

Emerging Workforce Initiative

April 2011
Part 1 of a 3 Part Series
College and Career Readiness of Louisville's Youth

The Education and Career Goals of Louisville's Youth

The process of preparing for college and career begins long before a student completes an application for financial aid or takes the ACT. Often, before children can read they are observing the world around them and imagining what they will “be” when they grow up. Ideally, children will have many opportunities to develop the skills and understanding to shape their vision of themselves into a set of goals and plans for their future.

Unfortunately, there are indications too many youth have not developed well considered education and career plans, even by the time they are in 12th grade. While most young people eventually manage to find their way into the adult workforce, evidence suggest many struggle to complete college degrees or to adequately develop workplace skills, at least in part because they have weak education and career goals or a specific plan to make them happen.

This brief addresses three important questions that will assist educators, parents and community leaders to pinpoint strategies that effectively help young people prepare goals and plans for success:

1. What are the career and college goals of Louisville's youth and young adults?
2. What do young people believe will keep them from success?
3. What can parents, teachers, educators, community leaders and others do to help young people set attainable, important and ambitious career and education goals?

Answers to these questions rely on opinions or self-reports from young people themselves. In Louisville, there are several sources of relevant, current information on the goals of youth and young adults. Summarized in this brief is information from the following local sources:

Community Perceptions of Higher Education: How Does Greater Louisville Perceive the Value of College? This 2010 report, commissioned by the Business Leaders for Education and completed by IQS Research, summarizes the interviews of 300 students in grades 7th through 12th grades from Louisville and surrounding counties. Respondents were asked their opinions on the importance of a college degree and the challenges they perceived in earning a degree.

2008 Emerging Workers Survey Results: Louisville's Youth and Young Adults Describe Their Career and Education Plans. 803 youth and young adults (age 14 to 24 years), both in and out of school, responded to a survey conducted by the Emerging Workforce Initiative. The 2008 report revealed insights into the specific goals and perceived problems young people expect to confront in college and career.

Individual Learning Plan – Careers of Interest and Suggested Careers: Career Cruising's career and education planning tool, the ILP, is an online tool available to all middle and high

school students (including home school, public and private school students) in Kentucky. The tool assists individuals to explore options and make plans, maintaining a record of their interests and achievements over time. Because of its wide availability and longitudinal capacity, the ILP tool can help school administrators, program providers and community leaders understand how well young people are making plans for college and career. The data analyzed for this brief were compiled in January 2011 and include responses from all Jefferson County Public School 6 – 12th graders who had completed the interest inventory.

While each resource utilized different modes of data collection, general conclusions about the career and education goals of Louisville’s youth and young adults are possible. There are significant indications that Louisville’s young people:

- Believe a college degree is highly important;
- Expect to earn one or more degrees as adults;
- Have a career goal;
- Select careers that are traditional for their gender;
- Focus on a limited number of career fields;
- May be unaware of many careers in high-demand locally;
- Are uncertain of how to overcome obstacles to their goal.

In other words, many of Louisville’s young people seem to have high ambitions but lack focus and firm plans. Without the skills and knowledge needed to shape their vision into plans for their future, many of these ambitious goals will remain unrealized.

Fortunately, families, schools and entities throughout the community can create opportunities for young people to develop these skills and understanding. Through high quality workplace learning experiences (such as internships, apprenticeships or professional mentorships), individualized career and education guidance, and useful information on the local labor market and career pathways, Louisville’s youth can develop the tools they need to succeed.

**Louisville’s young people have high ambitions
but lack focus and firm plans.**

Education Goals

How important is it for high school students to get a college degree? ¹

Achieving ambitious community-wide educational attainment goals relies on equally high individual goals. The recent report, *Community Perceptions of Higher Education: How Does Greater Louisville Perceive the Value of College?*, provides timely and relevant insight into the importance of college-going to local residents.

Table 1 summarizes responses from the 300 young people interviewed, by gender. While a high percentage of male and female respondents indicate a college degree is “highly important”, there is some indications males may feel it is slightly less important compared to females.

Table 1: Importance of College Degree, Youth Respondents

	1 – Not at all important	2	3	4	5 – Extremely Important	Highly Important (4 and 5)
Male	1.05%	0.00%	3.16%	27.37%	68.42%	95.79%
Female	1.06%	0.00%	2.13%	21.28%	75.53%	96.81%

Youth respondents were also asked whether everyone needs a college degree. Nearly three in ten (28.57%) indicated a college degree is not necessary for everyone, indicating a general understanding that college is relevant for certain career fields or occupations. “(It) depends on what you want to do in life”, commented one student.

