

**THE
TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA
AREA
EMPLOYER SURVEY SUMMARY**

May, 2009

**Compiled and Prepared by
THE PATHFINDERS**



Dallas, Texas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	RECRUITMENT METHODS.....	2
III.	TURNOVER/TARDINESS/ABSENTEEISM/ SUBSTANCE ABUSE RATINGS....	3
IV.	WORK ETHICS RATINGS	4
V.	EDUCATIONAL RATINGS	6
VI.	AVAILABILITY RATINGS.....	8
VII.	COMPARISONS OF EMPLOYERS RATINGS.....	10
VIII.	LAY-OFFS/CALL-BACKS	17
IX.	HIRING PROJECTIONS	19
X.	SKILLS NEEDS/GAPS	24
XI.	TRAINING NEEDS.....	27
XII.	TRENDS/STRATEGIES.....	28
XIII.	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS.....	30
XIV.	GENERAL COMMENTS.....	31



INTRODUCTION

As part of the Tuscaloosa, Alabama area labor availability survey project, The Pathfinders conducted interviews with senior management and human resources professionals of companies located in the labor shed. The purpose of these interviews was to determine area employers' opinions of the Tuscaloosa workforce in terms of such factors as productivity and availability and to gather valuable information for use in workforce development. In addition, the workforce ratings given by the employers during these interviews provide a means for comparing local ratings to those of all locations surveyed by The Pathfinders over the past eighteen months.

Interviews were completed with fifty-nine (59) employers. Each of the companies interviewed operated in the industrial, commercial, or service sectors. The employers interviewed consisted of both union and non-union operations; companies new to the area and long-standing companies; and, companies ranging in size from fewer than 20 employees to over 3,000. In total, over 20,000 employees are represented in these survey findings. The counties represented in this employer survey are Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Pickens and Tuscaloosa.

It should be noted that the opinions expressed herein are those of the employers who were interviewed during the course of this project, and all attempts were made to convey the views of these employers. However, in some cases, answers were combined that appeared to be similar in nature and substance.



RECRUITMENT METHODS

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

As determined from the employer interviews, the tables below reflect the five methods most frequently used to recruit hourly and salaried workers in the Tuscaloosa region and the percent of employers utilizing each method. Many employers use multiple methods, therefore, the percentages will not add to 100%.

RECRUITING METHOD – HOURLY WORKERS	% of Employers
Word of Mouth	36%
State Agency	31%
Walk-Ins	27%
Newspaper Ads	20%
Staffing/Temporary Service	14%

RECRUITING METHOD – SALARIED WORKERS	% of Employers
Newspaper Ads	42%
Internet	32%
Recruiters	22%
Word of Mouth	17%
Internal	16%

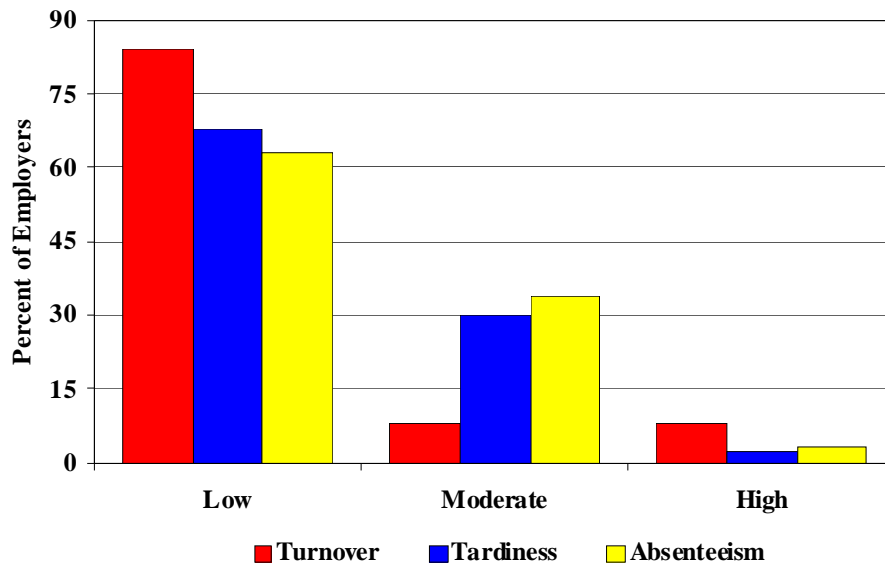
Other recruiting methods identified during the employer interview process, but used to a lesser degree, included, among others, colleges/technical schools/high schools; referrals; and, job fairs/trade shows/trade journals.



**TURNOVER / TARDINESS /
ABSENTEEISM / SUBSTANCE ABUSE RATINGS
The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce**

Based upon the experience of The Pathfinders in evaluating labor forces in numerous locations, a definite correlation between productivity, absenteeism, tardiness, turnover, and substance abuse appears to exist. That correlation goes beyond the fact that an absent worker is obviously unproductive. Rather, those factors are indicative of an employee’s attitude toward the job. The chart below shows the percent of employers’ ratings for turnover, tardiness and absenteeism in the Tuscaloosa region.

**PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS RATING
TURNOVER / TARDINESS / ABSENTEEISM
THE TUSCALOOSA AREA TOTAL WORKFORCE**



Additionally, in the Tuscaloosa region, 88% of the employers interviewed stated their companies tested for substance abuse, primarily pre-employment. Substance abuse within the individual companies’ workforces was reported as low.

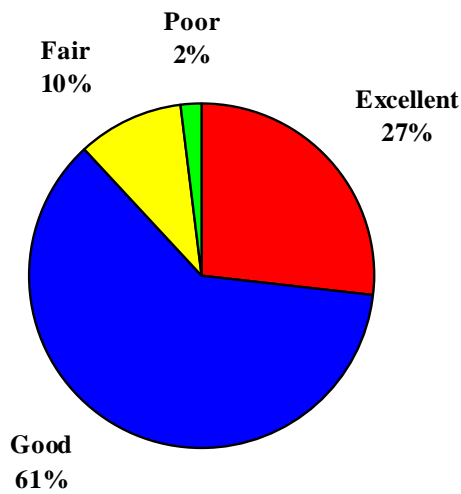


WORK ETHICS RATINGS

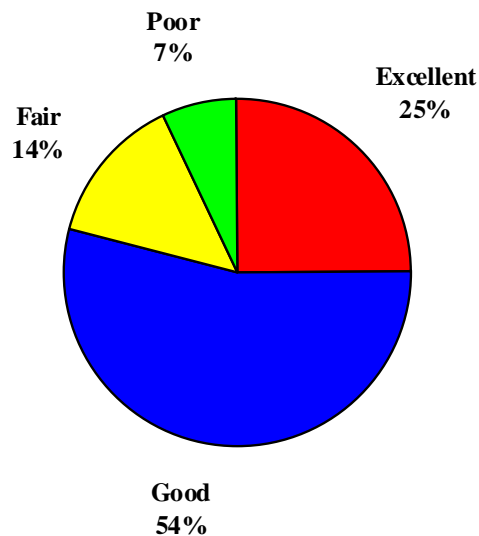
The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

In consideration of all factors, 88% of the employers in the Tuscaloosa area rated the productivity of the workforce as “Good” to “Excellent”. Worker attitudes received high marks from 90% of the employers.

