

Air Traffic Controllers

Labor Market Analysis: San Diego County

August 2026

Summary

NEW PROGRAM RECOMMENDATION?	EVIDENCE OF A SUPPLY GAP?	AT OR ABOVE THE LIVING WAGE?	EXPECTED LEVEL OF EDUCATION
 Proceed	 	 	☐ 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 	LOW 	

The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) developed this brief to assist the region's community colleges with strategic planning and program development. According to available data, *Air Traffic Controllers* in San Diego County have a labor market demand of 84 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 this occupation. Entry-level wages are above the living wage. This brief recommends that the colleges proceed with developing a new program for this occupation and supports a program modification because 1) there is a supply gap; 2) entry-level wages are above the living wage; and 3) the expected education is an associate degree.

Introduction

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

Air Traffic Controllers (SOC 53-2011): Control air traffic on and within the vicinity of airports and regulate the movement of air traffic between altitude sectors and control centers according to established procedures and policies. Sample reported job titles include:

- Air Traffic Control Specialists
- Subject Matter Experts
- Student Trainers
- Traffic Control Specialists
- Supervisory Air Traffic Control Specialists/Operations Supervisors
- Systems Engineers/Subject Matter Experts
- Aircraft Production Controllers
- Air Traffic Control Specialists Support Specialist
- Air Traffic Control Operators
- Tower Consultants

Projected Occupational Demand

Between 2025 and 2030, *Air Traffic Controllers* are projected to increase by 24 net jobs or three percent (Exhibit 1). Employers in San Diego County will need to hire 84 workers annually to fill new jobs and backfill jobs due to attrition caused by turnover and retirement, for example.²

Exhibit 1: Number of Jobs for Air Traffic Controllers (2025-2030)

Occupational Title	2025 Jobs	2030 Jobs	2025-2030 Net Jobs Change	2025-2030 % Jobs Change	Annual Job Openings (Demand)
Air Traffic Controllers	883	907	24	3%	84

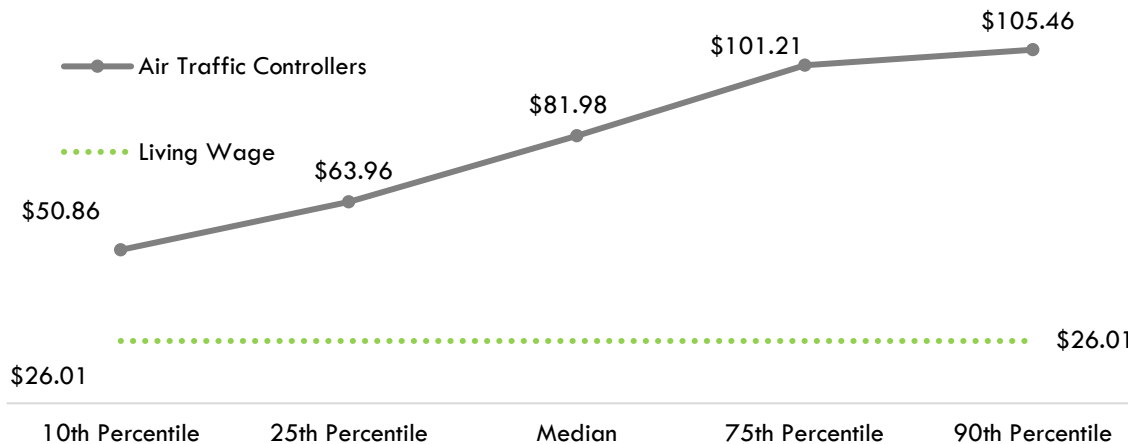
¹ The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system is used by federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating or disseminating data. [bls.gov/soc](https://www.bls.gov/soc)

² Lightcast 2026.3; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

Earnings

According to traditional³ labor market information (LMI), *Air Traffic Controllers* had entry-level hourly earnings of \$63.96—or \$133,030.17 annual salary⁴; this exceeds the living wage for a single adult in San Diego County, which is \$26.01⁵ per hour (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2: Hourly Earnings⁶ for Air Traffic Controllers in San Diego County⁷



³ Lightcast 2026.3; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

⁴ Annualized salaries assume a full-time position with 2,080 hours. Multiplying the hourly wage with 2,080 yields the annual salary.

