

CONNECTICUT'S UNSPOKEN CRISIS

Getting young people back on track

A study of Connecticut's at-risk and disconnected young people

Oct 2023



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Note: Some profiles of young people use pseudonyms in place of real names



Executive Summary

Across Connecticut, many of the state's 615,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 26 experience a variety of adverse circumstances that negatively affect their life outcomes. While a number of them overcome these challenges through personal resilience and the support of others, factors such as poverty, racism, and trauma increase the likelihood that these young people will become disconnected from educational and employment systems as well as other major institutions. Disconnection often results in outcomes such as financial insecurity, higher rates of crime and homelessness. Our report seeks to better understand this at-risk and disconnected population, including thorough analysis of statewide longitudinal data. Given that these individuals represent the future of Connecticut, we consider how Connecticut stakeholders can better identify, reconnect, and support them.

Research Findings

Our research revealed a crisis: 119,000, or 19%, of Connecticut's 14- to 26-year-olds were either at-risk or disconnected in 2021–2022. Of these, 63,000 were deemed “disconnected.” This group is of particular concern, as their limited connection to education and employment systems impedes their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Twelve thousand were “severely disconnected,” meaning they are neither employed nor have attained a high school diploma or equivalent. The remaining 51,000, comprising high school graduates who are neither employed nor enrolled in postsecondary education, as well as high school non-graduates who are employed, are considered “moderately disconnected.” The at-risk students (up 29% since the 2017–2018 school year) are also important to highlight,

given that they exhibit warning signs of not graduating high school, which leads to heightened likelihood of disconnection.

This report's findings point to meaningful populations of at-risk and disconnected young people in every municipality in Connecticut, though with significant geographic differences. Although they were most concentrated in the largest cities (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Waterbury, Stamford, Danbury, Norwalk, and New Britain), rural towns, especially those in eastern and western Connecticut (e.g., Sterling, Sprague, and Salisbury) also had higher concentrations of at-risk and disconnected young people. Addressing the needs of these young people urgently requires a strategy that accounts for the diversity of communities across Connecticut.

The data shows that over time, the total number of disconnected young people, as well as the number of newly disconnected young people (i.e., those who have exited high school in the most recent year of data) has remained relatively constant (10,000 newly disconnected young people annually). This indicates that despite meaningful state efforts to promote connection of young people over recent years, especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, more action is needed. One area for concentrated effort is addressing chronic absenteeism; largely due to a 97% increase from 2017 to 2022, one in three Connecticut high schoolers were at risk of not graduating in 2022.

To better understand the economic prospects of disconnected young people, this report examined the impact of disconnection on employment and wages, and uncovered profound negative effects. The analysis shows that only 40% of young people who experienced disconnection one year after exiting high school were employed at age 22, even after excluding young people who might not be working because they were pursuing a postsecondary degree. Those with jobs had median wages (~\$14,000 annually) substantially below the wage level needed for economic independence¹ (\$25,000 annually for a single adult in Connecticut (see section 1B for more detail)). Outcomes for the severely disconnected were even worse: among those who neither completed high school nor entered the workforce, only 31% were employed at age 22, and the median annual wage was just \$8,000.

This report also looked at various socioeconomic factors associated with disconnection to help stakeholders better identify who might be most vulnerable and target efforts to prevent disconnection. For many of the factors analyzed, young people experiencing adversities were more likely to be disconnected, including non-White racial categories (e.g., Hispanic/Latino young people had twice the rates of disconnection as White young people), experience

with out-of-school conditions (e.g., interaction with the Department of Children and Families or the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness), and certain in-school factors (e.g., attending high-poverty schools, enrollment in special education, moving schools two or more times, and involvement in alternative education). Exposure to several of these factors further increased risk; young people with four to seven risk factors had a five to six times greater likelihood of disconnection than those with no factors.

The justice system also plays a large role in the lives of at-risk and disconnected young people. While the number of arrests and incarcerations among this population has declined in recent years, there were still nearly 10,000 arrests and 2,000 incarcerations among young people in 2021. Research shows that involvement with the criminal and juvenile justice systems is critically damaging to young people's future prospects. Further action is needed to reengage the most disconnected young people, who are often repeat offenders, and help get them back on track.

This study also calculated the economic opportunity for Connecticut if it can help these young people get back on track. Support would help fill a large portion of the state's 90,000 unfilled jobs, boost gross domestic product by \$5 billion–\$5.5 billion, and improve fiscal performance by \$650 million - \$750 million annually (in the form of added tax revenue and lower spending on government services), accelerating statewide economic growth. These economic benefits only multiply over a reconnected individual's lifetime via the many years they spend as economically self-sufficient members of society.

Recommendations

While this research suggests that there is a lot of work to be done, it has yielded a variety of best practices and community recommendations that would respond to this crisis and improve outcomes for at-risk and disconnected young people in Connecticut. The nine recommendations include:

Increase visibility

- 1. Improve school district data systems and practices to identify and support at-risk students.** Help districts expand their capabilities with continued investment in data systems, sharing, and implementation/capacity-building processes that enable better and timely monitoring and support of at-risk students
- 2. Publish annual reports about at-risk and disconnected young people.** Publish reports using integrated data across state agencies to highlight the challenges and opportunities of at-risk and disconnected young people on an ongoing basis and promote collective accountability.

Improve coordination

- 3. Establish cross-sector coalitions and partnerships focused on supporting at-risk and disconnected young people.** Regional/statewide coalitions could work on behalf of this population, identifying and supporting them using integrated data and coordinating and advocating on their behalf; this includes evaluating programs and policies that could benefit this population.
- 4. Designate an entity in every municipality or region responsible for supporting disconnected young people.** While the entity might differ by municipality, each should designate and fund an organizational entity, beyond the school district, that takes ownership and responsibility for identifying and monitoring disconnected young people and connecting them to crucial services.

Expand capacity

- 5. Significantly strengthen the capacity of organizations that serve at-risk and disconnected young people.** Provide technical assistance around program design and implementation, talent, data collection and analysis, performance tracking, financial management, and IT support to boost the effectiveness of these organizations.

Fund effective programs

- 6. Invest in expanding supports and services for at-risk and disconnected young people.** Provide additional funding to invest in evidence-based supports, along with rigorous measurement and evaluation, especially for high-priority topics such as chronic absenteeism, school mobility, mental health, and justice system involvement.
- 7. Invest in high-touch case management for at-risk and disconnected young people.** Use case management practices to help identify, prevent, and support at-risk and disconnected young people (e.g., through mentorship, connection to services, using cognitive behavioral principles).
- 8. Invest in tackling chronic absenteeism.** Make significant investments in addressing chronic absenteeism, including working with students and families to understand and tackle its root causes and examining the systemic challenges underpinning this issue.
- 9. Invest in strengthening pathways from disconnection to employment.** Employers should partner with service providers to create pathways to employment, including job training and mentorship, connection to job opportunities, and wraparound services.

By increasing visibility and awareness of the challenges faced by disconnected young people, improving coordination among stakeholders, expanding capacity of high-performing organizations that serve at-risk and disconnected young people, and funding effective programs to increase scale, there is immense opportunity to reengage young people and help them get back on track.

Acknowledgements

BCG had the privilege of being commissioned by Dalio Education to develop this report.

We hope our findings contribute to work being done across the state to help young people realize their full potential and build momentum around a broader movement to set Connecticut up for a brighter future. Our intent is for this report to raise awareness about the needs of Connecticut's young people, make visible the challenges impacting them, and highlight insights from communities to inform the general public and provide local leaders with recommendations.

We thank all the many contributors who helped make this report possible, including:

Our 100+ interviewees, including educators and district leaders, municipal leaders, nonprofit leaders, community stakeholders, and many others, who shaped our knowledge of the experiences of Connecticut's young people and offered valuable insights around ways local leaders can work together to better serve them.

Connecticut's The Preschool through 20 Workforce Information Network (P20 WIN), who were critical partners in collecting and integrating data across five different agencies/providers, allowing for a comprehensive, individual-level, longitudinal view of Connecticut's young people. This work would not have been possible without data provided by the P20 WIN participating agencies.

Connecticut State agencies and organizations that shared the data necessary for us to identify and understand this population like never before: the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Corrections, the State Department of Education, the Department of Labor, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Judicial Branch Court Operations, and the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division. Note, the findings of this report do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the State of Connecticut or the organizations and agencies contributing data. The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors.

Our Advisory Group members, who have generously donated their time and expertise in helping us develop the strongest possible report

Dalio Education's Connecticut Opportunity Project team, especially Adhlere Coffy, who contributed the critical expertise, thought partnership, and passion required to lead and shape this important work

Markeshia Ricks, an independent writer who authored the profiles of young people incorporated throughout the report, bringing their voices to life

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Glossary of Terms

As the use of terms varies widely across sectors, we include a glossary that provides definitions for the purposes of this report. In many instances, our definitions build off those established by researchers and practitioners, while several others are newly developed concepts that are entered as contributions to the broader effort.

ALICE Wages: Refers to Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households. Wages are based on family size and estimate the bare minimum required for purchasing household necessities, including housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and basic technology. The ALICE threshold is calculated for every US county and is also reported as a state-level threshold.

At-risk and disconnected young people: Combined population of 14- to 26-year-olds who are either at risk of not graduating high school on time (four years) or experiencing disconnection through limited educational attainment and low to no labor force participation. For readability, this report describes the subgroups within this population as “at-risk young people” and “disconnected young people,” but it is critical to note that these terms signify temporary conditions that are experienced and can be overcome. They are not intended to be read as descriptors of these individuals or any who may share in their lived experience.

At-risk: Population of high school students who are at heightened risk of not graduating; combines students who are off-track, severely off-track, and at-risk due to other factors:

- **Off-track:** Students not on track to graduate due to low credit attainment (as defined by the Connecticut State Department of Education)
- **Severely off-track:** Students off-track due to low credit attainment and displaying additional risk factors of absenteeism and/or behavioral incidents (suspensions and expulsions)
- **At-risk due to other factors:** Students on-track with credit attainment, but displaying concerning trends in attendance and/or behavioral incidents

Chronic absenteeism: Attendance is defined as the percentage of available days a student attends school. This report considers students chronically absent if their attendance is below 90% for 9th and 10th grade, and below 85% for 11th and 12th grade

Credit attainment: Student’s cumulative credit attainment compared with what they need to graduate, as defined by the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) graduation requirements (e.g., for years that CSDE required 20 credits to graduate high school, on-track 9th graders attained at least 5 credits, 10th graders attained at least 10 credits, etc.)

Disconnected: Combined population of 14- to 26-year-olds who are experiencing either moderate or severe disconnection, defined as:

- **Moderately disconnected:** Includes high school diploma holders, both traditional graduates and those who have attained an adult education diploma/equivalent (e.g., GED), who are neither employed nor enrolled in postsecondary education, as well as high school non-graduates who are employed
- **Severely disconnected:** Includes individuals neither employed nor holding a high school diploma, as well as incarcerated individuals

Gainful employment: Employment that provides progressive advancement in earned wages, skill development, and position within the organization; all enabling economic self-sufficiency

High-poverty school: A school where more than 75% of students are eligible for a free/reduced-price lunch

Justice-involved: The population of young people who have ever been arrested and/or incarcerated

Justice system: Includes both the juvenile justice system (serving youth under the age of 18) and the criminal justice system (serving young adults and adults 18 and older)

Student behavioral incidents: Includes in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions (does not include detention or other minor incidents)

Young person / young people: Population aged 14–26, which covers the continuum across school-aged youth and young adults and allows for examination of how high school participation impacts longer-term outcomes

Foreword

Connecticut has an unspoken crisis—one that impacts every city and town—and it's time it gets the attention it deserves.

In 2022, one in five of Connecticut's young people were either at-risk or disconnected. These are 119,000 young people who have either dropped out of school or are in danger of dropping out of school, and who are, for those aged 18 to 26, unemployed and in many cases unemployable.

Many of these young people have become functionally invisible to the systems that are designed to educate and train them on a path to success.

And, as if the problem by itself weren't staggering enough, it's clear that COVID-19 accelerated the deep inequities in our communities of color, low-income families, and other vulnerable populations, and the challenges that our young people face when they fall off-track or become totally disconnected.

A statewide problem that has existed for many years has now exploded into a full-blown crisis because this population has, for too long, been unrecognized and not supported in a way that truly responds to its needs.

Why should people care about this? There are two main reasons.

First, we believe we have a moral obligation to address this crisis. We believe that the 14-year-old teenager who gets his only hot meal of the day at school is our 14-year-old teenager, that the 15-year-old young woman who has dropped out of school because there's no one to keep her focused is our 15-year-old young woman; that the 19-year-old young woman who is the victim of domestic violence is our 19-year-old young woman; and that the 22-year-old young man who grew up poor and is currently unemployed is our 22-year-old young man.

We believe that we are all in this together and that it is our obligation as a society to leave no one behind.

Second, people should care because the economic implications of doing nothing about this crisis are, for the State of Connecticut, enormous.

Left unaddressed, Connecticut's unspoken crisis will result in far too many young people essentially becoming permanent wards of the state, descending into lives that are often exposed to substance abuse, crime, incarceration, homelessness, and other challenges. Our report suggests that, left unattended, this crisis could cost Connecticut taxpayers upward of \$650 million - \$750 million a year.

Conversely, if we can get these young people back on track, many will become productive Connecticut taxpayers, sparking a virtuous cycle of community building that will serve as the state's future resident base. With the right kind of help, they'll be trained for jobs that pay well and provide good benefits, they'll become parents of healthy children, they'll become homeowners—and they'll raise children who will become the same.

The economic implications are clear: we either pay the cost of inertia, or we reap the benefits of action. It's up to us to decide.

While there's no doubt this is a crisis, it's also true, as Albert Einstein once said, "In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity."

Every single one of these 119,000 young people has a story—many of them heartbreaking—and we know that if they receive the right kind of support and opportunities, many of them can reach their potential.

We are hopeful that Connecticut will seize this opportunity.

For more than a decade, we have worked closely with educators, nonprofit leaders, and many others who serve off-track or disconnected young people. We know from personal experience that Connecticut is home to thousands of heroes who are already doing so much good for them.

But we also know that heroes need help, and that more people must join in the effort to address this statewide crisis.

We commissioned this report and are releasing it publicly to shine a bright light on these challenges believing that Connecticut must first understand the crisis before it can realize the opportunity.

We offer this report in the spirit of raising public awareness, and in the hope that more people will join in the effort to get our young people back on track.

In partnership,



Barbara Dalio

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Advisory Group Endorsement

Since May 2023, we have worked collaboratively as the Advisory Group in support of BCG’s research and analysis to create this report. As advisors, we provided input at various stages of the report development process, including crystalizing the report’s purpose, elevating key insights from stakeholders on the ground, evaluating the analytical findings, and refining the recommendations.

We believe this report is novel in its focus on both older youth (aged 14–17) and young adults (aged 18–26) and the continuum between the age groups. It also effectively articulates the critical challenges Connecticut’s young people are facing and provides a roadmap for driving change. Our hope is that this document is used by all stakeholders invested in shaping the future of our state.

We proudly endorse this report and encourage its widespread consideration.

In partnership,



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Introduction

Connecticut's 615,000 14- to 26-year-olds will have a tremendous impact on the future of the state. Unfortunately, many of these young people experience limited access to resources, systemic racism, and chronic traumas, that inhibit their ability to meet their potential. The most recent data reveals a crisis: 119,000—or one in five Connecticut 14- to 26-year-olds—are at-risk or disconnected (see section 1A for detail). Moreover, at-risk and disconnected young people are present in every Connecticut municipality, not just its urban centers, demonstrating the pervasiveness of this issue and urgent need to act.

Broader literature defines disconnection as not being involved in employment, education, or training² (see Approach section for this report's definition). Disconnected young people often face a difficult life marked by financial insecurity and challenging life outcomes. For instance, our analysis shows that only 40% of young people who experienced disconnection one year after exiting high school were employed at age 22, even after excluding young people who might not be working because they were pursuing a postsecondary degree. Those with jobs had median wages of \$14,000 annually. By comparison, the ALICE threshold—the benchmark for economic independence in Connecticut—for a single adult is roughly \$25,000 (see section 1B for more detail).³ Research has also found that students disconnected from education systems are also more likely to experience homelessness.⁴

Disconnected young people are also five times more likely to have a criminal record,⁵ and more likely to be incarcerated,⁶ with nearly half of the prison population in Connecticut comprising individuals who dropped out of high school.⁷ The warning signs of disconnection can be traced to high school, if not earlier. This report's research found that the in-school indicators of credit attainment, behavioral incidents, and attendance rates, well documented to be predictive of high school graduation outcomes, are also associated with experiencing disconnection after high school.

Given that these at-risk and disconnected young people are Connecticut's future, identifying more effective ways to help them reconnect should be a top priority for stakeholders. The goal of this report is to provide insights that will inform this process. Being at-risk or disconnected are temporary states an individual can fall into at various points in time, not a permanent reflection on who they are as individuals or their capacity to achieve their life goals. With the right supports and resources, individuals experiencing disconnection can successfully become connected once again.

There has never been a more pressing time for this discussion. Even before the pandemic, rates of young people at-risk or experiencing disconnection in Connecticut were concerning.⁸ COVID-19 intensified these trends, bringing reduced student interaction, fewer support services, rising mental health challenges, and overall increases in young people's feelings of disconnection. Though the state has made progress in recent years in important areas, such as improving graduation rates as well as reducing arrests and incarceration of young people, this progress has been unevenly realized and there is much more work to be done to bring forth the resources needed to fill the gaps.

