Milwaukee County

2025 WORKFORCE PROFILE

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DWD
Department of Workforce Development

WisConomy

DETI-17957-MIL-P (R. 05/2025)

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 reconstrued 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.

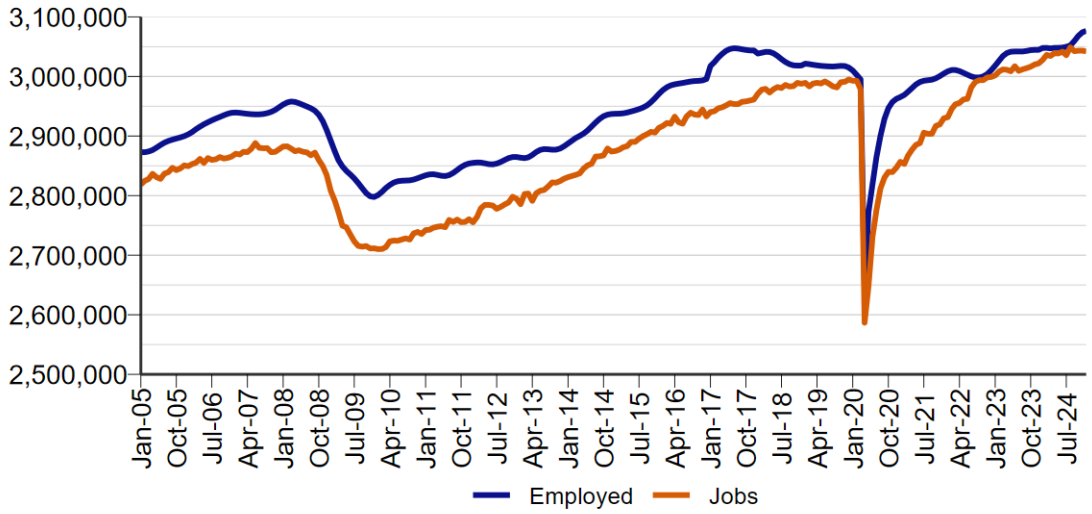


Figure 1: Wisconsin employment and jobs.

Economy

Wisconsin Gross Domestic Product (WGDP) reached new highs in nominal and real dollar terms in 2024[1], 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.

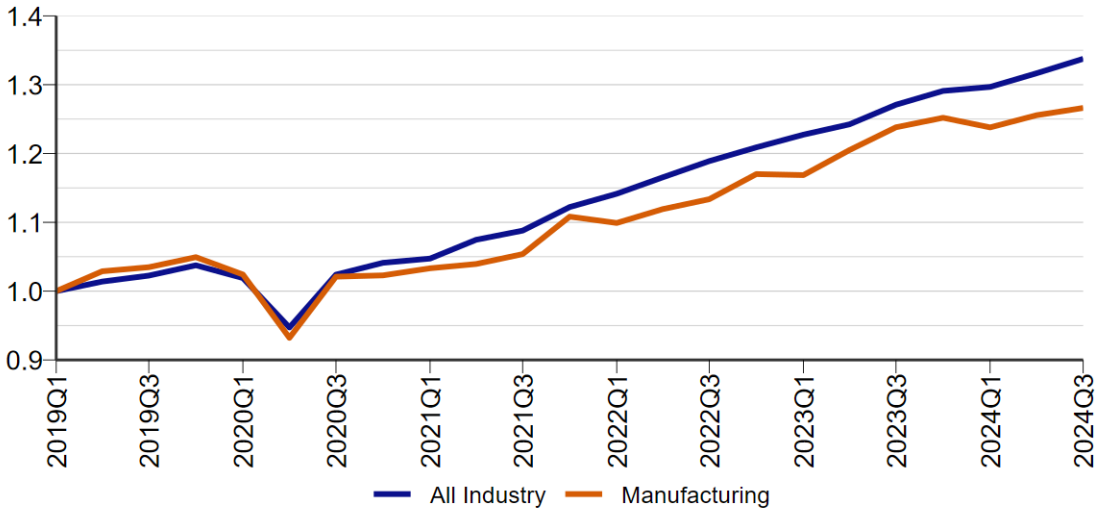


Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

[1]Third quarter 2024 is latest data available.

