

Making Higher Education Policy Work for Opportunity Youth

WHO ARE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH?

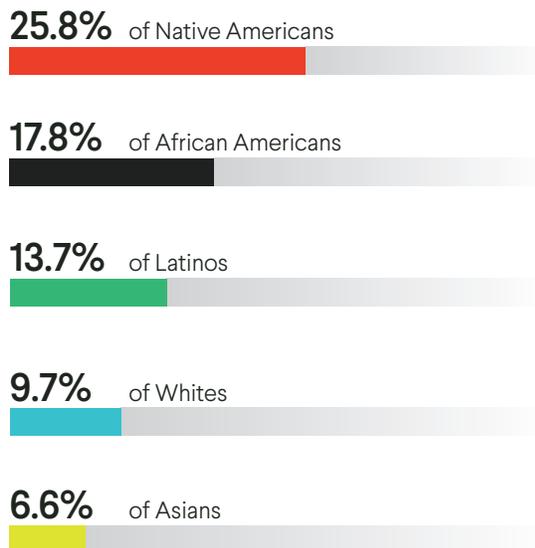
Today, **4.6 million young people between ages 16 and 24 are disconnected from school and not working.** Often referred to as “opportunity youth,” these young adults face significant barriers in the labor market, especially as automation and technological advances reshape the economy. Many factors influence why young adults become disconnected, including family challenges, unstable housing, and schools that lack resources and talent, especially in the low-income communities where most opportunity youth reside. These young people often struggle to find access to quality alternative education and career training options.

KEY FACTORS

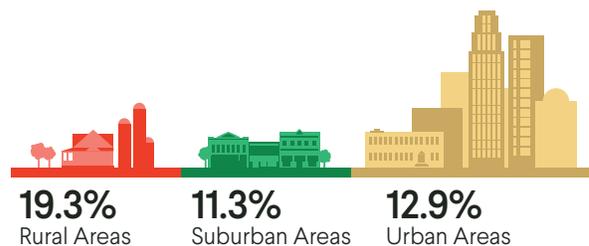
What Percentage of Young People in the US are Disconnected From School & Work?

Source: <http://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/>

By Racial or Ethnic Group



By Location



Key Facts

- Disconnected females are nearly **4x more likely to be young mothers** than connected females.
- Disconnected youth are **more likely to live in poverty** than their peers (35.3% compared to 18.9%).
- Disconnected youth are **twice as likely to have no education beyond a high school diploma** than connected youth (50% vs 26.8%).

IMPORTANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION PATHWAYS

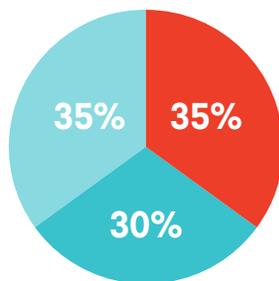
TO SUPPORT OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

In a world where there are 6.7 million job openings nationwide, and only 59% of undergraduate students graduate within 6 years, higher education policy reform is critical to ensuring that young adults succeed in today's economy.¹ Opportunity youth need access, guidance, and support to high-quality and flexible postsecondary and career pathways that will positively change their future. Reconnecting disenfranchised young adults to opportunities for success benefits not only their communities, but employers and the nation as a whole.

Estimates show that **taxpayers save more than \$102 billion in lifetime savings** when the majority of a cohort of 1 million opportunity youth are reconnected and remain permanently on track.² On the other hand, opportunity youth risk losing out on **nearly \$1 million in lifetime earnings** by not completing high school or obtaining a highly valued postsecondary credential.³ Creating pathways into and through higher education is imperative for opportunity youth to reach success.

