WEST CENTRAL MOUNTAINS
BUSINESS NEEDS ASSESSMENT
2018

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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
IDAHO POLICY INSTITUTE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can understanding the plans of high school students and workforce needs in the West Central Mountains Region of Idaho inform workforce development in the region?

To answer this question, Boise State University's Idaho Policy Institute partnered with West Central Mountains Economic Development Council to analyze the workforce needs of the region. Research included utilizing secondary data and a survey of businesses to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing the region's business community. The key findings of this 'SWOT ' analysis indicate that wages are high and businesses in the region are growing. However, businesses are seeing both high rates of turnover and large gaps in the labor pool - particularly when it comes to entry level positions and positions requiring skilled labor and technical expertise and experience. The housing market and overall cost of living may be contributing to these challenges. Opportunities for both continued and new partnerships with the Idaho Department of Labor, Idaho Department of Commerce, local school districts, Boise State University, University of Idaho and College of Western Idaho could support low residency and distance-learning apprenticeship and training programs to help alleviate employment needs. The student survey addendum further informs the SWOT analysis and helps identify future workforce development partnerships and programs.

OVERVIEW

Examining an organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) provides structure to analyze how an organization can strategically advance their work while taking into consideration internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors. This report discusses an analysis of the business sector in the West Central Mountains Region (WCMR) of Idaho. It provides objective information about the strengths and weaknesses of the region's business community as well as the opportunities and threats confronting the region. This SWOT analysis can inform West Central Mountains Economic Development Council's (WCMEDC) effort to fulfill its commitment to a dynamic, sustainable regional economy through business retention and expansion efforts, and promote programming from their regional partners. The structure and process of the SWOT analysis were guided by a comprehensive review of the available literature. For a full write-up of the literature, see Appendix A.

LIMITATIONS

The following report summarizes the information gathered from secondary data analysis and a survey of businesses in the WCMR. The student survey addendum further informs the SWOT analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This research project utilized two surveys to help identify the gap that exists between workforce needs in the WCMR and the career aspirations of juniors and seniors in the region's high schools. Secondary data also informed the analysis. This report focuses on the first survey of businesses in the region.

BUSINESS SURVEY

The business survey was designed to assess the status of the current workforce in the region and was distributed to local employers. Local employers across a variety of sectors were identified by the regional Chambers of Commerce and West Central Mountain Economic Development Council. The survey sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the status of your current workforce?
2. How do you think your workforce needs might change in the near future (three years)?

The first set of questions in the survey assess the health of a business' workforce and identifies its needs, and the challenges encountered in the hiring stages. Two units of analysis were used (1) Job classification, and (2) Skills. Together, identifying job classifications and skills, the survey revealed the levels of employment and the corresponding skills that businesses are currently successfully fulfilling, and which levels of employment and skill sets businesses are struggling to fill. The survey also asked businesses to share information about the desired level of education and experience they prefer candidates for each job classification to hold. The IPI research team consulted with the Idaho Department of Labor (DOL) to identify the job classifications and skills that were relevant and prominent in the state, and confirmed the language that was included in the survey to describe skills and job classifications.

A job classification describes a level of position within a business. It is possible for a variety of positions to be included in the same classification. The job classifications described in the survey were:

- C-Suite
- Director
- Senior Management
- Junior Management
- Skilled Labor / Technical Skills
- Entry Level (some experience)
- Entry Level (no experience)

The survey also allowed for participants to describe job classifications in their business that were not adequately represented in this list.

The Idaho DOL also shared a list of skills with the IPI research team most commonly expressed in job postings in the state. The skills were divided into two separate lists, the first described as 'occupational skills' and the second described as 'personal attributes.' The skills represented on the survey are as followed:

TABLE 1: OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS

Occupational Skills		
Accounting and Bookkeeping	Electrician	Mechanic
Administration	EMT / Paramedic	Nursing Assistant Certification
Bank Teller	Equipment Operating (excavation, road maintenance)	Physical Therapy
Barista	Fire (firefighter)	Plumbing
Bartending	Flooring Installation	Police (law enforcement officer)
Basic Math	Forestry Technician (resource, timber, fire, wildlife)	Radiology / CT Technician
Building/Grounds Maintenance	Home Health Care (care-giver, personal care assistance)	Registered Nurse
Cashier / Clerk	Host / Hostess	Restaurant Staff
Child Care	Housekeeping	Sawmill Labor
Computer Knowledge / Software Specific Knowledge	HVAC Installation and Servicing	Skilled Carpentry (framing / roofing, dry walling)
Cooking (chef, line cook, prep cook)	IT Analytics	Teaching (teacher / teacher's aide)
Customer Service	Kitchen Management	Truck Driving (Class A and Class B Commercial)
Delivery Driving	Manager / Supervisor	Welding (fabricator)

The personal attributes outlined in the survey:

TABLE 2: PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

Personal attributes		
Adaptable and Flexible	Good Written Communication	Positive Attitude
Detail-Oriented	Honest and Loyal	Reliable and Dependable
Goal-Oriented	Leadership	Strategic Planning
Good Verbal Communication	Motivation to Grow and Learn	Team Player

DESIGN AND DISTRIBUTION OF BUSINESS SURVEY

The business survey was designed on a software platform called Qualtrics and distributed to businesses in the WCMR via email. A total of 405 emails for chamber members were provided to the IPI research team. An additional 16 public sector agencies were identified by the client as important stakeholders. The IPI research team sourced email addresses for these public offices via the internet and inquiries made by phone to the agency offices. Overall, the survey was distributed to 421 participants. A number of emails did not arrive successfully and the final sample size was 385. The survey remained in the field for a total of 20 days.

RESULTS

## BUSINESSES' NEEDS

INDUSTRY AND JOB CLASSIFICATION

The business survey received 102 responses, for a response rate of 26.5%. Responses were representative of 10 industrial sectors. The most common industry category among the respondents was accommodation and food services, followed by retail trade. The industry distribution among respondents closely matched the distribution of industry in the region, with a slight overrepresentation from accommodation and food service businesses. These two sectors each represent 12% of the total business sector in Valley County. In Adams County accommodations and food services account for 9% and retail trade represents 10% of the business sector (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

FIGURE 1: INDUSTRY REPRESENTATION

26 Accomodation and Food Services

3 Construction

3 Educational Services

4 Finance / Insurance

7 Health Care and Social Assistance

7 Professional, Scientific & Technical Services

4 Government and Public Administration

4 Real Estate, Rental & Leasing

11 Retail Trade

9 Tourism / Recreation

5 Other

Survey respondents most often reported employing entry level workers with some experience, followed by skilled/technical labor. Likewise, these same two employment categories were the most commonly needed. Roughly 53% of businesses reported needing entry level workers with some experience, while 38% needed skilled and technical labor. Entry level workers with no experience are also in high demand, with approximately 37% of employers reporting a shortage in that category.

FIGURE 2: NEEDED EMPLOYEES

Number of Responses
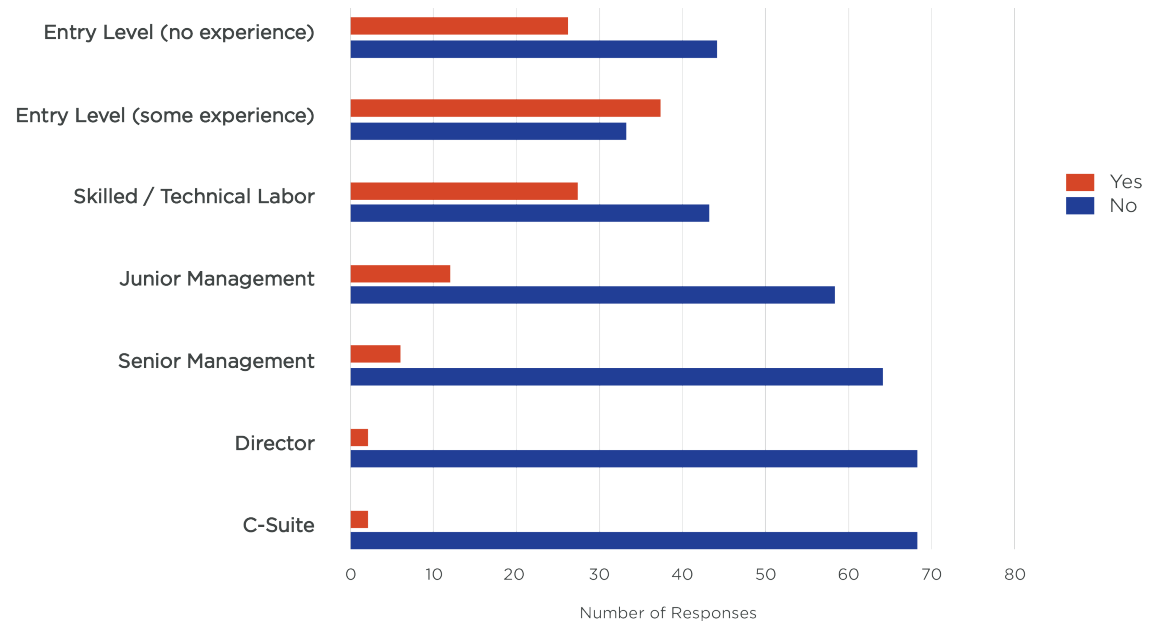
Seasonal jobs made up the smallest percentage of jobs in each position, except for entry level - no experience, as reported by respondents. Respondents most commonly indicated that their entry level (both no experience and some experience) jobs could be both seasonal and year round. This indicates that seasonality may contribute to some labor instability, but does not make up the majority of jobs.

