
WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM: 10 YEAR STUDENT MEMBERSHIP FORECAST

School Year 2024-2025

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DEMOGRAPHY

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Demographic
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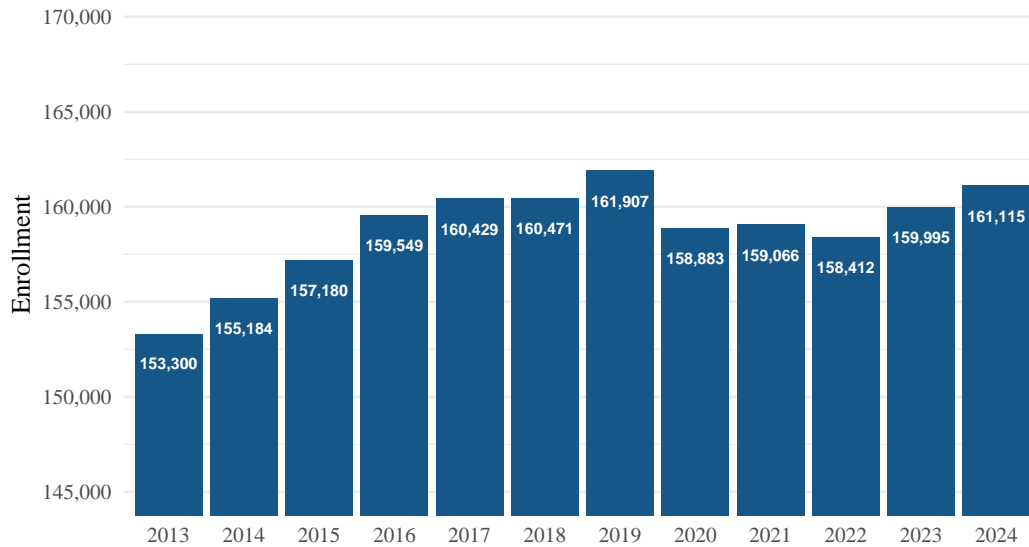
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Executive Summary

Average Daily Membership (ADM) increased by 1,120 students (0.7%) in 2024-25 versus the 2023-24 ADM, after a slightly larger increase last year. Small declines were seen in grades K, 2, 4, and 7 through 9. Small increases occurred in 1st, 6th, and 11th grades, with larger increases in grades 3, 5, 10, and 12.

Figure 1. Student Membership Growth
2013–14 to 2023–24



2020–21 and 2021–22 school years were adjusted for anomalous attendance violations.

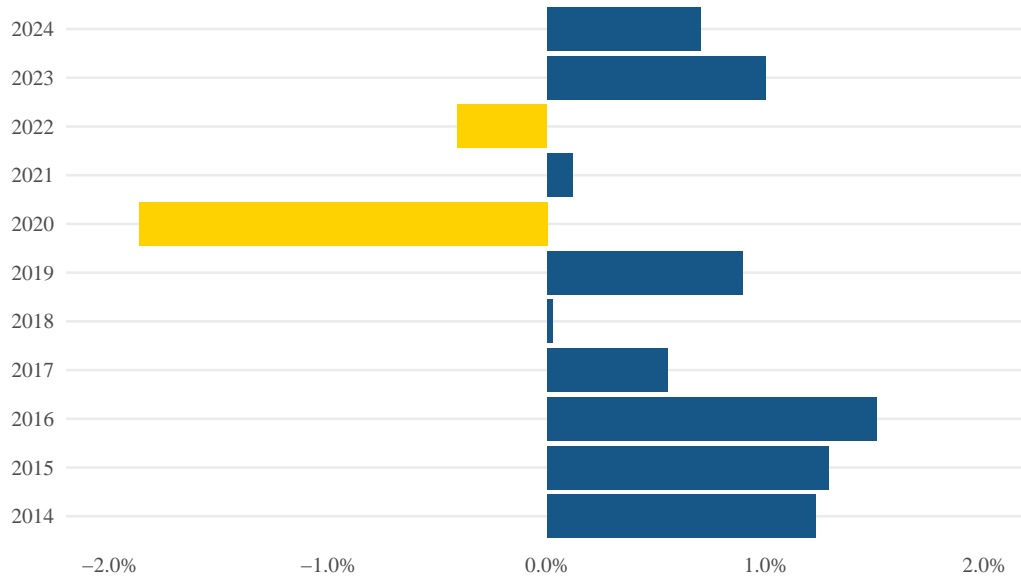
Wake County (billing) charter school enrollments continued their increase, rising by 1,176 or 6.61% between 2023-24 and 2024-25, likewise private school enrollment also likely increased based on the most recent data available. Home school enrollment turned around a recent decline and again increased. During 2023-24 the number of home school students in Wake County increased 1,016 or 7.25% from 2022-23, further, the number of private school enrollments increased 714 or 3.29%.

It does seem that we have started to see some regularization of trends post-COVID-19 pandemic. However, the new private school voucher law, which triples the budget of the Opportunity Scholarship program and removes income and prior public school enrollment restrictions, raises new uncertainty. Further, the full funding of all students on the waiting list as of late 2024 may also have an impact into the future. While we do not necessarily know what the overall impact will be, there is some historical precedent to the first few years of an increase in funding like this to go mostly to current private school students, with increases in enrollment beginning as supply increases. We are continuing to assess the incoming data on trends in charter and private schools to determine if any changes need to be made in the forecast in the future. The ten-year forecast was made with the following assumptions:

- Individuals who are currently enrolled in alternative schooling options (home school, charters, and privates) will stay in these options.

- No new assumptions were made about increases in private school enrollment, beyond the current growth trends.
- Births in Wake County will have small but steady increases, reflecting continued population growth.
- Grade progression ratios (GPRs) ignore the impacts of COVID-19 in 2020 and are based on observed transitions between 2018-2019 and 2021-2024.
- One new charter will impact in 2025-26, and we continue to provide additional analysis of the impacts of potential charter openings.
- Home sales and building permits have leveled out and perhaps began to rise again slightly, thus we are not including any new assumptions about impacts on school enrollment based on these trends.

Figure 2. Percent Change in Student Membership Growth
2013–14 to 2024–25



The 2024-25 WCPSS forecast predicts a 2025-26 Month 2 K-12 ADM of 1,305 students over the 2024-25 Month 2 ADM, an increase of 0.81%. This increase reflects a combination of expected continued and increased returns to normal kindergarten entry patterns and continued in migration to Wake County.

