Sauk County

2025 WORKFORCE PROFILE

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DWD
Department of Workforce Development

WisConomy

DETI-17957-SAK-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.

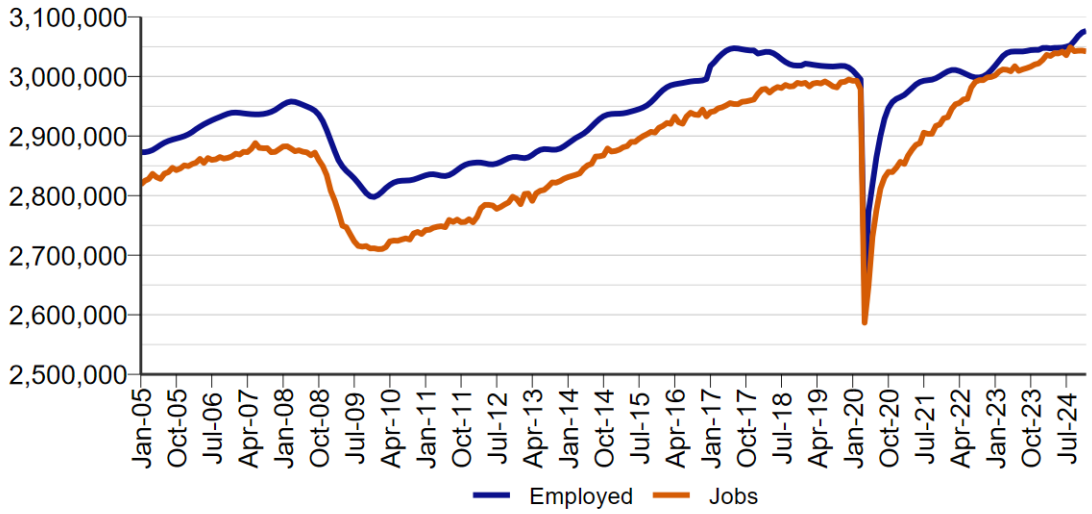


Figure 1: Wisconsin employment and jobs.

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.