FIGURE 3: SEASONAL OR YEAR-ROUND

Number of Responses
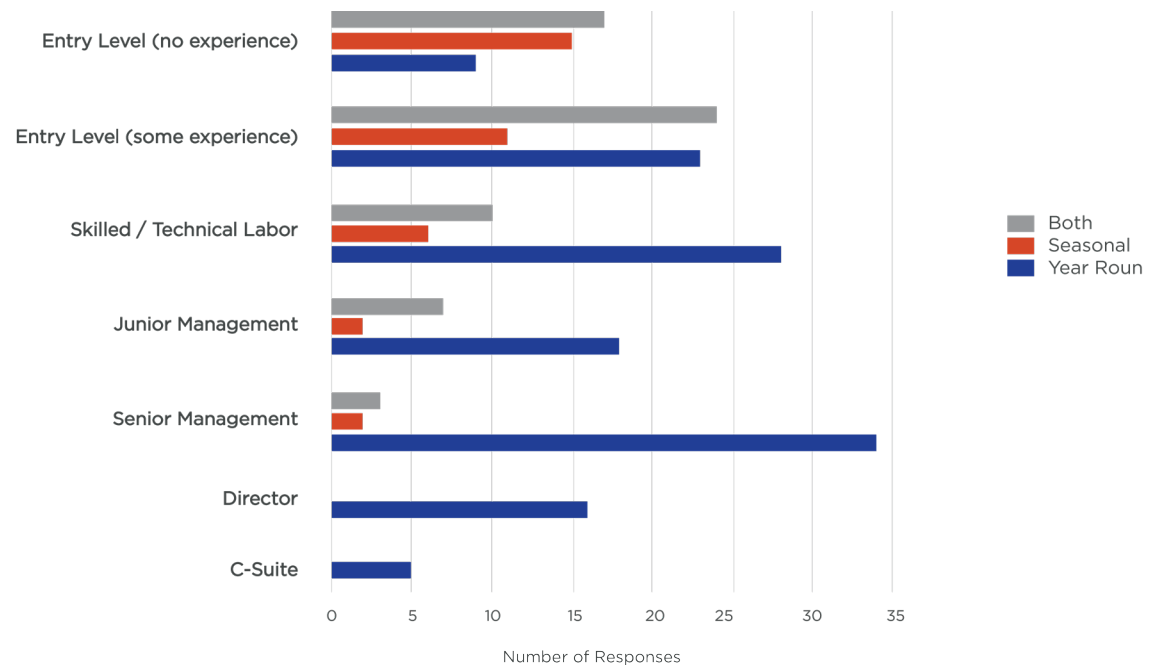
EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

A high school diploma was the minimum educational requirement that employers reported for junior management, skilled/technical labor, and entry level (some experience) positions, while entry level (no experience) position requirements were distributed equally between "some high school" and "high school diploma." Upper level positions, such as senior management, director and C-Suite, were reported to have a broader range of minimum educational requirements. Preferred educational requirements were also broader across positions, although a high school diploma remained the most common answer for entry level and skilled/technical labor positions (closely followed by technical certification for skilled/technical labor positions).

FIGURE 4: MINIMUM EDUCATION

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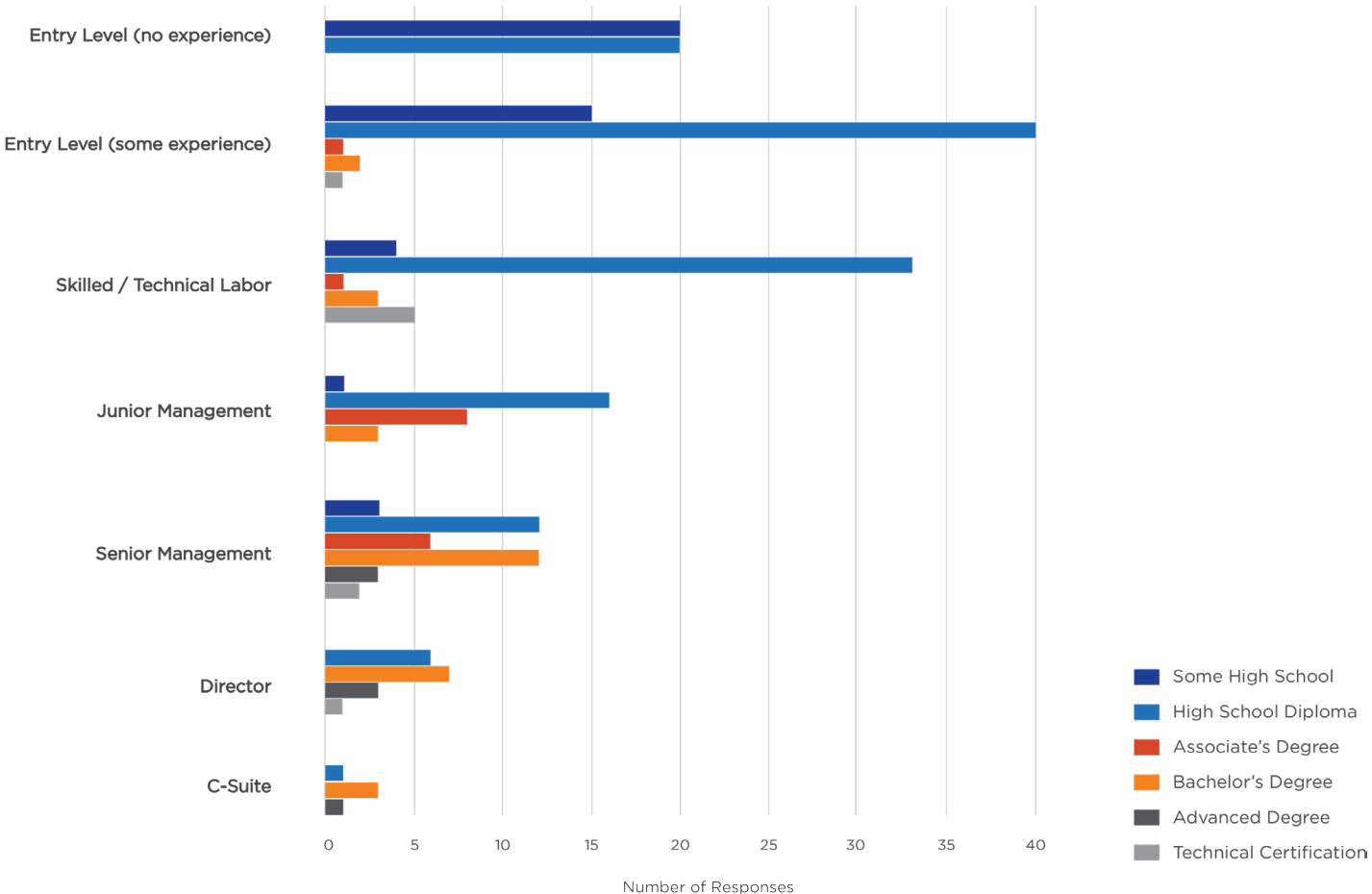
Regarding minimum experience requirements, entry level (some experience), skilled/technical labor, and junior management positions all most commonly required 6 months - 2 years of experience, while higher level positions most commonly required 3 - 5 years. These observations remain the same when looking at preferred experience for each position, with the exception being that the most commonly preferred level of experience for senior management and C-Suite positions is 6 - 10 years.

The survey results indicate that there is a relatively low educational and experience barrier for those seeking to enter the workforce in this area, particularly for entry level and skilled/technical labor positions.

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING EMPLOYEE EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

The majority of respondents reported that applicants' experience levels met their expectations for each position, with the exception of senior management applicants (60% reported that their applicants were not meeting expectations). Apart from senior management, skilled/technical labor applicants received the largest percentage of dissatisfied responses, with 45% of employers reporting that their applicants for this position were not meeting their educational expectations.

Experience expectation responses were similar. The majority of respondents reported that applicants met their expectations in all positions save for senior management (80% reported that applicants were not meeting expectations). Apart from senior management, entry level (some experience) position applicants received the largest percentage of dissatisfied responses, with 43% of employers reporting that their applicants for this position were not meeting experience expectations.

The findings in the survey indicate that although respondents were generally satisfied with the education and experience that their applicants possess, there is a potential demand for educational and experiential offerings that could create a stronger applicant pool. When it comes to the residents of the WCMR that make up the local labor pool, more than half of the residents over age 25 in Valley and Adams Counties have achieved a high school diploma or less; 6% of residents from each county have an Associate's Degree; 21% of residents in Valley County have a Bachelor's Degree, while only 14% of Adams County residents have one; and 10% of Valley County residents have an advanced degree compared to 8% in Adams County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS AND PERSONAL TRAITS

Customer service was the most sought after occupational skill for entry level, skilled/technical, and junior management employees, followed by basic math. Cashier was third for entry level employees, computer was third for skilled/technical employees, and manager was third for junior management. Upper level position responses all favored administration, manager, and accounting, in addition to the skills that were common for lower level positions.

FIGURE 5.A: OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS - ENTRY LEVEL (NO EXPERIENCE)

Skill	Number of Responses
Accounting and Bookkeeping	4
Basic Math	14
Building and Grounds Maintenance	9
Cashier / Clerk	12
Computer Knowledge	4
Cooking	11
Customer Service	21
Host / Hostess	9
Housekeeping	11
Restaurant Staff	11

Number of Responses

FIGURE 5.B: OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS - ENTRY LEVEL (SOME EXPERIENCE)

