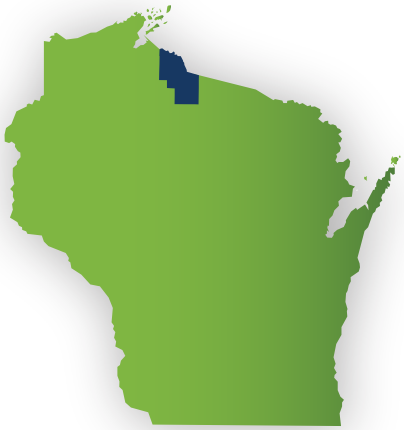
# Iron County



## 2025 WORKFORCE PROFILE


STATE OF WISCONSIN
DWD
Department of Workforce Development

WisConomy

DETI-17957-IRN-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.

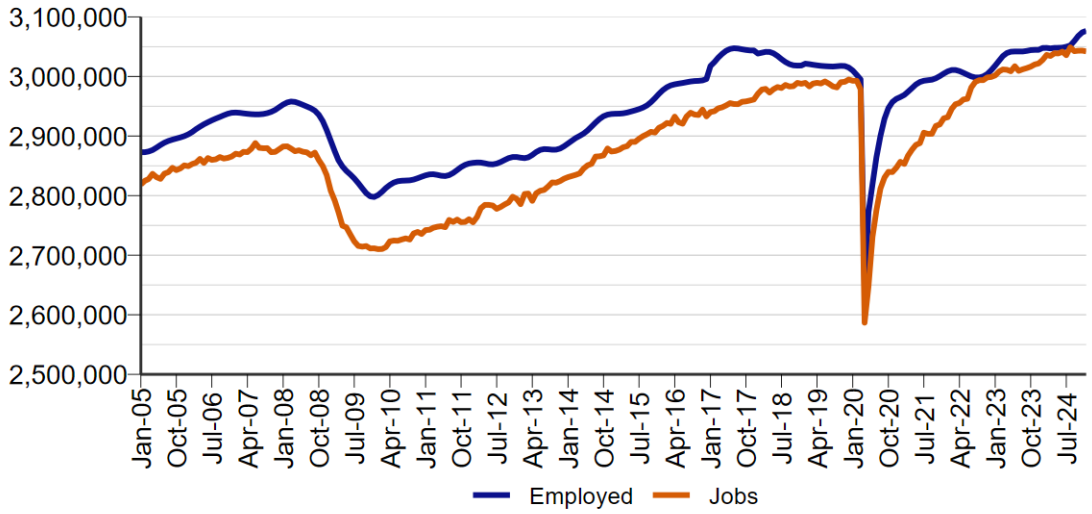



Figure 1: Wisconsin employment and jobs.

