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New Data Reveals Nearly 10 Percent of New Jersey’s Young People Ages 16 to 24 are Not in School and Not Working

Youth disconnection rate in New Jersey rose from 2023 to 2024—from 9.4 percent to 9.9 percent—representing 104,400 young people not connected to opportunity.

Newark, NJ (March 31st) – A data brief released today entitled *Building Brighter Futures in New Jersey* reveals that there are 104,400 young people ages 16-to-24 who are neither working nor in school - also referred to as opportunity youth - throughout the state of New Jersey. The brief, published by Measure of America, a program of the Social Science Research Council, in partnership with Opportunity Youth Network (OYN) and New Jersey Opportunity Youth Coalition (NJOYC), makes clear that a community’s youth disconnection rate is a strong indicator of its resources and a telling gauge of its residents’ well-being and access to opportunity.

These statewide figures mask wide variation by county and by demographic group. Boys and young men in New Jersey are more likely to be disconnected than girls and young women, echoing the pattern seen across the United States. These gender gaps, while significant, pale in comparison to the gaps between racial and ethnic groups and between counties in the state.

“In 2024, Governor Murphy signed the Youth Disconnection Prevention Bill and the New Jersey YouthBuild Act into law, both of which were significant milestones for young people throughout the state,” said Robert Clark, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Opportunity Youth Network. “Despite the recent progress, the recent data from Measure of America underscores just how much more work needs to be done. It is my hope that these findings will not cause despair, but rather inspire a statewide movement dedicated to creating a better foundation for all young people.”

Key findings in “Building Brighter Futures in New Jersey” include:

- The youth disconnection rate in New Jersey rose slightly from 2023 to 2024—from 9.4 percent to 9.9 percent—representing 9,400 additional young people
- One in five young people in Cumberland County is not in school and not working (20.2 percent)
- Essex County, which has a much larger population, has the largest number of disconnected young people at 14,400
- 11.7 percent of young men across the state are disconnected, compared to 8.1 percent of young women.
- By the time young people reach their 30s, those who worked or were in school throughout their teens and early 20s earn \$41,200 more per year (in inflation-adjusted 2024 dollars) and are 45 percent more likely to own a home, 42 percent more likely to be employed, and 52 percent more likely to report excellent or good health than those who had been disconnected as young people.

The brief serves as a preview to a full report anticipated to be released early in 2027 that will include a full examination of the state's disconnection rates and the associated impacts. The research, based on the American Human Development Index (HDI), derived from the United Nations Human Development Index, will measure three fundamental capabilities: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The report will also offer detailed analysis and data from across the 21 counties and 40 legislative districts in the state, serving as a resource to help community members, local and state governments, and advocates identify areas of opportunity for support and growth.

"Our research aims to shine a light on the opportunity gaps that individuals across the State of New Jersey are facing," said Kristen Lewis, Director of Measure of America. "While we continue to work toward a full report next year, policymakers and legislators should use the data in *Building Brighter Futures* to improve public systems - in particular education and workforce development - in order to better serve all young people."

OYN and its partners are urging legislators and the Sherrill administration to treat these numbers not as a baseline to monitor, but as a mandate to act.

The *Building Brighter Futures in New Jersey* data brief can be found below:

<https://measureofamerica.org/building-brighter-futures-in-new-jersey-data-preview/>

About Opportunity Youth Network (OYN)

OYN is a Newark-based nonprofit and New Jersey's leading advocate of opportunity youth with a body of replicable initiatives that are designed to address youth disconnection. These initiatives work in tandem to accomplish OYN's mission to re-engage opportunity youth while drastically changing systems that inhibit their success. OYN serves as the intermediary of the NJOYC.

About New Jersey Opportunity Youth Coalition (NJOYC)

NJOYC is a network of organizations who are committed to advocating for policy change to remove the barriers that inhibit opportunity youth's success. The Coalition is dedicated to engaging in collective work to ensure that all young people throughout the state of New Jersey have the resources and supports they need to thrive.

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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