

Montana Employer Satisfaction Data

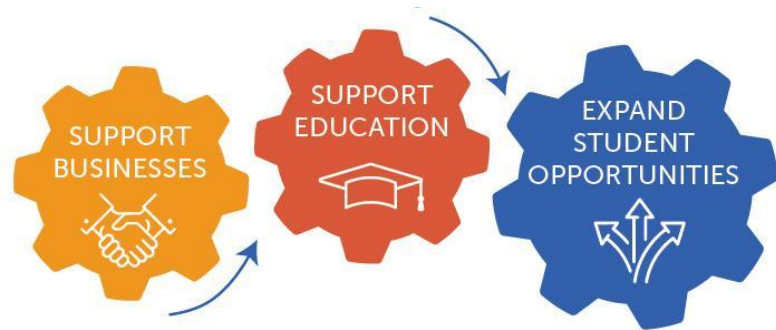
Employers' experience
with entry-level employees

Spring 2026 survey updates

Work-based Learning Collaborative

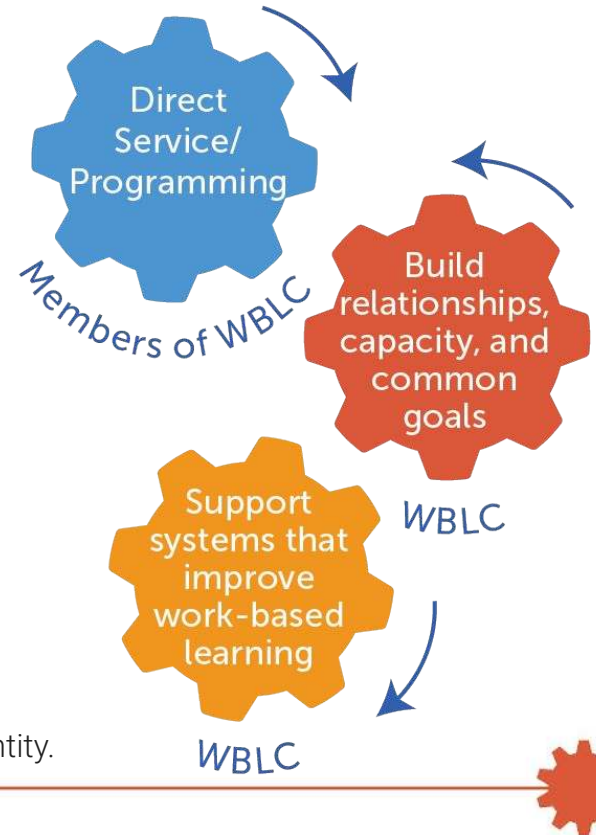
Vision: *Every young adult in Montana will have multiple pathways to economic mobility, supported by a statewide work-based learning system that honors the potential of students and addresses the workforce needs of Montana businesses, today and tomorrow.*

- Formed: 2021
- Members: 30+ private, public, or nonprofit organizations
- Staff: Director & Data Analyst



Role of Work-based Learning Collaborative

- Convene stakeholders and build partnerships
- Collect and share data around career-connected learning in Montana
- Share best practices, policy information, and drive innovation
- Develop tools and resources to help stakeholders execute high-quality WBL
- Deliver workshops and provide technical support



The WBLC is a non-partisan, capacity-building entity.

Why WBLC collects & shares data

Share learner, educator, and employer insights with stakeholders

Inform data-driven programs and policies

Support effective resource management

Facilitate collaboration by highlighting strengths and opportunities across Montana

Track long-term effectiveness and system-wide outcomes of WBL activities

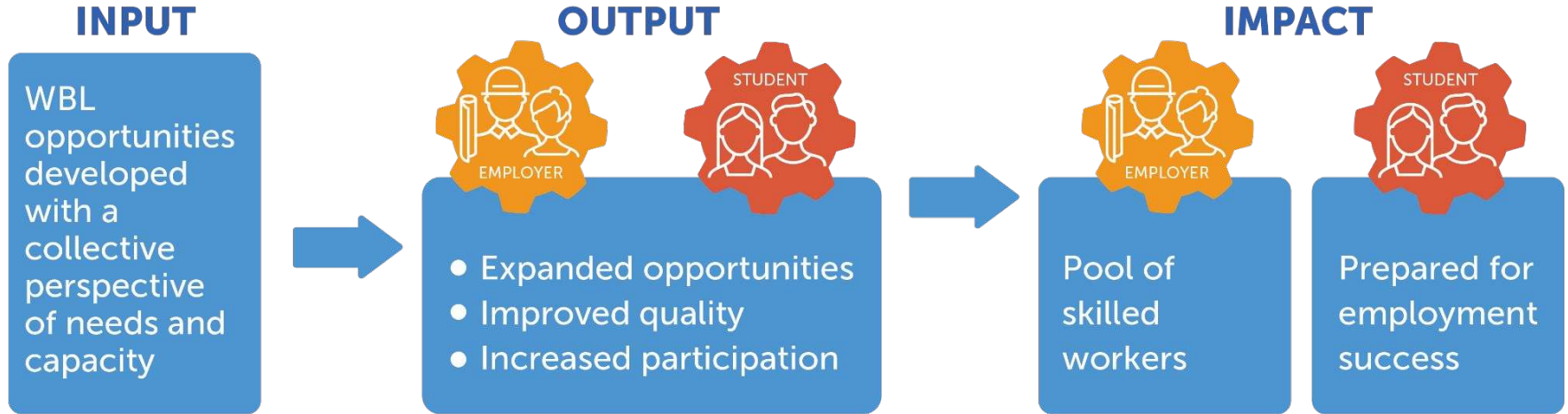


Why the employer satisfaction survey?

- Inform work of Work-based Learning Collaborative and partners
- Provide one method of measuring workforce health
- Study longitudinal changes in employer satisfaction around recruitment, readiness, and retention



WBLC Data Theory of Change



Indicator data for WBLC includes **Workforce Health**

- Employer's satisfaction with ability to hire by level of experience.
- Ability to hire skilled workers from MT.
- Employer's satisfaction with readiness of new hires by level of experience.
- Ability to retain skilled workers in MT.



What do we mean by career-connected learning?

