BERKS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Berks Workforce 2030



Prepared by

TPMA

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Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive picture of Berks County's current workforce landscape and future outlook through 2035. Drawing on quantitative data, employer surveys, and interviews with educators, community leaders, and businesses, it identifies the demographic, economic, and structural forces shaping local talent supply and demand. The findings reveal a stable but constrained workforce, where modest population growth, flat participation, and rising costs require coordinated strategies to retain, prepare, and engage every willing worker.

Population and Workforce Trends

Berks County's working-age population (ages 25–64) will remain essentially flat through 2035, with minimal growth of up to 4% under optimistic projections. The population will skew older as mid-career workers (40–49) increase and older cohorts (55–64) retire. With limited inflow of younger adults, new workforce supply will depend on higher participation and retention rather than population growth. Strategic focus areas include raising participation among underemployed groups, developing early-career pipelines, and planning for the replacement of retiring technical and clinical workers.

Labor Force Participation

Participation will hold between 78% and 83% through the next decade, with only modest potential for growth even under strong economic conditions. Employers report continued hiring difficulty, especially in healthcare, trades, and entry-level service roles. Barriers such as childcare, transportation, and housing constrain participation, while shifting worker expectations emphasize flexibility, culture, and advancement. Retention and job quality are now as critical as recruitment in sustaining workforce strength.

Education, Literacy, and Numeracy

Employers across sectors report growing concerns about literacy, numeracy, and communication skills, especially in frontline and technical roles. English proficiency challenges are most acute in manufacturing and healthcare, while math readiness lags workforce demand. Nearly half of Berks' eighth graders test "below basic" in math, signaling long-term risk for the local talent pipeline. Strengthening contextualized literacy, numeracy, and digital skills through industry-led training and employer-education partnerships is essential to sustaining middle-skill employment and upward mobility.

Mobility, Commuting, and Talent Retention

Outmigration of educated young adults remains a core challenge. Roughly 40% of residents commute outside the county for work, and inflows from nearby counties do not fully replace the skill loss. Without improved retention of college graduates and emerging professionals, Berks risks a "bedroom community" dynamic. Targeted actions—such as countywide internship-to-hire models, a local talent fellowship, and relocation incentives—can convert student engagement into long-term retention and strengthen the professional workforce base.

Remote Work and Flexibility

Remote work participation in Berks County (8.9%) trails the national average (15.2%), limiting flexibility benefits that could draw more residents into the workforce. While manufacturing and healthcare limit full remote options, hybrid scheduling, digital training, and coworking hubs can expand inclusion. Branding Berks as a "flexible work" county and supporting digital literacy would help attract and retain younger professionals and caregivers seeking balance.

Housing and Workforce Stability

Housing affordability has become a major barrier to workforce retention. Median home prices nearly doubled between 2020 and 2025, while half of renters are cost-burdened. Essential workers in healthcare, manufacturing, and public service increasingly struggle to live near their jobs. Coordinated employer-assisted housing, zoning updates for mixed-use and multifamily development, and rehabilitation of aging housing stock are critical to sustaining local employment and community stability.

Strategic Priorities for the WDB

The WDB can play a catalytic role by connecting employers, educators, and community partners around five priorities:

1. Expand participation by engaging underutilized talent groups—parents, veterans, older workers, and immigrant professionals.
2. Strengthen early-career and credential pipelines to ensure younger workers transition smoothly from education to employment.
3. Invest in job quality and retention by supporting employers in developing career ladders, flexible scheduling, and inclusive cultures.
4. Integrate literacy, numeracy, and digital readiness into all workforce training to close foundational skill gaps.
5. Align workforce, housing, and transportation systems to remove barriers that keep residents from fully participating in the labor market.

Berks County is at an important point in its growth. Stability provides a strong foundation, but continued progress will depend on collaboration, focus, and sustained investment. By aligning employers, educators, and community partners around shared goals, the county can strengthen participation, expand skill development, and make Berks a place where people choose to work and build their futures.

Achieving this vision will also require consistent and creative funding. Strategic use of public and private resources can support the programs, training, and partnerships that keep the workforce adaptable and resilient. With steady coordination, thoughtful investment, and a shared commitment to long-term outcomes, Berks County's workforce can continue to drive opportunity and economic strength through 2030 and beyond.



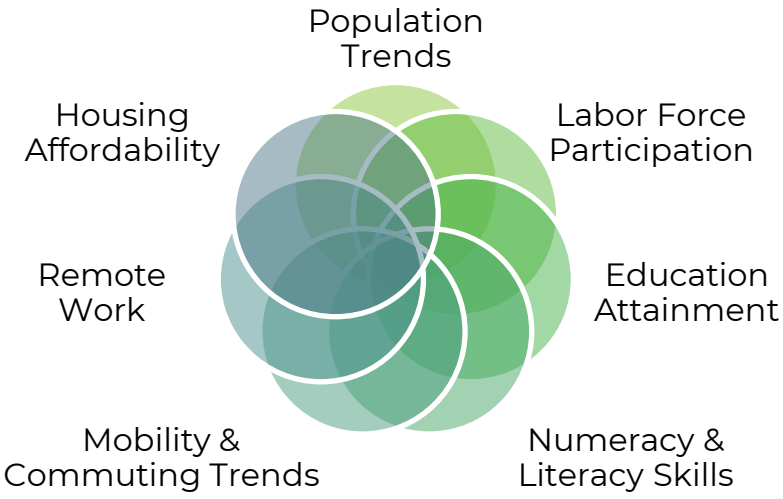
Introduction

This report provides a clear view of where Berks County stands today and where its workforce is heading. It brings together data, employer and partner perspectives, and practical examples to show how population stability, capped participation, foundational skills, mobility, flexibility, and housing all shape the local talent picture. The goal is straightforward: use the best available evidence to help the Workforce Development Board and its partners keep every willing worker engaged, prepared, and advancing in Berks County.

Purpose and Context

The Berks County Workforce Development Board leads long-term planning, oversees federal and state workforce funds, and coordinates system partners through PA CareerLink® Berks County. To support that mission, the Board engaged TPMA to complete a countywide workforce study that will guide decisions through 2030.

This study examines post-pandemic labor market and demographic trends in the Reading metropolitan area with a primary focus on adults ages 25 to 64 and a complementary look at emerging talent ages 18 to 24. It identifies risks and opportunities and translates them into actions that align education and training to employer demand, reduce barriers to work, and strengthen retention.



The analysis is organized around the Board's research questions. Each theme below anchors one or more questions from the RFP and frames the findings, implications, and recommendations that follow.

Theme	Research Question
Population Trends	Working-age population in Berks over next 10 years
	Size of labor force in Berks over next 10 year
Labor Force Participation	Labor force participation projections for next 10 years
	Approaches to raise labor force participation in next 5 years
Education, Numeracy, and Literacy Skills	*Compare current and future trends among Berks County, surrounding LWDAs, and the Commonwealth*
	Educational attainment
	English language proficiency
	Applied math/numeracy
	Trends and challenges for young adults in the workforce
	Numeracy challenges for young adults through 2030
Mobility and Commuting Trends	Migration in and out of Berks County,
	Local labor market share and commuting
	Berks residents working outside the county
Remote Work	Remote work trends for Berks County residents
Housing	Inventory of affordable housing and its effect on talent attraction and retention
Recommendations and Opportunities	Current and future barriers to employment
	Key strengths of working adults in the next 10 years
	Opportunities to grow the labor force size and skills

Report Organization

This study is structured around the key questions identified by the Berks County Workforce Development Board. The goal is to connect data and stakeholder input to practical strategies that can strengthen the county's workforce. Each section includes an overview of findings, implications, and recommendations for the Workforce Development Board and employers, illustrated with examples of best practices that can be adapted locally.



Quantitative Research



Employer Survey



Interview and Focus Groups

1. **Quantitative Research –** This study relies on a mixed-methods design that integrates both quantitative data and qualitative insights. On the quantitative side, TPMA drew from a wide array of sources to examine labor force trends, educational attainment, skills, and workforce projections. Key data sources are included below

   - U.S. Census Bureau
   - U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
   - Lightcast™ modeling
   - Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)
   - O*NET
   - PA Center for Workforce Information and Analysis
   - PA Department of Education
   - Regional housing data (CoStar, Lightcast™, Redfin, Zillow Housing Market Data, ESRI)

2. **Employer Survey –** The Berks County Employer Survey gathered input from organizations across industries, with respondents asked to reflect on their workforce experiences within the county. Participation was voluntary, and not all respondents answered every question, so totals vary across findings. While responses represent a broad range of sectors, this report emphasizes six priority industries that are both major regional employers and areas of strategic interest:

   - Construction (NAICS 23)
   - Educational Services (NAICS 61)
   - Healthcare (NAICS 621, 622, 623)
   - Manufacturing (NAICS 31–33)
   - Social Assistance (NAICS 624)
   - Transportation and Warehousing (NAICS 48–49)

These industries are essential to Berks County's current labor market and future economic growth, and survey results from these sectors are highlighted throughout to inform workforce strategy and planning. A breakdown of the survey questions are in Appendix A. Survey Questions.

3. **Interview and Focus Groups** – TPMA conducted confidential one-to-one interviews and two focus groups with employers, educators, and community leaders in June 2025

Each section brings together statistical context and the lived experiences of stakeholders, creating a fuller picture of workforce dynamics in Berks County. More detailed findings on each theme are available in the appendices for readers who wish to explore the data and stakeholder input in greater detail.



Population Trends

Population dynamics shape the foundation of a region's workforce capacity. For Berks County, the focus is on the prime working-age population (25–64). This group drives local productivity, fills critical roles, and sustains the tax base. Stability in this population suggests predictability, but the composition inside the workforce tells a different story: age bands are shifting, retirements loom, and the inflow of younger workers is not keeping pace.

Understanding these patterns is essential for workforce boards, employers, and educators to anticipate both risks and opportunities. Additional detail, including supporting data from interviews, focus groups, and quantitative labor market analysis, can be found in Appendix D. Population Trends.



How many people are in the target working-age population in Berks County, and will that change over the next 10 years? The number of adults in Berks County who are in their prime working years (ages 25–64) is expected to stay about the same over the next decade. Two sets of projections were used:

- The ACS model shows almost no change, with only about +277 more people by 2035.
- The Lightcast™ model shows a bit more growth, with about +9,000 more people (+4.2%) by 2035.

In both cases, the overall size of the working-age population does not grow much. The biggest change within age groups is that the number of people in their 40s will increase, while the number in their late 50s and early 60s will shrink as more workers retire.

What is the size of the local workforce and how will that size change over the next 10 years? The size of the local labor force will follow the same trend as the population; steady, with only modest growth at best. Even in the more optimistic scenario, growth is less than 1% per year. This means:

- New workers will not be enough to meet employer demand on their own. Growth will need to come from more people working or returning to work, not just population gains.
- Younger groups (ages 25–34) will grow very little, which limits the number of new workers entering the pipeline.
- Mid-career workers (ages 40–49) will make up the largest growing group, giving employers a strong pool of experienced workers for now.
- Older workers (ages 55–64) will decline, which could leave gaps in technical, trade, and clinical jobs as they retire.

Berks County's total prime-age population and labor force will remain essentially stable through 2035, with only slight growth at best. Workforce strategy must therefore emphasize raising participation among underemployed groups, strengthening early-career pipelines, and planning for the replacement of retiring workers in critical industries.

Implications

Projections of Berks County's prime-age workforce (ages 25–64) through 2035 vary depending on the method used, but both approaches point to relative stability overall. These projections indicate that Berks County's prime-age workforce will remain relatively stable in size through 2035, with only modest growth under the more optimistic scenario. This stability highlights several important implications for how the county should plan for future workforce needs:

Flat overall growth means demand must be met through higher participation, not new population. The number of 25–34 year-olds will rise by fewer than 2,000 by 2035, offering little "natural replacement" for older workers who are leaving the labor force. Stronger pipelines from high school, college, and early career training into good local jobs will be needed to keep the workforce strong.

Weak early career pipelines pose risks. The ACS method projects just +0.1% growth in the 25–64 population by 2035, and Lightcast™ shows only +4.2%. Within this, the 25–34 group grows by fewer than 2,000 workers, signaling limited "natural replacement" from younger cohorts.

Mid-career workers will dominate. The 40–49 age group is expected to grow by more than 6,000 people, providing stability in the near term. However, without enough younger workers coming in behind them, the county could face leadership and skills gaps later in the decade. Succession planning and leadership development will be important to close this gap.

Older workers are expected to decline the most. By 2035, the county could lose between 1,000 and 4,800 workers ages 55–64, many of whom hold technical, trade, and healthcare jobs. Replacing these retiring workers will be one of the most urgent challenges, since these are critical roles for the local economy.

Overall, the county's strategy will need to focus on keeping workers engaged, helping people move up into better jobs, and building skills at all levels. By strengthening participation, preparing young people for high-demand jobs, planning for leadership turnover, and replacing retirees in critical fields, Berks can keep its workforce stable despite slow overall growth.

Recommendations

With only modest growth projected in Berks County's working-age population, the Workforce Development Board's role is to help employers maximize participation, retention, and readiness. The following tactics outline how the Board can support employer strategies while drawing on proven models and best practices.

1. **Help Employers Expand Participation Through an Underutilized Talent Pool.** Flat population growth means participation must rise, and new workforce expansion will need to come from groups not fully engaged in the economy today. The WDB can help employers design return-to-work programs for parents, veterans, and immigrant professionals, and provide technical assistance for small and mid-sized employers that lack HR capacity to onboard and retain workers who face barriers. A strong example is Northampton Community College's Career Pathways in Manufacturing, an MTTC-funded eight-week, 160-hour course that provides NIMS-recognized machining and CNC training to veterans, low-income residents, and those with limited tech access. Engaging and expanding the talent pools gives: employers access to overlooked workers, diversify their talent base, and fill vacancies more effectively.
2. **Strengthen Early Career Pipelines in Partnership with Employers.** Minimal growth in the 18–34 population means younger groups will not provide enough "natural replacement" for retiring workers. The WDB can help employers build stronger school-to-work transitions by scaling internships, apprenticeships, and contextualized literacy and math programs that directly prepare students for high-demand jobs. One example is the Pennsylvania College of Technology Advanced Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship (AMP), which engages high school juniors and seniors in a four-month program covering CNC, robotics, and lean manufacturing while awarding stackable credentials. Enrollment has doubled, showing clear demand, and the anticipated result is that employers strengthen recruitment pipelines, reduce succession risks, and benefit from a flow of better-prepared entry-level talent.
3. **Support Employers In Developing Advancement And Succession Pathways.** Berks' workforce is heavily mid-career, offering stability now but exposing risks as older, highly skilled workers retire. The WDB can provide resources and convening support for employers to build advancement tracks, leadership training, and knowledge-transfer systems. This includes capturing the expertise of retiring staff through mentorship

and job-shadowing, while preparing mid-career employees for supervisory and technical leadership roles. The anticipated result is that employers reduce disruption from retirements, protect institutional knowledge, and build loyalty by offering clear upward mobility.

4. **Emphasize Retention And Advancement Of The Existing Workforce.** With overall workforce growth expected to remain flat, the WDB can help employers keep workers engaged through investments in retention strategies, skill development, and career ladders. Supporting employers in accessing funding, coordinating training partnerships, and offering technical assistance ensures that employees can advance within Berks rather than leaving the region. The anticipated result is that employers will reduce turnover costs, stabilize their operations, and remain competitive despite limited growth in the prime-age population

These recommendations are starting points for responding to the projected stability of Berks County's working-age population. They highlight where the WDB can play a catalytic role in supporting employers, but the later sections of this report provide more detailed strategies, specific programmatic options, and actionable recommendations for raising participation, strengthening pipelines, and addressing industry-specific workforce needs.



Labor Force Participation

The labor force participation rate (LFPR) measures how many people in Berks County are actively working or looking for work. It links population to productivity. For a county where employers consistently report difficulty finding talent, LFPR is a key signal of economic capacity and competitiveness.

As Berks County's population ages, reduced participation among older cohorts will steadily pull down the overall LFPR. Additional detail—including supporting data from interviews, focus groups, and quantitative labor market analysis—can be found in Appendix E. Labor Force Participation.



What projections can be made about LFPR over the next ten years, and what are the implications of higher or lower participation?



Recession Scenario

If unemployment rises and wage growth slows, LFPR could fall to **73–74%** by 2027–28 before recovering by 2032. That would mean several thousand fewer workers just when employers may need them most.



Baseline Projection

LFPR is expected to remain between **78%** and **82.3%** through 2035. The upper bound stays stable; the lower bound dips slightly from 79% in 2023 to 78% in 2035.



Boom Scenario

Under strong conditions (low unemployment, faster wage growth), LFPR could climb to **83.7–83.9%** by 2027–28. Even in this "best case," gains are modest and level off quickly.

Berks County's labor supply is capped. Even in a boom, participation is unlikely to exceed 83–84%. In a downturn, participation could fall sharply. Workforce growth cannot come from participation alone. Employers confirm these trends:

Stable demand: Half reported steady workforce size over the past five years; 31% grew. Looking forward, 43% expect growth, 50% expect stability, and only 7% expect declines.

Ongoing shortages: Employers continue to face fewer applicants, high turnover in entry-level roles, and persistent gaps in healthcare, accounting, and skilled trades.

Shifting worker values: Younger workers in particular emphasize flexibility, workplace culture, and balance. Many avoid leadership roles because of stress and time demands.

These dynamics show that healthy LFPR is not enough. Retention, aligning with worker values, and reducing barriers to work are equally important.

What steps can the WDB and local partners take to maximize LFPR over the next five years? Three priorities emerge:

Retention First: With limited room for LFPR growth, keeping current workers engaged is critical. Employers must invest in flexible scheduling, career pathways, and supportive cultures.

Remove Barriers to Participation: Childcare, transportation, and housing constraints sideline willing workers. Addressing these challenges is essential as training or recruitment.

Strengthen Pipelines: The future workforce depends on aligning education and training with demand. Schools, colleges, and training providers must smooth school-to-work transitions and expand access for Berks' growing Hispanic/Latino population.

In summary, Berks County's LFPR will likely remain between 78% and 83% over the next decade. The outcome depends on whether workers find jobs that meet their needs, employers can retain them, and barriers to participation are reduced. Stability is the most likely result, but if it holds at the wrong level, it could weaken Berks' competitiveness.



Implications

Flat labor force participation, modest employer expectations, and shifting worker values put Berks County in a difficult position. The county will not see big increases in workforce size, so the focus must shift to readiness and alignment: making sure residents have the skills for high-growth, high-wage industries. Without stronger pipelines in math, science, literacy, and technical training, too many residents will remain in low-wage jobs while employers struggle to fill higher-skill roles.

Stable participation caps future growth. With prime-age LFPR holding between 78% and 83% through 2035, the county faces a ceiling on workforce expansion. Even under a boom, growth is small. Future growth must come from improving productivity, retention, and skill alignment.

Employer expectations reinforce a picture of modest expansion. Surveys show half of employers report stable workforce levels and half expect stability in the next five years. Only 43% expect growth. This matches LFPR projections, showing little confidence in a major increase in workforce supply.

Industry trends are uneven. Healthcare and construction are the most optimistic, but both face credential and readiness barriers. Manufacturing shows the steepest declines, threatening a key base of middle-skill, family-supporting jobs.

Retention and worker values are critical. Workers are leaving for nearby counties or industries that offer slightly better pay and more predictable schedules. At the same time, many younger employees place higher value on flexibility, workplace culture, and balance, and are less likely to pursue leadership roles under traditional models. Unless these values are addressed, retention challenges will persist.

Readiness and entry-level shortages persist. Entry-level pipelines are strained not only by skills gaps in math, literacy, and technical training, but also by a lack of applicants overall. Even when positions are available, too few residents are prepared or willing to step into them, leaving employers with unfilled roles.

Succession planning is at risk. Many qualified employees hesitate to move into supervisory roles, leaving gaps in mid-level management and technical leadership. Without stronger advancement pathways, Berks County risks losing its next generation of managers and skilled leaders in high-demand fields such as healthcare, IT, and advanced manufacturing.

Recommendations

With labor force participation projected to stay between 78% and 83%, growth in Berks County's workforce will come less from adding new workers and more from retaining talent, building skills, and removing barriers to work. The following actions highlight where local partners can make the most impact:

1. **Invest in Current Workers through "Grow Your Own" Pipelines.** Retaining talent is often more cost-effective than recruiting new staff, but employers need support to make that investment pay off.
    - Spotlight and recognize employers who successfully invest in incumbent worker training, giving peers models they can adapt.
    - Partner with community colleges to expand credit for prior learning, helping workers move more quickly through degree or credential pathways.
    - Support the development of apprenticeship programs that blend classroom instruction with on-the-job experience, including assistance with program design and funding.

By investing in current workers, Berks employers can reduce turnover, strengthen advancement into middle-skill jobs, and build a workforce pipeline that remains competitive even as labor force participation levels off.

2. **Engage Youth Earlier.** Keeping young people in Berks starts with showing them that meaningful opportunities exist locally. The WDB brings employers, schools, and students together through internships, mentorships, and advisory opportunities that build awareness and career readiness.
    - Offer short-term, project-based internships that let students experience workplace expectations without requiring full-time commitments.
    - Invite high school students to sit on advisory boards, ensuring their perspectives shape career programming while giving them an early connection to local employers.
    - Add leadership and career readiness activities in schools, building communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skill.

Early engagement ensures that more graduates see a future in Berks, giving employers earlier access to talent and reducing the risk of losing young workers to opportunities outside the county.



3. **Expand Credentialing Pathways.** Reliable credential-based programs are proven to create reliable pipelines into critical industries like healthcare, manufacturing, and IT. The WDB convenes employers and educators to ensure credentials reflect actual workforce demand and give workers clear steps for advancement.
    - Partner with employers to expand use of clinical rotations, internships, and hands-on training models as direct pipelines into jobs.
    - Convene industry groups to design stackable credentials and apprenticeships that reflect real advancement opportunities in healthcare, manufacturing, and IT.
    - Standardize credential frameworks across industries so employers can trust worker readiness and employees see clear and consistent routes to advancement.

Expanding credentialing pathways gives employers a predictable stream of job-ready candidates while offering workers visible routes to advancement, creating long-term stability in high-demand fields.

4. **Anchor Workforce Strategy Around Job Quality.** With overall labor force participation capped, the competitiveness of Berks will depend on whether jobs are attractive enough to keep people engaged . The WDB helps employers measure job quality, share practices that make workplaces more appealing, and celebrate those leading the way.
    - Develop a Job Quality Scorecard to benchmark wages, benefits, and career advancement opportunities, making it easier for employers to identify gaps and improvements.
    - Provide technical assistance for employers to build transparent career ladders and promotion pathways that motivate workers to stay and grow.
    - Highlight workplaces that offer flexible scheduling, positive culture, or other employee supports, raising the visibility of employers who set the standard for job quality.

Focusing on job quality ensures Berks employers can retain workers in a competitive market, attract new talent to the region, and position the county as a destination for family-sustaining careers.

5. **Expand Affordable Childcare Access through a Tri-Share Model**. Childcare is one of the most consistent barriers preventing Berks residents from entering and staying in the workforce. Employers, educators, and service providers emphasized that parents frequently decline jobs, turn down shifts, or leave the labor force entirely because they cannot find affordable and reliable care. This issue cuts across industries, affecting entry-level and skilled positions alike, and has only intensified as more households face financial strain. A tri-share childcare model offers a promising solution. First piloted in states like Michigan and North Carolina, tri-share splits the cost of childcare evenly among three parties: the employer, the employee, and the state (or an intermediary partner such as a foundation). This model ensures that workers pay only a third of the market cost, while employers gain more reliable staff and the public sector reduces the economic losses tied to low labor force participation.

   The Berks County WDB is well-positioned to coordinate a local pilot by:
    - Bring together employers in sectors hardest hit by childcare issues (healthcare, manufacturing, human services) to pool demand.
    - Secure state and philanthropic funding so small and mid-sized employers can participate.
    - Work with local childcare providers to expand hours that fit shift work.
    - Embed childcare navigation into workforce programs so parents starting new jobs or apprenticeships get immediate support.

By piloting a tri-share childcare program, Berks County can directly reduce one of the most persistent barriers to workforce participation. Employers would benefit from lower turnover and expanded applicant pools, workers would gain financial stability and peace of mind, and the county would see a stronger, more reliable labor supply despite demographic constraints.

6. **Improve Workforce Access through Employer-Supported Shuttles and Guaranteed Ride Home Programs**. Reliable transportation is one of the largest barriers keeping Berks residents, especially hourly and middle-skill workers, out of the labor force. Employers, training providers, and human service leaders consistently report that workers decline job offers or leave their positions because they cannot secure dependable transportation across multiple shifts. In a county where many positions require evening, overnight, or weekend coverage, public transit often cannot meet demand. Without intervention, this barrier sidelines willing workers and constrains employer growth. A practical solution is to coordinate an employer-supported shuttle and vanpool system, paired with a Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) safety net. This combined approach ensures daily access to work while giving employees peace of mind that emergencies will not cost them their jobs.
   - Convene anchor employers to co-fund shuttle routes that serve industrial corridors and training hubs.
   - Partner with BARTA and workforce training providers to align shuttle schedules and routes with 2nd and 3rd shift work.
   - Pursue public-private cost sharing, drawing on a mix of:
     - Employer contributions, offset by reduced turnover costs.
     - Employee participation fees, set at an affordable flat weekly rate.
     - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds to cover pilot program costs for jobseekers.
     - Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) or other federal transportation grants that specifically target low-income workers.
     - State programs such as PennDOT's Multimodal Transportation Fund or DCED workforce development grants.
     - Philanthropic partners (e.g., Berks County Community Foundation) to underwrite initial operating costs or subsidize rides for small employers.
   - Establish a Guaranteed Ride Home program through partnerships with Uber, Lyft, taxis, or local service providers, offering up to 4–6 free emergency rides per year for participating workers.

By building shared transportation infrastructure with a reliable safety net and leveraging diverse funding streams, Berks County can directly expand labor force participation, reduce absenteeism and turnover, and make it feasible for more residents to accept and sustain employment.

Berks County cannot count on higher participation rates to fuel growth. The county's competitiveness depends on how well it retains current workers, connects young people to local careers, builds clear credential pathways, improves job quality, and tackles barriers like childcare and transportation.



Education, Numeracy and Literacy

In today's workforce, few skills are as fundamental or as taken for granted as the ability to read, write, and work with numbers. In Berks County, where manufacturing, healthcare, transportation, and construction anchor the economy, literacy and numeracy are not abstract academic measures; they determine whether a nurse's aide can record accurate patient information, a machinist can read a blueprint, or a truck driver can interpret safety protocols. Nationally, research shows that gaps in these skills can limit earnings, raise the risk of unemployment, and hinder career mobility. Berks County employers are beginning to raise the alarm. While most businesses still report that literacy and numeracy are "good enough," a growing number are seeing declines, especially in frontline roles where communication and applied math are essential. These signals matter because they show the challenges of today and the risks to tomorrow's workforce. Additional detail, including supporting data from interviews, focus groups, and quantitative labor market analysis, can be found in Appendix F. Education, Numeracy, and Literacy.



How is educational attainment in Berks County changing, and how does it compare to nearby regions? Survey results from employers show a mixed picture. Just over half of businesses (51%) reported no change in English proficiency among workers over the past five years. Yet more than one-third (34%) reported declines, and 13% called those declines "significant." Only 15% saw improvements, usually tied to targeted English as a Second Language (ESL) or workplace literacy programs.

This means Berks County is not facing a collapse in basic literacy, but warning signs are clear. The cracks are appearing in industries that are central to the regional economy, where communication and documentation are critical.

How strong are English language skills among local workers, now and in the future? The declines are not spread evenly. Employers in manufacturing and healthcare reported the sharpest concerns. In manufacturing, 4 in 10 employers noted declines in English proficiency. Supervisors shared that while workers can often operate machines effectively, they may struggle to document incidents, understand written instructions, or communicate clearly across shifts. In healthcare, nearly the same share of employers (38%) cited challenges, especially with medical terminology, charting, and documentation.

Transportation and construction also reported issues, though at slightly lower rates (22–35%). Even in technical jobs, gaps in literacy can slow training, increase errors, and create safety hazards.

How prepared are workers with basic math and problem-solving skills? Concerns about math skills are broader but less concentrated. Most employers (58%) said math ability has stayed about the same. Nearly 30% reported declines, especially in applied math such as fractions, measurements, and unit conversions. These skills are not abstract. They determine whether raw materials are cut correctly the first time, whether equipment is calibrated safely, or whether a dosage is accurate.

Employers that did see improvements credited their own interventions such as refresher courses, mentoring, or in-house training rather than broader changes in the labor pool. Without those efforts, the gaps might be even larger.

What challenges are young adults ages 18 to 24 facing as they enter the workforce? Looking ahead, two scenarios emerge:

- If nothing changes, literacy and numeracy will stay "good enough" for entry-level hiring but will increasingly block advancement. Workers with weak skills will remain in low-wage roles, while employers absorb higher costs from retraining and rework.
- In a downturn, those same workers are often first to lose jobs, especially in frontline roles, widening inequities and slowing recovery.

If Berks invests now in workplace-focused literacy and numeracy training—like safety-specific ESL or applied math for manufacturing—the region could see real gains: greater advancement, lower turnover, and a stronger, more capable talent pool.

What do local math test scores tell us about the future workforce, especially for STEM careers? The evidence suggests four imperatives:

- **Expand contextualized training.** Programs are most effective when they connect directly to job tasks. For manufacturing, this may mean modules on blueprint reading or measurement. For healthcare, this may focus on charting and medical vocabulary.
- **Deepen employer–educator partnerships.** Employers know where the gaps are. Educators learn how to teach. Programs that align the two can be powerful but require more sustained coordination.
- **Recognize bilingualism as an asset.** Many workers bring strong language skills in Spanish or other languages. Targeted support to bridge technical English vocabulary, not just general ESL, can unlock greater potential.
- **Measure what matters.** Right now, the county has snapshots of employer perceptions. To track progress, leaders need consistent measures of literacy and numeracy over time, connected to workforce outcomes. One such instrument to measure these skills is found in ACT WorkKeys, which is "a portable, evidence-based credential earned by completed and ranking scores in Applied Math, Graphic Literacy, and Workplace Documents WorkKeys Assessments".[1]

[1] ACT WorkKeys – Workforce Development Solutions | ACT

The data tell a consistent story: literacy and numeracy in Berks County are not collapsing, but pressure points are real and concentrated in industries too important to ignore. Employers are making short term fixes such as dropping pre-hire tests or offering in house training, but these piecemeal efforts are not enough. Without a coordinated approach, skill gaps will continue to limit worker advancement, raise business costs, and weaken the county's competitiveness. With timely action, however, these same skills can become a foundation for opportunity, productivity, and sustained growth.

Today, that foundation extends beyond reading, writing, and math. Digital literacy, the ability to find, use, evaluate, and create information through digital tools, is now essential for success in almost every occupation. In Berks County, digital fluency influences who can access training, qualify for remote or hybrid roles, and adapt to new technologies. Local institutions such as RACC and Tec Centro are embedding computer and technology skills into ESL, credential, and healthcare programs, recognizing digital competence as a prerequisite for long term employability.

This analysis focuses on traditional literacy and numeracy measures, but future efforts should explicitly examine digital literacy as a core workforce skill. As technology reshapes how people learn, communicate, and work, closing digital skill gaps will be vital to expanding opportunity and ensuring the region remains competitive.

Taken together, these findings show that literacy, numeracy, and digital readiness are interdependent. They shape who enters the labor market, who advances, and who is left behind. The next section broadens this view to labor force participation, illustrating how skill development connects with demographics, employment patterns, and economic trends in Berks County.

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Implications

The evidence from multiple data sources, educational attainment, standardized assessments, employer surveys, and stakeholder interviews, converges on a central concern: too many residents lack the literacy and numeracy foundations required for the mid-skill jobs that form the backbone of Berks County's economy.

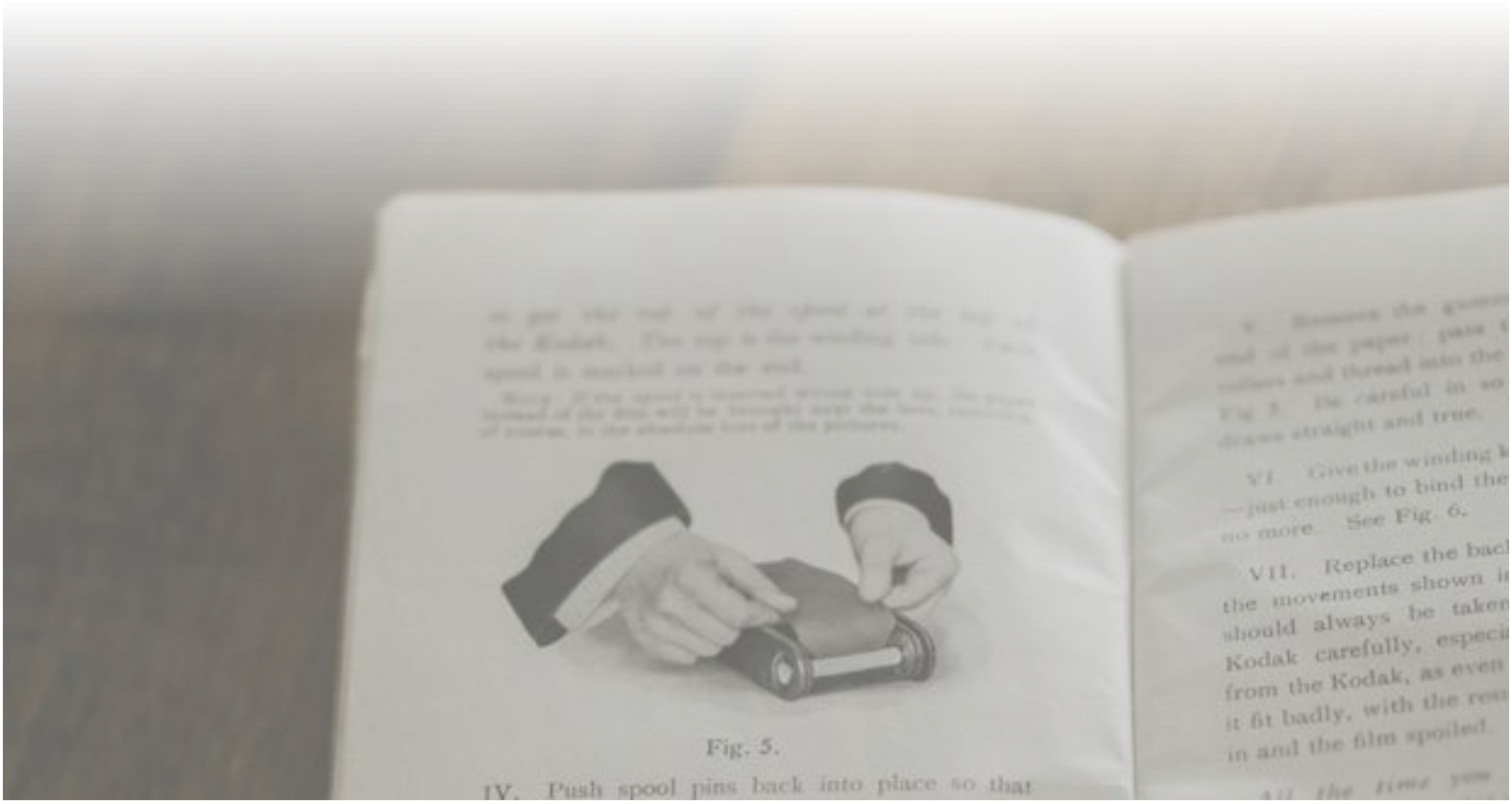
Educational attainment levels show why the challenge persists. By 2035, 36% of Berks residents are expected to hold only a high school diploma, compared to 30% statewide. Growth in associate and bachelor's degrees will be modest. At the same time, data show that three-quarters of local jobs require literacy and numeracy skills that fall in the mid-range—not advanced degrees, but well beyond "below basic." The real issue is not just raising attainment but improving the quality of preparation at the high school and associate levels so that graduates are equipped for the jobs available.

Math proficiency data highlight the depth of the problem. In recent years more than half of Berks County 8th graders scored "below basic" on the state PSSA math assessment. Yet fewer than 9% of local jobs can be performed with that level of mathematical reasoning. The majority of jobs—about 64%—require at least "basic" math, but only one-quarter of students met that bar. This mismatch leaves too many young people underprepared for the workforce, while employers in manufacturing, healthcare, and technical fields face a shrinking pool of qualified candidates.

English proficiency adds another layer of concern. Demographic projections point to declining English skills among Spanish-speaking and Asian/Pacific Islander residents through 2035. Employer surveys already reflect this trend: nearly one-third reported worsening English skills among new hires. The issue is especially pronounced in industries where documentation, communication, and safety are critical. Employers are responding with bilingual signage, on-site ESL classes, and relaxed entry requirements. These measures help in the short term but do not address the long-term need for consistent, high-quality English acquisition. Without stronger investment, Berks risks deepening inequities in access to good jobs, especially for Hispanic and Latino residents who make up a growing share of the workforce.

The stakes extend beyond individuals to regional competitiveness. On PIAAC literacy scores, Berks performs similarly to Lancaster and Lehigh Valley but trails Chester and Montgomery. For employers making location and expansion decisions, stronger literacy and numeracy in neighboring counties could tip the scale. Without progress, Berks risks being perceived as a less competitive labor market.

Employers are adapting where they can, but the costs are visible. Some have dropped pre-employment math tests, choosing instead to prioritize reliability and provide training in-house. Others work with organizations like the Literacy Council to embed ESL instruction directly in the workplace. These strategies produce results for individual workers but shift the burden of remediation onto employers. That approach is flexible but not sustainable at scale. Long-term solutions will require stronger K–12 math preparation, accessible English language supports, and deeper collaboration between employers, schools, and literacy providers.



Recommendations

Gaps in literacy and numeracy are not collapsing Berks County's workforce, but the pressure points are clear and concentrated in industries too important to ignore. Employers in manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation report declines in English proficiency and applied math, particularly in frontline roles where documentation, measurement, and communication are essential. Without targeted interventions, these gaps will limit advancement for workers, raise costs for businesses, and weaken regional competitiveness. The following recommendations build on local best practices and align with the earlier implications analysis, offering practical steps that the WDB and employers can take together to strengthen foundational skills across the pipelines.

1. **Build and Brand an Employer Support Hub.** Many employers, especially small and mid-sized firms, struggle to find the right entry point into workforce resources. The Workforce Development Board already has strong programs, but they can be hard to navigate. A centralized hub would make it easier for employers to access training funds, short-term credentials, and technical assistance. It could also provide toolkits for onboarding and workplace training and serve as the place where industry groups guide curriculum and credential design. By creating a clear "front door," Berks can reduce duplication, expand participation, and make it easier for employers to invest in their workers.
    - Provide access to training funds such as WedNet, tuition reimbursement, and state or federal incentives
    - Offer clear pathways into short-term, stackable credentials (e.g., CNA and LPN in healthcare, mechatronics and CNC certifications at RACC, CDL for logistics)
    - Deliver technical assistance to smaller firms, including help applying for grants, setting up tuition supports, or designing training pipelines
    - Create employer toolkits for onboarding, screening, and embedding English and math readiness in workplace training
    - Formalize industry groups in manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics as advisory councils to guide curricula, credentials, and dual enrollment pathways
    - This approach ensures employers can quickly find and use available resources, increasing participation in workforce programs and building stronger pipelines of skilled workers.

2. **Facilitate a Career Connected Learning Model with Levels of Engagement.** While many employers want to support the talent pipeline, they are often unsure of how to get involved or lack the capacity to sustain high-intensity partnerships. A tiered engagement model gives employers a roadmap of options, from simple career awareness activities to deep pipeline-building partnerships.
    - Career Exploration (low commitment): Career talks, industry days, job site tours, and student-led projects such as “What’s So Cool About Manufacturing”.
    - Career Engagement (moderate commitment): Mock interviews, workplace challenges, project-based learning, and mentorship (e.g., PSU Berks senior design projects).
    - Career Experience (high commitment): Internships, apprenticeships, co-ops, and credential-aligned projects that directly address literacy, numeracy, and technical skill gaps.

With this model, employers of all sizes can engage at the right level, giving students consistent exposure to career pathways and strengthening the overall workforce pipeline.

3. **Leverage Industry-Led Curriculum Models.** The Schmidt Training and Technology Center at RACC demonstrates how employer-driven design leads to training programs that directly meet workforce needs. Employers co-develop curricula, integrate applied math and communication skills, and provide guaranteed job pathways for graduates. This model shows how flexible scheduling, competency-based progression, and industry-grade labs can close foundational skill gaps while preparing workers for



technical roles. Expanding this approach ensures training aligns with employer expectations and provides smaller companies with access to high-quality programs they could not deliver on their own.

- Employer-driven design: East Penn and other firms co-create training, set benchmarks, and align credentials with hiring needs.
- Flexible scheduling: Competency-based, open-entry courses allow shift workers to complete training in 6–12 weeks.
- Applied learning: Labs and simulators emphasize hands-on performance, with 75% of grading based on practice rather than tests.
- Foundational integration: Applied math, blueprint reading, and communication are built into every program.
- Regional access: Smaller employers without in-house training capacity benefit from shared services.

Expanding this model ensures training consistently produces job-ready candidates, reduces remediation costs, and supports both large and small employers in Berks County.

4. **Expand Contextualized Literacy and Numeracy Training.**
   General remediation often fails to engage adults or connect to real workplace demands. Contextualized training addresses this gap by tying instruction directly to job tasks—turning math and literacy from abstract concepts into tools for safety, productivity, and advancement. Local employers have already piloted this model, embedding ESL and applied math into daily work. Scaling these efforts countywide would give workers the skills they need to succeed while giving employers confidence in training outcomes.
   - Siemens' Mechatronic Systems Certification Program offers applied STEM curriculum aligned with global standards.
   - East Penn Manufacturing offers math, blueprint reading, and ESL training during and after shifts with the Literacy Council.
   - Training includes both English language learners and English-speaking workers who want to expand skills.
   - Programs have documented success: six East Penn employees recently graduated from Level 1 ESL after 10 weeks of on-site instruction, improving communication and career readiness.

By integrating literacy and numeracy into workplace training, Berks can expand advancement opportunities, reduce errors, improve retention, and strengthen internal pipelines.

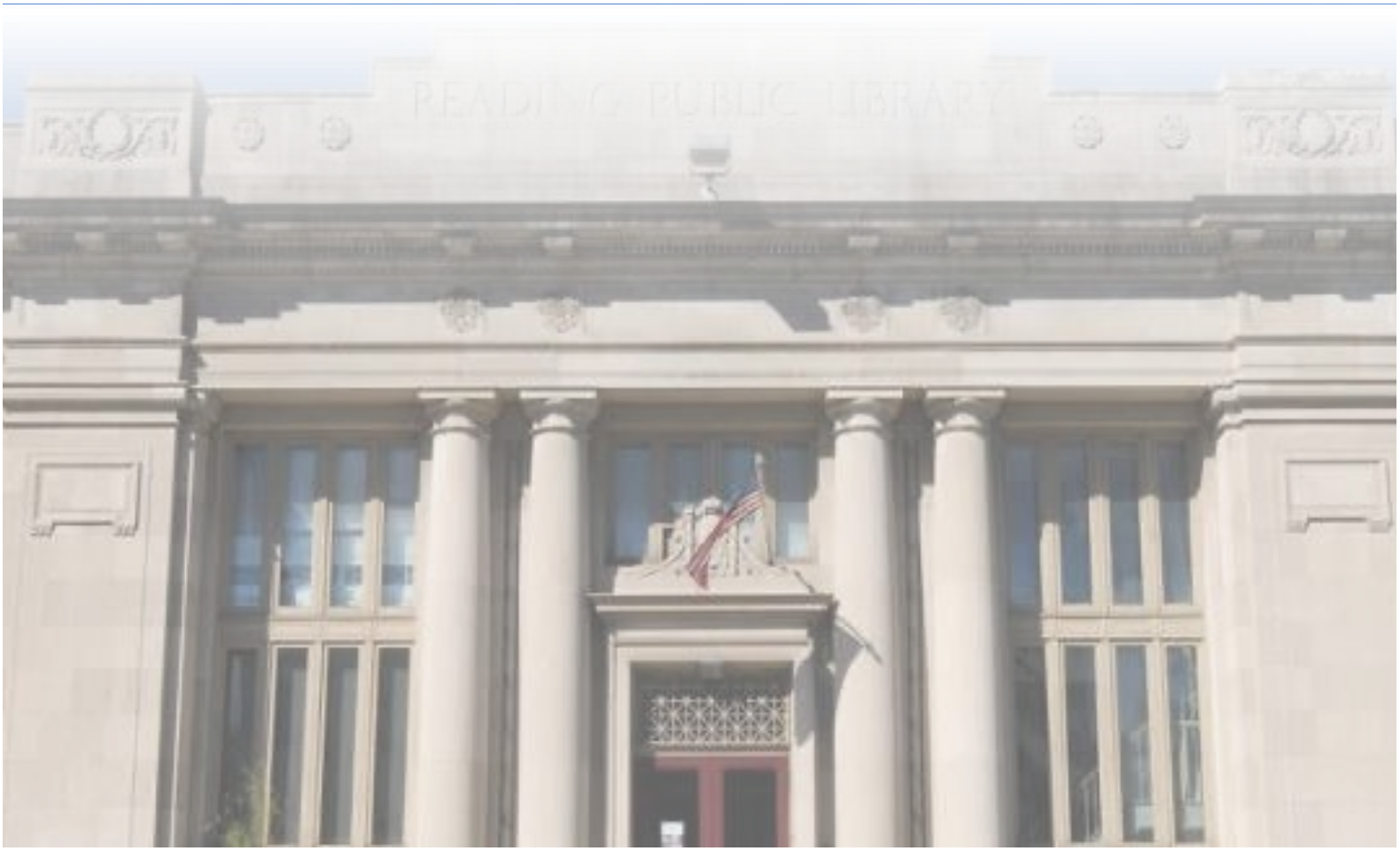
5. **Engage Diverse Stakeholders Across the Pipeline.** Workforce solutions are most effective when those navigating the system—students, adult learners, and English language learners—have a seat at the table. Too often, workforce strategies are designed without the perspective of those directly impacted by barriers such as scheduling, transportation, or language. By intentionally including learners in planning, the WDB ensures solutions are grounded in lived experiences, making programs more accessible, equitable, and effective.
    - High school students: Establish advisory panels to share insights on readiness and career activities.
    - Postsecondary learners: Host forums to discuss the value of internships, apprenticeships, and applied learning.
    - Adult learners: Gather input from those pursuing GEDs, short-term credentials, or career transitions on barriers like childcare and work schedules.
    - English language learners: Partner with Literacy Council and Tec Centro to represent ELL voices and ensure programs address technical vocabulary and workplace literacy needs.

Including learners' voices in planning will make workforce programs more responsive and sustainable, leading to higher retention and stronger alignment with employer needs.

6. **Measure and Track Skills with Standardized Tools.** Right now, most data on literacy and numeracy in Berks County comes from employer anecdotes or student test scores. These measures are fragmented and do not provide a consistent picture of workforce readiness. Standardized assessments give schools, training providers, and employers a shared framework for evaluating progress and accountability. By adopting portable credentials and participating in data-sharing agreements, Berks can move from isolated snapshots to long-term tracking that informs hiring, funding, and policy.
    - Adopt evidence-based assessments such as ACT WorkKeys to measure applied math, workplace documents, and graphic literacy.
    - Provide portable credentials for workers, recognized across industries.
    - Establish cross-sector data-sharing agreements with K–12 districts, higher education, and adult education providers.
    - Encourage statewide opt-in to the Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) program, which links graduate outcomes to wages and industries across state lines.

A consistent and evidence-based approach to measuring literacy and numeracy will give employers confidence in hiring, provide workers with recognized credentials, and help local leaders direct resources where they will have the greatest impact.

Together, these recommendations highlight where the WDB can lead as a convener and connector, bringing partners together to co design solutions and align resources. With public funding now limited and in some cases nonexistent, this kind of coordination and shared investment across sectors is essential to sustaining progress. If implemented, these strategies will strengthen the talent pipeline, reduce costly remediation, and help ensure that Berks remains competitive in retaining and attracting businesses.



Mobility and Commuting Trends

Where people live and how they get to work reveals much about opportunity in Berks County. These patterns influence whether residents stay local, whether employers retain their workforce, and whether families can balance jobs with daily life.

As Berks navigates demographic change and shifting employer needs, these trends reveal whether the county is retaining talent, attracting new workers, and ensuring residents can access meaningful jobs. Understanding who moves in, who leaves, and how residents commute is vital for shaping workforce strategies that align with both employer demand and worker realities. Additional detail—including supporting data from interviews, focus groups, and quantitative labor market analysis—can be found in Appendix G. Mobility and Commuter Trends**.**



How are people moving in and out of Berks County, and what does this mean for the local workforce?

Patterns of both retention and leakage are clear. Younger adults, especially those under 35, are the most mobile and the most likely to leave Berks County. Nearly 16% of residents ages 25–34 moved within Berks in 2018, compared to just 6% of those ages 35–54 and 4% of those ages 55–74. Mobility tapers with age, but it highlights that younger cohorts are actively searching for housing, neighborhoods, or lifestyles that fit their needs.

Many of these younger adults with college experience or degrees leave for larger metro regions like Philadelphia or New York in search of stronger career opportunities. This "brain drain" is especially concerning for employers.

At the same time, Berks attracts new residents. Some move in from nearby counties such as Montgomery and Lehigh for more affordable housing, while others arrive as recent migrants from other countries. These inflows add workforce potential but do not fully offset the steady outmigration of educated young adults.

What do commuting patterns tell us about the local labor market and workforce connections?

Commuting reinforces the same story. About 40% of employed Berks residents travel outside the county for work, while many others commute in for manufacturing, healthcare, and service jobs. This creates a dual dynamic where Berks is both a labor exporter and importer, depending on the sector.

Employers note that transportation challenges show up in daily life. Workers without reliable cars struggle to stay on time, and public transit options do not always align with shift schedules. These issues limit access to steady employment, especially in industries that require fixed hours on site.

Education is a key driver of commuting. College graduates are the most likely to travel elsewhere for work. Less mobile residents with lower levels of education tend to remain in Berks and fill essential jobs in manufacturing, logistics, and services.

Quantitative data alone cannot capture the full story. Insights from employer surveys and worker focus groups highlight the lived realities behind the statistics.

- **Employer surveys** reveal consistent concerns about the difficulty of recruiting skilled talent. Employers noted shortages in accounting,

nursing, and technical fields, and observed that younger workers often commute elsewhere or leave the county entirely. They also report higher turnover in entry-level positions, where many workers view jobs as temporary stepping-stones rather than long-term commitments.

Worker focus groups add depth. Participants described barriers such as limited childcare, transportation gaps, and housing attainability, factors that directly affect mobility and commuting choices. Some young professionals expressed a desire to remain in Berks but cited limited career advancement opportunities as a push factor.

These perspectives illustrate that mobility and commuting are not just about geography, they reflect how residents weigh opportunity, quality of life, and support systems.

Looking ahead, the interplay of migration and commuting suggests several scenarios:



Recession Scenario
Outmigration may accelerate if local jobs decline, as younger workers will be even more likely to seek opportunities in larger markets. Inflows may slow as housing and relocation decisions become more cautious.



