

Predictors of Working Learner Status in High School

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The current study investigated differences in the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of “working learners” (high school students working 15 hours or more a week) and non-working learners. It also explored how working learner status is related to a measure of postsecondary readiness as well as career sureness. This was done using self-reported data from the assessment records of U.S. high school students from the October 2014 ACT national testing date.¹

Table 1. Group Differences by Working Learner Status

n = 366,528

Variable	Mean or Percentage	
	Working Learner	Non-Working Learner
Age	18.5	18.4
Female	57.6%	58.2%
Male	42.4%	41.8%
Parents' highest level of education—high school degree or less	40.0%	33.0%
Parents' highest level of education—college degree or higher	60.0%	67.0%
Parental income—\$36,000 or less	31.1%	27.3%
Parental income—more than \$36,000	68.9%	72.7%
Occupational sureness—I am fairly sure or not sure	66.9%	71.9%
Occupational sureness—I am very sure	33.1%	28.1%
Planned work hours per week in college—none or up to 10 hours	28.1%	49.1%
Planned work hours per week in college—11 hours or more	71.9%	50.9%
Minority	36.4%	38.7%
White/Asian	63.6%	61.3%
ACT composite score	20.9	22.0

Findings

- 28.4% of respondents reported working more than 15 hours a week, while 71.6% of respondents reported working 0-15 hours a week.
- Working learners were more likely to have lower postsecondary readiness scores, expect to work more intensely while in college, and to be more sure of their career plans.
- Gender did not significantly predict working learner status.
- White/Asian students were found to be more likely than minority students to work in high school.
- Older students were found to also be more likely to work in high school.
- SES status as defined by parental income had no real impact on working learner status after controlling for other student characteristics. ■

Notes

¹For more information, see LeFebvre, M. (2017). *Predictors of working learner status in high school*. Iowa City, IA: ACT.

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