

## 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 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.