

CHICAGO – While teenagers may experience increased competition for coveted jobs this summer, the economic slowdown is not expected to significantly reduce the number of seasonal jobs filled by 16- to 19-year-olds between May and July. In fact, some seasonal positions may go unfilled as teens avoid areas requiring heavy labor.

Between 1.5 million and 1.6 million 16- to 19-year-olds will be added to payrolls this summer, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). That is down significantly from a recent high of 2.02 million teenagers – who found summer positions in 1999 – but is only slightly lower than the average number of teen jobs added the previous four summers (1.674 million).

Number of Jobs Gained By 16- to 19-Year-Olds

Year	May	June	July	Summer Jobs Gained
1998	270,000	1,058,000	675,000	2,003,000
1999	415,000	750,000	852,000	2,017,000
2000	111,000	1,087,000	311,000	1,509,000
2001	58,000	1,124,000	560,000	1,742,000
2002	161,000	985,000	510,000	1,656,000
2003	152,000	859,000	458,000	1,469,000
2004	168,000	827,000	597,000	1,592,000
2005	183,000	1,007,000	546,000	1,736,000
2006	230,000	1,033,000	471,000	1,734,000
2007	62,000	1,114,000	459,000	1,635,000
2008	?	?	?	???

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas using non-seasonally adjusted data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics

There will not be a significant decline in teen employment this summer. Even if we discover that we're in a recession, it takes several months and sometimes years for the impact to be felt in the teen job market. During the 2001 recession, which lasted from March through November, teen employment grew by more than 1.7 million (up from 1.5 million the year before).

At its lowest point, it's telling that nearly 1.5 million teens were still able to find summer employment. The biggest problem in recent years has not been the shrinking number of summer jobs for teens but the shrinking number of teens who want traditional summer jobs.

Teenagers are increasingly participating in a wide range of activities that don't allow time for summer jobs. More teens attend summer school, participate in college preparatory programs, volunteer or even run their own businesses. Flipping burgers or folding shirts at a clothing store simply are not appealing to today's technology-addicted, career-oriented teen.

For the teens seeking traditional jobs this year, there may be increased competition and particularly in the retail sector where many chains are declaring bankruptcy and closing underperforming locations. However, these losses could be offset by increased demand for workers among seasonal employers who usually rely on immigrants to fill positions.

It is estimated that 65,000 fewer foreign workers will be able to enter the United States this summer under the H-2B visa program. A provision in the immigration laws allowing extra H-2B workers during the summer has expired. Many employers (from landscaping firms to resorts and restaurants) are struggling to fill the void.

While many of these jobs could be available to teens, many may pass on the opportunity to work in labor-intensive areas like landscaping. It's not that teens are lazy but many are seeking opportunities that will enhance their chances of getting into a good college and look good on a professional resume.

Despite the need for seasonal workers in many regions and industries, some teenagers may still struggle to find a job. This is usually due to inexperienced job-search techniques. Many young men and women spend a few afternoons making the rounds at area malls

to fill out applications, which they then leave with someone at a cash register.

In recent years, some of this activity has become even less personal as it has moved to the Internet. Unfortunately, this approach to job seeking is not very effective. In the professional world, this would be akin to simply dropping off your resume at a human resources department and waiting for someone to call.

Finding a job as a teenager is just like finding a job as an adult. It requires constant attention and depends significantly on the strength of your network. Use your parents, friends and the parents of your friends as sources for job leads. Try to meet with hiring managers face to face rather than dropping off a completed application form.

The newspaper is also a good source for job leads. While the classified ad section will contain some help-wanted advertisements, don't forget to read the local and business news sections where you might find stories of new local businesses or ones that are struggling to find workers.

Most important, don't get frustrated by failure. Many teens give up after applying to 10 or 12 jobs and conclude that "no one is hiring teens this summer". As the chances are good that there are more than 10 or 12 employers in your city or town, it's necessary to cast a wider net. There are many summer job opportunities outside the confines of the local mall.

Challenger, Gray & Christmas President James E. Challenger is in his fourth decade of job search counseling after pioneering outplacement as an employer-paid benefit. He has authored three books including "Secrets of the Job Hunt" and his most recent Job-Hunting Success For Mid-Career Professionals". Challenger lives and works in Chicago.