EQUITY COUNTS

Tracking Opportunity Youth Outcomes

Measures for capturing community-level improvements in opportunity youth outcomes

September 2019

EQUAL MEASURE

FINDING PROMISE
FUELING CHANGE

"What gets measured gets managed."

—Peter Drucker

About the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions promotes collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity. We support communities to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges. The Forum for Community Solutions plays an integral role in the national opportunity youth movement via the Opportunity Youth Forum, including functions related to coordinating funding, producing research and learning, providing technical assistance and other activities. For more information, visit: https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth/

About Equal Measure

Equal Measure is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization that works with foundations, nonprofit organizations, and public entities to advance social change. For more than 30 years, we have partnered with organizations like these working on complex, often messy, social issues to help create more powerful, equitable, and enduring systems and positive outcomes. To have a more direct impact with clients, Equal Measure offers five service lines—program design, evaluation, capacity building, technical assistance, and communications. Through these services, we help our clients clarify program goals, support implementation, engage in learning and plan improvement, conduct mixed-method developmental evaluations, frame narratives to have the strongest impact, and share what we have learned with the field. Whether it's improving access to college education and careers, expanding access to healthy foods, or building opportunities for financial empowerment, we help our clients make communities stronger, healthier, more equitable, and more inclusive. For more information, visit: www.equalmeasure.org

INTRODUCTION

Opportunity youth (OY) are among the hardest-to-reach youth in our communities. Unlike youth who are connected to school systems, postsecondary institutions, or employers, opportunity youth—defined as "young people between the ages 16 to 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor force"—do not interact with these systems. There is no system or single point of contact through which opportunity youth are engaged, and through which progress and outcomes are measured. Rather, opportunity youth, if connected at all, float among service providers, in and out of school, and between jobs.

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions' Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) and other national cross-sector and collective impact efforts such as Lumina Foundation's Talent Hubs initiative, StriveTogether's Cradle to Career Network, and the BUILD Health Challenge—to name a few—have embraced a culture of data-driven decision-making. Rigorous data use is essential to collaborative efforts to improve community-level outcomes, yet attempts to accurately track opportunity youth outcomes are fraught with logistical and technical challenges and are almost impossible to do consistently. To improve outcomes and deepen the impact of the opportunity youth movement, we must measure and report on youth connection consistently across communities and over time. Only then will the movement to reconnect opportunity youth get the attention of funders, policymakers, and other stakeholders it deserves.

EQUITY COUNTS DATA COLLECTION PILOT (DCP) COMMUNITIES

- Austin Opportunity Youth Collaborative, Austin, TX
- Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative, Boston, MA
- Thrive Chicago, Chicago, IL
- Oakland-Alameda County Opportunity Youth Initiative, Alameda County, CA
- Project U-Turn, Philadelphia, PA
- Santa Clara County Opportunity Youth Partnership, Santa Clara County, CA

For the past year, Equal Measure has partnered with the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions on the *Equity Counts* initiative, with the goal of developing a way to track opportunity youth outcomes across communities. Funded with 12 months of initial support from The Ballmer Group, the goal of *Equity Counts* is to help OYF member communities increase their capacities for data collection and data use, with a focus on using data to promote equitable outcomes. Six OYF communities participated in the Equity Counts Data Collection Pilot (DCP) in 2018-2019 to define measures and participate in a data collection effort focused on select opportunity youth population-level data points in their communities. Equal Measure worked with these communities to develop community-wide indicators of OY success and progress, and to disaggregate these measures by key demographic factors such as race/ethnicity, gender, and age.

On the following pages, we:

» discuss the importance of creating common measures for tracking opportunity youth outcomes;

» describe the greatest challenges associated with these efforts; and

» introduce a set of measures—The OYF Common Measures—that utilize publicly available data to capture community-wide progress in connecting 16 to 24 year-olds to high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce.

USING DATA TO ADVANCE A MOVEMENT

Data have long played an important role in the social sector. As far back as 1954, Peter Drucker reminded us that *"what gets measured gets managed."*[1] If we want to create change, we need to use data to set strategies, monitor progress, and capture impact. The OYF Data Use Framework outlines six ways cross-sector efforts can use data. The OYF Common Measures—which help communities track youth connection and disconnection to education and workforce pathways—play a critical role in this framework, and are necessary to *communicate the vision* and *make the case* for the opportunity youth movement.

