

# COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT



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WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start Community Assessment

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### AGENCY OVERVIEW

For almost 60 years, Western North Carolina Source (WNCSource) (formerly Western Carolina Community Action) has been a nonprofit agency dedicated to helping low-income families achieve economic stability. While changing the agency name in 2022 to signify a refocus and redefinition of the agency role, WNCSource remains committed to delivering vital community programs and services with the goal of “empowering people and transforming lives.” WNCSource remains uniquely positioned to provide an integrated approach to social services to benefit residents through the delivery of multi-faceted programs that serve the whole family.

WNCSource serves 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 within its service area. These programs are the cornerstone of the agency’s early childhood services and remain central to the agency achieving its vision to giving people the power to transform their futures and live more fully in their community. WNCSource also offers programs focused on housing, transportation and services for older adults.

#### SERVICE AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

The total population in the WNCSource service area is 233,818. Over the past five years, the population in the service area has been fluctuating or increasing, while increasing statewide. Median age is high in the service area, with large percentages of the population over age 65. Of the counties in the service area, Rutherford County has the highest percentage of the population under age five (5.6%).

Individuals in the service area are predominately White, non-Hispanic; racial diversity continues to be greatest in Rutherford County, where 8.6% of the population is Black or African American. The percentage of the population that is Hispanic or Latino origin ranges from 2.2% in Transylvania County to 6.8% in Henderson County, where the greatest ethnic diversity continues to be represented.

English is the primary language spoken, followed by Spanish. The highest percentage of the population that speaks a language other than English is in Henderson County, where 8.0% of the population speaks Spanish.

The percentage of the population that is foreign-born is relatively low. While 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.

Poverty rates have been fluctuating in the counties in the WNCSource service area in recent years. The rate is high in Rutherford and Transylvania counties and above the statewide rate. While poverty rates are lowest in Henderson and Polk counties, Polk County experienced a 1.5% increase in the poverty rate from 2021 to 2022. There are also disparities in the poverty rate by race, ethnicity, and with regard to single-parent and two-parent families; in families with a female head of household (no spouse present), the poverty rate is substantially higher than married-couple families.

In the WNCSource service area, most children live with their biological, step, or adopted parents. In some communities, particularly in Polk and Rutherford counties, there is a high rate of children living with grandparent(s) or other relatives, generally due to parental substance abuse. Many children enrolled in WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start programs live in single-parent families (more than 50%), and the program provides a vital resource to these families.

## NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO MEET NEEDS

There is diversity of need in WNCSource's service area. While some individuals and families may have few needs, other families experience many of the factors that contribute to the cycle of poverty within their communities.

Data on educational attainment show trends toward high school diploma or some college. Half of the school districts in the service area have a graduation rate that is greater than the statewide rate (86.5%). High school graduation rates are most challenging in the Polk and Transylvania school districts. A majority of districts in the service area have a dropout rate that is consistent with or better than the statewide rate (1.95%), with the exception of Transylvania County (2.6%). From the year prior, all county school districts had a decreasing drop-out rate, with the exception of Transylvania County.

Looking at health benchmarks, data point to some challenges with regard to poor health and chronic health conditions. When reviewing vaping statistics in terms of percentages, North Carolina ranks as the second top state where high school teen students vape (35.5% of teens). Drug overdose rates are high in the service area and are still reflecting an increasing trend, with the exception of Transylvania County where the number slightly decreased. The greatest rate of recent deaths by overdose was in Rutherford County, followed by Polk County.

Many children and adults in the service area have access to health insurance. Data shows that health care – primary, dental, and mental health – is available, but limited. This is particularly evident for pediatric dental providers in Transylvania County, where no providers consistently accept Medicaid. 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.

Like adult health factors, there are strengths and challenges when considering infant and maternal health. A majority of pregnant women begin prenatal care in the first trimester. Teen birth rate have been decreasing in recent years; the greatest number of teen pregnancies in the service area were in Henderson County followed by Rutherford County, though the rate was greatest in Rutherford County, and above the statewide rate in both counties.

Data suggests that maintaining an up-to-date status of preventative and primary care for children may be a challenge for some families, as a low percentage of Head Start/Early Head Start children are up-to-date

when they enter the program. Childhood obesity and asthma are concerns for some youth in the service area. Further, in a majority of the service area, child abuse and neglect rates have been elevated in recent years. With the exception of Rutherford County, the rate of assessments for child abuse and neglect had increased from the year prior.

Healthy nutrition is a critical factor for children's healthy development. Food insecurity rates are elevated across the service area, and there are also four low-income and low-access census tracts (food deserts). SNAP and WIC data show increasing trends in North Carolina from 2019 to 2022, with the greatest participation in 2022 and then decreasing participation from 2022 to 2023. Like the WIC program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) data show fluctuating trends. Many school districts in the service area have rates of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch that increased from the 2021-2022 to 2022-2023 school year. Transylvania County School District reflects the greatest percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch at 60.7%.

Economic data show median home values are generally greater than statewide values. While owner and rental costs are lower in the service area compared to the state, the rental cost burden remains high, greater than 45%. The rental cost burden is highest in Rutherford County, where 47.6% of households are spending 30% or more of their monthly income on rent. Additionally, affordable housing data show that 23%-28% of individuals in the service area are renting their homes. The hourly wage necessary to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent ranges from \$14.83 in Rutherford County to \$28.19 in Henderson County. In all counties in the service area, the two-bedroom housing wage is well above the North Carolina minimum wage (\$7.25).

The percentage of the population in the labor force varies within WNCSource's service area, but is consistently lower than the statewide rate (62.6%), and is notably lowest in Transylvania County (51.8%). Labor force participation is greater among households with young children in which all parents are in the labor force. The top industry in the area is educational services, and health care and social assistance. Unemployment data show recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these improvements, in recent years, Rutherford County has had an unemployment rate that is consistently higher than the rest of the service area and the statewide rate, and unemployment is also elevated among WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start families compared to the general population.

In communities served by WNCSource, there are many social services available to meet families' needs, including subsidized child care, cash assistance, WIC, and SNAP. Workforce training and education opportunities are available, as are two- and four-year universities, community colleges, and technical and trade schools. Access to training and educational opportunities may be limited for some individuals due to factors such as cost, scheduling, child care, language, and transportation.

## HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

In the WNCSource service area, the poverty rate for young children (birth to age five) ranges from 11.3% in Polk County to 27.0% in Transylvania County. In the service area, there are an estimated 2,327 children under age five living in poverty who are income-eligible for participation in Head Start/Early Head Start. A

majority (45.3%) of income-eligible children reside in Henderson County. There are approximately 665 pregnant women who are eligible for Early Head Start.

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 28,615 youth experiencing homelessness enrolled in public school (PreK-12), a decrease of 20.9% from the prior year. Many homeless children and youth are “doubled up,” living with another family. During the 2022-2023 program year, WNCSource served 23 families with 23 children (3 additional families and 2 additional children than 2021-2022), that were experiencing homelessness. Of the 23 families, four acquired housing during the program year. Based on this historic information, it is estimated that more than 23 children in the service area are eligible to receive Head Start/Early Head Start services based homelessness status.

Additionally, it is estimated there are 143 children in foster care who are categorically eligible for participation in Head Start/Early Head Start in the service area, 86 of whom are birth to age 3. A majority of children in foster care live in Rutherford and Henderson counties. Since 2020, the number of children in foster care had been increasing, but in 2023 all WNCSource service area counties reflect a decrease from 2022. The number of children in foster care in the service area in 2023 represents an 11.1% decrease from the year prior.

Enrollment in Head Start/Early Head Start based on public assistance is dependent on receipt of Work First (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Many children birth to age 18 in the service area live in households that receive public assistance with an estimated 2,916 children under age five who are eligible for Head Start/Early Head based on receipt of public assistance. Of these children, 1,750 are estimated to be under age three.

Further, Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) require that at least 10% of program enrollment be children eligible for services under IDEA (i.e., early intervention and preschool special education). Public school data show increasing or fluctuating trends of children with disabilities in the school districts in the service area, with an increase from the prior year in WNCSource programs (36.9%). In communities served by WNCSource, there are an estimated 697 children birth to age five with diagnosed disabilities.

## AGENCIES SERVING HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, in the WNCSource service area, there are 100 licensed child care centers and family child care programs, with licensed capacity to serve 5,868 children, birth to school age (if fully enrolled). A majority (81%) of capacity is in center-based programs and 67% of programs are licensed to serve infants.

When comparing the number of children under 5 years old in the service area to total licensed child care capacity, which includes school age, the number of children under 5 years old far exceeds total licensed/registered capacity. Licensed capacity does not necessarily reflect the number of children that a program would typically have enrolled, as other factors, such as class sizes and staffing may impact the

number of children served at any given time. Many child care programs are facing a child care workforce shortage which makes it difficult to fully enroll and meet children's needs.

The Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program coordinates home visiting services provided by local agencies to high-need families in communities across North Carolina. In 2024, Rutherford County was added as an eligible MIECHV county. Overall, the program has the current funded capacity to serve 1,950 individuals in North Carolina annually. Additionally, the North Carolina Division of Child and Family Well-Being supports two evidence-based home-visiting models Healthy Families America and Nurse-Family Partnership. Home visiting services are available across the service area through the implementation of various programs including Early Head Start, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, Adolescent Parenting Program, Healthy Beginnings, and Family Connects. These programs reach approximately 700 children annually.

Publicly funded preschool in North Carolina (NC Pre-K) is designed to provide high-quality educational experiences to enhance school readiness for eligible four-year-old children. In the state, 53% of 4-year-old children participate in the NC Pre-K program and there are 35 NC Pre-K providers in the service area. Across the WNCSource service area, participation rates have increased since 2020, with increases ranging from 5% to 27%.

## FAMILY, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

### FAMILY INSIGHTS

A WNCSource Family Survey administered in March 2024 gathered information from families with a child(ren) currently enrolled in one of WNCSource's programs. The survey gathered information on the families' experiences with the program and the community in their service area (Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, or Transylvania county). One hundred and thirty families completed the survey (35% response rate).

Family Snapshot. Families responded with the following demographics about their race/ethnicity: 51% White, 51% Hispanic/Latino, 9% Black or African American, 4% Multi-Racial. The breakdown of the respondent's employment and education level included: 41% work full-time, 29% work part-time, 24% are unemployed, and 15% are currently in school or participate in a job training program. The highest education level of respondents are as follows: 55% high school graduates/GED, 13% Bachelor's degree, 9% have some high school, 9% Associates degree, 6% with less than a 9th grade education, 5% with an Advanced degree (Master's, PhD, etc.), and 3% enrolled in vocational school.

- 89% of respondent families have only one child currently enrolled in a WNCSource program; 11% have two or more children enrolled.
- 48% of the families have a child in a center-based Early Head Start program; 43% of the families have a child in a center-based Head Start program; and 6% are in the home-based Early Head Start program.
- 95% of respondents reported being the biological parent of the enrolled child; 3% were an extended family member (e.g., grandparent, aunt, uncle, etc.); and 2% are an adoptive/foster parent, step-parent, or partner/significant other.
- 75% of respondents reside in Henderson County, 15% reside in Rutherford County, 9% reside in Transylvania County, and 1% reside in Polk County.



### Program Snapshot.

- 94% of respondent families say the location of their child(rens) EHS/HS center meets their needs. Some families commented that they feel the program location/center is too far from their home or that space was not available for their child(ren) at the closest center.
- 92% of respondents say the program offers a schedule that meets their needs. Eight percent of respondents noted that the program schedule does not meet their needs and noted that they would like extended early morning and late afternoon hours or help with transportation.
- 40% of respondents said their work schedules are a problem when trying to be involved in their child(rens) EHS/HS program, with 16% noting transportation challenges, 13% indicating child care needs, 12% said that language barriers were a problem for their family and an additional 11% of respondents said their lack of access to the internet or technology (e.g., devices) was an issue.

Respondents to the Family Survey indicated that their preferred methods to communicate with staff about their child(ren) is face-to-face (63%) and phone calls (64%), followed by texts (57%), flyers/letters sent home/newsletters (43%), email (41%), monthly school readiness calendars (22%), and social media platforms such as Facebook (8%).

The majority of respondents (121 of 135) agreed that communication between their family and staff were easy to understand. Other respondents responded with a neutral opinion. Specifically,

- 120 agreed that their child(ren)'s program connects their family with the appropriate staff or resources to address their questions or concerns;
- 122 families are satisfied with the services they receive from the EHS/HS program;
- 125 agree that the EHS/HS program is helping their child(ren) get ready for school; and
- 127 agree that the program gives their child(ren) a safe place to learn.

Community Snapshot. When asked what they think is best about their community, most families selected services offered by the local government (e.g., SNAP, WIC) (63%). Additional selections were neighborhood parks and playgrounds (53%), safety (52%), services offered by community organizations (36%), affordable child care (34%), and the quality of schools and universities (34%). Between 20-30% of respondents selected the quality of healthcare services (30%), immigrant friendly community (23%), neighborhood relationships (21%), and availability of jobs (20%). Less than 20% of respondents said the community was diverse (19%), had public transportation (17%), had affordable housing (10%), job training (9%), and available therapy services (1%).

Families were asked what services they need, or want, but are unable to find in their community. The greatest response was that families have access to all the services they need (34%). Of the services that families indicate they cannot find affordable housing (24%) was the top selection, followed by dental care (20%), housing/rental assistance (12%), job search or training (9%), health care (9%), mental health services (9%), child care (7%), food assistance (7%), legal aid (6%), education (6%), immigration services (5%), and transportation (4%).

Stressors for Families. When asked about their biggest stressors, family respondents said work/life balance (32%), finances (23%), housing (16%), access to dental care (15%), their child's behavior (13%), employment (12%), and access to child care (12%) were the greatest stressors. Another 12% of families also indicated

that COVID-19 is the biggest stressor. Other stressors included marital/personal (12%), food insecurity (7%), their child's disabilities (7%), community or domestic violence (3%), and getting help from the K-12 schools (3%).

Families said the biggest issues for their families were having enough money to pay for their home utilities (36%). Other issues included having enough money to buy food (28%), reliability of their vehicle (24%), having difficulty finding help (financial, medical, dental, child care, etc.) (22%), having enough room in their home for the people living there (18%), and legal issues (13%).

Reflections from Families. Some families indicated that they have difficulty getting financial, medical, dental, or other help. Several said they make too much money to receive local government assistance but do not make enough money to pay for housing, food, and other bills. Others said they need help finding resources like dental homes or legal advice.

## STAFF INSIGHTS

A WNCSource Staff Survey was administered in October 2023 and gathered information from current staff on different aspects of the organization's engagement, leadership, teamwork, and work culture. The results reflect WNCSource's strengths as well as areas for improvement. The staff response rate was 68%, including 127 employees.

Engagement and Company Confidence. A majority of respondents said they are proud to work for WNCSource (88%), while 82% would recommend WNCSource as a great place to work and 79% said WNCSource provides services that are as good as, or better than, the agency's main competitors (79%). A majority of staff (72%) agree the agency effectively directs resources towards company goals, 71% saw themselves still working at WNCSource in 2 years, 70% thought that WNCSource is in a position for success over the next 3 years, and 66% felt like WNCSource motivates them to go beyond what they would do in a similar role elsewhere. In terms of engagement and agency confidence, the lowest response in this category (57%) was when asked if staff think about looking for a job at another company.

Alignment & Involvement Snapshot. Respondents answered mostly favorably to their alignment and involvement with WNCSource; 91% said they knew what they needed to do to be successful in their role, 87% said they knew how their work contributes to the goals of WNCSource, 79% said they were happy with their current role, 73% said they are appropriately involved in decisions that affect their work, and 62% said they believed their total compensation (base salary + any bonuses + benefits + equity) was fair, relative to similar roles in other organizations.

Collaboration & Communication and Feedback & Recognition. Based on responses to these categories, there are areas that need improvement. Respondents felt like their job performance was evaluated fairly (77%), they receive appropriate recognition for good work (73%), and most other employees make a good effort to consult other staff where appropriate (70%). Respondents felt less favorable about other departments at WNCSource collaborating well to get the job done (54%), and 53% felt the right people are rewarded and recognized at the agency, that there is open and honest two-way communication (52%), and that when it is clear that someone is not delivering in their role, WNCSource responds accordingly (46%).

Enablement and Innovation. Respondents felt most favorably that they have the information they need to do their job effectively (80%), have access to the things they need to do their job well (79%), and have enough



autonomy to perform their jobs effectively (79%). Most also responded favorably to enjoying working in their physical workspace (73%), having the support to get their work done effectively with the systems and processes available to them (72%), feeling encouraged to be innovative even though some of those initiatives might not be successful (70%), and feeling that WNCSource acts on promising new or innovative ideas (62%).

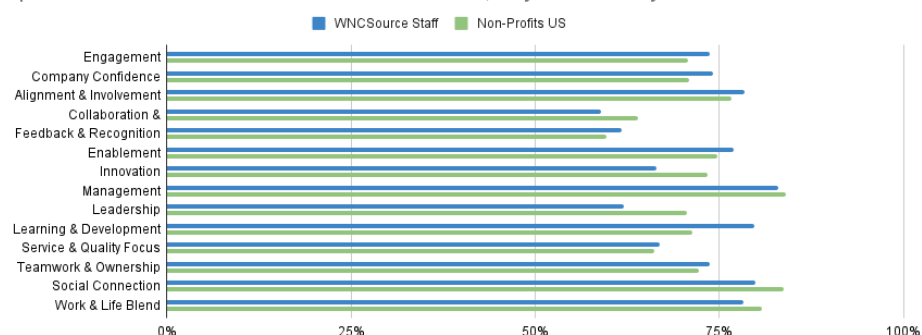
**Management and Leadership.** Staff respondents answered most favorably to management in the following areas. Their manager genuinely cares about their wellbeing (90%), their manager gives useful feedback on how well they are performing (86%), their manager is a great role model for employees (81%), and their manager keeps them informed about what is happening at WNCSource (75%). Respondents were less favorable towards overall leadership. 66% have confidence in the leaders at WNCSource, 62% think the leaders have communicated a vision that motivates them, 61% responded that the leaders at WNCSource demonstrated that people are important to the company's success, and 60% said the leaders keep people informed about what is happening.

**Learning & Development.** Respondents answered favorably to learning and development opportunities at WNCSource. 87% said they have access to the learning and development they need to do their jobs well. 83% said they are given opportunities to develop skills relevant to their interests. 78% said WNCSource is a great company for them to make a contribution to their development. 75% believe there are good career opportunities at WNCSource. 74% said their manager (or someone in management) has shown a genuine interest in their career aspirations.

**Service & Quality Focus and Teamwork & Ownership Snapshot.** Staff rated these areas a little less favorably than other areas in the survey. 68% of staff felt that WNCSource acknowledges people who deliver outstanding service here. 66% said day-to-day decisions at WNCSource demonstrate that quality and improvement are top priorities. 61% of staff feel like workloads are divided fairly among people where they work. 78% felt like they hold themselves and their colleagues accountable for results. The most favorable response was that 82% of staff feel they are part of a team.

**Social Connection and Work & Life Blend.** Staff ratings on social connections are that 87% of staff said WNCSource allows them to make a positive difference and 73% said WNCSource's commitment to social responsibility is genuine. For work & life blend, respondents said they are able to arrange time out from work when they need to (83%), they are genuinely supported if they choose to make use of flexible working arrangements (80%), and they generally believe their workload is reasonable for their role (72%). The following graph shows a comparison of responses from the WNCSource Staff Survey in October 2023 to a July 2023 Survey from Non-Profits in the US.

Comparison of WNCSource Staff to Non-Profits in US, July 2023 Survey Results



## COMMUNITY PROVIDER INSIGHTS

A Community Provider Survey administered in March 2024 gathered information from community agencies about their experiences serving the service area population and their ideas for improved collaboration and coordination. Ten agency respondents completed the Community Provider Survey, representing all four counties in the WNCSource service area (Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania counties) as well as Buncombe, Cleveland, Gaston, Lincoln counties.

Agencies responding to the survey provide an array of services. When identifying the type of services provided by the agency, half (50%) provide Early Intervention services, 30% offer mental health services for children (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention) or parenting support, and/or teen assistance, 20% provide child care, food assistance, housing/rental assistance, and senior services. Another 10% of community providers identified providing education support, job search or training or utilities supports. It is of note, as half of respondents are employed by Early Intervention programs and one-third by youth mental health providers, responses may be skewed regarding the needs of young children with special needs and in need of mental health supports.

Respondents primarily provide services for free (60%) or for a fee based on income (10%). Eighty percent of respondents to the Community Provider Survey are current partners of WNCSource, while the remaining 20% are not. Among the partners, half have been partners for more than five years. When asked if WNCSource could contact the agency regarding additional ideas, one respondent provided contact information (a licensed Psychologist from Henderson County).

Respondents to the Community Provider Survey indicated that the best way to communicate with families is face-to-face (90%) and via text message (80%), followed by email, social media and phone calls (50%). There is also some communication over video chat (30%) and through flyers, letters sent home, newsletters (10%).

Community Snapshot. Reflecting on what they think is best about the community where their agency provides services, most respondents selected the area's natural resources (e.g., mountains, hiking trails) (80%), the parks and playgrounds (70%), followed by the services offered by community organizations (50%). Additional responses include health care availability and safety (both 30%), and immigrant friendly (20%). Ten percent of respondents indicated the following community services: dental care availability, diversity, employment opportunities, mental health services for adults, housing affordability, and services for children with disabilities.

Changes in Use of Community Resources. Respondents reported observing increases in their communities in the following areas in the past year:

- 80% of community providers observed an increase in homelessness in the community;
- 70% observed an increase in the number of low-income families contacting their agency, mental health needs for children, and transportation needs.
- 60% observed an increase the number of children with special needs/disabilities and community substance/drug abuse.
- 50% observed an increase in job availability, mental health needs for adults, and the number of female head of households.

- 40% observed an increase in the number of services they offer, the number of multi-generational families they serve.
- 30% observed an increase in the number of teen pregnancies.
- 20% observed an increase in low-income housing availability, and the number of adults with special needs/disabilities.
- 10% observed an increase in the average household income and the number of individuals or families slightly over agency income guidelines.

Many respondents indicated a decrease in the number of licensed child care providers (80%), affordable housing availability and average household income (50% each). Fewer respondents (20%) noted decreases in job availability, mental health needs for children and for adults, the number of individuals or families slightly over agency income guidelines, the number of teen pregnancies, and the services the agency offers.

A majority of respondents (70%) reported no change in the number of individuals slightly over agency income guidelines, and the number of teen pregnancies and the number of multi-generational families served (both 50%).

**Barriers.** When asked about the most common barriers to families accessing resources, the top responses (80%) included limited knowledge of what resources are available, fear/reluctance to access services and access to technology (e.g., computers, phones, devices etc.) and to Internet/Wi-Fi. Seventy percent reported availability of needed services and lack of bilingual staff at point of service as a barrier, while 60% indicated availability of needed services and burdensome requirements (e.g., documentation, excessive paperwork, meetings). Half of respondents (50%) also included lack of education, language, and stigma around mental health needs as a barrier to community resources.

A majority of respondents believe families may not be able to find or access:

- child care (100%),
- affordable housing (90%),
- mental health services for children (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention) (80%),
- housing/rental assistance (70%),
- drug/substance abuse treatment (60%),
- services for children with special needs/disabilities and dental care (50%); and
- foster care, health care, immigration services, legal aid and assistance (e.g., immigration, family, criminal, tenant relations), mental health services for adults, transportation, and utilities (40%).

**Stressors for Families.** When asked what they believe are families' biggest stressors, community providers indicated many areas. The greatest number of responses (80%) indicated the lack of affordable housing, followed by a lack of access to mental health services for children, financial concerns, transportation, and how to support and provide care for a child with disabilities (70%). Another 60% of responses reflected on drug/substance abuse in the community as a stressor, as well as managing the behavior of children, while half (50%) also felt work-life balance is a large stressor for families.

The top services that the respondents believe families may not be able to find or access in the community align closely with the biggest stressors, particularly in regard to the lack of affordable housing and the need for mental health services.

Reflections on Local Agencies. Most respondents believe their agency's strengths include established relationships with families (90%), the ability to connect families with resources and staff experience and expertise (70%), bilingual staff (60%) and culturally aligned services (30%). Two respondents also wrote in a response, which included that the agency strength was their compassionate and holistic approach in serving the community and that services are free and accessible.

## REFLECTIONS

Drawing from the data and key findings of the *2024 Community Assessment* and input from leadership team members, the following reflections will be considered to support the program's continued responsiveness to community need.

**Reflection 1: Program Design.** The WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start program regularly engages in the best practice of reviewing slot allocations in the context of community-wide trends (e.g., availability of publicly funded pre-kindergarten, demand for infant/toddler care, and wait list data) to explore strategies that support full enrollment across the program. WNCSource will continue this practice in order to respond to changes in community needs when they arise and to explore updates to program schedules to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable families are met.

**Reflection 2. Community Partnerships.** Continue WNCSource participation on local task forces with community partners to address identified challenges and plans for partnerships. Continue to maintain and build upon strong community partnerships to facilitate connecting enrolled children, families, and staff with resources, including but not limited to health, mental health/trauma resilience, education, training, employment supports, housing, substance misuse, adult health, developmental disability, and other social services in the community. Continue the work of creating and formalizing partnerships and MOUs with partner agencies to ensure ongoing and new collaboration and coordination efforts with community representatives best meet the needs of the families in the service area.

**Reflection 3. Reliable Transportation.** Continue to support families that lack reliable transportation by staying abreast of community resources that can support residents to meet their transportation needs and ultimately to increase the financial position of families to be able to afford to purchase and maintain a reliable vehicle (e.g., training, education, employment opportunities).

**Reflection 4. Mental Health Supports.** Continue to successfully support access to mental health supports for children experiencing challenging behaviors and utilization of trauma-informed practices. Continue to enhance the provision of critical connections and the integration of resources regarding social and emotional supports for staff and enrolled families, which will also serve to minimize the impact on children (e.g., childhood stress can disrupt development and compromise the nervous and immune systems, leading to potential health problems later in life). Supports may focus on maintaining healthy relationships, managing stress, and identification of signs of mental health issues.

**Reflection 5: Staff Recruitment, Professional Development, and Retention.** Continue to enact best practices and innovative recruitment methods to hire qualified staff. Communicate with staff regarding their professional development and training needs to help them meet their professional goals. Review staff's

interest in management/leadership training more closely and leverage this interest to support staff members' professional growth within the agency.

**Reflection 6: Continue Provision of Community Information, Resources, and Referrals.** Continue staff participation on key local community Councils and Boards to build internal and external awareness of resources and services that serve the population in the service area.

Continue to communicate with, and connect, families intentionally with available community resources to increase sustainability (e.g., health, mental health/trauma resilience, adult education, training, employment supports, Medicaid providers, housing, substance misuse, adult health, developmental disability, emergency assistance, food resources, legal support, home energy assistance, and other social services in the community).

Continue ongoing focus of supporting access for enrolled children to pediatric, or appropriate, dental services in the service area, particularly for more severe dental needs (e.g., oral surgery), in Transylvania County. Continue to work with the community partners to discuss expansion of pediatric dental services. Continue to support the dental needs of children by providing supports (i.e., transportation, gas cards) to enrolled families that may not have the financial ability to afford exorbitant dental costs and may need to travel outside the service area to connect with necessary dental services for their children.

**Reflection 7: Bilingual Supports and Cultural Alignment.** Continue to assess the language needs of enrolled children and families and provide services to meet the evolving needs (bilingual forms, translation/interpretation services, help families access bilingual, culturally sensitive resource providers in the community etc.). In light of national, state, and program-wide staffing challenges in early education programs, continue to focus efforts on recruiting bilingual staff, if necessary, to meet the needs of enrolled children and families and the community. Continue to collaborate with community agencies to culturally align and to address language barriers families may face when accessing forms, resources, and supports.

**Reflection 8: Affordable Housing and Homelessness.** Continue to advocate for, and provide support to, families experiencing homelessness and those on the brink of eviction, foreclosure, or homelessness. Continue to explore and provide referrals for housing resources with community partners. Utilize community assessment data and updated data sources to understand the locations where families may be experiencing greater rates of homelessness or struggle to meet their housing needs (e.g., evictions, foreclosures, affordability), in the service area.

**Reflection 9: Promote Head Start Through Friend and Family Referrals.** Continue to coordinate fun informational events and encourage enrolled families to invite friends, families, and neighbors to participate to learn more about WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start programs and opportunities. Raise awareness and focus on the high-quality programming and benefits of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs, the comprehensive services provided, the focus on kindergarten readiness as programs prepare enrolled children for future success in school, as well the transition supports for HS children entering kindergarten.

## CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Agency Overview.....	16
Community Assessment.....	16
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Head Start Program Performance Standards.....	17
Process and Data Collection Methods.....	17
Data Analysis: An Equity Perspective .....	18
Limitations of 2024 Community Assessment .....	18
<b>OVERVIEW OF SERVICE AREA .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Geographic Boundaries.....	19
County and Local Government and Economics .....	19
Service Area Demographics.....	20
Poverty .....	24
Household Composition and Family Characteristics.....	26
<b>NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Education.....	28
Health .....	30
Nutrition.....	40
Social and Economic Factors Impacting Well-being.....	42
<b>EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE, AND TRANSPORTATION .....</b>	<b>49</b>
Labor Force, Industries, and Occupations .....	49
Employment.....	51
Education and Training.....	54
Transportation .....	55
Work and Training Schedules.....	56
<b>HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Child Poverty and Geographic Location .....	57
Race and Ethnicity of Eligible Children in Poverty .....	61
Language of Eligible Children .....	61
Cultural Trends.....	62
Children Experiencing Homelessness .....	62
Children in Foster Care .....	64
Children Receiving Public Assistance.....	65
Children with Disabilities .....	67
<b>AGENCIES SERVING HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN.....</b>	<b>72</b>
Child Care Centers and Family Child Care.....	72
Home Visiting.....	76
Publicly Funded Preschool.....	77
<b>FAMILY, STAFF AND COMMUNITY INSIGHTS .....</b>	<b>78</b>
Family Input .....	78
Staff Input .....	80
Community Input.....	82
<b>RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>REFLECTIONS.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>LOOKING AHEAD.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>88</b>
Appendix A: Children Living in Families Under 200% FPL .....	88
Appendix B: WNCSource Geographic Areas of Interest.....	90



Appendix C: Detailed Licensed Child Care and Family Child Care Capacity .....	91
Appendix D: Trends Related to Franchising of Local Child Care Centers.....	97
Appendix E: Community Provider Survey .....	98
Appendix F: WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Funded Enrollment.....	104

## INTRODUCTION



For almost 60 years, Western North Carolina Source (WNCSource) (formerly Western Carolina Community Action) has been a nonprofit agency dedicated to helping low-income families achieve economic stability. While changing the agency name in 2022 to signify a refocus and redefinition of the agency role in the communities served, WNCSource remained committed to delivering vital community programs and services with the goal of “empowering people and transforming lives.” WNCSource remains uniquely positioned to provide an integrated approach to social services to benefit residents through the delivery of multi-faceted programs that serve the whole family.