## 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.

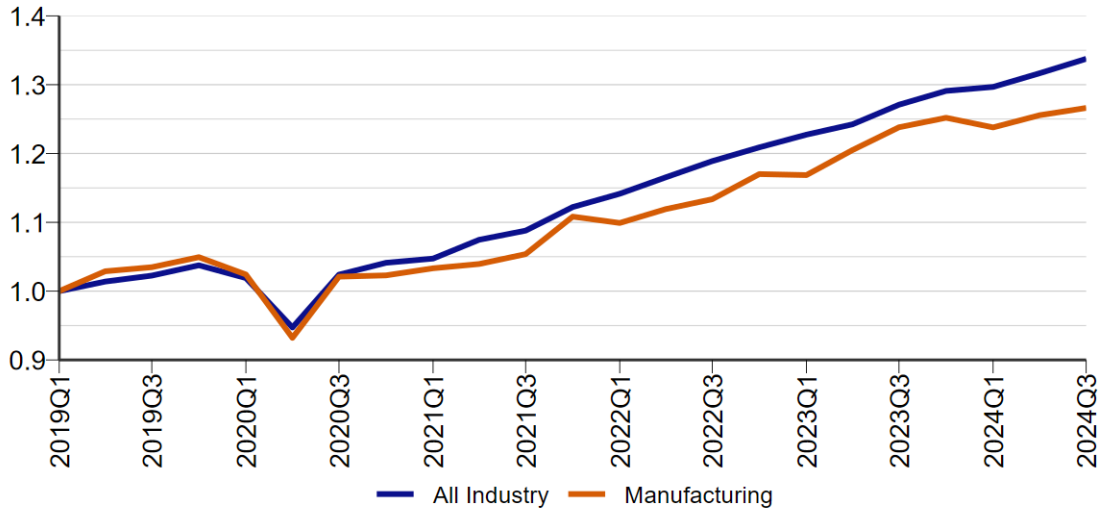



Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

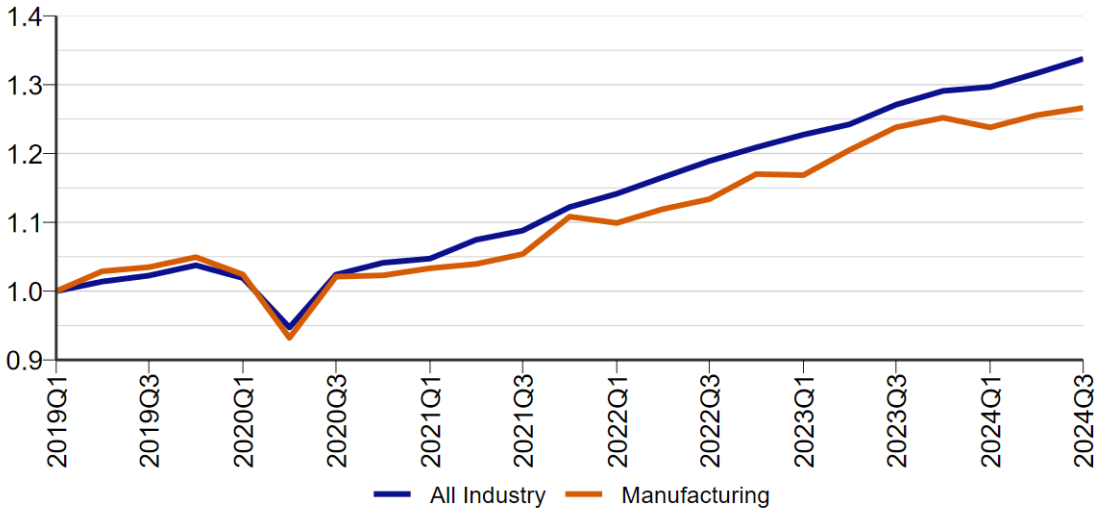



Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

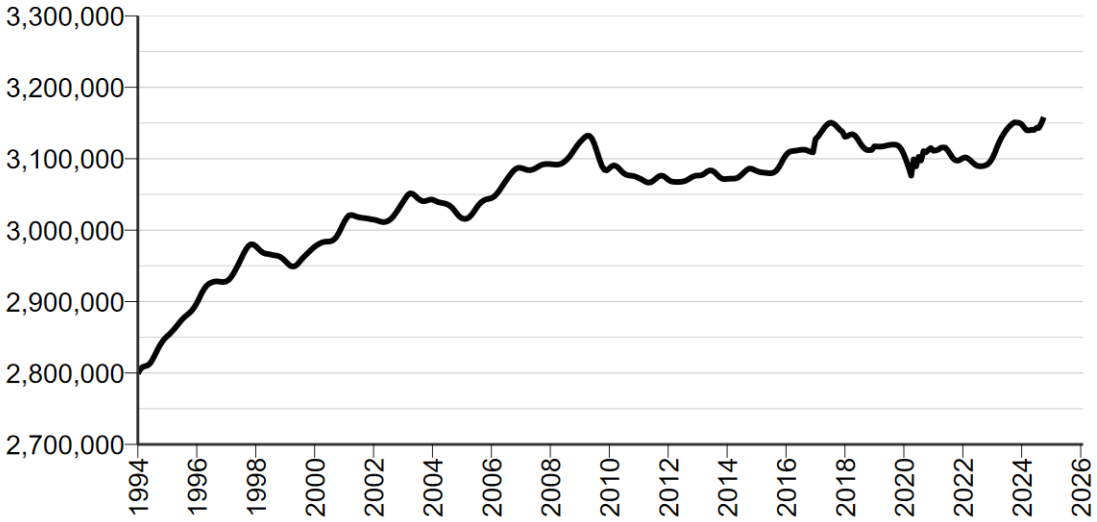



Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

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.

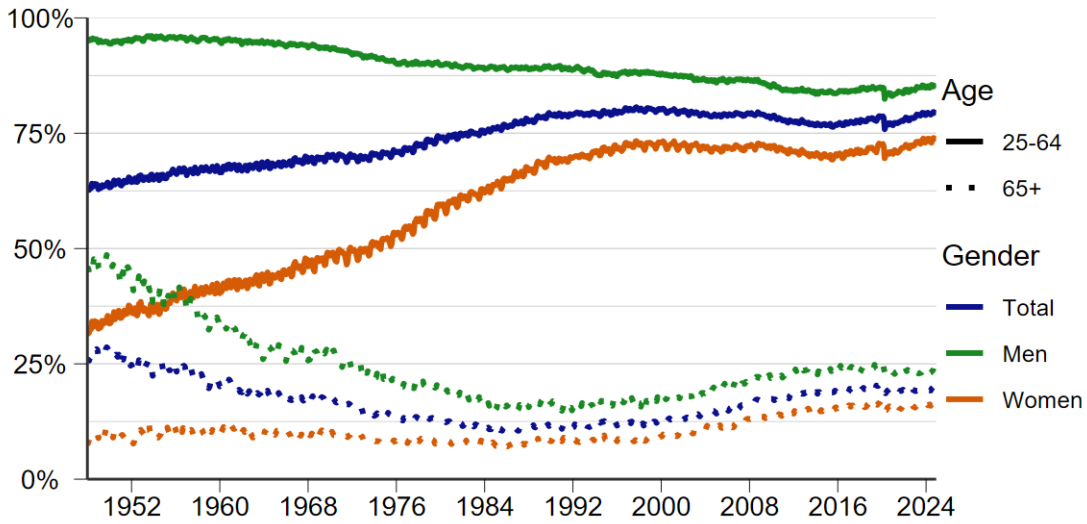



Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

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.

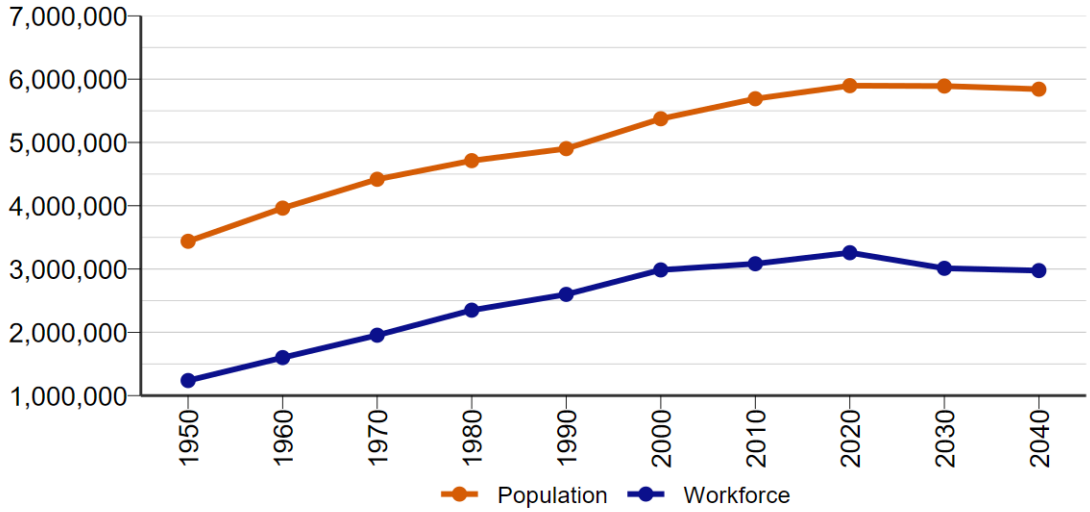



Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

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.

