

FACTS & FIGURES

EDUCATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

2024

BEST NC's Vision:

Every student graduates with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to succeed in a competitive global economy.



BEST NC (Business for Educational Success and Transformation) is a nonprofit organization created by business leaders who believe the future of our state's economy is inseparable from the quality of our education. North Carolina's education system must keep pace with the rapidly changing economic landscape of the 21st century. BEST NC supports the creation of the boldest education success story in America, one that nurtures the talents of every student, from early learning to post-graduate, by investing in students, teachers, school leaders, and innovation, and establishing high standards of success for all.



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A Note About Icons:

Throughout *Facts & Figures*, graphs, tables, and other assets may be denoted by one of the two following icons:



COVID-19

Many key education metrics were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures. The COVID-19 icon indicates data that may have been impacted by the pandemic, and we encourage the use of caution when interpreting longitudinal trends.



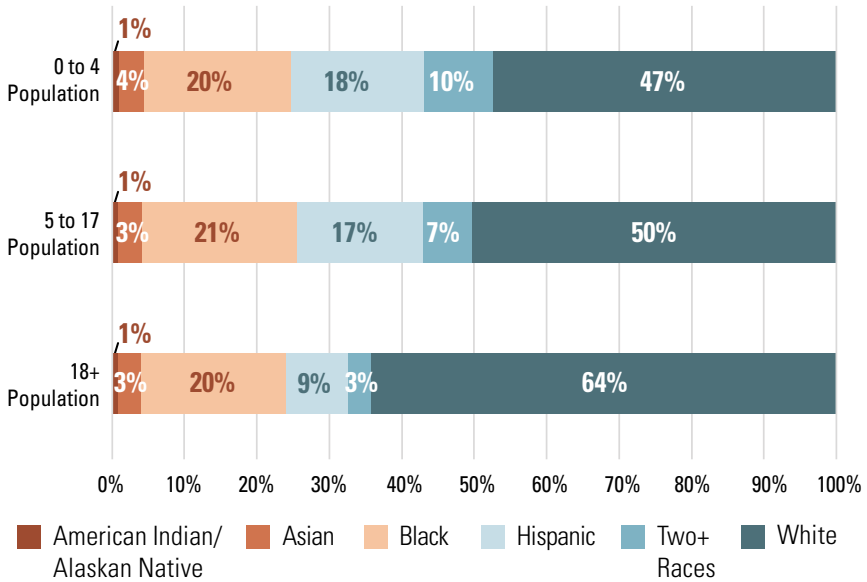
myFutureNC

The myFutureNC icon indicates key education performance measures directly tied to North Carolina's education-to-workforce continuum and the state goal of increasing educational attainment to 2 million by 2030. For more information visit: myfuturenc.org



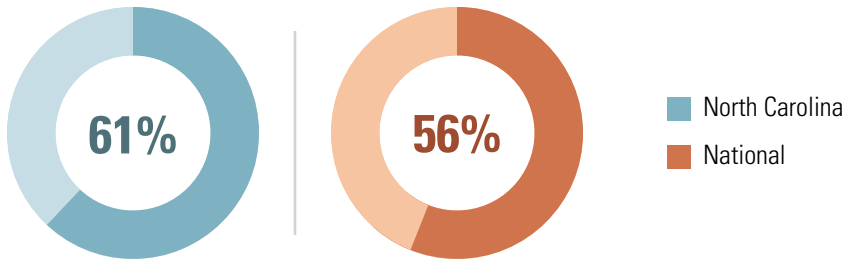
SECTION 1: Children & Students

North Carolina Population, by Age and Race/Ethnicity (2022)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2022), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201

Children Ages Three and Four Not in School (2022)



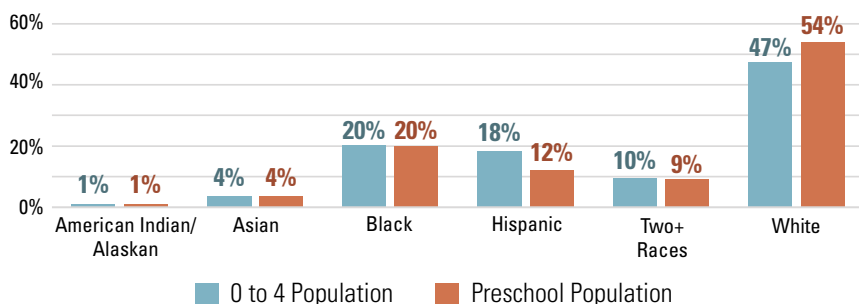
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2022), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B14003

71%

In 2022, **71%** of children in the United States and **70%** of children in North Carolina lived in households where all parents were in the labor force.

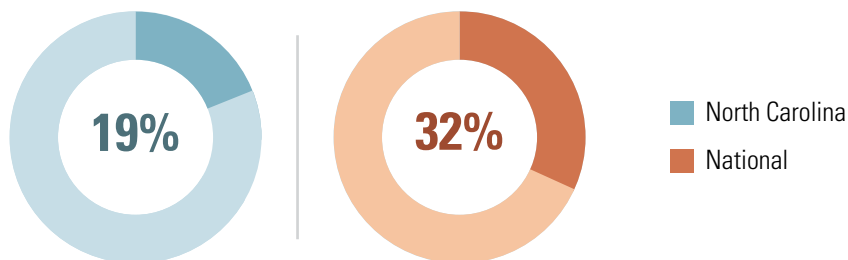


North Carolina Preschool Enrollment and 0 to 4 Population, by Race/Ethnicity (2022)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2022), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201

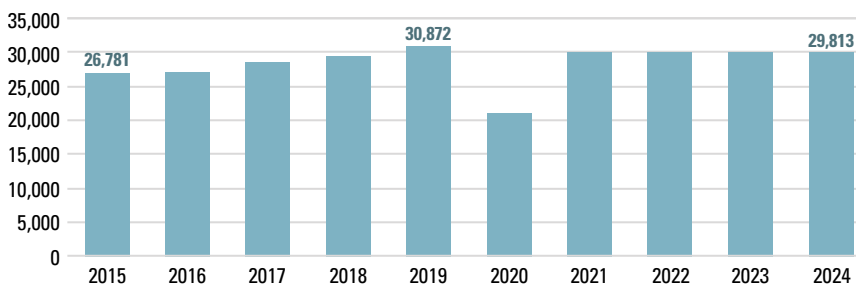
Children Age Four Enrolled in State Pre-K (2021-22) 🦠



Note: 51% of eligible 4-year-olds in North Carolina are participating in NC Pre-K (see page 6 for information on eligibility). Enrollment data for eligible children are not available at the national level.

Source: NIEER 2022 State of Preschool Report; myFutureNC – NC Pre-K Enrollment

North Carolina Pre-K Seats (2015 to 2024) 🦠



Source: NC Dept. of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education (Data Request)



North Carolina Pre-K (NC Pre-K)

Since it was initiated in 2001, the North Carolina Pre-K program (formerly More at Four) has served more than 350,000 children. Students enrolled in NC Pre-K attend school for 6.5 hours per day, 180 days per year.

Families at or
BELOW 75%
of the state median
income are eligible.

Children from families at or below 75% of the state median income are eligible to enroll in NC Pre-K, along with English language learners, children with developmental disabilities or chronic health conditions, and children of active-duty military members.

**36% OF NC
COUNTIES**
meet NIEER enrollment
targets for NC Pre-K.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) encourages states to enroll 75% of eligible children in state Pre-K programs. Approximately 36% of North Carolina's counties met NIEER's enrollment targets in 2021-22.



Source: NC Dept. of Health and Human Services – NC Pre-K Program; myFutureNC: NC Pre-K Enrollment

North Carolina Subsidized Child Care

The Subsidized Child Care Program is a statewide child-care assistance program for low-income and other eligible families. This program helps families afford child care by sharing the cost. Most parents must pay a fee, depending on the size of their family and their income.

Families at or
BELOW 200%
of the federal poverty
level are eligible.

The Subsidized Child Care Program helps families that earn at or below 200% of the federal poverty level to pay for child-care while they work or attend school.

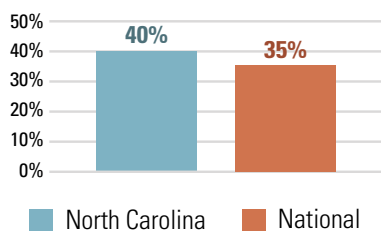
**64,238
CHILDREN**
benefited from the Child
Care Subsidy Program.

In November 2023, there were 64,238 children participating in the Subsidized Child Care Program, while another 3,109 eligible children were on the waiting list.

Source: NC Dept. of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education (Data Request)

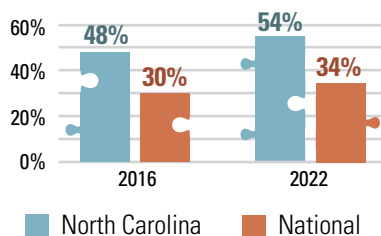


Children Under 18 Living At or Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (2022)



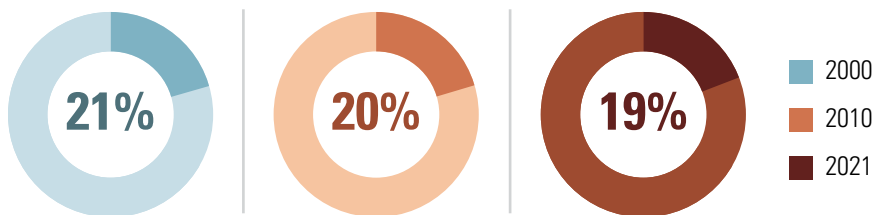
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2022) Current Population Survey, Detailed Tables for Poverty, POV11 – Poverty Status by State

Children Ages Nine to 35 Months Receiving Developmental Screening (2016 and 2022)



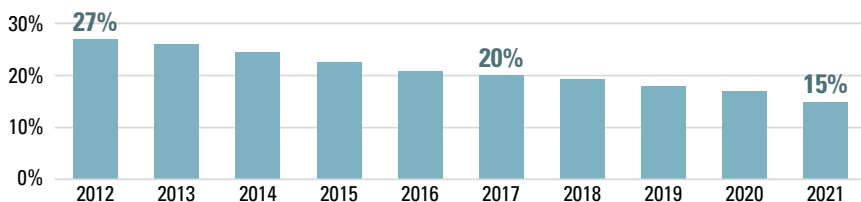
Source: National Survey of Children's Health, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration

School-Age Population as a Percentage of State Population (2000, 2010, and 2021)



Source: 2000 Census Profile of General Demographic Characteristics; 2010 Census American Community Survey; U.S. Census Bureau (2022), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

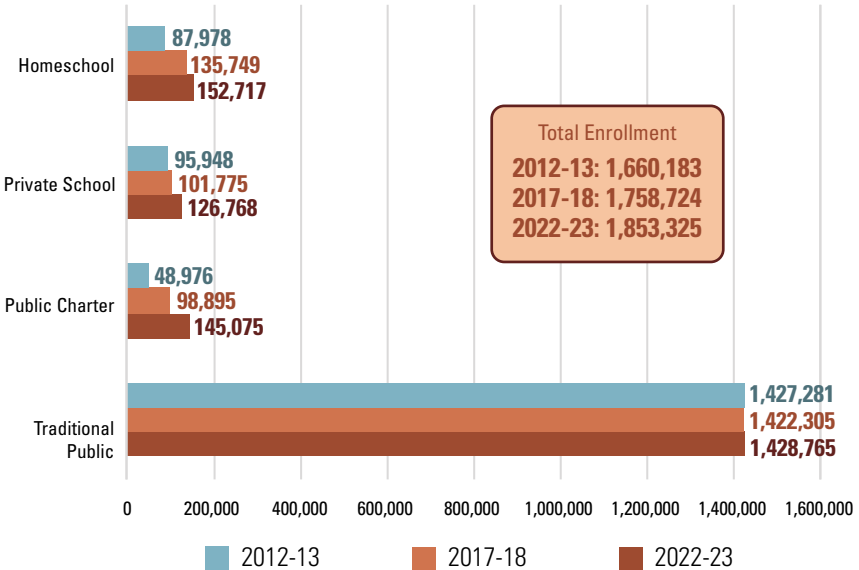
Children Living in Households with Food Insecurity (2012 to 2021)



Source: NC Department of Health and Human Services Early Childhood Data Dashboard (2012-2016); Feeding America (2017-2021)

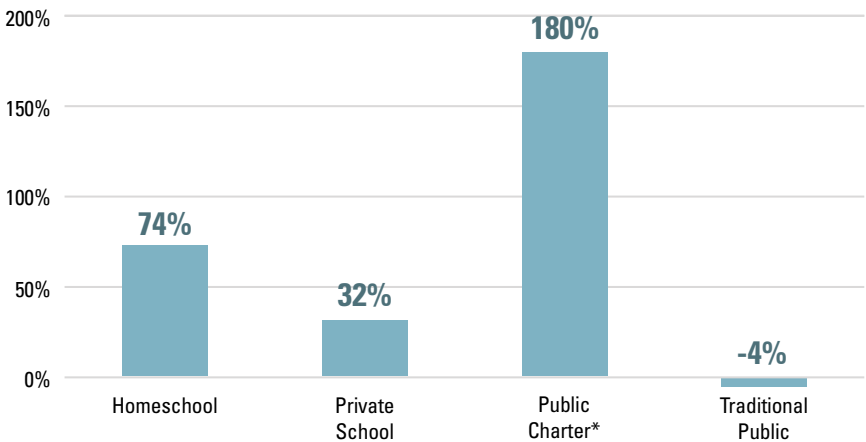


K-12 Enrollment, by School Type (2012-13 to 2022-23)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 3; NC Statistical Summary for Private Schools, 2022-23; 2023 NC Homeschool Statistical Summary

10-Year Percentage Change in K-12 Enrollment, by School Type (2012-13 to 2022-23)

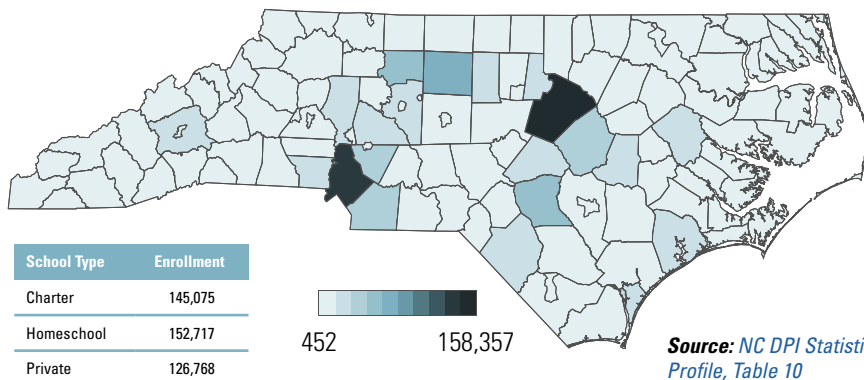


*In 2012, the 100-school cap on the number of charter schools in North Carolina was lifted.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 3; NC Statistical Summary for Private Schools, 2022-23; 2023 NC Homeschool Statistical Summary



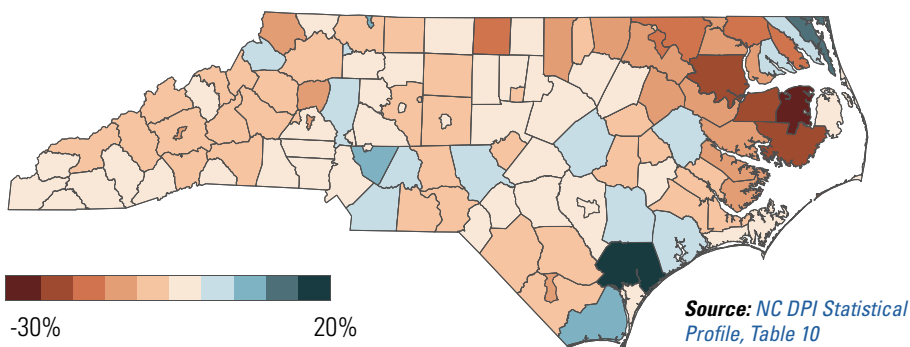
K-12 Traditional Public School Enrollment, by District (2023-24)



In 2023-24, enrollment in K-12 traditional public-school districts ranged from **447** in Tyrrell County Schools to **159,827** in Wake County Public School System, with a median of **5,368** students.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10

Five-Year Percentage Change in K-12 Traditional Public School Enrollment, by District (2018-19 to 2023-24)



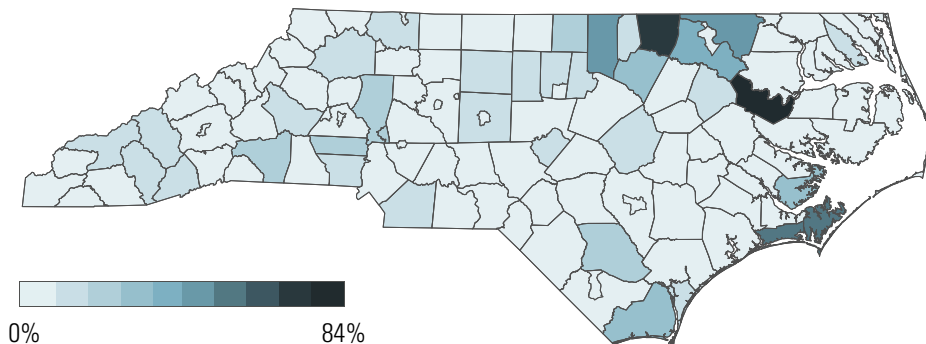
3.4%

Overall enrollment in K-12 traditional public schools decreased by **3.4%** between 2017-18 and 2023-24, with **98** of 115 districts experiencing a decline.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10

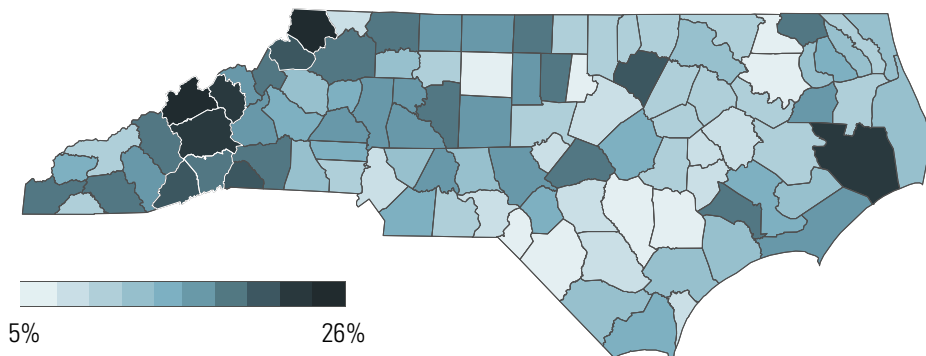


Public Charter School Enrollment as a Percentage of Total K-12 Public School Enrollment, by District (2023-24)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 10 & 37

Homeschool Enrollment as a Percentage of K-12 Traditional Public School Enrollment, by County (2022-23)

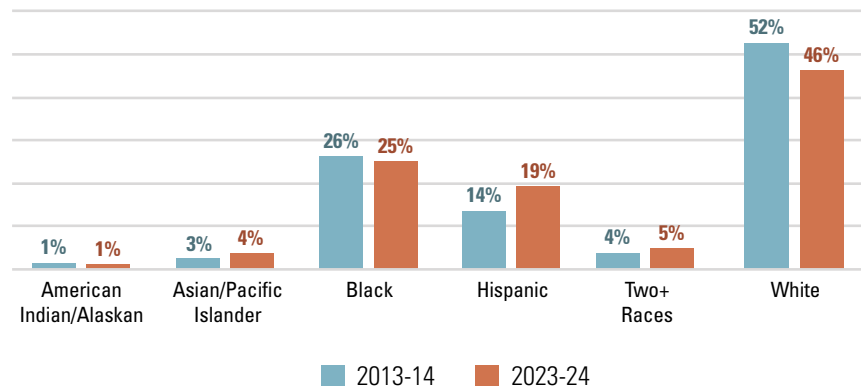


Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10; 2023 Homeschool Statistical Summary

Between 2017-18 and 2022-23, the number of public charter school students increased by **47%** and the number of homeschool students increased by **12%**. In 2022-23, charter and homeschool students each represented **8%** of the total K-12 student population.

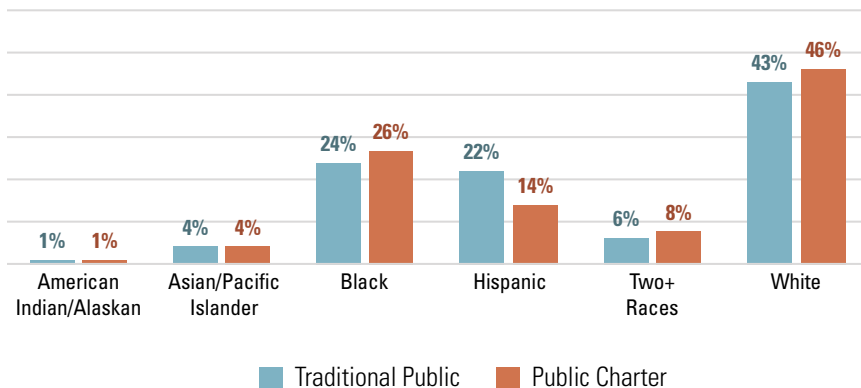


K-12 Public School Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity (2013-14 and 2023-24)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 10, 11, & 37

K-12 Public School Enrollment, by School Type and Race/Ethnicity (2023-24)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 10, 11, & 37

From 2014 to 2024, the number of Hispanic and Asian students in K-12 public schools increased by 50% and 61%, respectively. At the same time, the number of White students decreased by 11% and the number of Black students stayed about the same.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 10, 11, & 37

SPOTLIGHT ON:

20-Year Enrollment Trends in North Carolina Schools

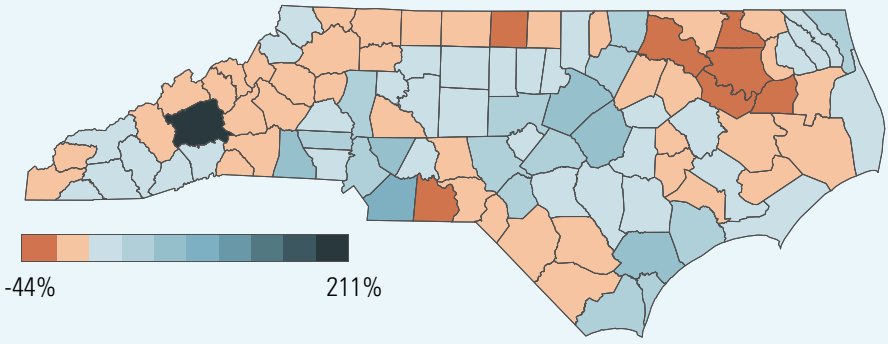
North Carolina is the 9th largest state in the nation with the 8th highest population growth between 2000 to 2020. Much of the growth can be attributed to in-migration, not births, with the largest increases in urban areas, including Charlotte and the Research Triangle area. However, population growth has not been uniform across the state, as many counties face decreasing populations.

