

# Polk County



Asheville  
Prosperity Zone Sub-Region  
Peer County Type: Rural Non-Metro  
Local Education Agencies: 1  
Charter Schools: 0

**2030 NC Degree Attainment Goal: 2 million (67%)**  
**2030 Proposed Polk County Attainment Goal: 3,478 (69%)**

## Population Spotlight

2010 Census: 20,510  
2020 Census: 19,328  
Change: -1,182

## Growth Rate

**-5.8%** County vs. **9.5%** State

**\$58,607**  
Median Household Income (2020)

**10.8%**  
Child Poverty Rate (2020)

**85%**  
Households with Broadband (2020)

**77%**  
Home Owners (2020)

**76%**  
Voter Registration Rate (2021)

**4.7%**  
Unemployment Rate (2021)

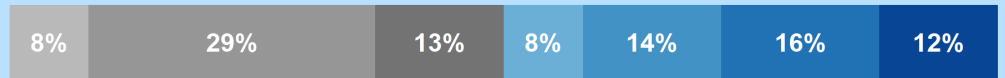
## Educational Attainment

Polk County residents ages 25-44, 2021

Less than high school | High school graduate (including GED) | Some college, no credential | Short-term credential | Associate degree | Bachelor's degree | Graduate or professional degree

**No Degree**  
**50.2%**  
1,752

**Have Degree or Credential**  
**49.8%**  
1,736



Note: Numbers may add to more than 100% due to rounding

## Top Opportunities for Growth

These three areas represent the biggest opportunities for Polk County to improve future attainment outcomes.



### First-Year Persistence

72% of Polk County high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary persist to their second year, below the rural non-metro county average of 73%.



### Transition to Postsecondary

53% of Polk County seniors enroll in postsecondary within 12 months of graduation, below the state average of 55%.

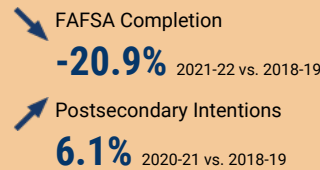
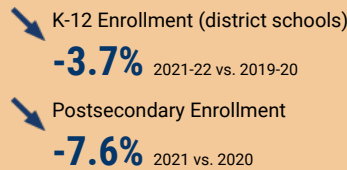


### Adult Learners

17% of Polk County adults 25-44 have some college, no degree, above the state average of 15%.

## Impact of Covid-19 on Education Pipeline

Covid-19 has affected critical transition points along the education continuum.



## Data Disruptions

- College-and-Career-Ready in Reading
- College-and-Career-Ready in Math
- Chronic Absenteeism



[ncdemography.org](http://ncdemography.org)

## ACADEMIC READINESS

### How students in Polk County traditional schools are currently doing:

To meet state goals, each year Polk County needs:

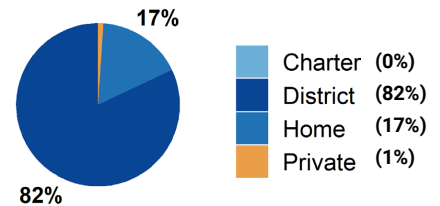
- Polk County has met the goal for **Pre-K enrollment**. (Goal: **75%**). 2022
- 44%** of 3-8 graders are earning college-and-career-ready scores (level 4 or 5) in **reading**; 272 more needed to meet state goal of **73%**. 2022
- 42%** of 3-8 graders are earning college-and-career-ready scores (level 4 or 5) in **math**; 417 more needed to meet state goal of **86%**. 2022
- 92%** of 9th graders **graduate within four years**; 5 more needed to meet state goal of **95%**. 2021
- 15%** of students are **chronically absent from school**; 88 less needed to meet state goal of **11%**. 2021

Polk County has a **student-to-school counselor ratio** of 228:1 versus 318:1 in peer counties. 2021

### School Choice

2,472 total students were enrolled in K-12 in Polk County in the 2021-22 school year.

Note: This profile focuses on outcomes of students enrolled in district schools.



### Career and College Preparation

**42 high school students** took at least one **AP course** (6%) versus 7% in peer counties (2021).

**92 graduates** participated in **Career & College Promise programs** (56%) versus 49% in peer counties (2021).

Students in Polk County completed **146 Career & Technical Education concentrations** in 2021. The top three CTE concentrations completed include Agricultural, Food, & Natural Resources; Health Science; and Human Services.

## COLLEGE & CAREER ACCESS

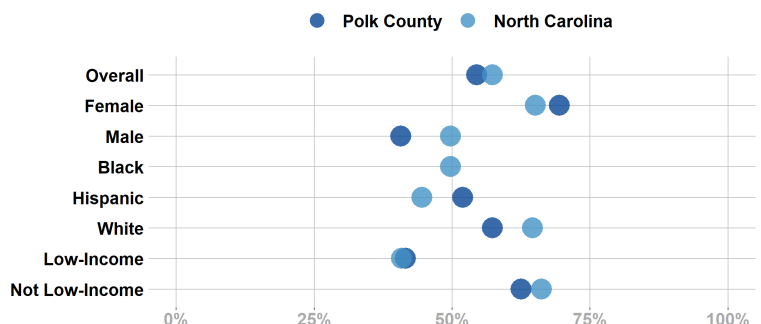
**60%** of seniors **completed the FAFSA** in 2022; 30 more need to complete in 2022 to meet state goal of **80%**. 2022  
<https://www.myfuturenc.org/ourwork/first-in-fafsa/>

**80%** of graduates reported **intentions to enroll** in a postsecondary institution versus 69% in peer counties. 2021

**53%** of graduates **enrolled in a postsecondary institution** within 12 months versus 50% in peer counties. 2021

**54%** of Polk County students have **parents with no college degree** (either 2- or 4-year) versus 59% in peer counties.