The Connecticut community shares a collective responsibility to ensure young people have a pathway to realizing their full potential, regardless of their circumstances. Reengaging and reconnecting disconnected young people to educational and employment institutions yields many benefits to the individual: higher income and employment, better health, lower rates of homelessness and incarceration, among others. Young people who attain higher levels of education consistently demonstrate both higher earnings and greater economic resilience. Individuals who complete high school earn 28% (or about \$500,000) more over their lifetimes than those without a high school diploma (a median of \$1.8 million vs. \$1.3 million, respectively), and lifetime earnings grow with subsequent levels of higher education. In addition, workers with higher levels of education are more resilient to disruptions in the labor market (recessions, COVID-19, etc.) and less likely to lose their jobs in times of economic distress.⁹

Beyond the individual benefits, there is a robust economic case for focusing on this issue. Reengaging and re-connecting disconnected young people could help fill a large portion of the Connecticut labor market's 90,000 unfilled jobs¹⁰ and grow its gross domestic product (GDP) by \$5 billion–\$5.5 billion—equivalent to 2% of the state's economy. This could boost the state's fiscal performance by \$650 million - \$750 million annually through a combination of increased tax revenues, lower spending on government services such as Medicaid, and lower incarceration costs (see section 2 for detail). If this reconnection is sustained, the financial impact could compound over an individual's lifetime. Supporting disconnected young people to get back on track represents an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of thousands of Connecticut residents, boost economic growth, and further strengthen the state's fiscal performance.

This report aims to shed light on the following key questions:

- 1 Who are the young people who are at-risk or disconnected in Connecticut? What can be learned about their lived experiences through data and stakeholder conversations?
- 2 How can we use what we've learned to better identify, reconnect, and support these young people?

While there have been prior reports on this topic, this report advances the field in several ways:

Based on Individual-Level, Longitudinal, Integrated Data. This report is grounded in an analytical understanding of the size and nature of the problem, student subpopulations and geographic areas most affected, the educational and employment outcomes of these young people, and the current volume and nature of their interactions with other social services. Rooting the problem in comprehensive data enables stakeholders to understand the predictors of at-risk and disconnected status and to develop a prioritized and strategic response.

Focused on the Unique Age Range of 14- to 26-Year-Olds. Unlike prior research on related topics, this report combines analysis and discussion not only of older youths (aged 14–17) but also of young adults (18–26). Young adults are included in this study because research shows they are still developing cognitively and in their life aspirations at this age, and thus have a unique set of needs

compared with older adults.¹¹ This broader scope allows for a comprehensive view of the population most at risk for disconnection and enables a deeper understanding of the transition from high school.

Tailored to the Unique Connecticut Context and Statewide in Scope. Very few existing resources on at-risk and disconnected young people have concentrated specifically on Connecticut, its unique circumstances and demographics, existing social safety net landscape, and ambitious statewide aspirations for supporting at-risk and disconnected young people. While lessons learned from other places are helpful, this report serves as a custom resource for Connecticut, ensuring that insights are tailored to the local context.

Community Insights Drawn from Extensive Stakeholder Engagement. In addition to leaning on data to examine the characteristics and lived experiences of at-risk and disconnected young people, this report brings together the perspectives of 100+ Connecticut stakeholders, including leaders from municipalities, school districts, the justice system, and community organizations. This collective insight allows for the identification of ways local leaders can work together to address this issue.

Our findings reveal both a crisis and a promising opportunity for Connecticut. We invite educators, district leaders, parents, community leaders, municipal leaders, foundation leaders, employers, social service providers, and other stakeholders across the state to read and share this report and foster partnerships across the ecosystem of providers to better serve at-risk and disconnected young people.

Our findings reveal both a crisis and a promising opportunity for Connecticut



Approach

Exhibit 1 visualizes the framework developed through this work for understanding the association between being at risk of not graduating high school and later disconnection from employment and/or postsecondary

education. This continuum identifies indicators at each transition point that can be utilized to deliver interventions tailored to the challenges experienced by young people.

EXHIBIT 1

Definitional Framework for Identifying At-Risk and Disconnected Young People



On-Track

Young people aged 14–26 who are engaged in prosocial institutions and on-track for gainful employment

At-Risk

High school students who are at risk of not graduating and, therefore, also at risk for eventual disconnection. Category has three sub-populations:

- **Off-track:** Students who do not meet state credit attainment requirements
- **At-risk due to other factors:** Students who exhibit concerning rates of absenteeism and/or behavioral issues
- **Severely off-track:** Students who are both off-track and at-risk due to other factors

Disconnected

Young people aged 14-26 who are not engaged in prosocial institutions and/or not on-track for gainful employment.¹ Category has two sub-populations:

- **Moderately disconnected:**
(1) High school diploma holders who are neither employed nor in postsecondary and
(2) high school non-graduates who are employed
- **Severely disconnected:** Young people who are not employed, have not attained a high school diploma/equivalent and/or are incarcerated

1. Includes participation in workforce training programs

Note: Though framework focuses on education and workforce, other factors and systems also play an important role in connection and disconnection.

This report's definition of *disconnection* is based on whether an individual is connected to employment and/or educational attainment.

Though there are other definitions of disconnection based on connection to those two levers, this report incorporates the impact of high school completion on the likelihood of achieving economic self-sufficiency and distinguishes between the experiences of “moderate” and “severe” disconnection to account for important differences in these young people's lived experiences and likely outcomes. This analysis looks primarily at their disconnection status one year after they have exited high school successfully with a diploma or unsuccessfully without a diploma.

- **Moderately Disconnected.** Two populations fall under the “moderately disconnected” subcategory. The first are high school diploma holders (both traditional graduates and those who have attained an adult education diploma/equivalent (e.g., GED)) who are neither employed nor enrolled in postsecondary education. The second are employed high school non-graduates. Though these individuals are employed, they are likely to face obstacles to achieving economic self-sufficiency due to lack of a high school diploma.
- **Severely Disconnected.** An individual who is neither employed nor holds a high school diploma is considered severely disconnected, given that they do not have access to either of the two primary levers for eventual economic independence. The analysis also considers individuals who are currently incarcerated to be severely disconnected; while some may participate in educational or employment activities while in prison, they fall into this subcategory given the substantial impact incarceration often has on a young person's long-term outcomes.

In terms of employment, this report treats an individual as employed if they earn more than \$7,000 in a year (equivalent to working full-time at ALICE wages for one-quarter of the year¹²) or are enrolled in a workforce training program (See Appendix B.)

Due to data limitations, this report's definition of employment does not include self-employment, independent contractor work (e.g., gig economy), or informal economy workⁱ

This report's definition of *at-risk* reflects the in-school risk factors of falling behind on credit attainment, chronic absenteeism, and behavioral issues.

Credit Attainment. The in-school analysis begins with a view of each student's cumulative credit attainment compared with what they need to graduate, as defined by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE).¹³ If a student is not on track to graduate from a credit perspective, they are considered “off-track.” This analysis does not account for district-level credit requirements, which vary by district and are often higher than the state requirements. All students who repeated a grade in high school were also characterized as “off-track”.

In addition to credit attainment, two critical risk factors have been shown (via the data and broader literature) to influence whether a student will graduate:

- **Attendance.** Attendance is defined as the percentage of available days a student attends school. This measure is used because attendance has been shown to be a critical risk factor/predictor in student success; students who are chronically absent are less likely to reach educational milestones (e.g., on-time grade promotion) and more likely to drop out of school.¹⁴ For the purposes of this analysis, students are considered chronically absent if their attendance is below 90% for 9th and 10th grade, and below 85% for 11th and 12th grade.
- **Student Behavior Incidents.** The analysis also looks at student behavior incidents, defined as whether a student has been suspended one or more times and/or expelled. External literature shows that behavior incidents are another critical risk factor; school suspensions are linked to lower math and reading achievement,¹⁵ probability that the student will be arrested in the future, failure to advance to the next grade level, and lower graduation rates.¹⁶

Students who are off-track and display one or both of these additional risk factors are categorized as “severely off-track,” given their heightened risk profile for not graduating on time.

Students who are on-track from a credit perspective, but display concerning trends in attendance and/or behavior, are considered “at-risk due to other factors.”

The total at-risk population comprises students who are off-track, severely off-track, and at-risk due to other factors; these are the students in need of both identification and support to prevent them from falling through the cracks and potentially experiencing disconnection.

i. Research suggests gig economy work is often worse for individuals than formal employment due to its instability, income variability, and limited access to benefits, which ultimately undermine long-term financial security. See appendix for detailed approach 1A

This report draws insight from various quantitative and qualitative sources, including a novel and expansive data set of young people in Connecticut.

Our research is the first to utilize an individual-level, longitudinal database that integrates both in-school and out-of-school data of all 527,000 young people who attended Connecticut high schools from 2014 to 2022; this was the largest data request to be processed by P20 WIN to date (See Appendix B.)

Specifically, the data pulls from the following entities:

- Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH)
- Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- Department of Labor (DOL)
- Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)
- State Department of Education (SDE)

This report also incorporates data from the Judicial Branch and the Department of Corrections to better understand young people’s involvement in the justice system from 2015 to 2021. Given that the Judicial Branch and the Department of Corrections were not part of P20 WIN at the time the data request was completed, data from these sources was analyzed separately from the integrated longitudinal dataset. The two agencies have since joined P20 WIN.

Lastly, the analysis was augmented with census data from the American Community Survey from 2015 to 2021.¹⁷

In addition to the quantitative sources, the report leverages extensive qualitative research, including:

- 100+ interviews with Connecticut stakeholders, including educators and district leaders, municipal and state leaders, employers, funders, researchers, and nonprofit leaders
- Detailed reviews of existing relevant literature
- Interviews with young people (in partnership with Markeshia Ricks, an independent writer)

Though this report provides the most comprehensive view to date of Connecticut’s at-risk and disconnected young people, it also opens opportunities to further hone the analysis moving forward.

- Develop a more integrated view using data on how the justice system interacts with the education and labor systems with regard to young people who are at-risk or experiencing disconnection
- Gain a deeper understanding of the out-of-school experiences of this population by further expanding the number of state agencies/data providers to participate in data sharing
- Expand the comprehensiveness of this study by conducting and incorporating research to fill gaps in available data sources (e.g., self-employment and gig economy work, disconnection patterns of young people who are based in the state but did not attend high school in the state, etc.)

This report draws insight from...
a novel and expansive data set





SECTION 1:

Data Insights

SECTION 1A:

Counts and Trends of At-Risk and Disconnected Young People

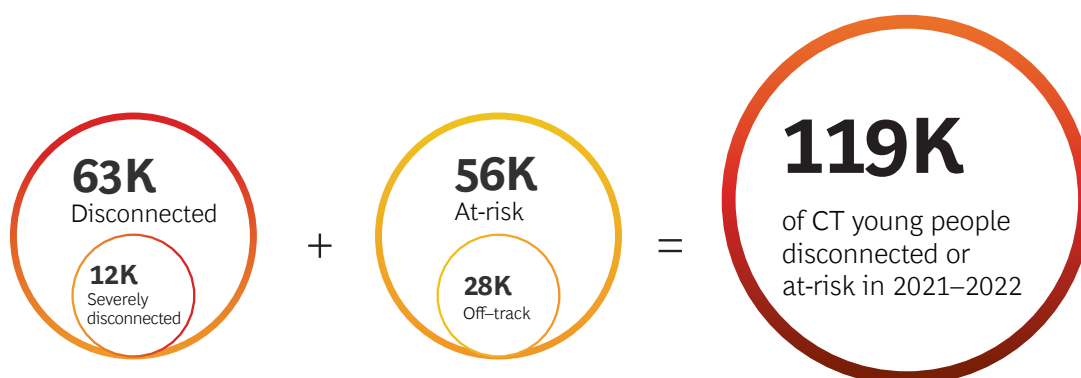
One in five of Connecticut’s 14- to 26-year-olds were either at-risk or disconnected in 2022.

In Connecticut, 119,000 young people (aged 14–26) were either at-risk or disconnected in 2022. (See Exhibit 2.) This figure includes 63,000 disconnected young people with limited connection to employment and education, of whom

12,000 were severely disconnected, meaning they were not employed/enrolled in a workforce program and had not attained a high school diploma or equivalent. It also includes 56,000 at-risk high school students who were exhibiting warning signs that they might not graduate high school, which heightens risk of disconnection.

EXHIBIT 2

Approximately one in five Connecticut Young People Was Disconnected or At-Risk in 2021–2022



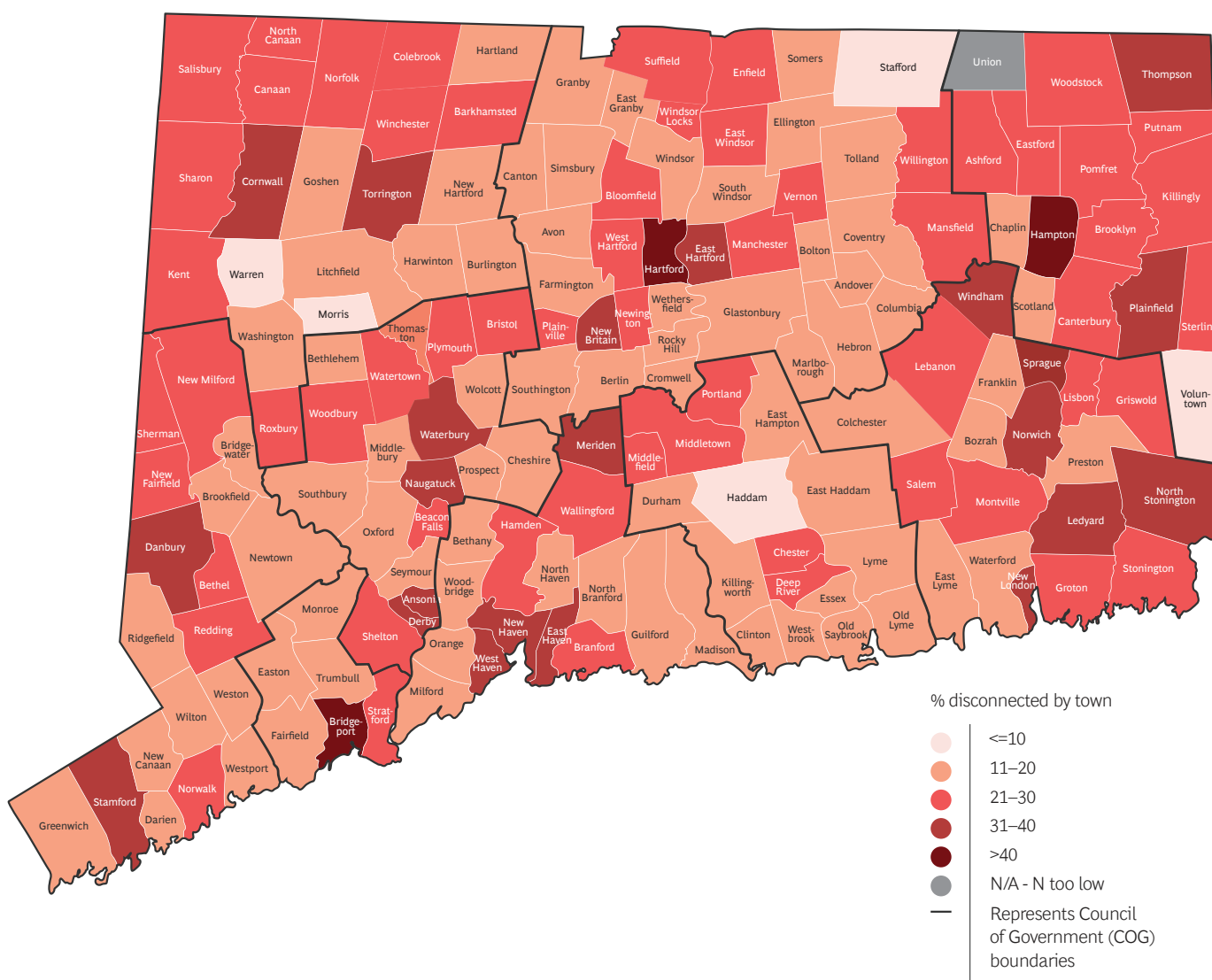
Source: American Community Survey, P20 WIN, BCG analysis

At-risk and disconnected young people can be found in every town in Connecticut, indicating a widespread issue.

At-risk and disconnected young people can be found in every corner of the state. (See Exhibit 3.) Of Connecticut’s

169 municipalities, 138 have had at least 50 young people *newly disconnected* over the five-year period from 2017 to 2022. Additionally, 134 municipalities have had at least 50 at-risk young people in the 2021–22 school year. (See Exhibit 4.)

EXHIBIT 3
Map of Young People Aged 14–26
Experiencing Disconnection in Connecticut

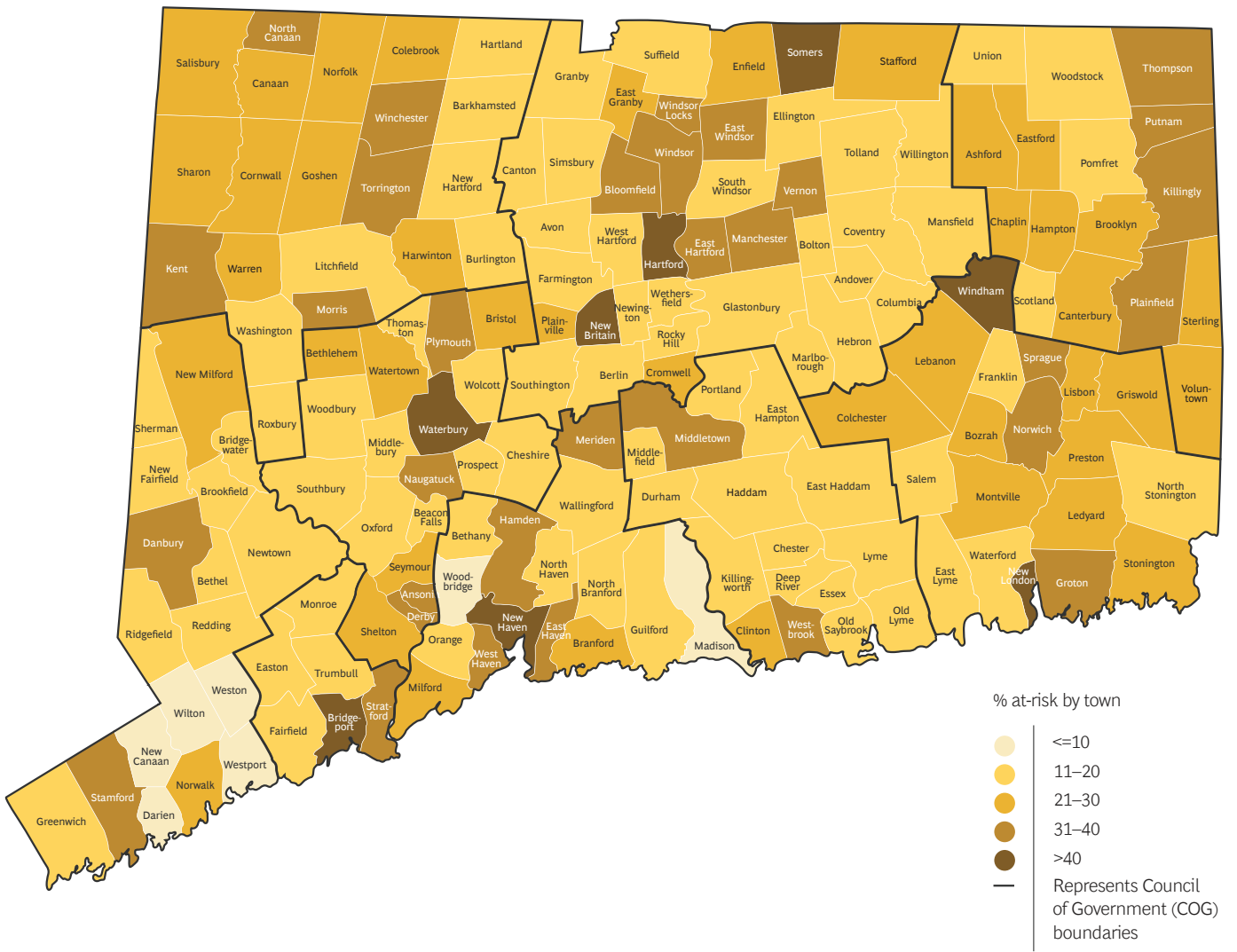


Source: P20 WIN (2017-2022), BCG analysis

Note: % disconnected by town, age 14–26.

