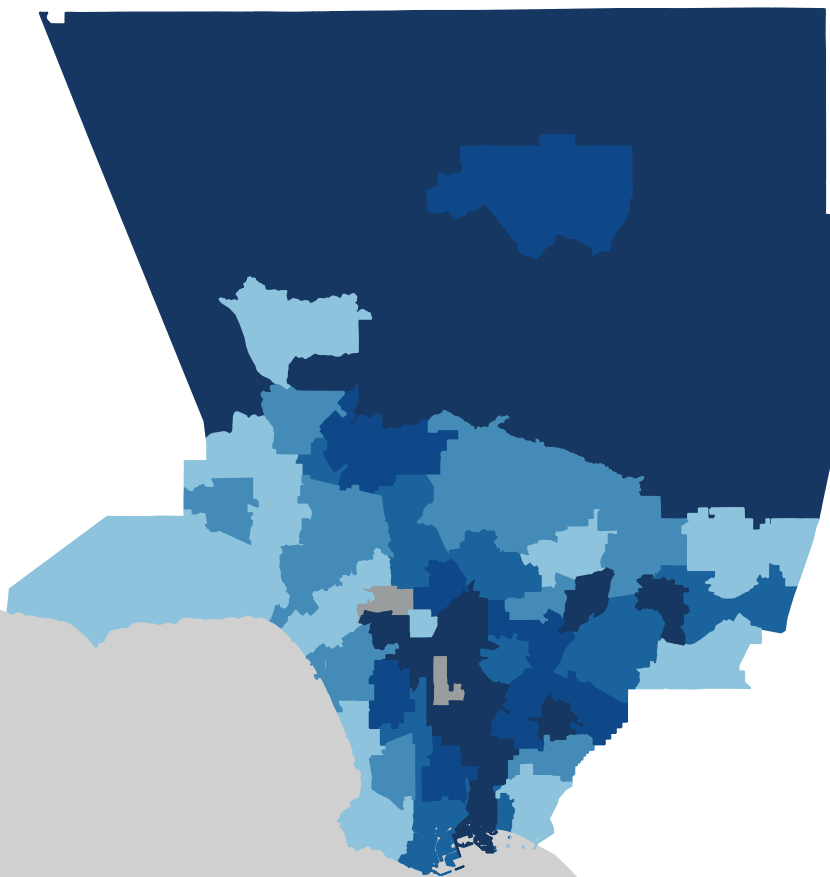


BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES FOR YOUTH IN **LOS ANGELES**

Spotlight on Young Women

Kristen Lewis



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MEASURE OF AMERICA

Measure of America is a project of the **Social Science Research Council**, a century-old independent nonprofit that mobilizes knowledge for the public good. Measure of America creates easy-to-use and methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being and opportunity in America. Through reports, interactive websites and apps, and custom-built dashboards, Measure of America works with partners to breathe life into numbers, using data to identify areas of need, pinpoint levers for change, and track progress over time.

The root of this work is the human development and capabilities approach, the brainchild of Harvard professor and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. Human development is about improving people’s well-being and expanding their choices and opportunities to live freely chosen lives of value. Measure of America cares about youth disconnection because it hampers human development, closing off some of life’s most rewarding and joyful paths and leading to a future of limited horizons and unrealized potential.

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INTRODUCTION

The youth disconnection rate—the share of young people ages 16 to 24 who are not in school or working—is a strong indicator of a community’s collective assets and a telling gauge of its residents’ access to opportunity. Emerging adulthood—the late teens and early twenties—is when people develop many of the capabilities required to live a good life: knowledge and credentials, social skills and networks, a sense of mastery and agency, an understanding of one’s strengths and preferences, and the ability to handle stressful events and regulate one’s emotions, to name just a few. At school and on the job, connected young people set goals and lay the groundwork to realize them. Out-of-school, out-of-work youth also have dreams and aspirations but have far less support to make them a reality.

Disconnected youth are young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither working nor in school. Here in the United States, organizations that work with this population began to use the term “opportunity youth” as a more optimistic phrase “that calls attention to the opportunities these young people seek and that should be opened up for them.”¹ Internationally, the most commonly used term to describe this population is “NEETs,” an acronym that stands for “not in employment, education, or training.”

As Los Angeles County transitions out of the worst of the Covid-19 era, new opportunities are opening up, and unprecedented resources from the American Rescue Act are available for meaningful investments in education, social services, and infrastructure. The pandemic underscored that both physical infrastructure like broadband internet and social infrastructure like affordable childcare, health benefits, and medical leave are essential to the functioning of modern life, helping to make the case and generate support for long-overdue investments in these necessities. Los Angeles has a once-in-a-lifetime chance to build an infrastructure of opportunity for all its young people.

At the same time, Covid-19’s harmful and potentially persistent effects on young people in Los Angeles cannot be underestimated (see **BOX 1**). The pandemic overturned a decade of progress in reducing youth disconnection—the consequences of which can be serious and

enduring. Using data from a large longitudinal study that has run for more than 50 years,² Measure of America determined that by the time they reach their thirties, people who worked or were in school throughout their teens and early twenties earn \$35,000 more per year 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. Research shows that youth disconnection is associated with lower levels of educational attainment, higher rates of substance use, worse health, less stable relationships, and more criminal activity. For young people who are already parents, the chances that their children will grow up in poverty increase with disconnection.³ Early successes, caring mentors, and lucky breaks can set a young person on the path to a flourishing adulthood; closed doors, adverse events, and limited connections can block off a host of rewarding and joyful paths, leading to a future of limited horizons and unrealized potential.

Los Angeles has a once-in-a-lifetime chance to build an infrastructure of opportunity for all its young people.

BOX 1 Covid-19's Impact on Young Angelenos

Employment plummeted in the early days of Covid-19, and the sectors most likely to employ young people—young women without college degrees in particular—such as the food service, hospitality, leisure, and retail industries, were hardest hit. The closure of schools and day-care providers pulled girls and young women into caretaking for siblings and other younger relatives, particularly in families where adults worked in front-line occupations and other jobs where going virtual wasn't an option. In fact, less-educated young women were harmed from all sides—they were concentrated in the hardest-hit industries, they were less likely to be able to work from home or to live in a household with parents eligible for remote work, and many found themselves on their own to care for their own children or siblings.⁴

The pandemic's impacts on education were as severe and arguably longer lasting. In March 2020, the vast majority of K–12 public schools in California lurched haphazardly to virtual learning, and most young Angelenos would not see the inside of a classroom for more than a year.⁵ Los Angeles Unified School District went remote on March 16, 2020,⁶ and did not begin a phased reopening until April 2021. Given what was known about the virus at the time and the widespread fear and uncertainty surrounding it, there were no crystal-clear good choices about virtual versus in-person school, only less-bad ones. But research available now makes clear that virtual instruction had various adverse effects on young people and that low-income and English-language-learning students were most at risk.⁷ Furthermore, school districts with larger shares of low-income students were three times as likely to remain in distance-learning mode even

as schools in other districts began to open, increasing the vulnerability of those already disproportionately experiencing educational disadvantages and potentially widening existing learning and achievement gaps by race and income.⁸ For high schoolers in 2020 and 2021, both the grounding rituals of daily life as students and rites of passage like homecoming and prom disappeared, leaving isolation and anxiety.

Less-educated young women were harmed from all sides—they were concentrated in the hardest-hit industries, they were less likely to be able to work from home or to live in a household with parents eligible for remote work, and many found themselves on their own to care for their own children or siblings.



Mental health challenges spiked nationwide, and young people felt Covid's effects on their psychological health most keenly. Youth with disabilities that are typically addressed in school as well as those who depend on school for basic necessities like meals saw these vital lifelines severed. For many young people already at risk of dropping out, remote learning broke the bonds—relationships with caring adults, in-person

friendships, enjoyable clubs or sports—that had kept them connected. The highest costs were borne by the least-advantaged students, who were less likely to have computers, broadband access, quiet places to study, and adults who could help them with schoolwork. These students were also more likely to need to contribute to their households by working or—particularly for girls and young women—caring for siblings or elderly relatives and taking on domestic tasks. Young Angelenos who were low-income, Black, or Latino were disproportionately likely to have lost a loved one to Covid-19. That remains the case; even now, thirty-one months after the pandemic began, the Latino Covid-19 mortality rate in Los Angeles County is two-and-a-half times the white mortality rate, and the Covid-19 mortality rate in high-poverty neighborhoods is three times the rate in low-poverty neighborhoods.⁹

Nationwide, college enrollment in 2020 dropped sharply, particularly in two-year community colleges, which are the most likely to admit low-income and nonwhite students.¹⁰ While enrollment at California’s four-year colleges remained roughly the same after the pandemic started, community colleges saw an across-the-board decrease in students. Enrollment fell the most among Black and Latino students—by nearly 17 percent in the fall of 2020 relative to previous years.¹¹ Looking just at Los Angeles County community colleges, first-time student enrollment plummeted by 40 percent for Black students and by 32 percent for Latino students.¹²

Prior to Covid-19, a large gap already existed between poor and nonpoor young people in terms of the rate of high school graduates who go directly from high school to college, and that gap increased due to the pandemic. Nationally, the enrollment gap between high-poverty and low-poverty high schools widened from 22 percentage points in 2019 to 28 percentage points in 2020.¹³

Recent research suggests that Covid-19 could continue to fuel youth disconnection in years to come. Nationwide testing data reveal a disturbing pattern: low-income, Black, and Latino students disproportionately remain behind where they would have been were it not for the pandemic. Middle school students have struggled the most,¹⁴ which is particularly worrisome given that difficulties with core academic classes during middle school is a risk factor for dropping out of high school. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that 9-year-olds’ test scores declined five points in reading and nine points in math, the largest drop in three decades; that students who were already struggling saw the greatest declines; and that the Black-white test score gap grew from 25 points in 2020 to 33 points in 2022.¹⁵ Without a strong foundation in reading by age 9, subsequent years become increasingly difficult as classroom instruction shifts from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”

YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

This report provides the youth disconnection rate for Los Angeles County using 2020 data, the latest available, unless noted otherwise. The data come from the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). The survey’s main advantage over other sources is that its sample size is extremely large, making it possible to calculate youth disconnection rates not only nationally and by state but also for counties, metro areas, and neighborhood clusters. The ACS also allows for disaggregation by race and ethnicity and by gender for geographies with sufficiently large populations.

BOX 2 What Is the Source of the Data and Who Is Included?

