

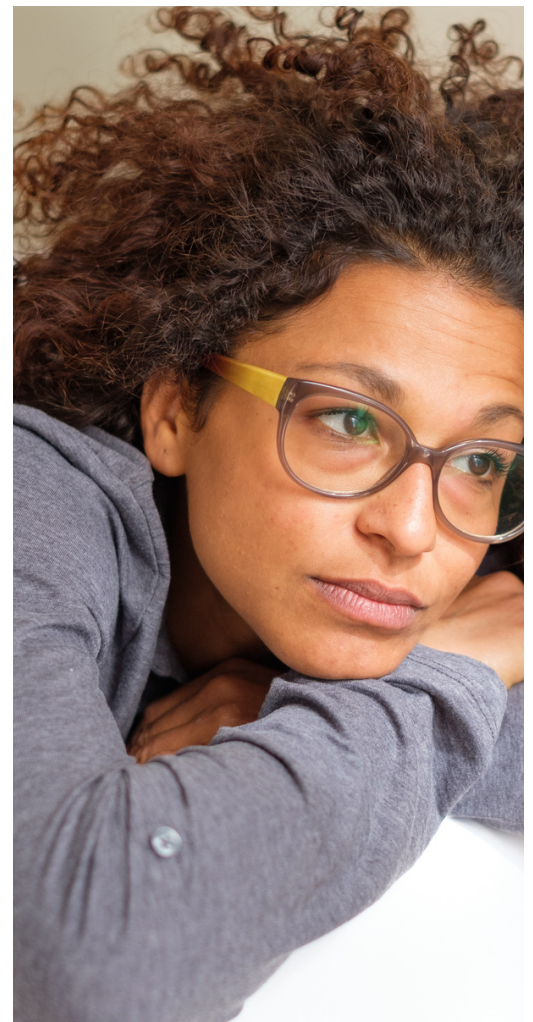


# CALIFORNIA'S OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

AN UPDATED ANALYSIS PREPARED BY  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the evolving landscape of our modern economy, one of the most critical, yet often overlooked challenges we face is how to support teens and young adults (ages 16-24) who are disconnected from two of the most foundational, indispensable institutions of education and employment. Not surprisingly, the consequences of disengagement from both school and work are far-reaching, affecting not just the individual youth, but the communities in which they live, and even society as a whole.

Any meaningful attempt to answer key questions about both prevention and intervention, requires an analysis of the relevant facts. Data, when properly analyzed, provides invaluable insights that not only present a clearer picture of the situation but also guides policy and intervention design. It helps pinpoint the specifics: who is affected, when are they most vulnerable, where are the hotspots, and why these trends are emerging.

**As of 2021, more than 570,000 youth in California between the ages of 16-24 were neither in school nor at work (12.5% disconnection rate) – a nearly 20% increase from 2019.**



**Below, we highlight a few of the major findings of our analysis:**

- As of 2021, there were more than 570,000 (12.5% disconnection rate) youth in California between the ages of 16-24 who were neither in school nor at work. Between 2019 and 2021, there was a 19% increase in youth disconnection in the state.
- Overall, a significant proportion of Opportunity Youth (OY) were male (54.3%) and a similar percentage were Hispanic/Latino (55.3%). Approximately 40% of all OY were considered very low income (income-to-poverty ratio of less than 150%).
- The majority of OY had at least a high school diploma (81.6%), however, higher levels of education correlated with a decreased likelihood of disconnection.
- Disconnection rates differed substantially by age and race. Young adults (20-24) and Black youth (overall, male, and female) were disengaged from both school and work at notably higher rates, relative to their peers.
- While more teenage males were disconnected relative to females, these rates equalized by age 23. Significant variations in disconnection rates were also observed between ages 17 to 18, especially among specific racial groups.
- The 12 most populous California counties were home to the bulk of disconnected youth. Between 2019 and 2021, certain counties, including Los Angeles and Contra Costa, saw greater increases in their disconnected youth populations.

The data presented in this brief are particularly timely given that Assembly Concurrent Resolution 16 (ACR 16) has been chaptered as of August 22, 2023. Armed with new and promising legislation and comprehensive data analyses, we are better equipped to address youth disconnection head-on. Strategic interventions, guided by recent events and data insights, can help reintegrate our youth into education and employment, securing a brighter future for California and its next generation. Detailed data, including disconnection rates for all California counties, can be found in the appendices.



# INTRODUCTION



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As a relatively new feature of the modern economy, youth disconnection from both school and work is one of the most pressing topics in our lifetime. Although often overlooked, its repercussions echo not only in the lives of these young people, but also resonate within the broader contours of our society. Economic and societal costs, compounded by personal struggles like incarceration, housing instability, and chronic unemployment, create a series of complex challenges that demand our immediate attention.

The state of California, a microcosm of these ongoing challenges, has seen fluctuations in the number and rate of disconnected youth in recent years, with a sharp rise precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year, our brief was the most recent analysis of California's disconnected (or "opportunity") youth population. Much of the data summarized in that brief was from 2020 – the year in which the Census Bureau advised caution in interpreting results given their limited capability to collect reliable and valid information. This brief serves as an update to last year's and is based on data from 2021, which was collected and aggregated using their normal methods.



# PURPOSE OF REPORT



Understanding and analyzing data on Opportunity Youth (OY) is crucial for California's socioeconomic vitality. These young individuals, detached from both education and employment, represent not just lost potential but also serve as a warning of potential economic and social challenges in the future. By comprehensively evaluating this data, California's policymakers can pinpoint the magnitude, root causes, and regional disparities of youth disconnection, paving the way for targeted interventions. The implications of youth disconnection extend beyond the immediate concern, including decreased statewide economic output, an increased reliance on social welfare systems, and the potential perpetuation of a cycle of disconnection for subsequent generations. Without such crucial insights, California risks neglecting a demographic that, if effectively reintegrated, could become a driving force of statewide progress and economic prosperity.

While an examination of broad policy changes and their implementation is beyond the purview of this report, we emphasize that the key to establishing and implementing comprehensive reform in California (or anywhere else) starts with probing and understanding the data. Although this report will not inform readers of everything there is to know about our state's OY population, our hope is that the insights gleaned from this brief will spur immediate action at the local and state levels. Accordingly, the objectives of this brief are twofold. We aim to (1) provide an updated analysis and synopsis of the most recent disconnection data available for the state of California, and (2) summarize a set of policy recommendations that seek to reduce educational and employment barriers, facilitate the development of additional pathways within and between school and work, and place a growing number of youth on the path to success. Importantly, although we refer to California's OY population as a group, each young person is unique, with their own experiences, circumstances, and challenges that require customized services and supports.