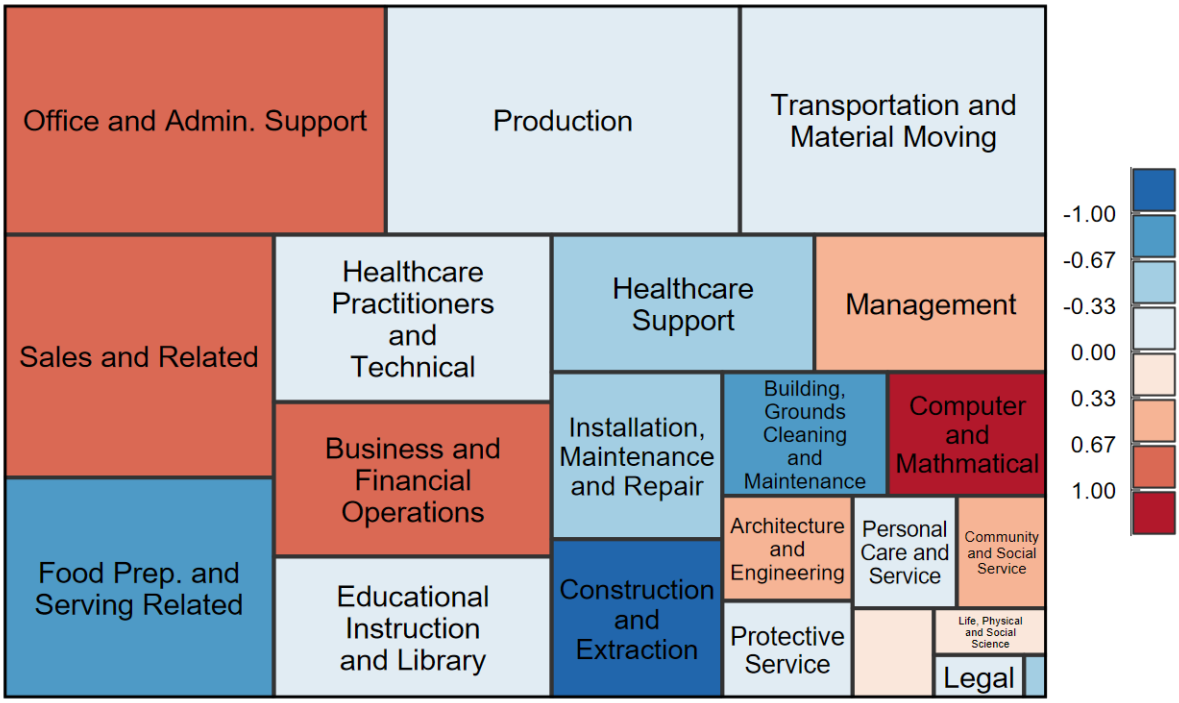


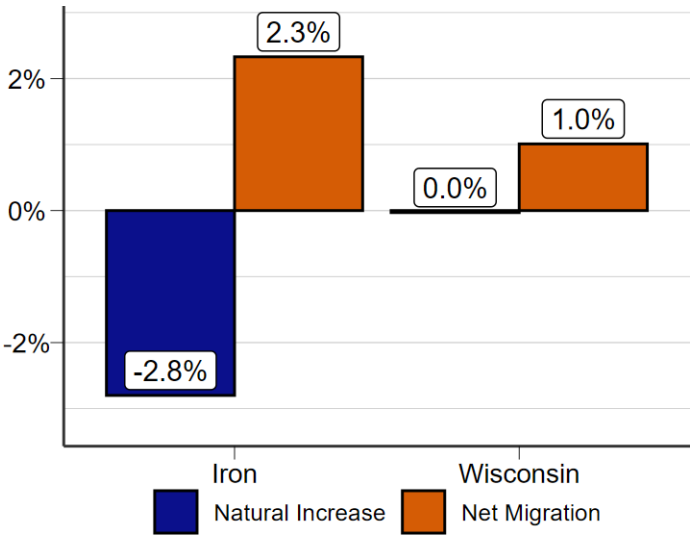

Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

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 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mercer, Town | 1,649 | 1,653 | 4 | 0.2% |
| Hurley, City | 1,558 | 1,537 | -21 | -1.4% |
| Montreal, City | 801 | 792 | -9 | -1.1% |
| Kimball, Town | 490 | 491 | 1 | 0.2% |
| Oma, Town | 320 | 327 | 7 | 2.2% |
| Saxon, Town | 290 | 288 | -2 | -0.7% |
| Sherman, Town | 286 | 285 | -1 | -0.4% |
| Knight, Town | 212 | 209 | -3 | -1.4% |
| Carey, Town | 172 | 170 | -2 | -1.2% |
| Pence, Town | 160 | 159 | -1 | -0.6% |
| Iron, County | 6,137 | 6,108 | -29 | -0.5% |
| Wisconsin, State | 5,893,718 | 5,951,400 | 57,682 | 1.0% |

Iron County is the 70th most populous county in Wisconsin with 6,108 residents. It is also the 57th fastest-growing county in the state. From 2020 to 2023, the population changed by -0.5%, compared to the 1.0% change in Wisconsin. Iron County saw its population peak in 1920 at 10,261. The City of Hurley saw its population peak in 1940 at 3,375.




**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 fastest-growing municipality in Iron County is the Town of Oma, which added 7 people, for a 2.2% growth rate.

Iron County's population growth in terms of natural increase was -2.8%, ranking 72nd in the state. Net migration was 2.3%, ranking ninth in the state.

According to data gathered by Wisconsin's Department of Health Services, there were 46 births in Iron County. Its fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15□44) in 2022 was 58.5, rating 30th highest out of Wisconsin's 72 counties. In 2022, Wisconsin's fertility rate was 54.2 and the

United States' was 56.0. As a comparison, the rate for the county was 50.2, the state's was 62.3 and the United States' was 64.7 in 2010. Iron County's 0-5 age population in 2022 is 4.4% of the county's population, compared to Iron County's 75 and older population, which is 14.3% of the county's population. In 2010, the 0-5 age population was 4.3%, and the 75 and older population was 13.5%. Iron County's fertility rate has been low for a long time. The baby boomer generation is currently aged 60 to 78. Once the baby boomer generation passes on, Iron County's population will have a hard time rebounding because births have decreased over time. Immigration from outside the county must accelerate to stabilize the population.