What is the highest level of education you expect to complete in your lifetime? ²

The 2008 report, *Emerging Workers Survey Results: Louisville’s Youth and Young Adults Describe Their Career and Education Plans*, also documents a high priority on college. When asked what is the highest level of education they expect to complete, 87.3% indicated a 2-year degree or higher. More than half (51.2%) expect to earn a Masters degree or higher. If Louisville’s youth understand that “college is not for everyone”, as indicated in the recent report *Community Perspectives of Higher Education*, they seem to believe they personally will complete a degree.

Table 2: Highest Level of Education Expected to Complete

	Percent of Respondents
Will not finish high school	0.2%
GED	2.1%
High school diploma	7.8%
Vocational certificate after high school	2.6%
2 year college degree	8.6%
4 year college degree	27.4%
Masters degree	26.3%
Professional degree or PhD	24.9%

Career Goals

What careers interest you? ³

All Jefferson County Public School students have an Individual Learning Plan, created by the student through a series of online activities completed in 6th through 12th grades. The ILP helps students identify careers of interest, develop specific educational goals and track their progress. When viewed collectively, the ILP can provide important insights into the career goals of Louisville’s youth. Table 3 outlines the most frequently expressed careers of interest by gender and grade level. These interests were generated when students completed a questionnaire; students were also able to add to their “careers list” and rank occupations according to preference. Careers requiring a college degree are shaded in the table below.

Table 3: Career Interests Indicated in Individual Learning Plans

	6 th Grade	7 th Grade	8 th Grade	9 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
Male							
1	Professional Athlete	Professional Athlete	Professional Athlete				
2	Video Game Developer	Video Game Developer	Musician				
3	Artist	Police Officer	Police Officer	Musician	Coach	Musician	Video Game Developer
4	Police Officer	Coach	Musician	Police Officer	Musician	Coach	Coach
5	Actor	Musician	Coach	Coach	Police Officer	Lawyer	Athletic Trainer
6	Sports Official	Artist	Lawyer	Lawyer	Actor	Doctor	Police Officer
7	National Guard	Animator	Artist	Actor	Lawyer	Athletic Trainer	Computer Engineer
8	Coach	National Guard	Actor	Artist	Architect	Actor	Lawyer
9	Stunt Person	Actor	Animator	Sports Instructor	Artist	Police Officer	Architect
10	Enlisted Armed Forces	Enlisted Armed Forces	Architect	Athletic Trainer	Athletic Trainer	Sports Instructor	Actor
Female							
1	Fashion Designer	Fashion Designer	Fashion Designer	Actor	Pediatrician	Pediatrician	Nurse
2	Singer	Actor	Actor	Fashion Designer	Nurse	Nurse	Pediatrician
3	Actor	Singer	Veterinarian	Pediatrician	Fashion Designer	Actor	Child and Youth Worker
4	Elem School Teacher	Veterinarian	Singer	Singer	Actor	Child and Youth Worker	Psychologist
5	Veterinarian	Elem School Teacher	Pediatrician	Nurse	Veterinarian	Fashion Designer	Fashion Designer
6	Artist	Nurse	Nurse	Veterinarian	Elem School Teacher	Psychologist	Actor
7	Nurse	Artist	Elem School Teacher	Lawyer	Lawyer	Lawyer	Doctor
8	Dancer	Doctor	Lawyer	Doctor	Doctor	Veterinarian	Elem School Teacher
9	Model	Dancer	Artist	Elem School Teacher	Photographer	Elem School Teacher	Photographer
10	Doctor	Pediatrician	Photographer	Photographer	Child and Youth Worker	Photographer	Early Child Educator

What job do you want to have when you are 25 years old? ⁴

The data from the ILP indicates how students' *current interests* relate to potential careers. These data are important because they can indicate how well individual students are developing career plans throughout middle and high school, how effective community-wide initiatives are impacting college and career goals, which careers that will be in demand in the future may have difficulty attracting skilled workers, and who may need additional career exploration opportunities.

Another source of information on the *career goals* of Louisville's youth and young adults is the *2008 Emerging Workers Survey*. The survey asked open ended questions about the career respondents want when they are 25 years old (approximately five to ten years in the future). Because respondents were given the opportunity to list any job, expressed in their own words, responses required some interpretation to be classified into these categories.

As outlined in Table 4, more than three in four youth had a specific goal and only five percent listed no career goal. Examples of the responses for each category are listed below the table.

