

Connecting Nevada's Young Adults to Training and Employment: Perspectives from Nevada's Young Adults and Employers

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION	3
SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND RESPONSE	4
EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES	13
IMPLICATIONS FOR K-12 INSTITUTIONS	16
IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS	18
SURVEY LIMITATIONS	20
CONCLUSION	20

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The unemployment rate for the young adult population (usually defined 16-24 years old) has risen over the last few decades; and labor force participation amongst young adults is lower than they were several decades ago. Data from the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR) Research and Analysis Bureau shows that the unemployment rate for the 12 months ending in August 2016 for young adults was 11.5%. The national youth unemployment rate in July 2016 was also 11.5%, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS).¹

The young adult population has always faced barriers to employment; however, in recent decades, they have faced even greater challenges. Even as Nevada's overall unemployment rate has fallen below 6% to a seasonally adjusted 5.8% in September 2016, young Nevadans are still unemployed at a significantly greater rate than the adult population. The longer young adults go without employment in their early years, the harder it is for them to gain employment later on because of accumulated disadvantages.

To learn more about and respond to this gap in young adult employment, OWINN conducted three forms of data: a *Young Adult Job and Training Opportunity* web-based survey, focus groups and various individual conversations with Nevada young adults' ages 16-29 years old for a total of six weeks from late August to the end of September 2016. In doing so, we acquired a deeper insight into what the state can do to better support this population in finding employment and job training opportunities. We also spoke with many industry representatives and employers to determine where there may be any gaps between young adult perspectives and employer viewpoints. Some key findings that came from the data collection are:

- Young adults believe the level of education is the greatest barrier they face to employment. More specifically, they believe a four-year college education would prepare them.
- Young adults consistently express frustration with the lack of opportunities they have to gain professional work experience.
- Young adults were more likely to state soft skills as a barrier in focus groups or conversations than in the survey.
- Young adults believed that the most effective ways to share information about jobs and training opportunities is: 1) having a centralized website that can provide them with certain relevant reminders/notifications, and 2) social media.
- Career Technical Education and Jobs for America's Graduates students are more likely to be career ready and engaged in their school learning than non-CTE students.

As such, the report ends with sharing several key implications the state should consider executing to address these findings and more effectively support the young adult population.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016, August 17). Employment and Unemployment Among Youth Summary. Retrieved November 8, 2016, from United States Department of Labor, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/youth.nr0.htm

INTRODUCTION

The importance of employing young adults cannot be understated. Impacts of young adult unemployment can have significant negative long-term consequences to those individuals due to loss of work experience, skills, and network. An ongoing longitudinal study conducted by BLS of young adults born between 1980 and 1984 show those young adults in the study group who were unemployed for six weeks or more, earn \$402 to \$487 less a week than individuals in the same study group, who did not experience such long gaps in unemployment.² As these individuals age, the gap in their average weekly earnings is expected to increase. One analysis by the Center for American Progress concludes that the young adult population will lose about \$20 billion in earnings over the next ten years due to their unemployment, which breaks down to approximately \$22,000 per individual.³ Even further, young adults who are unemployed will cost their respective states more than \$4,100 annually per person, 93% of that loss is due to loss of tax revenue⁴. Moreover, the number of individuals 65 and older will continue to increase, going from a current 14.8% to 21.3% by 2055. Because Social Security and Medicare are financed by payroll taxes, as the number of individuals who are ages 65 and older increase from 48 to 56 million in 2020. the impact of young adult unemployment will be substantial to states and the federal government as they will need to work to maintain these benefits for the 65 and older population.

The conversation about the barriers young adults face to training and employment often and appropriately includes stakeholders, such as service providers, educational leaders, policymakers, and employers. Yet, rarely does the conversation include young adult voices on a broad scale. Without including young adults' perspectives on a large scale, we may miss the opportunity in creating and implementing effective solutions that connect young adults to work.

Through a web-based survey and a series of focus groups and individual conversations, this report highlights barriers Nevada's young adults ages 16-29 years old face to employment from their point of view. The respondents shared insight on what challenges they face to job opportunities and how to effectively reach out to their population. As the findings suggest, there are similarities in what educators, policymakers, and employers believe is keeping young adults from employment, but there are many meaningful differences with what young adults believe are barriers. The goal of this report is to not only increase awareness and impact of young adult unemployment, but to also encourage education and workforce institutions to support young adults in acquiring the career skills necessary to gain employment and succeed in the labor market.

