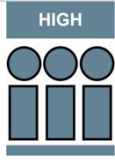


Respiratory Therapists

Baccalaureate Labor Market Analysis

July 2026

Summary

BDP PROGRAM RECOMMENDATION?	EVIDENCE OF A SUPPLY GAP?	JOB POSTINGS WITH BA/BS OFFER HIGHER WAGES THAN THOSE WITHOUT BA/BS?	EXPECTED EDUCATION FOR OCCUPATIONS ANALYZED
 Proceed with Caution	 	 	Associate Degree
EXPEDITED REVIEW ELIGIBLE?	EXISTING ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAM IN REGION?	NUMBER OF ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS	OCCUPATIONS PAY LIVING WAGES FOR A...?
 	 		 Single Adult  Adult with Child

The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) developed this brief to determine if an unmet workforce need exists for a baccalaureate degree program (BDP) for [Respiratory Therapists](#). According to Assembly Bill No. 927, community college districts seeking approval for a BDP must 1) not offer “program curricula already offered by the California State University or the University of California” systems, 2) “continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject”¹ of the proposed BDP, and 3) “provide evidence of unmet workforce needs.”²

This brief recommends that the regional colleges proceed with caution in developing a new BDP for [Respiratory Therapists](#) because 1) **this occupation typically requires an associate degree**; 2) **entry-level wages exceed the living wage for a single adult but not for an adult with one child**; and 3) **employers advertise higher entry-level wages in job postings that require a bachelor's degree than those that do not. At the same time, colleges should note that BDP proposals for Respiratory Therapists are eligible for the Chancellor's Office expedited review process.**³

¹ “The bill would require a community college district to continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject for which a baccalaureate degree program has been approved, unless the community college district has received approval from the chancellor to eliminate the associate degree program, as specified.”

² “AB-927 Public postsecondary education: community colleges: statewide baccalaureate degree.” California Legislative Information. Accessed 07/14/2025. leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB927

³ California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. Baccalaureate Degree Program: 2025 Baccalaureate Degree Workshop – Day 1. Accessed June 30, 2026. See “Expedited Review” section. ccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/What-we-do/Curriculum-and-Instruction-Unit/Curriculum/Baccalaureate-Degree-Program.

Additionally, **Respiratory Therapists** in California must be licensed by the Respiratory Care Board of California, which requires completion of an accredited respiratory care program and satisfaction of the Board's licensure requirements.

Introduction

According to Assembly Bill No. 927, community college districts seeking approval to offer a baccalaureate degree program (BDP) must:⁴

1. Not offer a BDP or "program curricula already offered by the California State University or the University of California"
2. "Continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject for which a baccalaureate degree program has been approved"
3. Identify and document unmet workforce needs "in the local community or region of the district"

To determine the need for a new BDP, this brief examines labor market information (LMI) for **Respiratory Therapists** using the following Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)⁵ code:

- **Respiratory Therapists** (SOC 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.

The following sections "assess the workforce value of [a] proposed baccalaureate degree program" for **Respiratory Therapists** in accordance with AB-927.⁶

⁴ "AB-927 Public postsecondary education: community colleges: statewide baccalaureate degree." California Legislative Information. Accessed 07/14/2025. leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB927.

⁵ 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.

⁶ "AB-927 Public postsecondary education: community colleges: statewide baccalaureate degree." California Legislative Information. Accessed 07/14/2025. leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB927.

BDP Proposal Requirements

UC and CSU Programs

According to AB-927, community colleges must not offer a BDP or program curricula already offered by the CSU or UC systems. To determine if a BDP already exists for Respiratory Therapists, the COE examined CSU and UC programs in related Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes.⁷

According to CIP data, the following institutions from the UC and CSU systems offer programs related to Respiratory Therapists (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: California UC and CSU Institutions with Related Programs by CIP Code (2023)⁸

CIP Code and Title
51.0908 Respiratory Care Therapy/Therapist
None

Existing Associate Degree Program(s)

