



WISCONSIN EMPLOYER SURVEY

WINTER 2026

EDUCATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Students Unprepared for Workforce, Employers Say WMC's Survey Shows Math and Reading Skills Gap

Over half of Wisconsin employers say the state's K-12 education system does not adequately prepare students for the workforce, according to the latest **Wisconsin Employer Survey**. This frustration, though not new, compounds other workforce issues in the state, including labor availability and demographic challenges.

As the economy seems to be strengthening, hiring is on the rise, but 60 percent of Wisconsin businesses say they are having trouble finding workers. The top obstacle, by far, is the lack of skilled applicants, as 59 percent of employers indicated, followed by a lack of job applicants (20 percent).

"These numbers make clear that we have a skills gap in Wisconsin," said WMC Associate Vice President of Government Relations & Senior Political Advisor Rachel Ver Velde. "Employers are concerned that applicants do not even have basic skills to do the job at hand."

In fact, 64 percent of employers indicated their employees struggle with reading, math, or both – necessary skills in any position.

Many companies – 30 percent of respondents – have had to resort to providing remedial education or tutoring for employees because their K-12 education did not prepare them with adequate reading or math skills.

"As taxpayers, we're investing more and more into public education," continued Ver Velde. "But the return on investment just isn't there. Our education system isn't equipping Wisconsin students for Wisconsin jobs, and employers are understandably frustrated."

According to the survey, only 10 percent of Wisconsin employers rate the quality of their local school district as "excellent."

"With less than a quarter of our businesses content with public education outcomes, it's time to evaluate the system," Ver Velde concluded. "Our workforce, our business climate, our economic success all hinge on adequately preparing the next generation of employees."

About the Wisconsin Employer Survey

The **Wisconsin Employer Survey** is conducted twice a year by WMC. The assessment provides a snapshot of where Wisconsin's employers stand on a number of important issues and outlines their economic outlook for both Wisconsin and the U.S. For the Winter 2026 edition, WMC surveyed 205 employers that make up a representative sample of its membership. Businesses of all sizes, industries and geographic locations in Wisconsin participated.

What is the top business concern facing your company?

NATIONAL ECONOMY	32%
HEALTHCARE COSTS	20%
LABOR AVAILABILITY	16%
EXCESSIVE REGULATION	11%
OTHER	21%

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Are you **having trouble hiring** employees?

YES

60%

NO

40%

What is the **#1 obstacle** to having trouble hiring?

LACK OF SKILLED APPLICANTS	59%
LACK OF JOB APPLICANTS	20%
GOVERNMENT BENEFITS TOO GENEROUS	7%
HOUSING SHORTAGE	5%
CAN'T COMPETE ON WAGES / BENEFITS	5%
OTHER	4%

**Does your current K-12 education system
adequately prepare students for
your workforce needs?**

YES

23%

NO

56%

NOT SURE 21%

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**Do you have any employees who struggle
with the ability to read or do math?**

YES

64%

NO

36%

Have you ever had to provide employees with
additional education or tutoring because
their K-12 education did not prepare them with the
reading or math skills necessary for a job?

YES

30%

NO

70%



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