

Wanted: Work Experience for Young Adults

A Report to the
Washington Legislature



December 2010

Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
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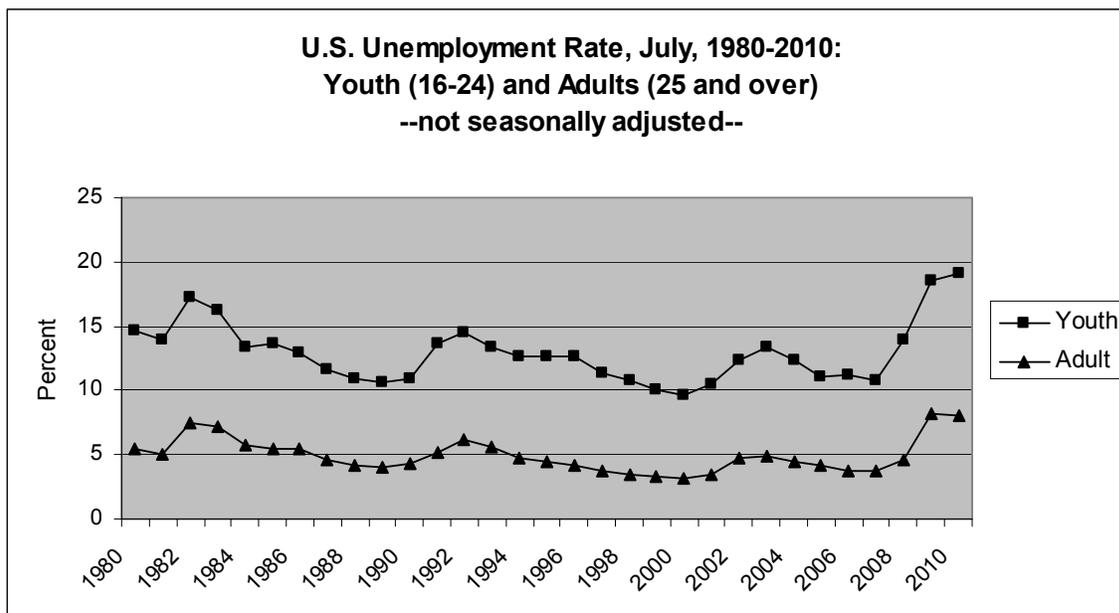
There is no good time to lose a job. But for many Washington young people, the recession-battered job market has left them unable to land their *first job*, a critical milestone for effective transition to adulthood.

Held back at the starting gates, hungry for a job but unable to find one, this kind of setback promises repercussions that last longer than Washington's unemployment lines.

Studies show that young people who enter the labor market during a recession are at risk of not moving forward in their chosen careers, lowering their lifetime earnings and delaying milestones, such as buying a home, getting married and having children.¹ They face a greater struggle in becoming self-sufficient and living independently at a critical moment in their lives.

Youth unemployment rates twice as high as for other workers

Washington's young adults, 18 through 24, experience the highest unemployment and the greatest difficulty of any age group in getting a job, and keeping it. Young people routinely experience unemployment rates that range above two times the rate experienced by other workers (see chart below of U.S. unemployment rates). However, when adult employment rates are double their historical norm, the situation for young adults is even more troubling.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

¹ Andrew Sum and Joseph McLaughlin, Out with the young and in with the old: U.S. labor markets 2000-2008 and the case for an immediate jobs creation program for teens and young adults, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, 2008.

Early work experience shapes future success

Of even greater concern is how early work experiences, or the lack of it, shape future performance and earnings. The experiences of youth from the time they leave school can play a critical role in their long-term success.

It is a time when they develop occupational competence, learn to apply their academic capabilities, and gain the generic workplace skills required in most jobs. It is often a time of testing careers and of completing formal education. Starting out on the right foot also allows youth to demonstrate a track record necessary for a productive career, obtain positive recommendations from their early employers, and draw on social networks of other workers.²

Young adults unable to grab a foothold in the labor market after graduation will jostle with each succeeding graduating class to find their place in the economy. Those that fail to graduate will struggle to overcome even greater obstacles. At this point, with three successive years of higher than usual youth unemployment, today's graduates will compete with preceding graduates as well.

