



NORTH CAROLINA
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

Innovative Signature Career Academy Pilot
Program

SL 2021-180, sec. 7.72

Date Due: August 15, 2024
DPI Chronological Schedule, 2023-2024

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SL 2021-180, SEC. 7.72 INNOVATIVE SIGNATURE CAREER ACADEMY PILOT PROGRAM

SECTION 7.72.(a) Establish; Purpose. – There is established the Innovative Signature Career Academy Program (Program) as a pilot program to be implemented in Guilford County Schools for the purpose of reforming its current career and technical education (CTE) program to more deliberately prepare its students for high-wage, high-skills careers. The Program shall focus on hosting signature career academies at traditional high schools located in the local school administrative unit that specialize in defined areas of career and technical education.

SECTION 7.72.(d) Reporting. – By June 30 of the first school year of operation of the Program, and every June 30 thereafter for the duration of the Program operated as a pilot, Guilford County Schools shall report to the Department of Public Instruction on (i) implementation and administration of the Program, including the use of additional resources provided as an appropriation of State funds specifically for the Program, (ii) data from the Program on student completion rates for career pathways and any other data requested by the Department, and (iii) any recommendations on the modification of the Program or the potential application of the Program in other local school administrative units. By **August 15** of the first year of reporting by Guilford County Schools under this subsection, and every August 15 thereafter for the duration of the Program operated as a pilot, the Department of Public Instruction shall report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the information submitted by Guilford County Schools pursuant to this subsection.

LOCAL REPORT FROM GUILFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS (GCS)

Career academies are a leading high school reform designed to engage students and better prepare them for college and the workplace. They offer small, more personalized learning environments; integrated academic and technical courses organized around career themes; and work-based learning opportunities. Career academies, in use for nearly 40 years (Kemple and Willner 2008), are a leading high school reform designed to engage students and better prepare them for college and the workplace.¹ Initially intended to provide vocational training to students at risk of dropping out of school, they have since become a comprehensive high school strategy (Stern, Dayton, and Raby 2000), offering small, more personalized learning environments; integrated academic and technical courses organized around career themes; and work-based learning opportunities.

The Innovative Signature Career Academy Program as a pilot program is in year five of implementation in Guilford County Schools (GCS) with the fulfilled purpose of reforming its current Career and Technical Education (CTE) program to more deliberately prepare its students for high-wage, high-skills careers. The Program hosts signature career academies at traditional high schools located in the local school administrative unit that specialize in defined areas of career and technical education. There are five Signature Career Academies (SCA): The Academy of Biomedical & Specialized Health Science at The Smith Academy offers Biotechnology Research, Pharmacy Technician and Counseling & Mental Health Pathways; Northeast Guilford and Kearns Academy of Computer and Information Sciences offers Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity Pathways; Western Guilford Academy of Transportation, Distribution and Logistics offers Drone Technology and Global Logistics & Supply Chain Management Pathways; and, Ben L. Smith of Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering offers pathways in Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Pathways. Southeast Guilford will be GCS's sixth SCA and it will duplicate Ben L. Smith offering pathways in Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering; it is set to start in the 2024-25 school year.

Shaping students, through multilayered supports, to become successful citizens, workers, and leaders for the global economy is the collective mission of CTE. Our vision extends to the realization that when students participate, and concentrate, in Career and Technical Education career pathways, when parents recognize CTE's impact, and when partners engage in meaningful, ongoing ways, a more talented workforce pipeline results, yielding greater economic development and stronger communities. Using equitable appropriation of federal CTE funds provides students with career exposure, career exploration, and authentic career experience; and, helps educators identify the unique smartness of students.

Students in Guilford County Schools' CTE five current Innovative Signature Career Academies (SCA) earned over 364 industry-recognized credentials during the 2023-24 school year. There were 180 pathway completers for the 2023-24 school year. The total enrollment for SCAs in Guilford County Schools is 501 students. Female students make up 45 percent of SCA students. Our academic exceptionalities equate to 38 percent of the SCA student enrollment. The racial/ethnic demographic of our SCA students is as follows: 55.09 percent (Black), 24.15 percent (Hispanic), 12.18 percent (White), and 8.58 percent (Other). CTE is the ultimate classroom experience centered

on our “Six C’s” as goals and measurements for our CTE programs: Concentrators, Credentials, College Credit, Courageous Partnerships, Career Placements, and Continued Innovation.

SCA CTE Career Pathway Completers		
School SY 2023-24	Career Pathways	
The Academy at Smith	Counseling and Mental Health (CMHC)	PLTW Biotechnology Research and Development (PLWB)
	36	40
Ben L. Smith HS	PLTW Engineering (PLWE)	SREB Integrated Productions (INPT)
	37	29
Kearns Academy	Cybersecurity (CBSY)	Artificial Intelligence (AI)
	0	0
Northeast High School	Cybersecurity (CBSY)	Artificial Intelligence (AI)
	0	0
Western Guilford	Drone Technology (DRON)	Global Logistics & Supply Chain Management (GLSC)
	14	24

The Signature Career Academies (SCA) within Guilford County Schools provide equitable choices for high-quality education via relevant career and technical pathways in emerging labor markets. The SCAs have exceeded the expectations of our students & parents, staff, and partners by offering pathways that are in-demand and high skill in four of the Triad's top four job sectors, healthcare, transportation/distribution/logistics, computer science/cybersecurity/artificial intelligence, and manufacturing/engineering. The continuous improvements and recommendations for our SCAs are to strengthen and deepen Career & Technical Education coursework, academic challenge and technical skills with credentialing opportunities; develop modern career pathways that identify required knowledge, skills, experiences, credentials & educational levels; align pathways with current & future economic development needs; spark student interests earlier; innovate facilities and technologies; increase business/industry partnerships (apprenticeships, internships & mentorships); and, increase college and career student readiness.