COLLEGE AND WORKFORCE TRAINING READINESS

The Future Workforce of Wisconsin

Wisconsin's labor force and economy are strengthened when the state's high school graduates are prepared for college and are interested in pursuing available jobs in Wisconsin. Academic preparation is critical, given that many of the projected high growth job openings in Wisconsin will require a 2-year college degree or more. In Wisconsin, five of the expected highest growth career fields will be education, management, computer specialties, health care, and community services. Do Wisconsin's future workers have the necessary skills to fill positions in these high-growth careers? Are Wisconsin's future workers interested in jobs in these fields?

Using 2008 ACT results for 25,884 Wisconsin high school graduates with career interest information, and 2006-2016 Wisconsin state long-term occupational projections (based on job growth and job replacement), here is what we know so far.

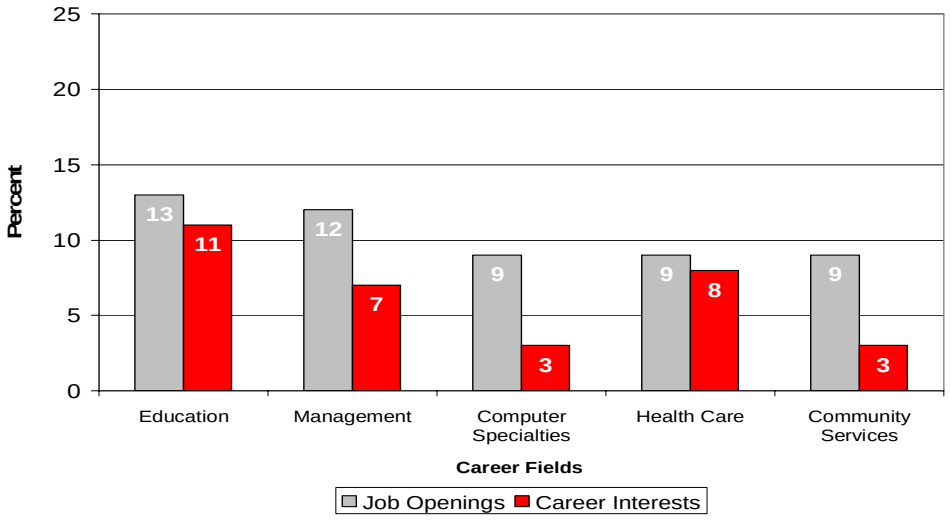
- There is some interest among Wisconsin high school students in pursuing these high-growth career fields, but not enough to meet the demand.
- Of Wisconsin students expressing interest in these high-growth career fields, more than two-thirds are ready for first-year college English courses, while less than two-thirds are prepared for college-level social science courses.
- Of Wisconsin students expressing interest in most of these high-growth career fields, less than one-half are ready for college-level math or science courses.

Wisconsin educators should continue to encourage their students to pursue high-growth Wisconsin career fields.

Students' Interests

- Gaps between expected jobs and interested students are apparent for careers in education (secondary teachers, administrators, etc.), management (convention planners, hotel/restaurant managers, etc.), computer specialties (computer programmers, database administrators, etc.), and community services (social workers, school counselors, etc.), with more jobs expected than students interested in jobs in these fields (Figure 1). Wisconsin may be faced with potential labor shortfalls in fields where skilled individuals are most needed.

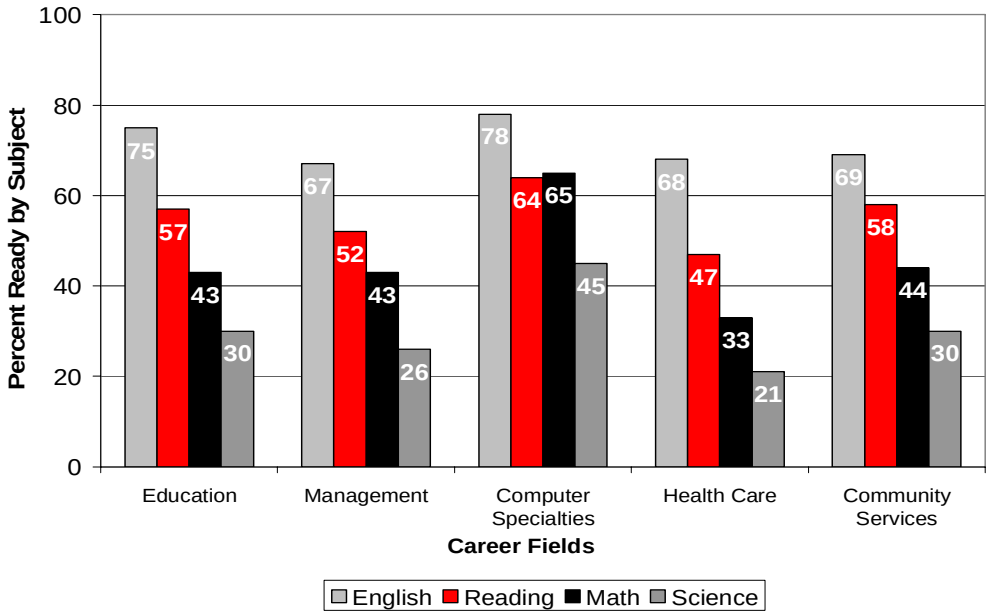
Figure 1: Projected Annual Job Openings and Wisconsin High School Students' Interests in High Growth Wisconsin Career Fields[1, 2]



[1]State projections 2006-2016 provided by Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.
[2]Based on 2008 ACT-tested Wisconsin students (*n* = 25,884) with valid career information.

- Although the gap between students interested in the health care field (nurses, occupational therapists, etc.), and the jobs that will be available in this field is more narrow, many of these students are not ready to meet or exceed one or more of ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks in English, reading, mathematics, or science, as shown in Figure 2. Students who are interested and college ready are more likely to be successful in the coursework needed to enter this high-growth career field.

Figure 2: ACT College Readiness Benchmark Performance of Wisconsin High School Students Interested in High Growth Wisconsin Career Fields by Subject[3]



[3]Based on 2008 ACT-tested Wisconsin students (*n* = 25,884) with valid subject scores and career information.

Wisconsin educators should continue to encourage their students to achieve the highest level of preparation for college, in order to meet Wisconsin Workforce demands.

Students' Skills

- Students are ready to succeed in entry-level college courses if they meet ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks. In Wisconsin, more than two-thirds of students are prepared for first-year college coursework in English for the five high-growth career fields. Fewer students interested in these high-growth fields are prepared to succeed in college-level social science courses (indicated by ACT Reading Benchmark), with students pursuing health care careers being the least prepared and students pursuing computer specialties careers being the most prepared.
- Approximately two-thirds of students wanting to enter computer specialties are ready for college-level math courses, while less than one-half are ready for college-level science. Less than one-half of students pursuing careers in education, management, health care, and community services are ready for college-level math, while less than one-third of students pursuing these careers are ready for college-level science.
- Overall, the pattern of readiness for college coursework is similar across the five high-growth career fields: Student preparation is highest for English and social sciences, and much lower for math and science. The lower levels of preparation among graduating high school students is alarming, given the high demand for science- and math-intensive careers such as computer programming, nursing, and teaching.