WNCSource’s mission is “working with communities and partners, WNCSource improves people’s lives by creating pathways to self-reliance and healthier living.”

To achieve this mission, WNCSource administers a number of programs in four counties in southwestern North Carolina, including: children’s services, housing, transportation, and older adult services.

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### *WNCSource’s Mission*

*Working with communities and partners, WNCSource improves people’s lives by creating pathways to self-reliance and healthier living.*

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As of April 2024, WNCSource provides Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) services to 484 children and families and is specifically funded to serve 185 Head Start (HS), 219 Early Head Start (EHS), and 80 EHS-CCP enrolled children through these programs, which are the cornerstone of the agency’s early childhood services. Head Start and Early Head Start programming remains central to the agency achieving its vision to giving people the power to transform their futures and live more fully in their community.

In October 2023, WNCSource submitted Change in Scope Requests that focused on maintaining the improved EHS/HS teacher turnover rate following the agency’s 2022 Change in Scope Request, continuing to strengthen retention practices, while also attracting and hiring qualified staff to fill vacancies or join the Apprenticeship Program. Together these factors aim to increase WNCSource’s capacity to achieve and sustain full enrollment.

Specifically, for the EHS Expansion Grant, WNCSource proposed an enrollment reduction of 64 EHS slots; the new funded enrollment will be 35. The EHS Expansion grant will be combined with grant number 00306 effective August 1, 2024, resulting in the merger of the agency’s three current grants into two grants.

Additionally, for WNCSource’s Head Start/Early Head Start grant, the agency proposed optimizing enrollment and staffing levels with an enrollment reduction which included reducing the total Head Start funded enrollment by 49 slots, from 185 slots to 136 slots, and an EHS reduction of 40 slots, for an EHS funded enrollment of 80 slots. WNCSource anticipates a full approval of the 2023 Change in Scope Requests for implementation by June 2024.

Once the Change in Scope Request is fully approved and implemented, anticipated for June 2024, WNCSource would provide Head Start, and Early Head Start services to 331 children as noted in Table 1 below.

## Agency Overview

The WNCSource service area includes four counties in southwestern North Carolina, including: Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania counties. Henderson County is the most densely populated county in the service area with 311.8 people per square mile and is characterized as one of North Carolina's 14 regional cities or suburban counties. The remainder of the service area are three of North Carolina's 80 rural counties. Specifically, Rutherford County has 114 people per square mile, while Transylvania and Polk counties have 87.2 and 81.3 people per square mile, respectively.<sup>i</sup>

WNCSource provides Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) as well as NC Pre-K services, North Carolina's publicly funded pre-kindergarten program. Table 1 describes WNCSource's funded enrollment and number of classrooms by program type, for the programs as of April 2024 and once the Change in Scope Requests are approved (anticipated by June 2024). For more details regarding funded enrollment, by site location and county, and the impact of the Change in Scope Requests on enrollment, see Appendix F.

**Table 1. WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP Funded Enrollment Slots – April 2024 and June 2024 (Change in Scope)**

Program	As of April 2024	Change In Scope – June 2024
Head Start Center-based	185 slots 19 classrooms	136 slots 17 classrooms
Early Head Start Center-based	96 slots 12.5 classrooms	80 slots 10 classrooms
Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP)	80 slots 10 classrooms	80 slots 10 classrooms
HS/EHS Home-Based (HB)	24 EHS 0 HS	0 EHS slots 0 HS slots
EHS Expansion Funding	99 slots 10.5 classrooms	35 slots 4 classrooms
Total	484 slots <sup>1</sup> 52 classrooms	331 slots 41 classrooms

## Community Assessment

Prior to this comprehensive community assessment, WNCSource completed community assessment updates in 2020, 2022, and 2023. The 2023 WNCSource *Community Assessment Annual Update* highlighted the needs of children and families in the service area and reflected on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in both the Head Start/Early Head Start program and in communities, as a whole.

The primary purpose of this 2024 *Community Assessment* is to provide data and information to support WNCSource program planning. It is an opportunity for the agency to explore the needs of community

<sup>1</sup> Total includes 24 home-based slots.

residents and to look closely at the availability of resources and early learning services for young children and their families.

Throughout this report, highlighted areas of data tables point to data that stands out in comparison to other data (e.g., statewide data). Data table footnotes provide additional detail about comparison points.

## METHODOLOGY

### Head Start Program Performance Standards



Community assessment is a central aspect of any Head Start or Early Head Start program, serving as a tool for program planning and implementation. The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), Section 1302.11, *Determining community strengths, needs, and resources*, requires that programs complete a community assessment once during each five-year grant period and must review and update the community assessment annually.<sup>ii</sup> This 2024 WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start Community Assessment

Community Assessment provides data and information to describe the strengths, needs, and resources of its Head Start/Early Head Start program and service area. Data from the community assessment will be used by the agency, in collaboration with the Governing Board and Policy Council, to determine immediate and longer-term goals and objectives for the program.

Per the HSPPS, Section 1302.11<sup>iii</sup>, required data presented in the 2024 Community Assessment includes:

- 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 available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families; and
- 6) Strengths of the community.

### Process and Data Collection Methods

The 2024 Community Assessment was conducted in February-April 2024 under the leadership of Linda Carter, Children's Services Director, and accompanying leadership staff. WNCSource contracted with Foundations for Families, a consulting, training, and technical assistance company, to conduct the community assessment with input and guidance from leadership team members.

Data collection methods included:

- Review of program operations, challenges, and observed trends with agency staff;
- Program-level data from WNCSource programs, including the Head Start/Early Head Start program;
- Needs assessments and reports gathered from county departments and community agencies;
- Information gathered from publicly available data sources (e.g., U.S. Census, state departments, federal agencies, state and national organizations); and
- Data from surveys of WNCSource clients, including Head Start/Early Head Start families, staff, and community providers.

## **Data Analysis: An Equity Perspective**

When conducting the *2024 Community Assessment*, Foundations for Families analyzed data from an equity perspective to determine if there are certain types of families that are accessing or could benefit from WNCSource programs, including the Head Start/Early Head Start program, more than other families. In doing so, Foundations for Families explored layers of data to uncover disparities among subgroups within the service area and among children and families served. By taking the additional step to identify disparities, WNCSource will be able to target its strategies to address the most pressing needs through its program. This is a method to continuously improve program implementation while monitoring specific data for trends indicating whether outcomes are improving for the children and families most in need.

## **Limitations of 2024 Community Assessment**

The WNCSource service area is defined at the county level; therefore, a substantial amount of data at the county and municipal level was used to inform the agency's community assessment. State-level data is provided when county-level data is not available, for comparison to city/county data, or to set the context for North Carolina within the national landscape. School district, zip code, city/town, and census tract-level information is provided for key data points and to illustrate unique and specific needs in local communities.

Throughout the report, when relevant or required data points could not be obtained to inform the community assessment, this is indicated in the text. Anecdotal information is provided, where possible, to balance statewide, county, and local data with observations and reflections about the experiences of children and families in the service area.

When examining U.S. Census data tables, the margins of error for data on communities with small populations may be higher than communities with large populations. Zip code level data provided in the U.S. Census is a representation of the U.S. Postal Service zip code service area known as a "ZIP Code Tabulation Area."<sup>iv</sup> Zip codes are used by the Postal Service for mail delivery routes, and these boundaries may cross county, school district, or other geographic boundaries. A sum of zip code level or municipal data for a county will not necessarily total the county level data.

## OVERVIEW OF SERVICE AREA

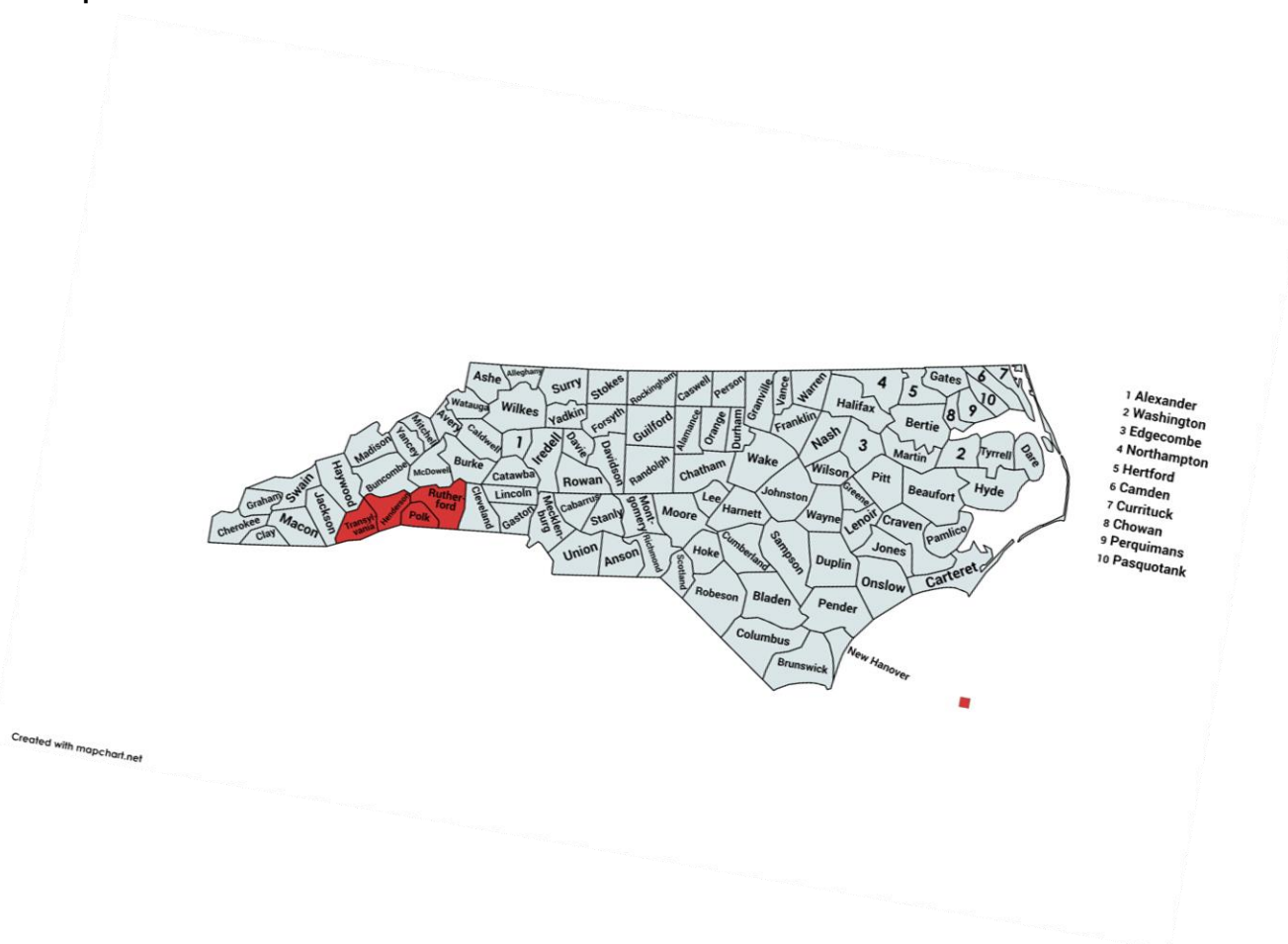


### Geographic Boundaries

The WNCSource service area includes Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania counties in southwestern North Carolina. All service area counties border South Carolina (Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg, and Cherokee counties) to the south. A map of the service area is provided in Figure 1.

## County and Local Government and Economics

Figure 1. Map of WNCSource Service Area<sup>v</sup>





There are 100 counties in North Carolina. Each county is governed by a board of county commissioners. County government serves an important role in the implementation of governmental functions at the local level. Additionally, the state has 1,041 county subdivisions, known as minor civil divisions (MCDs) and 1,035 townships which are nonfunctioning nongovernmental entities. North Carolina has 118 unified school districts. The U.S. Department of Defense runs two of the unified school districts, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs runs one unified school district in the state.<sup>vi</sup>

The WNCSource service area includes six federally designated Opportunity Zones (designed to increase economic development by providing investors with tax benefits), half of which are in Rutherford County (3).

**Table 2. Opportunity Zone Census Tracts by County (2024)<sup>vii</sup>**

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

## Service Area Demographics

The total population in the WNCSource service area is 233,818. Over the past five years, the population in the service area has been fluctuating or increasing; the population is increasing statewide (Table 3).

**Table 3. Population by Geographic Area and Year (2018-2022)<sup>viii</sup>**

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	113,625	114,913	116,298	116,281	116,469	Increasing
Polk County	20,458	20,557	20,682	19,328	19,538	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	66,532	66,599	66,741	64,444	64,680	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	33,513	33,775	34,039	32,986	33,131	Fluctuating
Service Area Total	234,128	235,844	237,760	233,039	233,818	Fluctuating
North Carolina	10,155,624	10,264,876	10,386,227	10,439,388	10,470,214	Increasing

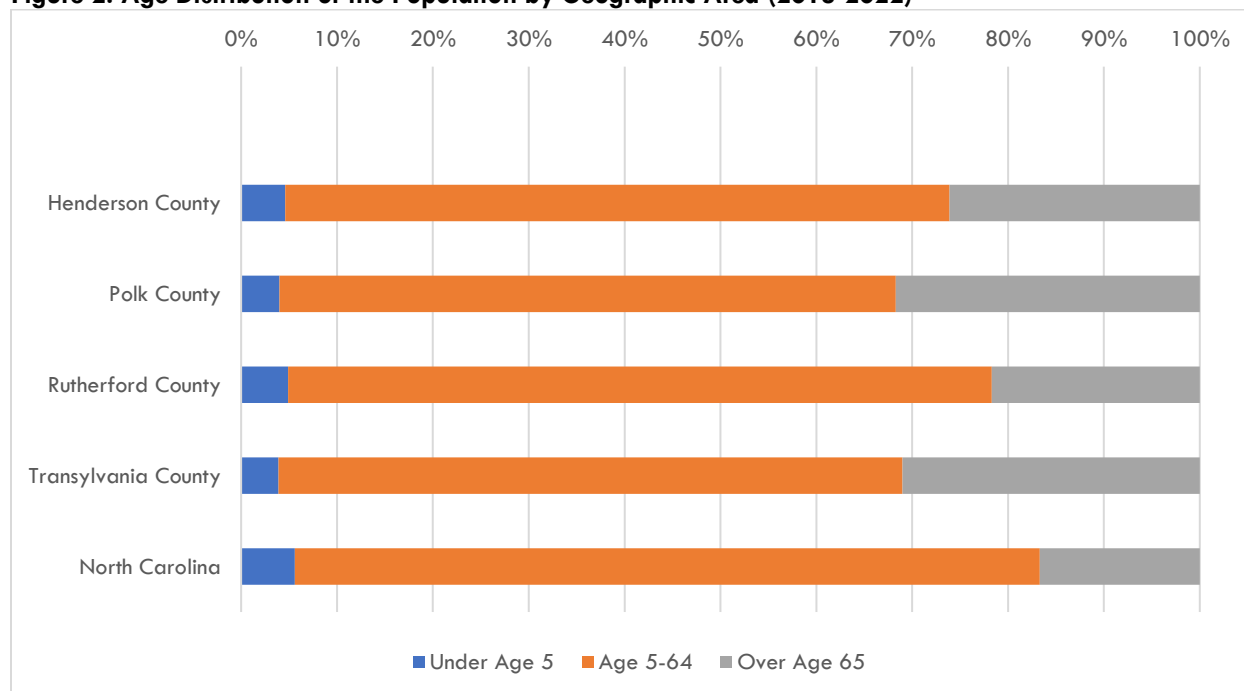
Median age is high in the service area, well above the statewide rate in a majority of the service area, and there are large percentages of the population over age 65. Rutherford County has the highest percentage of the population under age 5 (4.9%), yet still less than the statewide rate (5.6%) (Table 4).

**Table 4. Median Age and Distribution of the Population by Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>ix</sup>**

Geographic Area	Median Age <sup>2</sup>	Percent of Population Under Age 5	Percent of Population Over Age 65 <sup>3</sup>
Henderson County	47.7	4.6%	26.1%
Polk County	54.2	4.0%	31.7%
Rutherford County	44.9	4.9%	21.7%
Transylvania County	52.4	3.9%	31.0%
North Carolina	39.1	5.6%	16.7%

<sup>2</sup> Values greater than the statewide value are highlighted.

<sup>3</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

**Figure 2. Age Distribution of the Population by Geographic Area (2018-2022)\***

According to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, between 2019 and 2020, North Carolina experienced a Covid-19 baby “bust,” with births in North Carolina decreasing by 1.7% with the largest decline (-4.1%) in October-December, about nine months after March 2020. In 2020, there were 1,995 fewer births in the state from the year prior. The NC State Center for Health Statistics reflected that from 2020 to 2021, births increase by 3.2% and then again, from November 2021 to November 2022, by 5.1%, with continued increasing trends in 2022. These increases allowed North Carolina to recoup the number of births from the impact of the pandemic. Although North Carolina’s births have rebounded and there have been two years of consecutive growth, data indicates that the population will decline if people do not move into the state.<sup>xi</sup>

In recent years, the number of births has been fluctuating (Henderson and Transylvania counties) and declining (Polk and Rutherford counties) in the service area, while fluctuating across the state. With the exception of Polk County, most recent rates for all counties are less than the statewide rate. Data shows the highest birth rate in Rutherford County and greatest number of births is in Henderson County (Table 5).

**Table 5. Number of Live Births and Birth Rate (per 1,000 resident population) by Geographic Area (2017-2022)<sup>xii</sup>**

Geographic Area	2017	2019	2020	2021	2022	Birth Rate 12/2022 <sup>4</sup>	Trend for Birth Rate
Henderson County	1,040	1,022	1,044	998	1,050	8.4	Fluctuating
Polk County	161	166	111	158	121	9.9	Declining
Rutherford County	689	680	628	633	632	8.5	Declining
Transylvania County	252	262	226	262	229	6.1	Fluctuating
North Carolina	120,099	118,725	116,755	120,501	121,557	8.6	Fluctuating

<sup>4</sup> Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

Data on race and ethnicity of the population is described in Tables 6 and 7. Individuals in the service area are predominately White; racial diversity continues to be greatest in Rutherford County, where 8.6% of the population is Black or African American.

**Table 6. Population (and Percentage of Population) by Race and Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>xiii</sup>**

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	101,264 (86.9%)	3,948 (3.4%)	518 (0.4%)	1,506 (1.3%)	168 (0.1%)	3,992 (3.4%)	5,073 (4.4%)
Polk County	17,351 (88.8%)	948 (4.9%)	35 (0.2%)	40 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	407 (2.1%)	757 (3.9%)
Rutherford County	54,235 (83.9%)	5,585 (8.6%)	122 (0.2%)	351 (0.5%)	6 (0.0%)	1,532 (2.4%)	2,849 (4.4%)
Transylvania County	29,993 (90.5%)	1,476 (4.5%)	69 (0.2%)	18 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	345 (1.0%)	1,230 (3.7%)
North Carolina	6,800,458 (65.0%)	2,192,455 (20.9%)	109,600 (1.0%)	325,670 (3.1%)	6,948 (0.1%)	421,954 (4.0%)	613,129 (5.9%)

As described in Table 7, the percentage of the population that is Hispanic or Latino origin ranges from 2.2% in Transylvania County to 6.8% in Henderson County, where the greatest ethnic diversity continues to be represented.

**Table 7. Ethnicity as a Percentage of the Population by Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>xiv</sup>**

Geographic Area	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	6.8%	1.2%	0.1%	2.4%	10.6%
Polk County	4.8%	0.2%	0.1%	0.8%	5.9%
Rutherford County	2.8%	0.3%	0.4%	1.5%	5.0%
Transylvania County	2.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.7%	3.5%
North Carolina	5.3%	1.2%	0.3%	3.3%	10.0%

In addition to U.S. Census data, the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) provides county and state level population projections through 2028. Population projections are provided by age, geographic area, and year by county.

It is estimated based on current poverty rates by county, that of the projected increase of 1,155 children under age five, from 2024 to 2028, 260 would be living below the poverty level. Specifically, it is estimated that 131 children would be income eligible for Early Head Start and 129 children would be income eligible for Head Start (Tables 14-15).

**Table 8. Population Projections by Geographic Area and Age/Year (2024-2026)<sup>xv</sup>**

Geographic Area	2024			2025			2026		
	0-2	3-5	0-5	0-2	3-5	0-5	0-2	3-5	0-5
Henderson	3,207	3,054	6,261	3,331	3,024	6,355	3,421	3,091	6,512
Polk	444	458	902	460	440	900	477	438	915
Rutherford	2,014	1,965	3,979	2,102	1,928	4,029	2,148	1,943	4,091
Transylvania	799	754	1,553	848	730	1,578	877	750	1,627
Service Area	6,464	6,231	12,695	6,741	6,122	12,862	6,923	6,222	13,145

**Table 9. Population Projections by Geographic Area and Age/Year (2027-2028)<sup>xvi</sup>**

Geographic Area	2027			2028		
	0-2	3-5	0-5	0-2	3-5	0-5
Henderson	3,496	3,212	6,708	3,571	3,332	6,903
Polk	477	457	934	478	473	951
Rutherford	2,146	2,026	4,172	2,144	2,114	4,258
Transylvania	874	801	1,675	869	853	1,722
Service Area	6,993	6,496	13,489	7,062	6,772	13,834

**Table 10. Population Projections by Age and Geographic Area (2024)<sup>xvii</sup>**

Geographic Area	2024					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Henderson	1,115	1,074	1,018	997	1,006	1,051
Polk	158	141	145	143	148	167
Rutherford	714	670	630	636	658	671
Transylvania	294	262	243	242	241	271
Service Area	2,281	2,147	2,036	2,018	2,053	2,160

**Table 11. Population Projections by Age and Geographic Area (2026)<sup>xviii</sup>**

Geographic Area	2026					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Henderson	1,165	1,140	1,116	1,074	1,019	998
Polk	156	159	162	146	147	145
Rutherford	716	716	716	674	633	636
Transylvania	291	293	293	261	245	244
Service Area	2,328	2,308	2,287	2,155	2,044	2,023

**Table 12. Population Projections by Age and Geographic Area (2028)<sup>xix</sup>**

Geographic Area	2028					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Henderson	1,216	1,190	1,165	1,140	1,116	1,076
Polk	158	159	161	163	163	147
Rutherford	713	714	717	721	719	674
Transylvania	289	289	291	293	295	265
Service Area	2,352	2,334	2,317	2,293	2,162	2,352

**Table 13. Change in Number of Children, Population Projections by Geographic Area and Year (2024-2028)<sup>xx</sup>**

Geographic Area	Growth 2024 to 2028		
	Age 0-2	Age 3-5	Age 0-5
Henderson	+364	+278	+642
Polk	+34	+15	+49
Rutherford	+130	+149	+279
Transylvania	+70	+115	+185
Service Area	+598	+557	+1,155

**Table 14. Estimated Number of Children (0-2) Eligible for Early Head Start by 2028 by Geographic Area (2024-2028)<sup>xxi</sup>**

Geographic Area	Age 0-2	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old <sup>xxii</sup>	Estimated Increase in EHS Income Eligible Children by 2028
Henderson	+364	20.1%	73
Polk	+34	11.3%	4
Rutherford	+130	26.6%	35
Transylvania	+70	27.0%	19
Service Area	+598	--	+131

**Table 15. Estimated Number of Children (3-5) Eligible for Head Start in by 2028 by Geographic Area (2024-2028)<sup>xxiii</sup>**

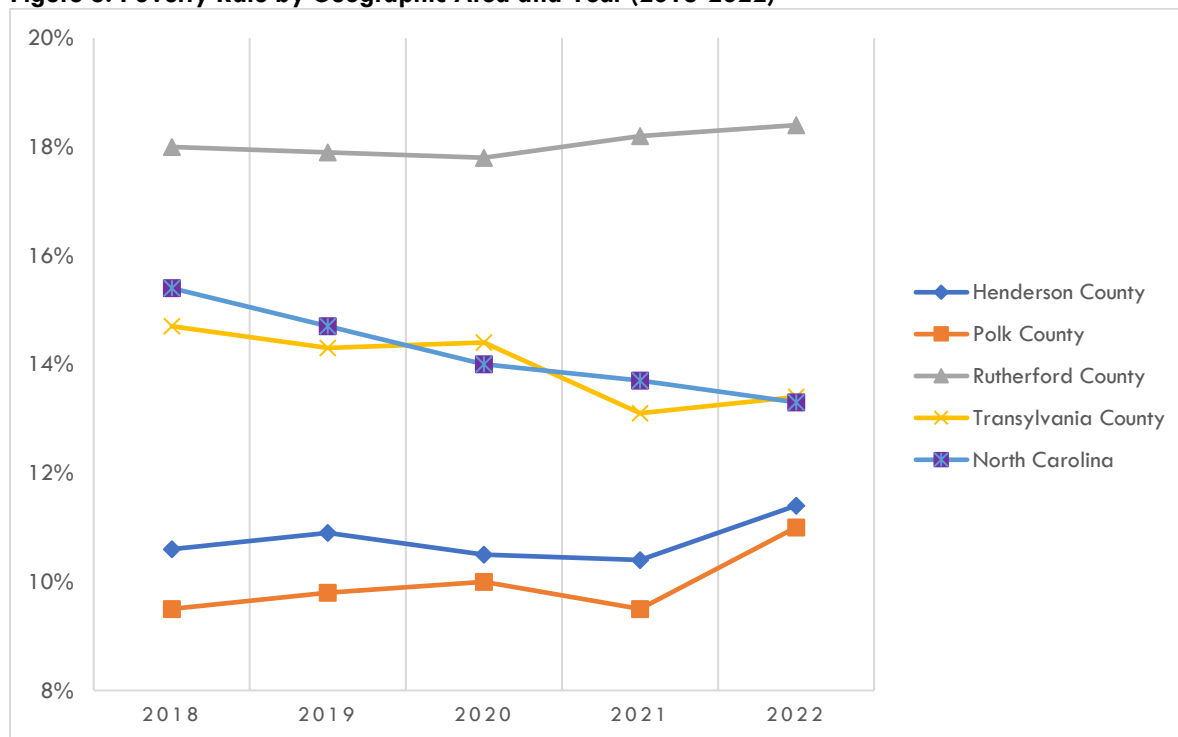
Geographic Area	Age 3-5	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old <sup>xxiv</sup>	Estimated Increase in HS Income Eligible Children by 2028
Henderson	+278	20.1%	56
Polk	+15	11.3%	2
Rutherford	+149	26.6%	40
Transylvania	+115	27.0%	31
Service Area	+557	--	+129

## Poverty

As described in Figure 3, poverty rates have been fluctuating in the counties in the WNCSource service area in recent years. However, the rate is high in Rutherford and Transylvania counties and above the statewide rate. While poverty rates are lowest in Henderson and Polk counties, Polk County experienced a 1.5% increase in poverty rate from 2021 to 2022. Child poverty data is discussed in detail in the Head Start/Early Head Start Eligible Children and Pregnant Women section of the report.

**Table 16. Poverty Rate by Geographic Area and Year (2018-2022)<sup>xxv, 5</sup>**

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	10.6%	10.9%	10.5%	12.5%	11.4%	Fluctuating
Polk County	9.5%	9.8%	10.0%	9.5%	11.0%	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	18.0%	17.9%	17.8%	18.2%	18.4%	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	14.7%	14.3%	14.4%	13.1%	13.4%	Fluctuating
North Carolina	15.4%	14.7%	14.0%	13.4%	13.3%	Declining

**Figure 3. Poverty Rate by Geographic Area and Year (2018-2022)<sup>xxvi</sup>**

<sup>5</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

Across the service area, there is disparity with regard to poverty rates by race. Poverty rates remain 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 race categories. In Rutherford County, for example, the poverty rate among Black or African American individuals is 46.4%, three times the poverty rate among White individuals, 15.1% (Table 8).

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. Of note, compared to the data from the prior year, the number/percent of Hispanic individuals below the poverty level in Transylvania County increased from 66 individuals (6.1%) to 350 individuals (31.3%) (Table 18).

*Compared to the data from the prior year, the number/percent of Hispanic individuals below the poverty level in Transylvania County increased from 66 individuals (6.1%) to 350 individuals (31.3%)*

**Table 17. Number (Percent) of Individuals Below Poverty Level by Race and Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>xxvii,6</sup>**

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	9,416 (9.4%)	394 (10.4%)	79 (15.3%)	126 (8.4%)	36 (21.4%)	1,114 (29.0%)	1,922 (38.2%)
Polk County	1,771 (10.3%)	164 (18.6%)	16 (45.7%)	6 (15.0%)	n/a	0 (0.0%)	159 (21.0%)
Rutherford County	8,041 (15.1%)	2,459 (46.4%)	40 (35.1%)	69 (20.5%)	1 (16.7%)	265 (17.9%)	780 (27.5%)
Transylvania County	3,425 (11.7%)	485 (39.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	n/a	91 (27.9%)	304 (25.1%)
North Carolina	669,717 (10.1%)	433,360 (20.5%)	24,826 (23.4%)	27,095 (8.6%)	1,318 (20.5%)	95,716 (23.1%)	105,386 (17.8%)

**Table 18. Number (and Percent) of Individuals Below Poverty Level by Ethnicity and Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>xxviii,7</sup>**

Geographic Area	Hispanic or Latino Origin	Non-Hispanic or Latino Origin, White Alone
Henderson County	3,391 (28.1%)	8,427 (8.9%)
Polk County	111 (9.7%)	1,712 (10.4%)
Rutherford County	606 (19.0%)	7,776 (14.9%)
Transylvania County	350 (31.3%)	3,370 (11.6%)
North Carolina	225,906 (22.1%)	594,248 (9.4%)

Disparities also exist with regard to single-parent and two-parent families with young children. In families with a female head of household (no spouse present), the poverty rate is substantially higher than married-couple families, though rates are generally declining or steady from the prior year, with the exception of Transylvania County where the rate increased 22.2% and most recently approximately 64.6% of single mothers with young children live in poverty (Table 19).

WNCSource leadership reports that while they tend to see more mothers with custody, fathers are more involved in recent years and many share custody. With many couples choosing not to marry, this could mean

<sup>6</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>7</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.



that fathers are underrepresented in the data. Additionally, some may be concerned about losing some services if the families report father participation in household.

**Table 19. Poverty Rate by Family Status and Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>xxix,8</sup>**

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 <sup>9</sup> (% change from 2017-2021)
Henderson County	10.3%	10.1%	16.1% (-4.5%)
Polk County	2.1%	0.0%	9.5% (-9.9%)
Rutherford County	7.8%	2.3%	19.7% (+0.4%)
Transylvania County	22.8%	0.0%	64.6% (+22.2%)
North Carolina	14.0%	4.6%	38.5% (-1.3%)

## Household Composition and Family Characteristics

In the WNCSource service area, most children continue to live with their biological, step, or adopted parents. Table 20 describes the percentage of children by relationship to householder. In some communities, and particularly in Polk and Rutherford counties, there is a high rate of children living with grandparent(s) or other relatives.