The Great Recession, as expected, has only increased this age group's economic woes. Early in 2010, when Washington's unemployment rate was 10 percent for adults 25 to 64 years of age, the rate for young adults was more than 22 percent.³

In this second biennial legislative report on young adult unemployment, we provide an update of the economic and educational status of this age group that numbers over 655,700⁴ in Washington and represents 15 percent of the state's working age population (18 to 64 years old). We also provide recent developments with some model programs and update recommendations listed in the 2008 report.⁵

Youth by the Numbers

About 45 percent of the state's estimated 655,700 young adults are attending school either full time or part time. Of the nearly 260,000 that are in school, 46 percent are working, 54 percent are not. Many students don't need or want to work but about 48,000, or 29 percent of young adult students, are looking for work and not finding it.

The good news for these young adults is they are in school. For those who are not in school, unemployment means being disconnected from any path that leads to economic independence.

Disconnected Youth – Young adults, ages 18 through 24 who are neither attending school nor working.

There are around 75,700 young adults in Washington who are not in school and not working. This disconnected population represents over 13 percent of the state's young adult population. The greatest portion of this group—some 80 percent—does not have an education above a high school diploma.

² Robert Lerman, "Helping Out-of-School Youth Attain Labor Market Success: What We Know and How to Learn More," American University and Urban Institute, 2005, p. 2.

³ Does not include young adults who are not looking for work and, therefore, not considered part of the workforce.

⁴ Data in this report is weighted using information supplied by the state's Office of Financial Management's 2008 and 2010 State Population Surveys.

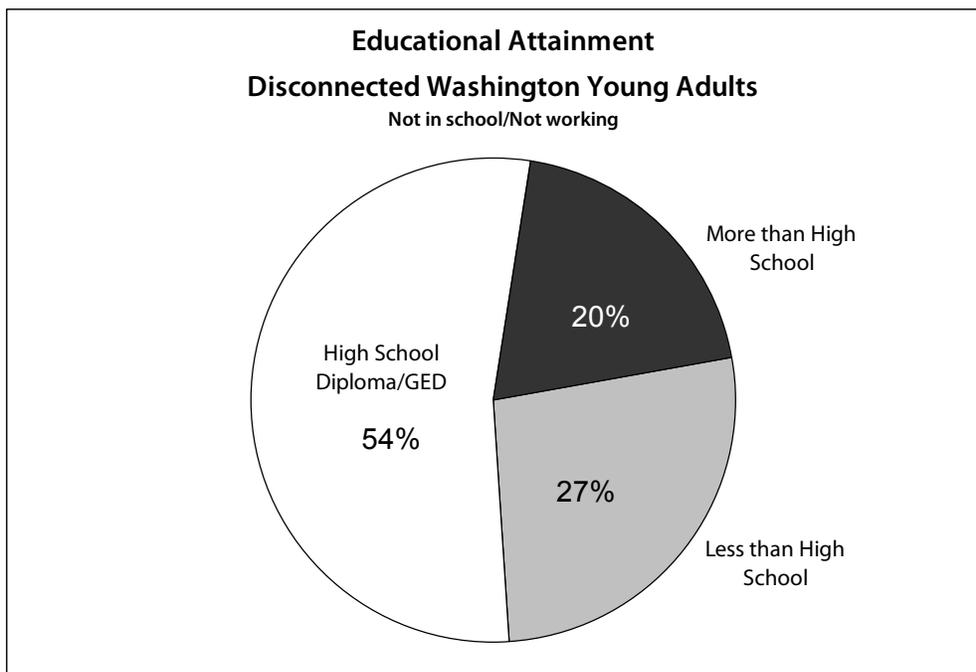
⁵ The first report was "Reconnecting Young Adults, 18-24," Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, 2008. RCW 28C.18.060 (28).

Washington Young Adult Employment and Education Snapshot

Total number of 18-24 year olds: 655,700

- Working: 56 percent
- In-School:* 45 percent
- Unemployed: 16 percent
- Disconnected: 13 percent
- *Some of these young adults might still be attending high school. Also, nearly half of the students are also included in the percentage of working young adults.*

As can be seen in the chart below more than 80 percent of disconnected youth (not in school, not employed) have a high school diploma or less. With little work experience and low education levels, these youth face significant barriers in entering the labor market.



