

Youth Unemployment

“In July 2008, 3.4 million youth were unemployed and the youth unemployment rate was 14.0 percent, the highest rate for July since 1992.”

In December 2008, the Washington unemployment rate was 7.1 percent, seasonally adjusted. This rate is well above the December 2007 rate of 4.7 percent (a 2.4 percent increase). The state unemployment rate is slightly below the national rate (7.2 percent in December 2008).

In Washington State, approximately 17.6 percent of those youth (16 to 19 years old) seeking employment were unemployed in 2007 (well above the national rate for youth of 15.7 percent). This represents a slight decline from 2006, and a more significant change from 2004, when Washington's unemployment rate for youth seeking employment was 21.9 percent (the highest youth unemployment rate for our state in the past 10 years).

According to a recent (August 2008) Bureau of Labor Statistics news release: “In July 2008, 3.4 million youth were unemployed and the youth unemployment rate was 14.0 percent, the highest rate for July since 1992. As with the decline in employment, the increase in youth unemployment in the summer of 2008 partly reflected a weaker job market.” According to the news bulletin, almost one-fourth (23 percent) of employed youth worked in the leisure and hospitality industry (include food services) and 18 percent worked in retail trade.

Findings released in April 2005 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (based upon the recurring interviews of a panel of young people conducted over the 1997-2003 period), included: “Year-round attachment to the formal labor market forms early while in high school. Nearly 18 percent of freshmen worked during both the school year and the following summer. By sophomore year, the percent of students who worked during both school and summer doubled to 39 percent. By senior year, two-thirds of students worked during both the school year and summer.”

Many youth begin working during their first year (9th grade) in high school—nearly 41 percent of freshmen worked at some time during the school year or following summer. Working while in high school was common—“nearly 75 percent of high school seniors worked at some time during the school year.” The study also found there were differences in the working behaviors of students who later drop out of high school compared to the working behavior of students who eventually graduate: “Youth who eventually dropped out of high school were less likely than their peers to have worked more than half of the school year prior to the one in which they dropped out.”

³ Washington State Employment Security Department, LMEA, January 2008.

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved from: <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aat5.txt>.

⁵ Source: American's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2005, “Youth Neither Enrolled in School Nor Working,” Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

⁶ The press release examines only “employee jobs”, also known as wage and salary jobs, in which youths have an ongoing formal relationship with a particular employer. “Freelance jobs,” such as baby sitting or lawn care, in which youths are more casually involved in the labor market are not examined.

TABLE 25
Juvenile Unemployment
for 16-19 Year Olds
1994 - 2007

Year	Approximate Number	Approximate Rate
2007	28,000	17.6%
2006	31,000	18.0%
2005	29,000	18.9%
2004	32,000	21.9%
2003	37,000	21.7%
2002	39,000	20.7%
2001	37,000	19.8%
2000	36,000	18.6%
1999	35,000	18.1%
1998	29,000	16.0%
1997	28,000	15.8%
1996	29,000	17.2%
1995	31,000	19.5%
1994	24,000	15.9%

Source: Labor Market and Economic Analysis (LMEA), Department of Employment Security, October 2008; 2005 to 2007 data from "Employment Status of the Civilian, Noninstitutional Population by Sex, Race, Hispanic or Latin Ethnicity," various years, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics; 1994 to 2004 data from the "Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population by Sex, Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin," annual averages, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.