

Poll STATION

With Linda Banister

The debate regarding children in the workplace has been around for many years. While some people believe children should be out playing and enjoying their younger years, others feel it is important they have the opportunity to earn their own money and contribute to their families. Recently, the Alberta government made an amendment that makes it legal for employers in the restaurant industry to hire employees between the ages of 12 and 14 to perform certain duties in restaurants, with parental consent and proper safety training. The lower age limit before this change was age 14. This month the *Poll Station* asked Edmontonians about their thoughts and opinions on children in the workplace.



AT WHAT AGE SHOULD CHILDREN ENTER THE WORKPLACE?



To begin the interview, respondents were asked what they felt was the youngest age a child should be allowed to legally work in Alberta. The majority of respondents—84 percent—felt they should be at least 14 years of age: 34 percent said age 14, 20 percent said age 15 and 38 percent said 16 or older. Seven percent felt it was acceptable for children under 14 years of age to work. The average age stated by respondents was 15 years.

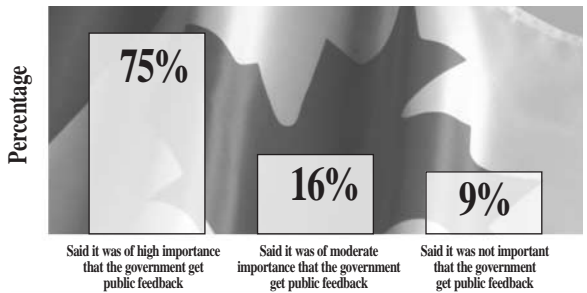
Next, respondents were asked to rate how supportive they were of allowing 12- and 13-year olds to work in restaurants, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means not at all supportive and 5 means very supportive. More than three-quarters of respondents indicated a rating of low support (1 or 2), while 10 percent were neutral (a rating of 3), and 14 percent provided a rating of high support (4 or 5). The most frequently mentioned reasons for not supporting this initiative were that the age group is too young (66 percent) and children should be playing or going to school (44 percent). Those who supported the initiative said it offers good experience (53 percent), and allows children to earn their own money (33 percent). Twenty percent of respondents indicated they had worked when they were that age.

WHAT RESTAURANT JOBS ARE APPROPRIATE FOR 12- & 13-YEAR OLDS?

After being informed that only specific positions had been approved under the amendment, respondents were asked to comment on several typical restaurant positions as to whether they felt it would be appropriate for someone aged 12 or 13 to be working at these positions. Forty-four percent thought dishwashing, bussing tables or cleaning was an appropriate duty, while 22 percent found assembling orders to be appropriate. Being a cashier and waiting

on tables were both supported by 14 percent of respondents. Only 12 percent said being a host/hostess was appropriate for children in this age group.

WHO SHOULD PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON THIS INITIATIVE?



Finally, respondents were asked how important they feel it is that the government has a consultation process to get public feedback on such an initiative, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means not at all important and 5 means very important. Three-quarters stated that it was of high importance (a rating of 4 or 5) that the government get feedback, while 16 percent stated it was of moderate importance (a rating of 3), and nine percent felt it was not important (a rating of 1 or 2). When asked who they thought should be consulted on this type of initiative, almost two thirds of respondents (64 percent) stated that consultation sessions should be held with parents. Others mentioned were employers (28 percent), teachers (28 percent) and the general public (12 percent).

The *Poll Station* surveyed 100 City of Edmonton residents on the topic and, while the results of the research are not statistically reliable, they do provide a qualitative indication of what Edmontonians are thinking. ✓

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