AB-927 states that districts should “continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject for which a baccalaureate degree program has been approved.” To determine if an associate degree program in the same subject area exists, the COE reviewed the [California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office’s official TOP-CIP crosswalk](#) and found that there is one TOP code and one CIP code related to Respiratory Therapists (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2: Chancellor’s Office TOP-CIP Crosswalk for Baccalaureate Degree Programs

TOP Code	TOP Title	CIP Code	CIP Title
1210.00	Respiratory Care/Therapy	51.0908	Respiratory Care Therapy/Therapist

According to the [Chancellor’s Office Curriculum Inventory \(COCI\)](#), Grossmont College offers an associate degree program for the CIP code listed above (Exhibit 3).⁹

Exhibit 3: San Diego Community Colleges with Associate Degree Programs in Related CIP Codes

CIP Code	CIP Title	Community College(s) with Program in CIP Code
51.0908	Respiratory Care Therapy/Therapist	Grossmont

⁷ CIP data comes from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data). The COE uses the national SOC-CIP crosswalk to determine which programs could potentially train for the occupation in question. nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/post3.aspx?y=56

⁸ Lightcast. Q2 2026 Data Set. Program Overview. Completions by Institutions.

⁹ “Programs. California Community Colleges Curriculum Inventory (COCI).” Accessed 04/01/2026. coci2.ccctechcenter.org/programs

Workforce Needs Assessment: Supply vs. Demand

According to AB-927, community colleges must identify and document unmet workforce needs “in the local community or region of the district.” To assess the regional workforce need for [Respiratory Therapists](#), this section compares educational supply with labor market demand.

Educational Supply

Baccalaureate educational supply for an occupation can be estimated by analyzing the number of completions¹⁰ in related CIP codes. According to CIP data, there were 34 completions in San Diego County (Exhibit 4) and 820 completions in California (Exhibit 5) for [Respiratory Therapists](#).

Exhibit 4: Number of Completions by CIP Codes (San Diego County, 2024)

CIP Code	CIP Title	Completions (2024)
51.0908	Respiratory Care Therapy/Therapist	34
Total		34

Exhibit 5: Number of Completions by CIP Codes (California, 2024)

CIP Code	CIP Title	Completions (2024)
51.0908	Respiratory Care Therapy/Therapist	820
Total		820

Labor Market Demand

In 2019, there were 1,326 and 16,319 total jobs for [Respiratory Therapists](#) in San Diego County and California, respectively. In 2024, the number of jobs in San Diego County increased to 1,463, which was a 10% increase. In California, the number of jobs for [Respiratory Therapists](#) increased to 18,486 which was a 13% increase (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6: Historical Employment Trend for Respiratory Therapists¹¹

SOC Code	Occupational Title	2019 Jobs		2024 Jobs	
		San Diego	California	San Diego	California
11-9021	Respiratory Therapists	1,326	16,319	1,463	18,486

¹⁰ Completion numbers include bachelor’s degree programs or higher.

¹¹ Lightcast. 2026.02; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

Between 2024 and 2034, employers in San Diego County will need to hire 106 workers annually to fill new jobs and backfill jobs due to attrition caused by turnover and retirement for Respiratory Therapists (Exhibit 7). Across California, the projected demand will be 1,204 annual job openings between 2024 and 2034. In other words, in a 10-year period, the total labor market demand for San Diego County and California will be 1,060 and 12,040, respectively.

Exhibit 7: Labor Demand (Annual Job Openings) for Respiratory Therapists (2024-2034)¹²

SOC Code	Occupational Title	Annual Job Openings (2024-2034)	
		San Diego	California
11-9021	Respiratory Therapists	106	1,204

Demand vs. Supply

Comparing labor market demand (annual job openings) with educational supply (bachelor's degree completions) suggests that there is a supply gap for Respiratory Therapists in San Diego County, with 106 annual openings and 34 awards. Comparatively, there are 1,204 annual openings in California and 820 awards, suggesting that there is also a supply gap across the state¹³ (Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8: Labor Demand (Job Openings) vs. Educational Supply (Completions)¹⁴

	Demand (Job Openings)	Supply (Completions)	Supply Gap or Oversupply
San Diego County	106	34	72
California	1,204	820	384

¹² Lightcast. 2026.02; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

¹³ "Supply and Demand," Centers of Excellence Student Outcomes, coeccc.net/our-resources

¹⁴ 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.

