



4 North Carolina Counties

Foothills Workforce Development Board



111 West Court St.
Rutherfordton, North Carolina 28139

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Report Parameters

4 Counties

37045	Cleveland County, NC	37149	Polk County, NC
37111	McDowell County, NC	37161	Rutherford County, NC

Class of Worker

QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

The information in this report pertains to the chosen geographical areas.

Economy Overview

233,370

Population (2024)

Population grew by **1,868** over the last 5 years and is projected to grow by **2,635** over the next 5 years.

86,169

Total Regional Employment

Jobs grew by **102** over the last 5 years and are projected to grow by **1,596** over the next 5 years.

\$59.0K

Avg. Earnings Per Job (2024)

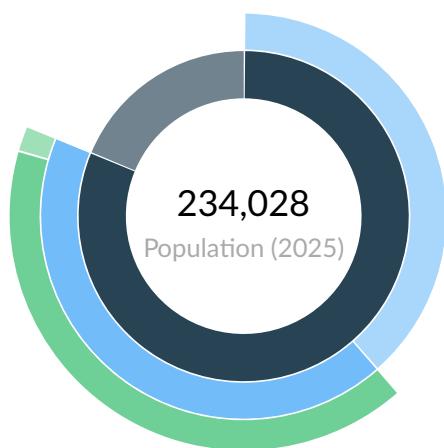
Regional average earnings per job are **\$27.7K below** the national average earnings of **\$86.7K** per job.

Takeaways

- As of 2024 the region's population **increased by 0.8%** since 2019, growing by 1,868. Population is expected to **increase by 1.1%** between 2024 and 2029, adding 2,635.
- From 2019 to 2024, jobs **increased by 0.1%** in 4 North Carolina Counties from 86,067 to **86,169**. This change fell short of the **national growth rate of 4.4% by 4.3%**. As the number of jobs increased, the **labor force participation rate increased from 52.7% to 52.8% between 2019 and 2024**.
- Concerning educational attainment, **14.2% of the selected regions' residents possess a Bachelor's Degree** (7.4% below the national average), and **12.6% hold an Associate's Degree** (3.8% above the national average).
- The top three industries in 2024 are Education and Hospitals (Local Government), Restaurants and Other Eating Places, and Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals.

	Population (2025)	Labor Force (Sep 2025)	Jobs (2024)	Cost of Living	GRP	Imports	Exports
Region	234,028	99,919	86,169	94.4	\$10.72B	\$15.64B	\$12.56B
State	11,152,533	5,313,870	5,570,448	95.5	\$811.10B	\$603.91B	\$732.54B

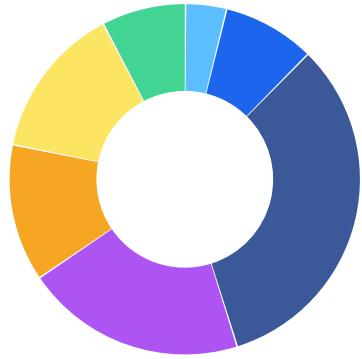
Sep 2025 Labor Force Breakdown



	Population
16+ Civilian Non-Institutionalized Population	190,007
Not in Labor Force (16+)	90,088
Labor Force	99,919
Employed	95,764
Unemployed	4,155
Under 16, Military, and institutionalized Population	44,021

Educational Attainment

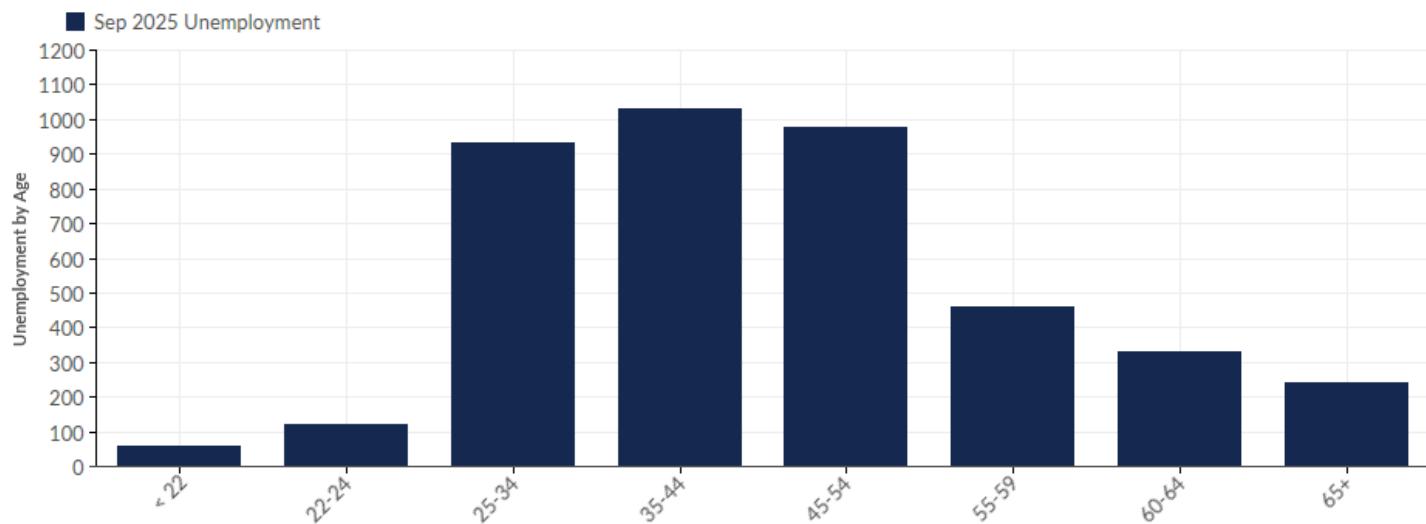
Concerning educational attainment, **14.2% of the selected regions' residents possess a Bachelor's Degree** (7.4% below the national average), and **12.6% hold an Associate's Degree** (3.8% above the national average).



	% of Population	Population
Less Than 9th Grade	3.8%	6,350
9th Grade to 12th Grade	8.5%	14,315
High School Diploma	32.8%	55,067
Some College	20.4%	34,188
Associate's Degree	12.6%	21,246
Bachelor's Degree	14.2%	23,774
Graduate Degree and Higher	7.8%	13,026

