

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025**

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SENATE BILL 579

Short Title: Transforming the High School Experience. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Lee, Sawyer, and Settle (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

March 26, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN
COMMISSION, TO ESTABLISH VARIOUS COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING
PROGRAMS, AND TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR THOSE PURPOSES.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

PART I. NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN COMMISSION

SECTION 1.(a) Commission Established. – There is established the North Carolina High School Redesign Commission (Commission). The Commission shall be located administratively in the Department of Public Instruction but shall exercise all of its prescribed powers independently of the Department. The purpose of the Commission is to explore and recommend changes to policies and systems governing high school and higher education that will better prepare North Carolina students for success as they transition to higher education or the workforce.

SECTION 1.(b) Commission Membership. – The Commission shall consist of 15 members as follows:

- (1) Two members appointed by the General Assembly upon recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.
- (2) Two members appointed by the General Assembly upon recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate.
- (3) One member appointed by the Governor.
- (4) The State Superintendent of Public Instruction or his or her designee.
- (5) The President of The University of North Carolina or his or her designee.
- (6) The President of North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities or his or her designee.
- (7) The President of the North Carolina Community College System or his or her designee.
- (8) The chief executive officers of each of the following organizations, or their designees: MyFutureNC, the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce, BEST NC, and SparkNC.
- (9) One chief administrative officer or president of a community college participating in a program, project, or initiative developed pursuant to this act and one superintendent of a local school administrative unit participating in a program, project, or initiative developed pursuant to this act or their respective designees. These commissioners shall be appointed by the chair of the Commission elected pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.



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SECTION 1.(c) The Commission shall elect a chair from the members appointed by the General Assembly. Each commissioner shall have one vote for the chair, except those commissioners to be appointed by the chair pursuant to subdivision (9) of subsection (b) of this section who shall not yet be appointed. The Commission shall meet at least four times annually. The Commission shall meet on the call of the chair or as additionally provided by the Commission. A quorum is six members of the Commission. Members may not vote by proxy.

SECTION 1.(d) All members shall be appointed to terms for the entire duration of the Commission. Any vacancy in a term shall be filled by the appointing authority for the remainder of the unexpired term.

SECTION 1.(e) Commission Duties. – The Commission shall examine promising practices in North Carolina and nationally to inform the Commission's recommendations. At a minimum, the Commission shall consider the following:

- (1) Flexible requirements for high school diplomas that are relevant to the knowledge, skills, and abilities students will need for success in the future workforce.
- (2) Access to apprenticeships, internships, clinical experiences, and other high-quality, work-based learning experiences while in high school.
- (3) Opportunities for students to earn industry recognized credentials while in high school.
- (4) Partnerships between public school units and North Carolina Community Colleges, The University of North Carolina, and North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities for the purposes of facilitating subdivisions (1) through (3) of this subsection.
- (5) Personalized pathways for students to satisfy core graduation requirements.
- (6) Modular credit bearing alternatives to semester or yearlong courses.
- (7) Competency-based alternatives to time bound courses.
- (8) Strategies for extending learning beyond school walls at scale via community connected experiences, including incorporating incentives for local businesses to partner with schools.
- (9) Uses of artificial intelligence to expand student opportunities to engage in career exploration and work-based learning experiences.
- (10) Alternative funding models to enable the development of a statewide learning ecosystem that encourages subdivisions (1) through (9) of this subsection.
- (11) Career exploration opportunities for students in middle school and the first two years of high school that prepare students to engage successfully in a redesigned high school experience.
- (12) Evaluation of the programs, projects, and initiatives established by this act, and any other competency-based education (CBE) programs or high school redesign efforts taking place in the State. The Commission shall partner with the Office of Learning Research at the North Carolina Collaboratory to conduct these evaluations.

SECTION 1.(f) Meetings and Organization. – The chair shall designate one or more of the organizations identified in subdivision (8) of Section 1(b) of this act to plan and manage Commission meetings and draft reports. Designated organizations shall provide administrative staff for meetings. Funds appropriated to the Department of Public Instruction to be used to contract with one or more organizations to plan and manage Commission meetings pursuant to this act shall be divided equally among the organizations designated by the chair unless otherwise agreed by the chair and all designated organizations.

SECTION 1.(g) Report. – The Commission shall submit a report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by April 30, 2026, and annually thereafter. The reports shall include all recommendations approved by a majority of Commission members and

a summary of any evaluations of the efficacy of any CBE programs and high school redesign efforts implemented during the current school year.

SECTION 1.(h) The Commission shall terminate on June 30, 2030, or upon filing of its final annual report, whichever occurs first.

