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From the Sacramento Business Journal:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/news/2017/04/21/youth-unemployment-in-sacramento-region-among.html>

## Youth unemployment in Sacramento region among highest in nation

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Eighteen-year-old Steven Torres used to spend his days at his local public library, perusing the online job listings.

Torres, who lives with his mother at her North Highlands home and graduated from Florin High School last year, estimates he probably spent four months searching for work. Not having a computer or a wireless connection at home made that more challenging. Nonetheless he was determined to find a job.

"After I got out of high school, I thought 'I've got to make my own money. I can't just sit here,'" he told the Business Journal.

After searching without success, he eventually enrolled in a job training program at Green Technical Education and Employment, a local nonprofit that provides education and workforce skills. After learning resume building and other skills, he landed a minimum-wage, part-time job as a barista at the Golden 1 Center. He also has a part-time paid internship at a Marshalls department store.

With dreams of becoming a mechanical engineer, he plans to enroll at American River College or Sacramento City College this summer and eventually transfer to a four-year college — possibly his dream school, Michigan State University.

In the meantime, Torres said he's still hoping for full-time work so he can start saving for college and eventually get out on his own.

"There's jobs here, but you actually have to build up the effort to go out there and get a job," Torres said.

Statistics show that many Sacramento residents in their late teens and early 20s fail to find work.

Although the area's unemployment has decreased since the recession, recent data from the Greater Sacramento Economic Council suggests the region's unemployment levels for 16- to 24-year-olds are among the nation's worst.

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***Steinberg focuses on youth unemployment***

***Aquaponics program provides workplace skills to youth***

Out of the 25 largest U.S. metropolitan regions, the greater Sacramento area — Sacramento, Yolo, Placer, El Dorado, Yuba and Sutter counties — has the second-highest youth unemployment in the nation, according to data generated by GSEC research director Chris Weare.

His analysis, based on 2015 one-year estimates from the U.S. Census American Community Survey, found that 16.5 percent of people ages 16 to 24 are unemployed in the Sacramento region.

Southern California's Inland Empire region — Riverside, San Bernardino and Ontario — was the only big metropolitan area with higher youth unemployment, at 19.2 percent.



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Some local officials say the Sacramento region's historic reliance on government jobs has played a role in its high number of unemployed youth.

Barry Broome, GSEC's CEO, said he believes the area's youth unemployment rate is a result of the region's historic dependence on government jobs — which he said is higher here than in any other state capital region.

### **Dependence on government**

"We're not just a typical state government" capital, he said. "We're more dependent (on government jobs) than any community in the U.S. by multiples."

Young adults, particularly those without college degrees, are unable to get government jobs, Broome said.

"These kids are not going to get those jobs," he said. "These young adults are suffering because we've allowed ourselves to be dependent on a government economy."

Sacramento's government sector provides 23 percent of jobs for the region, while government jobs nationally average around 15.5 percent, according to a GSEC analysis based on data from Economic Modeling Systems Inc. The firm integrates data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and some private data providers.

Oklahoma City's economy is the second-most government dependent, with 19.4 percent of its workforce employed in government jobs. Richmond, Virginia, ranked third, with 16.1 percent.

To be sure, the Sacramento region's youth unemployment rate compares more favorably to some more rural areas.

According to data from the state Employment Development Department, Sacramento County's youth unemployment rate was 24.8 percent in 2015, which is in about the middle of the range of California counties. Imperial County is at the high end of the range, with 35.5 percent youth unemployment. Alpine County is at the low end, with 7.9 percent.

EDD spokesman Kevin Callori concurred with GSEC's finding that among U.S. metropolitan areas, the greater Sacramento region trails only the Riverside/San Bernardino area. He noted, however, that those findings are based on 2015 data and that Sacramento's situation may have improved since then.

Also some of the outlying counties around Sacramento have high youth unemployment rates, even relative to the more desperate parts of California. Yuba County has a 31.2 percent youth unemployment rate. Sutter County's is 30.6 percent.

