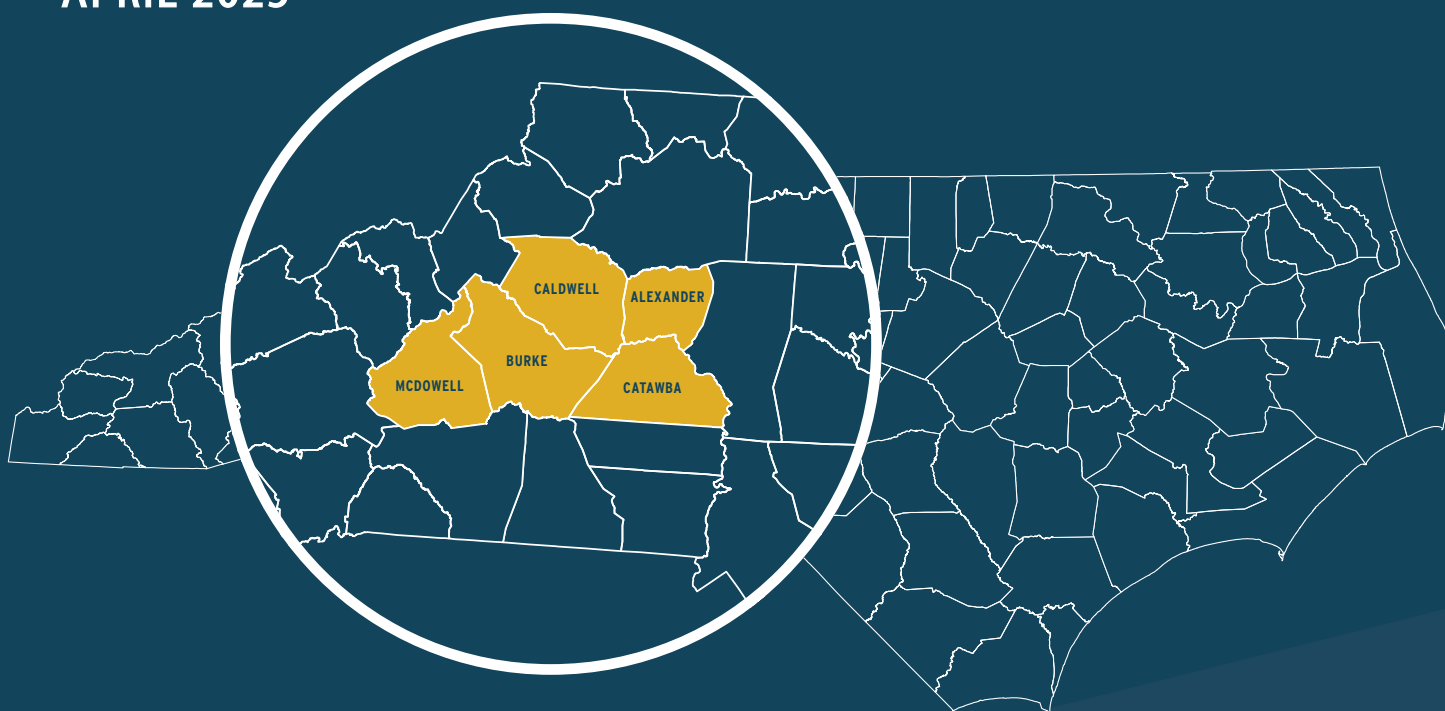


North Carolina Community College System

2025 Hickory Region Labor Market Analysis Report

APRIL 2025



Hickory Region Counties

Burke • Caldwell • Alexander • Catawba • McDowell

NC Community Colleges serving the Hickory Region

Caldwell CC and TI • Catawba Valley CC • McDowell TCC • Western Piedmont CC

Note: Projections do not
account for impact of
Hurricane Helene



NC DEPARTMENT
of COMMERCE
LABOR & ECONOMIC
ANALYSIS



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP of
NORTH CAROLINA

NC COMMUNITY
COLLEGES
CREATING SUCCESS

Introduction

This report is designed to help stakeholders understand the current and future labor market within their region. It is also a tool for North Carolina community colleges as they consider programmatic changes that align with the labor market and identify potential opportunities for programmatic collaboration with other colleges in the region. This report specifically provides regional insights into:

- Recent trends associated with overall employment at the region and county levels
- Current regional diversity of industry sectors and occupational groups
- Projected regional changes across industry sectors and occupational groups
- Regional projections for annual openings in occupations requiring or preferring a community college education and their associated earnings
- Annual count of regional community college completers by program and their associated earnings
- Comparison of occupational openings and community college completers by PropelNC Workforce Sector
- Recent economic development activity

Region

North Carolina's 100 counties are organized into eight multi-county economic regions called Prosperity Zones, which are further divided into sixteen Sub Prosperity Zones. The Hickory Region is one of two subzones of the Northwest region, encompassing the following counties: Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, and McDowell.



Highlights

Employment (Pages 4-5)

- The region grew employment by 0.7% between 2018-2023, resulting in 169,387 workers in 2023.
- 3 of 5 counties in the region saw growth in employment across the 6-year period.
- The regional unemployment rate was 3.3% in 2023, below the statewide rate (3.5%).
- All counties showed a net decrease or stability in unemployment rates across the 6-year period. In 2023, unemployment rates ranged from 3.2%-3.4%.

Existing Industry Sectors and Occupational Groups (Pages 6-7)

- In 2022, the four largest industry sectors in the region were Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Accommodation and Food Services.
- In 2022, the four largest occupational groups in the region were Production, Transportation and Material Moving, Office and Administrative Support, and Sales and Related.

Labor Supply and Demand (Page 8)

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an oversupply of job seekers relative to job openings. In every year since (through 2023), job openings have outpaced labor.
- In 2023, Architecture and Engineering Occupations and Healthcare Support Occupations had significantly more jobs than job seekers (ratio: 0.2), whereas Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations had about twice as many job seekers as available jobs (ratio: 2.3).

Employment Projections (Pages 9-10)

- The region is projected to add 7,777 jobs between 2022 and 2032. The Accommodation and Food Services sector will experience the largest growth (+1,792 jobs), and the Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction sector will have the largest percentage growth (18.7%).
- Across the 10-year period, the Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations group will experience the largest growth (+1,702 jobs), and the largest percentage growth (12.6%).

Focused Occupational Projections and Current Earnings (Pages 11-12)

- Between 2022 and 2032, it is projected that Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators and Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers will be the two occupations with the highest number of annual openings in the region.
- Within the region, median annual earnings among the top twenty-five occupations range from \$27,858 (Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary) to \$76,897 (Accountants and Auditors).

Community College Completers and Earnings (Page 13)

- In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Nursing Assistant/Aide and Patient Care Assistant/Aide and Emergency Medical Technology/Technician (EMT Paramedic) pathways produced the most completers (288 and 196, respectively).
- The Fire Prevention and Safety Technology/Technician completers had the highest average median salary (\$77,174).

PropelNC Workforce Sector Occupation Projections and Community College Completers

(Page 14)

- Using projections for 2032, the PropelNC-aligned workforce sectors with the largest number of openings in the Charlotte region were Trades and Transportation (51.1%) and Business and Management (15.1%).
- In comparison, based on completions in the 2023-2024 academic year, the PropelNC-aligned workforce sectors with the largest number of completers included Trades and Transportation (17.3%) and Public Safety and First Responders (17.0%).

Economic Development Projects (Page 15-16)

- Between 2019 and 2024, 125 economic development projects were reported across the region, adding a total of 6,121 jobs and \$3.5 billion in capital investment.
- Across the six-year period, the Furniture and Home Furnishings sector saw the largest growth in jobs (1,507 new positions) while the Information Technology sector saw the greatest investment (\$2.4 billion).
- The announced projects included 19 foreign direct investments from 8 different countries, including Italy (5 projects), China (3 projects), Germany (3 projects), and France (2 projects).

