

# Eau Claire County

## 2025 WORKFORCE PROFILE



## State Narrative for County Profiles

Wisconsin's labor market experienced a strong year in 2024. Employment reached record levels, inflation appeared on the wane, and interest rates are accommodating a largely reconstructed supply chain. In addition, real wages turned positive, and consumer spending was robust.

The primary challenge still facing the future economic construct is the labor quantity challenge and its broader economic impacts.

### Wisconsin Jobs

The 2024 employment picture was favorable for Wisconsin, reaching new records in December at 3,076,500. The state's low unemployment rates were also noteworthy registering 3.0% or below the entire year. Although setting new records is always a good sign, new highs in employment would be expected through new expansionary economic periods.

Total non-farm employment also reached new highs, climbing through the year to peak in August at a seasonally adjusted basis of 3,048,000 and consolidating high levels through the remainder of the year, ending in December at 3,042,100. That marks a 1.6% increase over the pre-pandemic highs set in December 2019.

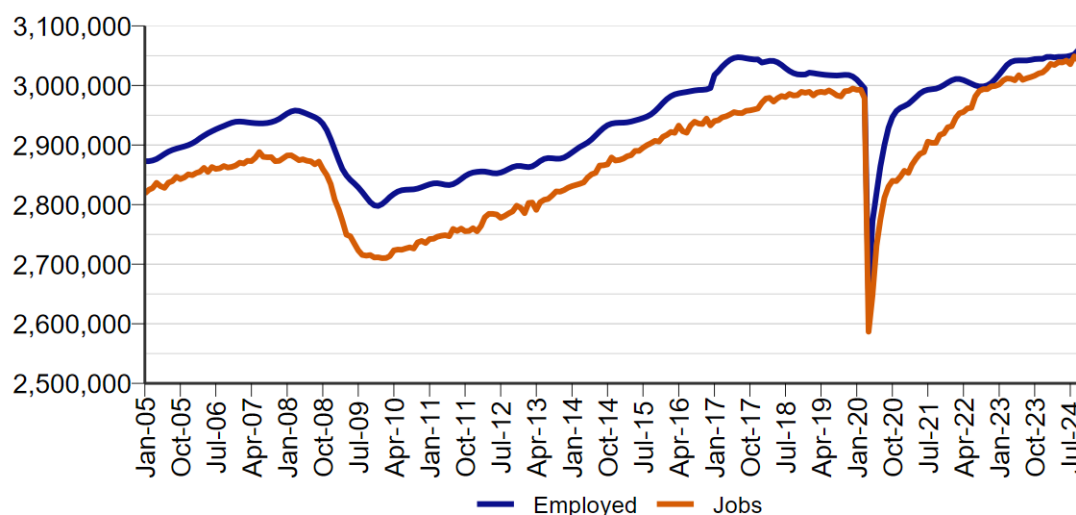


Figure 1: Wisconsin employment and jobs.

## Economy

Wisconsin Gross Domestic Product (WGDP) reached new highs in nominal and real dollar terms in 2024<sup>1</sup>, at \$456 billion or \$357 billion in real 2017 dollars. After a slower recovery coming out of the COVID-19 recession, Wisconsin's GDP growth rate has mimicked that of the country.

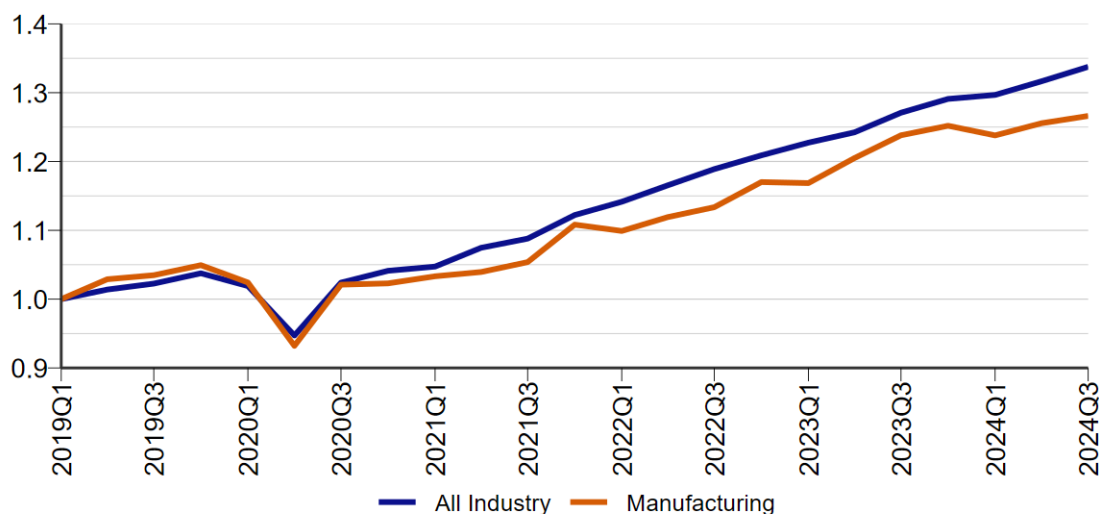


Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

Many industry sectors were vibrant. Construction industry jobs hit new records, surpassing 140,000. Healthcare jobs also set new highs at 324,200. The leisure and hospitality sector recovered almost all the nearly 50% loss of jobs experienced during the COVID-19 recession, finishing with 285,200 jobs. Manufacturing jobs rose above 2023 levels to 481,200, but have not yet returned to pre-Covid19 levels.

Wisconsin ranks first in the number of manufacturing jobs per government job and second in manufacturing jobs share of total jobs. However, state-level manufacturing output was relatively weak against overall economic output. Two of the state's primary manufacturing industries, fabricated metal and machinery manufacturing, lost jobs through 2024. Fabricated metal manufacturing jobs peaked in July 2019, before the COVID-19 recession at 79,400 jobs, and ended 2024 with 74,300. Machinery manufacturing peaked in early 2023 with 68,800 jobs and finished 2024 with 67,200.

<sup>1</sup>Third quarter 2024 is latest data available.