**Table 20. Percent of Children (ages 0 to 18-years-old) by Relationship to Householder and Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>xxx,10</sup>**

Geographic Area	Own Child (biological, step, or adopted)	Grandchild	Other Relatives	Foster Care, Other Unrelated Relative
Henderson County	88.8%	7.0%	2.0%	2.2%
Polk County	82.6%	12.1%	4.5%	0.8%
Rutherford County	83.7%	11.8%	2.5%	2.0%
Transylvania County	90.1%	5.6%	3.7%	0.6%
North Carolina	88.0%	7.8%	2.4%	1.9%

During the 2022-2023 program year, 1.8% of WNCSource HS/EHS children were in the care of grandparents (6 families). One child was in the care of other relatives, and 10 children were in the care of foster parents (Table 21).<sup>xxxi</sup> WNCSource has not observed much fluctuation in the number of grandparents caring for their grandchildren, but note that in most cases it is due to parental substance abuse.

**Table 21. Number and Percent of WNCSource HS/EHS/EHS-CCP Families in Which Grandparent(s) or Other Relative(s) is Guardian (2022-2023)<sup>xxxii</sup>**

Geographic Area	Grandparent(s)	Other Relative(s)	Foster Parent (not a relative)	Total
Head Start (99 families)	2 (2.0%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.0%)
Early Head Start (135 families)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	4 (2.9%)	5 (3.7%)
EHS-CCP (95 families)	3 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	6 (6.3%)	9 (9.5%)
Total (329 families)	6 (1.8%)	1 (0.3%)	10 (3.0%)	17 (5.2%)

<sup>8</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>9</sup> Households with female householders refer to those with husband absent because of separation or other reason where husband and wife maintain separate residences; and female householders who are widowed, divorced, or single with at least one other relative in the household.

<sup>10</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

In the WNCSource service area, there are many one-parent households. Rates have been decreasing slightly for the last 10 years across the state. Rutherford and Transylvania counties continue to have rates higher than the statewide rate (Table 22).

Children served by WNCSource's programs are living in single-parent households at higher rates than the countywide rates. In the Head Start program, 56.6% of families served are single-parent families; the rate is 51.9% in Early Head Start. In the EHS-CCP program, the rate continues to be highest, at 61.1%. A significant number of these single-parent households are led by a woman.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

As described earlier, the poverty rate among single-parent families is very high in the service area. WNCSource is providing critical, comprehensive services to single-parent families.

**Table 22. Children in One-Parent Families by Geographic Area**

Geographic Area	County/Statewide (2017-2021) <sup>xxxiv 11</sup>	Head Start <sup>xxxv</sup>	Early Head Start <sup>xxxvi</sup>	Early Head Start CCP <sup>xxxvii</sup>
Henderson County	30.0%	56 out of 99 families (56.6%)	70 out of 135 (51.9%)	58 out of 95 (61.1%)
Polk County	32.9%			
Rutherford County	44.4%			
Transylvania County	35.3%			
North Carolina	35.8%			

## NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



The needs of children and families in communities served by WNCSource are multi-faceted and interconnected. In an area where there is great diversity of need, some families experience many of the factors that contribute to the cycle of poverty within their communities. Together with other agencies, WNCSource strives to meet the needs of the area's most vulnerable families.

In December 2019, COVID-19 emerged as a new infectious disease. COVID-19 quickly spread throughout the world, and on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Across the U.S., COVID-19 impacted the health and well-being of communities. While COVID-19 continues to be present in communities, its impacts have stabilized as evident in data and reflections from WNCSource.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, other factors, such as inflation, are significantly impacting families. During the summer of 2022, inflation, measured by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, reached a nationwide, four-decade high of 9.1%. From Summer 2022 to early 2023, inflation rates decreased overall, though modest month to month increases in inflation are still common. Because low-income households spend a greater portion of their income on basic necessities (e.g., food, gasoline, heating), they tend to be more deeply impacted by rising inflation.<sup>xxxix, xl</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

## Education

In communities served by WNCSource, educational attainment trends toward high school diploma or some college. In Rutherford County, the rate of individuals (age 25 and over) whose highest education attainment is 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, no diploma, is greater than the statewide rate. Fewer individuals in the service area have a Bachelor's or advanced degree than statewide rates, with the exception of Transylvania County and Henderson County (Table 23).

The educational attainment among families served by WNCSource Early Learning Programs trends lower and toward a high school degree or GED (48.8%). WNCSource leadership report that generally families seek to first improve their English or literacy skills as a foundational step to prepare for and attain their General Educational Diploma (GED). Family Advocates connect enrolled families to resources at Blue Ridge Community College and a local community program (Goodwill) for support.

WNCSource staff utilize the Teaching Strategies online learning system, Quorum, which offers content to support the CDA pathway, as well as the National Head Start Association learning platform academy.

**Table 23. Percent of Education Attainment for Adults over 25 years old by Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>xli,12</sup>**

Geographic Area	Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> grade	9 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> grade, no diploma	High school graduate	Some college, no degree	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree	Advanced degree
Henderson County	3.4%	5.0%	25.2%	21.7%	10.7%	21.2%	12.7%
Polk County	2.2%	5.1%	26.6%	21.7%	11.2%	21.4%	11.9%
Rutherford County	4.5%	9.6%	30.9%	23.7%	11.5%	13.0%	6.8%
Transylvania County	1.8%	4.4%	24.0%	23.1%	9.6%	23.8%	13.3%
North Carolina	4.0%	6.6%	25.2%	20.4%	10.0%	21.4%	12.5%

**Table 24. Educational Attainment of Families Served by WNCSource Program (highest level of education obtained by parent(s)/guardian(s) (2022-2023)<sup>xlii</sup>**

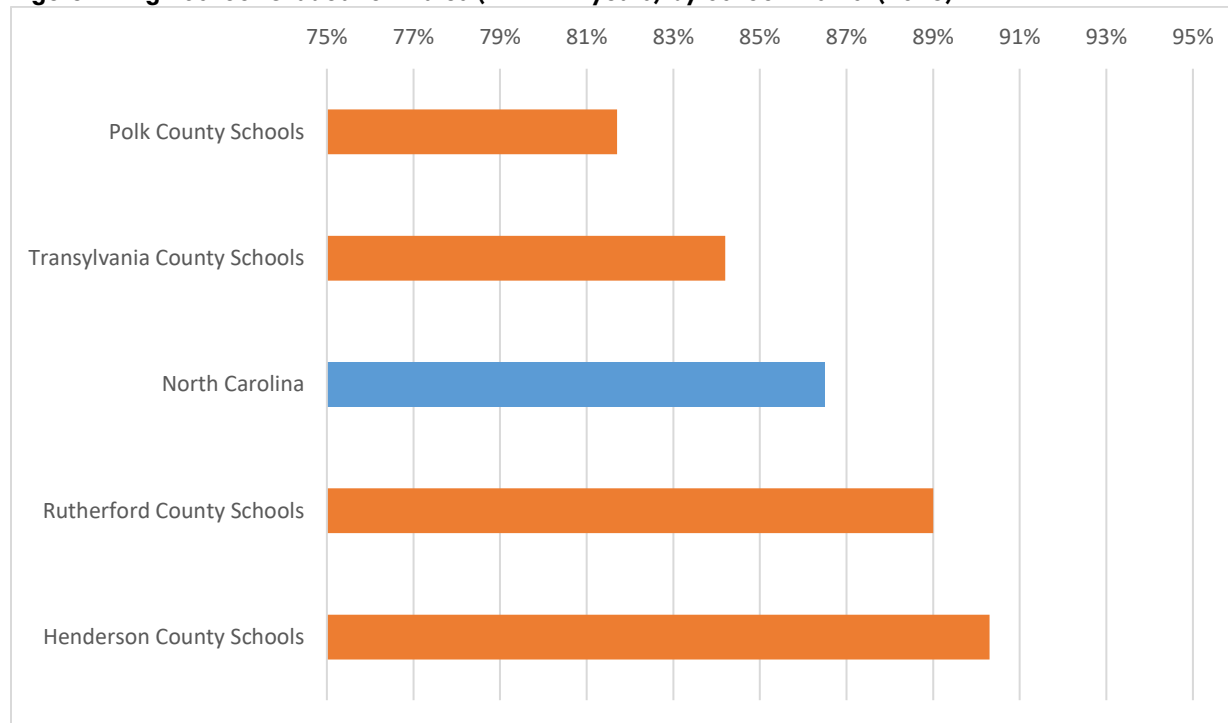
Degree Status	Early Head Start-CCP	Early Head Start	Head Start	Total	Percent change from 2021-2022
Less than a high school degree	19	37	26	82 (25.2%)	-3.5%
High school graduate or GED	54	60	45	159 (48.8%)	+3.9%
Associates degree, vocational school, or some college	17	26	16	59 (18.1%)	-0.4%
Bachelor's or advanced degree	4	13	9	26 (7.9%)	0.0%

Public School Districts. Data on high school graduation show a wide range of rates among school districts in WNCSource's service area. Half of the school districts in the service area have a graduation rate that is greater than the statewide rate (86.5%). High school graduation rates are most challenging in the Polk and Transylvania School Districts. Graduation rate trends from the year prior and longer term (2014-2023) are reflected in Table 25.

<sup>12</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

**Table 25. High School Graduation Rate by School District (2023)<sup>xliii, 13</sup>**

School District	Percent of Students that Graduated in Four Years		
	2023	Compared to 2022	Long Term Trend 2014-2023
Henderson County Schools	90.3%	-0.5%	+0.8%
Polk County Schools	81.7%	-5.2%	-1.2%
Rutherford County Schools	89.0%	+1.8%	+10.4%
Transylvania County Schools	84.2%	-4.8%	+4.3%
North Carolina	86.5%	+0.1%	+2.6%

**Figure 4. High School Graduation Rates (within 4 years) by School District (2023)<sup>xliv</sup>**

A majority of districts in the service area have a dropout rate that is consistent with or better than the statewide rate (1.95%), with the exception of Transylvania County (2.6%) (Table 26). From the year prior, all county school districts had a decreasing drop-out rate, with the exception of Transylvania County.

**Table 26. High School Drop Out Rate by Geographic Area (2018-2023)<sup>xlv, 14</sup>**

Geographic Area	2018-2019	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	% Difference from 2021-2022
Henderson County	2.15	1.71	1.93	1.72	-0.21
Polk County	1.73	0.89	2.78	1.51	-1.27
Rutherford County	1.82	3.21	2.79	0.75	-2.04
Transylvania County	2.58	1.16	1.47	2.60	+1.13
North Carolina	3.22	1.91	3.27	1.95	-1.32

The most current data on student achievement in school districts in WNCSource's service area show the strongest rates of student proficiency on reading and mathematics state assessments in Polk County School

<sup>13</sup> Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>14</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

District. All county school districts in the service area demonstrated proficiency levels greater than the state rate in the 2022-2023 school year (Table 27).

While data was not publicly available for all school districts in the service area, in Rutherford County, 11% of kindergarten students were held back, and 12% were held back in first grade in the 2021-2022 school year; data is likely impacted by the pandemic.

**Table 27. Percent of Students Proficient (Level Three and Above) on North Carolina End-of-Year Grade Tests by Geographic Area (2022-2023)<sup>xlvi</sup>**

Geographic Area	Reading	Mathematics
Henderson County	52.5%	57.4%
Polk County	66.4%	66.8%
Rutherford County	54.8%	58.7%
Transylvania County	53.7%	55.6%
North Carolina	50.2%	53%

**Table 28. Percent of Students Held Back in Kindergarten and First Grade by Geographic Area (2021-2022)<sup>xlvii</sup>**

Geographic Area	Kindergarten	First Grade
Henderson County	Not reported	Not reported
Polk County	3%	5%
Rutherford County	11%	12%
Transylvania County	3%	1%
North Carolina	Not reported	Not reported

## Health

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ranks communities across health and wellness factors. The overall rankings in health outcomes represent how healthy counties are within the state. The healthiest county is ranked #1.

Rankings are based on two types of measurements: how long people live and how healthy people feel. The overall rankings in health factors represent what influences the health of a county. They are an estimate of the future health of counties compared to other counties within a state and are based on four factors: health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic, and physical environment.

According to the most recent rankings (2023), out of 100 counties in North Carolina, counties in the service area rank in the top 20% for health outcomes, with the exception of Rutherford County which continues to have the most consistent, and significantly less optimal, outcomes in comparison to the state outcomes.

**Table 29: Community Health Outcomes Rankings by Geographic Area (1 healthiest - 100 least healthy county in North Carolina) (2021-2023)<sup>xlviii</sup>**

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 30, factors related to poor health, as well as the percentage of adults experiencing physical or mental distress are high in parts of the service area. Rutherford County rates are greater than statewide and nationwide rates across all measures, indicating poorer health outcomes. In the entirety of the service

area, there are high rates of mentally unhealthy days, defined as the average number of mentally unhealthy days reported in the past 30 days.

**Table 30. Health Outcomes Data by Geographic Area<sup>xlix,15</sup>**

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	7,700	11%	2.9	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
United States	7,300	12%	3.0	4.4

Service area residents may experience challenges with other health-related factors. Rates of smokers, obesity, and adults who are diabetic are described in Table 31. There are high rates of smokers in Rutherford and Transylvania counties, but lower or equal rates of obesity, diabetes, and HIV within the service area, compared to statewide.

**Table 31. Adult Health Factors by Geographic Area (2020)<sup>i,16</sup>**

Geographic Area	% Smokers	% Obese	% Diabetic	HIV Prevalence Rate per 100,000
Henderson County	17%	34%	8%	171
Polk County	17%	32%	9%	133
Rutherford County	23%	33%	10%	111
Transylvania County	18%	29%	9%	123
North Carolina	17%	34%	11%	374
United States	16%	32%	9%	380

**Vaping.** When reviewing vaping statistics, in terms of percentages, high school teen students in North Carolina (35.5%) vape more than in any other state, with the exception of West Virginia (35.7%). The growth of vaping in recent years has been significant. In 2021, a national study indicated that 77% of teens who acknowledged using tobacco products specified their first tobacco-related product was an e-cigarette. This was compared to 2014 data, when only 27% of tobacco-using teens were introduced to smoking through an e-cigarette.<sup>li</sup>

The significant vape usage of North Carolina teens is concerning as the adverse health impacts from smoking/vaping are clear and are also known to be triggers for asthma. The smoke irritates the airways and causes inflammation, leading to symptoms like coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. Younger children with asthma who are exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to experience more severe and frequent asthma attacks, which can lead to hospitalization and other serious complications.<sup>lii</sup>

Further, e-cigarette, or vaping, product use associated lung injury (EVALI) is on the rise. One study showed that by late 2019, with increased use of vaping products, there had been 2,051 EVALI cases and 39 deaths reported in the United States over four months. The rapidly increasing use of vaping and e-cigarettes appeared to be limited to the United States, with few reported cases and no deaths from the rest of the world.<sup>liii</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>16</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

## Substance Misuse

In 2021, a record 4,041 North Carolinians died of a drug overdose. More than 3 out of 4 (77%) of these deaths involved fentanyl – fentanyl on its own or in combination with other drugs. Death data for 2022 are provisional and likely to increase as cases are finalized.<sup>liv</sup>

Provisional data for 2022 shows additional increases in overdose deaths in the service area (with the exception of Transylvania County where the number slightly decreased). The greatest rate of deaths by overdose was in Rutherford County, followed by Polk County. Data for North Carolina indicates that in the state in 2023, the number of suspected overdose deaths decreased 10%, though data is subject to change and may increase (e.g., delayed data may be received regarding NC residents who died in other states) (Table 32).<sup>lv</sup>

North Carolina has a rate of drug overdose deaths of 38.5 per 100,000 residents, above the nationwide rate (32.5). Within counties in the service area, drug overdose rates are high in Polk County and particularly in Rutherford County; both counties reflect substantial increases in drug overdose deaths in 2022, compared to 2021.<sup>lvi</sup>

**Table 32. Drug Overdose: Deaths (Number of Individuals) (2015-2022) by Geographic Area<sup>lvii 17</sup>**

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	2022 (Provisional Data)
Henderson County	20	35	34	40
Polk County	6	5	2	10
Rutherford County	11	23	34	43
Transylvania County	7	6	7	6
Service Area	44	69	77	99
North Carolina	2,352	3,304	4,041	4,036

**Table 33. Rate of Drug Overdose Deaths Per 100,000 Residents (2021-2022) by Geographic Area<sup>lviii 18</sup>**

Geographic Area	2021	2022 (Provisional Data)
Henderson County	29.0	34.1
Polk County	9.7	48.3
Rutherford County	50.7	64.2
Transylvania County	20.4	17.4
North Carolina	42.0	38.5

**Table 34. Number of Suspected Drug Overdose Deaths (2018-2023) by Geographic Area<sup>lix</sup>**

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
North Carolina	2,554	2,688	3,132	3,961	4,243	4,156

<sup>17</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>18</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.



Further, the rates of excessive drinking in counties served by WNCSource (17%-19%) are slightly elevated from the statewide rate in Polk and Transylvania counties. There are also greater rates of driving deaths involving alcohol in Henderson County (Table 35).

**Table 35. Tobacco and Alcohol Use by Geographic Area<sup>lx,19</sup>**

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

## Healthcare and Clinical Care

As described in Table 36, a vast majority of adults and children in the service area are covered by health insurance. The percentage of children under age 19 who are uninsured is relatively low across most of the service area; it is highest in Polk County and Henderson County, where the rates are 7% and 6% respectively.

In the WNCSource HS/EHS programs, at the beginning of enrollment, a majority (98.9%) of children (348) had health insurance, of which 341 children were enrolled in Medicaid/EPSTD or CHIP and only 4 (1.1%) had no health insurance.<sup>lxi</sup>

**Table 36. Percent of Individuals Without Health Insurance by Geographic Area (2020)<sup>lxii,20</sup>**

Geographic Area	Adults (Under Age 65)	Children (Under Age 19)
Henderson County	18%	6%
Polk County	16%	7%
Rutherford County	17%	5%
Transylvania County	18%	6%
North Carolina	15%	5%
United States	12%	5%

On December 1, 2023 more people became eligible for NC Medicaid through Medicaid expansion. Under expansion, NC Medicaid covers people ages 19 through 64 years with higher incomes. Many North Carolinians who did not qualify for health coverage prior to expansion now do. In the WNCSource service area, as of March 2024, an additional 7,489 adults enrolled in Medicaid Expansion representing a range of 4.6% to 8.0% of adults in the counties that enrolled in expansion (Henderson 2,841, 4.6%; Rutherford 2,927, 8%; Polk 691, 6.6%; Transylvania 1,030 (6.1%).<sup>lxiii</sup>

Individuals are eligible for the program if they reside in North Carolina, are 19 through 64 years old, are a citizen (though some non-US citizens can also get coverage), and if the household income falls within a provided income guideline based on family size.<sup>lxiv</sup>

North Carolina formerly offered two programs for eligible children, NC Medicaid (federally funded) and NC Health Choice (funded through the federal Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)). The North Carolina state budget (July 2022) moved the NC Health Choice beneficiaries (approximately 55,000 children) from

<sup>19</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>20</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

the Medicaid program, becoming one of 17 other states who combined Medicaid/CHIP programs for children.<sup>lxv</sup>

The change will increase the ability to access assistance getting to and from medical appointments and Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment. Families will also no longer pay enrollment fees or copays for medical visits and prescriptions and have greater access to enhanced behavioral health services not previously covered by NC Health Choice.<sup>lxvi</sup>

To get health coverage through Medicaid some non-U.S. citizens are eligible if they have “qualified immigration status,” though most in this category must wait five years before they can apply. Though some non-U.S. citizens do not have to wait five years to be eligible, including children under the age of 19. Parents who are undocumented seeking coverage for their eligible children need to give “the names of all members in their household, their mailing address, any verification of any income, and proof of state residency from the parent(s) to determine the child’s eligibility along with a signed application. Parents do not need to give immigration information or a social security number for themselves if they are not applying for Medicaid for themselves. Medicaid does not report any information to law enforcement or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).”<sup>lxvii</sup>

The ratio of primary care physicians, dentists, and mental health providers to individuals in counties in the service area is described in Table 37. With the exception of the primary care physician and dentist ratios in Henderson County and the mental health provider ratio in Transylvania County, provider ratios are greater than the statewide ratios 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.

WNCSource leadership report that many staff and enrolled families have had successful experiences with RHA Mobile Crisis Team, which offers crisis services across the state, in urgent situations to safely stabilize individuals who are experiencing acute distress related to behavioral health, substance use, or developmental disabilities. Additionally, the Mobile Outreach, Response, Engagement and Stabilization (MORES) program is North Carolina’s publicly funded crisis service may be used by anyone regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. “MORES is a team-based crisis response intervention for children and adolescents ages 3-21 years experiencing escalating emotional and/or behavioral needs.”<sup>lxviii</sup>

Dental care continues to be a challenge for some residents, especially the youngest children. The American Dental Association recommends children be seen by a dentist by age 1 to get used to care. WNCSource leadership report that Transylvania County no longer has a consistent dental practice that accepts Medicaid for children under age 3 (only over age five). One provider closed, and another caps Medicaid patients; limited appointments are filled immediately. Henderson and Rutherford counties each have two pediatric providers that accept Medicaid.

WNCSource leadership note that some pediatricians are providing fluoride applications for parents to apply at home. Additionally, WNCSource offers gas cards or transportation to help families travel long distances to appointments with providers outside the area. The WNCSource Health Specialist has also leveraged a relationship with a local dental hygienist at the health department who conducts dental health screenings (in classrooms) on all children, with parental consent. When dental or related health concerns are identified, WNCSource works with families to assist with making an appointment and accommodations to ensure children are able to access necessary care.

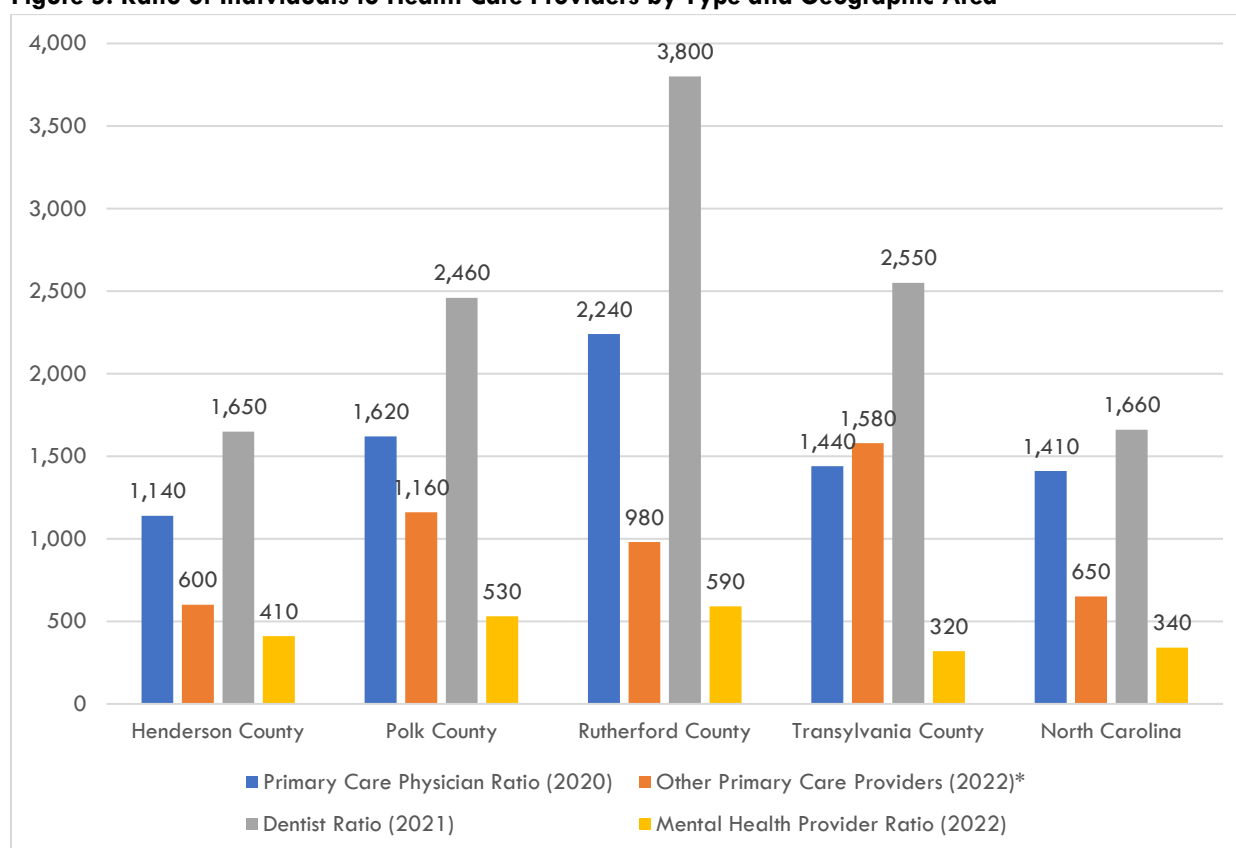
Across the state, there are large numbers of children who are receiving preventive care (77%) and have teeth in excellent or very good condition (79%). However, slightly more than one-third of the state continues to lack access to fluoridated water (often due to the utilization of well water that is not fluoridated); many children enrolled in WNCSource require fluoride treatment.<sup>lxix</sup>

**Table 37. Access to Care - Ratio of Health Care Providers by Geographic Area<sup>lxx,21</sup>**

Geographic Area	Primary Care Physician Ratio (2020)	Other Primary Care Providers (2022)*	Dentist Ratio (2021)	Mental Health Provider Ratio (2022)
Henderson County	1,140:1	600:1	1,650:1	410:1
Polk County	1,620:1	1,160:1	2,460:1	530:1
Rutherford County	2,240:1	980:1	3,800:1	590:1
Transylvania County	1,440:1	1,580:1	2,550:1	320:1
North Carolina	1,410:1	650:1	1,660:1	340:1
United States	1,310:1	810:1	1,380:1	340:1

\* Includes nurse practitioners (NPs), physician assistants (PAs), and clinical nurse specialists who can provide routine and preventative care.

**Figure 5. Ratio of Individuals to Health Care Providers by Type and Geographic Area<sup>lxxi</sup>**



In WNCSource's service area, there are 50 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) (Table 38). FQHCs are established in underserved areas and provide comprehensive health services that are reimbursable for Medicare, Medicaid, and other health benefits.<sup>lxxii</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ratios greater than the statewide ratios are highlighted.

**Table 38. Federally Qualified Health Centers by Geographic Area (2024)<sup>lxxiii</sup>**

County	Federally Qualified Health Centers
Henderson County (27)	Hendersonville (20) Mills River (2) Arden (3) East Flat Rock (1) Etowah (1)
Polk County (7)	Tryon (1) Columbus (3) Mill Spring (3)
Rutherford County (3)	Lake Lure (2) Spindale (1)
Transylvania County (13)	Brevard (10) Rosman (3)

### Infant and Maternal Health

Like adult health factors, there are strengths and challenges when considering infant and maternal health. Disparities exist with regard to health factors and health outcomes, pointing to a need for continued services to young children and their families.

**Prenatal Care.** Child health and well-being includes adequate prenatal care that begins in the first trimester. While a majority of babies in the service area are born to women with first trimester prenatal care, the rates are lower in Rutherford County and Transylvania County.

**Table 39. Women Who Receive Early Prenatal Care by Geographic Area, Percent of Total Births (2019-2021)<sup>lxxiv,22</sup>**

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	Three Year Trend
Henderson County	76.2%	83.0%	86.1%	Increasing
Polk County	62.7%	66.7%	85.4%	Increasing
Rutherford County	61.9%	73.7%	78.2%	Increasing
Transylvania County	82.1%	84.1%	82.8%	Fluctuating
North Carolina	67.5%	67.5%	73.8%	Increasing

**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.<sup>lxxv</sup>

Rates of babies born at a low birthweight are generally lower than the statewide rate in the service area; the county with the highest percentage of babies born at a low birth weight is Rutherford County (Table 40). Also of note, the percentage of babies identified as White 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.

<sup>22</sup> Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

**Table 40. Percentage of Low Birth Weight by Geographic Area (2019-2021)** <sup>lxxvi, 23</sup>

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	Three Year Trend
Henderson County	9.1%	8.2%	8.1%	Fluctuating
Polk County	7.4%	7.2%	5.7%	Decreasing
Rutherford County	9.0%	11.8%	9.3%	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	10.1%	9.3%	6.1%	Decreasing
North Carolina	9.3%	9.5%	9.5%	Increasing

**Table 41. Percentage of Low Birth Weight by Geographic Area and Race (2021)** <sup>lxxvii, 24</sup>

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%

**Teen Pregnancy.** In North Carolina in 2022, the rate of births to teenage girls ages 15 to 19 was 21.8 per 1,000, 0.3% lower than in 2021. Compared to the prior year, there were also 45 fewer teen pregnancies in the service area.

The greatest number of teen pregnancies in the service area was in Henderson County followed by Rutherford County, though the rate was greatest in Rutherford County, and above the statewide rate in both counties. Data for teen pregnancy rates in Polk and Rutherford counties was suppressed as it was too small to be stable (<20 cases).

With full approval of the Change In Scope Request, anticipated for June 2024 implementation, WNCSource will be tasked with serving at least three pregnant women each year in Rutherford County in an expectant family program. The agency continues to put forth a strong recruitment effort and also has a partnership with Hands of Hope Pregnancy Resource Center, which refers pregnant teens. While there is some level of apprehension from the teen community, interested teens are not able to enroll due to schooling and other challenges or commitments. Currently, WNCSource serves four families in Rutherford County, an increase from the prior year, after recruitment efforts were bolstered.

