



EDUCATION

WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

In the Asheville area, the education and business community work closely together to build the elements necessary to support a vibrant economy.



RIVERBIRDRESEARCH

A DIVISION OF THE ASHEVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

RIVERBIRDRESEARCH.COM

COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

ASHEVILLE-BUNCOMBE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A-B Tech has 7 college-wide academic divisions including: Academic Success, Allied Health, Arts and Sciences, Business and Hospitality Education, Emergency Services, Engineering and Applied Technology, and Workforce Development/Continuing Education. A-B Tech offers 87 curriculum programs, 877 degrees, 109 diplomas and 646 certificates.

Source: A-B Tech Institutional Profile 2021-2022

Craft Beverage Institute

A-B Tech's Craft Beverage Institute of the Southeast provides the training needed to meet the professional standards of Asheville and Buncombe County's spectacular beverage industries.

Advanced Manufacturing

The Advanced Manufacturing Center is a state of the art teaching facility focused on building and sustaining a skilled workforce.

Information Technology

A-B Tech has certificates ranging from Computer Basics to Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) preparation.



HAYWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Haywood Community College offers over 30 programs and supports workforce, industry, and small businesses through the Regional High Tech Center in Waynesville, NC.

- Award Levels: Certificates and Associate's Degree
- Enrollment (Fall 2024): 1,376 curriculum students / 1,083 continuing education students
- Completions (2023): 215 Certificates, 206 Associate's

Select programs include:

- Auto Systems Technology
- Forestry Management Technology
- Computer-Integrated Machining

BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Blue Ridge Community College offers more than 200 degrees, diplomas, and certificates in over 30 areas of study and has one of the largest Continuing Education programs in the state.

- Award Levels: Certificates and Associate's Degree
- Enrollment (Fall 2024): 2,623 curriculum students / 2,051 continuing education students
- Completions (2023): 437 Certificates, 364 Associate's

Select programs include:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- IT & Computer
- Healthcare



>> Photography:

Courtesy of Blue Ridge Community College

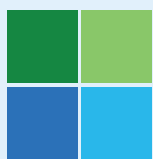
ISOTHERMAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Awarded as one of the top online schools in North Carolina, Isothermal Community College offers custom training for new businesses and existing industry in the area.

- Award Levels: Certificates and Associate's Degree
- Enrollment (Fall 2024): 1,984 curriculum students / 1,133 continuing education students
- Completions (2023): 522 Certificates, 356 Associate's

Select programs include:

- Computer-Integrated Machining
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing Technology



**OF THE 58 COLLEGES IN THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM,
12 ARE IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA*:**

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College | 7 Mayland Community College |
| 2 Blue Ridge Community College | 8 McDowell Technical Community College |
| 3 Caldwell Community College | 9 Southwestern Community College |
| 4 Cleveland Community College | 10 Tri-County Community College |
| 5 Haywood Community College | 11 Western Piedmont Community College |
| 6 Isothermal Community College | 12 Wilkes Community College |

**Western North Carolina includes 24-counties: Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey counties.*

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE

As part of the University of North Carolina System, UNC Asheville is one of the top public liberal arts colleges in the nation according to *U.S. News and World Report*.

- Award Levels: Certificates, Bachelor's Degree, and Master's Degree
- Enrollment (2022): 2,914
- Completions (2023): 684 Bachelor's, 0 Master's

65%

of UNC Asheville's students complete original research in their field of study

Top Ten

"BEST BUY" PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES
IN THE NATION

