EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Commonwealth Corporation and Drexel University Center on Labor Markets and Policy recently surveyed, interviewed and conducted focus groups with nearly 200 businesses from sectors that have traditionally hired 16-19 year old youth into entry-level jobs in retail, fast food, banking, entertainment and health care.

They developed questions to identify employer perceptions in five areas:

- Teen work behaviors;
- Hard skills (reading, math, writing and technology);
- Impact of teen employment laws;
- Factors affecting employer hiring decisions;
- Hiring preferences.

Employers shared the following good news:

- Teens are still applying for jobs and show interest in working in these sectors, indicating that low teen employment rates are not the results of teens withdrawing from the labor market.
- Teens’ hard skills in the areas of math, reading and writing are considered equal to those of adults who are applying for similar positions.
- Teens’ skills in technology are perceived to be far superior to those of adults.

However, they also said:

- Teen work behaviors are perceived as a major risk to employers (absenteeism, tardiness and higher quit rates).
- Employers perceive that there are too many legal restrictions on hours of work.
- Teens demonstrate a lack of focus and direction – they don’t know what they want after school.
- Teens lack good presenting behaviors – both at an interview and on paper in resumes.
- Teens have a short-term focus on the job.

As for youth employment programs, employers said:

- Some youth and summer jobs programs have very transitory relationships with employers, communicating that the program just wants “… to get their numbers and then they are gone.”
• Some programs just place youth in summer positions with no interviewing by employers – again, just getting numbers.

• There is poor screening of youth who are referred, and

• Little support after the hire if problems emerge.

Employers say…

• Although they would trust referrals from a school or employment organization, they rarely receive referrals from those institutions, with exception of career and technical high schools.

• It is not clear who within the high schools or other youth-servicing organizations an employer should approach in order to make a connection. Working with guidance counselors or principals is the exception. In some cases, employers never received a return phone call.