



Labor Market Assessment: Respiratory Care Therapists

December 2024

Introduction

This report profiles Respiratory Therapists in California and the 12-County Bay Region for a proposed bachelor’s degree program.

This report provides student outcomes data on employment and earnings for Respiratory Care/Therapy programs (TOP 1210.00) in the Bay Region. It is recommended that this data be reviewed to better understand how these students’ outcomes compare to those in similar programs at other colleges in the region.

This report evaluates labor market needs and workforce alignment for the proposed bachelor’s degree program called “Respiratory Care Therapists.” In the sections to follow, the report leverages state and regional data to provide insights into educational and occupational requirements, employment trends, salary differentials, hourly earnings, and degree alignment for entry-level positions as a Respiratory Therapist.

There is an increase in demand for Respiratory Therapists at both state and regional levels. In the Bay Region, this occupation typically offers a wage of \$50 per hour for entry-level positions – above the living wage for the region of \$27 per hour. There also appears to be an "undersupply" of Respiratory Care/Therapy graduates compared to the demand for this occupation. The projected annual gap in the Bay Region is approximately 75 students.

Occupation under Review

Respiratory Therapists (29-1126): Assess, treat, and care for patients with breathing disorders. Assume primary responsibility for all respiratory care modalities, including the supervision of respiratory therapy technicians. Initiate and conduct therapeutic procedures; maintain patient records; and select, assemble, check, and operate equipment.

Occupational Characteristics	
Typical Entry-Level Educational	Associate degree
Work Experience Required	None
Typical On-the-Job Training	None
Existing Workforce (% of individuals age 25+ with an associate degree, certificate, or some postsecondary coursework as their highest level of education attainment)	62%

Note. Students are required to complete clinical hours, on-the-job training, to earn their degree.

State Level Analysis

Under existing law, to work as a Respiratory Therapist in California requires a licensure from the Respiratory Care Board (www.rcb.ca.gov). To qualify for state licensure, applicants must have an associate degree in Respiratory Care/Therapy from an accredited institution or university.

There is a growing consensus that the licensing requirement will advance from an associate degree to a bachelor's degree beginning in 2030 for new entrants to the profession. While the typical entry-level education is currently listed as an associate degree, this report will provide information from job postings to show how this occupation is evolving in the labor market in advance of any formal change to the license requirements.

Table 1 shows the number of job postings that list licenses and certifications. In California, this occupation requires a Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) and Respiratory Care Practitioner (RCP) license, which can be obtained through the Respiratory Care Board of California. Approximately 48% of the job postings listed the RCP license, and many also included preferences for additional certifications.

Table 1. Educational Licenses or Certifications for Respiratory Therapists in California

Licenses or Certifications	# of Job Postings	% of Total
Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) Certification	2,238	53%
Respiratory Care Practitioner (RCP) License	2,026	48%
Basic Life Support (BLS) Certification	1,822	43%
Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS) Certification	1,610	38%
Neonatal Resuscitation Program Certification (NRP)	1,221	29%
Certified Respiratory Therapist (CRT)	964	23%

Source: Lightcast 2024.4; "Job Posting Analytics." Nov 2023 - Oct. 2024

Employers' job postings often include educational preferences, and these preferences frequently correlate with higher wages for candidates with advanced degrees. During a twelve-month period, 32% of employers included an educational requirement or preference in their job posting, while 68% did not.

Of those postings that did contain educational requirement information, Table 2 shows that wages levels increase with more education which highlights the value of pursuing bachelor's degrees, particularly in fields where advanced education is preferred but not mandated for entry. This correlation underscores the economic benefits to students for continuing their education, supporting the case for expanding bachelor's degree programs in Respiratory Care/Therapy to align with employer demands and enhance workforce readiness.

Table 2. Educational Level and Entry Level Wages for Respiratory Therapists in California

Education Level	# of Job Postings	% of Total	25% Hourly Advertised Wage
High school or GED	441	19%	\$41
Associate degree	909	40%	\$41
Bachelor's degree	768	34%	\$45
Master's degree	143	6%	\$45

Education Level	# of Job Postings	% of Total	25% Hourly Advertised Wage
PhD. or professional degree	17	1%	\$59

Source: Lightcast 2024.4; "Job Posting Analytics." Nov. 2023 - Oct. 2024

Note: 68% of records have been excluded because they do not include a degree level. As a result, the chart above may not be representative of the full sample.

Table 3 indicates that most job postings (93%) only require between 0 and 3 years of work experience. The remaining job postings required 4 or more years of work experience.

Table 3. Work Experience Requirement for Respiratory Therapists in California

Working Experience Required	Job Postings	% of Total
0 - 1 Years	1,128	41%
2 - 3 Years	1,421	52%
4 - 6 Years	161	6%
7 - 9 Years	18	1%
10+ Years	7	<1%

Source: Lightcast 2024.4; "Job Posting Analytics." Nov. 2023 - Oct. 2024

Note: 36% of records have been excluded because they do not include experience level. As a result, the chart above may not be representative of the full sample.

