

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Who Is Considered a “Disconnected Youth”?

Youth disconnection rates in this report are calculated by Measure of America using employment and enrollment data from the 2019 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 on a Huffington Post blog piece from 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 youth disconnection rates and numbers at the national, state, congressional district, and metro area levels use 2019 data. Estimates at the county and public use microdata area (PUMA) level use 2015–2019 (five-year) data. Time series data are one-year estimates from the relevant year.

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 US Census Bureau provides a list of metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) by population size. The top one hundred MSAs include Grand Rapids-Wyoming, Michigan; Madison, Wisconsin; Durham-Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Boise City, Idaho; Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, Florida; and North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton, Florida. But because the standard error of the youth disconnection estimate for these metro areas were too large to provide a reliable estimate, these MSAs are not included in this report.

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 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 three reports: *Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps: Youth Disconnection in America*, *More Than a Million Reasons for Hope: Youth Disconnection in America Today*, and *Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection*.

Counties

US county and county equivalent (as defined by the federal government) estimates are custom tabulations provided by special arrangement with the US Census Bureau. Counties range in size from over 10 million to under one hundred residents. Because many counties are relatively small, disconnected youth rates for each county in this report are calculated using five-year estimates from 2015–2019. Counties with disconnected youth populations considered statistically unreliable have been removed from the analysis.

Urban-Rural Classification of Counties

There are multiple definitions of urban and rural areas used by different federal agencies in the United States. In this report, the youth disconnection estimates for each of the six urban-rural categories use the taxonomy developed by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Its schema places each of the 3,154 counties in the United States into one of six categories: large central metro, large fringe metro, medium metro, small metro, micropolitan, and non-core. Further details on this classification are [here](#). For ease of communication, these six categories have been renamed to commonly used terms: urban centers, suburbs, medium-sized cities, small cities, towns, and completely rural areas. The table above contains the definitions used by NCHS in classifying counties.

Based on the most recent NCHS county categorizations (2013), each county was assigned to a category in the above schema. Then, using county-level estimates prepared for MOA by the Census Bureau, we calculated an aggregate disconnected youth rate for each of the six county classifications by dividing the total number of disconnected youth in a given county classification by the total number of people ages 16–24 in a given county classification.

Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs)

This report includes youth disconnection estimates for each public use microdata area in the country. 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. Due to this population threshold, urban areas may contain multiple PUMAs within a county whereas in rural areas a PUMA may cover multiple counties. There are 2,351 PUMAs within the 50 US states.

Post-Pandemic Priority Counties

To calculate the percentage of virtual schooling during the September 2020 through April 2021 school year we purchased data from Burbio.com. Burbio compiled data across the U.S. counties to calculate the number of weeks the school district was virtual only. We then applied that number to the total number of weeks calculated to estimate the percent of the school year that the district was virtual and not in-person across all grades.

TYPE OF COUNTY	DEFINITION
URBAN CENTERS (Large Central metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations 1,000,000 or more
SUBURBS (Large fringe metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations 1,000,000 or more that are not urban centers
MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES (Medium metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations between 250,000 and 999,999
SMALL CITIES (Small metro)	Counties containing cities with populations between 50,000 and 249,999
TOWNS (Micropolitan)	Counties within metro areas with populations between 10,000 and 49,999
COMPLETELY RURAL AREAS (Non-core)	Counties with no cities larger than 10,000