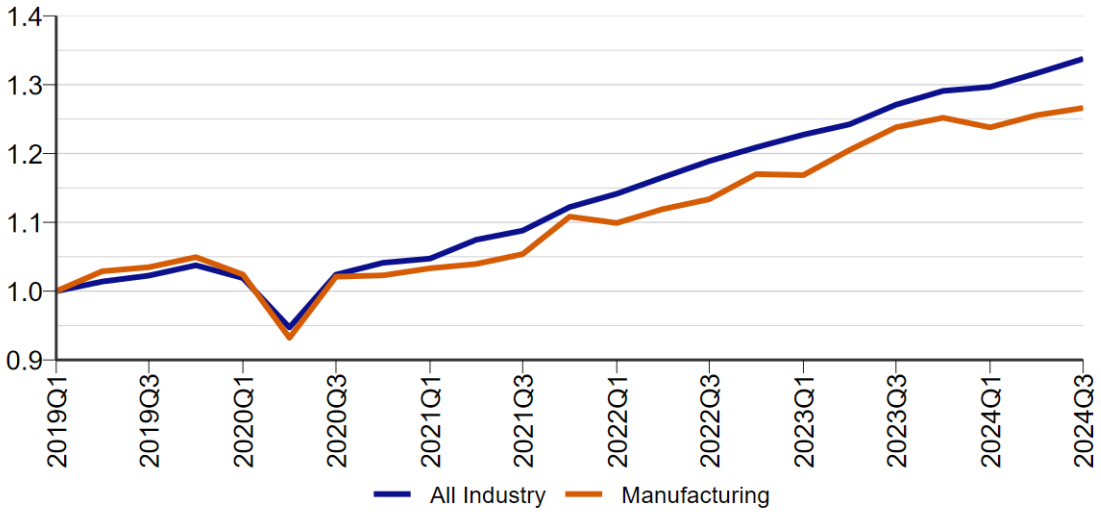


Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

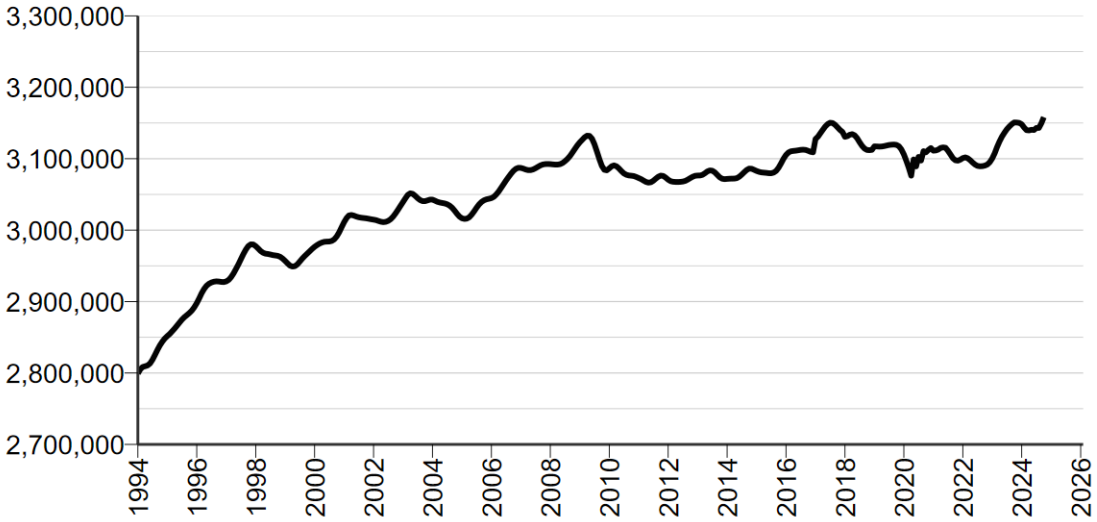


Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

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.

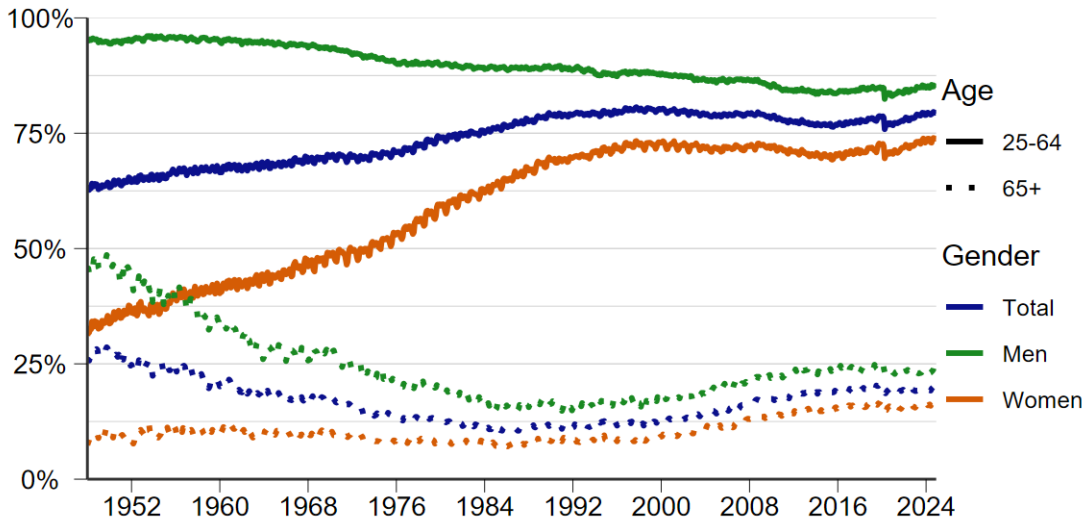


Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

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.

