

FACTS & FIGURES

EDUCATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

June 2026

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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Table of Contents



Children & StudentsPages 4-17

Who goes to school in North Carolina? Where do they go to school? How has this changed over time?

Spotlight On: The North Carolina Opportunity Scholarship Program...10-11



Educators.....Pages 18-34

Who is teaching in North Carolina, pre-k through postsecondary? How do teachers enter the profession? How are educators compensated?

Spotlight On: Understanding Teacher Pay.....30

Spotlight On: The North Carolina Principal Recruitment Supplement Program (PRSP).....33



Schools & Programs.....Pages 35-41

How many schools are in North Carolina? Where do students go to school from pre-k to postsecondary? What schooling options do students have?

Spotlight On: K-12 Population Shifts.....39



FinancePages 42-56

How is education paid for in North Carolina? How is funding distributed? Are there funding inequities?

Spotlight On: Categorical Allotments for K-12 Education.....46-47



Achievement.....Pages 57-75

How are students performing on state and national assessments? At what rate do North Carolina students graduate from high school and postsecondary programs? How are students performing in higher education?

Spotlight On: Advanced Teaching Roles™ and Student Growth in North Carolina.....62

A Note About Icons:

Throughout *Facts & Figures*, graphs, tables, and other assets may be denoted by one or more of the three 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.



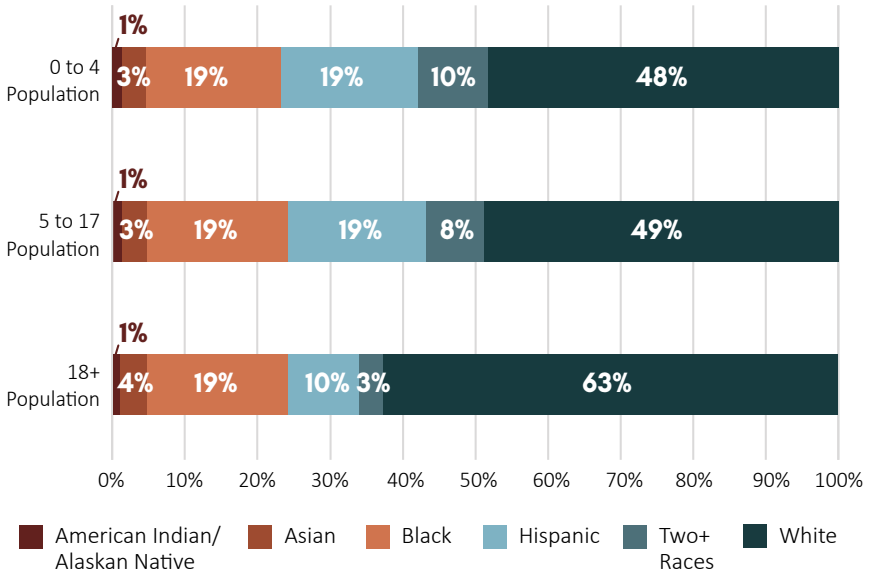
myFutureNC

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.



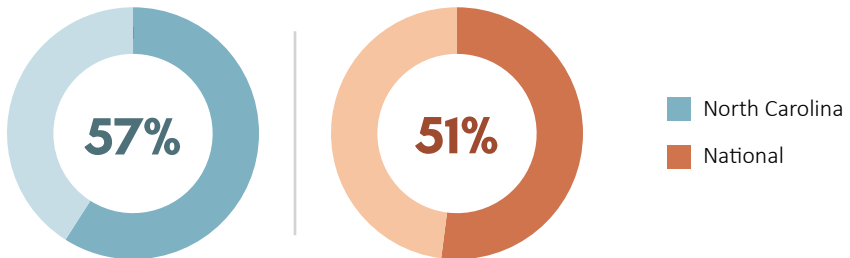
SECTION 1: Children & Students

North Carolina Population, by Age and Race/Ethnicity (2024)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, S0201

Children Ages Three and Four Not in School (2024)



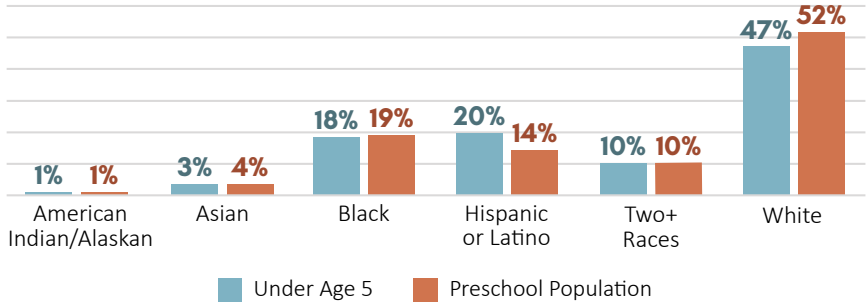
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B14003

73% In 2024, **73%** of children in the United States and **72%** in North Carolina lived in households where all parents were in the labor force.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B23008

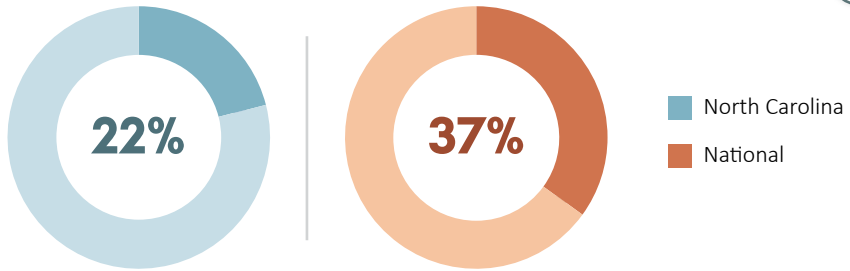


Total North Carolinians Under Age 5 and in Preschool, by Race/Ethnicity (2023-24)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201

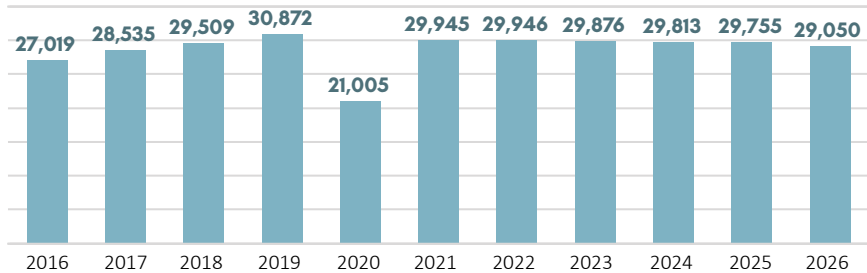
Children Age Four Enrolled in State Pre-K (2023-24)



Note: 57% 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 State of Preschool 2024 Yearbook; myFutureNC Pre-K Dashboard

North Carolina Pre-K Seats (2016 to 2026)



Source: North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS), Division of Child Development and Early Education (Data Request)



SECTION 1: Children & Students

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 2024-25.



Source: NCDHHS, 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.

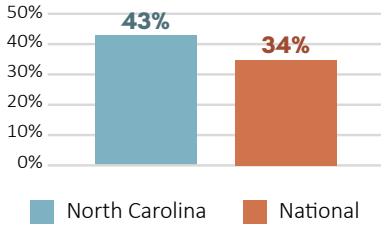
**54,761
CHILDREN
benefited from the Child
Care Subsidy Program.**

In November 2025, there were 54,761 children participating in the Subsidized Child Care Program, while another 15,789 eligible children were on the waiting list – up from 4,125 children in the prior year.

Source: North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) Fiscal Research Division (Data Request); NC Division of Child Development and Early Education, Expenditure Reports

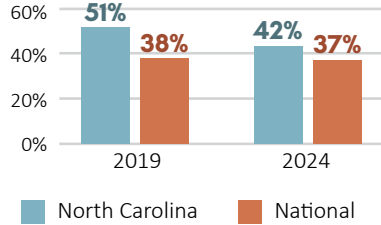


Children Under 18 Living At or Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (2025)



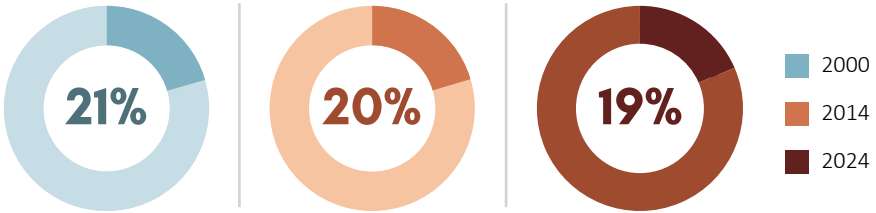
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2025 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC)

Children Ages Nine to 35 Months Receiving Developmental Screening (2019 and 2024)



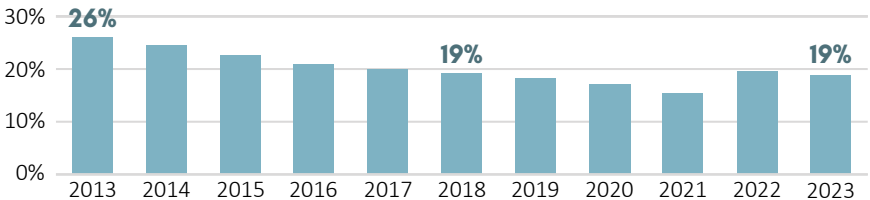
Source: 2023-24 National Survey of Children's Health: Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant Measures

North Carolina School-Age Population as a Percentage of State Population (2000, 2014, and 2024)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000), Decennial Census, Table DP1; U.S. Census Bureau (2014), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0101; U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0101

Children Living in Households with Food Insecurity (2013 to 2023)

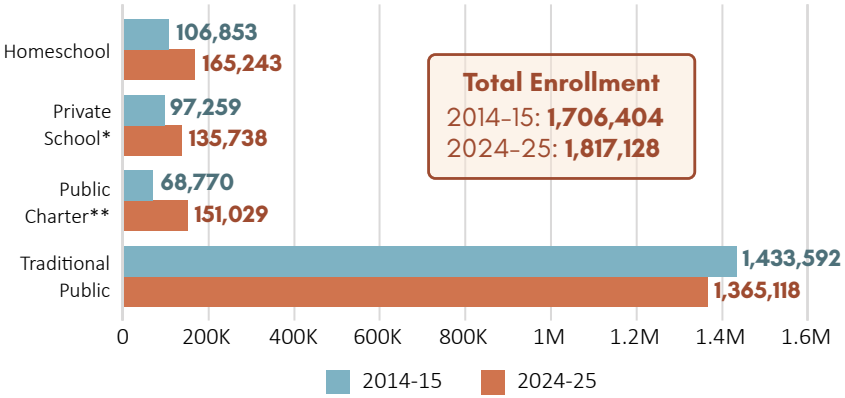


Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap (Data Request)



SECTION 1: Children & Students

K-12 Enrollment, by School Type (2014-15 and 2024-25)



Note: Private Schools are not required by law to report the number of students they serve. This figure likely underreports the number of NC private school students.

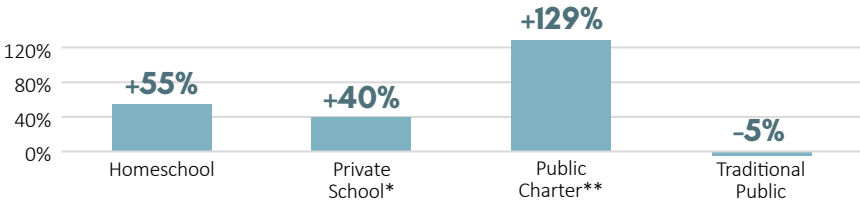
Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) Statistical Tables 1 & 3; NC Statistical Summary for Private Schools 2024-25; NC Statistical Summary for Homeschools 2024-25



In 2024-25, 80,472 students received Opportunity Scholarships as a subsidy to attend private schools. The average award amount was \$5,371. In 2024-25, the state spent \$432 million to offer these private school scholarships. In 2014-15, 1,216 students received an Opportunity Scholarship.

Source: North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA)

10-Year Percentage Change in K-12 Enrollment, by School Type (2014-15 to 2024-25)



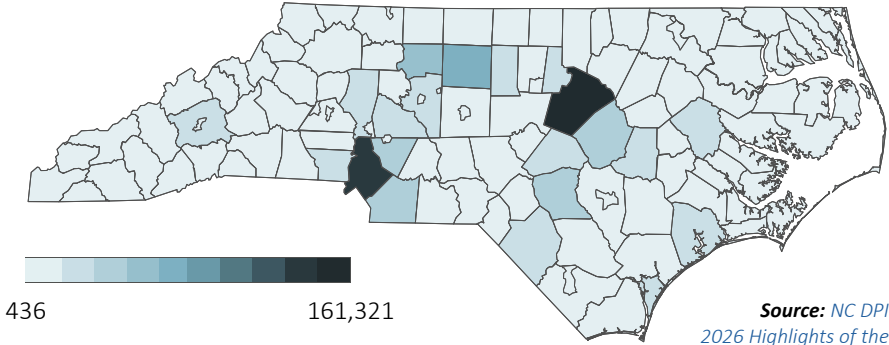
*In these same 10 years, Opportunity Scholarships have increased from 1,216 recipients in 2014-15 to 80,472 recipients in 2024-25 (a 6,518% increase).

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

Source: NC DPI Statistical Tables 1 & 3; NC Statistical Summary for Private Schools 2024-25; NC Statistical Summary for Homeschools 2024-25



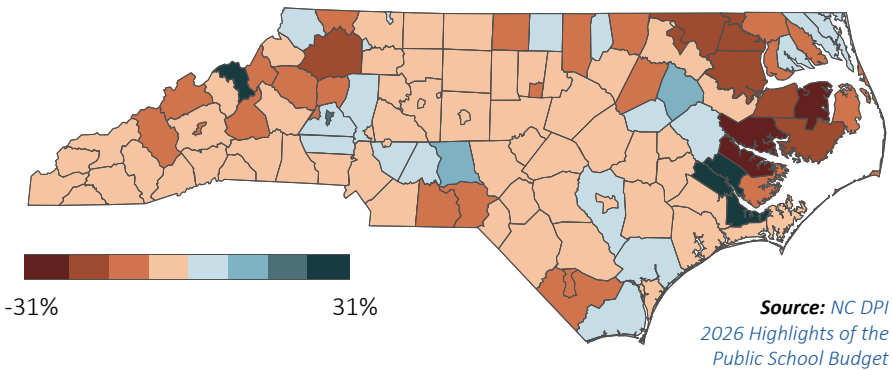
K-12 Traditional Public School Enrollment, by District (2025-26)



In 2025-26, enrollment in K-12 traditional public-school districts ranged from **436** in Tyrrell County Schools to **161,321** in Wake County Public School System, with a median of **5,359** students.

Source: NC DPI Highlights of the 2026 Public School Budget

Five Year Percentage Change in K-12 Traditional Public School Enrollment, by District (2020-21 to 2025-26)



1.7%

Overall enrollment in K-12 traditional public schools decreased by **1.7%** between 2020-21 and 2025-26, with **91 of 115 districts** experiencing a decline.

SPOTLIGHT ON:

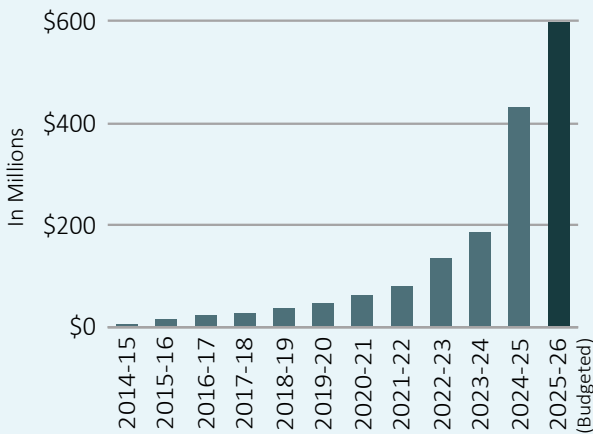
The North Carolina Opportunity Scholarships Program (NCOSP)

The North Carolina Opportunity Scholarships Program (NCOSP) provides state-funded tuition assistance to families who choose to enroll their children in private K-12 schools. The program launched in the 2014-2015 school year, providing scholarships exclusively to students from low-income families. It was expanded in 2024-25 to be available to all families, with scholarship amounts tied to family income levels.

In its first year, the NCOSP issued scholarships to 1,216 students. As of March 2026, over 106,000 scholarships had been distributed for the 2025-26 school year, reflecting rapid and sustained growth in participation over the past decade. Expanded eligibility and enrollment result in a steadily increasing financial commitment from the state.

For the 2025-26 school year, \$600 million is budgeted for Opportunity Scholarships. At the current pace of distribution, demand will likely exceed remaining allocations needed to support tuition payments in the second half of the school year.

Figure 1 – Total Statewide Spending on Scholarships (2014-15 to 2025-26)

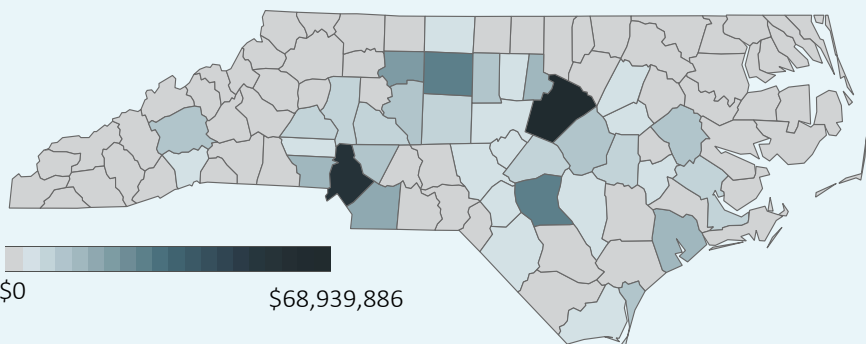


Funding by County

- In 2025-26, students in Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) received \$68M and \$57M, respectively.
- 23 counties had fewer than 100 recipients in 2024-25.

Scan QR Code to Access Additional Scholarship Data:

Figure 2 – Total Statewide Spending on NCOSP Scholarships, by District (2025-26)



Student Participation Data

In its first year, 100% of scholarship students were from families qualifying for free and reduced lunch (<185% of the poverty line). From 2014-15 until 2023-24, families earning up to 370% of the federal poverty guidelines according to their family size were eligible. In 2024-25, 30% of scholarships and 41% of total funds went to families qualifying for free and reduced lunch (see Figure 3).

- At an estimated 106,000 students, NCOSP recipients make up 6% of the K-12 population and rank as the 5th largest group in the state – behind Wake County Schools, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Homeschooled students, and Charter students.
- 86% of students who received NCOSP scholarships in 2024-25 renewed their status for 2025-26.
- Increasing numbers of Opportunity Scholarships are for younger students, indicating a long-term financial commitment by the state to support these students through the course of their education.
- Hispanic student awardees decreased from 15% to 10% since the 2022-23 school year.
- The share of white students has increased since 2022-23, from 61% to 73% (see Figure 4).

Figure 3 – Share of Opportunity Scholarships, by Poverty Level (2014-15 and 2024-25)

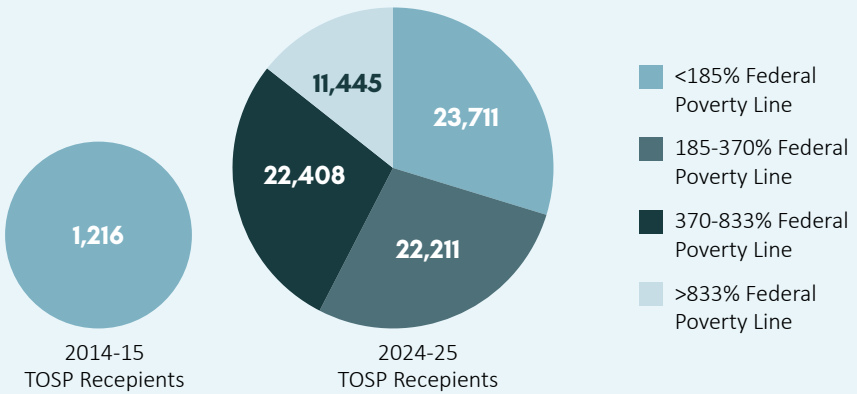
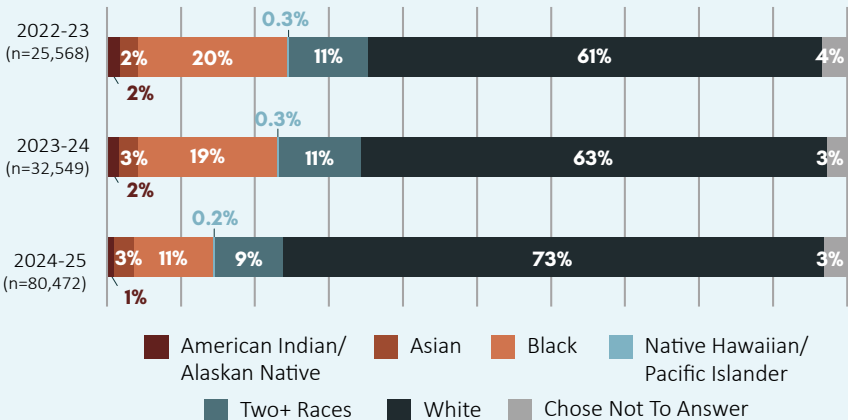


Figure 4 – Share of Opportunity Scholarships, by Race (2022-23 to 2024-25)

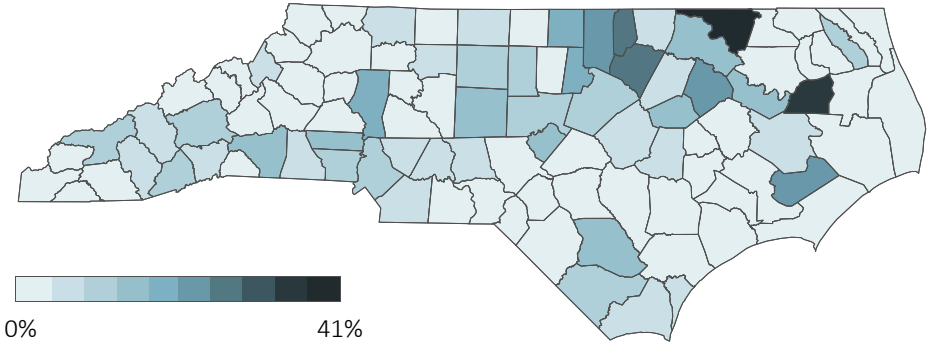


Note: Reporting on the NCOSP does not include Hispanic subgroup data with other racial data.

