



# WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

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## **Expanding Apprenticeship Pathways: Helping to Meet Wisconsin's Future Workforce Needs**

*Report identifies regions, occupations that present opportunities for expansion*

Even with participation in registered apprenticeships at record levels, opportunities remain to further expand these programs in specific regions and occupations of the state, a new [Wisconsin Policy Forum report](#) finds.

If sufficient support exists among employers and other partners, there may be opportunities to expand apprenticeship pathways in areas of the state, such as northwestern and west central Wisconsin, with few apprentices relative to the projected demand for workers in key occupations. Occupations with low ratios of apprentices to projected job openings, such as nursing or teaching, may also offer opportunities to strengthen programs, the report finds.

In partnership with workforce development officials, employers may also wish to explore creating apprenticeship programs, where feasible, in occupations that currently have limited or no apprenticeship pathways. This may include occupations that currently lack apprenticeship pathways in Wisconsin that are available in other states, such as for bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks.

"Though not the only pathway into many in-demand, good-paying careers, apprenticeships are a critical tool for addressing Wisconsin's workforce demand in many industries and could be further expanded," the report finds.

### **Wisconsin's history in apprenticeships**

This report is the second in a series that looks at Wisconsin's apprenticeship programs and pathways. The [first report](#) analyzed the landscape around three programs in Wisconsin: registered apprenticeships, certified pre-apprenticeships, and youth apprenticeships.

Recent growth in participation in Wisconsin's Registered Apprenticeship Program comes more than a century after the state pioneered the first apprenticeship law in the United States in 1911, becoming a model for other states and for the federal government. Today, our concentration of registered apprentices continues to outpace most other states on a per capita basis.

Usually lasting between one and five years, registered apprenticeships offer paid, on-the-job training for their occupation. This is coupled with classroom instruction, often provided at a technical college and paid for by the employer. Once a worker completes an apprenticeship -- and passes a licensure exam in occupations that require a license -- they achieve journey worker status and are able to earn higher wages.

### **Regions vary in apprenticeship participation**

First, one segment of our analysis examined 22 occupations with registered apprenticeship pathways in Wisconsin that are projected by the state Department of Workforce Development to have at least 1,000

annual job openings statewide through 2032. (Our data analysis for this report was supplemented with stakeholder interviews that provided on-the-ground perspectives from economic and workforce development leaders and labor unions across the state.) This revealed limited apprenticeship participation outside of a few construction and manufacturing occupations that pay relatively strong wages.

We then examined 10 occupations that have strong apprenticeship programs and at least 500 annual projected job openings, and that largely pay relatively high wages. Within this group of occupations, we found significant regional variation in how apprenticeship numbers matched up with projected job openings. Comparing this ratio in each of the state's 11 workforce development areas, we found that northwest and west central Wisconsin lag other areas of the state.

Areas of the state with high apprentice-to-job ratios include south central and northeast Wisconsin. These regions may offer lessons for how to strengthen partnerships among regional stakeholders and recruit employers and workers that could help to increase participation in other regions.

### **Apprenticeships limited in some occupations**

Apprenticeship programs frequently are associated with the construction and manufacturing sectors, in part because those programs are some of the oldest in the state and include the occupations for which apprenticeship participation levels are highest. Some occupations in those sectors have both robust apprenticeship participation and relatively high wages, including electricians, carpenters, construction laborers, and welders.

However, in other occupations such as nursing and teaching, existing apprenticeship programs are very limited, and participation is low. Apprenticeships for many high-demand health care occupations, in particular, remain limited in Wisconsin and are primarily or exclusively offered in Dane County. Meanwhile, apprenticeships for elementary and middle school teachers currently are available only as a pilot program with select employers.

In other occupations where employer demand for workers is high but participation and wages are relatively low, such as early childhood educators, increasing participation may require raising wages or providing other incentives.

Our analysis also looked at possibilities to expand pre-apprenticeship programs, which provide foundational training to prepare individuals for registered apprenticeships and connect them to employers. For some in-demand occupations with registered apprenticeship pathways, we found that pre-apprenticeship programs are available only in limited areas of the state. For other occupations, pre-apprenticeship programs don't exist anywhere in the state.

[Click here](#) to read the report, which was commissioned and supported by W RTP | BIG STEP using a grant from Ascendium Education Solutions. Gilbane also contributed financial support to this research project.

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