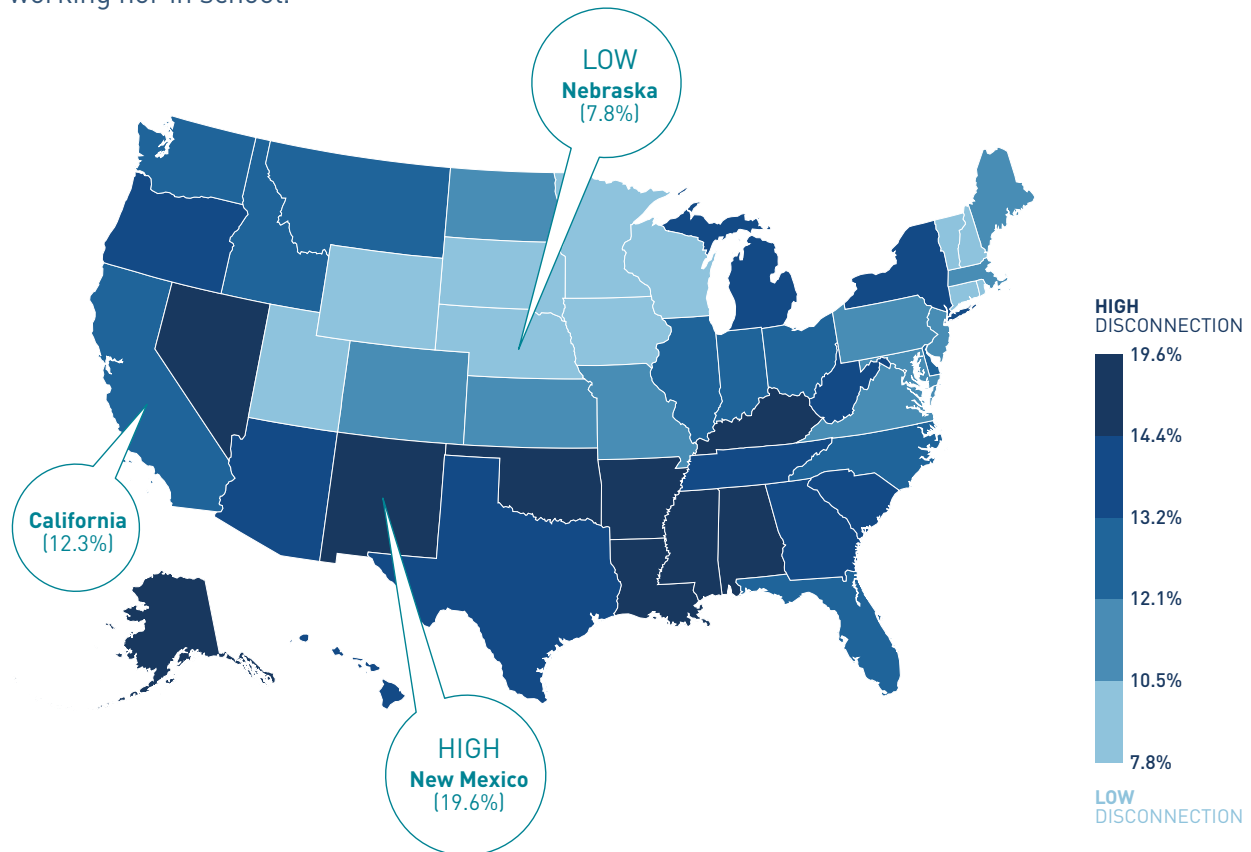
Measure of America’s data come from the **American Community Survey (ACS)**. The survey’s main advantage over other sources is that its sample size is extremely large, making it possible to calculate youth disconnection rates nationally and by state, as well as for counties, metro areas, and even smaller geographic areas. The ACS also allows for disaggregation by race and ethnicity and by gender for geographies with sufficiently large populations.

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (ACS) DEFINITION	
IN SCHOOL	Part-time or full-time students who have attended school or college in the past three months.
WORKING	Those who had any full- or part-time work in the previous week.
NOT WORKING	Unemployed in previous week or not in labor force and not looking for a job.
LIVING IN “GROUP QUARTERS”	People in non-household living arrangements such as correctional facilities, residential health facilities, dorms, etc. If enrolled in educational programs, they are considered connected.
MEMBERS OF ARMED FORCES (Group Quarters)	Counted as employed and thus as connected.
HOMELESS (Group Quarters)	Surveyed but likely to be undercounted; surveying the homeless is difficult.

The youth disconnection rate in Los Angeles County is 13.2 percent, or 156,200 young people. Los Angeles County has a higher disconnection rate than California as a whole, at 12.3 percent. California ranks twenty-third among the fifty states and Washington, DC. Among the country's one hundred most populous metro areas, greater Los Angeles (the Los Angeles–Long Beach–Anaheim metro area, which includes Los Angeles County and Orange County) ranks fifty-eighth.¹⁶

BOX 3 The National Context

On the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic, the share of teens and young adults disconnected from both work and school in the United States was lower than it had been in over a decade, 10.7 percent. Between 2010 and 2019, the youth disconnection rate fell 27 percent, driven largely by the steady increase in youth employment in the years following the Great Recession. **The 2020 national youth disconnection rate is 12.6 percent, or 4,830,700 disconnected youth**—a Covid-fueled upward spike that reversed a decade-long decline in the share of the country's young people neither working nor in school.



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

BOX 4 What Are the Limitations of the Data?

Collecting and presenting data using traditional statistical methods have come under criticism of late. Some argue that statistical methods make certain groups and their concerns invisible to policymakers, which perpetuates their marginalization; this critique is well founded. In this report, for instance, we are not able to provide youth disconnection rates for young people who are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) or Native American because their populations fall below the number required for reliable calculations, we are not able to provide rates for LGBTQ young people because survey respondents don't have a chance to identify themselves this way on Census Bureau surveys, and we can't provide rates for nonbinary people because male and female are the only categories offered. Others argue that this kind of exercise is an example of data colonialism, which is when data are taken from a group for research or other purposes, and then that group does not have access to or control over the results; a good example of this is medical researchers traveling to the site of an epidemic outbreak, taking samples from people, and then inventing and patenting a medicine that results from research done on those samples or people, without them benefiting. Measure of America uses publicly available data and makes the results of our research freely available to all. In addition, we convene a diverse group of local advisors to guide us for each and every place-based report we publish to ensure that community members themselves are involved in the process.

Still others argue that presenting data on inequality harms disadvantaged groups by reinforcing negative stereotypes. We ourselves find the disparities our research reveals to be profoundly unjust and distressing; this injustice is what motivates us to work in this area.

Given the risk that presenting these data has the potential to cause pain, what's the point? Simply put, we believe that understanding today's reality is necessary to create a better tomorrow. Data on specific groups of young people help stakeholders—among them policymakers, philanthropists, community leaders, and opportunity youth themselves—understand the nature and scope of challenges, tailor programs to specific needs, target resources, and track change over time. Further, local indicators and highly visible rankings can help create local accountability and support collective impact efforts. These data points are also essential to determining the degree to which efforts are achieving their goals: young people staying in school, getting and retaining jobs, enjoying physical and mental health, participating in their communities, and laying the groundwork for a flourishing, freely chosen adulthood. Nevertheless, data cannot paint the full picture of the range of struggles and opportunities of any given community. That is why Measure of America takes a both/and approach, both using large datasets and seeking to fill in the gaps with locally collected data, qualitative research, and storytelling.

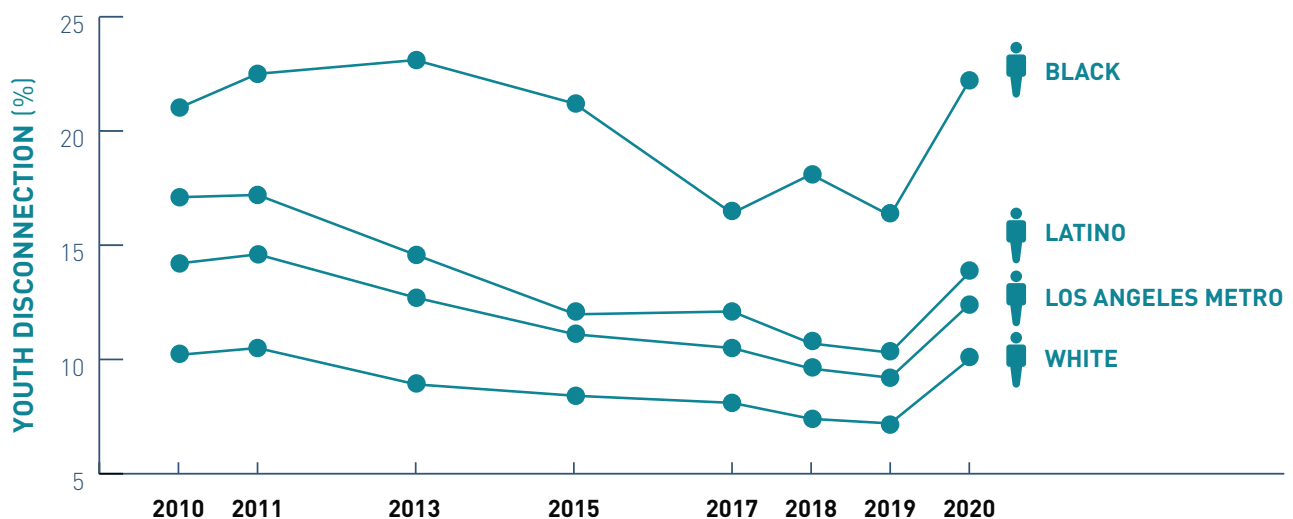
Youth Disconnection over Time in the Los Angeles Metro Area

The decade between 2010 and 2019 saw a steady and heartening decrease in the youth disconnection rate in the Los Angeles metro area, from 14.2 percent to 9.2 percent. Covid-19 reversed this trend, with the rate jumping to 12.4 percent in 2020. (Note that the 2020 metro area figures in this section differ from the county figures that appear elsewhere in this report).

Disaggregating by race and ethnicity reveals a more complicated story, however. The rate for Black young people increased between 2010 and 2013 before decreasing through 2019. In 2019, on the eve of the pandemic, the rate was 16.3 percent. Despite some progress, the rate for Black young people remained well above the Los Angeles metro area average for the entire period, and Black young people were more likely to be disconnected in 2020 than they had been in 2010.

Latino young people saw an encouragingly substantial drop in youth disconnection between 2010 and 2019; the rate fell from 17.1 percent to 10.3 percent before jumping to 13.8 percent in 2020.

FIGURE 5 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 2010–2020



*The missing data points are years when Measure of America did not release a nationwide metro area-level analysis of youth disconnection. For 2016, the Census data for Black young people in Greater Los Angeles were not reliable.

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

White young people saw steady declines in the disconnection rate, from 10.2 percent in 2010 to 7.2 percent in 2019. The pandemic-fueled reversal in 2020 brought the rate back up to 10.0 percent.

Future over-time tracking at the metro area level will include Asian young people. Measure of America's analysis for *A Portrait of Los Angeles County*, which used data from 2015, found the Asian youth disconnection rate for Los Angeles County to be 6.1 percent. That is on par with the 2020 youth disconnection rate for Asian young people in Los Angeles County: 6.0 percent.

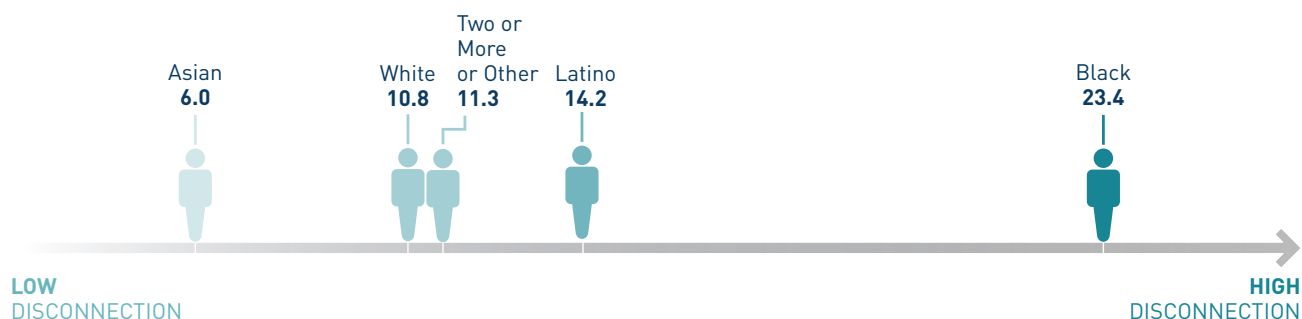
Between 2016 and 2019, the rate for young men in the Los Angeles metro area changed little, starting at 10.0 percent and ending at 9.7 percent; it then jumped to 14.3 percent in 2020. Young women saw a greater drop in the disconnection rate during this period, from 10.0 percent to 8.6 percent, and a smaller increase in 2020, when the rate rose to 10.3 percent.