## Population Projections

| | 2020 | 2030 | 2040 | 2050 | 2020-2050 Population Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Iron | 6,137 | 5,970 | 5,520 | 4,935 | -19.6% |
| Wisconsin | 5,893,718 | 5,890,915 | 5,841,620 | 5,710,120 | -3.1% |

Source: Demographic Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

The recently released Wisconsin population projections show a decrease in Iron County's total population of 19.6% from 2020 to 2050. The 0-19 age group is projected to decrease by 50.3%, the 20-69 age group is projected to decrease by 26.2%, and the 70 and older age group is projected to increase by 1.3%. Comparing Iron County's numbers to Wisconsin's, the projected decrease in Wisconsin's overall population from 2020-2050 is 3.1%. The 0-19 age group in Wisconsin is projected to decrease by 13.4%. It's 20-69 age group is projected to decrease by 7.4%. The population 70 and older in Wisconsin is projected to increase by 40.6%.

# Employment by Industry

| | 2023 Avg Monthly Employment | 5-year Change | 5-year % Change | % of Total Employment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total, All Industries | 1,707 | 81 | 5.0% | 100.0% |
| Education and Health Services | 394 | -54 | -12.1% | 23.1% |
| Leisure and Hospitality | 287 | NA | NA | 16.8% |
| Trade, Transportation, and Utilities | 243 | -22 | -8.3% | 14.2% |
| Public Administration | 232 | 40 | 20.8% | 13.6% |
| Construction | 200 | 43 | 27.4% | 11.7% |
| Manufacturing | 164 | -15 | -8.4% | 9.6% |
| Professional and Business Services | 94 | 34 | 56.7% | 5.5% |
| Financial Activities | 54 | -5 | -8.5% | 3.2% |
| Natural Resources and Mining | 17 | 1 | 6.2% | 1.0% |
| Information | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Other Services | NA | NA | NA | NA |

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

Iron County employment added 81 jobs (5.0%) from 2018 to 2023. Average employment levels were at 1,707 jobs in 2023. The largest industries was education and health services, accounting for 23.1% of employment in the county in 2023. From 2018 to 2023, the fastest-growing industry was professional and business services, adding 34 jobs for a 56.7% growth rate. Some of the largest employers in Iron County are Hurley School District, Villa Maria Health Center, and High-line Corporation. The Quarterly Workforce Indicators dataset includes age groups of workers by industries at the county level. The share of 65 and older workers in the construction industry was 8.3% in 2018 versus 12.5% in 2023. This increase suggests an increase in future retirements. To help counteract a rise in retirements, industries in Iron County could embrace advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics. Examples of these technologies would be autonomous semi-trucks in the transportation industry, automated robots in the warehouse and manufacturing industries, and digital ordering in the food services industry.

# Unemployment

Iron County's monthly average unemployment rate in 2023 was 5.5%, compared to the state's rate of 3.0%. This ranks the county 71st in terms of unemployment in 2023. These rates were much lower than the all-time high rates achieved during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which interrupted a long steady decline that began at the end of the great recession in 2010. Both Iron County and Wisconsin reached their lowest unemployment rates on record in 2022, while the United States reached its lowest in 2023. Iron County's unemployment rate has a higher degree of variability than does the state and nation. A larger share of its businesses temporarily increase employment at certain times of the year, mainly caused by changes in demand for a service or a change in weather. Industries that often have seasonal employment are logging, retail, and tourism.

**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.

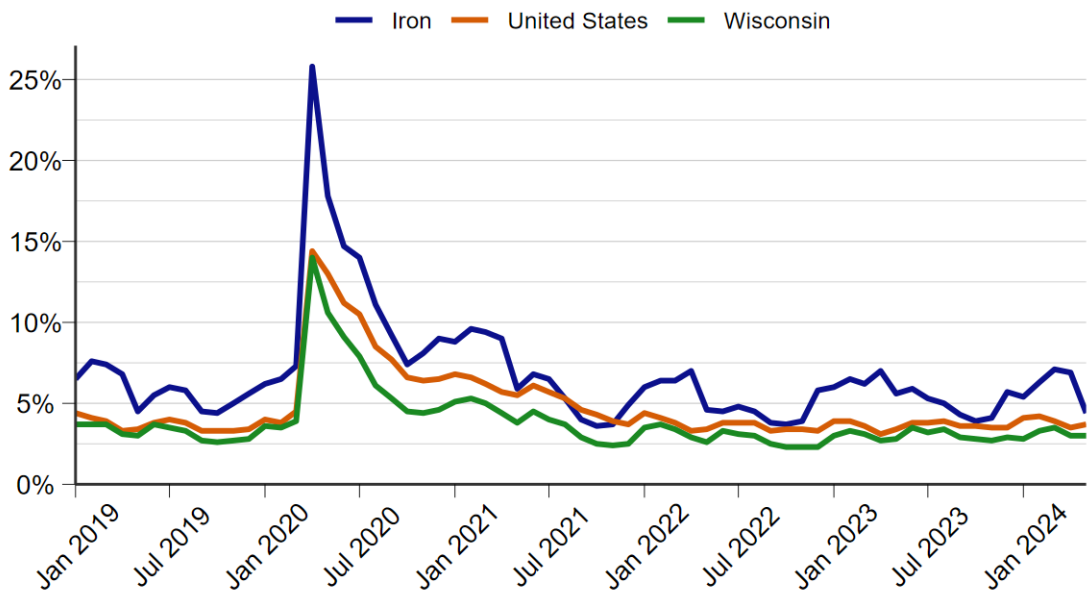



Figure 9: Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics.

