

Optical Occupations

Labor Market Analysis: San Diego County

April 2026

Summary

NEW PROGRAM RECOMMENDATION?	EVIDENCE OF A SUPPLY GAP?	AT OR ABOVE THE LIVING WAGE?	EXPECTED LEVEL(S) OF EDUCATION
 Proceed with Caution	 	 	☐ Doctorate Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Associate Degree ☐ Some College or Certificate ☒ HS Diploma or Equivalent ☐ Less Than a HS Diploma ☐ Apprenticeship
SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM MODIFICATION?	NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS THAT PROVIDE TRAINING	NUMBER OF ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS	
 	LOW 	MEDIUM 	

The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) developed this brief to assist the region's community colleges with strategic planning and program development. *Optical Occupations* include "Ophthalmic Laboratory Technicians" and "Opticians, Dispensing." According to available data, *Optical Occupations* in San Diego County have a labor market demand of 66 annual job openings (while average demand for a single occupation in San Diego County is 289 annual job openings), and no institutions supply awards for these occupations. On average, entry-level wages are below the living wage. This brief recommends proceeding with caution when developing a new program and supports a program modification because 1) there is a supply gap; 2) a medium number of annual job openings exist for these occupations; 3) no institution in San Diego County supply awards for these occupations. However, entry-level and median wages are below the living wage. Additionally, colleges should note that the expected level of education is a high school diploma or equivalent.

Introduction

This report provides labor market information in San Diego County for the following occupational codes in the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)¹ system:

- **Ophthalmic Laboratory Technicians** (SOC 51-9083): Cut, grind, and polish eyeglasses, contact lenses, or other precision optical elements. Assemble and mount lenses into frames or process other optical elements. Includes precision lens polishers or grinders, centerer-edgers, and lens mounters.
- **Opticians, Dispensing** (SOC 29-2081): Design, measure, fit, and adapt lenses and frames for client according to written optical prescription or specification. Assist client with inserting, removing, and caring for contact lenses. Assist client with selecting frames. Measure customer for size of eyeglasses and coordinate frames with facial and eye measurements and optical prescription. Prepare work order for optical laboratory containing instructions for grinding and mounting lenses in frames. Verify exactness of finished lens spectacles. Adjust frame and lens position to fit client. May shape or reshape frames. Includes contact lens opticians.

For the purpose of this report, these occupations are referred to as *Optical Occupations*.

¹ The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system is used by federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating or disseminating data. <https://www.bls.gov/soc/>.

Projected Occupational Demand

Between 2024 and 2029, businesses in San Diego County will need to hire **66** employees annually to fill new jobs and backfill jobs due to attrition caused by turnover and retirement, for example (Exhibit 1). Most of this labor market demand comes from Opticians, Dispensing, which is projected to have the most annual job openings with **55** openings each year between 2024 and 2029.

Exhibit 1: Number of Jobs for Optical Occupations (2024-2029)²

Occupational Title	2024 Jobs	2029 Jobs	2024 - 2029 Net Jobs Change	2024 - 2029 % Net Jobs Change	Annual Job Openings (Demand)
Opticians, Dispensing	610	638	28	5%	55
Ophthalmic Laboratory Technicians	90	91	1	1%	11
Total	700	729	29	4%	66

Earnings

According to traditional³ labor market information (LMI), entry-level hourly earnings for *Optical Occupations* range from **\$18.37** to **\$23.88** (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2: Hourly Earnings for Optical Occupations in San Diego County⁴

Occupational Title	Entry-Level Hourly Earnings (25 th Percentile)	Median Hourly Earnings	Experienced Hourly Earnings (75 th Percentile)
Opticians, Dispensing	\$23.88	\$24.50	\$35.07
Ophthalmic Laboratory Technicians	\$18.37	\$20.55	\$23.61

