

# A DISRUPTED YEAR

## HOW THE ARRIVAL OF COVID-19 AFFECTED YOUTH DISCONNECTION

**Kristen Lewis**

THE MEASURE OF AMERICA  
YOUTH DISCONNECTION SERIES  
**2022**



**SSRC**

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Kristen

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### MEASURE OF AMERICA

**Measure of America** is a project of the **Social Science Research Council**, a century-old independent nonprofit that mobilizes knowledge for the public good. Measure of America creates easy-to-use and methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being and opportunity in America. Through reports, interactive websites and apps, and custom-built dashboards, Measure of America works with partners to breathe life into numbers, using data to identify areas of need, pinpoint levers for change, and track progress over time.

The root of this work is the human development and capabilities approach, the brainchild of Harvard professor and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. Human development is about improving people's well-being and expanding their choices and opportunities to live freely chosen lives of value. Measure of America cares about youth disconnection because it hampers human development, closing off some of life's most rewarding and joyful paths and leading to a future of limited horizons and unrealized potential.

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# A DISRUPTED YEAR

HOW THE ARRIVAL OF COVID-19 AFFECTED YOUTH DISCONNECTION

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# WHO ARE AMERICA'S DISCONNECTED YOUNG PEOPLE?

38,256,800

UNITED STATES YOUTH POPULATION

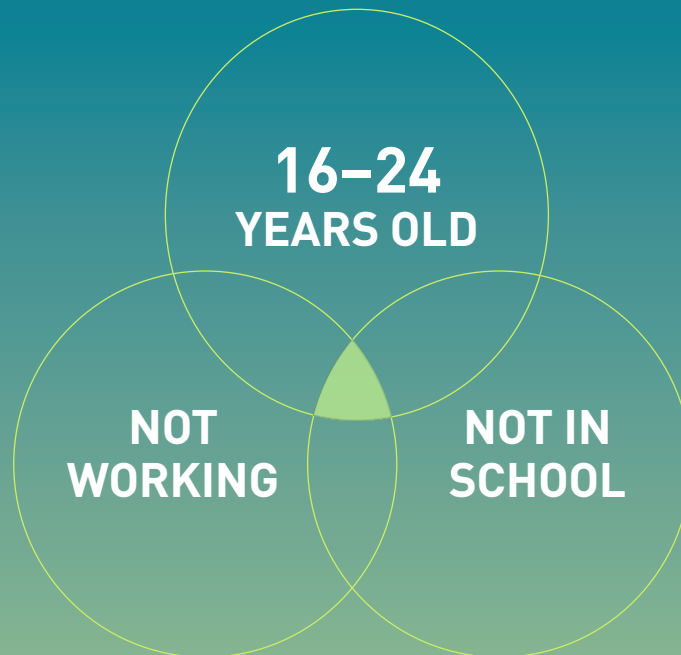
(Teens & Young Adults 16–24 Years Old)

12.6%

OF YOUTH IN THE UNITED STATES ARE DISCONNECTED

( 4,830,700 PEOPLE )

Measure of America defines disconnected youth as teens and young adults ages 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor working.



Measure of America has used this definition in its data calculations and analysis on youth disconnection since its first report on the topic, *One in Seven*, published in 2012.

## INTRODUCTION

A full two years after Covid-19 first took hold and dramatically upended our lives, the pandemic continues to pose countless health, educational, and economic challenges. Though teenagers and young adults were less likely than older people to become seriously ill, they nonetheless suffered grave losses. The events of 2020 deprived America's young people of a host of experiences that would have allowed them to build the capabilities required to live flourishing lives as adults. These losses are reflected in **the 2020 national youth disconnection rate of 12.6 percent**—an upward spike that reverses a decade-long trend of falling rates. And, due to data collection challenges discussed below, we believe that this rate is a sizeable underestimate of the share of young people neither working nor in school in 2020.

Touchstones along the road to adulthood are usually plentiful for 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds—participating in clubs, playing sports, taking important tests like the SAT and ACT, getting a driver's license, working a first part-time job, and visiting colleges—not to mention fun and meaningful traditions like homecoming, prom, and graduation. For high schoolers in 2020, these experiences all but vanished, replaced by isolation, anxiety, grief, and the grinding tedium of remote learning. Young people whose disability needs are typically addressed in school were left without needed services. Those who depend on school for basics like meals and a safe place to spend the day saw these vital lifelines severed. And for those already at risk of dropping out, the strains of remote learning frayed or even snapped the tenuous bonds keeping them attached to school. While some students—such as those who struggle with social anxiety or who had experienced racism or bullying at school—preferred remote learning, most did not, and the highest costs were borne by the least advantaged students. For example, a study of participation in online learning among secondary students in the Los Angeles Unified School District during spring 2020 found that “compared to more advantaged students, fewer middle and high school students who are Black, Hispanic, living in low-income households, classified as English learners, have a disability, are in the district's homeless program, or are in foster care participated across all measures of online activity” and that this low participation likely caused lost learning that “could take students years to recoup.”<sup>1</sup> In October 2021, the Census Bureau released data showing that 2020 school enrollment levels among people under 35 were at a more than twenty-year low, 52 percent.<sup>2</sup> For youth ages 16 to 24, this translates to 530,000 fewer students enrolled in high school and college in 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Slightly older youth looking forward to starting or returning to college, participating in internships or apprenticeships, completing degrees and certificates, starting first “real” jobs, living independently for the first time, or even getting married likewise saw their plans evaporate as the pandemic raced across the country. Colleges shut their doors and sent their students home, employers went

Disconnected youth are teens and young adults ages 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor working.

out of business, and the hiring of entry-level workers came to an abrupt halt. Strikingly, 3.7 million fewer youth were employed in July 2020 than in July 2019, the typical seasonal high-water mark of youth employment.<sup>4</sup> A time of life that promises freedom and adventure became the opposite, amounting to, in essence, a collective grounding of the nation's youth. While some boomeranged home to wait out the pandemic in comfortable childhood bedrooms with computers and strong internet connections, others returned to crowded quarters, struggled to stay connected to school, or found themselves thrust into the roles of caretaker for younger siblings or breadwinner for the household.

College enrollment in 2020 dropped to levels not seen since 2007. But the decline was not spread across all types of higher education institutions; the bulk took place in two-year community colleges, which are the most likely to admit low-income and nonwhite students.<sup>5</sup> In fall 2020, college enrollments were down by about 2 percent at public and private four-year colleges and universities, but by 9.5 percent at community colleges, reaching the lowest enrollment level in twenty years. Among first-time college-goers, community college attendance dropped nearly 30 percent for Black, Hispanic, and Native American students and by nearly 20 percent for Asian and white students. Male community college enrollment fell by 14.4 percent, more than double the drop in female enrollment, 6.0 percent.<sup>6</sup> Fall 2021 enrollment did not show a recovery; rather, rates fell further still. In total, community colleges lost 15 percent of their students over two years.<sup>7</sup> In terms of credential type, while enrollment among students studying for a four-year bachelor's degree was down just 1.1 percent, enrollment among students studying for both undergraduate certificates and two-year associate degrees was down 9.0 percent;<sup>8</sup> these credentials are more typically sought by low-income than by high-income students.

Covid-19 was a national nightmare for our young people, one that may cast a long shadow into adulthood unless mitigation strategies are put into place quickly. Research shows that being disconnected as a young person has long-term consequences; it's associated with lower earnings, less education, worse health, and even less happiness in later adulthood. Our research shows that how long a young person is disconnected also matters, with longer spells of disconnection associated with worse outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

Covid-19 was a national nightmare for our young people, one that may cast a long shadow into adulthood unless mitigation strategies are put into place quickly.

**BOX 1 How Covid-19 Affected Data Collection in 2020 and What That Means for This Year's Estimates**

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted the federal statistical collection and curation processes. These disruptions resulted in lower American Community Survey response rates not only from the very groups most likely to be out of school and work, such as low-income, Black, and Latino households, but also during the initial months of the pandemic, when the economy shed literally millions of jobs, sending the youth disconnection rate through the roof.<sup>10</sup>

Although the Census Bureau took several steps to shore up the 2020 survey data by cross-referencing additional government data sources, the Bureau nonetheless released these data with a host of caveats and urged users to exercise caution when making comparisons to previous years' data. These caveats suggest that the estimates we provide in this report understate the magnitude of youth disconnection in 2020; we believe that the actual rates, in other words, are at least this high and likely higher. That said, these data are still the most comprehensive and reliable available.

Based on 2020 monthly youth unemployment figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which tend to track closely with the youth disconnection rate, we believed that disconnection skyrocketed in the spring of 2020.<sup>11</sup> This appears to have been the case: 2020 data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) indicate that the national disconnection rate in April 2020 was 20 percent—two in ten young people across the country were neither working nor in school. By June the rate

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted the federal statistical collection and curation processes.



reached 28 percent, nearly three in ten young people.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned above, an astonishing 3.7 million fewer youth were employed in July 2020 than in July 2019.

