Pepin County

2025 WORKFORCE PROFILE

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DWD
Department of Workforce Development

WisConomy

DETI-17957-PEP-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.

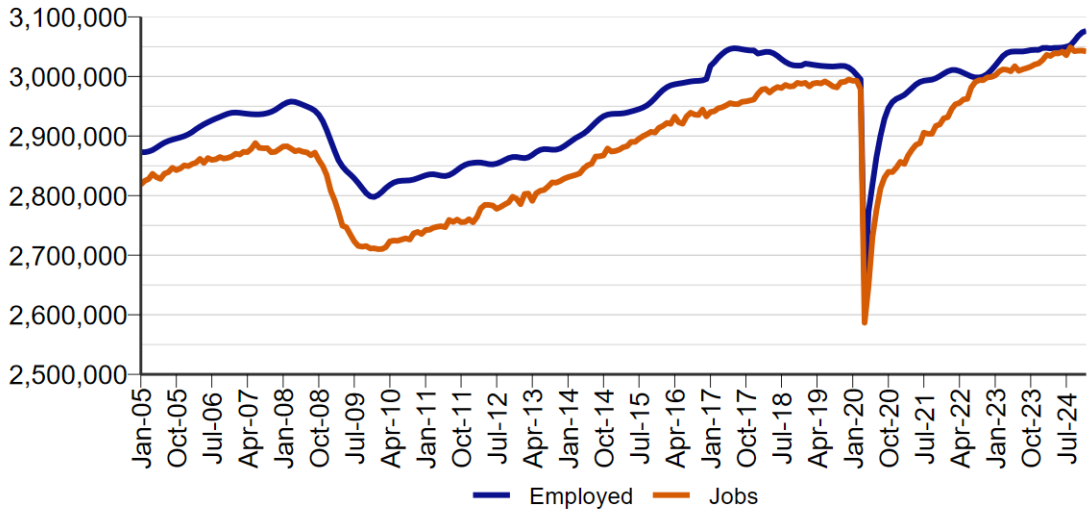


Figure 1: Wisconsin employment and jobs.

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.

