

Assessing Adult Learner Needs in Carver County: Field Report



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Personal Interview with Manufacturers at the Education/Job Fair on April 7, 2016

This analysis was conceived as part of the Resilient Communities Project, an award-winning, cross-disciplinary program at the University of Minnesota that supports one-year partnerships between the University and communities in Minnesota to advance local sustainability and resilience. RCP's 2015–2016 partnership was with Carver County and its partners, which included the Carver County Community Development Agency, SouthWest Transit, Eastern Carver County School District (ISD 112), and the Cities of Victoria, Chaska, and Watertown.

The goal of the project was to assess adult learner needs in Carver County in order to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive joint effort to strengthen adult learning options in Carver County.

With this in mind, existing recent Community Profiles data (community profiles) from the Metropolitan Council have been compiled; new data was extracted from recent records from the Carver County Workforce Center (DHS & DEED) and the SouthWest Metro Educational Cooperative (ECCS), especially for this study. In addition, new information has been collected from two surveys: One survey was distributed to Carver County manufacturers (appendix 1) with the assistance of the Southwest Chamber of Commerce; the other survey was given to the students of Adult Basic Education in Chanhassen and Chaska (appendix 2). Finally, personal interviews were conducted with 21 people from education, the manufacturing industry, the workforce center and other employment specialists to find the reasoning and meaning behind the numbers. The report concludes with four recommendations.