EXHIBIT 4

Map of High School Students At Risk of Not Graduating In Connecticut



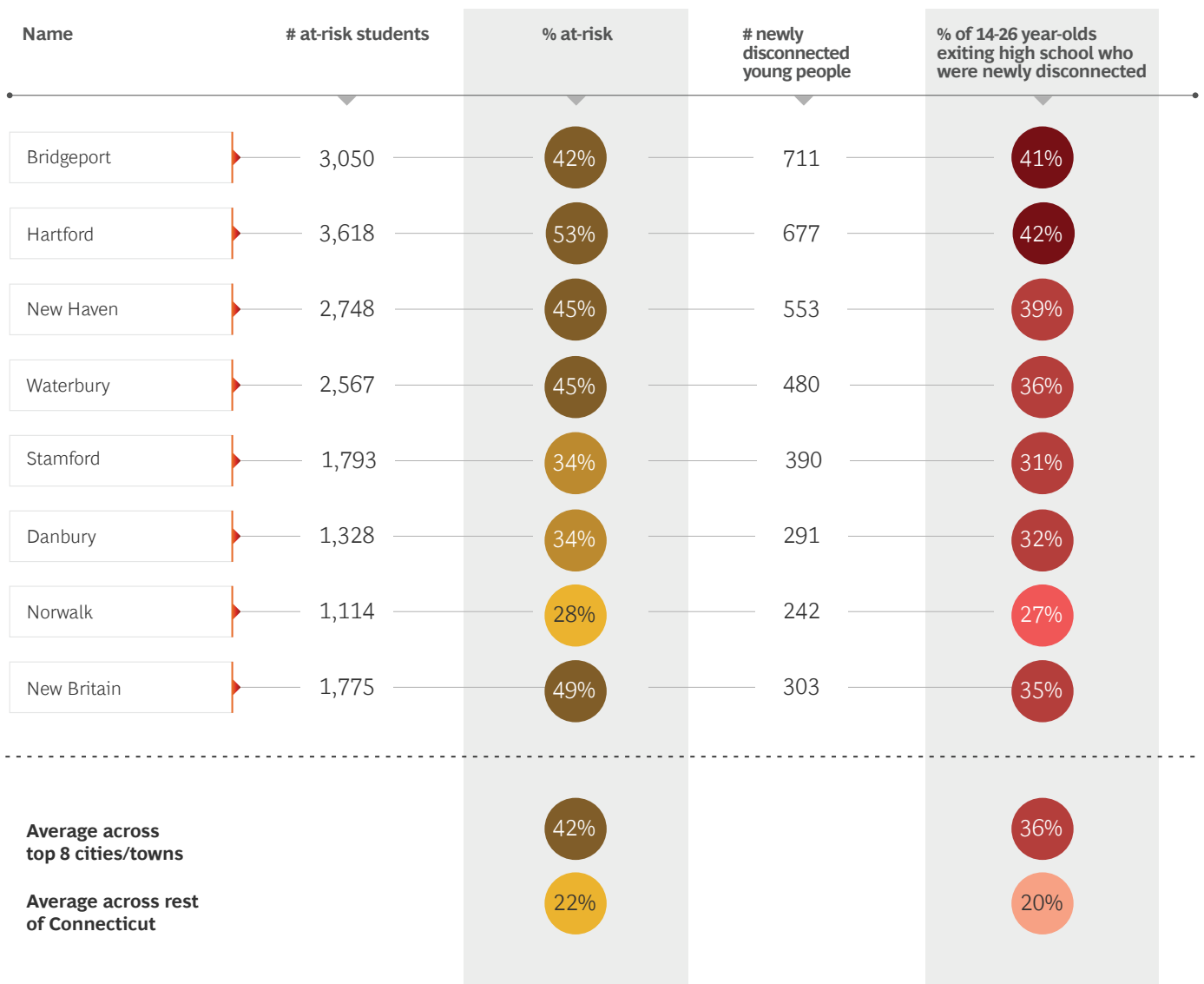
Source: P20 WIN (2017-2022), BCG analysis

There are large concentrations of at-risk and disconnected young people (aged 14–26) in Connecticut’s eight largest cities and towns; many rural towns are also experiencing higher concentrations of at-risk and disconnection.

There are major concentrations of at-risk and disconnected young people in the state’s eight largest cities: Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Waterbury, Stamford, Danbury, Norwalk, and New Britain. Reviewing data across a

five-year period (2017–2022), the research found that these cities have particularly high rates of at-risk young people (42% versus 22% across the rest of Connecticut) and those who are disconnected (36% versus 20% across the rest of Connecticut). In fact, these cities (among Connecticut’s 169 municipalities), constitute 40% of all at-risk and 36% of all disconnected young people in the state, starkly illustrating the acute challenges facing its urban communities.ⁱⁱ (See Exhibit 5.)

**EXHIBIT 5
Number of At-Risk and Disconnected Young People
in the State’s Eight Largest Cities and Towns**



Source: P20 WIN (2014-2022), BCG analysis

ii. Statistics use aggregated data from 2017 to 2022 to ensure adequate sample size at town- level.

But cities are not the only areas of concern. As can be gleaned from exhibits 3 and 4, Connecticut’s rural towns, especially those in the eastern and western parts of the state, are also experiencing higher concentrations of at-risk and disconnected young people. For example, the small towns of Sterling, Sprague, and Salisbury have disconnection rates of 30%, 28%, and 34%, respectively. To help all at-risk and disconnected young people get back on track, a strategy that accounts for the diversity of communities across Connecticut is required.

Not only are at-risk and disconnected young people (aged 14–26) everywhere across the state, but they are also often highly transient and frequently move across town lines.

Eleven percent of Connecticut’s high school students transfer schools once during their tenure, and another 9% of high school students transfer schools at least twice. As will be covered in more detail in Section 1C, transiency is associated with higher rates of disconnection (52% of high school students who transfer high schools at least twice experience disconnection one year after high school versus 19% of students who never transfer high schools), illustrating how both the underlying unstable living conditions of some families and the disruptive act of changing schools can contribute to disconnection.

These school transfers happen both across town lines and within a single town. Overall, 70% of school transfers

happen across town lines.ⁱⁱⁱ Particularly high rates of school transfers across town lines can be seen in Connecticut’s smaller rural towns such as Cornwall (30 transfers per 100 high school students each year), Sprague (29), and Hampton (27), compared with the state town median of 11. These figures point to the importance of a coordinated approach across the state to identify, monitor, and support young people at risk of disconnection.

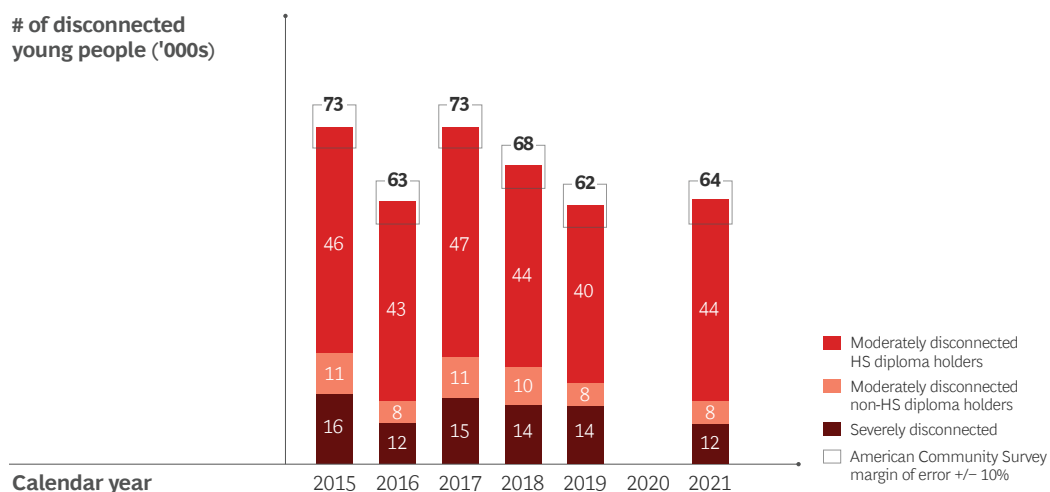
In addition, 30% of school transfers happen across high schools within a single town. These transfers can also be quite disruptive and are seen most often in Connecticut’s larger cities and towns. Particularly high rates of school transfers within town lines were observed in Hartford (10 school transfers per 100 high school students each year), New Britain (7), and East Hartford (6), compared with the state town median of 2.

Despite steps Connecticut has taken to improve outcomes for young people, the count of disconnected young people has remained consistently—and concerningly—high.

Despite improvement in graduation rates and reduced incarceration counts, from 2015–2021, the number of disconnected young people has stayed between 62,000 and 73,000 (10–12% of 14- to 26-year-olds). (See Exhibit 6.) This number should be interpreted as roughly constant, given that it is within the margin of error of American Community Survey data.^{iv18}

EXHIBIT 6

Number of Disconnected Young People, 2015–2021



Source: American Community Survey, BCG analysis

Note: Standard one-year American Community Survey data was not published for 2020 due to pandemic-related data collection challenges.

iii. Inclusive of both school transfers between two Connecticut towns and school transfers both to and from outside the state.

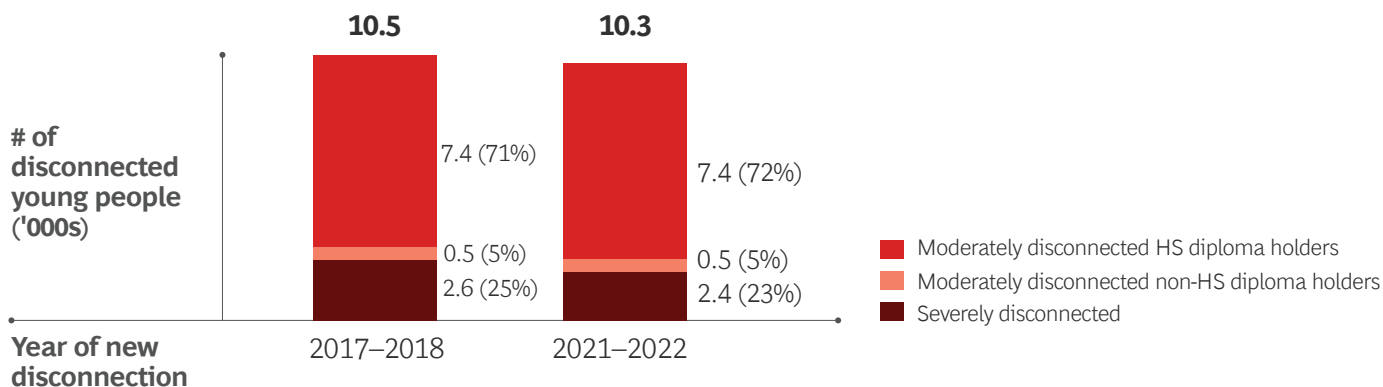
iv. All subsequent analyses on disconnection use counts of newly disconnected young people sourced from the P20 WIN data.

Adding to the 60,000–70,000 disconnected young people, roughly 10,000 young people newly experience disconnection each year.^v Despite declines in the population of school-going young people, the number of newly disconnected young people has seen little

movement since 2017, indicating limited progress in preventing new young people from experiencing disconnection. (See Exhibit 7.)

EXHIBIT 7

Number of Young People Becoming Newly Disconnected



Source: P20 WIN, BCG analysis

Of the 10,000 young people newly disconnected each year, 7,000 are moderately disconnected high school graduates, which means that while they graduated high school, they were not employed, pursuing postsecondary education, or in a workforce training program in their first year after graduation.^{vi}

The remaining 3,000 newly disconnected young people are high school non-graduates. Three out of four of these non-graduates experience the most severe form of disconnection in their first year after exiting school, with no connection to employment or educational attainment. The overall count of non-graduates has declined 11% from 2017–2022 due to improved high school graduation rates, driving the slight decline seen in the exhibit.

The sheer size of the high school graduate population accounts for their comprising much of the disconnected group, though high school graduates are significantly less likely to experience disconnection than high school non-graduates (18% of graduates experience disconnection versus 97% of non-graduates).

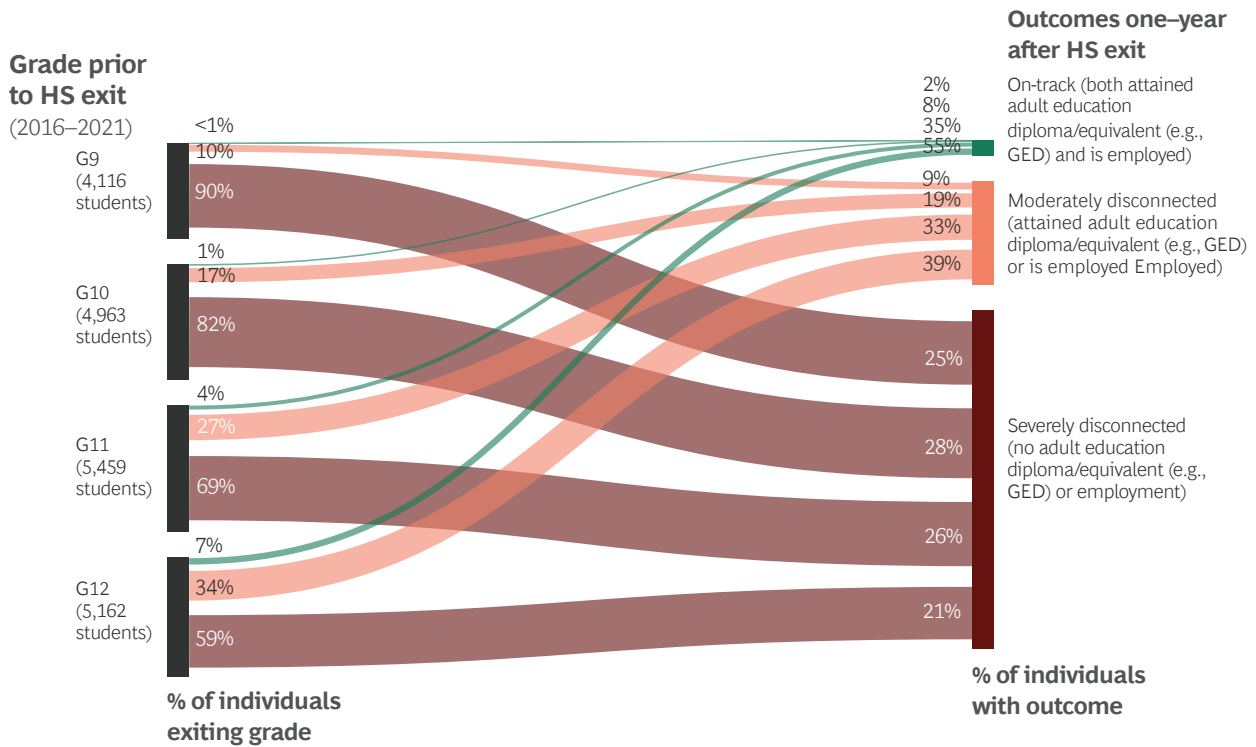
The timing of when an individual drops out of high school also greatly influences outcomes—as seen in Exhibit 8, students who drop out at higher grades are less likely to experience severe disconnection. This is in part because younger students are more likely to experience severe disconnection a year after exiting high school (e.g., a 16-year-old who drops out in 10th grade is 22 percentage points more likely to be severely disconnected than an 18-year-old who drops out in 10th grade). But this is more than about age. The vast majority of high school non-graduates (71%) are 18 years old and above, and even controlling for age, students are less likely to be severely disconnected if they drop out at a higher grade level (an 18-year-old who drops out in 12th grade is 29 percentage points less likely to be severely disconnected than an 18-year-old who drops out in 9th grade).

v. This 10,000 figure and the report’s other analyses on disconnection are likely to be a slight overestimate, given that the integrated P20 WIN data used does not allow us to identify how many young people, instead of experiencing disconnection, actually moved out of Connecticut. Migration trends leveraging the American Community Survey suggest that upward of 5%–10% of young people flagged as having disconnected may have left the state.

vi. This data and all subsequent analysis on disconnection reflect outcomes one year after an individual was last enrolled in high school. See appendix for detailed approach 1B

EXHIBIT 8

The Point at Which an Individual Exits High School Influences Outcomes



Source: P20 WIN (2016–2021), BCG analysis

The warning signs of disconnection can be traced to high school, if not earlier, indicating the importance of identifying and understanding the at-risk population.

As is well documented in the field, the in-school indicator of being at-risk (low credit attainment, behavioral incidents, and/or absenteeism) is strongly correlated with not graduating high school, with 83% of non-graduates identifying as at-risk at some point during their high school tenure, compared with 34% of graduates. In fact, the warning signs can already be clearly observed in 9th grade, at which point 75% of non-graduates were at-risk, as compared with 18% of graduates.