Skill	Number of Responses
Accounting and Bookkeeping	7
Administration	8
Basic Math	21
Building and Grounds Maintenance	12
Cashier / Clerk	19
Computer Knowledge	16
Customer Service	31
Host / Hostess	12
Housekeeping	13
Restaurant Staff	12
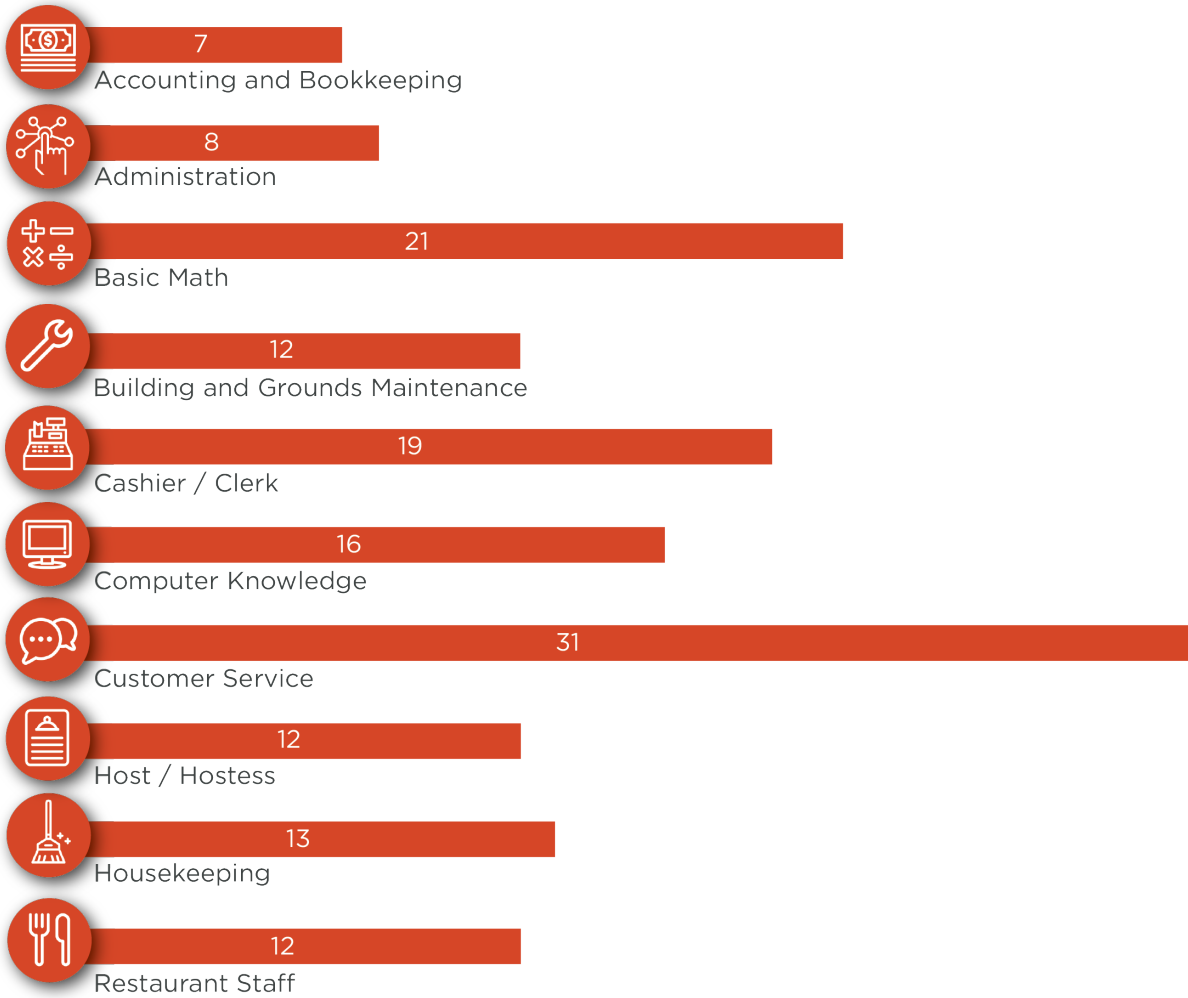
Number of Responses

FIGURE 5.C: OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS - SKILLED / TECHNICAL LABOR

Skill	Number of Responses
Accounting and Bookkeeping	13
Administration	11
Basic Math	20
Building and Grounds Maintenance	13
Carpentry	10
Cashier / Clerk	10
Computer Knowledge	16
Customer Service	24
Equipment Operating	8
Host / Hostess	8
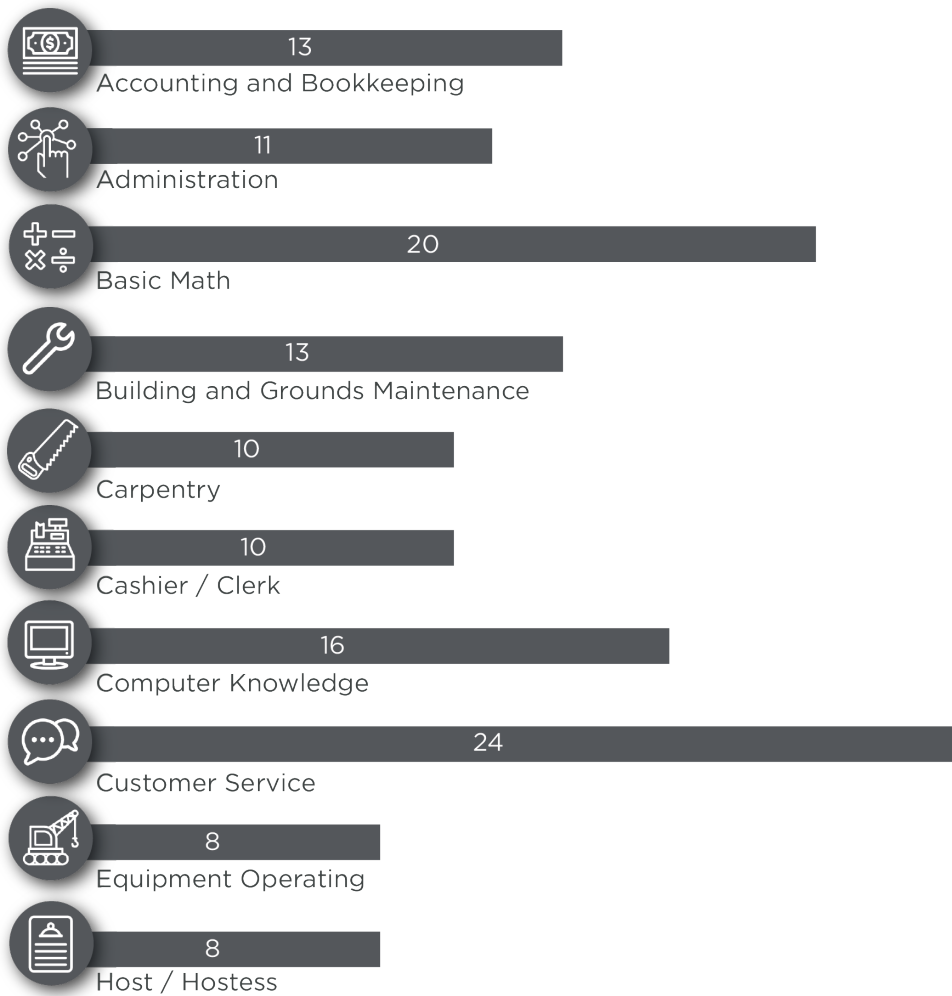
Number of Responses

Positivity and reliability ranked among the most sought after personal traits for every position, while other traits varied more by position. The 'Team Player' trait was also commonly sought after among lower level employees, while motivation and communication were valued among higher level employees.

These results indicate that soft skills, in particular customer service and a sound work ethic, are in high demand among businesses in this area. This reflects a training and development need that the educational system and the business sector may each be able to fill.

FIGURE 6: PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

6.A: ENTRY LEVEL (NO EXPERIENCE)

- 11.36% Adaptable and Flexible
- 8.33% Detail-Oriented
- 4.55% Goal-Oriented
- 8.33% Good Verbal Communication
- 4.55% Good Written Communication
- 10.23% Honest and Loyal
- 4.17% Leadership
- 11.36% Motivation to Grow and Learn
- 12.50% Positive Attitude
- 12.50% Reliable and Dependable
- 1.89% Strategic Planning
- 10.23% Team Player

6.B: ENTRY LEVEL (SOME EXPERIENCE)

- 9.43% Adaptable and Flexible
- 8.63% Detail-Oriented
- 4.85% Goal-Oriented
- 9.97% Good Verbal Communication
- 5.66% Good Written Communication
- 10.78% Honest and Loyal
- 3.77% Leadership
- 9.70% Motivation to Grow and Learn
- 12.40% Positive Attitude
- 11.59% Reliable and Dependable
- 1.62% Strategic Planning
- 11.59% Team Player

6.C: SKILLED / TECHNICAL LABOR

- 9.39% Adaptable and Flexible
- 9.39% Detail-Oriented
- 6.97% Goal-Oriented
- 9.09% Good Verbal Communication
- 6.36% Good Written Communication
- 10.00% Honest and Loyal
- 4.24% Leadership
- 9.39% Motivation to Grow and Learn
- 10.61% Positive Attitude
- 10.61% Reliable and Dependable
- 3.94% Strategic Planning
- 10.00% Team Player

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RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

Respondents indicated for every position except C-Suite that the recruitment process has taken more time than expected.

The most common challenges that respondents reported with their employees were lateness and reliable transportation, which are likely linked. Employee hygiene ranked as a distant third most common challenge. Some employers posited cost of living was a factor impacting their ability to find employees.

FIGURE 7: RECRUITMENT TIME
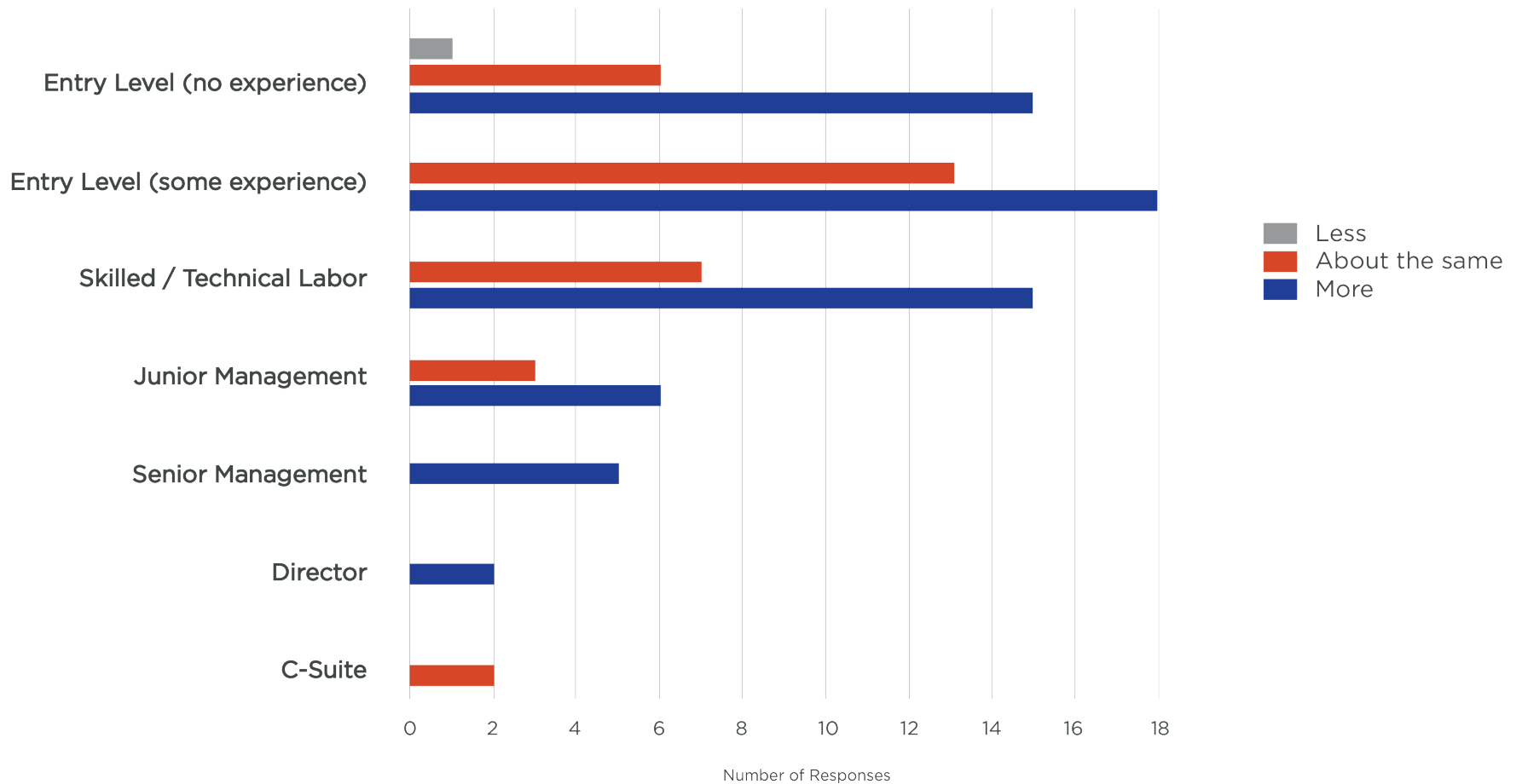
REGIONAL OVERVIEW

According to the cost of living indicators listed below (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), Valley County has a higher cost of living than Adams County and the state average, while the cost of living in Adams County is lower than average. The low rental vacancy and unemployment rates in Valley County support open-ended responses that point toward housing and a labor shortage as major concerns for local businesses in the area. A higher than average median age in both counties could also point to a shortage of entry level labor in particular.

