

TEEN EMPLOYMENT IN DELAWARE

The Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership is a federal-state cooperative program involving the states and the US Bureau of the Census. Under the LED Partnership, states agree to share Unemployment Insurance earnings data and the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) data with the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau combines these administrative data, additional administrative data and data from censuses and surveys. From these data, the program creates statistics on employment, earnings, and job flows at detailed levels of geography and industry and for different demographic groups. The Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) data can be accessed through a tool known as the QWI Explorer, which is maintained by the Census Bureau: <https://qwiexplorer.ces.census.gov>. Here, we use it to examine some characteristics of the labor market for teenagers in Delaware.

The LED data use a different definition of teenagers in the labor force from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Current Population Survey (CPS) data. LED uses the age group 14-18, while BLS uses 16-19, so direct comparisons of the two are not valid.

There were an estimated 12,943 teenagers from 14 to 18 years old employed in Delaware on average in 2025. That is approximately 500 less than in 2024, when there were 13,455 teens working in the state. Teen employment has been trending upward since the aftermath of the Great Recession when it hit its nadir in 2011 with employment of 7,553. The total employment count in 2025 for all age groups was 471,711, so teenagers made up 2.7 percent of those with jobs in the state. Historically, with data going back to 1999, teens have comprised on average 2.8 percent of all jobs in Delaware. Teens made up 2.6



percent of those employed in Kent County, 2.5 percent in New Castle County, and 3.5 percent in Sussex County in 2025. Nearly all worked in the private sector, with only 317 teenagers working at government jobs.

The *Accommodation and Food Services* sector was the largest employer of teenagers in the state, employing 5,639 on average in 2025. With *Retail Trade* employing another 2,563 teens, 63 percent of all employed teenagers worked in these two sectors. With data going back to 1999, the *Accommodation and Food Services* sector and the *Retail Trade* sector have been the dominant industries for teen employment. In the year 1999, 64 percent of employed teenagers worked in those two sectors, not much different from today. What has changed over time is the slow shift in the distribution of teen employment between the two sectors. In 1999, there was an equal share of teen employment in *Retail Trade* and *Accommodation and Food Services*. In 2025, there are twice as many teens in *Accommodation and Food Services* as there are in *Retail Trade*.