

An Education Profile of the Great Rivers Region

Introduction

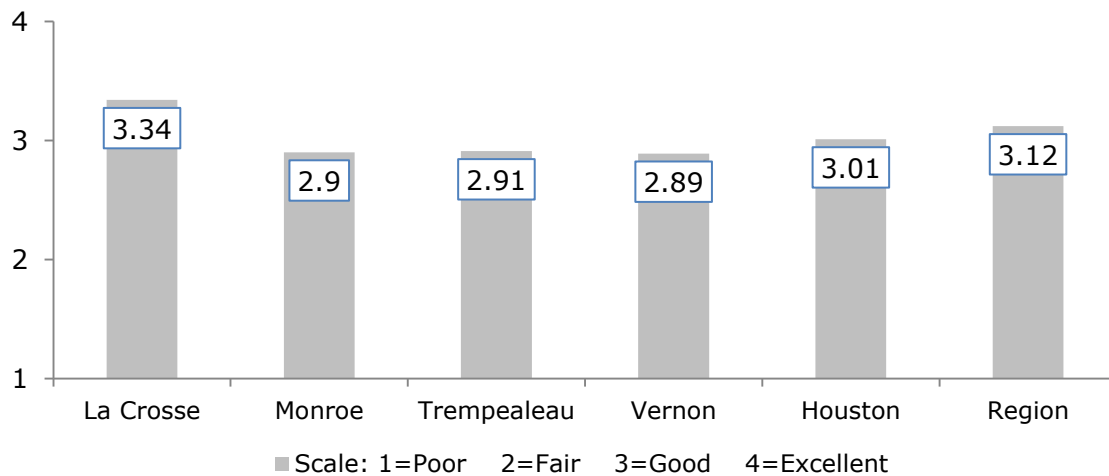
Education is a key building block to a healthy community reaching its full potential. There are clear economic and social benefits of education that impact individuals and communities. Education gives us a better understanding of the world around us; it challenges us through new experiences and knowledge and gives individuals an opportunity to share ideas through a variety of settings. Education is essential to economic growth and key to reducing poverty. Education is linked to an increase in workforce productivity and higher household income.

This section of the COMPASS report will briefly give an overview of the education system in the Great Rivers Region. The purpose of the report is to highlight key public education indicators, present community perceptions regarding education, and share information on various education related challenges facing our communities

Our educational needs

In the COMPASS NOW 2012 Random Household Survey, residents of each county were asked to rate their community as a place that meets their educational needs. Overall, 83% of the survey respondents gave an excellent or good rating to their community in this regard. However as shown in **Figure 1**, La Crosse County residents rated their community considerably higher than residents in the rest of the region. Many factors can affect how residents rate whether or not their community meets their educational needs. If we look at educational needs on a continuum of lifelong learning then needs range from early pre-school through elementary, secondary, post-secondary, training and professional development, and life and leisure enrichment.

Figure 1: Rating their community as a place that meets educational needs



Source: COMPASS NOW 2012 Random Household Survey

Enrollment and School Funding

Enrollment in public schools is measured by counting the number of students enrolled in school on a particular day in September or October. In 2011, the Great Rivers Region had approximately **37,422** school aged students (Pre-K-12) in public schools, **3,995** students (K-12) in private schools, and **1,058** being homeschooled. There are **26 public school districts** in the region with **123 public schools** and **45 private schools**. **Table 1** shows school enrollment by county for 2005 and 2011. Between these years, an expected increase in public school enrollment was seen in La Crosse and Monroe counties, with more significant increases in Vernon and Houston counties, and a dramatic increase in enrollment in Trempealeau County. Private school enrollment however saw an opposite trend over the past 5 years with private school enrollment dropping dramatically in every county except La Crosse. The number of students who are homeschooled increased significantly in the La Crosse school district and decreased in La Farge school district in Vernon County. Reporting of homeschooled students to the residential school district is required by the Wisconsin Department of Instruction. Private Amish schools are included in private school enrollment however their compliance with reporting varies.

Table 1: Public and Private School Enrollment

County	Public school enrollment PK-12			Private school enrollment PK-12			Homeschool enrollment		
	2005	2011	% Change	2005	2011	% Change	2005	2011	% Change
La Crosse	15,513	16,098	4%	2260	2,339	3%	199	337	41%
Monroe	6,880	7,046	2%	819	668	-23%	312	293	-6%
Tremp.	4,534	5,832	22%	405	298	-36%	149	152	2%
Vernon	3,811	4,129	8%	450	343	-31%	433	276	-57%
Houston	3,876	4,317	10%	394	347	-14%	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Minnesota Department of Education

The public education system is a large and important investment in our communities. Providing adequate resources to meet student needs is an ongoing and increasing challenge. Funding for public schools is set by a complex mechanism of state revenue limits, calculations of state aid and local taxes. School districts may seek additional funds through a referendum. Some school districts in the Great Rivers Region have successfully passed referendums to augment limited budgets while others have failed to garner the necessary public support. A record number of school districts in Minnesota asked tax payers to support referendums in 2011 to help pay for the education costs that are simply outpacing funding. Wisconsin has seen significant debate over public school funding with the 2011-13 state biennial budget which cut government aid to education in unprecedented amounts. **Table 2** shows the percentage change in school aid to Wisconsin school districts from the 2010-11 school year to the 2011-12 school year.

The majority of school district expenses are instruction related including teacher salaries and benefits, supplies, equipment, and textbooks. Budget cuts to education effect school staffing decisions, instructional materials and support to extra-curricular activities. Budget cuts may cause classroom sizes to increase and enrichment programs may be limited or eliminated.

Table 2: Percentage change in state aid to school districts from 2010-11 to 2011-12

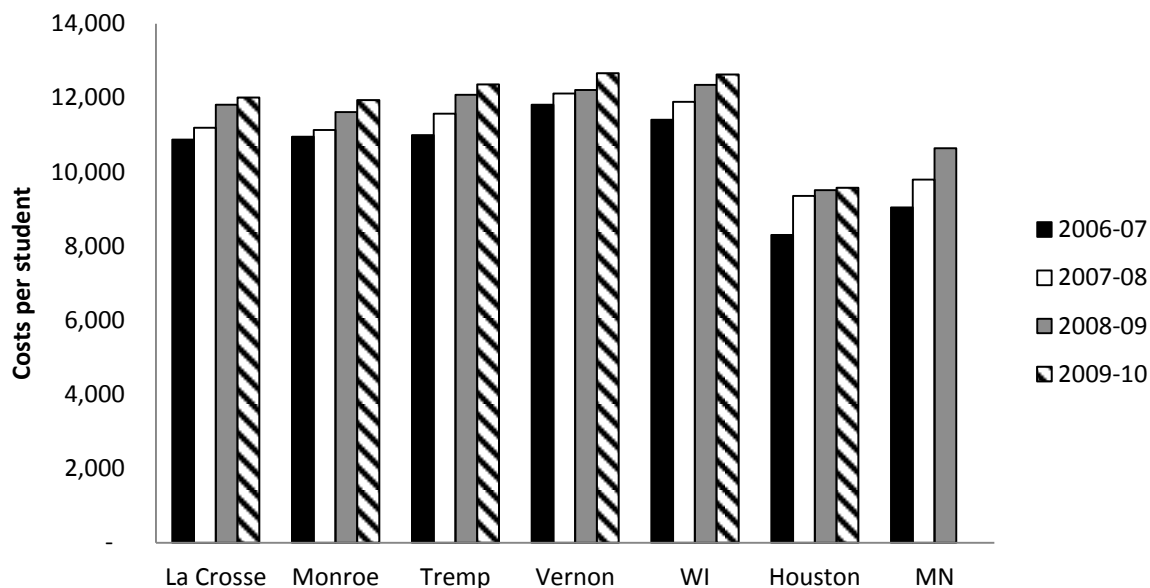
	% Change
Arcadia School District	-4.27
Bangor School District	-9.98%
Blair-Taylor School District	-9.98%
Cashton School District	.25%
De Soto Area School District	-9.98%
Eleva-Strum School District	-9.98%
Galesville-Ettrick-Trempealeau	-10.07%
Hillsboro School District	-8.88%
Holmen School District	-2.77%
Independence School District	-5.41%
Kickapoo Area School District	-9.98%
La Crosse School District	-9.98%
La Farge School District	-2.29%
Norwalk-Ontario-Wilton School District	-3.39%
Onalaska School District	-9.98%
Osseo-Fairchild School District	-9.98%
Sparta Area School District	-7.59%
Tomah Area School District	-10.02%
Viroqua Area School District	-10.22%
West Salem School District	-8.27%
Westby Area School District	-6.39%
Whitehall School District	-7.08%

