

The Digital Economy & Responsible AI Pathway

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SB579 takes a bold step toward preparing North Carolina students for careers in healthcare and high-tech. But there is a gap. The bill does not name the fastest-growing adjacent sector: **the digital economy infrastructure layer** — the compliance officers, product managers, UX researchers, data annotators, and AI governance professionals who make technology trustworthy, usable, and accountable. These jobs exist now. They pay well above median wage. They require judgment, communication, and ethics — skills AI cannot replace. And they are **disproportionately inaccessible to low-income students** who have no roadmap into them. This proposal closes that gap.

THE GAP

Why This Pathway, Why Now

The Genius Act and Clarity Act are establishing federal frameworks for digital asset regulation. RegTech — technology that automates compliance — is projected to be one of the fastest-growing sectors of the decade. NC is already home to fintech leaders including nCino and Live Oak Bank.

Yet no high school pipeline exists to connect students — especially in low-income communities — to these careers. Healthcare has a pathway. Aviation and manufacturing have pathways. The digital economy does not. SB579 is the right vehicle to fix that.

THE ADVANTAGE

Jobs AI Regulates, Not Replaces

Every career in this pathway shares one characteristic: they require human judgment, ethical reasoning, and accountability — qualities that regulation demands and that AI cannot legally or practically substitute.

A compliance officer must sign off on risk. A UX researcher must interpret human behavior. A product manager must make tradeoffs between competing stakeholder needs. A data annotator teaches AI what is true. These roles govern AI — they are not governed by it.

CAREER TARGETS

Roles This Pathway Produces

GRC / RegTech Analyst

Digital Asset Compliance

AI Policy & Ethics

UX Researcher

Product Manager

Data Annotator

Solutions Architect

Smart Contract Auditor

Fintech Operations

WILMINGTON ADVANTAGE

Apprenticeship Partners, Already Here

New Hanover County is uniquely positioned to pilot this pathway. Anchor employers for apprenticeships and career exposure exist in our own backyard:

nCino

Live Oak Bank

GE Aerospace

Port of Wilmington

ILM Airport

Local Credit Unions

Regional Fintechs

THE PATHWAY

Grade-Band Progression — Digital Economy & Responsible AI

Middle School Grades 6–8	Early High School Grades 9–10	Pathway Selection Grade 11	Capstone Year Grade 12
- Financial literacy foundations - How apps & platforms are built - Blockchain basics & crypto safety - Intro to how AI makes decisions - Employer site visits	- AI literacy & data ethics - Intro to compliance concepts - User research fundamentals - Product thinking (no code) - Project-based learning	- RegTech / GRC track - Product & UX track - Data & AI Governance track - Dual enrollment begins - Industry certifications start	- Paid apprenticeship or internship - CompTIA / Google UX / CAMS cert - Credential in SB579 digital wallet - Direct hire or CC continuation - Portfolio & case study

THE PROPOSAL

Four Specific Requests Under SB579

1. Name the Sector

Include digital assets, fintech, and responsible AI as named high-demand sectors under the Seamless Skills Initiative (Section 4), alongside healthcare and general high-tech.

2. Pilot in Wilmington

Designate New Hanover County as a pilot site. Local employer infrastructure — nCino, Live Oak Bank, GE Aerospace — enables immediate apprenticeship partnerships without building from scratch.

3. Start in Middle School

Activate the career exploration provision already in Section 1(e)(11) to include digital economy exposure for 6th–8th graders. The Board of Education's employer visit initiative is a ready vehicle.

4. Appoint Practitioners

Ensure the Commission and working groups include digital asset investors, RegTech practitioners, and community educators — not only academic or government representatives.

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IN SUPPORT OF SB579 — TRANSFORMING THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE — NC GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SESSION 2025
PROPOSED ADDITION: DIGITAL ECONOMY PATHWAY