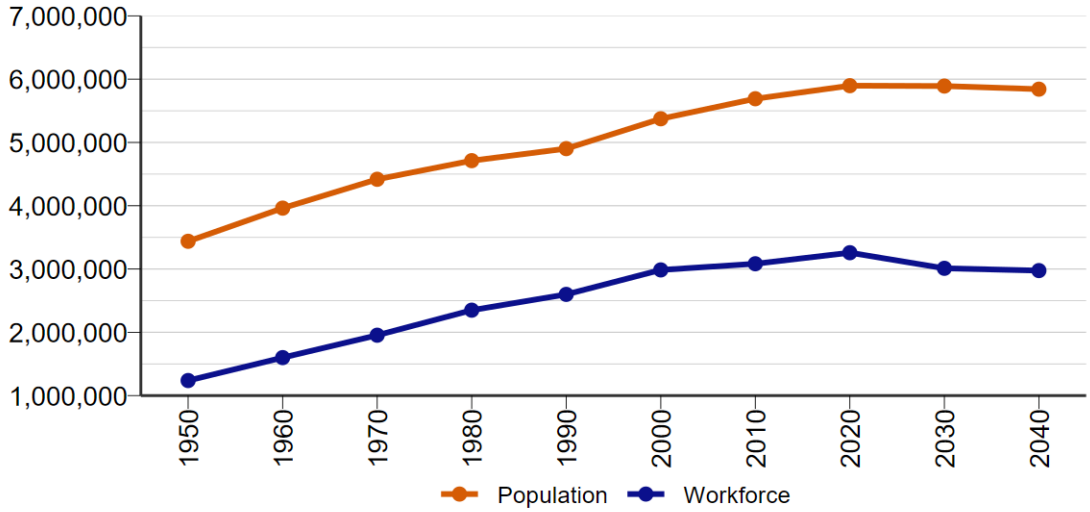


Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

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) 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.

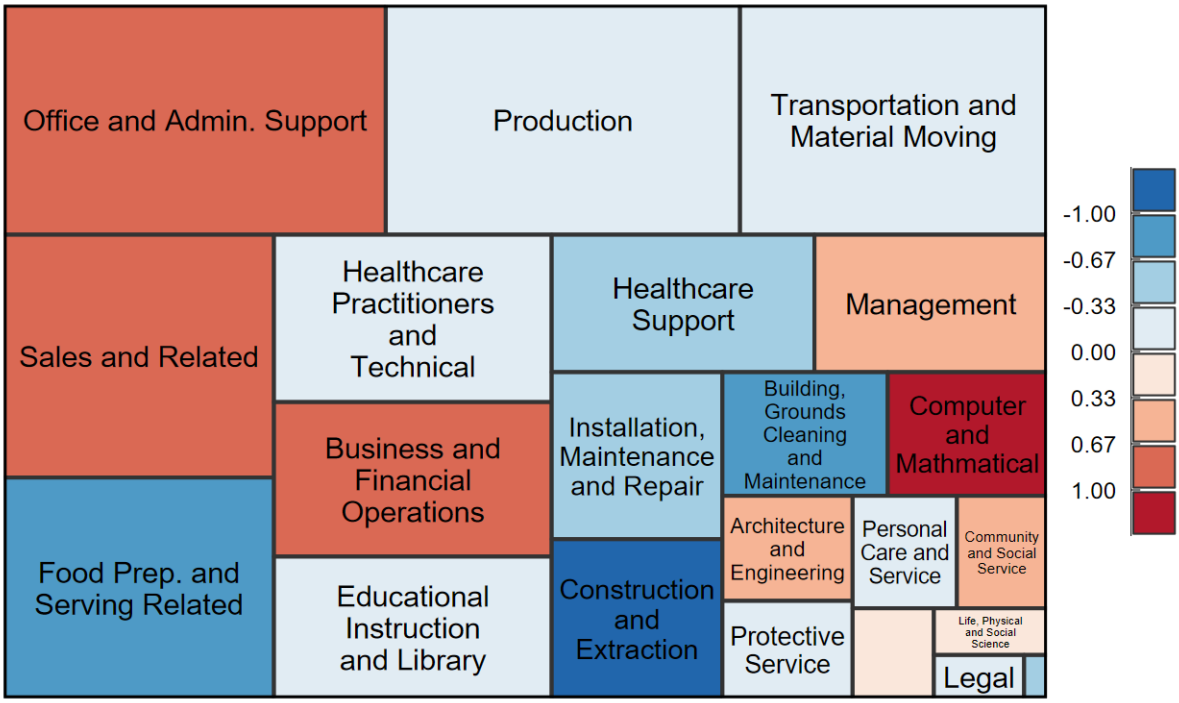


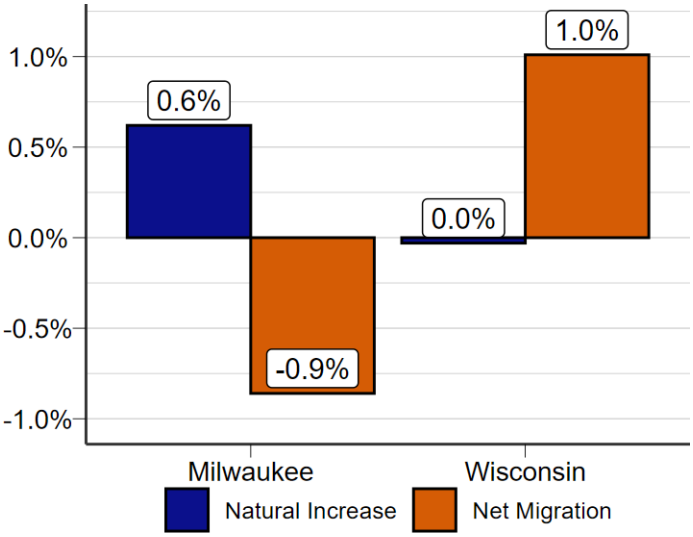
Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