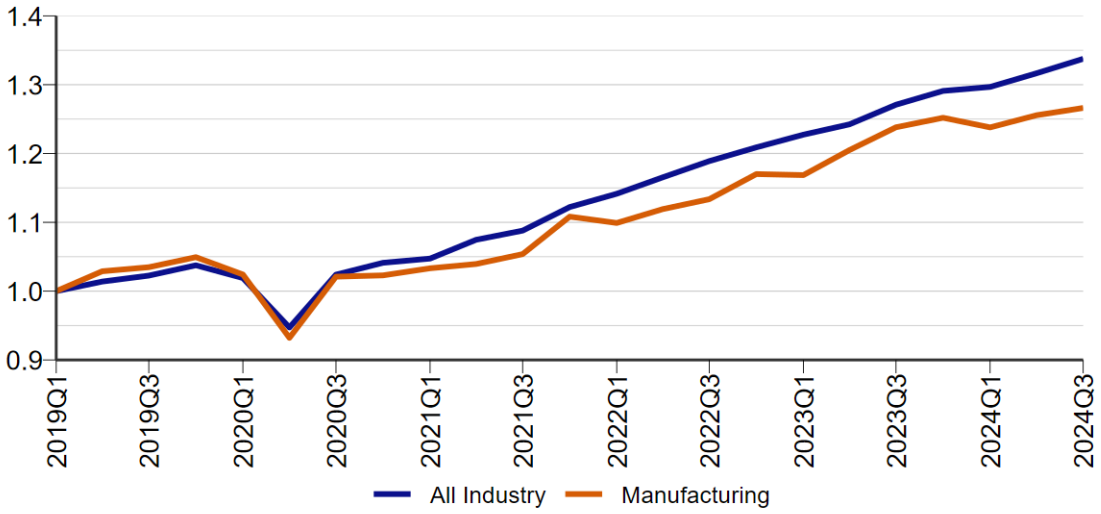


Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

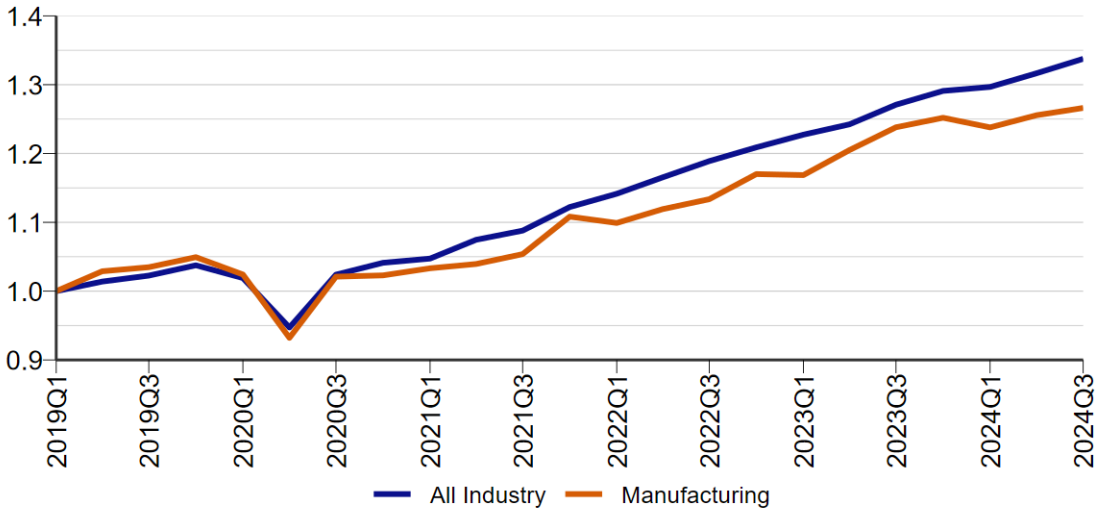


Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

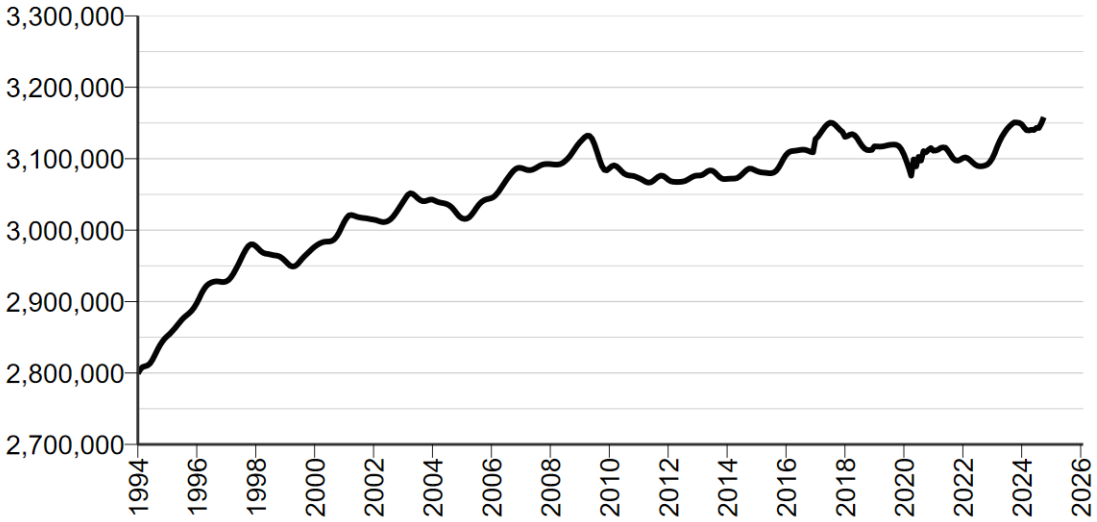


Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

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.

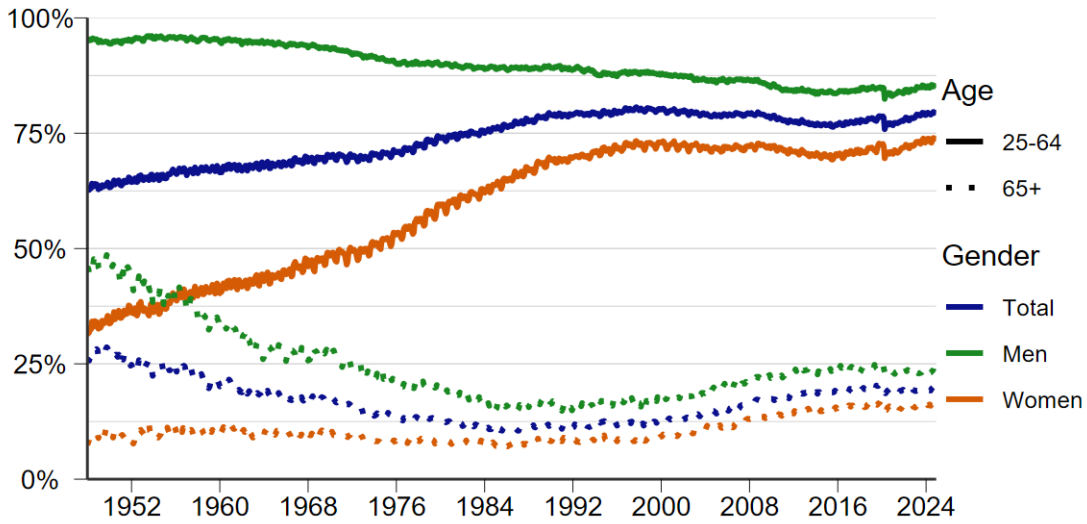


Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

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.

