

# Northwest

## Prosperity Zone (PZ)

myFutureNC 2025 Attainment Profiles



### Counties in Northwest PZ:

Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, McDowell, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties

### Northwest PZ Served By:

High Country, Foothills, and Western Piedmont Councils of Governments and Foothills, High Country, and Western Piedmont Workforce Development Boards

### Educational Attainment

Northwest residents ages 25-44, 2023

**Have Degree or Credential**  
63,562  
45.1%

**No Degree**  
77,262  
54.9%

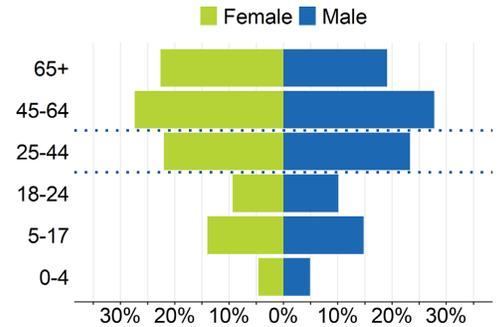
**Residents Ages 25-44**  
140,824

### Educational Level Breakdown, 2023

Graduate or Professional degree	7.1%
Bachelor's degree	17.8%
Associate degree	12.7%
Short-term credential	7.5%
Some college, no credential	15.3%
High school graduate (including GED)	28.2%
Less than high school	11.4%

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

### Age Structure, 2023



2030 Proposed Northwest Attainment Goal: 89,988

2030 State Attainment Goal: 2 million

### Population Spotlight

2020 Census: 618,550  
2023 Estimate: 625,587  
Change: 7,037

### Growth Rate

**1.1%** vs. **3.8%**  
County State

### Race/Ethnicity, 2023

Amer. Indian	0.1%
Asian/Pac. Isl.	2%
Black	4.7%
Hispanic	7.9%
Multiracial	2.8%
White	82.3%



**\$56,066**  
Median Household Income (2023)  
State: \$70,838



**73.7%**  
Home Owners (2023)  
State: 66.3%



**69.3%**  
Households with Broadband (2023)  
State: 77.1%



**20.0%**  
Child Poverty Rate (2023)  
State: 17.6%



**16.4%**  
Single Parent Households (2023)  
State: 17.0%



**4.6%**  
Foreign Born (2023)  
State: 9.2%

LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

### In Northwest Prosperity Zone:

**82.2%**

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

**695** Individuals served in an ApprenticeshipNC program in 2023

### UNC and NC Community College Outcomes:

**7,341** graduates in 2020  
**72.4%** of 2016 graduates were employed in NC in 2021  
**\$42,094** annual average earnings of graduates employed in NC (includes both part-time and full-time jobs), 2021

**43.8%** of adults (ages 25-44) in Northwest earned a **family sustaining wage**. State: 57.6%, 2023

**12.7%** of youth (ages 16-24) in Northwest were **Opportunity Youth**. State: 10.3%, 2023

**80.4%** of adults (ages 25-44) in Northwest **participated in the labor force**. State: 84.2%, 2023

### Top Industries in Northwest PZ, 2024 Q2

Industry Name	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wages
Health Care and Social Assistance	34,106	\$1,119
Retail Trade	29,103	\$627
Accommodation and Food Services	23,861	\$392
Public Administration	13,999	\$1,002
Admin Support, Waste Mgmt, Rem. Services	11,394	\$750

### Top Job Sectors in Northwest PZ, 2024 Q2

Job Sector	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wages
Private	203,091	\$931
Local Government	25,045	\$956
State Government	12,351	\$1,135
Federal Government	1,250	\$1,242

POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

### Degree Credentials Awarded in PZ, 2023

2,317 certificate | 2,504 associate | 4,612 bachelor's

### Adult Learners

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

1,115 Basic Skills  
8,979 Continuing Education  
2,841 Curriculum

15.3% of residents (aged 25-44) have some college but no degree. State: 11.7%, 2023

