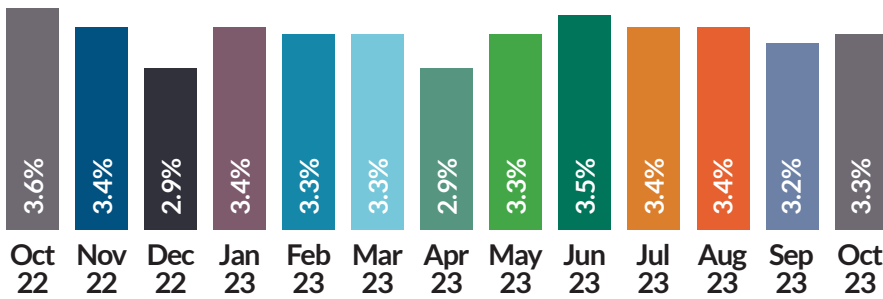


## Civilian Labor Force

The Hickory MSA's October 2022 unemployment rate equaled 3.6%. The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate was 3.3% as of October 2023 (Figure 1). Between October 2022 and October 2023, the estimated number of employed persons increased from 169,466 to 171,104 (1,638), while the civilian labor force grew from 175,716 to 176,889 (1,173). In October 2023, the Hickory MSA was tied for the sixth lowest (tied for eighth highest) unemployment rate among North Carolina MSAs (Table 1). October 2023 unemployment rates by county were Alexander 3.4%, Burke 3.3%, Caldwell 3.3%, and Catawba 3.2%.

**Figure 1. MSA Unemployment, Oct. 2022 - Oct. 2023**

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.



**Table 1.**

**MSA Unemployment Rate, October 2023**

Asheville	2.8%
Durham-Chapel Hill	2.9%
Raleigh	3.0%
Wilmington	3.1%
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia	3.2%
<b>Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton</b>	<b>3.3%</b>
Burlington	3.3%
Winston-Salem	3.3%
New Bern	3.4%
Goldsboro	3.7%
Greensboro-High Point	3.7%
Greenville	3.8%
Jacksonville	3.9%
Fayetteville	4.5%
Rocky Mount	4.5%

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

## Hickory Metro Average Annual Wages

Average annual Hickory MSA wages grew from \$40,924 in 2018 to \$50,440 in 2022 (Figure 2). The percentage increase in Hickory MSA average yearly salaries between 2018 and 2022 (23.3%) was 5.7 percentage points higher than the US inflation rate from 2018 to 2022 (17.6%) (Table 2). The Hickory MSA's wage growth rate between 2018 and 2022 was lower than the NC average (24.5%) but was higher than the national average (22.2%). The Hickory Metro's average annual wage growth rate from 2021 to 2022 (6.5%) was less than the US inflation rate (8.5%) but was more than the NC salary growth rate (6.0%). The growth in Hickory MSA wages between 2021 and 2022 is partly due to job growth in higher-paying sectors, such as manufacturing (1,625 workers) and information (73 workers).

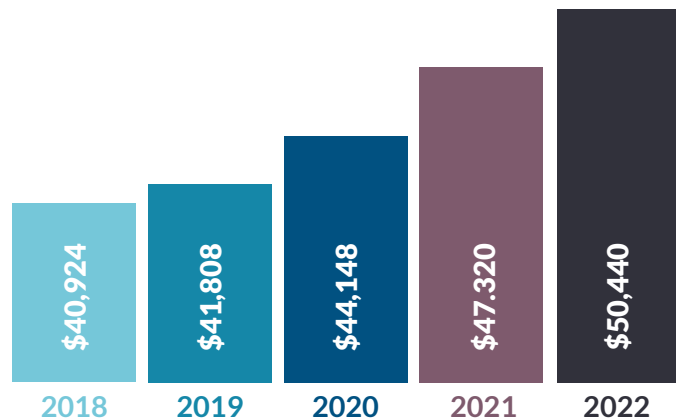
**Table 2. Change in Wages Versus Inflation, 2018-22**

Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Census and NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

County	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2018-2022
US Inflation Rate	1.8%	1.0%	5.4%	8.5%	17.6%
Hickory MSA Wages	2.2%	5.6%	7.2%	6.5%	23.3%
NC Wages	3.3%	7.3%	5.9%	6.0%	24.5%
US Wages	3.4%	8.1%	5.6%	3.5%	22.2%

**Figure 2. Hickory MSA Average Yearly Wages per Worker**

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.



## EIN Spotlight – Hickory MSA Employment Trends

The United States has experienced improved economic conditions over the past few years with the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, different regions of the country are gaining jobs at different rates or, in some cases, are still losing employment. How has the Hickory MSA fared in terms of job growth in the past four years, and which industries in the region have been gaining employment? This “EIN Spotlight” article will focus on job and wage growth in the Hickory MSA since the second quarter of 2019, including comparisons to other metro areas in North Carolina. The article will also analyze industries in the region that have gained or lost employment between the second quarter of 2022 and the second quarter of 2023.

After falling to 137,191 in the second quarter of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, total employment in the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSA has increased to 154,299 as of the second quarter of 2023 (Table 3). Seven of the 15 major Hickory MSA industry sectors with available data have more employment in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019. The largest numeric growth occurred in transportation and warehousing (598 more in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019, followed closely by construction (595 increase) and retail trade (568 increase). The largest percentage gains took place in construction (13.3% growth), followed by transportation and warehousing (9.6% growth) and arts, entertainment and recreation (8.1% growth).