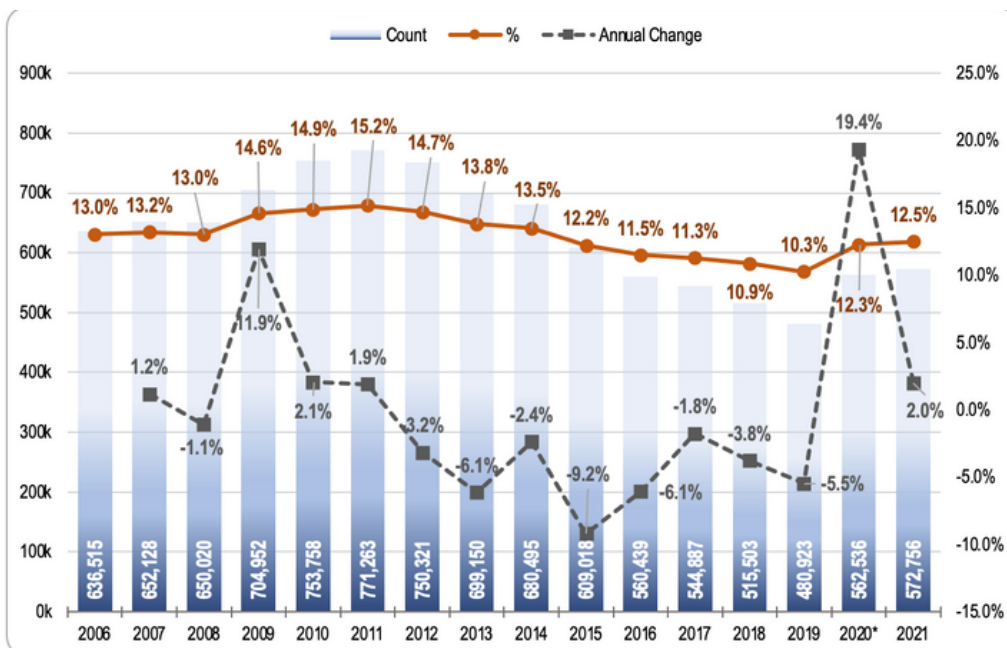
New Ways to Work, California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN), and its dedicated members work diligently to expand opportunities for the state's young adult population and ultimately improve their education, employment, and quality-of-life outcomes. Many of these joint efforts focus on those residents who have been or are connected to the foster, juvenile justice, and homelessness care systems in the state, as well as OY. We know that much of the work being conducted across the state to support OY has undoubtedly made a positive impact on many lives in many communities.



# CALIFORNIA'S DISCONNECTED YOUTH POPULATION

Before the pandemic in 2019, there were approximately 4.1 million disconnected youth in the US and 480,923 of them lived in California. Just two years later, the country’s disconnected youth population swelled to 4.7 million (15% increase), while California’s grew to **572,756 (19% increase)**. **In other words, in a span of just 24 months, there was a net increase of more than 90,000 disconnected teens and young adults in California** (American Community Survey, 2019 and 2021; ACS).

FIGURE 1. YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN CALIFORNIA (16-24; 2006-21; 1-YR. EST.)



Note: According to Measure of America (MoA), 2020 data is likely to underestimate the number of OY. Source: Authors' compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.inums.nm





Table 1 shows education and employment data for young adults (ages 16-24) in California. The labor force participation rate – that is, the percentage of young people who were either working or seeking work – was 53% (2,429,986), meaning that 47% were not in the labor force at all (2,168,007). With respect to education, many teens and young adults were attending public or private school or college (63%; 2,889,090), while more than one in three were not enrolled in any educational institutions (37%; 1,695,610). Of the out-of-school youth, 171,337 were unemployed and 401,419 were out of the labor force. Collectively, these two subgroups comprised California’s disconnected youth population in 2021.

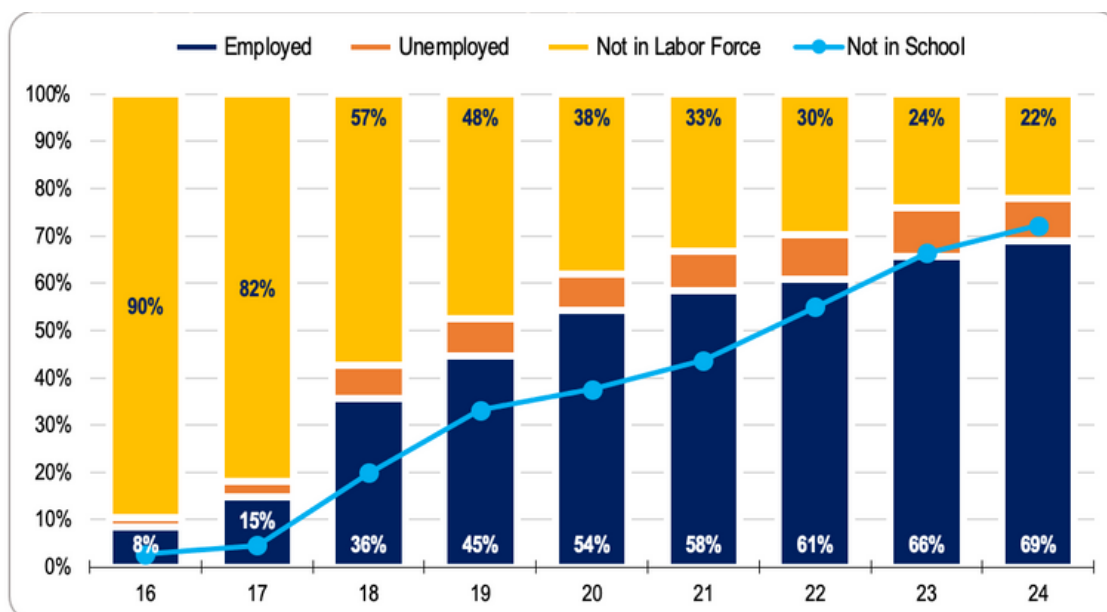
**TABLE 1. EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION DATA (16-24; ACS 2021, 1-YR. EST.)**

	Not in School	In School	Total
<b>Employed</b>	1,122,854	964,551	<b>2,087,405</b>
<b>Unemployed</b>	171,337	157,951	<b>329,288</b>
<b>Not in Labor Force</b>	401,419	1,766,588	<b>2,168,007</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,695,610</b>	<b>2,889,090</b>	<b>4,584,700</b>

Source: Authors’ compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org).