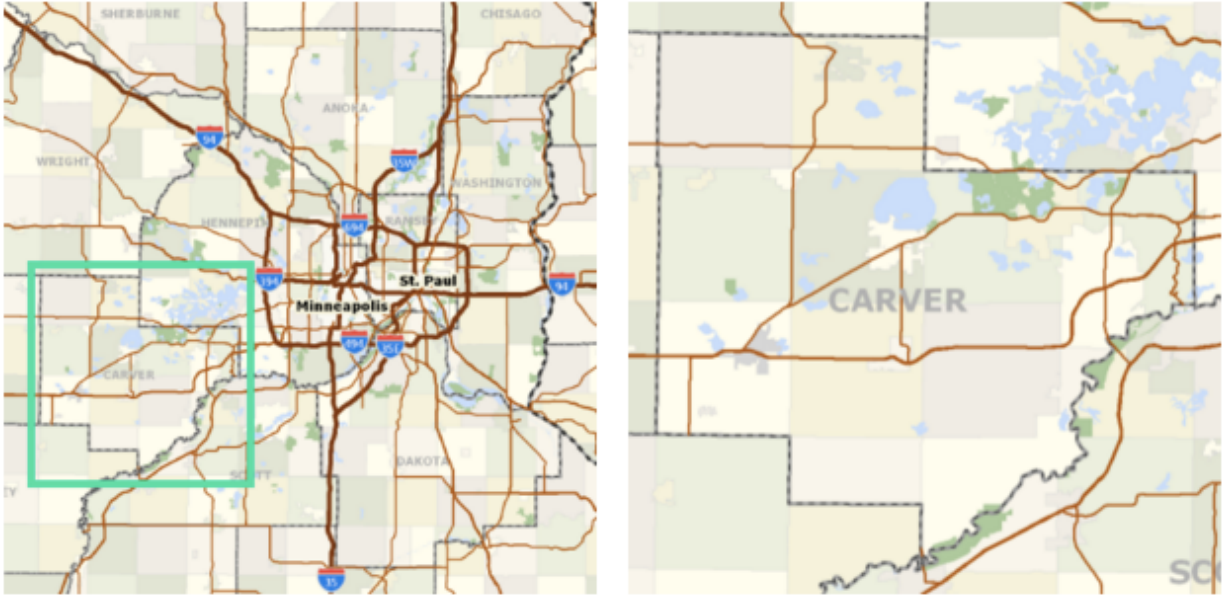
GEOGRAPHY

Carver county is one of the seven Twin Cities counties, located Southwest of the two downtowns (map 1). It has an area of 375.7 sq. miles or 240,480 acres of which 13,154 acres are parts of recreation and preserves, which is a very large area considering its location within the metropolitan area (Community Profiles). The area is very attractive with rolling hills, the Minnesota river and 7 lakes. 5.8% is water. People who want to get away from the busy city and look for open space feel attracted to Carver County.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The population has steadily grown and is expected to continue growing; as of the 2000 census, the population was 70,205; in 2010, the population was 91,042; in 2014 it was 97,162 and according to the forecast, there will be 108,520 people by 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau [Decennial Census](#), [Metropolitan Council Annual Estimates](#), and [Metropolitan Council Forecasts](#)).

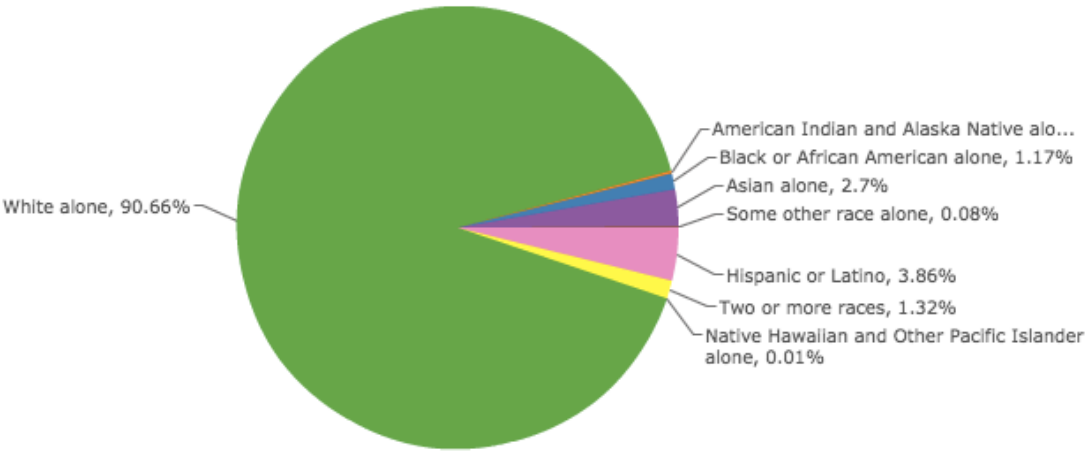
For the purpose of this study, information is provided for the Eastern part of the Carver County where the two biggest cities, Chaska and Chanhassen are located.



Map 1. Map :<http://giswebsite.metc.state.mn.us/> Retrieved from <http://stats.metc.state.mn.us/profile/detail.aspx?c=019>

The majority of the population is white (90%), between 25 and 55 years old with an average of 2 – 3 children. Next is the Hispanic or Latino population with 3.8% (Community profiles, map 2). There is a noticeably small number of 20-24 year-old age group that is mysteriously absent.

