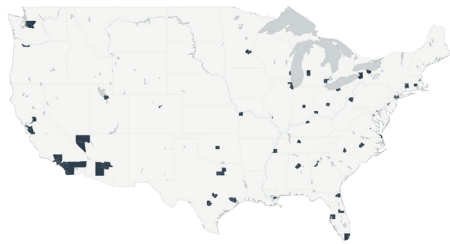
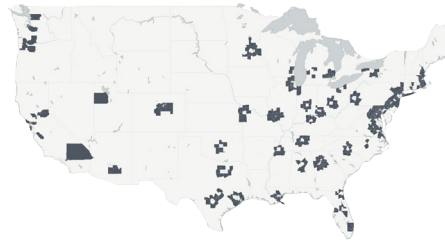


PROMISING GAINS, PERSISTENT GAPS

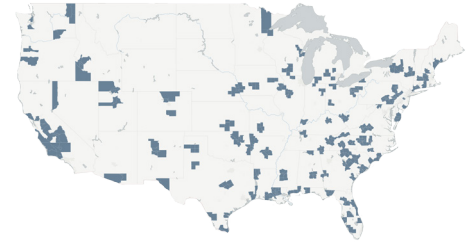
YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA



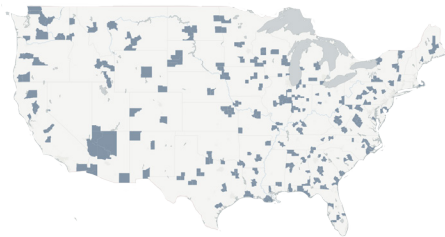
URBAN CENTERS



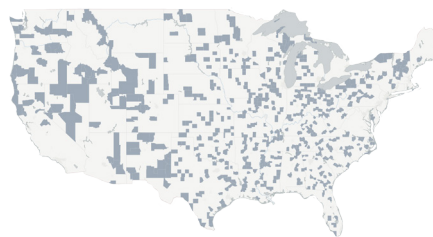
SUBURBS



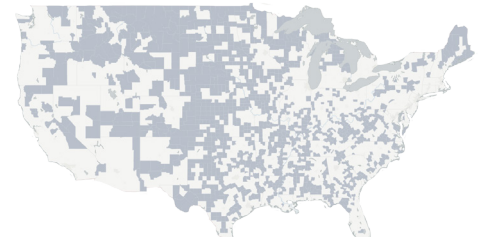
MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES



SMALL CITIES



TOWNS



COMPLETELY RURAL AREAS

YOUTH DISCONNECTION RATES FOR STATES, METRO AREAS, RURAL AND URBAN AREAS, AND COUNTIES AS WELL AS BY GENDER AND RACE/ETHNICITY.

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PROMISING GAINS, PERSISTENT GAPS

YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA



First, the good news: fewer young people are disconnected from school and work today than were before the Great Recession. The 2015 youth disconnection rate, 12.3 percent, is below the 2008 rate of 12.6 and well below the 2010 youth disconnection peak, 14.7 percent. **This 16 percent drop over five years translates to roughly 900,000 fewer young people cut off from pathways that lead to independent, rewarding adulthoods.**

Disconnected youth are teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. Being detached from both the educational system and the labor market during the pivotal years of emerging adulthood can be dispiriting and damaging to a young person, and the effects of youth disconnection have been shown to follow individuals for the rest of their lives, resulting in lower incomes, higher unemployment rates, and negative physical and mental health outcomes. The harms accrue not only to young people themselves, but reverberate across time and place, making youth disconnection a national concern that must be addressed by society at large.

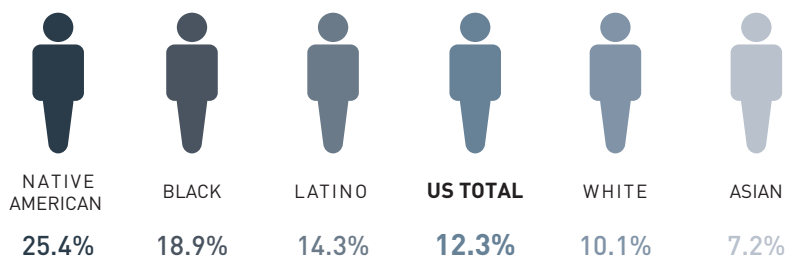
The five-year decline in the youth disconnection rate is certainly cause for celebration. For the many groups that have come together to address the issue—including federal, state, and local policymakers, large national companies and municipal business groups, nonprofit organizations, community-based groups, educators, and more—this will be welcome news. But the work is not over: there are still nearly **4.9 million** young people in the United States who are detached from both school and the workforce.