Communicating the Vision

Using data to communicate a vision for large-scale, place-based change has gained traction in the field of collective impact over the past eight years. Communicating a common vision is vital to any movement's success. Data are used to build commitment toward a shared vision for connecting the community's youth to education and employment pathways and advancing equitable outcomes. This vision is often communicated in the form of a single public goal or set of goals. A collaborative may share annual progress reports through dashboards, report cards, or similar public-facing publications to report on progress toward this vision. Regardless of the tools they use, collaboratives must articulate a central, data-driven vision for their work and gauge progress toward that goal.

Making the Case

A key component of any successful movement is its ability to "make the case" for supporting the movement. Data are used to communicate with funders, policymakers, the media, the general public, and other stakeholders to articulate the need for support in advancing the OY agenda. These data may illustrate OY characteristics/demographics (race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, education level), disparate outcomes pointing to inequity, or other data necessary to articulate the need to support the OY agenda and where that support can be directed. A common, agreed upon approach to measuring youth disconnection is essential for effectively communicating the "case" for supporting the opportunity youth movement. Using clear and consistent data to communicate with external stakeholders is also an important step in advancing discussions about the scale of the issue at hand.

[1] Drucker, P. F.. (1954). *The practice of management.* New York: Harper & Row.

THE OYF DATA USE FRAMEWORK

- **COMMUNICATING THE VISION**
  Data are used to articulate and build commitment toward a shared vision for connecting the community's youth to education and employment pathways and advancing equitable outcomes.

- **CASE-MAKING**
  Data are used to communicate with funders, policymakers, the media, the general public, and other stakeholders to articulate the need for support in advancing the OY agenda.

- **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**
  Data are used to assess, improve, and target the collaborative's and partners' OY supports or services.

- **UNDERSTANDING YOUTH AND THEIR NEEDS**
  Data are used to understand "who" opportunity youth are to ensure effective engagement and support. These data are disaggregated to identify inequities in the system and design targeted interventions.

- **PARTNER ACCOUNTABILITY**
  Data help the collaborative's partners "own" their contributions to the OY agenda.

- **ASSESSING PARTNERSHIP HEALTH**
  Data are used to make sure the collaborative's infrastructure—including communication channels, decision-making processes, and work groups—function properly, and are equitable and inclusive.

THE NEED FOR CONSISTENCY

Consistency in how we measure youth connection and disconnection is needed to assess whether communities are improving youth connection. Talking about issues as "good" or "bad"—or saying that an issue is "improving"—is challenging without data.

What may be "good" to one person may be "bad" to another. We use common definitions when talking about a community's poverty rate, the country's unemployment rate, or infant mortality around the world. This consistency allows for comparisons across geographies and over time, allowing us to determine areas of greatest need, and to determine whether things are getting better.

Communicating effectively about opportunity youth—their number, their life circumstances, and improvements in connection rates—requires that we mean the same thing when we talk about "youth disconnection." Currently, no common set of measures or indicators exists for communities to capture opportunity youth outcomes: connection to education (high school and postsecondary) or employment. Establishing consistent measures for "disconnection" and "connection":

Allows for standard methods of understanding the OY population within and across communities.
By using the same measures over time, communities can assess their progress in connecting youth to education and/or employment. Using common measures across communities allows for "apples to apples" comparisons and helps us understand trends and progress.

Helps align goals and strategies.
Consistent measures can provide a snapshot of the current landscape, which can be used to set goals and strategies for achieving those goals. Establishing goals can motivate communities to focus efforts on particular areas.

Improves a community's ability to "tell the story."
Community-level measures can help communities tell the story of the current state of youth connection or disconnection. When communities use the same data, they can contextualize that story and combine stories to provide an even bigger story about opportunity youth nationally.

CHALLENGES IN TRACKING YOUTH DISCONNECTION AND CONNECTION

Despite its importance, consistently tracking youth disconnection—and their re-connection to education and employment pathways—is challenging. The unique situation of opportunity youth, defined by their "disconnection" from a variety of systems that typically track youth outcomes, poses significant challenges.