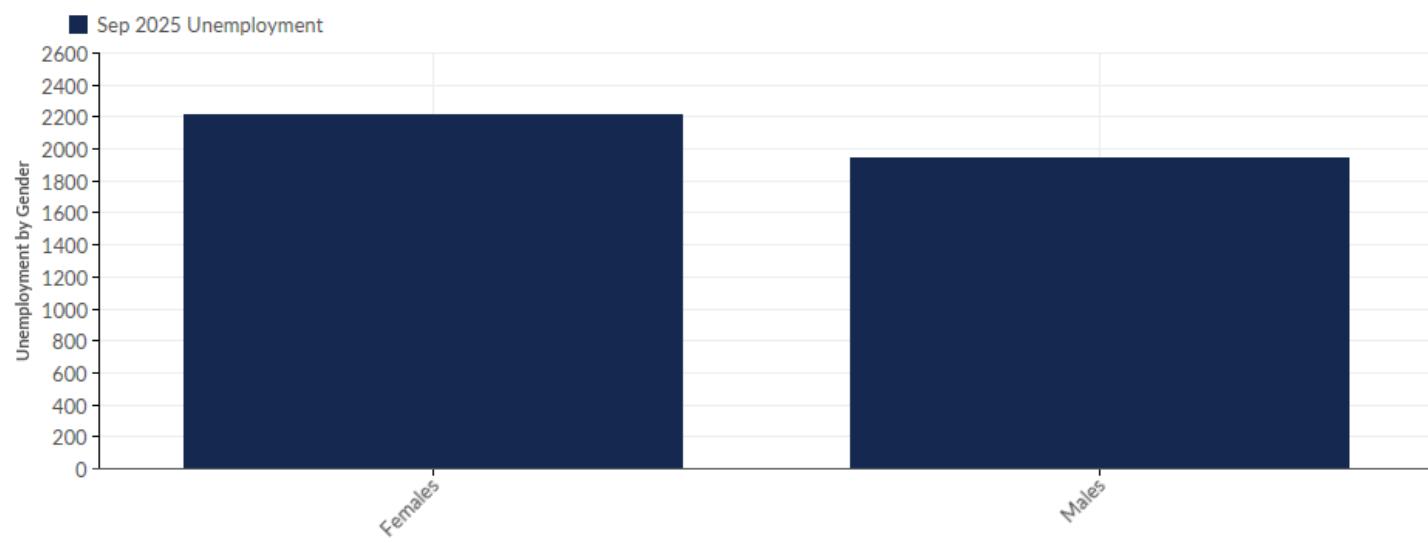
Unemployment by Demographics

Unemployment by Age



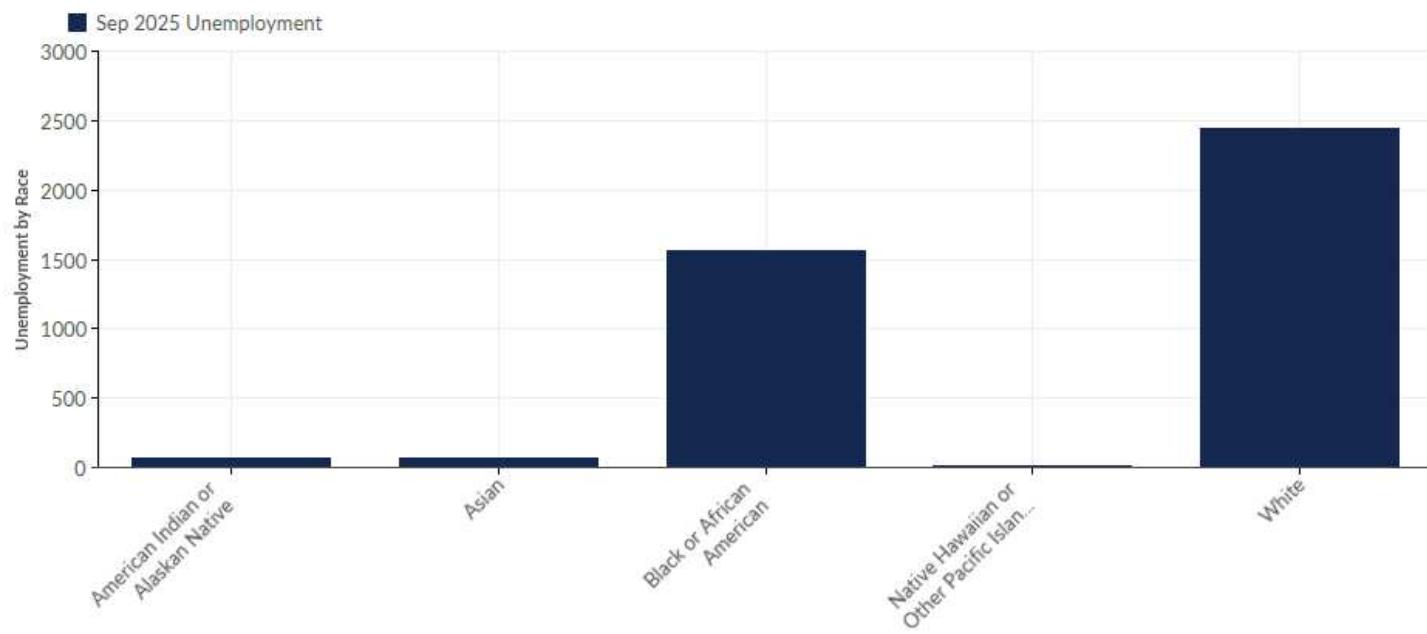
Age	Unemployment (Sep 2025)	% of Unemployed
< 22	59	1.42%
22-24	122	2.94%
25-34	930	22.38%
35-44	1,030	24.79%
45-54	978	23.54%
55-59	462	11.12%
60-64	332	7.99%
65+	242	5.82%
Total	4,155	100.00%

Unemployment by Gender



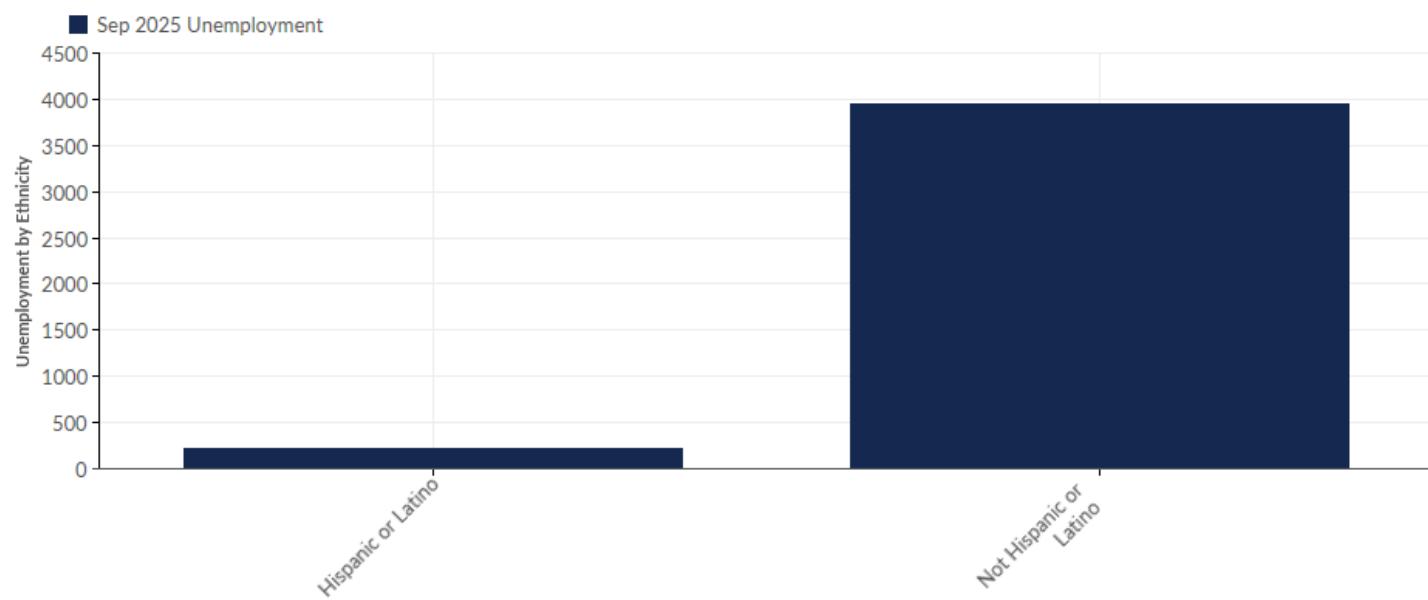
Gender	Unemployment (Sep 2025)	% of Unemployed
Females	2,216	53.33%
Males	1,939	46.67%
Total	4,155	100.00%

Unemployment by Race



Race	Unemployment (Sep 2025)	% of Unemployed
American Indian or Alaskan Native	69	1.66%
Asian	72	1.73%
Black or African American	1,566	37.69%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	9	0.22%
White	2,439	58.70%
Total	4,155	100.00%

Unemployment by Ethnicity

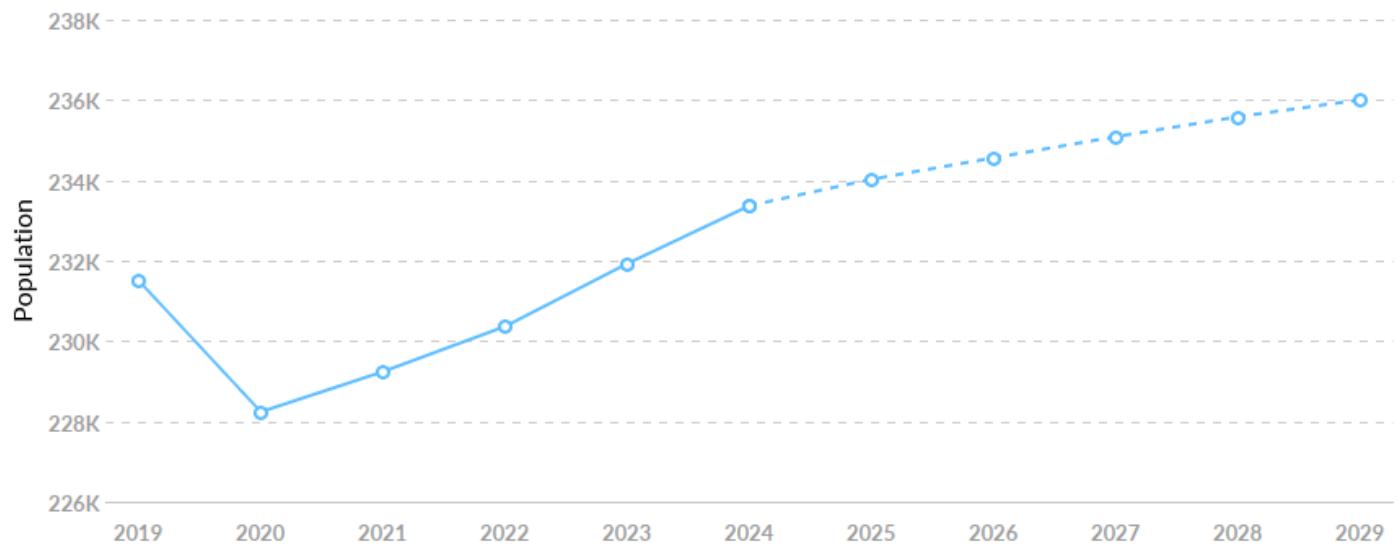


Ethnicity	Unemployment (Sep 2025)	% of Unemployed
Hispanic or Latino	215	5.17%
Not Hispanic or Latino	3,940	94.83%
Total	4,155	100.00%

Historic & Projected Trends

Population Trends

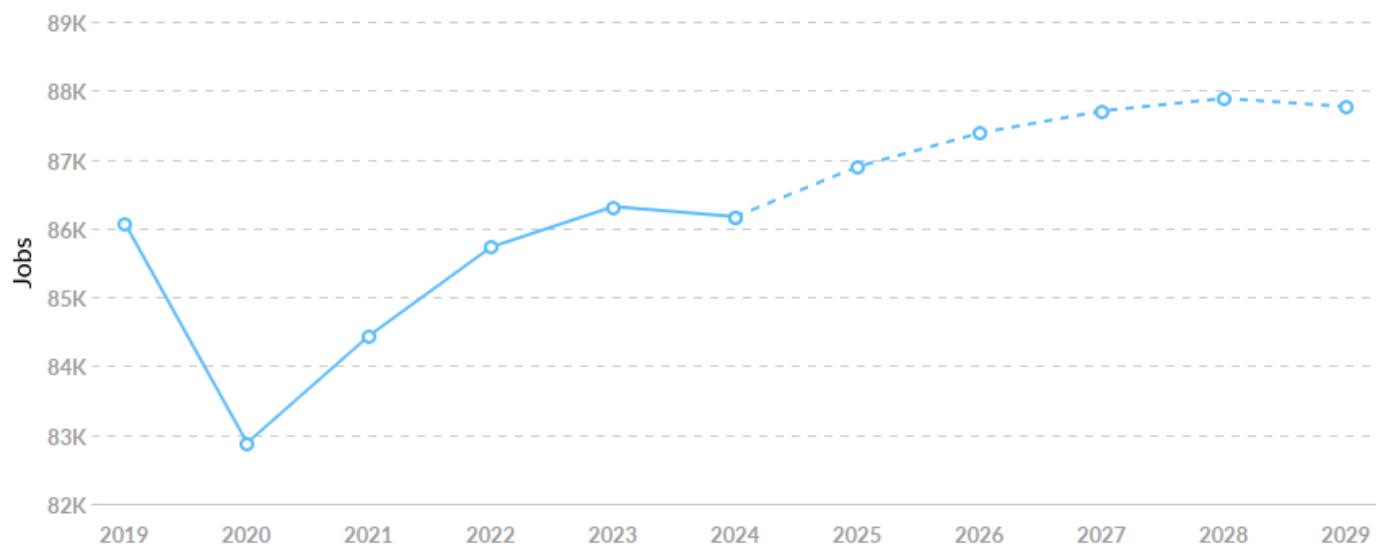
As of 2024 the region's population **increased by 0.8%** since 2019, growing by 1,868. Population is expected to **increase by 1.1%** between 2024 and 2029, adding 2,635.