Career Awareness

- Interest Inventories
- Guest Speakers
- Career Fairs
- Workplace Tours
- Community Involvement

Career Exploration

- Informational Interviews
- Job Shadows/Externships
- Industry Design Challenge
- Project-based Learning
- Career-focused Summer Camps
- Career and Technical Student Organizations

Work-based Learning and Training

- Internships
- Student-run Enterprise
- Service Learning
- Supported Employment
- Pre-Apprenticeship
- Assistantships
- Clinicals
- Practicum
- Youth Apprenticeship
- Apprenticeship
- Industry Recognized Credentials
- On-the-job Training



Organization Respondents

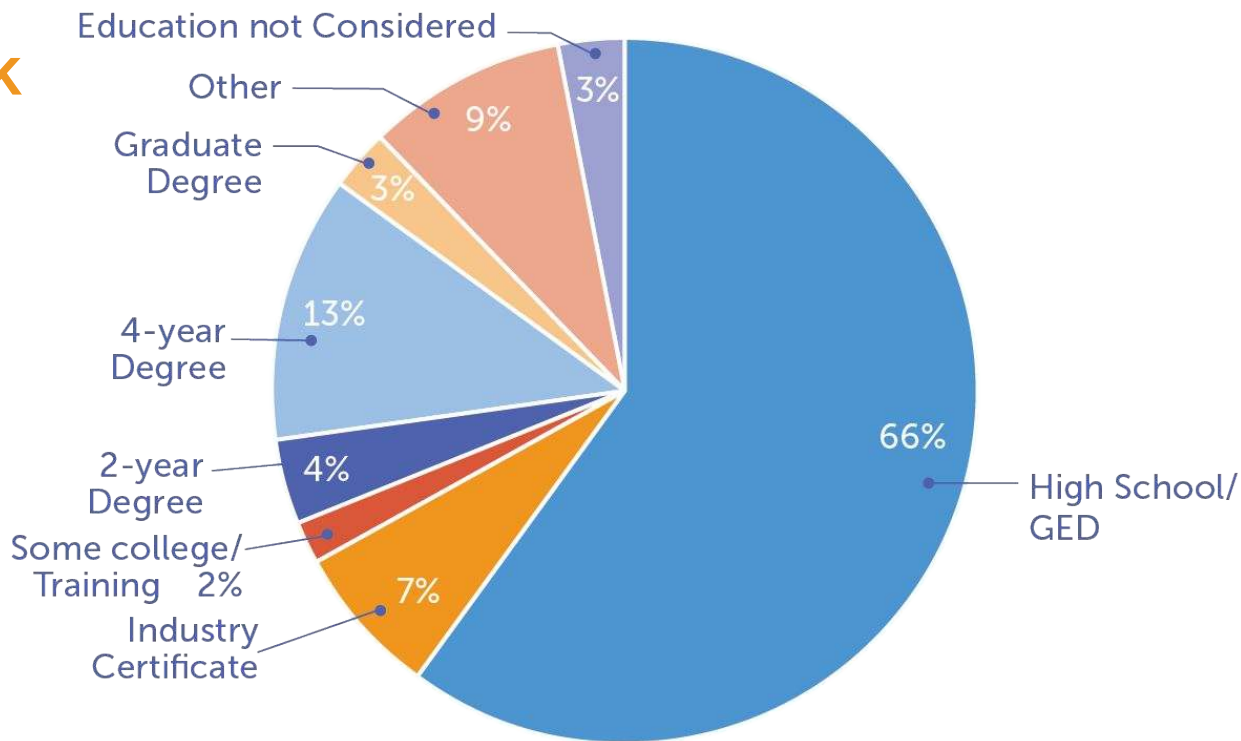
41 respondents from 2026, 161 total organizations for survey over time

- Information was collected between Spring 2024 and Spring 2026
- Organizations range in size from 1 employee to over 500 employees
- Private, public, and non-profit organizations from all regions of Montana are represented
- The most common industries for 2026 respondents were Educational Services, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Manufacturing

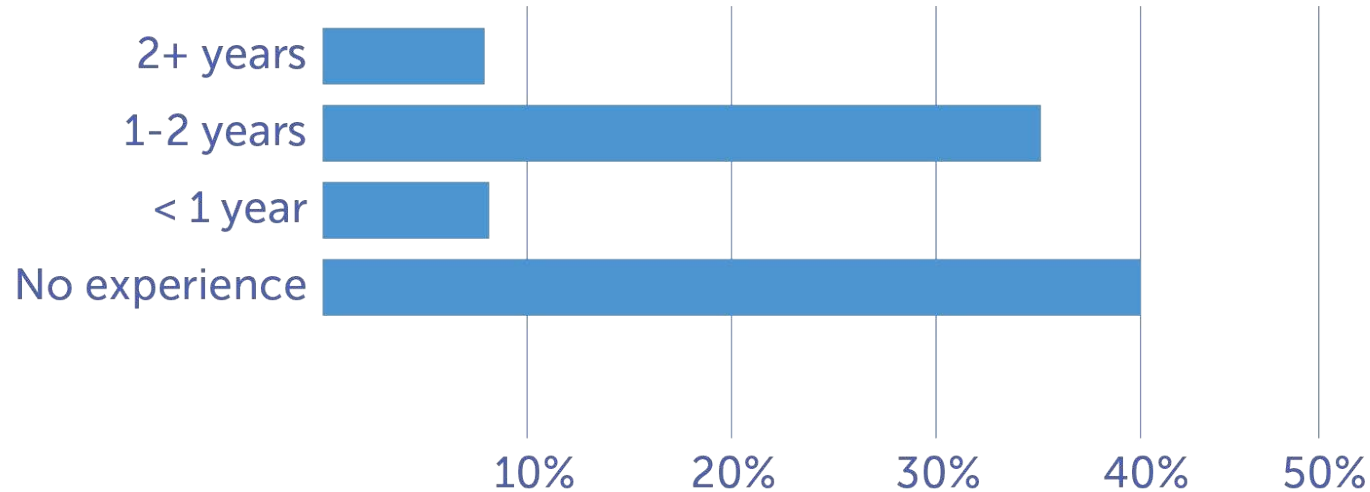


Education level employers seek in entry-level employees

The survey asked about an ideal entry-level employee, so this education level may or may not be required for the position.



