

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT ANNUAL UPDATE



January
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Western North Carolina Source (WNCSource)
Head Start, Early Head Start, and
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships
Annual data update to the 2019 Community Assessment



Empowering people, transforming lives

Community Assessment Annual Update

WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA SOURCE (WNCSOURCE) HEAD START, EARLY HEAD START, AND EARLY HEAD START-CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIPS ANNUAL DATA UPDATE TO THE 2019 COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEAD START, EARLY HEAD START, AND EARLY HEAD START-CCP

Western North Carolina Source (WNCSource) is a local, nonprofit organization serving four counties in southwestern North Carolina, including Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania. The WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships programs offer a variety of home-based and center-based programming to meet the wide range of needs found within its service area. In the 2020-2021 program year, the cumulative funded enrollment of WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships was 608 children and pregnant women.

SERVICE AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

The WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start service area includes four counties in western North Carolina. The service area is approximately 1,500 square miles, which is 3.2% of the total land area in the state of North Carolina. WNCSource's service area is vastly rural, with a low population per square mile. Three out of the four counties have been designated rural counties by the North Carolina State Data Center.

The WNCSource service area's total population is 235,844. Over the past three years, the population in North Carolina has been increasing. Poverty in the service area is highest in Rutherford County, though indicating a declining three-year trend, while the other counties are below the state poverty rate. Twenty-four percent of children, under age 6, in North Carolina live in poverty, and nearly 50% of all NC children live in families experiencing poverty. Among Black and Hispanic children, nearly 40% live in poverty.

In the service area, the median age trends higher than the statewide rate with significant portions of the population over age 65, while the population under age 5 is lower than the statewide rate.

While all counties in the service area have a population that is predominantly White, racial diversity is the greatest in Rutherford County, where 9.5% of the population is Black or African American. Henderson County has the most ethnic diversity, as 10.1% of the population is Hispanic or Latino.

In the WNCSource service area, there are many single parent households; Rutherford and Transylvania counties have rates higher than the statewide rate and the children served in all program types by WNCSource have rates of single parent households higher than the state rate.

NEEDS OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO MEET THOSE NEEDS

In the WNCSource service area, there are at least 2,634 children who are eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start services based on family income at or below the federal poverty level. In North Carolina, while the number of children experiencing homelessness has been declining, the needs are substantial and the full impact of the pandemic for this population is still unknown.

During the 2020-2021 program year, WNCSource served 51% fewer children who were in foster care and received about half of the number of the child welfare referrals for placement in a program than during 2017-2018. This is likely a reflection of underreporting during the height of the pandemic versus actual declining need in the service area. WNCSource also offers services to families experiencing homelessness; particularly higher levels of need are seen in Henderson and Rutherford counties.

The number of children with disabilities enrolled in WNCSource's Head Start program is 12%, exceeding the 10% enrollment requirement, though the Early Head Start and Early Head Start-CCP programs have enrollment levels of children with disabilities at 5-6%. Historically, these programs have also served over 10% of children with disabilities. As children with disabilities are more likely to experience health conditions, WNCSource administrators report that during the pandemic, many families of these children have delayed their entrance into early education programs, many based on the recommendation of their pediatrician. Additionally, for many families enrolling their child in the Early Head Start program, this is their child's first experience in a program. Building relationships, developing rapport and training EHS staff to identify and support these children are key priorities for WNCSource to ensure families trust and engage in the referral process.

Large numbers of children remain eligible for public assistance programs in the service area, where low levels of education exist. The highest educational attainment level for a majority of individuals is high school graduate or some college, with no degree. In the counties in the service area, the high school graduation rate was steady and above the statewide rate, with the exception of Transylvania County Schools. Dropout rates for all race/ethnicity groups saw a reduction in the number of dropouts from 2018-2019.

The drug overdose mortality rate has increased dramatically in the service area and across the state, likely due to the isolating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of fentanyl in other illicit drugs. Preliminary state data from 2020 shows a 23% increase in overdose-related emergency room visits over the previous year. For other health-related factors, including chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes, rates are high in Rutherford County, and generally in line with the state rates in the other counties.

In Rutherford County, children born with low birth weight exceeds the state rate. Also of note, the percentage of White babies with low birth weights exceeded the statewide rate in all counties in the service area. In Transylvania County, the rate for Hispanic or Latino babies is almost double the statewide rate and the "other" race category is almost 44% over the state rate.

Though the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot yet be established through current data sources, it is likely that it will have an effect on the needs of the eligible children and families in the service area.

AGENCIES SERVING ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

In the WNCSource service area; there are 105 child care and family child care programs available to families, with the capacity to serve 4,418 children, birth to school age. Just over one-third (34%) of providers are participating in NC Pre-K, the state-funded preschool program, and 67.6% accept child care subsidies. Just under 60% of programs are serving infants and more than 87% of programs participate in the Smart Start program in the service area. Detailed descriptions of child care capacity by program type and zip code are available in Appendix A.

In the WNCSource service area, there are many social service resources available to families, in addition to those offered by the grantee. WNCSource continues to connect with resources within the service area and contiguous counties to expand access to comprehensive services for families.

PARENT, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY INSIGHT

In 2021, WNCSource surveyed parents regarding communication processes and the quality of relationships with WNC staff. Staff were also surveyed regarding employee satisfaction and job security.

Surveys of enrolled families indicate overall satisfaction with the amount of contact WNCSource provides, with less than 1% indicating that they would like additional communication, and 2.9% indicating they felt there was too much communication from the agency. Families indicated that they appreciated taking part in activities at school, assistance with food and diapers, and the weekly activities that connected children with their teachers and classmates. Families also indicated that video and phone calls from teachers are helpful, and the general level of services provided are helpful.

Half of families reported no barriers existed to staying in contact with WNCSource services during the pandemic. Some respondents reported that barriers to communication included work, school, family obligations, helping other children with schoolwork, poor cell phone reception or limited number of minutes, poor internet quality, and language barriers.

When surveying staff, WNCSource found on nearly every measure, average scores for Head Start program staff were better than average and employee satisfaction rose significantly for management staff between from 2017 to 2021, though job security is below the agency's average score for management positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WNCSource has made significant progress toward the recommendations put forth in the May 2019 Community Assessment, which include:

- Review of program design to determine the best ways to increase the number of full-day/full-year center-based slots for birth to five (particularly infants and toddlers) and maintaining home-based slots for families who need them.
- Continue to build upon strong community partnerships to increase access to comprehensive services in WNCSource sites. This will alleviate transportation issues by bringing health, mental health, and social services into locations where children and families regularly gather.

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- Formalize a process for reaching outside of the WNCSource service area to access additional services including mental health, substance misuse, adult health, developmental disability, and other social services.
 - Identify service area transportation successes and challenges in order to enhance overall quality of services for families. Use previous experiences with Apple Transportation to identify solutions. Identify partnerships with Medicaid transportation services to coordinate better systems for collaboration. Work with families to better understand the Apple Transportation system.
 - Ensure WNCSource representatives participate on local task forces with community partners to address identified challenges and develop strategic plan for partnerships. Focus of the committee could include housing, job training/availability, immigration issues, child welfare/foster care, and substance misuse. As appropriate, also identify possible advocacy action steps each partner can take. Coordinate all WNCSource members of the Task Forces to communicate and strategically plan community-wide efforts that impact program families and activities.
 - Create a Task Force related to services for Pregnant Women and Young Children (birth-5) that focuses on the wide range of issues that impact them in a way that builds upon the Transylvania Task Force Model.
 - Continue to develop and communicate clear policies and procedures to staff, families, and partners regarding program operations. Ensure all stakeholders understand all program operations, the process for using vouchers and child care subsidy, referral and follow up roles and responsibilities, and communication strategies (both formal and informal).
 - Continue to create a program-wide focus on mental health supports for families, addressing challenging behaviors, and using trauma-informed practices. Integrate resources from national, regional, and statewide resources to enhance social and emotional supports in each center and home visiting setting.
 - Continue to enhance professional development for all staff. Training should include program policies and procedures, communication systems, processes for referral to community services, inclusive practices, management or leadership development opportunities, addressing challenging behaviors, and using trauma-informed practices.
 - Explore how EHS-CCP sites are utilizing supplies, materials, and supports that enhance teacher capacity and are communicating with and/or coaching the EHS-CCP programs regarding the logistical considerations related to supplies and materials.
 - Compare teacher job descriptions with real-world activities to ensure job descriptions accurately reflect job requirements in a realistic and manageable way. Continue to improve use of technology and data systems to streamline work tasks. Integrate reflective supervision as part of the process of managing expectations, job requirements, and strategies to become more efficient.
 - Review workloads and schedules for staff to identify more flexible staffing patterns while maintaining adult-child ratios. Consider rotating schedules, job shares, and longer days with shorter weeks as potential solution to flexible hours.

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

The 2022 Community Assessment Data Update serves as an update and supplement to the *Western Carolina Community Action (former agency name) Community Assessment, May 2019*. The purpose of this report is to update essential data provided in the May 2019 report and to provide new and enhanced data to ensure WNCSource has the most current and comprehensive information for program planning and grant writing.

Per Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), Section 1302.11ⁱ, community assessment requirements include:

- 1) The number of eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age children, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages they speak, including:
 - a) Children experiencing homelessness in collaboration with, to the extent possible, McKinney-Vento Local Education Agency Liaisons (42 U.S.C. 11432 (6)(A));
 - b) Children in foster care;
 - c) Children with disabilities, including types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to these children by community agencies;
- 2) The education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being;
- 3) Typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children;
- 4) Other child-development, child-care centers, and family child care programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of eligible children served;
- 5) Resources that are available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families; and,
- 6) Strengths of the community.

Information in this report is organized according to the community assessment requirements noted above.

DATA LIMITATIONS

When examining U.S. Census data, zip code level data is based on the census designated “Zip Code Tabulated Area,” an approximation for that geographic area.¹ Zip code level data does not always align with one county, as zip codes can extend geographically across county boundaries.

In order to best target and understand the precise location of the capacity of child care, as it relates to the number of children age 5 and under, this report utilizes Census data that is gathered both by zip code and by county. Specifically, Table 17 (Children Under Age 5, Child Poverty, and Trends by Geographic Area) utilizes zip code level data.

Separately, data in Tables 102-104 indicates where child care providers are located, by zip code and county. In these tables, zip codes are listed in the county where it is geographically predominant. Child care

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/zctas.html>

providers and their capacity are listed at the zip code level, in the county where services are provided. For these tables, service area totals sum the county level data.

Zip codes that cross multiple counties include:

- 28711 (Black Mountain), primarily located in Buncombe County. A small portion of this zip code is in Henderson County. An even smaller portion of this zip code falls in Rutherford County. This zip code is omitted from this report.
- 28756 (Mill Spring), primarily located in Polk County. One area (near Chimney Rock) is in Rutherford County.
- 28773 (Saluda). More than half of the geographic area and the town of Saluda are located in Polk County. This zip code also spans Henderson County. All data is attributed to Polk County.
- 28792 (Hendersonville), primarily located in Henderson County. A very small portion (about one neighborhood) of this zip code falls in Polk County.
- 28739 (Hendersonville), primarily located in Henderson County. Two portions of this zip code are located in Transylvania County. All data is attributed to Henderson County.
- 28742 (Horse Shoe), primarily located in Henderson County. This zip code is broken into four areas. A small portion of this zip code is located in Transylvania County. All data is attributed to Henderson County.

Margins of error for data on communities with small populations may be higher than communities with large populations. Where relevant, county sub-totals are combined to provide totals for the service area. Throughout the report, when relevant or required data points could not be obtained to inform the data alignment, this is indicated in the text.

Additionally, as WNCSource enrollment was reduced in 2020-2021, and beyond, due to the extended impact of the pandemic, some changes in data are reflective of the reduced number of children/families served (e.g., the same number of children in a category will appear as a greater percentage, due to the lower enrollment). For example, in “Table 2. Number and Percent of Children Enrolled in Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP by Primary Eligibility Criteria” the increase or decrease for each given population (income eligible, foster children, those experiencing homelessness, etc.) must be viewed with this note of caution.

Throughout the report, notable changes from the 2019 comprehensive Community Assessment will appear as boxed text with light gray shading.

INTRODUCTION

Head Start and Early Head Start Program Summary

Western North Carolina Source (WNCSource) continues to serve four counties in western North Carolina, including: Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania counties. WNCSource is funded to serve 245 children in its Head Start program and 164 children in its Early Head Start program, both of which are implemented through a full-day, center-based and a home-based program option. An additional 100 children are served in a full-day, center-based model through Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships and 99 children in full-day, center-based Early Head Start, supported by expansion funding (beginning March 2021).

Transportation is not provided. A summary of the WNCSource funded slots, by type, is presented in Table 1. A detailed list of sites and funded enrollment by county is provided in Appendix A.

Table 1. WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP Funded Enrollment Slots

Program	Full-Day Center-Based	Home-Based	Total Children
Early Head Start	104	60	164
Head Start	225	20	245
Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership (CCP)	100	0	100
Early Head Start Expansion (3/2021)	99	0	99
Total	528	80	608

Primary eligibility captures only one factor by which a child is eligible for services and many children have needs that fall into multiple categories. As described in Table 2, based on family income, over 72% of enrolled children are eligible for Head Start, over 80% in Early Head Start, and over 74% in Early Head Start-CCP. Eligibility categories of enrolled children have not differed significantly since 2017-2018, though there was a 9% reduction in children who were income eligible in Head Start and a 4.4% reduction in Early Head Start-CCP. The enrollment of children experiencing homelessness also decreased by 4.7% and 3.5% in Head Start and Early Head Start, respectively, and by 1% in Early Head Start-CCP.

Table 2. Number and Percent of Children Enrolled in Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP by Primary Eligibility Criteriaⁱⁱ²

Primary Eligibility Criteria	Number of Children (HS)	% Cumulative Enrolled Children (HS)/% Change from 2017-2018	Number of Children (EHS)	% Cumulative Enrolled Children (EHS)/% Change from 2017-2018	Number of Children (EHS-CCP)	% Cumulative Enrolled Children (EHS-CCP) / % Change from 2017-2018
Income-eligible (at or below 100% FPL)	108	72% (-9%)	160	80.4% (-2.6%)	85	74.6% (-4.4%)
Public assistance	8	5.3% (+1.3%)	10	5% (+2%)	3	2.6% (1.4%)
Status as foster child	4	2.7% (-.3%)	4	2% (-2%)	9	7.9% (-.01%)
Homeless	8	5.3% (-4.7%)	13	6.5% (-3.5%)	8	7% (-1%)
Other ³	14	9.3% (+7.3%)	4	2% (+2%)	4	3.5% (+1.5%)
Exceeding over income (100-130% FPL)	8	5.3% (+5.3%)	8	4% (+4%)	5	4.4% (+4.4%)
Total	150	100%	199	100%	114	100%

² Percentages indicating a change over 4% are highlighted.

³ Compared to former "over income" criterion.

COVID-19 Pandemic and the Impact on Early Education

Despite the key role child care providers play in supporting other essential industries during the COVID-19 crisis, the child care system remains increasingly fragile due to the economic impact. Many programs are faced with closure and are unable to sustain operations with diminishing enrollment and staffing shortages. Yet child care providers have remained open despite the physical risk to support the needs of working families in their community.ⁱⁱⁱ

INCREASED OPERATING COSTS

Initial analysis finds that providers are facing, on average, a 47% increase in operating costs during the pandemic, with even higher increases for programs serving 3- and 4-year-olds.^{iv}

The largest expense for a child care program is the cost of paying staff. Personnel expenses account for approximately 70% of a child care provider's total budget, despite the fact that the average early childhood educator makes only slightly more than \$12 an hour. Additional pandemic-related costs have been incurred over the course of the pandemic, including the utilization of fewer floating staff to ensure dedicated staff for each classroom (reduce exposure), staff needed to manage new safety procedures and protocols (drop-off and pick-up procedures, temperature checks, etc.), increasing access to mental health specialists to support children during the pandemic (increased mental health needs), and increased sanitation supply costs (cleaning products, masks, gloves, etc.).^v

STAFFING SHORTAGES AND REDUCED ENROLLMENT

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 166,900 fewer people worked in child care in December 2020 than in December 2019, when the industry employed about 1,040,400.^{vi} While an exact count of center closures is not clear, this 16% reduction in available staff has most certainly impacted child care centers.

Child-care specialists say several factors have led to the decreased availability of early education staff, which began when centers closed at the start of the pandemic. While many reopened in late June 2020, some programs did not, and instead closed permanently. Early educators left employment at child care programs for various reasons, including their own health concerns and to care for their own children at home. Layoffs meant additional workers began to collect unemployment. During the pandemic, these benefits increased by \$600 a week; in many states, benefits continued to be supplemented through June 2021. This led many workers to postpone a job search to the fall.^{vii}

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conducted surveys (2020-2021) aimed at understanding the challenges child care programs face amidst the pandemic. Survey results indicated that while high turnover and staffing shortages have historically been a consideration in early childhood education, for many child care providers, the pandemic has significantly increased these concerns. NAEYC reported that nationally, more than half of survey respondents are experiencing greater difficulties with recruiting and retaining staff now than before the pandemic. Eighty percent are experiencing a staffing shortage, and 15% reported a "major shortage" (e.g., 6-15 fewer workers than needed).^{viii}

In the context of programs facing staffing challenges and parents facing ongoing pandemic uncertainty, programs that are open are operating at an average enrollment rate of 71% of their licensed capacity, with just 48% of enrolled children attending on an average day.^{ix} As more Americans return to work and as

schools reopen, advocates say the child care industry is being left behind. Among the child care centers that remained open, 81% say they lost enrollment over the past year, according to a NAEYC survey of more than 6,000 providers.^x

NAEYC SURVEY OF NORTH CAROLINA CHILD CARE PROVIDERS (JUNE 2021)^{xi}

NAEYC conducted a survey of child care providers in June 2021. In North Carolina, 327 providers responded, including 58% of child care centers and 19% of family child care homes. This survey indicated that among respondents in North Carolina, 82% of child care centers are experiencing a staffing shortage, 47% of programs impacted by staffing shortages are serving fewer children, 27% are unable to open classrooms, 40% have a longer waitlist, and 18% have reduced their operating hours. Additional details from this survey indicate that in NC:

- “50% of respondents say it is more difficult to recruit and retain qualified educators compared to before the pandemic.
- 75% of survey respondents identify wages as the main recruitment challenge because they are so low that potential applicants are either relying on pandemic unemployment or are recognizing they can make more money working just about anywhere else.
- On the issue of retention, 62% of respondents say that low wages are the most common reason that educators leave the field, followed by 12% of respondents who pointed to exhaustion and burnout and 11% who said lack of benefits. Only 3% said regulations were a key challenge.
- In reflecting on their own time in the field, 22% of respondents, inclusive of all settings, said they were considering leaving their program or closing their family child care within the next year, with another 17% saying maybe they would close. This percentage rises to 32% of minority-owned businesses and 60% of those who have been in the field for one year or less.
- Child care centers and family child care homes are operating at an average enrollment rate of 76% of their licensed capacity, with 66% of enrolled children attending on an average day.
- One out of every three respondents, inclusive of all settings, say their program likely would have closed without help. That includes 22% of all family child care providers and 39% of those who are a minority-owned business.
- 31% of respondents working in child care centers and 53% of those working in family child care homes have been able to reduce debt they took on during the pandemic using relief funds they have received to date. Another 46% say they will be able to reduce debt with future relief funds, such as the stabilization grants.
- 64% of respondents in child care centers and family child care homes received an increase in compensation through bonuses or an increase in baseline pay.
- 65% of early childhood educators say they would want their compensation to increase temporarily (for 1-2 years), even if they knew it would eventually revert to what they receive now. At the same time, 32% of early childhood educators working in centers and family child care homes are worried about being cut off from public benefits (like SNAP or housing subsidies) if their compensation is increased.”

ROLE OF FEDERAL RELIEF FUNDING

In April 2021, the Biden administration released nearly \$40 billion of the administration's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package to confront what President Biden referred to as an "acute, immediate child care crisis." This funding helped providers pay their rent, rehire workers that lost jobs due to the pandemic, and made child care more affordable for low-income families.^{xii} Federal and state relief funds have helped stabilize child care programs and prevented more program closures. "However, staffing shortages, low wages, and a broken market mean that substantial, sustainable public investments are needed for this essential sector to recover and rebuild."^{xiii}

Federal relief funds assisted many programs nationally through the height of the pandemic, with 46% of NAEYC survey respondents indicating they would have closed during the pandemic without federal assistance. Nationally, 54% of minority-owned programs reported they would have closed and in North Carolina, 33% of programs surveyed report they would have closed. Many early educators reported an increase in compensation from relief funds. While these funds provided short term support, they did not provide a long-term solution for the underlying economic conditions in the early childhood education sector that facilitated the crisis and led to the eventual closure of thousands of programs.^{xiv}

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF EARLY EDUCATION STAFF AND CHILDREN

The pandemic has had clear mental health impacts on both early childhood educators and the children and families they serve.^{xv} The additional stress for essential workers, including those in child care, often resulted in increased levels of depression, anxiety, guilt, irritability, and social withdrawal. A representative from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention explained that essential workers remained resilient for others while taking on great personal risk, impacting their mental health with increased anxiety about their health and fears of spreading infection.^{xvi}

The teaching profession has historically experienced high rates of poor mental health, increasingly, with a spike during the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, approximately 17% of teachers left the profession annually, increasing to 27% of teachers that considered leaving classroom teaching due to the pandemic, at least temporarily. In one study, as compared to the year prior (2019), teachers indicated a dramatic increase in their workload, reduced job satisfaction, the belief that their employment benefits would not cover for COVID-related illness expenses or necessary time off. Additionally, many felt the financial stress from inadequate pay and increasing debt or reduced savings did not warrant the risks inherent to teaching during the pandemic.^{xvii}

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought upheaval to families across the globe with "widespread disruption to family life due to school closures, loss of access to regular child care, social distancing, household crowding, economic recession and its associated consequences (e.g., job loss, loss of employer-sponsored insurance, and food insecurity)".^{xviii} Women are disproportionately at particular risk for leaving the workforce during the pandemic, possibly due to the increase in child care responsibilities. Overall, these social disruptions pose a significant threat to the mental health of parents and their children.^{xix} Specifically, "school closures, social distancing and confinement increase the risk of poor nutrition among children, their exposure to domestic violence, increase their anxiety and stress, and reduce access to vital family and care services."^{xx}

Considering all aspects of young children's development, the global pandemic has far-reaching implications as normal childhood activities are suspended, such as attending school, interacting with extended family, playing with friends. The social emotional benefits from children engaging in these experiences are also lost at a time when the adults they depend on, including early educators, are also trying to cope with multiple demands with decreased support systems.^{xxi}

The pandemic has had a significant impact on children's mental health, with some potential for long lasting effects if appropriate supports are not put in place. Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are approximately twice as likely to report elevated emotional and behavioral difficulties.^{xxii}

One of the largest global studies on children's mental health during the pandemic to date shows just how significant the toll has been. One in four youths around the globe are grappling with clinically elevated symptoms of depression, and one in five have increased signs of anxiety, suggesting that childhood depression and anxiety have effectively doubled worldwide during the pandemic.^{xxiii}

The most negatively impacted subgroup of children include those living in poverty and individuals who are: "chronically ill, living with a disability, experiencing housing and food insecurity, residing in remote areas, marginalized by mainstream society (e.g., indigenous people and migrant workers), or are suffering from neglect or abuse."^{xxiv} As concerning as these immediate and observable consequences of COVID-19 are for young children, even less is known about what the long-term effects may be.^{xxv}

WNCSource administrators report that, during the program year, reduced enrollment resulted in smaller class sizes, facilitating staff-to-child ratios that supported children who were experiencing challenging behaviors. As class sizes grow, teachers are reporting more incidences of severe challenging behaviors. Compounding the effects of the pandemic are the systemic disadvantages some face, including many of the children enrolled in the WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

COVID-19: Impact on WNCSource Head Start / Early Head Start Program

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, WNCSource modified programming beginning in mid-March 2020 to prioritize the health and safety of enrolled children and staff. Programming shifted to remote virtual lessons within two weeks (April 2020). Home visits were provided based on the comfort level of families and staff and local transmission rates, and were also offered virtually. On October 5, 2020 in-person programming reopened through December 2020. In response to a surge in COVID-19 cases and an uptick of transmission rates in the community, WNCSource again shifted to virtual programming from January 2021 through July 2021, reopening to in-person learning in August 2021 for the entirety of the program year.

Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership sites were able to safely operate in-person throughout 2020, though they were under-enrolled and faced staffing shortages.

During the virtual learning periods, WNCSource was able to provide a rich, robust virtual curriculum through the ReadyRosie app. Parent surveys indicated that the resources provided were useful and WNCSource had 463 total registered ReadyRosie users engaged, with 309 users connected to a classroom. Family evaluations also revealed that during the start of the pandemic, families felt very supported by WNCSource, but would prefer a streamlined approach to communication. WNCSource immediately pivoted to provide families with consolidated weekly contact from a dedicated staff member (Family Advocates) to provide individualized resources and mental health supports.

WNCSource worked closely with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and local public-school nurses to develop overarching COVID policies. Communication with families was central to the agency efforts and aimed at directly addressing their concerns. The WNCSource Health and Nutrition Consultant led planning efforts for the agency, with support from the HR team, to provide communications to staff about developing COVID protocols.

WNCSource successfully individualized and implemented health and safety protocols for each site, implementing best practices based on the North Carolina COVID Toolkit, and employed multiple mitigation efforts including maintaining mask mandates indoors for staff, weekly proactive testing, and quarantining exposed individuals. **In the 2020-2021 program year, WNCSource had no COVID infections transmitted at work or within any of the program sites.**

WNCSOURCE STAFFING SHORTAGES DUE TO COVID-19

WNCSource is experiencing severe challenges in staffing, and shortages continue to impact daily programming. Pre-pandemic, WNCSource had a healthy substitute pool and is now down to a reduced pool of 4 active and has current openings for 64 staff members. For the purposes of Early Head Start Expansion staffing, WNCSource is looking to fill an additional 29 staff positions for new sites as many staff left during the pandemic to care for their own children at home or due to concerns related to the pandemic.

As the Office of Head Start requires, all staff were also required to be vaccinated by November 5, 2021. All vaccinated staff received 40 hours of paid time off and 8 hours of paid time off for the vaccine booster. Due to the vaccination requirement, the WNCSource Head Start/ Early Head Start programs have lost fourteen staff members, including a Site Supervisor and an Assistant Site Supervisor, with an additional two ERSEA staff members working remotely with a medical/religious exemption. These staffing losses have resulted in the temporary closure of five classrooms. Due to the temporary classroom closures, due to the staff vaccine mandate, WNC provided additional services to families, such as contact and support of a Family Advocate and invitation to attend all family engagement activities.

WNCSource administrators report that staff morale is also down and entry level, opportunities elsewhere are paying higher hourly wages. Former staff have sought similar employment with the local health department, other Dogwood grant funded projects and the local school systems, because they are offering higher pay. In addition, local employers in marketing, nursing, and related fields are also offering more competitive salaries.

In a recent survey of Henderson County early educators, respondents reported wages as low as \$7.00/hour, with the average hourly wage reported by teachers being \$14.70. Participants indicated that the wages and working conditions in the field were the more difficult aspects of working in early childhood education, and as the most important changes that need to be made to support early childhood workers.^{xxvi}

Due to staffing shortages, staff are also in a position to work only optimal hours and many staff have refused to provide extended day care as WNCSource has no leverage to impose consequences. A three-tiered stipend was implemented on 1/31/2022 for staff providing 6 or more hours, per two-week pay period, for afternoon extended day care. Staff indicated the stipends would help incentivize more participation and help those with costs incurred for care of their own children. WNCSource administrators report that the most challenging positions to fill are the NC PreK teaching positions, though through a waiver on requirements, the positions have been filled in the short-term. Additionally, EHS teaching positions are challenging to fill due to

a lack of overall applicants and strict EHS Performance Standards for education requirements. WNCSource reached out and has been advised by their Region IV Program Specialist that waivers will not be given for EHS staff that do not meet the EHS Performance Standards for the minimum education requirements. Waivers may be requested for Head Start Teachers, but for WNCSource there are currently, only five classrooms designated as 100% Head Start; the others are a combination of NC PREK and Head Start children and fall under the NC PREK education requirements for the lead NC PREK teachers.

In an effort to increase staffing levels, WNCSource began to offer \$1,000 signing bonuses (Summer 2020) for new EHS/HS teachers and \$1,500 for NC PreK teachers, which also had the unforeseen consequence of creating resentment among existing staff that were not privy to the benefit. WNCSource was able to offer appreciation bonuses in December 2021, which awarded between \$250-\$550 based on length of service. Those who received a signing bonus were exempt. Additionally, WNCSource has implemented cross training activities to build a collaborative workforce and help improve morale while staffing levels are low, with those in administrative roles stepping up to support classrooms (Area Managers have acted as Site Supervisors, Managers working in the classrooms, Coaches have become teachers, etc.).

With external entry level positions in the area offering increased wages at a rapid rate, WNCSource engaged in a wage comparison study which resulted in recommendations to increase teaching salaries. It took five months to implement the increases, and additional funding sources are needed to maintain the necessary increases. WNCSource administrators note that most new hires were not currently living in the local area, but are relocating to the area for the job.

WNCSource has engaged in multiple recruitment efforts. The newly added Volunteer and Recruitment Coordinator has created an online presence with materials to target December Early Childhood graduates at four-year colleges in the surrounding 100-mile radius. WNCSource held their own job fairs in Henderson County and Transylvania County, which resulted in 7 hires. WNCSource has also participated in job fairs in the surrounding areas, although these activities have yet to yield new staff. Additional efforts include advertising on interstate billboards, paid Facebook advertisements, a media campaign with HOLA Carolina to attract bilingual staff. WNCSource offers a collaborative workplace and excellent benefits, a two-week orientation, dedicated planning time and an assigned coach for new staff.

In addition to historically low numbers of individuals entering the Early Childhood Education (ECE) field, the Head Start hiring requirements (CDA) limit the pool of applicants as well as qualified substitute teachers. To that end, WNCSource has launched the CDA Trainee Pathway Program to help hire staff full or part-time who would not be counted in ratio until they attain the necessary certifications for classroom teaching. Obtaining the necessary certifications could range from 6 weeks to 6 months, depending upon the entry level of the person.

WNCSource administrators report that qualified staff are not currently living in the service area (e.g., Blue Ridge Community College had just three ECE graduates last year), though Early Childhood degrees and certificates programs are available at many local colleges and universities (Blue Ridge Community College, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, Haywood Community College, Southwestern Community College, Isothermal Community College, Western Carolina University, and UNC Asheville). Limited affordable housing also negatively impacts the ability of those graduating and starting their teaching careers to live in the area.

WNCSOURCE WELLNESS EFFORTS

When the pandemic began, the WNCSource Early Intervention team noticed an immediate need to provide staff with the opportunity to confidentially share about their personal lives and the impact it was having on their work life. The Behavior Specialists built "wellness circles" into the virtual work experiences, allowing staff to come together and share their frustrations, fears, and successes in navigating this unprecedented new experience. Mindfulness and related tools were shared to support staff in finding their own work-life balance.

During the spring of 2020, the Program Support Services Manager started sending "Wellness Wednesday" emails, which continued into 2022. The topics of the emails have dealt with many different mental health concerns and resources from Mental Health America. The theme of every email is that "the wellness of our staff reflects the wellness of our children."

During the Spring of 2021, WNCSource sought to reconnect co-workers with a staff day dedicated to multiple small group experiences to support their mental health. Activities included swimming, hiking, basketball, crafting, and gathering by the campfire. The event was such a success, it inspired the agency to use pandemic funding in the Fall of 2021 to support staff members to take one mental health day in the year. The time was requested in advance and provided eight hours for staff to take care of their own wellness by engaging in an activity of their own design.

Historically, WNCSource has utilized an incentive wellness program to encourage healthy lifestyles by awarding points that turn into cash or paid time off. This successful effort continued throughout the pandemic and was coupled with different activity offerings (hikes, sessions to learn about health topics, engaging in annual exams and health monitoring, etc.).

Throughout the report, COVID-related findings and data will appear as boxed text with blue shading.

SERVICE AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

State and Local Government

The WNCSource service area includes six federally designated Opportunity Zones (designed to increase economic development by providing investors with tax benefits).^{xxvii} The number and location of Opportunity Zones is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Opportunity Zone Census Tracts by County (2021)^{xxviii}

Henderson County (1)
37089931000 (Hendersonville)
Polk County (1)
37149920200 (Mill Spring)
Rutherford County (3)
37161960200 (Union Mills)
37161960900 (Alexander Mills)
37161961101 (Alexander Mills)
Transylvania County (1)
37175960100 (Pisgah National Forest)

Service Area Demographics

WNCSource's service area is vastly rural. Transylvania, Polk, and Rutherford are designated as rural counties.^{xxix} The total population in WNCSource's four-county service area is 235,844. Over the past five years, the population in the service area and in North Carolina as a whole has been increasing. This trend holds true for Henderson County and Transylvania County (Table 4).

Over the past three years, the number of births has been fluctuating in the service area, while declining across the State (Table 5).

Table 4. Population by Geographic Area and Year^{xxx}

Geographic Area	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	109,719	110,905	112,156	113,625	114,913	Increasing
Polk County	20,327	20,324	20,434	20,458	20,557	Steady
Rutherford County	66,865	66,701	66,523	66,532	66,599	Steady
Transylvania County	32,928	33,062	33,291	33,513	33,775	Increasing
Service Area Total	229,839	230,992	232,404	234,128	235,844	Increasing
North Carolina	9,845,333	9,940,828	10,052,564	10,155,624	10,264,876	Increasing

Table 5. Number of Births and Birth Rate (per 1,000 resident population) by Geographic Area (2018)^{xxxi}

Geographic Area	Number of Births 2016	Number of Births 2017	Number of Births 2019	Birth Rate ⁴	Three-Year Trend for Birth Rate
Henderson County	1,089	1,040	1,022	8.7	Fluctuating
Polk County	140	161	166	8.0	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	659	689	680	10.1	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	263	252	262	7.6	Fluctuating
North Carolina	120,765	120,099	118,725	11.3	Declining

⁴ Birth rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

In the service area, the median age trends higher than the statewide rate, and significant portions of the population in the service area are over age 65 (Table 6). Across the service area, the percentage of the population under age 5 remains lower than the statewide rate. Polk County has the smallest percentage of the population that is under age 5 (Table 6).

All counties are above the statewide average for the percentage of seniors in the population. Additionally, in the service area, the percentage of seniors not in the labor force is above the statewide average. Therefore, when examining data representing the larger population within WNCSource’s service area, it is important to reflect on how the population of seniors impacts the data.

Table 6. Median Age and Distribution of the Population by Geographic Area (2019)^{xxxii}

Geographic Area	Median Age ⁵	Percent of Population Under Age 5	Percent of Population Over Age 65 ⁶
Henderson County	47.4	4.9%	25.4%
Polk County	52.7	3.3%	30.2%
Rutherford County	45.0	5.1%	21.1%
Transylvania County	51.1	4.0%	29.9%
North Carolina	38.7	5.9%	15.9%

Tables 7 and 8 describe the race and ethnicity of the service area population by county. Areas with the most racial and ethnic diversity are highlighted. The race and ethnicity of individuals in the service area did not change significantly from 2017 to 2019. Counties within the service area remain less diverse than North Carolina as a whole, with the exception of Henderson County.

Racial diversity is greatest in Rutherford County, where 9.5% of the population is Black or African American. Henderson County has the most ethnic diversity, as 10.1% of the population is Hispanic or Latino.

Table 7. Population (and Percentage of Population) by Race and Geographic Area (2019)^{xxxiii,7}

County	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaskan Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	Some other race	Two or more races
Henderson County	104,809 (91.2%)	4,002 (3.5%)	425 (0.4%)	1,537 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2,268 (2.0%)	1,872 (1.6%)
Polk County	18,556 (90.3%)	1,005 (4.9%)	64 (0.3%)	136 (0.7%)	6 (0.0%)	617 (3.0%)	173 (0.8%)
Rutherford County	57,790 (86.8%)	6,355 (9.5%)	298 (0.4%)	282 (0.4%)	16 (0.0%)	550 (0.8%)	1,308 (2.0%)
Transylvania County	30,933 (91.6%)	1,612 (4.8%)	99 (0.3%)	47 (0.1%)	17 (0.1%)	608 (1.8%)	459 (1.4%)
North Carolina	7,049,919 (68.7%)	2,200,761 (21.4%)	123,952 (1.2%)	292,992 (2.9%)	7,213 (0.1%)	316,763 (3.1%)	273,276 (2.7%)

⁵ Values higher than the countywide rate are highlighted.

⁶ Values higher than the countywide rate are highlighted.

⁷ Counties with the most racial diversity in the service area are highlighted.

Table 8. Ethnicity as a Percentage of the Population by Geographic Area (2019)^{xxxiv, 8}

Geographic Area	White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	Hispanic or Latino Origin (of any race)	Hispanic or Latino Origin: Mexican	Hispanic or Latino Origin: Puerto Rican	Hispanic or Latino Origin: Cuban	Hispanic or Latino Origin: Other
Henderson County	89.9%	10.1%	7.3%	0.5%	0.2%	2.1%
Polk County	94.1%	5.9%	3.9%	0.5%	0.8%	0.7%
Rutherford County	95.6%	4.4%	2.5%	0.3%	0.4%	1.2%
Transylvania County	96.7%	3.3%	3.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%
North Carolina	90.6%	9.4%	5.2%	1.0%	0.3%	2.8%

Poverty

The poverty rate of counties in the service area as compared to the state of North Carolina is provided in Table 9. In the service area, the poverty rate is highest in Rutherford County and above the state rate, though indicating a declining three-year trend, while the other counties are below the state rate.

Though the poverty rate did not change significantly in 2019, it is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic could potentially have an extended impact on the poverty rate in the service area.

One in four very young children in North Carolina live in poverty and nearly half of all NC children live in poverty. Among Black and Hispanic children, nearly 40% live in poverty. Of the 709,254 children under age 6 in North Carolina, 170,221 or 24% live in poverty. Compared to other families, families living in poverty are more likely to be headed by a single female who has not completed high school. These families are more likely to have parents who are unemployed, to move in the past year, and to have no English language speakers in the household.^{xxxv}

Of note, the pandemic has had disproportionately larger impacts on Black adults, Latino adults, other people of color and households with children, likely due to the exacerbation of existing societal constraints.^{xxxvi}

Table 9. Poverty Rate by Geographic Area and Year (2017-2019)^{xxxvii, 9}

Geographic Area	2017	2018	2019	Three-Year Trend
Henderson County	11.8%	10.6%	10.9%	Fluctuating
Polk County	10.9%	9.5%	9.8%	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	19.6%	18.0%	17.9%	Declining
Transylvania County	15.5%	14.7%	14.3%	Declining
North Carolina	16.1%	15.4%	14.7%	Declining

Across the service area there is disparity with regard to poverty rates by race. Poverty rates are substantially higher among Black or African American and American Indian & Alaskan Native individuals (only 77 individuals in the service area) than other races. In Rutherford County, for example, the poverty rate among Black or African American individuals is 33.9%, more than double the poverty rate among White individuals, 16.3% (Table 10).

Similarly, across the service area, the poverty rate among individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin is higher than that of individuals who are White alone. In the service area, with the exception of Rutherford County, the

⁸ Counties with the most ethnic diversity, beyond White, not Hispanic, in the service area are highlighted.

⁹ Counties with a poverty rate above the statewide rate (2017) are highlighted.

poverty rate is significantly greater for Hispanic or individuals of Latino origin, as compared to Non-Hispanic or Latino Origin, White Alone (Table 11).

Table 10. Number (Percent) of Individuals Below Poverty Level by Race and Geographic Area^{xxxviii10}

County	White	Black or African American	American Indian & Alaskan Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Some other race	Two or more races
Henderson County	10,654 (10.3%)	615 (16.2%)	1 (0.2%)	156 (10.1%)	n/a	673 (31.3%)	309 (16.5%)
Polk County	1,758 (9.6%)	17 (1.8%)	64 (100.0%)	8 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	145 (23.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Rutherford County	9,268 (16.3%)	2,078 (33.9%)	12 (5.0%)	60 (21.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	294 (23.2%)
Transylvania County	3,933 (13.1%)	433 (29.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	186 (31.5%)	127 (29.7%)
North Carolina	790,244 (11.5%)	475,973 (22.5%)	29,981 (24.9%)	30,707 (10.7%)	1,360 (20.5%)	84,699 (27.2%)	54,627 (20.8%)

Table 11. Number (and Percent) of Individuals Below Poverty Level by Ethnicity and Geographic Area (2019)^{xxxix, 11}

Geographic Area	Hispanic or Latino Origin	Non-Hispanic or Latino Origin, White Alone
Henderson County	3,210 (28.1%)	8,164 (8.6%)
Polk County	306 (25.5%)	1,597 (9.2%)
Rutherford County	450 (15.4%)	8,818 (16.2%)
Transylvania County	405 (37.8%)	3,757 (12.7%)
North Carolina	248,474 (26.4%)	644,440 (10.2%)

There are also disparities with regard to one-parent and two-parent families. In families with children under age 5, for “female head of household (no spouse present),” the poverty rate is substantially higher than for “married-couple families” (Table 12).^{xi}

Young women/mothers disproportionately left the workforce during the start of the pandemic, possibly due to the increase in child care responsibilities, offering female householders, with no husband present, fewer options to remain employed.^{xii}

Table 12. Poverty Rate by Family Status and Geographic Area (2019)^{xlii, 12}

County	All Families with Related Children Under Age 5	Married-couple Families with Related Children Under Age 5	Families with Female Householder, No Spouse Present, with Related Children Under Age 5
Henderson County	12.9%	8.3%	30.3%
Polk County	15.6%	6.1%	52.0%
Rutherford County	14.0%	5.0%	37.3%
Transylvania County	17.7%	4.3%	47.4%
North Carolina	16.7%	5.4%	44.7%

¹⁰ Poverty rates above the statewide rates for each race are highlighted.

¹¹ Poverty rates above the statewide rates for each ethnicity are highlighted.

¹² Poverty rates above the statewide rates are highlighted.

Household Composition and Family Characteristics

In the WNCSource service area, there are many one-parent households; Rutherford and Transylvania counties have rates higher than the statewide rate and the children served in all program types by WNCSource have rates of single parent households higher than the state (Table 13).

Children served by WNCSource’s programs are living in single-parent families more often than the countywide rates. In the Head Start program, 41% of families served are single-parent families, and the rate is 45% in the Early Head Start program. In the EHS-CCP program, the rate is highest, at 64% of families (2020-2021 program year). A significant number of these one-parent households are led by a woman.^{xliii}

Table 13. Children in One-Parent Families by Geographic Area (2020-2021)

Geographic Area	County/Statewide (2015-2019) ^{xliv13}	Head Start ^{xlv}	Early Head Start ^{xlvi}	Early Head Start CCP ^{xlvii}
Henderson County	29%	58 (41%)	77 (45%)	67 (64%)
Polk County	29.8%			
Rutherford County	43.3%			
Transylvania County	42.6%			
North Carolina	36.4%			

In North Carolina, 7.9% of all children (0-18) at all family income levels are in the care of grandparents.^{xlviii} In the service area, children are in the care of grandparents at rates higher than the state rate and with the exception of Henderson County, children are also in the care of other relatives at a higher rate (Table 14).

While not a one-to-one comparison, during the 2020-2021 program year, the rates of children in the care of grandparents were 2% in the Head Start program (three families), 1% in Early Head Start (2 families), and 2.6% in Early Head Start-CCP (three families). Children in five additional families were in the care of relatives other than grandparents and children in ten families were in the care of foster parents that were not relatives.

Table 14. Percent of Children (ages 0 to 18-years-old) by Relationship to Householder and Geographic Area (2019)^{xlix14}

Geographic Area	Own Child (biological, step, or adopted)	Grandchild	Other Relatives	Foster Care, Other Unrelated Relative
Henderson County	86.5%	9.2%	1.7%	2.6%
Polk County	81.9%	13.0%	3.9%	1.2%
Rutherford County	83.5%	11.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Transylvania County	84.1%	11.6%	3.1%	1.2%
North Carolina	88.2%	7.9%	2.2%	1.7%

¹³ Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

¹⁴ Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

Table 15 provides estimated numbers of eligible children in the service area compared to the current number of children served by WNCSource’s Head Start and Early Head Start programs (listed by primary eligibility type). Primary eligibility captures only one factor by which a child is eligible for services; many children have needs that fall into multiple categories.

Table 15. Estimated Number of Children in the Service Area Eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start Services¹⁵

Eligibility Criteria	Estimated Total Number of Eligible Children (Ages 0-5) /Pregnant Women in the Service Area (Percent Change from May 2019 Community Assessment data)	Number of Eligible Children (Ages 0-5) Currently Served by WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP
Income-eligible children	2,634 children (+14.8%)	353
Income-eligible pregnant women	523 (+24.1%)	9
Children experiencing homelessness	>32 (-44.4%) ¹⁶	29
Children in foster care	180 (+28.4%)	17
Children with disabilities	>401 ¹⁷	35
Children receiving public assistance	2,808 (-0.4%)	21
Over income/Other/Exceeding over income	8,095 ¹⁸	43

Poverty and Geographic Location

In the WNCSource service area, there are a total of 2,634 children (a 14.8% increase from 2017) eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start services based on family income at or below the federal poverty level (Table 16); 44.6% of income-eligible children in the service area reside in Henderson County (1,174 children).

In North Carolina, the poverty rate for children under age 5 is 23.8%. It is higher in the service area in Rutherford (29.4%) and Transylvania (28.5%) counties. In Table 17, zip codes with a poverty rate for children under age 5 that is higher than the countywide rate are highlighted.

Though the child poverty rate remained fairly steady over the service area, it is notable that the rate in Polk County declined by 6.7% from 2017 to 2019.

In Henderson County, the highest poverty rate for children under age 5 (49.5%) is in zip code 28742 (Horse Shoe), followed by 44.9% in zip code 28731 (Flat Rock) and 39.6% in zip code 28792 (Hendersonville), where the greatest number of children under age 5 reside in the county.¹⁹ This represents a change from 2018, when the zip code 28792 (Hendersonville) had the highest poverty rate at 26.9%.

¹⁵ The source for each of the data points in Table 15 is described throughout the report.

¹⁶ Based on currently enrolled children experiencing homelessness (32 children compared to 72 in the 2019 Community Assessment).

¹⁷ Data for 3 to 5-year-old children with disabilities is not readily available; this data is the number of children, 0-3, receiving Early Intervention services (383) in addition to the number of WNCSource enrolled children with an IEP (18).

¹⁸ Number of children birth to age 5 (10,729) less the number of children birth to age 5 living in poverty (2,634).

