

Multiple Pathways for Young Adults



A Report to the Washington Legislature on Young Adult Unemployment



December 2014

Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
128 10th Avenue SW | PO Box 43105, Olympia, WA 98504-3105
360-709-4600, www.wtb.wa.gov

Table of Contents

Executive Summary..... 2

A Comprehensive Solution..... 4

Young Adult Unemployment 5

Out of School and Older Youth..... 9

In-School Youth 12

Summary 17

Executive Summary

Today's Young Adults Face High Unemployment, Lower Lifetime Earnings

Since the Great Recession, Washington's young adults have continued to struggle with high unemployment, putting at risk their long-term economic prospects and potentially delaying traditional milestones such as home ownership, marriage, and children. Some 15.5 percent of our state's young adults were unemployed in 2013,¹ more than double the rate (6.1 percent) of those aged 25-64. While it's not unusual for young adults to have higher unemployment rates than older workers, young adults in the pre-recession year of 2007 had an unemployment rate of 10.6 percent—a third lower than the 2013 rate.

The impacts of high unemployment on young adults are far reaching and go beyond young adults taking longer to find their first rung on the career ladder. This "failure to launch" puts them in competition with the younger people coming up behind them, new labor market entrants who continue to fill the pipeline and are often picked over "older" young adults for likely first jobs. Because of this competition, young adults often "age out" of the running. At the other end of the spectrum, older, experienced workers buffeted by unemployment and lay-offs are vying more often for those same low-wage, often entry-level jobs. And as older, experienced adult workers take lower wage jobs, "likely youth jobs" are decreasing, further heightening the competition.

Delayed entry into the labor market comes with serious repercussions for Washington's youth, pushing down individual income, lifetime earning potential, and long-term employability for a generation of workers. More worrisome is the number of disconnected young adults, neither in school or employed. This group isn't actively gaining skills or credentials, and isn't building a resume through work experience, or earning a paycheck, for that matter.

Education is Key

Education—particularly education that goes beyond a high school diploma—is proven to help young adults successfully enter the labor market, earn higher wages and increase their job security. Unemployment rates for young adults drop considerably as they gain postsecondary education or training, whether it's an associate's degree or certificate, a four-year degree, or apprenticeship. Young people who earn a two-year or four-year degree have the lowest rates of unemployment, at 6 percent and 7 percent,² respectively.

Meanwhile, those who drop out of high school face the biggest employment challenge. One out of three young adults who has not earned a high school diploma is unemployed—the highest among their peers. In the 2012-13 school year, approximately one in five high school students dropped out, or about 14,000 students statewide.³ Washington's 77 percent graduation rate falls below the 80 percent average rate

¹ Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013, Current Population Survey. Note: The BLS survey includes 16- and 17-year olds and thus does not completely align with this report's definition of young adult (18-24).

² U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey

³ The high school class of 2013 had an on-time graduation rate of 76 percent, according to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report 2012 - 13

nationwide. And the state's low-income seniors have just a 66 percent graduation rate. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy estimates the cost to taxpayers of each student who drops out at \$10,500 per year for their entire lives.

Finding new ways to reconnect with out-of-school youth, many of whom lack high school diplomas, is a pressing need that goes beyond our state. It's a key piece of the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which replaced and expanded upon the long-standing Workforce Investment Act. WIOA, a far-reaching federal act passed by Congress in the summer of 2014, promises better integration of workforce services across a wide range of populations, and a more substantial investment in older, out-of-school youth. (See more on page 9)

Disconnected Youth or Lost Opportunity?

Nearly 15 percent, or approximately one in six youth in Washington, aged 16-24, are not in school and are not working.⁴ Persistent unemployment and disconnection from the world of work places our state's youth at a competitive disadvantage. This struggle to connect to the economy also erodes confidence and optimism, replacing it with doubt regarding their preparation for entering the job market.

Disconnected teens and young adults represent a critical lost asset in Washington's economy. However, if given the right resources, understanding, and access, these young people represent a unique opportunity. The benefits derived from fully engaging disconnected young adults in education and the workforce are felt not only by the individual young person, but by the surrounding communities where they live and work.

Research shows that the length of disconnection matters to young adult success. For instance, of those who were disconnected from employment for between one and two years, 61 percent of men and 48 percent of women were employed full time between the ages of 25-28. Yet of those who were disconnected from the workforce or education for three years or more, only 41 percent of men and 21 percent of women were employed full time between the ages of 25-28. For individuals who stayed connected to school or employment, 75 percent of men and 62 percent of women were employed full time at the same age in their lives.⁵

⁴Nation, O. (2013), Opportunity Index, Washington Opportunity Index: <http://opportunityindex.org/#5.00/45.635/-93.089/>

⁵Bridgeland, J. M., & Milano, J. A. (2012). Opportunity Road; the Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth. Civic Enterprises & America's Promise Alliance.

A Comprehensive Solution

Moving forward, a comprehensive solution must speak to all young Washingtonians, including: those still in school, those who have exited high school, and those who have yet to transition to either postsecondary education or a meaningful career path.