The Fiske Guide to Colleges, 2025



<< Photography:
Courtesy of UNC Asheville

SELECT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Engineering

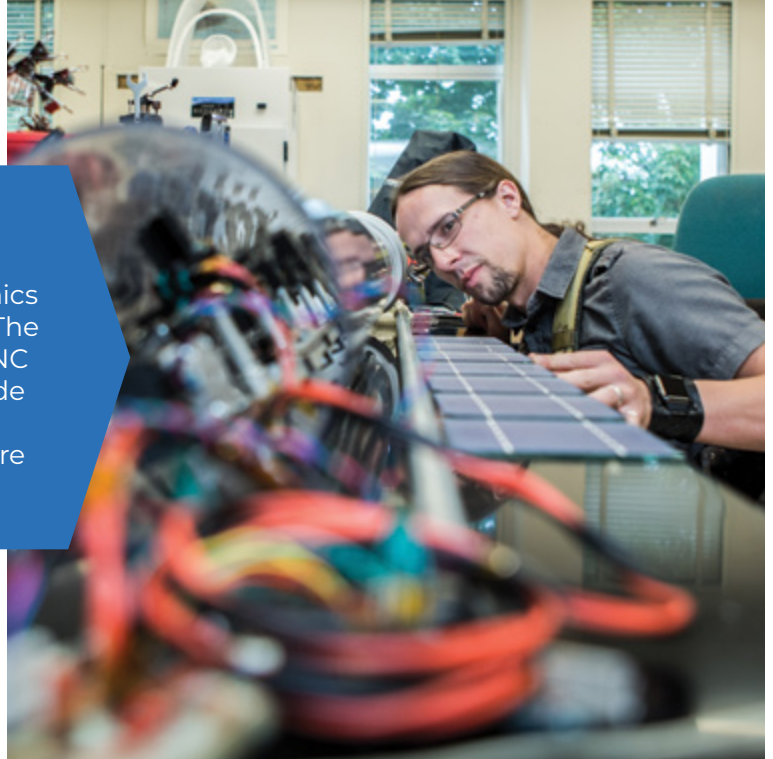
NC State and UNC Asheville jointly offer Mechatronics Engineering with all years completed in Asheville. The 2+2 Engineering program is also offered jointly by NC State and UNC Asheville with disciplines that include Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Environmental Engineering, and more. Two years are completed at UNCA and two years at NCSU.

Music Technology

The music department has a key partnership with Bob Moog Electronic Music Studio playing an important role in developing talent for music industry growth in the area. The music industry was estimated to contribute \$254M in total output and supported over 4,800 jobs in Buncombe county in 2024.

Life Sciences

Biology and Chemistry Bachelor's degrees are offered with state-of-the-art research labs preparing students for Master's and Ph.D. programs. The Atmospheric Science program provides opportunities to connect with National Centers for Environmental Information, one of the nation's largest weather data centers.



<< Photography: Courtesy of UNC Asheville



WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

WCU ranked in the top 100 Best Employers in North Carolina, 2024. It also ranked #135 on a national list for the Best Employers for Women. - Forbes.com, 2024

Also part of the UNC System, Western Carolina University (WCU) offers more than 115 undergraduate majors and over 40 graduate degree and certificate programs.

- Award Levels: Certificates, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctor's Degree
- Enrollment (2022): 11,635
- Completions (2023): 53 Certificates, 2,771 Bachelor's, 555 Master's, 79 Doctor's

Western Carolina is approximately 50 miles from Asheville and sits on 600 acres of gorgeous mountainous area. Several of the graduate and professional programs operate from a large instructional site in south Asheville in Biltmore Park Towne Square. These include degrees in Business, Counseling, Education Leadership, Engineering, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Public Affairs and more.

#3 AMONG "AMERICA'S BEST MIDSIZE EMPLOYERS"

Forbes.com, 2025

Nursing

Western Carolina University's Bachelor of Science in nursing prelicensure program is ranked first in the state by the Nursing Schools Almanac research team, in part for achieving an almost perfect rate of graduates passing the National Council Licensure Examination, on their first attempt. Additionally, WCU offers several highly ranked nursing degrees at the Master's and Doctoral levels in Asheville and online.



<< Photography: Courtesy of WCU

SELECT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Engineering

The Bachelor of Science in Engineering program provides traditional engineering curriculum with extensive hands-on laboratory and real world experience. Concentrations include Electrical Power, Manufacturing, and Mechanical. The College of Engineering and Technology also partners with businesses, industry and entrepreneurs to develop new products and processes through The Rapid Center, the in-house research and development center.