Figure 2 below shows the education and employment status of the total teen and young adult population by age. The data indicate that labor force participation and school enrollment rates varied widely between teens and young adults. In general, most young teens were out of the labor force but still in school, while many young adults were employed but were not in school. This confirms a pattern we would expect to see, given the differences in life stage between these subgroups. Another visible trend is the increase in the percentage of out-of-school youth for 17-, 18-, and 19-year-olds (5%, 20%, and 33%, respectively), suggesting that many teens receive their diploma, but do not pursue further education (or at least not right away).

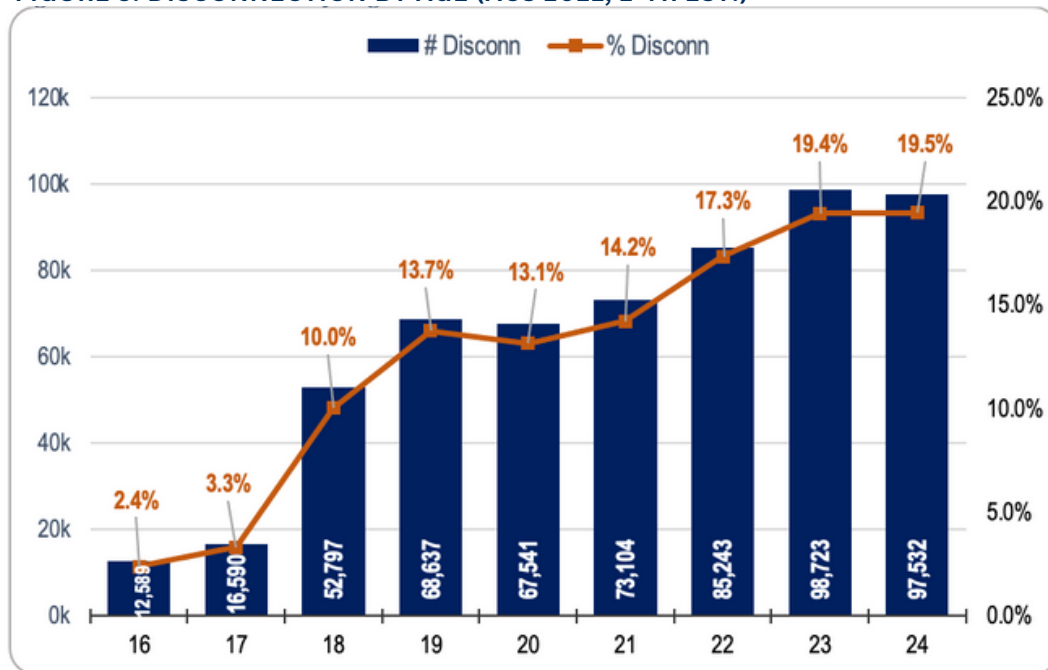
**FIGURE 2. EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION STATUS BY AGE (ALL 16-24-YR-OLDS; ACS 2021, 1-YR. EST.)**



Source: Authors’ compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org).

Figure 3 below provides a high-level overview of youth disconnection in California by age. Whereas high school is the primary focus of teens (16-19), young adults (20-24) typically engage in a variety of activities given their different life stage. Therefore, to better understand who was (and was not) connected, it is important to analyze subgroups separately. By disaggregating the data by age, a few clear trends emerge. There exists a significant negative link between age and disconnection, such that many more young adults were disconnected relative to their younger teen counterparts. In fact, for every disconnected 16-year-old, there were eight disconnected 24-year-olds. Additionally, approximately 3% of all 16- and 17-year-olds were disconnected, compared to nearly 20% of all 23- and 24-year-olds. The largest single year jump in disconnection was between the ages of 17 and 18 (difference of 36,207).

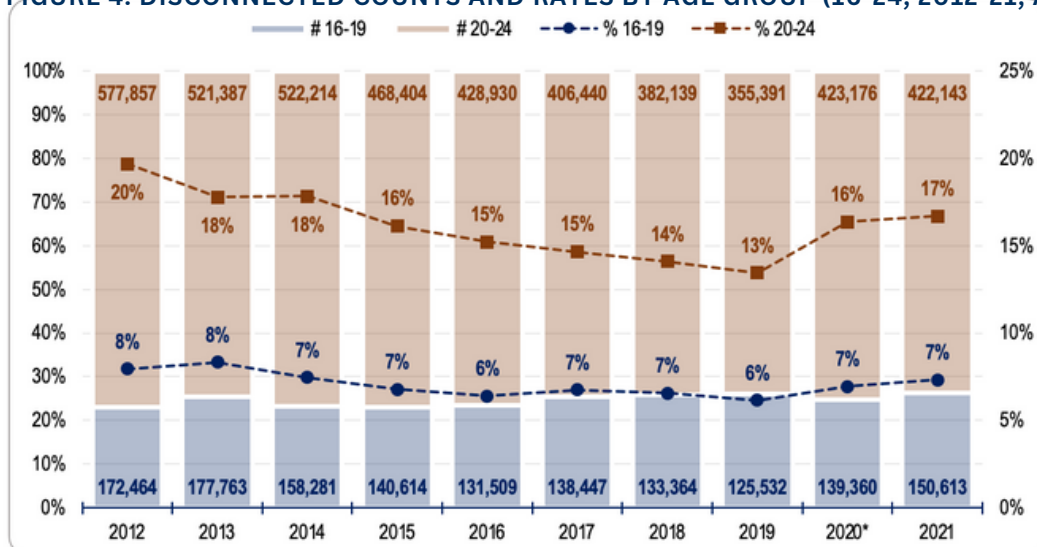
**FIGURE 3. DISCONNECTION BY AGE (ACS 2021, 1-YR EST.)**



Source: Authors' compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

The general discrepancy in disconnection between teens (16-19) and young adults (20-24) is not a recent trend. As shown below, in the decade spanning 2012 to 2021, disconnection rates for young adults have been at least twice as high, and at most three times as high, as that of teens. Consistently, teens comprised approximately 25%, and young adults 75%, of all OY.

**FIGURE 4. DISCONNECTED COUNTS AND RATES BY AGE GROUP (16-24; 2012-21; ACS 1-YR. EST.)**



\*Note: According to MoA, 2020 data is likely to underestimate the number of OY. Source: Authors' compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.