Baseline Projection
Berks will continue to lose a portion of its educated young adults while attracting in-migration from nearby counties. Commuting will remain a defining feature, with roughly 40% of workers traveling across county lines.



Growth Scenario
With targeted interventions—expanding local career pathways, addressing childcare and housing barriers—Berks could stabilize retention of educated workers and even attract new talent.

The common thread across scenarios is that commuting and mobility will remain central to Berks' workforce realities. The data raises the question of whether the county can improve its retention rate relative to out-migration. Three key priorities are evident:

Retention of Educated Workers: Local employers, colleges, and policymakers must create stronger career pathways that keep graduates in the county. This includes internships, mentorships, and industry partnerships that connect young professionals to local opportunities.



Reduce Barriers to Participation: Investments in childcare, transportation, and affordable housing directly impact mobility. By lowering these barriers, Berks can help more residents remain engaged in the local labor market rather than seeking opportunities elsewhere.

Leverage Inflows Strategically: The county should recognize and support migrants and other new residents as an asset. Programs that connect these populations to training, language support, and career ladders can turn inflows into long-term workforce stability.

Migration and commuting trends reveal both challenges and opportunities for Berks County. Outmigration of educated young adults risks eroding the local talent base, while commuting patterns mean that many residents' economic contributions benefit neighboring counties. Yet the county also attracts new residents and remains a job hub in key sectors.

This data story provides a high-level synthesis of Berks County's mobility and commuting patterns. The deeper analysis below is complete with tables, figures, and expanded data crosstabs, offering additional detail on the magnitude of inflows and outflows, age and education breakdowns, and sector-specific commuting flows. Together, these insights form a comprehensive foundation for workforce strategies designed to retain talent, expand opportunity, and strengthen Berks County's economic future.

Implications

The data on migration and commuting patterns underscores several critical implications for Berks County's workforce and economic future:

Most new residents come from nearby Pennsylvania counties. Migration into Berks is largely regional, with most new residents arriving from other parts of Pennsylvania. Between 2016 and 2024, for every 100 people moving into Berks County,

70-80 residents are from other PA counties

15-20 residents are from other states

5-10 residents are from abroad

However, this migration is not strengthening the county's skills base; Berks is importing more residents without a high school diploma than those with a bachelor's degree, widening workforce gaps in healthcare, IT, and other skilled industries. At a minimum, Berks has gained about eight new residents without a high school diploma for every one with a bachelor's degree. In some years, the gap has been as wide as 15 to 1 (see Appendix G).

Commuting patterns add another layer. In 2024, only about 60 to 65 percent of employed residents both lived and worked in Berks, while 25 to 30 percent commuted elsewhere and 10 to 15 percent came in from outside the county. Many of those leaving work in higher-skilled professions such as IT, cybersecurity, and healthcare, meaning Berks is exporting some of its most skilled talent while inflows are concentrated in lower-skill roles. To counter this, reducing outbound commuting through stronger local job quality and clearer career pathways is essential to keep more economic output and tax revenue in the county.

The largest share of outbound commuters travel to Montgomery, Lancaster, and the Lehigh Valley, which together account for about 32,000 workers or 14 percent of the entire Berks labor force. This suggests that strengthening connections with neighboring counties could create new pipelines, whether through cross-county training partnerships or strategies to capture returning commuters. Without action, outbound commuting is projected to grow by 20 to 25 percent by 2030, reinforcing a "bedroom community" dynamic where people live in Berks but generate economic value elsewhere. To avoid this outcome, Berks must position itself as a destination for high-wage, high-skill employment, making the county a place where talent not only lives but builds long-term careers.

Recommendations

1. **Expand Internship to Hire Pathways across the County.** A countywide internship to hire model turns student interest into local employment by pairing real experience with community connection. Building on the momentum of the Internship Summit and campus led events, a clear pipeline gives educated young adults reasons to launch careers in Berks rather than leaving for larger metro areas. Healthcare employers who host interns report that clinical placements create stronger pipelines. By allowing students to learn the employer's culture and role expectations firsthand, internships build familiarity and trust. Employers note that when those students later seek full time employment, they demonstrate greater buy in and long term commitment.
    - Embed mentorship and community building in every internship, including civic and cultural touchpoints such as college night style events that showcase neighborhoods and amenities.
    - Connect employer-led internships and early career roles to a retention campaign so students see a path to full-time work in Berks County.
    - Track conversion to full time roles and one year retention to focus resources where the pipeline works best.

This approach keeps more graduates in the county, stabilizes hiring, and strengthens connections between students, employers, and the community.



2. **Launch a Countywide Talent Fellowship for Recent Graduates and Young Professionals.** A visible, branded fellowship signals that Berks invests in emerging talent and offers structured pathways into high demand roles in information technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. By combining paid placements, mentorship, leadership development, and community engagement, the fellowship addresses brain drain and reduces outbound commuting.
    - Partner with Greater Reading Young Professionals to add civic projects, cultural events, and peer networking to the fellowship experience.
    - Design a residency-style model that pairs fellows with local employers and includes community-based projects to deepen place attachment.
    - Coordinate a marketing campaign that highlights affordability, amenities, outdoor recreation, and employer strength to attract and retain higher skill talent.
    - Align placements with employers in Berks and neighboring counties to capture returning commuters and build cross county pipelines.
    - Focus on outcomes such as local placement, one year retention, and reduced outbound commuting among participants.

A fellowship of this kind converts more college educated residents into long term Berks contributors and builds a steady bench for priority sectors.

3. **Market Relocation Incentives to Attract Higher Skill Residents**. A targeted relocation campaign meets mobile talent where they are and elevates Berks as a compelling choice for people seeking both career growth and community. Using established platforms and employer backed perks increases reach and makes incentives tangible. In Pennsylvania, Mercer County has already used the MakeMyMove platform to attract new residents with tailored incentive packages. Hermitage offers a $5,000 cash incentive plus perks valued at $7,400, while Greenville and Sharon provide smaller relocation bundles, showing how even modest packages can influence decisions. Featuring Berks on the same platform would expand visibility and create competitive positioning in the regional market.
    - Feature Berks on platforms that showcase financial incentives, signing bonuses, cultural perks, and networking opportunities aimed at recent graduates, remote workers, and young professionals.
    - Encourage employer backed relocation perks such as signing bonuses, housing stipends, or tuition repayment linked to target roles.

- Pair incentives with messaging about quality of life, including outdoor recreation, arts, and family friendly neighborhoods.
- Target outreach to high demand fields aligned to local needs in information technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing.
- Monitor engagement and relocations tied to the campaign to refine offers and ensure impact.

Taken together, these actions respond directly to the findings on outmigration of educated young adults, significant outbound commuting, and the need to convert inflows into lasting workforce strength. By expanding internship to hire pathways, launching a countywide talent fellowship, and marketing relocation incentives with clear employer ties, the Workforce Development Board and partners can shift the balance toward retention and growth, keeping more earnings, career pathways, and community investment within Berks County.



Remote Work

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a global shift in work arrangements. Before 2020, remote work was a niche option, concentrated in professional and technology fields. The pandemic disrupted this balance, forcing millions of employers to reimagine where and how work was performed. For some workers, this was liberating, eliminating commutes, reducing childcare conflicts, and opening new possibilities for employment. For others, particularly in frontline roles, the shift underscored inequities by highlighting who could and could not work from home.

For Berks County, remote work matters because it connects directly to labor force participation (LFP). Flexible work arrangements can bring parents, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities into the workforce, and they can retain talent that would otherwise leave. At the same time, low adoption compared to national norms raises questions about whether Berks is missing opportunities to strengthen its workforce through flexibility. Additional detail—including supporting data from interviews, focus groups, and quantitative labor market analysis—can be found in Appendix H. Remote Work.



How has remote work reshaped the workforce, and how significant are its implications for participation? Remote work has not yet reshaped Berks County's workforce as significantly as it has nationally. While Asian workers and certain professional occupations have seen higher participation, the overall rate of 8.9% means most Berks workers remain tied to on-site employment.

Berks County is not capturing the full retention and participation benefits that remote work could provide. Parents, caregivers, and workers with transportation barriers are less likely to stay engaged in the labor force. A structural split has emerged — between those in jobs that allow flexibility and those in industries (like manufacturing and healthcare support) where remote work is impossible.

In short, remote work in Berks has changed worker expectations, but it has not transformed participation at the county level. Looking forward, three scenarios illustrate how remote work may affect Berks County's workforce:



Recession Scenario

Economic downturns often push employers back toward traditional models. Remote work could contract to 6–7%, making it harder for specific populations, such as caregivers or workers with health limitations, to remain employed.



Baseline Projection

If trends continue, remote work participation will remain between 8–10% over the next five years. This stability reflects limited employer adoption outside of white-collar sectors.



Growth Scenario

If employers expand flexibility, Berks could see remote participation rise to 12–13%, closer to the national average. This would not erase gaps but could create meaningful participation gains for underrepresented groups.

Even in the most optimistic scenario, Berks is likely to lag behind the U.S. average. This means remote work will not be the sole driver of higher labor force participation, but it can serve as a lever to expand inclusion and retention.

Quantitative data is the baseline; employer insight adds context.

Employers: Many businesses acknowledge that flexibility is now a factor in recruitment. Larger employers with administrative staff have adopted hybrid models, but small and mid-sized manufacturers, a backbone of Berks' economy, cannot extend remote options to most employees.

Workers: Younger workers increasingly expect some degree of flexibility. Parents and caregivers describe remote work as the difference between participating in the workforce and stepping out. Frontline workers without access to remote roles express frustration that their peers enjoy flexibility while they continue with long commutes and rigid schedules.

Community leaders: Some note that remote work can keep local talent from relocating, but it may also tether workers to employers outside the county, complicating efforts to retain talent for the local economy.

Remote work isn't a universal solution, but it is a key indicator of workforce change. In Berks County, data reveals both opportunities and limits. While adoption lags the national average, costing potential participation gains, the high uptake among Asian workers and rising expectations of younger workers show flexibility is now a lasting part of the workforce landscape.

This examination of remote work provides one lens on workforce participation in Berks County. It highlights inequities in access, shifting worker expectations, and the limited but fundamental role of flexibility in shaping labor supply.



Implications

The findings carry several important implications for Berks County workforce and broader economic trajectory.

Berks risks being perceived as a less attractive destination for talent, with local remote work participation at 8.9% compared to 15.2% nationally. Younger workers and professionals in high-demand fields increasingly weigh flexibility as a deciding factor in job choice. With limited opportunities for remote and hybrid work, the county may see outmigration of qualified workers, worsening existing labor shortages.

The county's economy, anchored by manufacturing, healthcare, and education, constrains remote opportunities by design. While these sectors cannot fully pivot to remote models, they can expand hybrid scheduling, flexible shifts, and technology-enabled solutions. Employers who fail to innovate will fall behind in recruiting and retention, even in traditionally in-person industries. Flexibility, balance, and career pathways are now baseline expectations, not optional perks. Ignoring them risks disengagement and turnover, weakening the region's talent pipeline.

Remote work also intersects with barriers like childcare, transportation, and housing costs that suppress participation. Expanding flexibility without addressing these will yield only partial gains. A coordinated approach is needed to bring more individuals into the labor force and sustain engagement over time.

The county's current trajectory suggests stability at a suboptimal level of labor force participation. Without change, employers will keep fighting over the same limited pool of workers. Modest gains in remote adoption, paired with strategies that reduce barriers, could unlock significant untapped capacity.

Expanding remote and hybrid work in Berks County will be key to retaining young professionals and reducing outmigration. Ensuring equitable access through digital infrastructure, coworking spaces, and support for childcare and transportation can make flexible work sustainable. Positioning Berks as a "flexible work" county can strengthen its appeal to talent seeking balance, opportunity, and long-term roots.

Recommendations

Remote work adoption in Berks County remains below the national average, 8.9% compared to 15.2%. This gap represents a missed opportunity to draw more parents, caregivers, and professionals into the labor force and to retain younger workers who increasingly expect flexibility. Because not all industries can support remote arrangements, Berks stakeholders must take a balanced approach: expanding remote options where possible while supporting frontline workers through other forms of flexibility. The following tactics outline how Berks County leaders and institutions can assist:

1. **Expand Remote-Eligible Roles through Occupation-Based Audits**.



Remote work in Berks County lags the national average, with only 8.9% of residents working remotely compared to 15.2% nationwide. This gap signals missed opportunities to boost participation among parents, caregivers, and professionals seeking flexibility. Employers often assume that most roles in manufacturing, healthcare, or education cannot be adapted, but analyzing job functions at the occupational code level reveals opportunities that may otherwise be overlooked. Many positions include components such as scheduling, documentation, analysis, or customer support that can be performed off-site even if the core role requires in-person work. The Workforce Development Board can support this process by helping employers review standard occupational classifications (SOC codes) and typical responsibilities within their industry to determine which elements could shift to hybrid or remote formats.

- Provide free or low-cost job analysis services for employers, especially small and mid-sized firms that lack internal HR capacity.

- Develop templates and case studies that show how specific occupation codes in manufacturing, healthcare, and education include tasks that can be separated into remote or hybrid functions.
- Offer consulting and/or technical support to companies that want to pilot flexible arrangements based on occupational task analysis, ensuring productivity is maintained while opening opportunities for a wider pool of workers.

By using an occupation-based approach to expand remote-eligible roles, Berks employers can systematically identify flexibility options, attract talent that might otherwise leave the county, and create accessible pathways into jobs for residents with transportation or caregiving barriers.

Berks County cannot close its labor force participation gaps without addressing flexibility. By assisting employers with job audits, expanding digital training, piloting frontline supports, creating remote hubs, and branding flexibility as a local strength.

2. Strengthen Digital Skills and Remote Work Readiness.

One reason remote work opportunities are uneven is that not all workers possess the digital literacy required for success in online environments. This is especially relevant for Hispanic/Latino workers in Berks, who currently report the lowest remote participation rates at just 5.1 % Targeted training in remote collaboration tools and cybersecurity not only makes workers more competitive for flexible jobs but also ensures employers have staff who can operate securely in distributed environments.

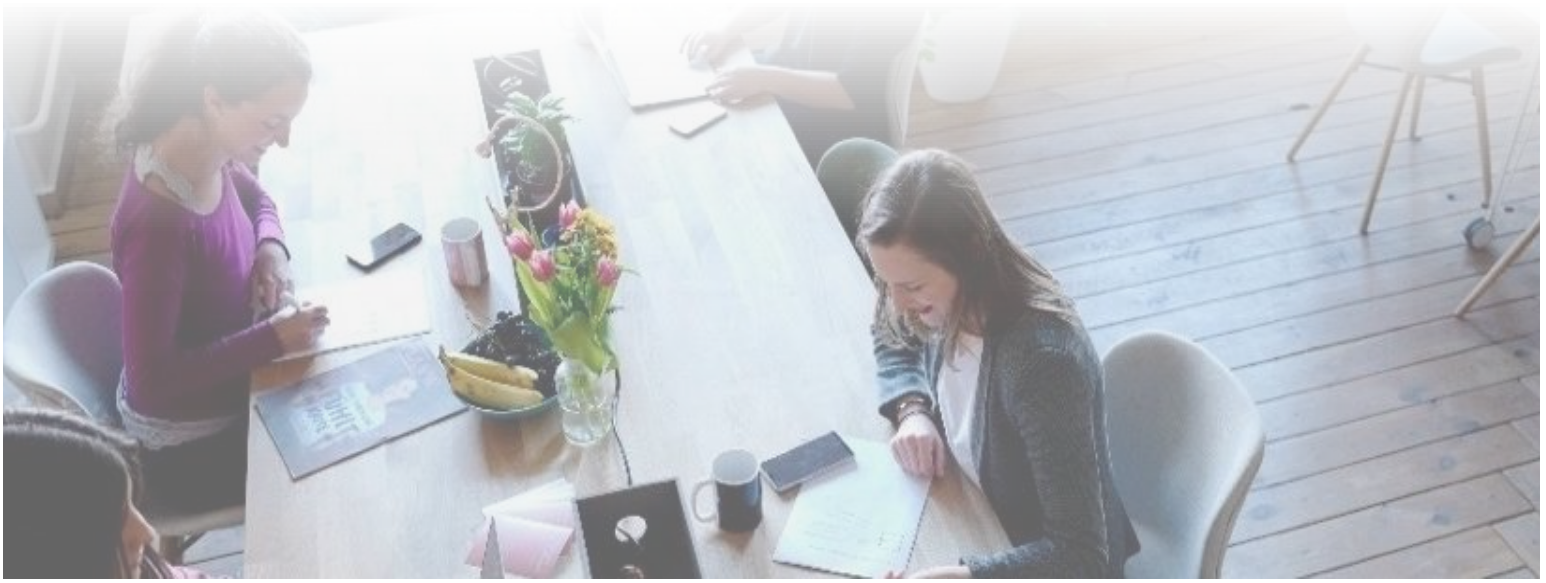
- Partner with RACC, the Literacy Council, and local libraries to deliver short courses in tools like Teams, Zoom, project management software, and digital security.
- Market these programs directly to underrepresented groups to close racial and ethnic gaps in remote participation.
- Subsidize training through employer vouchers to encourage businesses to hire program graduates into remote-eligible roles.

By building a digitally confident workforce, Berks can ensure flexibility becomes an engine of equity rather than a driver of exclusion.

3. **Leverage Coworking Spaces as Remote Work Connectors.** Remote workers tied to employers outside the county represent both a challenge and an opportunity. Without intentional local connections, these individuals may eventually relocate closer to their employers. By partnering with and expanding the reach of existing coworking spaces, Berks can anchor talent locally, create a professional base for remote workers, and keep external wages flowing into the county economy. These spaces can serve not only as physical work environments but also as connectors to networks, training, and community engagement.
    - Partner with existing coworking providers to market their services directly to remote professionals living in Berks County..
    - Use coworking spaces as venues for networking, professional development, and remote-worker affinity groups, creating social ties that encourage long-term residence.
    - Promote coworking as part of Berks County's workforce brand, highlighting flexibility, high-speed connectivity, and professional amenities that allow residents to "live local, work anywhere."

Coworking spaces offer a practical, high-visibility solution for embedding remote workers into Berks' economy and community

Remote work is a powerful lever for inclusion, retention, and competitiveness for Berks' County workforce. By auditing roles, strengthening digital skills, supporting frontline flexibility, and leveraging coworking as a connector, Berks can narrow its gap with national trends while ensuring flexibility supports the local economy and community life.



Housing Market and Attainability

Housing trends in Berks County provide critical insight into the county's long-term economic health, workforce participation, and quality of life. Housing is not simply a question of supply and demand—it shapes whether residents can afford to live near their jobs, whether employers can attract and retain talent, and whether families can remain rooted in the community. Rising costs, limited supply, and mismatches between wages and housing prices create barriers that ripple across the workforce system. Additional detail—including supporting data from interviews, focus groups, and quantitative labor market analysis—can be found in .Appendix I. Housing Market and Attainability.



Over the last decade, employment has fueled housing demand in the County. Increases in the Health Care, Manufacturing, and Management industries have specifically driven demand for higher-value housing types. Reports have estimated that employment gains from 2010 to 2020 could have increased housing unit demand by 3,281 to 6,561 units depending on household composition. Notably, demand for higher-value housing was the largest contributor. As a result, smaller homes are selling for higher prices and are more likely to be bought in cash or with exceedingly high down payments. A lack of supply of larger and higher-value homes has pushed traditionally affordable housing out of reach for much of the workforce, and especially for first-time homebuyers.

Key Characteristics of the Housing Market

Berks County's housing inventory is dominated by owner-occupied single-family homes, which account for roughly 71% of households. This is slightly higher than the state average, suggesting a strong tradition of homeownership. However, vacancy rates for both owned and rented units are well below the "natural" rate of 7–8%, signaling a constrained market. Only 0.8% of owner units and 4.5% of rental units are vacant—an undersupply that pushes prices higher and reduces attainability.

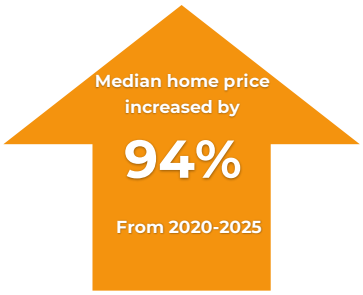
Household composition has also changed in the county in recent years. Families are no longer the primary demographic, making up approximately 27% of households. Seniors, including retirees and workforce aged 55 and over have driven much of the development.



Nearly **80% of housing units are single-family structures**, leaving relatively few medium- and high-density options. This lack of multifamily housing limits attainability and diversity of choice, particularly for younger workers, renters, and essential employees seeking flexible housing near job centers. Compounding these challenges, more than half of the county's housing stock was built before 1970. With limited new development since 2000, an aging inventory constrains quality, reduces mobility within the housing lifecycle, and limits the ability of families to "right-size" as their circumstances change.

Rising Costs and Financial Strain

Housing costs have escalated sharply in the last five years. **The median home price rose from $160,000 in January 2020 to $310,000 by June 2025,** an increase averaging more than 1% per month or 94% in 5 years. Rental prices have also climbed by 25% since early 2020. These increases outpace wage growth, placing significant strain on households.



By 2023, more than 28% of households were cost-burdened, meaning they spent 30% or more of their income on housing. Among renters, nearly half (46.5%) were cost-burdened, and nearly one in four were extremely burdened, spending over half their income on housing. These rates are much higher than among homeowners, highlighting the vulnerability of lower-income and younger residents who rely on rental housing.

Attainability for Essential Workers

The gap between wages and housing costs is especially stark for essential workers, those in healthcare, education, food service, and public safety roles. Median wages for common occupations such as retail clerks, home health aides, or janitors range between $28,000 and $38,000 annually, translating to affordable housing costs of $700 to $950 per month. Yet median rents in the county exceed $1,100, making independent housing unattainable for many single earners. Even dual-income households at or near the county's median income often cannot afford homes priced above $200,000, even though fewer than one in four available homes are listed at that level.



Implications

The housing dynamics in Berks County carry direct and long-term implications for workforce participation, employer competitiveness, and community stability. Rising home prices, constrained supply, and mismatches between wages and housing costs have created structural barriers that go beyond real estate and into the county's economic future.

Young adults and lower-wage earners face limited options for independent living. With median rents already exceeding attainability thresholds for occupations such as home health aides and construction laborers, many workers are priced out of local housing. This limits entry into the workforce for those who would otherwise take local jobs, contributes to out-migration, and delays life milestones such as household formation.

Employers are competing for talent in a market where housing attainability is a decisive factor. Without accessible housing near job centers, employers' risk higher turnover, longer vacancies, and difficulty attracting essential workers. This is particularly acute in healthcare, education, and logistics, industries that depend on stable, local talent pipelines.

Cost burdens disproportionately impact renters, young adults, and minority households. As nearly half of renters are already cost-burdened, further housing pressures could increase instability, evictions, and reliance on social safety nets. Communities may face declining civic engagement and weakened local connections if residents must commute long distances or relocate entirely.

Without intervention, rising housing costs risk undermining Berks County's economic competitiveness. Companies considering relocation or expansion will weigh housing availability as part of location decisions. A county perceived as unaffordable may lose out on investment opportunities, reducing its ability to attract high-quality jobs and industries.

The interplay between wages, training, and housing attainability underscores the need for coordinated strategies. Expanding workforce training alone will not increase participation if workers cannot afford to live locally. Similarly, housing investments must be tied to workforce needs, with employers engaged as partners in developing housing solutions.

Recommendations

Berks County's housing attainability crisis is not just a real estate issue—it is a workforce issue. Employers across healthcare, manufacturing, and human services report that unstable or unaffordable housing directly affects recruitment, retention, and performance. Rising home prices, limited rental options, and an aging housing stock put particular strain on essential workers and younger professionals. Addressing these challenges will require collaboration not only from the Workforce Development Board and employers but also from local governments, housing authorities, developers, and community partners. Coordinated engagement across these sectors can ensure that housing solutions are designed to strengthen both the labor force and long-term community stability. The recommendations that follow are presented collectively and are not listed in order of priority.

1. **Strengthen Employer-Assisted and Workforce-Linked Housing.** Employers have a critical role to play in stabilizing housing for their workforce. Models already exist in Pennsylvania that can be expanded locally. Embedding housing into the workforce toolkit, helps employers reduce turnover, ensuring that staff can live near their work
   - Activate the PHFA Employer Assisted Housing Program and encourage major Berks employers to co-sponsor down-payment and closing costs.
   - Partner with the Housing Authority to pilot vouchers for residents enrolled in workforce training or employed in high-need industries such as healthcare and logistics.
   - Position housing assistance as a core retention strategy alongside tuition reimbursement and upskilling opportunities.
2. **Expand and Diversify Affordable Housing Supply**. The county's housing stock remains heavily single-family, while today's largest household category is singles living alone Expanding the mix of housing types will make Berks more affordable and attractive for both essential workers and mobile young professionals. To meet changing needs, Berks must expand multifamily and alternative housing models.
   - Update zoning in municipalities in and around job centers to allow for higher density zoning (and excluding single family density zoning) and removing barriers (codes, parking, etc).
   - Encourage development of accessory dwelling units to provide flexible, affordable options for younger workers, single earners, and older adults.
   - Streamline approvals for workforce-oriented projects and incentivize employer or nonprofit co-investment.

3. **Rehabilitate and Preserve Aging Housing Stock**. More than half of Berks County's homes were built before 1970, limiting quality and attainability. Preserving these units is crucial to maintain housing attainability.
    - Direct PHARE funds and USDA Housing Preservation Grants toward repairs and modernization of workforce households' homes.
    - Launch a Workforce Rehab Initiative that prioritizes essential workers referred by employers for stabilization support.
4. **Leverage Federal, State, and Rural Housing Resources**. Rural areas of the county face unique challenges and qualify for federal housing tools.
    - Expand use of USDA Section 502 Direct Loans (zero-down, income-based homeownership) and Section 515 Multifamily Loans (developer financing for affordable rentals).
    - Host an annual "USDA Housing Access Workshop" to connect nonprofits, townships, and developers to these resources.
    - Integrate rural housing expansion with workforce strategies, particularly in healthcare and manufacturing hubs outside Reading.

Berks County's housing attainability challenges directly constrain its workforce. Rising costs, limited multifamily stock, and an aging inventory make it difficult for essential workers and young professionals to live near their jobs. By activating PHFA's Employer Assisted Housing program, leveraging USDA rural housing resources, expanding rehab funding for workforce households, linking vouchers to training, and incentivizing workforce-focused development, Berks can transform housing from a barrier into a competitive advantage. These strategies position Berks not only as an affordable place to live but also as a region that invests in the stability and vitality of its workforce.

Conclusion

Berks County stands at a crossroads. The region's workforce is stable but constrained, resilient but under pressure from demographic shifts, rising costs, and evolving employer expectations. The data and voices collected through this study reveal both the challenges and the assets that define Berks County's future: an economy anchored by strong employers and institutions, yet limited by flat population growth, uneven participation, and persistent barriers that keep too many residents on the sidelines.

The path forward is not about growth for growth's sake. It is about using the workforce Berks already has more fully, more effectively, and more equitably. Employers, educators, and community leaders agree that the county's next generation of workforce success will depend on alignment between education and industry, between training and opportunity, and between talent and the quality of jobs available. Several key priorities emerge:

Engage underutilized talent. With overall labor force growth projected to stay flat, Berks must raise participation by connecting parents, veterans, older workers, immigrants, and others who wish to work but face persistent barriers.

Strengthen foundational and technical skills. Literacy, numeracy, and employability skills remain decisive factors in whether workers can advance into middle-skill jobs. Expanding contextualized instruction, industry-led curriculum models, and employer-supported training will close critical gaps.

Retain and attract talent. Outmigration of educated young adults, limited remote work flexibility, and rising housing costs threaten long-term competitiveness. By investing in career pathways, local fellowships, and quality of place, Berks can turn stability into sustained growth.

Link workforce, housing, and transportation strategies. Workforce participation depends on reliable access to jobs, childcare, and affordable housing. Coordinated investment across these systems will unlock new labor supply and strengthen community stability.

Support employers as partners. Employers are central to every solution. The Workforce Development Board can serve as a connector, helping businesses design training pipelines, share best practices, and access resources to upskill and retain their teams.

The story of Berks County's workforce is not one of decline but of potential. The region's deep manufacturing heritage, strong healthcare and education institutions, and growing ecosystem of workforce partners provide a foundation few counties can match. What comes next depends on collaboration—on every sector working together to make Berks a place where employers can grow and every resident can build a lasting career.

If the strategies in this report are pursued with focus and shared commitment, Berks County can transform stability into strength and ensure that its workforce remains the engine of regional prosperity through 2030 and beyond.

BERKS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

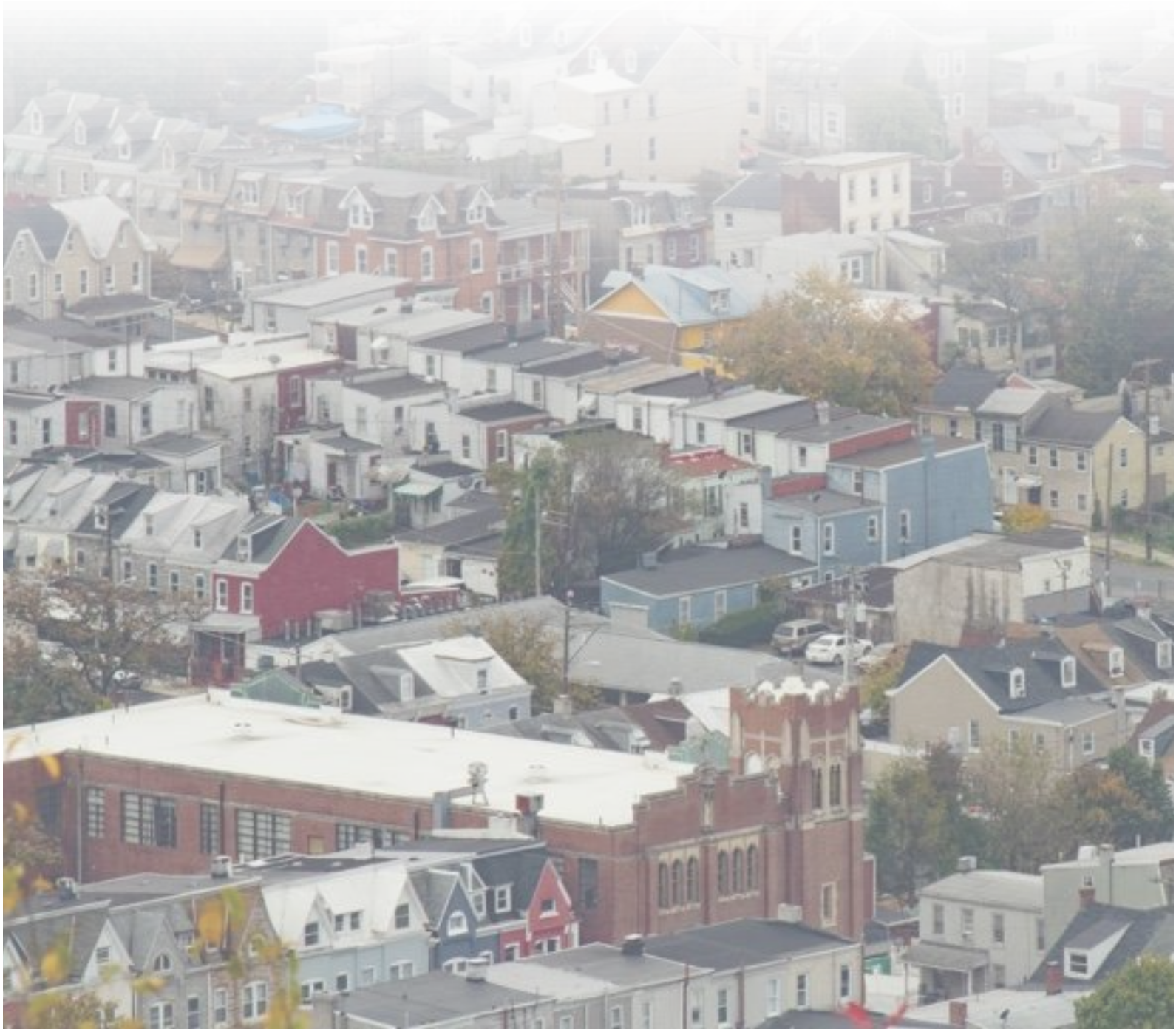
Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Language assistance services available free of cost.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program AColumbo@berkspa.gov

For program funding details, in compliance with the Stevens Amendment, please visit

https://www.berkspa.gov/departments/workforce-development-board



Appendix A. Survey Questions

1. What is your company's primary industry?
    a. Construction (NAICS 23)
    b. Manufacturing (NAICS 31–33)
    c. Transportation and Warehousing (NAICS 48–49)
    d. Educational Services (NAICS 61)
    e. Healthcare (NAICS 62)
    f. Social Assistance (NAICS 62)
    g. Other (If 'Other' please specify)

A total of 105 employers participated in the survey, representing a diverse cross-section of industries in Berks County. The target industries for this survey are **indicated in bold**.

Table 1 Number of Survey Respondents by Industry

Industry	Number of Respondents
Accommodation and Food Services	1
Administrative and Support Services	5
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2
Construction	**15**
Educational Services	**11**
Finance and Insurance	2
Healthcare	**12**
Information	2
Manufacturing	**25**
Other Services (except Public Administration)	5
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	7
Public Administration	3
Retail Trade	4
Social Assistance	**5**
Transportation and Warehousing	**6**

2. What is the total number of employees at your company in Berks County?
    a. 1–10
    b. 11–50
    c. 51–100
    d. 101–500
    e. 500+

Table 2 Number of Survey Respondents by Employer Size

Employer Size in Berks County	Number of Respondents
1–10	15
11-50	31
51-100	18
101-500	25
500+	16

3. At your employer, has the number of people working in Berks County changed over the past five years?
    a. Significant decrease: 25% or greater decrease
    b. Slight decrease: less than 25% decrease
    c. Stay about the same
    d. Slight increase: less than 25% increase
    e. Significant increase: 25% or greater increase

4. At your employer, do you expect the number of employees in Berks County to change over the next five years?
    a. Significant decrease: 25% or greater decrease
    b. Slight decrease: less than 25% decrease
    c. Stay about the same
    d. Slight increase: less than 25% increase
    e. Significant increase: 25% or greater increase

5. For new hires, have you noticed changes in English language proficiency (read, write, speak, listen effectively) compared to five years ago?
    a. Significant decline: 25% or greater decline
    b. Slight decline: less than 25% decline
    c. Stay about the same
    d. Slight improvement: less than 25% improvement
    e. Significant improvement: 25% or greater improvement

6. Have you adjusted your English language requirements for hiring to accommodate our available local workforce?
    a. Yes
    b. No

    6a. If yes, please describe (Open-ended)

7. For new hires, have you noticed any changes in numeracy skills (use interpret and communicate mathematical information) compared to five years ago?
    a. Significant decline: 25% or greater decline
    b. Slight decline: less than 25% decline
    c. Stay about the same
    d. Slight improvement: less than 25% improvement
    e. Significant improvement: 25% or greater improvement

    7a. If change describe numeracy skill shift (Open-ended)

8. How much contact, if any, does your employer have with local job-seeker resources like PACareerLink® Berks County or our local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)?
    a. Frequent contact- We regularly collaborate or use these services
    b. Occasional- We engage with these resources from time to time
    c. Rare- We have interacted with these resources but do not use them regularly
    d. No contact- We have not engaged with these resources

9. What local job seeker resources does your employer use? (Open-ended)

10. How much contact, if any, does your employer have with local educational institutions?
    a. Frequent- Regular partnerships, internships, training collaborations
    b. Occasional- Periodic engagement for hiring, events, workforce programs
    c. Rare- Limited interaction
    d. None- No engagement
    e. Unsure

    10a. If yes, which institutions? (Open-ended)

11. Does your employer have any significant relationship with education institutions located outside Berks County?
    a. Yes
    b. No

c. Unsure

12. For your industry, how accessible is the required or preferred job training for potential workers in Berks County?
    a. Scale: 1 (Very inaccessible) to 5 (Very accessible)

13. Does your employer offer remote work positions?
    a. Yes, Fully remote- All positions can be performed remotely
    b. Hybrid- Some remote work is allowed, but employees are required to be in the office at times
    c. No, fully in person- All positions require on-site work

13a.If your employer offers remote work, what percentage of your employer's workforce works remotely?
    a. Less than 10% of all employees
    b. More than 10% but less than 25% of all employees
    c. More than 25% but less than 50% of all employees
    d. More than 50% but less than 75% of all employees
    e. More than 75% of all employees

13b. Is this percentage likely to increase, decrease or stay the same over the next 5 years?
    a. Increase
    b. Decrease
    c. Stay the same

14. Approximately what percentage of your employees live outside of Berks County? If your company has multiple locations, please consider only the employees who report to your Berks County location
    a. Less than 10%
    b. More than 10% but less than 25%
    c. More than 25% but less than 50%
    d. More than 50% but less than 75%
    e. 75% or more

15. What percentage of local job seekers have the skills needed for available jobs in your industry sector?
    a. Less than 10% of all job seekers
    b. More than 10% but less than 25% of all job seekers
    c. More than 25% but less than 50% of all job seekers
    d. More than 50% but less than 75% of all job seekers
    e. More than 75% of all job seekers

16. To what extent are there enough qualified people to fill locally available jobs in your industry sector?
    a. Less than 10% of all job seekers
    b. More than 10% but less than 25% of all job seekers
    c. More than 25% but less than 50% of all job seekers
    d. More than 50% but less than 75% of all job seekers
    e. More than 75% of all job seekers

17. Which specific skills are most often lacking in candidates who apply for open roles? (Open-ended)

18. What are the biggest hiring challenges for young adults (ages 18 to 24) in Berks County? (Select all that apply)
    a. English language barriers
    b. Lack of interest in available career pathways
    c. Lack of technical or job-specific skills
    d. Limited work experience
    e. Other (please specify)
    f. Poor numeracy or math proficiency
    g. Soft skills deficiencies (communication, reliability)
    h. Transportation barriers
    i. Other

19. How confident are you that your employer will be able to meet your hiring needs and retention goals here in Berks County over the next five years?
    a. Not Confident
    b. Slightly Not Confident
    c. Slightly Confident
    d. Fully Confident

20. What strategies would best increase workforce participation rates in Berks County?
    a. Enhanced workforce training programs
    b. Expanded apprenticeship and internship programs
    c. Greater engagement, support of 18–24-year-olds entering the workforce
    d. Hiring and career trajectory planning
    e. Improved retention of recent college graduates
    f. Other (please describe)

21. To what extent do you feel like your employer will be impacted by recent tariffs?
    a. Highly impacted by tariffs
    b. Moderately impacted by tariffs
    c. Somewhat impacted by tariffs
    d. Not impacted at all by tariffs

22. To what extent do you feel like your employer will be affected by inflation?
    a. Highly affected by tariffs
    b. Somewhat affected by inflation
    c. Moderately affected by inflation
    d. Not affected at all by inflation

23. How do you anticipate inflation will change over the next two years? (Open-ended)

24. Would you be interested in participating in a one-on-one discussion with research staff to further elaborate on the information provided in this survey? If yes, please provide your contact information (name, email, phone number)

Appendix B. Interview and Focus Group Questions

1. Can you introduce yourself and share your thoughts on the current state of the workforce in Berks County?
2. What jobs are the hardest for you to fill right now, and what makes them difficult to hire?
    a. Are these new roles or ones that have historically been hard to fill?
    b. Are the challenges due to skills, pay expectations, working conditions, or something else?
    c. Have those hiring difficulties changed over the last 3-5 years?
    d. Do you anticipate hiring challenges over the next 5-10 years. Why?
3. When you look at people applying for jobs, what skills are they often missing, whether technical, academic, or interpersonal?
    a. Are these gaps more common among younger applicants, older workers, or both?
    b. Do you see differences in skill gaps between local and out-of-county candidates?
    c. Which missing skills tend to be most critical for job success in your company?
4. Are you seeing any challenges with job applicants or employees who struggle with reading, writing, or math?
    a. What specific challenges have you seen with applicants? How does it affect their ability to succeed on the job?
    b. Have you seen any effective strategies or opportunities to better support applicants who struggle with reading, writing, or math?
5. Have you offered any training or support to help new hires build the skills they need? If so, what's worked well or not so well?

a. Do you do this training in-house or work with outside providers?
b. How do you decide which skills are worth investing in?
c. What would make it easier for you to expand or improve training?
d. Does your company pay for training or reimburse tuition costs?

6. When young adults (ages 18–24) apply for jobs with you, what challenges do they run into? What's helped the ones who've been successful?
    a. Are the challenges more about readiness, behavior, or logistics like transportation?
    b. Do any local schools, colleges or training programs do a good job of preparing young workers

Appendix C. Workforce and Education Opportunities

Berks County is taking steps to shape its workforce for the future. With shifting economic conditions, demographic change, and rapid technological adoption, the region's ability to connect working-age adults with sustainable employment opportunities will determine its long-term competitiveness.

Three research questions guided the research:

12. Analyze other relevant current and future barriers to employment of the target population in Berks County compared to surrounding local WDAs and the Commonwealth. Berks County faces many of the same barriers as surrounding workforce areas and the Commonwealth, but some are more pronounced locally. Employers highlight gaps in core skills such as communication, reliability, literacy, math, and English proficiency, which limit readiness for available jobs. Structural challenges including transportation, childcare, and housing insecurity further reduce participation, especially for workers in entry level and lower wage roles. In addition, competition from nearby regions and the growth of remote work draw talent away and make retention more difficult. These challenges are especially significant in Berks because of the county's reliance on manufacturing, healthcare, and service industries that depend on both technical skills and strong workplace preparation.

13. What are the predominant competitive strengths within the target population of working age adults ages twenty-five to sixty-four (25-64) over the next ten (10) years? At the same time, Berks County benefits from clear strengths within its prime age workforce. Strong partnerships between employers and educators create flexible, industry aligned pathways that connect students and workers to career opportunities. Internships, apprenticeships, and upskilling programs often convert participants into permanent hires and build loyalty. Community based organizations reinforce these efforts by addressing social barriers and strengthening literacy, math, and English foundations. Together, these assets position the county to retain a skilled and adaptable workforce over the next decade.

14. What opportunities exist to increase the size and skills of the labor force within the target population? The most consistent employer recommendations point toward deeper investment in three areas:

- Youth engagement and early preparation. Begin career readiness in high school, expand internships and job fairs, and strengthen math and science pipelines for healthcare and technical careers.
- Expanded training and apprenticeship pathways. Scale up training, apprenticeship, and flexible upskilling models through partnerships with higher education, community colleges, and training providers.
- Supportive services to remove barriers. Address transportation, housing, childcare, and healthcare cliffs that limit participation, especially for entry level workers, through coordinated investment and system wide supports.

Taken together, these findings show that Berks County's future workforce strategy must balance persistent barriers with clear competitive strengths. Addressing foundational skills and structural challenges will be essential to sustain participation, while scaling strong partnerships, flexible training, and targeted supports can expand both the size and skills of the labor force. By investing in early preparation, inclusive pathways, and community-based solutions, the county is well positioned to strengthen its prime age workforce and remain competitive in a rapidly changing economy.

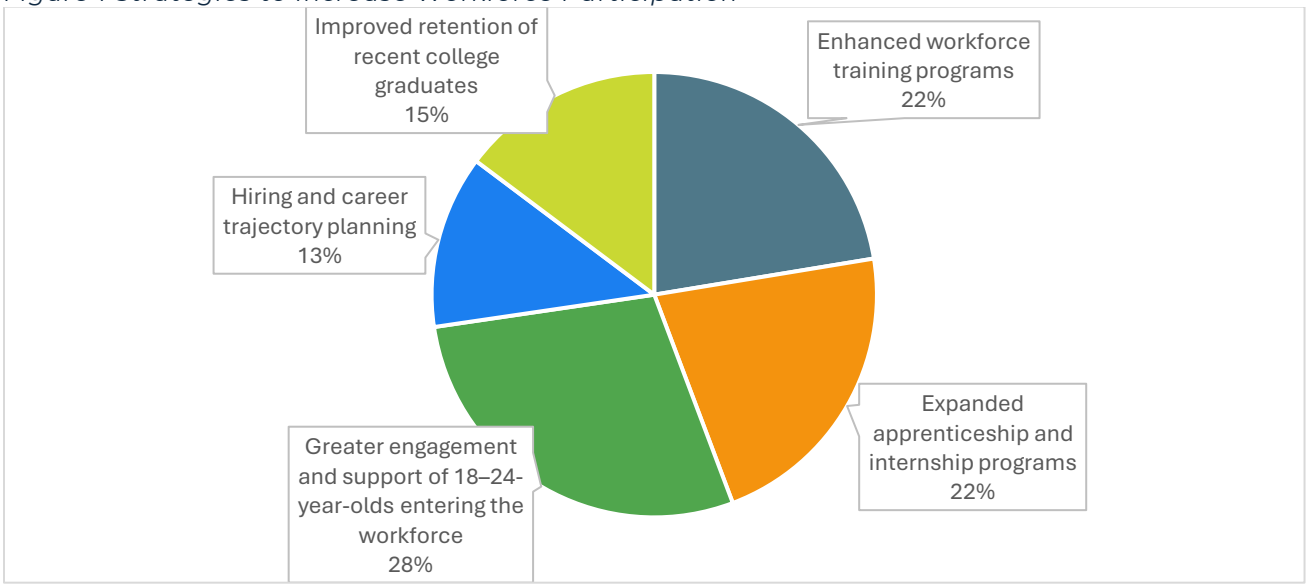
Survey

What strategies would best increase workforce participation rates in Berks County? Employers identified engaging young adults and expanding training pathways as the top strategy to strengthen workforce participation (52 respondents). Other commonly recommended strategies included enhanced workforce training programs (41 respondents) and expanded apprenticeship and internship opportunities (40). A smaller number of employers also emphasized the importance of improved retention of recent college graduates (27) and clearer hiring and career advancement planning (23).
Targeted industries had a similar feedback, top responses were evenly distributed across three strategies: enhanced workforce training programs (29 responses), expanded apprenticeship and internship opportunities (27), and greater engagement and support for 18–24-year-olds entering the workforce (34).

In addition to structured response options, many employers offered open-ended suggestions focused on early preparation, basic professionalism, and stronger cultural expectations around work. Several emphasized the need to

begin career readiness efforts in high school and to instill work ethic and responsibility at home, noting that many challenges start well before job entry.
Others called for better communication about job expectations such as the importance of showing up, minimizing distractions like cell phone use, and recognizing the long-term value of training and benefits like health insurance. Employers also pointed to specific sector needs, including interest in healthcare, training for truck driving, and technical systems like Sage 100. These responses reflect a desire for early exposure, practical preparation, and stronger alignment between employer needs and candidate behaviors, especially among young adults entering the workforce for the first time.

Figure 1 Strategies to Increase Workforce Participation



What are the biggest hiring challenges for young adults (ages 18-24) in Berks County? (Select all that apply) Employers identified a range of barriers facing young adults entering the workforce, with the most common being soft skills deficiencies such as communication and reliability. Respondents cited soft skills as a top concern, followed by lack of technical or job-specific skills (42) and limited work experience (40). Other frequently reported challenges included a lack of interest in available career pathways (36) and transportation barriers (33). Less commonly cited issues included English language barriers (21) and poor numeracy or math proficiency (19).

Among target industry respondents, employers in manufacturing were particularly concerned with job-specific skills, soft skills, and work experience. Healthcare and Educational Services frequently cited soft skills gaps and transportation challenges. Construction and Transportation and Warehousing highlighted barriers such as English proficiency and reliability.

Meanwhile, Social Assistance organizations reported challenges across nearly all categories, reflecting the complex needs of the populations they serve.

Figure 2 Reported Hiring Challenges for Young Adults Ages 18–24

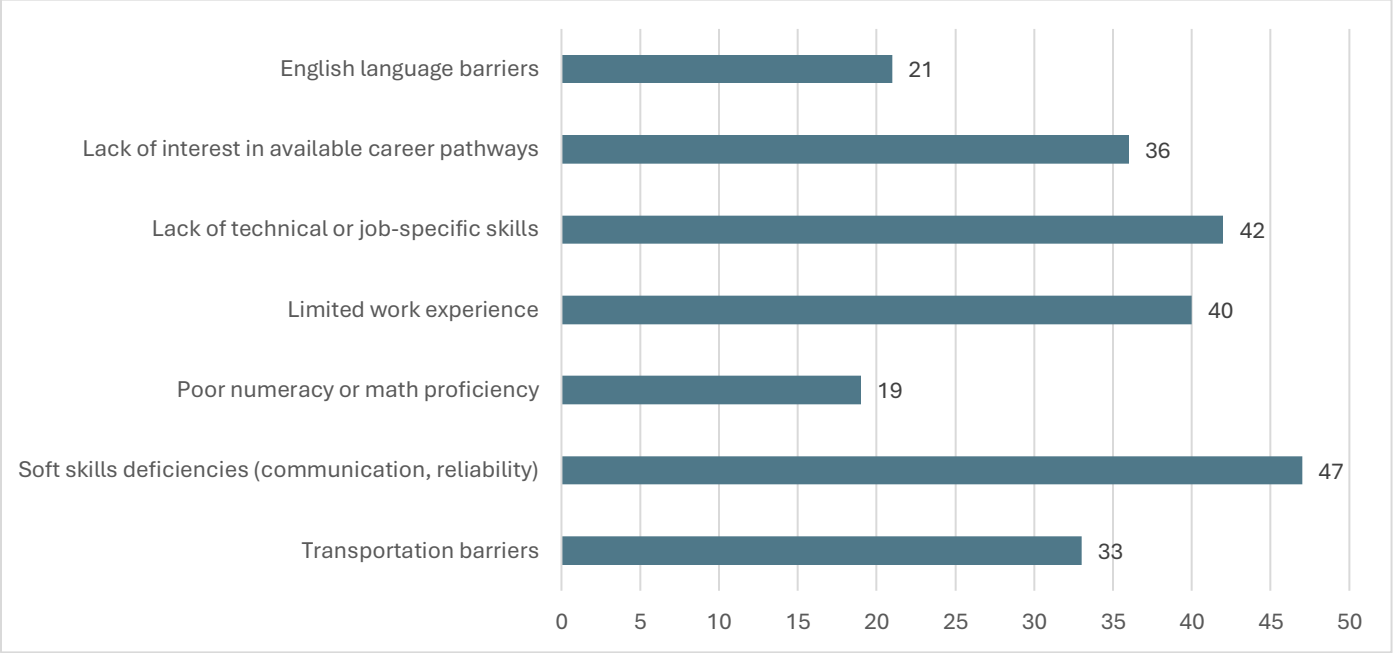
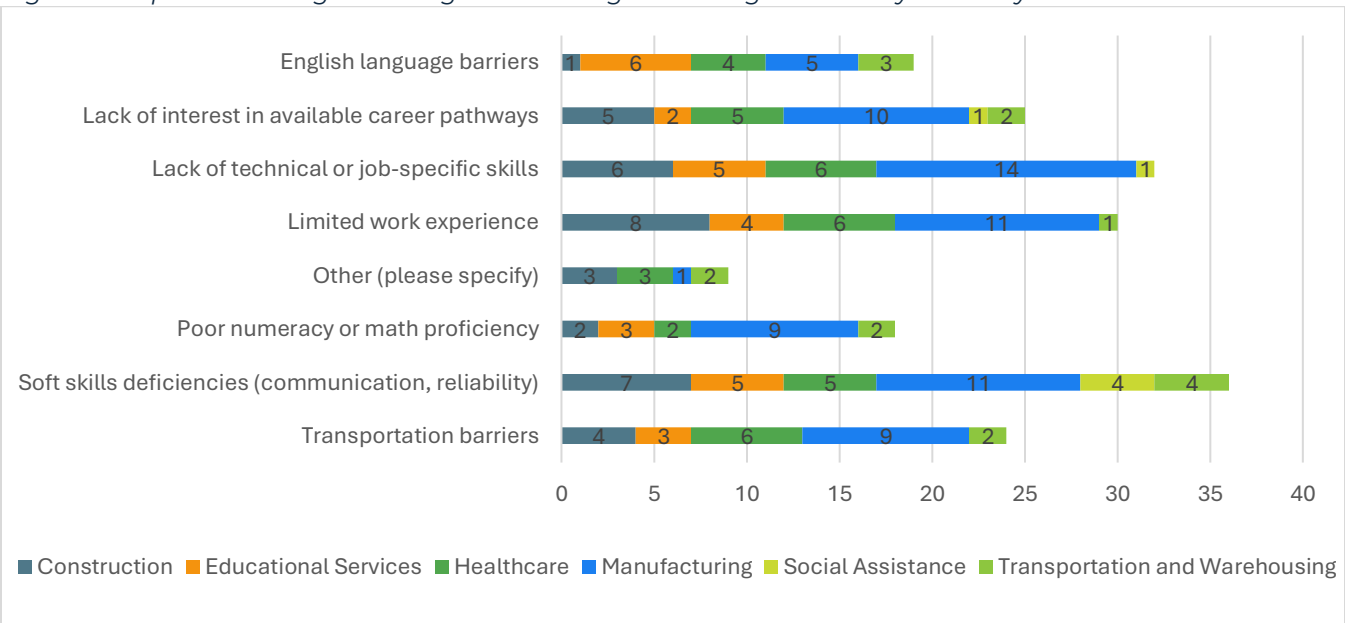


Figure 3 Reported Hiring Challenges for Young Adults Ages 18–24 by Industry



How confident are you that your employer will be able to meet your hiring needs and retention goals here in Berks County over the next five years? **Employer confidence is generally cautious but not pessimistic.** Most respondents (42 out of 81) described themselves as slightly confident, while only 15 were fully confident in their organization's ability to meet future hiring and retention needs. The remaining responses included 17 who were slightly not confident, and 7 who were not confident at all, highlighting a range of outlooks and some concern about workforce stability over time. Target industries are generally confident. Manufacturing and Healthcare employers were more likely to be slightly confident but had few who were fully confident. Educational Services and Social Assistance showed more polarization, some respondents reported high confidence. Transportation and Warehousing respondents tended to express lower confidence overall, with survey respondents indicating with few positive outlooks. Input from less optimistic outlooks indicate concerns about the talent pools technical skills, workplace readiness and employability skills.

