

Out of School, Out of Work ... Out of Luck? New York City's Disconnected Youth

A Summary of Findings

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Getting from 16 to 24 can feel like a lifetime. At 16, we are at the end of childhood and at the edge of adulthood. And 24 seems a million miles away. It isn't, we learn. But what happens to us in that period of transition, how successfully we finish high school, go on to a promising first job or higher education, how well we avoid the wrong turns so easily made, can shape our lives for many years to come.

This briefing paper summarizes a major CSS study about those young people who may not make it. (The full report is available at: www.cssny.org.) Its focus is New York City's "disconnected youth," our 16 through 24-year-olds who are neither attending school nor participating in the labor force. These young people are an "at risk" group. Disconnected youth are more likely than other young people to engage in activities that are destructive to themselves and their communities. Adults who have experienced prolonged spells of disconnection in their youth are more likely than other adults to experience long bouts of joblessness and earn lower wages throughout their lives.

The life long implications of disconnection are the primary motive for this study. Prior CSS research has documented a "crisis of Black male employment" in New York City, finding that just over half of our Black men (16 through 64 years of age) were employed in 2003. Readers of this report are invited to draw a connection between the low rates of jobholding among the city's Black men and the high rates of disconnection afflicting New York's Black youth. The long-term costs of New York's high drop out rate and our seemingly inadequate efforts to find ways to connect out of school youth to work may then become clear.

The Study's Key Findings:

1. Nearly one-in-six (almost 170,000) of New York City's youth is disconnected. The disconnected rate for New York City males (16.2 percent) is twice the rate for males

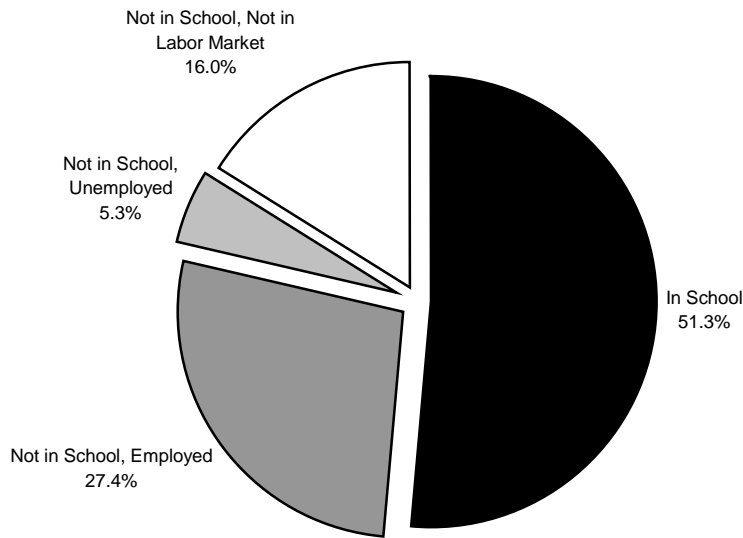
nationally (7.7 percent). For females, the city/nation disparity is less dramatic; 15.8 percent of New York's female youth were disconnected compared with 13.2 percent for the total U.S.

2. Trends over time for the city's male and female youth are markedly divergent. Since 1996/1995 there has been a dramatic 9.8 percentage point decline in the disconnected rate for females. Trends for males, however, are troubling; since the onset of the recession in 2001/2000 their disconnected rate has climbed by 4.5 percentage points. Comparing 1996/1995 to 2003/2002, there has been no growth in either the share of New York's male youth who are enrolled in school or participating in the labor market.
3. The disconnected rate for New York City's youth is higher than the nation's because of the low labor market participation rate among our out of school youth. The labor force participation rate for New York's males is 68.3 percent, while it is 85.2 percent for male youth nationally. For females, the New York/U.S. disparity is 65.8 percent against 73.3 percent.
4. Within New York City there are stark racial disparities in disconnected rates. Among both males and females, African American and Latino youth have much higher disconnected rates than do Non-Hispanic Whites and Asians. The differences are greatest among males, where, in 2000, Black (16.6 percent) and Hispanic (16.0 percent) disconnection rates are twice those of Whites (7.6 percent) and Asians (7.3 percent). But the very highest disconnection rate is for Hispanic females (20.5 percent).
5. Racial disparities are also dramatic when it comes to who is actually holding a job. Among the city's out of school youth, only 42.7 percent of Black and 56.6 percent of Hispanic males were employed in 2000, compared with 73.0 percent of White and 70.0 percent of Asian males. Similarly, only 44.8 percent of Black and 42.7 percent of Hispanic females were employed in that year, while 54.0 percent of Asian and 68.9 percent of White females held a job.
6. The trends and disparities identified in this study demand action and point toward new programmatic initiatives; efforts to improve New York's schools must be complemented by employment-based programs that address the needs of the city's out of school and out of work youth.