Source: Office of Financial Management, 2010 Washington State Population Survey

As with other age groups, young adults with more education are paid more and enjoy higher employment rates than less educated peers. A one-year certificate or two-year degree from a community or technical college, for example, raised the median paycheck for Washington's young adults in 2010 to \$14 per hour, compared with \$10 for those with just a high school diploma.

High school dropouts particularly at risk

Most worrisome is the unemployment rate for those who dropped out of high school. Between 2008 and 2010, the unemployment rate for young adults who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent more than doubled, from 18.7 percent to 38.6 percent. Slightly more than one in four young people do not graduate from high school with their classmates each year. For the class of 2009, Washington's on-time high school graduation rate stood at 73.5 percent. Those young adults without high school diplomas who managed to land a job earned a median hourly wage of \$9, only slightly higher than the state's \$8.55 minimum wage for 2010.

Young Adults Not Attending School by Education Level, 2010

Education Level	Unemployment Rate	Median Hourly Wage (working young adults)
Less Than High School	38.6%	\$9
High School or GED	17.5%	\$10
Associate's Degree or Certificate	5.9%	\$14
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	4.2%	\$17

Who is most likely to be disconnected?

Not all segments of the young adult population have been hit equally hard by the recent recession. Young men were far more likely to be out of work and out of school than young women. Those who come from low-income households were also more likely to be unemployed and not in school.

A large proportion of unemployed young adults, both in school and out of school, come from economically disadvantaged households. The unemployment rate for young adults who live in economically disadvantaged households was 30 percent in 2010, compared to 18 percent for youth from higher income households. Slightly more than one out of three young adults are from households that live at or below 200 percent of the federal Poverty Line.⁶ More than half the state's disconnected young adults are from these households.

Selected Demographic Characteristics of Young Adults, 2010

	All Young Adults	All Unemployed Young Adults	Disconnected Young Adults
Male	52%*	65.30%	62.5%
Female	48%*	34.70%	37.5%
Rural	31.7%	30.5%	34.4%
Urban	68.3%	69.5%	65.6%
Disabled	13.5%	10.6%	10.5%
White	68.1%	70.6%	**
African American	3.8%	6.5%	**
Native American	1.3%	1.9%	**
Asian/Pacific Islander	8.9%	5.0%	**
Mixed	3.5%	3.4%	**
Hispanic	14.4%	12.7%	**
18-19	29.3%	32.8%	17.2%
20-24	70.7%	67.3%	82.8%
Economically Disadvantaged (HH Income < 200% of Federal Poverty Line)	35.6%	45.6%	55.2%

Source: Office of Financial Management, 2010 Washington State Population Survey

* These numbers are from U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

** Sample sizes are insufficient for reporting race/ethnicity for this subgroup.

⁶ The income threshold for 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines for 2010 is \$21,660 for one and \$44,100 for a family of four.

Growing education gap between men and women

As seen in the previous chart, young men made up over 62 percent of disconnected adults—neither working, nor in school. This trend is reflected in a growing gap between men and women in postsecondary education. In the 2009-2010 academic year, women were awarded 58 percent of all associate degrees in Washington.⁷

Low income levels linked to lower college participation, later start

Too many young adults struggle to connect to a career path after leaving high school. This happens across socioeconomic lines, but is more pronounced at lower incomes. Instead of heading to college or entering an apprenticeship, they wander through a series of low-paying jobs and suffer bouts of unemployment. In particular, people in the lowest 20 percent of income delay or decline attending college. When they finally do arrive at college, they tend to be older adults with low skills and additional challenges related to raising and supporting families. Many also have been away from school for such a significant time that they need to take remedial classes in English, math and other subjects, further delaying the completion of a college credential.⁸

As mentioned previously, more than one out of four Washington students drop out of high school and enter the job market without a diploma. These young adults face even more severe struggles to gain employment that leads to self sufficiency. Years are lost before many young people enter postsecondary education with the objective of connecting to a career.