**Table 3. Hickory MSA Employment by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**

NAICS Code	Industry	2nd QTR 2019	2nd QTR 2020	2nd QTR 2021	2nd QTR 2022	2nd QTR 2023	Change 2019-23	% Change 2019-23
23	Construction	4,479	4,501	4,937	5,109	5,074	595	13.3%
31	Manufacturing	41,834	36,251	39,554	41,753	41,543	-291	-0.7%
42	Wholesale Trade	6,627	*	7,024	*	*	N/A	N/A
44	Retail Trade	17,349	16,374	17,107	17,628	17,917	568	3.3%
48	Transportation & Warehousing	6,216	6,163	6,474	7,437	6,814	598	9.6%
51	Information	782	715	695	798	658	-124	-15.9%
52	Finance & Insurance	2,103	2,111	2,089	2,139	2,145	42	2.0%
53	Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	917	887	886	966	961	44	4.8%
54	Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	3,831	3,454	3,742	3,804	3,713	-118	-3.1%
56	Admin. & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	7,961	6,661	7,780	8,366	7,899	-62	-0.8%
61	Educational Services	*	*	9,420	9,484	9,881	N/A	N/A
62	Health Care & Social Assistance	22,092	20,839	21,651	20,689	21,217	-875	-4.0%
71	Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	1,575	936	1,450	1,653	1,703	128	8.1%
72	Accommodation & Food Services	13,181	9,469	11,335	12,149	12,917	-264	-2.0%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	3,020	2,609	3,094	3,186	3,231	211	7.0%
92	Public Administration	7,995	7,675	7,924	7,931	7,896	-99	-1.2%
0	<b>Total, All Industries</b>	<b>153,742</b>	<b>137,191</b>	<b>148,289</b>	<b>153,723</b>	<b>154,229</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>0.3%</b>

Note: Data for NAICS Code 11-Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting, 21-Mining, 22-Utilities, and 55 Management of Companies & Enterprises was not disclosed, but is included in the total, all industries data. \*Data not disclosed. Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023.

In terms of numbers, healthcare and social assistance are the largest industries in the region that have yet to recover fully in terms of employment after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hickory MSA's health care/social assistance industry has 875 fewer employees in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019. Much of the difference is because thousands of healthcare job openings remain unfilled across the region. A surprising result of the data seen in Table 3 is the number of regional jobs in the information sector (producing and distributing information and cultural products and/or providing the means to transmit or distribute these products as well as data or communications and/or processing data.) is 15.9% less in second quarter 2023 than in second quarter 2019.

Overall, the number of manufacturing sector jobs in the region is 291 less in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019. However, there is significant employment growth/decline variation among different manufacturing sectors. Furniture, for instance, had 218 fewer employees in 2022 than in 2019 (only annual data is available), while plastics and rubber products had 165 more workers in 2022 than in 2019. Employment in accommodation and food services, one of the hardest hit industries during the pandemic, appears to have nearly gained all of the employment lost in 2020 (13,181 in the second quarter of 2019 versus 12,917 in the second quarter of 2023).

Changes in Hickory MSA wages by industry are displayed in Table 4. As of second quarter 2023, seven Hickory MSA industries (with available data) tallied average weekly wages of more than \$1,000 a week: professional, scientific, and technical services (\$1,331), information (\$1,266), finance and insurance (\$1,245), health care and social assistance (\$1,108), construction (\$1,088), manufacturing (\$1,063) and transportation and warehousing (\$1,010). The lowest average weekly wages were in the following industries: accommodation and food services (\$383), arts, entertainment, and recreation (\$518), retail trade (\$736), and other services, except public administration (\$736). Many of these positions are part-time jobs paying closer to minimum wage.

**Table 4. Hickory MSA Average Weekly Wages by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**

NAICS Code	Industry	2nd QTR 2019	2nd QTR 2020	2nd QTR 2021	2nd QTR 2022	2nd QTR 2023	Change 2019-23	% Change 2019-23
23	Construction	\$886	\$889	\$956	\$1,041	\$1,088	\$202	22.8%
31	Manufacturing	\$914	\$874	\$956	\$1,069	\$1,063	\$149	16.3%
42	Wholesale Trade	\$1,051	*	\$1,186	*	*	N/A	N/A
44	Retail Trade	\$535	\$597	\$681	\$736	\$736	\$201	37.6%
48	Transportation & Warehousing	\$857	\$858	\$953	\$990	\$1,010	\$153	17.9%
51	Information	\$1,348	\$1,448	\$1,643	\$1,473	\$1,266	-\$82	-6.1%
52	Finance & Insurance	\$1,031	\$1,144	\$1,265	\$1,341	\$1,245	\$214	20.8%
53	Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	\$742	\$730	\$792	\$929	\$959	\$217	29.2%
54	Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	\$1,013	\$1,032	\$1,094	\$1,246	\$1,331	\$318	31.4%
56	Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	\$516	\$567	\$637	\$681	\$741	\$225	43.6%
61	Educational Services	*	*	\$796	\$843	\$845	N/A	N/A
62	Health Care & Social Assistance	\$896	\$898	\$991	\$1,084	\$1,108	\$212	23.7%
71	Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	\$335	\$392	\$367	\$368	\$518	\$183	54.6%
72	Accommodation & Food Services	\$290	\$299	\$348	\$369	\$383	\$93	32.1%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	\$581	\$623	\$670	\$730	\$736	\$155	26.7%
92	Public Administration	\$792	\$855	\$838	\$887	\$963	\$171	21.6%
0	<b>Total, All Industries</b>	<b>\$783</b>	<b>\$808</b>	<b>\$875</b>	<b>\$945</b>	<b>\$960</b>	<b>\$177</b>	<b>22.6%</b>

Note: Data for NAICS Code 11-Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting, 21-Mining, 22-Utilities, and 55 Management of Companies & Enterprises was not disclosed, but is included in the total, all industries data. \*Data not disclosed. Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023.

Average weekly wages for all Hickory MSA industries grew 22.6% between the second quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2023 to \$960. The national inflation rate (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics) from the second quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2023 was 19.1%. Average weekly wages increased by 1.6% between the second quarter of 2022 and 2023 compared to the national inflation rate of 3.0%.

The only Hickory MSA industry sector (with available data) with lower average weekly wages in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019 was information (\$82 less, or 6.1% lower average wage in 2023 than in 2019). This result would indicate that the job losses shown in Table 3 were higher-paying jobs. Except for the information industry, however, average weekly wages for Hickory MSA workers have grown over the past four years. The increase in wages is due to more part-time workers increasing the number of hours worked per week, higher hourly wages due to inflation, and a low supply of available employees in the labor market driving up starting salaries.