Appendix (Page 17-22)

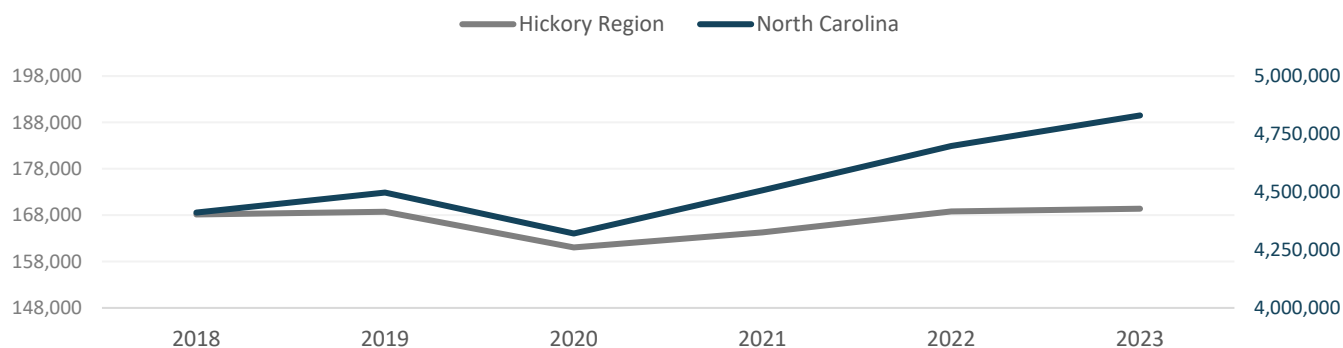
- Technical Documentation
- Detailed Data Tables
- Acknowledgements

Employment

Employment Trends

Data from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages shows that the Hickory region has experienced a 0.7% change in employment between 2018 and 2023, resulting in 169,387 workers in 2023. After reducing the workforce by over 7,500 individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic, the region steadily recovered and experienced a net gain of around 1,200 workers since 2018. Compared to state trends, Hickory lost a higher percentage of its workforce during the pandemic (-3.9% statewide compared to -4.6% regionally) and recovered at a slower rate (4.2% growth statewide in 2021-2022 compared to 2.7% regionally). Figure 1 compares statewide and regional employment from 2018 to 2023.

Figure 1. Statewide and regional employment statistics from 2018-2023.



Employment by County

Counties in the Hickory region show little change in employment between 2018 and 2023. Two of the five counties experienced a net loss in employment: McDowell (over 700 workers, -4.5%) and Alexander (over 300 workers, -3.3%). The three remaining counties (Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba) grew their workforce over the six-year period. Slight gains in the region were driven by increased employment in Catawba (+1,768 jobs), which boasted around 90,000 workers in 2023 (accounting for over half of the regional workforce). The two counties with mid-size workforces, Burke and Caldwell, had changes of less than 400 workers across the period. Table 1 provides a breakdown of statewide, regional, and county-level employment across the period.

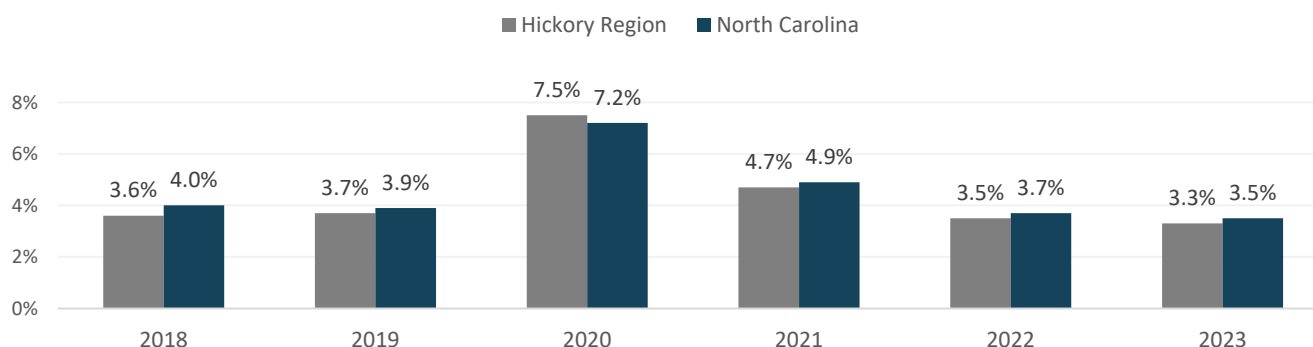
Table 1. Statewide, regional, and county-level employment statistics from 2018-2023.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Net Change
North Carolina	4,411,261	4,497,459	4,321,018	4,506,954	4,698,369	4,830,066	9.5%
Hickory	168,135	168,720	161,028	164,284	168,793	169,387	0.7%
Alexander	9,142	9,353	8,672	9,225	9,421	8,839	-3.3%
Burke	29,146	29,685	28,502	28,932	29,111	29,498	1.2%
Caldwell	25,201	25,254	24,805	24,445	25,088	25,375	0.7%
Catawba	88,349	88,599	83,698	86,224	89,733	90,117	2.0%
McDowell	16,297	15,829	15,351	15,458	15,440	15,558	-4.5%

Unemployment Rate Trends

Unemployment data, obtained from the Local Area Unemployment Statistics, suggests that the rate of unemployment in the Hickory region hovered around 3.6% in 2018 and 2019, below statewide averages. Unsurprisingly, unemployment rates hit a record high across the 6-year period in 2020, reaching 7.5%. Since then, unemployment rates have declined rapidly, reaching pre-pandemic levels by 2022 (3.5%) and resulting in a net change in unemployment rate of just 0.3% between 2018 and 2023. Compared to statewide trends, the Hickory region saw greater unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as of 2023 has slightly lower unemployment rates (3.3% versus 3.5% statewide). Figure 2 compares statewide and regional unemployment rates from 2018 to 2023.

Figure 2. Statewide and regional unemployment statistics from 2018-2023.



Unemployment Rate by County

All five counties within the Hickory region (i.e., Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, and McDowell) show unemployment rates within 0.1% of the regional employment rate in 2023. During each year except 2020, Alexander County had the lowest unemployment rate, whereas Caldwell had the highest. All counties saw a peak unemployment rate during 2020, with rates between 6.9% (McDowell) and 7.9% (Catawba). Since then, unemployment rates across the region have declined quickly, decreasing between 2.3% and 3.2% in 2021 and another 1.0% to 1.4% in 2022. All counties saw little net change across the 6-year period; most noted lower unemployment rates in 2022 relative to 2018 (-0.1% to -0.3%), but Alexander and McDowell saw slightly higher unemployment rates (net increase of 0.1%). Table 2 displays statewide, regional, and county-level unemployment rates from 2018-2023.

Table 2. Statewide, regional, and county-level unemployment statistics from 2018-2023.

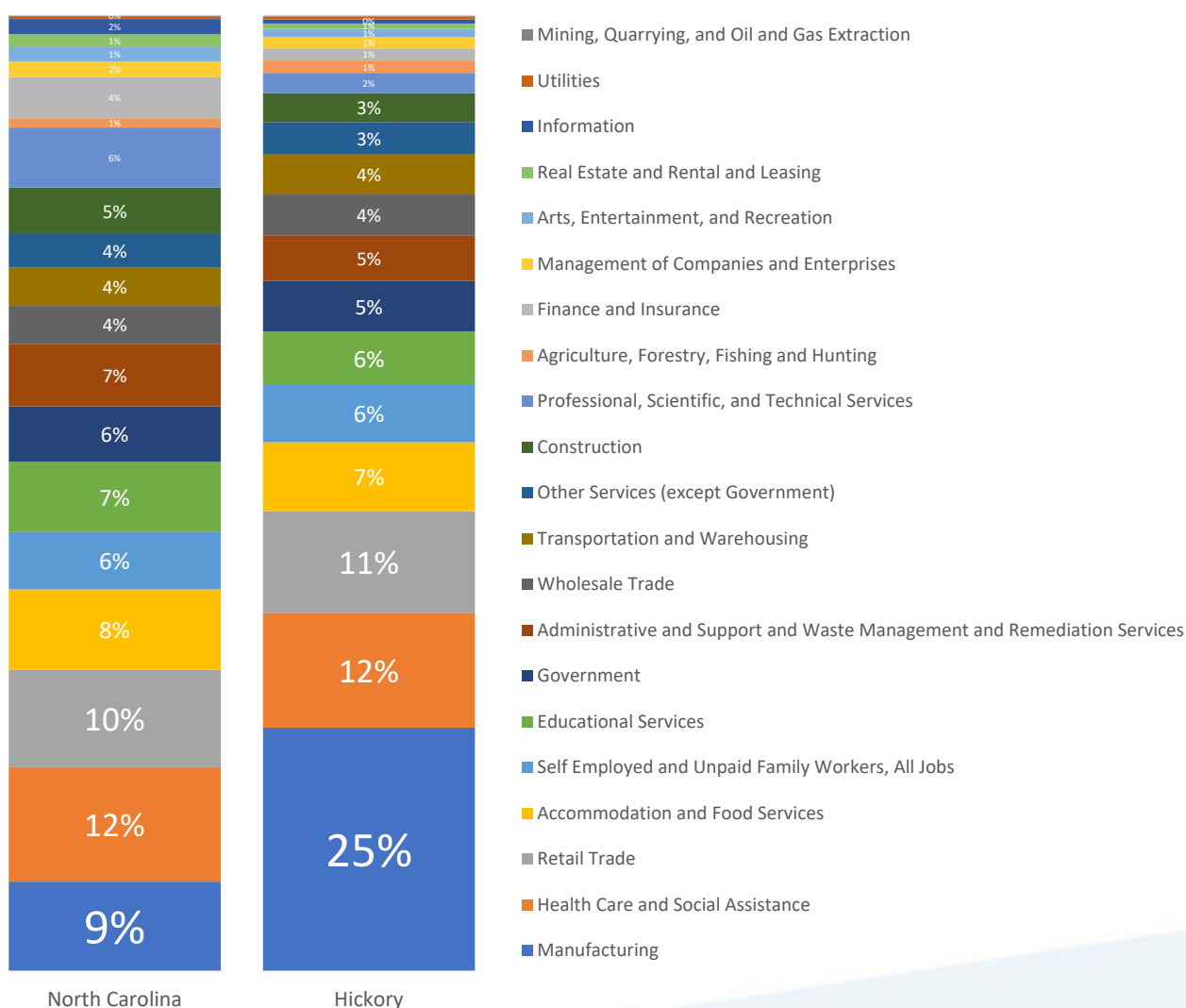
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
North Carolina	4.0%	3.9%	7.2%	4.9%	3.7%	3.5%
Hickory	3.6%	3.7%	7.5%	4.7%	3.5%	3.3%
Alexander	3.2%	3.3%	7.4%	4.3%	3.3%	3.2%
Burke	3.7%	3.7%	7.1%	4.6%	3.5%	3.3%
Caldwell	3.9%	4.0%	7.8%	5.0%	3.6%	3.4%
Catawba	3.6%	3.6%	7.9%	4.7%	3.5%	3.3%
McDowell	3.4%	3.8%	6.9%	4.6%	3.5%	3.2%

