

The journey to meaningful workforce participation for Southwest students

Job vacancies at historic highs

And it's not just low-paying jobs requiring little education. It's all occupations, industries, and educational background requirements. The biggest economic development issue facing southwest Minnesota is the lack of people to fill vacant job positions – not creating more jobs.

State of workforce participation after high school

We analyzed 38,154 individuals who graduated from a high school located between 2008 and 2019 in EDR 6E, EDR 6W, and EDR 8 to see what path they took after graduating high school. Figure 1 shows the proportion of individuals that were in each workforce participation “state” each year after they graduated high school. There are a few highlights.

1. The percentage of SW high school graduates that have meaningful workforce participation in Southwest grows quickly right after high school, but stagnates about 25%.
2. The percentage of SW high school graduates with meaningful workforce participation in Minnesota but not Southwest grows slowly, but increases as college grads enter the labor force and stagnates at about 25% 6 years after high school.
3. There is a consistent 15% of SW graduates at any given year after high school that are working part-time somewhere in Minnesota.
4. The percentage of individuals that have no MN employment record and are not attending post-secondary grows significantly over the years after high school. By 10 years after high school, over a third of the SW high school students do not have a Minnesota employment record.

Percent share by year(s) after graduating high school

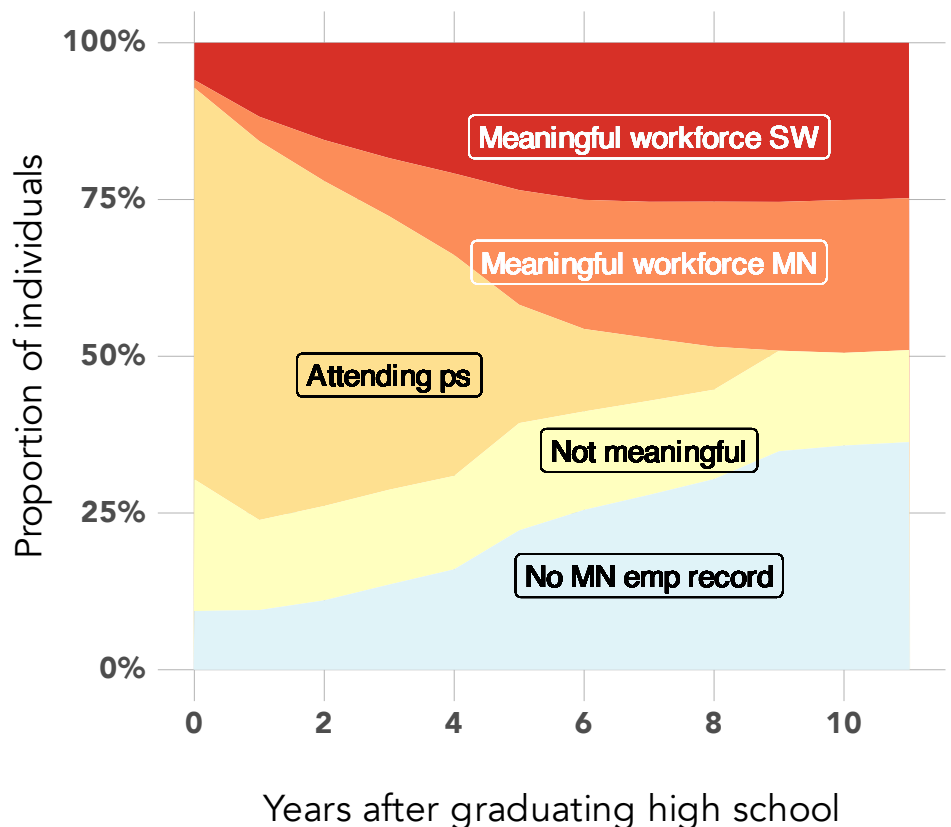


Figure 1: Proportion of SW high school graduates that are categorized in each workforce participation state by each year after graduating high school.

Increasing likelihood to be in specific workforce participation “state”

Meaningful workforce participation - SW	Meaningful workforce participation – MN, not SW	No Minnesota employment record
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate from a college in the region • Graduate from a 2-year college • Earn an Associate degree • Involved in CTE programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate from a college in MN but not SW • Graduate from a 4-year college • Earn a bachelor's degree or higher • Higher involvement in college prep programming (MCA tests, ACT, etc...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not attend college • Graduate from a college located outside Minnesota • No involvement in CTE programming

No MN employment record – who are they?

Individuals that don't have a Minnesota employment record can mean that someone is self-employed, working in another state, serving in the military, employed by the federal government, or not participating in the labor force. We estimate that roughly **22%** of SW high school graduates that are not attending post-secondary five years after high school are in the labor force in another state.

Why leave if opportunities exist

This analysis indicates that old, traditional narratives that the “brightest” students must leave rural areas to find opportunities is still strong despite their being plenty of opportunities for individuals with advanced degrees.

More focus needs to be in investing in programs that highlight local and regional opportunities for ALL students, not just traditional Career and Technical Education careers.

Recommendations

Invest in local ties: Invest in current (such as CTE) and new programming that ties students to the local area and increases awareness of opportunities not just for immediate careers, but also after graduating college.

Tweak current policy to compete with Build Dakota: The North Star Promise (tuition waiver program passed in 2023) is a step in the right direction and can create incentives for students that are pulled to border states for college. A few tweaks, such as putting in a work requirement and allow for local investment, would make it even more helpful to Southwest Minnesota.