Work experience is critical

Work experiences—part-time for students and full-time for those not attending school—reinforce and help form key behaviors that educational specialists recognize as essential to success. These behaviors include planning for the future and setting goals, identifying resources, seeking information and feedback, and evaluating what has worked and what has not. These habits of mind are formed through modeling by parents, coaching by teachers and mentors, and through practice in the home, classroom, and early work experiences. When firmly in place, these habits help guide an individual through life's many choices and obstacles. Employers also recognize and value these habits in their employees as teamwork, problem-solving, critical-thinking skills, and perseverance or "stick-to-itiveness."

Without real work opportunities, young people are less likely to master positive work habits.

Less work experience today leads to less work experience tomorrow and lower earnings down the road. Disadvantaged teens who work in high school are more likely to remain in high school than their peers who do not work. Teens who work more in high school have an easier time transitioning into the labor market after graduation.⁹

⁷ Source: "Student Progress and Success," 2010, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

⁸ State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, The Socioeconomic Well-being of Washington State: Who Attends Community and Technical College, Research Report No. 06-4, September 2006.

⁹ Andrew Sum, Joseph McLaughlin, Ishwar Khatiwada, The Continued Collapse of the Nation's Teen Job Market and the Dismal Outlook for the 2008 Summer Labor Market for Teens: Does Anybody Care?, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, April 2008.

Exposure to work experiences should occur before high school graduation. While child labor laws limit how early a young person can formally work, school programs can expose students to work experiences through career days, job shadowing, Career and Technical Education programs and more intensive learning communities such as Career Academies. (In Washington, a high school model similar to career academies, known as Technical Innovation High Schools, has evolved. Technical Innovation High Schools and career academies in the state include Aviation High School in south King County, Delta High School in Tri-Cities, and Health Career Academies in Spokane, Yakima and Seattle, among others.)

A recent report authored by leading workforce development think tank MDRC highlighted the value of Career Academies and the work experience they provide—particularly for young, disadvantaged, minority men.

Investments in career-related experiences during high school can produce substantial and sustained improvements in the labor market prospects and transitions to adulthood of youth. In fact, Career Academies are one of the few youth-focused interventions that have been found to improve the labor market prospects of young men.¹⁰

Ideally, part-time work experience while in high school—whether inside a Career and Technical Education classroom or an after-school job— keeps young people focused on the work world, and their place in it. Not only does this experience shape their job skills and help young adults discover their passions and interests, but, ultimately, it builds their resume.

Young adults who gain work experience are more likely to be hired than those who don't, boosting their employment opportunities and employability at the same time. Meanwhile, young adults who fail to connect to work experiences miss out on these opportunities, and can suffer from "a number of severe adverse consequences on their future employment, earnings, incomes, household formation, marriage behavior, and fiscal contributions to state and national governments."¹¹

Washington's Work Experience Programs

Developing good habits and gaining work experience can be difficult under the best of circumstances. It is particularly difficult in the absence of strong role models and economic opportunities. This can be seen by data showing lower college participation and higher unemployment rates among low income young adults. A recent paper commissioned by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation argues that President Obama's goal of an additional five million college graduates by 2020 "cannot rely solely on the traditional pathway to higher education for rising high school seniors." As argued by the paper, we must find a mix of ways to recapture young people who are on the margins.¹²

¹⁰ James J. Kemple with Cynthia J. Willner, Career Academies: Long-term Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes, Educational Attainment, and Transitions to Adulthood, MDRC, June 2008.

¹¹ Andrew Sum and Joseph McLaughlin, Out with the young and in with the old: U.S. labor markets 2000-2008 and the case for an immediate jobs creation program for teens and young adults, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, 2008.

¹² Dan Bloom, Saskia Levy Thompson, Rob Ivry, Building a Learning Agenda Around Disconnected Youth, MDRC, March 2010.

While far from comprehensive, there are programs in Washington that can provide work experience, job skills, mentoring, and academic and job preparation assistance.

Workforce Investment Act Youth Program

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Program served 4,400 low-income Washington youth (14 through 21) during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2010. This federally funded program, begun in 1998, is administered by Washington's 12 regional Workforce Development Councils, and provides individualized services such as counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and study skills training to help youth stay in school, connect to work and ultimately enter postsecondary education. The program also can provide subsidized work experience and internships.