² Buckley, D. P. (2015, April 29). An unbalanced age: Effects of youth unemployment on an aging society. Retrieved November 8, 2016, from Deloitte University Press, https://dupress.deloitte.com/dup-us-en/economy/issues-by-the-numbers/effects-of-youth-unemployment-us.html#endnote-4

³ Steinberg, S. A. (2013, April 05). The High Cost of Youth Unemployment. Retrieved November 8, 2016, from American Progress, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2013/04/05/59428/the-high-cost-of-youth-unemployment/

⁴ O'Sullivan, R., Mugglestone, K., & Allison, T. (2014, January). The Hidden Cost of Young Adult Unemployment. Retrieved November 8, 2016, from Young Invincibles, http://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/In-This-Together-The-Hidden-Cost-of-Young-Adult-Unemployment.pdf

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND RESPONSE

To better understand challenges Nevada's young adults believe they face to employment and to bridge the gap with this population's perspectives and employers' concerns, OWINN launched a statewide electronic *Young Adult Jobs and Training Opportunity Survey* to acquire insights directly from young adults between the ages of 16-29. Though the Department of Labor defines young adults between 16-24 years old, we expanded the survey to include 16-29 years old. We believe that the 25-29 age range is important to include to compare and contrast with younger youths. Many other studies on young adults also include the 25-29 year old range for the same reasons.

OWINN designed the web-based survey to understand various factors that impact young adult employment opportunities. For instance, the survey asked the following questions:

- *Are you currently employed?*
- Do you find your employment meaningful?
- What do you believe is keeping you from gaining meaningful employment?
 - Education
 - o *Job function skills (i.e., technical, etc.)*
 - o Soft skills (i.e., interview, people skills, etc.)
 - o Access to job information
 - Transportation
 - Something else
- Do you feel confident that you know where to go and get help to find job or training?
- What would be the most effective for you in sharing information about upcoming jobs and training?

OWINN reached out to individuals and institutions (i.e., higher education, school districts, local boards, community-based organizations and individuals), who work with young adults (both in and out of schools), to help disseminate the survey. As a result of great partnerships, OWINN received almost 1,000 responses from young adults across the state. After cleaning the data to exclude responses outside the age range (OWINN received 61 responses from 15 year olds) duplicates, and irrelevant responses, the survey generated 782 valid responses. Furthermore, OWINN held three focus groups ranging from 4-30 participants each to incorporate qualitative information with the quantitative data captured to understand nuances in the analysis. Focus groups were held in Elko, Reno, and Las Vegas (i.e. Clark County district). In addition, OWINN held dozens of individual conversations with various young adults. Thus, the survey narrative was fortified by additional responses from conversations with young adults from across the state.

Analysis of Survey Responses

Young adults were asked for their zip code to complete the survey. This allowed OWINN to analyze the location distribution of respondents from across the state. As shown in Figure 1, we received at least 1 response from zip codes matching to 14 of the 16 counties in the state of Nevada. About 54% of the respondents were from Clark County, 12% from Washoe, 11% from Elko, and 7% from Carson City.

Figure 1

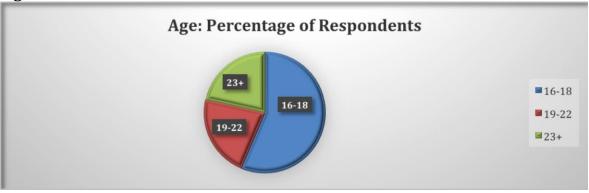
COUNTY	RESPONSES	%DISTRIBUTION
Carson City	63	7.1%
Churchill	19	2.1%
Clark	477	53.9%
Douglas	25	2.8%
Elko	97	11.0%
Esmeralda	0	0.0%
Eureka	1	0.1%
Humboldt	10	1.1%
Lander	6	0.7%
Lincoln	3	0.3%
Lyon	35	4.0%
Mineral	2	0.2%
Nye	31	3.5%
Pershing	1	0.1%
Storey	0	0.0%
Washoe	110	12.4%
White Pine	5	0.6%

When disaggregating the responses by age, 56% of the young adults were between 16-18 years old, 22% were from 19-22 years old, and 22% were from 23-29 years

Young adults employed

The majority of the survey respondents, 52%, reported that they were unemployed, while, 19% reported being employed part-time, and 29% employed full time.





Individuals, regardless of age, were employed part-time at about the same rate. Not surprisingly, individuals were more likely to be employed between the ages of 23-29 than 16-18 or 19-22. However, the most telling aspect of the data from Figure 3 is not the correlation between age and part-time/full time employment, but the sheer number of young adults who are unemployed- 52% of respondents. Additionally, during the focus groups, a significant number of young adults between 16-22 years old reported that they have never had a part-time job or any kind of work experience.

The longer young adults go without any form of employment, the more difficult it will be to transition to part-time or full-time employment. Many young adults reported that they have been trying for years to gain some kind of professional experience but are unsuccessful. Furthermore, young adults between 23-29 years old, who have never had any form of employment when they were 16-22 years old, stated that adjusting to a work environment was extremely challenging.