Population by Race and Ethnicity in Carver County

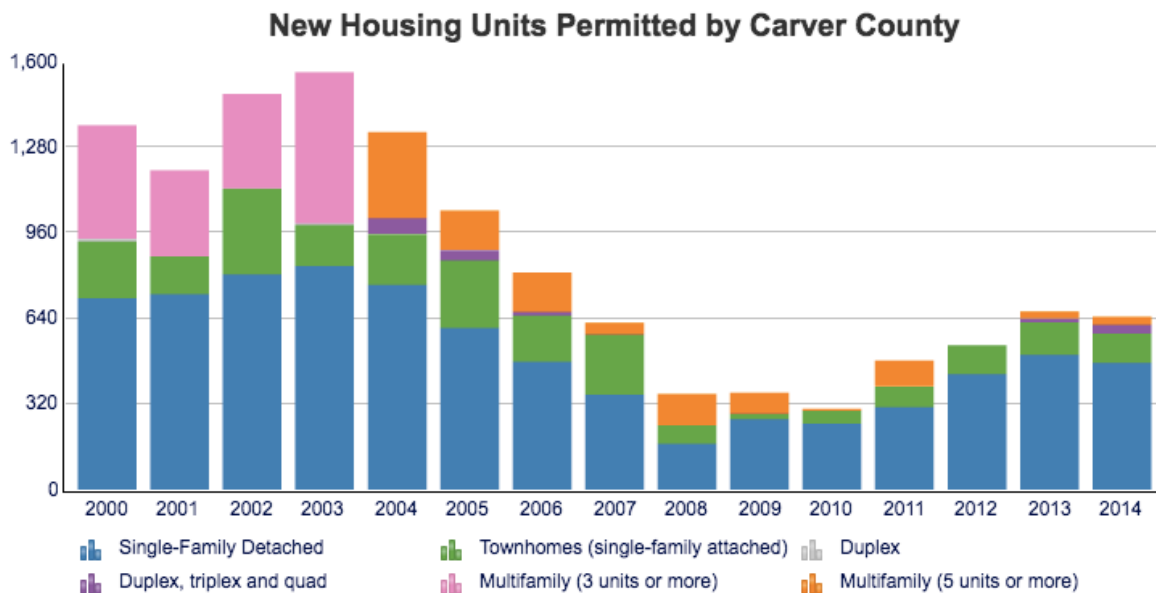


Source: U.S. Census Bureau [Decennial Census](#) or [American Community Survey](#).

HOUSING

Carver County is a wealthy area. Overall, the cost of living is 125.70% of U.S. average and housing is 166%. According to Trulia Real Estate, the median sales price for a home is \$337,000 in Chanhassen and \$224,000 in Chaska (Trulia). The increase in population requires an increase in housing and the residential building permit survey clearly shows that more than two thirds of the houses are single-family detached houses and a very small percentage are multifamily units (map 3).

It becomes clear that this is an affluent area with very few pockets of low-income housing. There is one trailer park and subsidized rentals in Carver County are limited. Carver County Community Development Agency currently owns and manages 81 units of public housing. (CDC)



Note: Between 2003 & 2004 housing unit type definitions changed: Duplex category was expanded to include duplex, triplex and quad, and the definition of multifamily changed from 3 or more units to 5 or more units.

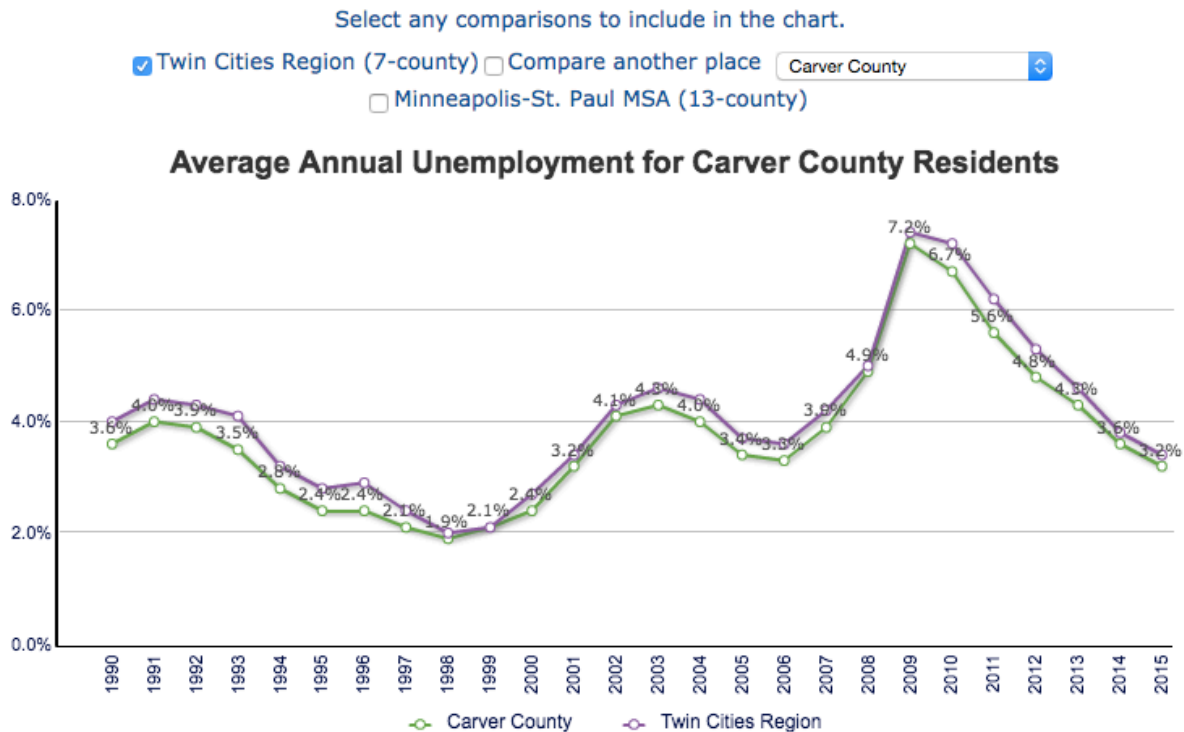
Source: Metropolitan Council Residential Building Permit Survey.