GSEC's role is to promote the Sacramento region and attract economic investment. Broome said GSEC released the youth unemployment numbers it generated because diversifying Sacramento's economy beyond its historic dependence on government — and building a "shared economy" — will be key to its success. "We put the number out to increase the focus that the government town economy isn't a fair economy, and it isn't an economy that allows people to share in it," Broome said. "People don't think of it as an economy of the elite, but it is an economy of the elite. ...We need to build an industry strategy in our community so that our economy is more fair and more equitable."

### **Complicated problem**

Sacramento's large proportion of government jobs may not entirely explain the problem, however.

Jeffrey Michael, director of University of the Pacific's Center for Business and Policy Research, said it should also be noted that Sacramento has a relatively high number of "disaffected youth," who are neither working nor in school.

A 2015 report from the Obama administration's My Brother's Keeper initiative found more than 42,600 teens and young adults ages 16 to 24 in Sacramento fit into this category.

Michael said that while older workers in the Sacramento region tend to have higher levels of education, those under 25 tend to have lower achievement than the national average. "Sacramento has always been high in those past rankings (of youth unemployment) — although not necessarily second out of 25," he said.

Improving educational outcomes and increasing internship and workplace opportunities for youth could help address the problem, he said.



Sanjay Varshney, finance professor at California State University Sacramento, said he agrees that the region's historic reliance on government jobs has played a role in its high number of unemployed youth. He added, however, that there is "probably a lot more going on." He speculated that because of the relatively few middle- and advanced-opportunity jobs in Sacramento, more people across the age spectrum are competing for lower- and minimum-wage jobs.

"These are the jobs typically you would have expected the younger folks in the workforce to take," he said. "So now you have older people competing for the same jobs."

Varshney said the region's growing population may be increasing competition for jobs — leaving less opportunity for those with minimal skills.

Also, a key difference between Sacramento and many other capital regions is that there, young people may be more likely to move to greener pastures after college. That's not necessarily the case here. Varshney pointed to Sacramento State as a prime example, where 85 percent of the student body remains in the area after graduation. "California happens to be this good population growth state, where our youth sticks around," he said.

### Possible solutions

Despite the difficulties young adults like Torres face in finding work, there are reasons to be optimistic.

Terri Carpenter, workforce development manager at Sacramento Employment and Training Agency, said high school regional occupation programs and trade programs that were cut during the recession are starting to come back. "You saw less and less of the automotive and those types of classes in the high schools. Now those are coming back with great force. It's just now tied to a career pathway," she said.

GSEC, meanwhile, has a goal of attracting 200 tech startups to the region over the next decade, to fulfill its aim of diversifying the economy.

Broome argues that bringing in tech companies is the "clearest way" to change the city's reputation so that more private businesses will want to locate here. "In the world of business and industry, we're a government town and it's not where you go to do things. It will be a slow grind but we will change it."

The "good news," said Broome, is that people in the region are starting to see the problems posed by its government town economy and to understand that Sacramento has a "long way to go" before it's competitive with other cities.

Schools also have a big role to play, Broome said, in getting students ready for tech jobs. "The new workforce model is, 'Who are we training to be coders and developers?'" Broome said.

Varshney said that along with the technology startups, Sacramento will need to attract more large private-sector employers. "We need many more large employers," he said. "Small businesses we know do well, but then they also struggle. They are also more sensitive to economic cycles. Large employers typically give you a little more stability to the job mix."

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg, who has made youth unemployment a major theme of his administration, said it's the community's "adult responsibility" to ensure there are opportunities for youth. "We are accountable to these young people," Steinberg said. "They gotta do their part, but then we gotta do our part."

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## Steinberg focuses on youth unemployment

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Mayor Darrell Steinberg has made youth unemployment a major theme of his administration, starting with a commitment to provide close to 1,000 paid internships this summer.

But longer term, he says that diversifying the economy will be necessary to address the problem. "The reawakening in Sacramento is that we can no longer just rely on government," he said.

Steinberg said that diversifying the economy with more high-wage private jobs in technology, tourism, arts and other sectors needs to be a top priority.