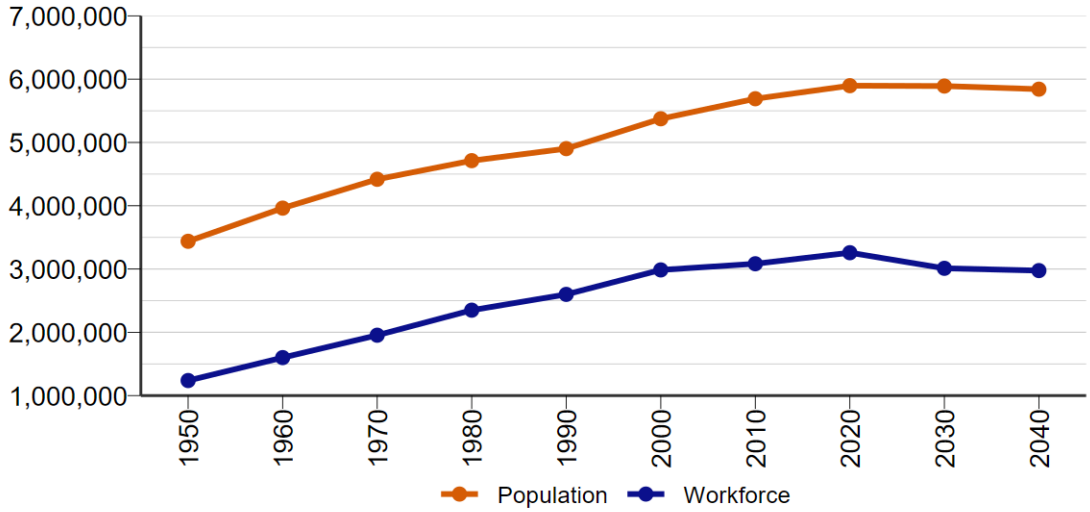


Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

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.

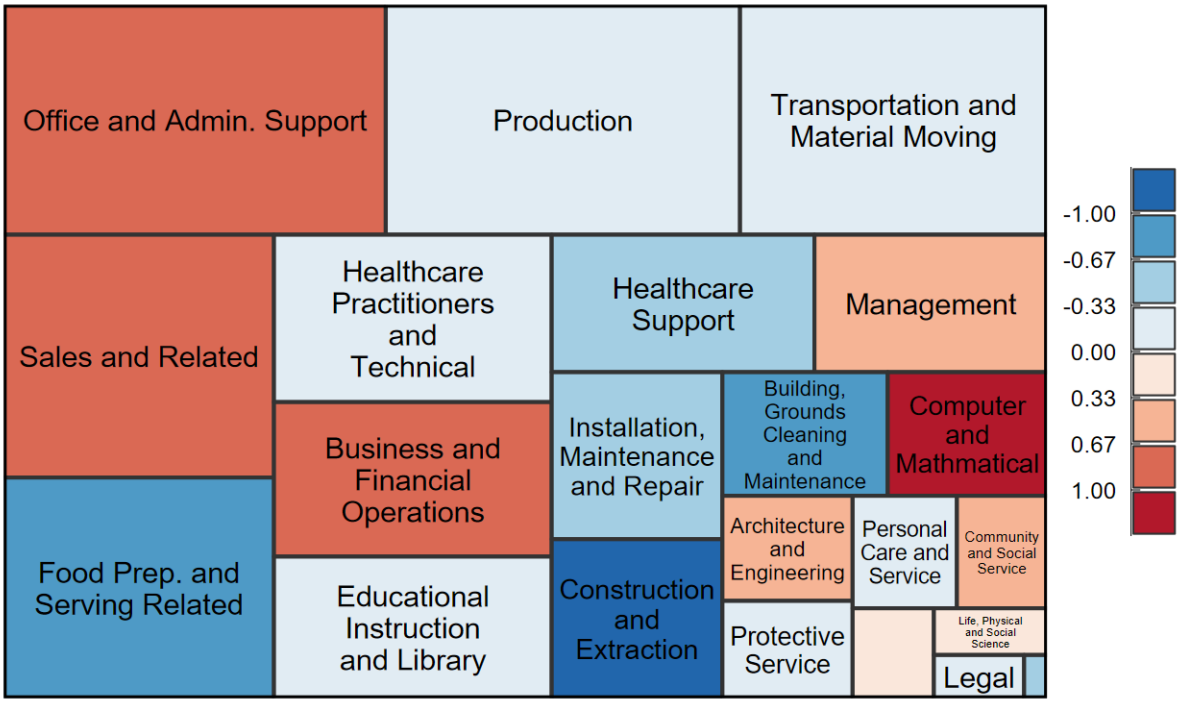


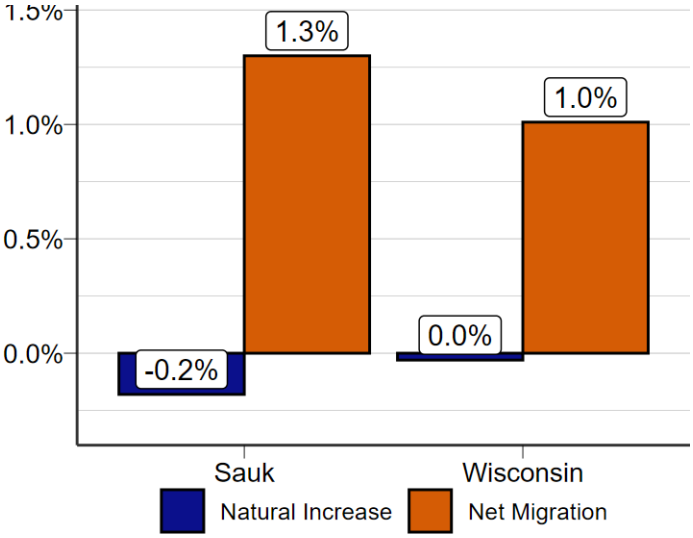
Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