Figure 3



Figure 4



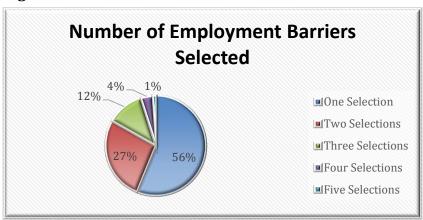




Young adults' beliefs about barriers to meaningful employment

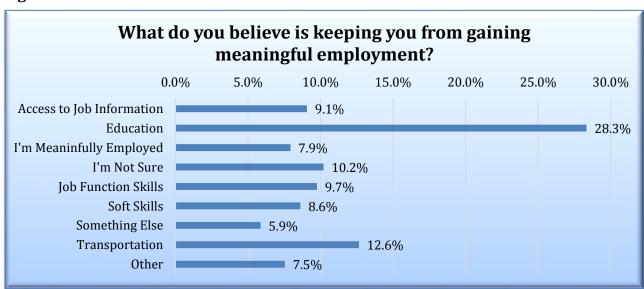
We asked young adults what they believed were barriers they faced to employment. We provided respondents with a variety of potential barriers such as education, technical job function skills, soft skills, transportation, access to job information, and they had the opportunity to insert a barrier that was not listed. This question is also where we spent a significant amount of time during focus groups. As seen in Figure 5, 56% of the young adults stated that they faced only one barrier to employment and about 42% selected two or more barriers to employment.

Figure 5



Diving deeper into the data, 28% of respondents indicated level of education as their greatest barrier to meaningful employment, making it the most frequently cited barrier. They thought of "education" as a four-year degree that would eventually help them access careers. Beyond education, the five most frequently cited responses (in descending order) were: other/something else, transportation, "not sure", job functioning skills, access to job information, and soft skills as additional barriers young adults face to employment.

Figure 6



Young adults' beliefs about employment barriers beyond education

The survey data and the focus groups shed additional light on perceptions that young adults had about barriers to their employment beyond education. As seen in Figure 7, young adults between 16-18 years old saw transportation as the second biggest hurdle to employment. About 17% believed transportation to be their greatest hurdle. Of course, young adults between 16-18 years old are less likely to have access to their own transportation than older young adults. However, a significant number of young adults said if they had an opportunity for a great job they "would figure out how to get to work" and transportation would not hold them back. This suggests that transportation is a bigger hurdle for them when thinking about exploring job opportunities and attending job interviews, but it would not hold them back if they were to find a job.

Further, a significant number of young adults ages 16-18 (about 14%) reported "I'm not sure" regarding their beliefs as to what barriers they saw to their employment. During focus groups, it became clear the "I'm not sure" response boils down to a lack of combination of soft and technical skills and a lack of clarity with job openings that aligned with their career interests or an understanding of different industries. In fact, many young adults could not identify industries or occupations that their parents did not work in or had an obvious strong presence in their region. And often, their perception of industries and occupations were limited. Additionally, soft skills consistently stood out during a focus group in southern Nevada. Students said they were uncertain with "how to talk to bosses" and some were "scared" to. Others stated uncertainty with what teamwork means in a workplace, how to manage their emotions when things may go wrong, and time management.

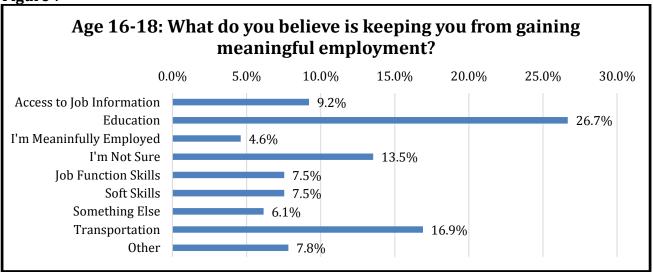
The data also shows that 16-18 year olds were more likely than 19-29 years olds to respond "I'm not sure" when asked what barriers stood in the way of gaining employment. When probing further during the focus groups, we realized 16-18 year olds indicated this response primarily because they are unaware of what skill sets they possess, what their career interests are, and what career(s) they want to pursue.

Regardless of age, young adults believe that schools (K-12 and postsecondary) are the place to support them in removing barriers to employment by equipping them with career skills. Those in the 16-18 age group, who were engaged in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, expressed optimism about schools' abilities to help them remove barriers to employment. However, students who were not involved with CTE, or programs such as Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), were pessimistic and did not believe schools could support them. When asked what institutions should support young adults, non-CTE students usually said, "I don't know" and were unclear how their current schooling was preparing them for careers. More importantly, young adults who were out of school (and not enrolled in any form of schooling) expressed even greater pessimism and stated more bluntly that "my school did not help me with anything career wise." These out of school respondents were usually those who dropped out and were unable to contextualize the connection between every day school environments and career skills.