The solution should emphasize:

- Short-term credentials focused on in-demand jobs that quickly move many young people into the labor market at satisfactory wages.
- Programs that offer “earn-and-learn” options, such as apprenticeships and paid internships.
- Education programs that blend job skills, internships, and job shadows, with classroom learning.

These types of programs should be supported and expanded, in particular for the many young people who have aged out of our K-12 system, often with little or no means of support.

For those still in school, the focus needs to be on:

- Career Guidance
- Career and Education Planning
- Career-Connected Learning

Youth Are Not Pursuing Postsecondary Education

Although high school graduation remains an important milestone in the life of young people, it is not an end goal as it once was 25 to 30 years ago. For those who graduate from high school, low-wage, part-time work awaits—a far cry from the living-wage careers previous generations entered into with a high school diploma.

Despite the lack of opportunity that comes from just a high school diploma, only 62 percent of Washington high school graduates went on to enroll in postsecondary education or training in the most recent reporting year.⁶ This means that over a third of recent high school graduates did not continue their education or training after high school,⁷ stranding them in a tight job market with only a high school diploma to compete for jobs that often require more advanced credentials or attract people with postsecondary qualifications seeking the same jobs.

Even as Washington’s youth scramble for employment, thousands of Washington employers report leaving positions unfilled for lack of qualified candidates who have the necessary education or skills. In particular, employers report a lack of “soft skills” or “work readiness” skills among young job applicants. Many young people lack work readiness skills such as being punctual, dressing appropriately, and working as a team.

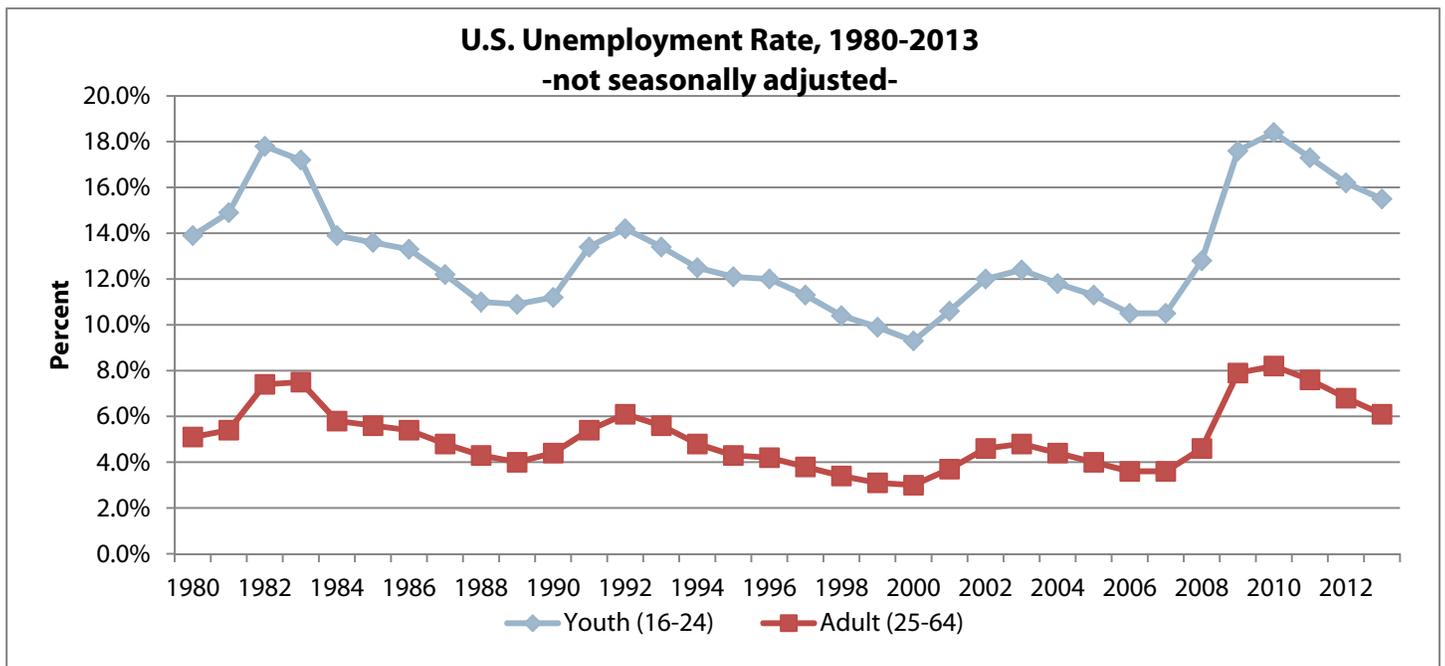
⁶ Education Research and Data Center (2013). Key Indicators: A Compendium. Olympia: Education and Research Data Center.

⁷ Ibid.

Lack of work experience is a key reason why young people lack these employability skills. When young people are unable to land a first job, it makes it much more difficult to learn these unwritten but critical skills and find a foothold in the labor market. It also increases the likelihood of them being unemployed later in life.

