

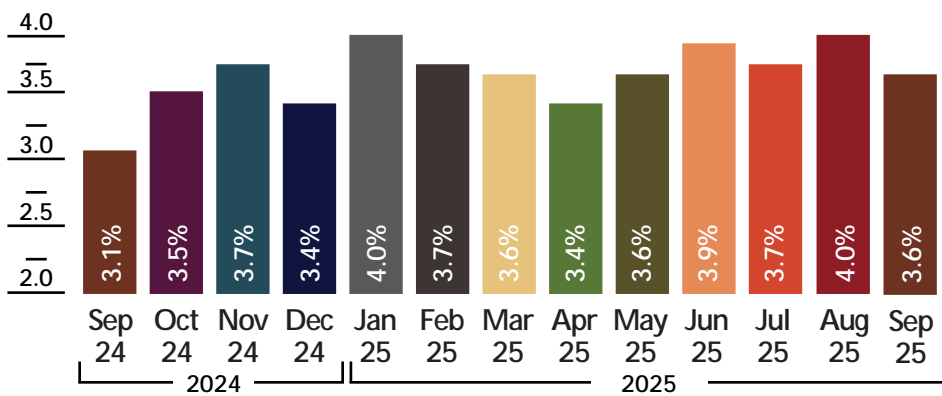
## Civilian Labor Force

The Hickory MSA recorded an unemployment rate of 3.1% in September 2024, rising to 3.6% by September 2025 (Figure 1). Over this period, the estimated number of employed residents declined from 165,295 to 162,989 (-2,306), and the civilian labor force decreased from 170,633 to 169,051 (-1,582).

As of September 2025, the Hickory MSA ranked tied for the fourth-lowest (tenth-highest) unemployment rate among North Carolina's metropolitan areas (Table 1). County-level unemployment rates for September 2025 were: Alexander 3.6%, Burke 3.7%, Caldwell 3.7%, and Catawba 3.5%.

**Figure 1. MSA Unemployment, Sept. 2024 - Sept. 2025**

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2025.



**Table 1.**

**MSA Unemployment Rate, Sept. 2025**

<i>Raleigh</i>	3.2%
<i>Durham-Chapel Hill</i>	3.4%
<i>Pinehurst-Southern Pines MSA</i>	3.5%
<b><i>Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton</i></b>	<b>3.6%</b>
<i>Asheville</i>	3.6%
<i>Wilmington</i>	3.6%
<i>Burlington</i>	3.7%
<i>Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia</i>	3.8%
<i>Goldsboro</i>	3.8%
<i>Jacksonville</i>	3.8%
<i>Winston-Salem</i>	3.8%
<i>Greenville</i>	3.9%
<i>Greensboro-High Point</i>	4.1%
<i>Fayetteville</i>	4.6%
<i>Rocky Mount</i>	5.1%

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2025.

## Hickory Metro Average Annual Wages

Average annual Hickory MSA wages grew from \$44,148 in 2020 to \$53,040 in 2024 (Figure 2). The percentage increase in Hickory MSA average yearly salaries between 2020 and 2024 (20.1%) was 1.3 percentage points lower than the US inflation rate from 2020 to 2024 (21.4%) (Table 2). The Hickory MSA's wage growth rate between 2020 and 2024 was lower than the NC average (22.2%), but was higher than the national average (18.1%). The Hickory Metro's average annual wage growth rate from 2023 to 2024 (3.3%) was higher than the US inflation rate (2.9%), but was lower than the NC salary growth rate (4.7%). Average wage growth in the Hickory MSA between 2023 and 2024 is due in part to job growth in higher-paying sectors, such as health care (539 workers) and construction (535 workers).

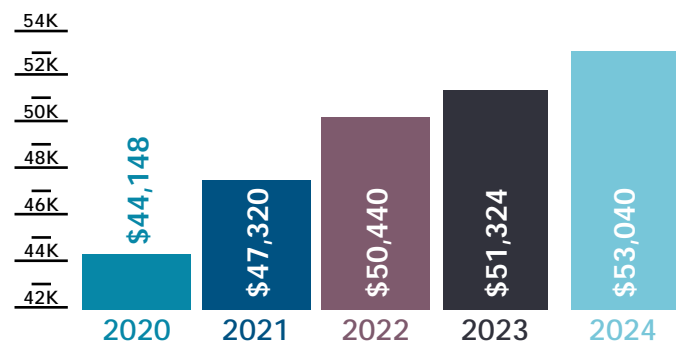
**Table 2. Change in Wages Versus Inflation, 2020-24**

Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Census and NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2025.

County	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2020-2024
US Inflation Rate	5.4%	8.5%	3.2%	2.9%	21.4%
Hickory MSA Wages	7.2%	6.5%	1.9%	3.3%	20.1%
NC Wages	5.9%	6.1%	3.9%	4.7%	22.2%
US Wages	5.6%	3.5%	3.4%	4.5%	18.1%

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

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2025.



## EIN Spotlight - Hickory MSA Job Flow (Commuting) Trends

The “OntheMap” application ([www.onthemap.ces.census.gov](http://www.onthemap.ces.census.gov)), provided through a partnership between the US Census Bureau and the Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership States, provides data showing “where people work and where working people live.” The software can generate reports on business characteristics, commuting patterns, employment, and residential area comparisons and workflows. This EIN Spotlight will focus on commuting patterns through 2023 (the most recent data available, released in December 2025) for each Hickory MSA County (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba) based on results from the “OntheMap” application.

OntheMap collects information on commuting patterns from a variety of data sources. Unemployment insurance wage records, which are provided by employers and maintained by the states, include data on employees/jobs for the private sector and state and local governments. Data for federal workers, however, is not included in the 2023 data.

The States assign employer locations as part of the Quarterly Census for Employment and Wages, while the Census Bureau identifies worker residence locations. Census Bureau staff then perform the final calculations and confidentiality protections.

Table 3 and Table 4 (located on page 3) begin the analysis of Hickory MSA job flow patterns. **Table 3** displays the number of jobs (job count) in the Hickory Metro in which 1) the job is in the same Hickory MSA County as the worker, 2) the job is in a Hickory MSA County, but the worker lives in a different Hickory MSA County, and 3) the job is located outside the Hickory MSA, but the worker lives in the Hickory MSA.