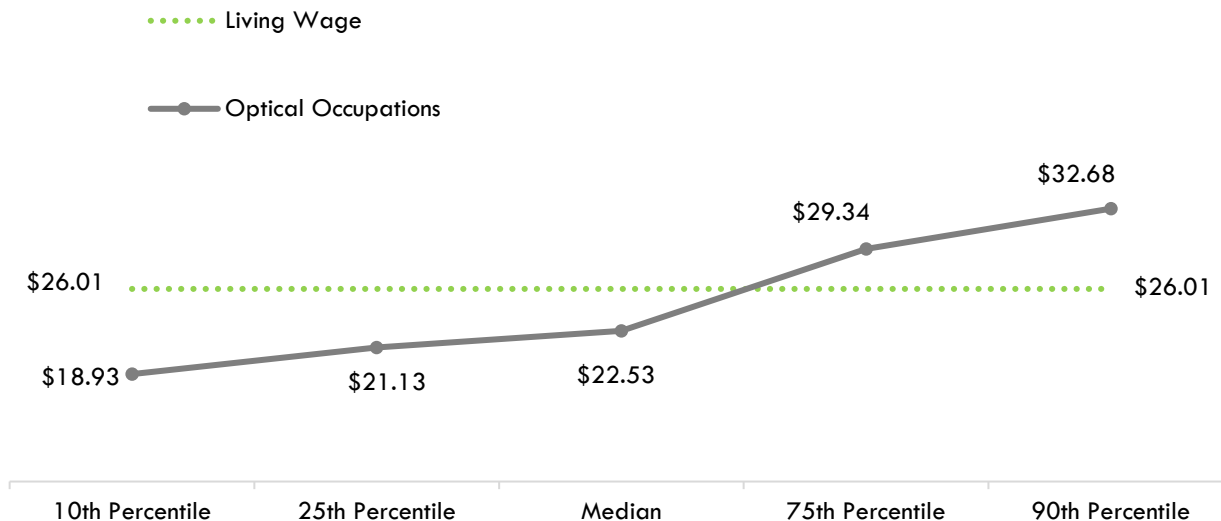
² Lightcast 2026.01; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

³ Traditional LMI is generally historical data captured by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) or the California Employment Development Department (EDD). It does not account for recent technological, economic, or legislative changes that may affect labor market demand and wages.

⁴ Lightcast 2026.01; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

On average, the entry-level hourly earnings for employed *Optical Occupations* are \$21.13—or \$43,940 annual salary⁵; this is less than the living wage for a single adult in San Diego County, which is \$26.01 per hour (Exhibit 3).⁶

Exhibit 3: Hourly Earnings⁷ for *Optical Occupations* in San Diego County⁸



⁵ Annualized salaries assume a full-time position with 2,080 hours. Multiplying the hourly wage with 2,080 yields the annual salary.

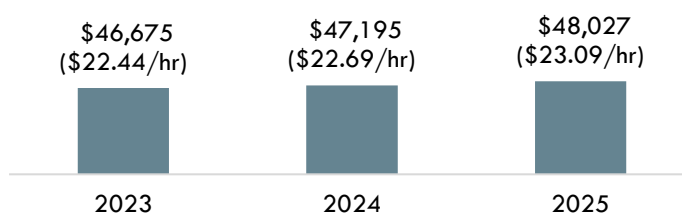
⁶ Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington. (2024). The self-sufficiency standard for California 2024. selfsufficiencystandard.org/California.

⁷ 10th and 25th percentiles could be considered entry-level wages, and 75th and 90th percentiles could be considered experienced wages for individuals who may have been in the occupation longer, received more training than others, etc.

⁸ Lightcast 2026.01; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

In online job postings, employers also advertised between \$22 to \$23 per hour between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025 for *Optical Occupations* in San Diego County (Exhibit 4).⁹ This suggests that employer-advertised wages in online job postings were slightly above the entry-level wages reported in traditional labor market information and increased slightly over the period analyzed.

**Exhibit 4: Entry-Level Advertised Salaries in Online Job Postings for
Optical Occupations in San Diego County (2023-2025)**



Expected Level of Education

According to traditional LMI (data reported to EDD and BLS), *Optical Occupations* have a national educational attainment of a [high school diploma or equivalent](#) (Exhibit 5).¹⁰

Exhibit 5: National Educational Attainment for *Optical Occupations*¹¹

Occupational Title	Typical Entry-Level Education
Opticians, Dispensing	High school diploma or equivalent
Ophthalmic Laboratory Technicians	High school diploma or equivalent

⁹ Lightcast 2026.01; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

¹⁰ Lightcast 2026.01; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

¹¹ Lightcast 2026.01; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

Similarly, online job postings between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025 in San Diego County had a [high school or GED](#) as the most requested educational requirement for *Optical Occupations*; however, employers also expected the following certifications (Exhibit 6).¹²

**Exhibit 6: Top Certifications for *Optical Occupations*
in San Diego County in Online Job Postings (2023-2025)**¹³

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. American Board Of Opticianry (ABO) Certified | 6. Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS) Certification |
| 2. ABO-NCLE Certified | 7. Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) |
| 3. Certified Ophthalmic Assistant | 8. Basic Life Support (BLS) Certification |
| 4. Certified Ophthalmic Technician | 9. Certified Ophthalmic Medical Technologist |
| 5. Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Certification | |