Figure 6.a

Breakdown of "Other" Category		
Age	10	
Disability or Health Reasons	6	
Don't Want to Work	4	
Experience	12	
Job Availability	8	
N/A	4	
Networking	2	
Recent Relocation	2	
Time	38	
Work Environment	6	
Employers Not Calling Back	1	
Need Certification	3	
Parents	1	

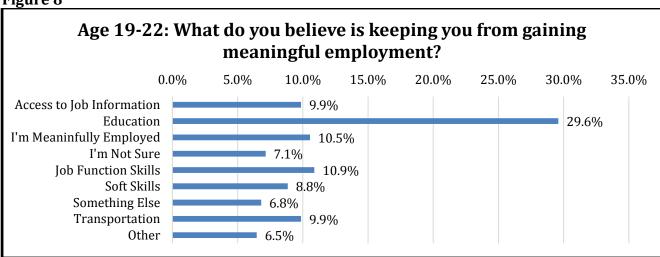
Figure 7



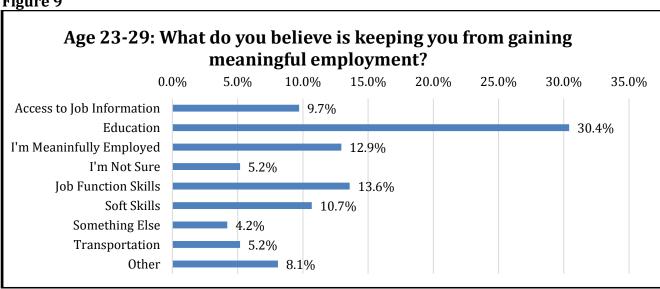
Figures 8 and 9 show that for individuals in the 19-22 and 23-29 age groups, "job function skills" was seen as the second greatest barrier to employment, after education. Young adults expressed concerns that the lack of job function skills was strongly attributed to their inability to access training or gain relevant work experience. Between the two age groups, 24.5% of responds believed job function skills was a barrier to employment. Young adults expressed frustration in not only their ability to gain quality experience that employers saw valuable, but also articulating the specific job function skill needed to access employment. Often, older young adults said they had some work experience but that employers did not accept their experience.

Young adults in school or out of school in all age groups consistently stated their willingness to work- in fact, only 4 respondents total (0.05%) stated an unwillingness to work as a barrier keeping them from attaining employment- but many times said they were rejected because they lack experience. As one young adult described, "how can we get experience if every job we apply to requires experience?" Both employers and young adults believe experience is needed in order to enter or excel in a profession. However, young adults are confused about where to find a job that will provide them with the experience they need. Young adults who graduate high school or have some postsecondary experience without any work-based learning opportunities are significantly disadvantaged and that disadvantage is exacerbated every additional year they go without employment.

Figure 8







Other barriers shared by young adults

Many young adults who are currently employed or who are exploring job opportunities shared additional barriers they believe they face to employment. During focus groups, young adults from 16-22 years old were more likely to share barriers such as discomfort with what they perceived as a "typical" work environment and perceived challenges with a supervisor or there not being an adult to whom they can relate. Additionally, during individual conversations, young adults between 23-29 years old were more likely to share barriers such as childcare and past misdemeanor criminal records, which negatively impacted their job applications. However, in the survey, young adults most commonly reported that concerns with their age and lack of experience were barriers they felt would continue to keep them out of work.

The only exception to this belief of education being the biggest barrier is for young adults in North Las Vegas. As seen in Figure 10, young adults in North Las Vegas perceived transportation to be a greater barrier than even education (25% to 23% respectively).

What do you believe is keeping you from gaining meaningful employment? North Las Vegas zip codes 0.0% 5.0% 10.0% 15.0% 20.0% 25.0% 30.0% Access to Job Information **1**0.7% Education 23.0% I'm Meaninfully Employed 1.6% I'm Not Sure 9.8% Job Function Skills 9.0% Soft Skills 9.0% Something Else 3.3% Transportation 24.6% Other 9.0%

Figure 10

Educational attainment of young adults

The overall low Bachelor's Degree attainment of the respondents may have contributed to the young adult's perception that education is holding them back. The highest education level of 76% of the respondents is a high school diploma or GED. After excluding 16-18 year olds, who may still be in the process of completing high school, about 14% of respondents between 19-22 years old indicated they do not have a high school diploma or GED. Approximately 7% have an Associate's Degree, and 2% have a Bachelor's Degree. In addition, 61% of 23-29 year olds, hold a high school diploma or GED, 20% hold an Associate's Degree, and 12% hold a Bachelor's Degree (Figures 11 and 12).