Population changes directly impact student enrollment in K-12 public schools, private schools, and homeschools. From 2004 to 2023, 55 counties saw an increase in total K-12 school enrollment, while 45 counties saw a decrease in enrollment. The percentage change in enrollment ranged from a 211% increase in Buncombe County to a 44% decrease in Washington county.

Scan QR Code for Online Access to Heat Map



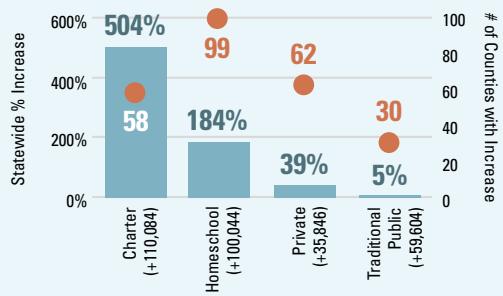
Figure 1: 20-Year Change in Total School Enrollment (2004 to 2023)



Traditional public and public charter schools served **84%** of all K-12 students in 2022-23, down from **90%** in 2004.

From 2004 to 2023, homeschool enrollment increased by 184% or 100,044 students statewide, with increases in nearly all counties. Homeschool enrollment has now surpassed total private school enrollment which increased by 39% or 35,846 students during this period.

Figure 2: Percentage Enrollment Increase and the Number of Counties with Increasing Enrollment, by School Type (2004 to 2023)

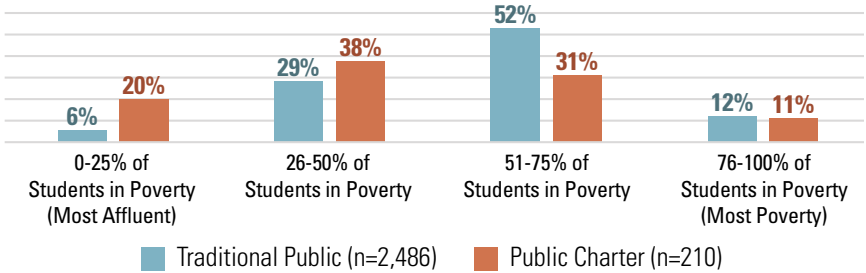


Within public schools, traditional school enrollment has grown 4%, from 1,318,529 to 1,378,133 students (up 59,604 students) since 2004. Charter school enrollment increased by 504% or 110,084 students, with charter school enrollment increasing in nearly twice as many counties as traditional enrollment. The chart to the left shows the percentage increase statewide by school type, as well as the number of counties that saw growth in each school type. Of the counties with increasing enrollment, 21 saw gains across all four school types.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 3; NC Home School Statistical Summary (Years 2004 – 2023); NC Private School Statistical Summary (Years 2004 – 2023)



K-12 Public Schools, by School Poverty Level and School Type (2022-23)



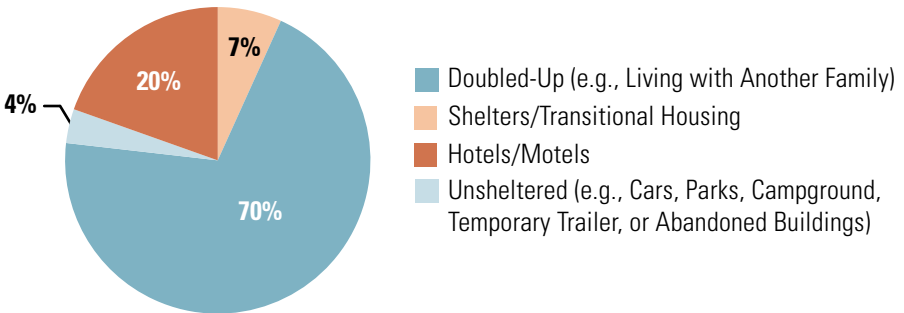
Source: NC DPI Data & Reports – Economically Disadvantaged Students



During the 2021-22 school year, **28,631** North Carolina students experienced homelessness, representing **1.8%** of all students in K-12 public schools.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 3; McKinney-Vento Act (2021-2022) – Ed Data Express

Homeless Youth, by Primary Nighttime Residence (2022)



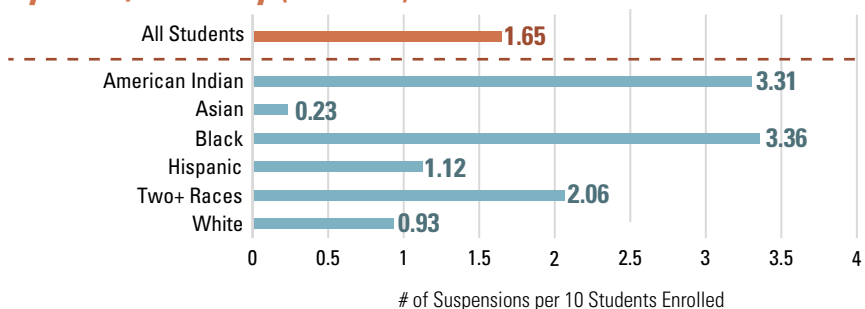
Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 3; McKinney-Vento Act (2021-2022) – Ed Data Express

In 2022-23, **6%** of K-12 traditional public schools had fewer than 25% economically disadvantaged students (EDS), while **20%** of public charter schools had fewer than 25% EDS.

Source: NC DPI Data & Reports – Economically Disadvantaged Students



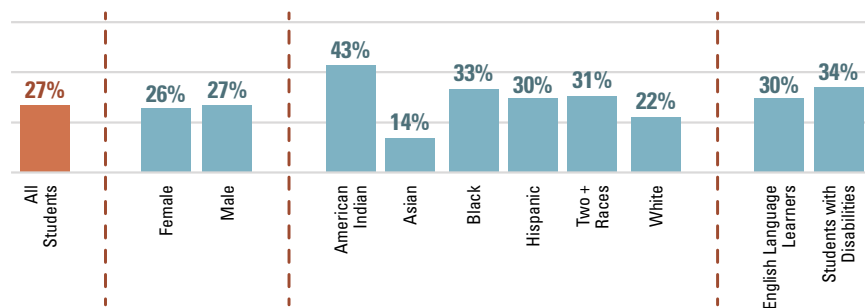
Short-Term Suspension Rates in K-12 Public Schools, by Race/Ethnicity (2022-23)



Source: Report to the North Carolina General Assembly – Consolidated Data Report, 2022-2023



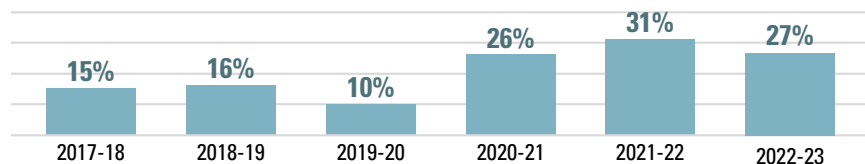
Chronic Absenteeism* in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by Student Subgroup (2022-23)



*Chronic absenteeism is defined as students who are enrolled in a school for at least 10 days and absent for 10% or more of those days.

Source: NC DPI School Report Cards – State Highlights Report

Chronic Absenteeism* in K-12 Traditional Public Schools (2017-18 to 2022-23)



*Chronic absenteeism is defined as students who are enrolled in a school for at least 10 days and absent for 10% or more of those days.

Source: NC DPI School Report Cards – State Highlights Report



North Carolina Community College System Full-Time Equivalent Enrollment (Fall 2023)



Fall Curriculum Enrollment

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Career and Technical Education | 79,358 |
| Transfer and General Education | 88,251 |
| Special Credit | 8,308 |
| Total Curriculum Unduplicated Enrollment | 175,916 |

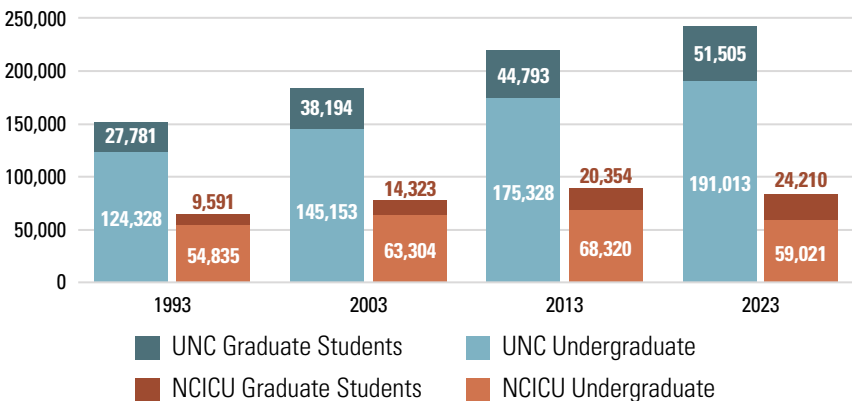
Fall Continuing Education Enrollment

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Basic Skills | 11,588 |
| Workforce Development | 40,499 |
| Total Continuing Education Unduplicated Enrollment | 52,087 |

Note: Many community college students enroll part-time, so the total number of enrolled students is substantially higher than the unduplicated full-time equivalent enrollment shown here.

Source: [North Carolina Community College System Data Dashboard](#)

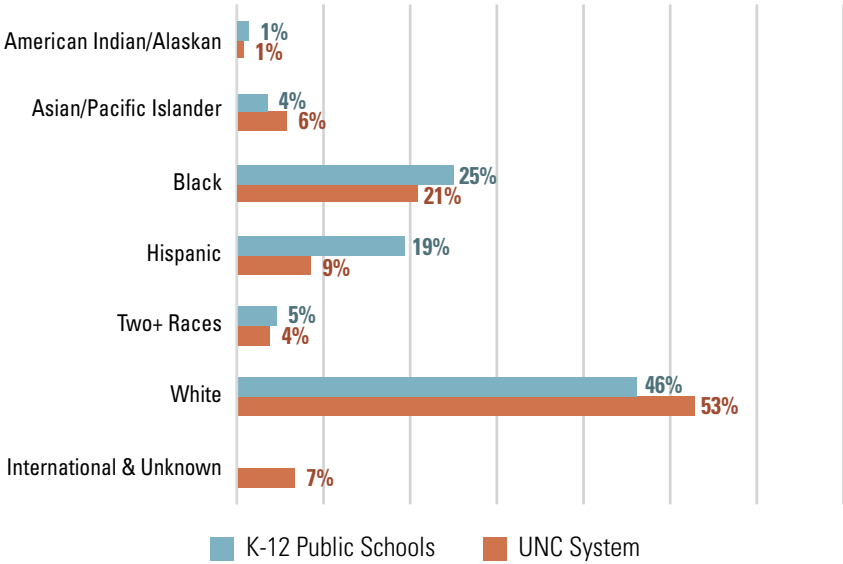
UNC System and North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities Enrollment (1993-2023)



Source: [UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards](#); [NCICU \(Data Request\)](#)

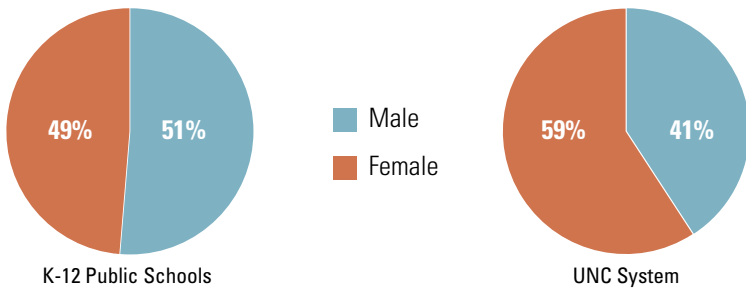


K-12 Traditional Public School (2023-24) vs. UNC System (Fall 2023) Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 10 & 37; UNC System Interactive Data Dashboard

K-12 Traditional Public School (2023-24) vs. UNC System (Fall 2023) Enrollment, by Gender



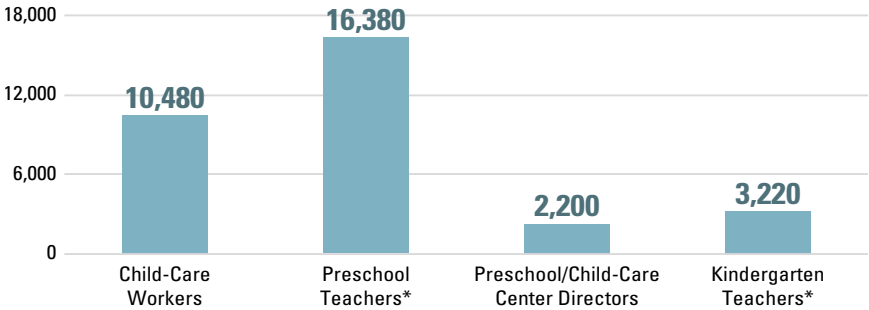
Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10; UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards

In 2023-24, 53% of UNC System students were White, while only 46% of K-12 public school students were White. In contrast, Hispanic students accounted for 19% of the K-12 student population, but only 9% of the UNC System enrollment.



SECTION 2: Educators

Early Childhood Educators, by Occupation (May 2022)



*Excludes special education.

Note: Preschool Teacher data includes both public and private centers.

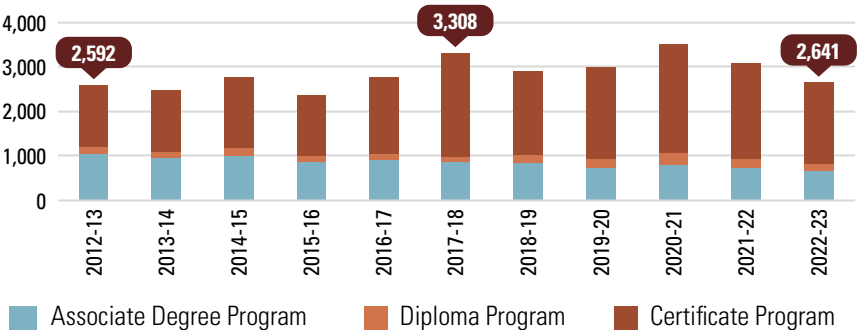
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES)

INFANT AND TODDLER TEACHERS are required to complete 1 COURSE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

NC Pre-K requires ALL LEAD TEACHERS to hold a BACHELOR'S DEGREE in Early Childhood Education.

Source: NC Dept. of Health and Human Services – NC Pre-K Program

Early Childhood Education Graduates at North Carolina Community Colleges, by Program Type (2012-13 to 2022-23)

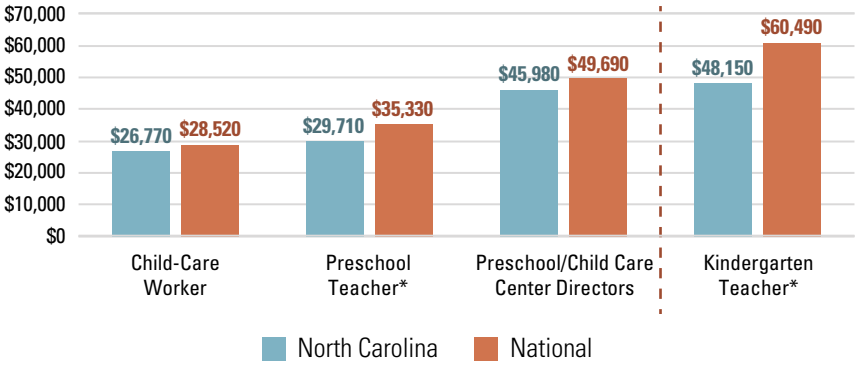


Source: North Carolina Community College System Data Dashboard



SECTION 2: Educators

Median Early Childhood Education Wages, by Occupation (May 2022)

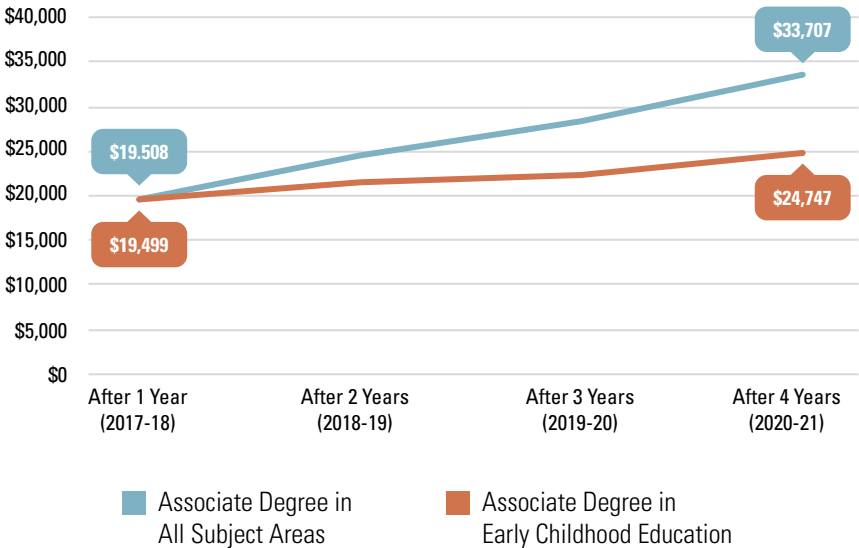


*Excludes special education.

Note: Preschool Teacher data includes both public and private centers.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES)

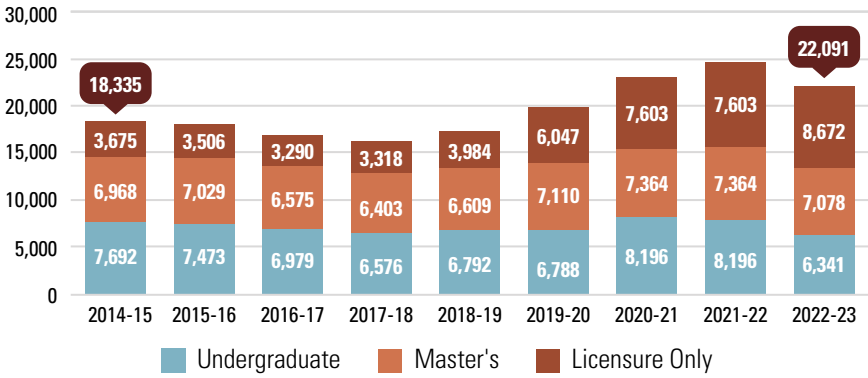
Average Wages for North Carolina Community College System Graduates, by Program Area and Over Time (2016-17 Graduating Class)



Source: NC TOWER

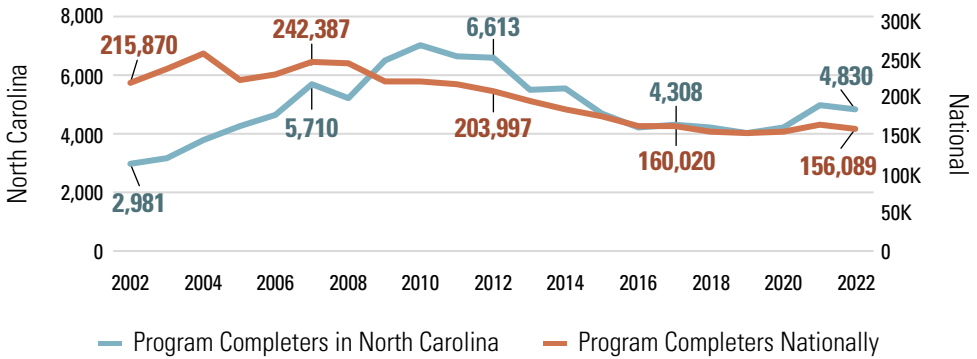


Public and Independent Educator Preparation Program Enrollment, by Degree Type (2014-15 to 2022-23)



Source: NC DPI (Data Request)

Public and Independent Educator Preparation Program Completion in the United States and North Carolina (2002 to 2022)



Note: Year corresponds to the year the individual completed the educator preparation program.

Source: U.S. Department of Education 2023 Title II Report, Academic Year 2021-22 Data

75%

The percentage of North Carolina educator preparation program completers who were employed in North Carolina public schools the next year rose from 68% in 2017-18 to 75% in 2022-23.

Source: NC DPI (Data Request)



SPOTLIGHT ON:

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program was created in 1986 to provide forgivable loan scholarships to teacher candidates attending 17 public and private educator preparation programs across the state. The program graduated 400-500 Teaching Fellows each year and recipients agreed to teach in North Carolina public schools for four years in exchange for having their loans forgiven. A 2012 evaluation of the program found that Teaching Fellows graduates stayed in the profession longer than other teachers, but were more likely to work in lower poverty schools.

After funding for the program was discontinued in 2012, the program was reestablished in 2017 with an emphasis on hard-to-staff subject areas (originally STEM and Special Education, with elementary education added beginning with the 2024-25 cohort) and high-need schools. Under the new version of the program, Teaching Fellows participants receive up to \$5,000 per semester for tuition, books, and fees at one of ten North Carolina educator preparation programs selected by the Teaching Fellows Commission. Funds may now be used for undergraduate, graduate, or licensure-only educator preparation programs and loan forgiveness is accelerated when candidates work in low-performing schools.

Between 2018-19 and 2022-23, the New Teaching Fellows Program awarded scholarships to 559 participants, resulting in 217 graduates.

Figure 1: North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program Participants, by Gender (2018-19 to 2023-24)

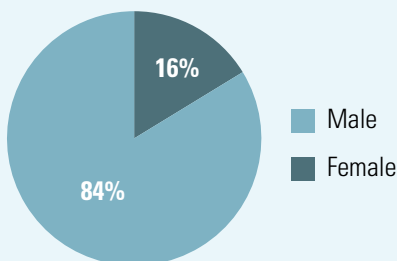
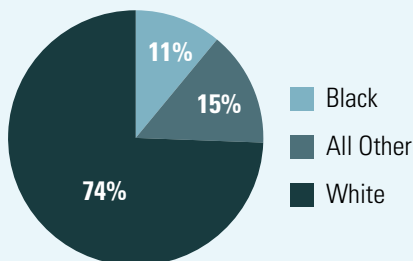


Figure 2: North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program Participants, by Race/Ethnicity (2018-19 to 2023-24)



Of the 217 program graduates to date, 167 are teaching in a North Carolina public school in a qualifying licensure area (15 of these graduates participated in the program but did not take scholarship funding). Twenty-two percent of these are receiving accelerated loan forgiveness by working in a school that is designated as low-performing.

Of the 217 Teaching Fellows graduates to date:

- 70%** have repaid or are repaying their loans through service (22% of these are working in low-performing schools).
- 30%** have chosen not to teach and have entered cash repayment.

