

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT ANNUAL UPDATE



July
2023

WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships



Empowering people, transforming lives

Community Assessment Annual Update

WNCSOURCE HEAD START, EARLY HEAD START, AND EARLY HEAD START-CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIPS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEAD START, EARLY HEAD START, AND EHS-CCP

Western North Carolina Source (WNCSource) is a local, nonprofit organization serving Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania counties in southwestern North Carolina. The WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCP) 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 2021-2022 program year, the cumulative funded enrollment for all three programs was 484 children and pregnant women.

SERVICE AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

The WNCSource service area includes four counties spanning approximately 1,500 square miles in southwestern North Carolina. The service area is vastly rural, with a low population per square mile. Three out of the four counties are designated rural counties by the North Carolina State Data Center.

The WNCSource service area's total population is 233,039. Over the past five years, the population in the service area has been fluctuating, while increasing in North Carolina. Poverty is highest in Rutherford County, though indicating a fluctuating three-year trend, while the other counties are below the state poverty rate. In the service area, 9.5%-18.2% percent of individuals live in poverty, with rates greater for Black and Hispanic residents.

Within the service area, 2,360 children (a 10.4% decrease from January 2022) are eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start services based on family income at or below the federal poverty level; 45.1% of income-eligible children reside in Henderson County (1,064 children).

In North Carolina, the poverty rate for children under age 5 is 21.3%. It is higher in the service area in Rutherford (28.9%) and Transylvania (21.4%) counties. 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 9.1% of the population is Black or African American. Henderson County has the most ethnic diversity, as 10.5% 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 live in single-parent households at a higher rate than the state.

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

In North Carolina, 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 2020-2021, there were 22,644 children/youth experiencing homelessness enrolled in public school (PreK-12), a decrease of 16.2% from the prior year. Many homeless children and youth are “doubled up,” living with another family. In the 2021-2022 program year, WNCSource served 21 children in its Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP programs. Therefore it is estimated that there are at least 21 children in the service area who would be eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start.

There are 578 children in foster care in the service area under age 18. When applying an equal distribution for each age, it can be estimated that there are 161 children in foster care eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start (97 of whom are estimated to be age birth to 3, and 64 are ages 3-5). Since 2020, the number of children in foster care has been increasing. The number of children in foster care in 2022, in the service area, represents a 4.3% increase from the year prior.

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 has been increasing across the counties in the service area, the four-year rate is decreasing in three of the four counties, and increasing in Transylvania County Schools. The 2021-2022 dropout rates are above the statewide rate across the service area; in Henderson and Transylvania counties, the rates have declines from one year pre-pandemic, while increasing in Polk and Rutherford counties.

The number of children with disabilities enrolled in WNCSource’s Head Start and Early Head Start programs is 11.8%, exceeding the 10% enrollment requirement. The program models vary in terms of the enrollment levels of children with disabilities, with 17.1% in Head Start, 8.7% in the Early Head Start, and 9.3% in the Early Head Start-CCP.

There were 252 children receiving early intervention services in the WNCSource service area during 2021, representing a 34.2% decrease from the number of children served pre-pandemic in 2019. During the start of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 18, 2020, and into 2021, 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.ⁱ During this time, teachers also had reduced time and interactions in person with children, leading to fewer referrals, identification, and interventions. The time it took to evaluate children and provide services was delayed compared to pre-pandemic service levels. The significant decrease in the number of children served is very likely a function of systemic delays and may represent an undercount of the number of children with disabilities in the service area and in the state.

In 2021, North Carolina reported a 22% increase in overdose deaths. Data from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services for 2021 show that 4,041 individuals in North Carolina lost their lives to overdose, the highest number of overdose deaths in a single year on record in the state. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this crisis. Overdose deaths have increased 72% since 2019, with a 40% jump in 2020 during the first year of the pandemic. Aligned with the state data, there are high rates of opioid use within the WNCSource service area, with significant overdose rates reflected in all counties, with the exception of Polk County.

Overall, children born with low birth weight exceed the state rate in Rutherford County, and increased in that county, from the year prior, while decreasing in all other counties in the service area. 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.

AGENCIES SERVING ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

In the WNCSource service area, there are 119 child care and family child care programs available to families, with the capacity to serve 5,346 children, birth to school age. Just over one-third of providers continue to participate in NC Pre-K, the state-funded preschool program, and 73% accept child care subsidies. Forty-three percent of programs are licensed to serve infants and toddlers, though this likely does not represent actual enrollment levels. Detailed descriptions of child care capacity by program type and zip code are available in Appendix B.

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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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 maintain home-based slots for families who need them.
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.
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.
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.

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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.
 6. Create a task force related to services for pregnant women and young children (birth-5) that focuses on the wide range of issues impacting this population in a way that builds upon the Transylvania Task Force Model.
 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).
 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.
 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.
 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.
 11. Compare teacher job descriptions with real-world activities to ensure job descriptions reflect 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.
 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 solutions to flexible hours.

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

The 2023 Community Assessment Annual 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 1302.11ⁱⁱ, 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.ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

Separately, additional data tables indicate 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 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.

Throughout the report, notable changes from the 2022 Community Assessment Annual Update will appear as boxed text with light gray shading.

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

ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT THE EARLY EDUCATION WORKFORCE

The child care sector has not yet recovered from the economic impacts initiated at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past three years, 16,000 licensed child care programs closed nationwide. While historically the child care sector has experienced high turnover because of low compensation, the staff shortages of the last few years are unprecedented. “According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 79,600 fewer child care workers than there were before the pandemic.”^{iv}

EARLY EDUCATION WORKFORCE: COMPENSATION, STAFFING, ENROLLMENT

In an industry with historically low pay, given a changing labor market with more options for low-wage workers, many employees in early childhood education are now seeking better jobs with higher wages and benefits.

The Center for American Progress reports that “nationally, full-time child care teachers are paid, on average, \$14.01, less than half the wage of kindergarten teachers. Additionally, Black and Hispanic women are paid even less, at \$11.27 and \$12.59 per hour, respectively. Wages are a central factor for workforce struggles and require large-scale structural change in order to expect any improvement in attraction and retention of staff.”^v

Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.^{vi} In North Carolina, early educators are engaged in difficult and complex work that has been recognized as essential to children’s learning and development, supportive for families, and foundational to the economy. The North Carolina State Profile shows:

- There are 37,400 employees in the early childhood teaching workforce.
- In 2019, the median wage for child care workers was \$10.62, a 3% increase since 2017.
- For preschool teachers, the median wage was \$12.83, a 1% decrease since 2017.
- For preschool or child care center directors, the median wage was \$20.88, a 5% decrease since 2017.

NHSA Surveys.^{vii} In September 2022, at the start of the 2022-2023 HS/EHS program year, the National Head Start Association (NHSA) surveyed grant recipients to determine the extent to which workforce struggles continue to be an ongoing problem. Direct feedback from 378 HS/EHS grant recipients (about a quarter of all grant recipients) presents the following key findings:

- 17% of Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms were closed the week of September 6, 2022.
 - Of those with closed classrooms, 77% cited staff vacancies as the primary reason
- 18% of staff positions were vacant nationwide.
- 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 candidates with required qualifications.
- As a result of this ongoing workforce crisis, current enrollment relative to funded enrollment, as of September 9, 2022 was approximately 73% for Head Start and 77% for Early Head Start.
- There is a large pay gap between early learning and public sectors as states and localities adjust salaries and expand hiring flexibilities to attract staff for school district positions.
 - Early childhood education ranks in the bottom 10% of professions for compensation

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- It is difficult to compete for staff; Early childhood staff continue to depart early learning programs for higher salaries in school districts.
 - Compensation is the top reason why staff are leaving.
 - Working conditions related to understaffing is another contributing factor.
 - Children are also showing signs of trauma and are behind on developmental milestones.

The National Head Start Association polled attendees to its May 2022 annual conference and received approximately 900 responses; key findings include:

- 57% indicated compensation is the top reason for staff leaving.
- 85% indicated staff turnover was higher than in a typical year.
- 90% of respondents' programs have closed classrooms permanently or temporarily due to lack of staff.
- An estimated average of 30% of staff positions were unfilled.
- The salary gap between Head Start and other employers has taken on new significance in the current tight labor market.
 - Current and potential staff are making financial decisions in the best interest of their own families and seeking higher paying jobs unrelated to early childhood education.
 - Turnover includes lead teachers—whose expertise and credentials make them particularly suited to move to the public school system.
 - Turnover also includes other Head Start staff who are leaving for entry-level jobs (unrelated to early childhood education) that pay more and offer better benefits.
- 23% indicated workplace conditions, which in many instances, includes compensation as well as burnout, were exacerbated by staffing shortages.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Survey. In October 2022, the NAEYC conducted a field survey to better understand the impact of federal stabilization grants that served more than 200,000 child care providers in every state. While nationwide responses from more than 12,000 early childhood educators in a variety of settings indicate that relief helped, there is ongoing uncertainty about the future.

NAEYC reports, “staffing shortages caused by low compensation are leading to supply shortages that negatively impact families’ ability to work, children’s access to safe and quality care, and educators’ health and well-being. Far too many educators are considering leaving the field, threatening an exodus that—if not reversed with the support of public investments in the ECE workforce—will deepen the supply, quality, and affordability crises for years to come.”^{viii}

WNCSOURCE EARLY HEAD START AND HEAD START STAFFING

Early educators have left employment at child care programs nationally for various reasons, including their own health concerns, mental health, opportunities to explore other careers, and to care for their own children at home. WNCSource leadership report that higher turnover of staff began at the start of the pandemic. In the 2021-2022 program year, 107 staff left the program, and only 39 positions could be filled due to the critical nature of the staffing shortage in the area. Of those providing a reason for leaving the program, two retired or relocated and 30 noted a reason other than retirement, involuntary separation, or higher compensation (e.g., change in job field, reason not provided).

WNCSource has been able to offer multiple incentives to retain and recruit staff, including a sign-on bonus, employee referral bonus, and retention bonuses. Retention bonuses are paid twice a year, in June and December, and amount to \$750 for less than a year of service, \$1,000 for between 1-3 years of service, and \$1,500 for over 3 years of service.

Employees who receive a sign-on bonus do not receive retention bonuses. Sign-on bonuses have been extended through January 2024. Bonuses are offered to eligible staff, with a minimum education level, and are paid over six month intervals from the second paycheck until 18 months of working full time. Bonus levels range from \$2,000 to \$4,500 by position (NC Pre-K teachers, which are difficult to hire, \$4500; Early Head Start teachers, \$4000; Early Head Start teachers (without an Early Childhood Education degree), \$2000; Head Start teachers, \$3500). If an employee refers a qualified candidate who remains employed at least 90 days as a full-time employee with Children's Services, they are awarded a first referral bonus of \$500 and an additional \$500 if the employee works 365 days as a full-time employee with Children's Services.

Additionally, WNCSource submitted two Change in Scope applications, which were approved and allowed for greater retention and wage increases for teaching staff from 2%-26% depending on position and education level. Cost of living increases also were distributed earlier in the year, which staff appreciated.

WNCSource continues to evaluate and modify recruitment efforts and retention strategies as it faces the national staffing challenge of hiring qualified teachers. WNCSource leadership report that they are actively engaged in best practices in order to effectively hire new staff and retain the current workforce. When the agency vaccine mandate was lifted in March, former staff agreed to return and new applicants began to apply. The agency employs a full-time recruiter; an outside marketing firm supports messaging and outreach.

As a result of extensive recruitment efforts, in June 2023, WNCSource signed two new contracts for a family child care home in Henderson County and a center-based child care partner (CCP). The program expects to have a third contract shortly for family child care in Rutherford County. Partners are expected to be operational by August or sooner. These new partnerships will help boost enrollment in the EHS-CCP program, where some existing partners have been unable to open classrooms due to lack of staff.

The agency is also newly partnering with an apprenticeship program at Blue Ridge Community College. As one of eight partners, WNCSource will hire participating graduating high school seniors. This is a new source of applicants into the program and a starter pipeline for hiring. This year, the class includes approximately 10 students. After 1 year, the students will have earned an early childhood education certificate (with 5 completed courses) and can continue under apprenticeship, working at WNCSource as they earn their Associate's degree.

Through the Dogwood Health Trust grant, WNCSource was allocated \$1 million over a 5-year grant period to pay housing stipends for NC Pre-K teachers. Applicants willing to move to the area will receive a 3-year housing stipend. To date, one new hire has signed up. The grant also provides funding for family child care providers (\$5,000 start-up money for new providers); one contract is currently pending. The grant has also enabled the agency pursue hiring a full-time education coach dedicated to trainees and apprenticeship participants.

A new Site Supervisor Trainee program has been very successful this year as WNCSource was able to hire candidates who did not have administrative credentials, but had some early childhood education. Participants

shadowed Site Supervisors and assisted in classrooms. Two individuals have completed the program with hopes to become a Site Supervisor shortly. One participant completed the program, but moved for personal reasons.

WNCSource administrators continue to report that qualified staff do not reside in the service area and many new staff are generally individuals who have moved into the area. Limited affordable housing negatively impacts the ability of new graduates starting their teaching careers to live in the service area.

WNCSOURCE TEACHER RETENTION STUDY

In 2023, WNCSource contracted with Mano-Y-ola, an independent consulting firm, to conduct a Teacher Retention Study aimed at identifying the causes of high teacher turnover rates and recommended strategies the agency can employ to reduce turnover and increase teacher retention.^{ix}

The study collected information regarding teacher retention and departure rates at each site and by length of tenure; identified patterns, trends, causes, and conditions that contribute to high teacher turnover rates; identified the priorities of current teachers, including what will help them stay in their teaching job at WNCSource; and provided consultant observations and conclusions, including strategies to reduce teacher turnover and increase retention.

The study found, over the course of four years, 182 staff were terminated or resigned from their job at WNCSource. Approximately one-third of staff (60) was terminated from King Creek – Program Services. The top three centers with the highest staff turnover include: Hillview Center (28), King Creek Head Start Center (19), and Sugar Hill Head Start Center (15).

Of the 182 staff terminated/resigned, 46 were teachers and 30 were substitutes. On average, teachers were employed at WNCSource for 1,366 days; substitutes were employed for 770 days; teacher assistants were employed for 1,074 days; and trainees were employed for 168 days.

Multiple methods of data gathering were employed to gain an understanding of the priorities of teaching staff, including conversations with 18 current teachers, four former employees (teachers), and all site supervisors. Focus groups with current teachers were conducted in both Spanish and English, to ensure participants were able to dialogue with mano-Y-ola staff in their native language. Additionally, a survey was developed and administered in both Spanish and English; all teaching staff and site supervisors were encouraged to participate in the survey, including teachers at partner sites.

Of note, 72.4% of staff noted that work-life balance is extremely important to them. When reflecting on “work schedules and time off,” many noted the importance of flexibility in work hours (e.g., 8-2:30/3, four ten-hour days), options to spread paychecks over 12 months, more paid time off (PTO) or return to separate sick leave, and elimination or modification of wraparound hours.

Wraparound care is a necessity for working families. However, only four WNCSource teachers have expressed interest in working these extra hours, but only during limited times. In response to feedback from the Mano-Y-ola staff retention survey, and to support staff and teachers work-life balance, minimize stress, and enhance staff retention, WNCSource began piloting part-time positions to support wraparound care at a rate of \$19-\$20/hour. With these higher wages, the agency received an influx of applications. The agency is

working with its finance department to see if this successful pilot program can be replicated and move forward to scale to provide wraparound services.

The staff retention study found that in terms of competitive salary and incentives, staff were most interested in increases in salaries and more frequent salary reviews, bonuses for perfect attendance, longevity, or summer work, and the return of wellness gift cards.

When providing analysis regarding the reasons teachers left their position or the field of early childhood education in general, teachers provided multiple reasons. Top reasons included work-life balance, dissatisfaction with compensation levels, high levels of stress impacting their mental health and well-being, and better, lower stress job alternatives available that pay similar or higher.

WNCSource values the voice of program staff and has reflected on the Teacher Retention Study and has begun planning and implementing strategies aimed at making meaningful changes to the program to bolster staff retention.

In addition to the Teacher Retention Study, WNCSource is awaiting results from additional evaluations, including an organizational assessment survey conducted across the agency through Crossnore Consulting and a recent staff survey regarding how well staff they feel are supported by coaches. The program is currently conducting a Self-Assessment, an attendance survey, and a family satisfaction survey.

WNCSOURCE WELLNESS EFFORTS

WNCSource has continued to utilize multiple staff wellness efforts, including wellness afternoons for staff, incentives to encourage healthy lifestyles by awarding points that turn into cash or paid time off, Wellness Wednesday email to all staff, reflective supervision, occasional free lunches, increased opportunities for outside learning for staff (e.g., farms for activities and training), a monthly newsletter from Children's Services, and weekly 15-minute huddles that all staff can join virtually.