Table 4 shows that respiratory therapist employment in California is substantial in size. In 2023, there were 15,384 positions, and the field is projected to grow statewide by 15% over the next 10 years. Additionally, entry-level to experienced occupational wages range from \$40-\$49 per hour (25th and median wages, respectively).

Table 4. Employment Outlook for Respiratory Therapists in California

Occupation	2023 Jobs	2033 Jobs	10-yr Change	10-yr % Change	Annual Openings	Annual Replacement Rate	25% Hourly Wage	50% Hourly Wage
Respiratory Therapists	15,384	17,695	2,311	15%	1,055	5%	\$40	\$49
Total	15,384	17,695	2,311	15%	1,055	5%	\$40	\$49

Source: Lightcast 2024.4

Regional Level Analysis

Employment Historical Trend for Respiratory Therapists

Table 5 shows the number of professionals employed as respiratory therapists over the past decade increased across California and within the Bay Area. California employers added close to 600 new respiratory therapist jobs, an average of 60 per year, with the Bay Area accounting for more than half of the new jobs (57%) or approximately 340 jobs. The high concentration of new jobs in the Bay Area translated to 11% growth, compared to 4% for the state.

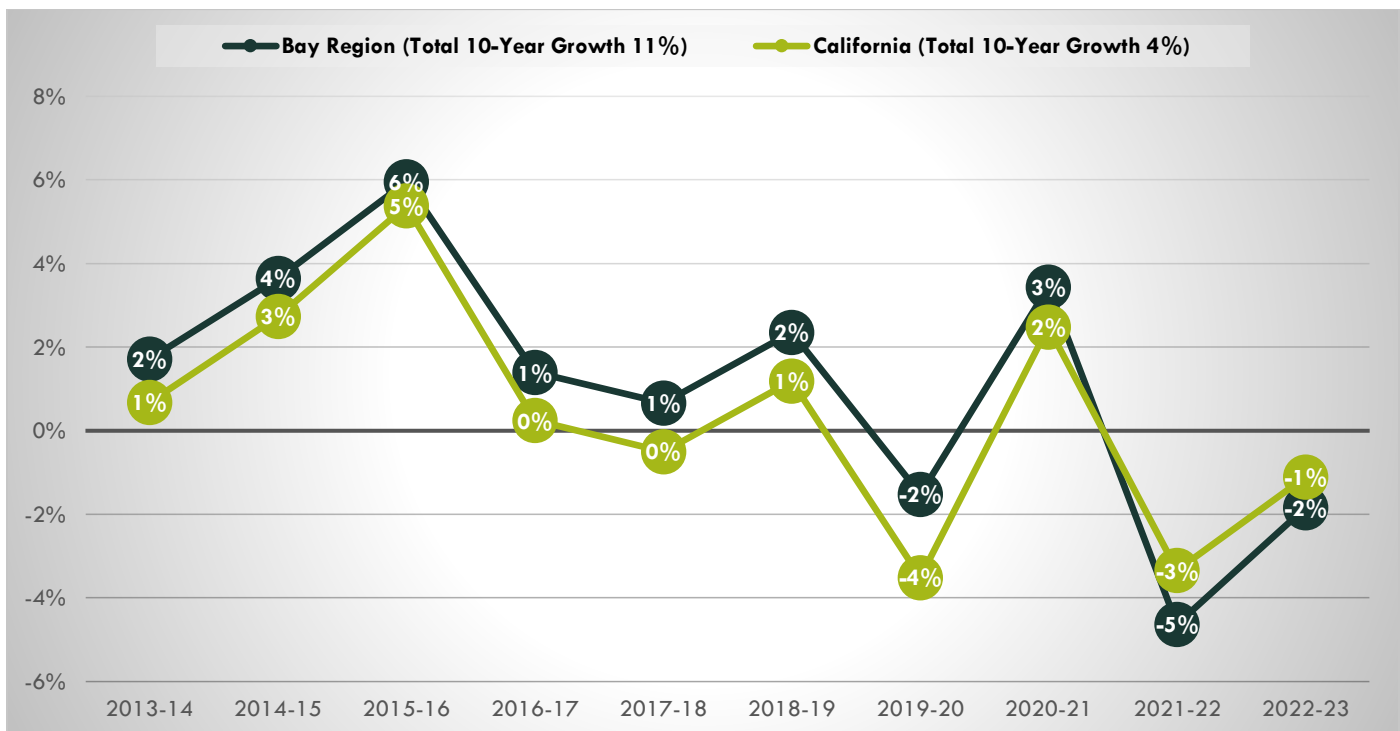
Table 5. Historical 10-Year Employment Trend for Respiratory Therapists in the Bay Region vs. California

Occupation	Area	2013 Jobs	2023 Jobs	10-yr Change	10-yr% Change
Respiratory Therapists	Bay Region	2,995	3,333	338	11%
	California	14,791	15,384	592	4%

Source: Lightcast 2024.4

Figure 1 also illustrates the historical employment trend for respiratory therapists at both the state and regional levels. It shows that the Bay Region has a higher growth rate compared to the state overall each year, though both demonstrate strong and healthy growth trends.

