

THE SCHOOL DATA REPORT

High Country & Triad, North Carolina

Where the Numbers Actually Point

2024–25 NCDPI School Performance Data • Released September 2025

Realty ONE Group Results • Winston-Salem, NC

No opinions. No hearsay. No "everybody knows." Just what the state's own numbers say.

Every buyer with a child asks the same question, and almost nobody answers it honestly. "Are the schools good?" usually gets a shrug, a neighborhood reputation, or somebody's cousin's opinion from 2011.

This report answers it with data — the same data the State of North Carolina publishes every September and almost nobody reads. Every school named here earned its place on measurable performance across **nine regions and counties**, pulled from state accountability files, statewide percentile rankings, and national college-readiness indexes.

Here's the part that matters: **the spread inside a single county is wider than the spread between counties**. In Forsyth, an elementary school in the 98th percentile and one in the 2nd percentile sit less than ten miles apart. That gap is the address. Which is exactly why this is a real estate document and not an education document.

Part 1 — What We Measured, and Why

Before ranking anything, we had to decide what actually matters to a parent. Here is the hierarchy we used, in order of weight, and the reasoning behind each.

1. Grade-Level Proficiency Against the State Average

The percentage of students scoring at or above grade level on NC End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) exams. This is the outcome measure — can the kids read and do the math. North Carolina's own School Performance Grade formula is **80% achievement**, so this is also the metric the state itself weights most heavily. We compared every school against the statewide average rather than the district average, because district averages hide too much.

2. Academic Growth (EVAAS)

How much a school moves students forward in a year, measured against expected growth for those same students. We weighted this **higher than the state does**. Here's why: raw achievement tracks household income almost as closely as it tracks teaching. Growth measures what the school itself adds. A school in a wealthy ZIP code can post good proficiency numbers while teaching nobody anything new. A school can also serve a hard population and be one of the best-run buildings in the state. Growth is the only number that separates the two.

Statewide in 2024–25, 70.7% of North Carolina schools met or exceeded growth expectations — down from 73.1% the year before. Growth scores run on a 50–100 scale.

3. Statewide Percentile Rank

Where a school sits among all North Carolina schools in its grade band. This is what lets us compare an elementary school in Banner Elk to a high school in Greensboro on the same scale. A 90th-percentile school is a 90th-percentile school regardless of what grades it serves.

4. College & Career Readiness (High Schools Only)

Four-year cohort graduation rate, ACT composite, SAT composite, and AP or dual-enrollment participation. The 2024–25 statewide benchmarks: an 87.7% graduation rate (the highest in ten years) and an average 11th-grade ACT composite of 18.2. Any high school below those numbers is below average, full stop.

5. Access Type — Zoned vs. Application

Not a quality measure. A **reality** measure — and the one that turns school data into real estate advice. See Part 2.

What We Deliberately Left Out

Parent review scores. Community star ratings. Facilities. Per-pupil spending. Sports records. Every one of those is either subjective, popularity-driven, or uncorrelated with whether a child learns to read. This report is data only, and that means leaving out the comfortable stuff.

Part 2 — The Two Kinds of "Best"

This is the single most important thing in this report, and it is the thing that gets missed in every school ranking article ever published.

Some of North Carolina's very best public schools cannot be bought into.

Early colleges, magnets, and academies admit by application or lottery across an entire county. Your address does not get you in — and your address does not keep you out. Buying a \$900,000 house in the right ZIP code buys you exactly zero advantage at The Early College at Guilford.

Attendance-boundary schools are the opposite. The deed is the admission letter. That is the school your buyer's child will attend on day one, and that is the school that gets priced into the house.

So we ranked both ways. Where an application school won on raw data, we said so — and then named the strongest school you can actually get by buying a house. Both answers are true. Only one of them shows up on the closing statement.

THE HIGH COUNTRY — TOP THREE

Watauga • Ashe • Avery • Wilkes • Alleghany • Mitchell • Yancey

Across all seven High Country counties, three schools separated themselves. Two of the three are attendance-boundary schools, which is unusual and worth noting — in the mountains, the best schools are largely the ones you can move to.

