
Attracting and Retaining Young Adults to the Pennsylvania Heartland

Research conducted to develop baseline information on the perceptions, attitudes and trends of young adults occupational choices and potential employment opportunities in the Pennsylvania Heartland.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction - Natalie M. Ferry, Penn State University

Turning Points: Adolescents' and Young Adults' Reasoning about Career Choice and Future Employment

Natalie M. Ferry, Penn State University

In a study of career choice of high school seniors and young adults in a rural eleven county area of Central Pennsylvania, wide diversity existed in the youth's career maturity. Sixty-five percent of the high school seniors in the study expressed having made a career choice, while 35 percent were undecided. The critical choice of "what will I do" upon high school graduation appeared to be directly tied to the adolescent's family and the individual's perceived efficacy to fulfill educational and future occupational roles. The diversity in the level of the groups' career maturity appeared to be embedded in the family and community context that had great influence upon the youth's perception of what were appropriate occupational choices. Family was a critical factor in the young adolescent's occupational choice and future employment. Yet the majority of the high school, college-bound youth, and graduating college seniors were not planning to remain in Central Pennsylvania due to their perception that employment opportunities were not available. The majority of the work-bound youth were planning to remain in the area, most frequently finding employment through assistance of family or friends. The perception of the major occupational clusters in the area was greatly influenced by stereotypical assumptions. These perceptions play key roles in youth's career selection process.

Perceptions of the Forces Changing Central Pennsylvania's Economy

Natalie M. Ferry, Penn State University

Rural Central Pennsylvania currently is exhibiting stable employment in the Healthcare, Manufacturing and Lumber and Wood Products industry clusters. The lack of job turnover, the transitioning to newer technology and work practices indicates that local industry clusters are moving forward to embrace the demands of 21st Century workplace. Yet the local workforce, especially entry level workers are not equipped with the skills to operate effectively in high performance environments. Most local businesses are assuming the training of their current workforce as a given to move forward in the adoption of newer technology and operation. As well, these rural businesses are facing the challenges of a global competitive economic environment that is complicated by state public policy issues that are having direct impact upon their profitability. The local workforce is committed and supportive of the changes local businesses need to be making to remain competitive. Local employees believe that their future is tied to the success of their employers' ability to remain profitable in Central Pennsylvania.

Industry Cluster Analysis: Inspiring a Common Strategy for Community Development Abstract

Rachel V. Smith, Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation

Industry cluster analysis is becoming an increasingly popular tool for workforce and economic development professionals to identify, validate and support local and regional industry groupings that have demonstrated or show promise of competitive advantage. The Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board (WIB) implemented a four-phased methodology (research and analysis, consensus building, validation, and application) to identify four regional clusters: Diversified Manufacturing, Lumber and Wood Products, Healthcare, and Education. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative cluster analysis, the Central Pennsylvania WIB, together with its regional partners from education, economic development, and industry, has been able to identify clusters, sectors, occupations, and skill sets. Although industry clusters will vary from region to region based on workforce, infrastructure, and natural resource availability, the methodology developed by the Central Pennsylvania WIB provides a sound model for coordinated and continuous industry cluster analysis that will support integrated community development.

Building for the Future: Next Steps

Natalie M. Ferry, Penn State University