



Among the Florida Hot Jobs list, Computer Systems Analyst entry level workers earned on average \$56,712 in 2017 according to the Florida Bureau of Labor Market Statistics. GETTY IMAGES/FUSE

Rise to 55 campaign sets goals for education, jobs

Pam Forrester
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“Rise to 55 by 2025” is a new campaign Florida education and industry leaders hope you tune into and participate in this year. The initiative is aimed at Floridians between the ages of 25 and 64 years old who want to work in Florida and stay competitive in the state’s fast-paced global economy.

Florida’s Higher Education Coordinating Council which includes the Department of Education, The Florida College System, The State University System, Enterprise Florida, The Manufacturers Association of Florida, and Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida launched the initiative with national backing from supportive educational foundations including Lumina Foundation, Helios Education Foundation and CareerSource Florida.

The mission is to increase awareness of the need for workers to continue their education past high school. The new statewide target for earning post-secondary certificates or degrees is 55 percent by the year 2025.

“The goal is to produce a more talented and educated workforce so employers have the resources they need to grow their businesses to create a stronger economy and more robust communities across Florida,” says Madeline Pumariega, the Chancellor of the Florida College System.

A high school education used to lead to a job supporting a family. That is no longer always the case. Labor economists predict by 2025, more than 60 percent of the nation’s jobs will require a post-secondary education; such as a workforce certificate, a two-year associate degree or a baccalaureate degree. A degree or certificate pay off when you enter the workforce.

According to the Florida College Access Network, of recent high school graduates who don’t continue their education, only half are working by the following fall and earn less than \$8 an hour on average. Adults with an associate degree earn 18 percent more than those with a high school diploma. With a bachelor’s degree in hand, a worker earns 50 percent more.

“Increasing educational attainment is crucial to building a strong financial future, not only for our state’s economic stability but also for our residents’ quality of life,” says Jimmy Patronis, Florida’s Chief Financial Officer. “We must strive continually to ensure our citizens are prepared for the kind of high-wage, in-demand jobs that will fuel our economy, and encourage the growth of companies that can sustain meaningful careers.”

Florida’s postsecondary attainment rate is currently 47 percent, just above the national average of 46 percent with some counties reaching as high as 56, but others below. The expectation is not for every county to reach 55 percent but for each county to raise their base to create that skilled and ready workforce to meet the needs in local communities.

Businessman Richard Dodd, President of ReliantSouth Construction Group in Panama City says, “There’s a huge challenge in the construction business. In the construction business, about 10 percent are degreed professionals and the other 90 percent are skilled craftsmen. We as a society have done a poor job by saying that everyone has to go to college, but who is going to build your house, or fix your air conditioner or car?”

Dodd added, “We need to not just focus on higher education, but to look at two-year programs as well. Graduates of technical programs can start a job making \$60,000 a year. What a great investment that is. I hope that we don’t lose sight of that while focusing on bachelor’s degrees. People need good jobs. Jobs can solve a lot of society’s problems by putting money in people’s pockets.”

The campaign is a call to action for business leaders, elected officials and concerned citizens to come together to identify opportunities to help Florida



The Florida College System Certificate in Applied Welding Technologies graduates earn on average \$39,228 annually. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

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Richard Dodd
President of ReliantSouth
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have the talented workforce it needs to build a stronger economy. Statewide meetings and convenings are an effort to encourage students to pursue additional education and strengthen the pipeline to post-secondary education. Educators hope to develop plans to Rise to 55 by engaging local leaders and businesses.

“It is extremely important to bring together local officials, business and education leaders in communities,” said Scott Jenkins, state policy director at Lumina Foundation. “At Lumina, we see the power of convenings and its impact, allowing individuals, from different backgrounds, to coalesce around the issue of higher education attainment and come up with potential solutions for the community.”

The Rise to 55 organizers want to educate, inspire and enlist stakeholders including businesses to pledge to join the effort and partner locally.

“Lumina Foundation’s President and CEO Jamie Merisotis says it best: ‘Communities will rise or descend based largely on their pools of talent, which is the critical human capital needed to fuel this century’s workforce,’” said Nicole Washington, Florida State Policy consultant. “Florida leaders and the Rise to 55 initiative understand this concept and are positioning their communities and the state as exemplars for the future.”

As the slogan says, Rise to 55 by 2025; the initiative is for today, as well as for the future.

“The real focus is to increase the number of students who successfully exit a certificate or degree program so that we make our next generation feel capable and that the sky is the limit,” adds Chief Financial Officer, Jimmy Patronis.

Rise to 55 by 2025 means educational and career achievements for those presently in the academic and employment pipeline, as well as the promise of a better future for Florida’s children and grandchildren.

Dance instruction is positive step for schools



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Dancing is one of the true joys of being human and, when coupled with another human pleasure — the creation of music — one would be hard pressed to have a better time. Dancing is as natural and integral a part of being a human being as singing and dates back countless thousands of years.

The only thing holding a lot of people back from hitting the dance floor is the social awkwardness of not really knowing what you are doing, which brings us to another all-too-human-trait: not wanting to make an abject fool of ourselves in front of others. This is especially true of children and teenagers. Just ask any middle school teacher.

So, this begs the question of “Where do I go to learn to dance that is both emotionally safe, entertaining and educational?” My response is “Why not in school?” The closer it is examined, the more one realizes the advantages that having dancing education as a part of the weekly educational curriculum brings to a school. There are many, and could all be done through P.E. on a regular basis.

The first is basic, simple exercise. As childhood obesity becomes more prevalent and dangerous, dancing is a way for all children to get away from the desk and exercise in a fun way. It is a lot more attractive than doing laps and as every educator will tell you, physical exercise during the school day will allow children to concentrate much better when they have to sit and focus back in the classroom.

The second advantage for a school is that dance creates a positive social bond amongst all children that carries over into the hallways and classrooms. Children get to interact with each other in a structured, team-work oriented way, all with the end purpose of having fun. Each person has a “job” to do and a good dance is had if everybody does their “job” well, so it is incumbent upon each child and instructor to help each other perform well.

Dance also allows boys and girls of all kinds to have the opportunity to interact both physically and emotionally in a structured, positive setting. This pays off in dividends amongst children who might otherwise be physical or social outcasts and not included in interactions with other children. There are no “outcasts” on the dance floor because it is in everybody’s interest to have others do well. It is an anti-bullying exercise.

There are a lot of different dances, but square dancing and its upbeat cousin contra-dancing are perfect for team and positive relationship building. Dancing is history personified. Square dancing came from community barn-raising. Immigrants from parts of Europe had large square barns. Other parts of Europe had long, thin barns — hence contra dancing with long lines instead of spread-out squares. Music from Africa, South America, Asia, the Caribbean, etc. all fostered their own styles of dancing.

The same goes with music from different parts of the U.S., depending on the immigration patterns. Everything from Cajun, to Salsa, to Samba, to ballroom, to folk, to rock, to line to whatever can be taught with large dollops of history added on.

Dancing is also math in a wonderfully enjoyable disguise. Different moves are to different beats in multiples of twos. Often times it takes four, eight, or 16 beats for a move. Since all of this math is physical, it plays strongly into the hands of children who learn through movement and opens up new worlds for those who are more cerebrally inclined.

The icing on the cake is that the dance experience is fun. A child having fun in school is a large gift for the classroom teacher when the school experience is less than fun for some children. It also pays off for the children themselves who have positive experiences with other children that they may usually not interact with, lessening the friction during the rest of the school day. Organized dance instruction is a winner for the whole school.

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