



Missouri Economy Indicators

Youth Employment

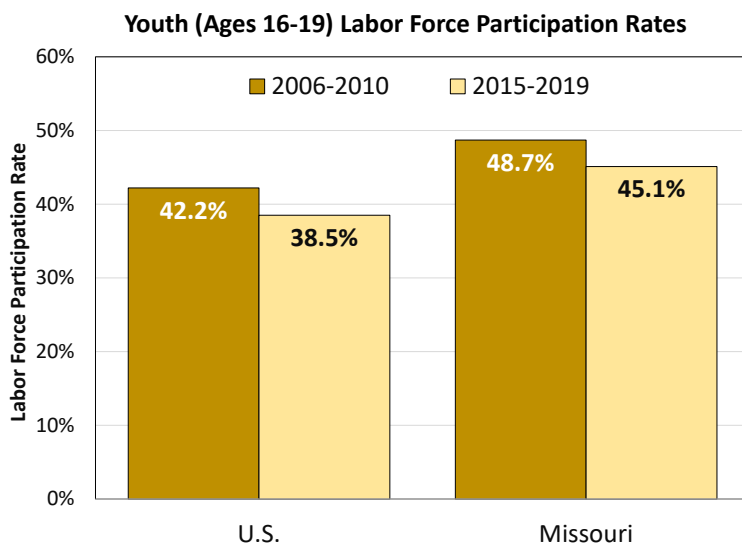
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As the economy recovers, employers throughout Missouri face difficulties in finding workers. Engaging younger workers—both high school students and recent high school graduates—represents one potential solution for addressing this labor shortage. Younger workers often fill many low-wage, part-time or seasonal jobs. These employment opportunities expose young people to the world of work, allow them to explore potential careers and enable them to earn money. For recent high school graduates, early employment opportunities may represent first steps in establishing careers. This brief examines several key youth employment trends.

Missouri's labor force has fewer young workers than it had a decade ago.

Labor force participation rates show the extent to which young people actively participate in the workforce. Among 16- to 19-year-olds, Missouri's labor force participation rate from 2015 to 2019 (45.1%) exceeded the national rate (38.5%), but in the past decade this rate—and the total number of 16- to 19-year-olds—declined.

Between 2006 and 2010, Missouri's labor force averaged 168,000 workers aged 16 to 19. During the 2015 to 2019 period, however, the size of this age cohort fell to 143,000—a 15% drop in a decade's time.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2010 and 2015-2019

More than 1 in 5 Missouri high school graduates elect to directly enter the labor force upon graduation.

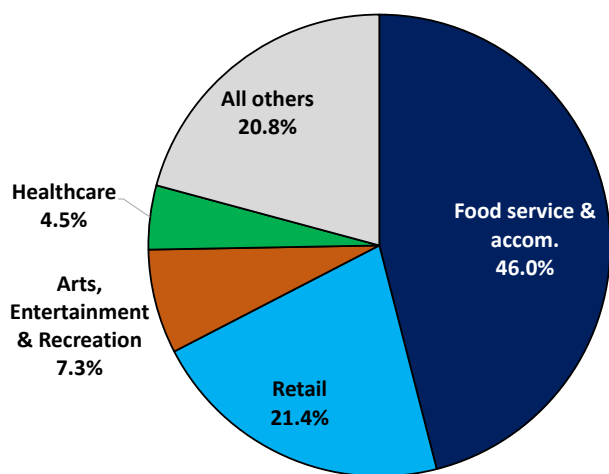
Missouri's demographic trends limit the potential pool of younger workers. To address the declining labor force participation rate, employers may focus on creating more opportunities for young people to enter the workforce and begin potential careers. Survey data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education show 22% of high school graduates on average directly entered the workforce each year between 2015 and 2019. The state of the economy often dictates whether recent high school graduates pursue employment or post-secondary education. During down economies, graduates have greater interest in post-secondary education, particularly at community colleges. When the economy improves, they increasingly choose to pursue employment.

Most youth employees work in sectors most impacted by the pandemic.