Source: Wisconsin Department Public Instruction

Education administrators have a variety of measures to help identify the costs to educate a student each school year. The **Total Education Cost** (TEC) is one measure that attempts to identify the overall costs for instruction, support services, transportation, as well as expenditures for facilities attributable per student per year. The TEC calculation includes support services costs such as guidance counselors, psychologists, school health personnel, speech pathologists and other student focused needs. The TEC figure does not include the cost of food service, community service activities funded by fees. **Figure 2** shows the average TEC figures for each county and the state averages. In 2010 the TEC in the Great Rivers Region ranged from \$9,570 per student in Houston County to \$12,660 per student in Vernon County.¹ During challenging economic times school administrators are required to do more with less. However student needs are ever present. On average, 13% of the student population in public schools receives **special education services** for a variety of

needs and disabilities including cognitive disabilities, hearing and vision impairment, speech or language impairment, autism, and emotional behavioral disability.² Public school districts are required to offer special education services for children ages 3-21. Expenses for services for students with severe and multiple disabilities are challenges for local school budgets.

Figure 2: Public School Expenditures



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: Comparative Cost per Member,
Minnesota Department of Education: School District Financial Profiles

Charter schools and alternative education programs

There is an increasing amount of choice in the Great Rivers Region when it comes to public education options. **Charter schools** are independent public schools that offer a choice to parents and students in the area of curriculum, teaching methodology, and classroom structure. Charter schools foster an environment of innovation and are created with the best elements of traditional public schools in mind. Each school is created through a contract or “charter” between the charter school body and the sponsoring school board. Charter schools employ licensed teachers, offer services to special needs students and require students to take state assessment tests to assure academic accountability. Charter schools do not charge tuition. There are several charter schools throughout the Great Rivers Region for example, the Montessori Academy (La Crosse, Monroe and Houston County), the School of Technology and Arts, Design Institute (La Crosse County),

the School of Science, Engineering and Technology (Trempealeau County) and Laurel High (Vernon County). School districts have also developed alternative education options focused on reaching **at-risk students** who were not succeeding in traditional school settings and are at-risk for not graduating. Some of these schools are charters schools and some are not. However all of these programs offer low student-to-teacher ratio, individualized instruction, and extra social support to create a positive learning atmosphere where students can achieve. Some of the schools for at-risk students in the region include Better Futures (Vernon County), Sparta Area Independent Learning School and the Robert Kupper Learning Center (Monroe), Summit Learning Center (Houston County), and LaCrossroads (La Crosse County).

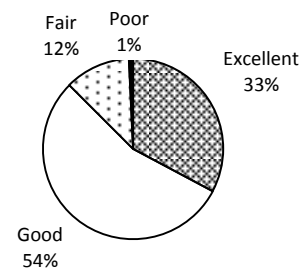
A fast growing trend in K-12 learning is **online education**. Online learning may offer students flexibility and added educational opportunities however the efficacy of this teaching methodology has not been well tested.³ Online education give students the opportunity to take individual courses not offered in their school or student may even enroll full-time in a virtual school. The Minnesota Virtual Academy (MNVA) is a K-12 online public school based in the Houston County School District. It is one of the fastest growing public schools in Minnesota and boasts an individualized approach to learning that allows students to learn at their own pace and focus on areas of interest. Students in Wisconsin have several options for online instruction as well. The Wisconsin eSchool Network and the Wisconsin Virtual School offer online programs to school districts that may complement course offerings or meet a specific student need. According to program information, 49% of students who participate in this online education option do so because a desired course is not offered within their school, 31% of students participating are homeschooled or homebound.⁴

Pre-school education

Enrollment in school is mandated by law at the age of 6. However, it is well-established that participation in high quality early childhood education programs before age 5 can have positive effects on children's cognitive, language, and social development. Evaluations of prekindergarten programs have found that children exposed to high-quality early education were less likely to drop out of school, repeat grades, or need special education.⁵ Respondents of the COMPASS random household survey were asked to rate the availability of preschool opportunities in their community. The results are shown in **Figure 3**. Overall, residents felt the availability of preschool programs

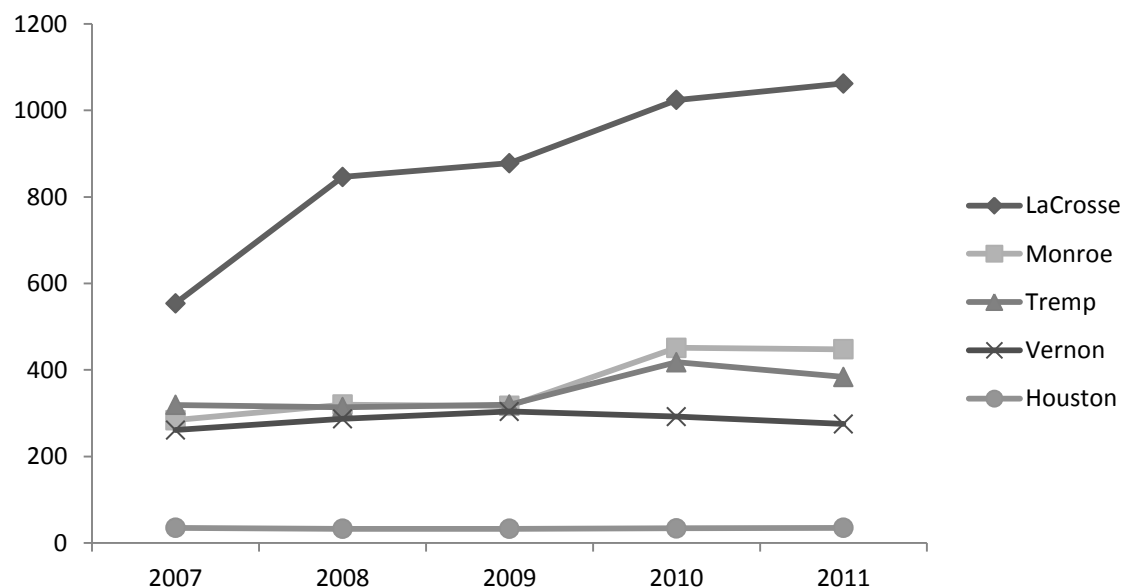
was excellent or good with only 12% indicating the availability was fair or poor. Respondents from each county rated the availability of preschool programs similarly, although respondents with minor children in the household tended to rate the overall availability higher than respondents without dependent children. Indeed the availability of public preschool programs in the Great Rivers Region has increased over the past 5 years; see **Figure 4**. One of the main reasons for the increase is that in 2007, only 60% of school districts in the Great Rivers Region had public 4 year old pre-kindergarten programs. Today, 100% of school districts in La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon counties offer public pre-school education with many programs utilizing an innovative community partnership approach that brings together community businesses, schools, child care providers, Head Start, parents and teachers. The structure of the pre-school programs varies throughout the region with most districts offering a half-day schedule 4-5 days a week and a few districts offering a full-day schedule 2-3 days a week. Spring Grove school district offers a school readiness program that meets monthly from January through May and hosts a three-week kindergarten prep class between May and August.