Figure 4 Employer Confidence in Meeting Future Hiring and Retention Goals by Industry

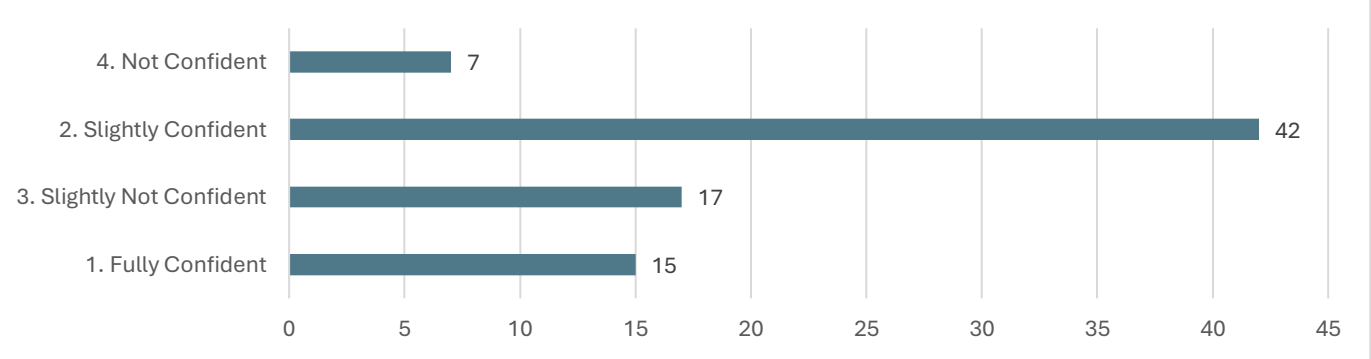
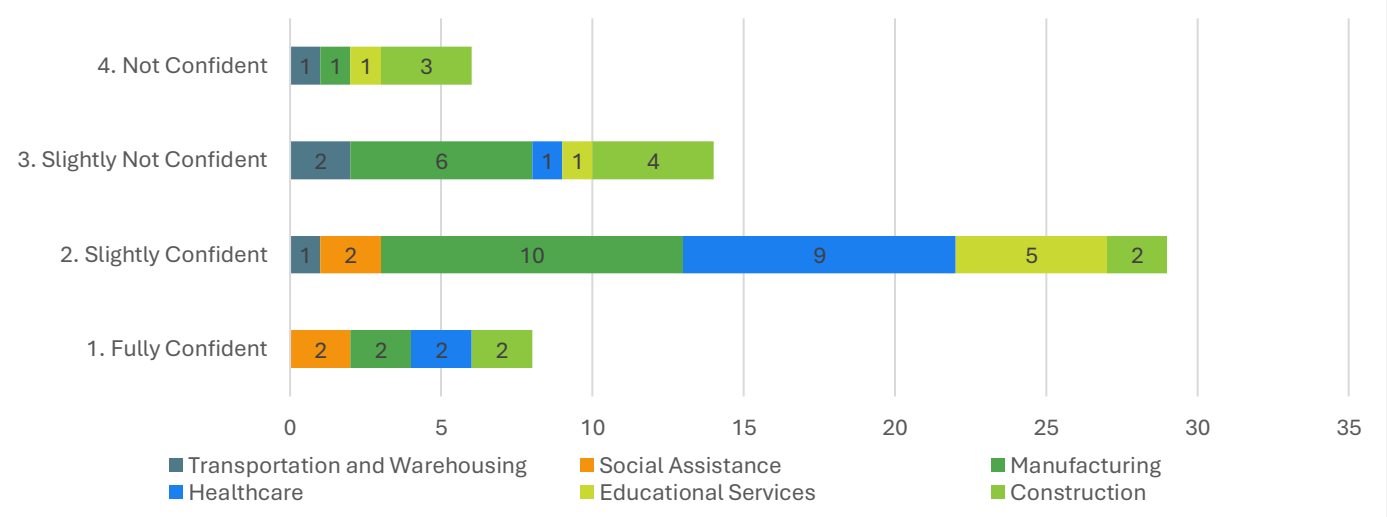


Figure 5 Employer Confidence in Meeting Future Hiring and Retention Goals



Interview and Focus Group

For strengths, Berks County employers emphasized strong cultural and institutional advantages that position the region well for workforce development.

Strong educational partnerships sustain pipelines. A defining strength of Berks County is the strong collaboration between employers, schools, and higher education institutions. These partnerships create innovative, flexible pathways that connect students and workers to meaningful career opportunities while ensuring employers have access to a skilled talent pipeline.

- **K–12 Career Exploration** – Healthcare employers visit middle and high schools to highlight the math and science skills needed for future careers. Year-round internship programs engage 30–40 students annually in rotations across multiple hospital departments, giving students early exposure to diverse career paths.
- **Internships and Work-based Learning** – Healthcare providers collaborate with regional colleges and training centers to host interns, with one employer noting that more than 60% of their interns are hired into permanent roles. These partnerships create a steady stream of work-ready graduates who are already familiar with the local employer environment.
- **Flexible Training Models** – A regional higher education training center works with manufacturers across several counties to design curriculum, share equipment, and develop customized apprenticeships. Its model is intentionally flexible:
    - Open labs available 12 hours daily to accommodate shift workers.
    - Blended learning where 50% of content is online and self-paced, and 50% is hands-on
    - Curriculum co-designed with employers, sometimes involving company engineers or supervisors in direct training.

These efforts demonstrate a shared belief that community-focused initiatives are essential to Berks County's economic vitality. By working together, employers and educators are not only meeting immediate workforce needs but also building sustainable pipelines that adapt to changing industry demands.

Community-Based Education and Support Strengthens Pathways
Before individuals can fully benefit from upskilling or reskilling opportunities, addressing personal and social barriers is often essential. Community-based organizations in Berks County provide holistic supports that set participants up for success before they enter training or the workforce.

- **Case Management Supports** – One organization described their approach as a "secret sauce," emphasizing that barriers like childcare, housing, and re-entry must be addressed first. By stabilizing these challenges, case managers ensure participants are ready to succeed in training or employment.
- **Onsite ESL and Math Classes** – Building on this foundation, employers collaborate with the Literacy Council to provide English as a Second Language instruction and applied math support in workplace settings. These services improve communication, strengthen basic skills, and prepare workers for technical training and advancement.

Young adults often lack readiness skills and hold unrealistic workplace expectations. Employers across industries reported that many applicants lack essential foundational skills and struggle to meet the academic requirements of high demand programs. Misalignment between what schools emphasize and what employers need was also a recurring theme. At the same time, younger workers often carry expectations about rapid advancement, scheduling, and workplace culture that do not align with the realities of entry level roles. These mismatches make it harder to build a pipeline of committed talent ready to grow into long term careers.

- Many students enter health sciences programs without the math and science preparation needed to succeed.
- New graduates commonly expect only day shifts with no weekends or holidays and assume they will move into management within a few years.
- Younger talent often has entrepreneurial aspirations and does not see the value of entry level roles to build skills toward long term career goals.
- Retaining younger workers is difficult when nearby counties offer newer facilities and clearer career pathways.

Numeracy and literacy skills are essential for entrance and advancement in high growth, high wage industries. Skill gaps in reading, math, and English proficiency continue to block entry into self-sustaining careers. Employers noted that otherwise qualified individuals often lack the literacy and numeracy needed to perform essential job functions or succeed in training programs. For English learners, technical fields like healthcare are particularly difficult because of the specialized language and documentation requirements. In manufacturing, weak math and measurement skills compromise both productivity and safety.

- Limited English proficiency prevents otherwise qualified workers from moving into clinical roles. Many need training in medical terminology before they can accurately complete documentation, delaying entry into higher wage positions.

- New hires in manufacturing frequently lack measurement skills such as reading a ruler or calculating dimensions, which undermines safety and quality.

Entry level roles in high demand industries are hard to fill and even harder to keep. Employers face persistent difficulty attracting and keeping workers in entry level positions. Even in high demand, high growth industries, these roles are hard to fill because wages lag behind retail and food service, where jobs often pay more while requiring fewer skills and offering less demanding work. Combined with rising expectations for flexibility, culture, and career advancement, many workers see entry level jobs as temporary rather than pathways to stability.

- Patient service staff and similar roles often leave for factory jobs paying just one or two dollars more per hour, especially when combined with less stressful working conditions.
- Entry level roles in high demand, high growth industries are difficult to staff because comparable jobs in retail and food service offer higher pay for less demanding work.
- Employers noted that turnover is especially high in the first year, with many workers viewing entry level roles as steppingstones until better opportunities arise.

Structural and social challenges limit workers' ability to sustain employment. Challenges outside the workplace continue to limit workforce participation, particularly for lower wage employees. Transportation, housing insecurity, childcare costs, and family responsibilities were repeatedly cited as obstacles that employers cannot address on their own. These barriers make it difficult for workers to remain consistently employed and for businesses to maintain a reliable workforce.

- Homelessness among employees has become more visible since COVID, with some staff living in shelters while working full time.
- Some employees decline raises because even small increases make them ineligible for Medicaid or childcare subsidies, turning higher wages into a financial burden.
- Dependence on limited public transit leads to chronic lateness and absenteeism, especially among entry level workers without cars.

Regional competition and remote work make the workforce more transient. Employers must also contend with intensified competition for talent both within Berks County and from neighboring areas. Remote work options and commuting patterns broaden the field of opportunities available to workers, making it harder for local employers to attract and retain staff. The result is a more fluid workforce where skilled talent often leaves for even modest improvements in pay or working conditions.

- Remote work has widened the competitive field, with administrative and professional roles increasingly filled by employers outside the region.
- Berks has become a net exporter of talent, with many residents commuting out of the county for higher wages and more specialized opportunities. This trend drains skilled workers while bringing in new residents with lower levels of educational attainment.

Appendix D. Population Trends

Quantitative Research

Before taking a deeper look at labor force participation rates and the projected change in workforce participation, by age cohort, we start with a summary overview of the current population in Berks County. Based on direction from the Berks County team, we are most interested in the size, composition, and projected change of the prime-age workforce, comprised of individuals between the ages of 25 and 64.

To estimate the size of the future population aged 25-64 through the year 2035 in Berks County, we utilize two sets of data: projections derived by Lightcast™ and our own projections, calculated using American Community Survey data. Both methods have limitations associated with them; Lightcast™ modeling is proprietary and is produced in "black box" form, that is, there is no line of sight into the calculations or methods employed to produce their estimates. The ACS data and our own unique process is much more transparent- but relies on a largely linear estimation process and is based solely on data from previous years, which is, as of this writing, not fully up to date. The last year of available estimates from Census is 2023, already 2 years out of date. Nonetheless, by comparing both sets of estimates, side-by-side, we can produce a reliable range of future population and while the precise numbers 10 years in the future will certainly need to be adjusted, the trends revealed will likely be much more reliable. To address this question, at this point in the report, we are only interested in age cohort totals, not composition by gender, race, ethnicity or country of origin.

ACS Method

Our first approach relies on 1-year estimates of population, by age cohort, from the American Community Survey (ACS). To model future projected change, we utilized historical data from the years 2017-2023 reported via the ACS

Demographic and Housing Estimates[2]. Historical data, as reported directly by Census, appears in *Table 3*.

Table 3 ACS Estimates, Population by Age Cohort (2017-2023)

	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021	2022	2023
Under 5 years	24,178	24,088	24,098	23,853	23,608	23,309	23,405
5 to 9 years	26,434	25,468	25,762	26,136	26,509	23,733	27,057
10 to 14 years	26,386	27,230	27,224	27,548	27,872	29,346	26,121
15 to 19 years	30,128	30,031	29,262	29,201	29,140	30,706	31,488
20 to 24 years	27,765	27,433	27,393	27,526	27,658	28,317	27,585
25 to 34 years	50,943	51,764	52,567	53,134	53,701	52,545	53,630
35 to 44 years	48,175	47,962	48,799	50,748	52,697	53,189	53,662
45 to 54 years	56,521	56,659	53,826	53,085	52,344	52,333	51,577
55 to 59 years	31,319	30,661	29,056	29,754	30,452	29,426	29,577
60 to 64 years	25,169	26,541	28,964	29,102	29,240	29,471	29,126

*1-year estimates for 2020 were not produced due to COVID-19 but estimated by the research team

Accounting for missing data: 2020

The ACS did not produce 1-year population estimates for 2020 due to COVID-19. To estimate the age cohort population for 2020, we focused on the years 2019 and 2021 and assumed a linear change relationship between them and the missing year of 2020.

Specifically, first we subtracted the smaller annual number from the larger annual number (these varied by age group, with some cohorts growing from 2019 to 2021 and others shrinking), then dividing this difference by 2: assuming half the change occurred in 2020 and the other half in 2021. Next, we either added (if the population grew from 2019-2021) or subtracted (if the cohort population declined from 2019-2021) this number from the 2019 total

[2] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP05, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP1Y2023.DP05?q=Berks+County,+Pennsylvania+Populations+and+People&t=Civilian+Population (2017-2023)

and plugged the result in as an estimated count for 2020. As a practical example with actual numbers, consider the 20-24 age group:

Known Values, 2019 population: 27,393 AND 2021 population: 27,658

Step 1: 2021 population (27,658) minus 2019 population (27,393) = 265

Step 2: Divide the difference by 2 (265/2 = 132.5) and round up/down to whole number (133)

Step 3: Add the number generated in Step 2 to the 2019 population (133 + 27,393 = 27,526)

Step 4: Estimated 20-24 population in 2020 = 27,526

If the population under review declined from 2019 to 2021 (for example, age cohort 15-19) then we reverse the years in step 1, subtracting the 2021 total from the 2019 total and then subtract the number generated in step 2 from the 2019 total (instead of adding to it).

Armed with the 'missing' data from 2020, we use these annual estimates- beginning with the cohorts as reported in 2023- to calculate the future population, based on current population and aging each group appropriately, annually. To accomplish this, we must apply 2 simplifying assumptions:

1. The number of citizens moving into or out of the county will, in effect, be a wash. Because we are using historical data in this modeling, which does not break out new arrivals or departures as part of the population change, there is no way to disaggregate citizens along these lines.
2. Each age cohort, as reported by Census, is evenly distributed among its component ages. For example, the age cohort 20-24, which includes 5 different ages (20, 21, 22, 23, and 24), is in its totality made up of 5 equal parts- 20% 20-year-olds, 20% 21-year-olds, 20% 22 years old, 20% 23 years old, and 20% 24-year-olds. For cohorts that cover a 10-year span (35-44, for example), each component age makes up 10% of the cohort total

If we accept these assumptions as valid, then the annual breakouts for each of these cohorts appear in

Table 4 below.

Table 4 Age Breakouts for Cohorts, 2017-2023

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 5 years in 5 parts	4,836	4,818	4,820	4,771	4,722	4,662	4,681
5 to 9 years in 5 parts	5,287	5,094	5,152	5,227	5,302	4,747	5,411
10 to 14 in 5 parts	5,277	5,446	5,445	5,510	5,574	5,869	5,224
15 to 19 in 5 parts	6,026	6,006	5,852	5,840	5,828	6,141	6,298
20 to 24 in 5 parts	5,553	5,487	5,479	5,505	5,532	5,663	5,517
25 to 34 in 10 parts	5,094	5,176	5,257	5,313	5,370	5,255	5,363
35 to 44 in 10 parts	4,818	4,796	4,880	5,075	5,270	5,319	5,366
45 to 54 in 10 parts	5,652	5,666	5,383	5,309	5,234	5,233	5,158
55 to 59 in 5 parts	6,264	6,132	5,811	5,951	6,090	5,885	5,915
60 to 64 in 5 parts	5,034	5,308	5,793	5,820	5,848	5,894	5,825

Table 2 above shows the size of a single component of each of the targeted age cohorts in each cell (each cell represents 20% or 10% of the cohort total, as noted). Utilizing a single component (one year of the age cohort) is important for building out the projections for each of the years 2024 through 2035 because, annually, one segment (part) of the cohort "graduates" into the next age category.

For example, individuals aged 19 in 2023 will leave the 15–19-year-old age cohort in 2024 and join the 20–24-year-old category. Similarly, the eldest of the latter cohort, those aged 24 in 2023, will join the 25- to 34-year-old cohort in the year 2024. By breaking each of Census reported cohorts into either 5 or 10 parts (for the groups 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54) we can manually migrate part of each population every year through 2035 to estimate future population, by age.

The logic behind this is straightforward: individuals in the 15-to-19-year cohort in 2023 will be part of the "prime age" 25-to-34-year cohort in 2035 and should be counted appropriately. Formulaically, we calculate movement from category to category as described in the table below.

Applying this process through the year 2035 allows us to estimate the potential size of the prime, work-age population over the next 10 years, as reported in the *Table 5* below. The figure that follows plots the annual size of the primary cohorts of interest, those made up of the ages 25 to 64.

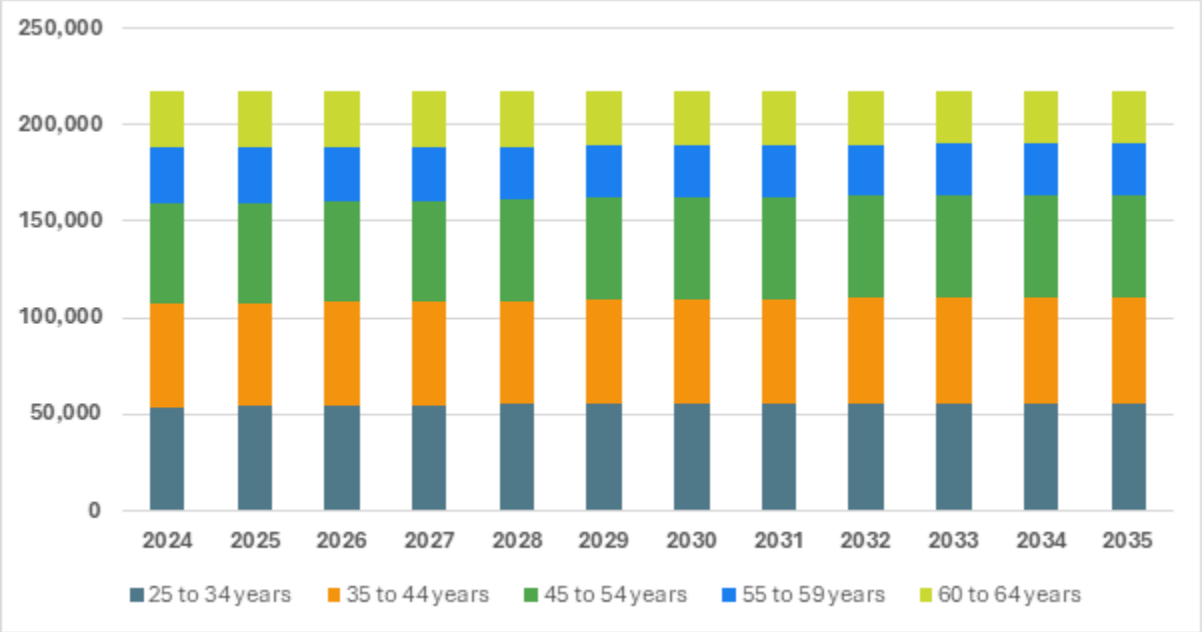
Table 5 Projected Population of Berks County, By Cohorts, through 2035

Age	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Under 5	23,791	23,736	23,686	23,627	23,595	23,593	23,633	23,666	23,648	23,635	23,628	23,628
5-9	26,327	25,820	25,403	25,059	24,773	24,537	24,348	24,205	24,097	24,007	23,933	23,872
10-14	26,308	26,312	26,213	26,051	25,853	25,637	25,417	25,203	25,004	24,822	24,659	24,514
15-19	30,415	29,593	28,937	28,392	27,924	27,510	27,135	26,792	26,474	26,180	25,908	25,659
20-24	28,366	28,775	28,939	28,939	28,829	28,640	28,421	28,164	27,889	27,606	27,321	27,038
25-34	53,784	54,079	54,426	54,771	55,082	55,339	55,535	55,666	55,732	55,737	55,684	55,580
35-44	53,659	53,671	53,712	53,783	53,882	54,002	54,136	54,276	54,415	54,547	54,666	54,767
45-54	51,786	51,973	52,143	52,300	52,448	52,591	52,732	52,873	53,013	53,153	53,293	53,430
55-59	28,819	28,234	27,784	27,442	27,183	26,992	26,852	26,755	26,691	26,654	26,639	26,640
60-64	29,216	29,137	28,956	28,722	28,466	28,209	27,966	27,743	27,546	27,375	27,231	27,112

*The Under 5 estimate for 2024 is an average of the prior 7 years, 2017-2023. Each subsequent year for this age category only is calculated via a rolling 7-year average (e.g. 2025 is 2018-2024, 2026 is 2019-2025, etc.)

Utilizing the available information from Census and applying the logical, linear estimation techniques described above, this first approach yields a largely static estimate of the prime-age population. Indeed, *Figure 6* below illustrates the more-or-less stable size of the projected population over the next decade, with some slight variance year-over-year within select age groups

Figure 6 Population 25-64, by Cohort, 2024-2035



Lightcast™ Method

To contrast this more-or-less stable, linear estimation of population size in Berks County through 2035, we next considered the proprietary population projections of Lightcast™. As mentioned earlier, the primary limitation of utilizing Lightcast™ is the inability to fully unpack all components of their approach to model estimation, beyond the general methodological notes they provide[3]. Lightcast™ does include as part of their estimation tract-level details, again derived from the Census Bureau, and pulls in national level trends on births, deaths, and migration, adjusting for local conditions/idiosyncratic available data. Based on their estimates, and as reported as part of their output report, *Table 6* below provides year-by-year estimates of cohorts by age category.

Table 6 Lightcast™ Cohort Population Estimates, through 2035

Age	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Under 5	23,237	23,336	23,569	23,772	24,200	24,459	24,816	25,109	25,408	25,703	26,064	26,292
5-9	25,551	25,392	25,170	25,103	24,902	24,857	24,916	25,107	25,260	25,662	25,914	26,260
10-14	27,172	27,288	27,441	27,487	27,471	27,348	27,165	26,917	26,842	26,638	26,575	26,618
15-19	31,028	30,929	30,832	30,632	30,284	30,211	30,270	30,380	30,396	30,355	30,208	29,987
20-24	28,342	28,636	28,877	29,531	30,157	30,197	30,080	29,945	29,737	29,435	29,387	29,467
25-34	53,768	53,731	53,732	53,457	53,353	53,634	54,057	54,545	55,140	55,831	56,294	56,512
35-44	54,645	55,728	56,703	57,532	58,286	58,976	59,419	59,664	59,828	59,875	59,869	59,872
45-54	50,942	50,780	50,643	51,029	51,768	52,679	53,745	54,966	56,092	57,276	58,417	59,490
55-59	28,441	28,124	28,109	27,800	27,292	26,590	25,837	24,982	24,687	24,787	25,212	25,825
60-64	29,444	29,310	28,807	28,217	27,516	26,944	26,635	26,621	26,348	25,896	25,259	24,560

[3] https://kb.lightcast.io/en/articles/6957652-population-demographics-methodology

Comparing these totals to those produced by our in-house ACS modeling approach, Lightcast™ projects more growth in the key age cohorts in Berks County, estimating an increase of 9,019 members (vs. 277 in the ACS-only estimations). The side-by-side annual comparisons appear in *Table 7* below.

Table 7 Lightcast™ vs. ACS Prime-Age Population Estimates, by Year

	Lightcast™	ACS Method	Difference
2024	217,240	219,288	-2,048
2025	217,673	219,119	-1,446
2026	217,994	219,047	-1,053
2027	218,035	219,045	-1,010
2028	218,215	219,089	-874
2029	218,823	219,163	-340
2030	219,693	219,252	441
2031	220,778	219,344	1,434
2032	222,095	219,429	2,666
2033	223,665	219,499	4,166
2034	225,051	219,546	5,505
2035	226,259	219,565	6,694

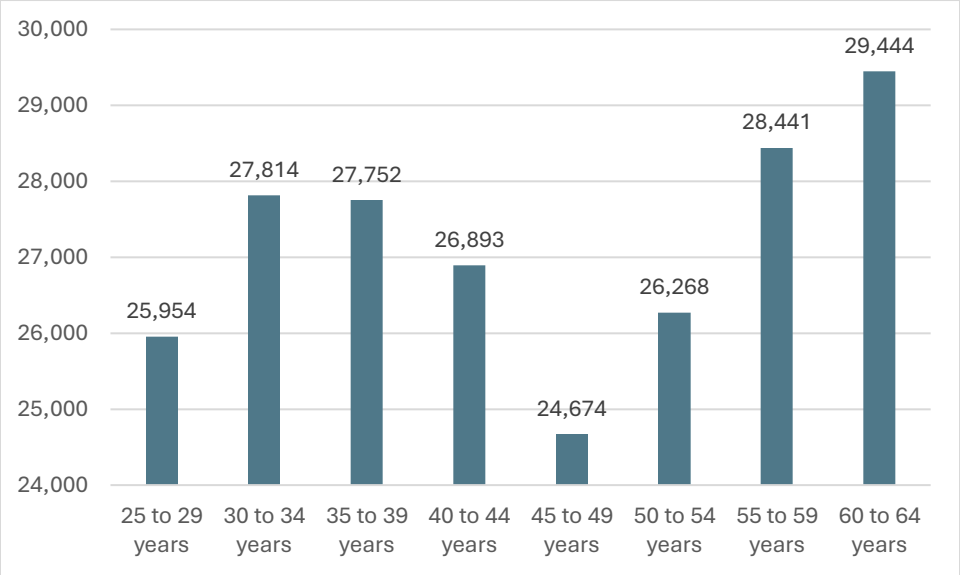
Interestingly, when comparing the sets of projections side-by-side in *Table 7* above, through the year 2029, the ACS estimates are larger than those produced by Lightcast™. Then, in the year 2030, the Lightcast™ estimate jumps by 870 from 2029, setting off a run of large annual swings through 2035 (+1,085 in 2031, -695 in 2032, +1,570 in 2033, +1,386 in 2034 and +1,208 in 2035). While Lightcast™ does not explain these wide swings in the years 2029 through 2035, it seems reasonable that the margin of error increases as we move farther away from the current year with verifiable data. Regardless, by the year 2035 the Lightcast™ population projection is larger by a factor of 6,694 vis-à-vis the linear, ACS projection model.

While it is impossible to predict the future with certainty, the range of estimates provided through our 2 unique approaches does add a certain degree of confidence to adopting conservative assumptions about the growth of the prime-age workforce in Berks County through 2035. To put it into perspective, while the ACS-only modeling is perhaps too conservative, the more ambitious, by contrast, estimates from Lightcast™ still represent only a 4% increase. Considering these 2 approaches- Lightcast™ and ACS

Linear Modeling- in concert provides both low- and high-water marks for future population projections.

Supplemental for RQ1:

Figure 7 Working-Age Cohort Population Totals: Berks County, 2024[4]

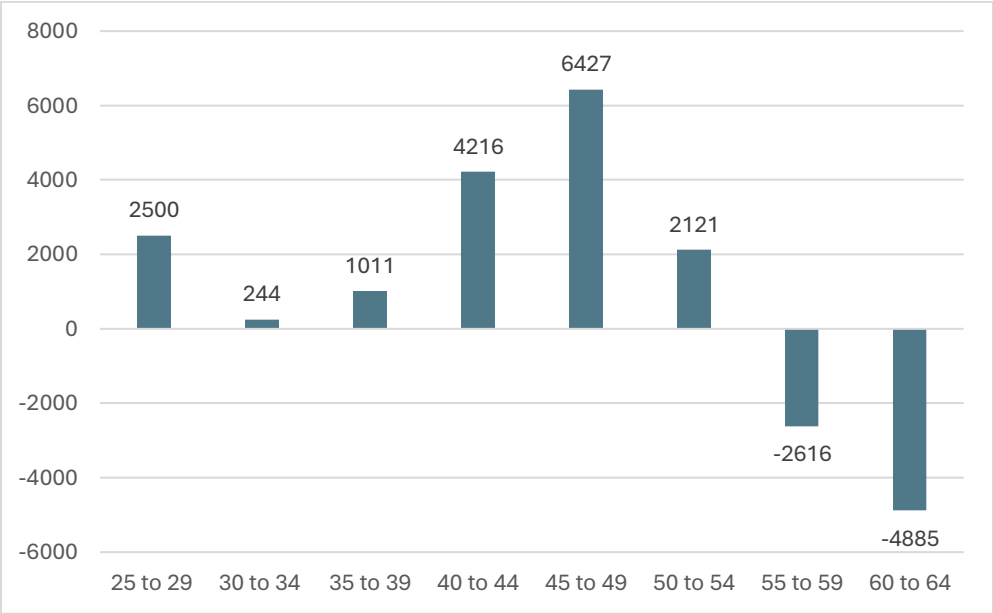


The figure above shows population estimates from Lightcast™ for the year 2024. The TPMA team obtained population projections for the same age group cohorts projected to the year 2035.

[4] Data from Lightcast.

Below shows the net population changes per age group projected from 2024 to 2035. Net increases are observed for all working-age groups between the ages of 25 – 54 years of age, with the only net decreases in projections for the 55 – 64-year-olds. This decrease is offset almost entirely by the growth of those aged 45-49, who are projected to grow the most by a population value of 6,427. Lightcast™ projects the next highest growth rate among 40–44-year-olds, making those aged 40-49 the largest projected portion of the working age population, accounting for approximately two-thirds of the increasing age groups.

Figure 8 Net Age Group Population Change 2024 - 2035[5]



[5] Data from Lightcast.

Appendix E. Labor Force Participation

Quantitative Research

The next task in this analysis is to identify the size of the actual labor force itself, through the year 2035. To estimate the size of the workforce- not the full population- we need to first estimate the future labor force participation rates, by age cohort. Next, we need to apply these estimated labor force participation rates to the full population projections (also by age cohort), as developed in the previous section, yielding a defensible estimate of the size of the future workforce.

As a primer, it is important to remember the following definitions regarding labor force participation rate and the labor force itself. Each has a specific meaning and should not be conflated with population estimates.

- Labor Force Participation Rate: Calculated as the number of employed individuals PLUS the number of unemployed individuals, with the total divided by the full work-eligible population.
- Work Eligible Population: All civilian, non-institutionalized members of the population aged 16 or older.
- Unemployed: An individual is considered unemployed if they are a) not currently employed and b) have actively sought employment within the last 30 days.
- Not in the Labor Force: An individual who is not employed and has not actively sought employment during the last 30 days

These key definitions guide the regular (monthly) data releases from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, which generate unemployment rates (by county) and labor force participation rates, by state. These releases cover the entire work-age population (aged 16 and up) and do not provide estimates by age group, which would require a much larger sample size than that collected monthly. To supplement the US BLS data, the US Census Bureau releases annual estimates of labor force participation rate by age group, available in 5-year and 1-year estimates. *Table 8* below shows the labor force participation rate, by age group, in Berks County circa 2023.

Table 8 Labor Force Participation Rate Cohorts 25 to 64, 2023[6]

Age Group	Labor Force Participation
25 to 29 years	84.1%
30 to 34 years	83.6%
35 to 44 years	85.4%
45 to 54 years	84.7%
55 to 59 years	78.8%
60 to 64 years	60.5%

Projections and Implications

To project the Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) out to 2035, we began by gathering the historic LFPRs for Berks County and the surrounding WDAs dating back to 2015 from the American Community Survey. The data were constrained to include only the working-age population between 25 and 64 years of age. TPMA then calculated weighted averages of these isolated populations in the labor force to estimate the LFPR for prime working-age individuals from 2015 to 2023. A weighted average is necessary to account for the population differences between age cohorts and is a more statistically rigorous calculation. Consider the following steps and *Table 9* which demonstrates this process using the estimation of labor force participation for prime working age individuals in Berks County for 2023:

[6] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. “Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=Berks+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301 (2023)

Step 1: Isolate the prime working-age cohorts from the ACS data and sum them to attain a population total.

Step 2: Multiply the LFPR Estimate per cohort by the Population per cohort.

Table 9 Labor Force Participation Rate, Cohorts 25 to 64, 2023[7]

Age	Population	LFPR Estimate	Cohort Population x LFPR Estimate
25 to 29 years	26,194	84.1%	22,029.15
30 to 34 years	27,220	83.6%	22,755.92
35 to 44 years	51,800	85.4%	44,237.20
45 to 54 years	53,223	84.7%	45,079.88
55 to 59 years	30,035	78.8%	23,667.58
60 to 64 years	29,358	60.5%	17,761.59
Total:	217,830		175,531.33

Step 3: Sum the products of the LFPR Estimates and Populations (sum of Cohort Population x LFPR Estimate column = 175,531.325)

Step 4: Divide the sum attained in Step 3 by the total Population to arrive at an estimation of the LFPR for prime working age cohorts (175,531.325 / 215,830 = 0.80582)

The second phase of this process involves modeling a range of labor force participation around the LFPR values calculated for the WDAs. TPMA did this by utilizing the Census Bureau's measurements of error reported with the LFPR data.

This was achieved by essentially employing the same process as described above, but with the additional steps of adding the Margin of Error from the American Community Survey tables to the percentage of the working-age population and subtracting the same Margin of Error from the working-age population percentages to produce the estimated high and low ranges per age group. These high and low values were then calculated into separate weighted averages in the same fashion as in the previous phase. Taken together, these calculations provide a low, actual, and high range of values

[7] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=Berks+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301 (2023)

for the Labor Force Participation Rate between 2015-2023. Consider the following example of the process to produce a high and low range of estimated LFPR for Berks County prime working-age individuals for 2023:

Step 1: Isolate the prime working-age cohorts from the ACS data and sum them to attain a population total.

Step 2: Add the Margin of Error (MOE) to each LFPR Estimate to create a "High LFPR" column. Subtract the MOE from the LFPR Estimate to create a "Low LFPR" column.

Step 3: Multiply the Population column by the High LFPR and Low LFPR columns.

Table 10 Labor Force Participation Rate, Cohorts 25 to 64, 2023, [8]

Age	Population	LFPR Estimate	Margin of Error (MOE)	High LFPR (Plus MOE)	Low LFPR (Minus MOE)	Population x High LFPR	Population x Low LFPR
25-29 years	26,194	84.1%	±2.3	0.864	0.818	22,631.62	21,426.7
30-34 years	27,220	83.6%	±1.6	0.852	0.82	23,191.44	22,320.4
35-44 years	51,800	85.4%	±1.2	0.866	0.842	44,858.8	43,615.6
45-54 years	53,223	84.7%	±1.3	0.86	0.834	45,771.78	44,388.0
55-59 years	30,035	78.8%	±1.6	0.804	0.772	24,148.14	23,187.0
60-64 years	29,358	60.5%	±2.2	0.627	0.583	18,407.47	17,115.7
Total	217,830					179,009.24	172,053.4

Step 4: Sum the products of the Population x High LFPR and Population x Low LFPR columns (179,009.242 and 172,053.408, respectively)

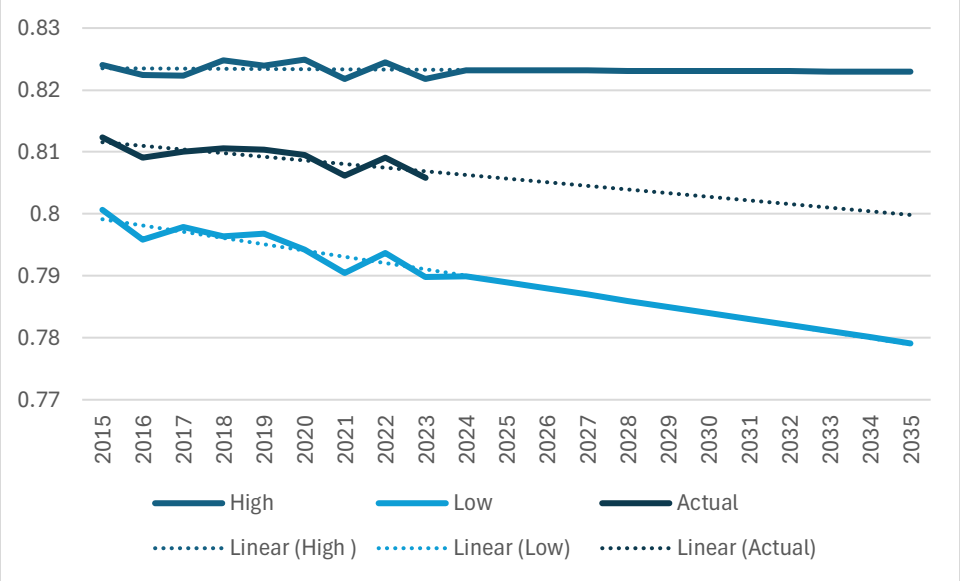
Step 5: Divide the sums from Step 4 by the total population to attain a range of LFPR (179,009.242 / 217,830 = 0.82178; 172,053.408 / 217,830 = 0.78985)

The final phase of this analysis is to project these trends into the next 10 years. To provide a relatively simple estimation of the range of the Labor

[8] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=Berks+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301 (2023)

Force Participation Rate to 2035, a linear forecasting formula was applied to the known data. In general terms, the formula establishes a linear projection based on known values and carries it to the desired extent *Figure 9* below shows the results of this formula applied to the weighted averages calculated in the previous phases.

Figure 9 Linear Projections of the Target Population in Terms of LFPR: 2015-2035



As seen in *Figure 9* above, the high rate of labor force participation in Berks County is projected to remain stable at approximately 82.3% for the entirety of the projection to 2035. This projection is lower than the Berks WDB LFPR reported in the 4-year plan. This discrepancy is likely because the CWIA obtains information from the CPS-LAUS, which provides monthly model estimates.[9] TPMA utilized the ACS 5-year estimates of LFPR as the source material for this analysis. There are differences in reporting between the ACS and the CPS-LAUS which cause discrepancies in the data, being "overall questionnaire differences, differing requirements in the two surveys with regard to whether an individual is actively looking for work, and differing reference periods, modes of collection, and population controls".[10] The low

[9] Labor Force Employment and Unemployment (LAUS). *CWIA*. August 21, 2025. https://paworkstats.geosolinc.com/vosnet/analyzer/resultsNew.aspx?enc=HofuwY22SoLTS/uC+bpmizFUgATxi0zDNlFs4+9Hw7g9lTJtUrNvGxiYgz0aN/w4

[10] American Community Survey (ACS) Questions and Answers. *BLS*. August 21, 2025. https://www.bls.gov/lau/acsqa.htm#:~:text=A%20number%20of%20factors%20may,of%20collection%2C%20and%20population%20controls.

range, however, based on the linear projection methodology described above, is projected to decrease slightly from 79.0% in 2023 to 78.0% by 2035. Figures included as appendices to this document show the historic and projected LFPR ranges for the surrounding WDAs, such as the one above for Berks County.

See *Table 11* below for the Actual, High, and Low LFPR values calculated in this step of the analysis:

Table 11 Actual LFPR 2015 - 2023, High and Low LFPR values and projections 2015-2035

	High	Low	Actual
2015	0.82405	0.80065	0.81235
2016	0.82238	0.79580	0.80909
2017	0.82234	0.79785	0.81010
2018	0.82484	0.79637	0.81060
2019	0.82388	0.79680	0.81034
2020	0.82491	0.79418	0.80954
2021	0.82182	0.79044	0.80613
2022	0.82443	0.79369	0.80906
2023	0.82178	0.78985	0.80582
2024	0.82320	0.78993	
2025	0.82318	0.78895	
2026	0.82316	0.78796	
2027	0.82314	0.78698	
2028	0.82312	0.78599	
2029	0.82310	0.78501	
2030	0.82308	0.78402	
2031	0.82306	0.78303	
2032	0.82303	0.78205	
2033	0.82301	0.78106	
2034	0.82299	0.78008	
2035	0.82297	0.77909	

Recession and Boom Effects on LFPR

With the Labor Force Participation Rates projected to 2035 in hand from the previous phases under stable historical conditions, the TPMA team prepared to use these projections to model both positive and negative scenarios as impacts on high and low ranges of the LFPR. Research conducted by Cairó et al. (2020) out of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia[11] provided a conceptual framework for the effects of business cycles on Unemployment Rates and what the effect on the Labor Force Participation Rate could be. This study delves into motivations for households to enter or leave the labor force, which are numerous and beyond the scope of this analysis, but it does provide a foundation to estimate the effect that a future hypothetical boom or recession could have on the Labor Force Participation Rate in Berks County based on changes in Unemployment Rates and Wages.

With this conceptual foundation laid, we collected additional data on historic Unemployment Rate and wage growth in Berks County from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to use in modeling best and worst-case scenarios. First, we present the Recession Scenario.

[11] https://www.philadelphiafed.org/the-economy/macroeconomics/labor-force-participation-in-response-to-business-cycles-and-its-effect-on-unemployment

Recession Scenario

Unemployment Rate: TPMA gathered Unemployment Rate and wage data from the BLS dating back to 2006 for Berks County to capture the years before the Great Recession, during, and subsequent recovery. The Unemployment Rates reported below are from the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) datasets, which are a key component of the data reported by the Center for Workforce Information & Analysis (CWIA).

Table 12 shows the Unemployment Rates from 2006 to 2024 as reported by the BLS:

Table 12 Unemployment Rate, Berks County: 2006 – 2024[12]

Year	Unemployment Rate
2006	4.5
2007	4.4
2008	5.4
2009	8.7
2010	8.4
2011	7.6
2012	7.4
2013	6.8
2014	5.6
2015	5.0
2016	4.9
2017	4.6
2018	4.3
2019	4.3
2020	9.2
2021	6.0
2022	4.1
2023	3.7
2024	3.7

The average Unemployment Rate for this period 2006 – 2024 is 5.72%, which happens to coincide with the approximate reported Unemployment Rate in

[12] Reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as part of the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) datasets, which are a key building block of the Center for Workforce Information & Analysis reporting. https://www.bls.gov/lau/tas.htm#cntyaa

Berks County in the years 2007-2008 before the Great Recession, and by 2014, when the Unemployment Rate stabilized just under the average of 5.72% for the period in focus. Based on these guidelines, the following years were selected for inclusion in the Recession Scenario:

Table 13 Unemployment Rate, Included in Recession Scenario[13]

Year	Unemployment Rate
2007	4.4
2008	5.4
2009	8.7
2010	8.4
2011	7.6
2012	7.4
2013	6.8
2014	5.6

Table 13 above shows that by 2009, the effects of the Great Recession were evident in the Berks County Unemployment Rate, with an increase in the Unemployment Rate to 8.7% compared to 5.4% recorded in 2008. By 2014, the Unemployment Rate had decreased to meet pre-Great Recession levels.

It is not enough to only consider the changing Unemployment Rate in terms of its possible effect on the Labor Force Participation Rate, but also the size of the effect. Again, referencing the work by Cairó et al. (2020), a coefficient must be included in the calculations to show this effect. For the sake of this analysis, the percentage change in Unemployment Rate from the anchor year of 2007 was calculated as the coefficient acting upon the Unemployment Rate in our calculations. 2007 was chosen as the anchor year for its chronology, having passed prior to the effects of the Great Recession becoming severe, and having an Unemployment Rate below the 5.72% average for the time period. Therefore, differences in Unemployment Rate calculated based on the 2007 data would impart continuity with existing trends into the model, allowing for an effect but not to a jagged, unrealistic extent, and allow for a return to the mean, demonstrating realistic recovery.

Table 14 details this step:

Table 14 Berks County Unemployment Rate, Percent Change From 2007

[13] https://www.bls.gov/lau/tables.htm#cntyaa

Year	Unemployment Rate	Percentage Change from 2007
2006	4.50%	-
2007	4.40%	-
2008	5.40%	-23%
2009	8.70%	-61%
2010	8.40%	-56%
2011	7.60%	-41%
2012	7.40%	-37%
2013	6.80%	-26%
2014	5.60%	-4%

*Percent Change from 2007 is negative to indicate an inverse relationship with LFPR

Wages: The second variable to factor into this process is the change in wages from year to year. Again, referencing Cairó et al. (2020) it has been shown that wages, alongside the Unemployment Rate, can be considered to have some effect on labor force participation.

The preparation of wage data followed a similar, but unique, set of circumstances. Once again, TPMA turned to the BLS to attain the desired data on wages[14][15]. A straightforward calculation was done to convert average weekly wages to average annual wages.

Step 1: Find the average weekly wage based on data from all four quarters

Step 2: Multiply this average weekly wage by 52 weeks to find average annual wages

[14] https://www.bls.gov/web/cewqtr.supp.toc.htm
[15] "Average annual wages per employee for any given industry are computed by dividing total annual wages by annual average employment. A further division by 52 yields average weekly wages per employee. Annual pay data only approximate annual earnings because an individual may not be employed by the same employer all year or may work for more than one employer at a time." *Bureau of Labor Statistics*. https://www.bls.gov/cew/publications/employment-and-wages-annual-averages/2023/.

Table 15 Average Annual Wage Calculation

Year	Quarter	Average Weekly Wages
2008	1	$770.00
2008	2	$771.00
2008	3	$770.00
2008	4	$817.00
	Average Weekly Wage:	$782.00
	Average Annual Wage:	$40,664.00

This step was repeated for years 2007 – 2014 to have symmetry with the calculations of Unemployment Rate in the period before and during the Great Recession, and to capture the time when stabilization occurred in 2014.

A key difference between the preparation of the Unemployment Rate and Wages is that in terms of Wages, the percentage change year after year continues a growth pattern. Unlike the Unemployment Rate, there is no desire to see high wages decrease. To model the effect of a future hypothetical recession on the labor force, the real historic change in wages was multiplied by a factor of 0.75 to show a significant slowing in the growth of wages. In effect, this functions the same as calculating the percentage change in Unemployment Rate from the anchor year 2007.

Table 16 Average Annual Wages, Percent Change, and Adjusted Growth Rate

Year	Average Yearly Wage	Proportion Change	Percent Change	Adjusted Wage Growth Rate
2007	$39,936.00	1.049897471	4.99%	3.74%
2008	$40,664.00	1.018229167	1.82%	1.37%
2009	$41,067.00	1.009910486	0.99%	0.74%
2010	$41,561.00	1.012029123	1.20%	0.90%
2011	$42,588.00	1.024710666	2.47%	1.85%
2012	$43,641.00	1.024725275	2.47%	1.85%
2013	$43,979.00	1.00774501	0.77%	0.58%
2014	$45,552.00	1.035767071	3.58%	2.68%
2015	$46,943.00	1.03053653	3.05%	2.29%

With labor force projections and historical reference points in both unemployment and wages, the TPMA team is now equipped to combine them to model the effect of an economic recession on the Labor Force Participation Rate.

Recession Model Calculation Example

The following example calculation is the formula by which all values of the Recession model Labor Force Participation Rates are obtained (where x equals the projected Labor Force Participation Rate, UR equals Unemployment Rate, URΔ equals Change in Unemployment Rate, WΔ equals year-to-year change in Wages, and Wt equals the adjusted chang in wages that has been throttled down for this model):

$$x = LFPR + (W\Delta + Wt) + (UR * UR\Delta)$$

This formula was applied to both the High and Low LFPRs from the previous step of this analysis to model a range of Labor Force Participation Rates before, during, and after a Recession period. To use a case with real numbers, see the following example from 2026, the first year chosen for this segment of the analysis based on historic UR and Wage data from 2008:

LFPR (high range): x = .82316 + (1.37% * 1.82%) + (5.4% * -.2272)

x = .81114

LFPR (low range): x = .78796 + (1.37% * 1.82% + (5.4% * -.2272)

x = .77594

Though this is a singular example, the effect of these calculations can begin to be seen. Note that attained values for the LFPR at both the high and low ranges show a sign of decreasing from the original projected value.

To apply this concept, years within the labor force projections to 2035 must be chosen at some point in the future to begin the model, have enough years to endure the hypothetical recession and to recover, all within the boundary of 2035 as an end point. For this analysis, the years 2026 – 2032 were chosen as the recession/recovery range, allowing time for a leveling off again by 2035.