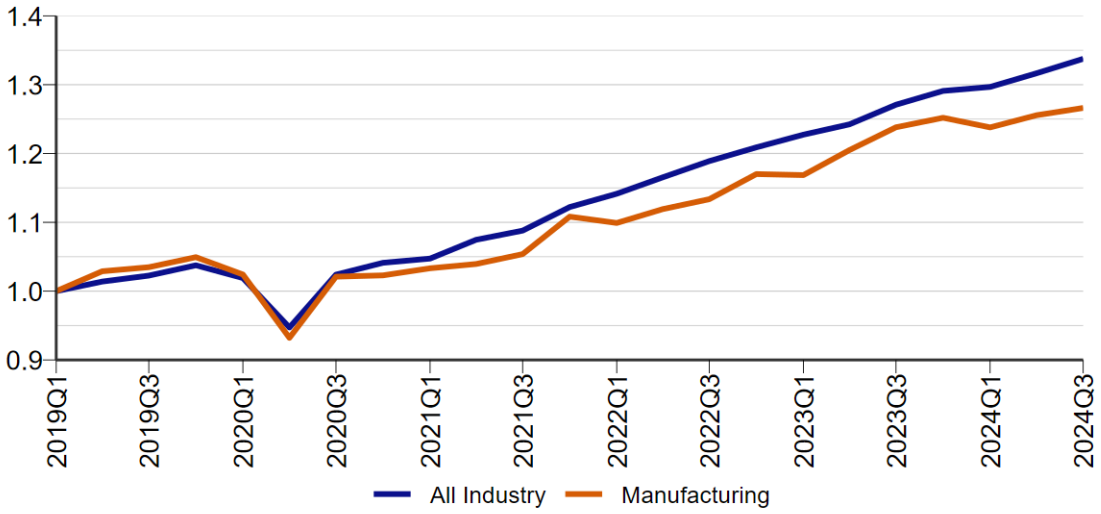


Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

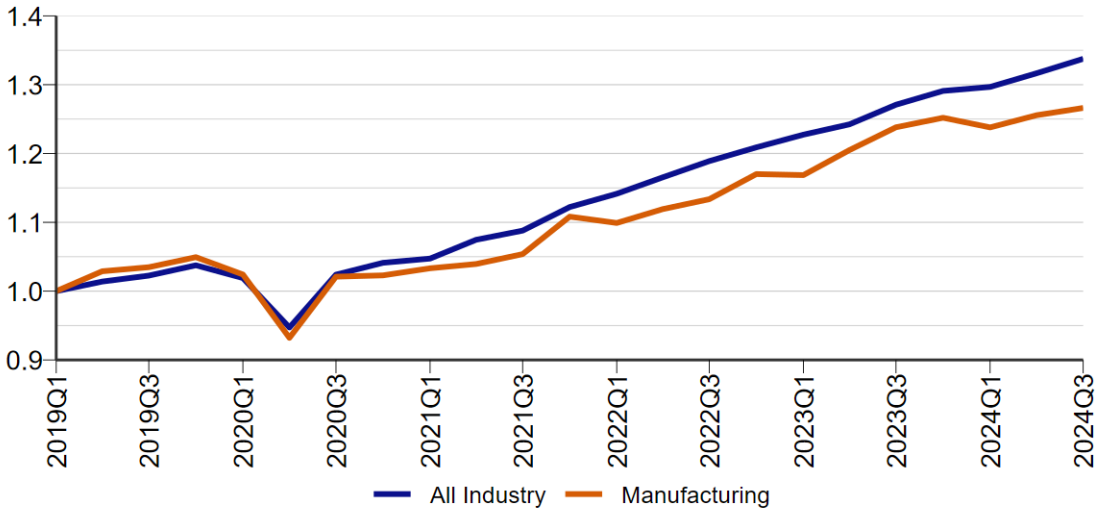


Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

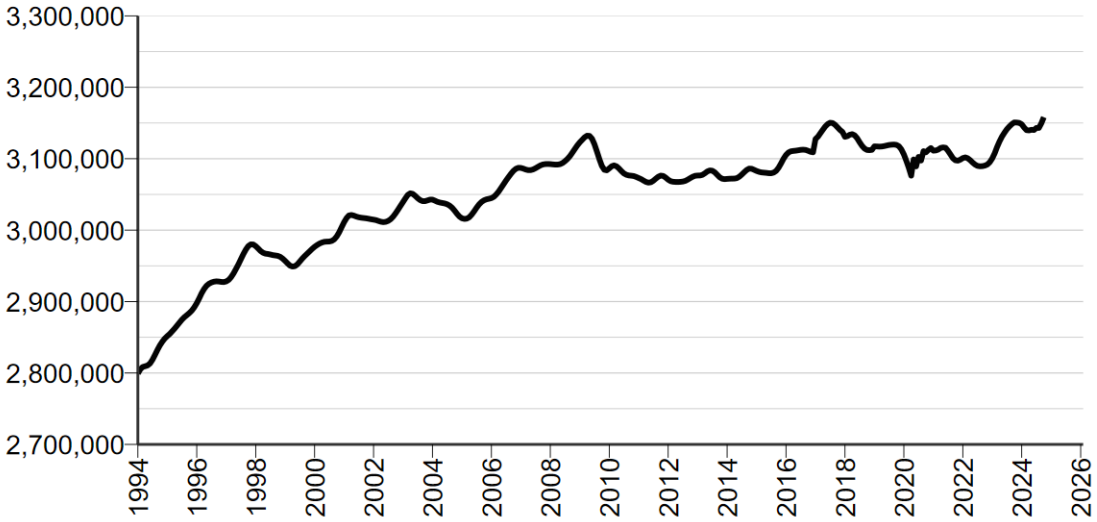


Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

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.

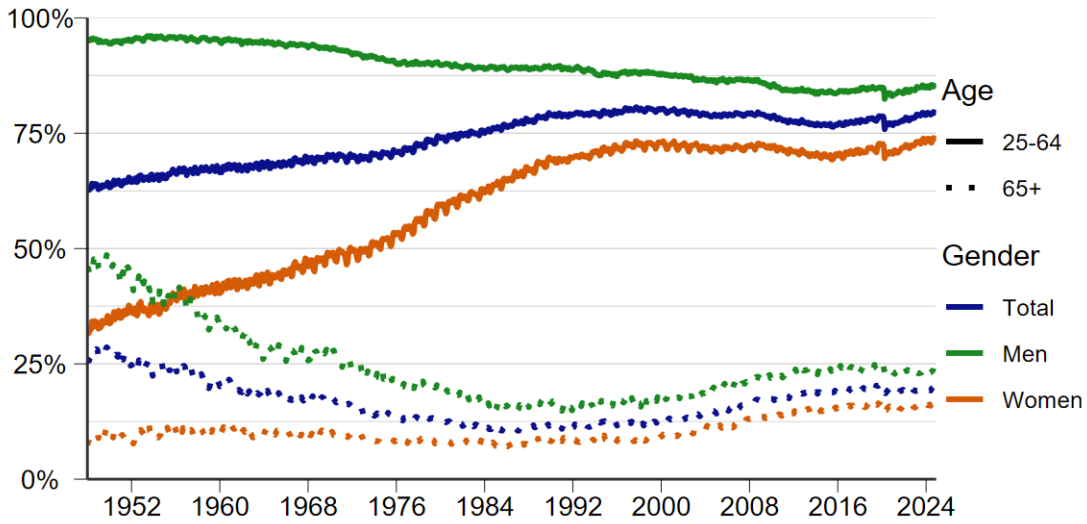


Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

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.