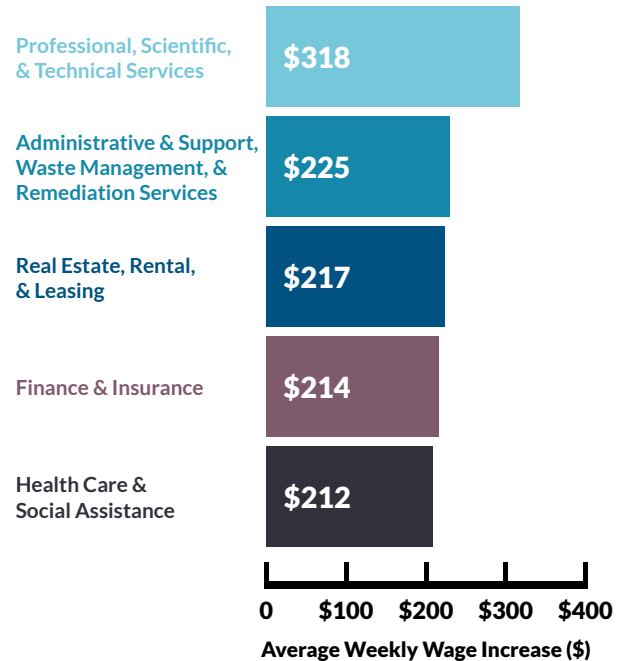
The largest average weekly wage gains since the second quarter of 2019 occurred in professional, scientific, and technical services, administrative and support (such as temporary work agencies)/waste management services, and real estate/rental/leasing (Figure 3, page 4). The average weekly wage in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector grew from \$1,013 in the second quarter of 2019 to \$1,331 in the second quarter of 2023. The \$318 per week increase in average weekly wages indicates the high demand for professional service sector workers in the region. Temporary work agency workers have also seen significant wage growth over the past four years, as average weekly wages have increased by \$225 a week to \$741. Results in Table 4 also reveal that wages' largest percentage gain (54.6%) occurred in the arts, entertainment, and recreation industries (\$335 a week in 2019 to \$518 a week in 2023). It would appear that these workers are getting higher hourly rates and more working hours per week in the second quarter of 2023 compared to the second quarter of 2019.

## Hickory MSA Employment and Wage Trends vs. Other North Carolina MSAs

Hickory MSA employment was 0.3% higher in the second quarter of 2023 compared to the second quarter of 2019 (Table 5). North Carolina's total employment rose 7.9% over the same period, partly due to rapid job growth in the Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh, and Wilmington MSAs. The Hickory MSA was one of 12 metro areas in North Carolina that experienced employment gains over the past four years (Figure 4, page 5). Three metro areas, Goldsboro, Greensboro, and Rocky Mount, had less total employment in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019. The Rocky Mount MSA suffered a 4.0% employment decrease (2,056 jobs) over the past four years, representing the greatest percentage job loss of any North Carolina metro area. Employment in the Greensboro MSA fell by 3,346 jobs from 357,542 in the second quarter of 2019 to 354,196 in the second quarter of 2023. The Goldsboro MSA tailed 2.2% fewer jobs in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019.

The Raleigh MSA had the greatest employment growth rate between the second quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2023 (12.6%). The number of jobs in the Raleigh MSA rose from 637,960 in 2019 to 711,201 in 2023. Meanwhile, the Charlotte MSA experienced a 9.7% employment gain (95,875 jobs). The Charlotte and Raleigh MSAs accounted for 52% of all North Carolina job growth between the second quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2023.

**Figure 3. Hickory MSA Largest Average Weekly Wage Increases by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

**Table 5. NC MSA Employment, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**

(Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023.)

NC MSA	2nd Quarter 2019	2nd Quarter 2020	2nd Quarter 2021	2nd Quarter 2022	2nd Quarter 2023	Change 2019-23	% Change 2019-23
Asheville	197,149	166,777	189,091	198,454	203,284	6,135	3.7%
Burlington	62,393	56,082	62,294	63,544	66,637	4,244	7.6%
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia	1,080,746	989,038	1,083,329	1,135,993	1,176,621	95,875	9.7%
Durham-Chapel Hill	311,148	294,873	317,682	329,567	339,339	28,191	9.6%
Fayetteville	130,398	117,893	126,824	129,705	132,004	1,606	1.4%
Goldsboro	41,980	39,178	40,570	40,313	41,112	-868	-2.2%
Greensboro-High Point	357,542	317,735	342,498	352,669	354,196	-3,346	-1.1%
Greenville	77,693	70,671	76,128	78,391	79,910	2,217	3.1%
Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton	153,742	137,191	148,289	153,723	154,229	487	0.3%
Jacksonville	49,553	45,544	50,141	51,976	53,526	3,973	8.7%
New Bern	44,942	41,414	44,171	45,211	45,878	936	2.3%
Raleigh	637,960	579,246	644,679	684,634	711,201	73,241	12.6%
Rocky Mount	56,099	51,413	54,077	53,578	54,043	-2,056	-4.0%
Wilmington	131,505	116,737	130,872	138,332	143,448	11,943	10.2%
Winston-Salem	266,229	239,201	259,524	266,896	269,836	3,607	1.5%
<b>North Carolina Total</b>	<b>4,511,892</b>	<b>4,098,719</b>	<b>4,485,571</b>	<b>4,694,118</b>	<b>4,835,914</b>	<b>324,022</b>	<b>7.9%</b>

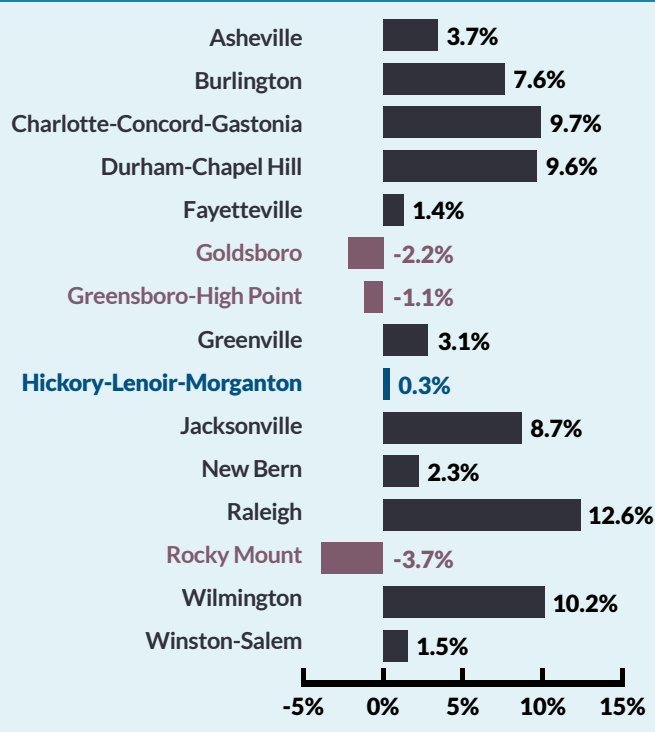
The North Carolina Metro area with the second fastest employment growth (in terms of percentage) since the second quarter of 2019 is the Wilmington MSA. The number of employees in the Wilmington MSA grew 10.2% from 131,505 in 2019 to 143,448 in 2023. Durham MSA employment rose 9.6% between the second quarter of 2019 and 2023 to 339,339. Asheville MSA employment was 3.7% higher in the second quarter of 2019 than in the second quarter of 2023. Over the past four years, the 0.3% employment growth rate in the Hickory Metro was the twelfth fastest among North Carolina's 15 MSAs.

