



Community Assessment Update - 2023

Community Changes Since January 2022

- **Demographics:**

- 2360 children in our service area are eligible for HS or EHS services based on family income being at or below federal poverty level. 10.4% decrease from January 2022.
- 45.1% of income-eligible children in our service area reside in Henderson County (1064 children).

- **Birth Rate:**

- Except for Henderson County, birth rate has been decreasing in our service area over the last 3 years.

- **Homeless:**

- No specific data for our service area. In 2020-2021, NC saw a decrease of 16.2% of homeless children enrolled in public schools.
- We served 27 children experiencing homelessness over the 2022-2023 program term. 21 were served the previous year.

- **Foster Care:**

- An estimated 161 Children in our service area could be eligible for HS or EHS.
- 4.3% increase of children in foster care in our service area.

- **Disabilities:**

- 11.8% of children enrolled have a disability, exceeding our 10% minimum requirement.
- Overall decrease of 34.2% in the number of children we served due to staffing and classroom closures.

- **Substance Abuse:**

- In 2019, there was a 72% increase in number of deaths by overdose in NC. That number continued to increase in 2020 (by 40%) and 2021 (by 22%).

Community Changes Since January 2022

- **Poverty Rate:**

- Decreased in our service area since 2019. Henderson County -1.6%, Polk County -4.5%, Rutherford County -0.5%, and Transylvania County -7.1%.
- Rutherford County has the highest poverty rate of children under age of 5 in our service area at 28.9%.

- **Public Assistance:**

- 1.8% increase for children under age 5 who are eligible for HS or EHS based on families receipt of public assistance.
- Highest increase in families receiving public assistance was in Rutherford County.

- **Education:**

- Decrease in high school graduation rates for 3 of our 4 counties (Transylvania has increased 5%).
- Increase in teens (16-19) not enrolled in school and not a graduate for 3 of our 4 counties (Transylvania decreased 1.9%).
- High school dropouts have decreased in Henderson and Transylvania counties since 1 year prior to the pandemic. Rutherford and Polk counties have seen an increase.

- **Health and Nutrition:**

- 3 of our 4 counties are less healthy compared to previous year (Transylvania is healthier).
- Rutherford County has had the most consistent and significantly worse health outcomes.
- 3 of our 4 counties have higher food insecurity rates than the state average. Henderson county is at the state average 12%.

Social and Economic Factors to Wellbeing

- **Inflation:**

- In late 2022, almost all respondents (97%) to a U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey reported that prices were increasing, and almost half of those individuals felt very stressed by inflation.
- Based on income level, inflation is disproportionately impacting low-income households, including Black and Hispanic households and renters.
- Lower income respondents were almost 20% more likely to be “very stressed” by rising costs. Though lower-wage positions have undergone higher wage growth, the stress levels of respondents suggest these increases are inadequate in reducing the impact of high inflation.
- Consumer prices in November 2022 are up 7.1% from a year prior. Food costs are +10.6%, fuel +10.1%, rent +7.9%, and medical services +4.4%.
- Costs of used cars and automobile maintenance and repairs have also increased, impacting family transportation.

- **Home Value and Affordability:**

- Zillow indicates all home values in the service area increased 26.8% - 41.5% since 2021.
- This has also led to higher rent costs and higher home maintenance costs.

Other Children's Services Programs

There are 119 licensed child care centers and family child care programs in our service area, with the capacity to serve 5346 children ages 0-5 (if fully enrolled). About 1/3 of the programs participate in NCPReK, and 73% accept child care subsidies.

New Competitors

- Kids City USA - reportedly buying a childcare business in Brevard (100- 150 kids) and plans to establish centers in Hendersonville, Fletcher and Mills River

Full Enrollment and Staff

- TCPS - 4 Elementary Schools for NCPReK (full enrollment of 80 children and Staff).
- PISGAH Collective - very popular Outdoor preschool - Living wage certified (began several years ago).
- Four Church Preschools fully enrolled in Transylvania County.
- Brevard Nature School Family Co-op “exploring nature with children curriculum” established in 2018.

Private Child Care Providers

- Little Blessings - is closing its doors 10/31/2023
- Nanna's and Mommy's - on the market due to staffing and enrollment.
- Lisa's Kiddiegarten - has had struggles with staffing.

Public Nonprofit - County

- New Adventure Learning Center

Economic Factors to Workforce

Nationwide:

- 17% of HS and EHS classrooms were closed the week of September 6, 2022.
 - 77% cited staff vacancies as the primary reason.
- 18% of staff positions were vacant.
- 77% of respondents report that staff vacancies are higher than usual.
 - 79% cited compensation as the driving force behind vacancies.
 - 66% noted a lack of qualified candidates.
- Early childhood education ranks in the bottom 10% of professions for compensation.
- Early childhood staff continue to depart early learning programs for higher salaries in school districts.

WNCSource:

- In 2021-2022, 107 staff left the program and only 39 positions could be filled due to the critical nature of the staffing shortage.
- We are offering multiple incentives to retain and recruit staff.
 - sign-on bonus, referral bonus, and retention bonuses
 - higher wages implemented 01/23, COLA 5.6% on 05/01/23
 - Hired Wrap Around staff to provide teachers with dedicated time for planning, and better work life balance
 - January through August 2023- Classroom staff turnover rate was 4.96% compared to 7.75% in 2020 and 25.23% in 2022

Goals and Outlook

- Prioritized staff retention and recruitment efforts in order to open all classrooms and support full enrollment.
- 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.
- Identify service area transportation successes and challenges in order to enhance overall quality of services for families.
 - Enrolled families do not seem to be using the Apple Transportation system, but this could be a connected service in the future.
- Continue to create a program-wide focus on mental health supports for families, addressing challenging behaviors, and using trauma-informed practices.
 - WNCSource formalized partnership with Crossnore Consulting for Trauma Resilient Communities. The plan is to roll out the commitments and norms to be part of the community. WNCSource continues to update policies and procedures, and provide training on how to implement them.