In late 2021 the Census Bureau released some of the 2020 American Community Survey employment and education data we used to calculate youth disconnection rates in this report. This is the source that we use to calculate the youth disconnection rate by race and ethnicity, by gender, and by place—nationally and by state, metro area, congressional district, county, and neighborhood cluster. The 2020 Census Bureau data released so far allowed us to calculate rates for all these population slices except for counties and neighborhood clusters; we will calculate those rates later this year when the data become available.

For additional context and detail, please see **Appendix 1: Youth Disconnection Data Collection and Reporting in 2020** on **PAGE 30** of this report.

# YOUTH DISCONNECTION **NATIONALLY**



YOUTH DISCONNECTION  
BY GENDER AND BY RACE  
AND ETHNICITY



The 2020 youth disconnection rate is **12.6 percent, or 4,830,700 young people**. As noted above, we believe this rate to be an underestimate of the true extent of disconnection in 2020. Either way, this 12.6 percent rate signals a Covid-fueled reversal of the decade-long decline in the share of the country's young people neither working nor in school. Between 2010 and 2019, the youth disconnection rate fell 27 percent, driven largely by the steady increase in youth employment in the years following the Great Recession. On the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic, the youth disconnection rate was lower than it had been in over a decade, 10.7 percent.

### BOX 2 What Is the Source of the Data and Who Is Included?

Measure of America's data come from **American Community Survey (ACS)**. The survey's main advantage over other sources is that its sample size is extremely large, making it possible to calculate youth disconnection rates nationally and by state, as well as for counties, metro areas, and even smaller geographic areas. The ACS also allows for disaggregation by race and ethnicity and by gender for geographies with sufficiently large populations.

	AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (ACS) DEFINITION
<b>IN SCHOOL</b>	Part-time or full-time students who have attended school or college in the past three months.
<b>WORKING</b>	Those who had any full- or part-time work in the previous week.
<b>NOT WORKING</b>	Unemployed in previous week or not in labor force and not looking for a job.
<b>LIVING IN 'GROUP QUARTERS'</b>	People in non-household living arrangements such as correctional facilities, residential health facilities, dorms, etc. If enrolled in educational programs, they are considered connected.
<b>MEMBERS OF ARMED FORCES</b> (Group Quarters)	Counted as employed and thus as connected.
<b>HOMELESS</b> (Group Quarters)	Surveyed but likely to be undercounted; surveying the homeless is difficult.

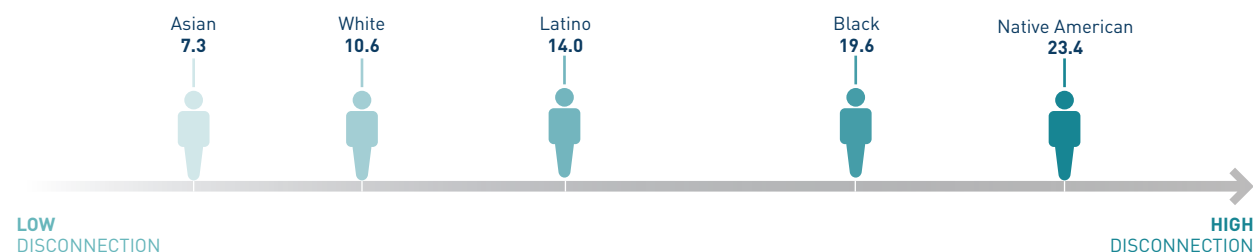
## Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity

As in past years, girls and young women are less likely to be disconnected than boys and young men, 12.1 percent versus 13.2 percent. The size of the gender gap varies by race and ethnicity, however. Black young people have the largest gender gap in the youth disconnection rate of any racial or ethnic group—16.6 percent for Black girls and young women, compared to 22.5 percent for their male counterparts.

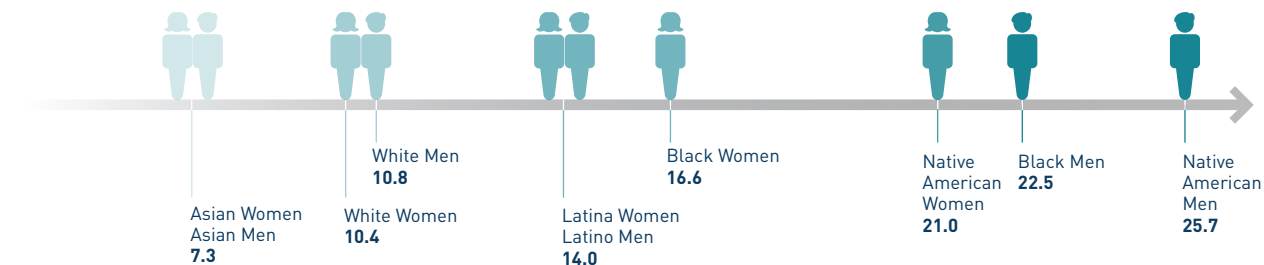
### Native American Youth

Nearly one in four Native American teens and young adults are neither working nor in school. The Native American youth disconnection rate is 23.4 percent, the highest of the United States' five major racial and ethnic groups. Because the Native American population is the smallest of the five groups, the number of Native American disconnected youth is likewise the smallest, approximately 64,400 young people. Native American teen boys and young men have the highest disconnection rate of any race/gender combination, 25.7 percent. Native American girls and young women have the highest female disconnection rate, 21.0 percent.

#### YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY (%)



#### YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY AND BY GENDER (%)



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

## Black Youth

Black teens and young adults have the second-highest disconnection rate, 19.6 percent, or 982,900 young people. As mentioned above, Black boys and young men are much more likely than their female counterparts to be disconnected, 22.5 percent compared to 16.6 percent, the largest gender gap of any racial or ethnic group.

## Latino Youth

The Latino youth disconnection rate stands at 14.0 percent, or 1,258,700 young people. In past years, Latina girls and young women were slightly more likely than their male counterparts to be disconnected, but in 2020, the male and female rates were the same, 14.0 percent. We were able to calculate disconnection rates for several Latino subgroups: Mexican; Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban; Central American; and South American young people (see [SIDEBAR](#)). Rates ranged from 10.9 percent for South American young women to 16.4 percent for Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban young men.

## White Youth

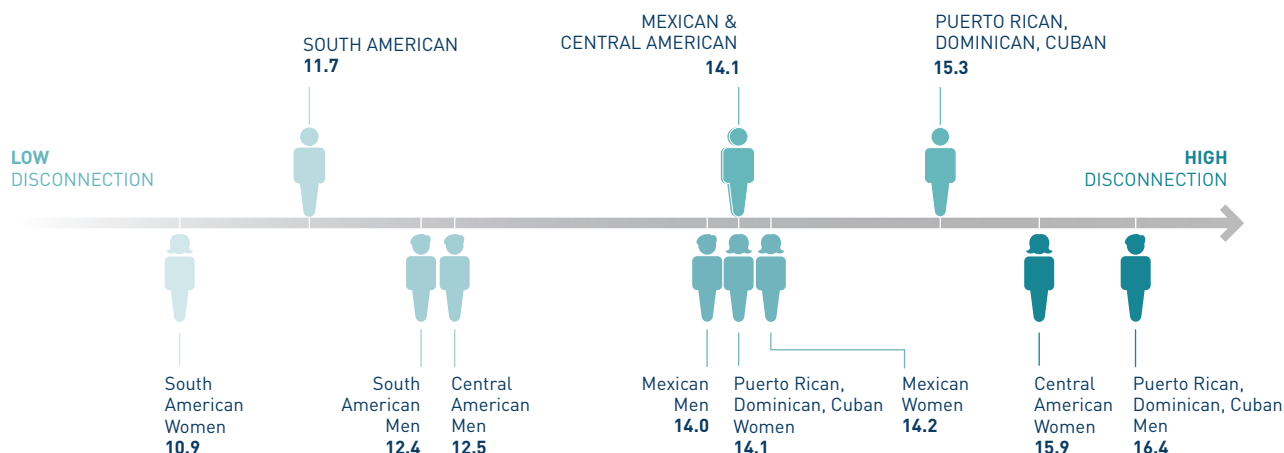
The disconnection rate for white teens and young adults is 10.6 percent, the second-lowest rate. White teens and young adults make up the largest absolute number of disconnected youth, 2,087,800 people (even though whites have a lower-than-average rate, they make up a plurality of people in the 16-to-24 age range). White boys and young men are more likely than their female counterparts to be disconnected, 10.8 percent and 10.4 percent, respectively.

## YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY LATINO SUBGROUP

LATINO SUBGROUP	%	#
<b>SOUTH AMERICAN</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>60,400</b>
Men	12.4	32,900
Women	10.9	27,500
<b>MEXICAN</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>796,600</b>
Men	14.0	399,200
Women	14.2	397,300
<b>CENTRAL AMERICAN</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>114,600</b>
Men	12.5	51,800
Women	15.9	62,800
<b>PR, DR, CUBAN</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>196,800</b>
Men	16.4	107,600
Women	14.1	89,100

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

## YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY LATINO SUBGROUP (%)



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

## Asian Youth

Asian teens and young adults have the lowest disconnection rate, 7.3 percent, or 156,100 young people. Asian young men and young women have the same disconnection rate, 7.3 percent, which is the lowest disconnection rate of any race/ gender combination. The category “Asian” is extremely broad, however, and rates vary widely by Asian subgroup. We were able to calculate disconnection rates by gender for the nine largest Asian subgroups in the United States. The rates ranged from a low of 4.5 percent for Chinese and Japanese boys and young men to a high of 18.8 percent for Cambodian boys and young men (see [SIDEBAR](#)).

### YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY ASIAN SUBGROUP (%)



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

### BOX 3 Disconnected Young People Differ from Connected Young People in Important Ways

Connected and disconnected young people differ in many ways that go beyond their current employment and educational status. These differences have remained roughly stable over the last decade. We have found that, compared to connected youth, disconnected young people are about twice as likely to live in poverty, three times as likely to have a disability, twice as likely to be living apart from both parents (for 16- and 17-year-olds), twenty times as likely to live in an institution, and eight times as likely to have dropped out of high school. Disconnected young women are four times more likely to be mothers than connected young women.

Usually, we include an updated summary of such differences with exact figures in our yearly reports; however, because of the data challenges of 2020, we did not feel comfortable doing so this year. For ease of reference, we have included a summary table from last year's report as [Appendix 2: Characteristics of Disconnected Youth on PAGE 31](#).

## YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY ASIAN SUBGROUP

ASIAN SUBGROUP	%	#
<b>CHINESE</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>24,600</b>
Men	4.5	11,200
Women	4.8	13,300
<b>INDIAN</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>20,500</b>
Men	5.2	10,900
Women	5.3	9,600
<b>JAPANESE</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>2,400</b>
Men	4.5	900
Women	8.2	1,500
<b>PAKISTANI</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>4,700</b>
Men	5.8	2,100
Women	8.0	2,600
<b>KOREAN</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>11,200</b>
Men	9.3	7,600
Women	5.1	3,600
<b>FILIPINO</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>22,100</b>
Men	8.1	11,800
Women	7.2	10,200
<b>VIETNAMESE</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>21,000</b>
Men	9.0	11,600
Women	7.7	9,500
<b>HMONG</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>5,600</b>
Men	13.9	3,000
Women	12.0	2,600
<b>CAMBODIAN</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>5,000</b>
Men	15.4	2,300
Women	18.8	2,700

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

# YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY PLACE



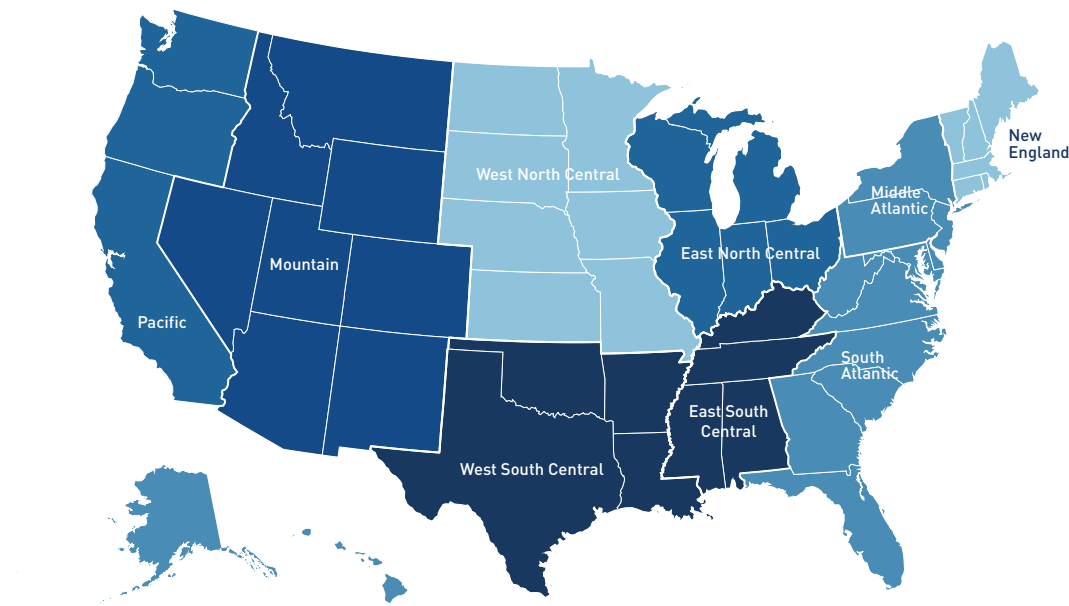
YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY  
REGION, STATE, METRO AREA,  
AND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

## Regions, States, Metro Areas, and Congressional Districts

### REGIONS

The West South Central region, which comprises Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas, has the **highest disconnection rate** of any region in the United States, 14.6 percent. In this region, one in five Black young people is disconnected and one in eight white people is disconnected, the highest white disconnection rate of any region.

**FIGURE 4 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY REGION**



REGION	OVERALL (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	White (%)	Latino (%)	Black (%)
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>19.6</b>
West North Central	9.9	9.7	10.0	8.6	10.7	18.2
New England	10.1	11.6	8.5	8.4	17.6	13.6
South Atlantic	12.3	13.1	11.5	10.5	12.1	17.7
Middle Atlantic	12.4	13.3	11.5	10.0	15.7	19.7
Pacific	12.5	13.4	11.6	11.6	13.5	20.2
East North Central	12.6	13.0	12.3	10.4	13.5	24.1
Mountain	13.0	12.6	13.5	10.5	14.8	20.9
East South Central	14.5	15.7	13.2	12.5	14.5	20.1
West South Central	14.6	14.6	14.6	12.7	15.1	19.9

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

The West North Central region has the **lowest disconnection rate** of all US regions, 9.9 percent. It is home to seven states: Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. This region has the lowest Latino youth disconnection rate, 10.7 percent, and relatively low disconnection rates for white and Black youth.

New England is home to the lowest rate for both white and Black young people, 8.4 percent and 13.6 percent, respectively, but the highest rate for Latino young people, 17.6 percent.

## STATES

Nebraska has the lowest youth disconnection rate (7.8 percent), followed by New Hampshire (8.3 percent) and Minnesota (8.6 percent). New Mexico has the highest rate (19.6 percent), followed by Alaska (19.5 percent) and Arkansas (17.4 percent).

The highest disconnection rates for **young men** are in Alaska (23.2 percent), New Mexico (18.9 percent), and Arkansas (18.3 percent), and the lowest rates are in Nebraska (6.2 percent), South Dakota (8.1 percent), and Wyoming (8.6 percent).

**Young women** are most likely to be disconnected in New Mexico (20.4 percent), Hawaii (18.4 percent), and Nevada (17.6 percent) and least likely to be disconnected in Vermont (6.1 percent), New Hampshire (6.7 percent), and Maine (7.2 percent). The lowest disconnection rate of any gender/state combination is for young women living in Vermont.

Hawaii has the lowest share of **Black** disconnected young people, 8.8 percent, and Nevada the highest, an astonishing 27.8 percent.

**Asian** youth in Alabama have the lowest rate of youth disconnection of any race/state combination, 2.1 percent. The highest share of Asian youth disconnection is found in Arkansas, 22.4 percent.

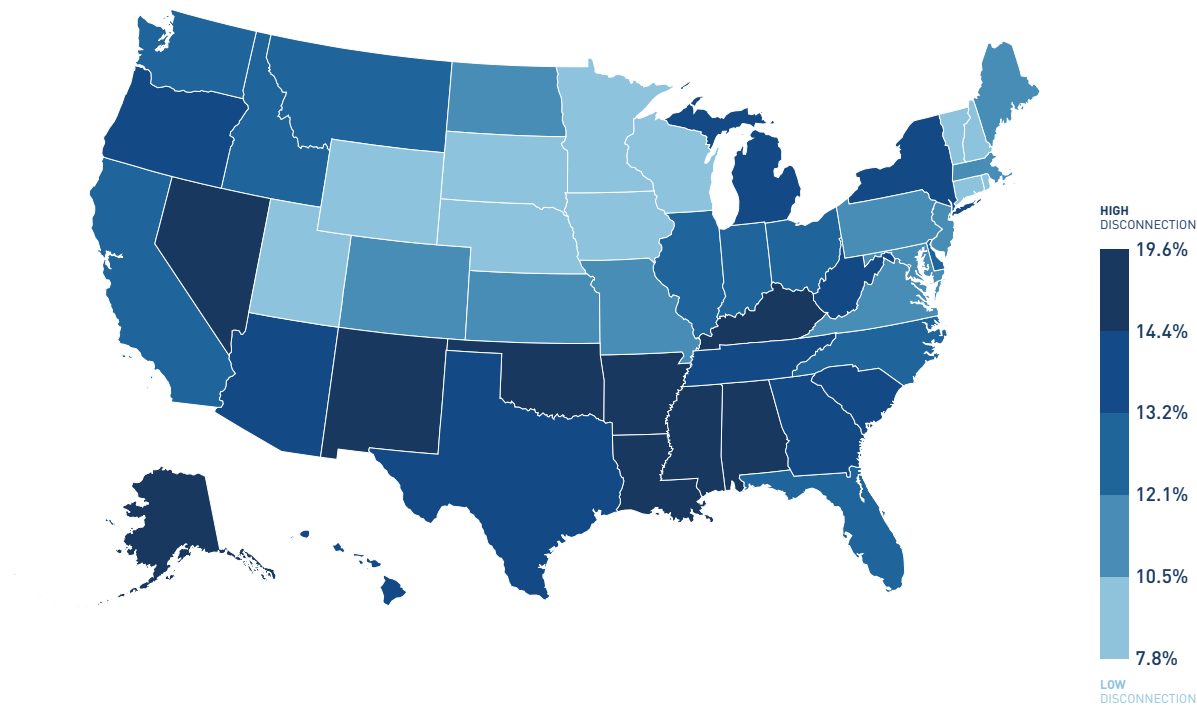
For **Latinos**, the lowest share of disconnected young people can be found in Washington, DC (5.5 percent), and the highest in Hawaii, 21.6 percent (home to the lowest share of Black disconnected youth).

