

Wilkes County Schools

Graduation Project Handbook 2013-2014



Wilkes County Schools Graduation Project

Hello students! Welcome to your new handbook for the Graduation Project. The following pages will guide you, parents, teachers, and others during your experience with the Graduation Project. I am thankful for everyone's part in making this experience both memorable and uplifting for you. Although you will demonstrate many of the high levels skills needed for navigating successfully in today's global community, I am equally excited about the humanitarian outcomes that arise from the projects. Historically, many individuals, groups, and communities have benefited from the products designed by our seniors. Our past students have conveyed a true sense of pride in accomplishing something that has proven to be useful and helpful to others.

I look forward to the outcome(s) of your project. I believe you will continue to "raise the bar" for how beneficial the projects will be for both you personally, and for our community. Your culminating project will demonstrate many of the high-level skills needed for navigating successfully in today's global community. Your ability to engage in action research, blend your creativity with scientific reasoning, and to lead a collaborative effort to accomplish your goal(s) are transferrable skills needed for success in your career, future educational endeavors, and in many other areas of life. You will also demonstrate your excellence in Literacy as you read, research, reason, write, collaborate, listen, design, reflect and present.

I wish you the very best as you go forward with your project. I encourage you to do your very best and to give this important project the thought and time needed to be successful. Utilize the resources of your community and learn more about your community along the way! Today's youth continue to amaze me with their ideas and their willingness to make a difference in their community. I, and many others, look forward to what you will have to share with us as you complete your Graduation Project! It is a privilege to have you representing the Wilkes County Schools!

Sincerely,



Marty T. Hemric, Ed.D Superintendent—
Wilkes County Schools

Wilkes County Schools Graduation Project Handbook

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Wilkes County Schools Graduation Project Overview

The Graduation Project was adopted as a requirement for graduation by the Wilkes County Board of Education on June 8, 2009 (WCS Policy Code: 3460). It is a cross-curricular culmination of knowledge and skills acquired by students throughout their years of education. The topic of the Graduation Project depends on the student. Each student will design his or her own project based on an area of interest. Once a topic is chosen and a proposal has been submitted to and accepted by the school's Graduation Project Advisory Committee, the student is free to begin planning his or her project. The Graduation Project has four components. These are often referred to as the four Ps:

Paper – This is a research paper that is generally completed during the student's English IV class (senior year). The length of the paper will be six to ten pages. The exact requirement varies depending on the English IV teacher and whether the student is enrolled in English IV Honors or standard English IV.

Product – This is a product/project completed in the student's chosen topic area. Through completion of this product, the student must show a "stretch of learning" and demonstration of global readiness via 21st Century Skills. Simple demonstration of knowledge already possessed will not fulfill the requirement. Something new must be learned. The product may be "tangible or intangible" and will vary greatly from one student to the next depending on each student's topic area. Students are encouraged to be creative and innovative. The product must reflect at least fifteen hours of actual student work, and each student will be responsible for acquiring an outside mentor (in the chosen field) for guidance as the product is completed.

Portfolio – This portfolio will be completed by the student as work progresses on his or her product. The portfolio is designed to document the student's work through reflective writing pieces, work logs, photographs, etc. The student's faculty advisor and mentor will help the student fill out the required forms and decide if any additional documentation should be included.

Presentation – Upon completion of the other three components (near the end of the semester in which the student takes English IV), each student will create an oral presentation to showcase his or her project. It will be presented to a panel of judges consisting of: teachers, parents, community members, business leaders, etc. In addition to the student's speech, the presentation should include visual aids, the product or evidence of the product, and a component using technology.

Students must pass all four components to complete the Graduation Project requirement.

WCS Graduation Project—Roles and Responsibilities

This outline provides a general description of the individuals and groups who will take part in the WCS Graduation Project.

Advisory Committee

The Graduation Project Advisory Committee advises the Graduation Project Coordinator, establishes timelines, approves Topics and Products, monitors Project implementation, identifies barriers to successful implementation, and proposes solutions. The committee will also respond to a student's request to change topics or request for an extension or a re-evaluation of a Project component. Specific guidelines are in place that address Advisory Committee Hearings. The Graduation Project Advisory Committee includes administrators, faculty members, media specialists, and the Graduation Project Coordinator.