Just as the Great Recession swelled the ranks of disconnected young people, the economic recovery reduced them; at least part of the drop in youth disconnection is due to the nationwide decline in the unemployment rate for workers of all ages between 2010 and 2015. Thus, those who remain disconnected likely have higher barriers to reconnection than those whose fortunes responded more readily to an improving labor market, such as involvement with the criminal justice system, lack of a high school diploma, or caregiving responsibilities. In addition, looking only at the topline national rate masks great variation among demographic groups and geographic regions. This report seeks to highlight this variation, showing that while we should applaud the reduction in youth disconnection overall, it remains a serious problem for certain groups of young adults.

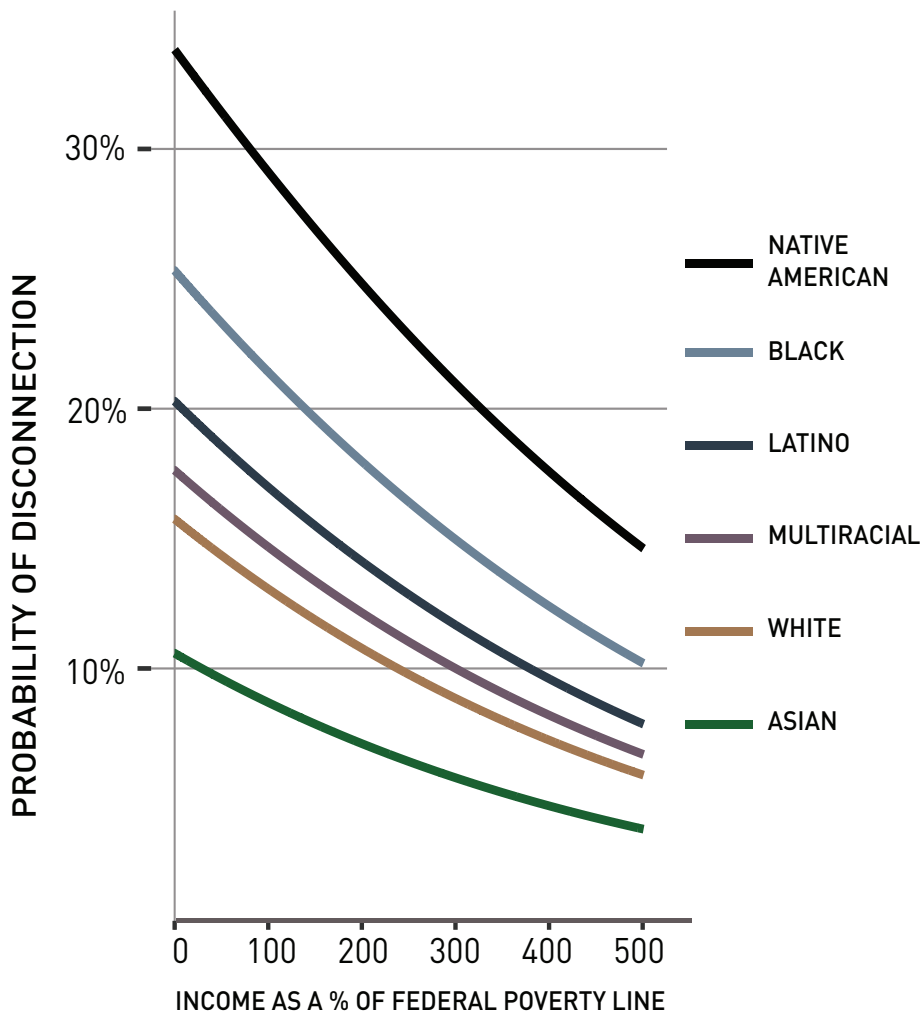
In *Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps: Youth Disconnection in America*, Measure of America (MOA) updates disconnection data since we last looked at this topic in the 2015 report *Zeroing In on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in American Cities* for key geographies (states, metro areas, and counties) as well as by race and ethnicity and gender. In addition, this report offers MOA's first-ever exploration of how youth disconnection differs in rural, suburban, and urban communities. Because a one-size-fits-all approach to engaging with disconnected youth won't work, MOA interrogates the data to probe key issues. What particular challenges do different groups of disconnected youth face? Where do they live? And what kind of support do they require in order to make successful transitions to adulthood and lead freely chosen lives of value?