Timeframe	Population
2019	231,502
2020	228,236
2021	229,238
2022	230,365
2023	231,928
2024	233,370
2025	234,028
2026	234,562
2027	235,088
2028	235,584
2029	236,005

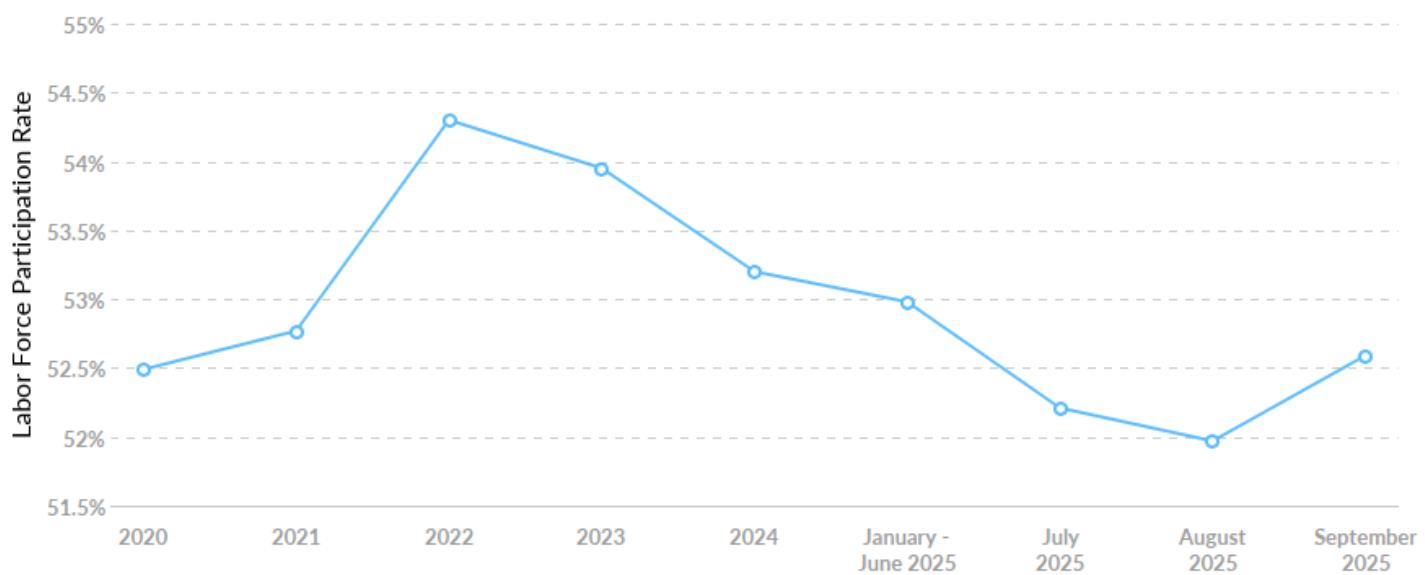
Job Trends

From 2019 to 2024, jobs increased by 0.1% in 4 North Carolina Counties from 86,067 to **86,169**. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 4.4% by 4.3%.



Timeframe	Jobs
2019	86,067
2020	82,880
2021	84,439
2022	85,728
2023	86,315
2024	86,169
2025	86,895
2026	87,383
2027	87,704
2028	87,887
2029	87,766

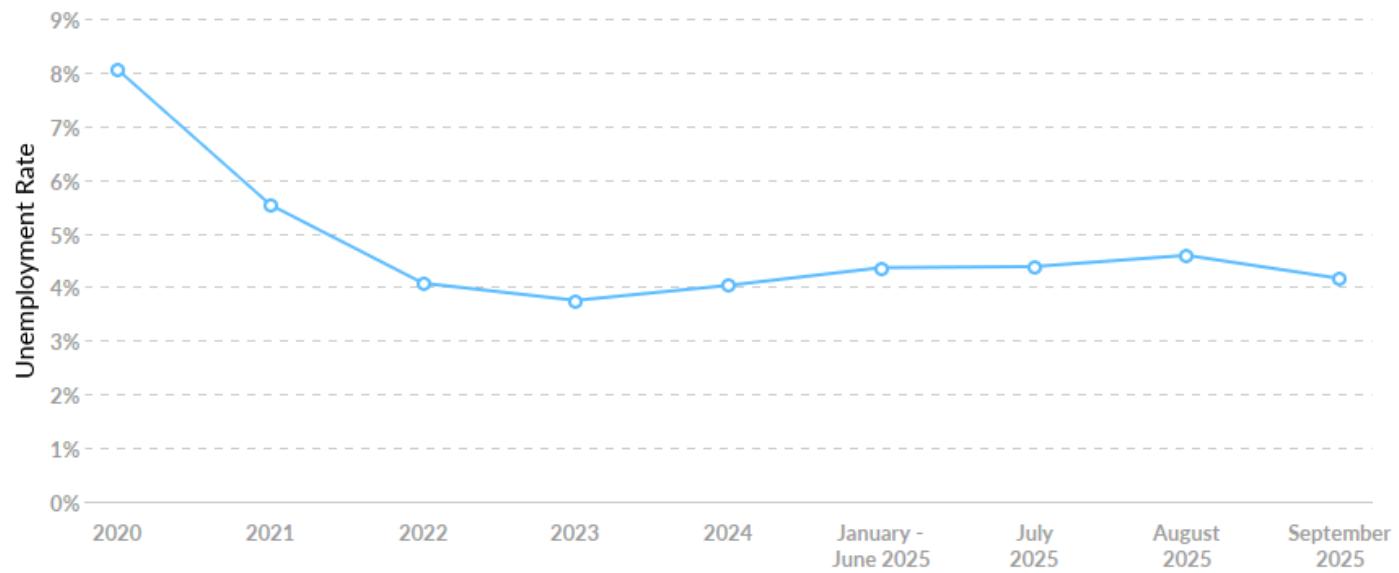
Labor Force Participation Rate Trends



Timeframe	Labor Force Participation Rate
2020	52.49%
2021	52.77%
2022	54.30%
2023	53.95%
2024	53.20%
January - June 2025	52.98%
July 2025	52.21%
August 2025	51.97%
September 2025	52.59%

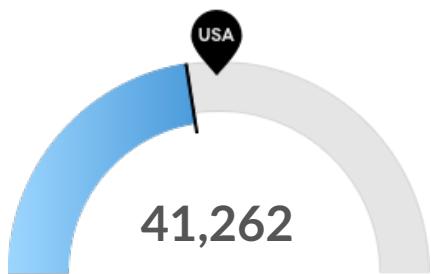
Unemployment Rate Trends

Your areas had a September 2025 unemployment rate of 4.16%, decreasing from 8.05% 5 years before.



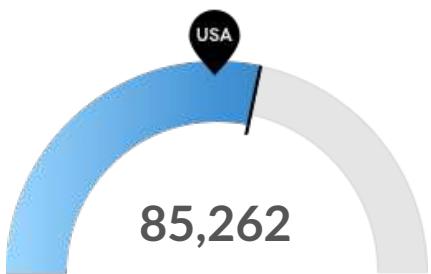
Timeframe	Unemployment Rate
2020	8.05%
2021	5.53%
2022	4.07%
2023	3.75%
2024	4.03%
January - June 2025	4.36%
July 2025	4.38%
August 2025	4.59%
September 2025	4.16%

Population Characteristics



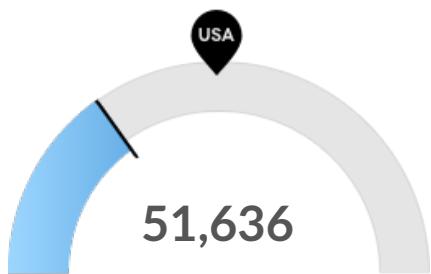
Millennials

Your area has 41,262 millennials (ages 25-39). The national average for an area this size is 47,773.



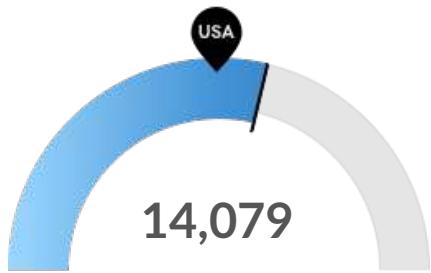
Retiring Soon

Retirement risk is high in your area. The national average for an area this size is 70,566 people 55 or older, while there are 85,262 here.



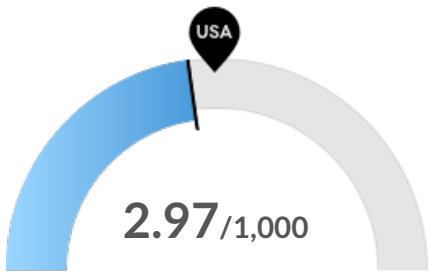
Racial Diversity

Racial diversity is low in your area. The national average for an area this size is 99,272 racially diverse people, while there are 51,636 here.



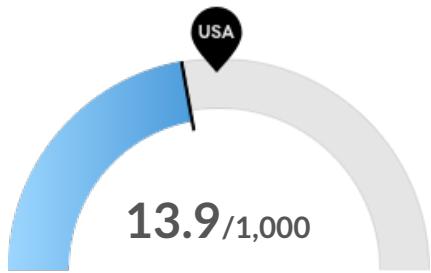
Veterans

Your area has 14,079 veterans. The national average for an area this size is 11,410.



Violent Crime

Your area has 2.97 violent crimes per 1,000 people. The national rate is 3.38 per 1,000 people.