TRANSPORTATION

There is no local bus transportation within Carver County, only to specific locations in Eden Prairie and Hennepin County. It is much easier to go by bus to Eden Prairie and downtown Minneapolis than to another area within the County. This is consistent with the statistics that show that the majority of the Carver County population works in Eden Prairie and Minneapolis. However, last Summer SouthWest Transit started a program called "SouthWest Prime". Anybody can call and be driven from and to any place in Chaska, Chanhassen and downtown Carver and Eden Prairie. Rides are available from 6:30AM to 6 PM and cost \$3.00 per ride. Riders have to call one hour prior and there is no booking in advance (SW Transit). Although this is of great benefit, it still doesn't work for people who work night shifts.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment rate is low at 3.2 % versus 3.7% for Minnesota and 4.9 as national rate (DEED).



Source: [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. Current year data average monthly data year-to-date. [Download chart data.](#)

Data requested from the Carver County Workforce Center distinguished the specific groups that were unemployed in 2015 and their education level. It showed that among the 39 Diversionary Work Program participants (DWP) 10 people had below HS (26%), and 21 had GED/HS as highest degree (54%). Among 44 MN Family Investment Program participants (MFIP), 16 people had below HS (36%), and 22 had a GED/HS as highest degree (50%) (DHS & DEED).