WORKER PRODUCTIVITY



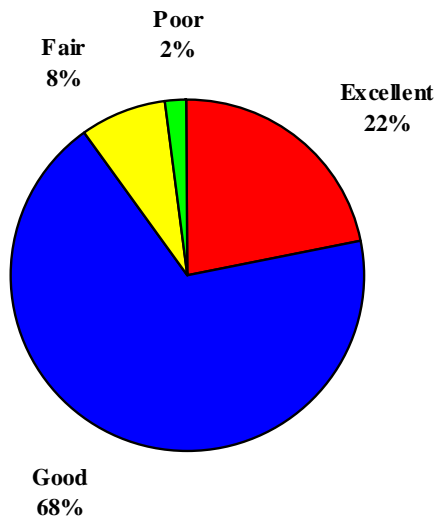
WORKER RELIABILITY



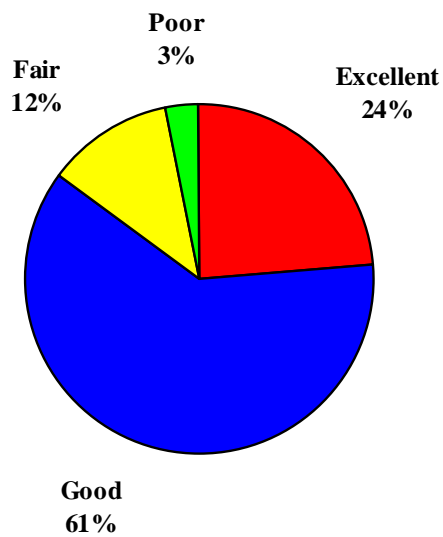
WORK ETHICS RATINGS

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

WORKER ATTITUDES



WORKER TEAMWORK SKILLS

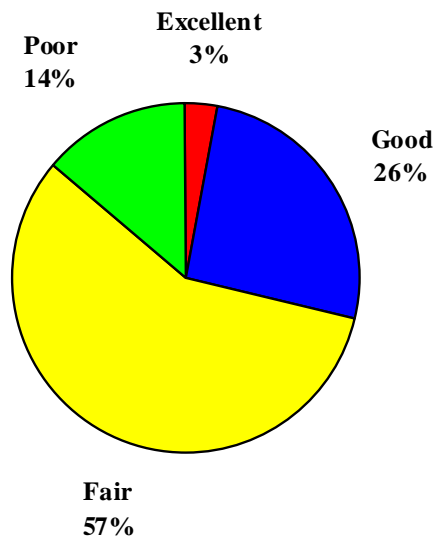


EDUCATIONAL RATINGS

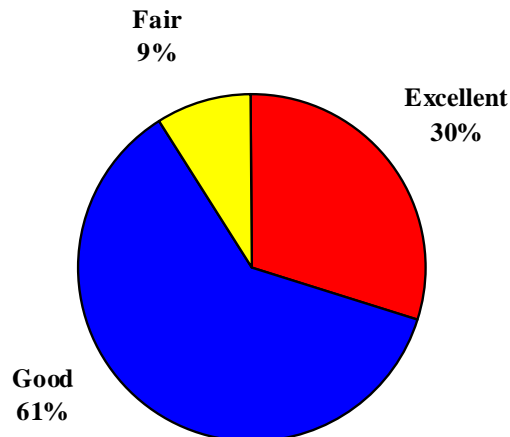
The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

The educational competencies of employees are additional factors used to evaluate an area's labor force. In the Tuscaloosa area, 29% of the employers interviewed rated the local public schools as "Excellent" or "Good"; 91% of the employers rated the local community colleges and technical schools as "Excellent" or "Good".

LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

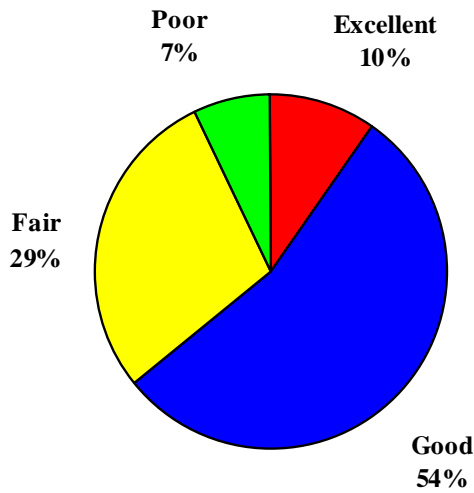


LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND TECH SCHOOLS

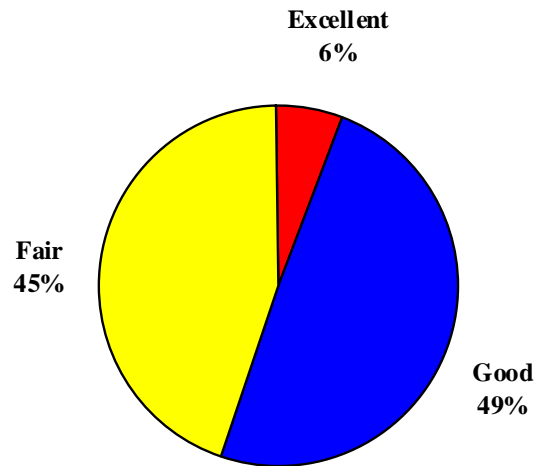


Further, employers gave the following ratings to their employees relative to competency in basic skills and entry level skills.