Hickory MSA's average weekly wages were 22.6% higher in the second quarter of 2023 compared to the second quarter of 2019 (Table 6). North Carolina's average weekly wage rose 22.0% over the same period. The Hickory MSA was one of seven metro areas in North Carolina that experienced greater than 20% growth in average weekly wages since the second quarter of 2019 (Figure 5, page 6). The Greenville MSA had the highest average weekly wage percentage gain among NC MSAs (22.8%), followed closely by the Asheville MSA (22.7%). The New Bern MSA had the lowest percentage increase (13.0%), perhaps due to lower percentage pay increases for military personnel compared to private sector employment.

Average weekly wages varied widely across North Carolina Metro areas. Eight of the State's 15 metro areas had average weekly wages of over \$1,000 as of the second quarter of 2023. The highest average weekly wage was in the Durham MSA (\$1,525), followed by the Charlotte MSA (\$1,341) and the Raleigh MSA (\$1,327). Average weekly wages varied widely across North Carolina Metro areas. Eight of the State's 15 metro areas had average weekly wages of over \$1,000 as of the second quarter of 2023.

**Figure 4. NC MSA Percentage Employment Change, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**

(Source: Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023.)



**Table 6. NC MSA Average Weekly Wage, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**

(Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023.)

NC MSA	2nd Quarter 2019	2nd Quarter 2020	2nd Quarter 2021	2nd Quarter 2022	2nd Quarter 2023	Change 2019-23	% Change 2019-23
Asheville	\$814	\$875	\$907	\$962	\$1,013	\$199	22.7%
Burlington	\$830	\$869	\$900	\$912	\$956	\$126	14.5%
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia	\$1,098	\$1,182	\$1,235	\$1,312	\$1,341	\$243	20.6%
Durham-Chapel Hill	\$1,219	\$1,353	\$1,384	\$1,448	\$1,525	\$306	22.6%
Fayetteville	\$841	\$875	\$912	\$964	\$979	\$138	15.8%
Goldsboro	\$739	\$786	\$803	\$860	\$871	\$132	16.8%
Greensboro-High Point	\$899	\$938	\$988	\$1,023	\$1,044	\$145	15.5%
Greenville	\$863	\$913	\$941	\$1,013	\$1,071	\$208	22.8%
Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton	\$783	\$808	\$875	\$945	\$960	\$177	22.6%
Jacksonville	\$695	\$754	\$778	\$807	\$838	\$143	19.0%
New Bern	\$837	\$879	\$915	\$949	\$951	\$114	13.0%
Raleigh	\$1,107	\$1,167	\$1,239	\$1,295	\$1,327	\$220	18.9%
Rocky Mount	\$769	\$795	\$851	\$890	\$917	\$148	18.6%
Wilmington	\$852	\$935	\$999	\$1,045	\$1,061	\$209	22.4%
Winston-Salem	\$889	\$950	\$1,000	\$1,072	\$1,085	\$196	20.6%
North Carolina Total	\$970	\$1,037	\$1,092	\$1,160	\$1,198	\$228	22.0%



Data in Table 6 also shows that these MSAs have had the largest wage increases (in total dollars) over the past four years. The Charlotte, Durham, and Raleigh MSAs have the highest average weekly wages due to the high number of well-paying service jobs in finance, research and development, professional services, and universities.

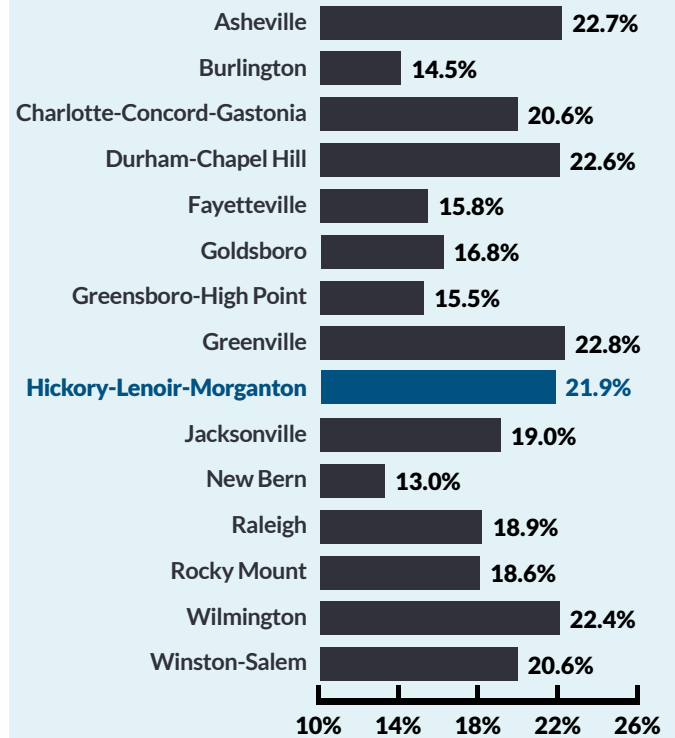
The Hickory MSA was one of seven NC MSAs with an average wage of less than \$1,000 a week as of the second quarter of 2023. The 22.6% Hickory MSA wage between the second quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2023 was the most among NC MSAs whose average weekly wage is less than \$1,000 as of the second quarter of 2023. In the second quarter of 2023, the Jacksonville MSA had the lowest average weekly wage (\$838), followed by the Goldsboro MSA (\$871) and the Rocky Mount MSA (\$917).