The Disconnected Youth Rate

In 2003/2002, there were a little more than one million New York City residents 16 through 24 years of age (about one-eighth of the entire city population).¹ Figure One classifies these young people into one of four mutually exclusive categories. Slightly more than half (51.3 percent) were in school. A little more than a quarter (27.4 percent) were not at school, but were working. A small proportion (5.3 percent) was out of school and unemployed (jobless and actively seeking work). Finally, nearly one-in-six (16.0 percent) was neither in school, employed, nor seeking employment. These nearly 170,000 young people were “disconnected.”²

**Figure One: School Enrollment and Labor Market Status
NYC Youth, 2003/2002**



Source: CSS Tabulations from the Current Population Survey.

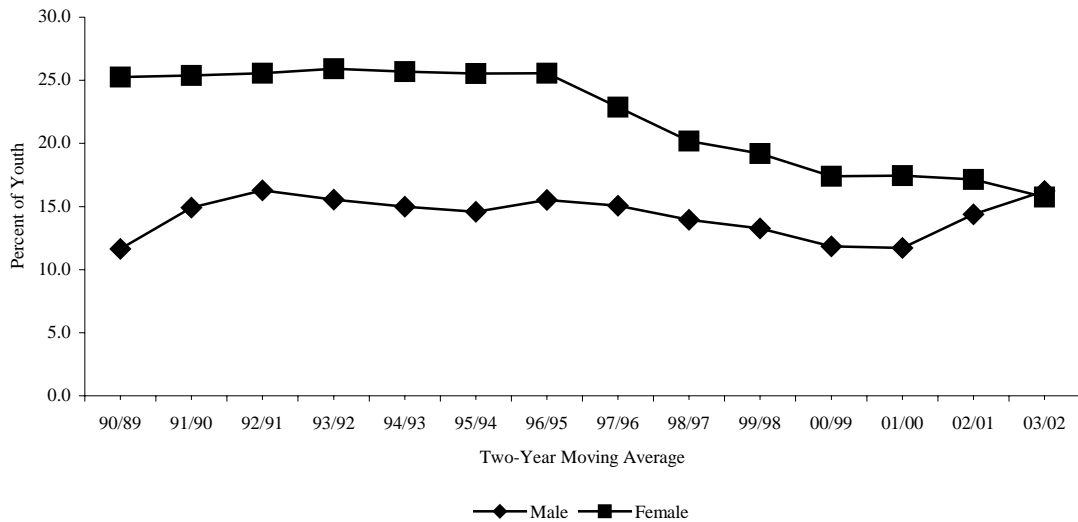
¹ Due to the limited sample of New York City youth available from the Current Population Survey, these data are reported as two-year averages.

² The study follows the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) practice of categorizing persons as in the labor force if they are either employed or unemployed. The latter are individuals who are jobless, available for work, and have made specific efforts to find work the last four weeks. Persons who are jobless, but are either unavailable or not actively seeking work, are not unemployed. They are classified as “not in the labor force.”

Trends by Gender

The most recent data yield estimates of nearly identical disconnected rates for males and females (16.2 percent against 15.8 percent). As a result of the 4.5 percentage point increase since 2001/2000, the disconnected rate for the New York City's male youth is as high as it has been since the end of the 1980s. The lack of progress for males contrasts sharply with the trends for the city's female youth. Trends by gender are illustrated in Figure Two. At the 1990/89 business cycle peak there was a wide (13.6 percentage point) gap in the disconnected rate for males (at 11.6 percent) and females (at 25.3 percent).³ But, since the mid-1990s, there has been a significant decline in the female youth disconnected rate, which has closed the once large gender gap.

Figure Two: NYC Disconnected Youth Rate, By Gender



Source: CSS tabulations from the Current Population Survey.

³ Differences are taken from unrounded numbers.

What Closed the Gender Gap?

Further insight into the very different trajectories of male and female disconnected rates can be gained by decomposing changes in the disconnected rate into changes in the two activities that define connection, school enrollment and labor force participation. Table One measures the contribution of changes in each of these activities to the closing of the gender gap. From 1996/1995 to 2003/2002, there was virtually no change in the male disconnected rate; neither the share who was in school or in the labor force experienced statistically meaningful change. The disconnected rate for females, by contrast, plunged by 9.8 percentage points over this period. Most of the decline was due to a 7.1 percentage point increase in the share of females enrolled in school. While the increase in the proportion of all female youth who were in the labor force rose by a more modest 2.7 percentage points, gains in labor force participation among those females who were out of school was impressive, a 13.9 percentage point climb.

Table One:
Change in Activities, New York City Youth, 1996/95 to 2003/2002
 (Numbers are the percent of the population in the given activity.)

| Year | Males | | | Females | | |
|---|-------|-------|---------|---------|-------|---------|
| | 96/95 | 03/02 | Change* | 96/95 | 03/02 | Change* |
| Percent Disconnected | 15.5 | 16.2 | 0.7 | 25.6 | 15.8 | -9.8 |
| Percent In School | 49.8 | 48.6 | -1.2 | 46.8 | 53.9 | 7.1 |
| Percent In Labor Force | 34.7 | 35.2 | 0.5 | 27.6 | 30.4 | 2.7 |
| Labor Force Participation Rate Of Out of School Population | 69.1 | 68.3 | -0.8 | 52.0 | 65.8 | 13.9 |