# Labor Force Participation

Iron County's labor force participation rate (LFPR) was 49.6%, ranking 71st in the state. Historically, Iron County's LFPR has been lower that the state of Wisconsin's. Since Iron County's recent high of 58.5% in 2002, the gap between the county and the state has widened to 15.7 percentage points, 65.3% (WI) and 49.6% (Iron). The main reason for this divergence is the aging of the Iron population. The LFPR includes the number of people aged 16 and older working or looking for work. Most workers retire in their 60's. In recent years, the baby boomer generation, the largest generation in American history, began to retire causing the LFPR to decrease dramatically. The share of the Iron County population in 2002 that was 65 and older was 23%, in 2022 it was 33%.

Another way to look at this situation is through the Employment-Population Ratio (EMRATIO). The EMRATIO is the proportion of the civilian non-institutional population aged 16 years and over that is employed. The EMRATIO is the LFPR without accounting for the people who are looking for a job. The larger the unemployment rate, the larger the difference is between the two metrics. Iron County's EMRATIO was 53.2% in 2002 declining to 45.6% in 2022.

As stated earlier, the share of the population 65 and older was 33% in Iron County. That was 2,100 individuals. If the LFPR is to return to the 2002 high of 58.5%, many of those 2,100 will have to be recruited back into the labor force, because the number of youths entering the labor market is not large enough to offset the people retiring.

**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.

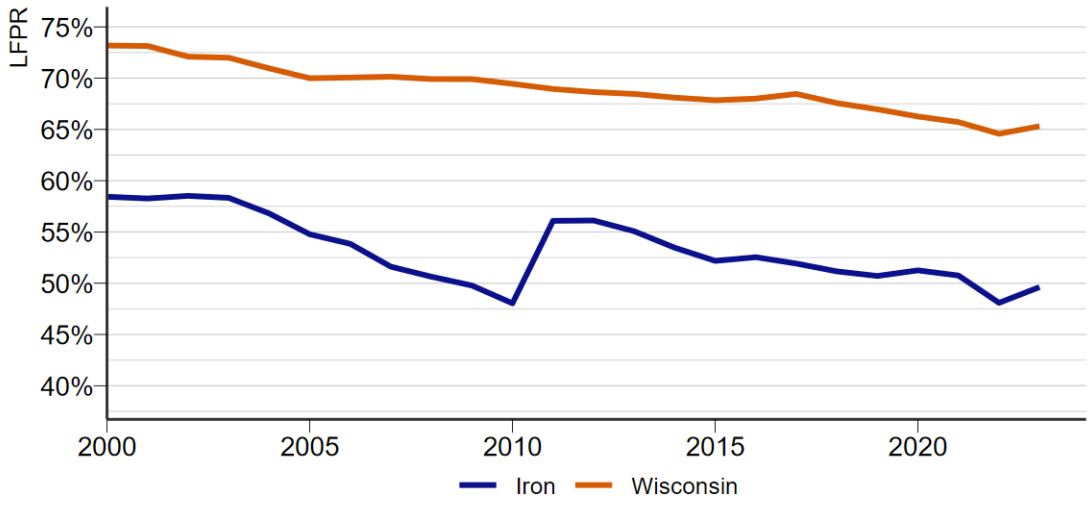



Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

# AI Impact

| Occupation | Employment | % of Total Employment | AI Exposure Index |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cashiers | 2,170 | 3.6% | 0.89 |
| Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers | 1,560 | 2.6% | -0.09 |
| Retail Salespersons | 1,230 | 2.1% | 0.40 |
| Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand | 1,180 | 2.0% | -0.78 |
| Office Clerks, General | 1,150 | 1.9% | 1.00 |
| Stockers and Order Fillers | 1,150 | 1.9% | -0.05 |
| Fast Food and Counter Workers | 1,130 | 1.9% | -1.00 |
| Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education | 970 | 1.6% | 0.15 |
| Bartenders | 970 | 1.6% | -0.68 |
| Registered Nurses | 920 | 1.5% | 0.04 |

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)

The largest occupation in the Northwest Workforce Development Area (WDA) is cashiers, accounting for 3.6% of the area's employment. This occupation has an artificial intelligence (AI) exposure index of 0.89. For context, the occupations with the highest potential AI exposure are bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks, with an AI exposure index of 1.89. It is estimated to be 1.2% of the Iron County employment. Another occupation with a high potential AI exposure is general office clerks with an AI exposure index score of 1.00, accounting for 2.4% of Iron County's employment. Woodworking machine setters, operators, and tenders have a low AI exposure index value of -0.53 and account for 3.6% of Iron County's total employment.

# Industry Employment Projections

| | Industry | 2022 Employment | 2032 Projected Employment | Employment Change 2022-2032 | % Change 2022-2032 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Highest Percent Growth | Construction | 3,322 | 3,695 | 373 | 11.23% |
| Most Jobs Added | Trade, Transportation, and Utilities | 12,804 | 13,912 | 1,108 | 8.65% |
| Highest Number Employed | Education and Health Services | 15,227 | 15,860 | 633 | 4.16% |
| Total | Total All Industries | 75,106 | 78,912 | 3,806 | 5.07% |

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

DWD conducts employment projections for Wisconsin's 11 WDAs every two years. Iron county is part of the Northwest WDA, which includes Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, and Washburn counties. Non-farm employment within Northwest WDA is expected to increase by 3,806 (5.1%), compared to the state's growth rate of 7.1%. In recent decades, the Northwest WDA's projected industry growth has been lower than the state because its population growth has been lower, and the Northwest WDA population's median age has been higher. The higher the growth rate in the working-age population, the higher the employment growth rate when you have an economy where the main limiting factor to growth is a shortage of human capital.

In the Northwest WDA, the construction industry is projected to be the fastest-growing industry, growing at a rate of 11.2% from 2022 to 2032. This growth rate is slightly higher than the statewide growth rate of 11.1%.

In the Northwest WDA, the trade, transportation, and utilities industry is projected to have the most jobs added of an industry, growing by 1,108 jobs from 2022 to 2032. The industry projected to have the most jobs added statewide is the education and health services industry.

