

CASE STUDY

A State of Opportunity:

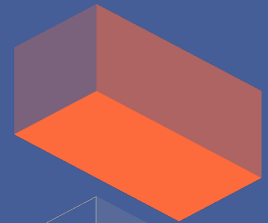
North Carolina's Approach to Construction Workforce Development



North Carolina Department of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

NCCER

National Center for Construction
Education and Research



The Problem: Meeting Labor Demand While Expanding Opportunity

The construction industry faces a widening labor gap. In 2026 alone, roughly 350,000 new workers are needed¹. Addressing this gap will require state policymakers to adapt in many ways, including investing in the education infrastructure needed to build more durable workforce pathways. However, closing this gap is not just an economic imperative; it is an opportunity to change the trajectory of thousands of young lives.

For decades, young people were told that in order to move forward in life, they had to get a four-year college degree. What resulted were generations of students who never learned that

construction skilled trades could offer them high-paying and meaningful careers. Part of the labor gap we see today was created by that narrow-minded philosophy.

But states are now responding, and organizations like North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) are building real pathways into the trades for the next generation of workers. The task is steep: meeting construction labor demand will require North Carolina to fill nearly 25,000 construction job openings annually through 2030².



The Solution: Statewide Integration

Although NCDPI has been partnering with NCCER since 2010, it wasn't until Trey Micheal, Senior Director of Career and Technical Education, took the helm in 2018 that the partnership shifted to a more focused strategy. Recognizing not only the need for skilled labor, but also the barriers limiting easy entry into the construction industry, Michael arrived with a clear plan: expand NCCER training and credentials into Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs across the state.

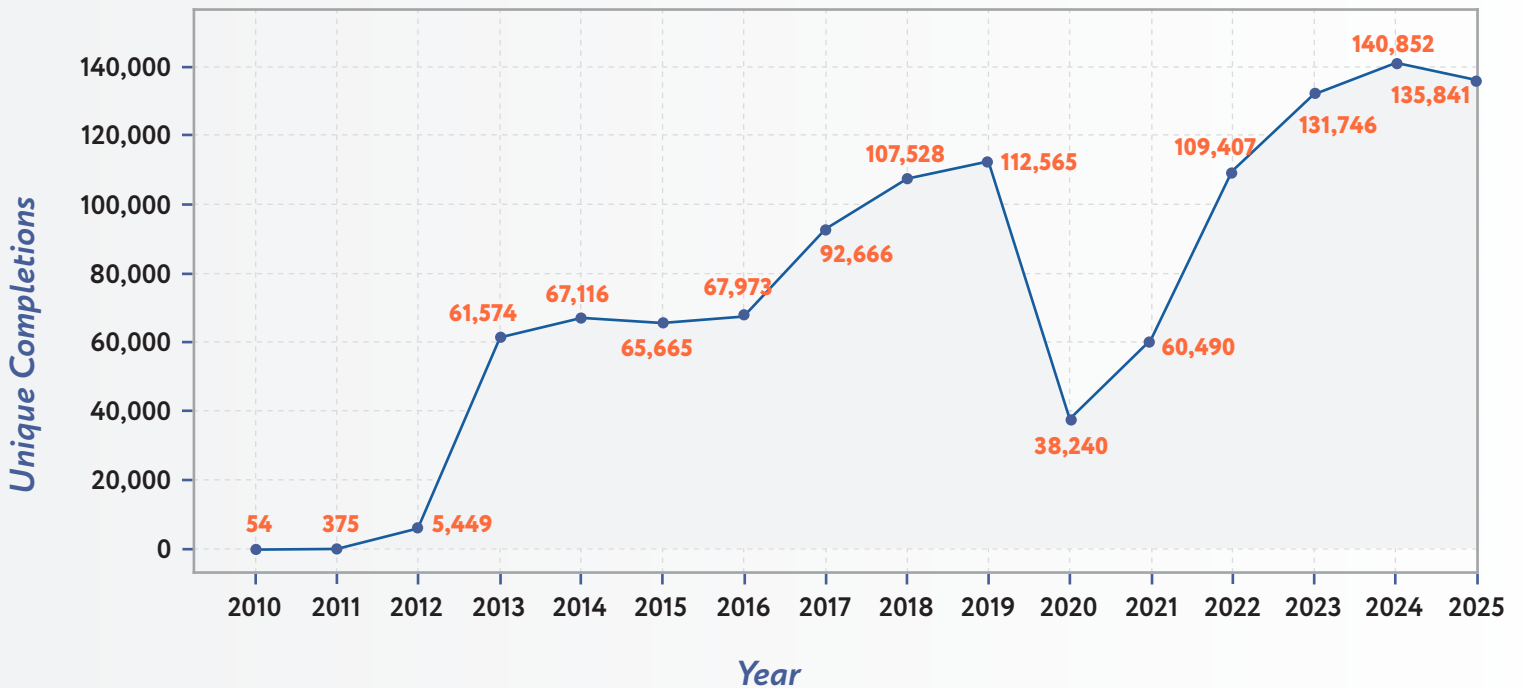
What makes NCDPI's approach distinctive is the depth of NCCER's integration into the state's CTE system. Through an enterprise agreement, NCDPI sponsors NCCER testing for every CTE program in the state. Nolan Fahrer, NCDPI's Trade Education Consultant and state NCCER director, describes the commitment:

"It's baked into our state board policy that we use NCCER. There's no barriers around cost. Teachers do not have to ask, 'do I have enough money to do this?' We take care of that at the state level."

That commitment matters because it ensures a student's zip code does not determine their early career opportunities. Without it, students from rural or underserved communities may never have the chance to earn an NCCER credential simply because their school district cannot afford it. Given the industry recognition and portability of NCCER's credentials, those who do complete the training gain a verified record of their knowledge and skills that employers value and trust. This provides these students the opportunity to enter the workforce straight out of high school or continue with further education. It is this outcome that brings Michael's vision to life.

NCCER Credential Completions

Students from NCDPI-sponsored CTE programs earn more than 100,000 NCCER credentials annually.



The Results: Crafting the Future

The impact of NCDPI's approach can be seen in the data. When the partnership began in 2010, there were 89 CTE programs using NCCER curricula in 39 of North Carolina's 100 counties. Today, that footprint has expanded to 218 programs and 89 counties, more than doubling the number of communities served.

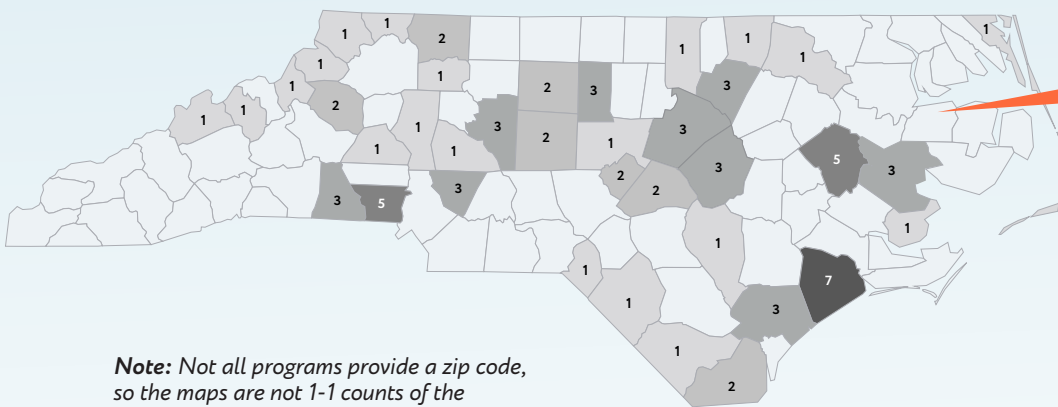
Impressively, students from NCDPI-sponsored CTE programs earn more than 100,000 NCCER credentials annually, a trajectory interrupted briefly by the pandemic before rebounding and

exceeding the previous high levels. Over the 16 years of partnership with NCCER, more than 1,000,000 credentials have been completed.

And it's not just volume; credentials are being earned in alignment with specific, in-demand occupations. For example, three of the most in-demand construction occupations for North Carolina are electricians, masons and carpenters². In each of these occupations, respective NCCER credential attainment has grown over the past five years.

NC Department of Public Instruction: NCCER CTE Programs By County

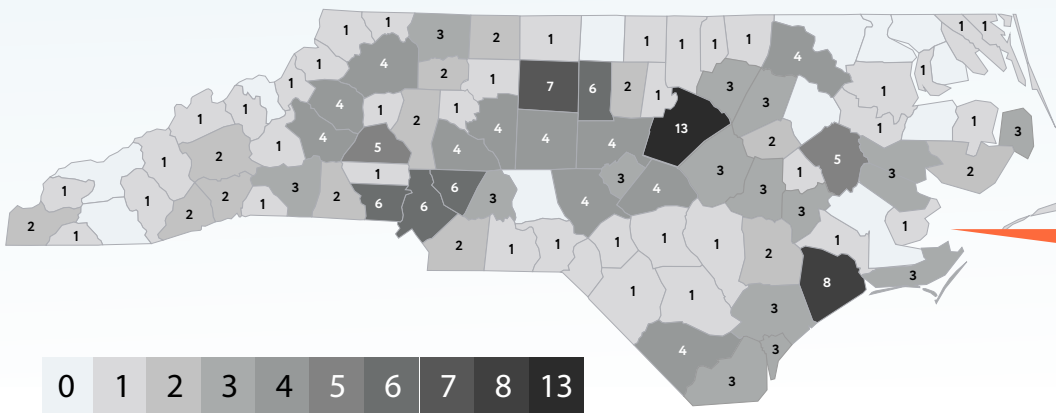
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2010
89 Programs
39 Counties

Note: Not all programs provide a zip code, so the maps are not 1-1 counts of the programs and counties.