Figure 11

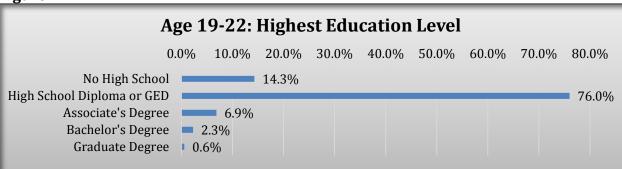
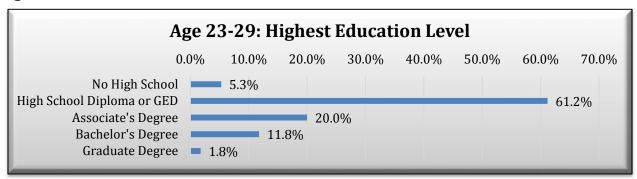


Figure 12



Young adults' confidence in knowing where to get training and employment support

The biggest mismatch between the survey and the focus groups was the question asking participants about their confidence level in knowing where to go to find a job or training. In the survey, 65% of respondents (regardless of age group) said they were confident in knowing where to go to find job information and roughly 35% were unsure. However, in focus groups, young adults rarely could name a place to find job information besides a "teacher," a "counselor," "word of mouth," a "friend," or "Google." Other than applying for jobs online at individual companies' websites, they rarely seek out help preparing for resumes, interviews, or training from local employment support organizations. Individuals not currently enrolled in school (K-12 or postsecondary education) expressed even greater frustration in not knowing where to go for support.

Method most effective for sharing information about jobs and training

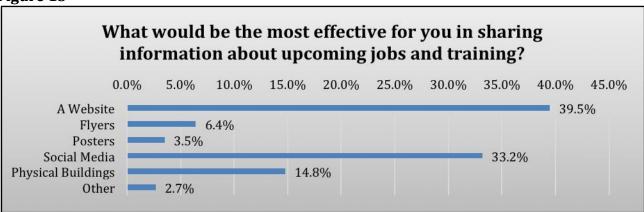
Young adults were asked what would be the most effective method to share information about jobs and training opportunities with their population. Thirty-eight percent of 16-18 years olds favored social media and 36% favored a central website. However, overall, young adults consistently mentioned that a combination of a central website and social media (mainly Facebook) would be the most effective way to share information about training and employment opportunities- 40% believed a website would be most effective and 33% believed social media would be (Figure 13).

Young adults mentioned that a website is preferred because they can access it at any time. In speaking more about the website, young adults had many thoughts on how to make such

a website actually effective for them. First, they stated the importance of them being aware that the website even exists. Next, they cautioned that the website would have to be centralized and user friendly, contain many different options, and allow them to sign up to receive reminder notifications in order to be effective. Young adults expressed concerns that they are inundated with information, so it is hard to keep track of the many sources of information, therefore, a website that does not allow them to receive reminder notifications would be ineffective.

Lastly, it is important to note that all age groups believed flyers, posters, and written communication in physical buildings (such as schools) were usually the least effective way to reach them. According to respondents, fliers and posters "are all over the place" and they rarely have time to read through all the content.





EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES

In the fall of 2016, OWINNN coordinated and convened all eight of the Governor's Workforce Development Board Industry Sector Council meetings since the reorganization of the Sector Councils authorized by Executive Order 2016-08. Eight Sector Councils were established: Aerospace and Defense, Construction, Information Technology, Health Care and Medical Services, Manufacturing and Logistics, Mining and Materials, Natural Resources, and finally, Tourism, Gaming, and Entertainment. The goal of the Sector Councils is to convene employers, educators, and labor representatives to provide recommendations and insights on industry needs, particularly around top occupations, skills, education and experiences needed to be successful. The first round of meetings was informational for all eight Sector Councils established. Because of this, no formal recommendations were proposed or voted on. However, key themes (particularly from employers) that align with the young adult survey came out of the meetings and are worth mentioning.

One critical data point shared from DETR's Research and Analysis Bureau was the concern over Nevada's aging workforce. Sector Councils echoed concerns that they see the aging workforce either as a serious worry or a challenge they will soon face as more of their employees retire. In addition, employers shared that an even greater challenge they have is finding young adults with the appropriate balance of technical and soft skills as well as experience to fill their openings – both for entry level and management positions.

Employers believe young adults lack appropriate soft and technical skills

Employers consistently expressed concerns that today's Nevada young adults, particularly millennial employees, lacked appropriate soft and technical skills to fill their openings. Sector Council members stated that young adults lacked understanding of appropriate workplace culture and environment, "communications etiquette," teamwork, problem solving, compliance and honesty, among other soft skills. Some employers even stated that young adults often struggle "showing up to work on time." For some employers, soft skills are a greater barrier than any other skill if the young adult has a high school diploma or GED. Not having appropriate soft skills makes prospective employees "un-trainable."