Figure 1. Historical 10 Year to Year Present Change in Employment for Respiratory Therapists in the Bay Region vs. California



Source: Lightcast 2024.4. Year 2013-Year 2023

Occupational Demand

Table 6 highlights that employment for respiratory therapists in the Bay Region is small, with 3,333 jobs in 2023 but with a projected growth rate of 15% through 2033. The occupation also offers competitive wages, with an entry-level hourly rate of \$50 and a median hourly wage of \$62. All of this reflects the field's robust demand and earning potential in the region.

Table 6. Employment Outlook for Respiratory Therapists in the Bay Region

Occupation	2023 Jobs	2033 Jobs	10-yr Change	10-yr % Change	Annual Openings	Annual Replacement	25% Hourly Wage	50% Hourly Wage
Respiratory Therapists	3,333	3,847	515	15%	232	5%	\$50	\$62
Total	3,333	3,847	515	15%	232	5%	\$50	\$62

Occupation	2023 Jobs	2033 Jobs	10-yr Change	10-yr % Change	Annual Openings	Annual Replacement	25% Hourly Wage	50% Hourly Wage
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Source: Lightcast 2024.4

The Bay Region includes: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Benito, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano and Sonoma counties

Educational Supply

There are nine community colleges in the state with Respiratory Care/Therapy bachelor's degree programs, with three programs operating already in the Bay Region.

- Bay Region: Foothill College, Hartnell College, and Skyline College
- South Central Coast Region: Antelope Valley College
- Inland Empire/Desert Region: Crafton Hills College
- Los Angeles Region: East Los Angeles College, El Camino College, Los Angeles Valley College
- Central Valley/Mother Lode Region: Modesto Junior College

There are five community colleges in the Bay Region that issue an average of 116 awards annually (certificates, associate degrees, or bachelor's degrees) in TOP 1210.00 - Respiratory Care/Therapy, based on data from the last three years (2021-2023). Foothill College and Hartnell College are launching their recently approved bachelor's degree programs in the 2024-2025 academic year – planning on a maximum enrollment capacity of 30 students. As a result, Table 7 estimates 24 graduates from these programs annually (an estimated 80% success rate). The North Bay Sub-Region, where Napa Valley Community College is located, has only one community college that has issued an average of 20 awards annually under this TOP code over the past three years. However, none of these awards were bachelor's degrees.

There are no other educational institutions in the Bay Region issuing awards on CIP 51.0908- Respiratory Care Therapy/Therapist.

Table 7. Community College Awards on TOP 1210.00 - Respiratory Care/Therapy in Bay Region

College	Subregion	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Total
Foothill	Silicon Valley	23	24*	47
Hartnell	SC-Monterey	17	24*	41
Napa	North Bay	20	0	20
Ohlone	East Bay	18	0	18
Skyline	Mid-Peninsula	18	13	31
Total	-	96	61	157

Source: Data Mart

Note: The annual average for awards is 2020-21 to 2022-23. The asterisk means they are estimated numbers.

Gap Analysis

Based on the data included in this report, there is a labor market gap in the Bay Region with 232 annual openings for the Respiratory Therapists and 157 annual (3-year average) awards for an annual undersupply of 75 students. If approved and implemented, Napa Valley College's program could potentially reduce the undersupply from 68 to 44, assuming similar award rates to those of Foothill and Hartnell Community Colleges.

Living Wage

The Self-Sufficiency Standard Calculator estimates the income needed for working families to meet basic living standards, considering family composition, children's ages, and regional costs. It calculates a living wage as the hourly income required for full-time workers to cover basic needs, factoring in family budgets, taxes, and local cost variations across counties, MSAs, and states.

Table 8 shows Respiratory Therapists (29-1126), the 25th percentile hourly wage is \$50, which meets the living wage requirements for an adult with no dependents, an adult with one school-aged child, and an adult with a teenager. However, the starting wage does not quite meet the hourly living wage requirements for an adult with an infant or an adult with a preschool-aged child. On the other hand, the median wage for Respiratory Therapists is \$62, which meets the living wage requirements for all scenarios involving one adult and one child, regardless of the child's age.

Table 8. Hourly Living Wage compared to Entry- and Mid-Level Wages in Bay Region

Occupation	Hourly Living Wage						
	25% Hourly Wage	50% Hourly Wage	Adult Only	Adult + Infant	Adult +Preschool	Adult + School-age	Adult + teenage
Respiratory Therapists	\$50	\$62	\$27	\$56	\$53	\$46	\$36

Source: Lightcast 2024.4

The Self-Sufficiency (SS) Standard for California (2024) Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington.

Methodology

The occupation for this report was identified by Napa Valley College. Labor demand data is sourced from Lightcast occupation and job postings data. Educational supply and student outcomes data is retrieved from multiple sources, including CCCCO Data Mart.

Sources

Data and information referenced in this report were compiled from the following public and proprietary sources:

- Lightcast [URL: lightcast.io].
- California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) [DataMart](#).
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System ([IPEDS](#)).
- U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Occupational Information Network ([O*NET](#)).
- Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington. 2024 [California Dataset](#).

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