



YouthWorks: Putting Teens and Young Adults on the Path to Employment

Work experience is critically important for the long-term success of young people and their communities. That's why Massachusetts invests in YouthWorks to expand job opportunities for teens and young adults. 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.
- 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.
- 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. 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:



- 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. 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.



Employers Can Also Support Development of Work-Readiness Skills

Business partners play an essential role in helping to prepare young people for work. Helping a young person enter the workforce with a concrete understanding of professional behaviors supports 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. 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. 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.

YouthWorks

Massachusetts is investing across the state to create a career-ready workforce. Since 2007, more than 42,000 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.

In addition to work opportunities, young people receive work-readiness training with the Signal Success curriculum that enhances teens' aptitude for collaboration, communication, dependability, and initiative – core skills for success in work, school, and life (signalsuccess.org). The program goal is to support teens in finding unsubsidized employment after being well-prepared through training and on-the-job experiences for what employers expect.

Program Partners

Berkshire County Regional
Employment Board
413-442-7177

Boston Private Industry
Council 617-423-3755

Bristol Workforce Investment
Board
508-675-1161

Brockton Area Workforce
Investment Board
508-584-3234

Cape & Islands Workforce
Investment Board
508-775-5900

Central Mass Workforce
Investment Board
508-799-1590

Franklin/Hampshire Regional
Employment Board
413-773-1835

Greater Lowell Workforce
Investment Board
978-937-9816

Greater New Bedford
Workforce Investment Board
508-979-1504

Hampden County Regional
Employment Board
413-755-1362

Merrimack Valley Workforce
Investment Board
978-682-7099

Metro North Regional
Employment Board
617-864-1570

Metro South/West Workforce
Investment Board, Partnership
for a Skilled Workforce
508-281-6910

North Central Workforce
Investment Board
978-534-1023

North Shore Workforce
Investment Board
978-741-3805

South Shore Workforce
Investment Board
617-328-7001