

Teens Not in School and Not Working

DEFINITION

Teens not in school and not working is the percentage of teens ages 16 to 19 who are not enrolled in school, not in the Armed Forces, and not employed. Teens who are recent high school graduates and who are unemployed and teens who have dropped out of high school and are unemployed are included.

SIGNIFICANCE

School and work help teens acquire the skills, knowledge, experience, and supports they need to become productive adults. Youth who drop out of school and do not become a part of the workforce are at risk of experiencing negative outcomes as they transition from adolescence to adulthood and over the long term. Teens in low-income families, teens who leave high school without a diploma, young mothers, youth with disabilities, youth with limited English proficiency, and youth involved in the child welfare system often face barriers in maintaining connections to both school and work.^{1,2} Disconnected youth are more likely to live in poverty, experience poor physical and mental health, be involved with the child welfare system, experience difficulties finding and maintaining employment, earn low wages, and need public benefits to make ends meet.

Young people disconnected from both work and school are disproportionately people of color.^{3,4,5}

Programs that offer post-secondary education or job training; provide high-quality early work experiences, adult mentoring, and youth development opportunities; and address root causes of inequity all decrease the likelihood of youth disconnection.^{6,7,8} There is also a financial cost to youth disconnection. If we were to connect all youth, the federal government would gain an estimated \$55 billion in annual tax revenue.⁹

Between 2014 and 2018, an estimated 3,167 (5.2%) youth ages 16 to 19 in Rhode Island were not in school and not working. Of the youth who were not in school and not working, 56% were males and 44% were females. Fifty-eight percent of these youth were high school graduates, and 42% had not graduated from high school.¹⁰

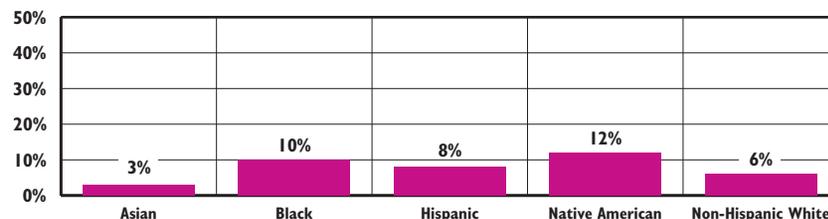
Teens Not in School and Not Working	
	2018
RI	3%
US	7%
National Rank*	16th
New England Rank**	6th

*1st is best; 50th is worst

**1st is best; 6th is worst

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

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Percentage of U.S. Youth Ages 16 to 19, Not in School and Not Working, by Race and Ethnicity, 2018



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

◆ In the U.S., youth of color (with the exception of Asian youth) are more likely to be disconnected from school and work than White youth.¹¹ In 2018 among U.S. youth ages 16 to 19, 12% of Native American youth, 10% of Black youth, and 8% of Hispanic youth were not in school and not working, compared to 6% of White youth and 3% of Asian youth.¹²

◆ While Rhode Island has a low overall youth disconnection rate, there are striking racial and ethnic disparities. In 2015, 18.5% of Latino young adults ages 16 to 24 in Rhode Island were not in school and not working, which was nearly triple the White rate of 6.7%.¹³

◆ Youth disconnection has declined in recent years. In 2017, 7% of youth ages 16 to 19 reported being disconnected; compared to 10% in 2014. Older youth are more likely to be out of work and school than younger teens. In 2017, 11% of 18- to 19-year-olds were disconnected, compared to 4% of 16 to 17-year-olds.¹⁴

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Compulsory School Attendance

◆ Rhode Island requires school attendance until age 18. Rhode Island students over age 16 may obtain a waiver from the attendance requirement if they have an alternative learning plan for obtaining a diploma. Plans can include independent study, private instruction, community service, or online coursework and must be developed in consultation with the student, school guidance counselor, school principal, and at least one parent or guardian. Alternative learning plans must be approved by the district superintendent.¹⁵

◆ As of 2017, one state has compulsory attendance to age 19, 24 states (including Rhode Island) have compulsory attendance to age 18, 10 states to age 17, and 15 states to age 16.¹⁶



Connecting Youth to School and Work

- ◆ Education has a positive impact on the likelihood of finding and maintaining employment. Between 2014 and 2018, the unemployment rate for Rhode Island adults ages 25 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher was 2.7%, compared with 4.9% for some college or associate degree, 7.8% for high school graduates, and 9.4% for those with less than a high school diploma.¹⁷
- ◆ Successful strategies to prevent youth disconnection must be comprehensive, including adequately funded K-12 public schooling, restorative discipline, a focus on healthy youth development, paid opportunities to gain knowledge and skills, support services such as child care and transportation, and targeted post-secondary education and workforce development programs that are designed with career opportunities in mind. Additionally, it is important to have adults available to help disconnected youth navigate these various systems and transitions between them.^{18,19,20}
- ◆ Programs and alternative schools that enable students to earn college credits at no cost while working toward their high school degrees can improve high school graduation rates and better prepare students for college completion and high-skill careers.²¹



Youth Work Experience

- ◆ Work experience during the teen years increases academic achievement, employability, and wages into early adulthood.²²
- ◆ Public and private investment in paid summer work programs helps keep adolescents attached to constructive youth development activities, increases employment rates, and helps reduce youth violence.^{23,24}
- ◆ Expanding work-based learning opportunities can help more youth in Rhode Island successfully transition into college and careers. These types of programs can help to motivate students, teach them critical knowledge and skills, connect them with mentors and positive adult role models, and help them to make informed decisions about their future. Many work-based learning internship programs allow youth to receive school credit and/or earn money while gaining important workplace experience.^{25,26}

References

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- ²⁶ *Workforce guidance*. (2018). Cranston, RI: Governor's Workforce Board.