Additionally, WNCSource is one of 12 partner agencies working to implement a trauma informed/trauma reliance practice. The agency is currently in the education phase, and management staff have completed a three-day training. The entire process takes 3 years, but the agency has begun using some tools and resources. WNCSource is adopting "commitments" from Trauma Resilience because it is community wide, so all agencies use the same language in an effort to create a positive, inclusive culture. A Dogwood Health grant supports diversity, equity, and inclusion, and a committee will be formed with regard to trauma resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Head Start and Early Head Start Program Summary

Western North Carolina Source (WNCSource) continues to serve four counties in southwestern North Carolina, including: Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania counties. WNCSource is funded to serve 484 children in its Head Start program and Early Head Start program, both of which are implemented through a full-day, center-based and a home-based program option. An additional 80 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	Slots
Head Start Center-based	185 slots 14 classrooms
Early Head Start Center-based	96 slots 12 classrooms
Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP)	80 slots 11 classrooms
HS/EHS Home-Based (HB)	24 EHS 0 HS
EHS Expansion Funding	99 slots 16 classrooms
Total	484 slots ¹ 52 classrooms

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).^x The number and location of Opportunity Zones is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2. Opportunity Zone Census Tracts by County (2021)^{xi}

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)

¹ Total includes 24 home-based slots.

Service Area Demographics

WNCSource's service area is vastly rural. Transylvania, Polk, and Rutherford are designated as rural counties.^{xii} The total population in WNCSource's four-county service area is 233,039. Over the past five years, the population in the service area has been fluctuating, while increasing in North Carolina. (Table 3).

Over the past three years, the number of births has been fluctuating or declining in the counties in the service area, while declining across the state (Table 4).

Table 3. Population by Geographic Area and Year^{xiii}

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	Four-Year Trend
Henderson County	113,625	114,913	116,298	116,281	Fluctuating
Polk County	20,458	20,557	20,682	19,328	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	66,532	66,599	66,741	64,444	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	33,513	33,775	34,039	32,986	Fluctuating
Service Area Total	234,128	235,844	237,760	233,039	Fluctuating
North Carolina	10,155,624	10,264,876	10,386,227	10,439,388	Increasing

Table 4. Number of Births and Birth Rate (per 1,000 resident population) by Geographic Area (2017-2020)^{xiv}

Geographic Area	2017	2019	2020	Birth Rate ² 2020	Trend for Birth Rate
Henderson County	1,040	1,022	1,044	8.5	Fluctuating
Polk County	161	166	111	5.3	Declining
Rutherford County	689	680	628	9.4	Declining
Transylvania County	252	262	226	6.6	Fluctuating
North Carolina	120,099	118,725	116,755	11.0	Declining

In the service area, the median age continues to trend higher than the statewide rate. All counties are well above the statewide average for the percentage of the population that is over age 65 (Table 5). 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.

The percentage of the population under age 5 remains lower than the statewide rate. Polk County continues to have the lowest percentage of the population that is under age 5.

Table 5. Median Age and Distribution of the Population by Geographic Area (2021)^{xv}

Geographic Area	Median Age ³	Percent of Population Under Age 5	Percent of Population Over Age 65 ⁴
Henderson County	47.6	4.70%	25.70%
Polk County	54	3.90%	30.50%
Rutherford County	45.1	5.00%	21.50%
Transylvania County	52	4.10%	30.10%
North Carolina	39	5.70%	16.30%

Tables 6 and 7 describe the race and ethnicity of the service area population. Areas with the most racial and ethnic diversity are highlighted. The race and ethnicity of individuals in the service area did not

² Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

³ Values higher than the countywide value are highlighted.

⁴ Rates higher than the countywide rate are highlighted.

change significantly from 2019 to 2021. Counties within the service area remain less diverse than North Carolina as a whole.

Racial diversity continues to be greatest in Rutherford County, where 9.1% of the population is Black or African American. Henderson County has the most ethnic diversity, as 10.5% of the population is Hispanic or Latino.

Table 6. Population (and Percentage of Population) by Race and Geographic Area (2021)^{xvi}

Geographic Area	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	102,346 (88.5%)	3,962 (3.4%)	311 (0.3%)	1,588 (1.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2,890 (2.5%)	4,516 (3.9%)
Polk County	17,594 (90.6%)	939 (4.8%)	21 (0.1%)	133 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	275 (1.4%)	451 (2.3%)
Rutherford County	54,935 (85.0%)	5,878 (9.1%)	124 (0.2%)	325 (0.5%)	15 (0.0%)	1,114 (1.7%)	2,201 (3.4%)
Transylvania County	29,960 (90.8%)	1,448 (4.4%)	67 (0.2%)	31 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	408 (1.2%)	1,065 (3.2%)
North Carolina	6,865,508 (66.2%)	2,193,147 (21.2%)	113,719 (1.1%)	314,690 (3.0%)	7,119 (0.1%)	372,381 (3.6%)	500,458 (4.8%)

Table 7. Ethnicity as a Percentage of the Population by Geographic Area (2021)^{xvii}

Geographic Area	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	89.50%	10.50%	6.90%	1.00%	0.20%	2.30%
Polk County	94.00%	6.00%	5.00%	0.40%	0.10%	0.50%
Rutherford County	95.20%	4.80%	2.50%	0.30%	0.30%	1.80%
Transylvania County	96.60%	3.40%	2.40%	0.40%	0.30%	0.30%
North Carolina	90.20%	9.80%	5.30%	1.10%	0.30%	3.10%

Poverty

The poverty rate of counties in the service area as compared to the state of North Carolina is provided in Table 8. The poverty rate continues to be highest in Rutherford County and above the state rate, while the other counties are below the state rate.

Table 8. Poverty Rate by Geographic Area and Year (2017-2021)^{xviii, 5}

Geographic Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	11.8%	10.6%	10.9%	10.5%	12.5%	Fluctuating
Polk County	10.9%	9.5%	9.8%	10.0%	9.5%	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	19.6%	18.0%	17.9%	17.8%	18.2%	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	15.5%	14.7%	14.3%	14.4%	13.1%	Fluctuating
North Carolina	16.1%	15.4%	14.7%	14.0%	13.4%	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, American Indian & Alaskan Native individuals (though representing a very small number of individuals), and individuals of “some other race” and “two or more races” than other

⁵ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

race categories. In Rutherford County, for example, the poverty rate among Black or African American individuals is 42.5%, almost three times the poverty rate among White individuals, 15.1% (Table 9).

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. With the exception of Rutherford County, the poverty rate is significantly greater for Hispanic or individuals of Latino origin, as compared to Non-Hispanic or Latino Origin, White Alone (Table 10).

Table 9. Number (Percent) of Individuals Below Poverty Level by Race and Geographic Area (2021)^{xix,6}

Geographic Area	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	8,628 (8.5%)	476 (12.5%)	43 (13.9%)	43 (2.7%)	n/a	860 (31.3%)	1,806 (40.0%)
Polk County	1,724 (9.9%)	35 (4.1%)	18 (85.7%)	7 (5.3%)	n/a	0 (0.0%)	40 (8.9%)
Rutherford County	8,157 (15.1%)	2,402 (42.5%)	23 (25.6%)	59 (18.2%)	1 (6.7%)	221 (20.9%)	709 (32.4%)
Transylvania County	3,652 (12.5%)	433 (34.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	n/a	57 (14.6%)	45 (4.4%)
North Carolina	697,847 (10.4%)	445,971 (21.1%)	26,484 (24.0%)	29,425 (9.6%)	1,600 (24.1%)	88,337 (24.2%)	90,008 (18.6%)

Table 10. Number (and Percent) of Individuals Below Poverty Level by Ethnicity and Geographic Area (2021)^{xx,7}

Geographic Area	Hispanic or Latino Origin	Non-Hispanic or Latino Origin, White Alone
Henderson County	3,150 (26.4%)	7,631 (8.1%)
Polk County	156 (13.3%)	1,601 (9.7%)
Rutherford County	575 (18.7%)	7,932 (15.1%)
Transylvania County	66 (6.1%)	3,612 (12.5%)
North Carolina	231,783 (23.4%)	599,394 (9.5%)

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 greater than for “married-couple families” (Table 11).^{xxi} There was a significant shift in the data from 2019 to 2021, with declining rates of poverty for single mothers in 2021; the most significant decrease was 30.6% in Polk County though WNCSource leadership note that there was no/limited child care capacity in Polk County at that time and families with younger children may have left the area.

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.^{xxii}

⁶ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁷ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 11. Poverty Rate by Family Status and Geographic Area (2021)^{xxiii,8}

Geographic Area	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 (% change from 2019)
Henderson County	10.60%	10.40%	20.60% (-9.7%)
Polk County	5.90%	2.70%	19.40% (-30.6%)
Rutherford County	10.40%	4.70%	19.30% (-18.0%)
Transylvania County	13.60%	0.00%	42.40% (-5.0%)
North Carolina	14.60%	4.90%	39.80% (-4.9%)

Household Composition and Family Characteristics

In the WNCSource service area, there are many one-parent households. Rates have been decreasing slightly for the last 10 years across state. Rutherford and Transylvania counties continue to have rates higher than the statewide rate (Table 12).

Children served by WNCSource’s programs are living in single-parent households at higher rates than the countywide rates. In the Head Start program, 43.8% of families served are single-parent families; the rate is 51.6% in Early Head Start. In the EHS-CCP program, the rate continues to be highest, at 61.9%. A significant number of these single-parent households are led by a woman.^{xxiv}

Table 12. Children in One-Parent Families by Geographic Area (2021-2022)

Geographic Area	County/Statewide (2017-2021) ^{xxv 9}	Head Start ^{xxvi}	Early Head Start ^{xxvii}	Early Head Start CCP ^{xxviii}
Henderson County	30.0%	61 out of 139 (43.8%)	81 out of 157 (51.6%)	60 out of 97 (61.9%)
Polk County	32.9%			
Rutherford County	44.4%			
Transylvania County	35.3%			
North Carolina	35.8%			

In North Carolina, 7.9% of all children (birth-18) at all family income levels are in the care of grandparents.^{xxix} In the service area, children are in the care of grandparents at rates higher than the state rate in Polk and Rutherford counties. Children are also in the care of other relatives at a higher rate in Polk and Transylvania counties. They are in foster care at higher rates in Henderson and Rutherford counties (Table 13).

During the 2021-2022 program year, 2.8% of WNCSource HS/EHS children were in the care of grandparents (11 families). One child was in the care of other relatives, and 13 children were in the care of foster parents.

⁸ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁹ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 13. Percent of Children (ages 0 to 18-years-old) by Relationship to Householder and Geographic Area (2021)^{xxx,10}

Geographic Area	Own Child (biological, step, or adopted)	Grandchild	Other Relatives	Foster Care, Other Unrelated Relative
Henderson County	88.60%	7.80%	1.70%	2.00%
Polk County	82.30%	13.20%	3.70%	0.90%
Rutherford County	83.60%	12.00%	2.10%	2.30%
Transylvania County	88.70%	5.80%	4.80%	0.70%
North Carolina	87.90%	7.90%	2.30%	1.90%

ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

Table 14 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 14. Estimated Number of Children in the Service Area Eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start Services¹¹

Eligibility Criteria	Estimated Total Number of Eligible Children (Ages 0-5) /Pregnant Women in the Service Area (Percent Change from January 2022 Community Assessment data)	Number of Eligible Children (Ages 0-5) Served by WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP by Primary Type of Eligibility (2021-2022)
Income-eligible children	2,360 children (-10.4%)	317
Income-eligible pregnant women	492 (-5.9%)	4
Children experiencing homelessness	>21 (-34.4%) ¹²	19
Children in foster care	161 (+4.3%)	19
Children with disabilities	>278 (-30.7%) ¹³	
Children receiving public assistance	2,860 (+1.8%)	21
Over income/Other/ Exceeding over income	8,218 ¹⁴ (+1.5%)	26

Table 15. Estimated Number of Children in WNCSource Service Area Eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start Services (based on primary eligibility)¹⁵

Eligibility Criteria	Estimated Number of Eligible Children in WNCSource Service Area		
	Age 0-3 (EHS)	Age 3-5 (HS)	Total Age 0-5
Income-eligible children	1,416	944	2,360
Income-eligible pregnant women	492	n/a	492
Children experiencing homelessness	>13	>8	>21
Children in foster care	97	64	161
Children receiving public assistance	1,716	1,144	2,860
Children with disabilities (10% program enrollment requirement)	253	>25	>278

¹⁰ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

¹¹ The source for each of the data points in this table is described throughout the report.

¹² Based on currently enrolled children experiencing homelessness (21 children compared to 32 in the 2022).

¹³ 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 (253) plus the number of WNCSource enrolled children in Head Start with an IEP (25).

¹⁴ Number of children birth to age 5 (10,578) less the number of children birth to age 5 living in poverty (2,360).

¹⁵ The source for each of the data points in this table is described in the sections that follow.

Poverty and Geographic Location

In the WNCSource service area, there are a total of 2,360 children (a 10.4% decrease from January 2022) eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start services based on family income at or below the federal poverty level (Table 16); 45.1% of income-eligible children in the service area reside in Henderson County (1,064 children). In North Carolina, the poverty rate for children under age 5 is 21.3%. It is higher in the service area in Rutherford (28.9%) and Transylvania (21.4%) counties (Table 17).

Though the poverty rate for children under age 5 remained fairly steady over the service area, it did decrease at varying rates by county from 2019, including: Henderson County -1.6%, Polk County -4.5%, Rutherford County -0.5%, and Transylvania County -7.1%.

Henderson County. In Henderson County, the highest poverty rate for children under age 5 was 35% in zip code 28792 (Hendersonville), a reduction of 4.6% in the zip code from 2019. This is also the zip code where the greatest number of children under age 5, and under age 5 living in poverty reside in the county.¹⁶

- ❖ Notably, while the rate in 2019 was greatest in in zip code 28742 (Horse Shoe) at 49.5%, the 2021 rate was only 5.1% representing a 44.4% reduction; additionally in zip code 28731 (Flat Rock), there was a reduction of 17.8% from 2019.

Polk County. In Polk County, the highest number of children, under age 5, living in poverty is still concentrated in zip codes 28773 (29.1.8% in Saluda; a decrease of 8.7% from 2019) and 28139 (17.6% in Rutherfordton, a decrease of 2.8% from 2019), 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 2021, the poverty rate for children under age 5 living in poverty was 5% in zip code 28756 (Mill Spring), a reduction of 10.5% from 2019.

Rutherford County. In Rutherford County, zip codes 28043 (Forest City) and 28040 (Ellenboro) continue to have significantly higher rates of poverty for children under age 5 than the rest of the county, at 41.70% and 34.60% respectively (both decreased from 2019). Forest City is where the greatest number of children under age 5 reside in the county (1,552).

- ❖ Rutherford County has a poverty rate for children under 5 years old that is greater than the state rate. Notably, in 2021, in zip code 28040 (Ellenboro), there was a 21.5% reduction in children under age 5 living in poverty from 2019 and a 2.3% reduction in 28043 (Forest City).

Transylvania County. In Transylvania County, most children under age 5 who are living in poverty, reside in Brevard (26.3%), Lake Toxaway (21.6%), and Pisgah Forest (28768).

¹⁶ 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.

- ❖ Transylvania County has a poverty rate for children under 5 years old that is greater than the state rate. Notably, in 2021, there were reductions in the number of children under age 5 who are living in poverty from 2019 in Brevard (-13.3%), Lake Toxaway (-4.3%), and Pisgah Forest (17.3%).

Table 16. Summary: Children Under Age 5, Child Poverty, and Trends by Geographic Area (2019)^{xxxi,17}

Geographic Area	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 County	16.50%	19.90%	5,340	1,064	Fluctuating
Polk County	10.80%	12.90%	736	95	Decreasing
Rutherford County	25.20%	28.90%	3,175	917	Decreasing
Transylvania County	19.10%	21.40%	1,327	284	Decreasing
Service Area	---	---	10,578	2,360	Decreasing
North Carolina	19.30%	21.30%	583,646	124,073	Decreasing

Table 17. Children Under Age 5, Child Poverty, and Trends by Geographic Area (2021)^{xxxii}

Geographic Area ¹⁸	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old ¹⁹	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
28726 (East Flat Rock)	14.00%	0.00%	185	0	n/a
28729 (Etowah)	0.00%	0.00%	300	0	n/a
28731 (Flat Rock)	32.30%	27.10%	347	94	Decreasing
28732 (Fletcher)	6.10%	3.90%	930	36	Fluctuating
28735 (Gerton)	0.00%	0.00%	10	0	n/a
28739 (Hendersonville)	18.30%	27.10%	1,036	281	Increasing
28742 (Horse Shoe)	5.10%	18.20%	99	18	Decreasing
28759 (Mills River)	4.30%	11.80%	340	40	Fluctuating
28766 (Penrose)	8.00%	0.00%	55	0	n/a
28790 (Zirconia)	0.00%	0.00%	107	0	n/a
28791 (Hendersonville)	6.20%	7.60%	471	36	Fluctuating
28792 (Hendersonville)	26.90%	35.00%	1,647	577	Decreasing
Henderson	16.50%	19.90%	5,340	1,064	Fluctuating
28139 (Rutherfordton)	20.8%	17.6%	939	165	Fluctuating
28722 (Columbus)	14.00%	10.80%	287	31	Increasing
28756 (Mill Spring) ²⁰	3.90%	5.00%	201	10	Decreasing

¹⁷ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

¹⁸ Zip code level data does not add up to the county level; county level data is a separate data point and included for context.