Siloed data systems

Opportunity youth, by definition, are not connected to education or workforce pathways. Their status is defined by their lack of connection to these systems, which makes tracking their engagement (or lack thereof) a challenge. Whereas high school students' progress can be tracked within a school district's management information system, and employers can track key information among those they employ, the success of opportunity youth cannot be followed in the same way. Additionally, youth who are engaged with and then leave these systems are no longer "followed" across organizations or sectors. A community college may know that one of its students is no longer attending its classes, but rarely can reliably track where the student has gone—whether to another community college, a four-year institution, the workforce, or home to take care of an ill family member. Employers present similar challenges. As a young person ends employment for one reason or another, her former employer keeps no records of her next move.

The momentary nature of "opportunity youth"

Opportunity youth "age out" when they become 25 years old, and a new set of youth become part of the 16-24 year-old age range each year. To further complicate the issue, no single national database or systems tracks the education or employment status of young people over time—many of whom may move in and out of "opportunity youth" status as their connection to school and employers changes. While there are several national longitudinal studies,[2] these data focus on a specific cohort, in a specific timeframe (e.g., 10th graders in 2002), and provide a national rather than community-level perspective. Therefore, to understand OY in communities on a regular basis, data must be derived from some other source or combination of sources.

[2] Such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), and the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS).

Figure 1: Characteristics of An Ideal Data Source for Tracking OY Outcomes

FEASIBLE to collect

ACCURATE count across the community

CONSISTENT across communities and time

A Solution: The American Community Survey

While some communities have sophisticated data sets and strong relationships that allow them to track opportunity youth across partner organizations, these approaches: a) are not always exclusively tracking "opportunity youth" (because youth who don't technically meet the definition are also being served); and b) do not have complete "community coverage," as they are limited to the youth being served by or interacting with partner organizations. While some communities come close to tracking this information through a robust set of databases across a variety of workforce and education systems, their approaches vary, and represent a very small set of communities across the U.S. and are not replicable across communities. To strengthen how we report on opportunity youth, we need a system that consistently collects data across the country, such as the American Community Survey (ACS).

The ACS, administered annually by the U.S. Census Bureau, is the most comprehensive annual source of information that tracks school enrollment and employment status among those not connected to education and employment systems.[3] The ACS data allow communities to capture OY disconnection using reliable data that are produced annually. Additionally, the ACS captures a number of demographic characteristics that allow for deeper analysis of opportunity youth, including by race, ethnicity, age, income level, and nativity.

[3] For more information about the American Community Survey, see *American Community Survey Information Guide*: https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/programs-surveys/acs/about/ACS_Information_Guide.pdf

Figure 2: Sample Data Illustrating How to Monitor Disconnection Rates Over Time
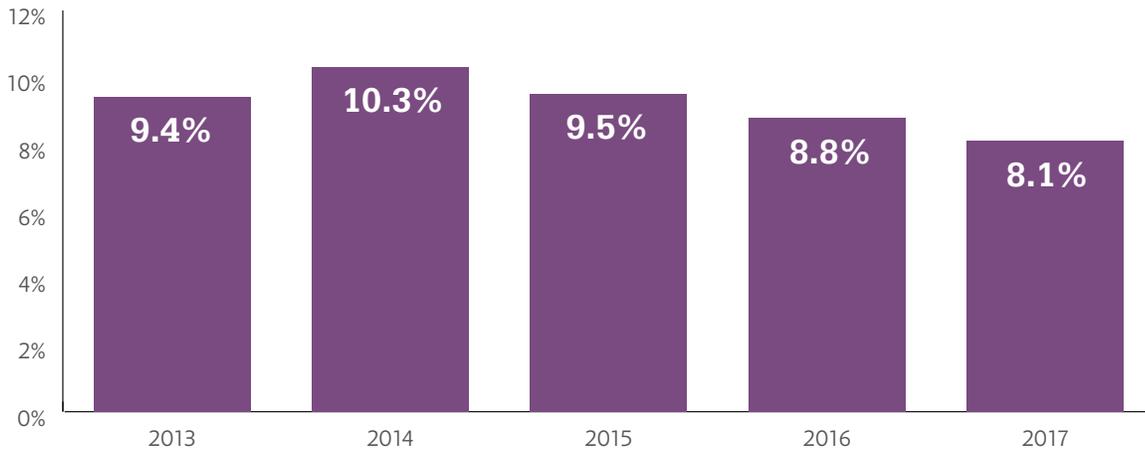
Perhaps most importantly, the ACS is the only data set that allows for the production of trend data on youth disconnection, and in the same way, across communities. ACS data can compensate for the challenges with tracking opportunity youth progress—connections to education or employment outcomes—over time. The ACS' yearly "snapshot" of a community's residents offers an alternative to longitudinal data. These annual data allow for a review of progress in the same way poverty and unemployment rates are monitored. By monitoring the extent that their 16-24 year-olds are disconnected, communities can determine whether they're reducing disconnection (and thus increasing connection) rates over time. In Figure 2, we provide an example of how several years of data can be used to track youth disconnection over time.

