



Milestones Program Description

Florida CAN (College Access Network) research indicates that by 2018, 59% of jobs in Florida will require a high-quality post-secondary degree or credential. According to “A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education”, the March 2012 special report from the Lumina Foundation, 36.5% of working-age Florida adults hold a two- or four-year degree. These and other education statistics indicate that Florida youth who seek meaningful work, financial independence, social acceptance and personal fulfillment must acquire post-secondary educational certification.

Milestones, a collaborative partnership between MERGE, Inc., Brooks DeBartolo High School and We’re HERE To HELP, Inc., offers a continuum of services for economically and academically challenged students who are at-risk with regard to obtaining higher education achievement. MERGE Inc. provides workshops, one-on-one consultations, mentoring programs and college tours for students. The eMerge College Prep Curriculum prepare students and their families for life beyond high school.

A cohort of 30 juniors and seniors from Brooks DeBartolo and other local charter high schools will be recruited to participate in the Milestones project. Brooks DeBartolo will provide space to host project activities.

A minimum of 25% of the students selected to participate in We’re HERE To HELP’s Integrated Training for Personal Advancement and Youth Success (IT PAYS) program will be students who complete the Milestones college prep curriculum.

Post-secondary students selected as IT PAYS Scholars are guided towards completion of a two- or four-year college degree or certification from an accredited vocational program. They receive financial assistance and participate in life, social and job skills workshops, group mentoring and other activities designed to help them achieve academic and personal goals.

We believe this joint effort will produce positive outcomes. Participating high school students will successfully transition into college. They will learn how to develop SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) goals. Post-secondary students will complete higher education requirements which will position them to pursue graduate studies or secure gainful, real living wage employment. Students’ educational experience will be enriched as they develop critical life, social and employment skills and learn to give back to their community.

The Milestones collaboration will instill hope, excitement, discovery, promise and drive to fulfill post-secondary requirements. Wraparound services will arm program participants with practical training designed to increase their marketability in an ever-changing world and workforce climate. Students will gain a better opportunity to become well adjusted, self-sufficient, economically independent adults who demonstrate increased confidence when exposed to social, cultural and employment situations.

The availability of quality employees is particularly critical to our geographic area. The September 12, 2012 issue of the Tampa Bay Times reported that “the Tampa Bay region is one of the worst in the U.S. in terms of finding workers with the necessary training and educational background for the available jobs.” Hillsborough County’s workforce will be strengthened as employers will have access to qualified individuals who possess the required academic certification. Communities whose population consists of an increased number of highly educated residents are better positioned to prosper, experience less poverty and lower crime rates.