Young Adult Unemployment

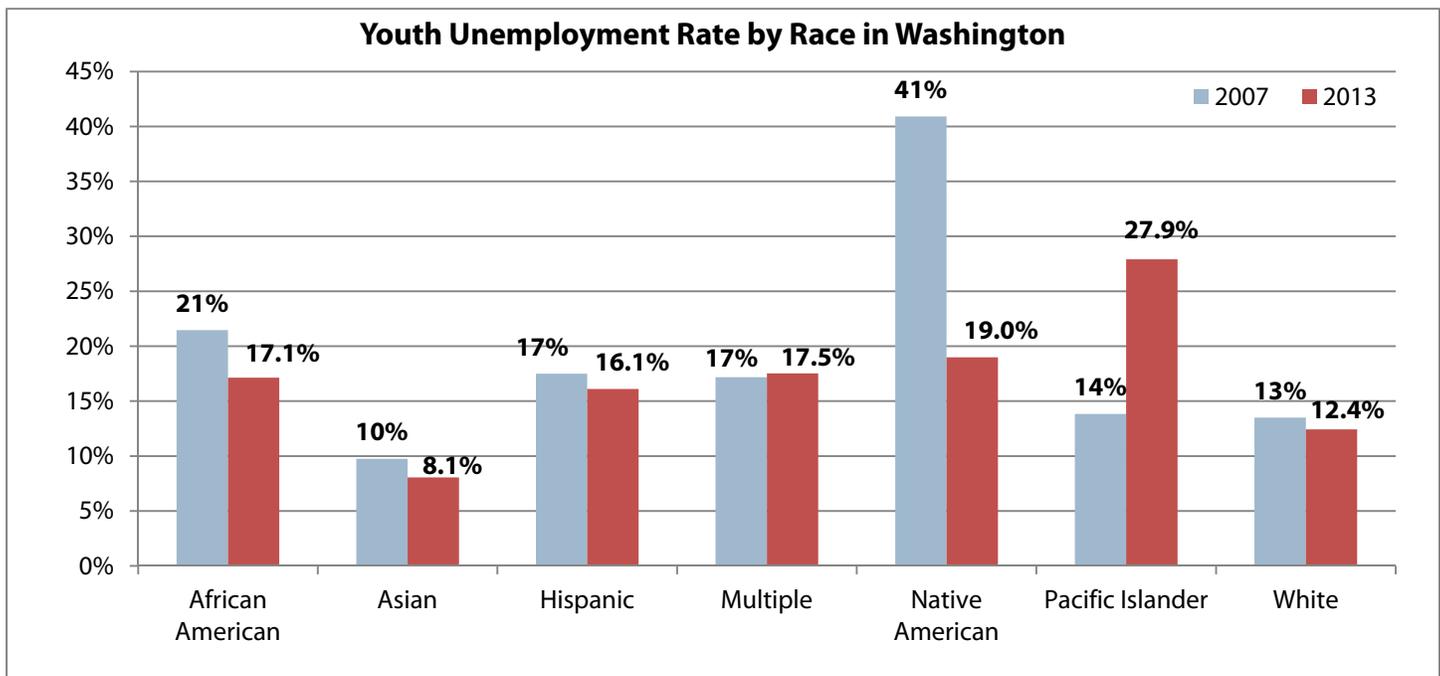
Young adult unemployment is a persistent problem that becomes even more acute during economic downturns. In 2013, 15.5 percent of our state’s young adults were unemployed, compared to 6.1 percent of older adult workers (25-64). But there is nothing new about this differential. Young adults have long experienced unemployment rates between 6 and 10 percentage points higher than the older workforce. The chart below compares unemployment rates between these two age categories.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. <http://www.bls.gov/data/home.htm#unemployment>.

Unemployment Rates Even Higher Among Minorities

Unemployment rates for minority young adults are significantly higher than the general population of young adults. In 2013, young adult Pacific Islanders in Washington had the highest unemployment rate at nearly 28 percent, followed by Native American young adults (19 percent), African American young adults (17 percent) and Hispanics (16 percent). That works out to roughly one out of three young adult Pacific Islanders and one out of five Native Americans and African American young people without jobs—a startlingly high percentage and a cause for alarm if we are to keep these young people on track for living-wage careers, and life milestones such as marriage and home ownership. Hispanic young adults had a 16 percent unemployment rate, while white young adults had a 12.4 percent unemployment rate, and Asian young adults had an 8 percent unemployment rate.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau's 2013 and 2007 American Community Survey, Washington young adults aged 16-24.⁸

Far Reaching Impacts From Youth Unemployment

High unemployment and long-term low wages are often intertwined. That is, as more people search for work and jobs are scarce, wages tend to fall. A young person who experiences a six-month period of unemployment can expect to miss out on at least \$45,000 in wages over the next decade—about \$23,000 for the period of unemployment and an additional \$22,000 in lagging wages due to their time spent unemployed.⁹ Higher unemployment rates not only depress initial wages, they can harm lifetime earning potential as well. One study found individuals who experience joblessness when unemployment rates are

⁸ Note that some of these populations are very small and susceptible to wide variations in estimates. Native American youth for example saw very large changes in unemployment rates from year to year. The number of unemployed for Native American youth reached 3,025 according to ACS data, only to fall to 2,373 in 2008.