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
Milwaukee, City	577,922	575,722	-2,200	-0.4%
West Allis, City	60,325	59,714	-611	-1.0%
Wauwatosa, City	48,387	48,836	449	0.9%
Oak Creek, City	36,497	38,174	1,677	4.6%
Greenfield, City	37,803	37,672	-131	-0.4%
Franklin, City	36,116	35,785	-331	-0.9%
South Milwaukee, City	20,795	20,526	-269	-1.3%
Cudahy, City	18,204	17,970	-234	-1.3%
Whitefish Bay, Village	14,954	14,782	-172	-1.2%
Greendale, Village	14,854	14,682	-172	-1.2%
Milwaukee, County	939,489	937,259	-2,230	-0.2%
Wisconsin, State	5,893,718	5,951,400	57,682	1.0%

Milwaukee County is the most populous county in the state with 937,259 residents. From 2020 to 2023, the population changed by -0.2%, compared to the 1.0% change in Wisconsin. Since the local economy draws workers throughout the surrounding region, population change for the whole Milwaukee metropolitan statistical area provides valuable context. Population grew in Waukesha (+1.1%), Ozaukee (+1.3%), and Washington Counties (+1.2%). The net population gain for the metro area was 0.3%. This indicates that there is likely movement out of Milwaukee into the surrounding suburban counties.



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.

Both components of population change differed from statewide averages. Milwaukee County's net migration was -0.9%, ranking 69th in the state. Milwaukee County's population growth in terms of natural increase was positive (0.6%), ranking sixth in the state. This reflects the county's relatively younger population. Fertility rates, measured as births per 1,000 women between 15 and 50 years old, were slightly lower in the county than the state (45 vs 48).

Going forward, state and county population are both projected to decline. This is a concerning outlook, but it is 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 underling rates in the projections. In addition to being slightly lower than the statewide rates currently, fertility rates have declined over time. The rate was 58 births per 1,000 women between 15 and 50 in 2010. There would be a positive impact on population growth if fertility rates increase.

Net migration can also improve through continued efforts to retain current residents and to attract new people to the county. This could include changing codes to allow for density, increasing the number of family supporting job opportunities, and more generally making the county a more desirable place to live.

While net migration is typically viewed in the short-term, it can also help lead to more sustainable population growth. Long-term natural population would be likely to increase if net migration improves among younger residents.

Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020-2050 Population Change
Milwaukee	939,489	917,915	885,710	851,605	-9.4%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: Demographic Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

Employment by Industry

	2023 Avg Monthly Employment	5-year Change	5-year % Change	% of Total Employment
Total, All Industries	467,332	-21,044	-4.3%	100.0%
Education and Health Services	139,307	-1,577	-1.1%	29.8%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	77,158	-2,678	-3.4%	16.5%
Professional and Business Services	70,594	-8,324	-10.5%	15.1%
Leisure and Hospitality	49,809	-2,634	-5.0%	10.7%
Manufacturing	48,082	-3,008	-5.9%	10.3%
Financial Activities	28,709	-832	-2.8%	6.1%
Public Administration	19,218	-791	-4.0%	4.1%
Other Services	13,506	-2,728	-16.8%	2.9%
Construction	12,816	1,687	15.2%	2.7%
Information	8,049	-171	-2.1%	1.7%
Natural Resources and Mining	85	13	18.1%	0.0%

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

Milwaukee County employment lost -21,044 jobs (-4.3%) from 2018 to 2023. Average employment levels were at 467,332 jobs in 2023. Employment hit a low of 451,244 in 2020 as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health response. The employment recovery has been stubbornly slow relative to the state, which netted an increase of 1.6% over the same timeframe.

The largest industry was education and health services, accounting for 29.8% of employment in the county in 2023. Employment in the industry declined by 1.1% between 2018 and 2023. As a reference, statewide employment increased by 2.0%. Professional and business services had the largest numeric decline losing -8,324 jobs (-10.5%). Industry employment in the state grew by 0.7%. The majority of the decline was concentrated in the administrative and support services subsector, which lost 7,886 jobs. The downward trend for both industries is recent. Education and health and Professional and business services grew through the 2010's.

The construction industry added 1,687 jobs (+15.2%), which outpaced statewide growth (+11.3%). The specialty trade contractors subsector makes up most employment in the industry and gained 1,134 jobs (15.0%). The construction subsector includes businesses that perform specific tasks in building construction that can include plumbing, painting, electrical work, pouring concrete, site preparation, additions, alterations, maintenance, and repairs. The construction of buildings and heavy and civil engineering construction subsectors make up the remainder of the industry.

