

McDowell County

myFutureNC 2025 Attainment Profiles



Hickory
Prosperity Zone Sub-Region
Peer County Type: Rural - Non-Metro

Educational Attainment

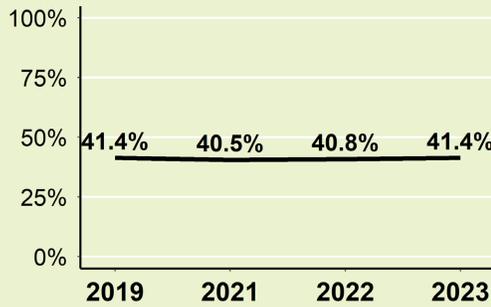
McDowell County residents ages 25-44, 2023

Have Degree or Credential
4,474
41.4%

No Degree
6,330
58.6%

Residents Ages 25-44
10,804

Educational Attainment Trend



Note: 2020 data not shown due to inconsistency

Educational Level Breakdown, 2023



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

2030 Proposed McDowell County Attainment Goal: 5,871 (Stretch Goal: 5,972)

2030 State Attainment Goal: 2 million

Population Spotlight

2020 Census: 44,582
2023 Estimate: 44,893
Change: 311

Growth Rate

0.7% County vs. 3.8% State

Race/Ethnicity

Amer. Indian 0.4%
Asian/Pac. Isl. 1.1%
Black 3.9%
Hispanic 6.8%
Multiracial 1.6%
White 86.3%

\$53,697
Median Household Income (2023)
State: \$70,838

74.0%
Home Owners (2023)
State: 66.3%

57.2%
Households with Broadband (2023)
State: 77.1%

17.5%
Child Poverty Rate (2023)
State: 17.6%

17.0%
Single Parent Households (2023)
State: 17.0%

3.8%
Foreign Born (2023)
State: 9.2%

Top Opportunities for Growth



Labor Force Participation

73% of McDowell County adults 25-44 are in the labor force, below the rural - non-metro county average of 78%.

In Hickory Prosperity Zone Sub-Region:

68.3%

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

Top Misalignments

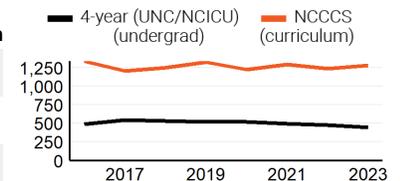
Job Openings vs. Degrees/Credentials

- Education & Training Jobs < Creds
- Health Science Jobs > Creds
- Business Management & Administration Jobs > Creds

Top 3 Five-Star Jobs in Hickory Prosperity Zone Sub-Region

Job Title	Annual Growth
Nurse Practitioners	4.11%
Logisticians	3.20%
Physician Assistants	2.68%

Postsecondary Enrollment for McDowell County Residents



41 Individuals served in an ApprenticeshipNC program in 2023

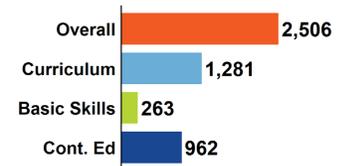
UNC and NC Community College Outcomes:

2,139 graduates in 2020
80.0% of 2016 graduates were employed in NC in 2021
\$37,952 annual average earnings of graduates employed in NC (includes both part-time and full-time jobs), 2021

Top 3 Employers in McDowell County

Employer	Employment Range
Baxter Healthcare Corp	1000+
McDowell County Schools	1000+
Love's Travel Stops & Country Store	250-499

McDowell County residents enrolled in NCCCS, Fall 2023



Top 3 industries in McDowell County

Industry	Jobs Percent
Manufacturing	4,997 32.1%
Retail Trade	2,300 14.8%
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,557 10.0%

McDowell County is served by:

- Foothills Workforce Development Board
- Foothills Regional Commission

LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

Top Opportunities for Growth



Postsecondary Completion

47% of McDowell County high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary education earn a degree or credential within 6 years, below the rural - non-metro county average of 55%.

Degree Credentials Awarded in PZ Sub-Region, 2023

1,394 certificate | 1,970 associate | 380 bachelor's

Adult Learners

McDowell County Residents Aged 25+ enrolled in NC Community Colleges, Fall 2023

143 Basic Skills
806 Continuing Education
317 Curriculum

13.3% of residents (aged 25-44) have some college but no degree. Peer: 15.9% | State: 11.7%, 2023



10.6% of McDowell County residents have student loan debt. 2.0% of debt holders had student loans in default. 2024

Success of McDowell County High School Graduates

83.4% of students who enroll persist to their second year.