Educational Supply

Educational supply for an occupation can be estimated by analyzing the number of awards in related Taxonomy of Programs (TOP) or Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes. There are [two](#) TOP codes and [two](#) CIP codes related to *Optical Occupations* (Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7: Related TOP and CIP Codes for *Optical Occupations*¹⁴

TOP or CIP Code	TOP or CIP Program Title
TOP 0961.00	Optics
TOP 1219.00	Optical Technology
CIP 51.1006	Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology/Technician
CIP 51.1801	Opticianry/Ophthalmic Dispensing Optician

¹² Lightcast 2026.01; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

¹³ Lightcast 2026.01; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

¹⁴ This brief uses a conservative estimate of program supply and only calculates awards from the TOP code listed in Exhibit 7.

According to TOP and CIP data, no community college or non-community college institution supplies the region with awards for these occupations (Exhibit 8).

**Exhibit 8: Number of Awards (Certificates and Degrees) Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions
(Program Year 2021-22 Through Program Year 2024-25 Average)**

TOP6 or CIP Code	TOP6 or CIP Program Title	3-Yr Annual Average CC Awards (PY22-23 to PY24-25)	Other Educational Institutions 3-Yr Annual Average Awards (PY21-22 to PY23-24)	Total Average Supply (PY21-22 to PY24-25)
0961.00	Optics	0	0	0
1219.00	Optical Technology	0	0	0
51.1006	Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology/Technician	0	0	0
51.1801	Opticianry/Ophthalmic Dispensing Optician	0	0	0
Total				0

Demand vs. Supply

Comparing labor demand with labor supply¹⁵ suggests that there is a supply gap for these occupations in San Diego County, with 66 annual openings and zero awards. Comparatively, there are 992 annual openings in California and 89 awards, suggesting that there is a supply gap across the state (Exhibit 9).¹⁶

Exhibit 9: Labor Demand (Annual Openings) Compared with Labor Supply (Average Annual Awards)

	Demand (Annual Openings)	Supply (Annual Awards)	Supply Gap or Oversupply
San Diego	66	0	66
California	992	89	903

Please note: This is a basic analysis of supply and demand of labor. The data does not include workers currently in the labor force who could fill these positions or workers who are not captured by publicly available data. This data should be used to discuss the potential gaps or oversupply of workers; however, it should not be the only basis for determining whether or not a program should be developed.

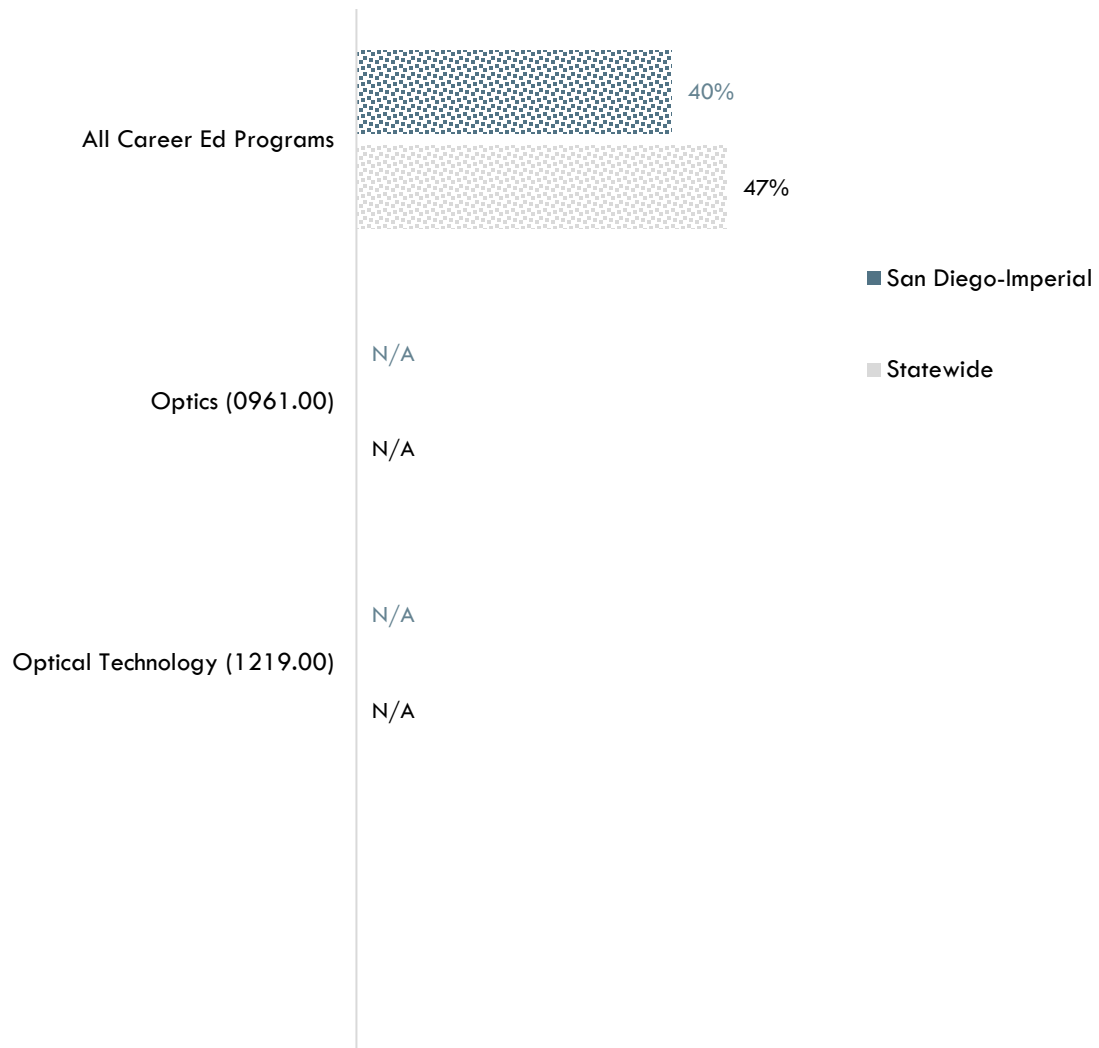
¹⁵ Labor supply can be found from two different sources: Lightcast or the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office MIS Data Mart. Lightcast uses CIP codes while MIS uses TOP codes. Different coding systems result in differences in the supply numbers.