Source: NC State Education Assistance Authority, Opportunity Scholarship Data; NC General Assembly, Fiscal Research Division, Student Financial Aid: State Funding Overview

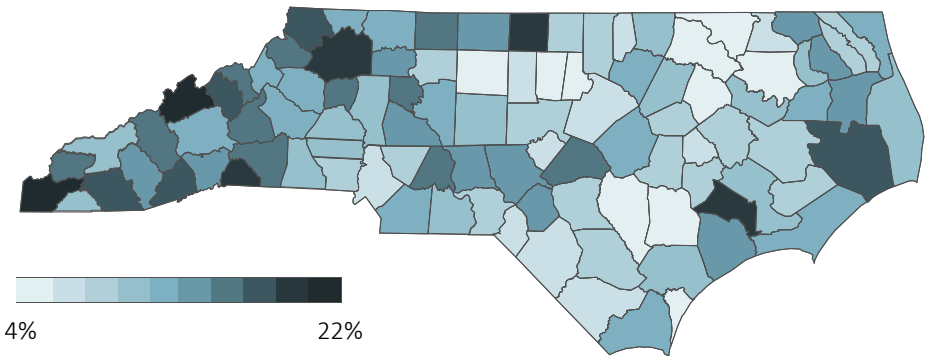


Public Charter School Enrollment as a Percentage of Total Number of K-12 Students, by County (2024-25)



Source: NC DPI EDDIE Active Charter School Report 2024-25

Homeschool Enrollment as a Percentage of Total Number of K-12 Students, by County (2024-25)

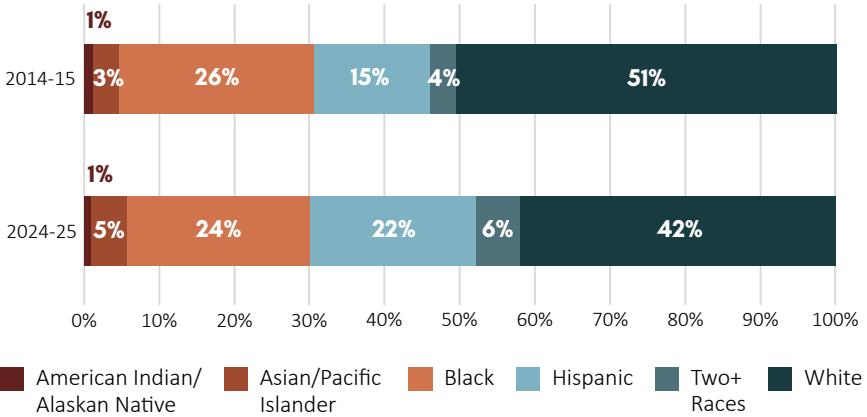


Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10; NC Statistical Summary for Homeschools 2024-25

Between 2019-20 and 2024-25, the number of **public charter school students increased by 30%** and the number of **homeschool students increased by 11%**. In 2024-25, charter and homeschool students represented 8% and 9% of the total K-12 population, respectively.

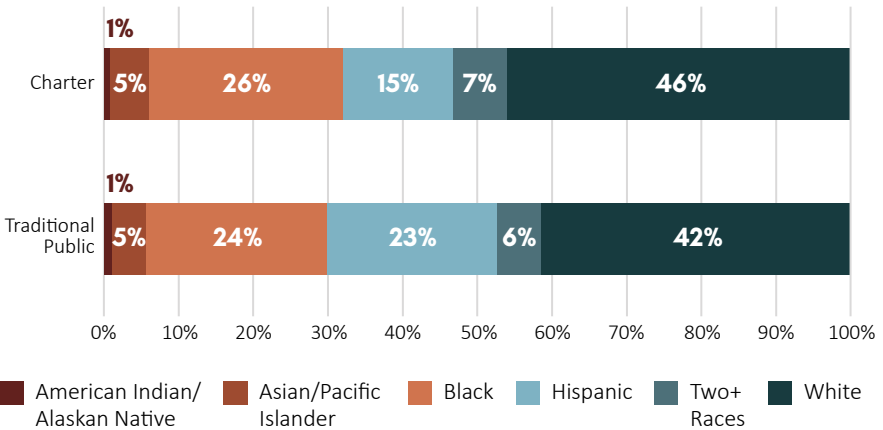


K-12 Public Charter and Traditional School Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity (2014-15 and 2024-25)



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

K-12 Public Charter and Traditional School Enrollment, by School Type and Race/Ethnicity (2024-25)



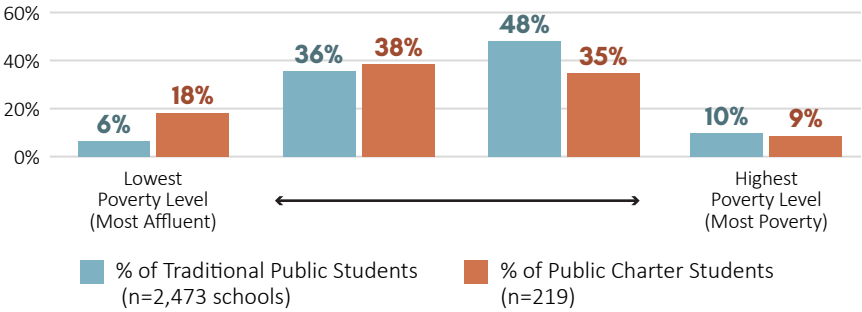
Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 10, 11, & 37

From 2015 to 2025, the number of Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students in K-12 public schools **increased by 42% and 55%**, respectively. At the same time, the number of White students **decreased by 17%** and the number of Black students **decreased by 6%**.



SECTION 1: Children & Students

K-12 Public Schools, by School Poverty Level and School Type (December 2025)



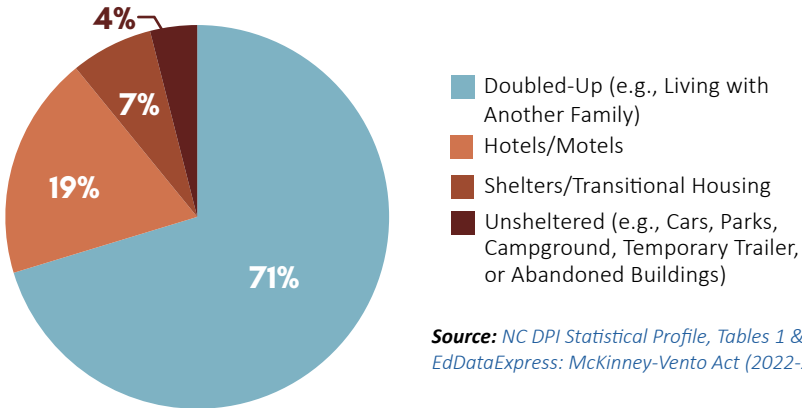
Source: NC DPI Data and Reports, Economically Disadvantaged Students



During the 2022-23 school year, **33,243** experienced homelessness, representing **2.2%** of all students in North Carolina K-12 public schools.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 3; EdDataExpress: McKinney-Vento Act (2022-23)

Homeless Youth, by Primary Nighttime Residence (2023)



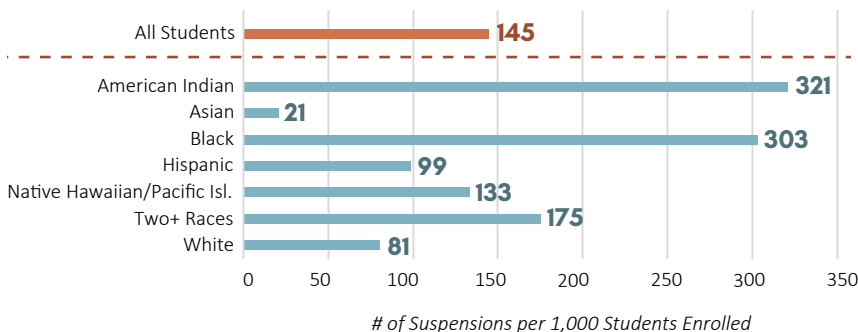
Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 3; EdDataExpress: McKinney-Vento Act (2022-23)

In 2024-25, **6% of traditional K-12 public schools** had fewer than 25% economically disadvantaged students (EDS), while **18% of public charter schools** had fewer than 25% EDS.

Source: NC DPI Data & Reports, Economically Disadvantaged Students

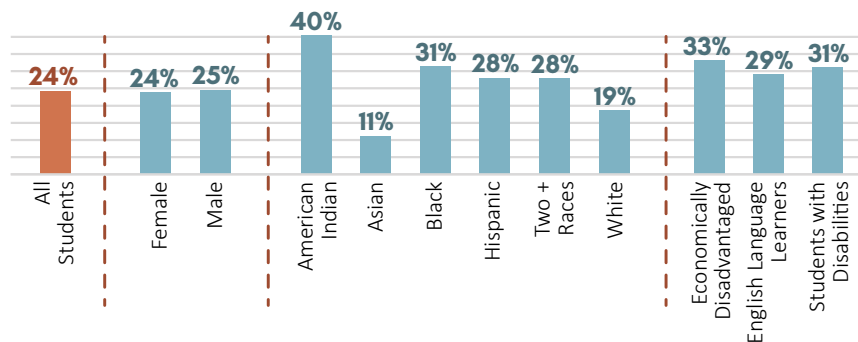


Short-Term Suspension Rates in K-12 Public Schools, by Race/Ethnicity (2024-25)



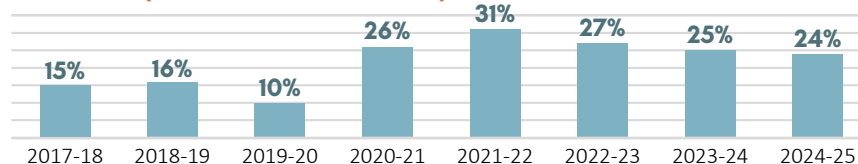
Source: NC DPI Annual Report on Discipline, Alternative Learning, and Dropout 2024-25

Chronic Absenteeism* in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by Student Subgroup (2024-25)



Source: NC DPI School Report Cards, State Highlights Report

Chronic Absenteeism* in K-12 Traditional Public Schools (2017-18 to 2024-25)



Source: NC DPI School Report Cards, State Highlights Report

*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.



SECTION 1: Children & Students



North Carolina Community College System Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Enrollment (Fall 2025)

Fall Curriculum Enrollment

Career and Technical Education	87,766
Transfer and General Education	100,514
Special Credit	9,067
Total Curriculum FTE Enrollment	197,347

Fall Continuing Education Enrollment

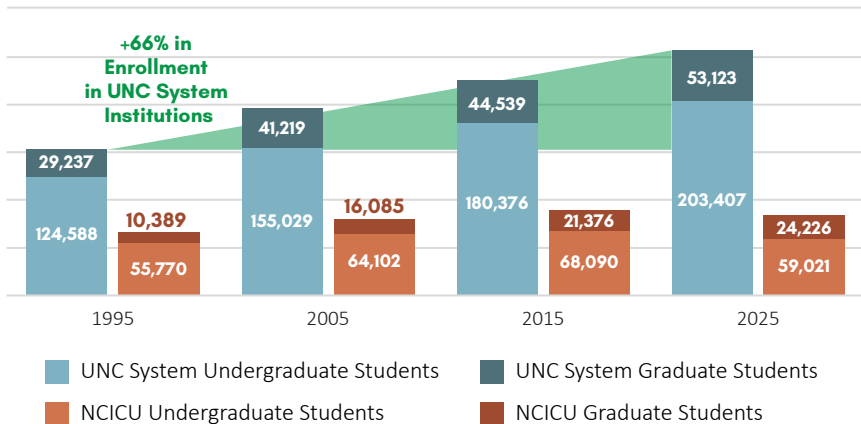
Basic Skills	13,552
Workforce Development	44,808
Total Continuing Education FTE Enrollment	58,360

Note: Many community college students enroll part-time, so the total number of enrolled students is substantially higher than the full-time equivalent enrollment shown here. See pg. 41 for total student count.

Source: North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) Data Dashboard



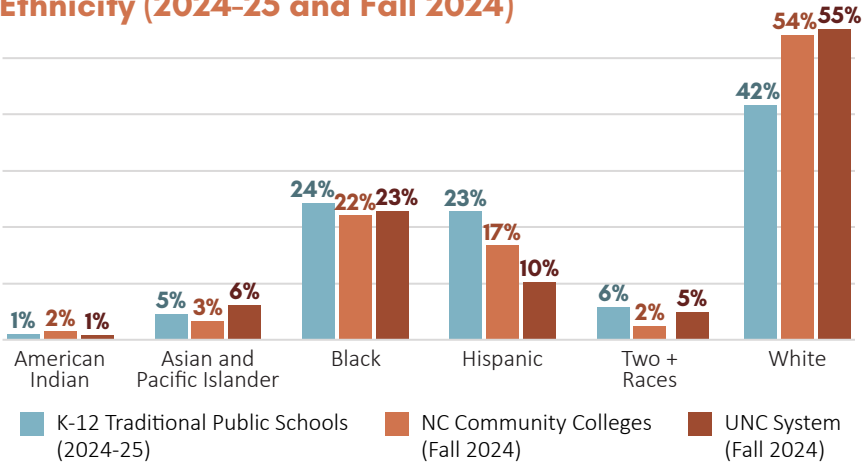
UNC System and North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU) Enrollment (1995 to 2025)



Source: University of North Carolina (UNC) System Interactive Data Dashboards; North Carolina Independent Colleges & Universities (NCICU) 2024-25 Fact Card; NCICU (Data Request)

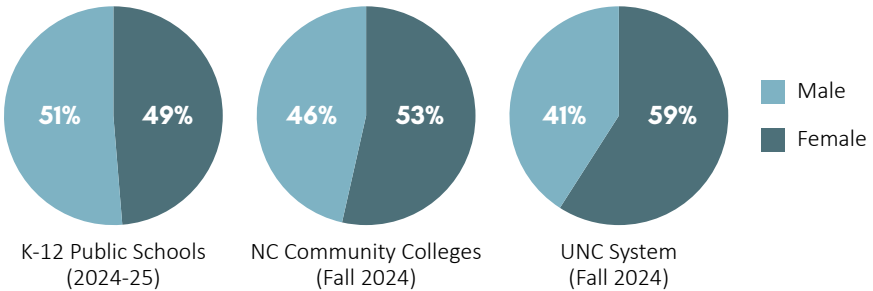


North Carolina Public Education Systems, by Race/ Ethnicity (2024-25 and Fall 2024)



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

North Carolina Public Education Systems, by Gender (2024-25 and Fall 2024)



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

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

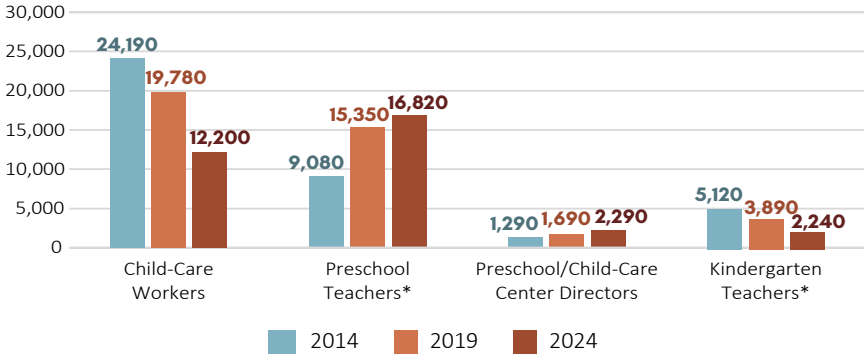
In 2024-25, **55% of UNC System and 54% of NC Community College students were White**, while only **42%** of K-12 public school students were White. In contrast, **Hispanic students accounted for 23%** of the K-12 student population, but **only 16% of NC Community College and 10% of UNC System enrollment.**

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



SECTION 2: Educators

Early Childhood Educators, by Occupation (2014, 2019, and 2024)



*Excludes special education. **Note:** Preschool Teacher data includes both public and private centers.

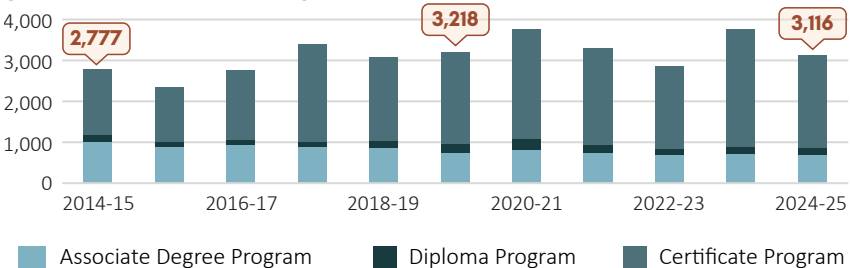
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES)

TEACHERS OF INFANTS & TODDLERS 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: NCDHHS, NC Pre-K Program

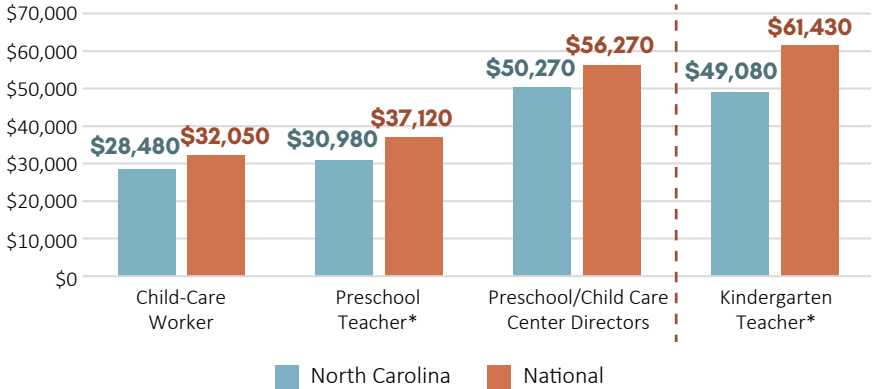
Early Childhood Education Graduates at North Carolina Community Colleges, by Program Type (2014-15 to 2024-25)



Source: NCCCS Data Dashboard



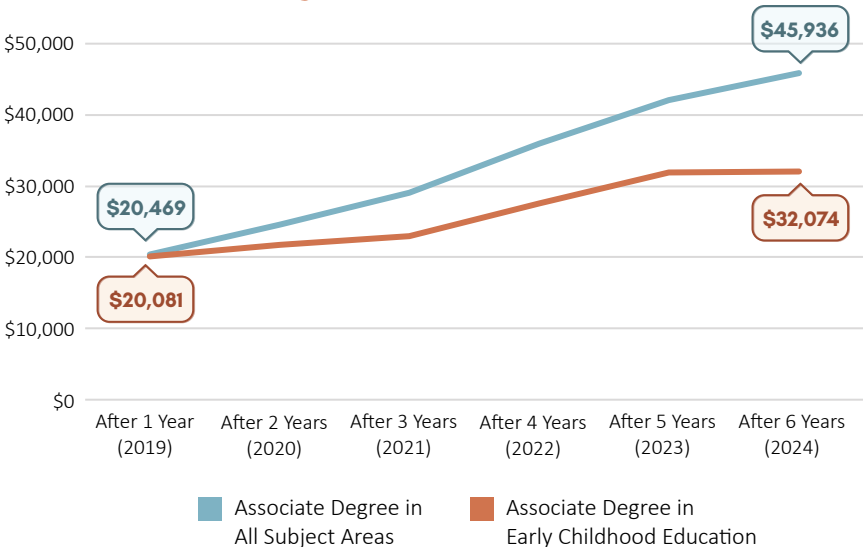
Median Early Childhood Education Wages, by Occupation (May 2024)



*Excludes special education. **Note:** Preschool Teacher data includes both public and private centers.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), Occupational Employment Statistics (OES)

Median Wages for North Carolina Community College System Graduates, by Program Area and Over Time (2017-18 Graduating Class)

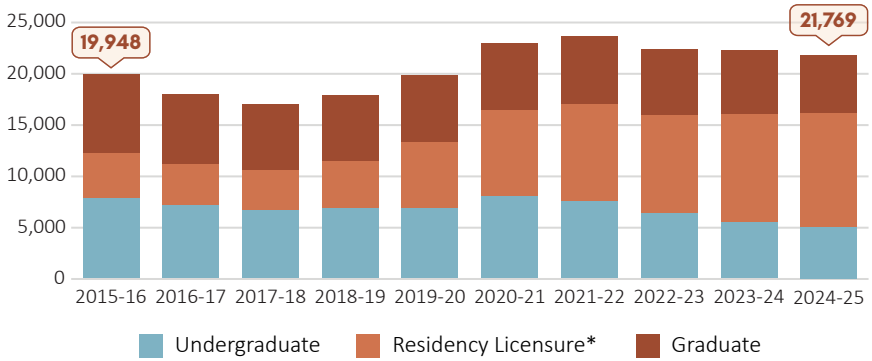


Source: NC TOWER



SECTION 2: Educators

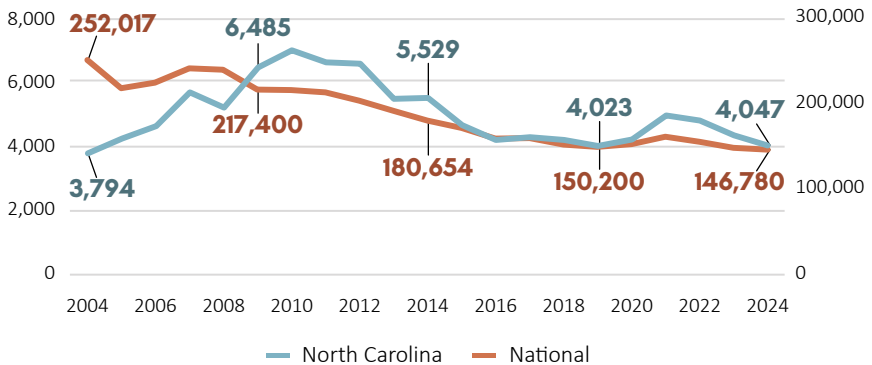
Public and Independent Educator Preparation Program Enrollment, by Degree Type (2015-16 to 2024-25)



*Residency programs began in 2018-19 and are considered a subset of Lateral Entry programs.