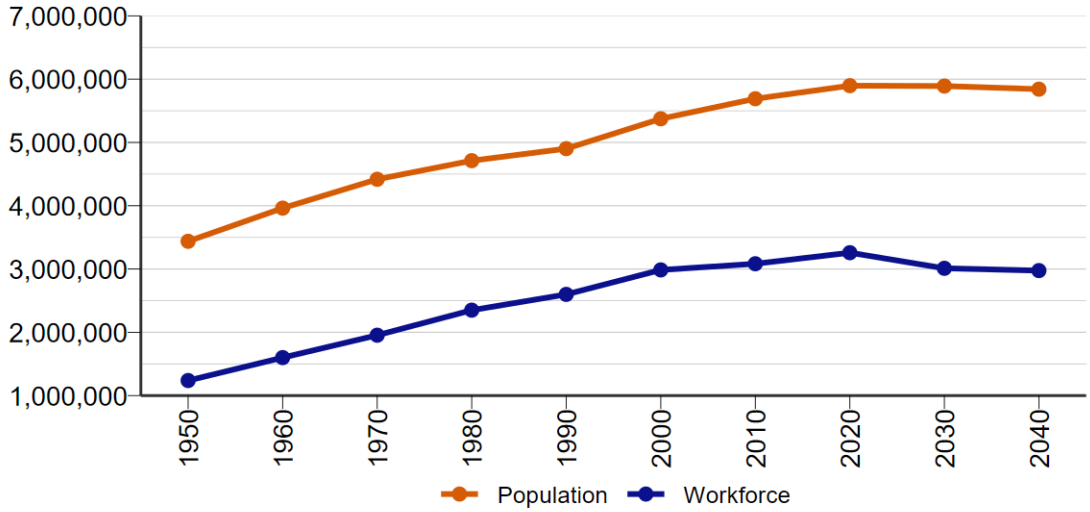


Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

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.