Existing Industry Sectors and Occupational Groups

Industry Sectors

In 2022, three industries – Retail Trade, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Manufacturing – each accounted for over 10% of jobs in the Hickory region (a combined 88,793 out of 184,622 jobs in the area). An additional four industry sectors each boasted between 5.3-7.2% of the total job count, including Government (9,741 jobs), Educational Services (10,358 jobs), Self Employed and Unpaid Family Workers (11,062 jobs jobs), and Accommodation and Food Services (13,334 jobs jobs). Collectively, these seven industries account for around 72% of positions in the Hickory region in 2022. In contrast, three sectors – Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction, Utilities, and Information – had less than 1,000 jobs and accounted for less than 0.5% of the total job market. Other sectors – for example, Finance and Insurance and Wholesale Trade – accounted for between 0.6% (roughly 1,000 jobs) and 4.8% (around 8,800 jobs) of the market. Figure 3 shows the statewide and regional distribution of the workforce in each industry sector.

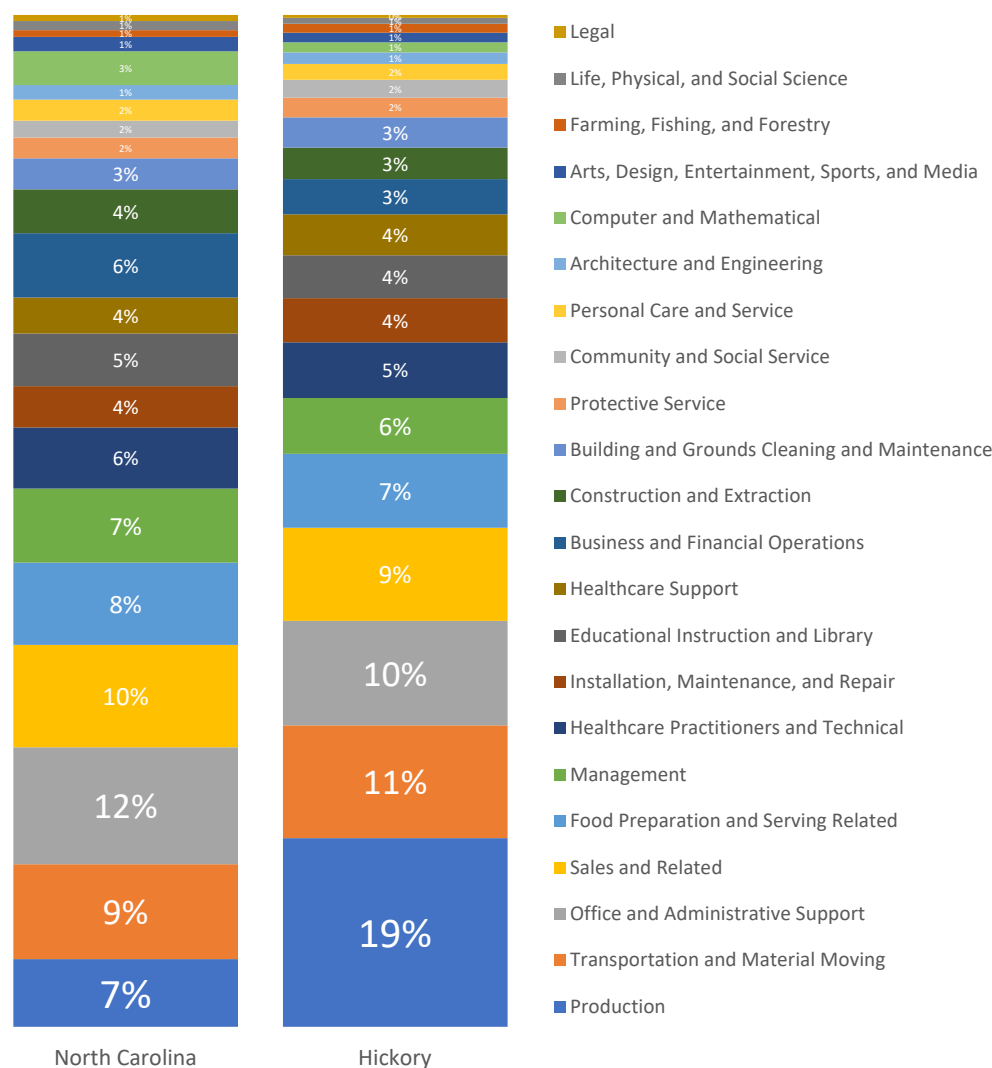
Figure 3. Statewide and regional distribution of industry sectors in 2022.



Occupational Groups

The occupational landscape consists of twenty-two occupational groups, the smallest of which (Legal Occupations) was estimated to contain 520 positions in 2022, and the largest of which (Production Occupations) was estimated to have 34,404 positions in 2022 in the Hickory region, representing between 0.3% and 18.6% of the total workforce in this area. Other smaller occupational groups include Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations (1,083 jobs), Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations (1,655 jobs), and Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations (1,726 jobs). In total, nine occupational groups have less than 5,000 jobs, each representing less than 2.0% of the total workforce. In contrast, in addition to Production Occupations, three occupational groups had more than 15,000 positions in Hickory in 2022 - Sales and Related Occupations (around 17,000 jobs), Office and Administrative Support Occupations (around 19,000 jobs), and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (around 20,600 jobs). Each of these groups comprised more than 9% of the total workforce. Figure 4 shows the statewide and regional distribution of the workforce in each occupational group.

Figure 4. Statewide and regional distribution of occupational groups in 2022.

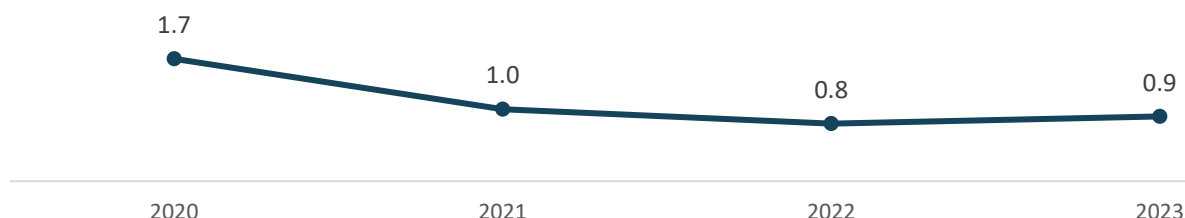


Labor Supply and Demand

Occupational Trends – State Level

Data from the NC Department of Commerce compares the amount of labor supply (the number of persons looking for a job) to labor demand (the number of job openings) at a statewide level. In 2020, this ratio was positive, indicating an oversupply of job seekers relative to job openings. In 2021, the ratio was 1.0, indicating equal supply and demand, whereas in the years since, job openings have outpaced labor. Figure 5 shows statewide average rates of jobseekers to job openings from 2020 to 2023.