**Table 42. Teen Pregnancies (15-19 Years Old) (2022)** <sup>lxxviii, 25</sup>

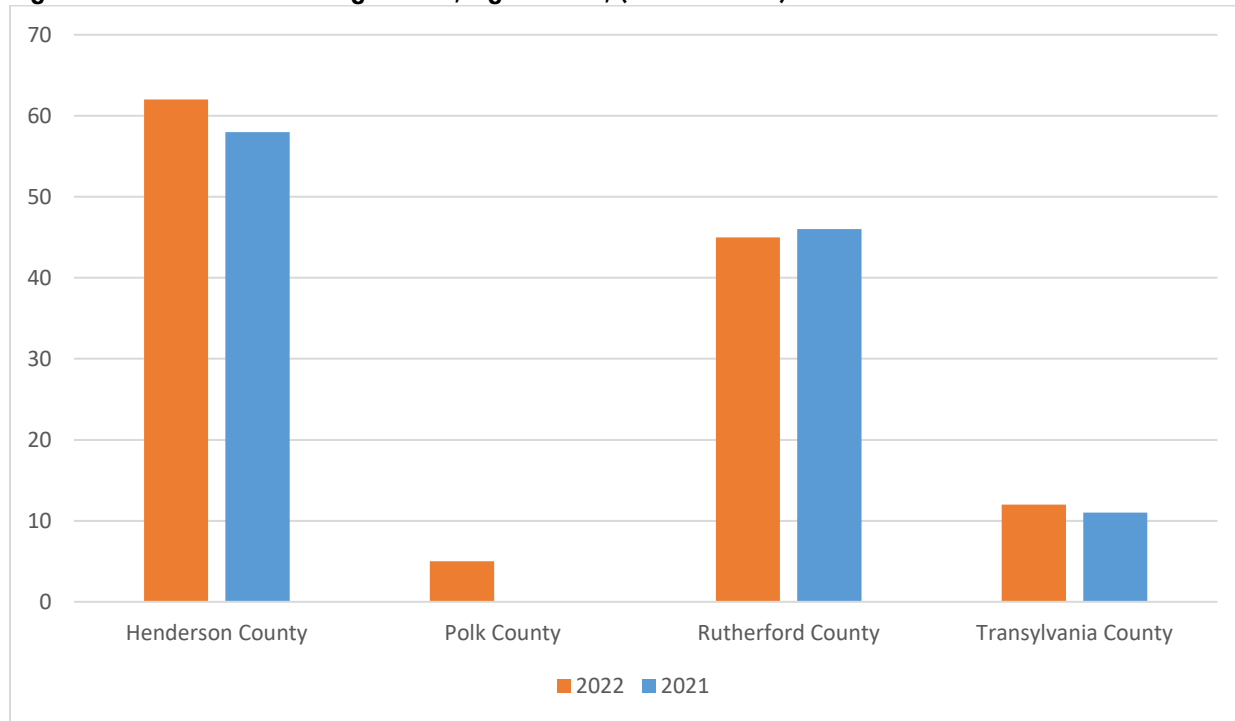
Geographic Area	Number of Pregnancies	Number of Pregnancies Compared to 2021	Teen pregnancy rate	Teen pregnancy rate - African American	Teen pregnancy rate - Hispanic	Teen pregnancy rate - White
Henderson County	62	+4	20.7	*	*	15.7
Polk County	5	+5	*	*	*	*
Rutherford County	45	-1	23.7	*	*	24.6
Transylvania County	12	+1	*	*	*	*
North Carolina	7,511	- 45	21.8	30.2	40.1	12.3

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

<sup>23</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>24</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>25</sup> Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

**Figure 6. Number of Teen Pregnancies, Ages 15-19, (2021 & 2022)<sup>lxxix</sup>**

**Infant Mortality.** Infant mortality rates are provided below in Tables 43. In 2021, the rate of infant mortality in Rutherford (7.0), and Transylvania County (8.6) were above the state rate (6.8%).

**Table 43. Infant Mortality Rate by Geographic Area and Race (2016-2021)<sup>lxxx</sup>**

Geographic Area and Race	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Henderson County	5.5	5.8	4.6	5.9	8.0	5.2
• White/Non-Hispanic	2.5	5.2	2.5	6.6	8.2	4.8
• African American	23.8*	33.3*	0	0	0.0	6.5
• Hispanic	14.2	4.6	14.9	4.7	10.7	6.8
Polk County	7.1	6.2	0	0	0	4.0
• White/Non-Hispanic	0	7.4	0	0	0	3.2
• African American	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
• Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	14.5
Rutherford County	6.1	8.7	9.2	7.3	8.0	7.0
• White/Non-Hispanic	3.8	3.7	11.6	5.5	2.0	5.8
• African American	0	33.3*	0	24.7*	2.0	14.2
• Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	4.3
Transylvania County	0	7.9	7.2	11.5*	8.8	8.6
• White/Non-Hispanic	0	9.5	8.2	8.7*	10.2	9.2
• African American	0	0	0	0	0	0
• Hispanic	0	0	0	66.7*	0	10.1
North Carolina	7.2	7.1	6.8	6.8	6.9	6.8
• White/Non-Hispanic	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.7	4.8	4.8
• African American	13.4	12.5	12.2	12.5	12.8	12.6
• Hispanic	6.0	5.7	4.8	5.6	5.8	5.4

## Child Health and Well-being

**Primary and Preventative Health.** Maintaining an up-to-date status on preventative and primary care is essential for children's healthy development. Among children served by WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start, the percentage of children who are up-to-date on primary and preventative health care at enrollment ranged from 31.4% to 41.2%. By the end of enrollment, a majority of children are up to date (Table 44).

**Table 44. Percent of WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Children Up-to-Date on Age-Appropriate Preventative and Primary Health Care as a Percentage of Cumulative Enrollment (EPSDT) (2022-2023)** <sup>lxxxix</sup>

Program Option	At Enrollment	End of Enrollment Year
Head Start	41.2% (42 out of 102)	92.2% (94 out of 102)
Early Head Start	36.5% (54 out of 148)	85.8% (127 out of 148)
Early Head Start-CCP	31.4% (32 out of 102)	77.5% (79 out of 102)

**Obesity and Chronic Diseases.** 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 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 45. WNCSource: Head Start Body Mass Index Data** <sup>lxxxix</sup>

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

Asthma is the most commonly reported chronic condition experienced by children enrolled in WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start. During the 2022-2023 program year, 8 children (4 Head Start, 4 Early Head Start) had asthma. Rates of identified health conditions for enrolled children were not significantly different than those reported in prior years. The next most common chronic health conditions included vision problems (4), seizure disorders (4), life threatening allergies (3), and hearing difficulties (1).

**Table 46. WNCSource: Enrolled Children Identified Health Conditions** <sup>lxxxix</sup>

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

Table 47 indicates the asthma hospitalization discharges per county for six years. While rates are low in the service area (< 5) in all counties, the rate was 61 (per 100,000) in the state.

**Table 47. Asthma Hospital Discharges (Ages 0-14), Rate per 100,000 Residents by Geographic Area** <sup>lxxxix</sup>

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 Rate	96	93	99	82	36	61

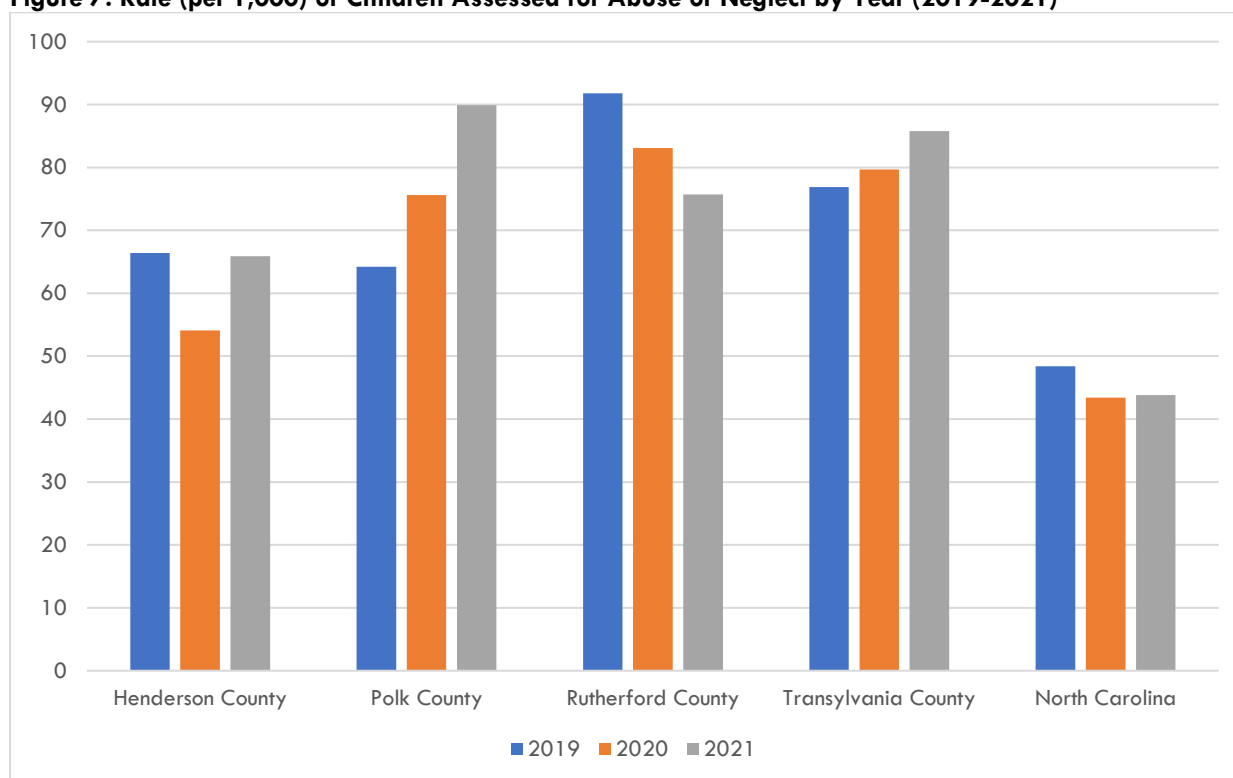


**Child Abuse and Neglect.** There continue to be concerning rates of child abuse and neglect in the service area. With the exception of Rutherford County, the rate of assessments for child abuse and neglect in 2021 increased from the year prior. As described in Table 48, all counties in the service area had rates of children assessed for abuse or neglect that are higher than the statewide rate, with the most significant rate in Polk County (89.9%).

**Table 48. Children Assessed for Abuse or Neglect (Rate per 1,000) by Geographic Area (2019-2021)**<sup>lxxxv, 26</sup>

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	Trend
Henderson County	66.4	54.1	65.9	Fluctuating
Polk County	64.2	75.6	89.9	Increasing
Rutherford County	91.8	83.1	75.7	Decreasing
Transylvania County	76.9	79.7	85.8	Increasing
North Carolina	48.4	43.4	43.8	Decreasing

**Figure 7. Rate (per 1,000) of Children Assessed for Abuse or Neglect by Year (2019-2021)**<sup>lxxxvi</sup>



## Nutrition

**Food Insecurity and Access.** Healthy nutrition is a critical factor for children's healthy development. Food insecurity rates are elevated across the service area, and consistent with the state rate in Henderson County, where limited access to healthy foods is most challenging. Additional factors (e.g., cost, transportation) may impact families' ability to obtain healthy foods.

<sup>26</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

**Table 49. Food Access by Geographic Area**<sup>lxxxvii,27</sup>

Geographic Area	Food Environment Index <sup>28</sup> (2019 & 2020)	% 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	7.0	6%	12%

There are four low-income and low-access census tracts (food deserts) in the service area – two in Henderson and two Rutherford counties, as described in Table 50. A food desert is defined as low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.

**Table 50. Food Deserts by Geographic Area (2023)**<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

Henderson County Census Tracts (2)
37089930401 (Hendersonville)
37089931000 (Hendersonville)
Rutherford County Census Tracts (2)
37161960100 (northeastern corner of Rutherford County)
37161960600 (Spindale)

**WIC and SNAP.** Data on the number of individuals receiving WIC benefits show increasing trends in North Carolina from 2019 to 2022, with a high in 2022 and then decreasing participation from 2022 to 2023. When comparing eligibility for WIC participation by race, Black-only and Two or More Races or Other (not Hispanic) comprise the largest number of eligible individuals (142,700), though the coverage rate is greatest for Hispanic/Latino residents (Table 51).

**Table 51. Number of Children in North Carolina Participating in Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) by Geographic Area**<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Geographic Area	December 2019	December 2020	December 2021	December 2022	December 2023	Trend
North Carolina	103,265	141,848	142,648	147,772	122,651	Fluctuating

**Table 52. Number of WIC Participants by Race and Geographic Area (2019)**<sup>xc,29</sup>

Geographic Area	Number Eligible	Number of Participants	Coverage Rate
White Only	135,900	72,200	53.2%
Black-only, not Hispanic, and Two or More Races or Other, Not Hispanic	142,700	82,800	58%
Hispanic/Latino	87,600	53,100	60.6%
All Race/Ethnicity Service Area Total	366,161	208,072	56.8%

Like the WIC program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits data show fluctuating trends. State WIC participation decreased 12.3% in 2023 from the year prior, but reflects an increase of 19.4% from pre-pandemic levels (2019). The most significant number of households participated at elevated

<sup>27</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

rates at the start of the pandemic (2021-2022). Of those participating in the SNAP program in the state, more than 69% are in families with children.

**Table 53. Number of Households Receiving SNAP Benefits in North Carolina by Year<sup>xcii</sup>**

Geographic Area	December 2019	December 2020	December 2021	December 2022	December 2023	Five-Year Trend
North Carolina	594,121	725,252	869,457	820,258	719,203	Fluctuating

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency and through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020, a temporary change was made to raise the monthly SNAP benefit for recipients. The increase in allotment was based on household size, rather than income. Due to the passing of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, this benefit has ended. Effective March 2023, SNAP households are no longer receiving the supplemental amount; benefits returned to normal levels.<sup>xcii</sup>

Local nutrition needs are also evident in rates of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. With the exception of Henderson County School District, the school districts in the service area had increased eligibility from 2021-2022 to 2022-2023. Transylvania County School District reflects the greatest percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch at 60.7% (Table 54).

**Table 54. Free and Reduced Lunch Rate by School District (2017-2023)<sup>xciii</sup>**

School District	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2021-2022	2022-2023	Five Year Trend
Henderson School District	53.3%	52.0%	50.2%	67.6%	56.1%	Declining
Polk School District	68.1%	61.9%	60.2%	40.2%	52.8%	Fluctuating
Rutherford School District	86.4%	75.9%	75.9%	42.4%	57.5%	Declining
Transylvania School District	54.0%	51.4%	51.2%	50.3%	60.7%	Fluctuating

## Social and Economic Factors Impacting Well-being

### Home Value and Affordability

Median home values are generally greater than the state value and greatest in Transylvania County, with the exception of Rutherford County. Owner and rental costs are lower in the service area than the state. Median home value, as well as owner and rental cost, are highest in Henderson County (Table 55).

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.

**Table 55. Median Home Value by Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>xciv</sup>**

Geographic Area	Median Home Value <sup>30</sup>	Median Owner Costs <sup>31</sup>	Median Rent
Henderson County	\$291,500	\$1,495	\$1,032
Polk County	\$255,000	\$1,309	\$984
Rutherford County	\$158,200	\$1,076	\$729
Transylvania County	\$298,600	\$1,450	\$861
North Carolina	\$234,900	\$1,496	\$1,093

<sup>30</sup> Values below the statewide value are highlighted.

<sup>31</sup> Values greater than the statewide value are highlighted.

When examining census data regarding median home values in recent years, from the time period 2015-2019 to 2018-2022, the value of homes increased across the service area, from 11.8% to 19.3%. As current census data (2022) does not capture the impact of the pandemic on the most current value of homes, Zillow data is utilized to supplement census data and provide a more real-time understanding of increasing housing costs in the service area.

The 2024 Zillow data reflects that current home values are significantly greater than 2018-2022 Census values, and range from \$197,685 in Rutherford County to \$425,397 in Transylvania County. In 2024, Zillow data reflects that housing values increased from July 2023 in Polk County by 15.7%, while decreasing in the other counties in the service area.

Median rent and owner costs have also increased greatly over time in the service area (Tables 58a., 58b. and 59).

**Table 56. Median Home Value by Geographic Area (2015-2019 to 2018-2022)<sup>xv</sup>**

Geographic Area	2015-2019	2016-2020	2017-2021	2018-2022	% change 2015-2019 to 2018-2022
Henderson County	\$214,000	\$232,000	\$251,800	\$291,500	+15.8%
Polk County	\$225,700	\$222,700	\$228,000	\$255,000	+11.8%
Rutherford County	\$124,100	\$128,800	\$133,600	\$158,200	+18.4%
Transylvania County	\$221,900	\$231,300	\$250,200	\$298,600	+19.3%
North Carolina	\$172,500	\$182,100	\$197,500	\$234,900	+18.9%

**Table 57: Zillow Home Values Index: Median Home Value (2024)<sup>xvii, 32</sup>**

Geographic Area	Median Home Value (June 2023)	Median Home Value (January 2024)	Change in Value (%) from 6/2023 to 1/2024
Henderson County	\$422,017	\$405,953	-3.8%
Polk County	\$311,556	\$360,584	+15.7%
Rutherford County	\$216,750	\$197,685	-8.8%
Transylvania County	\$427,717	\$425,397	-0.5%
North Carolina	\$323,487	\$318,266	-1.6%

**Table 58a. Median Rent By Geographic Area (2015-2019 to 2018-2022)<sup>xvii</sup>**

Geographic Area	2015-2019	2016-2020	2017-2021	2018-2022	% change 2015-2019 to 2018-2022
Henderson County	\$853	\$915	\$960	\$1,032	+21.0%
Polk County	\$851	\$855	\$870	\$984	+15.6%
Rutherford County	\$703	\$707	\$685	\$729	+12.7%
Transylvania County	\$756	\$731	\$787	\$861	+13.9%
North Carolina	\$907	\$932	\$988	\$1,093	+20.5%

**Table 58b: Fair Market Rent, Two Bedroom (FY2003-2024)<sup>xviii, 33</sup>**

Geographic Area	Fair Market Rent (2 bed) (FY2023)	Fair Market Rent (2 bed) (FY2024)	Change in Value FY2023 to FY2024
Henderson County	\$1,466	\$1,680	+12.7%
Polk County	\$924	\$1,004	+8.0%
Rutherford County	\$771	\$856	+10.0%
Transylvania County	\$995	\$1,128	+11.8%

<sup>32</sup> Values greater than the statewide value are highlighted.

<sup>33</sup> Values greater than the statewide value are highlighted.

**Table 59. Median Owner Costs By Geographic Area (2015-2019 to 2018-2022)<sup>xcix</sup>**

Geographic Area	2015-2019	2016-2020	2017-2021	2018-2022	% change 2015-2019 to 2018-2022
Henderson County	\$1,287	\$1,324	\$1,420	\$1,495	+16.2%
Polk County	\$1,238	\$1,216	\$1,239	\$1,309	+5.7%
Rutherford County	\$1,084	\$1,078	\$1,008	\$1,076	-0.7%
Transylvania County	\$1,224	\$1,283	\$1,361	\$1,450	+18.5%
North Carolina	\$1,314	\$1,328	\$1,397	\$1,496	+13.9%

When examining data on rental vacancy, data show that there may be limited housing available for renters in some areas of the service area. Rates are as low as 1.7% in Transylvania County (Table 60).

Also described in Table 60, the rental cost burden is high in the service area, greater than 45%. The rental cost burden is highest in Rutherford County, where 47.6% of households are spending 30% or more of their monthly income on rent. A high rental cost burden can strain a family's finances and make it difficult to sustain stable housing and have enough income available to support other expenses (e.g., food, medical care).

**Table 60. Housing Characteristics by Geographic Area (2017-2021 and 2018-2022)<sup>c,34</sup>**

Geographic Area	Rental Vacancy Rate		Households Spending 30% or More of Monthly Income on Rent	
	2017-2021	2018-2022	2017-2021	2018-2022
Henderson County	6.1%	6.2%	45.5%	44.4%
Polk County	8.1%	7.9%	39.6%	42.5%
Rutherford County	6.5%	8.1%	50.6%	47.6%
Transylvania County	1.7%	2.6%	40.8%	46.4%
North Carolina	6.6%	6.9%	47.2%	47.6%

Affordable housing data from the National Low Income Housing Coalition show that the highest percentage of individuals in the service area that are renting their home live in Rutherford County, where the rate is 28%. There are smaller percentages of renters in other parts of the service area, ranging from 23% to 25%. The hourly wage necessary to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent ranges from \$14.83 in Rutherford County to \$28.19 in Henderson County. In all counties in the service area, the two-bedroom housing wage is well above the North Carolina minimum wage (\$7.25) (Table 61).

**Table 61. Affordable Housing Data by Geographic Area (2023)<sup>ci</sup>**

Geographic Area	Percent Renters	Minimum Wage	Two-bedroom Housing Wage	Two-bedroom Fair Market Rent	Work Hours/Week at Minimum Wage for Two-bedroom Housing
Henderson County	25%	\$7.25	\$28.19	\$1,466	156
Polk County	23%	\$7.25	\$17.77	\$924	98
Rutherford County	28%	\$7.25	\$14.83	\$771	82
Transylvania County	23%	\$7.25	\$19.13	\$995	106
North Carolina	34%	\$7.25	\$21.54	\$1,120	119

According to recent data from the North Carolina Housing Coalition, 2024 County Profiles, within WNCSource's service area, many households have difficulty affording rent or home ownership, including 48% (604,365 households) of North Carolina renters and 19% of homeowners (513,855 households).<sup>cii</sup> In the

<sup>34</sup> Rental vacancy rates below the statewide rate, and household spending above the statewide rate, are highlighted.

service area, homeowners in Henderson and Polk counties struggle the most to afford home ownership (Table 62).

The eviction ranking is greatest for renters in Rutherford County, ranking just below the 50th percentile for the state (49 out of 100). Though, of the 1,089 families that faced a recent eviction filing in the service area, 46% where in Henderson County (497), while 4% of renters were burdened and faced foreclosure in Rutherford County.

WNCSource leadership note that enrolled families are not reporting increasing rates of evictions, though and nearly half of enrolled families are living doubled-up. Many enrolled families are living doubled-up to conserve income and many are living in multigenerational households, partly by choice, to help with children and due to finances.

**Table 62. Percent Residents Who Have Difficulty Affording Housing by Geographic Area (2024)**<sup>ciii, 35</sup>

Geographic Area	Renters	Homeowners
Henderson County	44%	20%
Polk County	43%	20%
Rutherford County	48%	14%
Transylvania County	46%	18%
North Carolina	48%	19%

**Table 63. County Ranking for Evictions Among Renter Households by Geographic Area (2024)** (1 = highest and 100 = lowest)<sup>civ</sup>

Geographic Area	County Rank
Henderson County	77
Polk County	96
Rutherford County	49
Transylvania County	84

**Table 64. Households Involved with an Eviction Filing or Foreclosure by Geographic Area (2024)**<sup>cvi, 36</sup>

Geographic Area	Eviction		Foreclosure	
	Number of Families that Faced an Eviction Filing	Percent of all cost burdened renters that faced eviction	Number of Families That Faced Foreclosure	Percent of all cost burdened renters that faced foreclosure
Henderson County	497	9.78%	104	1.46%
Polk County	36	5.79%	31	2.46%
Rutherford County	450	16.09%	111	4.06%
Transylvania County	106	7.86%	26	1.32%
Service Area	1,089		272	
North Carolina	164,823	27.27%	12,652	2.46%

Many factors impact housing stability and affordability in western North Carolina. Statewide, 15% of households are experiencing severe housing problems (overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen facilities, or lack of plumbing facilities). The rates in the service area are less than the statewide rate ranging from 13% to 14% (Table 65).

According to the North Carolina Justice Center, “living in substandard housing conditions puts families at a higher risk of poor health due to increased exposure to contaminants such as dust, mold, lead, and structural

<sup>35</sup> Rental vacancy rates below the statewide rate, and household spending above the statewide rate, are highlighted.

<sup>36</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

deficiencies. These contaminants have lasting health effects, especially for young children.”<sup>cvii</sup> WNCSource leadership report that overcrowding is particularly an issue in Henderson and Transylvania counties.

**Table 65. Households Experiencing at Least 1 of 4 Severe Housing Problems (overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen, lack of plumbing) by Geographic Area (2013-2017 and 2015-2019)<sup>cviii</sup>**

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

Over the last three decades, access to technology has increased. In 2017, 91% of U.S. adults owned a computing device and 81% had broadband internet. Technology has become crucial to work, community participation, and during the pandemic, community disaster response and recovery.

Access to technology still varies by income and geography. For many families, that lack of access to technology means no access to health care or financial tools, as well as reduced opportunities for employment and education. The percentage of households with broadband internet access in the service area ranges from 77% (Rutherford County) to 87% (Henderson County) (Table 66).

WNCSource leadership report that most families have a cell phone, but usually not a computer, limiting some functionality (printing out paperwork, etc.). Family Advocates work with families to ensure they are able to access any technical resources needed.

**Table 66. Percent of Households with Broadband Internet Connection by Geographic Area (2017-2021)<sup>cix,37</sup>**

Geographic Area	Percent of Households
Henderson County	87%
Polk County	81%
Rutherford County	77%
Transylvania County	86%
North Carolina	85%
United States	87%

Evictions negatively impact mental health, causing increased stress, anxiety, and depression.<sup>cx</sup> Evictions for households with children can lead to a disruption in the learning environment, stress, and anxiety, but also a greater threat to a child’s overall physical well-being. Children who experience unstable housing conditions are more likely to use the emergency room for medical services, are underweight for their age, and are at a higher risk of developmental delays.

<sup>37</sup> Rates less than the statewide rate are highlighted.



In counties served by WNCSource, median household income is lower than the statewide rate (\$66,186), ranging from \$50,512 in Rutherford County to \$65,508 in Henderson County (Table 67).

**Table 67. Median Household Income by Geographic Area (2022)<sup>cx i</sup>**

Geographic Area	Median Household Income
Henderson County	\$65,508
Polk County	\$60,465
Rutherford County	\$50,512
Transylvania County	\$62,056
North Carolina	\$66,186

Income inequality is further described in Table 68. A higher income inequality ratio indicates greater division between the top and bottom of the income spectrum. Within the service area, income inequality is greatest in Rutherford County.

**Table 68. Income Inequality by Geographic Area (2017-2021)<sup>cx ii</sup>**

Geographic Area	80 <sup>th</sup> percentile income	20 <sup>th</sup> percentile income	Income Ratio <sup>38</sup>
Henderson County	\$114,185	\$27,099	4.2
Polk County	\$111,419	\$25,791	4.3
Rutherford County	\$89,128	\$20,041	4.4
Transylvania County	\$108,866	\$27,197	4.0
North Carolina	\$121,138	\$25,660	4.7
United States			4.9

Living wage data, which provides insight into how much money families must earn in order to cover everyday expenses, show that wages at the Federal Poverty Level are far insufficient to meet families' needs. For example, as described in Table 69, the living wage for a single-parent family with one working adult and two children is more than \$38 per hour across the service area; this is substantially higher than a poverty wage of \$12.41.

The North Carolina Housing Coalition reports that the annual salary for a child care worker in the service area ranges from \$25,550 to \$28,260, while the annual income needed to afford Fair Market Rent ranges from \$34,240 to \$67,200 (Table 70).

**Table 69. Living Wage<sup>39</sup> and Poverty Wage by Family Size and Geographic Area (2024)<sup>cx iii</sup>**

Geographic Area	Two Adults (1 working) and 2 Children		One Adult (working) and 2 Children	
	Living Wage	Poverty Wage	Living Wage	Poverty Wage
Henderson County	\$40.75	\$15.00	\$45.67	\$12.41
Polk County	\$37.29	\$15.00	\$40.27	\$12.41
Rutherford County	\$35.03	\$15.00	\$38.14	\$12.41
Transylvania County	\$37.69	\$15.00	\$41.41	\$12.41
North Carolina	\$39.35	\$15.00	\$45.31	\$12.41

<sup>38</sup> A higher inequality ratio indicates greater division between the top and bottom ends of the income spectrum.

<sup>39</sup> The *Living Wage Calculator*, first developed in 2004, provides insights into how much money families must earn in order to cover everyday expenses. The *Living Wage Calculator* indicates that the median household income is not enough to make ends meet, when accounting for high home values, high rental cost burden, and the high cost for child care.

**Table 70a. Child Care Salary Compared to Average Annual Salary Needed to Afford Fair Market Rate by Geographic Area<sup>cxiv, 40</sup>**

Geographic Area	Salary for Child Care Worker	Annual income per year needed to afford Fair Market Rent
Henderson County	\$27,870	\$67,200
Polk County	\$28,260	\$40,160
Rutherford County	\$25,550	\$34,240
Transylvania County	\$28,260	\$45,120
North Carolina	\$26,770	\$43,316

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 70b., having one parent stay home to care for children eliminates child care costs, one of the highest categorical expenses (\$19,210) for families.

Notably, in 2024, the required annual income before taxes for households with one adult with two children was \$12,867 more than in 2022, an increase of 13.7% and \$5,876 (+7.2%) more for households with two adults (one working) with two children.

**Table 70b. Typical Expenses in North Carolina and Household Composition (February 2024)<sup>cxv</sup>**

Typical Expenses	1 adult, 2 children	2 adults (1 working), 2 children
Food	\$9,402	\$12,498
Child Care	\$19,210	\$0
Medical	\$9,656	\$10,128
Housing	\$15,679	\$15,679
Transportation	\$14,531	\$16,720
Civic	\$4,795	\$5,553
Other	\$7,407	\$10,238
Required annual income after taxes	\$ 82,172	\$72,887
Annual taxes	\$12,077	\$8,953
Required annual income before taxes	\$94,250	\$81,840

<sup>40</sup> Salaries and income levels greater than the statewide income level are highlighted.

## Community Safety

In the WNCSource service area, crime rates generally decreased from 2021 to 2022, with the exception of index and violent crimes in Rutherford County and index and property crimes in Transylvania County (as noted in bold font in Table 71. WNCSource enrolled families do not report feeling unsafe in their communities, though some may be experiencing domestic violence or relationship issues in their homes.

