PROJECT SECURE
(Wake County)

"I could not find a job. Project SECURE changed that." — *Project SECURE student*

"Information technology skills are perishable goods. We have to work with employers to stay on top of things." — *Project SECURE administrator*

What Is Project SECURE?

Wake Technical Community College plans to train 450 people for information technology (IT) jobs in healthcare, cybersecurity, manufacturing, and financial services through Project SECURE — Supporting and Enhancing Cybersecurity through Upwardly-Mobile Retraining and Education. This training will be supported by the federal TechHire Initiative. On March 10, 2015, President Obama announced this initiative to expand local tech sectors by building tech talent pipelines in communities across the country. Through the associated grant program at the U.S. Department of Labor, the Capital Area Workforce Development Board and Wake Technical Community College received a $3.9 million grant to train 350 young adults with barriers to employment for IT jobs in cybersecurity, network and computer systems administration, and computer user support. IBM is also sending 100 employees to Project SECURE to receive additional training on these topics. Participants who complete the program receive industry-recognized certifications.

Grant winners and TechHire community partnerships focus on the following:

- Data and innovative hiring practices to expand openness to non-traditional hiring.
- Models for training that prepare students in months, not years.
- Active local leadership to connect people to jobs with hiring on-ramp programs.

Who Are the Partners and What Are Their Roles?

- **Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech):** Provides classroom training to participants.
- **Capital Area and Durham Workforce Development Boards:** Facilitate work experience, on-the-job training, and support services for trainees. These NC Works programs serve as the first point of contact for many participants. They also provide labor market analysis and career pathways.
- **Wake County Economic Development:** Provides labor market analysis and connections to employers.
- **City of Raleigh:** Recruits people interested in IT careers and often feeds recruits to Project SECURE.

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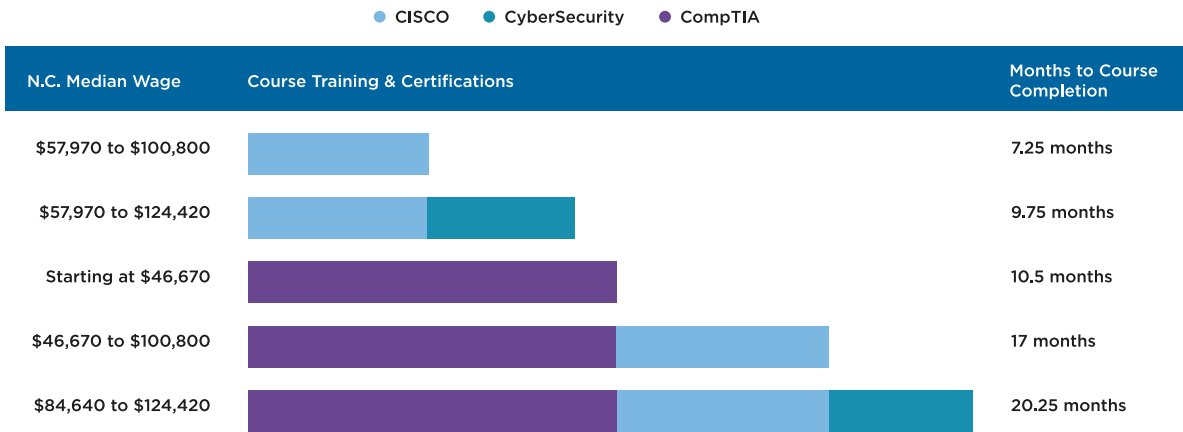
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- **HCL, IBM, and SAS:** As the program's business partners, these companies helped develop its curriculum and are prepared to hire its graduates.
- **Other employers:** Offer work-based learning opportunities for students.

How Does the Program Work?

TechHire is for individuals, aged 17–29, looking to go into IT and cyber security careers. These are high-skill/high-demand occupations with established career pathways. In North Carolina, computer user support specialists earn a median wage of $46,670. From there, one can go on to become a computer network support specialist ($57,970), a network and computer systems administrator ($75,130), or a computer network architect ($100,800). With additional training and experience, the pathway can lead to a job as a computer and information systems manager ($124,420), a computer systems analyst ($84,640), or an information security analyst ($86,180). See **Figure 1** for the median North Carolina wage associated with completion of various training courses at Wake Tech.

FIG. 1: **N.C. MEDIAN WAGE BY COURSE TRAINING**

● CISCO   ● CyberSecurity   ● CompTIA

N.C. Median Wage	Course Training & Certifications	Months to Course Completion
$57,970 to $100,800		7.25 months
$57,970 to $124,420		9.75 months
Starting at $46,670		10.5 months
$46,670 to $100,800		17 months
$84,640 to $124,420		20.25 months

*Source: Wake Technical Community College.*

To qualify for Project SECURE grant funding, a person must:

- Be between the ages of 17 and 29;
- Be out of secondary school;
- Be unemployed or underemployed; and
- Have no education or work experience in cybersecurity.

If accepted, students receive support for tuition, books, and certification testing fees. A student may also be eligible to receive support for expenses such as childcare and travel. In addition, students are supported by career coaches who ensure that they get the academic assistance they need.