ACS is not a perfect data collection tool, and is not without its critics and shortcomings. Despite its limitations, it offers many benefits that make it the best option for capturing youth connection and, more specifically, calculating disconnection rates. Many communities focused on opportunity youth already use ACS data to track youth disconnection in their community, and the most well-known provider of data on youth disconnection, Measure of America,[4] uses ACS data to keep the field abreast of trends among this group. The uniformity and comprehensive nature of the data, as well, allow the OYF to use this information to track network-wide progress, capture the scale of that progress, and use consistent and reliable data to "make the case" for supporting the opportunity youth movement. Because of the benefits, and in spite of its limitations, the ACS provides the best source of data for tracking community-wide youth disconnection. In Table 1 we highlight these benefits and limitations.

[4] http://measureofamerica.org/disconnected-youth

Table 1: Benefits and Limitations of the American Community Survey

BENEFITS OF THE ACS	LIMITATIONS OF THE ACS
• **Feasible to collect** – Data are publicly available on the Census website	• **Delayed** – Data are not available until approximately 10 months after being collected
• **Consistency in timing and methods** – Collected through an annual survey from a representative sample of the U.S. population	• **Presents an annual "snapshot"** – Doesn't track the same individuals over time
• **Credibility** – Acknowledged as a credible source across sectors and used by community leaders and policymakers	• **Level of detai**l – Some variables are not as detailed as some would like. Data reflecting postsecondary enrollment and attainment, for example, are limited to two-and four-year college degrees[5]
• **Accuracy** – Uses a reliable sample of the U.S. population	• **Provides estimates, not actual counts** – The survey is distributed to a sample of people rather than the full population. Some samples are so small that the data can't be disaggregated
• **Geographic scope** – Representative of the community as a whole	
• **Geographic specificity** – Data can be analyzed according to customized geographic areas using Public Use Microdata Areas	
• **Ability to disaggregate** – Data can be disaggregated according to a variety of demographic characteristics	

Using the ACS, and working closely with the Equity Counts Data Collection Pilot sites, we developed four measures—The OYF Common Measures— to understand the extent that young people are disconnected from education and employment pathways. These measures, discussed on the following pages, were developed in partnership with collaboratives of the OYF in an effort to rigorously and systematically capture education and employment outcomes among opportunity youth in the communities they serve. They provide a yearly snapshot of what is happening within a community, and can track changes in disconnection overall— as well as specific types of disconnection—over time. *(Note: All ACS data reported on the following pages are from 2017, the most recent data available at the time).*

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[5] For more information on the ACS and the variables used to examine OY outcomes, see *Equity Counts: Development of Common Measures, A Brief Technical Guide.*

A COMMUNITY-WIDE MEASURE FOR TRACKING YOUTH DISCONNECTION

At the most basic level, communities working to improve outcomes for opportunity youth want to monitor the rate of their young people, ages 16-24, who are disconnected from work and school. Most communities focusing on opportunity youth already do this, using a variety of methods.

A community's disconnection rate reflects the percentage of young people in the community, ages 16 to 24, who are not working *and* not in school. Monitoring this rate can help a community determine whether its efforts—both preventative and responsive—to connect young people with education or career pathways are working. This rate *does not,* however, communicate where the greatest need for reconnection lies—whether in high school, postsecondary education, or the workforce—or where communities are making progress in reconnecting youth.

While the disconnection rate is a valuable metric for communities looking to connect opportunity youth to education and employment pathways, a reduction in the community disconnection rate does not reveal what outcomes are being achieved, simply that fewer youth are disconnected from one year to the next.