**Native American** young people have a very low disconnection rate in Florida, just 4.3 percent, and a very high one in Alaska, 35.4 percent. These rates, while statistically reliable, are based on a very small number of survey responses and therefore should be viewed with caution.

Only 2.2 percent of **white** youth living in Washington, DC, are disconnected, compared to 16.1 percent of white youth living in Alaska. Strikingly, Washington, DC, has the second-highest rate for Black young people, 27.6 percent, but the lowest rate for both white and Latino youth; in DC, the Black youth disconnection rate is more than twelve times the white rate.

In Washington DC, the Black youth disconnection rate is more than twelve times the white rate.

FIGURE 5 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY STATE



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.



TABLE 6 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY STATE

Rank	State	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)						
				Men	Women	Asian	Black	Latino	Native American	White
1	Nebraska	7.8	18,400	6.2	9.7		14.3	8.8		7.7
2	New Hampshire	8.3	13,400	9.8	6.7			11.2		7.6
3	Minnesota	8.6	52,900	9.0	8.1	7.4	17.8	12.1	20.3	6.9
4	Vermont	8.8	7,100	11.3	6.1					8.4
5	South Dakota	8.8	9,800	8.1	9.6				25.1	5.4
6	Wyoming	9.2	6,100	8.6	10.0			9.2		8.3
7	Rhode Island	9.4	12,700	10.1	8.7			16.1		8.0
8	Iowa	9.7	37,400	9.6	9.8	9.3	17.3	8.4	22.7	8.5
9	Connecticut	9.7	41,700	10.9	8.4		12.2	15.4		7.5
10	Wisconsin	9.8	66,700	10.7	8.8	9.6	24.8	7.2		8.6
11	Utah	9.8	47,700	9.5	10.2	12.4	20.2	9.7	32.5	9.2
12	Virginia	10.5	105,900	11.3	9.6	4.1	17.4	9.4		9.7
13	Maryland	10.5	70,800	11.8	9.3	7.0	15.6	11.0		8.1
14	Massachusetts	10.6	88,400	12.1	9.2	4.9	17.0	20.4		8.2
15	New Jersey	10.9	105,900	12.8	9.0	4.7	17.2	14.3		8.5
16	North Dakota	11.0	11,000	12.4	9.5				35.1	5.7
17	Kansas	11.0	40,700	9.5	12.6	2.7	20.6	11.5	22.8	10.1
18	Missouri	11.2	81,600	11.5	10.9	9.5	16.3	9.0		10.7
19	Colorado	11.3	73,800	11.0	11.6	6.1	17.7	15.4		9.0
20	Maine	11.5	15,000	15.5	7.2					12.3
21	Pennsylvania	11.7	166,100	12.4	10.9	6.2	20.3	15.4	28.7	9.6
22	Florida	12.1	269,900	13.7	10.5	8.5	16.9	12.1	4.3	10.2
23	California	12.3	562,500	13.3	11.1	7.2	20.6	13.4	19.8	10.8
24	Ohio	12.3	165,700	12.6	12.0	6.5	21.7	16.6		10.3
25	Idaho	12.4	26,100	11.0	13.8			9.4		12.9

TABLE 6 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY STATE, CONTINUED

Rank	State	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)						
				Men	Women	Asian	Black	Latino	Native American	White
26	Montana	12.4	15,500	11.4	13.6				32.9	10.7
27	Illinois	12.7	186,700	13.4	12.0	6.1	24.1	13.5		9.9
28	Washington	12.7	107,000	12.8	12.6	9.8	19.5	13.3	20.3	12.1
29	North Carolina	12.9	162,700	13.4	12.3	6.8	17.3	13.9	19.7	11.2
30	Delaware	13.1	13,900	13.3	12.8		22.9	12.4		7.9
31	Indiana	13.1	110,400	12.3	13.9	9.0	26.7	11.6		11.6
32	Georgia	13.2	172,800	13.2	13.3	4.5	18.9	13.6		10.2
33	Arizona	13.4	120,800	13.4	13.4	8.3	18.2	13.6	30.9	11.0
34	Oregon	13.4	61,900	15.0	11.8		14.6	14.2	24.1	13.2
35	New York	13.6	291,900	14.2	13.0	8.0	20.5	16.4	12.9	11.1
36	South Carolina	13.7	83,400	13.0	14.5		17.9	9.1	33.4	12.7
37	Tennessee	14.0	107,600	15.1	12.9	13.0	20.1	13.5		12.5
38	Texas	14.0	510,900	14.0	14.1	6.5	19.6	15.1	7.2	11.5
39	West Virginia	14.1	27,500	14.1	14.1		12.7			14.0
40	Michigan	14.2	169,600	14.7	13.8	8.1	25.2	17.9	18.7	11.4
41	Hawaii	14.3	21,700	10.9	18.4	14.1	8.8	21.6		9.7
42	Kentucky	14.4	77,300	16.9	11.7	8.0	14.8	18.6		14.3
43	Alabama	14.6	84,100	14.1	15.0	2.1	20.2	14.0		11.8
44	Oklahoma	14.9	73,300	15.1	14.6	6.7	18.1	15.2	20.8	13.5
45	District of Columbia	15.2	13,000	17.2	13.7		27.6	5.5		2.2
46	Mississippi	15.5	55,000	18.0	12.9		22.0	11.2		9.9
47	Nevada	16.6	56,200	15.7	17.6	6.9	27.8	18.1	27.5	13.4
48	Louisiana	16.7	86,600	16.3	17.1	8.0	19.3	12.5		15.3
49	Arkansas	17.4	60,700	18.3	16.4	22.4	25.0	16.6		15.3
50	Alaska	19.5	15,000	23.2	14.5				35.4	16.1
51	New Mexico	19.6	47,900	18.9	20.4	6.6		18.8	32.9	14.7

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

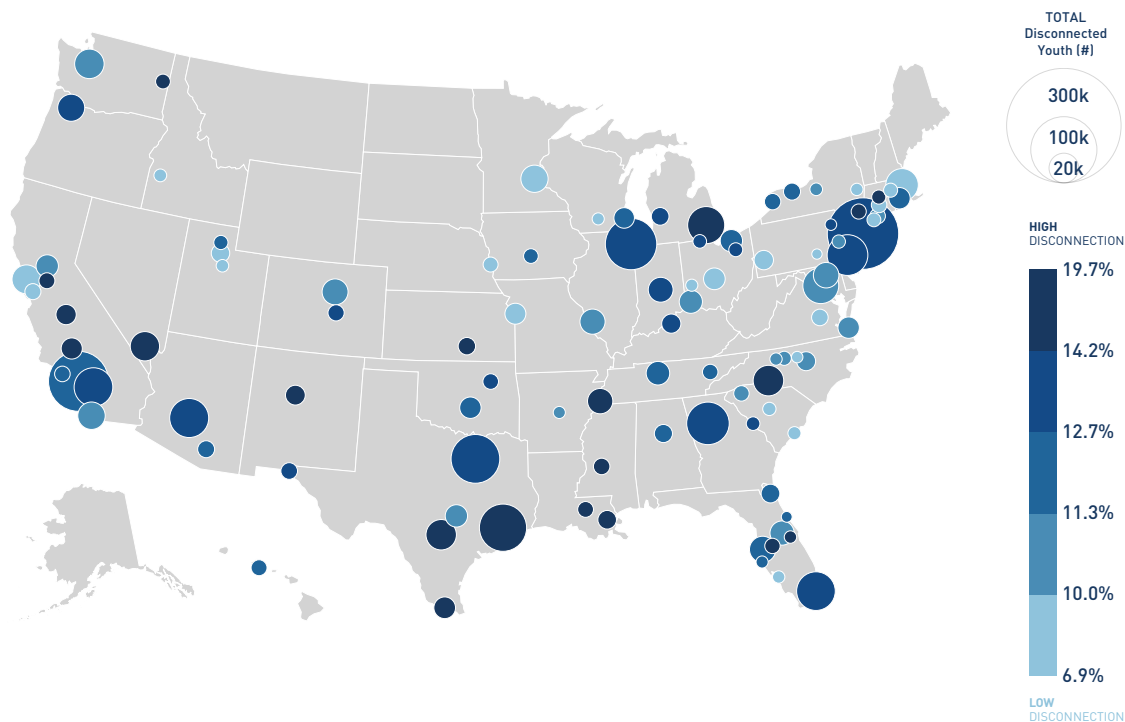
## METRO AREAS

A metropolitan area is a central city and its surrounding towns, suburbs, and exurbs. Communities within metro areas are bound together by strong economic, social, and environmental ties, even when they cross state lines. Metro areas are a key unit of analysis for understanding youth disconnection rates, as they frame labor markets and higher education systems, which can be more aligned with metro areas than state or county lines.