## Employment by Industry, Second Quarter 2019 to Second Quarter 2023

Displayed in Table 7 is the second quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2023 total employment by Hickory MSA County. Catawba is the county in the region that had more jobs in the second quarter of 2023 (90,379) than in the second quarter of 2019 (89,026). Caldwell County was close to the same number of jobs in the second quarter of 2023 (25,387) as in the second quarter of 2019 (25,477). Burke County had 387 fewer jobs in the second quarter of 2023 compared to the second quarter of 2019. Alexander County's total employment was about 5% less in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019.

**Figure 5. NC MSA Percentage Average Weekly Wage Growth, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023.



**Table 7. Hickory MSA County Employment, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**

(Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023.)

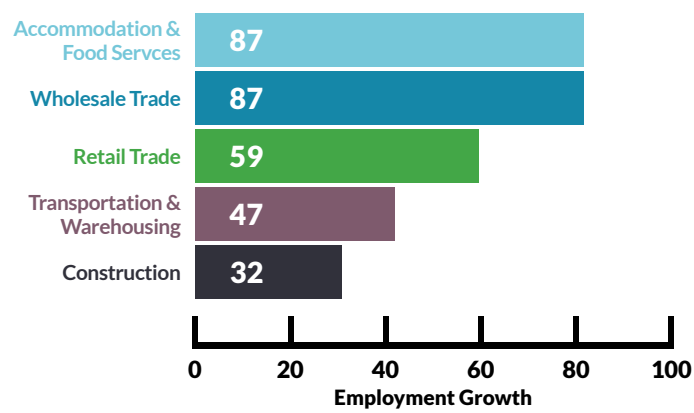
NC MSA	2nd Quarter 2019	2nd Quarter 2020	2nd Quarter 2021	2nd Quarter 2022	2nd Quarter 2023	Change 2019-23	% Change 2019-23
Alexander	9,378	7,955	9,122	9,529	8,989	-389	-4.9%
Burke	29,861	26,965	29,241	29,146	29,474	-387	-1.4%
Caldwell	25,477	24,063	24,242	25,206	25,387	-90	-0.4%
Catawba	89,026	78,208	85,684	89,842	90,379	1,353	1.7%
Hickory MSA	153,742	137,191	148,289	153,723	154,229	487	0.4%



Figure 6 on page 7 shows **Alexander County** employment gains by industry from the second quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2023. Tied for the biggest employment increase (87 workers) in Alexander between the second quarter of 2019 and 2023 were accommodation and food services and wholesale trade. The number of accommodation and food services workers grew from 631 in 2019 to 718 in 2023. An 87-job increase also occurred in wholesale trade (defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) as a method of purchasing goods in large quantities and reselling them in smaller quantities to organizations like businesses or other wholesalers). Alexander County wholesale trade employment grew from 110 in the second quarter of 2019 to 187 in 2023. Retail trade gained 59 workers from 2019 to 2023, followed by transportation and warehousing (47), and construction (32).

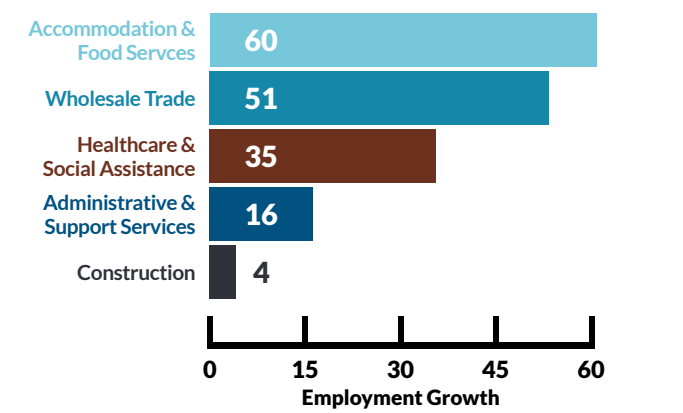
Several Alexander County manufacturing sectors gained employment over the last 12 months of available data (Figure 7, page 7). Sixty (60) jobs were added in accommodation and food services, while more than 50 positions were added in wholesale trade. Small employment increases took place in health care and social assistance (35), administrative and support services (defined by BLS as establishments engaged in activities that support the day-to-day operations of other organizations) (16), and professional, scientific, and technical services (4).

**Figure 6. Alexander County Employment Gains by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

**Figure 7. Alexander County Employment Gains by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2022 to 2nd Quarter 2023**

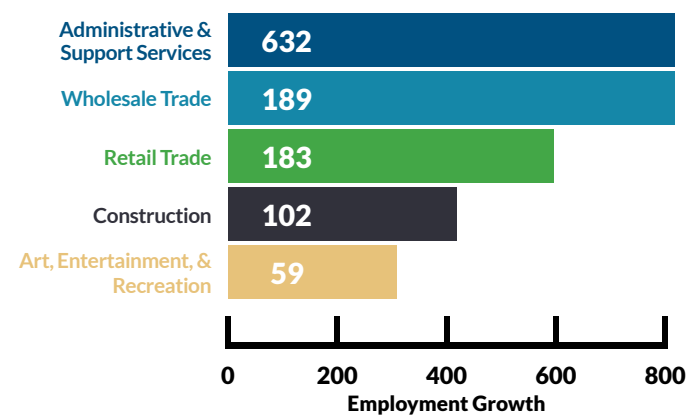


Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.



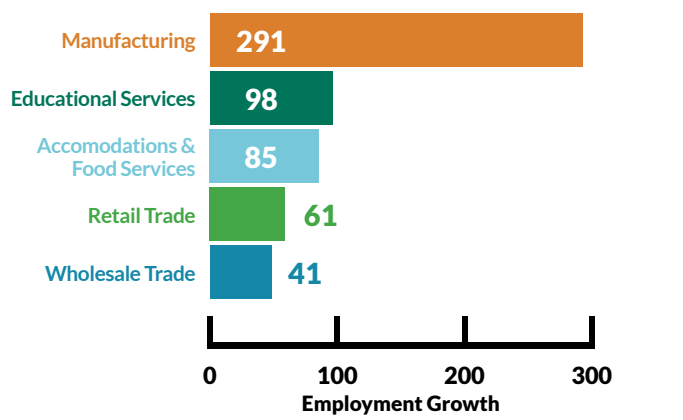
The biggest Burke County employment increase from the second quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2023 was in administrative and support services (Figure 8). Administrative and support services employment equaled 1,910 in the second quarter of 2023 compared to 1,278 in the second quarter of 2019. Significant employment growth has also occurred in wholesale trade (189 jobs), retail trade (183), and construction (102). The number of Burke County jobs in these industries as of the second quarter of 2023 totaled 3,064 in retail trade, 765 in construction, and 574 in wholesale trade.