Other Factors or LMI to Consider for Program Development

In California, Respiratory Therapists must be licensed by the Respiratory Care Board of California (RCB). Licensure requires completion of a Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC)-accredited respiratory care program, a minimum of an associate degree, successful completion of the required examinations, and satisfaction of the Board's application requirements.¹⁵

According to available LMI, employers require that [Respiratory Therapists](#) have a minimum educational attainment of an [associate degree](#) with [no](#) work experience required. Entry-level hourly earnings for [Respiratory Therapists](#) are [\\$40.55](#), which is above the [\\$26.01](#) per hour living wage for a single adult and below the [\\$42.00](#) per hour living wage for a single adult with a school-age child in San Diego County (Exhibit 9).¹⁶

Exhibit 9: Wages, Educational Attainment, and Work Experience for Respiratory Therapists

SOC Title (SOC Code)	Entry-Level Hourly Earnings ¹⁷	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry-Level Education	Work Experience Required
Respiratory Therapists (29-1126)	\$40.55	\$49.32	Associate degree	None

¹⁵ "Application Requirements." Respiratory Care Board of California. Accessed 06/28/2026. rcb.ca.gov/applicants/app_requirements.shtml.

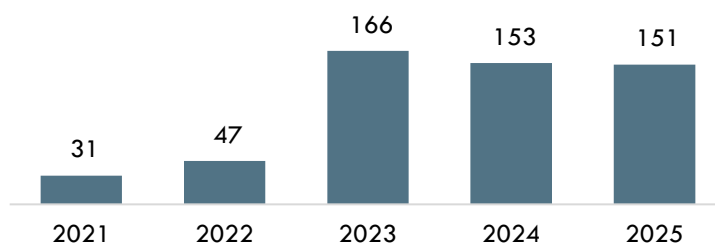
¹⁶ "Sustainability Calculator (formerly the Family Needs Calculator)," Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington, last updated Feb. 2024. mavencollaborative.org/family-sustainability-index/.

¹⁷ 25th Percentile. Lightcast. 2026.02; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

Online Job Postings

This report analyzes not only historical and projected (traditional LMI) data, but also recent data from online job postings (real-time LMI). Online job postings may provide additional insight about recent changes in the labor market that are not captured by historical data. Between 2021 and 2025, there was an average of 99 online job postings per year for **Respiratory Therapists** in San Diego County (Exhibit 10). Please note that online job postings do **not** equal labor market demand; demand is represented by annual job openings (see Exhibit 7). While this brief includes online job postings data to help with curriculum development, the community colleges should note that this type of data is impacted by several variables: employers may post a position multiple times to increase the pool of applicants; a job posting can remain posted after a business decides not to fill a position; or an employer may use one posting to fill multiple positions, for example.

Exhibit 10: Number of Online Job Postings for Respiratory Therapists in San Diego County (2021-2025)¹⁸



Between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025, employers in California advertised hourly wages of **\$40.49** for online job postings for **Respiratory Therapists** requiring less than a bachelor's degree. For positions requiring a bachelor's degree, the advertised wages were **\$45.17** per hour. This suggests that employers advertise higher entry-level wages for positions requiring a bachelor's degree (Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11: Entry-Level Advertised Wages in Online Job Postings for Respiratory Therapists by Education Level in California (2025)¹⁹

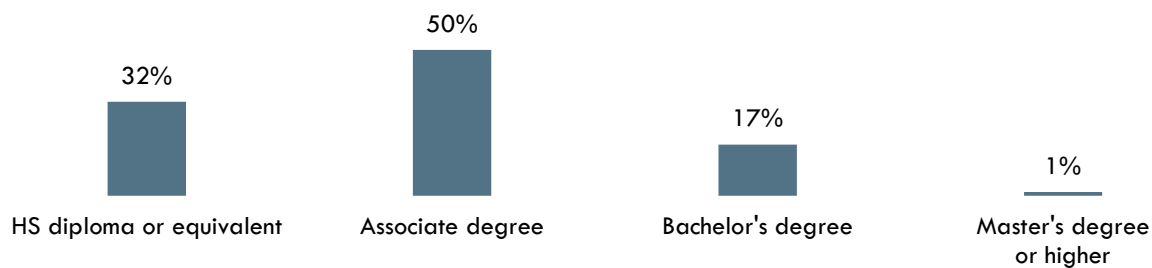
Minimum Required Education	Advertised Wages at the 25 th Percentile (2025)
Bachelor's degree	\$45.17
Below a bachelor's degree	\$40.49

¹⁸ Lightcast; "Job Posting Analytics." 2021-2025.