Youth Disconnection by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity

Girls and young women in Los Angeles County are less likely to be disconnected than boys and young men, 10.5 percent versus 15.7 percent. The size of the gender gap varies by race and ethnicity, however.

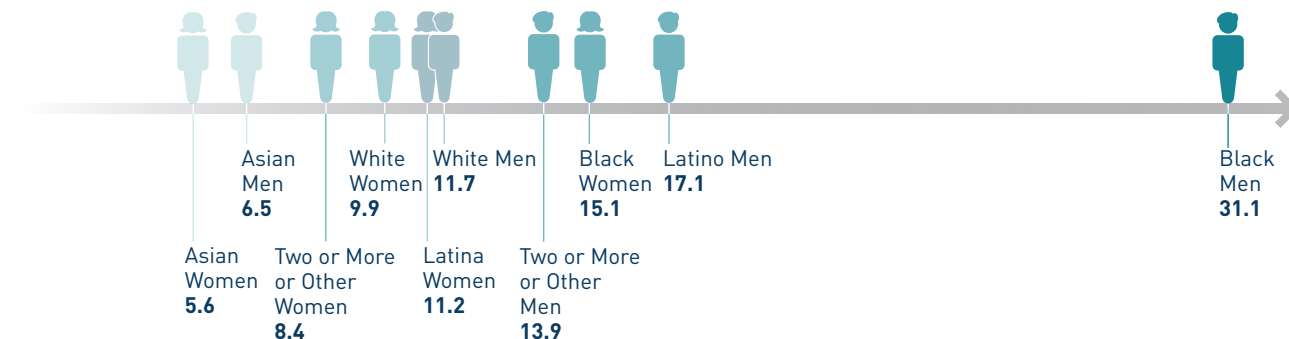
Black teens and young adults have the highest disconnection rate, 23.4 percent, or 19,000 young people. Black young people have the largest gender gap in the youth disconnection rate of any racial or ethnic group—15.1 percent for Black girls and young women, compared to double that, 31.1 percent, for their male counterparts. Black young people saw the sharpest rise in youth disconnection between 2019 (16.7

FIGURE 6 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY (%)



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

FIGURE 7 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY AND BY GENDER (%)



Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

percent) and 2020, a 40 percent increase, and Black boys and young men have by far the highest youth disconnection rate of any race/gender combination. Thirty-eight percent of Black young people living with a disability are disconnected, compared to 28 percent of Latino youth with a disability and 27 percent of white youth with a disability. Labor market discrimination against Black young people, particularly young men, drives their high rate of disconnection.¹⁷

The **Latino** youth disconnection rate stands at 14.2 percent, or 99,800 young people. (Though the rate for Black youth is much higher than the rate for Latino youth, the Latino youth population is more than eight times larger than the Black youth population in Los Angeles County.) Latina girls and young women are much less likely than their male counterparts to be disconnected, 11.2 as compared to 17.1 percent. In a striking departure from the situation a decade ago, Latina girls and young women are now about as likely as white boys and young men to be out of school and work.

Among Latino subgroups, Latino youth who trace their origins to Mexico have a disconnection rate of 14.4 percent, with sharp gender

BOX 8 Youth Disconnection among LGBTQ Youth

The US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), the source of some of the data for our youth disconnection research, does not currently ask questions about either sexual orientation or gender identity. Male and female are the only gender options available on the ACS, leaving no option for those who identify as nonbinary. For these reasons, Measure of America cannot provide youth disconnection rates for LGBTQ young people. Such data would be very useful for those working to understand and address youth disconnection, as research suggests that LGBTQ youth disproportionately experience harassment and discrimination in schools and workplaces and are more likely than straight, cisgender young people to experience mental health challenges. In addition, in this report we refer to girls and women, boys and men; this is because we are talking about the data the government provides, which, as noted above, sort people into only two categories, male and female. Starting in July 2021, the Census has included questions on sexual orientation and gender identity on its Household Pulse Survey. Measure of America has asked the Census to extend these questions to the ACS and its Decennial Census. This would greatly enhance youth disconnection research.

differences; boys and young men have a rate of 17.5 percent, girls and young women, 11.2 percent. Those whose heritage is Central American have an overall rate of 15.1 percent; boys and young men have a rate of 16.9 percent, their female counterparts, 13.1 percent. The group termed “Other Latino” includes all Latinos not Mexican, Central American, South American, Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Cuban; 13.4 percent of young adults in this group are disconnected from work and school (see **SIDEBAR**). There were not reliable data for the South American, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban subgroups in 2020.

The disconnection rate for **white** teens and young adults is 10.8 percent, or 22,000 people. White boys and young men are more likely than their female counterparts to be disconnected, 11.7 percent compared to 9.9 percent.

Asian teens and young adults have the lowest disconnection rate, 6.0 percent, or 8,500 young Angelenos. Asian girls and young women have the lowest rate of any race/gender combination, 5.6 percent, and Asian boys and young men have the second-lowest rate, 6.5 percent. Considerable variation exists within this racial category; people who trace their origins to nearly fifty countries are grouped together as Asian in the American Community Survey. Data allowed for reliable calculations of three Asian subgroups. Chinese young people have a disconnection rate of 3.5 percent; Filipino young people, 7.1 percent; and Vietnamese young people, 11.5 percent—a considerable range (see **SIDEBAR**).

Because so few **Native American and NHOPI** young people were surveyed in 2020, it was not possible to calculate reliable youth disconnection rates for these groups. In 2019, the NHOPI rate was 13.6 percent; given that the overall Los Angeles County rate increased by about 30 percent between 2019 and 2020, it is likely that the NHOPI rate also increased. The Native American youth disconnection rate in 2019 had an unacceptably high margin of error.

YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY LATINO SUBGROUP

LATINO SUBGROUP	%	#
MEXICAN	14.4	76,200
Men	17.5	46,400
Women	11.2	29,800
CENTRAL AMERICAN	15.1	17,000
Men	16.9	10,000
Women	13.1	7,000
OTHER LATINO	13.4	4,100
Men	15.8	2,600
Women	10.6	1,500

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY ASIAN SUBGROUP

ASIAN SUBGROUP	%	#
CHINESE	3.5	1,600
FILIPINO	7.1	2,300
VIETNAMESE	11.5	1,400

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

Characteristics of Connected and Disconnected Youth in Los Angeles County

Connected and disconnected young people living in Los Angeles County differ in many ways that go beyond their current employment and educational status.



Poverty

About one in four disconnected young people (26 percent) live below the poverty line, compared to about one in seven connected youth (15 percent).



Disability

Disconnected youth in Los Angeles County are more than twice as likely to have one or more disabilities as connected youth—11.8 percent as compared to 4.5 percent.



Motherhood and marriage

Disconnected young women in Los Angeles County are four times as likely to be mothers as connected young women—16 percent of disconnected young women are mothers living with their own child or children, compared to 4 percent of connected young women. Disconnected youth are more likely to be married than their connected counterparts; 5 percent of disconnected youth are married, compared to 3 percent of connected youth.



Institutionalization

Disconnected youth are ten times as likely as their connected peers to be living in institutionalized group quarters such as prisons, jails, juvenile detention centers, or residential health facilities, 3.2 percent compared to just 0.3 percent.

1/4

About one-fourth of disconnected young people in Los Angeles County live in a **poor household**.



Educational degree attainment

Nearly 18 percent of disconnected young people have less than a high school diploma, 46 percent have graduated high school, 22 percent have attended some college classes but don't have a college degree, almost 4 percent have an associate degree, and roughly one in ten have a college degree. It may seem confusing that 27 percent of connected youth have less than a high school diploma, nearly 10 percentage points higher than the share of disconnected young people. This is because the vast majority of connected youth under age 18 are still enrolled in high school and will remain so until they graduate. Similarly, more than twice as many disconnected as connected young people have completed high school as their highest degree; this is because more connected youth have continued their educations beyond high school, and so show up in the "some college," "associate degree," or "bachelor's or higher" categories (see **FIGURE 9**).



Age

Young people 20 to 24 years old are more likely than teenagers 16 to 19 years old to be disconnected. The rate for 16- to 19-year-olds is 7.6 percent, and the rate for 20- to 24-year-olds is 17.2 percent. In California, young people must attend high school until they either graduate or turn 18, a policy that keeps 16- and 17-year-olds connected to school and contributes to a lower disconnection rate for this age group than for people in their early twenties.

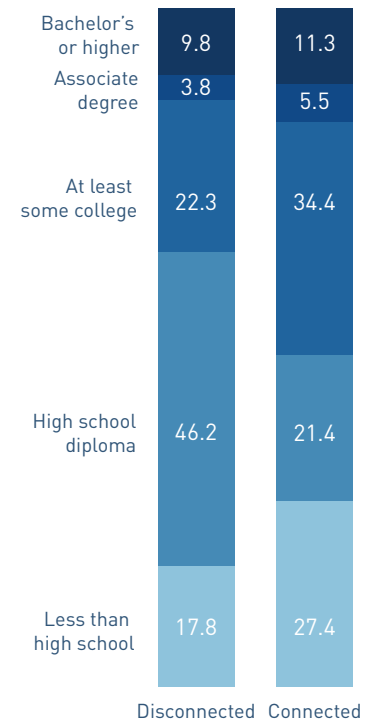


Health insurance

Disconnected youth are more than twice as likely to be uninsured as connected youth, 19.6 percent compared to 9.2 percent. People without health insurance often fail to seek or receive the health care they need.

Forty-two percent of disconnected youth in Los Angeles County receive Medicaid, compared to 29 percent of connected youth.

FIGURE 9 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG LOS ANGELES YOUTH (%)



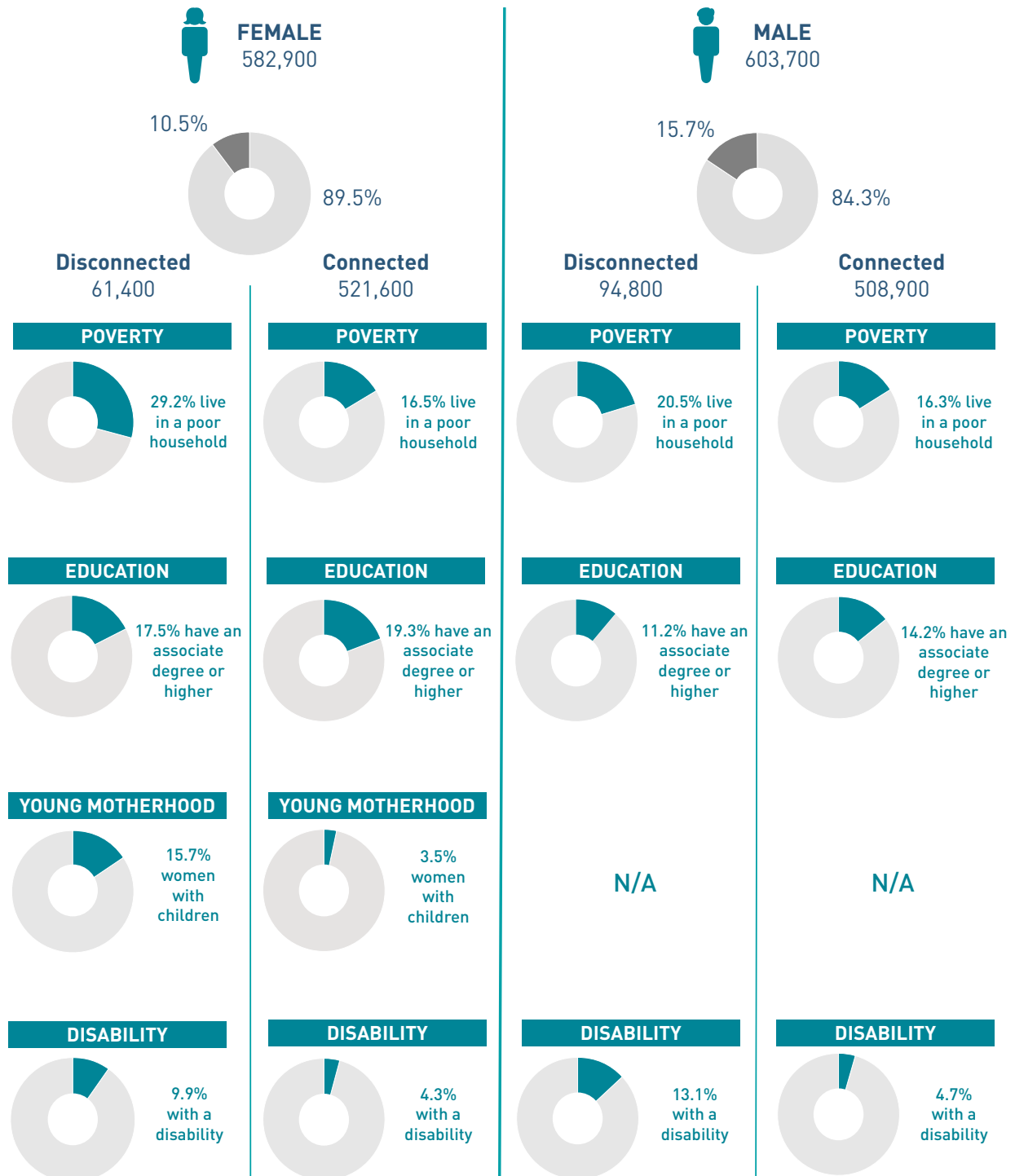
Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2020.