**Figure 8. Burke County Employment Gains by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

**Figure 9. Burke County Employment Gains by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2022 to 2nd Quarter 2023**



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

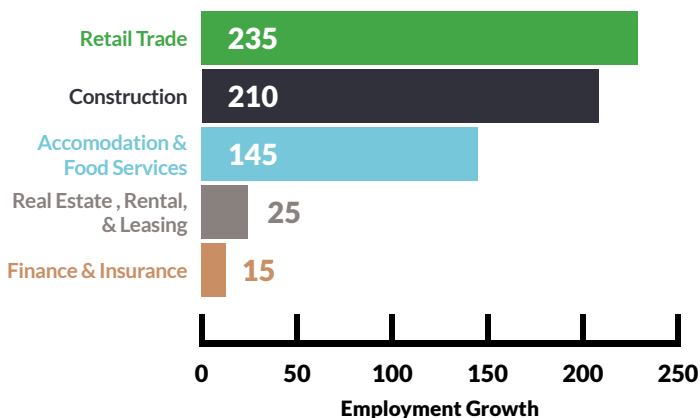
Over the past 12 months of available data (second quarter 2022 to 2023), Burke County has experienced significant growth in the manufacturing sector (291 jobs) (Figure 9). The number of manufacturing jobs in Burke grew from 7,036 in the second quarter of 2022 to 7,327 in the second quarter of 2023. In part, the new School of Science and Math in Morganton has led to an increase of 98 educational service jobs in Burke County since the second quarter of 2022. Accommodation and food service employment grew from 2,685 in the second quarter of 2022 to 2,770 in the second quarter of 2023.



**Caldwell County's** retail trade industry grew by 235 workers, from 2,704 in the second quarter of 2019 to 2,939 in the second quarter of 2023 (Figure 10, page 8). Significant growth also occurred in construction (due to new commercial and residential development), which increased by more than 200 jobs between the second quarter of 2019 (764) and the second quarter of 2023 (974). New restaurants in Lenoir and surrounding areas led to a net gain of 145 jobs in Caldwell County's accommodation and food services industry over the past four years.

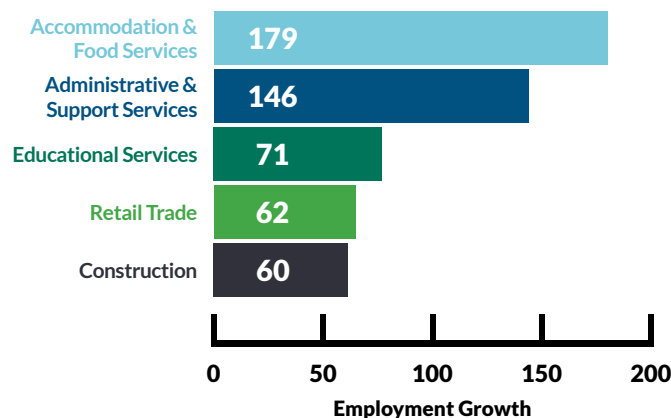
Two Caldwell County industries experienced a greater than 100 net employment increase from the second quarter of 2022 to the second quarter of 2023 (Figure 11). The number of accommodation and food services jobs grew from 1,933 in the second quarter of 2022 to 2,112 in 2023. Administrative and support services increased by 146 jobs to 1,186 in the second quarter of 2023. Between the second quarter of 2022 and the second quarter of 2023, Caldwell County educational services employment gained 71 positions; retail trade grew by 62 jobs, while construction added 60 employees.

**Figure 10. Caldwell County Employment Gains by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

**Figure 11. Caldwell County Employment Gains by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2022 to 2nd Quarter 2023**



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

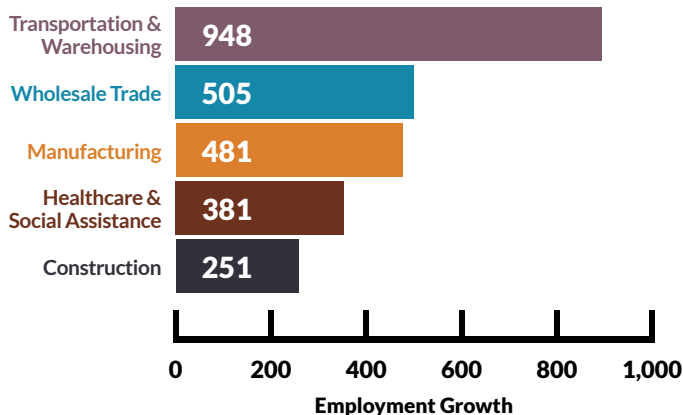


In **Catawba County**, the transportation and warehousing industry gained nearly 1,000 jobs between the second quarter of 2019 and 2023 (Figure 12, page 9). Transportation and warehousing employment in Catawba County equaled 5,715 as of the second quarter of 2023. Wholesale trade had the second-largest employment gain among major Catawba industry sectors over the past four years. Catawba County wholesale trade employment increased from 4,375 in the second quarter of 2019 to 4,880 in 2023. Manufacturing gained nearly 500 jobs, from 24,331 in the second quarter of 2019 to 24,812 in the second quarter of 2023. Since the second quarter of 2019, other Catawba County employment increases occurred in health care and social assistance (381), and construction (251).

The largest Catawba County employment growth between the second quarter of 2022 and the second quarter of 2023 was in health care and social assistance (578) (Figure 13, page 9). The number of jobs in health care and social assistance in Catawba County increased from 10,284 in the second quarter of 2022 to 10,862 in the second quarter of 2023. These results show a bounce back in healthcare employment after the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for additional healthcare workers as the “baby boomer generation” ages. Despite the employment growth seen in Figure 13, over 1,000 job openings in healthcare occupations across Catawba County remain.