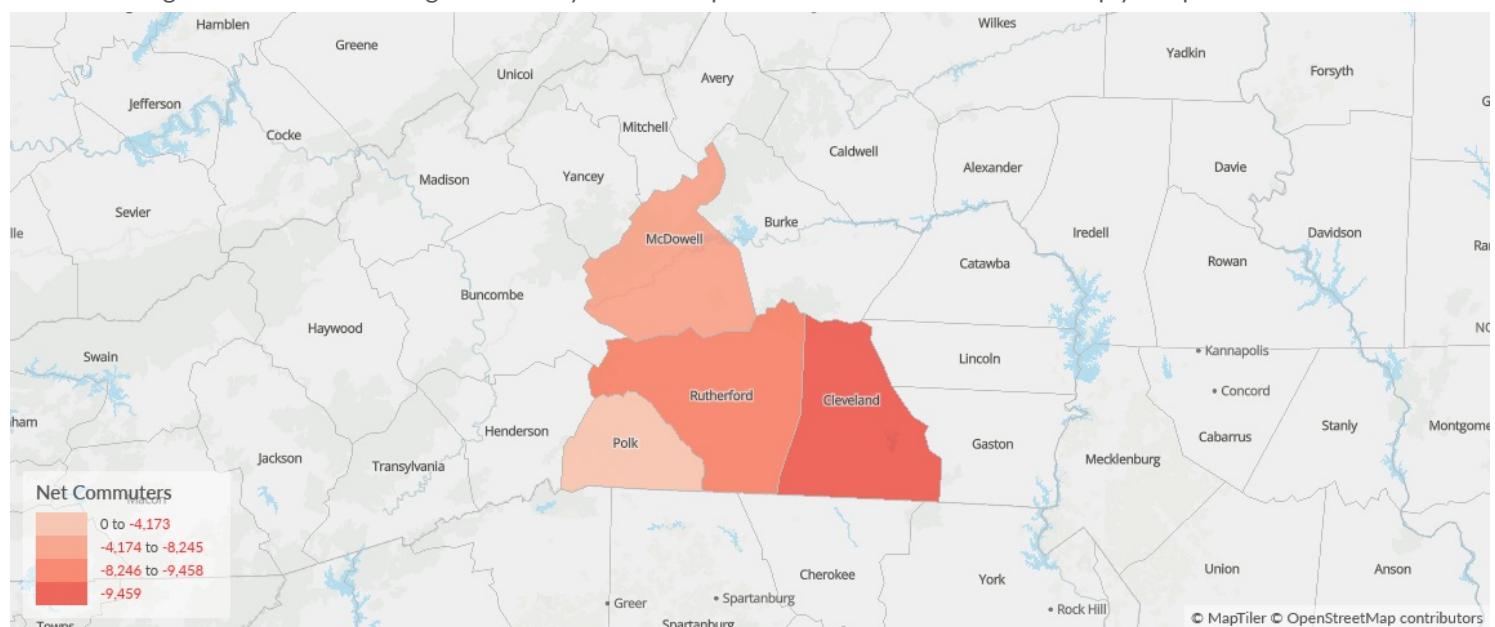


Property Crime

Your area has 13.9 property crimes per 1,000 people. The national rate is 16.44 per 1,000 people.

Place of Work vs Place of Residence

Understanding where talent in the region currently works compared to where talent lives can help you optimize site decisions.



Where Talent Works

County	Name	2024 Employment
37045	Cleveland County, NC	41,209
37161	Rutherford County, NC	21,123
37111	McDowell County, NC	17,236
37149	Polk County, NC	6,601

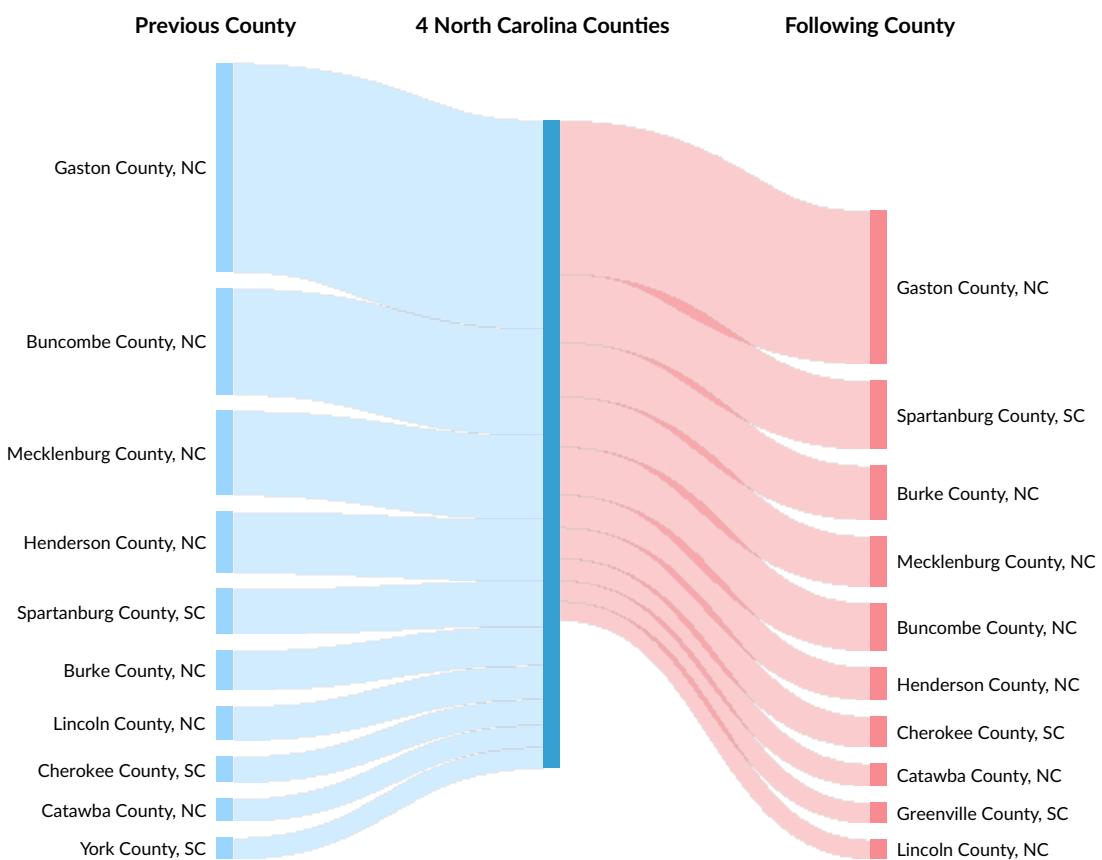
Where Talent Lives

County	Name	2024 Workers
37045	Cleveland County, NC	50,669
37161	Rutherford County, NC	29,369
37111	McDowell County, NC	21,409
37149	Polk County, NC	9,615

Inbound and Outbound Migration

The table below analyzes past and current residents of 4 North Carolina Counties. The left column shows residents of other counties migrating to 4 North Carolina Counties. The right column shows residents migrating from 4 North Carolina Counties to other counties.

As of 2022, **1,365** people have migrated from Gaston County, NC to 4 North Carolina Counties. In the same year, **1,004** people left 4 North Carolina Counties migrating to Gaston County, NC. The total Net Migration for 4 North Carolina Counties in 2022 was **2,442**.



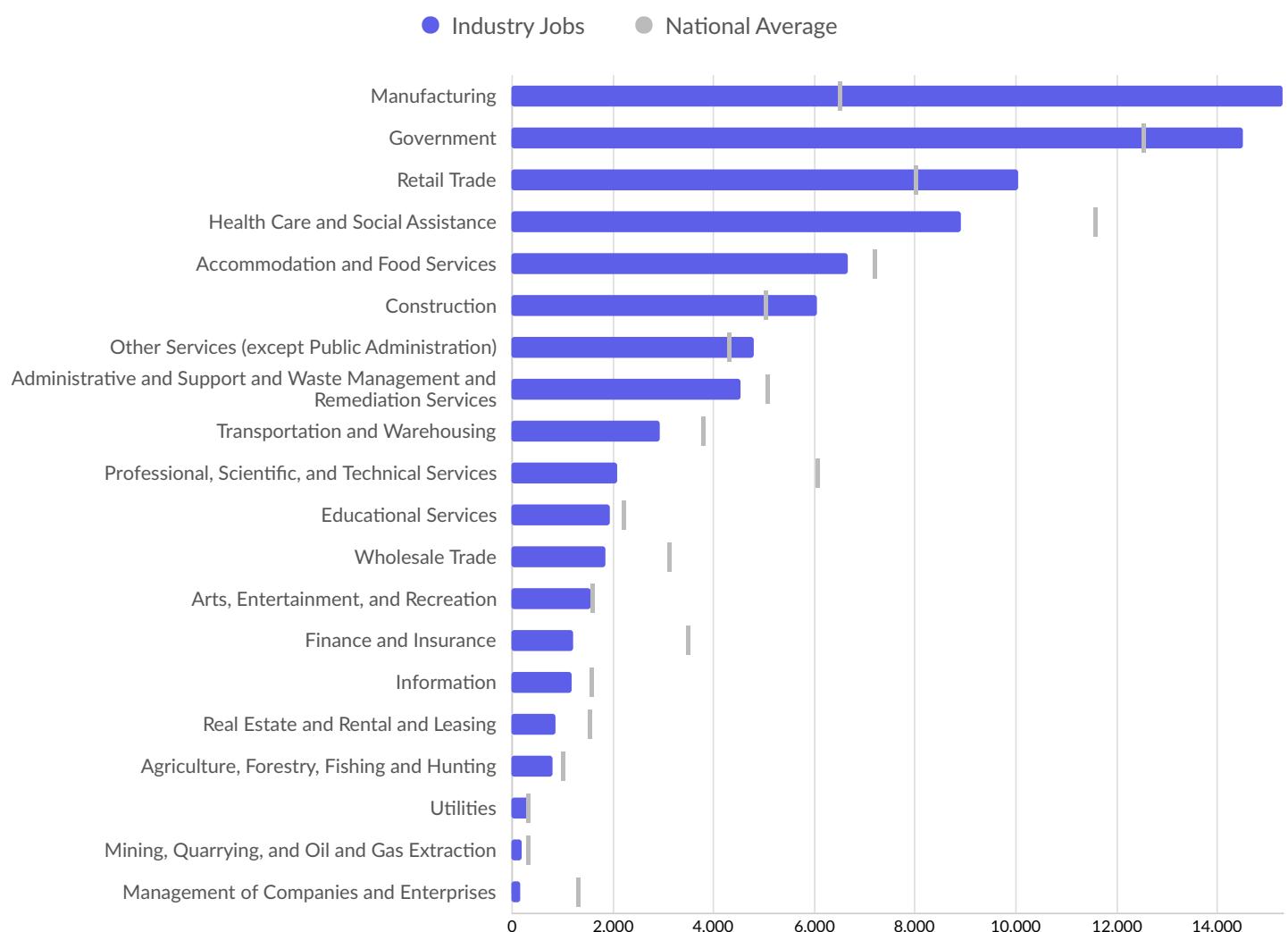
Top Previous Counties	Migrations
Gaston County, NC	1,365
Buncombe County, NC	695
Mecklenburg County, NC	550
Henderson County, NC	401
Spartanburg County, SC	294