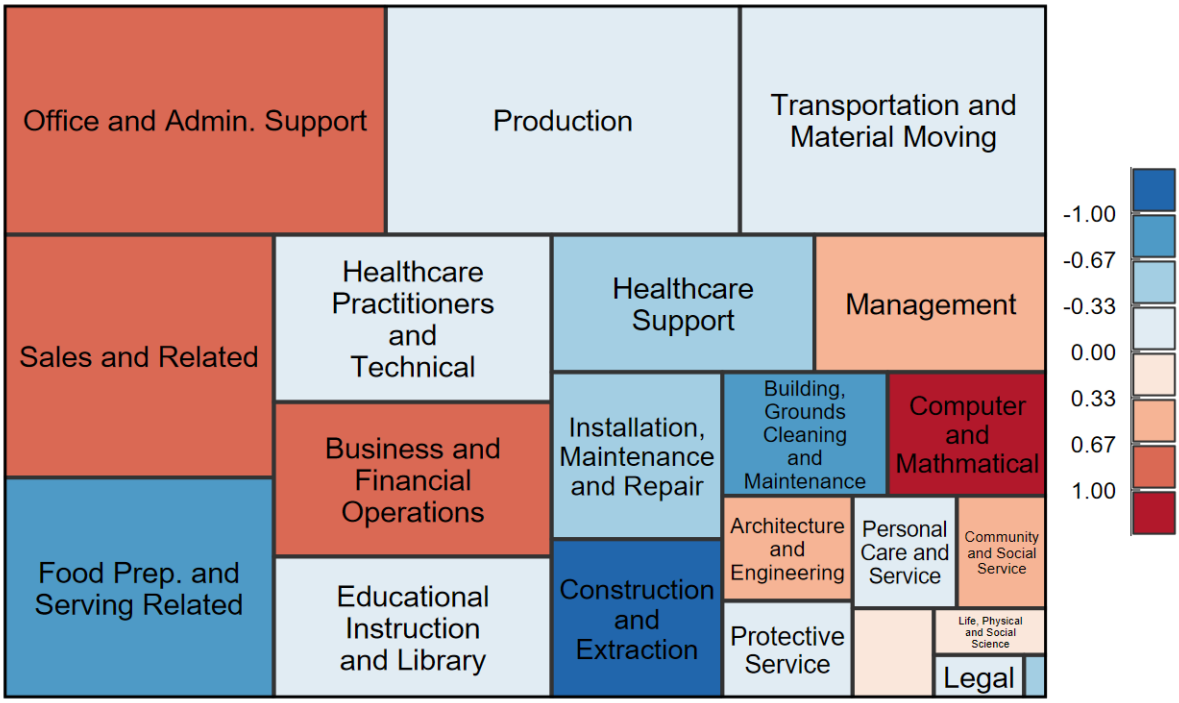


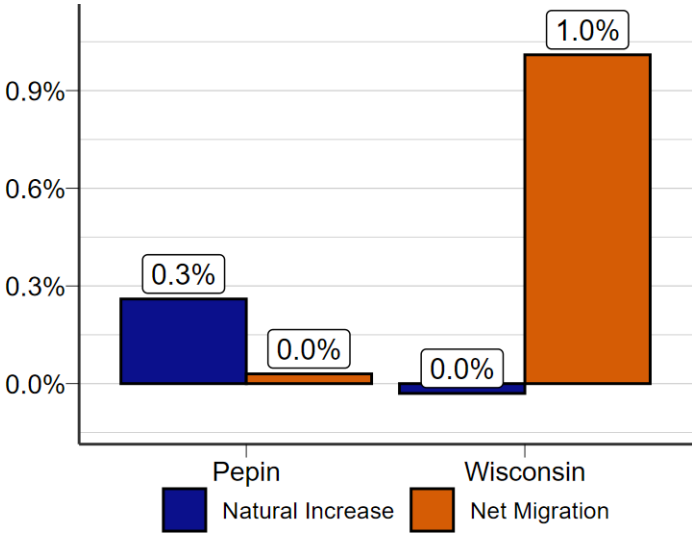
Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

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
Durand, City	1,854	1,834	-20	-1.1%
Waterville, Town	829	840	11	1.3%
Pepin, Town	741	745	4	0.5%
Pepin, Village	731	741	10	1.4%
Albany, Town	716	731	15	2.1%
Durand, Town	710	706	-4	-0.6%
Lima, Town	693	685	-8	-1.2%
Waubeek, Town	423	424	1	0.2%
Frankfort, Town	325	327	2	0.6%
Stockholm, Town	218	225	7	3.2%
Pepin, County	7,318	7,339	21	0.3%
Wisconsin, State	5,893,718	5,951,400	57,682	1.0%

Pepin County is the 69th most populous county in Wisconsin with 7,339 residents. It is also the state's 30th fastest-growing county. From 2020 to 2023, the population changed by 0.3%, compared to the 1.0% change in Wisconsin.



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 population of Pepin County is estimated to have increased by 21 individuals from 2020 to 2023. Durand, the county's largest city and county seat, had an estimated population of 1,834 in 2023. Excluding the City of Durand, Pepin County is composed of many smaller municipalities with populations of 1,000 or fewer.

Pepin County's population growth in terms of natural increase was 0.3%, ranking 13th in the state. Net migration was 0.0%, ranking 58th in the state.

From 2020 to 2023, net migration was positive by two individuals. Unlike many surrounding counties and the trend in Wisconsin, population change due to natural increase was positive in the

county, which was estimated to have increased the population by 19 people. The sum of net migration and natural increase explains the estimated increase of 21 people. This is one of Wisconsin's smallest counties, both geographically and in terms of population, meaning that small changes can greatly influence growth rates. The relatively high rate of natural increase points to relatively high birth rates, but Pepin is still relatively old. From 2017 to 2022, the median age in Pepin County was 46.3, compared to Wisconsin's median age of 39.9, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020-2050 Population Change
Pepin	7,318	6,855	6,325	5,755	-21.4%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: Demographic Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

Pepin County is projected to have a significant decrease in population from 2020 to 2050, going from 7,318 in 2020 to 5,755 in 2050. Considering the numerous variables that influence these estimates, which can fluctuate rapidly or evolve over time, it's crucial to highlight that these figures are merely projections. However, based on current and expected trends in natural increase and net migration, Pepin County will likely see a decrease in population over the next few decades.

