



REACH
MANATEE

Local College Access Network (LCAN)

2026

Guiding Plan





GUIDING PLAN

REACH Manatee is Manatee County's Local College Access Network (LCAN), a community collective bringing together individuals from education, business, nonprofit, and government to help students and families access education and career pathways that lead to economic mobility and workforce success.

Florida's *Sail to 60* initiative aims to increase the percentage of working-age adults in the state of Florida with a high-value certificate or a college degree from 54.8% to 60% by 2030. REACH Manatee plans to increase postsecondary enrollment throughout the county for students and their families.

VISION

Every Manatee County resident has equitable access to education, training, and career opportunities that lead to lifelong success and economic prosperity.

MISSION

REACH Manatee mobilizes community partners to increase educational attainment, expand career pathway opportunities, and support student success through coordinated strategies that improve FAFSA completion, postsecondary enrollment, and workforce readiness.

CORE VALUES

- Plans and actions drive a commitment to our community and to individuals in need of support.
- Our community thrives when individuals are empowered to achieve credentials in post-secondary education, which fosters economic stability through increased earning potential, workforce readiness, and sustainable career opportunities.
- Leveraging the strengths and abilities of diverse partners enhances our success.
- Data and metrics drive our ability to evolve, respond, adapt, and innovate.
- Post-secondary education opportunities encompass five career pathways: A.A., A.S. degrees, B.A., B.S. degrees, Military, Career and Technical, and Apprenticeships.
- REACH Manatee will be an active participant in FCAN activities to learn from and share with our fellow LCAN's across the state.

AREAS OF FOCUS & CORE METRICS

Focus Areas

- FAFSA Completion
- Postsecondary Enrollment
- Credential Attainment
- Student and Family Engagement

Core Metrics

- 48.7% of senior students in Manatee County completed a FAFSA application in 2026, as of 06.12.26 (FCAN).
- The graduation rate in Manatee County for 2026 was 90% (FLDOE).
- The post-secondary enrollment within 16 months of high school graduation is 49.7% for Manatee County: 56.6% White, 42.4% Black, 42.1% Hispanic population. (2024 FCAN).
- The percentage of Hispanic adults ages 25 and older with a high school diploma or less is 68.8% in Manatee County, compared to 54.3% for Florida. (U.S. Census Bureau).

DRIVERS

Workforce Demand

- In 2024 Manatee County's annual job growth rate was 2.28%. (FCAN)
- 64% of Florida jobs by 2031 will require some post-secondary education or training beyond high school (Georgetown University, *After Everything Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031*, 2023).

Educational Attainment

- Only 54.8% of adults in the United States hold a degree or other postsecondary credential today. (Lumina, Stronger Nation Report, 2025).
- 44.5% of Manatee County residents (ages 25-64) have a college degree compared to 47.4% statewide in Florida (2024).

Economic Barriers

- 32% of Manatee County households are ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained but Employed). 11% are living in poverty. The Florida average is 34%. (2024).
 - 68% of households fall below the ALICE Threshold in zip code 34207.
 - 62% of households fall below the ALICE Threshold in zip code 34205.
 - 56% of households fall below the ALICE Threshold in zip code 34208.
 - 53% of households fall below the ALICE Threshold in zip code 34210.

Community Input

- Community stakeholders and students say that students have limited exposure to career options.
- Parents are supportive but may have limited ability and resources to guide.
- Guidance resources are limited because of the number of counselors and a redirection of their role and responsibilities.

STRATEGIES

REACH Manatee seeks to increase access to degrees, industry-recognized credentials, apprenticeships, and military pathways, with a particular focus on financially vulnerable populations, including those living below the Federal Poverty Level and those in the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) population. The LCAN also aims to ensure every student graduates with a clear postsecondary plan that supports long-term economic mobility.

YOUTH

Middle School Students

- Increase participation in career exploration experiences among middle school students.

High School Students

- Increase the FAFSA completion rate.
- Increase the number of students with a completed post-secondary education plan.

ADULTS

Parents of targeted youth populations

- Provide parents with the knowledge, resources, and support necessary to understand post-secondary education options, assess affordability, and recognize the long-term value of continued education and training after high school.
- Increase the number of parents who enroll to complete their post-secondary education.

Working Adults

- Increase enrollment of working adults in postsecondary education and credential programs.
- Complete post-secondary education.

APPOINTED AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

Manatee County

- Advocate for post-secondary support needed to achieve REACH goals within the School District of Manatee County.

