Rock County

2025 WORKFORCE PROFILE

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DWD
Department of Workforce Development

WisConomy

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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.

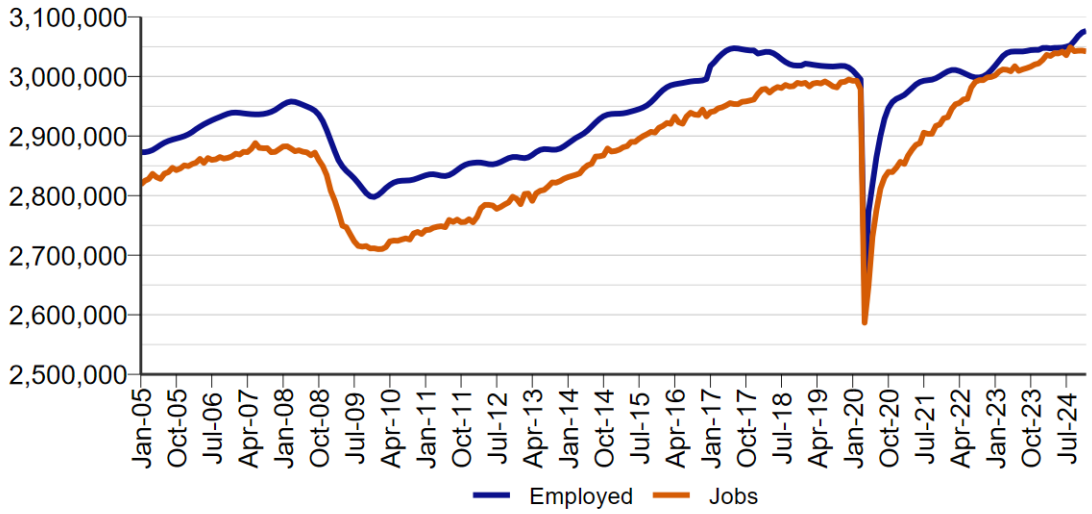


Figure 1: Wisconsin employment and jobs.

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.