Peer: 79.6% | State: 83.8%, 2023

94.4% UNC | 72.2% NCCCS | 95.0% NCICU

46.5% of students who enroll earn a degree or certificate within 6 years. Peer: 55.5% | State: 60.0%, 2023

21.2% UNC | 12.9% NCCCS | 6.5% NCICU

Top destinations of all college-goers, 2023

- 1,874 of all college-goers attended McDowell TCC
- 186 of all college-goers attended Asheville-Buncombe TCC
- 169 of all college-goers attended Western Piedmont CC

COLLEGE & CAREER ACCESS

Top Opportunities for Growth

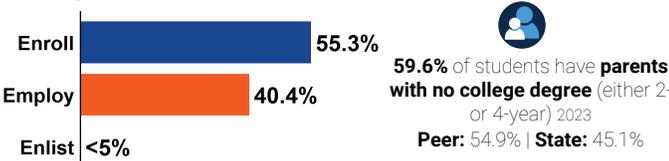


FAFSA Completion

45% of McDowell County high school seniors complete the FAFSA, below the rural - non-metro county average of 54%.

44.9% of 2024 high school class completed the FAFSA as of Sept. 27, 2024. 156 more need to complete in 2024 to meet state goal of 80%. Peer: 54.0% | State: 55.0%

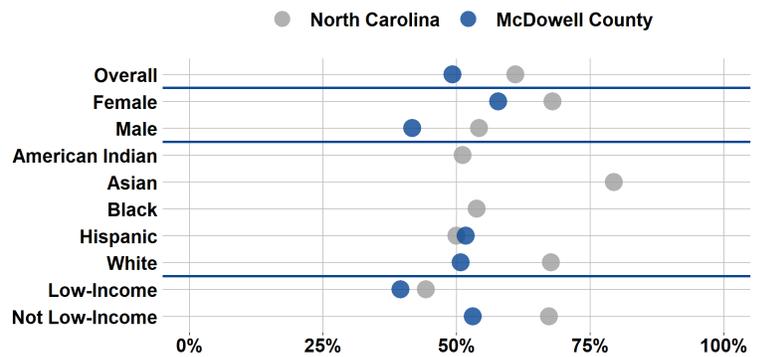
Post High School Graduation Intentions



85.2% of 9th graders graduated within four years. 50 more needed to meet state goal of 95%. Peer: 85.7% | State: 87.3% 2024

47.5% of graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 12 months. Peer: 52.6% | State: 59.3% 2023

Postsecondary Enrollment Rates for Select Groups in McDowell County, 2023



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

ACADEMIC READINESS

Top Opportunities for Growth



Math Performance

31% of McDowell County 3-8 graders earn college-and-career-ready scores in Math, below the state average of 36%.

McDowell County has met the goal for Pre-K enrollment (Goal: 75%). Peer: 71.0% | State: 57.2% 2024

Note: Enrollment numbers only include students served by the NC Pre-K Program and may not represent all Pre-K offerings available.

McDowell County Traditional Public Schools students:

25.1% of 3-8 graders earned college-and-career-ready scores in reading in 2024. 1,160 more needed to meet state goal of 73%. Peer: 24.5% | State: 29.8%

30.7% of 3-8 graders earned college-and-career-ready scores in math in 2024. 1,338 more needed to meet state goal of 86%. Peer: 30.3% | State: 36.5%

27.4% of students were chronically absent from school in 2024. 931 fewer needed to meet state goal of 11%. Peer: 27.7% | State: 25.7%

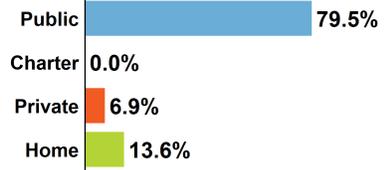
McDowell County has a student-to-school counselor ratio of 284:1 compared to 332:1 in peer counties. 2024

2.8% of students drop out of high school (54 total students), compared to 2.1% statewide. 2023

School & Student Overview (2024 school year)

Traditional Public School District(s): 1
Traditional Public School(s): 15
Charter School(s): 0
Private School(s): 4
Home School(s): 554

6,818 total K-12 students enrolled in schools.



Pathways to College and Career

Students in traditional public schools completed 2,376 Career & Technical Education (CTE) credentials and 251 concentrations. 319 (13.4%) of credentials were industry-valued in 2023. The top three CTE concentrations: Law, Public Safety, Corrections, & Security; Manufacturing; and Arts, Audio/Video Technology, & Communications.

127 (7.4%) high school students took at least one AP, IB, or CIE exam. State: 16.8% (2023).

231 (54.7%) high school graduates participated in Career & College Promise programs. State: 36.0% (2024).

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

dashboard.myfuturenc.org/county-data-and-resources/