Experience employers seek in entry-level employee



Common skills needed for entry-level positions

- Basic computer skills/office productivity software
- Basic math and measurement skills
- Construction/mechanical/technical skills
- Problem solving/troubleshooting
- Professional communication skills
- Sales & food service skills



Needed/desired licenses, credentials, or certifications



Transportation

- Drivers License*
- CDL



Medical

- CPR
- CNA
- EMT
- HIPPA



Food Handling

- ServSafe
- TIPS



Trade-specific

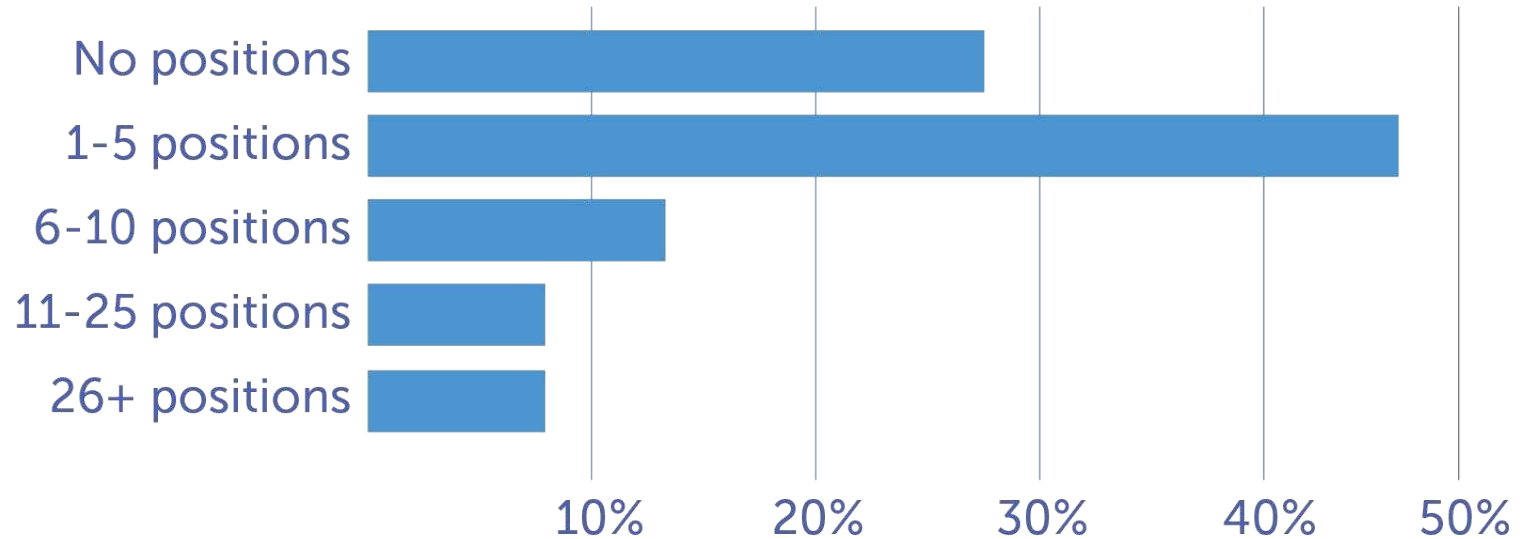
- Forklift
- Electrical
- Welding
- Concrete/ACI
- Mechanic