County coverage increased
126%
between 2010 and 2026.

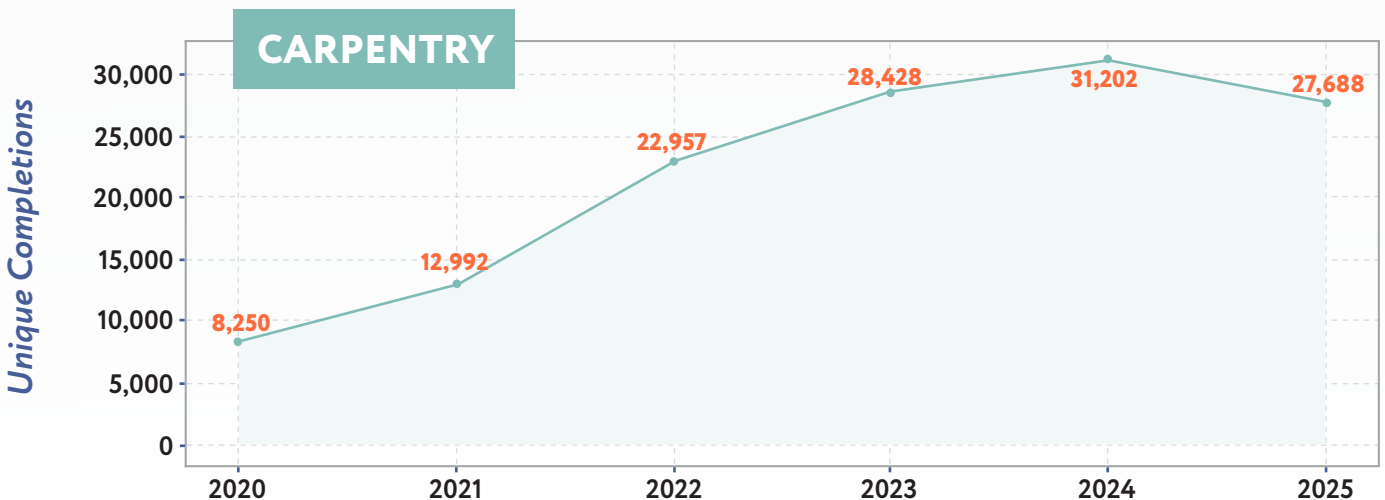
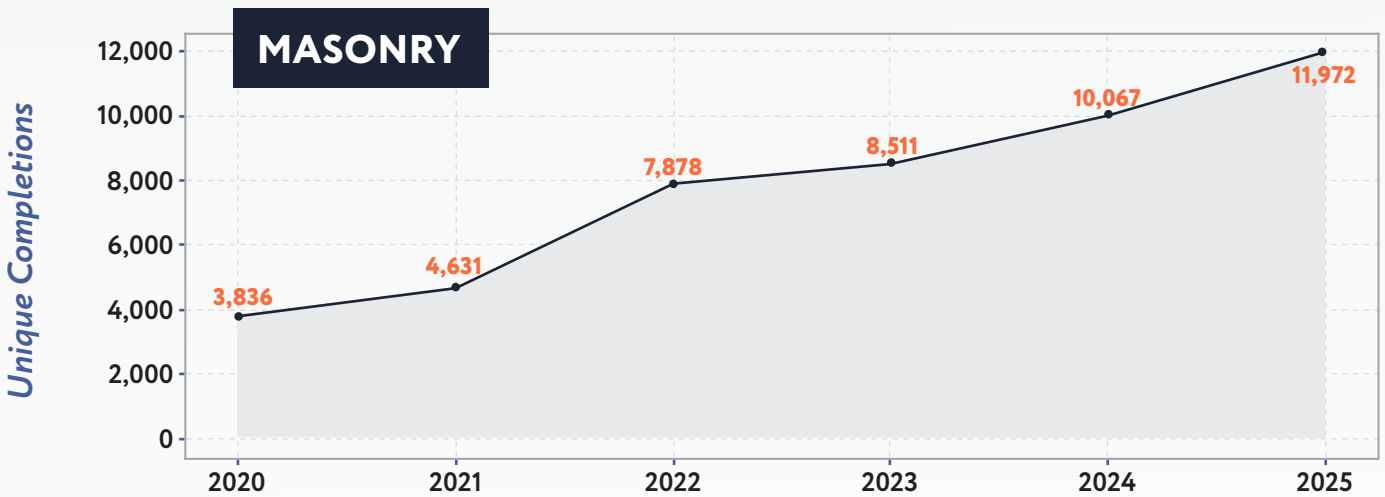
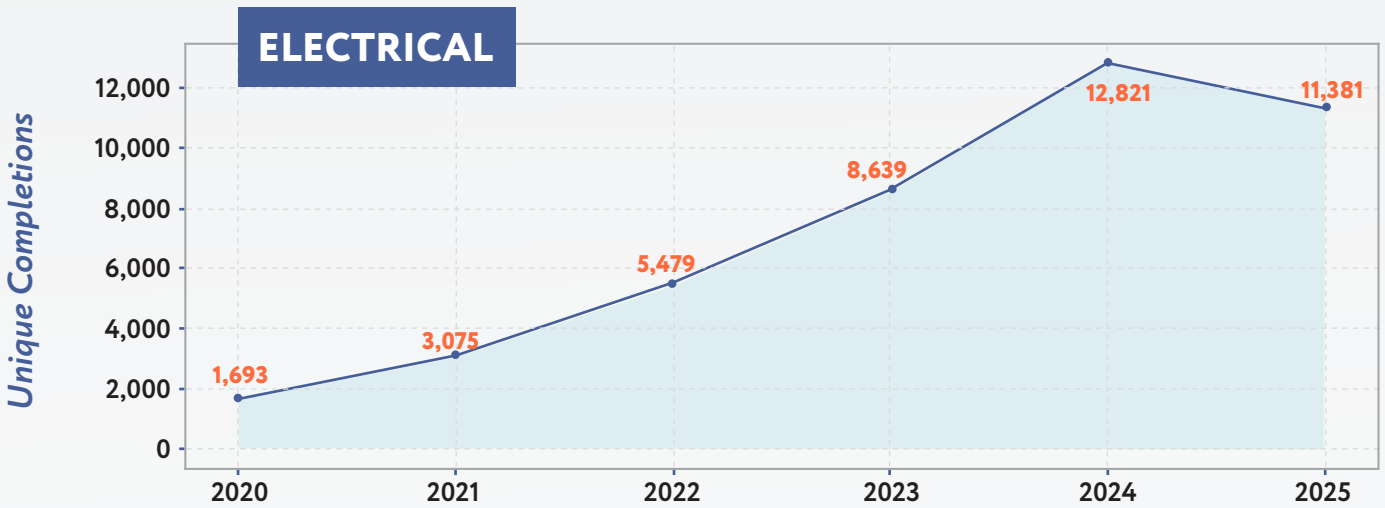