In 2023, Hickory MSA residents worked a total of 164,731 jobs, or 11,879 more jobs than 2020, and 21,203 more jobs than 2010. About 42.5% (or 5,046) of the Hickory MSA employment increase (11,879) between 2020 and 2023 were jobs in which the Hickory MSA resident lives in the same county the job is located in. Another 41.8% (or 4,965) of the Hickory MSA employment increase since 2020 was jobs in which the Hickory MSA resident travels outside the region for employment. The remaining 1,868 were jobs in which the Hickory MSA resident works in a different Hickory MSA County than the County he or she resides in. As of 2023, about one-in-five jobs (19.7%) worked by Hickory MSA residents were in a Hickory MSA County, but the worker lives in a different Hickory MSA County.

**Table 3. Hickory MSA Resident-County to Job-County Workflows (All Jobs\*), 2010-2023**

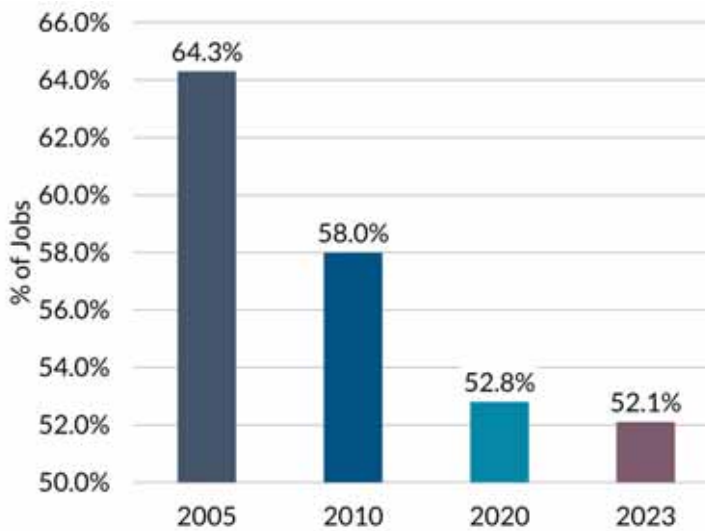
Job/Resident Location	2010 Job Count	% of Jobs	2020 Job Count	% of Jobs	2023 Job Count	% of Jobs	Change in Jobs 2020-23	Change in % of Jobs 2020-23
Reside in Hickory MSA County, job located in same county as worker's residence	83,273	58.0%	80,744	52.8%	85,790	52.1%	5,046	-0.7%
Reside in Hickory MSA County, job located in other Hickory MSA County	27,873	19.4%	30,554	20.0%	32,422	19.7%	1,868	-0.3%
Reside in Hickory MSA County, job located outside of Hickory MSA**	32,382	22.6%	41,554	27.2%	46,519	28.2%	4,965	1.0%
Total Job Count of Hickory MSA residents	143,528	100.0%	152,852	100.0%	164,731	100.0%	11,879	0.0%

\*Includes primary and secondary jobs. Workers can have only a primary job, or have a primary job plus secondary job(s).  
 \*\*Person lives inside the Hickory MSA, but job is located outside the Hickory MSA. To reduce error, job counts from outside the MSA residents was calculated by only adding the number of jobs, as reported by OntheMap, from counties within 75 miles of the Hickory MSA. The remaining jobs were considered as jobs located in the same county as worker's residence, since it is unlikely that workers will travel more than 75 miles for a job.  
 Source: OntheMap Application, US Census Bureau, 2025.

The percentage of jobs worked by Hickory MSA residents in which the job is in the same county as the worker's residence declined from 64.3% in 2005 to 52.1% in 2020 (Figure 3, page3), which indicates that many workers have increased the number of miles they are willing to commute over the past 18 years. As the percentage of jobs worked by Hickory MSA residents in the same county in which they live have decreased, the percentage of jobs worked by Hickory MSA residents outside of the region has been steadily growing (Figure 4, page 3). In 2023, more than one-quarter (28.2%) of jobs worked by

Hickory MSA residents were located outside the region. In comparison, just 16.0% of jobs worked by Hickory MSA residents in 2005 were located outside the region. There are several reasons behind these trends including residential growth in southeastern Catawba County (many of these residents take jobs in Iredell, Lincoln, and Mecklenburg Counties) and the need or desire to find jobs outside the region to match the skill sets of Hickory MSA residents.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Jobs Worked by Hickory MSA Residents in which the Job is Located in the Same County as the Worker's Residence** *Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.*



**Figure 4. Percentage of Jobs Worked by Hickory MSA Residents in which the job located outside of Hickory MSA** *Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.*

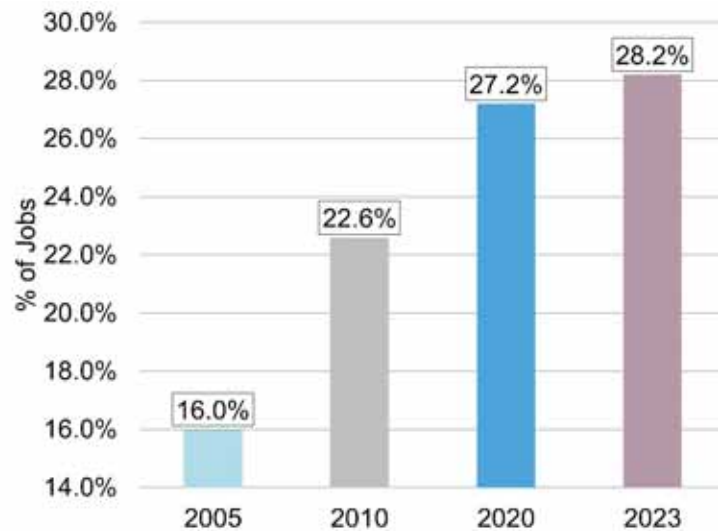


Table 4 reveals the number of Hickory MSA jobs in which 1) the worker lives in the same Hickory MSA County that the job is in, 2) the worker lives in a different Hickory MSA County than the job is in and 3) the worker resides outside of the Hickory MSA. The number of jobs in the Hickory MSA increased by 8,871 between 2010 and 2020 but grew by 13,713 to 158,748 jobs in 2023 as region recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 4. Hickory MSA Job-County to Resident-County Work Flows (All Jobs\*), 2010-2023**

Job/Resident Location	2010 Job Count	% of Jobs	2020 Job Count	% of Jobs	2023 Job Count	% of Jobs	Change in Jobs 2020-23	Change in % of Jobs 2020-23
Job in Hickory MSA County, worker resides in same county as job	83,273	61.1%	80,744	55.6%	85,790	54.1%	5,046	-1.5%
Job in Hickory MSA County, worker resides in other Hickory MSA County**	27,873	20.5%	30,554	21.1%	32,422	20.4%	1,868	-0.7%
Job in Hickory MSA County, worker resides outside of the Hickory MSA***	25,018	18.4%	33,737	23.3%	40,536	25.5%	6,799	2.2%
<b>Total Number of Jobs in Hickory MSA</b>	<b>136,164</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>145,035</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>158,748</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>13,713</b>	<b>0.0%</b>

\*Includes primary and secondary jobs. Workers can have only a primary job, or have a primary job plus secondary job(s).