Calculating the Community Disconnection Rate

$$\frac{\text{\# of young people not working and not in school}}{\text{\# of 16-24 year-olds in the community.}}$$

In Boston—which has 113,503 young people between the ages of 16 and 24—4,922 are not working or in school. Its community disconnection rate is 4.3%, the lowest of all OYF communities.

4.3%

A NEW WAY TO TRACK OPPORTUNITY YOUTH OUTCOMES: SEGMENTED DISCONNECTION RATES

In addition to a community-wide youth disconnection rate that many communities already use, The OYF Common Measures include *three new ways* to track youth disconnection, and provide an opportunity to understand youth connection to specific points along the education-to-career continuum. By taking a closer look at a community's 16-24 year-olds, we can capture the extent that OY are connected to high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. These measures, referred to as "segmented disconnection rates," offer a way to use ACS data to monitor these connections over time, both within and across communities.

High School Disconnection Rate. The rate of young people without a high school diploma/GED and not working who are disconnected from high school.

Postsecondary Disconnection Rate. The rate of young people with a high school diploma/GED, without a postsecondary credential, who are disconnected from postsecondary education and not working.

Workforce Disconnection Rate. The rate of young people with a postsecondary credential, but not enrolled in postsecondary education, who are disconnected from the workforce.

These three disconnection rates reflect a more nuanced understanding of a community's disconnection rate by reporting the percentage of youth who are disconnected from *a particular segment of the education-to-career continuum* (high school, postsecondary, workforce).

To determine each rate, we focus on the segment of the 16-24 year-old population that we would reasonably expect to be connected to that portion of the education-to-career continuum (i.e., the "denominator" in each calculation). We then calculate the percentage of those youth who are not connected to that pathway (the "preferred connection point").

A PREFERRED CONNECTION POINT

To accurately capture youth disconnection from each portion of the education-to-career continuum, we must determine who we can expect to be connected to that pathway. To do so, we have identified a "preferred connection point" for each 16 to 24 year-old based on their level of education and employment status. OY without a high school credential, for example, are captured in the "High School Disconnection Rate," even though they could technically find work without a secondary credential (If this were to happen, the community's High School Disconnection Rate would still improve). Identifying "preferred" outcomes ensures:

a) consistency in how we capture youth connection; and

b) that each OY is counted only once across the three segmented rates.

Because of the way the rates are calculated, any OY who becomes connected to a different pathway—for example, someone identified as disconnected from postsecondary education who becomes employed—still reduces the overall disconnection rate and the "segmented" disconnection rate (the Postsecondary Disconnection Rate, in this example).

Figure 3: Segmenting OY Disconnection

All 16-24 year-olds

High School · Postsecondary · Employed

HS Disconnection · PS Disconnection · Workforce Disconnection

OY are not connected to any of these pathways
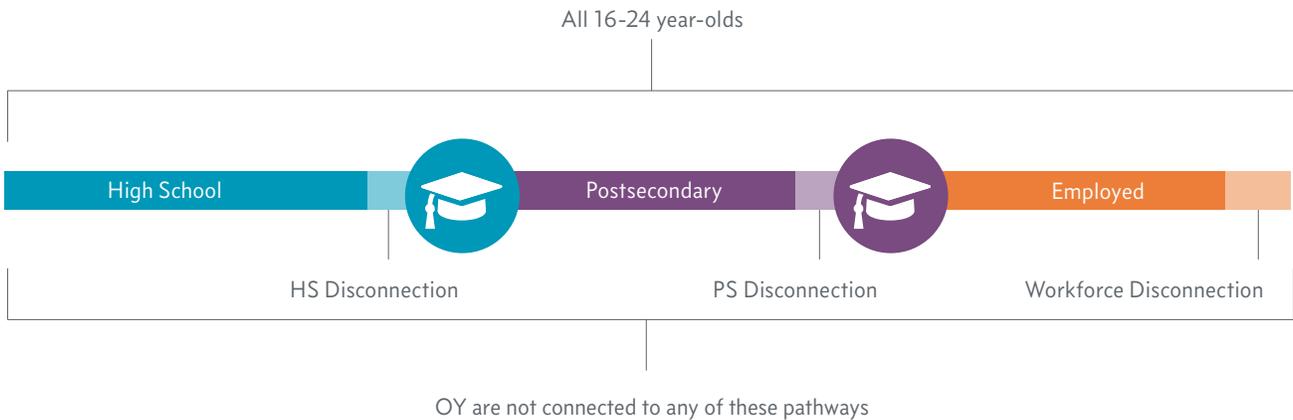
The youth reflected in each disconnection rate are opportunity youth; and the opportunity youth reflected in these three disconnection rates capture *all* of a community's opportunity youth. These rates are mutually exclusive and exhaustive: they capture the disconnection "type" of all opportunity youth, and each opportunity youth is counted in only one of the three disconnection rates.