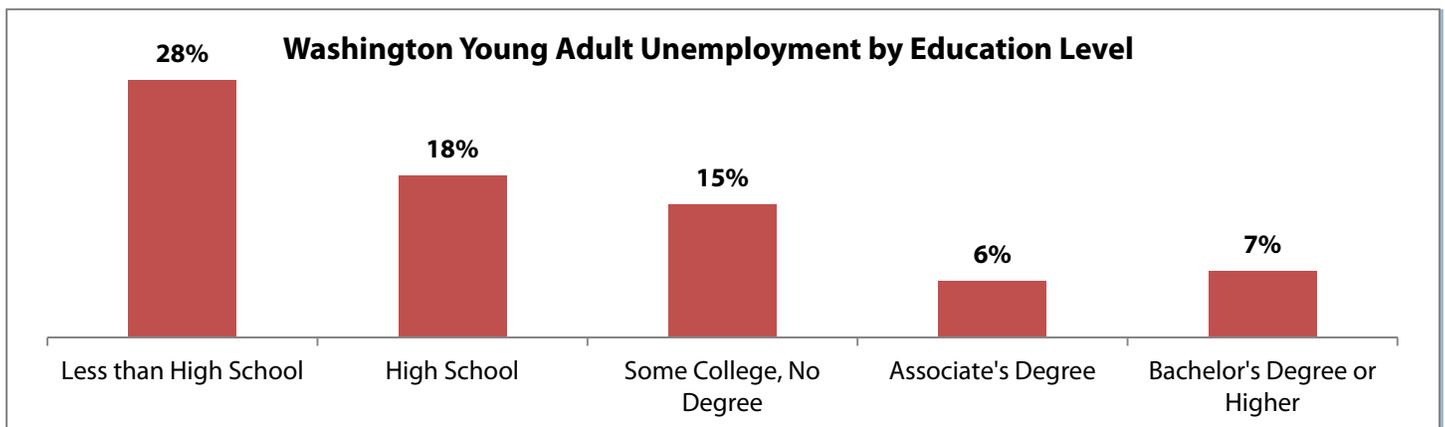
⁹ Ayres, Sarah. (2013). America's 10 Million Unemployed Youth Spell Danger for Future Economic Growth. Center for American Progress.

above 8 percent will see a loss of 2.8 years of earnings over their lifetime.¹⁰ Graduating in a bad economy has long-lasting economic consequences. For the next 10 to 15 years, those in the high school Class of 2014 will likely earn less than if they had graduated when job opportunities were more plentiful.

Education plays a significant role in the ability of young adults to land and keep jobs. While 28 percent of young adults without a high school diploma were unemployed in 2012, the unemployment rate for young adults with a postsecondary degree ranged from 6 to 7 percent.¹¹ Jobs in sectors such as manufacturing, where past generations of high school graduates used to find work after graduation, now require post-high school education and training. Some 42 percent of manufacturing jobs by 2018 are expected to require at least some postsecondary education and training.¹² Overall, 70 percent of Washington's jobs will require postsecondary education by 2020. Current education attainment levels are only 68 percent of the level projected to be necessary by 2020.¹³

Even so, graduating high school is an important first step toward long-term career success. High school graduates have significantly lower unemployment and higher earnings than those without diplomas, and this earning power and employability rise with additional education at every level.

The connection between education and employability applies to both genders and all ethnicities and races. Nationwide, 28 percent of youth say they should have been more careful about the courses they took as electives, and roughly the same number say they should have taken more classes directly related to preparing for a career.¹⁴



Source: U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey, Washington young adults aged 18 to 24.

For many young adults, the critical first step in their transition from high school to higher education is proving difficult. More than one third of Washington's young adults are not engaging in some form of

¹⁰ Rory O'Sullivan, A. J. (2012). No end in sight? The long term youth jobs gap and what it means for America. Young Invincibles.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey

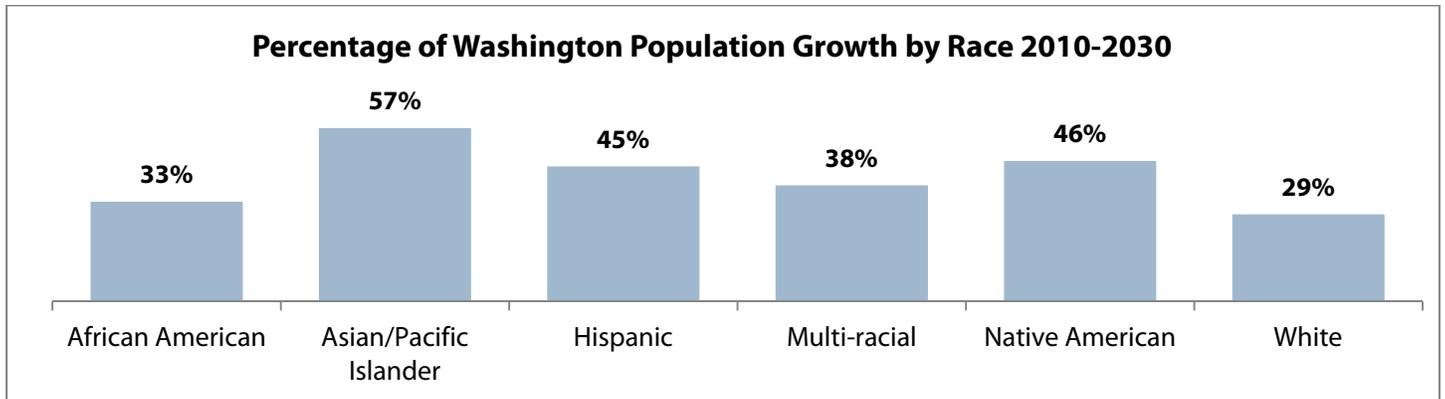
¹² Workforce, G. U. (2011). Career Clusters: Forecasting demand for high school through college jobs: 2008-2018. Georgetown: Georgetown University.