**Nativity**

Young Angelenos who were born in the United States and those who were born in other countries have similar disconnection rates; 14 percent of foreign-born youth and 13 percent of US-born youth are disconnected.

**English proficiency**

Disconnected young people are slightly more likely than connected young people to speak English “less than very well,” 10.5 percent as compared to 7.8 percent.

FIGURE 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF CONNECTED AND DISCONNECTED YOUTH IN LOS ANGELES

Youth Disconnection by Place

NEIGHBORHOOD CLUSTERS

To present disconnection rates by neighborhood cluster, Measure of America uses geographic units called public use microdata areas (PUMAs).¹⁸ The Census Bureau defines the boundaries of PUMAs; they nest within states, comprise census tracts and counties, are almost always geographically contiguous, contain at least 100,000 people, and together cover the entirety of the United States. In urban areas, counties comprise one or more PUMAs; in rural areas, PUMAs generally comprise several contiguous counties. Los Angeles County comprises sixty-nine PUMAs.

The lowest youth disconnection rates in Los Angeles County are found in Westwood and West Los Angeles in the City of Los Angeles, East Long Beach, and the Palo Verdes Peninsula; the highest, in Lancaster, Southwest Long Beach, and Central City and Boyle Heights in the City of Los Angeles (see **MAP 11**).

Neighborhood youth disconnection rates reflect the well-being of residents and the opportunities available in different communities. Another way to gauge well-being and access to opportunity is the **American Human Development Index (HDI)**, a composite measure that combines indicators on health, education, and earnings—the basic building blocks of a flourishing life—into a single score. Measure of America has applied the American HDI to California communities since 2011. High levels of youth disconnection are associated with low scores on the American HDI, as disconnected young people come overwhelmingly from communities that have long experienced disinvestment; residential segregation by race; poor quality health, education, and transportation services; and isolation from the mainstream.

The figure below (FIGURE XX) shows the strong correlation between American HDI scores for Los Angeles County neighborhood clusters and their youth disconnection rates: as HDI scores decrease, youth disconnection rates tend to increase. A thorough investigation of HDI scores in California can be found in Measure of America's *A Portrait of California 2021–2022*.



Log onto
www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive
to find the data for your PUMA.

MAP 11 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY NEIGHBORHOOD CLUSTER

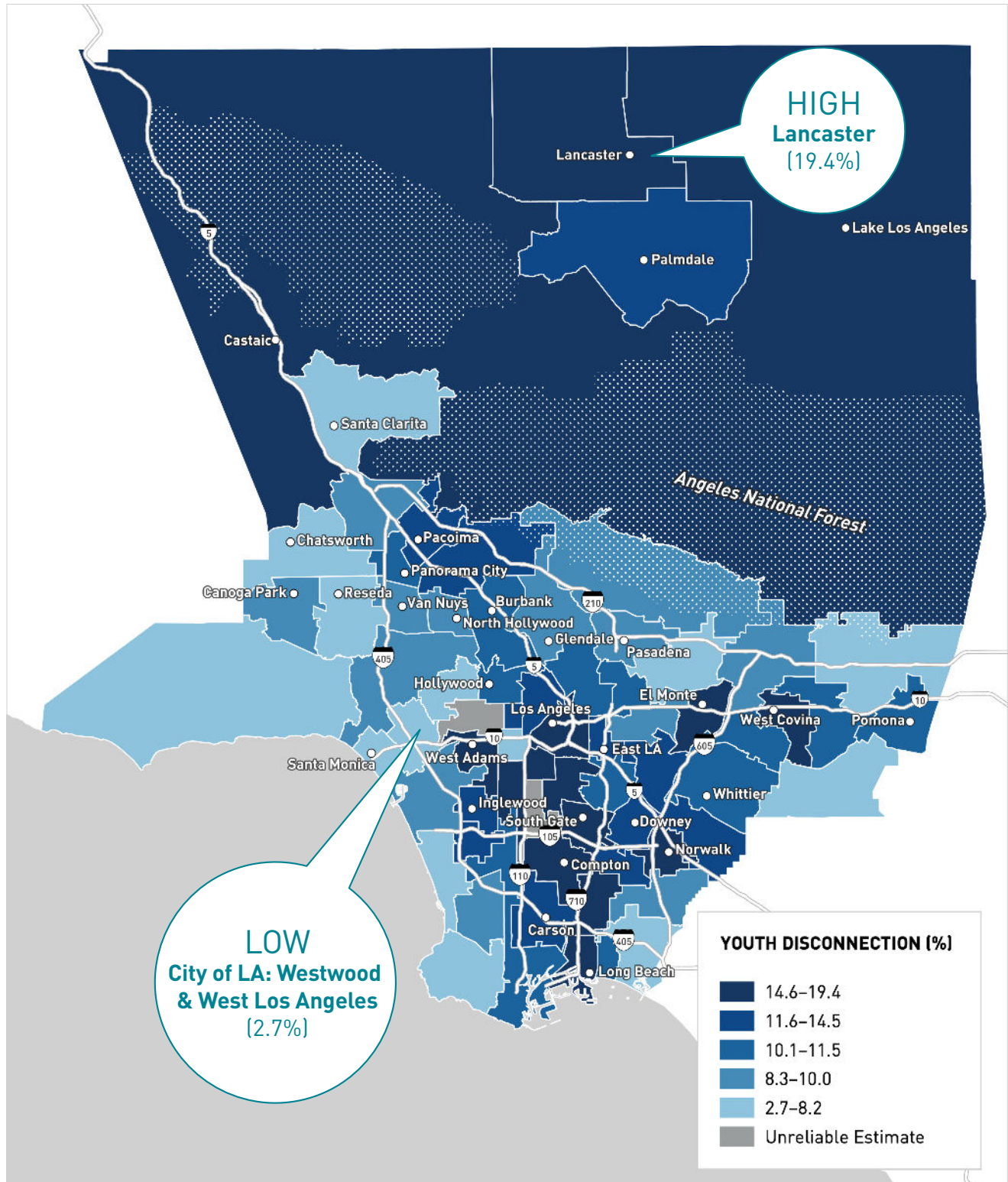
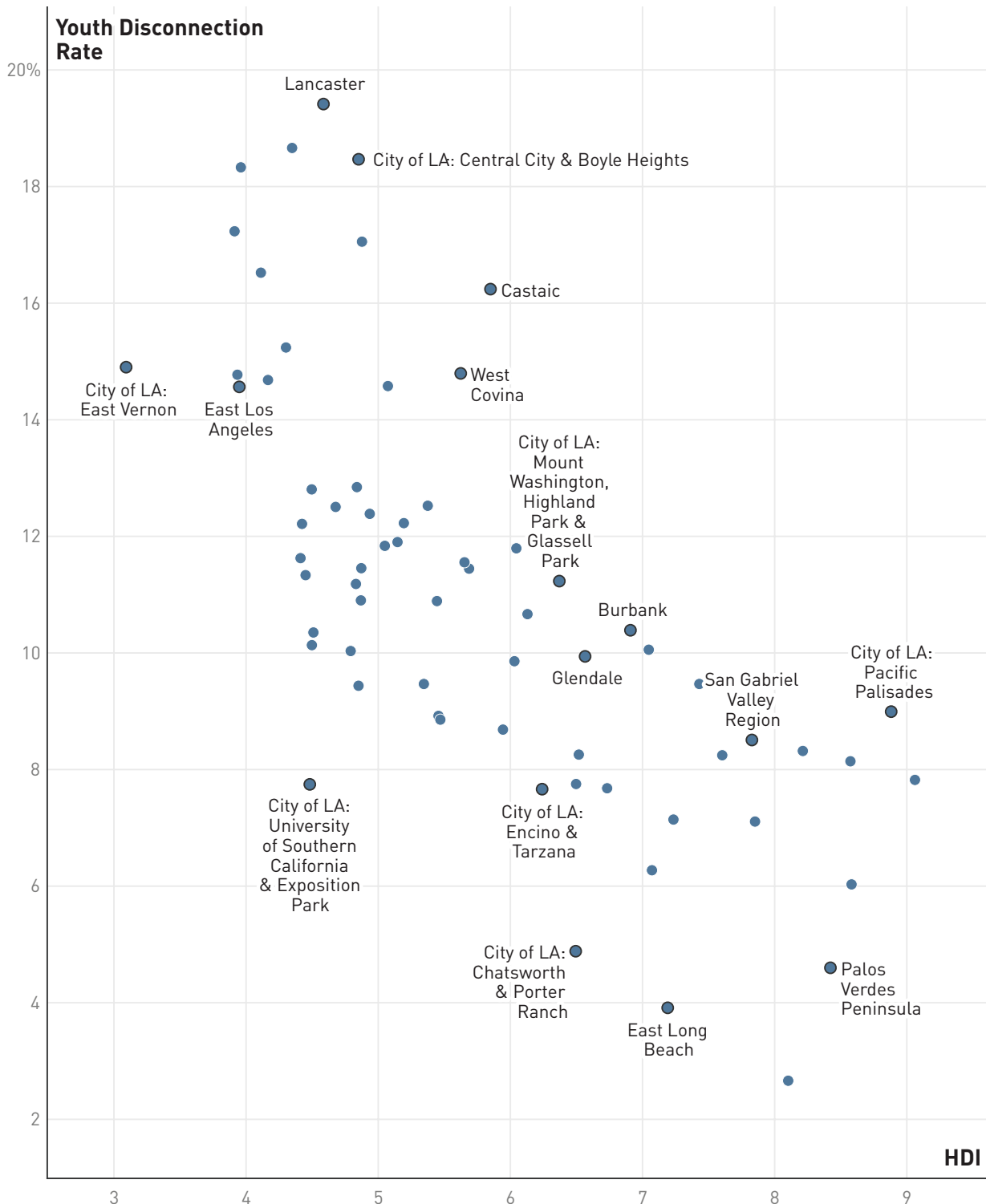


FIGURE 12 AMERICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX AND YOUTH DISCONNECTION

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016–2020; American Human Development Index: *A Portrait of California 2021–2022*.