### Success of Northwest High School Graduates

82.7% of students who enroll persist to their second year. State: 83.8%, 2023

93.2% UNC | 72.7% NCCCS | 91.0% NCICU

61.0% of students who enroll earn a degree or certificate within 6 years. State: 60.0%, 2023

29.3% UNC | 18.6% NCCCS | 7.7% NCICU

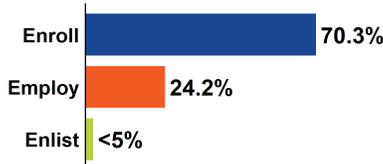
### Top destinations of all college-goers, 2024

- 6,636 of all college-goers attended **Catawba Valley CC**
- 5,157 of all college-goers attended **Caldwell CC and TI**
- 4,508 of all college-goers attended **Wilkes CC**

COLLEGE & CAREER ACCESS

53.1% of 2024 high school class completed the FAFSA as of Sept. 27, 2024. 1,496 more need to complete in 2024 to meet state goal of 80%. State: 55.0%

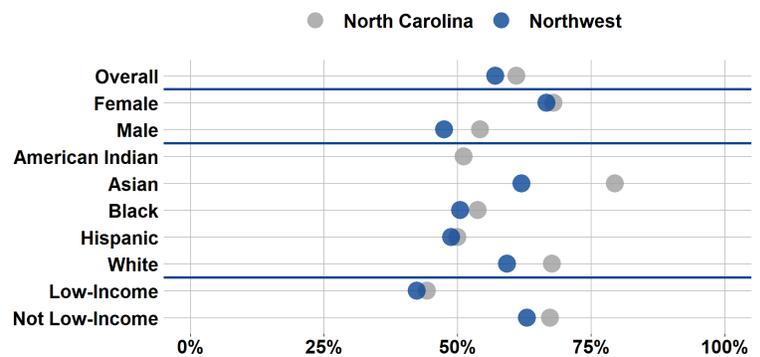
### Post High School Graduation Intentions, 2023



87.8% of 9th graders graduated within four years. 467 more needed to meet state goal of 95%. State: 87.3% 2024

55.4% of graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 12 months. State: 59.3% 2023

### Postsecondary Enrollment Rates for Select Groups in Northwest, 2023



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

ACADEMIC READINESS

71.4% of eligible 4-year-olds enrolled in NC Pre-K program in 2024. 108 more needed to meet state goal of 75%. State: 57.2%

### Northwest Traditional Public Schools students:

28.4% of 3-8 graders earned college-and-career-ready scores in reading in 2024. 19,449 more needed to meet state goal of 86%. State: 29.8%

37.6% of 3-8 graders earned college-and-career-ready scores in math in 2024. 11,929 more needed to meet state goal of 73%. State: 36.5%

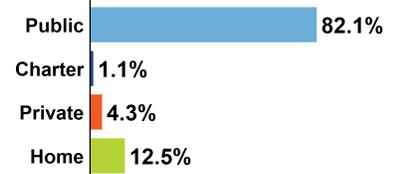
21.1% of students were chronically absent from school in 2024. 7,934 fewer needed to meet state goal of 11%. State: 25.7%

1.9% of students drop out of high school (491 total students), compared to 2.1% statewide. 2023

### School & Student Overview (2024 school year)

Traditional Public School District(s): 14  
Traditional Public School(s): 186  
Charter School(s): 4  
Private School(s): 37  
Home School(s): 6,999

91,523 total K-12 students enrolled in schools.



### Pathways to College and Career

Students in traditional public schools completed 32,348 Career & Technical Education (CTE) credentials and 4,125 concentrations. 5,234 (16.2%) of credentials were industry-valued in 2023. The top three CTE concentrations: Human Services; Health Science; and Architecture and Construction.

2,313 (9.5%) high school students took at least one AP, IB, or CIE exam. State: 16.8% (2023).

3,167 (54.4%) 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/](https://dashboard.myfuturenc.org/county-data-and-resources/)