



## SouthTech Academy Delivers Hundreds of Industry Recognized Certifications in Charter High School Career and Technical Education Programs

*"We pride ourselves on preparing our students to graduate and be successful."*

SouthTech Schools was established in Boynton Beach, Florida in 1976. Recently, SouthTech Schools has become its own Local Education Agency, recognized as a school district with four institutions: SouthTech Academy High School, SouthTech Preparatory Middle School Academy, SouthTech Adult Education, and SouthTech Success Center serving at risk high school students, set to open in the Fall of 2019.

SouthTech Schools' core mission is to graduate students prepared for work, higher education, and productive citizenship. They offer 13 career and technical programs and students spend at

least one out of four periods a day in a career-focused course.

"It's not just college OR career ready, it's college AND career ready," said Steven Kozak, Director of Business and Community Partnerships for SouthTech Schools. "We serve a 91 percent free and reduced lunch student population and last year we had a 98 percent graduation rate. We pride ourselves on preparing our students to graduate and be successful."

Of those graduates, an impressive 95 percent left with an industry certification, a skillset they can bring with them to college or to an employer if they choose. Industry certification has been part of SouthTech Schools since the beginning, and they currently offer more than 40, ranging

from automotive to medical sciences to technology.

For more than ten years, those industry certifications have included Certiport's Adobe Certified Associate, QuickBooks Certified User, Microsoft Office Specialist, and Microsoft Technology programs.

### **Adobe Certified Associate Certification Bolsters Commercial Arts and Digital Film Academies**

Chris White is an Instructor in the SouthTech Academy Commercial Arts and Graphic Design Academy. Freshmen take the Adobe Certified Associate Photoshop exam, followed by Illustrator as sophomores, Animate as juniors, and InDesign as seniors. "We are proud that the great majority of these students have

four industry certifications when they leave the Academy,” said White. “I don’t have to make the certifications mandatory, because once students see their classmates passing, they want to earn certifications too. Everyone wants to be certified.”

The curriculum is project-based and the class begins to take their certifications as they approach winter break. White knows his students are really catching the fire for graphic design because they are entering and winning both local and national graphic design contests. One of his certified students recently won a school bus poster design, so her artwork will be on over 1,000 school buses in the local school district. Another student got a job at a marketing and advertising firm in New York. “He was ready, he felt prepared, and he knew how to use all four of those Adobe programs,” said White.

SouthTech Academy has another pathway utilizing the ACA certification, Digital Film. Instructor Jon Palardis requires the certification as a final exam. Freshmen take the ACA Premiere Pro exam, sophomores take Photoshop, and Illustrator is being added to the pathway as well. “Once my students get certified, they learn different aspects of filmmaking. Some of my students go on to film school, and some have gotten internships in the summer which I hope turn into paying jobs.”

Some may find it surprising, but the Digital Film Academy even recently produced SouthTech Academy’s Valedictorian. Julian Pollifrone went on to the University of Central Florida where he is studying film.

**SouthTech Information Technology Academy Starts Students on a Path to Tech Success with Microsoft Office Specialist**

SouthTech’s IT Academy has several paths, and students decide which they will choose towards the end of their freshman year. Linda Berkheimer teaches those first-year students the Introduction to Digital Information Technology (DIT) course, which focuses on teaching the Microsoft Office suite of products. DIT students work on earning their Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certifications including Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and now Berkheimer is working on integrating SharePoint. Students do projects as they are studying for the certifications; for instance when they work on PowerPoint they are required to do an All About Me presentation.

The State of Florida requires three passing scores for MOS so students have to pass Word, PowerPoint, and Excel to meet the state requirement. “The competition is fierce!” said Berkheimer. “I’ll have one student earn a score they are happy with, and then the next day their friend beats the score and they want a retake. These certifications mean a lot to them and they mean a lot to me – it brings me to tears when they try so hard and earn these MOS certifications.”