Employment by Industry

	2023 Avg Monthly Employment	5-year Change	5-year % Change	% of Total Employment
Total, All Industries	2,424	154	6.8%	100.0%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	608	30	5.2%	25.1%
Education and Health Services	478	-30	-5.9%	19.7%
Leisure and Hospitality	317	81	34.3%	13.1%
Construction	225	16	7.7%	9.3%
Manufacturing	213	NA	NA	8.8%
Natural Resources and Mining	179	NA	NA	7.4%
Public Administration	164	-9	-5.2%	6.8%
Professional and Business Services	116	-47	-28.8%	4.8%
Financial Activities	70	-5	-6.7%	2.9%
Information	NA	NA	NA	NA
Other Services	NA	NA	NA	NA

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

Pepin County employment added 154 jobs (6.8%) from 2018 to 2023. Average employment levels were at 2,424 jobs in 2023. From 2018 to 2023, the fastest-growing industry was leisure and hospitality, adding 81 jobs for a 34.3% growth rate.

Looking at the five-year numeric change, the county has exceeded pre-pandemic employment numbers. Trade, transportation, and utilities remained the largest industry in 2023, representing 25.1% of the county's industry workforce. Within that industry, the subsector of merchant wholesalers, durable goods was the largest subsector, with an average monthly employment of 146 in 2023. This points to Pepin's rural nature with farm equipment representing a substantial portion of that industry. This industry has exceeded its pre-pandemic levels, growing by 33 employees since 2018.

Not all industries saw an increase in employment, professional and business services had the largest numeric decrease of 47 jobs between 2018 and 2023. Pepin County is a smaller county, so some of its employment data is suppressed to protect identifiable information.

Unemployment

Pepin County's monthly average unemployment rate in 2023 was 3.1%, compared to the state's rate of 3.0%. This ranks the county 33rd in terms of the rate of unemployment in 2023.

The average annual unemployment rate for Pepin County has remained between 3.1% and 3.5% annually since the pandemic. In 2020, the average unemployment was 6.0%, decreasing to 3.1% in 2023. With unemployment rates being around historical lows since the pandemic, it's common to hear the term "tight labor market," meaning there are more job openings than workers to fill the positions. While a tight labor market is usually considered good for job seekers, it can make it difficult for employers to maintain and grow their business. 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 underutilized talent pools like the justice-involved, people with disabilities, among others.

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.

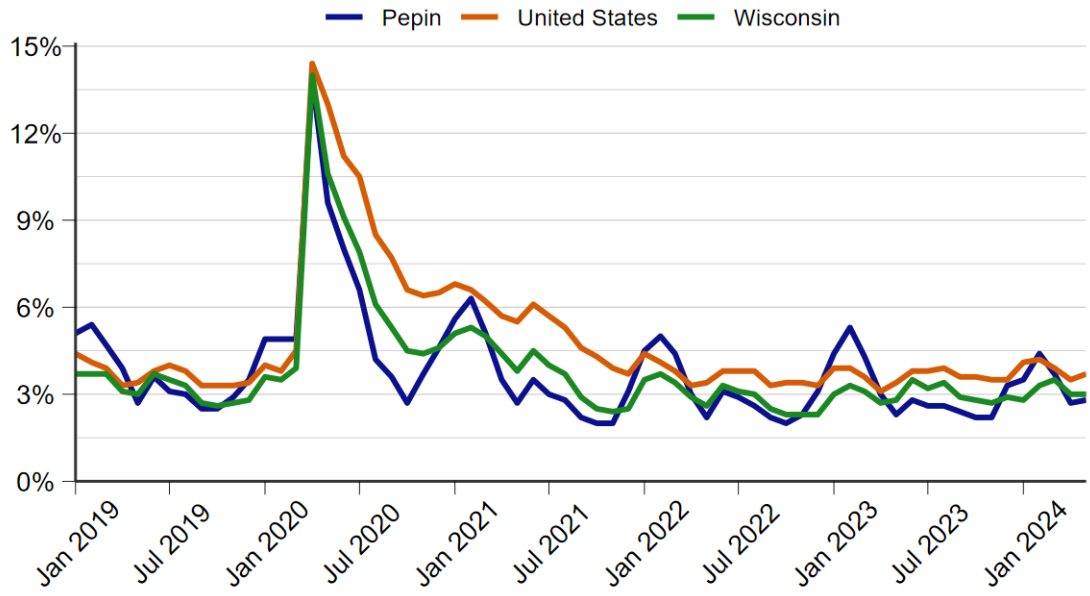


Figure 9: Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Labor Force Participation

Pepin County's labor force participation rate (LFPR) has remained relatively stable the past decade, ranging between 68.0% and 71.0%, with a rate of 70.2% in 2023. In recent years, this has exceeded Wisconsin's LFPR, despite Pepin's age. This likely reflects delayed retirements as individuals work into older age. However, there are limits to this. As its population continues to age, more individuals will retire and exit the labor market, reducing the LFPR. To address the challenges of a declining labor force, two key strategies can be implemented: increasing migration and maximizing the potential of the existing population by overcoming workforce barriers.