A Workforce Board analysis of participants who exited the WIA Youth Program in 2007-2008, found that half of the participants who were no longer in high school had employment six to nine months after leaving the program. Slightly more than one out of four of program participants were working 30 hours or more a week. As for educational attainment, 31 percent exited with a high school diploma, and another 21 percent exited with a GED. However, 35 percent were reported not in school and not obtaining a diploma, putting this group at risk of a lifetime of lower earnings and other struggles.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Summer Youth Program

As a result of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the long dormant Summer Youth Employment Program came back to life long enough to demonstrate how even short-term work experience opportunities can benefit young adults. This popular federally funded program was available to low-income youth since the 1970s but ended in 2000. For the summer of 2009 only, the Recovery Act reinstated the Summer Youth Employment Program providing a one-time increase in subsidized employment for youth. In Washington, \$19.9 million in federal recovery money flowed to the program, providing more than 5,600 summer jobs for low-income youth and young adults at more than 1,500 worksites statewide. The program was administered locally by Washington's 12 Workforce Development Councils. An important feature of the Recovery Act Summer Youth Employment Program was expanding the age eligibility ceiling. The program allowed young people through age 24 to participate, instead of stopping at age 21.

By combining job-ready services and training with work at local public, nonprofit, and private employers, the program emphasized real-world job expectations and provided opportunities for career instruction, financial literacy training, academic improvement and social growth. (See examples of work experiences under Summer Youth Employment results.)

Mathematica Policy Research conducted a study of the 2009 Recovery Act Summer Youth Initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. Employers interviewed for this study were overwhelmingly positive about the initiative. They reported that the experience mentoring a new employee was worth the effort and almost unanimously agreed that they would participate again if given the opportunity. The study also showed that youth valued

the opportunity to hold a job, gain work skills, and build their resumes. They also valued the exposure to professional environments and adult mentors. Many were enthusiastic about having money and being able to help their families in these tough economic times. In absence of the initiative, many reported they would be competing for jobs with more experienced adult workers or doing nothing productive during the summer months.¹³

Summer Youth Employment results

Some 92 percent of participating youth (ages 14 to 24) in Washington completed their work experience with 78 percent attaining a significant level of work readiness that will help them find a job and keep it. Work readiness assessments were developed by local areas, shaping expectations and outcomes for participating youth region by region. Below are examples of 2009 Summer Youth Employment Program work experiences made available through Washington's 12 Workforce Development Councils:

- Teacher assistant through the Olympic Educational Services District Head Start program.
- Forklift operator who received forklift certification while moving freight at the Port of Willapa Harbor.
- Energy research assistant at the Western Washington University Vehicle Research Institute.
- Crew member for Rubbish Truck, a Snohomish County residential waste disposal firm, with emphasis on recycling.
- Early Learning aide at Innovative Services NW in Vancouver, Washington providing age appropriate lessons and activities.
- Landscape worker helping with final phase of the WorkSource Central Basin facility in Moses Lake and helped install an irrigation system.
- Construction worker for OIC's Housing and Weatherization site, Marvin Gardens, including final painting and finish work.
- Office assistant at WSU Cooperative Extension in Pend Oreille County.
- Pre-apprenticeship for the electrical trade in Benton-Franklin counties in coordination with the IBEW local Union.
- Computer technician, refurbishing donated computers at Goodwill in Spokane by installing hardware, new software and virus protection upgrades.

Washington Service Corps/AmeriCorps

Both AmeriCorps and Washington Service Corps provide work experience for young adults, and offer college scholarships for program completers. The Washington Service Corps, funded through AmeriCorps dollars, places citizens in full-time community service projects and supports them with a monthly minimal living allowance of \$1,050. The individual placement program is for youth, including unemployed and out-of school youth who must be between the ages of 18 and 25.

