Prosperity Profile Technical Report

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROSPERITY PROFILE

What is the Prosperity Profile?

The Prosperity Profile is a component of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) developed by the Centralina Economic Development District (EDD). The Centralina EDD, a 501(c)3 nonprofit established in 2005 by Centralina Regional Council (Centralina), promotes a diversified and innovative regional economy through collaboration and advocacy. The Centralina region includes nine counties in the greater Charlotte area - Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union - and is delineated as North Carolina Council of Government Region F.

The Centralina EDD is designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), a bureau with the U.S. Department of Commerce, as the approved regional Economic Development District. It is responsible for developing and maintaining the Centralina region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is a locally based, regionally driven economic development strategy to generate good jobs, diversify the economy and spur economic growth.

Over the past 10 months, the Centralia team worked in partnership with the Centralina EDD Board of Trustees, CEDS Steering Committee and a range of stakeholders to assess the region's current economic conditions and develop a strategy to build on existing assets while addressing both short-term shocks and structural challenges to the economy. At the heart of our *Prosperity for All* approach is the desire to improve the overall resilience and inclusivity of the people, places and economy of our nine-county Centralina region.

While equity analysis has not historically been a component of CEDS plans, the EDA has since designated Equity as its top Investment Priorities, specifically planning or implementation projects that directly benefit traditionally underserved populations or underserved communities. Further, the Centralina EDD recognizes the importance of a regional understanding of equity to further economic prosperity for all people. To that end, the purpose of the Prosperity Profile is to create a baseline set of metrics for the nine-county region to assess the state of equity across the region. The Prosperity Profile directly informs the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and will also be used long-term to monitor the region's progress on equity.

Selecting the Framework

The first step towards understanding the state of prosperity or an examination of equity conditions in the Centralina region was to develop a set of prosperity indicators. While the indicators are not an exhaustive measure of all equity considerations, they provide a high-level

overview of how each county is performing on a variety of metrics related to economic, social and community wellbeing.

The Centralina team scanned numerous resources to determine best practices and distill what was important and relevant for our region. Moreover, the team scanned for available data sets for all nine of the Centralina counties. Ultimately a set of indicators based on the National Equity Atlas[i] indicators developed by the non-profit Policy Link and the USC Equity Research Institute was adapted for our region, with some additions and modifications from other equity analytics reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Economic Development Administration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Further, these indicators were grouped under three distinct categories, identified as *Resilience*, *Community* and *Mobility*, to form the **Centralina Region Prosperity Framework**. The table below provides an overview of each category and corresponding indicators.
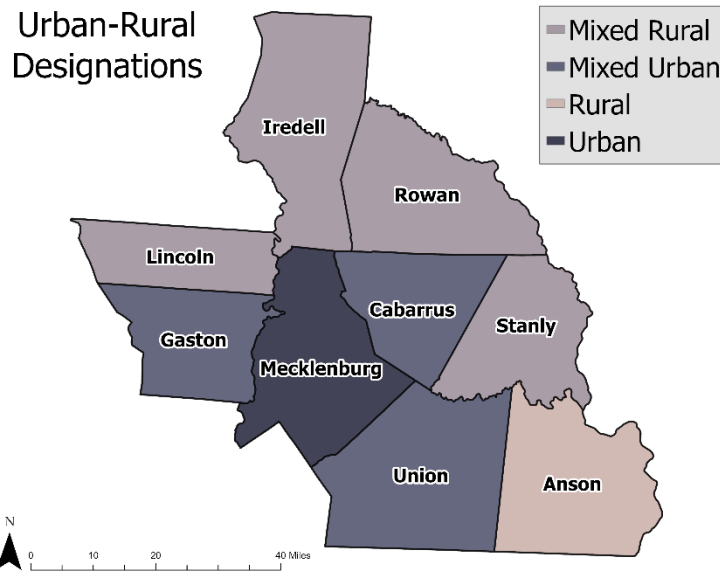
Centralina Region Prosperity Framework		
Resilience	**Community**	**Mobility**
Ability to withstand economic shocks and bounce forward as a result	*Local economic and social conditions that may inform quality of life and participation in the economy*	*Access to economic prosperity through transportation, economic and social resources*
• Median Household Income • Air Pollution Index • Community Resilience Index (three or more risk factors)	• Individual Poverty • School Poverty • Neighborhood Poverty • Housing Burden: Rent • Housing Burden: Mortgage	• Educational Attainment: Bachelor's degree or more • Labor Force Participation Rate (ages 16-24) • Unemployment Rate • School Enrollment Rate • Rate of Jobs Requiring a Bachelor's Degree • Unemployment • Commute Time • Housing and Transportation Costs as a Percentage of Income

