

## County Career Academy

### Comprehensive Needs Assessment

**Purpose:**

A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted to identify strengths and areas for growth aligned to IPG implementation and school improvement goals. The needs assessment process includes focus group interviews and classroom visits to identify trends across research-based dimensions of school improvement: leadership, instruction, climate/culture, and community engagement. RTI Project Team members interviewed stakeholder groups (administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and district personnel) and visited classrooms across various grade levels and subject areas.

### SCHOOL REPORT

Name of School	[REDACTED]
Name of District	[REDACTED]
Name of Principal	[REDACTED]
School Phone	[REDACTED]
School Address	[REDACTED]
Date(s) of Assessment	11/29/22, 12/6/23, 12/9/23

Adapted [REDACTED]

## Part I: The School Content & Information About the School

Located in ██████████ County Career Academy is housed in the Innovative High School building, a modern state of the art building, on the campus of ██████████ Community College. The school serves a small, unique population of the high school students from across the district. The school was once known as ██████████ Education Center and served as the alternative school. The school and district are working to change the perception of the school. The current purpose of ██████████ County Career Academy is to provide students from across the district a choice of high school settings with a focus on a career pathway.

The Innovative High School building is also home to the county's Early College as well. Both schools enroll students from the four traditional schools in the district. ██████████ County Career Academy recruits for admission to one of the five academies but also receives students who experience difficulties in the traditional high school setting.

██████████ County Career Academy has transformed from an alternative school ██████████ into a school with alternative choices. The purpose of the school is to provide students with a strong career pathway with the following options available: Art, Business & Finance, Fire Fighter, Food Service, and Mechatronics. Working to develop stronger partnerships with community and businesses, the school's goal is to provide a pipeline for students from school to work.

Student enrollment fluctuates based on recommendations from the four traditional high schools in the district as well as recruiting efforts. Currently there are approximately 120 students.

## Part II: Overview

### What the School does well

- The school is safe, clean, well maintained, and inviting, providing an environment conducive for learning.
- The staff works to build a supportive, welcoming and nurturing student-centered culture which contributes to the community like environment.
- Students are attending school and have the opportunity to advance through the partnership with the community college.
- The school provides a plethora of services for a high needs population and works diligently to ensure student success.
- The school seeks opportunities for students to accelerate through the partnership with the community college.

### What the school could improve

- Work to stabilize and sustain school instructional capacity through efforts to minimize staff turnover to include recruiting, retaining, and rewarding teachers in pathways and core courses.
- Maximize the instructional focus to provide rigorous, standards aligned instruction through
  - Intentional instructional design
  - Bell to bell instruction
  - Higher level questioning and writing (relevant real-world learning)
- Continue to pursue new ways to engage parents and community members to promote positive public relationships and connections.

**Needs Assessment Executive Summary**

School and district leadership are working to create a cohesive, student-centered model for instruction to improve academic outcomes for all students and to prepare them for college and careers. These efforts have resulted in an increased sense of belonging among the staff and students. The school is poised to improve academic outcomes for students.

The current principal is in her second year at the school and was a successful high school principal at one of the traditional high schools before serving as the Career Academy principal. School leadership works tirelessly to support staff and students both socially, emotionally and academically.

Staff works to integrate academic and social-emotional learning to build an inclusive and resilient community among teachers and students. However, academic integration is at times overshadowed by social-emotional needs. Leadership provides clear communication about behavioral and academic expectations while maintaining strong positive relationships between staff, students, and the community college. The strong focus on Career and Technical Education provides students with options to complete pathways and transition to the community college to work towards certificates and credentials. However, students do not always display the skills needed to be successful in community college classes, thus, limiting the academic potential available to students.

## Part IV: Dimensions of School Improvement

### Dimension A: Instruction

The district has provided professional development in the Learning Forward Instructional Model. While the Learning Forward Instructional Model was made mention, limited observation of the framework was observed. The school has access to an instructional coach for a portion of the day one day per week. The coach works primarily to facilitate teacher capacity improvement.

The school's master schedule contains four instructional blocks for core and elective courses to fulfill graduation requirements and career pathways. The school has sixteen teachers serving approximately 120 students. However, there are a number of staff vacancies leaving classes without a certified teacher. This shortage creates conditions requiring other staff members to cover and little time for planning.