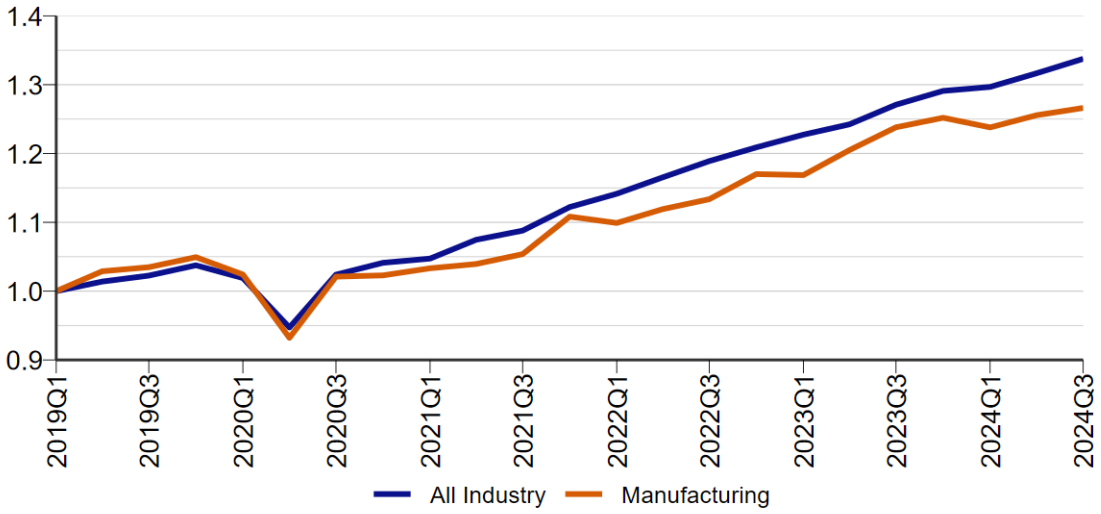


Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

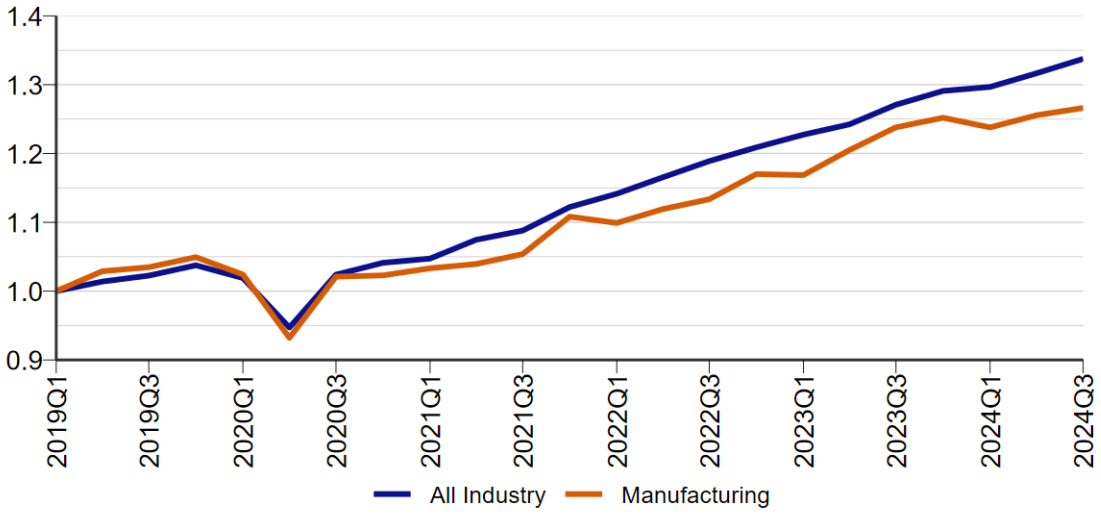


Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

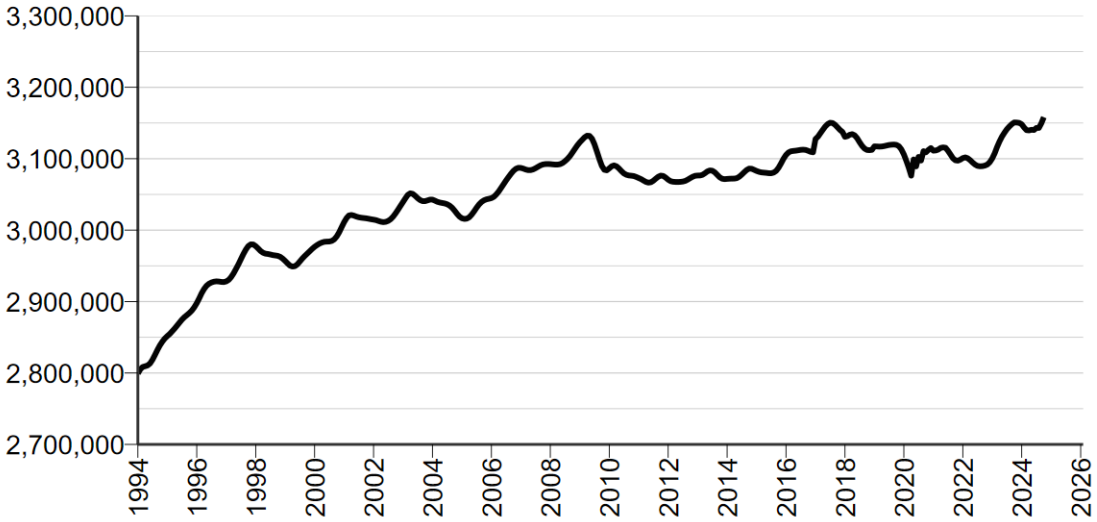


Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

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.

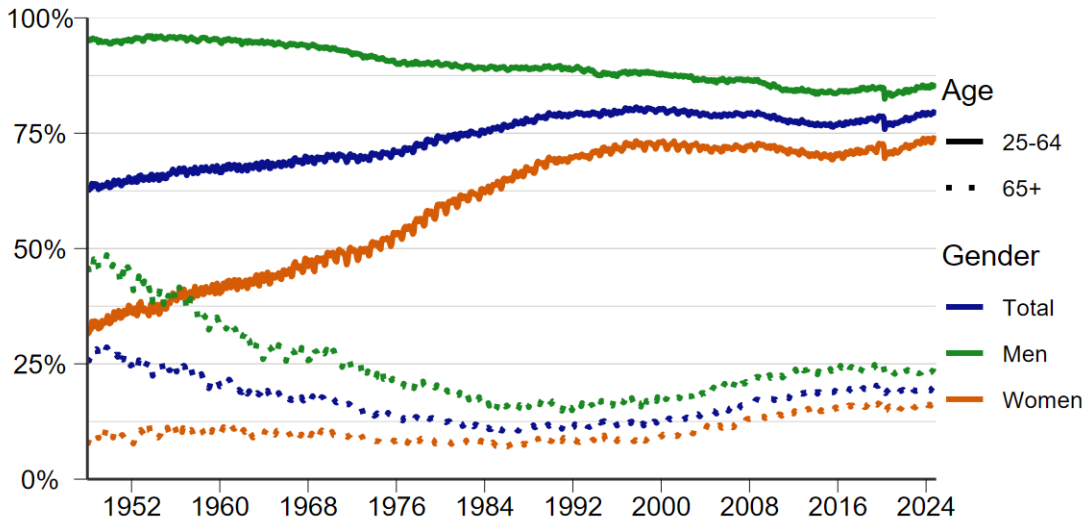


Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

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.

