



## What do teens do all summer?

# Summertime, summer teens:

by Tiffany Stringer

The summer months of yesteryear were long regarded as a time for youths to embark upon adventure. For some, that meant taking a family vacation, participating in sports, or going to summer camp. Increasingly for today's teens, however, summertime also means attending summer school or working a summer job. The tradition of a carefree summer has all but disappeared for many youths.

In July 2002, 5.4 million 16- to 19-year-olds were enrolled in school during the summer, and 9.3 million were either working or looking for work. Compared with teen activity in July 1994, though,

those data reflect an increase in school enrollment during the summer and a decrease in labor force participation.

This article explores some of the changes in the way teens spend their summers. The section on summer school enrollment examines overall trends. The discussion of teens' labor force participation includes information about the types of jobs they have, the hours they work, and the wages they earn. And a box on page 40 outlines teenage workers' rights.

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# Summer school enrollment and the youth labor force

## Summer school enrollment

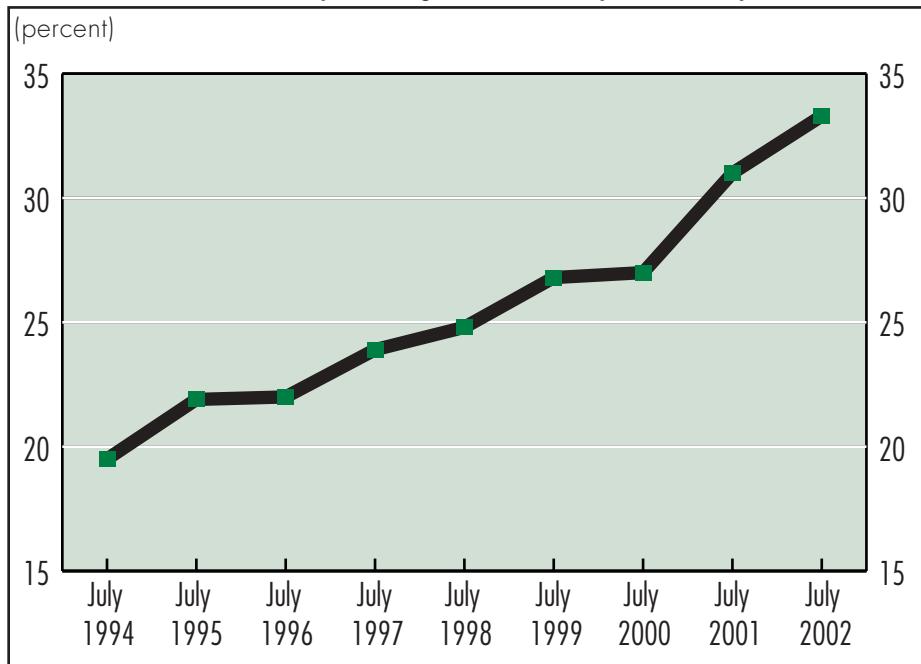
Although remediation continues to be a mainstay of summer school, more rigorous and academically challenging courses are becoming part of the standard curriculum. Some summer school students take classes to avoid having to repeat a grade, but others

enroll to stay competitive with fellow college-bound students applying to selective postsecondary schools.

Between 1994 and 2002, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data show that there has been a steady increase in the proportion of 16- to 19-year-olds enrolled in school during July. (See



(Debra Spina Dixon/Getty Images)

**Chart 1****Summer school enrollment of persons aged 16 to 19, July 1994 to July 2002**

Source: Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics

chart 1.) The 33 percent of teens enrolled in school in July 2002 is up substantially from the 20 percent enrolled in July 1994. The month of July was examined because it is the month when school enrollment tends to be low.