The Prosperity Profile informs the Centralina EDD's efforts to monitor economic prosperity across the Centralina region. The purpose of the data is to encourage people in the region and elsewhere to utilize the findings to pursue solutions to economic prosperity. As with all data analysis tools there are limitations and therefore, it will be important to continue to evaluate and evolve the Prosperity Profile throughout the five-year CEDS implementation process.

The Centralina Region Prosperity Framework outlined above will be used throughout the CEDS to define our areas of opportunity for improvement at the county and regional levels. The Prosperity Profiles will also become an integral part of the evaluation and monitoring approach.

Defining the Region

The Centralina region is comprised of nine counties—Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, and Union. Despite the strong economic, cultural, and social ties between these counties, there is an immense diversity between each individual community. For example, Mecklenburg County is the largest county with a population of almost 1.1 million. Anson County, the smallest county, has a population of roughly 25 thousand. In turn, the economic, social, and cultural context for each county is unique.

To account for these differences, this report uses a geographic framework which places the counties in one of four categories: Urban, Mixed Urban, Mixed Rural, and Rural. These categories are based on the population density and the rate of residents in urban areas within each county. The counties which fall under each designation are shown below. For more information on the methodology, refer to Table 4 of the Appendix.

HOW TO USE THE PROSPERITY PROFILE

Process for Analysis

After the Prosperity Framework was established, data was collected on the various prosperity indicators. More information on the data sources is in Table 3 in the Appendix. For each variable, the data was collected at multiple geographic scales. These scales include:

- The individual Centralina counties
- The Centralina region
- North Carolina
- Community Type (Urban, Mixed-Urban, Mixed-Rural, and Rural)
- Census Tracts, which are a Census-designated sub-set of an individual county

The Prosperity Profile uses a **regional comparison** and a **state comparison** to assess at a high-level the performance of each county. The analysis identifies each county's areas of **"strength"** and **"opportunity"**, where strength is an indicator where the county is over-performing compared to the region or state, and opportunity is an indicator where the county is under-performing compared to the region or state. Strength does not imply that the value for the

county is higher than the region/state value, but rather that it is overperforming. For example, if a county had a higher commute time than the region, it would be underperforming, but if it had a higher median household income, it would be overperforming.

Strength	Indicator for which the county value overperforms compared to the state/region value	●
Opportunity	Indicator for which the county value underperforms compared to the state/region value	●

Strength indicates a "higher" value	Strength indicates a "lower" value
Median household income	Air pollution
Bachelor's degree or more	3+ risk factors (Community Resilience Index)
Labor force participation rate (Ages 16-24)	Individual Poverty
School enrollment rate (Ages 15-24)	School Poverty
Share of jobs requiring a bachelor's degree	Neighborhood Poverty
	30% or more income on rent
	30% of more income on housing (mortgage)
	Unemployment rate
	Unemployment rate (Ages 16-24)
	Commute time
	Housing and transportation costs, combined

The **Regional Comparison Overview** (Table 1) and the **State Comparison Overview** (Table 2) are the primary use of the Prosperity Profile. Users can identify how individual counties are performing relative to the region and the state on the Prosperity Profile indicators, but they can also make comparisons between individual counties, between community types (Urban, Mixed-Urban, Mixed-Rural, Rural), between data categories (Resilience, Community, Mobility), and other combinations.

Users can also investigate patterns in more detail by drilling down into specific Prosperity Profiles using the Census Tract data, which will be available on the CEDS website starting in January 2023. The Prosperity Profile also harmonizes with other tools developed by Centralina Regional Council such as the CONNECT Beyond Transportation Equity Portal which are more narrowly focused on one subject. To access more tools, visit https://centralina.org/data/

Table 1: Regional Comparison Overview

Legend: ● = green (white dot) · ○ = light green (gray dot)