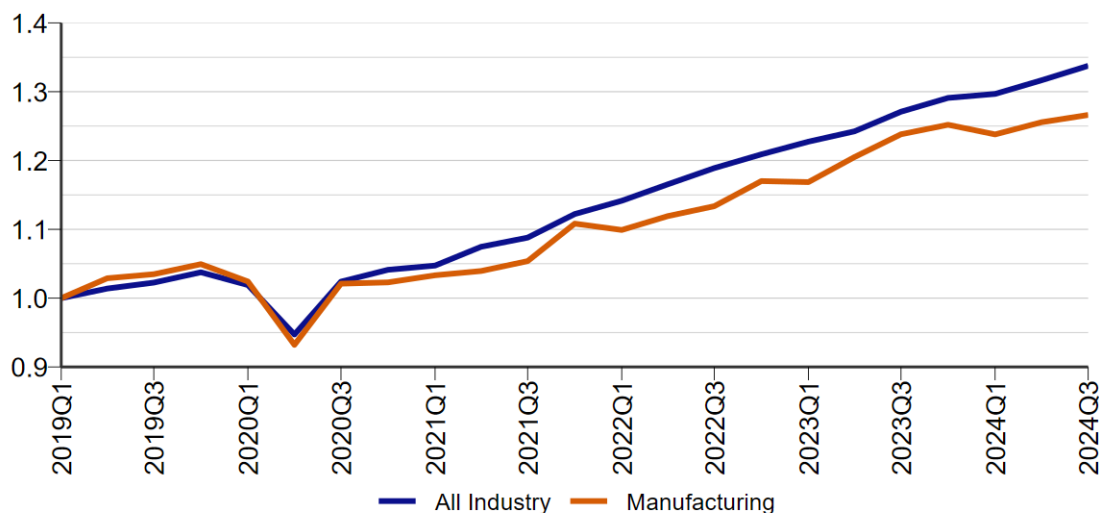


Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

While the durable goods manufacturing sector saw declines, non-durable goods manufacturing in Wisconsin has made headway. Jobs in the non-durables industries have increased since the pre-Covid high of 198,600 in July of 2019, to 201,000 in December 2024. Most of that has occurred in the food processing industry.

### Labor Quantity Challenges

Employers continue to express challenges finding workers. This situation is being felt in all industries and most occupations – locally, regionally, and globally. Even China is experiencing population and workforce declines. Industries that are showing steady job growth, such as construction and healthcare, are limited by the number of workers available for positions.

As noted in studies dating back to 2000, there are not sufficient numbers of young workers to fill the jobs being vacated by the generation of baby boomers and the increased demand for workers associated with economic growth. The number of workers entering the labor market is essentially the same as the boomers exiting. A growing economy necessitates an increasing labor force or at least a more productive one. Wisconsin's labor force growth has remained close to zero.

The new high in Wisconsin's labor force reached in December 2024 of 3,170,300 is only 0.63% above the previous high in July 2017 and only 0.83% above the peak before that in June of 2009. That amounts to an annual average labor force growth rate of 0.08% per year, or about zero over 15 years.



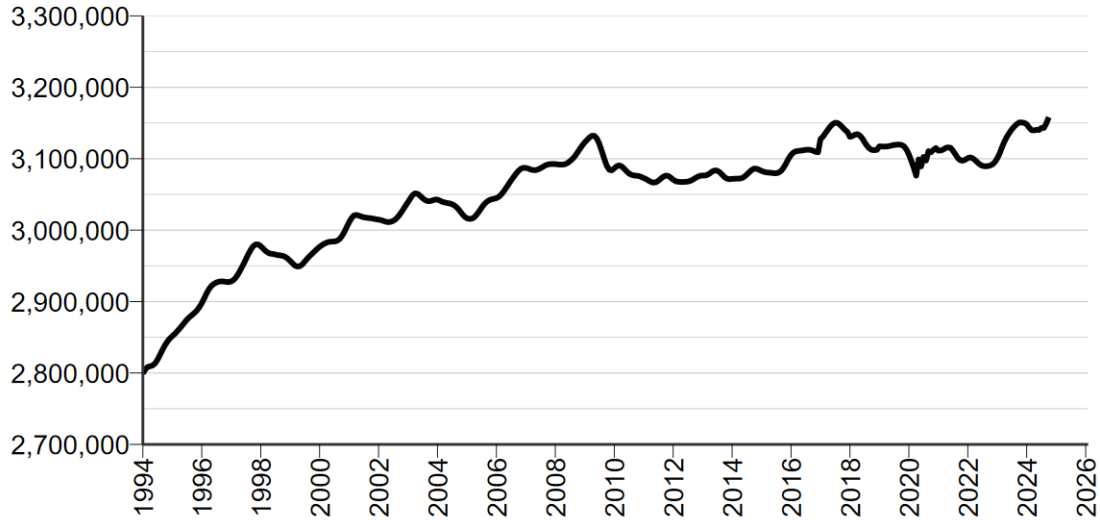


Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

This shift has long been anticipated and is well documented. The front edge of the baby boomers turned 63 years old in 2009. By 2024, the back edge of the boomers (those born in 1964) were 60 years old. And while the labor force participation rates of workers 65 and older has increased since the 1990s, the remaining tenure of the boomers is short.

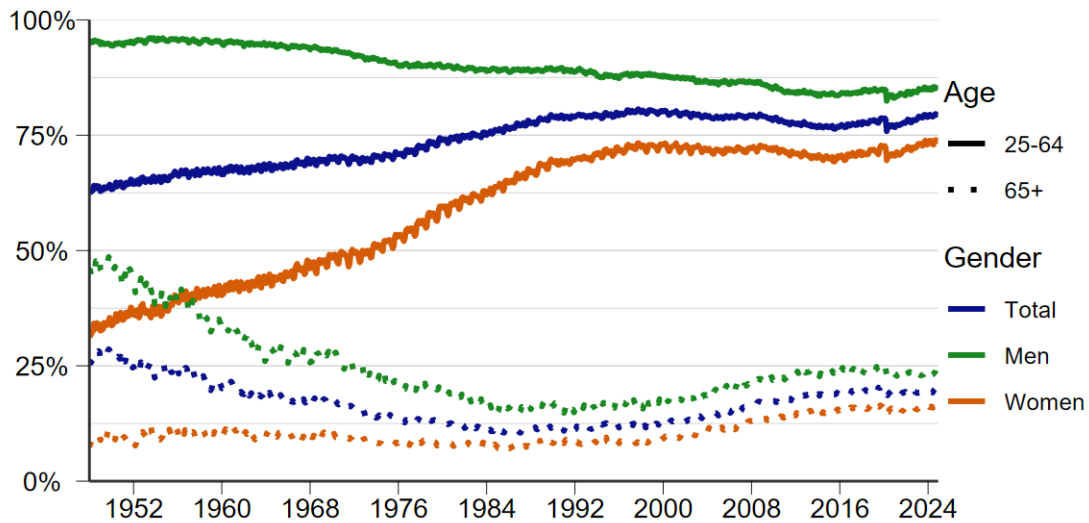


Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

Below is a graph of Wisconsin's population and labor force projected out to 2040 based on the latest information from the Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services. On a decennial basis, Wisconsin's population has already peaked. This suggests that the workforce will not experience substantial growth moving forward.