¹³ Carnevale, Anthony P, Smith, Nicole, & Strohl, Jeff. Recovery, Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

¹⁴ Van Horn, C., Zukin, C., Szeltner, M., & Stone, C. (2012). Left out. Forgotten? Recent High School Graduates and the Great Recession. John I Heldrich Center for Workforce Development.

postsecondary education within a year of their high school graduation.¹⁵ This problem becomes more acute when filtered through race.

Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, and whites are underrepresented in post-high school education and training programs. When comparing postsecondary education trends with population projections, this problem becomes even more pressing. The following chart shows population growth projections through 2030. While all groups will grow during the next 20 years, minority population growth is expected to significantly outpace whites. Yet, if young people from many of the state's minority groups don't scale the education ladder in greater numbers through certificates, degrees and apprenticeships, Washington's workforce will be less educated than it is today.



Source: OFM Projections of the State Population by Age, Gender and Race/Ethnicity 2000-2030, March 2006 and 2010. U.S. Census Bureau estimates from the American Community Survey.

¹⁵ Education Research and Data Center (2013). Key Indicators: A Compendium. Olympia: Education and Research Data Center

Cost of Higher Education Poses Barrier

The average annual loan for Washington students during the 2010-11 academic years was \$7,654 for need-based students and \$9,533 for non-need based students.¹⁶ Tuition growth has outpaced growth in median household income over the past two decades, with tuition growing nearly 300 percent in that timeframe.¹⁷ This has resulted in 58 percent of graduates leaving college with some form of student debt.¹⁸ The relatively rapid increase in the cost of a higher education is posing barriers to many students and families as they weigh the cost of education beyond high school.

The average debt of recent college graduates has steadily increased in recent years. In the 2009-10 school year, Washington's student debt load averaged \$22,101 per graduate. This increased to \$23,293 in the 2011-12 school year.¹⁹ In 2012-13, the average tuition and fees to attend a four-year institution for one year in Washington was \$15,670, while total costs reached \$30,460.²⁰ Put another way, the consumer price index increased by 32% between 2001 and 2013, while tuition rose by 148%.

State Aid Helping Close the Gap

To help low-income Washington young people afford college, the Legislature has funded a variety of financial aid programs, such as the College Bound Scholarship. The scholarship, which covers tuition and fees at the state's public colleges and universities, is available to eligible low-income seventh and eighth graders who maintain at least a 2.0 GPA in middle school and high school. Students must sign up by the end of their eighth grade year. In 2013-14, College Bound Scholarship students had a four-year high school graduation rate of 76 percent, while other low-income students had a 60 percent graduation rate, according to the Washington Student Achievement Council. Some 69 percent of College Bound Scholarship students are currently attending college, above the rate for all students in the high school class of 2012. Just 50 percent of other low-income students attended college, according to the council.

Out of School and Older Youth

Earn and Learn Options Provide Job Skills and Connections for Students

Early work experience is critical to getting young people better connected to jobs and to their next education steps. Through work experience they gain soft skills, learn to work under supervision, and gain a solid understanding of how increasing education and training leads to a solid career path. However, for many young people, work experience ideally needs to come with a paycheck. Without this financial support, it can be difficult for young Washingtonians to seek out this critical connection to the workplace. In some cases, they are helping their families pay the bills or providing other assistance, such as childcare for younger siblings.

¹⁶ HECB, H. E. (2012). Key facts about Higher Education in Washington. Olympia: Higher Education Coordinating Board.

¹⁷ HECB, H. E. (2009). Tuition Policy Report. Olympia: Higher Education Coordinating Board.

¹⁸ <http://college-insight.org/#explore/go&h=cb6ba2b1aa26f070939a59c8779084a6>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ College InSight from the Institute for College Access and Success, <http://college-insight.org/#>

Broadly speaking, earn-and-learn models center on programs that meet the needs of industry and include options such as on-the-job training (OJT), paid internships, and registered apprenticeships.

On-the-Job Training (OJT)

With on-the-job training, workers earn money while gaining job skills and an income. OJT's stated goal is to have participants become permanent employees at the end of the training. In an OJT, a contract with definitive milestones is drawn up between the employer, the employee, and the organization subsidizing the training. Typically, an employer is paid up to 50 percent of the wages for the costs of training and supervision. Most OJTs last anywhere from three to nine months. In Washington, most OJTs are paid via state and contracted organizations using federal dollars.

http://www.wa.gov/esd/1stop/technical_assistance/additional_resources.htm

Paid Internships

Although work experience is valuable--whether paid or unpaid--internships that also provide a paycheck help more youth access this opportunity. The New York Times reported that internships are growing rapidly across the U.S. but that many of them are unpaid, causing an uneven playing field between those with means and those from less financially secure backgrounds. The U.S. Department of Labor uses a six-point test in evaluating whether interns need to be paid.