Category	Variable	Urban	Mixed Urban			Mixed Rural				Rural
		Mecklenburg	Cabarrus	Gaston	Union	Iredell	Lincoln	Rowan	Stanly	Anson
Resilience	Median Household Income	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
Resilience	Air Pollution	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	●
Resilience	3 or more risk factors from Community Resilience Index	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○
Community	Individual Poverty	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
Community	School Poverty (Ages 5-17)	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Community	Neighborhood Poverty	○	●	○	●	●	●	○	●	○
Community	30% or more of income on rent	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Community	30% or more of income on housing expenses (for homes with mortgages)	○	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	○
Mobility	Bachelor's degree or more	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mobility	Labor Force Participation Rate (Ages 16-24)	○	●	○	○	●	●	○	●	○
Mobility	Unemployment Rate (Ages 16-24)	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
Mobility	School Enrollment Rate (Ages 15-24)	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
Mobility	Share of jobs requiring a Bachelor's degree	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mobility	Unemployment Rate	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
Mobility	Commute Time	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●
Mobility	Housing and Transportation Costs as a % of Income	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○

Table 2: State Comparison Overview

	Variable	Urban	Mixed Urban			Mixed Rural				Rural
		Mecklenburg	Cabarrus	Gaston	Union	Iredell	Lincoln	Rowan	Stanly	Anson
Resilience	Median Household Income	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○	○
	Air Pollution									
	3 or more risk factors from Community Resilience Index	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Community	Individual Poverty	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○
	School Poverty (Ages 5-17)	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
	Neighborhood Poverty									
	30% or more of income on rent	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
	30% or more of income on housing expenses (for homes with mortgages)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Mobility	Bachelor's degree or more	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
	Labor Force Participation Rate (Ages 16-24)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
	Unemployment Rate (Ages 16-24)	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○
	School Enrollment Rate (Ages 15-24)	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
	Share of jobs requiring a Bachelor's degree									
	Unemployment Rate	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○
	Commute Time	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Housing and Transportation Costs as a % of Income	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○

Examples of Prosperity Profile Findings

The Prosperity Profile was used to inform the strategies and recommendations of the CEDS Strategy 2023-2028 document. To see how the findings were integrated, users can refer to the plan itself on the CEDS website (to be updated January 2023). However, some brief observations that were developed by looking at the **Regional Comparison Overview** are included below:
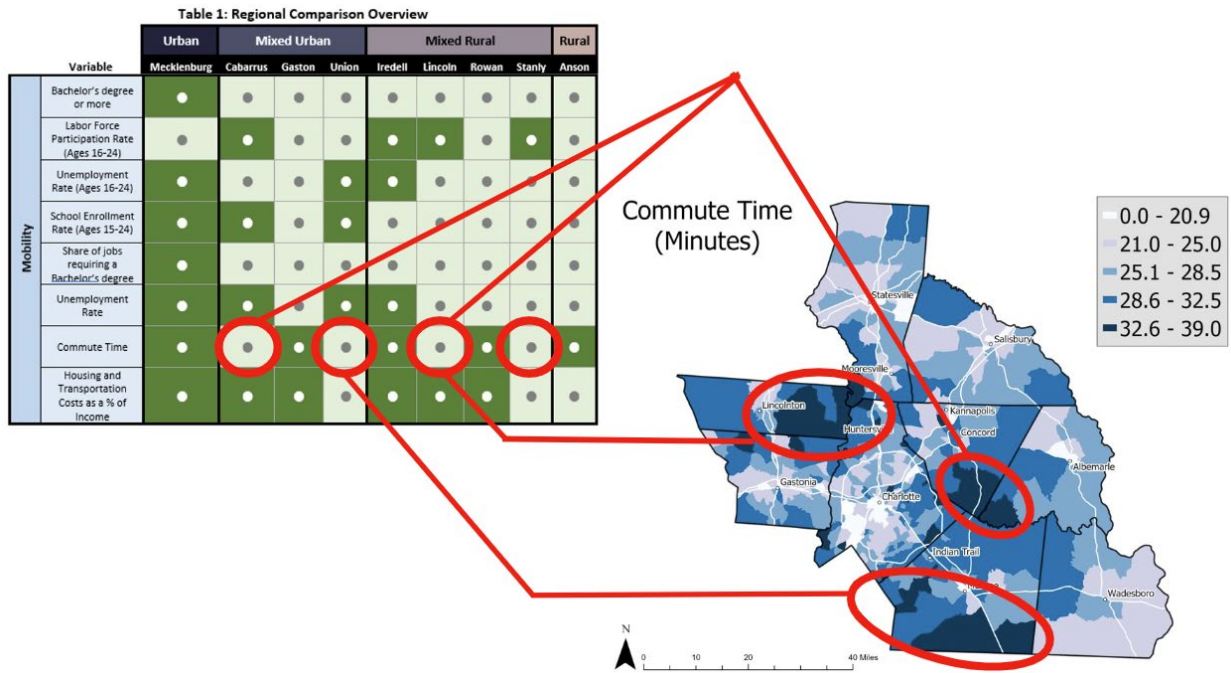
- Amongst Mixed Urban counties Gaston County under performs as compared to Cabarrus and Union for Mobility, Community and Resilience measures
- Increased housing cost burdens are concentrated in or near many of the Urban / Mixed-Urban communities—particularly Mecklenburg County.
- Housing affordability in Rural / Mixed-Rural counties is often counteracted by the increased cost of transportation.
- Mixed Urban/Rural and Rural counties educational Bachelor's degree performance is lower than the state and Mecklenburg County.
- Commute times in Cabarrus, Union, Lincoln and Stanly higher than state and region values.