Figure 3: Availability of preschool opportunities



Source: COMPASS NOW 2012
Random Household Survey

Figure 4: 4K enrollment



Source: WI Department of Public Instruction, MN Department of Education

However, not all pre-school aged children in the Great Rivers Region have the same access to pre-school education. Although several pre-school programs are administered in cooperation with Houston County

school districts, they charge tuition. Pre-school programs charge from a daily rate of \$10 to a monthly rate of \$170 or more. These tuition rates may be cost prohibitive for families and thus may keep children from accessing beneficial educational and emotional foundations to prepare them for success in school.

Head Start is a publically funded pre-school option that provides low-income preschoolers with education, nutrition, health, and social services at special community based settings throughout the region. In 2010, **485** children participated in Head Start in the Great Rivers Region with **310** on waiting lists.⁶ Growing numbers of children living in poverty clearly points to an increasingly vulnerable population within our community.⁷ It is unknown whether the children on Head Start waiting lists are able to enroll in another pre-school option or if they do not attend school at all.

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) developed by a partnership of the Department of Public Instruction, the Department of Health and Family Services, Head Start, Work Force Development and the Early Childhood Collaborating Partners provides a framework for families, professionals, and policy makers that are based on evidence-based research. The WMELS specify the developmental expectations for children from birth to 1st grade and are intended to reflect a comprehensive approach to child development. However, 4K programs are not required to use the WMELS as a guideline nor do the standards include benchmarks, a curriculum, or assessment tools. Apart from licensing requirements of child care centers, pre-school programs have the flexibility to design their curriculum based on their own adopted philosophy.

Screening and assessment in early childcare settings can provide critical information to parents, caregivers and educators that can lead to identification, early intervention and improved outcomes for children. Programs such as Birth to 3 are federally funded and mandated to provide services for children identified with disabilities and coordinate with school districts for continuity and education planning. Yet a survey of early learning programs in the Great Rivers Region found that the use of developmental screening and assessment was inconsistent and that barriers to assessment included lack of time, training, and assessment tools.⁸

Assessing **school readiness** for kindergarten may seem straight forward but in fact the issue is quite complex. Much of the school readiness debate centers on a lack of agreement on the definition of school readiness and on a lack of agreement on what to do with school readiness assessment information.⁹ The School Readiness Indicators

Initiative started in 2005 sought to develop a core set of indicators and found that school readiness needed to be more broadly defined than the knowledge of language and math. According to the Initiative, school readiness expectations should include all areas of child development: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional competence as well as positive attitudes toward learning and community factors that influence children's learning. Children cannot enter school ready to learn unless their families and communities are also ready to provide an environment that is conducive to positive growth.¹⁰ Children who are unhealthy and experience barriers to accessing quality healthcare or children who are hungry and live in a household where food security is tenuous are likely to be less ready for school. Thus indicators such as percentage of children covered by health insurance, percentage of pregnant mothers accessing appropriate pre-natal care, household income, and percentage of children in poverty are as relevant to school readiness as basic measures of literacy and numeracy. **Table 3** below summarizes a few key indicators that in a broader definition have an effect on our children's school readiness, the trends seen in the period 2006-2009 point to the challenges children face today and challenges communities will likely face in the future.

Table 3: Comparison of School Readiness Factors by County 2006-2009

	% Uninsured Under 19 years old	Children in Poverty	Free and Reduced Lunch	Teen Births rate per 1000 births	Late prenatal care
La Crosse	4.2% Trend: decreasing	Medium:13.5 Trend: Increasing	Medium: 30.8 Trend: increasing	Low: 18.8 Trend: decreasing	Low: 15.9%
Monroe	6.8% Trend: flat/increasing	High: 20* Trend: flat	High: 39.5* Trend: increasing	High: 37.3 Trend: increasing	High: 28.4%*
Trempealeau	7.1% Trend: increasing	Medium: 13.8 Trend: Increasing	Medium: 34.9 Trend: increasing	Medium:28.3 Trend: Flat/decreasing	Medium:25.3%
Vernon	8.3% Trend: increasing	High: 23.8* Trend: flat	High: 40.1* Trend: increasing	Low: 17.2** Trend: decreasing	High:37.2%*
Houston	6.6% Trend: increasing	Low: 10.6 Trend: increasing	Low: 22.2 Trend: Flat	Low: 14.8** Trend: decreasing	Low: 14.4%**

Source: COMPASS NOW 2012 Indicators Report: Poverty, Free and Reduced Lunch, Teen Births, Prenatal Care, Health Insurance Coverage. *indicates areas of concern; **indicates areas performing well

To address the lack of a systematic process to assess school readiness, the Minnesota Department of Education has conducted an annual assessment of kindergarteners since 2002. The purpose of the school readiness study is to assess entering kindergarten student proficiency across 5 domains of child development. The sample for the study is selected randomly and is large enough to ensure that the results are reliable and generalizable to the state population. The results of the study provide information on school readiness that can be fed back to parents, school teachers and administrators, child care providers, policy makers, and the general public. The results from the 2009 are summarized in **Table 4** and have consistently confirmed that children enter kindergarten with a range of skills, knowledge, behaviors and accomplishments. Comparisons from year to year have not varied significantly but when the results were analyzed by household income, the data were consistent with national research that has shown the negative impact of poverty on children's development. Students entering kindergarten in Wisconsin are assessed early in the school year in accordance with K-12 standards.

Table 4: 2009 MN Kindergarten Readiness

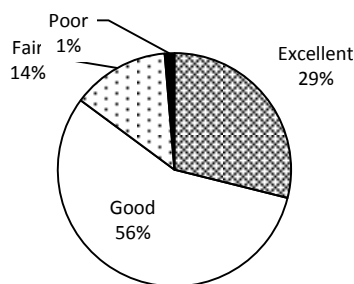
Child Development Domain	Not Yet	In Process	Proficient
Physical Development	3%	32%	65%
The Arts	6%	42%	53%
Personal & Social Development	8%	39%	53%
Language & Literacy	10%	40%	51%
Mathematical Thinking	9%	42%	49%

Note that categories may not add to 100% due to rounding and are adjusted for stratified cluster sampling.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education: School Readiness

K-12 education

**Figure 5:
Quality of K-12 schools**



Source: COMPASS NOW 2012
Random Household Survey

The COMPASS Random Survey also asked respondents to rate the quality of the K-12 schools in their community. Overall, respondents gave a very favorable rating with 85% of respondents rating their K-12 schools either good or excellent.