To date, the program has served 190 students. These students come to Project SECURE from a variety of backgrounds. Some are coming straight out of high school, others have started college but did not complete a degree or high-quality certificate, some have already been in the workforce, some have been outside the workforce for decades, and others have four-year college degrees but have been unable to secure well-paying jobs. **Figure 2** gives an overview of educational attainment for adults in Wake County.
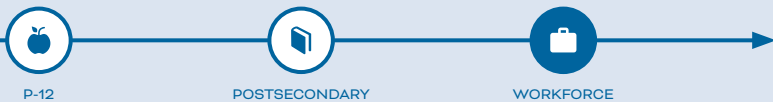
Employers appreciate that Project SECURE graduates not only have the necessary certifications, but also the work experience that allows them to hit the ground running when hired. Indeed, even as interns, Project SECURE students are well prepared to contribute to their respective companies. The potential impact of this on the labor market is significant, as IT jobs are critical to many fast-growing industries in the region. **Figure 3** presents industry employment trends in Wake County over the past 15 years, which demonstrate the growing importance of technical jobs.

What Is the Governance Structure?

Wake Tech serves as the hub for the program.

Is the Program Data Driven?

TechHire grants pay for training projects for American workers that support well-paying, middle- to high-skilled, and high-growth jobs. These cover a diverse group of industries that have increasingly turned to skilled foreign workers under the H-1B visa program. As a grantee, Wake Tech tracks the number of students receiving certificates, and the program is ahead of schedule for providing them. Wake Tech also has tracked data on placement of graduates in specific industries.

What Are the Indicators of Success?

The number of students applying to Project SECURE is the first indicator of success. The second is the high degree of satisfaction among employers. One employer interviewed has been so pleased with his company's participation in the program to date, that he now reserves a spot so that the company is always able to accommodate a Project SECURE intern. The same employer hired an intern into a permanent position after the intern was lauded as the company's employee of the month. Further, Project SECURE expects that it will continue after the federal grant ends. The program has enjoyed such success, its supporters are certain that employers will continue to support it and that students will support a tuition-based model.

FIG. 2: **WAKE COUNTY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**
(Ages 25–64)
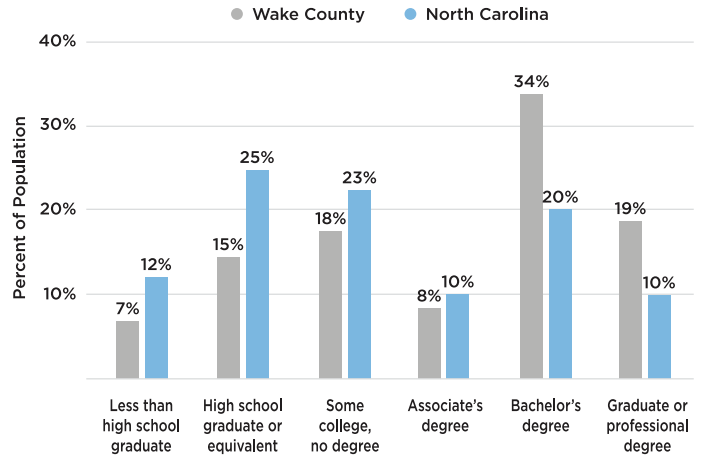
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012–2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

FIG. 3: **WAKE COUNTY EMPLOYMENT**
(by Industry, 2002 and 2017)
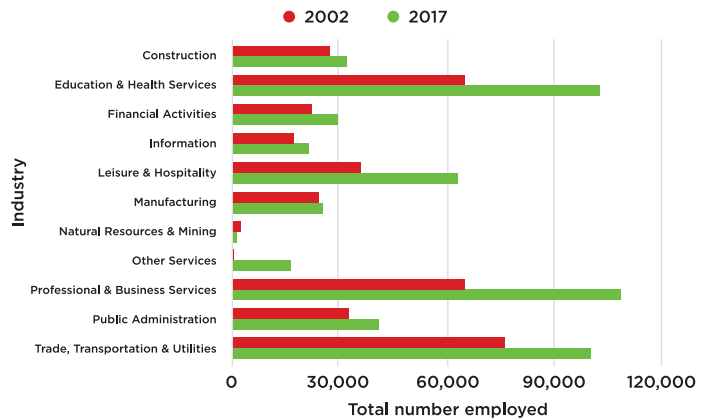
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.

What Is the Promise of the Strategy for Increasing Educational Attainment in North Carolina?

The promise of the strategy does not lie in the federal dollars but, rather, in the structure of the program. Employers have actively engaged in structuring Project SECURE and they continue to be engaged in refining it. The program is setting new standards for demand-driven curriculum.

Also, a Wake Tech instructor is engaged in a benchmark study that will track the horizontal movement of students between continuing education and a curriculum program in IT. Given how important it is for students to have sufficient entry and exit ramps to upskilling opportunities, the study will no doubt prove insightful to Wake Tech far beyond its intended scope.

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