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.

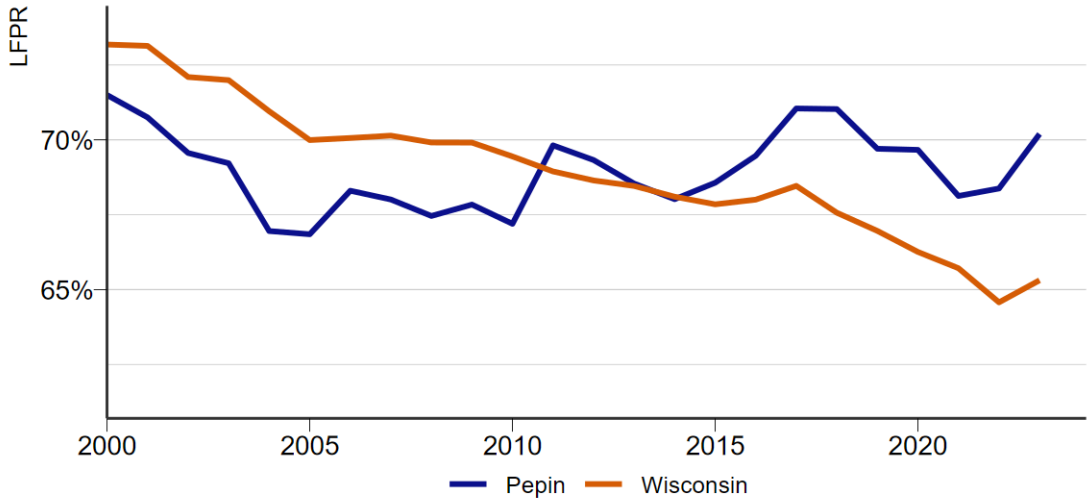


Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

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)

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 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 office clerks 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).

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 occupation of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers illustrates the dynamics of job openings. This occupation is expected to have 473 annual openings for West Central WDA, but only 41 of these openings stem from expected employment growth. The remaining 432 openings are from estimated 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

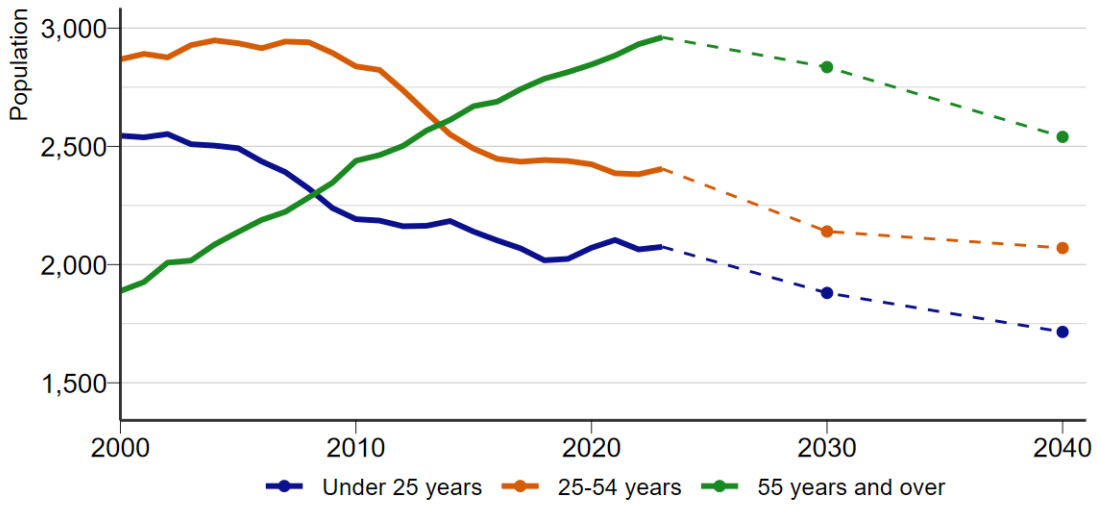


Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and
WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

The selected age groups, under 25, 25-54, and over 55, represent three broad life stages, each with unique needs and impacts in society. Individuals under 25 are typically pursuing education or exploring early career options. The 25-54 age group represents 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.

The population aged 55 and older grew from 1,888 in 2000 to 2,961 in 2023. Between the years of 2024 and 2030, the population of 55 years and over is projected to level off and to begin decreasing in Pepin County. If these population projections hold true, the county will have decreasing populations in all three age groups over the next decade.