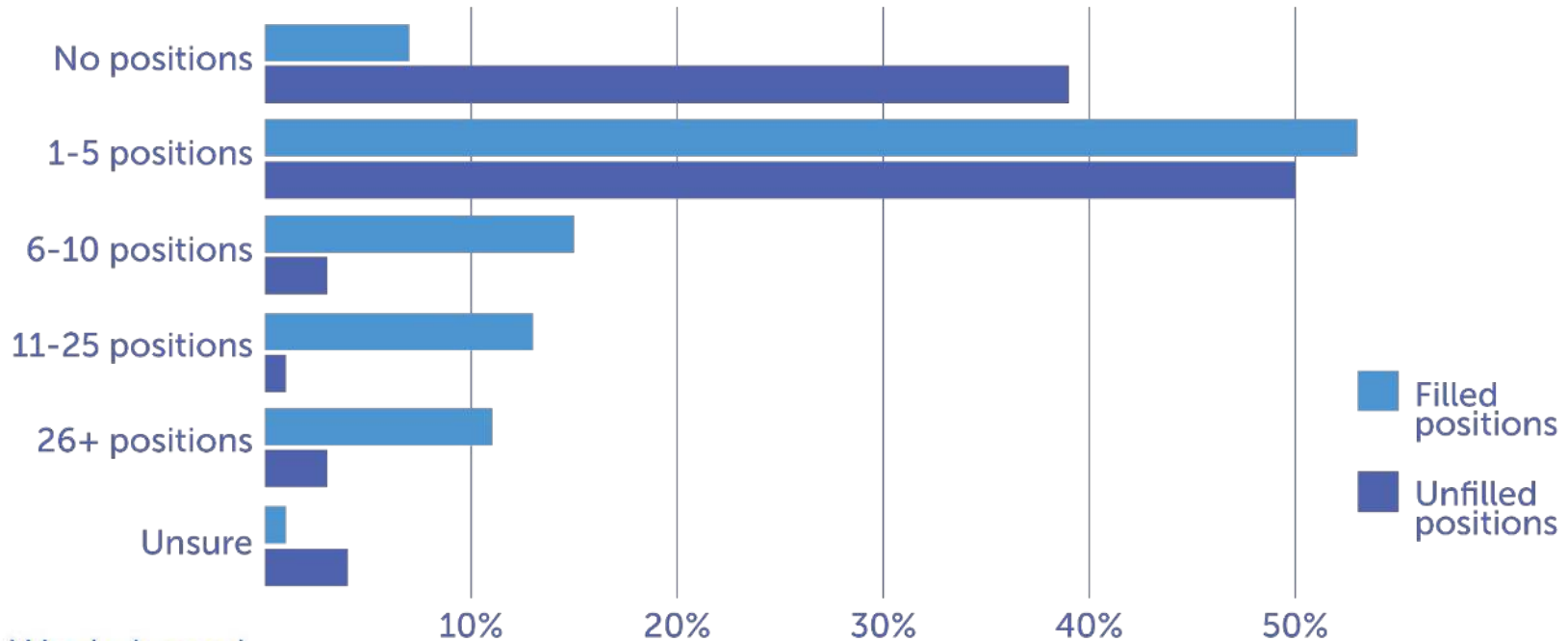
4-year degree



2026 estimated empty entry-level positions the next 2 years

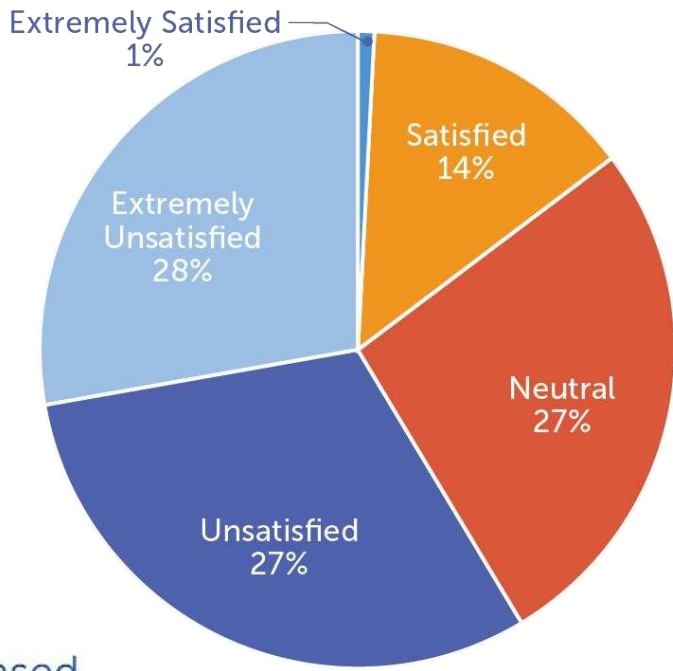


Number of entry-level positions in past 4 years

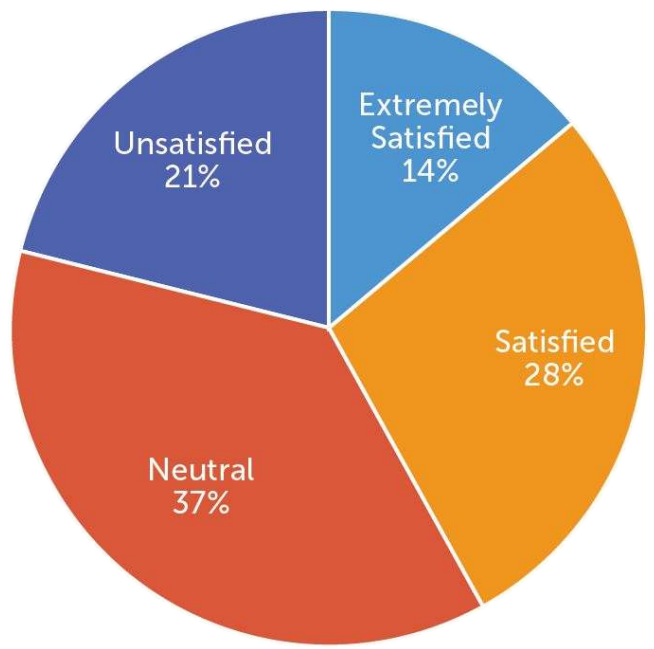


Employer satisfaction with entry-level employee recruitment

2024



2026



Types of difficult to fill entry-level positions

- **Laborers** (i.e. construction, maintenance, kitchen)
- **Drivers** (i.e. warehouse, delivery, passenger)
- **Technicians** (i.e. laboratory, installation, health-related)
- **Assistants** (i.e. legal, laboratory, Certified Nursing Assistant)
- **Office** (i.e. clerk, bookkeeper, front desk)



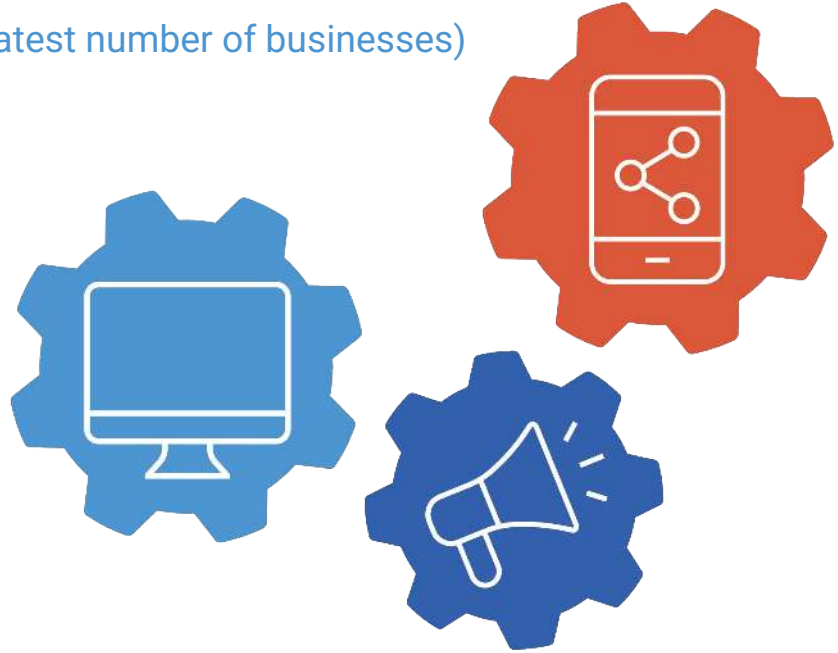
Reasons positions were difficult to fill

- 63% reported a low number of applicants
- 56% reported applicants lack sufficient interpersonal skills
- Others reasons:
 - Position is low pay
 - Hours/shifts of position
 - Type of work



Successful recruitment strategies

- Word of Mouth (strategy used by greatest number of businesses)
- Online Job Sites
- Social Media
- Organization's Website



Somewhat successful recruitment strategies

- Sign posted at their business
- Career-connected learning opportunities
I.e. career fairs, job shadows, internships, apprenticeships
- Partnership with an educational institute
College or high school provides a direct recruitment pipeline



Least successful recruitment strategies

Many employers reported not using these strategies; for those who reported using them, these were least successful.