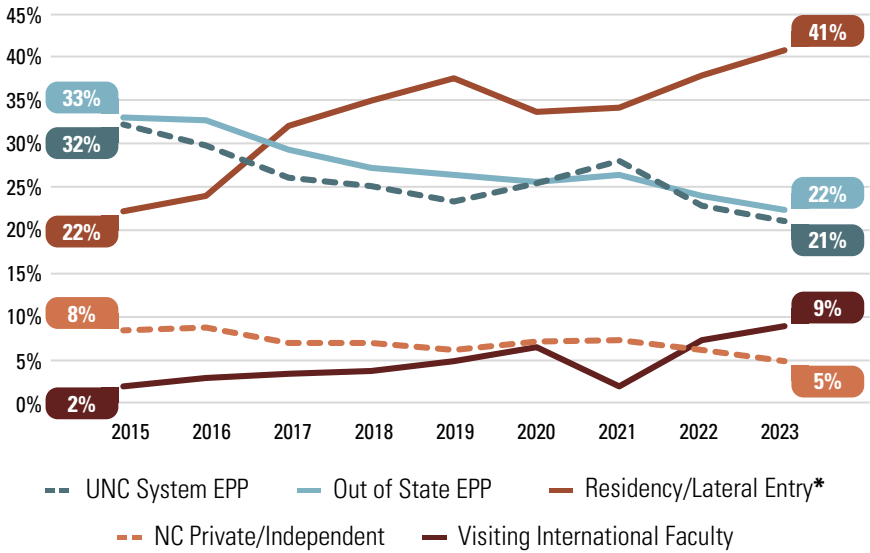
An additional 66 graduates (30%) have chosen not to teach and are in cash repayment for their loans. Graduates who choose cash repayment must pay back interest accrued since the date they received their scholarship. The relatively high rate of cash repayment suggests that more support and/or policy changes may be needed to retain Teaching Fellows participants in the teaching profession during their service-based repayment period and beyond.

Source: North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program



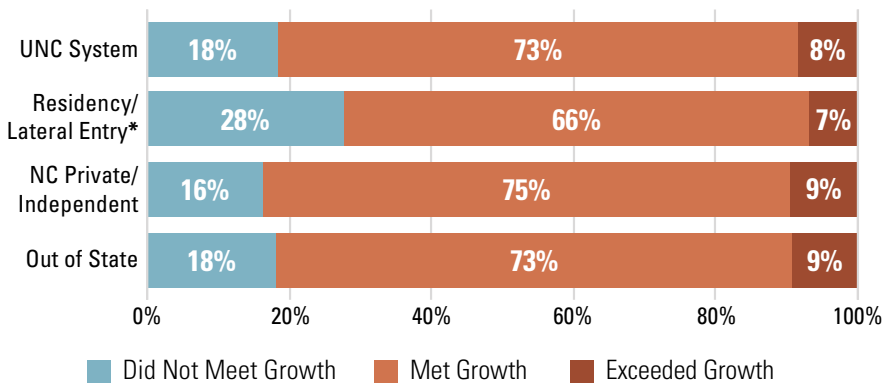
SECTION 2: Educators

Distribution of Preparation Routes for Newly Hired K-12 Public School Teachers (2015 to 2023)



Source: NC DPI (Data Request)

Distribution of EVAAS Scores for First Year K-12 Public School Teachers, by Preparation Route (2021-22 to 2023-24)

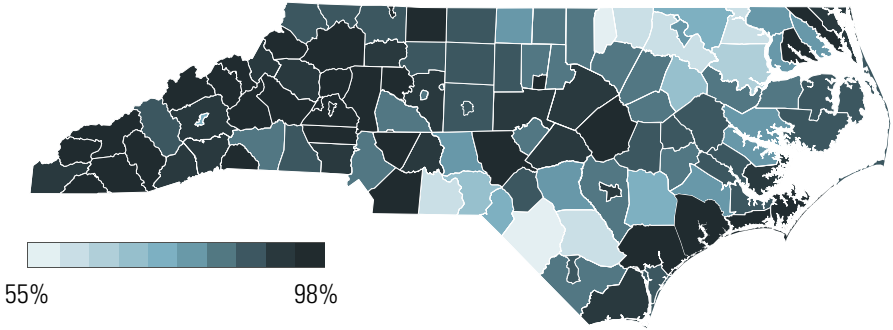


Source: NC DPI (Data Request)

*Beginning in 2019-20, the route for alternate certification changed from lateral entry to residency licenses. The Residency/Lateral Entry category includes those teaching with an Emergency License or Permit to Teach.



Percentage of Teachers Meeting or Exceeding Expected Student Growth, by District (2020-21) 🌐



Source: NC DPI (Data Request)

Classroom Teacher Allotment Ratios* for North Carolina Public Schools (2023-24)

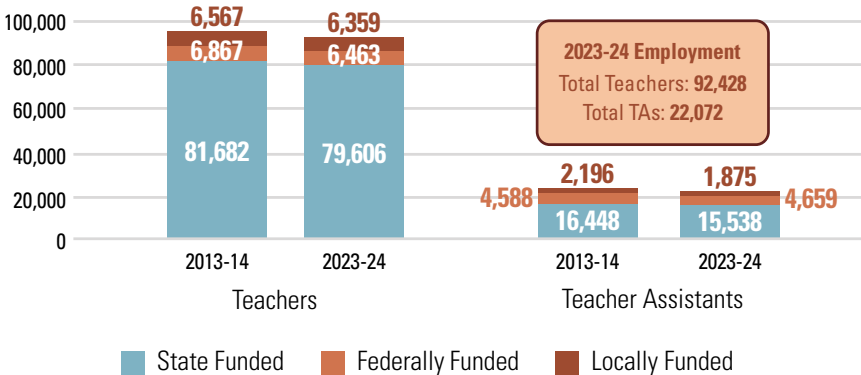
| Grade | Allotment Ratio |
|-------|-----------------|
| K-3** | 1:18 |
| 4-8 | 1:21 |
| 9 | 1:24.5 |
| 10-12 | 1:26.64 |

*Expressed as teachers per students in average daily membership.

**Maximum average class size, as required by state law.

Source: NC DPI Allotment Policy Manual 2023-24

K-12 Traditional Public School Teachers and Teacher Assistants, by Funding Source (2013-14 and 2023-24)

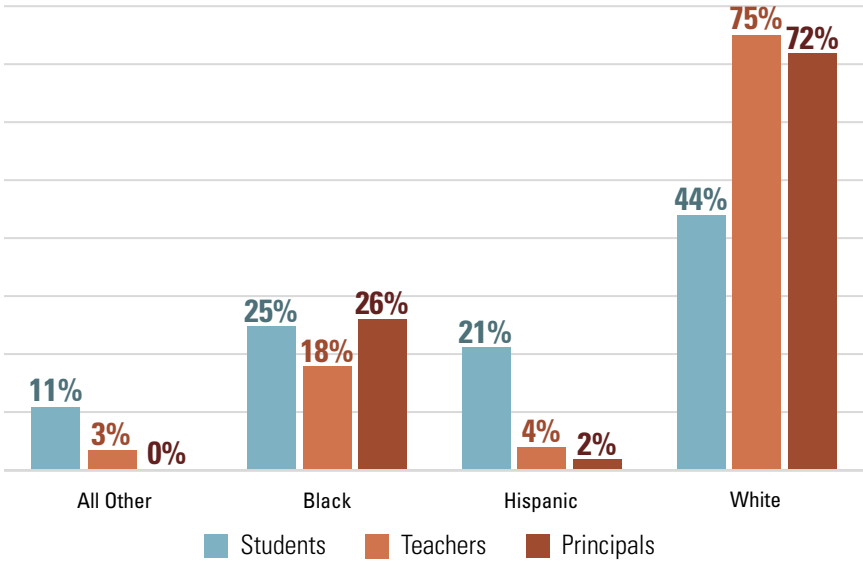


Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 16



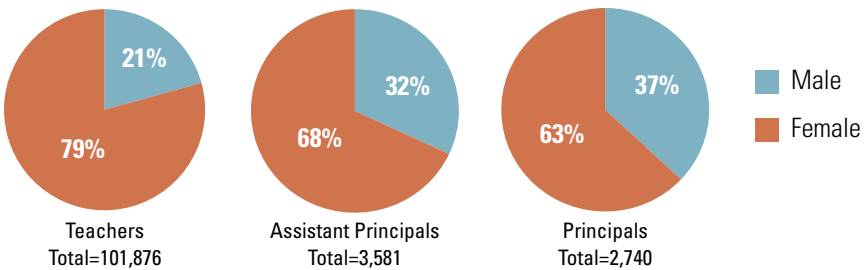
SECTION 2: Educators

Distribution of K-12 Public School Students, Teachers, and Principals, by Race/Ethnicity (2023-24)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 10, 16, 16.1, & 37; NC DPI (Data Request)

K-12 Public School Teachers, Principals, and Assistant Principals, by Gender (2023-24)



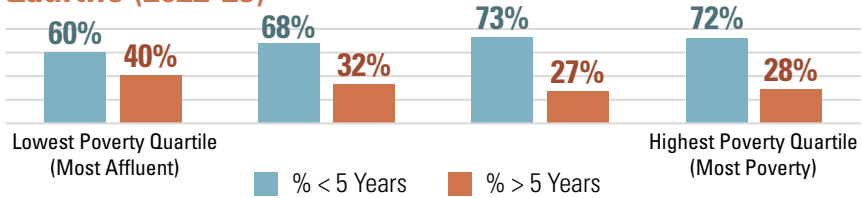
Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 16

75% In 2023-24, **75%** of K-12 teachers are White, while **44%** of K-12 public school students are White.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 10 & 16



Average Years Principals Have Led Their Current K-12 Traditional Public School, by School Poverty Quartile (2022-23)

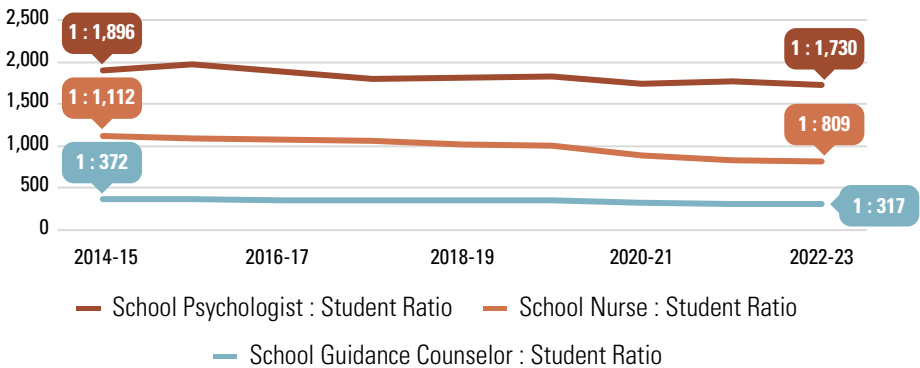


Note: Schools were sorted by their percentage of economically disadvantaged students and grouped into quartiles such that the number of schools was equal across each quartile.

Source: NC DPI (Data Request)



Ratio of K-12 Public School Guidance Counselors, Nurses, and Psychologists to Students (2014-15 to 2022-23)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 16; NC Dept. of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Annual School Health Services Report

The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of

1 : 500

The National Association of School Nurses recommends a ratio of

1 : School

The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of

1 : 250*

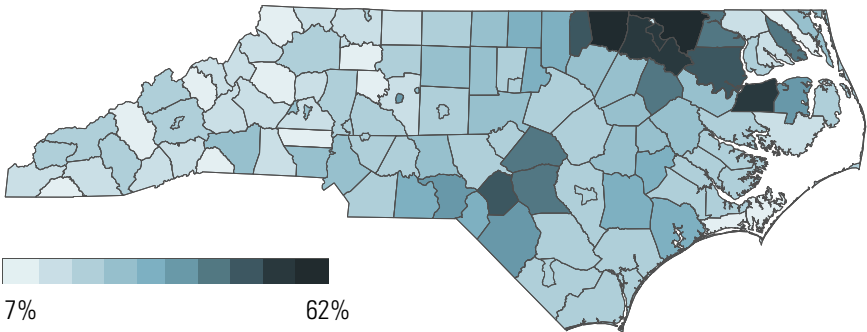
*Counselors do not include GearUp counselors and Community College coaches.

Sources: American School Counselor Association – School Counselors Matter; National Association of School Nurses – School Nurse Workload – Staffing for Safe Care; National Association of School Psychologists – Shortage of School Psychologists



SECTION 2: Educators

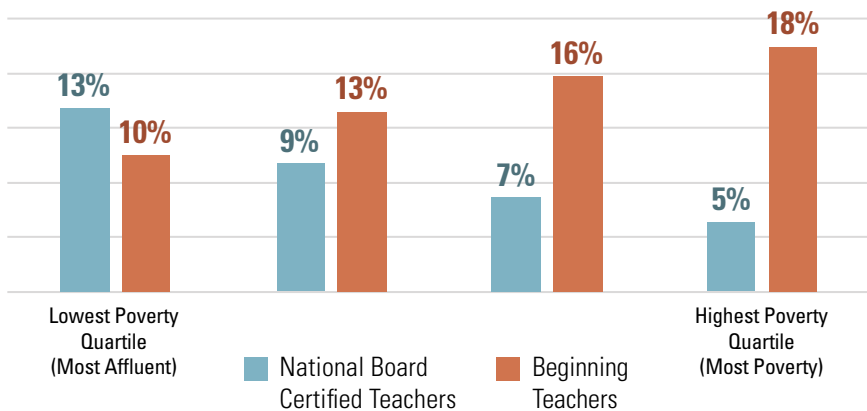
Percentage of Teachers Not Fully Licensed, By District (2022-23)



Note: Fully licensed is defined as having a Continuing Professional License (CPL). Teachers not fully licensed are those with an Initial Professional License (IPL), who are generally beginning teachers, or those with other license types such as Residency, Visiting International Faculty, Emergency, or Permit to Teach.

Source: NC DPI (Data Request)

Beginning Teachers* and National Board-Certified Teachers in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by School Poverty Quartile** (2021-22)



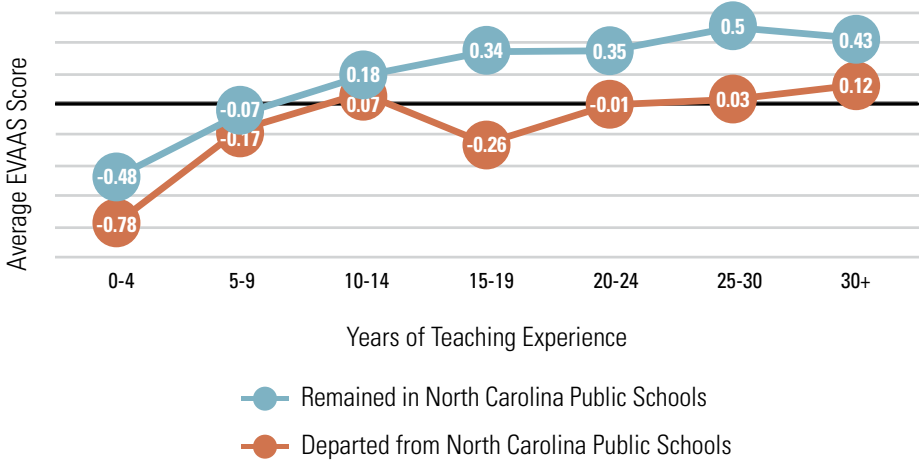
*Beginning Teachers are teachers with between 0 and 2 years of experience.

**Schools were sorted by their percentage of economically disadvantaged students (EDS) and grouped into quartiles such that the number of schools was equal across each quartile. The lowest poverty quartile includes schools with 0-30% EDS, while the highest poverty quartile includes schools with 56-95% EDS.

Source: NC DPI School Report Card Data Set; NC DPI (Data Request)



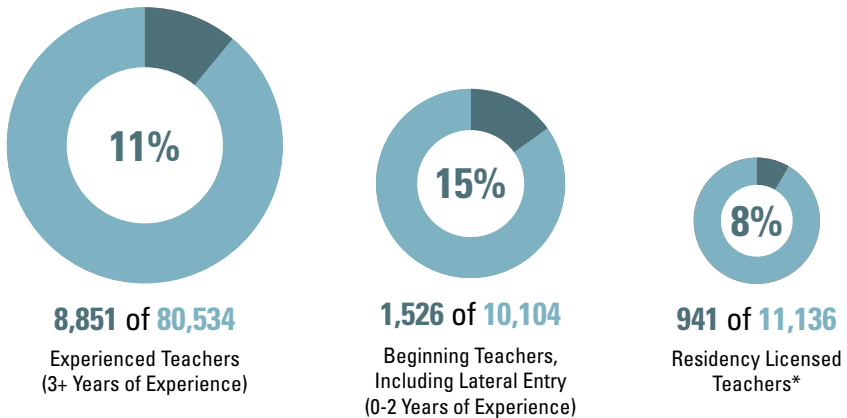
Average EVAAS Scores* of K-12 Teachers Who Remained In and Departed From Public Schools, by Years of Experience (2022-23)



*Teachers with EVAAS scores of zero are considered to be as effective as the hypothetical "average" North Carolina teacher.

Source: 2022-23 State of the Teaching Profession Report

Teacher Attrition Rates in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by Teacher Category (2022-23)



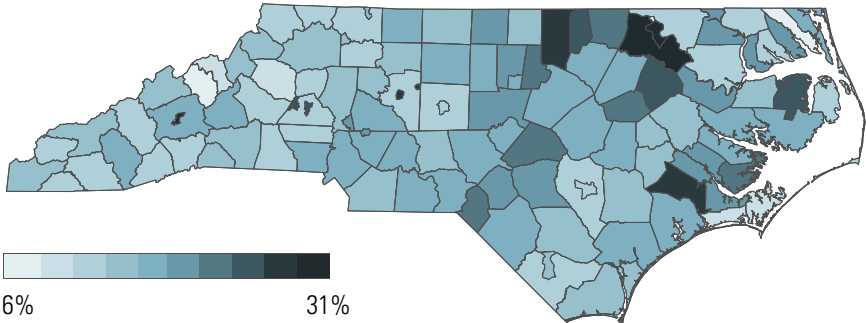
Source: NC DPI 2022-23 State of the Teaching Profession Report

*Some Residency Licensed Teachers are also Beginning Teachers.



SECTION 2: Educators

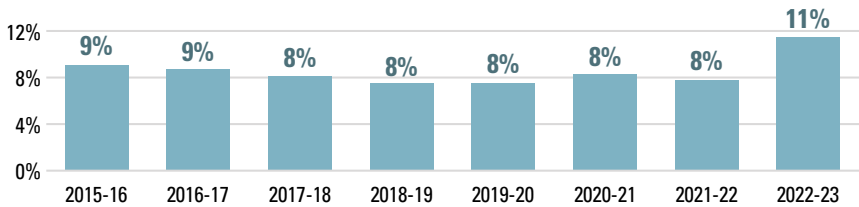
K-12 Traditional Public School Teacher Departure* Rates, by District (2022-23)



*Departure rate is the sum of the percentage of teachers who left teaching in North Carolina and the percentage of teachers who switched districts.

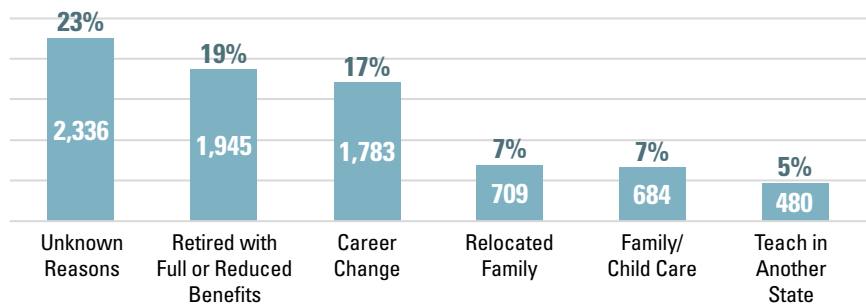
Source: NC DPI 2022-23 State of the Teaching Profession Report

Teacher Attrition Rates in K-12 Traditional Public Schools (2015-16 to 2022-23)



Source: NC DPI 2022-23 State of the Teaching Profession Report

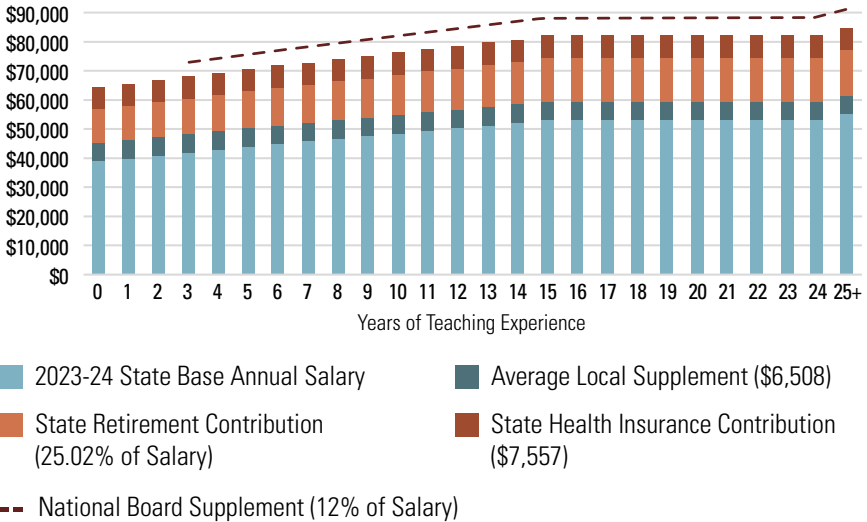
Top Reasons for K-12 Traditional Public School Teacher Attrition (2022-23)



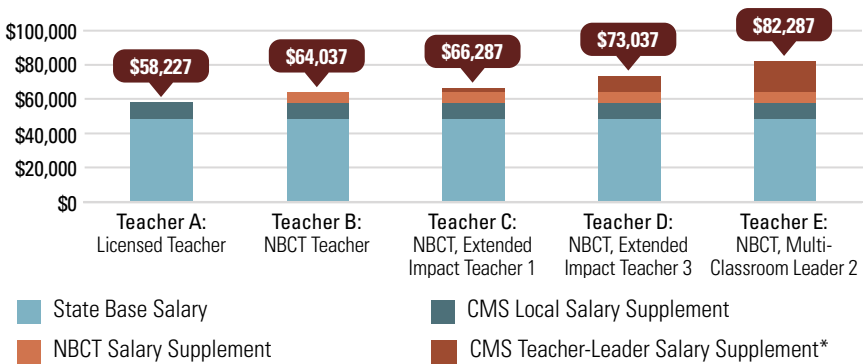
Source: NC DPI 2022-23 State of the Teaching Profession Report



Average Compensation (including Benefits) for K-12 Public School Teachers, by Years of Experience (2023-24)



In addition to state base salary and local salary supplements, there are several state and local opportunities for higher salaries. For example, National Board-Certified Teachers (NBCT) earn 12% more, and Advanced Teaching Roles can pay as much as \$20,000 more. The following demonstrates some of the career and salary options in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) during the 2023-24 academic year for teachers with 10 years of experience:



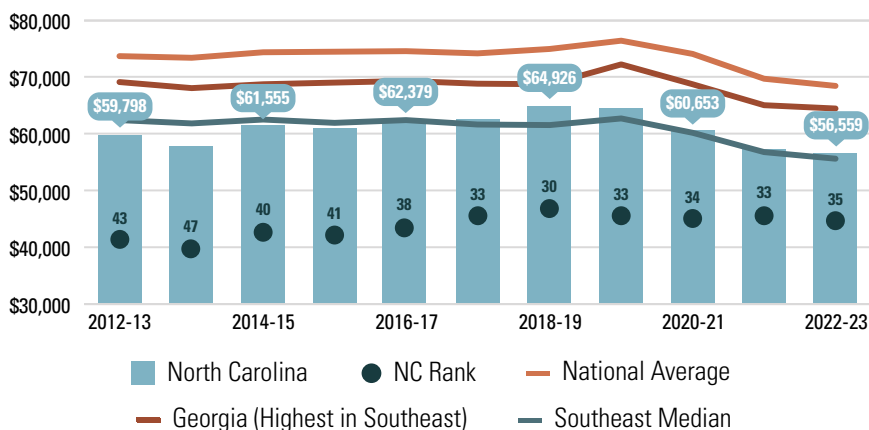
*Advanced Teaching Roles supplements are paid along a range. Supplements included in the chart reflect work in a Title I school.