How Can You Use the Prosperity Profile?

As mentioned, the power of the Prosperity Profile is **to identify regional trends and patterns**. The **Regional Comparison Overview** and the **State Comparison Overview** allow users to observe multiple types of patterns including:

- Between an individual county and the Centralina Region
- Between an individual county and North Carolina
- Between multiple counties in the region
- Between community types (Urban, Mixed-Urban, Mixed-Rural, Rural)
- Between data categories (Resilience, Community, Mobility)

With these various comparisons, users have multiple ways to assess their communities relative performance at a high-level. However, users can also investigate trends for specific variables in more detail. Figure 1 provides an example of how an individual variable (Commute Time) can be investigate more closely by looking at census tract data. Whereas the table alone shows that Commute Time is an "Opportunity" for Cabarrus, Union, Lincoln, and Stanly, the Census Tract data shows where specifically commute time is the highest. Tools such as the CONNECT Beyond Transit Equity Portal, as discussed earlier, can also be used in conjunction with the Prosperity Profile.
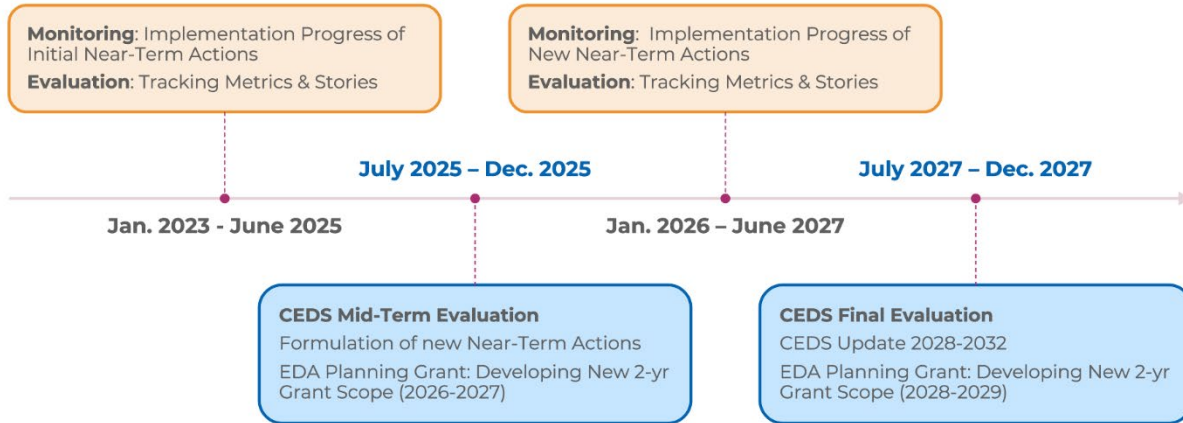
Figure 1: Assessing Commute Time in Detail

THE PROSPERITY PROFILE MOVING FORWARD

In addition to this Technical Report, the Prosperity Profile is housed in two locations: The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2023-2028 document, and the CEDS website. The CEDS document contains some of the high-level findings from the Prosperity Profile and how those findings relate to plan recommendations. On the CEDS website, which will be updated in January 2023, users will be able to access the **Prosperity Profile Monitoring & Evaluation** of the Prosperity Profile as well as the **Prosperity Profile Data**.