¹⁹ Zip code 28792 (Hendersonville), is primarily located in Henderson County, but a very small portion (about one neighborhood) of this zip code falls in Polk County, and may slightly elevate the figure.

In Polk County, the highest number of children, under age 5, living in poverty is concentrated in zip codes 28773 (35.8% in Saluda) and 28139 (20.4% in Rutherfordton), where the greatest number of children under age 5 reside in the county. It is of note that more than half of the geographic area of zip code 28773 (and the town of Saluda) are located in Polk County, but also spans Henderson County. All data is attributed to Polk County and likely inflates the figure significantly. Notably, in 2018, the poverty rate for children under age 5 was highest in zip code 28722 (Columbus), but in 2019, it was just 9.8%.

In Rutherford County, zip codes 28040 (Ellenboro) and 28043 (Forest City) continue to have significantly higher rates of poverty for children under age 5 than the rest of the county, at 56.1% and 44% respectively (both increased from 2018 when rates were 44.5% and 35.5% respectively). Forest City is where the greatest number of children under age 5 reside in the county.

In Transylvania County, most children under age 5 who are living in poverty, continue to reside in Brevard and Pisgah Forest (zip codes 28712 and 28768).

Table 16. Summary: Children Under Age 5, Child Poverty, and Trends by Geographic Area (2019)²⁰

County	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty	Three-Year Trend for Number of Children <5 in Poverty
Henderson	17.7%	21.5%	5,457	1,174	
Polk	14.6%	17.4%	650	113	
Rutherford	25.5%	29.4%	3,310	973	
Transylvania	26.3%	28.5%	1,312	374	
Service Area			10,729	2,634	
North Carolina	21.2%	23.8%	595,657	141,716	

Table 17. Children Under Age 5, Child Poverty, and Trends by Geographic Area (2019)ⁱⁱ

Geographic Area ²¹	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old ²²	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty	Three-Year Trend for Number of Children <5 in Poverty
28704 (Arden)	9.5%	8.4%	1,113	93	Fluctuating
28726 (East Flat Rock)	28.6%	0.0%	204	0	n/a
28729 (Etowah)	0.0%	0.0%	168	0	n/a
28731 (Flat Rock)	32.8%	44.9%	312	140	Increasing
28732 (Fletcher)	6.2%	2.7%	922	25	Fluctuating
28735 (Gerton)	0.0%	0.0%	10	0	n/a
28739 (Hendersonville)	14.7%	25.1%	952	239	Increasing

²⁰ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

²¹ Zip code level data does not add up to the county level; county level data is a separate data point and included for context.

²² Zip codes with rates above the county rate are highlighted.

Geographic Area ²¹	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old ²²	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty	Three-Year Trend for Number of Children <5 in Poverty
28742 (Horse Shoe)	8.5%	49.5%	101	50	Increasing
28759 (Mills River)	7.5%	15.1%	352	53	Increasing
28766 (Penrose)	0.0%	0.0%	73	0	n/a
28790 (Zirconia)	1.9%	0.0%	142	0	n/a
28791 (Hendersonville)	5.8%	2.0%	743	15	Decreasing
28792 (Hendersonville) ²³	29.1%	39.6%	1,687	668	Fluctuating
Henderson	17.7%	21.5%	5,457	1,174	Increasing
28139 (Rutherfordton)	18.1%	20.4%	1,040	212	Increasing
28722 (Columbus)	19.0%	9.8%	184	18	Decreasing
28756 (Mill Spring) ²⁴	7.5%	15.5%	220	34	Steady
28773 (Saluda) ²⁵	30.4%	35.8%	134	48	Fluctuating
28782 (Tryon)	9.0%	10.1%	129	13	Fluctuating
Polk	14.6%	17.4%	650	113	Fluctuating
28018 (Bostic)	11.6%	1.4%	295	4	Decreasing
28020 (Casar)	13.4%	19.4%	108	21	Increasing
28040 (Ellenboro)	26.2%	56.1%	155	87	Decreasing
28043 (Forest City)	38.9%	44.0%	1,398	615	Increasing
28114 (Mooresboro)	13.4%	22.1%	299	66	Decreasing
28139 (Rutherfordton)	18.1%	20.4%	1,040	212	Increasing
28160 (Spindale)	6.9%	0.0%	120	0	n/a
28167 (Union Mills)	41.2%	29.3%	92	27	Decreasing
Rutherford	25.5%	29.4%	3,310	973	Increasing

²³ A very small portion (about one neighborhood) of this zip code is in Polk County.

²⁴ This zip code is primarily in Polk County. One area (near Chimney Rock) is in Rutherford County.

²⁵ This zip code also spans Henderson County. More than half of the geographic area is in Polk County, and the town of Saluda is in Polk County.

Geographic Area ²¹	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old ²²	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty	Three-Year Trend for Number of Children <5 in Poverty
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0.0%	0.0%	46	0	n/a
28712 (Brevard)	31.8%	39.6%	679	269	Increasing
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	39.1%	17.3%	75	13	Increasing
28766 (Penrose)	0.0%	0.0%	73	0	n/a
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	22.4%	23.8%	319	76	Decreasing
28772 (Rosman)	0.0%	0.0%	66	0	n/a
28774 (Sapphire)	0.0%	0.0%	21	0	n/a
Transylvania	26.3%	28.5%	1,312	374	Fluctuating
Service Area			10,729	2,634	
North Carolina	21.2%	23.8%	595,657	141,716	

As described in Table 18, the number of live births remained steady from 2016 to 2018 and remains highest in Henderson County.

The number of income-eligible pregnant women in the service area can be estimated based on data for live births and poverty. Based on the poverty rate of children under age 5 and the number of live births per year, it is estimated that there are 523 income-eligible pregnant women in the service area, a majority of whom reside in Henderson and Rutherford counties (Table 19).

Table 18. Number of Live Births Per Yearby Geographic Area^{lii}

Geographic Area	Number of live births (2019)
Henderson County	1,022
Polk County	166
Rutherford County	680
Transylvania County	262
Service Area Total	2,130
North Carolina	118,725

Table 19. Income-Eligible Pregnant Women by County (2019)

Geographic Area	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old ^{liii}	Number of Live Births per Year (2019) ^{liv}	Number of Income-Eligible Pregnant Women ²⁶
Henderson County	21.5%	1,022	220
Polk County	17.4%	166	29
Rutherford County	29.4%	680	199
Transylvania County	28.5%	262	75
Service Area Total		2,130	523
North Carolina	23.8%	118,725	28,257

Race and Ethnicity of Eligible Children in Poverty

Children and families served by the WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start programs are more diverse than the general population as reflected in Table 20.^{lv} In the Head Start program, 50% of enrolled children are Hispanic or Latino, while the rate is 57.8% in Early Head Start and 18.4% in Early Head Start-CCP.^{lvi}

Table 20. WNCSource Programs: Race of Children/Pregnant Women (2020-2021)^{lvii}

Program Type	White	Black or African American	Bi-racial /multi-racial	American Indian / Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	Asian
Head Start	84.6%	8%	4.6%	0%	2%	0.6%
Early Head Start	80%	4.5%	12%	1%	2%	0%
Early Head Start-CCP	77.2%	7.9%	14.9%	0%	0%	0%

The number of young children living in poverty by race is not readily accessible in publicly available data sources. Table 21 describes the percent of all children who live below the federal poverty level by race and ethnicity. Poverty rates above the state average for the identified racial groups are highlighted. Concentrated poverty is a concern in Rutherford County as highlighted in Table 21; all other counties have suppressed data due to having fewer than 10 cases. Concentrated poverty is defined as an area in which the census tract has a poverty rate of 30 percent or more. In Rutherford County, it is notable that between 2012-2016 and 2014-2018, the rate of Black or African American children living in concentrated poverty decreased 25.9%, while “some other race” decreased 15.5% and “Hispanic or Latino” decreased 17.1%.

Notably, in 2012-2016, there were 1,699 children living in concentrated poverty in Henderson County and in 2014-2018, all data was suppressed indicating that less than 10 children in each race category.

Table 21. Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty²⁷ by Race and Ethnicity (2014-2018)^{lviii}

Geographic Area	White Non-Hispanic	Black or African American	Some Other Race	Hispanic or Latino	Total Population
Henderson County	S	S	S	S	S
Polk County	S	S	S	S	S
Rutherford County	664 (6.3%)	158 (10.7%)	155 (10.7%)	155 (13.6%)	977 (7.0%)
Transylvania County	S	S	S	S	S
North Carolina	3.1%	20.1%	11.1%	15.2%	9.4%

S=Indicates suppressed data (less than 10 cases).

²⁶Calculated by applying the poverty rate for children under age 5 in each of the counties to the number of live births per year (2018).

²⁷ Table 17 has more recent 2019 zip code level data, but does not provide data by race category.

Language of Eligible Children

The primary language of individuals in the WNCSource service area is English. Table 22 describes the percent of people over the age of 5 in the service area, by language spoken at home.

The highest percentage of the population that speaks a language other than English is in Henderson County, where 7.5% of the population speaks Spanish (Table 22).

Table 22. Language Spoken at Home (5 Years and Over) by Geographic Area and Percentage of Population (2019)^{lix}

Geographic Area	English	Spanish	Other Indo-European	Asian and Pacific Island	Other
Henderson County	89.9%	7.5%	1.2%	1.0%	0.3%
Polk County	92.8%	4.6%	1.8%	0.7%	0.1%
Rutherford County	95.0%	3.7%	0.9%	0.1%	0.2%
Transylvania County	95.5%	3.0%	1.3%	0.1%	0.1%
North Carolina	88.2%	7.6%	1.9%	1.7%	0.6%

During the 2020-2021 program year, a slight majority of families of children enrolled in the WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-CCP programs spoke English as their primary language at home. Spanish is the next most common language spoken at home by enrolled families (Table 23).^{lx}

Notably, from 2018-2019 to 2020-2021, rates of English speakers decreased 13.6% for families enrolled in the WNCSource Head Start program and 31.8% in Early Head Start, while rates of Spanish speakers increased 10.9% and 28.2%, respectively. This data shift should be interpreted with a note of caution: 2020-2021 enrollment is significantly reduced from 2018-2019, which may result in the same number of Spanish speaking families appearing as a greater percentage.

Table 23. WNCSource Programs: Primary Language of Families at Home (2020-2021)^{lxi}

Program Type	English	% Change from 2019	Spanish	% Change from 2019	Other Languages
Head Start	59.3%	-13.6%	38%	+10.9%	2.7%
Early Head Start	50.7%	-31.8%	45.7%	+28.2%	3.6%
Early Head Start-CCP	86%	n/a	14%	n/a	0%

Cultural Trends

The percent of the population in the service area that is foreign-born is less than the statewide rate. In 2019, Transylvania County reflected a 4.5% greater rate of foreign-born individuals that are not US citizens, than the state rate (Table 24).

Families served by WNCSource have deep concerns about local Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity and its impact on their families.

Table 24. Foreign-Born Population by Geographic Area (2019)^{lxii}

Geographic Area	Percent Foreign-Born	Percent of Foreign-Born Population that is non-US Citizen	Predominant Region of Birthplace for Foreign-Born Population
Henderson County	8,423 (7.3%)	5,075 (60.3%)	Latin America (61.6%), Europe (16.8%), Asia (15.6%), Northern America

Geographic Area	Percent Foreign-Born	Percent of Foreign-Born Population that is non-US Citizen	Predominant Region of Birthplace for Foreign-Born Population
			(4.7%), Africa (1.4%), Oceania (0.0%)
Polk County	836 (4.1%)	464 (55.5%)	Latin America (52.5%), Europe (26.7%), Asia (17.1%), Northern America (1.6%), Africa (1.2%), Oceania (1.0%)
Rutherford County	1,828 (2.7%)	842 (46.1%)	Latin America (63.5%), Europe (16.4%), Asia (11.9%), Northern America (5.2%), Africa (3.0%), Oceania (0.0%)
Transylvania County	969 (2.9%)	630 (65.0%)	Latin America (42.7%), Europe (31.2%), Northern America (12.0%), Africa (6.9%), Asia (5.7%), Oceania (1.5%)
North Carolina	822,764 (8.0%)	497,991 (60.5%)	Latin America (51.3%), Asia (27.8%), Africa (7.3%), Europe (10.9%), Northern America, (2.3%), Oceania (0/4%)

Children Experiencing Homelessness

Data specifically related to the number of young children and families who are homeless in the WNCSource service area is not readily available. However, data on homeless students and families illustrates trends and needs more broadly.

In North Carolina in 2018-2019, there were 34,721 children/youth experiencing homelessness enrolled in public school (preK-12), an increase of 16.8% from the prior year, representing 2.2% of total children/youth enrolled in public school; 16.6% of homeless children/youth are children with disabilities.^{lxiii} Many homeless children and youth are “doubled up,” living with another family (Table 25).

Table 25. Percentage of Homeless Children/Youth Enrolled in Public Schools by Primary Nighttime Residence^{lxiv} (2018-2019)

Primary nighttime residence	Percentage of Homeless Children/Youth (PreK-12)
Doubled up (e.g., living with another family)	72.6%
Hotels/motels	14.3%
Shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care	9.6%
Unsheltered	3.5%

The January 2019 point-in-time count of homeless individuals across North Carolina, the number of people experiencing homelessness during one specific night, increased by 0.5% from 2018. In the 2019 count, 31% of homeless individuals were people in families with children and 51% were African American individuals, though African-Americans only represent 22% of North Carolina’s population, indicating a disproportionate rate of homelessness by race.^{lxv}

Annually, across the country and in North Carolina, Continuums of Care (CoCs) conduct a Point in Time (PIT) count of both sheltered and unsheltered households. The counties in the service area are in the “Balance of the State” CoC, which includes 79 of the state’s 100 counties.^{lxvi}

In North Carolina, the unsheltered PIT Count has been postponed and will not be submitted to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for 2021 due to challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. Next year, the unsheltered count will be conducted through regional Coordinated Entry (CE) systems.^{lxvii}

Point-in-time data is provided for 2019-2020 (Table 26) and indicates a decrease of children in homeless families in 2021; due to the pandemic and varying data collection methods, the number of homeless children in each county in 2021 may be an undercount and must be interpreted with a note of caution. Data from 2020 and 2021 is generally not comparable to data collected in previous years due to the pandemic.

Table 26. Point in Time Count: Children (17 and under) in Homeless Families by County, 2019^{lxviii}

Geographic Area	Homeless Children 2019	Homeless Children 2020	Homeless Children 2021
Henderson County	13	23	3
Polk County	2	6	0
Rutherford County	4	4	6
Transylvania County	6	13	3
Service Area Total	25	46	12

In 2021, the Child Care Services Association (CCSA) provided data indicating that 2,249 young children (under age 5) may be at risk for homelessness in the service area (Table 27).^{lxix}

The National Center for Children in Poverty has identified seven risk factors for poor children that have a greater level of impact on early childhood outcomes. While these are not specifically risk factors for early child homelessness, many of them have been identified by researchers as significant factors associated with family homelessness.^{lxx}

The risk factors and number of families in each category are reflected in Table 28. Economic hardship is by far the risk factor most linked with homelessness.^{lxxi}

Table 27. Children At-Risk of Homelessness, 2021 (Age 5 and under)^{lxxii}

Geographic Area	Number of Children
Henderson County	1,095
Polk County	169
Rutherford County	689
Transylvania County	296
Service Area Total	2,249

Table 28: Number of Children At-Risk for Homelessness by Risk Factor^{lxxiii}

Risk Factor	Number of Children in North Carolina
Families with income below poverty	26% (32,455)
Poor parents with children under 6, female-headed families with no spouse present.	67%
Poor parents with children under 6, unemployed	27%
Poor parents with children under 6, less than a high school education	25%
Poor families with children under 6, no English language speakers at home	12%
Poor families with children under 6, moved in the past year at least once	15%
Large families (5+ persons) making housing more difficult / result in overcrowding	21%

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an unprecedented infusion of federal funding to address homelessness and housing instability. Using these funds appropriated by Congress, state, local governments, CoCs, and partner agencies have invested in solutions to homelessness, including rent and utilities assistance, sheltering, outreach, supportive services, and more.

In September 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a temporary halt on evictions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, which nationally prevented tenants from being evicted if they struggled to pay rent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This public health measure aimed to support housing stability and to reduce exposure and serious illness due to homelessness. Nationally, this unprecedented moratorium on evictions ceased in August 2021.^{lxxiv}

Data is not yet available regarding the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals experiencing homelessness in the service area. However, given widespread job losses, and varying eviction protections, the current homeless population may be impacted.

During the 2020-2021 program year, WNCSource served 32 families experiencing homelessness in its Head Start (10.6% of total enrollment), Early Head Start (5.5% of total enrollment), and EHS-CCP programs (4.4% of total enrollment). Of the 32 families, four acquired housing during the program year.^{lxxv} Based on this historic information, it is estimated that more than 32 children in the service area are eligible to receive Head Start/Early Head Start services based on the criteria of currently experiencing homelessness.

Table 29. WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Homelessness Services (2020-2021)^{lxxvi}

	Early Head Start	Early Head Start-CCP	Head Start	Total
Total number of families experiencing homelessness that were served during the enrollment year	11 (5.5%)	5 (4.4%)	16 (10.6%)	32
Total number of children experiencing homelessness that were served during the enrollment year	10	5	16	31
Total number of families experiencing homelessness that acquired housing during the enrollment year	0	1	3	4

Children in Foster Care

WNCSource served 19 children (5 Head Start, 4 Early Head Start, and 10 EHS-CCP) who were in foster care at any point during the 2020-2021 program year (compared to 37 children in 2018-2019²⁸). The same number of children in foster care were served through the EHS-CCP program, but nine fewer were served in each of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs.^{lxxvii} Children in foster care make up approximately 4.1% of total program enrollment across Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP, a slight reduction of 0.9% from 2018-2019. In 2020-2021, due to staffing shortages, WNCSource could not provide wraparound care that children in foster care generally require, which may have led to their placement with other providers.

²⁸ This decrease must be viewed within the context of the pandemic and the understanding that overall enrollment was decreased in 2020-2021.

WNCSource received 16 (compared to 30 in 2018-2019) child welfare referrals for placement in Head Start (6), Early Head Start (1) and EHS-CCP (9).^{lxxviii}

Reductions in services and referrals for children in foster care may be reflective of the underreporting that was occurring during the height of the pandemic.^{lxxix} According to the Children’s Home Society of North Carolina, there are now about 10,500 children in foster care in the state who are in need of adoption. “Foster care and adoption are in a state of crisis. Foster care has been growing at an alarming rate with a shortage of permanent, safe, and loving homes for adoptable children...”^{lxxx}

There are 614 children in foster care in the service area, age 0-17 (Table 30). If applying an equal distribution for each age, it can be estimated that there are 180 foster children eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start (65 Henderson County, 20 Polk County, 70 Rutherford County, and 25 Transylvania County). This represents a 28.4% increase from the year prior.

Table 30. Children in Foster Care (0-17) by County ^{lxxxi}

Geographic Area	Number of Children 0-17 (2019)
Henderson County	226
Polk County	72
Rutherford County	239
Transylvania County	77
Service Area	614
North Carolina	17,039

In North Carolina, the reporting of child abuse and foster care placements have dropped dramatically during the pandemic. Experts worry that the underreporting of child abuse during the pandemic is a concern due to the isolation of children and families during this time. Poverty, systemic racism, substance abuse, and added stressors are some of the risk factors for child maltreatment. The pandemic increased these stressors for families while limiting access to support systems, like grandparent care and school nutrition programs.^{lxxxii}

Previously, children may have had a teacher or adult outside their family who would report suspicion of abuse; this type of reporter makes up 20% of those generally reporting suspicion of child abuse. As the pandemic began, the reporting of child abuse fell and was likely going unreported at alarming rates, as the number of referrals from education personnel dropped by about 30% in the 2019-2020 school year.^{lxxxiii}

From April to August of 2020, more than 700 fewer children entered the foster care system, compared to the previous five-year average, a decline of almost 30%.^{lxxxiv}

Data is not yet available regarding the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children experiencing child abuse and neglect, however, given widespread declines in reporting, a future surge in issues related to potential trauma may be possible.

In November 2021, the Smart Start Partnership for Children, reported that their recent survey found mental health services for children and families in Henderson County to be insufficient, as are the systems and supports needed to address family stress and trauma. They report that “early educators are witnessing multiple indicators of trauma and family stress in the lives of the children and families. Community partners report a community-wide lack of mental health services and advocate for collaborative, trauma-informed responses to family stress, including training early educators and caregivers in understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).” ^{lxxxv}

Child Abuse. There are concerning rates of child abuse and neglect in the service area. As described in Table 31, in 2021, all counties in the service area had rates of children assessed for abuse or neglect that are higher than the statewide rate. This concerning trend is also reflected in the rate of children in foster care; racial disparities also exist with African American or Black children assessed for abuse and neglect at much higher rates.

Table 31. Children Assessed for Abuse or Neglect (per 1,000) by County (2021)^{lxxxvi}

Geographic Area	Overall Rate (per 1,000)	African American or Black	Hispanic or Latino	White
Henderson County	66.4	140.8	50.8	63.2
Polk County	64.2	195.5	45.8	58.7
Rutherford County	91.8	108.9	52.7	82.4
Transylvania County	76.9	83.3	77.6	75.5
North Carolina	51.5	70.1	34.9	33.7

Children with Disabilities

During the 2020-2021 program year, 35 children with disabilities were enrolled in the WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-CCP programs, including:

- 18 children in the Head Start program, 12% of the total enrollment, had an IEP (a reduction of 6.7% from 2018-2019). The most commonly diagnosed disability continued to be “non-categorical/developmental delay” followed by “speech or language impairments.”^{lxxxvii}
- 10 children, 5% of total enrollment, in the Early Head Start program in 2020-2021, had an Individualized Family Service Plan (a reduction of 13.2% from 2018-2019), all of which received early intervention services.^{lxxxviii}
- 7 children, 6.1% of total enrollment, in the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership program, had an Individualized Family Service Plan, all of which received early intervention services.^{lxxxix}

There was a total of 383 children receiving early intervention services in the WNCSource service area during 2019 (representing just 1.3% fewer than those served in 2017, with an increase in only Rutherford County).^{xc} It is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the 2020 data more significantly. On March 18, 2020, the North Carolina Early Intervention Branch suspended face-to-face services with families during the pandemic and began providing families services via teleservices and teletherapy.^{xc1}

Table 32. Infants and Toddlers (Age 0-3) Receiving Early Intervention Services by County (2019)^{xcii29}

Geographic Area	Number of Children	Percent of Children
Henderson County	143	4.4%
Polk County	25	5.4%
Rutherford County	190	9.1%
Transylvania County	25	3.0%
Service Area	383	
North Carolina	21,095	5.8%

In WNCSource’s EHS and EHS-CCP programs, 70.5% of children with disabilities were identified prior to enrollment. In the Head Start program, 55.5% of children were identified prior to enrollment.^{xciii} As noted above, in 2020-2021, greater than 10% of children enrolled in WNCSource’s Head Start program are

²⁹ Percentages above the statewide rate are highlighted.

children with disabilities (12%), while only 5% of children in Early Head Start and 6.1% of children in Early Head Start-CCP are children with disabilities.^{xciiv} Historically, these programs have also served over 10% of children with disabilities.

During the pandemic, teachers also had reduced time and interactions in person with children, leading to fewer referrals, identification, and interventions. As children with disabilities are more likely to experience health conditions, WNCSource administrators report that during the pandemic, many families of these children have delayed their entrance into early education programs, many based on the recommendation of their pediatrician. Additionally, for many families enrolling their child in the Early Head Start program, this is their child’s first experience in a program. Building relationships, developing rapport and training EHS staff to identify and support these children are key priorities for WNCSource to ensure families trust and engage in the referral process.

