

Teens juggle jobs and homework as more enter the work force

The economy forces some to work, but not everyone agrees it's a good idea

By Victoria Irwin
Staff writer of
The Christian Science Monitor

Lincoln Rhoads, a senior at Lane Technical High School in Chicago, works three days a week as a clerk with the Illinois Banking Association in the Chicago Loop. He says he is learning about office management, and he also enjoys the salary he earns.

"I need the spending money, especially with inflation, and money to save for college," says Lincoln, who plans to study engineering in college. He saved \$1,500 last year. He also bought a car, taking out a loan to help pay for it.

But not all people agree that jobs for high school students is a good idea.

"A teen's first priority should be school," says Superintendent Edward Rachford of the Homewood-Flossmoor High School District south of Chicago. Teachers in his 3,000-student school have fielded complaints from pupils about juggling their schoolwork and extra activities with a job. As more teens take on part-time jobs, students come into class sleepy or distracted. Homework is left unfinished and grades decline, he claims.

Teens are becoming a more active part of the work force. The Department of Labor reports that high school students accounted for most of the increase in students in the labor force between 1977-78. Nearly 46 percent of high school students in 1978 were part of the labor force, a number that many parents, teens, and school officials say has increased since then.

Why are students flocking to part-time jobs? Some parents urge their high school son or daughter to take a part-time job. Peer pressure is high. Students like the independence a job gives them. But most parents and teens list the economy as the main reason for after-school jobs.

"Kids are growing up faster," says Gary Smalley of a Massachusetts employment office in the Hyde Park area of Boston. "The economy ten years ago was not as bad, and parents were able to provide for their kids. Now it is a fact of life that students need to earn their own money if they want to be able to have a nice wardrobe or go to movies."

Superintendent Rachford estimates that working students at Homewood-Flossmoor, an area he calls "mildly affluent," save about 50 percent of their money for further schooling. They spend the rest on investments such as designer blue jeans, gasoline, auto insurance, and entertainment. But other students insist that they are not working merely for expensive extras.

"My jeans are \$12.95 from Filene's Basement," points out Amy Wood, a junior from Madison Park High School in Roxbury, Mass. She works 23 hours a week at a storefront



By Barth J. Falkenberg, staff photographer

Amy Wood, top, Cathy Boudreau, below

where she helps behind the counter and is in charge of the soda fountain. She lives with her mother and brother, and although most of her money goes into the bank to save for her college education, she contributes to grocery costs and buys some of her clothing.

Students who don't have a part-time job feel the financial pinch as well. Tony Kingsey from Wellesley, Mass., who is involved with student government, the school newspaper, and sports, says he doesn't spend much money, but he does baby-sit and do odd jobs occasionally for extra cash.

There is plenty to be gained from a part-time job after school, say parents of teens who work.

"It gives my son motivation, and a little pocket money," says one Chicago mother. "He is helping someone else. It makes him independent. And it helps him to learn self-government."

Other parents have weighed the lessons that their teen will learn at work against the importance of school, and have decided that it is better that their teen does not work. One couple in Oregon do not want their son to take a part-time job. Instead, he gets paid an allowance of \$15 per week for household duties.

"He's not a good enough student to have a job," says the mother, who adds that her son is a very good worker who earned high praise from his summer employer. "Work would end up being his highest priority."

Some parents say that extracurricular activities such as sports, drama, or clubs are more important than a job.

"I don't think my parents want me to work," says Anne Idzal from Wellesley High

School. "It would be unreasonable with activities."

Anne Idzal is a member of Key American Field Service, the school newspaper, the German Club, and she is a "bitter" to a young girl in the Wellesley area.

"I have accomplished something. Am not just coming home and watching operas!"

Students who have jobs say that sometimes have to cut back on their life. Lincoln Rhoads from Chicago is allowed to set his own hours, something few of his friends can do.

"Most students have lousy hours on weekends, and it hurts their socially," he points out.

Some working students and their families find that family time is diminished. Wood from Madison Park High School does get to see her mother much, since she works too.

Working students say they still find time to do homework, even though it may involve juggling. Cathy Boudreau from Madison Park High School in Roxbury works at school promptly at 2:15 p.m. three days a week. She goes home and does homework an hour before she changes her clothes to head to work at a Boston nursing home.

Despite the fact that time is tight, students successfully maintain special activities are important on college applications. Lincoln Rhoads is treasurer of the student and belongs to a bicycle club. Amy Wood plans to graduate this spring after three years of high school, also writes for the school newspaper. But it is not always easy to hold a job and extra projects.

"Either the job or my newspaper activities will have to go if my grades start to fall," Amy. She is more prepared to give up newspaper than her job.

"I've got to get good grades, but I need money," says Amy. "It is a tight rope. If not doing so well, I will drop the newspaper and pick up a class like typing."

Teens who work need the support of parents, school counselors, and employers. Employers may tailor work hours to student needs. Some work with each student, consulting his or her high school counselor for school progress.

"If we find that his grades are dropping because of work, we tell him we will cut his hours until the grades go up again," one owner of an Arby's Roast Beef Sandwich franchise. "We've got the responsibility that, because each teen needs education."

School officials can be flexible, also. Lincoln Rhoads is on the Lane Tech wrestling team, and his coach lets him give up practice three days a week for his job.

Parents of working teens need to deal priorities with their son or daughter. Lincoln Rhoads's mother.

"We have told Lincoln to work only if anything is going to happen," says Elsa Boudreau.

Living Page Editor
The Christian Science Monitor
One Norway Street
Boston, Mass. 02115

What do you think about teens taking part-time jobs? Is it important for teens to learn responsibility and independence from a job? Or does work become the first priority.