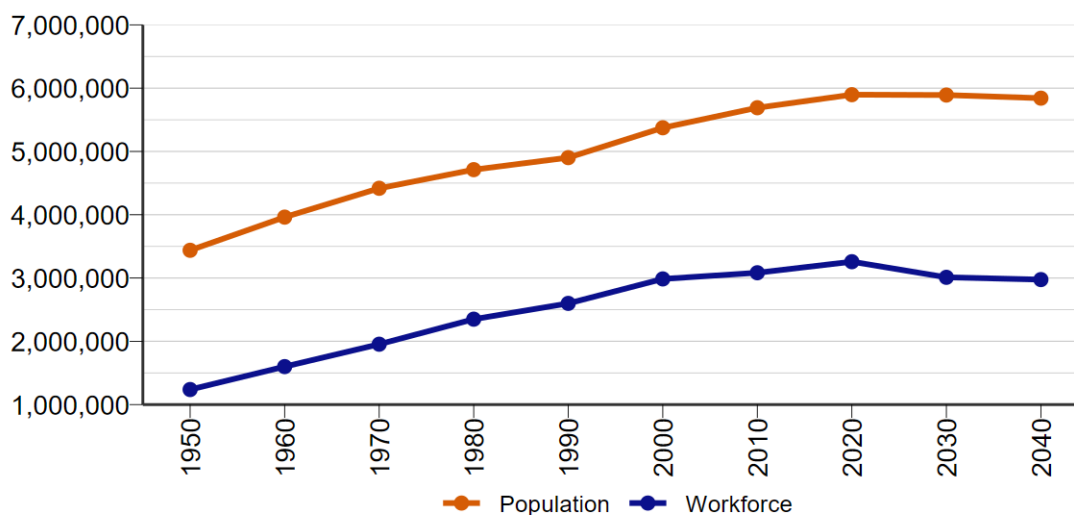


Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

While the overall situation has been realized for some time, the actual quantity of the shortfall has been undetermined until now. Staff at the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Office of Economic Advisors estimate that by 2031, the state could face a labor shortage exceeding 241,000 workers. (See Labor Supply Projections for Wisconsin 2020 – 2040, Winters, Kaur, and Otis, [Labor Supply Projections for Wisconsin](#)).

## New Construct

Human resource constraints affect the entire economic construct. As one of the three primary components of economic inputs – along with natural resources and capital – a compromise in the abundance of labor permeates the economy. Having never encountered a labor constraint before, it needs to be noted – old models and old policies do not apply.

Moreover, the labor quantity challenge is a macroeconomic phenomenon. It cannot be remedied with microeconomic solutions. Microeconomic attraction and retention incentives of higher wages, better benefits, early exposure, and more are, at best, short-term and limited symptom remedies.

Jobs will go unfilled. Macroeconomic solutions to the challenge include:

1. A workable immigration policy
2. Reducing barriers to employment (see [2023 Wisconsin County Profiles](#))
3. Expanding trade
4. Technology infusion

Altering a fundamental input of the macroeconomic construct will impact all sectors. The limited and shifting human resource segment will alter income streams, change demand for goods and services, and affect the provision of public goods and services.

Wisconsin's economic health and vigor has been illustrated in the employment and jobs data. However, record low unemployment rates signify two usually unassociated yet coupled performance indicators. On the one hand, low unemployment rates indicate an engaged labor force – a relatively large numerator. On the other hand, in today's environment, low unemployment rates indicate a scarce labor force – a relatively small denominator.

This is an unprecedented situation – and it is not likely to resolve itself quickly.

Yet to be explored are how the limited labor pool and aging population effects other critical economic drivers, such as personal income, as a significant portion of the population (Baby Boomers) shifts to transfer payments that are fixed in real dollar terms, housing stock, dependency ratios, and fiscal balances.

One major unknown on the horizon are the effects that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will have on the future of economic and workforce development. The Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence Advisory Action Plan ([dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf)) outlines some of the expected effects of AI. For example, the chart below sheds some light on the extent that occupations may be affected by AI.