Top Previous Counties	Migrations
Burke County, NC	258
Lincoln County, NC	221
Cherokee County, SC	168
Catawba County, NC	146
York County, SC	138
Greenville County, SC	109
Wake County, NC	100
Cabarrus County, NC	81
Fairfax County, VA	65
Cumberland County, NC	63
Top Following Counties	Migrations
Gaston County, NC	1,004
Spartanburg County, SC	448
Burke County, NC	353
Mecklenburg County, NC	329
Buncombe County, NC	313
Henderson County, NC	214
Cherokee County, SC	202
Catawba County, NC	147
Greenville County, SC	134
Lincoln County, NC	126
York County, SC	90
Wake County, NC	72
Guilford County, NC	61
Horry County, SC	55

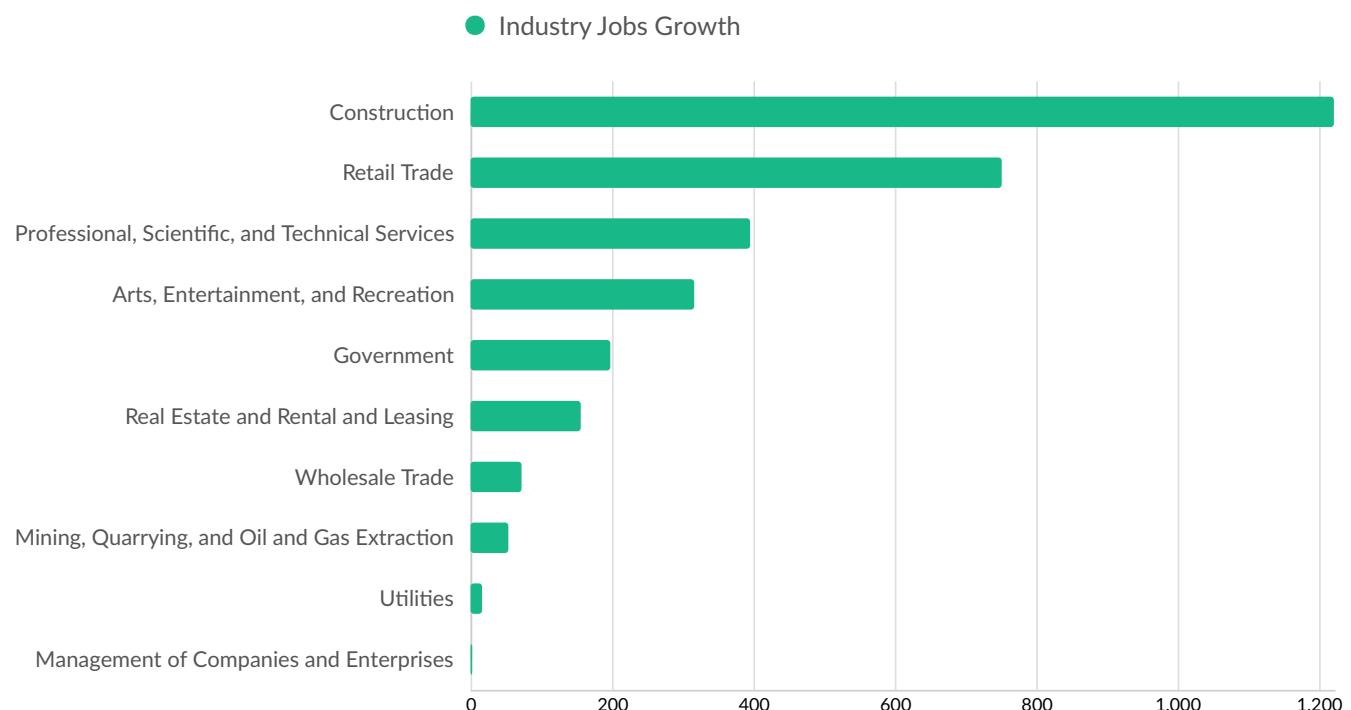
Top Following Counties	Migrations
Onslow County, NC	44