Table 2 shows educational enrollment and attainment data for California’s teen and young adult population. In general, the data from 2021 relative to 2006 are encouraging – the percentage of out-of-school teens (ages 16-18) remained low and even decreased slightly. Furthermore, significantly fewer young adults (ages 19-24) were without a high school diploma, while post-secondary enrollment has increased. Finally, more young people earned a bachelor’s degree in 2021 than in 2006. That said, 84.5% of adults (25+) in California had at least a high school diploma in 2021 – the lowest percentage in the country. Table 2 also compares the educational attainment of specific age groups in the disconnected youth population to the same age groups in the connected youth population. Across the board, connected youth achieved academic milestones at higher rates relative to their disconnected peers. In comparison, a greater number of disconnected youth had at most a high school diploma, while fewer had some college or at least a bachelor’s degree.

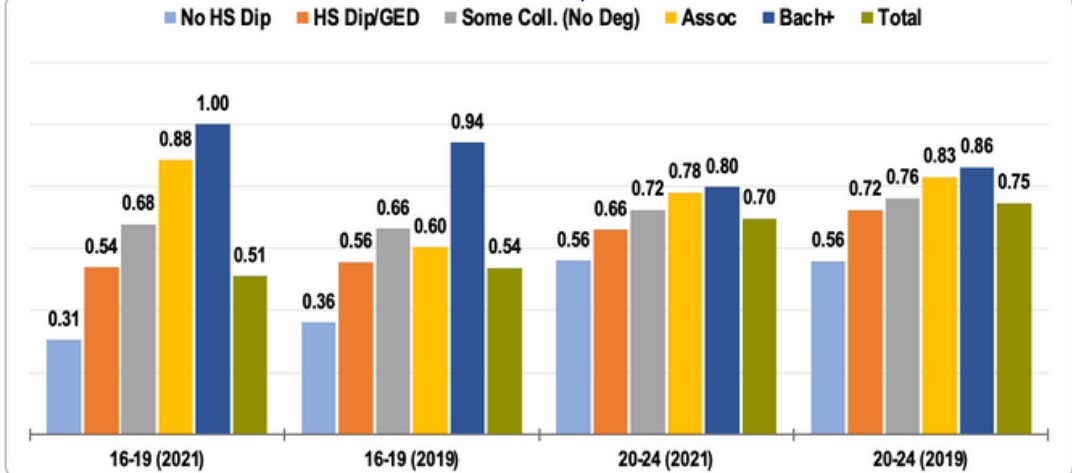
**TABLE 2. EDUCATIONAL ENROLLMENT AND ATTAINMENT (ACS 2006-21, 1-YR. EST.)**

	Status	All Youth		Disconn. Youth	Connect. Youth
		2021	% Δ Since 2006	2021	2021
Enroll.	Out of School (16-18)	9%	▼ 2%	--	--
	Post-Secondary (19-24)	47%	▲ 6%	--	--
Attain.	No HS Dip (19-24)	7%	▼ 9%	15%	5%
	HS Dip, No Further (19-24)	32%	32%	51%	28%
	Some Coll, No Deg (23-24)	29%	▲ 2%	22%	30%
	BA/S or More (21-24)	21%	▲ 9%	15%	23%

Source: Authors’ compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Figure 5 below shows the employment-to-population ratio for out-of-school-youth (ages 16-24). That is, the percentage of young people who were not in school but were working. Overall, these ratios indicate that 51% of out-of-school teens (ages 16-19) and 70% of out-of-school young adults (ages 20-24) were employed at some point in 2021. Additionally, these data clearly illustrate the positive link between educational achievement and employment – for every additional “step” in the academic ladder, young people significantly increase the likelihood of securing a job. Favorability of the job market, however, may have had an impact on employment outcomes, as evidenced by differences in ratios between 2019 and 2021. Nonetheless, these data underscore the importance of parlaying one source of social capital (i.e., education) to increase overall gains through a second source (i.e., work).

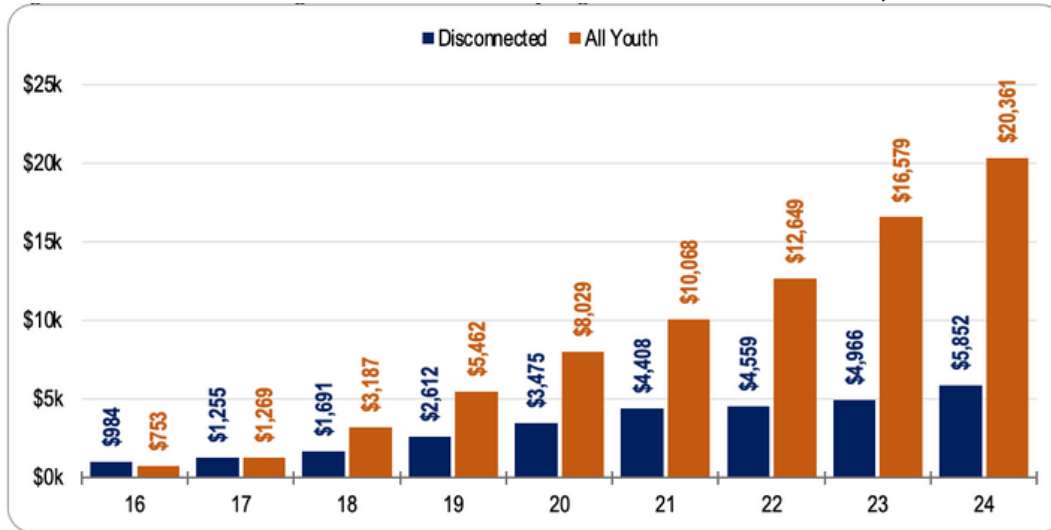
**FIGURE 5. EMPLOYMENT TO POP. RATIO FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH BY EDU. ATTAINMENT (2019 & 2021; ACS 1-YR. EST.)**



Source: Authors’ compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.


Young people who are both out of school and out of work miss critical opportunities to build not only social capital, but financial capital as well. Figure 6 below compares the ten-year averages of total incomes of the disconnected and overall youth populations. Starting at 18 years old, salary gaps between OY and the overall teen and young adult population begin to widen and these gaps increase until at least age 24. Research shows that this trend is likely to continue over the lifespan of OY, particularly for those who spent a greater proportion of time being disconnected.

**FIGURE 6. TEN-YEAR AVERAGES OF TOTAL INCOME BY AGE (2012-21; ACS 1-YR. EST.)**



Source: Authors' compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

In addition to differences in financial outcomes, teens and young adults detached from both school and work tend to be significantly disadvantaged in other areas relative to their connected peers. In Figure 7, we compare and contrast disconnected and connected youth (ages 16-24) on a number of situational variables.