Over time, communities can use these rates to determine whether they are closing the gap of youth disconnection from each point along the education-to-career continuum.

HIGH SCHOOL DISCONNECTION RATE

Connecting opportunity youth to high school is a priority for youth without a high school diploma. Even though they could find employment, the "preferred connection point" for young people who have not completed high school or an equivalency program, and who are not attending school (i.e., have dropped out) or are working, is to get them back into secondary schooling.

The high school disconnection rate determines the percentage of young people in the community who are disconnected from high school. The high school disconnection rate reflects the percentage of 16-24 year-olds in the community who "should be" enrolled in high school but are not. The rate is calculated by looking at the number of 16-24 year-olds without a high school diploma or GED, and not working, who are not enrolled in high school.

Calculating the High School Disconnection Rate

$$\frac{\text{\# of young people not enrolled in HS}}{\text{\# of 16-24 year-olds without a HS diploma/GED and not working}}$$

13,199 young people in Boston do not have a high school credential and are not working. Since the preferred connection point for these youth is high school, we look at the number who aren't enrolled in high school to determine the high school disconnection rate. In this community, most of these youth are enrolled in high school, but 1,005 are not. Thus, 1,005 of 13,199 eligible young people are disconnected from high school, for a High School Disconnection Rate of 7.6% (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Determining High School Disconnection

13,199 youth COULD be enrolled in HS

High School	Postsecondary	Employed

12,194 are enrolled in HS
1,005 are NOT enrolled in HS
92.4% HS enrollment rate
or 7.6% HS disconnection
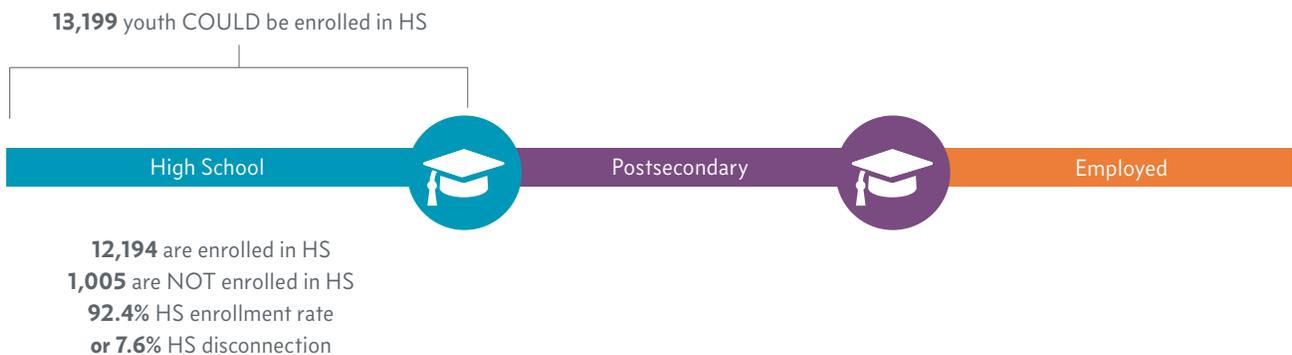
POSTSECONDARY DISCONNECTION RATE

In the same way that communities can capture the extent that young people in their community are disconnected from high school, they can determine the extent that young people are disconnected from postsecondary education. Opportunity youth with a high school credential don't need to be re-connected to high school; rather, the "preferred connection point" for young people who have a high school diploma or equivalent, but are not currently enrolled in a postsecondary program or working, is to get them into a postsecondary program. The postsecondary disconnection rate reflects the percentage of 16-24 year-olds in the community who "should be" enrolled in a postsecondary institution, but are not.

