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UPDATED REPORT ON TEENS AND YOUNG ADULT DISCONNECTION IN CALIFORNIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth disconnection, defined as young people aged 16-24 who are neither in school nor employed, remains a critical challenge in California. This annual report aims to shed light on the prevalence of youth disconnection across California, with a particular focus on demographic, racial, ethnic, and geographic disparities. By examining these factors, the report seeks to inform policymakers and practitioners on the necessary interventions to reduce youth disconnection and support the public and private investment to re-engage our state's young people in educational and employment opportunities.

Recent research and our collective experience have documented the far-reaching consequences of disconnection from school and work during these critical development years. There is an urgent need for targeted interventions and policies to address this issue especially in Governor Gavin Newsom's proposed Master Plan for Career Education. Studies have consistently shown that disconnected youth, also referred to as "opportunity youth," face a range of adverse outcomes including lower lifetime earnings, higher rates of unemployment, poorer health, and increased involvement with the criminal justice system (Belfield et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2009).

UPDATED DISCONNECTION RATES

As of 2022, California had 523,983 disconnected youth, representing 11.2% of the 16-24 age group. While this marks a decrease from the peak disconnection rate of 12.5% (572,756) in 2021, it is still higher than the pre-pandemic rate of 10.3% (480,923) in 2019. The fluctuation in these rates reflects the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth engagement and the ongoing challenges in re-engaging disconnected youth.

DEMOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES

Youth disconnection is influenced by several demographic factors, including age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Disconnection rates increase sharply as youth transition from adolescence to young adulthood, particularly among males, Black and Hispanic/Latino youth, and those living in poverty.

GEOGRAPHIC VARIATION

The rate of youth disconnection varies significantly across California's 12 most populous counties. In 2022, disconnection rates ranged from a low of 7.1% in San Francisco to a high of 17.2% in Kern County. While some counties saw decreases in disconnection rates from 2021 to 2022, others experienced increases, reflecting ongoing challenges in reconnecting youth post-pandemic.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

There are stark disparities in educational outcomes among older disconnected young adults (22-24). Individuals who identified as Other Race (10%), Black (13%), and Hispanic/Latino youth (13%) were less likely to have higher levels of educational attainment (associate or bachelor's degrees or more) compared to their White (28%) and Non-Hispanic/Latino (31%) counterparts. These disparities highlight the critical need for educational interventions that support high school completion and access to higher education.

From age 18 onwards, the disconnection rate continues to climb, reaching 12.0% at age 19, 13.3% at age 20, and 12.2% at age 21. The rate peaked at age 24, where 17.2% individuals were disconnected. While 24-year-olds account for just 11% of the total 16-24 population, they constitute nearly 17% of the out-of-school, out-of-work youth population, indicating that they are disconnected at a disproportionate rate.

Youth disconnection not only limits the future prospects of individuals but also has broader social and economic implications. This report calls for a coordinated, cross-sector approach to address youth disconnection and ensure that all young people in California can succeed.

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