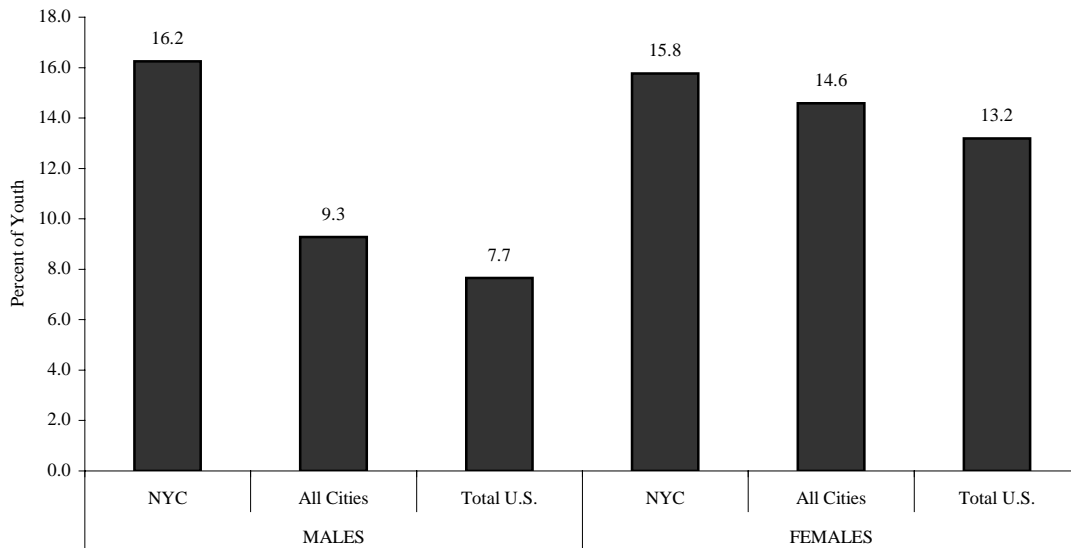
* Change is the percentage point change.
 Source: CSS tabulations from the Current Population Survey.

Comparing Disconnection in New York City to the Nation

New York's youth suffer from higher disconnected rates than do youth across the nation. Figure Three compares the disconnected rates for male and female city youth with those for their

counterparts living in Census-designated central cities across the country as well as all youth in the nation. For males the differences are dramatic; the disconnected rate for New York's male youth is over twice that for the nation at large (16.2 percent against 7.7 percent) and 1.7 times as large as the rate for all urban youth (16.2 percent against 9.3 percent). The differences among females are much smaller. The disconnected rate for New York City is 1.2 percentage points above and 2.6 percentage points higher than that of all central city and total U.S. females, respectively.⁴

Figure Three: Disconnected Rates, 2003/2002



Source: CSS tabulations from the Current Population Survey.

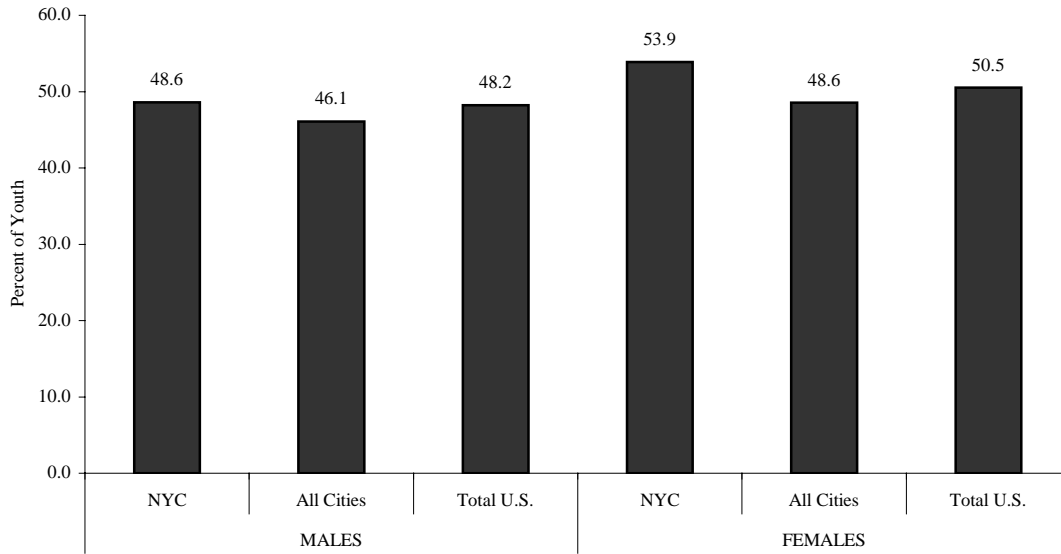
Why Are Disconnected Rates So High in New York City?

The city's higher-than-national disconnected rates could be due to differences either in school enrollment and/or labor force participation rates. As Figure Four illustrates, there is little difference between the share of New York's and the share of the nation's male youth who are in school. The city's female youth, however, hold a small advantage over their national

⁴ Figure Three also reveals that the gender gap has not been closed nationally.

counterparts; the school enrollment rates for New York are 5.3 percentage points higher than the all city rate and 2.4 percentage points higher than the total U.S. rate.