Industry Characteristics

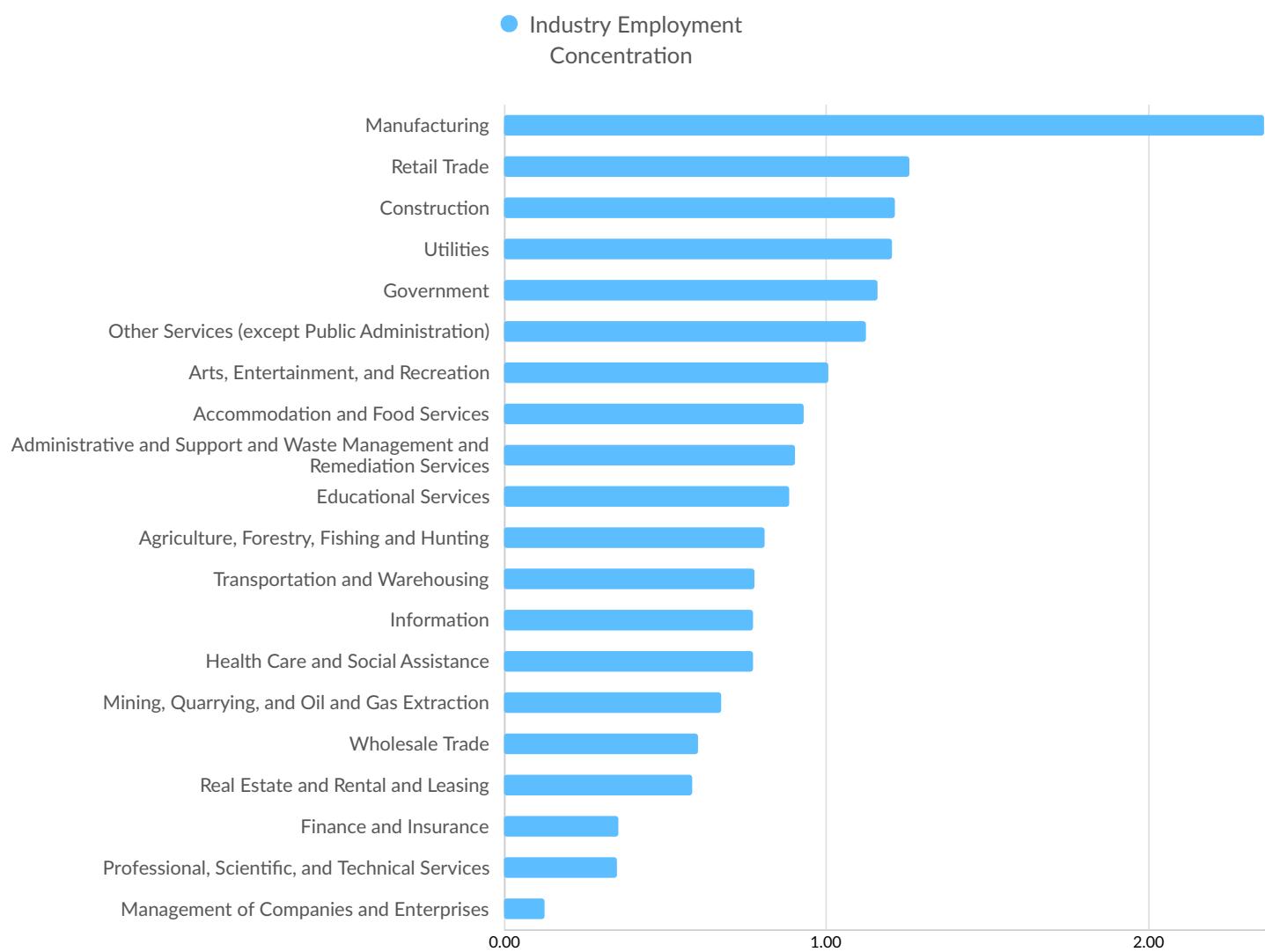
Largest Industries



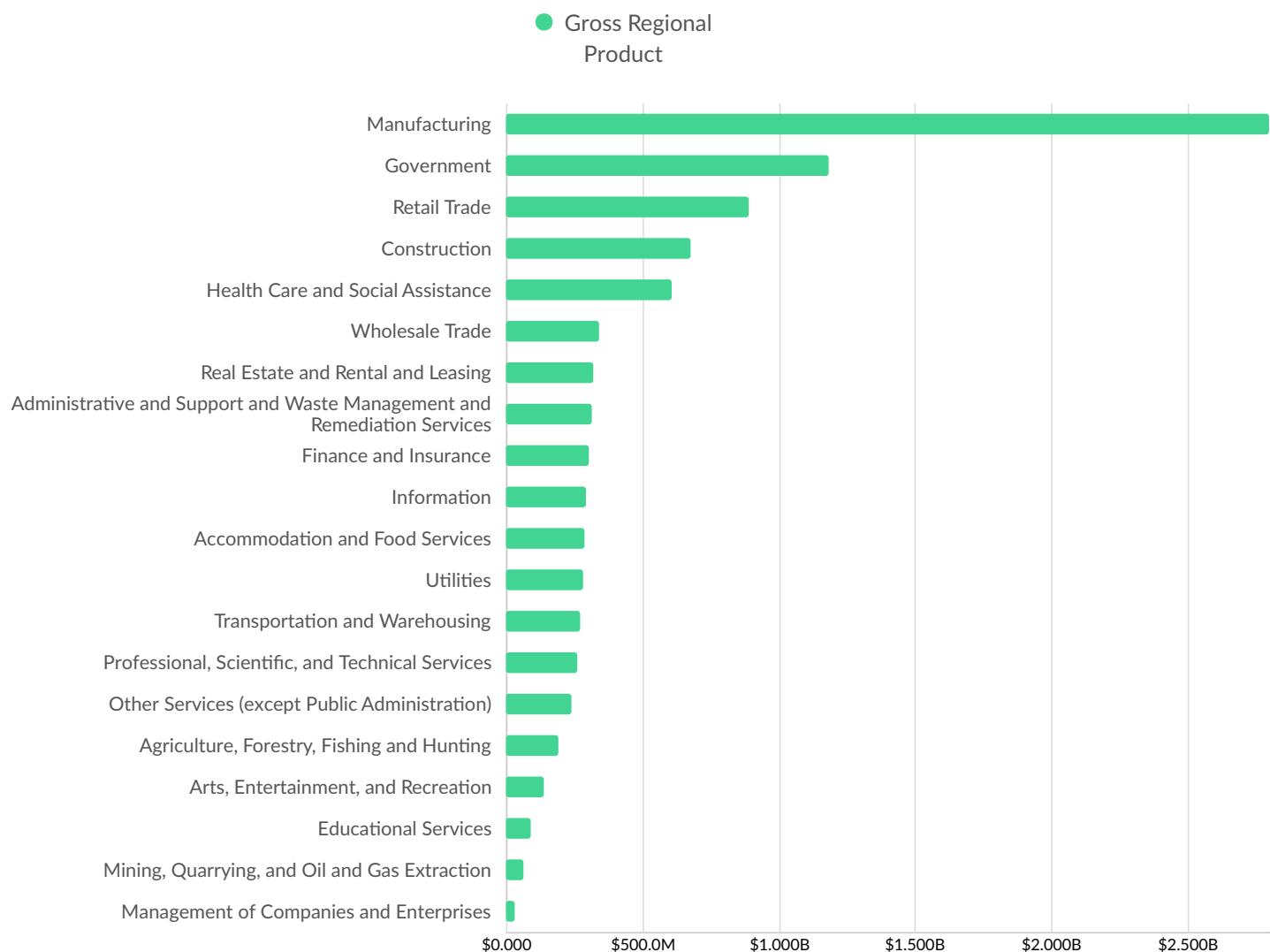
Top Growing Industries



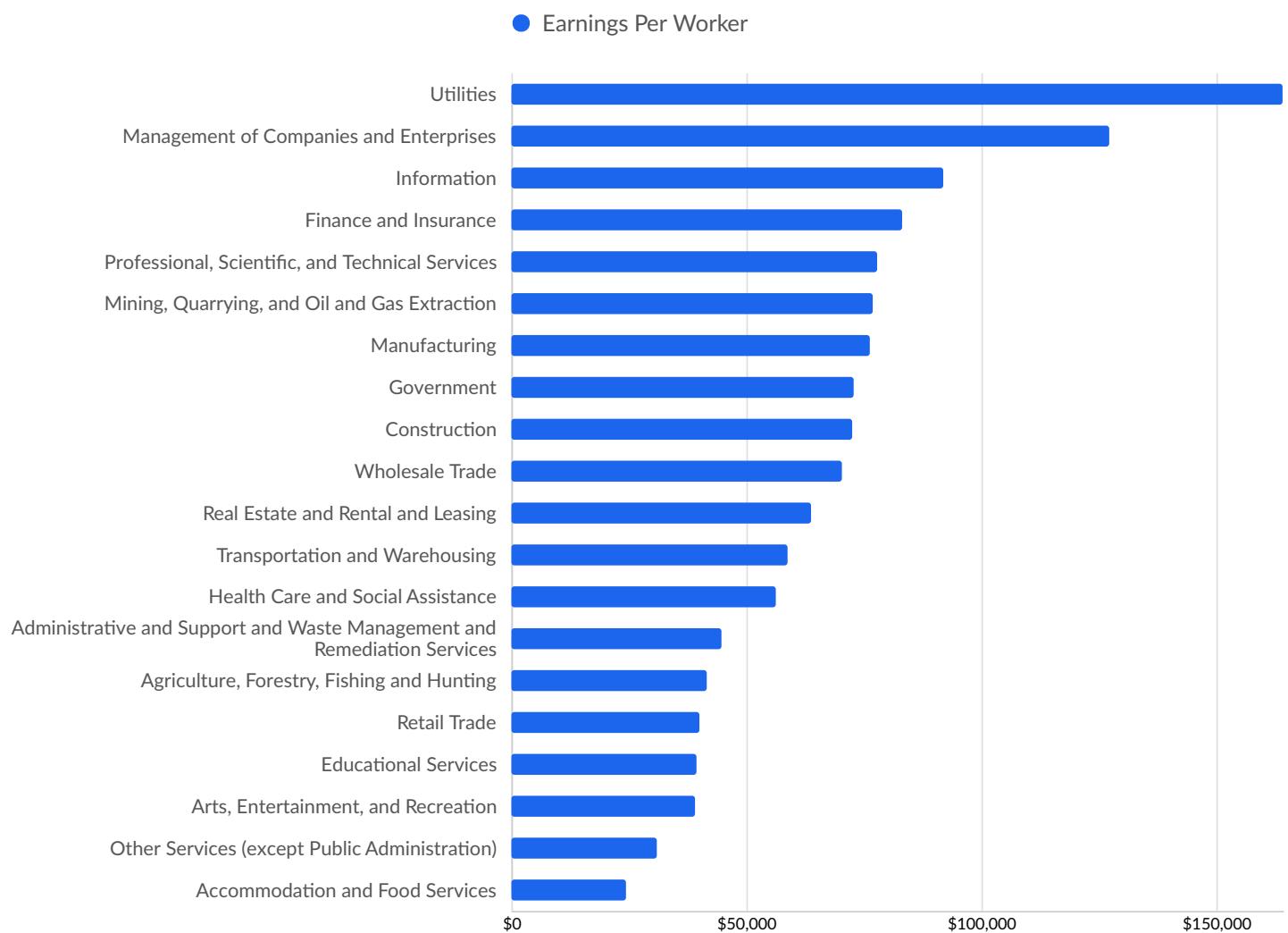
Top Industry Employment Concentration



Top Industry GRP



Top Industry Earnings



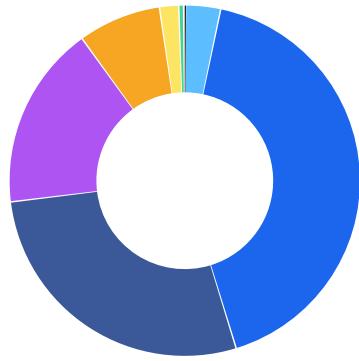
Business Characteristics

18,536 Companies Employ Your Workers

Online profiles for your workers mention 18,536 companies as employers, with the top 10 appearing below. In the last 12 months, 1,771 companies in your area posted job postings, with the top 10 appearing below.

Top Companies	Profiles	Top Companies Posting	Unique Postings
Atrium Health	590	Atrium Health	724
Rutherford County Schools	585	Duke University	474
Cleveland County Schools	567	Agape Care Group	451
Gardner-Webb University	493	Mission Health	426
Baxter International	430	Dollar General	374
Walmart	402	LifePoint Health	364
Mcdowell County Schools	279	Baxter International	345
Cleveland Community College	267	HCA Healthcare	256
Ingles	233	Gardner-Webb University	252
Cleveland County	227	Southern Health Partners	239

Business Size

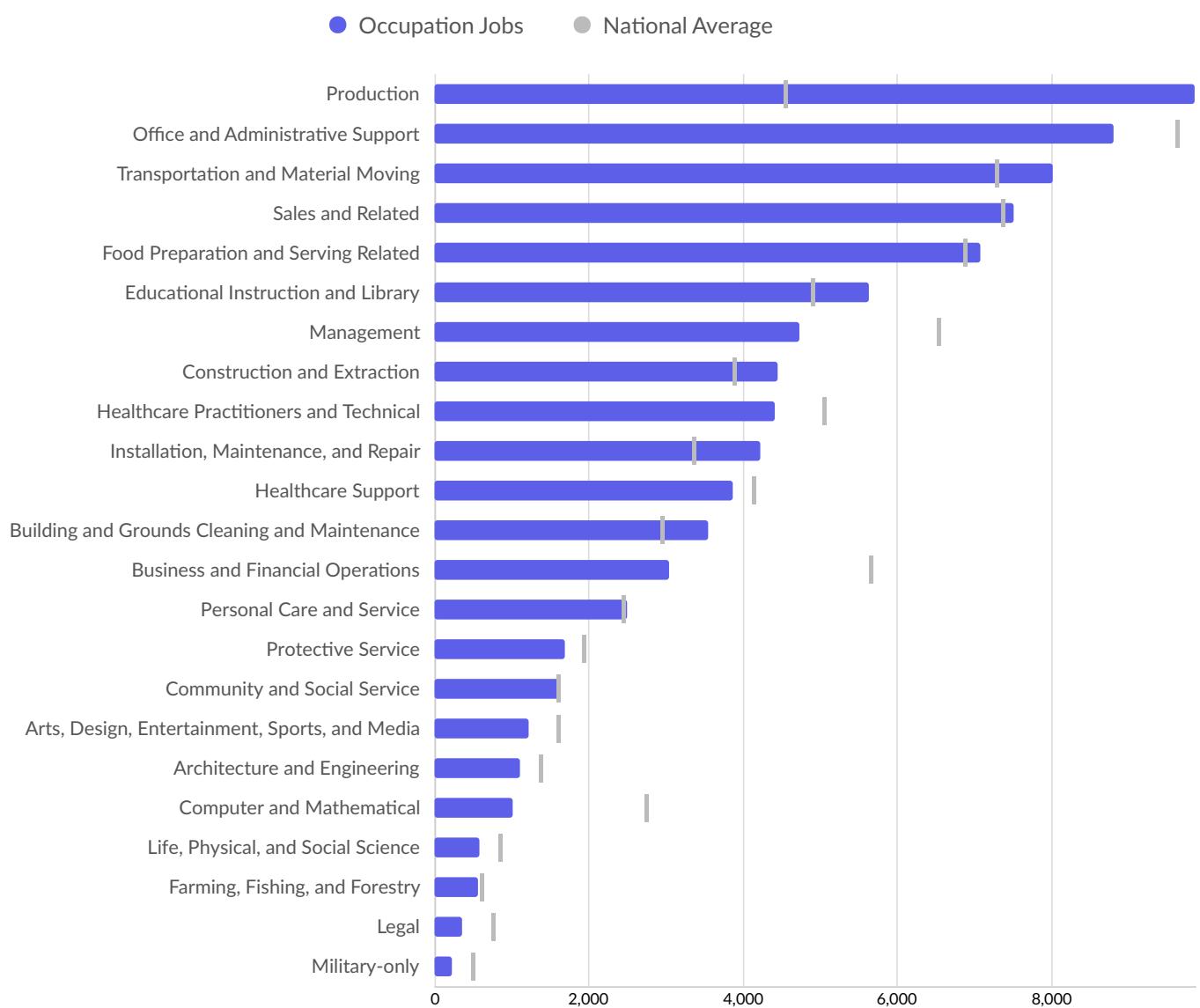


	Percentage	Business Count
1 to Professional employees	3.2%	177
1 to 4 employees	42.0%	2,305
5 to 9 employees	27.8%	1,527
10 to 19 employees	17.0%	932
20 to 49 employees	7.6%	420
50 to 99 employees	1.8%	97
100 to 249 employees	0.4%	24
250 to 499 employees	0.1%	8
500+ employees	0.0%	2

*Business Data by DatabaseUSA.com is third-party data provided by Lightcast to its customers as a convenience, and Lightcast does not endorse or warrant its accuracy or consistency with other published Lightcast data. In most cases, the Business Count will not match total companies with profiles on the summary tab.