Over the next ten years, WCPSS is forecasted to gain 16,864 students overall (10.467%) by 2034-35. These gains reflect larger anticipated birth cohorts driven mostly by continued in-migration of families and those who are likely to have children to Wake County.

Statewide Trends

At the statewide level, enrollment decreased by 3,426 or -0.25%. As we can see below, Wake County Public Schools is instead increasing in enrollment. At the LEA level:

- 37 LEAs had increased enrollment in 2024-25 compared to 2023-24.
- 77 LEAs had decreased enrollment in 2024-25 compared to 2023-24.

Table 1. ADM Changes, 2024-25 vs. 2023-24, Selected LEAs

	2024-25	2023-24	Change	Percentage Change
North Carolina Total	1,368,531	1,371,957	-3,426	-0.2%
Harnett County Schools	19,844	19,704	140	0.7%
Wake County Schools	161,115	159,995	1,120	0.7%
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	141,726	140,863	863	0.6%
Durham Public Schools	31,024	30,848	176	0.6%
Johnston County Schools	37,030	36,883	147	0.4%
Cumberland County Schools	48,374	48,313	61	0.1%
Franklin County Schools	7,855	7,852	3	0.0%
Chatham County Schools	8,790	8,822	-32	-0.4%
Guilford County Schools	66,055	66,392	-337	-0.5%
Orange County Schools	6,908	6,978	-70	-1.0%
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools	11,099	11,236	-137	-1.2%
Winston Salem/Forsyth County Schools	50,550	51,198	-648	-1.3%
Granville County Schools	6,273	6,452	-179	-2.8%
Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	12,973	14,303	-1,330	-9.3%

Source: Month 2 ADM. Principal's Monthly Report, NC DPI and WCPSS Technology

The only other local or large school districts that saw increases were Harnett County Schools (140 students / 0.7%), Durham Public Schools (176 students / 0.6%), Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (863 students / 0.6%), Johnston County Public Schools (147 students / 0.4%), Cumberland County Schools (61 students / 0.1%) and Franklin County Schools (3 students / 0.0%).

Long-Range Forecast: Assumptions & Threats to Model

Making accurate school enrollment projections relies on two key elements: high-quality input data and accurate forecasts of future trends, such as births. When past trends are relatively stable, it is generally easier to forecast the future from the past. Rapidly changing local contexts – and deviations from historical norms – increase the challenge of producing accurate forecasts.

There are three areas that we continue to watch in terms of potential threats to the long-range forecast:

1. The lingering impacts of COVID-19
2. Changes in laws and decision-making for both charter and private schools that may increase enrollment in those options
3. The impact of inflation on home building and home sales

The local context was already dynamic, with steady population growth, declining fertility rates¹, and shifting market share before the COVID-19 pandemic. The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 was an unprecedented event, with no historical precedent as a point of reference. We saw significant disruptions to trends at the start of the 2020-21 school year through the 2021-22 school year. These disruptions have declined in many ways, but we are still not fully back to pre-pandemic patterns. It seems that we may be reaching a “new normal,” but it is hard to say if things will return to pre-pandemic “normal” anytime soon – or ever.

Additionally, given how charter school governance has changed, and the change in the legislative landscape around private school vouchers, there is some lack of clarity on market share trends moving into the future:

- WCPSS lost 4,234 students in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20 (-1.9%). Enrollments rebounded by 183 or 0.1% in 2021-22, but this rebound did not make up for the decline in 2020-21². In the 2022-23 school year WCPSS enrollments declined by 654 students or 0.4%, dropping enrollment to a new post-pandemic low. In 2023-24 we saw a rebound of 1,583 students, or 1%, and in 2024-25 we have seen a smaller increase of 1,120, or 0.7%.
- Charter school openings have continued, with 1 new school slated to open next year. Overall charter school enrollment for 2024-25 is up 1,176 students or 6.6%.
- Home school enrollments increased after recent drops from the pandemic high from 2020-21. From 2021-22 to 2022-23 we see a loss of 399 students or 2.8% year over year, while in 2023-24 we saw an increase of 1,016 or 7.3%. Over this same period, private school enrollments increased by 714 or 3.3%.

Many families have become more involved in the day-to-day education of their children during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may change their expectations of public education. Some of the data bear this out with declines in home schooling and increases in private schools. These changing expectations may lead families to continue to choose nonpublic instruction in the future unless public instruction adapts to these new expectations of greater flexibility and individualized instruction³.

Finally, home sales and building permits have begun to stabilize or even rebound in Wake County. While inflationary pressures have slowed, and the Fed has started lowering interest rates, it is unclear when interest rates will come down noticeably. Further, it is unclear how behavior will change based on these trends in the medium- to long-term.

Given these challenges and the unknowns they create, the ten-year forecast was made with the following assumptions:

- Individuals who are currently enrolled in alternative schooling options (home school, charters, and privates) will stay in these options.

¹Fertility rates are the number of births per woman 1,000 women ages 15 to 44. While the fertility rate has been declining, the number of births in Wake County are projected to increase. This may seem counterintuitive, but this difference is due to steady increases in the size of the population of women 15 to 44 in Wake County and projected continued increases in this population in the near term.

²These comparisons are based on violation-adjusted ADM for 2020-21 and 2021-22, as attendance patterns remained strongly influenced by COVID-19. When comparing non-violation adjusted ADM, WCPSS lost 4,234 students in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20 (-2.6%). Non-violation adjusted enrollments rebounded by 1,087 or 0.7% in 2021-22.