\*\*Person lives inside the Hickory MSA, but job is located outside the Hickory MSA. To reduce error, job counts from outside the MSA residents was calculated by only adding the number of jobs, as reported by OntheMap, from counties within 75 miles of the Hickory MSA. The remaining jobs were considered as jobs located in the same county as worker's residence, since it is unlikely that workers will travel more than 75 miles for a job.

Source: OntheMap Application, US Census Bureau, 2025.

More than 54% of all Hickory MSA jobs were positions where the worker lived in the same county in which the job is located. In 2023, about 25.5% of Hickory MSA jobs were worked by residents that live outside the region compared to just 18.4% in 2010 and 23.3% in 2020.

Data from the OntheMap application indicates the region had 158,748 jobs in 2023 with 164,731 jobs worked by Hickory MSA residents, for a net outflow of 5,983 jobs. Back in 2005, the region had a net job inflow of 1,305, while in 2010 the Hickory MSA had a net job outflow of 7,364. The OntheMap data results indicate that the 2008-2010 economic recession caused the region to become a net job outflow region instead of a net job inflow region. Hickory MSA Net outflow was 1,834 less in 2023 than during 2020 (7,817 net outflow).

Results seen in Table 5 show that all four Hickory MSA counties had greater job inflows (occurs when a job is in the County, but the worker resides in a different County) in 2023 than in 2010. In Alexander County, job inflows more than doubled between 2010 (2,334) and 2023 (5,620). Total job inflows in Burke County rose from 8,240 in 2010 to 11,890 in 2023. Caldwell County job inflows equaled 11,208 in 2023 compared to 7,608 in 2010. Catawba County job inflows grew from 34,708 in 2010 to 44,240 in 2023. All four counties in the Hickory MSA had greater job inflows from both other Hickory MSA Counties and counties outside the Hickory MSA in 2023 than in 2010.

**Table 5. Hickory MSA Job Inflows by County, 2010-2023**

Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.

County	2010 Job Count				2023 Job Count			
	Alexander	Burke	Caldwell	Catawba	Alexander	Burke	Caldwell	Catawba
Job located in same county as worker	6,122	17,751	17,499	41,901	5,106	18,141	15,277	47,266
Job located in County, worker resides in other Hickory MSA County	1,872	4,856	5,243	15,902	2,941	5,674	5,802	18,005
Job located in County, worker resides outside the Hickory MSA	463	3,384	2,365	18,806	2,679	6,216	5,406	26,235
Total Jobs in County	8,457	25,991	25,107	76,609	10,726	30,031	26,485	91,506
Total Job inflows (+)	2,334	8,240	7,608	34,708	5,620	11,890	11,208	44,240

The number of job outflows (occurs when a resident has a job outside the county they live in) grew significantly in all four Hickory MSA Counties between 2010 and 2023 (Table 6). Catawba County experienced the largest job outflow increase (7,892), from 21,736 in 2010 to 29,628 in 2023. Job outflows in Caldwell County grew by 4,605 workers between 2010 (14,680) and 2023 (19,285). Burke County job outflows rose from 14,640 to 19,435 in 2023. Job outflows in Alexander County exceeded 10,100 in 2023.

**Table 6. Hickory MSA Job Outflows by County, 2010-2023**

Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.

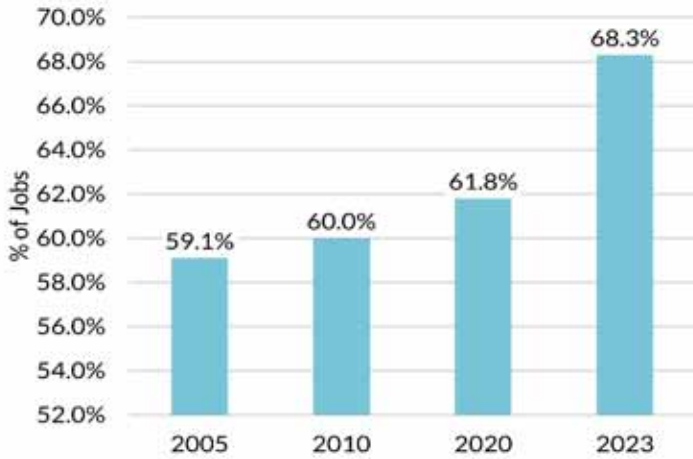
County	2010 Job Count				2023 Job Count			
	Alexander	Burke	Caldwell	Catawba	Alexander	Burke	Caldwell	Catawba
Job located in same county as worker	6,122	17,751	17,499	41,901	5,106	18,141	15,277	47,266
Job located in other Hickory MSA County, worker resides in County	5,251	7,948	8,722	5,952	5,325	9,301	10,625	7,171
Job located outside the Hickory MSA, worker resides in County	3,948	6,692	5,958	15,784	5,660	10,055	10,356	20,448
Total Jobs worked by County residents	15,321	32,391	32,179	63,637	16,091	37,497	36,258	74,885
Total job outflows (-)	-9,199	-14,640	-14,680	-21,736	-10,151	-19,435	-19,285	-29,628

Among the Hickory MSA Counties, Alexander has the highest percentage of residents taking jobs in other counties (Figure 5, page 5). As of 2023, almost seven out of ten workers that live in Alexander County work outside the County. In 2005, less than 40% of Burke County residents had employment in other counties (Figure 6). Slightly more than half of Burke County residents that worked in 2020 and 2023 were employed in other counties.

The 2023 percentage of Caldwell County residents working in other counties equaled 57.9% (Figure 7). Caldwell had the greatest percentage growth of residents working in other counties between 2010 and 2023, perhaps due to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic along with new job opportunities in nearby counties. The percentage of Catawba County residents taking jobs in other counties increased from 28.8% in 2005 to 38.4% in 2020 (Figure 8). This change was due to growth in Catawba County residents taking jobs in Iredell, Lincoln, and Mecklenburg Counties. Since 2020, however, the percentage of Catawba residents taking jobs in other counties has fallen to 36.9% due to strong job growth in the County.