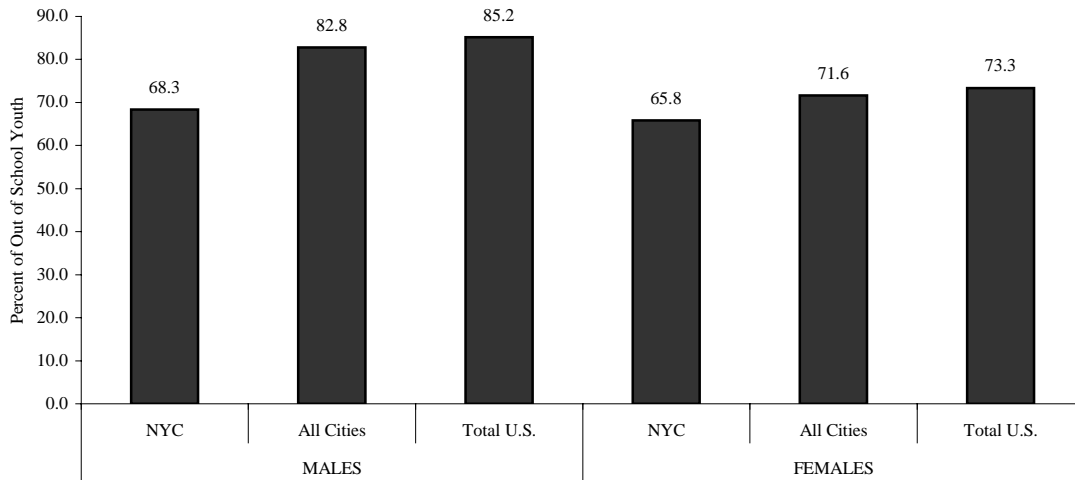
Figure Four: School Enrollment Rates, 2003/2002



Source: CSS tabulations from the Current Population Survey.

This implies that the New York/national disparities are the result of differences in labor force participation rates for out of school youth. As depicted in Figure Five, that is especially true for males. In 2003/2002, just 68.3 percent of the city's out of school males were labor force participants, compared to 82.8 percent of all urban youth and 85.2 percent of total U.S. youth. Differences among females were smaller, 65.8 percent in New York, 71.6 percent in all cities, and 73.3 percent across the nation.

Figure Five: Labor Force Participation Rates, Out of School Youth, 2003/2002



Source: CSS tabulations from the Current Population Survey.

Who Are New York City's Disconnected Youth?

The disconnected rate measures the proportion of New York City's youth who are neither in school nor in the labor force. It doesn't, however, reveal who they are. Table Two fills in the blank by detailing the demographic composition of the city's disconnected youth. Blacks and Hispanics, it reports, dominate the ranks of the disconnected. The table also identifies attributes of the disconnected that may limit their ability to connect to work: poverty, parental responsibilities, low levels of educational attainment, and lack of employment experience.

Age: Disconnected youth are predominantly in their twenties. Over seven-in-ten disconnected males and three-out-of-four disconnected females are 20 through 24 years of age.

Race/Ethnicity: Latinos and African Americans dominate the ranks of the disconnected. Among males, Hispanics (42.1 percent) constitute the largest race/ethnic group among the disconnected, followed by Non-Hispanic Blacks (31.8 percent). A broadly similar pattern holds

for females, among whom Latinas make up 42.1 percent and Non-Hispanic Blacks accounted for 26.4 percent of the disconnected.

Nativity: Foreign-born females are more likely to be disconnected than foreign-born males. Females who were born abroad constitute 42.9 percent of disconnected females, while their male counterparts were only 36.4 percent of disconnected males.

Presence of Own Children in Household:⁵ A very small fraction of disconnected males were living with a son or daughter, 6.4 percent. By contrast, over a third of female disconnected youth (34.1 percent) were living with an own child. Disconnected mothers were nearly equally distributed between those who were married or were single; the former were 17.6 percent and the latter were 16.5 percent of the disconnected population.⁶

Educational Attainment: Education levels among disconnected youth are extremely low. About half of the disconnected (51.9 percent of the males and 47.9 percent of the females) had not completed high school or earned a GED.

Poverty Status: Most disconnected youth are living in low-income families. More than four-in-ten (44.8 percent of males and 46.4 percent of females) disconnected youth are living in poor families. Nearly another quarter (23.3 percent of males and 23.7 percent of females) were “near poor” (living between 100 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty line).

Prior Work Experience:⁷ A large fraction of the disconnected has been jobless for an extended period of time. About two-thirds (67.1 percent) of the disconnected males and three-quarters (75.2 percent) of the disconnected females have not worked in the prior calendar year.

⁵ This cross tabulation is derived from a Census question that asks respondents how many of their own children (sons, daughters, stepchildren, or adopted children) are living with them in the same household.

⁶ The report’s one-dimensional definition of disconnection (preparing for, seeking, or engage in employment) classifies all “stay at home moms” as disconnected. See the full report for a discussion of this and other limitations of the study’s definition of disconnected.

