

BY KATRINA MULLEN

New from the Richmond Fed's Regional Matters blog

Laura Dawson Ullrich. "Community College Enrollment in Fall 2021 and Cumulative Enrollment Impacts."

In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, community colleges experienced significant enrollment declines. By fall 2021, community colleges were hopeful that enrollment would increase — only to experience another, though smaller, decline. While male enrollment fell considerably in fall 2020, female enrollment fell slightly more than male enrollment in fall 2021. Another trend emerged in the Fifth District: The most urban community colleges experienced greater enrollment declines compared with more rural schools, due to stricter COVID-19 restrictions, limited public transportation, and smaller campus size. Now the uncertainty of the pandemic is causing community colleges to think about funding and the dynamics of the future workforce.

Joseph Mengedoth and Jacob Walker. "Regional Job Openings and Quits Rates Jolt to New Highs."

The Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) provides information not only on the demand for labor, but also on firms' abilities to fill open positions or retain workers. Between June and July 2021, the job openings rate reached record highs in the United States and all Fifth District states — West Virginia reached the highest in the district at 9.1 percent. Two jurisdictions in the Fifth District, the District of Columbia and Maryland, had a higher quits rate than the United States as a whole. Overall, the JOLTS lends itself to state-level observations of the labor market and the confidence of workers.

Erika Bell. "Rural Spotlight: Promoting Small Business Development in South Carolina."

Small businesses — firms with fewer than 500 employees — comprise 99.9 percent of all businesses in the United States and are vital to local economies and communities. The Southeastern Institute for Manufacturing and Technology in Florence, S.C., and its Gould Business Incubator (GBI) is one example of the nearly 1,400 U.S. business incubators that provide startups and early-stage businesses the space and support to grow. Despite challenges from COVID-19, GBI pivoted and reallocated resources to continue its services. With more than 30 businesses ranging from home health to IT and an urban wear retailer, GBI has benefitted from networking and collaborating; in the process, it says it added over \$20 million into the Florence and Darlington economies during the last fiscal year.

Hailey Phelps. "2020 Census: A Look at the Fifth District."

Since the last U.S. Census in 2010, the national population has grown 7.4 percent, the slowest growth rate since the 1930s. The slowdown is indicative of longer-term trends such as fewer births and more deaths from an aging population. Fifth District states, excluding the District of Columbia, experienced this slowdown in population growth. Still, total

population in those states increased by nearly 2.5 million people. Another takeaway from the 2020 U.S. Census is a continued population shift toward urban areas: The number of people living in urban counties in the Fifth District increased, while generally, the number living in rural areas decreased.

Jason Kosakow. "Rising Wages and Increased Hiring Two Years Into the COVID-19 Pandemic."

The Richmond Fed's monthly survey of businesses about their hiring plans and changes in wages indicated that more businesses plan to increase employment and raise wages. Of the Fifth District firms that responded in November 2021, more than half said they planned to increase employment in the next 12 months.

Between 2020 and 2021, the percentage of firms raising starting wages more than doubled for most job categories. Firms have noted there is a strong demand for workers, but it remains increasingly difficult to fill open positions, especially those requiring a high school degree or less. While skill matching and reservation wages continue to plague firms and workers, increasing employment and raising wages will depend on the ability of firms to find workers.

Tiffany Hollin-Wright and Jessica King. "Rural Spotlight: Resuscitating the Health Care Workforce Pipeline in the Valleys."

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified shortages of health care workers, especially in rural areas, where more than half of the shortages exist. The Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, a community-based Goodwill organization in Roanoke, Va., and the surrounding areas, has been trying to address this shortage through its GoodCare program. With three occupational tracks — health information, nursing, and health care support — the program offers a six-week foundations training course, primarily for low-income individuals and referrals from Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act providers. Despite partnerships and increased enrollment, GoodCare participants face workforce barriers including low entry-level wages, child care, and benefits cliffs. (See also "The Rural Nursing Shortage," p. 4.) **EF**