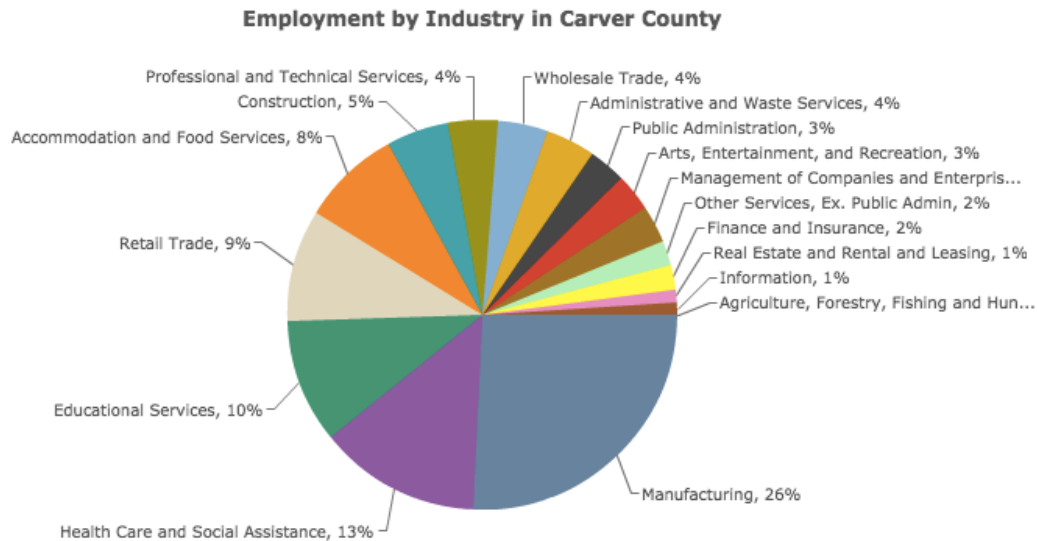
INDUSTRY

Carver County is known for its abundance of manufacturers. According to the 2014 data of the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 26% of the total employment works in manufacturing. This is the reason why manufacturing was selected for this study.

The second reason is that the majority of the entry-level employees find a job in manufacturing and that this can be a stepping stone for better paying jobs and for additional training. These entry-level employees often can benefit from ESL, computer and/or GED classes.

The attached survey (see Appendix 1) was prepared and distributed directly to the manufacturers with the assistance of Lori Anderson, president of SouthWest Chamber of

Commerce; one questionnaire was returned. Although this was the only sample, it is believed to be very representative and was later reconfirmed by the answers received from the manufacturers themselves during the job fair on April 7, on-line research and the job postings advertised this Spring. The questions lead to useful findings.



Source: [Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages](#), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2nd quarter data; Metropolitan Council staff have estimated some data points.

WORK AVAILABILITY, WORK ENVIRONMENT AND CHALLENGES

There are plenty of jobs available in Carver Country’s manufacturing business. The vacant positions are at all levels, but demand is greatest for the manufacturing line, technicians and machining. It is hard to find quality employees who are reliable. Because the unemployment rate is very low 3.2 % (unemployment chart), people have a lot of options and have a tendency to avoid manufacturing because of the work schedule in shifts, the mostly noisy, sometimes dirty or cold work environment and the long cold nightly commutes. Manufacturers are raising their wages but are still complaining that their employees don’t have the skills they need to operate the machines. In general, students lack math skills, are not attracted to go to technical school, do not like to work in a noisy manufacturing plant and shun a shift schedules in the night even though an excellent paying job is waiting for them a year before they graduate from a two-year program.

There are plenty of jobs available; for example, on March 29, 2016, the “INDEED” job list had 18 entry-level types of jobs available in Chaska and Chanhassen only (with possibly more than one opening per type). These were entry-level jobs that required “ability to read and write basic English; basic computer skills; previous experience not required”. This was more than double that in any other suburb of the Twin Cities.

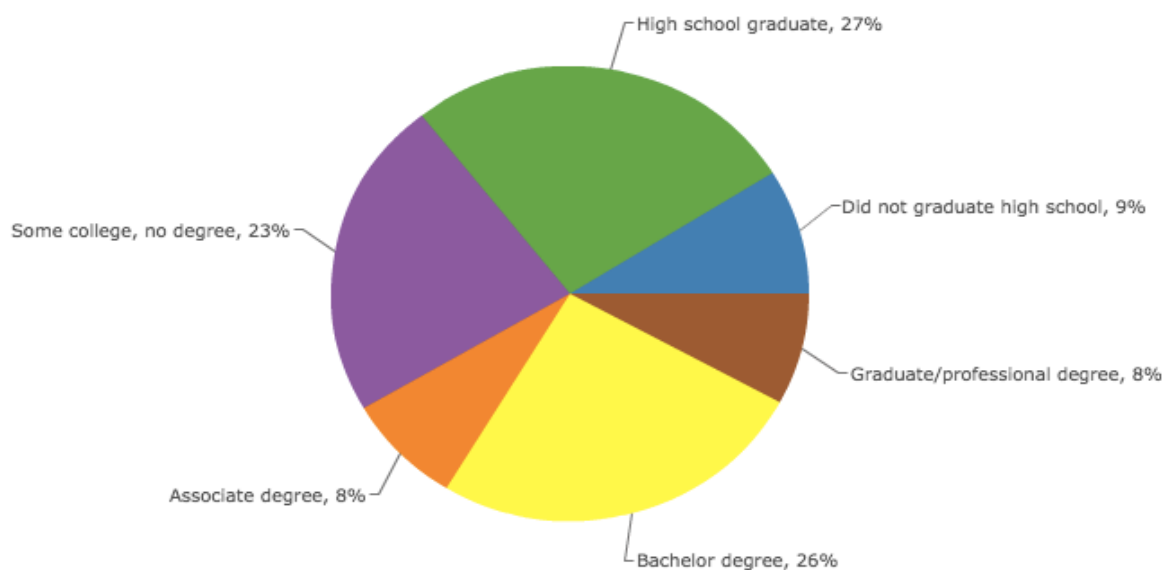
Especially entry-level jobs are hard to fill because of low wages, long shifts, irregular work and transportation issues. The companies purchase very expensive equipment that forces them to keep operations going day and night in order to beat the competition. Hence the 24-hour operation schedule. Shifts are 8, 10 and 12 hours long. People work 5 days for 8 hours, or 4 days for 10 hours or 3 days for 12 hours. For some this is advantageous as they can take turns working with other members of the family and cut down on daycare expenses or work two full-time jobs.