- Radio, TV, or newspaper advertising
- Partnership with a non-profit organization
Not many respondents reported having partnerships with nonprofits
- Recruiting/temp agencies
Of the few companies that did use recruiting and temp agencies, responses were a mix of being completely unsuccessful or one of their most successful strategies with not much in between.



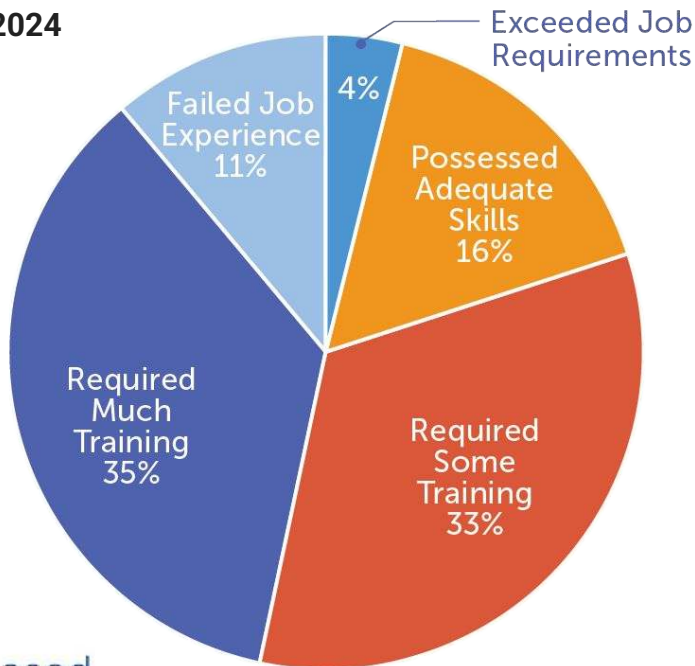
Recruitment incentives

- Over half of the respondents did not offer any recruitment incentives
- The most common recruitment incentives offered are referral bonuses and signing bonuses
- Other incentives offered include:
 - immediate start on benefits (i.e. insurance, paid leave)
 - paid training
 - moving expenses
 - flexible shifts/schedules
 - remote work possible
 - tuition reimbursement
 - child care assistance

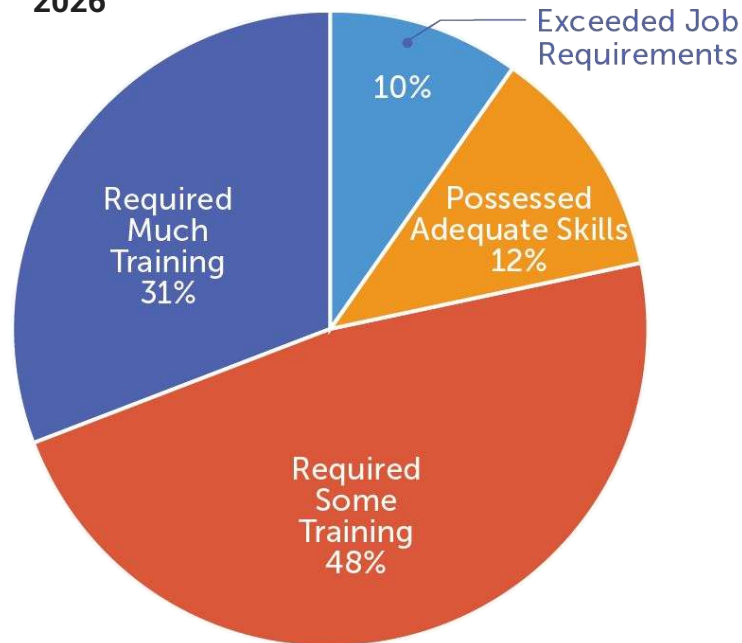


Employer perspective on entry-level employee readiness

2024



2026



Training required for new entry-level employees

- Nearly 80% of new entry-level employees required some level of training
- Of the new employees needing training, approximately 70% needed training in technical skills
- Just over half needed training in employability skills
 - Time Management
 - Dependability/Timeliness
 - Critical Thinking
 - Work Ethic
 - Leadership
- Basic education skills were generally reported as sufficient



Training methods to develop employees' skills

- Nearly every employer used some form of informal on-the-job training
- Around two thirds of employers used a more formalized training program customized for their business
- Nearly half of employers utilized self-study or online training programs
- Other regularly used were seminars or conferences and formal training provided by product vendors

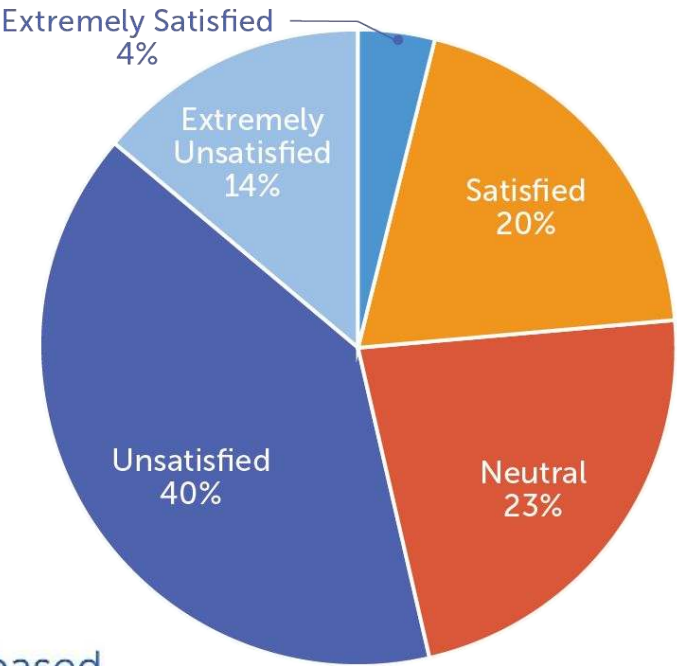


Note: these answers are not mutually exclusive, so one employer could use multiple training methods.