**Table 71. Community Safety Rates (offenses per 100,000 population) by Geographic Area (2021-2022)** <sup>cxvi</sup>

Geographic Area	Year	Index Crime Rate <sup>41</sup>	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate
Henderson County	2021	1,965.3	155.8	1,809.5
	2022	1,508.1	135.4	1,372.7
	Change	-457.2	-20.4	-436.8
Polk County	2021	1,502.9	93.6	1,409.3
	2022	1,124.2	66.4	1,057.7
	Change	-378.7	-27.2	-351.6
Rutherford County	2021	2,026.2	241.5	1,784.7
	2022	2,080.5	311.6	1,769.0
	Change	<b>+54.3</b>	<b>+70.1</b>	-15.7
Transylvania County	2021	975.4	133.7	841.7
	2022	1,019.2	113.9	905.2
	Change	<b>+43.8</b>	-19.8	<b>+63.5</b>
North Carolina	2021	2,561.4	428.8	2,132.7
	2022	2,526.0	412.2	2,113.9
	Change	-35.4	-16.6	-18.8

## EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE, AND TRANSPORTATION



### Labor Force, Industries, and Occupations

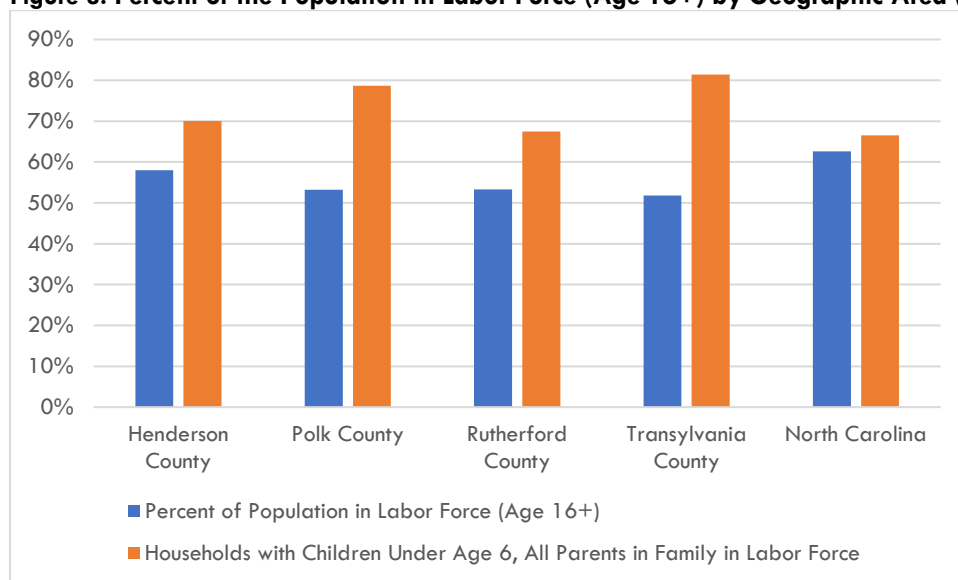
In WNCSource's service area, the percentage of the population in the labor force is lower than the statewide rate (62.6%) and is notably low in Transylvania County (51.8%). Many young children have all parents in the labor force, with rates ranging from 67.5% to 81.4%. It is important to note that labor force participation rates may not capture the full extent of the workforce, as some populations, particularly undocumented individuals, are not reflected in these numbers.

Labor force data speaks to the need for child care services for families. In some communities where child poverty rates are also high (described in the section that follows), data suggests that some families may be employed in low paying jobs.

<sup>41</sup> Index crimes include murder, aggravated assault, forcible rape, robbery, motor vehicle theft, burglary, larceny/theft, and arson. (Source: U.S. Department of Justice. Office for Victims of Crime. (2024). National Incident-Based Reporting System. Retrieved from <https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/NIBRS/crimedata.html>)

**Table 72. Percent of the Population in Labor Force (Age 16+) by Geographic Area (2018-2022)**<sup>cxvii,42</sup>

Geographic Area	Population Age 16+	Households with Children Under Age 6, All Parents in Family in Labor Force
Henderson County	58.0%	70.1%
Polk County	53.2%	78.7%
Rutherford County	53.3%	67.5%
Transylvania County	51.8%	81.4%
North Carolina	62.6%	66.5%

**Figure 8. Percent of the Population in Labor Force (Age 16+) by Geographic Area (2018-2022)**<sup>cxviii</sup>

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, using Census-defined categories of workers, the top type of worker in the service area is private wage and salary workers, followed by government workers.

**Table 73. Number of Employed Individuals (Age 16+) and Percentage of the Employed Workforce by Class of Worker and Geographic Area (2018-2022)**<sup>cxix</sup>

Geographic Area	Private wage and salary workers	Government Workers	Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	Unpaid family workers
Henderson County	44,478 (81.5%)	5,522 (10.1%)	4,446 (8.1%)	108 (0.2%)
Polk County	6,816 (79.7%)	833 (9.7%)	898 (10.5%)	6 (0.1%)
Rutherford County	21,443 (80.3%)	3,383 (12.7%)	1,810 (6.8%)	72 (0.3%)
Transylvania County	10,775 (75.9%)	1,857 (13.1%)	1,525 (10.7%)	39 (0.3%)
North Carolina	3,960,703 (80.4%)	678,370 (13.8%)	276,271 (5.6%)	10,156 (0.2%)

<sup>42</sup> Rates below the statewide rate are highlighted.

The top industries in the service area are educational services, and health care and social assistance and vary by county (Table 74).

**Table 74. Percentage of the Employed Workforce (Age 16+) by Industry and Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>cxx 43</sup>**

Industry	Henderson County	Polk County	Rutherford County	Transylvania County	North Carolina
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1.2%	3.9%	1.5%	1.8%	1.1%
Construction	8.8%	9.1%	7.6%	8.8%	7.3%
Manufacturing	12.5%	12.2%	17.0%	10.5%	11.9%
Wholesale trade	2.1%	1.6%	1.1%	0.9%	2.3%
Retail trade	14.4%	10.7%	11.7%	12.0%	11.4%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4.0%	3.7%	6.1%	3.0%	5.2%
Information	1.1%	1.3%	1.5%	1.2%	1.7%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	5.2%	8.0%	3.3%	7.2%	6.9%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	9.3%	9.6%	11.2%	9.2%	11.9%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	21.7%	24.3%	20.8%	22.0%	22.5%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	10.7%	6.5%	9.3%	12.6%	8.8%
Other services, except public administration	6.4%	7.2%	5.9%	6.7%	4.9%
Public administration	2.5%	2.0%	3.1%	4.1%	4.1%

## Employment

According to the most up-to-date data on unemployment, rates in the service area tend to be below the statewide rate and have recovered from drastic spikes in unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these improvements, in recent years, Rutherford County has had an unemployment rate that is consistently higher than the rest of the service area and the statewide rate (Figure 9).

**Table 75. Monthly Unemployment Rates February 2020-April 2023<sup>cxxi,44,45</sup>**

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	<b>14.6</b>	8.8	6.1	4.2	4.8	3.4	2.8	3.6	3.0	2.6
Polk County	3.2	<b>11.4</b>	7.2	5.7	4.7	5.2	4.1	3.5	4.2	3.5	3.1
Rutherford County	4.5	<b>15.9</b>	11.4	8.8	6.6	7.4	5.5	4.1	5.1	4.4	4.3
Transylvania County	3.1	<b>11.9</b>	7.1	5.6	4.1	4.9	3.5	3.0	3.8	3.3	2.9
North Carolina	3.4	<b>13.2</b>	8.9	7.1	5.1	5.5	4.2	3.2	4.0	3.4	3.1

<sup>43</sup> Types of employment with the largest number of employed individuals in reflected in bold font.

<sup>44</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted; the spike in unemployment rates due to the pandemic is represented in bold.

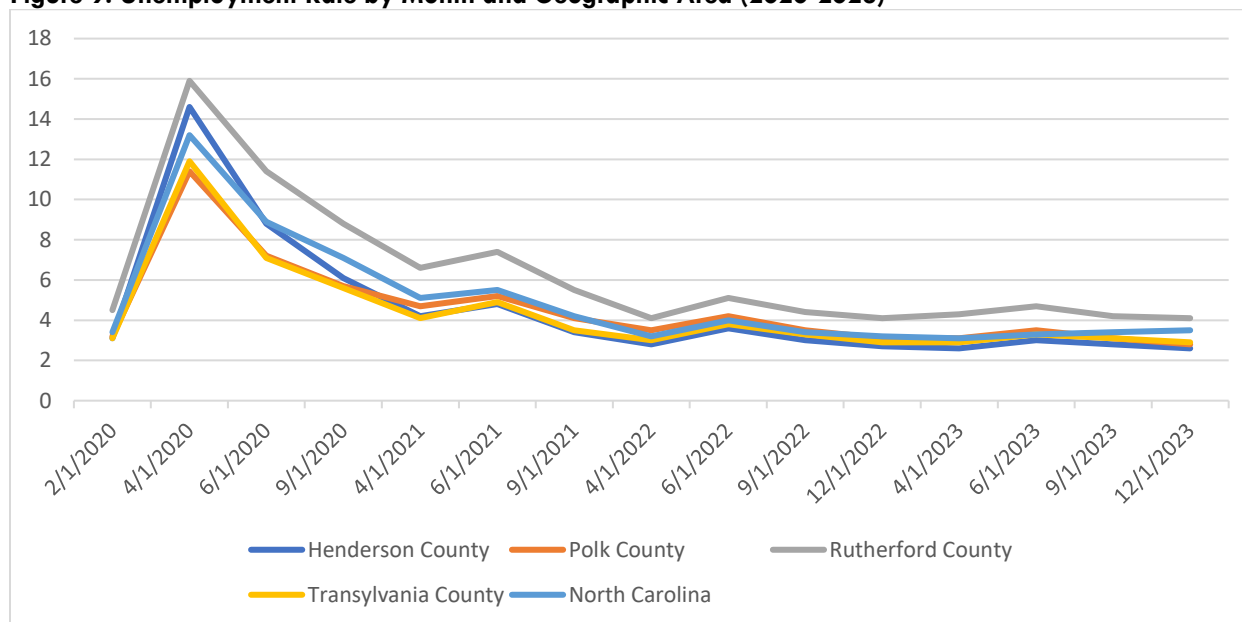
<sup>45</sup> Rates for North Carolina are seasonally adjusted, while rates by county are not seasonally adjusted.

**Table 76. Monthly Unemployment Rates, June 2022-April 2023<sup>cxix,46,47</sup>**

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

**Table 77. Monthly Unemployment Rates, May 2023-December 2023<sup>cxix,48,49</sup>**

Geographic Area	5/23	6/23	7/23	8/23	9/23	10/23	11/23	12/23
Henderson County	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.6
Polk County	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.1	3.2	2.8
Rutherford County	4.4	4.7	4.9	4.9	4.2	4.5	4.4	4.1
Transylvania County	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.3	3.2	2.9
North Carolina	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.5

**Figure 9. Unemployment Rate by Month and Geographic Area (2020-2023)<sup>cxix</sup>**

Data from WNCSource Early Learning Programs show a majority of Head Start/Early Head Start families had at least one parent who was employed, in job training, or in school at the start and at the end of the 2022-2023 program year, but not to the same degree as the larger population. Unemployment is much greater among Head Start/Early Head Start families (Table 78).<sup>cxix</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>47</sup> Rates for North Carolina are seasonally adjusted, while rates by County are not seasonally adjusted.

<sup>48</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>49</sup> Rates for North Carolina are seasonally adjusted, while rates by County are not seasonally adjusted.

**Table 78. WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Families Employment Status at Enrollment (2022-2023)** <sup>cxixvi</sup>

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	33 (70.2%)	14 (29.8%)	47
Early Head Start	39 (78.0%)	11 (22.0%)	50
Early Head Start-CCP	29 (87.9%)	4 (12.1%)	33
Overall	101 (77.7%)	29 (22.3%)	130

Aligning with industry and occupation data, the top employers in the service area are a mix of public and private entities. Many of the top employers continue to represent the education sector, health services field, or public administration.

**Table 79. Top Employers by County (2024)** <sup>cxixvii</sup>

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+
		Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	500-999
	Public Administration	County Of Henderson	500-999
	Manufacturing	Wilsonart LLC	500-999
		Meritor Heavy Vehicle Systems LLC	500-999
Polk	Educational Services	Polk County Public Schools	250-499
	Health Care and Social Assistance	Health Care and Social Assistance	250-499
		St Lukes Hospital Inc	250-499
	Public Administration	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
	Retail Trade	Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	250-499
		Ingles Markets, Inc	250-499
Transylvania	Educational Services	Transylvania County Schools	500-999
		Brevard College Corp	250-499
	Health Care and Social Assistance	MH Transylvania Regional Hospital L	250-499
	Public Administration	Transylvania County	250-499
	Retail Trade	Ingles Markets, Inc	250-499

Data related to undocumented individuals in North Carolina show that approximately 68% are employed, representing 190,000 workers in the labor force. The top industries of employment (2019) for the undocumented population were construction (32%); accommodation and food services, arts, entertainment and recreation (14%); professional, scientific, management, administrative (14%); manufacturing (13%); and retail (6%). <sup>cxixviii</sup>



## Education and Training

There are educational opportunities within and outside the service area that are accessible to residents. Many residents also take advantage of online virtual educational opportunities. WNCSource staff also tend to prefer online colleges coursework based on convenience and the time the courses are offered. Many staff take courses at Blue Ridge Community College and Haywood Community College.

Community and technical schools provide trades training to students, and professional programs are available for certifications and licenses. Public and private colleges offer undergraduate and graduate education as well as continuing education opportunities.

Specifically, in Henderson and Transylvania counties, Blue Ridge Community College offers more than 100 programs and courses for career, transfer, and continuing education coursework. Rutherford County is home to Isothermal Community College, which offers over 125 programs, with hands-on training and online options and flexible schedules.

Due to the proximity to the service area, community residents may also access education and training opportunities nearby at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, Western Carolina University, and the University of North Carolina at Asheville.

### Workforce Training

WNCSource leverages many community partnerships to support the workforce development of its own staff and clients.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Apprenticeship. WNCSource has continued to partner for a second year with the ECE apprenticeship program at Blue Ridge Community College, with the goal of hiring participating graduating high school seniors or adults. The ECE Apprenticeship program allows eligible high school graduates and adult learners to earn while they learn in the classroom and on the job. The program is a collaborative effort of Blue Ridge Community College, Henderson County Public Schools, Transylvania County Schools, Homeschool Association, and WNCSource.

In Summer 2024, Blue Ridge expanded the ECE apprenticeship program and partnered with additional providers, allowing WNCSource to selectively choose participants that may be most successful in the program. After one year, the participating students will have earned an early childhood education certificate (with five completed courses) and can continue under apprenticeship, working at WNCSource as they earn their Associate's degree. This program year, approximately five students participated, of which, three are continuing in the field and taking remaining certifications/coursework before being placed full time in the classroom.

CDA Teacher Training Program. WNCSource developed a Teacher Trainee program, which aims to prepare potential Early Head Start Teachers with the Infant Toddler CDA so that they can be hired into an Early Head Start classroom as a fully qualified teacher. Participants work with a mentor teacher and education coach as they get on-the-job experience in the classroom learning skills, taking training courses, and developing a personalized CDA portfolio. During the 2023-2024 program year WNCSource has brought three individuals through the paid program who will be ready for classrooms in the 2024-2025 program year.

Dogwood Health Trust Grant. Through the Dogwood Health Trust grant, WNCSource was allocated \$1 million over a five-year grant period to pay a three-year housing stipend for teachers who move into the area. To date, one new hire has signed up. The grant also provides funding for family child care providers (\$5,000) to support starting up a new program; one provider has successfully participated to date. The most recent focus is working with colleges to hire summer interns, most of whom just need to complete student teaching and will graduate in August and will hopefully be offered a position in a WNCSource classroom. Some of the housing stipend funding will be used to support lodging for these interns over the summer.

Site Supervisor Trainee Program. Lastly, WNCSource developed a Site Supervisor Trainee program, which aims to hire candidates who may not have administrative credentials, but have some early childhood education background. Participants shadow Site Supervisors and assist in classrooms. Last year, two individuals completed the program and became Site Supervisors. WNCSource has brought in one additional hire this program year who is taking credential courses and acting as a Site Supervisor.

State Resource: NCWorks Commission. Statewide, the NCWorks Commission recommends policies and strategies that enable the state's workforce and businesses to compete in the global economy. The Commission is designated as the state's Workforce Development Board under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Led by a private sector chair, the 37-member Commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders. All members are appointed by the Governor.

In 2022, the NCWorks Commission noted that 81% of NC employers had difficulty hiring in the past 12 months (up significantly from 56% in 2019). Employers struggled with both entry-level and above-entry-level positions, with the top reasons for difficulty being: too few applicants, employability issues, and the offered pay was too low. Among employers who reported using the workforce system to respond to hiring challenges, 82% reported using the community colleges, followed by NCWorks Online (61%) and NCWorks Career Centers (59%). Thirty-six percent reported using local Workforce Development Boards, up from 23% in the previous survey. The industry employers reported a similar mix of workforce development resources. For those who did not use the workforce development system, a lack of awareness was the most common reason.<sup>cxix</sup>

## Transportation

Public Transportation. Access to public transportation in WNCSource's service area remains a barrier for some families that live in more remote areas that are seeking to obtain child care, maintain employment, access healthcare, and meet the daily needs of their family. While public transportation systems exist, WNCSource leadership note that most families enrolled in HS/EHS reside in more rural communities, outside the bus service area. In the WNCSource service area, the burden of transportation is placed on individual families and while many HS/EHS families own a vehicle, many face the ongoing challenge of maintaining a reliable car with the increasing cost of maintenance, repairs, and gas.

Access to Vehicles. The percentage of households with no vehicle available in WNCSource communities is relatively low and less than the statewide rate (5.4%), with the exception of Rutherford County (6.0%). Households without a vehicle and households with one vehicle for two working parents have to rely more heavily on alternative transportation or limited public transportation. WNCSource leadership team members

note that many families served by the agency have only one car and there may be transportation barriers for families who have a vehicle (e.g., cost for repairs/maintenance, insurance, gas) as noted above.

**Table 80. Households with No Vehicle Available by Geographic Area 2020-2022)<sup>cxxx,50</sup>**

Geographic Area	2020	2021	2022
Henderson County	4.3%	3.60%	3.7%
Polk County	5.6%	4.20%	3.7%
Rutherford County	7.5%	6.10%	6.0%
Transylvania County	3.8%	4.20%	4.6%
North Carolina	5.8%	5.50%	5.4%

Most residents in the service area commute to work in a personal vehicle or carpool, while few workers use public transportation, walk, or travel by other means (Table 81). Commute times are relatively consistent with the statewide rate (25 minutes), with the exception of Polk and Rutherford counties, where mean travel time to work is slightly above the state rate, but still under 30 minutes.

**Table 81. Transportation to Work by Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>cxxxi,51</sup>**

Geographic Area	Car, truck, or van – drove alone	Car, truck, or van – carpooled	Public transportation	Walked	Other means
Henderson County	79.6%	9.8%	0.1%	0.7%	1.7%
Polk County	77.2%	8.1%	0.0%	1.9%	0.5%
Rutherford County	79.4%	11.9%	0.1%	1.2%	1.8%
Transylvania County	77.7%	8.8%	0.2%	2.1%	1.1%
North Carolina	75.2%	8.6%	0.8%	1.6%	1.4%

**Table 82. Mean Travel Time to Work by Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>cxxxii,52</sup>**

Geographic Area	Minutes
Henderson County	22.3
Polk County	27.2
Rutherford County	25.4
Transylvania County	22.1
North Carolina	25

## Work and Training Schedules

While specific work and training schedules of families in the service area are not readily available, the top industries suggest a variety of schedules. With a mix of service occupations, manufacturing jobs, and education options, it can be reasonably assumed that some individuals work traditional business hours while others may have second- or third-shift employment.

<sup>50</sup> Rates above the state rate are highlighted.

<sup>51</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

<sup>52</sup> Values above the statewide value are highlighted.

## HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN



Children must meet an age requirement to participate in Early Head Start or Head Start. The age requirement is birth to 2 years old (up to age 3) for Early Head Start and 3 to 5 years old for Head Start. At least 10% of program enrollment must be children eligible for services under IDEA (children with disabilities).

Children are eligible to receive Head Start/Early Head Start services if they meet one or more of the following eligibility requirements: their family has an income at or below the federal poverty level, the family

receives public assistance (i.e., TANF, SSI, SNAP), the child is experiencing homelessness, and/or the child is in foster care.

Table 83 provides estimated numbers of children in the service area by primary eligibility type for Head Start/Early Head Start compared to the current number of children served by WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start. Primary eligibility captures only one factor by which a child is eligible for services, and many children have needs that fall into multiple categories.

**Table 83. Estimated Number of Children in the Service Area Eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start Services<sup>53</sup>**

Eligibility Criteria	Estimated Eligible Children (Ages 0-3)	Estimated Eligible Children (Ages 3-5)	Estimated Eligible Children (Ages 0-5) (Percent Change from 2023 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 (2022-2023)
Income-eligible children	1,398	929	2,327 (-1.4%)	170
Income-eligible pregnant women	n/a	n/a	665 women (+32.3%)	1
Children experiencing homelessness	20	3	>23 (+8.7%) <sup>54</sup>	24
Children in foster care	86	57	143 (-11.2%)	10
Children receiving public assistance	1,750	1,166	2,916 (+1.9%)	104
Children with disabilities (potentially eligible)	265	432	697 (+36.9)	34

### Child Poverty and Geographic Location

In WNCSource's service area, the poverty rate for young children (birth to age 5) ranges from 11.3% in Polk County to 27.0% in Transylvania County. There are an estimated 2,327 children under age 5 living in poverty who are income-eligible for participation in Head Start/Early Head Start, 1,398 of whom are estimated to be birth to age 3, and 929 estimated to be 3-5 years old (Table 84). The greatest number and percentage (45.3%) of children under age five, living in poverty in the service area, continue to reside in Henderson

<sup>53</sup> The source for each of the data points in this table is described throughout the report.

<sup>54</sup> Based on currently enrolled children experiencing homelessness (23 children (2022-2023) compared to 21 in 2021-2022).

County. Zip code level data in Table 85 reflects the significant disparities in poverty rate and the number of young children living in poverty in each county in the service area.

WNCSource leadership note that the waitlist for the Head Start and Early Head Start program has been the strongest in Henderson County and more challenging in Rutherford counties, though zip code 28732 (Fletcher) in Henderson County remains a challenge. Transylvania County has also reflected a reduction in demand.

**Table 84. Children Under Age 5, Child Poverty, and Trends by Geographic Area (County) (2018-2022)**<sup>cxiii, 55</sup>

Geographic Area	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Estimated Number of Children <3 Years Old Living in Poverty	Estimated Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty	Three-Year Trend for Number of Children <5 in Poverty
Henderson County	18.0%	20.1%	5,248	633	1,053	Decreasing
Polk County	13.5%	11.3%	770	52	87	Decreasing
Rutherford County	24.9%	26.6%	3,157	504	839	Decreasing
Transylvania County	19.8%	27.0%	1,288	209	348	Fluctuating
Service Area	--	--	10,463	1,398	2,327	--
North Carolina	18.5%	20.3%	578,975	70,519	117,418	Decreasing

**Table 85. Children Under Age 5, Child Poverty, and Trends by Geographic Area (Zip Code) (2018-2022)**<sup>cxiv, 56</sup>

Geographic Area	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old <sup>57</sup>	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Estimated Number of Children <3 Years Old Living in Poverty	Estimated Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty	Three-Year Trend for Number of Children <5 Living in Poverty
28726 (East Flat Rock)	15.0%	0.0%	119	0	0	Steady
28729 (Etowah)	0.0%	0.0%	210	0	0	Steady
28731 (Flat Rock)	32.6%	17.8%	439	47	78	Decreasing
28732 (Fletcher)	2.8%	4.1%	856	21	35	Increasing
28735 (Gerton)	0.0%	0.0%	10	0	0	Steady
28739 (Hendersonville)	16.4%	21.9%	1,036	136	227	Fluctuating
28742 (Horse Shoe)	5.4%	15.5%	110	10	17	Decreasing
28759 (Mills River)	3.0%	8.9%	359	19	32	Decreasing
28790 (Zirconia)	5.6%	0.0%	49	0	0	Steady
28791 (Hendersonville)	8.4%	14.1%	583	49	82	Increasing
28792 (Hendersonville)	31.6%	35.5%	1,582	337	561	Decreasing
Henderson	18.0%	20.1%	5,248	633	1,053	Decreasing
28722 (Columbus)	11.6%	7.1%	252	11	18	Fluctuating
28756 (Mill Spring)	17.6%	12.7%	291	22	37	Fluctuating
28773 (Saluda)	28.1%	38.5%	135	31	52	Fluctuating
28782 (Tryon)	9.9%	8.4%	131	7	11	Steady
Polk	13.5%	11.3%	770	52	87	Decreasing

<sup>55</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

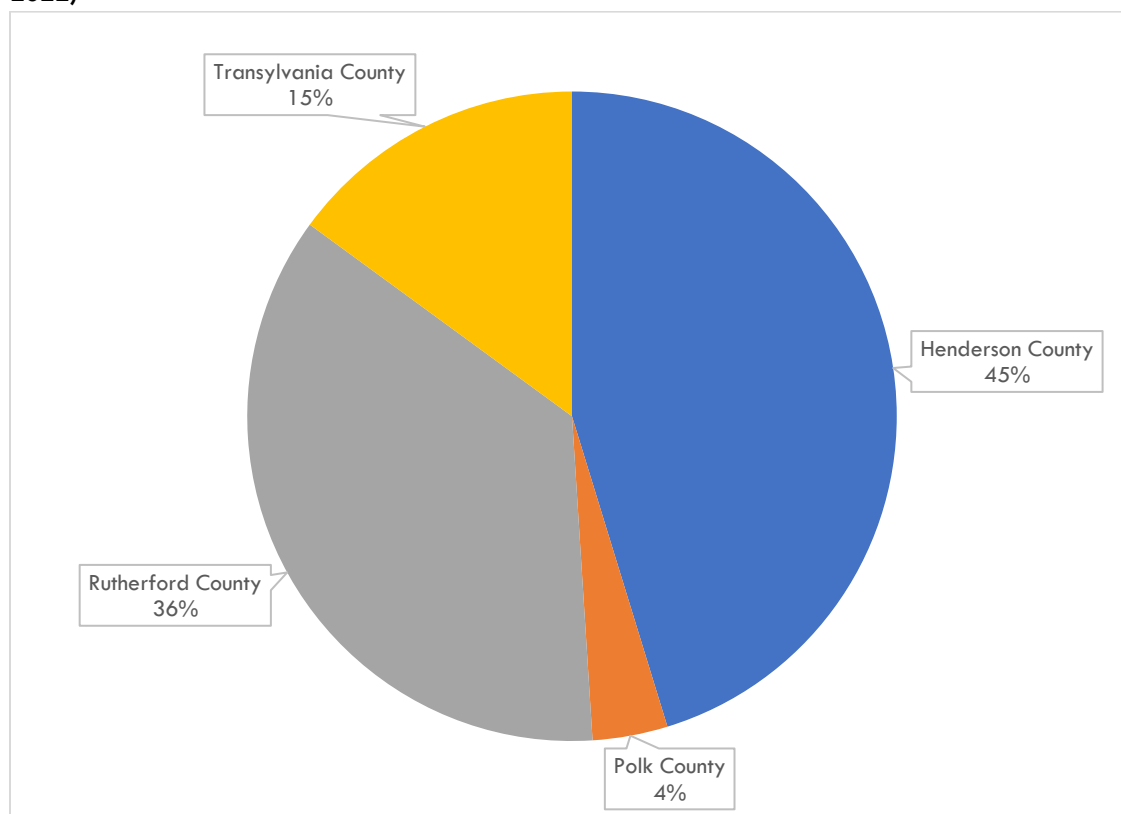
<sup>56</sup> Zip code level data does not add up to the county level; county level data is a separate data point and included for context.

<sup>57</sup> Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

Geographic Area	Child poverty rate (0-18)	Poverty Rate for Children <5 Years Old <sup>57</sup>	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Estimated Number of Children <3 Years Old Living in Poverty	Estimated Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty	Three-Year Trend for Number of Children <5 Living in Poverty
28018 (Bostic)	7.1%	8.1%	186	9	15	Increasing
28020 (Casar)	13.4%	10.8%	158	10	17	Fluctuating
28040 (Ellenboro)	13.1%	16.2%	308	30	50	Fluctuating
28043 (Forest City)	37.6%	40.3%	1,503	364	606	Decreasing
28114 (Mooresboro)	3.9%	2.2%	448	6	10	Fluctuating
28139 (Rutherfordton)	19.4%	18.1%	867	94	157	Steady/ Decreasing
28160 (Spindale)	21.3%	6.5%	46	2	3	Decreasing
28167 (Union Mills)	34.1%	0.0%	72	0	0	Decreasing/ Steady
Rutherford	24.9%	26.6%	3,157	504	839	Decreasing
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0.0%	0.0%	7	0	0	Steady
28712 (Brevard)	17.1%	25.1%	688	104	173	Decreasing
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	26.7%	22.7%	75	10	17	Decreasing/ Steady
28766 (Penrose)	11.2%	0.0%	29	0	0	Steady
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	24.2%	31.2%	439	82	137	Fluctuating
28772 (Rosman)	24.0%	28.6%	14	2	4	Increasing
28774 (Sapphire)	0.0%	n/a	0	0	0	Steady
Transylvania	19.8%	27.0%	1,288	209	348	Fluctuating
Service Area	--	--	10,463	6,278	2,327	Decreasing
North Carolina	18.5%	20.3%	578,975	347,385	117,418	Decreasing

As illustrated in Figure 10, a majority (45%) of income-eligible children reside in Henderson County, while the fewest reside in Polk County (4%).

**Figure 10. Distribution of Head Start/Early Head Start Income-Eligible Children in WNCSource Service Area (2018-2022)<sup>cxv</sup>**



Data also show that, in most of the service area, the number of children under age 5 living in poverty has been fluctuating in recent years, while decreasing in the state.

**Table 86. Number of Children Under Age 5 Living in Poverty by Geographic Area (2014-2018 to 2018-2022)<sup>cxvii</sup>**

Geographic Area	2014-2018	2015-2019	2016-2020	2017-2021	2018-2022	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	689	1,174	1,180	1,064	1,053	Fluctuating
Polk County	77	113	101	95	87	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	834	973	945	917	839	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	412	374	344	284	348	Fluctuating
Service Area	2,012	2,634	2,570	2,360	2,327	Fluctuating
North Carolina	146,941	141,716	131,206	124,073	117,418	Decreasing

In counties served by WNCSource, most recent data shows approximately 2,032 births annually. While exact data on the number of pregnant women who would be income-eligible for Early Head Start is not available, the number can be estimated by applying county-level poverty rates for children birth to age 5 to the number of live births annually. Using this calculation, there are an estimated 665 pregnant women who are eligible for Early Head Start, a vast majority of whom reside in Henderson County (Table 87).

The most current estimate of income-eligible pregnant women in the service area is 214 more women than the year prior. The largest impacts on the increase of pregnant women in the service area is derived from a

substantial increase in the number of births, particularly in Henderson County and the significant shift in poverty rate in Transylvania County over time (+5.6% from 2020 to 2022 Census data).

**Table 87. Number of Live Births Per Year by Geographic Area (2019-2022)** <sup>cxvii</sup>

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	2022
Henderson County	1,022	1,044	998	1,050
Polk County	166	111	158	121
Rutherford County	680	628	633	632
Transylvania County	262	226	262	229
Service Area	2,130	2,009	2,051	2,032
North Carolina	118,725	116,755	120,501	121,557

**Table 88. Estimated Number of Pregnant Women Income-Eligible for Early Head Start by Geographic Area**

Geographic Area	Number of Live Births (2022) <sup>cxviii</sup>	Poverty Rate (<Age 5) <sup>cxix</sup>	Estimated Number of Income-Eligible Pregnant Women	Change from 2023 Community Assessment
Henderson County	2,044	20.1%	411	+ 203
Polk County	403	11.3%	46	+ 32
Rutherford County	340	26.6%	91	- 90
Transylvania County	435	27.0%	117	+ 69
Service Area Total	3,222	---	665	+214

## Race and Ethnicity of Eligible Children in Poverty

Data for the number of young children living in poverty by race is not readily accessible from public sources. As described in the Overview of Service Area section, there are disparities with regard to poverty rate and race within the service area. WNCSource serves a population of children enrolled in its programs that is as diverse as the general population.