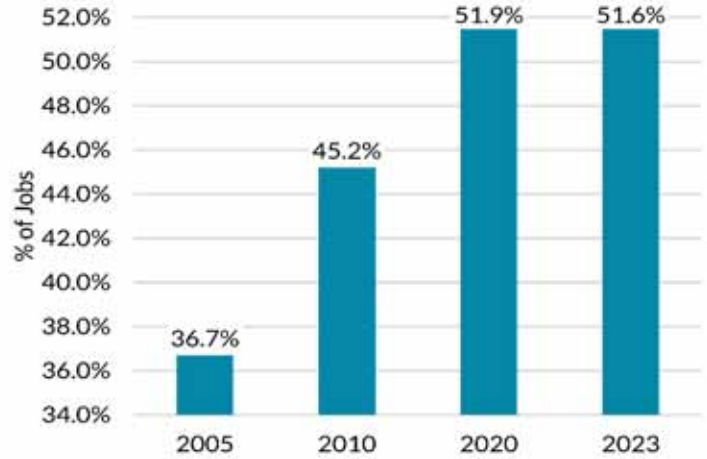
**Figure 5. Percentage of Alexander County Employed Residents that have Jobs in Other Counties**

Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.



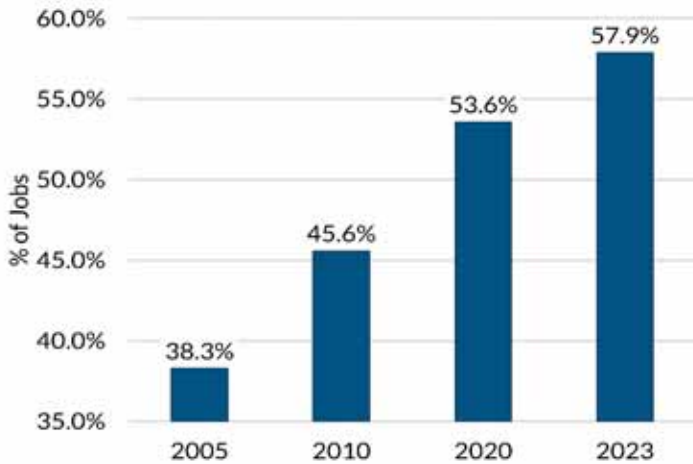
**Figure 6. Percentage of Burke County Employed Residents that have Jobs in Other Counties**

Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.



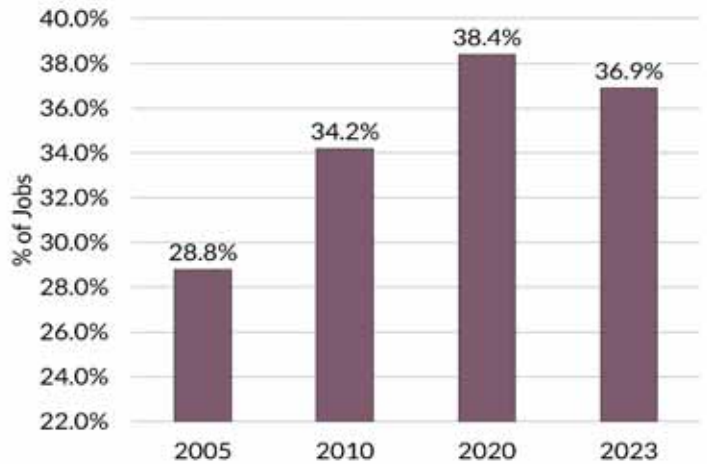
**Figure 7. Percentage of Caldwell County Employed Residents that have Jobs in Other Counties**

Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.



**Figure 8. Percentage of Catawba County Employed Residents that have Jobs in Other Counties**

Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.



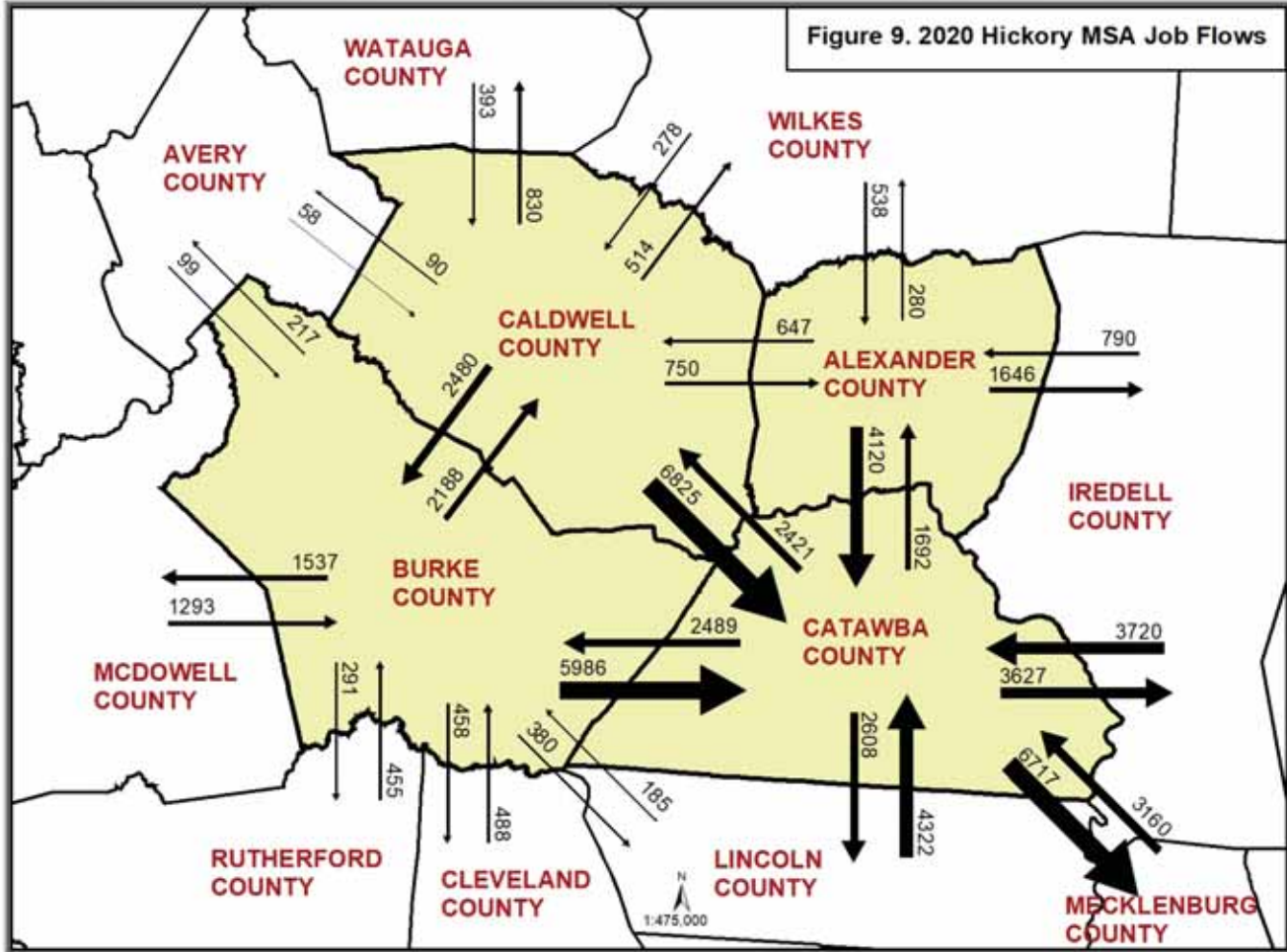
Net job flows for Hickory MSA counties between 2010 and 2023 are displayed in Table 7. Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell Counties had net job outflows in 2023, meaning that more county residents took jobs in other counties than in-county jobs worked by out-of-county residents. Catawba is a net job inflow County. Between 2010 and 2023, net job inflows in Catawba County grew from 12,972 to 14,612. Net job outflows in Burke County increased by more than 1,145 positions from 2010 to 2023. Growth in net job outflows (1,005) occurred in Burke County from 2010 to 2023, while net outflows have fallen by more than 2,300 jobs in Alexander County since 2010.