When carried out to completion, the full effect, using historical measurements of Unemployment Rate and Wages, can be seen in *Figure 10*

Figure 10 Labor Force Participation Rate, Effect of Modeled Recession with High and Low Ranges

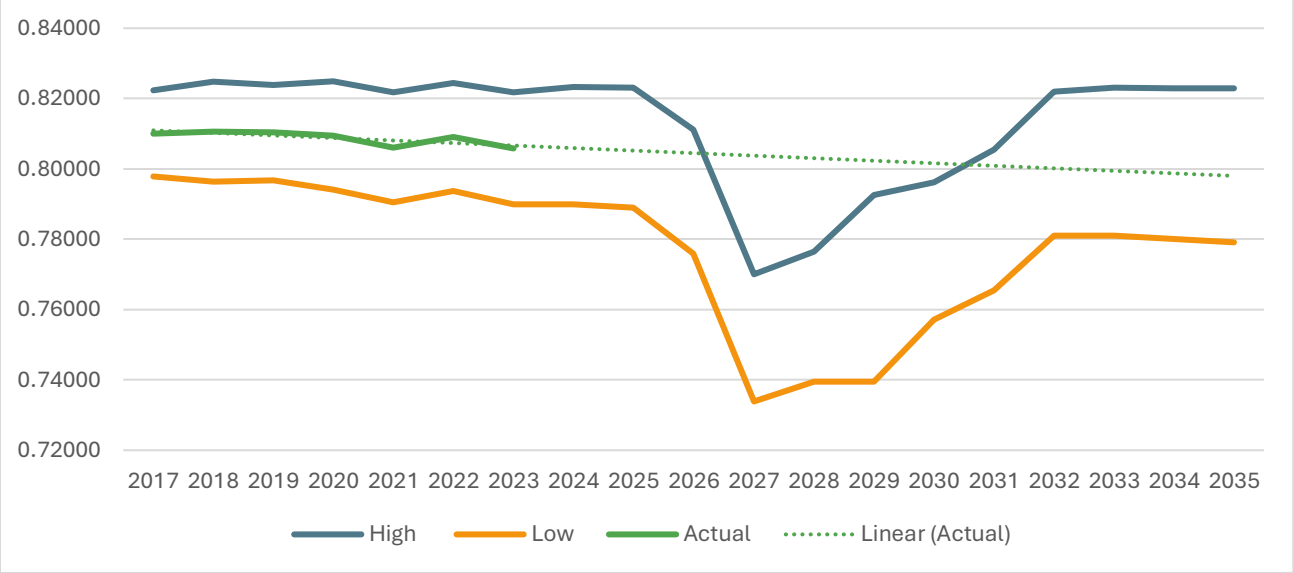


Table 17 shows the numeric values constituting the model depicted visually above in *Figure 10*:

Table 17 LFPR Values, Recession Model

Year	High	Low	Actual
2017	0.82234	0.79785	0.81010
2018	0.82484	0.79637	0.81060
2019	0.82388	0.79680	0.81034
2020	0.82491	0.79418	0.80954
2021	0.82182	0.79044	0.80613
2022	0.82443	0.79369	0.80906
2023	0.82178	0.78985	0.80582
2024	0.82320	0.78993	
2025	0.82318	0.78895	
2026	0.81114	0.77594	
2027	0.77005	0.73388	
2028	0.77656	0.73943	
2029	0.79261	0.73943	
2030	0.79613	0.75707	
2031	0.80547	0.76545	
2032	0.82192	0.78093	
2033	0.82301	0.78106	
2034	0.82299	0.78008	
2035	0.82297	0.77909	

Boom Model

To present a best-case scenario in terms of the estimated and projected size of the Labor Force Participation Rate in Berks County, referred to in this report as the Boom Model, we implemented a similar methodology to the Great Recession-inspired model described above.

Using the same Wage and Unemployment Rate data from 2006 to 2024 obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for Berks County, the TPMA team isolated a range of years in which the Unemployment Rate fell below the 5.72% average of the period 2006 - 2024 to indicate a positive economic turn with a strong labor force. The years selected occurred relatively recently in the historical data, between 2022 and 2024. For this phase of the analysis, the anchor year to calculate the change in Unemployment Rate is 2021, which the BLS reported was 6.0%.

Setting the anchor year at 2021 is appropriate for two reasons. The first is that the Unemployment Rate of 2021 was reported at 6.0%, slightly higher than the average for the years of data collected, which enables the ensuing calculations to follow a trend of a falling Unemployment Rate below the 5.72% average. Second, the following years 2022 through 2024 have Unemployment Rates that descend to 3.7% with a reduction in the growth rate of wages, which returns the modeled projection back toward the mean.

In a similar fashion to the Recession model, the growth in Wages year-to-year was adjusted in favor of an economic boom by multiplying the annual percentage of wage growth by 1.25 to introduce the effect of a booming local economy beyond the rate at which Wages naturally increased.

Table 18 below shows the values chosen for the Boom model of this analysis:

Table 18 Unemployment Rate and Wage Growth With Percent Change in UR and Adjusted Wage Growth Rate[16][17]

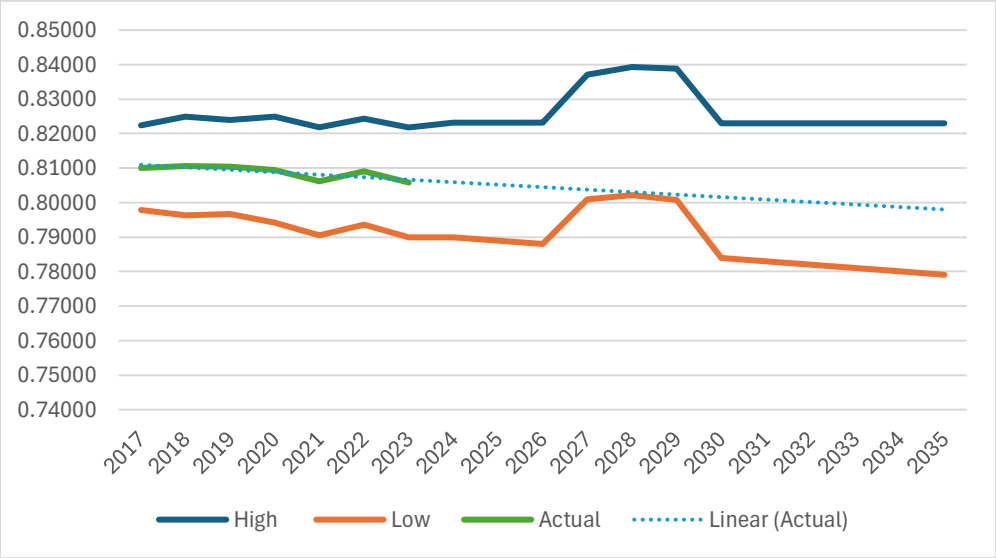
Year	Unemployment Rate	Percent Change from 2021	Wage Growth (YoY)	Adjusted Wage Growth Rate (Wage Growth * 1.25)
2022	4.1%	31.67%	2.9%	3.60%
2023	3.7%	38.33%	4.0%	5.01%
2024	3.7%	38.33%	3.6%	4.45%

[16] https://www.bls.gov/lau/tables.htm#cntyaa
[17] https://www.bls.gov/web/cewqtr.supp.toc.htm

With these numbers in hand, the calculations to project a range of Labor Force Participation Rates in a best-case scenario of a booming local economy are now possible. The formula is the same as shown in the Recession model (where x is the projected Labor Force Participation Rate).

When calculated to fruition, Figure 11 shows the effect of these values on the Berks County Labor Force Participation Rate in a model representing a boom time in which the Unemployment Rate is below 5.72%, and wage growth is between 3.6% and 5.01%:

Figure 11 Labor Force Participation Rate, Effect of Modeled Boom with High and Low Ranges



In this projection, utilizing the circumstances prescribed above, a potential boom in the local Berks County economy may anticipate a Labor Force Participation Rate as high as 83.9% for the target population between the ages of 25 – 64 at the high end of the range. A boom under the same conditions may only contribute to a peak Labor Force Participation Rate of 80.2% at the low end of the range in this projection. Table 19 below contains the values seen graphically in Figure 11 above.

Table 19 LFPR Values, Boom Model

Year	High	Low	Actual
2017	0.82234	0.79785	0.81010
2018	0.82484	0.79637	0.81060
2019	0.82388	0.79680	0.81034
2020	0.82491	0.79418	0.80954
2021	0.82182	0.79044	0.80613
2022	0.82443	0.79369	0.80906
2023	0.82178	0.78985	0.80582
2024	0.82320	0.78993	
2025	0.82318	0.78895	
2026	0.82316	0.78796	
2027	0.83716	0.80099	
2028	0.83931	0.80218	
2029	0.83886	0.80077	
2030	0.82308	0.78402	
2031	0.82306	0.78303	
2032	0.82303	0.78205	
2033	0.82301	0.78106	
2034	0.82299	0.78008	
2035	0.82297	0.77909	

LFPR Comparisons by County

Figure 12 Chester County Historic and Projected LFPR[18]

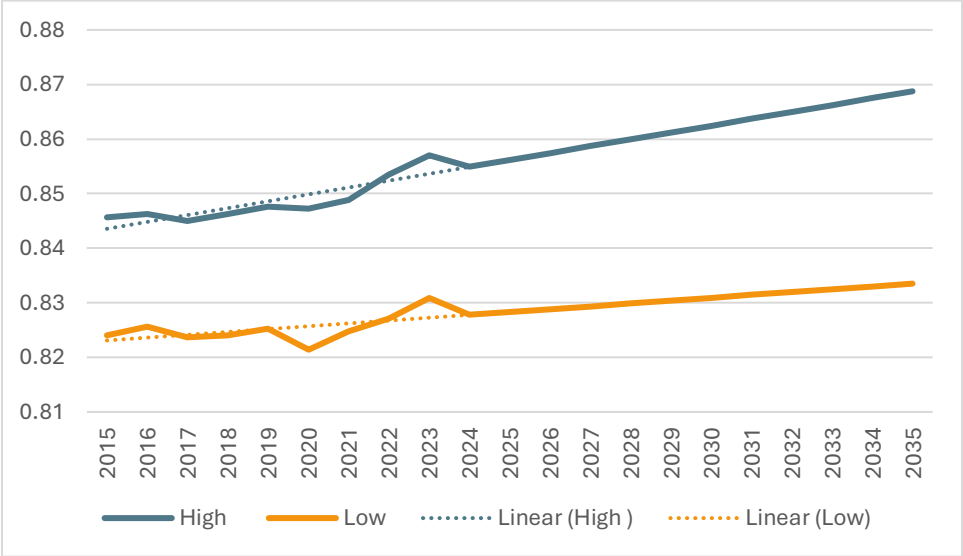
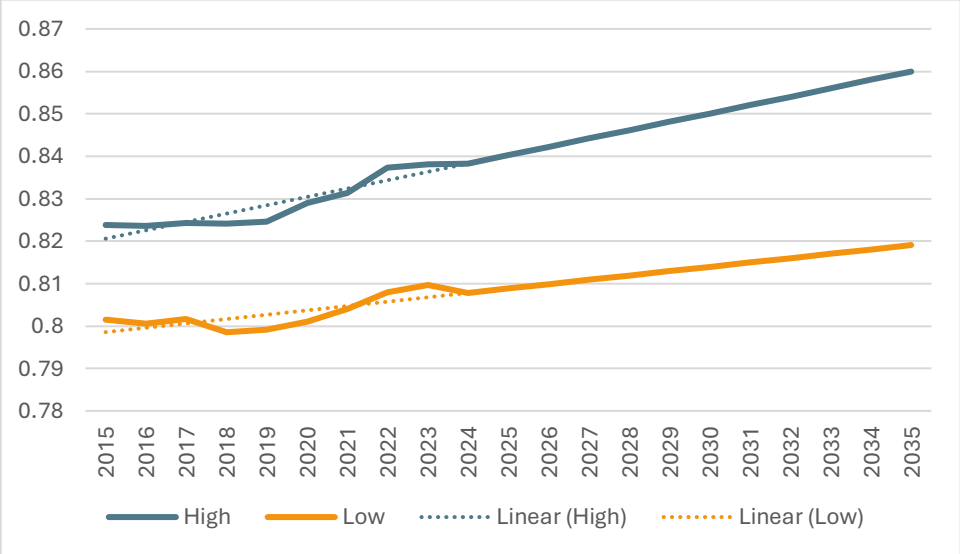


Figure 13 Lancaster County Historic and Projected LFPR[19]



[18] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=Chester+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Subject+Tables. (2015 – 2023

[19] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=Lancaster+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Subject+Tables. (2015 – 2023).

Figure 14 Lehigh Valley Historic and Projected LFPR [2021]

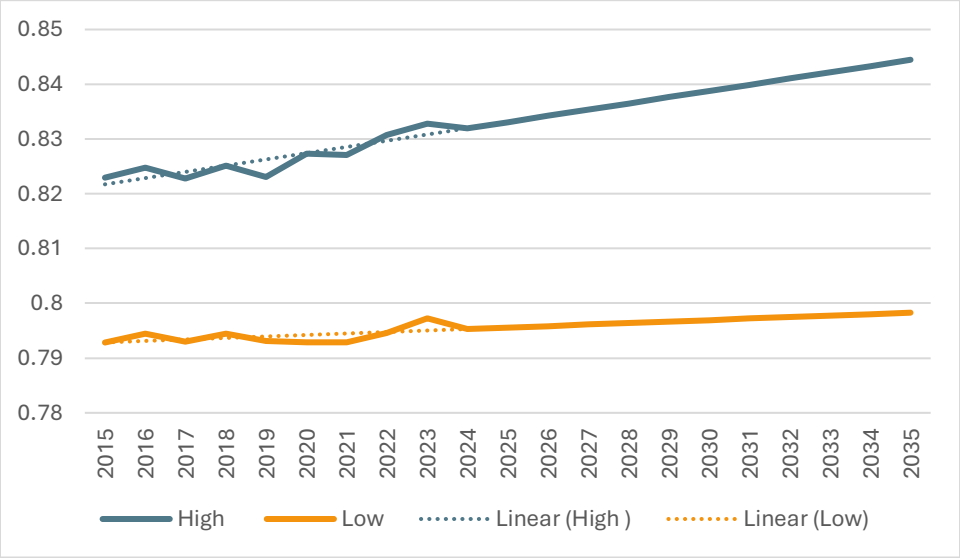
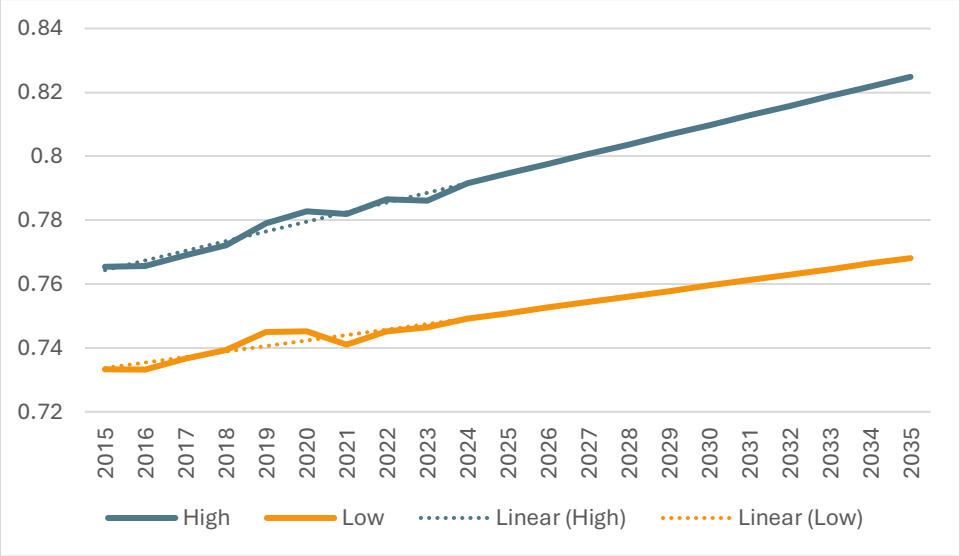


Figure 15 Luzerne-Schuylkill Historic and Projected LFPR[22]

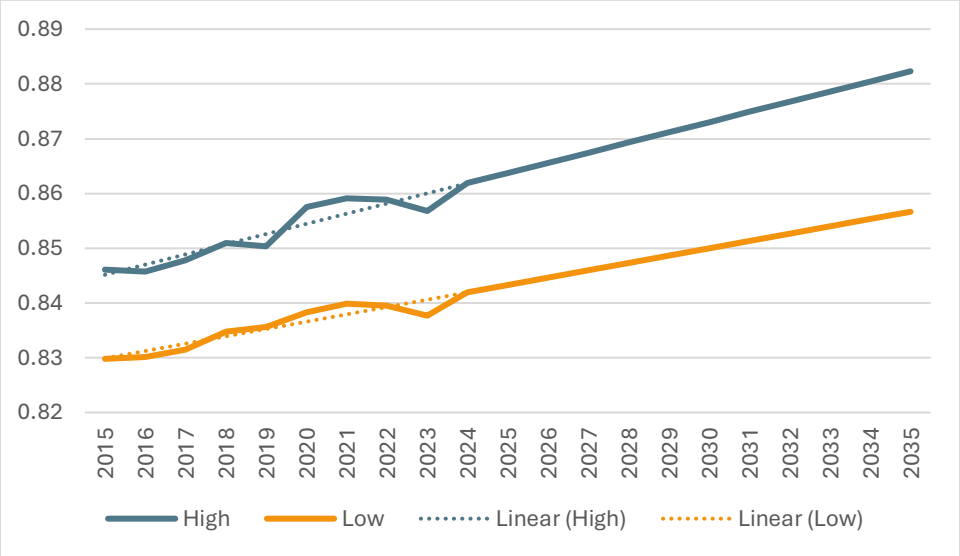


[20] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=lehigh+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Subject+Tables. (2015 – 2023)

[21] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=lehigh+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Subject+Tables. Accessed on May 2, 2025.

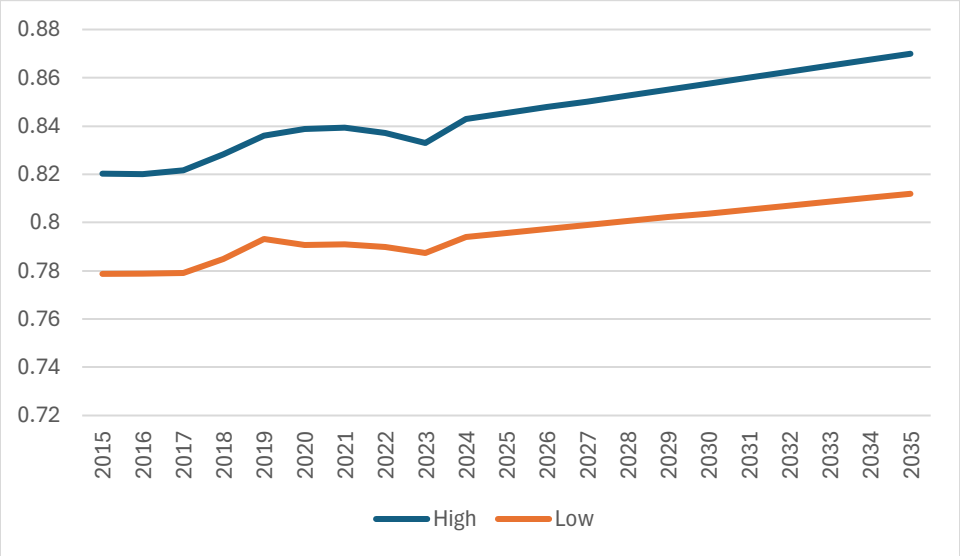
[22] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=luzerne+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Subject+Tables. (2015 – 2023)

Figure 16 Montgomery County Historic and Projected LFPR[23]



[23] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=Montgomery+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Subject+Tables. (2015-2023).

Figure 17 South Central Historic and Projected LFPR[24][25][26][27][28][29][30][31]



[24] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=Adams+County,+PA+s2301. (2015 – 2023)

[25] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=Cumberland+County,+PA+s2301. (2015-2023)

[26] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=dauphin+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Subject+Tables. (2015-2023)

[27] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=franklin+County,+PA+s2301. (2015 – 2023)

[28] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=juniata+County,+PA+s2301. (2015 – 2023)

[29] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=lebanon+County,+Pennsylvania+s2301&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Subject+Tables. (2015 – 2023)

[30] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=perry+County,+PA+s2301. (2015 – 2023)

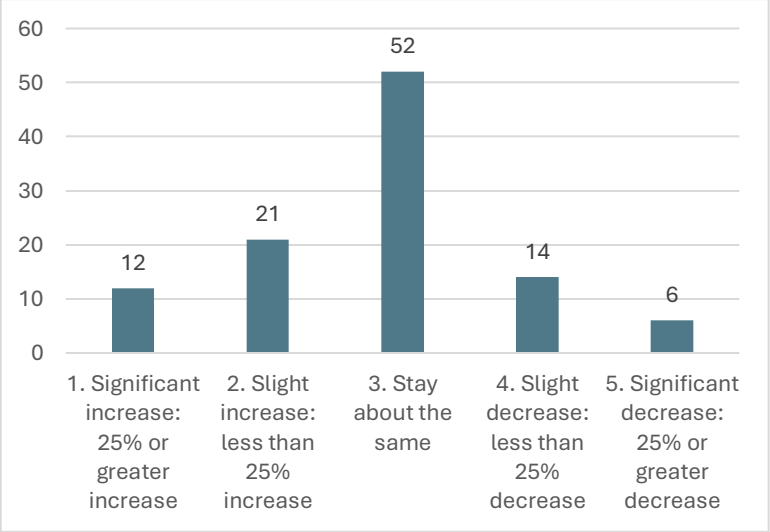
[31] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2301, 2023, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2301?q=york+County,+PA+s2301. (2015 – 2023)

Survey

Quantitative projections provide one view of how labor force participation in Berks County may shift over the coming decade. To complement these estimates, the employer survey offers a grounded perspective on how workforce size has changed in recent years and what employers expect going forward. These insights also inform recommendations for Berks County and partners on where to focus interventions to maximize LFPR within the next five years.

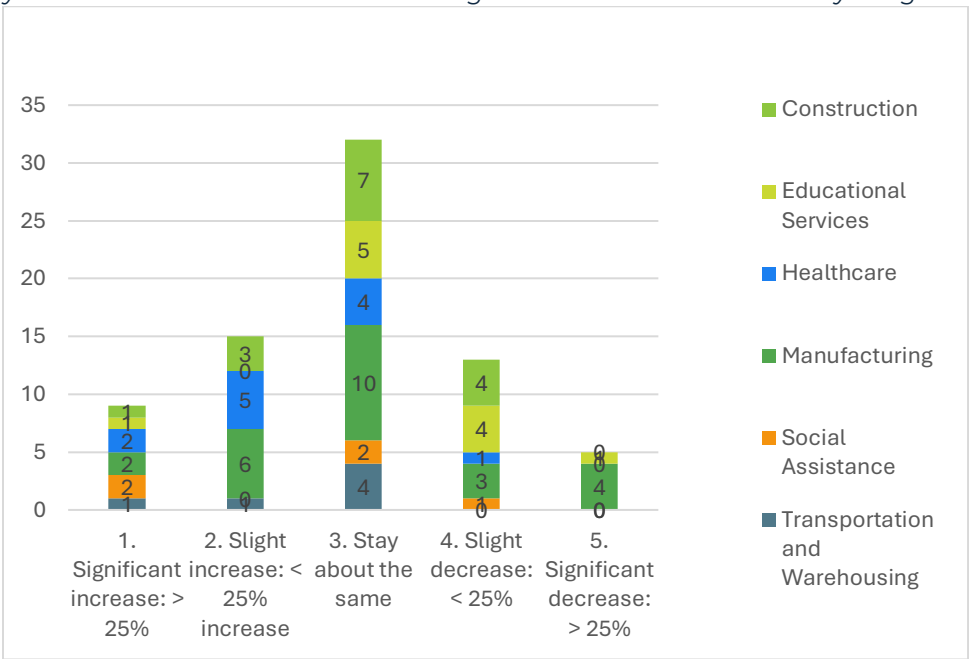
At your employer, has the number of people working in Berks County changed over the past five years? As shown Figure 18, most employers across Berks County reported either stable or increasing employment over the past five years. Among all respondents (n=105), 50% said their workforce size had stayed about the same, while 31% reported growth and 19% reported a decline. Overall, these results reflect a relatively steady employment landscape, with modest growth in many sectors and limite d significant reductions.

Figure 18 Employer Reflections on Workforce Changes in the Past Five Years



Across the six target industries, most employers reported stable or growing workforce levels over the past five years. Healthcare and Social Assistance showed the strongest signs of growth, while Construction and Transportation leaned toward stability. Manufacturing stood out for its mixed results, including the highest share of significant declines among all sectors.

Figure 19 Employer Reflections on Workforce Changes in the Past Five Years by Target Industry



At your employer, do you expect the number of employees in Berks County to change over the next five years? Most employers anticipate either stable or modestly increasing workforce levels in the coming years. Nearly half (43%) expect some level of growth, while only 7% anticipate a decline. The most common response— "stay about the same"—reflects overall expectations of continued workforce stability across sectors.

As shown in Figure 21, industry-level responses follow a similar pattern. Employers in Construction and Healthcare were especially optimistic, with the highest share of respondents expecting workforce growth. Educational Services and Manufacturing leaned toward stability, while Social Assistance and Transportation & Warehousing projected minimal change, with no significant declines reported in any sector.

Figure 20 Projected Change in Berks County Employment Over the Next Five Years

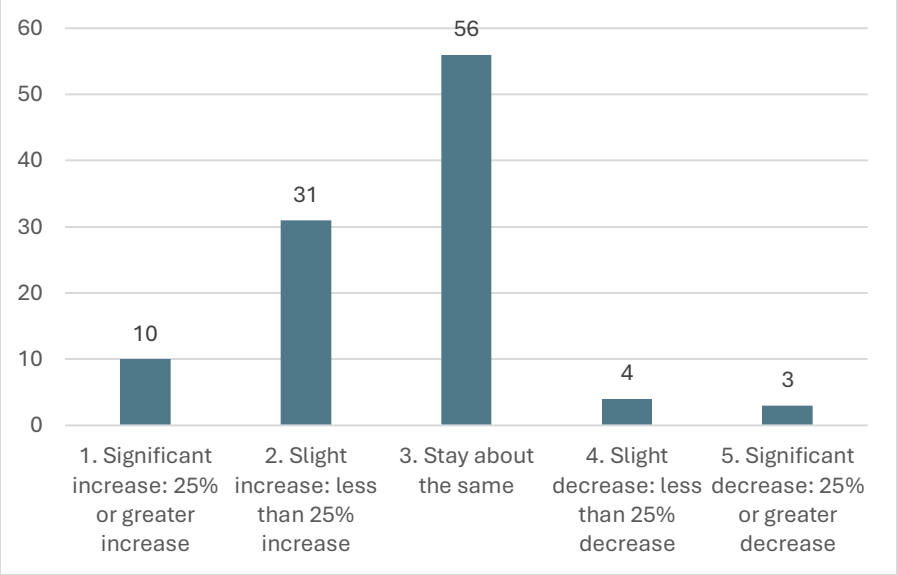
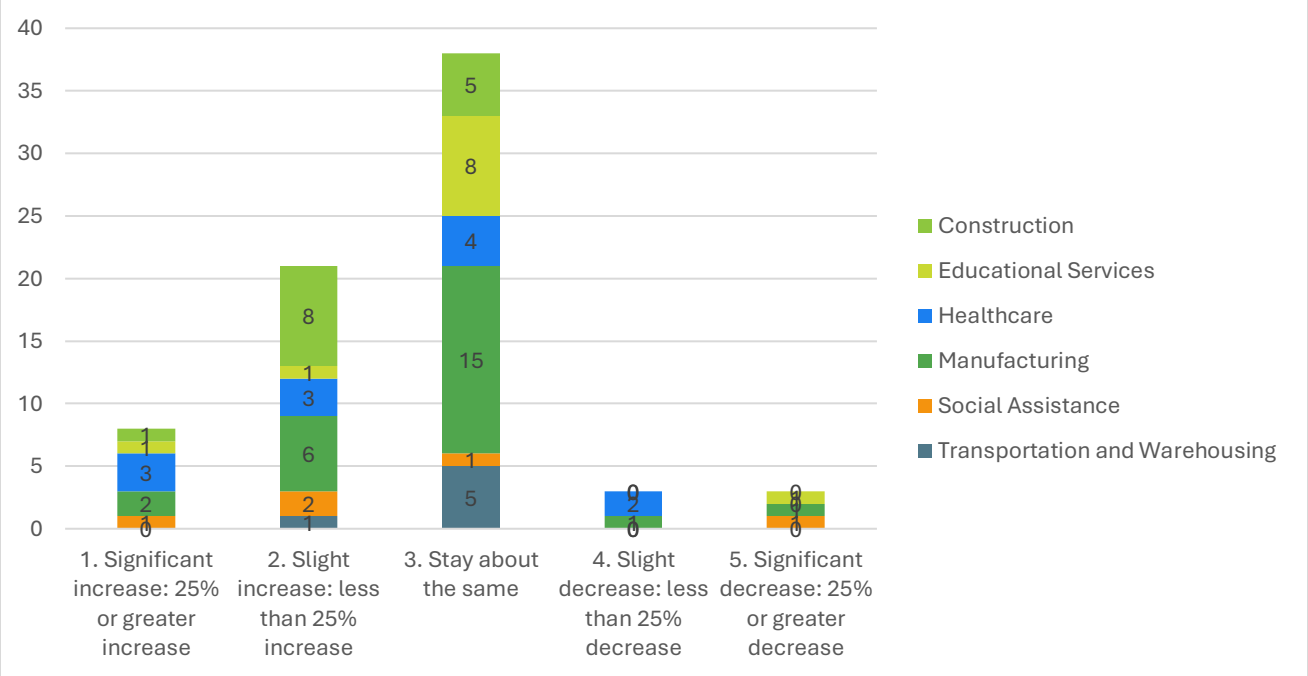


Figure 21 Employer Expectations for Workforce Growth or Decline in the Next Five Years by Industry



Interview and Focus Groups

Employers and educators across industries emphasized that early-career workers are seeking stronger alignment between personal values and workplace culture. Mission-driven roles, particularly in healthcare and community-focused organizations, continue to attract and retain individuals who are deeply committed to purpose-driven work. Many remain engaged in patient- and community-facing positions despite staffing shortages and demanding environments, citing fulfillment and meaning in serving others.

Interviews with local employers suggest that while mission can be a strong initial draw, other factors such as pay, scheduling, and workload often drive early exits from these same roles. Employers across industries report there is growing evidence that this values-oriented mindset is extending beyond traditional service-based sectors. Flexibility, supportive environments, and a clear sense of impact are becoming more influential than traditional metrics like salary or long-term advancement. As a result, organizations in all fields are rethinking how they design roles, foster belonging, and communicate their mission to attract and retain the next generation of talent.

"I think the best way to get the youth engaged in a job is through the company's culture... they want to see a long-term career track." -Regional Workforce Leader

From stakeholder interviews, several workforce challenges emerged as symptoms of this broader shift in values and expectations among job seekers:

- **Fewer applicants and higher turnover for entry-level roles,** as individuals opt for positions in other sectors that offer similar pay but more predictable hours or less demanding conditions.
- **Persistent challenges remain in filling both frontline roles and specialized positions** that require advanced credentials, such as licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs), physicians, accountants, and grant writers.
- **Growing reluctance among staff to pursue leadership or supervisory roles**. Even when employees are qualified for advancement, they are often hesitant to take on additional responsibilities due to concerns about workload, stress, and work-life balance. This reluctance has weakened internal pipelines and made it more difficult to fill critical mid-level positions.

“For many younger individuals, they value their time, and they don’t want those calls after hours… they’re fine to stay at the status quo because they’re making a good wage without some of the pressures that come with management” – Manufacturing Employer

While labor force participation among prime-age workers remains a clear strength in Berks County, stakeholder feedback underscores the need for responsive workforce strategies. Evolving values around advancement, flexibility, and workplace culture are reshaping how individuals approach employment. To sustain workforce participation and support long-term retention, employers and education providers will need to adapt their training, recruitment, and career development models to better align with the expectations of today’s workforce.

Appendix F. Education, Numeracy, and Literacy

Quantitative Research

Educational Attainment

To establish comparisons between Berks County, the surrounding LWDAs, and the Commonwealth in terms of educational attainment, TPMA used Lightcast™ to attain data for 2024 and the projected year of 2035. This data leaves out curriculum and is presented merely for comparisons across the WDAs and the Commonwealth.

For the South Central, Lehigh Valley, and Luzerne-Schuylkill WDAs, each level of Educational Attainment must be weighted to account for population differences among the counties that comprise these three LWDAs.

To accomplish this, a straightforward calculation provides the weighted averages needed for this analysis. See the following example with real numbers for high school graduates in the Luzerne-Schuylkill LWDA in 2024:

Step 1: Add the populations together of like educational attainments of each county in the multi-county WDA. This provides a sum of the populations at a given level of attainment for the entire LWDA.

County	Population
High School Diploma (Luzerne)	86,588
High School Diploma (Schuylkill)	45,830
Total	132,418

Step 2: Divide the population of a given level of attainment in a county by the total population of all educational attainments in the respective county to obtain the percentage of overall attainment in that county at that level.

Luzerne	86,588 / 234,510 =	0.437432437
Schuylkill	45,830 / 104,771 =	0.369230473

Step 3: Multiply the population of each attainment per county by the percentage of the total that level of attainment represents in the county.

Luzerne	45,830 * 0.437432437 =	20,047.67641
Schuylkill	86,588 * 0.369230473 =	31,970.96229

Step 4: Sum these products together.

20,047.67641 + 31,970.96229 =	52,018.63871

Step 5: Divide the sum by the total population found in Step 1.

52,018.63871 / 132,418 =	0.392835337 (39%)

Table 20 Educational Attainment, Berks County and the Commonwealth,

	Berks		Commonwealth	
Education Level	2024	2035	2024	2035
Less Than 9th Grade	5%	4%	3%	2%
9th Grade to 12th Grade	7%	6%	5%	4%
High School Diploma	36%	36%	33%	30%
Some College	15%	14%	15%	15%
Associate's Degree	10%	11%	9%	10%
Bachelor's Degree	17%	18%	21%	23%
Graduate Degree and Higher	*10%*	*11%*	*14%*	*16%*

Table 21 Educational Attainment, Comparisons of Berks County and Surrounding WDAs, 2024 and 2035

	Berks		South Central		Lehigh Valley		Luzerne-Schuylkill		Chester		Lancaster		Montgomery	
Education Level	**2024**	**2035**	**2024**	**2035**	**2024**	**2035**	**2024**	**2035**	**2024**	**2035**	**2024**	**2035**	**2024**	**2035**
Less Than 9th Grade	5%	4%	3%	2%	3%	4%	4%	5%	2%	2%	6%	6%	2%	2%
9th Grade to 12th Grade	7%	6%	6%	5%	5%	4%	6%	6%	2%	2%	6%	4%	3%	3%
High School Diploma	36%	36%	37%	32%	33%	31%	39%	37%	18%	16%	34%	32%	22%	20%
Some College	15%	14%	16%	9%	16%	16%	17%	16%	13%	12%	14%	14%	13%	12%
Associate's Degree	10%	11%	9%	10%	10%	10%	11%	13%	6%	6%	8%	9%	7%	8%
Bachelor's Degree	17%	18%	19%	21%	21%	22%	15%	15%	33%	35%	21%	23%	30%	31%
Graduate Degree and Higher	10%	11%	12%	21%	13%	14%	9%	9%	24%	27%	12%	13%	23%	24%

*Totals may add up to greater than 100% due to rounding.

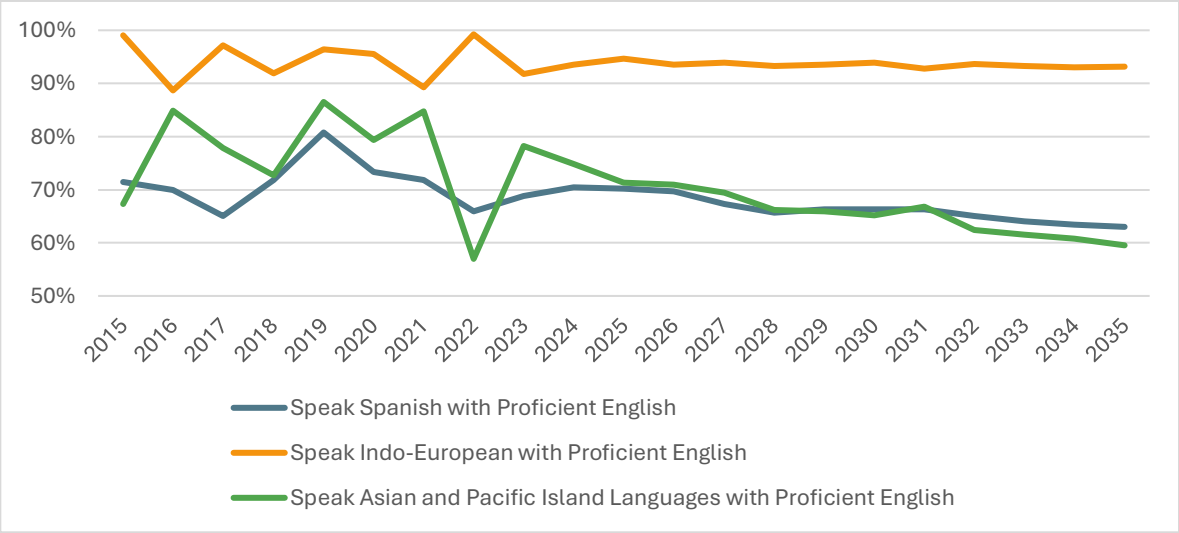
English Language Proficiency

To account for adults in Berks County and surrounding LWDAs that are not covered by the 8th grade assessments, especially those who speak languages other than English, TPMA turned to the American Community Survey. TPMA gathered data on the language spoken at home with some level of English proficiency for the adult population between the ages of 18-64.

For each language, the ACS reports a population of individuals who speak that language who can also speak English "not at all", "not well", "well", or "very well". The number of individuals who can speak English "well" and "very well" was isolated in this analysis as a proxy for English proficiency.

With those numbers available for years 2015-2023 for those that speak Spanish, Indo-European languages, (the U.S. Census Bureau designates Indo-European languages to include, but not be limited to, languages such as Spanish, German, French, and Italian[32]) and Asian and Pacific Island Languages, a linear forecasting formula was applied to the results to forecast the trends to 2035.

Figure 22 Adult English Language Proficiency of Foreign Language Speakers, Ages 18-64[33]



[32] New Data on Detailed Languages Spoken at Home and the Ability to Speak English. *U.S. Census Bureau*. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2025/2017-2021-acs-language-use-tables.html

[33] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Age by Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B16004, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B16004?q=berks+county,+pa+b16004. (2015-2023).

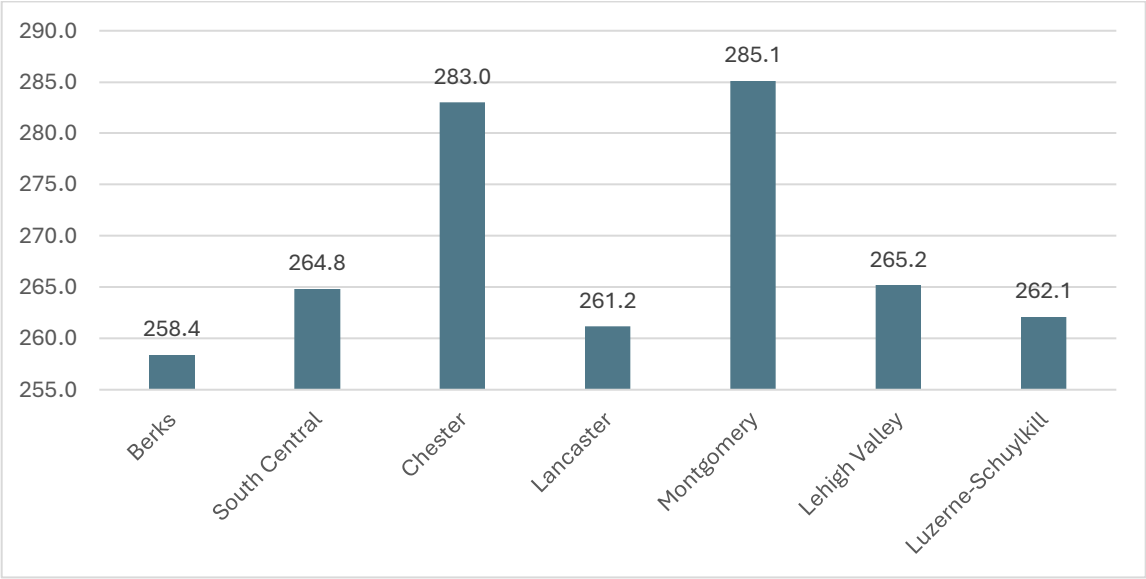
Based on this model, similar declines are projected for English proficiency among Spanish Speakers and Asian and Pacific Island language speakers in Berks County from 2024 to 2035 based on known estimation values from 2015 through 2023. A limitation of this approach is that most current data is only available up to 2023, and the linear forecasting methodology may accurately display trends into the future, but not specific values or percentages.

Another limitation is the general distinction of Indo-European and Asian and Pacific Island Languages speakers in relation to the specificity of Spanish speakers. However, this limitation does highlight the high proportion of Hispanic and Latino residents in Berks County. As reported in the Berks County Workforce Development Board Multi-Year Local Plan (2025-2028), Berks County is home to a larger portion of Hispanic or Latino residents than any other race or ethnicity, supported by data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2018-2022) and other sources.[34] In terms of the local workforce, there is a higher likelihood of accommodations to understand and speak English being necessary for Spanish speakers than for those speaking Indo-European or Asian and Pacific Island Languages. A nuance to Figure 8 is that while it appears Spanish speakers and Asian and Pacific Island Language speakers decrease in proficiency at relatively the same rate, the sheer numbers of these speakers are drastically different, leading to different levels of importance in outcome. The average number of Spanish speakers who can at least speak English "well" is 31,869, compared to an average of 1,612 for those speaking Asian and Pacific Island Language speakers.

Additionally, TPMA sourced data from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) to examine the literacy skills of residents of Berks County outside of the standardized 8th grade assessments in comparison to the surrounding WDAs. Results of this analysis are reported in terms of an average scoring system the PIAAC uses. In cases where a WDA is comprised of more than one county, a weighted average was calculated to control for the population differences among the counties in the respective WDA as reported by the PIAAC based on the Census Bureau American Community Survey data gathered between 2013-2017.

[34] Berks County Workforce Development Board Multi-Year Local Plan. *Berks County Workforce Development Board*.

Figure 23 PIAAC Literacy Score, Per WDA[35]



To interpret this data, we must know that the PIAAC registers these scores on a scale from 0-500 with cutoffs at 176, 226, 276, 326, and 376. According to these cutoffs, Berks County ranks in the same bracket as the South Central, Lancaster, Lehigh Valley, and Luzerne-Schuylkill WDAs in terms of literacy skills for the population defined by the PIAAC between the ages of 16-74. In this bracket, the PIAAC defines literacy skills in the following way:

"At this level, the medium texts may be digital or printed, and texts may comprise continuous, non-continuous, or mixed types. Tasks at this level require respondents to make matches between the text and information and may require paraphrasing or low-level inferences. Some competing pieces of information may be present. Some tasks require respondents to:

- Cycle through or integrate two or more pieces of information based on criteria.
- Compare and contrast or reason about information requested in the question; or
- Navigate within digital texts to access-and-identify information from various parts of a document."[36]

[35] https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/
[36]The Survey of Adult Skills Reader's Companion. *OECD*. 2013. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2013/10/the-survey-of-adult-skills_g1g34649/9789264204027-en.pdf

When it comes to applying literacy skills at the level described above to the key industries contained in this report, there are several implications. As in the case of Construction or Manufacturing industries, literacy skills at the level Berks County has been scored at by the PIAAC may not interfere with completion of routine, entry level tasks. Job taskings at this level may typically require standard, operationalized processes that are underpinned by repetitive or routine physical actions which are within the average literacy ranking. Roles above these that may require scheduling, planning, strategizing, or design may be more apt to require individuals to cycle through sources, find conflicting or supporting information, and follow up on references to incomplete information. These roles may be more managerial, or professional, in nature.

The Chester and Montgomery WDAs ranked higher than the others in this section of the analysis and are placed in the next higher scoring bracket. The WDA defines literacy skills in this higher bracket as:

"Texts at this level are often dense or lengthy, and include continuous, non-continuous, mixed, or multiple pages of text. Understanding text and rhetorical structures become more central to successfully completing tasks, especially navigating complex digital texts. Tasks require the respondent to identify, interpret, or evaluate one or more pieces of information, and often require varying levels of inference. Many tasks require the respondent to construct meaning across larger chunks of text or perform multi-step operations to identify and formulate responses. Often tasks also demand that the respondent disregard irrelevant or inappropriate content to answer accurately. Competing information is often present, but it is not more prominent than correct information".[37]

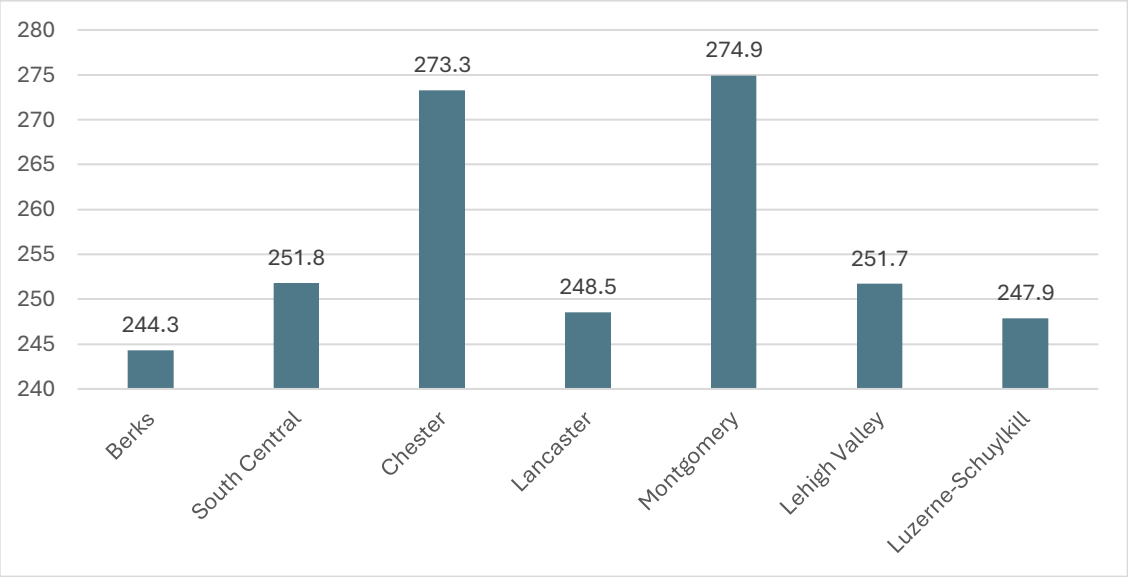
Applied Math and Numeracy Proficiency

This section examines the applied math and numeracy proficiency of the Berks County workforce in both current and projected contexts, benchmarking performance against surrounding LWDAs and the Commonwealth as a whole. The analysis identifies relative strengths and gaps that may influence employability, training needs, and long-term economic competitiveness.

[37] The Survey of Adult Skills Reader's Companion. *OECD*. 2013. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2013/10/the-survey-of-adult-skills_g1g34649/9789264204027-en.pdf

Comparative numeracy analysis proceeded in the same fashion as the literacy analysis above, based on the same data set from the PIAAC. LWDAs comprised of multiple counties had weighted averages calculated to account for population differences.

Figure 24 PIAAC Numeracy Score, by WDA



Unlike the literacy analysis, all WDAs score in the same bracket. According to the PIAAC, scores in this bracket involve:

"Tasks at this level require the respondent to understand mathematical information that may be less explicit, embedded in contexts that are not always familiar and represented in more complex ways. Tasks require several steps and may involve the choice of problem-solving strategies and relevant processes. Tasks tend to require the application of number sense and spatial sense; recognizing and working with mathematical relationships, patterns, and proportions, expressed in verbal or numerical form; and interpretation, and basic analysis of data and statistics in texts, tables and graphs".[38]

[38] The Survey of Adult Skills Reader's Companion. *OECD*. 2013. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2013/10/the-survey-of-adult-skills_g1g34649/9789264204027-en.pdf

Standardized Measurement: Current and Projected Levels & Importance of Written Comprehension & Mathematical Reasoning

On the demand side of the analysis, we utilize scores and rankings from O*NET, focusing on the "Importance" and "Level" values assigned to various "Abilities" that are tied to the importance of literacy and numeracy to all specific occupations. O*NET defines these concepts in a very specific manner, so before proceeding to a review of our methods, it is worthwhile to examine each in turn.

Abilities- the "enduring attributes of the individual that influence performance" of an occupation. O*NET considers a full array of abilities categories for nearly all the current occupations recognized by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, down to the 6-digit SOC level. Every ability, for each job, is assigned a unique score (explained below), rating its relative importance for an individual to successfully perform the required tasks associated with the occupation. These abilities are classified into one of four general categories: Cognitive, Physical, Psychomotor, and Sensory.

To gauge the importance and level of requisite skill of the literacy and numeracy indicators we examined above, we focused on the *Cognitive* category, which is comprised of abilities "that influence the acquisition and application of knowledge in problem solving"[39]. Specifically, we utilized the scores assigned to the following abilities:

1. **Written Comprehension**-ability to read and understand written information and ideas
2. **Mathematical Reasoning**- ability to choose the right methods or formulae to correctly solve problems

Importance- the score for importance is drawn from surveys of job holders and industry experts in which they were asked to rank, on a scale of 1 to 5, how important the ability is to successful performance of key job tasks. Once aggregated and averaged, each occupation is assigned a unique, original score between the values of 1 and 5. A score of 1 indicates the ability is "not important" for completion of the job tasks while a score of 5 indicates that the ability is "extremely important".

[39] Information from the Abilities heading comes from: https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/browse/1.A/1.A.1/1.A.1.d/1.A.1.c/1.A.1.a

Level- the score for level is, once again, drawn from a collection of surveys of job holders and industry experts, aggregated and averaged. However, this level score can range from 0 to 7 and represents a continuum along which the job holder must achieve a certain level of proficiency to perform the job. The higher the score, the higher the degree of mastery of the given ability required for the occupation under review. For example, while the ability of "speaking" is important for both paralegals (level score of 54) and lawyers (level score of 70), it is more important for lawyers. The difference in level scores is akin to being able to interview individuals about the personal and work history (score of 57) vs. being able to argue a case before the Supreme Court (level score of 85).

Adding to the complexity of importance vs. level scores is the decision by O*NET to standardize both along a 100-point scale to enable direct comparison across the categories. Because the level and importance scales each have a different range of possible scores, (Level is 0-7, Importance is 1-5), it is not always intuitively obvious how they can be compared. To address this and make the information more accessible to a wider range of users, O*NET standardizes all ratings to a scale ranging from 0 to 100[40] through the following formula:

Standard Score = {(Original Rating-Lowest Possible)/ (Highest Possible-Lowest Possible)} *100

In practical terms, consider the example of an occupation rated as 3.5, the mid-point of the level scale (0-7). This occupation level score is standardized as follows:

Standard Score = {(3.5-0)/ (7-0)} *100
Standard Score = (3.5/7) *100
Standard Score = (.5) *100
Standard Score = 50

Working through this example, we see how a mid-point score on a 7-point scale (3.5) is translated into a mid-point score on a 100-point scale (50). The process is identical and yields the same results on the 5-point scale used to rank importance of an ability, using low and high values of 1 and 5, respectively, in the standardization formula above.

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[40] Documentation on how scores are standardized, as well as examples and explanation of levels and importance scores can be found at: https://www.onetonline.org/help/online/scales#score. A full examination of the methods and procedures used to score abilities can be found at: https://www.onetcenter.org/dl_files/AnalystProc.pdf

Finally, to enable direct comparability to the 4 levels of proficiency identified in PSSA scores (below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced), we attempt to deconstruct the score ranges provided by the PA Department of Education and translate them into a simple 100-point scale to better align with O*NET occupational abilities scale. This step proves somewhat challenging, as the ranges and even the upper limit of the scale can change, year over year. However, based on the understanding that a "perfect" score is 1800 points on any particular assessment, we utilize the latest round of published ranges[41] and standardize, using 1800 as the denominator.