In addition to being associated with non-graduation, this indicator of at-risk is correlated with experiencing disconnection after high school. Even among high school graduates, having been identified as at-risk at any point during their high school tenure was associated with increased disconnection. 59% of high school graduates who became disconnected in the year after high school were flagged as at-risk—a figure far higher than the 28% of high school graduates who did not become disconnected

(because they secured employment and/or pursued postsecondary education) who were at-risk in high school.

This data shows the importance of understanding today’s at-risk population in order to proactively intervene and prevent potential future disconnection.

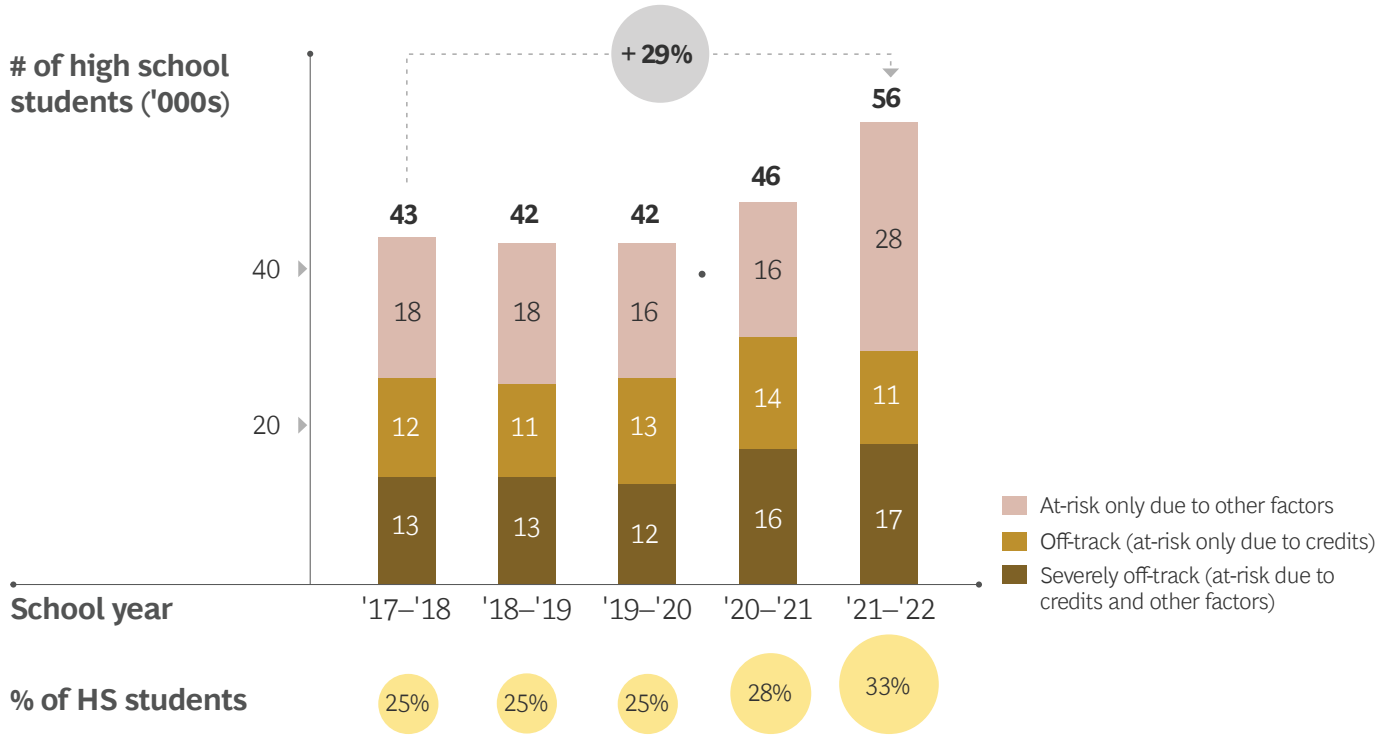
One in three Connecticut high school students is at risk of not graduating, largely driven by a 97% increase in absenteeism from 2017–2022.

In 2022, 56,000 students (or 33% of high schoolers) were at risk of not graduating and were thus also at risk of experiencing disconnection. This population grew 29% from 2017–2022. Purely from a credit attainment perspective, 28,000 of these students (or 17% of high schoolers) were off-track or severely off-track during the 2021–2022 school year.^{vii} More than 50% of this population were severely off-track or also displaying risk factors of absenteeism and/or behavioral issues. Students who are exhibiting multiple risk factors should be of particular concern to school and district leaders.

vii. The difference in ages is due to data constraints that do not allow for tracking disconnected young people through age 24. For the age 22 analysis, ACS data was used to estimate the percentage of young people who may have left the state prior to age 22 to avoid underestimating educational attainment and employment figures.

EXHIBIT 9

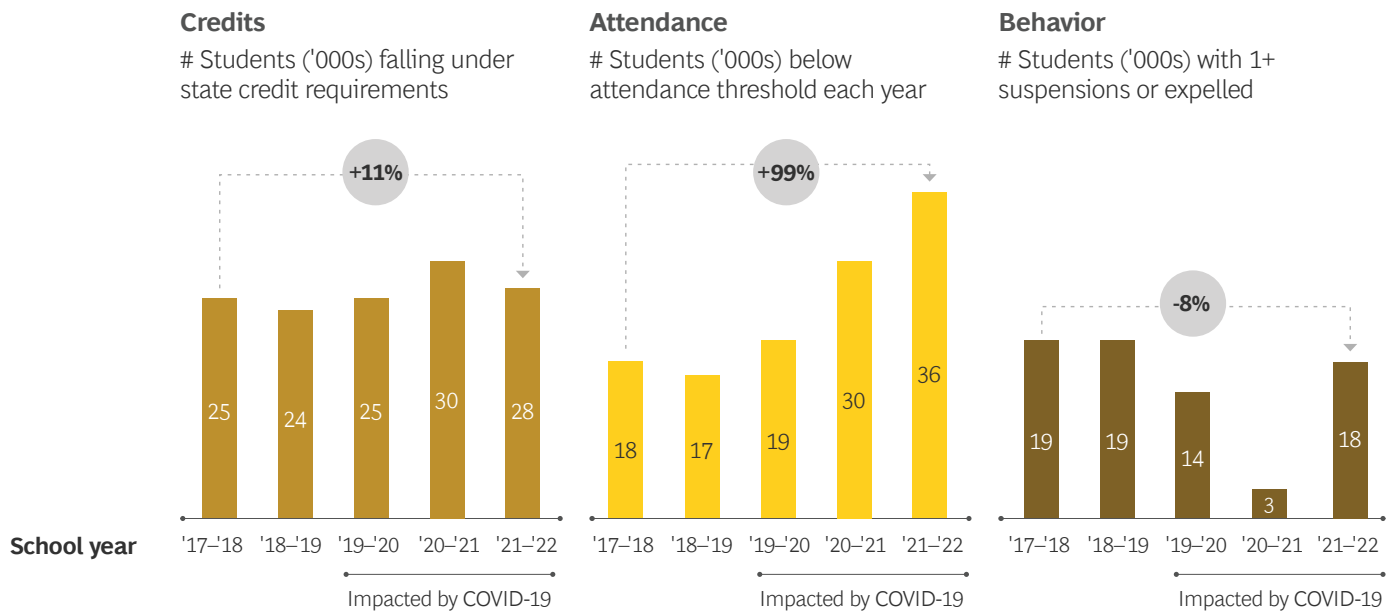
Connecticut High School Students At Risk of Not Graduating



Source: P20 WIN, BCG analysis

EXHIBIT 10

Increase in At-Risk Population Largely Driven by Dramatic Increase in Chronic Absenteeism



Source: P20 WIN, BCG analysis

The trends seen in the exhibit were driven, at least in part, by the impact of the pandemic. COVID-19 disrupted student learning by forcing instruction to move online and adding trauma and stressors to student lives. Over this period, there was a significant increase in the at-risk population, largely due to a sharp increase in absenteeism. Interestingly, despite the rise in absenteeism from 2019–2022, there was not a commensurate increase in students falling behind on credit attainment.

Though CSDE K–12 data from the most recent school year (2022–23) shows a slight decline in chronic absenteeism, the counts remain concerningly elevated compared with pre-pandemic levels.¹⁹

The increase in at-risk count over the past few years has not translated to a significant decline in graduation rates . . . yet.

High school graduation rates increased by 1.3 percentage points from 2018–2021 but recently dipped 0.7 percentage points between the class of 2021 and class of 2022.²⁰ One potential explanation is that the impact of the data above has not yet fully flowed through to graduation outcomes and the state will see a commensurate decline in the next few years. Another potential explanation cited by stakeholders is that more students were put on alternative graduation plans (e.g., tracking toward graduating in five years versus four) during this time and therefore were not

included in the reported graduation rate calculations. A related hypothesis was that educators and district leaders, seeing the disruptive impact the pandemic had on students, passed students who may have otherwise been identified as needing to repeat courses/grades.

Regardless of the explanation, people should be concerned about the implications of the data above. Some graduating students are leaving high school with worse credit attainment and attendance vs. prior years, likely resulting in a reduced level of preparedness for the critical next stage of their lives. If the current trajectory continues, the count of at-risk students could remain elevated. Today's high school students who are at-risk have the potential to become tomorrow's disconnected young people, so timely intervention to get them back on track is critical.

“We are at risk of losing a generation”

– Leader of nonprofit serving at-risk and disconnected young people



SIDE BAR 1:

Danielle's Story

Danielle was just learning the ropes of middle school when the world changed. She'd experienced the loss of friends while navigating having a boyfriend. "A lot of people turned their back on me," she says. "Then COVID-19 happened, and I never went back to school."

She finished seventh and eighth grade online, like so many other students who had their education and social development interrupted by the pandemic. "We graduated eighth grade on the computer," she recalls. "We had to pick up [graduation] gowns just to wear them on the computer. It was crazy."

Danielle entered her freshman year of high school during the post-pandemic shift back to in-person school, but she wanted no part of it.

"I didn't want to go back to school," she says. "I didn't want to meet new people. I already had too many problems."

Danielle showed up to her designated high school twice—and spent one of those days in in-school suspension. She refused to go back after that.

There were people around her who wanted her to finish school, including a friend who tried to help her understand that there was value in getting a diploma. But all she wanted to do was be alone.

Then, while facing a truancy case, Danielle learned about an alternative education program in Hartford, where she could recover the credits she needed to graduate without having to be in a traditional school setting. She saw it as a lifeline and asked to be allowed to participate.

Danielle affirms that it has been the best thing for her. She's gone from having zero high school credits toward graduation to earning ten credits in less than a year. She's also thinking about the future, with a focus on what she needs to do right now that she didn't have before the program.

"I feel like it would have been better if I could have been in this program [in ninth grade]," she says. "I probably already would have graduated and been heading to college."

Danielle says she never wanted to go to college before the program because it seemed like it would take too long. Now, the 17-year-old (she turns 18 in January) is thinking about a career as a pediatric nurse or a cosmetologist.

"I'm just now realizing school goes by like that," she says, snapping her fingers. "It takes time for you to understand that."

Authored by Markeshia Ricks

“COVID-19 happened, and I never went back to school”

SECTION 1B:

Impact of Disconnection on Educational Attainment and Employment Outcomes

In this section, we leveraged longitudinal data from Connecticut’s school systems, employment records, and postsecondary education and training institutions to conduct two related analyses:^{viii}

- To understand the impact of educational attainment and labor force participation on wages at age 24
- To examine the impact of post–high school disconnection on educational attainment and wages by age 22

Not surprisingly, greater educational attainment and more consistent employment were linked to significantly higher annual wages at age 24—indeed, wages were more than five times higher for young people who gained some postsecondary training and work experience. More profound were the findings related to young people who experience disconnection straight out of high school.

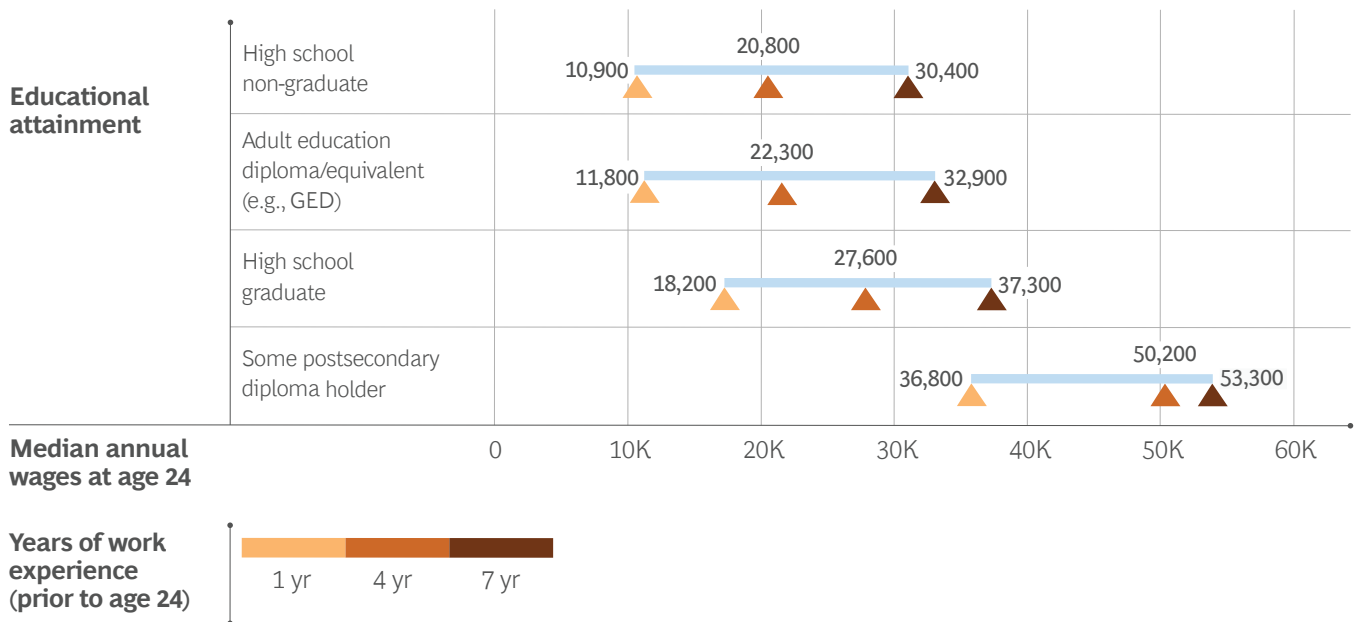
Overall, these young people are significantly less likely to earn a high school diploma and reach a living wage by age 22. Below we delve into these findings in greater detail.

Differences in educational attainment and in years of work experience already lead to significant differences in annual earnings by age 24.

As seen in Exhibit 11, by age 24 there is already a clear and significant earnings gap across both levels of educational attainment and years of work experience.^{ix} For example, a high school non-graduate and a high school graduate with the same years of work experience have a median annual earnings gap of roughly \$5,000–\$11,000. Similarly, having consistent work experience grows earnings across every level of educational attainment, with earnings growing by \$17,000–\$20,000 from having one year of some work experience to having seven.

Based on the national literature, it is evident that these early differences compound over the course of a lifetime. For instance, the median lifetime earnings of a full-time, full-year worker with a high school diploma are \$1.6 million, compared with \$2 million for an associate’s degree, \$2.8 million for a bachelor’s, and \$3.2 million for a master’s.²¹

EXHIBIT 11 Educational Attainment and Years of Work Experience Are Both Critical to Wage Growth



Source: P20 WIN (2016-2021), BCG analysis

viii. Defined as having some experience in a year, and as having worked enough to have earned at least \$7,000 (the equivalent of working full-time at ALICE wages for one quarter of the year). Age 24 is the selected cutoff, given that most young people are likely to have finished schooling and entered the workforce by this age.
 ix. Defined as earning greater than or equal to \$7,000 in a year.

Moreover, looking specifically at young people who become disconnected immediately upon exit from high school shows what a crucial juncture this is.

Next, we zoomed in on young people who became disconnected immediately upon exit from high school, with or without a degree. The goal was to examine how this vulnerable population fared in young adulthood within their first few years after high school.

In terms of educational outcomes, the analysis found that only a minority of disconnected young people completed further education and improved their earning power by age 22.

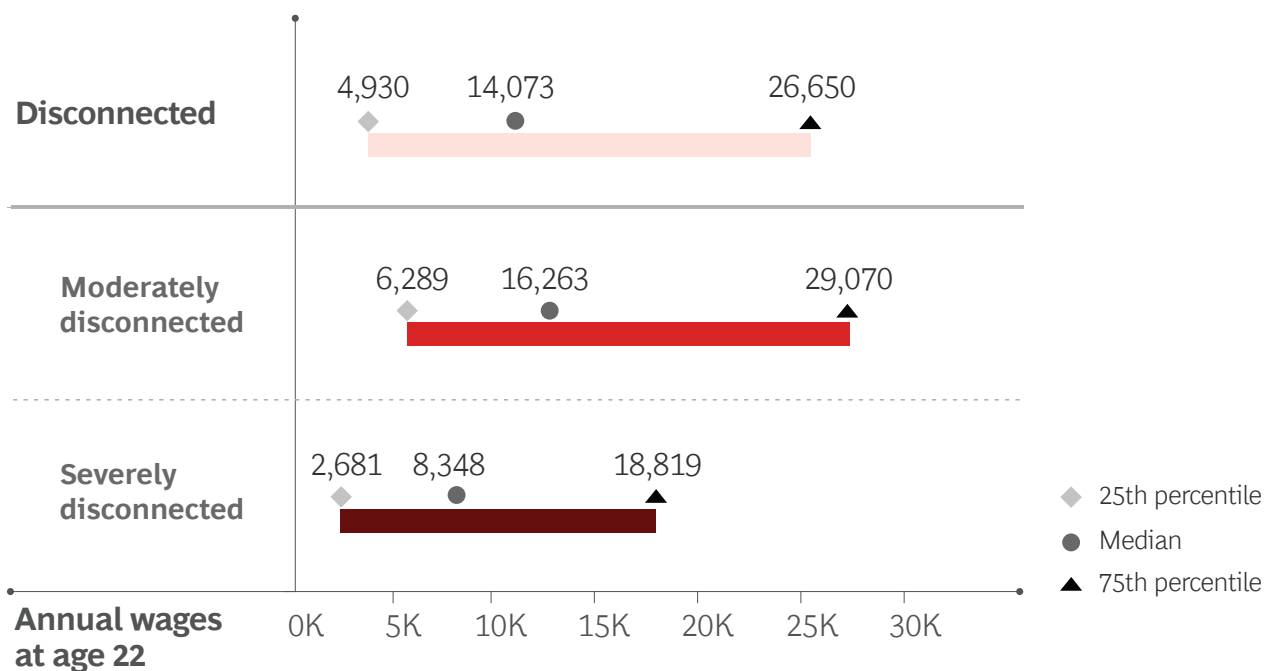
- Among high school non-graduates, just 24% could be confirmed as having earned an adult education diploma/equivalent (e.g., GED) or returned to high school and graduated (22% and 2%, respectively) by age 22. (As seen above, attaining an adult education diploma/equivalent (e.g., GED) still leads to significantly lower earnings than those of traditional high school graduates.)
- Among disconnected high school graduates, only 14% could be confirmed as having completed a postsecondary degree or currently enrolled in a postsecondary program at age 22 (6% and 8%, respectively). By contrast, 68% of connected high school graduates (those who immediately pursued

postsecondary education and/or entered the workforce) had completed a postsecondary degree or were enrolled in a postsecondary program at age 22 (53% and 15%, respectively).