#1 — BLOWING ROCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Blowing Rock, NC • Watauga County Schools • Grades PK–8 • ~400 students • Attendance boundary

State Percentile	89th percentile as an elementary school (#166 of 1,536) • 94th percentile as a middle school (#45 of 774)
Second Source	SchoolDigger ranks it #38 of 773 NC middle schools — better than 95.1% of the state
NCDPI Grade	B • 10-star rating (CarolinaSchoolHub)
Growth	82.8 — Met Growth (67th percentile statewide)
Proficiency	7th-grade math 93.9% vs. 53.5% state • 7th-grade reading 87.9% vs. 51.9% state
Subgroups	Top 10 in NC for students with disabilities • Top 6 for academically gifted

Why It Won

Blowing Rock Elementary is the only school in the entire High Country that ranks in the top 11% of North Carolina **in two different grade bands at the same time**. A PK–8 school has to be good twice — once at teaching third graders to read and again at getting eighth graders ready for high school algebra. Most schools are good at one. This one is elite at both.

The 7th-grade math number is the outlier that decided it: 93.9% proficient against a state average of 53.5%. That is not a rounding difference. That is nearly double the state, in the subject where American schools lose the most kids. Add top-10 statewide performance for students with disabilities — a subgroup where good schools quietly fail all the time — and this is the most complete academic profile in the region.

#2 — WATAUGA HIGH SCHOOL

Boone, NC • Watauga County Schools • Grades 9–12 • ~1,251 students • Attendance boundary

State Percentile	89th percentile — #51 of 470 NC high schools
NCDPI Grade	B • 10-star rating
Growth	88.4 — EXCEEDED Growth (79th percentile statewide)
SAT	1195 composite — #36 of 278 ranked NC high schools (87th percentile)

ACT	21 composite vs. 18.2 state average
Proficiency	EOC English II 76.2% vs. 59.6% state
National	U.S. News #74 in North Carolina • #2,663 nationally • 46% AP participation
District Grad Rate	92.9% — Watauga County's highest since 2019–20 (state: 87.7%)

Why It Won

It is the only high school in the High Country that clears the top 15% statewide **and** exceeded growth. Plenty of schools do one. Doing both means the students arrive strong and leave stronger — the school is not just harvesting good demographics.

The SAT number is the one to quote to a relocating buyer: a 1195 average places Watauga High 36th out of 278 ranked North Carolina high schools. For a rural mountain county of roughly 56,000 people, that is a genuinely anomalous outcome. The 92.9% district graduation rate sits more than five points above the state, and 46% AP participation means the honors track is a real track, not two sections and a hope.

#3 — BANNER ELK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Banner Elk, NC • Avery County Schools • Grades PK–5 • ~158 students • Attendance boundary

State Percentile	89th percentile — #171 of 1,536 NC elementary schools
Second Source	SchoolDigger #48 of 1,505 — better than 93% of NC elementary schools • 5-star
NCDPI Grade	B • 10-star rating
Growth	88.2 — EXCEEDED Growth (79th percentile statewide)
Proficiency	3rd-grade math 85.3% vs. 51.6% district and 64.1% state
Overall	Math 80–84% proficient • Reading 75–79% proficient (state: 51% / 50%)
District Context	Avery County Schools overall ranks 131 of 242 NC districts — this school is the outlier

Why It Won

Banner Elk Elementary posts the largest gap between school performance and district performance of any school in this study. Avery County Schools as a district ranks in the bottom half of North Carolina. This one building inside it performs better than 93% of elementary schools in the state.

It also does it with a high free-and-reduced-lunch population, which is the tell. When a school outperforms both its district and the state **while serving an economically mixed student body**, the variable is instruction, not affluence. The 88.2 growth score confirms it — exceeded growth, 79th percentile statewide. Third-grade math at 85.3% against a district figure of 51.6% is a 34-point spread inside the same county system.

DATA NOTE — The School That Beat Them All (And Why It Isn't Ranked)

Wilkes Early College High School posted a 98.3% four-year graduation rate in 2024–25 — more than ten points above the state — with 90%+ proficiency in both math and reading and top-1% statewide test scores. On raw output it is the strongest school in the High Country by a wide margin.