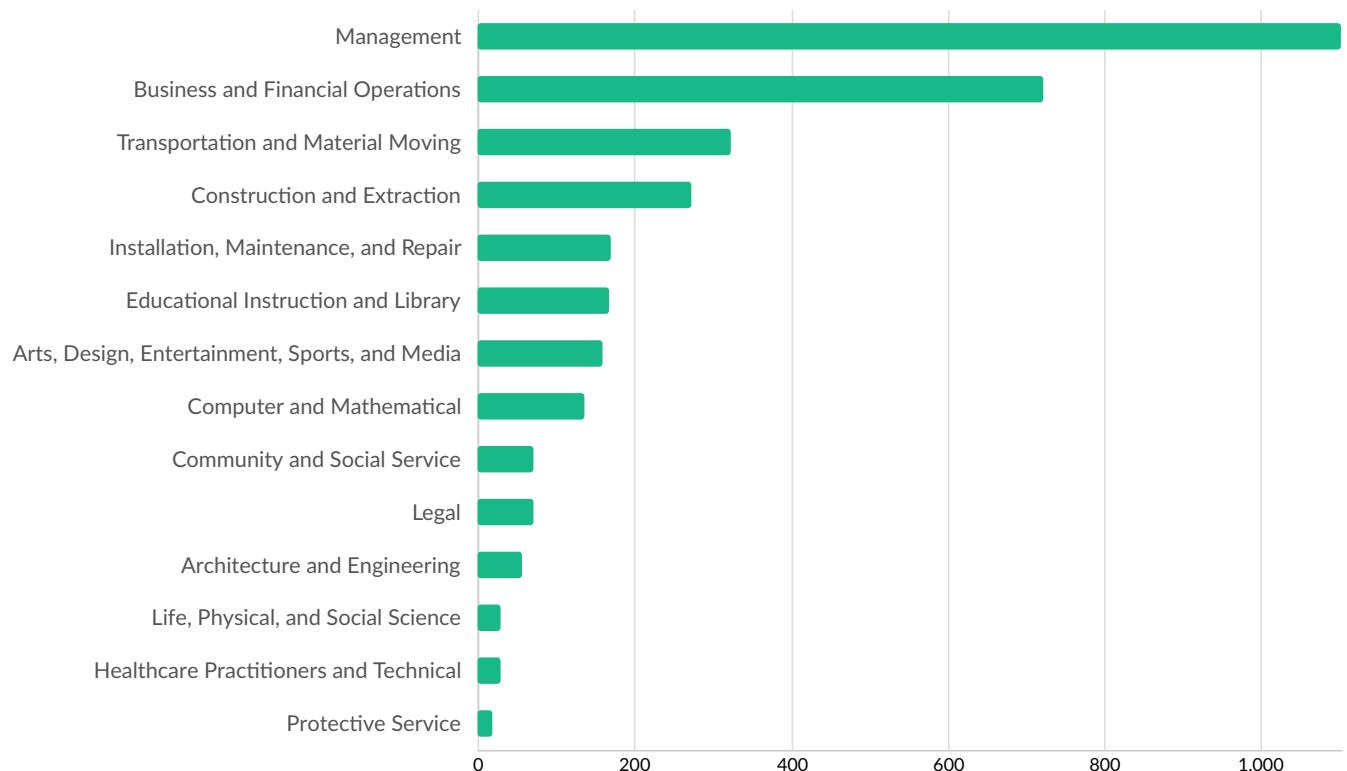
Workforce Characteristics

Largest Occupations

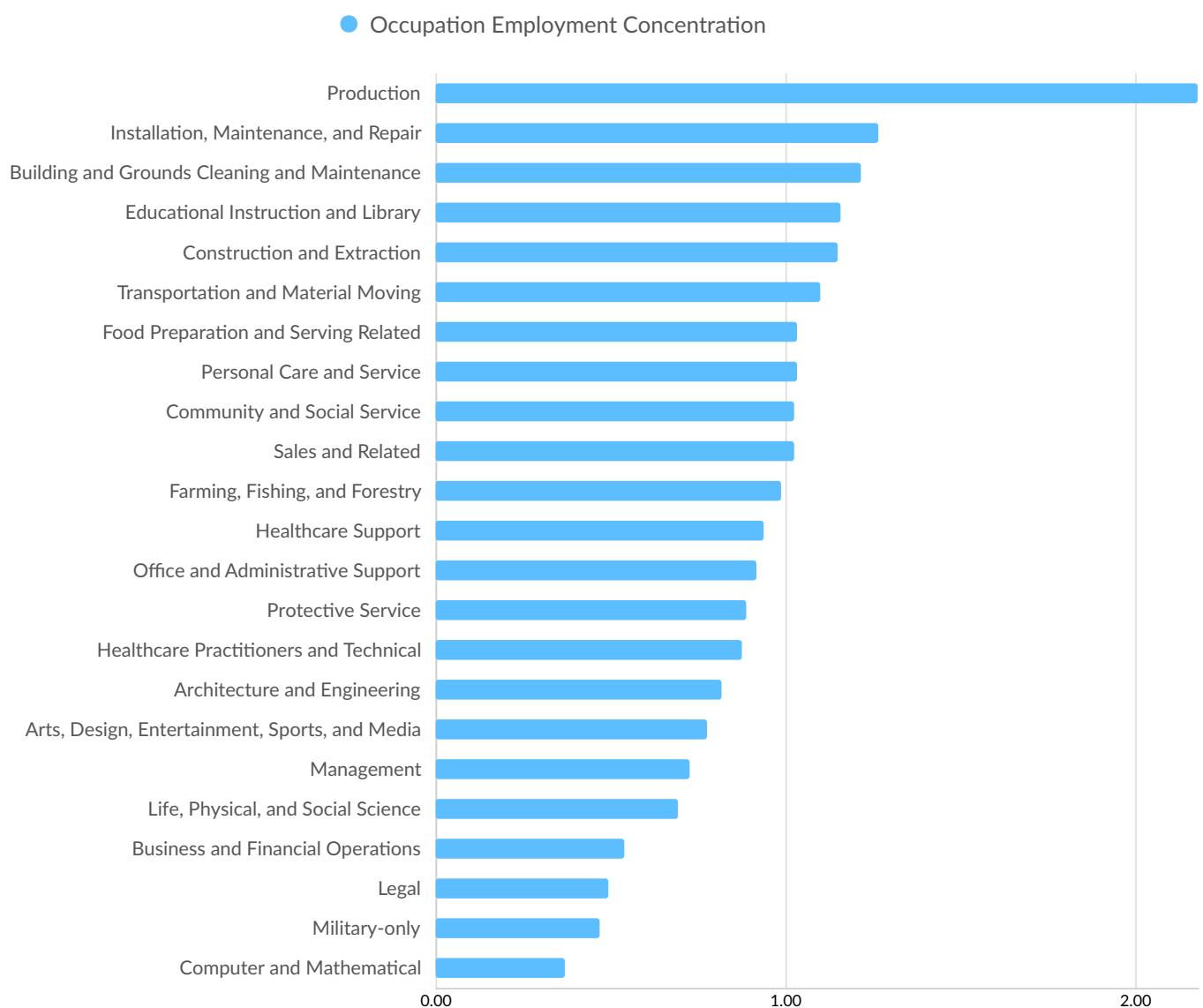


Top Growing Occupations

● Occupation Jobs Growth

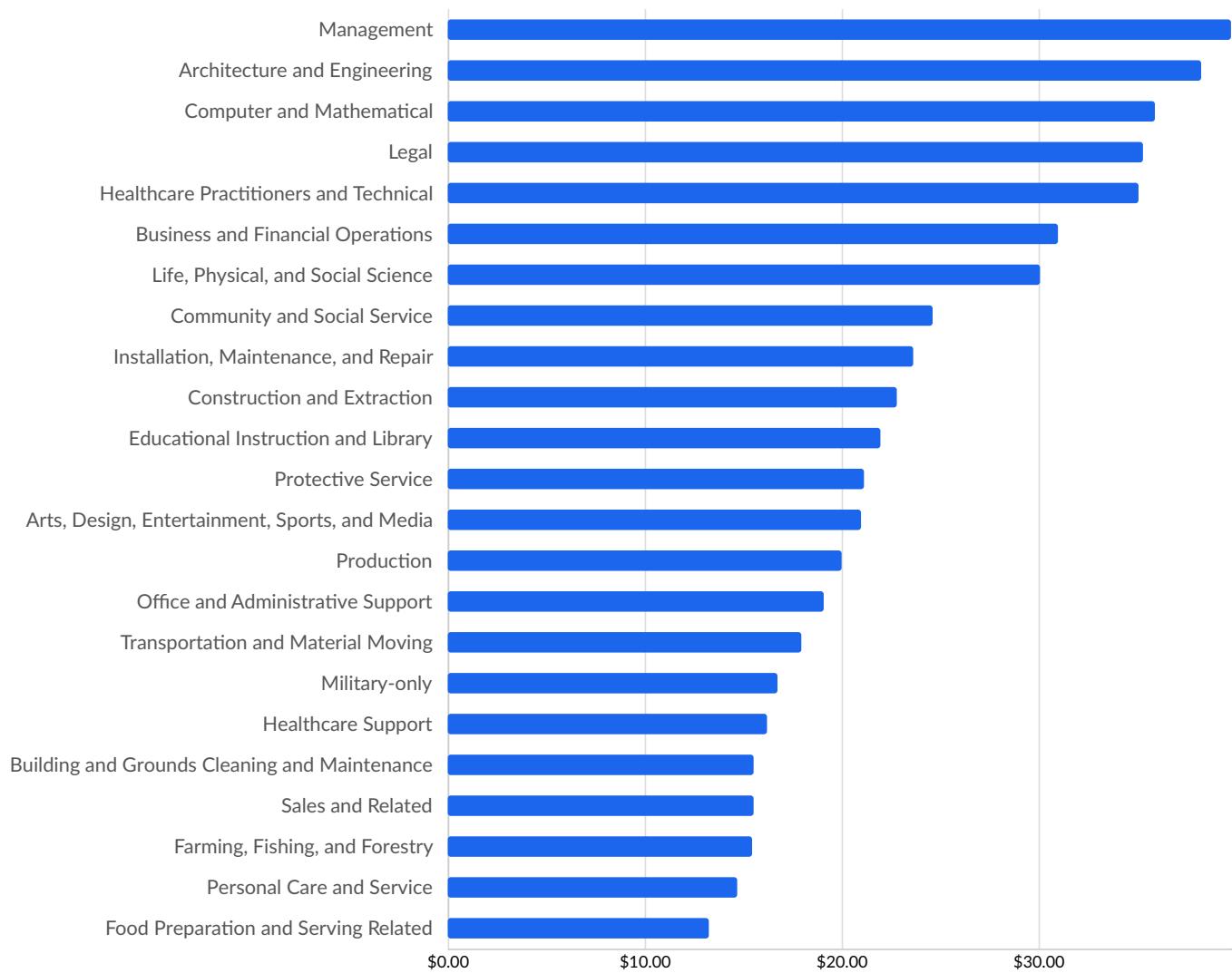


Top Occupation Employment Concentration

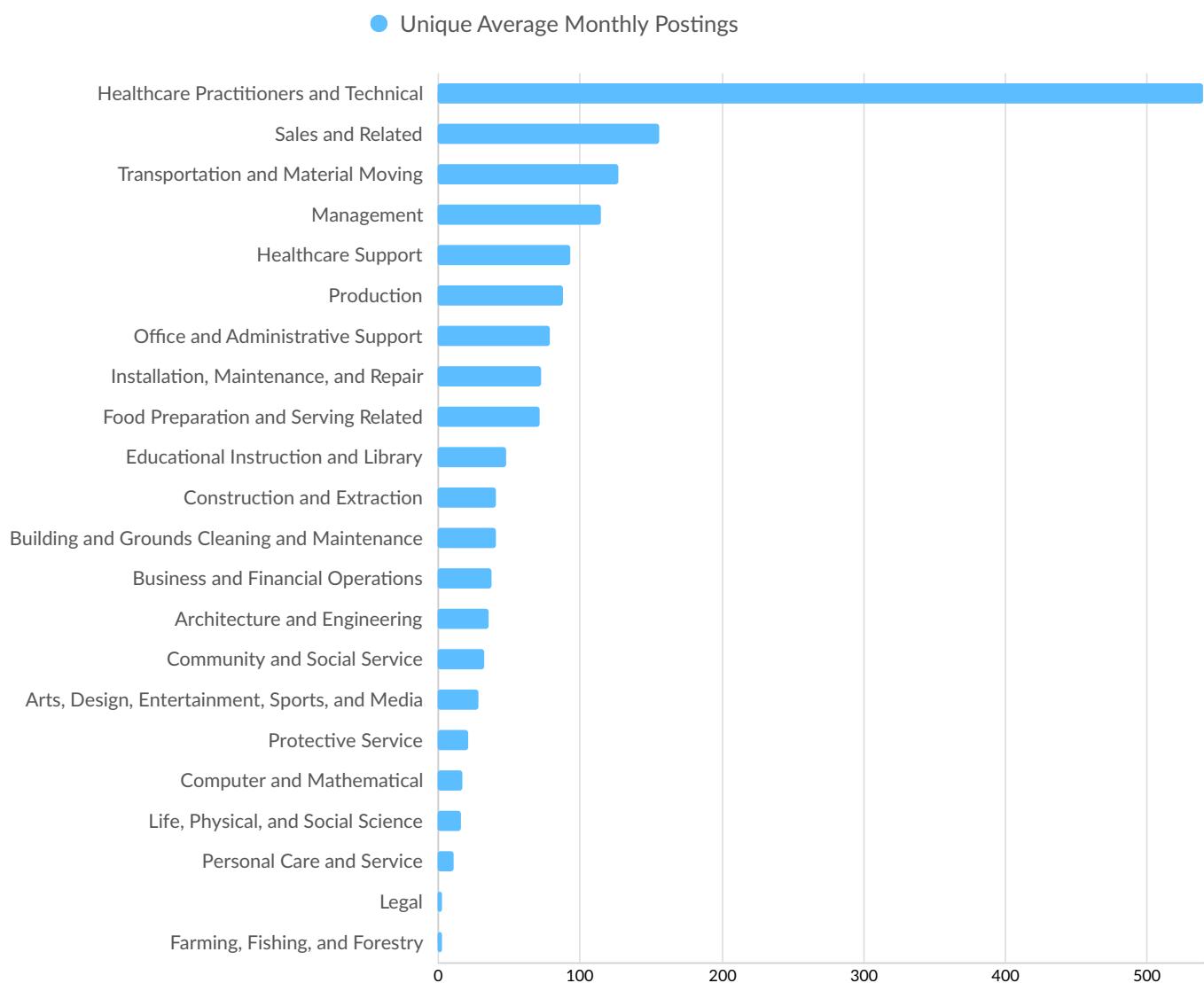


Top Occupation Earnings

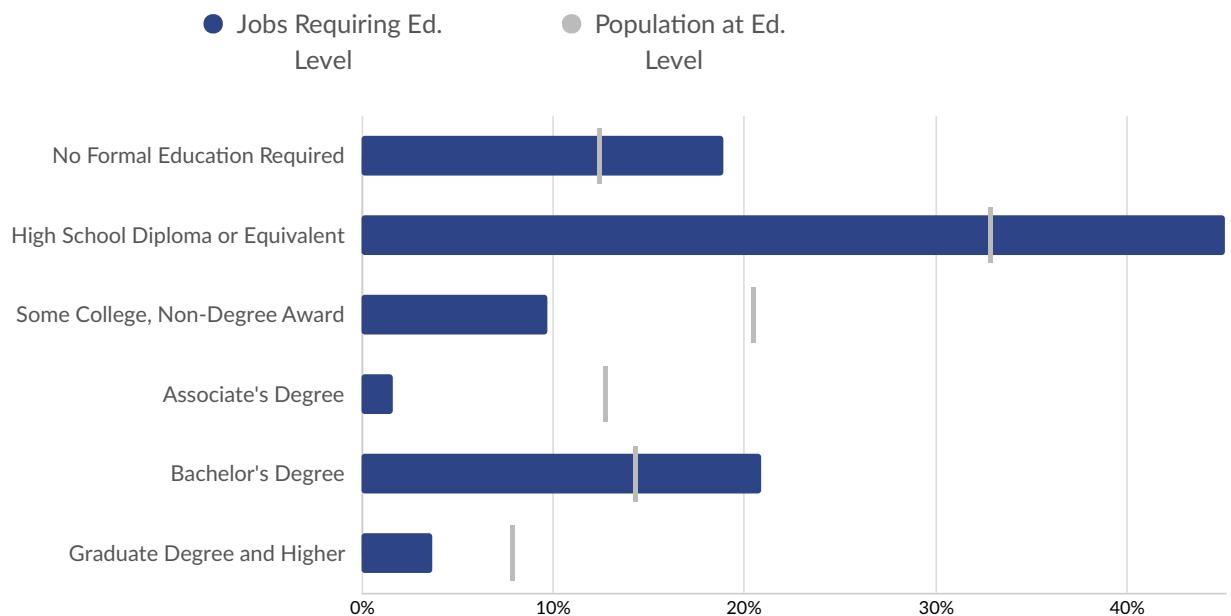
● Median Hourly Earnings



Top Posted Occupations

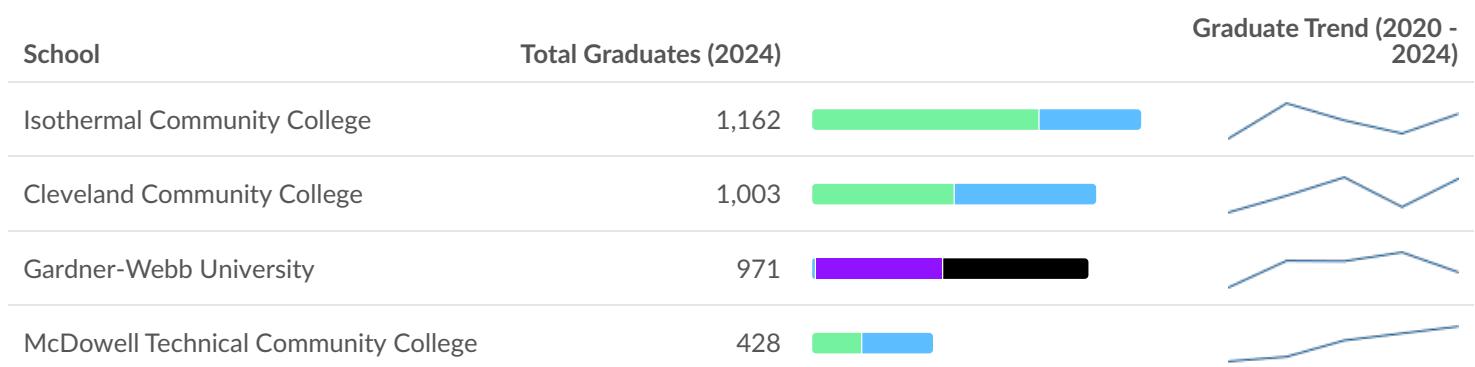


Underemployment



Educational Pipeline

In 2024, there were 3,564 graduates in 4 North Carolina Counties. This pipeline has grown by 35% over the last 5 years. The highest share of these graduates come from "Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies" (Associate's), "Business Administration and Management, General" (Certificate), and "Educational Leadership and Administration, General" (Master's or Higher).



● Certificate ● Associate's ● Bachelor's ● Master's or Higher

In-Demand Skills