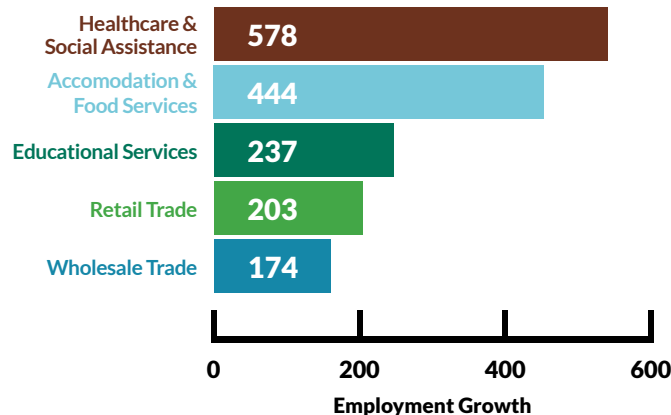
As new restaurants and hotels open across Catawba County, the number of accommodation and food services jobs has increased. The number of employees in accommodation and food services equaled 7,317 as of the second quarter of 2023, or 444 more than in the second quarter of 2022. More than 200 jobs have been added in Catawba County’s educational services and retail trade industries since the second quarter of 2022. Catawba County wholesale trade employment has gained 174 positions between the second quarter of 2022 and the second quarter of 2023.

**Figure 12. Catawba County Employment Gains by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2019 to 2nd Quarter 2023**



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.

**Figure 13. Catawba County Employment Gains by Industry, 2nd Quarter 2022 to 2nd Quarter 2023**



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2023.



## Summary

Hickory MSA employment equaled 154,229 in the second quarter of 2023 compared to 153,742 in the second quarter of 2019 (pre-pandemic). The Hickory MSA was one of 12 metro areas in North Carolina that experienced employment gains over the past four years. North Carolina's total employment gained 7.9% over the same period, partly due to rapid job growth in the Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh, and Wilmington MSAs. Nine of the 15 Hickory MSA industry sectors (with available data) had more employment in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019. Transportation and warehousing had the most employment growth (598 jobs) of any Hickory MSA industries over the past four years.

Average weekly wages grew in the Hickory MSA from \$783 in the second quarter of 2019 to \$960 in the second quarter of 2023. The 22.6% increase was higher than the national inflation rate from the second quarter of 2019 to 2023 (19.1%). All Hickory MSA industries with available data, except for information, had higher average weekly wages in the second quarter of 2023 than in the second quarter of 2019. The largest average weekly wage gains since the second quarter of 2019 occurred in professional, scientific, and technical services (\$318 per week increase), administrative and support services (\$225 a week increase), and real estate/rental/leasing (\$217 a week increase).

The Hickory MSA was one of seven metro areas in North Carolina that experienced greater than 20% average weekly wage growth since the second quarter of 2019. Still, the Hickory MSA is one of seven metro areas in the State with an average weekly wage of less than \$1,000 a week. The highest average weekly wage was in the Durham MSA (\$1,525), followed by the Charlotte MSA (\$1,341) and the Raleigh MSA (\$1,327).

## Hickory MSA Computer and Internet Use

Household computer and internet access are measures of economic vitality in a region. Since 2013, the American Community Survey (ACS) has asked households questions concerning computer and internet access. The latest results of the survey are now available for states and metropolitan statistical areas. This EIN article will examine computer and internet use characteristics in the Hickory MSA, including an analysis of 2017 and 2022 ACS results for the region.

Table 8 shows the types of computers in Hickory MSA Households based on 2017 and 2022 American Community Survey results. As of 2022, about 14 out of 15 households in the Hickory MSA had a computer. The number of households in the Hickory MSA with computers has increased by 19.1% (or 22,574) since 2017. American Community Results for 2017 indicated that more than 22,700 households in the Hickory MSA did not have a computer. By 2022, less than 10,500 households in the Hickory MSA did not have computer access.

**Table 8. Hickory MSA Households by Type of Computer, 2017-2022**

(Source: 2017 and 2022 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.)

Category	2017 Households	2017 % of Households	2022 Households	2022 % of Households	2017-2022 Change	2017-2022 % Change
Total Households	141,250	100.0	151,501	100.0	10,251	7.3%
With a computer	118,498	83.9	141,072	93.1	22,574	19.1%
Desktop or laptop	96,824	68.5	111,976	73.9	15,152	15.6%
Desktop or laptop alone	8,443	6.0	5,323	3.5	-3,120	-37.0%
Smartphone	103,852	73.5	132,272	87.3	28,420	27.4%
Smartphone alone	12,949	9.2	18,608	12.3	5,659	43.7%
Tablet or other portable wireless computer	80,225	56.8	86,445	57.1	6,220	7.8%
Tablet or other portable wireless computer alone	1,802	1.2	1,060	0.7	-742	-41.2%
Other computer	1,741	1.2	4,256	2.8	2,515	144.5%
Other computer alone	42	<0.1	127	0.1	85	202.4%
No Computer	22,752	16.1	10,429	6.9	-12,323	-54.2%

About three-quarters (73.9%) of Hickory MSA households in 2022 had a laptop or desktop, while 87.3% had smartphones and 57.1% had a tablet. In 2022, about 89% of Hickory MSA households had multiple computer types, including desktops, laptops, smartphones, and tablets. Results from the 2017 ACS showed that approximately 69% of all Hickory MSA households had multiple computer types.

Table 9 shows the Hickory MSA internet subscription types by household for 2017 and 2022. Over 87% of households (or seven out of eight households) in the Hickory MSA had a computer with one or more types of broadband internet subscriptions (cellular data, cable, fiber optic, DSL, or satellite) in 2022, compared to 78.5% with broadband internet subscription in 2017. Of the 132,572 households with broadband internet subscriptions, 17,844 households only had a cellular data plan (106,347 households in the Hickory MSA had a cellular data plan and at least one other broadband plan), and 8,615 had a satellite internet subscription. Over 109,000 households in the region had cable, fiber optic, or DSL. About 900 more Hickory MSA households had a computer without internet subscription in 2022 than in 2017.

**Table 9. Hickory MSA Households by Internet Subscription, 2017-2022**

(\*Includes cellular data, cable, fiber optic, DSL or satellite. Source: 2017 and 2022 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.)

