



SENATE BILL 257: 2026 Appropriations Act, Sec. 6.8: Workforce Diploma Program

2025-2026 General Assembly

Analysis of: S.L. 2026-41, Sec. 6.8

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Section 6.8 of S.L. 2026-41 (Senate Bill 257), as amended by Section 3.5 of S.L. 2026-61 (House Bill 268), requires the Community Colleges System Office (CCSO) to establish a Workforce Diploma Program (Program) for the 2026-2027 fiscal year. The Program will serve students who are 21 years of age or older who are North Carolina residents and have not earned a high school diploma or its equivalent. The CCSO must contract with qualifying third-party entities to provide courses to help students earn a high school diploma. To qualify, the third-party entity must meet the following criteria:

- Have administered at least three statewide adult high school diploma programs outside of the State in the past five years and maintained at least a 50% graduation rate beginning with the second cohort of students.
- Be accredited by an external regional accrediting agency.
- Offer a course catalog that aligns with curriculum requirements for a North Carolina high school diploma.

Program Requirements – The Program must (i) provide competency-based courses to help students earn a high school diploma, (ii) assist students in obtaining employment, including resume development and mock interviews, and (iii) provide at least the following:

- Proactive communication regarding pace and progress.
- Course and credit plans aligned with graduation requirements and career goals.
- Mentoring services.
- Milestone tracking.
- Academic skill intake assessments and transcript evaluations.
- Catalog of courses necessary to meet graduation requirements.
- Remediation opportunities in literacy and numeracy.
- Employability skills certifications.
- Preparation for workforce credentials.
- Career advising services.
- Access to online tutoring services at any time.

Allocation of Funds – Funds must be provided to each third-party entity on a per-participant basis, as follows:

- \$275 for completion of each half credit.
- \$275 for completion of an employability skills certification equivalent to one credit.
- \$275 for attainment of an industry-recognized credential that requires up to 50 hours of training.
- \$550 for attainment of an industry-recognized credential that requires 51-100 hours of training.

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Senate Bill 257

Page 2

- \$825 for attainment of an industry-recognized credential that requires more than 100 hours of training.
- \$1,100 for attainment of a high school diploma.

Follow-Up – The CCSO must attempt to collect data on employment outcomes for students who participated in the Program. The CCSO must submit any data collected to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC) by July 15 of the year in which it was collected.

Report – The State Board of Community Colleges, in consultation with each third-party entity, must submit a report by August 15, 2028, to the JLEOC and the Fiscal Research Division on the impact of the Program. The report must include the following information:

- The number of participants.
- The number of credits earned by participants.
- The number of employability skills certifications issued to participants.
- The number and type of workforce credentials earned by participants.
- The number of participants who received a high school diploma.
- The average funding provided per participant who received a high school diploma.
- The percentage of participants who received a high school diploma.

Administration – The CCSO must use \$100,000 of funds appropriated for the Program to hire one full-time equivalent position to administer the Program.

This section became effective July 1, 2026.