

Area teen employment down 16% since 2000

National rate lowest since World War II, according to study.

By **Dave Larsen**

Staff Writer

In the past decade, the youth employment rate has plummeted to the lowest level since the 1940s as teens were forced to compete against working-age adults in a recession-based job market.

Employment levels for youth in the region declined dramatically, but the area's labor market fared better than some other parts of the country, according to the authors of a Brookings Institution report released today.

Local officials attributed some of that success to area initiatives to match employer demand with education and training. In addition, Gov. John Kasich this week proposed several new programs for improving K-12 education, job training and higher education.

The number of area teens ages 16-19 who are in the workforce decreased more than 16 percent from 2000 to 2012, which is greater than the national average of 14.2 percent, the Brookings report said. The region ranks 59th out of the the largest 100 U.S. metro areas for the strength of its teen employment over that period. The region's young adults, ages 20-24, enjoyed significantly higher employment rates, which fell just 4.5 percent from 2000 to 2012. That drop was lower than the national average of 5.5 percent for that age group, ranking the area 44th nationally for young adult employment performance.

"The (national) employment rates, particularly for teens, by the time you get to 2011 and 2012, they plummeted to the lowest rate that we've ever had since World War II, so the size of these declines was very substantial," said Andrew Sum, director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston, and one of the report's co-authors.

Sum said this region's young adults are doing slightly better than the national average with 66.6 percent employment in 2012, despite declines over time. "But teenagers got beat up very badly in Dayton, just like they did in the country as a whole," he said. The area's teen employment rate was 31.5 percent in 2012.

The local youth labor market didn't see the same large drops as metro areas in Florida and California, whose economies were more severely impacted by the housing market collapse, said Martha Ross, a fellow with the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program and co-author of the report. However, this area was affected by the "painful" decline in its auto manufacturing sector, she said.

"A slack labor market is always harder for young people, because they have less experience by virtue of their age, especially if they are teenagers," Ross said. "They have lower levels of education and they have smaller networks, so they are typically going to be back of the line in terms of attractiveness to employers."

Ross said an influx of prime working-age adults into the labor market puts young people at an even greater disadvantage.

"Often teens are employed in hospitality and retail, and those are sectors that are affected by recessions, because people have less money to spend," she said.

The report, "The Plummeting Labor Market Fortunes of Teens and Young Adults," found that the nation's youth labor market declined more dramatically in the 2000s than indicated by official unemployment rates.

In 2011, 43 percent of teens and 30 percent of young adults were struggling to find their place in the labor market, while the official unemployment rates were lower at 25 percent and 15 percent, respectively, for those age groups.

Ross said a smaller youth work force and disrupted career trajectories can lead to reduced earnings and spending, which in turn lead to slower economic growth and job creation.

The report recommends a number of initiatives designed to improve employment outcomes for the next generation of workers. They include incorporating work-based learning such as internships, co-ops and apprenticeships into high school and college education, and to create stronger pathways from high school to post-secondary credentials.

Kasich's proposals announced Tuesday include allowing students as young as the seventh grade to start learning about careers via the state's technical and vocational education schools, and giving more students the opportunity to earn college credits while they are still in high school.

In addition, Kasich proposed using \$10 million from state casino-license fees to provide 3-to-1 matching grants to support efforts in which community groups and businesses mentor students, to help them develop skills that lead to success in school and the workplace.

The Miami Valley Career Technology Center in Clayton has been offering career programs to area youth for 40 years, said Nick Weldy, the school's superintendent. "Our whole focus is for the students to be career and college ready," he said.

MVCTC's precision machining program has a 100 percent job placement rate for students that qualify. Nearly 70 percent of the school's student go on pursue to some type of post-secondary training, Weldy said.

"As long as you've got a skilled trade, we've not had any problems finding folks jobs or apprenticeships. We've got partners all over the Miami Valley," he said.

Internships are a key strategy for engaging high school and college students with career opportunities while they are in school, to help them develop skills that give them a competitive advantage once they enter the market place, said Sean Creighton, executive director of the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education.

"In our region, our member colleges and universities are working with companies to nearly double the number of internships, striving toward a goal of 20,000 internships annually by the year 2020," Creighton said.

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YOUTH EMPLOYMENT RATE

The percentage of youth employed in the region. A high employment rate shows people can find jobs.

Age group	2000	2012	Percentage point change
Ages 16-19	48%	31.5%	-16.4
Ages 20-24	71.1%	66.6%	-4.5
Ages 25+	63.1%	57.6%	-5.5

Source: The Brookings Institution