Personal Income

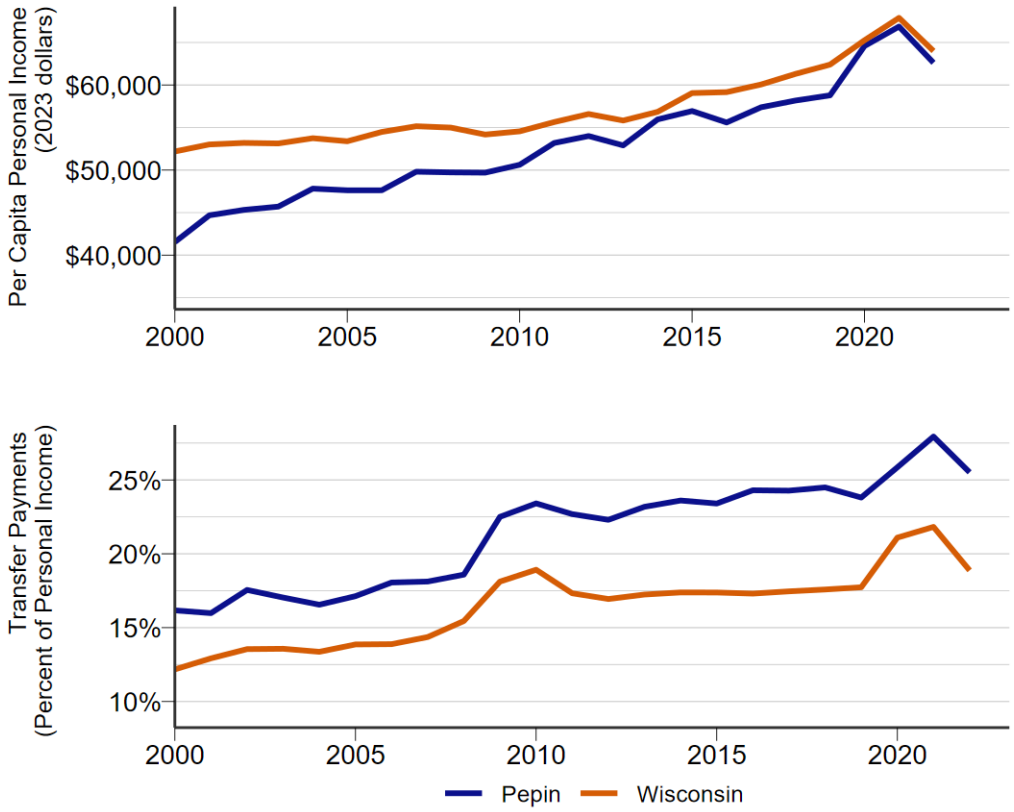


Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

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 (PCPI) in Pepin County was $62,612 in 2022, compared to the statewide average of $63,996. While these figures are adjusted for inflation, they do not account for differences in cost of living across regions. Counties with higher proportions of younger or older population demographics, meaning less of the population in their prime working years, naturally tend to have a lower PCPI than the state.

In 2022, 25.5 % of PCPI came from transfer payments rather than earned income. 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. Increases in transfer payments can be observed during the 2008-2009 Great

Recession and the 2020 pandemic, when Unemployment Insurance and stimulus payments played a key role in stabilizing the economy during those economic downturns.

Workforce Pipeline

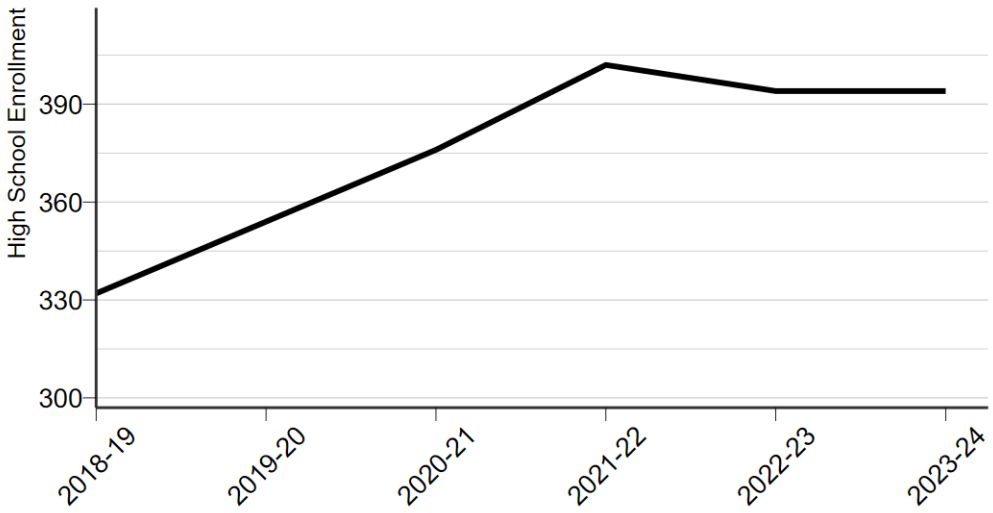


Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education prepares the next generation of the labor force. As of the 2023-24 school year, 394 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. Counts are determined by the reported enrollment of school district whose main office is located in that county.