TABLE 3: COST OF LIVING INDICATORS

Cost of Living Indicators[1]	Adams County	Valley County	Idaho State
Population	3,976	9,862	1,567,582
Median Age	50	46.9	34.6
Average Household Size	2.26	2.23	2.66
Median Household Income	$41,335	$53,630	49,174
Median Monthly Housing Costs	$606	$921	$840
Median Housing Value	$160,700	$246,300	$167,900
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	2.7%	1.8%	1.9%
Rental Vacancy Rate	11.6%	0.0%	5.3%
Unemployment Rate	10.8%	4.9%	6.2%
Poverty Rate	14.6%	14.0%	15.2%

In the WCMR there is certainly a housing shortage. In 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau), there were 11,789 housing units accounted for in Valley county. However, approximately 54% of those housing units were for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. In Adams County there are 2,636 housing units, 24% percent of which are used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Predictions from 2016 Census data suggest minimal change in housing stocks in both counties. These factors contribute to the low vacancy rates in the table above. As outlined in the table below, cost of housing is also an issue.

TABLE 4: HOUSING BURDEN

Housing Burden (Percent of Households Paying More Than 30% of Income on Housing Costs)[2]			
Type of Cost	Adams County	Valley County	Idaho State
Housing Units with a Mortgage	38.0%	45.0%	28.9%
Housing Units without a Mortgage	17.2%	8.4%	9.7%
Rent	44.5%	53.6%	47.6%

54% of housing units in Valley County were for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

The housing burden is higher than the state average in both Adams and Valley counties for housing units with a mortgage, while Adams County has a lower than average housing burden for renters, and Valley County has a lower than average housing burden for housing units without a mortgage. This data indicates that housing costs are a financial strain for a higher percentage of residents in both counties than the state average.

STUDENTS' CAREER PLANS

The student survey, distributed to each of the region's school districts, collected data on students' plans after high school as well as their perception of development of their personal attributes. Data from the student survey was utilized to create an addendum to this report that further articulates strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of the current labor market in the WCMR.

ANALYSIS

The first components of the analysis highlight internal factors of the WCMR business sector; or the 'Strengths' and 'Weaknesses.' The latter component of the analysis identifies external factors for the sector; these are considered 'Opportunities' and 'Threats' for the WCMEDC to consider when planning for the future. The key findings of the SWOT analysis are provided below.

STRENGTHS

The key findings of this 'SWOT ' analysis indicate that wages are high and businesses in the region are growing. Businesses are able to fill upper level positions with employees that meet the requirements for both experience and education.

WEAKNESSES

Businesses reported both high rates of turnover and large gaps in the labor pool - particularly when it comes to entry level positions and positions requiring skilled labor and technical expertise and experience. Although there is some seasonable instability, it doesn't impact the vast majority of the employers when it comes to hiring. Employers reported shifting employee schedules to require six-day work weeks and overtime. This may be due to the lack of available employees in general. The cost of living in the region may also cause employees to work more than one job in order to afford housing, transportation and food needs. Both of these final two factors may be contributing to the high rate of employee turnover.

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for both continued and new partnerships with the Idaho Department of Labor, Idaho Department of Commerce, local school districts, Boise State University, University of Idaho and College of Western Idaho abound. Low residency and distance-learning apprenticeship and training programs may help alleviate employment needs. Some businesses are already sending their employees to apprenticeship programs offered at College of Western Idaho (CWI) in Caldwell. In this instance, the employee takes most of the coursework online and travels to CWI about once per week. In addition, WCMEDC has also partnered with the Idaho Department of Labor to launch two apprenticeship programs. WCMEDC may be able to increase the level of this partnership and launch new programs suitable for the region.

THREATS

The housing market and overall cost of living may be contributing to the challenges facing employers in the WCMR. Competition from other similar resort communities, such as Ketchum, Sun Valley, Coeur d'Alene, ID, or Jackson, WY, may be pulling potential employees away from the region. With a lack of proximity to a large, urban center, the region cannot draw off the available workforce most often present in urban areas.

FIGURE 8: SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
S	W	O	T
Businesses are growing	Employees work multiple jobs	Increase apprenticeship program	Competition
Upper level positions are able to be filled	Employees work overtime		Cost of living
Most applicants are meeting the education expectations	High turnover	Partnerships with postsecondary education institutions	Distance from urban center
Wages are high	Lack of available employees for entry level positions, skilled labor positions and positions needing technical expertise and experience	Partnership with school districts	Economy as a whole
	Potential employees lack applicable training		Housing market
	Seasonal instability		

CONCLUSION

IPI's research identifies some clear needs that employers are facing in the WCMR. High rates of turnover and large gaps in the labor pool have made it more difficult for employers to attract, hire and keep employees. This can result in an increased workload for managers and employees, which only exacerbates the present difficulty in training and keeping current employees. Environmental factors such as the current housing shortage further complicate the region's path to growing its workforce. Despite these challenges, many business survey respondents remained positive and optimistic about their own employee teams and the region's economic future.
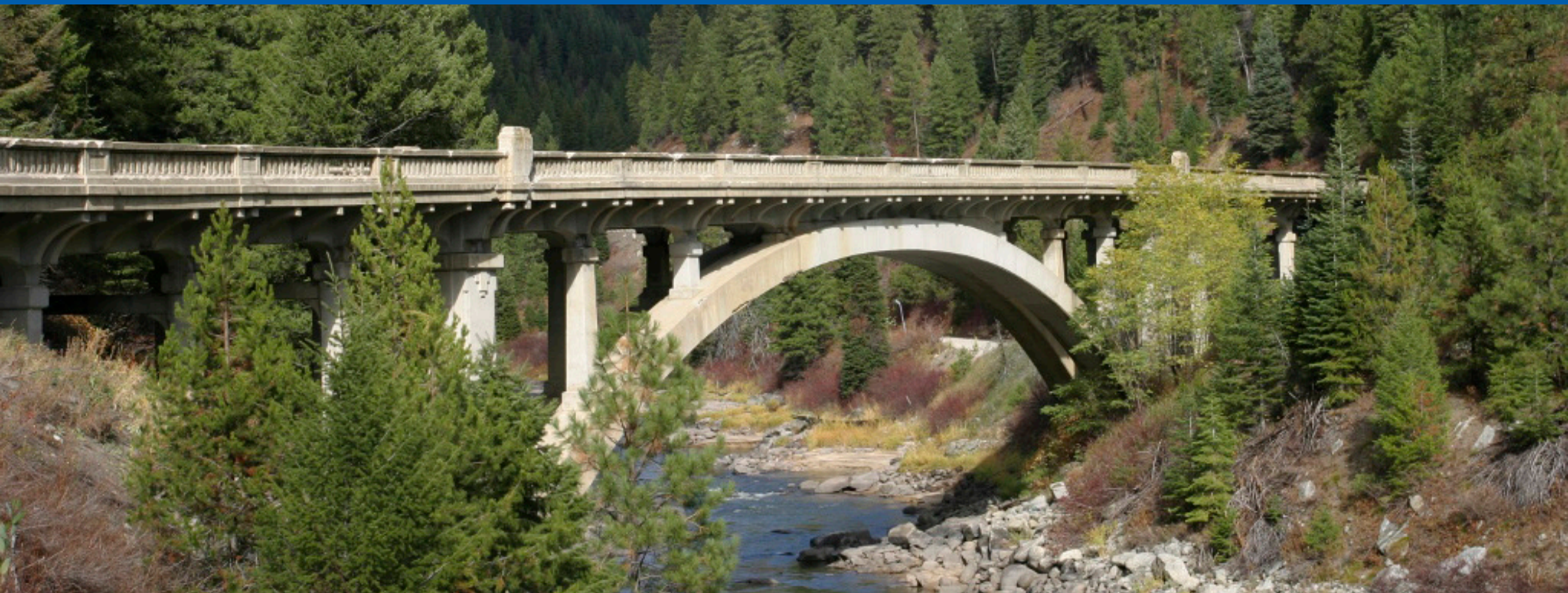
The WCMEDC and its partners can address local industry needs by strategically leveraging the region's strengths and using the opportunities present to begin targeting programmatic and policy decisions toward the weaknesses in the current labor force. Our survey results highlight some of the most demanded skills and personal traits that future workforce development programs and policies might address, as well as the employment categories that are currently in the most demand.

The following addendum will further inform the SWOT analysis in this report, and will help to identify future workforce development partnerships and programs by gauging student aspirations and motivations with regard to their own career decisions. This information will help to bridge the potential gap in understanding between local industries and the workforce that they hope to engage with.

WEST CENTRAL MOUNTAINS BUSINESS NEEDS ASSESSMENT - STUDENT SURVEY ADDENDUM:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can understanding the plans of high school students and workforce needs in the West Central Mountains Region of Idaho inform workforce development in the region?