Additionally, employers expressed concern with the lack of experiences students had to enhance their technical skills in educational settings. Common technical skills members mentioned were analytical thinking, precision, accuracy, safety, mechanical/technical thinking and expertise and mechanical aptitude. Members hypothesized that younger employees have less opportunities at the high school level for hands-on learning where they gain comfort with using basic tools and instruments. Members shared that these experiences are crucial to give employees foundational skills. Classes that provide students with hands on experiences working with equipment, an exposure to information technology or systems, engineering, and software development are seen as vital for students even if they do not plan to work directly in information technology. These kinds of courses are seen as building blocks that provide all employees with a foundation that can be built upon with additional work-based training; these skills are needed in all of Nevada's existing and emerging industries. It is also clear that regardless of the industry, automation and technology are impacting the way work is done thus, technical experience and skills will be essential for all industries, according to employers.

Differences and similarities in young adult and employer perspectives

As the survey indicated, education is the barrier that most young adults believe stands in their way of accessing job training and employment. Young adults also believe that transportation is a barrier to exploring opportunities but also noted that transportation would not be a barrier if they found a meaningful job. Two other important barriers that consistently came up was a combination of soft and job function skills- when combined, the percentage of young adults that indicated those two barriers is greater than that of transportation. Although young adults were overall less likely to state soft skill as a barrier in the survey, they (particularly younger teens) were more likely to state it during the focus groups. Older young adults expressed greater concerns about opportunities to gain relevant work experience that employers accepted.

Employers, however, were less likely to state education as a barrier to employment (as long as the individual had a high school diploma, GED and, in other cases, an Associate's Degree). Employers were also less likely to state a four-year college degree as a prerequisite to employment with the exception of some employers in aerospace and defense. Rather, they believed that having some education background beyond a high school diploma (not necessarily a four-year degree) and strong soft and technical skills were enough to be hired and advance professionally in their company.

Both young adults and employers believed there is a mismatch in work culture and environment. Employers believed young adults lacked appropriate skills to succeed in today's work culture whereas young adults believed it was difficult to transition into the work environment or "connect" with employers. In many instances, young adults believed employers "had to understand them" and adjust their work environment and employers believed young adults had to "understand how a professional work environment operates."

However, the differences between young adults and employers dissipated when it came to CTE or JAG students. Employers who hired CTE students in the past consistently stated they were more prepared and had the skills to succeed in the workplace. Similarly, CTE students were more likely to share positive experiences working with employers. The differences seem to stem from exposure and experience early on more than anything else. CTE and JAG students were more likely to have exposure with the work environment via internships early on in their education (high school) and receive training that instilled confidence in them being career ready than students who neither engaged in CTE programming nor were part of JAG. In conversations with CTE and JAG students, they were confident and optimistic about their professional skills and transitioning into either college or a career.

Moreover, while speaking with one group of diverse high school CTE students in Reno, it was apparent that they were not only confident in their ability, but were also able to articulate the concrete skills they have gained from internships through their CTE programming. When asked what skills they have gained and why they were confident, students responded that they can "communicate with employers without getting nervous, write technically, draft, [have done] public speaking through capstone projects" and were "using equipment that is used by industries." Students also said they had a career portfolio and had experiences with mock interviews and resumes. These students consistently stated that the professional experience allowed them to better comprehend what they learned in school and made school more "engaging and fun." Those same students said they either planned to work immediately after high school or had plans to go to college (2 and 4 year) because they understood what additional skills they needed to acquire to be successful in their careers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR K-12 INSTITUTIONS

1. The Nevada Department of Education and LEAs should consider how best to significantly expand the number of work-based learning opportunities available to all secondary students

The high young adult unemployment rate in Nevada will be reduced only with young adults gaining opportunities to acquire career readiness skills. Providing young adults opportunities to acquire career readiness skills at the K-12 level is not just good for their employment prospects, but also for their educational experiences. During the focus groups, it was clear that young adults who have had work-based learning opportunities were more likely to make connections to the work environment and classroom learning and even more likely to have an interest in pursuing postsecondary credentials. Moreover, work-based learning opportunities can also support young adults in being exposed to and learning more about careers they are interested in earlier before they make financial investments in postsecondary education.

The state of Nevada can play a significant role in setting a vision and the expectations for work-based learning. In setting a vision, the state should consider how best to leverage and communicate their expectations to teachers, parents, employers, and all other key stakeholders. The state should also consider how many credits students should earn for a work-based learning opportunity that would go toward attaining their high school diploma.

