

JOINT LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE FOCUSES ON SPARKNC



Posted on March 28, 2024 by Elizabeth Yelverton

The Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC) held its second meeting of the year on Tuesday, March 26, with most of the meeting focused on SparkNC, a new state-supported pilot program that exposes high school students to high-tech learning experiences and careers. The NC General Assembly previously provided \$3 million for the program in the 2023 state budget to help 17 initial school districts create "SparkLabs" in which students can explore growing fields like artificial intelligence, software development, cybersecurity, and robotics.

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While the program is still in its pilot phase, it has already received extensive support from participating districts and lawmakers. JLEOC Committee Co-Chair Sen. Michael Lee (R-New Hanover), whose district is participating in the initial pilot, applauded the program during Tuesday's meeting, stating, "This is the future of education — and I'm not just talking about high school — the ability to work at your own pace, partner with industry, achieve a skill." While representatives from SparkNC did not specifically request additional state funding at Tuesday's meeting, they noted they would like to expand the program to more school districts in the future.

In addition to hearing an overview of SparkNC, committee members also briefly heard presentations on the [NC Principal Fellows Program \(NCPFP\)](#) and the [Career and Leadership Development Academy \(CLDA\)](#), a program created in collaboration with New Hanover County Schools "to provide NHC middle school students with career experiences and exploration and education on leadership." During the Principal Fellows Program presentation, NCPFP Director Dr. Lauren Lampron highlighted the continued success of the program, noting 138 candidates plan to graduate from the program in 2024 and 124 candidates plan to graduate in 2025.

While Dr. Lampron did not request additional state funding for the program during Tuesday's meeting, she did request "additional flexibility within the program's operational funding structure," which she said would allow for greater support to candidates. Specifically, Dr. Lampron noted the program funding flexibility, if

approved, would provide candidates with additional resources to address emerging issues in principal preparation, greater professional development and “Just-in-Time Training,” and expanded leadership coaching during and after the program.

While the next JLEOC meeting date has not yet been shared, NCASA will continue to monitor the work of this committee and will provide members with updates as needed.