BACKGROUNDER: COMPLETE TAMPA BAY

In fall 2019, LEAP Tampa Bay partnered with Complete Florida on an initiative to re-engage “stopped-out” students that did not complete their education or training programs after high school. This new Complete Tampa Bay initiative utilizes a “college success coaching” model to offer support in navigating a return to school for local adults — those identified by education partners from Hillsborough Community College, St. Petersburg College, and the University of South Florida.

Primarily funded in the first year by a grant from Lumina Foundation, a completion coach will support returning adult learners by helping them find the right school and pathway for re-engagement, complete the financial aid process, maximize the credits they’ve already earned, and access other basic needs. The work strategically aligns with the State of Florida’s new “Last Mile” program, which guarantees free tuition at state colleges for anyone within 12 credits (and in good academic standing) of earning their degree or certificate. **Priority will be given to people from disadvantaged populations — specifically students of color and low-income status.** United Way Suncoast, local technical colleges, and area education foundations have also been partners in designing this support from the beginning.

With **more than 330,000 working-age adults** in Tampa Bay who have started college but never finished a credential (2017 American Community Survey), LEAP Tampa Bay network partners are collaborating to:

- Extend an outreach campaign to the target adults about the benefits of returning to complete a degree or credential, specifically targeting underserved populations
- Finalize the Complete Tampa Bay coaching model to help returning students evaluate the best choice for them to return and assist them through the appropriate steps to re-start
- Connect school and community resources more seamlessly to provide a full complement of support for students with barriers to completing
- Eliminate barriers related to the transfer of credits for returning students, as well as improve credit-earning opportunities for experience and prior learning

Some of these adults have few credits or hours of training left to achieve their education and training credentials, so LEAP Tampa Bay is building a structure to get them past the finish line to open up opportunities that could create as much as a $10,000 annual difference in their wages.

The Complete Tampa Bay initiative was at the center of our community’s successful designation as a national “Talent Hub.” Talent Hub is a programmatic designation bestowed by Lumina Foundation — a national funding leader in college access and attainment work. Only 26 communities in the U.S. have been designated as Talent Hubs by Lumina in the three years of the program, and Tampa Bay is one of just two Florida communities that has earned the designation. The Kresge Foundation is a partner with Lumina and helps support the one-year grant award of $125,000 to build out this imperative coaching work.

[Click here to view the official Complete Tampa Bay press release.](#)