

BACKGROUND

Despite recent attempts across the District of Columbia to improve public education, boost students' educational attainment and prepare them for workforce success, many youth are disconnecting from education before attaining a high school credential or transitioning into employment.

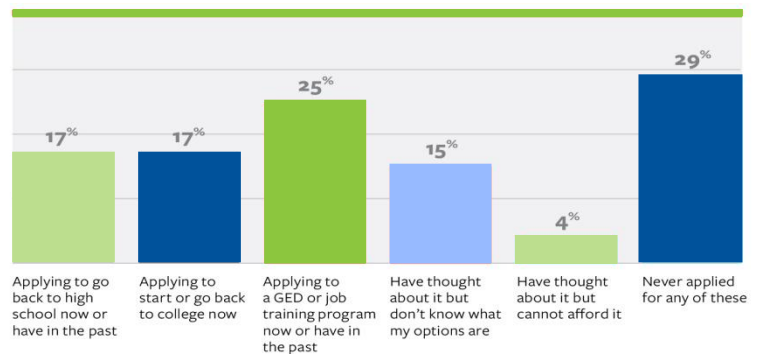
Why are youth disconnecting?

A history of poor academic performance, chronic truancy, negative school “push-out” policies regarding suspension and expulsion, responsibilities at home, and/or the need to earn an income are all causal factors of disconnection. **About 8,300 young people in the District are categorized as disconnected youth**, meaning they are neither in school nor employed.¹ This represents 9% of all District youth 16 to 24.²



Disconnected youth in the District are often:

- **Falling short of educational benchmarks.** In 2013-2014 only 61% of the city's young people graduated high school within four years³ and college completion rates remained below the national average.⁴
- **Struggling to find the entry-level jobs that provide the foundation for lifelong success.** Only 12% of 16–19 year olds and 59% of 20–24 year olds were able to find paid, unsubsidized work in 2014.⁵
- **Balancing significant family responsibilities.** DCAYA's 2013 *Connecting Youth to Opportunity* (CYO) survey of disconnected youth found 32% of respondents were pregnant or parenting.⁶
- **Accessing disparate services across multiple “systems of care”.**
 - In 2015, the city claimed 5,000 TANF heads of household between the ages of 18 and 25.⁷
 - 19% of CYO respondents reported that they had been on probation or committed to the District's juvenile justice agency.⁸
 - 16% of CYO respondents indicated that they were currently or had been involved in the child welfare system.⁹
- **Actively trying to re-engage.** Despite the challenges facing disconnected youth, 60% of CYO respondents were trying to re-engage in school or had in the past, suggesting that they will make many attempts to get back on track.¹⁰



1) American Community Survey microdata, 2013 1-year estimates conducted by M. Ross and M. Thakur.

2) Ibid.

3) Office of the State Superintendent for Education. “DC 2014 ADJUSTED COHORT 4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE”. Available: http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2014_ACGR_summary_wnongrad.pdf

4) Office of the State Superintendent for Education. “District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant Program (DC TAG)”. Available: <http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/DC%20TAG%20Accomplishment%20Oct.%202014%20-2.pdf>

5) Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2014. Available: www.bls.gov/lau/table14full14.xlsx

6) DCAYA, 2013. *Connecting Youth to Opportunity*. Retrieved from DCAYA website: http://www.dc-aya.org/sites/default/files/content/Connecting%20Youth%20to%20Opportunity_Final%20Report.pdf

7) DC Department of Human Services, Economic Security Administration, 2015.

8) DCAYA, 2013. *Connecting Youth to Opportunity*. Retrieved from DCAYA website: http://www.dc-aya.org/sites/default/files/content/Connecting%20Youth%20to%20Opportunity_Final%20Report.pdf

9) Ibid.

10) Ibid.



WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

- **Support the DC ReEngagement Center (DC REC).** The DC REC serves as an anchor institution where disconnected youth are guided to best-fit educational options, including alternative and adult education programs. Reengagement specialists also link youth to the wrap-around services necessary to sustain reconnection, including housing supports and childcare, and income or food assistance.
- **Expand capacity in programs that best serve disconnected youth.** It's critical to offer programming that prioritizes the incorporation of real-world context and a pathway towards long-term success for youth who have struggled to thrive in a traditional school or work environment . Continuing to scale-up non-traditional, alternative education and workforce development programs, while also soliciting the opinions of youth to determine their needs, will maximize best-fit matches for re-engaging youth.
- **Improve data sharing between systems.** At present, very little information is shared system-wide when youth plug into programs in their efforts to reconnect. Important information can be gleaned about this at-risk population to determine programmatic best practices and system-wide policy shifts.
- **Support efforts that focus on long-term engagement and success.** Sustainable reengagement hinges on the ability of youth to “bridge” from one level of service to the next. By designing programs that link to other organizations and service providers, youth can seamlessly navigate a comprehensive system of reengagement with less risk of further disconnection.
- **Establish formal mechanisms to solicit the opinions of youth.** The input of youth will inform program improvement, solidify best practices, and demonstrate how to replicate efforts across the system of reengagement.
- **Create a comprehensive system of disconnected youth service provision.** By agreeing to comparable indicators of success, establishing a network of referrals and shared resources, and sharing data, the many programs, agencies, and organizations that serve disconnected youth will hone their ability to meet this dynamic population where they are.