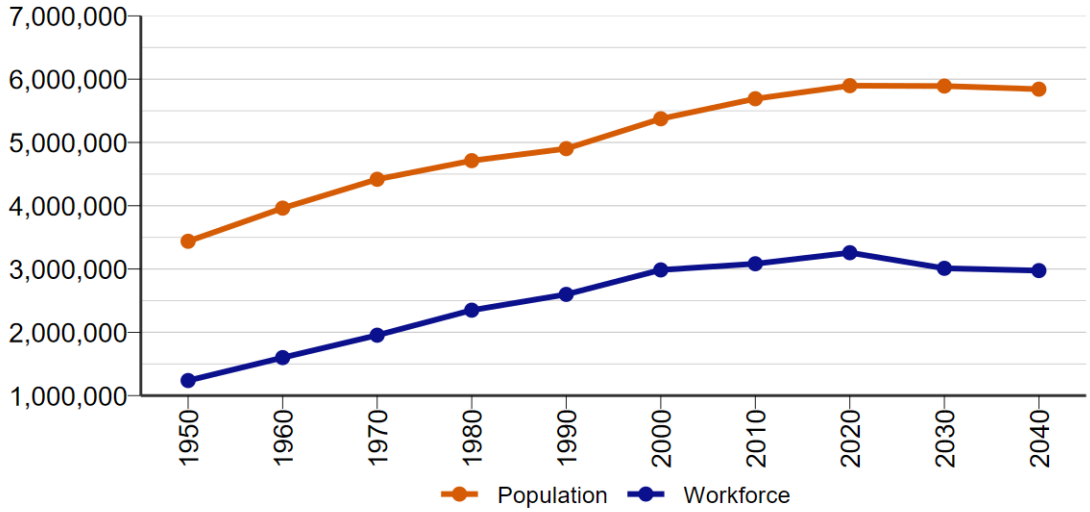


Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

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.

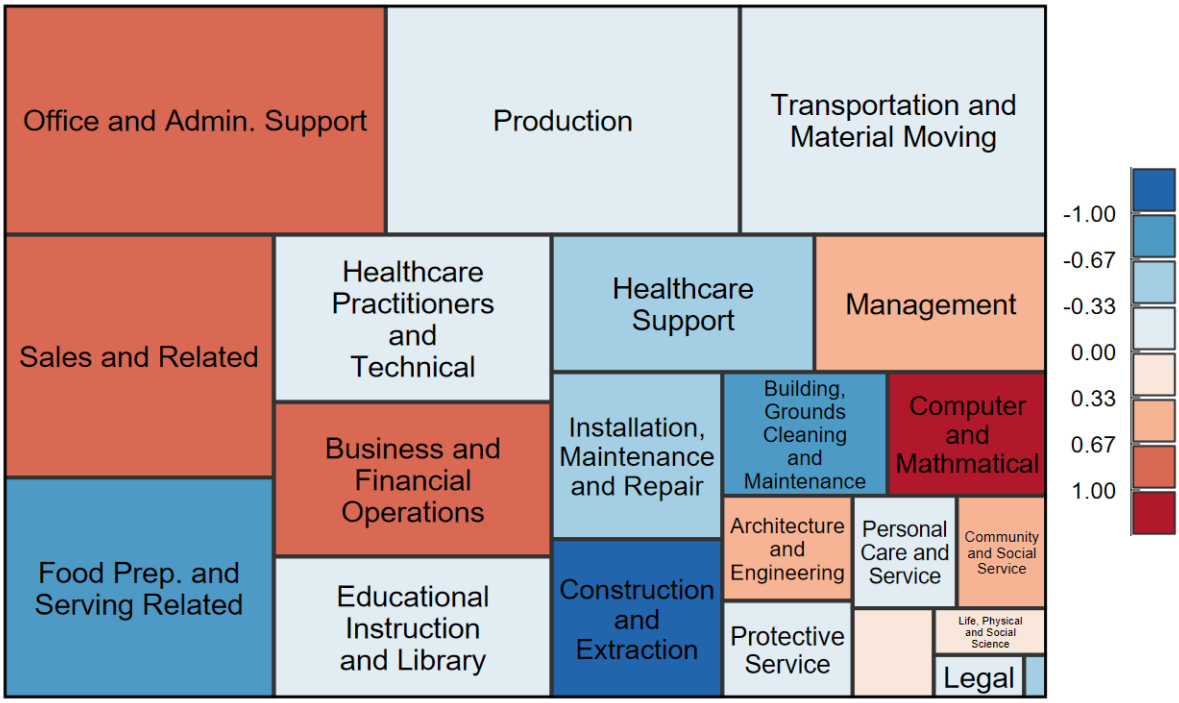


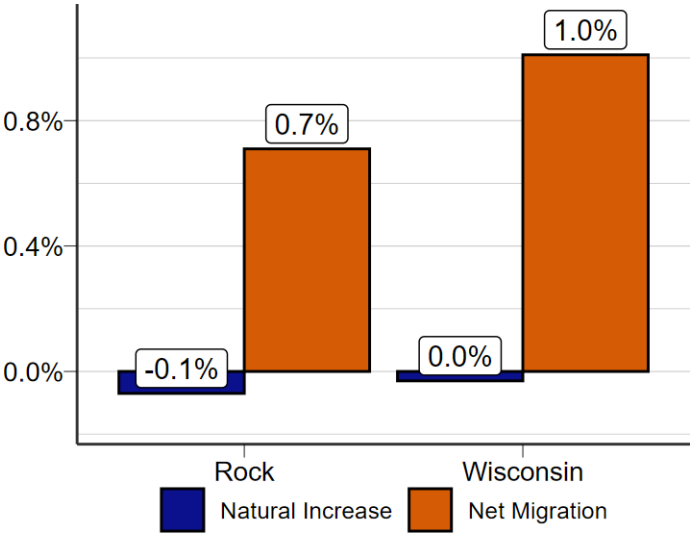
Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