Wilkes County Schools

The Wilkes County School District is responsible for implementing the NC Graduation Project in a fair and equitable manner. Individuals at the district level monitor schools for consistency, determine local policy, coordinate professional development, support high schools in the district, and generate publicity.

Department of Public Instruction

The NC Department of Public Instruction website is a resource for material and information related to the implementation of the NC Graduation Project. The Department has made a wide variety of resources available to students, parents, community members and educators.

English Teachers

English teachers provide instruction on writing Project proposals, writing the research Paper, and preparing a speech for the student's oral Presentation. They will also evaluate the research Paper according to the WCS Graduation Project.

Faculty Advisors

Faculty Advisors work with and encourage students throughout the Graduation Project process. If a student does not select a Faculty Advisor, one will be assigned by the Graduation Project Coordinator.

Faculty Advisors:

- Check the student's thesis statement and proposal.
 - Meet with the student on a regular basis.
 - Track the student's overall progress.
 - Read and comment on all written work.
 - Check that the student has a Mentor.
 - Check that the student has submitted all the forms and components.
 - Coach/Encourage the student on writing the Paper and submitting the Product.
 - Help the student rehearse for the oral Presentation.
 - Evaluate the Portfolio component of the Project according to the Rubric.
-

WCS Graduation Project—Roles and Responsibilities....Continued

Graduation Project Coordinator

The school Graduation Project Coordinator acquires information about the WCS Graduation Project, disseminates information about the Project to stakeholders, keeps a calendar of events, monitors the program, consults with district and school administrators, serves as a liaison between the school and the community, conducts meetings with students and teachers, provides training for Mentors, recruits and trains Review Panel members, coordinates judging for Products and Presentations, and works with the Faculty Advisors to monitor student progress.

Media and Technology Specialists

The Media Specialist and Technology Specialist will play an integral part in the Graduation Project. The Media Specialist will assist students as they locate and document sources, teach information retrieval skills, and teach students how to evaluate sources for authenticity and quality. The Technology Specialist will manage student's electronic Portfolios and serve as a technology resource for students as they complete the four components of the Project.

Parents

Parents should become familiar with the WCS Graduation Project requirements, help their student brainstorm Topic ideas, post key dates and timelines in the home, communicate with their student's Mentor, know who their student's Faculty Advisor is, read their student's research Paper and offer feedback, and listen to their student rehearse the oral Presentation and offer input.

Principal

The principal will set the tone and provide overall leadership for the WCS Graduation Project at his/her school.

Mentors (Volunteer)

Mentors are community volunteers who have expertise or experience with a student's WCS Graduation Project Topic. Mentors play a critical role in guiding students through the Product component of their Project. The role of the Mentor is to encourage, listen, give advice, advocate and share expertise. In addition, Mentors help the student define the exact Product, verify the completion of the Product, verify the student's Product log and confirm the number of hours the student worked on the Product. Mentors must be approved. The Mentor must be at least 25 years of age and may not be a member of the student's immediate household.

Review/Grading Panel Member (Volunteer)

Review Panel members are volunteers who evaluate the oral Presentation component of the WCS Graduation Project. Review Panel members commit to attend the oral Presentation event, they listen to student oral Presentations, and ask clarifying questions at the end of the Presentations. They are consistent and fair in evaluating student Presentations, they evaluate the success or failure of the Presentation in accordance with the WCS rubric, they preview and examine the student's Portfolio to become familiar with the Project, and they provide feedback about the experience. Review Panel members will receive training.

Students (Class of 2010 and beyond)

Students will successfully complete all the components of the WCS Graduation Project, submit material by designated deadlines, seek advice when needed, maintain regular contact with their Faculty Advisor and Mentor, and complete and document a minimum of 15 hours of work on the Product component of their Project. Students also commit to follow the guidelines for Academic Integrity outlined by Wilkes County Schools. Violation of the policy will result in penalties that require students to re-do the Project and risk or delay graduation.