Figure 5. Statewide average rate of jobseekers per job opening from 2020-2023.



The trend of decreasing ratios generally holds true across all occupational groups (Table 3). As of 2023, Architecture and Engineering Occupations and Healthcare Support Occupations have the lowest ratios (0.2), indicating that there are approximately five jobs for every job seeker in these fields. In contrast, Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations (2.3), Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations (1.9), and Construction and Extraction Occupations (1.9) have the highest ratios, indicating that there are about twice as many jobseekers as there are available jobs.

Table 3. Statewide average rate of jobseekers per job opening by occupational group from 2020-2023.

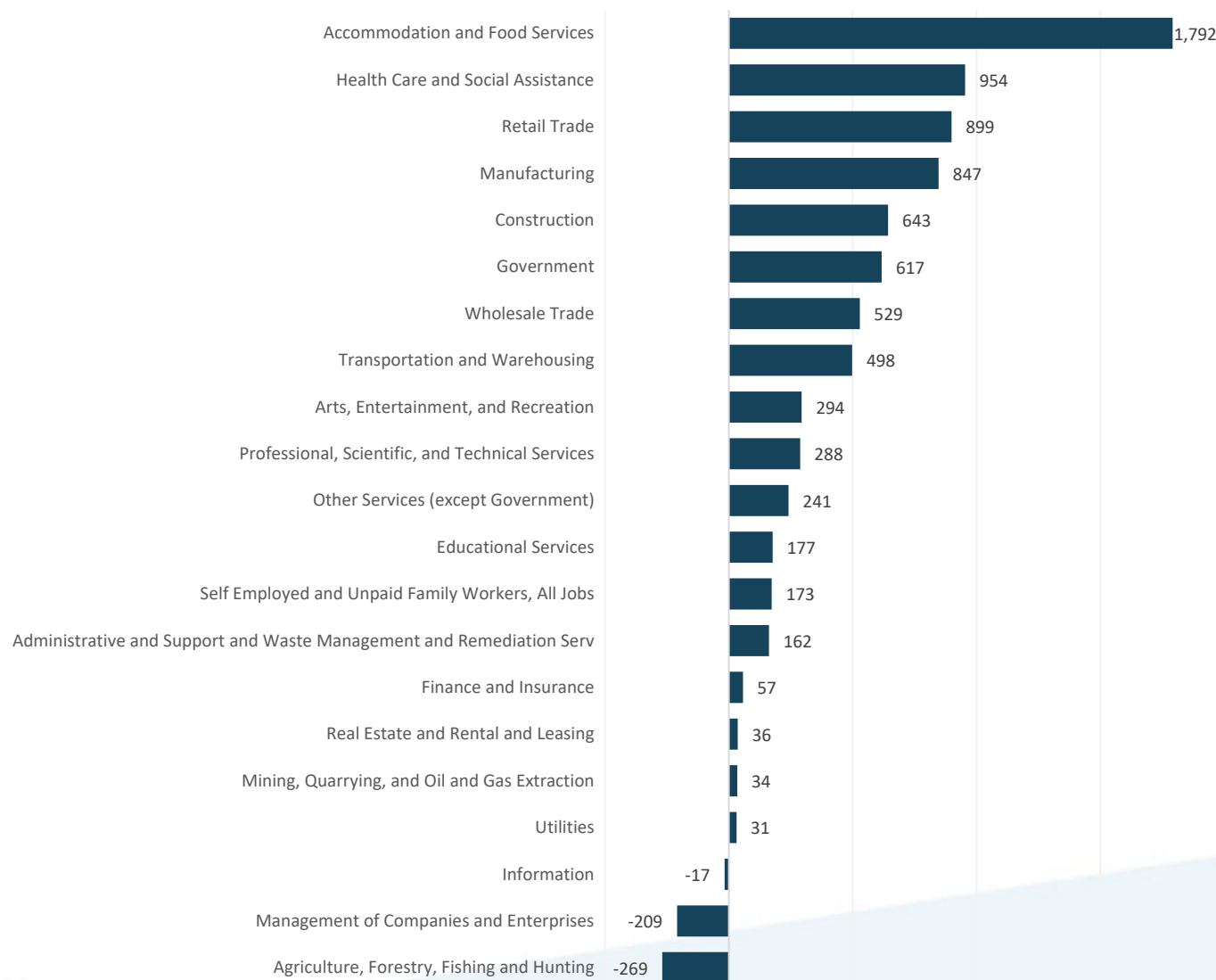
Occupational Group	2020	2021	2022	2023
Architecture and Engineering	1.0	0.4	0.4	0.2
Healthcare Support	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.2
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	0.9	0.3	0.4	0.3
Business and Financial Operations	1.2	0.9	0.5	0.5
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.5
Community and Social Service	1.9	1.9	0.8	0.7
Food Preparation and Serving Related	1.2	0.5	0.5	0.7
Transportation and Material Moving	2.2	0.8	0.8	0.9
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.0
Legal	1.2	0.3	0.8	1.0
Office and Administrative Support	1.2	1.0	0.8	1.0
Protective Service	1.3	0.8	0.5	1.0
Educational Instruction and Library	2.8	2.6	1.6	1.1
Production	2.3	1.1	0.8	1.1
Computer and Mathematical	1.7	1.2	1.3	1.2
Management	2.7	1.3	0.9	1.2
Personal Care and Service	3.6	1.8	1.2	1.2
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	3.1	3.2	2.0	1.9
Construction and Extraction	3.5	2.5	2.2	1.9
Sales and Related	2.5	1.3	1.5	1.9
Life, Physical, and Social Science	2.1	2.6	1.2	2.3
Total (average across all occupational groups)	1.7	1.0	0.8	0.9

Employment Projections

Industry Projections

Based on the latest projections, the Hickory region is expected to add 7,777 jobs between 2022 and 2032. By percentage, Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction is projected to be the fastest-growing industry in the region, adding 34 positions across the ten-year period (an 18.7% increase). Similar in magnitude, the Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation sector is projected to add 294 positions (an 18.3% increase), the Accommodation and Food Services sector is projected to add 1,792 positions (a 13.4% increase), and the Construction sector is projected to add 643 positions (an 11.4% increase). Three other large sectors will add over 800 positions each – Manufacturing (+847 jobs), Retail Trade (+899 jobs), and Health Care and Social Assistance (+954 jobs). In contrast, while most industry sectors are expected to grow in the Hickory region between 2022 and 2032, three are expected to lose jobs. Namely, Information (-17 jobs), Management of Companies and Enterprises (-209 jobs), and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (-269 jobs) are expected to decrease positions by 2.1% to 11.3%. Figure 6 shows the projected net growth across the ten-year period for each industry sector.