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
Baraboo, City	12,556	12,700	144	1.2%
Reedsburg, City	9,984	10,264	280	2.8%
Prairie du Sac, Village	4,420	4,435	15	0.3%
Sauk City, Village	3,518	3,518	0	0.0%
Lake Delton, Village	3,501	3,477	-24	-0.7%
Delton, Town	2,460	2,481	21	0.8%
Dellona, Town	1,901	1,921	20	1.0%
Spring Green, Town	1,828	1,836	8	0.4%
Baraboo, Town	1,816	1,802	-14	-0.8%
West Baraboo, Village	1,627	1,616	-11	-0.7%
Sauk, County	65,763	66,495	732	1.1%
Wisconsin, State	5,893,718	5,951,400	57,682	1.0%

Sauk County is the 25th most populous county in Wisconsin with 66,495 residents. It is also the 16th fastest-growing county in in the state. From 2020 to 2023, the population changed by 1.1%, compared to the 1.0% change in Wisconsin. The fastest-growing municipality in Sauk County is the City of Reedsburg, which added 280 people, for a 2.8% growth rate.



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 largest municipality in Sauk County is Baraboo, which has 12,700 residents. Baraboo is located centrally in the county along the US 12 highway. South along that highway is Sauk City and Prairie du Sac in Sauk County. North along US 12 is Lake Delton and the southern portion of the Wisconsin Dells, which is a major tourism destination.

Sauk County's population growth in terms of natural increase was -0.2%, slightly lower than the state. Like Wisconsin overall, Sauk County's population is getting older, which contributes to the low rate of natural increase. Sauk County's net migration was 1.3%, slightly higher than Wisconsin's net migration. Overall, Sauk County's population changes closely mirrored the state.

Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020-2050 Population Change
Sauk	65,763	67,400	69,075	70,000	6.4%
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 Sauk County will be one of the fastest-growing counties in the coming decades. While the state's overall population is predicted to decline by 3.1% from 2020 to 2050, Sauk County is predicted to increase by 6.4% over the same period. While this is a positive indicator for Sauk County's future economy, these predictions are not set in stone. While Sauk County's population may continue to grow, it will also continue to age.

Employment by Industry

	2023 Avg Monthly Employment	5-year Change	5-year % Change	% of Total Employment
Total, All Industries	35,917	-846	-2.3%	100.0%
Leisure and Hospitality	9,037	1,185	15.1%	25.2%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	7,163	-85	-1.2%	19.9%
Education and Health Services	5,923	-25	-0.4%	16.5%
Manufacturing	5,513	-686	-11.1%	15.3%
Professional and Business Services	2,570	312	13.8%	7.2%
Construction	1,940	104	5.7%	5.4%
Public Administration	1,329	-1,796	-57.5%	3.7%
Financial Activities	1,198	163	15.7%	3.3%
Other Services	701	23	3.4%	2.0%
Natural Resources and Mining	412	-37	-8.2%	1.1%
Information	132	-2	-1.5%	0.4%

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

Sauk County employment lost 846 jobs (-2.3%) from 2018 to 2023. Average employment levels were at 35,917 jobs in 2023. From 2018 to 2023, the fastest-growing industry was financial activities, adding 163 jobs for a 15.7% growth rate. COVID-19 caused a very steep job loss in 2020, interrupting a multi-year growth trend, from which the county is still recovering.

The largest industry was leisure and hospitality, accounting for 25.2% of employment in the county in 2023. This industry represents a significantly larger share of the county's employment than the state where it only accounts for 10.0% of all employment. This is due to Sauk County, and adjacent Adams, Columbia, and Juneau counties, containing the Wisconsin Dells, a major tourist attraction. Sauk County also contains Devil's Lake State Park, the most-visited state park in Wisconsin.

Unemployment

Sauk County's monthly average unemployment rate in 2023 was 2.7%, compared to the state's rate of 3.0%. This ranks the county 17th in terms of unemployment in 2023. Sauk County's unemployment has generally been lower than the state's overall.

Sauk County, with much of its employment in leisure and hospitality, was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the county experienced a spike in unemployment much higher than the state, it recovered relatively quickly. In 2024, unemployment ticked up slightly compared to the record low unemployment rates of late 2022 and early 2023 which Sauk County and the state experienced. However, this puts Sauk County safely within the range of unemployment rates experienced before the COVID-19 Recession.

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.

