

For Immediate Release

Skills Mismatch Threatens Businesses and Families in Wisconsin

Madison, WI (April 15, 2008) - Two interconnected challenges are colliding in Wisconsin with potentially dire consequences for families and businesses. Demographic and workforce shifts are resulting in shortages of skilled workers for many industries, while at the same time many Wisconsinites aren't receiving the education and training necessary to land a decent job with family-sustaining wages. A new report, *Skilled Workers, Quality Jobs: Meeting the Needs of Wisconsin's Workers and Businesses*, from the UW-Madison based Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS), addresses these two interrelated challenges and makes a series of policy recommendations to address them.

Fast Facts:

- ✓ 23% of Wisconsin working families are low income.
- ✓ 43% of Wisconsin minority families are low income.
- ✓ The number of 65-year olds in Wisconsin is expected to approach the number of 18-year olds in the next 15 years.
- ✓ Industries with projected skill shortages include health care, manufacturing, information technology, and construction.
- ✓ 295,431 Wisconsin adults do not have a high school credential and are not in school.
- ✓ 120,169 Wisconsin adults speak English less than very well.

"An aging and increasingly diverse population, combined with growing education and skills shortages, pose tremendous challenges to the future productivity and success of Wisconsin's workforce," said Laura Dresser, Associate Director of the Center on Wisconsin Strategy. "The opportunity here is that both problems can be addressed with the same solution."

The report points to an educational and training gap in Wisconsin (see box) and suggests that there is a real opportunity to bolster the economy by facilitating education and training among populations that are unemployed, do not have a high school credential, or who do not speak English very well.

Education and Training Gap in Wisconsin

	Education & Training Pool		Number Served
Number unemployed (2005)	143,987	Number of unemployed adults and dislocated workers receiving training through Workforce Investment Act services (2005)	3,320
Number of adults without a High School credential & not in school (2006)	295,431	Number receiving Adult Basic Education services (2005-06)	26,803
Number of adults who speak English less than very well (2005)	120,169	Number of individuals enrolled in English Language Learner courses (2005-06)	7,248

Source: *Skilled Workers, Quality Jobs: Meeting the Needs of Wisconsin's Workers and Businesses*, Center on Wisconsin Strategy, 2008.

Policy recommendations in the COWS report include:

- ✓ **Strengthening and improving access to Wisconsin’s education and training systems** by increasing investment in adult basic education, improving access to education and training for low-income working adults, and focusing on transitions from basic education to and through post-secondary training.
- ✓ **Pursuing a policy agenda for stronger jobs** by raising and indexing the minimum wage and putting job quality first in state and local economic development.

About COWS

Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “think-and-do tank” dedicated to improving economic performance and living standards in the state of Wisconsin and nationally. Based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, COWS works to promote “high road” strategies that support living wages, environmental sustainability, strong communities, and public accountability. For more information visit: www.cows.org.