In the past, however, the region has failed to effectively connect public education, workforce development and the "new economy" — particularly in the areas of the city with the most poverty, he said.

"We do not have the diversity of opportunity here when it comes to our economy, and we've got some significantly challenged neighborhoods," Steinberg said. "And we haven't yet connected our desire and our current efforts ... to diversify this economy with the kids from those neighborhoods. That's our job."

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Steinberg said he's committed to creating, as a start, close to 1,000 paid internships by this summer for high school juniors entering their senior year, in a program he's called Sac Youth At Work. The number of participants is expected to grow as the program expands, he said.

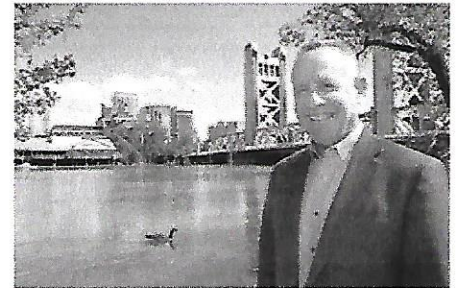
The program will launch in high schools in areas of the city where the need is greatest. The city has raised commitments of more than \$2 million for the program, nearly half of which is from a state grant geared toward employment for young adults, while \$950,000 is coming from the city's general fund. The city also is raising money from school districts and the private sector to assist with the effort.

"This is going to be very much focused on those young people that might never get these kinds of opportunities," Steinberg said.

To oversee the program, last month Steinberg hired a new director of workforce development in his office, Erica Kashiri. She was previously director of policy and programs for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for Education and Workforce in Washington, D.C.

The model for the program includes eight weeks of life and job skills training during the summer and a minimum of 10 hours a week of paid employment during participants' senior year.

Successful completion of the program will lead either to admission into a higher learning institution or a paid apprenticeship program, Steinberg said.



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Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg



"This is a signature priority for me as the new mayor," he told the Business Journal. "I ran for this office to do this."

Steinberg also focused on the issue of youth unemployment during his tenure in the State Senate, where as president pro tem he spearheaded the creation of the Career Pathways Trust. Under legislation signed in 2013, it provided competitive state grants to programs to teach career skills to high school and community college students.

Steinberg noted that the Great Recession exacerbated the problem of youth unemployment and reduced the resources available to serve youth in the labor market.

In 1996, when he was a Sacramento city councilman, Steinberg spearheaded the START program — Students Today Achieving Results for Tomorrow — which opened school campuses beyond the school day to keep youth engaged in activities. "It got as high as 60 some-odd (school) sites. Now it's down to less than half," Steinberg said.

Still, the mayor said he is optimistic that new programs will have a long-term impact. "What we need is a unified strategy and a systems change," he said. "What I love about this Career Pathways agenda is that it has the potential to be unifying."

In the meantime, Steinberg said the city will track data from the Sac Youth At Work program after it launches this summer. He said the success of the program won't necessarily be judged by the number of youth involved, but by the proportion of its participants who go on to higher education or high-wage jobs.

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From the Sacramento Business Journal:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/news/2017/04/21/aquaponics-program-provides-workplace-skills-to.html>

## Aquaponics program provides workplace skills to youth

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Simeon Gant sees the problem of youth unemployment at ground level.

Gant is executive director of Green Technical Education and Employment, a nonprofit that provides job skills to young people, from resume building and computer coding, to training for the solar energy industry and pre-apprenticeship construction.

Green Technical's cornerstone project is an aquaponic community garden off 38th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in Oak Park.

Aquaponics is a form of farming that uses waste produced by fish as fertilizer. The fish are kept in aquariums, and the water is pumped into the soil where crops are grown.

The nonprofit also is in the midst of making its facility 100 percent solar powered.

From 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. on Tuesdays and Saturdays, Gant meets with several young people at a time, who range on average from 15 to 19 years old. A large majority of the youth at Green Tech are black and Latino.

In Sacramento County, more than 53 percent of black and Latino students are not proficient in English language arts, according to a 2015 report from the Obama administration's My Brother's Keeper initiative. The report also found there is a 23 percent achievement gap between black and Latino students and their white peers.