The estimated number of self-employed people in Northwest WDA in 2022 was 6,169 and is projected to grow 8.6% to 6,700 in 2032. The Wisconsin projected grow rate for the self-employed is higher at 10.4%

For more information and detailed projections results for both occupations and industries, view Wisconomy's 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 | 837 | 939 | 102 | 12.19% |
| Lowest Percent Growth | Legal | 276 | 262 | -14 | -5.07% |
| Highest Number Employed | Production | 8,302 | 8,351 | 49 | 0.59% |
| Most Jobs Added | Transportation and Material Moving | 7,090 | 7,917 | 827 | 11.66% |
| Total | Total, All | 75,106 | 78,912 | 3,806 | 5.07% |

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

In the Northwest WDA, architecture and engineering are projected to be the fastest-growing occupations, growing 12.2% from 2022 to 2032. The occupation projected to be the fastest growing in Wisconsin is the computer and mathematical occupation at 17.8%. The second fastest-growing occupation in the Northwest WDA is transportation and material moving occupation at 11.7%, which is also projected to have the most jobs added.

Two useful things not in the occupation employment projections table below are projected total openings and typical education. The Northwest WDA occupation projected to have the most total openings is food preparation and serving occupations with 1,190 total openings. The employment change for food preparation and serving occupations is only projected to increase by 289. An occupation can have a high rate of turnover in employees, as shown in the high number of openings, and have a low growth rate in employment. Total openings include three categories: labor force exits, occupational transfers, and annual growth. For all occupations in the Northwest WDA, labor force exits are projected to be 39.7% of job openings; occupational transfers are projected to be 56.1% of openings; and annual growth is projected to be 4.2% of job openings. Annual growth is lower than the Wisconsin projected rate of 5.9%, which is consistent with the higher projected growth rate in Wisconsin employment of 7.1% versus the Northwest WDA's projected employment growth rate of 5.1%.

When viewing the growth rate of employment based on the typical education required to perform an occupation, 62% of employment growth in the Northwest WDA is in occupations that typically require a high school degree or less. Thirty-eight percent typically require education beyond high school, with 19% typically requiring a bachelor's degree. The projected employment growth at the state level is in occupations that typically require higher levels of education than in the Northwest WDA. Forty-six percent of statewide projected employment growth is in occupations with typical education above a high school diploma, and 29% requiring a bachelor's degree.

# Aging Population

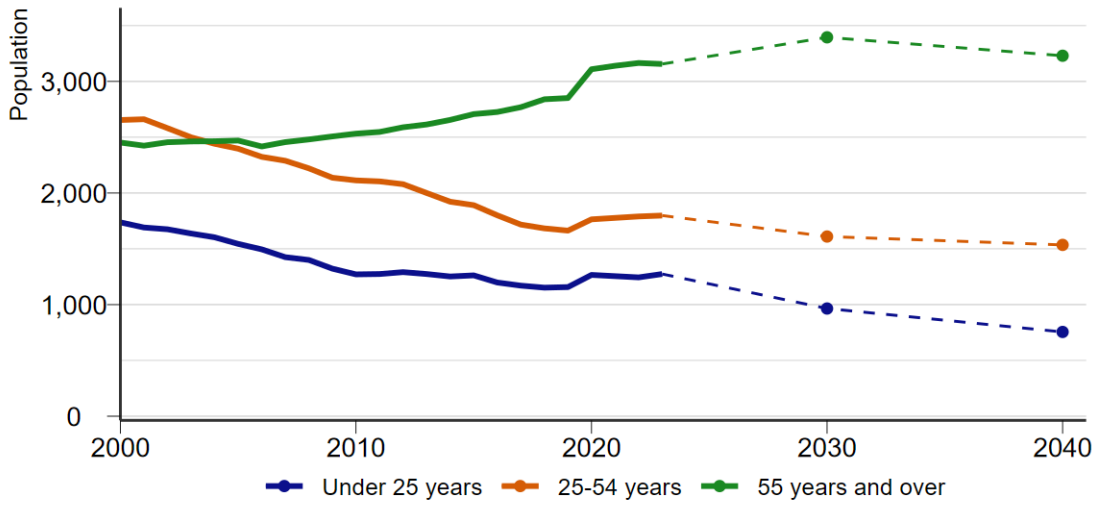



Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and
WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

The aging population is an issue not only in Iron County, but most of Wisconsin. The above graph shows the change over time of three age groups, the green line representing 55 years and over is flat in the early 2000s and then increases dramatically during the remainder of the time. This illustrates the aging of the baby boomer generation. The share of the population age 55 and older was 50.7% in 2023, growing from 44.4% in 2013 and 37.3% in 2003. The rapid acceleration in the 55 and over share of the total population has plateaued in Iron County starting in 2020. The share of the population aged 25 to 55 was 28.9% in 2023, shrinking from 34.0% in 2013 and 37.9% in 2003. The number of individuals within the 25 to 55 age group has increased slightly over the last 4 years. Ages 25 through 55 are considered prime working years when the labor force participation rate is the highest. When the share of a community's workforce declines in this age group it becomes challenging to grow the economy in industries that require humans. The share of the population aged under 25 was 20.5% in 2023, shrinking from 21.6% in 2013 and 24.8% in 2003. The under-25 age group will soon replace the 55 and over age group when they retire. The under-25 age group grew slightly from 2022 to 2023, increasing by 30 individuals. From 2017 to 2022, the median age in Iron County was 56.1, compared to Wisconsin's median age of 39.9, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Iron County's median age is the oldest in Wisconsin's 72 counties.

Like the rest of Wisconsin, Iron County has a shortage of affordable childcare. A lack of affordable childcare compounds the negative effect that the downward trend in the 25-54 age group has on the growth of the area's workforce. If both parents want to work outside the home, but can't find affordable childcare, then one or both parents must work fewer hours outside the home to be able to watch their children. Not only is a lack of childcare bad for the current economy, but it also disincentivizes future parents from having children early and often, which reduces the number of young people in Iron County. A challenge that the large increase in the number of elderly in Iron

County creates is the increased need for personal care workers to help care for them, either in the home or at a nursing home. Both childcare and eldercare are highly physically and emotionally demanding jobs that are important for many people in Iron County. It will continue to be a challenge to find workers for these occupations when a worker in these occupations can make as much, if not more money working at a fast food restaurant or a gas station.

