

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 2009, the Washington unemployment rate was 9.5 percent, seasonally adjusted. This rate is well above the December 2008 rate of 7.1, and the December 2007 rate of 4.7 percent (a 2.4 percent increase from 2008 to 2009). The state unemployment rate is slightly below the national rate (10.0 percent in December 2009).

In Washington State, approximately 25.7 percent of those youth (16 to 19 years old) seeking employment were unemployed in 2008 – this is the highest youth unemployment rate for our state in the past 15 years, and well above the 2007 unemployment rate of 17.6%.

According to a recent (August 2009) Bureau of Labor Statistics news release: “In July 2009, 4.4 million youth were unemployed, up by nearly 1.0 million from July 2008. The youth unemployment rate was 18.5 percent in July 2009, the highest July rate on record for the series, which began in 1948. As with the decline in employment, the increase in youth unemployment in the summer of 2009 reflected a weak job market.” According to the news bulletin, almost 25 percent of employed youth worked in the leisure and hospitality industry (includes food services), and another 20 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 - 2008

Year	Approximate Number Unemployed	Approximate Unemployment Rate
2008	39,000	25.7%
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, November 2009; 2005 to 2008 data from "Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population by Sex, Race, Hispanic or Latin Ethnicity," 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.