



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
June 10, 2020

CONTACT

Genevieve Friedman
Group Gordon
(212) 784-5709

After a Decade of Progress, Pandemic Could 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 – June 10, 2020 – [Measure of America](#), a project of the Social Science Research Council, today released [A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus](#), its eighth annual report on U.S. young people aged 16 to 24 who are neither working nor in school. It found that the youth disconnection rate had steadily fallen for eight years in a row, from a recession-fueled high of 14.7 percent in 2010 to 11.2 percent in 2018, the most recent year for which data are available through the American Community Survey. But now, with schools shuttered and classes online across the country, more than 40 million people filing for unemployment, and an unstable economy, Measure of America predicts the COVID-19 pandemic will erase those gains completely and the disconnected youth rate will spike even higher than it did during the Great Recession.

The 2018 youth disconnection rate was 11.2 percent, or one in nine young people. *A Decade Undone* breaks down this figure by race and ethnicity, gender, and various geographic delineations, including states, counties, congressional districts, metro areas, and for the first time, public use microdata areas (PUMAs), a Census Bureau-defined geography of at least 100,000 people. The numbers and trends in the report, based on pre-coronavirus data, provide a map of vulnerability indicating where disconnection rates are highest and which communities are most at risk of being further left behind as a result of the pandemic.

“At the height of the Great Recession, the youth disconnection rate was approximately one in seven. As a result of COVID-19, that figure could rise to one in five or even one in four teens and young adults,” said Kristen Lewis, Director of Measure of America. “As the U.S. moves toward recovery, we cannot forget about young people from our most disadvantaged, disenfranchised communities. The pandemic is leaving teens and young adults with the fewest resources even further behind their peers.”

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

- **Race and ethnicity:** Native American youth had the highest disconnection rate (23.4 percent) of any major racial or ethnic group, followed by Black (17.4 percent), Latino (12.8 percent), white (9.2 percent), and Asian (6.2 percent) young people. Latino young people continued to make the most significant strides, with disconnection down 30 percent since 2010.
- **Gender:** Women had a lower youth disconnection rate (10.8 percent) than men (11.5 percent); however, this gap varied by race and ethnicity. The largest racial gender gap existed between Black young women (14.8 percent) and Black young men (19.9 percent). Native American women’s youth disconnection rate of 24.8 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 three percent; the ten PUMAs facing the greatest challenges had youth disconnection rates ranging from 29.8 percent to 36.1 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.

- **Civic engagement:** Young people overall came out to vote in 2018 in greater numbers than in 2014, but states with higher rates of youth disconnection saw smaller increases in youth voter turnout. For every percentage point higher a state's disconnection rate is than another's, its voter turnout rate increase was 1.3 percentage points lower, on average.
- **Other characteristics:** Disconnected youth are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty, more than three times as likely to have a disability, and nine times as likely to have dropped out of high school. Connected youth between 21 to 24 years old are more than twice as likely to have a bachelor's degree (22.4 percent) as their disconnected counterparts (8.9 percent).

"Even as youth disconnection rates improved over the last decade, our analysis has shown consistent and major disparities along racial, ethnic, and geographic lines," said Rebecca Gluskin, Deputy Director and Chief Statistician at Measure of America. "Youth disconnection will only continue to grow with the unemployment rate, and communities across the country need consistent and targeted resources in order to weather the storm."

"Mobilizing knowledge for the public good is the core mission of the SSRC," said Alondra Nelson, president of the Social Science Research Council. "Now more than ever, as we struggle to understand and address the interlocking crises of persistent disadvantage, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people of color, and our tragic history of police brutality against Black people, research like this that illuminates the nature and extent of inequalities among America's teens and young adults is critical."

"Even before the COVID-19 crisis, disconnected youth were at a higher risk of poor health and economic outcomes as compared to their peers. Unfortunately, the pandemic has further widened the divide for an already vulnerable community," said Ellen Gardner, senior program officer at the Schultz Family Foundation. "Now more than ever, measuring and tracking disconnection rates is critical to informing our work to continue to keep young people at the forefront of opportunity."

"Measure of America's reports on youth disconnection are indispensable reading for anyone who wants to understand this key issue," said Tamar Mendelson, Bloomberg Professor of American Health and Director, Center for Adolescent Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Their latest release includes youth disconnection calculations at a fine-grained level based on approximately 2,400 public use microdata areas (PUMAs), a novel way of characterizing urban, suburban, and rural communities, and associations of youth disconnection with youth voter turnout. I know I'll be turning to this critical resource again and again."

The full report is available [here](#) and more demographic data is accessible at Measure of America's [interactive website](#). *A Decade Undone* was made possible through the support of the [Schultz Family Foundation](#).

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.