Likewise, in terms of employment outcomes, immediate disconnection upon exit from high school has a profound impact on both employment and wages. Our analysis found that only 40% of young people who experienced disconnection immediately after high school could be confirmed as employed at age 22, (See appendix B) even after excluding young people who might not be working because they were pursuing a postsecondary degree. Outcomes for the severely disconnected were even worse: among those who neither completed high school nor entered the workforce, only 31% were employed at age 22. The majority remained unemployed or were involved in the gig or informal economy.²² This stands in stark contrast to the 69% of connected young people who were employed at age 22.

Even among those disconnected young people who achieved employment by age 22, their incomes were well below what would be considered a “living” wage. As seen in Exhibit 12, their median annual earnings were \$14,000. For young people who experienced severe disconnection the first year out of high school, the median wage was even lower, just \$8,348. By comparison, the ALICE threshold—the benchmark for economic independence in Connecticut—for a single adult is roughly \$25,000.²³

**EXHIBIT 12
Annual Wages at Age 22 for Young People Who Became Disconnected in the First Year After High School**



Source: P20 WIN (2014-2022), BCG analysis

The data presented in Exhibit 12 illustrates the significant and sustained negative impact of experiencing disconnection immediately after high school, further underscoring the need for interventions before they become disconnected while also accelerating the progress of disconnected young people into postsecondary training

programs and employment. These early education and work experiences are vital to ensuring that young people can build the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary to achieve economic independence, sustain a family, and contribute to the state's economic and civic life.

Experiencing disconnection has a significant and sustained negative impact on both employment and wages



SIDE BAR 2:

Kendrick's Story

Kendrick didn't want to attend a school where he didn't know anyone and where most of the teachers and students didn't look like him. But that's what happened when he moved from his native New York City to Greenwich.

He and his mother lived with his uncle in a three-room house where he and his mom shared a room and a bed. His mother would eventually move back to New York to be with his stepfather.

"I went through a depressive phase," he recalls. "I felt like I didn't have real friendships." Kendrick remembers feeling so isolated and alone that he requested a transfer to alternative school so he could be with his friends. "But they just said that that wasn't me," he says.

He did well enough academically and behaviorally that he didn't end up in alternative school—even if he did eat lunch alone, under the stairs. He played football and made some friends, but they were the kind of friends who encouraged skipping class and smoking marijuana.

He describes how he resisted the drug scene until after he graduated high school but fell deeply into addiction while enrolled at Western Connecticut State University, where he played football.

An injury upended Kendrick's college football career and he began using cocaine, rapidly changing the trajectory of his life. He first went to prison in 2016 and served nine months. Returning home without support, he reverted to his habits and was back in prison two years later.

Before he got out the second time, he was able to enroll in a reentry program designed to help individuals returning

from incarceration to develop the behaviors and skills needed to prevent recidivism. A man from the program, who had also been justice-involved, became his mentor and visited him often before and after he came out of prison. "He was actually the only person [who visited while I was incarcerated] because my family is in New York, so being all the way up in Enfield, I didn't really get visitors," he says.

Ultimately, his mentor and the program helped him get on his feet with skills training and his first job. The program went on to help him when he became a first-time father and when he went on to purchase his first house for his new family.

Kendrick says if he could go back in time and re-do parts of his life, he would go back to his freshman year in high school. While he doesn't know if his younger self would have been ready to receive the kind of help that he needed to address the problems he faced as a young person, he thinks he could have benefited from a mentorship opportunity like the kind he received after he got out of prison.

"That would have made a huge difference, honestly," he says.

Authored by Markeshia Ricks

Ultimately, his mentor and the program helped him get on his feet with skills training and his first job.

SECTION 1C:

Factors Associated with Disconnection

This section aims to capture the factors most strongly correlated with disconnection to help point stakeholders to the specific young people (aged 14–26) who are most vulnerable and enable them to develop targeted interventions to better support them.^x

Young people of almost all races/ethnicities are more likely to experience disconnection compared with White young people, with Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian/Alaskan Native young people being twice as likely.

Minority communities often experience this type of outcome disparity, as they are systematically disadvantaged by

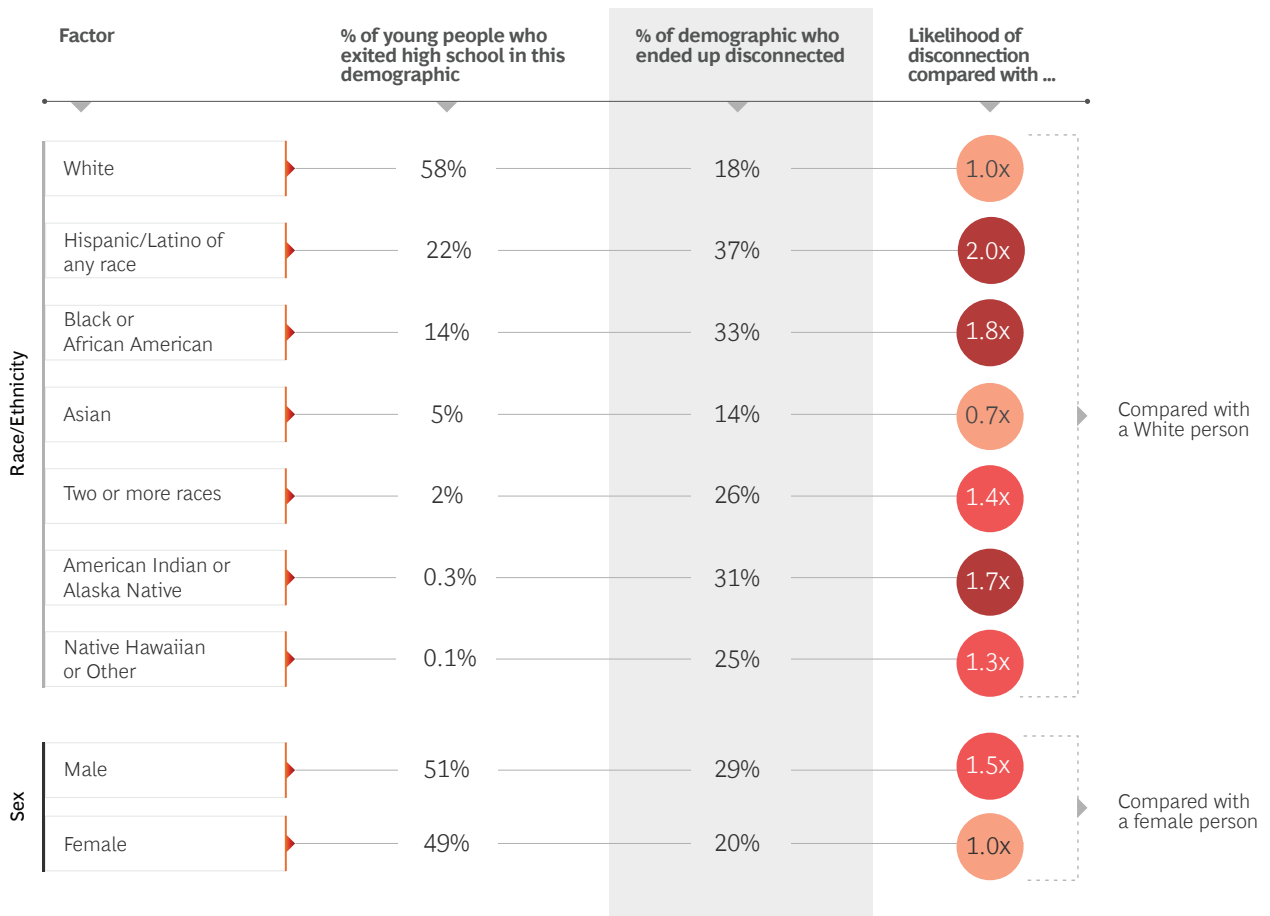
historic inequities, marginalization, and racial biases that lead to inequitable access to resources and opportunities.

Key data points from Exhibit 13 are:

- **Hispanic/Latino** young people have the strongest association with disconnection, at 2 times that of White young people.
- **Black or African American** young people have the second strongest association, at 1.8 times that of White young people.
- 29% of young **men** are disconnected versus 20% of young women, indicating heightened risk of disconnection dependent on sex.
- **Young men of color** (Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaskan Native) are particularly vulnerable to disconnection, with 41% of this population ending up disconnected.

EXHIBIT 13

Young People of Almost All Non-White Races/Ethnicities Are More Likely to Experience Disconnection



Source: P20 WIN (2014-2022), BCG analysis

x. Based on percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch (as defined by National Center for Education Statistics research).

A young person who experiences just one of the out-of-school or in-school factors has a two to three times stronger association with disconnection than a young person who does not experience any.

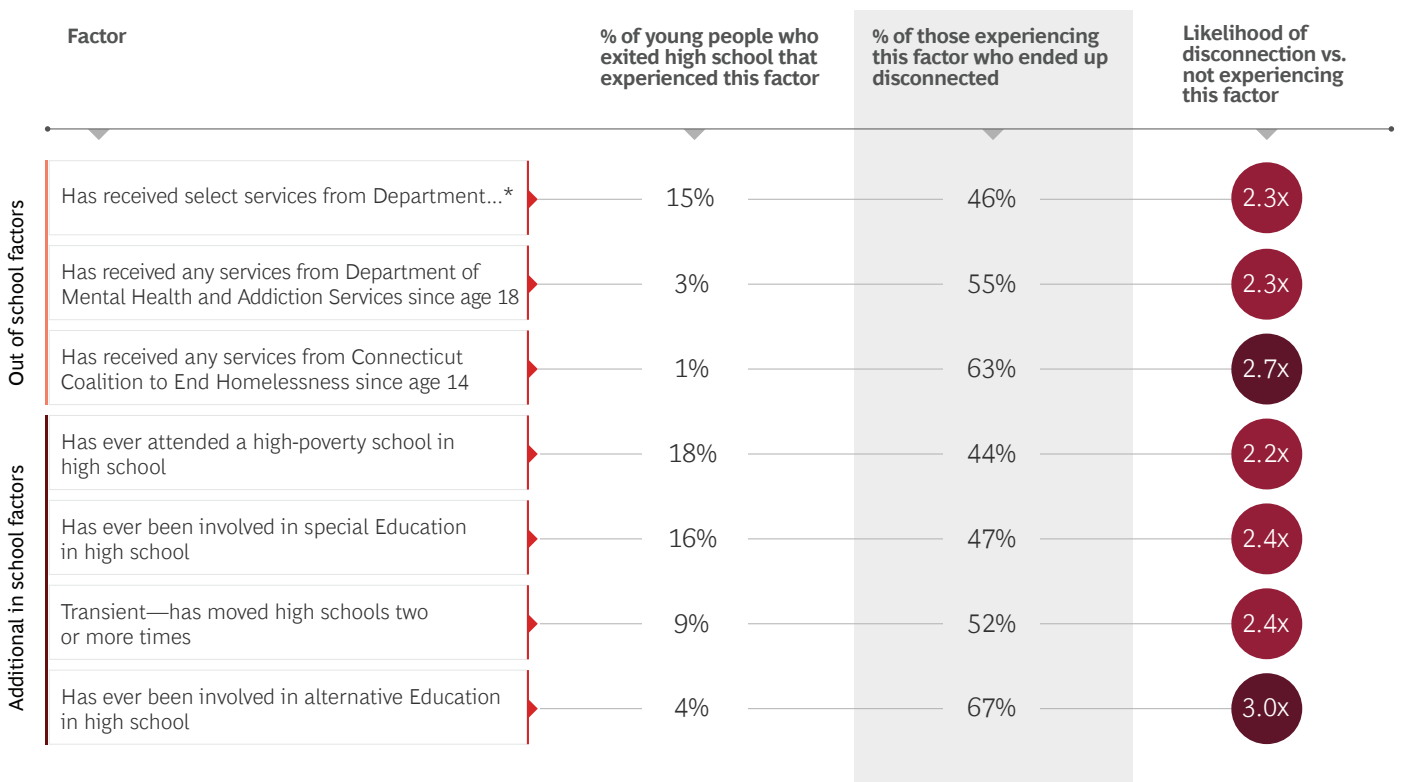
All the factors listed in Exhibit 14 have a strong association with disconnection, implying that they could be effective indicators for educators and other stakeholders to monitor for risk of disconnection. Particularly salient takeaways from the data are:

- Fifteen percent of Connecticut young people aged 14-17 **received select services from Department of Children and Families**, which include (but are not limited to) foster care placement, mental health supports, and responses to allegations. Receiving these services is used as a proxy for a young person’s mental health needs and/or trauma associated with their family context, contributing to their heightened association with disconnection (2.3 times). This data highlights a group in need of additional supports.

- Being involved in **special education** at some point in high school is another factor that is strongly associated with disconnection (2.4 times), revealing another easily identifiable segment of young people in need of supports both before and after graduation.
- Forty-four percent of young people who ever attended a **high-poverty school**^{xi24} during high school end up disconnected, illustrating the acute detrimental effect exposure to poverty can have on outcomes.
- Perhaps less well known than some of the other factors, **transiency** during high school (defined as moving high school 2+ times) has a 2.4 times association with disconnection (compared with moving high schools 0–1 times), indicating a clear need for district leaders to improve monitoring and support for this population, especially in times of transition.

EXHIBIT 14

Out-of-School and In-School Factors Heighten Risk of Disconnection



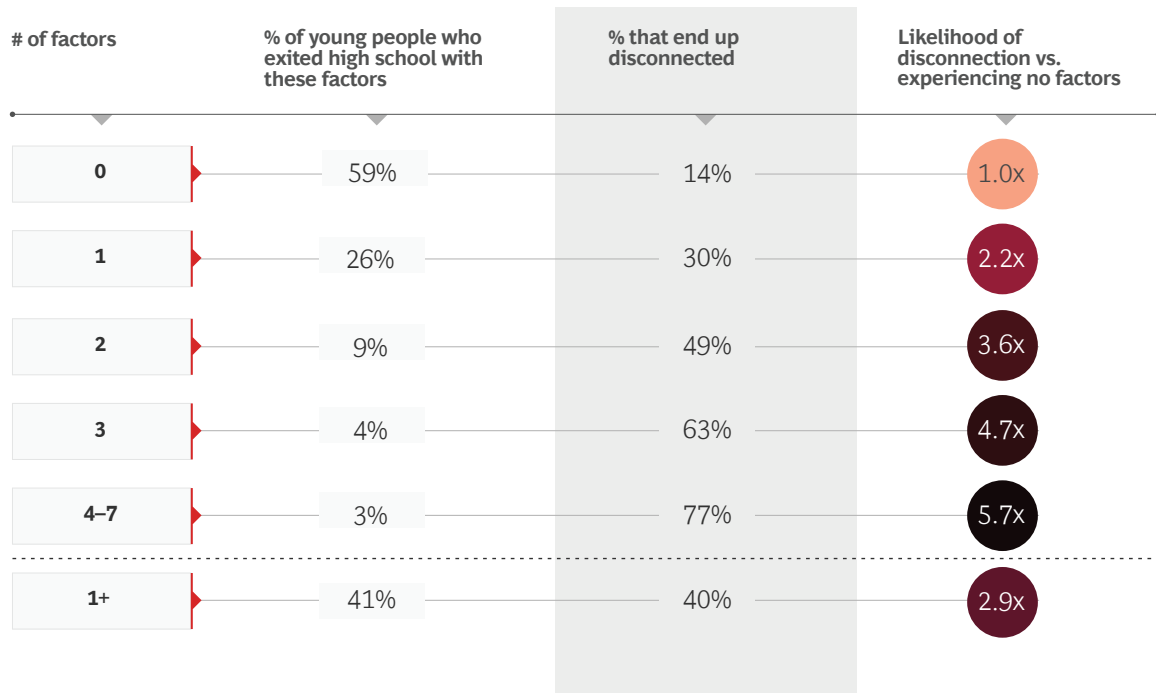
*Has received Child Protective Services, or >=1 Contracted Service, from Department of Children and Families since age 14

Source: P20 WIN (2014-2022), BCG analysis

xi. Data sourced from Department of Corrections, Judicial Branch, State Department of Education (2021)

EXHIBIT 15

More Risk Factors Increase Association with Disconnection



Source: P20 WIN (2014-2022), BCG analysis

Young people experiencing multiple factors often face underlying conditions (e.g., poverty, trauma, challenging home environment, and exposure to violence either by perpetrating or being victimized by it) that contribute to their outcomes. For example, University of Chicago research found that 90% of school-aged Chicago youth who are victims of shootings are not enrolled in school at the time of victimization, illustrating the association between disconnection and vulnerability to violence.²⁵ Another study by Connecticut’s Office of the Child Advocate found that the vast majority of incarcerated boys (under age 18) were at some point involved with the Department of Children and Families for abuse or neglect. Children referred to the child welfare system often struggle with trauma associated with their family instability, making

them even more vulnerable to associations with the justice system.²⁶

In addition to using the factors above as indicators to guide additional supports, it is important for stakeholders working with vulnerable young people to understand and surface the root causes of disconnection and for researchers to uncover the rates at which these underlying conditions are associated with disconnection. The factors listed above are only a selection of those that influence disconnection, so future studies should explore other relevant factors, such as justice involvement, exposure to violence, childcare responsibilities, disability status, and immigration status.