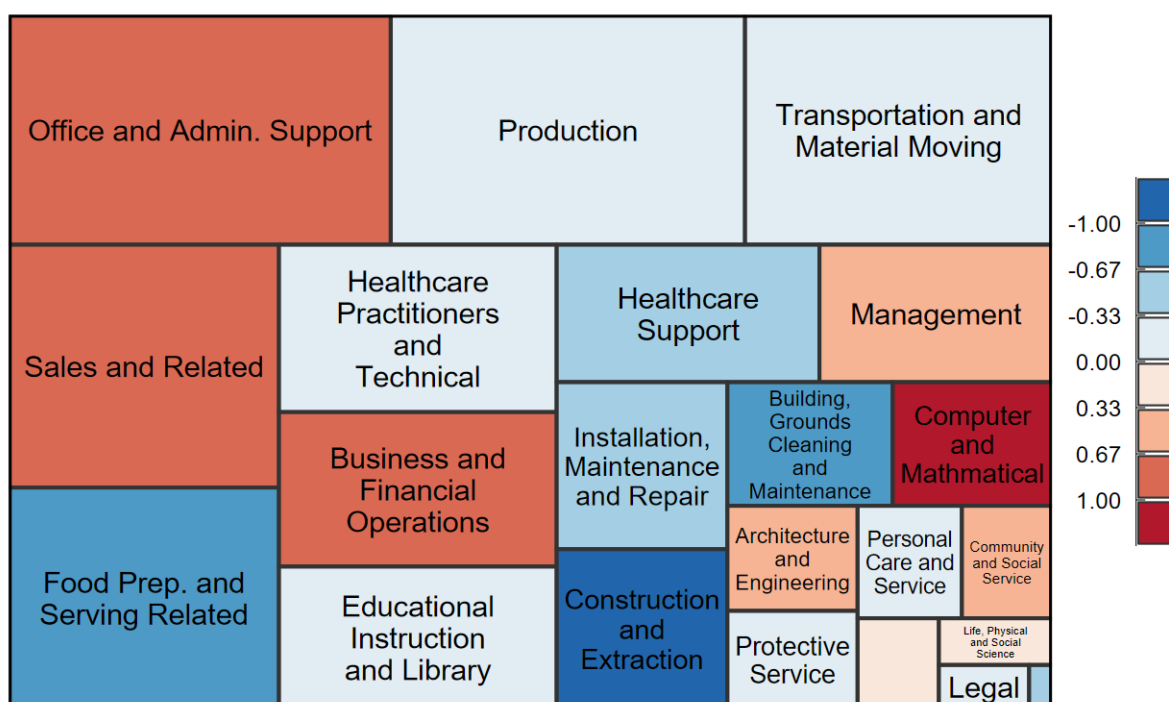


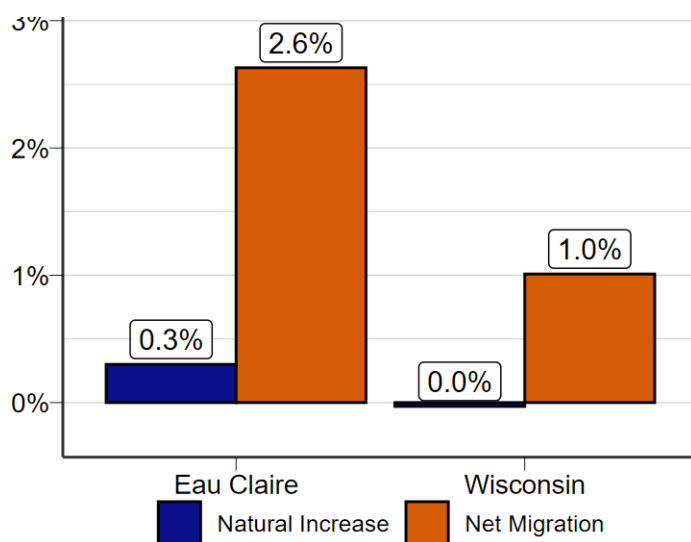
Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

Fundamental changes are in store for Wisconsin's economy due primarily to two new influencers: workforce constraints and artificial intelligence technology. The degree to how each will affect the other and the whole is yet to be determined.

## Population and Demographics

	2020 Census	2023 Final Estimate	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Eau Claire, City	67,238	68,995	1,757	2.6%
Altoona, City	8,293	9,320	1,027	12.4%
Washington, Town	7,662	7,766	104	1.4%
Pleasant Valley, Town	3,791	3,970	179	4.7%
Seymour, Town	3,352	3,380	28	0.8%
Union, Town	2,696	2,673	-23	-0.8%
Bridge Creek, Town	2,214	2,233	19	0.9%
Brunswick, Town	1,958	1,979	21	1.1%
Augusta, City	1,567	1,534	-33	-2.1%
Fall Creek, Village	1,422	1,424	2	0.1%
Eau Claire County	105,710	108,807	3,097	2.9%
Wisconsin, State	5,893,718	5,951,400	57,682	1.0%

Eau Claire County is Wisconsin's 14th most populous county with 108,807 residents. It is also the fourth fastest-growing county in state. From 2020 to 2023, the population grew by 2.9%, compared to the 1.0% change in Wisconsin. This population increase reflects the area's growing popularity. Eau Claire County's location at the confluence of two rivers and five major highways, in addition to its relative proximity to Minnesota's Twin Cities, has greatly influenced its growth. The City of Eau Claire, home to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, is the largest population center in the county with 68,9945 residents. The city also shares its northern border and its workforce with Chippewa Falls, a city with 14,731 residents.



### i Components of Population Change

Population change is driven by natural increase and migration. Natural population increase occurs when there are more births than deaths, while migration increases when more people move into the county than leave. Natural increase is primarily influenced by the population's age structure, while migration has a more immediate and actionable impact on the county labor force.

Figure 8: Source: WI Department of Administration.

The City of Eau Claire accounted for much of the county's population growth, shown by the boom in residential space downtown. Most other growth in the county is clustered around Eau Claire in a suburban/exurban pattern. Altoona especially added significant residential and business capacity near its western border shared with Eau Claire. This, along with strategic planning around the



city's livability, is demonstrated by its high growth rate. The City of Altoona was the fastest-growing municipality in Eau Claire County adding 1,027 people, for a 12.4% growth rate.

## Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020-2050 Population Change
Eau Claire	105,710	110,405	114,945	118,625	12.2%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: Demographic Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

Unlike the state, the Eau Claire County's population is projected to grow in the coming decades. The 12.2% projected growth rate is the third fastest, and the county is one of only 13 that are projected to gain population. This is a positive sign for the county. However, it is very important to remember that projections are not set in stone. The outlook will change if the actual components of change end up being different than the underlying rates in the projections. Continued efforts to retain current residents and to attract new people to the county are essential for helping to make the projections hold true.

## Employment by Industry

	2023 Avg Monthly Employment	5-year Change	5-year % Change	% of Total Employment
Total, All Industries	58,019	-499	-0.9%	100.0%
Education and Health Services	17,046	649	4.0%	29.4%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	12,728	817	6.9%	21.9%
Professional and Business Services	7,281	-582	-7.4%	12.5%
Leisure and Hospitality	6,420	-121	-1.8%	11.1%
Manufacturing	5,125	-376	-6.8%	8.8%
Public Administration	2,468	64	2.7%	4.3%
Financial Activities	2,259	-1,098	-32.7%	3.9%
Construction	2,154	105	5.1%	3.7%
Other Services	1,836	142	8.4%	3.2%
Information	590	-53	-8.2%	1.0%
Natural Resources and Mining	113	-45	-28.5%	0.2%

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Eau Claire County was down -499 jobs (-0.9%) from 2018 to 2023, with average employment levels at 58,019 jobs in 2023. COVID-19 caused a very steep job loss in 2020, interrupting a multi-year growth trend, from which the county is still recovering. That said, the first half of 2024 has averaged about two percent higher than 2023, and QCEW covered jobs averages have been nearly equal to or above the pre-COVID-19 months of 2020. If this trend persists, jobs numbers could exceed pre-COVID-19 levels.