Source: NC DPI (Data Request)

Public and Independent Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Completion in the United States and North Carolina (2004 to 2024)



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

Source: U.S. Dept of Education 2024, Title II Report, Academic Year Data

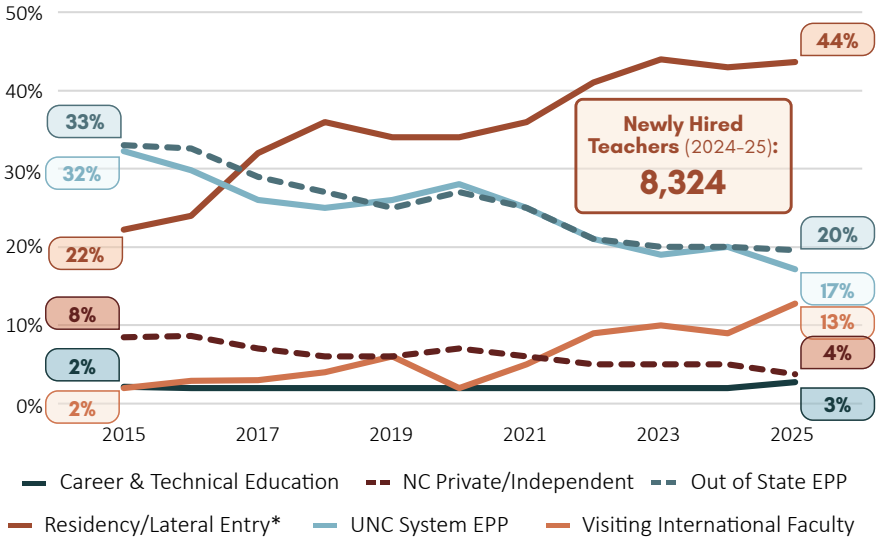
79%

The percentage of North Carolina educator preparation program completers who were employed in North Carolina public schools the next year rose from **75%** in 2020-21 to **79%** in 2024-25.

Source: NC DPI EPP Dashboard



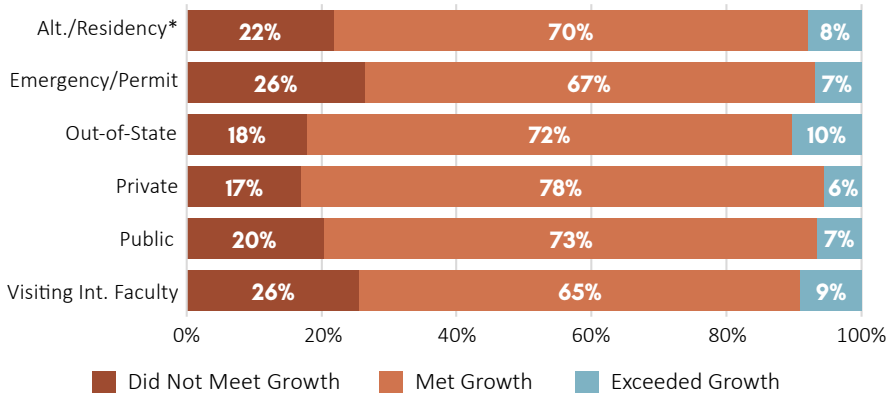
Distribution of Preparation Routes for Newly Hired K-12 Public School Teachers (2015 to 2025)



Note: This data does not include any educators previously employed in a North Carolina public school, regardless of any gaps in employment.

Source: NC DPI State of the Teaching Profession and School Administrator Report (April 2025); NC DPI (Data Request)

Distribution of EVAAS Scores for First Year K-12 Public School Teachers, by Preparation Route (2024-25)



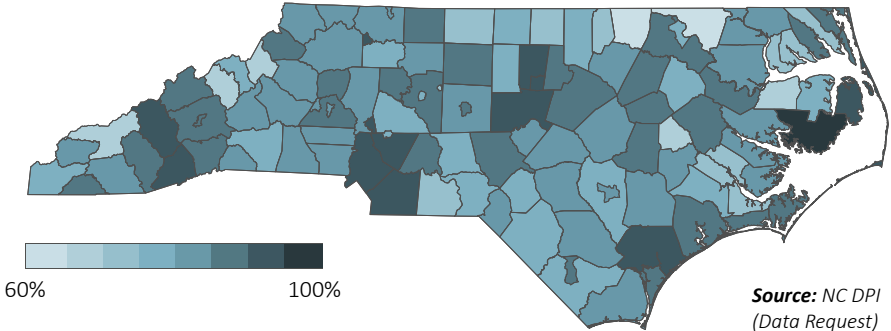
Source: NC DPI (Data Request)

*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.



SECTION 2: Educators

Percentage of Teachers Meeting or Exceeding Expected Student Growth, by District (2024-25)



Classroom Teacher Allotment Ratios* for North Carolina Public Schools (2025-26)

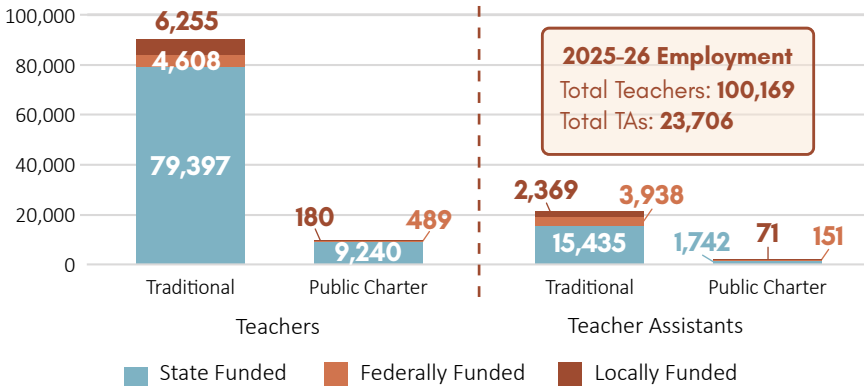
Grade	Allotment Ratio
K**	1:18
1**	1:16
2-3**	1:17
4-6	1:24
7-8	1:23
9	1:26.5
10-12	1:29

*Expressed as teachers per students in average daily membership.

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

Source: NC DPI Allotment Policy Manual 2025-26

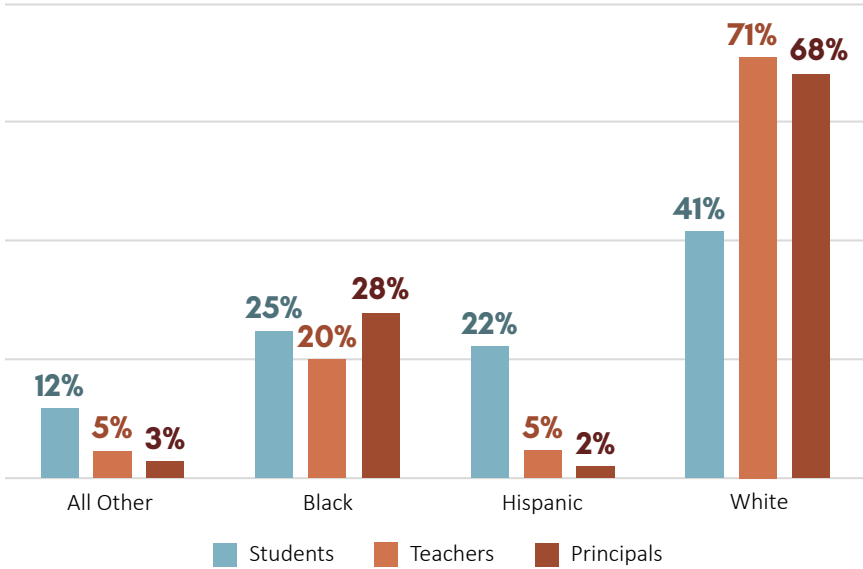
K-12 Traditional Public School Teachers and Teacher Assistants, by Funding Source (2025-26)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 16 & 16.1

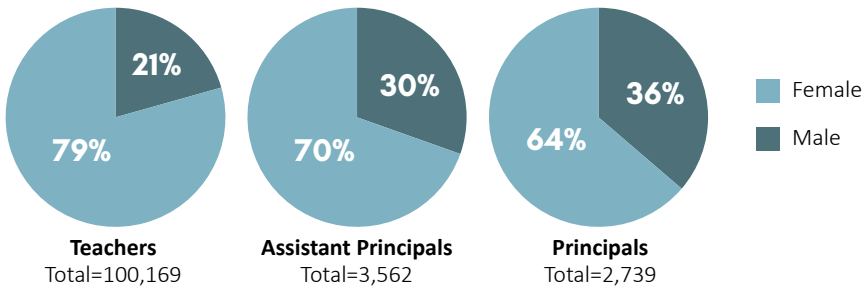


K-12 Public School Students, Teachers, and Principals, by Race/Ethnicity (2025-26)



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 (2025-26)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 16 & 16.1

36% In 2025-26, **36%** of all principals were male, while **21%** of K-12 public school teachers were male.

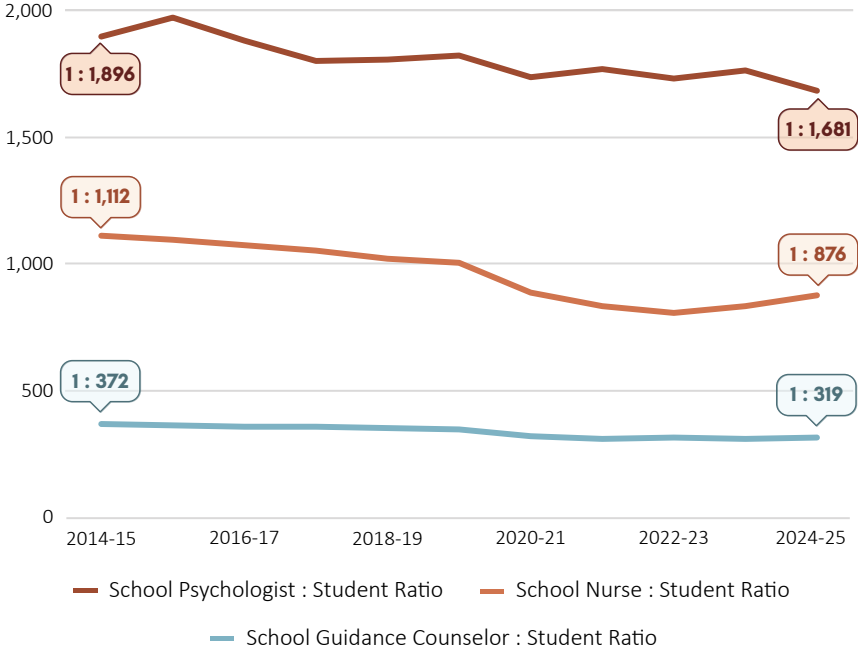
Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 16 & 16.1



SECTION 2: Educators



Ratio of K-12 Traditional Public School Guidance Counselors, Nurses, and Psychologists to Students (2014-15 to 2024-25)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 1 & 16; NCDHHS, School Nursing Support

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*

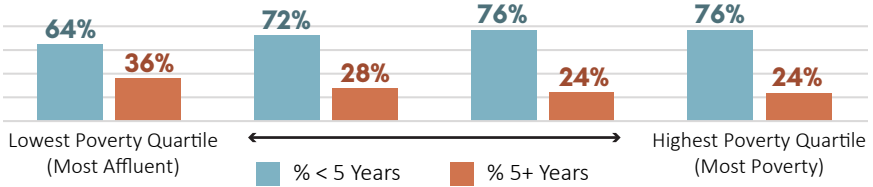
*Counselors do not include GearUp counselors and Community College coaches.

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

Over the past ten years, the student-to-nurse ratio has **improved by 21%**. In the same time frame, the student-to-psychologist ratio has also **improved by 14%**.

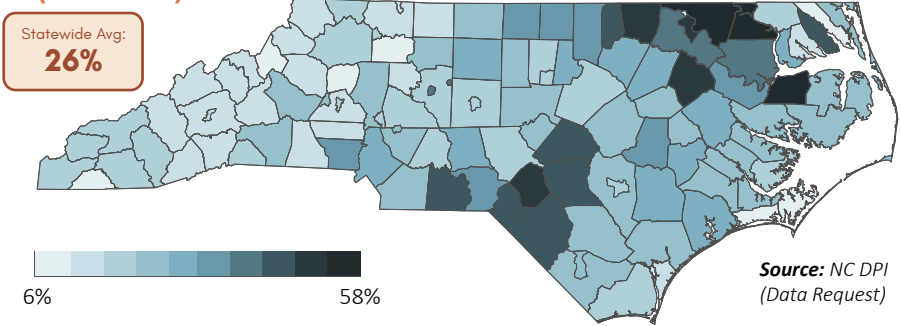


Average Years Principals Have Led Their Current K-12 Traditional Public School, by School Poverty Quartile* (2024-25)



Source: NC DPI (Data Request); NC DPI Economically Disadvantaged Student Data

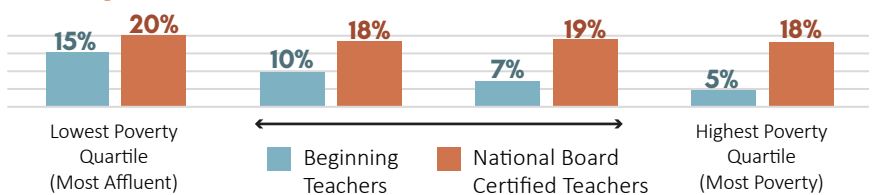
Percentage of Teachers Not Fully Licensed, by District (2024-25)



Source: NC DPI (Data Request)

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.

Beginning Teachers** and National Board-Certified Teachers in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by School Poverty Quartile* (2023-24)



*Schools were sorted by their percentage of economically disadvantaged students (EDS) and grouped into quartiles so that the number of schools was equal across each quartile. The lowest poverty quartile includes schools with 5-44% EDS, while the highest poverty quartile includes schools with 69-95% EDS.

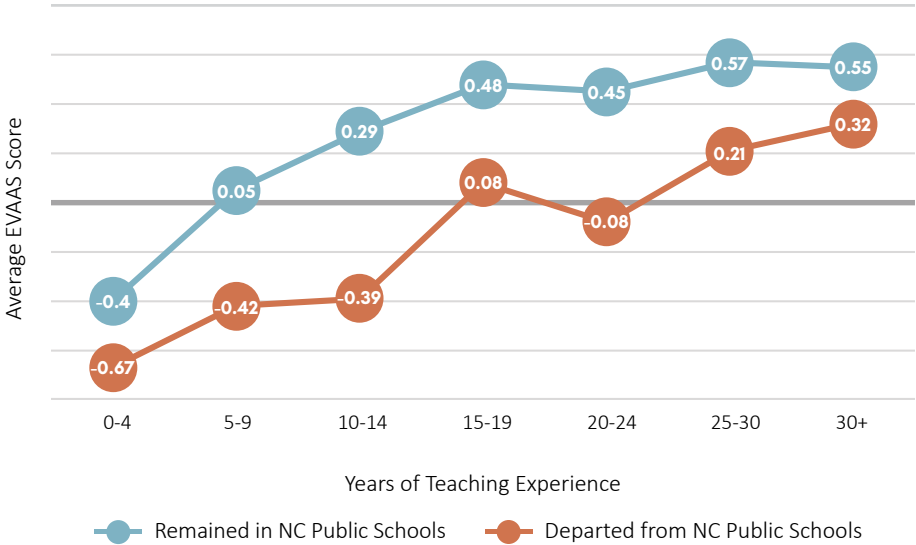
**Beginning Teachers are teachers with between 0 and 2 years of experience.

Source: NC DPI School Report Card Data Set; NC DPI Economically Disadvantaged Student Data



SECTION 2: Educators

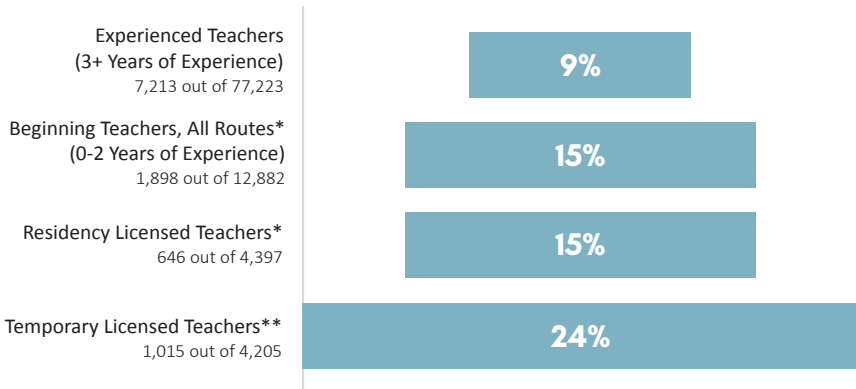
Average EVAAS Scores* of K-12 Teachers Who Remained In and Departed From Public Schools, by Years of Experience (2024-25)



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

Source: NC DPI 2024-25 State of the Teaching Profession Report

Teacher Attrition Rates in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by Teacher Category (2024-25)



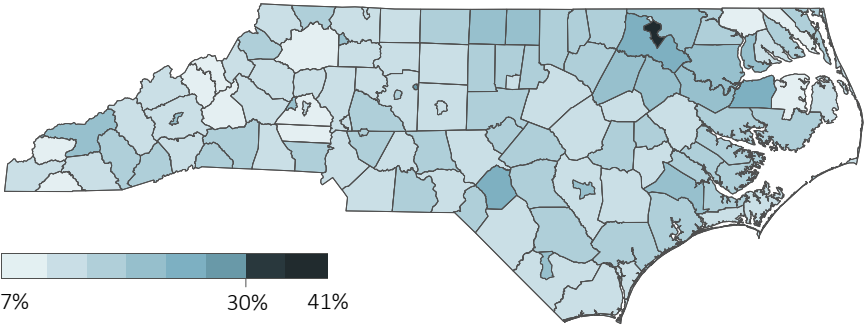
*Residency Teachers and Temporary Licensed teachers also count as Beginning Teachers.

**Temporary Licensed Teachers are those on a Permit-to-Teach or Emergency License.

Source: NC DPI 2024-25 State of the Teaching Profession Report



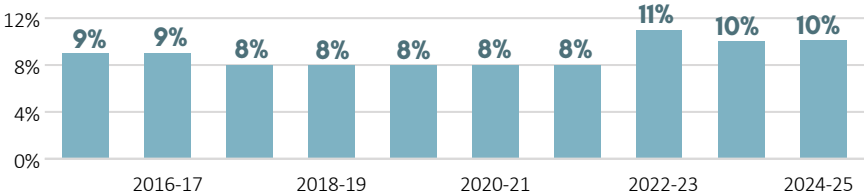
K-12 Traditional Public School Teacher Departure Rates*, by District (2024-25)



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

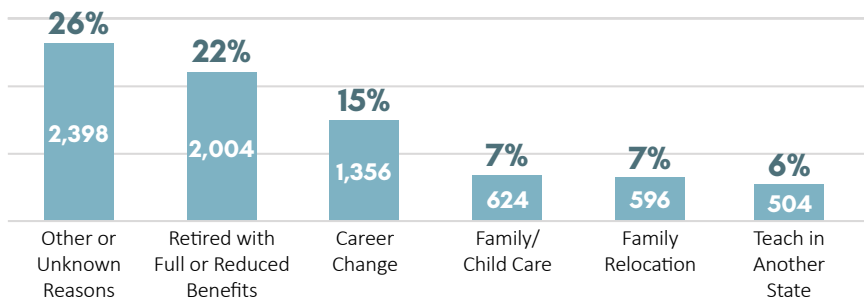
Source: NC DPI 2024-25 State of the Teaching Profession Report

Teacher Attrition Rates in K-12 Traditional Public Schools (2015-16 to 2024-25)



Source: NC DPI 2024-25 State of the Teaching Profession Report

Top Reasons for K-12 Traditional Public School Teacher Attrition (2024-25)

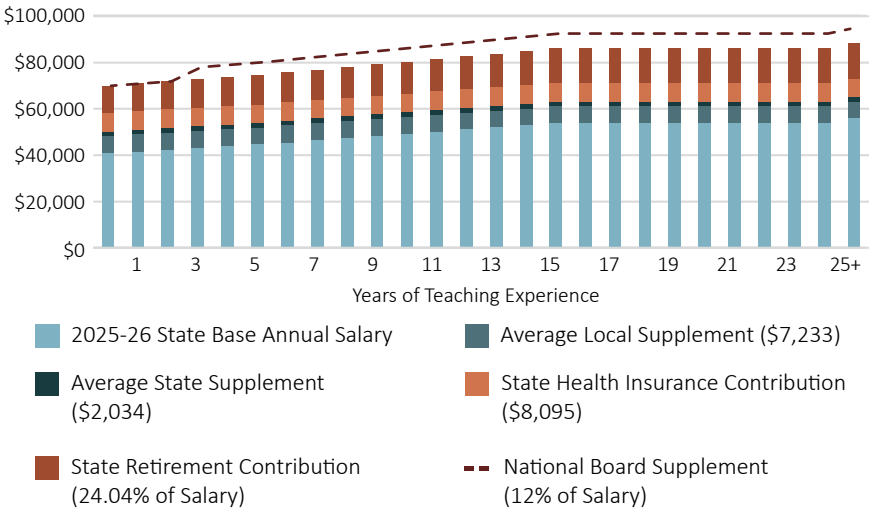


Source: NC DPI 2024-25 State of the Teaching Profession Report

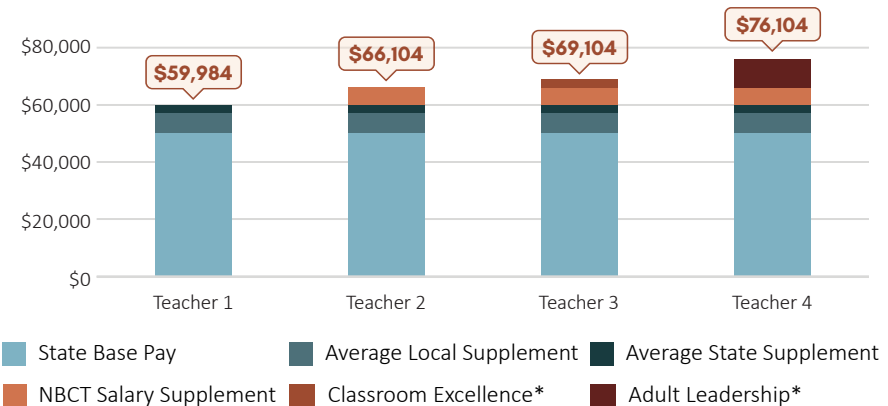


SECTION 2: Educators

Average Compensation (including Benefits) for K-12 Public School Teachers, by Years of Experience (2025-26)



In addition to state base salary and local salary supplements, there are several state and local opportunities for higher salaries. For example, Advanced Teaching Roles can pay as much as \$21,000 more.