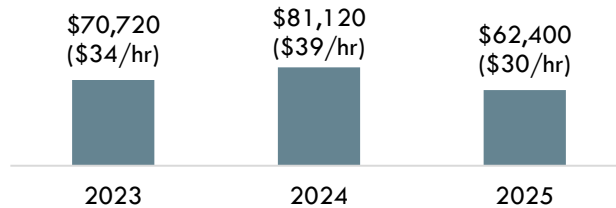
⁵ Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington. (2024). The self-sufficiency standard for California 2024. selfsufficiencystandard.org/california

⁶ 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.

⁷ Lightcast 2026.3; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

In online job postings, employers advertised between \$30 and \$39 per hour between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025 for *Air Traffic Controllers* in San Diego County (Exhibit 3). This suggests that employer-advertised wages in recent years are lower than traditional BLS estimates.⁸

Exhibit 3: Entry-Level Advertised Salaries in Online Job Postings for Air Traffic Controllers in San Diego County (2023-2025)*



*Hourly wages are rounded to the nearest dollar amount.

Expected Level of Education

According to traditional LMI (data reported to EDD and BLS), *Air Traffic Controllers* have a national educational attainment of an [associate degree](#) (Exhibit 4).⁹

Exhibit 4: National Educational Attainment for Air Traffic Controllers¹⁰

Occupational Title	Typical Entry-Level Education
Air Traffic Controllers	Associate degree

⁸ Lightcast 2026.3; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

⁹ Lightcast Q3 2026; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

¹⁰ Lightcast 2026.3; 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 diploma or GED](#) as the most requested educational requirement for *Air Traffic Controllers*; however, employers also expected the following certifications (Exhibit 5).¹¹

Exhibit 5: Top Certifications for Air Traffic Controllers in San Diego County in Online Job Postings (2023-2025)¹²

1. Security Clearance
2. Secret Clearance
3. FAA Second Class Medical Certificate
4. CompTIA Cybersecurity Analyst (CySA+)
5. IAT Level II 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 is [one](#) TOP code and [one](#) CIP code related to *Air Traffic Controllers* (Exhibit 6).¹³

Exhibit 6: Related TOP and CIP Codes for Air Traffic Controllers

TOP or CIP Code	TOP or CIP Program Title
TOP 3020.30	Air Traffic Control
CIP 49.0105	Air Traffic Controller

¹¹ Lightcast 2026.3; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

¹² Lightcast Q3 2026; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

¹³ Lightcast Q3 2026; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

According to TOP data, **no** community college supplies the region with awards for this occupation.

According to CIP data, **no** non-community-college institution supplies the region with awards (Exhibit 7).

**Exhibit 7: Number of Awards (Certificates and Degrees) Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions
(Program Year 2021-22 Through Program Year 2024-25 Average)**

TOP or CIP Code	TOP or CIP Program Title	3-Yr Annual Average CC Awards (PY22-23 to PY24-25)	Other Institutions 3-Yr Average Awards (PY21-22 to PY23-24)	Total Average Supply (PY21-22 to PY24-25)
3020.30	Air Traffic Control	0	0	0
49.0105	Air Traffic Controller	0	0	0
Total				0

Demand vs. Supply

Comparing labor demand (annual openings) with labor supply¹⁴ suggests that there is a **supply gap** for this occupation in San Diego County, with **84** annual openings and **zero** awards. Comparatively, there are **322** annual openings in California and **27** awards, suggesting that there is a **supply gap** across the state¹⁵ (Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8: Labor Demand (Annual Openings) Compared with Labor Supply (Average Annual Awards)

	Demand (Annual Openings)	Supply (Total Annual Average Supply)	Supply Gap or Oversupply
San Diego	84	0	84
California	322	27	295

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.