In any case, internships that provide a paycheck are far more accessible and valuable for a greater number of young people. New websites have sprung up to help make these matches, such as InternMatch, or been added to existing sites, such as SimplyHired.

Apprenticeships

The most successful earn-and-learn model is apprenticeship, where those who are in training are paid while advancing up a definitive career ladder that leads to living wage jobs. The Workforce Board's evaluation of apprenticeship in [2014 Workforce Training Results](#) showed those who complete a Washington apprenticeship program earned nearly \$64,000 per year, with an employment rate among completers of 84 percent.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Promises Stronger Partnerships

In the summer of 2014, Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which replaces and builds upon the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The new act promises a renewed focus on youth, in particular, older, out-of-school youth. The new act, which takes effect in July of 2015, also includes the capacity to more effectively coordinate programs that serve low-income and disadvantaged populations and focus more closely on boosting employment and earnings through a coordinated, comprehensive system. Special funding is also provided to assist youth with disabilities to effectively transition to adulthood and gainful employment.



The new Act requires local Workforce Development Councils to spend at least 75 percent of youth grant funds on out-of-school youth, compared to 30 percent under WIA. WIOA also places a new priority on work-based learning by requiring that at least 20 percent of local youth grant funds (for both in-school and out-of-school services) be used for paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component both academic and occupational education. Investments may include: summer and year-round employment opportunities, pre-apprenticeship programs, internships, job shadowing, and on-the-job training.

WIOA provides more leverage in helping youth who have dropped out of high school, many of whom are discouraged and disconnected from either work or education. Re-engaging these youth, who are likely to be unemployed or struggling to hold onto low-wage jobs, is a key feature of WIOA. The new act extended the age of “youth” to 24 (previously capped at age 21) to more accurately reflect the struggles of those in their early 20s who haven’t connected to education and careers. WIOA also provides both the funding and policy framework to focus on drop-out prevention that promises to help more youth stay in school and on track through career-connected learning opportunities such as paid work experience, internships, job shadows, and other opportunities that move young people forward on a career path that makes sense for them.

WIOA also engages employers and calls upon business owners to create internships, job shadows, and other opportunities that engage youth and provide them with valuable supervision and encouragement in the workplace. A more flexible system, in turn, helps vulnerable youth obtain education in discreet segments, gain work experience, then return for more education, with the necessary support and assistance through age 24. This will allow more of our youth to persist and attain necessary industry-recognized certificates and credentials. Find out more about WIOA at <http://wtb.wa.gov/WIOA.asp>.

In-School Youth

Keeping Youth in School, Engaged, and on Track

When education is integrated with job skills and real-world applications, students see the relevance of what they're learning, and are better connected to school, the work world, and the post-high school education and training they need to enter into living-wage careers. Students also require career guidance to sort through their choices and make informed decisions about their life and education goals. Supporting that career exploration should be a structured, well-developed High School and Beyond Plan. The process of student-directed planning provides students with a personalized roadmap that leads to further post-high school preparation, including vocational credentials, two- and four-year degrees, apprenticeships, and other forms of advanced training.

Make career-connected learning and guidance a routine part of high school, rather than an add-on or wish list item.

Right now, the availability of career-connected learning, along with career guidance and planning, varies by where a student lives. Some Washington students are able to immerse themselves in these options, particularly at career-themed high schools, comprehensive career and technical education programs, and at regional Skill Centers. However, other Washington students have little career guidance and planning, and few opportunities to blend their career interests with academic skills. This report calls for making career-connected learning and guidance a routine part of high school, rather than an add-on or wish list item.

Career Guidance is Key to Preparing Students

Career guidance programs help students identify and think critically about their unique abilities, natural interests, and the realistic steps to achieve their goals. Washington students and their families, along with teachers and counselors, can choose from among several online career exploration resources.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) also features a one-stop comprehensive guidance program, Career Guidance Washington, on the agency's website that includes lesson plans that focus on career planning and a graduation tool kit. The program is designed to prepare students for their next steps after high school, with support from an advisor or counselor. Consolidated curriculum, customizable lesson plans, and career web tools are located on the OSPI website and are available free of cost. Recent data indicate that college and career readiness programs like Career Guidance Washington increase student achievement and work well when part of a school-wide effort.²¹

<https://www.k12.wa.us/SecondaryEducation/CareerCollegeReadiness/default.aspx>

²¹ The BEREC Group. College Readiness Initiative: AVID and Navigation 101 (2013, November). Retrieved from http://www.collegespark.org/files/documents/CRI/CRI_Report_AVID_and_NAV_November_2013_FINAL.pdf

Other tools include:

CareerBridge.wa.gov – This free, online tool helps students explore occupations that align with their interests and connects these occupations to education and training programs that prepare them for a career. The site, created and administered by the Workforce Board, features over 6,000 public and private education programs in Washington and provides state-specific labor market data on how much jobs pay and whether demand for those jobs is growing or shrinking. Career Bridge also provides performance data for approximately 40 percent of the listed programs, a “consumer report” that lets users see how many students completed a program, how many found employment, and at what wage levels. The site also includes a “Pay for School” section so students can find ways to make education affordable.