¹⁶ "Supply and Demand," Centers of Excellence Student Outcomes, coecc.net/our-resources.

Student Outcomes and Regional Comparisons

According to the California Community Colleges DataVista, there was insufficient data regarding students in the San Diego-Imperial region and statewide who earned a living wage after completing a program related to *Optical Occupations*. In terms of Career Education programs in general, 47% of students earned a living wage across the state (Exhibit 10).¹⁷

Exhibit 10: Percentage of Students Who Earned a Living Wage by Program, PY2022-23¹⁸



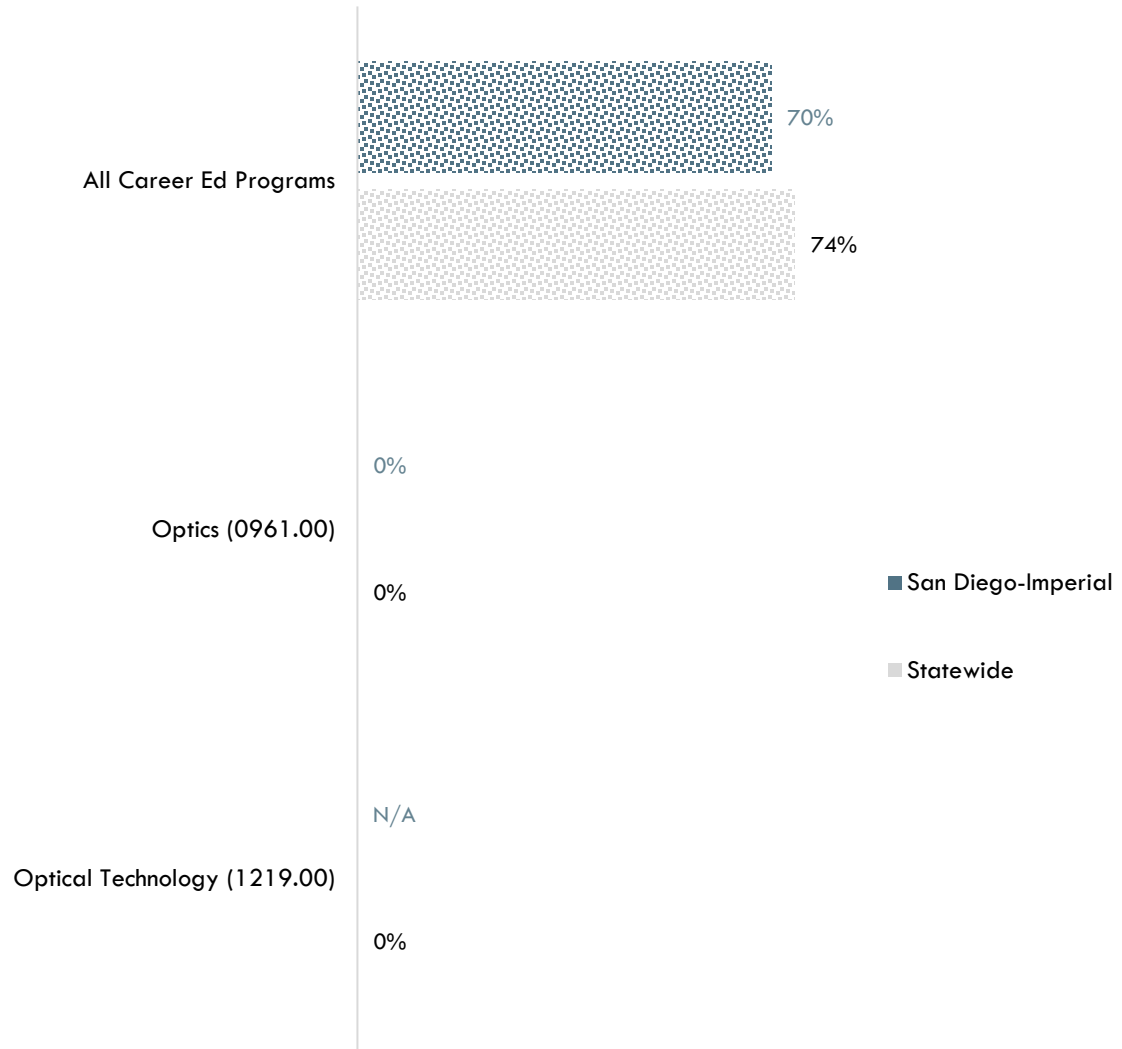
"N/A" indicates insufficient data

¹⁷ DataVista, California Community Colleges, datavista.cccco.edu/.

¹⁸ Most recent year with available data is Program Year 2022-23. Among completers and skills builders who exited, the percentage of students who attained a living wage.

According to the California Community Colleges DataVista, there was insufficient data regarding students in the San Diego-Imperial region and statewide who obtained a job closely related to their field of study after completing a program related to *Optical Occupations*. In terms of Career Education programs in general, 74% of students obtained a job closely related to their field of study in Career Education programs in general across the state (Exhibit 11).¹⁹

Exhibit 11: Percentage of Students in a Job Closely Related to Field of Study by Program, PY2021-22²⁰



"N/A" indicates insufficient data

¹⁹ DataVista, California Community Colleges, datavista.cccco.edu/.

²⁰ Most recent year with available data is Program Year 2021-22. Percentage of Students in a Job Closely Related to Field of Study: Among students who responded to the CTEOS, the percentage reporting employment in the same or similar field as their program of study.

Employers