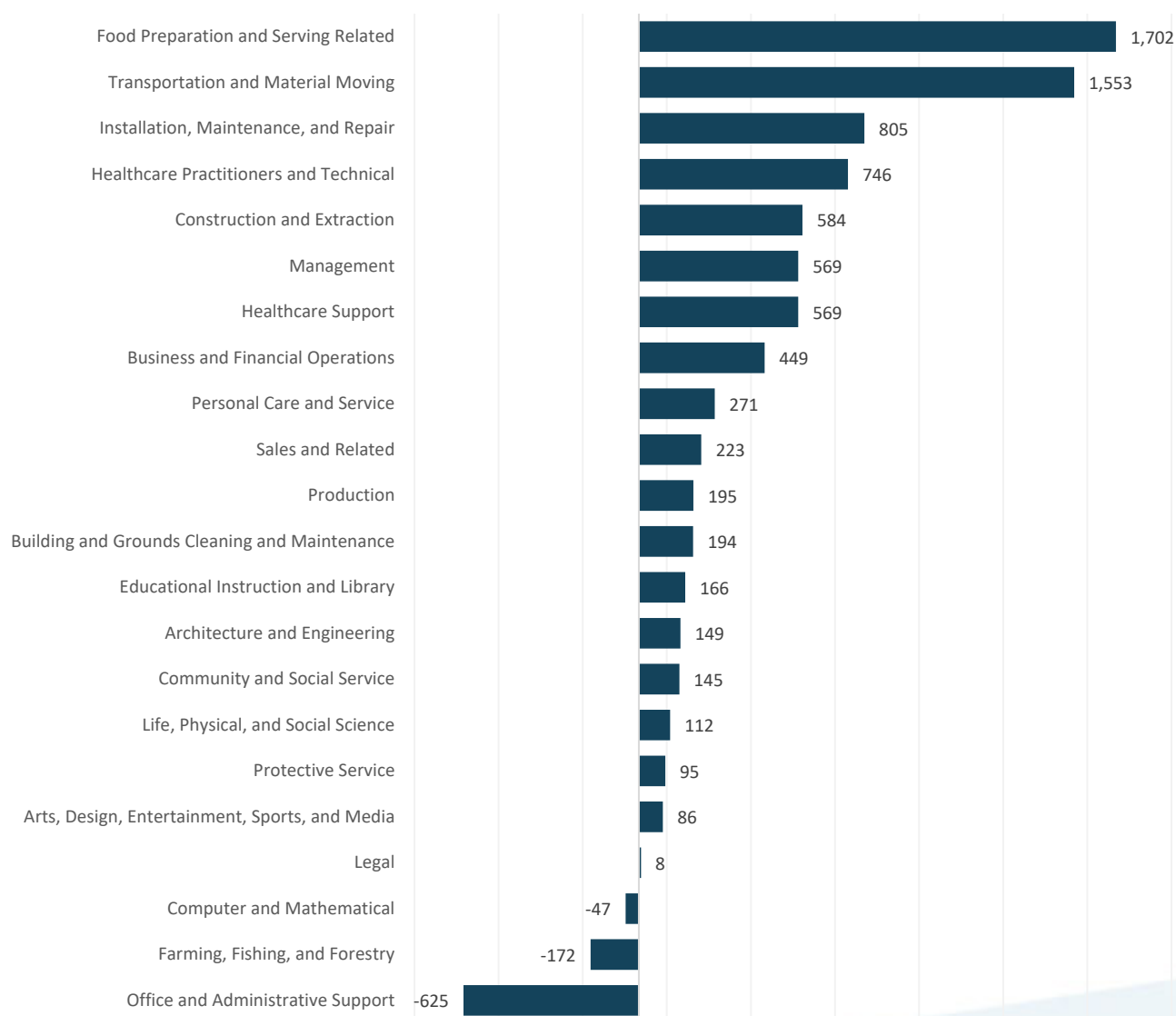
Figure 6. Regional projections for net growth of industry sectors from 2022 to 2032.



Occupational Group Projections

Occupational employment is divided among twenty-two occupational groups, fourteen of which are expected to change by less than 500 positions in the Hickory region between 2022 and 2032. Given the small share of the occupational group, this still represents a 9.3% net increase for Personal Care and Service Occupations (+271 jobs) and a 10.3% net increase for Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations (+112 jobs). Across all groups, Office and Administrative Support Occupations (-625 jobs), Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations (-172 jobs), and Computer and Mathematical Occupations (-47 jobs) are the only groups projected to lose positions. Meanwhile, two groups are expected to gain over 700 positions (namely, Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations), and two groups are expected to gain over 1,500 positions (Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (+1,553 jobs) and Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (+1,702 jobs)). These four occupational groups represent over half of the net growth in expected jobs (4,806 out of 7,777 added positions). Figure 7 shows the projected net growth across the ten-year period for each occupational group.

Figure 7. Regional projections for net growth of occupational groups from 2022 to 2032.



Focused Occupational Projections

Occupational Projections

Specific occupational projections are considered to provide a more granular look at which jobs are expected to have the most openings between 2022 and 2032 based on an annual average of the NC Department of Commerce employment projections. Based on an internal analysis of program alignment, occupations either minimally requiring or preferring a community college credential were included in the analysis.

In the Hickory region, the twenty-five occupations with the highest average annual openings range from Buyers and Purchasing Agents (74) to Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators (493). In total, these occupations account for 4,957 projected annual openings. Other occupations with a high number of annual openings include Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers (477), Home Health and Personal Care Aides (428), Nursing Assistants (373), and Upholsterers (338). Meanwhile, occupations toward the lower end of the top twenty-five include Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary; Childcare Workers; School Bus Drivers; and Cutting and Slicing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders.

Current Earnings

In the Hickory region, median annual earnings among the top twenty-five occupations range from \$27,858 (Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary) to \$76,897 (Accountants and Auditors). Nine of the top twenty-five have annual median earnings under \$40,000, while eight have annual median earnings between \$40,001 and \$50,000. Other occupations with lower annual median earnings include Childcare Workers; Home Health and Personal Care Aides; and First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers. Meanwhile, occupations with the highest annual earnings include Industrial Machinery Mechanics (\$64,604), First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers (\$66,049), and Registered Nurses (\$74,651).

Table 4 includes occupation titles, median earnings, and average annual openings for 25 Standard Occupation Code (SOC) titles with the largest number of annual openings. Two additional tables are available in the Appendices – one that details the 50 SOC occupation titles with the largest number of annual openings that require or prefer either a minimum of a high school credential or a community college credential (Table 8), and one that details the 50 SOC occupation titles with the largest number of annual openings that require a minimum of a Bachelor's degree (Table 9).

Table 4. Regional summary of the top 25 SOC occupation titles with the highest number of average annual openings.

Occupation Title	Median Earnings	Annual Openings
Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators	\$38,877	493
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	\$53,893	477
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	\$30,520	428
Nursing Assistants	\$38,227	373
Upholsterers	\$54,845	338
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	\$38,131	246
Light Truck Drivers	\$39,127	230
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	\$41,257	209
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	\$47,635	202
Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Assemblers, Except Coil Winders, Tapers, and Finishers	\$48,684	201
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	\$42,182	199
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	\$66,049	183
Registered Nurses	\$74,651	179
Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	*	152
Medical Assistants	\$40,450	134
Woodworking Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Except Sawing	\$38,781	106
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	\$47,248	100
Industrial Machinery Mechanics	\$64,604	97
Accountants and Auditors	\$76,897	96
Molding, Coremaking, and Casting Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Metal and Plastic	\$41,463	95
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	\$27,858	94
Childcare Workers	\$29,461	91
Bus Drivers, School	\$38,286	82
Cutting and Slicing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	\$43,324	78
Buyers and Purchasing Agents	\$61,328	74

*Represents a cell with insufficient data to calculate median.

Community College Completers and Earnings

This section summarizes the top 25 Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes with the highest number of completers in the region. “Completers” is defined as the unduplicated student count of Curriculum students successfully completing (i.e., graduating with) an AAS, Diploma, Certificate, or workforce continuing education students with 144+ hours of coursework aligned with workplace entry. It should be noted that the completion count is based on student county of residence, regardless of which college they are enrolled in. One important exclusion that results from this methodology is that those in the military with county residencies outside the state are not included in the completion counts.

Estimated median earnings are based on the earnings in the third year after exit of community college graduates who earned either an AAS, Diploma, or Certificate. For this report, exiters from 2016-17 through 2019-20 are included. Those with any post-secondary enrollment after exit are not included. Earnings are based on the highest quarterly wage record within a year projected out to an annual estimate.

In the Hickory region, the top 26 occupations (including a two-way tie at 18 completers) ranged from 18 completers to 288 completers. Five pathways produced more than 125 completers; these include Nursing Assistant/Aide and Patient Care Assistant/Aide; Emergency Medical Technology/Technician (EMT Paramedic); Welding Technology/Welder; Cosmetology/ Cosmetologist; and Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse. Table 5 (below) includes instructional program description, estimated median earnings, and completers for the 25 CIPs with the largest number of completers.

Table 5. Regional summary of the top 25 Classification of Instructional Programs (CIPs) with the highest number of completers (2023-24).