Washington Career Bridge is a free, online tool that helps students get connected to careers by matching interests to education and training available in the state.

ReadySetGrad.org – This website was launched in 2013 by the Washington Student Achievement Council. The site spans sixth grade through college as well as continuing education programs. The site was created to help students gain access to tools, information, and support to graduate high school and make postsecondary education and training accessible and affordable.

CheckoutCollege.com – This website from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges features the state’s 34 public community and technical colleges and the programs available to students. The site helps students and their families compare costs, find out about financial aid options, explore career areas, and take a career quiz.

Counselor Shortfall in Washington Schools

Although online career guidance tools help students make informed decisions, students need consistent access to one-on-one help from committed and accessible professional career and guidance counselors. Washington faces a significant shortfall in the number of counselors in the state’s public schools. A recent analysis conducted by the Career Education Opportunities Task force, created by the Legislature in 2013, calls for an increase in counseling staff at the elementary, middle and high school levels to help students shape an education plan that moves them through to high school graduation and into postsecondary education and training. In 2013, the Legislature enacted an enhanced funding formula to increase the number of high school counselors per student. However, it remains up to schools how those additional dollars are spent. Currently, there is approximately one counselor for every 470 students statewide.

<http://www.leg.wa.gov/JointCommittees/CEOTF/Documents/CEOTF-FinalRpt.pdf>

Career Planning Provides Students with Roadmap

While career guidance helps students think about the future, career planning focuses on the roadmap to get there, including the necessary education and training. It is not enough for students to know what they want to be when they grow up; they need to understand the steps necessary to advance to that chosen career, from initial education to more advanced education and training that leads to positions with room for advancement.

It's important that students and their families regularly review and update a student's career plan with counselors and teachers. This helps ensure students take full advantage of available classes and resources, and that they have looked at a wide range of career and education options.

The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium has arranged career opportunities into 16 Career Clusters, each with multiple, closely related careers that help students discover what they like to do, how their interests align with a variety of occupations, and how to navigate their way to college and/or a career.²²

Career Clusters are broken down into Career Pathways that provide more specific detail about opportunities within a Career Cluster. For example, Registered Nurse, Physical Therapist, and Optician are all pathways within the larger Health Science Career Cluster. Once students begin exploring a specific Career Cluster or Pathway, they can take courses that prepare them for the pathway, and capitalize on available career-connected learning opportunities.

High School and Beyond Plan Can Be Strengthened

Since 2009, all Washington students entering ninth grade have been required to create a High School and Beyond Plan. However, because state graduation requirements do not specify a plan's contents, the plans vary considerably in their detail and rigor, depending on the school and school district. In general, these plans are designed to help students think about their future and select courses to prepare them for their education and career goals after high school. Students are expected to update and revise their plan as they move through high school and their interests change. Typically these plans are developed in a student's homeroom, or counselors meet with classes or individual students.

Establish statewide expectations for High School and Beyond Plans.

These plans show great promise but are inconsistent across the state. Establishing statewide expectations for the content of these plans would help ensure they are rigorous, reliable, and valuable. Teachers and counselors also would benefit from professional development time to help students create and implement their plans.

²² The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEc) (2012, November). Career Clusters. Retrieved from CareerTech.org: <http://www.careertech.org/career-clusters/>.

Career-Connected Learning Prepares Students for World of Work

Career-connected learning is a foundation of career readiness - a critical component of what is expected of young adults as they complete middle and high school - and postsecondary education and training. Through work experiences like job shadows, career fairs, and internships, career-connected learning allows students to gain valuable experience and skills needed to succeed in the workplace. This is recognized by the Career Readiness Partnership Council (CRPC), a nationwide partnership that includes several businesses and foundations. In a recent effort to define career readiness, the CRPC recognized that college readiness is only part of the answer. What is needed is a more comprehensive and systemic strategy that bridges the gap between education and workforce preparation for all students.²³

Career-connected learning opportunities include something as simple as connecting a student with an employer for an informational interview, to a two-hour work site visit, to a three-month paid internship in a career area of interest, to a mentorship that lasts throughout their educational experience. There are a number of creative alternatives for career-connected learning within this spectrum. The most important aspect of any career-connected learning opportunity is that students have the ability to explore the world of work in a safe learning environment.

Career-connected learning opportunities should be in line with a developed and detailed plan of coursework that is unique to the individual student and prepares them for success in a high demand field. By participating in career-connected learning opportunities at every stage of their educational journey--starting with elementary school on into middle school--and through high school and beyond, young people gain knowledge that informs their decisions about long-term career and life goals. In the career-connected learning process, students become aware of how their education relates to a career, which, in turn, strengthens their resolve to continue with their education and earn a career-related degree or credential.²⁴

Career-connected learning opportunities are offered throughout the state. However, many are limited to a specific region, sector, or employer and, thus, are not accessible to all students.