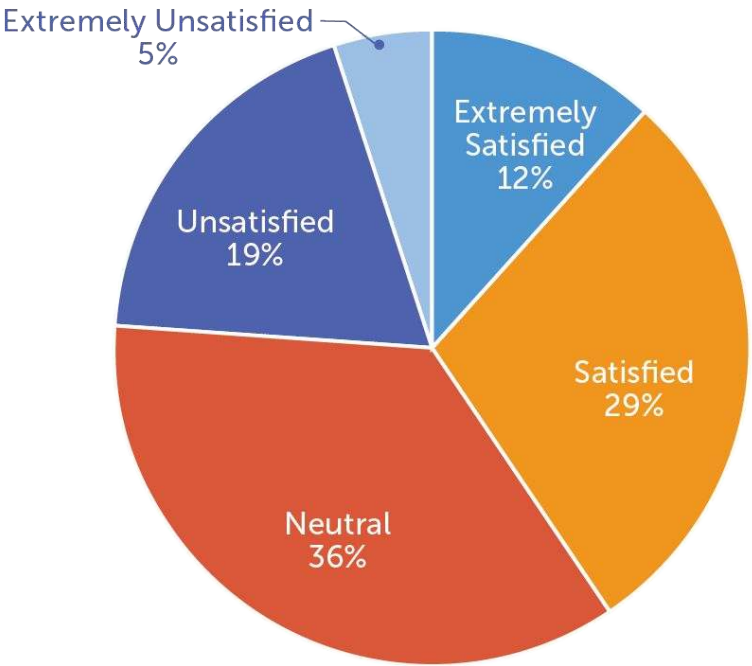


Employer satisfaction with entry-level employee retention

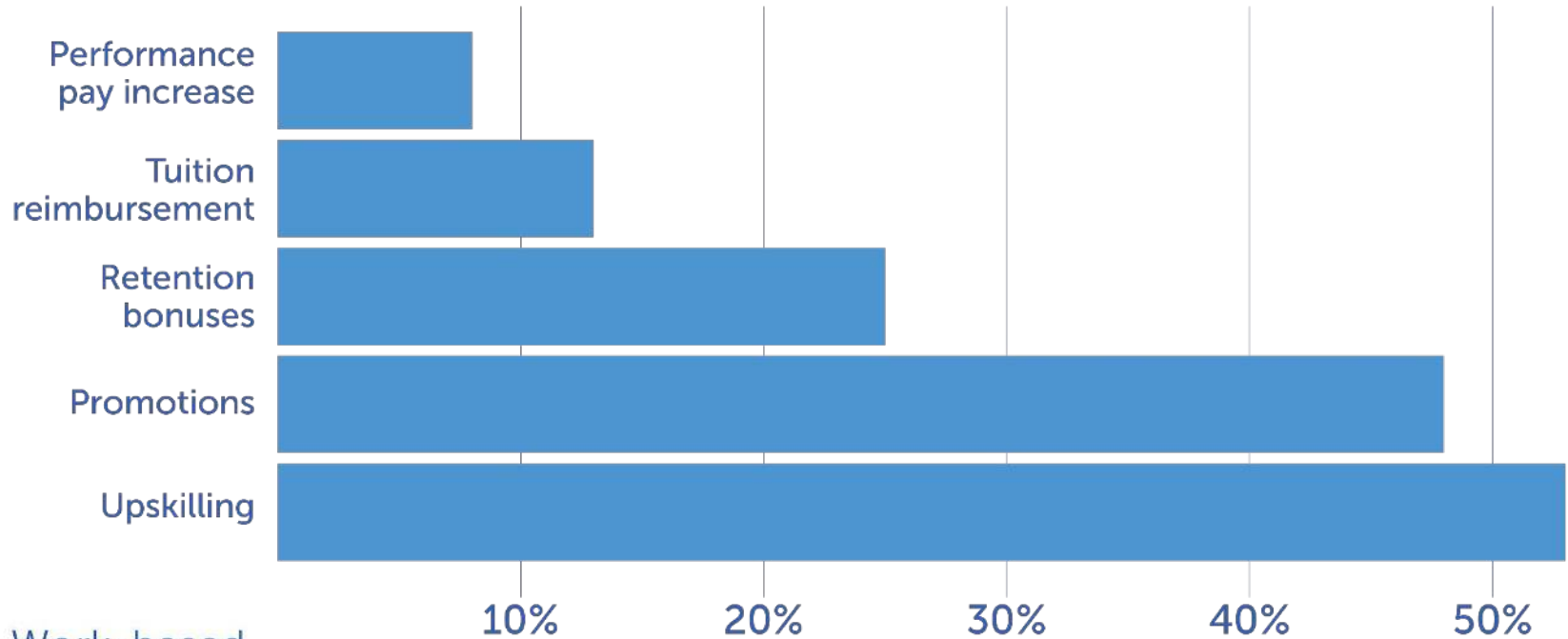
2024



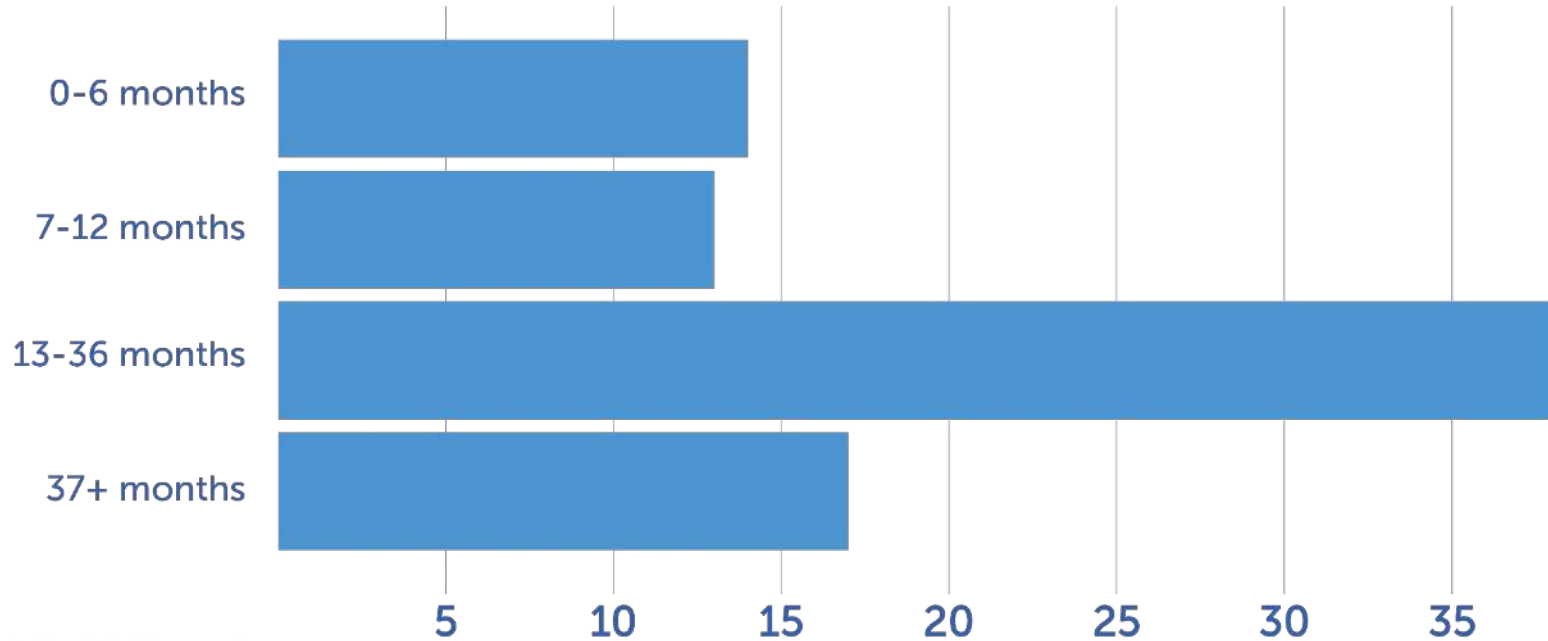
2026



Entry-level employee retention



Entry-level employee retention



Reasons employees leave entry-level positions

- The top reasons are entry-level employees leaving for new positions, either for higher pay or for more senior positions
- The least common reasons are entry-level employees leaving due to internal company restructuring and company downsizing
- Others reasons include:
 - Leaving for personal or family reasons
 - Fired
 - Seasonal employees

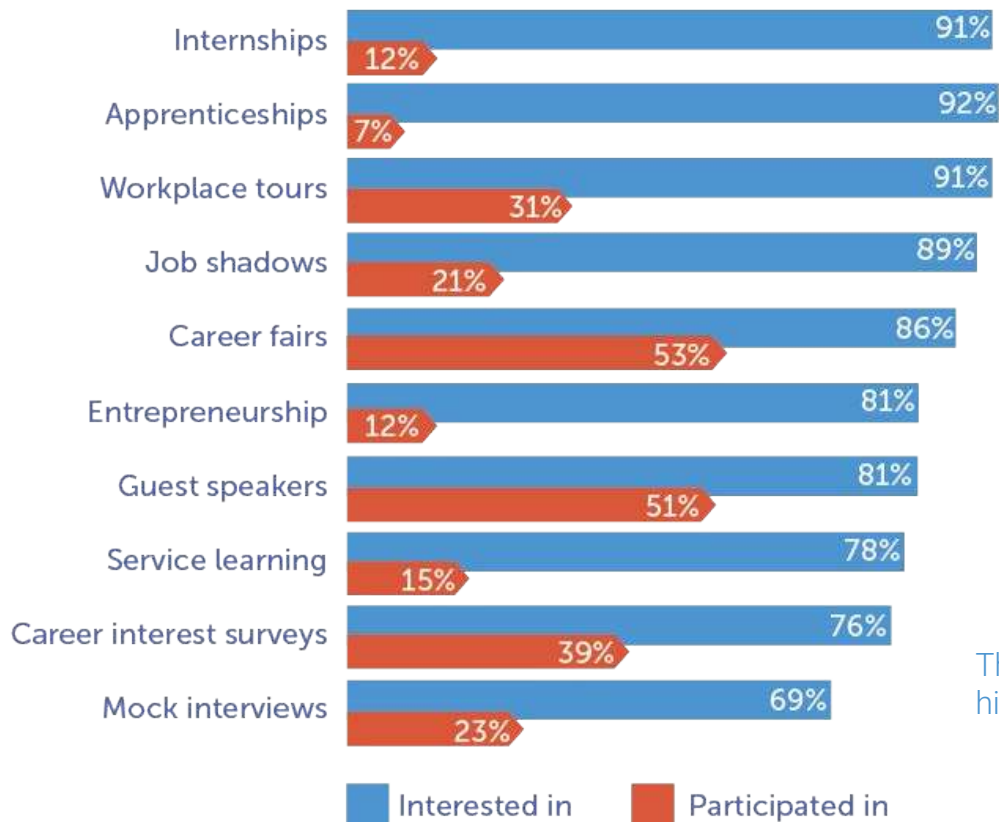


Employer participation in career-connected learning

- 60% of 2026 respondents are participating in career-connected learning activities
- 38% of 2024 respondents were participating in career-connected learning activities
- 47% of 2026 respondents are interested in adding or expanding their career-connected learning activities
- 12% of 20204 respondents were interested in adding or expanding their career-connected learning activities



Student Interest and Experience in Career-Connected Learning



These are responses from high school students.



Employer career-connected learning activities

Top career-connected learning activities currently offered:

- Internships - both paid and unpaid
- Career Fairs
- Job Shadows
- Workplace Experiences

Top career-connected learning activities interested in adding:

- Internships - both paid and unpaid
- Workplace Experiences
- Workplace Tours
- Job Shadows