Data Science

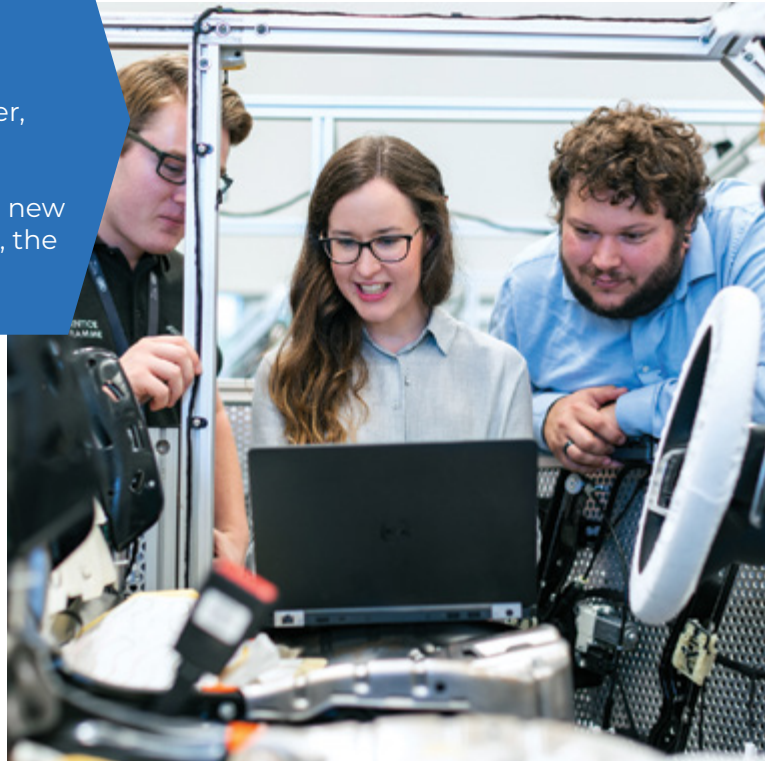
The Graduate Certificate in Data Science is designed for the part-time student who wants to improve their skills in managing, visualizing and modeling with data. The stand-alone certificate program is located at the main campus and the instructional site at Biltmore Park-Asheville.

Business Administration

WCU's Business Administration Program is home to the nationally renowned Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, as well as the Master of Project Management and MBA programs, which are fully accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), an international organization.

Ed2Go

Ed2Go is an independent provider of online non-credit training that partners with colleges and universities across the country. Their offerings often compliment what Continuing Education offices are doing or supplement when institutions don't offer certain topics. WCU offers both the "Fundamentals & Special Interest" listing, intro level courses that allow people to explore new areas and skills, and the "Advanced Career Training" list which has more in-depth certificate programs, preparing students for certification and higher level career advancement.



<< Photography: Courtesy of WCU

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Located in Boone, about 85 miles northeast of Asheville, Appalachian State University is part of the University of North Carolina system and is regularly cited as a top public school.

- Award Levels: Certificates, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctor's Degree
- Enrollment (2022): 20,436
- Completions (2023): 305 Certificates, 4,110 Bachelor's, 818 Master's, 20 Doctor's

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is an area of public education that focuses on providing students with opportunities in high skill, high demand and high wage areas. App State offers the only online degree program in the state of North Carolina for licensing Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers.

#2 AMONG "TOP PUBLIC SCHOOLS, SOUTH"

U.S. News & World Report, 2025 U.S. News Best Colleges

#3 IN LIST OF "REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES, SOUTH"

U.S. News & World Report, 2025 U.S. News Best Colleges

Nursing

At Appalachian State, the BSN, RN to BSN, and MSN programs are available within nursing. NCLEX pass rate for BSN students was 97%. Source: NC Board of Nursing, 2021-2023 3-year average.