Perhaps the most common form of career-connected learning is Career and Technical Education (CTE). Currently, CTE programs are available to students in 233 school districts (out of 295 total school districts), either in comprehensive high schools or at 14 regional Skills Centers throughout the state. Curriculum at Skills Centers is contextualized to a particular occupation or career cluster, and integrates hands-on, applied learning opportunities. CTE is a planned program of courses and learning experiences that begins with the exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards through relevant, career-focused education. Some 86 percent of Washington students who completed a sequence of CTE courses furthered their education after high school or entered employment.²⁵

²³ Career Ready Partner Council. (2012). *Building Blocks for Change: What it Means to be Career Ready*. Career Ready Partner Council.

²⁴ Thomas Raymond Bailey, K. L. (2004). *Working Knowledge: Work-Based Learning and Education Reform*. Routledge Falmer.

²⁵ Workforce Training Results 2014. Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

Employer and Business Engagement Essential to Success

Although CTE provides a solid foundation for students inside the classroom, a more comprehensive solution requires robust partnerships among education leaders and employers outside of the classroom. A recent report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation suggested that in many past initiatives, the role of the private sector in young adult policy has been more symbolic than substantive. Indeed, industry and education leaders are often unsure of how to collaboratively engage their education community to create career-connected learning opportunities. State level leadership and investment in brokering and supporting this learning would make these types of experiences more universally accessible to all Washington students. Addressing the challenge at hand will require greater involvement on the part of business leaders, and expanded public policy incentives.²⁶

This support will also call for educators to get more involved with local employers. Many educators have spent their professional lives working in schools. To better connect students with careers, it's important that teachers, counselors and administrators gain a better understanding of the labor market and the current skills required by those who are hiring.

Spokane's Teaching the Teachers program illustrates how to accomplish this goal. Teachers, counselors, and administrators get an on-site, real-life look at local businesses and a better understanding of the kinds of jobs employers are looking to fill. They then take that career information back to share with their students. The program, which launched in 2007, was created and is administered by Greater Spokane Inc., (GSI) which brings together the Spokane Chamber of Commerce and the region's Economic Development Council. The workshops last three hours or more and teachers receive clock hours as part of their professional development. The Spokane Business Foundation pays the cost for the teachers and provides them with clock hours through the regional Educational Service District.

Educators from the 15 school districts in Spokane County, as well as throughout the Spokane region have participated in the program, which served 180 teachers in 2013.

<http://www.greaterspokane.org/teaching-the-teachers.html>

In early 2014, Greater Spokane, Inc. launched Business After School, a series of two-hour workshops aimed at eighth through 12th grade students. Member businesses of GSI open their door to students, typically 100 to 150 per week, to show students their workplace, and meet with students and parents to share what it takes to work in certain industries. The program provides five "Industry Weeks."

Engineering was the focus in February 2014, followed by Healthcare, Manufacturing, Agri-business and Computer Science.

<http://www.greaterspokane.org/business-afterschool.html>

"As a CTE teacher, having a real connection to business and industry is crucial, but having the time to develop those relationships and keep ahead of the changing trends in area employment is difficult. When I attend a workshop through the Teaching the Teachers program, I know that it will be engaging, relevant, and organized."

Lauren House, CTE Director, West Valley School District, Spokane

²⁶ Annie E Casey Foundation. (2012). Youth and Work: Restoring Teen and Young Adult Connections to Opportunity. Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Programs such as Teaching the Teachers and Business After School require a strong relationship between business leaders and schools to better facilitate career-focused learning opportunities for both teachers and students. Business and labor leaders should be encouraged to look for more opportunities to connect with schools in a way that best accommodates packed schedules and a fast-paced work environment. These connections can promote the creation of more career-connected learning opportunities and provide a forum for exchanging ideas and expertise between local business and labor communities, public schools, apprenticeship councils, and institutions of higher education.

Workforce Development Councils Tackle Youth Unemployment

In Washington, regional Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) focus on building partnerships between employers, educators, and job seekers of all ages. The state's 12 WDCs are governed by industry-led boards and focus on a specific workforce area. Certified by the Governor, with agreement from local elected officials, WDCs provide unique insight and expertise in addressing chronic problems such as high rates of youth unemployment. The council profiles on the Workforce Board website (<http://wtb.wa.gov/youth.asp>) illustrate how WDCs are tackling high rates of youth unemployment in areas around the state. These regional efforts provide a good starting point for what a statewide initiative might look like.

Summary

Today's high rates of young adult unemployment will be felt in the years to come through decreased earnings, higher rates of anti-social and criminal behavior, and a higher likelihood of unemployment later in life. These long-term consequences are one reason this chronic problem remains so pressing, as its ripple effects extend far into the future. A comprehensive solution must ensure all of Washington's youth have access, and are encouraged to participate in, career-connected learning opportunities that help them make sense of their talents and abilities, explore their interests both inside and outside the classroom, and forge pathways to the education and training that will lead them to solid careers and productive lives.

This report and previous reports on young adult unemployment can be found at www.wtb.wa.gov