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
Janesville, City	65,615	66,202	587	0.9%
Beloit, City	36,657	36,674	17	0.0%
Beloit, Town	7,721	7,826	105	1.4%
Edgerton, City	5,799	5,848	49	0.8%
Evansville, City	5,703	5,833	130	2.3%
Milton, City	5,716	5,674	-42	-0.7%
Fulton, Town	3,580	3,701	121	3.4%
Janesville, Town	3,665	3,676	11	0.3%
Milton, Town	3,100	3,094	-6	-0.2%
Rock, Town	2,981	2,971	-10	-0.3%
Rock, County	163,687	164,726	1,039	0.6%
Wisconsin, State	5,893,718	5,951,400	57,682	1.0%

Rock County is the ninth most populous county in Wisconsin with 164,726 residents. It is also the 21st fastest-growing county in the state. From 2020 to 2023, the population changed by 0.6%, compared to the 1.0% change in Wisconsin. The largest city and economic center of Rock County is Janesville. Janesville is located off I-90, connecting it to the city of Madison to the North and Rockford, Illinois to the south. Beloit, the second-largest city in Rock County is located right on the Illinois border, connecting it closely to the Rockford, Illinois economic area.



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.

Overall, Rock County has grown slightly more slowly than the state. Like many counties in Wisconsin, Rock County is facing an aging population and declining birth rates.

Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020-2050 Population Change
Rock	163,687	160,165	154,190	145,770	-10.9%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: Demographic Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

Recent projections by the Department of Administration's Demographic Services Center predict that Rock County's population will decline over the coming decades. According to these predictions, Rock County population will lose 11.0% of its 2020 population by 2050, compared to the 3.1% decline for the state. Although birth rates are relatively stable, trends in net migration could help mitigate these declines.

Employment by Industry

	2023 Avg Monthly Employment	5-year Change	5-year % Change	% of Total Employment
Total, All Industries	68,698	1,732	2.6%	100.0%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	17,167	692	4.2%	25.0%
Education and Health Services	15,071	-73	-0.5%	21.9%
Manufacturing	11,759	1,344	12.9%	17.1%
Leisure and Hospitality	6,928	8	0.1%	10.1%
Professional and Business Services	6,175	151	2.5%	9.0%
Construction	3,711	446	13.7%	5.4%
Public Administration	2,966	-41	-1.4%	4.3%
Financial Activities	1,786	-73	-3.9%	2.6%
Other Services	1,743	22	1.3%	2.5%
Information	760	-728	-48.9%	1.1%
Natural Resources and Mining	633	-16	-2.5%	0.9%

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

Rock County employment added 1,732 jobs (2.6%) from 2018 to 2023. Average employment levels were at 68,698 jobs in 2023. COVID-19 caused a very steep job loss in 2020, interrupting a multi-year growth trend, from which the county has recovered from.

The largest industry was trade, transportation, and utilities, accounting for 25.0% of employment in the county in 2023. Within that industry, warehousing and storage was the fastest growing, adding 955 jobs for an impressive 146% growth rate. While much of this growth was catalyzed by COVID-19 era disruptions, this growth appears to be sustained by Janesville and Beloit's strategic location along a major interstate providing easy access to many major cities in the Upper Midwest.

From 2018 to 2023, the fastest-growing industry was construction, adding 446 jobs for a 13.7% growth rate. While construction may have been the fastest growing, the manufacturing industry added 1,344 jobs over that same period, for a similarly impressive 12.9% growth rate. Both industries far exceeded the overall employment growth of 2.6%. Food manufacturing was a fast-growing manufacturing industry, adding 652 jobs.

Unemployment

Rock County's monthly average unemployment rate in 2023 was 3.4%, compared to the state's rate of 3.0%. Rock County has consistently had a higher unemployment rate than the state. This was particularly noticeable during the Great Recession, when the large General Motors assembly plant in Janesville closed. Since then, the gap between Rock County and Wisconsin has shrunk to the point where Janesville's unemployment rate is barely higher than the state's. While Rock County's unemployment rate in 2024 has crept up from the historic lows of late 2022, the unemployment rate is at pre-COVID-19 levels.

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.

