



**NORTH CAROLINA**  
State Board of Education  
Department of Public Instruction

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# Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

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Pilot Program to Raise the High School  
Dropout Age

*SL 2016-94, sec. 8.21 (g)*

*(H1030)*

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**Date Due: Jan. 15, 2024**  
DPI Chronological Schedule, 2023-2024

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### **IMPORTANT NOTE**

*While the data reported on the following pages covers the full 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years, caution should be taken when making comparisons to previous years. After the March 16, 2020, school closures – which were mandated by Executive Order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – there were significant reductions in the number of incidents of Crime and Violence, Suspensions, Alternative Learning Placements and withdrawal dates for verified dropouts when compared to the same time frame in prior school years.*

## **LEGISLATIVE DIRECTIVE**

N.C. Session Law 2016-94, Section 8.21(g) states: “The local school administrative units, in collaboration with the State Board of Education, shall report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, and the Senate Appropriations Committee on Education/Higher Education by January 15, 2018, and by January 15 of each even-numbered year thereafter until the end of the operation of the pilot programs.

“The report shall include at least all of the following information:

- (1) An analysis of the graduation rate in each local school administrative unit and the impact of the pilot program on the graduation rate.
- (2) The teen crime statistics for Catawba County and for Rutherford County.
- (3) The number of reported cases of violations of compulsory attendance laws in Catawba County and Rutherford County and the disposition of those cases.
- (4) Implementation of enforcement mechanisms for violations of the compulsory attendance requirements of the pilot program, including the imposition of criminal penalties.
- (5) The number of at-risk students served in any night programs established as part of the pilot program and student graduation and performance outcomes for those students.
- (6) All relevant data to assist in determining the effectiveness of the program and specific legislative recommendations, including the continuation, modification, or expansion of the program statewide.”

This report will serve as the required reporting by the local school administrative units, in collaboration with the State Board of Education, to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education and the Senate Appropriations Committee on Education/Higher Education as indicated in N.C. Session Law 2016-94, Section 8.21(g).

## **BACKGROUND**

To reduce the number of dropouts, some leaders in education have called for states to raise the upper limit of their age of compulsory school attendance — hereafter referred to as the “dropout age” — to 18.

As of this report, 23 states and the District of Columbia do not allow students to drop out before turning 18. Texas has the highest dropout age of all states at 19. The rest of the states are split between dropout ages of 16 (14 states) and 17 (11 states).

In North Carolina, students may legally leave school at 16. The State Board of Education voted to support raising the dropout age.

In North Carolina in recent years, emphasis has been focused on a more comprehensive approach to education with increased wraparound services to meet the needs of “The Whole Child.” Also, alternative strategies to traditional education are being implemented, with virtual/online options, after-hours programming, Career and Technical Education pathways and Multi-tiered Systems of Support. All these factors support the concept that a continuum of strategies that engage students, support at-risk students and allow for flexible educational opportunities must be employed to improve results.

The “Pilot Program to Raise the High School Dropout Age from Sixteen to Eighteen” was initiated with Session Law 2013-360 (Senate Bill 402, sec. 8.49). The legislation instituted the pilot counties as Hickory Public Schools and Newton-Conover City Schools.

The first year of the pilot program — the 2014-15 school year — was used primarily for planning. The first full year of implementation was the 2015-16 school year.

Rutherford County Schools entered the pilot later, so its first year of implementation was the 2017-18 school year. In 2017, McDowell County Schools was added to the pilot program (House Bill 40, sec. 8.21(a)).

## **IMPACT OF THE PILOT PROGRAM**

Since the last report on the Pilot Program to Raise the High School Dropout Age was released in January 2022:

- The state dropout rate increased from 1.94 in 2020-21 to 2.25 in 2021-22.
- Newton-Conover (1.06) and Rutherford (2.79) experienced declines in dropout rates from 2020-21 to 2021-22.
- Hickory (2.55) and McDowell (3.73) posted increases in dropout rates from 2020-21 to 2021-22.
- The state graduation rate declined from 87.0 in 2020-21 to 86.4 in 2021-22.
- Hickory (85.2), McDowell (79.9), Newton-Conover (87.2) and Rutherford (87.2) posted declines in graduation rates from 2020-21 to 2021-22.
- Short-Term Suspension Rates Per 100 – All Students increased for Hickory (26.23), McDowell (6.47), Newton-Conover (16.61) and Rutherford (17.72) from 2020-21 to 2021-22.