It is excluded from the ranking above for one reason: it admits ~228 students countywide by application. No address in Wilkes County guarantees a seat, and no address excludes you from applying. It is a fantastic option to tell a Wilkes buyer about. It is not a school you can buy.

THE TRIAD — TOP THREE

Forsyth • Guilford • Davidson • Davie • Stokes • Rockingham • Randolph • Surry • Yadkin • Alamance

The Triad required both rankings, because the region's three strongest schools on pure data are all application-based — and two of them are among the best public high schools in the United States.

Ranking A — Top Three by Raw Performance (Application / Countywide Access)

School	County	The Data	Access
The Early College at Guilford	Guilford	#1 high school in North Carolina and #31 in the nation (U.S. News 2026). #20 nationally for STEM. Niche #2 in NC, A+ overall. ~192 students graduate with two years of Guilford College credit.	Countywide application
Philip J. Weaver Ed Center	Guilford	#4 high school in North Carolina (U.S. News). 93rd percentile statewide (#32 of 470). NCDPI grade A, 10-star. ACT composite 23 vs. 18.2 state. Graduation rate above 95%.	Countywide application / audition
Atkins Academic & Technology HS	Forsyth	94th percentile statewide (#28 of 470) — the highest-ranked high school in the Triad on statewide percentile. NCDPI grade A, 10-star. ACT 22. 1,150 students.	Forsyth countywide magnet

Why These Three

Guilford County holds three of North Carolina's top four public high schools — #1 (Early College at Guilford), #2 (STEM Early College at N.C. A&T) and #4 (Weaver). That is a genuinely extraordinary concentration and the strongest single education fact in the entire Triad. Atkins takes the third slot here because it is the highest-percentile high school in the region on the statewide ranking model, and because at 1,150 students it serves roughly six times as many families as the two Guilford early colleges combined.

Ranking B — Top Three You Can Buy Into (Attendance Boundary)

These are the three highest-performing Triad schools where the deed is the admission letter.

School	Location	The Data
Oak Ridge Elementary	Oak Ridge, Guilford Co. (27310)	99th percentile — #23 of 1,536 NC elementary schools. NCDPI grade A, 10-star. U.S. News #14 elementary in North Carolina. PK–5, 691 students.
Sherwood Forest Elementary	Winston-Salem, Forsyth Co. (27106)	98th percentile — #37 of 1,529 NC elementary schools. NCDPI grade A, 10-star. PK–5, 650 students. The highest-percentile zoned school of any kind in Forsyth County.
Ronald W. Reagan High	Pfafftown, Forsyth Co.	91st percentile — #40 of 470 NC high schools.

School	Location	The Data
School	(27040)	NCDPI grade A, 10-star. ACT 22 vs. 18.2 state. 2,067 students — the highest-ranked fully-zoned comprehensive high school in the Triad.

Why These Three

All three carry an NCDPI letter grade of A, which only a small fraction of North Carolina schools earn. Reagan is the one to know cold: at the 91st percentile with a 2,067-student enrollment, it is the largest high-performing **open-enrollment** high school in the Triad. Northwest Guilford High School is the closest Guilford equivalent at the 86th percentile (#64 of 470, NCDPI grade A) and belongs in the same conversation for buyers looking north of Greensboro.

TOWN & COUNTY WINNERS

The single best school in each market you asked about

TOWN OF BOONE — WATAUGA HIGH SCHOOL

Boone-address public schools: Watauga High, Watauga Innovation Academy, Parkway School, Hardin Park School, Green Valley School, and Two Rivers Community School (charter).

Boone School	Statewide Rank	NCDPI Grade	Growth
Watauga High School	89th pct — #51 of 470 HS	B • 10-star	88.4 — Exceeded
Parkway School (PK–8)	92nd pct middle • 83rd pct elem	B • 9-star	Met
Hardin Park School (PK–8)	89th pct middle • 79th pct elem	B • 9-star	Met
Watauga Innovation Academy	74th pct — #124 of 470 HS	C • 8-star	Did not meet
Two Rivers Community (charter)	73rd pct elem • 73rd pct middle	C • 8-star	Met
Green Valley School (PK–8)	38th pct elem • 71st pct middle	C • 6-star	Met

Why It Won

Watauga High posts the highest state percentile of any school with a Boone address (89th) and is the **only Boone school to exceed growth** in 2024–25. It also carries the region's best college-readiness data — SAT 1195, ACT 21, 46% AP participation.

