

Wilson Academy of Applied Technology

Executive Summary

Today's rapidly changing local economy in Eastern North Carolina is requiring that our public schools become more connected to local industries and that our students enter the workforce highly qualified and equipped with modern work-ready skills. With that in mind, Wilson County Schools (WCS), local industry leaders, Wilson Community College (WCC) and the Wilson Economic Development Council co-designed an innovative early workforce development program called Wilson Academy of Applied Technology (WAAT) to address the growing need for highly qualified employees in the manufacturing sector. Students who enroll in this ground-breaking program will earn a high school diploma and either an A. S. degree or an A.A.S. degree with a concentration in one advanced manufacturing area such as:

- Applied Manufacturing Technology
- Applied Automation Technology
- Applied Mechatronics Technology

In this nontraditional setting, students will participate in hands-on, rigorous training through coursework, technical labs, and an internship experience. Students will also be exposed to prominent industry ideas like Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), quality control management, and safety requirements. Through this partnership, students will have a direct pipeline from their public education program to the local Wilson workforce.

Local industry leaders will serve as advisors throughout the process to ensure that the program is relevant and that students are prepared with the necessary applied technical competencies. To this end, all students will have an opportunity for practicum experiences. These will range from job shadowing to competitive internships in which students may have the opportunity to interview for employment. Students will also have the opportunity to earn industry-recognized, third-party certifications such as:

- North Carolina Career Readiness Certification
- Six Sigma Certification
- ISO 9000 (International Organization of Standardization) Certification
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Certification

Students will take high school and entry-level courses at WAAT and advanced courses at WCC such as mechatronics, robotics, and CAD. Upon graduation, students will be well-equipped with useful certifications and foundational, core technical, and occupation-related skills that will vastly increase their marketability.

Wilson County Schools is seeking support for the funding of this project through grants and donations. We are projecting an initial, one-time capital cost of approximately \$2.5 million for renovations and equipment. Thereafter, we are projecting an annual cost of approximately \$600 thousand for additional personnel, professional development, content, materials, and transportation. With support, 75 workforce-ready students will graduate each year with the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to enrich the Wilson community and its surrounding regions.