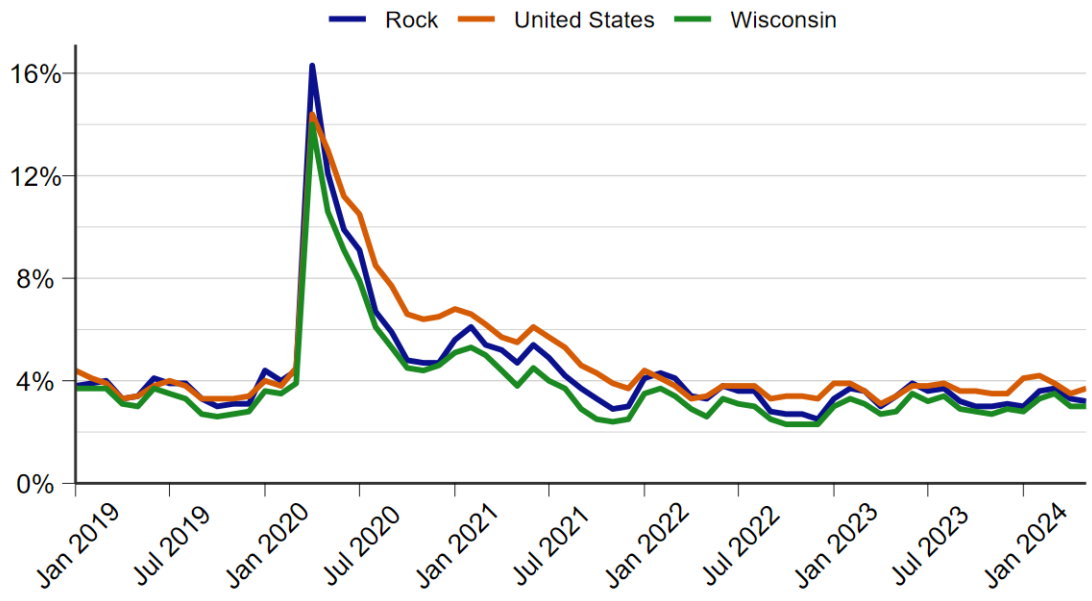


Figure 9: Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Labor Force Participation

Rock County's labor force participation rate (LFPR) was 67.0% in 2023, ranking 20th in the state. Wisconsin's LFPR has primarily been in slow decline since 2000.

During the 2010s, Rock County experienced an increase in LFPR, exceeding Wisconsin's LFPR after 2018. As Rock County's population is roughly the same age as the state's as a whole, this increase in the LFPR offers some hope that Rock County is a place where residents are finding employment. While this may be the case, demographics are still a primary driver of labor force participation. Like, the rest of Wisconsin, Rock County's population is aging. Individuals continuing to age out of the workforce, will only exacerbate worker quantity challenges in the county.

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.

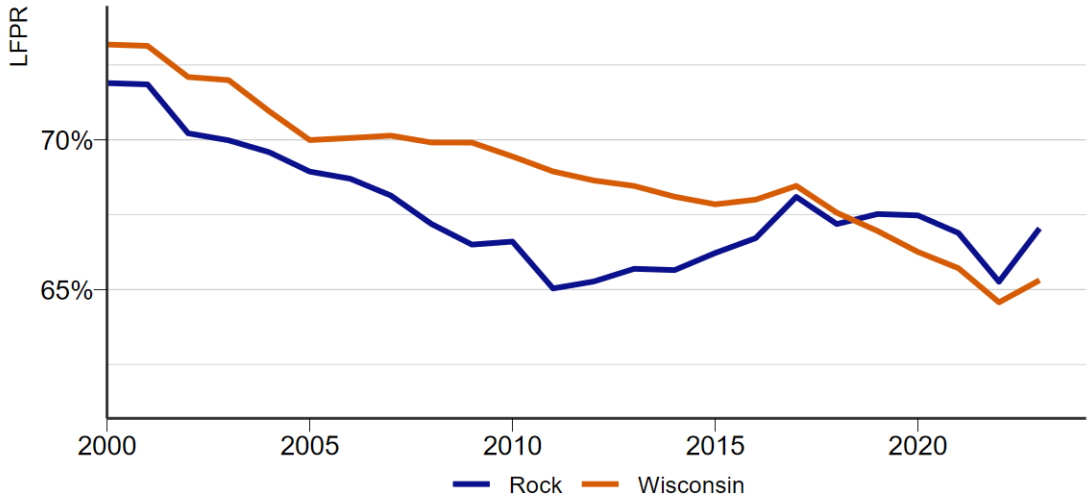


Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

AI Impact

Occupation	Employment	% of Total Employment	AI Exposure Index
Cashiers	3,960	3.3%	0.89
Retail Salespersons	3,380	2.8%	0.40
Fast Food and Counter Workers	3,160	2.6%	-1.00
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	3,000	2.5%	-0.09
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	2,840	2.4%	-0.78
Stockers and Order Fillers	2,790	2.3%	-0.05
Registered Nurses	2,550	2.1%	0.04
Office Clerks, General	2,060	1.7%	1.00
Customer Service Representatives	1,850	1.5%	0.75
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	1,740	1.4%	0.15

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 Southwest Workforce Development Area (WDA) is cashiers, accounting for 3.3% of the area's employment. Rock County is part of the Southwest WDA, which includes Grant, Green, Iowa, Lafayette, and Richland counties. 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.

Using Occupation and Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) data, three of the five largest occupations in Rock County are related to transportation and material moving, accounting for 8.1% of all employment in the county. These occupations, which heavily involve physical work, are less likely to be exposed to AI. Prominent retail trade occupations, like salespersons or cashiers, may be more likely to integrate AI tools into their occupations through automated customer service tools, for example.