⁷ Because data refer to the prior year, the sample in this cross tabulation is restricted to persons 17 through 24 years of age.

Even longer-term joblessness is common. Roughly half (51.0 percent) of the disconnected males and nearly six out of ten (58.7 percent) of the females report that they had not worked in the last five years.

The disconnected, in sum, are a severely disadvantaged population. An overwhelming majority are members of race/ethnic groups that have suffered a history and endure a present of inferior schooling and labor market discrimination; roughly half lack a high school degree; a large proportion lives in poor families; and most have little recent work experience. An additional issue is raised by the large fraction of disconnected females who are young mothers; they will need work supports, such as childcare, if they are to go to hold a job or attend school.

Table Two:
Who Are New York City's Disconnected Youth?
 (Numbers are the percent of the disconnected with each characteristic.)

| | <u>Males</u> | <u>Females</u> |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Age | | |
| 16-19 | 29.0 | 23.9 |
| 20-24 | 71.0 | 76.1 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | |
| Non-Hispanic White | 16.2 | 19.0 |
| Non-Hispanic Black | 31.8 | 26.4 |
| Asian | 5.8 | 8.0 |
| Hispanic, Any Race | 42.1 | 42.1 |
| Other | 4.1 | 4.5 |
| Nativity | | |
| Born in U.S. | 63.6 | 57.1 |
| Born Abroad | 36.4 | 42.9 |
| Own children in household? | | |
| If yes, Married? | 6.4 | 34.1 |
| If yes, Single? | NA | 17.6 |
| | NA | 16.5 |
| Educational Attainment | | |
| Less than High School | 51.9 | 47.9 |
| High School Degree | 32.8 | 32.7 |
| Some College | 11.1 | 13.1 |
| Bachelors and Higher | 4.1 | 6.3 |
| Poverty Status* | | |
| Less than 100% of FPL | 44.8 | 46.4 |
| 100% thru 199% of FPL | 23.3 | 23.7 |
| 200% and higher of FPL | 31.9 | 29.9 |
| Work Experience | | |
| Did not worked last year | 67.1 | 75.2 |
| Did not work in last 5 years | 51.0 | 58.7 |

*FPL is federal poverty line.

NA: Not Available: sample size is too small to generate statistically meaningful estimates.

Source: CSS tabulations from the 2000 Census Public Use Micro Sample.

Racial Disparities in Disconnection Rates

Table Two documents the overwhelming presence of African Americans and Latinos among New York City's disconnected youth. Is this merely a reflection of their large presence in the overall youth population? Are these groups prone to disconnection because of low rates of school enrollment or lack of labor force participation?

Table Three addresses these questions by reporting (for males and females, respectively) the share of Non-Hispanic Whites, Non-Hispanic Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics who were in school; out of school, but in the labor force; or disconnected in 2000.⁸ It indicates that among males, Non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics had markedly higher disconnection rates (16.6 percent and 16.0 percent, respectively) than do Non-Hispanic Whites and Asians (7.6 percent and 7.3 percent, respectively). Although their disconnected rates were nearly identical, there are notable differences between African Americans and Latinos; relative to Hispanics, Blacks had a higher school enrollment rate (54.7 percent versus 45.5 percent) and a lower labor force participation rate (28.7 percent versus 38.5 percent).

There is a broadly similar pattern in disconnection rates among females. Non-Hispanic Blacks (at 15.3 percent) and Hispanics (with 20.5 percent) had the highest rates of disconnection, compared to Asians (12.6 percent) and Non-Hispanic Whites (10.4 percent). The higher rate (57.7 percent versus 52.9 percent) of school enrollment for Blacks accounts for their somewhat lower disconnected rate than Hispanics. The share of each group that was in the labor force was virtually identical (27.0 percent for Blacks and 26.7 percent for Hispanics).

⁸ The share of each group that is disconnected, its disconnected rate, is not the same as the indicator reported in Table Two, the proportion of the disconnected who are members of a particular group. Comparing differences in rates most directly reveals disparities.

Table Three:
School Enrollment, Labor Force Participation, & Disconnection,
New York City Youth, by Gender and Race/Ethnicity
 (Numbers are the percent of each group in each status.)

| Share of Population: | Males | | | Females | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| | In school | In labor force | Disconnected | In school | In labor force | Disconnected |
| Non-Hispanic White | 59.2 | 33.1 | 7.6 | 58.6 | 31.0 | 10.4 |
| Non-Hispanic Black | 54.7 | 28.7 | 16.6 | 57.7 | 27.0 | 15.3 |
| Asian | 66.7 | 25.9 | 7.3 | 67.6 | 19.8 | 12.6 |
| Hispanic | 45.5 | 38.5 | 16.0 | 52.9 | 26.7 | 20.5 |