³Hill, Paul T. and Ashley Jochim. October 29, 2020. “Can public education return to normal after the COVID-19 pandemic?” Brown Center Chalkboard (blog). Retrieved January 12, 2021, from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/10/29/can-public-education-return-to-normal-after-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

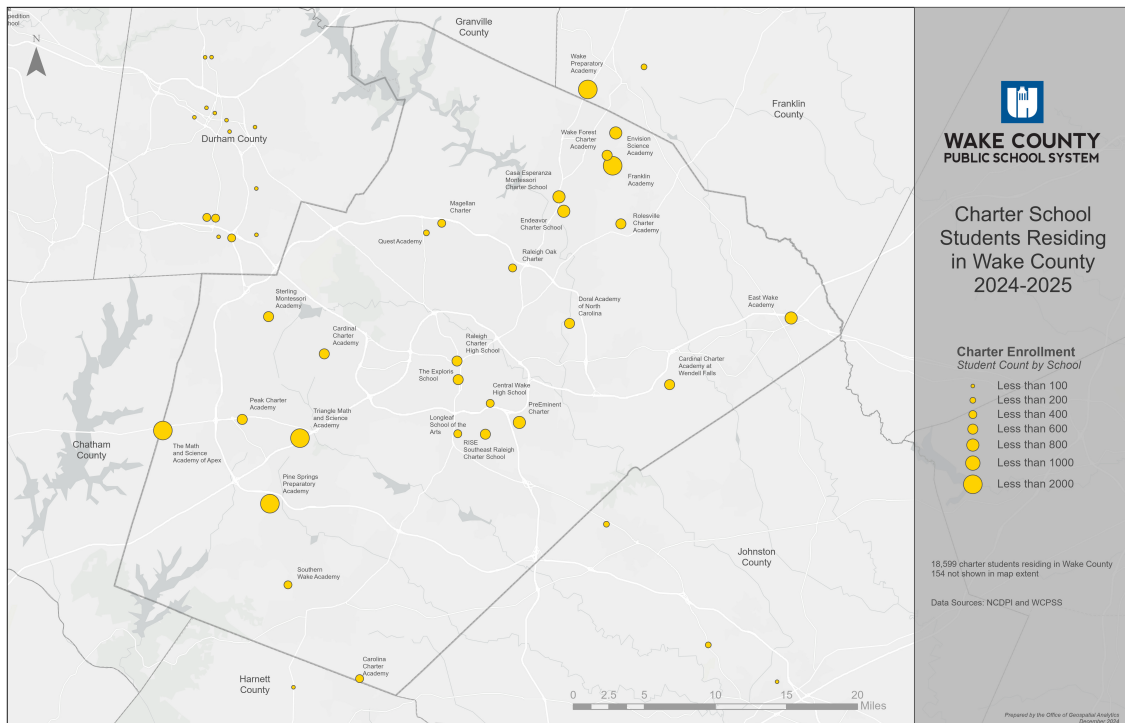
- No new assumptions were made about increases in private school enrollment, beyond the current growth trends.
- Births in Wake County will have small but steady increases, reflecting continued population growth.
- Grade progression ratios (GPRs) ignore the impacts of COVID-19 in 2020 and are based on observed transitions between 2018-2019 and 2021-2024.
- One new charter will impact in 2025-26, and we continue to provide additional analysis of the impacts of potential charter openings.
- Home sales and building permits stabilized and even began to increase this year. We are not including any new assumptions about impacts on school enrollment based on these trends.

Impacts of Market Share Changes on Enrollments

Market Share Trends, 2013-14 to 2023-24

Between 2013-14 and 2023-24, WCPSS enrollment grew by 6,695 students, an increase of 4.4%. At the same time, the total number of K-12 students in Wake County, including WCPSS, charter schools (Wake billing), private schools, and home schools, grew by 28,825 or 15.5%, to reach a total number of students in Wake County of 214,666 in 2023-24.

WCPSS market share—the percentage of K-12 enrollments occurring at Wake County Public Schools—dropped over seven percentage points over this period, from 82.5% to 74.5%. Market share declined most significantly between 2019-20 and 2020-21, dropping 1.8 percentage points from 77.6% to 75.8%.

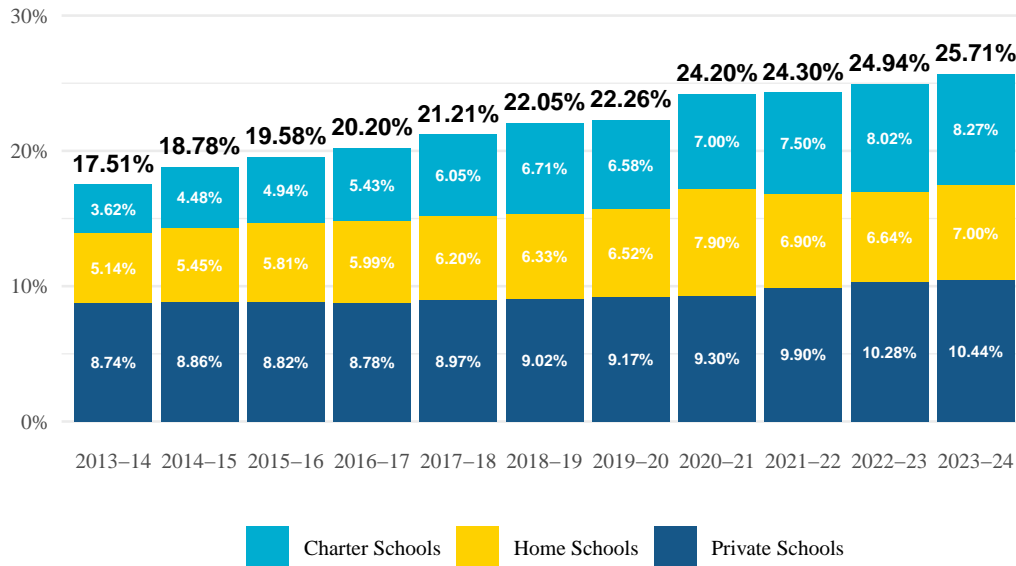


Over the past nine years, charter school, home school, and private school enrollments grew faster than WCPSS enrollments. WCPSS’s shifting market share reflects the following dynamics:

- **Rapid expansion of charter schools:** Between the 2013-14 and 2023-24 school years, Wake charter school enrollments more than doubled, rising from 6,733 to 17,790, an increase of 164%. Charter school market share rose from 3.6% to 8.3% over this time.
- Charter schools continued to grow into the current school year up to 18,966.
- **Growth of home schools:** Between 2013-14 and 2023-24, home school enrollments in Wake County grew from 9,559 to 15,025, an increase of 57%. Home school market share rose from 5.1% to 7.0% over this time.
- **Steady growth in private school enrollments:** Between 2013-14 and 2023-24, private school enrollments rose from 16,249 to 22,413, an increase of 6,164 or 40.0%. With this growth, private schools regained market share from their post-Great Recession low of 8.7% in 2013-14. As of 2023-24, they were at 10.4%.