Unemployment

Milwaukee County's monthly average unemployment rate in 2023 was 3.8%, compared to the state's rate of 3.0%. Rates for both the county and the state are historically low and indicate a tight labor market. Simply put, employers are having difficulty finding workers. There are some signs that that the difficulty has eased more recently. However, the demographic challenges of an aging population are tightening labor markets and not going away.

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.

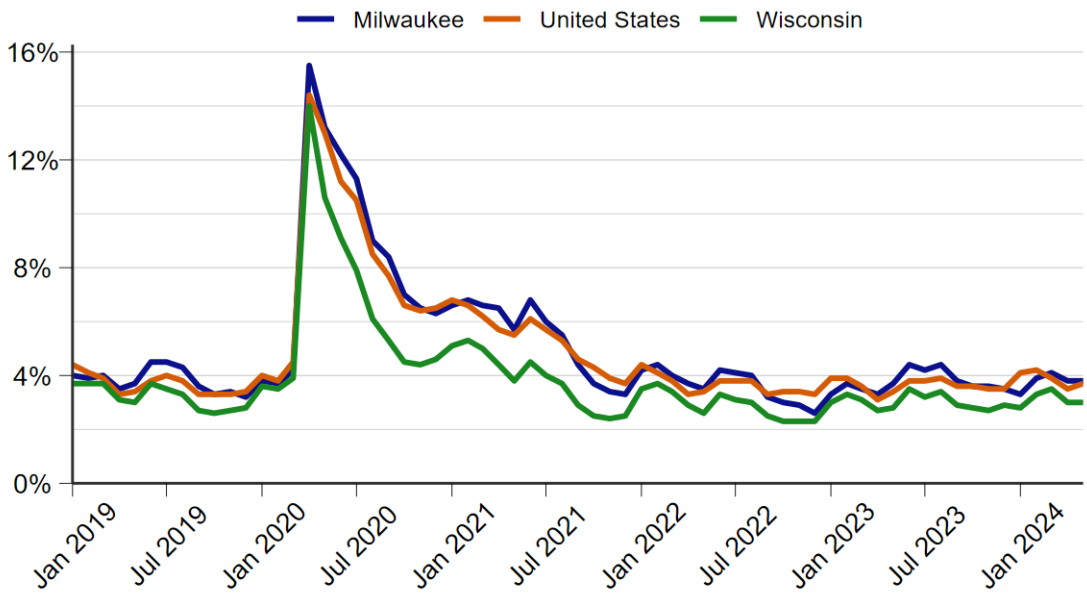


Figure 9: Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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. Milwaukee County's labor force participation LFPR stood at 63.3%, which was 2.0 percentage points below the statewide rate of 65.3%. However, the gap between the state and county has narrowed from 5.7 percentage points in 2000. Given the relatively younger age of its residents, the county could conceivably eclipse statewide LFPR. Additionally, improving net migration would help alleviate workforce quantity challenges.

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.

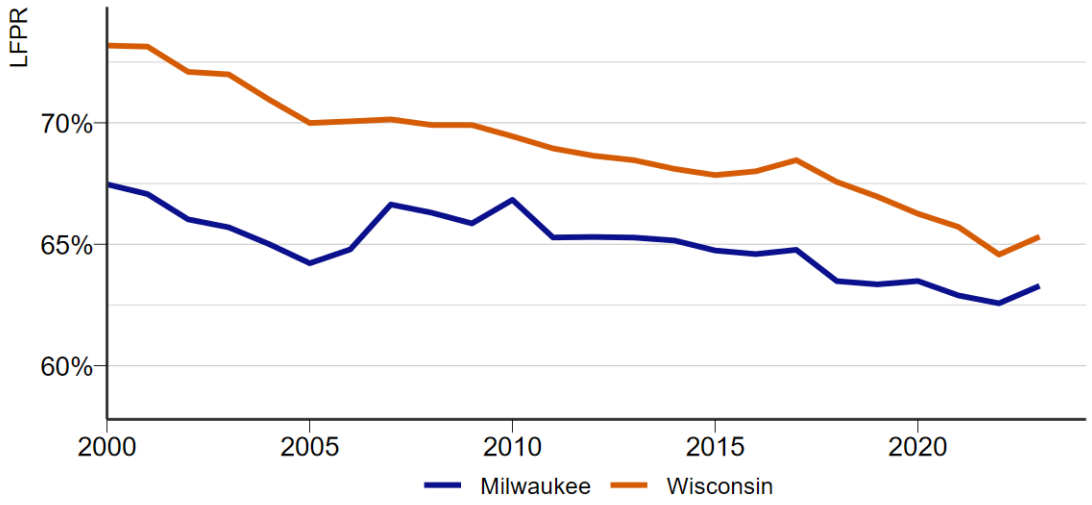


Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

AI Impact

Occupation	Employment	% of Total Employment	AI Exposure Index
NA	NA	NA	NA
:———	———-:	———————:	———————:

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)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are profoundly shaping the nature of work. If implemented correctly, it can contribute to alleviating demographically driven workforce quantity shortages by freeing up workers to focus more on tasks that cannot be replaced by technology. The challenge is to make sure that the workforce is prepared to adapt as technologies rapidly evolve.