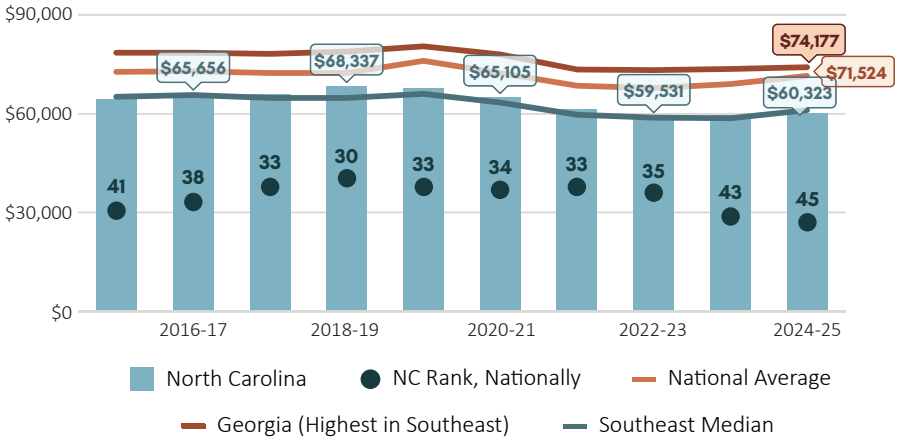
*Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) supplements are paid along a range. Supplements included in the chart reflect work in a Title I school.

Note: The teachers in these scenarios have 10 years of experience. Teachers 2, 3, and 4 are National Board Certified. Teacher 3 holds an ATR "Classroom Excellence" position and earns an additional \$3,000, while Teacher 4 holds an "Adult Leadership" position and earns an additional \$10,000 dollars.

Source: NC DPI Salary Schedules; NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20; NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget; Current Appropriations Act of 2023

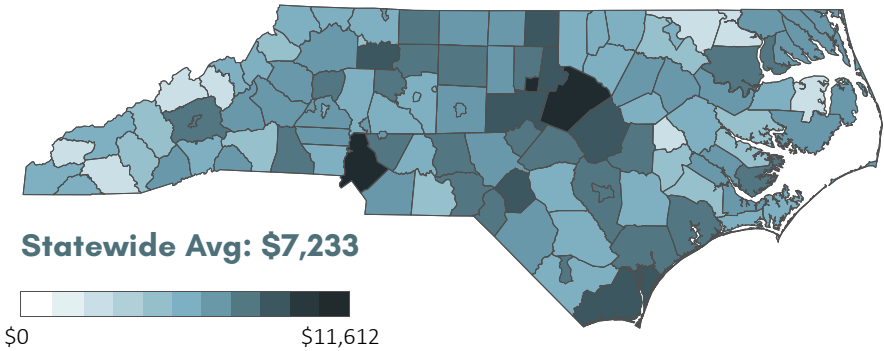


Average K-12 Teacher Salaries, Inflation-Adjusted to 2025 Dollars (2015-16 to 2024-25)



Source: 2025 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 (2025-26)



Note: Figures do not include funds from the Teacher Supplement Assistance Allotment. Graham County Schools offers no local salary supplements for K-12 teachers.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20

In 2024-25, the average K-12 teacher salary in **34 states** was below the national average.

Source: 2025 NEA Rankings and Estimates Report



SPOTLIGHT ON:

Understanding Teacher Pay

Although the most recent state base teacher salary schedule runs from \$41,000 to \$55,950, the average salary in North Carolina is \$60,984 for 2025-26. Through additional state bonuses and supplements, teachers may earn anywhere from the state minimum of \$41,000 to more than \$100,000, plus benefits.

Local Salary Supplements

In North Carolina, the state pays a teacher's base salary according to a statewide pay schedule, and the local school district can provide an additional local supplement. This salary structure is unique compared with many other states, where most teachers are paid on schedules set by their local school districts, even if the state contributes or sets certain minimums.

In the 2025-26 school year, local supplements ranged from \$0 in Graham County to \$11,612 in Chapel Hill/Carrboro City Schools. Each local school board has full discretion over this supplement and may choose to provide a flat amount or set another structure tied to experience or professional degrees. They can also offer other funding opportunities outside of the salary schedule. Local funds generally offset cost-of-living differences across the state (see BEST NC's 2025 *Teacher Pay in North Carolina* report, pages 15-16).

Scan QR Code to
Access BEST NC's
Teacher Pay Report



State Salary Supplements

Variation in local salary supplements can influence teacher mobility, with some educators choosing to work in neighboring districts that offer a higher local supplement. To help address disparities in local tax capacity, the state established the Teacher Salary Supplement Allotment for districts with smaller tax bases to use at their discretion. In practice, few districts use this money to strategically staff hard-to-fill positions; instead, most districts divide the funding equally between all teachers in the district, diluting its potential to retain or recruit educators strategically.

Additional State-Funded Pay

- **National Board Certified Teachers** earn an additional 12% on top of state base pay.
- **Highly Qualified NC Teaching Graduates** (those with high academic honors) can move up the pay schedule faster, particularly if they teach in a low-performing school, a STEM, or an exceptional children position.
- **Advanced Teaching Roles™ teachers** (Adult Leadership or Classroom Excellence) can earn:
 - \$10,000 for Adult Leadership Teacher (up to \$21,000 with local supplements); or
 - \$3,000 for Classroom Excellence Teacher (up to \$7,000 with local supplements).

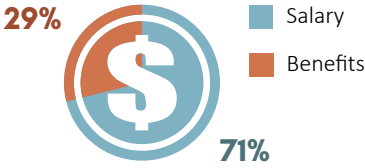
State-Funded Bonuses

- **Low-Wealth/Small County Bonus** provides up to \$1,000 from the state with 1:1 matching funds from the local district.
- **Reading and Math Bonuses:**
 - **3rd Grade Reading:** Teachers in the top 25% of EVAAS scores in the district or state are eligible to earn these bonuses. They may receive both if they qualify. The amount varies year to year, but cannot exceed \$3,500/year from each source (district and/or state).
 - **4th-8th Grade Math, 4th & 5th Grade Reading:** \$2,000 to each teacher whose EVAAS scores are in the top 25% of the state or district.
- **High School Achievement**
 - \$50 per student who passes AP/IB/Cambridge Exams, up to \$3,500.
 - \$25 or \$50 per student achieving an industry-recognized credential through CTE coursework. Each teacher for a course contributing to this credential is eligible, up to \$3,500 per teacher.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20; February 2024 Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee; 2023-24 Advanced Course Teacher Legislated Bonuses FAQ; 2024-25 Teacher Legislated Performance Bonuses –LEAs and Other Public Schools FAQ; State Financial Incentives for National Board Certification



Compensation Distribution for K-12 Traditional Public School Teachers (2024-25)



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

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 27

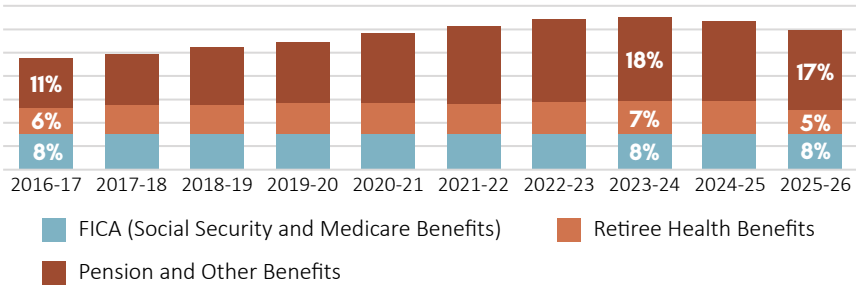
Private Sector Compensation Distribution in U.S. Southeast Atlantic* Region (June 2025)



*U.S. Southeast Atlantic Region includes DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, & WV.

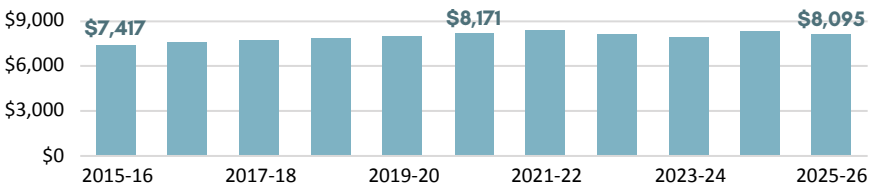
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025), Employer Costs for Employee Compensation

State Retirement Contributions for K-12 Traditional Public School Teachers and District Personnel, as a Percentage of Employee Salary (2016-17 to 2025-26)



Source: Budget Operations Adjustment Act of 2025

State Health Coverage Contributions for K-12 Traditional Public School Teachers and District Personnel, Inflation-Adjusted to 2025 Dollars (2015-16 to 2025-26)

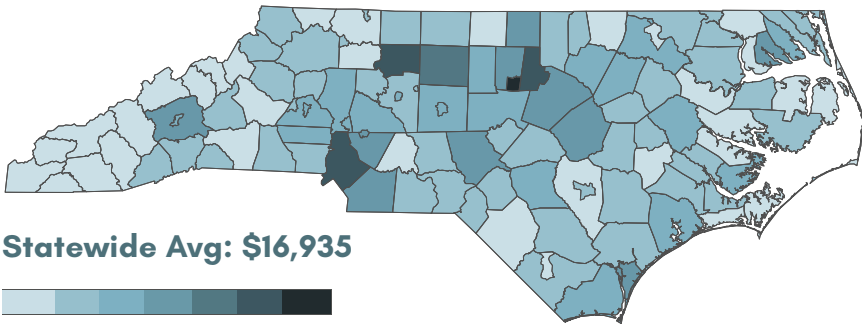


Source: Current Appropriations Act of 2023; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index



SECTION 2: Educators

Average Local Salary Supplement for K-12 Principals in Traditional Public Schools, by District (2025-26)

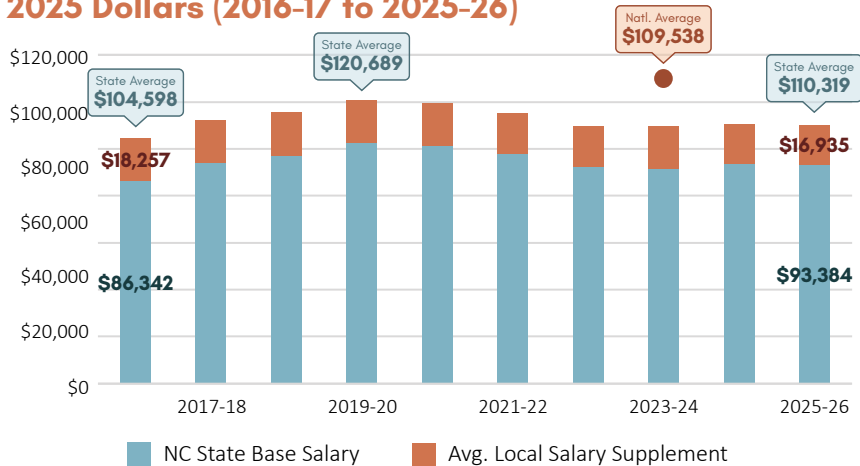


\$0 \$42,779

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

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20

Average K-12 Principal Salaries, Inflation-Adjusted to 2025 Dollars (2016-17 to 2025-26)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 20; NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget

6.1%

North Carolina public school principal attrition from September 2024 to September 2025 was **6.1% (151 principals)**. Of the principals leaving, 89 of them retired.

Source: NC DPI State of the Teaching Profession Report 2026

SPOTLIGHT ON:

The NC Principal Recruitment Supplement Program (PRSP)

Research consistently demonstrates that experienced, high-performing principals are less likely to lead schools serving large concentrations of low-income students, students of color, and low-performing students. The North Carolina Principal Recruitment Supplement Program (PRSP), established in 2019 through Session Law 2019-247, incentivizes proven leaders to move into and remain in the state’s lowest-performing schools to drive sustained turnaround efforts.

Qualified Principals

Under PRSP, qualifying principals receive a \$30,000 annual salary supplement for up to three years while serving at a low-performing school. Eligibility is tied to demonstrated effectiveness: receiving an “Exceeded Growth” score for two of the three previous years at the principal’s prior school.

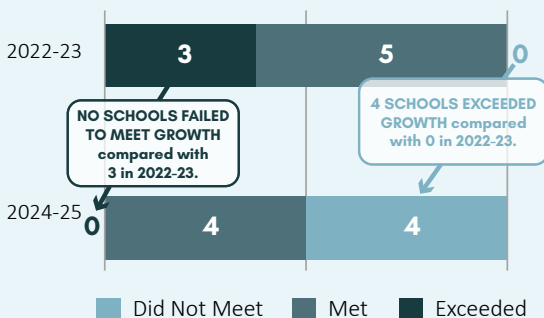
Schools In the Bottom 5% Statewide are Eligible

Qualifying schools are low-performing under G.S. 115C-105.37, with a School Performance Grade of D or F and a growth status of “Met” or “Not Met Expected Growth.” Typically, 110-150 schools qualify annually, based on the prior year’s data. Districts are notified between January and April.

Impressive Impacts

At least 50% of participating schools have exceeded growth, meaning they exit their status as a low-performing school. Among the 2023-24 schools, six schools’ growth scores improved in 2024-25 over the 2022-23 baseline, while two remained at “met growth.” These gains indicate that strategically placing high-performing leaders in struggling schools can meaningfully accelerate academic growth.

School Growth Scores Before and After Participating in the PRSP (2022-23 and 2024-25)



Participation Remains Low

The number of principals participating each year is much lower than program capacity, presenting a great opportunity for school districts to leverage these incentives. In 2024-25, 13 principals received the supplement across qualifying schools, out of 40 available slots statewide. Participation peaked at 20 principals across the three cohorts in 2023-24, with a total of 78 principals benefiting since the program’s inception.

Opportunities for Greater Impact

The NC Department of Public Instruction recommends increasing the number of years principals are eligible for the supplement and expanding school eligibility to increase participation. Also, strengthening program perception and flexibility could improve alignment between available funding and the state’s broader goal of ensuring that the most effective school leaders are equitably distributed across high-need schools.

85%
of PRSP-Participating Schools either Met or Exceeded Expected Growth. This represented some of the strongest collective results for turnaround schools in state history.

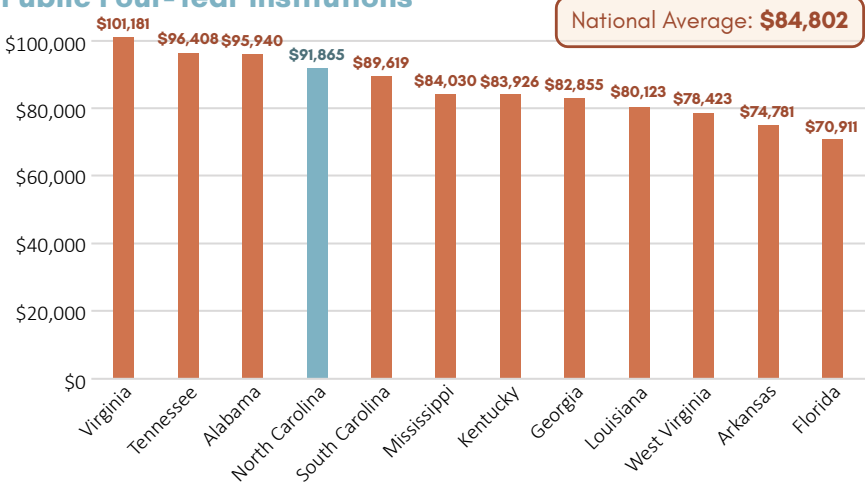
Source: PRSP Report to the NCGA 2024-25, EdNC Article on PRSP from BEST NC 2026



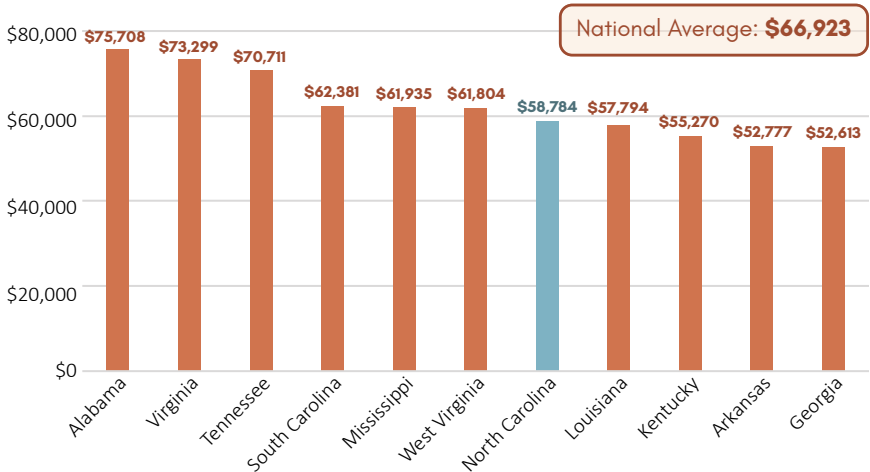
SECTION 2: Educators

Cost of Living-Adjusted Higher Education Salaries for Instructional Staff in the U.S. Southeast Region* (2024-25)

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. Two year national average only includes the 44 states that reported data.

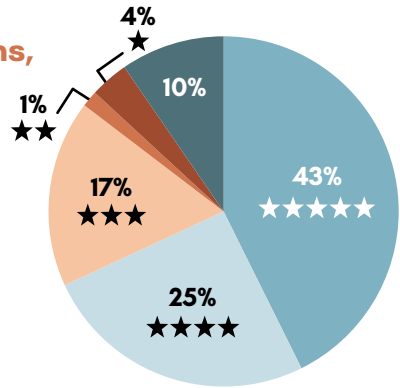
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) IPEDS Statistical Tables; World Population Review Cost of Living Index 2025



SECTION 3: Schools & Programs

Licensed Child-Care Programs, by Star Rating (2025)

- Five Star Facilities
- Four Star Facilities
- Three Star Facilities
- Two Star Facilities
- One Star Facilities
- Not Applicable*



*10% of facilities are exempt from the star-rated license system. For example, religious-sponsored child care programs do not receive a star rating unless they choose to apply.

Source: NCDHHS, Division of Child Development and Early Education Statistical Summary Report (September 2025)



In September 2025, 215,808 NC children attended one of 5,222 licensed child-care programs: 4,176 (80%) were child care centers and 1,046 (20%) were family childcare homes.

Source: NC Early Care and Learning Dashboard

K-12 Schools, by Type (2025-26)

Traditional Public	2,538
Cooperative Innovative High Schools	29
Early College High Schools	59
Magnet Schools	226
Public Charter	221
Regional and Lab Schools	7
Statewide: Deaf & Blind	3
Private	971
Receiving Opportunity Scholarships	696
Total Schools	3,740

Note: There are also over 101,880 individual homeschools across North Carolina.

Source: NC DPI Educational Directory and Demographical Information Exchange (EDDIE); NC Division of Non Public Education, Home School Annual Report 2024-25; NC Division of Non Public Education, Private School Directory (January 2026); NC DPI Education Services for the Deaf and Blind



SECTION 3: Schools & Programs

Public School Units (2025-26)

There are
346 PSUs
in North Carolina
as of January 2026

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, Local Agencies Report

K-12 Traditional Public School District Enrollment (2025-26)

North Carolina has **115 school districts** (otherwise known as Local Education Agencies). Districts range in size from **436 students** to **161,321 students**.



5,359 Students
Median District Size



11,919 Students
Average District Size

Source: NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget

42%

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 **55 smallest districts combined**.

Source: NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget

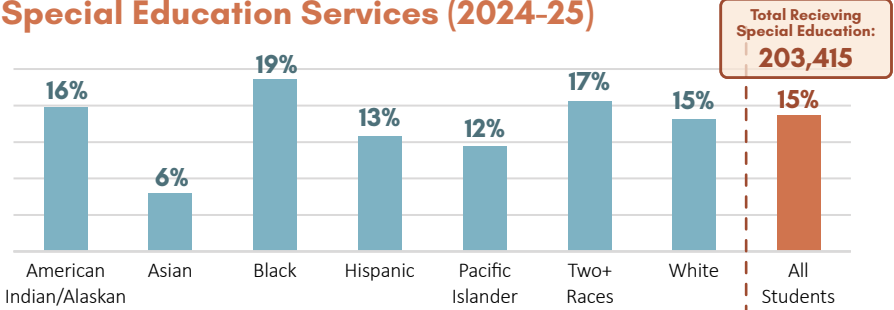


In the 2024-25 academic year, North Carolina had **165,243 homeschooled students**. If homeschooling were a district, it would be the largest district in North Carolina.

Source: NC DPI 2025 Highlights of the Public School Budget; NC Statistical Summary for Homeschools 2024-25

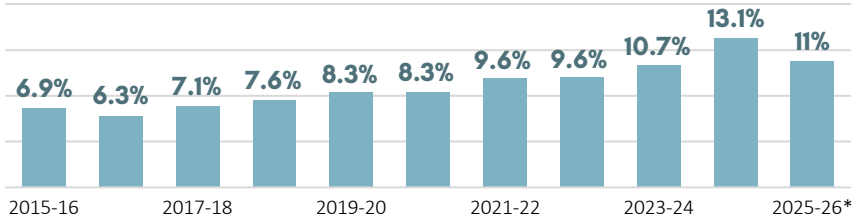


Percentage of Each Racial/Ethnic Category Receiving Special Education Services (2024-25)



Source: NC DPI Federal Child Count Reporting (2024-25); NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 10

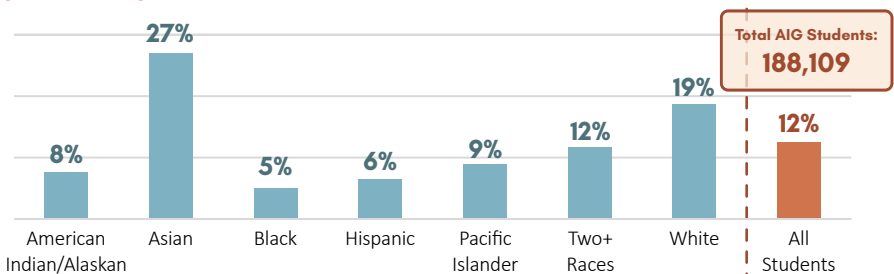
Percentage of K-12 Public School Students in Limited English Proficiency Programs (2015-16 to 2025-26)



*In the 2025-26 school year, English proficiency standards changed to promote students out of LEP services more quickly.