Industry Employment Projections

	Industry	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Highest Percent Growth	Construction	5,651	6,463	812	14.4%
Most Jobs Added	Manufacturing	21,906	23,668	1,762	8.0%
Highest Number Employed	Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	29,145	30,671	1,526	5.2%
Lowest Percent Growth	Information	1,505	1,479	-26	-1.7%
Total	Total All Industries	134,520	143,758	9,238	6.9%

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

DWD conducts employment projections for Wisconsin's 11 WDAs every two years. Employment in Southwest WDA is expected to increase by 9,238 (6.9%), only slightly below the state's growth rate of 7.1%.

In the Southwest WDA, the construction industry is projected to be the fastest-growing industry, growing 14.4% from 2022 to 2032. Declining interest rates and increased infrastructure investment have contributed to the recent growth in this industry. The Southwest WDA's strong career training helps propel growth through a quality workforce. More broadly, goods-producing industries are projected to grow at a faster rate than services-providing industries. For example, manufacturing is projected to have the highest employment increase between 2022 and 2032.

In contrast, the information industry is the only industry in the area projected to decline. For information technology and software-related publishing, this likely reflects the decreased demand for labor with increased productivity due to automation. The other significant portion of the information industry, newspaper publishing and broadcasting, have long experienced declines due to competition with larger, national information sources with increased internet access.

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	Personal Care and Service	3,111	3,563	452	14.5%
Lowest Percent Growth	Office and Administrative Support	14,661	14,522	-139	-1.0%
Highest Number Employed	Transportation and Material Moving	14,730	16,134	1,404	9.5%
Most Jobs Added	Transportation and Material Moving	14,730	16,134	1,404	9.5%
Total	Total, All	134,520	143,758	9,238	6.9%

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

In the Southwest WDA, personal care and service occupations are projected to be the fastest-growing occupations, growing 14.5% from 2022 to 2032. This includes a variety of occupations like hairdressers, childcare workers, and exercise trainers, among others. The high projected rate of growth in these types of occupations highlight the increase in small businesses that often employ personal care workers.

The transportation and material moving occupations are projected to add the most employment by 2032. This includes jobs like warehouse workers or truck drivers. The continued dominance of online retail shopping has contributed to the growth of these occupations.

Even occupations which are not expanding can provide a large amount of job opportunities. For example, overall employment in office and administrative support occupations is projected to decline slightly by 2032. Despite this overall decline, there will still be significant demand to fill positions in those occupations, primarily driven by labor force exits and occupational transfers. This occupations group is projected to have the second-most annual number of openings, with 1,625 openings annually.

Aging Population

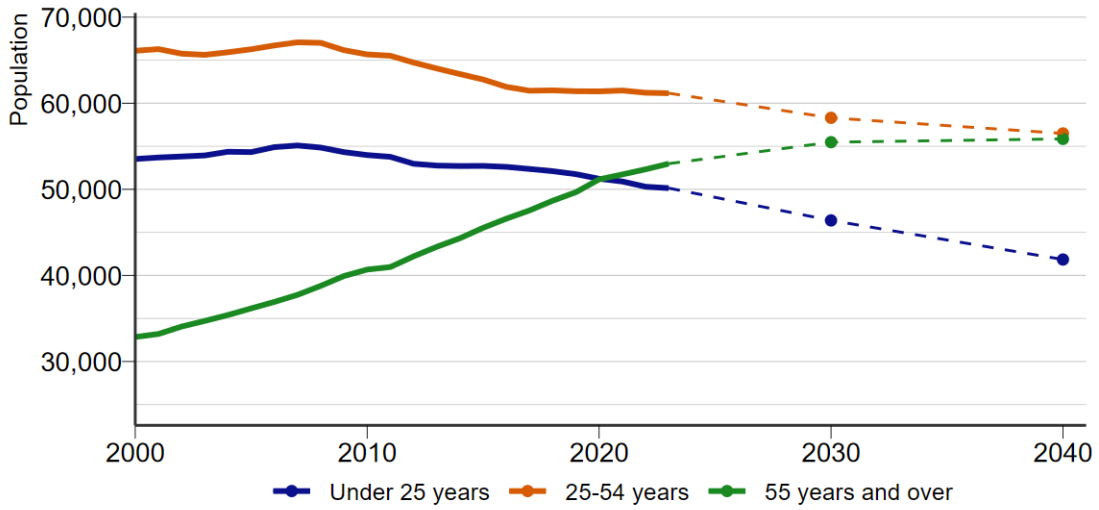


Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

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

Like many counties, Rock County's population is aging. The share of the population age 55 and older was 32.2% in 2023, growing from 27.1% in 2013. Often considered the prime-age workforce, Rock County's population of individuals between ages 25 and 54 peaked at 67,074 in 2007 but has declined since then. Beginning in 2021, the population of individuals aged 55 and over overtook the population of those under 25. As Rock County's population ages and retires, the challenges of finding and retaining employees will increase. This challenge is not unique to Rock County. For example, from 2017 to 2022, the median age in Rock County was 40.0, compared to Wisconsin's median age of 39.9 according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