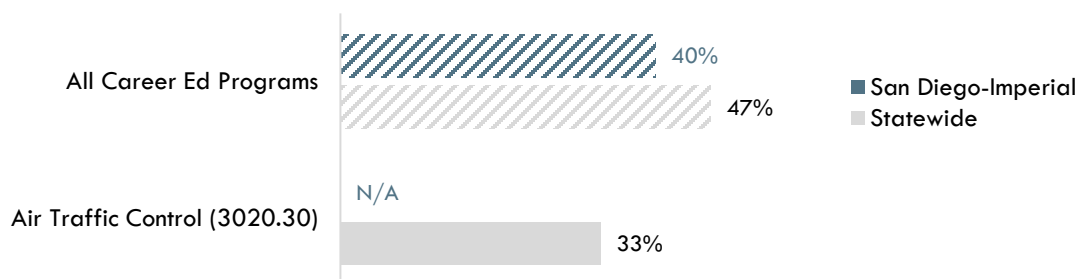
¹⁴ This brief includes awards from all TOP and CIP codes listed in Exhibit 6.

¹⁵ California Community Colleges Centers of Excellence. Supply and Demand Tables. coeccc.net/our-resources

Student Outcomes and Regional Comparisons

According to the California Community Colleges DataVista, regional data was insufficient for students who earned a living wage after completing an *Air Traffic Control (TOP 3020.30)* program, while 33% of students statewide earned a living wage. In comparison, 40% of students in Career Education programs in the region and 47% statewide earned a living wage (Exhibit 9).¹⁶

Exhibit 9: Percentage of Students Who Earned a Living Wage in an Air Traffic Control (TOP 3020.30) Program, PY2020-21¹⁷



N/A indicates insufficient data

According to the California Community Colleges DataVista, 65% of students statewide obtained a job closely related to their field of study after completing an *Air Traffic Control (TOP 3020.30)* program; regional data was insufficient. In comparison, 70% of students in Career Education programs in the region and 74% statewide obtained a job closely related to their field of study (Exhibit 10).¹⁸

Exhibit 10: Percentage of Students in a Job Closely Related to Field of Study in an Air Traffic Control (TOP 3020.30) Program, PY2016-17¹⁹



N/A indicates insufficient data

¹⁶ DataVista, California Community Colleges, datavista.cccco.edu

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

¹⁸ DataVista, California Community Colleges, datavista.cccco.edu

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

Employers

Between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025, the top five employers in San Diego County for *Air Traffic Controllers* were [Serco](#), [United States Department of Transportation](#), [San Diego Metropolitan Transit System \(Mts\)](#), [Epsilon Systems Solutions](#), and [Metropolitan Transit Development Board](#) based on online job postings (Exhibit 11).²⁰

Exhibit 11: Top Employers for Air Traffic Controllers in San Diego County

Top Employers	
• Serco • United States Department of Transportation • San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (Mts) • Epsilon Systems Solutions • Metropolitan Transit Development Board	• Epsilon Systems • SAIC • General Atomics • Naval Air Systems Command • Launchpointpeo

Skills

Exhibit 12 lists the top specialized, soft, and software skills that appeared in online job postings between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025.²¹

Exhibit 12: Top Skills for Air Traffic Controllers in San Diego County

Specialized Skills	Soft Skills	Software Skills
• Air Traffic Control • Aviation • Airspace • Federal Aviation Administration • Lifting Ability • Network Switches • National Airspace System • Lighting Systems • Control Systems • Surface Weather Observation	• Operations • Communication • Customer Service • Troubleshooting • Management • Planning • English Language • Research • Organizational Skills • Multitasking	• DuckDuckGo

²⁰ Lightcast Q3 2026; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

²¹ Lightcast Q3 2026; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

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Important Disclaimers

All representations included in this report have been produced from primary research and/or secondary review of publicly and/or privately available data and/or research reports. This study examines the most recent data available at the time of the analysis; however, data sets are updated regularly and may not be consistent with previous reports. Efforts have been made to qualify and validate the accuracy of the data and the report findings; however, neither the California Community Colleges Centers of Excellence (COE), COE host district, nor California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office are responsible for the applications or decisions made by individuals and/or organizations based on this study or its recommendations.