Key findings include:

- **Overall.** In 2015, 4.9 million young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 were disconnected—12.3 percent of American youth, about one in eight. This is a significant drop from the post-recession high of 14.7 percent, over 5.8 million youth, in 2010.
- **Rural-urban divide.** This research shows that rural counties as a whole are faring considerably worse than more populous counties in terms of youth disconnection. In completely rural counties, the youth disconnection rate is 20.3 percent, much higher than the rate for counties in urban centers (14.2 percent) or for suburban counties (12.3 percent). Rural counties in the South have a particularly high rate: 24.0 percent—double the national rate.
- **Race and ethnicity.** There is astonishing variation in disconnection rates by race and ethnicity, ranging from nearly one in fourteen Asian American youth to more than one in four Native American young people. The Asian American youth disconnection rate is 7.2 percent; the white rate is 10.1 percent; the Latino rate is 14.3 percent; the black rate is 18.9 percent; and the Native American rate is 25.4 percent. Though the rate varies among Asian subgroups, most are performing well on this indicator; only Hmong Americans have a rate of youth disconnection that surpasses the US average.



- **Women and men.** Nationally, girls and young women are slightly less likely to be disconnected than boys and young men, 12.0 percent vs. 12.5 percent, a small but statistically significant difference. The difference in youth disconnection rates between genders plays out differently for each racial or ethnic group.
- **States.** Young people are disconnected at rates that range from under 8 percent in some states (New Hampshire, Nebraska, North Dakota, Vermont, Minnesota, and Iowa) to over twice that in others, with New Mexico (17.4 percent), West Virginia (17.0 percent), and Mississippi (16.7 percent) facing the greatest challenges.
- **Black-white gaps.** Measure of America calculated the disconnection rate for blacks, Latinos, and whites at the state level when data allowed. The black-white disparity is so stark that even in states where white youth are faring the worst, they are still doing better than US blacks on average, and even in states where blacks are faring the best, they are still not doing as well as US whites on average.
- **Top and bottom metro areas.** Among the country's ninety-eight most populous metro areas, greater Albany, NY (6.5 percent), Grand Rapids, MI (6.8 percent), and Omaha, NE-IA (7.1 percent) had the lowest youth disconnection rates. The Bakersfield, CA (18.7 percent), McAllen, TX (19.7 percent), and Augusta, GA-SC (21.0 percent) metro areas had the highest rates.



• **Impact of poverty.** For young people of all races, the probability of disconnection falls as household incomes rise. White youth in affluent households are less likely to be disconnected than white youth in poor households, and the same is true for the other racial and ethnic groups; however, **blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans are more likely to be disconnected than whites and Asians given the same income level.** In fact, the rate of youth disconnection for Asian Americans in households with almost no income is the same as that for black youth in households with incomes close to five times the federal poverty line. Native American youth living in households with incomes at five times the poverty line face roughly the same probability of disconnection as white youth living in households with incomes well below the poverty line.

• **Biggest improvements.** Between 2010 and 2015, **Washington, DC** made the greatest progress, with a **43.9 percent** reduction in the rate of youth disconnection. **New Hampshire** had the second-largest drop, nearly **32 percent**, and now has the lowest rate of any state.

Though we have made great strides in reducing the youth disconnection rate since the Great Recession, the overall US rate is still nearly twice that of Germany.¹ Native American, black, and Latino young people face higher disconnection rates than whites and Asian Americans at every income level. And some parts of the country, including rural counties, many metro areas in the South and West, many states in the South, and segregated, low-income minority neighborhoods in America's big cities are being left behind.

We need to actively pursue policies that have been shown to prevent teenagers from becoming disconnected in the first place as well as to promote programs proven to reconnect youth. This report aims to help policymakers target interventions at the highest-risk groups of young people.