Personal Income

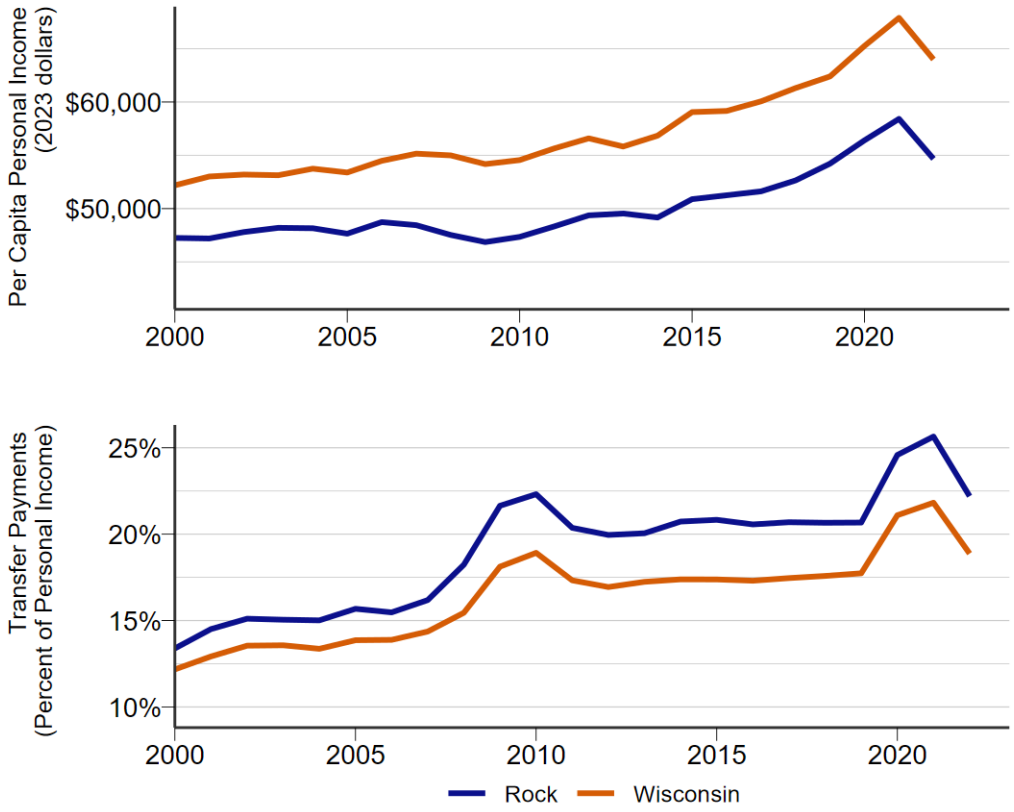


Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

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 Rock County was $54,670 in 2022, compared to the statewide average of $63,996. In total, 22.2% of that income came from transfer payments rather than earned income in 2022. As the population ages, an increasing share of income will come from transfer payments like Social Security. Overall, Rock County has consistently had a lower PCPI than the state.

Unfortunately, Rock County is generally an expensive place to live. Using the 2023 Self Sufficiency Standard for Wisconsin, a family of two adults, an infant, and a school age child requires $83,677 to maintain an adequate standard of living. This is significantly higher than the $71,986 required for the same family in the median county in Wisconsin.

Workforce Pipeline

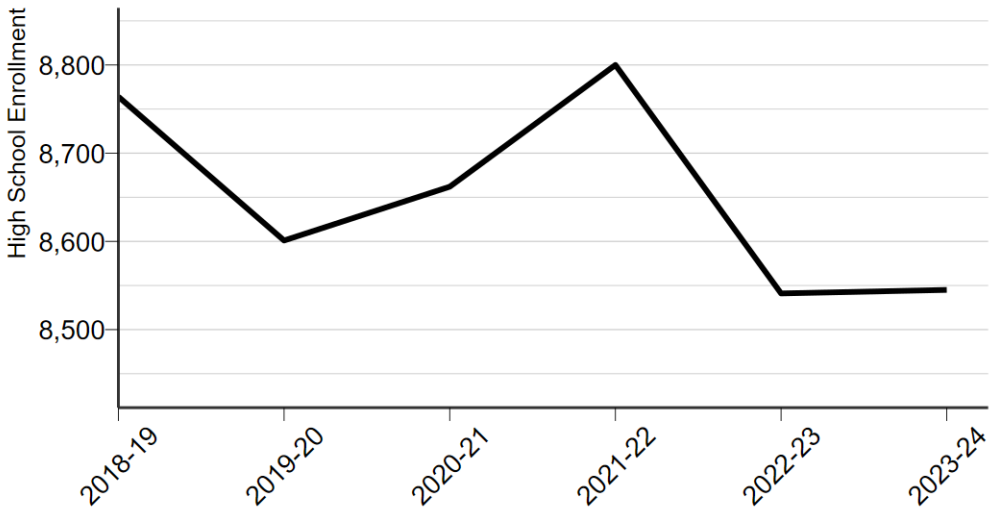


Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education prepares the next generation of the labor force. As of the 2023-24 school year, 8,545 students were enrolled in grades 9-12. This includes public, private, and home-based schools. 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. As the aging population retires, it is imperative that Rock County's next generation of workers acquire the skills necessary for gainful work, whether through traditional postsecondary institutions or direct experience through youth apprenticeship.