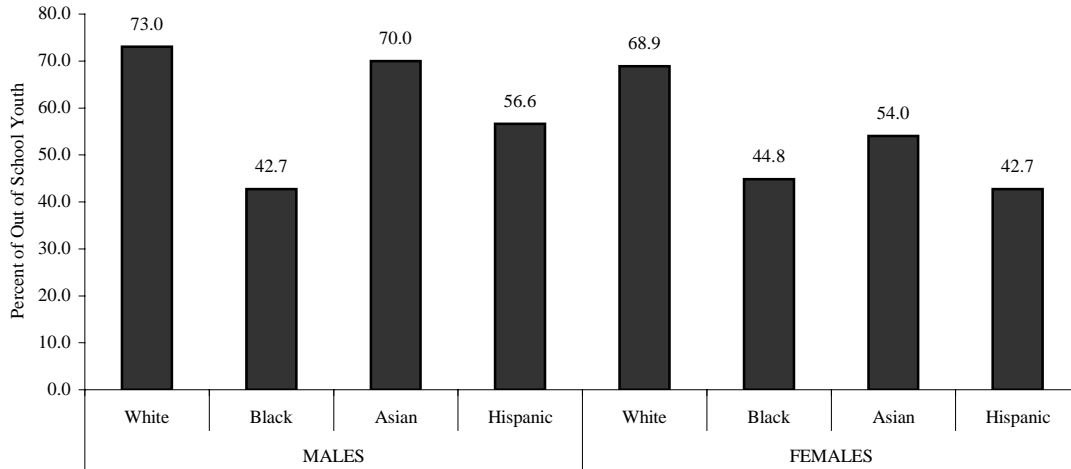
Source: CSS tabulations from the 2000 Census Public Use Micro Sample.

Racial Disparities in Jobholding

It's one thing to be in the labor force, it's quite another to actually be holding a job. The report's definition of disconnected has focused attention on labor force participation, the extent to which young people were either employed or jobless but actively seeking work. From the perspective of the research on disconnected youth, classifying job seekers as connected makes sense. These young people are taking positive steps forward in their lives. But this approach masks the very low rates of jobholding among the city's out of school youth, particularly those who are Black and Hispanic.

Figure Six provides employment-population ratios – the share of male and female youth who are employed – by race/ethnic group in 2000. Among males, Blacks had the very lowest rate of jobholding, a mere 42.7 percent, followed by Hispanics (at 56.6 percent). Rates for Whites and Asians, by contrast, stood at 73.0 percent and 70.0 percent, respectively. Among females, less than half of both Blacks and Hispanics (44.8 percent of the former and 42.7 percent of the latter) held a job while 54.0 percent of Asians and 68.9 percent of Whites were employed.

**Figure Six: Employment-Population Ratios
NYC Out of School Youth,
By Gender and Race/Ethnicity**



Source: CSS tabulations from the 2000 Census Public Use Micro Sample.

Implications for Public Policy

Strategic thinking about disconnected youth tends to focus on the schools.⁹ There is good reason to do so. Nearly every youth who is now disconnected was once connected to the educational system. And a high proportion of the city's disconnected youth are those former students who did not successfully complete high school. Out of school youth (especially males) have a reputation for being a "hard to serve" group. Many conclude that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Educational innovations that keep more young people in school and result in fewer high school dropouts would diminish the pool of youth who were at risk of joining the ranks of the disconnected. Higher levels of educational attainment among those who are out of school would strengthen their ability to make it in the labor market once they completed their schooling.

⁹ See, for example, the chapters by Robert Lerman, Paul Hill, and Andrew Hahn in Douglas J. Besharov, Editor. America's Disconnected Youth: Toward a Preventative Strategy. Washington DC: CWLA Press. 1999.

Mayor Bloomberg's new "Learning to Work" initiative is a welcome recognition of the city's high dropout rate and its impact on the future course of so many of our young people's lives. This vocational program will "include study programs, internships, and paid work. Students will participate in a full-day educational program, or an evening high school program, or a literacy program – all with workforce connections."¹⁰ At the time of writing few details of the program are available, but Michele Cahill of the city's Department of Education indicated that in its initial year the program would serve 2,600 students.¹¹

This program, or other such initiatives, will need to scale up if it is to make a significant inroad into the dropout rate. A recent New York City Department of Education study reports that 16,700 members of the class of 2003 were in a group of students who are at great risk of dropping out; they were overage, but did not have enough credits to graduate from high school. Another 12,890 had dropped out.¹² Clearly, the mayor's pledge to keep more youth in school and to attract dropouts back into the classroom will need to be backed by more resources and even more far reaching innovations.

And while it is essential that our schools do more to keep kids enrolled and that the educational system provide second (or more) chances for youth who have left school to reenter and complete high school, educational initiatives cannot do the job alone. The trends explored in this study send an additional message – job opportunities matter. New York City's disconnected youth rate, the data make clear, grows when jobs are scarce and declines when they are more plentiful. The significant progress made by female youth in recent years is the result of a number of factors, but it could not have been achieved if the labor market had not been generating job

¹⁰ Mayor Michael Bloomberg's 2005 *State of the City* address. January 11, 2005.

¹¹ "Bloomberg Claims Progress and Makes His Political Appeal." *The New York Times*. January 12, 2005.