Children Receiving Public Assistance

In the WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start programs, a majority of families receive state benefits (Table 33).

Table 33. Number and Percent of WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start Families That Received Federal or Other Assistance (At Enrollment, 2020-2021)^{xcv}

Program	TANF	SSI	WIC	SNAP
Early Head Start	2 (1%)	12 (6%)	108 (54.3%)	51 (25.6%)
Early Head Start-CCP	3 (2.6%)	2 (1.8%)	64 (56.1%)	43 (37.7%)
Head Start	1 (0.66%)	14 (9.3%)	64 (42.6%)	41 (27.3%)

In North Carolina, in 2019, 25% of children living in families received public assistance, ranking the state 39th highest out of the 50 states.^{xcvi} Applying this rate to the number of children under age 5 in the service area, it is estimated that 2,808 children are eligible for participation in Head Start/Early Head Start based on their families’ receipt of public assistance (Table 34). Head Start/Early Head Start eligibility based on receipt of public assistance is limited to SSI or TANF. Information provided serves as a proxy for estimating the number of eligible children. In 2019, the data regarding young children in families receiving public assistance is not significantly different than the year prior; the pandemic will likely have a greater impact on the imminent 2020 data.

Table 34. Children Living in Households that Received Public Assistance in the Past 12 Months (2019)^{xcvii}

Geographic Area	Number of children under age 5	Number of children under age 5 living in households that receive public assistance ³⁰
Henderson County	5,653	1,413
Polk County	784	196
Rutherford County	3,424	856
Transylvania County	1,370	343
Total	11,231	2,808

North Carolina’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is called Work First (WF). In the service area in 2019, 413 households received Work First benefits in 2019 (Table 35). In 2018, 619 children in the service area also received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (Table 36).

³⁰ Population of children under age 18 in families that receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash public assistance income, or Food Stamps/SNAP in the previous 12 months.

Table 35. Households Receiving Work First in North Carolina^{xcviii}

Geographic Area	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Henderson County	112	113	145	147	132
Polk County	53	52	43	36	32
Rutherford County	208	224	219	181	189
Transylvania County	54	52	53	55	60
Service Area	427	441	460	419	413

Table 36. Children Receiving Supplementary Security Income^{xcix}

Geographic Area	2015	2016	2017	2018
Henderson County	274	248	230	248
Polk County	38	43	42	43
Rutherford County	262	248	234	248
Transylvania County	85	593	77	80
Service Area	659	1,132	583	619
North Carolina	42,969	40,459	38,313	40,459

During the 2020-2021 program year, 4.5% of children enrolled in WNCSource's programs were primarily eligible based on public assistance (though they may have been eligible in other categories as well, such as income-eligible). Across all program types, WIC is the type of public assistance most commonly accessed by enrolled families (approximately 51%).^c

Further, in the WNCSource service area, more than 7,200 children are eligible for subsidized child care, but only about 14-20% are accessing subsidized child care. Since 2016-2017, the percent of eligible children accessing subsidized child care increased in both Henderson and Rutherford counties and decreased in Polk and Transylvania counties (Table 37).

Table 37. Children Eligible for and Access to Subsidized Child Care by County (2018-2019)^{ci31}

Geographic Area	Children eligible for subsidized child care	Children receiving subsidized child care	Percent of eligible children accessing subsidized child care (% change from 2016-2017)
Henderson County	2,891	563	19.47% (+6.69%)
Polk County	532	76	14.29% (-4.93%)
Rutherford County	2,640	545	20.64% (+8.36%)
Transylvania County	1,157	148	12.79% (-6.26%)
Service Area Total	7,220	1,332	18.4%

NEEDS OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The needs of children and families in WNCSource's Head Start/Early Head Start/Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership service area are multi-faceted and interconnected, in a rural area where resources require funding, transportation, and coordination. When possible, strong, trusting relationships that guide a coordinated approach to comprehensive services improve access and provide the greatest benefit for all children and families.

³¹ Percentages above the service area rate are highlighted.

Education

High school graduation rates are steady or increasing across the counties in the service area. With the exception of Transylvania County Schools, the counties in the service area have a four-year graduation rate above the statewide rate. Several high schools with significantly lower graduation rates are alternative schools that serve high need populations (Table 38).

Table 38. High School Graduation Rate by High School and County^{ci}

High School	Geographic Area	Entering 9th Graders Expected to Graduate in 2020-21	
		4 yrs. ³²	5 yrs.
East Henderson	Henderson County	93.3%	88.2%
Hendersonville	Henderson County	94%	>95%
North Henderson	Henderson County	93.8%	94.8%
Balfour Education Center	Henderson County	n/a	n/a
Henderson County Career Center	Henderson County	68.6%	71.4%
West Henderson	Henderson County	>95%	94.9%
Henderson County Early College	Henderson County	>95%	>95%
All Henderson County Schools	Henderson County	92.7%	92.2%
Polk County Early College	Polk County	93.2%	81.3%
Polk County High	Polk County	91.7%	89.4%
All Polk County Schools	Polk County	92.4%	88.7%
Chase High	Rutherford County	93.3%	92.3%
East Rutherford	Rutherford County	90.8%	87.6%
R-S Central	Rutherford County	94%	89.8%
Rutherford Early College	Rutherford County	>95%	>95%
Rutherford Opportunity Center	Rutherford County	58.6%	72.6%
All Rutherford County Schools	Rutherford County	88.2%	88.4%
Brevard High	Transylvania County	88.8%	91%
Davidson River	Transylvania County	44%	44.7%
Rosman	Transylvania County	>95%	93.8%
All Transylvania County Schools	Transylvania County	84%	85.4%
North Carolina	Statewide	87%	88.7%

In the WNCSource service area, the rates for 16- to 19-year-olds not enrolled in school and not a high school graduate show disparity across each county, with rates ranging from 0-5.5% (Table 39). The range for the percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who have not completed high school shows greater disparities across counties in 2018-2019, with rates decreasing in all counties. The exception is Polk County, which indicated a 6.1% increase (since 2013-2017) in 18–24-year-old individuals that are not completing high school (Table 39).

³² Rates below the countywide rate are highlighted.

Table 39. Population with High School Enrollment and Graduation by County^{ciii33}

Geographic Area	% 16- to 19-year-olds not enrolled in school <i>and</i> not high school graduate (2015-2019)	% 18- to 24-year-olds not completed high school (2015-2019)
Henderson County	3.6%	15.4% (-4.7%)
Polk County	0.0%	27.3% (+6.1%)
Rutherford County	5.0%	16.1% (-5.0%)
Transylvania County	5.5%	17.4% (-2.6%)
North Carolina	4.1%	12.9% (-1.0%)

The low high school graduation rates in the WNCSource service area are also reflected in educational attainment of the adult population (Table 40). There were no significant changes regarding educational attainment from 2017. The large percentage of retirees living within the service area likely skew the data regarding educational attainment, in particular reflecting a higher number of adults with bachelor's and graduate/professional degrees.

Table 40. Percent of Education Attainment for Adults over 25 years old by County (2019)^{civ34}

Geographic Area	Less than 9 th grade	9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	High school graduate	Some college, no degree	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate/professional degree
Henderson County	3.2%	6.9%	24.2%	23.7%	10.3%	20.5%	11.3%
Polk County	3.9%	5.3%	25.1%	24.5%	12.0%	18.6%	10.5%
Rutherford County	4.4%	11.8%	32.5%	22.3%	11.2%	12.2%	5.7%
Transylvania County	3.8%	7.2%	26.8%	21.0%	8.7%	19.5%	13.1%
North Carolina	4.5%	7.7%	25.7%	21.2%	9.7%	20.0%	11.3%

The educational attainment trends among families served by WNCSource's Head Start and Early Head Start programs have remained fairly steady and demonstrate how the program serves higher numbers of adults with less than a high school degree and high school graduates, than is represented in the general public (Table 41).

Table 41. Educational Attainment of Families Served by WNCSource Program (highest level of education obtained by parent(s)/guardian(s) (2020-2021)^{cv}

Degree Status	Early Head Start-CCP	Early Head Start	Head Start	Total	Percent change from 2018-19
Less than a high school degree	21	64	38	123 (26.6%)	-5.4%
High school graduate or GED	53	78	75	206 (44.5%)	-2.5%
Associates degree, vocational school, or some college	22	23	29	74 (16%)	+1%
Bachelor's or advanced degree	9	6	9	24 (5.2%)	-0.8%

As seen in the Program Information Report (PIR) data from 2020-2021, about 71.1% of the enrolled families have a high school degree or less (this is an 8% decrease from 2018-2019).^{cvi}

³³ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁴ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted; rates where the majority of the population fall are in bold font.

Additionally, Henderson and Rutherford counties have lower percentages of all children enrolled in preschool than the state average. Under-enrollment persists in Rutherford and Transylvania counties for children from 5- to 9 years old as well (Table 42).

Table 42. Percent of Children Ages 3 to 17 Enrolled in School by County (2019)³⁵ cvii

Geographic Area	3-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-17 yr.
Henderson County	41.0%	95.7%	99.5%	97.3%
Polk County	62.9%	97.2%	99.0%	98.1%
Rutherford County	25.8%	93.5%	95.7%	97.4%
Transylvania County	57.2%	92.4%	98.6%	99.1%
North Carolina	43.0%	94.5%	98.1%	96.3%

In the 2019-2020 academic year, students dropped out most frequently at grade 9 (32.1%), followed by grade 10 (30.4%), grade 11 (24.3%), and grade 12 (13.2%). The high school grade with the largest percentage decrease in dropouts from the 2018-2019 academic year was 12th grade (34.6%), followed by 11th grade (28.5%).^{cviii} The reason given for dropping out was “attendance” for 3,327 students, representing 46.25% of the students dropping out. White, Hispanic, and Black students account for 92.8% of the students who dropped out of school in 2019-2020. All Race/Ethnicity groups saw a reduction in the number of dropouts from 2018-2019.^{cix}

Both Rutherford and Transylvania counties include high levels of absenteeism with attendance rates ranking below the statewide average (ranking 65th and 73rd respectively out of 100 counties).

The county rank for Transylvania County remained steady, but the other counties in the service area demonstrate improving rankings, most notably, Rutherford County which increased from 97th to 65th.

Table 43. Local Education Agency and State Attendance Rates by County^{cx36}

Geographic Area	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	3-year	County Rank (out of 100)
Henderson County	95.17	96.41	94.90	95.49	13
Polk County	95.24	96.18	95.12	95.51	12
Rutherford County	93.91	95.83	93.42	94.39	65
Transylvania County	94.42	95.89	92.13	94.14	73
North Carolina	94.65	95.93	93.03	94.54	

Early educational experiences also support later achievement. Low rates of enrollment and attendance in early years can affect test scores in elementary and secondary schools. In all the counties in the service area, the percent of students that have achieved a satisfactory level of content knowledge (Level 3) is above the statewide rate, though at least a third of all students in Henderson, Rutherford, and Transylvania counties continue to show limited-to-partial command of both reading and math skills expected for their grade level.

On March 23, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education approved North Carolina's request to waive spring statewide assessments, accountability ratings, and certain reporting requirements in the Elementary and

³⁵ Percentages lower than the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁶ Rates lower than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for the 2019-2020 school year due to widespread school closures related to COVID-19. Therefore, Table 44 represents the most current data available, from the 2018-2019 school year.

Table 44. Performance of Students on the North Carolina End-of-Year Grade Tests by County (2018-2019)^{cxii}

Geographic Area and Standardized Assessment Content	Level One (limited command)	Level Two (partial command)	Level Three (sufficient command)	Level Four (solid command)	Level Five (superior command)	Level Three or Above
Henderson County						
Reading	18%	17%	13%	39%	13%	65%
Math	35%		17%	33%	15%	65%
Science	10%	8%	7%	46%	28%	81%
Polk County						
Reading	10%	13%	13%	46%	17%	76%
Math	24%		19%	38%	19%	76%
Science	6%	7%	11%	46%	29%	86%
Rutherford County						
Reading	19%	21%	14%	37%	9%	60%
Math	36%		21%	33%	10%	64%
Science	10%	9%	10%	51%	20%	81%
Transylvania County						
Reading	19%	17%	13%	40%	12%	65%
Math	38%		19%	34%	9%	62%
Science	12%	11%	7%	45%	25%	77%
North Carolina						
Reading	23%	20%	12%	35%	11%	58%
Math	41%		18%	28%	13%	59%
Science	14%	11%	10%	42%	24%	76%

Table 45 describes the overall performance grade score (based 80% on academic achievement and 20% on academic growth), academic growth history (not met= 50-69.9, met= 70-84.9, exceeded= 85-100) and incoming student readiness level for each elementary school in the school districts in the service area.^{cxiii} Only two schools in the service area (both in Henderson County) received an “A” for a performance grade score. As represented in bold font in Table 45, two elementary schools in both Henderson and Rutherford counties have significantly low incoming student readiness levels.

Table 45. Elementary School Performance (2019-20)^{cxiii}

Geographic Area	Performance Grade Score	Academic Growth History ³⁷	Incoming Student Readiness ³⁸
Henderson County (14 Elementary Schools)			
Total Performance Grades: A= 2 B= 5 C= 7			
Atkinson Elementary	83/B	83.1/ Met	16.3%
Bruce Drysdale Elementary	57/C	77.4/Met	51.9%
Clear Creek Elementary	75/B	80.0/Met	50.6%
Dana Elementary	61/C	74.7/Met	73.2%
Edneyville Elementary	68/C	85.3/Exceeded	46.4%
Etowah Elementary	80/B	83.3/Met	62.3%
Fernleaf Community Charter School	60/C	68.0/Not Met	9.1%

³⁷ Schools that received a “not met” in academic growth history are highlighted.

³⁸ Rates below 50% are highlighted; rates below 30% are in bold font.

Geographic Area	Performance Grade Score	Academic Growth History ³⁷	Incoming Student Readiness ³⁸
Fletcher Elementary	76/B	78.6/Met	84.4%
Glenn C Marlow Elementary	85/A	84.5/Met	95.5%
Hendersonville Elementary	87/A	92.0/Exceeded	84.8%
Hillandale Elementary	64/C	90.8/Exceeded	75.0%
Mills River Elementary	81/B	86.5/Exceeded	78.8%
Sugarloaf Elementary	56/C	58.6/Not Met	60.3%
Upward Elementary	59/C	81.1/Met	72.5%
Polk County (4 Elementary Schools) Total Performance Grades: A= 0 B= 3 C= 1			
Polk Central Elementary	78/B	84.5/Met	56.0%
Saluda Elementary	82/B	74.0/Met	87.0%
Sunny View Elementary	65/C	73.6/Met	46.4%
Tryon Elementary	81/B	76.2/Met	87.1%
Rutherford County (10 Elementary Schools) Total Performance Grades: A= 0 B= 8 C= 2			
Cliffside Elementary	78/B	89.5/Exceeded	71.0%
Ellenboro Elementary	73/B	69.5/Not Met	56.0%
Forest City-Dunbar Elementary	66/C	82.8/Met	60.5%
Forrest W. Hunt Elementary	75/B	83.3/Met	64.3%
Harris Elementary	73/B	82.9/Met	63.2%
Mt. Vernon-Ruth Elementary	74/B	91.2/Exceeded	61.8%
Pinnacle Elementary	76.B	82.1/Met	14.3%
Rutherfordton Elementary	73/B	84.0/Met	38.6%
Spindale Elementary	62/C	82.7/Met	56.7%
Sunshine Elementary	80/B	76.8/Met	27.8%
Transylvania County (4 Elementary Schools) Total Performance Grades: A= 0 B= 1 C= 3			
Brevard Elementary	62/C	67.6/Not Met	82.9%
Pisgah Forest Elementary	64/C	85.6/Exceeded	63.4%
Rosman Elementary	61/C	59.2/Not Met	72.9%
T.C. Henderson School of Science and Technology	72/B	74.6/Met	100.0%

Health and Social Services

Table 46. COVID-19 Rates as of January 1, 2022

Geographic Area	Reported Cases ^{cxiv}	Reported Deaths ^{cxv}	% of population fully vaccinated (age 5+) ^{cxvi39}
Henderson County	17,554	235	57%
Polk County	2,546	49	43%
Rutherford County	12,219	347	41%
Transylvania County	4,463	53	54%
Service Area	36,782	684	
North Carolina	1,667,493	19,399	59%

³⁹ Vaccination rates lower than the statewide rate are highlighted.

As of January 1, 2022, North Carolina has had 1,667,493 reported cases of COVID-19 and 19,399 reported deaths; 2.2% of the cases occurred in the WNCSource service area, as well as 3.5% of the related deaths^{cxvii}. Statewide, 59% of the population is fully vaccinated.

As of November 2, 2021, the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine was approved for children, ages 5 through 11. As of January 1, 2022, 15% of children in North Carolina, age 5-11, were fully vaccinated.^{cxviii}^{cxix}
^{cxix}Individuals in all counties in the service area have vaccination rates below the statewide rate (Table 46).^{cxxi}

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ranks communities across many health and wellness factors. The overall rankings in “health outcomes” represent how healthy counties are within the state. The overall rankings in “health factors” represent what influences the health of a county.

In 2021, all counties in the service area showed improvements in Health Outcomes and were ranked as having the healthiest outcomes in the state (Highest 75%-100%), with the exception of Rutherford County, which was ranked in the higher middle range (50-75%), up from the lower middle range in the past two years (Lower 25%-50%) (Table 47).

Table 47: Community Health Rankings by County (2021)^{cxxii}

Geographic Area	Health Outcomes (healthiest=1)	Health Factors
Henderson County	11	11
Polk County	9	14
Rutherford County	50	67
Transylvania County	21	16

The data used to calculate 2021 rankings are from 2019 and earlier. Therefore, the data in the latest rankings are not yet reflective of the impact that COVID-19 has had on counties. However, the 2021 rankings demonstrate the variation of health and opportunity by place and can highlight barriers to health which disproportionately affect communities of color and those with lower incomes. COVID-19 has likely worsened these disparities. COVID-19 will likely have an impact on measures such as unemployment, children in poverty, income inequality, premature age-adjusted mortality, food insecurity, and severe housing cost burden. We will continue to report these measures to focus on the entire impact COVID-19 has and will have on health in a community.^{cxixiii}

As seen in Table 48, factors related to poor health, as well as the number of physically and mentally unhealthy days, are high across the service area. Highlighted numbers show rates at or above the statewide average. This data could potentially be impacted by the pandemic, in particular in terms of “mentally unhealthy days.”

Notably, Rutherford County has the most consistent and significantly worse outcomes in comparison to the state outcomes.

Table 48. Health Outcomes Data by Geographic Area^{cxxiv,40}

Geographic Area	Years of Potential Life Lost (2017-2019)	% Poor or Fair Health (2018)	Physically Unhealthy Days (2018)	Mentally Unhealthy Days (2018)
Henderson County	7,000	17%	3.8	4.3
Polk County	7,100	16%	3.7	4.5
Rutherford County	9,000	22%	4.5	5.0
Transylvania County	7,100	18%	3.9	4.7
North Carolina	7,600	18%	3.6	4.1
Top U.S. Performers	5,400	14%	3.4	3.8

For other health-related factors, including smoking and chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes, rates are most consistently high in Rutherford County (Table 49).

Table 49. Adult Health Factors by Geographic Area^{cxv,41}

Geographic Area	% Smokers (2018)	% Obese (2017)	% Diabetic (2017)	HIV Prevalence Rate per 100,000 (2018)
Henderson County	18%	29%	12%	150
Polk County	18%	33%	11%	103
Rutherford County	24%	33%	14%	128
Transylvania County	21%	25%	12%	85
North Carolina	18%	32%	12%	364
Top U.S. Performers	16%	26%		

Across other health-related benchmarks, there is disparity across the service area. For example, life expectancy for children increases slightly for younger children (Table 50). Additionally, in all counties, the life expectancy of an African American individual continues to be lower than that of a White/Non-Hispanic individual.

Table 50. Life Expectancy by County and Race (2017-2019)^{cxvi,42}

Geographic Area and Race	Age <1	Ages 1-4
Henderson County	79.4	78.8
• White/Non-Hispanic	79.6	78.9
• African American	77.2	76.6
Polk County	79.6	78.7
• White/Non-Hispanic	80	79.2
• African American	75.7	74.7
Rutherford County	76.2	75.7
• White/Non-Hispanic	76.6	76.0
• African American	73.5	73.2
Transylvania County	80.8	80.5
• White/Non-Hispanic	80.7	80.5
• African American	78.7	77.7
North Carolina	78.1	77.6
• White/Non-Hispanic	78.4	77.8
• African American	75.5	75.4

⁴⁰ Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴¹ Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴² Rates, by race, below the statewide rate are highlighted.

Health Care and Clinical Care

Access to Health Care. There are very few health care professionals in each of the counties in the service area, with the fewest in Polk County. Henderson County has access to the most health professionals because of several larger cities where professionals work.

Table 51. Number of Health Professionals by County^{cxxvii}

Geographic Area	Primary Care Physicians	Dentists	Mental Health Providers
Henderson County	106	65	228
Polk County	12	7	38
Rutherford County	29	15	100
Transylvania County	27	14	92

The ratio of primary care providers, dentists, and mental health providers to individuals in counties in the service area is described in Table 52. With the exception of the primary care provider ratio in Henderson and Transylvania counties, and the mental health provider ratio in Transylvania County, the provider ratios are all well above the statewide rate across all categories and illustrate the high need for health care resources across the service area.

Table 52. Access to Care - Ratio of Health Care Providers by Geographic Area^{cxxviii,43}

Geographic Area	Primary Care Provider Ratio (2018)	Dentist Ratio (2020)	Mental Health Provider Ratio (2020)
Henderson County	1,100:1	1,800:1	510:1
Polk County	1,720:1	2,940:1	550:1
Rutherford County	2,300:1	4,180:1	670:1
Transylvania County	1,270:1	2,850:1	370:1
North Carolina	1,400:1	1,780:1	390:1
Top U.S. Performers	1,030:1	1,240:1	

Oral Health. WNCSource successfully addresses the high oral health needs within the service area. As seen in Table 53, PIR data demonstrated the high quality of support WNCSource provides by increasing access to oral health services, with rates of accessible dental care ranging from 33-78% across program types.^{cxxix}

Table 53. WNCSource Oral Health PIR Data at End of Enrollment Year^{cxxx}

Indicator	Early Head Start	Head Start	Early Head Start-CCP
Number of children with continuous, accessible dental care provided by a dentist	94 (47%)	117 (78%)	38 (33%)
Number of children up-to-date on a schedule of preventive and primary oral health care according to the NC EPSDT	43	n/a	n/a
Number of children diagnosed as needing treatment	n/a	19	0
Number of children diagnosed as receiving treatment	n/a	14	0

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that tooth decay is the most common chronic condition of childhood. Poor oral health can have a detrimental effect on children's quality of life, their performance at school, and their success later in life.^{cxxxi}

When looking at the state of North Carolina as a whole, there are large numbers of children receiving preventive care and with teeth in excellent or very good condition (Table 54). However, slightly more than

⁴³ Ratios higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

one-third of the state continues to lack access to fluoridated water (often due to the utilization of well water that is not fluoridated; many children enrolled in WNCSource require fluoride treatment).