The largest industry in the county was education and health services, accounting for 29.4% of employment in the county in 2023. Eau Claire has a high concentration of health care jobs compared to the state, with multiple large health care systems serving the surrounding counties. The strong nursing program at UW-Eau Claire also plays a role, as today's business location decisions are often driven by talent availability. However, it's important to note that the data do not yet reflect the March 2024 closure of Sacred Heart Hospital. On the education side, UW-Eau Claire and Chippewa Valley Technical College Eau Claire are both located in the county, making it a popular destination for post-secondary education.

Trade, transportation, and utilities, the second largest industry employment super-sector, gained 817 jobs from 2018 to 2023. Wholesale trade, retail trade and transportation all gained jobs rapidly during post-COVID spending, though all three have dipped in 2023. Eau Claire is a retail hub for surrounding counties, resulting in a high concentration of retail establishments.

## Unemployment

Eau Claire County's monthly average unemployment rate in 2023 was 2.7%, compared to the state's rate of 3.0%. This ranks the county 20th in terms of the rate of unemployment in 2023. This is below the statewide average, and while not quite as low as November 2021, it is still incredibly low by historical standards. Demographics are the root cause of these tight labor market conditions, creating a long-term trend that will impact Wisconsin's labor force for decades. Therefore, it's vitally important that we focus on efforts to create local talent pipelines in partnership with the education system, attract talent to the area, retain the talent we have, and recruit underused talent pools like justice-involved individuals or people with disabilities.

### Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate is the percentage of people who are not working but actively looking for work compared to the total number of people in the labor force.

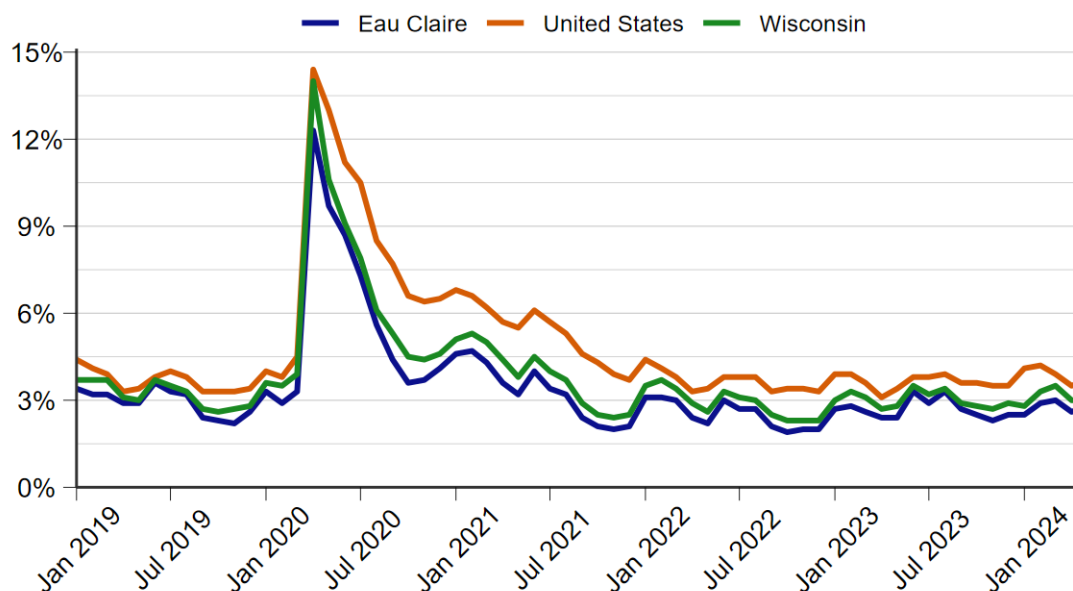


Figure 9: Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## Labor Force Participation

The long-term impact of the aging population is also seen in the declining labor force participation rate (LFPR). LFPR by age group has remained relatively steady over time. However, the population is getting progressively older. Therefore, the overall LFPR is declining as more and more residents enjoy their well-deserved retirements. While Eau Claire County's 2023 LFPR of 67.8% ranked 12th highest in the state, it was around 75% in the mid-1990s when baby boomers were in their prime working years. There are two general strategies that can help alleviate the challenges of declining labor force: 1) increase migration and, 2) more fully using the existing population, which largely boils down to addressing workforce barriers.

### i Labor Force Participation Rate

The labor force participation rate (LFPR) looks at the relative labor resources available and is expressed as the percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older that is working or actively looking for work.

