INTRODUCTION

From birth to career, there are many opportunities to develop strategies and interventions to increase attainment and improve workforce alignment. Below are some key areas and indicators that highlight where interventions may be possible to improve overall educational attainment outcomes.

Building the Foundation: Pre-K to 8

High-quality early learning and strong academic progress in early years helps prepare children for future success.

Wilkes County has 22 public schools with performance grades. Of these schools, none were classified as low performing in 2019.

Ready for College & Career

High school completion is a crucial step on the pathway to postsecondary success or the beginnings of a career. Activities that prepare students to navigate the transition to postsecondary include gaining experience in college-level coursework and applying for financial assistance.

Postsecondary Access and Success

These metrics capture student progression and educational attainment from high school graduation to postsecondary completion. They indicate relative strengths and weaknesses of Wilkes County at each stage of the postsecondary pipeline.

Labor Market Outcomes

Lack of technical skills and lack of education are among the primary reasons why NC employers struggle to fill vacancies. These metrics capture labor market outcomes among recent graduates, the alignment between postsecondary degree production and labor market demand, and future job demands.

Opportunities for Growth

Compared to rural non-metro counties and the state, these three areas represent the biggest opportunities for Wilkes County to improve future attainment outcomes.

COUNTY OVERVIEW

Wilkes County is in the Boone-Wilkesboro Prosperity Zone sub-region. It’s one of 50 rural non-metro counties in NC.

Overall, 5% of 25-44-year-olds in Wilkes County have earned a master’s degree or higher as their highest degree; 12% have a bachelor’s degree; 15% have an associate degree; 24% have some college, no degree; 28% have a high school diploma; and 16% have less than a high school diploma.

How students in Wilkes County traditional public schools are currently doing:

To meet state goals, Wilkes County needs:

- Wilkes County has met the goal for eligible 4-year-olds enrolled in NC Pre-K program (goal: 75% vs. 106%).
- 1,174 more 3-8 graders earning college-and-career-ready scores (level 4 or 5) in reading (goal: 73% vs. 45%).
- 1,902 more 3-8 graders earning college-and-career-ready scores (level 4 or 5) in math (goal: 86% vs. 41%).

To meet state goals, Wilkes County needs:

- 53 more 9th graders to graduate within four years (goal: 95% vs. 88%).
- 143 more seniors to complete the FAFSA (goal: 80% vs. 57%).
- 53 more students to attend school regularly (goal: 11% chronic absenteeism vs. 12%).

Students in Wilkes County completed 525 Career & Technical Education concentrations in 2019. The top three CTE concentrations completed include Health Science; Agricultural, Food, & Natural Resources; and Manufacturing.

Postsecondary Access and Success

Among Wilkes County high school graduates:

- 61% of graduates enroll in a postsecondary institution within 12 months versus 57% of peer counties.
- 69% of students who enroll persist to their second year versus 73% of peer counties.
- 53% of students who enroll earn a degree or credential within 6 years versus 49% of peer counties.

In your Prosperity Zone sub-region, 2018-19:

- 12,1740 individuals served in an Apprenticeship program.
- 8,809 Continuing Education enrollments at NC community colleges.

There are 84,705 job openings projected between 2017-2026. The top 3 in demand jobs with median wages of $50,000 or more are: 1) Registered Nurses; 2) General and Operations Managers; 3) First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers.

Labor Market Outcomes

5.7% of teens ages 16-19 are not working and not in school versus 8.9% of peer counties.

First-Year Persistence

69% of Wilkes County high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary persist to their second year, below the rural non-metro county average of 73%.

AP Participation

9% of Wilkes County high school students took at least one Advanced Placement exam, below the state average of 17%.

FAFSA Completion

57% of Wilkes County high school seniors complete the FAFSA, below the state average of 64%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prosperity Zone sub-region</th>
<th>Peer County Type: Rural Non-Metro</th>
<th>Local Education Agencies: 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018 Population</td>
<td>69,913</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030 Population</td>
<td>73,377</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 Students (2019)</td>
<td>8,972</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Schools</td>
<td>1,850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter/Private/Home</td>
<td>$44,080</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Poverty Rate</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wilkes County 2020 Attainment Profile

Largest postsecondary institutions in your Prosperity Zone sub-region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Name</th>
<th>Undergraduate Enrollments 2017-18</th>
<th>Graduate or Transfer in 8 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollments</td>
<td>28,661</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian State University</td>
<td>18,135</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute</td>
<td>4,636</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilkes Community College</td>
<td>3,416</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayland Community College</td>
<td>1,455</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lees-McRae College</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Enrollments reflect degree- or credential-seeking undergraduate enrollments. The graduate or transfer rate is drawn from IPEDS and represents the share of students who either graduate with a degree or credential from the institution or transfer to another institution within 8 years. The 8-year outcome is the only measure that includes information on transfer out. Detailed data guidance is provided at http://go.unc.edu/countydata

Local Cross-Sector Promising Practice: Wilkes Community College Student Advising

All Wilkes Community College students are assigned an ACA Advisor and a Faculty Mentor upon admission to the College. ACA Advisors help new students successfully transition to college. They help identify or clarify career interests; create an academic plan; recommend academic and campus resources; and answer questions about degrees. Faculty Mentors provide information about job opportunities within a student’s career and/or assist transfer students as they navigate their best path to a university. Faculty Mentors make sure graduating students understand their next step.

We identified this example of an emerging cross-sector promising practice in partnership with local leaders. If you have additional examples you’d like to share with myFutureNC, please respond to this short survey.

For more information about each indicator, including data sources and methodology, visit: dashboard.myfuturenc.org/county-data-and-resources/

ABOUT CAROLINA DEMOGRAPHY
Located within the Carolina Population Center at UNC-Chapel Hill, we use data and other available research to help you put a face or a story on the population-level changes facing your community. Our analysts provide a full array of demographic data and research services to inform decision making, evaluation, and policy across North Carolina, where we serve organizations and people in all 100 counties.

ncdemography.org  
demography@unc.edu  
@ncdemography

ABOUT MYFUTURENC
MyFutureNC is a statewide nonprofit organization focused on educational attainment and is the result of cross-sector collaboration between North Carolina leaders in education, business, and government. Our mission is to prepare North Carolina for the future by empowering individuals, strengthening communities, and ensuring our economic viability in a global economy.

myfuturenc.org  
facebook.com/myfuturenc  
@myFutureNC