Table 54. Statewide Oral Health Data (2018-2019)^{cxxxii}

Geographic Area	Children Received Preventive Care	Children whose teeth are in excellent or very good condition	Children without access to fluoridated water
North Carolina	1,676,596 (78%)	1,696,507 (79%)	814,684 (36%)

The 2019-2020 Kindergarten Basic Screening Survey results indicated that the average for untreated tooth decay was 15.3%. Fortunately, nearly 2/3 of the group (63.2%) had no decay and no evidence of previous dental treatment.^{cxxxiii} While significant oral health needs remain in the counties in the service area, the ratio of dentists to individuals varies greatly across counties, with all county dentist ratios lower than the statewide rate, likely due in part to the rural nature of the service area.

Access to Health Insurance. In North Carolina, the range of children without health insurance is 3-9%, with an average of 5% without insurance. All counties in the service area have rates above the statewide rate (Table 55).^{cxxxiv}

Table 55. Percent of Children, Under Age 19, Without Health Insurance (2019) ^{cxxxv44}

Geographic Area	No Insurance
Henderson County	6%
Polk County	6%
Rutherford County	5%
Transylvania County	6%
North Carolina	5%

Most children enrolled in WNCSource programs participate in health insurance available through Medicaid and/or CHIP, as reflected in Table 56. Additionally, in the Early Head Start program, eight pregnant women were enrolled in Medicaid and only one did not have health insurance at the end of enrollment. ^{cxxxvi}

Table 56. WNCSource Enrolled Children, Health Insurance Status at End of Enrollment (2020-2021) ^{cxxxvii}

Program Type	Medicaid and/or CHIP	State, private, or other insurance only	No Insurance
Head Start	141	3	6
Early Head Start	187	1	2
Early Head Start-CCP	110	0	4

The WNCSource service area includes Rutherford and Henderson counties, which are Rural North Carolina Counties Designated Health Professional Shortage Areas for primary care, dental, and mental/behavioral health; Polk and Transylvania counties are designated as health professional shortage areas for primary care and mental/behavioral health.^{cxxxviii}

The rate of uninsured adults is high in North Carolina. The rates are higher than the statewide rate in all counties in the service area.

⁴⁴ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 57. Rate of Uninsured Adults (Over Age 65) by Geographic Area^{cxix}

Geographic Area	% Uninsured (2021)
Henderson County	15%
Polk County	14%
Rutherford County	14%
Transylvania County	17%
North Carolina	13%
US	10%

Infant and Maternal Health

Prenatal Care. Child health and well-being begins with adequate prenatal care. Access to first trimester prenatal care is low in Polk and Rutherford Counties, below the statewide rate (Table 58).

Table 58. Women Who Receive Early Prenatal Care by Geographic Area, Percent of Total Births (2019)^{cxl45}

Geographic Area	All
Henderson County	76.2%
Polk County	62.7%
Rutherford County	61.9%
Transylvania County	82.1%
North Carolina	67.5%

Of the nine pregnant women enrolled in WNCSource Early Head Start, seven began prenatal care in the first trimester, and two began prenatal services in the second trimester. Eight women received postpartum health care.^{cxli}

Teen Pregnancy. In North Carolina in 2018, the rate of births to teenage girls aged 15 to 19 was 24.6 per 1,000 girls, representing a 2.1% decline from 2017.^{cxlii}

Table 59. Teen Pregnancies (15-19 Years Old) (2018)^{cxliii46}

Geographic Area	Number of Pregnancies	Teen pregnancy rate per 1,000	Teen pregnancy rate - African American	Teen pregnancy rate - Hispanic	Teen pregnancy rate - White
Henderson County	70	23.2	*	*	20.4
Polk County	7	*	*	*	*
Rutherford County	75	38.5	*	*	34.8
Transylvania County	16	*	*	*	*
North Carolina	8,255	24.6	33.7	41.4	16.1

*Rates based on small numbers (<20 pregnancies) are unstable and not provided, nor are they included in the County Ranking.

Low birth weight. A low birthweight (less than approximately 5.5 pounds) increases the risk of health problems as an infant and later in life. African American or Black families are most likely to have a low birthweight baby compared to all other racial and ethnic groups. Many factors can increase the likelihood of low birthweight, from environmental factors (exposure to pollution or lead) and health factors (nutrition and stress). Affordable health insurance and quality health care are two of the most effective tools to reduce racial disparities, so that more children can be born at a healthy birthweight.^{cxliv}

⁴⁵ Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴⁶ Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 60 describes the percentage of infants, by race, born at low birth weight by county and highlights percentages above the state percentages.

Overall, children born with low birth weight exceed the state percentage in Rutherford County. Also of note, the percentage of White babies with low birth weights exceeded the statewide rate in all counties in the service area. In Transylvania County, the rate for Hispanic or Latino babies is almost double the statewide rate and the “other” race category is almost 44% over the state rate.

Table 60. Percentage of Low Birth Weight by County by Race^{cxlv47}

Geographic Area	African American or Black	Hispanic or Latino	White	Other	Total
Henderson County	12.2%	8.9%	8.9%	9.1%	9.1%
Polk County	11.1%	0.0%	7.9%	0.0%	7.4%
Rutherford County	15.7%	0.0%	8.7%	16.7%	9.0%
Transylvania County	14.3%	14.3%	9.8%	0.0%	10.1%
North Carolina	14.3%	7.5%	7.5%	9.4%	9.3%

Infant Mortality. Infant mortality rates and the number of infant deaths is provided below in Tables 61 and 62. In 2019, Transylvania County had the only infant mortality rate (11.5%) above the state rate (6.8%) in the service area. This data must be interpreted with a note of caution as the 11.5% is representative of three deaths in the county as seen in Table 61. Overall, the number of infant deaths continues to be small in the service area with 13 deaths in 2018 and 10 in 2019, and is following a decreasing trend from 2015 (Table 62).

Table 61. Infant Mortality Rate by Race and County^{cxlvi}

Geographic Area and Race	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Henderson County	7.5	5.5	5.8	4.6	5.9
• White/Non-Hispanic	8.8	2.5	5.2	2.5	6.6
• African American	0	23.8*	33.3*	0	0
• American Indian	0	0	0	0	0
• Other Non-Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
• Hispanic	0	14.2	4.6	14.9	4.7
Polk County	7.1	7.1	6.2	0	0
• White/Non-Hispanic	8.6	0	7.4	0	0
• African American	0	0	0	0	0
• American Indian	0	0	0	0	0
• Other Non-Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
• Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
Rutherford County	7.3	6.1	8.7	9.2	1.5
• White/Non-Hispanic	5.5	3.8	3.7	11.6	0
• African American	24.7*	0	33.3*	0	0
• American Indian	0	0	0	0	0
• Other Non-Hispanic	0	250*	200*	0	0
• Hispanic	0	0	0	0	20.8*
Transylvania County	3.6	0	7.9	7.2	11.5*
• White/Non-Hispanic	4.3	0	9.5	8.2	8.7*
• African American	0	0	0	0	0

⁴⁷ Percentages of low birth weight above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Geographic Area and Race	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
• American Indian	0	0	0	0	0
• Other Non-Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
• Hispanic	0	0	0	0	66.7*
North Carolina	7.3	7.2	7.1	6.8	6.8
• White/Non-Hispanic	5.7	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.7
• African American	12.5	13.4	12.5	12.2	12.5
• American Indian	4.9	7.6	12.6	9.3	12.0
• Other Non-Hispanic	6.2	6.2	6.7	5.0	3.8
• Hispanic	5.4	6.0	5.7	4.8	5.6

* Based on a fewer than 10 deaths

Table 62. Infant Mortality (Number of Infant Deaths) by Race and County^{cxlvii}

Geographic Area and Race	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Henderson County	8	6	6	5	6
White/Non-Hispanic	7	2	4	2	5
African American	0	1	1	0	0
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0
Other Non-Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic	1	3	1	3	1
Polk County	1	1	1	0	0
White/Non-Hispanic	1	1	1	0	0
African American	0	0	0	0	0
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0
Other Non-Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
Rutherford County	5	4	6	6	1
White/Non-Hispanic	3	2	2	6	0
African American	2	0	3	0	0
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0
Other Non-Hispanic	0	2	1	0	0
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	1
Transylvania County	1	0	2	2	3
White/Non-Hispanic	1	0	2	2	2
African American	0	0	0	0	0
American Indian	0	0	0	0	0
Other Non-Hispanic	0	0	0	0	1
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0
Service Area Total	15	11	15	13	10
North Carolina	884	873	852	806	810
White/Non-Hispanic	385	335	356	325	300
African American	360	380	361	350	363
American Indian	8	12	20	15	19
Other Non-Hispanic	33	35	39	28	21
Hispanic	98	111	106	88	107

* Based on a fewer than 10 deaths

Child Health and Wellbeing

Preventative and Primary Health Care and Immunizations. The number of children with up-to-date, age-appropriate, preventative and primary health care rises significantly during their time in the program, particularly in the Early Head Start program (Table 63).^{cxlviii}

Table 63. Percent of Head Start/Early Head Start Children Up-to-Date on Age-Appropriate Preventative and Primary Health Care as a Percentage of Cumulative Enrollment (EPSDT) (2020-2021)^{cxlix}

Program Option	At Enrollment	End of Enrollment Year
Head Start	66.6% (100 out of 150)	88% (132 out of 150)
Early Head Start	35.2% (70 out of 199)	70.4% (140 out of 199)
Early Head Start-CCP	42.1% (48 out of 114)	55.3% (63 out of 114)

As seen in Table 64, well child care visits are a statewide issue with many children not receiving appropriate screens through Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT). WNCSource makes great strides to ensure children receive care that meets age appropriate EPSDT requirements.

Table 64. Statewide EPSDT Participation Report by Age Group (2019)^{cl}

Indicator	<1 year old	1-2 years old	3-5 years old
Expected number of screenings per eligible	3.10	1.88	0.94
Expected number of screenings	177,646	271,754	201,873
Total screens received	250,694	306,437	166,465

Historically, most children are up-to-date with immunizations at enrollment. Due to the pandemic, and the closure of medical facilities and related backlogs for preventative care, lower rates of immunization were likely seen in the 2020-2021 program year at enrollment, but significant gains were made in immunization status by the end of the enrollment year (Table 65).^{cli}

Table 65. Percent of Head Start/Early Head Start Children Up-to-Date on Age-Appropriate Preventative and Primary Health Care as a Percentage of Cumulative Enrollment (EPSDT) (2020-2021)^{clii}

Program Option	At Enrollment	End of Enrollment Year
Head Start	96 (64%)	141 (94%)
Early Head Start	163 (82%)	172 (86.4%)
Early Head Start-CCP	86 (75.4%)	98 (86%)

Due to the pandemic, nationally, temporary disruptions in routine and nonemergency medical care access and delivery were observed during periods of considerable community transmission. Delaying medical care may increase morbidity and mortality risk associated with treatable and preventable health conditions and might contribute to reported excess deaths directly or indirectly related to COVID-19. One survey indicated that an estimated 40.9% of U.S. adults have avoided medical care during the pandemic because of concerns about COVID-19, including 12.0% who avoided urgent or emergency care and 31.5% who avoided routine care.^{cliii}

Findings of one study in England point to the pandemic as having a potential detrimental effect on the early diagnosis of childhood cancer, which allows for prompt treatment and gives children and young people the best chance of surviving.^{cliv}

Table 66 indicates the rate at which adults living in households with children, in North Carolina, delayed getting medical attention due to the pandemic.

Table 66. Adults living in households with children who delayed getting medical care because of the Coronavirus pandemic by race/ethnicity in North Carolina^{clv}

Race	1/6 – 2/1/21	1/20 – 2/15/2021	2/3 – 3/1/21	2/17 – 3/15/21	3/3 – 3/29/21	4/14 – 5/10/21	4/28– 5/24/21	5/12– 6/07/21	5/26– 6/21/21	6/09 – 7/05/21
African American or Black	25%	26%	30%	38%	20%	11%	13%	11%	14%	13%
Hispanic/Latino	S	S	S	S	40%	S	S	S	S	S
White (non-Hispanic)	40%	33%	29%	29%	29%	20%	21%	16%	17%	22%
Total	34%	30%	29%	32%	29%	18%	19%	16%	18%	20%

S= Estimates suppressed when the effective sample size is less than 30 or the 90% confidence interval is greater than 30 percentage points or 1.3 times the estimate.

Obesity and chronic diseases. Rates of identified health conditions were not significantly different than reported in 2017-2018, but notably the rates of asthma declined from 7% to 4% in Head Start and from 3.5% to 1% in Early Head Start. Body Mass Index among Head Start children showed improvement with 4% fewer children reported as underweight, 4.7% fewer reported as overweight, and 4.7% fewer reported as obese (Table 67), though 32.6% of enrolled children were overweight or obese.

Table 67. WNCSource: Enrolled Children Identified Health Conditions^{clvi}

Indicator	Early Head Start	Head Start	Early Head Start-CCP
Asthma	2 (1%)	6 (4%)	0
Hearing Difficulties	3 (1.5%)	0	1 (.87%)
Vision Problems	0	1 (.66%)	0
Seizures	2 (1%)	1 (.66%)	1 (.87%)
Life Threatening Allergies	1 (.5%)	0	0
Body Mass Index: Head Start Only			
Underweight	n/a	3 (2%)	n/a
Overweight	n/a	23 (15.3%)	n/a
Obese	n/a	26 (17.3%)	n/a

Mirroring PIR data, children aged 2 through 4 in the service area show patterns of underweight, overweight, and obesity. Among North Carolina children ages 2–4 who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the prevalence of overweight and obesity is 31%.^{clvii} The rate of children who are enrolled in the WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start programs who are overweight or obese is slightly higher (32.6%).^{clviii} Weight for children under the age of 2 is not offered due to the rapid and constant physical growth of infants and toddlers.^{clix}

The highest percentages of underweight children who receive WIC services reside in Henderson and Rutherford counties with rates that vary from 1.7% to 3.8% (Table 68); while the children enrolled in WNCSource programs have an overall rate of 2%.^{clx}

Table 68. Percentage of Children 2-4 years of Age, Receiving WIC Program Services, Underweight <5th Percentile (2018)

Geographic Area	Overweight or Obese
Henderson County	3.8%
Polk County	1.7%
Rutherford County	2.2%
Transylvania County	3.1%

The adult and adolescent overweight/obesity rate in North Carolina is slightly above national rates for adults and on par for children ages 10-17. North Carolina is ranked 20th for adult obesity and 18th for youth obesity (ages 10-17) out of 50 states and Washington, D.C. ^{clxi}

Table 69. Prevalence of Obesity and Overweight Adults and Children in North Carolina (2020)^{clxii}

Geographic Area	Overweight or Obese
Adults (18+ older)	
North Carolina	68%
US	66%
Children 10-17	
North Carolina	31%
US	31%

Table 70. Overweight or Obese Ages 10-17, by Gender in North Carolina (2016-2019)^{clxiii}

Gender	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Male	32%	33%	34%
Female	29%	27%	27%
Total Age 10-17	31%	30%	31%

As seen in PIR data, asthma is also an ongoing issue within the four counties in the service area. Table 71 indicates the hospitalization discharges per county from 2016 to 2019.

Table 71. Asthma Hospital Discharges (Ages 0-14), Rate per 100,000 in North Carolina^{clxiv}

Geographic Area	2016	2017	2018	2019
Henderson County	<5	<5	5	6
Polk County	<5	0	0	0
Rutherford County	9	<5	6	6
Transylvania County	6	<5	<5	0
North Carolina	1,828	1,777	1,877	1,570
North Carolina Rate	96	93	99	82

Finally, no enrolled children at WNCSource in 2020-2021 were identified as having an elevated lead level; in 2018, Polk and Transylvania counties identified a higher percentage of children with elevated lead levels than the state. Polk County has consistently reported a higher percentage of children with elevated lead levels than the state since 2015 (Table 72).

Table 72. Lead Testing Data (2015-2018)^{clxv48}

Geographic Area	Children age 1-2 with elevated lead levels (≥ 5 mg per dl)			
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Henderson County	0.9%	1.8%	1.0%	1.1%
Polk County	3.8%	1.9%	5.9%	1.5%
Rutherford County	1.4%	2.0%	2.0%	0.2%
Transylvania County	8.7%	1.0%	0.7%	1.4%
North Carolina	1.7%	1.7%	1.3%	1.2%

Mental Health. In WNCSource’s Head Start/ Early Head Start programs during the 2020-2021 program year, three Mental Health Consultants (MHC) provided services for enrolled children and families. The Consultants engaged in a collaborative consultation model, working directly with the Early Intervention (EI) Behavior Specialists, who in turn worked to support the comprehensive needs of the enrolled children, families

⁴⁸ Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

and their teachers. All classrooms received informal check-ins or formal support from either a Mental Health Consultant or Early Intervention team member, as reflected in Tables 73a. and 73b.

Additionally, over the course of the program year, there were sixteen Team meetings, including the Mental Health Consultants and the and Early Intervention Team. Initially the Team met on a weekly basis and then moved to monthly meetings when appropriate.

Table 73a. Direct Mental Health Consultant and Early Intervention Staff - Support to Individual Children⁴⁹

Program Type	Children Receiving Direct Services from MHC	Children Receiving Support from EI Team Member
Head Start	10	49
Early Head Start	4	21
Early Head Start – CCP	5	16
Total	19	86

Table 73b. Mental Health Consultant and Early Intervention Staff - Classroom Support⁵⁰

Program Type	Check in with MHC or EI Team	Classroom Support by MHC	Classroom Support by MHC and/or EIT
Head Start	All classrooms	8 classrooms	21 classrooms
Early Head Start	All classrooms	2 classrooms	11 classrooms
Early Head Start – CCP	All classrooms	5 classrooms	11 classrooms
Total	All classrooms	15 classrooms	43 classrooms

The annual percentage of adolescents (age 12–17) experiencing a major depressive episode has increased between 2004-2007 and 2016-2019, while individuals having suicidal thoughts, serious mental illness and non-medical use of pain relievers decreased (Table 74). Globally, the pandemic has had a severe impact on adolescents of varying backgrounds, with increased high rates of anxiety, depression, and stress; adolescents also have a higher frequency of using alcohol and cannabis during the COVID-19 pandemic.^{clxvi}

Table 74. Mental Health Indicators for Adults (18+) and Adolescents (12-17 years old) in North Carolina^{clxvii}

Indicators	2013-2014	2017-2019	Trend
Adults aged 18 and older with suicidal thoughts	4.5%	4.1%	Declining
Serious mental illness among adults aged 18 or older	4.9%	4.6%	Declining
Past year major depressive episode among adolescents aged 12-17	11.4%	15.3% (2016-2019)	Increasing
Past year nonmedical use of pain relievers among adolescents aged 12-17	4.9%	3.5%	Declining

Substance Abuse

As mental health needs rise, substance abuse also presents a significant concern, particularly in the context of the pandemic. While the number of self-inflicted deaths has remained relatively stable, less than 200 a year, unintentional drug overdoses have continued to rise. Despite a dip from 2017 to 2018, overdose deaths rose in 2019. Opioids, specifically, have contributed to the majority of these deaths and remain an area of significant concern within North Carolina. As seen in Table 75, high rates of opioid use exist within the WNCSource service area; Polk and Rutherford counties both have rates of unintentional drug and opioid overdoses than the state rate.^{clxviii}

⁴⁹ Reported by WNCSource Administrators.

⁵⁰ Reported by WNCSource Administrators.

Table 75. Overdose Deaths by County^{clxx51}

Geographic Area	Rate of Unintentional Medication & Drug Overdose Deaths (2015-2019)	Rate of Unintentional Opioid Overdose Deaths (2015-2019)	County Covered by Syringe Exchange Program (as of June 2020)
Henderson County	15.8	13.0	No
Polk County	23.4	16.6	No
Rutherford County	23.1	17.1	No
Transylvania County	13.6	10.6	Yes
North Carolina	18.5	15.3	

North Carolina, along with the rest of the country, saw a big spike in opiate dependency as drugs such as Oxycontin were over-prescribed. By 2017, there were nearly 1,884 overdose deaths in North Carolina, a rate that more than doubled between 2014 and 2017, according to data collected by the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services.^{clxx}

The state instituted measures to help, and overdose deaths declined somewhat for a few years. But in 2020, deaths in North Carolina again surged — this time to more than 2,322.^{clxxi}

North Carolina saw a spike in overdoses in the spring and early summer months of the pandemic. When fewer people were going to the emergency room as the virus took hold in the state, the number of overdose-related visits shot up. Preliminary state data from 2020 shows a 23 percent increase in overdose-related emergency room visits over the previous year.^{clxxii}

Meanwhile, the street drug supply has become more contaminated and more dangerous. Fentanyl — a synthetic, highly potent drug often added to street drugs — was the “primary driver of the increases in overdose deaths,” according to the CDC.^{clxxiii}

Individuals using drugs in the state reported fentanyl in the drug supply throughout North Carolina. Harm reduction workers themselves have reversed more overdoses than in past years. Several participants using drugs reported needing to use four or more doses of naloxone to reverse an overdose, a result of the extreme potency of the added fentanyl.^{clxxiv}

Before the pandemic, drug overdose deaths and overdose mortality rates were high within the service area, as seen in Table 76, with the most deaths in Henderson County and the highest rate in Polk County.

Table 76. Unintentional Overdose Death Rate per 100,000 Population (2017-2019) by County^{clxxv52}

Geographic Area	# Drug Overdose Deaths	Drug Overdose Mortality Rate
Henderson County	75	21
Polk County	18	29
Rutherford County	48	24
Transylvania County	18	18
North Carolina		22

Tobacco and alcohol use is not as high as opioid use within the service area, and remains in line with state levels. Most counties are notably lower than the statewide rate for “alcohol related deaths,” with the

⁵¹ Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵² Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

exception of Henderson County, which aligns with the state data and reflected an increased from 22% in 2018 to 29% in 2021 (Table 77).

Table 77. Tobacco and Alcohol Use by County (2021)^{clxxvi}

Geographic Area	Tobacco Use ⁵³	Excessive Drinking	Alcohol-Related Motor Vehicle Deaths
Henderson County	14%	15%	29%
Polk County	14%	15%	16%
Rutherford County	19%	16%	17%
Transylvania County	16%	14%	13%
North Carolina	17%	17%	29%
Top US Performers	14%	13%	11%

Nutrition

Healthy nutrition is a critical factor for children’s healthy development, particularly given the high rates of childhood obesity in the service area. Rutherford County has the most limited access to healthy foods (above the state rate) and the highest food insecurity rate. In 2018, in the service area food insecurity ranged from 12-16% (Table 78).

Table 78. Food Access by Geographic Area^{clxxvii,54}

Geographic Area	Food Environment Index ⁵⁵ (2015 & 2018) 0 worst, 10 best	% Limited Access to Healthy Foods (2015)	% Food Insecurity (2018)
Henderson County	7.8	7%	12%
Polk County	8.3	0%	13%
Rutherford County	6.7	10%	16%
Transylvania County	7.9	2%	14%
North Carolina	6.8	7%	14%
Top US Performers	6.8		

Further, there are four low-income and low access census tracts (food deserts) in the service area, all located in Henderson and Rutherford counties (Table 79).

Table 79. Census Tract Food Deserts in WNCSource’s Service Area by County (2021)

Henderson County Census Tracts (2)
37089930401 (Hendersonville)
37089931000 (Hendersonville)
Rutherford County Census Tracts (2)
37161960100
37161960600

Nutrition needs are also evident in high rates of free and reduced lunch in school districts in the service area. Approximately 52% of public-school students in North Carolina are eligible for free lunch (2021-22).^{clxxviii} In the WNC Service area, the rate of students eligible for free and reduced lunch range from 50.2% in Henderson School District to 75.9% in Rutherford School District (Table 80).

⁵³ Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵⁴ Rates higher than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵⁵ The Food Environment Index ranges from 0 (worst) to 10 (best) and equally weights two indicators of the food environment: limited access to healthy food and food insecurity.