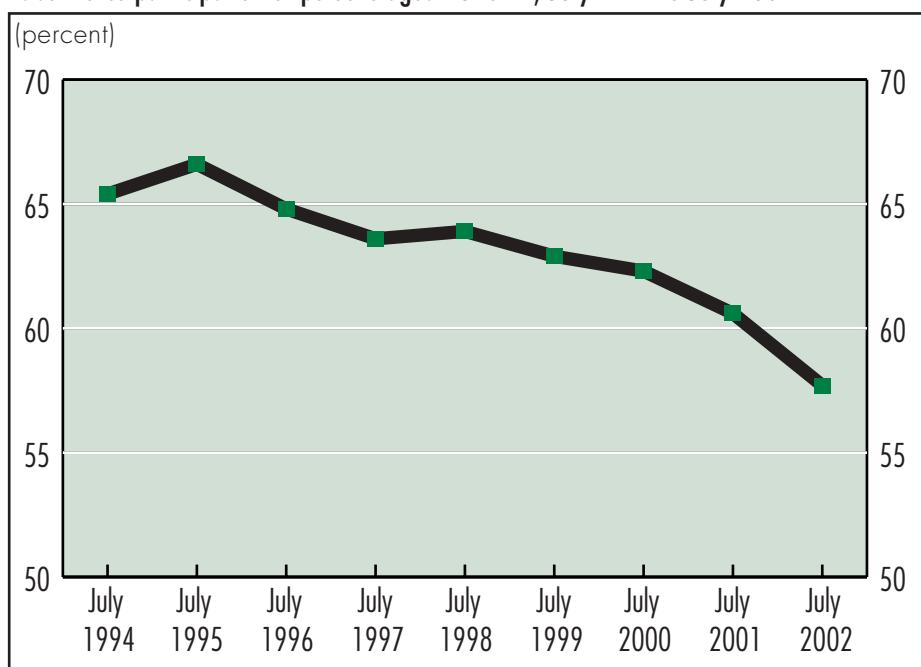
**Labor force participation rates**

The increasing interest in summertime scholastic enrichment has resulted in a decrease in the summer workforce. In other words, many teens are focusing on academics instead of working.

According to July 2002 BLS data, the labor force participation rate for teens—the proportion of the youth population aged 16 to 19 that is working or is looking for work—was 58 percent, a steady decrease from the 1994-2002 peak of 67 percent in July 1995. (See chart 2.) Fewer than half (44 percent) of teens enrolled in school in July 2002 were in the labor force, compared with almost two-thirds (65 percent) of those not in school. The decrease may reflect a rise in affluence that allows teenagers to engage in other summer activities.

Labor force participation rates were lower in July 2002 than they were in July 1994 for teens of both sexes and of all races and ethnic origins. But it is difficult to determine how much of the decrease was the result of increasing summer school enrollment and how much was the effect of the recession in 2001.

Young workers lack experience and skills, so they usually are the first to lose jobs in a recession. And many may decide not to look for work if they think that labor market conditions are poor. The most recent recession began in March 2001—and the labor force participation rate of teens showed a more pronounced decline between July 2001 and July 2002 than it did in previous years. The decline was in the number of jobs these workers held; the hours they

**Chart 2****Labor force participation of persons aged 16 to 19, July 1994 to July 2002**

Source: Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics

worked were not as dramatically affected. And their median earnings were above the minimum wage in 2001, the most recent year for which complete earnings data are available.

**Types of jobs.** The rate of decline in youth labor force participation was intensified by job cutbacks in occupations that are primary sources of employment for those aged 16 to 19: more than half of all teens were employed in service and retail occupations, which had severe job losses between July 2001 and July 2002.

BLS data show that in July 2002, most teens were employed in service and sales jobs, with fewer working in professional, technical, or agricultural jobs. (See chart 3.) These data are typical for the types of jobs teens work during the summer months. The Employment Policy Foundation points to the retail sector—which includes jobs such as clerks, cashiers, and servers in food-service establishments—as the primary source of teens' summer opportunities. "The retail industry serves as a great match for young people looking to gain their first working experience," says Ed Potter, president of the Foundation. "Employable teenagers, individuals who are between the ages of 16 and 19, can use workplace skills gained during these short-term, seasonal jobs after high school and college graduation when they search for more stable employment."

**Average hours worked.** During the summer, youths who are not in school are able to increase the number of hours they work each week. BLS data show that in July 2002, employed youths aged 16 to 19 worked an average of nearly 29 hours per week—slightly fewer than the 30 hours per week that teens worked in July 2001.