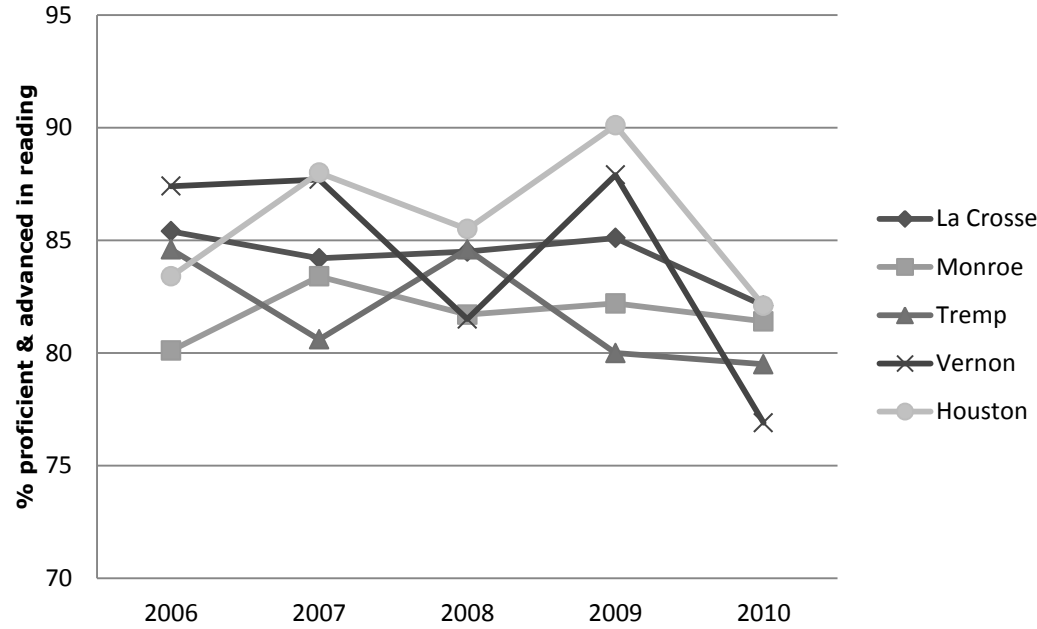
There are several measures of student assessment that the states of Wisconsin and Minnesota use to measure student attainment of subject-area proficiency. The **Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE)** and the **Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA)** were developed by educators and designed meet state and federal requirements and

provide timely information that educators can use to inform curricular and instructional decisions to improve student achievement in school. Administrators use assessment data as an accountability measure for school improvement. In addition to these state developed standards, the Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort to establish a shared set of clear educational standards for English language arts and mathematics that states can voluntarily adopt. The standards do not impose additional testing and have been informed by the best available evidence and the highest state standards across the country and globe. The Common Core State Standards were designed by a diverse group of teachers, experts, parents, and school administrators, and reflect both the highest aspirations for students and the realities of the classroom. These standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce and that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The standards are benchmarked to international standards to guarantee that our students are competitive in the emerging global marketplace. Wisconsin is among 45 states to adopt the Common Core State Standards; Minnesota has opted out of the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

Reading proficiency is a key education indicator and the cornerstone of all learning. The goal of every reading program is for all students to read and comprehend reading material at grade-level or above. The WKCE and MCA tests are administered to all students in grades 3-8 and grade 10. **Figures 6 and 7** show the assessment scores for 3rd and 10th grade reading for 2006-2010.

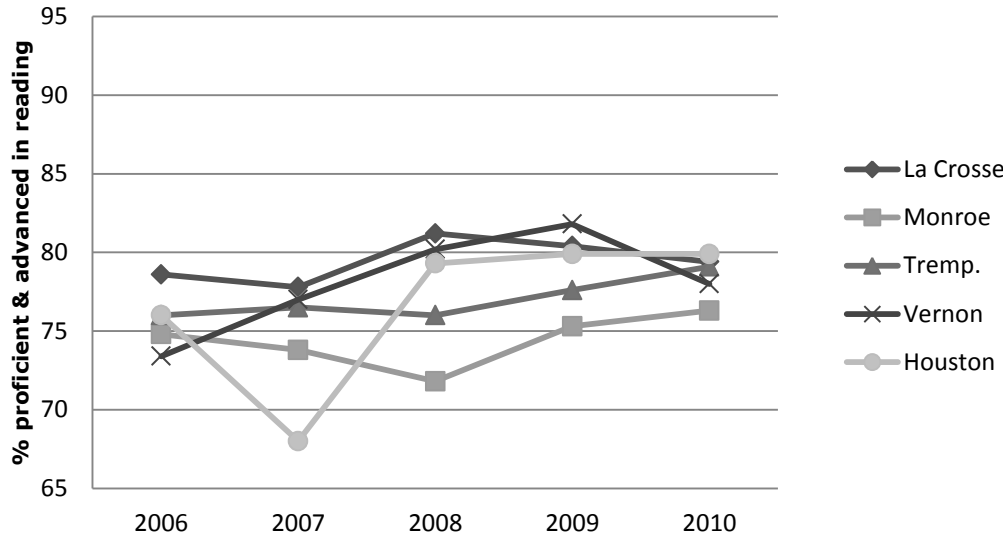
County averages of student scores show that a majority of students in the Great Rivers Region are testing similarly or higher than their counterparts in the rest of the state in both 3rd and 10th grade. However, looking at individual school districts a different picture emerges. In 2010, 3rd grade reading proficiency declined considerably across several school districts in Trempealeau, Vernon, and Houston counties. Although a slightly lower percentage of students are considered proficient or advanced in reading in 10th grade, test scores have been stable across the region in recent years.¹¹

Figure 6: 3rd Grade Results - Reading



Source: Minnesota Department of Education, Assessment and Testing: MCA
Wisconsin Department of Instruction, Wisconsin District and School Performance
Reports, WKCE