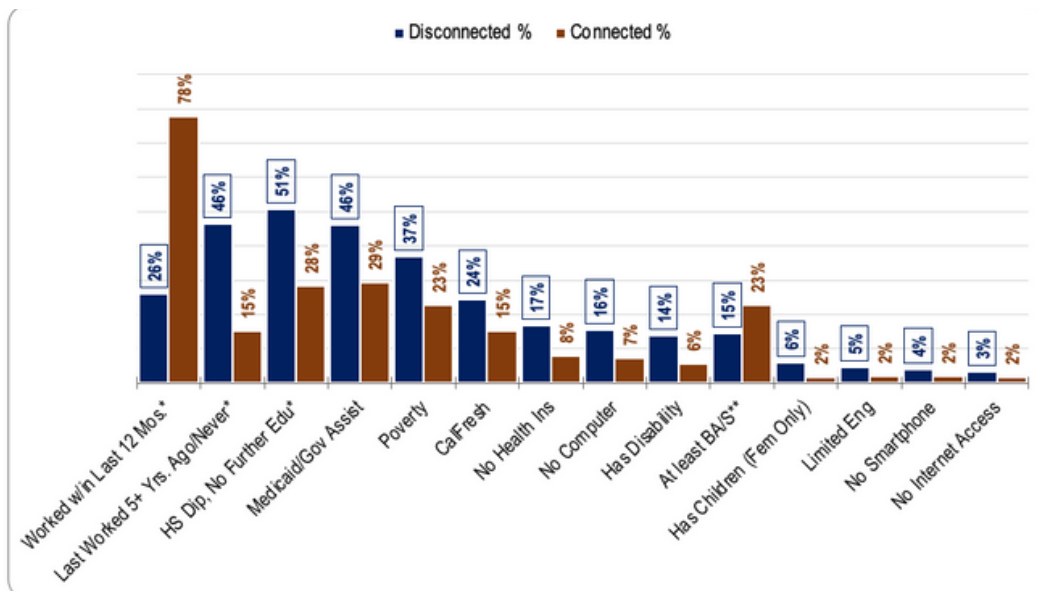
**DISCONNECTED YOUTH ARE MORE LIKELY TO...**

- Have HS dip/GED (but no further edu)
- Receive gov. assistance
- Live in poverty
- Receive food stamps
- Have a disability
- Have children of their own (those who identify as female)

**...AND LESS LIKELY TO**

- Have worked in the past 12 mos.
- Have a bachelor's degree
- Have health insurance
- Be proficient in English
- Have a computer

**FIGURE 7. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING DISCONNECTED AND CONNECTED YOUTH (16-24; ACS 2021, 1-YR. EST.)**



Source: Authors' compilation based on IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.





The following tables and figures summarize characteristics of California’s diverse disconnected youth population. The data in Table 3 indicate that, overall, approximately four in ten youth who were neither in school nor at work lived in poverty. More than half were male (54.3%) and a similar proportion identified as Hispanic/Latino (55.3%). More than one-in-four OY identified as some other race, followed by White (28.4%), two or more races (22.4%), Black (10.3%), and Asian (8.4%). Most individuals had at least a high school diploma (or equivalent; 81.6%), although percentages varied across races (see Figure 9).

**TABLE 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCONNECTED YOUTH BY AGE GROUP (ACS 2021; 1-YR EST.)**

Age Grp	Count	< 150% Poverty	Male	Hisp. / Latino	White	Black	Asian	2+ Races	Other Race	HS Dip or More
16-19	150,613	59,444	86,510	86,770	40,345	15,801	11,056	34,756	45,558	107,459
20-24	422,143	171,921	224,218	230,155	122,596	43,027	37,158	93,657	118,142	359,878
Total	572,756	231,365	310,728	316,925	162,941	58,828	48,214	128,413	163,700	467,337
	% of Total	40.4%	54.3%	55.3%	28.4%	10.3%	8.4%	22.4%	28.6%	81.6%

Disaggregating the data by specific subgroups can be instrumental in guiding policy and designing interventions. Identifying where disparities exist provides crucial information about who is most at risk of becoming disconnected and at what age they need to be reached. These insights can then be used to inform policies and to design and develop targeted and customized interventions. Furthermore, by understanding which subgroups are most at risk and at what point, we can help prioritize where funds and efforts should be directed. Such analyses also raise awareness among stakeholders, the public, and policymakers. In sum, any commitment to equity must involve recognizing and appropriately addressing disparities.



It is well known that there are significant differences in the rates at which teens and young adults are disconnected. Variability in rates of disconnection can be attributed to both individual and group differences. One of the major differentiating factors at the group level is race. Figure 8 below shows two sets of percentages. The values in the outer circle represent disconnection rates – that is, the proportions of teens and young adults who were neither in school nor working within each race subgroup. For example, 22.3% of all youth who identified as Black were disconnected. The values in the inner circle represent the share, by race, of the total OY population in California. Black teens and young adults, for example, comprised 10.3% of the total OY population. Overall, disconnection rates varied significantly by race subgroup – from a low of 6.1% (Chinese) to a high of 22.3% (Black). Close to eight-in-ten OY identified as one of three following race subgroups: White (28.4%), two or more races (21.0%), or some other race (28.6%).