Milwaukee County is the only single county workforce development area (WDA) in the state. The largest occupation in the county is registered nurses, accounting for 3.3% of the area's employment. This occupation has an artificial intelligence exposure index of 0.04. For context, the occupation with the highest potential AI exposure is bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks, with an AI exposure index of 1.89.

Industry Employment Projections

	Industry	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Highest Number Employed	Education and Health Services	132,101	141,020	8,919	6.75%
Most Jobs Added	Education and Health Services	132,101	141,020	8,919	6.75%
Highest Percent Growth	Leisure and Hospitality	46,226	52,998	6,772	14.65%
Total	Total All Industries	497,829	529,544	31,715	6.37%

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

DWD conducts employment projections for Wisconsin's 11 Workforce Development Areas (WDA) every two years. Employment in Milwaukee WDA is expected to increase by 31,715 (6.4%), compared to the state's growth rate of 7.1%. Goods producing industries are projected to grow by 4.4% while service providing industries are projected to grow by 6.4%.

In the Milwaukee WDA, the leisure and hospitality industry is projected to be the fastest-growing industry, growing at a rate of 14.6% from 2022 to 2032. This represents a return to pre-COVID levels as the industry was particularly hard hit during the pandemic.

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

Occupation Employment Projections

	Occupation	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Highest Percent Growth	Architecture and Engineering	8,290	9,687	1,397	16.85%
Lowest Percent Growth	Legal	5,355	5,087	-268	-5.00%
Most Jobs Added	Healthcare Support	37,395	42,011	4,616	12.34%
Highest Number Employed	Office and Administrative Support	60,844	58,057	-2,787	-4.58%
Total	Total, All	497,829	529,544	31,715	6.37%

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

In the Milwaukee County, architecture and engineering occupations is projected to be the fastest-growing occupational group, increasing at a rate of 16.9% from 2022 to 2032. Engineers make up about two-thirds of this group. Jobs in office and administrative support workers support occupations are projected to decline by 4.6%. However, this occupational group has a projected replacement need of nearly 6,400 workers. Given the aging population, there will be occupations that have limited growth or even declining employment totals but still have a need for employees. This is largely driven by increasing retirements.

Aging Population

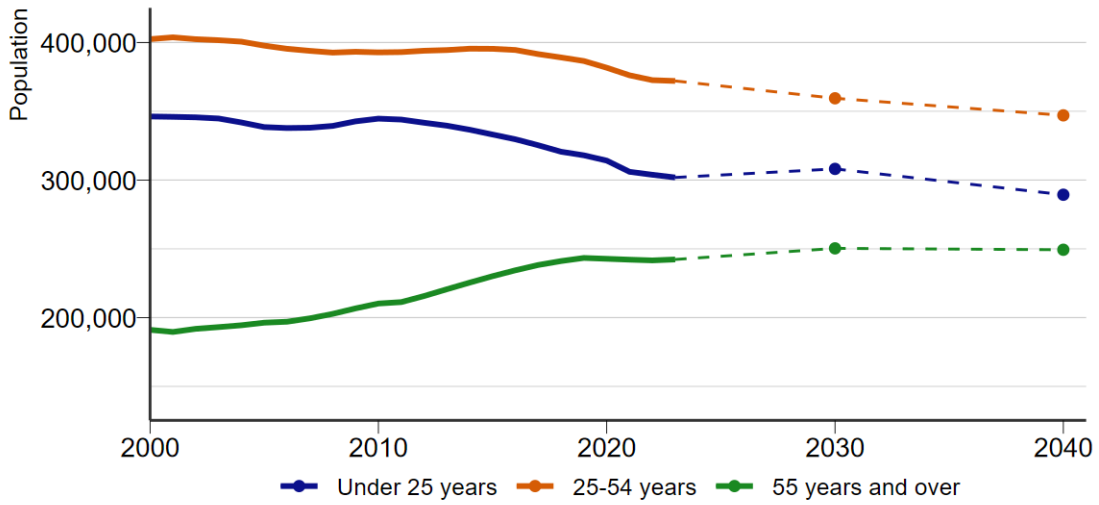


Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

Age demographics have been mentioned throughout this profile. The selected age groups in the chart above are significant because they represent different stages of typical labor force participation. Participation increases rapidly staring from 16 to 24 years old. Residents in these age groups are less likely to be full-time since they're more likely to be enrolled in secondary or post-secondary schools. 25 to 54 years old is considered prime working years. Participation starts to drop precipitously at 55 years old. This age group represents the tail end of the workforce participation as these residents can be expected to be nearing retirement, if they haven't already exited the workforce.

The share of the population age 55 and older was 26.4% in 2023, growing from 20.3% in 2000. It is projected to grow to 28.2% by 2040. The population under 55 has declined over the same timeframe. While this increase is and will continue to strain workforce availability, it is relatively less extreme than the rest of the state. Approximately 36% of the population in neighboring counties in the metro areas are 55 years or older. The statewide average is 32.7% and exceeds 50% in some counties.