Provo-Orem, UT (6.9 percent), boasts the lowest youth disconnection rate of the 100 most populous metro areas in the country, followed by San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA (7.0 percent), and Madison, WI (8.2 percent). The highest youth disconnection rate can be found in Albuquerque, NM (19.7 percent), followed by Bakersfield, CA (19.6 percent), and McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX (18.8 percent).

Metro areas are a key unit of analysis for understanding youth disconnection rates, as they frame labor markets and higher education systems, which can be more aligned with metro areas than state or county lines.

**FIGURE 7 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS**



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

TABLE 8 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS

Rank	Metro Area	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
1	Provo–Orem, UT	6.9	8,500	7.4	6.3		4.5	6.4
2	San Jose–Sunnyvale–Santa Clara, CA	7.0	13,800	6.6	7.3		8.3	7.6
3	Madison, WI	8.2	7,800	8.5	7.8	21.2		8.7
4	Dayton–Kettering, OH	8.4	7,900	11.6	4.8	16.3	11.9	6.1
5	Columbia, SC	8.5	9,500	7.9	9.2	13.9		6.6
6	Albany–Schenectady–Troy, NY	8.5	8,100	8.5	8.6	11.9		7.7
7	Durham–Chapel Hill, NC	8.6	7,100	8.7	8.5	9.6	18.5	6.2
8	Pittsburgh, PA	8.7	20,100	9.8	7.6	18.3	11.3	7.5
9	Hartford–West Hartford–East Hartford, CT	8.9	12,900	9.8	7.9		13.2	7.4
10	Bridgeport–Stamford–Norwalk, CT	9.3	10,300	11.0	7.6	14.2	13.8	6.3
11	Boston–Cambridge–Newton, MA–NH	9.4	56,600	11.3	7.6	15.4	17.7	7.3
12	Charleston–North Charleston, SC	9.5	9,200	8.7	10.2	10.5		10.8
13	Boise City, ID	9.5	8,700	7.0	12.6			10.9
14	Minneapolis–St. Paul–Bloomington, MN–WI	9.5	39,800	9.7	9.3	20.7	14.5	6.9
15	Harrisburg–Carlisle, PA	9.5	5,700	11.2	7.7	13.3		8.7
16	Cape Coral–Fort Myers, FL	9.6	8,200	8.6	10.3	8.3	13.9	7.1
17	San Francisco–Oakland–Hayward, CA	9.9	44,700	11.0	8.7	22.1	8.9	8.7
18	Kansas City, MO–KS	9.9	23,500	10.0	9.7	17.2	9.6	8.2
19	Richmond, VA	9.9	14,700	10.5	9.3	13.6	6.1	10.0
20	Worcester, MA–CT	9.9	10,600	11.2	8.4		19.8	7.8
21	Omaha–Council Bluffs, NE–IA	9.9	12,000	8.1	11.6	18.4	8.4	10.3
22	Salt Lake City, UT	9.9	18,200	9.1	10.8	20.6	12.6	8.4
23	Columbus, OH	9.9	25,100	9.8	10.1	17.7	13.8	6.5
24	Washington–Arlington–Alexandria, DC–VA–MD–WV	10.0	68,800	11.0	9.0	16.3	10.0	7.5
25	San Diego–Carlsbad, CA	10.1	40,300	9.9	10.3	10.4	12.2	8.2

TABLE 8 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS, CONTINUED

Rank	Metro Area	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
26	Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL	10.1	31,400	11.2	9.0	15.6	9.5	8.0
27	Austin-Round Rock, TX	10.2	26,700	11.6	8.5	2.8	12.9	11.3
28	St. Louis, MO-IL	10.2	33,900	11.3	8.9	18.0	5.8	8.4
29	Winston-Salem, NC	10.2	8,100	10.2	10.2	3.4	20.2	11.1
30	Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ	10.3	9,500	11.0	9.5		20.5	6.5
31	Sacramento--Roseville--Arden-Arcade, CA	10.3	26,800	12.1	8.5	22.4	11.5	8.0
32	Syracuse, NY	10.3	8,600	9.6	11.0	17.7	6.0	10.2
33	Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	10.5	24,500	12.2	8.5	17.3	5.6	8.9
34	Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	10.6	28,800	10.8	10.3	23.5	11.6	9.5
35	Raleigh, NC	10.7	19,200	12.1	9.2	19.2	6.4	9.2
36	Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway, AR	10.8	7,800	14.7	7.5	11.8	16.8	7.6
37	Baltimore-Columbia-Towson, MD	10.9	34,800	12.2	9.6	18.3	10.4	7.9
38	Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin, SC	11.0	12,700	9.3	12.6	17.6		11.2
39	Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	11.1	36,100	10.8	11.5	19.1	15.4	7.9
40	Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	11.2	46,500	11.5	10.8	20.4	10.0	10.1
41	Greensboro-High Point, NC	11.2	10,700	10.5	11.8	14.0	11.5	9.5
42	New Haven-Milford, CT	11.2	12,900	11.4	10.9	16.3	20.4	7.1
43	Deltona-Daytona Beach-Ormond Beach, FL	11.3	6,300	10.8	12.0	16.9	5.9	10.6
44	Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI	11.5	22,600	12.1	10.9	24.2	9.0	8.7
45	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	11.7	37,100	12.2	11.2	13.5	13.9	10.2
46	Jacksonville, FL	11.8	18,700	10.3	13.5	15.0	9.7	11.4
47	North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton, FL	11.8	7,900	12.6	11.1	42.0	8.0	8.0
48	Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA	11.9	11,500	11.9	11.9	25.6	5.5	9.9
49	Tucson, AZ	12.0	15,400	13.4	10.3		13.7	8.9
50	Oxnard-Thousand Oaks-Ventura, CA	12.1	13,000	12.8	11.3		15.9	7.6

TABLE 8 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS, CONTINUED

Rank	Metro Area	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
51	Urban Honolulu, HI	12.2	13,600	8.9	16.1	10.7	14.5	4.5
52	Cleveland–Elyria, OH	12.2	26,700	13.4	11.1	21.9	21.8	7.9
53	Knoxville, TN	12.3	12,800	11.6	13.0	20.6	5.5	11.8
54	Nashville–Davidson– Murfreesboro–Franklin, TN	12.3	29,700	13.8	10.7	17.1	13.6	11.6
55	Birmingham–Hoover, AL	12.3	17,600	13.1	11.5	22.4		7.7
56	Providence–Warwick, RI–MA	12.3	24,500	13.3	11.3	12.6	19.1	10.9
57	Buffalo–Cheektowaga– Niagara Falls, NY	12.3	14,400	12.5	12.2	15.3	7.0	12.9
58	Los Angeles–Long Beach– Anaheim, CA	12.4	192,800	14.3	10.3	22.2	13.8	10.0
59	Rochester, NY	12.5	15,600	11.3	13.8	28.6	11.7	9.7
60	Oklahoma City, OK	12.5	24,500	13.6	11.4	12.4	17.5	10.4
61	Ogden–Clearfield, UT	12.6	10,800	12.6	12.6		10.6	13.0
62	Augusta–Richmond County, GA–SC	12.7	10,000	17.1	8.0	14.4		13.5
63	Miami–Fort Lauderdale– West Palm Beach, FL	12.8	79,900	14.6	10.7	16.0	12.9	8.7
64	Philadelphia–Camden– Wilmington, PA–NJ–DE–MD	12.9	88,700	14.4	11.3	21.2	18.2	8.9
65	Akron, OH	12.9	10,400	12.1	13.7	15.1	9.8	12.3
66	El Paso, TX	12.9	14,800	12.3	13.6	24.5	13.1	9.0
67	Phoenix–Mesa– Scottsdale, AZ	12.9	81,600	12.6	13.3	18.5	13.8	10.5
68	Scranton–Wilkes– Barre–Hazleton, PA	13.0	7,200	15.8	10.1		12.9	10.8
69	Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI	13.0	141,600	13.9	12.0	25.1	14.2	8.4
70	Portland–Vancouver– Hillsboro, OR–WA	13.0	39,200	13.4	12.6	13.1	14.2	12.5
71	Grand Rapids–Wyoming, MI	13.0	16,700	13.8	12.3	21.2	21.3	10.3
72	New York–Newark–Jersey City, NY–NJ–PA	13.0	273,100	14.0	12.0	19.6	16.0	9.7
73	Dallas–Fort Worth– Arlington, TX	13.1	127,000	11.9	14.2	18.7	14.6	10.3
74	Indianapolis–Carmel– Anderson, IN	13.2	33,000	12.1	14.2	26.2	7.9	11.4
75	Atlanta–Sandy Springs– Roswell, GA	13.2	96,900	13.0	13.5	17.8	15.3	10.1

