

# Career Academy Responsive to Local Employment Needs

*December 2015*

Whitfield County Schools launched the North Georgia College and Career Academy (NWGCCA) in 2005 as a charter school to provide more flexibility in the education offered to high school students. Career Academy students are enrolled in one of our traditional high schools and attend half of their day at their home school and the other half of the day at the academy.

In addition to the local Board of Education, the NWGCCA is governed by a board of directors from local business, industry, and post-secondary schools, as well as parents, educators, and members of the community. They bring their work experience and expertise to the table when considering career pathways to offer at the school. The board of directors also sets the overall strategic direction of the academy and makes decisions regarding curriculum, budget, and staffing.

In addition to providing a quality education, the school strives to be responsive to employment needs in the community. Students can gain marketable skills for jobs that will be available immediately after graduation. They also build a firm foundation to pursue a technical or four-year college degree. Currently, students can study fields that include automotive, culinary arts, early childhood education, healthcare, public safety, mechatronics, chemical technology, and programming.

A recent study indicated that current pathways represent major employment sectors in our region with the exception of manufacturing, despite the fact that most jobs in Whitfield County are in that field. Manufacturing drives the economy in northwest Georgia, and the floorcovering industry is obviously at the center of that hub. To continue developing our local economy, we must train a workforce with the skills and abilities local industries need to ensure their current and future success.

Our new Advanced Manufacturing Academy is designed to prepare and equip students with essential academic and employment skills needed for jobs and careers in manufacturing. Pathway completers will support the specific workforce needs of manufacturers and connected companies located within north Georgia. Students will have options in the areas of manufacturing, logistics, and corporate administration. Many of the skills gained during courses offered in this pathway can be immediately put to use in not just the floorcovering industry, but in any manufacturing setting.

In order to provide students with practical on-the-job training, we offer an apprenticeship opportunity to work with regional manufacturers and suppliers during the junior and senior years. Students, who apply and are accepted into the apprenticeship program, will attend school two days a week with academic instruction delivered online with teacher support. The other three days of the week they are free to work as an apprentice 20 to 29 hours per week.

Partner businesses have committed to providing these apprenticeships in manufacturing and related operations for students. All tracks within the manufacturing pathway are designed to get students ready to enter the world of work after graduation or to continue their education beyond high school. The access to available dual enrollment classes means students can earn high school credit for their diploma while also earning free college credit toward a post-secondary degree or certificate. Another advantage Career Academy students have is that Georgia Northwestern Technical College shares space on the campus. Some of the college's lab courses are even taught in the Career Academy building.

Registration applications for classes that begin in fall 2016 will be accepted for this new pathway beginning in January. This is an exciting opportunity for students. Manufacturing is no longer just repetitive tasks and mundane routines. Today's manufacturing is high tech. Students who have interest and skills in robotics and engineering will find lots of opportunities for an exciting career with manufacturing in Whitfield County. Local industry leaders tell us that good jobs with good salaries remain unfilled due to a lack of qualified applicants. With many highly-skilled employees nearing retirement age, the deficit will continue to grow without skilled replacements. Whitfield County educators, in collaboration and with support from local industries, are providing the labs, equipment, and experienced instructors to teach students the technical skills needed to fill these positions.

The two main goals of the Advanced Manufacturing Academy are to prepare our students to find local jobs with good pay and for the global industries in our community to hire a skilled workforce that will continue producing quality products for a worldwide market.