Figure 3. Market Share of Non–WCPSS Schools

2013–14 through 2023–24



Charter and Private School Growth and Implications for Future Market Share

WCPSS enrollments increased by 1,120 compared to last year (0.7%). This gain more than makes up for the decline 2 years ago, and is only slightly smaller than the increase last year. The number of Wake County students enrolled in charter schools increased by 1,176 students or 6.6%. This increase is a slight uptick from last years increase.

However, the big unknown is the impact of the new law expanding private school vouchers. If this growth in charter schools is accompanied by increased utilization of private school options, WCPSS market share may continue to decline. We will not know the magnitude of private school enrollments until July 2025, when the 2024-25 data is released from the Division of Non-Public Education at the NC Department of Administration. We will not know the full impact of the new law until the largest increases in funding occur in the 2026-27 Fiscal Year.

Kindergarten Enrollments Remain Below Expectations

The birth to kindergarten ratio is the number of students who enter WCPSS kindergarten divided by the number of births to Wake County mothers five years prior. During 2010-11, this ratio was 0.947, meaning that the kindergarten class entering WCPSS was 94.7% of the births to Wake County mothers in 2005. This indicates a combination of any one of the following factors: more resident families with children born in the county were moving away from Wake County before their child entered kindergarten; lower net in-migration of families with young children to Wake County; or families with kindergartners being less likely to enroll their children in WCPSS.

The birth to kindergarten ratio has been relatively stable for the past decade. As WCPSS market share has declined over this period, the stable ratio likely reflects continued net in-migration of families with young children during these years. Meaning that growth from migration is making up what could otherwise be a larger decline in kindergarten enrollments.

Table 2. ADM Changes, Historical Birth to Kindergarten Ratios

Birth Year	Resident Births	School Year Entering Grade K	Actual WCPSS Grade K Enrollment	Birth to Kindergarten Ratio
2008	13,542	2013-14	12,213	0.902
2009	13,010	2014-15	12,065	0.927
2010	12,705	2015-16	11,860	0.933
2011	12,458	2016-17	11,855	0.952
2012	12,309	2017-18	11,664	0.948
2013	12,439	2018-19	11,416	0.918
2014	12,635	2019-20	11,819	0.935
2015	12,867	2020-21	10,438	0.811
2016	13,019	2021-22	11,233	0.863
2017	12,683	2022-23	10,963	0.864
2018	12,580	2023-24	11,053	0.879
2019	12,689	2024-25	11,052	0.871

Source: Month 2 ADM, Principal’s Monthly Report, NC DPI and WCPSS Technology and North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics

Between the 2015-16 and 2019-20, the average birth to kindergarten ratio was 0.938. This ratio dropped to 0.811 in 2020-21, the lowest ratio observed in WCPSS over the past 21 years. The ratio rebounded to 0.863 in 2021-22, 0.864 in 2022-23, and 0.879 in 2023-24, but in 2024-25 the ratio declined again to 0.871. These numbers are still below historical averages.

If historical ratios had held in 2024-25, WCPSS would have expected about 11,900 kindergartners; instead, there were 11,052 enrolled. As kindergarten is not mandatory, parents may still be withholding children from kindergarten or sending them to private or charter schools.

Grade-Level Enrollments

WCPSS system-wide gains in 2024-25 were driven by large increases in enrollments in grade three, six, ten, and twelve.

Despite this overall increase compared to last year, WCPSS enrollments are down for many grade levels. The largest decreases, though still small compared to the increases in other grades, occurred in second, eighth, and ninth grades.

Overall, grades K-5 had higher enrollments in 2024-25 compared to 2023-24 (809 more students or 1.2%). Grades 6-8 showed the only aggregate loss (157 fewer students or -0.4%). Fueled by large increases in tenth and twelfth grades, overall enrollments in WCPSS high schools grew by 468 or 0.9%.

Table 3. WCPSS Changes in Membership, 2023-24 vs. 2022-23

Membership by Grade

	2023-24	2024-25	Net Gain	Percentage Change
K	11,053	11,052	-1	-0.0%
1	11,416	11,437	21	0.2%
2	12,008	11,725	-283	-2.4%
3	11,476	12,211	735	6.4%
4	11,792	11,774	-18	-0.2%
5	11,704	12,059	355	3.0%
6	11,707	11,784	77	0.7%
7	12,042	11,950	-92	-0.8%
8	12,499	12,357	-142	-1.1%
9	14,954	14,778	-176	-1.2%
10	13,576	13,830	254	1.9%
11	13,197	13,225	28	0.2%
12	12,571	12,933	362	2.9%
Total	159,995	161,115	1,120	0.7%

Source: Month 2 ADM. Principal's Monthly Report, NC DPI and WCPSS Technology

Membership by Level

	2024-25	2023-24	Net Gain	Percentage Change
K-5	70,258	69,449	809	1.2%
6-8	36,091	36,248	-157	-0.4%
9-12	54,766	54,298	468	0.9%
Total	161,115	159,995	1,120	0.7%

Source: Month 2 ADM. Principal's Monthly Report, NC DPI and WCPSS Technology

Attendance Violations

WCPSS had 339 enrolled students in violation of attendance policies for Month 2 of the 2024-25 school year, getting much closer to pre-pandemic averages. In prior years, the number of students in violation ranged from 121 to 166, averaging 138 per year.

Given the return to near-normal trends, this year we are no longer including an adjustment for attendance violations in our projection model.

Table 4. WCPSS Members in Violation, 2015-16 through 2024-25

School Year	WCPSS Members in Violation
2015-16	166
2016-17	128
2017-18	142
2018-19	135
2019-20	121
2020-21	1,348
2021-22	442
2022-23	269
2023-24	374
2024-25	339

Source: Month 2 ADM. WCPSS Technology

Impacts on Fertility

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was significant speculation about its impact on fertility. In June 2020, some scholars predicted as much as a 15% decline in births⁴, reflecting economic uncertainty and the challenges of navigating childcare, work, and schooling during a pandemic⁵. This estimate was later revised downwards, based on a faster than expected economic recovery, but most experts were still predicting lower levels of births⁶. These predictions appear to be true for 2020, but may not hold beyond that year. 2021 saw increased births, and both 2022 and 2023 saw small decreases in births. We are estimating a relatively large increase in births for 2024, but that is not yet assured as data are not yet final.