Table 22 Standardized PSSA Performance Levels and Cut Scores

Mathematics				Reading		
Performance Level	**Cut Scores**	**Standardized**		**Performance Level**	**Cut Scores**	**Standardized**
Below Basic	700-1170	65 or lower		Below Basic	700-1145	64 or lower
Basic	1171-1283	66 to 71		Basic	1146-1279	65 to 71
Proficient	1284-1445	72 to 80		Proficient	1280-1472	72 to 82
Advanced	1446-1800	81 to 100		Advanced	1473-1800	83 to 100

Table 22 above uses the published cut scores and levels for the 8th grade assessments, with slightly different values reported for Mathematics and Reading assessments. Though minor, these different ranges show that a student must achieve a higher score on reading assessments to move out of the below basic category and into each successive performance level. Regardless, by dividing the upper and lower values of each cut score range by 1800, we can translate the values into a 100-point scale that can be compared with the standardized, 100-point scale developed by O*NET discussed above. These standardized scores, it should be noted, are a starting point when it comes to classifying jobs along PSSA proficiency levels and only work if each comparison sample includes values that cover the entire range of possibilities (0 to 100). The maximum values of O*NET abilities scores seldom reach the highest possible value of 100 and the lowest possible values of PSSA scores will not reach the absolute low value of 0. Because of this, some latitude will need to be taken when conducting comparisons across O*NET and PSSA scores, explained in detail in each subsequent section.

[41] https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pssa/pssa%20and%20pssa-m%20performance%20level%20cut%20scores.pdf

Methods: Tying O*NET Scores to Occupations

Armed with Occupation-level O*NET scores for levels and importance of abilities that can be tied directly to literacy and numeracy proficiency, we next need to attach, aggregate, and weight these unique scores to the universe of occupations (both current and projected) in Berks County. As a baseline, our first step was to download from Lightcast™ all occupations, at the 6-digit SOC level, in the county, with current and projected counts of positions and openings, annually, from 2025 through 2035. We also appended this data with information on typical entry-level education requirements, automation risk, age and gender breakdowns, and median wages for additional analysis.

Next, we added the unique occupation-specific scores[42] for the level and importance measures for all 6 of the abilities tied to literacy and numeracy (identified above) to the employment and openings data collected from Lightcast™. After merging the O*NET abilities scores with the Berks County-specific data on all occupations, we were able to use a series of pivot tables and breakouts to look for both any anticipated changes[43] in demand and the distribution of occupation levels and importance, vis-à-vis literacy and numeracy abilities, over the next decade.

The range of scores, it is important to note, for the occupations within Berks County varies considerably from level to importance and by ability. There is no perfect distribution across the categories, and when considering certain abilities, there can be very few of the highest-level scores in the County- or anywhere. As a way of an example, consider the Mathematical Reasoning ability from O*NET. The level required on this ability to "determine the mathematics required to simulate a space craft landing on the moon" is equivalent to a score of 85. Now, the mathematics required to accomplish such a feat are some of the most difficult known to exist, so clearly few- if any- occupations will require a score higher than 85. Indeed, when considering the occupation scores on this ability, the highest value reported is 86 (out of 100 possible)- which is the level expected of a professional mathematician (SOC 15-2021) to successfully complete their job functions. Because these scores are all relative, again, it is necessary to exercise a certain degree of latitude when assigning levels such as advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic to each occupation's ability requirement.

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[42] These ability-specific scores can be found and downloaded directly from O*NET at: https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/browse/1.A/1.A.1

[43]

To achieve this as objectively as possible, we consider the top-level occupations in each ability and adjust the requisite scores appropriately to create a link between job skill demands and student proficiency supply.

Future Jobs: Mathematical Reasoning and Written Comprehension

Starting with the Mathematical Reasoning ability, *Table 23* below highlights the current and projected distribution of occupations in the county, classified by the importance of mathematical reasoning to job completion. The job counts and percent change calculations in the table are for ALL jobs in Berks County, regardless of typical entry level education requirements for occupations.

*Table 23 importance of Mathematical Reasoning to Occupations in Berks County, by O*NET Score*

O*NET Score, IMPORTANCE	Jobs, 2025	Percent of Jobs, 2025	Jobs 2030	Percent of Jobs 2030	Jobs 2035	Percent of Jobs 2035	Change in Jobs, 2025-2035
0-9	282	0.15%	280	0.15%	275	0.14%	-7
10-19	7,299	3.82%	7,222	3.77%	7,137	3.76%	-162
20-29	66,230	34.63%	67,278	35.14%	67,367	35.45%	1,137
30-39	37,278	19.49%	37,258	19.46%	36,874	19.40%	-404
40-49	42,166	22.04%	41,559	21.71%	40,877	21.51%	-1,289
50-59	29,657	15.51%	29,571	15.45%	29,360	15.45%	-298
60-69	4,520	2.36%	4,540	2.37%	4,531	2.38%	11
70-79	3,647	1.91%	3,533	1.85%	3,431	1.81%	-217
80-89	121	0.06%	122	0.06%	123	0.06%	2
90-100	76	0.04%	78	0.04%	80	0.04%	5

Overall, when evaluating the importance of Mathematical Reasoning to the essential functions of jobs in Berks County, many occupations fall within the range of 20-49. Collectively, these categories capture 76.16% of all jobs in the county, circa 2025. This number is projected to remain largely stagnant through 2035, when jobs with an Importance score between 20 and 49 will make up 76.36% of all jobs in the county. Interestingly, both the largest gaining and falling categories appear within this relative mid-point range, with the 20-29 group projected to add 1,137 jobs and the 40-49 group projected to shed 1,289 jobs. This key category (scores of 20-49) contains 561 unique occupations[44].

Looking at the outlying scores- those below 20 and above 49- similarly, little movement is projected over the next decade. However, the lowest cohorts (score of 0-19) are projected to shed 169 jobs while the highest importance cohorts (scores of 80 to 100) are projected to add a modest 7 positions.

Turning next to the LEVEL of Mathematical Reasoning ability required to successfully perform job functions, two methodological notes are important. First, the maximum score possible on the O*NET mastery scale is 86, the ability level required of professional mathematicians. This will be important to keep in mind when aligning "Advanced" PSSA performance to comparable O*NET values later and will require some manual adjustment. Second, when ranking the level of mastery of a given skill for any occupation, respondents to the O*NET survey can respond "not relevant", which is reported as its own, non-numerical category. This means there is no value between 0-100 assigned to these occupations, something we adjust for by simply adding these incidences to the 0-9 score category. This change is minimal for Berks County- less than 400 out of approximately 91,000+ jobs in the county are coded as "not relevant" when it comes to mathematical reasoning. With these caveats in mind,

Table 24 below provides breakouts for occupations, by LEVEL of required mastery for Mathematical Reasoning.

*Table 24 Level of Mathematical Reasoning Required for Occupations in Berks County, by O*NET Score*

O*NET Score, LEVEL	Jobs, 2025	Percent of Jobs, 2025	Jobs 2030	Percent of Jobs 2030	Jobs 2035	Percent of Jobs 2035	Change in Jobs,

[44] The full list of occupations and their affiliated mathematical reasoning importance and level scores can be viewed and downloaded at: https://www.onetonline.org/find/descriptor/result/1.A.1.c.1

							2025-2035
0-9*	2,571	1.34%	2,582	1.35%	2,569	1.35%	-2
10-19	14,396	7.53%	14,294	7.47%	14,082	7.41%	-314
20-29	71,653	37.46%	72,509	37.88%	72,427	38.11%	774
30-39	50,616	26.46%	50,165	26.20%	49,459	26.02%	-1,157
40-49	36,048	18.85%	35,999	18.80%	35,755	18.81%	-293
50-59	14,701	7.69%	14,610	7.63%	14,493	7.63%	-208
60-69	1,158	0.61%	1,147	0.60%	1,135	0.60%	-23
70-79	93	0.05%	93	0.05%	93	0.05%	0
80-89	40	0.02%	40	0.02%	42	0.02%	2

*Includes jobs where mathematical reasoning level is reported as “not relevant”

Once again, when considering the overall breakouts of O*NET ability levels, unsurprisingly many jobs fall within what could be considered mid-skilled level, the range of 20-49. Within this group, the 20-29 level category will see the largest net change in jobs between now and 2035, adding an estimated 774 positions. While there are 258 unique, 5-digit SOC codes within the 20-29 category,

Table 25 and

Table 26 report the biggest gainers and their affiliated O*NET Level scores. The biggest declining group is the 30-39 cohort, projected to shed 1,157 jobs by 2035.

Table 25 Top Gainers, 20-29 Level of Mathematical Reasoning

O*NET Level, Mathematical Reasoning	SOC	Job Description	Jobs Change, 2025 to 2035
29	31-1128	Home Health and Personal Care Aides	1,012
20	53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	231
21	53-7065	Stockers and Order Fillers	229
21	51-2028	Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Assemblers, Except Coil Winders, Tapers, and Finishers	154
29	53-3054	Taxi Drivers	78
25	51-4121	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	65
29	53-7051	Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators	63
21	51-3022	Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers	59
21	39-2021	Animal Caretakers	51
29	31-1131	Nursing Assistants	43
29	53-3033	Light Truck Drivers	41
29	25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	40

Table 26 Top Decliners, 30-39 Level of Mathematical Reasoning

O*NET Level, Mathematical Reasoning	SOC	Job Description	Jobs Change, 2025 to 2035
32	41-2031	Retail Salespersons	- 352
37	43-9061	Office Clerks, General	- 283
30	43-4051	Customer Service Representatives	- 282
39	43-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	- 132
30	25-9045	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	- 90
34	41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	- 88
30	43-5071	Shipping, Receiving, and Inventory Clerks	- 71
37	43-6011	Executive Secretaries and Executive Administrative Assistants	- 66
34	51-9061	Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, and Weighers	- 46

Considering the entire universe of jobs within Berks County through the lens of Mathematical Reasoning level, several high-level observations emerge.

1. There is not projected to be a significant change- neither increase nor decrease- in the overall level of Mathematical Reasoning required to meet the overall workforce needs of the County through 2035.
2. Mid-level positions, that is, those with scores between 20 and 39 are anticipated to see the most change, as it were, with absolute gains/losses all but cancelled out when further disaggregating the categories into groupings of 20-29 (gains) and 30-39 (losses)
3. High-level skill positions (score of 60 or higher) make up a small percentage of jobs within the County, accounting for less than 1% of all jobs.

Next, we consider written comprehension through a similar lens. Although the overall importance of written comprehension, in general, will decline over the next decade (described above), we see a slightly different trend in the LEVEL of written comprehension required through 2035. While the lowest-skill cohorts (49 or lower) all see modest decreases through 2035 (net loss of 280 jobs collectively), the biggest decline will be in the mid-range

level of skill. For occupations that require written comprehension skills of between 50 and 59, there will be a drop of approximately 1,445 jobs through 2035. On the opposite end of the scale, we do see increases in occupations that require higher levels of written comprehension skills, with the 60-69 category expected to add 456 occupations and the 70-79 category expected to add 48 jobs.

While we will map these changes to PSSA performance in the next section, once again some salient themes emerge:

- There will be modest change in the skill levels required across the entire universe of jobs in the region, vis-à-vis written comprehension. The biggest "change" category (scores of 50-59) although significant at 1,445 jobs represents only just under 2.5% of all jobs in that category, circa 2025
- Higher skill jobs will indeed increase in absolute volume over the next decade, with the categories 60-69 and 70-79 (the high points of the scale for written comprehension) representing the only groups that will see growth.

Turning now to the Written Comprehension scores for occupations in the region, the table below breaks out the jobs in 2025, 2030, and 2035 by required LEVEL of written comprehension.

Table 27 Level of Written Comprehension Required, Jobs in Berks County

O*NET Score, LEVEL	Jobs, 2025	Percent of Jobs, 2025	Jobs 2030	Percent of Jobs 2030	Jobs 2035	Percent of Jobs 2035	Change in Jobs, 2025-2035
20-29	4,926	2.58%	4,916	2.57%	4,847	2.55%	-78
30-39	20,401	10.67%	20,498	10.71%	20,334	10.70%	-67
40-49	87,160	45.57%	87,556	45.74%	87,025	45.79%	-135
50-59	58,240	30.45%	57,578	30.08%	56,796	29.88%	-1,445
60-69	15,111	7.90%	15,426	8.06%	15,567	8.19%	456
70-79	5,437	2.84%	5,467	2.86%	5,485	2.89%	48

Highlighting the variability in the range of scores produced by O*NET, by topic, the

Table 28 below shows the distribution of jobs by skill level, this time for WRITTEN COMPREHENSION. While small, there were a percentage of jobs that require no, or extremely low levels of Mathematical Reasoning highlighted above; this is not the case for written comprehension scores. All jobs in the region, both now and the future, score no lower than 20 on the importance scale produced by O*NET.

*Table 28 Importance of Written Comprehension, by O*NET Score*

O*NET Score, IMPORTANCE	Jobs, 2025	Percent of Jobs, 2025	Jobs 2030	Percent of Jobs 2030	Jobs 2035	Percent of Jobs 2035	Change in Jobs, 2025-2035
20-29	3381.056	1.77%	3383.744	1.77%	3338.914	1.76%	-42
30-39	15875.61	8.30%	16048.91	8.38%	15978.08	8.41%	102
40-49	21856.21	11.43%	22144.16	11.57%	22084.26	11.62%	228
50-59	61304.3	32.05%	61689.9	32.22%	61431.86	32.32%	128
60-69	27511.17	14.38%	26950.67	14.08%	26360.06	13.87%	-1,151
70-79	57487.65	30.05%	57401.28	29.98%	57070.81	30.03%	-417
80-89	3173.038	1.66%	3145.959	1.64%	3121.241	1.64%	-52
90-99	686.2234	0.36%	674.9605	0.35%	669.4617	0.35%	-17

Interestingly, looking at the overall level of importance of written comprehension to the jobs of the future, the largest absolute decliners fall in categories at the higher end of the importance scale, with the 60-69 importance group leading this decline. Between 2025 and 2035, there will be approximately 1,637 FEWER jobs in the higher importance category for Written Comprehension (Importance score of 60 or above). The biggest (and only) gainers are between the range of 30 and 59, what could be considered mid-level importance scores, where the region will see a gain of 458 jobs, collectively.

Mapping PSSA Performance to Job Level Requirements

To accomplish this, we first consider the percent breakout, by performance level, on the PSSA Math and English assessments, conducted in the 8th grade.

Table 29 Berks County PSSA Math Evaluations, by Performance Level Percentage, 2019-2025

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Percent Advanced	8.98%	4.10%	4.38%	4.81%	7.32%
Percent Proficient	19.64%	13.50%	13.35%	15.24%	16.96%
Percent Basic	26.50%	24.19%	23.96%	25.34%	24.93%
Percent Below Basic	44.87%	58.16%	58.34%	54.61%	50.78%

Table 30 Berks County PSSA English Evaluations, 2019-2024

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Advanced	11.96%	7.01%	11.32%	10.03%	8.81%
Proficient	37.70%	39.40%	36.42%	35.50%	37.47%
Basic	31.99%	39.24%	33.20%	36.56%	36.09%
Below Basic	18.34%	14.30%	19.08%	17.91%	17.63%

Now, projecting these performance levels to the demands of the jobs of tomorrow requires us to adopt several limiting assumptions and caveats. Specifically:

1. Student performance- at both the individual and aggregate levels- can change in the years between 8th grade and 2 years post-HS Graduation. Absent a systemic intervention to an entire cohort, we assume that these changes are idiosyncratic and random, often canceling each other out, and the overall performance trends of the cohort remain stable across this 6-year (8th Grade to 2 years post-HS graduation) window.
2. By 2 years post-graduation, most students will only be eligible for occupations requiring an associate's degree or less for entry. While certainly some students may indeed earn a bachelor's degree within 2 years of HS graduation, we assume this is the exception, not the rule. As a result, we consider occupations that require an Associates or less on the demand-side calculations below.

3. We acknowledge and accept that reclassifying O*NET scores (especially those that do not reach a high value of 100 on their standard scale) to align with PSSA performance levels is an imperfect science. We applied reasonable cut points and breaks, based on logic and descriptions of occupations within the tiered categories.

With these limitations/conditions identified, the next thing to consider is the relationship between O*NET scores for the level of Mathematical Reasoning (& Written Comprehension) and comparable categories of PSSA performance. Ideally, we would be able to apply the standardized scoring for PSSAs discussed earlier in this report and line up directly to the O*NET level scores. Unfortunately, given the relative nature of the scale employed by O*NET, without a guaranteed distribution covering all values from 0 to 100, this one-to-one comparison of standardized scores breaks down quickly. Consider again our attempt to standardize PSSA scores to fit one of the 4 performance levels:

Table 31 Math PSSA Scores by Performance Level

Performance Level	Cut Scores	Standardized
Below Basic	700-1170	65 or lower
Basic	1171-1283	66 to 71
Proficient	1284-1445	72 to 80
Advanced	1446-1800	81 to 100

Table 32 English PSSA Scores by Performance Level

Performance Level	Cut Scores	Standardized
Below Basic	700-1145	64 or lower
Basic	1146-1279	65 to 71
Proficient	1280-1472	72 to 82
Advanced	1473-1800	83 to 100

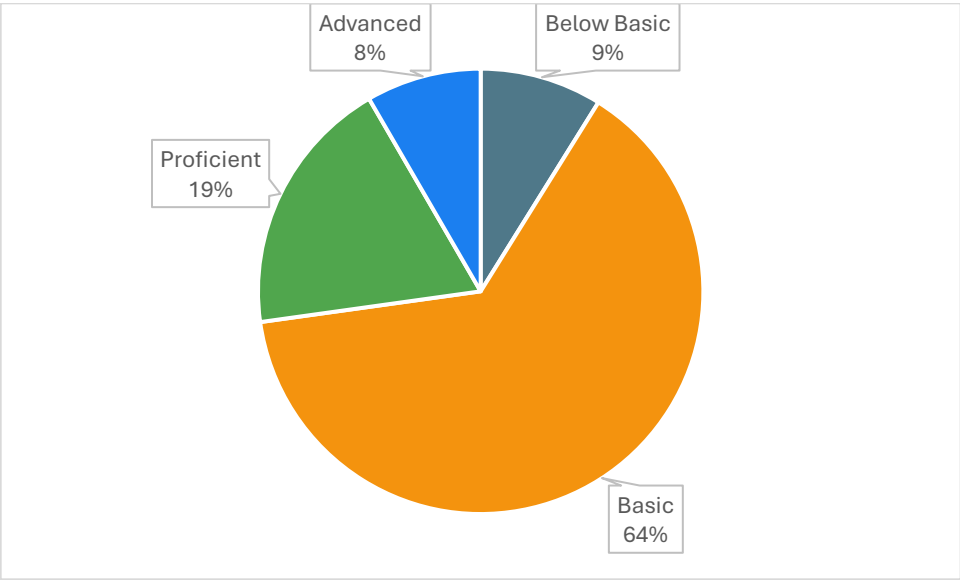
If we were to look at the O*NET scores, line them up with the standardized ranges calculated for PSSA scores, then plug in the corresponding performance level for the O*NET ability level, the process would yield the rankings in the tables (Mathematical Reasoning in the first, Written Comprehension in the Second) below, under the “With Standardized PSSAs” Column heading.

*Table 33 Aligning PSSA Math Performance Levels to O*NET Mathematical Reasoning Levels*

O*NET Score, LEVEL	Percent of Jobs, 2025	With Standardized PSSAs	Adjusted Method
0-9*	1.34%	Below Basic	Below Basic
10-19	7.53%	Below Basic	Below Basic
20-29	37.46%	Below Basic	Basic
30-39	26.46%	Below Basic	Basic
40-49	18.85%	Below Basic	Proficient
50-59	7.69%	Below Basic	Advanced
60-69	0.61%	Basic	Advanced
70-79	0.05%	Proficient	Advanced
80-89	0.02%	Advanced	Advanced

Using this standardized PSSA score method, virtually every job in Berks County (99.32%) would be classified as "Below Basic for Mathematical Reasoning. Clearly, adjustments need to be made to account for the top-end score which, as you may recall, for Mathematical Reasoning is an 86. Considering the percentages of all reported jobs and anchored with the knowledge that a top-end score of 86 qualifies an individual to serve as a professional mathematician, we manually adjusted the scoring categories in the "Adjusted Method" column above. Using this adjusted method, a much more standard distribution of jobs, by requisite skill level in mathematical reasoning emerges, as depicted in *Figure 25* below.

Figure 25 Distribution of Jobs in Berks County, by Requisite Mathematical Reasoning Skill Level



Similar- though slightly less extensive- adjustments were required to the Written Comprehension distribution levels as well. *Table 34* below shows the levels and adjustments; the relatively small number of jobs at the 2 highest levels- 60-69 and 70-79- led us to decide to peg these as the "Advanced" anchor point. The other categories were more compressed than the Mathematical Reasoning scores, so Below Basic was also adjusted to include only the lowest recorded levels (20-29).

*Table 34 Aligning PSSA English Proficiency Levels to O*NET Written Comprehension Skill Levels*

O*NET Score, LEVEL	Percent of Jobs, 2025	With Standardized PSSAs	Adjusted Method
20-29	2.58%	Below Basic	Below Basic
30-39	10.67%	Below Basic	Basic
40-49	45.57%	Below Basic	Basic
50-59	30.45%	Below Basic	Proficient
60-69	7.90%	Basic	Advanced
70-79	2.84%	Proficient	Advanced

As the final step in our gap analysis of the literacy and numeracy skills of the future workforce, we assess the alignment between the known skill levels of 8th graders, and the workforce needs of tomorrow. In the tables below we match a single PSSA cohort to the projected workforce needs 6 years after they have taken the exams. To highlight the important implications of including all possible jobs vs. limiting the demand calculations to jobs that require an associate degree or less, calculate gaps for both when considering the Mathematical Reasoning skill levels from O*NET.

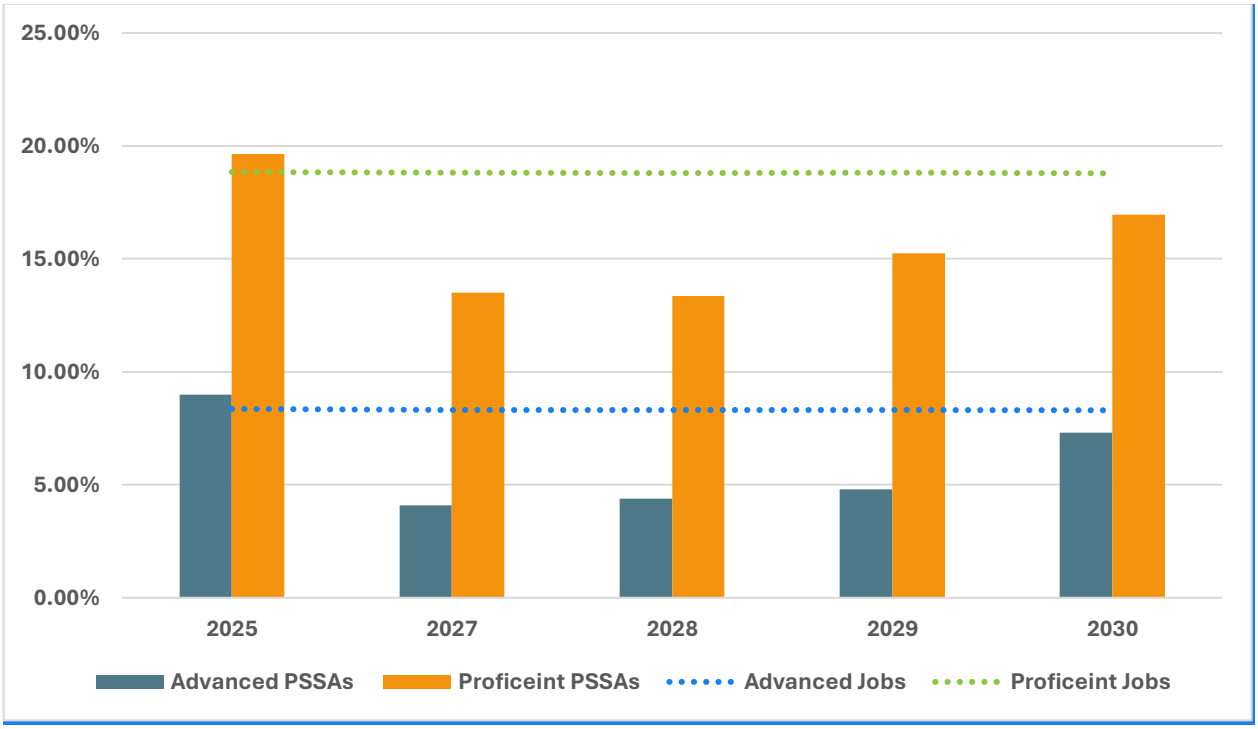
The first table below outlines the PSSA cohort year, its comparable jobs projections year, and contains the raw and percent data for occupations by Mathematical Reasoning level, ***all education levels***.

Table 35 PSSA Attainments vs. Future Job Requirements,

Academic Year	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Advanced PSSAs	8.98%	4.10%	4.38%	4.81%	7.32%
Proficient PSSAs	19.64%	13.50%	13.35%	15.24%	16.96%
Basic PSSAs	26.50%	24.19%	23.96%	25.34%	24.93%
Below Basic PSSAs	44.87%	58.16%	58.34%	54.61%	50.78%
Job Year	**2025**	**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**2030**
Percentages					
Advanced Jobs	8.36%	8.32%	8.31%	8.31%	8.30%
Proficient Jobs	18.85%	18.81%	18.80%	18.81%	18.80%
Basic Jobs	63.92%	64.02%	64.05%	64.05%	64.08%
Below Basic Jobs	8.87%	8.85%	8.84%	8.83%	8.82%
Counts					
Advanced Jobs	15,991	15,959	15,948	15,910	15,890
Proficient Jobs	36,048	36,081	36,068	36,023	35,999
Basic Jobs	122,269	122,791	122,868	122,657	122,674
Below Basic Jobs	16,967	16,982	16,961	16,906	16,876
Total	191,275	191,814	191,845	191,496	191,440

Plotting the PSSA attainment levels by the corresponding jobs year (2019 to 2025, etc.) highlights the discrepancy- if any- between the attainment levels of students and the anticipated needs of the job market. The figures below compare the advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic alignment of Math PSSA performance to O*NET ability level for Mathematical Reasoning.

Figure 26 PSSA Performance Level vs. Future Jobs Required Proficiency



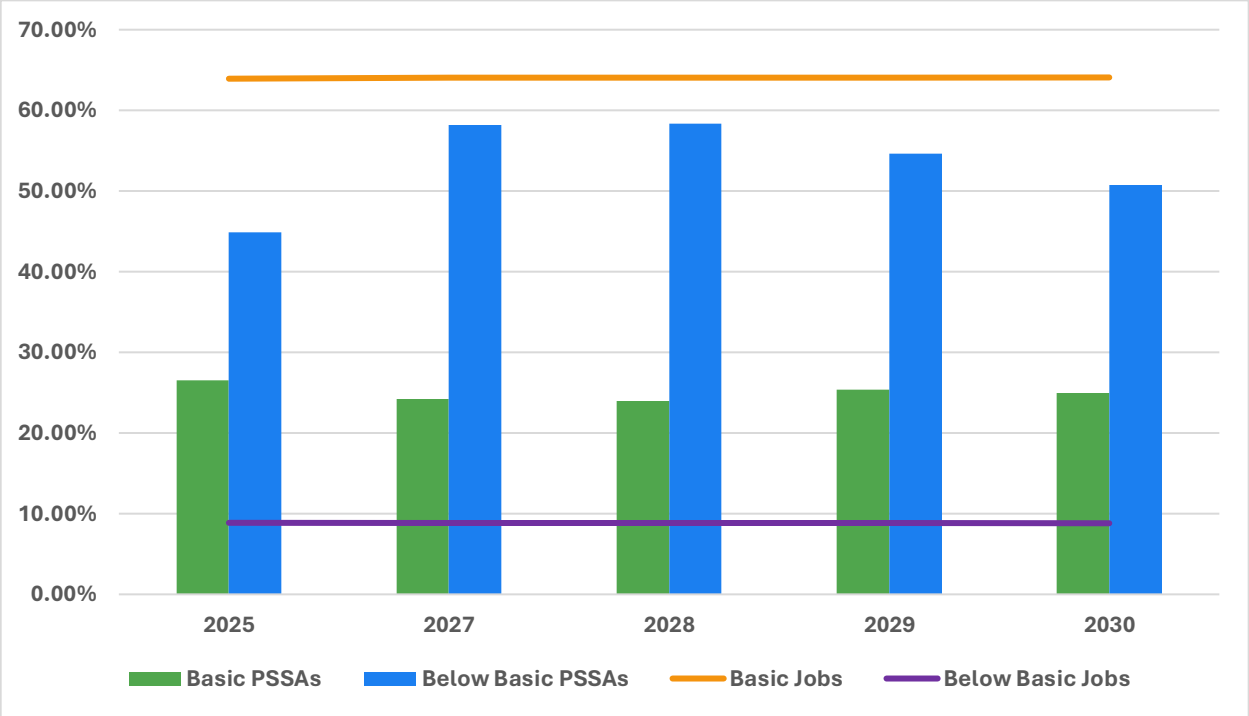
In Figure 26, the dotted lines (blue for advanced level and green for proficient level) represent the projected demand for jobs, by year. The bars correspond with the PSSA scores, by level, on 8th grade Math for the cohort that will be approximately 20 years old in the projected jobs year. Consistent with the charts that follow, the year 2026 is omitted to account for the assessment year of 2020, when no results are reported.

Clearly the pandemic had an impact on the preparation of the future workforce. For jobs year 2025, the 2019 8th grade cohort achieved proficiency and advanced scores at percent rates that exceeded those required of the corresponding jobs of the future, circa 2025. However, when testing was resumed in 2021, we see a marked shift to under-performance that persists through the projected workforce year of 2030. In 2027, 8.32% of all jobs are projected to require Advanced levels of Mathematical Reasoning, but only 4.1% of corresponding cohort of students (2021 8th Graders) achieved advanced levels on their Math assessments. This gap is consistent with the proficient levels as well, with a demand of 18.8% vs. supply of 13.5% for the

year 2027. Scores have rebounded in more recent iterations of the assessment exams; it should be noted. The gap between both advanced and proficient jobs and the corresponding score levels will close considerably by 2030 (PSSA exam year 2024).

Interestingly, in the figure below which plots the basic and below basic levels, the impact of the pandemic on the alignment between jobs and assessment results is minimal, with only a slight dip in achievement between the 2025 and 2027 cohorts, nearly fully recovered by 2029.

Figure 27 PSSA Performance Level vs. Future Jobs Required Proficiency



When considering the number of positions that will require basic or below basic skills in mathematical reasoning, the figure above shows a somewhat different story. The last pre-pandemic cohort, represented in job year 2025, had too many below basic performers for the anticipated ratio of below basic jobs (44.87% scored below basic on math in 2019, while only 8.85% of jobs in 2025 require only below basic proficiency levels). This pattern remains unchanged through 2030- too many below basic performers for too few below basic jobs.

The inverse pattern was present for "Basic" proficiency levels, where nearly 64% of jobs in 2025 require that level of proficiency and only 26.5% of students scored at this level. While it is important to note that we can include the advanced and proficient cohorts in the calculation- they exceed the Basic requirement- doing so would reduce, but not eliminate, the gap

between demand (Basic jobs) and supply (Basic or better assessment level). Once again, this pattern is projected to persist from 2025 through 2030.

Gap Analysis- Only Associates (or Lower) Jobs

While the figures and themes above are an important representation of the alignment between PSSA Math performance levels and the workforce Mathematical Reasoning demands, it is also important to restrict the analysis to only jobs that these students could realistically hold within 6 years of taking their 8th grade assessments. In this section, we restrict the universe of comparison jobs to only those that require either an Associates, a post-secondary credential, some college, a HS Diploma/GED, or no formal education at all.

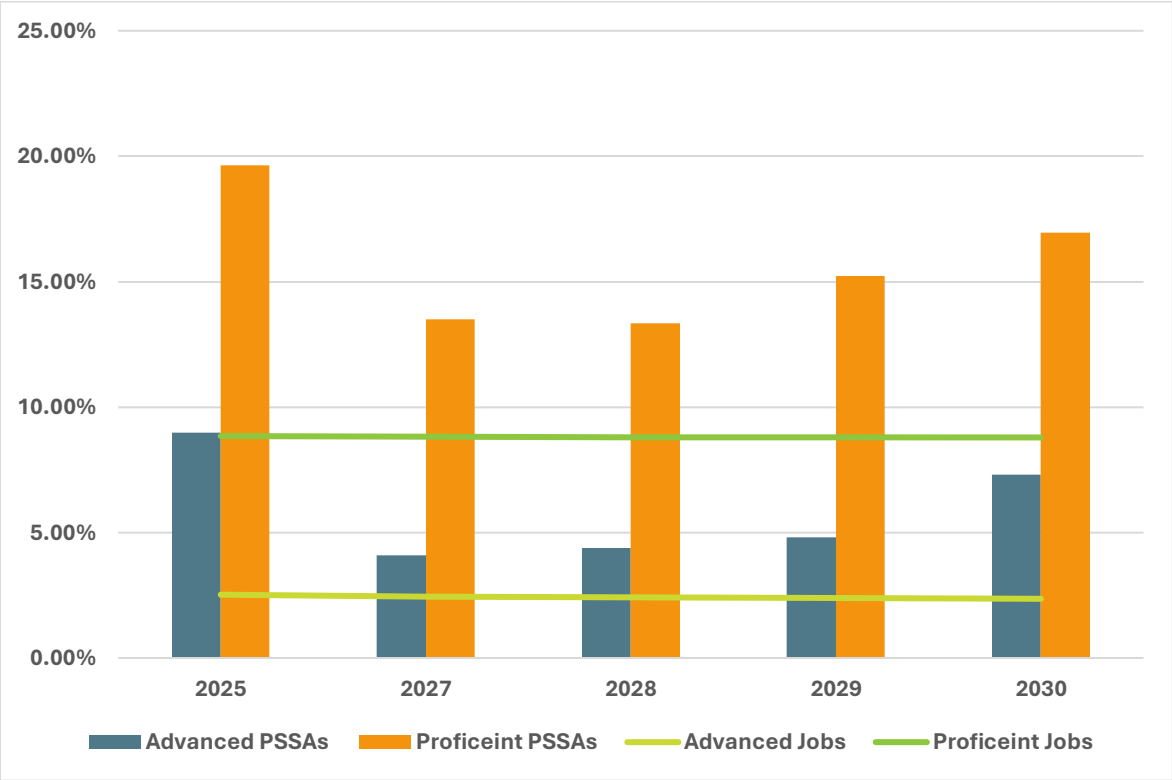
Table 36 PSSA Attainments vs. Future Job Requirements

Academic Year	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Advanced PSSAs	8.98%	4.10%	4.38%	4.81%	7.32%
Proficient PSSAs	19.64%	13.50%	13.35%	15.24%	16.96%
Basic PSSAs	26.50%	24.19%	23.96%	25.34%	24.93%
Below Basic PSSAs	44.87%	58.16%	58.34%	54.61%	50.78%
Job Year	**2025**	**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**2030**
Percentages					
Advanced Jobs	2.52%	2.44%	2.42%	2.39%	2.36%
Proficient Jobs	8.85%	8.81%	8.80%	8.80%	8.79%
Basic Jobs	77.18%	77.31%	77.37%	77.41%	77.46%
Below Basic Jobs	11.45%	11.43%	11.42%	11.40%	11.39%
Counts					
Jobs Advanced	3,692	3,583	3,543	3,495	3,451
Jobs Proficient	12,941	12,929	12,911	12,875	12,857
Jobs Basic	112,914	113,416	113,492	113,282	113,292
Jobs Below Basics	16,754	16,767	16,746	16,690	16,659
Total	146,300	146,695	146,693	146,342	146,259

Restricting the analysis to this more limited range of jobs has an immediate impact on the results: the percentage of students securing a proficient or advanced level on the PSSAs exceeds the percentage of occupations that require these levels of Mathematical Reasoning ability. This pattern remains consistent throughout the job years 2025 through 2030, although the relationship will tighten from 2027 to 2030, highlighting the lingering impact of the pandemic on assessment results. This relationship is represented graphically in the figure below; when the bar is higher than the line, the

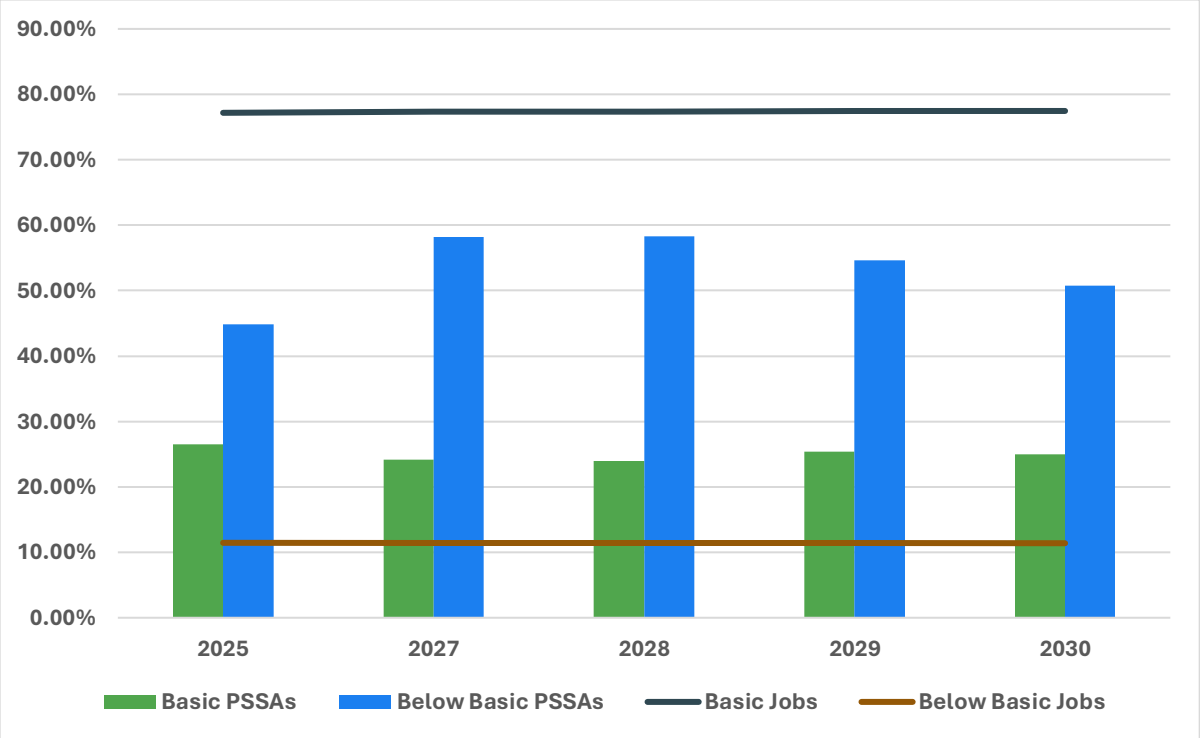
percentage of students achieving the requisite assessment level exceeds the percentage of jobs that require proficiency at a comparable level.

Figure 28 PSSA Performance Level vs. Future Jobs Required Proficiency



Interestingly, however, even with the restricted universe of jobs, the pattern detected when considering all education requirements persists too many below basic scores for too few below basic jobs and too few basic performers for too many basic jobs. The figure below illustrates this pattern graphically. Although the number or "basic" and "below basic" jobs shows little movement through 2030, should an existential shock to the system- like a massive leap forward in automation for these types of jobs or a radical offshoring initiative- occur, a wide swathe of basic and below basic skill holders could find themselves struggling to maintain stable employment. Additionally, in terms of oversupply, with too many basic and below basic skill holders for too few basic and below basic jobs, employers may already be settling for under-skilled individuals to fill jobs that require a higher level of mathematical reasoning skills.

Figure 29 PSSA Performance Level vs. Future Jobs Required Proficiency



Written Comprehension

Next, we employ the same process to compare the future occupation demands and readiness of the future workforce, this time for Written Comprehension. Based on the results highlighted above for Mathematical Reasoning, for this skill, we consider only the relationship between PSSA scores and jobs that require an associate's degree or less.

Table 37 PSSA Cohort Scores vs. Projected Job Distributions[45]

Academic Year	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Advanced PSSAs	11.96%	7.01%	11.32%	10.03%	8.81%
Proficient PSSAs	37.70%	39.40%	36.42%	35.50%	37.47%
Basic PSSAs	31.99%	39.24%	33.20%	36.56%	36.09%
Below Basic PSSAs	18.34%	14.30%	19.08%	17.91%	17.63%
Job Year	**2025**	**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**2030**
Percentages					
Advanced Jobs	3.37%	3.37%	3.37%	3.36%	3.36%
Proficient Jobs	13.94%	13.99%	14.00%	14.01%	14.01%
Basic Jobs	59.38%	59.52%	59.57%	59.62%	59.67%
Below Basic Jobs	23.03%	22.86%	22.80%	22.76%	22.70%
Counts					
Jobs Advanced	4,926	4,941	4,939	4,923	4,916
Jobs Proficient	20,401	20,521	20,537	20,498	20,498
Jobs Basic	86,873	87,310	87,392	87,247	87,275
Jobs Below Basics	33,696	33,539	33,448	33,304	33,208
Total	404	384	376	369	362

[45] Including only jobs that require an associate's degree or less

Based on the percent distributions in the table above (and graphics below) some key trends emerge, regarding Written Comprehension:

1. PSSA score performance on English also suffered during the pandemic, with the percentage of students scoring in the advanced range dropping markedly from 2019 to 2021. Interestingly, after making a more-or-less full recovery in 2022, Advanced performance has dwindled lower in the last 2 years, with the latest advanced cohort containing only 8.81% of all students
2. At the same time, 2021 served as a key year, with scores 'regressing to the mean': fewer students achieved advanced scores AND fewer students scored in the below basic level.
3. Based on the distribution of jobs vs. the distribution of PSSA performers, the region is producing a SURPLUS of both advanced and proficient test performers, vis-à-vis jobs in the future that require advanced or proficient levels of written comprehension (see Figure __ below)
4. While there is a slight gap between the number of below basic PSSA performers and the number of below basic jobs (with a lower percentage of performers than jobs), this should not be a concern, at least in terms of ability to fill those jobs. With a surplus of both advanced and proficient performers, there should certainly be enough qualified candidates to fill the needs of positions that require only a below basic written comprehension level.
5. More concerning, however, is the large gap between the number of positions that require basic written comprehension skills and the percentage of PSSA test-takers who score at that level. Between 2025 and 2030 there is a gap of between 20% and 30%; that is, there are far less "basic" achievers than there are basic jobs. While again some of these will be filled with surplus advanced or proficient achievers, there will likely remain a deficit among the youngest cohorts in the future workforce who possess the requisite basic Written Comprehension skills required of many of the jobs that will need to be filled.

Table 38 PSSA Percentages vs. Distribution of Future Jobs,

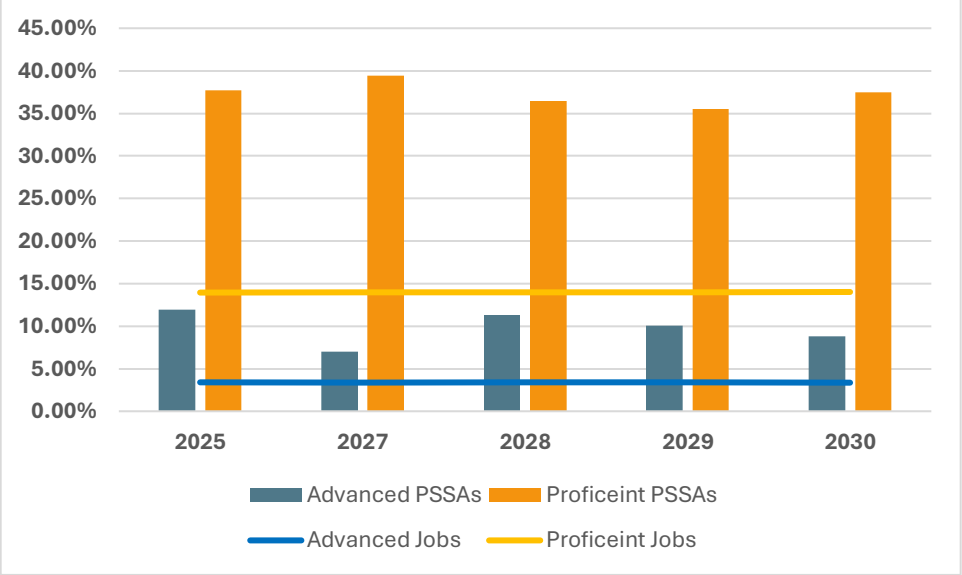
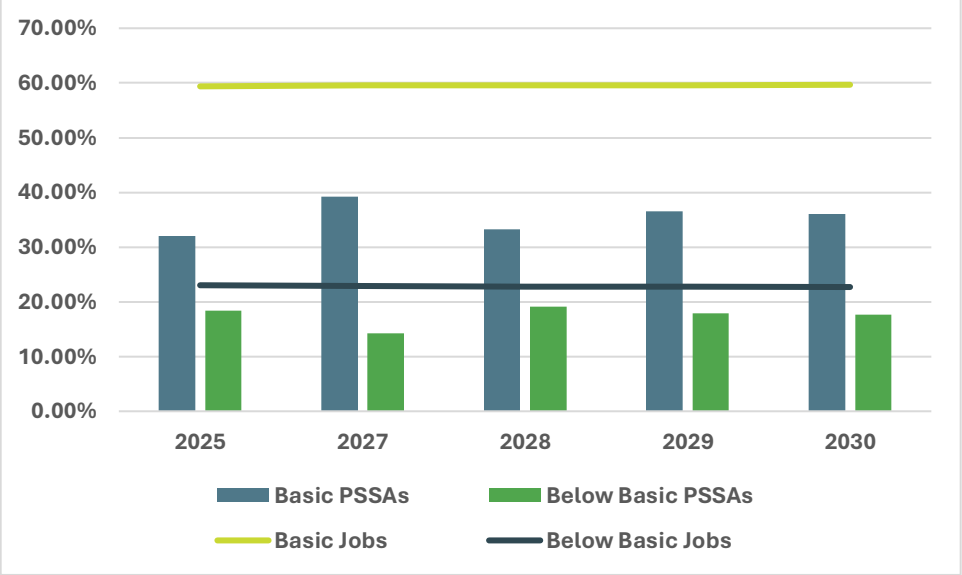


Table 39 PSSA Percentages vs. Distribution of Future Jobs, Basic and Below Basic



Survey

How much contact, if any, does your employer have with local job-seeker resources like the PACareerLink ® Berks County or our local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)? Across industries, most employers reported some level of contact with local job-seeker resources, though the depth of engagement varied widely. While 43% of respondents (41 out of 94) indicated frequent or occasional contact, over half reported only rare (35%, 33) or no contact (21%, 20) at all. Contact levels with local job-seeker resources varied across the six target industries. Most employers reported some level of engagement, though frequency ranged from strong partnerships to minimal contact. Construction and Manufacturing showed the broadest distribution, while Educational Services and Social Assistance reported higher levels of consistent engagement.

Figure 30 Employer Contact With Local Job-seeker Resources by Industry

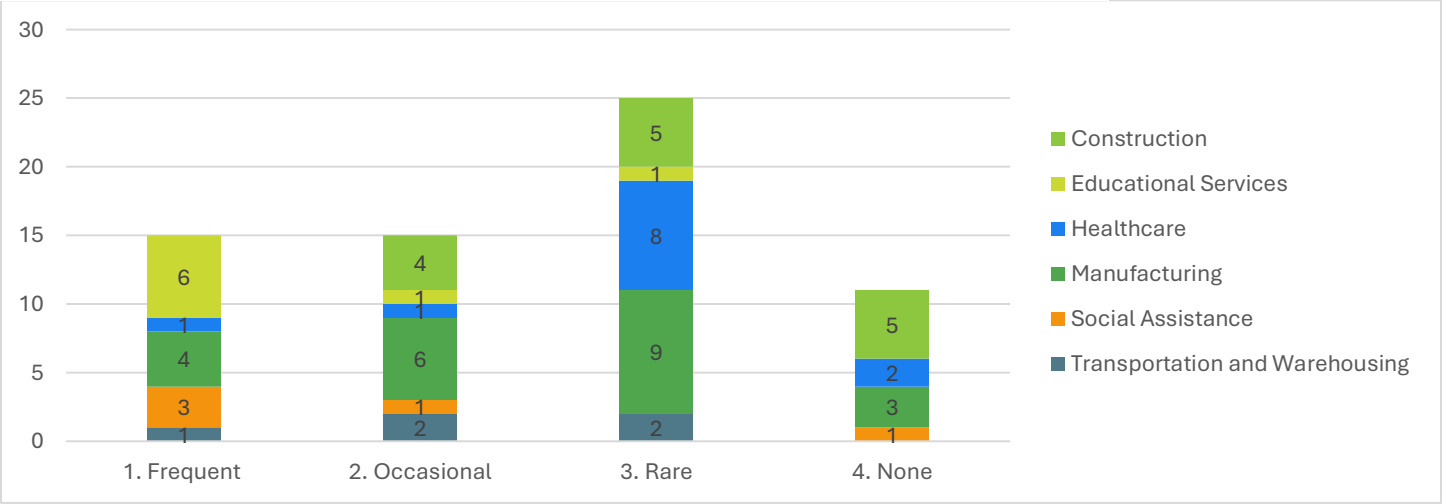
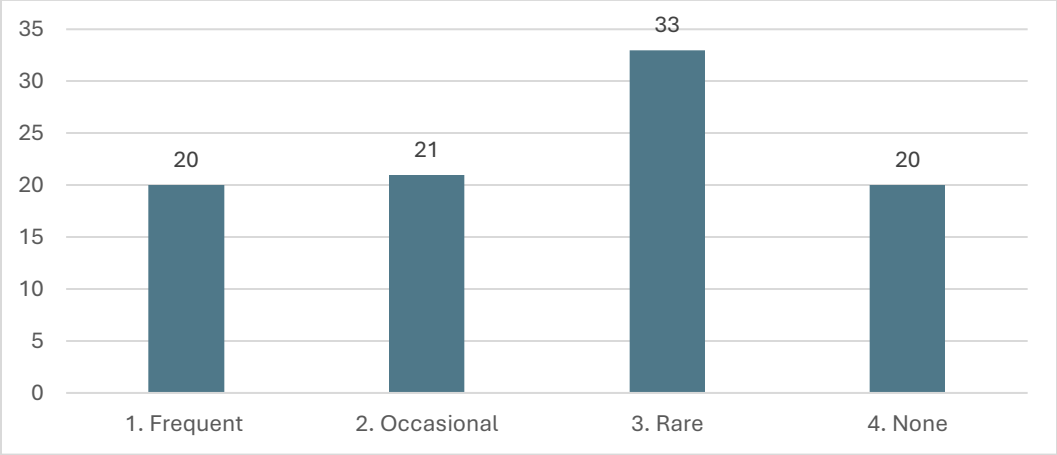


Figure 31 Employer Contact With Local Job-seeker Resources



What local job seeker resources does your employer interact with? (Open Response) **PA CareerLink® is the most recognized and utilized job seeker resource.** Fifteen respondents named PA CareerLink®, directly, while several others referenced it in combination with partners such as OVR, staffing agencies, local schools, and workforce organizations. Employers described varying levels of engagement, from occasional job fair participation to ongoing collaboration and ESL class offerings through PA CareerLink®,

Beyond PA CareerLink®, employers most often pointed to online job posting platforms such as Indeed, LinkedIn, and Monster (11 mentions) and job fairs or hiring events (5 mentions). Staffing agencies were noted by four respondents, while others highlighted connections with local colleges and training providers, including Penn State Berks, RACC, and area high schools. A few employers listed multiple or unspecified resources, while two reported no engagement and one noted poor experiences with available options.