Manufacturers mainly rely on immigrants to do the entry-level jobs. They recruit people with no GED, no math, no English (if somebody else in the company speaks their language), and have van transportation to and from work (through the employment agencies that charge the employees for the daily commute).

Production is not always steady as they have high and low seasons. Therefore, manufacturers work with temp agencies, especially for production and packaging. One company works with **four** different temp agencies to meet their needs. One staffing agency confirmed that they recruit entry-level employees from as far as the east side of St. Paul. This is temporary work that is unreliable, can fluctuate day-to-day, low pay (the agency receives a percentage of the wage), long hours, often requires a two-hour commute and no benefits. They recruit immigrants who rely on each other to communicate with the supervisors.

EDUCATION

Highest Level of Education Attained by Carver County Residents



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census or American Community Survey.

Looking at the education chart of the Census Bureau, it is obvious that most people living in Carver County will not be looking for an entry-level position. 65% of the population has graduate degrees, bachelors, associate or some college education. 27% has only a high school degree and just 8% don't (cf. unemployment). The latter often don't have a car which is a big problem in a suburb where public transportation is very limited (cf. transportation).

ESL STUDENTS SURVEY

A questionnaire (appendix 2) was distributed to 32 students, all of whom completed the form. There is a clear distinction between students who have arrived before and after 2010. Of the 18 people who arrived before 2010, 11 are working, 6 don't and one is retired. Of the 14 people who arrived after 2010, 7 are working, 6 are not working and one is retired. The people who arrived recently have great dreams; 5 want to go to college, an additional 3 want to be a nurse, some want to own their own business or teach. Whether students had arrived before 2000 or after 2010 didn't make much difference in their English language achievement; they were evenly distributed among the three levels. The people who are working have the following jobs: machine operator, assembly, preschool teacher, cook, housekeeper, massage and accountant.

Although race was not a question on the questionnaire, about 2/3 of the ESL students appeared Hispanic. When talking to the students, they are very much aware that learning English will lead to a better paying job. Some came from Texas and realized that the situation in Minnesota is very different from the South. In Texas they could function and work without English knowledge; this is not the case in Minnesota.

ABE STUDENTS

Additional data for all 169 ABE students according to the Marcs Reports (Marcs) provided the following information. The majority of ABE students in Carver County is Latino between 25 and 44 years old, followed by 45-59 years old.