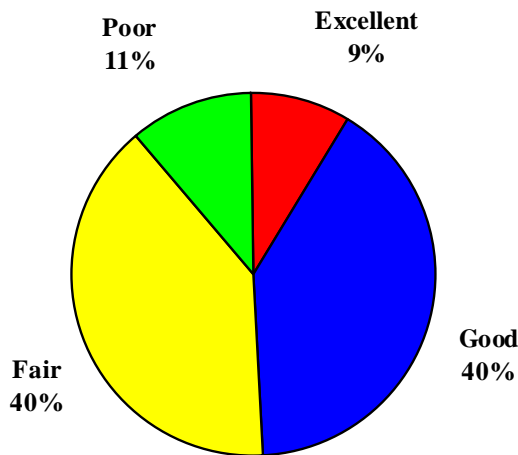
READING SKILLS



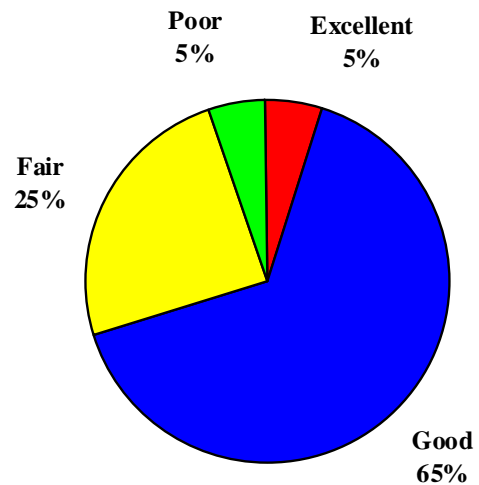
WRITING SKILLS



MATH SKILLS



ENTRY LEVEL SKILLS

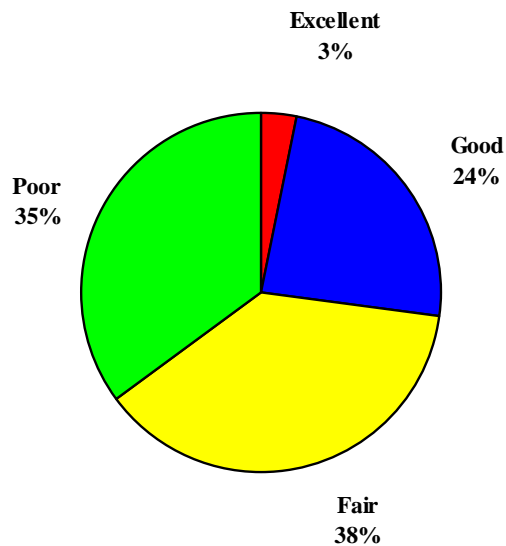


AVAILABILITY RATINGS

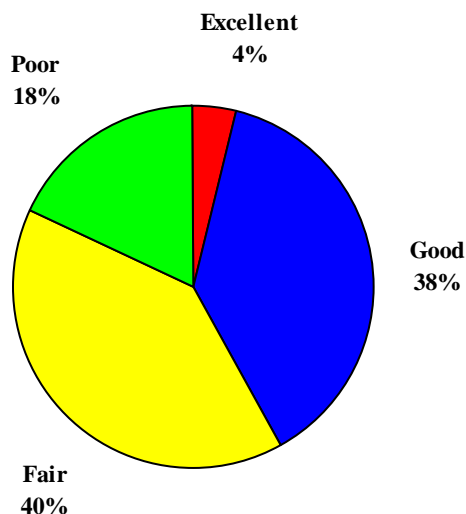
The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

A common employer complaint relates to an area's shortage of skilled and technical workers. These workers are in great demand and are often difficult to find in almost all locations. The employers interviewed in the Tuscaloosa area gave the following ratings for the availability of these workers.

SKILLED WORKERS AVAILABILITY

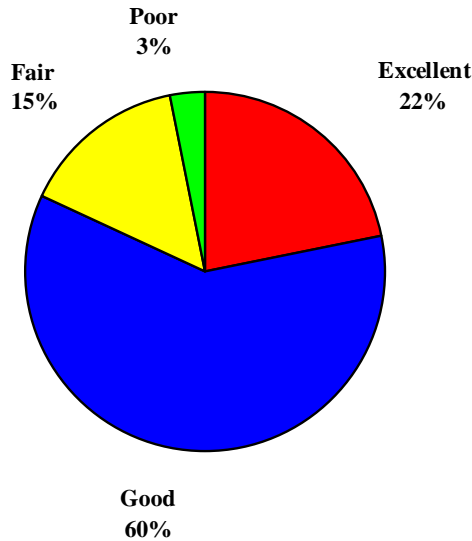


TECHNICAL WORKERS AVAILABILITY

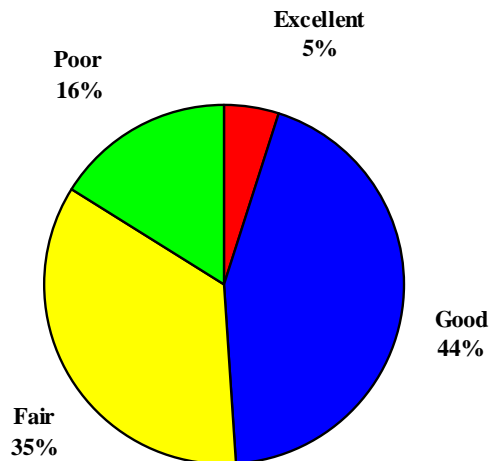


Although in most locations the availability of unskilled labor is sufficient, the availability of professional workers is often akin to that of skilled and technical workers. The Tuscaloosa area employer ratings for the availability of these workers are shown below.

UNSKILLED WORKERS AVAILABILITY



PROFESSIONAL WORKERS AVAILABILITY



COMPARISONS OF EMPLOYERS RATINGS

TOTAL WORKFORCE

The Tuscaloosa Area Labor Shed /

Locations Previously Surveyed

43% of the employers interviewed stated their companies had operations in other regions of the United States. Of these employers, those familiar with the workforces in those other locations reported that their Tuscaloosa area operations were comparable to or better than the other regions in terms of profitability and production. This is indicative not only of good management but also of a productive workforce.

As stated earlier in this report, local employers were asked to rate the area workforce on a number of factors including productivity, reliability, basic skills and availability. The employers were asked to rate each factor either “Excellent”, “Good”, “Fair”, or “Poor”. The purpose of these interviews and ratings was not only to determine how local employers rate their workers but also to provide a means for comparing local ratings to those of all locations surveyed during the past eighteen months.

The following charts present the comparative results for each factor. They compare the percentages of the Tuscaloosa area employers who rated their workers “Excellent”, “Good”, “Fair”, or “Poor” on each factor with the “Highest” rating of that factor in all areas surveyed in the last eighteen months and the “Median” rating for that factor in all areas surveyed during that time. As a result, the “Highest” and “Median” ratings do not add to 100%.

