



Itasca County Employment Projections

During the fall of 2006, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce Workforce Development Initiative and the Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) partnered to engage in a local recording of the anticipated position openings during the period 2007-2011. Twelve of the largest Itasca County employers participated. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development partnered with a Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce representative to interview human resource professionals about their projected employment needs at the request of company chief executive officers.

The data includes aggregated numbers of the twelve employers participating and does not delineate individual employer needs. ***Please note that the data provided is merely an "anticipated" projection given the circumstances of the twelve participating company's places within the local, regional, and international marketplace at one point in time, the fall of 2006. The data should be used only as a guide and a basis for program planning, training and education, rather than a promise of future employment.*** Verbal and written stated facts through the completion of a standard form and a direct interview process are included in this report.

Conclusions:

The majority of participating employers compete in a global market which subjects them to a greater extent to changing laws, regulations and technologies. Local companies deal within the United States and other countries such as: Kuwait, Finland, Australia, China, Portugal, and Canada.

Public employers have very little difficulty recruiting employees at this time because they offer a higher wage within the local market. However, competition is becoming a greater concern as talent is drawn away to private employers who can offer a larger wages.

While a great majority of businesses believe that while a Liberal Arts degree provides a foundation and the implied ability to commit to and achieve goals, it does not ensure that the applicant will be "fully ready" or posses the on-the-job work experience necessary to be successful. A common theme depicted by the businesses surveyed was that qualified applicants need to posses the skills, talent, and drive necessary to learn the processes and procedures of the organization. This generally requires the passing of pre-employment aptitude or ability tests along with an intense interview process. Employers see the high school diploma as adding to the potential for success in passing pre-employment tests.

Approximately 86% of businesses surveyed said they generally look for a certain level of education or experience over a specific skill set in entry level candidates.

Job related experience is important but "job hopping" (unless easily explained) is a large detriment to being hired by local employers especially when "job hopping" occurs within the confines of the local market. Most employers examine a candidate's work record to determine this.

While certain jobs have physical requirements, a great majority of the businesses surveyed have little difficulty managing people with disabilities. "Disabilities? No Problem!"

In the case of work history, most of the businesses put job candidates through a lengthy hiring process consisting of factors that underscore key behavioral elements. Pre employment testing can consist of such assessments as: background/work history verification, credit checks, criminal checks, drug testing, psychological evaluation, verbal and written assessments (math, grammar, spelling, vocabulary, medical terminology, spatial visualization, closure flexibility (figures)), physical testing, functional capacity testing, business skills assessments (team problem solving, interaction, handling trouble employees, writing an article, oral presentation), personality testing, and formal, informal, and group interviews.

There are limited opportunities for candidates with job related offenses or with offenses such as: terroristic threats, harassment, or theft. Sometimes the poor work history is dependant on the offense or reasonable explanation (for example job hopping vs. prior theft vs. poor performance), while others "do not rehabilitate new hires." One employer stated that, "We have a liability and responsibility to our current employees."

A candidate having military background is preferred by several employers versus a candidate without military background. This is due to the high level of discipline that military trained individuals are accustomed to. Employees with military background most often have a background working successfully in a team, respecting authority figures, and taking direction from supervisors.

Employers offering a locally competitive wage and benefits while recognizing the employee as a vital part of the organization encounter fewer difficulties in hiring, less turnover, and higher productivity rates.

Employers cited the top attributes utilized in attracting workers. These include:

- Benefits
- Good Paying Jobs
- Employee Driven / Innovator
- Others: Tuition Reimbursement, Working Closely with ICC to hire college students.

To support a quality foundation for the working world and ensuring competitiveness in the job market, employers recommended: (not listed in priority order):

- Digital literacy including: Microsoft Word and Excel, email knowledge and etiquette, Internet research and computer file organization
- Reading and Math including: addition, subtraction, division, multiplication, measuring, fractions, percentages, problem solving (not one job listed did not include math skills). For jobs not requiring a high school, a minimum of counting to 50 is required.)
- Word processing/typing minimum 35-40 words per minute
- Medical terminology, basic life support, and garage mechanics (to develop a base mechanical aptitude)
- Drivers License
- Budget management and business correspondence

Leading advice to 10th graders about work includes:

- Get Experience! : Job shadowing, Internships, Summer Jobs, & Volunteering.
- Be Ready, Self-Motivated, Hold Yourself Responsible and Accountable.
- Stay in School, Go to College or a Tech School, and Get More Education.
- Research Careers! Find out more about what you want to do and where you want to do it!
- Be willing to learn, accept authority, and understand a "Team Concept."
- Others: Learn to Communicate, Learn Discipline, Respect Yourself, and Maintain a Clean Appearance.

Attitudes, behaviors, and workplace ethics recommended and most used for success on a job include:

- Teamwork (being a team player)
- Multi tasking
- Motivated
- Self directed
- Bring new ideas
- Detail conscious
- Ability to work in a diverse work setting (it is anticipated that this will become more pronounced)
- Be ready for work (be on time, have home responsibilities handled)

When it comes to new job openings that become available it is not uncommon for a majority of the surveyed businesses to first post internally – either per union contracts, to take advantage of employee referrals, or support internal promotions. However, there is still a mixed bag of external resources businesses are both struggling with and benefiting from when it comes to posting externally. Some post to their own business's website, many use local or region newspaper advertisements or professional associations, provide internship opportunities or recruit students from Itasca Community College, utilize recruitment agencies, or post on costly external jobsites such as CareerBuilder, Monster, Star Tribune, etc. A limited but increasing number of employers posted positions on the free, self-service Minnesota Job Bank.

Top Employment Concerns of Surveyed Businesses by Rank:

- Recruitment/Locally available qualified applicants. (by far the #1 concern)
- Education/Lack of Experience
- Wage Competition
- Others include: Retirement rate/aging population; turnover; rising benefit costs; readiness of applicant to start and remain working (don't ask for time off-have stuff at home taken care of i.e. daycare, vacations); transportation and day care for employees; need to lay off good employees in light of market conditions/under-enrollment; motivation behind the application; recruiting for low-supply jobs while maintaining internal pay equity; minority requirements; competition with premier employers; limited ability to create internships with vo-techs due to union approval process

A Note about the need for lifelong learning:

Between the time one employer was interviewed and the time of this report, the company closed three plants thus requiring laid off employees to search for new jobs. Those who have continued their education and enhanced their skill development have greater success in securing future employment. The global market pressure on local area business detracts from long term, on-going employment. Keep your skills competitive.

Some employers noted important misnomers about jobs. These include:

- Mechanics is a dirty job. Actually it is highly computerized.
- A four year degree is the only route to a good paying job.