**FIGURE 8. DISCONNECTED YOUTH BY RACE (ACS 2021; 1-YR EST.)**

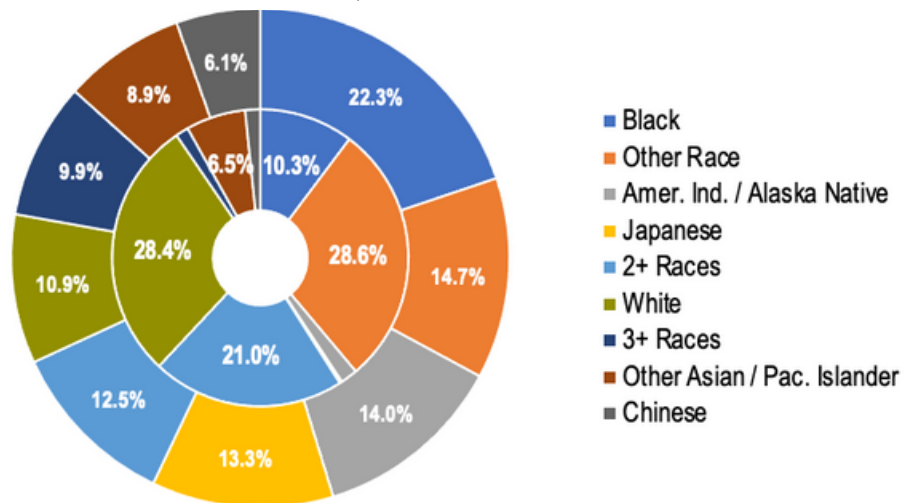
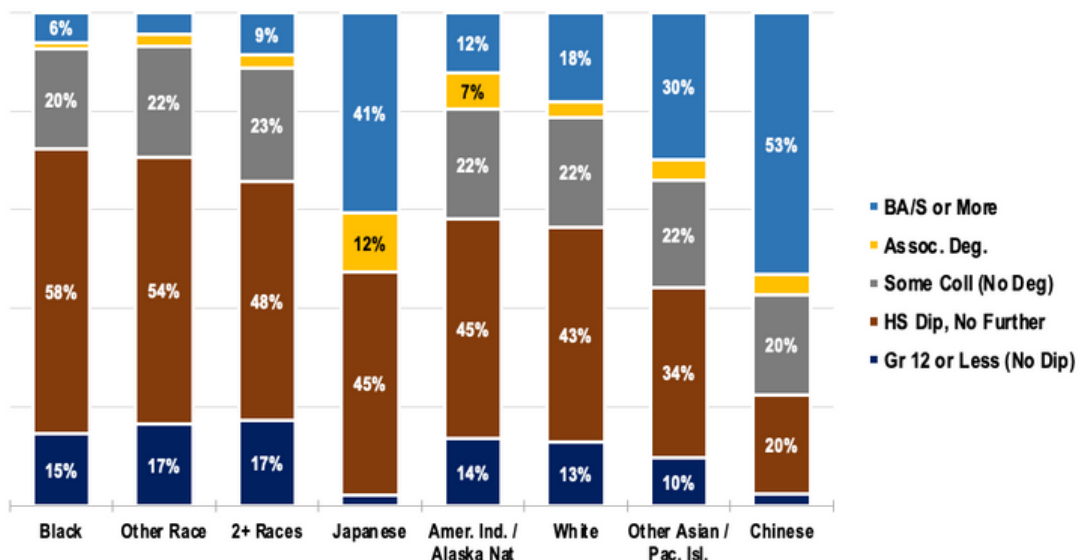


Figure 9 shows the educational attainment of disconnected young adults (ages 20-24) by race. The proportion of young adults without a high school education varied between subgroups (ranging from 2% to 17%), but across all races, most 20-24-year-olds who were out-of-school and out-of-work had at least a high school diploma (or equivalent). The largest variabilities in educational attainment were between the proportions of those young adults with no further education beyond high school and those with at least a bachelor's degree. Overall, these data further emphasize that the experience of disconnection can vary substantially between individuals in different subgroups.

**FIGURE 9. DISCONNECTED YOUNG ADULT EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY RACE (20-24; ACS 2021; 1-YR EST.)**



# ANALYSIS BY ETHNICITY



Table 4 shows the same type of data as Figures 7 and 8, disaggregated by ethnicity. Differences in educational attainment between the two subgroups (i.e., Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino) varied at some levels of academic achievement, but not others. For both subgroups, the majority of OY either had a high school diploma (but no further education) or had some college (but no degree). Comparatively, more Hispanic/Latino OY had at most a high school diploma and fewer held at least a bachelor’s degree. Furthermore, 13.6% of the teens and young adults who identified as Hispanic/Latino were disconnected from both school and work, and overall, they comprised more than half of the total OY population in California (55.3%). Non-Hispanic/Latino OY, on the other hand, were disconnected at a lower rate (11.3%) and comprised less than half of all California’s OY population in 2021 (44.7%).

**TABLE 4. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & DISCONNECTION BY ETHNICITY (ACS 2021; 1-YR EST.)**

Ethnicity	Disconnection (16-24)		Educational Attainment (20-24)				
	Disconn. %	Share of OY	Gr 12 or Less (No Dip)	HS Dip (No Further)	Some College (No Deg)	Assoc. Deg.	BA/S or More
Hisp. / Lat.	13.6%	55.3%	20.9%	49.6%	22.5%	2.4%	4.7%
Non-Hisp. / Lat.	11.3%	44.7%	14.9%	40.8%	25.4%	3.0%	15.8%



**A more in-depth analysis of subgroup differences in disconnection rates is summarized in the heatmap below. The data point to a few key trends:**

- Teenage males were disconnected at slightly higher rates than their female peers, but starting at age 23 the rates between the sexes became roughly the same.
- Disconnection rates for Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino OY are similar across ages. Hispanic/Latino males, however, tend to have slightly higher disconnection rates in the younger ages (16-20) relative to their Non-Hispanic/Latino male peers.
- Not only do disconnection rates increase with age across all subgroups, but the relative disparities between the subgroups remain somewhat consistent.
- The largest gap between subgroups was at age 22, wherein Black males were disconnected at a rate greater than four times that of Asian females.
- Black females experienced both the largest (17 to 18; +15.8%) and smallest (20 to 21; -6.3%) single year changes, and at age 24 had the highest disconnection rate across all ages (35.9%).
- As noted previously, the largest single year change across race and gender subgroups on average occurred between ages 17 and 18. Specifically, however, Black males, Black females, and Hispanic/Latino males became disconnected at significantly higher rates between ages 17 and 18.

**TABLE 5. DISCONNECTION RATES BY AGE AND SUBGROUP CHARACTERISTICS (ACS 2021; 1-YR EST.)**

	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
<b>Male</b>	3%	4%	12%	15%	15%	15%	18%	19%	19%
<b>Fem</b>	2%	3%	8%	13%	12%	13%	16%	20%	20%
<b>Hisp/Lat</b>	2%	4%	12%	16%	16%	16%	18%	21%	20%
<b>Non-Hisp/Lat</b>	2%	3%	8%	12%	10%	12%	17%	18%	19%
<b>Black</b>	5%	6%	20%	28%	23%	19%	31%	32%	32%
<b>White</b>	2%	3%	8%	11%	9%	13%	16%	17%	18%
<b>Asian</b>	2%	2%	6%	6%	8%	8%	12%	14%	15%
<b>Hisp/Lat Male</b>	3%	4%	14%	17%	18%	17%	20%	20%	20%
<b>Non-Hisp/Lat Male</b>	3%	4%	9%	12%	11%	13%	17%	19%	18%
<b>Black Male</b>	6%	9%	22%	31%	26%	22%	35%	32%	29%
<b>White Male</b>	2%	4%	9%	11%	9%	14%	16%	17%	18%
<b>Asian Male</b>	4%	2%	7%	7%	11%	8%	16%	14%	16%
<b>Hisp/Lat Fem</b>	2%	3%	9%	14%	15%	15%	16%	22%	20%
<b>Non-Hisp/Lat Fem</b>	2%	2%	8%	11%	9%	11%	17%	17%	20%
<b>Black Fem</b>	4%	3%	18%	24%	21%	15%	25%	31%	36%
<b>White Fem</b>	2%	2%	7%	12%	9%	12%	17%	16%	18%
<b>Asian Fem</b>	1%	2%	5%	6%	5%	8%	8%	13%	15%



