impact initiative working along the cradle-to-career pathway to create a skilled and sustainable workforce pipeline, will work with Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) and Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW) to propel the region's attainment numbers over the next 15 months.

"This designation and grant are the direct result of the FutureMakers Coalition building on five years of transforming systems in Southwest Florida to increase the number of working age adults with the credentials needed to fill in-demand jobs in the region," said Sarah Owen, president and CEO of the Southwest Florida Community Foundation, the backbone organization of the FutureMakers Coalition. "The Coalition will accelerate efforts that support the region's adult population with some college, but no credential."

A portion of the award (\$15,000) will go to the FutureMakers Fund at the foundation to support overhead of the backbone organization. The remaining dollars will go to FGCU to support a position and marketing to enroll former FGCU students to FGCU or FSW to complete a degree in an effort to significantly increase attainment in the near-term.

Talent Hubs are part of Lumina's \$13 million community mobilization strategy, which focuses on local and regional efforts to increase attainment in ways that can inform other communities.

## **About Florida College Access Network**

Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is Florida's first collaborative network committed to ensuring all Floridians have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond high school and prosper in Florida's dynamic economy. Our mission is to create and sustain a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to increase college and career preparation, access, and completion for all Florida students. For more information, visit [floridacollegeaccess.org](http://floridacollegeaccess.org).

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