TABLE 8 YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA'S MOST POPULOUS METRO AREAS, CONTINUED

Rank	Metro Area	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity (%)				
				Men	Women	Black	Latino	White
76	Toledo, OH	13.4	10,000	11.8	14.8	36.2	26.2	7.2
77	Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN	13.4	19,700	14.7	11.7	12.4	18.2	14.1
78	Tulsa, OK	13.5	13,000	12.0	15.1	16.1	11.8	13.7
79	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	13.7	80,100	15.4	12.0	19.8	12.9	15.2
80	Colorado Springs, CO	13.9	14,100	11.7	16.6	15.0	18.0	10.5
81	New Orleans-Metairie, LA	14.2	18,600	15.2	13.1	20.5	12.4	9.2
82	Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	14.3	119,400	15.6	13.0	19.4	13.8	13.1
83	Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Middletown, NY	14.6	12,200	12.7	16.7	9.8	23.4	13.3
84	Lakeland-Winter Haven, FL	14.8	12,700	16.5	13.2	22.5	16.0	11.2
85	Baton Rouge, LA	14.8	13,400	13.8	15.8	20.9		8.8
86	San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX	14.9	49,500	13.2	16.6	20.5	17.3	8.9
87	Spokane-Spokane Valley, WA	15.0	11,700	12.9	17.5		20.6	13.5
88	Springfield, MA	15.1	10,700	17.6	13.0	30.5	29.9	7.7
89	Stockton-Lodi, CA	15.2	13,600	15.4	14.9	35.6	14.5	12.0
90	Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	15.4	73,600	15.2	15.6	26.9	19.3	10.0
91	Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, FL	15.5	8,300	19.4	10.6	4.8	16.9	15.5
92	Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC	16.2	50,000	17.0	15.5	20.6	16.0	14.4
93	Wichita, KS	16.6	16,300	14.0	19.3	21.7	19.2	16.2
94	Fresno, CA	17.1	22,000	15.6	18.7	11.3	19.7	15.8
95	Memphis, TN-MS-AR	18.1	34,300	18.2	18.1	25.0	14.7	9.0
96	Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV	18.4	46,000	17.3	19.5	29.0	18.9	15.7
97	Jackson, MS	18.5	14,600	21.7	15.1	24.8		7.9
98	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX	18.8	25,200	21.4	16.2		19.2	17.7
99	Bakersfield, CA	19.6	23,900	20.3	18.9	31.8	16.3	28.8
100	Albuquerque, NM	19.7	21,000	17.9	21.6		20.5	12.6

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

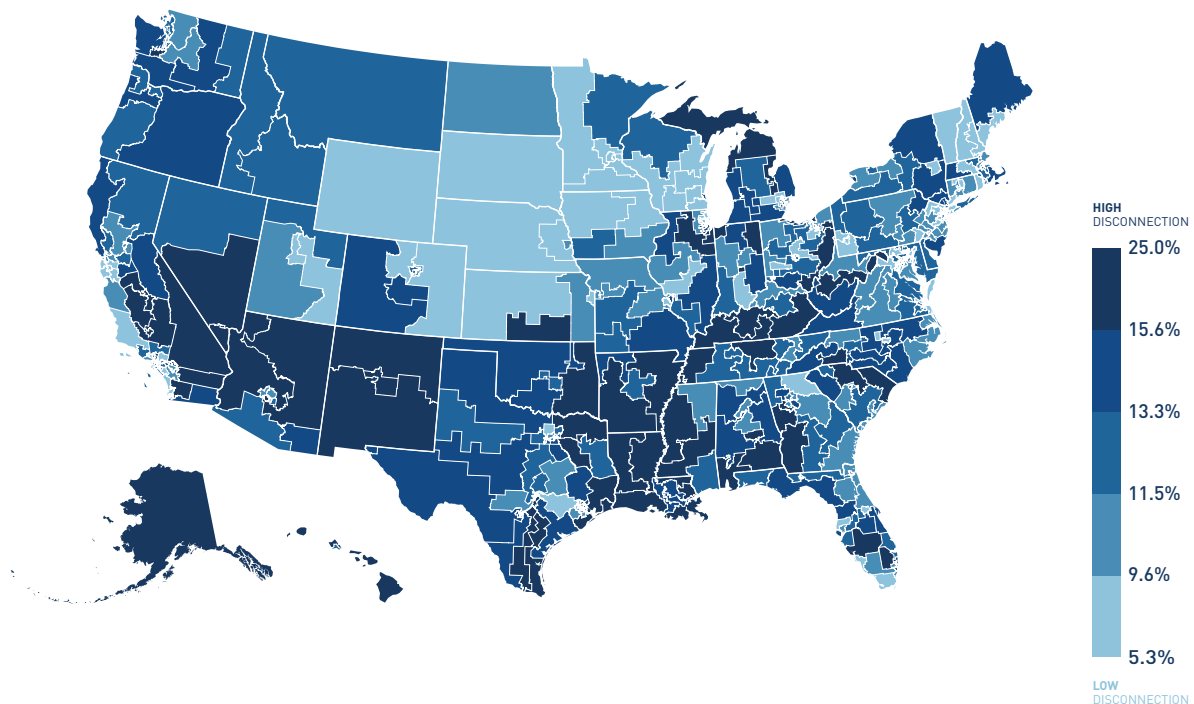
## CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

As is the case with the other geographies examined in this section, the youth disconnection rate varies widely by congressional district. California's 52nd congressional district, which includes the bulk of the city of San Diego, has the lowest youth disconnection rate (5.3 percent). Michigan's 14th congressional district, which includes some of the lowest-income neighborhoods in Detroit, is home to the highest youth disconnection rate, 25.0 percent.

The **male youth disconnection rate** is highest in Mississippi's 2nd congressional district (26.4 percent), the western segment of the state, and lowest in Nebraska's 1st congressional district (3.9 percent), which consists of the area surrounding Omaha.

The **female disconnection rate** is highest in Michigan's 14th congressional district (27.6 percent). The lowest rate for girls and young women is in Maine's 1st congressional district (4.0 percent), which includes Portland, Augusta, and many of the surrounding suburbs.

FIGURE 9 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.



TABLE 10 TOP- AND BOTTOM- SCORING CONGRESSIONAL DIS-

10 LOWEST-DISCONNECTION DISTRICTS		
District	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)
1 California 52	5.3	4,700
2 California 18	5.4	4,100
3 California 45	6.0	5,600
4 California 17	6.0	4,300
5 Nebraska 3	6.2	4,100
6 Minnesota 1	6.2	4,800
7 Missouri 2	6.3	5,800
8 Colorado 2	6.3	6,900
9 Maryland 8	6.5	5,200
10 Ohio 12	6.6	6,400

10 HIGHEST-DISCONNECTION DISTRICTS		
District	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)
427 Arkansas 4	21.1	17,600
428 Oklahoma 2	21.4	18,600
429 New Mexico 3	21.6	16,200
430 Arkansas 1	21.7	19,000
431 Mississippi 2	22.0	19,300
432 Pennsylvania 2	22.5	15,200
433 California 21	22.5	22,900
434 Michigan 13	22.5	18,700
435 Georgia 2	24.2	21,500
436 Michigan 14	25.0	19,600

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## KEY POINTS:

- Direct resources to areas with the highest rates of youth disconnection.
- Recognize that one size does not fit all.
- Don't let young people who fell through the cracks over the last two years lose their chance at an education.
- Continue to reduce Covid-19's spread.



The Covid-19 pandemic's impacts will reverberate for decades to come. Death, deprivation, and drastically different learning experiences have disrupted the transition to adulthood for millions of our young people. As with most natural or human-caused disasters, the burden of Covid-19 has fallen disproportionately on low-income communities of color, which are also disproportionately home to the highest rates of youth disconnection.

### **Direct resources to areas with the highest rates of youth disconnection.**

The young people struggling and off track prior to the pandemic will have the hardest time reconnecting to jobs and schools. These young people and their communities should receive the lion's share of attention and resources available to address this pressing issue. These hardest-hit youth tend to live in low-income communities of color, particular Black and Native American communities.