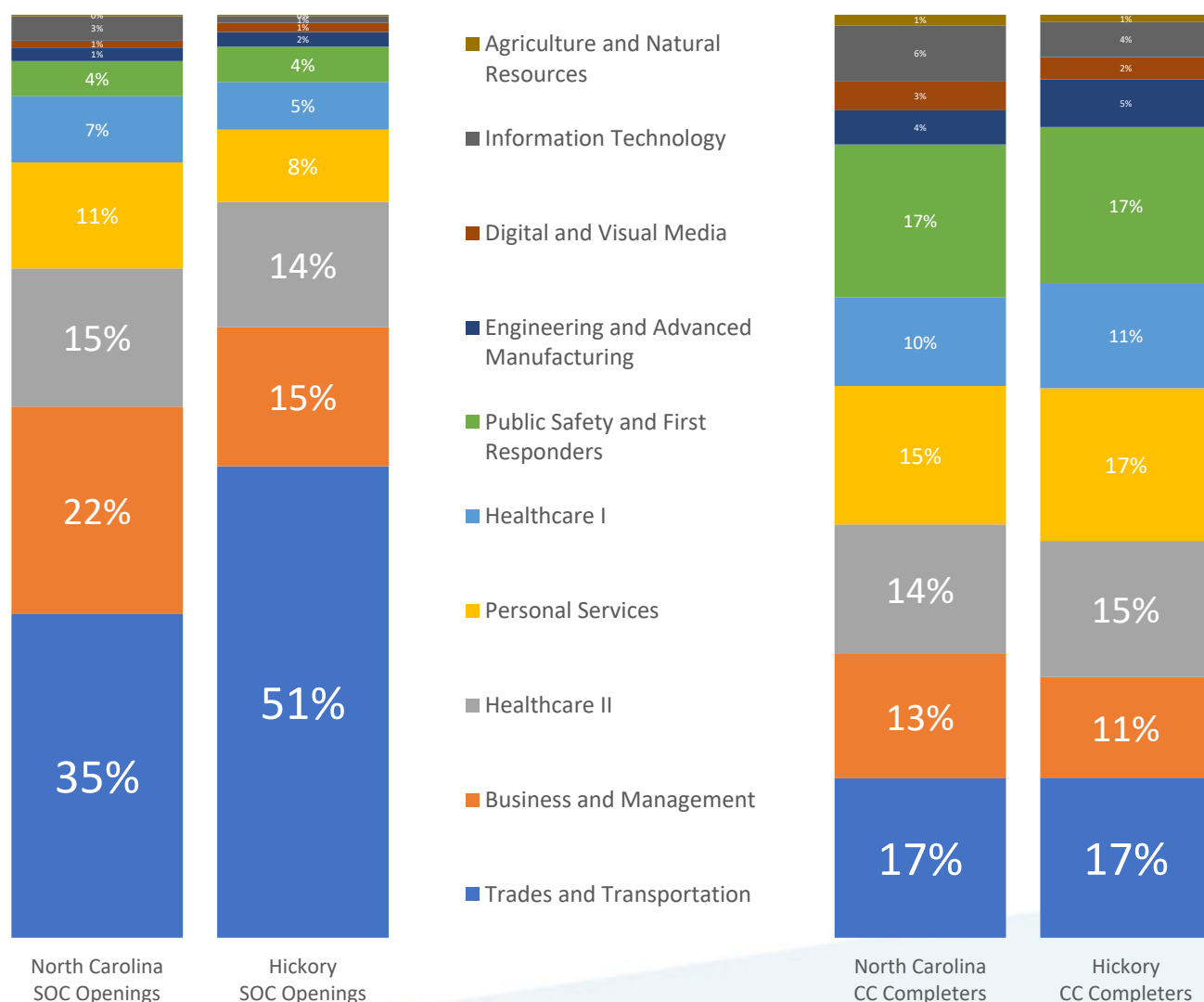
Instructional Program Description	Estimated Median Salary	Completers
Nursing Assistant/Aide and Patient Care Assistant/Aide	\$38,600	288
Emergency Medical Technology/Technician (EMT Paramedic)	\$52,220	196
Welding Technology/Welder	\$48,352	142
Cosmetology/Cosmetologist, General	\$34,652	140
Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse	\$74,252	133
Criminal Justice/Police Science	\$51,230	123
Business Administration and Management, General	\$45,170	108
Truck and Bus Driver/Commercial Vehicle Operator and Instructor	\$65,420	96
Information Technology	\$50,966	81
Early Childhood Education and Teaching	\$32,346	74
Electrician	\$57,892	65
Accounting and Finance	\$48,750	60
Barbering/Barber	*	58
Automobile/Automotive Mechanics Technology/Technician	\$51,476	49
Medical Office Management/Administration	\$36,656	48
Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse Training	\$59,944	40
Electromechanical Technologies/Technicians, Other	\$63,690	33
Fire Prevention and Safety Technology/Technician	\$77,174	31
Commercial and Advertising Art	\$41,148	29
Mechatronics, Robotics, and Automation Engineering Technology/Technician	\$67,584	28
Mental and Social Health Services and Allied Professions, Other	*	24
Medical/Clinical Assistant	\$34,684	23
Aesthetician/Esthetician and Skin Care Specialist	\$38,984	21
Mechanical/Mechanical Engineering Technology/Technician	\$53,498	19
Criminal Justice/Safety Studies	\$40,804	18
Radiologic Technology/Science - Radiographer	\$49,362	18

*Represents a cell with insufficient data to calculate median.

PropelNC Workforce Sector Occupation Projections and Community College Completers

Occupations where a community college credential is either required or identified as employer preferred were categorized into PropelNC-related workforce sectors. Similarly, this categorization was applied to programs and coursework associated with community college completers. Please note that some PropelNC workforce sectors were either combined or split for reporting purposes. Like the state, the largest share of PropelNC occupations in the Hickory region were in Trades and Transportation (51.1%). This was followed by Business and Management (15.1%), Healthcare II (13.6%), Personal Services (7.8%), and Healthcare I (5.2%). As for community college completers, the largest share of PropelNC completers in the Hickory region was also Trades and Transportation (17.3%). This was followed by Public Safety and First Responders (17.0%), Personal Services (16.6%), Healthcare II (14.7%), and Healthcare I (11.3%). Figure 8 shows the statewide and regional distribution projected annual openings and 2023-24 community college completers by PropelNC workforce sector.

Figure 8. Statewide and regional distribution projected annual openings and 2023-24 community college completers by PropelNC workforce sector.



Economic Development Projects

Between 2019 and 2024, the Hickory region reported 125 economic development projects, adding a total of 6,121 jobs and \$3.5 billion in capital investment. Across the six-year period, the Hickory region saw the greatest job creation in 2021 (1,668 jobs), but the greatest investment in 2022 (\$1.2 billion). In general, the region experienced a steady increase in job creation from 2019 to 2021, followed by a sharp decline. In comparison, statewide job creation was highest in 2022, with nearly 30,000 jobs created from project announcements that year. This corresponds with over \$20 billion in investments, which was the highest annual investment during the time period. The following figures show a comparison between annual statewide and regional job creation (Figure 9) and investment (Figure 10) from project announcements during the six-year period.

Figure 9. Statewide and regional job creation from project announcements by year from 2019 through 2024.

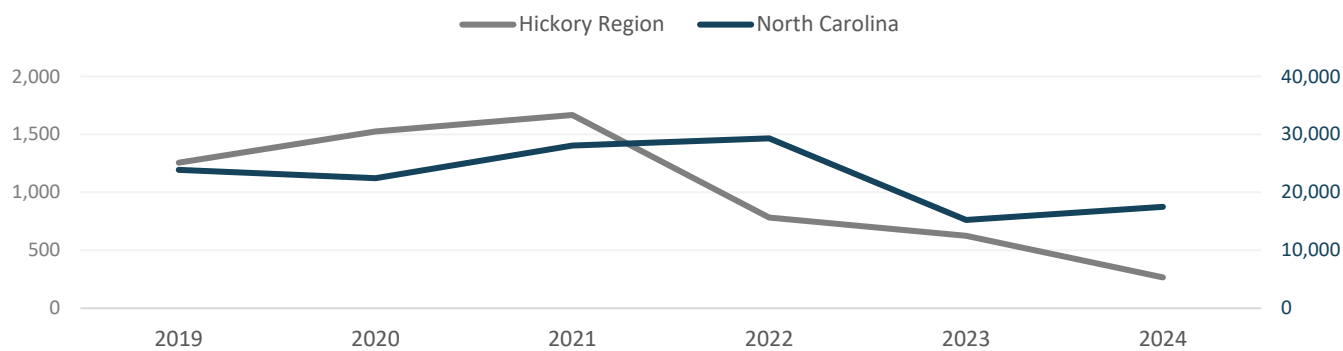
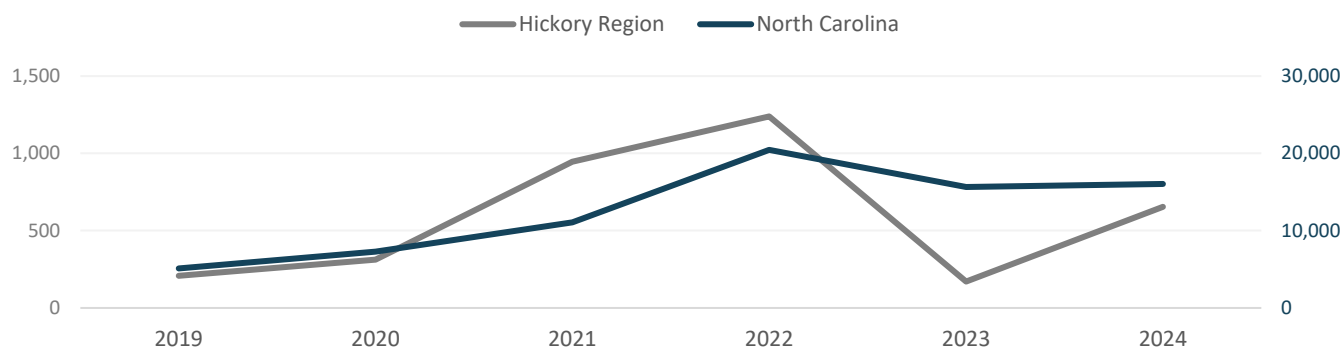


Figure 10. Statewide and regional investment from project announcements by year from 2019 through 2024 (in millions).