In Wake County, there were 12,514 births in 2020, a decrease of 175 or -1.4% from 2019. This is smaller than the year-over-year decrease in births observed statewide (-3.0%).

During 2021, there were 13,168 births to Wake County residents, and during 2022 there were 13,145 births to Wake County residents. During 2023 there were 12,950 births to Wake County residents. During the first

⁴Kearney, Melissa S., and Phillip B. Levine. June 15, 2020. "Half a million fewer children? The coming COVID baby bust." Washington, DC: Brookings. Retrieved July 5, 2021, from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/half-a-million-fewer-children-the-coming-covid-baby-bust/>.

⁵Dockterman, Eliana. October 15, 2020. "Women Are Deciding Not to Have Babies Because of the Pandemic. That's Bad for All of Us." Time. Retrieved December 5, 2020, from <https://time.com/5892749/covid-19-baby-bust/>.

⁶Kearney, Melissa S., and Phillip B. Levine. December 17, 2020. "The coming COVID-19 baby bust: Update." Washington, DC: Brookings. Retrieved January 13, 2021, from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/12/17/the-coming-covid-19-baby-bust-update/>.

6 months of 2024, there were 6,508 births in Wake County. This number is almost noticeably higher than in 2023, and is more than the total number of births reported in the first half of the year for any year since before the great recession. In the past five years, about 48% of Wake County births occurred in the first six months of the year; extrapolating these trends to 2023 suggests a total of 13,375 births for the year, eclipsing 2016 (13,019) as well as 2021 (13,168) and 2022 (13,145)⁷.

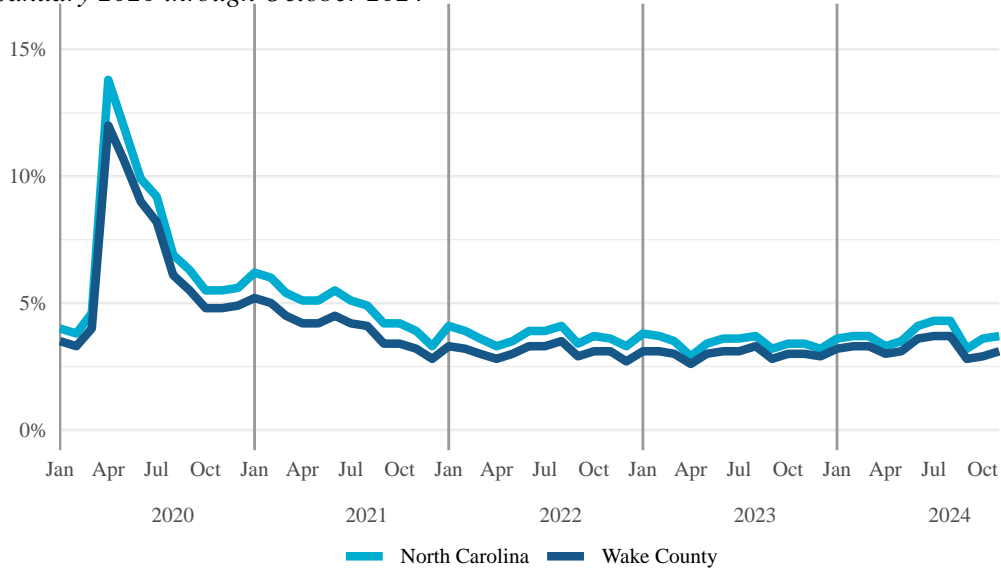
These trends indicate that the impact of COVID-19 has been unique and is not expected to have the same impact on fertility that we saw during the Great Recession, especially in counties, like Wake, where economic indicators remain strong. Further, we are not seeing significantly slowed birth rates due to inflation.

Impacts of Migration

Changes in migration have the potential to have larger, more immediate impacts on the school system than births, and economic indicators suggest that Wake will continue to experience population growth from migration.

Figure 5. Unemployment Rate by Month, Wake County vs. NC

January 2020 through October 2024



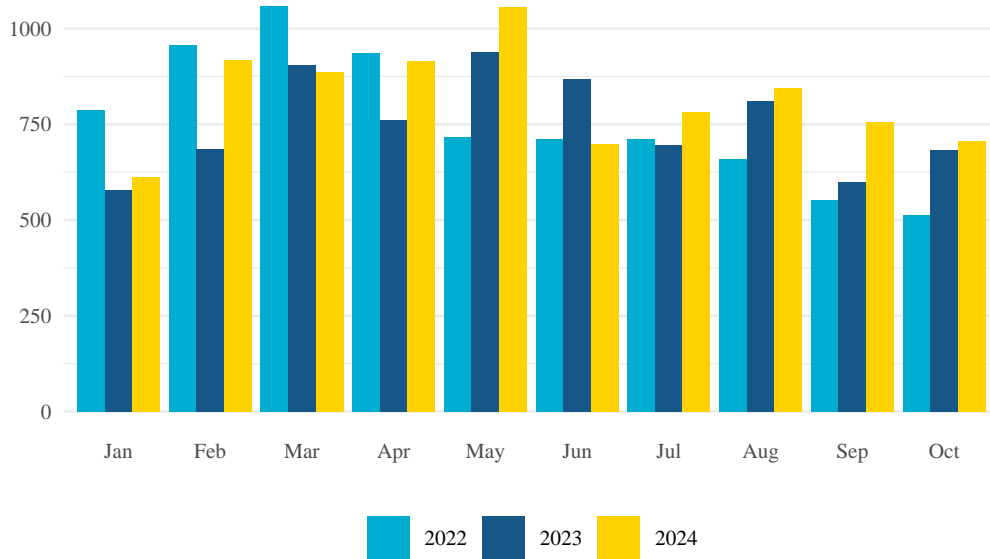
Economic indicators in Wake County remain strong: Wake County’s unemployment rate has been consistently lower than the state average. Both Wake County and North Carolina’s unemployment rates increased significantly in April and May during the first coronavirus lockdown and have since declined to pre-COVID levels. As of November 2024, Wake County’s unemployment rate was 3.1%, similar to the unemployment rate in February 2020 (2.9%).

⁷North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics. Data provided by request. Data received in fall 2023 were provisional for 2023 and may be revised slightly in future data release.