Source: NC DPI, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly -- Headcount of English Learners (December 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 & 2025)

Percentage of Each Racial/Ethnic Category in K-12 Academically and Intellectually Gifted Programs (2024-25)



Source: NC DPI Academically and Intellectually Gifted Child Count, 2025



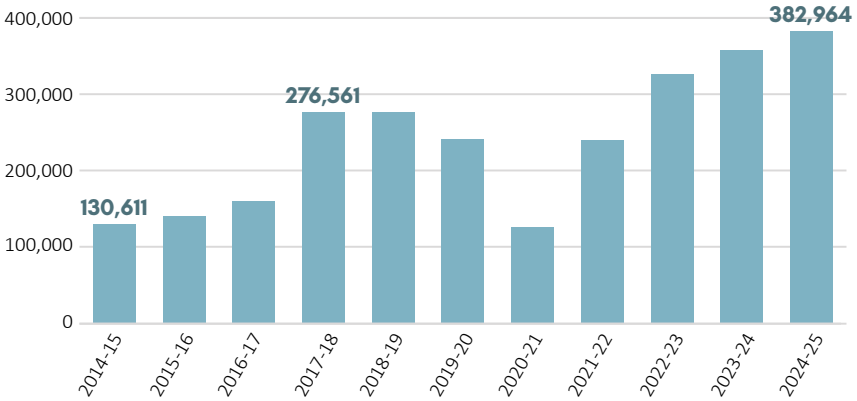
SECTION 3: Schools & Programs

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 (2014-15 to 2024-25)

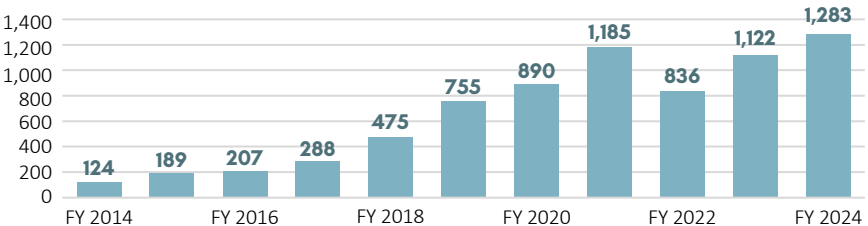


Source: NC DPI CTE Credentials and Reporting Page (2024-25 Credential Report)

Students ages 19 and younger may begin working toward apprenticeships through direct entry into a Registered Apprenticeship or completing a Pre-Apprenticeship program that connects their high school coursework to real world skills they will need to be successful in a future Apprenticeship. Many of these programs feature partnerships between industry, K-12 school districts, local community colleges, and other community partners.



Young Adults (Age 19 and Younger) Joining an Apprenticeship Program (FY2014 to FY2024)



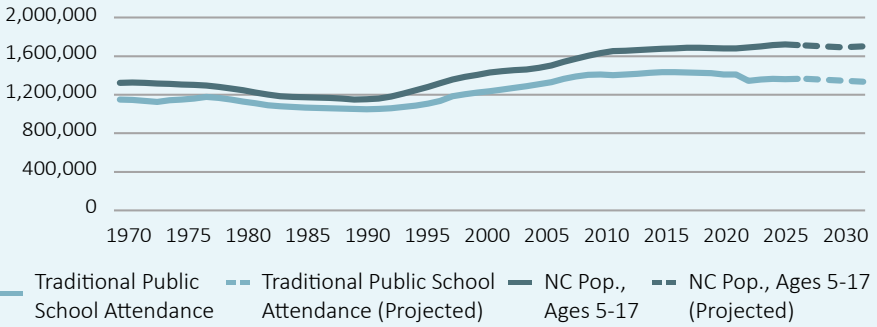
Source: ApprenticeshipNC (Data Request)



SPOTLIGHT ON:

K-12 Population Shifts

Figure 1 – School-Aged Children (Ages 5-17) vs. Traditional K-12 Public School Enrollment (1970-2030)



North Carolina Is Not Facing a Statewide Reduction in School-Aged Children, Defying National Trends

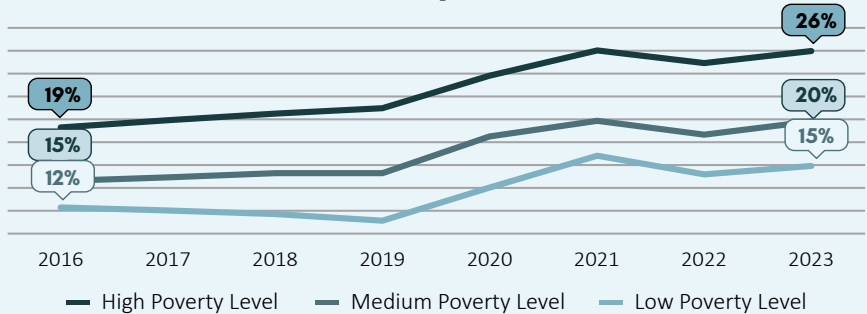
As birth rates have declined nationally, fears about a “demographic cliff” have become a national concern. While North Carolina is not projected to experience a statewide decrease in the number of school-aged (ages 5-17) children, there are declines in these populations in some regions of the state.

Most Districts Are Seeing Declines in Traditional Public School Enrollment

While the K-12 population as a whole is not declining, enrollment in traditional public schools is declining. Until 2010, the number of North Carolina children enrolled in traditional public schools was consistent with the school-aged population. Around 2010, traditional enrollment stayed fairly flat until it started to decline around 2021 as more students enroll in home schools, private schools, and public charter schools (see pgs. 8-10 for additional data and heat maps).

Similarly, high-poverty districts across the U.S. have been losing students more quickly than low- and medium-poverty districts. The same is true for predominately black districts compared with districts that are mostly white or Hispanic. However, all demographics chose non-traditional public schools a higher rates in 2023 than in 2016 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – National Proportion of Non-Traditional Public School Enrollment, by District (2016 to 2023)



Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 1; NC Office of State Budget and Management, Population Projections (by Age and Sex): Vintage 2025; NC Office of State Budget and Management, Population Projections (by Age and Sex): Vintage 2022 (Courtesy of Carolina Demography); National Bureau of Economic Research, US Census Intercensal Population Estimates; Brookings Institution, Declining public school enrollment (2025)

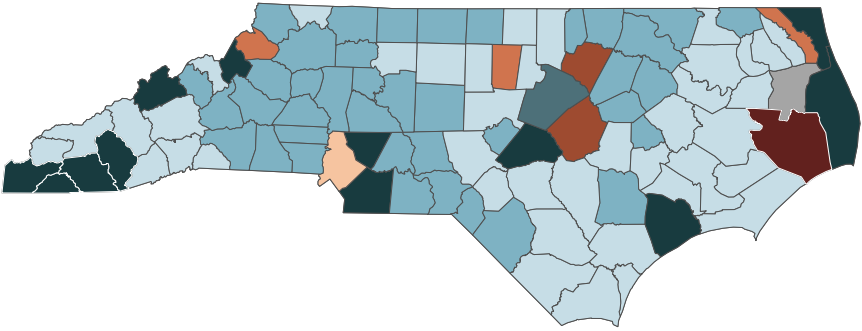


SECTION 3: Schools & Programs

School Systems as Employers

Traditional K-12 public school districts are the **top employer in 29 North Carolina counties**, a **top 3 employer in 76 counties**, and a **top 5 employer in 95 counties**. Institutes of higher education are the **single largest employer in two North Carolina counties**, with both institutions being part of the UNC System.

Largest Employing Industries, by County (2025)



- Agriculture
- Construction
- Education
- Finance
- Healthcare
- Manufacturing
- Professional Services
- Retail Trade
- Other

Note: In prior years, this map represented the industry of the single-largest employer in the county. In future editions of Facts & Figures, this map will instead report the industry in which the largest group of people in each county works, regardless of workplace size.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2024, Table S2403

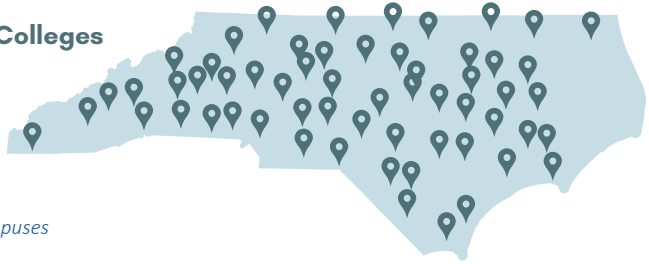




Higher Education Institutions (2026)

North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS)

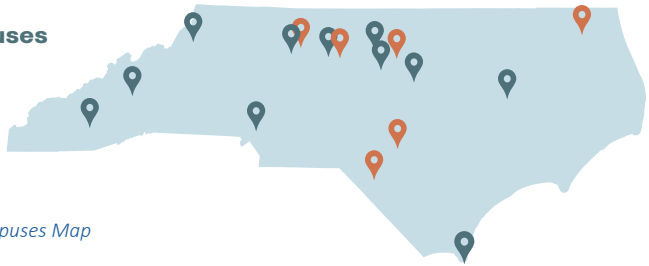
58 Community Colleges



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).

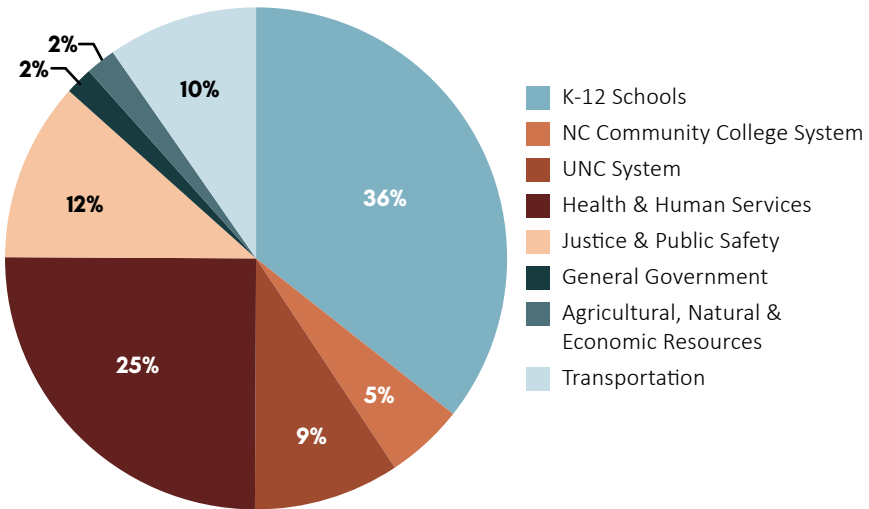
In Fall 2025, **256,070 students** attended North Carolina community colleges (including full-time and part-time students, but not including non-credit workforce enrollment). **31%** of these students were dually enrolled high school students.



SECTION 4: Finance

North Carolina General Fund Appropriations (2025-26)

K-12 Schools	\$11,882,482,748	36%
NC Community College System	\$1,680,600,008	5%
UNC System	\$3,134,836,257	9%
Health & Human Services	\$8,338,148,062	25%
HHS: Division of Child Development & Early Education	\$286,033,683	1%
Justice & Public Safety	\$3,849,574,787	12%
General Government	\$594,515,505	2%
Agricultural, Natural & Economic Resources	\$643,029,628	2%
Transportation	\$3,224,184,871	10%
Total	\$33,347,371,866	100%

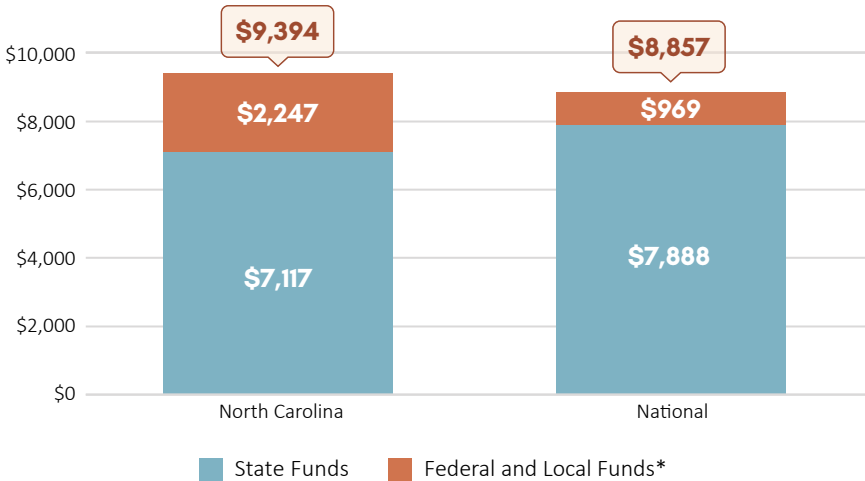


Source: North Carolina Office of State Management and Budget, Certified Budget Fiscal Year 2025-26

50% In 2025-26, **50%** of the North Carolina General Fund appropriations support K-12 public and higher education.



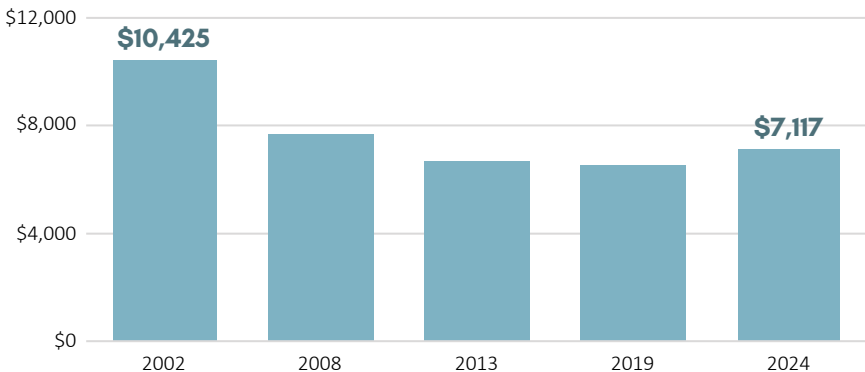
Total Spending per Child Enrolled in State NC Pre-K Programs, by Funding Source (2024)



*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 2024 State of Preschool Yearbook

State Spending per Child Enrolled in NC Pre-K, Inflation-Adjusted to 2024 Dollars (2002 to 2024*)



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

Source: NIEER 2024 State of Preschool Yearbook, NC Profile



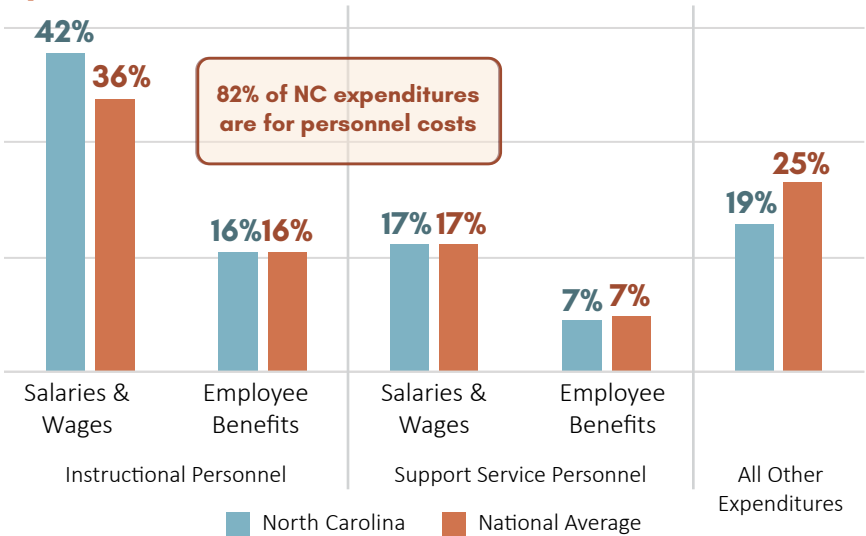
SECTION 4: Finance

Per Pupil Revenue for K-12 Public Education, by Source (2024-25)

	North Carolina	National Average
Total Revenue Per Pupil	\$14,448	\$17,367
State %	\$7,657 (53%)	\$8,336 (48%)
Federal %	\$2,312 (16%)	\$1,389 (8%)
Local %	\$4,479 (31%)	\$7,641 (44%)

Source: NEA Rankings and Estimates Report, 2025

Distribution of K-12 Public Education Expenditures, by Function (FY2022)



Note: 2023 data is not available.

Source: U.S. Census, 2022 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, 2023 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data, Summary Table 6



State Education Funding in North Carolina

North Carolina provides a base level of funding to all districts, determined primarily by the number of students enrolled with additional state funding allocated to districts based on student needs and district characteristics. In 2025-26, **state spending on K-12 education was \$12 billion** from all state sources, including the following allotments for special circumstances:



Funding for Children
with Disabilities:

\$1.21 Billion



Funding for English
Language Learners:

\$157 Million



Disadvantaged Student
Supplemental Funding:

\$111 Million



Small County
Supplemental Funding:

\$60 Million
(for 30 school districts)



Low Wealth District
Supplemental Funding:

\$345 Million
(for 78 school districts)

Source: NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget

In 2025, North Carolina ranked 36th*
in funding per student.

36th

In 2025, North Carolina ranked 20th
for the percentage of education
funding provided by the state.

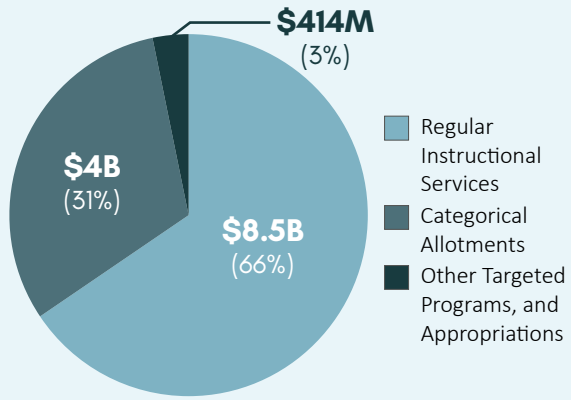
20th

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

Source: 2025 National Education Association Rankings and Estimates Report

North Carolina's Categorical Allotments for K-12 Education

Figure 1 – State K-12 Education Funding Purpose (2025-26)











The total state investment for K-12 public school funding is \$12.8 billion. Of that, around 66% of this appropriated budget is for resource-based items such as general administration, teachers, other personnel, and related services (\$8.4 billion).

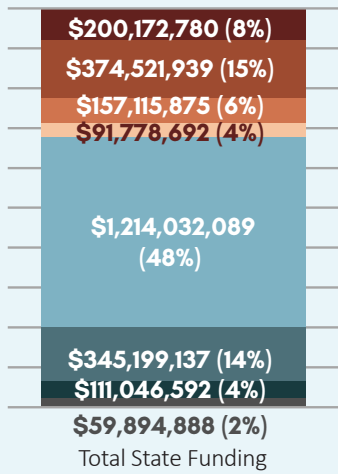
The second largest part of the K-12 public school funding is Categorical Allotments, which make up about 31% of the budget (\$4 billion). Categorical Allotments designate state funding to target specific student or district needs, such as supplementing low wealth counties, disadvantaged students, or academically gifted students.

The remaining approximately 3% (\$414M) are for various targeted programs, grants, and other targeted appropriations like AP/IB testing and Cooperative Innovative High Schools.

A majority of the Categorical Allotments (64%) are composed of eight categories based on specific student or district needs. Exceptional Children account for nearly half of these funds, about \$1 billion. The smallest Categorical Allotment is the Small County Supplemental Funding for small and sparsely populated districts at approximately \$48M (2%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Share of Total State Education Categorical Funding, by Program Category (FY2025-26)

-  Teacher State Supplements
-  Exceptional Children
-  At Risk Student Services
-  Low Wealth Supplemental Funding
-  Limited English Proficiency
-  Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Funding
-  Academically & Intellectually Gifted Programs
-  Small County Supplemental Funding



Categorical Allotment Types

Exceptional Children (\$1.2 billion) receive the most funding because of compliance with legal mandates, such as the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). North Carolina has a 13% cap on special education funds, meaning the state will only pay districts for whichever is smaller: the actual number of students identified with disabilities or 13% of the district's total student population.

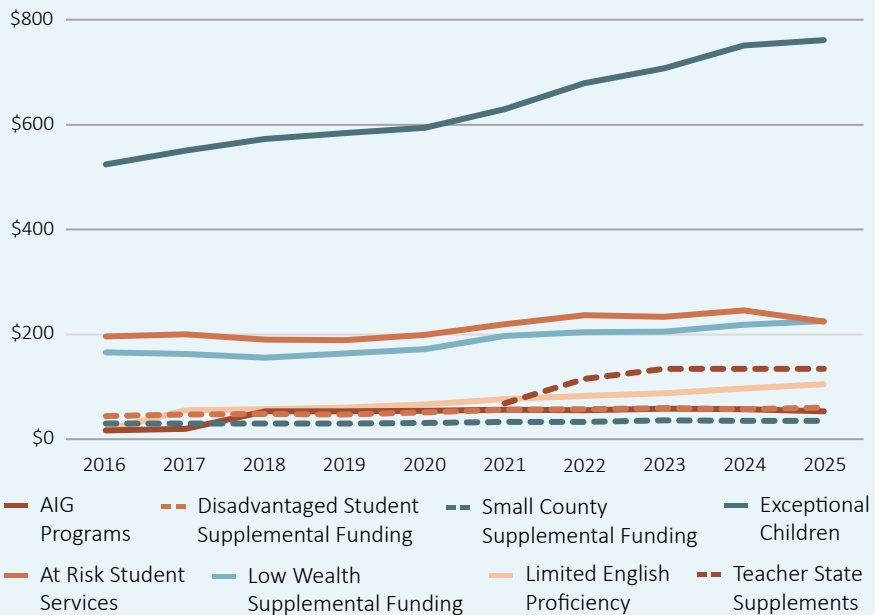
Other student-weighted Categorical Allotments include Academically and Intellectually Gifted (\$92M), At-Risk Student Services (\$374 M), and Limited English Proficiency (\$157M) that serve specific groups of students. These programs remain relatively low and stable from year to year because they are formula-driven, capped, or tied to small student populations.

Teacher State Supplements (\$200M in 111 districts), Low Wealth Supplemental Funding (\$345M in 78 districts), Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Funding (\$111M in all 115 districts), and Small County Supplemental Funding (\$60M in 30 school districts). These funds are awarded based on criteria met at the district level, not individual student characteristics, to support the overhead of operating smaller or lower wealth districts.