Wilkes County School Graduation Project Examples

Wilkes County students have produced many excellent Graduation Projects during senior year. Project ideas vary greatly, but the best ones are those in which the students have a vested interest. Since students select the topic area and design their own project, we suggest they pick an area of great interest for them. Examples of outstanding Projects:

- ◆ In one example, two students wanted to design their projects to work toward a common goal—refurbishing an old barn to create a recreation center for themselves and their friends. They are a good example of collaborative projects gone right. The students were cautioned by their faculty advisors that they each had to have their own individual projects, so they decided on their own specific elements to complete. One of them repaired the structural part of the building—such as roof and walls. The other cleaned, resurfaced, and painted a regulation size half basketball court on the floor and brought in furniture and other fixtures to enhance the appearance and functionality of the building. Together, they succeeded in creating a safe and aesthetically pleasing hangout for themselves.
 - ◆ In another example, a student researched water conditions in Africa. Upon researching, she realized just how awful the water conditions are in Africa. This made her want to make a difference in the lives of those in Africa. During a faculty meeting, she addressed the staff of Wilkes Central High School asking for help and inviting teachers to the dinner she was going to host. She hosted a dinner at North Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church in an effort to raise \$7,000.00 in order to fund a well in Malawi, Africa. Through planning, organizing, and time management, this student was able to raise the needed \$7000.00.
 - ◆ After finding out that a classmate’s mother was facing a serious, degenerative health condition, one student began looking for ways to help. After consulting with her advisor and coach, she decided to hold a 5k race to help the family cover the overwhelming costs of medical care. She sought sponsors, designed t-shirts, and collected donations prior to the day of the race. Her goal was to raise about a thousand dollars. Between registration fees and on-site donations, she was able to raise approximately eight thousand dollars to assist the family.
 - ◆ In another project, the student researched obesity in America, and for the product, the student organized a weight-loss challenge for teachers at school. The student had teachers volunteer to be on the team, and the student organized a three-month weight loss program for the teachers. To begin with, the student had a nutritionist speak to the team about health, diet, and exercise. Also, the student arranged for a fitness trainer to do a pre-assessment and post-assessment for the teachers, including measurements of BMI, blood pressure, and weight. The student also organized weekly workouts for the team with a fitness trainer. Along with the weekly exercise, the student designed competitive challenges for the team; the challenges would sometimes test knowledge and sometimes test physical endurance. The student had team weigh-ins every week, and the student recorded the results. At the end of the program, the student awarded the winning teacher, the one who lost the most weight, with prizes from the community, the grand prize being a three-month membership to the YMCA of Wilkes. The student combined leadership skills, community involvement, in both the school and outside community, and health literacy to make a meaningful and successful Graduation Project.
-

Wilkes County Schools Graduation Project Guidelines

Graduation Project general guidelines are as follows:

- The graduation project includes:
 - A research paper (completed during English IV)
 - A product
 - A portfolio with a reflective component
 - A presentation
- The Graduation Project idea must be student generated.
- The Graduation Project must be of sufficient depth to reflect extensive study and research.
- The Graduation Project must demonstrate global readiness including 21st Century Skills.
- The proposed Graduation Project must be approved by the academic advisor/committee and the student's parents/guardian.
- The product must show evidence of knowledge gained in completion of the research.
- The Graduation Project should not require large sums of money. Money will not enhance the evaluation of the Graduation Project.

Research Paper guidelines are as follows:

- The paper topic should explore related subjects to their project.
- The paper must have a topic outline.
- The paper should include a minimum of five sources. For example – interviews, print sources, and internet.
- The paper should include a visual element (graph, chart, diagram, picture, etc.) with source documentation.
- The paper should include a minimum of six to ten typed pages; double spaced; Times New Roman, 12-point font; one-inch margins.
- Documentation must be MLA format; minimum of twelve (12) parenthetical references.
- The paper must include a completed works cited page.
- Plagiarism *may* result in automatic failure.

Product guidelines are as follows:

- The product must be related to the research paper.
 - The product must take a minimum of fifteen (15) hours.
 - The student is expected to spend a minimum of seven (7) contact hours with the mentor.
 - The Student Log completed by the student must reflect a minimum of seven (7) mentor contact hours during project completion and be signed by the mentor
 - A photographic record of product progress should include 10 -12 pictures, with at least one picture of both the mentor and student.
 - The mentor should be over 25-years old and not immediate family.
-

Guidelines Continued.....

- Mentor verifications must be put in portfolio.
- Each student must complete the Student Log. The number of logs will be determined by the advisor based on the scope of the project.
- GP Mentor Confirmation Form must be completed.

