

04CH013150Community Assessment  
 Polk County Board of Education  
 Program Year 2025–2026

The Office of Head Start requires all Head Start Grantees to conduct a community assessment at least once over the five year grand period. In addition a program must annually review and update the community assessment to reflect any significant changes. In January and February 2026, the program conducted an assessment that included the requirements set forth by the Office of Head Start.

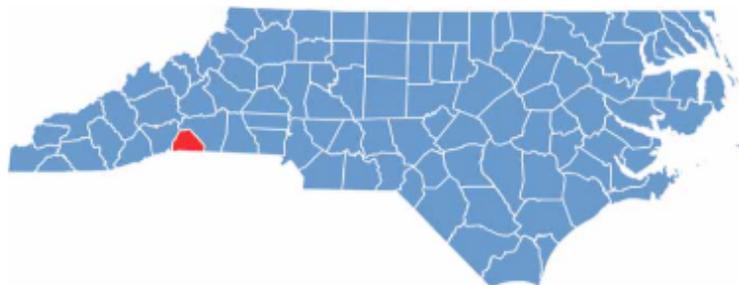
Component of the community assessment include:

1. Demographic information about eligible Head Start children
2. Information about the education, health, nutrition and social service needs of eligible children and their families
3. Work, school and training schedules of parents with eligible children
4. Information about other child development services, child care centers, and family child care programs that serve eligible children
5. Resources available in the community
6. Strengths of the community

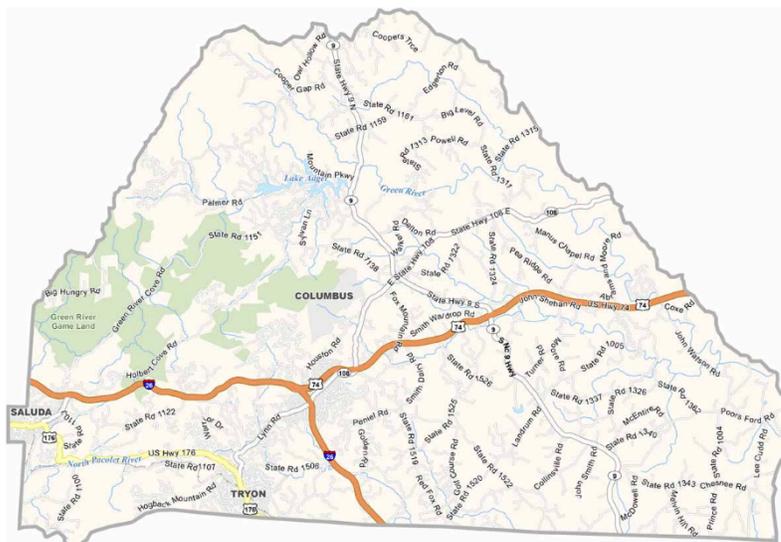
### General Area Description

#### Geographic Boundaries

Polk County Schools is the grantee for Head Start services in the service area of Polk County, North Carolina. Polk County is located in the western region of North Carolina in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, bordering South Carolina. The county covers approximately 237 square miles. The county is divided into six townships: Columbus, Cooper Gap, Green Creek, Saluda, Tryon, and White Oak.



Polk County Map, North Carolina



## Demographics

### Population

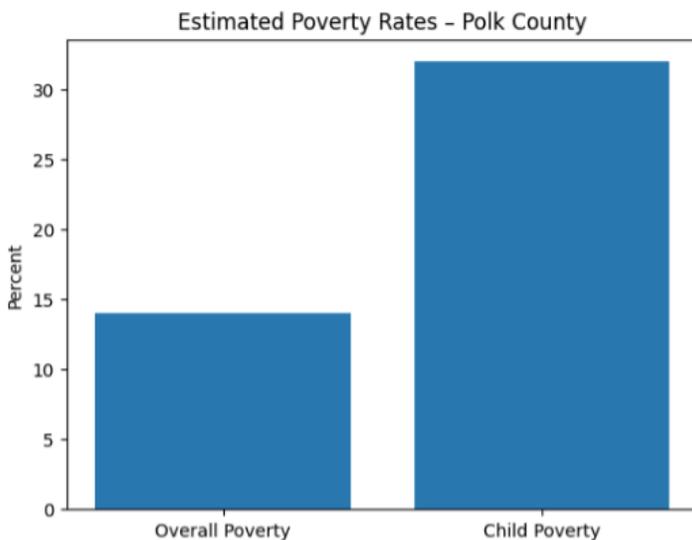
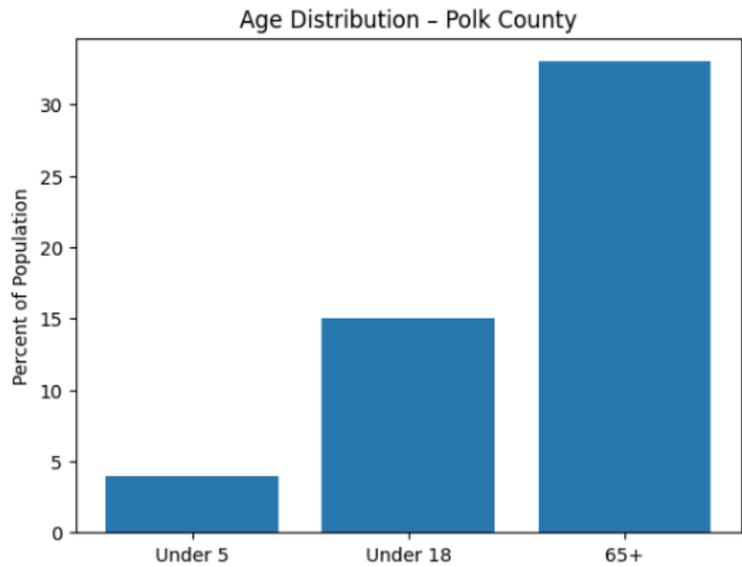
Estimated 2024 population: approximately 20,300–20,500 residents.