Washington Service Corps members provide literacy instruction, tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, help

¹³ Mathematica Policy Research, "Reinvesting in America's Youth: Lessons from the 2009 Recovery Act Summer Youth Employment Initiative." Study funded by the U.S. Department of Labor.

communities respond to disasters, and help build the capacity of nonprofit groups to become self-sustaining. Members who complete their term of service (normally 10 ½ months) are eligible to receive a federally funded education award of \$5,350. Members must have completed high school or received a GED before using their educational awards. For the current year 2010-2011, 71 percent of the members are 18-25 years of age. Sixty percent of the participants have college degrees with another 19 percent with some college education.

In a 2008 survey, 97 percent of Washington AmeriCorps participants reported the experience made them more skilled, confident, directed and service-oriented. And over three quarters of respondents reported higher levels of workplace skills due to AmeriCorps, including universal workplace skills such as leadership, management, teamwork and communication; as well as selected specialized skills ranging from chain sawing to teaching. Last year, Washington AmeriCorps enrolled 1,459 participants. So far, during the 2010-2011 program year, over 1300 participants have enrolled of which almost 860 (65 percent) are 24 years of age or younger.

Opportunity Internship program

The Opportunity Internship program created in 2009 has encouraged partnerships at the regional level with the objective of building stronger ties between high demand occupations in targeted industries and low-income high school students. In the 2009-2010 school year, the program made it possible for 359 students to complete an internship. One of the regional partners, the Northwest Workforce Council, followed up on its participants and found that so far 13 of their 34 internship completers were in a postsecondary program. The Opportunity Internship program has demonstrated how linkages can be made between local employers and young adults. The question is how, given limited state resources, this model can be repeated in every community in Washington.

Seeking Opportunities Developing Occupations (SODO, Inc.)

[SODO Inc.](#) specializes in recruiting, training, placing and retaining disadvantaged Seattle area youth ages 18-24 in manufacturing while also introducing the participants to emerging green trends and apprenticeship opportunities. Students are paid for their training and treated as employees. Successful students go on to internships with local manufacturers, and the prospect of employment. The program has been recognized as “one to watch” by the statewide team that reviews best practices in workforce and economic development.

Through a grant provided by the Seattle-King County Workforce Development Council, the program plans to begin new classes in 2011 in partnership with King County, South Seattle Community College, Puget Sound Industrial Excellence Center and the Manufacturing Industrial Council. The Manufacturing Industrial Council uses its industry relationships to place interns with companies. So far, 30 employers have participated in the program. King County Work Training Program assumes liability for the students while they participate in their internships. Additional wage subsidies come from a mix of federal funding streams.

Since the program’s start in July 2009, 108 youth (out of an original 117) were placed in internships. Of those, 67 kept their internships for the duration. While not intended as a job placement program, 16 of SODO’s interns have been hired by their internship provider.

Washington Business Week

For 35 years, the [Washington Business Week](#) program has prepared high school students to enter the workforce by giving them the skills, confidence and values to succeed in life. Through experiential learning, Washington Business Week serves more than 3,000 teens throughout Washington through summer camps at four Washington universities and in-school community programs each year.

Every year, dozens of businesses and hundreds of working professionals participate in providing teens a real world experience in a variety of careers. Building on its popular business program, Washington Business Week has expanded to include career pathways in healthcare, construction, manufacturing and an advanced business week program for teen alumni who want an even more rigorous experience.

Young Adult Strategy Recommendation

This paper argues for connecting Washington youth more directly to the workplace as a way of focusing them on their career choices, encouraging further education and developing habits of mind and work that foster future professional and personal success.

In November of 2008, the Workforce Board recommended several strategies to help reduce high unemployment rates among young adults. These recommendations are identified in *High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018: Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development*. The recommendations from the 2008 High Skills, High Wages report still hold true over the long term. In 2010, in the wake of a great recession, our recommendations here are focused on next steps.

Expand partnerships between local employers and young adults

Forging strong, ongoing relationships between the business community and young adults is essential in getting Washington youth needed work experience that leads to job opportunities, enhanced work ethic and job skills, and a job-ready resume. The programs mentioned previously are making those connections. The question is how the best of these practices can be scaled up to reach more disadvantaged young adults statewide.

