

# Watauga County

myFutureNC 2024 Attainment Profiles



Boone-Wilkesboro Prosperity Zone Sub-Region  
**Peer County Type:** Rural - Non-Metro  
**Local Education Agencies:** 1 (2023)  
**Charter Schools:** 1 (2023)

2030 Proposed Watauga County Attainment Goal: 13,321 (Stretch Goal: 13,384)

2030 State Attainment Goal: 2 million

## Population Spotlight

2020 Census: 54,077  
 2022 Estimate: 55,089  
 Change: 1,012

## Growth Rate

**1.9%** County vs. **2.5%** State



**\$57,888**  
 Median Household Income (2022)  
 State: \$67,516



**61%**  
 Home Owners (2022)  
 State: 67%



**8.8%**  
 Child Poverty Rate (2022)  
 State: 17.2%



**5.5%**  
 Opportunity Youth Rate (2022)  
 State: 10.9%



**77%**  
 Households with Broadband (2022)  
 State: 77%



**3.2%**  
 Unemployment Rate (2022)  
 State: 3.7%

## Educational Attainment

Watauga County residents ages 25-44, 2022

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**  
**3,534**  
 33.1%



**Have Degree or Credential**  
**7,133**  
 66.9%



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

## Top Opportunities for Growth

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



### Math Performance

47% of Watauga County 3-8 graders earn college-and-career-ready scores in Math, below the state goal of 86%.



### Reading Performance

45% of Watauga County 3-8 graders earn college-and-career-ready scores in Reading, below the state goal of 73%.



### FAFSA Completion

64% of Watauga County high school seniors complete the FAFSA, below the state goal of 80%.

## 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 Watauga County has been meeting local needs:

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

## LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

### In Boone-Wilkesboro Prosperity Zone Sub-Region:

**83.4%**

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

#### Top areas of misalignment:

**Health Science** below bachelor's  
**Transportation, Distribution & Logistics** below bachelor's  
**Business Management & Administration** bachelor's



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

### UNC and NC Community College Outcomes:

**5,202** graduates in 2020

**69%** of 2016 graduates were employed in NC in 2021

**\$44,421** annual average earnings of graduates employed in NC (includes both part-time and full-time jobs)

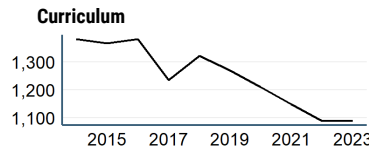


**44%** of adults (ages 25-44) in Watauga County earned a **family sustaining wage**, 2022

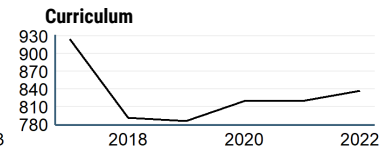
### Watauga County is served by:

**High Country Workforce Development Board**  
**High Country Council of Governments**

### UNC System College Enrollment



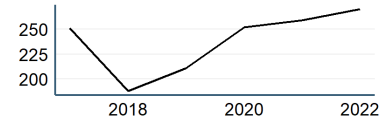
### NC Community College Enrollment



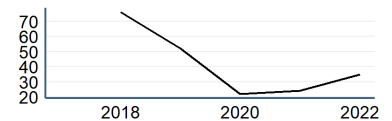
### Top 3 Five-Star Jobs in Boone-Wilkesboro Prosperity Zone Sub-Region

Job Title	Annual Growth
Nurse Practitioners	4%
Logisticians	3%
Occupational Therapy Assistants	3%

### First-time Curriculum Enrollments



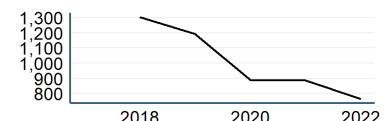
### Basic Skills



### Top 3 Employers in Watauga County

Employer	Employment Range
Appalachian State University	1000+
Appalachian Regional Healthcare Sys	1000+
Samaritan's Purse	500-999

### Continuing Education



### Adult Learners

Boone-Wilkesboro Sub-Prosperity Zone post-secondary enrollments in NC Community Colleges, Fall 2022