In addition:

- The state should take a deeper look into the implementation of NRS.389.167. NRS 389.167, which allows students to apply "not more than one credit toward the total number of credits required for graduation." A board of trustees or governing body of a charter school provides various pieces of information to the state board of factors that will go toward earning this credit, one of which is qualification for such an internship. For example, several districts provided guidelines in 2014 that required students to have a 3.0 GPA or above and not less than a "C" grade in any academic or elective class for them to earn this credit. While this qualification seems reasonable, it dramatically limits a school's ability to scale internships and students' abilities to participate- particularly the students who most need to be engaged and connect their academic learning to real world experiences. It also limits many students' abilities to acquire career readiness skills. Thus, using NRS.389.167 as a guideline but making it broader and more encompassing would be very beneficial.
- The state should also consider providing students, who are already employed parttime or have acquired non-internship programs on their own some type of positive recognition, such as credit toward their diploma. In doing so, LEAs can explore opportunities for these students to mentor other students who may also be thinking about working part-time to gain professional skills. This would send a strong signal

to students about the state's commitment to and admiration of young adults working while attending school.

• Finally, the state should consider expanding the professional development experiences that students in CTE and JAG receive to non-CTE/JAG students. During focus groups and individual conversations, CTE students expressed much more optimism in their skills to be successful in careers and were also more motivated to continue to postsecondary education compared to their counterparts. In many instances, CTE students graduate with certifications or credentials that make them more attractive to employers. Employers who had experiences with CTE students were also more positive about their career readiness skills. Therefore, such opportunities should be afforded to more of Nevada's youth.

2. The Nevada Department of Education should consider an accountability instrument that assesses students' career readiness

One of the state's strategic priorities is to "implement standards, programs, and assessments that prepare all students for college and careers." However, most assessments that the state reports on provide strong indicators of *college* readiness without also providing strong indicators of *career* readiness. Though not mutually exclusive, the state should explore deepening their reporting on career readiness indicators. In doing so, the state of Nevada should be clear on the measure and its purpose (i.e., for public reporting, for intervention, or for continuous improvement). Without explicitly including career readiness in the accountability structure, it is unlikely it will be prioritized.

Further, the state should look into enhancing the career readiness indicators used in the Nevada State Performance Framework (NSPF). The NSPF can be enhanced to better capture the state's definition of career readiness. For example, the number of students who graduate and earn industry-recognized credentials in high-demand sectors could be considered when reviewing a school's accountability measures.

Additionally, since high school juniors are already required to take the ACT, the state can explore how to include the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) Work Keys exam as a career readiness indicator, which provides a more comprehensive assessment of students' career readiness. Many employers are more familiar with Work Keys and find it to be valuable. However, though the ACT provides a result to students that correlate with the NCRC exam, students and parents are generally unaware of that aspect of the results. An alternative is for the state to explore how to train students, parents, and teachers to read the ACT exam that provides students with a correlation to the NCRC exam. Yet, because many employers are more familiar and prefer the Work Keys exam, exploring whether to include this exam for all students may be beneficial as well.

3. LEAs should consider partnering with their local workforce boards or nonprofit organizations to provide high school juniors and seniors with an overview/ orientation about where to go to receive employment and job training information (such as where their local One Stop/Job Connect office is located) and how these offices can support them

While conducting this study on young adults, it was clear that many of them (with the exception of CTE students) did not know where to go to receive employment support. Often times, they were overly confident about their ability to identify a general support service. For example, students would identify a guidance counselor or a teacher on the web-based survey, but could not identify organizations that have the sole goal of supporting them with employment. Although guidance counselors and teachers are critical partners, their capacity is extremely limited. A more appropriate and effective way for students to understand the services available to them is to orientate them with entities, which have that responsibility. Further, the research shows that the more removed a young adult is from school (K-12 or postsecondary), the less confident he/she is in knowing where to go for job and training support. Accordingly, LEAs partnering with organizations that provide high school junior and senior students with an overview of their employment support services make it more likely all students will know where to go for job and training support.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Employers and their associations need to continue to engage educational institutions in providing input on desired skills and credentials their company finds valuable and, when possible, provide input on relevant educational curriculums and career pathways. Employers need to be as concrete as possible when articulating the skills needed to be successful. This also requires employers, when able, to send their human resource professionals within their company to relevant school district career pathway meetings as those professionals have deep insight on human capital needs they can share with advisory groups. Individuals in human resources, who filter through applications, are usually in a better position to speak to their company's skill or credentialing needs. At times, employers should take the lead in working with educational institutions.

Furthermore, employers should be more aggressive in reaching out to educational institutions to form partnerships that expose students and educators to their company's careers, skills, and salaries. Given the low four-year college completion rates of Nevada's young adults, it is important for them to understand the myriad of career options and pathways available and the appropriate mix of experience and education needed to be successful in today's labor market. Often times, students are only interested in careers they are exposed to as they figure out what excites them. Also, because respondents surveyed consistently stated the importance of individuals who work for a company being able to relate to them as young adults and students, companies should be mindful in linking

schools with employees of their companies who are relatable to the young adult population and can make connections with the students.