Age	Number of learners	Percentage
16-18	7	4%
19-24	23	14%
25-44	101	60%
45-59	30	18%
60 and older	8	5%

Race	Female	Female %	Male	Male %	Total %
Latino	65	38 %	26	15 %	54 %
Asian	30	18 %	5	3 %	21%

White	16	9 %	10	6%	15 %
Black/AA	11	6.5%	6	4%	10%

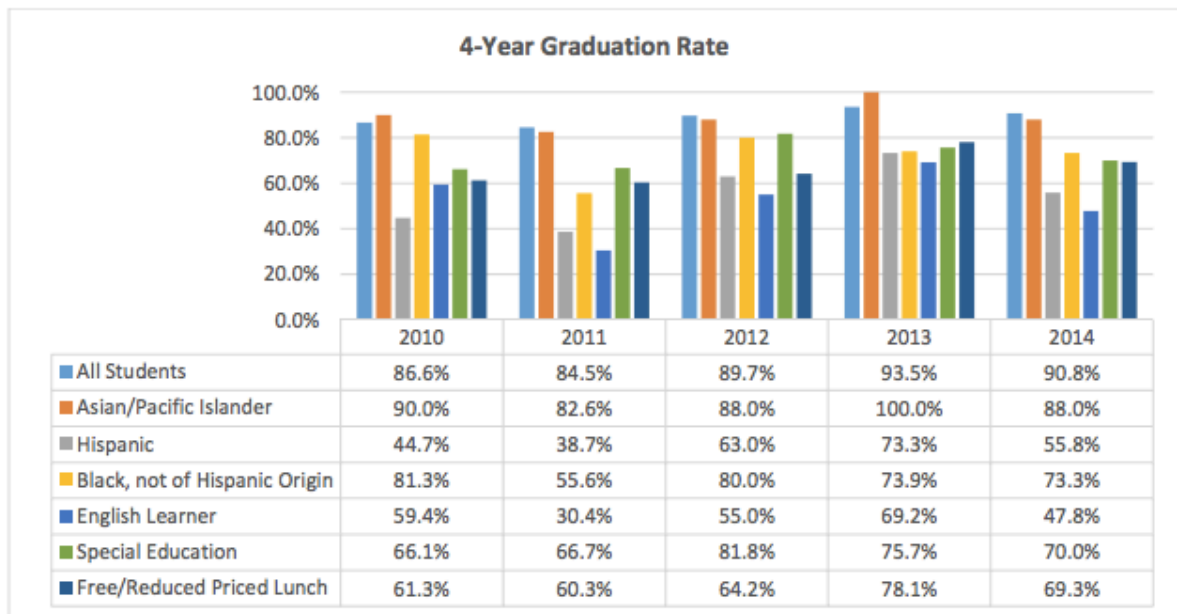
Education level: There is no correlation between last school grade and the ESL level
 All students who have a high school degree or above are non US citizen, except for one student who is disabled and one who is 69 years old.

There were 80 drop-outs out of 397 students in 2014-15 or 20% and up till now 67 drop-outs out of 292 students in 2015-16 or 23%; this includes people who left school to start a job.
 (Marcs)

Eastern Carver Country School Report for 2014-15

Eastern Carver County schools has reached the 2020 4-year cohort graduation rate goal of 90% for all students.” Their goal is to “increase their 4-year graduation rate by 2% from their starting percentage in 2015 and 2016.” (ECCS report 2015, V).

The chart below clearly shows the striking achievement gap between all the students (90.8) and the Hispanic students (55.8%) in 2014. The report includes additional charts comparing white students with Hispanic students in reading (76.4 versus 43.7 in 2014) and in math (72.8 versus 35.4) (ECCS Report).



Source: Eastern Carver County Schools Report, 2015

Case Study: Latino population

The disparity in education and type of work of the Latino population made it appealing to search for the underlying reasons. It became obvious that this is a complex issue with different elements to consider.

Demographics

There is a large increase in recent Latino immigration.

“In 1990, only 15% of Latino residents in the Twin Cities region were born abroad. While in 2010-2014, 42% of Latino residents were born outside the US, compared to 2% non-Latino residents. The Latino population is younger and more likely to self-report lower English language skills. Latino residents – as a whole – are younger. Data from 2010-2-14 show over 2/3 of Latino residents (69%) are under age 35 compared with 43% of White residents” (MetroStats)

These differences matter because they are associated with lower employment rates, less income and lower home ownership rates.