To answer this question, Boise State University's Idaho Policy Institute partnered with West Central Mountains Economic Development Council (WCMEDC) to analyze the workforce needs of the West Central Mountains Region (WCMR) of Idaho. This addendum to the original report analyzes a survey of high school students in the local school districts and further informs the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing the region's business community. It specifically helps identify future workforce development partnerships and programs between the school districts and WCMEDC.

OVERVIEW

Examining an organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) provides structure to analyze how an organization can strategically advance their work while taking into consideration internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors. This report discusses an analysis of the business sector in the West Central Mountains Region (WCMR) of Idaho. It provides objective information about the strengths and weaknesses of the region's business community as well as the opportunities and threats confronting the region. This SWOT analysis can inform West Central Mountains Economic Development Council's (WCMEDC) effort to fulfill its commitment to a dynamic, sustainable regional economy through business retention and expansion efforts and promote programming from their regional partners. The structure and process of the SWOT analysis were guided by a comprehensive review of the available literature.

LIMITATIONS

The following report summarizes the information gathered from secondary data analysis based on surveys of high school students in the local school districts (McCall-Donnelly, Cascade and Meadows Valley). Due to requests made by one school district, there are a few differences between the survey sent to students from that district. Nevertheless, most of these changes are related to the logic used in the survey and have no predictable impact of the content of the survey.

METHODOLOGY

This research project utilized two sets of data to help identify the gap that exists between workforce needs in the WCMR and the career aspirations of junior and seniors in the region's high schools. This addendum to the original report focuses on the secondary data from surveys of students in the region's high schools: McCall-Donnelly High School, Meadows Valley High School and Cascade High School.

Meadows Valley School has 40 students in grades 9-12. Cascade Junior/Senior High School has 96 students in grades 9-12 (NCES, 2018). McCall-Donnelly High School is the largest school included in the survey with 264 total students (NCES, 2018), consequently they are represented more in the survey than the other two schools with 81.6% of the responses. At least 40% of the students enrolled in each school are from low-income families. This qualifies all three schools for federal Title I status (Title I provides financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards). The graduation rate for McCall-Donnelly is 93.4%, 100% for Cascade and 84.6% at New Meadows (ISDE, 2017). The percentage of ELL students for each district is less than 5% and the percentage of students on an IEP for each school district is less than 15% (NCES, 2018).

TABLE 5: SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

	McCall Donnelly High School	Cascade Junior/ Senior High School	New Meadows School
Title I Status	Yes	Yes	Yes
Graduation Rate	93.4%	100%	84.6%
School Size (grades 9-12)	264	96	40
% of ELL Students (district)	1%	< 1%	5%
% of IEP Students (district)	11%	12%	11.3%

STUDENT SURVEY

The school districts distributed a student survey designed to determine the future plans and current interests of junior and senior students at three high schools in the region. One school district desired to gather more detailed information from their students. This district therefore administered a longer survey than the others. However, it did contain questions comparable to the questions on the survey distributed to the other schools.

The survey sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are your current plans for after high school?
2. What jobs/skills are you interested in pursuing after high school?
3. What personal attributes do you have/want?
4. What personal attributes have you been taught in school?

The questions regarding future plans included educational/occupational goals and where students intend to pursue these goals. Many of the questions were designed to align with questions from the survey administered to businesses. The jobs/skills list and the personal attributes list (See Appendix B) are identical to the lists used to ask businesses about their workforce needs, which were created with the assistance of the Idaho Department of Labor. They are representative of jobs/skills and personal attributes most commonly expressed in job postings in Idaho.

The survey also asked the students a series of demographic questions. A few of these questions address factors that have been shown to influence student career choices: When did you start thinking about career choices? Are you employed and receiving a paycheck? What is the highest level of education achieved by a parent in your household? (Borchert, 2002). Students were also asked how long they have been attending their current school district as this could affect their desire to stay or leave the community.

DESIGN AND DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT SURVEY

The student surveys were designed by IPI using the Google Forms application. IPI relinquished rights to the surveys to the school districts who distributed the survey to junior and senior students via school emails. When the school districts finished distributing surveys, IPI was able to request the data from the school districts. The survey was completed by 147 students between the three different high schools.

RESULTS

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The students taking this survey came from three high schools in the West Central Mountain region. 82% of the respondents were from McCall-Donnelly High School, 15% were from Cascade Junior-Senior High School and 3% were from Meadows Valley School.

FIGURE 9: SCHOOL DISTRICTS

15.0%   3.4%

81.6%

■ Cascade School District
■ McCall-Donnelly School District
■ Meadows Valley School District
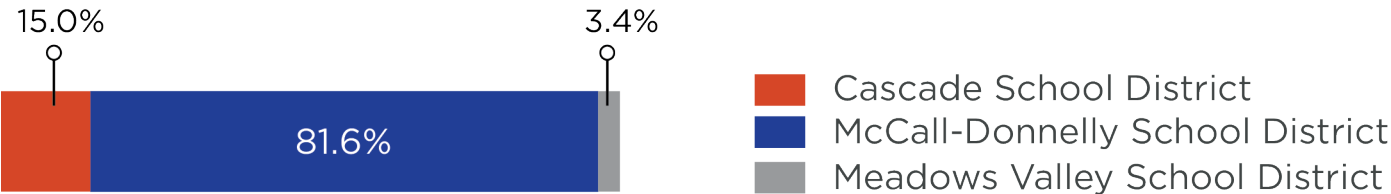
57% of the student respondents (students) were in the eleventh grade. 50% of the students were male, and 47% of the students identified as female. 63% of students were currently employed. On average, the students participating in this survey had been attending their school district for 9 years.
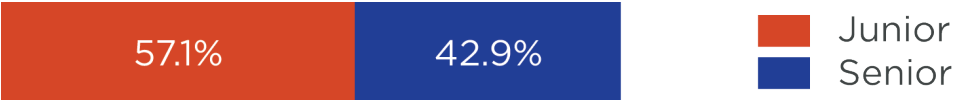
FIGURE 10: GRADE

57.1%   42.9%

■ Junior
■ Senior

FIGURE 11: CURRENTLY EMPLOYED

62.6%   37.4%

■ Yes
■ No

FIGURE 12: AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS GOING TO SCHOOL IN THE WEST CENTRAL MOUNTAINS AREA

Junior
- Cascade School District
- McCall-Donnelly School District
- Meadows Valley School District

Senior
- Cascade School District
- McCall-Donnelly School District

Average number of years going to school
in the West Central Mountains
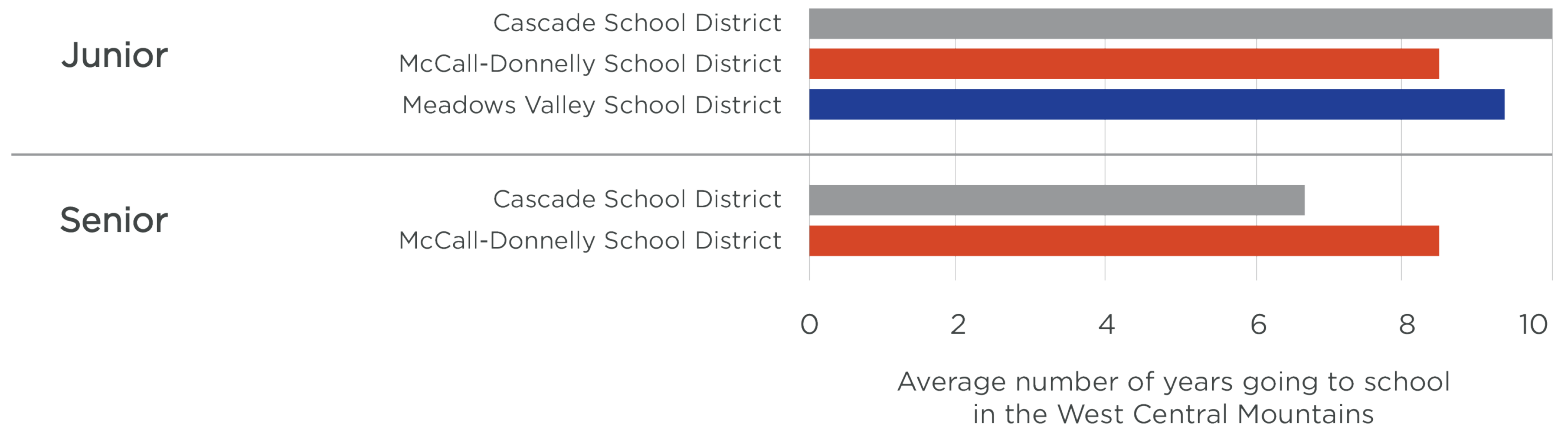
STUDENT PLANS FOR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