TABLE 13 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY NEIGHBORHOOD CLUSTER

Rank	Neighborhood Cluster	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)	Rank	Neighborhood Cluster	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)
1	City of LA: Westwood & West Los Angeles	2.7	2,800	26	City of LA: Canoga Park, Winnetka & Woodland Hills	9.9	1,100
2	East Long Beach	3.9	1,700	27	Glendale	9.9	600
3	Palos Verdes Peninsula	4.6	3,900	28	La Puente & Industry	10.0	1,100
4	City of LA: Chatsworth & Porter Ranch	4.9	3,000	29	Alhambra & South Pasadena	10.1	1,400
5	Redondo Beach, Manhattan Beach & Hermosa Beach	6.0	1,200	30	City of LA: Mission Hills & Panorama City	10.1	500
6	Diamond Bar, La Habra Heights & Rowland Heights	6.3	1,500	31	Pomona	10.4	1,900
7	West Hollywood & Beverly Hills	7.1	2,500	32	Burbank	10.4	1,600
8	Arcadia, San Gabriel & Temple City	7.1	1,900	33	Covina & Walnut	10.7	2,700
9	City of LA: Encino & Tarzana	7.7	800	34	City of LA: Hollywood	10.9	2,600
10	Glendora, Claremont, San Dimas & La Verne Cities	7.7	2,500	35	City of LA: San Pedro	10.9	1,100
11	City of LA: Univ. of Southern California & Exposition Park	7.7	1,600	36	Central Long Beach & Signal Hill	11.2	1,200
12	Santa Clarita	7.8	2,500	37	City of LA: Mount Washington, Highland Park & Glassell Park	11.2	2,600
13	Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Malibu & Westlake Village	7.8	1,600	38	Bell Gardens, Bell, Maywood, Cudahy & Commerce	11.3	2,200
14	Santa Monica	8.1	700	39	Whittier City & Hacienda Heights	11.4	1,900
15	Pasadena	8.2	2,100	40	Gardena, Lawndale Cities & West Athens	11.5	2,400
16	Lakewood, Cerritos, Artesia & Hawaiian Gardens	8.3	1,500	41	Carson	11.6	2,900
17	Culver City & City of LA: Marina del Rey & Westchester	8.3	1,300	42	Bellflower & Paramount	11.6	2,400
18	San Gabriel Valley Region	8.5	1,000	43	La Mirada & Santa Fe Springs	11.8	4,700
19	City of LA: Granada Hills & Sylmar	8.7	1,800	44	Downey	11.8	3,000
20	Monterey Park & Rosemead Cities	8.9	1,200	45	Pico Rivera & Montebello	11.9	2,300
21	City of LA: North Hollywood & Valley Village	8.9	1,200	46	San Fernando & City of LA: Arleta & Pacoima	12.2	2,600
22	City of LA: Pacific Palisades	9.0	1,800	47	City of LA: Koreatown	12.2	1,400
23	Baldwin Park, Azusa, Duarte & Irwindale	9.4	2,000	48	Hawthorne	12.4	1,700
24	City of LA: Van Nuys & North Sherman Oaks	9.5	1,400	49	Inglewood	12.5	4,200
25	Torrance	9.5	2,000	50	City of LA: Silver Lake, Echo Park & Westlake	12.5	4,300

TABLE 13 YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY NEIGHBORHOOD CLUSTER (CONTINUED)

Rank	Neighborhood Cluster	Youth Disconnection (%)	Youth Disconnection (#)
51	Palmdale	12.8	4,100
52	City of LA: Sunland, Sun Valley & Tujunga	12.8	1,600
53	East Los Angeles	14.6	2,400
54	City of LA: West Adams & Baldwin Hills	14.6	2,600
55	El Monte & South El Monte	14.7	1,900
56	Huntington Park, Florence-Graham & Walnut Park	14.8	4,000
57	West Covina	14.8	2,000
58	City of LA: East Vernon	14.9	1,700
59	North Long Beach	15.2	500
60	Castaic	16.2	1,000
61	South Gate & Lynwood	16.5	1,400
62	Norwalk	17.1	2,800
63	City of LA: South Central & Westmont	17.2	1,500
64	Compton City & West Rancho Dominguez	18.3	2,400
65	City of LA: Central City & Boyle Heights	18.5	2,300
66	Southwest Long Beach	18.7	500
67	Lancaster	19.4	1,300

Source: Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016–2020.

2 PUMAs did not have statistically reliable data: Hancock Park & Mid-Wilshire; South Central/Watts.

SPOTLIGHT ON GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

About a decade ago, the White House Council for Community Solutions put the issues of out-of-school, out-of-work young people in the national spotlight. Its 2012 report, *Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth*,¹⁹ which coined the term “opportunity youth,” laid out an ambitious agenda for creating robust pathways to rewarding adulthoods for disadvantaged young people. Although the report itself did not prioritize any particular group in its recommendations—it was silent on gender, and didn’t even contain the words “girls,” “boys,” “women,” or “men”—the reaction to the report was a different story. My Brother’s Keeper, the Executives’ Alliance for Boys and Young Men of Color, and dozens of initiatives supported by foundations and community-based organizations large and small across the country sprang up in response, focusing their attention almost entirely on the needs of boys and young men of color.²⁰

Programs that address the needs of boys and men of color were, and continue to be, both necessary and overdue. Young men of color, especially young Black men, disproportionately face harsh discipline in schools and aggressive policing in their communities; are vastly overrepresented in juvenile detention centers, jails, and prisons; face job discrimination and high rates of unemployment; and suffer America’s highest homicide rates. At that time, at the national level, Black boys and young men had the highest rates of youth disconnection (Native American boys and young men do now). And clearly the problem persists, with an astonishing 31.1 percent of Black boys and young men in Los Angeles out of work and school.

The puzzling thing, however, was the comparative lack of attention to the needs of disconnected girls and young women, which persists to this day. At the time of the report’s publication in 2012, the disconnection rate had long been higher for girls and young women than for boys and young men and had only recently switched, and the rates for Asian and Latina young women were, at that time, higher than the rates for their male counterparts. This is still true in many places, though in Los Angeles girls and women across racial and ethnic groups are outperforming their male counterparts. Although there was some outcry over the anemic response to girls’ and women’s needs—and, in response, in 2014, the White House established a task force looking at the needs and priorities of girls and young women of color²¹—commensurate foundation support, community organization, and government focus and investment never materialized.

The comparative lack of attention to the needs of disconnected girls and young women was puzzling.

Though their situation is not as dire as that of their brothers in some important respects, such as homicide and incarceration, Black, Latina, and Native American young women also face their own outsized challenges. Among them are early motherhood and single parenthood; gender norms and stereotypes that result in unequal domestic responsibilities in the home, fewer academic and vocational routes to well-paying jobs, concentration in low-paying occupation fields, and wage discrimination, all of which make employment less rewarding; disproportionate experience of violence, including sexual violence and trafficking; and trauma. In addition, girls of color are far more likely than white girls to experience severe school discipline, and women of color are more likely to be incarcerated than white women.

Black, Latina, and Native American young women also face their own outsized challenges.

Early motherhood. A notable exception to the lack of tailored programs for girls and young women in the opportunity youth space are programs that seek to reduce teen pregnancy, support pregnant girls and young women, and address the needs of young mothers and their small children. The best of these understand the needs and aspirations of young mothers, treating them as human beings with inherent rights and value, supporting their agency, and walking with them along the road to flourishing, freely chosen adulthoods. Unfortunately, some programs that target this population are rooted in sexist stereotypes about the proper role of women (mothers and caretakers); others take an instrumentalist approach to young mothers, seeing them chiefly as vehicles to improve the outcomes of their young children; and still others spring from the desire to control young women's sexuality, particularly that of young women of color.

Motherhood can be among life's most joyous and rewarding experiences. It is also a common one; by their early forties, 86 percent of women have at least one child.²² What differs among different groups of women is timing. Young women who have a wide range of desirable options tend to delay motherhood to focus on other goals, such as developing a strong relationship with their partner, continuing their educations, getting some years of work experience under their belts, or enjoying their young adulthoods unfettered by the demands of parenthood. For young women without a range of appealing options, motherhood can provide an attainable route to adulthood and a source of happiness and fulfillment they might not be able to find elsewhere.

Like mothers of every age, young mothers want the best for their children and often see parenting as the best, most meaningful, and most joyous part of their lives. Research finds that many young mothers credit

their commitment to their children as motivating them to make positive changes, such as continuing their educations.²³ But motherhood, which is demanding for anyone, can be particularly challenging for young mothers.

Compared to mothers in their twenties, teen mothers are more likely to experience domestic violence, poor birth outcomes, and postpartum depression. They also have higher rates of high school dropout, higher rates of poverty, and lower incomes and levels of educational attainment. Children born to teenage mothers perform less well in school, are less likely to complete high school, and are more likely to be incarcerated, become teen parents themselves, be unemployed, and have health problems than children born to older mothers. Once a young woman has a baby, some form of childcare is necessary for her to continue her education or keep a job, but in California, childcare is now more expensive than rent for families with small children.²⁴ Married parents at the poverty line spend nearly half their incomes on childcare costs, and single parents much more.

Two things are essential in developing programs that address the needs of young mothers. First, we must honor and respect the choices of young mothers and support them to have healthy pregnancies, safe births, and opportunities to continue their own development while being the parents they want to be to their much-loved children. Making their lives better is important, and pathologizing young motherhood is counterproductive and wrong. Second, we must do more to ensure that motherhood is not a young woman's *only* or *easiest-to-imagine* route to adulthood and fulfillment. That requires offering young women appealing career and educational opportunities—appealing enough to delay motherhood—alongside reliable, affordable birth control and the full range of reproductive health care, including abortion.

Domestic responsibilities. Around the world, girls tend to take on more household tasks than boys—this includes cooking, cleaning, and caretaking. This gender division of labor grows more pronounced as children get older, with girls taking on larger shares of housework and childcare as they enter their teens, laying the groundwork for unequal domestic responsibilities in adulthood and, in some cases, reducing the time available to girls for education and employment.²⁵ American girls ages 6 to 17 years old spend more time doing housework than they do playing, while boys spend twice as much time playing as they do on housework.²⁶ When children in the United States are paid an allowance for doing chores, boys not only are paid about double, \$7 for girls per

Around the world, girls tend to take on more household tasks than boys—this includes cooking, cleaning, and caretaking.

week and \$14 for boys—the gender pay gap starts early—but they are also paid for basic hygiene like taking showers and brushing their teeth; girls are more likely to be paid for cleaning.²⁷ Girls ages 15 to 17 spend nearly half again as much time on housework than boys, while boys get an extra hour per day of leisure.²⁸ While pre-pandemic research found that the gender gap in household chores between boys and girls was narrowing somewhat,²⁹ early evidence suggests that Covid-19 knocked that trend off course. During the pandemic, the domestic and caretaking burdens grew both heavier and more lopsided; a UK study found that girls and young women ages 14 to 24 had taken on the majority of household tasks during the pandemic, leaving them less time for school.³⁰

Families—especially low-income families who cannot afford to outsource domestic work—often need their children’s help in running their households, and young people can gain valuable skills and a sense of accomplishment and belonging by contributing to their families’ well-being. When girls and young women shoulder more of the cleaning, cooking, and caretaking work, however, what they and their brothers learn is that this kind of work is for women, a socialized belief that is also reflected in the wider economy. It also means that girls have less time for school and extracurricular activities and may receive less encouragement to pursue their educations or seek paying jobs. Given that girls and young women from low-income families do more housework not just than boys but also than girls from high-income families, young women living in poverty or near-poverty are particularly affected.