Boone K–8 answer: Parkway School.

If your buyer has younger children, Parkway is the Boone pick — 92nd percentile among NC middle schools (#62 of 774), NCDPI grade B, 9-star. Hardin Park is a close second at the 89th percentile. Both are strong; Parkway is measurably stronger.

BLOWING ROCK — BLOWING ROCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Blowing Rock has one public school, and it happens to be the best school in the High Country. Full profile in Part 3.

The Short Version	94th percentile as a middle school, 89th as an elementary. NCDPI grade B, 10-star, Met Growth at 82.8.
The Selling Line	7th-grade math proficiency of 93.9% against a state average of 53.5%.
Real Estate Note	A PK–8 attendance-boundary school in a town of roughly 1,300 residents. The zone is small, which makes the number of homes

inside it small — that scarcity is a legitimate pricing argument.

WEST JEFFERSON — WESTWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Two public schools carry a West Jefferson address: Westwood Elementary (K–6) and Ashe County High School (9–12). Westwood wins, and the margin is not close on the metric that matters most.

West Jefferson School	Statewide Rank	NCDPI Grade	Growth Score
Westwood Elementary (K–6)	69th pct — #476 of 1,536	C • 8-star	Met
Ashe County High School (9–12)	59th pct — #195 of 470	C • 6-star	51.8 — DID NOT MEET

Why It Won

Westwood ranks ten percentile points higher statewide and met growth. Ashe County High did not — and its growth score of 51.8 places it in the **2nd percentile of the 2,375 North Carolina schools with growth data**. On a 50-to-100 scale, 51.8 is roughly the floor. That is the most concerning single number anywhere in this report, and it belongs in an honest conversation with any family relocating to Ashe County with high-school-aged children.

The Ashe County school worth knowing: Ashe County Middle School.

Warrensville address, not West Jefferson — but it serves the whole county and it is Ashe's strongest performer: 83rd percentile statewide (#135 of 774 NC middle schools), 9-star, with a growth score of 87.8 — Exceeded Growth, 78th percentile. Ashe students are being grown well through 8th grade. What happens after that is a different data story.

BANNER ELK — BANNER ELK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Banner Elk is a two-county trap, and it catches agents constantly. Two public schools carry a Banner Elk mailing address, and they sit in **two different school systems**. The performance gap between them is 24 percentile points.

"Banner Elk" School	District	Statewide Rank	NCDPI Grade
Banner Elk Elementary (PK–5)	Avery County Schools	89th pct — #171 of 1,536 elem	B • 10-star
Valle Crucis School (PK–8)	Watauga County Schools	65th pct elem • 84th pct middle	C • 8-star

Why It Won

Banner Elk Elementary is 24 percentile points higher as an elementary school, carries a B to Valle Crucis's C, and exceeded growth at 88.2. See Part 3 for the full profile — it is also the #3 school in the High Country overall.

The practical point for showings: a Banner Elk address does not tell you which district a home is in. **Verify the county line and the assigned school before you say a word about schools.** Valle Crucis is a good school — 84th percentile at the middle grades — but it is not the same school, and it is not even in the same county system.

WILKES COUNTY — MORAVIAN FALLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Moravian Falls, NC • Grades PK–5 • 235 students • Attendance boundary

State Percentile	86th percentile — #214 of 1,536 NC elementary schools
NCDPI Grade	B • 9-star rating
County Context	The highest-ranked attendance-boundary school in any grade band in Wilkes County
Best Wilkes High School	West Wilkes High School — 60th percentile (#186 of 470), NCDPI grade B, 92.3% graduation rate
County Grad Rate	93.2% in 2024–25 — a Wilkes record and fourth straight annual increase (state: 87.7%)

Why It Won

Moravian Falls is the only zoned school in Wilkes County to clear the 85th percentile statewide, and one of only three Wilkes schools of any type to earn a B from NCDPI. In a county where the range runs from the 86th percentile down to the 20th, it is the clear top of the zoned market.