Source: 2023-24 Teacher Salary Schedule; NC Treasurer’s Office (Data Request); NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20; Charlotte-Mecklenburg Teacher Leadership Handbook (pg. 5)



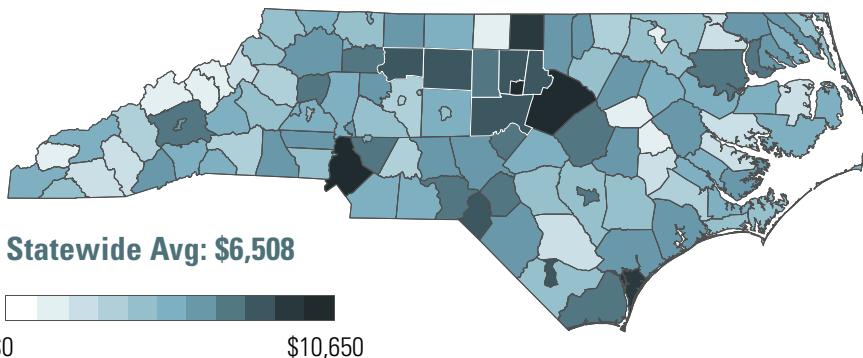
SECTION 2: Educators

Average K-12 Teacher Salaries, Inflation-Adjusted to 2023 Dollars (2012-13 to 2022-23)



Source: 2023 NEA Rankings and Estimates Report; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index

Average Local Salary Supplement for K-12 Teachers in Traditional Public Schools, by District (2023-24)



Note: Figures do not include funds from the Teacher Supplement Assistance Allotment. Three school districts offer no local salary supplements for K-12 teachers: Caswell County Schools, Graham County Schools, and Weldon City Schools.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20

In 2022-23, the average K-12 teacher salary in **36 states** was below the national average.

Source: 2023 NEA Rankings and Estimates Report



SPOTLIGHT ON:

Teacher Supplement Assistance Allotment

In North Carolina, teacher salaries typically include a state-funded base salary and a local salary supplement, with some teachers eligible for other performance and credential-based increases or bonuses.

Local Salary Supplements

Significant inequity exists in value of local salary supplements across North Carolina’s traditional public school districts, driven both by the property wealth of the district and local funding effort, typically determined by county commissioners. In 2023-24, average local salary supplements ranged from \$10,650 in Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools

to \$0 in Graham County Schools, Caswell County Schools, and Weldon City Schools (see page 29). Local supplements are roughly correlated with differences in cost of living in these counties (see page 17 of BEST NC’s Teacher Pay Report to learn more).

In 2023-24, average local teacher salary supplements ranged from **\$0 to \$10,650.**

The Supplemental Funds for Teacher Compensation Allotment

Recognizing that differences in local salary supplements may be a driver of the inequitable distribution of effective teachers (see page 25), the North Carolina General Assembly established the Teacher Supplement Assistance Allotment (“the Allotment”) in 2021. The state budget provided \$100 million in the first year, with \$70 million added in 2022 and \$30 million added in 2023, bringing current funding for the Allotment to \$200 million annually.

The Allotment is structured such that districts in less wealthy counties receive a greater amount of funding per teacher. This is designed to increase the capacity of those districts to offer competitive local salary supplements. In the first year of implementation, 109 of 115 traditional public-school districts (representing 69% of the state’s teachers) received teacher supplement funding ranging from \$436 to \$4,250 per teacher.

Effect on Local Salary Supplements

In 2021-22, local school districts spent approximately \$515M on locally funded salary supplements for teachers and the Allotment contributed an additional \$100M. State funding helped reduce variation in districts’ teacher salary supplements but did not fully mitigate the advantage held by districts at the top of the local salary supplement rankings. In 2021-22, average combined salary supplements – including local funds and funds from the Allotment – ranged from \$1,925 in Rutherford County Schools to approximately \$9,072 in New Hanover County Schools.

Scan the QR code below to see heat map of Combined Salary Supplements, including local and state funding:

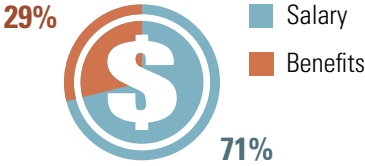


Ninety-five of the 109 school districts receiving Allotment funds gave the same amount of supplemental pay to each teacher. Just three districts – Bertie County Schools, Gaston County Schools, and Yadkin County Schools – implemented a pay strategy with a supplement range of more than \$300 and an appreciable difference between minimum, average, and maximum salary supplements. These data indicate that funds from the Allotment have not been deployed strategically to, for example, fill critical vacancies, retain effective teachers, or recruit effective teachers to low-performing schools.

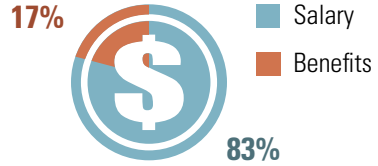
Sources: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20; North Carolina General Assembly: Fiscal Research Division; NC DPI Report: Supplemental Funds for Teacher Compensation; NC DPI (Data Request)



Compensation Distribution for K-12 Traditional Public School Teachers (2022-23)



Compensation Distribution for the Private Sector in the U.S. South Atlantic Region (Dec 2023)

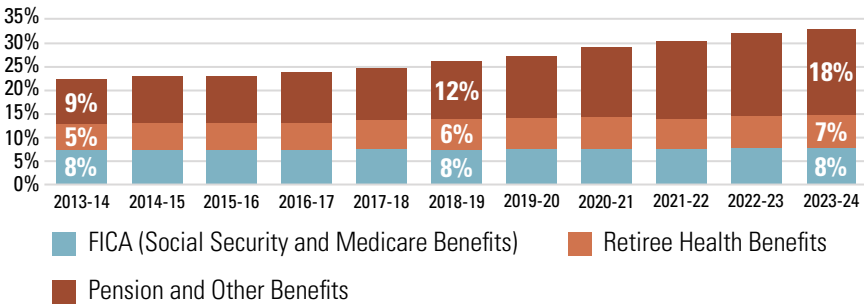


Note: Salary is defined as wages and salaries, paid leave, and supplemental pay. Benefits is defined as insurance, retirement contributions, and all other legally required benefits.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 27

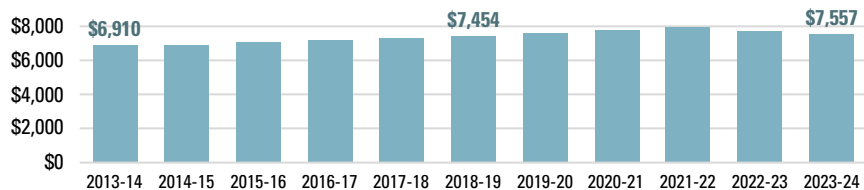
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), Employer Costs for Employee Compensation

State Retirement Contributions for K-12 Traditional Public School Teachers and District Personnel, as a Percentage of Employee Salary (2013-14 to 2023-24)



Source: Current Operations Appropriations Act of 2023

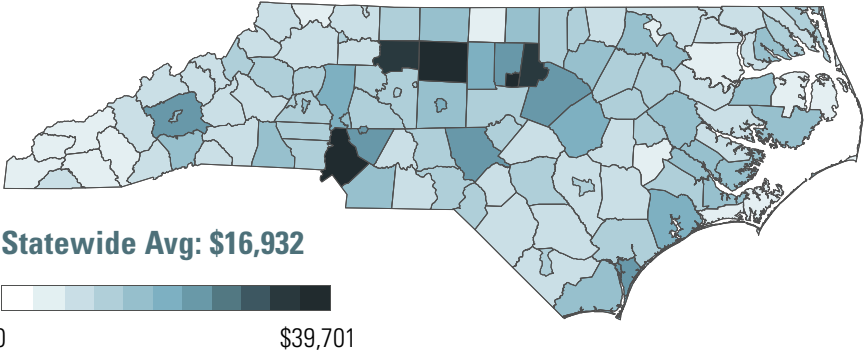
State Health Coverage Contributions for K-12 Traditional Public School Teachers and District Personnel, Inflation-Adjusted to 2023 Dollars (2013-14 to 2023-24)



Source: NC Treasurer's Office (Data Request)



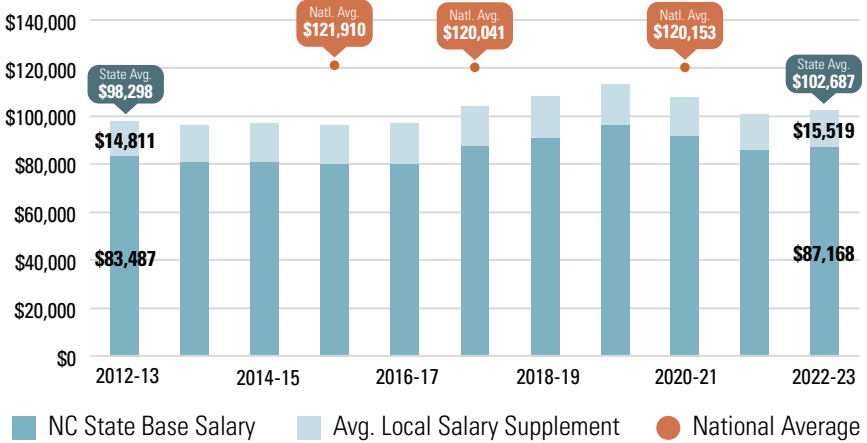
Average Local Salary Supplement for K-12 Principals in Traditional Public Schools, by District (2023-24)



Note: Four districts have no local salary supplements for principals: Carteret County Schools, Caswell County Schools, Dare County Schools, and Swain County Schools.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20

Average K-12 Principal Salaries, Inflation-Adjusted to 2023 Dollars (2012-13 to 2022-23)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20; NC DPI 2024 Highlights of the Public School Budget; NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey 2020-21

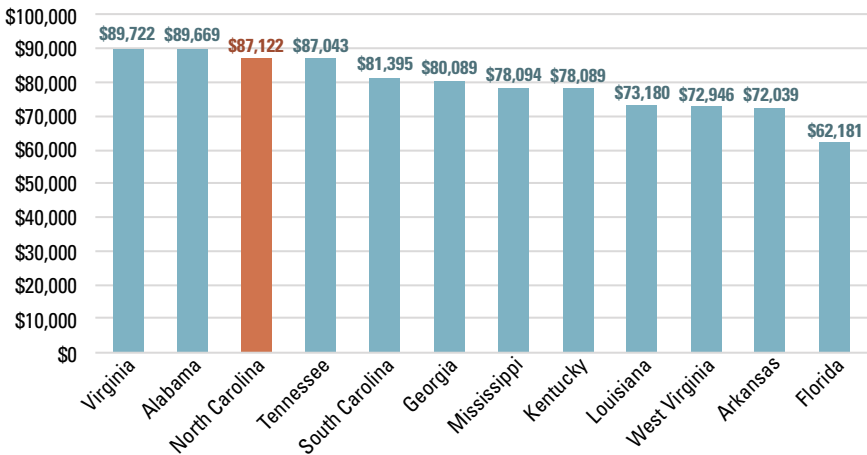
16.1%

North Carolina public school principal attrition from September 2022 to September 2023 was **16.1%** (397 principals). Average principal attrition from 2018-19 to 2022-23 was **13.6%**.

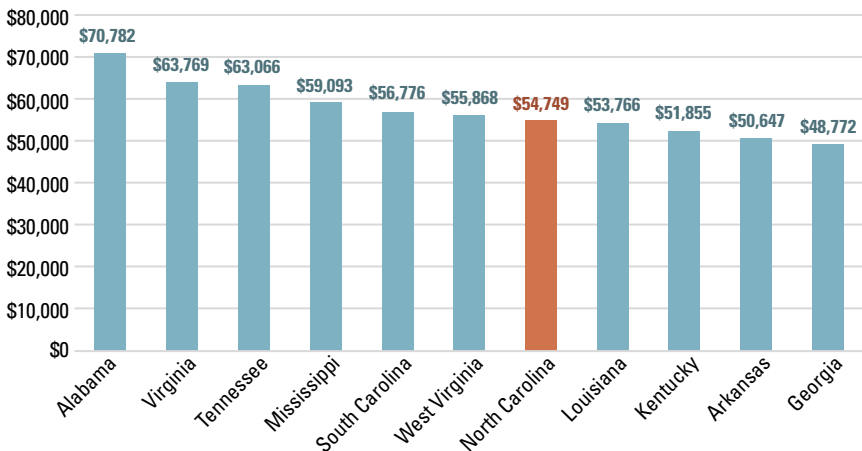


Higher Education Salaries in the U.S. Southeast Region* (2022-23)

Public Four-Year Institutions



Public Two-Year Institutions



*Salaries represent the average salary within each state for full time instructional staff, equated to a 9-month contract total.

Note: Florida is not included in the public two-year institution chart, as it did not report salary data for the current reporting year.

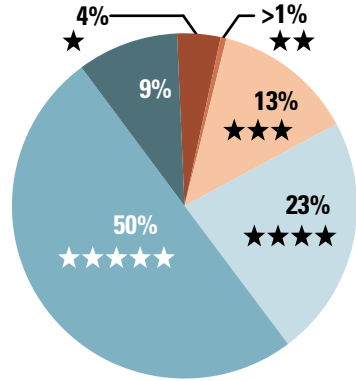
Source: NCES IPEDS Statistical Tables



SECTION 3: Schools & Programs

Licensed Child-Care Programs, by Star Rating (2023)

- Five Star Facilities
- Four Star Facilities
- Three Star Facilities
- Two Star Facilities
- One Star Facilities
- All Other Facilities*



*20,691 children are enrolled in child-care programs that are exempt from the star-rated license system. For instance, religious-sponsored child-care programs do not receive a star rating unless they choose to apply.

Source: NC Dept. of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education Statistical Summary Report, December 2023



In December 2023, **218,106** North Carolina children attended one of **5,287** licensed child-care programs: **4,160 (78%)** were child care centers and **1,127 (22%)** were family child-care homes.

Source: NC Dept. of Health and Human Services Division of Child Development and Early Education Statistical Summary Report, December 2023

K-12 Schools, by Type (2022-23)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Traditional Public | 2,550 |
| Cooperative Innovative High Schools | 134 |
| Public Charter | 206 |
| Regional and Lab Schools | 10 |
| Statewide: Deaf & Blind | 3 |
| Private | 884 |
| Total Schools | 3,653 |

Note: There are also over 101,000 individual homeschools across North Carolina.

Source: NC DPI Educational Directory and Demographical Information Exchange (EDDIE); NC DPI Statistical Summary for Private Schools 2022-23; 2023 NC Home School Statistical Summary; NC DPI Education Services for the Deaf and Blind



Public School Units (2023-24)

There are
337 PSUs
in North Carolina
as of August 2023

Public School Units (PSUs) include local education agencies (districts), public charter schools, lab schools, regional schools, and public residential schools.

Source: NC DPI Financial and Business Services

K-12 Traditional Public School District Enrollment (2023-24)

North Carolina has **115** school districts (otherwise known as Local Education Agencies or LEAs).



11,941 Students
Average District Size



5,368 Students
Median District Size

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10

47%

of K-12 traditional public school students attend one of the largest 10 school districts.

Wake County and **Charlotte-Mecklenburg** school districts each enroll more students than the **54 smallest districts combined**.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10



In the 2022-23 academic year, North Carolina had **152,717** home-schooled students. If homeschooling were a district, it would be the second largest district in North Carolina.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile; 2023 NC Home School Statistical Summary



SPOTLIGHT ON:

Restart Schools in North Carolina

Restart Schools are continually low-performing schools that have been granted certain operational flexibilities to improve student outcomes. To qualify, a school must have a School Performance Grade of D or F and a School Growth status of Met or Did Not Meet Expected Growth in at least two of the prior three school years. Under state statute, Restart Schools have flexibility in areas such as teacher licensure, the teacher salary schedule, class size, and school calendar. There are currently 148 Restart Schools in North Carolina.

On average, students in Restart Schools were

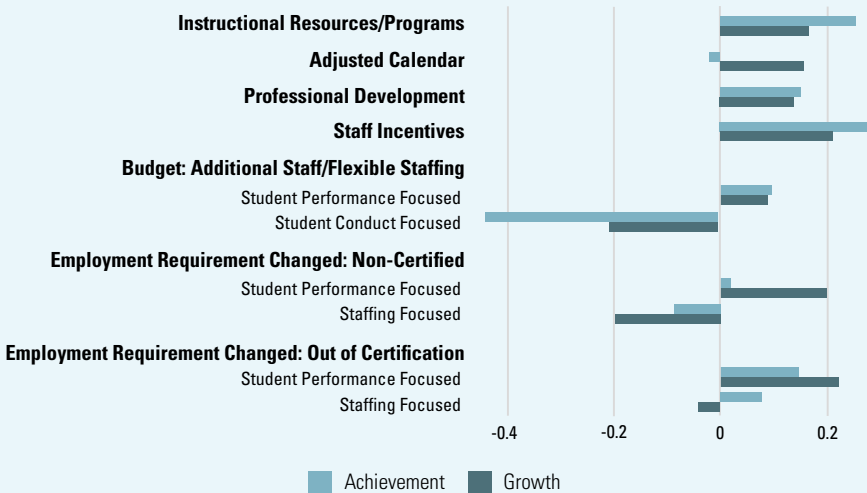
7% closer

to their expected pre-pandemic scores than students in other recurring low-performing schools.

Data from DPI reveal that the longer a school has had Restart Flexibility, the more likely they are to meet or exceed academic gain expectations, as defined by the State Board of Education. For instance, in the 2021-22 school year, 87% of schools that had Restart status for five years met or exceeded academic gain expectations, compared with 59% of schools that had Restart Flexibility for just one year. This positive impact also extended to Restart schools' ability to recover from the pandemic, where Restart schools have outperformed their other continually low-performing school peers. Comparing to the prior year, Restart students experienced 5% and 4% more recovery than their non-Restart peers in Math and ELA, respectively.

A 2024 report on Restart Schools found that school administrators deployed 81 unique strategies to improve student outcomes. The most common strategy was to utilize budget flexibility (142 schools) with 75% of those using budget flexibility to hire additional staff. Importantly, the report found that strategies focused on improving student performance had a greater positive impact on student achievement and growth, as compared to strategies focused on student conduct and school staffing.

Figure 1: Effect of Research Strategies on Student Achievement and Growth (2023)

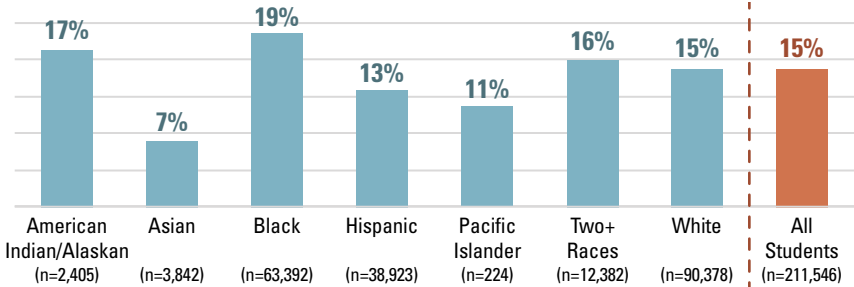


This report examined only the 2022-23 school year. In the years to come, it will be important to continue to track efforts to improve Restart School performance and, specifically, track the strategies that are most effective for students.

Source: NC Statute § 115C-105.37B; NC State Board Policy Manual; NC DPI Office of Learning Recovery & Acceleration - Restart, Learning Loss, and Recovery; NC DPI - Restart Annual Report Summary, August 2023; NC DPI - Restart Pathways: Variations and Test Score Associations

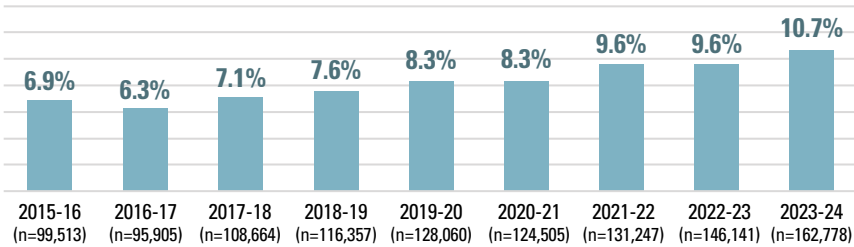


Children Receiving Special Education Services in K-12 Public Schools, by Race/Ethnicity (2022-23)



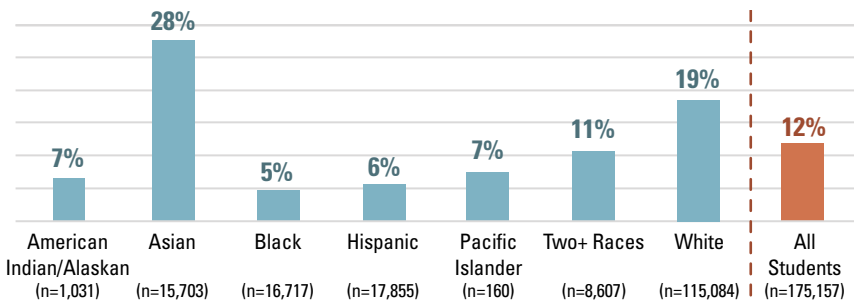
Source: NC DPI Federal Child Count Reporting (April 2023); NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10

English Language Learners in K-12 Public Schools (2015-16 to 2023-24)



Source: Report to the North Carolina General Assembly: Headcount of English Learners 2023-24

Children in Academically and Intellectually Gifted Programs in K-12 Public Schools, by Race/Ethnicity (2022-23)



Source: NC DPI Academically and Intellectually Gifted Child Count, 2023

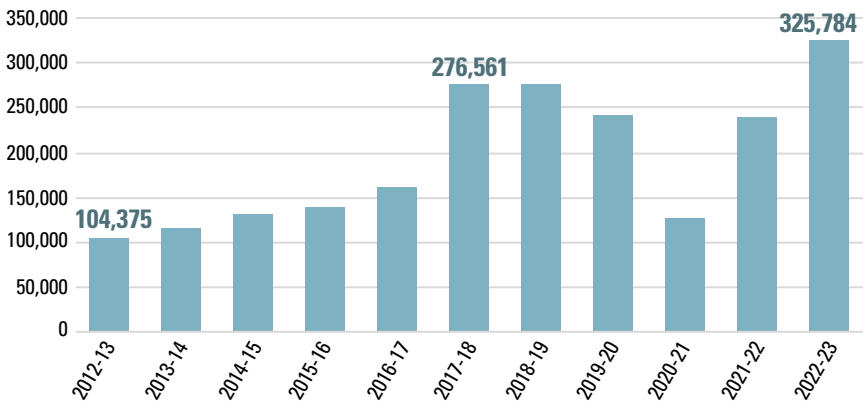


Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE) in North Carolina public schools provides students with academic, technical, and employability skills along with industry-recognized certifications and licenses that have value in local, regional, state, and global economies.



