



Understanding & Addressing the Youth Employment Crisis

Work experience is critically important for the long-term success of young people. This is why we work to expand job opportunities for young people in Massachusetts. By supporting young people in acquiring the skills they need to enter and be successful in the workforce, we're also meeting the needs of businesses for a pipeline of skilled workers.

The Problem

- Employment among teens in Massachusetts has dropped by nearly half since the late 1990s, greater than the decline in teen employment in the U.S.
- About half of today's high school students have no job experience, leaving these young people at a distinct disadvantage for the future.
- For teenagers and young adults, getting a job is increasingly difficult. Complex online applications involving personality screens, testing at the entry level and a greater reliance by employers on references and previous job experience make it harder for young people to successfully navigate the hiring process.
- Employers perceive youth work behaviors (attendance, punctuality, quit rates) as inferior to the work behaviors of adults; even though they see value in the technology and hard skills young people have to offer.¹
- Youth aren't prepared to face employer screening processes and testing for entry-level positions and often do not realize the signals they send that put employers off.²
- The Center for American Progress estimated that nearly 1 million young people experiencing long-term unemployment during the Great Recession will lose more than \$20 billion in earnings over the following ten years, or \$22,000 per person.³ This loss of income affects not only the individual but also the entire U.S. economy through lower consumer spending, resulting in slower growth and fewer jobs created.



The Opportunity

Studies show that early work experience pays off.⁴

22%
greater annual earnings

- Students who work 20 hours or less a week in high school have 22 percent greater annual earnings later in their career than those who do not.
- Students with early work experience also tend to find work later in higher-level occupations and have access to employer-provided health insurance and pension plans.
- Students who have longer duration, low-intensity (fewer than 20 hours per week) employment experiences during school are also more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than students who do not work.

Massachusetts workers are older and aging more rapidly than U.S. workers as a whole.⁵ Teens and young adults today will be our workers tomorrow. Employers will only be able to find the workers they need to grow and keep our economy strong if young people are given opportunities early on to learn the skills and behaviors that employers expect.

Promising Practice

Massachusetts is investing across the state to offer teens and young adults targeted instruction in developing the skills vital to creating a career-ready workforce. Since 2007, more than 33,000 young people have been employed through the YouthWorks program that offers subsidized employment opportunities in the summer and year round to low-income youth in 31 communities across the Commonwealth.

We are currently piloting *Signaling Success* in high schools in Malden and Lowell and an alternative education program in Boston. *Signaling Success* is a new, comprehensive curriculum that enhances teens' aptitude for collaboration, communication, dependability, and initiative – core skills for success in work, school, and life. In addition, the pilot programs include subsidized employment opportunities where students can demonstrate the soft skills they learned in the classroom. The goal is to support teens in finding unsubsidized employment after being well-prepared through the classroom and on-the-job experiences for what employers expect.

How Employers Can Support Development of Work Readiness Skills

Businesses can play an essential role in helping to prepare young people for work through a wide variety of activities. Helping a young person enter the workforce with a more concrete understanding of professional behaviors will help employers by creating a work-ready youth pipeline with core skills and work behaviors that match other entry-level job candidates. Employers should consider the following strategies:

- Take part in career exploration and awareness activities such as hosting a job shadowing experience or a company tour; taking part in informational or mock interviews; and contributing as members of program or school advisory boards.
- Provide feedback to young people who are not hired so they can be better prepared for future interviews.



If you are interested in partnering in this work, please contact your local workforce investment board. (See side bar for contact information)

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- Participate in the development of effective youth employment program design and help to deliver work-readiness training by working with local workforce boards and community organizations.
- When partnering with subsidized jobs programs, reinforce positive work behaviors such as regular attendance, punctuality, and professional communication styles.
- When possible, make aspects of the hiring process more transparent and 'user friendly' for teens and young people. For example, part of the growing disconnect between businesses and young people who are seeking employment can be attributed to screening mechanisms such as web-based applications. Larger retail chains could partner with schools to coach teens through the online applications.

1. Paul Harrington and Nancy Snyder, with Anne Berrigan and Laura Knoll, "Signaling Success: Boosting Teen Employment Prospects," Commonwealth Corporation, April 2014, Accessed 9/15/14: http://www.commcorp.org/resources/documents/BoostingTeenEmploymentProspects_042013.pdf
2. Ibid.
3. Sarah Ayres, "The High Cost of Youth Unemployment," Center for American Progress, April 5, 2013, Accessed 9/15/2014,

<http://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/AyresYouthUnemployment1.pdf>

4. Harrington et al., "Signaling Success."
5. Andrew Bundy with contributions by Dana Ansel and Nancy Snyder, "Closing the Massachusetts Skills Gap: Recommendations and Action Steps," Commonwealth Corporation, April 2013, Accessed 9/15/14: http://www.commcorp.org/resources/documents/statewide%20final_4-22.pdf

Contacts

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