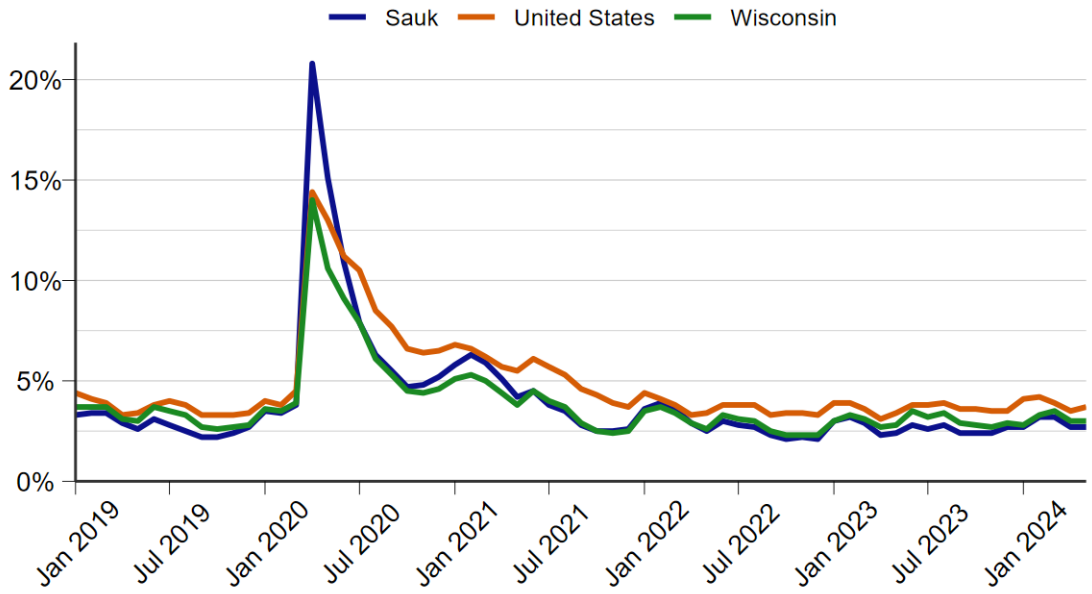


Figure 9: Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Labor Force Participation

Sauk County's labor force participation rate (LFPR) was 66.2%, ranking 23rd in the state. In recent years, Sauk County's LFPR closely matched the state's LFPR. Sauk County's LFPR has declined faster than the state's over the past two decades. As Sauk County's population continues to age and retire, the LFPR is likely to decline further.

Unlike the unemployment rate, which is more readily subject to economic conditions, labor force participation is conditional on broader social conditions like barriers to employment. As more workers retire, lowering barriers to employment (access to transportation, housing, or childcare, for example) can help address the workforce quantity challenge.

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.

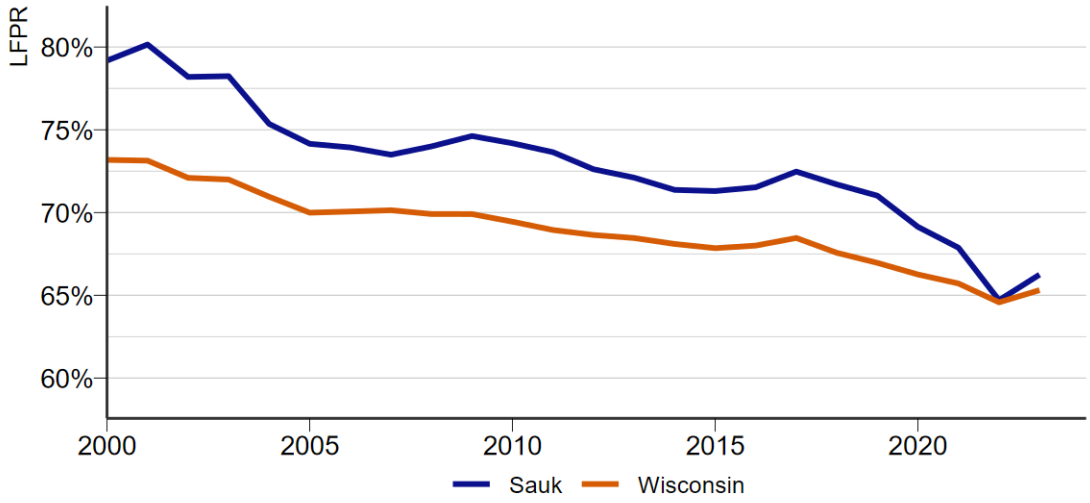


Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

AI Impact

Occupation	Employment	% of Total Employment	AI Exposure Index
Fast Food and Counter Workers	11,110	2.3%	-1.00
Retail Salespersons	10,730	2.2%	0.40
Cashiers	10,680	2.2%	0.89
Registered Nurses	10,320	2.2%	0.04
Customer Service Representatives	8,830	1.8%	0.75
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	8,700	1.8%	-0.78
Office Clerks, General	7,700	1.6%	1.00
Stockers and Order Fillers	7,360	1.5%	-0.05
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	7,010	1.5%	-1.27
Waiters and Waitresses	6,160	1.3%	-0.78

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 South Central Workforce Development Area (WDA) is fast food and counter workers, accounting for 2.3% of the area's employment. Sauk is part of the South Central WDA, which includes Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, and Marquette counties. This occupation has an artificial intelligence (AI) exposure index of -1.00. For context, the occupations with the highest potential AI exposure are bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks, with an AI exposure index of 1.89.