Perhaps most importantly, employers need to make significant financial investments in training programs that provide young adults with professional work experience. Employers will only maintain a competitive advantage if they invest in young talent, especially in today's unpredictable economy. As noted from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation 2014 report on managing talent pipelines, "growing business uncertainty and longer lead times to fill positions" requires employers to "approach talent recruitment and development like any other critical business investments."⁵

SURVEY LIMITATIONS

In part, the success of the young adult survey was that it was clear and succinct. This means we had to be purposeful with every question asked. Young adults indicated that the more questions asked, the less likely they were to complete a survey. Therefore, to ensure the greatest maximum number of responses, OWINN limited the web-based survey to 12 questions. Hence, many other valid or supplemental questions were left out to ensure a larger response rate.

For example, the survey did not ask young adults to share their race/ethnicity or income level. Data from BLS showed that nationally, the July 2016 young adult unemployment rates were 9.9% for Whites, 10% for Asians, 11.3% for Asians, and 20.6% for Blacks. ⁶ However, though the in-person focus groups consisted of a diverse mix of students, who voluntarily shared their socio-economic background, the web-based survey cannot be disaggregated by socio-economic status or race/ethnicity and it is unable to share conclusive insight based on Nevada young adults' socio-economic background or race/ethnicity.

Additionally, the survey did not explicit ask young adults about the occupations or industries they were aware of and/or exposed to. However, during conversations with young adults, it was clear they had limited knowledge of emerging industries and occupations. In the future, stakeholders may want to have an equally large sample of students' identified skills, interests, and exposure to current and emerging industries in Nevada to better inform students of opportunities. This would also provide an opportunity to compare the specific skill deficiencies employers shared during the Sector Council meetings to what students believe were their strengths or weaknesses. Finally, although approximately 70%-80% of the students in the focus groups said they recently applied for a job, it would have been useful to ask the broader young adult population how recent or often they applied to a job, especially since .05% students surveyed indicated they "did not want to work."

⁵ Foundation, U. S. C. of C. (2014). Managing the Talent Pipeline: A New Approach to Closing the Skills Gap. Retrieved November 8, 2016, from Publications-U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Managing%20the%20Talent%20Pipeline.pdf ⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016, August 17). Employment and Unemployment Among Youth Summary. Retrieved November 8, 2016, from United States Department of Labor, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/youth.nr0.htm

CONCLUSION

The Young Adult Jobs and Training Opportunity survey and related focus groups/conversations with young adults were designed to get this population's perspectives on what they believe are the barriers they face to unemployment. In doing so, OWINN gained a more nuanced insight not only on challenges, but also opportunities to engage young adults. This information will be crucial in the state meeting this group's needs moving forward.

The enthusiasm of young adults to share their perspectives in the survey, focus group discussions and individual conversations demonstrate that this population is eager to take advantage of employment and job training opportunities. While college and career readiness is often stated as missions in educational institutions, young adults lack opportunities to acquire experiences and skills that make them career ready. Accordingly, the state must examine the various prospects it has now to expand these opportunities for its young adult population. States such as Tennessee, Georgia, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Ohio provide relevant case studies from their experience expanding work-based learning opportunities for young adults from which Nevada can explore.

The collection of the data on unemployment regarding young adults is an important first step in meeting the needs of the young adult population. If they do not attain the necessarily skills, experiences, and credentials needed to gain high quality employment in the near future, Nevada will endure high costs economically and socially. The state should take advantage of the current opportunities it has so that today's young adults can contribute meaningfully to, not only their own success, but to the success of Nevada's future as well.

ABOUT OWINN

In March of 2016, Governor Sandoval issued Executive Order 2016-08 which created the Office of Workforce Innovation (OWINN) within the Office of the Governor. The creation of OWINN is aligned with the U.S. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) vision of a seamless workforce system that helps job seekers access employment, education, training, and other support services. Additionally, it is aligned to Governor Sandoval's mission of a "New Nevada," which is a place of innovation, new technologies, and a skilled, diverse and aligned educated workforce within a vibrant and sustainable economy.

Among many other objectives, OWINN will: provide leadership in creating career pathway strategies for Nevada in the fields of advanced manufacturing, education, healthcare, and technology; apply for and administer grants to help carry out its mission; provide support to the Governor's Workforce Development Board ('State Board') and industry sector councils; provide strategy in supporting the state in its implementation of WIOA; and enhance cooperation and collaboration among all entities engaged in workforce development. OWINN will serve as a catalyst for systemic change within Nevada's workforce development system.

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