**Table 7. Hickory MSA County Level Job Flows (All Jobs\*), 2010-2023**

County	2010 Job Inflows (+)	2010 Job Outflows (-)	2010 Net Job Inflow (+) or Outflow (-)	2023 Job Inflows (+)	2023 Job Outflows (-)	2023 Net Job Inflow (+) or Outflow (-)	Chg. 2010-23 Job Inflows	Chg. 2010-23 Job Outflows	Chg. 2010-23 Net Job Inflow (+) or Outflow (-)
Alexander	2,334	-9,199	-6,865	5,620	-10,151	-4,531	3,206	-952	2,334
Burke	8,240	-14,640	-6,400	11,890	-19,435	-7,545	3,650	-4,795	-1,145
Caldwell	7,608	-14,680	-7,072	11,208	-19,285	-8,077	3,600	-4,605	-1,005
Catawba	34,708	-21,736	12,972	44,240	-29,628	14,612	9,532	-7,892	1,640

\*Includes primary and secondary jobs. Workers can have only a primary job, or have a primary job plus secondary job(s). Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.

The next section of the EIN Spotlight analyzes job flow changes since the COVID-19 pandemic. The map (Figure 9) below shows 2020 job flows among Hickory MSA counties and counties that border the region. The map (Figure 10) on page 7 displays 2023 job flows among Hickory MSA counties and counties that border the region. The thicker the arrows on the maps, the stronger the job inflow or outflow tie between those two counties.



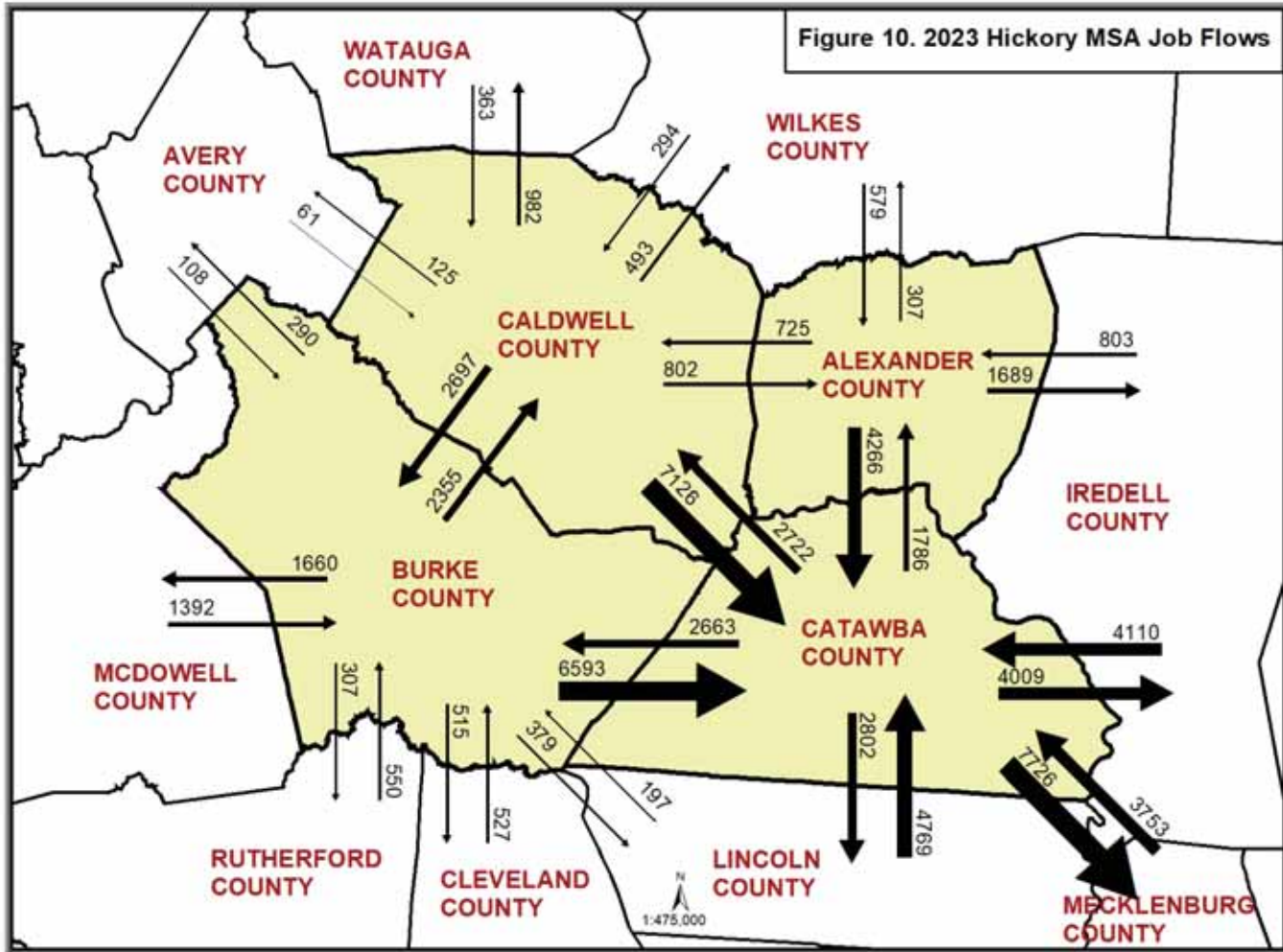
Catawba County remains Alexander County’s strongest job-flow partner. Inflows from Catawba grew from 1,692 in 2020 to 1,786 in 2023, accounting for more than 16% of Alexander’s workforce. In 2020, Caldwell and Iredell each supplied about 15% of Alexander’s workers, while Wilkes contributed 5.4%.