Changes in Funding by Category from FY2016-17 to FY2025-26

The following graphic shows the ten-year trends for each of these allotments based on 2025 dollars:

Figure 3 – Per Pupil Funding Over Time for Categorical Allotments, in 2025 Dollars (2016 to 2025)



Differences in growth across programs largely reflect differences in their formulas. Programs like Exceptional Children and At Risk Student Services use formulas that scale with student need, which naturally produce steady increases over time. Low Wealth also grows modestly because its formula recalculates county wealth gaps annually. Exceptional Children (+45.4%) and At Risk Student Services (+14.5%) increased significantly because they use formulas that scale with student need, which produces steady increases over time.

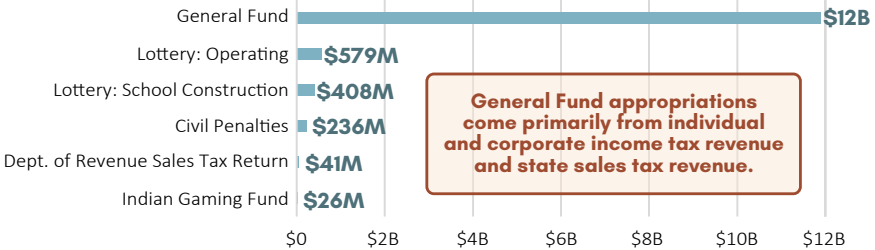
In contrast, Academically and Intellectually Gifted, Limited English Proficiency, and Small County Supplemental Funding remain relatively flat because they rely on fixed ratios, caps, or static eligibility rules. Whereas, Teacher State Supplements grew significantly in its first few years (FY 2021-22 to FY 2023-24) because of increased budget investments.

Source: NC DPI Final Pupils by Grade; NC DPI School Allotment Section, Allotment Data; NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget



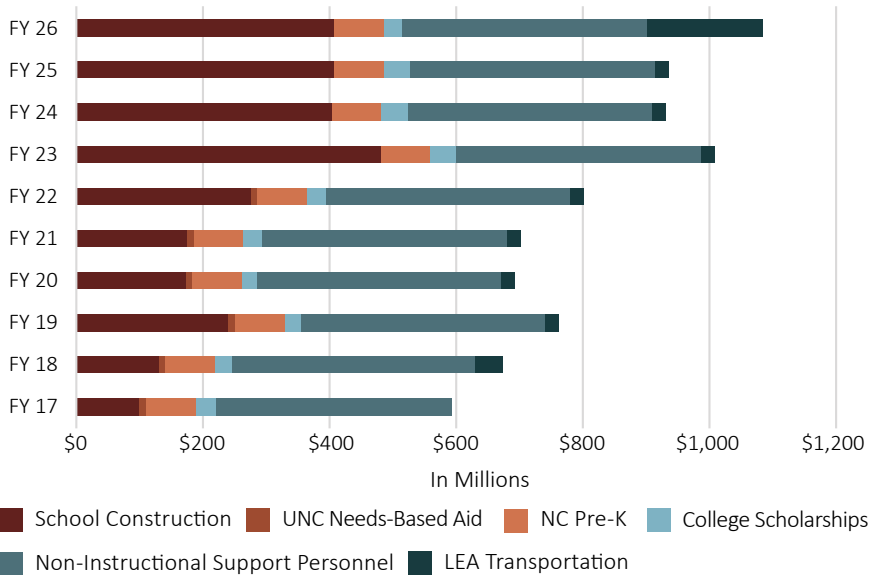
SECTION 4: Finance

State Revenue Sources for K-12 Public Education (2025-26)



Source: Session Law 2025-89, House Bill 125; North Carolina Office of State Management and Budget, Certified Budget Fiscal Year 2025-26

North Carolina Education Lottery: Education-Directed Spending, by Category (FY17-FY26)



Source: Session Law 2025-89, House Bill 125

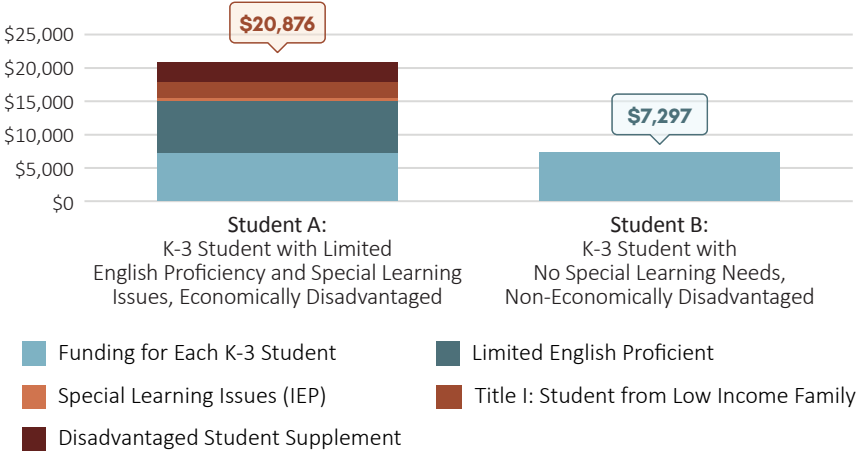


“The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students.”

– Article IX, Section 2, North Carolina Constitution



Example Federal and State per Pupil K-3 Public Education Funding, by Student Characteristic (2025-26)



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.

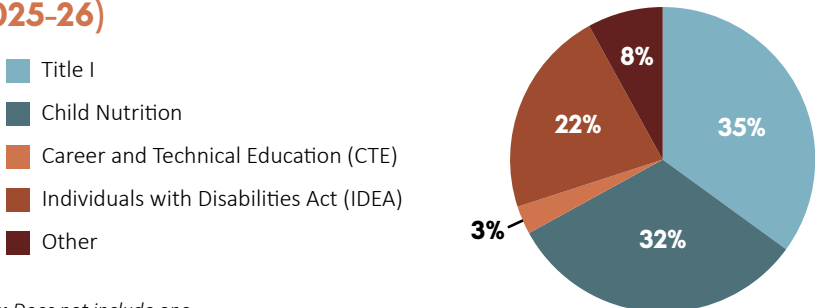
Source: NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget

Federal Education Funding in North Carolina

In the 2024-25 school year, roughly **12%** of the funding for North Carolina public schools came from the federal government. Federal funds support child nutrition, students with disabilities, and students from low-income households (Title I). About 2% of federal funds came from COVID relief funds.

Source: NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget

Distribution of Federal K-12 Public Education Funds (2025-26)



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

Source: NC DPI 2026 Highlights of the Public School Budget



SECTION 4: Finance

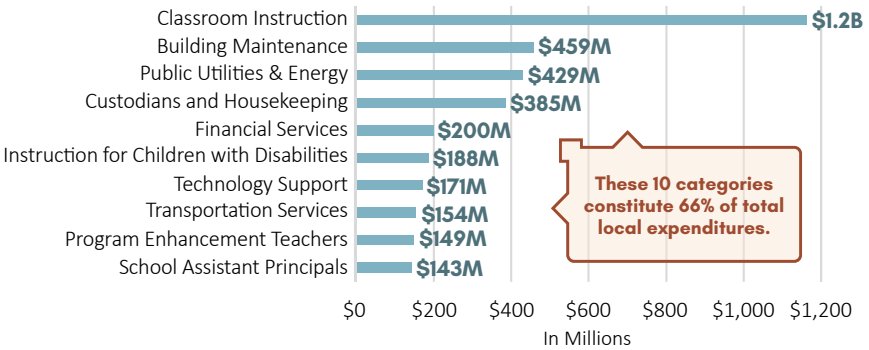
Local Education Funding in North Carolina

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 2024-25, local funds for school operations ranged from **\$1,304 per pupil in Whiteville City Schools** to **\$8,946 per pupil in Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools**, with a median of **\$2,823 per pupil in districts across the state**. In 2024-25, local dollars funded **28,045 positions in K-12 public schools**, including **6,771 service workers**, **6,255 teachers**, **2,369 teacher assistants**, and **790 assistant principals** across the state.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Tables 16 & 24

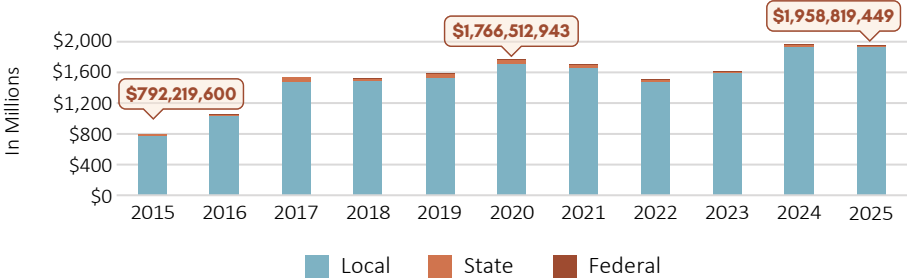
Top-10 Local K-12 Public Education Operating Expenditures (2024-25)



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

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 27

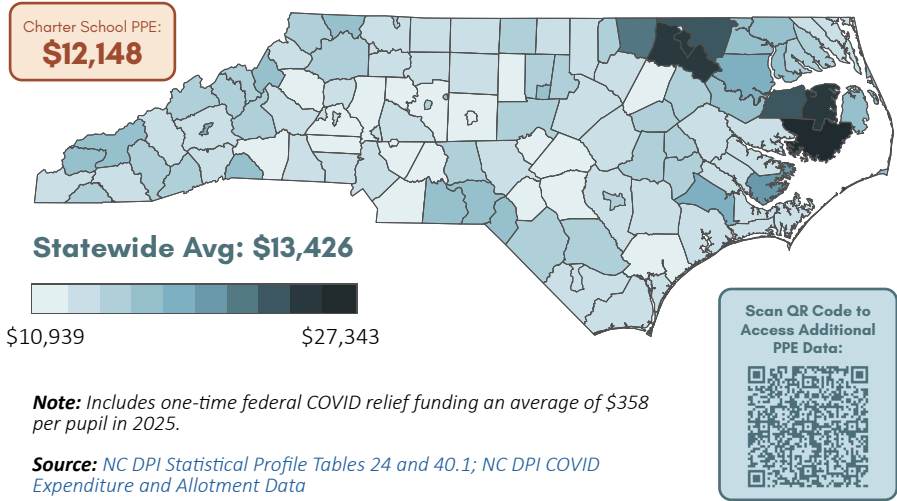
K-12 Public Education Capital Expenditures, Inflation-Adjusted to 2025 Dollars, by Source (2015 to 2025)



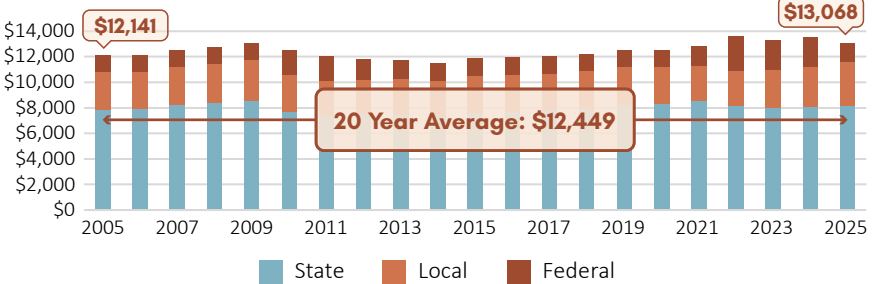
Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 28; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index (2015-2025)



Total K-12 Traditional Public Education per Pupil Expenditures from All Sources, by District (2024-25)



K-12 Traditional Public Education Per Pupil Expenditures, Inflation-Adjusted to 2025 Dollars, by Source (2005 to 2025)



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, \$1,089 per pupil in 2023, \$1,047 per pupil in 2024, and \$358 per pupil in 2025.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 23; US Bureau of Labor Statistics Databases, Tables and Calculators by Subject

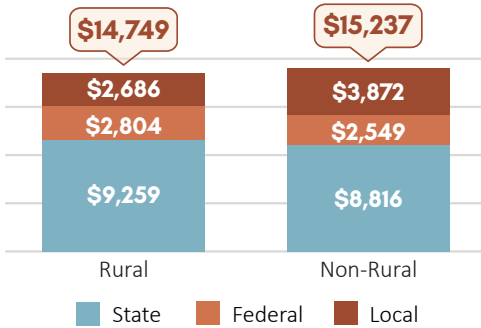
\$18B Overall, it costs the state of North Carolina **more than \$18 billion** from federal, state, and local sources to educate public school students

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile Tables 1 & 23



SECTION 4: Finance

K-12 Traditional Public School per Pupil Expenditures*, by Source and Rural Status (2023-24)

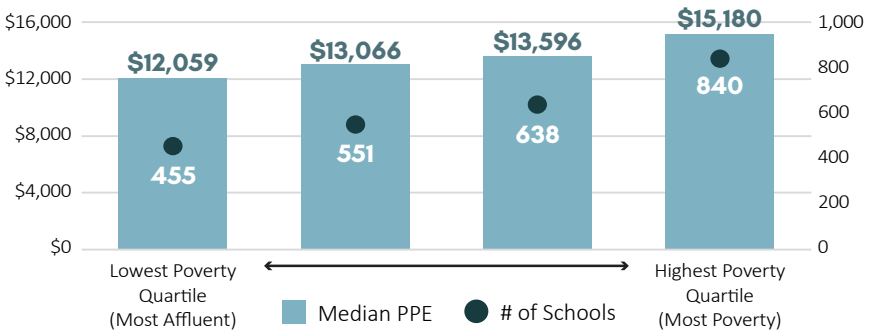


*Includes federal COVID relief funding.

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

Scan QR Code Above to Access the Interactive School Spending Data Explorer Tool and Analyze School- and District-Level Data to Gain Additional Insights and Identify Trends

Median per Pupil Expenditures* in Traditional K-12 Public Schools, by School Poverty Level (2023-24)



*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.

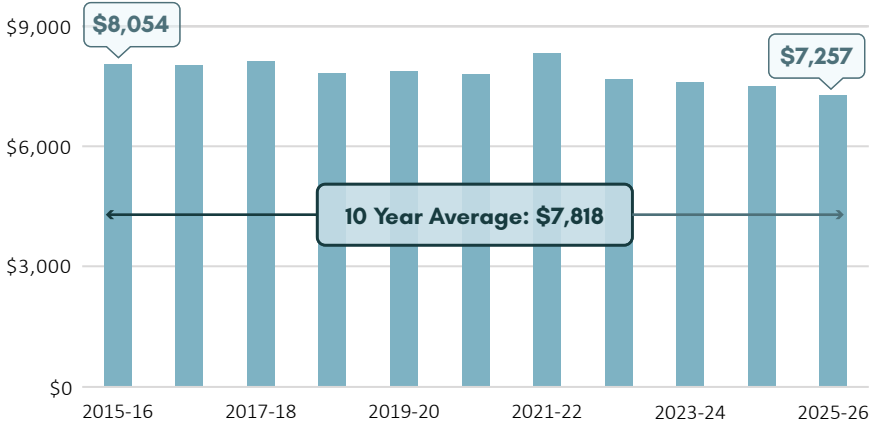
Source: NC DPI School Report Card Data Set

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

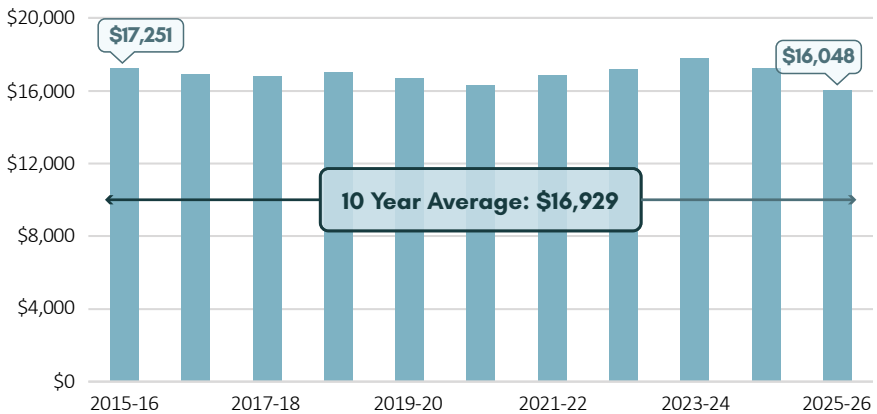


North Carolina Community College System: State Spending per Full-Time Student, Inflation-Adjusted to 2025 Dollars (2015-16 to 2025-26)



Source: NCCCS, Annual State Aid Allocations and Budget Policies Summary; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Databases, Tables and Calculators by Subject

UNC System: State Spending per Full-Time Student, Inflation-Adjusted to 2025 Dollars (2015-16 to 2025-26)

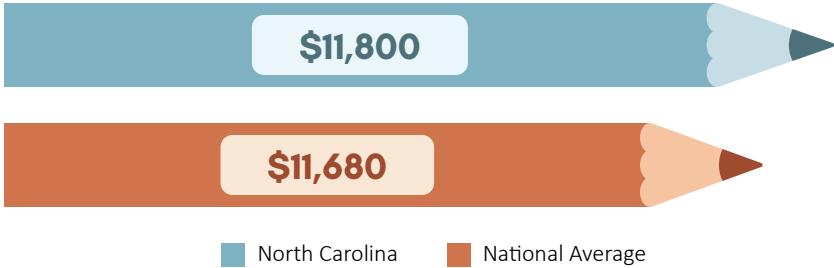


Source: North Carolina General Assembly, Fiscal Research Division (Data Request)



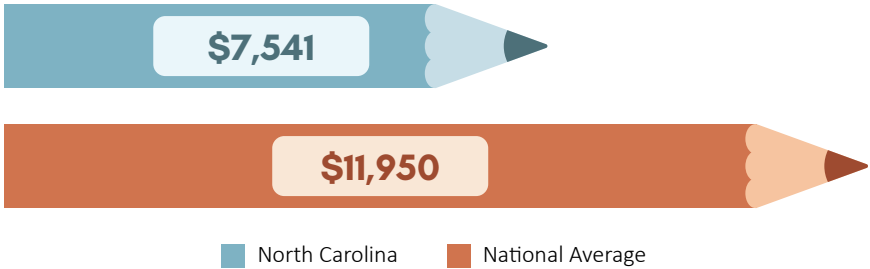
SECTION 4: Finance

State and Local Funding for Higher Education per Full-Time Student (2023-24)



Source: College Board, Trends in College Pricing Annual Report, Table CP-12

Average In-State Tuition and Fees at Public Four-Year Higher Education Institutions (2025-26)



Source: College Board, Trends in College Pricing Annual Report, Table CP-5

In 2023-24, North Carolina ranked 16th nationally for public higher education funding per full-time student.

16th

In 2025-26, average in-state tuition at North Carolina's public four-year institutions was 3rd-lowest nationally.

3rd

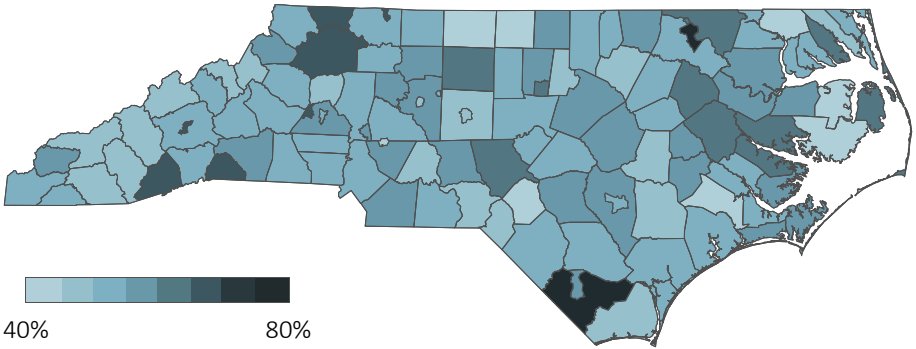
Source: College Board, Trends in College Pricing Annual Report



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 **40% and 45% in eight districts** to more than **80% in Columbus County and Weldon City Schools**, with a median district completion rate between **50% and 54%**.

FAFSA Completion Rates, by District (2025-26 Cycle, through December 2025)



Source: U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid, *FAFSA Completion by High School and Public School District (2025)*



75% of North Carolina public school districts have an estimated FAFSA completion rate of 50% or higher in 2025-26.

Source: U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid



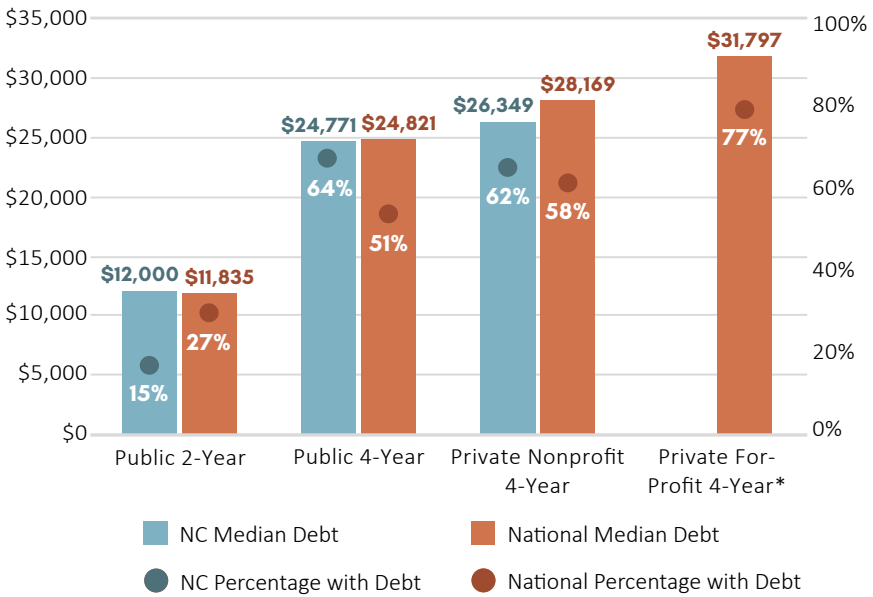
SECTION 4: Finance



“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 (Class of 2020)



*Reporting standards not met for North Carolina.

Source: NCES Powerstats

\$40,074

The Average Federal Student Loan Debt Owed by NC Borrowers in 2025

9th

NC's Cost-of-Living Adjusted Federal Student Loan Debt Ranking Amongst All States in 2025

Note: 91% of all student loan debt is a result of federal loans, nationally.