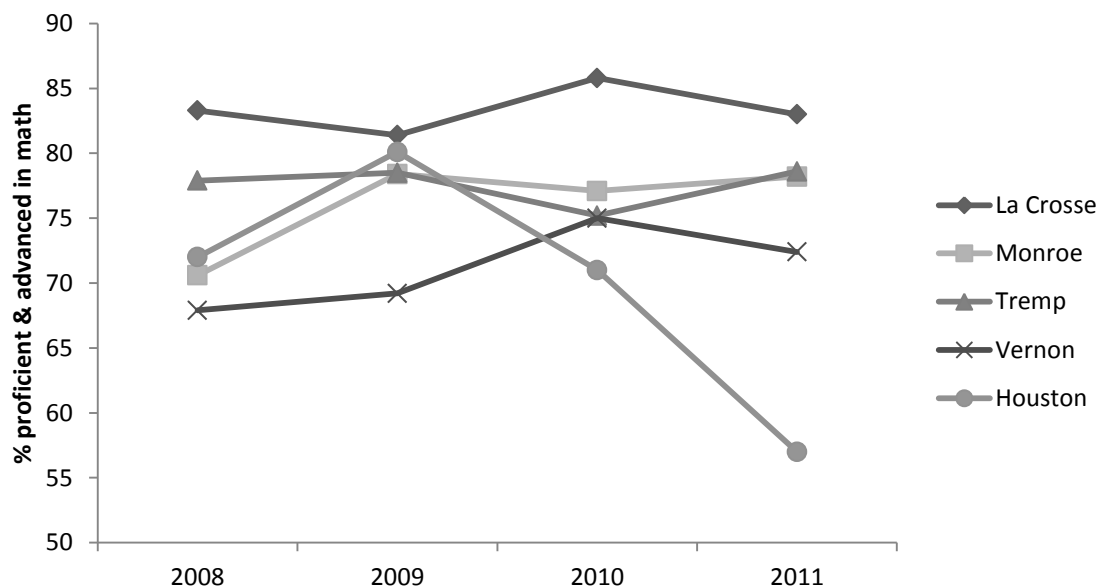
Figure 7: 10th Grade Results-Reading



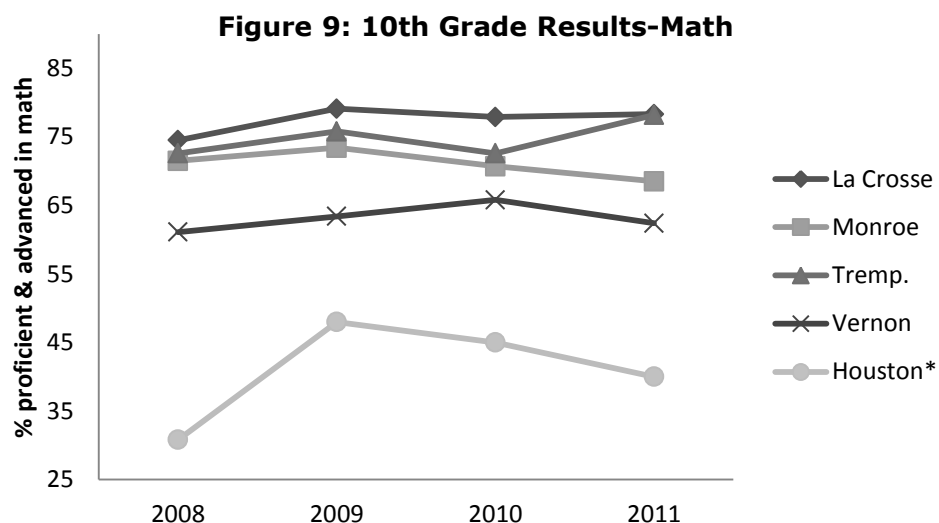
Source: Minnesota Department of Education, Assessment and Testing: MCA
Wisconsin Department of Instruction, Wisconsin District and School Performance
Reports, WKCE

Mathematics proficiency is another key indicator of student achievement. The use of mathematics in our everyday lives and its role in a variety of careers makes it important for students to be competent in key mathematical concepts and relationships. Students today are faced with a future that demands that they are accomplished problem solvers, able to represent and interpret data in a variety of formats, able to use mathematics to make financial decisions, and able to apply mathematical knowledge and thinking to their careers and other real-life experiences. The WKCE and MCA tests are administered to all students in grades 4-8 and grade 10 and 11. **Figures 8 and 9** show the assessment scores for 4th and 10th grade mathematics for 2006-2010.

Figure 8: 4th Grade Results-Math



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction WKCE, Minnesota Department of Education-MCA-II



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction-WKCE, Minnesota Department of Education-MCA-II and III,
 *Houston County Math results are from 11 grade assessments.

County averages of student scores show that a majority of students in the Great Rivers Region test similarly or higher than their counterparts in the rest of the state in both 4th and 10th grade. However, test scores between school districts in the same county can vary thus affecting the overall average.¹² Overall, a greater percentage of 4th grade students tested proficient or advanced in math than 10th grade students. In other words students are gradually becoming less proficient in math as the concepts become more advanced. Students in Wisconsin are only required to have 2 credits of math for graduation, Minnesota requires 3 credits. School districts have the option to exceed the minimum requirements required for graduation. Houston County test scores should be evaluated at the school level and not at the county level. Test scores from virtual /online schools may be pushing county-level scores downward.

High-school graduation rates are an important indicator of school performance for parents, policymakers and other concerned community members. A high school diploma is necessary to further education and is a basic requirement for most jobs. Earnings potential and unemployment are closely tied to education. Those who do not graduate high school have a greater chance of being unemployed, incarcerated, have children at a younger age and are more likely to be on government assistance. Accredited colleges require a high school diploma or its equivalent for entrance. Wisconsin has traditionally had one of the highest graduation rates in the nation. Formulas for calculating graduation rates have changed over time and new

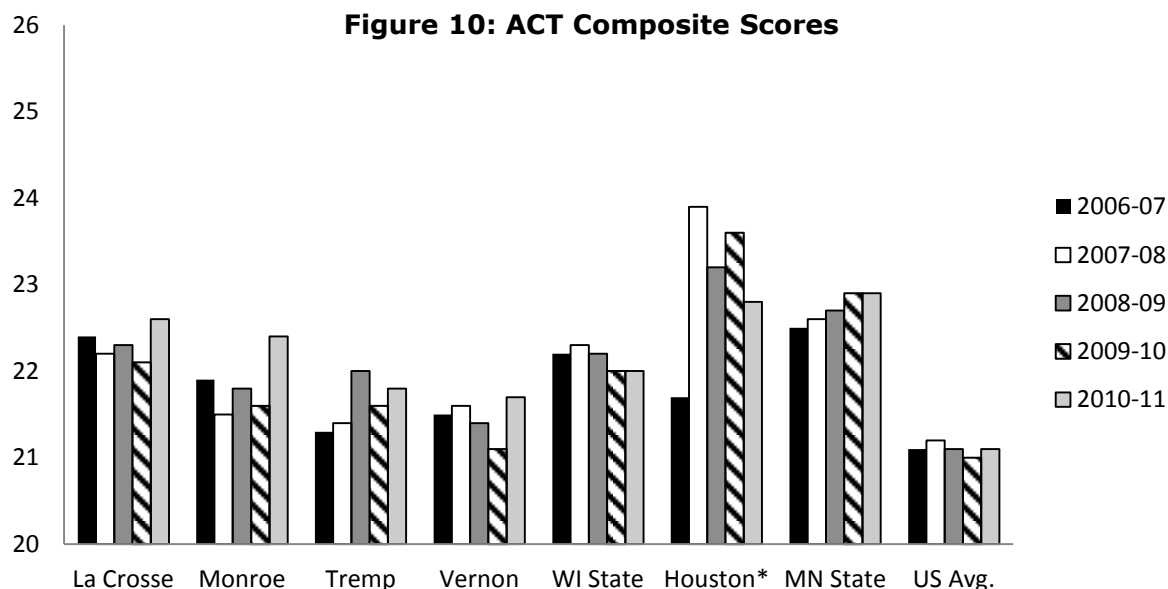
methodology recommended by the National Governors Association and is gradually being adopted. Calculations for students who complete high school in an extended amount of time or receive high school equivalency diplomas are now available on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Minnesota Department of Education websites. County averages of **four-year graduation** rates in the Great Rivers Region ranged from **89% – 92%** for the 2009-2010 school year. Data on individual school districts is available in the COMPASS Education Indicators Report. Over the past 4 years all Great Rivers Region school districts have consistently had higher graduation rates than their respective state averages.¹³