Wilkes County is the widest-spread county in this report. Both facts are true:

- Wilkes Early College High School graduated 98.3% of its 2024–25 cohort with top-1% statewide test scores — but admits by countywide application.
- Six Wilkes schools earned a D in 2024–25 and were designated low-performing by the state: Boomer-Ferguson, C.C. Wright, Mount Pleasant, Mountain View and North Wilkesboro elementaries, plus West Wilkes Middle. None of the six exceeded growth.

The county graduation rate is at an all-time high of 93.2% and climbing four years running. But in Wilkes, more than anywhere else in this study, the specific address determines the specific outcome. Never generalize about "Wilkes schools" — name the school.

FORSYTH COUNTY — SHERWOOD FOREST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Winston-Salem, NC 27106 • Grades PK–5 • 650 students • Attendance boundary

State Percentile	98th percentile — #37 of 1,529 NC elementary schools
NCDPI Grade	A • 10-star rating
Why It Wins	The highest-percentile school in Forsyth County that a buyer can access by purchasing a home
Runner-Up Elementary	Meadowlark Elementary (27106) — 96th percentile, #65 of 1,529, NCDPI grade B, 10-star
Top Forsyth High School	Atkins Academic & Technology — 94th percentile (#28 of 470), grade A, ACT 22 — countywide magnet
Top Zoned High School	Ronald W. Reagan High School — 91st percentile (#40 of 470), grade A, ACT 22, 2,067 students

Why It Won

Sherwood Forest sits at the 98th percentile with an NCDPI grade of A — higher than any other zoned school in the county, elementary, middle or high. Atkins ranks slightly higher on the high school scale (94th percentile), but Atkins is a countywide magnet: it is a school a Forsyth family can *apply* to from anywhere in the county, so it does not attach to any particular house.

The Forsyth County number that should be in every listing conversation:

Forsyth County contains Sherwood Forest Elementary at the 98th percentile and Easton Elementary at the 2nd. It contains Reagan High at the 91st percentile and Carver High at the 3rd, Parkland at the 4th, and North Forsyth at the 8th. Those buildings are within a short drive of one another.

No county in this report has a wider top-to-bottom range. In Forsyth, "good schools" is not a Winston-Salem question — it is a street-by-street question, and it is worth real money on both sides of the transaction.

GUILFORD COUNTY — OAK RIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Oak Ridge, NC 27310 • Grades PK–5 • 691 students • Attendance boundary

State Percentile	99th percentile — #23 of 1,536 NC elementary schools
NCDPI Grade	A • 10-star rating
National	U.S. News ranks it #14 among all North Carolina elementary schools
Why It Wins	The highest-percentile attendance-boundary school in Guilford County — the deed is the admission letter
Top Overall (Application)	The Early College at Guilford — #1 high school in NC, #31 in the nation (U.S. News 2026)
Top Magnet Elementary	Academy at Lincoln — 99th percentile (#20 of 1,536), grades 4–8 — U.S. News #2 in NC — application
Top Zoned High School	Northwest Guilford High — 86th percentile (#64 of 470), NCDPI grade A, 2,051 students

Why It Won

Oak Ridge Elementary is the single highest-ranked school in Guilford County that is tied to an address. At the 99th percentile with an A from NCDPI and a #14-in-North-Carolina placement from U.S. News, it outranks every other zoned school in the state's third-largest district.

Academy at Lincoln edges it by three spots statewide (#20 vs. #23) and ranks #2 in North Carolina per U.S. News — but it is a countywide magnet serving grades 4–8 by application. Same reason The Early College at Guilford, despite being the best public high school in the state, is listed here as context rather than as the county's answer for a buyer.

The strongest single education fact in the entire Triad:

Guilford County is home to three of North Carolina's top four public high schools — The Early College at Guilford (#1), STEM Early College at N.C. A&T (#2), and Philip J. Weaver Ed Center (#4), per U.S. News & World Report's 2026 rankings. All three are open to any Guilford County student by application, regardless of address.