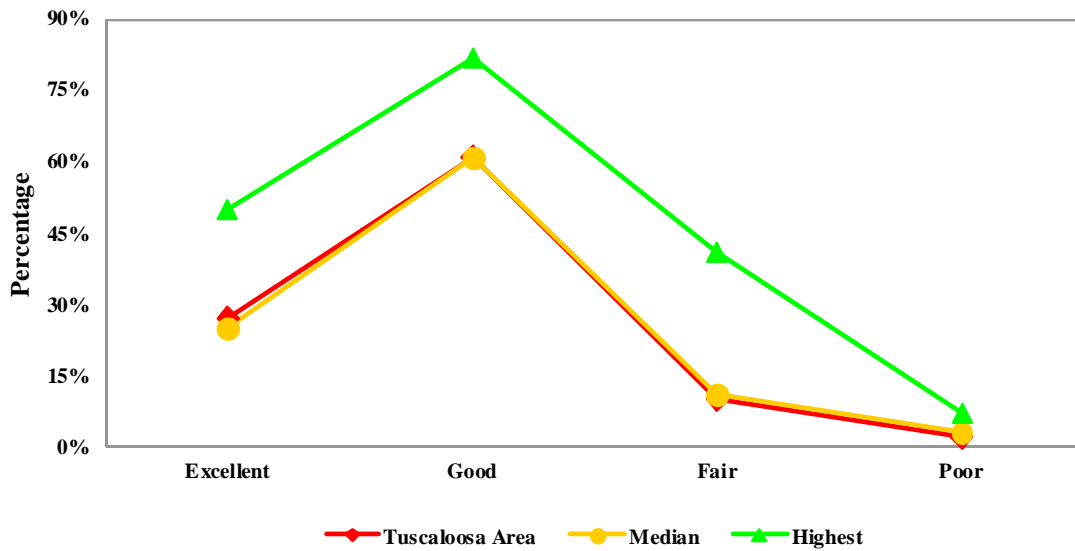
For example, 27% of the Tuscaloosa area employers rated “Worker Productivity” as “Excellent”. Of all the locations surveyed during the last eighteen months, the “Median” for that rating is 21%. The same comparison applies for each of the other factors.