CTE Credentials Earned in K-12 Traditional Public Schools (2011-12 to 2022-23) 🌞

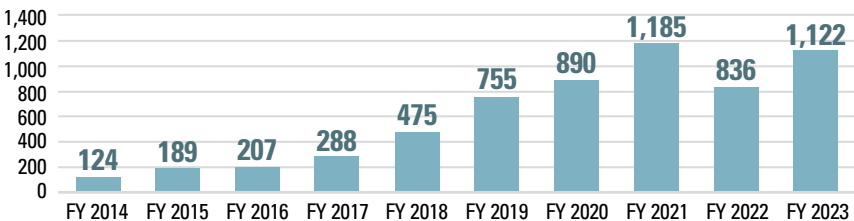


Source: NC DPI CTE Credentials and Reporting Page (2022-23 Credential Report)

Youth Apprenticeship programs prepare participants for entry into Registered Apprenticeships. Many of these programs feature partnerships between industry, K-12 school districts, local community colleges, and other community partners. Youth apprenticeships are designed to connect K-12 CTE programs to adult apprenticeship opportunities through certified career pathways.



K-12 Student Participation in Youth Apprenticeship Program (FY2014 to FY2023) 🌞



Source: ApprenticeshipNC (Data Request)

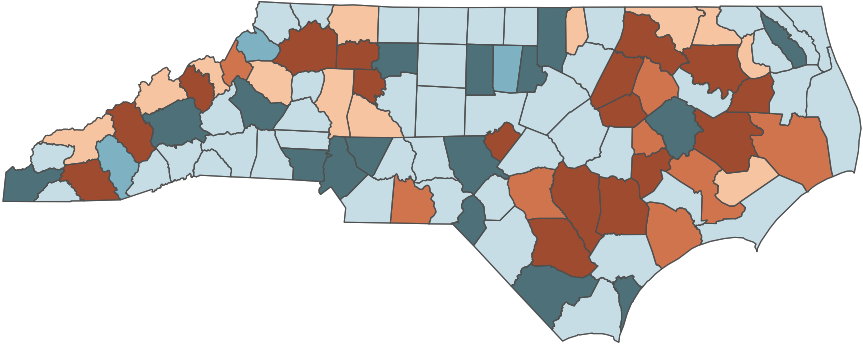


SECTION 3: Schools & Programs

School Systems as Employers

Traditional K-12 public school districts are the single-largest employer in 44 North Carolina counties, a top-3 employer in 85 counties, and a top-5 employer in all 100 counties. Institutes of higher education are the single-largest employer in 3 North Carolina counties, with all three being part of the UNC System.

Largest Employing Industries, by County (2023)



- Health Services
- Higher Education
- K-12 Education
- Manufacturing
- Public Administration
- Other

Source: NC Department of Commerce – Quarterly Census of Employers and Wages, Quarter 2, 2023

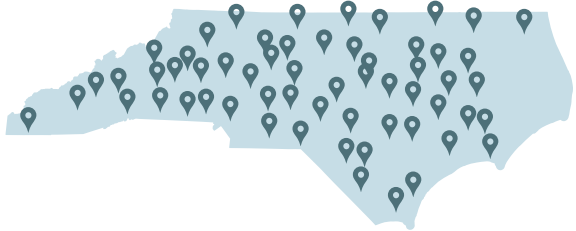




Higher Education Institutions (2024)

North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS)

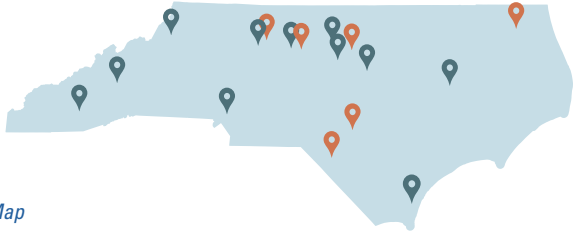
58 Community Colleges



Source: NCCCS Main Campuses

UNC System

17 Public Campuses



Source: UNC System Campuses Map

Independent Colleges and Universities

36 Institutions



Source: NCICU Colleges and Universities

Note: Orange markers indicate the location of Historically Black Colleges or Universities (North Carolina African American Heritage Commission) and Historically American Indian Universities (U.S. Department of Education).

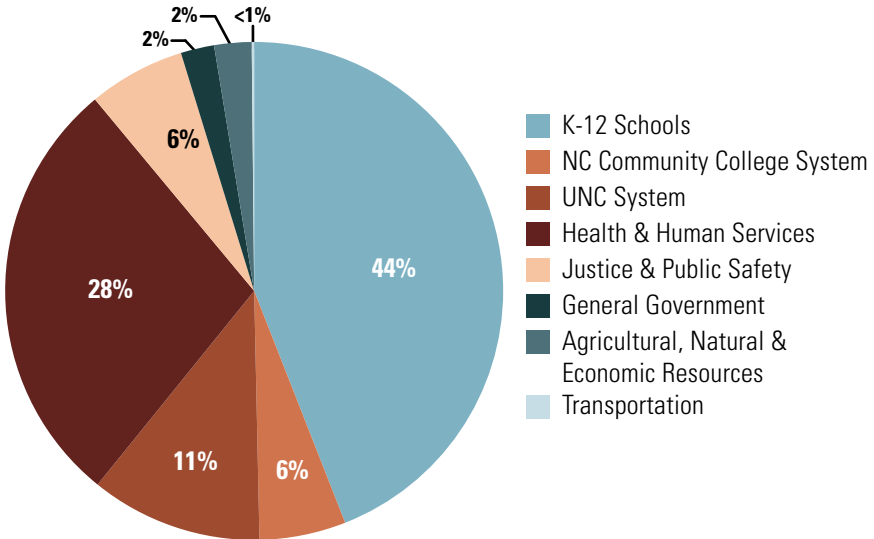
In Fall 2022, **215,338 students** attended North Carolina community colleges (including full-time and part-time students, but not including non-credit workforce enrollment), making it the **5th-largest** community college system in the nation.



SECTION 4: Finance

North Carolina General Fund Appropriations (2023-24)

| | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------------|
| K-12 Schools | \$11,574,558,926 | 44% |
| NC Community College System | \$1,475,740,607 | 6% |
| UNC System | \$2,933,434,743 | 11% |
| Health & Human Services | \$7,394,514,141 | 28% |
| HHS: Division of Child Development & Early Education | \$286,324,794 | 1% |
| Justice & Public Safety | \$1,651,996,803 | 6% |
| General Government | \$570,168,073 | 2% |
| Agricultural, Natural & Economic Resources | \$636,833,127 | 2% |
| Transportation | \$41,412,642 | <1% |
| Total | \$26,278,660,794 | 100% |

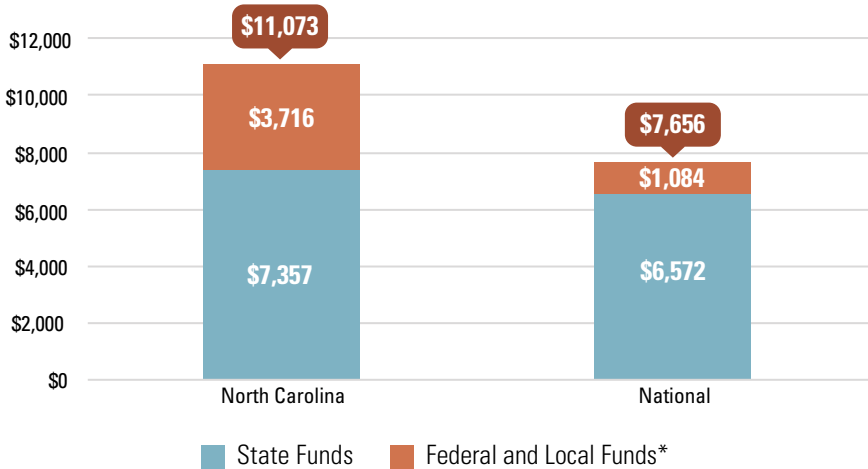


Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management – Certified Budget Fiscal Year 2023-24

62% of the North Carolina General Fund appropriations support K-12 public and higher education.



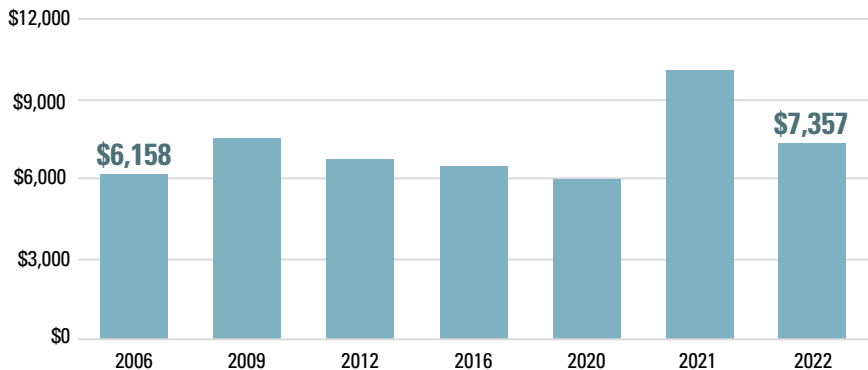
Total Spending per Child Enrolled in State Pre-K Programs, by Funding Source (2022)



*Pre-K programs may receive additional funds from federal or local sources that are not included in this figure. To learn more, check out the [NC Early Childhood Foundation Cost of NC Pre-K Fact Sheet](#).

Source: [NIEER 2022 State of Preschool Report](#)

State Spending per Child Enrolled in NC Pre-K, Inflation-Adjusted to 2022 Dollars (2006 to 2022*)



*Selective years as reported National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Source: [NIEER 2022 State of Preschool Report - NC Profile](#)



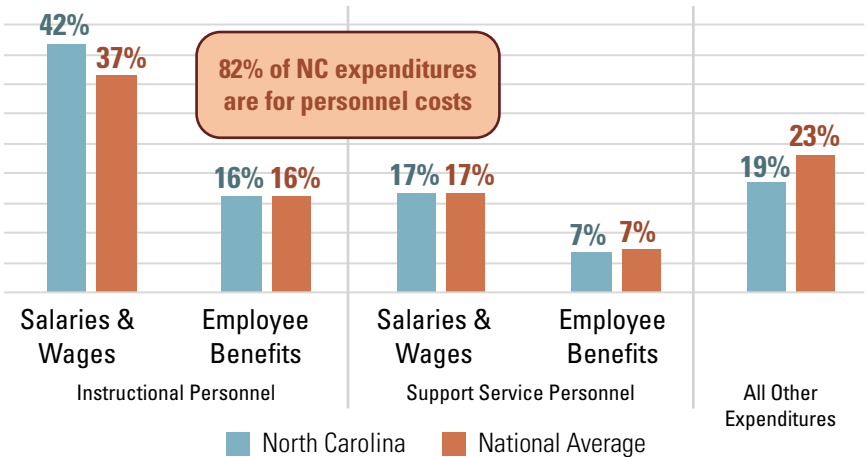
SECTION 4: Finance

Per Pupil Revenue for K-12 Public Education, by Source (FY2021)

| | North Carolina | National Average |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Total Revenue Per Pupil | \$11,592 | \$17,448 |
| State % | \$7,104 (61%) | \$7,909 (45%) |
| Federal % | \$1,457 (13%) | \$1,838 (11%) |
| Local % | \$3,031 (26%) | \$7,702 (44%) |

Source: U.S. Census, 2021 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data, Summary Tables 1 & 19

Distribution of K-12 Public Education Expenditures, by Function (FY2021)



Source: U.S. Census, 2021 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data, Summary Table 6



In North Carolina, **58%** of K-12 expenditures fund the salary and benefits of instructional personnel, compared to **53%** nationally.

Source: U.S. Census, 2021 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data, Summary Table 6



State Education Funding in North Carolina

North Carolina provides a base level of state funding to all districts, determined, in part, by the number of students enrolled, and provides additional state funding to districts based on student needs and district characteristics. In 2023-24, state spending on K-12 education included the following allotments for special circumstances:



Funding for Children
with Disabilities:
\$1.07 Billion



Funding for English
Language Learners:
\$130 Million



Disadvantaged Student
Supplemental Funding:
\$111 Million



Small County
Supplemental Funding:
\$59 Million
(for 30 county school districts)



Low Wealth District
Supplemental Funding:
\$310 Million
(for 78 school districts)

Source: NC DPI 2024 Highlights of the Public School Budget

In 2023, North Carolina ranked 40th in total per pupil funding.*

40th

In 2023, North Carolina ranked 12th for the percentage of education funding provided by the state.

12th

*This ranking is not adjusted for cost of living amongst states and does not include federal COVID funding.

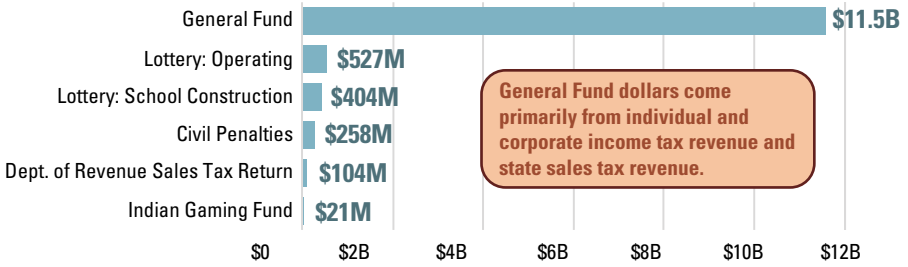
Source: 2023 NEA Rankings and Estimates Report

In 2022-23, total per pupil expenditures ranged from **\$9,524** in Idaho to **\$31,299** in New York. The percent of education funding provided by the state ranged from **27%** in Missouri to **86%** in Vermont.



SECTION 4: Finance

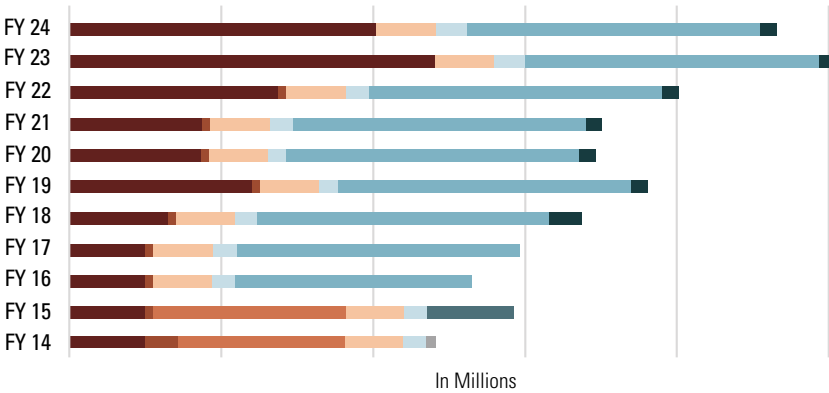
State Revenue Sources for K-12 Public Education (2022-23)



General Fund dollars come primarily from individual and corporate income tax revenue and state sales tax revenue.

Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management FY 2022-23; Current Operations Appropriations Act of 2023

North Carolina Education Lottery: Education-Directed Spending, by Category (FY14-FY24)



- School Construction
- UNC Needs-Based Aid
- Classroom Teachers
- NC Pre-K
- College Scholarships
- Digital Learning
- Non-Instructional Support Personnel
- Teacher Assistants
- School Transportation

Source: Current Operations Appropriations Act of 2023

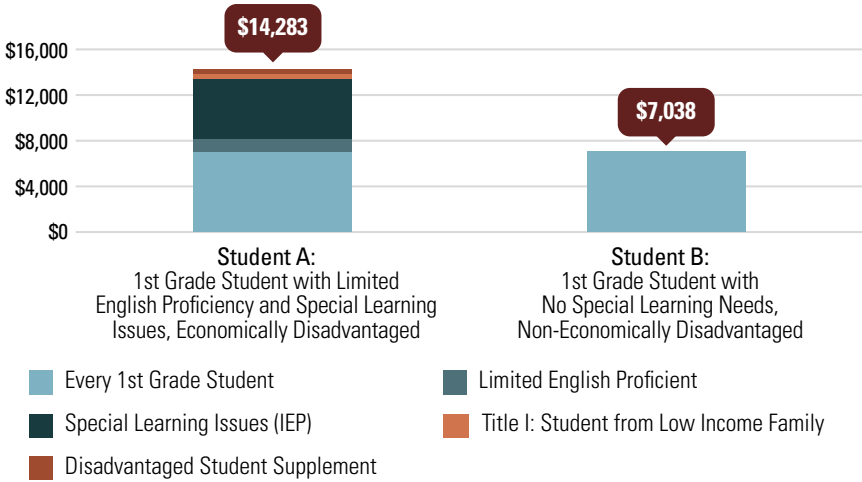


“The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students.”

– Article IX, Section 2, North Carolina Constitution



Example Federal and State per Pupil K-12 Public Education Funding, by Student Characteristic (2023-24)



Note: Data are based on student characteristics and exclude all local funding, as well as any low-wealth and small county supplemental funding from the state.

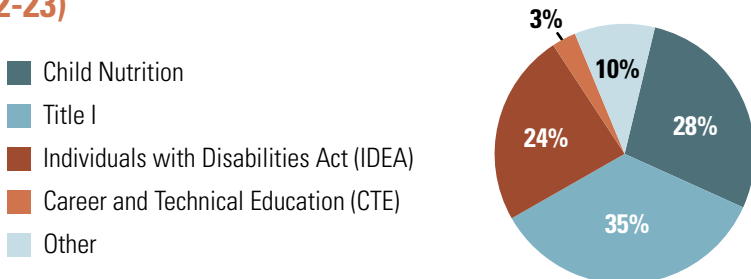
Source: NC DPI 2024 Highlights of the Public School Budget

Federal Education Funding in North Carolina

In most school years, roughly 10% of K-12 public education funding in North Carolina comes from the federal government. However, due to COVID-19 relief funding, federal funding accounted for 18% of K-12 public education funding in North Carolina in 2022-23. Traditionally, federal funds mainly support child nutrition, students with disabilities, and students from low-income households (Title I).

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 27

Distribution of Federal K-12 Public Education Funds (2022-23)



Note: Does not include one-time COVID-19 relief funding.

Source: NC DPI 2024 Highlights of the Public School Budget



SECTION 4: Finance

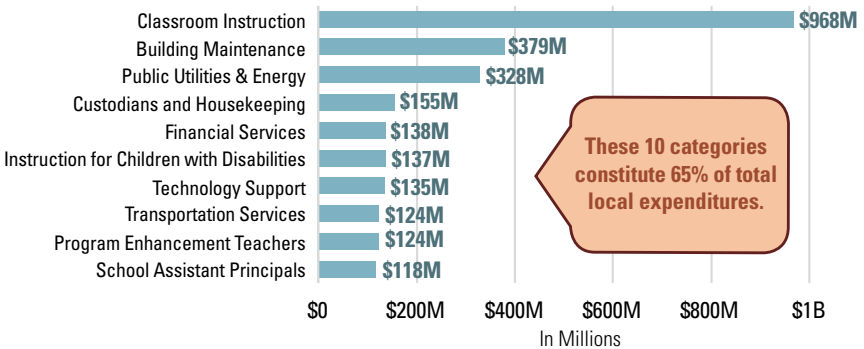
Local Education Funding in North Carolina

In addition to state and federal funds, North Carolina counties provide local funding to supplement K-12 school “operations,” such as funding for teachers and other staff. Local funds are also used for “capital expenditures,” which help build, furnish, and maintain K-12 school buildings.

In 2022-23, local funds for school operations ranged from **\$682 per pupil in Hoke County Public Schools** to **\$8,071 per pupil in Chapel-Hill/Carrboro City Schools**, with a median of **\$2,441 per pupil**. In 2022-23, local dollars funded **26,889 positions** in K-12 public schools, including **6,903 service workers**, **5,409 teachers**, **1,776 teacher assistants**, and **814 assistant principals** across the state.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 16 & 24

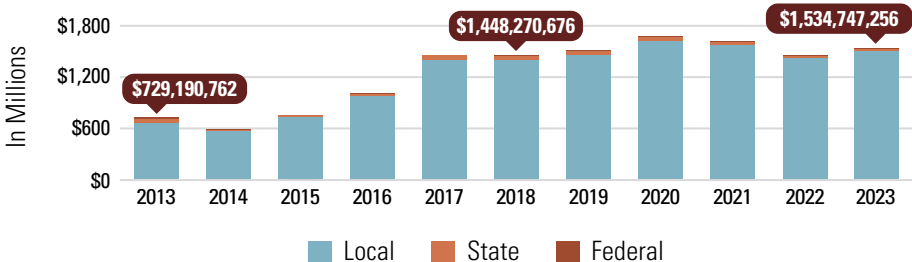
Top-10 Local K-12 Public Education Operating Expenditures (2022-23)



Note: This does not include capital expenditures (see below).