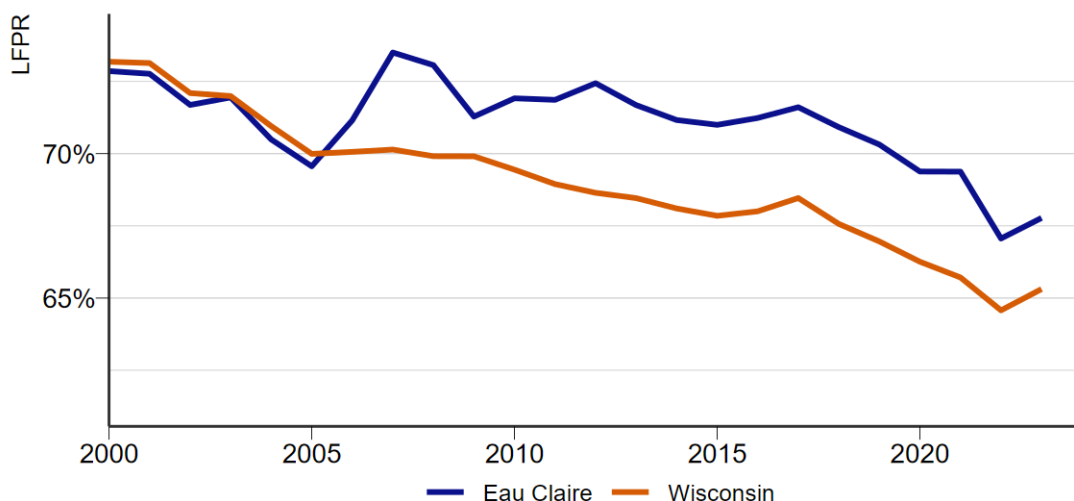


Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

## AI Impact

Occupation	Employment	% of Total Employment	AI Exposure Index
Cashiers	6,300	3.2%	0.89
Fast Food and Counter Workers	5,290	2.7%	-1.00
Retail Salespersons	4,930	2.5%	0.40
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	4,640	2.3%	-0.78
Registered Nurses	4,310	2.2%	0.04
Stockers and Order Fillers	4,050	2.0%	-0.05
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4,030	2.0%	-0.09
Customer Service Representatives	3,340	1.7%	0.75
Office Clerks, General	3,270	1.6%	1.00
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	2,630	1.3%	-1.27

Source: Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence.

### AI Exposure

AI exposure, as computed by the Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence, is the median value across four different research paper's measures of exposure after normalizing each paper's measure to the same mean and variance. A positive value of AI exposure indicates placement in the top 50% of occupations for AI exposure, with higher values indicating greater exposure to AI. Conversely, negative numbers indicate exposure in the bottom 50%. For more information about AI exposure, refer to The Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence Advisory Action Plan ([dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf))

In the West Central Workforce Development Area (WDA), which includes Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix counties, the largest occupation in the WDA is cashiers, accounting for 3.2% of the area's employment. This occupation has an artificial intelligence exposure index of 0.89. For comparison, the occupation with the highest potential AI exposure is bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks, with an AI exposure index of 1.89.

Manual occupations, such as laborers and janitors, tend to have lower AI exposure indexes (0.78 and -1.27, respectively). In contrast, office-based roles like cashiers and customer service representatives have higher AI exposure indexes, reflecting a greater likelihood of being impacted by AI adoption. Given the emerging nature of AI and its limited current adoption across industries, the long-term effects on occupations and the economy remain uncertain.



## Industry Employment Projections

	Industry	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Highest Percent Growth	Construction	8,800	10,035	1,235	14.03%
Lowest Percent Growth	Information	1,208	1,075	-133	-11.01%
Highest Number Employed	Education and Health Services	48,084	52,353	4,269	8.88%
Most Jobs Added	Education and Health Services	48,084	52,353	4,269	8.88%
Total	Total All Industries	221,430	242,223	20,793	9.39%

Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

DWD produces employment projections for Wisconsin's 11 WDAs every two years. Employment in the West Central WDA is projected to grow by 20,793 (9.4%) between 2022 and 2032, slightly outpacing the state's overall rate of 7.1%.

Industries are categorized as either goods-producing industries (for example, manufacturing, construction, and natural resources and mining) or service-producing industries (trade, transportation, utilities, education, health services, and leisure and hospitality). Goods-producing industries are expected to see growth of 8.3% over the decade, while service-producing industries are projected to grow by 9.5%, reflecting demand for services.

During the pandemic, demand shifted dramatically from services to goods, contributing to rapid inflation. With the economy opening, demand for services – and the industries that provide them – is expected to grow significantly.

For more information and detailed projections results for both occupations and industries, view the WisConomy projections page ([jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/projections](https://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/projections)).

## Occupation Employment Projections

	Occupation	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Lowest Percent Growth	Protective Service	3,352	3,381	29	0.9%
Highest Percent Growth	Personal Care and Service	5,561	6,447	886	15.9%
Highest Number Employed	Production	25,871	27,394	1,523	5.9%
Most Jobs Added	Transportation and Material Moving	21,814	24,472	2,658	12.2%
Total	Total, All	221,430	242,223	20,793	9.4%

Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

In the West Central WDA, employment is projected to grow by 20,793 jobs between 2022 and 2032, translating to an average annual increase of approximately 2,079 jobs in the region. However, annual growth is just one component of total yearly job openings. The other two components include labor force exits (retirements) and occupational transfers (people switching to different roles). Strategies to address job openings will vary depending on the combination of these factors for each occupation.

For example, the computer numerically controlled tool operators occupation illustrates the dynamics of job openings. Total employment in this role is expected to decline by 1.6% for west central Wisconsin, but there are 96 projected annual openings. The openings will stem from labor force exits or occupation transfers. Addressing these openings may require strategies beyond simply hiring new workers, such as incentivizing current workers to stay in their occupations longer.

## Aging Population

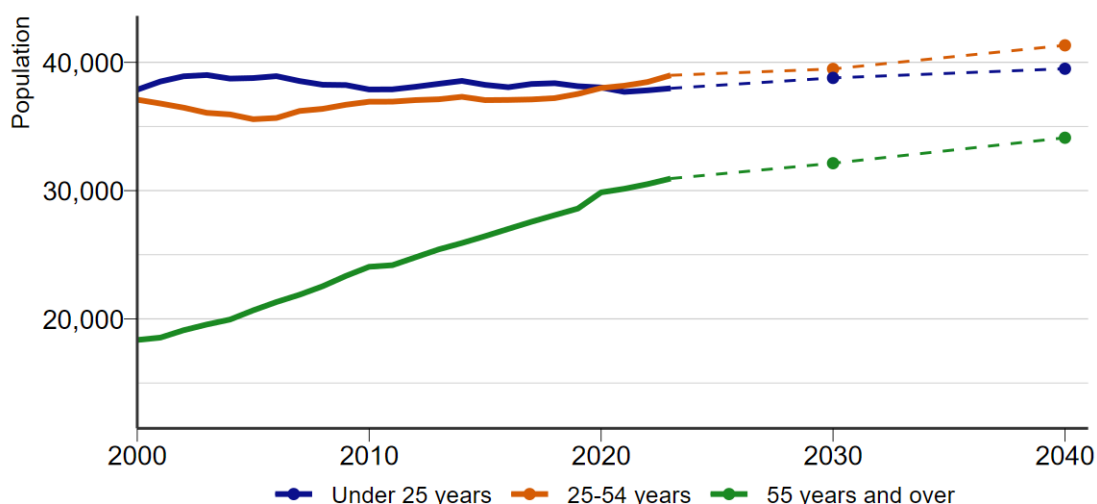


Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

The selected age groups, under 25, 25-54, and over 55, represent three broad life stages, each with unique social needs and impacts. Individuals under 25 are typically pursuing education or exploring early career options. The 25-54 age group represent the prime working years, often associated with career advancement and family formation. Those aged 55 and older are more likely to be transitioning out of the workforce and into retirement.