These findings underscore PA CareerLink's® role as a central hub for local hiring support, while also illustrating that employers tap into a broader ecosystem of job boards, staffing firms, and education partners to meet their workforce needs.

How much contact, if any, does your employer have with local educational institutions? **Most employers report at least some contact with local educational institutions, though depth of engagement varies significantly by industry.** Over 60% of respondents (55 out of 91) reported either frequent (29) or occasional (26) contact, while 17 reported no contact and 15 indicated rare contact. These results suggest that while relationships between employers and education providers are generally present, there is room to expand deeper or more consistent engagement across sectors.

In target industries, contact levels were strongest in Educational Services and Manufacturing, with many reporting frequent engagement. Other sectors, such as Construction, Healthcare, and Transportation, showed greater variability, with some employers maintaining strong connections and others reporting minimal or no engagement. These findings reflect uneven partnerships and signal opportunities to broaden outreach in sectors where collaboration with education providers remains limited.

Figure 32 Employer Contact With Local Education Institutions by Industry

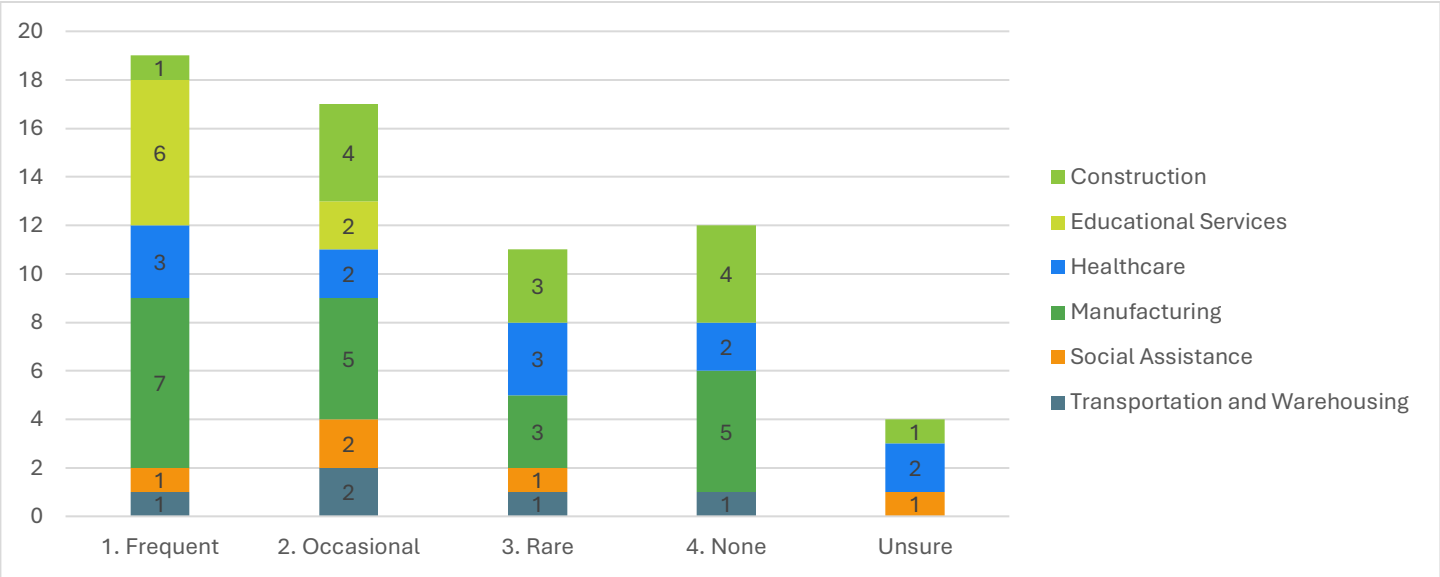
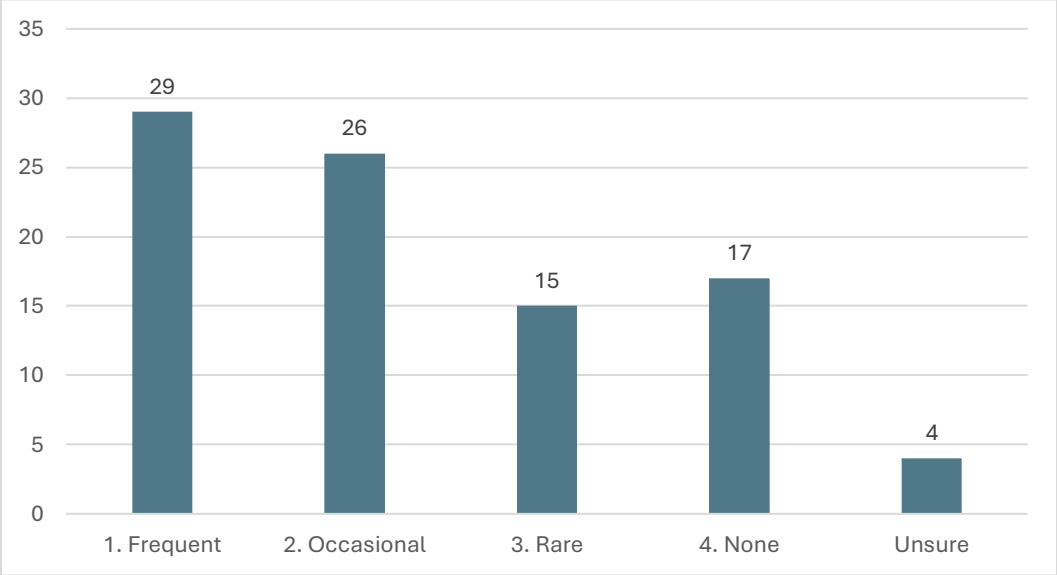
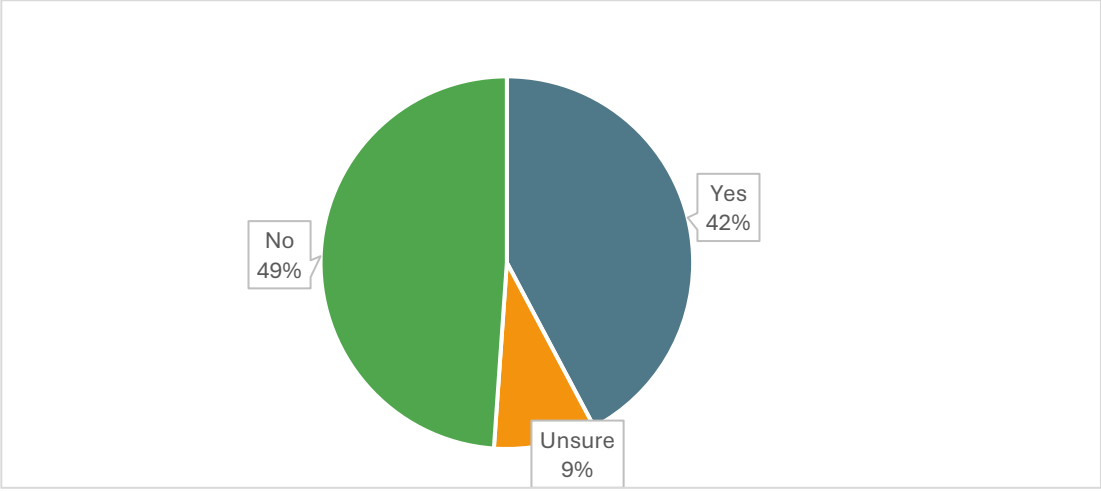


Figure 33 Employer Contact With Local Education Institutions



Does your employer have any significant relationship with education institutions located outside Berks County? **Employers are nearly evenly split on whether they maintain relationships with education institutions outside Berks County.** About half of respondents (49%) said they do not maintain significant relationships with education institutions beyond Berks County, while 42% indicated they do have such relationships. This suggests that many employers maintain regional or statewide education partnerships, though this is far from universal. A smaller share of employers (9%) was unsure, reflecting possible gaps in communication or awareness within their organizations

Figure 34 Employer Relationship with Education Institutions Outside Berks County



For your industry, how accessible is the required or preferred job training for potential workers in Berks County? **Most employers find local job training at least somewhat accessible, though barriers remain in some industries**. Responses were mixed, with a slight lean toward optimism about local training accessibility. Across all respondents (n=90), employers offered mixed views on the accessibility of local job training. Nearly half described training access as either neutral (42%, 38 respondents) or somewhat accessible (27%, 24 respondents), while 20% (18) found training to be very accessible. In contrast, 11% (10 respondents) reported that training was somewhat or very inaccessible, pointing to continued gaps in availability, alignment, or awareness in some sectors.

By industry, Manufacturing and Educational Services were the most likely to report training as accessible, with many rating it neutral or better. Construction responses were spread across categories, reflecting a wide range of experiences. Healthcare and Transportation, however, reported greater barriers, with several employers identifying training as somewhat or

very inaccessible. These patterns highlight uneven access to training across sectors, with some industries facing more significant challenges in aligning workforce needs with available programs.

Figure 35 Employer Perceptions of Job Training Accessibility in Berks County by Industry

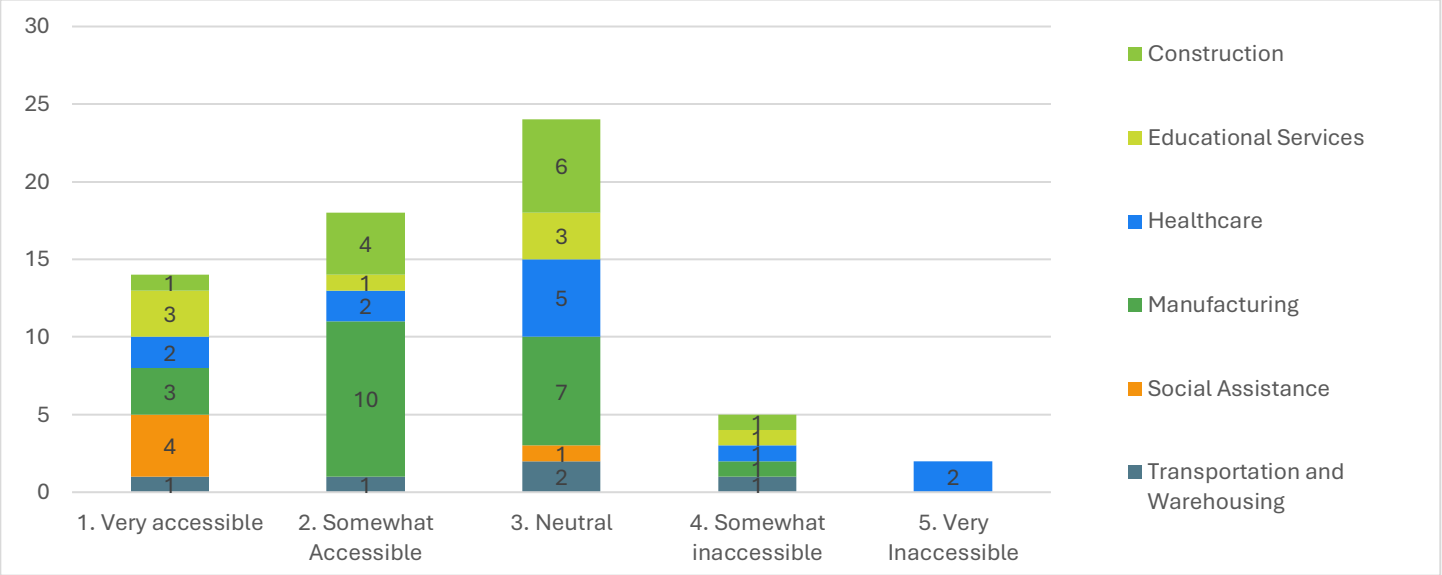
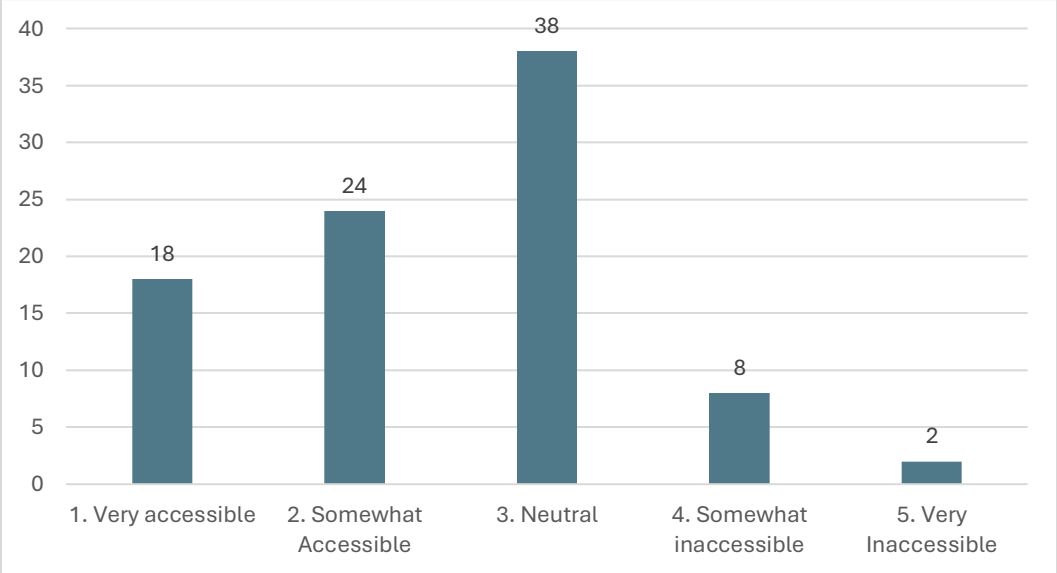


Figure 36 Employer Perceptions of Job Training Accessibility in Berks County



What percentage of local job seekers have the skills needed for available jobs in your industry sector? Most employers believe only a fraction of local job seekers have the skills needed for available jobs, with significant gaps in technical training, credentials, and industry-specific experience. While some employers felt most candidates were prepared, many noted gaps in technical training, credentials, and industry-specific experience.

Only 23% of respondents (19 out of 84) believed that 75% or more of local job seekers were adequately skilled. Another 21% (18 respondents) estimated that 50% to 74.9% met the required qualifications. The largest share—24% (20 respondents)—said just 25% to 49.9% were prepared. Meanwhile, 20% (17) estimated 10% to 24.9%, and 12% (10) believed 10% or fewer had the necessary skills.

Industry patterns followed similar themes. Manufacturing and Construction respondents were more likely to report low to moderate skill alignment, while Healthcare and Transportation and Warehousing showed more evenly spread responses. Educational Services had a slight lean toward higher alignment, while Social Assistance responses spanned all categories, reflecting a mix of job types and skill needs.

Figure 37 Employer Perceptions of Job Seeker Skill Alignment by Industry

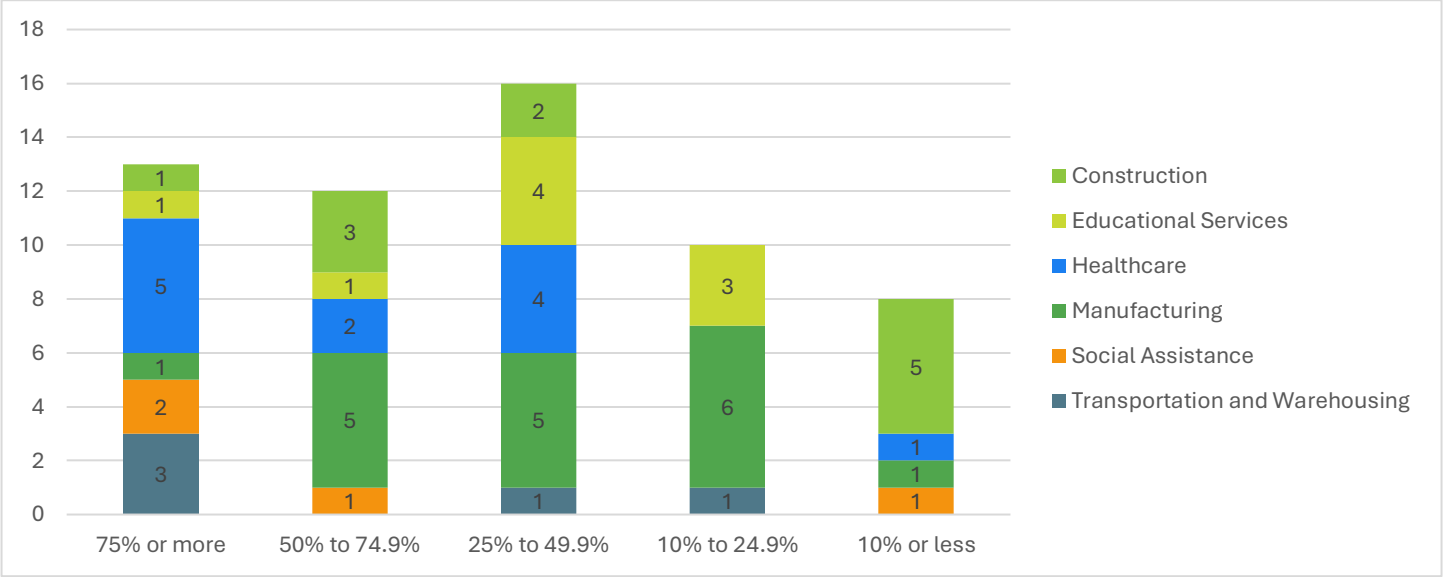
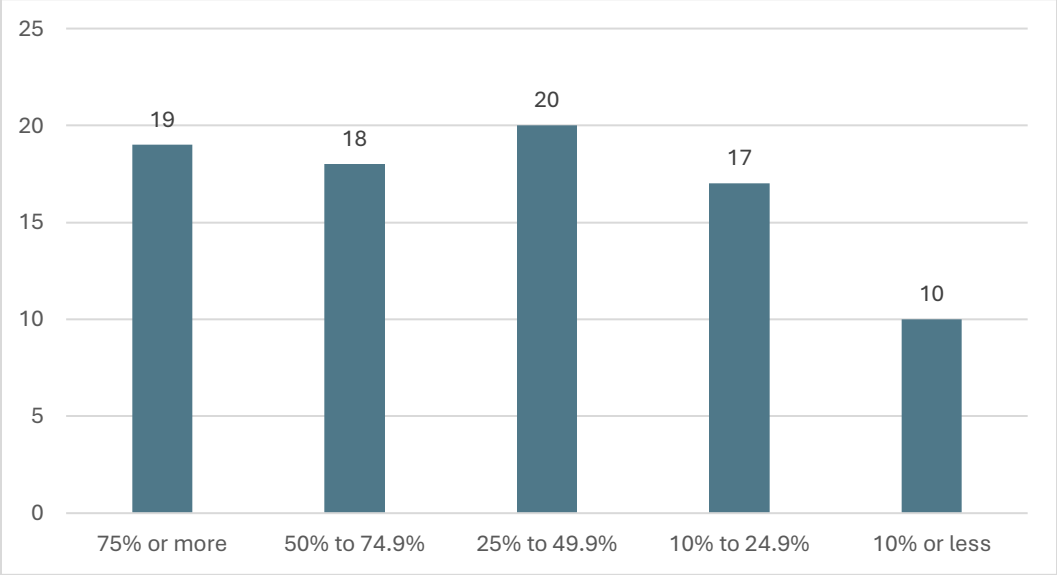


Figure 38 Employer Perceptions of Job Seeker Skill Alignment



To what extent are there enough qualified people to fill locally available jobs in your industry sector? While some indicated a relatively healthy pipeline, many reported that fewer than half of local job seekers are equipped to meet hiring needs. Among all respondents (n=84), only 24% (20 respondents) believed that 75% or more of local job openings could be filled by qualified candidates. Another 18% (15) estimated 50% to 74.9%. The remainder (59% of respondents) said that less than half of job seekers met the required qualifications.

Among target industries, Healthcare and Educational Services were more likely to view the talent pool positively, with several respondents in each industry reporting 75% or more of roles could be filled locally. Manufacturing and Construction, by contrast, had more moderate estimates, with most respondents falling in the 25% to 49.9% or 10% to 24.9% ranges. Social Assistance and Transportation and Warehousing reflected the greatest concern, with multiple employers indicating that 10% or fewer of applicants were adequately qualified for their jobs.

Figure 39 Employer Assessment of Qualified Talent Availability

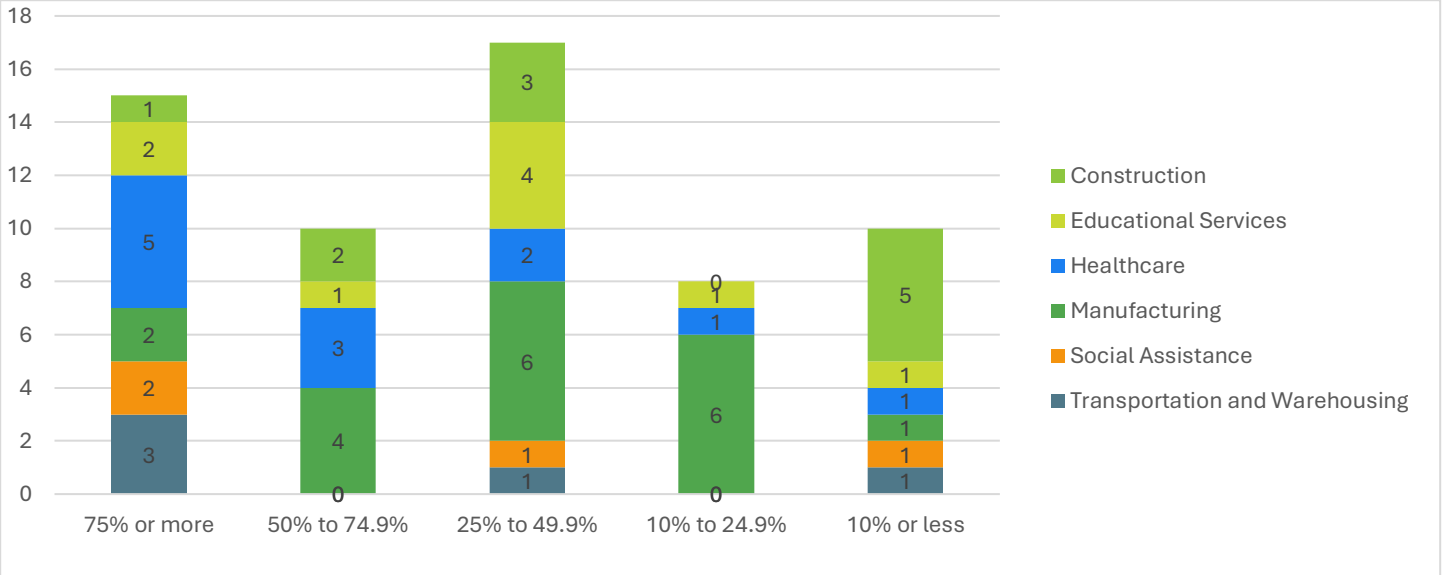
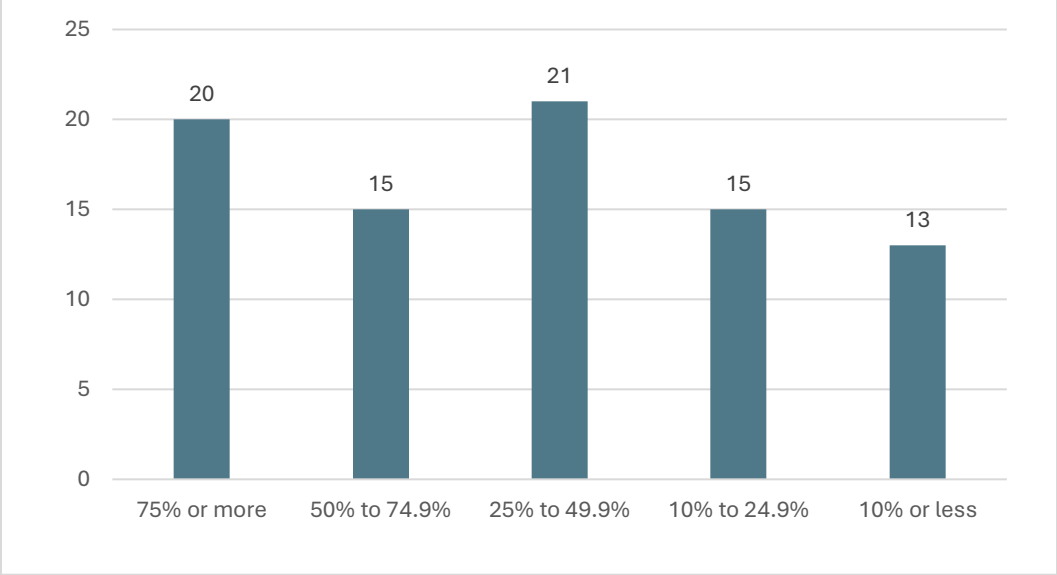


Figure 40 Employer Assessment of Qualified Talent Availability by Industry



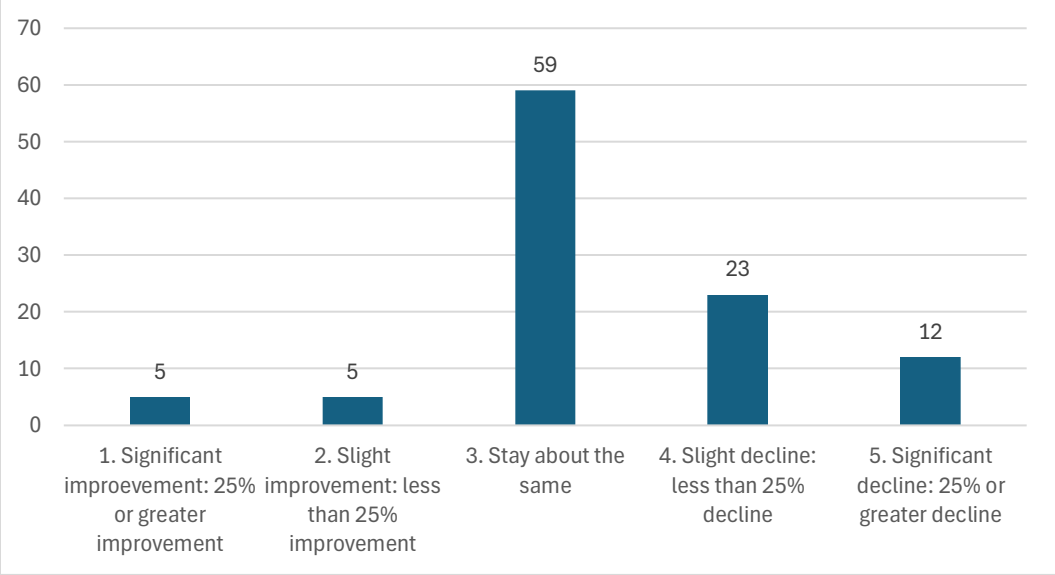
Which specific skills are most often deficient or lacking in candidates who apply for open roles? Employers most frequently cited concerns around work ethic, attendance, and reliability. Of the 105 responses, 43 directly referenced issues with attendance, consistency, or general work ethic, making these the most identified deficiencies across sectors.

Beyond these foundational concerns, employers also highlighted deficits in math and technical skills, such as basic math, mechanical ability, blueprint reading, and computer literacy. Several respondents mentioned lacking industry-specific experience in fields like construction, healthcare, or CNC operations. Communication also emerged as a cross-cutting theme, with multiple employers noting poor verbal, written, or English language skills, and some citing lack of professionalism, dependability, or motivation.

Collectively, these responses point to a combination of soft skills and technical gaps, reinforcing earlier findings about employer concerns related to job readiness and the need for targeted training and early work-based learning experiences.

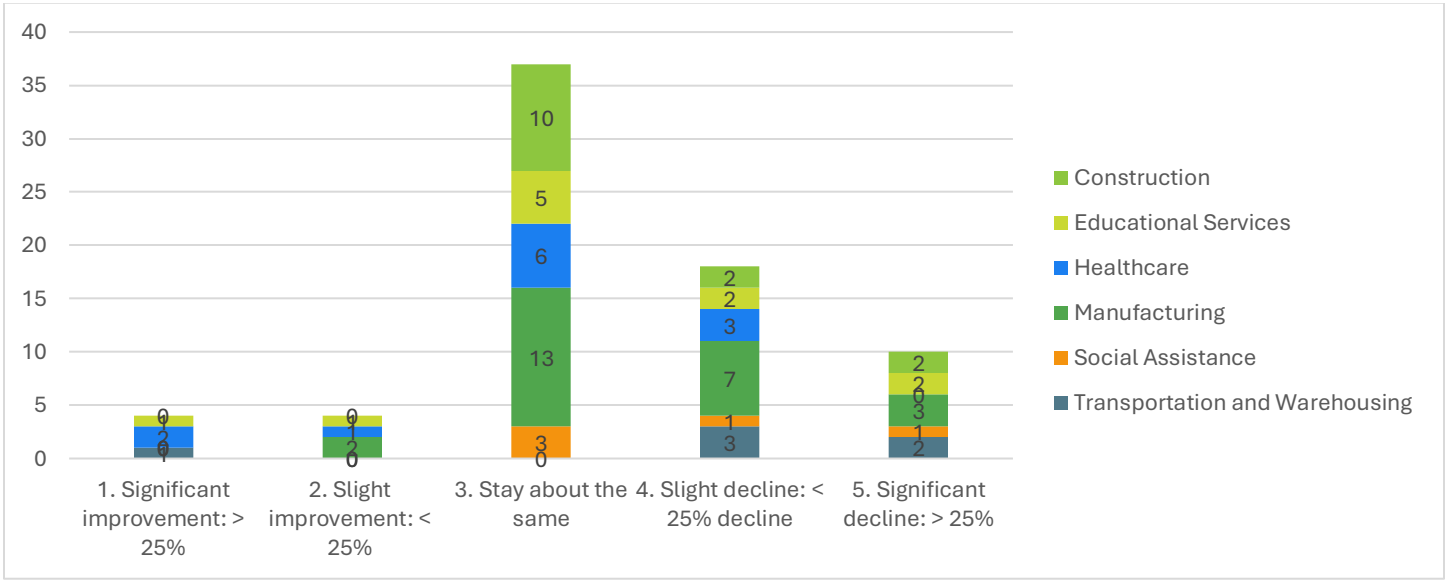
For new hires, have you noticed any changes in English language proficiency (read, write, speak, listen effectively) compared to five years ago? Across all respondents, most employers reported that English language proficiency among new hires has remained stable over the past five years. Just over half said there had been no noticeable change, while 34% observed some level of decline, including both slight and significant reductions in communication skills. Only a small share reported any improvement

Figure 41 Perceived Changes in English Language Proficiency of New Hires Over the Past Five Years



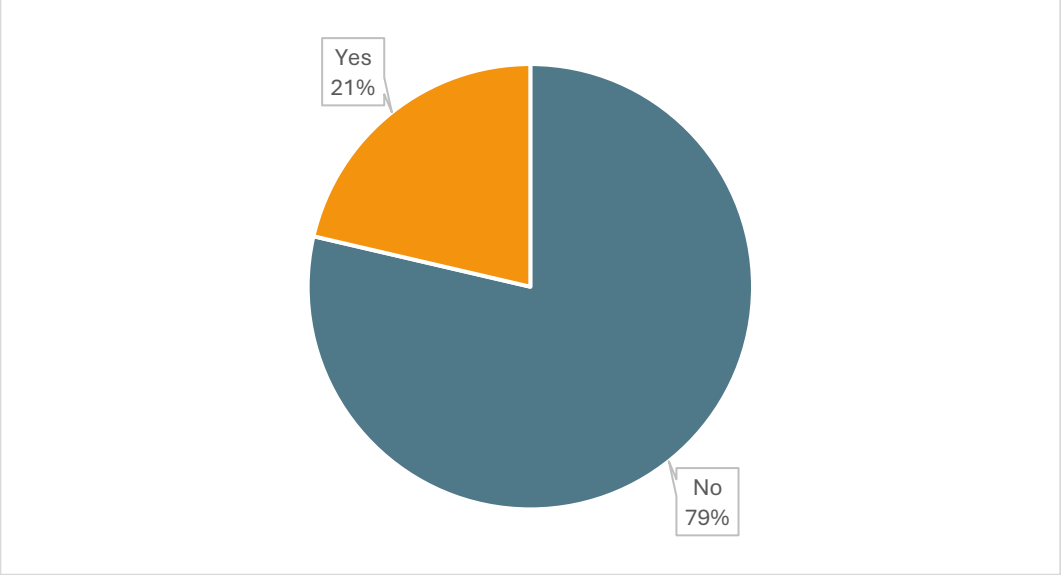
Target industry-level trends followed similar patterns. Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Social Assistance were more likely to report a decline in English proficiency, reflecting concerns around workplace communication and documentation. In contrast, Educational Services and Construction saw fewer issues, with most responses indicating no change.

Figure 42 Perceived Changes in English Language Proficiency of New Hires Over the Past Five Years by Industry



Have you adjusted your English language requirements for hiring to accommodate our available local workforce? Most employers (79 percent) reported no changes to their English language requirements for hiring, while 21 percent indicated that they have adjusted to better accommodate the local workforce.

Figure 43 Employers Adjusting English Language Requirements

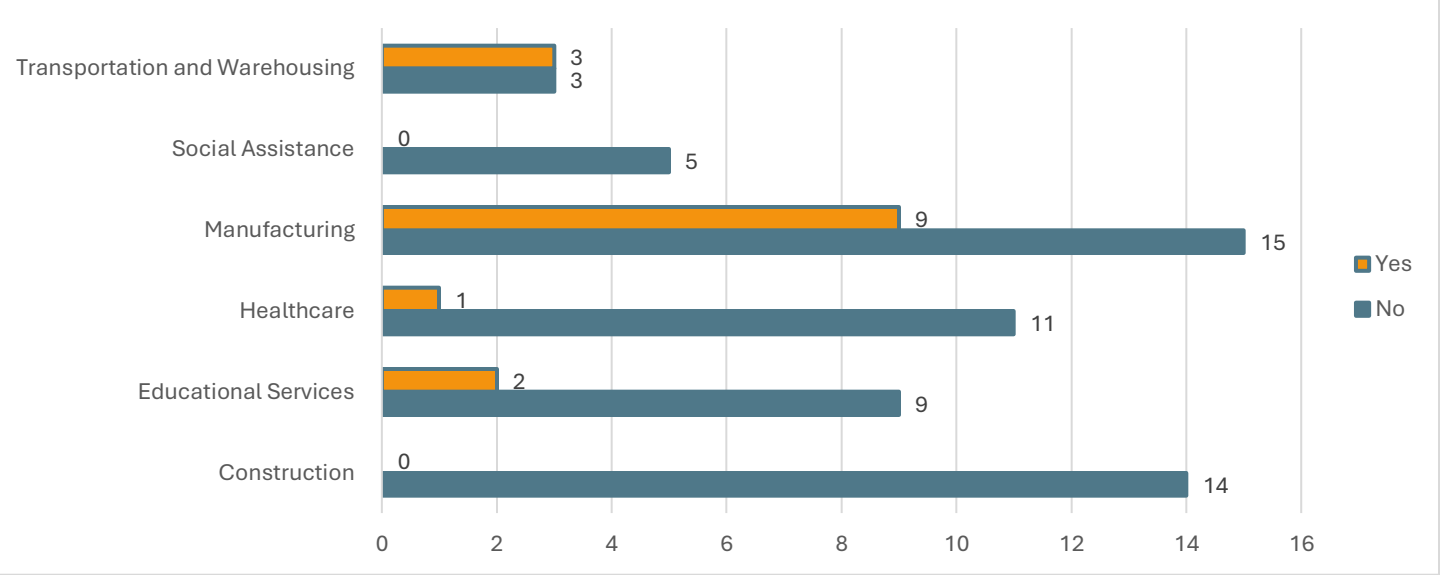


For those who reported changing their language requirements, the following themes emerged

- **Bilingual materials and communication**: Many provide training, forms, signage, and onboarding documents in both English and Spanish to support non-English speakers.
- **Workplace support for ELL staff**: Employers have hired bilingual supervisors, crew leaders, and recruiters to guide ESL candidates and improve on-the-job communication.
- **Relaxed language requirements for certain roles**: English is no longer required for some entry-level or production jobs, expanding access to a broader talent pool.
- **Incentives for bilingual ability:** Some employers offer premium pay for bilingual staff and have embedded inclusive practices to better attract and retain non-English-speaking workers.

As show in Figure 44, most respondents in target industries reported that English language proficiency among new hires has either remained stable or declined in recent years. Reports of improvement were rare and typically modest. Declines were most common in Manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing, and Social Assistance.

Figure 44 Employers Adjusting English Language Requirement by Industry



For new hires, have you noticed any changes in numeracy skills (use, interpret, and communicate mathematical information) compared to five years ago? Across industries, most employers reported no significant change in the numeracy skills of new hires over the past five years. However, nearly one-third observed some level of decline, and very few noted any improvement. These findings suggest that while overall math proficiency has remained steady for many, skill gaps persist in sectors requiring applied or technical math.

As shown in Figure 45, most employers across the six target industries reported that new hires' numeracy skills have stayed about the same over the past five years. However, declines were more common in Manufacturing and Transportation & Warehousing, where employers noted increased difficulty with applied math. Very few respondents across all sectors reported any improvement.

Figure 45 Change in English Proficiency of New Hires Over the Past Five Years

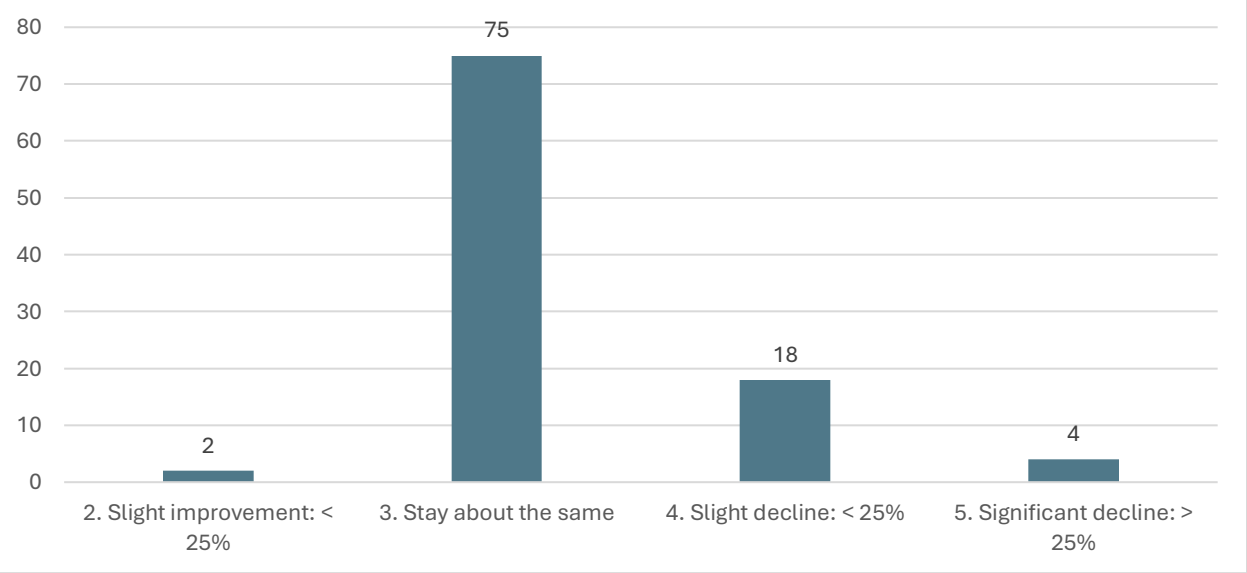
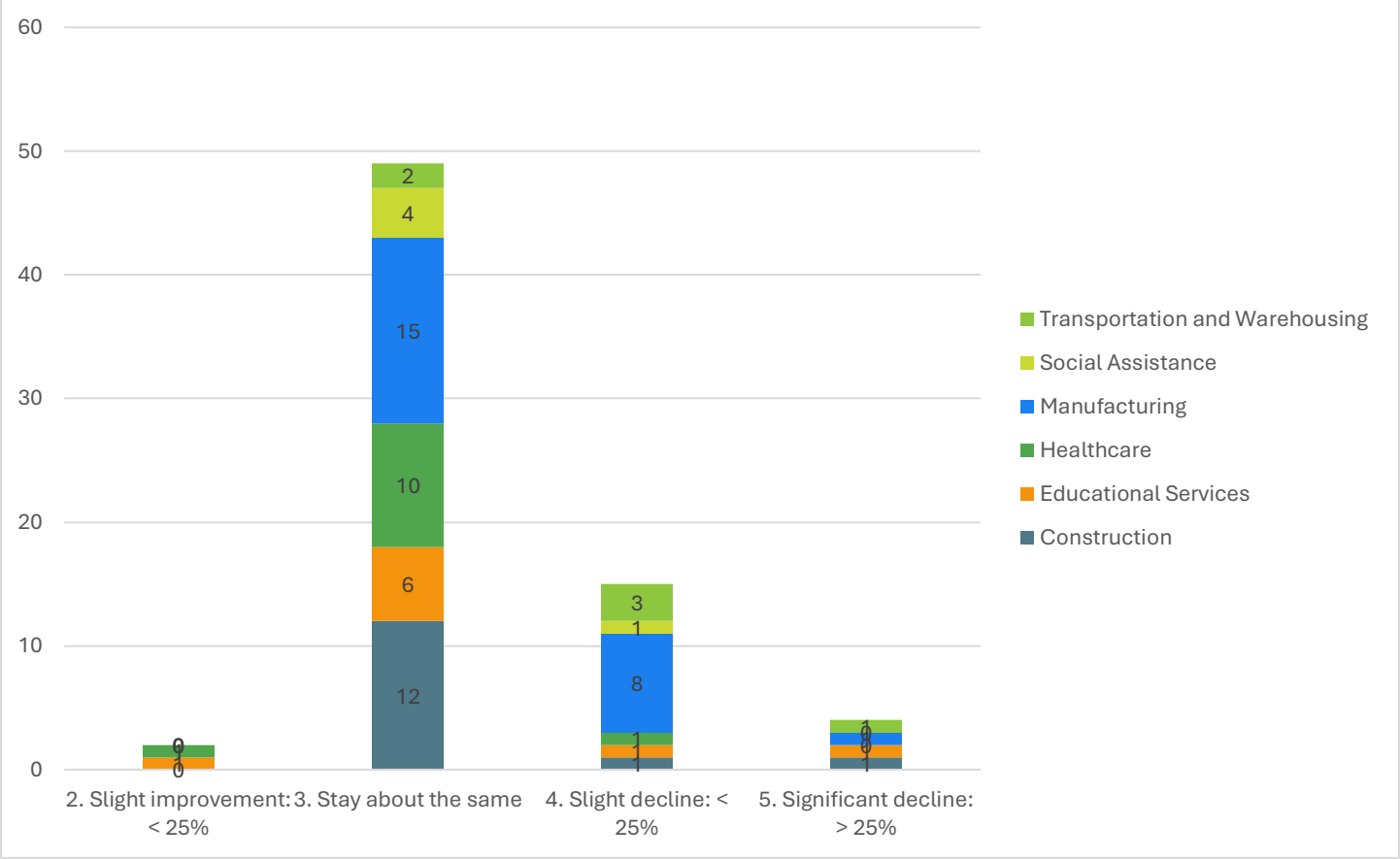


Figure 46 Change in English Proficiency of New Hires by Industry



Interviews and Focus Groups

Math and Numeracy Skills

Employers reported that applicants frequently struggle with basic concepts such as fractions, measurement conversions, and shop math. Stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of applied math skills across manufacturing, healthcare, and technical roles. Despite this need, many job seekers in Berks County lack the foundational proficiency required for success. In some cases, these gaps have prevented individuals from enrolling in training programs or qualifying for entry-level positions. In response, some employers have changed their practices to create more inclusive pathways into the workforce:

- **Adjusted Hiring Criteria:** Employers have responded by adapting their practices. Some have dropped pre-employment math assessments, focusing instead on candidates' reliability and willingness to learn. "If someone shows up on time and wants to work, we can teach the rest," one manufacturer explained.
- **Partner with Training Providers**: Some employers have established partnerships with organizations like the Literacy Council to deliver on-site math instruction. For example, one manufacturer offers job-specific training that focuses on skills such as measurement. These supports help new hires develop the competencies needed for success while reducing barriers to entry.

English Language Skills

Employers are seeing an increased concentration of unfilled openings in roles that require strong English skills. Employers report that this is not due to an increase in the number of roles, but because the growing share of applicants are not native English speakers and may lack the language proficiency needed for success in roles with complex tasks or safety requirements.

One of the most common barriers identified by employers is the difficulty some workers face in reading technical documents, entering accurate information in medical records, or understanding written instructions related to equipment safety or patient care. In healthcare settings, employees often need to comprehend terminology related to chemical handling or infection control, making English proficiency a prerequisite for both safety and quality assurance. In manufacturing, similar challenges arise when employees are

asked to follow written operating procedures or participate in documentation-heavy quality checks.

To address these challenges, many employers have implemented targeted interventions to support English learners on the job.

- **Integrated ESL instruction during onboarding**: Employers offer on-site English as a Second Language (ESL) courses that are built into onboarding and training processes, helping new hires develop communication skills from day one.
- **Job-specific ESL training in manufacturing**: In manufacturing settings, employees may spend part of their shift in ESL classes that are tailored to workplace vocabulary and the specific tasks they perform on the job.
- **Medical terminology support in healthcare**: Healthcare employers are enrolling bilingual staff in medical terminology courses to improve confidence and accuracy in documentation, especially in roles involving patient records and written communication.

Community organizations such as the Literacy Council play a central role in delivering flexible, employer-aligned ESL instruction. Services include both group classes and individual coaching, with a focus on helping workers prepare for advancement or meet essential workplace communication standards. However, sustaining participation in these programs remains a challenge. Employers have noted that shift schedules, long work hours, and off-site training formats can limit attendance and reduce long-term engagement.

Appendix G. Mobility and Commuter Trends

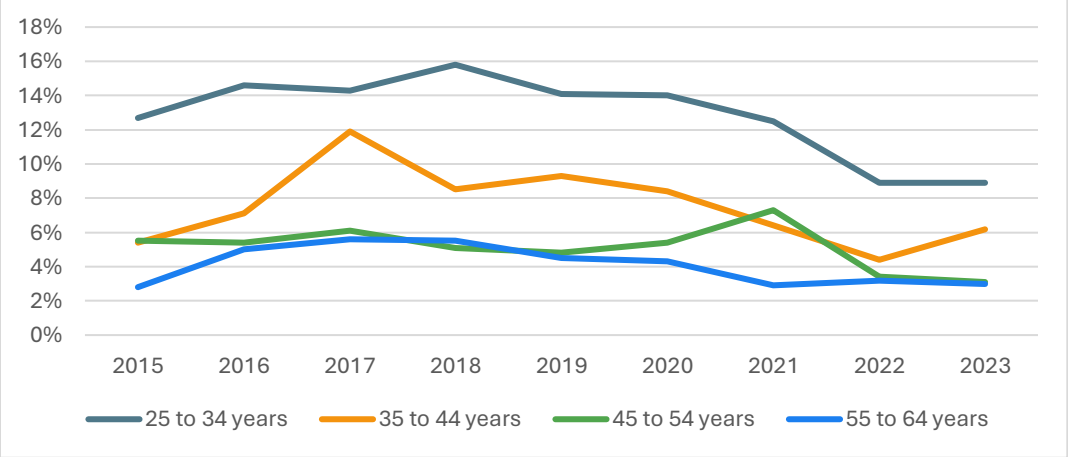
Quantitative Research

An analysis that includes projections of migration and mobility both inside and outside of Berks County must begin with an analysis of the current trends in this area. TPMA consulted data from the American Community Survey between 2015 to 2023 to investigate any phenomena that have been occurring regarding the migration and mobility of Berks County residents by age and educational attainment.

First, TPMA examined the trends in those moving into Berks County. This analysis revealed some insights into trends in the origins and age groups that have moved within and relocated to Berks County between 2015 and 2023.

To begin, Figure 47 shows the percentages of cohorts who have moved within the Berks County boundary for the years 2015 to 2023.

Figure 47 Percentage of Berks County Population Moved within Berks County, 2015 – 2023[46]



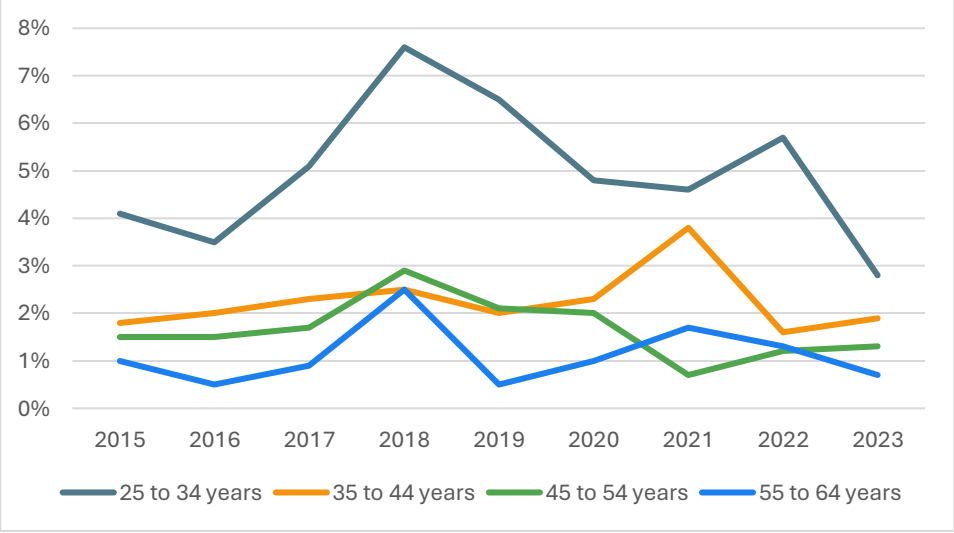
[46] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. “Geographic Mobility by Selected Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0701, 2015-2023, https://data.census.gov/table?q=berks+county,+s0701 (2015 - 2023)

Though the figure above may not indicate any conclusions about the changing talent pool in terms of those migrating in or out, it does show the churn of age groups within the county itself. The cohort of 25 to 34-year-olds peaked above other age groups in terms of relocation within the county in 2018, with 15.8% of this cohort changing residence within Berks County. As evidenced by discussions with stakeholders, relocations of the local population can impact the local talent pool due to a mismatch between the affordable housing stock and the prime working-age population. That is, the younger cohorts depicted above in Figure 47 (between 25-44 years of age) have been moving the most, which may be evidence of a desire for more affordable, convenient, or otherwise suitable housing options that are conducive to starting or maintaining a career in Berks County.