**Median earnings.** The minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour is associated with many youths entering the workforce. In



(Debra Spina Dixon/Getty Images)

fact, a youth minimum wage, authorized by 1996 amendments to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, allows employers to pay workers who are under age 20 a lower wage for 90 calendar days. But BLS data show that half of workers aged 16 to 19 earned more than \$6.75 in 2001.

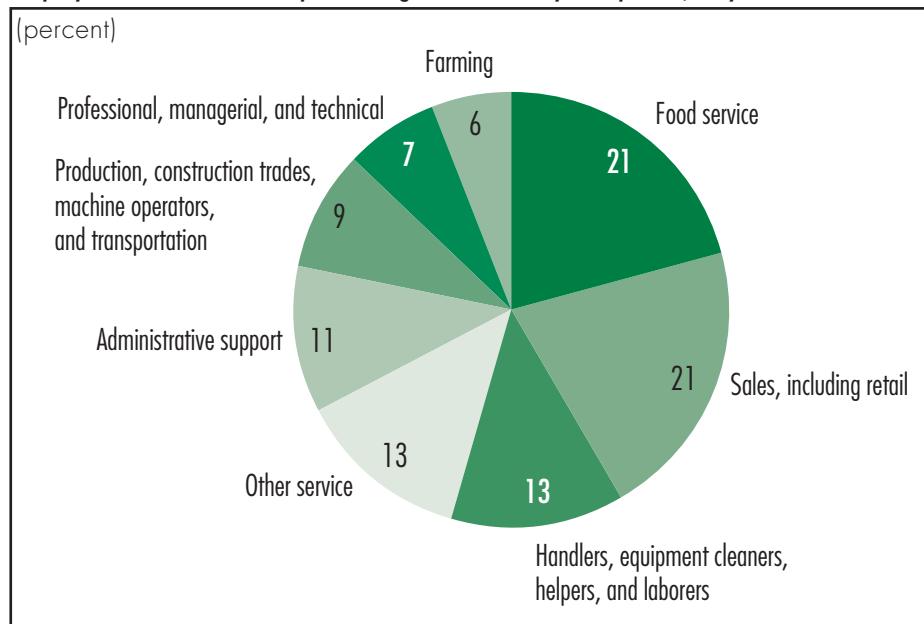
### Summer school or summer work: Why bother?

Given a choice between spending the summer lounging by the pool and attending school or working, many teenagers may opt for the pool. But presented differently—wasting time instead of getting ahead academically or earning spending money—those same teens might change their minds.

Many teens both attend school and work during the summer. In doing so, these teens may be able to give themselves more academic opportunities while at the same time earning money. And by necessity, they also are likely to learn to manage their time effectively, a skill that will serve them well throughout their lives.

Of course, not all teens have a choice: some must go to summer school to avoid repeating a year in school, others work because of financial necessity, and still others must do both. Regardless of

**Chart 3**  
Employment distribution of persons aged 16 to 19 by occupation, July 2002



Source: Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics

# Teen workers' rights



The wage and hour division of the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment Standards Administration enforces the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA). The FLSA is the framework for Federal child labor regulations.

Not all employment of youth workers is covered under the FLSA. In addition, some jobs held by youths—such as delivering newspapers and performing in motion pictures and theatrical, radio, and television productions—are specifically exempted from child labor laws. The following is an overview of some FLSA provisions that apply to teen workers.

**Nonagricultural employment.** This type of work includes jobs in retail, food service, construction, manufacturing, and any other nonfarm establishment. Nonagricultural employment encompasses the majority of teens' summer jobs, providing jobs for 96 percent of them in July 2002.

- ◆ The minimum age for nonagricultural employment is 16. However, 14- and 15-year-olds may be employed for certain periods—outside of school hours—in jobs that will not interfere with their health and well-being. Examples include retail, food service, and gasoline service establishments.
- ◆ Teenagers 16 years of age and older may work at any time of the day for unlimited hours.
- ◆ Workers under age 18 are prohibited from performing nonagricultural occupations that have been deemed particularly hazardous or detrimental to their health or well-being. Examples include jobs in excavation, logging, roofing, demolition, and meatpacking.