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 27

K-12 Public Education Capital Expenditures, Inflation-Adjusted to 2023 Dollars, by Source (2013 to 2023)

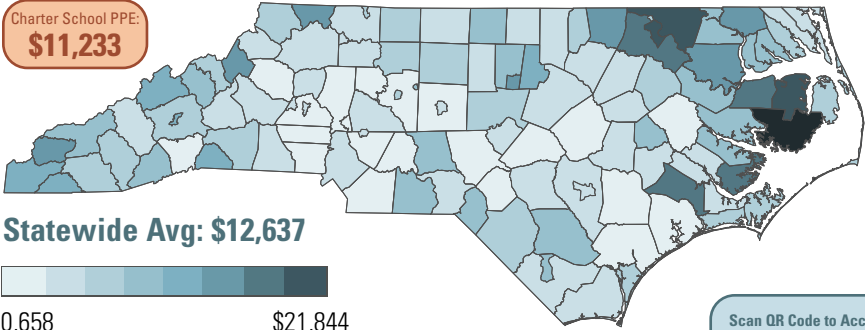


Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 28



Total K-12 Traditional Public Education per Pupil Expenditures, by District (2022-23)

Charter School PPE:
\$11,233



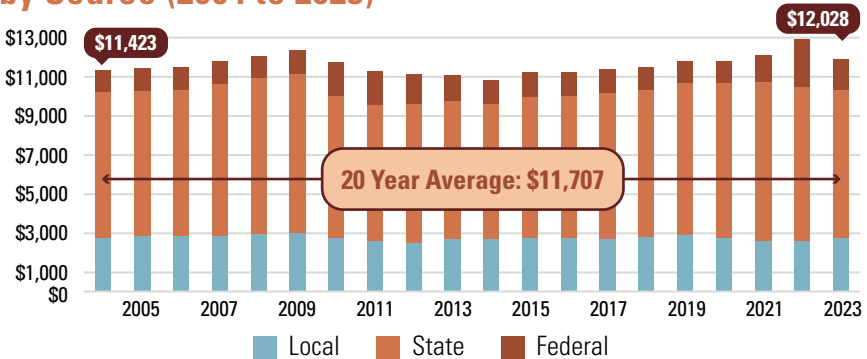
Note: Includes one-time federal COVID relief funding an average of \$60 per pupil in 2020, \$463 per pupil in 2021, \$1,441 per pupil in 2022, and \$1,089 per pupil in 2023.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 24; NC DPI COVID Expenditure and Allotment Data

Scan QR Code to Access Additional PPE Data:



K-12 Traditional Public Education Per Pupil Expenditures, Inflation-Adjusted to 2023 Dollars, by Source (2004 to 2023)



***Includes one-time COVID relief funding, an average of \$60 per pupil in 2020, \$463 per pupil in 2021, \$1,441 per pupil in 2022, and \$1,089 per pupil in 2023.**

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 23; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject

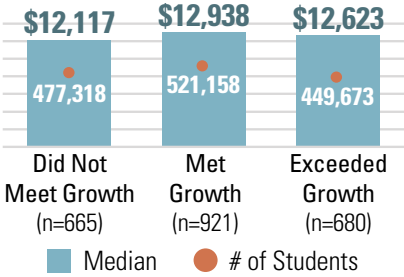
Between 2018 and 2023, inflation-adjusted total-per-pupil expenditures in North Carolina have increased by 4%. This increase is due in part to an influx of one-time federal COVID relief funds. Inflation-adjusted federal and state per pupil expenditures increased by 35% and 10% respectively, while inflation-adjusted local per pupil expenditures decreased by 2%.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 23



SECTION 4: Finance

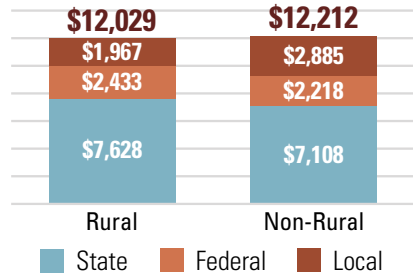
K-12 Traditional Public Schools per Pupil Expenditures*, by School Growth Status (2021-22)



*Includes federal COVID relief funding.

Source: NC DPI School Report Card Data Set; NC DPI School Performance Grades

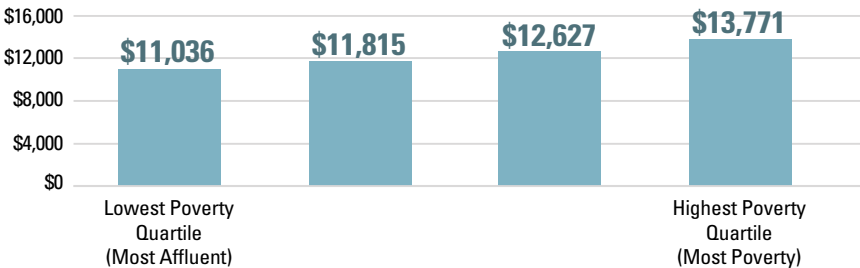
K-12 Traditional Public School per Pupil Expenditures*, by Source and Rural Status (2021-22)



*Includes federal COVID relief funding.

Source: NC DPI School Report Card Data Set; NC DPI EDDIE Database

Median per Pupil Expenditures* in Traditional K-12 Public Schools, by School Poverty Level (2021-22)



*Per pupil expenditures include COVID relief funding.

Note: Schools were sorted by their percentage of economically disadvantaged students and grouped into quartiles such that the number of students was equal across each quartile.

Source: NC DPI School Report Card Data Set

26% Traditional public schools in the highest poverty quartile receive **26% more** per pupil funding than traditional public schools in the lowest poverty quartile (the most affluent schools).

Source: NC DPI School Report Card Data Set



SPOTLIGHT ON:

School Expenditures in North Carolina During the COVID-19 Pandemic

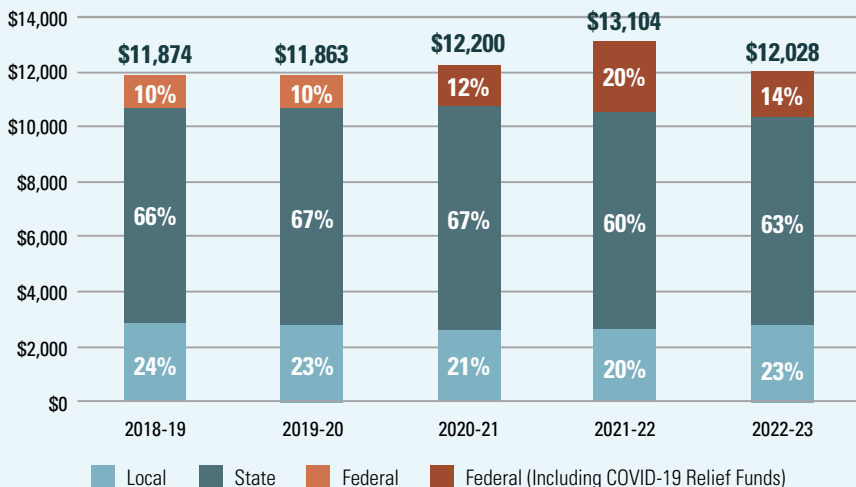
To address both the funding and academic challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government issued over \$190.5 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Funds (ESSER), of which \$5.6 billion was distributed to North Carolina schools.

ESSER Funds and Per Pupil Expenditures

Made in three allotments, ESSER provided state and local education agencies with one-time funds to support schools and school programming during the pandemic and subsequent learning recovery efforts. The last of this funding, known as ESSER III, was distributed at the end of 2021 as part of the *American Rescue Plan*. All ESSER funding must be spent by the end of September 2024 and, although these funds were always understood to be one-time funds, there are concerns about a looming “fiscal cliff” and a potential negative impact on students when funding returns to typical levels.

Beginning in 2020-21, the influx of federal COVID relief funding increased the percentage of North Carolina public school funding that came from the federal government. Typically, federal funds account for 10% of all school funding. This percentage peaked at 20% in 2021-22, before decreasing to 14% in 2022-23.

Figure 1: K-12 Public Education per Pupil Expenditures, Inflation-Adjusted to 2023 Dollars, by Source (2018-19 to 2022-23)



While state per pupil education expenditures have increased every year since 2015, state spending has not kept up with the pace of inflation. As a result, inflation-adjusted state per pupil expenditures have decreased 3% since 2018-19, the school year immediately prior to the pandemic. Inflation-adjusted decreases in state per pupil education funding, in addition to the expiration of federal COVID relief funds, may cause resource challenges for schools in the years ahead.

In addition to funds allocated directly to LEAs, North Carolina allocated

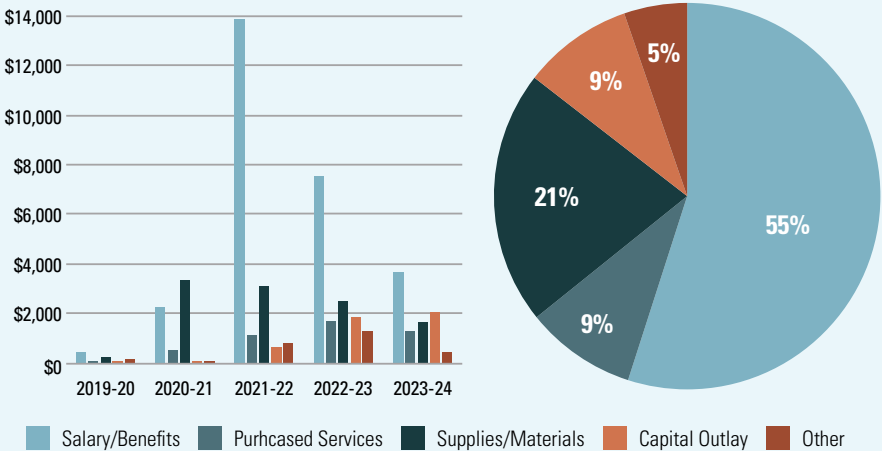
\$19.5 Million to Non-Profits

for services, including Communities in Schools, the YMCA, United Way, and others.

Expenditure of COVID Relief Funding

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) has created an interactive dashboard to track expenditures of COVID relief funding, including funding from ESSER, the COVID Recovery Fund (CRF), the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER), and state funding. Figure 2 examines school and district expenditures by category, illustrating the way funding priorities have shifted over time.

Figure 2: COVID-19 Relief Funds Spending by K-12 Public School Units, by Category (2019-20 to 2023-24)



The majority of COVID relief funding (55%) has been spent on salaries and benefits for school staff with approximately 20% of all funding used to supplement educator contracts in the form of one-time bonus pay, mostly in 2021-22. While salaries and incentives for educators remained the top expense in 2022-23 and 2023-24, many districts have begun to allocate a greater portion of funding towards Capital Outlay (i.e., facilities) to update and maintain infrastructure in school buildings.

As of April 2024, 40 LEAs have 10% or more of their COVID relief funding remaining, while 75 LEAs have less than 10% remaining, including three districts which have spent all of their COVID relief funding.

Looking Ahead

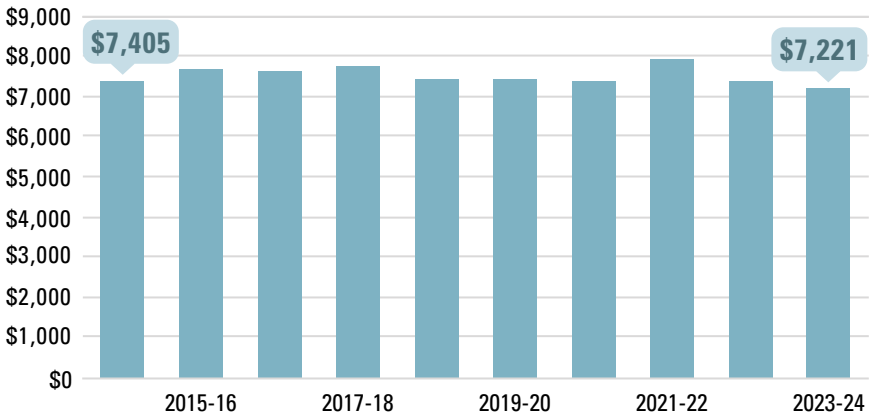
In order to understand how ESSER funds have contributed to learning recovery and academic improvement, NC DPI’s Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR) will continue to investigate the outcomes of programs and policies that were supported by ESSER funding. By evaluating the return on investment, policymakers can better understand how educational supports utilized during the pandemic can be leveraged to improve student outcomes in the future.

Source: OESE ARP ESSER – State and Local Educational Agency (LEA)/School District Plans; ESSER Funding Cliff Toolkit (February 2024); NC DPI Allotment and Expenditure Data Visualization (4/2/24); NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 23



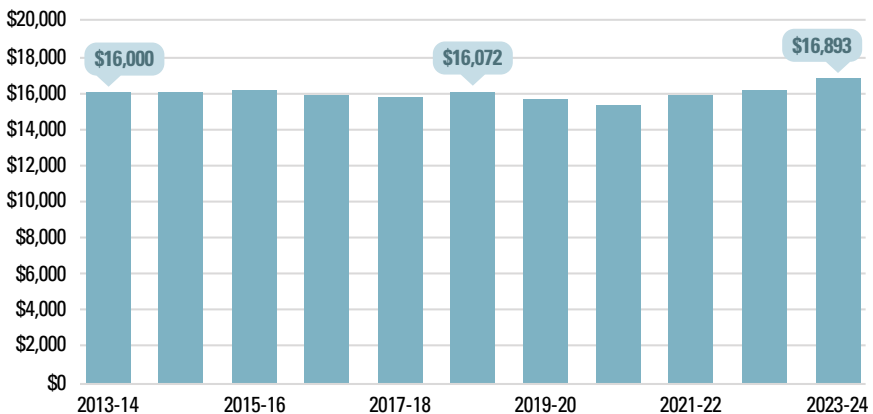


North Carolina Community College System: State Spending per Full-Time Student, Inflation-Adjusted to 2023 Dollars (2014-15 to 2023-24)



Source: North Carolina Community College System – State Aid Allocations and Budget Policies Summary FY 2023-24

UNC System: State Spending per Full-Time Student, Inflation-Adjusted to 2023 Dollars (2013-14 to 2023-24)

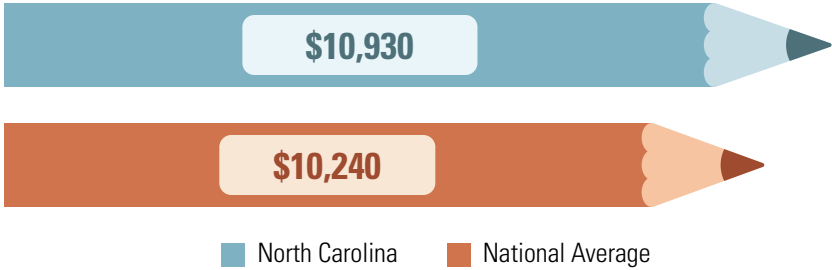


Source: North Carolina General Assembly – Fiscal Research Division (Data Request)



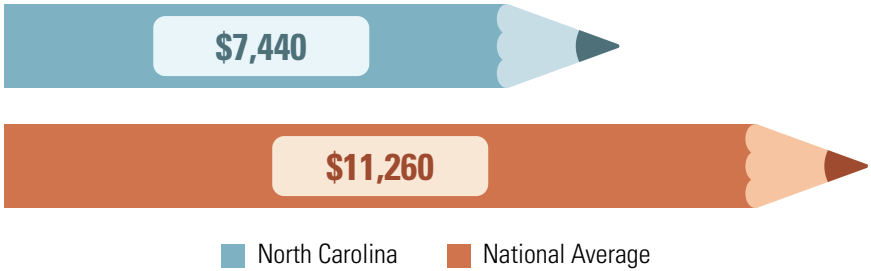
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State and Local Funding for Higher Education per Full-Time Student (2021-22)



Source: College Board – Trends in College Pricing Annual Report

Average In-State Tuition and Fees at Public Four-Year Higher Education Institutions (2023-24)



Source: College Board – Trends in College Pricing Annual Report

In 2021-22, North Carolina ranked 13th nationally for public higher education funding per full-time student.



In 2023-24, average in-state tuition at North Carolina's public four-year institutions was 3rd-lowest nationally.



Source: College Board – Trends in College Pricing Annual Report

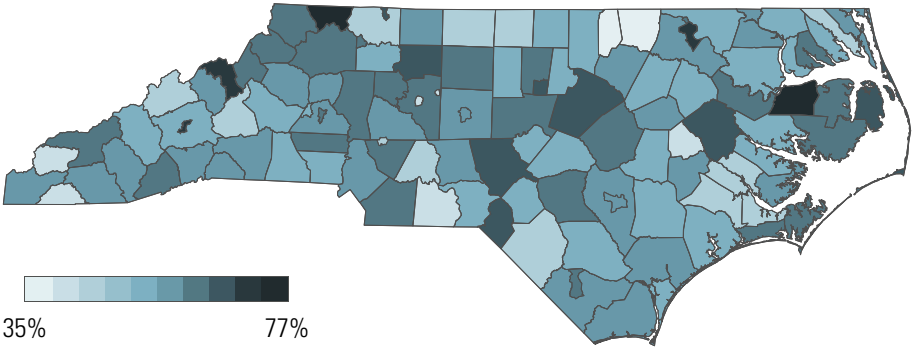


Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) must be filled out by anyone seeking federal aid to help fund their higher education expenses. This is a key metric for educational matriculation and attainment. In North Carolina, FAFSA completions range from between 35% in Vance County and Warren County Schools to greater than 80% in Avery County and Washington County Schools, with a median district completion rate between 50 and 54%.



FAFSA Completion Rates, by District (2023-24 Cycle, through December 2023)



Source: U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid – FAFSA Completion by High School and Public School District (December 2023)



83% of North Carolina public school districts have an estimated FAFSA completion rate of 50% or higher in 2023-24.



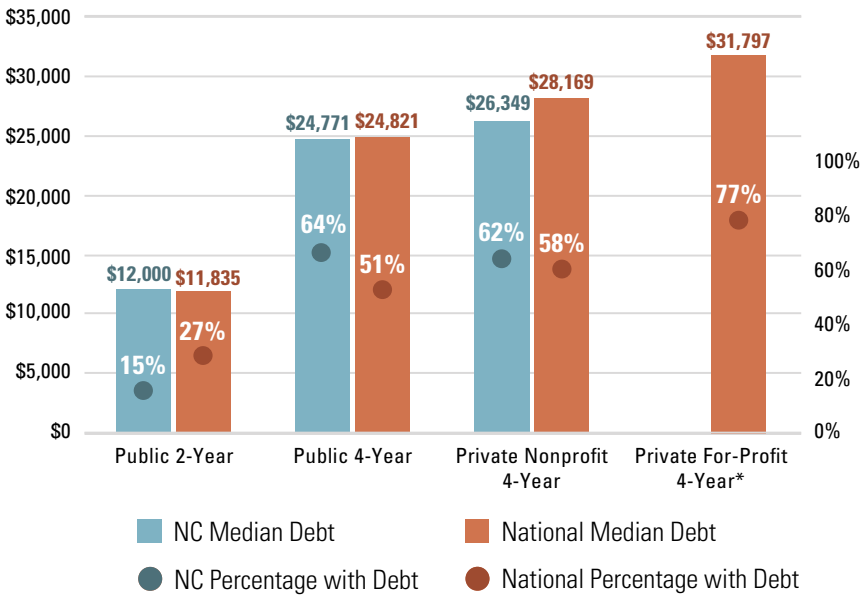
SECTION 4: Finance



“The General Assembly shall provide that the benefits of The University of North Carolina and other public institutions of higher education, as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the State free of expense.”

– Article IX, Section 9, North Carolina Constitution

Median College Debt and Percentage of Graduates with Debt, by Institution Type (Graduating Class of 2020)



* Reporting standards not met for North Carolina.

Source: NCES Powerstats

\$37,485

The Average Federal Student Loan Debt Owed by NC Borrowers

7th

NC’s Cost-of-Living Adjusted Federal Student Loan Debt Ranking Amongst All States

Note: 92% of all student loan debt is a result of federal loans, nationally.

Source: Institute for College Access & Student Success – Student Debt and the Class of 2020



SECTION 5: Achievement

Statewide Assessments for K-12 Public School Students

In addition to the statewide assessments below, local districts often require multiple additional assessments, such as interim or benchmark tests, that provide educators with more information about student growth and achievement across the school year.

| Test | State | Federal |
|--|-------|---------|
| K-3 Reading (Various Assessments) | ✓ | |
| 3rd Grade Beginning-of-Grade Reading | ✓ | |
| 3rd-8th Grade End-of-Grade Tests in Math and Reading, and also in Science for 5th and 8th Grades | | ✓ |
| End-of-Course Tests in Biology, Math I, and English II | | ✓ |
| ACT Testing Suite, Given in 10th and 11th Grades | ✓ | |
| Career and Technical Education (CTE) Assessments in CTE Courses | | ✓ |

Note: Assessments above are given to the majority of students in North Carolina.

Source: *NC DPI Testing and School Accountability, Technical Information*

Achievement Levels on North Carolina End-of-Grade and End-of-Course Tests

Performance on North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) tests is broken down into four achievement levels.

| Achievement Level* | Command of Grade-Level Knowledge and Skills | Indicates Grade-Level Proficiency | On Track for College and Career Readiness |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| 5 | Comprehensive | Yes | Yes |
| 4 | Thorough | Yes | Yes |
| 3** | Sufficient | Yes | No |
| Not Proficient | Inconsistent | No | No |

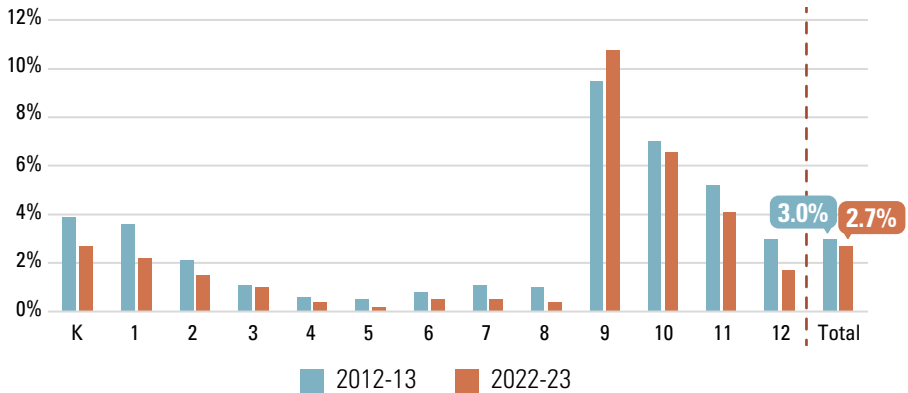
*For NCEXTEND Alternate Assessments, student achievement levels are Level 4, Level 3, and Not Proficient.

**Students performing at this level have a sufficient command of grade-level knowledge and skills, but may need academic support to engage successfully in the next grade level.

Source: *NC DPI Testing and School Accountability, Technical Information*



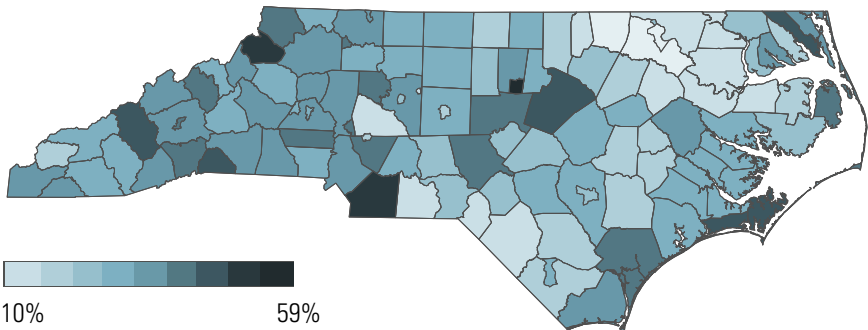
Retention* (Non-Promotion) Rates in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by Grade Level (2012-13 and 2022-23)



*Students were retained at the end of the academic year listed and remained in the same grade for the following school year.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 2

College and Career Readiness* of K-12 Traditional Public School Students, by District (2022-23)



*College and career readiness is indicated by a score of 4 or 5 on all End-of-Grade or End-of-Course assessments.