## Language of Eligible Children

The primary language of individuals in the WNCSource service area is English. Table 89 describes the percentage 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 8.0% of the population speaks Spanish.

**Table 89. Language Spoken at Home (5 Years and Over) by Geographic Area and Percentage of Population (2018-2022)** <sup>cxl</sup>

Geographic Area	English	Spanish	Other Indo-European	Asian and Pacific Island	Other
Henderson County	89.7%	8.0%	1.1%	0.8%	0.4%
Polk County	93.0%	5.1%	1.6%	0.1%	0.2%
Rutherford County	94.9%	4.0%	0.5%	0.5%	0.1%
Transylvania County	97.4%	1.8%	0.6%	0.0%	0.1%
North Carolina	87.7%	7.8%	2.0%	1.8%	0.7%



## Cultural Trends

In WNCSource's service area, the percentage of the population that is foreign-born is relatively low. While the service area counties have lower percentages than the state rate, in Transylvania County the percentage of the foreign-born population that is a non-US citizen is greater than the statewide rate (Table 90).

**Table 90. Foreign-Born Population by Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>cxli</sup>**

Geographic Area	Percent Foreign-Born	Percent of Foreign-Born Population that is non-US Citizen <sup>58</sup>	Predominant Region of Birthplace for Foreign-Born Population
Henderson County	7,899 (6.8%)	4,312 (54.6%)	Latin America (60.9%), Europe (16.9%), Asia (14.6%)
Polk County	826 (4.2%)	356 (43.1%)	Latin America (57.9%); Europe (29.3%); Northern America (7.4%)
Rutherford County	1,969 (3.0%)	868 (44.1%)	Latin America (72.0%); Asia (15.5%); Europe (7.1%)
Transylvania County	846 (2.6%)	575 (68.0%)	Latin America (59.1%); Europe (27.9%); Africa (5.9%)
North Carolina	867,946 (8.3%)	500,953 (57.7%)	Latin America (50%); Asia (28.4%); Europe (10.9%)

## 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 28,615 youth experiencing homelessness enrolled in public school (PreK-12), a decrease of 20.9% from the prior year. Many homeless children and youth are "doubled up," living with another family (Table 91).

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).<sup>cxlii</sup>

**Table 91. Percentage of Homeless Children/Youth (PreK-Grade 12) Enrolled in Public Schools by Primary Nighttime Residence<sup>cxliii</sup> (2018-2021)**

Primary nighttime residence	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021*	2021-2022
Doubled up (e.g., living with another family)	72.6%	72.4%	70.7%	70.7%
Hotels/motels	14.3%	16%	18.6%	19.6%
Shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care	9.6%	8.3%	6.6%	6.8%
Unsheltered	3.5%	3.3%	4.1%	3.6%
Total Number	34,721	27,037	22,644	28,615

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

<sup>58</sup> Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

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.<sup>cxliiv</sup> For federal fiscal year 2021, the CoC reflected:

- 3,698 unduplicated homeless children under age 18 served in the 79 mostly rural counties;
- 40% (1,470 children) of those served were under age 6 and 60% (2,228 children) were between 6 and 17 years of age
- 65% of homeless children ages birth-5 were Black/African American/African while making up only 17% of the Balance of State birth to 5 population; followed by 26% White
- Of the 1,470 children under age six, 593 children used Rapid Rehousing and 388 used emergency shelters, with other programs used less frequently. Some children accessed more than one program. <sup>cxlv</sup>

Point-in-time data for 2019-2023 (Table 92) indicates a fluctuating number of children in homeless families in the service area, with 44 children in 2023; 23 of which were from Henderson County. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and varying data collection 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 92. Point-in-Time Count: Children (17 and under) Experiencing Homelessness by Geographic Area (2019-2022)**<sup>cxlvi</sup>

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Henderson County	13	23	3	15	23
Polk County	2	6	0	3	0
Rutherford County	4	4	6	9	6
Transylvania County	6	13	3	15	15
Service Area	25	46	12	42	44

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 93).

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 94. Economic hardship is by far the risk factor most linked with homelessness. <sup>cxlvii</sup>

**Table 93. Children At-Risk of Homelessness, 2021 (Age 5 and under)**<sup>cxlviii</sup>

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

**Table 94: Number of Children in North Carolina At-Risk for Homelessness by Risk Factor<sup>cxlix</sup>**

Risk Factor	Number of Children
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%

WNCSource leadership team members report that nearly half of enrolled families in the Head Start/Early Head Start program who are experiencing homelessness are living doubled up. During the 2022-2023 program year, WNCSource served 23 families with 23 children (3 additional families and 2 additional children than 2021-2022), that were experiencing homelessness. Of the 23 families, four acquired housing during the program year. Based on this historic information, it is estimated that more than 23 children in the service area are eligible to receive Head Start/Early Head Start services based homelessness status.<sup>cl</sup>

**Table 95. WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Homelessness Services (2022-2023)<sup>cli</sup>**

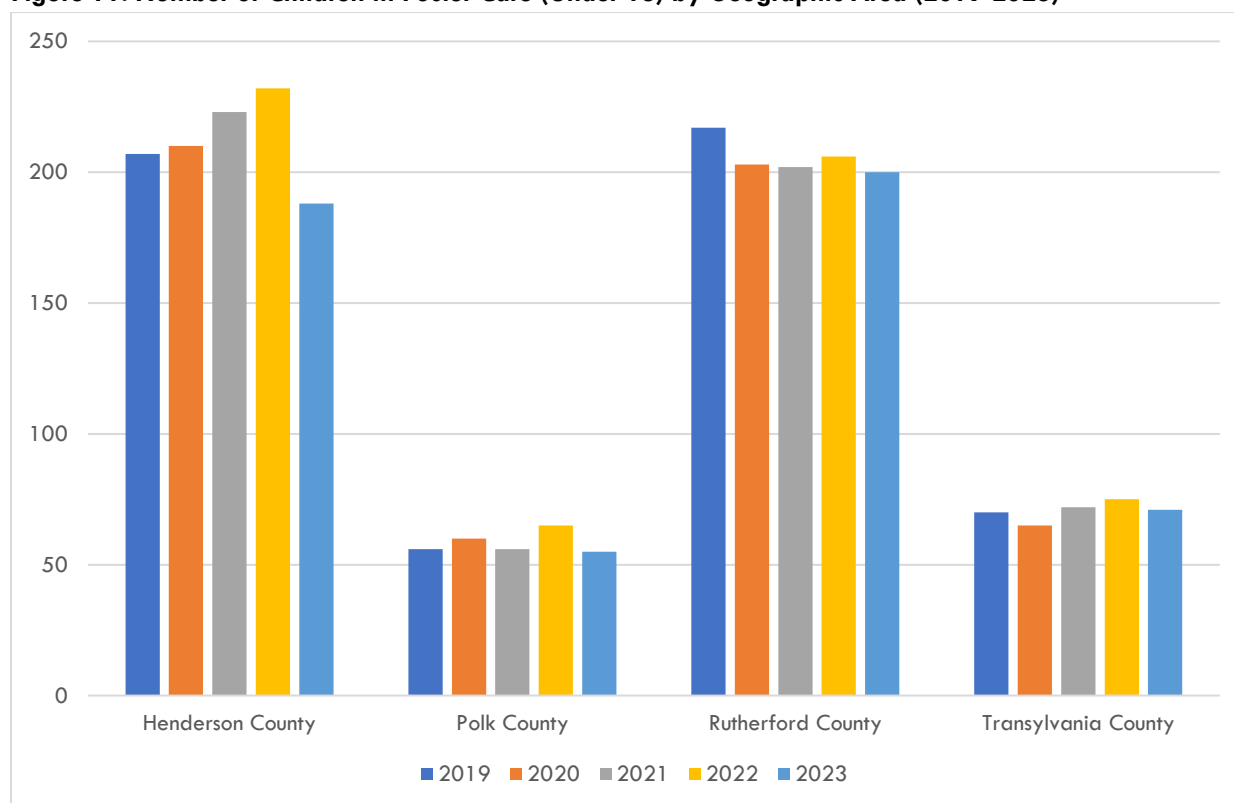
	Early Head Start	Early Head Start-CCP	Head Start	Total (and Change from 2021-2022)
Total number of families experiencing homelessness that were served during the enrollment year	14	6	3	23 (+3 families)
Total number of children experiencing homelessness that were served during the enrollment year	14	6	3	23 (+2 children)
Total number of families experiencing homelessness that acquired housing during the enrollment year	1	2	1	4 (no change)

## Children in Foster Care

In WNCSource's service area, there are 514 children in foster care under age 18 (Table 96). If applying an equal distribution for each age, it can be estimated that there are 143 foster children eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start (86 of whom are estimated to be age birth to 3, and 57 are age 3-5). Since 2020, the number of children in foster care had been increasing, but in 2023 all WNCSource service area counties reflect a decrease from 2022. The number of children in foster care in the service area in 2023 represents an 11.1% decrease from the year prior.

**Table 96. Children in Foster Care (Under 18) by Geographic Area (2019-2023)<sup>clii</sup>**

Geographic Area	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	207	210	223	232	188	Fluctuating
Polk County	56	60	56	65	55	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	217	203	202	206	200	Decreasing
Transylvania County	70	65	72	75	71	Fluctuating
Service Area	550	538	553	578	514	Fluctuating
North Carolina	15,520	15,268	15,043	14,516	14,416	Decreasing

**Figure 11. Number of Children in Foster Care (Under 18) by Geographic Area (2019-2023)** <sup>cliii</sup>

During the 2022-2023 program year, WNCSource served 17 children who were in foster care at any point during the program year, seven of which were referred by a child welfare agency.

**Table 97. WNCSource HS/EHS/EHS-CCP Foster Care Data (2022-2023)** <sup>cliv</sup>

	Head Start	Early Head Start	EHS-CCP	Total
Total number of enrolled children who were in foster care at any point during the program year	2	8	7	17
Total number of enrolled children in foster care who were referred by a child welfare agency	2	1	4	7

## Children Receiving Public Assistance

Enrollment in Head Start/Early Head Start based on public assistance is dependent on receipt of TANF, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or SNAP benefits. Across the service area, the number of children who are recipients of TANF has been fluctuating or decreasing in recent years. North Carolina's TANF program is called Work First (WF). In the service area in 2022, 260 households received Work First benefits – the lowest number of participants in five years (Table 98).

In recent years, the number of children who were recipients of SSI has been fluctuating or decreasing as well. In 2022, 479 children in the service area received SSI, which represented the lowest number of participants in the past five years, aligning with the same decreasing trend in North Carolina.

**Table 98. Households Receiving Work First in North Carolina (2018-2022)<sup>clv</sup>**

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	138	120	125	93	76	Fluctuating
Polk County	33	29	21	24	20	Decreasing
Rutherford County	169	177	157	137	128	Decreasing
Transylvania County	47	60	52	38	36	Fluctuating
Service Area	387	386	355	292	260	Decreasing
North Carolina	15,608	14,379	13,173	11,744	10,927	Decreasing

**Table 99. Children Receiving Supplementary Security Income (2017-2021)<sup>clvi</sup>**

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Five-Year Trend
Henderson County	213	186	208	194	184	Fluctuating
Polk County	39	40	38	36	41	Fluctuating
Rutherford County	201	214	216	204	193	Decreasing
Transylvania County	72	75	72	60	61	Decreasing
Service Area	525	515	534	494	479	Decreasing
North Carolina	36,234	35,198	34,808	32,937	31,580	Decreasing

The number of children birth to age 5 living in households that receive public assistance can be estimated by applying the percent of children (0-18) living in households that receive public assistance to the number of children birth to age 5 in the service area (Table 100). Data aligns with Head Start/Early Head Start eligibility based on public assistance (i.e., TANF, SSI, SNAP).

Assuming an even distribution across ages, it can be estimated that 2,916 children, under age 5, are eligible for participation in Head Start (1,166)/Early Head Start (1,750) based on family receipt of public assistance.

**Table 100. Estimated Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start Based on Receipt of Public Assistance by Geographic Area (2018-2022)<sup>clvii</sup>**

Geographic Area	Percent of Children Receiving Public Assistance (SSI, Cash Public Assistance, SNAP) <sup>59</sup>	Number of Children Birth to Age 5	Number of Children 0-3 Living in Households Receiving Public Assistance <sup>60</sup>	Number of Children 0-5 Living in Households Receiving Public Assistance <sup>61</sup>
28726 (East Flat Rock)	43.5%	119	31	52
28729 (Etowah)	47.4%	210	60	100
28731 (Flat Rock)	27.1%	439	71	119
28732 (Fletcher)	5.0%	856	26	43
28735 (Gerton)	0.0%	10	0	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	22.7%	1,036	141	235
28742 (Horse Shoe)	27.8%	110	18	31
28759 (Mills River)	17.3%	359	37	62
28790 (Zirconia)	14.2%	49	4	7
28791 (Hendersonville)	10.2%	583	36	59
28792 (Hendersonville)	28.4%	1,582	270	449
Henderson	22.3%	5,248	702	1,170
28722 (Columbus)	24.9%	252	38	63
28756 (Mill Spring)	31.8%	291	56	93
28773 (Saluda)	14.8%	135	12	20

<sup>59</sup> 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.

<sup>60</sup> Estimated by applying the percent of children 0-18 living in households receiving public assistance to the population of children birth to 3

<sup>61</sup> Estimated by applying the percent of children 0-18 living in households receiving public assistance to the population of children birth to 5

Geographic Area	Percent of Children Receiving Public Assistance (SSI, Cash Public Assistance, SNAP) <sup>59</sup>	Number of Children Birth to Age 5	Number of Children 0-3 Living in Households Receiving Public Assistance <sup>60</sup>	Number of Children 0-5 Living in Households Receiving Public Assistance <sup>61</sup>
28782 (Tryon)	19.2%	131	15	25
Polk	25.9%	770	120	199
28018 (Bostic)	36.7%	186	41	68
28020 (Casar)	47.4%	158	45	75
28040 (Ellenboro)	19.2%	308	35	59
28043 (Forest City)	50.5%	1,503	455	759
28114 (Mooresboro)	23.0%	448	62	103
28139 (Rutherfordton)	32.0%	867	166	277
28160 (Spindale)	30.3%	46	8	14
28167 (Union Mills)	31.0%	72	13	22
Rutherford	38.5%	3,157	729	1,215
28708 (Balsam Grove)	65.7%	7	3	5
28712 (Brevard)	24.0%	688	99	165
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	37.3%	75	17	28
28766 (Penrose) <sup>62</sup>	0.0%	29	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	26.7%	439	70	117
28772 (Rosman)	30.9%	14	3	4
28774 (Sapphire)	0.0%	0	0	0
Transylvania	25.7%	1,288	199	331
Service Area		10,463	1,750	2,916
North Carolina	26.5%	578,975	92,057	153,428

In the WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start programs, many families receive assistance benefits, with the greatest participation levels in the WIC and SNAP programs (Table 101).

**Table 101. Number of WNCSource Head Start and Early Head Start Families That Received Federal or Other Assistance (At Enrollment, 2022-2023)**<sup>clviii</sup>

Program	TANF	SSI	WIC	SNAP
Early Head Start	5	6	48	28
Early Head Start-CCP	4	2	63	42
Head Start	3	4	86	46
Total	12	12	197	116

## Children with Disabilities

Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) require that at least 10% of program enrollment be children eligible for services under IDEA (i.e., early intervention and preschool special education).

During the 2022-2023 program year, WNCSource served 53 children in its Head Start/Early Head Start program with an IEP/IFSP. This represented 14% of Head Start children, 14.2% of enrollment in Early Head Start, 10% in EHS-CCP, and 2.0% in Early Head Start Expansion (Table 102).

<sup>62</sup> This zip code is primarily in Transylvania County. One small area is in Henderson County.

**Table 102. Number and Percent of Enrolled Children with an IEP/IFSP in WNCSource HS/EHS/EHS-CCP (2022-2023)<sup>clix</sup>**

Program Option	Funded Enrollment (2022-2023)	Total Number (and Percent) of Enrolled Children with IEP/IFSP	Percent of Funded Enrollment	Number Determined Eligible Prior to Enrollment Year	Number of Children with an IEP/IFSP Who Did Not Receive Special Education Services
Head Start	185	26	14%	20	1
Early Head Start	120	17	14.2%	15	0
Early Head Start - Expansion	99	2	2.0%	2	0
EHS-CCP	80	8	10%	5	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>11.0%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1</b>

WNCSource leadership noted that needs of children have increased. 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. Public school feedback is also reflecting an increase in the number of children with delayed speech or language impairments.

The North Carolina Early Intervention Section (NCEI) is a part of NCDHHS' Division of Child and Family Well-Being. It is the lead agency for the North Carolina Infant-Toddler Program (NC ITP). NC ITP provides early intervention support and services for families and their children, birth to three who have special needs. The program serves children birth to age 3 with developmental delays and disabilities, and is implemented by local agencies.

In 2022, 265 children received early intervention services in the WNCSource service area, representing a 4.9% increase from 2021, but a 30.8% decrease from the number of children served pre-pandemic in 2019 (Table 103).

**Table 103. Number and Percent of Infants and Toddlers (Age 0-3) Receiving Early Intervention Services by Geographic Area (2019-2022)<sup>clx, 63</sup>**

Geographic Area	2019 (FY 2018-2019)	2020 (FY 2019-2020)	2021 (FY 2020-2021)	2022 (FY 2021-2022)	Trend 2021 to 2022
Henderson County	143 (4.4%)	105 (3.2%)	94 (3.0%)	108 (3.5%)	Increasing
Polk County	25 (5.4%)	25 (5.3%)	25 (5.1%)	26 (6.1%)	Increasing
Rutherford County	190 (9.1%)	169 (8.3%)	105 (5.2%)	101 (5.1%)	Decreasing
Transylvania County	25 (3.0%)	29 (3.5%)	28 (3.4%)	30 (3.9%)	Increasing
Service Area	383	328	252	265	Increasing
North Carolina	21,095 (5.8%)	19,800 (5.5%)	18,230 (5.1%)	19,157 (5.5%)	Increasing

Special education services for young children ages 3-5 years in NC is provided by The Preschool Exceptional Children's Program, funded by IDEA, Part B. County level data for children age 3-5 who are receiving early childhood special education services under IDEA are reflected in Table 104.

Compared to December 2019 (pre-pandemic), an overall decrease in the number of children receiving early childhood special education services is reflected between December 2020 and December 2022 in the service area (likely due to the impact of the pandemic). The most current data (December 2023) reflects an uptick across the service area in the number of children served from 2022 to 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Rates above the statewide rate are highlighted.

WNCSource leadership note that the impacts of the pandemic are still evident with more parents continuing to keep their children at home instead of sending them to child care centers. This is particularly true for Transylvania and Henderson counties where the early education staff that evaluates children for disabilities is steady and experienced, but the number of children in programming and hence requesting evaluations, has declined.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction notes that “in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, starting in March of the 2019-2020 school year and continuing through the 2020-2021 school year, public school units across the state employed unprecedented methods to ensure continued student learning by utilizing various modes of instruction and student outreach. As such, caution should be taken when comparing data reported for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years to data reported for prior and subsequent years.”

**Table 104. Children Age 3-5<sup>64</sup> Receiving Early Childhood Special Education Services Under IDEA, by Geographic Location (2019-2023)<sup>clxi</sup>**

Geographic Area	December 2019	December 2020	December 2021	December 2022	December 2023	Trend 2022 to 2023
Henderson County	179	172	161	173	204	Increasing
Polk County	33	20	24	29	38	Increasing
Rutherford County	127	121	105	116	141	Increasing
Transylvania County	46	33	39	33	49	Increasing
Service Area	385	346	329	351	432	Increasing
North Carolina	20,892	16,433	17,316	19,638	22,283	Increasing

**Table 105. Summary: Children Age 0-5 Receiving Early Childhood Special Education Services by Geographic Location<sup>clxii, clxiii</sup>**

Geographic Area	0-3 (2022)	3-5 (Dec 2023)	0-5
Henderson County	108	204	312
Polk County	26	38	64
Rutherford County	101	141	242
Transylvania County	30	49	79
Service Area	265	432	697

<sup>64</sup> Includes five year old children in Kindergarten.



**Figure 12. Number of Children Age 0-5 Receiving Early Intervention (2022) and Early Childhood Special Education (2023) Services by Location**<sup>clxiv, clxv</sup>

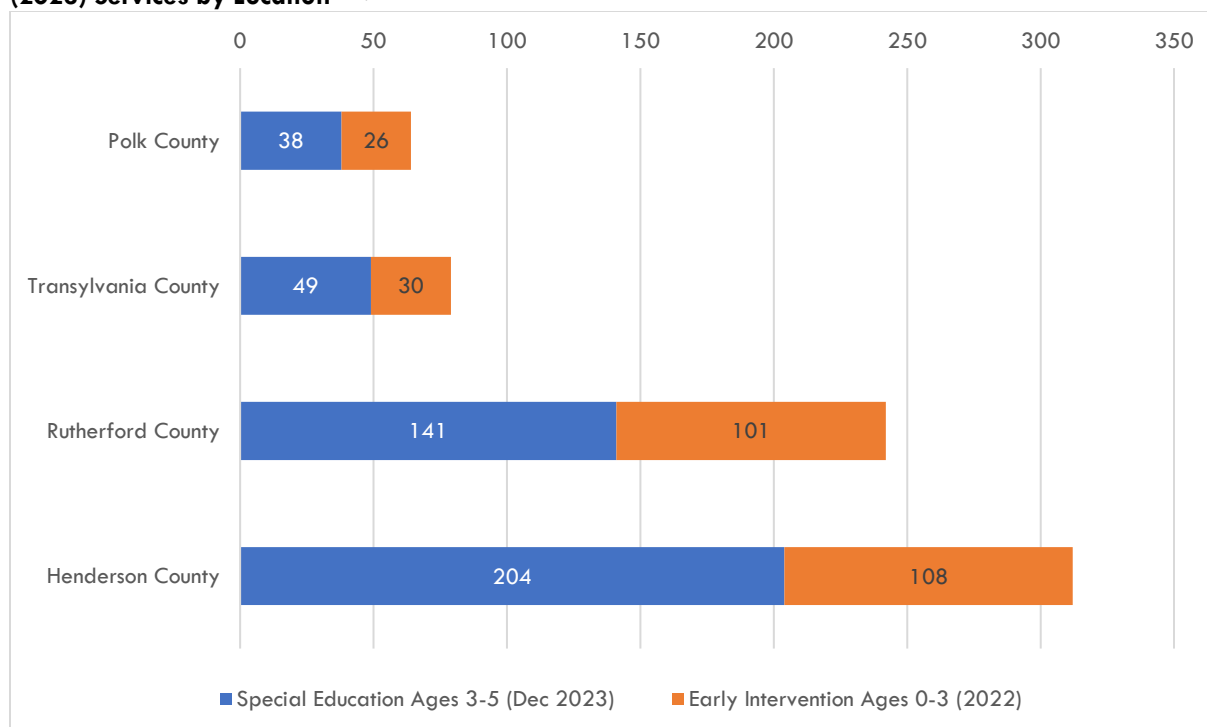


Table 106 shows state data indicating the disability category for children ages 3-5 years who are receiving early childhood special education services. Across the state, of the 14,343 children, the most frequently reported disabilities are developmental delay (6,504), speech or language impairment (3,782) and Autism (3,442).

Notably, from December 2020 (pre-pandemic) to December 2023, while overall levels of disabilities increased 28.6%, the disability category with the greatest increase in frequency is Autism, with a 47.6% increase.

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. The growth in these disability categories aligns with the trends of disabilities, by type, that are represented in enrolled children in the HS/EHS program.

**Table 106. Children Ages 3-5 Receiving Early Childhood Special Education Services in North Carolina (2020-2023), by Disability<sup>clxvi</sup>**

Age/Disability	12/2020	12/2021	12/2022	12/2023	% Change 12/2020-12/2023
Autism	1,802	2,105	2,720	3,442	+47.6%
Deaf-blindness	*	*	*	*	*
Developmental delay	4,689	5,016	5,777	6,504	+27.8%
Deafness	*	22	15	19	n/a (steady)
Emotional disturbance	145	*	*	*	n/a
Hearing impairment	1,802	125	120	148	-91.8%
Intellectual disability - Mild	*	*	*	*	n/a
Intellectual disability - Moderate	*	*	*	*	n/a
Intellectual disability - Severe	*	*	*	*	n/a
Specific learning disability	n/a	*	*	*	n/a
Multiple disabilities	118	112	122	137	+13.9%
Other health impairment	122	129	149	153	+20.3%
Orthopedic impairment	39	40	33	38	-2.6%
Speech or language impairment	3,200	3,151	3,547	3,782	+15.4%
Traumatic brain injury	82	76	86	79	-3.7%
Visual impairment	39	36	31	41	+4.9%
Total	10,239	10,813	12,602	14,343	+28.6%

\* Indicates 10 or less students in the count.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the early identification of developmental delays and disabilities in young children was highly impacted in many early childhood programs. Some of the impacts on early identification and service delivery included reduced resources, poor service delivery coordination, communication challenges, and families struggling to meet basic needs.<sup>clxvii</sup> Research also shows delays in language development among children born during the pandemic, and some of this may be caused by less language engagement than is typical for young children. Data show that that the number of words a 2-year-old heard before the pandemic was significantly more than what a 2-year-old in 2020 and 2021 would hear. These differences were most pronounced for children in low-income households.<sup>clxviii</sup>

## AGENCIES SERVING HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

### Child Care Centers and Family Child Care

The far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on an already fragile child care sector is a considerable factor in programs' abilities to meet families' needs. The child care sector's workforce challenges (recruitment, turnover, and retention) were unsustainable prior to the pandemic, and child care workforce numbers have not recovered from pandemic-related job losses to the same extent as other industries.<sup>clxix</sup>

Research indicates that child care workers are underpaid. Experts suggest that without improvements to the quality of the job (for example, increased wages) workers simply may no longer consider employment in the child care sector.<sup>clxx</sup> While there are a variety of strategies states are implementing to try to recruit and retain child care workers – such as financial assistance for degrees and credentials, bonuses, or more flexible paid leave – low pay continues to be a primary issue driving high turnover in programs.<sup>clxxi</sup>

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conducted a January 2024 survey that included educators from centers, homes, faith-based programs, Head Start, and public preschool programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. As reported by EducationNC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education news organization, “More than half of survey respondents indicated their programs are under-enrolled relative to the capacity of their facilities, reducing the overall availability of child care. The top reason given for this trend was staffing shortages (89%).

Survey respondents in North Carolina report similar rates of under-enrollment as the rest of the country. But 60% of North Carolina respondents indicated their program is experiencing staffing shortages, compared with 53% nationally.

While a report from the Century Foundation warns of a wave of child care program closures — they predict 1,178 closures affecting 155,539 children in North Carolina — the NAEYC survey suggests we should expect less of a sudden wave and more of an ongoing ripple effect.”<sup>clxxii</sup>

According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, there are 100 licensed child care centers and family child care programs in the WNCSource service area, with licensed capacity to serve 5,868 children, birth to school age (if fully enrolled). A majority (81%) of capacity is in center-based programs (Table 107). Sixty-seven percent of programs are licensed to serve infants.

Detailed zip code level data on the number and capacity of child care programs, by county, is provided in Appendix C.

**Table 107. Number (and Capacity) of Licensed Child Care Centers by Geographic Area (March 2024)**<sup>clxxiii</sup>

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	42 (3,514)	10 (454)	14	28	26
Polk County	4 (228)	4 (228)	4	0	0
Rutherford County	25 (1,446)	13 (669)	10	11	17
Transylvania County	10 (531)	7 (360)	1	7	5
Service Area Total	81 (5,719)	34 (1,711)	29	46	48

**Table 108. Number (and Capacity) of Family Child Care Homes by Geographic Area (March 2024)**<sup>clxxiv</sup>

Geographic Area	Number of Family Child Care Homes (Capacity)	Number FCC Homes Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Number of FCC Homes Serving Infants
Henderson County	12 (93)	6	12
Polk County	0 (0)	0	0
Rutherford County	5 (40)	4	5
Transylvania County	2 (16)	1	2
Service Area Total	19 (149)	11	19

**Table 109. Summary: Total Number (and Capacity) of All Child Care Facilities by Geographic Area (March 2024)**<sup>clxxv</sup>

Geographic Area	Total Child Care Facilities (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	54 (3,607)	10 (454)	14	34	38
Polk County	4 (228)	4 (228)	4	0	0
Rutherford County	30 (1,486)	13 (669)	10	15	22
Transylvania County	12 (547)	7 (360)	1	8	7
Service Area Total	100 (5,868)	34 (1,711)	29	57	67

As reflected in Table 110, the majority of programs in the WNCSource service area are participating in Smart Start (92%), 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 Appendix C.