>> Photography: Courtesy of Appalachian State University

TOTAL STUDENTS
404,721

ASHEVILLE AREA HIGHER EDUCATION MARKET

WITHIN 25-MILE RADIUS**

Enrolled Students: 20,259
Completions: 5,510

- University of North Carolina at Asheville
- A-B Tech Community College
- Montreat College
- Warren Wilson College
- Mars Hill University
- Haywood Community College
- Blue Ridge Community College

WITHIN 50-MILE RADIUS**

Enrolled Students: 135,394
Completions: 38,254

- Brevard College
- Clemson University
- East Tennessee State University
- Furman University
- Greenville Technical College
- Isothermal Community College
- Maryland Community College
- McDowell Technical Community College
- North Greenville University
- Southern Wesleyan University
- Southwestern Community College
- Tusculum University
- Western Carolina University*
- Western Piedmont Community College

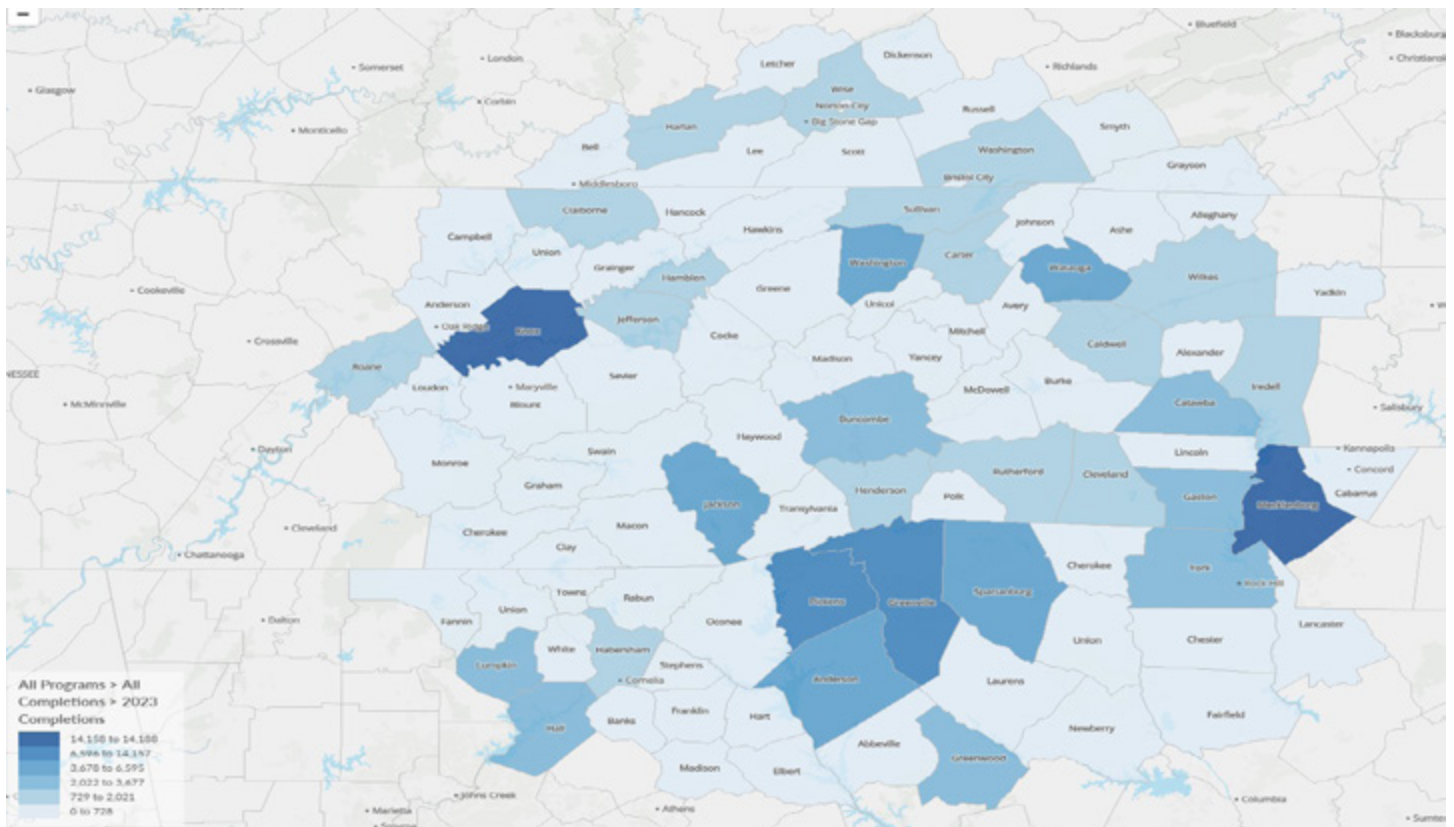
WITHIN 100-MILE RADIUS**

Enrolled Students: 404,721
Completions: 108,262

- Anderson University
- Belmont Abbey College
- Converse University
- Emory & Henry College
- Gardner-Webb University
- King University
- Lenoir-Rhyne University
- North Georgia Technical College
- Piedmont University
- Presbyterian College
- Spartanburg Community College
- University of Tennessee-Knoxville
- University of South Carolina-Upstate
- Winthrop University
- Wofford College
- York Technical College
- Young Harris College

*Schools that have a satellite campus in Asheville.

**Not a comprehensive list and subject to change



PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES

LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY

Lenoir-Rhyne University's Center for Graduate Studies of Asheville is one of the university's three campuses (other campuses are located in Hickory, NC and Columbia, SC). The Center primarily offers master's degree programs, and houses the Lenoir-Rhyne Equity & Diversity Institute (LREDI) and Thomas Wolfe Center for Narrative.

- Award Levels: Certificates, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctor's Degree
- Enrollment (2022): 2,354
- Completions (2023): 334 Bachelor's, 284 Master's, 16 Doctor's

Select programs include:

- Sustainability Studies
- Equity & Diversity Institute
- MBA Social Impact

MBA in Social Impact

Emphasizes multiple business-related routes toward a better world and how they rely on one another. The curriculum is built for students who are interested in industries related to mission-driven for-profit companies, nonprofits, philanthropy, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other business models



▲ Photography: Courtesy of Lenoir-Rhyne

MARS HILL UNIVERSITY