¹² Numbers are tabulated from New York City Department of Education. March 2004. *The Class of 2003 Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 2002-2003 Event Dropout Rates*. Table 6.

openings for them in the city's burgeoning service sector. Although the trends for male youth are disappointing, the male disconnected rate did fall from 1996/95 to 2001/00 and (because there was no rise in male school enrollment) this decline was entirely the result of increased participation in the job market. Practitioners who work with disconnected youth, moreover, report that many have no desire, at this point in their lives, to return to the classroom. What they want is a job.¹³ School-based programs must be complemented with a commitment to a comprehensive employment-based strategy focused on out of school youth.¹⁴

Specific Labor Market Initiatives

Increased job opportunities are essential to the prospects of New York's out of school youth. City-level policy making can foster the quantity and affect the quality of local job opportunities through its economic and workforce development programs, as well as its commitment to first class infrastructure, high quality public schools and the world famous public amenities that make New York an attractive place to do business and raise a family.¹⁵ These investments, if well made, pay off in the long-term for New Yorkers from all walks of life.

But the focus here is on actions that can yield immediate results. The proposals that follow suggest three ways that city and the state can create employment opportunities for the most disadvantaged out of school youth. Specifically, New York's leaders can:

1. Open apprenticeship opportunities in the construction industry.
2. Expand the apprenticeship model to new industries.
3. Establish a New York City Job Corps.

¹³ United States General Accounting Office. February 2004. *Workforce Investment Act: Labor Actions Can Help States Improve Quality of Performance Outcome Data and Delivery of Youth Services.*

¹⁴ Labor market and education-based programs should not be seen as competing strategies. Employment-based programs in the schools can be a means toward dropout prevention. Work experience programs for out of school youth can provide remedial education and motivate youth to go back to school in the future.

¹⁵ Building a Ladder to Jobs and Higher Wages: A Report by the Working Group on New York City's Low-Wage Labor Market 2000 provides a comprehensive array of job creation proposals.

Open Construction Apprenticeship Opportunities

A number of Western European nations have developed extensive apprenticeship systems as both a workforce development tool and as a mechanism to transition non-college bound young people from school to work.¹⁶ In the United States apprenticeships are largely confined to the unionized segment of the construction industry, where they successfully provide employers with a highly skilled workforce and offer participants a path toward a family-supporting career. The attraction of apprenticeships for out of school youth is that apprentices earn a wage while they are mastering a trade. Entry into building trades apprenticeships, however, is limited. The building trades unions are reluctant to bring more people into programs than they can provide jobs for. Another factor that limits access are entry requirements. Depending on the specific trade, admission into the program requires a high school degree or GED as well as satisfactory performance on physical and written examinations.¹⁷

Both of these factors are a significant barrier to many disconnected youth. But they are not immutable. First, more jobs, and therefore more apprenticeship slots, are in the offing. New York City is about to experience a construction boom. Massive projects from Lower Manhattan, the Far West Side, Columbia University, to Downtown Brooklyn, will be erecting office buildings, sports facilities, subway extensions, and new housing over the next decade. In addition, industry observers note that the ranks of the unionized construction workforce are aging. The impending retirement of the baby boom generation of skilled journeymen, along with these new projects, is creating a unique opportunity that the city has a responsibility to seize.

¹⁶ Ryan, Paul. "The School-to-Work Transition: A Cross-National Perspective." Journal of Economic Literature. March 2001.

¹⁷ Another barrier, which some industry observers believe to be on the wane, is a history of racial exclusion.

The mayor has announced his intention to establish a Commission on Construction Opportunity for the purpose of ensuring “opportunities for all.”¹⁸ The Commission is to be composed of representatives from the industry, its unions, senior members of the administration and Congressman Charles Rangel. With this initiative the mayor has established a clear public commitment and created a sound institutional framework by which to honor it. What is needed next is a concrete plan. To realize this promising start, the Commission should establish clear goals by which it and the public can measure its success. If the Commission’s mandate truly is opportunity for all, it must also acknowledge the difficulty many of the youth who need these jobs the most will have in gaining admission into an apprenticeship program.

“Pre-apprenticeship” programs can serve young people, who have an interest in the building trades, but do not now have the qualifications to directly enter apprenticeships. New York City is already home to a promising in-school program, Construction Trades 2000, which is jointly sponsored by the Construction Trades Council of Greater New York and the Building Trades Employers’ Association. High school seniors who successfully complete the program are given preferred access to construction apprenticeships.¹⁹

The Mayor’s Commission should establish a pre-apprenticeship program for youth who are out of school. If it is going to be helpful to disadvantaged youth, the program will have to combine educational remediation, support services, and mentorship along with an orientation to what work in the construction industry is like. This will require funding, coordination with the apprenticeship system, contracts with service providers, as well as efforts by organizations with roots in the city’s low-income neighborhoods to encourage young people in their communities to participate.

¹⁸ Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s 2005 *State of the City* address. January 11, 2005.

¹⁹ More information is available at www.constructionskills2000.org.

Seattle's Office of Port Jobs provides a model for how local industry, labor, community and political leaders can join together to open construction apprenticeship opportunities to disadvantaged groups. A key element in the system is the Apprentice Opportunities Project, which serves as a pipeline between low-income city residents and the building trades. The Project is responsible for recruitment, placement, support services, mentorship, and follow up with construction apprenticeship candidates that are economically disadvantaged, people of color, or women.²⁰ The Commission should learn from Seattle's experience.