Statewide

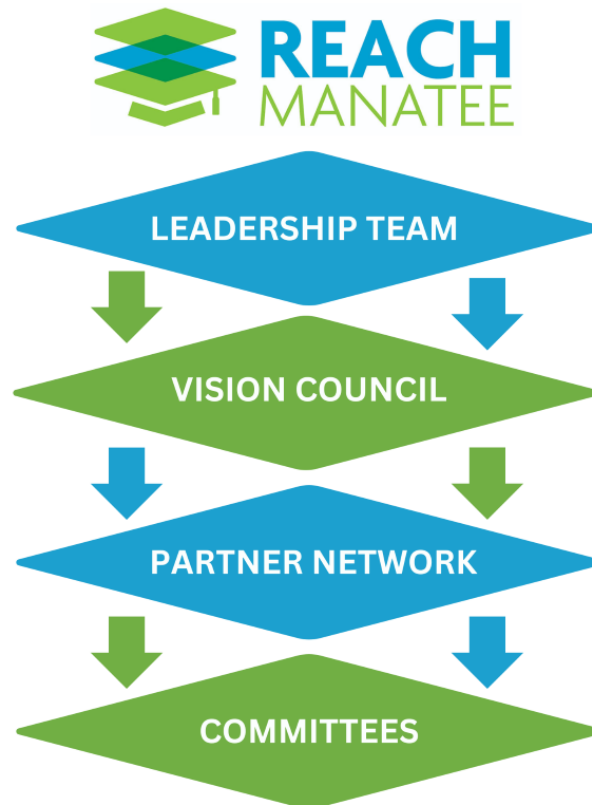
- Support, encourage, and inform statewide legislative priorities of post-secondary education institutions and the School District of Manatee County.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

- Career Pathways
- Mentoring
- Business/Education Partnerships
- Engagement with SDMC and post-secondary institutions
- Collaboration with Career Source Suncoast on Apprenticeships, Internships and Skills Gaps

BACKBONE ORGANIZATION

The Manatee Chamber of Commerce serves as the backbone organization for REACH Manatee, providing the central support structure.



LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Leadership Team is composed of committed individuals who provide strategic direction and policy guidance while serving as a catalyst for collaboration. They promote alignment across working groups by offering oversight, support, partnership, and accountability to advance collective goals and organizational success.

Members:

- Evelyn Almodóvar, Executive Director, UnidosNow
- Dr. Laurie Breslin, Superintendent, School District of Manatee County
- Jacki Dezelski, President & CEO, Manatee Chamber of Commerce
- Mary Glass, Consultant
- Deborah Perry, Director of Education & Workforce Partnerships, Manatee Chamber of Commerce
- Veronica Thames, Chief Executive Officer, Manatee Community Foundation

VISION COUNCIL

The C-Suite decision makers represent a broad spectrum of local agencies that advocate and work collaboratively for meaningful change. Members agree on a common agenda and collaborative approach to meet the collective's set goals.

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- Evelyn Almodóvar, Executive Director, UnidosNow
- Dr. Laurie Breslin, Superintendent, School District of Manatee County
- Jacki Dezelski, President & CEO, Manatee Chamber of Commerce
- Mary Glass, Consultant
- Tommy Gregory, President, State College of Florida
- Jamie Kahns, Senior Vice President, Market Executive, Bank of America
- Dr. Brett Kemker, Interim Regional Chancellor, USF Sarasota Manatee
- Josh Matlock, President and CEO, CareerSource Suncoast
- Shirar O'Connor, CEO, Bradenton Area Economic Development Corporation
- Deborah Perry, Director of Education & Workforce Partnerships, Manatee Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Brittany Pyjas, Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management, State College of Florida
- Veronica Thames, Chief Executive Officer, Manatee Community Foundation

PARTNER NETWORK

The Partner Network is comprised of stakeholders from community organizations who come together to contribute their time, expertise, passions, and lived experiences to help develop and implement strategies. They are more narrowly focused groups charged with strategy implementation.

COMMITTEES

FAFSA Committee

- Increase the percentage of Manatee County students completing the FAFSA.
- Develop a strategy to increase financial literacy among families in Manatee County Schools

Data/Metrics Committee

- Utilize meaningful and accurate data to help make informed decisions.
- Connect data and information from all LCAN partners and community stakeholders/employers to better understand how to support young people and achieve our goals.
- Data should be aligned with our goals/impact/story.

Communications Committee

- Develop and implement a comprehensive communication and outreach strategy that engages students, parents, and families throughout Manatee County and promotes awareness of educational and career pathway opportunities.
- Increase community awareness of available programs, resources, supports, and events by strengthening communication and coordination among organizations serving youth across Manatee County.

Mentoring Committee

- Increase the number of students graduating from high school with a viable post-secondary plan.
 - Career exploration in earlier grades (e.g. 9th grade instead of waiting until 11th or 12th)
 - Post-secondary pathways for every student (skills, culture, social/emotional development, etc.)
 - Educate parents in the post-secondary process.
- Develop a college and career culture from early childhood to post-secondary.
 - Emphasize life-long learning across all socio-economic indicators.
 - A network of diversified resources and support for students and families
- Create a list of community stakeholders/volunteers (e.g., employers) not already engaged in REACH Manatee and include them in REACH efforts.
- Increase the number of adults with a post-secondary plan.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

- **Leadership Team** will review progress regularly to identify areas for celebration and those requiring new strategies, participation, or engagement for success.
- **Vision Council** meetings will include progress updates about each of the three key areas: youth, adults, and elected/appointed officials.
- **Partner Network** meetings will include updates on strategic objectives and results of workgroup initiation in the community.
- **Committees** will develop action plans and annual goals that outline major activities, timelines, responsibilities, metrics, and required investments that support the objectives identified in the plan.

REACH Manatee is committed to ensuring that all residents, particularly those facing barriers to educational attainment, have access to the resources, information, and support needed to pursue post-secondary education and career success. We invite employers, educators, nonprofits, community organizations, elected officials, and residents to join our efforts to expand educational attainment and workforce opportunity throughout Manatee County.



Contact Us

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