### ***IMPORTANT NOTE***

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## **NEXT STEPS**

House Bill 206 was filed in February 2023. The legislation would gradually raise North Carolina's compulsory attendance age to 18:

- 2024-25 school year: 16 years, 6 months
- 2025-26: 17 years
- 2026-27: 17 years, 6 months
- 2027-28: 18 years

HB 206 was passed on first reading and referred to the Committee on Education – K-12 in February 2023.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increased communication with the judicial system, including district attorneys and judges, might help that critical support system understand this session law as well as the impact in their local community.
- Increased communication with social services agencies would be another positive opportunity for education and outreach as a result of the changes. What are expectations for the state Department of Health and Human Services and local DSS agencies regarding supporting compulsory school attendance?
- Allow more time for communication efforts to take hold and for this to become “the way.” The community members, parents and students need to wrap their minds around new, higher compulsory attendance ages and higher expectations for student attendance.
- Fix disconnects in the N.C. Department of Public Instruction’s Dropout Manual and the Student Attendance and Accounting Manual. NCDPI’s reporting requirements need to be examined for consistency while processes and supports provided to districts need to be differentiated and responsive, especially for those districts participating in the pilot.
- In light of the state’s Raise the Age legislation and major changes to the juvenile justice system taking place as a result, revisit moving the age for the state – even if as an “opting” opportunity. North Carolina’s compulsory attendance law should simply be rewritten to require school attendance from ages 7-18 rather than only require attendance through age 16 as currently written. This would seem to be a natural area for alignment across state agencies and a chance for the law to support best practices aligning with major elements of the State Board of Education’s strategic plan.
- Identify strategies put in place by other local education agencies that have experienced the largest three-year percentage decrease in the high school dropout rates and counts but not raised the dropout age.
- Further explore the ramifications of attendance issues as the main reason listed by schools for students dropping out.
- Continue the pilot and data collection with opportunities to increase the number of districts in the pilot.



# DATA

## CRIME AND VIOLENCE ACTS AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

	2014-15			2015-16			2016-17		
	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)
Catawba County	95	18.03	13.19	63	11.92	12.75	59	11.02	12.12
Hickory	21	17.09	13.19	37	30.71	12.75	4	3.29	12.12
Newton-Conover	11	10.81	13.19	11	10.68	12.75	19	19.15	12.12
McDowell	42	22.35	13.19	19	9.97	12.75	45	23.38	12.12
Rutherford	36	14.06	13.19	33	12.83	12.75	38	14.97	12.12

	2017-18			2018-19			2019-20*		
	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)
Catawba County	72	13.79	11.88	56	11.41	10.73	49	10.12	8.08
Hickory	11	9.22	11.88	9	7.77	10.73	4	3.42	8.08
Newton-Conover	11	11.2	11.88	10	10.73	10.73	16	17.17	8.08
McDowell	26	13.80	11.88	53	30.53	10.73	28	16.20	8.08
Rutherford	18	7.20	11.88	16	6.56	10.73	6	2.56	8.08

	2020-21*			2021-22		
	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)
Catawba County	23	4.86	1.46	51	10.67	13.16
Hickory	0	0.00	1.46	9	8.12	13.16
Newton-Conover	1	1.10	1.46	8	8.70	13.16
McDowell	6	3.45	1.46	34	19.73	13.16
Rutherford	9	4.01	1.46	21	9.20	13.16

**Source:** <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/data-reports/dropout-and-discipline-data/discipline-alp-and-dropout-annual-reports>

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## GRADUATION RATES

### 4-Year Cohort

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21	2021-22
State	83.9	85.6	85.9	86.5	86.3	86.5	87.6	87.0	86.4
Catawba County	90.8	89.8	89.8	91.5	91.9	89.0	89.1	87.1	86.2
Hickory	83.9	83.9	84.7	85.0	90.6	87.0	87.5	88.4	85.2
Newton-Conover	92.5	>95	93.5	>95.0	91.3	94.4	94.8	88.2	87.2
McDowell	77.0	80.4	81.6	85.3	85.2	83.2	86.9	85.0	79.9
Rutherford	78.6	81.9	81.2	85.0	84.1	84.2	87.8	88.2	87.2