Additional context on factor analysis:

As shared above, this section aims to identify factors strongly correlated with disconnection to help stakeholders better identify and support this population. It does so by identifying factors that are often associated with the conditions individuals experience that influence their outcomes.

This analysis is not meant to...

- Be a judgment of the individuals themselves or determinative of their educational or employment outcomes
- Make a claim about the level of need in this population, given the data captures only a portion of the young

people in need of support services (e.g., mental health issues often go undiagnosed or untreated; in addition, DMHAS provides less than half of the state’s mental health services)

- Make a claim about the effectiveness of services provided, given the data does not capture young people who need services but do not receive it (e.g., data does not show the association with disconnection for young people with untreated mental health issues)

SIDE BAR 3:

Dynell's Story

Dynell has several memories of being bused out of the city where he lived to attend a “better school” in the suburbs. Most of them aren't happy memories.

The 24-year-old remembers changing classes at his predominantly White middle school and having another student come up to him and slap his books out of his hands. “He called me the N-word with the hard R,” Dynell recalls.

When that happened, he did what students are taught to do: he told the principal. A two-day investigation ensued. Though the incident had happened in front of other students, Dynell says that ultimately there were no consequences for the offender. But there were consequences for him.

He and the student would be placed in the same class the following year. “I realized there are sides,” he says. “They were on their side.”

Dynell notes that it wasn't the first or the last time he would feel the sting of discrimination at school or within a system, including the criminal justice system. “They didn't see me as Dynell,” he says of high school. “They kept seeing me as Jamal or Jordan or something else you think in your mind is Black.”

He recalls how he spent many of his high school years battling with teachers to be seen as an individual, but he didn't often win those battles. He faced suspensions. He had struggles at home and was kicked out of the house at 16, but he still managed to graduate at 17.

However, without support, he was arrested just two years later for a crime he maintains he did not commit. He was incarcerated for three years. “I was at the wrong place at the wrong time,” he says of the charge. “I shouldn't have been there.”

Now, he's trying to build a life for himself in the face of what he's learned about systems and navigating them. “It's difficult,” he says.

Dynell wants to continue his education and pursue a career in the music industry. In addition to studying and making music, he aspires to travel the world using his love of the arts.

Authored by Markeshia Ricks

It wasn't the first or the last time he would feel the sting of discrimination

SIDE BAR 4:

Justice Involvement

The criminal and juvenile justice systems often play large roles in the lives of at-risk and disconnected young people (aged 14-26).

For many at-risk and disconnected young people aged 14–26, the criminal and juvenile justice systems play large roles in their lives. Many have had direct interactions and experiences with these systems, including arrests, referrals to the juvenile review board, and participation in diversionary programs. Others have had close family and friends with these experiences, which researchers have found can have a long-term negative impact on a young person’s outcomes, such as heightened risk of dropping out of school or more serious delinquency.²⁷ The justice system is critical to the discussion around at-risk and disconnected young people, given their disproportionate involvement and the many negative outcomes correlated with involvement with the justice system, such as lower rates of educational attainment, lower employment rates and earnings, and higher rates of physical and mental health problems.²⁸ Those who are incarcerated are especially vulnerable; even if they attend school while incarcerated, they remain severely disconnected from societal systems and are likely to face substantial challenges upon release, including financial penalties, difficulties in qualifying for public assistance or housing, challenges to securing and maintaining employment, obstacles to returning to schooling, trauma and poor health outcomes, and ongoing stigma.²⁹

Far too many young people in Connecticut are involved with criminal activity and have interactions with the justice system each year.^{xii} In 2021,

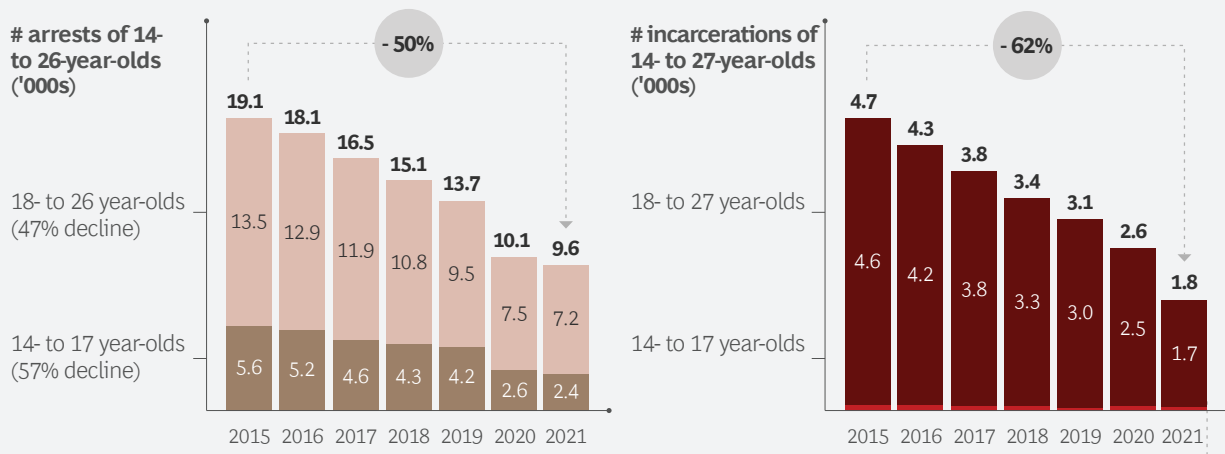
- 9,600 young people (or 1.6% of 14- to 26-year-olds) were arrested
- 1,800 (or 0.3% of 14- to 26-year-olds) were incarcerated, including roughly 215 juveniles who attended school while incarcerated

While young people’s involvement with the criminal and juvenile justice systems has declined significantly in recent years, more needs to be done to reengage the most disconnected young people, who are often repeat offenders, and help get them back on track.

Crime rates and the number of young people aged 14–26 involved with the justice system have declined significantly in Connecticut over the last several years. (See Exhibit 15.) First, violent crime rates have declined 43% from 2012 to 2021 and property crime rates have declined 29% from 2012 to 2021. Second, as seen in Exhibit 15, arrests of young people have declined from ~19,100 in 2015 to ~9,600 in 2021, and the number of incarcerations for young people has declined from ~4,700 in 2015 to ~1,800 in 2021.

EXHIBIT 16

Arrests and Incarcerations Are Down ~50%–62% from 2015 to 2021



Very low number of juveniles incarcerated, which has further declined over time period from 84 to 31

Source: Department of Corrections, Judicial Branch, BCG analysis

xii. Data sourced from Department of Corrections, Judicial Branch, State Department of Education (2021)

Connecticut has seen a consistent decline in reported crime and arrests since 2015, without having impeded the ability of police to make arrests. This suggests that crime has actually gone down, and that the decline is not the result of other external factors or, given the time frame, not merely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The positive implication is that fewer crimes and incarcerated young people means there are fewer severely disconnected young people who need to face the immense challenge of reentering society. Another implication is that upstream efforts to reduce criminal activity over the past decade, such as restorative school-based practices and diversion, seem to be having a positive effect on reducing young adult crime in the aggregate.

However, there is still significant work to be done, especially for the core group of young people aged 14–26 who are still committing crimes, many of whom are repeat offenders; efforts to help this population get back on track are essential. Among the 9,600 young people who were arrested in 2021, roughly half (49%) have already been arrested at least once in the past six years (since 2015), and 29% have been arrested at least three times.³⁰ This trend persists in serious crimes as well—among the 604 juvenile auto theft arrests in the state over the first six months of 2023, 20% were for a second auto theft offense and another 20% were for a third offense or higher.³¹ Given that work and school engagement have been found to be critical protective factors against recidivism,³² stakeholders should prioritize reengaging at-risk and disconnected young people and support them in pursuing their education and securing consistent employment to make further progress on reducing crime and building safer communities. More stable employment and securing jobs of a higher occupational level and/or with higher pay are all associated with a reduced risk of reoffending.³³

An important next step in this work will be to leverage integrated data to more deeply understand how justice system involvement impacts disconnection and education and labor market outcomes, and vice versa. This would enable stakeholders to better understand the long-term impacts of interactions with the justice system and devise a path forward for more effective strategies to support at-risk and disconnected young people.





SECTION 2:

Economic Benefits of Addressing Disconnection

There is a substantial moral case for investing in all of Connecticut's young people (aged 14–26); they are the state's future and they deserve better than what they have right now. In addition, there is also a compelling economic opportunity for Connecticut to help get disconnected young people back on track.

Supporting disconnected young people to get back on track could help fill a large portion of the Connecticut labor market's 90,000 unfilled jobs and boost Connecticut's GDP by \$5 billion—\$5.5 billion.

The Connecticut labor market is experiencing a substantial labor shortage. There are 90,000 unfilled jobs—many of which have been vacant for several years—concentrated in industries including health care, manufacturing, and retail and wholesale trade. These job openings are creating a drag on the economy, stifling economic growth, and reducing tax revenues for the state. Given that Connecticut's labor force participation rate is currently high (64%³⁴), employers need to focus on sourcing talent and labor from new and typically overlooked areas.

If stakeholders were able to fill a substantial portion of these unfilled jobs by helping to get the 56,000 disconnected young

people who are currently unemployed back on track and employed, Connecticut's gross domestic product (GDP) could grow by \$5 billion–\$5.5 billion or by 2% of current GDP.

Though filling these open jobs could reap significant benefits for both employers and the state at large, successfully doing so and ensuring disconnected young people are able to stay in the workforce will require significant effort in developing creative new pathways from disconnection to employment. This involves identifying and engaging disconnected young people where they are, providing robust training and skill-development opportunities, and equipping them with the support and wraparound resources required to sustain employment long-term.

Acting on this issue could further boost Connecticut's fiscal performance by \$650 million - \$750 million annually.

Our analysis suggests that getting today's 63,000 disconnected young people back on track could also boost Connecticut's fiscal performance for an overall annual fiscal impact of \$650 million - \$750 million. This includes:

\$300-350M

in additional tax revenue, driven by higher earnings, which then translate to higher income taxes and greater levels of consumer activity.

\$350-400M

lower spending on government services, driven by reconnected young people utilizing fewer social safety net services (e.g., Medicaid, SNAP benefits) and having lower rates of incarceration.

If a disconnected young person could be supported to get back on track, Connecticut would continue accruing the economic benefits of reconnection over the course of the individual's life.

At-risk and disconnected young people—even if only a portion of them are ultimately able to be reengaged and reconnected—represent a massive opportunity for Connecticut to both improve its economic and fiscal performance as well as put young people on the path to lead fulfilling, self-sufficient lives (see Appendix B).

\$5B-
\$5.5B

annual GDP increase

\$650M-
\$750M

annual fiscal impact
to the state

If a disconnected young person could get back on track, Connecticut would continue accruing the economic benefits of reconnection over an individual's lifetime





SECTION 3:

Community Recommendations for Local Leaders

Despite the many challenges faced by at-risk and disconnected young people aged 14–26, there are opportunities that enable individuals to become reconnected. This research’s 100+ interviews with stakeholders across the state—including municipal leaders, educators and school district leaders, community organization leaders, criminal justice experts, and employers—provided insight into the most promising opportunities to strengthen pathways to reconnection.

(See Exhibit 17) This section synthesizes these insights to provide local leaders with ways they can help transform the lives of Connecticut’s young people for generations to come.

EXHIBIT 17

Strengthening Pathways to Reconnection

Recommendations fall under four key categories



INCREASE VISIBILITY

Expand awareness of the current state of at-risk and disconnected (AR&D) young people

1. Improve school district data systems and practices
2. Publish annual AR&D report



IMPROVE COORDINATION

Strengthen connections between stakeholders supporting AR&D young people

3. Establish cross-sector coalitions and partnerships
4. Designate and fund entities in every municipality



EXPAND CAPACITY

Increase capabilities of high-performing organizations that serve AR&D young people

5. Significantly expand organizational capacity



FUND EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

Invest in scalable, evidence-based supports and services for AR&D young people

6. Invest in expanding supports and services
7. Invest in high-touch case management
8. Invest in tackling chronic absenteeism
9. Strengthen AR&D pathways to employment



Increase visibility:

Community Recommendation 1: Improve school district data systems and practices to identify and support at-risk students

Population(s) served – at-risk

CONTEXT:

Progress has been made in data collection and data-informed decision-making practices in schools and districts, especially through the adoption of learning management systems and student information systems, the emergence of data-informed communities of practice, and the development of a statewide education data platform, EdSight (especially its early warning system tool).³⁵ However, many educators and district leaders interviewed cited the need to build on this progress by better identifying at-risk students in real time and developing tailored interventions to help get them back on track, with a particular focus on the students most at risk of disconnection.

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

Education stakeholders have a role in increasing visibility of at-risk students. Stakeholders should build on existing data systems by increasing their capacity to identify and support at-risk students. They should continue investing in data systems and implementation/capacity-building processes that enable better and timely monitoring and support of at-risk students, especially for topics such as:

- Student mobility and transfers
- Student referrals to alternative education, special education, and adult education
- Student experiences with homelessness
- Student experiences with the child welfare system
- Student interactions with the justice system
- Educators' understanding of events in students' lives outside of school

While keeping student privacy in mind, school districts should seek to partner and share data where appropriate with the entity designated by their municipality as responsible for supporting disconnected young people (as articulated in recommendation 4).

Community Recommendation 2: Publish annual reports about at-risk and disconnected young people

Population(s) served – at-risk and disconnected

CONTEXT:

A common theme in the stakeholder interviews was frustration around the lack of visibility on this issue. Stakeholders did not have a clear view into the size of this population or the magnitude of the challenges they faced and were therefore ill-equipped to advocate effectively on their behalf. There is a clear need to continuously spotlight the significance of this issue and encourage collective accountability for the wellbeing of at-risk and disconnected young people.

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

The second recommendation is to publish an annual report to continuously spotlight the challenges and opportunities associated with at-risk and disconnected young people and to encourage collective accountability for this population. This recommendation takes inspiration from, among other examples, the reporting of child fatalities conducted by Connecticut's Office of the Child Advocate.³⁶ The report should include the overall count of at-risk and disconnected young people and breakdowns by key demographics and subgroups (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age, municipality). Over time, the report should be expanded to include data on at-risk and disconnected young people's interactions with additional systems (e.g., justice) and analysis of promising practices and exemplar programs that stakeholders might emulate.

Improve coordination

Community Recommendation 3: Establish cross-sector coalitions and partnerships focused on supporting at-risk and disconnected young people

Population(s) served – at-risk and disconnected

CONTEXT:

Another key challenge noted by stakeholders is a significant need for an organized effort to better support disconnected young people. Though the state has many promising service providers, they face challenges in identifying those most in need and coordinating effectively with one another to provide supports, especially in regard to sharing information. Coordination across town borders is especially important, given the transiency many disconnected young people experience. The lack of a centralized, integrated effort

that is responsible for this population leaves many disconnected young people to fall through the cracks.

“Identification and monitoring are where everything gets tricky . . . disconnected young people are identified through word-of-mouth on the ground, not formal systems”

—Local law enforcement leader

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

Recommendation 3 is to establish regional and/or statewide cross-sector coalitions and partnerships focused on supporting at-risk and disconnected young people. This would include identifying them in a consistent way and coordinating and advocating on their behalf. Coalitions or partnerships could assume leadership roles in sustained coordination, including by reporting on outcomes for at-risk and disconnected young people, thereby creating accountability for stakeholders and spotlighting programs that would benefit this population.

Coalitions could include community organizations that directly serve this population, Youth Service Bureaus and other local public entities, educational institutions and school districts, adult education programs and community colleges, workforce training programs, and entities that interact with specific subgroups such as homeless or justice-involved young people. Coalitions could partner or closely collaborate with, among others, regional collective impact movements and related statewide initiatives such as the Coalition for a Working Connecticut and the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC).

Community Recommendation 4: Designate an entity in every municipality or region responsible for supporting disconnected young people

Population(s) served – disconnected

CONTEXT:

Given that disconnected young people are not involved in educational institutions or the workforce and often not referred to service organizations, it is especially challenging to identify them and provide the long-term supports they require. While many municipalities have entities such as Youth Service Bureaus or community organizations that case manage and support this population, most do not have a mandate to identify and support all disconnected young people in their municipality.

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

All of Connecticut’s municipalities should designate and fund an organizational entity, beyond the school district,

that takes ownership and responsibility for identifying and supporting disconnected young people and connecting them to crucial services and supports. This recommendation takes inspiration from the data-based community needs mapping and risk-prediction work conducted in public health to enable earlier identification and support of high-risk individuals and families.

The appropriate entity and jurisdiction is likely to differ by municipality. It may be appropriate for a branch of the municipal government, an existing community organization, a community health center, or even the public housing authority to play this role. In some municipalities, it may make more sense for a regional entity such as a regional governmental organization (e.g, the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG)) or a regional collective impact organization to play this role. These entities could serve as the core of the coalitions articulated in recommendation 3.

Expand capacity

Community Recommendation 5: Significantly strengthen the capacity of organizations that serve at-risk and disconnected young people

Population(s) served – at-risk and disconnected

CONTEXT:

Addressing the complex, multifaceted challenges at-risk and disconnected young people face requires the use of rigorous, evidence-based practices. Developing the capabilities and expertise needed to successfully execute this work takes significant upfront training and continuous monitoring for programmatic improvements. Most organizations that currently provide or aspire to provide services to at-risk and disconnected young people are capacity constrained, and collectively Connecticut’s service providers are ill-equipped to address the magnitude of this crisis.