The dashed lines on the aging population graph show the projected populations of the three age groups discussed in the previous paragraph. Two of the three age groups are projected to decline in Iron County when comparing 2020 to 2040. Under 25 is projected to decrease by 391, 25-54 is projected to decrease by 236, and 55 and over is projected to increase by 10. Overall, the total population is projected to decrease by 617. This would be devastating for the county's economy. Companies, that are challenging to automate, would have a hard time finding employees. Demand for local goods and services will greatly decline, some examples would be groceries, haircuts, schools, and energy consumption. The list could go on. The housing market would have an oversupply of structures, leading to many structures becoming abandoned and falling into disrepair. Local road maintenance would be more challenging due to fewer gasoline taxes being collected.

# Personal Income

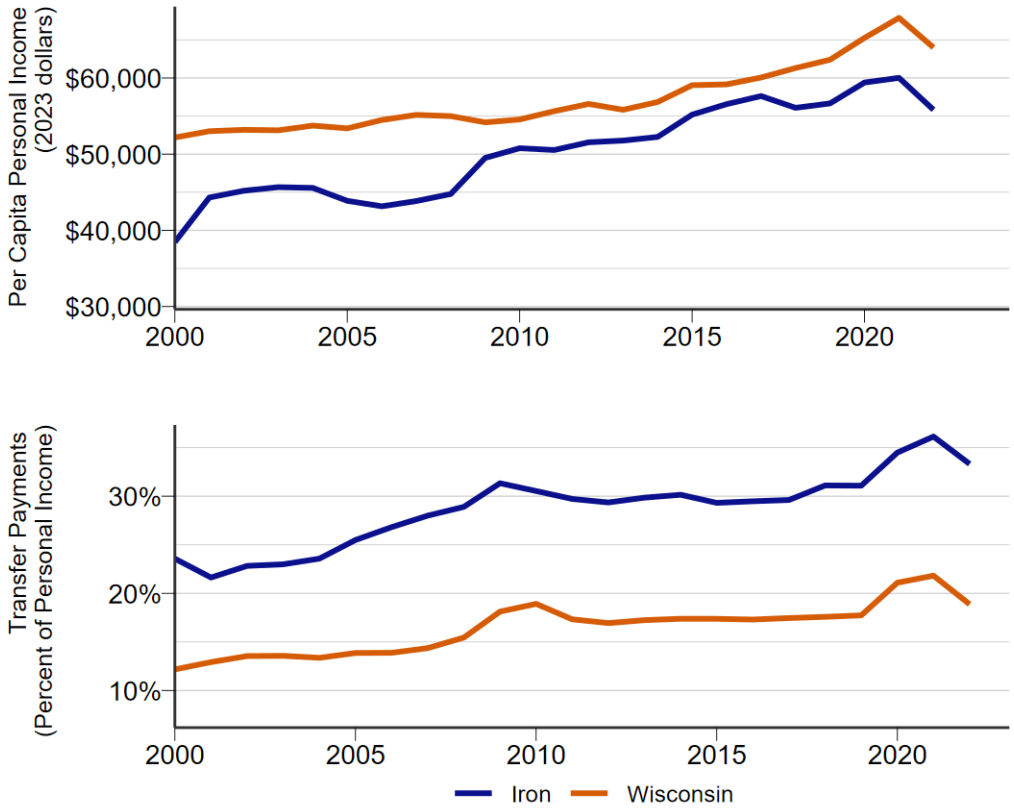



Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

**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.

In the modern world, per capita income usually increases over time even after accounting for inflation. A couple of reasons for this are technological innovation that improves worker efficiency, and a decrease in the number of children as a share of the total population. Children do not work to earn income and don't collect money from public and private retirement accounts. The per capita personal income (PCPI) in Iron County was $55,825 in 2022, compared to the statewide average of $63,996. The gap between the statewide and Iron County average PCPI has narrowed over the last 22 years. The gap in 2000 was $13,728, in 2022 the gap was $8,171.

In total, 33.3% of that income came from transfer payments rather than earned income in 2022. Transfer payments as a share of personal income increase during economic depressions and re-

cessions because the number of people working decreases and the number of people collecting government payments such as food stamps and unemployment insurance increases. Transfer payments as a share of personal income in Iron County grew faster than the share in Wisconsin because Iron County's population has a larger share of older individuals than the statewide population. Therefore, a larger share of Iron County's personal income is retirement income which includes things like private pensions, Social Security, and Medicare. Transfer payments as a share of personal income in Wisconsin grew 6.7 percentage points from 2000 to 2022. In Iron County the share increased 9.7 percentage points during the same period.

# Workforce Pipeline

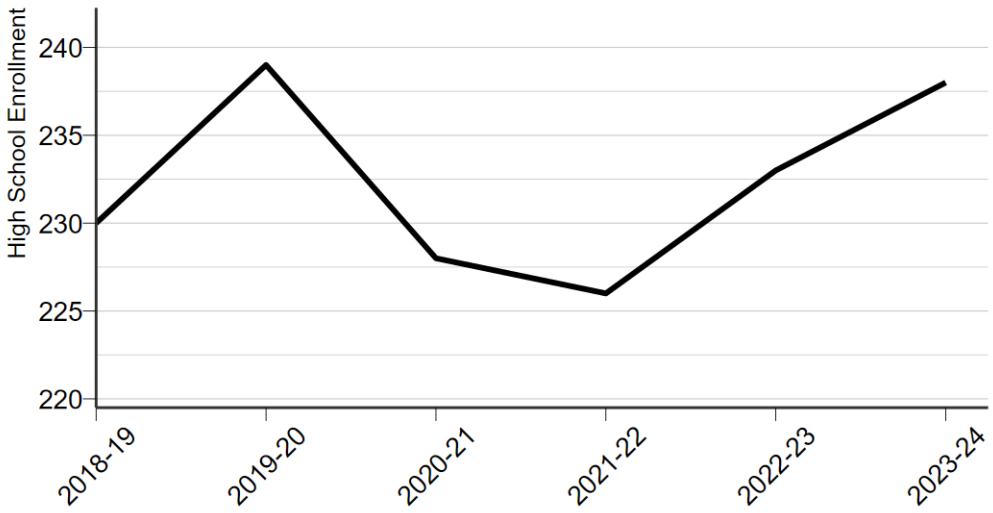



Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education prepares the next generation of the labor force. As of the 2023-24 school year, 238 students were enrolled in grades 9-12. This includes public, private, and home-based schools. Another term for home-based schools is home-schooling, which is classified differently than online schooling. It is important to note that school district boundaries can extend into multiple counties, meaning that county-level enrollment figures may not precisely reflect the number of students residing within the county. Enrollment counts are based on the location of the school district's main office.