Moving to Berks County: Inbound Migration Patterns

For an increasingly broader perspective of the changing talent pool in Berks County during the same timeframe, TPMA examined the inflow of those between the ages of 25 to 64 who have moved into Berks County from a different county, but still from within the Commonwealth. The inflow of the youngest cohort of prime working-age individuals (those between 25-34 years of age) has led this charge, as seen in Figure 48 below.

Figure 48 Percentage of Berks County Population Moved to Berks County from Different County, Same State: 2015 – 2023[47]



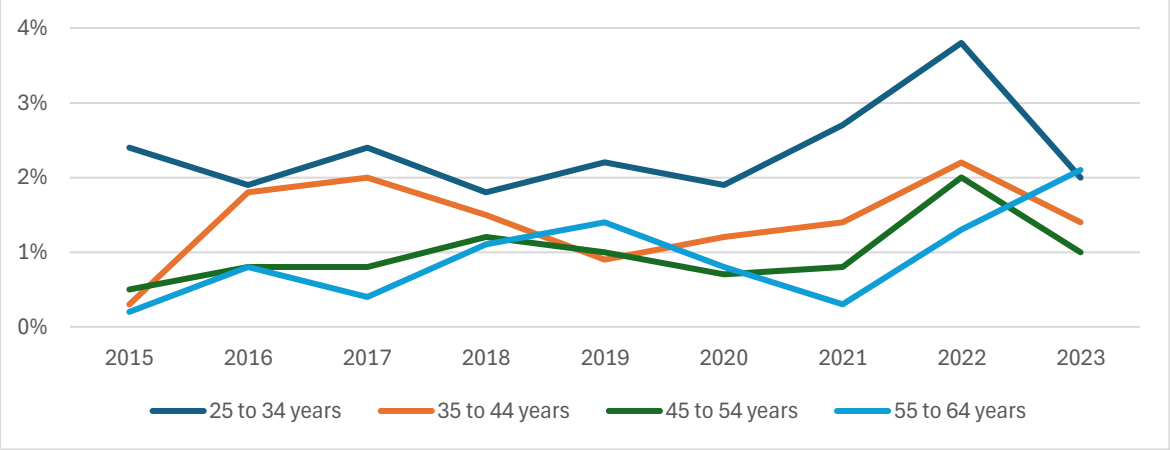
[47] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. “Geographic Mobility by Selected Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates

It is worth noting that after a peak in 2018 of 7.6%, the rate at which the 25 to 34-year-old cohort has relocated into Berks County from another county in the Commonwealth has declined to nearly the same rate as those between 35 to 64 years of age. This peak in 2018 of 25 to 34-year-olds moving into Berks County from another county of the Commonwealth is in sync with the previous Figure 48 showing the peak of that same cohort also occurred in 2018. As of 2023, with less than 3% of each cohort moving into Berks County from another county in the Commonwealth, these migrations are unlikely to upset the local talent supply by much.

Figure 49 and Figure 50 below report the most far-reaching trends in terms of geography possible, those that have moved to Berks County from a different state and those that have moved to Berks County from abroad. For those who moved to Berks County from a different state, the 25 to 34-year-olds have again led this charge in the period 2015 – 2023. Figure 49 and Figure 50 represent much smaller percentages of the overall Berks County population than those that move within Berks County and those that move to Berks County from a different county in the Commonwealth. The peak of those moving to Berks County from a different state occurred later than in previously depicted trends, this time in 2022 and only represents 3.8% of the 25 to 34-year-old cohort (a total of 1,997 individuals). A difference in Figure 18 compared to the previous figures is that the rate at which the 25 – 34 cohort has moved into Berks County from another state has declined to meet the increasing rate at which 55 – 64 year olds are entering the county at 2.1% and 2.0% percent respectively, while the remaining cohorts in the middle decline from approximately the same level of 2%.

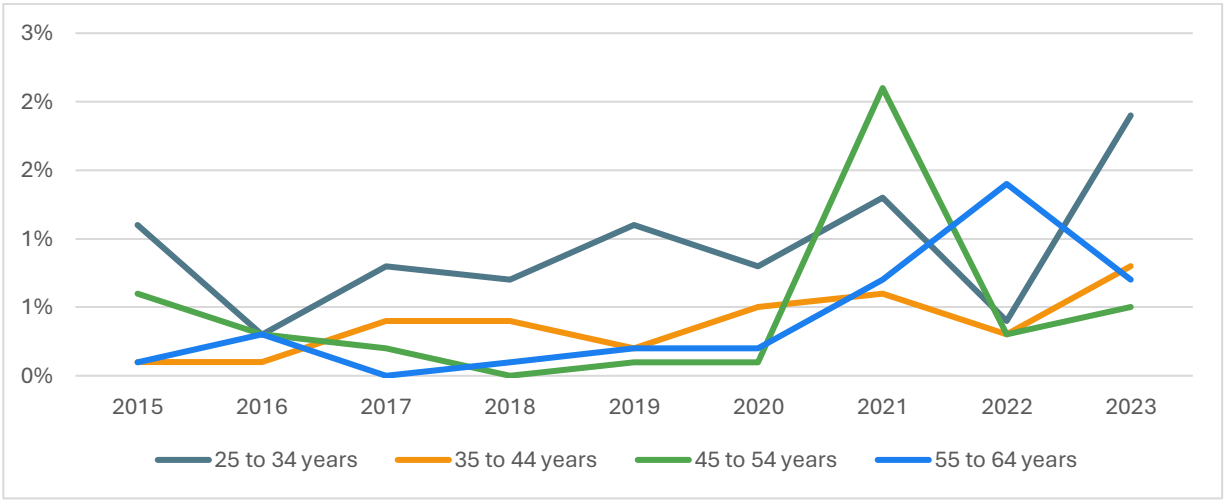
Subject Tables, Table S0701, 2015-2023,
https://data.census.gov/table?q=berks+county,+s0701 (2015 - 2023)

Figure 49 Percentage of Berks County Population Moved to Berks County Different State: 2015 - 2023[48]



The percentage of those who have moved to Berks County from abroad is like the percentage of those who have moved from a different state but likely represents unique considerations about the changing talent pool in terms of skills, experience, and languages spoken. And, while these assumptions may be true, they must be considered in the context of their share of the Berks County population per cohort they represent.

Figure 50 Percentage of Berks County Population Moved to Berks County, From Abroad: 2015 - 2023[49]



[48] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Geographic Mobility by Selected Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0701, 2015-2023, https://data.census.gov/table?q=berks+county,+s0701 (2015 - 2023)

[49] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Geographic Mobility by Selected Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates

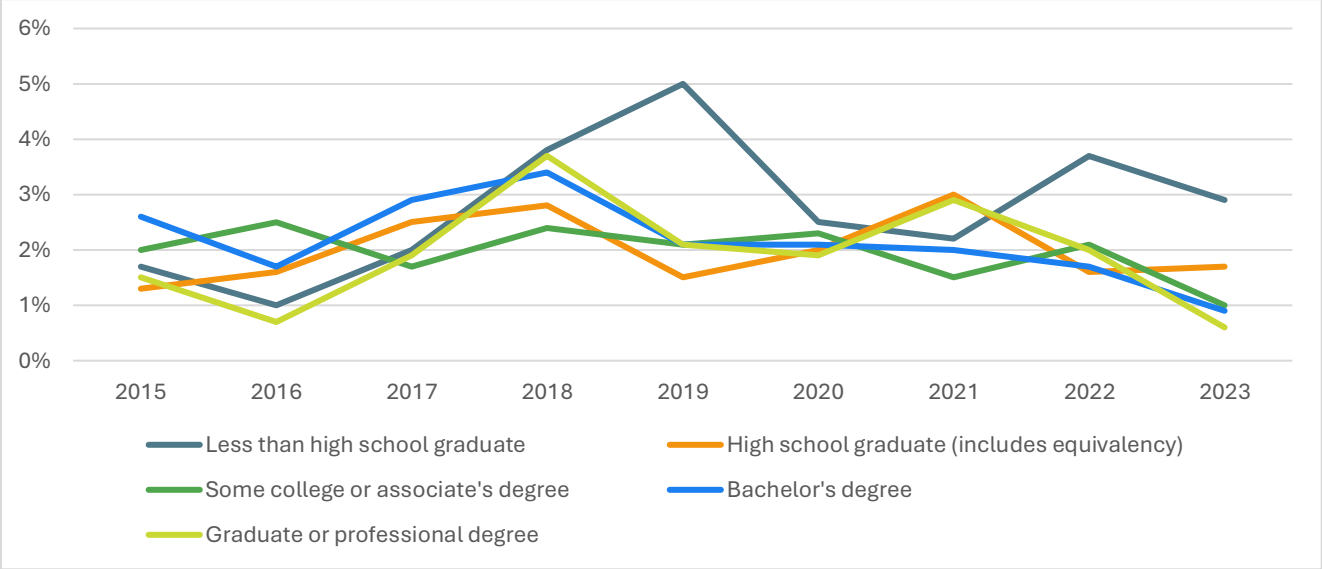
One apparent spike in the data is representative of 2.1% of the 45 to 54-year-old cohort in 2021 having moved to Berks County from abroad. At 2.1% of the cohort, this share is comprised of 1,099 individuals. In broad terms, those 1,099 individuals represent 0.26% of the total Berks County population in 2021. An implication of the growth of this cohort of 45 to 54-year-olds is that they may be arriving in Berks County with spouses and families. They would need to seek stable, gainful employment and may be needing to enroll children in local K-12 educational institutions. Without knowing the exact point of origin of these individuals, we can assert with some validity that a sizeable portion of all cohorts are Spanish-speaking individuals based on in-migration from abroad comprising 2.9% of the 99,309 Hispanic or Latinos (of any race) living in Berks County in 2021. Based on Figure 8 earlier in this report (Adult English Language Proficiency of Foreign Language Speakers, Ages 18-64), 72% of the Spanish-speaking population in Berks County could also speak English "well" or "very well". In-migrations of Indo-European or Asian/Pacific Islander descent spoke English at the same proficiency at the rate of 89% and 85%, respectively. Based on this data, it is likely the incoming portions of these cohorts arrive in Berks County with the capability to participate in the labor force in some capacity, perhaps at higher levels if English-speaking proficiency is high, or if there are suitable accommodations as indicated being made by some local employers.

Inbound by Educational Attainment

Another important aspect to examine when considering the inflow of residents to Berks County and how this affects the changing talent pool is the educational attainment these individuals have brought with them. As is commonly understood, educational attainment affects the occupations one is qualified for and most likely attempts to attain. Again, TPMA examined the data from the ACS to highlight any trends that have manifested for the period 2015 – 2023. The ACS presents this data for those 25 and older.

Subject Tables, Table S0701, 2015-2023, https://data.census.gov/table?q=berks+county,+s0701 (2015 - 2023)

Figure 51 Percentage of Berks County Population Moved to Berks County by Educational Attainment: Same State, Different County, age 25 years and over, 2015 - 2023[50]

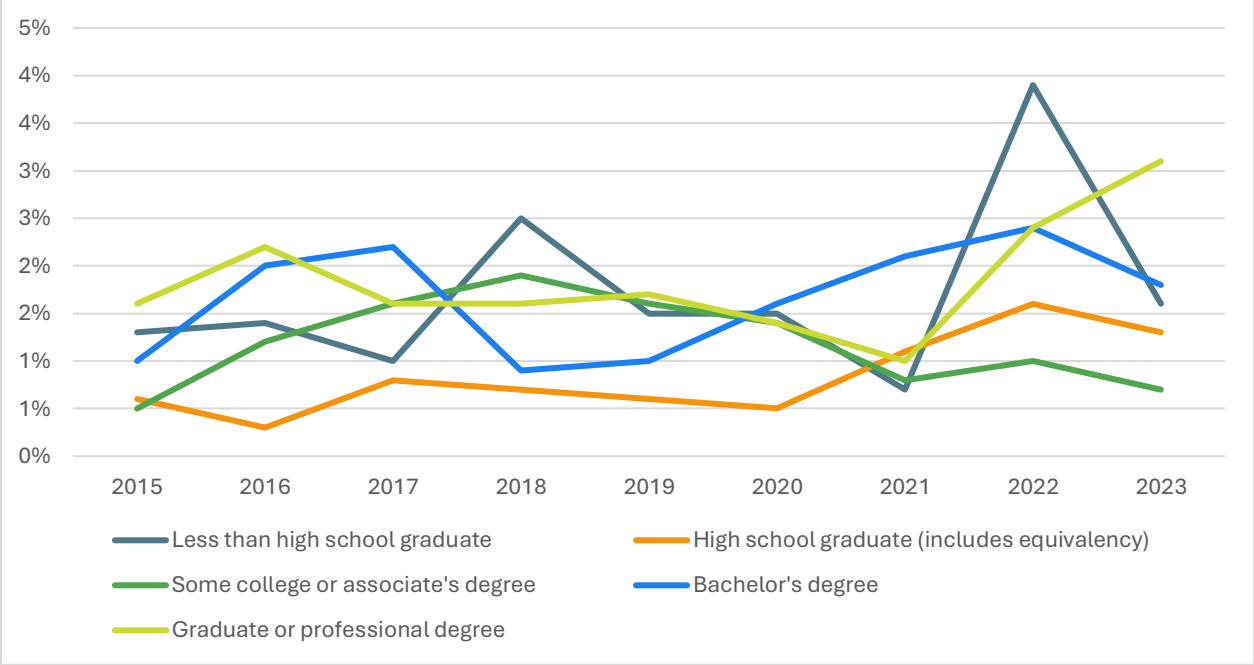


For those who relocated to Berks County from another county of the Commonwealth between 2015 - 2023, the peak is claimed by those who began residing in Berks County in 2019 with less than a high school diploma (5.0% of total residents without a high school diploma). As a comparison, in 2019, in-migrators who were high school graduates composed 1.5% of the population, individuals with some college, Bachelor's Degrees, and graduate degrees each represented 2.1% of the sample, respectively.

In terms of real numbers, and again examining 2019, less than high school graduates at 5% of the population 25 and over represent 14,371 individuals. Those moving into Berks County with a high school diploma (or equivalent) numbered 1,614. Those having some college represent 1,471 individuals, 984 with Bachelor's degrees, and 548 with a graduate level degree. It is likely this series of migrations into Berks County has a small effect on the local talent pool, especially given the 14,371 entrants without a high school diploma in 2019, but this stands against the overall population of those 25 and older in Berks County of 297,165 in 2023.

[50]U.S. Census Bureau. "GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY BY SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS IN THE UNITED STATES." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0701, 2019, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.S0701?q=berks+county,+pa+s0701. (2015-2023)

Figure 52 Percentage of Berks County Population Moved to Berks County by Educational Attainment: Different State, age 25 years and over, 2015 – 2023[51]



In terms of those who have relocated to Berks County from another state, static trends are difficult to decipher. Worth noting is the fact that those without a high school diploma peaked at 3.9% in 2022 and sharply declined to 1.6% in 2023. In terms of real numbers, this represents a decline from 1,281 individuals moving into Berks County to 582. This is significant because the population of those with less than a high school diploma or equivalent increased by 10% from 2022 to 2023. Those who moved in from out of state with less than a high school diploma contributed less to this cohort overall in a meaningful way during the same period. During the same two years, those with Graduate degrees increased from 2.4% in 2022 to 3.1% of incoming residents from another state. This decrease in less than high school attainment is accompanied by like decreases in all other attainments from high school diploma to Bachelor's degrees from 2022 – 2023.

Like those moving into Berks County from a different state, it is difficult to ascertain any particular pattern or hard and fast trend in the data for educational attainment of those who have moved into Berks County from abroad between 2015 – 2023. The most represented level of attainment in

[51] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Geographic Mobility by Selected Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0701, 2015-2023, https://data.census.gov/table?q=berks+county,+s0701 (2015 - 2023)

those moving to Berks County from abroad from 2021 to 2023 has been less than a high school diploma, and this level of attainment also peaked in 2018. Peaks in this level of attainment in 2021 and 2023 are 2.2% and 2.1% of the overall attainment level population in Berks County. These percentages equate to 780 and 764 individuals in 2021 and 2023, respectively.

Figure 53 Percentage of Berks County Population Moved to Berks County by Educational Attainment: From Abroad 2015 – 2023 [52]

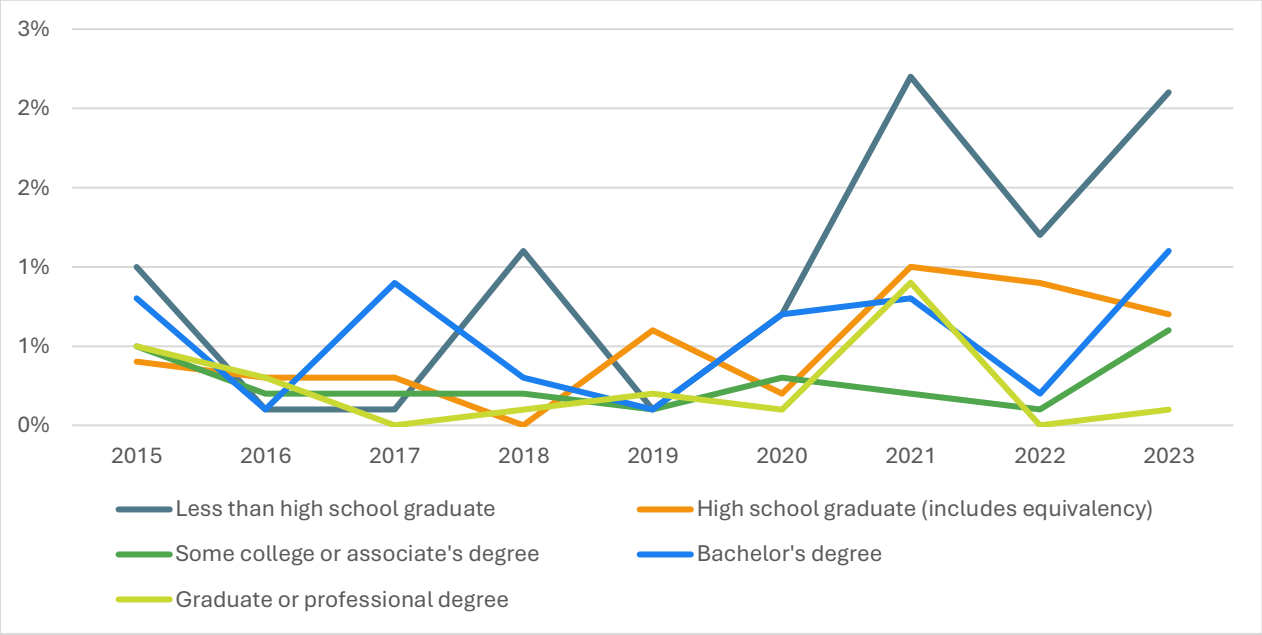
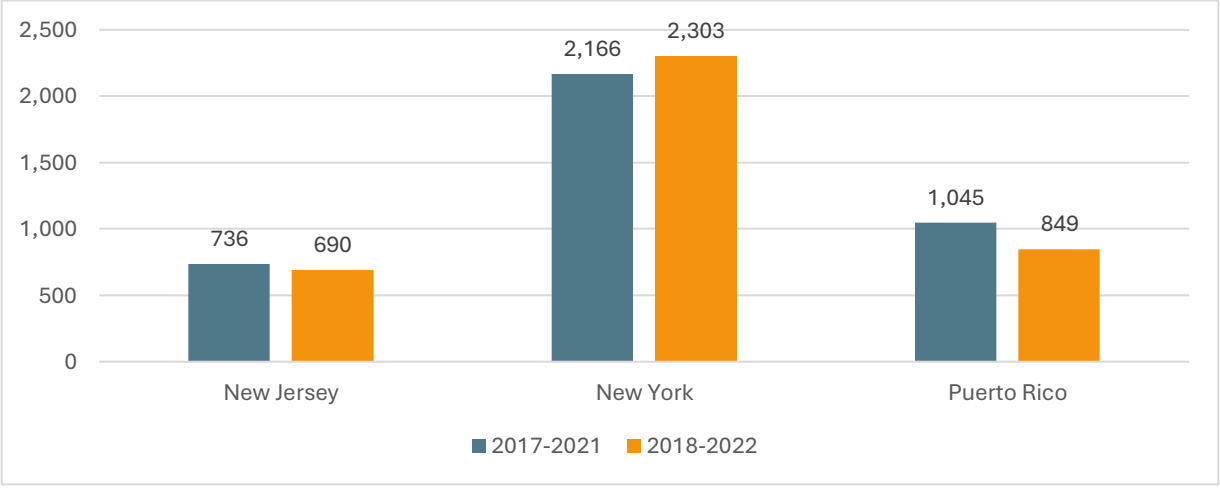


Figure 54 Entrants to Berks County, New Jersey, New York, and Puerto Rico[53]



[52] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Geographic Mobility by Selected Characteristics in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0701, 2015-2023, https://data.census.gov/table?q=berks+county,+s0701 (2015 - 2023)

[53] https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/geographic-mobility/state-to-county-migration.html

To confirm the Berks County Workforce Development Board's assumption that there is a trending inflow of Berks County residents migrating in from New York and New Jersey, TPMA gathered data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. This data shows movers from their residence of 1 year ago at the time of data collection as they move to Berks County. This data set spans a 5-year collection timeframe and relies on a series of monthly samples to produce these estimates.[54] Inflow from New Jersey decreased slightly but remains high. Inflow from New York increased and is higher than the inflow from New Jersey by an approximate factor of 3. Puerto Rico was included in this analysis based on the relatively high number of inflows from this area. Accordingly, this influences the Spanish-speaking population in Berks County, and in turn, the English Language Proficiency in the county.

A significant event that affected the population and migration of Puerto Ricans across the United States was the severe fallout from Hurricane Maria.[55] This major displacement sent Puerto Ricans searching to re-establish stability in job markets from Florida to Alaska in 2017, which coincides with the ACS collecting the data above. Pennsylvania was a top relocation destination for dislocated Puerto Ricans seeking resettlement, but behind Florida as the most requested resettlement destination with 40% of applicants requesting placement there.[56]

In terms of what this influx means for local labor markets, Utah State University completed a study looking at Orlando, Florida, where a great number of resettled Puerto Ricans arrived (a portion of the more than 120,000 Puerto Ricans seeking a new home in Florida). What they found was that the influx of workers had a positive net effect on employment (especially in the Construction industry, which grew by 4% but suffered earnings degradation), and employment of native workers without advanced degrees rose by 0.8%.[57]

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[54] State-to-County migration flows. *United States Census Bureau*. August 20, 2025.

[55] 'Exodus from Puerto Rico: A visual guide. *CNN*. August 20, 2025. https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/21/us/puerto-rico-migration-data-invs

[56] Ibid.

[57]The economic impact of migrants from Hurricane Maria. *The Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University*. August 20, 2025. https://www.thecgo.org/research/the-economic-impact-of-migrants-from-hurricane-maria/#:~:text=Executive%20Summary,growth%20in%20the%20Orlando%20area.

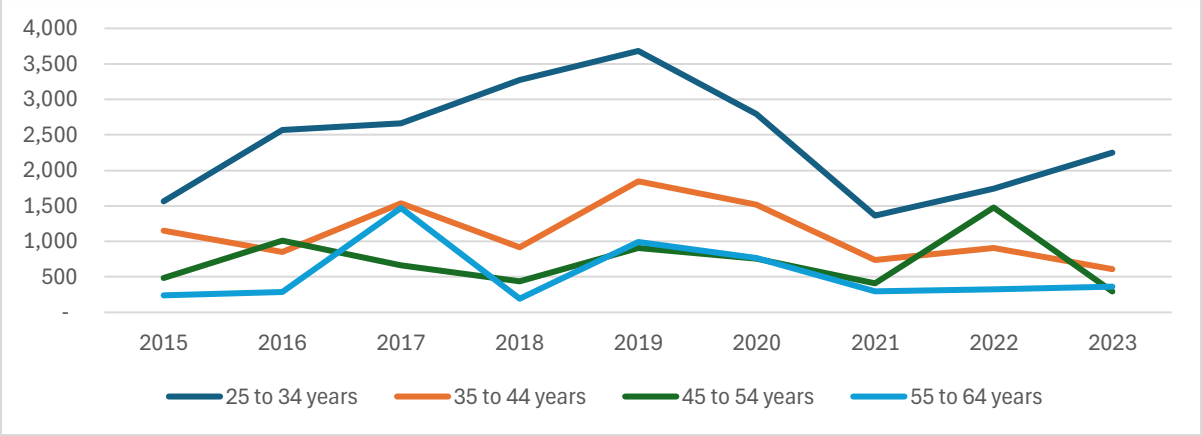
Moving from Berks County: Outbound Migration Patterns

Trends in inbound migration are one side of the coin. For a proper analysis, TPMA also examined historical trends of outbound migration between the same timeframe, 2015 to 2023, in terms of age and educational attainment.

Figure 45 below shows the number per age cohort of outbound migration from Berks County to an unspecified location within the same state between 2015 and 2023.

Like the previous findings regarding inbound migration to Berks County, the 25 to 34-year-olds contribute the most to the outbound migration. Also, as in the case of inbound migration, the high-water mark in terms of outbound migration occurred in a similar year, 2019 for outbound migrations as opposed to 2018 for inbound. After this high point of out-migration in 2019 of 3,682 individuals aged 25 to 34, the trend reverses to a low point of 1,746 by 2021 before rebounding to 2,250 by 2023.

Figure 55 Outbound Migration by Age, Same State, 2015-2023[58]



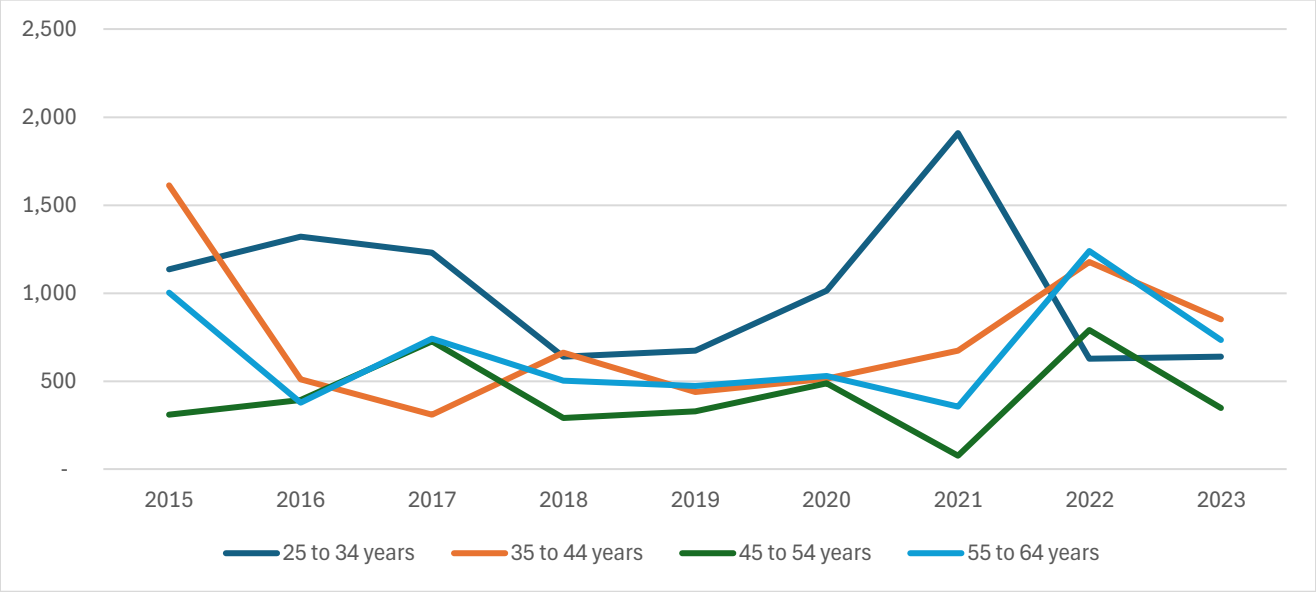
When comparing the peaks of outbound and inbound migration of 25 to 34-year-olds in Berks County coming from or going to another county in the same state, the inbound migration is greater than the outbound by 252 individuals. Essentially, what Berks County gained in this young cohort in 2018, it lost in 2019, making the dramatic appearance in these graphs a wash with little change likely to have been noticeable in the local talent supply for

[58] U.S. Census Bureau. "GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY IN THE PAST YEAR BY AGE FOR RESIDENCE 1 YEAR AGO IN THE UNITED STATES." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B07401, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2018.B07401?q=Berks+County,+Pennsylvania,+b07. (2015-2023).

this age group until 2023 when the number increased substantially from 2021. Older cohorts' outward migration to other locations in the same state are lesser in magnitude but somewhat greater in variability. In terms of the local workforce, this indicates a greater likelihood of those aged 45 to 64 being available to maintain positions requiring experience and institutional knowledge, but no large influx of potentially younger workers to replace them.

When examining trends of outbound migration from Berks County to a different state in Figure 46 below, there is a similar finding compared to the in-and-out migrations within the same state. Berks County gained 1,996 individuals in the 25 to 34-year-old cohort in 2022, one year after losing 1,909 in 2021, for a net gain of 87 individuals aged 25 to 34-years-old year to year.

Figure 56 Outbound Migration by Age, Different State, 2015-2023[59]

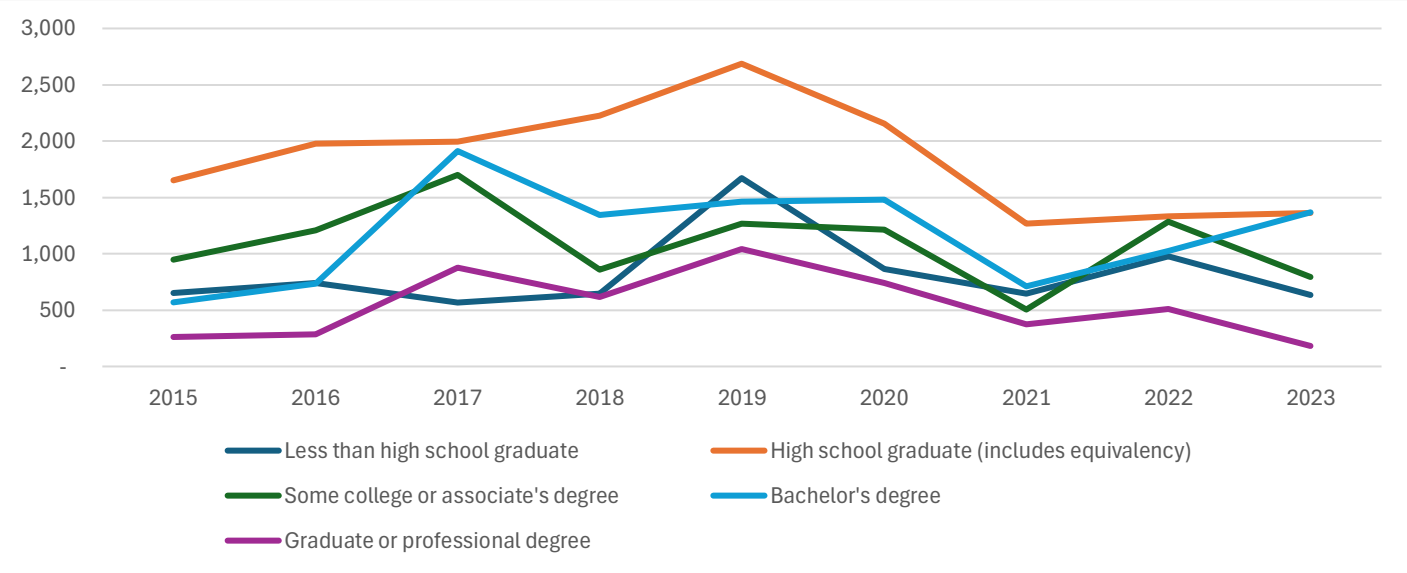


[59] U.S. Census Bureau. "GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY IN THE PAST YEAR BY AGE FOR RESIDENCE 1 YEAR AGO IN THE UNITED STATES." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B07401, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2018.B07401?q=Berks+County,+Pennsylvania,+b07. (2015-2023).

Outbound by Educational Attainment

Comparisons of outbound and inbound migration by educational attainment to and from the same state indicate a key difference at a high level. In terms of outbound migration, high school graduates (or equivalency) have the highest consistent rate of leaving Berks County, while those with less than a high school diploma or equivalent lead the charge in terms of inbound migrators. As with previous graphs in this section, the peak of out-migration of this cohort having a high school diploma or equivalent is in 2019, the same year that those having less than a high school diploma or equivalent relocated to Berks County from another county in the Commonwealth. In terms of real numbers, this equates to an influx of 1,840 individuals with less than a high school diploma moving into Berks County in 2019 and 2,687 individuals with a high school diploma or equivalent moving out in 2019. This essentially created a deficit of 847 individuals over the age of 25 without a high school diploma or equivalent in terms of those migrating in and out of Berks County.

Figure 57 Outbound Migration by Educational Attainment, Same State (Age 25 and Up)[60]

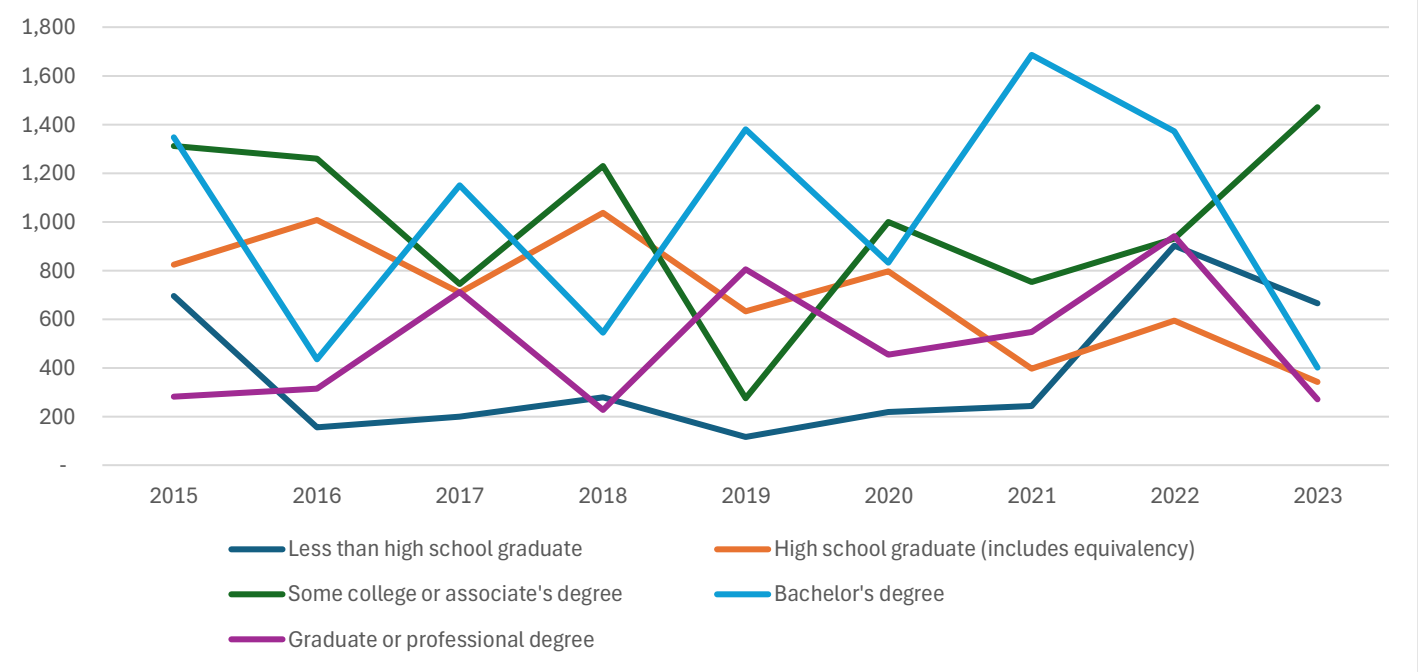


[60] U.S. Census Bureau. "GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY IN THE PAST YEAR BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR RESIDENCE 1 YEAR AGO IN THE UNITED STATES." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B07409, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2018.B07409?q=Berks+County,+Pennsylvania,+b07. (2015-2023)

Since 2019, this trend has stabilized as the rate of high school graduates migrating out of Berks County to other areas of the Commonwealth has decreased to approximate levels of higher educational attainments.

Outbound migration trends to a different state based on educational attainment is a more difficult pattern to decipher than in previous figures in this section. Trends are highly variable, but two somewhat levels of attainment appear to covariate. Trends in outmigration of "Some college or associate's degree" and high school graduates, and, to a much lesser magnitude, "Less than high school graduate" appear to fluctuate in a semblance of rhythm with each other, while Bachelor's degree and Graduate or professional degree appear to do the same. Additionally, these oscillations appear to be the inverse of each other, as one group peaks, the other is in a valley.

Figure 58 Outbound Migration by Educational Attainment, Different State (Ages 25 and Up)[61]



Graduates with a high school diploma or equivalent, some college or associate's degree, and Bachelor's degree have been leading this out-of-state migration of those 25 and older. Given that this data set is of the age 25 and

[61] U.S. Census Bureau. "GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY IN THE PAST YEAR BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR RESIDENCE 1 YEAR AGO IN THE UNITED STATES." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B07409, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2018.B07409?q=Berks+County,+Pennsylvania,+b07. (2015-2023).

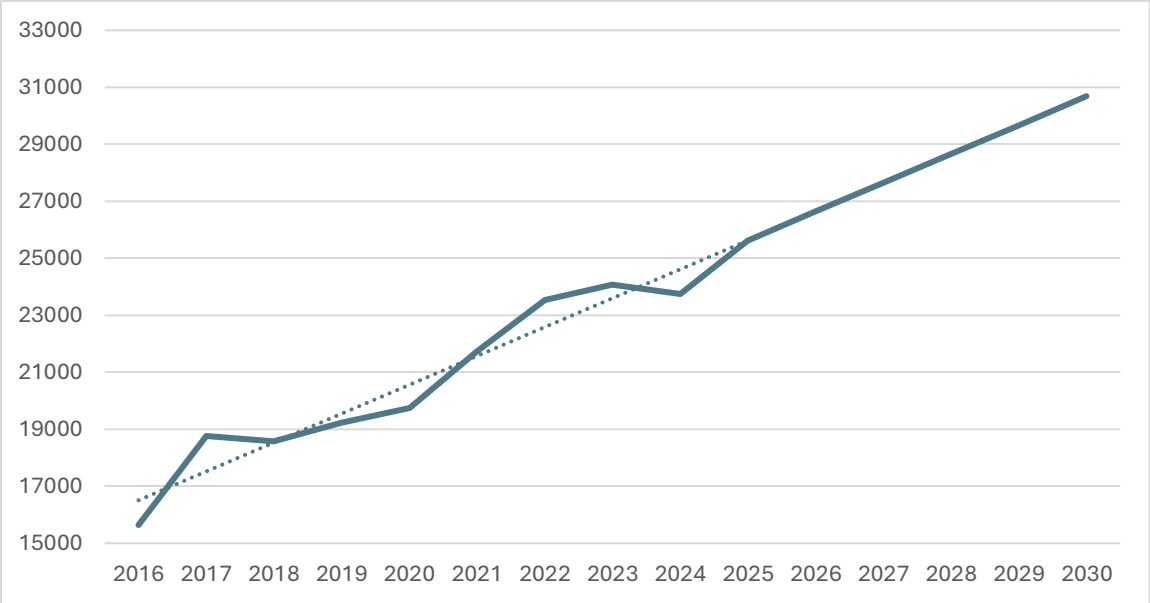
older, we can assume that these cohorts proceeded through school in a standard chronological fashion, and that many completed at least their Bachelor's attainments by their early 20s, or at least prior to 25. In the case of this data, for losses to other Commonwealth counties or states, the individuals migrating out had time between their highest level of attainment and deciding to relocate. A conclusion that can be drawn from this assumption is that by creating more ideal conditions in the labor market for those that have various (but higher levels of) educational attainment, they may decide to remain in Berks County by the time they reach the age of 25.

Commuting Patterns of Berks County Residents

To lay a foundation for the analysis of those who work outside of Berks County, TPMA examined commuting patterns of both workers coming into and out of Berks County. To begin this analysis, TPMA acquired commuting data from Lightcast™ for the years 2016-2024. This data reports the number of inbound commuters to Berks County and their county of origin, the number of outbound commuters and their county of destination, and the net number of commuters either into or out of Berks County. The counties of the surrounding WDAs were included in this examination and graphed below. The net number of commuters to all surrounding WDAs is represented in Figure 49. For each year of data (2016-2024), the net number of commuters skews heavily to the outbound category and shows a consistent upward trajectory, indicating an increasing net loss of commuters per year.

The continuation of the line from 2025-2030 is a linear forecast projection based on the Lightcast™ historical data. Each year, there is a forecasted net loss of commuters to the surrounding WDAs that is tending to increase to 2030. This trend is concerning as it relates to population and labor force projections. Expecting average labor force participation rates of the working age population to remain stable on the high end at approximately 82% to 2035 and only slight growth in working age population of .1%-4.2%, net growth in outbound commuters further taps the available workforce in Berks County that could work inside Berks County. As a primer to the interviews and focus groups on this topic discussed later in this section, these commuters also represent jobs higher in pay and professionalism.

Figure 59 Net Outbound Commuters, 2016-2024 with Projection to 2030 [62]



For a more informative analysis of overall commuter behavior, TPMA analyzed this commuter data obtained from Lightcast™ at a finer grain. The TPMA team broke this data down to the constituent parts of the overall commuter behavior of those inbound to Berks County, and workers who commute outbound to the surrounding WDAs.

Figure 60 below shows the outbound commuters by WDA destination. Historical data has been graphed for the years 2016 – 2024, and a linear forecasting formula has been applied to the known numbers in the same fashion as

[62] Inbound and Outbound Commuter data from Lightcast

Figure 59 above to attain projections to 2030.

Figure 60 Net Outbound Commuters from Berks County by Destination, 2016 – 2030[63]

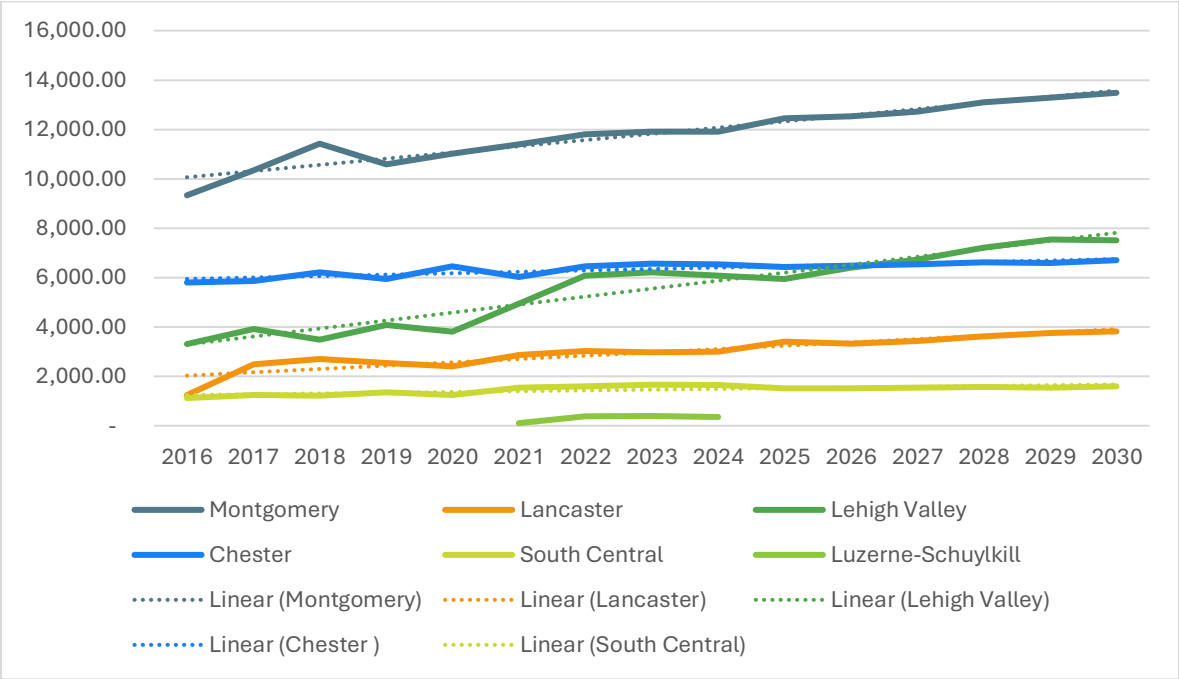
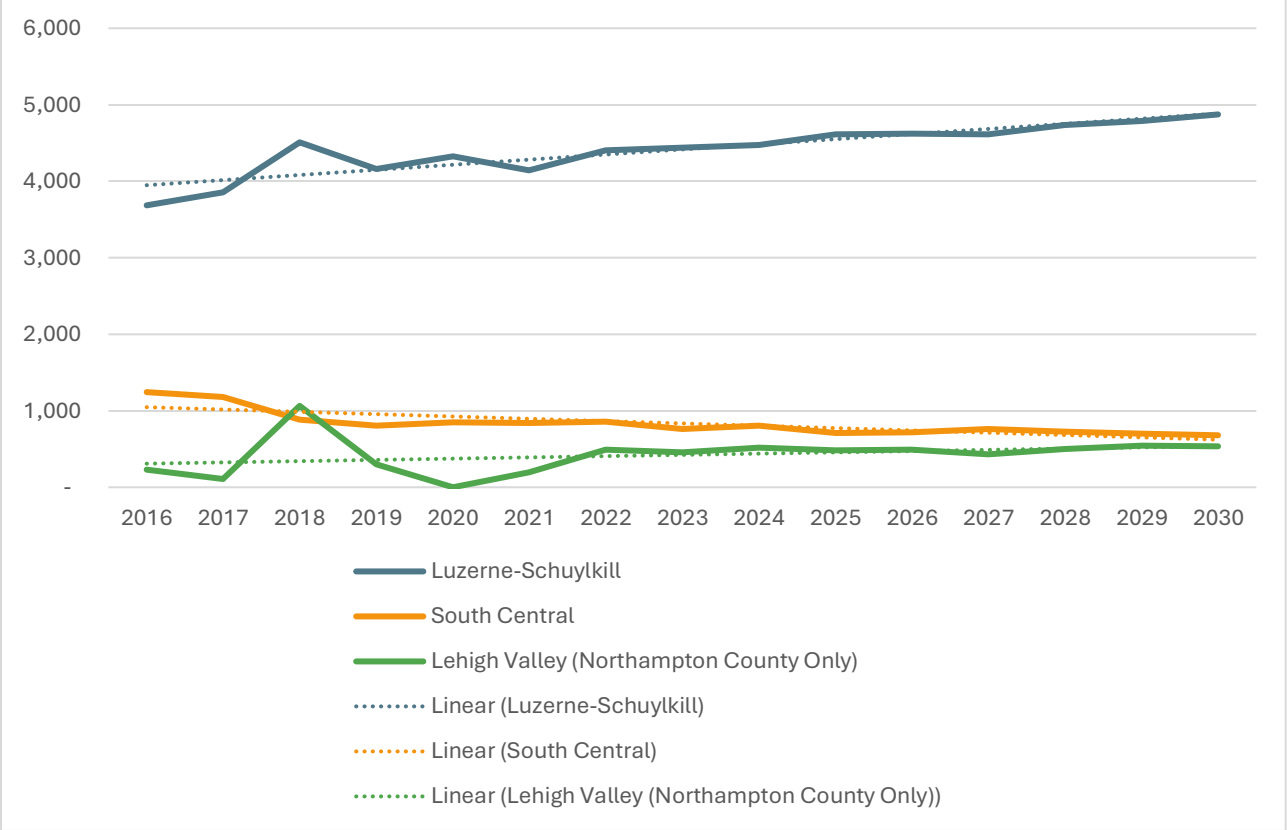


Figure 60 above, the outbound commuters from Berks County report to work in various surrounding WDAs. Montgomery, Lancaster, Lehigh Valley, and Chester are the most traveled to destinations for net outbound commuters from Berks County. Montgomery County has historically received the most outbound commuters from Berks County, starting at 11,916 commuters in 2024 and is projected to receive 13,484 by 2030, an estimated 27% increase during this projection period. Lancaster and Lehigh Valley have also exhibited a growth trend in the number of outbound commuters from Berks County as Lancaster anticipates a 27% increase and the Lehigh Valley WDA can experience a 23% growth in commuters coming from Berks County between 2024 and 2030.

For greater context, the TPMA team also examined the trend of net inbound commuter activity to Berks County over the same period. Using the same Lightcast™ data as described above, the inbound commuters were isolated for the years 2016-2024.

[63] Inbound and Outbound Commuter data from Lightcast

Figure 61 Net Inbound Commuters by WDA, 2016–2024 with Projection to 2030



It is important to note that the surrounding WDAs that are comprised of more than one county (South Central, Lehigh Valley, and Luzerne-Schuylkill) can send and receive commuters at levels high enough to be placed on both the net inbound and net outbound commuter figures. Consider the large geographic area of the South Central WDA, comprised of eight counties. Berks County often receives a net number of commuters from York, Franklin, Adams, and Perry counties, while donating a net number of commuters to Dauphin, Cumberland, and Juniata counties. Lehigh Valley is another WDA that provides an example of this commuter behavior. Lehigh County consistently receives a net number of outbound commuters from Berks County, and Northampton County (the other county of the two-county WDA) donated a net number of commuters to Berks County every year except 2020. See the following tables for a detailed breakdown of commuter behavior to and from WDAs comprised of more than one county

Commuting Patterns of Berks County Residents

Table 40 Inbound vs. Outbound Commuters, South Central WDA, 2016 - 2024: [64]

	Outbound to South Central					Inbound from South Central						
	Dauphin	Cumberland	Juniata	Total		Lebanon	York	Franklin	Adams	Perry	Juniata	Total
2016	702	383	36	1,120		531	256	9	182	267	x	1,244
2017	814	402	24	1,240		645	217	11	119	191	x	1,183
2018	762	417	417	1,596		355	226	11	95	193	x	879
2019	916	386	47	1,349		254	122	175	56	196	x	804
2020	970	236	43	1,249		187	206	116	169	172	x	849
2021	1,135	413	x	1,548		191	195	158	108	178	10	840
2022	1,087	499	x	1,586		294	167	89	98	203	3	855
2023	1,160	501	x	1,661		226	140	93	100	203	4	765
2024	1,157	494	x	1,651		227	156	95	111	206	6	801

Table 41 Inbound vs. Outbound Commuters, Luzerne-Schuylkill WDA, 2016 – 2024 [65]

	Outbound to Luzerne-Schuylkill				Inbound from Luzerne-Schuylkill		
	Luzerne	Schulylkill	Total		Luzerne	Schuylkill	Total
2016	x	x	x		19	3,666	3,685
2017	58	x	58		x	3,853	3,853
2018	x	x	x		278	4,235	4,513
2019	x	x	x		55	4,106	4,161
2020	x	x	x		125	4,198	4,323
2021	104	x	104		x	4,147	4,147
2022	368	x	368		x	4,407	4,407
2023	394	x	394		x	4,441	4,441
2024	366	x	366		x	4,474	4,474

Table 42 Inbound vs. Outbound Commuters, Lehigh Valley WDA, 2016 - 2024[66]

	Outbound to Lehigh Valley				Inbound from Lehigh Valley		
	Lehigh	Northampton	Total		Lehigh	Northampton	Total
2016	3,308	x	3,308		x	231	231
2017	3,904	x	3,904		x	104	104
2018	3,481	x	3,481		x	1,064	1,064
2019	4,072	x	4,072		x	297	297
2020	3,792	11	3,803		x	x	x
2021	4,945	x	4,945		x	143	143
2022	6,078	x	6,078		x	490	490
2023	6,218	x	6,218		x	461	461
2024	6,083	x	6,083		x	516	516

[64] Inbound and Outbound Commuter data from Lightcast
[65] Inbound and Outbound Commuter data from Lightcast
[66] Inbound and Outbound Commuter data from Lightcast

Survey

Approximately what percentage of your employees live outside of Berks County?