In 2023, individuals aged 55 and older comprised 28.7% of Eau Claire County's population, up from 19.7% in 2000. This trend is projected to continue for the foreseeable future. This aging trend is not unique to Eau Claire County but reflects broader state and national patterns. A rapidly aging population impacts communities by reducing the labor force, increasing demand for health care, and raising the number individuals relying on transfer payments. While these issues are not as urgent for Eau Claire compared to other counties, these demographic shifts present challenges and opportunities for policy and workforce planning.

## Personal Income

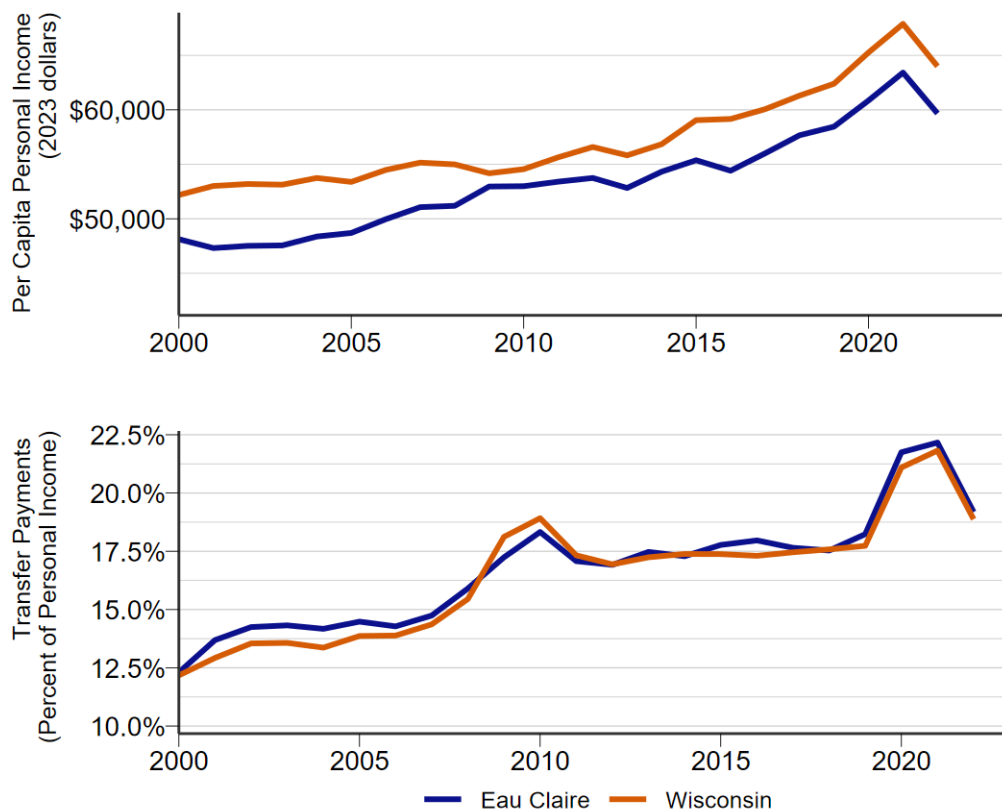


Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

### **i** Personal Income

Personal income includes income from all sources, such as wages, business income, rental income, investments, and government transfer payments. It excludes capital gains or losses, whether realized or unrealized. All dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation using 2023 dollars.

The per capita personal income in Eau Claire County was \$59,670 in 2022. This is below the statewide average of \$63,996 but above the median among Wisconsin's 72 counties at \$56,656. While these figures are adjusted for inflation, they do not account for differences in cost of living across regions.

In 2022, 19.2% of PCPI came from transfer payments rather than earned income. This share is an increase from 12.3% in 2000. The steady increase in the share of transfer payments is likely closely tied to the county's aging population. As residents age, many become eligible for Social Security benefits, which contribute significantly to transfer payments.

## Workforce Pipeline

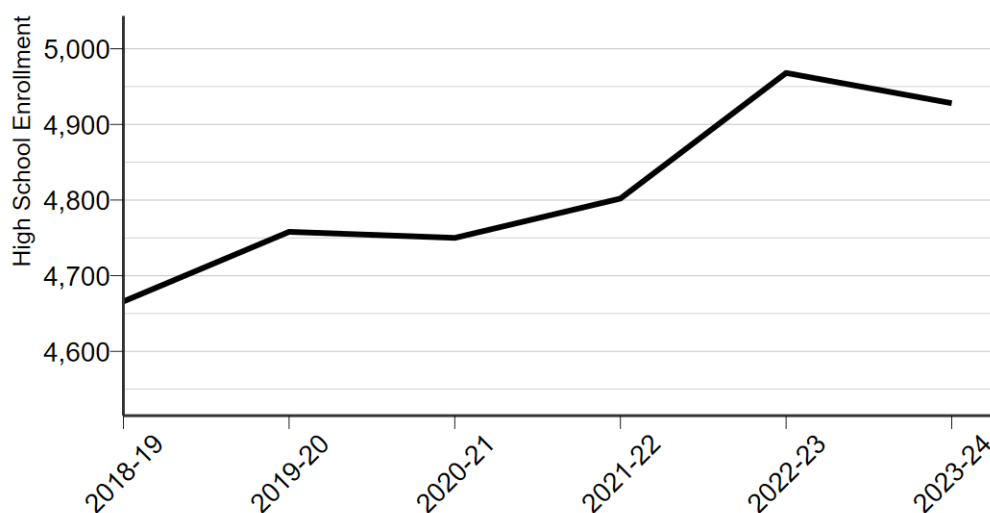


Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education plays a vital role in preparing the next generation of the labor force. The quality of education and training becomes increasingly critical to meet the county's economic needs and ensure a skilled labor force as the county and state's population continues to age.