Source: Federal Student Aid, Federal Student Loan Portfolio; Education Data Initiative; Missouri Economic Research & Information Center, Cost of Living Data Series



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, English II, & Math III		✓
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.

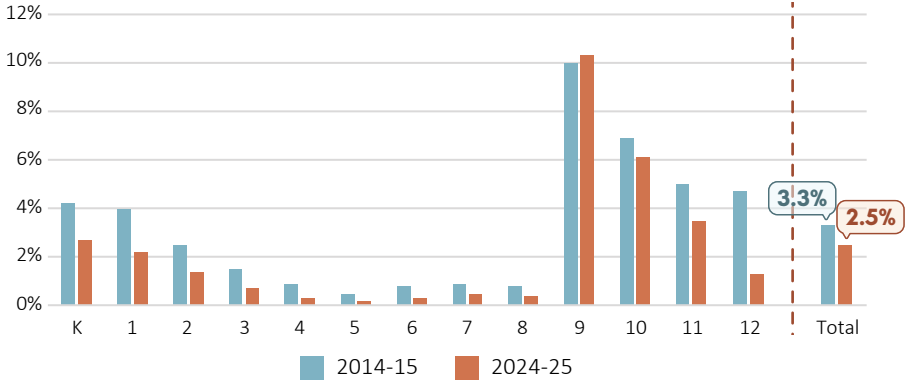
**Students performing at this level have a sufficient command of grade-level knowledge and skills, but may need academic support to engage successfully in the next grade level.

Source: [NC DPI Testing and School Accountability, Technical Information](#)



SECTION 5: Achievement

Retention* (Non-Promotion) Rates in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by Grade Level (2014-15 and 2024-25)

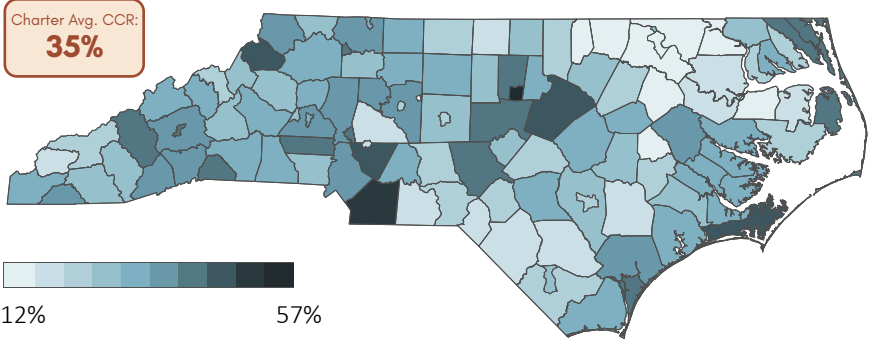


*Students were retained at the end of the academic year listed and remained in the same grade for the following school year.

Source: NC DPI Statistical Profile, Table 2



College and Career Readiness* of K-12 Traditional Public School Students, by District (2024-25)



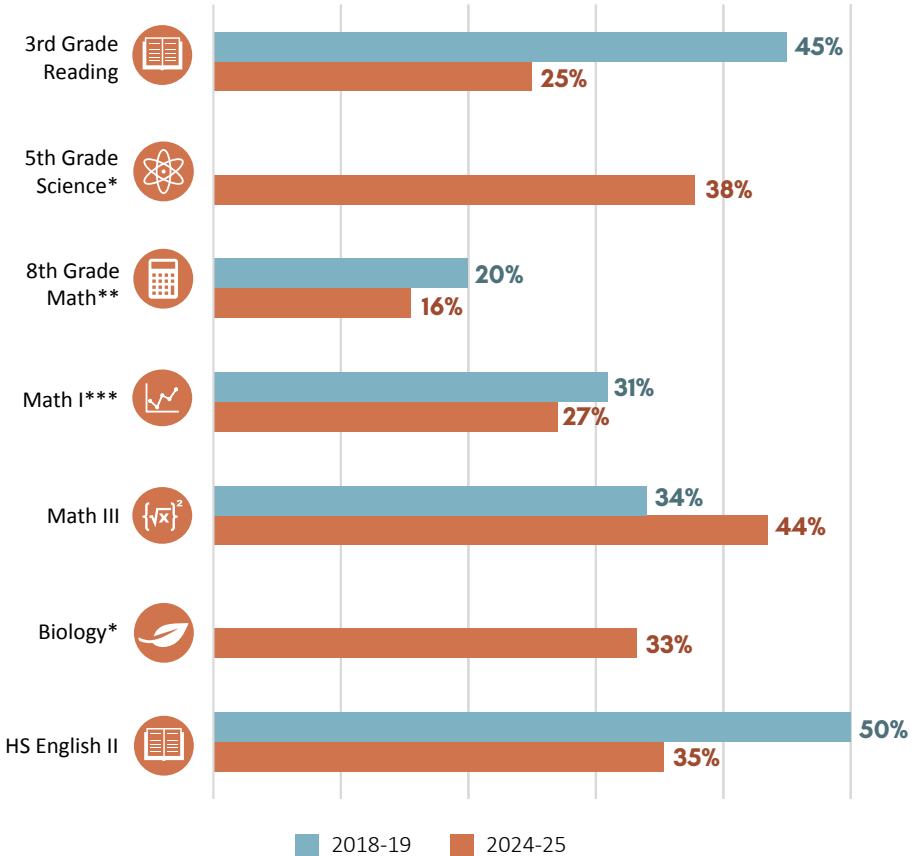
*College and career readiness is indicated by a score of 4 or 5 on all End-of-Grade or End-of-Course assessments.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Data Sets and Reports

In 2024-25, the overall student retention rate in North Carolina traditional public schools was 2.5%. Retention was **highest in grade 9 (10.3%) and grade 10 (6.1%)** and **lowest in grades 4-8** (less than 1%).



K-12 Public School Students On Track for College & Career, by Selected Subject (2018-19 & 2024-25)



*New Biology and Science 5 tests were administered during the 2024-25 academic year. Results cannot be compared to previous years.

**Represents only the students who took the 8th grade Math course.

***Includes all students who took Math 1, regardless of whether they were in 8th grade or high school.

Source: NC DPI Testing Dashboard; NC DPI (Data Request)

25% of 3rd grade students in North Carolina public schools were on track for college and career in reading in 2024-25.

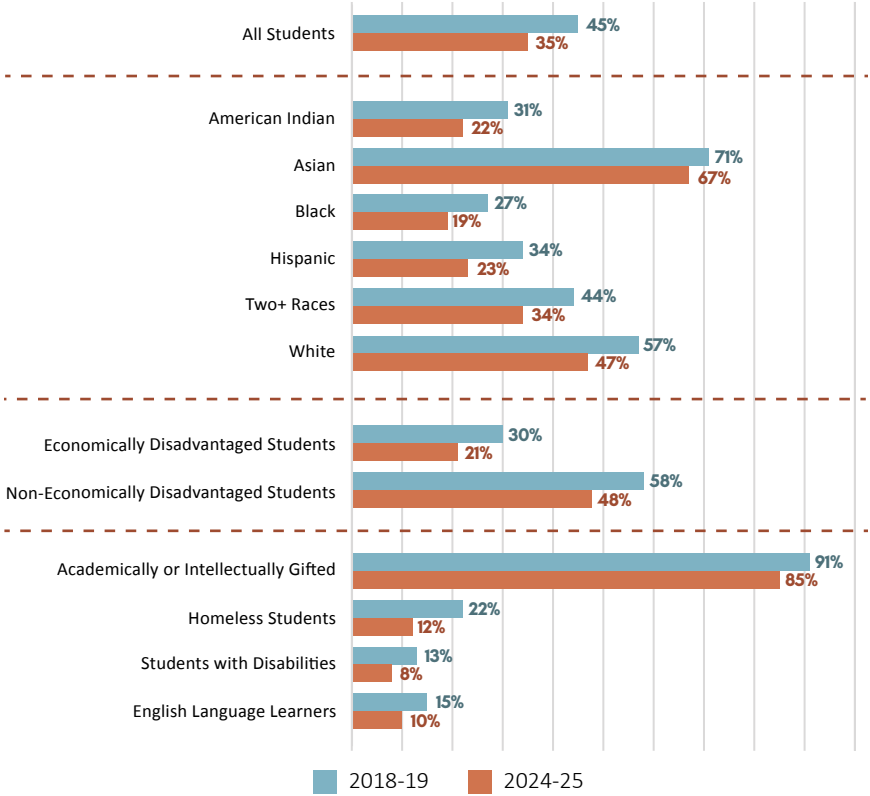
Source: NC DPI Accountability Data Sets and Reports



SECTION 5: Achievement



College and Career Readiness of K-12 Traditional Public School Students, by Student Subgroup (2018-19 & 2024-25)*



Source: NC DPI Testing Dashboard

College and Career Readiness Achievement Gap (2024-25)

Gap between White and Black students:
28 PERCENTAGE POINTS

Gap between White and Hispanic students:
24 PERCENTAGE POINTS

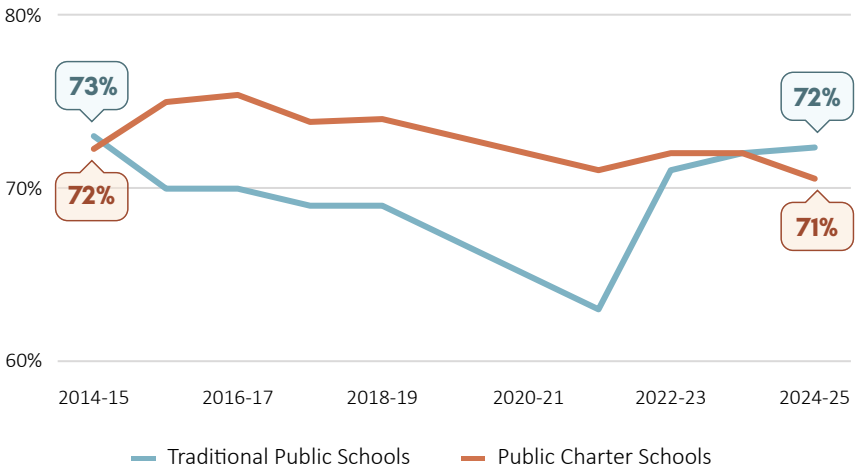
Gap between ED* and non-ED* students:
27 PERCENTAGE POINTS

*Economically disadvantaged

Source: NC DPI Accountability Data Sets and Reports



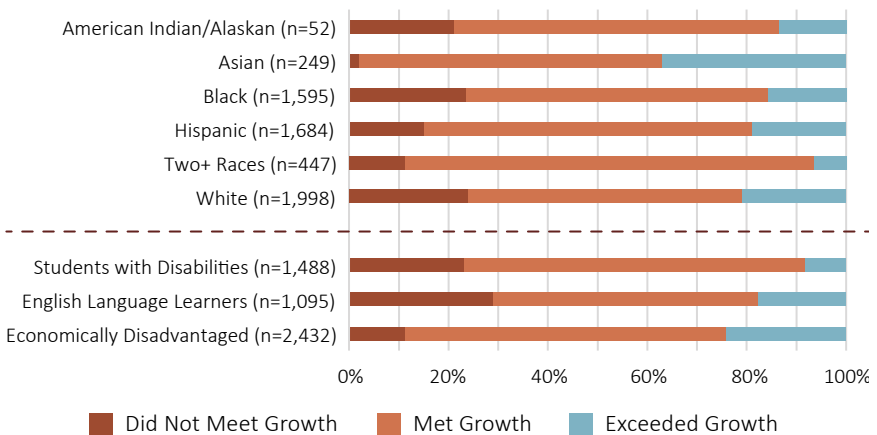
K-12 Public Schools Meeting or Exceeding Expected Student Growth, by School Type (2014-15 to 2024-25)



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

Source: NC DPI Accountability Data Sets and Reports

Distribution of Academic Growth for K-12 Public Schools, by Student Subgroup (2024-25)



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 2024-25 Annual Testing Report, Table 15



SPOTLIGHT ON:

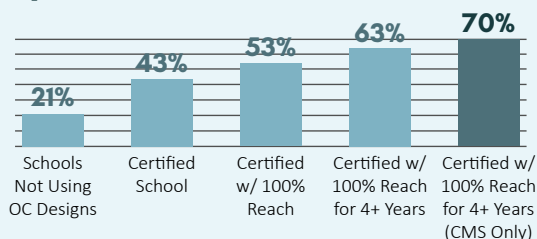
Advanced Teaching Roles™ and Student Growth in North Carolina

The Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) initiative began in 2013 as a public-private partnership in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools called Project L.I.F.T., using Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture model. ATR has since been adopted in about 1/3 of all districts, becoming the nation’s only state-supported, district-led strategic staffing initiative.

As of Fall 2026, more than 600 schools across North Carolina will be actively implementing ATR staffing models. These schools rely on Adult Leadership teachers who lead a team of three to eight teachers to extend the reach of highly effective educators, provide in-classroom coaching, and take direct responsibility for student outcomes. Teachers also earn up to \$21,000 on top of their base pay to take on these advanced roles.

Approximately 89% of schools implementing ATR qualify for Title I funding, which means they have a higher poverty population. Also, most ATR schools are using Public Impact’s Opportunity Model (OC). A 2024–25 analysis of Title I ATR schools using OC (ATR-OC schools) shows strong results. These schools are two to three times more likely to achieve high growth than comparable non-ATR Title I schools.

Percentage of Title I Schools Exceeding Growth Expectations, by OC™ School Status (2024-25)



Specifically, 43% of participating ATR-OC Title I schools exceeded growth targets, compared with just 21% for non-OC Title I schools. Meanwhile, ATR-OC Title I schools that serve all students in core subjects (100% reach) and sustain Advanced Teaching Roles teams for four or more years saw 63% achieve high growth — three times the rate of other Title I schools. The data are clear; ATR expands access to excellent teaching for students who need it most.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools continues to lead in both scale and depth of implementation. Nearly every public school in the district is implementing the ATR model. In 2024–25, schools with ATR teams were more likely to achieve high growth and less likely to post low growth than in prior years. Approximately 70% of schools with four or more years of implementation exceeded growth targets.

Statewide results remain strong, even when excluding Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Title I schools with four or more years of implementation are still more than twice as likely to achieve high growth. These outcomes demonstrate that the model works across districts and contexts.

ATR is currently concentrated heavily in higher poverty schools, making its results especially meaningful. The initiative strengthens educator pipelines while accelerating student learning in historically underserved schools by attracting, developing, and retaining teacher talent.

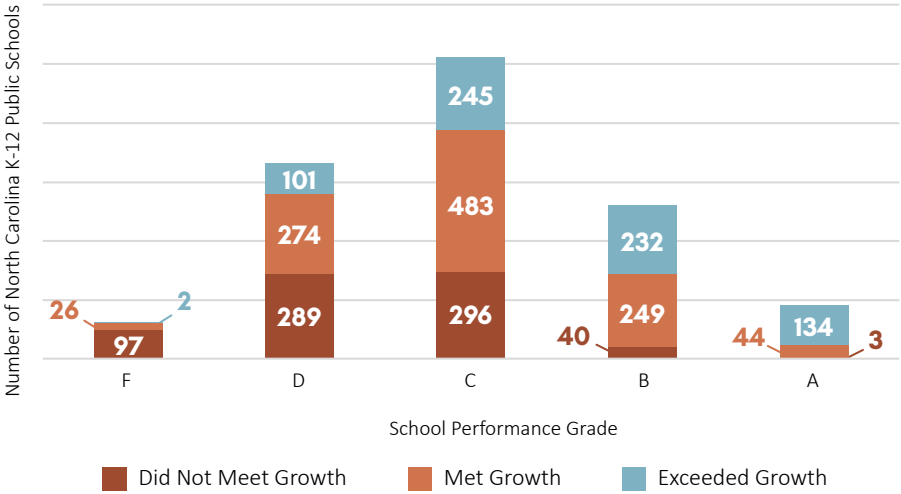
As implementation deepens across North Carolina, the evidence is clear: design matters, duration matters, and reaching all students matters. North Carolina is proving that when excellent teaching reaches every student, the results follow.

Scan QR Code for More Information on ATR™ in NC



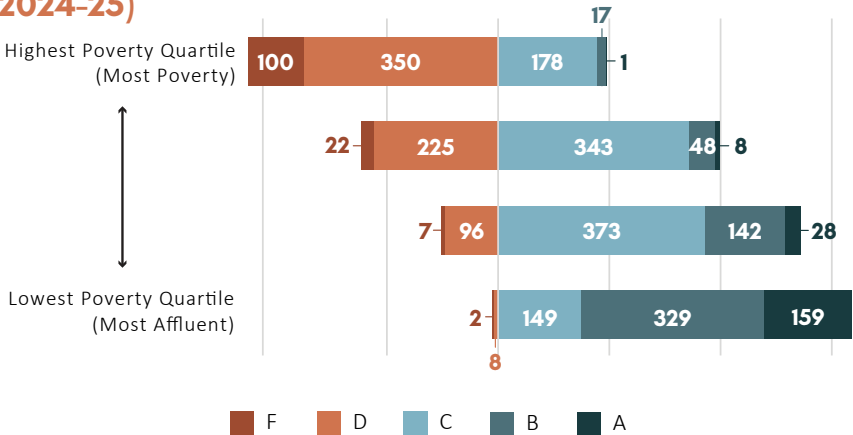


K-12 Public School Performance Grades, by Student Academic Growth (2024-25)



Source: NC DPI Performance and Growth of NC Public Schools 2024-25 Annual Testing Report, Table 19

School Performance Grades, by School Poverty Level (2024-25)



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

Source: NCDPI Accountability Services Division - School Performance Grades; NC DPI Economically Disadvantaged Status Data



National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2024)

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.

Grade	Subject Area	% of Students At or Above Proficient		Highest Proficiency Rate
		North Carolina	National Public Average	
4th	Reading	30%	30%	40% (MA)
4th	Math	41%	39%	51% (MA)
8th	Reading	27%	29%	40% (MA)
8th	Math	31%	27%	37% (MA & WI)

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.

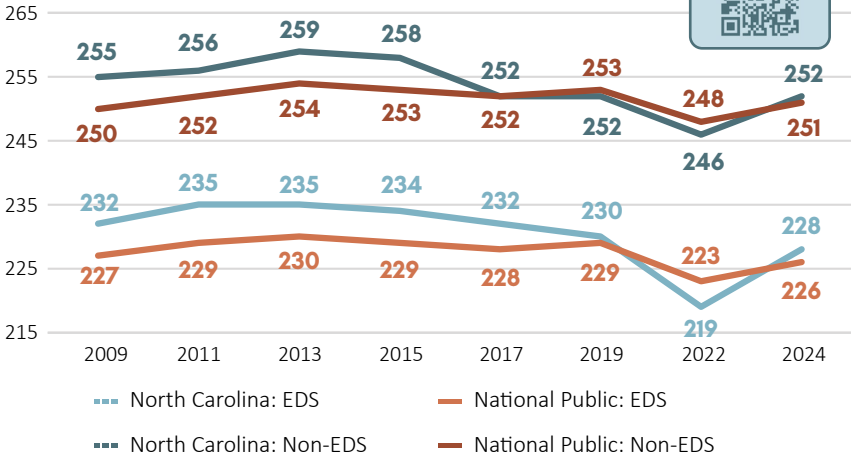
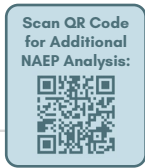
Source: NAEP Data Explorer

31% of North Carolina 4th grade students met proficiency standards on the 2024 NAEP reading assessment.

Source: NAEP Data Explorer

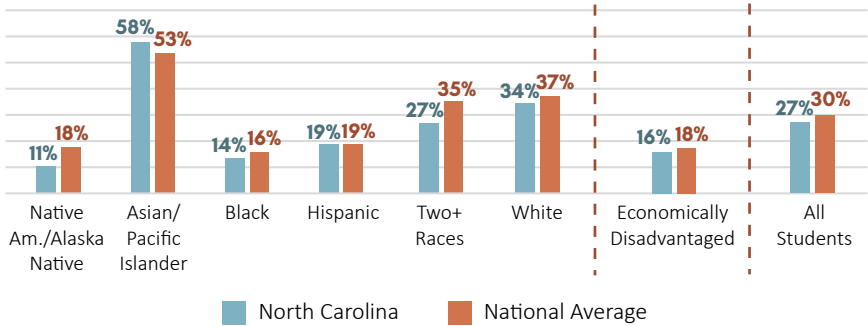


NAEP 4th Grade Math Proficiency, by Economically Disadvantaged Status (EDS) (2009 to 2024)



Source: NAEP Data Explorer

NAEP 8th Grade Reading Proficiency, by Student Subgroup (2024)



Source: NAEP Data Explorer

27% of North Carolina 8th grade students met proficiency standards on the 2024 NAEP reading assessment.



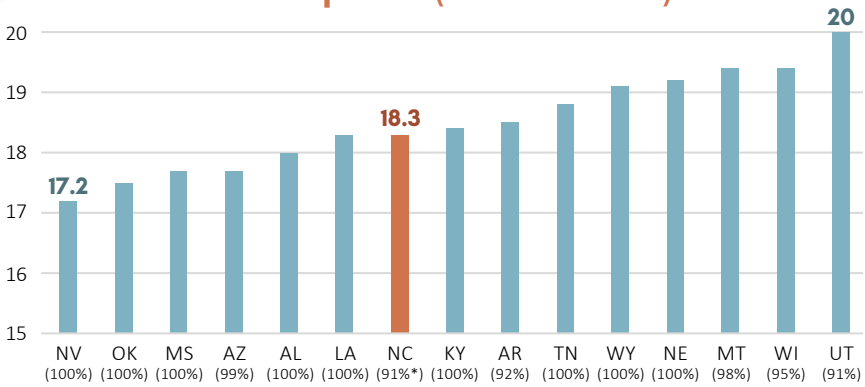
SECTION 5: Achievement

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 (Class of 2025)



Note: State participation percentages in parentheses.

*Participation in NC was calculated using the number of students tested and NC 4th grade enrollment.

Source: ACT, Average ACT Test Scores by State Graduating Class of 2025



In 2024-25, 54% of 11th grade students in North Carolina scored above 17 on the ACT, which is the minimum entry score required for admission into UNC-System institutions.