The types of occupations associated with the largest industry in Sauk County, leisure and hospitality, are less likely to have a high AI exposure index. These occupations generally have little opportunity for digital automation. For example, maids and housekeepers, have an AI exposure index of -1.54.

Industry Employment Projections

	Industry	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Highest Percent Growth	Information	17,853	21,530	3,677	20.6%
Most Jobs Added	Professional and Business Services	56,016	63,379	7,363	13.1%
Highest Number Employed	Education and Health Services	119,801	126,968	7,167	6.0%
Lowest Percent Growth	Government	36,633	37,319	686	1.9%
Total	Total All Industries	527,186	568,717	41,531	7.9%

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

DWD conducts employment projections for Wisconsin's 11 WDAs every two years. Employment in the South Central WDA is expected to increase by 41,531 (7.9%), slightly faster than the state's growth rate of 7.1%.

In the South Central WDA, the information industry is projected to grow by 20.6% from 2022 to 2032, making it the fastest growing industry. While much of the employment in the information industry is driven by Epic Systems, a healthcare software developer, other software developers and publishers in the area are contributing to this growth. Despite not being the fastest-growing industry, professional and business services is expected to add the most jobs in the region. This points to the growing importance of these highly technical and professional industries to the area. In contrast, manufacturing is projected to grow by 4.7% by 2032, a slower rate than the area as a whole.

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	Computer and Mathematical	23,528	27,764	4,236	18.0%
Most Jobs Added	Computer and Mathematical	23,528	27,764	4,236	18.0%
Lowest Percent Growth	Legal	3,481	3,391	-90	-2.6%
Highest Number Employed	Office and Administrative Support	63,491	62,767	-724	-1.1%
Total	Total, All	527,186	568,717	41,531	7.9%

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

Overall employment in the South Central WDA is projected to increase by 41,531, growing 7.9%. In the South Central WDA, computer and mathematical occupations are projected to be the fastest-growing occupations, growing 18.0% from 2022 to 2032. This growth is driven by the growing information industry in the region, the high pay for computer-related occupations, and the increasing demand for software-driven business solutions. Additionally, the South Central area has a concentration of employers in highly technical industries, like biotechnology and computer systems, which takes advantage of graduates from the area's postsecondary institutions. This is also exemplified by the second-fastest growing occupation group: life, physical, and social sciences.

While an occupation group with shrinking employment may not initially appear promising, these occupations can still provide ample occupational opportunities. For example, total employment in administrative and support occupations are projected to decline. 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 7,040 openings annually.

Aging Population

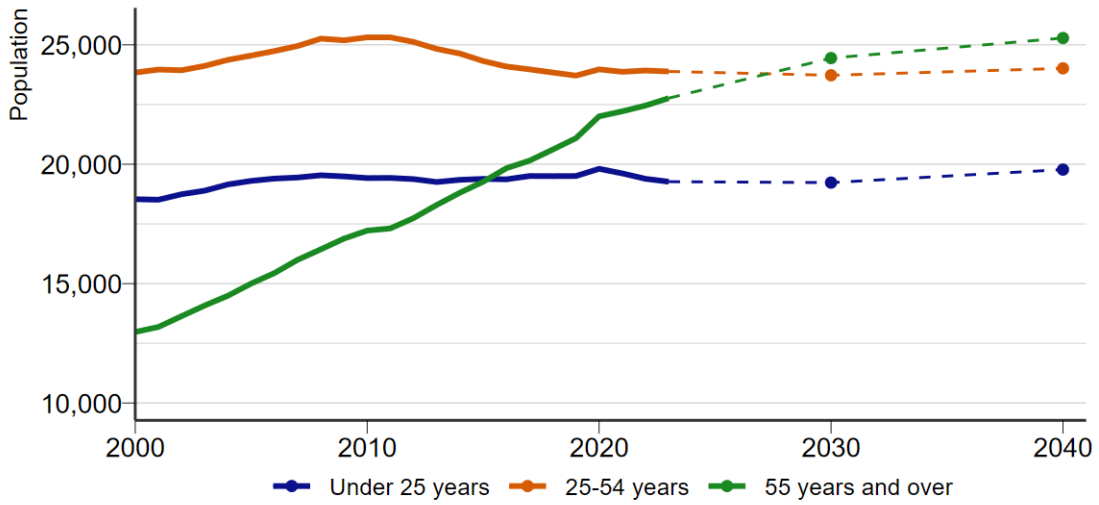


Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

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.

Sauk County's population is older than the state. From 2017 to 2022, the median age in Sauk County was 41.1, compared to Wisconsin's median age of 39.9. Similarly, the share of the population age 55 and older was 34.5% in 2023, growing from 29.3% in 2013. As an increasing number of older workers retire, Sauk County will face an intensifying workforce quantity challenge.

