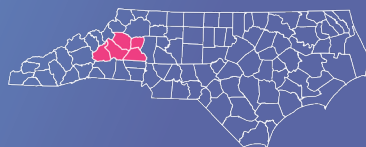


What are Star Jobs?

North Carolina's 5-Star Jobs represent occupations with the greatest projected employment potential through 2034. Occupations were rated from 1-5 stars based on wages, projected growth rates, and projected job openings.

HICKORY REGION



Alexander | Burke | Caldwell
Catawba | McDowell



For a complete list of Star Jobs and explanation of the rating process, scan the QR code or visit:
www.commerce.nc.gov/star-jobs

Advanced Degree

		MEDIAN WAGE	
		Hourly	Annual
★	Pharmacists	\$65.95	\$137,183
★	Nurse Practitioners	\$61.39	\$127,695
★	Lawyers	\$46.80	\$97,335
★	Kindergarten through Secondary Education Administrators	SALARY POSITION	\$82,921
★	Physical Therapists	\$48.78	\$101,469
★	Speech-Language Pathologists	\$43.44	\$90,365
★	Clinical and Counseling Psychologists	\$43.76	\$91,027
★	Veterinarians	\$60.08	\$124,967
★	Urban and Regional Planners	\$36.15	\$75,201
★	Audiologists	\$38.69	\$80,478

All wages are based on LEAD analysis of data of Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) 2025 Data released in June 2026.

This workforce product was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The product was created by the recipient and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. This product is copyrighted by the institution that created it. Internal use by an organization and/or personal use by an individual for non-commercial purposes is permissible. All other uses require the prior authorization of the copyright owner.

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Top 10 careers with high wages and employment growth, grouped by education requirements.

High School & Work Experience**MEDIAN WAGE**
Hourly Annual

★5	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	\$29.81	\$62,006
★5	Food Service Managers	\$34.68	\$72,140
★5	Transportation, Storage, and Distribution Managers	\$45.55	\$94,752
★5	Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	\$36.28	\$75,462
★5	First-Line Supervisors of Police and Detectives	\$36.04	\$74,970
★5	Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics	\$29.61	\$61,581
★4	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	\$24.48	\$50,910
★4	Electricians	\$25.83	\$53,732
★4	Real Estate Sales Agents	\$28.66	\$59,613
★4	Chefs and Head Cooks	\$28.91	\$60,128

Postsecondary Training**MEDIAN WAGE**
Hourly Annual

★5	Powerhouse, Substation, and Relay Electrical and Electronics Repairers	\$49.57	\$103,096
★4	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	\$30.01	\$62,429
★4	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	\$24.33	\$50,608
★4	Computer Numerically Controlled Tool Programmers	\$28.91	\$60,127
★4	Fire Inspectors and Investigators	\$28.21	\$58,683
★3	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	\$27.31	\$56,804
★3	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	\$22.22	\$46,211
★3	Dental Assistants	\$23.42	\$48,723
★3	Paramedics	\$23.78	\$49,465
★3	Medical Records Specialists	\$19.18	\$39,905

Associate's Degree**MEDIAN WAGE**
Hourly Annual

★5	Registered Nurses	\$38.49	\$80,060
★5	Dental Hygienists	\$45.21	\$94,046
★5	Respiratory Therapists	\$37.67	\$78,348
★5	Physical Therapist Assistants	\$30.99	\$64,461
★4	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians	\$28.98	\$60,286
★3	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	\$23.33	\$48,533
★3	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	\$37.84	\$78,716
★3	Civil Engineering Technologists and Technicians	\$29.99	\$62,375
★3	Architectural and Civil Drafters	\$28.10	\$58,442
★3	Forest and Conservation Technicians	\$24.07	\$50,076

Bachelor's Degree**MEDIAN WAGE**
Hourly Annual

★5	General and Operations Managers	\$44.95	\$93,491
★5	Accountants and Auditors	\$37.10	\$77,165
★5	Industrial Engineers	\$41.70	\$86,730
★5	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	\$36.14	\$75,174
★5	Construction Managers	\$49.26	\$102,460
★5	Buyers and Purchasing Agents	\$31.64	\$65,803
★5	Project Management Specialists	\$41.91	\$87,165
★5	Mechanical Engineers	\$42.66	\$88,727
★5	Management Analysts	\$37.02	\$76,993
★5	Computer Systems Analysts	\$45.15	\$93,918

Note: Selected occupations for each education/experience category are based on the Star Jobs Methodology. Education categories in this brochure represent the minimum level of education required for entry according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Actual market conditions may require additional education and training.