Pockets of high youth disconnection did not appear out of nowhere with the onset of the pandemic; rather, they are the product of years of neglect and underinvestment. The light-speed passage of the CARES Act in March 2020 showed that, when political will appears, trillions of dollars could be shoveled into the economy to shore up its perceived shakiness. Depriving millions of their chance at a freely chosen life of opportunity, youth disconnection in America is a slow-motion disaster, taking years to unfurl but no less urgent due to its pace. With the tremendous resources that Americans as a whole have at our disposal, meeting the needs of disconnected youth in our communities is a moral imperative.

Tailoring programs to meet the distinct needs of different groups of young people is more important than ever.

### **Recognize that one size does not fit all.**

Data in this report show that disconnected young people share many challenges but also differ in important ways. School enrollment for the population ages 3 to 34 declined dramatically in 2020—the largest drop since records began in 1964—a shift that will likely reverberate well into the future.<sup>13</sup> Efforts to reconnect youth need to take this broad backdrop into account, although it is important to keep in mind that one size does not fit all.

Tailoring interventions to the specific needs of communities and individuals experiencing disconnection should be front of mind for policymakers, philanthropists, advocates, and researchers. For instance, some girls and young women may need appealing and attainable educational and career options that make delaying motherhood worthwhile as well as support like childcare to reengage with educational programs, whereas others may need help to improve their English-language skills so that they can find employment commensurate with their educational backgrounds. Reaching disconnected youth in rural areas will be a more formidable challenge than connecting out-of-school-and-work young people in urban areas with broad and thriving job markets. Tailoring programs to meet the distinct needs of different groups of young people is more important than ever.

**Don't let young people who fell through the cracks over the last two years lose their chance at an education.**

Covid-19 disrupted the educational trajectories of millions of young people. Hundreds of thousands of teens and young adults who did everything right and were enrolled in, poised to begin, or on-track to apply to degree, certificate, or training programs found the rug pulled out from under them. There is a very real danger that many of these young people—especially first-generation and low-income students—will find themselves unable to reconstruct and resume their plans. Postsecondary educational institutions should be as creative and flexible as possible with a view to bringing students back, allowing previously accepted students another chance to start, adjusting entrance requirements to account for two lost Covid years, and strengthening bridges from high school to postsecondary education for vulnerable youth. High schools must cultivate welcoming environments and develop holistic approaches that respond not just to learning loss but also to the trauma, isolation, and disengagement so many young people experienced during Covid. Fostering a sense of belonging and focusing on social-emotional learning as well as academic skills is critical. A generation of young people is at risk of being permanently scarred by lost educational opportunities: this is a tragedy we must work to avert.

A generation of young people is at risk of being permanently scarred by lost educational opportunities: this is a tragedy we must work to avert.

**Continue to reduce Covid-19's spread.**

Pandemic containment fatigue is real; as of early March 2022, all fifty states have repealed their respective mask mandates against a backdrop of around 1,500 deaths a day. Even with the advantages of pioneering vaccines and booster shots, Covid-19 remains far deadlier than even the most lethal recent seasonal flus.<sup>14</sup> While children and young adults are far less likely than adults to die of Covid-19, their caregivers and teachers are not similarly protected by the advantages of youth.

The effects of “long Covid” on children remain poorly understood; recent research on adults has documented neurological damage in nonhospitalized Covid-19 survivors equivalent to up to a decade of aging.<sup>15</sup> Assessing the tradeoffs involved in Covid-19 mitigation—for instance, when to test and mask youth—is an exercise beyond the scope of this paper. That said, we urge caution against rushing toward a “return to normal”—a normal that is still far off for the families of the thousands of Americans that are dying each day, and those that live with less visible conditions who remain vulnerable to a continually virulent and mutating pathogen.

# REFERENCES



## APPENDIX 1: YOUTH DISCONNECTION DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING IN 2020

As it did for most areas of life, the pandemic disrupted the normal methods and workflows of the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey in many ways. Due to stay-at-home orders, census workers were not able to mail paper surveys, staffing at Census Bureau call centers available to conduct phone interviews was limited, and in-person follow-up interviews were suspended from March through July (and in some areas, until September). These disruptions resulted in lower survey response rates, particular from April to June, the very months that disconnection rates reached their peak.

More importantly, nonresponse was not distributed randomly throughout the population; some groups were less likely to respond to the survey than others. The Census Bureau observed large differences between 2020 and previous years in terms of respondents' key demographic characteristics. Respondents in 2020 were disproportionately likely to live in single-family homes (rather than apartments), to be married, to have bachelor's degrees, to be US citizens, and to have higher-than-average incomes. They were also less likely to be enrolled in Medicaid, a means-tested health insurance program for people with low incomes. The process of obtaining survey responses from people living in group quarters like juvenile detention centers was particularly disrupted, and these groups had an especially low response rate as a result. In addition, those whom the Census Bureau describes as underrepresented populations, such as Black and Latino households, were less likely than white households to respond to the 2020 survey.<sup>16</sup>

Living in a single-family home, being married, being a college graduate, having a higher income, and not being enrolled in Medicaid are all signs of higher socioeconomic status. Because higher-socioeconomic-status households became relatively more likely to respond during the pandemic and

lower-socioeconomic-status households became less likely to respond, the survey results were biased in favor of wealthier households with more-educated adults. Disconnected young people hail disproportionately from low-income households, from families and neighborhoods where adults have limited formal education, and from single-parent households; as a result, they and their families were more likely to have been missed by the survey or less likely to have completed it. Similarly, out-of-school and out-of-work young people are disproportionately Black or Latino, groups that were less likely than whites to respond to the 2020 survey. All this means that even with the Census Bureau adjustments described below, the 2020 ACS data likely result in underestimates of youth disconnection.

To address these biases, the Census Bureau used other data sources, such as administrative data, to adjust the ACS survey weights.<sup>17</sup> This approach improved the quality of the data but did not remove bias entirely. Particularly relevant to youth disconnection, the Census Bureau noted that even with the adjusted weights, the 2020 unemployment rate at the national level is still lower than expected when considering the relationship between the ACS and BLS unemployment rates over past years.<sup>18</sup> As a result of these many concerns, the Census Bureau released the 2020 data with caution and advised against comparing these 2020 data to previous years' data.

Nonetheless, the upshot is that the 2020 ACS is still the best data source for estimating youth disconnection at the national level and the best and only source for calculating comparable rates for smaller geographies and racial and ethnic groups. In addition, data biases mean that it is likely that the youth disconnection rates in this report are underestimates; in other words, the actual rates are at least this high and likely higher.

## APPENDIX 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCONNECTED YOUTH

Connected and disconnected young people differ in many ways that go beyond their current employment and educational status. These differences have remained roughly stable over the last decade. To avoid drawing false conclusions based on 2020 surveys that struggled to reach vulnerable populations with higher rates of disconnection, as well as the data challenges discussed on [PAGE 7](#), we have decided to include the characteristics of disconnected youth observed in 2019. The information in this “Characteristics of Disconnected Youth” section—and in this section only—is based on 2019 data. The rest of the data throughout this report are from 2020.

### Poverty

Overall, 16.5 percent of connected youth and 30.9 percent of disconnected youth are poor; disconnected youth are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty as their connected counterparts. More than four in ten Black and Native American disconnected young women live in poverty (42.7 percent and 41.6 percent, respectively).

### Disability

Disconnected youth are nearly three times as likely to have one or more disabilities as connected youth—17.4 percent as compared to 5.4 percent.

**TABLE 11 WHO ARE AMERICA’S DISCONNECTED YOUNG PEOPLE?**

	DISCONNECTED YOUTH (%)	CONNECTED YOUTH (%)
LIVING IN POVERTY	30.9	16.5
LIVING WITH A DISABILITY	17.4	5.4
LIVING IN AN INSTITUTION	5.9	0.3
DID NOT COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL	23.8	2.9
HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA/NO FURTHER EDUCATION	52.3	23.3
BACHELOR’S DEGREE	5.2	9.1
WOMEN WITH CHILDREN	24.0	5.7
MARRIED	11.1	6.5
NONCITIZEN	7.3	5.6
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY	6.9	4.0
UNINSURED	25.4	11.0
RECEIVES MEDICAID	37.4	18.8

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2019.

White disconnected youth and Black disconnected youth had the highest rates of disability, at 21.6 percent and 15.0 percent, respectively.

### **Motherhood and Marriage**

Overall, disconnected young women are more than four times as likely to be mothers as connected young women, 24.0 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively. Disconnected Native American and Latina young women have the highest motherhood rates (25.6 percent and 27.7 percent, respectively).

As a whole, disconnected girls and young women are 2.5 times as likely to be married as their connected counterparts, with 18.8 percent of disconnected women married versus 7.4 of connected young women. Latina disconnected young women are three times as likely, and Asian disconnected young women are nearly six times as likely, to be married as their connected counterparts.

### **Living Arrangements**

Compared to connected youth, disconnected youth ages 16 and 17 are more than twice as likely to be living apart from both parents, 21.7 percent versus 8.3 percent. Over 90 percent of connected teens in this age group live with either both parents (six in ten) or one parent (three in ten). Living apart from one's parents at this age may indicate traumatic childhood experiences, and lacking parental guidance in the transition to adulthood poses significant challenges.