Personal Income

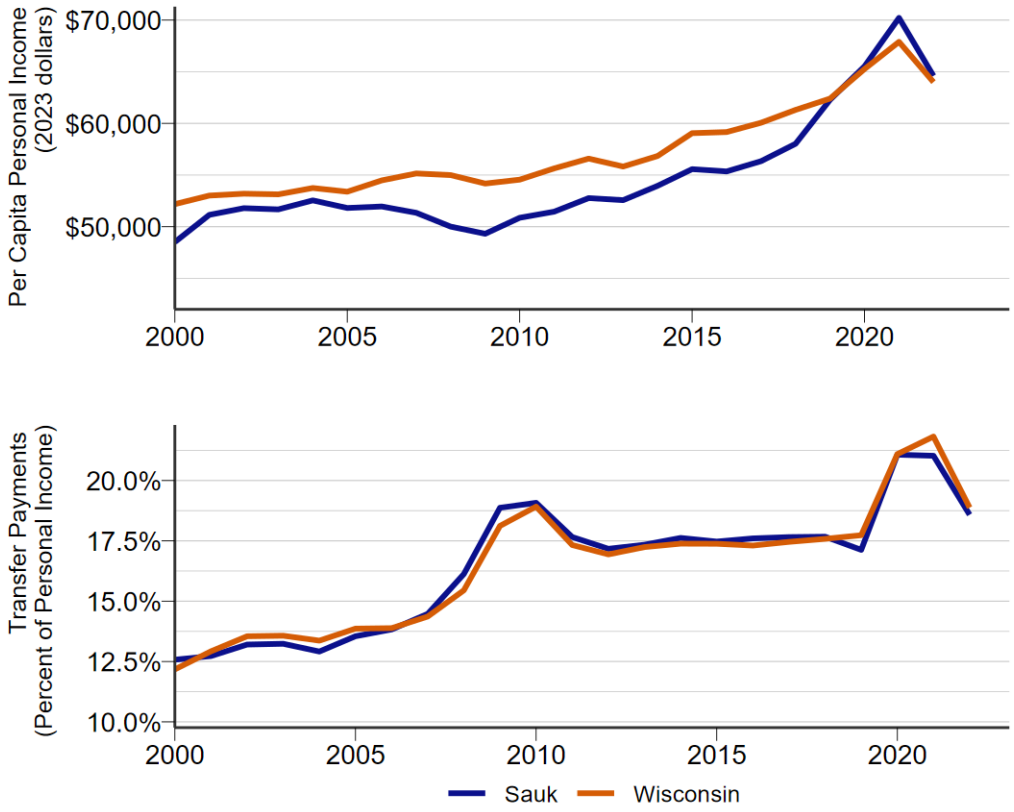


Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

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 Sauk County was $64,596 in 2022, compared to the statewide average of $63,996. During the mid-2000s and 2010s, Wisconsin had a noticeably higher PCPI than Sauk County. However, that gap closed such that Sauk County's PCPI exceeded Wisconsin's in 2021.

Sauk County is one of Wisconsin's more expensive counties to live in. A family in Sauk County of two adults, an infant, and a school age child requires $75,964 per year to maintain an adequate standard of living according to the 2023 Self Sufficiency Standard. For comparison, the same family in the median county in Wisconsin requires $71,986 to maintain an adequate standard of living.

In total, 18.6% of total personal income came from transfer payments rather than earned income in 2022. Sauk County closely matches the state-level upward trend in transfer payments as a percentage of personal income. As Sauk County and the state's population ages, a greater share of the population becomes eligible for transfer payments like Social Security.

Workforce Pipeline

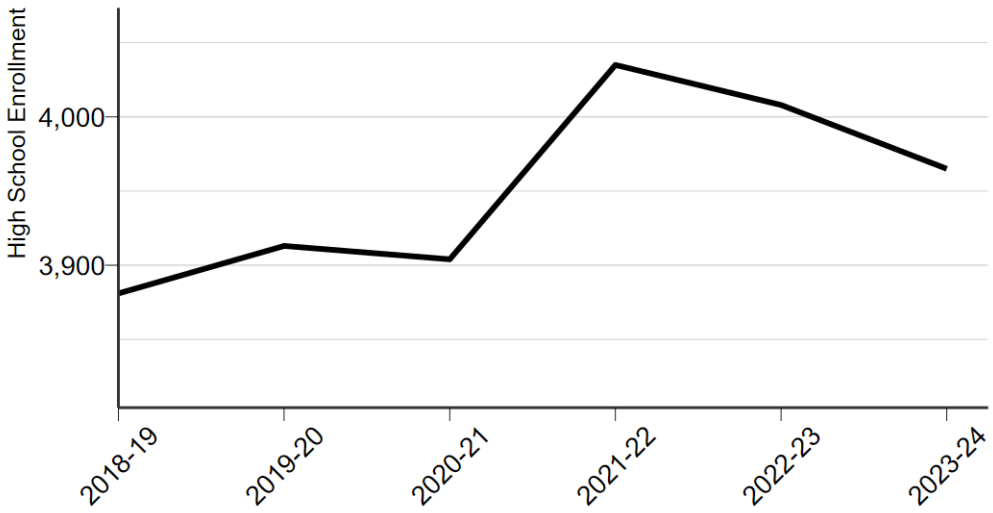


Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education prepares the next generation of the labor force. As of the 2023-24 school year, 3,965 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.

