



SENATE BILL 257: 2026 Appropriations Act, Sec. 6.4: Seamless Skills Initiative

2025-2026 General Assembly

Analysis of: S.L. 2026-41, Sec. 6.4

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Sections 6.4 and 8.15 of S.L. 2026-41 (Senate Bill 257) establish the Community College Seamless Skills Initiative (Initiative) to create a competency-based education model that seamlessly connects high school and community college.

Participants and Design – Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC) and Wilkes Community College (WCC) must partner to implement the Initiative and do the following:

- Establish high-tech pathways that integrate high school and community college curricula for hands-on, project-based learning.
- Develop competency-based pathways that create cross-curricular maps for dual credit, fostering seamless transitions between secondary and postsecondary education.
- Scale and replicate to build a scalable framework for rapid implementation across North Carolina.
- Empower student ownership by enabling students to set long-term learning goals and to manage and own their credentials with a digital wallet.
- 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.
- Address workforce needs by developing and sustaining a comprehensive talent pipeline of skilled workers for high-demand technology fields in occupations that depend upon informational technology and operational technology for operational success.
- Develop statewide resources, including a guidebook to facilitate model replication and a new talent development model to accelerate learning using competency-based education.

Digital Wallet – The participants in the Initiative must contract with a third-party entity to create a secure, interoperable digital wallet platform that is subject to specific requirements.

Technical Support – The North Carolina Community Colleges System Office must provide ongoing technical support to community colleges participating in the Initiative. FTCC must enter into a memorandum of understanding with WCC to jointly co-design the Initiative and they must 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 must have a history of co-designing stackable credentials with public school units 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 must assist in the development of a comprehensive framework for the Initiative, including

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course design, sequencing, credentialing structure, and related elements necessary to support personalized student progression during the 2026-2027 school year.

Funding – Of the funds appropriated for the Initiative, \$2.75 million must be allocated to FTCC and \$1 million must be allocated WCC. Funds allocated to FTCC and WCC will not revert and will remain available until the end of the 2029-2030 fiscal year.

Section 8.15 of S.L. 2026-41 requires the Office of Learning Research (OLR) at the North Carolina Collaboratory to study and evaluate the Initiative. OLR must submit a report on the Initiative to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC) by March 15, 2028, and annually thereafter, culminating in a final report on March 15, 2030. All reports to JLEOC must include (i) the total number of students engaging in the Initiative, (ii) the total amount of funds expended to implement, design, and operate the Initiative, and (iii) the effects on student achievement and learning outcomes.

These sections became effective July 1, 2026.