--View summer work experiences as an extension of the learning experience

Summer is an ideal time for youth to gain work experience through both paid and unpaid opportunities. There are more activities and tasks that can be done outdoors and it's a time when most young people have more time on their hands. Sadly, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's Summer Youth Employment Program has disappeared, and it's unlikely that federal funds for this program will be available any time soon. Summer work experiences can reinforce academic learning, generate thoughts about future careers and teach the value of managing time. The state's 12 Workforce Development Councils, which oversee the Workforce Investment Act Youth Program, are natural intermediaries for schools, youth service providers, and employers willing to tackle this issue in their community.

--Consider volunteer, community-service opportunities

Work does not have to be paid to be valuable for youth. Community service or non-profit volunteer work can be engaging to youth, if properly supervised, structured to provide learning, and consistent in its scheduling. Setting this up might require

technical assistance for non-profits who are strapped for resources, but once established would pay dividends to the engaged youth and the sponsoring organizations.

--Connect disadvantaged youth to AmeriCorps and Washington Service Corps

These programs provide work experience for young adults, and offer college scholarships for program completers. Demographic data for the Washington Service Corps show that it currently reaches the group of college-attending youth very well, but might be expanded to include greater numbers of disadvantaged or at-risk young adults.

Enhance employment and training options for target populations

Young African-Americans made up 6.5 percent of the unemployed in Washington in 2010,¹⁴ compared to their overall percentage (3.8 percent) of the Washington population. This was the main exception to Washington's State Population Survey data, which showed most target populations were not disproportionately represented among unemployed young adults. These results might have something to do with how this deep recession has hit everyone hard. As the economy improves, programs should be evaluated on their performance across the broad spectrum of populations and should be prepared to offer customized solutions.

Provide online access to education, training and career counseling

Providing young adults with online options for education and training—especially training that leads to in-demand occupations—is critical. Whether they're community and technical college courses that students can take from home or credentialed technology skills training provided over the Internet, such as Microsoft's Elevate America program, more Washington young people spend time and find value in doing coursework online. That's one reason Washington's nationally recognized CareerBridge.wa.gov web site has the potential to impact so many young Washington residents. The site provides labor market information combined with detailed data on over 5,000 education and training programs, including apprenticeships. The site helps young adults plan their future by providing information on which jobs are in demand, what they pay, where the applicable training is and the success record of those training programs. It also directs them to free counseling at local WorkSource one-stop career centers.

Do everything possible to ensure young adults get a high school diploma

In 2010, the Legislature wisely endorsed the creation of a statewide dropout re-engagement system that will provide education and services to older youth who have dropped out of school or are not expected to graduate from high school by the age of 21. Given that the young adults who struggle the most are those without a high school diploma, such a comprehensive approach is a good investment. However, while the statute calls for allocating basic education dollars for dropout reengagement programs that address non-academic barriers, the state's basic education funds will not be enough to cover the extra services that such programs must provide.¹⁵

¹⁴Source: Office of Financial Management, 2010 Washington State Population Survey.

¹⁵Second Substitute House Bill 1418

Therefore, a key element to the success of dropout reengagement, as well as prevention and intervention programs, is the coordination of program resources across agencies and community-based organizations. The Building Bridges Work Group's recommendations that call for targeting vulnerable youth, by leveraging resources, coordinating activities, and reducing service duplication should be supported.

Washington's experience and policy leadership in dropout reduction should not be lost. The challenge is how to keep moving forward in the face of budget cuts. Many of the Building Bridges Work Group recommendations can move forward without state funding. It would be helpful, however, if funds could be provided to schools with the lowest graduation rates so that the state can continue to build expertise in this field. In turn, the state will be in a better position to make sound investments when the economy and the state budget allow for the level of investment this issue needs.

Summary

The economic recession and consequent budget challenges paint a bleak picture for young adults who are disconnected from both work and education, and for those on the edge of leaving school and entering the working world. Data shows that even when the economy improves, young adults are expected to continue to suffer from disproportionate unemployment, and underemployment. Education is an essential ingredient for success: earnings and employment rise for youth as their education level increases. Still, a diploma is no guarantee. Without work experience, recent graduates have a tough time finding a job. But gaining that critical experience is increasingly difficult in an economy where so many jobs have been shed. As the economy improves, policymakers should look at how our next generation will get the education and work experience that will guide them on the path to a living-wage career.