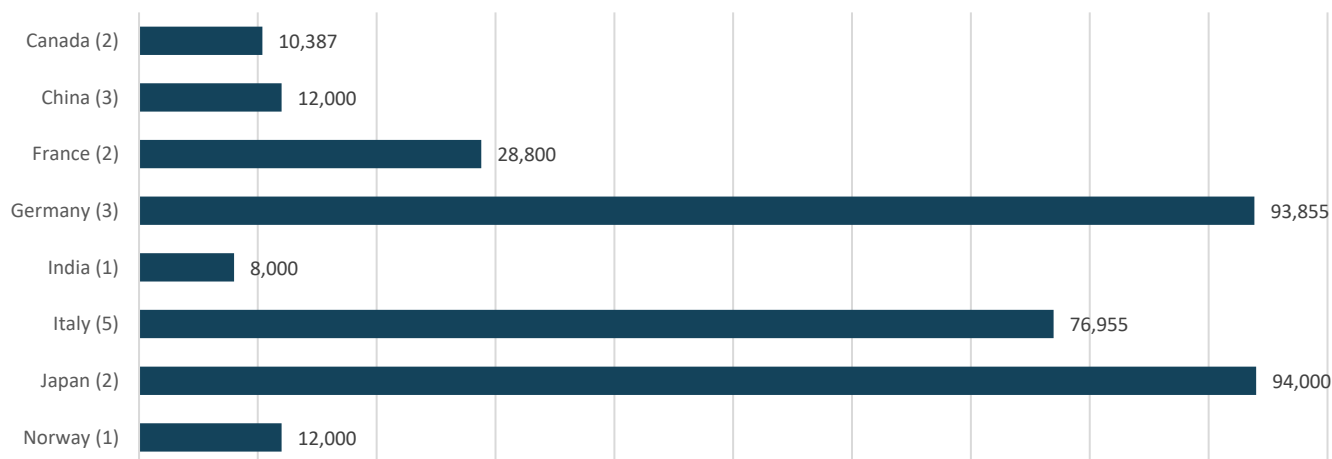
In the Hickory region, the industry sectors with the highest number of jobs included Furniture and Home Furnishings (1,507 jobs), Food, Beverage and Agriculture (1,080 jobs), and Information Technology (694 jobs). Similarly, these industry sectors have the highest investment (in thousands): Information Technology (\$2,367,305), Food, Beverage and Agriculture (\$369,081), and Furniture and Home Furnishings (\$141,257). Table 6 shows the number of projects, announced jobs, and investment by industry sector from 2019 through 2024.

Table 6. Regional Number of Projects, Announced Jobs, and Investment by Industry Sector from 2019-2024.

Industry Sector	Number of Projects	Announced Jobs	Investment (in thousands)
Aerospace/Aviation	2	61	6,466
Automotive	7	502	109,375
Biotechnology, Pharmaceuticals and Life Sciences	7	636	104,192
Boating and Marine	1	170	10,525
Business and Financial Services	1	11	1,287
Chemicals, Plastics and Rubber	5	142	79,863
Energy	2	37	1,211
Food, Beverage and Agriculture	14	1,080	369,081
Furniture and Home Furnishings	27	1,507	141,257
Information Technology	10	694	2,367,305
Military/Defense	1	10	545
Other	23	692	82,158
Textiles	9	328	20,258
Transportation and Logistics	2	10	2,385

The announced projects included 19 total foreign direct investment projects from 8 different countries, including Italy (5 projects), China (3 projects), Germany (3 projects), and France (2 projects). Foreign-based companies often seek partnerships with local community colleges to establish a talent pipeline, through apprenticeship programs or other custom training opportunities. Figure 11 shows the cumulative investment of all countries who announced projects in the region from 2019 through 2024.

Figure 11. Investment (in thousands) per Foreign Direct Investment Parent Country. Project Count in Parentheses.



Appendices

Technical Documentation

Table 7. Summary of data sources.

Section	Sub-section(s)	Description	Source
<i>Employment</i>			
	Employment Trends; Employment by County	<i>The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program publishes a quarterly count of employment reported by employers covering more than 95 percent of U.S. jobs, available at the county, metropolitan statistical area, state, and national levels by industry.</i> URL: https://d4.nccommerce.com/QCEWSelection.aspx Dates: 2018-2023	Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages: N.C. Department of Commerce & U.S. Department of Labor
	Unemployment Rate Trends; Unemployment Rate by County	<i>The Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program is a federal-state cooperative effort in which monthly estimates of total employment and unemployment are prepared.</i> URL: https://d4.nccommerce.com/LausSelection.aspx Dates: 2018-2023	Local Area Unemployment Statistics: N.C. Department of Commerce & U.S. Department of Labor
<i>Existing Industry Sectors and Occupational Groups</i>			
	Industry Sectors; Occupational Groups	<i>Two measures of employment produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) are used to determine base year employment: (1) the Current Employment Statistics (CES) survey, an establishment survey that provides data on wage and salary employment and weekly hours for most nonagricultural industries and the logging industry, and (2) the Current Population Survey (CPS), a household survey that includes information regarding agricultural employment, self-employed workers and hours, and private household workers.</i> URL: https://tools.nccareers.org/employmentprojections/about.html Dates: 2022	Employment Projections Program: N.C. Department of Commerce & U.S. Department of Labor
<i>Labor Supply and Demand</i>			
	Labor Supply and Demand	<i>The amount of labor supply—the number of persons looking for a job, by occupation and place of residence—is estimated using labor force data from federal household surveys. Occupational trends are derived from labor force data on experienced workers from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Current Population Survey (CPS). The amount of labor demand—the number of job openings, by occupation and place of work—is estimated using online job postings data and federal surveys of employers. Data on job openings at the state level come from the BLS's Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS).</i> URL: https://analytics.nccommerce.com/NC-Labor-Supply-Demand/ Dates: 2020-2023	NC Labor Supply and Demand: N.C. Department of Commerce & U.S. Department of Labor
<i>Employment Projections</i>			
	Industry Projections; Occupational Group Projections	<i>Every two years, in conjunction with the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the North Carolina Department of Commerce publishes long-term industry and occupational employment projections for statewide and sub-state areas. The employment projections are an estimate of the future demand for workers based on historical employment data and various economic factors.</i> URL: https://tools.nccareers.org/employmentprojections/about.html Dates: 2022, 2032 projections	Employment Projections Program: N.C. Department of Commerce & U.S. Department of Labor

Focused Occupational Projections and Current Earnings

Occupational Projections	Occupational projections were calculated using the methodology described above for “Occupational Group Projections.” Based on an internal analysis of program alignment, occupations either minimally requiring or preferring a community college credential were included in the analysis. URL: https://tools.nccareers.org/employmentprojections/about.html Dates: 2022, 2032 projections	Employment Projections Program: N.C. Department of Commerce & U.S. Department of Labor
Current Earnings	<i>LEAD utilizes industry employment data derived from the Enhanced Quarterly Unemployment Insurance (EQUI) dataset. The data contains a quarterly count of employment and wages report that is sent from employers based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code. Employment data on uncovered industries within the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program is collected from other sources such as Current Employment Statistics (CES), Census Bureau, and Railroad Retirement Board.</i> Dates: 2022	Enhanced Quarterly Unemployment Insurance (EQUI) dataset: N.C. Department of Commerce & U.S. Department of Labor

Community College Completers and Earnings

Community College Completers	“Completers” is defined as the unduplicated student count of Curriculum students successfully completing (i.e., graduating with) an AAS, Diploma, Certificate, or workforce continuing education students with 144+ hours of coursework aligned with workplace entry. Dates: 2023-2024 academic year	North Carolina Community Colleges
Estimated Median Salary	Estimated median earnings are based on the earnings in the third year after exit of community college graduates who earned either an AAS, Diploma, or Certificate. For this report, exiters from 2016-17 through 2019-20 are included. Those with any postsecondary enrollment after exit are not included. Earnings are based on the highest quarterly wage record within a year projected out to an annual estimate. Dates: graduates from 2016-17 through 2019-20; wages from 2019-20 through 2022-23	North Carolina Community Colleges; National Student Clearinghouse (NSC); Common Follow-up System (CFS)

PropelNC Workforce Sector Occupation Projections and Community College Completers

PropelNC Workforce Sector Occupation Projections and Community College Completers	See methodology for occupational projections and community college completers above. Occupations were categorized into PropelNC-related workforce sectors. Similarly, this categorization was applied to curriculum programs and workforce continuing education coursework associated with community college completers. Please note that some PropelNC workforce sectors were either combined or split for reporting purposes.	North Carolina Community Colleges
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Economic Development Projects

Economic Development Projects	The North Carolina Economic Development Activity Report is a comprehensive picture of job and investment growth, tracking job and capital investment of economic development projects, by county, across the state of North Carolina. URL: https://cir.edpnc.com/ Dates: 2019-2024	North Carolina Economic Development Activity Report (EDAR): The Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC)
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**Italics indicate that the text is copied directly from documentation provided by the data producers.*

Detailed Data Tables

Table 8. Summary of the top 50 SOC occupation titles (including ties), where a community college education is either required or preferred, with the highest number of annual openings in the Hickory region.