On the outflow side, most Alexander County residents commute to Catawba or Iredell. In 2023, over 26% worked in Catawba—an increase of 166 workers since 2020—and more than 10% worked in Iredell.

**Table 8. Alexander County Job Flows, 2020 to 2023** *Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.*

Residence County	Job Inflows				County Job is Located in	Job Outflows			
	2020 Jobs	% of Jobs	2023 Jobs	% of Jobs		2020 Jobs	% of Jobs	2023 Jobs	% of Jobs
Catawba	1,692	15.6%	1,786	16.7%	Catawba	4,120	26.8%	4,286	26.6%
Iredell	790	7.3%	803	7.5%	Iredell	1,646	10.7%	1,689	10.5%
Caldwell	750	6.9%	802	7.5%	Mecklenburg	795	5.2%	940	5.8%
Wilkes	538	5.0%	579	5.4%	Caldwell	647	4.2%	725	4.5%
Burke	473	4.4%	353	3.3%	Burke	304	2.0%	314	2.0%
Mecklenburg	157	1.4%	148	1.4%	Wilkes	280	1.8%	307	1.9%
Gaston	116	1.1%	130	1.2%	Buncombe	294	1.9%	293	1.8%
Surry	82	0.8%	92	0.9%	Forsyth	176	1.1%	178	1.1%
Other	1,029	9.5%	927	8.6%	Other	1,257	8.2%	1,419	8.8%

**Burke County** had more job inflows from Caldwell (2,697 or 9.0% of all jobs) in 2023 than any other county (Table 9, page 8). Caldwell, Catawba, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Cleveland, Rutherford, and Iredell Counties had more job inflows to Burke County in 2023 than in 2020. Except for Catawba, Caldwell, and McDowell Counties, all other counties that border Burke (Avery, Cleveland, Lincoln, and Rutherford) had job inflow rates to the County of less than 2.0% each.



During 2023, 17.6% of Burke County working residents traveled to Catawba for employment. The 6,593-job outflow to Catawba County from Burke County in 2023 is much higher than in 2020 (5,968) due to economic growth. The number of job outflows to Caldwell also grew between 2020 (2,188) and 2023 (2,355). About 6.0% of Burke County residents traveled to Mecklenburg County for work in 2023, while 4.4% were employed in McDowell County.

**Table 9. Burke County Job Flows, 2020 to 2023** *Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.*

Residence County	Job Inflows				County Job is Located in	Job Outflows			
	2020 Jobs	% of Jobs	2023 Jobs	% of Jobs		2020 Jobs	% of Jobs	2023 Jobs	% of Jobs
Caldwell	2,480	9.4%	2,697	9.0%	Catawba	5,968	17.4%	6,593	17.6%
Catawba	2,489	9.4%	2,663	8.9%	Caldwell	2,188	6.4%	2,355	6.3%
McDowell	1,293	4.9%	1,392	4.6%	Mecklenburg	1,873	5.5%	2,243	6.0%
Mecklenburg	433	1.6%	531	1.8%	McDowell	1,537	4.5%	1,660	4.4%
Cleveland	488	1.8%	527	1.8%	Iredell	698	2.0%	782	2.1%
Rutherford	455	1.7%	550	1.8%	Buncombe	760	2.2%	621	1.7%
Iredell	376	1.4%	407	1.4%	Gaston	459	1.3%	558	1.5%
Gaston	379	1.4%	378	1.3%	Cleveland	458	1.3%	515	1.4%
Others	2,846	10.7%	2,745	9.1%	Others	3,364	9.8%	4,108	11.0%

In 2023, **Caldwell County** had the highest number of job inflows from Catawba County (2,722) followed by Burke (2,355) and Alexander (725) (Table 10). Seven of the top eight job inflow counties (Catawba, Burke, Alexander, Mecklenburg, Iredell, Cleveland, and Gaston Counties) had more job inflows to Caldwell in 2023 compared to 2020. The number of job inflows from Catawba County to Caldwell County was 301 more in 2023 than in 2020. Job inflows from Burke to Caldwell grew by 167 workers between 2020 and 2023. About 10.3% of Caldwell County jobs are held by Catawba County residents, while 8.9% of Caldwell jobs are held by Burke County residents.

**Table 10. Caldwell County Job Flows, 2020 to 2023** *Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.*

Residence County	Job Inflows				County Job is Located in	Job Outflows			
	2020 Jobs	% of Jobs	2023 Jobs	% of Jobs		2020 Jobs	% of Jobs	2023 Jobs	% of Jobs
Catawba	2,421	10.1%	2,722	10.3%	Catawba	6,825	20.1%	7,126	19.7%
Burke	2,188	9.1%	2,355	8.9%	Burke	2,480	7.3%	2,697	7.4%
Alexander	647	2.7%	725	2.7%	Mecklenburg	1,817	5.3%	2,004	5.5%
Mecklenburg	572	2.4%	686	2.6%	Watauga	830	2.4%	982	2.7%
Iredell	343	1.4%	421	1.6%	Iredell	831	2.4%	824	2.3%
Cleveland	383	1.6%	385	1.5%	Alexander	750	2.2%	802	2.2%
Gaston	338	1.4%	365	1.4%	Buncombe	708	2.1%	623	1.7%
Watauga	393	1.6%	363	1.4%	Wilkes	514	1.5%	493	1.4%
Others	2,719	11.3%	3,186	12.0%	Others	2,642	7.8%	3,734	10.3%

About one out of five (19.7%) Caldwell County residents with employment work in Catawba County. The number of job outflows from Caldwell to Catawba County increased from 6,825 in 2020 to 7,126 in 2023 due to an increase in employment opportunities. About 7.4% of Caldwell County working residents (2,697) are employed in Burke County, while more than 5% (2,004) have jobs in Mecklenburg County.

As the job center for the region, Catawba County receives large numbers of job inflows from all neighboring counties (Table 11, page 9). Workers that live in either Burke or Caldwell Counties hold about one in seven Catawba County positions. In 2023, Caldwell County had the most job inflows with Catawba County (7,126) followed by Burke (6,593), Lincoln (4,769), and Alexander (4,286). Catawba County 2023 job inflows of more than 3,700 each occurred with Iredell and Mecklenburg Counties. Results in Table 11 also show that all of Catawba County's neighboring counties had more job inflows to Catawba in 2023 than in 2020 as economic conditions improved after the COVID-19 pandemic. The biggest increase was in the number of job inflows from Burke County, which grew from 5,968 in 2020 to 6,593 in 2023.