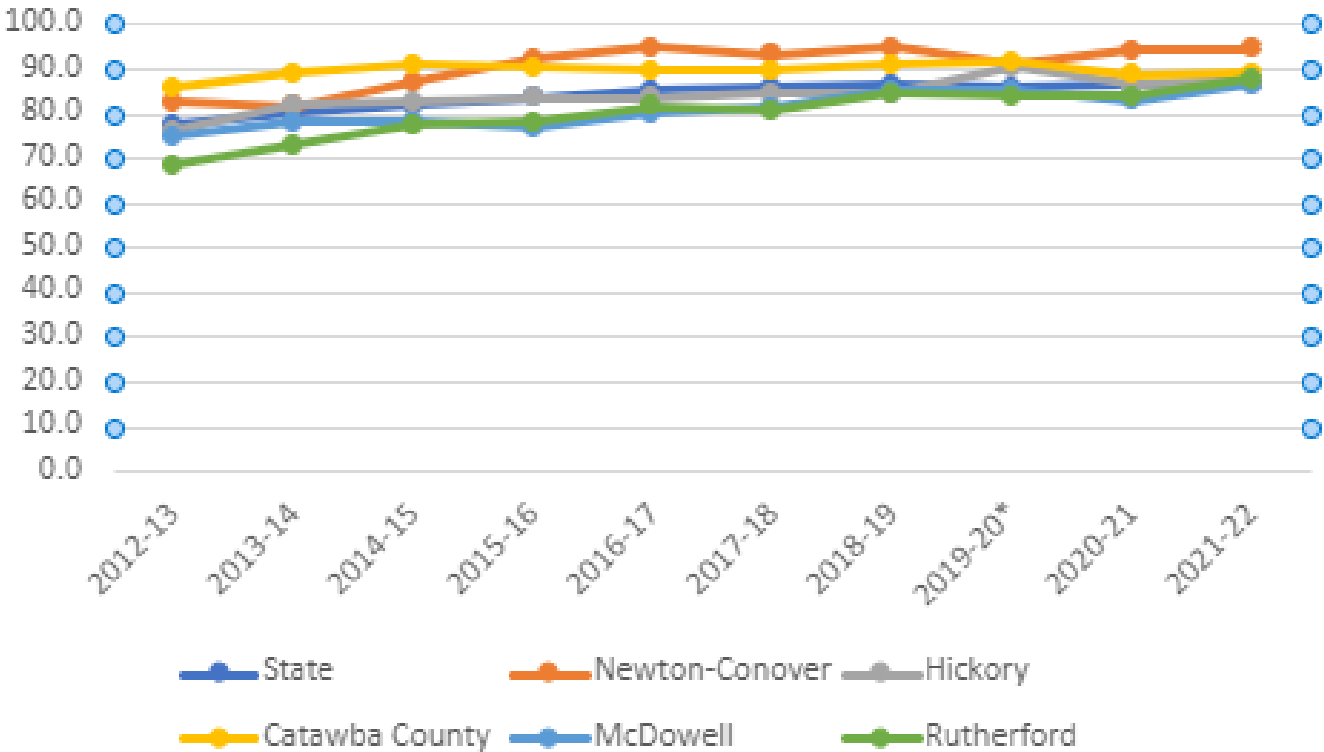
### Source:

[https://bi.nc.gov/t/DPIAccountabilityandTesting/views/CohortGraduationRate\\_StateLevel/State?%3Aorigin=card\\_share\\_link&%3Aembed=y](https://bi.nc.gov/t/DPIAccountabilityandTesting/views/CohortGraduationRate_StateLevel/State?%3Aorigin=card_share_link&%3Aembed=y)

### Graduation Rates Over Time

	State	Catawba County	Hickory	Newton-Conover	McDowell	Rutherford
2005-06	68.3	81.6	70.4	67.3	64.1	66.2
2006-07	69.5	80.6	70.8	79.6	68.1	69.1
2007-08	70.3	81.2	76.8	81.0	68.6	68.7
2008-09	71.8	83.8	74.3	76.3	72.3	64.0
2009-10	74.2	83.2	68.6	88.6	72.9	67.1
2010-11	77.9	86.2	76.5	83.0	75.2	69.0
2011-12	80.4	89.3	82.2	81.9	78.2	73.3
2012-13	82.5	91.3	82.8	87.4	78.2	77.7
2013-14	83.9	90.8	83.9	92.5	77.0	78.6
2014-15	85.6	89.8	83.9	95.0	80.4	81.9
2015-16	85.9	89.8	84.7	93.5	81.6	81.2
2016-17	86.5	91.5	85.0	95.0	85.3	85.0
2017-18	86.3	91.9	90.6	91.3	85.2	84.1
2018-19	86.5	89.0	87.0	94.4	83.2	84.2
2019-20*	87.6	89.1	87.5	94.8	86.9	87.8
2020-21	87.0	87.1	88.4	88.2	85.0	88.2
2021-22	86.4	86.2	85.2	87.2	79.9	87.2