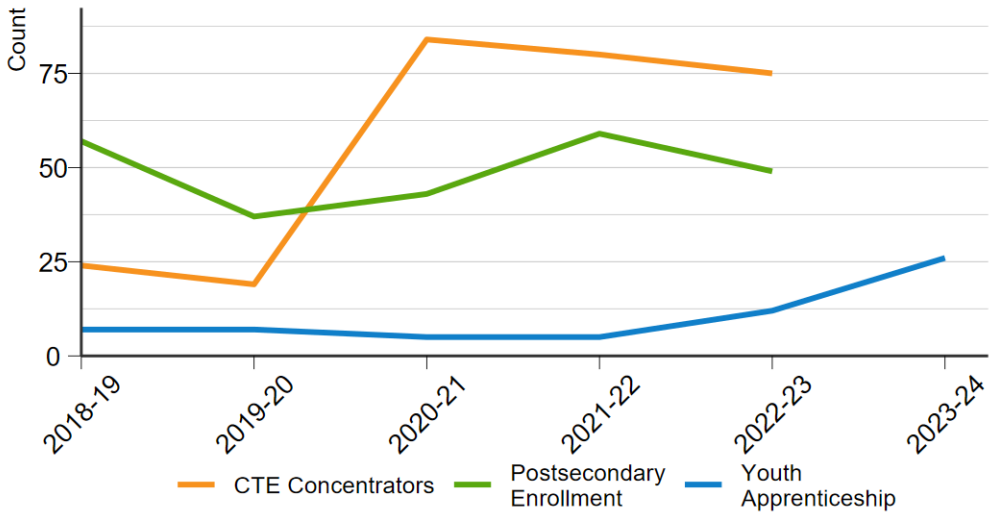


Figure 14: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Workforce Development.

Career and Technical Education

Of those attendees, 35.9% 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, 35.9% 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 agriculture, food, and natural resources, which had 33 students. This makes sense given the rural nature of Pepin County, where there are 3.9 cows per resident as of 2017 (UW Applied Population Lab). Architecture and construction followed as the second most popular pathway, with 17 students concentrating in the field.

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
Pepin	75	35.9%
Wisconsin	64,124	44.3%

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

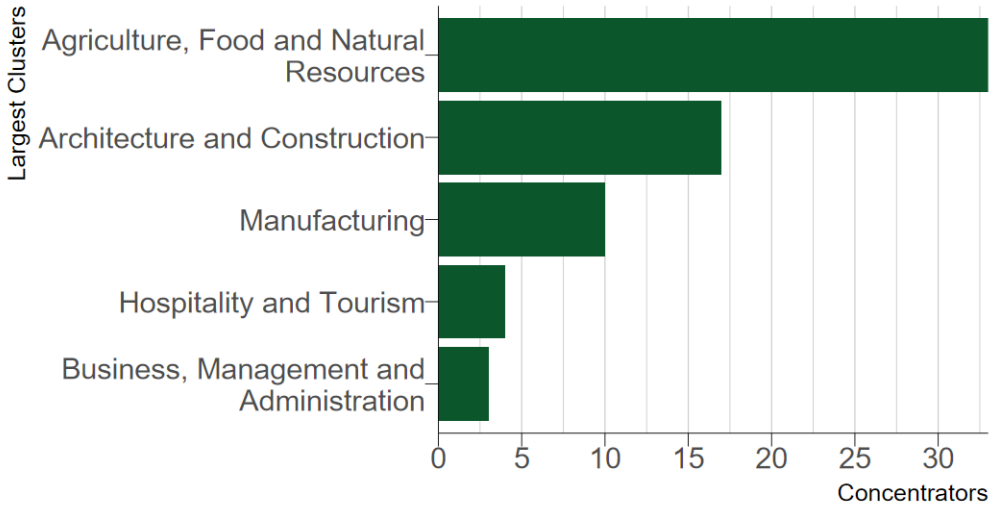


Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

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 48.0%. In Wisconsin, it was 43.6%.

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
Pepin	49	48.0%
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 12 youth apprentices in Pepin County in the 2022-23 school year.

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
Pepin	12	5.7%
Wisconsin	8,222	5.7%

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