¹⁹ Rates above the countywide rate are highlighted.

²⁰ This zip code is primarily in Polk County. One area (near Chimney Rock) is in Rutherford County.

Geographic Area ¹⁸	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old ¹⁹	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
28773 (Saluda) ²¹	14.30%	29.10%	103	30	Decreasing
28782 (Tryon)	11.20%	8.50%	141	12	Decreasing
Polk	10.80%	12.90%	736	95	Decreasing
28018 (Bostic)	7.60%	3.60%	195	7	Increasing
28020 (Casar)	12.20%	11.70%	188	22	Fluctuating
28040 (Ellenboro)	15.50%	34.60%	205	71	Fluctuating
28043 (Forest City)	37.40%	41.70%	1,552	647	Fluctuating
28114 (Mooresboro)	4.50%	6.10%	442	27	Fluctuating
28139 (Rutherfordton)	20.80%	17.60%	939	165	Fluctuating
28160 (Spindale)	16.70%	19.40%	31	6	Fluctuating
28167 (Union Mills)	15.20%	0.00%	87	0	Decreasing
Rutherford	25.20%	28.90%	3,175	917	Decreasing
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0.00%	n/a	0	0	n/a
28712 (Brevard)	19.60%	26.30%	695	183	Decreasing
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	45.00%	21.60%	74	16	Fluctuating
28766 (Penrose)	8.00%	0.00%	55	0	n/a
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	11.70%	15.00%	448	67	Decreasing
28772 (Rosman)	1.20%	0.00%	22	0	n/a
28774 (Sapphire)	0.00%	0.00%	19	0	n/a
Transylvania	19.10%	21.40%	1,327	284	Decreasing
Service Area			10,578	2,360	Decreasing
North Carolina	19.30%	21.30%	583,646	124,073	Decreasing

As described in Table 18, the number of live births remained fairly steady from 2019 to 2020 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 511 income-eligible pregnant women in the service area, 12 fewer than reported in 2022, a majority of whom continue to reside in Henderson and Rutherford counties (Table 19).

Table 18. Number of Live Births Per Year by Geographic Area (2020) ^{xxiii}

Geographic Area	Number of live births (2019)	Number of live births (2020)
Henderson County	1,022	1,044
Polk County	166	111
Rutherford County	680	628
Transylvania County	262	226
Service Area	2,130	2,009
North Carolina	118,725	116,755

²¹ 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.

Table 19. Income-Eligible Pregnant Women by Geographic Area (2020)

Geographic Area	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old (2019) ^{xxxiv}	Number of Live Births per Year (2019) ^{xxxv}	Number of Live Births per Year (2020) ^{xxxvi}	Estimated Number of Income-Eligible Pregnant Women ²² (Change from 2022 Community Assessment)
Henderson County	21.8%	1,022	1,044	223 (+3)
Polk County	15.3%	166	111	25 (-4)
Rutherford County	28.9%	680	628	196 (-3)
Transylvania County	25.4%	262	226	67 (-8)
Service Area		2,130	2,009	511 (-12)
North Carolina	25.4%	118,725	116,755	30,163

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. In EHS, 57.4% of enrolled children are Hispanic or Latino, while the rate is 19.6% in Head Start and in EHS-CCP, potentially reflecting a shift in the ethnicity of younger children and families in the service area.

Table 20. WNCSource Programs: Race and Ethnicity of Children/Pregnant Women (2021-2022)^{xxxvii}

Program Type	White	Black or African American	Bi-racial /multi-racial	Hispanic or Latino Origin	American Indian / Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	Asian
Head Start	77.6%	6.5%	15.9%	19.6%	0%	0%	0%
Early Head Start	77.8%	9.7%	12.5%	57.4%	0%	0%	0%
EHS-CCP	77.6%	6.5%	15%	19.6%	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. Concentrated poverty is a concern in Rutherford County; 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 2014-2018 and 2017-2021, the rate of Black or African American children living in concentrated poverty increased 41.5%, as did “some other race” by 2.1%, while rates for “White Non-Hispanic” (-1.1%) and “Hispanic or Latino” (-5.0%) declined.

Notably, in 2017-2021, there were 977 children living in concentrated poverty in Henderson County and in 2014-2018, compared to 1,325 in 2017-2021, an increase of 2.7%.

Table 21. Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty by Race and Ethnicity (2017-2021)^{xxxviii,23,24}

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	532 (5.2%)	585 (52.2%)	208 (12.8%)	103 (8.6%)	1,325 (9.7%)
Transylvania County	S	S	S	S	S
North Carolina	3.1%	36.4%	8.8%	11.0%	7.5%

²²Calculated by applying the poverty rate for children under age 5 to the number of live births per year.

²³ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted; S represents fewer than ten cases.

Language of Eligible Children

The primary language of individuals in the WNCSource service area is English. Table 22 describes the percent of people over age 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 7.9% of the population speaks Spanish. Though 10.3% speak a language other than English in their home, WNCSource reports the rates may even be greater, as indicated by additional sources. (Table 22).

Table 22. Language Spoken at Home (5 Years and Over) by Geographic Area and Percentage of Population (2021)^{xxxix}

Geographic Area	English	Spanish	Other Indo-European	Asian and Pacific Island	Other
Henderson County	89.70%	7.90%	1.30%	0.80%	0.30%
Polk County	92.40%	4.80%	2.00%	0.70%	0.10%
Rutherford County	95.20%	3.40%	0.70%	0.40%	0.40%
Transylvania County	96.70%	2.10%	1.00%	0.10%	0.10%
North Carolina	87.90%	7.70%	1.90%	1.80%	0.70%

During the 2021-2022 program year, a slight majority of families of children enrolled in the WNCSource, Head Start (56.8%) and Early Head Start (53.4%), spoke English as their primary language at home, as did over 87% of EHS-CCP programs. Spanish is the next most common language spoken at home by enrolled families at a rate of 13%-46% by program type (Table 23).

Table 23. WNCSource Programs: Primary Language of Families at Home (2021-2022)^{xl}

Program Type	English	% Change from 2020/2021	Spanish	% Change from 2020/2021	Other Languages	% Change from 2020/2021
Head Start	56.8%	-2.5%	41.8%	+3.8%	1.4%	-1.3%
Early Head Start	53.4%	+2.7%	46%	+0.3%	0.6%	-3.0%
Early Head Start-CCP	87.9%	+1.9%	13%	-1.0%	0%	0%

Cultural Trends

The percentage of the population in the service area that is foreign-born is less than the statewide rate. The counties in the service area have lower percentages of foreign-born individuals than the state rate; in Transylvania County the percent of the foreign-born population that is a non-US citizen is greater than the statewide rate (Table 24). Families served by WNCSource continue to have concerns about local Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity and its impact on their families.

Table 24. Foreign-Born Population by Geographic Area (2021)^{xli}

Geographic Area	Percent Foreign-Born	Percent of Foreign-Born Population that is non-US Citizen ²⁵	Predominant Region of Birthplace for Foreign-Born Population
Henderson County	7,862 (6.8%)	4,039 (51.4%)	Latin America (61.6%), Europe (16.8%), Asia (15.6%), Northern America (4.7%), Africa (1.4%), Oceania (0.0%)
Polk County	861 (4.4%)	414 (48.1%)	Latin America (50%); Europe (27%); Asia (17%)
Rutherford County	1,811 (2.8%)	877 (48.4%)	Latin America (67%); Asia (14%)
Transylvania County	795 (2.4%)	490 (61.6%)	Latin America (44%); Europe (37%)
North Carolina	845,983 (8.2%)	497,107 (58.8%)	Latin America (51%); Asia (28%); Europe (11%)

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 2020-2021, there were 22,644 children/youth experiencing homelessness enrolled in public school (PreK-12), a decrease of 16.2% from the prior year. Many homeless children and youth are “doubled up,” living with another family (Table 25).

Table 25. Percentage of Homeless Children/Youth (PreK-Grade 12) Enrolled in Public Schools by Primary Nighttime Residence^{xlii} (2018-2021)

Primary nighttime residence	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021*
Doubled up (e.g., living with another family)	72.6%	72.4%	70.7%
Hotels/motels	14.3%	16%	18.6%
Shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care	9.6%	8.3%	6.6%
Unsheltered	3.5%	3.3%	4.1%
Total Number	34,721	27,037	22,644

*COVID-19 operations impacted the identification of eligible students. Data should be interpreted with caution.

As part of a larger national trend, the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness is increasing in North Carolina. Between 2020 and 2022, the number of North Carolinians experiencing unsheltered homelessness rose from 2,558 to 3,625. The number children experiencing homelessness (and in particular, unsheltered homelessness) increasing from 119 children in 2020 to 482 children in 2022 (482).^{xliii}

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.^{xliv}

Point-in-time data is provided for 2019-2022 (Table 26) and indicates a fluctuating number of children in homeless families, with 42 children in 2022. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and varying data collection

²⁵ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

methods, the number of homeless children in each county in 2021 is very likely an undercount and is generally not comparable to data collected in previous years.

Table 26. Point-in-Time Count: Children (17 and under) Experiencing Homelessness by Geographic Area (2019-2022)^{xlv}

Geographic Area	Homeless Children 2019	Homeless Children 2020	Homeless Children 2021	Homeless Children 2022
Henderson County	13	23	3	15
Polk County	2	6	0	3
Rutherford County	4	4	6	9
Transylvania County	6	13	3	15
Service Area	25	46	12	42

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).

The National Center for Children in Poverty has identified seven risk factors for children that have a greater level of impact on early childhood outcomes. While these are not specifically risk factors for early childhood homelessness, many of them have been identified by researchers as significant factors associated with family homelessness. 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.^{xlvi} The data source for Tables 27 and 28 have not been updated since the last Community Assessment update.

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

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^{xlviii}

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%

During the 2021-2022 program year, WNCSource served 20 families with 21 children (12 fewer families than 2020-2021), that were experiencing homelessness in its Head Start (8 children), Early Head Start (8 children), and EHS-CCP programs (5 children). Of the 20 families, four acquired housing during the program year. Based on this historic information, it is estimated that more than 21 children in the service area eligible to receive Head Start/Early Head Start services based homelessness status.

Table 29. WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Homelessness Services (2021-2022)^{xlix}

	Early Head Start	Early Head Start-CCP	Head Start	Total
Total number of families experiencing homelessness that were served during the enrollment year	8	4	8	20 (-12 children compared to 2020-2021)
Total number of children experiencing homelessness that were served during the enrollment year	8	5	8	21 (-10 children compared to 2020-2021)
Total number of families experiencing homelessness that acquired housing during the enrollment year	1	2	1	4 (no change compared to 2020-2021))

Children in Foster Care

WNCSource served 24 children who were in foster care at any point during the 2021-2022 program year, representing 5.6% of total program enrollment across the Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP programs.

There are 578 children in foster care under age 18 in the service area (Table 30). If applying an equal distribution for each age, it can be estimated that there are 161 foster children eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start (97 of whom are estimated to be age birth to 3, and 64 are ages 3-5). Since 2020, the number of children in foster care has been increasing. The number of children in foster care in the service area in 2022 represents a 4.3% increase from the year prior.

Table 30. Children in Foster Care (Under 18) by Geographic Area (2019-2022)ⁱ

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	2022	Four-Year Trend
Henderson County	207	210	223	232	Increasing
Polk County	56	60	56	65	Increasing
Rutherford County	217	203	202	206	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	70	65	72	75	Fluctuating
Service Area	550	538	553	578	Fluctuating
North Carolina	15,520	15,268	15,043	14,516	Decreasing

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. The report indicated 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).”^{li}

Child Abuse. There are concerning rates of child abuse and neglect in the service area. As described in Table 31, all counties in the service area had rates of children assessed for abuse or neglect that are higher than the statewide rate, with the most significant rates in Rutherford County.

Table 31. Children Assessed for Abuse or Neglect (Rate per 1,000) by Geographic Area (2019-2020)^{lii,26}

Geographic Area	2019	2020	Trend
Henderson County	66.4	54.1	Decreasing
Polk County	64.2	75.6	Increasing
Rutherford County	91.8	83.1	Decreasing
Transylvania County	76.9	79.7	Increasing
North Carolina	48.4	43.4	Decreasing

Children with Disabilities

During the 2021-2022 program year, 50 children with disabilities were enrolled in the WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP programs, representing 11.8% of cumulative enrollment across programs. Of these 50 children, 26 (52%) were identified prior to enrollment. By program type, the percentages of children with disabilities vary and include:

- 25 children in the Head Start program, 17.1% of the total enrollment, had an IEP (an increase of 5.1% from the year prior). The most commonly diagnosed disability was “non-categorical/developmental delay” followed by “Autism.”^{liii}
- 15 children, 8.7% of total enrollment, in the Early Head Start program, had an Individualized Family Service Plan (an increase of 3.7%), all of whom received early intervention services.^{liv}
- 10 children, 9.3% of total enrollment, in the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership program, had an Individualized Family Service Plan (an increase of 3.2%), all of whom received early intervention services.^{lv}

WNCSource leadership noted that needs of children have increased, and specifically the program has seen an uptick in Autism Spectrum Disorder and more challenging behaviors, as many younger children had limited socialization opportunities due to the pandemic. Also, increasingly, parents do not consistently bring their children to the program every day, and often not on time. Parents are often struggling with trauma or mental health issues. The agency plans to add more universal mental health intervention training through teacher coaches.

In 2021, 252 children received early intervention services in the WNCSource service area, representing a 34.2% decrease from the number of children served pre-pandemic in 2019. During the start of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 18, 2020, and into 2021, the North Carolina Early Intervention Branch suspended face-to-face services with families and began providing teleservices and teletherapy.^{lvi} During this time, teachers also had reduced time and interactions in person with children, leading to fewer referrals, identification, and interventions. The time it took to evaluate children and provide services became longer compared to pre-pandemic service levels. The significant decrease in the number of children served is very likely a function of systemic delays and may represent an undercount of the number of children with disabilities in the service area and in the state.

²⁶ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 32. Infants and Toddlers (Age 0-3) Receiving Early Intervention Services by Geographic Area (2019-2021)^{lvii,27}

Geographic Area	2019 (FY 2018-2019)	2020 (FY 2019-2020)	2021 (FY 2020-2021)	Four-Year Trend
Henderson County	143 (4.4%)	105 (3.2%)	94 (3.0%)	Decreasing
Polk County	25 (5.4%)	25 (5.3%)	25 (5.1%)	Steady
Rutherford County	190 (9.1%)	169 (8.3%)	105 (5.2%)	Decreasing
Transylvania County	25 (3.0%)	29 (3.5%)	28 (3.4%)	Steady/ Increasing
Service Area	383	328	252	Decreasing
North Carolina	21,095 (5.8%)	19,800 (5.5%)	18,230 (5.1%)	Decreasing

Children Receiving Public Assistance

In the WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start programs, many families receive assistance benefits, with the greatest participation being in the WIC and SNAP programs (Table 33).

Table 33. Number and Percent of WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start Families That Received Federal or Other Assistance (At Enrollment, 2021-2022)^{lviii}

Program	TANF	SSI	WIC	SNAP
Early Head Start	5 (2.8%)	9 (5.1%)	107 (60.8%)	56 (31.8%)
Early Head Start-CCP	3 (2.8%)	3 (2.8%)	63 (58.9%)	42 (39.3%)
Head Start	2 (1.4%)	9 (6.2%)	72 (49.3%)	48 (32.9%)

Census data indicates the number of children, under 18, who reside in households that receive public assistance (TANF, SSI, and SNAP). Assuming an even distribution across ages, it can be estimated that 2,860 children, under age 5, are eligible for participation in Head Start/Early Head Start based on their families' receipt of public assistance, a 1.8% increase from 2019 (Table 34).

Table 34. Children Living in Households that Received Public Assistance ²⁸ in the Past 12 Months (2019-2021) ^{lix}

Geographic Area	Number of children under age 5	Number of children under age 5 living in households that receive public assistance (2019)	Number of children under age 5 living in households that receive public assistance (2021)
Henderson County	5,340	1,413	1,100
Polk County	736	196	174
Rutherford County	3,175	856	1,200
Transylvania County	1,327	343	386
Service Area	10,578	2,808	2,860

North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is called Work First (WF). In the service area in 2020, 384 households received Work First benefits (Table 35). In 2021, 494 children in the service area also received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (Table 36). Both figures represent a decrease from the year prior.