PART II. COMPETENCY-BASED AND HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN PROGRAMS

COMPETENCY-BASED HIGH SCHOOL AND HEALTHCARE AND HIGH-TECH PATHWAYS PROGRAM

SECTION 2.(a) Program Established; Purpose. – There is established the Competency-Based High School and Healthcare and High-Tech Pathways Program (Program). The purpose of the Program is to create pathways that will utilize competency-based education (CBE). Pathways will result in obtaining either an associate degree or an industry recognized credential/certification/licensure based on the student's goal of employment or enrollment. Students will decide their college or career track at the end of their junior year with an initial emphasis on healthcare preparation.

SECTION 2.(b) Participants. – Mooresville Graded School District (MGSD) shall partner with Mitchell Community College (MCC) to implement the Program.

SECTION 2.(c) Program Time Line. – MGSD, in collaboration with MCC, shall contract with an organization with demonstrated expertise in designing and implementing learner-centered, modular, and competency-based high school programs that align with emerging and high-tech career pathways. The organization shall have experience in co-designing stackable credentials with local education agencies and higher education partners and a documented track record of developing digital infrastructure that supports student-paced progression, interdisciplinary learning, and real-world skill acquisition. This expert partner shall assist in developing a framework for the Program, including course design, sequencing, credentialing structure, and other elements necessary for personalized student progression during the 2025-2026 school year. Students will have the opportunity to participate in a pathway provided by the Program by the 2027-2028 school year at the latest.

SECTION 2.(d) Program Flexibilities. – Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the following flexibilities shall be available to Program participants:

- (1) MGSD may offer Credit by Demonstrated Mastery assessments and CTE Proof of Learning assessments outside of existing State testing windows.
- (2) MCC may enroll MGSD students in community college courses prior to their eleventh grade year without the student meeting the requirements for ninth and tenth grade students pursuant to subdivision (4) of G.S. 115D-20.
- (3) Students participating in the Program shall have access to all community college courses at MCC, regardless of pathway selection.
- (4) MGSD may replace any high school graduation credit requirement, except those outlined in this subdivision, with either community college courses offered by MCC or locally developed CBE courses that are consistent with the student's pathway. MGSD shall not replace any graduation credit requirements in the following subject areas:
 - a. English.
 - b. Mathematics.
 - c. Science.
 - d. Social Studies.
- (5) All schools in MGSD shall be deemed to have been continuously operating under a modified calendar since the 2003-2004 school year for purposes of G.S. 115C-84.2(d). MGSD may align their school calendar with the MCC calendar.

- (6) Notwithstanding G.S. 115C-295, beginning July 1, 2026, so long as MGSD is participating in the Program, up to fifty percent (50%) of the teachers in each school in MGSD may be employed as teachers despite not holding teacher licenses if they meet the requirements set out in this subdivision. All teachers who are teaching in the core subject areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts shall be college graduates. All teachers hired by MGSD who are not licensed as a teacher by the State shall complete preservice training, which may be offered through an educator preparation program or by a local school administrative unit, in all of the following areas prior to beginning instruction:
- a. The identification and education of children with disabilities.
 - b. Positive management of student behavior.
 - c. Effective communication for defusing and de-escalating disruptive or dangerous behavior.
 - d. Safe and appropriate use of seclusion and restraint.
- (7) Beginning with the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the Department of Public Instruction shall calculate the amount of State funds to be allocated to MGSD on the same basis as other local school administrative units and shall distribute those funds to MGSD. The Department shall use statewide average salary figures for the purpose of calculating the dollar equivalent of guaranteed positions as necessary. The funds allocated to MGSD shall be subject to any restrictions as to use imposed by federal law, the conditions of federal or State grants, or as provided through any rules that the State Board adopts to ensure compliance with federal regulations. Notwithstanding G.S. 115C-105.25, use of these funds shall otherwise be unrestricted except as provided in this act.
- (8) The deposit of money in the State treasury to the credit of MGSD shall be made as necessary for the operation of MGSD. The State Board may withhold money to be distributed to MGSD if any report required to be filed with State school authorities is more than 30 days overdue. Money in the State Public School Fund and State bond moneys shall be released only on warrants drawn on the State Treasurer, signed by a local official as required by the State Board.
- (9) Upon notification by the Board of Trustees of the Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System to the State Treasurer and the Office of State Budget and Management as to any default of MGSD, the State Board shall withhold from any State appropriation due to MGSD an amount equal to the sum of all delinquent contributions and payments due to the Retirement Systems Division and shall transmit that amount to the Retirement Systems Division.