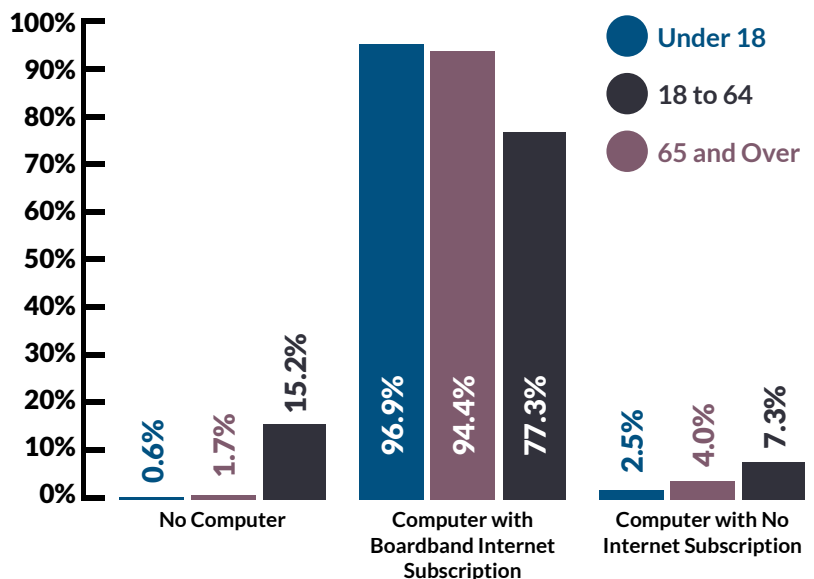
Type of Internet Subscription	2017 Households	2017 % of Households	2022 Households	2022 % of Households	2017-2022 Change	2017-2022 % Change
Has a Computer with Dial-Up Internet Subscription Only	157	0.1%	82	0.1%	-75	-47.8%
Has a Computer with Broadband of any Type*	110,806	78.5%	132,572	87.5%	21,766	19.6%
Has a Computer with No Internet Subscription	7,535	5.3%	8,418	5.5%	883	11.7%
No Computer	22,752	16.1%	10,429	6.9%	-12,323	-54.2%
<b>Total Households</b>	<b>141,250</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>151,501</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>10,251</b>	<b>7.3%</b>

## Computer Access by Age Groups, Ethnic Groups and Educational Attainment

The 2022 ACS tabulated responses concerning computer and internet access for three age groups: 1) under 18 years, 2) 18 to 64 years, and 3) 65 and over. Figure 14 reveals the analysis results for the Hickory MSA. Less than 1% of persons under 18 (416) had no computer access in their household, while 15.2% of persons age 65 and over (11,210) had no computer access. In 2017, 1.2% of children under age 18 and 28.0% of adults age 65 and over had no computer access. As of 2022, 8,483 (4.0%) persons 18 to 64 had a computer with no internet subscription compared to 12,052 (5.6%) of people age 18 to 64. Nearly the same percentage of persons under 18 (96.9%) and age 18 to 64 (94.4%) in 2022 had access to a computer with a broadband internet subscription. More than three-quarters of adults age 65 and over (77.3%) in 2022 had a computer with broadband internet subscription in their household. These results represent a significant change from 2017, when less than two-thirds of persons in the region age 65 and over (65.5%) had a computer with a broadband internet connection.

**Figure 14. Hickory MSA Computer Access by Age Group, 2022**

Source: 2022 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.



Computer and internet access data for the Hickory MSA are also available in the 2022 American Community Survey for African-Americans, Two or More Races (Mixed Race), Hispanics, and White, not Hispanics (Hickory MSA 2022 ACS data for American Indians, Asian-Americans were not available). For both White, not Hispanic and African-American Hickory MSA residents, 90.8% had at least one computer with broadband internet subscription in their households, while less than 5% had no computer access (Table 10). A similar percentage of Two or More Races

(3.5%) and Hispanics (3.2%) did not have computer access at their house. ACS results for the Two or More Races group in 2022 indicated that 93.9% had a computer with a broadband internet subscription, while about 93.1% of Hispanics had a computer with a broadband internet subscription.

**Table 10. Hickory MSA Population by Type of Internet Subscription by Ethnic Group, 2022**

(Source: 2022 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.)

Type of Internet Subscription	White, not Hispanic		African-American		Two or More Races		Hispanic	
	Pop.	% of Pop.	Pop.	% of Pop.	Pop.	% of Pop.	Pop.	% of Pop.
Has a Computer with Broadband Internet Subscription	13,227	4.7%	612	3.2	733	2.6%	1,137	3.7%
Has a Computer with No Internet Subscription	256,993	90.8%	17,409	90.8%	26,112	93.9%	28,840	93.1%
No Computer	12,841	4.5%	1,156	6.0%	969	3.5%	996	3.2%
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>283,176</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>19,177</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>27,814</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>30,973</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Another way to analyze ACS data is to examine computer access and internet subscription services by educational attainment level. Results seen in Table 11 clearly show the relationship between computer access and educational attainment levels. In 2022, over 15% (or more than one in six) of persons age 25 and older with less than a high school education attainment level did not have a computer in their household. In comparison, only 4.1% of Hickory MSA persons age 25 and older with a Bachelor's Degree or higher, and 5.3% of the population age 25 and older with an educational attainment level of high school graduate, some college or Associate Degree did not have a computer. As of 2022, over 95% of Hickory MSA residents age 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher had a computer with broadband internet subscription.

**Table 11. Hickory MSA Population Age 25 Years and Older by Type of Internet Subscription by Educational Attainment Level, 2022**

(Source: 2022 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.)

Type of Internet Subscription	Less than High School		High School Graduate, Some College, or Associates Degree		Bachelor's Degree or Higher	
	Pop.	% of Pop.	Pop.	% of Pop.	Pop.	% of Pop.
Has a Computer with Broadband Internet Subscription	24,761	76.3%	151,371	90.5%	57,737	95.1%
Has a Computer with No Internet Subscription	2,613	8.1%	6,994	4.2%	2,463	4.1%
No Computer	5,057	15.6%	8,829	5.3%	473	0.8%
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>32,431</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>167,260</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>60,722</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

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- Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSA Real Estate Trends
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