The smaller class size allows for personalized learning. The alternative nature of the school focuses on credit recovery for some and acceleration for others. The schedule provides students with an opportunity to complete high school courses while on a pathway to a career in art, business & finance, firefighting, food science, and electronics. The school utilizes technology for instruction and platforms like Google Classroom are readily used should the teacher be absent. Technology also allows students to work on individualized projects and assignments.

Efforts are made to have hands-on learning as much as possible. This goal while in progress has not been fully embedded in all classes. Instructional rigor and pacing are inconsistent from class to class. Deliberate planning to incorporate real world learning experiences have the potential to create a more engaging learning environment.

Students are excited to come to school and feel they make better grades because teachers take the time to break down information. If students are absent, they have an opportunity to complete missed work. They can also stay for extra help; teachers will not let students fall behind.

Formal and informal observations provide insight to instructional delivery; however, monitoring has been impacted due to staffing shortages and class coverage. Teachers are provided feedback on instruction through follow up conferences and personalized sticky notes. Structures for providing feedback could elevate the professional learning environment and result in stronger collaboration for integrating real world teaching and learning opportunities.

### Dimension B: Leadership

The current principal has been at the school for two years. Staff and parents are appreciative of the leadership and dedication of the principal to ensure students are safe and well cared for. The school is staffed with a principal, an assistant principal, a counselor, a graduation coach, college liaison, Innovative Partnership Grant coach, as well as a school nurse. The support staff in conjunction with the teaching faculty work to ensure students have materials and needs met. The small school setting provides opportunities for personalization. While this is overall positive, at times the small setting highlights the significant external needs of the student population and at times overshadows the academic needs of the school. For example, students may be experiencing homelessness but continue to attend school. Teachers spend time listening and working to assist students with basic needs.

The school improvement team provides an opportunity for teachers to be in leadership roles. Additionally, since the school is small there is also the opportunity for open sharing and dialogue. For example, if a teacher has an idea on how to make a situation better, the mutual trust between administration and faculty provides an opportunity for the teacher to share and carry out the improvement initiative.

Distributive leadership is practiced at the school through the school improvement team and collaborative structures. The small nature of the school provides a family like atmosphere not only for the students but the staff as well. Leadership works to support faculty and staff by acknowledging success and highlighting positive efforts especially in the area of social and emotional wellbeing. The school would benefit from similar practices for academic elements. Making practice public and developing a mindset of continuous improvement for academic and professional growth would catapult the school's efforts to increase academic rigor.

### **Dimension C: Climate & Culture**

While the climate is positive and caring, the staff is worn and spread thin due to inconsistent staffing. Teachers and leadership work diligently to ensure all classes are covered; however, coverage does not always provide the desired outcomes of rigorous aligned instruction. Currently, the school has vacancies in several areas. The caring and supportive culture provides adults as well as students a place for acceptance and comfort. Bi-monthly student need meetings provide staff with the opportunity to collectively work to find solutions for students demonstrating at-risk behaviors.

The school houses two independent schools, the Career Academy and the Early College. Efforts are being made for the two schools to work collaboratively yet maintain their unique identities. For example, if a Career Academy student needs a course being offered by the Early College, then the Career Academy student can enroll in the Early College course. Conversely, Early College students who wish to enroll in a Career Academy pathway course have the same opportunity. A division exists in the physical location of hallways, but students benefit from having the two innovative schools in proximity. Efforts for the two schools to have mutual notoriety are underway and have the potential for the Career Academy to yield positive marketing and recruiting efforts for additional student enrollment as the school's academic structure and focus develops.

### **Dimension D: Community Engagement**

Parents are pleased with the school and indicate they are informed. Parents appreciate the personal connections the staff build with their students and feel the size of the school is a strength. Prior to the pandemic the school hosted face to face open house events and during the pandemic the attempt was made to host the event virtually with limited participation. Parents also commented that the school works hard to engage students and build a sense of community. Efforts to encourage students pay off when students report they look forward to going to school.

Parents also expressed the desire for stronger academic preparedness. While parents noted they were aware of their students' academic progress through PowerSchool and teacher communication, they also desire the school to challenge students academically to ensure readiness for community college coursework.

The school was awarded an Innovative Partnership Grant from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. This funding stream has provided the school with a coach. The coach is working to expand community partnerships and connect students to sustainable careers.