Prosperity Profile Monitoring & Evaluation

Following the Community Economic Development Strategy plan's adoption in November 2022, a five-year implementation process will begin which will run from January 2023 to December 2027. A major component of the implementation process will be the monitoring and evaluation of the Prosperity Profile metrics. There will be two distinct evaluation windows during the mid-term (July 2025 – December 2025) and end (July 2027 – December 2027) of the five-year window. The graphic below shows the implementation timeline.

Monitoring & Evaluation Timeline

Monitoring: Implementation Progress of Initial Near-Term Actions
Evaluation: Tracking Metrics & Stories

Monitoring: Implementation Progress of New Near-Term Actions
Evaluation: Tracking Metrics & Stories

July 2025 – Dec. 2025

July 2027 – Dec. 2027

Jan. 2023 - June 2025

Jan. 2026 – June 2027

CEDS Mid-Term Evaluation
Formulation of new Near-Term Actions
EDA Planning Grant: Developing New 2-yr Grant Scope (2026-2027)

CEDS Final Evaluation
CEDS Update 2028-2032
EDA Planning Grant: Developing New 2-yr Grant Scope (2028-2029)

Outside of the two evaluation windows, the Prosperity Profile will be periodically updated as new data for each prosperity indicator becomes available. As the data is updated, communities will be able to monitor their progress on the various metrics. The data, along with this technical report and other resources, will be available on the CEDS website beginning in January 2023.

Prosperity Profile Data

One the CEDS website, the Prosperity Profile data will be made available. While the specifics of the data release have not yet been determined, the goal is to have data available at the various geographic scales (region, counties, census tracts) and in multiple data formats (.CSV or Shapefile). Metadata will also be made available.

APPENDIX

Table 3: Prosperity Profile Indicators

Variable	Definition	Source
Median Household Income	Median income in the past 12 months for households	ACS* 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
Air Pollution Index	Average daily density of fine particulate matter in micrograms per cubic meter (PM2.5)	CDC Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (2018)
Community Resilience Index (3 Or More Risk Factors)	The percentage of people who experience three or more risk factors as defined in the Community Resilience Index**	U.S. Census Bureau
Individual Poverty	The percentage of people who are below the poverty level (for whom poverty is measured)	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
School Poverty	The percentage of people age 5-17, in families, who are below the poverty level	Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (U.S. Census Bureau)
Neighborhood Poverty	The percentage of people who lives in 'high-poverty' Census Tracts where 25 percent or more of residents are below the poverty level	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)***
30% Or More Of Income (Rent)	The percentage of people who spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent (rental units only)	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
30% Or More Of Income (Mortgage)	The percentage of people who spend more than 30 percentage of their income on mortgage (units with mortgages only)	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
Educational Attainment	The percentage of people who have a bachelor's degree or higher	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
Labor Force Participation Rate (16-24)	The percentage of people aged 16 to 24 who are participating in the labor force	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
Unemployment Rate (16-24)	The percentage of people aged 16 to 24 who are in the labor force but unemployed	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
School Enrollment Rate (15-24)	The percentage of people aged 15 to 24 who are enrolled in school	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
Occupation Characteristics	The percentage of jobs which have some degree of educational requirements	Jobs EQ (Chmura Economics & Analytics)
Unemployment	The percentage of peopled aged 16 and over who are in the labor force but unemployed	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
Commute Time	The median travel time to work, in minutes, for workers aged 16 and over	ACS 5-yr estimates (2015-2019)
Housing + Transportation Costs	Combined housing and transportation costs as a percentage of annual income	Housing and Transportation Affordability Index

*ACS = American Community Survey
** Addition documentation on risk factors located here
*** Requires additional geospatial processing

Table 4: Urban-Rural Designation – Definitions & Counties

The U.S. Census Bureau traditionally defines communities as one of two categories: rural or urban. However, these designations do not appropriately describe the full range of community types in the Centralina Region, which includes both Mecklenburg County (around 1.1 million residents) and Anson County (around 20 thousand residents). Thus, this report uses the following designations developed by Andrew Isserman (2005): **Urban**, **Mixed Urban**, **Mixed Rural**, and **Rural**. The Mixed Urban and Mixed Rural designations account for counties which may have qualities of either urban or rural communities but are not decidedly one or the other. The definitions of the designations, as well as the counties which fall under each designation, are included in the table below:

	Urban	Mixed Urban	Mixed Rural	Rural
Definition	- Population density ≥ 500 people/sq mile - 90 % of pop in urban areas - Urban pop ≥ 50,000	- Does not meet Urban or Rural definition - Population density ≥ 320 people/sq mile	- Does not meet Urban or Rural definition - Population density < 320 people/sq mile	- Population density < 500 people/sq mile - 90 % of pop in rural areas OR no urban area with pop > 10,000
Counties	Mecklenburg	Cabarrus Gaston Union	Iredell Lincoln Rowan Stanly	Anson

Table 5: Prosperity Profile Data Values

Geography	Median Household Income ($)	Air Pollution (PM 2.5)	3 or more risk factors, Community Resilience Index (%)
Anson	40213	7.9	29.68
Cabarrus	67328	9.1	16.30
Gaston	52835	9.1	20.08
Iredell	60955	9.3	17.71
Lincoln	57536	9.0	19.52
Mecklenburg	66641	9.0	17.91
Rowan	49842	9.2	23.50
Stanly	52623	8.5	22.68
Union	80033	8.7	15.21
Urban	66641	9.0	17.91
Mixed-Urban	66279	9.0	17.16
Mixed-Rural	55859	9.0	20.42
Rural	40213	7.9	29.68
Centralina Region	63952	8.9	18.32
North Carolina	54602	null	22.2

Table 6: Prosperity Profile Data Values

Geography	Individual Poverty (%)	School Poverty (%)	Neighborhood Poverty (%)	30% or more of income on rent (%)	30% or more of income on mortgage (%)
Anson	19.5	28.8	12.7	42.9	29.3
Cabarrus	10.2	9.9	7.7	40.5	21.7
Gaston	14.5	15.5	11.9	41.6	23.0
Iredell	10.9	12.1	8.0	37.7	24.3
Lincoln	12.1	12.6	6.2	35.8	21.5
Mecklenburg	11.6	16.6	11.3	44.3	23.4
Rowan	15.9	20.7	16.8	35.1	22.8
Stanly	12.9	19.3	5.5	33.4	26.9
Union	8.2	7.1	8.0	41.2	21.8
Urban	11.6	16.6	11.3	44.3	23.4
Mixed-Urban	10.9	10.4	9.2	41.2	22.1
Mixed-Rural	12.9	15.6	10.0	36.0	23.7
Rural	19.5	28.8	12.7	42.9	29.3
Centralina Region	11.8	14.5	10.4	42.2	23.1
North Carolina	14.7	17.0	null	42.7	25.0

Table 7: Prosperity Profile Data Values

Geography	Bachelor's Degree or More (%)	Labor Force Participation Rate (Ages 16-24) (%)	Unemployment Rate (Ages 16-24) (%)	School Enrollment Rates (Ages 15-24) (%)
Anson	11.3	56.2	32.9	57.8
Cabarrus	32.3	63.2	14.1	65.4
Gaston	21.2	59.5	15.1	59.7
Iredell	28.4	65.2	12.0	60.6
Lincoln	23.0	62.6	15.0	56.3
Mecklenburg	45.4	61.4	12.6	64.1
Rowan	18.5	61.5	19.7	61.2
Stanly	17.3	62.4	17.3	59.9
Union	35.4	61.5	12.3	68.2
Urban	45.4	61.4	12.6	64.1
Mixed-Urban	29.5	61.3	13.9	63.2
Mixed-Rural	22.9	63.2	15.6	56.3
Rural	11.3	56.2	32.9	61.1
Centralina Region	35.5	61.7	13.9	63.0
North Carolina	32.0	59.1	14.8	62.3

Table 8: Prosperity Profile Data Values

Geography	Share of jobs requiring a bachelor's degree (%)	Unemployment rate (%)	Commute time (Minutes)	Housing and transportation costs as a percentage of income (%)
Anson	33.5	8.4	26.7	67
Cabarrus	29.4	5.0	28.2	53
Gaston	30.1	6.2	26.5	49
Iredell	31.8	4.9	25.8	53
Lincoln	28.6	5.5	30.3	52
Mecklenburg	37.7	4.8	26.4	53
Rowan	32.3	7.2	25.6	48
Stanly	28.6	5.7	27.0	62
Union	29.1	4.6	29.8	58
Urban	37.7	4.8	26.4	53
Mixed-Urban	29.5	5.3	28.2	53
Mixed-Rural	30.9	5.8	26.7	53
Rural	33.5	8.4	26.7	67
Centralina Region	33.8	5.2	27.0	53
North Carolina	null	6.5	24.8	57