As of the 2023-24 school year, 4,928 students were enrolled in grades 9-12 across public, private, and home-based schools. County-level totals are determined by the reported enrollment of school district whose main office is located in that county. As school district borders do not necessarily align with county borders, the numbers below may not match the total number of students residing in the county.



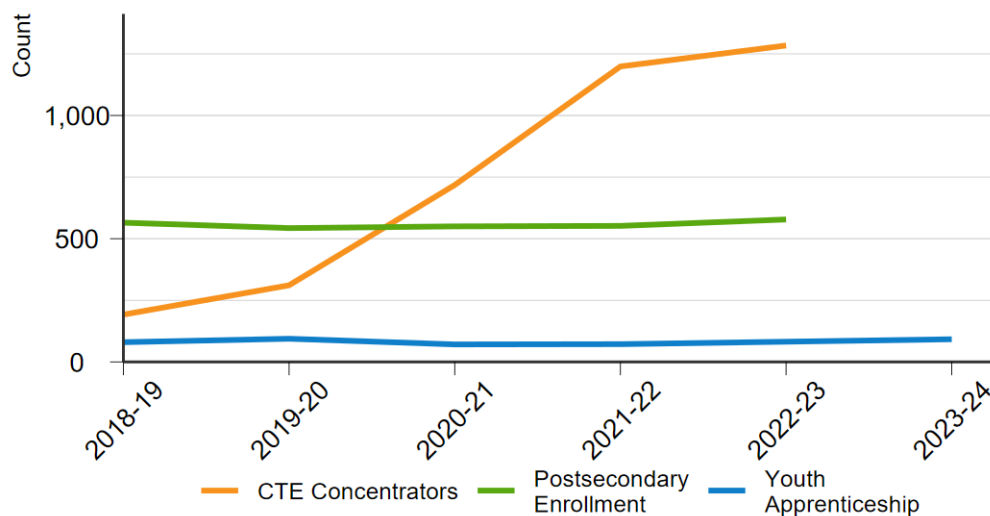


Figure 14: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Workforce Development.

## Career and Technical Education

Of those attendees, 52.3% were concentrators in career and technical education (CTE), compared to 44.3% for the state during the 2022-23 school year.

Among students in grades 11-12, 52.3% were enrolled as concentrators in career and technical education (CTE) during the 2022-23 school year, compared to 44.3% statewide. The career pathway with the largest number of participants was hospitality and tourism, which had 296 students.

### **i** Career and Technical Education

Career and technical education (CTE) equips students for both the workforce and postsecondary education through work-based learning opportunities. CTE concentrators are 11th and 12th graders who have passed at least two CTE courses within a specific career pathway. Home-based students are not included in this data.

	CTE Concentrator	Percent of Grade 11 and 12
Eau Claire	1,284	52.3%
Wisconsin	64,124	44.3%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

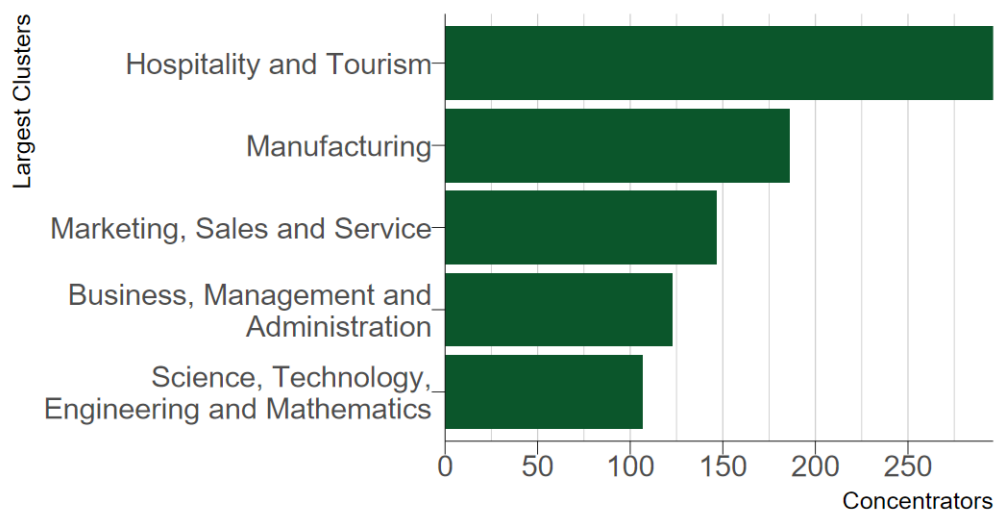


Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

## Postsecondary Enrollment

In the 2022-23 school year, 45.3% of high school graduates in Eau Claire County enrolled in a postsecondary school, compared to 43.6% statewide. This includes enrollment in public and private colleges, universities, and technical schools.

### i Postsecondary Enrollment

Postsecondary enrollment tracks the percentage of high school graduates who attend a postsecondary school (public or private colleges, two- or four-year universities, technical colleges, or training programs) in the fall immediately following graduation. It is important to note that this data may slightly underrepresent actual enrollment due to limitations in how information is matched within the National Student Clearinghouse.

	Postsecondary Enrollment	Percent of Grade 12
Eau Claire	578	45.3%
Wisconsin	31,893	43.6%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

## Youth Apprenticeship

Youth apprenticeship prepares participants for the workforce through direct, hands-on work experience. There were 82 youth apprentices in Eau Claire County in the 2022-23 school year.

Youth apprenticeship programs provide students with hands-on experience to prepare them for the workforce. In the 2022-23 school year, 82 students in Eau County participated in youth apprenticeship opportunities, gaining valuable skills and practical training. This represents 3% of all 11th and 12th graders, which is about half of the statewide participation rate.

### Youth Apprenticeship

Youth Apprenticeship (YA) Program is a school-supervised program that combines work and classroom learning to help high school students prepare for a career. Participants receive on-the-job training directly from the employer. The program helps students explore career paths and helps employers develop a qualified workforce.

	Youth Apprenticeship Participants	Percent of Grade 11 and 12
Eau Claire	82	3.3%
Wisconsin	8,222	5.7%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.