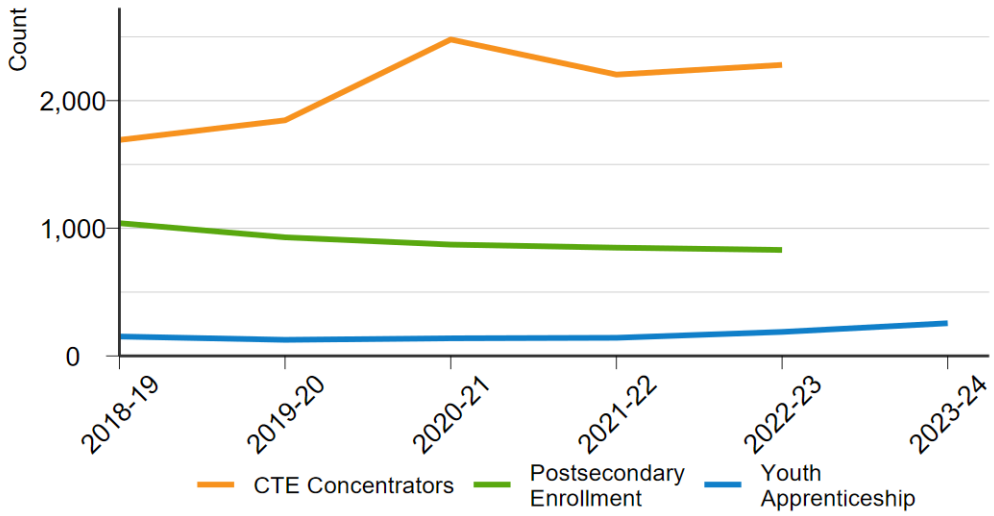


Figure 14: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Workforce Development.

Career and Technical Education

Of11th and 12th grade students attendees, 53.3% were concentrators in career and technical education (CTE), compared to 44.3% for the state during the 2022-23 school year. The largest career cluster chosen by concentrators was agriculture, food, and natural resources. As the food manufacturing industry is one of the largest industries in Rock County, the CTE program is preparing students well for employment in the county.

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
Rock	2,280	53.3%
Wisconsin	64,124	44.3%

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

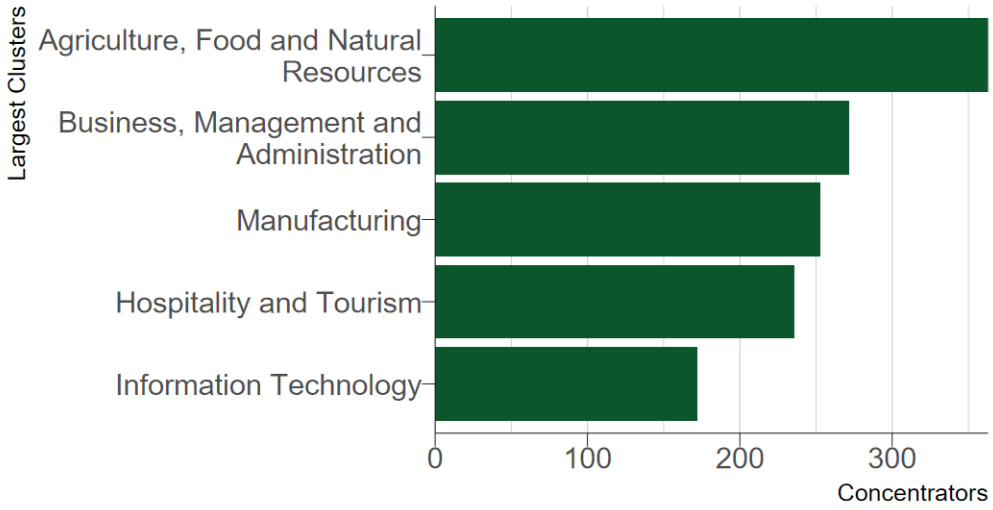


Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Postsecondary Enrollment

The percentage of high school completers who enrolled in a postsecondary institution as a percentage of all 12th-grade students in 2022-23 was 38.7%. This percentage is slightly lower than the statewide enrollment rate of 43.6%, despite Rock County containing campuses from Blackhawk Technical College and UW-Whitewater. While the number of Rock County high school students who choose to enroll in a postsecondary institution is declining, other options for career preparation are increasing in the county as students adopt alternative routes to prepare for the workforce.

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
Rock	830	38.7%
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 188 youth apprentices in Rock County in the 2022-23 school year. While youth apprenticeship participation in Rock County is lower than statewide, it is steadily trending upward.

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
Rock	188	4.4%
Wisconsin	8,222	5.7%

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