

73 percent of businesses in WMC survey say public high school grads unprepared for workforce

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About three-fourths of businesses tapped in a recent WMC survey say public high school graduates in the state aren't prepared to join the workforce.

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce yesterday rolled out education-related findings from its latest Wisconsin Employer Survey, which found 56 percent of respondents employ people who struggle with reading or math. Plus, 41 percent said they are providing workers with education or tutoring on "basic" career skills.

Meanwhile, 63 percent of respondents said they have reduced hiring requirements in hopes of getting more applicants. And 40 percent said they've removed bachelor's degree requirements for job postings that previously required them.

In a statement on the results, WMC Senior Director of Workforce, Education & Employment Policy Rachel Ver Velde argues the state's public school system is "failing our children" and harming both the workforce and economy.

"Not only is this new data disappointing, but it should also make all of us outraged," she said.

In response to WMC's comments, Department of Public Instruction spokesperson Abigail Swetz said the agency is "glad to see the WMC recognizes the need" for Wisconsin students to be well-prepared for the workforce.

"I would be interested in looking back over their press releases during budget season to see if WMC advocated for the robust funding our public schools need to meet the needs of our future workforce, or if WMC instead decided to double-down on supporting private schools receiving public money while operating under fewer accountability measures than public schools," Swetz said in an email.

She charged the manufacturing group with "constantly advocating to siphon money

away from” public schools for voucher programs and using divisive rhetoric to stir up negativity.

WMC’s survey found 99 percent of respondents support expanding funding for apprenticeships, dual enrollment credits and work-based learning opportunities for high school students, including 78 percent that strongly support it and 21 percent that somewhat support it.

It also found 89 percent support providing more funding for school choice and charter schools, including 62 percent that strongly support it and 27 percent that somewhat support it.

The June survey was conducted online and through the mail and included 170 businesses.

See the release:

<https://www.wmc.org/press-releases/wisconsin-employers-give-k-12-schools-a-failing-grade/>

See more survey results:

https://media.wmc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/17104044/CEO-Survey-Report_Summer-2023_EDUCATION.pdf