The **American College Test (ACT)** is designed to assess educational development and the ability to complete college level work. ACT test scores are one of the primary measures of college readiness and is an entrance requirement for many colleges and universities. The ACT test consists of four subject areas and a 30 minute writing test. The 215 question, multiple-choice test covers four skill areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science. The ACT, which is an optional exam, is typically taken by college bound students in their junior or senior years. The SAT, an alternative test, may be required by some private and out-of-state colleges. Each portion of the ACT test has a maximum score of 36. Typically, students who take a rigorous college preparatory curriculum will score better on the ACT. Composite score averages are influenced by the percentage of students who opt to take the test - the greater the percentage, the lower the composite average. On average 67-70% of graduating students in WI and MN take the ACT. Students are allowed to retake the ACT with only the most recent score being recorded. The ACT is not required for admission to two-year Minnesota and Wisconsin technical and career colleges. **Figure 10** shows ACT scores for the Great Rivers Region for the past five years. Overall, students in the Great Rivers Region score similarly to the national average. Students in La Crosse and Houston County have the highest composite scores in the region.

In Focus

Youth agreed that bullying was a problem facing the community and that cyber-bullying was increasingly being used in school. The discussion regarding solutions to bullying focused quite extensively on the fear of retaliation youth have when bullied or when they know of someone being bullied. Youth suggested having a point person in school that they could go to and involving parents more in education about the problem.

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Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: Graduation
 Minnesota Department of Education: Data Downloads, Student Graduation Rates

Student services

Students attend school with a variety of needs that can affect their learning. Many factors can adversely influence a child's ability to achieve success in school. Examples include acute or chronic physical or mental illness, lack of health care, hunger, poverty, abuse, challenging family situations, high rates of mobility, alcohol and other drug abuse, violence, a lack of English language skills, and a lack of a stimulating home environment.¹⁴ Every two years a national survey of young people called the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is conducted by the CDC to monitor certain health-risks. In 2009-2011, students in grades 9-12 in the Great Rivers Region were surveyed using the YRBS and Minnesota Student Survey. The results of the survey point to a number of alarming issues facing our students today including: **drug and alcohol use, thoughts of suicide, violence, and sexual activity**. These issues were discussed more extensively in the COMPASS Health issues profile but are worth mentioning here as they affect our education outcomes. Because children spend a great part of their day at school, school personnel are increasingly recognizing the importance of addressing the psychosocial needs of students in order to enhance learning success. Data on utilization of school social services does not readily exist although schools have documented an increase in economically disadvantaged students which

often points to an array of unmet needs and increases stresses in student's lives.¹⁵ **Table 5** summarizes key data showing a variety of risks youth face in the Great Rivers Region.

Table 5. Select Youth Risk Behaviors

YRBS Data	La Crosse 2010	Monroe 2011	Tremp 2011	Vernon 2009	WI 2009	Houston 2010¹
Tobacco Use						
Daily smoking	11.1%	18.1%	12.1%	12.7%	11.3%	6.6%
Smoked past 30 days	13.8%	18.5%	12.3%	23.7%	16.9%	17.1%
Alcohol Use						
Binge drinking past 30 days	19.9%	20.4%	15.0%	25.3%	25.2%	22.3% (past 2wks)
Drove after drinking past 30 days	7.7%	9.3%	8.0%	9.8%	8.9%	15.4%
Drug Use						
Marijuana use ever	29.9%	25.1%	18.5%	28.0%	34.2%	13.9% (30 day)
Used inhalant ever	9.3%	9.3%	6.3%	12.9%	9.6%	2.4% (past year)
Used ecstasy ever	8.0%	4.5%	5.2%	4.4%	4.9%	4.4%
Used prescription drug without a doctor's permission	14.7%	18.4%	17.2%	20.6%	20.5%	NA
Violence						
Were ever hit, slapped or physically hurt by their boyfriend or girlfriend during the past 12 months	12.3%	8.3%	7.2%	8.0%	8.4%	7.6%
Bullied on school property past 12 months	23.9%	23.4%	31.3%	27.1%	NA	NA
Electronically bullied past 12 months	19.4%	17.0%	19.1%	NA	NA	NA
Sexual Activity						
Ever had sex	35.0%	44.2%	35.9%	46.6%	40.9%	34.6%
Mental Health						
Seriously considered suicide past 12 months	13.8%	12.5%	12.2%	12.2%	13.2%	22.1% (ever)
Feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for 2wks	23%	20%	21%	21%	21%	23.4%
Hurt oneself on purpose (cutting, burning) in past 12 months	18%	16%	16%	16%	14%	17.7%
Source: COMPASS Now 2012 Health Indicator: Risks to Youth. Data from Centers for Disease Control, YRBS, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2011.						

Support for youth

Students in the Great Rivers Region also have a great deal of positive support in their lives. In addition to surveying risks, the YRBS also surveyed student perceptions with regard to feelings of belonging, caring, and family support. These factors play a significant role in positive youth development and student success. The results are summarized in **Table 6**.

Table 6: Youth Assets YRBS Data

Asset	La Crosse 2010	Monroe 2011	Trempealeau 2011	Vernon 2009	Houston 2010
Family gives love and support	87%	83%	84%	85%	90.8%
Teachers really care, give support, and encouragement	63%	58%	56%	61%	41.2%
Feel like you belong at school	73%	63%	67%	66%	N/A
Adult (teacher or other staff) at school you could talk to	69%	67%	67%	73%	N/A

Source: COMPASS Now 2012 Health Indicators: Risks to Youth. Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009-2011, Minnesota Student Survey 2009

Extra-curricular activities

Extra and co-curricular activities are school sanctioned activities intended to broaden, develop, and enhance a student's school experience in the areas of academics, athletics, and music. These activities help students connect to their school and develop positive

Table 7: Percentage of students in grades 6-12 in extra-curricular activities (academic, athletic, music)