Located in Madison County, Mars Hill University is a private, four-year liberal arts institution. Founded in 1856 by Baptist families of the region, it is the oldest institution of higher learning in western North Carolina on its original site.

- Award Levels: Certificates, Bachelor's Degree, and Master's Degree
- Enrollment (2022): 1,032
- Completions (2023): 198 Bachelor's, 28 Master's

Select programs include:

- Business Administration
- Music Education
- International Studies

International Studies

Students learn to analyze and tackle global issues while navigating the increasing complexity of our globalized world. Students gain experience with political science, history, economics, and more.



MONTREAT COLLEGE

Montreat College is a private, Christian, liberal arts college founded in 1916. The main campus is located in Montreat, North Carolina, just outside Asheville. The college's School of Adult and Graduate Studies also has locations in Asheville, Charlotte, Morganton, and online.

- Award Levels: Certificates, Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's Degree
- Enrollment (2022): 972
- Completions (2023): 5 Associate's, 151 Bachelor's, 52 Master's

Select programs include:

- Clinical Mental Health Counseling
- Human Resource Management
- Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity

Montreat College is designated a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education by the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).



WARREN WILSON COLLEGE

A small, private four-year college located in the Swannanoa Valley near Asheville. Warren Wilson College is on an 1,100 acre campus where students can learn in a working farm and garden, in managed forests, in native wilderness, and on land-based work crews from landscaping to fiber arts.

- Award Levels: Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree
- Enrollment (2022): 793
- Completions (2023): 127 Bachelor's, 42 Master's

Select programs include:

- Economics
- Environmental Studies
- MFA for Writers

MFA for Writers

Established in 1976 and taught by nationally-recognized faculty, including Pulitzer and National Book Award winners, national and state poets laureate, and NEA, Guggenheim, Fulbright, and MacArthur fellows.



DAOIST TRADITIONS COLLEGE OF CHINESE MEDICAL ARTS

Founded in 2003, Daoist Traditions College is a small, private four-year college located in the historic Montford district of Asheville, NC. The school prepares students to become successful practitioners of Chinese acupuncture and herbal medicine. Programs include a Master and Doctor of Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine (MAHM and DAHM), as well as a Certificate in Chinese Herbal Medicine (CCHM).