### Graduation Rates over Time



## DROPOUT COUNTS AND RATES

\*Source: Consolidated reports found on website

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18		2018-19		2019-20*		2020-21*		2021-22	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
State	10404	2.28	11190	2.39	10889	2.29	11097	2.31	10523	2.18	9512	2.01	7194	1.53	9147	1.94	10841	2.25
Catawba County	98	1.2	110	2.01	105	1.29	64	1.45	100	1.84	96	1.87	81	1.61	155	3.07	64	1.29
Hickory	35	1.82	40	3.04	30	1.52	18	1.42	15	1.21	17	1.39	13	1.06	30	2.45	31	2.55
Newton-Conover	9	0.62	2	0.19	6	0.4	2	0.2	7	0.69	17	1.75	8	0.84	28	2.92	10	1.06
McDowell	70	3.55	86	4.20	70	3.47	55	2.71	75	3.77	57	3.10	28	1.56	64	3.46	70	3.73
Rutherford	94	3.40	87	3.16	102	3.67	95	3.46	58	2.20	47	1.82	28	1.14	77	3.21	69	2.79

<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/data-reports/dropout-and-discipline-data/discipline-alp-and-dropout-annual-reports>

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## ATTENDANCE RATES

Source: APA/ADM Ratio tables provided by Alexis: <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/financial-and-business-services/demographics-and-finances/student-accounting-data#average-daily-attendance--average-daily-membership-ratios-adaadm>

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*
Hickory Career & Arts Magnet	91.67	90.16	92.90	94.19	92.72	93.71	96.36
Hickory High School	94.71	92.99	93.16	93.40	91.17	91.54	94.33
Newton-Conover High School	96.19	93.05	93.16	92.09	92.63	91.37	94.36
Discovery High School	96.92	96.49	96.92	92.51	93.06	93.98	96.19

	2020-21	2021-22
Hickory Career & Arts Magnet	93.09	94.58
Hickory High School	84.17	87.27
Newton-Conover High School	88.18	89.74
Discovery High School	98.56	90.95

## ADA Rate Over Time

	Hickory Career & Arts Magnet	Hickory High School	Newton-Conover High School	Discovery High School
2005-06		94.91	94.07	
2006-07		95.04	93.67	
2007-08		95.79	95.69	
2008-09	79.61	96.07	95.03	
2009-10	77.11	95.38	96.04	
2010-11	85.48	94.14	95.62	
2011-12	89.94	93.83	96.41	96.30
2012-13	92.20	95.76	96.70	96.30
2013-14	91.67	94.71	96.19	96.92
2014-15	90.16	92.99	93.05	96.49
2015-16	92.90	93.16	93.16	96.92
2016-17	94.19	93.40	92.09	92.51
2017-18	92.72	91.17	92.63	93.06
2018-19	93.71	91.54	91.37	93.98
2019-20*	94.39	90.01	91.30	96.25
2020-21	94.39	90.01	91.30	96.25
2021-22	94.61	88.73	90.78	95.23

## SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM SUSPENSIONS

Source: School Report Card

### Short-Term Suspension Counts – All Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22
Catawba County	1171	1063	1157	1170	1525	574	381	1562
Hickory City	752	759	674	488	637	284	104	968
Newton-Conover	440	289	270	290	332	42	87	465
Iredell-Statesville	2435	2492	2453	2361	2041	457	727	828
McDowell	405	328	482	367	526	146	109	170
Rutherford	1192	1310	1203	1020	1074	195	103	573

### Short-Term Suspension Rates Per 100 – All Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22
Catawba County	7.06	6.51	7.10	7.27	9.70	11.85	2.51	10.31
Hickory City	17.26	17.83	16.01	11.85	15.76	24.27	2.78	26.23
Newton-Conover	14.08	9.36	9.01	9.73	11.30	4.51	3.14	16.61
Iredell-Statesville	11.73	12.07	12.08	11.62	10.13	6.67	3.64	14.90
McDowell	6.47	5.30	7.86	6.11	8.96	8.45	1.95	6.47
Rutherford	14.36	16.04	15.01	12.83	13.81	8.30	1.40	17.72

### Long-Term Suspension Counts – All Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22
Catawba County	1	0	3	1	0	1	0	0
Hickory City	16	8	4	0	2	2	0	1
Newton-Conover	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Iredell-Statesville	4	4	6	0	6	2	2	13
McDowell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Rutherford	4	4	1	1	2	2	0	1

### Long-Term Suspension Rates Per 100 – All Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22
Catawba County	0.006	0.000	0.018	0.006	0.000	0.006	0.000	0.000
Hickory City	0.367	0.188	0.095	0.000	0.049	0.049	0.000	0.027
Newton-Conover	0.000	0.032	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.036
Iredell-Statesville	0.019	0.019	0.030	0.000	0.030	0.010	0.010	0.064
McDowell	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.036
Rutherford	0.048	0.049	0.012	0.013	0.026	0.027	0.000	0.014

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