Occupational segregation. Some occupations are made up almost entirely of women of color. These careers—among them, childcare providers, home health aides who assist the elderly, health aides in rehabilitation facilities, housekeepers, cleaners, maids, and nursing assistants—are among America’s lowest-paying occupations. Not coincidentally, the caring, cleaning, and cooking tasks that represent the lion’s share of this type of work mirror the gendered household division of labor described above.³¹ These careers are not low-paying because they are not essential—to the contrary, those who care for the most vulnerable among us are performing society’s most valuable work—nor because workers in these fields are “unskilled” or lack educational credentials. They are low-paying because the workers are mostly women, doing what society still thinks of as “women’s work.”

While pre-pandemic research found that the gender gap in household chores between boys and girls was narrowing somewhat, early evidence suggests that Covid-19 knocked that trend off course.

Wage inequality. Wage discrimination against women is widespread in the United States and in Los Angeles. It isn't limited to any one industry sector, educational qualification, or income level. While the gender pay gap has narrowed over time, it persists at the national, local, and individual level. Female-dominated fields pay less than male-dominated fields that require equivalent skill and educational levels; mothers are less likely to be hired and promoted (in contrast to fathers); and even when men and women work the same job (or, as recent research shows, have the same exact degree from the same exact school), women earn less.³²

In Los Angeles County, the median salary for all women over 24 years of age is \$40,000, 85 percent of what the median man earns, \$47,200. The gulf is wider for women without a high school diploma, who earn \$21,300 annually—69 percent of what men without a high school diploma earn (\$30,700). This discrimination also weighs heavily on the next generation of Angelenos. One in four children in Los Angeles County live with a single mother (or grandmother); households headed by a single woman have a median income of \$34,500, compared to households headed by a single man (\$46,500) or those headed by a married couple (\$97,400). Thirty-eight percent of single women with children live below the poverty line, compared to 22 percent of single men with children.³³

Data on occupation earnings can illustrate the low value society places on what is viewed as “women’s work.” In the Los Angeles metro area, childcare providers (nannies, daycare workers) are paid a median of \$14.70 per hour—far less than landscaping and groundskeeping workers, who earn a median of \$17.90 per hour. Preschool teachers earn \$17.70 per hour, compared to carpet installers, who are paid \$23.00 per hour. That translates to an annual premium of \$10,900 for installing carpets and \$6,700 for landscape labor. Ninety to ninety-five percent of carpet installers and landscaping workers nationwide are men. Conversely, about 95 percent of preschool teachers and childcare workers are women.³⁴

Gender-based violence. Anyone can be a victim of gender-based violence, including boys and men. Transgender women and men are particularly at risk; they are four times as likely to experience violence, including rape, sexual assault, and aggravated assault, as cisgender individuals.³⁵ **In terms of absolute numbers, however, girls and women account for the vast majority of those who experience gender-based violence, and those in the 16- to 24-year-old age bracket are at the**

Girls and women account for the vast majority of those who experience gender-based violence, and those in the 16- to 24-year-old age bracket are at the highest risk.

highest risk. Experiencing violence as a teen or young adult is traumatic when it occurs and has lasting effects throughout people's lives, particularly for women. A study that followed women and men who had been victims of violence during the transition to adulthood, interviewing them nine, nineteen, and twenty-six years after their exposure to violence, found that women who had been exposed to violence were more likely to experience a heavy illness burden and bad self-reported health as adults than women who had not been exposed to violence; this long-term effect was not found in men.³⁶

Violence and the threat of violence are present in numerous forms in all the spaces where girls and women exist, from homes to schools to workplaces to streets and now into cyberspace. For girls, sexual harassment continues to be part and parcel of life in middle and high school; 56 percent of girls in grades 7 to 12 report experiencing harassment, including physical groping and threats of rape.³⁷ Experiencing and witnessing sexual harassment in school creates a hostile environment, erodes girls' sense of safety and belonging, and normalizes objectification and coercion. Girls are more likely than boys to report that sexual harassment made it difficult to sleep, made them not want to go to school, and caused them to alter their route to school. These effects contribute to lost productivity and increased absenteeism,³⁸ a risk factor for school dropout.

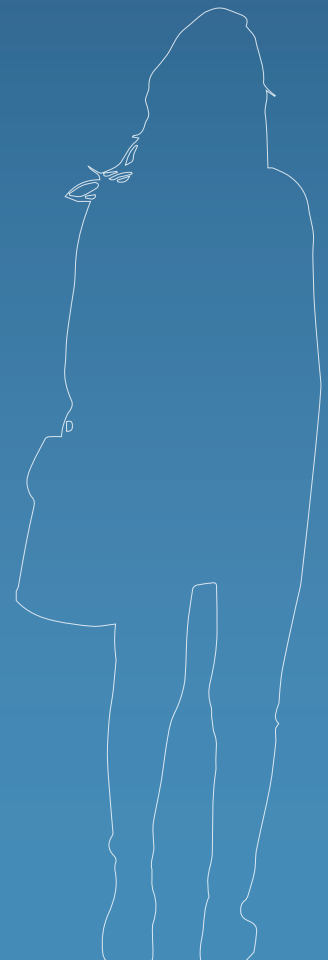
Women ages 24 and younger are the most likely of all groups to experience rape, and women ages 20 to 24 face the highest rates of nonfatal intimate partner violence. The young women most likely to be out of school and work, particularly low-income women and Black women, are disproportionately victims of domestic violence and rape. Research has found that young people who left school before graduating tended to experience their home, neighborhood, or school as toxic, and sexual harassment and violence contribute to such toxicity, especially for girls and young women.³⁹

School discipline and incarceration. Boys and young men of color are more likely than other groups to experience harsh discipline in schools, and ending the school-to-prison pipeline has justifiably captured the attention of activists and policymakers. While girls and young women of color are less likely than their male counterparts to experience harsh discipline and incarceration, however, they are far more likely to do so than white girls. In the 2017–2018 school year, Black girls were four times as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension or to be expelled from school as white girls. They were also more than three times as likely to be arrested at school, more than twice as likely to be restrained,

In the 2017–2018 school year, Black girls were four times as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension or to be expelled from school as white girls.

and more than five times as likely to be transferred to another school for disciplinary reasons.⁴⁰ Harsh discipline is associated with isolation and disengagement from school, academic difficulties, stress, and contact with the juvenile justice system, all of which increase the likelihood of disconnection.⁴¹

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



CONCLUSIONS

Important multisectoral efforts have identified a number of strategies to improve the lives and well-being of young people, particularly young people of color, in Los Angeles County. We list four of these efforts below (**BOX 14**). We encourage you to read their reports, which we drew upon in crafting the recommendations to follow. We were also informed by the ideas and experiences of our Los Angeles County advisory committee (whose members are listed on **PAGE 2**) and social science research on youth disconnection.

Young people in Los Angeles County are working to rebuild their lives and looking toward the future after the profound disruptions of Covid-19. In this recovery period, several interventions are particularly important.

Address learning loss at all levels.

On average, students lost ground academically during 2020 and 2021, the years when the pandemic was at its height. Those who were already struggling saw the greatest declines and the test-score gap between Black and white students grew. Students with disabilities were cut off from vital supports during the pandemic and helping them get back on track is critical. Urgent steps are required to prevent the inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic, from affecting the academic trajectories of tens of thousands of children in Los Angeles County. High-quality tutoring and more instructional time are important strategies, as are more opportunities for professional development for teachers and concrete steps to address funding inequalities between schools. Evidence shows that tutoring is most effective when tutors are trained educators (including retired teachers and education students), when tutoring takes place during the school day at least three times per week, and when tutoring sessions are aligned with the core curriculum.⁴² Unfortunately, the current shortage of teachers—especially teachers of color, male teachers, STEM teachers, and special education teachers—could both exacerbate learning loss and reduce the availability of tutors. Expanding the pathways into teaching, improving clinical experiences (i.e., student teaching and internships), and providing more and better support for existing teachers are important strategies for expanding and nurturing an inclusive teacher workforce. The American Rescue Plan has many provisions to address learning loss, outlined in the US Department of Education’s report *Strategies for Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Address the Impact of Lost Instructional Time*.⁴³

BOX 14 Ongoing Multisectoral Initiatives

[Bold Vision](#) is a multisector effort designed to improve the lives of a generation of young Angelenos, particularly children and young people of color, and create lasting change in Los Angeles by establishing new paths toward success for youth across the county. Bold Vision engaged in a robust community engagement process with over 140 organizations, experts on a range of issues, and young people themselves; this process culminated in a set of policy and strategy recommendations that can be found [in Bold Vision's final report](#). These recommendations focus on supporting the flourishing of young Black, Indigenous, Native American, Latino, Pacific Islander, and Asian Angelenos by focusing efforts in four areas: supporting youth civic engagement and power-building, ensuring that youth are able to develop their skills and talents, creating resource-rich neighborhoods in which children and young people can thrive, and rebuilding public systems to better meet their needs.

The [Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative \(OYC\)](#) brings together 100 public and private agencies from a variety of sectors to address the systemic barriers facing transition-age foster youth in Los Angeles County and improve their educational and employment outcomes. The OYC aims to ensure that these young people are served in a holistic way with coordinated, complementary educational and employment services that will enable them to thrive. The OYC [strategic plan](#) calls for facilitating information-sharing among organizations that serve young people who have experienced foster care, building the capacity of such organizations, transforming the systems with which foster youth interact, promoting awareness of the needs of foster youth as well as the resources available to assist them, and elevating the voices of foster youth themselves.

The [Los Angeles Performance Partnership Pilot \(LA P3\)](#) is an intergovernmental, cross-sector initiative that focuses on realizing better workforce, education, and housing outcomes for opportunity youth in greater Los Angeles and improving their well-being. LA P3 grew out of a federal effort to test innovative, cost-effective strategies for enhancing opportunity-youth services and bettering outcomes for disconnected young people. It brought together the City of Los Angeles, County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles Community College District, local Cal State universities, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Los Angeles Housing Service Agency, and over 50 public, philanthropic, and community-based organizations. They jointly developed a shared vision for collaboration, coordination, and integration at the policy and operational levels with a view to improving services for out-of-school, out-of-work young people, foster youth, homeless youth, and youth involved in the justice system.⁴⁴ The goal of this transformative initiative is that “all disconnected youth in Los Angeles will secure quality education, training, and employment opportunities.”

In 2008, UNITE-LA convened twenty cross-sector leaders to establish the [L.A. Compact](#)—a bold commitment to close the education and workforce gaps caused by systemic inequities and racism. The signers of the L.A. Compact have committed their institutions to collaboratively implement targeted and transformative strategies along the cradle-to-career continuum to accomplish the following goals: all children are healthy and ready to succeed in school; all students graduate high school; all students complete some form of postsecondary education; young people have the skills and knowledge to succeed in their careers; and children and young adults thrive socially and emotionally and contribute in positive ways to their communities. It charts progress toward these goals with its [data dashboard](#).

Address the mental health challenges many young people face.

The fear, loss, uncertainty, and isolation Covid-19 engendered among people of all ages hit young people with particular force. Managing the demands of high school and college and navigating important transitions, such as moving from middle to high school, high school to postsecondary education, and school to work, can be difficult for anyone, but a young person experiencing anxiety or depression, recovering from a traumatic experience, or grieving a loved one is particularly likely to struggle. For young people who had already experienced traumatic events, including many foster youth, the pandemic's many upheavals were particularly distressing. Those engaged in youth-serving programs should receive training on how to best support young people experiencing mental health challenges as well as support for the trauma they themselves may have experienced as a result of Covid-19. The country is experiencing a shortage of mental health care providers, which requires short-term strategies like expanding access to support groups alongside a long-term strategy for expanding the mental health care labor force.

Don't let young people who fell through the cracks over the last two years lose their chance at an education.