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Six findings worth repeating out loud

1. The Triad has the ceiling. The High Country has the floor.

The Triad holds North Carolina's #1, #2 and #4 high schools — and also holds high schools in the 2nd, 3rd and 5th percentiles. The High Country holds nothing in the top 25 statewide, but its counties cluster far more tightly. Watauga County Schools ranks 39th of 242 NC districts with three schools in the top 11% of NC middle schools and a 92.9% graduation rate. If a buyer wants a ceiling, point them at the Triad. If a buyer wants to worry less about which specific street they land on, point them at Watauga.

2. In three of the four biggest markets here, the best school can't be bought.

Guilford, Forsyth and Wilkes all have their top performer behind an application. Any conversation about "the best schools" in those counties that doesn't distinguish access type is misleading a buyer — in both directions. Some families are paying a premium for a ZIP code that doesn't buy them the school they think it does. Others are ruling out neighborhoods that would give their child access to a top-5 school in the state.

3. Growth scores tell a different story than letter grades.

Ashe County High School and Watauga High School both look mid-pack on a quick glance. But Watauga exceeded growth at 88.4 (79th percentile) and Ashe County High scored 51.8 — the 2nd percentile statewide. Two schools, forty miles apart, moving students in opposite directions. Letter grades are 80% achievement; they will not show you this.

4. Small mountain schools are punching far above their weight.

Banner Elk Elementary serves about 158 students and outperforms 93% of North Carolina elementary schools while sitting inside a district that ranks 131st of 242. Blowing Rock serves about 400 across nine grade levels and ranks in the top 6% of NC middle schools. In the High Country, enrollment size is not predicting quality — in several cases it is inversely correlated.

5. Mailing addresses lie. County lines don't.

Banner Elk has two public schools in two different county systems, 24 percentile points apart. West Jefferson's two schools sit ten percentile points apart with opposite growth results. Never quote a school based on a mailing address — pull the assignment.

6. Graduation rates across this footprint are at or near record highs.

Watauga: 92.9%, highest since 2019–20. Wilkes: 93.2%, an all-time county record and the fourth straight annual increase. Both sit above North Carolina's statewide 87.7% — which is itself the highest in ten years. That is a real, verifiable, positive story about this region's schools, and almost nobody in our market is telling it.

How to Use This Report

- ❑ Never answer "are the schools good?" with an opinion. Answer it with a percentile and a source.
- ❑ Always confirm the assigned school before discussing schools — mailing address is not school assignment.
- ❑ Distinguish zoned schools from application schools every single time. Both matter; they matter differently.
- ❑ Lead with growth scores when a school's raw proficiency is average. Lead with proficiency when growth is average.
- ❑ Quote graduation rates against the 87.7% state figure — the region beats it, and buyers don't know that.
- ❑ Give the data. Let the family decide. That is the whole job.

Fair Housing reminder.

Provide school performance data as published by NCDPI and other public sources. Do not characterize schools, neighborhoods, or the families in them as "good," "bad," "better for" any group, or steer buyers toward or away from areas based on school demographics. Share the numbers and the source. Let the buyer draw the conclusion — that is both the compliant approach and, as it happens, the more persuasive one.

Sources & Data Vintage

All performance figures reflect the 2024–25 North Carolina school year unless otherwise noted. NCDPI released 2024–25 School Report Cards and accountability data in September 2025.

- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction — 2024–25 School Report Cards, Accountability Data Sets, Cohort Graduation Rate Executive Summary, and Low-Performing School Designations
- CarolinaSchoolHub — statewide percentile rankings and star ratings derived from NCDPI 2024–25 assessment and growth data
- SchoolDigger — independent statewide ranking and subgroup analysis
- U.S. News & World Report — Best High Schools 2026 and Best Elementary/Middle Schools rankings
- Niche — 2026 Best Public High Schools and Best School Districts, North Carolina
- PublicSchoolReview and district accountability reporting via EdNC, Watauga Democrat, and the Wilkes Journal-Patriot

Percentile ranks compare a school against all North Carolina public schools in its grade band. NCDPI School Performance Grades are calculated as 80% achievement and 20% growth. Growth scores run on a 50–100 scale and are reported as Exceeded, Met, or Did Not Meet expected growth. Rankings from different sources use different methodologies and will not agree precisely; where sources diverge, both figures are shown.

Realty ONE Group Results

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