



SENATE BILL 257: 2026 Appropriations Act, Sec. 7.22: SparkNC Expansion.

2025-2026 General Assembly

Analysis of: S.L. 2026-41, Sec. 7.22

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Section 7.22 of S.L. 2026-41 (Senate Bill 257) expands and codifies the SparkNC Pilot Program into various learning accelerator programs that are student-driven and modular learning experiences focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) that, when aggregated, provide a competency-based equivalency to a traditional elective course credit.

Learning Accelerator Program Authorization – This section gives public school units (PSUs) the authority to partner with SparkNC to implement learning accelerator programs that include high-tech learning accelerators, health science learning accelerators, or both. Students who are participating in a learning accelerator can continue to aggregate learning units throughout their enrollment in a public school unit and are not required to complete the learning accelerator in a single semester or school year.

Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Lab Facilitators – PSUs must enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with SparkNC to implement a learning accelerator. The MOU must address the following:

- The provision of a learning lab, including its operating schedule.
- The qualifications for learning lab facilitators.
- The learning lab facilitator's duties, including at least the following:
 - o Being the teacher of record for students enrolled in the learning accelerator program.
 - o Advising students.
 - o Designing learning experiences.
 - o Coordinating with industry partners.
 - o Validating student work.
 - o Networking with other learning lab facilitators to share best practices across PSUs.

Learning lab facilitators are not required to hold a teaching license but must meet the qualifications established by the MOU and are subject to criminal history check requirements. PSUs are also not required to pay learning lab facilitators based on the teacher salary schedule. PSUs and SparkNC can contract with additional nonlicensed personnel on a full or part-time basis for the purpose of providing timely, real world content, industry expertise, and student learning experiences as part of a learning accelerator program.

Course Credit – PSUs are required to award an elective credit to a student who completes a high- tech learning accelerator or health science learning accelerator upon verification of successful completion of the learning units by the learning lab facilitator in accordance with the following:

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- The PSU can award a student up to four learning accelerator credits but cannot award credit for a learning accelerator that includes a learning unit that the student has already completed for credit.
- For a student who does not complete all of the learning units for a learning accelerator, the PSU is prohibited from denoting a "fail" on the student's transcript.
- The PSU must denote the elective credit on the student's transcript as achieved competency in either a high-tech learning accelerator or a health science learning accelerator.
- Successful completion of a high-tech learning accelerator satisfies the State's computer science graduation requirement.

Report – No later than March 1 of each year, SparkNC, in consultation with participating PSUs and the Department of Public Instruction, must report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the following information, disaggregated for each PSU by grade level and school, when practicable:

- Number and percentage of students with access to a learning accelerator program.
- Student retention and persistence in learning accelerator programs.
- Student completion of learning accelerator elective credits and student achievement of personalized learning goals.
- Student evaluation of the learning accelerator programs.
- Student interest in STEM following participation in a learning accelerator program.
- Cost per student for learning accelerator programs.
- Number and percentage of students who have participated in a learning accelerator program who choose to pursue a career pathway or further study in a STEM field.
- Number and percentage of PSUs that established a learning accelerator program and public school unit persistence in maintaining the program.
- Recommendations for program changes, including recommended legislative changes and changes needed to ensure that federal funding for career and technical education can be used for the learning accelerator programs.
- Recommendations on development of a competency transcript.

This section became effective July 1, 2026.