Presentation guidelines are as follows:

- The student should wait for a signal from the facilitator before beginning.
- The facilitator will introduce the panel to the student.
- The student should remember that this is a formal presentation. Dress appropriately. Consult a teacher, academic advisor, mentor, or presentation rubric to ensure appropriate selection of attire.
- Speeches must meet the 6 to 10 minute time limit.
- Students must complete an acceptable dress rehearsal prior to the panel presentation with academic advisor.
- Speeches are judged on content and delivery.
- Students are required to use a technological component: audio and/or visual aids.
- A completed portfolio is required to share with the panel.

Note: Questions should address a clarification or extension of the topic. Panelists should be trained as to what constitutes appropriate questions.

Portfolio Content

Each student portfolio must include:

- Title Page (student generated)
 - Table of Contents (student generated)
 - Current student resume (student generated)
 - GP Contract Form GP-1
 - Proposal Letter (student generated)
 - GP Proposal/Approval Form GP-2
 - GP Mentor Confirmation Form GP-3
 - GP Student Log GP-4
 - Photographs or other audio-visual media that document the student's work over the span of the project (student generated)
 - Other items beyond those required that the student believes important to illustrate his/her progress (student generated)
 - Research paper (student generated)
 - GP Mentor Reflection GP-5
 - GP Student Self-Evaluation (student generated, based on GP-6)
 - Written acknowledgment to those who helped in the student's learning/copies of thank you notes sent (student generated)
 - GP Portfolio Checklist GP-7
-

Graduation Project Contract Form

Description: The Graduation Project is a culminating project.

Student

Requirements: The graduation project includes:

- A research paper
- A product
- A portfolio with a reflective component
- A presentation

Student

Responsibilities: The student:

- Will develop a written proposal to be approved by the GP committee prior to beginning the project.
- Will select and research a topic of interest, develop a research paper, and complete a product which is reflective of the research project topic.
- Will write, speak, solve problems, and use real life skills, such as time management and organization.
- Will work with the academic advisor and mentor in collaboration with other community partners, business representatives, and other school-based personnel in the development of the graduation project.
- Will keep a log of events and meetings, record hours involved, and write a research paper.
- Will turn in a completed research paper, product, reflective portfolio, and other evidence at the time designated by the GP committee.
- Will present the completed graduation project before a review panel composed of teachers, community partners, business representatives, or other school personnel.
- Will be responsible for any expenses.

I, _____, have read and understand the above requirements involving the Graduation Project. I agree to abide by the requirements. I will conduct myself with utmost professionalism in working with school and community leaders. I understand if at any time before, during, or after the project, it is found that I have falsified information, I will be subject to redo the project. I understand that once the Graduation Project is started, it must be completed within the designated timeframe. I understand that it is necessary for me to work with my mentor outside of the regular school hours. I realize that my success will depend on my ability to work between school and community resources. I understand any part of the Graduation Project components (paper, product, portfolio, and presentation) not completed will result in my not meeting the Wilkes County Schools requirements for graduation. Each component of this Graduation Project depends on the other three components; therefore, I understand in order to complete the Graduation Project requirement, I must successfully complete all components.

Student Signature: _____ **Date** _____

Parent Signature: _____ **Date** _____

Graduation Project Mentor Confirmation Form

Student Information:

Student _____ Faculty Advisor _____

Project Topic/Title _____

Mentor Information and Confirmation:

Mentor _____ Mentor Job Title _____

Mentor Employer _____

Phone Number (Work) _____ (Home) _____

Address _____

Years of Experience in Project Area _____

I have been personally enlisted to serve as a Graduation Project mentor by the student and parent listed on this sheet. I agree to oversee the above student's progress during this Graduation Project; and, I will take all due care and precaution to prevent any harm from occurring to this student while under my supervision. I verify that I am 25 years or older and not an immediate family member to this student.

Signature of Mentor

Date

Parent Confirmation:

As the parent or legal guardian of _____, I am aware that my child is working on a Graduation Project as required by the Wilkes County Schools for high school graduation. As part of the Graduation Project, my child will complete a portion of the project/product under the direction of a mentor knowledgeable in the project area. I agree to allow the enlisted mentor named above to supervise and direct my child's progress during the required hours of work on the project. I understand this mentor is in no way affiliated with the Department of Public Instruction or Wilkes County Schools, and the selection of both the project and mentor is entirely mine and my student's; therefore, I agree that I will not hold the school, school district, or its employees responsible for any financial obligations, damages, injuries, or accidents incurred while my child participates in the completion of his/her project.