¹⁹ Lightcast; "Job Posting Table." 2025.

Based on online job postings between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025 in California, employers most frequently requested an [associate degree](#) followed by a [high school diploma or equivalent](#) as the minimum educational requirement for [Respiratory Therapists](#) (Exhibit 12).²⁰

Exhibit 12: Educational Requirements for Respiratory Therapists in California²¹

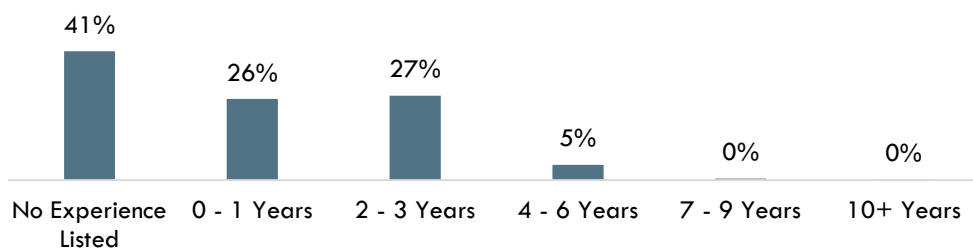


*May not total 100% due to rounding

Work Experience

Based on online job postings, 41% of job postings for [Respiratory Therapists](#) do not list an experience requirement and 27% list two to three years of experience (Exhibit 13).

Exhibit 13: Work Experience Requirement for Respiratory Therapists in California²²



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

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

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

Top Employers

Between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025, the top employers in California were [Turner & Kaiser Permanente](#), [Providence](#), [Adventist Health](#), [Sutter Health](#), and [CommonSpirit Health](#) based on online job postings (Exhibit 14).

Exhibit 14: Top Employers for Respiratory Therapists in California²³

Top Employers	
• Kaiser Permanente • Providence • Adventist Health • Sutter Health • CommonSpirit Health	• University of California • ScionHealth • Prime Healthcare Services • Apria Healthcare • Asante

Skills and Certifications

Exhibit 15 lists the top specialized, soft, and software skills that appeared in online job postings between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025 for this occupation.

Exhibit 15: Top Skills for Respiratory Therapists in California²⁴

Specialized Skills	Soft Skills	Software Skills
• Respiratory Care • Respiratory Therapy • Pediatrics • Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation • Arterial Blood Gas Analysis • Critical Care • Circulatory System • Medical Ventilators • Pulmonary Function Testing • Mechanical Ventilation • Neonatal Intensive Care Unit • Nebulizer • Medical Records • Geriatrics • Nursing	• Communication • Management • English Language • Quality Control • Troubleshooting (Problem Solving) • Interpersonal Communications • Teaching • Planning • Confidentiality • Problem Solving • Customer Service • Time Management • Computer Literacy • Accountability • Critical Thinking	• N/A

²³ Lightcast; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025.

²⁴ Lightcast; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025. Skills must populate in at least 10% of job postings to be listed.

Exhibit 16 lists the top certifications that appeared in online job postings between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025.

Exhibit 16: Top Certifications for Respiratory Therapists in California²⁵

Top Certification in Online Job Postings

1. Basic Life Support (BLS) Certification
2. Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT)
3. Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS) Certification
4. Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS)
5. Respiratory Care Practitioner
6. Neonatal Resuscitation Program Certification (NRP)
7. Certified Respiratory Therapist (CRT)
8. Basic Cardiac Life Support
9. Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Certification
10. Registered Pulmonary Function Technologist

²⁵ Lightcast; "Job Posting Analytics." 2023-2025

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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 Regional 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.