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

To address this gap in capacity, organizations (community-based nonprofits, school districts, etc.) need significant technical assistance. Topics to consider include, but are not limited to:

- Program design and implementation, including support with identifying and scaling evidence-based practices
- Talent attraction, development, and retention to increase capacity and reduce staff turnover
- Data collection, analysis, and sharing to better understand target populations and outcomes from interventions

- Key performance indicator (KPI) tracking to measure organizational impact and make the case for increased/continued funding
- Financial management support, including long-term budget planning and fundraising efforts
- IT support, including setting up systems to streamline back-office operations

As a precursor to providing technical assistance, it is critical to first identify the Connecticut organizations most likely to benefit from investment, including those that are serving this target population.

Fund effective programs

Community Recommendation 6: Invest in expanding supports and services for at-risk and disconnected young people

Population(s) served – at-risk and disconnected

CONTEXT:

There is currently a lack of funding to address the magnitude of this challenge in Connecticut, given the 119,000 14- to 26-year-olds in the state who require support. This funding gap will be especially problematic in the coming years, as pandemic-related federal funding for various programs runs out. Greater financial resources are required to execute a large-scale expansion in comprehensive, evidence-based supports and services to prevent at-risk young people from experiencing disconnection and to create pathways for disconnected young people to become engaged citizens.

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

Adequately addressing this crisis will require significant infusions of funding over multiple years, given that programs are not currently equipped to serve the sheer volume of need. These investments should be targeted toward the communities with higher rates of at-risk and disconnected young people, and any financial support for addressing technical needs should be paired with rigorous measurement of outcomes to ensure it results in the desired impact.

This expansion in services should be targeted to address the most salient issues facing at-risk and disconnected

“What we really need are localized, coordinated hubs of services that can stick with the [young person] for the long haul”

– Leader of nonprofit serving disconnected young people



young people today, including:

- Chronic absenteeism and truancy in schools
- School transfers/high mobility
- Mental health and life/soft skills
- Family stability, including experiences in foster care and group homes
- Justice involvement and exposure to violence
- Poverty, housing insecurity, and homelessness
- Migration, including the experiences of being undocumented
- Challenges with gaining employment and building a career

Community Recommendation 7: Invest in high-touch case management for at-risk and disconnected young people

Population(s) served – at-risk and disconnected

CONTEXT:

Interviewees consistently described high-touch case management as a highly effective tool to identify and support at-risk and disconnected young people across contexts; case management is especially effective for disconnected young people, who are otherwise very difficult to reach due to their limited involvement with formal systems and services. Of the host of case management tools described, cognitive behavioral therapy was cited as a particularly promising approach for teaching practical skills to understand and change negative thought patterns and behaviors.

External literature also highlights the impact of intensive case management for our target population. One evaluation of disconnected young people³⁷ indicated that case management interventions reduced school suspensions, increased course completion and return to high school, improved employability skills and employment rates, and increased families' participation in their children's education and service receipt from a partner. When coupled with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) services, case management was found to increase the probability of completing GED certification and achieving readiness for college coursework. Another study of people experiencing homelessness³⁸ found that intensive case management substantially reduced the number of days spent homeless as well as substance and alcohol use. These studies demonstrate that intensive support, ideally in a face-to-face

environment and with targeted skills training, can improve educational and employment outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

Further investment is needed in high-touch case management, given the central role it often plays in identifying, preventing, and supporting at-risk and disconnected young people. Key roles case management can play include:

- Providing a young person with a stable and positive relationship with a trusted adult/case manager
- Monitoring the young person over time
- Understanding the young person's context, needs, and aspirations and connecting them to services
- Providing growth opportunities through mentorship based on cognitive behavioral therapy principles
- Identifying additional at-risk and disconnected young people to serve (e.g., friends or siblings of program participants)

Community Recommendation 8: Invest in tackling chronic absenteeism

Population(s) served – at-risk

CONTEXT:

Absenteeism is a key risk factor for high school non-graduation and experiencing disconnection. Connecticut's high schools are seeing unprecedented levels of chronic absenteeism and truancy. Though an increase in absenteeism during COVID-19 was to be expected, counts have remained significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels, despite a return to in-person instruction. The persistence of this issue indicates the underlying challenge schools are facing in meaningfully engaging students and families and meeting young people where they are.

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

Significant investments should be made to tackle the state's unprecedented absenteeism and truancy rates, with a focus on the highest-need districts. Though chronic absenteeism and its underlying drivers have no obvious, singular fix, there are programs and policies that have shown promise as being effective elements of a solution. First, to accurately count attendance, districts should track such that the default status is "absent" instead of "present." Currently, this is not standard, but default "present" will systematically overcount students in attendance and therefore mask the true extent of the challenge.

Second, programs that work to diagnose and solve root causes of attendance issues should be invested in further. The state’s Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP), a home visit program to engage chronically absent students and their families, is a promising example. Among the 9,000 students who participated, students in grades 6–12 experienced ~16% increase in attendance rates after nine months in the program.³⁹

Third, attendance review boards, which formally established attendance case management at the school level and performance management at the district level, have shown promise in identifying chronically absent students and tracking efforts to encourage their attendance. While state policy mandates the establishment of attendance review boards in districts with levels of chronic absenteeism at 10% or higher,⁴⁰ any school seeking to strengthen its attendance levels might consider this approach.

Though the initiatives above can be part of addressing chronic absenteeism, it is critical for stakeholders to recognize that holistic, systemic change is needed and programmatic solutions alone will not be enough. Leaders need to look beyond strategies to get students into the building and to also think imaginatively about how to better motivate and engage students while they’re there. If students do not feel a sense of belonging in school or feel that their learning is relevant to their future, improving attendance rates can be only part of the solution.

Community Recommendation 9: Invest in strengthening pathways from disconnection to employment

Population(s) served – Disconnected

CONTEXT:

Many Connecticut employers and existing workforce development programs have pressing talent needs, especially in industries suffering from labor shortages (e.g., manufacturing, health care, and construction). Roughly 39,000 job openings in the state today could be filled with young people without post-secondary attainment; if the state could support young people in completing postsecondary education, an additional 10,000 could be filled by those with associate’s degrees, and 36,000 by those with bachelor’s degrees.⁴¹ Disconnected young people have the potential to fill those gaps, but first employers need to be convinced of that potential and brought on board. These young people need to be systematically identified, connected to existing opportunities, and once connected, comprehensively supported to be successful.

“We need to go beyond charitable contributions to ‘roll-up-your sleeve’ partnerships with employers”

—Leader of workforce development nonprofit

RECOMMENDATION DETAIL:

Stronger linkages are needed between the organizations that serve young people along the pathway from disconnection to gainful employment. As a starting point, all parties should recognize the potential of these young people and consider stable, long-term employment the guiding North Star for this population. Next, to address their pressing labor needs, Connecticut’s employers should invest in this talent pool by partnering with service providers to develop and strengthen pathways to employment. For example, one approach could involve service providers offering mentorship to disconnected young people, determining participant readiness for employer-run workforce training programs, and connecting young people to existing opportunities, while continuing to provide wraparound services to support retention.

Further research, investment, and experimentation is needed to determine the most effective approaches to strengthening pathways, but additional ideas surfaced by stakeholders include vocational education in schools and prisons, summer internships offered by employers focused on at-risk young people, and expansion of the state’s existing apprenticeship and workforce training programs.

SIDE BAR 5:

Cynthia's Story

Cynthia hates school. Yet the 20-year-old is a first-year college student.

She says school can be draining and boring, but she knows that to achieve her goal of becoming a psychologist in the criminal justice system, she has to show up to her classes despite her social anxiety and struggles with getting up early.

"I had to learn that I have to do things I don't like," she reflects. "I had to learn to go with it."

Cynthia says she almost didn't learn how to overcome the things she didn't like about school. Back when she was in middle school, she was chronically late to class, or didn't go at all. She did well in classes in which she had a strong interest. It was different in classes she didn't find interesting or rarely attended because she got to school too late.

Then, just before she was headed to high school, she was connected with Chris Arenas, a youth development professional from a school engagement program based in Stamford. She says Arenas demonstrated that he cared more about her success as a person and a student and less about her failures. He did that by showing up for her even when she didn't want him to.

"I really didn't talk to him for the first two weeks of meeting him," she remembers. But when she realized he wasn't going to go away, she started to open up.

Arenas became someone who listened to her talk about her sisters and her pets—and just allowed her to vent. He also helped her through her social anxiety, first by talking

with her teachers when she was missing the mark or acting out in class, then by teaching her how to advocate for herself.

"I have a lot of social anxiety, so even if I needed help in a class, I'm not asking," she recalls. "[He] forced me to talk to my teachers alone and tell them if I needed more time to complete my assignments."

She says it was text messages and phone calls from Arenas that helped her survive her last two years of high school, which happened during the COVID-19 pandemic while she was recovering from complications arising from a medical procedure.

"My junior and senior years were horrible," she says of enduring remote school, an inability to walk for several months, and numerous doctors' appointments. "Honestly, I probably wouldn't have graduated on time if he wasn't so strict."

She notes that Arenas had earned the right to be strict with her because she felt strongly that he had her best interests at heart. Cynthia credits Arenas and the program for teaching her how to set goals like getting to class on time and helping her to manage strong emotions when she had disagreements with her teachers. Though she's now a college student, she still talks regularly with Arenas, whom she considers a friend.

"I know I [can] always go to him," she says.

Authored by Markeshia Ricks

“He cared more about her success as a person and a student and less about her failures”

Areas for Inquiry

Over the course of creating this report, the 100+ stakeholders interviewed across Connecticut shared a wide range of perspectives on what programs, practices, and policies would be most beneficial in better identifying and supporting at-risk and disconnected young people. Given the scope of this report, not all of these important ideas could be thoroughly researched and substantiated by the authors. To ensure that these ideas are not lost and are explored by other relevant parties, we point to “areas for inquiry” that may capture additional opportunities to advance outcomes for Connecticut’s young people. Topics include:

- Improving the student experience in schools
- Providing more supports to justice-involved young people
- Connecting at-risk and disconnected young people to employment opportunities
- Delivering wraparound services that reduce barriers and enhance everyday life
- Increasing focus on particularly vulnerable subgroups (i.e., young people experiencing homelessness, young people involved in child welfare, undocumented young people, and LGBTQ+ young people)

Please see Appendix A for the full breadth of areas for further inquiry.





Conclusion

This report sought to better understand the at-risk and disconnected young people in Connecticut and explain how the state can improve in identifying, reconnecting, and supporting this population. The research revealed the alarming challenge of 119,000, or one in five, of the state's 14- to 26-year-olds being either at-risk or disconnected in 2021–2022. It also quantified the wage disparities that disconnected young people face, highlighting the importance of both educational attainment and work experience for economic advancement. By identifying factors that are highly associated with disconnection, this report points practitioners to the areas and populations most in need of intervention.

If stakeholders come together to address this issue, in addition to supporting young people in need, they could boost Connecticut's GDP by \$5 billion–\$5.5 billion and improve its fiscal performance by \$650 million–\$750

million annually, accelerating statewide economic growth. The recommendations listed in this report demonstrate that by increasing visibility of at-risk and disconnected young people, improving coordination among stakeholders, expanding the capacity of high-performing organizations, and funding effective programs to increase scale, there is immense opportunity to help get at-risk and disconnected young people back on track.

We encourage stakeholders across Connecticut to examine their role in this ecosystem and find ways to work together to drive better outcomes for Connecticut's young people, ultimately delivering a more promising future for every resident of the state.

Areas for Inquiry

Summary of areas for further inquiry | Education

- 1. Explore improvements to supporting students when they enter/leave a district**

Stakeholders should consider building on recent development of the state-wide EdSight system and exploring how students might be better monitored and supported when leaving a school district

 - Includes transferring to another district, transfers into alternative/special education, transfers into adult education, and shifting to homeschooling
 - 2. Evaluate potential improvements to alternative and special education systems**

Stakeholders should build on recent improvements to alternative/special ed accountability measures by identifying and implementing exemplar models, which ensure that appropriate students are entering these programs and that all students are receiving a tailored, flexible, high-quality education

 - Exemplar models may include alt/special ed staff trained in youth development and flexible curricular structures (e.g., mastery-based progression, part-time options to accommodate work schedules)
 - As quality improves, long-term goal is for programs to be normalized as part of a continuum of education services
 - 3. Consider elevating opportunities to strengthen school climate and culture**

Stakeholders should explore opportunities to further strengthen school climate and culture, and thereby motivate young people to participate in school, such as:

 - Investing in training school staff on how to form high-quality, trusted relationships with students
 - Standardizing measurement of social-emotional well-being metrics across the state's districts
 - Expanding restorative and trauma-informed practices to help mitigate the school-to-prison pipeline
 - 4. Explore expansions to project-based and career pathway learning in schools**

Stakeholders should explore opportunities to expand engaging project-based and career learning in schools, thereby improving student engagement and strengthening pathways to employment for at-risk young people; both programmatic and policy changes can be levers for implementation

 - Programmatic expansions could include extracurricular projects, curricular pathways designed with employers and postsecondary programs, relevant life skills development (e.g., financial literacy)
 - Policy changes could include increased curricular flexibility to enable alternatives to traditional coursework
-

- 5. Scale effective efforts to identify and support young people at-risk of justice involvement or violence**
- Stakeholders should study existing programming to identify and support young people at risk of interactions with the justice system or exposure to community violence (high overlap with at-risk and disconnected population), such as programs that provide proactive case management and wraparound supports, to determine and scale most effective solutions
-
- 6. Explore opportunities to continue making the evidence-based case for alternatives to justice system involvement**
- Stakeholders should build on progress made on juvenile justice reform by exploring new opportunities to engage and educate stakeholders involved in the justice system (e.g., probation officers, police officers, juvenile review boards) on how various elements of the system work and the broad spectrum of options available to address needs across treatment and supervision, all the way through to incarceration (e.g., mental health or substance abuse treatment)
-
- 7. Evaluate the most critical supports for reentry young people to mitigate recidivism**
- Stakeholders should evaluate existing programs that assist young people in reintegrating into society after incarceration all the way through securing/maintaining employment and housing, identify the most effective supports, and consider investing in them
- Includes case management, behavioral/mental health supports, reconnection with educational institutions, securing IDs, securing housing, supports with finding and keeping employment, etc.
-
- 8. Investigate feasibility and impact of adult justice system reform**
- Stakeholders should study the feasibility and impact of expanding elements of juvenile justice reform (e.g., alternatives to incarceration for minor crimes, parole eligibility requirements) to young people (ages 18–26) currently treated as full adults in the adult justice system; expanding effective reforms to 18- to 26-year-olds could reduce longer-term incarceration rates and recidivism, as seen with impact of juvenile justice reform
-

- 9. Study promising approaches to providing workforce readiness opportunities for at-risk and disconnected young people**
- Many stakeholders agree that, to be successful in traditional, full-time employment, at-risk and disconnected young people would benefit from interim opportunities to develop their skills and comfort with employment. Employers and other interested parties (e.g., workforce development boards) should investigate promising approaches to providing workforce readiness training such as apprenticeship programs, vocational education, employment with social enterprises tailored for at-risk and disconnected young people, soft skills training, summer internships, etc.
-
- 10. Consider revising hiring requirements to better access at-risk and disconnected young people**
- Employers should build on progress made to emphasize skills-based hiring and consider revising hiring requirements when they do not improve candidate selection or are discriminatory and reduce barriers preventing at-risk and disconnected young people from securing employment
- Depending on the role, requirements up for revision could include college degrees, occupational licensing requirements, criminal history (fair chance hiring), mandatory drug testing, and credit history checks
-
- 11. Examine best practices for job design to improve employee retention**
- Employers should explore implementing best practices for inclusive job design (often in partnership with community organizations) to improve job retention with at-risk and disconnected young people
- This includes pairing employees with job coaches to provide on-the-job supports, providing a gradual progression of financial compensation (including during training periods), and offering financial literacy supports to enable better financial management and a more stable life
-
- 12. Explore feasibility and potential impact of system of wraparound supports for workforce and further education**
- Researchers should investigate the feasibility and potential impact of establishing a robust system of wraparound supports for at-risk and disconnected young people pursuing further education (e.g., postsecondary, adult ed) and employment; priority wraparound supports would focus on housing, childcare, and mental health
- Key questions to explore would include ideal providers and mechanisms for supports (e.g., investments in childcare as part of workforce strategy, employers strengthening partnerships with community organizations working with at-risk and disconnected young people to identify talent, etc.)
-

Summary of areas for further inquiry | Wraparound supports

13. Consider increased investment in wraparound supports for at-risk and disconnected young people

To address the risk factors and needs of this population, stakeholders should consider investing behind a breadth of wraparound supports (e.g., affordable and quality housing, access to healthy food, support securing identification, etc.) This could include investing in evidence-based programming and addressing barriers to service access (e.g., cultural stigma)

14. Explore opportunities to improve access to quality childcare for at-risk and disconnected young people pursuing employment/education

Stakeholders (e.g., educators, employers) should (1) explore ways to design programming to be more supportive of caregiver needs (e.g., offering caregivers wraparound supports in addition to childcare, establishing shifts around school drop-off times) and (2) consider supporting existing coalitions and efforts to subsidize costs of childcare, especially for low-income young people

15. Investigate ways to reduce barriers to accessing mental health services

Given increasing mental health needs, stakeholders should investigate ways to reach young people struggling with mental health issues and work to reduce barriers to accessing services. This could include:

- Investment in flexible models for delivering services in under-resourced communities (e.g., mobile trucks for mental health assessments), especially given recent Medicaid regulation changes
 - Identification of evidence-based practices to reduce cultural stigma around mental health supports (e.g., investing in pipeline of mental health clinicians of color, long-term work with case managers)
-

16. Promote opportunities to increase the accessibility of quality, affordable housing for at-risk and disconnected young people

Stakeholders should study the high burden a lack of quality housing imposes on at-risk and disconnected young people (e.g., detrimental health and educational outcomes) and explore promising solutions that have been enacted nationwide to address gaps. This could include expanding efforts to finance the development of quality, affordable housing units in high-need areas

17. Investigate prevention and support strategies for young people experiencing homelessness

Stakeholders should investigate effective prevention and support practices for young people who are experiencing homelessness

- For prevention, consider assessing methods of identifying unstably housed young people early and coordinate services (e.g., housing, family remediation) to reduce short-term risk of becoming homeless
- For support, explore ways to increase tracking accountability (e.g., monitor effectiveness of in-school tracking systems) and expand services for securing/maintaining housing and employment and providing educational supports

18. Examine the transition in and out of child welfare

Individuals involved with the child welfare system are at greater risk of becoming at-risk and disconnected, partially due to traumas associated with family separation. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) should build on progress made through recent reforms to further **examine its interaction with young people and explore ways to support them through transitions into/out of the system**. Examples could include:

- Researching strategies to monitor academic performance and well-being of participants in foster care and independent living and provide proactive interventions to prevent them from becoming at-risk and disconnected (e.g., mentorship)
- Improving supports by increasing utilization of voluntary DCF resources (e.g., train case managers to promote positive perceptions of the resources) or connecting participants to other relevant service providers

19. Explore ways to support undocumented young people

Stakeholders cite that undocumented young people are more likely to be intentionally invisible to service providers, making it difficult for them to receive necessary supports. Community Leaders should explore ways to **make existing services more inclusive** (e.g., English Language Learner courses that do not require sensitive personal information to enroll, alternative education that enables part-time work) and **expand access to legal assistance programs** to support pathways to becoming documented

20. Consider ways to support LGBTQ+ young people

LGBTQ+ young people, and trans young people in particular, are at greater risk of homelessness, bullying, and human trafficking, partially because family strife often separates them from their households. Community leaders should explore ways to **support LGBTQ+ young people by funding and expanding service providers focused on this population**, particularly in areas of mental health supports, family remediation services, and resources for those affected by human trafficking

Note: Vulnerable justice-involved young people are addressed in the AFI category of the justice system

APPENDIX B:

Methodology

P20 WIN Data Set

Underpinning the vast majority of the report analysis is the creation, through P20 WIN, of an individual-level, de-identified, integrated data set of young people in Connecticut aged 14–26 between 2014 and 2022. The BCG research team facilitated a data request with P20 WIN, which supplied a de-identified, integrated data set that provided the team with data sets from five agencies/providers:

Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH):

Data on services (e.g., shelter, housing, street outreach) provided by CCEH coalition members, which was used to better understand the incidence of homelessness in Connecticut’s young people. This data set does not capture the actual count of Connecticut’s homeless population, but instead serves as a close proxy; namely, who/how many individuals have received homelessness support services from CCEH members.