US Job Landscape

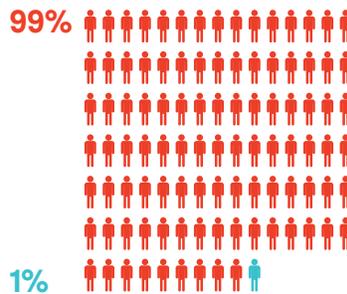
PROJECTED YEAR: 2020



- No postsecondary education required
- Bachelor's degree required
- At least some postsecondary education required

Opportunity Youth Preparedness

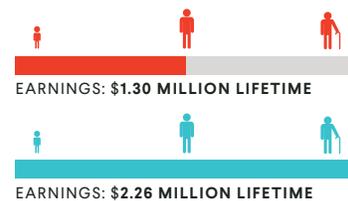
TOTAL OPPORTUNITY YOUTH POPULATION: 4.6 MILLION



- No bachelor's degree by age 28
- Bachelor's degree by age 28

Opportunity Youth Lifetime Earnings

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH: ~50% LIFETIME EARNINGS OF COLLEGE GRADUATES



- High school diploma
- Bachelor's degree

Sources:

<https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BridgetoReconnection.2016.pdf>
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2011/collegepayoff.pdf>

NOTES

1. Jobs Openings and Labor Turnover Summary, Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 5, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.nr0.htm>.
2. J. M. Bridgeland, E. S. Ingram, & M. Atwell, *A Bridge to Reconnection: A Plan for Reconnecting One Million Opportunity Youth Each Year Through Federal Funding Streams, 2016 Update*, <http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BridgetoReconnection.2016.pdf>.
3. A. P. Carnevale, S. J. Rose, & B. Cheah, *The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2011) <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2011/collegepayoff.pdf>.
4. C. Almeida & L. Allen, *Common Cause: Community-Based Organizations and Community College Partners for Student Success* (Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, 2017).

WHAT IS WORKING

FOR ENGAGING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

JFF research shows that proven approaches can support our nation's diverse and struggling opportunity youth population to succeed in college. These approaches include:

- **Connecting opportunity youth with a coach or dedicated academic advisor** to help prepare **young adults** for college and navigate college when they arrive.
- **Providing opportunity youth access to community-based programs** designed to help students become familiar with the college campus, develop positive academic habits, and develop general skills required to succeed in college.⁴

BACK ON TRACK

HOW JFF IS HELPING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

JFF's two models—Back on Track: Postsecondary Success and Back on Track: CareerNext—guide the design of pathways to credentials for opportunity youth. The models can be used for designing or enhancing multiple pathways toward a postsecondary credential.

An external evaluation of a national postsecondary success initiative that used the Back on Track: Postsecondary Success model found promising results, including that the majority of young adult participants entered postsecondary education, enrolled full time, and completed a first year.

JFF's Back on Track: Postsecondary Success model uses a three-phase approach for reengaging young adults who are off track:



Enriched Preparation

integrates high-quality college- and career-ready instruction with strong academic and social supports.



Postsecondary Bridging

builds college- and career-ready skills and provides informed transition counseling.



First-Year Supports

offer appropriate help in the first year to ensure postsecondary persistence and success.

TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

TO SERVE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH



Improving Data: Opportunity youth need information about the education and labor market outcomes they can expect to achieve to help them learn about and choose the best institution and program of study. Policy should enable data systems that link students' education and workforce outcomes and then make that data available, understandable, and accessible.



Guided Pathways: Policy should incentivize and enable the creation of guided pathways, a framework for redesigning institutions of higher education to improve students' experiences from entry through completion. Pathways provide students with clear “maps” to guide students through a program of study through a credential, combined with robust advising.



Support Services: Policy should ensure alignment of financial aid with programs that offer child care, transportation, nutrition, and other benefits for which opportunity youth are eligible. Opportunity youth also need guidance and counseling on choices both big—like selecting a college or choosing a career pathway—and small—like deciding what courses to take or how to get the textbooks they need. Policy should ensure that opportunity youth have the guidance they need before they enter higher education and once they enroll.



Accelerated Pathways: Rather than allowing opportunity youth to get stuck in unengaging remedial coursework, policy should help these students accelerate faster towards their higher education goals. This includes giving students credit for prior learning and experiences, advancing competency-based education models, and promoting co-enrollment and dual enrollment models that allow students to move more quickly towards credentials.



Flexible Financial Aid: Many opportunity youth support families, work while going to college, or have never completed high school. These students need flexible financial aid policies that make applying for financial aid simple, allow students to attend school all year, help them access Ability to Benefit, and recognize costs for students that go beyond tuition and books.



Work-Based Learning: Work-based learning traditionally has been available to the most socially connected students, rather than those who have the most to gain from work experiences. Policy should expand access to high-quality, relevant work-based learning experiences for opportunity youth, including through pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and work-study opportunities.