### Racial and Ethnic Composition:

- White: approximately 90–92%
- African American: approximately 4–5%
- Hispanic/Latino: approximately 6–7%
- Other or multiracial: approximately 2–3%

### Age Distribution:

- Persons under age 5: approximately 3–4%
- Persons under age 18: approximately 14–16%
- Persons age 65 and older: approximately 30%+



### Households and Income:

- Total households: approximately 9,000+
- Average household size: approximately 2.2 persons
- Median household income: approximately \$60,000–\$62,000
- Persons in poverty: approximately 13–15%

**Housing:**

- Median home value: approximately \$240,000–\$260,000
- Median gross rent: approximately \$900–\$1,000

**Head Start Eligible Children and Families:**

- Estimated children under age 5: approximately 700–800
- Estimated children ages 3–4: approximately 280–320
- Estimated Head Start–eligible 3–4 year olds: approximately 90–120

*Polk County is a rural county in western North Carolina with a population of approximately 20,000 residents. Children under age five represent approximately 4–5% of the population. Child poverty rates are higher than overall county poverty rates, indicating a continued need for comprehensive early childhood services.*

**Health and Nutrition Indicators:**

- Estimated 5–8% of children under age 18 are uninsured.
- Estimated 18–22% of children experience food insecurity.
- Approximately 40–45% of children live in poor or low-income households.

*Families in Polk County demonstrate needs related to affordable housing, access to health care, nutrition assistance, and stable employment. Health and Human Services provides WIC, immunizations, and well-child services. The Department of Social Services provides Medicaid, SNAP, and family support services.*

**Education and Child Care Environment:**

Polk County Schools operates Head Start and NC Pre-K classrooms. The county is rural with limited early childhood classroom availability and transportation challenges.

Work, School, and Training Schedules of Parents

*Employment in Polk County is concentrated in service, education, health care, retail, and construction sectors. Many parents work hourly or shift-based schedules or commute to nearby counties, creating the need for full-day early childhood services.*

**Community Strengths:**

Strong public school system, active faith-based organizations, cooperative extension, local health department, DSS, and community nonprofits that support families.

Available services include Polk County Schools Pre-K programs, Head Start, NC Pre-K, private child care centers, and family child care homes.

*Resources Available in the Community:*

Polk County Health and Human Services Agency  
2881 NC 108 Hwy East, Columbus, NC 28722  
Phone: 828-894-8271

Polk County Department of Social Services  
231 Wolverine Trail, Mill Spring, NC 28756

NC Cooperative Extension – Polk County Center  
79 Carmel Lane, Columbus, NC 28722  
Phone: 828-894-8218

**Conclusion:**

The Polk County Head Start Community Assessment confirms the continued need for comprehensive early childhood services for low-income children and families. Approximately 700–800 children under age five live in the county, with an estimated 30–35% living in low-income households. Housing costs, transportation barriers, and limited child care options remain key challenges. Community partners report increased mental health needs and continued demand for affordable early childhood programs. Based on the data reviewed, the current program design remains appropriate, and no change in scope is requested.

**References:**

*U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, QuickFacts – Polk County, NC.*  
*NC Kids Count Data Center – Polk County indicators.*  
*County Health Rankings & Roadmaps – Polk County, NC.*  
*NC Department of Public Instruction – Polk County Schools data.*  
*Polk County Schools program data and PIR reports.*  
*<https://uscountymaps.com/polk-county-map-north-carolina/>*