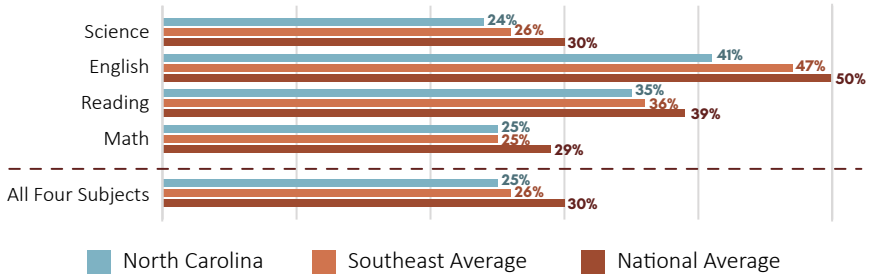
Source: NC DPI Accountability Data Sets and Reports

60% of high school seniors with a CTE concentration earned at least a Silver Career Readiness Certificate on the ACT WorkKeys assessment in 2024-25.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Data Sets and Reports

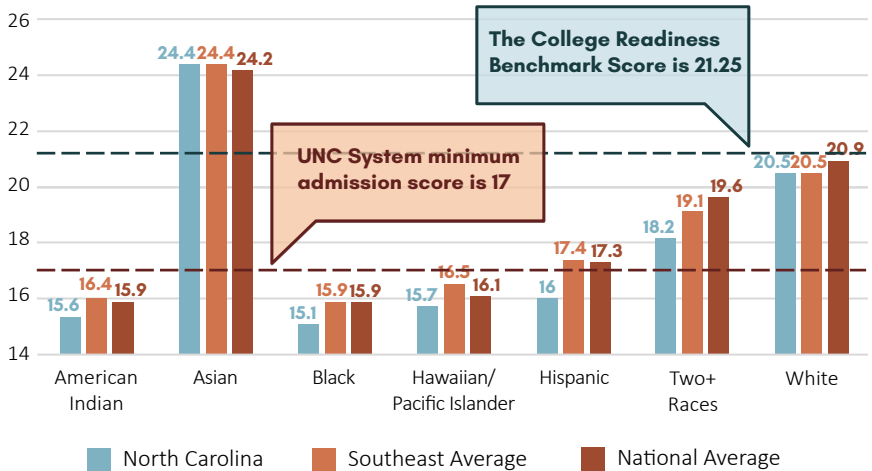


High School Students Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks on the ACT, by Subject Area (Graduating Class of 2025)*



Source: ACT High School Graduating Class Data Visualization Tool 2025

Average ACT Composite Score, by Race/Ethnicity (Class of 2025)*



Source: ACT High School Graduating Class Data Visualization Tool 2025

*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

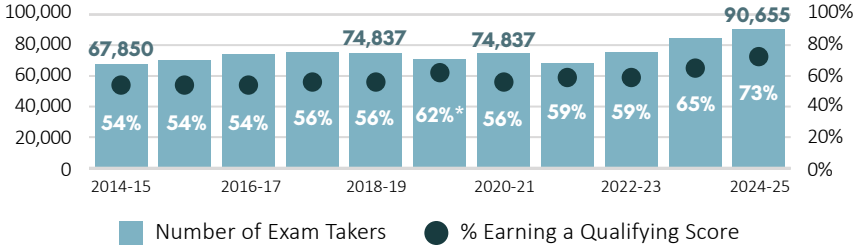
Only **37%** of economically disadvantaged students had a 17 or higher ACT composite score in 2024-25, compared to **66%** of non-economically disadvantaged students.

Source: NC DPI Accountability Data Sets and Reports



SECTION 5: Achievement

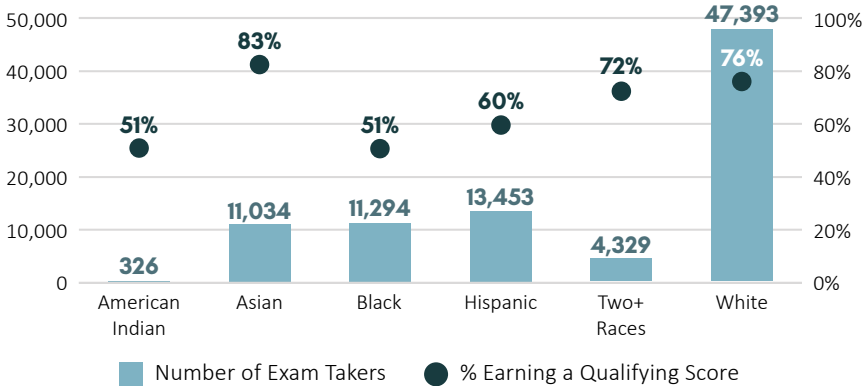
Advanced Placement (AP) Exam Participation and Percentage Earning a Qualifying Score in K-12 Public Schools (2014-15 to 2024-25)



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

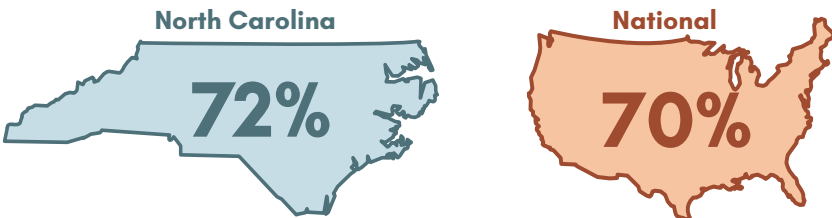
Source: NC DPI SAT and AP Reports

AP Exam Participation and Percentage Earning a Qualifying Score in K-12 Public Schools, by Race/Ethnicity (2024-25)



Source: College Board, Advanced Placement National and State Data

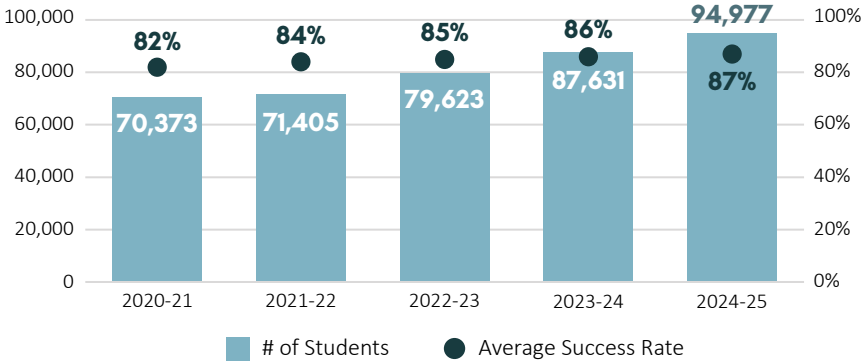
AP Exams Receiving a Qualifying Score (2024-25)



Source: College Board, Advanced Placement National and State Data

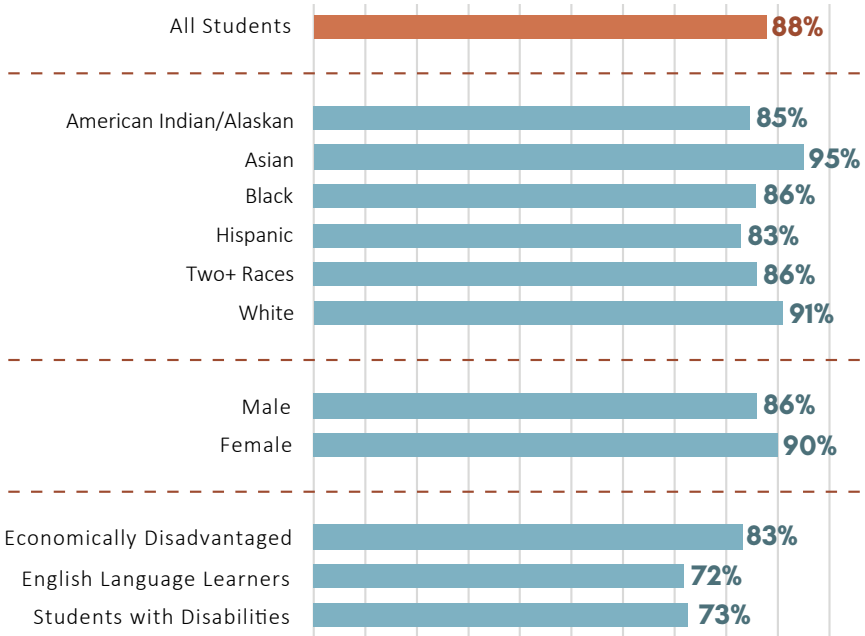


Career and College Promise Participation and Average Course Success Rates (2020-21 to 2024-25)



Source: NCCCS Data Dashboard, Dual Enrollment Programs

K-12 Public High School Four-Year Graduation Rates, by Student Subgroup (Class of 2025)



Source: NC DPI Accountability Dashboards



SECTION 5: Achievement

High School Diploma Integrity

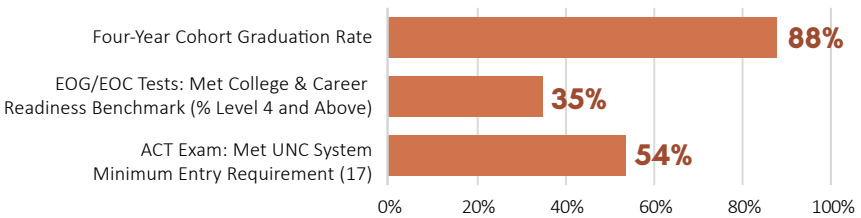
The four-year cohort graduation rate in North Carolina public schools increased from **77% in 2010** to **88% in 2025**. The integrity of North Carolina’s high school diploma is called into question when high school graduation rates are compared with ACT scores and End-of-Course exam proficiency. The 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 Data Sets and Reports

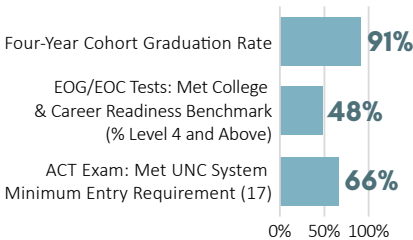


Public High School Graduation Rates vs. Postsecondary Readiness, by Student Subgroup (Graduating Class of 2025)

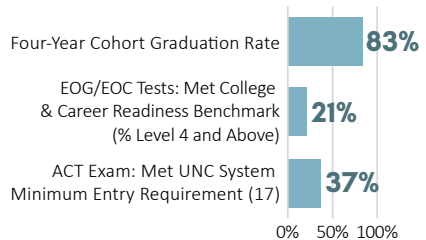
All Students



Non-Economically Disadvantaged Students



Economically Disadvantaged Students



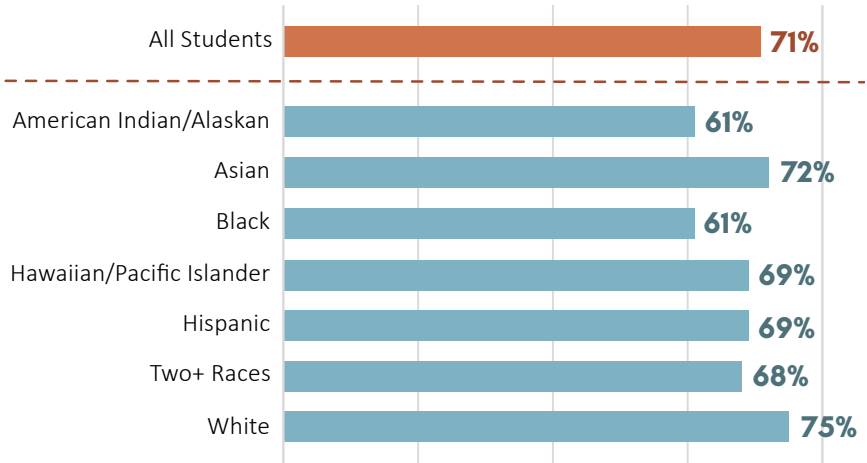
Source: NC DPI Accountability Data Sets and Reports

In 2024, female students had a 4-year graduation rate of **90%** and a college enrollment rate of **45%**, while male students had a 4-year graduation rate of **86%** and an enrollment rate of **31%**.

Source: myFutureNC Data Dashboards, Career and College Access



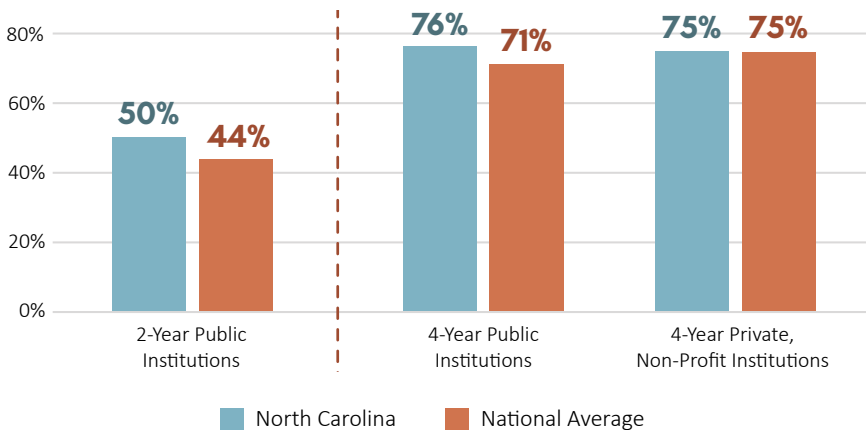
First Year Progression Rate* in the North Carolina Community College System, by Race/Ethnicity (Fall 2023)



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

Source: NCCCS Analytics and Reporting, First Year Progression Dashboard

Six-Year Higher Education Graduation Rates (Fall 2019 Cohort)

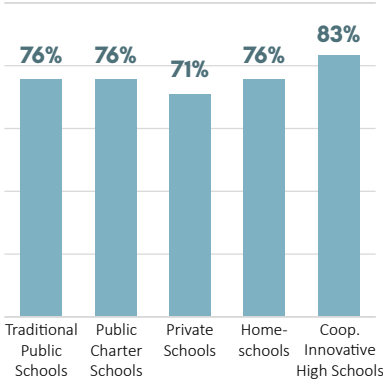


Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Yearly Progress and Completion



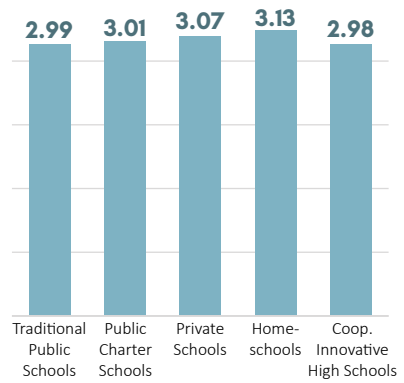
SECTION 5: Achievement

UNC System Acceptance Rates, by Incoming High School Type (Fall 2025)



Source: UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards

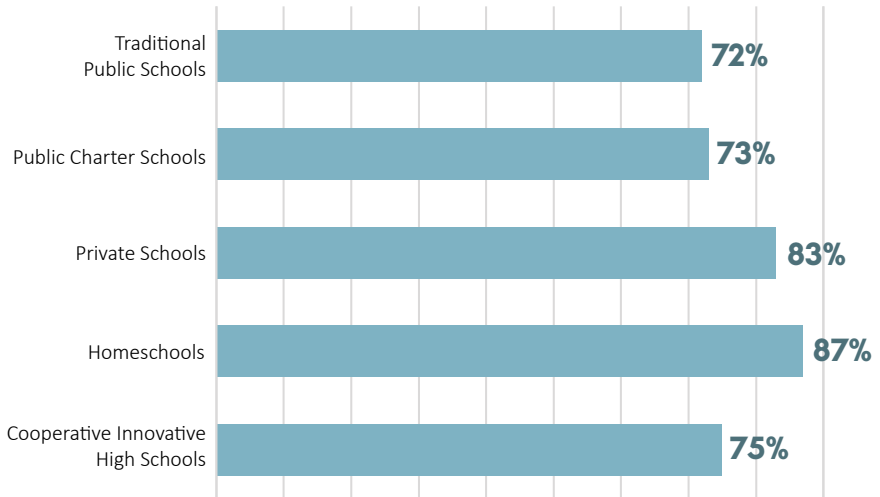
UNC System First Year GPA, by Incoming High School Type (Fall 2024)



Source: UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards



UNC System Six-Year Graduation Rates, by Incoming High School Type (2019 Cohort*)



*These students began college or university during the 2019-20 academic year, so their first year was impacted by COVID-19 pandemic-related closures.

Source: UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards



UNC System Enrollment and Six-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time Students Attending Full-Time (2019 Cohort)

Institution	Enrollment	Graduation Rate
Appalachian State University	3,501	71%
East Carolina University	4,364	63%
Elizabeth City State University	385	46%
Fayetteville State University	678	36%
NC A&T State University	2,289	56%
NC Central University	1,027	47%
NC State University	4,770	85%
UNC Asheville	654	51%
UNC-Chapel Hill	4,182	91%
UNC Charlotte	3,653	68%
UNC Greensboro	2,746	58%
UNC Pembroke	1,131	43%
UNC School of the Arts	234	80%
UNC Wilmington	2,342	72%
Western Carolina University	2,107	61%
Winston-Salem State University	967	47%
UNC System Total	35,030	68%

Source: *UNC System Interactive Data Dashboards*

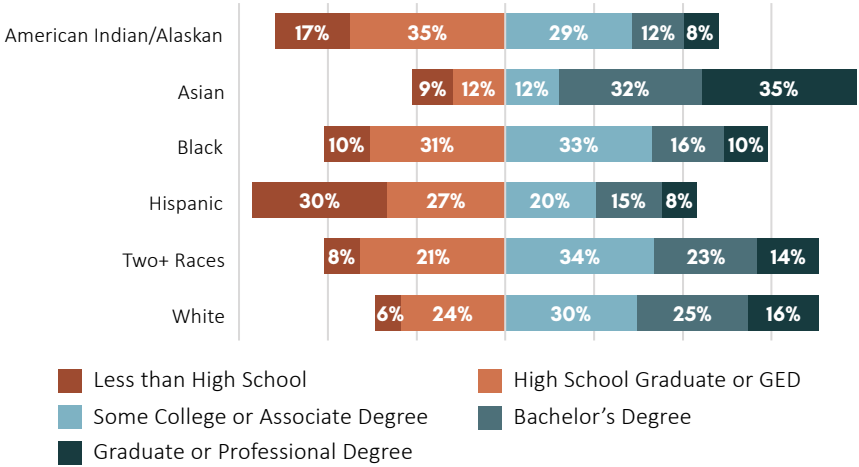
At **91%**, UNC-Chapel Hill has the highest six-year graduation rate within the UNC System for full-time students attending for the first time.



SECTION 5: Achievement



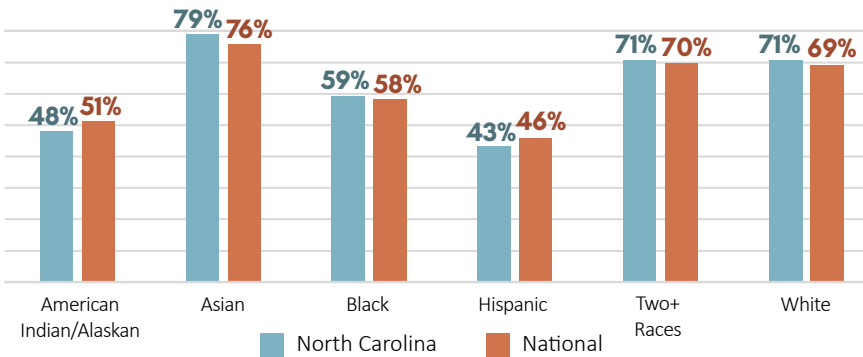
Educational Attainment of Adults Ages 25 and Older, by Race/Ethnicity (2024)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201



Adults Ages 25 and Older with Any Postsecondary Education, by Race/Ethnicity (2024)

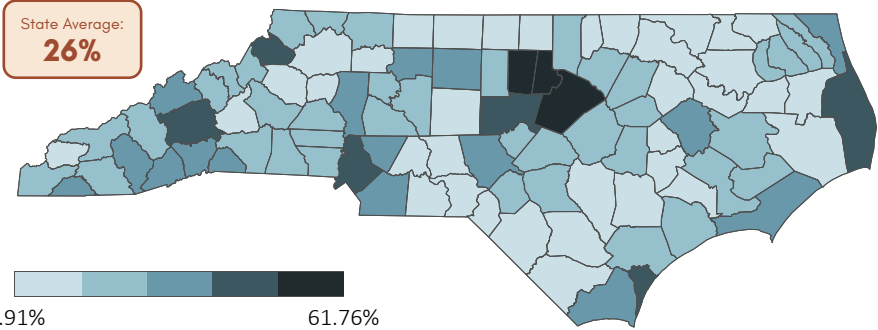


Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201

30% of Hispanic adults and 11% of Black adults over the age of 25 have less than a high school diploma, compared to **6%** of White adults.

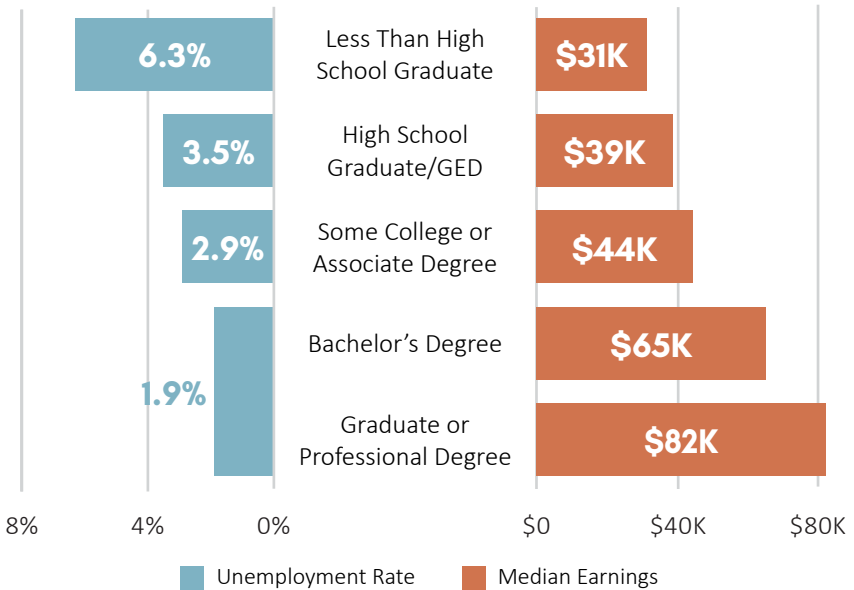


Percentage of Adults Ages 25 to 44 with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, by County (2024)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2024, Table B15003

Unemployment Rate and Median Earnings of Adults Age 25 and Older, by Educational Attainment (2024)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2024), American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B20004; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment (2024), 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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