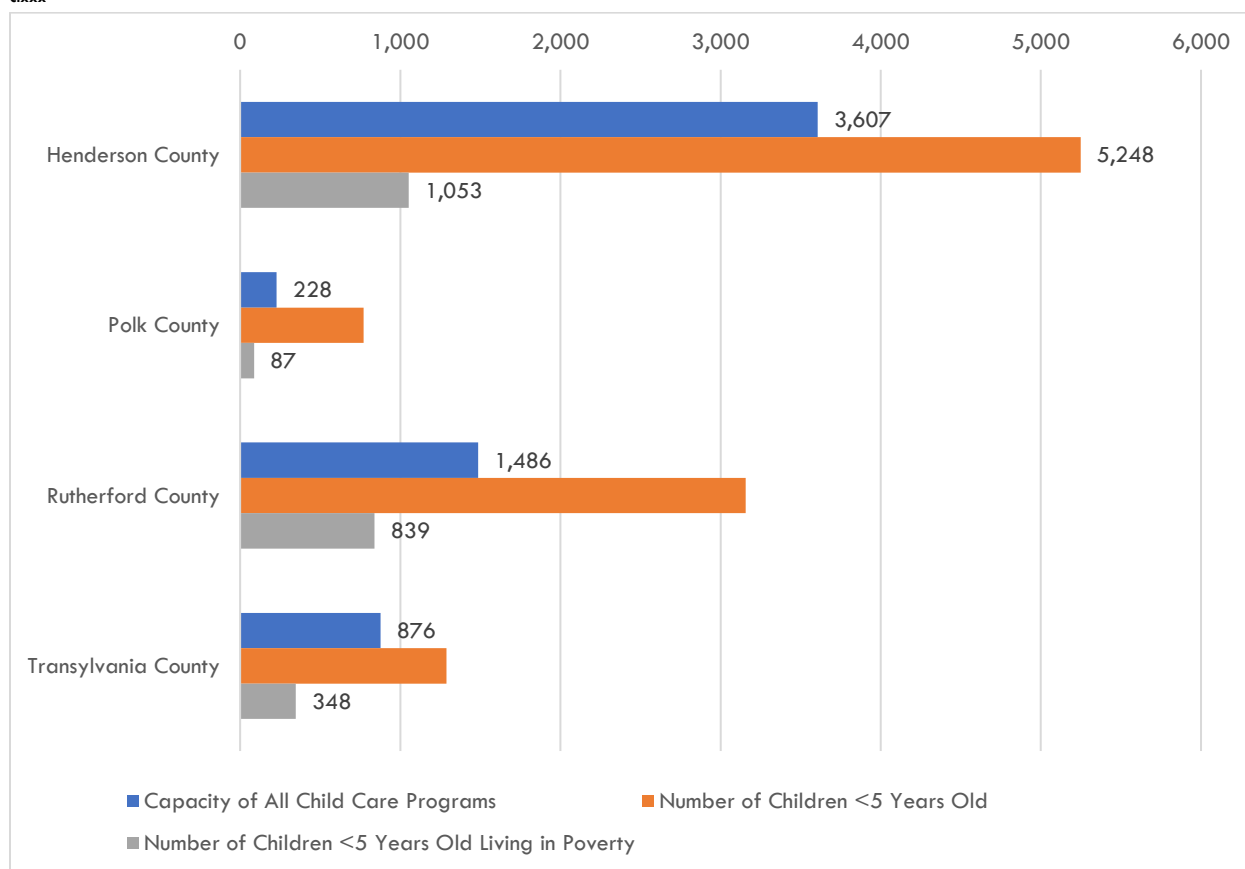
**Table 110. Number of Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes by Smart Start Star Level (March 2024)**<sup>clxxvi</sup>

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	TOTAL
Henderson County	20	26	2	0	3	51
Polk County	4	0	0	0	0	4
Rutherford County	19	5	2	1	0	27
Transylvania County	5	4	1	0	0	10
Service Area Total	48	35	5	1	3	92

When comparing the number of children under 5 years old in the service area to total licensed child care capacity, which includes school age, the number of children under 5 years old far exceeds total licensed capacity. Specifically, the child care capacity (5,868 slots) in the service area is lower than the total number of children birth to age 5 in the service area (10,463 children), representing available capacity for 56% of children under 5 in the service area. This does not necessarily reflect unmet need, as children may be served in other settings, such as public pre-kindergarten, and not all families with young children will need or want care. Zip code level data, by program type, regarding the location of child care programs in the service area can be found in Appendix C.

**Table 111. Summary Level: Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Compared to Capacity of Child Care Facilities by Geographic Area (March 2024)**

Geographic Area	Capacity of All Child Care Programs	Number of Children <5 Years Old <sup>clxxvii</sup>	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty <sup>clxxviii</sup>
Henderson County	3,607	5,248	1,053
Polk County	228	770	87
Rutherford County	1,486	3,157	839
Transylvania County	547	1,288	348
Service Area Total	5,868	10,463	2,327

**Figure 13. Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Compared to Licensed Child Care Capacity by Geographic Area**<sup>clxxxix, clxxx</sup>

According to the Child Care Services Association, there are 918 children, birth to age three, in the service area who are enrolled in child care facilities and 39 in family child care homes. Children age 3-5 represent 1,726 slots in child care facilities and 28 in family child care homes. The estimated number of children under age five who are enrolled in all child care programs in the service area is 2,711, which represents 26% of all children under five in the service area (10,463) (Table 112). <sup>clxxxi</sup>

**Table 112. Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Enrolled in Early Education and Care Center or Licensed Family Child Care (FCC) Home, by Age (January 2024)**<sup>clxxxii</sup>

Geographic Area	Children Enrolled in Centers Birth-3	Children Enrolled in Centers Age 3-5	Total Center Enrollment	Children Enrolled in FCC Homes Birth-3	Children Enrolled in FCC Homes Age 3-5	Total FCC Home Enrollment	Total Center and FCC Enrollment
Henderson County	547	833	1,380	22	19	41	1,421
Polk County	0	132	132	0	0	0	132
Rutherford County	291	572	863	9	8	17	880
Transylvania County	80	189	269	8	1	9	278
Service Area Total	918	1,726	2,644	39	28	67	2,711

In the service area, the number of children receiving subsidized child care assistance (subsidy) has been fluctuating or decreasing in recent years (Table 113).

Data on access to subsidized child care shows that many children birth to age 5 who are eligible for subsidy are unserved. In the WNCSource service area, more than 3,300 children are eligible for subsidized child

care, but only about 34.5% are accessing care. Since 2021-2022, the percentage 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 114).

WNCSource leadership report that the cost of child care is a potentially significant barrier to services for some families in the service area. In 2020-2021, the state waived the parent fee associated with child care subsidies (approximately 10% of a parent's income). WNCSource noted that some families that were eligible for subsidized care did not accept it due to the parent fee. Parent fees contribute to the reduction for subsidy uptake in Transylvania County as it is a barrier for some families.

**Table 113. Number of Children Receiving Subsidized Child Care Assistance by Geographic Area and Year**<sup>clxxxiii</sup>

Geographic Area	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2023-2024 <sup>clxxxiv</sup>	Trend
Henderson County	563	552	430	451	481 <sup>65</sup>	Fluctuating
Polk County	76	60	60	62	47	Decreasing
Rutherford County	545	467	430	520	403	Fluctuating
Transylvania County	148	143	183	134	112	Fluctuating
Service Area Total	1,332	1,222	1,103	1,167	1,043	Fluctuating
North Carolina	70,228	65,148	65,015	60,648 (10/2022)	n/a	Decreasing 2018-2021

**Table 114. Children Eligible for and Access to Subsidized Child Care by Geographic Area (2018-2022)**<sup>clxxxv, 66</sup>

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

Within the service area, there are other early care and education providers. The Head Start providers supporting families within the WNCSource service area include:<sup>clxxxvi</sup>

- 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, Mount Vernon Ruth Elementary, Spindale Elementary, Harris Elementary, Carver, Forest City Dunbar Elementary, Forrest W Hunt Elementary, and Ellenboro

<sup>65</sup> Includes 16 DSS slots.

<sup>66</sup> Percentages above the service area rate are highlighted.

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 MIECHV needs assessment is designed to identify communities with concentrations of risk. Per federal guidelines, each of North Carolina’s 100 counties are measured across five domains of risk to measure: socioeconomic status, adverse perinatal outcomes, substance use disorder, crime, and child maltreatment. Within the five domains, there are a total of 13 risk indicators that reflect a significant impact on the primary health outcomes targeted by most home-visiting programs. By understanding the distributions of these different risk indicators, MIECHV determines where additional home-visiting programs would most benefit North Carolinians. In 2024, Rutherford County was added as an eligible MIECHV county. Overall, the program has the current funded capacity to serve 1,950 individuals in North Carolina annually.<sup>clxxxvii</sup>

Additionally, the North Carolina Division of Child and Family Well-Being supports two evidence-based home-visiting models Healthy Families America and Nurse-Family Partnership. Home visiting services are available across the service area through the implementation of various programs as noted in Table 115.

Table 115. Home Visiting Programs and Reach by Geographic Area (2024)<sup>clxxxviii</sup>

Geographic Area	Home Visiting Programs Implemented
Henderson County	Parents as Teachers (PAT) Early Head Start Adolescent Parenting Program Parents As Teachers Healthy Beginnings
Polk County	Early Head Start Home Visiting
Rutherford County	Nurse-Family Partnership Early Head Start
Transylvania County	Early Head Start Home Visiting Family Connects

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.<sup>clxxxix</sup> 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 because they tend to have greater unmet need.<sup>cx</sup>

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 will test virtual delivery methods introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic as potential solutions for increasing access overall.<sup>cxci</sup>

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

Publicly funded preschool in North Carolina (NC Pre-K) 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.<sup>cxcii</sup>

In North Carolina, the most recent National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) data (2022) noted that 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 30<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>cxciii</sup>

There are 35 NC Pre-K providers in the service area (Table 116). In the state, 53% of 4-year-old children participate in the NC Pre-K program. Across the WNCSource service area, participation rates have increased since 2020; increases range from 5% to 27%.

**Table 116. Number of NC Pre-K Providers by Geographic Area (2021-2024)** <sup>cxciv</sup>

Geographic Area	Nov 2021	June 2023	March 2024
Henderson County	10	8	10
Polk County	4	4	4
Rutherford County	14	14	14
Transylvania County	8	8	7
Service Area Total	36	34	35

**Table 117. Percentage of Four-Year-Old Children Enrolled in NC Pre-K Programs by Geographic Area (2020-2023)** <sup>cxcv</sup>

Geographic Area	2020	Dec 2022	2022-2023 school year	Trend 2020 - 2023
Henderson County	35%	49%	131 children (28%)	Decreasing
Polk County	88%	103%	88 children (>75%)	Steady
Rutherford County	55%	60%	271 children (63%)	Increasing
Transylvania County	64%	91%	99 children (>75%)	Steady
North Carolina	48%	51%	53%	Increasing

By 2030, the goal is that 75% of eligible four-year-olds in each county will be enrolled in NC Pre-K. This goal is aligned with the North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan. Currently 36 out of 100 counties have met this enrollment goal. NC Pre-K will need 13,472 more low-income 4-year-olds to meet the statewide goal of 75% enrollment of eligible children in each county. <sup>cxcvi</sup>

Currently, larger percentages and numbers of eligible children are not participating in NC Pre-K in urban areas, while rural counties have the largest variation in the percentage of children who are eligible but are



not participating. Some rural counties, such as Polk County are serving all eligible 4-year-olds, while others are serving less than 25% of eligible 4-year-olds, similar to Henderson County (28%).

## FAMILY, STAFF AND COMMUNITY INSIGHTS



Family, staff, and community input are valuable sources of data to guide program options and services and to enhance collaborations among partners. WNCSource gathered data from Family, Staff, and Community Providers as important sources of data to inform this Community Assessment.

### Family Input

A WNCSource Family Survey administered in March 2024 gathered information from families with a child(ren) currently enrolled in one of WNCSource's programs. The survey gathered information on the families' experiences with the program and the community in their service area (Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, or Transylvania county). One hundred and thirty families completed the survey (35% response rate).

**Family Snapshot.** Families responded with the following demographics about their race/ethnicity: 51% White, 51% Hispanic/Latino, 9% Black or African American, 4% Multi-Racial. The breakdown of the respondent's employment and education level included: 41% work full-time, 29% work part-time, 24% are unemployed, and 15% are currently in school or participate in a job training program. The highest education level of respondents are as follows: 55% high school graduates/GED, 13% Bachelor's degree, 9% have some high school, 9% Associates degree, 6% with less than a 9th grade education, 5% with an Advanced degree (Master's, PhD, etc.), and 3% enrolled in vocational school.

- 89% of respondent families have only one child currently enrolled in a WNCSource program; 11% have two or more children enrolled.
- 48% of the families have a child in a center-based Early Head Start program; 43% of the families have a child in a center-based Head Start program; and 6% are in the home-based Early Head Start program.
- 95% of respondents reported being the biological parent of the enrolled child; 3% were an extended family member (e.g., grandparent, aunt, uncle, etc.); and 2% are an adoptive/foster parent, step-parent, or partner/significant other.
- 75% of respondents reside in Henderson County, 15% reside in Rutherford County, 9% reside in Transylvania County, and 1% reside in Polk County.

### Program Snapshot.

- 94% of respondent families say the location of their child(rens) EHS/HS center meets their needs. Some families commented that they feel the program location/center is too far from their home or that space was not available for their child(ren) at the closest center.

- 92% of respondents say the program offers a schedule that meets their needs. Eight percent of respondents noted that the program schedule does not meet their needs and noted that they would like extended early morning and late afternoon hours or help with transportation.
- 40% of respondents said their work schedules are a problem when trying to be involved in their child(ren) EHS/HS program, with 16% noting transportation challenges, 13% indicating child care needs, 12% said that language barriers were a problem for their family and an additional 11% of respondents said their lack of access to the internet or technology (e.g., devices) was an issue.

Respondents to the Family Survey indicated that their preferred methods to communicate with staff about their child(ren) is face-to-face (63%) and phone calls (64%), followed by texts (57%), flyers/letters sent home/newsletters (43%), email (41%), monthly school readiness calendars (22%), and social media platforms such as Facebook (8%).

The majority of respondents (121 of 135) agreed that communication between their family and staff were easy to understand. Other respondents responded with a neutral opinion. Specifically,

- 120 agreed that their child(ren)'s program connects their family with the appropriate staff or resources to address their questions or concerns;
- 122 families are satisfied with the services they receive from the EHS/HS program;
- 125 agree that the EHS/HS program is helping their child(ren) get ready for school; and
- 127 agree that the program gives their child(ren) a safe place to learn.

Community Snapshot. When asked what they think is best about their community, most families selected services offered by the local government (e.g., SNAP, WIC) (63%). Additional selections were neighborhood parks and playgrounds (53%), safety (52%), services offered by community organizations (36%), affordable child care (34%), and the quality of schools and universities (34%). Between 20-30% of respondents selected the quality of healthcare services (30%), immigrant friendly community (23%), neighborhood relationships (21%), and availability of jobs (20%). Less than 20% of respondents said the community was diverse (19%), had public transportation (17%), had affordable housing (10%), job training (9%), and available therapy services (1%).

Families were asked what services they need, or want, but are unable to find in their community. The greatest response was that families have access to all the services they need (34%). Of the services that families indicate they cannot find affordable housing (24%) was the top selection, followed by dental care (20%), housing/rental assistance (12%), job search or training (9%), health care (9%), mental health services (9%), child care (7%), food assistance (7%), legal aid (6%), education (6%), immigration services (5%), and transportation (4%).

Stressors for Families. When asked about their biggest stressors, family respondents said work/life balance (32%), finances (23%), housing (16%), access to dental care (15%), their child's behavior (13%), employment (12%), and access to child care (12%) were the greatest stressors. Another 12% of families also indicated that COVID-19 is the biggest stressor. Other stressors included marital/personal (12%), food insecurity (7%), their child's disabilities (7%), community or domestic violence (3%), and getting help from the K-12 schools (3%).

Families said the biggest issues for their families were having enough money to pay for their home utilities (36%). Other issues included having enough money to buy food (28%), reliability of their vehicle (24%), having difficulty finding help (financial, medical, dental, child care, etc.) (22%), having enough room in their home for the people living there (18%), and legal issues (13%).

Reflections from Families. Some families indicated that they have difficulty getting financial, medical, dental, or other help. Several said they make too much money to receive local government assistance but do not make enough money to pay for housing, food, and other bills. Others said they need help finding resources like dental homes or legal advice.

## Staff Input

A WNCSource Staff Survey was administered in October 2023 and gathered information from current staff on different aspects of the organization's engagement, leadership, teamwork, and work culture. The results reflect WNCSource's strengths as well as areas for improvement. The staff response rate was 68%, including 127 employees.

Engagement and Company Confidence. A majority of respondents said they are proud to work for WNCSource (88%), while 82% would recommend WNCSource as a great place to work and 79% said WNCSource provides services that are as good as, or better than, the agency's main competitors (79%). A majority of staff (72%) agree the agency effectively directs resources towards company goals, 71% saw themselves still working at WNCSource in 2 years, 70% thought that WNCSource is in a position for success over the next 3 years, and 66% felt like WNCSource motivates them to go beyond what they would do in a similar role elsewhere. In terms of engagement and agency confidence, the lowest response in this category (57%) was when asked if staff think about looking for a job at another company.

Alignment & Involvement Snapshot. Respondents answered mostly favorably to their alignment and involvement with WNCSource; 91% said they knew what they needed to do to be successful in their role, 87% said they knew how their work contributes to the goals of WNCSource, 79% said they were happy with their current role, 73% said they are appropriately involved in decisions that affect their work, and 62% said they believed their total compensation (base salary + any bonuses + benefits + equity) was fair, relative to similar roles in other organizations.

Collaboration & Communication and Feedback & Recognition. Based on responses to these categories, there are areas that need improvement. Respondents felt like their job performance was evaluated fairly (77%), they receive appropriate recognition for good work (73%), and most other employees make a good effort to consult other staff where appropriate (70%). Respondents felt less favorable about other departments at WNCSource collaborating well to get the job done (54%), and 53% felt the right people are rewarded and recognized at the agency, that there is open and honest two-way communication (52%), and that when it is clear that someone is not delivering in their role, WNCSource responds accordingly (46%).

Enablement and Innovation. Respondents felt most favorably that they have the information they need to do their job effectively (80%), have access to the things they need to do their job well (79%), and have enough autonomy to perform their jobs effectively (79%). Most also responded favorably to enjoying working in their physical workspace (73%), having the support to get their work done effectively with the systems and processes available to them (72%), feeling encouraged to be innovative even though some of those initiatives might not be successful (70%), and feeling that WNCSource acts on promising new or innovative ideas (62%).

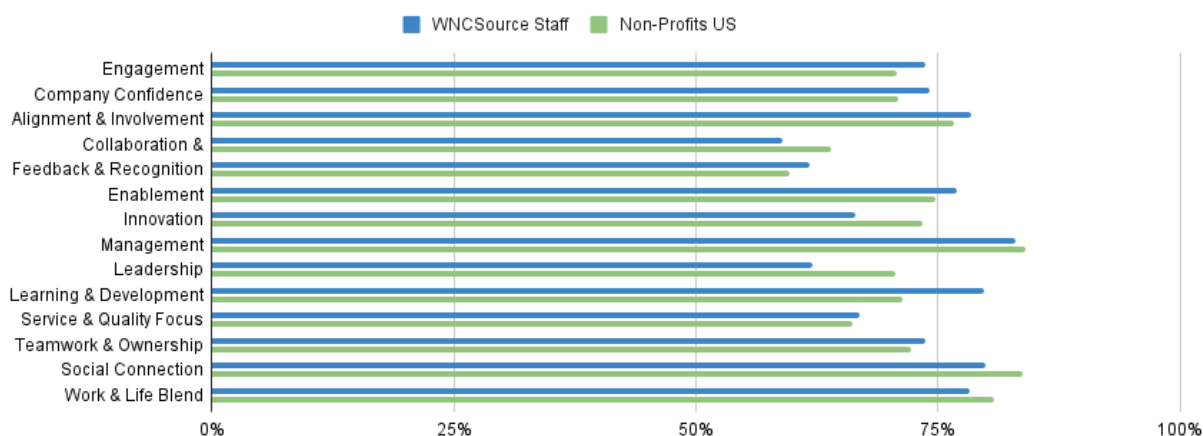
**Management and Leadership.** Staff respondents answered most favorably to management in the following areas. Their manager genuinely cares about their wellbeing (90%), their manager gives useful feedback on how well they are performing (86%), their manager is a great role model for employees (81%), and their manager keeps them informed about what is happening at WNCSource (75%). Respondents were less favorable towards overall leadership. 66% have confidence in the leaders at WNCSource, 62% think the leaders have communicated a vision that motivates them, 61% responded that the leaders at WNCSource demonstrated that people are important to the company's success, and 60% said the leaders keep people informed about what is happening.

**Learning & Development.** Respondents answered favorably to learning and development opportunities at WNCSource. 87% said they have access to the learning and development they need to do their jobs well. 83% said they are given opportunities to develop skills relevant to their interests. 78% said WNCSource is a great company for them to make a contribution to their development. 75% believe there are good career opportunities at WNCSource. 74% said their manager (or someone in management) has shown a genuine interest in their career aspirations.

**Service & Quality Focus and Teamwork & Ownership Snapshot.** Staff rated these areas a little less favorably than other areas in the survey. 68% of staff felt that WNCSource acknowledges people who deliver outstanding service here. 66% said day-to-day decisions at WNCSource demonstrate that quality and improvement are top priorities. 61% of staff feel like workloads are divided fairly among people where they work. 78% felt like they hold themselves and their colleagues accountable for results. The most favorable response was that 82% of staff feel they are part of a team.

**Social Connection and Work & Life Blend.** Staff ratings on social connections are that 87% of staff said WNCSource allows them to make a positive difference and 73% said WNCSource's commitment to social responsibility is genuine. For work & life blend, respondents said they are able to arrange time out from work when they need to (83%), they are genuinely supported if they choose to make use of flexible working arrangements (80%), and they generally believe their workload is reasonable for their role (72%). The following graph shows a comparison of responses from the WNCSource Staff Survey in October 2023 to a July 2023 Survey from Non-Profits in the US.

Comparison of WNCSource Staff to Non-Profits in US, July 2023 Survey Results



## Community Input

A Community Provider Survey administered in March 2024 gathered information from community agencies about their experiences serving the service area population and their ideas for improved collaboration and coordination. Ten agency respondents completed the Community Provider Survey, representing all four counties in the WNCSource service area (Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania counties) as well as Buncombe, Cleveland, Gaston, and Lincoln counties.

Agencies responding to the survey provide an array of services. When identifying the type of services provided by the agency, half (50%) provide Early Intervention services, 30% offer mental health services for children (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention) or parenting support, and/or teen assistance, 20% provide child care, food assistance, housing/rental assistance, and senior services. Another 10% of community providers provide education support, job search or training or utilities supports. It is of note, as half of respondents are employed by Early Intervention programs and one-third by youth mental health providers, responses may be skewed regarding the needs of young children with special needs and in need of mental health supports.

Respondents primarily provide services for free (60%) or for a fee based on income (10%). Eighty percent of respondents are current partners of WNCSource, while the remaining 20% are not. Among the partners, half have been partners for more than five years. When asked if WNCSource could contact the agency regarding additional ideas, one respondent provided contact information (a licensed Psychologist from Henderson County).

Respondents to the Community Provider Survey indicated that the best way to communicate with families is face-to-face (90%) and via text message (80%), followed by email, social media, and phone calls (50%). There is also some communication over video chat (30%) and through flyers, letters sent home, newsletters (10%).

Community Snapshot. Reflecting on what they think is best about the community where their agency provides services, most respondents selected the area's natural resources (e.g., mountains, hiking trails) (80%), parks and playgrounds (70%), followed by the services offered by community organizations (50%). Additional responses include health care availability and safety (both 30%), and immigrant friendly (20%). Ten percent of respondents indicated the following community services: dental care availability, diversity, employment opportunities, mental health services for adults, housing affordability and services for children with disabilities.

Changes in Use of Community Resources. Respondents reported observing increases in their communities in the following areas in the past year:

- 80% of community providers observed an increase in homelessness in the community;
- 70% observed an increase in the number of low-income families contacting their agency, mental health needs for children and transportation needs.
- 60% observed an increase the number of children with special needs/disabilities and community substance/drug abuse.
- 50% observed an increase in job availability, mental health needs for adults and the number of female head of households.
- 40% observed an increase in the number of services they offer, the number of multi-generational families they serve.
- 30% observed an increase in the number of teen pregnancies.

- 20% observed an increase in low-income housing availability, and the number of adults with special needs/disabilities.
- 10% observed an increase in the average household income and the number of individuals or families slightly over your income guidelines.

Many respondents indicated a decrease in the number of licensed child care providers (80%), affordable housing availability and average household income (50% each). Fewer respondents (20%) noted decreases in job availability, mental health needs for children and for adults, the number of individuals or families slightly over agency income guidelines, the number of teen pregnancies, and the services the agency offers.

A majority of respondents (70%) reported no change in the number of individuals slightly over the agency's income guidelines, and the number of teen pregnancies and the number of multi-generational families served (both 50%).

Barriers. When asked about the most common barriers to families accessing resources, the top responses (80%) included limited knowledge of what resources are available, fear/reluctance to access services and access to technology (e.g., computers, phones, devices) and to Internet/Wi-Fi. Seventy percent reported availability of needed services and lack of bilingual staff at point of service as a barrier, while 60% indicated availability of needed services and burdensome requirements (e.g., documentation, excessive paperwork, meetings). Half of respondents (50%) also included lack of education, language, and stigma around mental health needs as a barrier to community resources.

A majority of respondents believe families may not be able to find or access:

- child care (100%),
- affordable housing (90%),
- mental health services for children (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention) (80%),
- housing/rental assistance (70%),
- drug/substance abuse treatment (60%),
- services for children with special needs/disabilities and dental care (50%); and
- foster care, health care, immigration services, legal aid and assistance (e.g., immigration, family, criminal, tenant relations), mental health services for adults, transportation, and utilities (40%).

Stressors for Families. When asked what they believe are families' biggest stressors, community providers indicated many areas. The greatest number of responses (80%) indicated the lack of affordable housing, followed by a lack of access to mental health services for children, financial concerns, transportation, and how to support and provide care for a child with disabilities (70%). Another 60% of responses reflected on drug/substance abuse in the community as a stressor, as well as managing the behavior of children, while half (50%) also felt work-life balance is a large stressor for families.

The top services that the respondents believe families may not be able to find or access in the community align closely with the biggest stressors, particularly in regard to the lack of affordable housing and the need for mental health services.

Reflections on Local Agencies. Most respondents believe their agency's strengths include established relationships with families (90%), the ability to connect families with resources and staff experience and expertise (70%), bilingual staff (60%), and culturally aligned services (30%). Two respondents also wrote in a



response, which included that the agency's strength was their compassionate and holistic approach in serving the community and that services are free and accessible.

## RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



In WNCSource's service area, there are social services resources available to families in addition to those offered by the agency. WNCSource has formal and informal partnerships that help the agency to provide comprehensive services to individuals, children, and families, and connect them with resources to support well-being and self-sufficiency. Serving a diverse population of community members, WNCSource strives to tailor programs and services to the unique needs of the individuals it serves.

**Education.** Community education resources – early education, K-12, and higher education – provide a continuum of education support from birth through adulthood. Having resources available to support child development and student achievement enhances the overall economic welfare of a community. Access to high quality early learning and K-12 learning environments varies. Public and private higher education programs are available in the service area, as well as adult education (including ESL) and GED programs, certifications, and workforce training programs.

**Health.** The health, mental health, oral health, and nutrition service providers within WNCSource's service area are critical to meeting the health needs of individuals, children, and families. In general, health care services are available throughout the service area, though high ratios of individuals to care providers suggest access may be challenging. Families may encounter difficulties accessing services and maintaining an up-to-date status of preventative and primary care. Other barriers such as cost, lack of insurance, or transportation may also impact access to health, mental health, and substance abuse treatment in the service area. WNCSource community partnerships, such as those with local food banks that bring food on-site for distribution, are critical for bridging connections between families and resource providers. As noted, one area of particular concern is the lack of pediatric dental providers in Transylvania County, where no providers consistently accept Medicaid. The rural nature of the service area also contributes to the lack of central resources, and many residents travel outside the service area to access dental services.

**Social Services and Employment Support.** Across the service area, there are a number of organizations providing social services such as clothing assistance, food assistance, or public assistance. Families also have access to public health departments, housing authorities, and SNAP and WIC providers, among other state, county, and local departments supporting community needs. Some services are tailored to subgroups of the population such as seniors/grandparents raising grandchildren, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. Given the depth of need in WNCSource's service area, services may not be available or accessible to all who need them.

**Family Support and Well-being.** There is a significant growing need in the community in the areas of affordable housing, mental health services, and availability of child care. These areas may be particularly challenging for those with more limited access to transportation, financial means, and resources. Affordable housing is a widespread concern in the service area. A lack of adequate housing assistance or affordable

housing for families lead to many “doubling up;” available community resources may not meet all families’ needs.

Services for Vulnerable Populations. WNCSource serves a critical role in supporting vulnerable populations. The agency offers programs and partners with other community organizations to meet the needs of young children with disabilities, children who have experienced abuse and neglect, families experiencing homelessness, foster children, grandparents, and single-parent families. WNCSource provides vital assistance to residents to navigate and access available community resources.

## REFLECTIONS



As described throughout the Community Assessment report, there is diversity of need in the WNCSource service area. This becomes most evident when reviewing local data. By targeting services to areas with high rates of poverty and serving low-income individuals and families, WNCSource is providing services to those most in need.

Drawing from the data and key findings of the *2024 Community Assessment* and input from leadership team members, the following reflections will be considered to support the program’s continued responsiveness to community need.

**Reflection 1: Program Design.** The WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start program regularly engages in the best practice of reviewing slot allocations in the context of community-wide trends (e.g., availability of publicly funded pre-kindergarten, demand for infant/toddler care, and wait list data) to explore strategies that support full enrollment across the program. WNCSource will continue this practice in order to respond to changes in community needs when they arise and to explore updates to program schedules to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable families are met.

**Reflection 2. Community Partnerships.** Continue WNCSource participation on local task forces with community partners to address identified challenges and plans for partnerships. Continue to maintain and build upon strong community partnerships to facilitate connecting enrolled children, families, and staff with resources, including but not limited to health, mental health/trauma resilience, education, training, employment supports, housing, substance misuse, adult health, developmental disability, and other social services in the community. Continue the work of creating and formalizing partnerships and MOUs with partner agencies to ensure ongoing and new collaboration and coordination efforts with community representatives best meet the needs of the families in the service area.

**Reflection 3. Reliable Transportation.** Continue to support families that lack reliable transportation by staying abreast of community resources that can support residents to meet their transportation needs and ultimately to increase the financial position of families to be able to afford to purchase and maintain a reliable vehicle (e.g., training, education, employment opportunities).

**Reflection 4. Mental Health Supports.** Continue to successfully support access to mental health supports for children experiencing challenging behaviors and utilization of trauma-informed practices. Continue to enhance the provision of critical connections and the integration of resources regarding social and emotional supports for staff and enrolled families, which will also serve to minimize the impact on children (e.g., childhood stress can disrupt development and compromise the nervous and immune systems, leading to potential health



problems later in life). Supports may focus on maintaining healthy relationships, managing stress, and identification of signs of mental health issues.

**Reflection 5: Staff Recruitment, Professional Development, and Retention.** Continue to enact best practices and innovative recruitment methods to hire qualified staff. Communicate with staff regarding their professional development and training needs to help them meet their professional goals. Review staff's interest in management/leadership training more closely and leverage this interest to support staff members' professional growth within the agency.

**Reflection 6: Continue Provision of Community Information, Resources, and Referrals.** Continue staff participation on key local community Councils and Boards to build internal and external awareness of resources and services that serve the population in the service area.

Continue to communicate with, and connect, families intentionally with available community resources to increase sustainability (e.g., health, mental health/trauma resilience, adult education, training, employment supports, Medicaid providers, housing, substance misuse, adult health, developmental disability, emergency assistance, food resources, legal support, home energy assistance, and other social services in the community).

Continue ongoing focus of supporting access for enrolled children to pediatric, or appropriate, dental services in the service area, particularly for more severe dental needs (e.g., oral surgery), in Transylvania County. Continue to work with the community partners to discuss expansion of pediatric dental services. Continue to support the dental needs of children by providing supports (i.e., transportation, gas cards) to enrolled families that may not have the financial ability to afford exorbitant dental costs and may need to travel outside the service area to connect with necessary dental services for their children.

