

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2023**

S

1

SENATE BILL 687

Short Title: Igniting Futures in Technology. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Lee, Craven, and P. Newton (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

April 10, 2023

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE SPARKNC PILOT TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT-DRIVEN
LEARNING AND EXPLORATION IN TECHNOLOGY.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1.(a) There is established the SparkNC Pilot Program (Program). The pilot program authorizes SparkNC, a North Carolina nonprofit corporation, in partnership with selected public school units, to develop a nontraditional, student-driven pathway through which students may select and complete modular learning experiences that, when aggregated, will provide a competency-based equivalency to a traditional elective course credit. SparkNC shall provide a menu of modular learning experiences that include opportunities for work-based learning. The competency-based elective credit shall be denoted on student transcripts as High-Tech Learning Accelerator and focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

SECTION 1.(b) Each public school unit partnering with SparkNC in accordance with this act (partnering public school units) shall enter a memorandum of understanding with SparkNC to meet certain requirements for the Program. These requirements shall include the provision of a physical learning lab staffed by a learning lab facilitator that will provide a site for collaborative learning and virtual networking. Learning lab facilitators shall facilitate interdistrict instruction, provide student advising, design learning experiences, coordinate with industry partners, and validate student work.

SECTION 1.(c) Partnering public school units shall award the elective credit in High-Tech Learning Accelerator to any student who completes a combination of modules determined by SparkNC to provide the competency-based elective credit in that course upon verification of successful completion of the learning experiences and integrity of student work products by the learning lab facilitator. The elective credit shall be denoted as achieved mastery on the student's transcript. A student's participation in modules but failure to earn elective credit shall not be denoted as a fail on the student's transcript.

SECTION 1.(d) The following provisions shall apply to the Program:

- (1) Notwithstanding G.S. 115C-295, learning lab facilitators shall not be required to hold teacher licensure but shall meet the standards established by the memorandum of understanding. Learning lab facilitators shall be the teacher of record for students enrolled in the Program. Additional non-licensed personnel may be contracted with on a full- or part-time basis for the purpose of providing timely, real-world content, industry expertise, and student learning experiences. Learning lab facilitators and contract personnel with the



1 Program shall be subject to the requirements of Part 6 of Article 22 of Chapter
2 115C of the General Statutes (Criminal History Checks).

3 (2) For the purposes of student participation in the Program, the requirements of
4 Part 2 of Article 8 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes (Calendar) shall
5 not apply. Students may continue to participate in the Program and aggregate
6 learning experiences throughout the time the student is enrolled in the public
7 school unit and shall not be limited to a semester or school year. Learning
8 experiences may be provided to students in person, remotely, or through
9 asynchronous modules.

10 (3) Notwithstanding G.S. 115C-316 or any other law to the contrary, public
11 school units shall not be required to pay learning lab facilitators in accordance
12 to the salary schedule used for other teachers employed by the public school
13 unit.

14 (4) If a course in computer science is required for high school graduation,
15 completion of the competency-based elective credit of High-Tech Learning
16 Accelerator shall be deemed to satisfy that requirement.

17 **SECTION 2.(a)** For the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years, the following
18 public school units may partner with SparkNC to participate in the Program:

- 19 (1) Asheboro City Schools
- 20 (2) Cabarrus County Schools
- 21 (3) Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools
- 22 (4) Chatham County Schools
- 23 (5) Cumberland County Schools
- 24 (6) Edgecombe County Schools
- 25 (7) Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools
- 26 (8) Granville County Schools
- 27 (9) Guilford County Schools
- 28 (10) Lexington City Schools
- 29 (11) Mt. Airy City Schools
- 30 (12) New Hanover County Schools
- 31 (13) Rockingham County Schools
- 32 (14) Rowan-Salisbury Schools
- 33 (15) Scotland County Schools
- 34 (16) Vance County Schools
- 35 (17) Wake County Public School System
- 36 (18) Warren County Schools

37 **SECTION 2.(b)** For the 2024-2025 school year, SparkNC may select up to 10
38 additional public school units to partner with for the Program.

39 **SECTION 3.(a)** SparkNC, in consultation with the partnering public school units,
40 shall provide an interim report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by March
41 1, 2025, on the following information, disaggregated for each public school unit by grade level
42 and school, when possible:

- 43 (1) Number and percentage of student participation in the Program.
- 44 (2) Student retention and persistence in the Program.
- 45 (3) Student completion of the High-Tech Learning Accelerator elective credit.
- 46 (4) Student evaluation of the Program.
- 47 (5) Student interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
48 following participation in the Program.
- 49 (6) Cost per student for Program participation.
- 50 (7) Public school unit persistence in the Program.

- 1 (8) Recommendations for Program changes, including recommended legislative
2 changes.
3 **SECTION 3.(b)** SparkNC, in consultation with the partnering public school units,
4 shall provide a final report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by March 1,
5 2026, on the following information, disaggregated for each public school unit by grade level and
6 school, when possible:
7 (1) Number and percentage of student participation in the Program.
8 (2) Student retention and persistence in the Program.
9 (3) Student completion of the High-Tech Learning Accelerator elective credit.
10 (4) Student evaluation of the Program.
11 (5) Student interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
12 following participation in the Program.
13 (6) Cost per student for Program participation.
14 (7) Public school unit persistence in the Program.
15 (8) Recommendations for Program changes, including recommended legislative
16 changes.
17 (9) Recommendations on development of a mastery transcript.
18 **SECTION 4.** This act is effective when it becomes law and applies for the 2023-2024
19 and 2024-2025 school years.