- 249 Basic Skills
- 2,980 Continuing Education
- 407 Curriculum

17% of Watauga County residents have student loan debt; 5% of debt holders had student loans in default. 2022

### Success of Watauga County High School Graduates

- 88% of students who enroll persist to their second year versus 78% in peer counties. 2022
- 65% of students who enroll earn a degree or certificate within 6 years versus 55% in peer counties. 2022

### Top destinations of all college-goers, Fall 2023

- 1,007 of all college-goers attended Caldwell CC and TI
- 89 of all college-goers attended Wilkes CC
- 49 of all college-goers attended Appalachian State University

### Degree Credentials Awarded, 2022

763 certificate | 499 associate | 4,461 bachelor's

### Postsecondary assets in Boone-Wilkesboro Prosperity Zone sub-region

**Public, 4-year or above**  
Appalachian State University

**Public, 2-year**  
Mayland Community College, Wilkes Community College

**Private not-for-profit, 4-year or above**  
Lees-McRae College

**Private not-for-profit, 2-year**



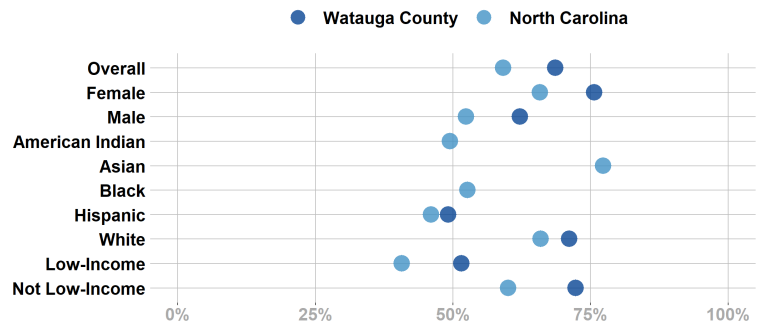
64% of seniors completed the FAFSA in 2023, compared to 62% statewide; 54 more need to complete in 2023 to meet state goal of 80%. 2023

81% of graduates reported intentions to enroll in a postsecondary institution versus 68% in peer counties. 2022

67% of graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 12 months versus 52% in peer counties. 2022

42% of Watauga County students have parents with no college degree (either 2- or 4-year) versus 55% in peer counties.

### Postsecondary Enrollment Rates for Select Groups in Watauga County, 2022



Note: Outcomes for groups with less than 10 students, <5% or >95% are not displayed.

### How students in Watauga County traditional schools are doing:

Watauga County has met the goal for Pre-K enrollment. (Goal: 75%). 2023

45% of 3-8 graders are earning college-and-career-ready scores (level 4 or 5) in reading, compared to 30% statewide; 872 more needed to meet state goal of 73%. 2023

47% of 3-8 graders are earning college-and-career-ready scores (level 4 or 5) in math, compared to 35% statewide; 823 more needed to meet state goal of 86%. 2023

91% of 9th graders graduate within four years, compared to 87% statewide; 14 more needed to meet state goal of 95%. 2023

17% of students are chronically absent from school, compared to 27% statewide; 300 less needed to meet state goal of 11%. 2023

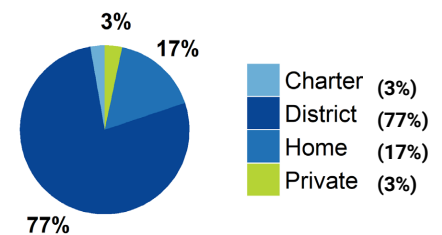
Watauga County has a student-to-school counselor ratio of 303:1 versus 325:1 in peer counties. 2023

1% of students drop out of high school (21 total students), compared to 2% statewide. 2023

### School Choice

5,920 total students were enrolled in K-12 in Watauga County in the 2022-23 school year.

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



### Access to Postsecondary Credits

Students in Watauga County completed 586 Career & Technical Education (CTE) credentials (259 (44%) were industry-valued credentials) and 225 concentrations in 2023. The top three CTE concentrations completed include Human Services; Architecture and Construction; and Health Science.

281 high school students took at least one AP test (19%) versus 8% in peer counties (2023).

221 high school students participated in Career & College Promise programs (63%) versus 51% in peer counties (2023).

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/)