**Reflection 7: Bilingual Supports and Cultural Alignment.** Continue to assess the language needs of enrolled children and families and provide services to meet the evolving needs (bilingual forms, translation/interpretation services, help families access bilingual, culturally sensitive resource providers in the community etc.). In light of national, state, and program-wide staffing challenges in early education programs, continue to focus efforts on recruiting bilingual staff, if necessary, to meet the needs of enrolled children and families and the community. Continue to collaborate with community agencies to culturally align and to address language barriers families may face when accessing forms, resources, and supports.

**Reflection 8: Affordable Housing and Homelessness.** Continue to advocate for, and provide support to, families experiencing homelessness and those on the brink of eviction, foreclosure, or homelessness. Continue to explore and provide referrals for housing resources with community partners. Utilize community assessment data and updated data sources to understand the locations where families may be experiencing greater rates of homelessness or struggle to meet their housing needs (e.g., evictions, foreclosures, affordability), in the service area.

**Reflection 9: Promote Head Start Through Friend and Family Referrals.** Continue to coordinate fun informational events and encourage enrolled families to invite friends, families, and neighbors to participate to learn more about WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start programs and opportunities. Raise awareness and focus on the high-quality programming and benefits of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs, the comprehensive services provided, the focus on kindergarten readiness as programs prepare enrolled children for future success in school, as well the transition supports for HS children entering kindergarten.

## LOOKING AHEAD



WNCSource will use the data from this *2024 Community Assessment* to support program planning in the agency's continued efforts to meet community needs, in partnership with community resource providers.

The HSPPS requirements to annually review and update the Community Assessment provides WNCSource with an opportunity to continuously reflect upon data and respond to community trends. With Community Assessment data as a driving factor for understanding and meeting

community needs, WNCSource will continue its mission to empower people with the skills they need to become self-sufficient.

## APPENDIX A-F

### Appendix A: Children Living in Families Under 200% Federal Poverty Level

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (2022), 30.3% of the population in North Carolina lives below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and may struggle to afford basic household necessities.<sup>cxcvii</sup> Of that population, 17.3% live between 100% and 199% FPL. While these households earn above the 100% FPL, they still may not earn enough to meet a household survival budget needed to support housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology (a smartphone plan) costs.

The eligibility requirements for the state preschool program (NC Pre-K) is that a child meets the age requirement and is from a family whose gross income is at or below 75% of the State Median Income (SMI). Children of certain military families are also eligible without regard to income. A proxy of 200% FPL is a close comparison for 75% SMI in North Carolina.<sup>cxcviii</sup>

To estimate the number of four-year-olds by county in the WNCSource service area who may be income-eligible for NC Pre-K, the percentage of the population made up by four-year-olds would need to be determined.

While the U.S. Census provides contextual data regarding the number of families and individuals with incomes below 200% FPL (Table A2), the number of children living in these families, specifically four-year-olds, is not readily available.

To roughly estimate the number of four-year-old children living in families with incomes below 200% FPL, the Kaiser Family Foundation data, which reflects that 30.3% of the population in North Carolina lives below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), is applied to the estimated number of four-year-old children living in each geographic area of interest (Table A1).

**Table A1. Estimated Number of Children Under Age Four Living in Families Under 200% FPL (2022)**

Geographic Area	Number of Children < 5 Years Old <sup>cxcix</sup>	Estimated Number of 4 Year Old Children <sup>67</sup>	Percentage of Population Living Under 200% FPL <sup>cc</sup> (2022)	Estimated Number of Children Age 4 Living in Families Under 200% FPL
28732 (Fletcher)	856	171	30.3%	52
28708 (Balsam Grove)	7	1		0
28712 (Brevard)	688	138		42
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	75	15		6
28766 (Penrose)	29	6		2
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	439	88		27
28772 (Rosman)	14	3		1
28774 (Sapphire)	0	0		0
Transylvania County	1,288	258		78

<sup>67</sup> Derived by dividing the number of five year old children by 5, assuming an even distribution.

**Table A2. Individuals and Families with Incomes Below 200% FPL (2018-2022)<sup>ccii</sup>**

Geographic Area	Number of Families with Income Below 200% FPL	Percent of Families with Income Below 200% FPL	Number of Individuals with Income Below 200% FPL
Fletcher Town	337	13.8%	1,385
28708 (Balsam Grove)	11	20.4%	79
28712 (Brevard)	1,266	22.7%	5,836
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	275	39.3%	978
28766 (Penrose)	90	27.4%	294
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	380	20.2%	2,187
28772 (Rosman)	101	35.1%	364
28774 (Sapphire)	83	19.2%	304
Transylvania County	2,214	23.6%	10,168

Using the North Carolina State Office of Budget and Management population projections, a forecast model which uses historical data to project total population by age and geographic area, the number of projected five year old children living in households with incomes below 200% FPL are provided for 2024 and 2026, to show change in this population over time. In 2024 it is projected that 654 children in the service area live in households earning less than 200% FPL, compared to 613 children forecasted in 2026.

**Table A3. Projected Number of Five Year Old Children Living in Households Earning Less Than 200% FPL by County (2024-2026)<sup>ccii</sup>**

2024			
Geographic Area	Projected number of five year old children <sup>cciii</sup>	Percentage of population living under 200% FPL <sup>cciv</sup> (2022)	Projected: five year olds in families below 200% FPL
Henderson County	1,051	30.3%	318
Polk County	167		51
Rutherford County	671		203
Transylvania County	271		82
Service Area	2,160		654
2026			
Geographic Area	Projected number of five year old children <sup>ccv</sup>	Percentage of population living under 200% FPL <sup>ccvi</sup> (2022)	Projected: five year olds in families below 200% FPL
Henderson County	998	30.3%	302
Polk County	145		44
Rutherford County	636		193
Transylvania County	244		74
Service Area	2,023		613

## Appendix B: WNCSource Geographic Areas of Interest

WNCSource is interested in the number of Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) eligible children in specific locations in the service area. Data from this 2024 Community Assessment is framed below to provide focus on these areas of interest. The greatest number of children eligible for HS and EHS services are those who are income eligible or living in families that are recipients of public assistance. An additional relatively small number of children are categorically eligible for EHS/HS services based on experiencing homelessness or living in foster care.

It should be noted that children may fall into both the eligibility category of income eligible and receipt of household public assistance and as they may be represented in both figures, the two categories should not be added together to avoid overrepresenting the number of eligible children in the geographic area.

- I. 28729 (Etowah), Henderson County: HS and EHS Eligibility  
Income Eligible (age <5): 0  
Children eligible based on receipt of public assistance (age <5): 100
- II. 28732 (Fletcher), Henderson County: HS Eligibility  
Income Eligible (age 3-5): 14 children  
Children eligible based on receipt of public assistance (age 3-5): 17
- III. 28792 (Hendersonville), Edneyville Elementary School area: Can this area support two HS classrooms?  
Income Eligible (age 3-5): 224 children  
Children eligible based on receipt of public assistance (age 3-5): 270
- IV. Polk County: EHS Eligibility  
Income Eligible (age <3): 52 children (*OSBM county population estimates indicate an additional 34 income eligible children <age 3 by 2028*)  
Children eligible based on receipt of public assistance (age <3): 120
- V. Rutherford County, mostly toward Rutherfordton/John Smith Road 28139: EHS Eligibility  
Income Eligible (age <3): 188 children  
Children eligible based on receipt of public assistance (age <3): 166
- VI. Transylvania County: HS and EHS Eligibility  
The primary two zip codes with children under five are in Pisgah Forest and Brevard.  
  
Pisgah Forest (28768):
  - Income Eligible (age <5): 137
  - Children eligible based on receipt of public assistance (age <5): 70  
Brevard (28712):  
Income Eligible (age <5): 173 (*OSBM county population estimates indicate an additional 50 income eligible children <5 by 2028; 19 EHS, 31 HS*)  
Children eligible based on receipt of public assistance (<5): 99

## Appendix C: Detailed Licensed Child Care and Family Child Care Capacity

**Table C1. Number (and Capacity) of Child Care Centers by Geographic Area (March 2024)<sup>ccvii</sup>**

Geographic Area	Number of Licensed Child Care Centers (Capacity)	Number of Child Care Centers Participating in NC Pre-K (Capacity)	Number of Head Start Programs	Number of Child Care Centers Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Number of Child Care Centers Serving Infants
28726 (East Flat Rock)	4 (274)	1 (18)	1	3	3
28729 (Etowah)	2 (152)	1 (52)	1	2	1
28731 (Flat Rock)	3 (292)	0 (0)	1	1	3
28732 (Fletcher)	5 (405)	0 (0)	1	3	3
28735 (Gerton)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	4 (329)	0 (0)	0	1	4
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	3 (438)	0 (0)	0	3	1
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	5 (410)	1 (94)	1	3	2
28792 (Hendersonville)	16 (1,214)	7 (290)	12	9	9
Henderson County	42 (3,514)	10 (454)	14	28	26
28722 (Columbus)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	2 (108)	2 (108)	0	0	2
28773 (Saluda)	1 (36)	1 (36)	0	0	1
28782 (Tryon)	1 (84)	1 (84)	0	0	1
Polk	4 (228)	4 (228)	4	0	0
28018 (Bostic)	1 (18)	1 (18)	0	0	0
28020 (Casar)	1 (18)	1 (18)	0	0	1
28040 (Ellenboro)	3 (164)	1 (84)	2	2	2
28043 (Forest City)	11 (573)	4 (153)	4	88	4
28114 (Mooresboro)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	4 (213)	3 (114)	2	3	1
28160 (Spindale)	5 (460)	3 (282)	3	4	2
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Rutherford	25 (1,446)	13 (669)	10	11	17
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	5 (324)	5 (324)	3	3	1
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	1 (18)	1 (18)	0	0	0
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest) <sup>68</sup>	1 (74)	0 (0)	1	1	0
28772 (Rosman) <sup>69</sup>	3 (115)	1 (18)	3	1	0
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
Transylvania	10 (531)	7 (360)	1	7	5
Service Area Total	81 (5,719)	34 (1,711)	29	46	48

<sup>68</sup> Includes Kid City USA Pisgah Forest

<sup>69</sup> Includes Kid City USA Rosman

**Table C2. Number (and Capacity) of Licensed Family Child Care Homes by Geographic Area (March 2024)<sup>ecviii</sup>**

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)	1	2
28729 (Etowah)	0 (0)	0	0
28731 (Flat Rock)	0 (0)	0	0
28732 (Fletcher)	2 (16)	0	2
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	3
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	0 (0)	0	0
28792 (Hendersonville)	4 (29)	3	4
Henderson County	12 (93)	6	12
28722 (Columbus)	0 (0)	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	0 (0)	0	0
28773 (Saluda)	0 (0)	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	0 (0)	0	0
Polk	0 (0)	0	0
28018 (Bostic)	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	1
28139 (Rutherfordton)	1 (8)	0	1
28160 (Spindale)	0 (0)	0	0
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0	0
Rutherford	5 (40)	4	5
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	1 (8)	0	1
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	0 (0)	0	0
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	0 (0)	0	0
28772 (Rosman)	1 (8)	1	1
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0	0
Transylvania	2 (16)	1	2
Service Area Total	19 (149)	11	19

**Table C3. Summary of Child Care Capacity, All Provider Types, by Geographic Area (March 2024)<sup>ccix</sup>**

Geographic Area	Total Number of Child Care Facilities (Capacity)	Total Child Care Facilities Participating in NC Pre-K (Capacity)	Total Head Start Programs	Number of Child Care Facilities Enrolled in Subsidized Child Care Program	Number of Child Care Facilities Serving Infants
28726 (East Flat Rock)	6 (290)	1 (18)	1	4	5
28729 (Etowah)	2 (152)	1 (52)	1	2	1
28731 (Flat Rock)	3 (292)	0 (0)	1	1	3
28732 (Fletcher)	7 (421)	0 (0)	1	3	5
28735 (Gerton)	1 (8)	0 (0)	0	1	1
28739 (Hendersonville)	4 (329)	0 (0)	0	1	4
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	6 (462)	0 (0)	0	4	4
28790 (Zirconia)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	5 (410)	1 (94)	1	3	2
28792 (Hendersonville)	20 (1,243)	7 (290)	9	15	13
<b>Henderson County</b>	<b>54 (3,607)</b>	<b>10 (454)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>38</b>
28722 (Columbus)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	2 (108)	2 (108)	2	0	0
28773 (Saluda)	1 (36)	1 (36)	1	0	0
28782 (Tryon)	1 (84)	1 (84)	1	0	0
<b>Polk</b>	<b>4 (228)</b>	<b>4 (228)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
28018 (Bostic)	2 (26)	1 (18)	0	1	1
28020 (Casar)	1 (18)	1 (18)	1	0	0
28040 (Ellenboro)	3 (164)	1 (84)	2	2	2
28043 (Forest City)	13 (589)	4 (153)	4	66	10
28114 (Mooresboro)	1 (8)	0 (0)	0	1	1
28139 (Rutherfordton)	5 (221)	3 (114)	1	2	4
28160 (Spindale)	5 (460)	3 (282)	2	3	4
28167 (Union Mills)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
<b>Rutherford</b>	<b>30 (1,486)</b>	<b>13 (669)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>22</b>
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	6 (332)	5 (324)	1	3	4
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	1 (18)	1 (18)	0	0	0
28766 (Penrose)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	1 (74)	0 (0)	0	1	1
28772 (Rosman)	4 (123)	1 (18)	0	4	2
28774 (Sapphire)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0	0	0
<b>Transylvania</b>	<b>12 (547)</b>	<b>7 (360)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Service Area Total</b>	<b>100 (5,868)</b>	<b>34 (1,711)</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>67</b>



**Table C4. Number of Child Care Centers, by Smart Start Star Level (March 2024)<sup>ccx</sup>**

Geographic Area	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Two Star	One Star	TOTAL
28726 (East Flat Rock)	1	3	0	0	0	4
28729 (Etowah)	1	1	0	0	0	2
28731 (Flat Rock)	1	2	0	0	0	3
28732 (Fletcher)	2	1	0	0	1	4
28735 (Gerton)	0	0	0	0	0	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	0	0	1	0	0	1
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	0	0	0	0	0
28759 (Mills River)	2	0	0	0	0	2
28790 (Zirconia)	0	0	0	0	0	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	2	2	0	0	1	5
28792 (Hendersonville)	8	7	0	0	0	15
<b>Henderson County</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>36</b>
28722 (Columbus)	0	0	0	0	0	0
28756 (Mill Spring)	2	0	0	0	0	2
28773 (Saluda)	1	0	0	0	0	1
28782 (Tryon)	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Polk</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>
28018 (Bostic)	1	0	0	0	0	1
28020 (Casar)	1	0	0	0	0	1
28040 (Ellenboro)	2	1	0	0	0	3
28043 (Forest City)	7	1	2	0	0	10
28114 (Mooresboro)	0	0	0	0	0	0
28139 (Rutherfordton)	3	0	0	0	0	3
28160 (Spindale)	5	0	0	0	0	5
28167 (Union Mills)	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Rutherford</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0	0	0	0	0	0
28712 (Brevard)	4	1	0	0	0	5
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	1	0	0	0	0	1
28766 (Penrose)	0	0	0	0	0	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	0	0	0	0	0	0
28772 (Rosman)	0	2	0	0	0	2
28774 (Sapphire)	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Transylvania</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Service Area Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>71</b>

**Table C5. Number of Family Child Care Homes, by Smart Start Star Level (March 2024)<sup>ccxi</sup>**

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

**Table C6. Number of Children Birth to Age 5 Compared to Capacity of Child Care Facilities (March 2024)** ccxii

Geographic Area	Capacity of Child Care Facilities	Number of Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty
28726 (East Flat Rock)	290	119	0
28729 (Etowah)	152	210	0
28731 (Flat Rock)	292	439	78
28732 (Fletcher)	421	856	35
28735 (Gerton)	8	10	0
28739 (Hendersonville)	329	1,036	227
28742 (Horse Shoe)	0	110	17
28759 (Mills River)	462	359	32
28790 (Zirconia)	0	49	0
28791 (Hendersonville)	410	583	82
28792 (Hendersonville)	1,243	1,582	561
Henderson	3,607	5,248	1,053
28722 (Columbus)	0	252	18
28756 (Mill Spring)	108	291	37
28773 (Saluda)	36	135	52
28782 (Tryon)	84	131	11
Polk	228	770	87
28018 (Bostic)	26	186	15
28020 (Casar)	18	158	17
28040 (Ellenboro)	164	308	50
28043 (Forest City)	589	1,503	606
28114 (Mooresboro)	8	448	10
28139 (Rutherfordton)	221	867	157
28160 (Spindale)	460	46	3
28167 (Union Mills)	0	72	0
Rutherford	1,486	3,157	839
28708 (Balsam Grove)	0	7	0
28712 (Brevard)	332	688	173
28747 (Lake Toxaway)	18	75	17
28766 (Penrose)	0	29	0
28768 (Pisgah Forest)	74	439	137
28772 (Rosman)	123	14	4
28774 (Sapphire)	0	0	0
Transylvania	547	1,288	348
Service Area (total of counties)	5,868	10,463	2,327

## Appendix D: Trends Related to Franchising of Local Child Care Centers

### Kid City USA

In North Carolina, child care licensing data reflect eight Kid City USA child care programs. In the service area, two Kids City USA programs are licensed in Transylvania County, including Kid City USA Pisgah Forest and Kid City USA Rosman. The remaining six programs are located in Canton, Jacksonville, Lincolnton, Lake Norman, Waynesville and Wilson; all newly licensed between 2021-2024.

The Kid City USA Pisgah Forest program has a temporary license (effective 10/30/2023), as new centers and family child care homes must wait six months before applying for a 2-5 star license. Their temporary license was and is licensed to serve 74 children. Previously the program was Nanna's & Mommy's, which sold on 10/30/23 (listed by agent as an existing daycare); the program was first listed on 4/6/23 and noted a license for 99 children and was represented as a five star center). The new primary owner is listed as The Forest Hive, Inc., a North Carolina Domestic Business Corporation filed on October 12, 2023. The company's filing status is listed as Current-Active and its File Number is 2723121.

Kid City USA Rosman program was formerly Little Blessings Learning Center, which sold on 11/30/23, and was licensed for 46 children and was represented as a five star center. As of March 2024, one website lists the property for sale again (as well as the Lincolnton, NC site) and nine across the country, as an investment opportunity. The group selling the program is the Sands Investment Group, which is offering a long-term 15-year triple net (NNN) lease on the property with zero landlord responsibilities with a strong corporate guarantee by Kid City USA Inc, indicating a secure investment.<sup>ccxiii</sup> The new, current, primary owner is listed as Rosman Hive, Inc., a North Carolina Domestic Business Corporation filed on October 12, 2023. The company's filing status is listed as Current-Active and its File Number is 2782531.

### National Trends

The research brief, titled "Toddlers and Investors Aren't Playmates: The Threat of Private Equity in Child Care," finds that nine of the top 11 for-profit chains by capacity serve more than 750,000 children every day and hold a market share of approximately 10% and growing. While the child care sector was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 50 largest for-profit child care chains opened or acquired 537 new centers, an 8% increase from the previous year, according to an annual survey by Exchange, a trade publication covering the industry. The research identified five major issues with investor-backed child care chains<sup>ccxiv,ccxv</sup>:

- lower quality of care than nonprofit or independent programs;
- greater risk of collapse, in the event of an economic downturn, due to their highly leveraged nature;
- loss of independent, community-based programs;
- investor-backed programs tend to serve higher-income children than rural or low-income urban areas; and
- reduced public support for a child care system that works for all families.

## Appendix E: Community Provider Survey



Empowering people, transforming lives

### WNCSource Community Provider Survey

At WNCSource, we believe that everyone deserves the opportunities they need to succeed. WNCSource serves children and families in Henderson, Transylvania, Rutherford and Polk Counties through children's services, and programs to support housing, transportation, and older adults.

WNCSource is in the process of gathering information for its community needs assessment that will inform the agency's Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership program.

Your feedback as a community resource provider is important. Sharing your ideas and experiences will help us to ensure we are providing services that meet the needs of children and families.

The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete and is confidential.

The deadline to complete this survey is Friday, March 15. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Eric Hoffman at 828-693-1711 or [ehoffman@wncsource.org](mailto:ehoffman@wncsource.org).

### Your Organization

1. Where does your agency provide services? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Henderson County
- ☐ Polk County
- ☐ Rutherford County
- ☐ Transylvania County
- ☐ Buncombe County
- ☐ North Carolina (statewide)
- ☐ Other: (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What type of services does your agency provide? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Child care
- ☐ Dental care
- ☐ Drug/Substance abuse treatment
- ☐ Early Intervention
- ☐ Education (e.g., computer, language, High School Diploma/GED, degree programs)
- ☐ Foster care
- ☐ Food assistance
- ☐ Health care (e.g., vision, hearing, vaccination, health care)
- ☐ Housing/rental assistance
- ☐ Immigration services (e.g., assistance with forms, case evaluation, referral)
- ☐ Job search or training
- ☐ K-12 education
- ☐ Legal aid and assistance (e.g., immigration, family, criminal, tenant relations)
- ☐ Mental health services for adults (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention)
- ☐ Mental health services for children (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention)
- ☐ Parenting
- ☐ Senior services
- ☐ Teen assistance
- ☐ Transportation services
- ☐ Utilities provider
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the cost of the services provided by your agency?

- ☐ Free
- ☐ For a cost, with fees based on income
- ☐ For a cost, with fees not based on income
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. How long have you been a partner with WNCSource?

- ☐ We are not a current partner
- ☐ We are not a current partner, but would like to discuss a future partnership. (Please provide contact information at end of survey).
- ☐ We are not a current partner, but have partnered in the past
- ☐ Less than 2 years
- ☐ 2 to 5 years
- ☐ More than 5 years

### **Your Community**

5. In your experience, what are the best ways to communicate with families that you serve? (Select all that apply.)
- ☐ Email
  - ☐ Face-to-face
  - ☐ Facebook/Social Media
  - ☐ Flyers, letters sent home, newsletters
  - ☐ Phone calls
  - ☐ Text messages
  - ☐ Video Chat (e.g., Facetime, Zoom, Google Meet)
  - ☐ Other: (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
6. What do you think is best about the community where your agency provides services? (Select all that apply.)
- ☐ Child care availability
  - ☐ Dental care availability
  - ☐ Diversity
  - ☐ Employment opportunities
  - ☐ Health care availability
  - ☐ Mental health services for children
  - ☐ Mental health services for adults
  - ☐ Housing affordability
  - ☐ Immigrant friendly
  - ☐ Natural resources (e.g., mountains, hiking trails)
  - ☐ Neighborhood relationships
  - ☐ Parks and playgrounds
  - ☐ Safety
  - ☐ Services for adults with disabilities
  - ☐ Services for children with disabilities
  - ☐ Services offered by community organizations
  - ☐ Transportation
  - ☐ Other: (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7. In the last year, to what extent has your agency seen changes in the following? (Select all that apply.)

	Increase	Decrease	No change
Average household income			
Job availability in community			
Drug/Substance abuse in community			
Homelessness			
Low-income housing availability			
Mental health needs for adults			
Mental health needs for children			
Number of adults with special needs/disabilities			
Number of children with special needs/disabilities			
Number of low-income families contacting your agency			
Number of individuals or families slightly over your income guidelines			
Number of multi-generational families you serve			
Number of female head of households			
Number of teen pregnancies			
Number of licensed child care providers			
Transportation needs			
Services you offer			



### **Barriers and Meeting Needs**

8. In your opinion, what are some of the barriers that families with low income may face to accessing resources in the community? (Select all that apply.)
- ☐ Availability of needed services
  - ☐ Affordability of needed services
  - ☐ Access to technology (e.g., computers, phones, devices etc.)
  - ☐ Access to Internet/Wi-Fi
  - ☐ Burdensome requirements (e.g., documentation, excessive paperwork, meetings)
  - ☐ Citizenship
  - ☐ Lack of Education
  - ☐ Language
  - ☐ Lack of bilingual staff at point of service
  - ☐ Limited knowledge of what resources are available
  - ☐ Stigma around mental health needs
  - ☐ Fear/reluctance or distrust to access services
  - ☐ Other: (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
9. Are there services that you think families with low income may not be able to find or access in the community? (Select all that apply.)
- ☐ Affordable housing
  - ☐ Child care
  - ☐ Dental care
  - ☐ Drug/Substance abuse treatment
  - ☐ Education (e.g., computer, literacy, language, High School Diploma/GED, degree programs)
  - ☐ Foster care
  - ☐ Food assistance
  - ☐ Health care
  - ☐ Housing/rental assistance
  - ☐ Immigration services (e.g., assistance with forms, case evaluation, referral)
  - ☐ Job search or training
  - ☐ Legal aid and assistance (e.g., immigration, family, criminal, tenant relations)
  - ☐ Mental health services for adults (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention)
  - ☐ Mental health services for children (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention)
  - ☐ Parenting
  - ☐ Senior services
  - ☐ Services for adults with special needs/disabilities
  - ☐ Services for children with special needs/disabilities
  - ☐ Teen assistance
  - ☐ Transportation
  - ☐ Utilities assistance
  - ☐ Other: (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. In the community your agency serves, what do you believe are families' biggest stressors?

(Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Access to dental care
- ☐ Access to medical care
- ☐ Access to mental health services for their child
- ☐ Access to mental health services for adults
- ☐ Community violence
- ☐ COVID-19
- ☐ Domestic violence
- ☐ Drug/Substance abuse in the community
- ☐ Educational/job training
- ☐ Employment
- ☐ Financial
- ☐ Food insecurity
- ☐ Lack of affordable housing
- ☐ How to manage their child's challenging behavior
- ☐ How to support and provide care for a child with disabilities
- ☐ Immigration issues (e.g., citizenship)
- ☐ Family/partner/personal relationships
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Work/life balance
- ☐ Other: (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. What do you believe are your agency's strengths when working with families with low income?

(Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Ability to connect families with resources
- ☐ Bilingual staff
- ☐ Culturally aligned services
- ☐ Established relationships with families
- ☐ Staff experience and expertise
- ☐ Other: (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

12. Please use the space below for other comments to provide ideas about how WNCSource could partner with your agency, or work to better meet the needs of low-income children and families.

13. If you would like us to contact you regarding your ideas, please provide your contact information  
(Optional)

- ☐ Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: WNCSource Head Start/Early Head Start Funded Enrollment April 2024 and June 2024 (Change In Scope)<sup>70</sup>

### Appendix F.a. WNCSource Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CCP Funded Enrollment Slots – as of April 2024 (Before June 2024 Change in Scope)

Site	Address	HS Center Based	EHS Center Based	EHS CCP	EHS Expansion	Total
Bruce Drysdale Elementary	271 Bearcat Boulevard, Hendersonville, NC 28792	7 1 classroom				7 1 classroom
Clear Creek Elementary	737 N Clear Creek Road, Hendersonville, NC 28792	7 1 classroom				7 1 classroom
Dana Elementary	690 Ridge Road, Hendersonville, NC 28792	7 1 classroom				7 1 classroom
Edneyville Elementary	2875 Pace Road, Hendersonville, NC 28792	6 1 classroom				6 1 classroom
Etowah Children's Center	233 Brickyard Road, Etowah, NC 28729	22 2 classrooms	16 2 classrooms			38 4 classrooms
Flat Rock Children's Center	130 Eagles Reach Drive, Flat Rock, NC 28731		24 3 classrooms			24 3 classrooms
Fletcher Children's Center	2840 Hendersonville Road, Fletcher, NC 28732	13 2 classrooms				13 2 classrooms
God's Gifts Family Child Care	282 Loop Road, Hendersonville, NC 28792			5 FCCH		5 FCCH
Hillandale Elementary	40 Preston Lane, East Flat Rock, NC 28726	7 1 classroom				7 1 classroom
King Creek Children's Center	20 Fickley Drive, Hendersonville, NC 28792	24 3 classrooms	16 2 Classrooms 24 Home-Based			40 5 classrooms 24 Homebased
Laurie's Childcare	108 Upward Acres Street, East Flat Rock, NC 28726			5 FCCH		5 FCCH
Little Bright Minds	3563 Chimney Rock Road, Hendersonville, NC 28792			8 1 classroom		8 1 classroom
Little Red School	604 Brooklyn Avenue, Hendersonville, NC 28792			10 2 classrooms		10 2 classrooms

<sup>70</sup> As reported by WNCSource.

Sugar Hill Children's Center	2 Sugar Hill Drive, Hendersonville, NC 28792	24 2 classrooms	24 3 classrooms	8 1 classroom		56 6 classrooms
Tebeau Children's Center	911 Tebeau Drive, Hendersonville, NC 28791	34 3 classrooms		8 1 classroom	32 4 classrooms	74 8 classrooms
Henderson County		151	104	44	32	331
New Construction - Columbus	11 Hope Valley Lane Columbus, NC 28722		12 1.5 classrooms		12 1.5 classrooms	24 3 classrooms
Polk County						
Forest City Children's Center	483 South Broadway Street Forest City, NC 28043				24 3 classrooms	24 3 classrooms
Kids Kingdom	143 Henrietta Street, Ellenboro, NC 28040			12 2 classrooms		12 2 classrooms
Rutherford County				12	24	36
Hillview Children's Center	181 Hillview Extension, Brevard, NC 28712	34 2 classrooms	4 1 classroom	8 1 classroom	15 2 classrooms	61 6 classrooms
Kid City	1131 Wilson Road, Pisgah Forest, NC 28768			16 2 classrooms		16 2 classrooms
CCP/FCCHs	TBA				16	16
Transylvania County		34	4	24	31	93
Total		185	120	80	99	484

**Appendix F.b. WNCSource Funded Enrollment by Head Start and Early Head Start Grants — June 2024 (Change in Scope)**

Head Start / Early Head Start Grant – 11737				
	Head Start (April 2024)	Head Start (Change in Scope)	Early Head Start (April 2024)	Early Head Start (Change in Scope)
Henderson County	134	102	24 (home based) 65 (center based)	49
Polk County	0	0	12	12
Transylvania County	51	34	19	19
<b>Total Enrollment</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>80</b>

Grant – 00306 (formerly 00443 EHS Expansion Grant)*			
	Early Head Start (April 2024)	Early Head Start (Change in Scope)	Notes
Henderson County	59	11	Center Based
Rutherford County	16	24	Center-Based/Expectant Families
Transylvania County	12	0	Family Child Care Home
Transylvania County	4	0	CCP
Transylvania County	8	0	Center Based
<b>Total Enrollment</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>35</b>	

Grant – 00306 (no change)	
	Early Head Start Funded Enrollment
Henderson County	31
Rutherford County	12
Transylvania County	37
<b>Total Enrollment</b>	<b>80</b>

\*Grant 00443 EHS Expansion grant will be combined with 00306 effective 8/1/2024

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