Expand the Apprenticeship Model to New Industries

Policymakers should also look beyond the confines of the construction industry to expand the apprenticeship model. Although the decline of manufacturing is hollowing out the middle tiers of the labor market, there are still jobs in New York that provide living wage careers, but do not require four-year college degrees to perform them.²¹ For example, over 85,000 New Yorkers are employed in occupations classified as "installation, maintenance, and repair." Workers in these occupations keep the physical and technological infrastructure of our economy and our homes running. Everything from elevators, air-conditioning, and computer networks, to photocopying machines may be manufactured outside the city, but they usually need to be serviced here. Another example is "transportation and material moving" occupations, which employ another 200,000 New Yorkers in the task of moving people and freight via subways, busses, taxis, aircraft and trucks.²²

²⁰ See www.portjobs.org for more information.

²¹ This is not to say that the city should passively allow its remaining manufacturing sector to slip away. The Zoning for Jobs campaign advocates for policies that would foster New York City manufacturing. See <http://www.nyirn.com/ZFJ.htm>.

²² CSS tabulation from the 2003 Current Population Survey.

These jobs are blue collar in nature, and while some of them are manufacturing-related, they are also integral to the success of a service-based economy.²³ And they pay more than work in service occupations. The median wage for the installation, maintenance, and repair occupational group is \$16.00 per hour. For transportation and moving occupations it's \$12.00 per hour. These compare favorably to the median of \$9.50 for service occupations.²⁴

Unlike Western Europe, there is no overarching system for recruiting and training workers for these positions. Young people typically make their way to them via a patchwork of vocational high schools, the community colleges, or through social networks of family and friendship that provide the necessary connections. These routes exclude many disconnected youth because they lack the educational prerequisites or the connections to adults who are working in these fields. Apprenticeship-style programs in industries or occupations where they do not currently exist could offer disconnected youth an alternative path to these jobs.

As a start the New York State Department of Labor (DOL) could use discretionary funds provided by the federal Workforce Investment Act to offer seed money and technical assistance to industry partners who want to establish apprenticeship programs in their industries. The DOL should issue a request for proposals from employer associations and trade unions that are interested in creating programs for their industry. As part of the criteria for awarding funds, proposals should be required to address the ways in which the programs will reach out and actively recruit disadvantaged youth.

²³ Although these jobs are not regarded as a high growth sector, the New York State Department of Labor projects that there will be an annual average of 5,030 and 2,620 job openings in the transportation and material moving and installation, maintenance and repair occupational groups, respectively.

²⁴ CSS tabulation from the 2003 Current Population Survey.

Create a New York City Job Corps

Apprenticeship opportunities are a good fit for young people who are ready for a challenging situation. But one size will not fit all. For youth who have little or no work experience or have a difficult time getting hired because of specific barriers such as work limiting disabilities or a criminal record, a different program model is more appropriate. One approach that offers participants work experience and a wage is publicly subsidized employment. This approach has a long history, dating back to the New Deal's Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps. In the 1970s the federal government funded up to 750,000 public service employment positions through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. More recently New York City has created transitional job programs for welfare participants, such as the Parks Opportunity Program. Paid transitional employment can also be an important tool in job readiness programs for people returning from prison.²⁵

What public service or transitional jobs programs offer is a time-limited, wage-paying job to people who do not yet have the capacity to secure employment in the unsubsidized labor market. Besides providing income and on the job training, these programs can offer remedial education and vocational training, as well as social services. An additional benefit to participants (and the broader community) is that they are performing real work that contributes to the well being of the city. Typically participants in transitional jobs programs work for city agencies or nonprofit institutions. But opportunities in the for-profit sector should be considered as well. This is a relatively expensive model (depending on the wage rate and intensity of ancillary services, costs would range between \$15,000 to \$20,000 per participant per year), but it is one of

²⁵ The Center for Employment Opportunities runs such a program here in New York. See www.ceoworks.org for more information.

the few approaches that has consistently shown positive outcomes for low-income youth in rigorous evaluations.²⁶

The city should initiate a New York Job Corps program that would provide 5,000 unemployed, out of school youth with a one-year publicly subsidized job.

These three suggestions are no cure all. They are not large enough in scale. They do not meet every need or address all the barriers that stand between disconnected youth and steady work. They do illustrate, however, that meaningful steps can be taken to address the needs of out of school youth, if policy makers are willing to do so.

The costs of a more comprehensive effort, not doubt, would be considerable. But New York's political leadership and the public need to bear in mind the price of inaction. Each young person who ends up in prison rather than in a career is an enormous cost to society. The price of incarceration (at \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year) is just the most obvious expense. Wasted potential must also be weighed. Each young person who drops by the wayside is one less person who can contribute to the economy, pay taxes, provide love and sustenance to their children, and contribute to the life of our city.

²⁶ For an excellent summary of the literature on public service employment programs see Chapter Seven of Bartik, Timothy J. [Jobs for the Poor: Can Labor Demand Policies Help?](#) Russell Sage Foundation. 2001.