Table 4: Percent of Youth with a Job Goal, by Gender

	Specific Job Goal	Several Goals or General Goal	No Goal
All respondents	78.7%	15.9%	5.4%
Male respondents	74.1%	19.1%	6.8%
Female respondents	82.0%	13.7%	4.3%

Sample of responses classified as "specific goal":

- "good paying job at GE"
- "elementary school teacher"
- "apprentice electrician"
- "P.E. teacher"
- "vice president of a hospital"

Sample of responses classified as "several goals or general goal":

- "professional soccer player or lawyer"
- "director, artist, actor, teacher, business owner"
- "nursing, hair dresser, lawyer"
- "some sort of medical job"
- "I would like to do something with my hands"

Sample of responses classified as "no goal":

- "Really don't know yet, will see after high school; may join the Air Force."
- "I want to have a successful job."
- "Hard work with good pay"

There were a wide variety of fields of interest indicated by the 78.7% of respondents stating a career goal. Table 5 lists the careers, in occupational fields, expressed by young people completing the survey. Again, because the questions regarding career goal were open-ended, some interpretation of stated goals was necessary. The table also indicates the projected demand for careers and career fields in the local area, in 2014.

Table 5: Career Goals Compared to Local Labor Market

Career Field and Occupation	Percent of Survey Respondents with this Goal	Labor Market Projections Louisville, 2014 ⁵
Medical or Health Related	23.4%	18.2%
Nurse	11.3%	
Doctor	6.5%	
Allied health	2.7%	
Pharmacist	1.4%	
Dentist	1.1%	
Hospital administration	.03	
Business Related	12.3%	26.7%
Business – own or manage	7.2%	
Office	1.9%	
Accountant	1.4%	
Real estate	1.1%	
Advertising	.03%	
Banking	.03%	
Arts and Entertainment Related	8.6%	1.1%
Music	2.8%	
Art	1.9%	
Fashion design	1.4%	
Interior design	.06%	
Photographer	.06%	
Entertainment	.06%	
Graphic design	.04%	
Law or Criminal Justice Related	8.5%	2.4%
Law or Lawyer	5.7%	
Crime scene scientist	1.3%	
Police	1.1%	
Corrections	.03%	
Science and Engineering Related	7.7%	7.1%
Engineer	3.2%	
Computer - engineering, gaming	2.9%	
Architect	1.4%	
Scientist	.01%	
Personal Care	7.2%	.3%
Cosmetologist/Hair Stylist	7.2%	
Mechanical or Trades Related	6.5%	10.7%
Mechanic - car or other	3.0%	
Construction	2.5%	
Electrician	.06%	
Welding	.03%	
Education Related	6.4%	6.3%
Teaching	5.4%	
Child care	.09%	
Sports Related	5.7%	0.3%
Sports – athlete	3.8%	
Sports – medicine, trainer	1.3%	
Sports – management, coach	.06%	
Counseling and Human Service Related	4.1%	1.7%
Psychiatrist/psychologist/therapist	2.3%	
Social worker	1.3%	

Career Field and Occupation	Percent of Survey Respondents with this Goal	Labor Market Projections Louisville, 2014 ⁵
Ministry	.04%	
Animal Related	2.5%	3.2%
Veterinarian	2.5%	
Other animal related	.07%	
Communications Related	2.3%	.01%
Broadcasting – general, sports	1.3%	
Journalism	.09%	
Writer	.01%	
Restaurant Related	1.9%	16.0%
Chef	1.7%	
Waitress	.01%	
Military Related	1.7%	--
Other	.09%	6.0%
Aviation/Pilot	.07%	
Coroner	.01%	

Challenges

What obstacles to going to college face high school students? ⁶

Louisville’s young people understand achieving their education and career goals will not be effortless. In the study, *Community Perceptions of Higher Education*, respondents indicated the following obstacles could make going to college more difficult.

Table 6: Obstacles to Going to College

Paying for College	41.30%
Balancing College & Life	29.35%
Grades & Test Scores	27.03%
Succeeding Academically	27.03%
Family Support	24.86%
Beginning	18.58%
Peer Support	15.22%

What will be the hardest thing about reaching your goals? ⁷

When youth and young adults were asked by the Emerging Workforce Initiative to complete an open ended question about what they believed would make achieving their goals most difficult, responses varied.

43.2% Related to School

“All the schoolwork and stress”
 “Being in school for a long time”
 “Choosing the best college to go to”
 “Maintaining good grades”

25.6% Related to Focus and Hard Work

“Believing I can and not giving up”
 “Committing myself”
 “Doing all the work it takes!”
 “All the work”
 “Not getting side tracked”
 “Making myself stick with it”

13.7% Related to Resources

“Financial problems”
 “Knowing who to talk to”
 “Money for college”
 “Finding someone who will mentor”

7.0% Related to Other Issues

“Figuring out what to do”
 “Getting up for class”
 “Its gonna take a lot of time”
 “Trying to balance everything else”
 “Time management”

6.1% Related to Obstacles

“Distraction throughout school”
 “My life struggle”
 “People bringing me down”
 “Staying out of trouble”
 “Going through people that will try to stop me”
 “Having kids”

4.3% Related to Demands of the Career

“Getting in the industry”
 “Physical and mental strength”
 “Practicing”
 “The paperwork and process of getting the job”

Where do you go for assistance? ⁸

The Emerging Worker Survey asked young people who they rely on for assistance with the challenges they expect to face in reaching their goals. Parents were consistently the source of support and guidance in matters relating to college and career. In Table 7, respondents indicated the type of individual or entity they turn to for help with different needs (respondents could select more than one).