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Signature of Student Date

Signature of Faculty Advisor Date

Graduation Project Mentor Reflection

Student _____ Project _____

Please confirm this student's work on his/her Graduation Project. It is necessary for you to verify the efforts made by this student and that the work hours have occurred outside the student's regular school day. Please answer the following questions as thoroughly as possible giving at least a 2-3 sentence response.

1. Did this student spend at least seven (7) hours working on his/her project under your direction?
_____ Yes _____ No

Comments:

2. Does the student's product reflect fifteen (15) hours of work?
_____ Yes _____ No

Comments:

3. What kind of obstacles did this student experience, and how were the problems resolved?

4. What accomplishments and/or growth have you seen this student achieve during the course of the project?

Mentor Signature

Phone Number

Date

Graduation Project
Student Self-Evaluation

Reflecting upon your research paper, product and portfolio, please address the following questions with a minimum of one well-written paragraph per question. Include the narrative in your portfolio.

1. Including the dates you began and completed, give a brief overview of your project hours (beginning with the first hour actually spent working on your project). Describe progress achieved at various stages of your Graduation Project.
2. Describe the resources you used to complete your project (people, community agencies, businesses, books, journals, and/or Internet) and how they were helpful.
3. How did you manage your time and school/work schedule in order to successfully complete your project?
4. What challenges and/or risks did you face in completing this project? Discuss intellectual, emotional, and/or physical challenges.
5. Discuss at least three concepts learned as you progressed through your Graduation Project.
6. How does your project demonstrate global readiness? Discuss your use of 21st Century Skills as you completed the project.
7. What did you learn about yourself? What are the most important benefits learned from completing the Graduation Project? What personal satisfaction did you gain?
8. What were your ideas of your project topic when you began your Graduation Project study? Did these ideas change (and how) through the process of the Graduation Project?
9. What would you do differently in terms of organizing your time, materials, and resources if you began the project now?
10. What grade should you receive for your Graduation Project? Why should you receive this grade?

Graduation Project Portfolio Checklist

Student _____ Faculty Advisor _____

Advisor Initials	Student Initials	Items to Place in Portfolio
		Title Page (student generated)
		Table of Contents (student generated)
		Student Resume (student generated)
		GP Contract Form GP-1
		Proposal Letter (student generated)
		GP Proposal/Approval Form GP-2
		GP Mentor Confirmation Form GP-3
		GP Student Log GP-4
		Photographs or other audio-visual media (student generated)
		Other Appropriate Items
		Research Paper (student generated)
		GP Mentor Reflection GP-5
		GP Student Self-Evaluation (student generated, based on GP-6)
		Copies of Thank You Notes (student generated)
		GP Portfolio Checklist GP-7

Wilkes County Schools
Guidelines for Completing the Graduation Project Proposal Letter

Follow these guidelines in completing your proposal letter. It should end up looking very similar to what you see below. Also, please type your letter (Times New Roman 12 pt. font) and follow the format of the instructions below.

1" margins all around the page

[Date of letter completion]

Graduation Project Advisory Committee

[Name of high school]

[High school address]

Dear Advisory Committee Members:

[Paragraph 1: Give an introduction to the topic of your project. Explain the reason for your choice and the **prior knowledge** you have of the area before you actually begin the research.]

[Paragraph 2: Describe the **product you intend to create or the service you plan to perform**. Make sure you explain your stretch of learning in completing this product, and explain how your product will reflect at least 15 hours of work.]

[Paragraph 3: Explain how this project will demonstrate your **global readiness** and include **21st Century Skills** (e.g. entrepreneurship, self-enrichment, job shadowing/career explorations, volunteerism, physical product, etc). How will the project and the skills you acquire benefit you personally?]

Sincerely,

[Actually sign your letter here]

[Type your name exactly as you sign it]

The letter length shouldn't be much longer than what you see here. Try to keep it within one page.

NAME of PROJECT

Student Name

Why I Chose (topic)

- Brief reason for choosing topic. Explain why it interests you.

(Add pictures for interest.)

Research Paper Topic

- List the main points covered in your paper.
- Briefly discuss your best sources of information.

