

### **After a Decade of Progress, Pandemic Reset the Clock on Youth Disconnection**

*Measure of America's latest report finds lowest rate of young people aged 16 to 24 neither working nor in school, but warns Covid-19 will reverse progress and exacerbate existing inequalities*

New York, NY – July 29, 2021 – Measure of America, a project of the Social Science Research Council, today released *A Decade Undone: 2021 Update*, its ninth annual report on US young people ages 16 to 24 who are neither working nor in school. It found that the youth disconnection rate had steadily fallen for nine years in a row, from a recession-fueled high of 14.7 percent in 2010 to 10.7 percent in 2019, the most recent year for which data are available through the American Community Survey. But now, as the country transitions from a year of shuttered schools and online classes, record unemployment rates, and an unstable economy, Measure of America estimates suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic has erased those gains and that in 2020, approximately six million youth were disconnected, more than during the Great Recession.

The 2019 youth disconnection rate was 10.7 percent, or one in nine young people. *A Decade Undone: 2021 Update* breaks down this figure by race and ethnicity, gender, and various geographic delineations, including states, counties, congressional districts, metro areas, and public use microdata areas (PUMAs), a Census Bureau–defined geography of at least 100,000 people.

New for this report, Measure of America identified thirty counties in which a combination of already-high youth disconnection rates coupled with lengthy stretches of virtual learning in the 2020–2021 academic year have caused educational emergencies. Disconnected youth are already eight times as likely to have dropped out of high school as connected young people, with one in four leaving high school without a diploma. These “post-pandemic priority counties” had at least one in five youth disconnected in 2019, with many more at risk of being pushed into disconnection due to remote learning and other pandemic-related challenges. These counties must be targets of American Rescue Plan dollars, as young people within them need help to catch up and move forward.

Despite a continued decline in the overall disconnection rate, significant gaps among groups persist. Key findings from *A Decade Undone: 2021 Update* include:

- **Race and ethnicity:** Native American youth had the highest disconnection rate (22.1 percent) of any major racial or ethnic group, followed by Black (16.7 percent), Latino (12.1 percent), white (8.8 percent), and Asian (5.7 percent) young people. Across all these groups, youth disconnection fell between 2018 and 2019.
- **Gender:** Women had a lower youth disconnection rate (10.3 percent) than men (11.0 percent); however, this gap varied by race and ethnicity. The largest gender gap existed between Black young women (13.7 percent) and Black young men (19.5 percent). Native American men’s youth disconnection rate of 23.3 percent was the highest for any race/gender combination.
- **Geography:** There are wide gaps in disconnection rates among the country’s approximately 2,400 PUMAs. Using PUMAs is one of the most accurate ways to draw “apples to apples” neighborhood comparisons. Some affluent areas of large cities or well-to-do suburbs had youth disconnection rates below 3 percent; the ten PUMAs facing the greatest challenges had youth disconnection rates ranging from 28.9 percent to 35.0 percent and were either in low-income, majority-minority neighborhoods in large metro areas or isolated rural areas characterized by long-term, deep poverty. Several PUMAs across the country with distinctly different characteristics had similar youth disconnection rates.

- **Other characteristics:** Disconnected youth are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty, more than three times as likely to have a disability, more than twice as likely to lack health insurance, and more than twenty times more likely to be institutionalized compared to connected youth. Disconnected youth between 21 and 24 years old are less than half as likely to have a bachelor's degree as their connected counterparts.

The full report is available [here](#), and more demographic data is accessible at Measure of America's [interactive website](#).

#### **About Measure of America**

An initiative of the **Social Science Research Council**, Measure of America provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding the distribution of well-being and opportunity in America and stimulating fact-based dialogue about issues we all care about: health, education, and living standards.

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