

Watauga County

myFutureNC 2025 Attainment Profiles



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

Educational Attainment

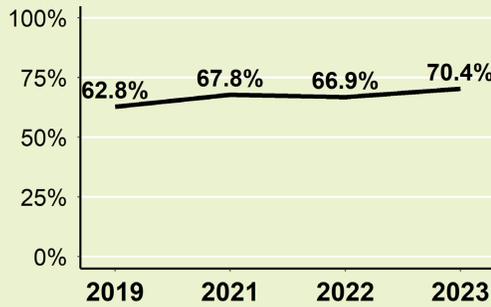
Watauga County residents ages 25-44, 2023

Have Degree or Credential
7,514
70.4%

No Degree
3,164
29.6%

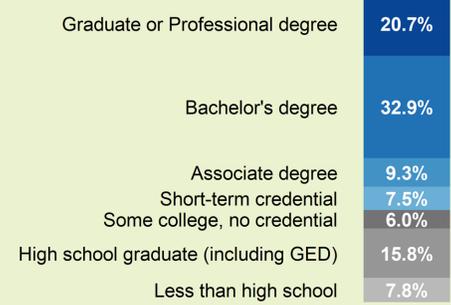
Residents Ages 25-44
10,678

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

2030 State Attainment Goal: 2 million

Population Spotlight

2020 Census: 54,077
2023 Estimate: 54,748
Change: 671

Growth Rate

1.2% County vs. 3.8% State

Race/Ethnicity

Amer. Indian 0.2%
Asian/Pac. Isl. 1.2%
Black 1.6%
Hispanic 6%
Multiracial 2%
White 88.9%

\$62,045
Median Household Income (2023)
State: \$70,838

61.2%
Home Owners (2023)
State: 66.3%

75.2%
Households with Broadband (2023)
State: 77.1%

10.5%
Child Poverty Rate (2023)
State: 17.6%

7.9%
Single Parent Households (2023)
State: 17.0%

3.7%
Foreign Born (2023)
State: 9.2%

Top Opportunities for Growth



Family Sustaining Wage

45% of Watauga County adults 25-44 earn a family sustaining wage, below the state average of 58%.

In Boone-Wilkesboro Prosperity Zone Sub-Region:

79.6%

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

Top Misalignments

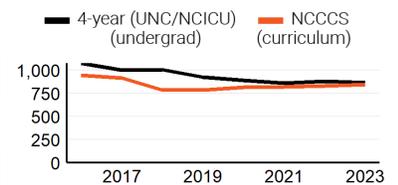
Job Openings vs. Degrees/Credentials

- Health Science Jobs > Creds
- Transportation, Distribution & Logistics Jobs > Creds
- Education & Training Jobs < Creds

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

Job Title	Annual Growth
Nurse Practitioners	3.93%
Occupational Therapy Assistants	2.99%
Logisticians	2.98%

Postsecondary Enrollment for Watauga County Residents



18 Individuals served in an ApprenticeshipNC program in 2023

UNC and NC Community College Outcomes:

5,202 graduates in 2020
68.7% 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), 2021

45.1% of adults (ages 25-44) in Watauga County earned a **family sustaining wage**. Peer: 40.5% | State: 57.6%, 2023

5.9% of youth (ages 16-24) in Watauga County were **Opportunity Youth**. Peer: 13.8% | State: 10.3%, 2023

86.0% of adults (ages 25-44) in Watauga County **participated in the labor force**. Peer: 78.3% | State: 84.2%, 2023

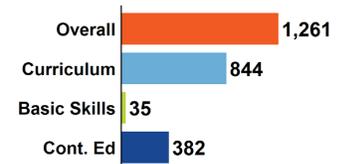
Top 3 Employers in Watauga County

Employer	Employment Range
Appalachian State University	1000+
Appalachian Regional Healthcare System	1000+
Samaritans Purse Inc	500-999

Top 3 industries in Watauga County

Industry	Jobs Percent
Educational Services	4,771 19.0%
Accommodation and Food Services	4,383 17.4%
Health Care and Social Assistance	3,817 15.2%

Watauga County residents enrolled in NCCCS, Fall 2023



Watauga County is served by:

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

LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

Top Opportunities for Growth



Postsecondary Completion

72% of Watauga County high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary education earn a degree or credential within 6 years, below the state goal of 80%.