Personal Income

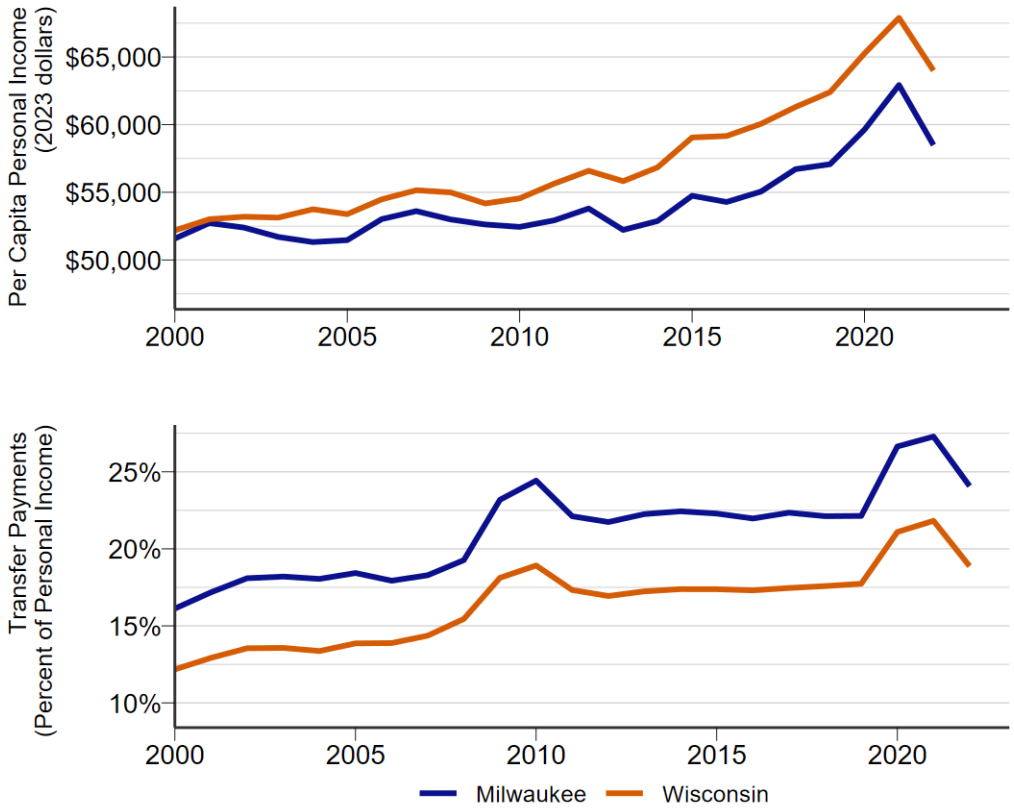


Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

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 Milwaukee County was $58,492 in 2022, which was $5,503 below the statewide average ($63,996). The graph below displays the change over time for the two areas. Per capita income for the state and the county essentially matched in the 2000's before a subtle but noticeable divergence has persisted for the past two decades. This aligns with national outsourcing trends that have impacted a number of rustbelt cities.

In total, 24.1% of income came from transfer payments as opposed to earned income in 2022. The share has increased from 16.1% in 2000. The two prominent temporary rises in the share of transfer payments align with the Great Recession and Covid era recession. Economic downturns usually put downward pressure on earned income sources such as wages and business income.

At the same time, they trigger automatic stabilizers such as the Unemployment Insurance program. The long-term upward trend in the share of transfer payments is yet another reflection of the aging population since this component includes Social Security and other retirement income sources.

Workforce Pipeline

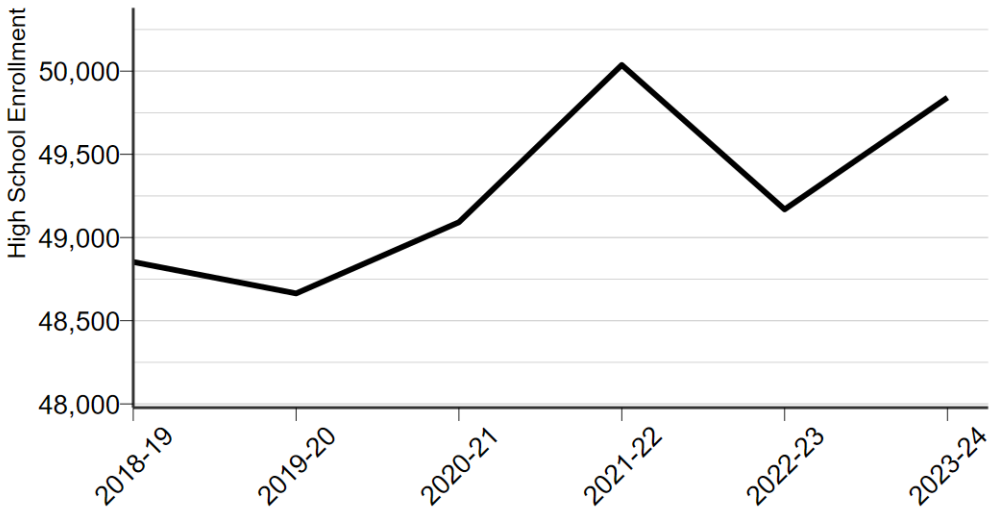


Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education prepares the next generation of the labor force. As of the 2023-24 school year, 49,841 students were enrolled in grades 9-12. This includes public, private, and home-based schools. Note that school district borders can extend into multiple counties, meaning that county-level counts may not necessarily represent the precise enrollment within county borders. County-level totals are determined by the reported enrollment of school district whose main office is located in that county. Because 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.