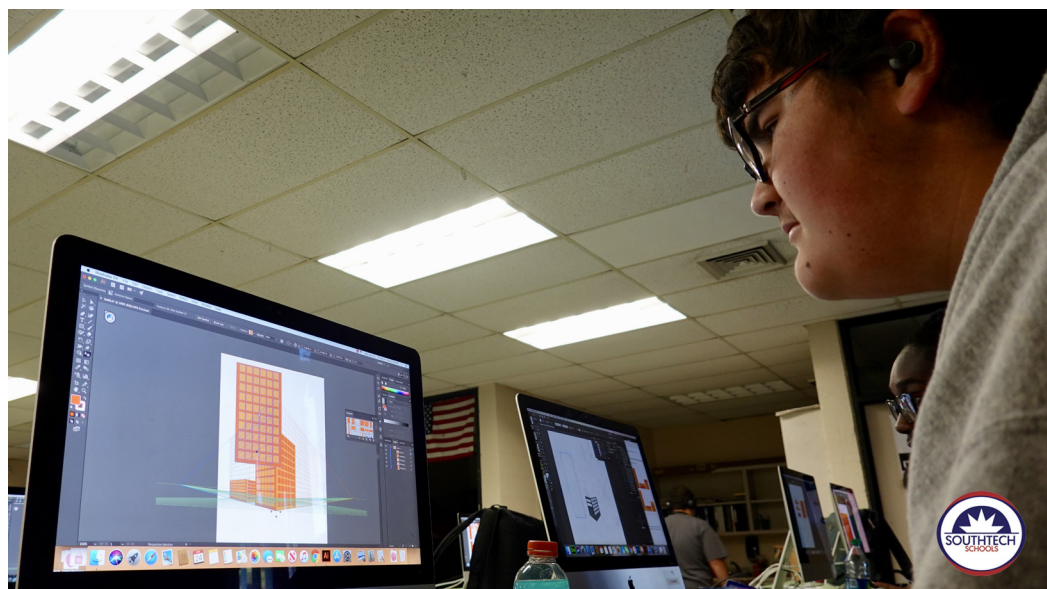
Kozak sings Berkheimer’s praises in the classroom. “She’s a certification machine. She has a unique way in the classroom with a pure love for the students. They know the skills they are going to learn from her will go with them out of high school and carry them into workplace success.”

Some students in other Academies take Berkheimer’s course as an elective as well, such as two seniors in the Automotive Technology Academy. “Once they got introduced to Microsoft certification they were hooked. Even though they are in the automotive specialty they realized these are general skills for any job.”

Berkheimer even had a student who got hired thanks to her MOS Excel certification. “As soon as she mentioned Excel, they hired her because the business owner didn’t know Excel and needed someone to use it to schedule employees for their shifts. She came back to me and said I was right, it IS useful!”

### **IT Academy Students Move Ahead with Microsoft Technology Associate Certification**

Once students enter the IT Academy at SouthTech, they choose a more







**Microsoft**  
Office Specialist

**Microsoft**  
Technology Associate



specific technology path, including the Microsoft Technology Associate or the Microsoft Program Technology Associate Coder path, among others. Julius Guerra teaches those courses and uses Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA) certification exams to help carve out those paths.

"We typically start with the MTA Operating Systems, Security, Networking, and Server exams," said Guerra. "Coding students would of course take the MTA coding exams. I push my students to earn three certifications per academic year so they have a dozen by graduation."

Guerra also works with local employers to place his seniors in job opportunities, including an internship program with Palm Beach County. "Most of the years I've been teaching and using MTA certification I've had students come back and say they received an extra 3, 4, or 5 dollars an hour to their salary thanks to the certifications."

### **Business Management Academy Validates both Microsoft Office and QuickBooks skills with Certification**

Lynn Moran runs the Business Management Academy, which incorporates several industry

certifications. Microsoft Office Specialist has recently been the fourth industry certification available in her Academy but next year she will move it back to a freshman course.

The freshman course, Business Communication and Technology, requires business plans, marketing presentations, and other activities that require a firm grasp of Microsoft Office. "With Microsoft Office being the industry standard for word processing, it is important to make sure our students know these programs as they start to progress through high school and college. By learning Microsoft Office as freshmen, they can use those skills in coordination with curriculum for all of their other classes."

Moran recently added the QuickBooks Certified User certification program to her pathway as well by adding a Personal Finance course for Seniors. "We are learning QuickBooks together – 15 students and myself," said Moran. "Our curriculum seems to be spot on and we started to use GMetrix to complement our study. Every Senior will sit for the QuickBooks Certified User exam before the end of the year so we are very excited to see how they do."

Kozak believes QuickBooks is a valuable addition to the program.

"There is a business aspect to all of our career and technical academies and QuickBooks is essential. Virtually every small business utilizes QuickBooks, knowledge of which equips our students with great entrepreneurial skills."

The best part is SouthTech is delivering industry-recognized certification to economically disadvantaged populations. SouthTech also works with a local school to bring in high-functioning students with disabilities to earn certifications.

SouthTech Academy High School currently has 1130 students, 380 of whom earned Certiport certifications including ACA, MOS, and MTA. They've produced well over a thousand certifications over the past several years with many more to come.

"Inspiring success is our ultimate goal at SouthTech Schools, and these certification programs are a tangible example of how we are accomplishing that goal," said John-Anthony Boggess, Deputy Superintendent of SouthTech Schools. "Industry-recognized certification gives students a credentialed career pathway that will guide them in becoming a productive member of our community."