The number is calculated by looking at the number of 16-24 year-olds with a high school diploma or GED—but not a postsecondary credential and not working—who are not enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Additionally, because many young people work while enrolled in postsecondary, we capture those youth in our pool of youth who "could" be working, so that they are factored into the community's Postsecondary Disconnection Rate. Importantly, because we use ACS data, postsecondary enrollment is limited to a two-year or four-year college and does not include training programs, apprenticeships, or non-degree credential programs.

Calculating the Postsecondary Disconnection Rate

# of young people not enrolled in a PS institution

# of 16-24 year-olds with a HS diploma/GED who do not have a PS credential and are not working
+
# of 16-24 year-olds with a HS diploma or GED do not have a PS credential and are enrolled in PS AND working

In Philadelphia, 58,891 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 have a high school credential, but do not have a postsecondary credential and are not working. Of these young people, 32,564 are enrolled in a postsecondary institution and 26,327 are not. An additional 22,677 young people are enrolled in a postsecondary institution AND working. In total, 26,327 out of 81,568 young people in Philadelphia are not enrolled in a postsecondary institution, for a 32.3% Postsecondary Disconnection Rate (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Determining Postsecondary Disconnection

58,891 youth have a HS credential but not a PS credential and are not working
22,677 additional youth are enrolled in PS AND working

| High School | Postsecondary | Employed |

55,241 are enrolled in PS
26,327 are NOT enrolled in PS
67.7% PS enrollment rate
or 32.3% PS disconnection
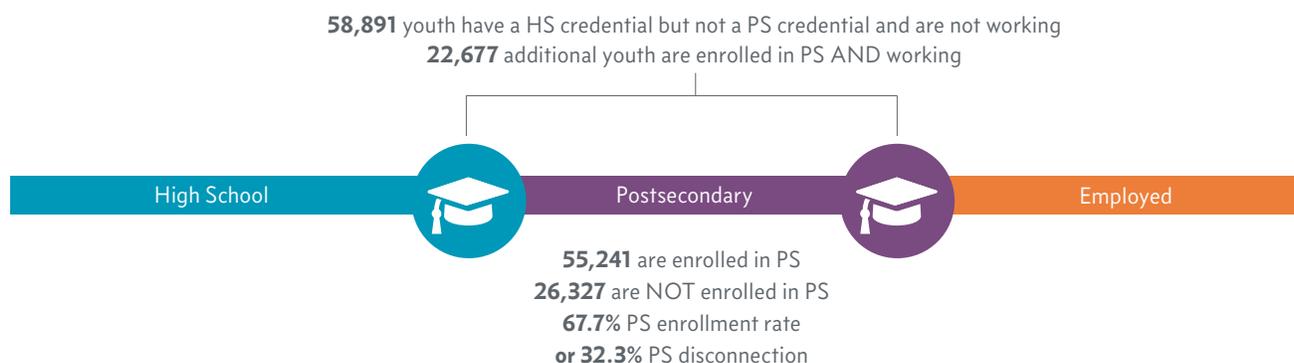
WORKFORCE DISCONNECTION RATE

The Workforce Disconnection Rate captures the percentage of young people who are not working relative to the number of young people we can expect to be working. The rate reflects the percentage of 16-24 year-olds in the community who "should be" employed, but are not. To determine this rate, we look at those who have a postsecondary credential (namely a two-year or four-year college degree) and are not currently working. Because we can only expect young people with a postsecondary credential to be employed, we include only those with this level of education in this rate—the "preferred connection point" for these young people is employment.

The rate is calculated by looking at the number of 16-24 year-olds with a postsecondary credential—but not enrolled in a postsecondary institution—who are not working. Even though a postsecondary credential is not needed for employment, we only include young people with this level of education—associate's or bachelor's degree—into the calculation. Those with a high school diploma or equivalent are instead factored into the Postsecondary Disconnection Rate described previously.

