

Guide to Understanding this Study

This CPCC study identifies jobs in demand and top occupations – as defined by different, assigned measures – for Mecklenburg County, N.C., and the Charlotte MSA (Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia NC-SC). Its focus is middle-skill and middle-wage occupations. The federal Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) codes⁵ are used throughout the report for occupations and groups of occupations.

Middle-skill or skilled jobs are those that generally require some significant education and training beyond high school, but less than a four-year degree. Attainment includes an associate’s degree or some particular vocational training or certification. The federal clearinghouse O*NET identifies these as Job Zone Three, meaning medium preparation.⁶

A North Carolina database also assigns education levels by occupations and ranks jobs as Star Jobs.⁷ Stars are awarded based on wages, job openings and growth and may be filtered by state economic regions. The more stars awarded the higher the career prospect.

Note that many middle-skill jobs may have differing educational requirements, and that workers with an associate’s degree who earn technical credentials may have higher wages than those with bachelor’s degrees.ⁱ For this study, **middle-wage jobs** are considered those with an average annual wage between \$35,000 and \$70,000 – a figure derived for this study using the living wage calculation for a single adult living in the MSA determined to be \$11.36 per hour wage.⁸

The main report of this study (Section 2) presents an overview and research highlights by first providing employment data in All Industries. It features middle-skill jobs and indications on regional career opportunity by factors, including:

⁵ Appendix and Notes: SOC Major Groups

⁶ Appendix and Notes, “O*NET Job Zones.”

⁷ Appendix and Notes, “North Carolina Star Jobs.”

⁸ Appendix and Notes: Living Wage Calculation.

WHAT IS A MIDDLE-SKILL JOB?

A middle-skill job or skilled job is one requiring more than a high school diploma and less than a four-year college degree. This covers many occupations with a range in salary and training required to earn credentials. They are often thought of as between service and agricultural jobs and the more highly educated professional or technical and managerial categories. The scope includes jobs in:

- office/admin support
- healthcare
- sales
- construction
- transportation/material moving
- production and installation, maintenance and repair

In North Carolina, 55 percent of all jobs in 2015 were middle-skilled with strong demand, while only 44 percent of workers are trained at middle-skill level. (See Appendix and Notes: National Skills Coalition.)

O*NET lists occupations in five broad zones based on typical training and education requirements. For this study, middle-skill occupations are the 251 occupations listed in Job Zone Three and that require “medium preparation.” (See Appendix and Notes.)

- number of jobs available,
- projected demand,
- number of job postings,
- and fastest-growing occupations.

Facts about Wages and Middle-Paying Jobs

The middle-wage job range used in this report - \$35,000 to \$70,000 – is based on taking a rounded figure of 50 percent greater than the minimum “living wage” (reported as \$11.36/hr.) for a single adult. The upper figure is twice the lower threshold.

(\$11.36 x .50)	x	2080 (annual hrs. for full-time work)	=	\$17.04
\$17.04	x	2080	=	\$35,443
\$35,000 (rounded)	x	2	=	\$70,000

Other facts:

- Middle wages here include the range (\$45,000 to \$69,000) used in studies by NCSU’s Michael Walden. Widely reported by media, Walden found that while the number of middle-class jobs rose by 6 percent nationwide between 2001 and 2015, there were 5 percent fewer in North Carolina. In Charlotte, middle-paying jobs have grown by less than 2% since 2001 while the number of low-paying jobs expanded by almost 25%. (See Appendix and Notes: Additional Reading, Item 4.)
- The NC hourly living wage for an adult is \$10.96/hr. (\$22,797 annual wages)
- The Charlotte Chamber tracks three wage groups.* For 2017Q1:

High – more than \$75,000 (21.5%) (NC=12%)
 Middle - \$50-75,000 (16%) (NC=17%)
 Low – less than \$50,000 (61.1%) (NC=71%)

*Charlotte Chamber: “The ‘Missing Middle’ in N.C. and Charlotte’s Growth Story” by Chuck McShane. July 6, 2017.