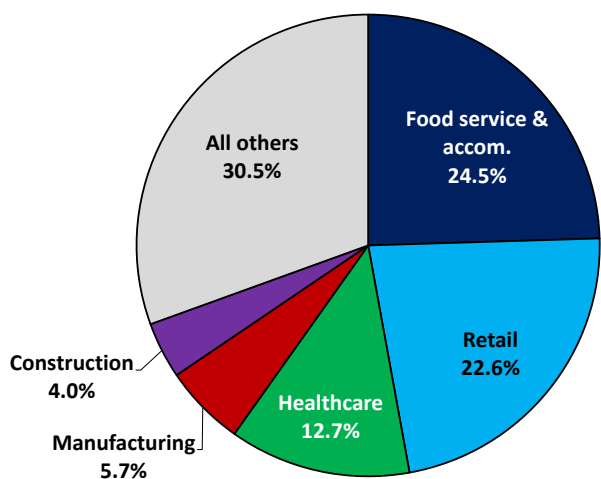
Often, a first job represents the first time a young person experiences the workplace. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Quarterly Workforce Indicators highlight the sectors where younger workers are more likely to find employment. Among workers aged 14 to 18, almost half worked in *food service* from third-quarter 2019 to second-quarter 2020; another roughly 20% worked in the *retail* sector. The *arts, entertainment and recreation* sector, which tends to create many part-time and seasonal jobs, represented an additional 7% of jobs held by Missouri's 14- to 18-year-olds.

Although many of these jobs are not necessarily career-oriented, they do provide important experiences for workers and help employers fill a number of their part-time jobs, seasonal jobs or jobs with irregular shifts. Note, these sectors were also most impacted by the pandemic. As with the workforce overall, the pandemic led to fewer employment opportunities for younger workers. Overall, employment among 14- to 18-year-old workers was down by more than 14% between the second-quarter of 2019 and the second-quarter of 2020. Within the *accommodation and food service* and *retail* sectors, this employment was down 19%.

Youth (Age 14-18) Employment by Sector in Missouri



Youth (Age 19-21) Employment by Sector in Missouri



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Quarterly Workforce Indicators. Average of 4 quarters (Q3 2019 to Q2 2020)

For workers aged 19 to 21, many continue to have *food service* and *retail* jobs. These sectors accounted for about half of these workers' employment from third-quarter 2019 to second-quarter 2020. Again, the pandemic led to significantly fewer job opportunities in these fields. For instance, the number of 19- to 21-year-olds working in *food service* declined by almost 30% between second-quarter 2019 and second-quarter 2020.

Several differences distinguish the employment profile of 19- to 21-year-old workers and 14- to 18-year-old workers. For instance, a greater share of workers aged 19 to 21 tend to work in sectors—such as healthcare, manufacturing and construction—that offer greater career opportunities. Each of these sectors enable people who have only a high school degree, some additional training and education or an industry-recognized certification to start careers. For young people to choose these pathways, it remains critical to introduce students to these careers and inform them about what they need to do in order to take advantage of these career opportunities.

Find ways to engage young people and bring them into the world of work.

- A [November 2020 report](#) from the Brookings Institution described several ways to engage young people. These efforts range from providing basic career awareness (e.g., career fairs, speakers) that may start in middle school to offering registered apprenticeships, which blend on-the-job work experience with post-secondary education. Each targets distinct groups and requires different time commitments and partners.
- The [Brookings Institution report](#) also identified six keys to high-quality career exploration and work-based learning experiences. Those include tying workers' tasks to what they learn in school, assigning meaningful tasks to students and providing feedback. These keys relate more to work-based learning opportunities (e.g., internships) than traditional jobs. Many, however, apply to employers who may want to retain and develop their younger workers over the long term.
- Although much of the burden for creating career exploration and work-based learning programs falls on schools and employers, they are not the only groups that can and should be involved. A recent University of Missouri Extension study on the state's [food, agriculture and forestry workforce](#) found that more than 60% of employers within these industries worked with youth groups such as 4-H and FFA to promote careers in their respective industries. Depending on the industry, these groups can be critical to establishing and supporting career exploration and work-based learning programs.

Additional Resources:

- **The Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics program's Quarterly Workforce Indicators** are developed through a partnership between the U.S. Census Bureau and state labor market information agencies (e.g., Missouri Economic Research and Information Center in Missouri). These data provide quarterly employment estimates by detailed firm characteristics (e.g., geography, industry, size) and worker demographics (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment). These data are available here: qwiexplorer.ces.census.gov
- **The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education** annually provides information about school performance and student outcomes. This reporting includes data, by district, about the placement status on the previous year's graduates. Currently, data cover students graduating from 1991 to 2019. These data are available here: apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Home.aspx
- **Missouri Small Business Development Center COVID-19 Resource Page** has a small business guide to the CARES Act, video guides and other resources at sbdc.missouri.edu/sbdc-covid-19-resources

All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available at tinyurl.com/ExceedEconomyIndicators

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