Between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025, the top employers in San Diego County for *Optical Occupations* included EssilorLuxottica, LensCrafters, Walmart, Total Vision, and Acuity Eye Group based on online job postings (Exhibit 12).

Exhibit 12: Top Employers for Optical Occupations in San Diego County²¹

Top Employers	
• EssilorLuxottica • LensCrafters • Walmart • Total Vision • Acuity Eye Group	• Stephen J Moffett Od A Professional Corporation • Warby Parker • National Vision • Kaiser Permanente • Sam's Club

Skills

Exhibit 13 lists the top specialized, soft, and software skills that appeared in online job postings between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025.

Exhibit 13: Top Skills for Optical Occupations in San Diego County²²

Specialized Skills	Soft Skills	Software Skills
• Medical Prescription • Merchandising • Contact Lenses • Product Knowledge • General Mathematics • Optometry • Key Performance Indicators • Patient Assistance • Selling Techniques • Cash Register • Patient Education And Counseling • Inventory Management • Setting Appointments • Retail Management • Invoicing	• Customer Service • Sales • Detail Oriented • Calculators • Communication • Multitasking • Problem Solving • Self-Motivation • Interpersonal Communications • Management • Prioritization • Proactivity • Time Management • Organizational Skills • Scheduling	• Project Management Software • Spreadsheets • Inventory Management System • Payroll Systems • Microsoft Excel • R • eClinicalWorks • Microsoft Word • Microsoft Outlook • Productivity Software • Epic EMR • Google Sheets • Dashboard • Google Docs • Google Drive • Mono

²¹ Lightcast 2026.01; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

²² Lightcast 2026.01; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

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