Building permits will require further watching. Last year, building permits were weak early in the year, but then rebounded. In 2024, we have seen a stabilization and even increase throughout the year.

Figure 6. New Residential Building Permits: Wake County

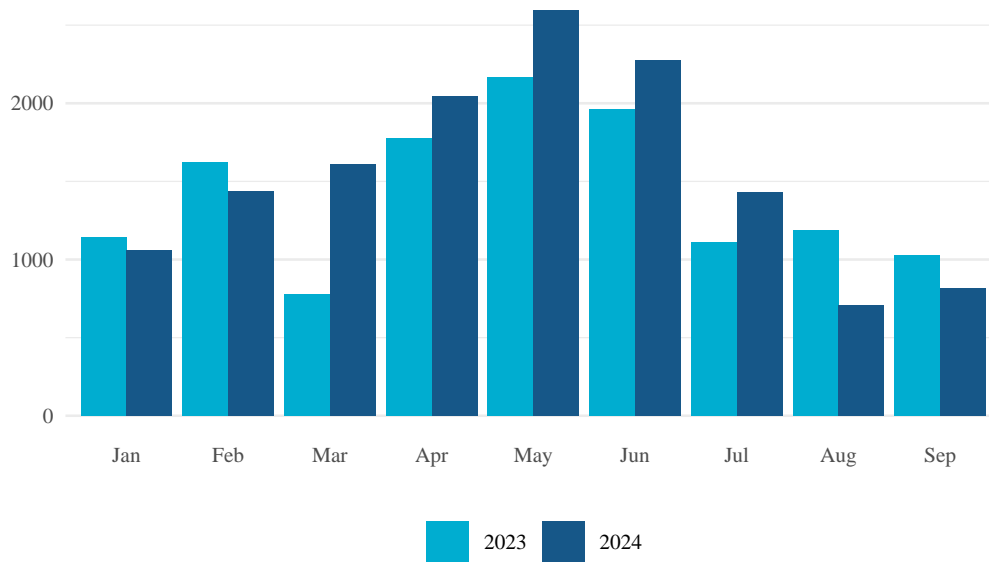
January – October, 2022, 2023, and 2024



Home sales declined in 2020 compared to 2019 and increased slightly in 2021 compared to 2020 with a very strong close to the year. In 2022, sales began falling with the impact of rising interest rates. Yearly sales fell 23% (-6,704 sales). In 2023, sales were down even more. However, in 2024, between January and September 2024, total home sales in Wake County were up 1,215 or 9.5% compared to the same period in 2023.

Figure 7. Home Sales: Wake County

January – September, 2023 and 2024

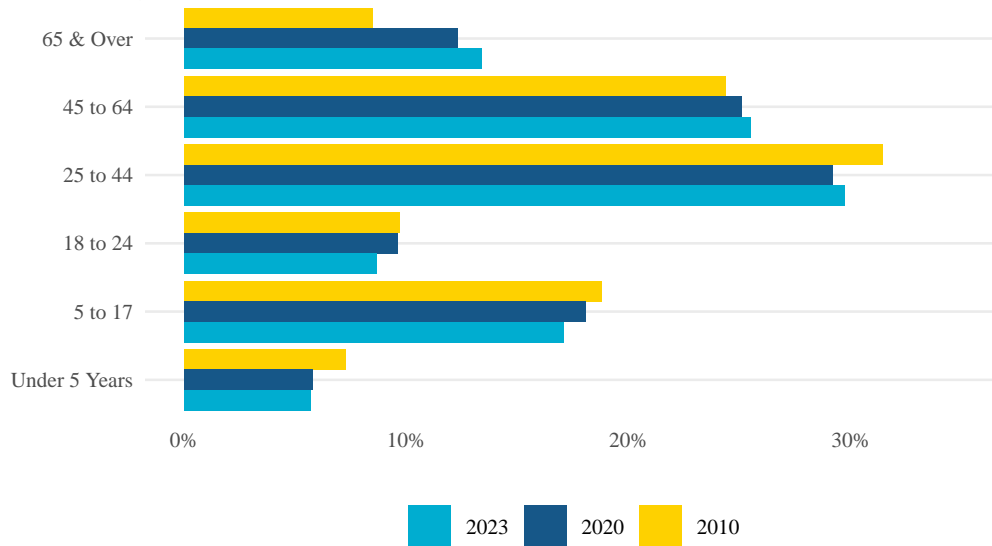


Impacts of Population Structure and Change

U.S. Census Bureau estimates indicate that Wake County’s population continues to age. Examining the change in distribution of select age cohorts reflects an increase in the share of total population for older adults (ages 65 years and over) between 2010 and 2022. As shown below in Figure 8, the population ages 65 and over accounted for 9% of the population on July 1, 2010; by July 1, 2020, this age group accounted for 12% of the County’s total population.

Figure 8. Share of Population by Age Group

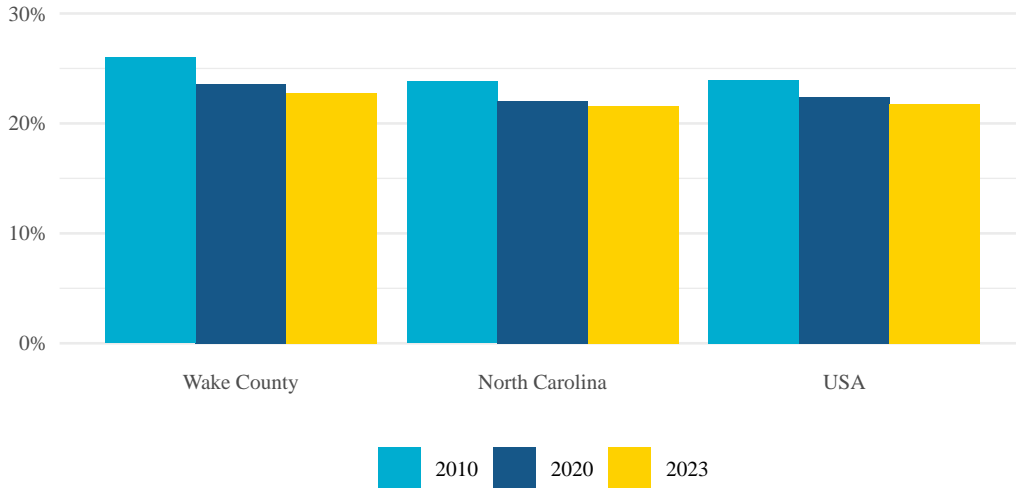
Wake County: 2010, 2020, and 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Population Estimates

However, while the population continues to age, Wake County is still slightly younger than North Carolina and the United States as a whole. Figure 9 shows the proportion of the population 18 years and under for 2010, 2020, and 2023 for Wake County, North Carolina, and the United States. As we can see here, while the percentage decreases over time for each geographic entity, Wake County stays at a higher percentage than the comparison groups.