As it relates to youth disconnection, the questions of “Who” and “When” should be considered in conjunction with the question of “Where.” Accordingly, Table 6 shows disconnection counts and rates in the 12 most populous California counties. Collectively, these counties are home to more than three-quarters (77%) of the state’s young adults (ages 16-24), and 61% of the state's OY population. As noted at the beginning of this brief, the overall increase between California’s 2019 and 2021 disconnected youth populations was 91,833. A significant percentage of these individuals lived in one of the 12 counties below (85%; 77,980).

With the exception of San Bernardino (-2,574), the number of OY in each county increased between 2019 and 2021. Specifically, the largest increases were in Los Angeles (+25,164), Riverside (+11,238), Orange (+10,101), San Diego (+9,065), and Contra Costa (+7,108) Counties. In contrast, the smallest increases were all within, or not too far from, the Bay Area – Sacramento: +54, Santa Clara: +1,928, San Francisco: +2,812, and Alameda: +2,960. To account for unequal population sizes, the percent change between the two years is also shown. The OY population in Contra Costa County nearly doubled (91.3% change), followed by the counties of San Francisco (+80.3% change), Orange (+43.1% change), Fresno (+33.3% change), and Riverside (+30.7%). The smallest percentage changes were in San Bernardino (-6.1% change), Sacramento (+0.2%), and Santa Clara (+14.3%) Counties. The 2021 disconnection rates for all California counties can be found in Appendix A, and a proportional symbol map can be found in Appendix B.

**TABLE 6. DISCONNECTED YOUTH IN CALIFORNIA’S 12 MOST POPULOUS COUNTIES (16-24; ACS 2021 & 2019, 1-YR. EST.)**

	County	2021		2019		Δ #	% Change
		#	%	#	%		
1	<i>Los Angeles</i>	143,463	12.9	118,299	10.1	+25,164	21.3%
2	<i>Riverside</i>	47,843	15.8	36,605	12.0	+11,238	30.7%
3	<i>San Diego</i>	40,332	10.1	31,267	7.6	+9,065	29.0%
4	<i>San Bernardino</i>	39,808	14.1	42,382	14.8	-2,574	-6.1%
5	<i>Orange</i>	33,514	9.3	23,413	6.3	+10,101	43.1%
6	<i>Fresno</i>	24,232	18.8	18,179	14.6	+6,053	33.3%
7	<i>Kern</i>	22,550	18.3	18,479	16.5	+4,071	22.0%
8	<i>Sacramento</i>	22,542	13.0	22,488	12.8	+54	0.2%
9	<i>Santa Clara</i>	15,454	7.7	13,526	6.6	+1,928	14.3%
10	<i>Contra Costa</i>	14,891	12.0	7,783	6.3	+7,108	91.3%
11	<i>Alameda</i>	14,661	8.9	11,701	6.7	+2,960	25.3%
12	<i>San Francisco</i>	6,312	9.4	3,500	4.8	+2,812	80.3%





# BRIEF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The California Legislature understands the pressing need to forge pathways for California's Opportunity Youth. To this end, there is a significant push to devise a holistic statewide strategy that addresses longstanding economic disparities endured by California's disconnected teen and young adult population. The data presented in this brief are particularly timely given that Assembly Concurrent Resolution 16 (ACR 16) has been chaptered as of August 22, 2023. Here, we echo our support for this critical piece of legislation, which calls for:

- Allocating resources to education and workforce training programs that focus on opportunity youth, ensuring they have avenues to quality employment.
- Broadening innovative "earn and learn" schemes, inclusive of apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and various work-based learning opportunities.
- Bolstering the dual enrollment system, thus enabling opportunity youth to gain college credits while simultaneously obtaining their high school equivalency. Integrating OY within the scope of the California Cradle-to-Career Data System.
- Fortifying and expanding the social safety net for OY, which includes addressing fundamental necessities like food, housing, internet connectivity, transportation, childcare, health and mental health services, and eliminating obstacles preventing access to student financial assistance programs.



# CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

As an update on last year's brief, the current report provides an overview of California's Opportunity Youth population in 2021. Given the surge in disconnection counts and rates from 2019 to 2021, an acute understanding of who these youth are, where they live, and when they detached from school and work is crucial for both policy reform and targeted interventions. The data presented in this brief emphasizes the urgent need to connect and reconnect our youth with educational and employment opportunities and provide them with the support and resources they need to thrive.

With sustained collaboration and outreach, New Ways to Work and the California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN) are committed to crafting actionable recommendations for policymakers. Both organizations champion the inherent potential in all young people and urge a shift in perspective: viewing disconnected youth not as a challenge, but as a reservoir of untapped talent crucial for our collective future.

We extend our gratitude to the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Tipping Point Community, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and the Stuart Foundation for supporting the mission of New Ways, COYN, and our partners in restoring opportunities for our youth.

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## APPENDIX

# ABOUT NEW WAYS TO WORK

For nearly four decades, New Ways to Work has effectively provided technical assistance and capacity building with people and organizations across the country to help communities better prepare youth and young adults for bright futures. New Ways draws on a history of building systems that support transitions for the economically disadvantaged, those in foster care or engaged in the criminal justice system, those with disabilities or those who are simply out-of-work and out-of-school and need better opportunities to succeed.

# ABOUT CALIFORNIA OPPORTUNITY YOUTH NETWORK

The California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN) was established in 2015 with support from The Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions to bring communities together to advocate for the large number of disconnected youth in California. COYN members represent geographical areas across the state with high numbers of disconnected youth, including Alameda, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Los Angeles, San Diego, and the Del Norte and Tribal lands region. COYN facilitates statewide communication, organizing, and policy advocacy to remedy systemic inequities affecting Opportunity Youth across California—working to transform systems, policies, investments, and narratives to ensure all youth and young adults in California have the opportunity to flourish in adulthood.