Table 80. Free and Reduced Lunch Rate by School District (2015-2020)^{clxxxix}

School District	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	5 Year Trend
Henderson School District	54.4%	55.3%	53.3%	52.0%	50.2%	Declining
Polk School District	50.1%	69.4%	68.1%	61.9%	60.2%	Fluctuating
Rutherford School District	56.3%	86.7%	86.4%	75.9%	75.9%	Fluctuating
Transylvania School District	59.0%	56.8%	54.0%	51.4%	51.2%	Declining

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Agriculture began a universal free lunch program to provide free meals to all students regardless of their income level (currently extended through the 2021-22 school year).^{clxxx}

Finally, North Carolina breastfeeding data indicates fairly high rates of breastfeeding in the service area. Table 81 reflects the percentage of infants who initiated breastfeeding, defined as receiving any breast milk or colostrum during the period between delivery and discharge from the birth facility. These rates show awareness within the WNCSource service area of the importance of breastfeeding in infant years, as three out of four counties reflect initiation rates above the statewide rate.

Table 81: Breastfeeding Initiation Rates by County (2018-2019)⁵⁶

Geographic Area	Number of Infants	Breastfeeding Initiation Rate
Henderson County	2,088	88.6
Polk County	312	84.6
Rutherford County	1,297	68.7
Transylvania County	535	85.6
North Carolina		81.6

WNCSource established a recent partnership with the Henderson County Public Schools (HCPS) allowing Head Start students and teachers to receive meals from the school system, reimbursing only for the cost of teacher meals. As a result, Henderson County Head Start also realized savings by reducing the size of the cooking staff, by two full-time cook positions.

Further illustrating nutrition needs in the service area, during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020, there was a sharp increase in demand at local Food Banks.

Mountain Area Nutritional Needs Alliance Food Bank (MANNA) (serving Henderson, Polk and Transylvania counties) has helped nearly 100,000 people each month since March 2020; a 61% increase since January 2020 and significantly more than past years. With newly unemployed and furloughed workers, new food pantry users created an overnight demand. MANNA's mobile food pantries experienced a 100 percent jump in demand in April 2020 at the start of the pandemic, while calls to the MANNA Food Helpline spiked 400 percent over that same period.^{clxxxix}

In the last 16 months, Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina (serving Rutherford County) has reported that the effects of the pandemic are still continuing, and they have distributed over 110 million pounds of food, served 67,000 families, and distributed over 65 million pounds of produce, meat, and dairy products.^{clxxxii}

⁵⁶ Rates lower than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Social and Economic Factors Impacting Wellbeing

Home Value and Affordability

In 2019, home value and affordability continued to vary widely across the service area with costs surpassing the state median home value in all but Rutherford County, though median owner costs and median rent levels are below the state rate in all counties in the service area.

Table 82. Median Home Value by County (2019)^{clxxxiii}

Geographic Area	Median Home Value ⁵⁷	Median Owner Costs	Median Rent
Henderson County	\$214,000	\$1,287	\$853
Polk County	\$225,700	\$1,238	\$851
Rutherford County	\$118,300	\$983	\$636
Transylvania County	\$221,900	\$1,224	\$756
North Carolina	\$172,500	\$1,314	\$907

During the pandemic, in 2020, home values escalated quickly in North Carolina and nationwide, likely due to a strong demand from buyers, a shortage of inventory for sale, low interest rates, and the reevaluation of housing needs. Reports indicate that median sales prices nationwide have risen every week since May 2020 and are up 12.5% over the same time in 2019.

The rental vacancy rate is lower than the statewide rate in all counties, with the exception of Rutherford County (Table 83). Transylvania County has a particularly low rental vacancy rate (there are fewer homes available to renters in these areas) while 40.8% of individuals in the county are spending 35% or more of their monthly income on rent, above the statewide rate.

Also described in Table 83, the rental cost burden in the service area is high, which can strain a family's finances and make it difficult to sustain stable housing and have enough income available to support other expenses (food, medical care, etc.).

Table 83. Housing Characteristics by Geographic Area (2019)^{clxxxiv,58}

Geographic Area	Rental Vacancy Rate	Households Spending 30% to 34.9% of Monthly Income on Rent	Households Spending 35% or More of Monthly Income on Rent
Henderson County	2.8%	10.8%	35.5%
Polk County	5.9%	12.7%	32.1%
Rutherford County	7.9%	8.2%	37.6%
Transylvania County	1.2%	10.3%	40.8%
North Carolina	6.8%	9.1%	38.3%

Thirteen to fourteen percent of individuals in the service area are experiencing severe housing problems, slightly less than the statewide rate (15%), as reflected in Table 84.

⁵⁷ Median home values below the state values are highlighted.

⁵⁸ Rental vacancy rates below the statewide rate, and household spending above the statewide rate, are highlighted.

Table 84. Severe Housing Problems by Geographic Area (2013-2017)^{clxxxv}

Geographic Area	Percent of households experiencing at least 1 of 4: Overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen, lack of plumbing
Henderson County	13%
Polk County	13%
Rutherford County	14%
Transylvania County	13%
North Carolina	15%

Income Inequality

In the WNCSource service area, the median household income is above the statewide rate only in Henderson County (Table 85). In 2019, the North Carolina Justice Center reported that a family of four in North Carolina needed to earn a minimum of \$52,946 a year to afford housing, food, childcare, health care, transportation, taxes, and other necessities.^{clxxxvi}

Median household income reflects poverty trends in the counties in the service area. With the exception of Henderson County, all counties in the service area have a median household income lower than the statewide median (Table 85).

Table 85: Median Household Income (2019)^{clxxxvii}

Geographic Area	Median Household Income
Henderson County	\$55,945
Polk County	\$48,787
Rutherford County	\$42,608
Transylvania County	\$50,212
North Carolina	\$54,602

Income inequality is further described in Table 86. A higher income inequality ratio indicates greater division between the top and bottom ends of the income spectrum. The greatest income inequality in the service area is in Rutherford County.

Table 86. Income Inequality by Geographic Area (2015-2019)^{clxxxviii}

County	80 th percentile income	20 th percentile income	Income inequality ratio
Henderson County	103,670	25,389	4.1
Polk County	94,730	25,061	3.8
Rutherford County	82,840	17,773	4.7
Transylvania County	94,037	23,745	4.0
North Carolina			4.7
Top US Performers			3.7

Community Safety and Incarceration

The rate per 100,000 people of Crime Index offenses reported to law enforcement agencies throughout North Carolina decreased 4.5 percent during 2020 when compared to the figures reported in 2019.^{clxxxix}

As described in Table 87, the crime index across types of crime is lower in the WNCSource service area than statewide. In 2020, there were no incidences on domestic violence homicides recorded in the service area.

Table 87. Community Safety, (January – December 2020), by Geographic Area^{cxv}

Geographic Area	2019			2020		
	Index Crime Rate	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate	Index Crime Rate	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate
Henderson County	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,590.9	128.5	1,462.4
Polk County	1,276.2	55.7	1,220.5	1,426.7	105.5	1,321.2
Rutherford County	2,600.3	178.1	2,422.2	2,471.8	189.7	2,282.1
Transylvania County	1,418.2	156.6	1,261.6	1,127.9	141.7	986.2
North Carolina	2,906.3	406.8	2,499.6	2,775.5	451.6	2,324.0

Table 88. Domestic Violence Related Homicides by Geographic Area (2017-2020)^{cxvi}

Geographic Area	2017	2018	2019	2020
Henderson County	0	1	0	0
Polk County	1	2	0	0
Rutherford County	0	0	0	0
Transylvania County	0	1	0	0
North Carolina				134

During the pandemic, reports of domestic violence increased significantly. Across the state, sheriff's offices reported higher incidents of domestic violence. In 2020, there were an additional 2,000 cases, over 2019. Advocates note that the pandemic has made it more difficult for victims to access supports and services.^{cxvii}

"Though domestic violence can affect anyone, people of color are disproportionately at risk, in no small part due to structural racism and displacement, which can exacerbate risk factors such as poverty and trauma. In addition, a history of disparate policing and broken promises can lead people to be distrustful of government-backed support services."^{cxviii}

On April 6, 2020, a moratorium was placed on most inmate transfers from county jails to the state prison system to help manage pandemic. As a result, many inmates ordered to serve active time were released on appeal bond, or allowed to delay the start of their sentence resulting in a jail backlog. The pandemic also resulted in a suspension of jury trials, which have since commenced and as a result, jails may experience a future backlog of defendants detained pretrial.^{cxix}

Table 89. North Carolina Jail and Confinement Facility Occupancy (2019-2020)^{cxv}

Geographic Area	2019 Average Occupancy	2020 Average Occupancy
Henderson County	180	169
Polk County	47	42
Rutherford County	179	177
Transylvania County	84	62
North Carolina	17,880	18,030

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING

Labor Force, Industries, and Occupations

In the service area, the percent of the population in the labor force ranges from 50.2% in Polk County to 57.2% in Henderson County; all counties in the service area have lower percentages of the population in the labor force than the statewide rate. Also described in Table 90, many young children within the general population continue to have both parents in the labor force, though rates are lower than the state rate in Henderson and Rutherford counties.

Table 90. Percent of the Population in Labor Force (Age 16+) by Geographic Area (2019)⁵⁹

Geographic Area	Population Age 16+	Households with Children Under Age 6, All Parents in Family in Labor Force ⁵⁹
Henderson County	57.2%	58.0%
Polk County	50.2%	72.3%
Rutherford County	53.2%	63.7%
Transylvania County	51.7%	77.0%
North Carolina	62.4%	65.9%

Individuals are employed in a variety of occupations and industries in the WNCSource service area, and a majority of individuals are private wage and salary workers (Table 91).

Table 91: Number of Employed Individuals (Age 16+) and Percentage of the Employed Workforce by Class of Worker and Geographic Area⁶⁰

Geographic Area	Private wage and salary workers	Government Workers	Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	Unpaid family workers
Henderson County	42,949 (80.7%)	6,036 (11.3%)	4,184 (7.9%)	60 (0.1%)
Polk County	6,515 (77.9%)	995 (11.9%)	839 (10.0%)	10 (0.1%)
Rutherford County	21,883 (81.6%)	3,269 (12.2%)	1,593 (5.9%)	72 (0.3%)
Transylvania County	10,215 (72.7%)	1,747 (12.4%)	2,070 (14.7%)	23 (0.2%)
North Carolina	3,819,091 (80.2%)	666,896 (14.0%)	269,513 (5.7%)	8,635 (0.2%)

The types of employment across the service area are reflected in Table 92, with the largest numbers of individuals employed in health care and social assistance, manufacturing, retail trade and accommodations and food services.

Table 92: Types of Employment by County (2018, 3rd quarter)⁶⁰

County	Agriculture Forestry Fishing & Utilities	Construction	Manufacturing	Wholesale Trade	Retail Trade	Transportation & Warehousing	Information	Financing & Insurance	Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	
Henderson County	1,088	0	2,058	5,810	1,432	5,511	1,024	331	643	369
Polk County	114	0	209	312	101	385	58	38	89	0
Rutherford County	0	194	1,124	2,935	231	2,475	496	827	287	121
Transylvania County	16	0	558	722	194	1,339	155	124	206	101
Service Area Total	1,218	194	3,949	9,779	1,958	9,710	710	1,320	1,225	591

⁵⁹ Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁶⁰ Types of employment with the largest number of employed individuals in reflected in bold font.

Table 92b: Types of Employment by County (2018, 3rd quarter)^{cci,61}

County	Professional & Technical Services	Mgt of companies, enterprise	Administrative & Waste Services	Educational Services	Health Care & Social Assistance	Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	Accommodations & Food Services	Other Services Ex. Public Admin.	Public Administration
Henderson	1,214	0	2,185	0	6,750	663	4,304	1,319	1,591
Polk	135	0	184	0	1,498	441	489	160	413
Rutherford	319	123	1,036	1,540	1,540	199	1,833	303	1,381
Transylvania	308	0	248	0	1,493	210	1,516	339	741
Service Area Total	1,976	123	3,653	1,540	11,281	1,513	8,142	2,121	4,126

In 2019, individuals in Henderson and Transylvania counties worked from home at rates above the statewide rate. It is important to note that the data regarding employees that “work from home” will likely be heavily impacted by the pandemic, as one report indicated that in April 2021, 33% of the country’s labor force was working from home “always” and another 25% work remotely “sometimes.”^{cc}

Table 93. Workers Age 16+, Working from Home (2019)^{cci,62}

Geographic Area	Percent of Labor Force
Henderson County	6.5%
Polk County	5.7%
Rutherford County	3.0%
Transylvania County	7.7%
North Carolina	5.8%

Unemployment

According to data on unemployment, WNCSource offers services in a geographic area where most counties have an unemployment rate higher than the statewide rate, as highlighted in Tables 94 and 95.

According to data on unemployment, all counties with the exception of Henderson County exceed the statewide unemployment rate.

In the service area, as well as across the country, unemployment rates rose sharply with the impact of COVID-19. Unemployment data indicates a sharp increase in April 2020, before beginning to decrease, and currently approaching pre-pandemic levels. While the counties in the WNCSource service area have unemployment rates historically below the statewide rate, Rutherford County has rates consistently above the state rate (Tables 94 and 95).

During the pandemic, Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) was provided to eligible individuals who collected unemployment compensation (\$600/week in additional federal benefits through July 2020 and then extended at a reduced rate of \$300/week through September 4, 2021).^{ccii}

⁶¹ Types of employment with the largest number of employed individuals in reflected in bold font.

⁶² Values greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 94. Monthly Unemployment Rates February 2020-November 2020 ^{cciii63}

Geographic Area	2/20	3/20	4/20	5/20	6/20	7/20	8/20	9/20	10/20	11/20
Henderson County	3.1	3.6	14.6	14.3	8.8	8.3	6.1	6.1	5.6	5.3
Polk County	3.2	3.7	11.4	11.6	7.2	7.3	5.3	5.7	5.4	5.5
Rutherford County	4.5	5.3	15.9	17.0	11.4	11.8	8.5	8.8	8.1	7.9
Transylvania County	3.1	3.8	11.9	11.6	7.1	7.2	5.3	5.6	5.2	5.1
North Carolina	3.4	4.0	13.2	13.7	8.9	9.3	6.9	7.1	6.4	6.3

Table 95. Monthly Unemployment Rates, December 2020-October 2021 ^{cciv}

Geographic Area	12/20	1/21	2/21	3/21	4/21	5/21	6/21	7/21	8/21	9/21
Henderson County	5.3	5.2	4.8	3.9	3.6	3.9	4.3	4.0	3.8	3.2
Polk County	5.5	5.5	5.2	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.6	4.5	4.3	3.9
Rutherford County	7.9	7.9	7.4	6.1	5.8	6.0	6.6	6.3	6.0	5.1
Transylvania County	5.3	5.1	4.8	3.9	3.6	3.9	4.4	4.0	3.8	3.4
North Carolina	6.1	6.0	5.6	4.6	4.4	4.5	4.9	4.6	4.4	3.8

In North Carolina in 2021, adults in households with children that had lost child care arrangements due to the pandemic reported multiple impacts on their employment. Strategies they utilized to stay employed while staying home with their children included: taking unpaid leave, using paid leave days, cutting their hours at work, and supervising one of more children while working (Table 96).

Table 96: Employment Impact on Adults in Households with Children - Unable to Attend Child Care or Alternate Arrangement Due to Coronavirus Pandemic in North Carolina (April – July 2021) ^{64ccv}

Reason	Apr 14 – May 10, 2021	May 12 – Jun 07, 2021	May 26 – Jun 21, 2021	Jun 09 – Jul 05, 2021
Took unpaid leave	S	S	S	24%
Used vacation, sick days, or other paid leave	S	27%	21%	22%
Cut work hours	27%	S	S	19%
Left a job	S	S	28%	S
Lost a job	S	S	S	S
Did not look for a job in order to care for children	S	S	S	S
Supervised one or more children while working	50%	S	19%	S

Families enrolled in the WNCSource programs have a higher percentage of parents who are not working, ranging from 20-63.6% (Table 97).^{ccvii}

Table 97. WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Families Employment Status at Enrollment (2020-2021) ^{ccvii}

Program	Families with one or more parent that is employed	Families with one or more parent in job training	Families with no parent working	Total Number of Families
Early Head Start	128 (74.9%)	42 (24.6%)	38 (22.2%)	171
Head Start	48 (33.6%)	4 (2.8%)	91 (63.6%)	143
Early Head Start-CCP	77 (73.3%)	27 (25.7%)	21 (20%)	105

⁶³ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted; the spike in unemployment rates due to the pandemic is represented in bold font.

⁶⁴ S - Estimates suppressed when the effective sample size is less than 30 or the 90% confidence interval is greater than 30 percentage points or 1.3 times the estimate.

Employers

The top employers across WNCSource’s service area are in the education and health services field or public administration (Table 98).

Table 98. Top Employers by County (2020) ^{ccviii}

County	Industry	Employer	Employment Range
Henderson	Education and Health Services	Henderson County Board of Public Education	1000+
		Margert R Pardee Memorial Hospital	1000+
		Park Ridge Health	1000+
	Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	Ingles Markets Inc	1000+
	Public Administration	County of Henderson	500-999
	Private Sector	Ninc Hospitality LLC.	500-999
	Retail Trade	Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	500-999
Polk	Education and Health Services	Polk County Public Schools	250-499
		St. Lukes Hospital Inc	250-499
		Acts Inc.	250-499
	Public Administration	County of Polk	250-499
Rutherford	Education and Health Services	Rutherford County Schools	1000+
		Rutherford Regional Health System	250-499
	Public Administration	County of Rutherford	500-999
	Information	American Greetings Corporation	250-499
	Education and Health Services	Isothermal Community College	250-499
	Retail Trade	Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	250-499
Transylvania	Education and Health Services	Transylvania County Schools	500-999
		Mh Transylvania Regional Hospital	250-499
	Public Administration	Transylvania County	250-499
	Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	Ingles Markets Inc.	250-499
	Manufacturing	Gaia Herbs Inc	250-499

Projections for 2018-2028, indicate that North Carolina could add more than 302,000 new jobs over the 10-year period, with the “Health Care & Social Assistance” sector projected to add the most jobs (81,000) and have the second highest percentage growth (13.7%). The Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services industry is projected to be the fastest growing industry with 15.8% growth. While many key areas project growth, three sectors are projected to lose jobs, including Manufacturing (-19,300 or -4.1%), Utilities (-400 or -2.7%), and Agriculture (-1,000 or -2.0%).^{ccix}

The 2018-2028 long-term employment projections were developed March 2020-July 2020, utilizing historical data through 2018; the Bureau of Labor Statistics has recommended that states not incorporate the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic when calculating these long-term employment projections.

Transportation

Public transportation is a significant barrier in WNCSource’s service area. While few public transportation systems exist, WNCSource manages Apple County Transportation and attempts to work with Medicaid transportation services to address some of these issues (See Parent, Staff, and Community Insights).

In North Carolina, and nationally, counties are facing historic bus driver shortages. In a recent national survey, 51% of respondents described their bus driver shortage as “severe” or “desperate.” Seventy-eight percent said the shortage is getting “much worse” or “a little worse.”^{ccx} Potential factors driving the shortage may include: drivers not returning after being furloughed upon school closures, health concerns as some part-time drivers are retirees who may be vulnerable to COVID-19, or hesitancy to receive a required COVID-19 vaccination.^{ccxi}

WNCSource has also experienced severe staffing challenges impacting the ability to provide transportation services to high school students, with children attending the Flat Rock Children’s Center. These key transportation services were suspended November-January 2021, in order to reassign the driver to cover the county bus route served by the WNCSource transportation department. Though compensation has been increased to incentivize hiring for this position, there have been no qualified applicants.

Most households in the service area have at least one vehicle, though some families have no vehicle. The percent of households with no vehicle available ranges from 3.8% (Transylvania County) to 7.5% (Rutherford County); Rutherford County is the only county with a rate higher than the statewide rate.

Table 99. Households with No Vehicle Available (2019)^{ccxii65}

Geographic Area	Percent of Households with No Vehicle Available
Henderson County	4.3%
Polk County	5.6%
Rutherford County	7.5%
Transylvania County	3.8%
North Carolina	5.8%

In 2019, pre-pandemic, most residents in the service area drove themselves to work in their own cars (Table 100), adding to the cost of living for the area. Commute times rarely exceed 30 minutes (Table 101).

Table 100. Transportation to Work by Geographic Area (2019)^{ccxiii66}

Geographic Area	Car, truck, or van – drove alone	Car, truck, or van – carpoled	Public transportation	Walked	Other means
Henderson County	80.7%	10.0%	0.2%	1.3%	1.3%
Polk County	80.0%	9.8%	0.1%	1.8%	2.7%
Rutherford County	82.4%	11.4%	0.2%	1.6%	1.4%
Transylvania County	81.6%	6.5%	0.2%	2.6%	1.4%
North Carolina	80.9%	9.2%	1.0%	1.8%	1.3%

Table 101. Mean Travel Time to Work by Geographic Area (2019)^{ccxiv67}

Geographic Area	Minutes
Henderson County	21.8
Polk County	27.1
Rutherford County	25.6
Transylvania County	23.6
North Carolina	24.8

⁶⁵ Percentages above the state rate are highlighted.

⁶⁶ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁶⁷ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

AGENCIES SERVING ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Programs

Across the country, the child care industry has been greatly impacted as child care facilities nationwide are reporting a stark lack of staff and ability to retain existing staff. The National Association for the Education of Young Children found that four in five child care programs nationwide are understaffed, with 78% of those surveyed indicating that low wages are the main reason for the difficulty in recruiting new employees.^{ccxv}

WNCSource administrators report that many local entry-level positions in other sectors are raising wages and are competing with the early education workforce, forcing wages up at a rapid rate. Noting that the local Chick-fil-A restaurant is paying employees \$19 an hour.

As seen globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused dramatic changes in the landscape for child care and early education programs in the United States. Historically, child care programs have provided care on thin margins and were asked to continue to do so during the pandemic, leading to extreme financial upheaval.

Additional burdens were placed (and often continue) on these strained programs to: meet a fluctuating and unpredictable demand for child care, increase health and safety procedures (e.g., decreased ratios, more stringent cleaning procedures), and shift programming to full or partial virtual learning upon mandate. As a result of these burdens, costs for providers increased while enrollment in child care programs decreased, leaving child care programs across the county to navigate the ensuing financial consequence.^{ccxvi}

Research released before the pandemic indicated that only half of all North Carolina families were able to access any type of center-based or formal early childhood care programming. Six months into the pandemic, that rate fell to less than one in three. Further, the analysis found that “households of color face more early education challenges: the care they rely on is lower quality, with fewer employer supports; and the pandemic has disproportionately impaired their access to child care.”^{ccxvii}

In the WNCSource service area, there are 105 child care and family child care programs, with capacity to serve 4,418 children, birth to school age. Just over one-third (34%) of providers are participating in NC Pre-K and 67.6% accept child care subsidies. Just under 60% of programs are serving infants, and more than 87% of programs participate in the Smart Start program.

Table 102. Number (and Capacity) of Child Care Facilities by County as of December 2021^{ccxviii}

Geographic Area	Number of Licensed Child Care Centers (Capacity)	Number of Child Care Facilities Participating in NC Pre-K (Capacity)	Number of Head Start Child Care Programs	Number Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Number of Child Care Facilities Serving Infants
Henderson County	49 (2,175) ⁶⁸	10 (424)	10	36	24
Polk County	5 (252)	4 (228)	4	0	0
Rutherford County	25 (1,454)	14 (790)	7	16	17
Transylvania County	10 (409)	8 (334)	2	8	5
Service Area Total	89 (6,283)	36 (1776)	23	60	49

⁶⁸ Of the 4,248 slots in Henderson Public Schools, 2,073 slots are before and after care for school-aged children, so the figure 2,175 is most reflective of capacity for children younger than school age.