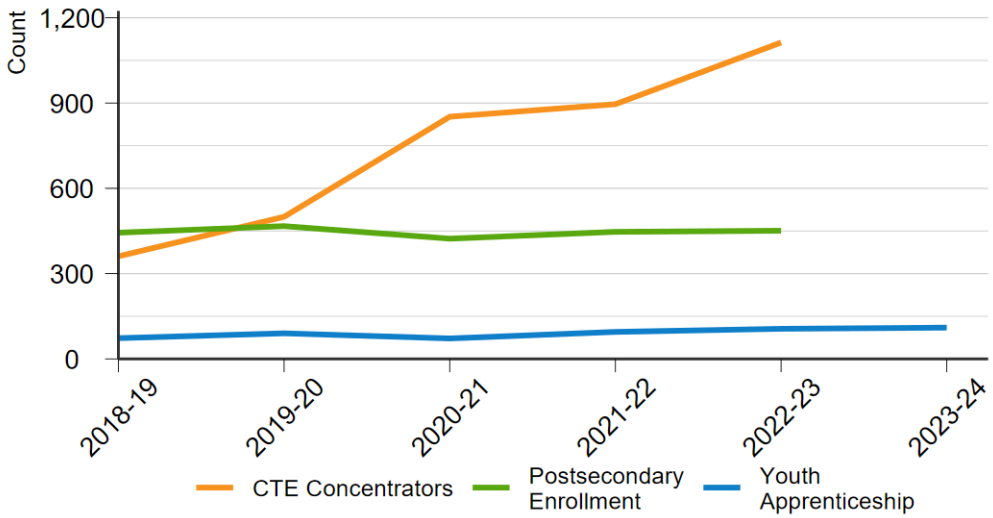


Figure 14: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Workforce Development.

Career and Technical Education

Of 11th and 12th grade students, 55.8% were concentrators in career and technical education (CTE), compared to 44.3% for the state during the 2022-23 school year. In the 2022-23 school year, the greatest number of CTE concentrators chose agriculture, food, and natural resources as their career cluster, which is appropriate for the importance of agriculture in Southwestern Wisconsin. Sauk County, like many of the counties in the region, have more cows than people ("Where Cows and Deer Outnumber People In Wisconsin", UW Applied Population Lab).

The second largest career cluster was hospitality and tourism, which is a natural fit given the importance of the leisure and hospitality industry to the region. In recent school years, the number of CTE concentrators has dramatically increased. This is a positive sign for the career readiness of the next generation of workers.

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
Sauk	1,113	55.8%
Wisconsin	64,124	44.3%

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

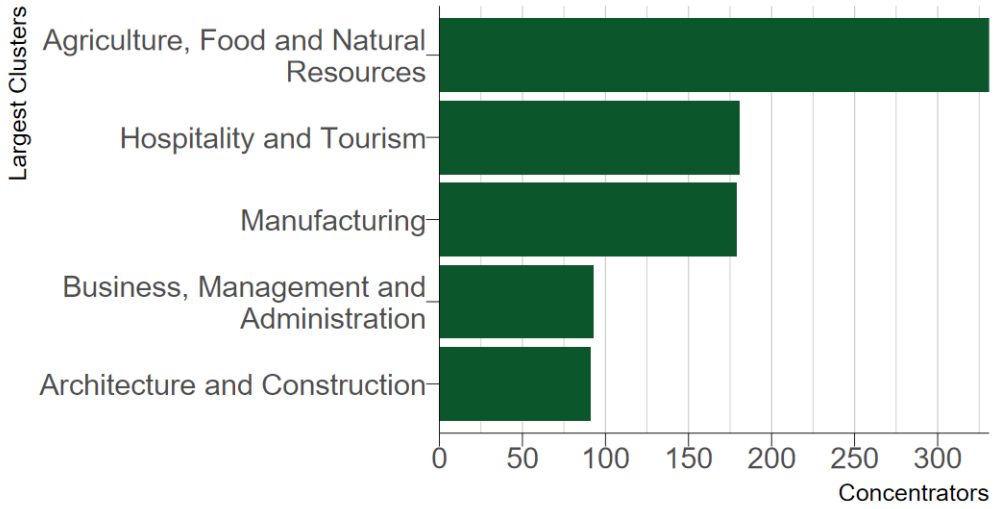


Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

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 45.5%. In Wisconsin, it was 43.6%. Sauk County is home to the University of Wisconsin-Platteville Baraboo campus and is close to the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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
Sauk	451	45.5%
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 106 youth apprentices in Sauk 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
Sauk	106	5.3%
Wisconsin	8,222	5.7%

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