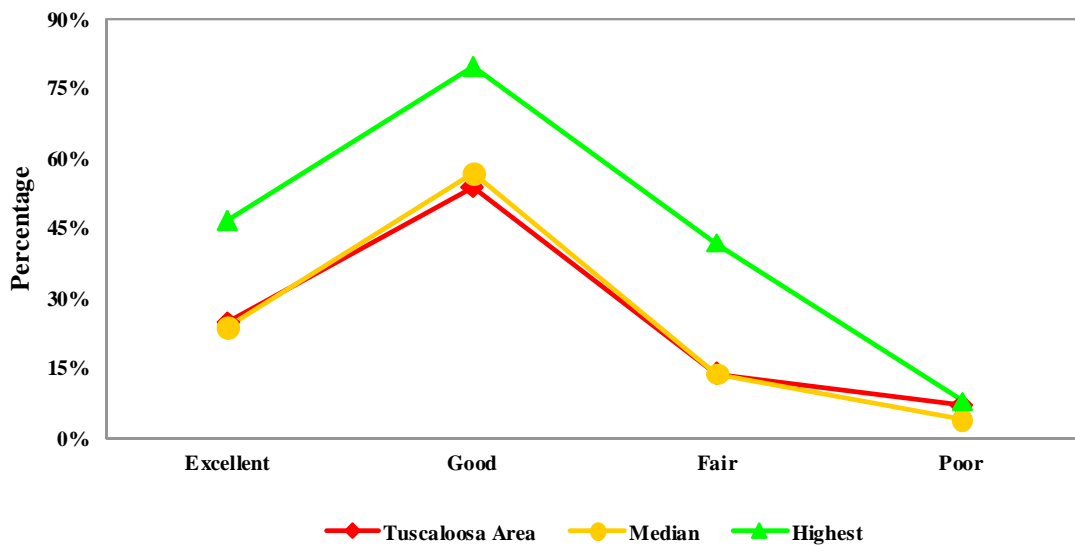
COMPARISON OF EMPLOYER RATINGS

The Tuscaloosa Area / Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months

Worker Productivity



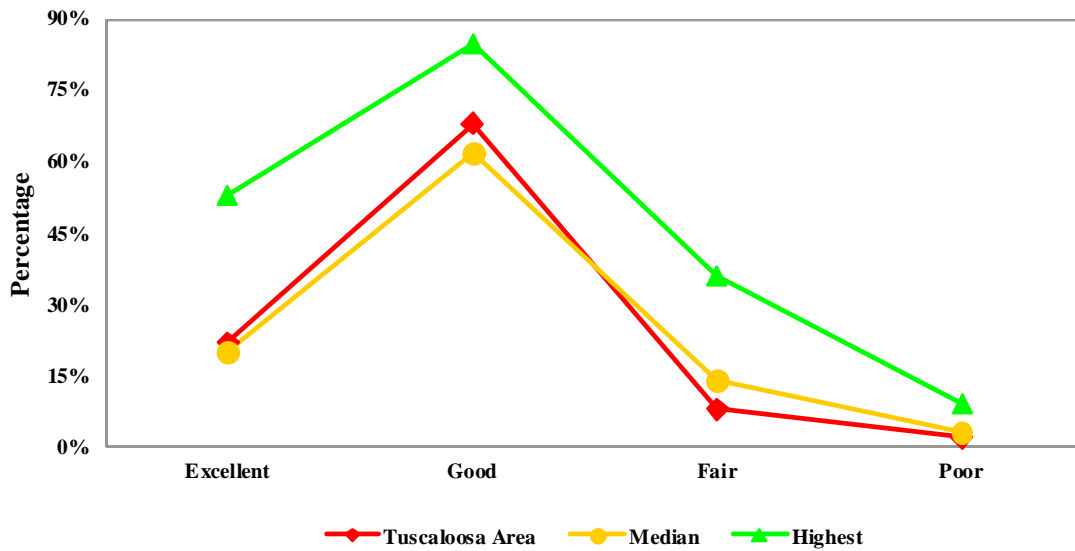
Worker Reliability



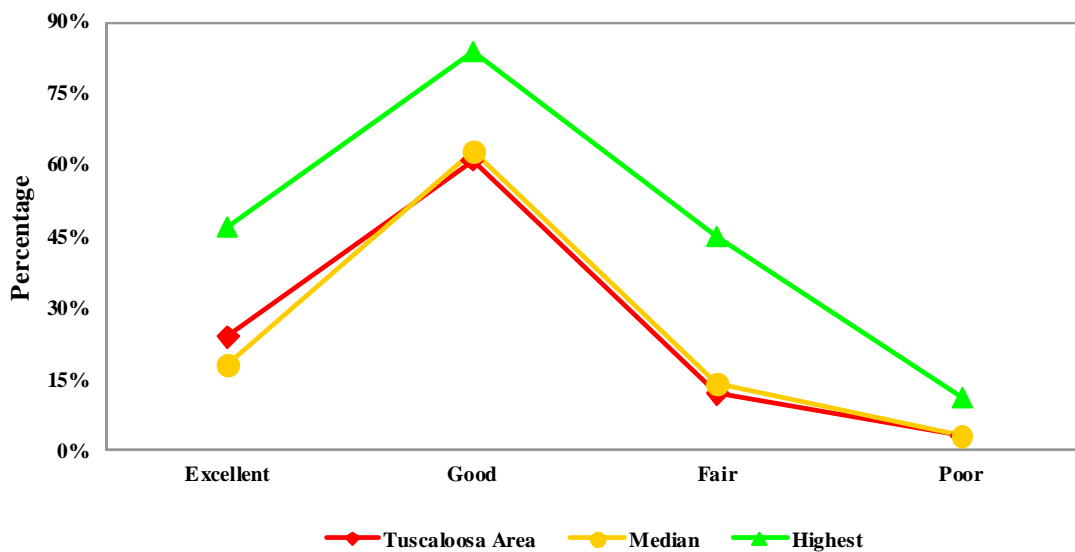
COMPARISON OF EMPLOYER RATINGS

The Tuscaloosa Area / Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months

Worker Attitudes



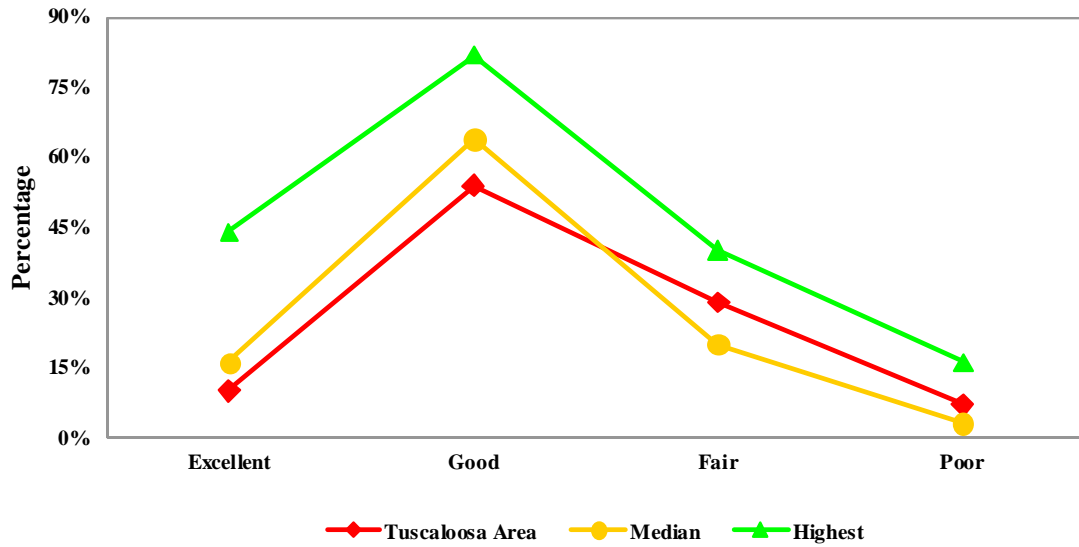
Worker Teamwork Skills



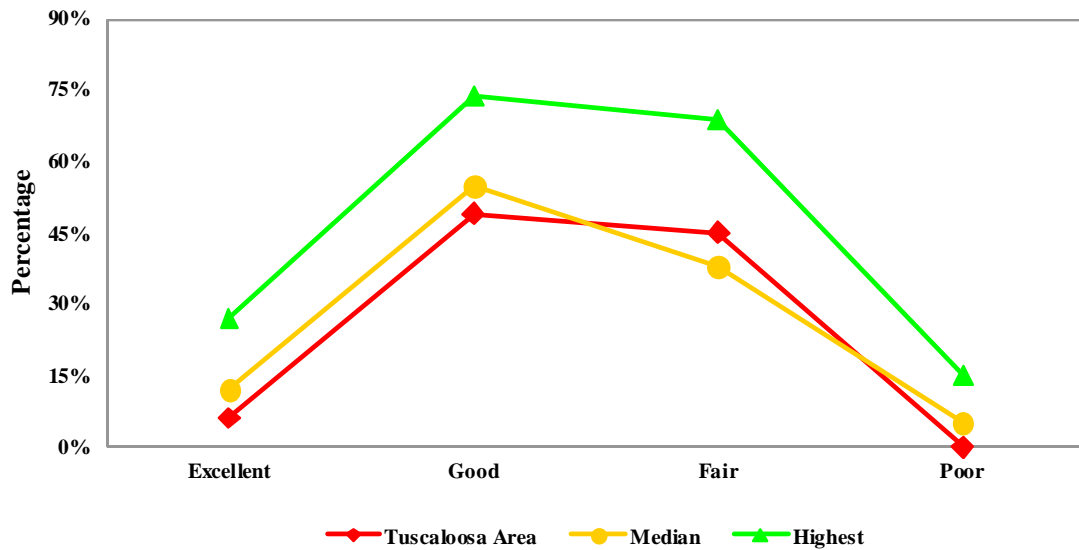
COMPARISON OF EMPLOYER RATINGS

The Tuscaloosa Area / Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months

Worker Reading Skills



Worker Writing Skills



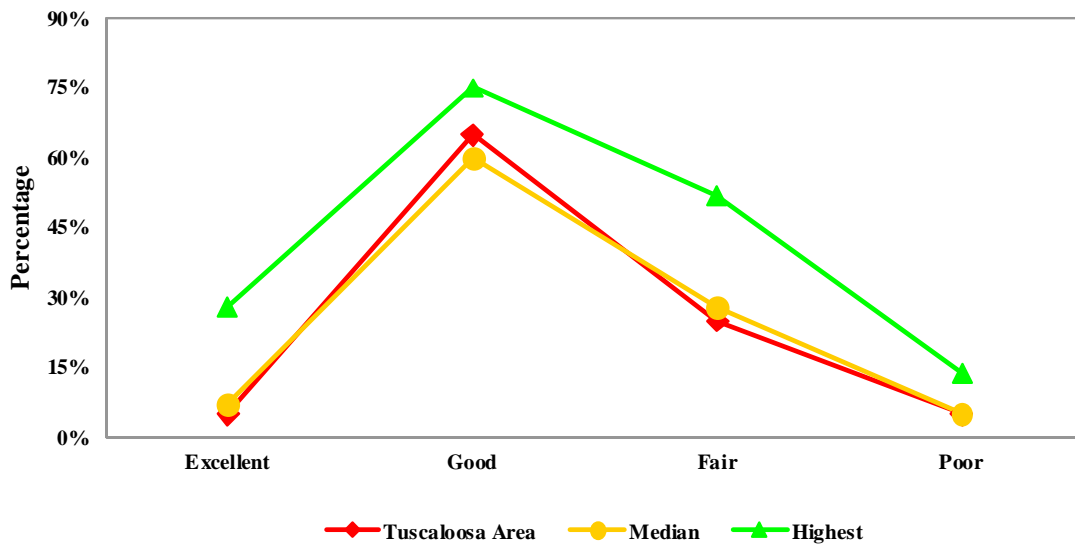
COMPARISON OF EMPLOYER RATINGS

The Tuscaloosa Area / Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months

Worker Math Skills



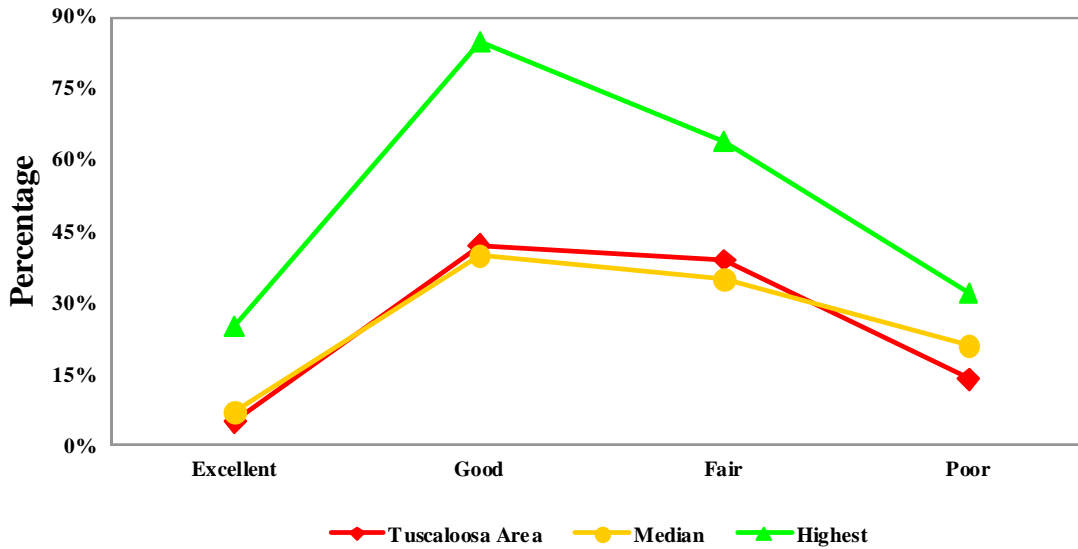
Worker Entry Level Skills



COMPARISON OF EMPLOYER RATINGS

The Tuscaloosa Area / Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months

Availability of Skilled Workers



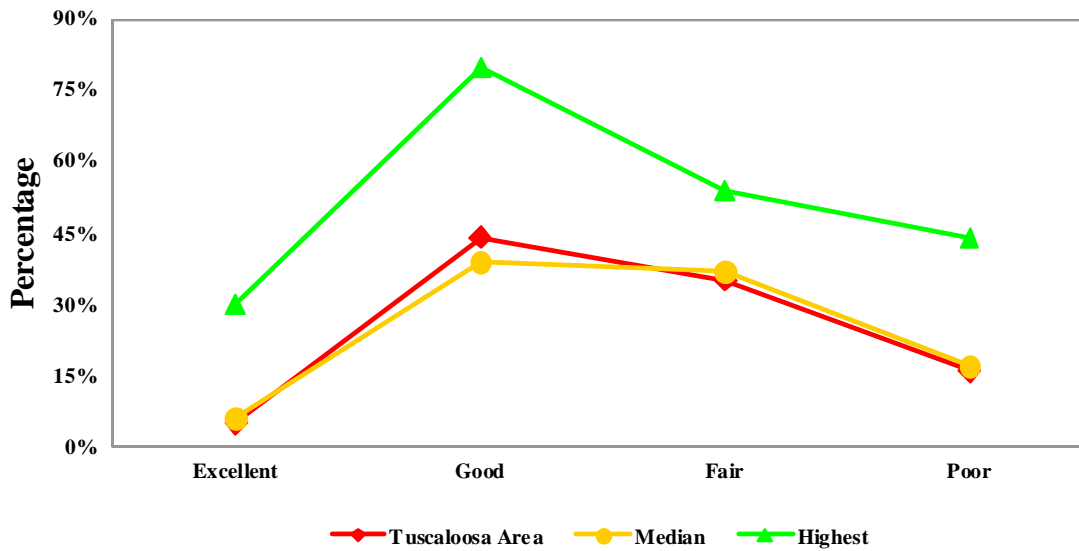
Availability of Unskilled Workers



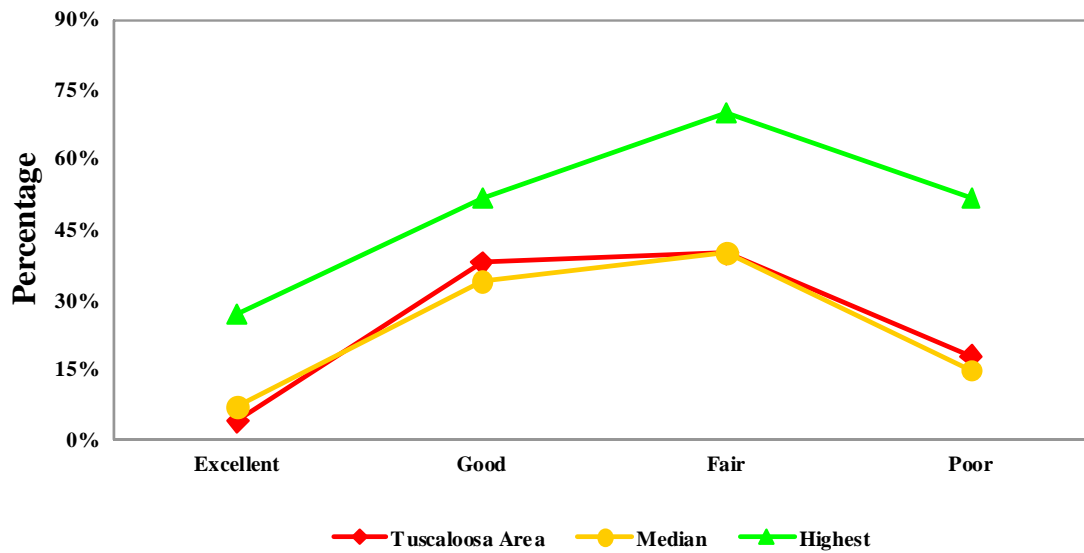
COMPARISON OF EMPLOYER RATINGS

The Tuscaloosa Area / Locations Surveyed Over the Past 18 Months

Availability of Professional Workers



Availability of Technical Workers



LAY-OFF / CALL-BACKS

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

Of the fifty-nine (59) surveyed employers, twenty (20) had experienced lay-offs in the last six months, (coinciding with the 2008/2009 economic downturn). The numbers of workers affected by these layoffs are as follows:

Full-Time, Permanent Workers	507
Part-Time, Permanent Workers	2
Temporary Workers	10
Total Workers Laid-Off	519

Of the companies who have experienced lay-offs, call-backs are anticipated in the following time periods:

Time Period	Number of Companies
6 Months	5
9 Months	3
12 Months	5
Other Time Period	2
Possible Call-Backs, But Not Certain	2
Not Anticipating Call-Backs	3



For those companies which plan call-backs, two additional questions were asked:

Q: “Will former full-time workers be called back at full or partial time?”

A: Full-Time 14 companies
 Partial Time 2 companies
 Unknown 1 company

Q: “How many workers will be called back altogether?”

A:

Full-Time, Permanent Workers	130
Part-Time, Permanent Workers	0
Temporary Workers	0
Total Workers Called Back	130

It should be noted that one employer reported two large, temporary plant shutdowns, but reported that all workers were or will be called back at their previous full-time status. This data is not included in the tables above.



**HIRING PROJECTIONS / ENTRY LEVEL REQUIREMENTS
BY JOB TITLE**

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

Area employers participating in this survey were asked to estimate the number of new hires over three timeframe categories – over the next 6 months; over the next 7 – 12 months; and, over the next 13 – 24 months. Several employers were able to estimate exact numbers of new hires. Many companies reported they would be hiring during these timeframes, but were unsure of the number of new hires. This is notated by “nk” (not known) in the tables that follow. Even though estimated numbers of new hires were not available in all cases, the skills and requirements for these positions are listed.

Job Title	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 6 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 7-12 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 13-24 Months	Requirements for Entry Level Job
Assembly Worker			nk	- High School Diploma - 2-Year Technical Degree
Bookkeeper			1	- B.S.
Cashier	5-10	15-20		- Experience
Clerical/Administrative		2 nk	nk	- High School Diploma/GED - Pre-Employment Test
Computer Operator		1		- Experience



Job Title	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 6 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 7-12 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 13-24 Months	Requirements for Entry Level Job
Computer Programmer/IT Specialist	nk	nk	nk	- High-Level Technology Skills
Dump Truck Driver	2			- CDL - 2 Years Experience
Engineer		nk	4-5 nk	- 4-Year Degree - B.S./Masters – Civil or Related Engineering
Engineering Technician		1		- High School Diploma/GED
Field Technician		5-10		- High School Diploma/GED - Associate Degree - B.S. - Technology Experience - Good Work Ethics
General Labor/Production	15 nk 1 nk	2 nk nk nk	nk 1 15-20 nk nk nk nk nk nk	- High School Diploma/GED - 18 Year of Age - Experience - Physical Exam - Drug-Free - Must Read/Write - Willing to Work 12-Hour Shifts - No Experience Required