Table 7: Sources of Assistance

	Parent, Guardian	Teachers, Mentors	Friends, Siblings	School Counselor	Community Program
Finding a job	62.27%	25.28%	49.44%	16.31%	15.82%
Deciding on a career	60.15%	34.12%	25.53%	26.03%	10.71%
Choosing a college	58.78%	40.47%	26.77%	38.73%	9.59%
Learning what jobs are like	60.02%	38.23%	33.37%	22.79%	19.05%
Learning skills for a job	52.68%	43.34%	26.90%	25.40%	17.68%
Preparing for a job interview	66.00%	36.24%	28.02%	22.04%	14.20%

Next Steps

The information reviewed in this brief indicate Louisville's youth and young adults understand the value of higher education and intend to earn one or more college degrees in their lifetime. Most young people have an idea of the career field or occupation they would like to enter. These results reflect a level of ambition and optimism necessary to reach important individual and community wide goals.

However, the information reviewed also points out problems:

- **Demand-Supply Mismatch:** Some career fields in high demand locally attract the interest of few youth and young adults (such as business and the trades). Some careers with very limited opportunities in Louisville have high level of interest (such as professional sports and video game developer). Educational goals seem to be much higher overall than career goals require and much higher than will be required in the labor market.
- **Specific Plans Needed:** There is little indication young people have specific or realistic plans for reaching their goals in the resources reviewed for this brief. We don't know whether they understand the specific steps or "career pathway" they must take. While the ILP is clearly a tool for assistant young people to develop a plan, there is little evidence that it is currently doing so. Also, youth seem keenly aware of the obstacles they will confront, but we do not understand whether they know how to overcome the problems.
- **Disparities May Exist:** This brief highlights the differences in the career and college goals of male and female students. There is some indication male students are not developing goals at the same level as female students and that they may not believe they will complete college.

While these sources of information have shed light on the college and career goals of Louisville's youth and young adults, several questions remain: What barriers make goal setting more difficult for students and can they be generalized by any demographic characteristic; How well aligned are students' career and college goals (that is, do students plan to achieve an educational level that matches their career goal); What can schools, parents and community groups do to help youth and young adults make education and work related goals and how will we know when we are succeeding?

Fortunately, there are steps families, schools and entities throughout the community can take to address these, and related, problems:

1. **Provide high quality workplace learning experiences** (such as internships, apprenticeships or professional mentorships);
2. **Develop opportunities for individualized career and education guidance** that introduce youth to information on the local labor market and career pathways;
3. **Identify a method for continually evaluating** how well Louisville's young people set college and career goals, understand local education and occupational options, and make decisions about their future;
4. **Evaluate whether programs are helpful** and how they can expand their reach.

The second and thirds parts of this series, *College and Career Readiness of Louisville's Youth*, review the challenges of youth unemployment and the local programs that provide youth readiness services.

For more information on the Emerging Workforce Initiative, a nonprofit organization committed to preparing all young people for college and career, visit our website: www.emergingworkforce.org.

¹ *Community Perceptions of Higher Education: How Does Greater Louisville Perceive the Value of College?* Prepared by IQS Research for the Business Leaders for Education, 2010

² *2008 Emerging Workers Survey Results: Louisville's Youth and Young Adults Describe Their Career and Education Plans*. Prepared by Emerging Workforce Initiative, 2008

³ *Individual Learning Plan – Careers of Interest and Suggested Careers*. Data extracted by Jefferson County Public Schools, January 2011.

⁴ *2008 Emerging Workers Survey Results: Louisville's Youth and Young Adults Describe Their Career and Education Plans*. Prepared by Emerging Workforce Initiative, 2008

⁵ Projected labor force data were extrapolated from the Bureau for Labor Statistics.

⁶ *Community Perceptions of Higher Education: How Does Greater Louisville Perceive the Value of College?* Prepared by IQS Research for the Business Leaders for Education, 2010

⁷ *2008 Emerging Workers Survey Results: Louisville's Youth and Young Adults Describe Their Career and Education Plans*. Prepared by Emerging Workforce Initiative, 2008

⁸ *2008 Emerging Workers Survey Results: Louisville's Youth and Young Adults Describe Their Career and Education Plans*. Prepared by Emerging Workforce Initiative, 2008

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