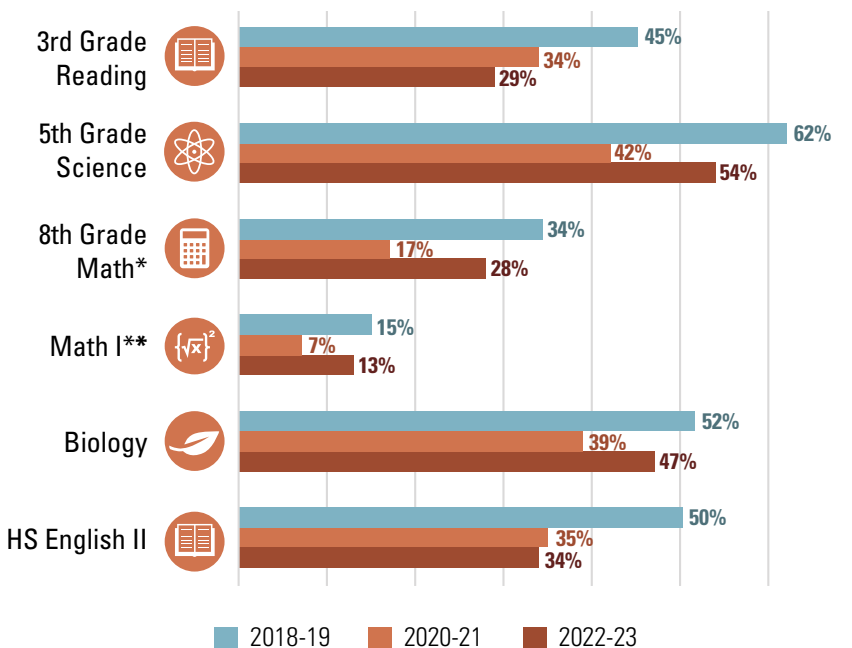
Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data

In 2023, the overall student retention rate in North Carolina traditional public schools was 2.7%. Retention was highest in **grade 9 (10.8%)** and **grade 10 (6.6%)** and lowest in **grades 4-8 (less than 1%)**.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 2



K-12 Public School Students On Track for College & Career, by Selected Subject (2018-19, 2020-21, and 2022-23)



*Represents a composite of the scores of 8th grade students on the Grade 8 Math EOG and the Math 1 EOC.

**Does not include the scores of students who took the Math 1 EOC in 8th grade.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data

29% of 3rd grade students in North Carolina public schools were on track for college and career in reading in 2022-23. 

Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data



SPOTLIGHT ON: Early Literacy in North Carolina

For decades, literacy instruction varied widely in schools across the United States. Many schools used what is called a “Balanced Literacy” approach, which emphasizes surrounding students with literature that they enjoy, with less focus on direct instruction of reading skills. This approach has been shown to be ineffective and, across the nation, states and districts are now shifting towards teaching practices that are aligned with the Science of Reading. The Science of Reading refers to a body of research that details how young students learn to read, including explicit (taught directly rather than implicitly or through discovery) and systematic (in a pre-determined order) instruction on fundamental reading skills like phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary.

North Carolina Legislation and Investments in the Science of Reading

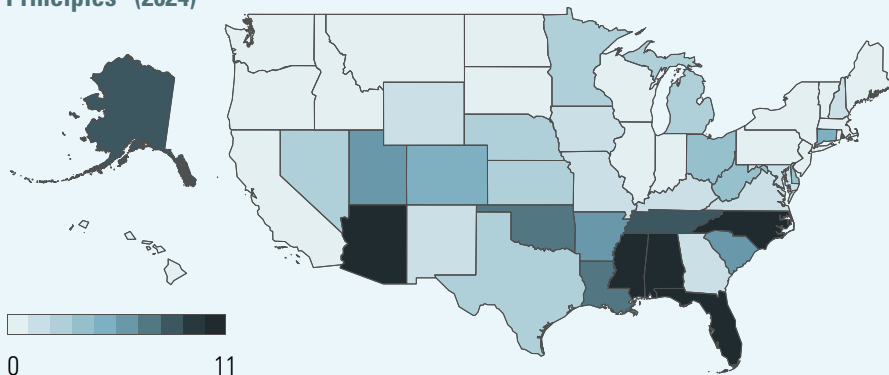
Recognizing the significant impact of early literacy on students’ long-term academic and social outcomes, in 2013, the North Carolina General Assembly established the *Read to Achieve* program to ensure that all 3rd grade students were proficient in reading before being promoted to fourth grade. After several years of implementation, the *Excellent Public Schools Act of 2021* modified *Read to Achieve* and required all public schools to adopt a Science of Reading-aligned approach to reading instruction. The 2021 state budget also appropriated \$37.5 million in federal COVID relief funding to train all elementary school teachers and principals in the Science of Reading. The following year, the 2022 state budget appropriated \$15 million in recurring funding to create one early literacy specialist position in each school district and eight regional early literacy coaches.

Beginning in the summer of 2021, all PreK-5 classroom teachers, special educators, and ELL teachers, as well as one administrator and coach from each elementary school, received Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training, a 160-hour course of study that takes two years to complete and instructs teachers in what literacy skills need to be taught, why, and how to teach them. School districts were placed into three cohorts, with the final cohort completing its training in spring 2024.

The National Landscape

Since 2013, 47 states have passed laws to encourage instructional practices aligned with the Science of Reading, including North Carolina. According to a recent ExcelinEd study of state literacy policies, North Carolina is one of a handful of states leading the nation in the implementation of the *Science of Reading*. The study found that North Carolina has fully implemented 11 of 18 Early Literacy Fundamental Principles, tied for most in the nation, alongside Alabama.

Figure 1: Adoption and Implementation of the 18 Early Literacy Fundamental Principles* (2024)



* Early Literacy Fundamental Principles are outlined in ExcelinEd’s Comprehensive Early Literacy Policy study.

Source: ExcelinEd Early Literacy Policy Map

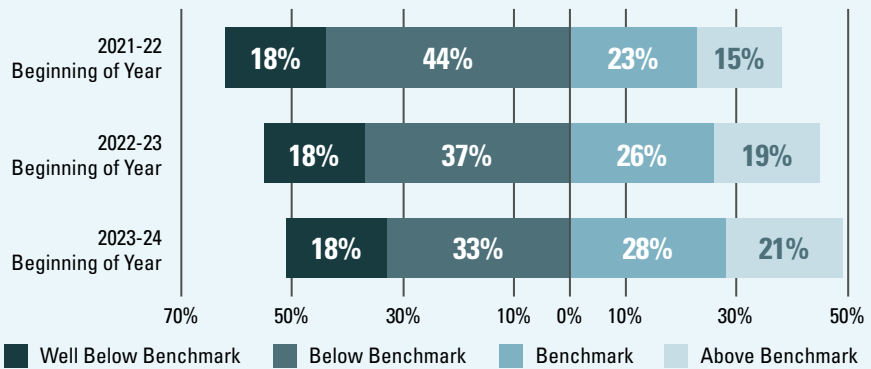
North Carolina earned high marks for training all elementary teachers in the state in the Science of Reading, for the use of a universal screener to test the literacy skills of all students in grades K-3, for providing reading camps to all struggling readers entering grades 1-4, and for requiring educator preparation programs in the state to align coursework to the Science of Reading.

Early Indicators: Impact on Student Achievement

The first year of statewide implementation of Science of Reading-focused policies was the 2022-23 school year. NC Department of Public Instruction officials have stated that they will likely have a full understanding of the impact of these policies in 2026-27 when students who are in kindergarten in 2023-24 reach 3rd grade.

Evidence from early literacy screeners of students in grades K-3 shows year-over-year increases in the percentage of students who are “on track,” with 49% of K-3 students at or above the benchmark in 2023-24, compared to just 38% in 2021-22. Because the Science of Reading implementation began after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult at this time to determine the extent to which improved student performance is the result of Science of Reading-aligned instructional practices, given that other interventions have been deployed related to overall learning recovery efforts. In order to measure the full impact of North Carolina’s early literacy efforts, it will be important to examine student results on End-of-Grade reading assessments in grades 3-8, and to continue to monitor the early acquisition of literacy skills of students in grades K-2.

Figure 2: Students in Grades K-3 “On Track” on DIBELS 8 Universal Early Literacy Screener in North Carolina Public Schools (2021-22 to 2023-24)



What Comes Next?

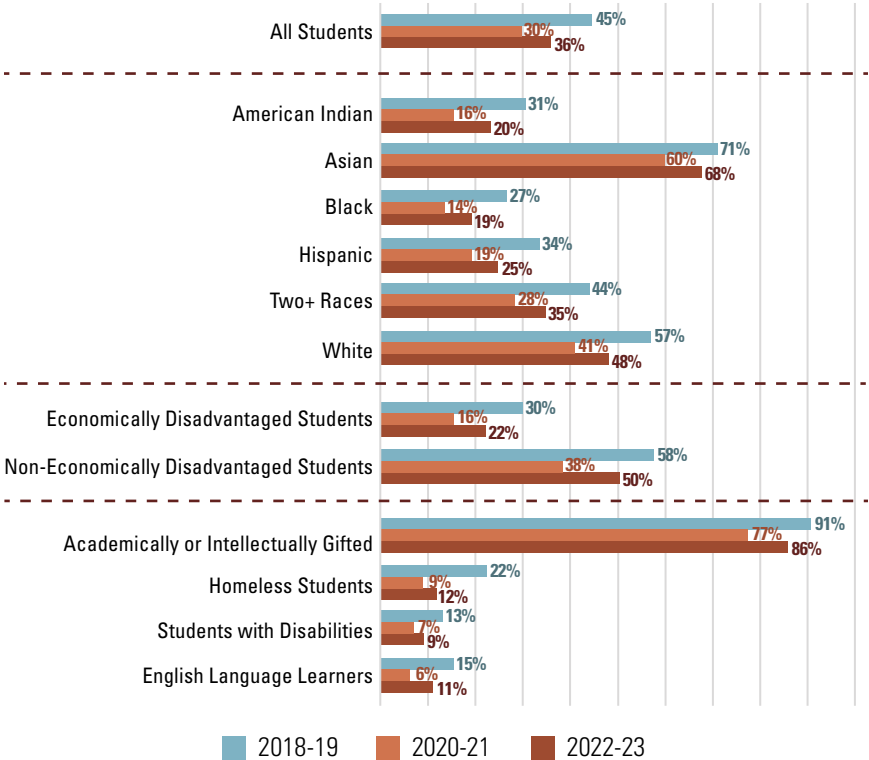
Maximizing the impact of North Carolina’s investment in early literacy will depend upon the coordinated efforts of NC DPI and local school districts, including:

- Strategic deployment by school districts of Literacy Intervention funding, which can be used to pay for literacy interventions for struggling readers (including summer reading camps), provide signing and performance bonuses for reading teachers, and provide LETRS training for new teachers in the district.
- Identifying and purchasing high-quality curricular materials that are aligned with the Science of Reading, and then training teachers to effectively use those materials.
- Identifying and sharing best practices for school- and district-level early literacy curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development to encourage the adoption of evidenced-based best practices statewide. For instance, Advanced Teaching Roles schools can leverage the leadership capacity of advanced roles teachers to support whole-school implementation of Science of Reading-based instructional strategies and curriculum.

Source: *ExcelinEd Early Literacy Policy Map; NC DPI Report to the State Board of Education - 2023-24 Early Grade Literacy Proficiency; NC DPI LETRS Implementation, 2021-2025*



College and Career Readiness (CCR) of K-12 Traditional Public School Students, by Student Subgroup (2018-19, 2020-21, and 2022-23) 🌟



Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data

College and Career Readiness Achievement Gap (2022-23)

Gap between White and Black students:

29 PERCENTAGE POINTS

Gap between White and Hispanic students:

23 PERCENTAGE POINTS

Gap between ED* and Non-ED students:

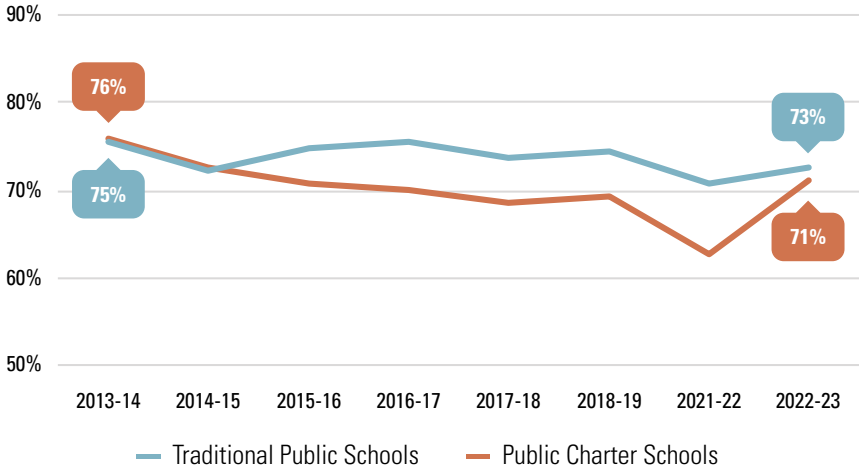
28 PERCENTAGE POINTS

*Economically disadvantaged

Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data



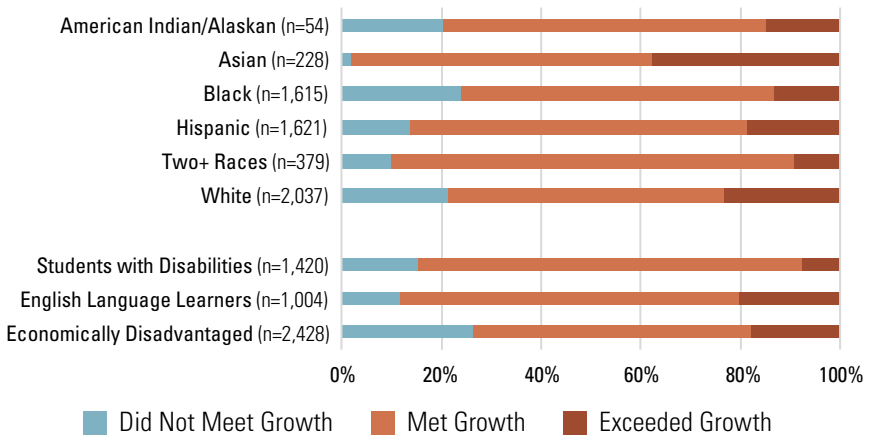
K-12 Public Schools Meeting or Exceeding Expected Student Growth, by School Type (2013-14 to 2022-23) 🌟



Note: School performance grades were not calculated in 2019-20 or 2020-21.

Source: NC DPI Performance and Growth of NC Public Schools 2022-23 Annual Testing Report

Distribution of Academic Growth for K-12 Public Schools, by Student Subgroup (2022-23)

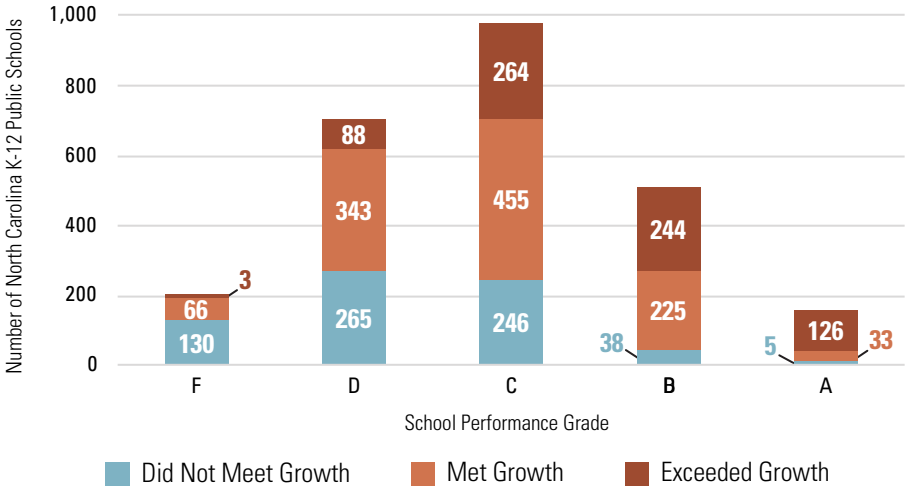


Note: n = the number of schools with 30 or more students in the indicated subgroup.

Source: NC DPI Performance and Growth of NC Public Schools 2022-23 Annual Testing Report

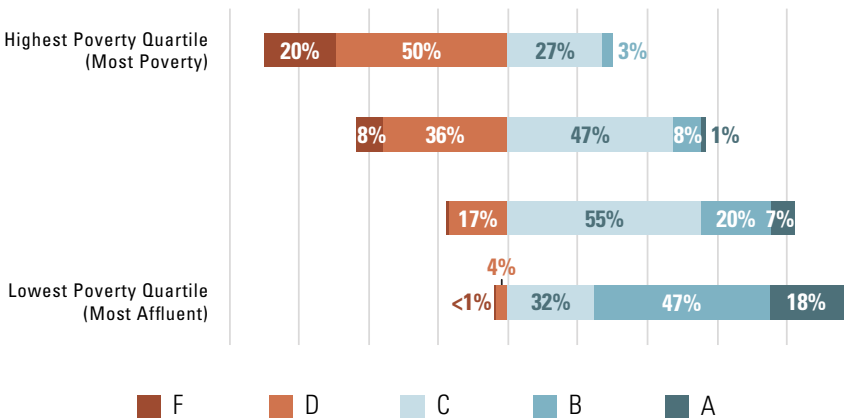


K-12 Public School Performance Grades, by Student Academic Growth (2022-23)



Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Performance Grades

School Performance Grades, by School Poverty Level (2022-23)



Note: Schools were sorted by the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and grouped into quartiles such that the number of schools was equal across each quartile.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Performance Grades



National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2022)

All states participate in NAEP, making it the most comprehensive measure of K-12 student achievement, trends, and state rankings across the nation. For more detailed data visit: www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile and www.NCEdFacts.org.

| | | % of Students At or Above Proficient | | |
|--|--------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Grade | Subject Area | North Carolina | National Public Average | Highest Proficiency Rate |
| 4th | Reading | 32% | 32% | 43% (MA) |
| 4th | Math | 35% | 35% | 44% (WY) |
| <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #ccc;"/> | | | | |
| 8th | Reading | 26% | 29% | 42% (NJ) |
| 8th | Math | 25% | 26% | 35% (MA) |

Note: Use caution when interpreting aggregated student achievement data. NAEP exams are taken by a representative sample of all students. The makeup of the student population – including the percentages of economically disadvantaged students, students receiving special education services, and English learners – varies from state to state, and the performance of student subgroups is masked by aggregated achievement data.

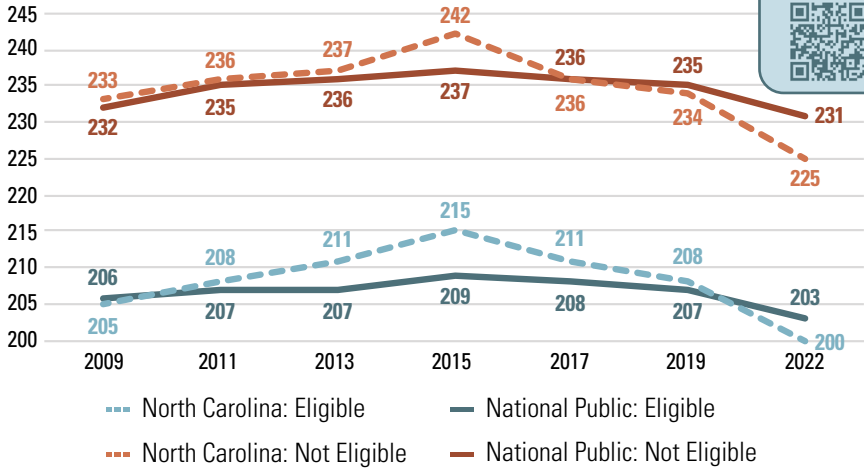
Source: [NAEP Data Explorer](#)

32% of North Carolina 4th grade students met proficiency standards on the 2022 NAEP reading assessment.



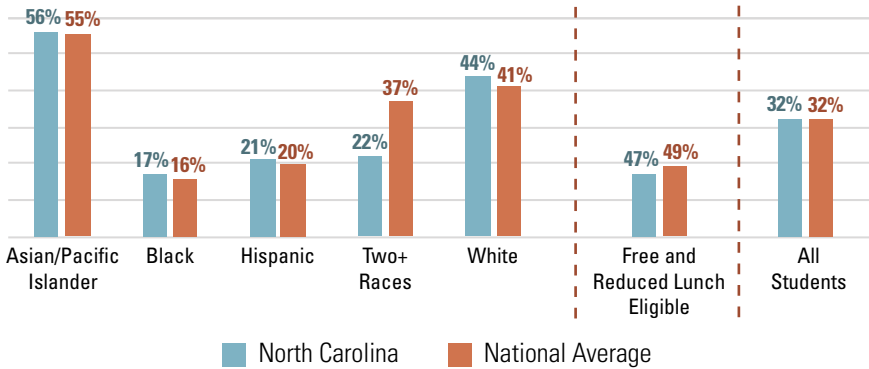
NAEP 4th Grade Reading Proficiency, by Free and Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility (2009 to 2022)

Scan QR Code for Additional NAEP Analysis:



Source: NAEP Data Explorer

NAEP 4th Grade Reading Proficiency, by Student Subgroup (2022)



Note: There were not enough American Indian students tested in North Carolina to meet reporting thresholds. Nationally, 19% of American Indian/Alaska Native students scored at or above proficient.

Source: NAEP Data Explorer

25% of North Carolina 8th grade students met proficiency standards on the 2022 NAEP math assessment.

Source: NAEP Data Explorer



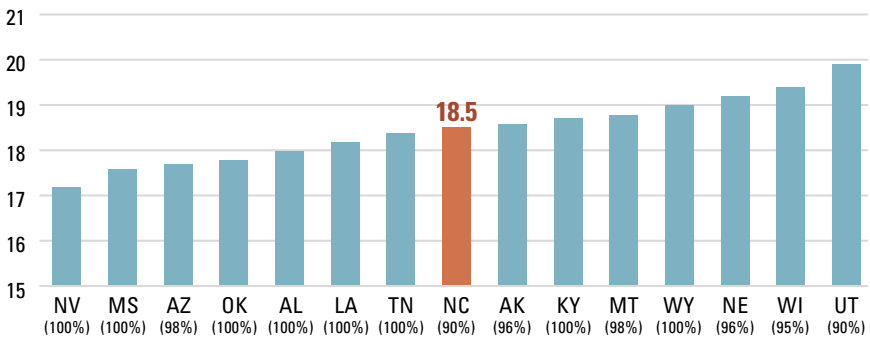
SECTION 5: Achievement

American College Testing (ACT)

The ACT and ACT WorkKeys assessments are used to measure college and career-preparedness among high school students in North Carolina public schools. All 11th grade students are required to take the ACT. All 12th grade students with a Career and Technical Education (CTE) concentration also take the ACT WorkKeys career readiness assessment.



Average ACT Composite Score for States with 90% or Greater Participation* (Graduating Class of 2023)



*State participation percentages in parentheses.

Source: ACT – Average ACT Scores by State Graduating Class of 2023



In 2022-23, 41% of 11th grade students in North Carolina scored above 19 on the ACT, which is the minimum entry score required for admission into UNC-System institutions. The UNC System minimum entry score increased from 17 to 19 in 2022.