Table 103. Number (and Capacity) of Family Child Care Homes by County as of December 2021 ^{ccxix}

Geographic Area	Number of Family Child Care Homes (Capacity)	Number FCC Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Number of FCC Homes Serving Infants
Henderson County	10 (80)	6	10
Polk County	0 (0)	0	0
Rutherford County	6 (48)	5	6
Transylvania County	0 (0)	0	0
Service Area Total	16 (128)	11	16

Table 104. Total Number (and Capacity) of All Child Care Providers by County as of December 2021 ^{ccxx}

Geographic Area	Total number of providers (Capacity)	Total Child Care Facilities Participating in NC Pre-K (Capacity)	Total Head Start Child Care Programs	Total Programs Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Total Child Care Facilities Serving Infants
Henderson County	59 (2,255)	10 (424)	10	42	34
Polk County	5 (252)	4 (228)	4	0	0
Rutherford County	31 (1,502)	14 (790)	7	21	23
Transylvania County	10 (409)	8 (334)	2	8	5
Service Area Total	105 (4,418)	36 (1776)	23	71	62

As reflected in Table 105, 92 programs in the WNCSource service area are participating in Smart Start (87.6%), North Carolina’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, seven fewer than in 2019. As seen in Table 105, Henderson and Rutherford counties continue to have the highest number of four- and five-star programs participating. A detailed list of programs by Smart Start star rating are provided by zip code in the Appendix B.

Table 105. Number of Child Care Centers, by Smart Start Star Level (December 2021) ^{ccxxi}

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	GS 110-106	Temporary	TOTAL
Henderson County	27*	14	3	0	0	4	1	49
Polk County	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Rutherford County	17	6	2	0	0	2	1	28
Transylvania County	5	4	0	0	0	0	1	10
Service Area Total	53	24	5	0	0	6	4	92

*Includes WNCSource centers

As seen in Table 106, Henderson and Rutherford are the only counties in WNCSource’s service area that have licensed Family Child Care centers participating in the Smart Start program, three fewer than in 2019. There are no licensed family child care centers in Polk and Transylvania counties. While most of these programs are high quality, receiving four or five stars, there is demonstrated need for support to improve quality and access to young children in Family Child Care.

Table 106. Number of Family Child Care Centers, by Smart Start Star Level (December 2021) ^{ccxxii}

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	TOTAL
Henderson County	1	5	2	0	0	8
Rutherford County	0	4	1	1	0	6
Service Area Total	1	9	3	1	0	14

As described in Table 107, child care capacity (4,418 slots) in the service area is lower than the total number of children birth to age 5 in the service area (10,729 children), representing available capacity for 59.7% of children under 5 in the service area. Child care capacity includes school age children, and therefore the number of slots actually available for young children is even lower. Table 108 provides zip code level data regarding the location of child care programs in the service area; multiple zip codes have no capacity.

Table 107. Summary Level: Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Compared to Capacity of Child Care Programs by County (December 2021)

Geographic Area	Capacity of All Child Care Programs	Number of Children <5 Years Old ^{ccxxiii}	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty ^{ccxxiv}
Henderson County	2,255	5,457	1,174
Polk County	252	650	113
Rutherford County	1502	3,310	973
Transylvania County	409	1,312	374
Service Area Total	4,418	10,729	2,634
North Carolina		595,657	141,716

Table 108. Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Compared to Capacity of Child Care Programs by County

Geographic Area	Capacity of Child Care Programs	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty
28704 (Arden)	0	1,113	93
28726 (East Flat Rock)	457	204	0
28729 (Etowah)	152	168	0
28731 (Flat Rock)	302	312	140
28732 (Fletcher)	379	922	25
28735 (Gerton)	8	10	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	409	952	239
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	101	50
28759 (Mills River)	462	352	53
28766 (Penrose)	0	73	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0	142	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	294	743	15
28792 (Hendersonville) ⁶⁹	1785	1,687	668
Henderson	2,175 ⁷⁰	5,457	1,174
28139 (Rutherfordton)	0	1,040	212
28722 (Columbus)	0	184	18
28756 (Mill Spring) ⁷¹	132	220	34
28773 (Saluda) ⁷²	36	134	48
28782 (Tryon)	84	129	13
Polk	252	650	113
28018 (Bostic)	50	295	4
28020 (Casar)	0	108	21
28040 (Ellenboro)	200	155	87

⁶⁹ A very small portion (about one neighborhood) of this zip code is in Polk County.

⁷⁰ This total was 4,248, with the inclusion of 2,073 school age, after school slots in the Henderson County Public Schools; those have been removed to be more reflective of the capacity of child care in the county.

⁷¹ This zip code is primarily in Polk County. One area (near Chimney Rock) is in Rutherford County.

⁷² This zip code also spans Henderson County. More than half of the geographic area is in Polk County, and the town of Saluda is in Polk County.

Geographic Area	Capacity of Child Care Programs	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty
28043 (Forest City)	579	1,398	615
28114 (Mooresboro)	0	299	66
28139 (Rutherfordton)	229	1,040	212
28160 (Spindale)	444	120	0
28167 (Union Mills)	0	92	27
Rutherford	1502	3,310	973
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0	46	0
28712 (Brevard)	289	679	269
28739 (Hendersonville)	0	952	239
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	101	50
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	18	75	13
28766 (Penrose)	0	73	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	9	319	76
28772 (Rosman)	93	66	0
28774 (Sapphire)	0	21	0
Transylvania	409	1,312	374
Service Area (total of counties)	4,418	10,729	2,634

The TEACH program is a scholarship program to support excellence in early educators. In 2021, Henderson and Transylvania counties continue to have the largest number of TEACH programs and the highest number of staff participating in TEACH programs.

Compared to 2019, in 2021, 40% fewer children are on the waiting list (84 compared to 212) in the service area and 16% fewer children are served with child care subsidies (1,074 compared to 1,280). Henderson and Rutherford counties, which serve the largest number of children (460 and 449 respectively), have no waitlist. In Polk County, 38 children are on the wait list and 46 children in Transylvania County. The Child Care Services Association notes that while considering this data, it is important to note that many data points differ significantly from previous months or years and may be due to the impacts of COVID-19 on both the information reported and the data collection process.

Table 109. Child Care Data (October 2021)^{ccxxv}

Geographic Area	# of Children with Working Parents in Need of Child Care	Children served with child care subsidy	On Waiting List for subsidy	Staff Participating in TEACH	TEACH Programs
Henderson County	3,814	460	0	41	19
Polk County	463	44	38	1	0
Rutherford County	2,312	449	0	2	1
Transylvania County	836	122	46	18	6
Service Area	7,425	1,075	84	62	26
North Carolina	459,771	51,435	20,121	2,064	942

Within WNCSource's service area there are other early care and education providers, but they vary in the quality and types of services provided. Five other Head Start providers support families within the WNCSource service area^{ccxxvi}. These are:

-
- East Coast Migrant Head Start
Enrollment: 2 classrooms
Site: Henderson Migrant Head Start
 - Polk County Schools
Enrollment: 80 Head Start center-based slots
Sites: Forbes Preschool, Polk Central School, Sunny View School, and Saluda School
 - Rutherford County Board of Education
Enrollment: 210 Head Start center-based slots and 52 Early Head Start slots
Sites: Rutherfordton Elementary School, Spindale Elementary, Harris Elementary, Carver, Forest City Dunbar Elementary, Forrest W Hunt Elementary, and Ellenboro

Home Visiting

The Women's and Children's Section of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services oversees home visiting services in the state of North Carolina through Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV). However, there are no MIECHV funded home visiting programs in the WNCSource service area.

In addition to WNCSource home visiting services, two programs offer home visiting services. Care Coordination for Children offers home visiting to families of children from birth to age 5 in Western Carolina in two networks: Community Care of Western North Carolina and Carolina Community Health Partnership.

The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC), which leads the statewide Smart Start network, and Family Connects International (FCI) announced new community programs that will serve nearly 10,000 North Carolina families over three years. Funding will support the programs for three years and was provided to North Carolina as the needs assessment identified a great need for home visiting services, with less than 1% of families having access to a home visiting program in the state. ^{ccxxvii}

Pilots led by Smart Start local partnerships will provide families of newborns in eight North Carolina communities access to comprehensive support to ensure children receive the care and nurturing they need to thrive. Two of the eight pilots will be in Henderson and Polk counties, as rural communities are a priority as they tend to have greater unmet need in home visiting services. ^{ccxxviii}

Participating families will be visited by a registered nurse to address newborn and postpartum health concerns, any immediate needs for support (e.g., breastfeeding, home safety), connection to community resources, and assistance with parental/baby bonding. These pilots are particularly timely because they will test virtual delivery methods that have been so important during the COVID-19 pandemic as potential solutions for increasing access overall. ^{ccxxix}

During the pandemic, home visiting programs continued to play a vital role in addressing the needs of pregnant women, young children, and families, both in-person and virtually. The potential impacts on pregnant women and families' access to critical health, early care and education, and family economic supports made continued connections with families essential.

The MIECHV program, and a number of evidence-based home visiting service delivery model developers released guidance to encourage the use of telephone and/or video technology to maintain contact with families to identify any necessary local COVID-19 resources (e.g., health and mental health services), assist with strategies for managing family stress and social isolation, keep families informed about current public health recommendations and promote family emergency planning strategies.^{ccxxx}

Publicly Funded Preschool

North Carolina's Pre-Kindergarten Program (NC Pre-K), state-funded preschool, is designed to provide high-quality educational experiences to enhance school readiness for eligible four-year-old children. NC Pre-K requirements are built on to ensure that children are prepared in all five of the developmental domains that are critical to children's overall well-being and success in reading and math as they enter school.^{ccxxxi}

In North Carolina, in 2020, the rate of 4-year-olds served in a public early care and education setting was 32%, with 68% served in "other" settings or "none." The public settings include: special education, Head Start, or NC Pre-K. Only 9% of 3-year-old children are served in these settings. North Carolina ranks 26th out of all states in the U.S. and Washington, D.C. for 4-year-olds access to public preschool. North Carolina Pre-K enrolled 31,059 children in 2019-2020, an increase of 1,550 children from the prior year. North Carolina Pre-K continues to meet eight out of the ten quality benchmarks (the two not met are in the areas of: staff professional development and assistant teacher degrees).^{ccxxxii}

There are 36 NC Pre-K providers in the service area (Table 110). In the state, 48% of 4-year-old children participate in the NC Pre-K program. In the WNCSource service area, all but one county (Henderson) has participation rates above the statewide rate, ranging from 35% in Henderson County to 88% in Polk County (Table 111).

Table 110. NC PreK Providers by County (November 2021) ^{ccxxxiii}

Geographic Area	Number of NC Pre-K Providers
Henderson County	10
Polk County	4
Rutherford County	14
Transylvania County	8
Service Area Total	36

Table 111. Children Enrolled in NC Pre-K Programs by Geographic Area (2020) ^{ccxxxiv}

Geographic Area	Number of Children
Henderson County	35%
Polk County	88%
Rutherford County	55%
Transylvania County	64%
North Carolina	48%

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THE COMMUNITY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

In WNCSource's service area, there are a number of social services resources available to families in addition to those offered by the grantee. Resource guides are available for each county within the WNCSource service area summarizing contact information and the type of resources available (e.g., adult education, employment and benefits services, parent and family support programs, medical and health, mental health, transportation, legal, housing).

Henderson County continues to have the most resources with notable strengths in employment, parenting support and family programs, and county-wide resources. Rutherford County offers more resources as well, including strengths in medical and health resources, mental health resources, and housing resources. Of note is the wide array of family emergency and support services (food, clothing, and shelter) in Henderson and Rutherford counties. Transportation remains an increasingly significant gap in the service area as well as legal resources. Finally, other than WNCSource, the only multi-program agency available within the counties continues to be El Centro Comunitario, which focuses on the needs of the Hispanic community.

PARENT STAFF, AND COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Parent, staff, and community input are valuable sources of data to guide program options and services and to enhance collaborations among partners. To that end, in 2021, WNCSource conducted surveys of its staff and the families it serves, a summary of those surveys can be found below.

Surveys

Family Surveys. In May of 2021, WNCSource conducted two surveys in order to understand how to best support enrolled families.

The first surveyed 377 families about their communications with the agency. Prior to conducting phone interviews, WNCSource staff met internally to determine which teacher or family service worker should conduct the interview. The conversation was framed with this statement: "During this time of COVID, our program has changed, and we are required to provide resources and outreach while we are unable to meet face-to-face. We wanted to get some feedback from you about how this process is going for you." Open-ended responses were recorded by the interviewers.

- Responses indicate that overall, families are satisfied with the amount of contact, which ranges from daily to two-three times a week. Just three families (less than 1%) felt there was not enough communication, and 11 (2.9%) felt there was too much.
- Families are generally in contact with their teachers, family service workers, and home visitors. Communication channels included phone calls, email, text, ClassDojo, ClassTag, and video chat.
- When asked about a "successful moment of connection for your family," responses included taking part in activities at school, help with food and diapers, and the weekly activities that connected children with their teachers and classmates. Families also indicated that video and phone calls from teachers are helpful, and the general level of services provided are helpful.
- Half of families (50.1%) reported no barriers existed to staying in contact with WNCSource service providers. Barriers to communication include work, school, family obligations, helping other children with

schoolwork, poor cell phone reception or limited number of minutes, poor internet quality, and language barriers.

The second survey measured the quality of relationships and asked enrolled families about the relationships they have with their Family Advocates (FAs) and teachers. Forty-three families participated in this survey, with the majority indicating positive and strong relationships with WNCSource staff. Highlights include:

- Just under half of families have been with the program for one year; more than half of families have been with the program for 2 or more years. 16.3% have been with the program for more than 5 years.
- 86% have only one child enrolled in the program.

Family Advocates:

- About two thirds of respondents have been working with their FA for less than a year.
- About 40% have worked with just one FA, and about 40% have worked with 2-3 FAs.
- A majority of respondents communicate with their FA about goals and their progress “sometimes” or “very often.”
- A majority of respondents are comfortable or very comfortable discussing their parenting style, family history, culture and values, and how they discipline their child.
- A majority of respondents feel encouraged by their FA to be involved in their child’s care and education.
- A majority of respondents find their FA demonstrate they care about their family by asking questions.
- Very few respondents (less than 4) feel judged by their FAs because of their culture and values, race/ethnicity, or financial situation.
- A majority of respondents work with their FA to develop strategies at home to support learning and development, and feel the FA listens to their ideas of how to improve the program and remembers personal details about their family.
- Most respondents find their FAs to be understanding, dependable, and trustworthy. Very few find them to be rude, unfriendly, or judgmental.
- More than 90% of respondents agree their FA “is open to learning different ways to help parents and children.”

Teaching Staff

- Families reflected on their children’s teachers. Most of the respondent’s children are 5 years old (42%) or older, followed by 3-4 years old (33%) and 1-2 years old (25.6%).
- Half of respondents have been with the current teacher for six months to one year; 40% have been with a teacher one to two years; 7% have been with a teacher two years or more, and 7% have been with a teacher less than six months.
- A majority of respondents communicate with their teachers about goals and their child’s progress “sometimes” or “very often.”
- A majority of respondents are comfortable or very comfortable discussing their family life, role of faith and religion in their household, and changes happening at home.

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- A majority of respondents have positive interactions with their teachers, including being offered parenting materials, discussing cultural values, talking about their families, giving feedback on performance, and remembering personal details.
 - Similarly, a majority of respondents believe their teachers listen to their feedback, reflect and communicate the cultural diversity of the students in their classroom activities, and ask questions to show they care about the family.
 - Most respondents find their teachers to be understanding, dependable, and trustworthy. Very few find them to be rude, unfriendly, or judgmental.

Staff Surveys. In January 2021, WNCSource conducted a survey of all Head Start program employees. A total of 105 employees completed the survey, which asked them to rate perceptions on key indices about: their supervisor, their employer, job related matters, and communications. Staff also rated indices on a motivation index and employee support index. Notable results include:

- On nearly every measure, average scores for Head Start program staff were better than average.
- Employee satisfaction rose significantly for management staff between from 2017 to 2021.
- Job security is below WNC's average score for managers.

Self-Assessment. In summer 2021, WNCSource engaged in a Self-Assessment. In order to use the Self-Assessment process with an ability to look at program year data and develop changes for the following program year, the Self-Assessment was completed during the summer, providing a natural break between program years and data collection cycles.

The management team reviewed data from the program year related to previous self-assessment recommendations and program goals and chose three big questions to ask of community partners. Community partners were invited to join staff in digging deeper into these three questions while reviewing and reflecting on quantitative and qualitative data from the program year.

The self-assessment leadership team, with input and approval from the Policy Council, identified three primary focus areas for the annual self-assessment related to school readiness and family engagement program goals. After an initial self-assessment team orientation to the process, the team was divided into subgroups per expertise and interest to further examine data, identify areas of growth, and develop recommendations. The primary questions of focus included: how to create a pipeline for qualified teaching staff and for those in supervisory roles; what work can be done to further create environments that are not only safe but also more inclusive; and how to motivate families to engage in Head Start programs.

It was determined that key program strengths included: the use of inclusive materials in classrooms that reflect the enrolled children and families, family trust in the WNCSource programs to provide safe and secure environments for their children to learn and grow, and one-third of the direct-services staff were working on furthering their education.

Key recommendations were developed with insight from community partners and included:

- Providing training for all staff around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and ensuring that there are actionable steps at the individual level to support communication with families and activities in the classrooms.

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- Shifting thinking about what family engagement looks like. Equip staff with the tools and resources to build communities and support families making connections with each other.
 - Improve digital presence to support families engaging with each other in meaningful ways.
 - Leveraging community partnerships to enable WNCSource to be a part of a community pathway to grow staff and the Early Childhood Education field.
 - Formalizing internal pathways for staff development.

Progress has been made in meeting these goals and objectives, and include:

School Readiness:

- Developed new processes and procedures to support accountability in staff completing goals set with coaches. The Coaching to Fidelity tool was introduced to staff and baseline data was captured on how well staff were implementing curriculum. The greatest need identified was with Early Head Start teaching staff, and plans were developed to support them with greater success for the upcoming program year.
- The installation of one center's Outdoor Learning Environment was completed.
- Training was provided to all staff regarding updates to their own spaces until their site can be designed and implemented.
- Home Visiting staff received training in the Parents as Teachers curriculums and Home Visiting Rating Scales (HOVRS) and full implementation began in September 2021.

Coordinated Program & Health Services:

- The Management Team with other WNCSource leadership are participating in local tasks forces including homeless coalition, child-find advocacy, community health, and county focused support for young children and their families.
- Quality funds targeted training and support for the organization to move to becoming a trauma-informed organization. Due to the pandemic and other community needs, the agency was unable to implement work with a partnering organization.
- Wellness Circles were offered as an opportunity for staff to have safe spaces to learn mindfulness skills and find support from one another.
- The Mental Health consultant program grew to two community mental health professionals providing support and care to programs.

Family Engagement:

- Application use increased through the agency website to more than 60%.
- The Enrollment Team added a bilingual staff member to ensure clear communication with Spanish-speaking families.
- During the pandemic, there was a forced decline in efforts of family involvement in Policy Council and Family Committees. As the program year continues, the agency hopes to renew and grow these connections.

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- ReadyRosie was implemented as the parenting curriculum with success and there are plans to utilize additional materials for workshops and learning moments during family committee meetings moving forward.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the rich data and key findings of WNCSource's May 2019 Community Assessment and reflection from WNCSource administrators, the following recommendations will be considered to improve services to children in the agency's service area.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Review WNCSource program design to determine the best ways to increase the number of full-day/full-year center-based slots for birth to 5 (particularly infants and toddlers) and maintaining home-based slots for families who need them.

a. Progress:

- Completed and received approval for a Home Based slot conversion to reduce EHS Home Based slots and increase classroom services for 8 EHS children in order to best meet the evolving needs of the community.
- Using expansion grant, unrestricted, Covid, and foundation funding acquired property (Tebeau Street) and began renovations of property to include 5 EHS and 3 NC PreK/HS classrooms.
- Applied for disaster relief and 1303 funding to replace the Columbus site that was lost due to flooding. Approximately \$273,000 awarded for soft costs to date.
- Created additional partnerships with Polk County Public Schools (PCPS) to replace space lost due to flooding and slots added through the EHS expansion grant for three classrooms within Sunny View Elementary (only one classroom is operational due to staffing shortage in 2021-2022). Additionally, collaborating with Polk County Schools to provide 4 private pay slots for the PCPS teaching staff, as the area is a child care desert.
- Converted the large Community Room at King Creek into a NC PreK/HS classroom.
- Placed half walls at Hillview and Flat Rock to add two EHS classrooms.
- Acquired an additional classroom from East Coast Migrant and converted to two EHS classrooms at Sugar Hill.
- In Rutherford County, a new-leased property was acquired, with renovations set to be complete by 4/2022. The three classrooms made possible through the EHS expansion grant.
- Closed three standalone WNCSource sites that had just one classroom each, due to the outdated model and facilities and leased a property with three classrooms, enabling more staff available to offer extended day care.

- b. Our work moving forward:** Work to finalize renovations of new properties, recruit staff. Continue strategic planning and partnership efforts to be responsive to the demonstrated community need. Consider implications of waiting list data.

Recommendation 2. Continue to build upon strong community partnerships to increase access to comprehensive services in WNCSource sites. This will alleviate transportation issues by bringing health, mental health, and social services into locations where children and families regularly gather.

c. Progress:

- In response to survey and outreach efforts, and in order to be more responsive to families, Family Advocates have been relocated from one site into program sites, which has improved engagement. Feedback regarding this change has been positive and indicated stronger connections with WNCSource teachers, team members, and families.
 - Increased ability to communicate with others in languages other than English by hiring a Bilingual Family Services Coordinator and Family Advocates that are on site in the communities with the most Spanish-speaking families in order to provide immediate translation services.
 - All ERSEA staff are bilingual.
- d. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to communicate and brainstorm solutions with local resource providers and enrolled families to monitor the pulse of ongoing and one-time family needs as pandemic-related funds and services potentially reduce or expire.

Recommendation 3. Formalize a process for reaching outside the WNCSource service area to access additional services including mental health, substance misuse, adult health, developmental disability, and other social services.

- e. **Progress:**
- Staff are serving on key local community Councils and Boards to build internal and external awareness of services in the service area, including, but not limited to: Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, GetSet READY!, PCPS & Trans Co.-NC PreK Committee, WNC-EC Advocacy Coalition Committee BRCC Ed. Advisory Committee, Local Interagency Community Council, Innovative Approaches, Mental Health RoundTable, Transylvania Childhood Education Project (WNCSource/Brevard College Partnership), Rotarian Reading to Children, Adolescent Parenting Program (APP) with CFRC, Family Education and Support Council with CFRC, WNCSource Recruitment Committee, HCPS /WNCSource Coordination of Services for Families, Henderson County for Activity and Nutrition, Family Connects Advisory Committee, GetSet: Kindergarten Readiness Rally Committee, BRCC Early Education Advisory Committee, READY! Sub-Committee: Early Childhood Education Coalition and WNCSource/Brevard College Intern Partnership.
 - Due to a lack of resources in the past, contracts have been improved and formalized with Mental Health providers to increase providers.
 - A Volunteer and Recruitment Coordinator has been hired for outreach to community partners to promote WNCSource programs and to learn more about resources and programs in the service area that serve the same population.
- f. **Our work moving forward:** Volunteer and Recruitment Coordinator and other staff will continue exploration and relationship building outside of the WNS Service area to better connect enrolled families to extended resources.