Figure 9. Share of Population Under 18 Years of Age
Wake County, North Carolina, and USA: 2010, 2020, and 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Population Estimates

2023-24 Forecast Performance

The table below highlights violation-adjusted attendance enrollments by grade for 2023-24 and actual enrollment for 2024-25 and the 2024-25 forecast for WCPSS. Patterns are similar to the changes in enrollment by grade described above.

When comparing the 2024-25 forecast to the actual enrollments, the total enrollment was 670 students above the forecast enrollment. This was driven primarily by the fact that almost every grade outperformed the model. The exceptions were Kindergarten and first grades, which continue to have lower than expected classes.

Forecast deviation was negative for elementary school ages, driven completely by Kindergarten and first grades. Middle and high school age deviation was positive with the largest percent deviation in high school.

Table 5. WCPSS Changes in Membership by Grade, 2023-24 vs. 2022-23 and Forecast

Membership by Grade

	2023-24 (actual)	2024-25 (forecast)	2024-25 (actual)	Net Gain (2024-25 - 2023-24)	Percentage Change	Variance (actual - forecast)
K	11,053	11,716	11,052	-1	-0.0%	-664
1	11,416	12,145	11,437	21	0.2%	-708
2	12,008	11,597	11,725	-283	-2.4%	128
3	11,476	12,091	12,211	735	6.4%	120
4	11,792	11,632	11,774	-18	-0.2%	142
5	11,704	11,975	12,059	355	3.0%	84
6	11,707	11,598	11,784	77	0.7%	186
7	12,042	11,785	11,950	-92	-0.8%	165
8	12,499	12,220	12,357	-142	-1.1%	137
9	14,954	14,577	14,778	-176	-1.2%	201
10	13,576	13,686	13,830	254	1.9%	144
11	13,197	12,814	13,225	28	0.2%	411
12	12,571	12,609	12,933	362	2.9%	324
Total	159,995	160,445	161,115	1,120	0.7%	670

Source: Month 2 ADM. Principal's Monthly Report, NC DPI and WCPSS Technology

Membership by Level

	2023-24 (actual)	2024-25 (forecast)	2024-25 (actual)	Net Gain (2024-25 - 2023-24)	Percentage Change	Variance (actual - forecast)
K-5	69,449	71,156	70,258	809	1.2%	-898
6-8	36,248	35,603	36,091	-157	-0.4%	488
9-12	54,298	53,686	54,766	468	0.9%	1,080
Total	159,995	160,445	161,115	1,120	0.7%	670

Source: Month 2 ADM. Principal's Monthly Report, NC DPI and WCPSS Technology

2024-25 Ten-Year K-12 Forecast

The 2024-25 ten-year K-12 forecast is based on the Month 2 Average Daily Membership (ADM) as reported by Wake County Public Schools (WCPSS).

Methodology

Future enrollments in WCPSS were projected using the grade progression methodology described by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)⁸.

More specifically, projections were calculated using a grade progression ratio (GPR), which uses data from kindergarten through twelfth grades to project enrollments in future years. A five-year smoothed average

⁸Bransberger, Peace and Demarée K. Michelau. 2016. Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates. 9th ed. Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

ratio was used to place greater weight on more recent years with changing demographics and was calculated as:

$$Y_{pt} = wY_{p(t-1)} + (1 - w) \frac{\sum_{i=2}^5 Y_{p(t-i)}}{4}$$

where Y_{pt} is the grade progression ratio at a point p in year t , and w is the weight. This weight is 0.4 in the first year and 0.15 for each of the four prior years.

Assumptions

The ten-year forecast was made with the following assumptions:

- Individuals who are currently enrolled in alternative schooling options (home school, charters, and privates) will stay in these options.
- No new assumptions were made about increases in private school enrollment, beyond the current growth trends.
- Births in Wake County will have small but steady increases, reflecting continued population growth.
- Grade progression ratios (GPRs) ignore the impacts of COVID-19 in 2020 and are based on observed transitions between 2018-2019 and 2021-2024.
- One new charter will impact in 2025-26, and we continue to provide additional analysis of the impacts of potential charter openings.
- Home sales and building permits stabilized and even began to increase this year. We are not including any new assumptions about impacts on school enrollment based on these trends.

Projecting Fertility

While Wake County births decreased during 2020, they rebounded in 2021 to the highest level since 2016 and had a small decline in 2022 and 2023, and a slightly larger increase in 2024. We assumed births will continue to stabilize and then grow, reflecting overall strong population growth in Wake County. Births were projected based on a linear regression of the last 20 years of births in Wake County.

Table 6. Wake County Resident Live Births

2024 estimated, 2025-2029 projected

2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
13,145	12,950	13,375	13,374	13,440	13,506	13,572	13,638

Accounting for Missing Kindergartners

Month 2 kindergarten enrollment was nearly 850 students lower than expected based on the number of births in 2019 and historical kindergarten yields. These missing kindergartners could enroll directly in Grade 1

in 2025-26, or they could instead enroll in kindergarten. Based on the challenge in accurately forecasting kindergarten enrollments in 2025-26, and the continued challenges posed by COVID-19, we did not assume that these “missing” kindergartners would be enrolled in WCPSS in 2025-26.

Charter School Impact

The current model accounts for the continued growth of three charter schools, as well as the continued build out of three other charter schools, with a potential impact of 1,131 students from WCPSS when they are fully built out. The impact of currently open and fully filled charters is assumed to be captured in the existing data⁹.