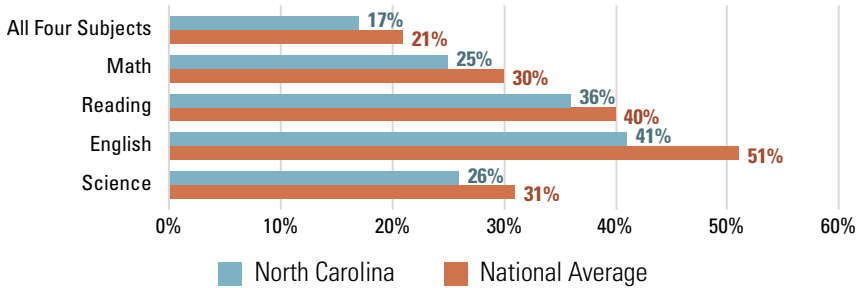
Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data

62% of high school seniors with a CTE concentration earned at least a Silver Career Readiness Certificate on the ACT WorkKeys assessment in 2022-23.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data

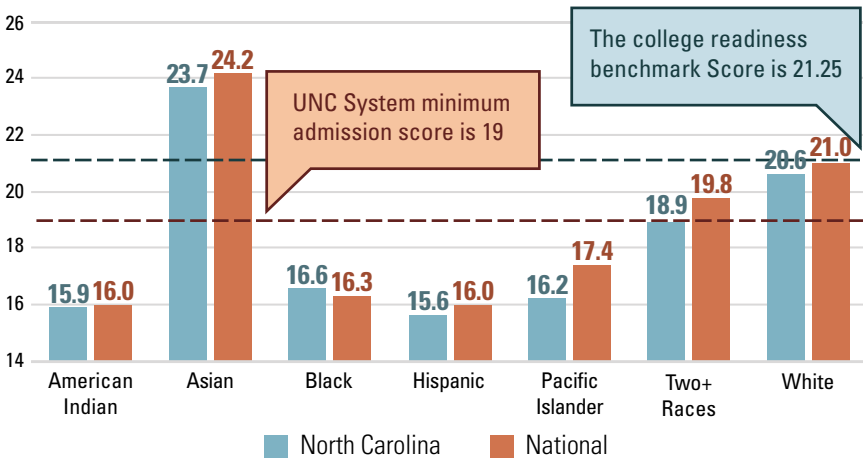


High School Students Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks on the ACT, by Subject Area (Graduating Class of 2023)*



Source: ACT High School Graduating Class Data Visualization Tool

Average ACT Composite Score, by Race/Ethnicity (Graduating Class of 2023)*



Source: ACT High School Graduating Class Data Visualization Tool

*North Carolina requires all 11th-grade students to take the ACT. In many other states, the test is elective and typically is taken by a more college-going student population

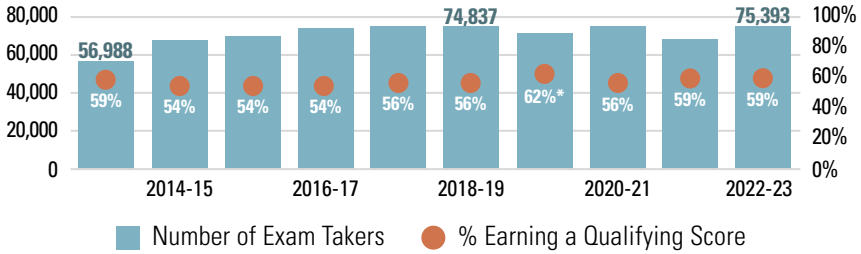
Only **23%** of economically disadvantaged students had a 19 or higher ACT composite score in 2022-23, compared to **54%** of non-economically disadvantaged students.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data



SECTION 5: Achievement

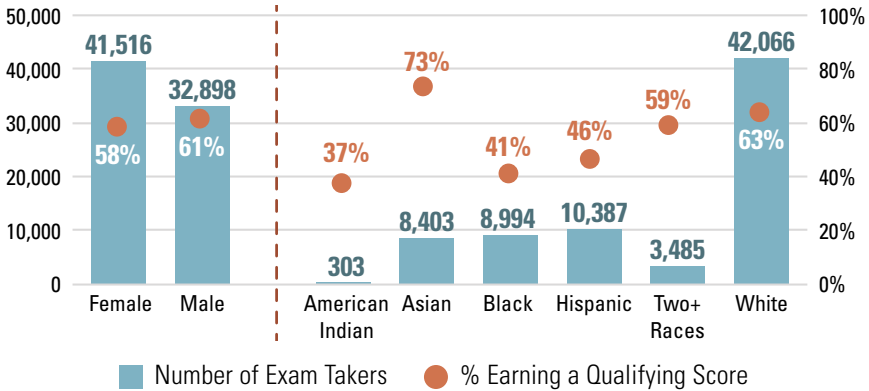
Advanced Placement (AP) Exam Participation and Percentage Earning a Qualifying Score in K-12 Public Schools (2013-14 to 2022-23)



*AP Exams were taken at home in 2019-20.

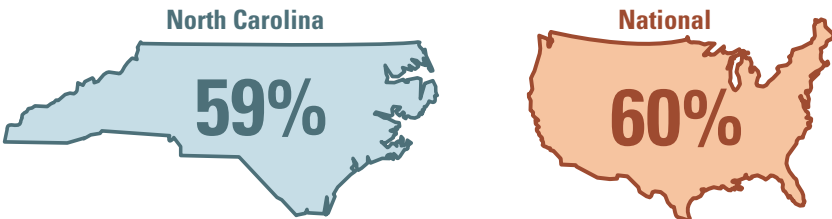
Source: NC DPI SAT and AP Reports

AP Exam Participation and Percentage Earning a Qualifying Score in K-12 Public Schools, by Student Subgroup (2022-23)



Source: NC DPI SAT and AP Reports

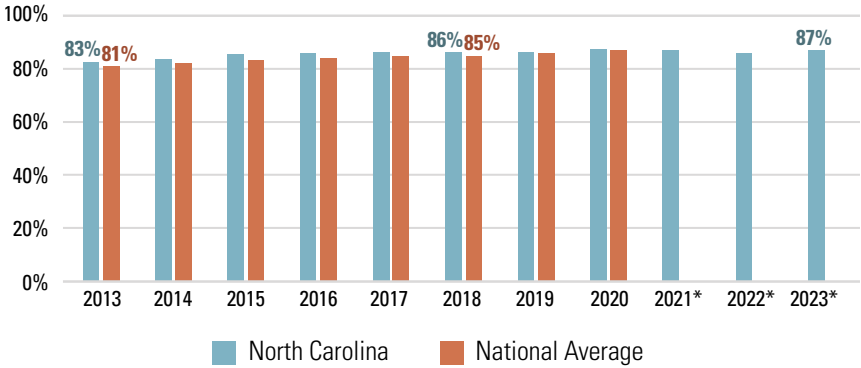
AP Exams Receiving a Qualifying Score (2022-23)



Source: NC DPI SAT and AP Reports



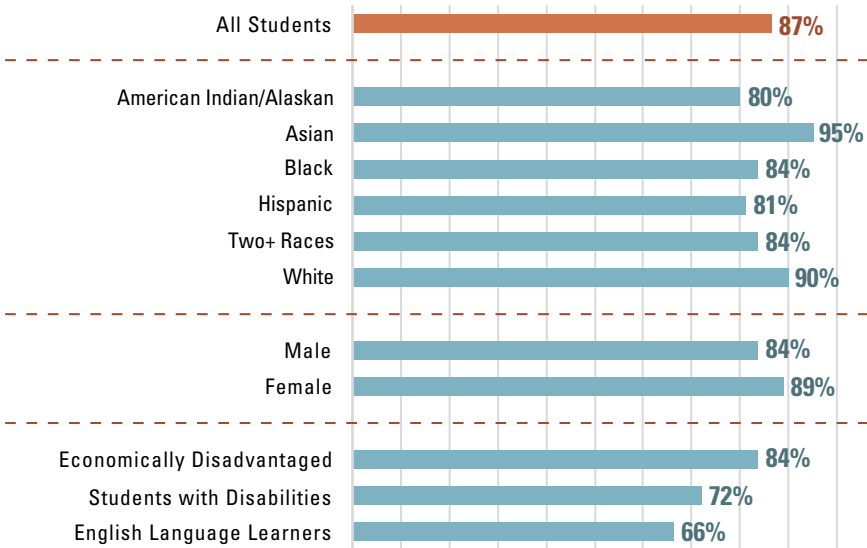
K-12 Public High School Graduation Rates (Classes of 2013 to 2023)



*National averages are not yet available.

Source: NC DPI Testing and School Accountability – 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate Report; NCES Digest of Education Statistics, Table 219.46

K-12 Public High School Graduation Rates, by Student Subgroup (Class of 2023)



Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data



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High School Diploma Integrity

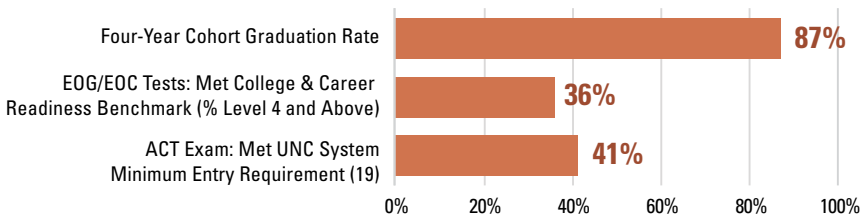
The four-year cohort graduation rate in North Carolina public schools increased from **77%** in 2010 to **87%** in 2023. The integrity of North Carolina’s high school diploma is called into question when high school graduation rates are compared with ACT scores and End-of-Course exam proficiency. The majority of students graduate without achieving college and career ready standards in math, English, and biology, and without meeting the minimum ACT score required for admission into UNC System universities, with greater disparities for economically disadvantaged students.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data

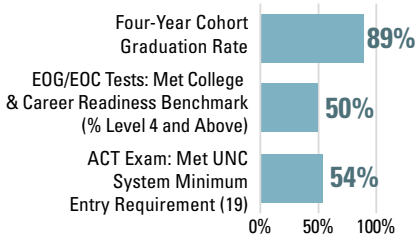


Public High School Graduation Rates vs. Postsecondary Readiness, by Student Subgroup (Graduating Class of 2023)

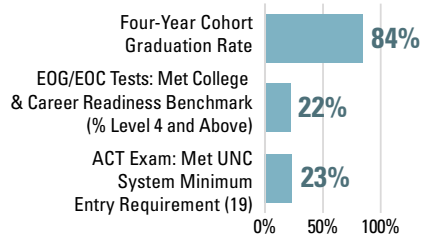
All Students



Non-Economically Disadvantaged Students



Economically Disadvantaged Students



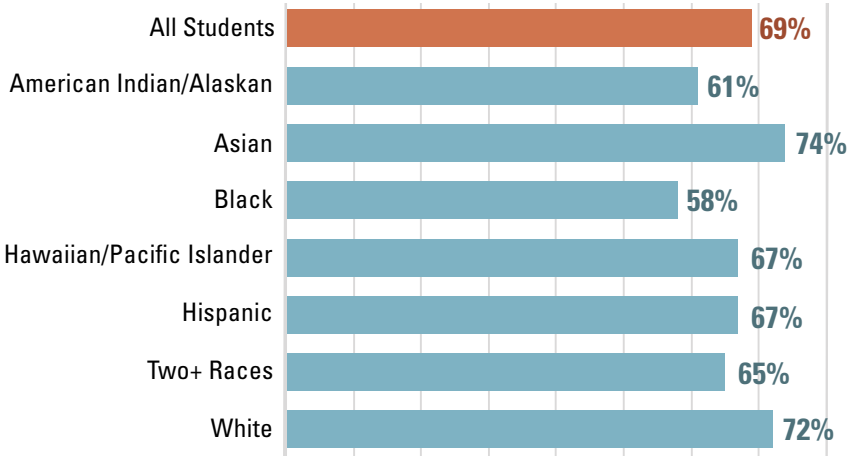
Source: NC DPI Accountability Services Division – School Assessment and Other Indicator Data

In 2022, female students had a 4-year graduation rate of **89%** and a college enrollment rate of **42%**, while male students had a 4-year graduation rate of **83%** and an enrollment rate of **34%**.

Source: myFutureNC Data Dashboards – Career & College Access



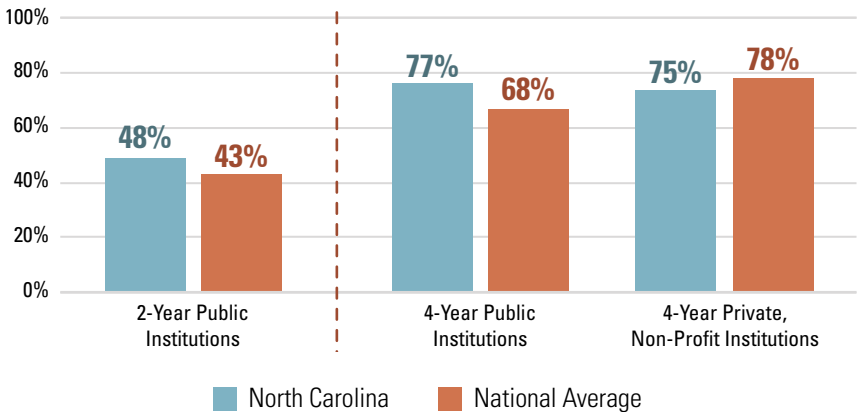
First Year Progression Rate* in the North Carolina Community College System, by Race/Ethnicity (Fall 2021)



*Percentage of first-time credential-seeking students who graduate prior to or are enrolled in postsecondary education during the subsequent fall term.

Source: North Carolina Community College System Analytics and Reporting

Six-Year Higher Education Graduation Rates (Fall 2017 Cohort)

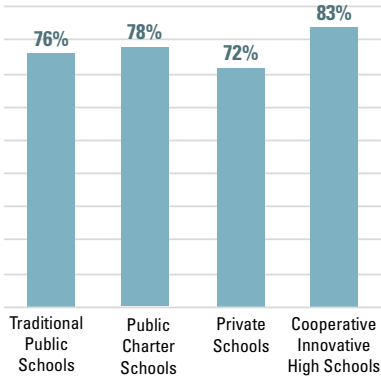


Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center – Completing College National and State Reports 2023



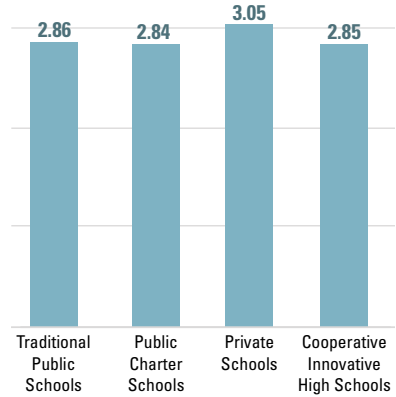
SECTION 5: Achievement

UNC System Acceptance Rates, by Incoming High School Type (Fall 2023)



Source: UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards

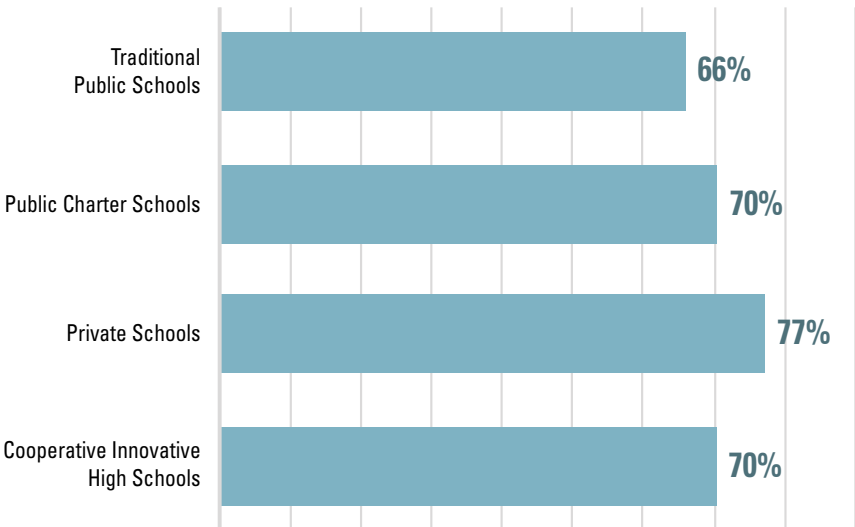
UNC System First Year GPA, by Incoming High School Type (Fall 2022)



Source: UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards



UNC System Six-Year Graduation Rates, by Incoming High School Type (2017 Cohort)



Source: UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards



UNC System Enrollment and Six-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time Students Attending Full-Time (2017 Cohort)

| | Enrollment | Graduation Rate |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Appalachian State University | 3,302 | 73% |
| East Carolina University | 4,312 | 62% |
| Elizabeth City State University | 341 | 48% |
| Fayetteville State University | 662 | 35% |
| NC A&T State University | 2,285 | 55% |
| NC Central University | 1,264 | 46% |
| NC State University | 4,648 | 85% |
| UNC Asheville | 647 | 55% |
| UNC-Chapel Hill | 4,355 | 92% |
| UNC Charlotte | 3,355 | 68% |
| UNC Greensboro | 2,768 | 58% |
| UNC Pembroke | 1,022 | 45% |
| UNC School of the Arts | 172 | 80% |
| UNC Wilmington | 2,137 | 71% |
| Western Carolina University | 1,980 | 59% |
| Winston-Salem State University | 933 | 49% |
| UNC System Total | 34,522 | 69% |

Source: *UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards*

At **92%**, UNC-Chapel Hill has the highest six-year graduation rate within the UNC System.

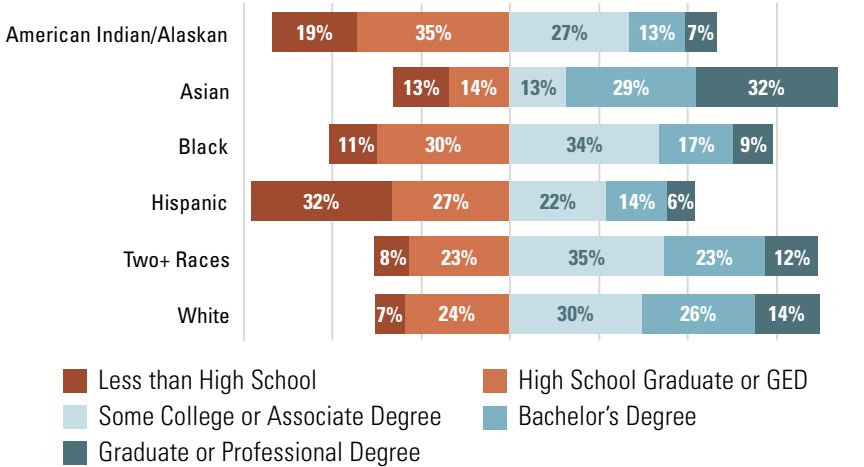
Source: *UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards*



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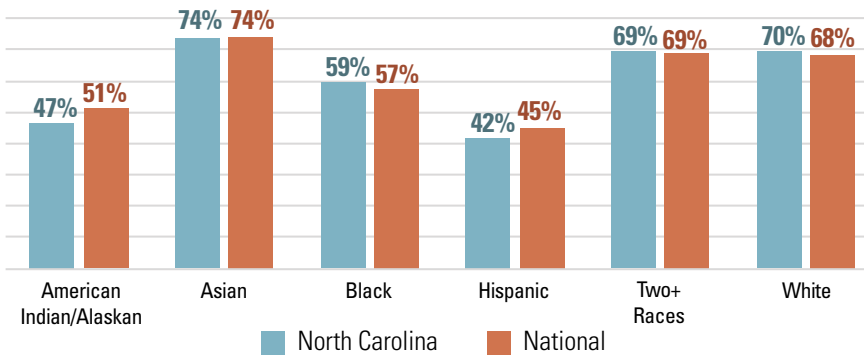
Educational Attainment of Adults Ages 25 and Older, by Race/Ethnicity (2022)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2022), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201



Adults Ages 25 and Older with Any Postsecondary Education, by Race/Ethnicity (2022)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2022), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201

32%

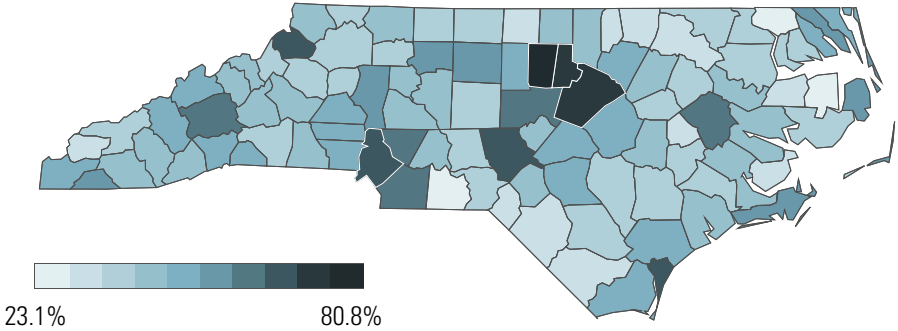
of Hispanic adults and 11% of Black adults over the age of 25 have less than a high school diploma, compared to 7% of White adults.



SECTION 5: Achievement



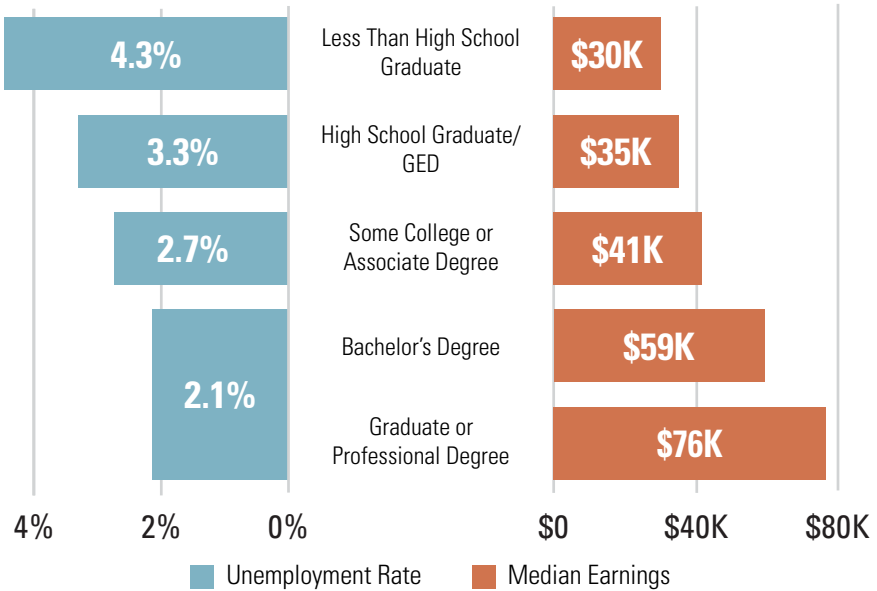
Percentage of Adults Ages 25 to 44 with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, by County (2022)



Source: myFutureNC Data Dashboards – Educational Attainment in North Carolina



Unemployment Rate and Median Earnings of Adults Age 25 and Older, by Educational Attainment (2022)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2022), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B20004; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022 Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment – Table 15



Our Vision

At BEST NC, we envision a North Carolina in which every student graduates with the knowledge, skills and behaviors to succeed in a competitive global economy.

BEST NC's mission is to unite an engaged and informed business perspective to build consensus toward dramatically transforming and improving education in North Carolina.

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