Job Title	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 6 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 7-12 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 13-24 Months	Requirements for Entry Level Job
Machinist	10-12		nk	- High School Diploma/GED - 2-Year Technical Degree or 5 Year Experience
Maintenance	nk	1 nk	1 nk	- 2 Years Experience - High School Diploma plus experience - Experience
Manager/Supervisor	nk nk nk	nk nk nk	nk nk nk	- No Degree Required
Mechanic	2	3 nk	nk	- 1 Year Experience - FAA license - Experience
Mixers Driver	5-6			- CDL - 2 Years Experience
Plant Operator			nk	- 2-Year Degree (welding/machining/electrical/maintenance)
Quality Assurance			1	- Experience
Retail Clerk	5-10 nk	15-20 nk	nk	- Experience - No Experience Required



Job Title	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 6 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 7-12 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 13-24 Months	Requirements for Entry Level Job
Route Driver			3-4 nk	- High School Diploma/GED plus CDL
Safety Manager			1	- 4-Year Degree
Sales/Customer Service	nk	nk nk	1 nk nk	- Sales Experience - High School Diploma/GED - Pre-Employment Test - No Experienced Required
Tanker Truck Driver	1			- CDL - 2 Years Experience
Warehouse/Distribution	3 nk	nk	nk 1 nk	- Fork Lift Experience - High School Diploma - Mining Experience



POSSIBLE HIRINGS BY JOB TITLE
The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

Several employers indicated the possibility of new hires during the three timeframe categories, but did not give estimated numbers. The table below identifies these positions.

Job Title	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 6 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 7-12 Months	Estimated New Hires Over the Next 13-24 Months
Assembly Worker		X	
General Labor		X	X
Drivers			X
Midline Skills			X
Computer Programmer		X	X



WORKFORCE SKILLS NEEDS / GAPS

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

Employers in the Tuscaloosa region were asked to give their opinions concerning skills they felt were most needed in the area's workforce. 92% of the employers interviewed responded to this question. Many of these employers expressed multiple needs, therefore, the percentages will not equal 100%. Opinions are shown below.

