

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025**

S

1

SENATE BILL 991

Short Title: Community College Workforce Readiness Act. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Lee, Overcash, and Barnes (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

May 4, 2026

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS TO SUPPORT NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY
COLLEGES AND TO MAKE VARIOUS CHANGES TO THE LAWS AFFECTING
NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

PART I. NCCCS IDD WORKFORCE TRAINING EXPANSION

SECTION 1.(a) G.S. 115D-10.21(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) The State Board of Community Colleges shall establish a community college training program for up to ~~45~~25 community colleges. The program shall provide opportunities for micro-credentials or other credentials that lead to increased employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the program shall improve the ability of participating community colleges to offer training and educational components that include improving employability skills and providing on-the-job training and apprenticeships with business and industry for individuals with IDD. The goal of the program shall be to inform community colleges and address cross-departmental supports within the individual community colleges on programs for individuals with IDD related to at least the following:

- (1) Establishing best practices for providing vocational training for individuals with IDD.
- (2) Providing financial and benefits counseling.
- (3) Developing strategies on integrating assistive technology.
- (4) Maximizing access, with supports, to credential and degree programs, including micro-credentials that are established by the State Board.
- (5) Identifying methods to increase orientation and integration of individuals with IDD into the college community to the greatest extent possible.
- (6) Determining a needs assessment, marketing, and evaluation to serve a broad array of individuals with developmental and other similar disabilities or learning challenges to assure adequate demand for new or existing programs."

SECTION 1.(b) Of the funds appropriated for North Carolina Community Colleges System IDD Workforce Training Expansion in this section, the Community Colleges System Office shall use the funds as follows:

- (1) The sum of six hundred forty thousand dollars (\$640,000) in recurring funds shall be used to create two positions to facilitate the creation of work-based learning opportunities and be dedicated to engagement with business and industry partners statewide. These funds shall also be used for the expansion



1 of Career and College Promise high school pathways and pre-apprenticeships
2 and work-based learning for individuals with intellectual and developmental
3 disabilities.

4 (2) The sum of eight hundred ten thousand dollars (\$810,000) in recurring funds
5 may be used for marketing evaluation, online resources, professional
6 development, and infrastructure support.

7 (3) The remaining funds shall be used to expand the program developed pursuant
8 to G.S. 115D-10.21, as amended by this section.

9 **SECTION 1.(c)** The Community Colleges System Office shall continue to provide
10 funds to community colleges participating in the program developed pursuant to
11 G.S. 115D-10.21, as amended by this section, at the rate of one hundred ninety-four thousand
12 dollars (\$194,000) per participating community college.

13 **SECTION 1.(d)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Community
14 Colleges System Office the sum of three million eight hundred fifty thousand dollars
15 (\$3,850,000) in recurring funds beginning with the 2026-2027 fiscal year to implement the
16 provisions of this section.

17 18 **PART II. EXPEDITED TEACHER PIPELINE PATHWAY STUDY**

19 **SECTION 2.** No later than March 15, 2027, ApprenticeshipNC shall report to the
20 Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on a plan to facilitate one or more expedited
21 pathways for apprenticeship candidates to enter the teaching profession. ApprenticeshipNC shall
22 develop the plan in collaboration with the Board of Governors of The University of North
23 Carolina, the State Board of Community Colleges, the Department of Public Instruction, and
24 Teach NC. In addition, ApprenticeshipNC may, in its discretion, collaborate with representatives
25 of approved educator preparation programs, local school administrative units, and existing
26 apprenticeship programs. The plan shall include at least the following components:

27 (1) Options for an accelerated transition pathway that allows high school students
28 to earn college credits leading to a teaching license while participating in
29 structured, paid, or other experiential learning in the classroom, including
30 applicable program design and sequencing components needed to achieve that
31 goal.

32 (2) Maximize usage and transferability of at least the following coursework
33 completion opportunities:

34 a. College transfer pathways provided through the Career and College
35 Promise Program that support entry into a recognized educator
36 preparation program.

37 b. Community college coursework leading to completion of an associate
38 degree related to teacher preparation.

39 c. Online or asynchronous coursework provided at a constituent
40 institution of The University of North Carolina leading to a bachelor's
41 degree.

42 d. Enrollment in an associate degree program or a bachelor's degree
43 program while serving (i) as a full-time employee in a public school
44 unit and (ii) as a teacher assistant or apprentice.

45 (3) Any legislative changes or appropriations needed to implement the plan.
46

47 **PART III. DIGITAL WALLET EXPANSION**

48 **SECTION 3.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Community
49 Colleges System Office (System Office) the sum of four million nine hundred thirteen thousand
50 one hundred dollars (\$4,913,100) in nonrecurring funds for the 2026-2027 fiscal year to be used
51 to expand access to digital credentials in all community colleges in the State. Funds appropriated

1 in this section shall be used (i) to select a single CrMS vendor consistent with the requirements
2 of subsection (b) of this section and (ii) to pay for deployment costs and other costs associated
3 with implementing the CrMS, including developing and supporting digital infrastructure to be
4 used by the vendor and community colleges. Funds appropriated in this section shall not revert
5 but shall remain available until the end of the 2027-2028 fiscal year.

6 **SECTION 3.(b)** Funds appropriated in this section shall be used to contract with a
7 vendor to provide a Credential Management System (CrMS) that meets the following criteria:

- 8 (1) Provides the capability to issue, manage, and verify digital credentials across
9 multiple widely adopted open standards, including World Wide Web
10 Consortium (W3C) Verifiable Credentials, OpenBadges, and AnonCredits,
11 within a single platform.
- 12 (2) Supports secure, persistent communication channels that enable
13 authenticated, peer-to-peer interactions between parties.
- 14 (3) Meets or exceeds National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)
15 Identity Assurance Level (IAL) 3 standards for identity proofing to ensure
16 high-confidence identity verification.
- 17 (4) Is designed as a decentralized deployment operating as a network appliance
18 within the State's controlled cloud environment rather than as a multi-tenant
19 Software as a Service (SaaS) offering in order to ensure data sovereignty,
20 reduce long-term operational costs, and eliminate dependency on third-party
21 hosted infrastructure.
- 22 (5) Includes a noncustodial mobile digital wallet that enables individuals to
23 maintain sole control of their credentials.
- 24 (6) Includes configurable, standards-based workflows that extend agency
25 processes directly to credential holders.
- 26 (7) Incorporates advanced capabilities for workforce matching, including
27 artificial intelligence driven analysis that aligns verified credentials with
28 employment opportunities.
- 29 (8) Includes trust and verification systems anchored using blockchain-based
30 mechanisms solely for publishing tamper-resistant public keys and service
31 endpoints, without storing any personally identifiable information or
32 credential data on-chain.

33 **PART IV. EFFECTIVE DATE**

34 **SECTION 4.** Except as otherwise provided, this act becomes effective July 1, 2026.
35