The survey asked respondents to indicate their plan for the year after they graduate high school. The choices offered were: employment, gap year (i.e. mission, travel, other), community college, technical/vocational school, 4-year college or university or military. Students were then asked where they intend to pursue their plans.
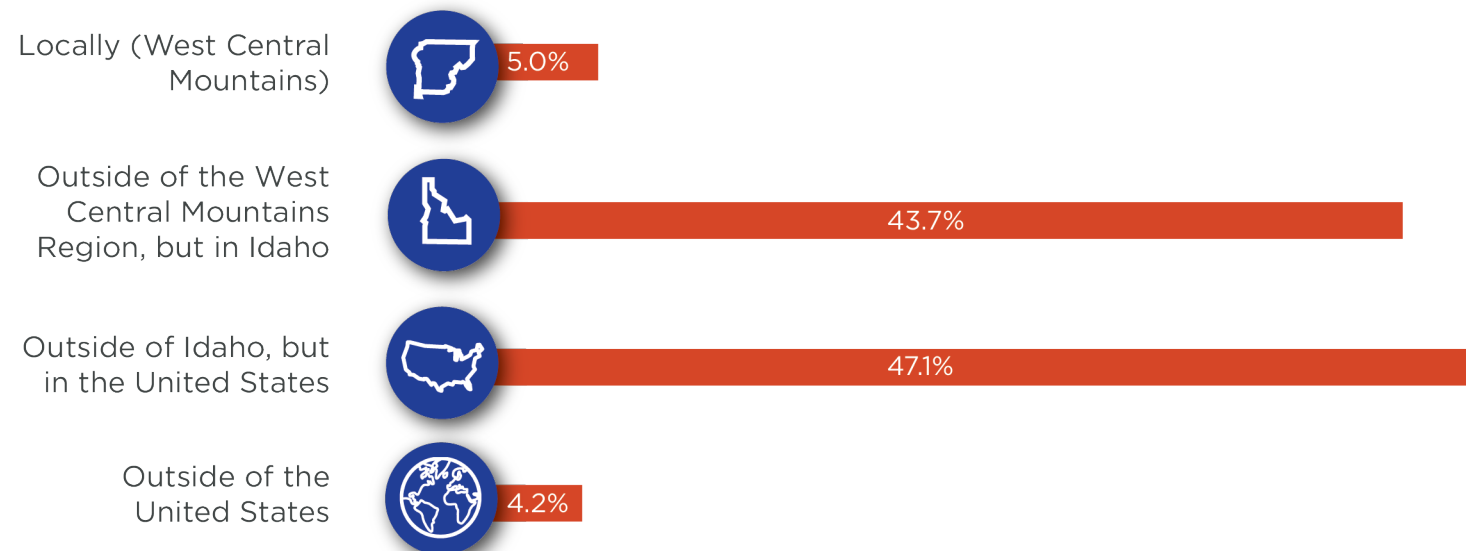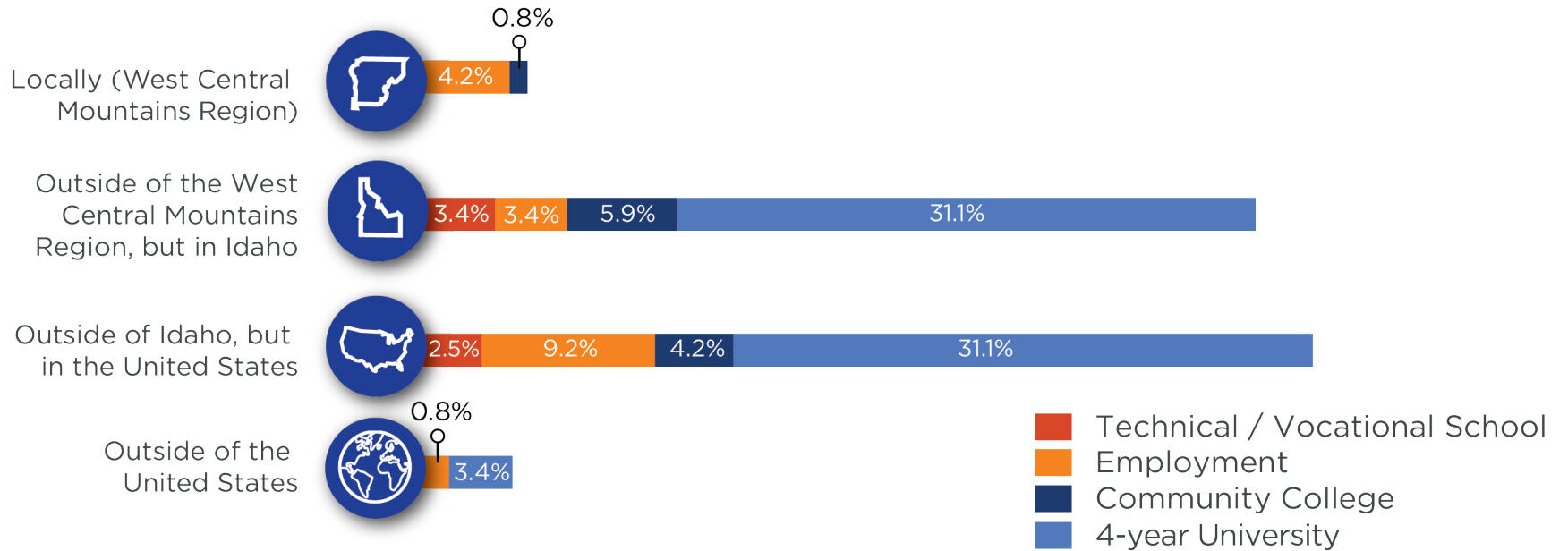
FIGURE 13.A: POST-GRADUATION MOVING PLANS

Locally (West Central Mountains) — 5.0%

Outside of the West Central Mountains Region, but in Idaho — 43.7%

Outside of Idaho, but in the United States — 47.1%

Outside of the United States — 4.2%

FIGURE 13.B: LOCATION BY PLAN

Locally (West Central Mountains Region)
0.8%
4.2%

Outside of the West Central Mountains Region, but in Idaho
3.4% | 3.4% | 5.9% | 31.1%

Outside of Idaho, but in the United States
2.5% | 9.2% | 4.2% | 31.1%

Outside of the United States
0.8%
3.4%

Legend:
- Technical / Vocational School
- Employment
- Community College
- 4-year University

More than half of respondents indicated that they planned on attending a 4-year college or university in the year after high school. Out of these students, 47% intend on staying in the state of Idaho to pursue their education.

The second most common plan for the year after graduation was taking a gap year as reported by 16% of the students. Entering into a branch of the military was the third most common answer as indicated by 11% of the students.
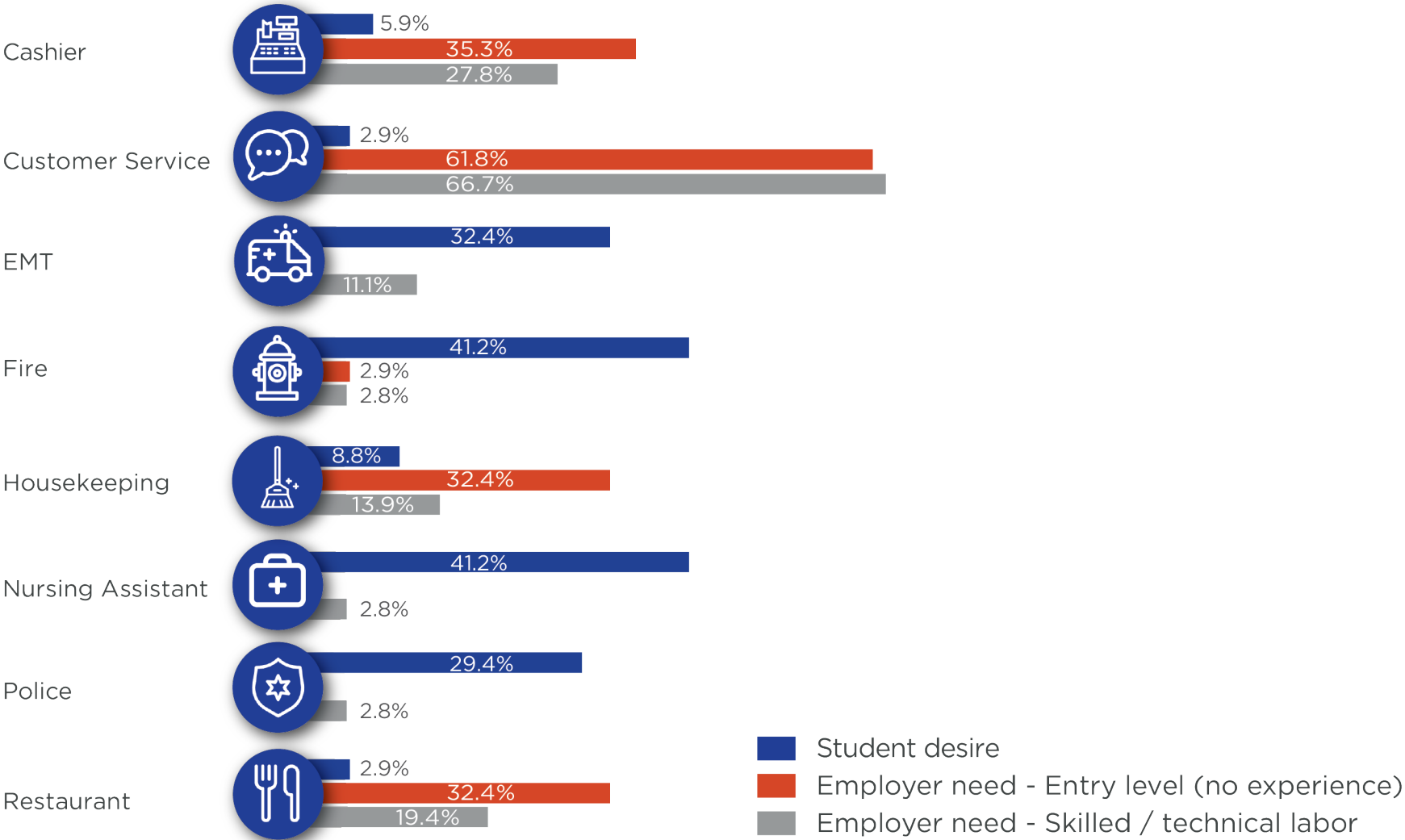
Community college was indicated as the plan for 9% of the students. Of these, 62% want to pursue their education in the state of Idaho. Technical/Vocational school was selected as a plan by only 5% of the students, half of which desired to attend a school in the state of Idaho.

Employment was one of the least common responses for the question with only 5% of the students indicating that they plan on going straight into employment after high school. Less than half of of these students intend to stay in the state of Idaho.

Overall, about half of the students planned to stay in the state of Idaho the year after graduation.

STUDENT OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS AND BUSINESS DEMAND

FIGURE 14: SKILLS COMPARISON

Cashier
- 5.9%
- 35.3%
- 27.8%

Customer Service
- 2.9%
- 61.8%
- 66.7%

EMT
- 32.4%
- 11.1%

Fire
- 41.2%
- 2.9%
- 2.8%

Housekeeping
- 8.8%
- 32.4%
- 13.9%

Nursing Assistant
- 41.2%
- 2.8%

Police
- 29.4%
- 2.8%

Restaurant
- 2.9%
- 32.4%
- 19.4%

Legend:
- ■ Student desire
- ■ Employer need - Entry level (no experience)
- ■ Employer need - Skilled / technical labor

The survey asked students who were interested in employment, technical/vocational schools and community college to pick, from a provided list of skills, which skills they were more interested in learning after high school. The above image indicates their responses, compared to employer responses indicating which, from the same list of skills, were most needed in their businesses.