SKILLS NEEDED	% of Employers
Technical	32%
Math	22%
Machining	19%
Computer	15%
Work Ethics	14%
Reading	12%
Communications	12%
Maintenance/Trades	11%
Writing	10%
Interpersonal/Life Skills	10%
Medical	3%
Professional/Management	3%
Problem Solving/Decision Making	3%
Engineering	2%



The employers interviewed were further surveyed as to gaps they felt existed in the area’s public schools and community colleges/technical schools that affect the region’s workforce. 65% of the employers commented on gaps in the public schools; 36% commented on gaps in the community colleges/technical schools.

GAPS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS	% of Employers
Reading/Writing	56%
Math	37%
Shop/Trades Classes	35%
Job Readiness/Work Ethics	19%
Overall Education	14%

GAPS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES/TECH SCHOOLS	% of Employers
Shop/Trades Classes*	39%
General Education	5%

* Welding, Hydraulics, Driving, Electrical, Drafting, Calculus, Geometry, PLC



Specific comments were made by some of the employers concerning public schools and community colleges/technical schools. These comments are presented here.

COMMENTS – PUBLIC SCHOOLS
- Teaching for college, not for trades
- Too low standards for graduation
- Administrative bureaucracy
- Low level of accountability
- Problem is environment, not schools themselves

COMMENTS – COMMUNITY COLLEGES/TECH SCHOOLS
- Good instructors and good equipment
- Support community very well
- Work well with existing industry
- Need more co-op programs
- Need medical/pharmacy training
- Cost prohibitive for some
- Need more on-site training
- Not specialized enough/need to be more attentive to specific needs of businesses
- Too much focus on professional degrees
- Residents don't take advantage of the offerings
- Do a great job for businesses



EMPLOYER TRAINING NEEDS

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

The Tuscaloosa area employers were surveyed as to their current and future training needs. Technical skills, including machining, welding, maintenance and mechanics were reported most frequently as training needs both currently and in the future. Soft skills such as communications and problem-solving, along with basic skills of reading, writing and math were also cited by the employees as training needs in both categories. Training on computers – literacy and application, programming and maintenance – was reported as a key issue for the future.

CURRENT TRAINING NEEDS	% of Employers
Technical Skills	54%
Soft Skills	20%
Computer	15%
Basic Skills	12%

FUTURE TRAINING NEEDS	% of Employers
Technical Skills	26%
Computer	19%
Soft Skills	7%
Basic Skills	6%

Other training needs reported included, among others, medical, safety, and professional/management.



WORKFORCE TRENDS / EMPLOYER STRATEGIES

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

During the interviewing of the Tuscaloosa area employers, questions were posed regarding industry trends and strategies to prepare for the expected loss in workforce due to retirements of “baby boomers”.

By far, the most-mentioned industry trend was advancement in technology/automation. Lay-offs and lean manufacturing (eliminate waste/do more with less) were also cited. Other trends include a more team approach to projects/production and more attention to detail. The industry trends reported are listed below.

INDUSTRY TRENDS
Increased Technology/Automation
Lay-Offs
Lean Manufacturing
Team Approach to Projects/Production
More Attention to Detail
Shortage of Professionals/Aging Workforce
Remote Workers/Jobs Leaving the U.S.
Decline in Certain Types of Industry
Younger Workforce/Not as Dedicated/Not as Willing to Work/Less Skilled
More Training – In-House and Web-Based
Immigrant Workforce
Trying to Stabilize to Deal with Economy



According to a recent national study, U.S. businesses will face a shortage of millions of workers over the next ten years due to the baby boomer generation approaching retirement. Strategies to prepare for this reduction in workforce were reported by 34% of the Tuscaloosa area employers. These strategies include:

STRATEGIES FOR FUTURE REDUCTION IN WORKFORCE
Mentoring
Succession Planning and Tracking
Reducing Workforce as a Whole/Reducing Hours Worked
Implementing More Automation to Replace to Workers
Cross-Training/More Internal Training
Creating Formalized Procedures for All Positions
More Work with Community Colleges/Career Center
Educational Assistance and Scholarships for Training
Job Fairs to Create Awareness of Industry as a Career Path
H1-B Visa (non-immigrant visa) for Higher Level Jobs



EMPLOYER SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE WORKFORCE

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

Employers were given the opportunity to give their opinions on what could be done to improve the quality of the area's workforce. 55% of the employers surveyed answered this question, with education, particularly K-12, being the top response. With regard to this issue, the following suggestions were made:

- Re-vamp the overall curriculum and process
- Increase commitment to technical training
- Add more technical training courses
- Re-educate students that blue collar jobs are good jobs for their future
- Concentrate on communication and comprehension
- Address work ethics and cultural attitudes
- Involve employers as partners to ensure future skills sets

Other suggestions for improving the workforce included alerting the public to the course offering available at the community colleges/tech schools and supporting government initiatives.



GENERAL COMMENTS

The Tuscaloosa Area Total Workforce

In conclusion, general comments made by the participating employers on the Tuscaloosa area workforce included the following statements. Please note that some statements are paraphrased.

- *“We have plenty of minimum wage workers but their productivity and education are poor. There are good people out there and we are willing to pay to get quality workers. We are trying to hire good people who have lost jobs at other companies.”*
- *“The workforce in Tuscaloosa is more dependable and has a better work ethic than other locations I have managed, but their education level is lower.”*
- *“This is a stellar workforce – hard working – diligent – committed to doing a good job.”*
- *“High school kids are unprepared for the workforce.”*
- *“The skilled labor is leaving the county for jobs in Birmingham or Selma.”*
- *“Great community! Skilled labor is readily available. It is a good workforce.”*
- *“I’m pleased with the economy – it is now easier to find qualified workers.”*
- *“We hire unskilled labor and...If it were not for the Hispanic employees we would not be able to staff our plants.”*
- *“We need to prepare high school students for jobs and teach soft skills.”*



- *“Good, reliable group of workers that want to do a good job.”*
- *“People are very motivated and engaged and want to do a great job.”*
- *“Work is changing from the textile industry to other areas.”*
- *“Need to get the kids more prepared for work.”*
- *“The workforce applicants we are being exposed to are capable of learning, they do have the aptitude. The field of education is centered around preparing a student for college, and only 20% of students make it through college. We need to be preparing the 80% for a productive life.”*
- *“West Alabama is a great place for business. The workforce is great. We need to work on technical skills and engineering...important if Alabama wants to stay competitive in manufacturing industry.”*
- *“People are so nice in Alabama. It is a great environment.”*





THE PATHFINDERS

**P.O. Box 702317
Dallas, Texas 75370**

**Telephone: 972-387-3750
Fax: 469-916-6878**

E-Mail: info@thepathfindersus.com

Web site: www.thepathfindersus.com