²⁷ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

²⁸ 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 (2016-2020)^{lx}

Geographic Area	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	113	145	147	132	131	Fluctuating
Polk County	52	43	36	32	27	Decreasing
Rutherford County	224	219	181	189	167	Decreasing
Transylvania County	52	53	55	60	59	Fluctuating
Service Area	441	460	419	413	384	Decreasing

Table 36. Children Receiving Supplementary Security Income (2017-2021)^{lxi}

Geographic Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Henderson County	230	248	186	208	194
Polk County	42	43	40	38	36
Rutherford County	234	248	214	216	204
Transylvania County	77	80	75	72	60
Service Area	583	619	515	534	494
North Carolina	38,313	40,459	35,198	34,808	32,937

During the 2020-2021 program year, 21 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 continues to be the type of public assistance most commonly accessed by enrolled families.^{lxii}

Further, in the WNCSource service area, more than 3,300 children are eligible for subsidized child care, but only about 34.5% are accessing it. Since 2021-2022, the percent of eligible children accessing subsidized child care increased in all counties in the service area. The increase is mainly due to the reduction in the number of children potentially eligible for subsidized child care (down from 7,220 in 2018-2019) (below 200% FPL) (Table 37).

Table 37. Children Eligible for and Access to Subsidized Child Care by Geographic Area (2021-2022)^{lxiii,29}

Geographic Area	Children potentially eligible for subsidized child care (below 200% FPL) 2018-2019	Children potentially eligible for subsidized child care (below 200% FPL) 2021-2022	Children receiving subsidized child care	Percent of eligible children accessing subsidized child care	Percent eligible accessing care (% change from 2018-2019)
Henderson County	2,891	1,348	451	33.45% (+13.98%)	19.47%
Polk County	532	222	62	27.93% (+13.64%)	14.29%
Rutherford County	2,640	1,288	520	40.37% (+19.73%)	20.64%
Transylvania County	1,157	528	134	25.37% (+12.58%)	12.79%
Service Area	7,220	3,386	1,167	n/a	n/a

²⁹ Percentages above the service area rate are highlighted.

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.

Education

While five-year high school graduation rates are increasing across the service area, the four-year rate is decreasing in three of the four counties, and increasing in Transylvania County Schools. The counties in the service area have graduation rate above the statewide rates, except for Transylvania County Schools which has a slightly lower five-year rate (Table 38).

Table 38. High School Graduation Rate by High School and School District (2021-2022)^{lxiv}

School District	Geographic Area	Entering 9 th Graders Expected to Graduate in 2021-22 (% Change from 2020-2021) ³⁰	
		4 yrs.	5 yrs.
All Henderson County Schools	Henderson County	90.8% (-1.9%)	93.9% (+1.7%)
All Polk County Schools	Polk County	86.9% (-5.5%)	92.4% (+3.7%)
All Rutherford County Schools	Rutherford County	87.2% (-1.0%)	89.1% (+0.7%)
All Transylvania County Schools	Transylvania County	89.0% (+5.0%)	85.8% (+0.4%)
North Carolina	Statewide	86.4% (+0.6%)	88.5% (-0.2%)

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 2.2%-5.5% and greatest in Henderson County. These rates have increased in all counties over time, with the exception of Transylvania County where the rate decreased (Table 39).

Table 39. Teen Population (16-19) Not Enrolled in School and Not a Graduate by Geographic Area (2016-2021)^{lxv,31}

Geographic Area	2016-2020	2017-2021
Henderson County	3.0%	5.5%
Polk County	1.1%	4.1%
Rutherford County	3.9%	4.6%
Transylvania County	4.1%	2.2%
North Carolina	4.0%	4.0%

The majority of the population in the service area have a high school degree or some college, with no degree. There were no significant changes regarding educational attainment from 2019. The large percentage of retirees living within the service area may skew the data regarding educational attainment, in particular reflecting a higher number of adults with bachelor’s and graduate/professional degrees.

³⁰ Rates below the countywide rate are highlighted.

³¹ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 40. Percent of Education Attainment for Adults over 25 years old by Geographic Area (2021)^{lxvi,32}

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	3.3%	5.2%	23.2%	19.2%	11.0%	23.0%	15.1%
Polk County	2.7%	4.6%	25.6%	22.6%	10.7%	21.5%	12.3%
Rutherford County	4.5%	10.0%	32.2%	22.6%	11.3%	12.8%	6.5%
Transylvania County	2.2%	5.8%	24.2%	22.3%	9.6%	22.8%	13.1%
North Carolina	4.0%	6.3%	24.9%	19.8%	10.1%	21.7%	13.2%

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) (2021-2022)^{lxvii}

Degree Status	Early Head Start-CCP	Early Head Start	Head Start	Total	Percent change from 2020-2021
Less than a high school degree	22	46	44	112 (28.7%)	+2.1%
High school graduate or GED	41	72	62	175 (44.9%)	+0.5%
Associates degree, vocational school, or some college	24	28	20	72 (18.5%)	+2.5%
Bachelor's or advanced degree	9	9	13	31 (7.9%)	+2.7%

In the service area there are 1,766 children enrolled in kindergarten and 23,083 in grades 1-12 (Table 42).

Table 42. Average Daily Membership of Children, by Grades and Geographic Area (2022-2023, Month 6)^{lxviii}

Geographic Area	Kindergarten	1 st to 12 th Grade
Henderson County	843	11,667
Polk County	155	1,861
Rutherford County	548	6,616
Transylvania County	220	2,939
Service Area	1,766	23,083
North Carolina	112,220	1,386,095

The 2021-2022 dropout rates are above the statewide rate across the service area; in Henderson and Transylvania counties, the rates have declined from pre-pandemic, while increasing in Polk and Rutherford counties (Table 43).

³² Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 43. High School Drop Out Rate by Geographic Area (2019-2022)^{lix,33}

Geographic Area	2018-2019	2020-2021	2021-2022	% Difference 1 Year Pre-Pandemic
Henderson County	2.15	1.71	1.93	-10.1%
Polk County	1.73	0.89	2.78	60.4%
Rutherford County	1.82	3.21	2.79	52.9%
Transylvania County	2.58	1.16	1.47	-42.8%
North Carolina	3.22	1.91	3.27	1.6%

With the exception of math and science in Transylvania County, assessment scores for all the counties in the service area are above the statewide rate in math, science, and reading. When comparing the percentage of students who performed at a level three (sufficient command) or above from 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, rates declined across subjects in both the service area and state, likely due to the disruption to in-person learning during the pandemic.

Table 44. Performance of Students on the North Carolina End-of-Year Grade Tests by Geographic Area and Content Area (2021-2022)^{lix}

Geographic Area and Standardized Assessment Content	Not Proficient	Level Three (sufficient command)	Level Four (solid command)	Level Five (superior command)	Level Three or Above ³⁴	% Change from 2018-2019
Henderson County						
Reading	48%	19%	22%	12%	53%	-12%
Math	45%	18%	26%	11%	55%	-10%
Science	28%	9%	44%	19%	72%	-9%
Polk County						
Reading	33%	22%	28%	16%	66%	-10%
Math	35%	29%	23%	13%	65%	-11%
Science	20%	7%	50%	23%	80%	-6%
Rutherford County						
Reading	50%	24%	20%	6%	50%	-10%
Math	48%	24%	23%	6%	53%	-11%
Science	24%	12%	50%	15%	77%	-4%
Transylvania County						
Reading	50%	21%	21%	9%	51%	-14%
Math	53%	20%	22%	6%	48%	-14%
Science	38%	11%	38%	13%	62%	-15%
North Carolina						
Reading	52%	19%	20%	9%	48%	-10%
Math	50%	18%	23%	9%	50%	-9%
Science	32%	10%	39%	20%	69%	-7%

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.^{lix} 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. This data has not been updated since the last WNCSource Community Assessment update was completed.

³³ Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁴ Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

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

Geographic Area	Performance Grade Score	Academic Growth History ³⁵	Incoming Student Readiness ³⁶
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%
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	63/C	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%

³⁵ Schools that received a “not met” in academic growth history are highlighted.

³⁶ Rates below 50% are highlighted; rates below 30% are in bold font.

Health and Social Services

On May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) declared an end to its “public health emergency of international concern” for COVID-19. While not signaling the end of the pandemic, the removal of the designation indicates that the virus is now “an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency.”^{lxxiii} One week later, on May 11, 2023, the United States ended its COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE). While access to care and testing remains the same for Americans, the end of the PHE signals an end to certain data tracking tools previously collected by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This includes weekly case and death counts previously reported by the states, as well as county-level positivity rates as previously reported by labs.^{lxxiv}

The COVID-19 dashboard in North Carolina was last updated on May 10, 2023; data metrics have been essential to North Carolina’s response to COVID-19. However, the process for tracking future COVID-19 data has evolved. With a greater number of individuals utilizing home tests, which are not reported to health officials, the case count is generally lower and less reliable. In May 2023, doctors and labs are no longer required to report COVID cases to the health department in North Carolina. The state will track data through emergency department visits for COVID-like, influenza-like, RSV-like, and overall acute respiratory illness; hospital admissions for COVID-19 and influenza; death certificate data; and through testing samples of wastewater.^{lxxv}

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ranks communities across many health and wellness factors. While Henderson, Polk, and Transylvania counties have some of the most optimal health rankings in the state (top quartile), Rutherford County falls in the bottom quartile (Table 46).

Table 46: Community Health Rankings by Geographic Area (1 healthiest - 100 least healthy) (2021-2023)^{lxxvi}

Geographic Area	2021	2022	2023	Trend
Henderson County	11	12	12	Less Healthy
Polk County	9	13	14	Less Healthy
Rutherford County	50	66	72	Less Healthy
Transylvania County	21	18	19	Healthier

As seen in Table 47, factors related to poor health, as well as the number of physically and mentally unhealthy days, are high across the service area. Highlighted cells show rates at or above the statewide average.

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

Table 47. Health Outcomes Data by Geographic Area^{lxxvii,37}

Geographic Area	Years of Potential Life Lost Before 75 (2018-2020)	% Poor or Fair Health (2020)	Physically Unhealthy Days (2020)	Mentally Unhealthy Days (2020)
Henderson County	7,400	12%	2.8	4.2
Polk County	8,000	18%	3.7	4.4
Rutherford County	10,000	16%	3.5	4.8
Transylvania County	6,600	12%	3.1	4.5
North Carolina	8,000	14%	3.0	4.1
Top U.S. Performers	7,300	12%	3.0	4.1

For other health-related factors, including smoking and chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes, rates are generally lower or consistent with the state, with the exception of smoking, which is higher in three counties (Table 48).

Table 48. Adult Health Factors by Geographic Area (2020)^{lxxviii,38}

Geographic Area	% Smokers	% Obese	% Diabetic	HIV Prevalence Rate per 100,000
Henderson County	17%	34%	8%	171
Polk County	19%	34%	11%	373
Rutherford County	23%	33%	10%	111
Transylvania County	18%	29%	9%	123
North Carolina	17%	34%	11%	374
Top U.S. Performers	16%	32%	9%	380

Across other health-related benchmarks, there is disparity across the service area. For example, life expectancy for children increased slightly for younger children (Table 49). 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 49. Life Expectancy by Geographic Area and Race (2018-2020)^{lxxix,39}

Geographic Area and Race	Age <1	Ages 1-4
Henderson County	79.0	78.4
• White/Non-Hispanic	79.3	78.7
• African American	74.6	73.6
Polk County	79.4	78.4
• White/Non-Hispanic	80.1	79.1
• African American	71.0	70.0
Rutherford County	75.2	74.7
• White/Non-Hispanic	75.7	75.1
• African American	71.5	71.0
Transylvania County	80.9	80.6
• White/Non-Hispanic	80.9	80.7
• African American	79.1	78.1
North Carolina	77.7	77.2
• White/Non-Hispanic	78.1	77.5
• African American	74.7	74.6

³⁷ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁸ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁹ Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

Health Care and Clinical Care

The ratio of primary care physicians, dentists, and mental health providers to individuals in counties in the service area is described in Table 50. With the exception of the primary care physician and dentist ratios in Henderson County and the mental health provider ratio in Transylvania County, the provider ratios are all less than the statewide rate across all categories. The rural nature of the service area contributes to the lack of central resources, and many residents travel outside the service area to access health services.

Table 50. Access to Care - Ratio of Health Care Providers by Geographic Area^{lxxx,40}

Geographic Area	Primary Care Physician Ratio (2020)	Dentist Ratio (2021)	Mental Health Provider Ratio (2022)
Henderson County	1,140:1	1,650:1	410:1
Polk County	1,440:1	1,710:1	360:1
Rutherford County	2,240:1	3,800:1	590:1
Transylvania County	1,440:1	2,550:1	320:1
North Carolina	1,410:1	1,660:1	340:1
Top U.S. Performers	1,310:1	1,380:1	340:1

Oral Health. WNCSource successfully addresses the oral health needs within the service area. As seen in Table 51, PIR data demonstrate the high quality of support WNCSource provides by increasing access to oral health services, with rates of accessible dental care ranging from 48.6%-82.2% across program types.^{lxxxi}

WNCSource leadership reports that Transylvania County does not have dentists who accept Medicaid for children under age 3. This is also the case with some pediatric dentists in Henderson County, who are also scheduling 8-month follow-up appointments for children instead of the typical 6 months. The American Dental Association recommends children be seen by a dentist by age 1 to get used to care. According to PIR data, beginning at age 3 (Head Start age), there is an uptick in children going to the dentist. WNCSource leadership note that some pediatricians are performing dental checks as part of EPSDT by providing a dental exam and fluoride varnish. This data may not be captured in the PIR.

Table 51. WNCSource Oral Health PIR Data at End of Enrollment Year (2021-2022)^{lxxxii}

Indicator	Early Head Start	Head Start	Early Head Start-CCP
Number of children with continuous, accessible dental care provided by a dentist	100 (56.8%)	120 (82.2%)	52 (48.6%)
Number of children up-to-date on a schedule of preventive and primary oral health care according to the NC EPSDT	22	n/a	n/a
Number of children diagnosed as needing treatment	n/a	12	0
Number of children diagnosed as receiving treatment	n/a	12	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.^{lxxxiii}

Across the state, there are large numbers of children who are receiving preventive care and have teeth in excellent or very good condition (Table 52). However, slightly more than 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).^{lxxxiv}

⁴⁰ Ratios greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 52. Statewide Oral Health Data (2020-2021)^{lxxxv}

Geographic Area	Children Received Preventive Care	Children whose teeth are in excellent or very good condition
North Carolina	77%	79%

Access to Health Insurance. In North Carolina, the rate of children without health insurance is 5%. While Rutherford County has a rate of uninsured children that is the same as the state, the other counties in the service area have a rate that is slightly greater (6%) (Table 53).^{lxxxvi}

Table 53. Percent of Children, Under Age 19, Without Health Insurance by Geographic Area (2020) ^{lxxxvii 41}

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

Most children enrolled in WNCSource programs continue to participate in health insurance available through Medicaid and/or CHIP, as reflected in Table 54. Additionally, in the Early Head Start program, four pregnant women were enrolled in the program and all four were without health insurance at the end of enrollment.^{lxxxviii}

Table 54. WNCSource Enrolled Children, Health Insurance Status at End of Enrollment (2021-2022) ^{lxxxix}

Program Type	Medicaid and/or CHIP	State, private, or other insurance only	No Insurance
Head Start	137	3	6
Early Head Start	168	3	1
Early Head Start-CCP	110	0	6

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 (Table 55).

Table 55. Rate of Uninsured Adults (Over Age 65) by Geographic Area (2021)^x

Geographic Area	% Uninsured
Henderson County	18%
Polk County	16%
Rutherford County	17%
Transylvania County	18%
North Carolina	15%
United States	12%

⁴¹ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Infant and Maternal Health

Prenatal Care. Child health and well-being begins with adequate prenatal care. Access to first trimester prenatal care continues to be below the statewide rate in Polk County, though rates improved in Rutherford County from 2019 to 2020 (Table 56).

Table 56. Women Who Receive Early Prenatal Care by Geographic Area, Percent of Total Births (2019-2020)^{xcii 42}

Geographic Area	2019	2020
Henderson County	76.2%	83.0%
Polk County	62.7%	66.7%
Rutherford County	61.9%	73.7%
Transylvania County	82.1%	84.1%
North Carolina	67.5%	67.5%

Of the four pregnant women enrolled in WNCSource Early Head Start, three received prenatal health care and three received postnatal care.^{xcii}

Teen Pregnancy. In North Carolina in 2021, the rate of births to teenage girls aged 15 to 19 was 22.1 per 1,000, 2.5% lower than in 2018. The teen pregnancy rate continues to be greatest for Hispanic teens.^{xciii}

WNCSource leadership noted that the EHS expansion grant tasks the agency with serving at least six pregnant women each year in Rutherford County. The agency has a partnership with Hands of Hope Pregnancy Resource Center, which has referred two pregnant teens, but they were not able to enroll due to schooling and other challenges. The agency continues to put forth a strong recruitment effort particularly for teen mothers in Rutherford County, though reports apprehension from the community.