SECTION 2.(e) Selection of Third-Party Vendor. – MGSD shall select a third-party vendor (Vendor) that is an educational support provider with a nationally recognized, research-based instructional and leadership framework, including a High Reliability School model, a taxonomy of educational objectives aligned to classroom strategies, and a system for implementing personalized competency-based education. The provider shall have published extensively in peer-reviewed and practitioner literature, have an established track record of working directly with K-12 schools and districts across multiple states, and offer professional development services, implementation support, and instructional resources developed and led by a founding education researcher with over four decades of influence in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

SECTION 2.(f) MGSD Partnership with Vendor. – MGSD shall partner with the Vendor selected pursuant to subsection (e) of this section to develop standards-aligned proficiency scales for all content areas in grades nine through 12 to ensure educators in the

participating schools have the tools necessary to successfully transition to CBE approaches. The Vendor shall provide professional development and coaching to the schools in MGSD to ensure educators can engage in learning about CBE approaches, including implementation of the proficiency scales developed by MGSD.

SECTION 2.(g) Funding. – It is the intention of the General Assembly to appropriate from the General Fund to the Department of Public Instruction the sum of up to two million dollars (\$2,000,000) in nonrecurring funds for each year of the 2025-2027 fiscal biennium. These funds would not revert but remain available until the end of the 2026-2027 fiscal year. These funds shall be allocated to MGSD for the following purposes:

- (1) To contract with experts in CBE and designing stackable credentials pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.
- (2) To hire one additional staff member at MGSD to oversee implementation of the Program.
- (3) To partner with a Vendor pursuant to subsection (f) of this section.

LIGHTHOUSE MATH PROJECT

SECTION 3.(a) Project Established; Purpose. – There is established the Lighthouse Math Project (Project). The purpose of the Project is to increase the percentage of high school students who are (i) eligible to complete college level mathematics upon graduation from high school and (ii) able to complete college level math either through dual enrollment while in high school or within the first year of college enrollment.

SECTION 3.(b) Project Participants. – Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) shall partner with Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) for high school students at East Wake High School and Knightdale High School to be eligible to participate in the Project at the Wake Tech East campus of Wake Tech. Wake Tech and WCPSS shall partner with SparkNC to align the Project participants' ongoing efforts at the Wake Tech East campus with the design and implementation of the Project.

SECTION 3.(c) Project Commitments. – WCPSS, in collaboration with Wake Tech, shall contract with Khan Academy, Inc. (Khan), for use of the artificial intelligence student tutoring program, Khanmigo. Students enrolling at participating high schools shall have access to Khanmigo from the time of enrollment in the high school and continuing through their attendance at Wake Tech if the student chooses to enroll at Wake Tech East. Wake Tech shall collaborate with Khan to do the following:

- (1) Develop and deliver at least one Khanmigo-centered gateway college math course to be offered to high school students at participating high schools to be completed as a college level math course. This course shall also be available to students who graduate from participating high schools and enroll in the courses at Wake Tech East.
- (2) Develop a Khanmigo-centered developmental math course sequence that will be provided by Wake Tech faculty to students from participating high schools in one of the following formats:
 - a. As part of a Career and College Promise Career Ready Pathway.
 - b. As supplement to a Career and College Promise Pathway.
 - c. As a summer bridge program eligible to students prior to or subsequent to their junior and senior years of high school.
 - d. As a community college course during the first semester of enrollment at Wake Tech.

SECTION 3.(d) Modular Math Course – As part of the Project, Khan, in consultation with Wake Tech and WCPSS, shall work to develop a self-paced, competency-based modular math course with appropriate student diagnostics and student assessments based on the college readiness math competencies provided as part of the Project. It is the intent that students

successfully demonstrating college readiness math competencies will be eligible to enroll in college level math courses.

SECTION 3.(e) Funding; DPI. – It is the intention of the General Assembly to appropriate from the General Fund to the Department of Public Instruction the sum of up to five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to contract with Khan for licenses for the Khanmigo application and to create the course developed pursuant to subdivision (1) of subsection (c) of this section. It is the intention of the General Assembly that funds appropriated for the purposes laid out in this section shall not revert but shall remain available to accomplish the purposes of this section until the end of the 2026-2027 fiscal year.

SECTION 3.(f) Funding; NCCCS. – It is the intention of the General Assembly to appropriate from the General Fund to the Community Colleges System Office the sum of up to one million dollars (\$1,000,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to be used to establish time-limited positions at Wake Tech. Two positions shall be assigned to work in each participating high school to assist in the implementation of the courses offered by the Project. It is the intention of the General Assembly that funds appropriated for the purposes laid out in this section shall not revert but shall remain available to accomplish the purposes of this section until the end of the 2028-2029 fiscal year.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SEAMLESS SKILLS INITIATIVE

SECTION 4.(a) Initiative Established; Purpose. – There is established the Community College Seamless Skills Initiative (Initiative). The purpose of the Initiative is to create a competency-based education (CBE) model that seamlessly connects high school and community college. By aligning learning experiences from high school with college-level competencies, the Initiative enables students to explore career pathways, earn dual credit, and fulfill computer science requirements while gaining credentials of value in high-demand technology employment sectors through college credit.