Student responses matched more closely to employer demands for skilled/technical positions than for entry-level positions. This was to be expected, as student responses were aspirational, rather than current, so they were less likely to list entry level skills as career goals. However, student responses did differ notably from employer responses for both entry level and skilled/technical positions.
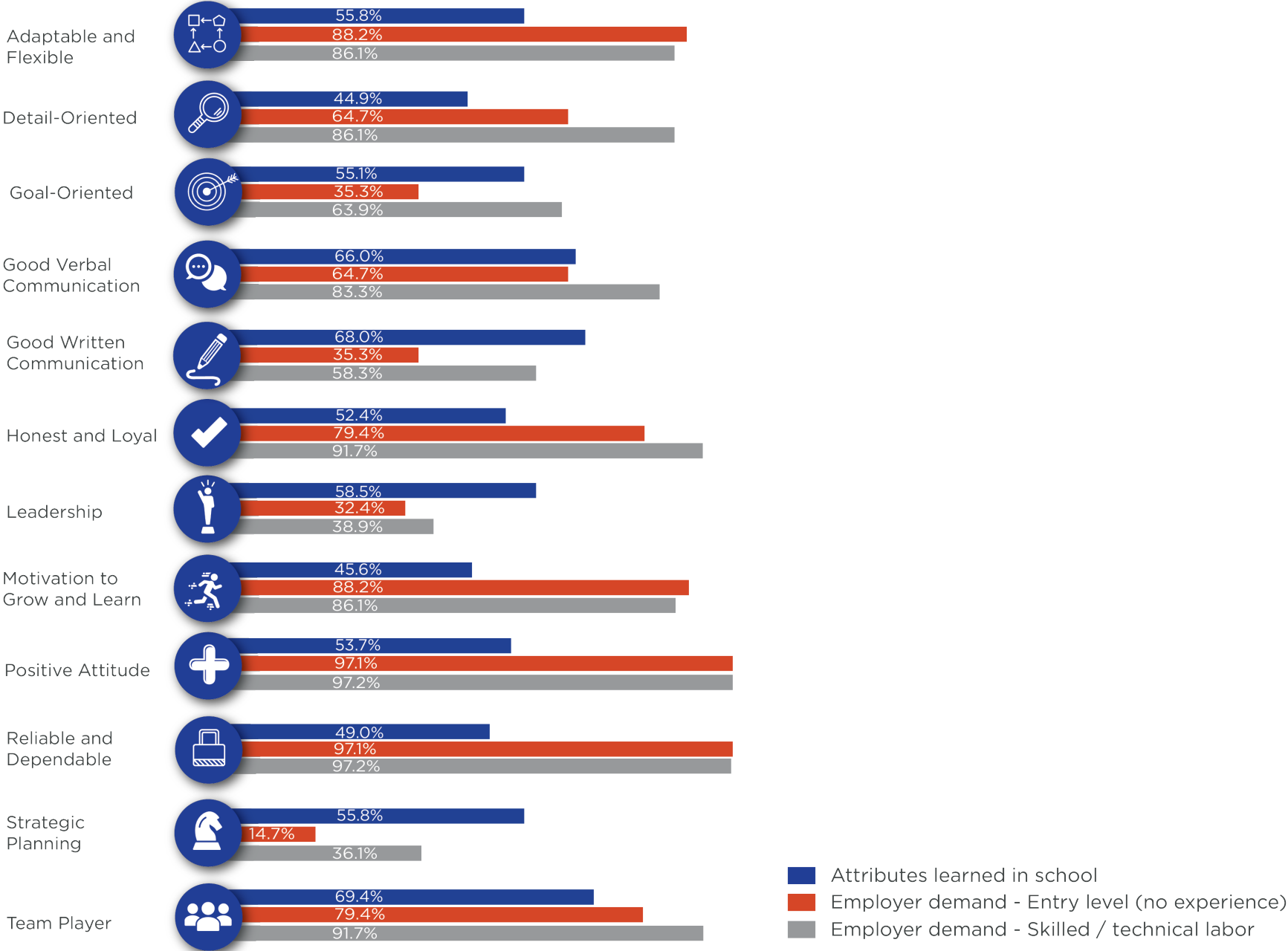
Among employers listing skills needed for both entry level and skilled/technical positions, customer service was by-and-large the most demanded skill. More than 60% of employers indicated that customer service was their most needed skill, regardless of position. This trend sharply contrasts with student preferences, as customer service was tied for last among their skill preferences, putting it among their least desired skills. Related service skills, such as cashiering, housekeeping, hosting, and restaurant work saw similar divergences between student and employer preferences, though not as dramatic. These skills were also among the most popular among employers.

Among employers' most demanded skills, cooking and maintenance were the only two that saw similar levels of student interest to match employer demand. Some of the most popular skills among students were linked to fire responder positions, such as fire, EMT, and police skills. However, these were among the least demanded among employers, possibly because these types of employers represented a small percentage of the respondent pool. Nursing was another anomaly, with students favoring this skill more than employers in the area. Nursing is among the fastest growing jobs in Idaho as a whole (Idaho Department of Labor, 2017), so this student preference may indicate a consideration for employment demands outside of the area , or again, could be related to these types of employers representing a small percentage of the respondent pool.

Student responses were more evenly distributed across the entire list of skills provided, while employer responses were more clustered around specific skills (more so for entry level positions than for skilled/technical positions).

STUDENT PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES AND BUSINESS DEMAND

FIGURE 15: ATTRIBUTES COMPARISON

Adaptable and Flexible
- 55.8%
- 88.2%
- 86.1%

Detail-Oriented
- 44.9%
- 64.7%
- 86.1%

Goal-Oriented
- 55.1%
- 35.3%
- 63.9%

Good Verbal Communication
- 66.0%
- 64.7%
- 83.3%

Good Written Communication
- 68.0%
- 35.3%
- 58.3%

Honest and Loyal
- 52.4%
- 79.4%
- 91.7%

Leadership
- 58.5%
- 32.4%
- 38.9%

Motivation to Grow and Learn
- 45.6%
- 88.2%
- 86.1%

Positive Attitude
- 53.7%
- 97.1%
- 97.2%

Reliable and Dependable
- 49.0%
- 97.1%
- 97.2%

Strategic Planning
- 55.8%
- 14.7%
- 36.1%

Team Player
- 69.4%
- 79.4%
- 91.7%

Legend:
- Attributes learned in school
- Employer demand - Entry level (no experience)
- Employer demand - Skilled / technical labor

The survey asked students to indicate, from a list of personal attributes, which they felt they had learned during their time in high school. The above image illustrates their responses (blue), compared with responses from a question on the employer survey (orange and gray), asking employers which personal attributes they most expect their entry-level and skilled employees to possess.

The above image illustrates that students have more confidence in their training in verbal communication, written communication and group work, but less confidence in their education regarding other skills related to a sound work ethic, such as reliability and dependability, honesty and loyalty, motivation, positive attitude and detail orientation.

Interestingly, the four attributes that employers most often expected from employees: positive attitude, reliable and dependable, motivation and adaptable and flexible, were among the skills that students reported the least confidence in having learned through their education.

Other skills had higher student confidence than employer demand, such as leadership, goal orientation, and strategic thinking - these skills become more important to employers when they are asked about their criteria for hiring higher level positions with more responsibility.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The first components of the analysis highlight internal factors of the student workforce; or the 'Strengths' and 'Weaknesses.' The latter component of the analysis identifies external factors for the student workforce; these are considered 'Opportunities' and 'Threats' for the WCMEDC to consider when planning for the future. The key findings of the SWOT analysis are provided below.

NOTES

- A relatively large percentage of students plan to go to school or work outside of the West Central Mountains, and outside of Idaho. This trend, combined with an already-high median age in both Valley (48.8 years) and Adams (51.7 years) counties, suggests that the area's current and future workforce may be threatened by an outmigration of young labor and talent.

- Despite the fact that a large number of students currently reported working in the Accommodation & Food Services sector, it was among the least popular sectors when students were asked about which sector they hoped to work in after graduation. This suggests a negative perception of the sector that may be contributing to labor shortages.

- Student confidence in attribute training in schools is fairly low, particularly for soft skills - this may indicate a need for better work-ethic development.

- McCall-Donnelly School District is the most populous in the region, which is reflected in the distribution of responding students.

- After-graduation plans are somewhat predicted by the education-level of the parent.

- Most students are not new to the area indicating that people with teenage-children are not moving to the area at high rates.

- There is a high level of disconnect between student skill preferences and employer demands - students are not as interested in service-oriented skills.

- Many students indicate a desire for careers that are not available in the area, contributing again to outflow of labor force.

STRENGTHS

The majority of student respondents indicated that they had a plan for career development after high school. A majority of students currently work in the local economy, particularly in the Accommodation & Food Services sector.

WEAKNESSES

Students had a fairly low confidence in the number of personal attributes that they had learned in their schools, and lack interest in developing the service skills that local businesses are demanding.

OPPORTUNITIES

A majority of students indicated that they currently work in the area, pointing to a chance to offer more training and opportunities in those jobs.

THREATS

Many students indicated that their post-graduation plans would take them out of the area, and out of the state, suggesting a potential labor drain that may be linked to a lack of career development opportunities, particularly in the West Central Mountains area.

FIGURE 16: SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS (S)

Students have plans for career development after high school

- Students currently work in the local economy
- Businesses are growing
- Upper level positions are able to be filled
- Most applicants are meeting the education expectations
- Wages are high

WEAKNESSES (W)

Students have low confidence in personal attributes learned in school

- Students lack interest in developing skills demanded by local businesses
- Employees work multiple jobs
- Employees work overtime
- High turnover
- Lack of available employees for entry level positions, skilled labor positions and positions needing technical expertise and experience
- Potential employees lack applicable training
- Seasonal instability

OPPORTUNITIES (O)

Offer training and opportunities in activities perfomed by employed students

- Increase apprenticeship program
- Partnerships with postsecondary education institutions
- Partnership with school districts

THREATS (T)

Many students plan to leave the West Central Mountains area after graduation

- Competition
- Cost of living
- Distance from urban center
- Economy as a whole
- Housing market

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CONCLUSION

The school districts' survey of students in the WCMR provides a second perspective to the employer survey, examined in the full report. The student responses summarized above provide context in light of the high rates of turnover and large gaps in the labor pool identified in the full report as barriers to attracting, hiring and keeping employees. In particular, student responses about where they plan to live, work and develop their careers after high school reveal discrepancies between their own preferences and those of local employers. Despite these differences, current student participation in the labor force remains high, which presents an opportunity for employers to bridge these divides through training and development.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LITERATURE REVIEW

For this study, WCMEDC was particularly interested in determining the gap between high school students' plans and expectations and employer workforce needs in order to inform future workforce development programs and partnerships. The key question being "What is the difference between what students want to do after they graduate and what industry needs in regards to to their workforce?" A review of the literature associated with school-to-work transitions provided a foundation for development of the methodology utilized to answer this question.

SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION

The school-to-work transition for high school students can take many paths. Some students may enter the workforce immediately after graduation, while others will choose to attain additional education before seeking employment. This education may range from apprenticeship programs, technical school and community college to a four-year college or university. Some may still choose to go on and attend graduate school or attain a professional degree through medical or law school. Still others may choose to travel or serve a mission immediately following high school. Thus, preparing high school students for a successful transition after graduation is a multi-faceted and somewhat challenging task.

Several factors can affect career choices of high school students. Borchert's (2002, pp. 11-13) study of the literature on the issue has shown that three areas of a student's life – environment, opportunity and personality – influence their decision. Concerning environment, the places where the student has lived or visited, their parents' educational background, or someone in their life who has made a significant impact are factors that could lead a student to a specific career. A student's personality also plays a significant role. Some careers demand that applicants have certain personality features that match the qualities of the occupation, and the way in which students perceive themselves is a determining factor that may influence their career choice. Finally, yet importantly, is opportunity, which may influence how students foresee their future in terms of the reasonable probability of success in particular career fields.

THE GAP IN INDUSTRY NEEDS

In 2006, an in-depth survey of more than 400 employers from a wide range of industrial classifications, representing a combined workforce of over two million U.S. based employees were asked to rate the

importance of 20 areas of basic knowledge and applied skills to the success of new entrants to the U.S. workforce. More than one-quarter of respondents projected that over the five years following the survey, their companies would reduce hiring of new entrants with only a high school diploma. According to the employers, high school graduates are deficient in the basic knowledge and skills of English and mathematics, as well as written communications, critical thinking, professionalism and work ethic. They did, however, state that these same students had adequate skills in information technology application, diversity, teamwork and collaboration (Casner-Lotto & Linda Barrington, 2006).

TECHNICAL SKILLS GAP

Technical schools, schools that aim to teach students a job skill through hands-on practice, are a training mechanism utilized to meet the demands of certain employers. Research in this area is promising. For example, Shimada et al. (2009) find that technical high schools are linked to higher rates of "jobconsciousness" and professional skill development among students. Bratucu et al. have also looked at ways that public schools can improve students' access to relevant vocational counseling - recommending a closer partnership between schools, universities, and the business sector[3] (2014, p.1023).

Research into economic sectors that rely on significant portions of youth labor, such as the hospitality (or service) industry, has yielded results that relate to this issue. Some of the hardships that entry-level job providers have in recruiting skilled workers are linked to negative student perceptions of those entry-level industries themselves. The hospitality industry often struggles to keep its employees trained, leading to low morale, poor performance, and high turnover (Poulston, 2008). Although some job training must necessarily be done by employers, there is an increasing demand in the U.S. that public schools prepare their students with the requisite skills to make good employees[4].

Research found that undergraduate college students tend to have negative perceptions about the service industry, particularly regarding workload, workplace respect, wages, flexibility and promotion opportunities (Richardson, 2009, p.385). Perhaps for these and similar reasons, other research (O'Mahony et al., 2001) found that only 10% of college students in the hospitality field had made the decision to study in that field before starting college, suggesting that hospitality may have been a second or third "fallback" preference for some (p.96). These same students rated the influence of school counselors and teachers as low regarding their career decisions.

Nevertheless, the results from the O'Mahony et al. study are not entirely negative. Many students indicated they had been influenced to choose the hospitality industry through positive work experiences and observations of the industry, as well as reports of rapid industry growth (p.95). In addition, the researchers found additional work experience, in the form of an internship program at a university, was a major strength of

its hospitality program for many students (p.95-96). These responses suggest that past work experience, and the opportunity for future work experience, may be powerful recruiting tools for hospitality workers.

Pearlman & Schaffer (2013) also provide a case study from Louisiana, describing a state-sponsored workforce training program (with no cost to employers) through the University of New Orleans that found significant demand among hospitality workers and employers - leading to a reported retention of 1,012 jobs and an average wage increase of 18% for participating workers (p.234). In response to the labor needs of the hospitality industry, papers by Poulson (2008) and Pearlman & Schaffer (2013) both recommend an increased emphasis on workforce training and development.

Mark Warner — the 69th Governor of Virginia, holding office from 2002 to 2006 — touted in an essay the importance of career and technical education. The increase in technical requirements for jobs that had once been seen as semi-skilled or unskilled was the main reason for his argument. A high school reform program with a focus on readily available and effective career and technical education was then implemented in the state. The main purpose of this 'Path to Industry Certification' program was to encourage students that were not college bound to continue working toward high school graduation while pursuing technical training for a selected industry certification. Under the program, students agreed to enroll in further training after completing high school. Typically, they attended a local community college during the summer and fall after graduation (Kazis, 2005, p.30).

Associated with this initiative was the implementation of teacher-training academies to increase the number of high school teachers with appropriate industry certifications. Finally, the statewide Career and Technical Education Foundation helped "bridge the gap between the large number of technical jobs available throughout Virginia and the comparatively small number of qualified applicants to fill them" (Kazis, 2005, p.30). Among other things, the foundation launched a website that was an information hub for parents, students and teachers on career opportunities in technical fields, certification requirements and available training.

SOFT SKILLS GAP

While technical skills are important to secure a position in the workforce, developing soft skills can also help a potential employee be more successful in any field (Deep and Seth, 2013; Robles, 2012). Soft skills extend beyond technical knowledge in the workplace (Robles, 2012), and include "communication and interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, leadership qualities, team skills, negotiation skills, time and stress management and business etiquettes" (Deepa and Seth, 2013, p. 7). A person with soft skills likely has a competitive edge on other job candidates and employees (Dixon et al., 2010; Robles, 2012). More specifically, soft skills can help a person perform better in a job or college interview, collaborate better with coworkers, and work more

efficiently than those who have not developed such abilities (Dixon et al., 2010).

Employees with soft skills are in high demand in the workforce and employers are expecting educators to help their students develop them (Heckman and Kautz, 2012; Robles, 2012; Schulz, 2008). For the past several decades, schools have been testing curricula and working with different businesses to find ways to teach soft skills. Researchers have found that engaging students as young as preschool-aged can be effective in building these skills and achieving desired outcomes (Heckman and Kautz, 2012). An introduction of soft skills at a young age has proven to lead to better life outcomes for students than peers of similar backgrounds without the education, even when controlled for class sizes, teacher quality and a school's overall performance on standardized tests (Heckman and Kautz, 2012, p. 13).

There are also structured programs found to be effective in teaching high school students soft skills. Some of the most effective programs are created by local businesses, implemented by schools and continue as a collaborative effort (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017). For example, Nike, in partnership with Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), created a mentorship program for school districts in the Portland, Oregon, area. Nike employees are partnered with the participating schools and meet regularly with the students to discuss the type of skills needed to succeed in the workplace. Students also attend their AVID classes, where the curriculum is focused on helping students graduate high school with the skills necessary to succeed in college and in the workforce (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017).

There are other low cost options and simple to implement solutions to improve soft skills. These include raising student awareness of soft skills by explaining what they are, why they are needed and how they are used in the workforce. Instruction that includes student centered learning, peer collaboration, and practicing reacting to real-life problems can also be useful. Effective and efficient learners will become effective and efficient workers (LaFrance, 2009; Schulz, 2008). Teaching soft skills to students will improve their ability to obtain and keep a job in the future (Heckman and Kautz, 2012; Schulz, 2008).

POLICY AND PROGRAM DESIGN

According to Bangser (2008), those willing to design policies and programs to prepare students for a successful transition into the job market should start by deciding (a) when the intervention should start; (b) whether the approach should be broad-based or targeted; and (c) how comprehensive the initiative can or should be. These decisions will first determine which students will be included in these programs (juniors and seniors, students with disabilities, etc.). Secondly, the flexibility and purpose of each program needs to be established. Should these programs prepare students to enter the market as a whole or to be competent in the skills required by local businesses? Finally, the level of collaboration and investment necessary to turn these initiatives into a reality will be determined. Some will be stand-alone interventions while others will

demand comprehensive reforms.

The report goes further by identifying subsequent steps that can increase the probability of success among these programs. High school curricula need to be rigorous and relevant, schools should provide counseling, assessment, and other supports, collaborative practices should be developed with other schools, employers and economic development agencies, and the costs of implementation and the sources of funding should be carefully identified (Bangser, 2008).

The quality of career and technical education across the country is uneven (Kazis, 2005). Many schools and programs end up doing a disservice to their students, who leave prepared for neither high-skill jobs nor college success. While progress has been made in many states, communities and schools in recent years, it is difficult to determine how fully and quickly career and technical education can raise standards, modernize curricula, build partnerships, and support teacher professional development. Therefore, these interventions must be attentively encouraged and monitored.

APPENDIX B: LIST OF SURVEY OPTIONS

Occupational Skills		
Accounting and Bookkeeping	Electrician	Mechanic
Administration	EMT / Paramedic	Nursing Assistant Certification
Bank Teller	Equipment Operating (excavation, road maintenance)	Physical Therapy
Barista	Fire (firefighter)	Plumbing
Bartending	Flooring Installation	Police (law enforcement officer)
Basic Math	Forestry Technician (resource, timber, fire, wildlife)	Radiology / CT Technician
Cashier / Clerk	Home Health Care (care-giver, personal care assistance).	Registered Nurse
Child Care	Host / Hostess	Restaurant Staff
Computer Knowledge / Software Specific Knowledge	Housekeeping	Sawmill Labor
Concrete Finishing	HVAC Installation and Servicing	Skilled Carpentry (framing / roofing, dry walling)
Cooking (chef, line cook, prep cook)	IT Analytics	Teaching (teacher / teacher's aide)
Customer Service	Kitchen Management	Truck Driving (Class A and Class B Commercial)
Delivery Driving	Manager / Supervisor	Welding (fabricator)

* Bartending, basic math and Nursing Assistant Certification was removed from the survey of one school district

* An "other" option was also included in the student survey

Personal attributes		
Adaptable and Flexible	Good Written Communication	Positive Attitude
Detail-Oriented	Honest and Loyal	Reliable and Dependable
Goal-Oriented	Leadership	Strategic Planning
Good Verbal Communication	Motivation to Grow and Learn	Team Player

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3. Baum (2002) argues, however, that skills development can lead to growth in the hospitality industry on its own, although the exact skills that should be taught remain undecided (pp.358-359).

4. If these findings can be connected to the aforementioned findings of Galliott & Graham (also Australian researchers), they may suggest that students who are unhappy with the career guidance they received in school, or uncertain about their career options, may be more likely to be directed toward the hospitality industry after school.

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