Table 57. Teen Pregnancies (15-19 Years Old) (2021)^{xciv 43}

Geographic Area	Number of Pregnancies	Teen pregnancy rate	Teen pregnancy rate - African American	Teen pregnancy rate - Hispanic	Teen pregnancy rate - White
Henderson County	58	19.2	0	34.5	15
Polk County	10	*	*	*	*
Rutherford County	46	24.9	*	*	*
Transylvania County	11	*	*	*	*
North Carolina	7,556	22.1	32.3	39.4	12.8

*Rates based on small numbers (<20 cases) are not stable and not provided.

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.^{xcv}

Overall, children born with low birth weight exceeded the state rate in Rutherford County, and increased in that county, from the year prior, while decreasing in all other counties in the service area (Table 58).

⁴² Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴³ Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 59 describes the percentage of infants, by race, born at low birth weight by county and highlights percentages above the state percentages. Data by race is available for 2021. 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 58. Percentage of Low Birth Weight by Geographic Area^{xcvi 44}

Geographic Area	2021	2022
Henderson County	9.1%	8.2%
Polk County	7.4%	7.2%
Rutherford County	9.0%	11.8%
Transylvania County	10.1%	9.3%
North Carolina	9.3%	9.3%

Table 59. Percentage of Low Birth Weight by Geographic Area and Race (2021)^{xcvii 45}

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 60 and 61. In 2020, rate of infant mortality in Henderson (8.0), Rutherford (8.0), and Transylvania County (8.8) were above the state rate (6.9%). Overall, the number of infant deaths in the service area has been within the range of 10-15 deaths since 2015, but is trending on the higher end at 15 deaths in 2020.

⁴⁴ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴⁵ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 60. Infant Mortality Rate by Geographic Area and Race^{xcviii}

Geographic Area and Race	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Henderson County	7.5	5.5	5.8	4.6	5.9	8.0
• White/Non-Hispanic	8.8	2.5	5.2	2.5	6.6	8.2
• African American	0	23.8*	33.3*	0	0	0.0
• Hispanic	0	14.2	4.6	14.9	4.7	10.7
Polk County	7.1	7.1	6.2	0	0	0
• White/Non-Hispanic	8.6	0	7.4	0	0	0
• African American	0	0	0	0	0	0
• Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rutherford County	7.3	6.1	8.7	9.2	7.3	8.0
• White/Non-Hispanic	5.5	3.8	3.7	11.6	5.5	2.0
• African American	24.7*	0	33.3*	0	24.7*	2.0
• Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transylvania County	3.6	0	7.9	7.2	11.5*	8.8
• White/Non-Hispanic	4.3	0	9.5	8.2	8.7*	10.2
• African American	0	0	0	0	0	0
• Hispanic	0	0	0	0	66.7*	0
North Carolina	7.3	7.2	7.1	6.8	6.8	6.9
• White/Non-Hispanic	5.7	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.7	4.8
• African American	12.5	13.4	12.5	12.2	12.5	12.8
• Hispanic	5.4	6.0	5.7	4.8	5.6	5.8

* Based on a fewer than 10 deaths

Table 61. Infant Mortality (Number of Infant Deaths) by Geographic Area and Race^{xcix}

Geographic Area and Race	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Henderson County	8	6	6	5	6	8
White/Non-Hispanic	7	2	4	2	5	6
African American	0	1	1	0	0	0
Hispanic	1	3	1	3	1	2
Polk County	1	1	1	0	0	0
White/Non-Hispanic	1	1	1	0	0	0
African American	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rutherford County	5	4	6	6	1	5
White/Non-Hispanic	3	2	2	6	0	2
African American	2	0	3	0	0	2
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	1	0
Transylvania County	1	0	2	2	3	2
White/Non-Hispanic	1	0	2	2	2	2
African American	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Service Area Total	15	11	15	13	10	15
North Carolina	884	873	852	806	810	803
White/Non-Hispanic	385	335	356	325	300	297
African American	360	380	361	350	363	366
Hispanic	98	111	106	88	107	112

* 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, at the end of enrollment (Table 62).^c

This past year, WNCSource hired a Family Advocate who is a longtime Rutherford County resident, where WNCSource has struggled to deliver services due to the geography. With the new position, services to child care partners in the county have greatly improved. The FA is there at least 4 days a week. Specifically, there have been great increases in Policy Council representation and family engagement.

Table 62. 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) (2021-2022)^{ci}

Program Option	At Enrollment	End of Enrollment Year
Head Start	21.2% (31 out of 146)	83.6% (122 out of 146)
Early Head Start	9.7% (17 out of 176)	69.3% (122 out of 176)
Early Head Start-CCP	3.7% (4 out of 107)	43.9% (47 out of 107)

WNCSource makes great strides to ensure children receive care that meets age appropriate Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT). requirements (Table 63).

Table 63. Statewide EPSDT Participation Report by Age Group (2021)^{cii}

Indicator	<1 year old	1-2 years old	3-5 years old
Expected number of screenings per eligible	3.10	2.43	0.97
Expected number of screenings	172,050	353,611	208,203
Total screens received	241,705	287,851	155,995

Obesity and chronic diseases. Rates of identified health conditions were not significantly different than those reported in prior years; across the program there were eight children with asthma, four with vision problems, four with a seizure disorder, three with life threatening allergies and one with hearing difficulties. Body Mass Index among Head Start children showed 54.1% were at a healthy weight, while 6.2% were underweight and the combined overweight/obesity rate was 39.7%.

Table 64. WNCSource: Enrolled Children Identified Health Conditions^{ciii}

Indicator	Early Head Start	Head Start	Early Head Start-CCP
Asthma	3	4	1
Hearing Difficulties	1	0	0
Vision Problems	1	3	0
Seizures	2	2	0
Life Threatening Allergies	2	1	0
Body Mass Index: Head Start Only			
Underweight	n/a	9 (6.2%)	n/a
Healthy weight	n/a	79 (54.1%)	n/a
Overweight	n/a	25 (17.1%)	n/a
Obese	n/a	33 (22.6%)	n/a

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 15.9%. The rate of children who are enrolled in the WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start programs who are overweight or obese is

higher (22.6%).^{civ} Weight for children under the age of 2 in the EHS program is not collected due to the rapid and constant physical growth of infants and toddlers.^{cv}

The highest percentages of underweight children who receive WIC services reside in Polk County (4.7%) with rates that vary from 2.2% to 4.7% (Table 66); while the children enrolled in WNCSource programs have an overall rate of 6.2% (representing just nine children).^{cvi}

Table 65. Number and Percentage of Children 2-4 years of age who receive WIC Program Services, by BMI Status (Underweight, Healthy Weight, Overweight, Obese) by Geographic Area, NC-WIC Program* (2019)^{cvi} 46

Geographic Area	Underweight	Healthy weight	Overweight	Obese
Henderson County	2.9%	66.3%	14.8%	16.0%
Polk County	4.7%	69.2%	15.9%	10.3%
Rutherford County	2.2%	64.7%	16.3%	16.9%
Transylvania County	3.8%	65.4%	16.1%	14.7%
North Carolina	4.0%	65.6%	14.4%	15.9%

The adult and adolescent overweight/obesity rate in North Carolina continues to be slightly above national rates for adults and on par for children ages 10-17.^{cvi}

Table 66. Prevalence of Obesity and Overweight Adults and Children in North Carolina (2020)^{cix}

Geographic Area	Adult Obesity
Henderson County	34%
Polk County	32%
Rutherford County	33%
Transylvania County	29%
North Carolina	34%
US	32%
Children 10-17	
North Carolina	31%
US	31%

Table 67. Overweight or Obese Ages 10-17, by Gender in North Carolina (2016-2021)^{cx}

Gender	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Male	32%	33%	34%	35%	33%
Female	29%	27%	27%	33%	34%
Total Age 10-17	31%	30%	31%	34%	34%

As seen in PIR data, asthma is somewhat of an ongoing issue for individuals within the four counties in the service area. Table 68 indicates the hospitalization discharges per county from 2016 to 2021. While under 5 in all counties in the service area, the rate was 61 (pre 100,000) in the state.

Table 68. Asthma Hospital Discharges (Ages 0-14), Rate per 100,000 in North Carolina by Geographic Area^{cx}

Geographic Area	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Henderson County	<5	<5	5	6	<5	<5
Polk County	<5	0	0	0	0	<5
Rutherford County	9	<5	6	6	<5	<5
Transylvania County	6	<5	<5	0	<5	0
North Carolina	1,828	1,777	1,877	1,570	692	1,160
North Carolina Rate	96	93	99	82	36	61

⁴⁶ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Finally, no enrolled children at WNCSource in 2021-2022 were identified as having an elevated lead level; in 2019, Transylvania County identified a significantly higher percentage of children with elevated lead levels than the state. Though Polk County has consistently reported a higher percentage of children with elevated lead levels than the state since 2015, in 2019 the levels were lower (Table 69).

Table 69. Lead Testing Data (2015-2018)^{cxii 47}

Geographic Area	Children age 1-2 with elevated lead levels (≥ 5 mg per dl)				
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Henderson County	0.9%	1.8%	1.0%	1.1%	1.8%
Polk County	3.8%	1.9%	5.9%	1.5%	1.1%
Rutherford County	1.4%	2.0%	2.0%	0.2%	1.0%
Transylvania County	8.7%	1.0%	0.7%	1.4%	5.3%
North Carolina	1.7%	1.7%	1.3%	1.2%	1.8%

Mental Health. In WNCSource's Head Start/ Early Head Start programs during the 2022-2023 program year, three Mental Health Consultants (MHC) continue to provide services for enrolled children and families. The MHCs 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 and their teachers. All classrooms received informal check-ins or formal support from either an MHC or EI team member, as reflected in Tables 70 and 71.

Table 70. Direct Mental Health Consultant and Early Intervention Staff - Support to Individual Children (2022-2023)⁴⁸

Program Type	Children Receiving Direct Services from MHC	Children Receiving Support from EI Team Member
Head Start	14	42
Early Head Start	21	52
Early Head Start – CCP	10	24
Total	45	118

Table 71. Mental Health Consultant and Early Intervention Staff - Classroom Support (2022-2023)⁴⁹

Program Type	Check in with MHC or EI Team	Classroom Support by MHC	Classroom Support by MHC and/or EIT
Head Start	All classrooms	6	9
Early Head Start	All classrooms	9	10
Early Head Start – CCP	All classrooms	5	8
Total	All classrooms	20	27

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 72). 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.^{cxiii} This table is not updated and represents the most recent data available.

The greatest suicide rates are seen for individuals in the state ages 45-54 (19.2%) and 25-34 (18.1%).^{cxiv}

⁴⁷ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴⁸ Reported by WNCSource Administrators.

⁴⁹ Reported by WNCSource Administrators.

While the rate of death by suicide in 2020 was 13.4 in the state, elevated rates were reflected in Henderson County (Table 73). WNCSource leadership report a surge in Henderson (and Buncombe County) particularly among high school students. This is a big focus in Henderson County. Multiple WNCSource family support staff attended a statewide First Aid Mental Health training, which was updated to focus on how to talk to teens with suicidal thoughts.

Table 72. Mental Health Indicators for Adults (18+) and Adolescents (12-17 years old) in North Carolina^{cxv}

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

Table 73. Suicide Deaths and Rates by County of Death (2020)^{cxvi} 50

Geographic Area	Number	Rate
Henderson County	21	17.7
Polk County	4	ND
Rutherford County	9	13.4
Transylvania County	3	ND
North Carolina	1,418	13.4

Substance Abuse

In 2021, North Carolina reported a 22% increase in overdose deaths. Data from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) in 2021 show that 4,041 North Carolinians lost their lives to overdose, the highest number of overdose deaths in a single year on record in the state.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this crisis. Overdose deaths have increased 72% since 2019, with a 40% jump in 2020 during the first year of the pandemic. The number of people who have died from overdose in the state has also impacted some historically marginalized communities at greater rates, with mortality rates increasing 117% for American Indian residents and 139% for Black/African American residents, as compared to 53% for White residents.

The rise in overdose deaths in recent years is driven by illegally manufactured fentanyl. In 2021, more than 77% of overdose deaths in North Carolina likely involved fentanyl. In response, NCDHHS is expanding access to treatment and prevention.^{cxvii}

⁵⁰ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

As seen in Table 74, high rates of opioid use exist within the WNCSource service area, with significant drug overdose rates reflected in all counties, with the exception of Polk County. ^{cxviii}

Table 74. Overdose Deaths (2021) by Geographic Area^{cxix 51}

Geographic Area	Rate of Unintentional Opioid Overdose Deaths (2015-2019)	Drug Overdose Rate (2021)	Count
Henderson County	13.0	29.0	34
Polk County	16.6	9.7	2
Rutherford County	17.1	50.7	34
Transylvania County	10.6	20.4	7
Service Area	15.3	---	77

Tobacco, excessive drinking, and alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths vary across the service area, with some elevated rates as noted in Table 75.

Table 75. Tobacco and Alcohol Use by Geographic Area^{cxx}

Geographic Area	Tobacco Use ⁵² (2020)	Excessive Drinking (2020)	Alcohol-Related Motor Vehicle Deaths (2016-2020)
Henderson County	17%	17%	28%
Polk County	17%	19%	13%
Rutherford County	23%	17%	13%
Transylvania County	18%	19%	13%
North Carolina	17%	17%	26%
United States	16%	19%	27%

Nutrition

Healthy nutrition is a critical factor for children’s healthy development, particularly given the high rates of childhood obesity in the service area. Henderson County has the most limited access to healthy foods (the same as the state rate), while the highest food insecurity rates are reflected in the other three counties in the service area, all above the statewide rate (Table 76).

Table 76. Food Access by Geographic Area^{cxxi, 53}

Geographic Area	Food Environment Index ⁵⁴ (2019 & 2020) 0 worst, 10 best	% Limited Access to Healthy Foods (2019)	% Food Insecurity (2023)
Henderson County	7.5	8%	12%
Polk County	8.0	2%	13%
Rutherford County	6.8	5%	17%
Transylvania County	7.8	3%	14%
North Carolina	6.5	8%	12%
United States	7.9	6%	12%

⁵¹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵² Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵³ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵⁴ 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.

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 77).

Table 77. Census Tract Food Deserts in WNCSource's Service Area by County (2021)^{cxvii}

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

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).^{cxviii}

Beginning with the 2022-23 school year, the federally subsidized program ended. Free school meals are still available to those who meet income requirements; however, students coming from households earning just above income thresholds to qualify must pay for school breakfast and lunch at full price.

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).^{cxix} In the WNCSource service area, the rate of students eligible for free and reduced lunch ranges from 50.2% in Henderson School District to 75.9% in Rutherford School District (Table 78). Data through 2020 is the most current data available publicly.

Table 78. Free and Reduced Lunch Rate by School District (2015-2020)^{cxv}

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

Finally, North Carolina breastfeeding data indicates fairly high rates of breastfeeding in the service area. Table 79 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 79: Breastfeeding Initiation Rates by Geographic Area (2018-2019)⁵⁵

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

⁵⁵ Rates lower than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Social and Economic Factors Impacting Wellbeing

Home Value and Affordability

In 2021, 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, with the exception of owner costs in Henderson County. From 2019 to 2021, generally home values, owner costs and median rent levels have increased (Tables 80-84).

As current census data (2021) does not capture the impact of the pandemic on current home values, Zillow data is also utilized to supplement census data and provide a more real-time understanding of increasing housing costs in the service area. In 2023, Zillow data reflects that housing values increased dramatically and currently range from \$311,556 in Polk County to \$422,017 in Henderson County.^{cxvii} Zillow values indicate that all home values in the service area increased 26.8%-41.5% since 2021, as did associated rent and owner costs, which are linked to home values (Table 80).

Table 80. Median Home Value by Geographic Area (2021)^{cxvii}

Geographic Area	Median Home Value ⁵⁶	Median Owner Costs ⁵⁷	Median Rent
Henderson County	\$251,800	\$1,420	\$960
Polk County	\$228,000	\$1,239	\$870
Rutherford County	\$133,600	\$1,008	\$685
Transylvania County	\$250,200	\$1,361	\$787
North Carolina	\$197,500	\$1,397	\$988

Table 81. Median Home Value by Geographic Area (2019-2021)^{cxviii}

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	% change 2019-2021
Henderson County	\$214,000	\$232,000	\$251,800	18%
Polk County	\$225,700	\$222,700	\$228,000	1%
Rutherford County	\$124,100	\$128,800	\$133,600	8%
Transylvania County	\$221,900	\$231,300	\$250,200	13%
North Carolina	\$172,500	\$182,100	\$197,500	14%

Table 82: Zillow Home Values Index: Median Home Value (June 2023)^{cxix,58}

Geographic Area	Median Home Value (June 2023)	Change in Value from 2022 (1 Year)	Change in Value from 2021 Census Data to 2023 Zillow Data
Henderson County	\$422,017	+4.6%	+40.3%
Polk County	\$311,556	+1.4%	+26.8%
Rutherford County	\$216,750	+6.0%	+38.4%
Transylvania County	\$427,717	+6.0%	+41.5%
North Carolina	\$323,487	+4.3%	+38.9%

Table 83. Median Rent By Geographic Area (2019-2021)^{cxix}

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	% change 2019-2021
Henderson County	\$853	\$915	\$960	13%
Polk County	\$851	\$855	\$870	2%
Rutherford County	\$703	\$707	\$685	-3%
Transylvania County	\$756	\$731	\$787	4%
North Carolina	\$907	\$932	\$988	9%

⁵⁶ Values below the statewide value are highlighted.