Department of Children and Families (DCF):

Data on DCF involvement, including Children in Placement data (such as foster care placements), allegations data (data capturing allegations of abuse and neglect directed to DCF), and Provider Information Exchange (PIE) services data (services offered or contracted by DCF such as mental health and family supports). Note that the PIE dataset does not cover all possible contracted services available from DCF. Further, DCF offers many other direct services not captured by being present in the allegations or placements data, though almost all children receiving some form of child protective service will be captured in those datasets.

Department of Labor (DOL):

- Two core sets of data:
- **Wages:** Includes data on wages recorded by DOL’s unemployment insurance data set for the target age range and years. To keep the data set size manageable, the research team received wage data only for individuals who were captured in one of the other data sets. The data includes only wages from employers paying into unemployment insurance, meaning it does not include wages associated with self-employment, independent contractor work, and gig economy work.
 - **Data on workforce training program participation:** Includes apprenticeships, Best Chance (for ex-offenders), Jobs First Employment Services (for individuals on the state’s

time-limited Temporary Family Assistance program), the Connecticut Youth Employment program (for young people aged 14–24), Trade Adjustment Assistance (for workers whose jobs were impacted by foreign trade), and programs associated with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including the Adult Program, Dislocated Workers Program, Youth Program, and Wagner-Peyser Act Program.

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):

Data on DMHAS involvement, including participation in inpatient programs, residential services, outpatient programs, and outreach and engagement services. The data includes only programs and services affiliated with DMHAS, meaning it does not provide a full window into the mental health and addiction services offered across the state, but instead provides a window into the subset offered by DMHAS, which tends to be the more vulnerable populations.

State Department of Education (SDE):

Data on young people’s educational experience across high school, adult education, and postsecondary education. Extensive data on young people’s high school experience includes attendance, behavior (suspensions data), academic performance (grades, credit accumulation), transfers in/out, special education and alternative education participation, etc; data on the attainment of an adult education diploma/equivalent (e.g., GED) through adult education programs; data from the National Student Clearinghouse on postsecondary education participation and the attainment of a credential/degree for all young people who attended high school in Connecticut, regardless of where they pursued their postsecondary education.

Leveraging the above, the research team created a master data set, which comprised all records of young people who attended high school in Connecticut between 2014 and 2022 (527,000 unique individuals) across the five agencies/providers. The master data set allowed researchers to see whether an individual was captured in any of the data sets over the 2014–2022 period, enabling the team to understand disconnection from a unique, longitudinal perspective.

1A: Counts and Trends of At-Risk and Disconnected Young People

Three discrete analyses were conducted to determine the counts and trends of at-risk and disconnected young people.

The first analysis leveraged SDE data to determine the counts and trends of at-risk young people from 2017 to 2022. As discussed in the Approach section, high

school students were identified as at-risk based on three indicators:

Credit accumulation, defined in this analysis as whether a student was on-track to meet the state's total credit requirements for graduation at each grade level, specifically:

- The analysis was conducted in line with the state's evolving graduation requirements—setting graduation requirement at 20 credits for classes prior to class of 2023, and then increasing graduation requirement to 25 credits starting with class of 2023.
- The analysis where possible looked at credit accumulation at each grade level and set the on-track threshold as: 5 credits at 9th grade, 10 credits at 10th grade, 15 credits at 11th grade, and 20 credits at 12th grade (for classes prior to the class of 2023), and as 6 credits at 9th grade, 12 credits at 10th grade, 18 credits at 11th grade, and 25 credits at 12th grade (for the class of 2023 onward). In other words, if a student did not meet this credit accumulation level, the student was flagged as off-track for that school year.
- For students for whom the data set did not have credit data for all grades (e.g., students who have transferred in from out of state), the analysis defined on-track/off-track by whether the student had earned 5 credits that year (prior to class of 2023) and 6 credits that year (class of 2023 onward).

Attendance rate, defined as days attended divided by the total available days in the school year. The specific threshold at which a student is defined as “at-risk” was set by identifying the threshold at which a student's likelihood of graduating drops below 80% (also roughly double the non-graduation rate compared with the state average graduation rate over the period). That threshold differed across grade level, illustrating the higher risk associated with absenteeism at earlier grades. The thresholds used were:

- <90% attendance rate for 9th and 10th grades
- <85% attendance rate for 11th and 12th grades

Behavior incidents, defined both in terms of suspensions incurred over a given school year or whether a student has been expelled. The specific thresholds used were (1) whether a student had been suspended one or more times in a given school year (inclusive of both in-school and out-of-school suspensions) or (2) whether a student had ever been expelled. Across grades, the analysis found that being suspended even once in a given year reduced a student's likelihood of graduating to below 80%.

The second analysis leveraged American Community Survey (ACS (US census)) data to determine total counts of disconnected young people from 2015–2021, including counts across subcategories of disconnection (e.g., moderately disconnected high school non-graduate).

The research team pulled census estimates of the population by querying population estimates using four filters:

- Age range to 14- to 26-year-olds
- Only individuals who had not attended school in the last three months
- Education attainment (high school non-graduate, high school graduate)
- Employment status (employed, unemployed, military—counted as employed, not in labor force)

Note: The ACS data should be used to make a high-level point estimate rather than inferring a trendline, given the margin of error of +/- 10%. ACS also did not include an estimate for 2020 given acute sampling challenges during the pandemic.

The third analysis leveraged the master dataset created through P20 WIN data (namely the education and labor datasets) to estimate total counts of newly disconnected young people from 2017-2022.

The analysis looked into how many young people experienced disconnection for their first year after leaving high school—either for their first year after graduating or for their first year after dropping out. In addition, it estimated how many of those same young people continued to experience disconnection in their third year after leaving high school. Because of the nature of the question, the analysis looked at school year (e.g., fall 2017–18).

For high school graduates, the analysis explored how many were employed, pursuing postsecondary education, doing both, or doing neither (classified as a high school graduate experiencing moderate disconnection). For high school non-graduates, the analysis explored how many were also employed (high school non-graduate experiencing moderate disconnection), attained their adult education diploma/equivalent (e.g., GED) (GED holder experiencing moderate disconnection), doing/have done both, and doing/have done neither (a young person experiencing severe disconnection). The analysis found a very small subset of GED holders who were pursuing a postsecondary education, and they were also classified as not experiencing disconnection.

Employment was defined for this analysis as having wage data recorded in the DOL unemployment insurance data set equal to or greater than \$7,000 in a given year, roughly equivalent to working full-time at ALICE wages for one-quarter of the year.⁴² This threshold was established on the recognition that a certain amount of workforce participation was necessary for there to be a benefit to a young person in terms of (1) serving as a connection to a prosocial institution and a protective factor against disconnection, and (2) of supporting a young person's pathway to economic self-sufficiency. The decision was reached to use a quarter of full-time work for the analysis. In addition to having an annual wage equal to or greater than \$7,000, the analysis allowed for participation in a workforce training program in that year (which has similar benefits to the young person) to count as employment.

Note: The counts of disconnection are likely to be a slight overestimate, given that the integrated P20 WIN data used did not allow us to identify how many young people, instead of experiencing disconnection, actually moved out of Connecticut. Migration trends leveraging the ACS suggest that upward of 5%–10% of young people flagged as having disconnected may have left the state.

Section 1A analyses looked at all P20 WIN records from 2017–2022. For data security purposes, all counts are aggregated. The sample sizes were the following:

- Exhibit 3 (map of disconnection) – there was one municipality (Union) that needed to be suppressed (colored grey) because it had less than 10 young people newly disconnected young people over a five-year period. The smallest N otherwise was Warren with 12
- Exhibit 4 (map of at-risk) – smallest N was Union with 183 student-year records of school enrollment over a five-year period
- Exhibit 8 (outcomes by timing of high school exit) – smallest N was exiting high school after 9th grade and being on track (both attaining GED and is employed) after one year at 13 records

1B: Impact of Disconnection on Wages

Two analyses were conducted leveraging the P20 WIN data set to understand the impact of disconnection on wages; both focused on young people in Connecticut some years after exiting high school (at age 24).

The first analysis explored the relationship between educational attainment, years of work experience, and wages at age 24. Years of work experience is defined here in the same way that employment is defined in our analysis

broadly (i.e. having recorded at least \$7,000 in wages annually in the unemployment insurance data set).

The second analysis explores, for young people who experienced disconnection in their first year after high school, what their educational attainment outcomes, employment outcomes, and ultimately their wage outcomes were at age 24. A longitudinal analysis over the period of exiting high school to age 24 introduces significant uncertainty related to whether a young person who attended high school in Connecticut is not captured in the P20 WIN data set at age 24 or has moved out of the state. To be more conservative, the analysis estimated what percentage of young high school graduates and non-graduates left the state of Connecticut leveraging ACS migration pattern data (18% overall, derived from migration benchmarks of high school graduates and high school non-graduates), and applied this percentage as a haircut on the analysis.

Section 1B analyses looked at all P20 WIN records from 2014–2022. For data security purposes, all counts are aggregated. The sample sizes were the following:

- Exhibit 10 (outcomes by educational experience and years of work experience) – smallest N was combination of Adult education diploma/equivalent (e.g., GED) holder and 7 years of work experience at 97 records
- Exhibit 11 (outcomes by disconnection category) – smallest N was Severely Disconnected at 2,265 records
- The data points included in the prose narrative of this section also comprised of counts >10, including % of high school non-graduates who returned to high school and graduated at 2% or 128, and % of high school graduates who graduated from a post-secondary program by age 22 at 6% or 820.

1C: Factors Associated with Disconnection

Three analyses were conducted to better understand how demographic, out-of-school, and in-school factors are associated with higher or lower rates of disconnection during a young person's first year after exiting high school (both graduated and dropped out). Both analyses were conducted using data across five school years (2017–2022).

The first analysis investigated the percentage of young people exiting high school who were part of a given demographic or were associated with a specific factor (e.g., what percentage of this population was Male).

The second analysis investigated the percentage of young people exiting high school who were part of a

given demographic or were associated with a specific factor, who experienced disconnection in their first year after high school (e.g., what percentage of the Male population exiting high school experienced disconnection). The analysis looks at correlations and does not seek to imply causation.

The third analysis took the percentage who experienced disconnection coming out of the second analysis and compared it to a comparison group to understand how many times more likely a young person who was part of a given demographic or associated with a specific factor was to experience disconnection. For the race/ethnicity analysis, a White person was used as the comparison group, while for the sex analysis, a Female person was used as the comparison group (e.g., what percentage of the Male population exiting high school experienced disconnection vs. what percentage of the Female population exiting high school experienced disconnection). For the in school and out of school factors analysis, the comparison group of young people exiting high school who did not experience this factor was used.

The out-of-school factors explored are noted in detail above (P20 WIN Data Set section of Methodology) and summarized below:

- **Has received any services from CCEH since age 14**
- **Has received any services from from DCF since age 14**
- **Has received any services from DMHAS since age 18**

In addition to the out-of-school factors above, this report explored the in-school factors below:

- **Has ever attended a high-poverty school in high school:** A school is characterized as high-poverty when more than 75% of its students are eligible for a free/reduced-price lunch. This definition is used widely in education research, including at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The factor aims to explore the association between exposure to poverty/attending a low-resourced school, and disconnection.
- **Has ever been involved in special education in high school:** The factor is defined as whether an individual has ever participated in a special education program since age 14.
- **Has ever been transient:** A young person is considered transient if they moved high schools more than two times. Being transient/high mobility is understood as a risk

factor for disconnection, so this research sought to explore the association as well.

- **Has ever been involved in alternative education in high school:** The factor is defined as, whether an individual has ever participated in an alternative education program (e.g., alternative, dropout diversion/credit recovery, expulsion program, public transition program) or an alternative school.

Section 1C analyses looked at all P20 WIN records from 2014-2022. For data security purposes, all counts are aggregated and the N of each analysis is greater than 50 records. The sample sizes were the following:

- Exhibits 12 (demographic factor table) - smallest N was Native Hawaiian or Other with 41 records for “% of demographic who ended up disconnected”
- Exhibits 13 (out of school and in school factor table) - smallest N was “Have received any services from Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness since age 14” with 1,708 records for “% of those experiencing this factor who ended up disconnected”
- Exhibit 14 (multiple risk factor table) – smallest N was 4-7 factors at 5,308 records

2A: Economic Impact of Addressing Disconnection

The report explored what the magnitude of economic impact might be of helping to get disconnected young people back on track. The high-level estimate is not meant to serve as a forecast of what is likely to happen based on implementing the report’s recommendations, which would require making too many assumptions and is beyond the scope of the report. It is instead meant to motivate the economic argument for addressing disconnection; namely, that there is substantial, unrealized economic value that Connecticut would be leaving on the table if it does not address this challenge.

The report conducted two analyses: an estimate of the economic growth potential (GDP impact), and an estimate of the fiscal benefit to the government (both in terms of increased tax receipts and lower levels of government spending) of reconnecting disconnected young people.

First, the study estimated the potential GDP impact that might be achieved if Connecticut’s disconnected young people helped to fill the state’s currently unfilled jobs.

To do so, the research team conducted the following steps:

First, identified the quantity and nature of unfilled jobs in Connecticut leveraging Lightcast data on job openings (roughly 90,000 unfilled jobs during summer 2023). Jobs data included details on which industry jobs were in, and what the education and work experience criteria were.

Second, identified how many and what types of jobs Connecticut's 56,000 disconnected and unemployed young people (out of 63,000 total disconnected young people) could fill if they get back on track and returned to school. The study assumed that the 56,000 disconnected young people could achieve levels of educational attainment across high school diploma, two-year college degree, and four-year college degree that mirrored Connecticut's current distribution of educational attainment (excluding advanced degrees). The study also assumed that only jobs requiring less than three-years of experience would be attainable.

Third, leveraged per job value-add benchmarks from the Bureau of Economic Analysis to estimate the total GDP impact of filling the jobs identified above. The benchmarks used were Connecticut-specific and differentiated by industry.

It is worth noting that the GDP impact would require years to realize in practice, since disconnected young people would need to go back to school to earn more diplomas and degrees, then successfully navigate the labor market to secure a job. The actual impact would also likely be a proportion of the total potential GDP impact, given that labor markets typically have some amount of inefficiency; for example, young people will likely have preferences in terms of what type of job to take, and where in the state they would be willing to take a job.

Second, the study estimated the potential fiscal benefit that could be reaped by the Connecticut state government if Connecticut's disconnected young people were reengaged and got back on track.

To do so, the research team conducting the following steps:

- First, defined the analysis to be taking the current distribution of young people across the categories of disconnection (e.g., unemployed high school non-graduate, employed high school non-graduate, unemployed high school graduate) and investigating the fiscal impact of transitioning them to a distribution of high school graduates, two-year college graduates, and four-year college graduates that mirror Connecticut's current distribution of educational attainment (excluding advanced degrees).
- Second, quantified the potential gains in tax revenues

from the shift in profiles described above across income and FICA taxes (through improved earnings), and sales and property taxes (through increased consumption).

- Third, looked at reduced government spending on services, both through the reduced use of social safety net benefits—such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Unemployment Insurance Assistance, and rental assistance—and the reduced incidence of incarceration.

The analysis relied primarily on ACS data to estimate the various assumptions above (e.g., earnings, incidence of SNAP benefits, incidence of incarceration) so generally reflects the incidence rates of the actual population of disconnected young people in Connecticut. The analysis also leveraged additional sources such as Connecticut Department of Social Services, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and National Institute of Corrections.

Like the GDP impact estimate above, the fiscal benefit estimate would require years to realize in practice, and the actual impact would also likely be a proportion of the total potential fiscal benefit articulated above, given the many challenges associated with reengaging and reconnecting disconnected young people.

Finally, it is worth noting that, while the analyses above estimate the potential one-year economic and fiscal impact of addressing disconnection, the true economic benefits would continue accruing over the course of a young person's life.

In addition, given that there will be a new cohort of at-risk and disconnected young people coming of age each year, the potential benefit of setting up the programs, policies, and systems across the state to successfully mitigate disconnection would also accrue every year in the form of a new cohort of engaged and connected young people, who otherwise might have experienced disconnection.

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