Covid-19 disrupted the educational trajectories of tens of thousands of young people in Los Angeles County. Teens and young adults who did everything right and were enrolled in, poised to begin, or on track to apply to degree, certificate, or training programs found the rug pulled out from under them. Many of these young people—especially first-generation and low-income students—are finding themselves unable to reconstruct and resume their plans. The statewide Recovery with Equity Taskforce's *Roadmap for Higher Education after the Pandemic* outlines a series of principles to guide postsecondary institutions in the Covid-19 recovery period: fostering institutional cultures and approaches to teaching that work for all learners, especially those left behind; providing clear, easy-to-navigate pathways to degrees; aiding student transition to college through high-touch, high-tech guidance and improved academic preparation; and simplifying supports to help students meet their basic, digital, and financial aid needs.⁴⁵

Postsecondary educational institutions should be as creative and flexible as possible with a view to bringing students back, allowing previously accepted students another chance to start, adjusting entrance requirements to account for two lost Covid years, and strengthening

I know from personal experience I couldn't go to school nor could I work because of my mental health. I couldn't even be around other people. And again, like we're foster youth. Like we go through a lot of stuff that other people do not go through. So it's like all together expecting a child to have the mental capacity and the mental resilience to be a grown-up when their entire childhood has been stolen from them and just everything else that we have to deal with just simple survival aspects, it's beyond...it is mentally, physically, emotionally challenging more than it could be for people who do have a support system.



Drew, former foster youth

bridges from high school to postsecondary education for vulnerable youth. Students who dropped out of college during the pandemic could benefit from direct outreach via text, calls, and in-person visits to find out what their goals are right now and help them forge a path back to school. Postsecondary institutions would need additional funding for these vital tasks, and legislators have an important role to play in ensuring its availability. High schools must cultivate welcoming environments and develop holistic approaches that respond not just to learning loss but also to the trauma, isolation, and disengagement so many young people experienced during Covid. Fostering a sense of belonging and focusing on social-emotional learning as well as academic skills is critical. A generation of young people is at risk of being permanently scarred by lost educational opportunities. We must work to avert this tragedy.

Direct resources to areas with the highest rates of youth disconnection.

The young people struggling and off track prior to the pandemic are having the hardest time reconnecting to jobs and schools. These young people and their communities should receive the lion's share of attention and resources available to address this pressing issue. These hardest-hit youth tend to live in low-income communities of color, particularly Black and Latino communities. Pockets of high youth disconnection did not appear out of nowhere with the onset of the pandemic; they are the product of years of neglect and underinvestment.

* * *

Covid-19 swelled the ranks of out-of-school, out-of-work young people and exacerbated the challenges facing them, but it did not create these challenges. Ensuring that all young people are ready to flourish in school, remain engaged in their education during middle and high school, successfully navigate the journey from high school to postsecondary career and technical education or college, and transition to thriving adulthood depends on them having a range of enriching, nourishing experiences. For that to happen, the following areas are key.

Help young children and their families thrive.

Children are born into families, so ensuring that parents are supported to be the moms and dads they want to be is critical for child well-being.

Helping parents ensure that their children get a good start is crucial.

Such support is also vital for aunts, grandparents, and others who have stepped in to care for their young relatives. Helping young parents, parents living in poverty, parents under stress, and parents who are themselves opportunity youth ensure that their children get a good start is key. Proven approaches like home-visiting programs, parent support groups, and educational programs on early childhood brain development should be expanded. Just as parents on airplanes are instructed to put their own oxygen masks on first before helping a child, so, too, do parents need support for their own wellness and mental health if their children are to flourish. Parents and other caregivers need access to mental health care services as well as support to understand how to foster wellness in their own lives and those of their families. Families with infants and toddlers need access to safe, enriching, affordable early care, something in short supply in Los Angeles. And young parents, especially former or current opportunity youth and transition-age foster youth, need support for economic mobility and stability. Postsecondary and workforce development pathways for working adult parents are few and far between, but they can interrupt cycles of generational poverty.

Provide access to free or affordable high-quality preschool education.

The expert consensus is that quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, particularly for at-risk children, is a valuable, cost-effective intervention. It is not learning to count or recite the alphabet that makes the difference. The social and emotional skills taught in these early years—learning to delay gratification while you wait your turn, for instance, or becoming used to asking an adult for help—are critical ingredients for success throughout life. High-quality preschool taught by loving, skilled teachers creates a joyous, safe place for young children to learn about the world, a valuable end in itself. It also allows parents to work. And attending a high-quality preschool is associated with fewer behavioral problems, higher high school graduation rates, less crime, fewer teen births, and higher wages and rates of homeownership. In April 2021, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) board voted unanimously to work toward providing universal preschool for all 4-year-olds by 2024. LAUSD is ahead of the state as a whole; the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care calls for all of California’s 4-year-olds to have access to free transitional kindergarten by 2025, a landmark achievement. Expanding access to 3-year-olds should be the next goal.

Preschool is a valuable, cost-effective intervention; expanding access to 3-year-olds should be the next goal.

Invest in high-quality K–12 schooling.

Children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances need schools with the expertise and resources to provide high-quality academic instruction; a safe, healthy, respectful, and nonpunitive environment; and support, both during and out of normal school hours, for at-risk children and children exhibiting dropout warning signs. Exclusionary and other forms of harsh discipline fall hardest on Black students, an injustice that needs to change. Better college and career advising starting in middle school and intensifying in high school is needed. Support for community-based programs and school curricula that directly foster positive youth development can help young people identify their life goals and increase their feelings of belonging and engagement in their schools and neighborhoods.

Help young people afford college.

The high and rising cost of college makes it difficult for many low-income young people to even imagine going, much less covering the bills. Tuition assistance, such as College Promise programs, which offer two years of free tuition at community colleges, is a vital first step. To attend school full time, however, low-income young people also need support for housing expenses, especially in high-cost Los Angeles, as well as for food, books, extracurricular activities, transportation, and health care. This is particularly true for foster youth. Expanding paid work opportunities on college campuses can help students both meet their current financial needs and build experience for greater success in the job market after college.

Support diverse pathways to meaningful careers.

Measures like apprenticeships, mentoring, specialized high schools, dual-enrollment programs, and bridge-year programs can help young people successfully navigate the school-to-work transition by providing support, relevant instruction, and a clear end goal. Countries with low disconnection rates—like Germany, the Netherlands, and the Nordics—create youth-friendly economies with multiple well-structured pathways leading from school to career. Workforce development systems in these countries rely on apprenticeship programs (often funded at least in part by industry), worker training programs, and specialized high schools to help people develop the skills they need for long-term, sustainable careers, not just in manufacturing and skilled trades but also in sectors like tourism and renewable energy. The Linked Learning model, which combines academics, career and technical education, a variety of

If you want to get your high school diploma and you move six, seven, eight times, you're not going to get the full credit and you're eventually going to drop out. If you want to go to college, A, it's expensive and nobody can afford that, and B, you can't even enroll in college if you don't have a high school diploma or a GED. So it's just all this stuff on top of each other, that is, it like freezes you. You can't do anything about it.



Ariel, former foster youth

student supports, and real-world experience, positions students to pursue a variety of postsecondary options—including trade school, college, and other credentialing programs; such programs should be expanded. Another priority is investing in promising new strategies to reach out-of-school young people and reengage them in career and education programs, such as short-term credentialing programs that fast-track youth into high-growth employment sectors. For opportunity youth—girls and young women of color in particular—to thrive in such programs, providing wraparound services like childcare, individualized coaching, and mentorship is vital.

Support transition-age foster youth.

Los Angeles County is home to some 10,000 current and former foster youth ages 14 to 24, the largest such population in the United States.⁴⁶ These young people have dreams for their future but face barriers in their transition to adulthood above and beyond what youth who have not been involved in the foster system face. Without the familial support that most teens and young adults take for granted, they are more likely to find themselves homeless, out of work, or incarcerated; to have limited education; to have a child before age 21; and to be

What people have when they're not in foster [care] is that they always have someone to rely on like a parent or a grandparent or something like that, and I think the lack of having a role model or just someone that can guide them through situations that they probably shouldn't be in, like not being able to afford rent or food. And usually, they look for guidance in the wrong places and what I've noticed is that substantially especially when they're teenagers, they're proactively looking for someone to fill that void and understandably they're not going to have someone that is going to be the parent that they should have and make sure that they're managing their money well and properly investing their time in certain situations.

It's just multiple things all at once that a teenager or a child or even a young adult has to deal with and it makes sense why they wouldn't go to work or go to school because they would have to deal with those things, even though they don't have anyone to guide them through that.



Barbara, former foster youth

victims of trafficking and other crimes. Many suffer from mental and physical health challenges, including posttraumatic stress disorder, related to the trauma they experienced. Society owes these young people comprehensive assistance to transition to safe and rewarding independent adulthoods in line with their aspirations. To thrive, these young people typically need housing support, support to complete high school and transition to a postsecondary program of some kind, mentorship and other forms of support from caring and consistent adults, and comprehensive health care, including behavioral health services.

Support the vital work of the City and County Youth Development Departments in advancing coordinated, cross-institutional strategies to address youth disconnection.

The newly inaugurated LA County Youth Development Department is charged with building the capacity and coordinating the activities of a wide range of youth development services and supports with a view to reducing youth justice system involvement, especially for Black and brown young people. This department, just six months old at the time of this writing, offers great promise for better, more holistic youth services. The City Youth Development Department, which was created in June 2021, centralizes all the City of Los Angeles' youth resources and programming, which had previously been scattered across scores of city departments. The coordination these new departments bring can help to ensure that youth-serving programs are greater than the sum of their parts and that young people's needs are met in ways that are compassionate, comprehensive, and efficient.

Recognize that one size does not fit all.

Data in this report show that disconnected young people share many challenges but also differ in important ways. School enrollment for the population ages 3 to 24 declined dramatically in 2020—the largest drop since records began in 1964—a shift that will likely reverberate well into the future.⁴⁷ Efforts to reconnect youth need to take this broad backdrop into account, but it is important to keep in mind that different young people may face different obstacles. Tailoring interventions to the specific needs of communities and individuals experiencing disconnection should be front of mind for policymakers, philanthropists, advocates, and researchers.

School enrollment registered the largest drop on record in 2020.

Finally, while boys and young men clearly face disproportionate challenges in many areas—a topic that has been recognized for over a decade and has received renewed attention of late⁴⁸—girls and young women, particularly low-income girls of color, deserve our attention as well. A few areas stand out.

Ensure that young women have appealing choices.

The days when girls and young women were far less likely than their brothers to attend college and the careers realistically open to them were mostly limited to secretaries, nurses, and teachers are behind us. Girls outpace boys in high school graduation and in college attendance and completion. But some girls and young women, disproportionately those who are Black or Latina and living in low-income communities, have not benefited from the general trend of expanding choices and opportunities. To ensure that motherhood is not one of the only attainable routes to adulthood and sources of joy, girls and young women from disadvantaged communities need exposure to a range of career options, support for their dreams and aspirations, contact with women from their own communities who have rewarding careers, and access to both college and technical training for well-paying, often male-dominated fields like computer science, green construction, and renewable energy. Technical training and apprenticeship programs in Los Angeles and elsewhere often have difficulties recruiting young women,⁴⁹ at least in part because of preconceptions about “women’s work” and “men’s work” as well as from an understandable concern that the culture of such fields is not welcoming to women.

To chart the course of their own lives, young women need the same rights to bodily integrity that men have long enjoyed, and exercising those rights requires access to reliable birth control and abortion services. Sixty-three percent of pregnancies among American women ages 15 to 24 are unplanned.⁵⁰ And young mothers should be supported to continue their education and advance along rewarding career paths, which is possible provided said paths are designed with their schedules and needs at the center. Competency-based educational pathways—which evaluate people based on their mastery of certain skills rather than the number of hours spent in a classroom—can provide the flexibility many parents and caretakers need and deserve.

Support the health and well-being of young women who are mothers.