Occupation Title	Median Earnings	Annual Openings
Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators	\$38,877	493
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	\$53,893	477
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	\$30,520	428
Nursing Assistants	\$38,227	373
Upholsterers	\$54,845	338
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	\$38,131	246
Light Truck Drivers	\$39,127	230
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	\$41,257	209
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	\$47,635	202
Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Assemblers, Except Coil Winders, Tapers, and	\$48,684	201
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	\$42,182	199
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	\$66,049	183
Registered Nurses	\$74,651	179
Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	*	152
Medical Assistants	\$40,450	134
Woodworking Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Except Sawing	\$38,781	106
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	\$47,248	100
Industrial Machinery Mechanics	\$64,604	97
Accountants and Auditors	\$76,897	96
Molding, Coremaking, and Casting Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Metal and Plastic	\$41,463	95
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	\$27,858	94
Childcare Workers	\$29,461	91
Bus Drivers, School	\$38,286	82
Cutting and Slicing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	\$43,324	78
Buyers and Purchasing Agents	\$61,328	74
First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	\$66,606	71
Chemical Equipment Operators and Tenders	*	69
Correctional Officers and Jailers	\$50,268	68
Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	\$38,591	66
Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	\$48,312	66
Human Resources Specialists	\$62,135	65
Pharmacy Technicians	\$40,259	65
First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	\$69,914	65
Electricians	\$50,250	64
Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	\$51,963	63
Dental Assistants	\$46,278	62
Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	\$28,639	62
Machinists	\$48,548	60
Carpenters	\$45,531	59
Maintenance Workers, Machinery	\$54,273	56
Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	\$49,059	55
Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists	\$52,653	55
Furniture Finishers	\$39,006	53
Business Operations Specialists, All Other	\$65,618	51
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	\$60,190	49
Extruding and Drawing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Metal and Plastic	\$52,222	49
Mixing and Blending Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	\$44,841	48
Food Service Managers	\$64,759	47
Firefighters	\$33,028	45
Exercise Trainers and Group Fitness Instructors	\$36,174	41

*Represents a cell with insufficient data to calculate median.

Table 9. Summary of the top 50 SOC occupation titles (including ties), where a Bachelor's degree is either required or preferred, with the highest number of annual openings in the Hickory region.

Occupation Title	Median Earnings	Annual Openings
General and Operations Managers	\$101,373	265
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	\$52,617	114
Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	\$30,815	95
Managers, All Other	\$99,838	65
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	\$65,657	60
Construction Managers	\$94,920	58
Clergy	\$58,179	58
Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	\$55,302	55
Religious Workers, All Other	*	54
Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	\$54,055	50
Industrial Production Managers	\$109,336	45
Medical and Health Services Managers	\$107,362	43
Industrial Engineers	\$82,768	42
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	\$55,848	42
Training and Development Specialists	\$54,899	40
Career/Technical Education Teachers, Postsecondary	\$62,880	34
Sales Managers	\$107,977	28
Financial Managers	\$137,035	28
Software Developers	\$126,932	21
Cost Estimators	\$51,743	20
Securities, Commodities, and Financial Services Sales Agents	\$50,140	19
Graphic Designers	\$52,416	18
Computer and Information Systems Managers	\$165,414	16
Mechanical Engineers	\$95,650	16
Directors, Religious Activities and Education	*	15
Writers and Authors	\$62,815	15
Loan Officers	\$50,399	14
Community and Social Service Specialists, All Other	\$48,955	13
Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and English as a Second Language Instructors	\$54,730	13
Coaches and Scouts	\$39,444	13
Compliance Officers	\$58,642	12
Occupational Health and Safety Specialists	\$73,659	12
Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists	\$52,948	12
Human Resources Managers	\$117,799	11
Architectural and Engineering Managers	\$171,265	11
Personal Financial Advisors	\$103,101	11
Special Education Teachers, Kindergarten and Elementary School	\$51,202	11
Public Relations Specialists	\$53,131	11
Marketing Managers	\$141,621	10
Facilities Managers	\$93,348	10
Electrical Engineers	\$105,756	10
Educational Instruction and Library Workers, All Other	\$38,167	10
Administrative Services Managers	\$94,410	9
Social and Community Service Managers	\$66,433	9
Chemists	\$80,157	9
Special Education Teachers, Secondary School	\$63,623	9
Interpreters and Translators	\$53,426	9
Purchasing Managers	\$129,017	8
Civil Engineers	\$87,714	8
Environmental Scientists and Specialists, Including Health	\$68,825	8
Interior Designers	\$55,527	8

*Represents a cell with insufficient data to calculate median.

Table 10. Summary of the top 50 Classification of Instructional Programs (CIPs, including ties) with the highest number of completers.

Instructional Program Description	Estimated Median Salary	Completers
Nursing Assistant/Aide and Patient Care Assistant/Aide	\$38,600	288
Emergency Medical Technology/Technician (EMT Paramedic)	\$52,220	196
Welding Technology/Welder	\$48,352	142
Cosmetology/Cosmetologist, General	\$34,652	140
Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse	\$74,252	133
Criminal Justice/Police Science	\$51,230	123
Business Administration and Management, General	\$45,170	108
Truck and Bus Driver/Commercial Vehicle Operator and Instructor	\$65,420	96
Information Technology	\$50,966	81
Early Childhood Education and Teaching	\$32,346	74
Electrician	\$57,892	65
Accounting and Finance	\$48,750	60
Barbering/Barber	*	58
Automobile/Automotive Mechanics Technology/Technician	\$51,476	49
Medical Office Management/Administration	\$36,656	48
Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse Training	\$59,944	40
Electromechanical Technologies/Technicians, Other	\$63,690	33
Fire Prevention and Safety Technology/Technician	\$77,174	31
Commercial and Advertising Art	\$41,148	29
Mechatronics, Robotics, and Automation Engineering Technology/Technician	\$67,584	28
Mental and Social Health Services and Allied Professions, Other	*	24
Medical/Clinical Assistant	\$34,684	23
Aesthetician/Esthetician and Skin Care Specialist	\$38,984	21
Mechanical/Mechanical Engineering Technology/Technician	\$53,498	19
Criminal Justice/Safety Studies	\$40,804	18
Radiologic Technology/Science - Radiographer	\$49,362	18
Heating, Air Conditioning, Ventilation and Refrigeration Maintenance	\$42,964	16
Dental Assisting/Assistant	\$38,354	15
Crisis/Emergency/Disaster Management	*	14
Legal Assistant/Paralegal	\$40,444	13
Office Management and Supervision	\$39,170	13
Child Development	\$29,224	12
Photographic and Film/Video Technology/Technician	\$37,218	12
Respiratory Care Therapy/Therapist	\$58,736	12
Nail Technician/Specialist and Manicurist	*	11
Medium/Heavy Vehicle and Truck Technology/Technician	\$60,672	11
Computer Engineering Technology/Technician	\$57,222	10
Biology/Biotechnology Technology/Technician	*	10
Dental Hygiene/Hygienist	\$67,962	10
Physical Therapy Assistant	\$52,992	10
Culinary Arts/Chef Training	\$39,836	10
Funeral Service and Mortuary Science, General	\$46,548	8
Electrical, Electronic, and Communications Engineering Technology/Technician	\$59,782	8
Cyber/Computer Forensics and Counterterrorism	*	8
Health Information/Medical Records Technology/Technician	\$40,012	8
Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) Machinist Technology/CNC Machinist	*	8
Sign Language Interpretation and Translation	*	7
Autobody/Collision and Repair Technology/Technician	\$35,556	7
Game and Interactive Media Design	*	7
Health/Health Care Administration/Management	*	7

*Represents a cell with insufficient data to calculate median.

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