2026
218 Programs
89 Counties



NC Department of Public Instruction: NCCER Credential Completions by Craft

In each of these occupations below, respective NCCER credential attainment has grown over the past five years.



More than anything, NCDPI has created an abundance of opportunities that are consistently extended to the students who need it most. Phillip Turlington, a trades teacher with 12 years of experience in North Carolina's public schools, warned of what that education would look like without NCCER credentials:

"It might be a fun class. Maybe with something else they would learn about the trades as well, but with NCCER we get that and there is a real practical benefit to those kids."

With support from the state, the outcomes for these students look entirely different. One of Turlington's former students graduated from his program early, started working last year, and as Turlington explains:

"He's 18 years old, still living at home, and in his first year of work he made just under \$90,000. He's a hard worker, but a huge part of his success is because of the NCCER credentials he was able to earn."

Conclusion

NCDPI has done more than just expand a program. By removing cost barriers at the state level and integrating NCCER training and testing into CTE programs at scale, North Carolina is developing a pool of credentialed graduates prepared to fill the construction roles the state needs most. More importantly, it is providing students with access to career pathways that can fundamentally alter their life trajectories and create opportunities to become industry leaders.

Perhaps the most meaningful achievement of NCDPI is the shift in terms of student success outcomes. Rather than focusing on a single career pathway that includes a four-year degree, North Carolina has built a system that meets students where they are and equips them with the skills they need to enter a labor market that is actively

looking for them. By doing so, more young people are starting to consider the value of a career in construction. Fahrer describes the shift he's witnessed firsthand:

"Students are seeing the value in the trades again. They're starting to see these as viable careers, and that is starting to help build the career pipeline."

Although credentialing alone does not guarantee that every job opening will be filled, it makes filling them much more possible. To learn more about the products supporting NCDPI, visit [NCCER.org](https://www.nccer.org).

Sources

¹ [Associated Builders and Contractors](#)

² [Projections Central](#)



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