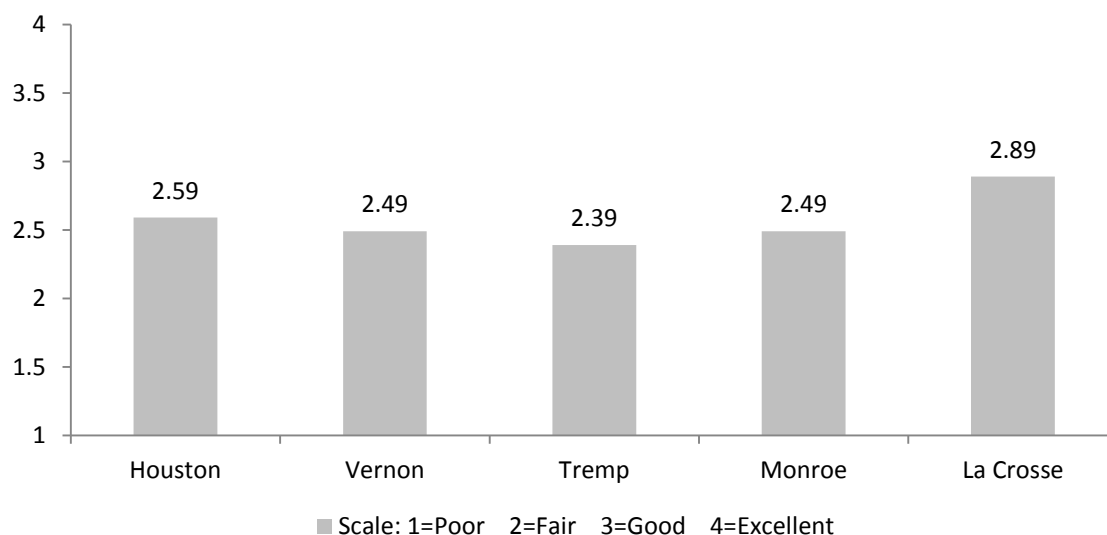
County	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
La Crosse	33.6	35.3	34.9
Monroe	30.9	38.0	39.2
Trempealeau	46.5	50.6	45.9
Vernon	40.9	44.9	40.8
Houston*	67.5	80.0	86.6

Source: COMPASS NOW 2012 Education Indicator Youth Activities, *Houston data reports grades 7-12 and Houston School District only.

personal and interpersonal skills. These activities offer opportunities for students to learn the values of teamwork, individual and group responsibility, competition, diversity, and a sense of culture and community. Research suggests that participation in extracurricular activities may increase school success. **Table 7** shows an average percentage of students that participate in academic, athletic or music extra-curricular activities in the Great Rivers Region. Participation in athletics was typically the highest in each school district while participation

in music was usually the lowest in most schools. Nonetheless, in 2009-10, 3 schools in the region had more than half of all students participating in extracurricular music activities: Brookwood (52.1%), Westby (63.2%), and Independence (68.9%). As part of the COMPASS Random Survey respondents were asked to rate their community with regards to the opportunities youth have to explore interests and positive in positive activities. Overall 60% respondents rated their community as good or excellent in this regard. **Figure 11** shows the ratings by county.

Figure 11: Positive opportunities for youth



Source: COMPASS NOW 2012, Random Household Survey

Post-secondary education

Higher education is critical to success in our 21st century globally competitive, knowledge-based economy. Employers are increasingly seeking a more educated workforce. Jobs that previously required a high-school diploma now require some postsecondary education, including two- and four-year degrees, certifications, and other industry recognized credentials. This trend will continue as more industries demand specific skills to compete effectively in a global and technology-based economy.

The percentage of people who have completed secondary education can be a good indicator of how well off a population is and what kind of opportunities for growth there are in the community. The percentage of people who have completed secondary education may also give

In their own words

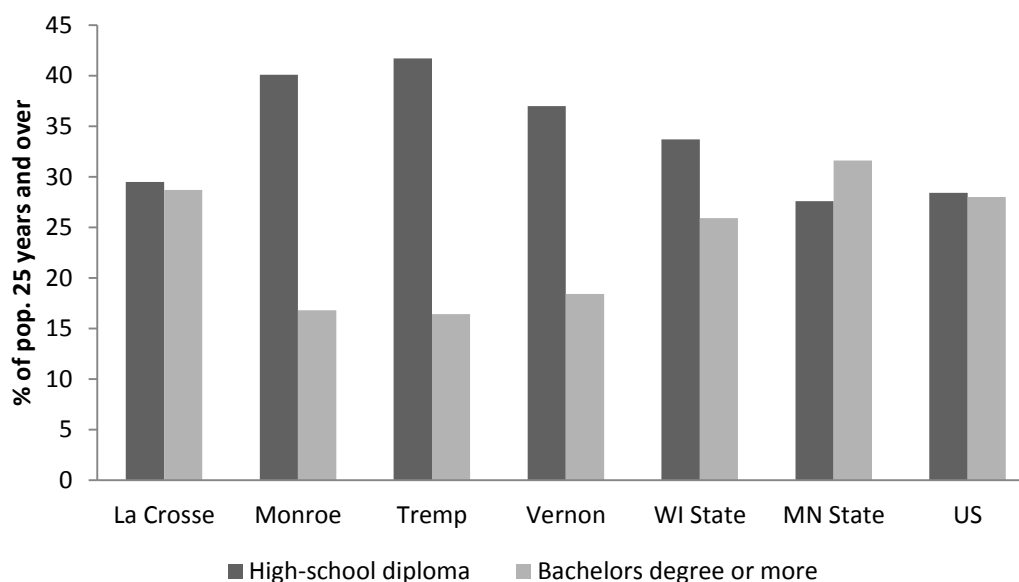
"There is a weakness in our community—there is not a desire to get further education. This impacts our philosophy about education in general. Education is not always valued."

"Communities will be divided further into those who can provide further education for their children and those who can't. There will be a wider gap between rich and the poor."

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some insight as to the types of jobs which are available nearby and their entry level or advancement requirements. The benefits of a college degree may be motivating more and more people to pursue higher education although increasing costs may be prohibitive for many. **Figure 12** shows US Census data of the percentage of population who is 25 years old and older in the Great Rivers Region with a high school diploma and with a Bachelor's Degree or higher. During COMPASS NOW focus group discussions on education many participants expressed concern that community members were undervaluing the importance of education and several participants identified the need to break the generational cycle of not achieving a high school diploma or not attaining any post-secondary education. It is worthy to note that La Crosse has the highest level of educational attainment of all counties and is close to the state averages for both categories. However the education gap between urban and rural counties in the region is of concern.

Figure 12: Educational Attainment

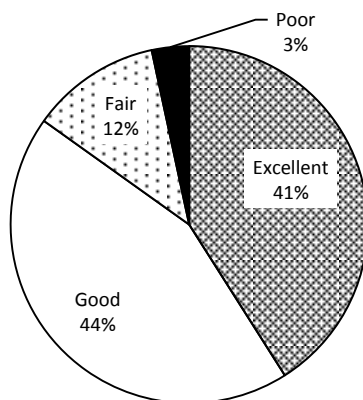


Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010.

The Great Rivers Region is fortunate to have a great number of higher education choices including The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Viterbo University, Western Technical College, and the newest addition Globe University. Other nearby colleges and universities include: Winona State University, St. Mary's University, Luther College, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Chippewa Valley Technical College, and Globe University-Eau Claire. Eighty-five percent of respondents to

the COMPASS Household Survey rated the quality of higher education in region as either good or excellent (see **Figure 13**).

Figure 13: Rating the quality of higher education in your community



Source: COMPASS NOW 2012
Random Household Survey

The University of Wisconsin–La Crosse is a public university and part of the University of Wisconsin System. UWL’s enrollment is 9,119 undergraduate and 955 graduate students. UW–La Crosse offers 87 undergraduate programs in 44 disciplines, and 26 graduate programs with emphases in eight disciplines. UW–L awards bachelor’s, master’s, and one doctoral degree. The University is divided into three colleges: Business Administration, Science and Health, and Liberal Studies. Many of UWL’s degree programs have earned high distinction.