Table 7. Total Anticipated Charter Impact in Wake County

2025 through 2034

grade	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034
K	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46
1	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
2	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
3	0	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
4	0	0	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
5	0	0	0	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
6	0	0	0	0	50	50	50	50	50	50
7	100	100	100	100	100	150	150	150	150	150
8	100	100	100	100	100	100	150	150	150	150
9	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
10	107	107	107	107	107	107	107	107	107	107
11	141	141	141	141	141	141	141	141	141	141
12	167	167	167	167	167	167	167	167	167	167
Total	831	881	931	981	1,031	1,081	1,131	1,131	1,131	1,131

Results

The forecast yields the following results for Month 2 ADM:

- In 2025-26, a net gain of 1,305 students over the 2024-25 Month 2 ADM, an increase of 0.8%.
- Steady increases in Month 2 ADM through 2033-34 after that.
- Overall gain of 16,864 students (10.4%) over the ten-year period.

⁹Most of the current charters are at capacity/buildout. Some of the existing charters are below their projected enrollments while others are above their approved/projected enrollments. Because these patterns are inconsistent, we assumed no changes going forward.

Table 8. Final WCPSS Enrollment Projections by Grade

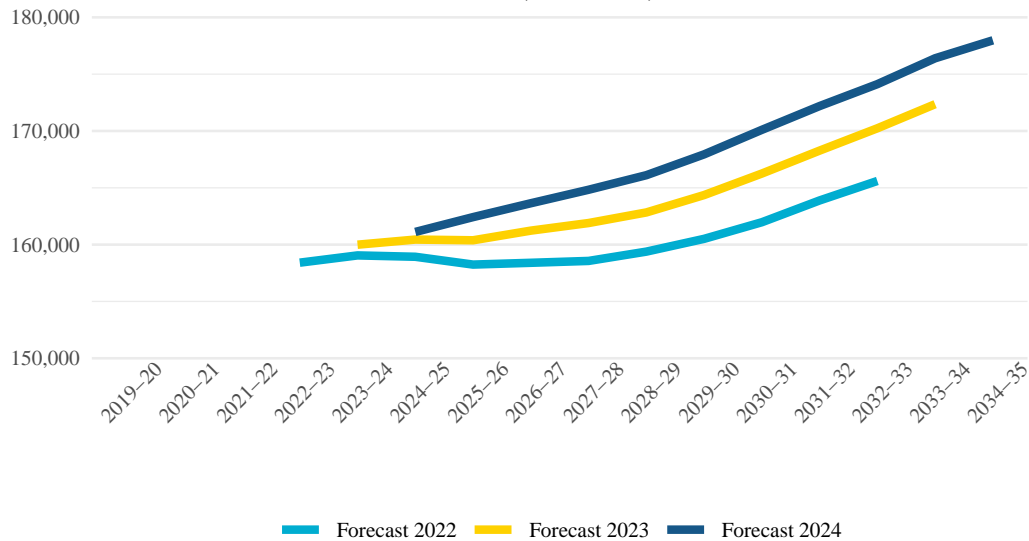
Month 2 ADM

Grade	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	Change, 2024-2034
K	11,053	11,052	11,728	12,304	12,282	12,100	12,497	12,496	12,558	12,620	12,681	12,743	1,691
1	11,416	11,437	12,313	12,186	12,784	12,762	12,573	12,985	12,984	13,048	13,112	13,176	1,739
2	12,008	11,725	11,690	12,586	12,456	13,067	13,045	12,851	13,273	13,272	13,337	13,403	1,678
3	11,476	12,211	11,845	11,810	12,715	12,584	13,201	13,178	12,983	13,409	13,408	13,474	1,263
4	11,792	11,774	12,420	12,048	12,012	12,933	12,799	13,428	13,404	13,205	13,639	13,638	1,864
5	11,704	12,059	11,961	12,618	12,240	12,204	13,139	13,003	13,641	13,617	13,415	13,856	1,797
6	11,707	11,784	12,015	11,917	12,571	12,195	12,159	13,091	12,955	13,591	13,567	13,366	1,582
7	12,042	11,950	11,979	12,214	12,115	12,779	12,397	12,360	13,307	13,170	13,816	13,792	1,842
8	12,499	12,357	12,158	12,187	12,426	12,325	13,002	12,612	12,575	13,539	13,399	14,056	1,699
9	14,954	14,778	14,577	14,342	14,376	14,658	14,539	15,337	14,878	14,834	15,971	15,806	1,028
10	13,576	13,830	13,634	13,449	13,232	13,264	13,524	13,414	14,150	13,727	13,686	14,735	905
11	13,197	13,225	13,295	13,107	12,929	12,720	12,751	13,001	12,896	13,603	13,196	13,157	-68
12	12,571	12,933	12,805	12,873	12,691	12,518	12,316	12,346	12,588	12,486	13,171	12,777	-156
Total	159,995	161,115	162,420	163,641	164,829	166,109	167,942	170,102	172,192	174,121	176,398	177,979	
# Change	1,583	1,120	1,305	1,221	1,188	1,280	1,833	2,160	2,090	1,929	2,277	1,581	
% Change	1.0%	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%	1.1%	1.3%	0.9%	

Starting in 2026, enrollments are forecast to rise steadily, largely due to the forecasted increase in birth cohorts due to in-migration of child-bearing aged adults, and because most of the charters projected to impact enrollment will largely be at full capacity by then.

Figure 10. Comparison of Current and Past Forecast Series

WCPSS Total Enrollment: Forecast 2024–25, 2023–24, 2022–23



Source: Demographic Analytics Advisors and Carolina Demography

The final set of projections has been included as an Excel file.

Concerns/Unknowns

Lingering questions about future years include:

- How will changes in decision making for charter schools, and new laws expanding vouchers for private schools impact enrollment?
- How many missing students will return to school?¹⁰
- How much will market share change—e.g. home schooling—made during the pandemic persist into the future? And for how long?
- How well will charter applications capture true build out?

In any year, there are challenges in making projections, but the last few years have been particularly challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is very hard to predict the response coming out of the pandemic during a period of inflation at levels we have not seen for decades, and we may see continued flux well into the 2025-26 school year and beyond.

¹⁰“Missing” refers to the significantly reduced enrollments in WCPSS that are not fully accounted for by increases in home schools, charter schools, and private schools. In Wake County, as in statewide, the decrease in public school enrollments was not fully offset by increased enrollments in other school systems. While some of this was concentrated in the earliest grades (Kindergarten), these enrollment declines do not account for the entirety of the shift.