SECTION 4.(b) Initiative Participants. – Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC) and Wilkes Community College (WCC) shall partner to implement the duties of the Initiative.

SECTION 4.(c) Project Commitments. – The Project shall commit to accomplishing each of the following:

- (1) Establish high-tech pathways that will integrate high school and community college curricula for hands-on, project-based learning.
- (2) Develop competency-based pathways that will create cross-curricular maps for dual credit, fostering seamless transitions between secondary and postsecondary education.
- (3) Scale and replicate to be able to build a scalable framework for rapid implementation across North Carolina.
- (4) Empower student ownership by enabling students to set long-term learning goals and to manage and own their credentials with a digital wallet.
- (5) Facilitate student work experiences to accelerate learning and transition students into work through "learn & earn" work-based learning in partnership with public agencies and private employers.
- (6) Address workforce needs by developing and sustaining a comprehensive talent pipeline of skilled workers for high-demand technology fields in occupations that depend upon IT and OT for operational success.
- (7) Develop statewide resources, including a guidebook to facilitate model replication and a new talent development model to accelerate learning using CBE.

SECTION 4.(d) Digital Wallet. – The participants in the Initiative shall contract with a third-party entity to create a secure, interoperable digital wallet platform capable of issuing, storing, verifying, and sharing learner credentials, including microcredentials, certifications, transcripts, and verified skill records. The platform shall allow for credential portability across educational institutions and employers, support open standards for interoperability, and ensure privacy and security in compliance with applicable laws. The system shall enable learners to manage a comprehensive, lifelong record of achievement that is accessible, verifiable, and shareable with third parties through digital means. All credential and learner data shall be owned and controlled by the student and shall not be stored in centralized cloud infrastructure.

SECTION 4.(e) Support. – The Community Colleges System Office shall provide ongoing technical support to community colleges participating in the Initiative. FTCC shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with WCC to jointly co-design the Program. As part of this effort, the colleges shall engage an organization with demonstrated expertise in designing and implementing learner-centered, modular, and competency-based high school programs aligned with emerging and high-tech career pathways. The selected organization shall have a history of co-designing stackable credentials with local education agencies and postsecondary institutions and a proven track record of building digital infrastructure that supports student-paced progression, interdisciplinary instruction, and authentic skill development. The organization shall assist in the development of a comprehensive framework for the Program, including course design, sequencing, credentialing structure, and related elements necessary to support personalized student progression during the 2025-2026 school year.

SECTION 4.(f) It is the intention of the General Assembly to appropriate from the General Fund to the Community Colleges System Office the sum of up to three million seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$3,750,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to be allocated to FTCC and WCC for the purposes outlined in this section. To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the sum of up to two million seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$2,750,000) shall be allocated to FTCC and the sum of up to one million dollars (\$1,000,000) shall be allocated to WCC. Funds allocated for the purposes outlined in this section shall not revert but shall remain available until the end of the 2028-2029 fiscal year.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION AND HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN STRATEGIC NETWORK

SECTION 5. MGSD, MCC, Wake Tech, WCPSS, FTCC, WCC, and SparkNC shall collaborate to create a Competency-Based Education and High School Redesign Strategic Network (Network). The president of SparkNC, or the president's designee, shall serve as the chair of the Network. The chair shall coordinate the operations of the Network and provide administrative and technical support for the Network to the extent such support is necessary. The Network shall provide a means for each entity to share what it has learned and developed regarding CBE and high school redesign. The goals of the Network shall be to advance the goals of developing a CBE approach to education across the State.

OFFICE OF LEARNING RESEARCH EVALUATION

SECTION 6.(a) The Office of Learning Research at the North Carolina Collaboratory shall study and evaluate the Programs established pursuant to this Part and report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by March 15, 2027, and annually thereafter, culminating in a final report on March 15, 2030. Reports shall include at least the following:

- (1) The total number of students engaging with these programs.
- (2) The total amount of funds expended to implement, design, and operate the programs.

(3) Effects on student achievement and learning outcomes.

(4) Any other information requested by the Committee.

SECTION 6.(b) It is the intention of the General Assembly to appropriate from the General Fund to the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina the sum of up to four hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$450,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to be allocated to the North Carolina Collaboratory for the Office of Learning Research to conduct the study and evaluation required by this section.

PART III. EFFECTIVE DATE

SECTION 7. This act becomes effective when the Current Operations Appropriations Act of 2025 becomes law and if that bill appropriates funds for the purposes detailed in each section of this act.