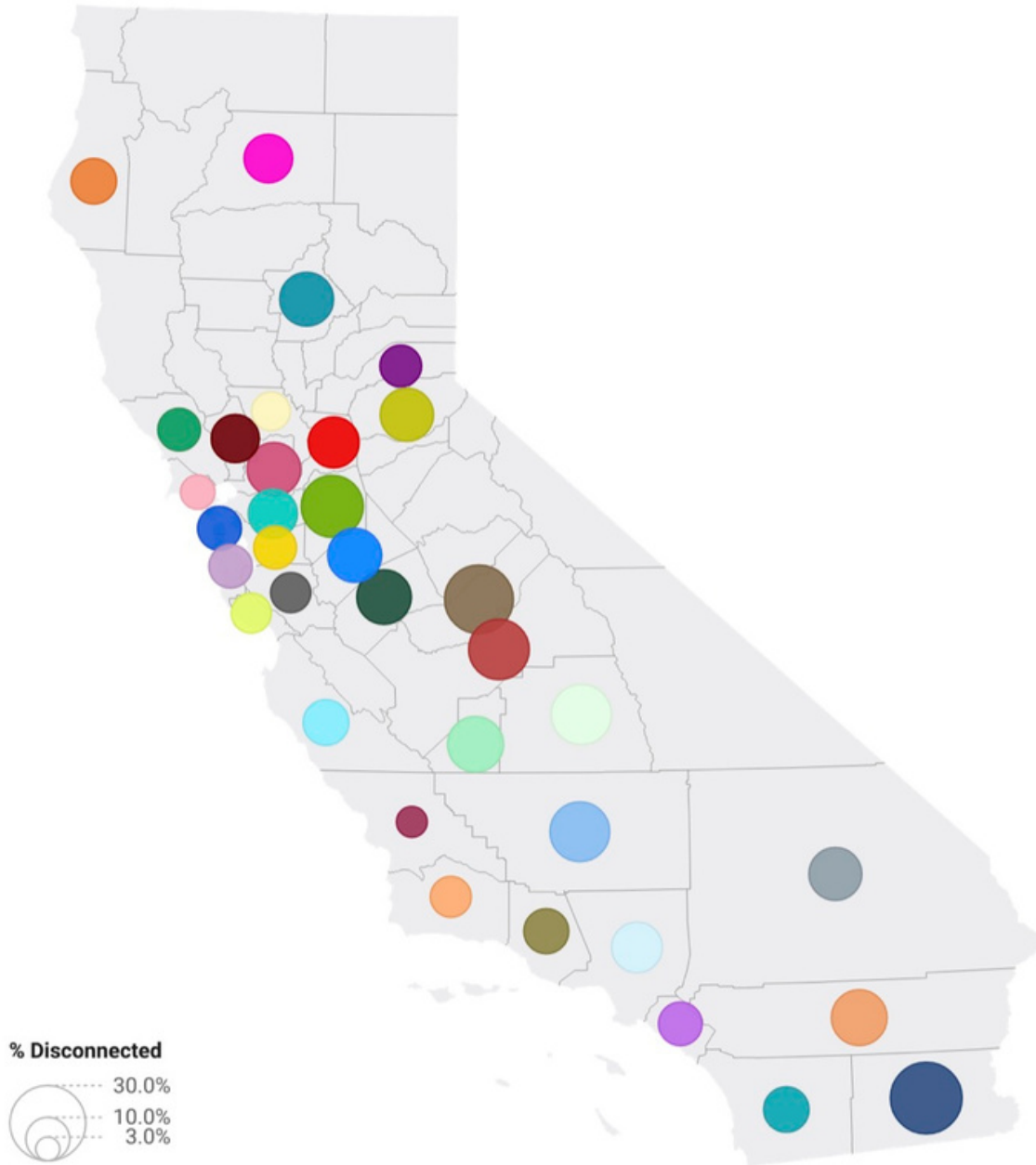
## APPENDIX A: Youth Disconnection by County (16-24; ACS 2021,

County	# Disconn	% Disconn	Share of Disconn
Lake & Mendocino	4,151	28.3%	0.7%
Imperial	5,899	26.9%	1.0%
Nevada & Sierra	1,810	24.9%	0.3%
Madera	4,958	24.6%	0.9%
Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, & Trinity	3,738	23.7%	0.7%
Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, & Siskiyou	2,428	20.5%	0.4%
Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, & Tuolumne	3,148	20.4%	0.5%
San Joaquin	19,326	19.8%	3.4%
Fresno	24,232	18.8%	4.2%
Tulare	12,205	18.7%	2.1%
Kern	22,550	18.3%	3.9%
Kings	3,262	15.9%	0.6%
Riverside	47,843	15.8%	8.4%
Merced	6,263	15.0%	1.1%
Stanislaus	9,853	14.7%	1.7%
Butte	5,046	14.6%	0.9%
Solano	7,180	14.5%	1.3%
El Dorado	2,436	14.3%	0.4%
San Bernardino	39,808	14.1%	7.0%
Sacramento	22,542	13.0%	3.9%
Los Angeles	143,463	12.9%	25.0%
Contra Costa	14,891	12.0%	2.6%
Shasta	2,162	11.7%	0.4%
Sutter & Yuba	2,329	11.5%	0.4%
Napa	1,754	11.5%	0.3%
Monterey	6,345	10.3%	1.1%
Humboldt	1,982	10.2%	0.3%
San Diego	40,332	10.1%	7.0%
Ventura	9,593	9.9%	1.7%
San Francisco	6,312	9.4%	1.1%
Orange	33,514	9.3%	5.9%
San Mateo	6,636	9.2%	1.2%
Alameda	14,661	8.9%	2.6%
Sonoma	4,367	8.8%	0.8%
Placer	3,396	8.4%	0.6%
Santa Barbara	6,456	8.1%	1.1%
Santa Clara	15,454	7.7%	2.7%
Santa Cruz	3,513	7.7%	0.6%
Yolo	3,503	7.2%	0.6%
Marin	1,370	5.5%	0.2%
San Luis Obispo	2,045	4.3%	0.4%
	<b>572,756</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Note:** Counties that are too small to have reported data are grouped together in the ACS.



## APPENDIX B: Proportional Symbol Map of OY (16-24; ACS 2021, 1-Yr. Est.)



Note: Only counties with Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) of at least 100,000 people are shown.