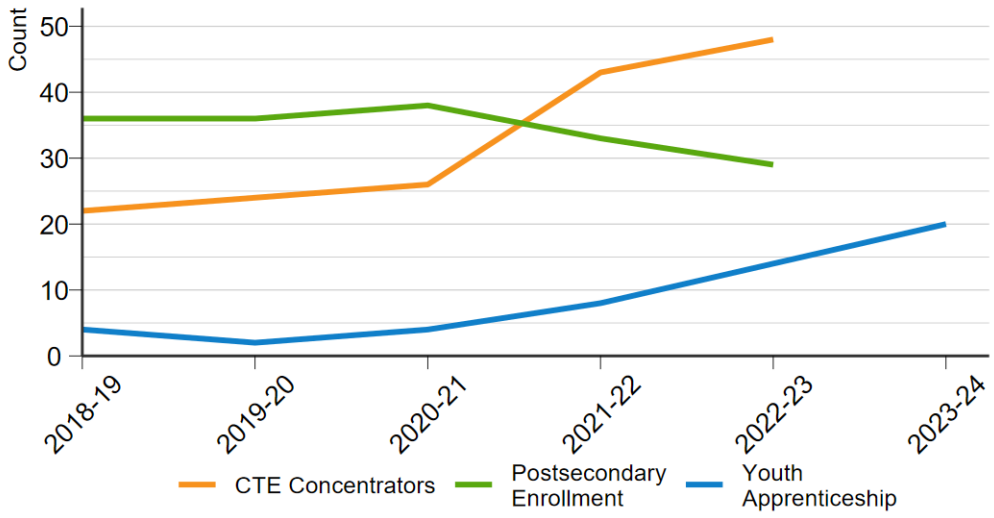



Figure 14: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Workforce Development.

## Career and Technical Education

Of those who attended school, 41.4% were concentrators in career and technical education (CTE), compared to 44.3% for the state during the 2022-23 school year. The number of Iron County students receiving CTE has been trending upward over the last 5 years on record. During those 5 years, the most popular career cluster in Iron County was manufacturing, with 130 students. The second most popular cluster was architecture and construction with 7 students. The manufacturing industry employs 8.0% of Iron County's workforce, and the construction industry employs 12.8% of Iron County's workforce.

**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 |
|---|---|---|
| Iron | 48 | 41.4% |
| Wisconsin | 64,124 | 44.3% |

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

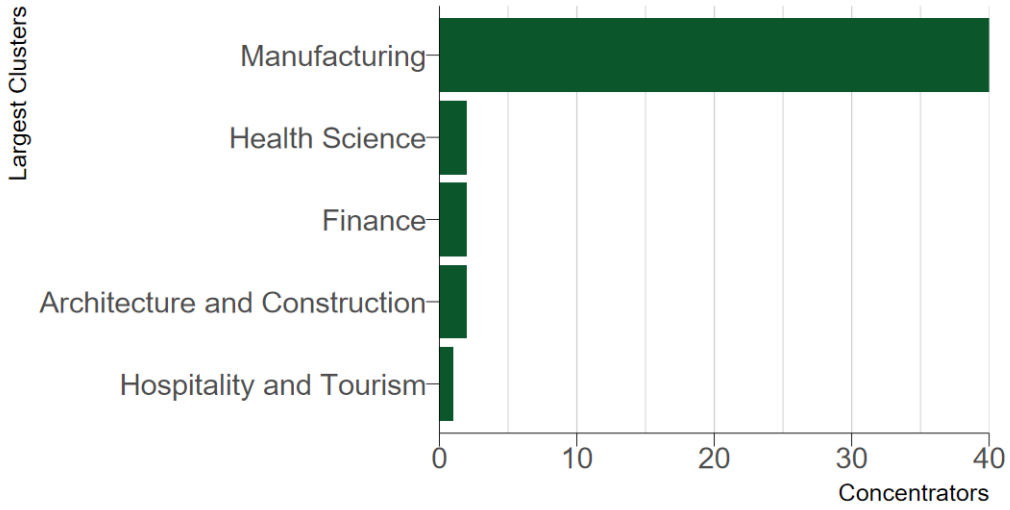



Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

## 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 54.7%. In Wisconsin, it was 43.6%. That 54.7% was a decrease in the percentage enrolled 5 years prior. 69.2% of the 2018-2019 graduating class pursued a postsecondary education. Students in Iron County must travel or move outside of the county to attend postsecondary education. Ashland County is home to a Northwood Technical College campus, and Price County is home to a Northcentral Technical College campus.

**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 |
|---|---|---|
| Iron | 29 | 54.7% |
| Wisconsin | 31,893 | 43.6% |

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

## Youth Apprenticeship

The Youth Apprenticeship (YA) Program prepares participants for the workforce through direct, hands-on work experience. There were 14 youth apprentices in Iron County in the 2022-23 school year. Iron County has a higher rate of youth apprentices than Wisconsin. Historically Northwest

Wisconsin counties have struggled to find employers to participate in youth apprenticeship programs. Youth Apprenticeship is an important tool for counties because it connects high school students to businesses in their local community. If a high school graduate knows a local employer is willing to hire them, they are less likely to move away. It can be a challenge for Iron County businesses to attract employees from outside of Northwest Wisconsin, emphasizing the importance of retaining the young talent that is already in the community.

**i** 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 |
|---|---|---|
| Iron | 14 | 12.1% |
| Wisconsin | 8,222 | 5.7% |

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