Catawba had more job outflows to Mecklenburg in 2020 than any other County. About 10.4%, or slightly more than one in ten Catawba County residents with a job are employed in Mecklenburg County. Job outflows from Catawba to Mecklenburg County, after growing from 5,046 in 2010 to 6,717 in 2020, increased to 7,726 in 2023 due to job gains in and around Charlotte. This growth should accelerate as the completion of the NC 16 By-Pass in Catawba and Lincoln Counties have made it easier to commute to the Charlotte area. In 2023, the job outflow from Catawba to Mecklenburg County (7,726) was more than the job inflow from Caldwell to Catawba County (7,126). Job outflows from Catawba County to Iredell County also increased substantially between 2020 (3,627) and 2023 (4,009).

**Table 11. Catawba County Job Flows, 2020 to 2023** *Source: OntheMap, US Census Bureau, 2025.*

Residence County	Job Inflows				County Job is Located in	Job Outflows			
	2020 Jobs	% of Jobs	2023 Jobs	% of Jobs		2020 Jobs	% of Jobs	2023 Jobs	% of Jobs
Caldwell	6,825	8.2%	7,126	7.8%	Mecklenburg	6,717	9.7%	7,726	10.4%
Burke	5,968	7.1%	6,593	7.2%	Iredell	3,627	5.2%	4,009	5.4%
Lincoln	4,322	5.2%	4,769	5.2%	Lincoln	2,608	3.8%	2,802	3.7%
Alexander	4,120	4.9%	4,286	4.7%	Caldwell	2,421	3.5%	2,722	3.6%
Iredell	3,720	4.4%	4,110	4.5%	Burke	2,489	3.6%	2,663	3.6%
Mecklenburg	3,160	3.8%	3,753	4.1%	Alexander	1,692	2.4%	1,786	2.4%
Gaston	2,660	3.2%	2,822	3.1%	Gaston	1,213	1.8%	1,459	1.9%
Cleveland	1,218	1.5%	1,368	1.5%	Forsyth	879	1.3%	1,078	1.4%
Others	8,362	10.0%	9,413	10.3%	Others	4,933	7.1%	5,383	7.2%

## Summary

Data from the US Census Bureau's OnTheMap application reveal that the Hickory MSA has more job outflows than job inflows. In 2023, the region had 158,748 jobs, while the number of jobs worked by Hickory MSA residents equaled 164,731. The results yield a net job outflow of 5,983. In comparison, the Hickory MSA had a net job inflow of 1,305 in 2005 and a net job outflow of 7,361 in 2010 and 7,547 in 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). The percentage of Hickory MSA employees that live and work in the same county declined from 64.3% in 2005 to 52.1% in 2023. This trend is due in part to residential growth in southeastern Catawba County (residents in southeastern Catawba County often have jobs located in Iredell, Lincoln, or Mecklenburg Counties), as well as changes in economic conditions over the past decade leading to more commuting between counties.

Within the Hickory MSA, Catawba County is the "job magnet" of the region, drawing more than 44,000 workers from surrounding counties. Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell Counties have more job outflows than job inflows. Greater than 65% of employed residents in Alexander County have jobs in other counties. More than 50% of employed residents in Burke and Caldwell Counties have jobs in other counties. The analysis also revealed significant growth in commuting patterns in the region since 2020, with increases in workflows between most counties located both inside and outside the Hickory MSA. The OnTheMap analysis, without knowing the full impact of telecommuting on the data, indicated that commuting, for at least part of the week, has returned, or has exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

## 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 (2024) are now available for states and metropolitan statistical areas. This EIN article will examine the characteristics of computer and internet use in the Hickory MSA, including an analysis of 2019 and 2024 ACS results for the region.

Table 12 shows the types of computers in Hickory MSA Households, based on results from the 2019 and 2024 American Community Survey. As of 2024, about 15 out of 16 households in the Hickory MSA (or 93% of all households) had a computer. The number of households with a computer in the Hickory MSA has increased 10.2% (or 13,209) since 2019. American Community Results for 2019 indicated that more than 16,400 households in the Hickory MSA did not have a computer. By 2024, less than 11,000 households in the Hickory MSA did not have computer access.

Results from the 2024 American Community Survey indicate that 110,642 households have at least one desktop or laptop computer. Close to three-quarters (71.9%) of Hickory MSA households in 2024 had at least one laptop or desktop, while 88.3% had smartphones and 57.3% had a tablet. In 2024, about 76% of Hickory MSA households had multiple computer types, including desktops, laptops, smartphones, and tablets. Results from the 2019 ACS showed that about 71% of all Hickory MSA households had multiple computer types. American Community Survey data revealed a slight increase in the percentage households with only a smartphone from 12.8% in 2019 to 13.5% in 2024.

**Table 12. Hickory MSA Households by Type of Computer, 2019-2024**

*Source: 2019 and 2024 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.*

Category	2019 Households	2019 % of Households	2024 Households	2024 % of Households	2019-2024 Change	2019-2024 % Change
Total Households	146,324	100.0	153,924	100.0	7,600	5.2%
With a computer	129,871	88.8	143,080	93.0	13,209	10.2%
Desktop or laptop	100,346	68.6	110,642	71.9	10,296	10.3%
Desktop or laptop alone	6,269	4.3	4,576	3.0	-1,693	-27.1%
Smartphone	119,132	81.4	135,971	88.3	16,839	14.1%
Smartphone alone	18,783	12.8	20,783	13.5	2,000	10.6%
Tablet or other portable wireless computer	80,199	54.8	88,151	57.3	7,952	9.9%
Tablet or other portable wireless computer alone	1,375	0.9	1,163	0.8	-212	-15.4%
Other computer	2,257	1.5	3,591	2.3	1,334	59.1%
Other computer alone	67	0.0	0	0.0	-67	-100.0%
No Computer	16,453	11.2	10,844	7.0	-5,609	-34.1%

**Table 13. Hickory MSA Households by Type of Computer, 2019-2024**

Type of Internet Subscription	2019 Households	2019 % of Households	2024 Households	2024 % of Households	Change 2019-2024	% Change 2019-2024
Has a Computer with Dial-Up Internet Subscription Only	76	0.1%	0	0.0%	-76	-100.0%
Has a Computer with Broadband of any Type*	122,109	83.5%	138,003	89.7%	15,894	13.1%
Has a Computer with No Internet Subscription	7,704	5.3%	5,077	3.3%	-2,627	-34.1%
No Computer	16,435	11.2%	10,844	7.0%	-5,609	-34.1%
<b>Total Households</b>	<b>146,324</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>153,924</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>7,600</b>	<b>5.2%</b>