Young mothers need support in three ways: first, to experience healthy pregnancies and safe births; second, to envision and realize their

own dreams and ambitions; and third, to be the mothers they want to be to their much-loved children. Access to caring, comprehensive, culturally sensitive reproductive health care, which includes prenatal care, protects the health of young women as well as transgender men and nonbinary people during and after pregnancy. Pregnancy-related complications are the seventh-leading cause of death for women ages 16 to 24 in Los Angeles County, though young Angelenos die from these complications at a rate 30 percent lower than that of the United States as a whole.⁵¹ Young mothers disproportionately live in poverty, and the accompanying stress and lack of material resources join forces to hinder healthy child development and erode young mothers' health and well-being. Free or subsidized childcare, some form of basic income, and subsidized housing and transportation for vulnerable families would alleviate poverty's negative impacts and open space for greater joy and well-being. Mental health and parenting supports are likewise vital in helping young families thrive.

Address gender stereotypes around caretaking and household labor.

Although men in heterosexual relationships today on average do more caretaking, cooking, and cleaning than their fathers did, their efforts still fall far short of their partners', even when both work outside the home. (In Los Angeles County, one in four children live with just their mother; in these households, women shoulder the whole caretaking burden.⁵²) This gender division of labor was exacerbated by the pandemic, when women disproportionately left their jobs or reduced their hours to care for children and the elderly, and teenage girls more often than boys stepped in to pick up the slack. The advent of flexible work is no panacea: in some cases, it has also reinforced traditional gender roles. Research has shown that working from home increases parent-child interaction, but mainly for mothers; that women are more likely to multitask housework and childcare with paid work compared to men; and that any increased childcare by work-from-home fathers is offset by an even larger increase in time spent on housework by work-from-home mothers.⁵³ The unpaid labor imbalance at home is also reflected in the concentration of women in caring professions like childcare provider and home health aide as well as in the low pay and status associated with these careers. Clear policy solutions exist to ameliorate these problems. First is free or subsidized high-quality childcare, which allows women and men alike to work with the knowledge that their children are well cared for and lifts the burden from older siblings, particularly sisters. Second is mandatory paid parental leave for fathers

7th

Pregnancy-related complications are the seventh-leading cause of death for women ages 16 to 24 in Los Angeles County.

as well as mothers. Evidence from countries with paid parental leave shows that hands-on responsibility for a newborn has lasting effects, resulting in fathers who continue to take on caring labor even after returning to work.⁵⁴

Improve pay equity and working conditions for girls and young women.

The median woman aged 25 and over in Los Angeles earns 85 percent of what the median man earns, compared to 76 percent nationwide. The gender gap is greatly magnified for those with limited education, however: among those without high school diplomas, women earn 69 percent of what men earn.⁵⁵ Pay equity matters to women but it also matters to children; the gender pay gap means that a high proportion of women-led Black and Latino families live in poverty, forced to choose among necessities week-in, week-out. Part of this inequity is due to the types of jobs women and men tend to hold: for instance, female-dominated fields such as childcare and health-care support are not paid nearly as well as male-dominated fields like construction. As mentioned earlier, building pathways to more remunerative fields for women is crucial. Another part of the gender wage gap is attributable to the precarity of part-time, typically low-paid work: one in five women in Los Angeles work part time, compared to one in seven men.⁵⁶ While practices that fall under the umbrella of “flexible work” are sometimes billed as inherently beneficial to women, especially mothers or those with family care responsibilities, this is not necessarily the case. The logistical, financial, and emotional burden of just-in-time scheduling—a common practice in the retail and hospitality industries, which together account for about one in five jobs nationwide—falls especially acutely on young parents and mothers with fewer educational credentials.⁵⁷ Unstable scheduling makes it more difficult to secure childcare, arrange transportation, or get a second job, constraining the options of those without many in the first place. Workers of color, especially women of color, are exposed to the most unstable and unpredictable work scheduling practices.⁵⁸ For blue-collar employees, having a predictable schedule is six times more important for predicting employee retention than having a flexible schedule.⁵⁹ Additionally, many safety-net programs are incompatible with volatile or unpredictable work hours, compounding the burden. Fair scheduling laws, which have been passed in several states and municipalities across the nation,⁶⁰ would help a large proportion of young workers build stable, secure lives—and can improve employee retention and on-the-job performance.⁶¹ As of October 2022, the Los Angeles City Council was considering an ordinance to address the issue.⁶²

In my family, we were starting to accept that girls get to take charge too just as much as men, but because we're Latina...it's [about] the patriarch...Always the men are in charge while women have to cook and clean. And sometimes they're in charge, but I think you only believe that women get to be in charge if they are single moms. I don't think that's true. Even though they're married to a man, can't they be in charge once in a while?



Lucy, former foster youth

Workers of color, especially women of color, are exposed to the most unstable and unpredictable work scheduling practices.

Work to eradicate violence against girls and young women.

Intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and trafficking can affect anyone, and all people deserve to feel and be safe in their families, communities, and relationships. Young women have long made up the majority of those who experience these types of violence, however, and the disproportionate harm that domestic violence, dating violence, intimate partner violence, gender-based violence (GBV), sexual abuse, trafficking, and sexual harassment cause them deserves a robust response. Primary prevention efforts that focus on changing “underlying attitudes, norms, and behaviors that support GBV” delivered through schools can be effective; for instance, social and emotional learning programs in elementary schools that teach self-awareness, self-management, healthy relationships, and emotional awareness can address some of the risk factors for gender-based violence.⁶³ Effective programs for adolescents rest on the idea that, much like athletic or academic skills, relationship skills can be taught. Programs that target boys and young men are particularly important, as most gender-based violence is perpetrated by men. Successful interventions help students understand the differences between healthy and abusive dating relationships, challenge gender norms around sexually aggressive behavior, change attitudes about consent and sexual violence, build empathy around the effect of sexual violence on women, and teach men to intervene as bystanders. The lion’s share of these programs take place in school settings, however; the question of how to best reach out-of-school young people is under-researched.

* * *

In addition to these steps, above all, at-risk youth need the kind of support from communities and institutions that other young people take for granted: safe places to live and food on the table; caring adults to help them navigate the often-bewildering transition from child to adult; opportunities to try new things, to fail, and to try again; and experiences that build self-knowledge, agency, and confidence as well as hard and soft skills. They need encouragement, trust, kindness, and love—not harsh discipline and not zero-tolerance. They need society to give them what it gives more fortunate young people, not just “a” chance, but many chances.

At-risk youth need the kind of support from communities and institutions that other young people take for granted.

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APPENDIX 1: YOUTH DISCONNECTION DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING IN 2020

As it did for most areas of life, the pandemic disrupted the normal methods and workflows of the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey in many ways. Due to stay-at-home orders, census workers were not able to mail paper surveys, staffing at Census Bureau call centers available to conduct phone interviews was limited, and in-person follow-up interviews were suspended from March through July (and in some areas, until September). These disruptions resulted in lower survey response rates, particularly from April to June, the very months that disconnection rates reached their peak.

More importantly, nonresponse was not distributed randomly throughout the population; some groups were less likely to respond to the survey than others. The Census Bureau observed large differences between 2020 and previous years in terms of respondents' key demographic characteristics. Respondents in 2020 were disproportionately likely to live in single-family homes (rather than apartments), to be married, to have bachelor's degrees, to be US citizens, and to have higher-than-average incomes. They were also less likely to be enrolled in Medicaid, a means-tested health insurance program for people with low incomes. The process of obtaining survey responses from people living in group quarters like juvenile detention centers was particularly disrupted, and these groups had an especially low response rate as a result. In addition, those whom the Census Bureau describes as underrepresented populations, such as Black and Latino households, were less likely than white households to respond to the 2020 survey.⁶⁴

Living in a single-family home, being married, being a college graduate, having a higher income, and not being enrolled in Medicaid are all signs of higher socioeconomic status. Because higher-socioeconomic-status households became relatively more likely to respond during the pandemic and

lower-socioeconomic-status households became less likely to respond, the survey results were biased in favor of wealthier households with more-educated adults. Disconnected young people hail disproportionately from low-income households, from families and neighborhoods where adults have limited formal education, and from single-parent households; as a result, they and their families were more likely to have been missed by the survey or less likely to have completed it. Similarly, out-of-school and out-of-work young people are disproportionately Black or Latino, groups that were less likely than whites to respond to the 2020 survey. All this means that even with the Census Bureau adjustments described below, the 2020 ACS data likely result in underestimates of youth disconnection.

To address these biases, the Census Bureau used other data sources, such as administrative data, to adjust the ACS survey weights.⁶⁵ This approach improved the quality of the data but did not remove bias entirely. Particularly relevant to youth disconnection, the Census Bureau noted that even with the adjusted weights, the 2020 unemployment rate at the national level is still lower than expected when considering the relationship between the ACS and BLS unemployment rates over past years.⁶⁶ As a result of these many concerns, the Census Bureau released the 2020 data with caution and advised against comparing these 2020 data to those of previous years.

Nonetheless, the upshot is that the 2020 ACS is still the best data source for estimating youth disconnection at the national level and the best and only source for calculating comparable rates for smaller geographies and racial and ethnic groups. In addition, data biases mean that it is likely that the youth disconnection rates in this report are underestimates; in other words, the actual rates are at least this high and likely higher.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Who Are Considered “Disconnected Youth”?

Youth disconnection rates in this report are calculated by Measure of America using employment and enrollment data from the 2020 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 [here](#) at a piece we wrote for the Huffington Post in September 2016.

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

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 homeschooled 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

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 aggregated by Measure of America from the Census Bureau’s Public Use Microdata Areas (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 inside and partly outside a metro area, it is included in the metro area.

DEFINITIONS

Disability – Disability status in this report refers to any enduring emotional, physical, or mental condition that makes everyday activities like walking, dressing, or remembering things difficult and restricts an individual's ability to work or to perform basic required tasks without assistance. This is self-reported; individuals who report having such a condition in the ACS are counted as having a disability. Those who do not are counted as not having a disability.

Group Quarters – The US Census Bureau refers to people who live in any kind of nonhousehold living arrangement as living in “group quarters.” These can be institutional group quarters such as correctional or supervised medical facilities or noninstitutional group quarters such as college or university dormitories, military bases, or group homes. One of the primary advantages of using the ACS as the data source for this research is that the survey includes young people living in group quarters.

Metro Area – Metro areas used in this report are formally known as Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), geographic areas defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and used by the US Census Bureau and other government entities. MSAs constitute counties grouped around an urban center and include outlying suburban and exurban counties from which a substantial percentage of the population commutes to the urban center for work.

PUMA – [Public Use Microdata Areas](#), or 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.

Racial and Ethnic Groups – Racial and ethnic groups in this report are based on definitions established by the OMB and used by the Census Bureau and other government entities. Since 1997, this office

has recognized five racial groups and two ethnic categories. The racial groups are Asian, Black, Native American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and white. The ethnic categories are Latino and not Latino. People of Latino ethnicity may be of any race. In this report, members of each of these racial groups include only non-Latino members of these groups. All references to Asians, Blacks, Native Americans, and whites include only those who are non-Latino. Throughout the report, the Asian racial group combines the OMB categories of both Asian and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Due to the very small population sizes of some of the racial and ethnic groups in some states and metropolitan areas, we cannot always present reliable estimates of youth disconnection for these groups. These are denoted in the report's tables.

In recognition of the fact that these racial groups are not monolithic, this report includes youth disconnection rates for the Asian and Latino subgroups in Los Angeles County for which statistically reliable estimates were able to be calculated.

Unreliable – Estimates with a coefficient of variance of greater than 0.2 are considered unreliable and are omitted from the report. In addition, due to the 2020 ACS data quality, an additional factor was considered to determine reliability. Estimates in which the total youth population for a group was based on fewer than ten survey responses were omitted.

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