Summer employment: A snapshot of teen workers

Domingo Angeles | June 2017

Earning money, gaining experience, building confidence—these are just a few of the rewards for teens who work. And for millions of teens, the summer months mean summer jobs.
According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment typically rises for 16- to 19-year-olds during June, July, and August. Chart 1 shows that the number of working teens has fallen somewhat since 2006, but the uptick in employment during the summer months remains.
Even with summer spikes, teens represent a small portion of all workers. In July 2016, for example, BLS data show that teens ages 16 to 19 accounted for about 4.5 percent of the labor force—that is, people who were either working or looking for work. (See chart 2.) By clicking on the wedges in chart 2, you’ll see that most of these young workers were part time, in contrast with other workers.

Chart 3 compares teen employment with 20-and-older employment by selected major occupational group. The data show that in July 2016, 16- to 19-year-old workers were concentrated in food preparation and serving occupations and sales and related occupations. In contrast, occupations in the professional and related and the management, business, and financial operations groups were among those that had higher shares of workers ages 20 and older.
Table 1 shows a primary reason for these concentrations: Occupations that employed large numbers of young workers typically require no formal educational credential or experience to enter, and none usually require more than 1 month of on-the-job training to attain competency. That means most 16- to 19-year-olds, who are still in school and usually haven’t had as much work experience or job-related training as the rest of the labor force, often qualify to enter these occupations.
Table 1. Employment and education, experience, and training typically needed in selected occupations that employed the largest numbers of young workers in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Annual employment, 2016, workers ages 16-19 (1)</th>
<th>Education typically needed for entry</th>
<th>Work experience in a related occupation</th>
<th>On-the-job training typically needed to attain competency (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cashiers</td>
<td>738,000</td>
<td>No formal educational credential</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiters and waitresses</td>
<td>326,000</td>
<td>No formal educational credential</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail salespersons</td>
<td>290,000</td>
<td>No formal educational credential</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food preparation workers</td>
<td>187,000</td>
<td>No formal educational credential</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosts and hostesses, restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop</td>
<td>156,000</td>
<td>No formal educational credential</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service representatives</td>
<td>152,000</td>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand</td>
<td>138,000</td>
<td>No formal educational credential</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock clerks and order fillers</td>
<td>135,000</td>
<td>No formal educational credential</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare workers</td>
<td>129,000</td>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop</td>
<td>108,000</td>
<td>No formal educational credential</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See footnotes at end of table.

Footnotes:
(1) Detailed occupational data are not available for summer employment. Data shown are annual averages.
(2) Short-term on-the-job training is assigned to occupations in which workers can attain competency during 1 month or less of on-the-job experience and informal training.

These employment data are from the Current Population Survey, a monthly national household survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for BLS and the source of the official unemployment rate. Education, experience, and training assignments are from the BLS Employment Projections program, which also produces the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

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