Education

“Latinos show the lowest level of educational attainment” (Metropolitan Council 2015). Immigrants in general, but especially the unauthorized have very low levels of education. For example, less than 2% non-Latino have less than a 9th grade education, but 15% of legal Latinos and 32% of unauthorized immigrants do. We have to keep in mind that in Mexico the compulsory attendance level was 6th grade until 2013 when it was raised to 9th grade (three years beyond elementary school). Even in Mexico, the drop-out rate is high (Educational System in Mexico).

According to the US statistics, the drop-out rate is 21% for legal immigrants and about 50% for unauthorized youth. However, we have to understand that “drop-out” means not completed high school, while many of the immigrant youth who are classified as “dropouts” never actually attended school in the U.S (Portela). If there is poverty, they urge their kids to go to work to assist the family rather than to encourage them to finish high school and continue school in order to obtain a better living standard than their parents.

Before 2013, there were very few private scholarships and foundations that were available to unauthorized students. In May 2013 Governor Dayton signed the MN Dream Act with the implication that unauthorized students who meet the criteria, are now eligible for in-state tuition rates, privately funded financial aid administered by Minnesota public colleges and universities and can apply for state financial aid (MN Office of Higher Education).

Culture

Culture also plays a big role. Motherhood is an important goal for women in Latino culture, and a mother is expected to sacrifice for her children and take care of elderly relatives. Although acculturation have affected women’s roles, they still persist. Especially, as Latino families tend to have larger families, the mother stays home to take care of the children. In addition, the term “familia” goes beyond the nuclear family, and includes the extended family. Family members have the responsibility to aid other members of the family who are in financial trouble. Hence, it is not unusual that there is one income of an unskilled worker that has to provide for an extended family, especially in unauthorized families. Thus, the average income

per person in unauthorized families is about 40% less than legal immigrant families and more than 50% below the US per capita income. (Portela)

Language

Low English language skills is another problem. As 42% of Latinos were born outside the U.S., it is not surprising that 37% self-report that they speak English “less than very well”. (Metropolitan Council, 2016). In addition, Latinos have the desire to preserve their language and continue to use Spanish when living in the U.S. As most mothers raise their children and speak Spanish at home, these children often start school with a disadvantage, having to catch up from the beginning. They sometimes are taken out of school to function as interpreters. It isn’t likely that they will receive the family support to study if the parents haven’t been exposed to the US education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Attract more entry-level employees to move to Carver County. This means attracting more immigrants, providing more low-income housing and better transportation. (\$6 per ride is reasonable, but shift workers need it when shifts start and finish).
2. Encourage people to take vocational training in order to operate the more sophisticated machinery. This means improving math skills in elementary, middle and high school supplemented by homework, finish high school or GED, and complete short technical programs, preferably within reasonable distance.
3. Strengthen the Latino community by supporting them to finish high school and to inform them that schooling is needed in order to earn a living wage.
4. If manufacturers would hire more low-income people/entry-level employees as permanent employees, they could assist with ESL education and technical training and hopefully also provide standard benefits.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire for Manufacturing Companies

1. What's your need for entry-level employees?
2. What skills are you looking for?
3. What are your challenges? please rank 1 - 5 with 1 not at all, 2 somewhat, 3 YES, 4 high and 5 very high
 - English
 - computer skills
 - punctuality and business behavior
 - length of shift
 - location - public transportation
 - wage
 - turnover
4. If the project could do something to help your business, what would you like it to be?

Appendix 2

Questions for ESL Students

1. When did you arrive in the USA? In.....
2. What classes are you taking now? Circle one: ESL beginners, ESL intermediate, ESL advanced, GED or other training
3. Are you working? Y – N ; What work do you do? _____
4. Do you like to work? Y – N
5. What type of work would you like to do 3 – 5 years from now?

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