Most employers reported that most of their workforce resides within Berks County. Specifically, 43% of respondents (39 out of 90) said that 10% or fewer of their employees live outside the county. Another 20% (18 respondents) estimated that 10% to 24.9% of their employees live elsewhere. Conversely, 37% of respondents reported a higher share of out-of-county employees.

Commuting patterns varied across target industries. Manufacturing employers were the most likely to report a local workforce, with 12 indicating that 10% or fewer of their employees live outside Berks County. Construction and Educational Services also reported mostly local staff, though with greater variation. In contrast, Healthcare and Transportation and Warehousing showed more evenly distributed responses, including some of the highest shares of out-of-county workers. Social Assistance employers were split, with several reporting that up to half of their employees commute from outside the county.

Figure 62 Share of Employees Residing Outside Berks County by Industry

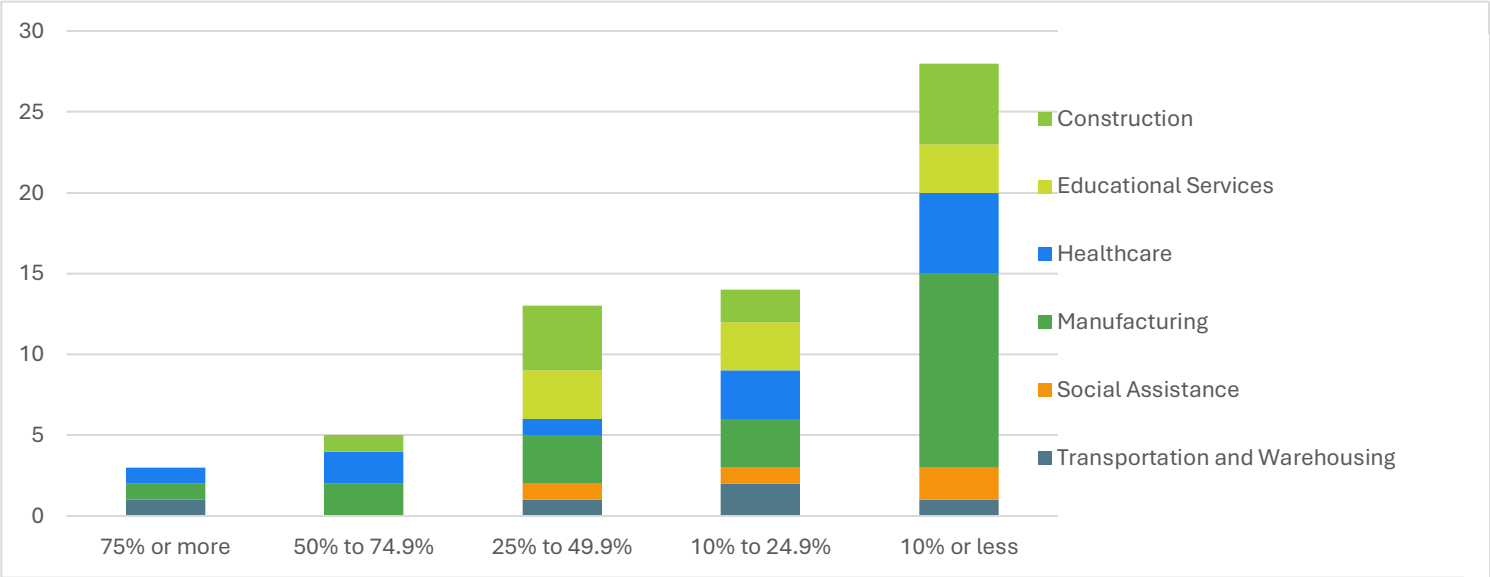
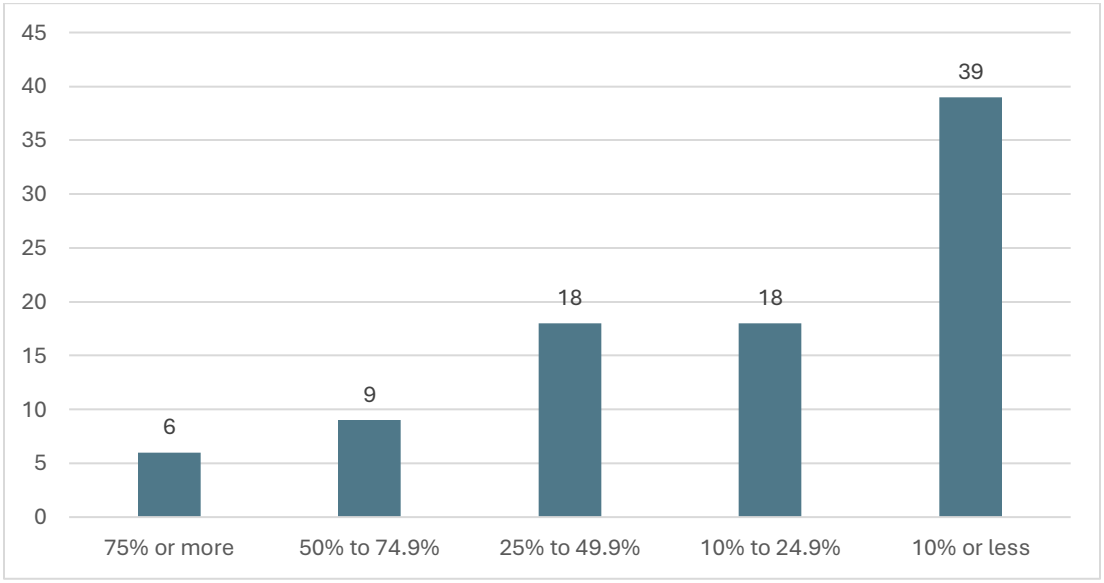


Figure 63 Share of Employees Residing Outside of Berks County



Interview and Focus Groups

Employer insights from stakeholder interviews offer critical context to the commuting and migration patterns seen in the data, showing how workforce movement is reshaping talent retention and hiring in Berks County. While the region continues to attract new residents, especially young workers at the start of their careers, employers shared growing difficulty holding on to experienced professionals and staying competitive with nearby labor markets.

A recurring theme across interviews was the steady outflow of Berks County residents commuting elsewhere for work, most often in higher-wage professional roles. Many of these commuters are in fields such as pharmaceuticals, IT, and cybersecurity, with Chester County often named as a draw due to better pay and a denser job market. These views align with commuting data showing a rising net loss of outbound workers, a trend projected to continue through 2030.

> *"I'd say the folks that are leaving Berks County to find employment are usually going to be more at the professional level... they're struggling to find... an opportunity here that meets what they're used to making, salary-wise, or level of compensation-wise, or working from home."*

In some cases, employers have moved certain jobs out of the county to find larger or more specialized talent pools. This shift limits the number of high-skill roles based in Berks and increases local competition. To respond, several employers stressed the need to show the full value of working in the county, asking job seekers to look beyond base pay and weigh benefits, growth paths, and quality of life.

Employers also reported a growing number of staff relocating out of state, not just commuting across county lines. These moves often involve professional workers and reflect broader patterns of geographic mobility in the workforce.

While these trends show that more professionals are open to leaving, they also highlight a path forward. Employers who offer not just pay but also a strong workplace culture, growth, and flexibility are more likely to keep their talent rooted in Berks County.

Appendix H. Remote Work

Quantitative Research

Future Projections and Workforce Implications

Remote work has experienced a boom of its own since the COVID-19 pandemic and given the relatively recent occurrence of the growth of this class of worker, there is a lack of historical data available to use to project trends.[67] As such, the ACS has the following data available only for the year 2023.[68]

The following tables were gathered from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey for Berks County. Additional data on remote workers for the Commonwealth overall stands as a means of comparison.

[67] New U.S. Census Bureau Data Show Detailed Characteristics of Home-Based Workers. *U.S. Census Bureau*. January 16, 2025. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2025/01/work-from-home-inequalities.html

[68] New U.S. Census Bureau Data Show Detailed Characteristics of Home-Based Workers. *U.S. Census Bureau*. January 16, 2025. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2025/01/work-from-home-inequalities.html

Table 43 Remote Work: Future Projections and Workforce Implications [6970]

Industry	Berks County	Commonwealth	Difference
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing And Hunting, And Mining	2.4%	1.20%	1.20%
Construction	2.8%	3.10%	-0.30%
Manufacturing	7.2%	8.50%	-1.30%
Wholesale Trade	2.3%	2.30%	0.00%
Retail Trade	9.1%	7%	2.10%
Transportation and Warehousing; Utilities	4.3%	3.40%	0.90%
Information and Finance and Insurance; Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	11.6%	17.70%	-6.10%
Professional, Scientific, Management; Administrative and Waste Management Services	21.8%	25.20%	-3.40%
Educational Services, And Health Care And Social Assistance	25.1%	20.70%	4.40%
Arts, Entertainment, And Recreation and Accommodation And Food Services	4.0%	3.30%	0.70%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	6.1%	3.80%	2.30%
Public Administration	3.3%	3.80%	-0.50%
Armed Forces	0.0%	0%	0.00%

[69] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Means of Transportation to Work by Selected Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0802, (2023). https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802?q=Berks+County,+PA+s0802.
[70] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Means of Transportation to Work by Selected Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0802, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802?q=pennsylvania,+s0802. (2023).

Berks County is comparable to the Commonwealth overall in many industries in terms of percentages of remote workers per industry. Construction, Manufacturing, and Public Administration are lower in Berks County compared to the Commonwealth, but not by any significant margin.

Three industries, "Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management services (including Temporary Help Services under NAICS Code 56[71])", "Educational services, and health care and social assistance", and "Information and finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing" comprise over 50% of the remote workers in both Berks County and the Commonwealth. Temporary Help Services may contribute somewhat to the balance of remote workers in Berks County, but unlikely a significant amount due to the inclusion of some sub-industries requiring in person work such as Construction Labor Supply Services (NAICS 561320).[72]

Table 44 below shows the relative ages of Berks County and Commonwealth residents overall who participate in remote work as of 2023:

Table 44 Berks County Remote Workers by Age [7374]

Age	Berks County	Commonwealth	Difference
16 to 19 years	1.8%	1.40%	0.40%
20 to 24 years	6.5%	4.90%	1.60%
25 to 44 years	43.7%	47.30%	-3.60%
45 to 54 years	19.9%	20.30%	-0.40%
55 to 59 years	10.4%	9.90%	0.50%
60 years and over	17.6%	16.10%	1.50%
Median age (years)	44.1	43.4	0.7

Again, Berks County is highly comparable to the Commonwealth in terms of age distribution of remote workers. A 3.60% disparity in favor of the Commonwealth exists for those 25 to 44 years of age, and a slight disparity

[71] *United States Census Bureau.* https://www.census.gov/naics/?input=56&year=2022&details=56
[72] *United States Census Bureau.* *https://www.census.gov/naics/?input=56&year=2022&details=561320*
[73] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Means of Transportation to Work by Selected Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0802, (2023). https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802?q=Berks+County,+PA+s0802.
[74] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Means of Transportation to Work by Selected Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0802, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802?q=pennsylvania,+s0802. (2023).

exists in those ages 45 to 54 by less than half of one percent. In all other age ranges, Berks County has a higher share of remote workers compared to the Commonwealth.

The final table featuring data from the ACS is Table 45 below, comparing the distribution and medium income levels for remote workers in Berks County and the Commonwealth:

Table 45 Berks County Remote Workers by Income[75][76]

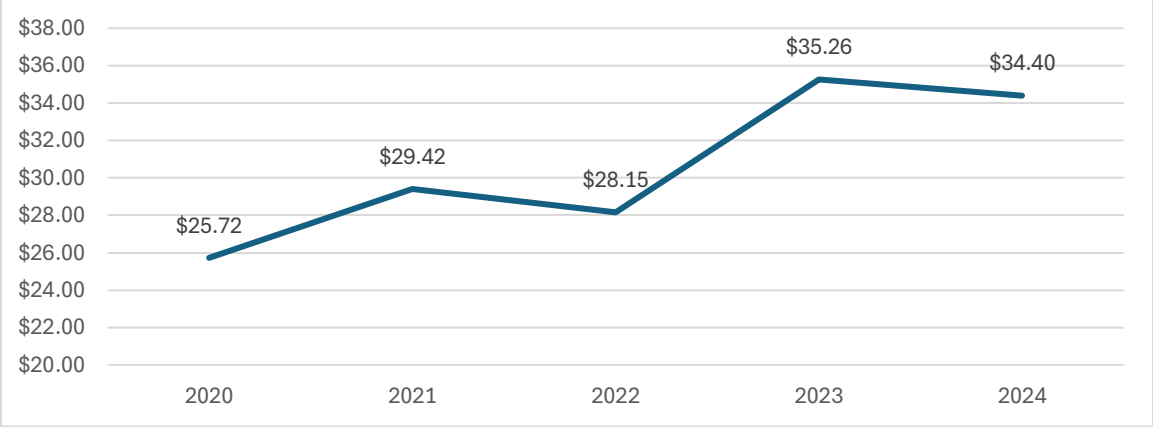
Income	Berks County	Commonwealth	Difference
$1 to $9,999 or loss	7.6%	6.70%	0.90%
$10,000 to $14,999	2.5%	3.60%	-1.10%
$15,000 to $24,999	9.1%	5.80%	3.30%
$25,000 to $34,999	7.2%	6.50%	0.70%
$35,000 to $49,999	14.6%	12.10%	2.50%
$50,000 to $64,999	17.7%	13.70%	4.00%
$65,000 to $74,999	5.2%	6.90%	-1.70%
$75,000 or more	36.1%	44.60%	-8.50%
Median	$58,969.00	$66,768	-$7,799

The Commonwealth has the advantage over Berks County in the $65,000+ income levels but Berks County offers slightly more remote positions at nearly every salary level beneath $65,000+ except the $10,000 to $14,999 range. But likely because the Commonwealth offers more remote work positions which provide the upper tier income levels, the Commonwealth boasts a higher median annual income than Berks County.

Switching gears somewhat to data available from Lightcast™ on remote work in Berks County, the TPMA team was able to retrieve data on advertised median hourly salaries for remote jobs in Berks County. Figure 64 Median Hourly Advertised Salary for Remote Work Jobs in Berks County shows this data dating back to 2020. TPMA chose to make the backward cutoff for this data 2020 to coincide with when the growth of remote work became intense at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[75] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Means of Transportation to Work by Selected Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0802, (2023). https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802?q=Berks+County,+PA+s0802.
[76] U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Means of Transportation to Work by Selected Characteristics." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0802, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802?q=pennsylvania,+s0802. (2023).

Figure 64 Median Hourly Advertised Salary for Remote Work Jobs in Berks County[77]

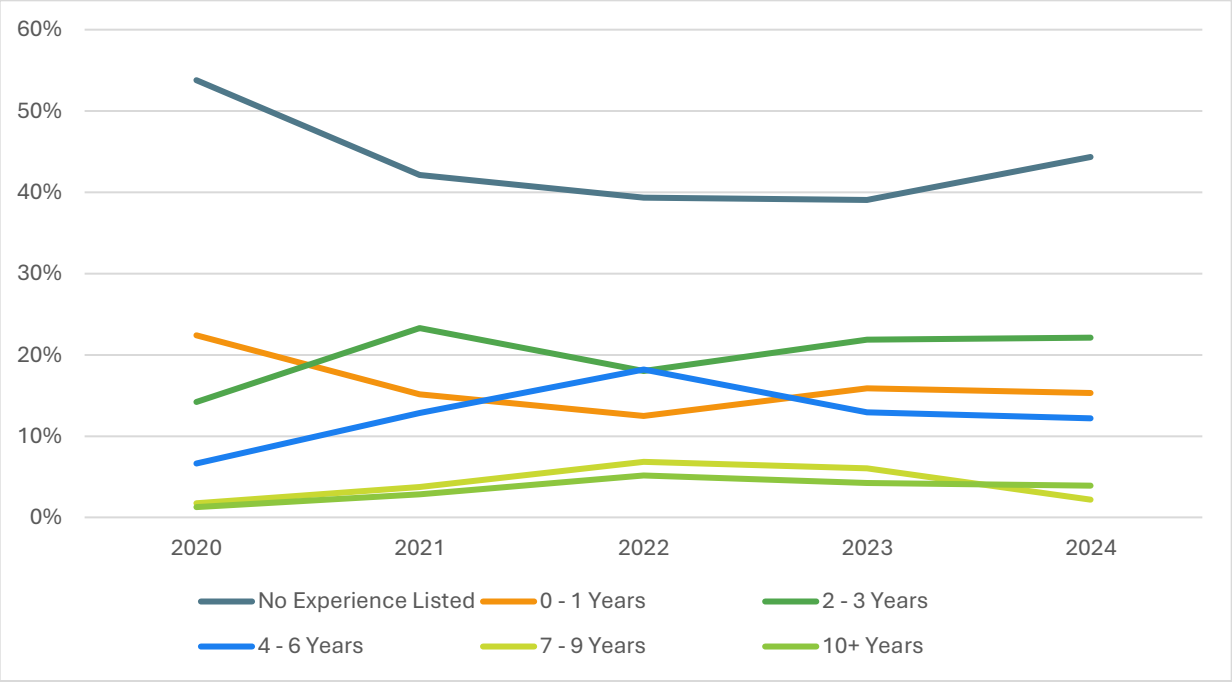


As is evident in the trend captured here, the average advertised median hourly salary for remote work in Berks County has tended to increase from 2020 to 2024, beginning at $25.72/hr., surpassing $30.00, and appearing to level off at $34.40/hr. in 2024.

Finally, when looking at the experience required that job postings include for remote work in Berks County, it is interesting to note that postings not requiring any particular years of experience have occurred 40%-50% of the time. This is possibly explained by the conditions in 2020 required so much transition to remote work that experience or other qualifications may have been foregone at first (placing no stated years of experience at over 50% of postings). As time went on and remote work became more common, postings requiring some specific years of experience became more common. By 2024, however, having no experience listed on remote work job postings has started to rise toward 50%, while years of experience otherwise has fluctuated but not undergone any major change.

[77] Remote work median hourly wage data from Lightcast

Figure 65 Experience Required, Remote Work Job Postings in Berks County[78]



[78] Remote work experience required data from Lightcast

Survey

Does your employer offer remote work positions?

Most employers reported limited availability of remote work options. 65% of respondents (59 out of 91) said their organization does not offer any remote positions. Meanwhile, 33% (30 respondents) reported offering hybrid work arrangements, allowing some flexibility in where and how work is completed. Only 2% (2 respondents) indicated that their employer provides fully remote positions. These findings suggest that while hybrid models are becoming more common in Berks County, fully remote roles remain rare

Figure 67 Availability of Remote Work Positions

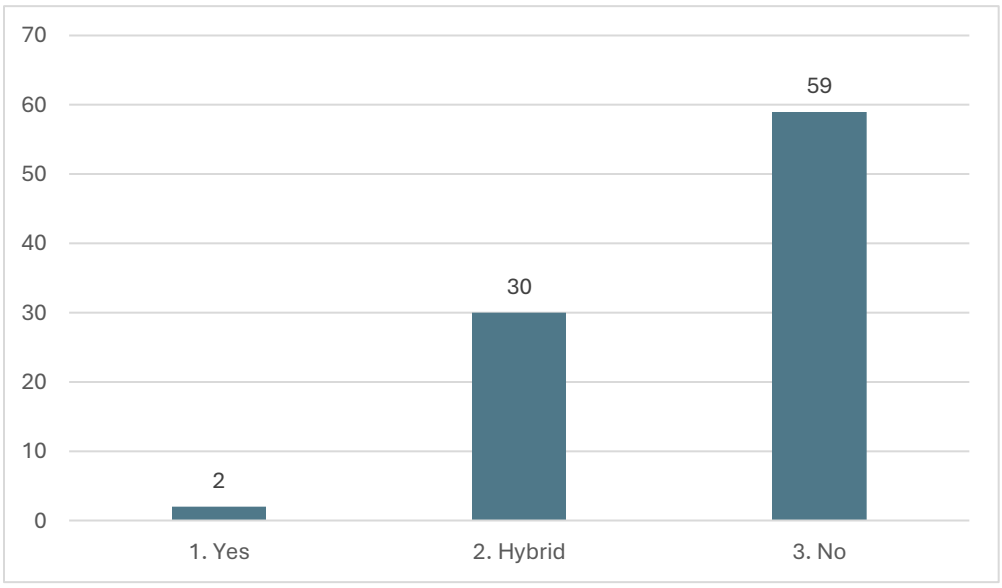
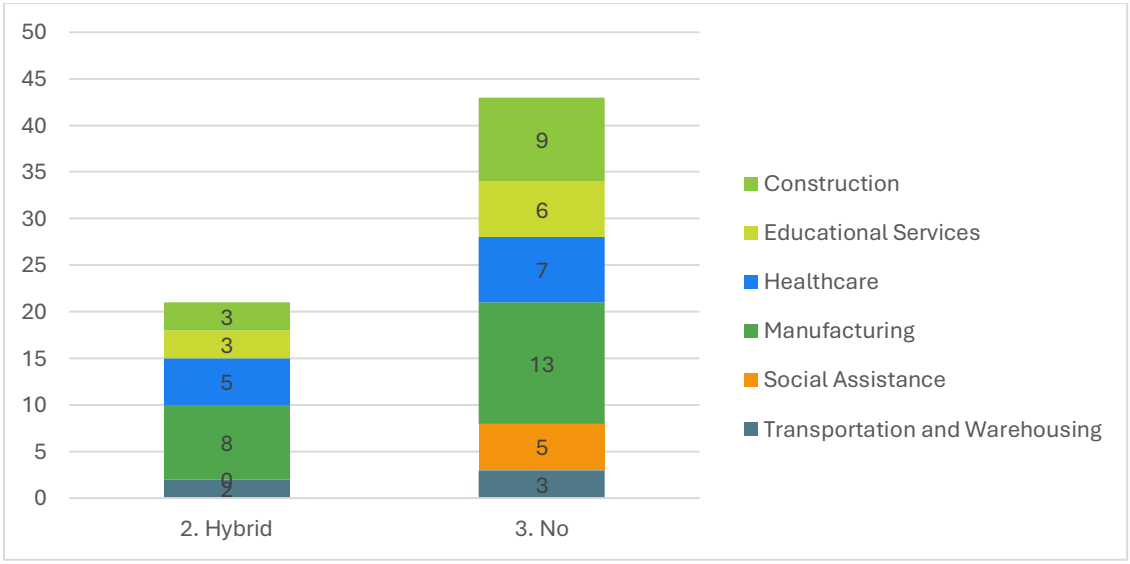


Figure 66 Availability of Remote Work Opportunities by Sector



The target industries findings suggest that remote work remains limited in Berks County, especially in sectors with essential in-person responsibilities like Manufacturing, Construction, and Transportation. Hybrid arrangements are more common in Healthcare, Social Assistance, and Educational Services, reflecting efforts to offer flexibility where feasible.

Interview and Focus Groups

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has reshaped the labor market in Berks County, though its adoption remains uneven across industries and occupations. Employers report that remote and hybrid flexibility has become a significant factor in attracting and retaining talent, particularly for administrative, IT, and professional roles. In sectors like healthcare and manufacturing, however, most jobs still require on-site presence, limiting the feasibility of remote arrangements for large portions of the workforce.

Jobseekers and Remote Work

Job seekers now routinely ask about remote options, even for roles that traditionally require in-person interaction. Across stakeholder interviews, many employers acknowledged that candidate expectations have shifted. Flexibility is increasingly seen as a standard expectation, particularly for administrative and professional roles. Many candidates inquire about remote options even in the early stages of recruitment.

"We really didn't do a lot of remote work... but the question comes up all the time." – Manufacturing Employer

Employers noted losing out on candidates due to the lack of remote offerings in Berks County, introducing new pressures around internal equity.

"We are seeing more competition from employers outside Berks County. Remote jobs and relocation options attract some of the talent we're trying to keep." -Higher Education Institution

Several employers also observed that some job seekers are primarily motivated by the ability to work remotely, rather than a specific interest in the role or industry. This trend has made recruitment more difficult in sectors like healthcare and manufacturing, where most positions require in-person presence. Employers noted that candidates often prioritize flexibility and convenience over alignment with organizational mission or job responsibilities.

“There are people who just want to work from home… not because they like what we do (as a company), they just want remote work.”- Staffing Agency

Employers and Remote Work

However, translating this growing demand for flexibility into practice presents a range of challenges for employers, particularly in industries where much of the work must be done in person.

Organizations with a mix of frontline and office-based roles often struggle to apply remote policies consistently. Clinical staff, production workers, and other direct-service employees are typically required on-site, while administrative or support roles may be eligible for hybrid or remote schedules. This distinction, while operationally necessary, has led to internal tension. Some employees view remote work as an added benefit rather than a function of job design, which can create perceptions of inequity within teams. In response, a few employers have moved toward uniform in-person expectations, even for roles that could technically be peormed off-site, to preserve workplace cohesion and avoid division between staff groups.

Managing hybrid teams effectively requires new tools and leadership approaches, particularly in communication, accountability, and team cohesion. Employers also identified that supervisory capacity can be a limiting factor. Several stakeholders noted that supervisors have not received formal training in managing remote employees, which has contributed to inconsistent implementation of flexible work policies across teams.

In addition, not all employees have access to the conditions necessary for productive remote work. Some workers lack high-speed internet, dedicated workspace, or sufficient privacy at home. These barriers are more common among lower-wage employees, raising concerns about equitable access to remote opportunities even within eligible job categories.

“What we've learned quickly from some people is that they just don't have a home environment that's conducive to working… they are dealing with confidential information… and that's just not a place that they can do that.” – Healthcare Employer

Lastly, employers pointed to the role of remote work in expanding talent competition. As remote jobs become more widely available across the region and beyond, some Berks County residents are accepting positions with employers based elsewhere while continuing to live in the county. This dynamic has introduced new pressure on local hiring and may also

contribute to rising housing demand, as remote workers with higher earnings seek to relocate or remain in the area.

> *"We have some candidates that we haven't been able to access because we're not offering remote opportunities." Manufacturing Employer*

As remote work continues to influence the labor market, its future in Berks County will depend not only on technological feasibility but also on the ability of employers to balance operational needs with evolving employee expectations. When approached strategically, remote work can serve as both a recruitment tool and a mechanism for inclusion, helping to attract new talent while retaining those who might otherwise be left behind.

Appendix I. Housing Market and Attainability

Key Findings

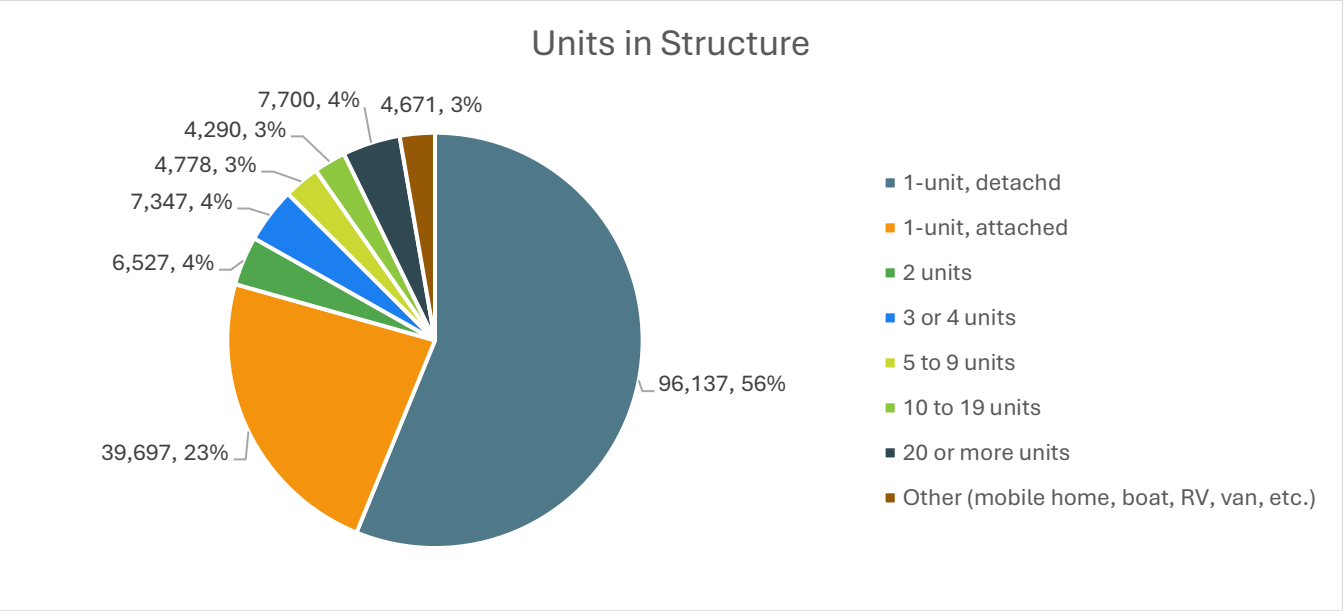
Table 46 Housing Units by Type and Vacancy Rate

	Housing Units	Vacancy Rate
All Units	171,147	5.52%
Owner-Occupied	114,882	0.80%
Renter-Occupied	46,819	4.50%

Many homes in the county are owner-occupied. Homeowners make up 71% of all households in Berks County, only slightly higher than Pennsylvania's state average of 69%. Vacancy rates for both owner and renter occupied housing were slightly lower than the state average, potentially signaling a supply side shortage. In real estate, the "natural" vacancy rate (the point at which there is balance between supply and demand, leading to price stability) is commonly thought to be 7% to 8%., allowing for enough open units to meet demand. A low vacancy rate commonly indicates an undersupplied rental market, where low supply drives up prices and reduces overall attainability.

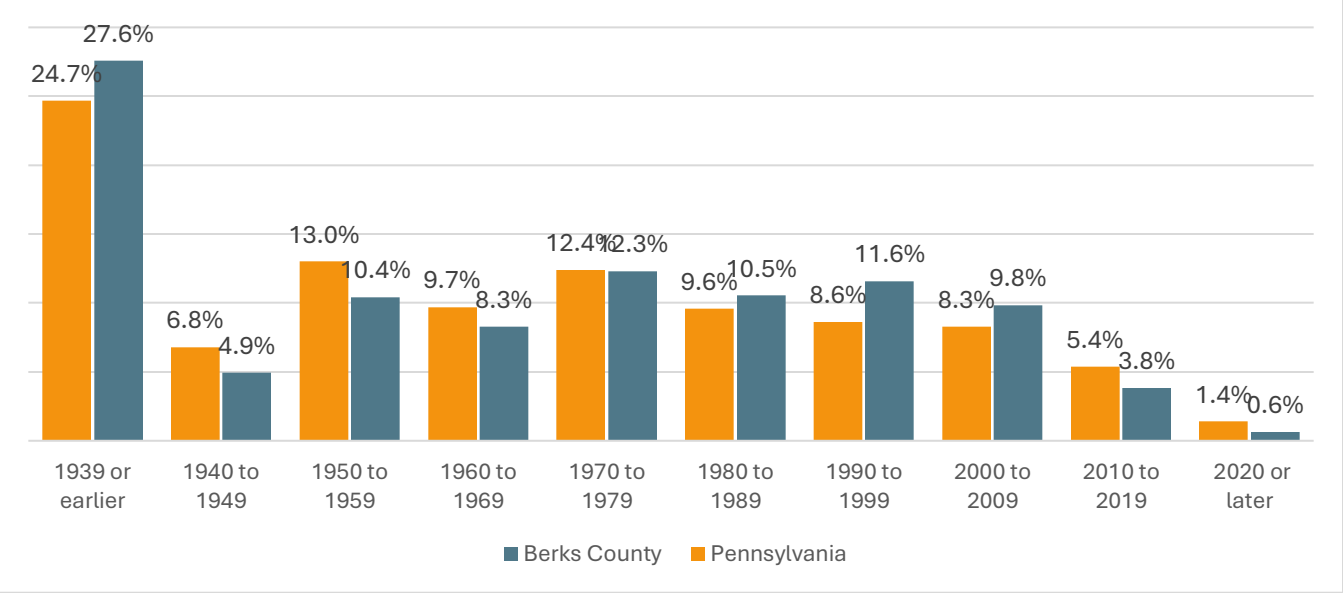
Figure 68 *Berks County Housing Density, 2023:*[79]

[79] American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



The county's housing stock is nearly 80% single family. This, paired with the notably low vacancy rate among rental housing, suggests a gap in the market for higher density multifamily housing. This housing type is essential to ensure attainability for a diverse set of households.

Figure 69 Housing Units by Year Built[80]

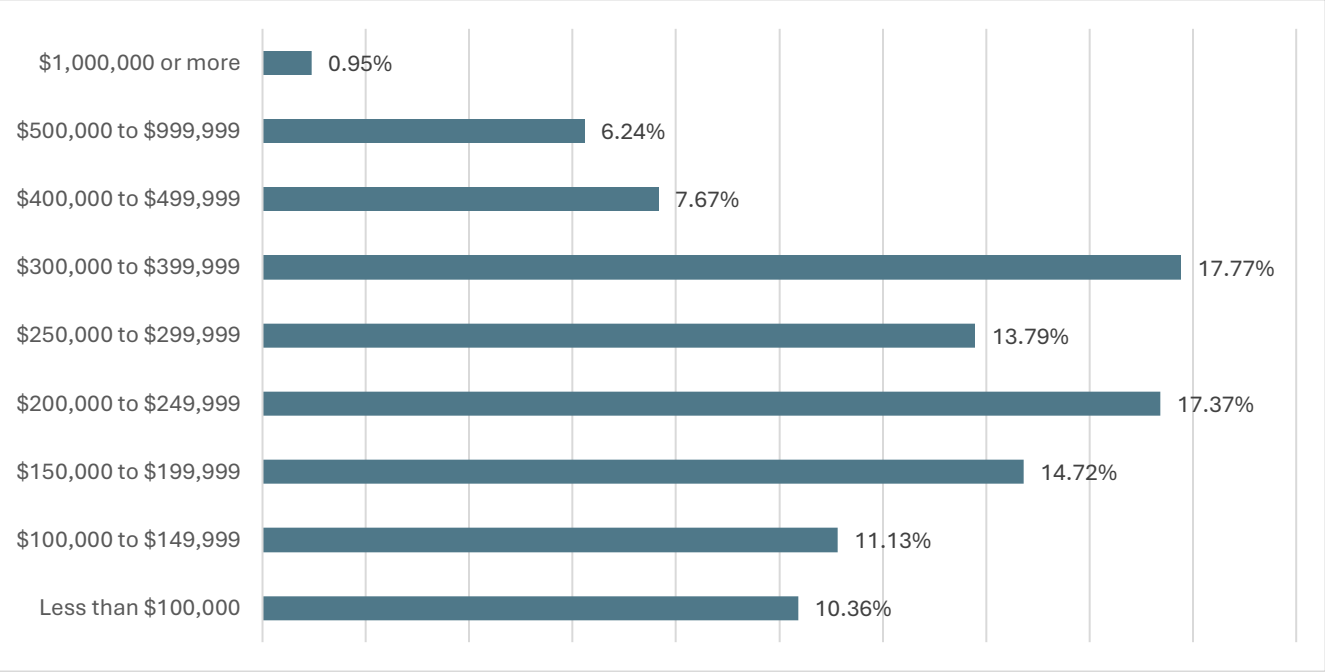


14% of the county's housing has been built since 2000, with much of that stock built between 2000 and 2009. More than half of the county's housing inventory is more than 50 years old (built before 1970), while just over a third was built between 1970 and 2000. An older housing stock signals a decline in

[80] American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

development over time, limiting the market's ability to maintain high quality housing options that meet residents' needs. Furthermore, supply issues limit households' ability to move through the housing lifecycle, sizing up as families grow and downsizing later in life, while remaining in their communities.

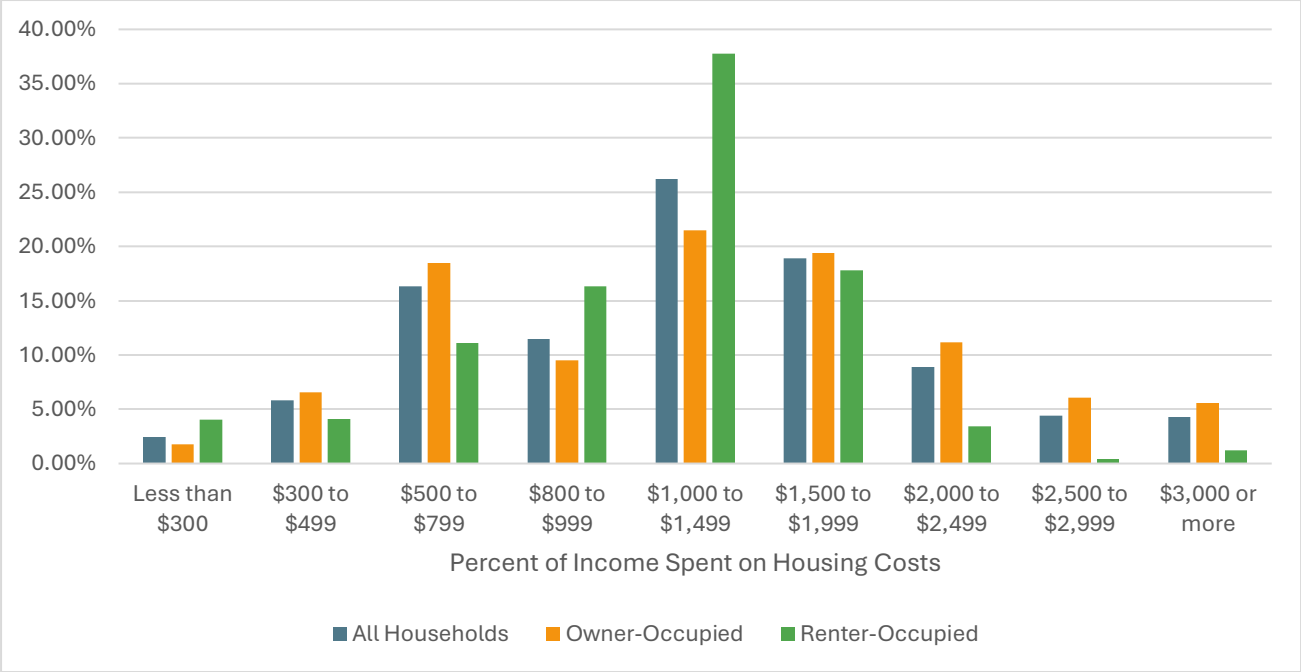
Figure 70: Home Value of Owner-Occupied Units, 2025 Estimates[81]



[81] Esri 2025 Estimates

Financial Characteristics

Figure 71 Monthly Housing Costs by Ownership Type



[82]

Housing in Berks County has grown increasingly expensive in recent years. The median sale price of a home has nearly doubled since January of 2020, rising from $160,000 to $310,000 in June 2025. Taking market fluctuations during the pandemic into account, the median sale price of a home has risen by an average of 1.14% per month since January 2020.

A sample of rental data for multifamily housing in the county shows a less steep but still significant rise in rental costs, which have risen by approximately 25% since quarter 1 of 2020. Rising housing prices come alongside other rises in cost of living such as transportation, food, and healthcare costs. As wages fail to keep pace with increasing costs, households are forced to make strategic sacrifices to maintain their housing.

[82] American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 72: Median Home Sale Price, Jan 20' - Jul 25'[83]

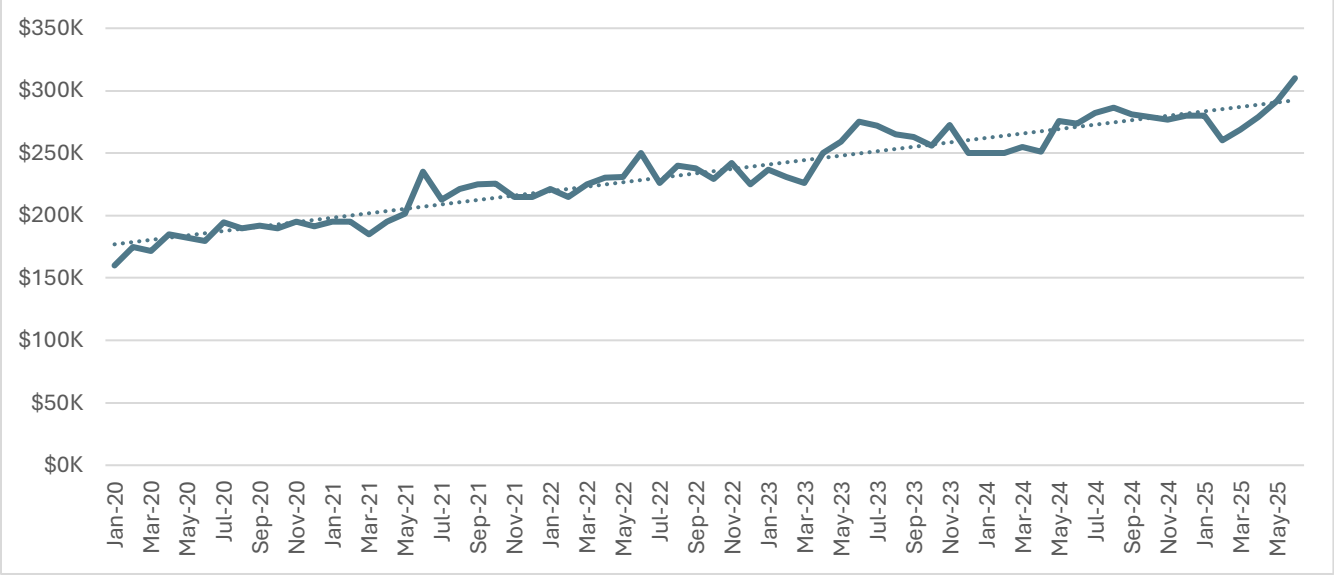
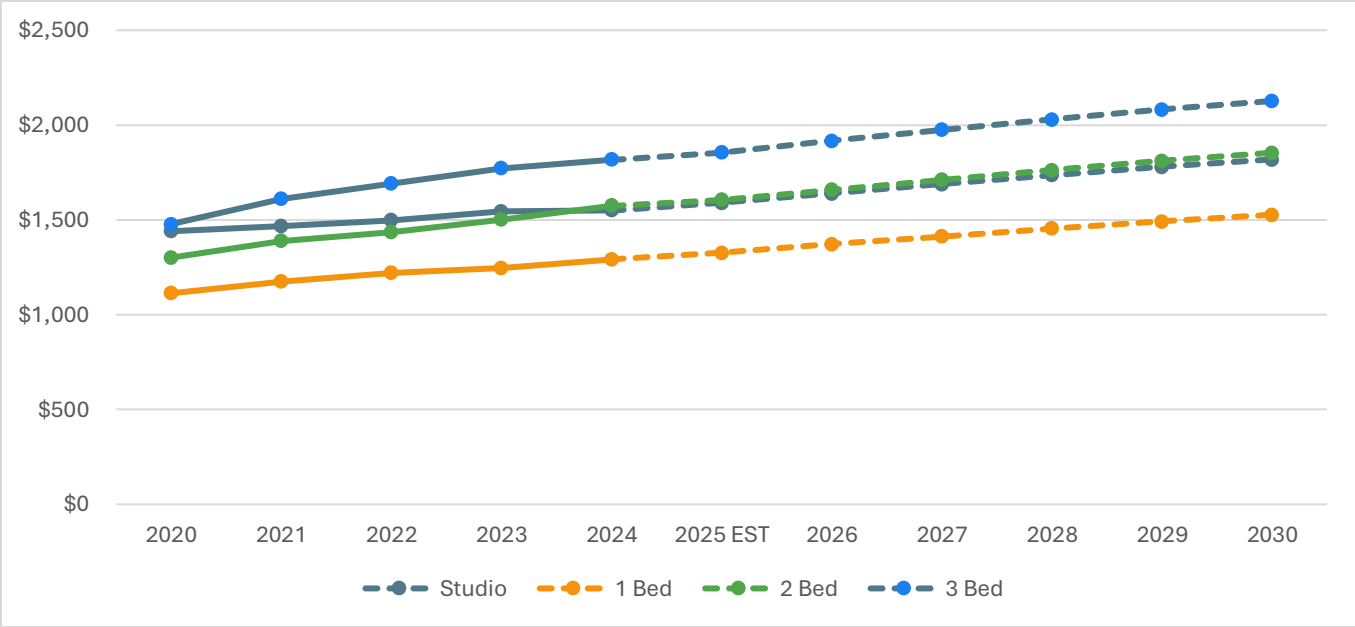


Figure 73: Median Asking Rent by Number of Bedrooms Projections, , 2020-2030[84]



[83] Redfin
[84] Costar

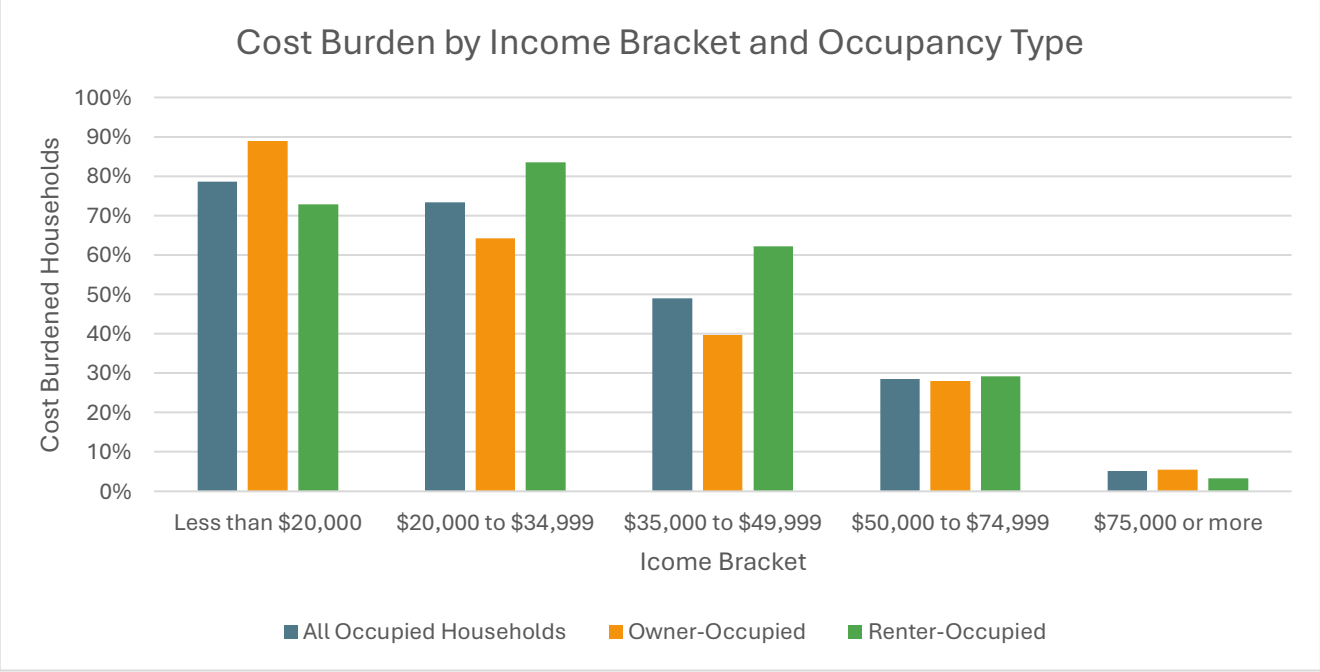
Cost Burden

Rising housing costs that outpace wages are evident in the incidence of cost burden. Households are considered cost-burdened if they spend 30% or more of their monthly income on housing costs. Housing costs include rent or mortgage payments, as well as utilities, homeowners or renters insurance, and HOA fees. A household is considered extremely cost burdened if they are spending 50% or more of their income on housing costs.

Table 47: Cost Burden by Tenure, 2023[85]

	All Households	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied
Total Cost Burdened (30% or more)	28.2%	20.7%	46.5%
Extremely Cost Burdened (50% or more)	12.2%	7.8%	23.0%
Not Cost Burdened (less than 30%)	71.9%	79.3%	53.5%

Figure 74: Cost Burden by Income Bracket and Occupancy Type[86]



[85] American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
[86] American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Attainability Impacts

According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, a single-earner household with two adults and a child needs to earn an annual income of $80,246 ($38.58 an hour) to afford the county's cost of living[87].

Essential workers are critical to the health, safety, and overall functioning of a community. They include first responders, healthcare workers, educators, and other public service employees whose roles are fundamental to maintaining daily life and emergency response systems.

Earnings data show that the median annual income for all 10 of the most common essential occupations is below $45,000, limiting affordable housing costs to $1,125 or less per month for a single worker or to $2,250 for a two-income household with both workers earning similar wages. When essential workers cannot find affordable housing locally, it can lead to longer commutes, staffing shortages, and weaker emergency response capabilities.

Table 48 shows some of these key/essential occupations and the maximum amount they could contribute to housing costs monthly without becoming cost burdened.

Table 48: Essential Worker Occupations and Earnings, 2024[88]

Occupations	Median Annual Income	Attainability Ceiling
Retail Salespersons	$32,072.27	$801.81
Cashiers	$28,381.56	$709.54
Fast Food and Counter Workers	$27,907.41	$697.69
Stockers and Order Fillers	$37,137.21	$928.43
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	$41,823.69	$1,045.59
Waiters and Waitresses	$28,994.14	$724.85
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	$35,153.57	$878.84
Customer Service Representatives	$38,574.81	$964.37
Construction Laborers	$44,644.72	$1,116.12
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	$29,112.74	$727.82

[87] MIT Cost of Living Calculator 2025 Estimates
[88] 2024 Lightcast Occupations Data

Comparing these wages to the existing rental data in the county reveals that most people in essential occupations cannot afford the median rental cost of $1,143 on a single income. Rental options at this price point are very rare in the county without a second income to contribute to the household.

Homeownership is even further out of reach for these households. For example, a household with two adults, one in retail and the other in construction, would make a combined $76,717 annually, with an attainability threshold of $1,918 a month. Assuming a $10,000 down payment, no other debts, and an interest rate of 6.63% (as of August 2025), the max home price they would likely be able to afford would be just under $200,000. Notably, this household income level is essentially the median household income in the county. Despite this, less than a quarter of the homes on the market as of the making of this report are listed at that price point.

Affordable housing allows for households with lower incomes, oftentimes those serving essential roles in their communities, to live where they work. Research has shown that communities are consistently better served when essential workers such as law enforcement, emergency response, and k-12 educators, are able to live in the communities they serve. But meeting this need often requires more than the market will naturally supply. Further analysis would help to determine the extent of the housing gap at varying income levels across the community, as well as what policies, incentives, and development opportunities can be leveraged to meet the housing needs of Berks County's residents in a rapidly evolving economic and housing ecosystem.



Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Language assistance services available free of cost.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program AColumbo@berkspa.gov

For program funding details, in compliance with the Stevens Amendment, please visit

https://www.berkspa.gov/departments/workforce-development-board