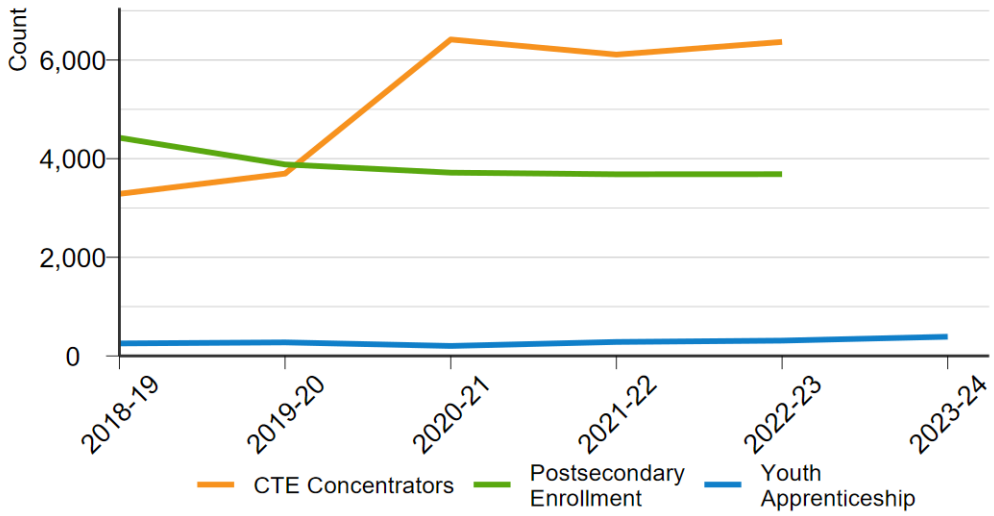


Figure 14: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Workforce Development.

Career and Technical Education

Of those attendees, 29.0% were concentrators in career and technical education (CTE), compared to 44.3% for the state during the 2022-23 school year. CTE participation is evidence of efforts to improve career readiness among high school students.

> **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
Milwaukee	6,367	29.0%
Wisconsin	64,124	44.3%

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

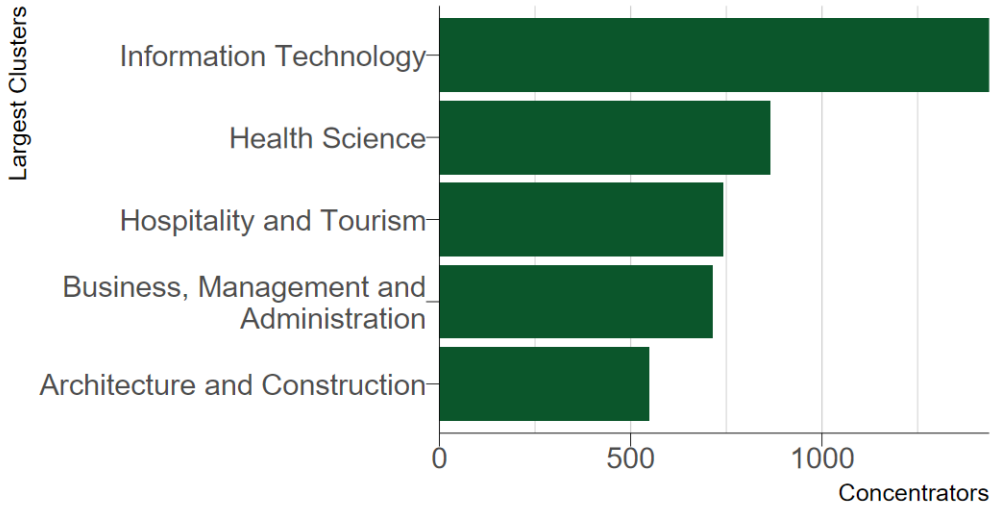


Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Postsecondary Enrollment

The percentage of high school completers who went on to enroll in a postsecondary institution as a percentage of all 12th grade students in 2022-23 was 34.9%. In Wisconsin, it was 43.6%. This metric counts students from Milwaukee County secondary schools that went on to postsecondary education, regardless of the location of the institution. While there is no guarantee that these students will return to the county, their ties to the area make them a potential source of skilled workers after they complete education and training programs.

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
Milwaukee	3,685	34.9%
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 310 youth apprentices in Milwaukee County in the 2022-23 school year, which makes up approximately 1% of 11th and 12th graders. The rate is substantially lower than the

state (6%). This indicates an opportunity to expand the program and improve workforce readiness among students.

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
Milwaukee	310	1.4%
Wisconsin	8,222	5.7%

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