**Agricultural employment.** This type of work includes jobs performed on farms. Agricultural employment accounted for about 4 percent of teen employment in July 2002.

- ◆ A child working in agriculture on a farm owned or operated by his or her parent is exempted from Federal agricultural child labor provisions.
- ◆ The Secretary of Labor declared certain agricultural tasks to be particularly hazardous, and therefore prohibited, for employees under age 16. These tasks include operating potentially dangerous machinery, handling pesticides or explosives, and transporting dangerous materials.
- ◆ The FLSA prohibits farmworkers under age 16 from working during school hours, but it neither prohibits their employment during other times of the day nor limits the number of daily or weekly hours they may be employed.

A Web site—*Youth Rules!*—created by the U.S. Department of Labor describes the regulations governing teen work. Presented in both English and Spanish, information on the site explains Federal and State rules about hours, wages, and occupations. In addition, the site contains links to youth statistics and job search advice. For more information, contact:

U.S. Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Ave., NW.  
Washington, DC 20210  
1 (866) 487-9243 (toll free)  
[www.youthrules.dol.gov](http://www.youthrules.dol.gov)

whether their school attendance or work during the summer is voluntary, however, either activity confers benefits on the teens who participate.

#### **Benefits to attending summer school.**

Summer school has become an important resource for many students. Generally, summer school is mandatory for a small group of students: those who have been conditionally promoted—that is, those who will be promoted to the next grade only after attending and passing a specified summer school curriculum. But thousands of students are encouraged to enroll in summer classes, including students who are not fluent in English or who performed poorly on State-mandated exams.

The remaining students who attend summer school do so for academic enrichment. These enrichment programs may include short-term intensive classes, review courses for college admissions exams, and specialty camps. Many high school students also take a course during the summer so they do not have to take it in the fall. That gives them the option during the school year of taking an

elective or a higher level course in the subject they studied in summer school.

#### **Benefits to working a summer job.**

Working during the summer offers teens many advantages. One of the main benefits is related to the paychecks they earn: youths begin to be more fiscally responsible for themselves and less dependent on their parents. Whether they are saving for a costly asset, such as a car, or earning pocket money, working teens are establishing the foundations of their financial independence.

Having a job makes teens responsible in other ways, too. After all, employment means more than simply showing up at a jobsite. Workers must find a way to arrive on time and be well rested, clean, and prepared to perform their job tasks. Working teens also learn important life skills that range from communication to problem-solving. And in many fields—including fast-growing ones, such as healthcare and computers—a job that provides those skills might serve as a valuable steppingstone to a future career.

#### **For more information**

If you are considering enrolling in summer school or working in a summer job, begin weighing your options long before June. For guidance on taking summer classes or finding summer work, ask your school counselor. He or she may refer you to contacts in your community or to school- or employment-related resources. Some resources, such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, may be in your school or local library.

To learn more about the types of work available to teens and how to get a summer job, see Matthew Mariani's article, "Successfully Seeking Summer Jobs," in the winter 1998-99 *OQ*.

Another BLS publication, *Issues in Labor Statistics*, profiled teenaged workers in the September issue. For a free copy of "Declining teen labor force



participation," summary 02-06, contact:

Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics  
Bureau of Labor Statistics  
2 Massachusetts Ave., NE.  
Washington, D.C. 20212-0001  
(202) 691-5200

The summary also is available online at [www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/obpils49.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/obpils49.pdf).

Information on summer school enrollment and youth employment is available from national and State departments of education, local school districts, and national and State employment services.

Connect for Kids, a Web site sponsored by the Benton Foundation, focuses on how families and communities can help youths succeed. Contact:

Benton Foundation  
Connect for Kids  
1625 K St., NW.  
11th Floor  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 638-5770  
[www.connectforkids.org](http://www.connectforkids.org)

For information on teens and summer experiences, click on "Topics A to Z" and "Out of School Time."