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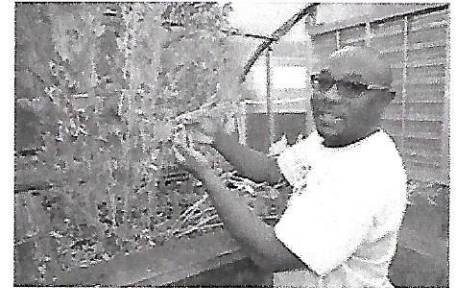
Many of the young people Gant sees have been looking for work for several months. "They often will ask, 'Mr. Simeon, do you have a job?' or, 'I am looking for work, do you know anyone who's got a job for me?'" Gant said. "I let them know, 'Stick with us for a little while, and we'll help you find a job.'"

Gant runs a tight ship. He doesn't tolerate tardiness, and those who slack off on the job risk having their \$20 stipend cut. His strictness is meant to impart lessons early on, so those youth won't take work for granted once they land full-time jobs. "We're teaching them about labor principles," Gant said.

His pre-apprentice construction program also teaches safety on the construction site, proper use of tools and construction math, he said.

When asked why there's such a high rates of youth unemployment in the area, Gant said competition for jobs is very high in Sacramento. He also said the region has a high proportion of youth who lack self motivation and basic skills.

"They are absolutely unskilled and unprepared for the workforce," he said. "I really don't have an answer to how that's unique from anywhere else, but I do know for kids of color in Sacramento, they quickly fall behind by the age of 14."



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Simeon Gant is executive director of Green Technical Education and Employment.



Gant, who has a contract with the Sacramento County Office of Education to extend services to youth, expressed support for Mayor Darrell Steinberg's plan to offer paid internships to students, starting with the most economically depressed areas of the city.

Gant said, however, that he expects the program to face steep challenges. "Darrell is going to have to convince these companies to not just take (young people) on as interns, but hire them," Gant said. "You can rest assured there are going to be some dropouts. That's to be expected."

Gant said that students in more affluent areas of the region have more exposure to career opportunities than young people in more economically depressed areas like Oak Park, Del Paso Heights and South Sacramento.

Gant is trying to change that, organizing trips with young people to places including Google's Mountain View headquarters; the California Independent System Operator, which maintains the state's electrical grid; and TomKat Ranch Educational Foundation, a learning laboratory for animal agriculture.

Gant, who previously worked in government relations and public affairs at the California Legislature, said he also believes the region's reliance on government jobs contributes to its youth unemployment. "Our kids aren't getting the government jobs. They can't pass the test," he said. "And these government jobs, there is a lot of nepotism."

With the obstacles young people face in finding work, Gant said he is inspired by those who come through his program, like Steven Torres, who had searched for a job for months before being referred to Green Tech.

Torres said the construction and other skills he's learning with Green Tech will hopefully help with his prospective mechanical engineering career. He said the time management and interview skills he learned at Green Tech also helped him land his current job as a barista at Golden 1 Center.

"I only found work through programs. If I was to do it by myself, I am sure that I would have a more difficult time. With Green Tech you just pick it up like that," he said, snapping his fingers. "You learn some new skills."

Another of Gant's mentees, Jewel James, 18, of South Sacramento, said she had been hunting for a job for two years. James finally was hired last month for a full-time job at Wal-Mart, making \$11 per hour. James also holds a part-time cashier job at Golden 1 Center and attends Sacramento City College. Her plan is eventually to move on to a career in nursing.

James, who graduated from Hiram W. Johnson High School, said finding a job is "really hard" in Sacramento. "Especially if you don't have a lot of experience," she said. "I don't know if (employers) don't want to hire younger people, or if the older people are taking all the jobs, but it's definitely hard to get a job."

Mock interviews and other training at Green Tech helped her eventually land employment, James said. Many of her friends, meanwhile, are still looking for work. "Before I got the job, I did feel like giving up, but I knew that if I did, I probably would never have a job. I had to keep going until someone finally gave me a chance."

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