\*Includes cellular data, cable, fiber optic, DSL, or satellite. Source: 2019 and 2024 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

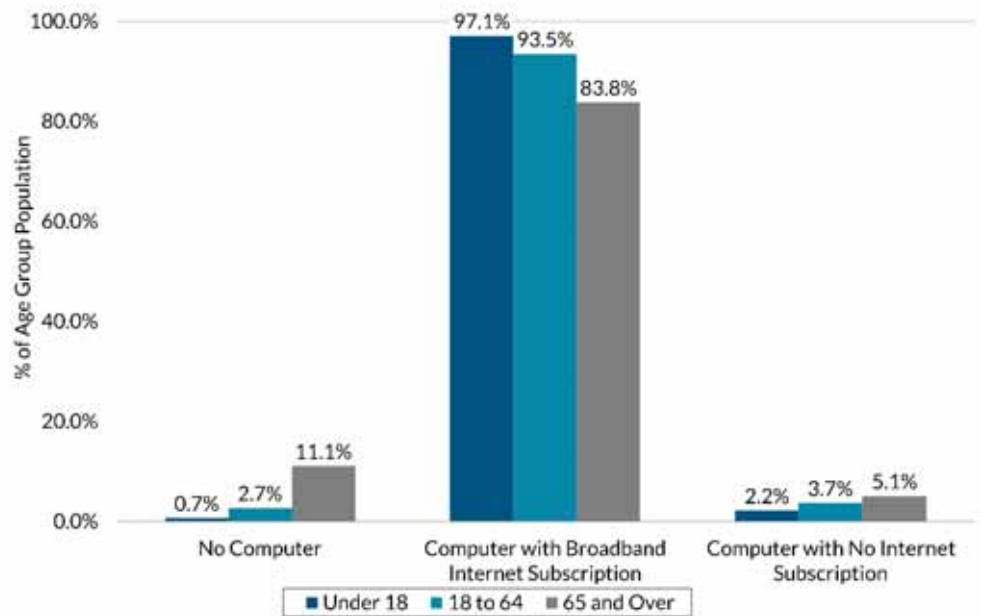
Hickory MSA internet subscription types by household for 2019 and 2024 are revealed in Table 13. Over 89% of households (or about nine out of ten households) in the Hickory MSA had a computer with one or more types of broadband internet subscriptions (cellular data, cable, fiber optic, DSL, or satellite) in 2024 compared to 83.5% with broadband internet subscription in 2019. Of the 138,003 households with broadband internet subscription, 17,863 households had a cellular data plan only (130,057 households in the Hickory MSA had a cellular data plan and at least one other broadband plan) and 7,755 had a satellite internet subscription. Over 113,000 households in the region had cable, fiber optic, or DSL. About 2,600 more Hickory MSA households had a computer with no internet subscription in 2019 than in 2024.

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

The 2024 ACS collected responses about computer and internet access for three age groups: 1) under 18 years, 2) 18 to 64 years and 3) 65 and over. The results of the analysis for the Hickory MSA are revealed in Figure 11. Less than 1% of persons under 18 (543) had no computer access in their household, while 11.1% of persons age 65 and over (8,518) had no computer access. In 2019, 1.4% of children under age 18 and 19.7% of adults age 65 and over had no computer access. As of 2024, 8,045 (3.7%) persons 18 to 64 years old had a computer with no internet subscription compared to 8,405 (5.1%) of people age 65 and over. Nearly the same percentage of persons under 18 (97.1%) and age 18 to 64 (93.5%) in 2024 had access to a computer with a broadband internet subscription. More than four-fifths of adults age 65 and over (83.3%) in 2024 had a computer with broadband internet subscription in their household. These results represent a significant change from 2019, when less than three-quarters of persons in the region age 65 and over (65.5%) had a computer with broadband internet connection.

**Figure 11. Hickory MSA Computer Access by Age Group, 2024**

Source: 2024 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.



Computer and internet access data for the Hickory MSA are also available in the 2024 American Community Survey for African-Americans, and White, not Hispanics (Hickory MSA 2024 ACS data for American Indians and Asian-Americans was not available). Less than 5% of White, not Hispanics and less than 7% of African-Americans had no computer access (Table 14). About 92% of White, not Hispanics and about 86% of African-Americans had a computer with broadband internet subscription. The latest ACS data available (2022) indicated that a similar percentage of Two or More Races (2.6%) and Hispanics (3.7%) did not have computer access at their house. ACS results for the Two or More Races group 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 14. Hickory MSA Population by Type of Internet Subscription by Ethnic Group, 2024**

County	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	260,876	92.1%	17,785	86.4%	26,112	93.9%	28,840	93.1%
Has a Computer with No Internet Subscription	10,103	3.6%	1,387	6.7%	733	2.6%	1,137	3.7%
No Computer	12,282	4.3%	1,423	6.9%	969	3.5%	996	3.2%
Total Population	283,261	100.0%	20,595	100.0%	27,814	100.0%	30,973	100.0%

Source: 2024 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau. Due to lack of available data, 2022 ACS results were used for the Two or More Races and Hispanic groups.

Another way to analyze ACS data is to examine computer access and internet subscription service by educational attainment levels. Results seen in Table 15 clearly show the relationship between computer access and educational attainment levels. In 2024, close to 14% (or about than one in six) of persons age 25 and older with less than high school education attainment level did not have a computer in their household. In comparison, only 2.3% of Hickory MSA persons age 25 and older with a Bachelor Degree or higher and 5.2% 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 2024, over 96% of Hickory MSA residents age 25 and older with a Bachelor's Degree or higher had a computer with broadband internet subscription.

**Table 15. Hickory MSA Population Age 25 Years and Older by Type of Internet Subscription by Educational Attainment Level, 2024**

County	Less than High School		High School Graduate, Some College or Associate's Degree		Bachelor's Degree or Higher	
	Pop.	% of Pop.	Pop.	% of Pop.	Pop.	% of Pop.
Has a Computer with Broadband Internet Subscription	23,261	81.8%	151,822	90.0%	64,507	96.4%
Has a Computer with No Internet Subscription	1,303	4.6%	8,130	4.8%	853	1.3%
No Computer	3,873	13.6%	8,764	5.2%	1,564	2.3%
Total Population	28,437	100.0%	168,716	100.0%	66,924	100.0%

Source: 2024 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

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