Recommendation 4. Identify service area transportation successes and challenges in order to enhance overall quality of services for families. Use previous experiences with Apple Transportation to identify solutions. Identify partnerships with Medicaid transportation services to coordinate better systems for collaboration. Work with families to better understand the Apple Transportation system.

g. **Progress:** WNCSource has three parents enrolled as students at Innovation High School on the Blue Ridge College campus, with children enrolled at the Flat Rock Children's Center. WNCSource works collaboratively with the high school counselors, Children Family Resource Center's -Adolescent Parenting Program and other local agencies to support these families. Due to the pandemic induced bus driver shortage, WNCSource has been working with local nonprofit agencies to assist these displaced high school students, to plan for transportation. One strategy utilized was to purchase gas cards for those who can drive the students to school. This short-term measure is meant to fill a gap as the pandemic has had a stark impact on transportation.

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- h. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to develop systemic transportation strategies to overcome challenges created during the pandemic.

Recommendation 5. Ensure WNCSource representatives participate on local task forces with community partners to address identified challenges and develop strategic plan for partnerships. Focus of the committee could include housing, job training/availability, immigration issues, child welfare/foster care, and substance misuse. As appropriate, also identify possible advocacy action steps each partner can take. Coordinate all WNCSource members of the Task Forces to communicate and strategically plan community-wide efforts that impact program families and activities.

- i. **Progress:** The most current community focus has been the pandemic and its impact on children and families. The WNCSource Health and Nutrition Coordinator participates in the community COVID working group, coordinated by the Partnership for Health (local hospital, state health department) to remain informed of current health metrics, vaccination and testing information, and other related information. The coordinator has worked diligently to implement state guidance to determine and implement health and safety protocols for WNCSource sites. The Children's Services Director is a member of the WNC Early Childhood Coalition focused advocacy at State and Federal levels around early care and education. WNCSource is also collaborating with Connecting Families for professional development training of teaching staff on strategies for supporting children with prenatal exposure to alcohol and drugs made possible through a grant award. The Director is also a member of Transylvania County GetSet! and Henderson County Ready! initiatives.
- j. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to work with local partners to ensure children and families are supported appropriately through the pandemic and continue networking to ensure representation in the community to work toward the creation of solutions to effectively support enrolled children and families with the most difficult barriers they face, beyond the pandemic.

Recommendation 6. Create a Task Force related to services for Pregnant Women and Young Children (birth-5) that focuses on the wide range of issues that impact them in a way that builds upon the Transylvania Task Force Model.

- k. **Progress:** A Task Force was created and an internal review was conducted to identify services needed, and an assessment was done on the available resources. Smart Start/Family Connect nurses are available to work with families, and WNNC Source Administrators serve on the Advisory Committee. The program is still being refined and very good progress is being made. The service needs of pregnant women and young children were clarified, methods for counting pregnant mothers were determined, and the implementation plan is in progress.
- l. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to refine the understanding of the evolving needs of pregnant women and young children (birth-5) in the service area, and planning and implementation efforts to meet those needs.

Recommendation 7. Continue to develop and communicate clear policies and procedures to staff, families, and partners regarding program operations. Ensure all stakeholders understand all program operations, the process for using vouchers and child care subsidy, referral and follow up roles and responsibilities, and communication strategies (both formal and informal).

m. **Progress:**

- Strengthened policies and procedures regarding Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance (ERSEA) and Family Advocates. Created strong policies and have implemented staff training. Created a family handbook in both English and Spanish.
- Have strong relationships with subsidy providers: Smart Start and DSS in Henderson County and DSS in Transylvania, Rutherford, and Polk counties. Communications and understanding regarding subsidies processes are consistent and the hours of care and wrap around care have been clarified. Extended hours have been added and now offer care 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. at all sites.

n. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure policies and procedures are clearly understood and followed consistently.

Recommendation 8. Continue to create a program-wide focus on mental health supports for families, addressing challenging behaviors, and using trauma-informed practices. Integrate resources from national, regional, and statewide resources to enhance social and emotional supports in each center and home visiting setting.

- o. **Progress:** Through the Infant-Toddler Trauma-Informed Care (ITTI Care) Project, “Building Capacity for Trauma-Informed Infant & Toddler Care: A Professional Development Framework,” WNC staff received training, consultation, and coaching using a trauma-informed approach to promote culturally responsive, relationship-based practices.

Built around promotion of adult capacity for self-regulation and co-regulation, this model centers workforce wellness as the fundamental component of high-quality early childhood education. ITTI Care works closely with teachers and administrators at all levels of early childhood infrastructure to identify individualized changes in policy and practice at the classroom, center, and systems levels, always prioritizing relationships as a central driver for teacher well-being.

The staff at Sugar Hill Child Care Center, including 6 teachers in three classrooms, were trained in trauma-informed child care to promote understanding of the impacts of stress and trauma on infants and toddlers, develop infant/toddler teacher skills to form supportive, resilience-building relationships and environments, and identify strategies to support child care provider health and well-being. Additionally, all of the center’s staff engaged in a staff wellness/learning day and created a staff wellness break room to encourage wellness during the day.

- p. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to understand and train on best practices in order to support families to address challenging behaviors, with a particular focus on behaviors emerging as a result of isolation, etc., from the pandemic.

Recommendation 9. Continue to enhance professional development for all staff. Training should include program policies and procedures, communication systems, processes for referral to community services, inclusive practices, management or leadership development opportunities, addressing challenging behaviors, and using trauma informed practices.

- q. **Progress:** Career pathways have been clearly defined and the requirements for teaching staff to move forward on a promotional pathway have been outlined, and include available professional development supports to help staff move forward in their career. Any staff member can apply for assistance through a newly established Education Committee. Additionally, all positions/job

descriptions were reviewed and updated to ensure they offer the necessary prerequisite skill set needed to move forward on this pathway. The Management Team is committed to the upward growth of staff within the agency and the hiring staff is encouraged to seek and hire employees that are interested in internal growth opportunities.

Children's Services has regularly hired management, site supervisors, coaches, ERESA staff, and coordinators from within the agency. For example, all 4 of our Children's Services classroom support coaches were former WNCSource teaching staff. The team also recognizes that the potential for mobility within an organization is a powerful factor in the retention of employees.

In 2020 and 2021, WNCSource worked with consultant company, Foundation For Families (FFF), to better standardize policies and procedures for Family Advocates, Home Visitors, and ERESA functions and staff. FFF provided extensive training for staff on all the new policies and procedures. Interwoven within the policies and procedures and training are measures for improved communication systems at all levels of the organization, as well as to families and community partners.

Children services staff were provided the opportunity to attend either Head Start trainings, webinars, or conferences. Virtual training was the primary mode used for 2020 and during upticks of Covid in 2021. Some of the staff development opportunities included trauma-informed practice, challenging behaviors, mental health, and COVID procedures. WNCSource also sent a team of Family Advocates, teachers, and management to Orlando for the National Head Start Family Engagement Conference in 2021.

- r. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to provide comprehensive training and engage with staff to clearly outline the promotional pathways and supports available to support their continuous internal career development.

Recommendation 10. Explore how EHS-CCP sites are utilizing supplies, materials, and supports that enhance teacher capacity and are communicating with and/or coaching the EHS-CCP programs regarding the logistical considerations related to supplies and materials.

- s. **Progress:** EHS-CCP sites have received supplies for outdoor learning environments and have been provided curriculum training through a coach working exclusively with EHS-CCP sites on implementation. Through a mentor program, each site has an identified mentor-teacher to help other EHS teachers, and quarterly stipends support this program. The mentor teacher supports the teacher daily to implement ReadyRosie, curriculum, and assessments. Additionally, EHS-CCP staff have taken part in professional development days provided by WNCSource and have a dedicated coach.
- t. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to explore supports for the EHS-CCP program and materials needed to successfully support teachers to implement the curriculum.

Recommendation 11. Compare teacher job descriptions with real-world activities to ensure job description accurately reflects job requirements in a realistic and manageable way. Continue to improve use of technology and data systems to streamline work tasks. Integrate reflective supervision as part of the process of managing expectations, job requirements, and strategies to become more time-efficient.

- q. **Progress:** Teacher job descriptions have been compared with real-world activities to ensure job description accurately reflects job requirements and technology and data systems are in place to streamline work tasks; these were found to reflect Federal and State requirements. Reflective supervision

has been integrated as part of the process of managing expectations, job requirements, and strategies to become more time-efficient.

- r. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to provide reflective supervision and ensure job descriptions reflect job requirements and use evolving technology to improve efficiency of work tasks.

Recommendation 12: Review workloads and schedules for staff to identify more flexible staffing patterns while maintaining adult-child ratios. Considering rotating schedules, job shares, and longer days with shorter weeks as potential solution to flexible hours.

- s. **Progress:** Completed a workforce study of staffing patterns and supports across sites to ensure an equal division of support staff, based on the number and age of children and type of classrooms. Implemented new standardized formula to ensure equal coverage at all sites. Largest impacts were seen in the schedules of afterschool teachers, the cleaning schedules, and the number of floaters in classrooms. Infant classroom also received additional support to compensate for the additional staffing needed for diapering and feeding. During the pandemic, additional staffing is not available, but will return as staffing levels increase.
- t. **Our work moving forward:** Continue to review workloads and evaluate the implementation of the formula-based staffing model to ensure equity in staffing levels across sites. As staffing levels increase, ensure pre-pandemic staffing supports and patterns return equitably.

LOOKING AHEAD

Building on the 2019 Community Assessment, WNCSource will leverage data and key findings from the 2022 Community Assessment Annual Update to improve the ability of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs to meet the needs of children and families. The WNCSource Board, Policy Council, staff, and parents will be provided with data from the Annual Update and be engaged in dialogue about how to use this information to establish or modify short- and long-term goals for the programs.

The HSPPS requirement to annually review and update the Community Assessment provides WNCSource with an opportunity to continuously reflect and improve upon data monitoring, data use, and implementation of data-driven, outcomes-oriented goals. With 2020 Community Assessment data as a driving factor for understanding and meeting community needs, and the 2022 Annual Update providing the most up-to-date and accurate reflection of community needs, WNCSource will continue its mission to improve the quality of children and families' lives by creating pathways to self-reliance and healthier living.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Funded Enrollment

Geographic Area	Head Start Center-based	Early Head Start Center-based	Early Head Start Partnership (CCP)	HS/EHS Home-Based (HB)	EHS Expansion Funding	Total
Sugar Hill Child Care Center 2 Sugar Hill Drive Hendersonville, NC 28792-8109	22 slots 2 classrooms	27 slots 3 classrooms	5 slots 1 classroom		8 slots 1 classroom	62 slots 7 classrooms
King Creek Children's Center 20 Fickley Drive Hendersonville, NC 28792-5701	33 slots 2 classrooms	16 slots 2 classrooms		60 EHS slots 20 HS slots		49 slots 4 classrooms 80 HB
Bruce Drysdale Head Start 271 Bearcat Blvd Hendersonville, NC 28792-4577	6 slots 1 classroom					6 slots 1 classroom
Etowah Children's Center 233 Brickyard Rd Etowah, NC 28729-9784	25 slots 2 classrooms	16 slots 2 classrooms				41 slots 4 classrooms
Clear Creek Children's Center 737 N Clear Creek Rd Hendersonville, NC 28792-7032	5 slots 1 classroom					5 slots 1 classroom
Hillandale 40 Preston Ln East Flat Rock, NC 28726-2810	5 slots 1 classroom					5 slots 1 classroom
Flat Rock Children's Center 130 Eagle Reach Drive Flat Rock, NC 28731		24 slots 3 classrooms				24 slots 3 classrooms
Fletcher Children's Center 2840 Hendersonville Rd Fletcher, NC, 28732-8223	21 slots 2 classrooms					21 slots 2 classrooms
Dana Children's Center 690 Ridge Rd Hendersonville, NC 28792-7468	5 slots 1 classroom					5 slots 1 classroom
Main Street Children's Center 766 N Main St Hendersonville, NC 28792-5078	34 slots 2 classrooms					34 slots 2 classrooms
Tebeau Children's Center Henderson, NC (NEW)	35 slots 3 classrooms		8 slots 1 classroom		32 slots 4 classrooms	75 slots 8 classrooms
Little Red School 604 Brooklyn Ave Hendersonville, NC 28792-6461			12 slots 2 classrooms			12 slots 2 classrooms
Laurie's Child Care 108 Upward Acres St East Flat Rock, NC 28726-2234			5 slots 1 classroom			5 slots 1 classroom
Love and Learning Center contract terminated 12/17/21 NEW Partner to be identified			20 slots 3 classrooms			20 slots 3 classrooms (TBA)
Henderson County	191 slots 17 classrooms	83 slots 10 classrooms	50 slots 8 classrooms	60 EHS HB 20 HS HB ⁷³	40 slots 5 classrooms	364 slots 40 classrooms 80 HB ⁷⁴
Sunny View Children's Center 86 Sunny View School Rd Mill Spring, NC 28756-4691 (NEW)		6 slots 1 classroom	2 slots 1 classroom		11 slots 1 classroom	19 slots 3 classrooms
Polk County		6 slots 1 classroom	2 slots 1 classroom		11 slots 1 classroom	19 slots 3 classrooms

⁷³ Home based slots are not included in grand total of classrooms

⁷⁴ Home based slots are not included in grand total of classrooms

Geographic Area	Head Start Center-based	Early Head Start Center-based	Early Head Start Partnership (CCP)	HS/EHS Home-Based (HB)	EHS Expansion Funding	Total
Rutherford Children's Center Forest City, NC (NEW)					24 slots 3 classrooms	24 slots 3 classrooms
Kid's Kingdom Preschool 143 Henrietta St Ellenboro, NC 28040-9302			19 slots 3 classrooms			19 slots 3 classrooms
Rutherford County			19 slots 3 classrooms		24 slots 3 classrooms	43 slots 6 classrooms
Hillview Children's Services 181 Hillview Ext Brevard, NC 28712-4533	34 slots 2 classrooms	15 slots 2 classrooms	9 slots 1 classroom		8 slots 1 classroom	66 slots 6 classrooms
FCCH - Transylvania County Brevard and Rosman, NC (NEW)					12 slots 4 classrooms	12 slots 4 classrooms
Little Blessings Learning Center 169 Main Street Rosman, NC 28772 (NEW)			20 slots 3 classrooms		4 slots 1 classroom	24 slots 4 classrooms
Transylvania County	34 slots 2 classrooms	15 slots 2 classrooms	29 slots 4 classrooms		24 slots 6 classrooms	102 slots 14 classrooms
Service Area Total	225 slots 19 classrooms	104 slots 13 classrooms	100 slots 16 classrooms	60 EHS 20 HS	99 slots 11 classrooms	608 slots ⁷⁵ 63 classrooms

Appendix B: Licensed Child Care and Family Child Care Capacity

Appendix Table B1. Number (and Capacity) of Child Care Facilities by Geographic Area (December 2021)^{ccxxxv}

Geographic Area	Number of Licensed Child Care Facilities (Capacity)	Number of Child Care Facilities Participating in NC Pre-K (Capacity)	Number of Child Care Facilities / Head Start	Number of Child Care Facilities Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Number of Child Care Facilities Serving Infants
28704 (Arden)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28726 (East Flat Rock)	5 (449)	1 (18)	1	4	3
28729 (Etowah)	2 (152)	1 (52)	1	2	1
28731 (Flat Rock)	4 (302)	0 (0)	1	2	2
28732 (Fletcher)	4 (379)	1 (32)	1	2	2
28735 (Gerton)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	6 (409)	0 (0)	0	2	5
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	3 (438)	0 (0)	0	3	1
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	3 (286)	0 (0)	0	3	1
28792 (Hendersonville)	22 (1753)	7 (322)	6	18	9
Henderson County	49 (2,175) ⁷⁶	10 (424)	10	36	24
28139 (Rutherfordton)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28722 (Columbus)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	3 (132)	2 (108)	2	0	0
28773 (Saluda)	1 (36)	1 (36)	1	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	1 (84)	1 (84)	1	0	0
Polk	5 (252)	4 (228)	4	0	0

⁷⁵ Total includes 80 home-based slots.

⁷⁶ This capacity figure does not include 2,073 school age, after school slots that were removed from the child care facility capacity total for the county (Henderson County Public Schools).

28018 (Bostic)	1 (18)	1 (18)	0	0	0
28020 (Casar)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	4 (200)	2 (120)	2	2	3
28043 (Forest City)	10 (579)	4 (201)	2	7	8
28114 (Mooresboro)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	4 (213)	2 (54)	1	2	1
28160 (Spindale)	6 (444)	5 (397)	2	5	5
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Rutherford	25 (1454)	14 (790)	7	16	17
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	5(289)	5 (289)	1	3	3
28739 (Hendersonville)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	1 (18)	1 (18)	0	1	0
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	1 (9)	1 (9)	1	1	1
28772 (Rosman)	3 (93)	1 (18)	0	3	1
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Transylvania	10 (409)	8 (334)	2	8	5
Service Area Total	89 (4,290)	36 (1776)	23	60	46

Appendix Table B2. Number (and Capacity) of Licensed Family Child Care Homes by Geographic Area (December 2021)^{ccxxxvi}

Geographic Area	Number of Licensed Family Child Care Homes (Capacity)	Number of Licensed Family Child Care Homes Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Number of Licensed Family Child Care Homes Serving Infants
28704 (Arden)	1 (8)	0	0
28726 (East Flat Rock)	0 (0)	0	1
28729 (Etowah)	0 (0)	0	0
28731 (Flat Rock)	0 (0)	0	0
28732 (Fletcher)	0 (0)	1	0
28735 (Gerton)	1 (8)	0	1
28739 (Hendersonville)	0 (0)	0	0
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	1	0
28759 (Mills River)	3 (24)	0	3
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	1 (8)	4	1
28792 (Hendersonville)	4 (32)	6	4
Henderson County	10 (80)	0	10
28139 (Rutherfordton)	0 (0)	0	0
28722 (Columbus)	0 (0)	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	0 (0)	0	0
28773 (Saluda)	0 (0)	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	0 (0)	0	0
Polk	0 (0)	0	0
28018 (Bostic)	4 (32)	4	4
28020 (Casar)	0 (0)	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	0 (0)	0	0
28043 (Forest City)	0 (0)	0	0
28114 (Mooresboro)	0 (0)	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	2 (16)	1	2
28160 (Spindale)	0 (0)	0	0
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0	0

Rutherford	6 (48)	5	6
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	0 (0)	0	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	0 (0)	0	0
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0	0
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	0 (0)	0	0
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	0 (0)	0	0
28772 (Rosman)	0 (0)	0	0
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0	0
Transylvania	0 (0)	0	0
Service Area Total	16 (128)	11	16

Appendix Table B3. Summary of Child Care Capacity, All Provider Types, by Geographic Area (December 2021)^{ccxxxvii}

Geographic Area	Total number of providers (Capacity)	Total Child Care Facilities Participating in NC Pre-K (Capacity)	Total Head Start Child Care Programs	Number of Child Care Facilities Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Number of Child Care Facilities Serving Infants
28704 (Arden)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28726 (East Flat Rock)	6 (457)	1 (18)	1	4	4
28729 (Etowah)	2 (152)	1 (52)	1	2	1
28731 (Flat Rock)	4 (302)	0 (0)	1	2	2
28732 (Fletcher)	4 (379)	1 (32)	1	2	2
28735 (Gerton)	1 (8)	0 (0)	0	1	1
28739 (Hendersonville)	6 (409)	0 (0)	0	2	5
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	6 (462)	0 (0)	0	4	4
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	4 (294)	0 (0)	0	3	2
28792 (Hendersonville)	26 (1785)	7 (322)	6	22	13
Henderson County	59 (2,255)⁷⁷	10 (424)	10	42	34
28139 (Rutherfordton)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28722 (Columbus)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	3 (132)	2 (108)	2	0	0
28773 (Saluda)	1 (36)	1 (36)	1	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	1 (84)	1 (84)	1	0	0
Polk	5 (252)	4 (228)	4	0	0
28018 (Bostic)	5 (50)	1 (18)	0	4	4
28020 (Casar)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	4 (200)	2 (120)	2	2	3
28043 (Forest City)	10 (579)	4 (201)	2	7	8
28114 (Mooresboro)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	6 (229)	2 (54)	1	3	3
28160 (Spindale)	6 (444)	5 (397)	2	5	5
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Rutherford	31 (1502)	14 (790)	7	21	23
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	5(289)	5 (289)	1	3	3
28739 (Hendersonville)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	1 (18)	1 (18)	0	1	0
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	1 (9)	1 (9)	1	1	1
28772 (Rosman)	3 (93)	1 (18)	0	3	1
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Transylvania	10 (409)	8 (334)	2	8	5
Service Area Total	105 (4,418)	36 (1776)	23	71	62

⁷⁷ This capacity figure does not include 2,073 school age, after school slots that were removed from the child care facility capacity total for the county (Henderson County Public Schools).

Appendix Table B4. Number of Child Care Centers, by Smart Start Star Level (December 2021) cxxxxviii

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	GS 110-106	Temporary	TOTAL
28704 (Arden)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28726 (East Flat Rock)	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	5
28729 (Etowah)	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
28731 (Flat Rock)	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
28732 (Fletcher)	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
28735 (Gerton)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	0	1	2	0	0	3	0	6
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
28766 (Penrose)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
28792 (Hendersonville)	15	7	0	0	0	0	0	22
Henderson County	27	14	3	0	0	4	1	49
28139 (Rutherfordton)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28722 (Columbus)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
28773 (Saluda)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
28782 (Tryon)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Polk	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
28018 (Bostic)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
28020 (Casar)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
28043 (Forest City)	5	2	2	0	0	1	0	10
28114 (Mooresboro)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
28160 (Spindale)	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
28167 (Union Mills)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rutherford	17	3	2	0	0	2	1	25
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	5
28739 (Hendersonville)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
28766 (Penrose)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
28772 (Rosman)	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
28774 (Sapphire)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transylvania	5	4	0	0	0	0	1	10
Service Area Total	53	21	5	0	0	6	4	89

Appendix Table B5. Number of Family Child Care Homes, by Smart Start Star Level (December 2021)^{ccxxxix}

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	GS 110-106	Temporary	TOTAL
28704 (Arden)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28726 (East Flat Rock)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
28729 (Etowah)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28731 (Flat Rock)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28732 (Fletcher)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28735 (Gerton)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
28739 (Hendersonville)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
28766 (Penrose)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
28792 (Hendersonville)	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	4
Henderson County	1	5	2	0	0	0	2	10
28139 (Rutherfordton)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28722 (Columbus)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28773 (Saluda)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Polk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28018 (Bostic)	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
28020 (Casar)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28043 (Forest City)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28114 (Mooresboro)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
28160 (Spindale)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28167 (Union Mills)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rutherford	0	4	1	1	0	0	0	6
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28766 (Penrose)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28772 (Rosman)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28774 (Sapphire)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transylvania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Service Area Total	1	9	3	1	0	0	2	16

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^{ccxxxyii} North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education. (2021) Search for a Child Care Facility.
Available at: <http://nchildcaresearch.dhhs.state.nc.us/search.asp>

^{ccxxxyiii} North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education. (2021) Search for a Child Care Facility.
Available at: <http://nchildcaresearch.dhhs.state.nc.us/search.asp>

^{ccxxxyix} North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education. (2021) Search for a Child Care Facility.
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