(Add pictures for interest.)

My Mentor

- Mentor's name and occupation.
- How you found your mentor.

(Add pictures for interest.)

Project Hours

- This section may contain several slides. It all depends on how many pictures you have and/or how many slides it will take to sum up your 15 hours. Explain the process of completing your hours from start to finish. Include all of the major steps you had to complete.

(Add pictures for interest.)

Project Hours

- Continue explanation of hours.

(Add pictures for interest.)

Project Hours

- Continue explanation of project hours.
- Finish explanation.

(Add pictures for interest.)

Finished Product (or could be titled ... Accomplishing My Goal)

- Add a photo or explanation of the outcome (result) of your hours.

(Add pictures for interest.)

Money and/or Time Invested

- If your project cost money, include this slide to explain how much and how you were able to fund the project.
And/or If your project took more than the required 15 hours, discuss that here.
- (Note adjust the title of this slide according to what content you include.)

(Add pictures for interest.)

Lessons Learned

- Briefly discuss what personal lessons you learned from the entire experience. For example, some students use the experience to help them decide upon a career. Some learn about time management and **that** procrastination can cause problems in a project such as this. Be honest about what you learned.

(Add picture for interest)

Thank you to...

- Thank you to my faculty advisor, (name).
- Thank you to my mentor, <name).
- Thank you judges for being here to view my presentation.
- Add anyone else who helped you along the way.

(Add pictures for interest.)

Questions?

(Add pictures for interest.)

WCS Graduation Project

Student Name _____

Presentation Evaluation Form

Scale:

Exemplary: Student has exceeded expectations

Satisfactory: Student has worked diligently to do strong work

Developing/Emerging: Student has more work to do to present satisfactory work

Resubmission Necessary: Student has considerable work to do

Content	Exemplary	Satisfactory	Developing/ Emerging	Resubmission Necessary
Introduction - Student gives his/her name and introduces the project				
Student explains research process - how/why he/she chose a topic, found information, wrote the paper, etc.				
Student should explain any obstacles or successes he/she encountered				
Student explains his/her product and how it related to the research				
Student explains how he/she chose a mentor				
Student makes evident what he/she learned				
Section I Comments (Optional):				
II. Visual Aids	Exemplary	Satisfactory	Developing/ Emerging	Resubmission Necessary
Student has one or more visual aids that are attractive and easy to read - visual should also be free from spelling/grammar errors (Power Point presentation, etc.)				
Visual(s) must clearly connect to the presentation and product topic				
Section II Comments (Optional):				
III. Delivery	Exemplary	Satisfactory	Developing/ Emerging	Resubmission Necessary
Student speaks clearly and communicates clearly using standard English - volume, rate, expression, enunciation, pronunciation				
Nonverbal - maintains eye contact, posture and gestures are appropriate and do not distract				
Preparedness - materials ready, evidence of planning and rehearsal				
Appearance - students should be dressed appropriately; no chewing gum.				
Questions from judges - student demonstrates poise and knowledge in answering questions about the topic				
Overall Presentation - student's overall fluency in the presentation				
Section III Comments (Optional):				

IV. Length of Presentation (<i>Facilitator use only</i>)	Exemplary	Satisfactory	Developing/ Emerging	Resubmission Necessary
Presentation should be between 6 and 10 minutes long. 8-10 minutes = Exemplary 6-8 minutes = Satisfactory 5 minutes or less = Developing/Emerging Less than 4 minutes = Resubmission Necessary				
Total Marks for Each Column				
Overall Comments:				

* Make sure that you mark a column for each item.

Wilkes County Schools' Graduation Project Coordinators

District Office—Mark Byrd, Director of Secondary Education

byrdma@wilkes.k12.nc.us

District Office—Robin Roten, High School Instructional Specialist

rotenr@wilkes.k12.nc.us

East Wilkes High School—Julie Mason

masonj@wilkes.k12.nc.us

North Wilkes High School—Melissa Walker

walkerme@wilkes.k12.nc.us

West Wilkes High School—Rachel Hughes

hughesr@wilkes.k12.nc.us

Wilkes Central High School—Dana Cantrell

cantrelld@wilkes.k12.nc.us

Wilkes Early College High School—Pamelitta Belk

belkp@wilkes.k12.nc.us