Viterbo University is a private Catholic university that enrolls approximately 1900 undergraduate and 700 graduate students in its 50 undergraduate majors, 27 minors, and 4 graduate programs. Viterbo’s nursing, education and fine arts programs are well regarded and have earned a good ratings.

Western Technical College (WTC) is state technical college and part of the Wisconsin Technical College System. Enrollment at WTC in 2010 was 7683 degree seeking students which split evenly between full and part-time. The school’s main campus is in La Crosse but classes are offered throughout the region including Independence, Sparta, Tomah and Viroqua. WTC offers 43 programs of study as well as several technical diplomas and certificates. The aim of the school is to provide relevant training to the current job market. WTC also has an

extensive offering of lifelong learning courses for non-degree seeking community members. In 2010, 2,861 students participated in the adult life-long learning program.

In their own words

"The rising cost of tuition is taking away the opportunity for kids to go to college."

"Our average income does not allow for residents to afford the high cost of rent. How can people afford additional education?"

"People are discouraged about going to school. It takes a long time to pay off student loans. Is it worth it?"

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Globe University is a private for-profit school and online university which provides specialized career training in 32 degree programs and 8 diploma programs in the fields of business, health sciences, legal sciences, creative media and information technology. Founded in 1885 in Minnesota and formerly known as Globe College the school has a close relationship to the Minnesota School of Business. The La Crosse campus opened in October 2009 and student enrollment for 2010 was 435 students. Globe University prides itself in offering personalized career placement services.

Cost of higher education

Proximity to higher education does not equate to accessibility. Trends in higher education show a steep increase in tuition and fees at both public and private institutions.¹⁶ During COMPASS Focus Group discussions participants indicated that one of the greatest barriers to higher education achievement is rising costs. It is no wonder that it is increasingly becoming more difficult for families to afford higher education. For demonstrative purposes, COMPASS examined the four higher learning institutions in the region and estimated the cost of a Bachelor's and Associate's degree in Accounting. The estimation of costs is summarized in **Table 8**. For cost comparison and to show the variability in higher education expenses, the cost of a Bachelor's degree in Accounting is shown for UW-L and Viterbo and an Associate's degree is shown for WTC and Globe University. Only in-state tuition prices were used and costs and fees were taken from current published documents and the institution's websites. It should be noted that costs do not account for inflation, future tuition price changes and financial aid. Room and board and other living expenses were not calculated and are not reflected in the costs.

**Table 8: Cost comparison of higher education costs
in the Great Rivers Region***

	Bachelor degree in Accounting		Associate degree in Accounting	
	UW-L	Viterbo	WTC	Globe University
Tuition	\$35,960	\$85,120	\$8,300	\$46,630
Fees	\$2,020	\$2,360	Included	\$200
Books	Included	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$2,976
Total Estimate	\$37,960	\$89,480	\$11,300	\$49,806

Note: Cost comparison was based on completing a Bachelor's degree in 4 years and an Associate's in 2 years. Tuition and fee rates were taken from each institution's website.

Table 9 summarizes financial aid data for one school year as published by College Navigator, a website of the US Department of Education that facilitates college cost comparison. The purpose of Tables 8 and 9 is to show the significant investment that is higher education and stress the importance of such an investment. Education can produce great gains not only for individuals but for families and communities. Students need to know both the costs and the benefits of post-secondary education and communities need to seek ways to support these endeavors.

Table 9: Estimated financial aid and net price for full-time degree seeking students 2009-2010

	UW-L	Viterbo	WTC	Globe University
% of students receiving any financial aid	74%	100%	70%	97%
% receiving grants: including Federal, Pell, and institutional	27%	99%	47%	74%
Average amount received in grants	\$5,001	\$13,263	\$4,761	\$4,291
% receiving loans: federal and non-federal	57%	76%	31%	91%
Average amount received in loans	\$5,905	\$6,584	\$4,860	\$11,643
Average Net Price*	\$10,280	\$16,354	\$6,725	\$25,271

Source: College Navigator, US Department of Education

*Full-time beginning undergraduate students who received grant or scholarship aid from federal, state, or local governments, or the institution

Job skills training and continuing education

Respondents of the COMPASS random household survey were asked to rate the availability of jobs that offer enrichment and advancement opportunities in their communities. The results are shown in **Figure 14**. In all counties, respondents did not rate this item very favorably with 65% indicating the availability was fair or poor. Vernon and Monroe County residents gave the lowest ratings and overall respondents with lower incomes tended to rate this item lower. The lack of enrichment and advancement in the workplace may signal the need for continuing education and professional development opportunities in the community that can enhance a person's skillset for other employment opportunities. However, residents of the Great Rivers Region have several opportunities to explore job training and professional development outside of their employer through licensure and certification programs at Western Technical College, continuing education at UW-L, independent learning programs of UW Extension and job training programs offered by Workforce Connections a non-profit organization largely funded by the Workforce Investment Act to provide training and employment assistance to displaced workers.

There are also several inexpensive programs offering **life and leisure** courses throughout the region. County parks and recreation departments offer a variety of activities for people of all ages. WTC and UWL both have extensive life and leisure offerings and UWL offers a Learning in Retirement program aimed to create a social network for older adults in the community. However when asked to rate the availability of community resources to learn new skills or hobbies, 57% of COMPASS survey respondents gave their community a favorable rating of good or excellent and 43% rated their community less favorable (see **Figure 15**). It appears there may be a disconnect between community perception of resources and what is actually available.

Figure 14: Availability of jobs that offer enrichment and advancement opportunities

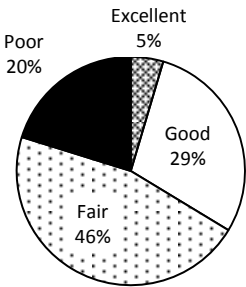
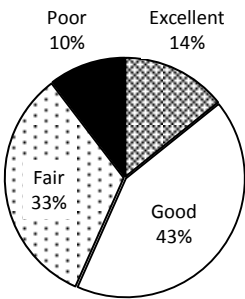


Figure 15: Availability of community resources to learn new skills or hobbies



Source: COMPASS NOW 2012 Random Household Survey

Summary

The Great Rivers Region offers its residents quality education from pre-school to post-secondary education. Barriers to education particularly exist for low-income families. Student success in education should not be viewed as only a personal achievement but a community asset.

Key issues to address

Based on this COMPASS NOW Education Profile, results of the focus groups, random household survey and socio-economic indicator data, the COMPASS NOW Leadership Team examined and scored the following 7 education issues to determine the issues of greatest concern:

- Pre-school
- School Readiness
- Risks to youth
- Youth activities
- Job skills training
- Higher Education Costs
- Adult Literacy

The COMPASS NOW Leadership Team determined the following 3 issues to be the main key income issues for the Great Rivers Region (in alphabetical order):

- School Readiness
- Job Skills training

The issues determined to be emerging or areas to watch were:

- Risks to Youth
- Higher Education Costs

It is important to note that some of the issues above were important to individual counties, but did not rise to the top when all ratings were examined.

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¹³ COMPASS NOW 2012 Education Indicator: High School Graduation Rate

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