⁵⁷ Values greater than the statewide value are highlighted.

⁵⁸ Values greater than the statewide value are highlighted.

Table 84. Median Owner Costs By Geographic Area (2019-2021)^{cxxxii}

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	% change 2019-2021
Henderson County	\$1,287	\$1,324	\$1,420	10%
Polk County	\$1,238	\$1,216	\$1,239	0%
Rutherford County	\$1,084	\$1,078	\$1,008	-7%
Transylvania County	\$1,224	\$1,283	\$1,361	11%
North Carolina	\$1,314	\$1,328	\$1,397	6%

The rental vacancy rate is lower than the statewide rate in all counties, with the exception of Polk County (Table 85). Transylvania County continues to have a particularly low rental vacancy rate (there are fewer homes available to renters in these areas). While the percentage of households spending 30% or more of their monthly income on rent is over 39% across the service area, rates are particularly high in Rutherford County (50.6%). The high rental cost burden in the service area 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 85. Housing Characteristics by Geographic Area (2021)^{cxxxii,59}

Geographic Area	Rental Vacancy Rate	Households Spending 30% or More of Monthly Income on Rent
Henderson County	6.10%	45.50%
Polk County	8.10%	39.60%
Rutherford County	6.50%	50.60%
Transylvania County	1.70%	40.80%
North Carolina	6.60%	47.20%

In the service area, 11%-14% of individuals are experiencing severe housing problems, lower than the statewide rate (15%), as reflected in Table 86. WNCSource leadership report that overcrowding is particularly an issue in Henderson and Transylvania County.

Table 86. Households Experiencing at Least 1 of 4 Severe Housing Problems (overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen, lack of plumbing) by Geographic Area (2013-2019)^{cxxxiii}

Geographic Area	2013-2017	2015-2019	Change 2013-2017 to 2015-2019
Henderson County	13%	11%	-2%
Polk County	13%	13%	0%
Rutherford County	14%	14%	0%
Transylvania County	13%	13%	0%
North Carolina	15%	14%	-1%
United States	17%	17%	0%

WNCSource leadership note that families are leaving Henderson County and moving south to Polk and Rutherford counties, but rent costs are rising there as well. Despite moving south, many families continue to travel to Henderson County for higher paying jobs. There is also very limited child care available in Polk County.

⁵⁹ Rental vacancy rates below the statewide rate, and household spending above the statewide rate, are highlighted.

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. When isolating the stress levels of respondents by income levels, it is clear that inflation is disproportionately impacting low-income households, including Black and Hispanic households and renters.

Lower income respondents (\$25,000-\$35,000 annual income) were almost 20% more likely to be “very stressed” by rising costs than those earning \$75,000-\$100,000 annually. 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.^{cxxxiv}

With consumer prices in November 2022 up 7.1% from a year prior, families are struggling with increasing prices as the cost of meeting basic needs rises. The Federal Reserve notes that while inflation may have peaked, the price of many necessities remains elevated, with increases in food costs (+10.6%), fuel (+10.1%), rent (+7.9%), and medical services (+4.4%).^{cxxxv}

In terms of transportation, while fuel prices are increasing, so are the costs of used cars and automobile maintenance and repairs. In March 2023, according to Kelley Blue Book, the average new vehicle price was \$48,763 compared to \$37,876 pre-pandemic; retail used vehicle prices now average \$26,510.^{cxxxvi}

A recent study conducted by the car insurance comparison site, Jerry, suggests that the used car market will not return to pre-pandemic levels until new car production returns to pre-pandemic levels. When the prices drop, pent-up demand may also be a factor in keeping costs high for some time. “In 2019, there were 13.1 million used cars on the market. That dropped to 11.6 million in 2020 and hit a low of 9.5 million in 2022.” Several factors have led to a shortage in the used car market keeping used car prices high, including: a shortage of semiconductors, halts in production lines for new cars, increased demand, and individuals with leased cars extending lease durations.^{cxxxvii}

With rising used car prices, WNCSource leadership note an increase in families that do not have a vehicle or cannot afford fuel and if a family car breaks down, they often cannot afford to replace or repair it, directly impacting the ability to drive children to programming. Even before the pandemic, many enrolled families have one vehicle, and it is not uncommon to have the vehicle break down and go without repairs until the family’s next paycheck.

There are few resources to support family transportation needs, though Working Wheels provides affordable, reliable transportation to local families in need, and True Ridge, a community provider that supports Hispanic families, is a partner with Working Wheels, though only partners can refer families to Working Wheels and WNCSource is not a partner.

In addition to the heightened prices for used cars, the cost of maintenance and repairs impact car owners. The car repair industry’s level of demand for vehicle technicians continues to outpace supply by almost 3-to-1, while the prices increase as car repair technology demands higher priced equipment, increasing repair costs.^{cxxxviii}

Income Inequality

Income inequality is further described in Table 87. 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 87. Income Inequality Ratio by Geographic Area (2015-2019 & 2017-2021)^{cxxxix}

Geographic Area	Income Inequality Ratio 2015-2019	Income Inequality Ratio 2017-2021	Change Over Time
Henderson County	4.1	4.2	Less optimal
Polk County	3.8	4.3	Less optimal
Rutherford County	4.7	4.4	More optimal
Transylvania County	4.0	4.0	No change
North Carolina	4.7	4.7	No change
United States	3.7	4.9	Less optimal

Table 88. Affordable Housing Data by Geographic Area (2022)^{cxli}

Geographic Area	Henderson County	Polk County	Rutherford County	Transylvania County
Percent Renters	26%	24%	28%	24%
Minimum Wage*	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25
Two-bedroom Housing Wage	\$26.50	\$15.83	\$13.82	\$17.98
Two-bedroom Fair Market Rent	\$1,378	\$823	\$724	\$935
Work Hours/Week at Minimum Wage for Two-bedroom Housing	146	87	77	99

*Data is based on 2022 minimum wage. 2022 minimum wage is \$15.74.

In order to support basic household necessities, many families depend on a wide range of social services to support their families, including subsidized child care, housing, cash and nutrition assistance. Public assistance is described in the Eligible Children and Pregnant Women section.

The *Living Wage Model*, first developed by Dr. Amy Glasmeier in 2004 “is a market-based approach that draws upon geographically specific expenditure data related to a family’s likely minimum food, childcare, health insurance, housing, transportation, and other basic necessities (e.g., clothing, personal care items) costs. The living wage draws on these cost elements and the rough effects of income and payroll taxes to determine the minimum employment earnings necessary to meet a family’s basic needs while also maintaining self-sufficiency.”^{cxli}

Cost differentials based on household composition have a significant impact on single parents. In North Carolina, the “living wage” needed to support a two-parent (1 adult working) family with two children is \$79,955.20, as one parent in the household is presumed to be caring for children (therefore reducing the largest household expense for households with children). The living wage for a single-parent family with two children is 17.2% higher (\$96,512.00) because child care expenses are included in this total (Table 90).

In either household type described, there is an estimated deficit when comparing median income levels to the funds needed to provide the basic necessities for a family, with a greater discrepancy in the ability for single-parent families to support a household’s expenses (Table 91).

Table 89. Living Wage Calculator by Household Type (2022) ^{cxlii}

Geographic Area	1 adult, 2 children		2 adults (1 working), 2 children	
	Hourly	Annual Equivalent	Hourly	Annual Equivalent
Henderson County	\$49.66	\$103,292.80	\$41.31	\$85,924.80
Polk County	\$42.14	\$87,651.20	\$37.20	\$77,376.00
Rutherford County	\$40.54	\$84,323.20	\$36.47	\$75,857.60
Transylvania County	\$43.21	\$89,876.80	\$38.03	\$79,102.40
North Carolina	\$46.40	\$96,512.00	\$38.44	\$79,955.20

Table 90. Median Household Income (2021) vs. Living Wage Model (2022)

Geographic Area	Median Household Income (2021)	Living Wage: 1 adult 2 children	Living Wage: 2 adults (1 working) 2 children
Henderson County	\$59,928	\$103,292.80	\$85,924.80
Polk County	\$55,058	\$87,651.20	\$77,376.00
Rutherford County	\$45,500	\$84,323.20	\$75,857.60
Transylvania County	\$57,830	\$89,876.80	\$79,102.40
North Carolina	\$60,516	\$96,512.00	\$79,955.20

Data for the seven expense categories detailed in the Living Wage Calculator vary by household type, though some of the largest expenses are consistently housing and transportation. As shown in Table 92, having one parent stay home to care for children eliminates one of the highest categorical expenses for families (child care).

Table 91. Typical Expenses by Geographic Area: 1 adult, 2 children (2022) ^{cxliii}

Typical Expenses	North Carolina
Food	\$8,707
Child Care	\$20,500
Medical	\$10,553
Housing	\$12,200
Transportation	\$12,045
Civic	\$6,821
Other	\$8,755
Required annual income after taxes	\$79,712
Annual taxes	\$16,795
Required annual income before taxes	\$96,507

Table 92. Typical Expenses by Geographic Area: 2 adults (1 working), 2 children (2022) ^{cxliv}

Typical Expenses	North Carolina
Food	\$11,564
Child Care	\$0
Medical	\$10,478
Housing	\$12,200
Transportation	\$14,484
Civic	\$9,300
Other	\$9,610
Required annual income after taxes	\$67,766
Annual taxes	\$12,191
Required annual income before taxes	\$79,957

Wages by Occupational Group. For comparison, the Living Wage Calculator provides the median hourly wage rates for 22 major occupations in the nation. Values were inflated from 2021 to December 2022 dollars using the Consumer Price Index inflation multiplier from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.^{cxlv} Table 93 shows these typical wages for North Carolina by occupational area.

Table 93. Typical Annual Salaries by Geographic Area (2022)^{cxlvi}

Occupational Area	Henderson County	Polk County	Rutherford County	Transylvania County	North Carolina
Management	\$112,315	\$112,315	\$112,315	\$112,315	\$112,315
Business & Financial Operations	\$83,021	\$83,021	\$83,021	\$83,021	\$83,021
Computer & Mathematical	\$108,633	\$108,633	\$108,633	\$108,633	\$108,633
Architecture & Engineering	\$85,513	\$85,513	\$85,513	\$85,513	\$85,513
Life, Physical, & Social Science	\$70,706	\$70,706	\$70,706	\$70,706	\$70,706
Community & Social Service	\$52,404	\$52,404	\$52,404	\$52,404	\$52,404
Legal	\$68,556	\$68,556	\$68,556	\$68,556	\$68,556
Education, Training, & Library	\$52,833	\$52,833	\$52,833	\$52,833	\$52,833
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, & Media	\$53,815	\$53,815	\$53,815	\$53,815	\$53,815
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$68,126	\$68,126	\$68,126	\$68,126	\$68,126
Healthcare Support	\$32,106	\$32,106	\$32,106	\$32,106	\$32,106
Protective Service	\$43,010	\$43,010	\$43,010	\$43,010	\$43,010
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$25,204	\$25,204	\$25,204	\$25,204	\$25,204
Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	\$31,775	\$31,775	\$31,775	\$31,775	\$31,775
Personal Care & Service	\$30,265	\$30,265	\$30,265	\$30,265	\$30,265
Sales & Related	\$32,404	\$32,404	\$32,404	\$32,404	\$32,404
Office & Administrative Support	\$41,069	\$41,069	\$41,069	\$41,069	\$41,069
Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	\$34,950	\$34,950	\$34,950	\$34,950	\$34,950
Construction & Extraction	\$48,181	\$48,181	\$48,181	\$48,181	\$48,181
Installation, Maintenance, & Repair	\$52,238	\$52,238	\$52,238	\$52,238	\$52,238
Production	\$40,143	\$40,143	\$40,143	\$40,143	\$40,143
Transportation & Material Moving	\$34,487	\$34,487	\$34,487	\$34,487	\$34,487

State Minimum Wage

The Office of Head Start's *Guide for Conducting a Wage and Fringe Benefits Comparability Survey* states: "the Head Start Act, Section 653 requires that Head Start programs not pay less than the minimum wage rate prescribed in section 6(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 and encourages Head Start agencies to provide compensation according to salary scales that are based on training and experience."

The current federal minimum wage, which was set on July 24, 2009, is \$7.25 per hour. In addition to federal minimum wage, many states have minimum wage laws, which may provide greater employee protections. Employers must comply with both.^{cxlvii}

Table 94. State Minimum Wage (2022)^{cxlviii}

State	State Minimum Wage	Notes
North Carolina	\$7.25	Premium pay after 40 hours weekly. Premium pay is required after 45 hours a week in seasonal amusements or recreational establishments. The overtime premium rate is one and one-half times the employee's regular rate.

Community Safety and Incarceration

As described in Table 95, the crime index across types of crime continues to be lower in the WNCSource service area than statewide. In the service area, there were two domestic violence related homicide deaths.

Table 95. Community Safety by Geographic Area (2020-2021) ^{cxlix}

Geographic Area	2020			2021		
	Index Crime Rate	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate	Index Crime Rate	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate
Henderson County	1,590.9	128.5	1,462.4	2,039.7	155.8	1,883.9
Polk County	1,431.3	100.9	1,330.3	1,596.5	93.6	1,502.9
Rutherford County	2,481.3	191.2	2,290.0	2009.9	237.8	1,772.0
Transylvania County	1,127.9	141.7	986.2	978.5	133.7	844.8
North Carolina	2,741.2	446.1	2,295.1	2,586.4	430.2	2,156.1

Table 96. Domestic Violence Related Homicides by Geographic Area (2017-2020)^{cl}

Geographic Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Henderson County	0	1	0	0	1
Polk County	1	2	0	0	0
Rutherford County	0	0	0	0	1
Transylvania County	0	1	0	0	0
North Carolina				134	148

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING

Labor Force, Industries, and Occupations

In the service area, the percent of the population in the labor force ranges from 52.80% in Rutherford County to 58.10% 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 97, 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 Rutherford County.

Table 97. Percent of the Population in Labor Force (Age 16+) by Geographic Area (2021)^{cli,60}

Geographic Area	Population Age 16+	Households with Children Under Age 6, All Parents in Family in Labor Force
Henderson County	58.10%	68.30%
Polk County	53.80%	76.50%
Rutherford County	52.80%	65.20%
Transylvania County	53.10%	86.80%
North Carolina	62.60%	66.50%

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 98).

Table 98. Number of Employed Individuals (Age 16+) and Percentage of the Employed Workforce by Class of Worker and Geographic Area (2021)^{clii}

Geographic Area	Private wage and salary workers	Government Workers	Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	Unpaid family workers
Henderson County	43,826 (81.2%)	5,506 (10.2%)	4,567 (8.5%)	73 (0.1%)
Polk County	6,951 (80.8%)	832 (9.7%)	814 (9.5%)	10 (0.1%)
Rutherford County	20,951 (80.1%)	3,354 (12.8%)	1,804 (6.9%)	48 (0.2%)
Transylvania County	10,800 (75.5%)	1,893 (13.2%)	1,589 (11.1%)	17 (0.1%)
North Carolina	3,888,016 (80.2%)	674,248 (13.9%)	273,785 (5.6%)	9,719 (0.2%)

The types of employment across the service area are reflected in Table 99, with the largest numbers of individuals employed in education services, and health care and social assistance, manufacturing and retail trade.

Table 99: Types of Employment by County (2021)^{cliii 61}

County	Agriculture Forest/Fishing	Construction	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Transportation Warehousing	Finance, insurance, real estate	Professional & Technical Services	Education services, and health care and	Arts, entertainment, and recreation,	Other Services Ex. Public Admin.	Public Administration
Henderson County	676	4,867	6,234	7,658	1,785	3,222	4,856	11,892	6,242	1,746	1,223
Polk County	276	773	1,059	1,014	273	608	787	2,158	642	573	168
Rutherford County	455	1,875	4,998	3,495	1,551	894	2,357	5,334	2,054	1,585	907
Transylvania County	241	1,287	1,424	1,507	417	995	1,341	3,250	1,975	988	516
Service Area Total	1,648	8,802	13,715	13,674	4,026	5,719	9,341	22,634	10,913	4,892	2,814

In 2021, with the exception of Rutherford County, residents worked from home at rates above the statewide rate. With the impact of the pandemic, the rate of working from home increased across the service area from 2019.

