



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**St. Louis selected for national initiative to increase degree attainment
led by partnership of St. Louis Graduates and St. Louis Regional Chamber**

- St. Louis Graduates announces new co-chairs guiding effort to support low-income students -

St. Louis, Missouri –[Lumina Foundation](#) announced today that St. Louis is one of the final 20 metropolitan areas joining its 75-city community-based attainment network designed to help communities and regions dramatically increase the number of local residents with postsecondary credentials.

Lumina’s focus on community-based attainment began because of the Foundation’s recognition that community-based networks are well-suited to play a role in institutional planning and can provide the implementation and coordination that is necessary to create impact at state and federal levels in order to improve the nation’s higher education system so that it better serves students.

“Two-thirds of Americans live in or near cities. Our nation cannot meet its growing demand for citizens who have earned a postsecondary credential without meaningful community-based efforts that are tightly focused on increasing educational attainment,” said **Jamie Merisotis**, Lumina’s president and CEO. “We are very pleased with the way this work has unfolded. With 75 communities across the nation working to align the work of business, civic and education efforts in their local communities, greater coordination will occur, resulting in tangible benefits for students of all ages. These students in turn will become graduates who form the backbone of the future economic, social and cultural success of those communities.”

St. Louis was invited to be part of [Lumina’s Community Partnership for Attainment network](#) because of work already underway through St. Louis Graduates and St. Louis Regional Chamber. St. Louis Graduates has for six years served as a community catalyst, bringing together education and community organizations to align and strengthen the system of support for low-income students through coordinated services and advocacy. St. Louis Regional Chamber is bringing St. Louis into the Top Ten regions in degree attainment by engaging business and higher education leadership to measure, monitor and inspire action to accelerate degree completion.

As part of Lumina’s Community Partnership for Attainment network, St. Louis will focus on strengthening efforts to increase degree completion rates for area students experiencing the greatest disparities: low-income and African American students.

Diverse leadership engaged; St. Louis Graduates announces new co-chairs

St. Louis Graduates' involvement is led by its two new co-chairs who are announced today: **Alan Byrd**, Dean of Enrollment Services at University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL), and **Allison Williams**, Senior Vice President at Wyman. Byrd holds a Bachelor's degree in Communications and Master's degree in Higher Education Administration, both from Southeast Missouri State University. He is currently working on his Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership at UMSL. Williams holds a Bachelor's degree from Saint Louis University and a Master's degree from Boston College, both in Social Work.

Byrd and Williams will transition into the co-chair role over the next two months. Founders **Jane Donahue**, President of St. Louis Public Schools Foundation, and **Faith Sandler**, Executive Director of The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis, continue as active members of the St. Louis Graduates Steering Committee involved in the Lumina network as well.

"St. Louis Graduates exists because of the vision and tireless commitment to students of Jane Donahue and Faith Sandler which has led to unprecedented regional collaboration in support of students. Alan and Allison will sustain that focus on students while building a regional advocacy voice," said St. Louis Graduates Steering Committee member **Kathy Reeves**, Corporate Community Relations Director at Enterprise Holdings, who, with **Cynthia Crim**, Foundation Program Manager at Commerce Bank, led the nominating process that identified Byrd and Williams.

As the leader of undergraduate recruitment initiatives at UMSL, Byrd works daily with students who are first in their families to attend college and face significant financial obstacles to get there. At Wyman, Williams oversees implementation of Wyman's Teen Leadership Program and Teen Outreach Program which build teen confidence, resilience and leadership skills in schools and community organizations locally and across the U.S.

"College and universities cannot work in isolation," said Byrd. "We need the shared commitment of business and community leaders to ensure our neediest students have the support to not only enroll in college, but graduate."

"Low-income and African American students face significant barriers to graduation – financial, academic, social-emotional, and cultural. Collaborating with the Chamber, business and higher education strengthens our voice in advocating for state and institutional policies that support students and keeps them on the path to a degree," added Williams.

Leading the Community Partnership for Attainment work from the Chamber are President and CEO **Joe Reagan** and Vice President of Education Strategy **Anne Klein**. Reagan joined the Chamber three years ago after leading Greater Louisville Inc. - the Metro Chamber of Commerce where he helped launch that region's 55,000 Degrees initiative. Klein joined the Chamber in December and brings extensive experience in policy and planning through positions with both St. Louis County and St. Charles County. The Chamber Higher Education Council and Talent Council representatives are also engaged.

“Not only is there an economic imperative to increase degree completion, there is a moral imperative to ensure greater equity in degree attainment for all St. Louisans. Working together with St. Louis Graduates creates a broad-based effort with the momentum to substantially increase the pool of metro graduates,” said Reagan.

Action plan in development

The overall effort connects to Goal 2025, Lumina’s national goal to increase the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025. Progress toward the goal will be measured by credentials earned after high school, including certificates, associate degrees and bachelor’s degrees held by local residents. The cities selected will work with Lumina through 2016 to expand and deepen the work they have demonstrated in advancing postsecondary attainment agendas.

St. Louis will work closely with Lumina and national thought leaders to develop a customized action plan focused on reaching attainment goals to increase the percentage of high-quality credentials. The collaborative effort connects St. Louis and participating cities with significant technical and planning assistance, data tools, flexible funding, and the ability to customize attainment plans that will best suit each community’s needs and the well-being of its residents.

St. Louis Graduates and St. Louis Regional Chamber last week convened representatives of area school districts, higher education institutions, college access organizations and businesses to begin crafting the regional plan.

The third and final cohort of communities include: Atlanta, Ga.; Birmingham, Ala.; Boise, Idaho; Charleston, S.C.; Charlotte, N.C.; Durham, N.C.; Fresno, Calif.; Miami, Fla.; Mobile, Ala.; Monterey Bay, Calif.; Racine, Wis.; Rockford, Ill.; Shasta County, Calif.; Southern Indiana; Springfield, Mo.; St. Louis, Mo.; Tampa, Fla.; Tulsa, Okla.; Twin Cities, Minn.; Tyler, Texas. To view a complete list of cities participating in this work, national thought leaders assisting these cities, and to learn more please [click here](#).

About Lumina Foundation: Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina’s outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025. For more information, log on to: www.luminafoundation.org

About St. Louis Graduates: St. Louis Graduates is a collaborative network of college access nonprofits, K-12 and higher education, business and philanthropy focused on increasing degree completion for low-income and first-generation students. For more information, visit www.stlouisgraduates.org

About St. Louis Regional Chamber: The St. Louis Regional Chamber is a broad community of leaders united for economic prosperity throughout the entire St. Louis bi-state region. Our aspiration is for St. Louis to be one of the Top 10 U.S. regions in prosperity. Our one purpose is to inspire a greater St. Louis. Together, we will make St. Louis a more attractive place for people to live, work and invest. We will win

on today's regional strengths in focused economic clusters. We will champion a better tomorrow through greater educational attainment, economic inclusion, entrepreneurship and innovation. For more information, visit www.stlregionalchamber.com

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