High School Interest in Work-based Learning & Career-connected Activities

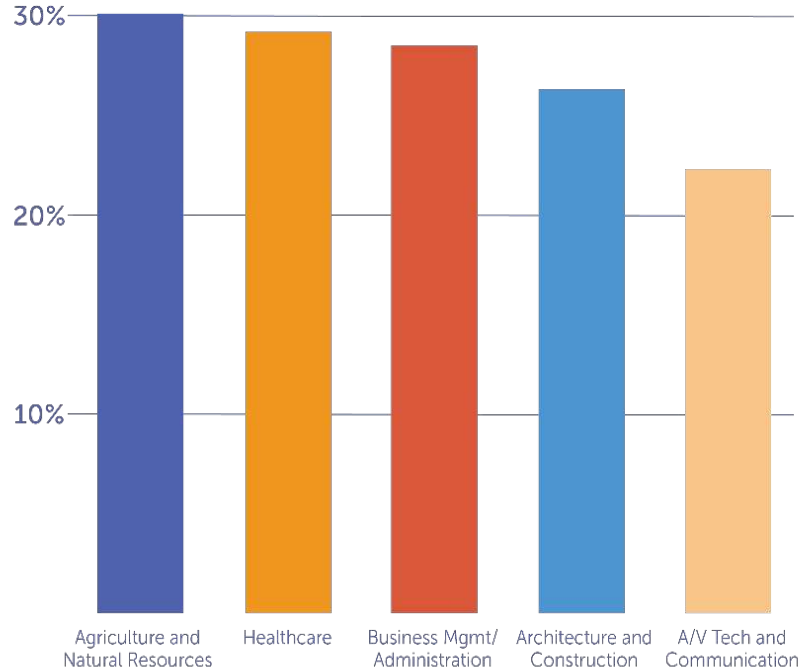
High school Students showed most interest in these activities:



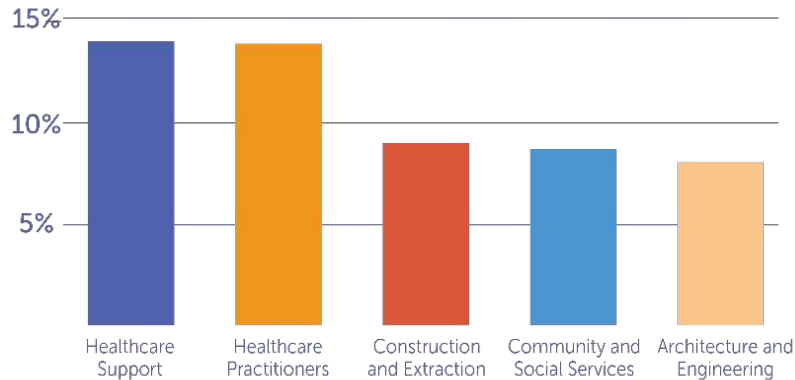
Employers showed most interest in providing these activities:



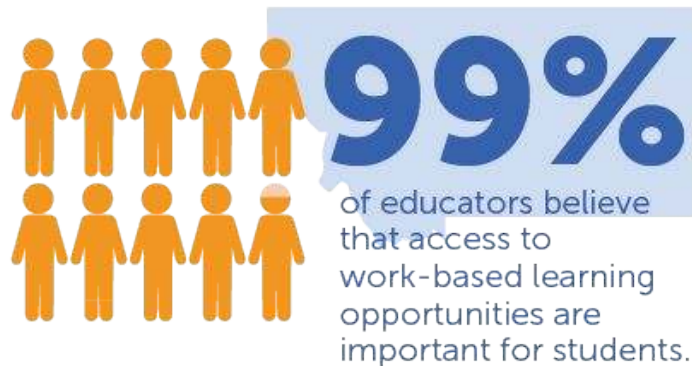
Top 5 high school student career field interests:



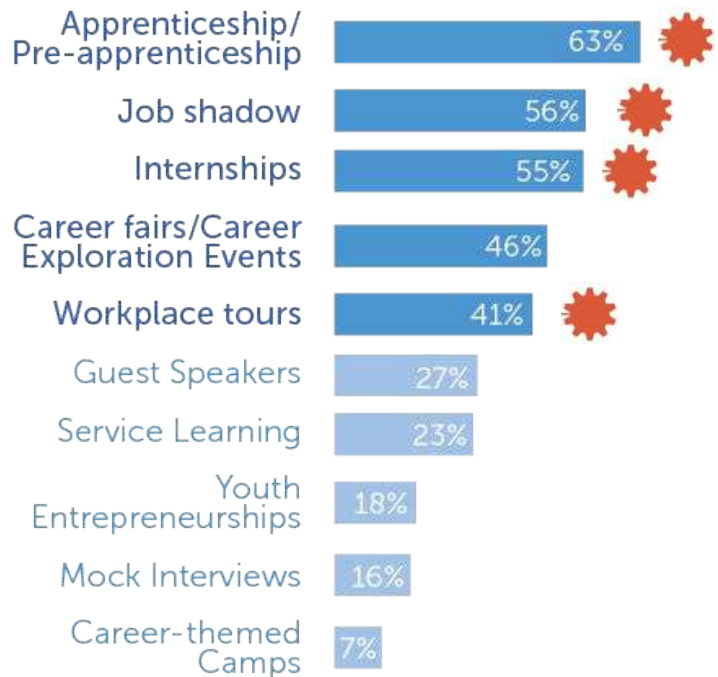
Fastest growing job fields in MT:



What Do K-12 Educators Say?



Most Important Career Connected Activities for Students, according to Educators



Advice for employers

From high school students

Students want employers to know that they want **meaningful work experience that relates to career development.**



Give us some grace,
we don't know
what we are doing.

Be brutally honest
(don't sugar coat the
job). Explain what
skills you actually
need and how much
time the job takes.

Advice for employers and educators

From high school students

Students want to be **respected and supported by both educators and employers.**



Tell me the expectations ahead of time. Start slow, do not assume I know what to do. Give me an opportunity to learn.

Respect our intelligence, provide a good mentor, have patience. Make it hands on. Let us be involved in more than one aspect of the career.

Sense of belonging at work in Montana

Approximately

80% of students

agree or strongly agree that they feel welcomed and included at their workplace.



70% agree or strongly agree that their employer organization values them and their contributions.

One in three

students does not feel comfortable expressing themselves and being their authentic selves at work.



Questions?



Additional WBLC Data Resources

Explore more insights on the WBLC Data dashboard at wblmt.org/data-dashboard

Data executive summaries can be found at wblmt.org/reports

Sign up for Work-based Learning Collaborative monthly newsletters at wblmt.org



Contact information

Gabrielle Eklund Rowley

Reach Higher Montana
growley@reachhighermontana.org
(406) 422-6809

Ian Beagles

Reach Higher Montana
ibeagles@reachhighermontana.org
(406) 431-1436

www.wblmt.org