⁶⁰ Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

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

Table 100. Workers Age 16+, Working from Home (2021) ^{cliv,62}

Geographic Area	Percent of Labor Force
Henderson County	7.8%
Polk County	10.9%
Rutherford County	4.4%
Transylvania County	8.8%
North Carolina	10.3%

Unemployment

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 returning to 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 101 and 102).

Table 101. Monthly Unemployment Rates February 2020-April 2023 ^{cliv,63}

Geographic Area	2/20	4/20	6/20	9/20	4/21	6/21	9/21	4/22	6/22	9/22	4/23
Henderson County	3.1	14.6	8.8	6.1	4.2	4.8	3.4	2.8	3.6	3.0	2.6
Polk County	3.2	11.4	7.2	5.7	4.7	5.2	4.1	3.5	4.2	3.5	3.1
Rutherford County	4.5	15.9	11.4	8.8	6.6	7.4	5.5	4.1	5.1	4.4	4.3
Transylvania County	3.1	11.9	7.1	5.6	4.1	4.9	3.5	3.0	3.8	3.3	2.9
North Carolina	3.4	13.2	8.9	7.1	5.1	5.5	4.2	3.2	4.0	3.4	3.1

Table 102. Monthly Unemployment Rates, June 2022-April 2023 ^{clvi}

Geographic Area	6/22	7/22	8/22	9/22	10/22	11/22	12/22	1/23	2/23	3/23	4/23
Henderson County	3.6	3.3	3.6	3.0	3.3	3.1	2.7	3.2	3.1	2.9	2.6
Polk County	4.2	4.0	4.2	3.5	3.9	3.6	3.1	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.1
Rutherford County	5.1	5.1	5.4	4.4	4.8	4.7	4.1	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.3
Transylvania County	3.8	3.4	3.9	3.3	3.7	3.5	2.9	3.4	3.4	3.1	2.9
North Carolina	4.0	3.9	4.2	3.4	3.7	3.6	3.2	3.7	3.6	3.5	3.1

Families enrolled in the WNCSource programs have many parents who are working, ranging from 80.2% - 83% (Table 103).^{clvii}

⁶² Values greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

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

Table 103. WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Families Employment Status at Enrollment (2021-2022) ^{clviii}

Program	At least one parent/guardian is employed, in job training, or in school at end of enrollment	Neither/No parent/guardian is employed, in job training, or in school at end of enrollment (e.g., unemployed, retired, or disabled)	Total Number of Families
Head Start	64 (83%)	13 (16.9%)	77
Early Head Start	67 (81.7%)	15 (18.3%)	82
Early Head Start-CCP	77 (80.2%)	19 (19.8%)	96
Overall	208 (81.6%)	47 (18.4%)	255

Employers

The top employers across WNCSource’s service area are in the education and health services field or public administration (Table 104).

Table 104. Top Employers by County (2022, Quarter 3) ^{clix}

County	Industry	Employer	Employment Range
Henderson	Educational Services	Henderson Co Bd Of Public Education	1000+
	Health Care and Social Assistance	Margaret R Pardee Memorial Hosp	1000+
		Park Ridge Health	1000+
	Retail Trade	Ingles Markets, Inc	1000+
	Public Administration	Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	500-999
		County Of Henderson	500-999
Manufacturing	Wilsonart Llc	500-999	
	Meritor Heavy Vehicle Systems Llc	500-999	
	Polk	Polk County Public Schools	250-499
Health Care and Social Assistance	Health Care and Social Assistance	250-499	
	St Lukes Hospital Inc	250-499	
	County Of Polk	250-499	
Rutherford	Educational Services	Rutherford County Board Of Education	1000+
		Isothermal Community College	250-499
	Health Care and Social Assistance	Rutherford Regional Health System	250-499
	Public Administration	County Of Rutherford	500-999
	Construction	Sumter Builders Inc	250-499
	Information	American Greetings Corporation	250-499
	Manufacturing	Trelleborg Coated Systems Us Inc	250-499
		Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	250-499
	Retail Trade	Ingles Markets, Inc	250-499
Transylvania	Educational Services	Transylvania County Schools	500-999
		Brevard College Corp	250-499
		Mh Transylvania Regional Hospital L	250-499
	Public Administration	Transylvania County	250-499
	Retail Trade	Ingles Markets, Inc	250-499

Projections for 2021 and 2030, indicate that North Carolina could add more than 445,000 new jobs, with the “Health Care & Social Assistance” sector projected to again add the most jobs (76,000) and have the fifth highest percentage growth (12.7%), while the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation sector is projected to be the fastest growing industry with 25.3% growth. There are two sectors that alternatively are projected to lose jobs: Utilities (-8.1%) and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting (-2.4%).^{clx}

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.

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 3.6% (Henderson County) to 6.1% (Rutherford County); Rutherford County continues to be the only county with a rate higher than the statewide rate.

Table 105. Households with No Vehicle Available by Geographic Area (2019-2021)^{clxi,64}

Geographic Area	2019	2021
Henderson County	4.3%	3.60%
Polk County	5.6%	4.20%
Rutherford County	7.5%	6.10%
Transylvania County	3.8%	4.20%
North Carolina	5.8%	5.50%

In 2021, most residents in the service area drove themselves to work in their own cars (Table 106), adding to the cost of living for the area. Commute times remain under 30 minutes (Table 107).

Table 106. Transportation to Work by Geographic Area (2021)^{clxii,65}

Geographic Area	Car, truck, or van – drove alone	Car, truck, or van – carpoled	Public transportation	Walked	Other means
Henderson County	80.20%	9.20%	0.20%	1.20%	1.50%
Polk County	77.50%	9.30%	0.10%	1.10%	1.00%
Rutherford County	81.70%	11.00%	0.10%	0.90%	1.80%
Transylvania County	81.00%	6.80%	0.20%	2.10%	1.10%
North Carolina	77.20%	8.70%	0.90%	1.60%	1.30%

Table 107. Mean Travel Time to Work by Geographic Area (2021)^{clxiii,66}

Geographic Area	Minutes
Henderson County	21.9
Polk County	26
Rutherford County	25.2
Transylvania County	22.5
North Carolina	25

AGENCIES SERVING ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Programs

In the WNCSource service area, there are 119 licensed child care centers and family child care programs, with capacity to serve 5,346 children, birth to school age (if fully enrolled). Just over a third of programs are participating in NC Pre-K, and 73% accept child care subsidies. Forty-three percent of programs are licensed to serve infants. A detailed list of programs by zip code is provided in the Appendix.

⁶⁴ Rates above the state rate are highlighted.

⁶⁵ Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁶⁶ Values above the statewide value are highlighted.

Table 108. Number (and Capacity) of Child Care Facilities by Geographic Area (June 2023)^{clxiv}

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 (2226) ⁶⁷	8 (342)	12	42	20
Polk County	8 (465)	6 (306)	3	3	0
Rutherford County	27 (1561)	15 (784)	9	18	19
Transylvania County	16 (1030)	8 (459)	2	10	4
Service Area Total	100 (5346)	37 (1891)	27	73	43

Table 109. Number (and Capacity) of Family Child Care Homes by Geographic Area (June 2023)^{clxv}

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	11 (88)	7	8
Polk County	1 (8)	0	0
Rutherford County	5 (40)	4	4
Transylvania County	2 (16)	0	1
Service Area Total	19 (152)	11	13

Table 110. Total Number (and Capacity) of All Child Care Providers by Geographic Area (June 2023)^{clxvi}

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	60 (2314) ⁶⁸	8 (342)	12	49	28
Polk County	9 (473)	6 (306)	4	3	0
Rutherford County	32 (1601)	15 (784)	9	22	23
Transylvania County	18 (1046)	8 (459)	2	10	5
Service Area Total	119 (5434)	37 (1891)	27	84	56

As reflected in Table 111 and 112, programs in the WNCSource service area are participating in Smart Start (95%), North Carolina’s Quality Rating and Improvement System. Henderson and Rutherford counties continue to have the highest number of four- and five-star programs. A detailed list of programs by Smart Start star rating are provided by program type and by zip code in the Appendix.

Table 111. Number of Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Centers by Smart Start Star Level (June 2023)^{clxvii}

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	GS 110-106	Temporary	TOTAL
Henderson County	27	18	4	0	3	4	1	57
Polk County	6	0	1	0	0	1	0	8
Rutherford County	20	5	3	1	0	2	0	27
Transylvania County	8	3	3	0	0	3	0	16
Service Area Total	61	26	11	1	3	10	1	113

⁶⁷ 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).

⁶⁸ 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).

As described in Table 112, child care capacity (5,434 slots) in the service area is lower than the total number of children birth to age 5 in the service area (13,285 children), representing available capacity for 40.9% 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. Zip code level data, by program type, regarding the location of child care programs in the service area can be found in the Appendix.

Table 112. Summary Level: Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Compared to Capacity of Child Care Programs by Geographic Area (June 2023)

Geographic Area	Capacity of All Child Care Programs	Number of Children <5 Years Old ^{clxviii}	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty ^{clxix}
Henderson County	60 (2314) ⁶⁹	5527	1082
Polk County	9 (473)	1671	248
Rutherford County	32 (1601)	3639	945
Transylvania County	18 (1046)	2448	565
Service Area Total	119 (5,434)	13,285	2,840
North Carolina	371,907	583,646	124,073

The TEACH program is a scholarship program to support excellence in early educators. In 2023, 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 2021, in 2023, the same number of children are on the waiting list (84) in the service area and 2.8% fewer children are served with child care subsidies (1,044 compared to 1,074). Henderson and Rutherford counties, serve the largest number of children (431 and 441 respectively). In Polk County, 56 children are on the wait list and 116 children in Transylvania County.

Table 113. Child Care Data (June 2023)^{clxx}

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	4,014	431	n/a	47	19
Polk County	675	56	55	1	1
Rutherford County	2,581	441	n/a	2	1
Transylvania County	1,231	116	29	13	5
Service Area	8,501	1,044	84	63	26
North Carolina	482,199	59,364	4,818	1,955	882

⁶⁹ 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).

Within the service area, there are other early care and education providers. The Head Start providers supporting families within the WNCSource service area include:^{clxxi}

- 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 through Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV). The Children and Youth Branch supports two evidence-based home visiting models - Nurse Family Partnership and Healthy Families America. Services are available in Rutherford County, through a network partner, the Foothills Health District, offering the Nurse-Family Partnership model, which works by having specially trained nurses regularly visit young, first-time moms-to-be, starting early in the pregnancy, continuing through the child's second birthday. Overall, the program has the current funded capacity to serve 1,950 individuals in North Carolina annually.^{clxxii}

In addition to WNCSource home visiting services, two programs offer home visiting services in the service area. 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.^{clxxiii} In the service area, Smart Start provides funds for Home Visiting through the Children and Family Resource Center and typically serves 45 children.

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.^{clxxiv}

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.^{clxxv}

WNCSource leadership also note that Hands of Hope and 4C Nurses from the Health Department also provide visitation services focused on health and medical supports for new mothers, for a short period after childbirth to support new mothers in the service area.

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 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.^{clxxvi}

In North Carolina, in 2022, the rate of 4-year-olds served in a public early care and education setting was 19%, with 5% served in Head Start, 3% served in special education, and 73% served in “other” settings or “none.” The public settings include: special education, Head Start, or NC Pre-K. Only 8% of 3-year-old children are served in these settings. North Carolina recent rankings have declined to 30th out of all states in the United States and Washington, D.C., for 4-year-olds access to public preschool. During the 2021-2022 school year, North Carolina preschool enrolled 23,679 children, an increase of 3,742 from the prior year, as the program began to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. NC Pre-K continues to meet eight out of the ten quality benchmarks.^{clxxvii}

There are 34 NC Pre-K providers in the service area (Table 114). In the state, 51% of 4-year-old children participate in the NC Pre-K program. Across the WNCSource service area, participation rates have increased since 2020, ranging from increases of 5% to 27% (Table 115).

Table 114. Number of NC Pre-K Providers by Geographic Area (November 2021-June 2023) ^{clxxviii}

Geographic Area	November 2021	June 2023	Change 2021 to 2023
Henderson County	10	8	-2
Polk County	4	4	n/a
Rutherford County	14	14	n/a
Transylvania County	8	8	n/a
Service Area Total	36	34	-2

Table 115. Percentage of Four-Year-Old Children Enrolled in NC Pre-K Programs by Geographic Area (2020-2022) ^{clxxix}

Geographic Area	2020	12/2022	Change 2020 to 2022
Henderson County	35%	49%	+14%
Polk County	88%	103%	+15%
Rutherford County	55%	60%	+5%
Transylvania County	64%	91%	+27%
North Carolina	48%	51%	+3%

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 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. Affordable housing, mental health supports, and transportation remain an increasingly significant gap in the service area along with 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.

WNCSource is also a partner in the Early Childhood Homeless Community Engagement Project, which aims to develop communities that prioritize and support the resilience and development of young children and their families who experience homelessness. Participants in the pilot project will receive technical assistance and support throughout the project through Partners for Impact, LLC. Communities will create a shared vision, gather stakeholder input, and build both a plan for improving integration of services and a sustainability plan for the selected activities. The meetings include attendees from Henderson, Polk, Transylvania, and Rutherford. Meetings to date have included discussion around available resources in each county, lack of resources, barriers, agency collaboration and a future vision.

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 maintain home-based slots for families who need them.

a. **2022 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-19, and foundation funding, acquired property (Tebeau Street) and began renovations of the property to include 5 EHS and 3 NC Pre-K/HS classrooms.

- Applied for disaster relief and Part 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 in Sunny View Elementary (only one classroom is operational due to staffing shortage in 2021 - 2022). Additionally, collaborating with PCPS 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 Pre-K/HS classroom.
- Placed half walls at Hillview and Flat Rock to add two EHS classrooms.
- Acquired an additional classroom from East Coast Migrant Head Start and converted it to two EHS classrooms at Sugar Hill.
- In Rutherford County, a new-leased property was acquired. The three classrooms were 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. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

- Prioritized staff retention and recruitment efforts in order to open all classrooms and support full enrollment.
- As staff survey results reflect, staff want a work-life balance and prefer to have their day end by 2:30/3:30pm. This impacts the ability to both provide wraparound services and retain staff and requires creative strategies to support wraparound care. WNCSource piloted an innovative approach and found modest success by offering higher wages for after care/wraparound applicants.
- In Henderson County, there is no child subsidy wait list. There are subsidy dollars for vouchers, but not enough parents getting vouchers. Lack of wraparound care impacts families' ability to work or go to school full time and therefore their need for child care.
- WNCSource waitlist has seen an increase in over-income families; along with those eligible due to SNAP/Work First.

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.

a. 2022 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 to 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 who are on site in the communities with the most Spanish-speaking families in order to provide immediate translation services.
- All ERSEA staff are bilingual.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

- WNCSource has additional contracts with mental health providers, though as WNCSource is understaffed there is an impact on the agency's ability to build strong partnerships. Within the context of the pandemic, the agency did not have opportunities to make in-person connections. WNCSource is beginning to meet more in person and strengthen connections and relationships again in the community.

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.

a. 2022 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 County-NC Pre-K Committee; WNC-EC Advocacy Coalition Committee; Blue Ridge Community College Education 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 with Community Family Resource Centers (CFRC's); Family Education and Support Council with CFRC; WNCSource Recruitment Committee; Henderson County Public Schools?/WNCSource Coordination of Services for Families; Henderson County for Activity and Nutrition; Family Connects Advisory Committee; GetSet: Kindergarten Readiness Rally 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.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

WNCSource has had difficulty finding additional mental health (MH) consultants who stay longer than 6 months. Finding MH resources for children and families is difficult because the providers rarely accept Medicaid or provide bilingual services. The resources that are available are overtaxed. WNCSource is part of a MH roundtable, where discussions focus on lack of funding and providers; this a community-wide issue.

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.

a. 2022 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.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

The Apple Transportation system is part of WNCSource services. The agency has been successful in securing funding to offer expanded services, though specific to the senior population. Apple Transportation received funding to take people to doctor appointments and to work ("Way to Work"). Neither have age stipulation. Another service is for seniors (65+) to go to the grocery store. Enrolled families do not seem to be using this service, but could be

connected to these services in the future. One recommendation from a study reflects on how to improve services and share information on routes and times.

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.

a. 2022 Progress:

The most current community focus has been the COVID-19 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, 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.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

- WNCSource still participates in the efforts highlighted in 2022 Progress.
- Additionally, WNCSource is a new partner in the Early Childhood Homeless Community Engagement Project, which aims to develop communities that prioritize and support the resilience and development of young children and their families who experience homelessness. Meetings to date have included discussion around available resources in each county, lack of resources, barriers, agency collaboration, and a future vision. The previous COVID working group ended and evolved into Community for Activity and Nutrition (CAN). They received a planning grant to begin meeting monthly with a focus on community food insecurity. WNCSource is also one of 12 agencies working with Crossnore Consulting around building Trauma Resilience in the community.