- Award Levels: Certificates, Master's Degree, and Doctoral Degree
- Enrollment (2024-2025): 102 (Master's and Doctoral programs)
- Completions (2025): 18 Master's, 10 Dual Enrollment Master's/Doctoral, 18 Doctoral



MOUNTAIN AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER (MAHEC)

Serving Western
North Carolina since

1974

Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) was established in 1974 to improve training and retention of healthcare professionals across Western North Carolina (WNC). Located in Asheville, MAHEC serves North Carolina's 16 westernmost counties and is the largest of the nine state AHECs.

Of the **727** graduates
with available data...



Of the **366** graduates
practicing in the state...



298 GRADUATES
went on to practice locally
in Western North Carolina

68 GRADUATES
went on to practice in other
areas of North Carolina



of our total graduates
practice in Western NC



of our total graduates
practice in the state



of graduates
in the state
practice in
Western NC



of graduates
in the state
practice outside
of Western NC

Infographics: Courtesy of MAHEC

CREATING



**4,758 JOBS
STATEWIDE**

GENERATING

\$641 MILLION
in local economic output
for Western North Carolina

\$146 MILLION
in economic output for
other areas of the state

**\$787 MILLION
STATEWIDE**
IN ECONOMIC OUTPUT*



Photography: Courtesy of MAHEC

*The AMA defines "output" as direct and indirect benefits.

**Above data includes only graduates whose employment status could be located.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS TRAINING & EDUCATION

Residency & Fellowship Programs

MAHEC trains the next generation of healthcare professionals for Western North Carolina through residency and fellowship programs in addiction, critical care, dentistry, family medicine, general surgery, internal medicine, maternal-fetal medicine, ob/gyn, rural health, psychiatry, pharmacotherapy, and sports medicine.

>80%

of MAHEC family medicine graduates stay and practice in WNC

Student Education

MAHEC's Center for Health Professions Education provides opportunities that inspire and prepare students to pursue healthcare careers in WNC. Programs span high school through undergraduate, postgraduate, and medical school to create a pipeline of well-trained healthcare professionals for WNC, an underserved region.

As of June 2024, more than 800 physicians and dentists have graduated from MAHEC.

Continuing Professional Development

UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC's Department of Continuing Professional Development educates more than 10,000 healthcare professionals every year. In-person and online programs address a wide range of healthcare topics including school health and safety, public health, rural health, complex and chronic health conditions, behavioral health, substance use disorders, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma resiliency, nutrition, nurse leadership, team-based care, clinical skills, and more.



 Photography: Courtesy of MAHEC

ASHEVILLE CITY & BUNCOMBE COUNTY K-12 SCHOOLS

Buncombe County Schools ranked as one of the top 100 Best Employers in North Carolina, 2024.
- Forbes.com

There are approximately 26,000 K-12 students in the Asheville City and Buncombe County public school systems with over 3,000 students enrolled in Buncombe County Charter Schools.

Laptops



Tablets



Our schools are connected with a wide variety of tools that enhance learning.

\$2.4 million

invested by Buncombe County Schools in 2019 for the Digital Learning initiative. The DLI provides every K-12 student in BCS with access to a digital device to enhance individualized instruction for critical thinking and creativity.

Asheville Area educators and business leaders collaborate to better engage young people in their learning. Teachers and leaders recognize the importance of equipping young students with the skills for success in a globalized era.

Students in middle and high schools build critical thinking and problem-solving techniques through hands-on learning and an innovative curriculum that emphasize Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) topics.



STEM School Programs

Buncombe County Schools opened the Nesbitt Discovery Academy in 2014 to provide opportunities for students to engage in innovative STEM curriculum. NDA is currently ranked the #1 high school in the Asheville MSA and #23 in North Carolina (U.S. News & World Report, 2024-2025).