### Postsecondary Enrollment Rates for Select Groups in Polk County, 2021



Note: Outcomes for demographic groups with fewer than 10 students are not displayed.

## Success of Polk County High School Graduates

### Top destinations of graduates, 2016-2020

- **39%** of college-goers attended a **public 4-year college**
  - **14%** of college-goers attended a **private 4-year college**
  - **46%** of college-goers attended a **public 2-year college**
  - **<5%** of college-goers attended a **private 2-year college**
  - **87%** of college-goers attended an **in-state college**
- **72%** of students who enroll **persist to their second year** versus 73% in peer counties. 2021
  - **63%** of students who enroll **earn a degree or credential** within 6 years versus 55% in peer counties. 2021

## Adult Learners

### Polk County resident enrollments in NC Community Colleges, 2021

- 35** Basic Skills
- 268** Continuing Education
- 410** Curriculum



9% of Polk County residents have **student loan debt**; 8% of debt holders had **student loans in default**. 2020

## In your Prosperity Zone Sub-Region:

**71.6%**

of postsecondary degrees and credentials conferred by regional institutions are **aligned with labor market needs**.

### Top areas of misalignment:

- Health Science** (all levels)
- Transportation, Distribution & Logistics** (below bachelor's)
- Finance** (bachelor's)

**636** Individuals served in an ApprenticeshipNC program in 2020

### UNC and NC Community College Outcomes:

- 3,023** graduates in 2020
- 69%** of 2016 graduates were employed in NC in 2021
- \$35,824** annual average earnings of graduates employed in NC (includes both part-time and full-time jobs)

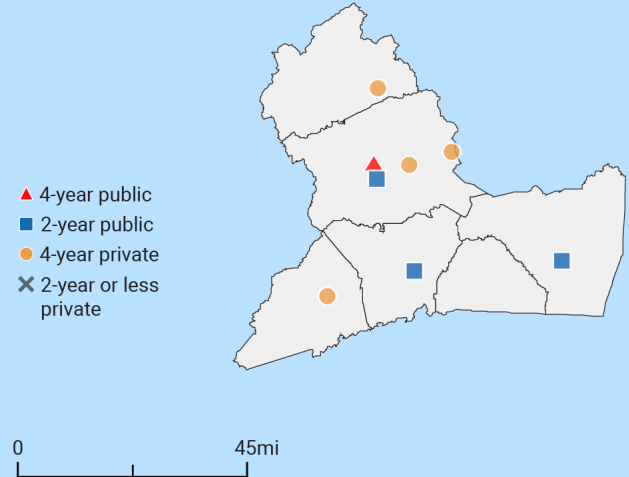
### In 2021 your Workforce Development Board served:

- 6,325** in Basic Services
- 2,960** in Career Services
- 200** in Education Services



**13.7%** of young adults ages 16-24 in Polk County were **not working and not in school** versus **15.2%** in peer counties. 2019

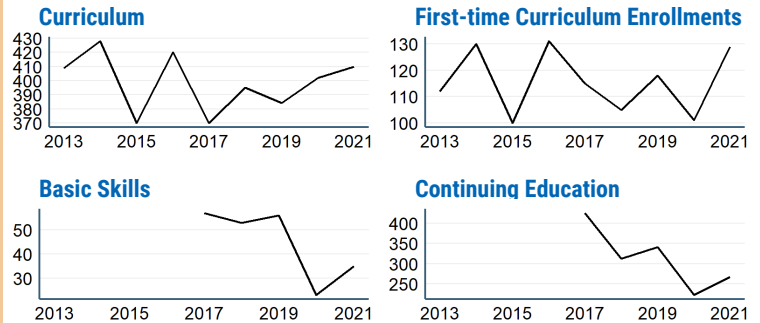
## Postsecondary assets in Asheville Prosperity Zone sub-region



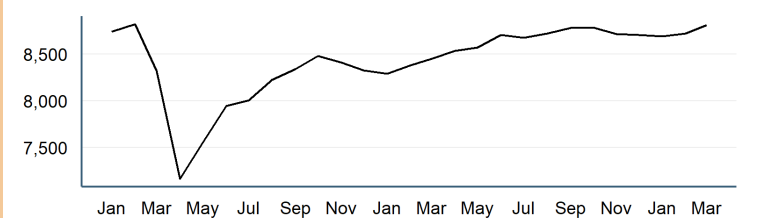
### Degree Credentials Awarded, 2021

**1,557** certificate | **1,492** associate | **1,388** bachelor's

## Impact of Covid-19 on NC Community College Enrollment



## Number of Polk County residents employed, January 2020 to March 2022



## Promising Attainment Practices

The new **Promising Attainment Practices Database** is a curated, searchable, and filterable collection of about 250 county, region, and state-level initiatives and programs that directly address various components of the state's attainment challenge. The Database allows local and regional initiative leaders and other stakeholders to identify groups across the state who are developing or operating initiatives designed to boost attainment.

Follow link to discover how Polk County has been meeting local needs:

[https://dashboard.myfuturenc.org/promising-attainment-practices/?wdt\\_search=Polk](https://dashboard.myfuturenc.org/promising-attainment-practices/?wdt_search=Polk)

For more information about each indicator, including data sources and methodology, visit:

[dashboard.myfuturenc.org/county-data-and-resources/](https://dashboard.myfuturenc.org/county-data-and-resources/)