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 impacting this population in a way that builds upon the Transylvania Task Force Model.

a. 2022 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 WNCSource 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.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

WNCSource has strengthened its partnership with Hands for Hope, a well-established agency that provides services for 63 expectant families / pregnant women in the service area. WNCSource has an outpost office there with a Family Advocate who is charged with recruitment and works with pregnant women. WNCSource's new Early Head Start expansion grant requires a minimum of six expectant families per year to be served in Rutherford County. WNCSource has struggled with recruitment possibly due to the lack of wraparound services, which the agency cannot offer until it has been operational for 6 months when it receives a permanent license.

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).

a. 2022 Progress:

- Strengthened policies and procedures regarding Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) and Family Advocates. Created strong policies and implemented staff training. Created a family handbook in both English and Spanish.
- Forge 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 wraparound care have been clarified. Extended hours have been added and now offer care 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at all sites.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

The agency has made big advances strengthening training around policies and procedures, with the front loading of materials at orientation. Feedback from staff indicated the need to make these materials more user friendly. Information is now being broken down in smaller segments to make materials more approachable.

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.

a. 2022 Progress:

- Through the Infant-Toddler Trauma-Informed Care (ITTI Care) Project, "Building Capacity for Trauma-Informed Infant & Toddler Care: A Professional Development Framework," WNCSource 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 the 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 six 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.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

As noted above, WNCSource formalized partnership with Crossnore Consulting for Trauma Resilient Communities. WNCSource is one of the backbone agencies in the community charged with making changes within the agency to support the community to be more trauma resilient. Staff have gone through training. CEO David White is leading a group to make changes within the organization (7 commitments/norms). 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.

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.

a. 2022 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 who 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 four Children's Services classroom support coaches are former WNCSource teaching staff. WNCSource 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, Foundations 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-19 in 2021. Some of staff development opportunities included trauma-informed practice, challenging behaviors, mental health, and COVID-19 procedures. WNCSource also sent a team of Family Advocates, teachers, and management to Orlando for the National Head Start Family Engagement Conference in 2021.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

The agency and CCP partners attended intensive Conscious Discipline training, supported by coaches. The training incorporates Conscious Discipline into the social-emotional aspect of supporting children in classrooms, in addition to using Baby Doll Circle Time. WNCSource will work on supporting child care partners to attend the training as many are interested in rolling it out to their staff.

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.

a. **2022 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; 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.

b. **2023 Progress/Considerations:**

This is no longer an ongoing issue. WNCSource provides CCP sites monthly funds to buy their own materials. A year ago, when there were extra funds, the agency provided OLE (outdoor learning equipment) for CCPs. WNCSource works with CCPs extensively on curriculum and teaching to fidelity. WNCSource has provided retention bonuses to EHS-CCP staff members (that was a first). The agency also extended sign-on bonuses to the CCP sites, similar as for agency staff as it boosts morale for staff. The hope is to match what is done at the agency site, but will depend on funding. EHS-CCP teachers will receive training on Teaching Strategies (Creative Curriculum) next year as they have less knowledge of the curriculum, even with coaching. An outside trainer will provide a full day of curriculum training.

Recommendation 11. Compare teacher job descriptions with real-world activities to ensure job descriptions reflect 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.

a. **2022 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.

b. **2023 Progress/Considerations:**

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 solutions to flexible hours.

a. **2022 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.

b. 2023 Progress/Considerations:

WNCSource will continue to focus efforts on rebuilding staffing capacity; when all classrooms can reopen, the sites that had lost an Assistant Site Supervisor will rehire. WNCSource increased wages for after-school positions and successfully attracted applicants in the pilot program at Sugar Hill, hiring four staff. The agency expects to expand this offer of \$19-\$20/hour for after-school positions at other centers. Currently, these positions pay \$16/hour after the COLA and previously paid \$13-14/hour.

LOOKING AHEAD

Building on the 2019 Community Assessment, WNCSource will leverage data and key findings from the 2023 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 2019 Community Assessment data as a driving factor for understanding and meeting community needs, and the 2023 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 (May 2023)

Table A1: WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Funded Enrollment (May 2023)

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	24 slots 2 classrooms	24 slots 3 classrooms	9 slots 1 classroom		2 slots 1 classroom	59 slots 7 classrooms
King Creek Children's Center 20 Fickley Drive Hendersonville, NC 28792-5701	24 slots 2 classrooms	16 slots 2 classrooms		24 EHS slots 0 HS slots		64 slots 4 classrooms 24 HB
Bruce Drysdale Head Start 271 Bearcat Blvd Hendersonville, NC 28792-4577	7 slots 1 classroom					7 slots 1 classroom
Etowah Children's Center 233 Brickyard Rd Etowah, NC 28729-9784	24 slots 2 classrooms	16 slots 2 classrooms				40 slots 4 classrooms
Clear Creek Children's Center 737 N Clear Creek Rd Hendersonville, NC 28792-7032	7 slots 1 classroom					7 slots 1 classroom
Hillandale 40 Preston Ln East Flat Rock, NC 28726-2810	7 slots 1 classroom					7 slots 1 classroom
Flat Rock Children's Center 130 Eagle Reach Drive Flat Rock, NC 28731		24 slots 3 classrooms				24 slots 3 classrooms
Dana Children's Center 690 Ridge Rd Hendersonville, NC 28792-7468	7 slots 1 classroom					7 slots 1 classroom
Fletcher Children's Center 2840 Hendersonville Rd. Fletcher, NC 28732	13 slots 2 classrooms					13 slots 2 classrooms
Tebeau Children's Center 911 Tebeau Dr Hendersonville, NC	38 slots 2 classrooms		4 slots 1 classroom		32 slots 4 classrooms	74 slots 7 classrooms
Little Red School 604 Brooklyn Ave Hendersonville, NC 28792-6461			10 slots 1 classroom			10 slots 1 classroom
Little Bright Minds - (Vanessa Nelton) NEW 3564 Chimney Rock Road Hendersonville, NC 28792			8 slots 1 classroom			8 slots 1 classroom
Laurie's Child Care 108 Upward Acres St East Flat Rock, NC 28726-2234			5 slots 1 classroom			5 slots 1 classroom
FCCH God's Gifts (Kayla Bradley) NEW 282 Loop Rd. Hendersonville, NC 28792					5 slots 1 classroom	5 slots 1 classroom
Henderson County	151 slots 12 classrooms	80 slots 10 classrooms	36 slots 4 classrooms	24 EHS HB 0 HS HB	39 slots 7 classrooms	330 slots 33 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
						24 HB ⁷⁰
Columbus Children's Center TO BE BUILT June, 2024					11 slots 2 classrooms	11 slots 2 classrooms
Polk County					11 slots 2 classrooms	11 slots 2 classrooms
Forest City Children's Center 483 S Broadway St Forest City, NC					24 slots 3 classrooms	24 slots 3 classrooms
FCCH - Above and Beyond Child Care (Tiffany Millard) NEW 144 Nuggett Ln, Forest City, NC 28043					5 slots 1 classroom	5 slots 1 classroom
Kids Kingdom Preschool 143 Henrietta St Ellenboro, NC 28040-9302			12 slots 3 classrooms			12 slots 3 classrooms
Rutherford County			12 slots 3 classrooms		29 slots 4 classrooms	41 slots 7 classrooms
Hillview Children's Services 181 Hillview Ext Brevard, NC 28712-4533	34 slots 2 classrooms	16 slots 2 classrooms	16 slots 2 classrooms		8 slots 1 classroom	74 slots 7 classrooms
FCCH - Transylvania County Brevard and Rosman, NC (NEW)					12 slots 1 classroom	12 slots 4 classrooms
Little Blessings Learning Center 163 Main Street Rosman, NC 28772			16 slots 2 classrooms			16 slots 3 classrooms
Transylvania County	34 slots 2 classrooms	16 slots 2 classrooms	32 slots 4 classrooms		20 slots 3 classrooms	102 slots 11 classrooms
Service Area Total	185 slots 14 classrooms	96 slots 12 classrooms	80 slots 11 classrooms	24 EHS 0 HS	99 slots 16 classrooms	484 slots ⁷¹ 52 classrooms

⁷⁰ Home based slots are included in grand total of classrooms

⁷¹ Total includes 24 home-based slots.

Appendix B: Licensed Child Care and Family Child Care Capacity

Table B1. Number (and Capacity) of Child Care Facilities by Geographic Area (June 2023)^{dx}

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
28726 (East Flat Rock)	5 (449)	1 (18)	2	6	3
28729 (Etowah)	2 (152)	1 (52)	1	2	1
28731 (Flat Rock)	4 (302)	0 (0)	1	2	2
28732 (Fletcher)	4 (387)	0 (0)	0	3	2
28735 (Gerton)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	1	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	6 (474)	0 (0)	0	2	2
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	3 (438)	0 (0)	0	4	0
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	5 (406)	0 (0)	1	3	1
28792 (Hendersonville)	20 (1603)	6 (272)	7	19	9
Henderson County	49 (2226)⁷²	8 (342)	12	42	20
28139 (Rutherfordton)	5 (273)	3 (114)	1	3	0
28722 (Columbus)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	2 (108)	2 (108)	2	0	0
28773 (Saluda)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	1 (84)	1 (84)	1	0	0
Polk	8 (465)	6 (306)	4	3	0
28018 (Bostic)	1 (18)	1 (18)	0	1	0
28020 (Casar)	1 (18)	1 (18)	1	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	3 (164)	1 (84)	2	2	2
28043 (Forest City)	12 (628)	5 (237)	3	8	9
28114 (Mooresboro)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	1	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	5 (273)	3 (114)	1	3	4
28160 (Spindale)	5 (460)	4 (313)	2	3	4
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Rutherford	27 (1561)	15 (784)	9	18	19
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	5 (324)	5 (324)	1	3	3
28739 (Hendersonville)	6 (474)	0 (0)	0	2	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 (99)	1 (99)	0	1	1
28772 (Rosman)	3 (115)	1 (18)	1	3	0
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Transylvania	16 (1030)	8 (459)	2	10	4
Service Area Total	100 (5346)	37 (1891)	27	73	43

⁷² 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).

Table B2. Number (and Capacity) of Licensed Family Child Care Homes by Geographic Area (June 2023)^{dxxxi}

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
28726 (East Flat Rock)	2 (16)	2	2
28729 (Etowah)	0 (0)	0	0
28731 (Flat Rock)	0 (0)	0	0
28732 (Fletcher)	2 (16)	0	0
28735 (Gerton)	1 (8)	1	1
28739 (Hendersonville)	0 (0)	0	0
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	3 (24)	1	2
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	0 (0)	0	0
28792 (Hendersonville)	3 (24)	3	3
Henderson County	11 (88)	7	8
28139 (Rutherfordton)	1 (8)	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	1 (8)	0	0
28018 (Bostic)	1 (8)	1	1
28020 (Casar)	0 (0)	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	0 (0)	0	0
28043 (Forest City)	2 (16)	2	2
28114 (Mooresboro)	1 (8)	1	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	1 (8)	0	1
28160 (Spindale)	0 (0)	0	0
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0	0
Rutherford	5 (40)	4	4
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	1 (8)	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)	1 (8)	0	1
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0	0
Transylvania	2 (16)	0	1
Service Area Total	19 (152)	11	13

Table B3. Summary of Child Care Capacity, All Provider Types, by Geographic Area (June 2023)^{clxxxii}

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
28726 (East Flat Rock)	7 (465)	1 (18)	2	8	5
28729 (Etowah)	2 (152)	1 (52)	1	2	1
28731 (Flat Rock)	4 (302)	0 (0)	1	2	2
28732 (Fletcher)	6 (403)	0 (0)	0	3	2
28735 (Gerton)	1 (8)	0 (0)	0	2	1
28739 (Hendersonville)	6 (474)	0 (0)	0	2	2
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	6 (462)	0 (0)	0	5	2
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	5 (406)	0 (0)	1	3	1
28792 (Hendersonville)	23 (1627)	6 (272)	7	22	12
Henderson County	60 (2314)⁷³	8 (342)	12	49	28
28139 (Rutherfordton)	6 (281)	3 (114)	1	3	0
28722 (Columbus)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	2 (108)	2 (108)	2	0	0
28773 (Saluda)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	1 (84)	1 (84)	1	0	0
Polk	9 (473)	6 (306)	4	3	0
28018 (Bostic)	2 (26)	1 (18)	0	2	1
28020 (Casar)	1 (18)	1 (18)	1	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	3 (164)	1 (84)	2	2	2
28043 (Forest City)	14 (644)	5 (237)	3	10	11
28114 (Mooresboro)	1 (8)	0 (0)	0	2	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	6 (281)	3 (114)	1	3	5
28160 (Spindale)	5 (460)	4 (313)	2	3	4
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Rutherford	32 (1601)	15 (784)	9	22	23
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	6 (332)	5 (324)	1	3	3
28739 (Hendersonville)	6 (474)	0 (0)	0	2	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 (99)	1 (99)	0	1	1
28772 (Rosman)	4 (123)	1 (18)	1	3	1
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Transylvania	18 (1046)	8 (459)	2	10	5
Service Area Total	119 (5434)	37 (1891)	27	84	56

⁷³ 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).

Table B4. Number of Child Care Centers, by Smart Start Star Level (June 2023) clxxxiii

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	GS 110-106	Temporary	TOTAL
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	1	0	0	4
28735 (Gerton)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	1	0	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)	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	4
28792 (Hendersonville)	13	7	0	0	0	0	0	20
Henderson County	25	13	3	0	2	4	1	48
28139 (Rutherfordton)	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	5
28722 (Columbus)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
28773 (Saluda)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Polk	6	0	1	0	0	1	0	8
28018 (Bostic)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
28020 (Casar)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
28040 (Ellenboro)	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
28043 (Forest City)	8	1	2	0	0	1	0	12
28114 (Mooresboro)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	5
28160 (Spindale)	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
28167 (Union Mills)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rutherford	20	2	3	0	0	2	0	27
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
28739 (Hendersonville)	1	0	2	0	0	3	0	6
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	8	3	2	0	0	3	0	16
Service Area Total	59	18	9	0	2	10	1	99

Table B5. Number of Family Child Care Homes, by Smart Start Star Level (June 2023)^{clxxxiv}

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	GS 110-106	Temporary	TOTAL
28726 (East Flat Rock)	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
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	1	0	0	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	0	0	0	0	0	0
28792 (Hendersonville)	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Henderson County	2	5	1	0	1	0	0	9
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	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
28020 (Casar)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28043 (Forest City)	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
28114 (Mooresboro)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
28160 (Spindale)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
28167 (Union Mills)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rutherford	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	4
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	1	0	0	0	0	1
28774 (Sapphire)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transylvania	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Service Area Total	2	8	2	1	1	0	0	14

Table B6. Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Compared to Capacity of Child Care Programs (June 2023) ^{clxxxv}

Geographic Area	Capacity of Child Care Programs	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty
28726 (East Flat Rock)	465	185	0
28729 (Etowah)	152	300	0
28731 (Flat Rock)	302	347	94
28732 (Fletcher)	403	930	36
28735 (Gerton)	8	10	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	474	1,036	281
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	99	18
28759 (Mills River)	462	340	40
28766 (Penrose)	0	55	0
28790 (Zirconia)	0	107	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	406	471	36
28792 (Hendersonville) ⁷⁴	1627	1,647	577
Henderson	2,31475	5527	1082
28139 (Rutherfordton)	281	939	165
28722 (Columbus)	0	287	31
28756 (Mill Spring) ⁷⁶	108	201	10
28773 (Saluda) ⁷⁷	0	103	30
28782 (Tryon)	84	141	12
Polk	473	1671	248
28018 (Bostic)	26	195	7
28020 (Casar)	18	188	22
28040 (Ellenboro)	164	205	71
28043 (Forest City)	644	1,552	647
28114 (Mooresboro)	8	442	27
28139 (Rutherfordton)	281	939	165
28160 (Spindale)	460	31	6
28167 (Union Mills)	0	87	0
Rutherford	1601	3639	945
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	332	695	183
28739 (Hendersonville)	474	1,036	281
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	99	18
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	18	74	16
28766 (Penrose)	0	55	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	99	448	67
28772 (Rosman)	123	22	0
28774 (Sapphire)	0	19	0
Transylvania	1046	2448	565
Service Area (total of counties)	5,434	13285	2840

⁷⁴ A very small portion (about one neighborhood) of this zip code is in Polk County.

⁷⁵ 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).

⁷⁶ This zip code is primarily in Polk County. One area (near Chimney Rock) is in Rutherford County.

⁷⁷ 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.

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- ⁱ NCDHHS. (2021). COVID-19 Information. Retrieved from: <https://bearly.nc.gov/>
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