To see ACT scores now at the level they were before the pandemic makes me very excited. It tells me we're trending in the right direction. Our scores continue to go up. Not that it's only about scores, but it's a great indicator of what I'm seeing in the classroom. I am seeing it.

-Dr. Rob Jackson
Superintendent, Buncombe County Schools
Source: WLOS, 2023

Career and Technical Education

The mission of CTE is to offer dynamic 21st century programs to students based on the 16 national career clusters that align with the business and industry sectors in our area.

Both Asheville City and Buncombe County Schools provide **Career and Technical Education (CTE)** to prepare students for future careers and higher education. CTE provides students a way to earn college credits and credentials sought by local industries and businesses. The CTE curriculum also develops life and soft skills such as decision-making, communication, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, leadership, and more.



4-YEAR COHORT GRADUATION RATES GRADUATING IN 2024

ASHEVILLE CITY
322 — 90%

BUNCOMBE COUNTY
1,663 — 92%

HAYWOOD COUNTY
508 — 92%

HENDERSON COUNTY
998 — 93%

MADISON COUNTY
170 — 91%

NORTH CAROLINA
106,584 — 87%

Source: NCDPI Cohort Graduation Rates

Public Schools Mean SAT Scores (2024)

	Number Tested	Percent Tested	ERW Score	Math Score	Total
Asheville City	126	40.6%	610	558	1168
Buncombe County Schools	232	15.7%	612	583	1196
Haywood County Schools	20	4.3%	601	591	1192
Henderson County Schools	99	10.8%	586	553	1140
Madison County Schools	<10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
North Carolina	18,269	18.1%	591	576	1166
United States	1,655,324	N/A	507	488	995

Source: NCDPI SAT Report

Note: Percent tested is the number of students taking the SAT divided by the final Average Daily Membership (ADM) for grades 12-13 + Extended Day 12-13.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

	Asheville City	Buncombe	Haywood	Henderson	Madison	NC	US
Population 25 Years and Over	71,490	202,143	47,259	87,598	15,745	7,261,810	228,434,661
Less than 9th Grade	2.5%	2.8%	2.8%	4.0%	3.2%	4.0%	4.7%
9th to 12th Grade, no Diploma	4.0%	4.9%	5.6%	4.9%	6.0%	6.3%	5.9%
High School Graduate	18.7%	22.7%	27.5%	24.6%	33.0%	25.0%	26.2%
Some College, no Degree	15.2%	16.3%	21.8%	21.1%	18.5%	20.0%	19.4%
Associates Degree	7.6%	8.7%	12.8%	10.3%	7.9%	10.1%	8.8%
Bachelor's Degree	30.5%	26.5%	17.9%	22.3%	21.1%	21.8%	21.3%
Graduate or Professional Degree	21.5%	18.2%	11.5%	12.8%	10.3%	12.9%	13.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

TALENT TRAINING & RETENTION



CAYLA gives Asheville's young people the opportunity to stay and work in Asheville, as well as to have valuable work experiences that will advance their future careers wherever they go. Learn more here: <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/department/community-economic-development/community-development/cayla/>



NEXT AVL pairs local university students with working professionals that offer connection, mentorship, and professional development. Through NEXT AVL, students will expand their professional networks and opportunities in Asheville so that they can pursue the NEXT step in their life after graduation as a young professional here – in AVL. Learn more here: <https://www.ashevillechamber.org/business-environment/talent-workforce/next-avl>



SCAN QR CODE

to learn about myFutureNC's Educational Attainment initiative. WNC is one of 15 Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives in the state.



Riverbird Research, located in beautiful Asheville, North Carolina and established by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, is an award-winning team with over 25 years of combined experience in data and systems analysis. Our team leverages well-informed expertise in labor market data, demographic and economic research, and economic impact analysis to communicate regional assets and opportunities. Our network has a national reach and our process is collaborative and creative. Check out more research reports at RIVERBIRDRESEARCH.COM

ADDITIONAL SOURCES: US Census Bureau, Education Superhighway, EMSI, NC Community College System (NCCCS), IPEDS, and schools' sources.

PLEASE CONTACT US

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RIVERBIRDRESEARCH.COM