Degree Credentials Awarded in PZ Sub-Region, 2023

923 certificate | 534 associate | 4,232 bachelor's

Adult Learners

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

- 16 Basic Skills
- 294 Continuing Education
- 143 Curriculum

6.0% of residents (aged 25-44) have some college but no degree. Peer: 15.9% | State: 11.7%, 2023



16.2% of Watauga County residents have student loan debt 0.4% of debt holders had student loans in default. 2024

Success of Watauga County High School Graduates

84.6% of students who enroll persist to their second year.

Peer: 79.6% | State: 83.8%, 2023

92.4% UNC | 71.4% NCCCS | 84.6% NCICU

72.1% of students who enroll earn a degree or certificate within 6 years. Peer: 55.5% | State: 60.0%, 2023

40.2% UNC | 16.2% NCCCS | <5% NCICU

Top destinations of all college-goers, 2023

- 1,024 of all college-goers attended Caldwell CC and TI
- 540 of all college-goers attended Appalachian State University
- 83 of all college-goers attended NC State

COLLEGE & CAREER ACCESS

Top Opportunities for Growth

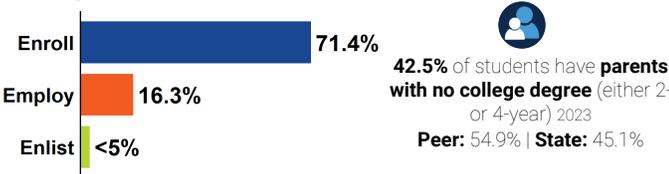


FAFSA Completion

59% of Watauga County high school seniors complete the FAFSA, below the state goal of 80%.

59.2% of 2024 high school class completed the FAFSA as of Sept. 27, 2024. 70 more need to complete in 2024 to meet state goal of 80%. Peer: 54.0% | State: 55.0%

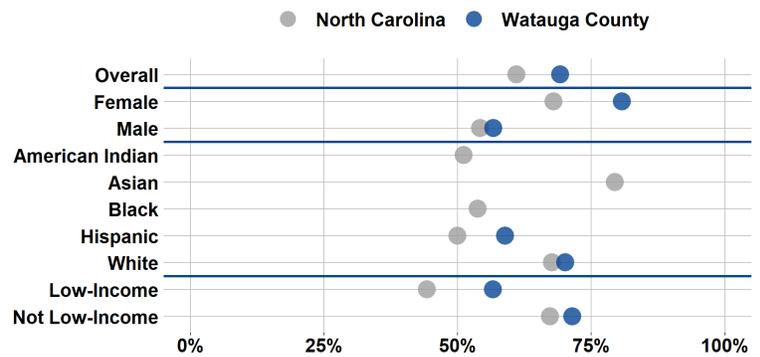
Post High School Graduation Intentions



90.3% of 9th graders graduated within four years. 18 more needed to meet state goal of 95%. Peer: 85.7% | State: 87.3% 2024

67.5% of graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 12 months. Peer: 52.6% | State: 59.3% 2023

Postsecondary Enrollment Rates for Select Groups in Watauga 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

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

Watauga 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.

Watauga County Traditional Public Schools students:

43.4% of 3-8 graders earned college-and-career-ready scores in reading in 2024. 603 more needed to meet state goal of 73%. Peer: 24.5% | State: 29.8%

47.4% of 3-8 graders earned college-and-career-ready scores in math in 2024. 788 more needed to meet state goal of 86%. Peer: 30.3% | State: 36.5%

14.9% of students were chronically absent from school in 2024. 184 fewer needed to meet state goal of 11%. Peer: 27.7% | State: 25.7%

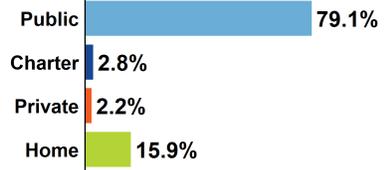
Watauga County has a student-to-school counselor ratio of 284:1 compared to 332:1 in peer counties. 2024

1.3% of students drop out of high school (21 total students), compared to 2.1% statewide. 2023

School & Student Overview (2024 school year)

Traditional Public School District(s): 1
Traditional Public School(s): 11
Charter School(s): 1
Private School(s): 3
Home School(s): 537

5,795 total K-12 students enrolled in schools.



Pathways to College and Career

Students in traditional public schools completed 586 Career & Technical Education (CTE) credentials and 225 concentrations. 259 (44.2%) of credentials were industry-valued in 2023. The top three CTE concentrations: Human Services; Architecture and Construction; and Health Science.

272 (18.8%) high school students took at least one AP, IB, or CIE exam. State: 16.8% (2023).

213 (61.0%) 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/