### **Institutionalization**

Disconnected youth are more than twenty times as likely to be living in institutionalized group quarters (such as correctional facilities or residential health facilities) as their connected peers, 5.9 percent compared to just 0.3 percent. About one in six disconnected Black boys and young men are living in institutionalized group quarters of some kind, attesting to continued racial disparities in the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

### **Limited Education**

Disconnected youth are more than eight times as likely to have dropped out of high school as connected youth; about one in four disconnected young people left high school without a diploma. Disconnected youth are twice as likely to have completed high school but not moved on to any further education: 52.3 percent of disconnected youth have a high school diploma and no further education, compared to 23.3 percent of connected youth. Among young adults ages 21 to 24, disconnected young adults are less than half as likely to have completed a bachelor's degree as connected young adults.



## METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

### Who Are Considered “Disconnected Youth”?

Youth disconnection rates in this report are calculated by Measure of America using employment and enrollment data from the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) of the US Census Bureau. Disconnected youth, also referred to as opportunity youth, are teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. Young people in this age range who are working or in school part-time or who are in the military are not considered disconnected. Youth who are actively looking for work are considered disconnected.

Several data sources exist that can be used for calculating youth disconnection. As a result, researchers working with different datasets—or using different definitions of what constitutes disconnection—can arrive at different numbers for this indicator. A good summary of these various definitions can be found at a piece we wrote for the Huffington Post in September 2016 [here](#).

Measure of America uses the Census Bureau’s ACS for four reasons: (1) it is reliable and updated annually; (2) it allows for calculations by state and metro area as well as by more granular census-defined neighborhood clusters within metro areas; (3) it includes young people who are in group quarters, such as juvenile or adult correctional facilities, supervised medical facilities, and college dorms; and (4) it counts students on summer break as being enrolled in school.

### Methods

In this report the disconnected youth rates and numbers at the national, state, congressional district, and metro area levels use 2020 data. Time series data are one-year estimates from the relevant year. The US Census Bureau has not yet released the 2016–2020 (five-year) data, so this report does not include estimates at the county or Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) level. Usually, we include an updated

summary of the characteristics of connected and disconnected youth in our yearly reports; however, because of the data challenges of 2020, we did not feel comfortable doing so this year and instead report the 2019 data.

The ACS is an annual survey conducted by the Census Bureau that samples a subset of the overall population. As with any data drawn from surveys, there is some degree of sampling and nonsampling error inherent in the data. Thus, comparisons between similar values on any indicator should be made with caution since these differences may not be statistically significant.

In order to arrive at the percentage of disconnected youth, the total number of disconnected young people and the total number of young people overall are calculated for each geographic area from the ACS Public Use Microdata Sample. Not in school means that a young person has not attended any educational institution and has also not been home schooled at any time in the three months prior to the survey date. **Not working** means that a young person is either unemployed or not in the labor force at the time they responded to the survey. Disconnected youth are young people who are simultaneously not in school and not working. This population cannot be estimated by simply adding the number of young people not enrolled in school to the number of young people not working because many students in this age range do not work and many young workers are not in school.

### Calculating Metro Area Youth Disconnection and Identifying the Largest Metro Areas

The top one hundred largest MSAs are determined using population data from the 2020 decennial census.

The employment and enrollment data needed to calculate youth disconnection for metro areas are not available directly by metro area from the ACS. Metro

areas were custom built up by Measure of America from the Census Bureau's Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) that make up metro areas. In cases where a PUMA falls partially within two or more metro areas, it is included in the metro area where it has the largest population. If the PUMA falls partly in and partly outside a metro area, it is included in the metro area.

Due to changes in the definitions of metro areas by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), findings from this report for specific metro areas are not directly comparable to findings from Measure of America's first three reports on youth disconnection: *One in Seven: Ranking Youth Disconnection in the 25 Largest Metro Areas*, *Halve the Gap by 2030: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities*, and *Zeroing In on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities*. They are comparable to the previous five reports: *Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps: Youth Disconnection in America*, *More Than a Million Reasons for Hope: Youth Disconnection in America Today*, *Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection*, *A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus*, and *A Decade Undone: 2021 Update*.

## DEFINITIONS

**Disability** – Disability status in this report refers to any enduring emotional, physical, or mental condition that makes everyday activities like walking, dressing, or remembering things difficult and restricts an individuals' ability to work or to perform basic required tasks without assistance. This is self-reported; individuals who report having such a condition in the ACS are counted as having a disability. Those who do not are counted as not having a disability.

**Group Quarters** – The US Census Bureau refers to people who live in any kind of non-household living arrangement as living in “group quarters”. These can be institutional group quarters such as correctional or supervised medical facilities or non-institutional group quarters such as college or university dormitories, military bases, or group homes. One of the primary advantages of using the ACS as the data source for this research is that the survey includes young people living in group quarters.

**Metro Area** – Metro areas used in this report are formally known as Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), geographic areas defined by the OMB and used by the US Census Bureau and other government entities. MSAs constitute counties grouped around an urban center and include outlying suburban and exurban counties from which a substantial percentage of the population commutes to the urban center for work.

**PUMA** – [Public Use Microdata Areas](#), or PUMAs, are the smallest geographic unit of the Public Use Microdata Sample. They are defined by the US Census Bureau, are built out of census tracts and counties, and have populations of at least 100,000 people.

**Racial and Ethnic Groups** – Racial and ethnic groups in this report are based on definitions established by the OMB and used by the Census Bureau and other government entities. Since 1997, this office

has recognized five racial groups and two ethnic categories. The racial groups include Asian, Black, Native American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and white. The ethnic categories are Latino and not Latino. People of Latino ethnicity may be of any race. In this report, members of each of these racial groups include only non-Latino members of these groups. All references to Asians, Blacks, Native Americans, and whites include only those who are non-Latino. Throughout the report, the Asian racial group combines the OMB categories of both Asian and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Due to the very small population sizes of some of the racial and ethnic groups in some states and metropolitan areas, we cannot always present reliable estimates of youth disconnection for these groups. These are denoted in the report's tables.

In recognition of the fact that these racial groups are not monolithic, this report includes youth disconnection rates for the nine largest Asian subgroups and the four largest Latino/a subgroups in the United States. The selection of these groups is based on national population estimates from the 2019 one-year ACS.

**Region** – In the discussion of regional differences in disconnected youth rates, we use the four regions and nine divisions of the United States as defined by the [US Census Bureau](#).

**Unreliable** – Estimates with a coefficient of variance of greater than 0.2 are considered unreliable and are omitted from the report. In addition, due to the 2020 ACS data quality, an additional factor was considered to determine reliability. Estimates in which the total youth population for a group was based on fewer than 10 survey responses were omitted.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Besecker, Thomas, and Daley, *Student Engagement Online During School Facilities Closures: An Analysis of L.A. Unified Secondary Students' Schoology Activity from March 16 to May 22, 2020*.
- 2 US Census Bureau, "Census Bureau Data Reveal Decline in School Enrollment."
- 3 US Census Bureau, "School Enrollment 2019," Table 1; US Census Bureau, "School Enrollment 2020," Table 1.
- 4 Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment and Unemployment Among Youth — Summer 2021."
- 5 US Census Bureau, "Census Bureau Data Reveal Decline in School Enrollment."
- 6 National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, "Fall 2020 #3 [as of Oct 22]."
- 7 Anderson, "Community Colleges Continue Major Enrollment Decline."
- 8 National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, "Fall 2020 #3 [as of Oct 22]."
- 9 Lewis and Gluskin, *Two Futures*.
- 10 Shin et al., *An Assessment of the COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on the 2020 ACS 1-Year Data*.
- 11 Lewis, *A Decade Undone: 2021 Update*; Lewis and Gluskin, *A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus*.
- 12 Fry and Barroso, "Amid Coronavirus Outbreak, Nearly Three-in-Ten Young People Are Neither Working nor in School." The CPS data can be used to calculate the youth disconnection rate at the national level; to calculate the rate by smaller geographies, such as states and metro areas, as well by race and ethnicity and by gender, as we do, requires a different data source, the American Community Survey (ACS). The annual ACS samples a larger population than the CPS, and the resulting data allow us to calculate rates for smaller slices of the population.
- 13 US Census Bureau, "CPS Historical Time Series Tables on School Enrollment."
- 14 New York Times, "Coronavirus in the U.S."; Deruy and Rowan, "Think COVID Is Becoming like the Flu?"
- 15 Gale, "Covid Can Shrink the Brain as Much as a Decade of Aging, Study Finds."
- 16 Shin et al., *An Assessment of the COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on the 2020 ACS 1-Year Data*.
- 17 To learn more about the ways in which the Census Bureau used administrative data and other data sources to arrive at the 2020 experimental results, refer to the resources available here: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/experimental-data.html>.
- 18 Rothbaum et al., *Addressing Nonresponse Bias in the American Community Survey During the Pandemic Using Administrative Data*.

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