Calculating the Workforce Disconnection Rate

$$\frac{\text{\# of young people not working}}{\text{\# of 16-24 year-olds with a PS credential, but not enrolled in a PS institution}}$$

In Santa Clara County, 28,086 young people have a postsecondary credential and are not enrolled in a postsecondary program. Of these, 2,950 are not working. The community's Workforce Disconnection Rate is 10.5% (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: Determining Workforce Disconnection

28,086 young people have a PS credential and are in the pool of those who COULD be working

| High School | Postsecondary | Employed |

25,136 are employed
2,950 are NOT employed
89.5% employment rate
or 10.5% workforce disconnection
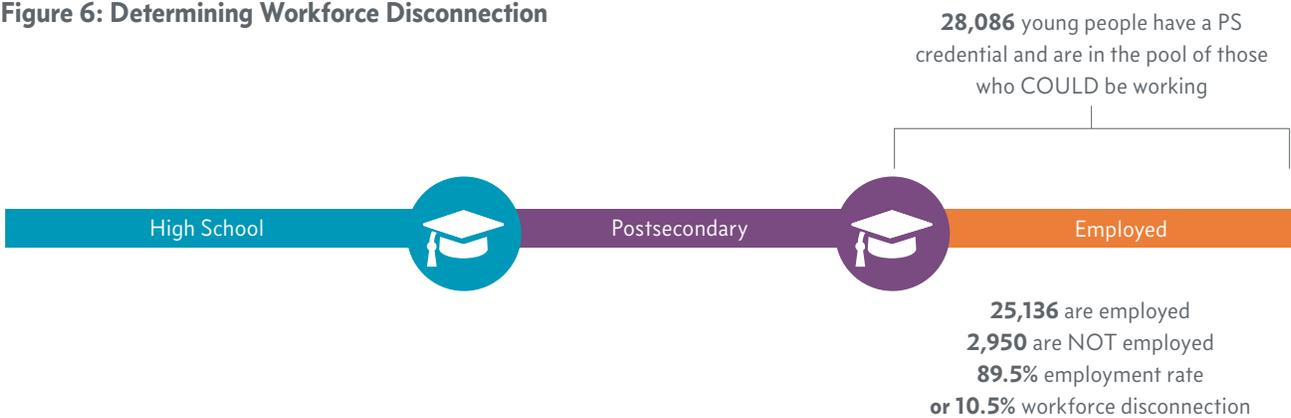
Figure 7: The OYF Common Measures 2017-Data for DCP Communities

	Austin	Boston	Chicago	Oakland/ Alameda Co.	Philadelphia	Santa Clara Co.
Community Disconnection Rate	8.2% (21,657)	4.3% (4,922)	14.6% (47,478)	8.0% (14,262)	17.5% (33,808)	6.5% (13,729)
High School Disconnection Rate	10.0% (5,584)	7.6% (1,005)	14.1% (10,912)	10.0% (3,846)	13.3% (5,530)	5.3% (2,607)
Postsecondary Disconnection Rate	14.7% (14,613)	5.1% (3,105)	27.1% (32,630)	11.1% (8,168)	32.3% (26,327)	10.2% (8,172)
Workforce Disconnection Rate	7.0% (1,460)	5.6% (812)	10.6% (3,936)	14.6% (2,248)	14.3% (1,951)	10.5% (2,950)

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Calculating each of the four OYF Common Measures provides a more nuanced view of the state of youth disconnection within and across communities. In Figure 7 we illustrate the 2017 OYF Common Measures for the six DCP communities using the methods described in this section. These data bring attention to areas for focus within each community by articulating the extent that opportunity youth are disconnected from their "preferred connection point" and measuring the gaps between who "should be" and who "is" connected to high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. Collectively, these measures provide a clearer picture of the state of disconnection and position communities to track and report on progress in connecting youth to high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce.

AN EMPHASIS ON EQUITY

In addition to tracking disconnection from and connection to education and employment pathways, capturing the extent that various subpopulations (e.g., racial/ethnic groups, gender) are represented among disconnected youth provides critical insight into whether some groups are disproportionately disconnected. Equity outcomes are calculated by looking at the number of disconnected youth of a specific subpopulation relative to the number of youth of the same subpopulation who are expected to be connected. For example, if 10 out of 30 Hispanic young people are disconnected, the equity measure is 33%. If 15 out of 100 White young people are disconnected, the equity measure is 15%. Comparing these rates among subpopulations can reveal disproportionate levels of disconnection and help partners prioritize and customize their efforts. Importantly, this calculation accounts for variations in the distribution of each group—it captures the disconnection rate of each group, and compares that rate to the other groups to determine where, if at all, there are disparities.

Figure 8: Equity Outcomes for Youth Disconnection Across the OYF Network

Group	Percentage
American Indian or Alaskan Native	31.3%
Black or AA	20.1%
Other race	16.4%
Hispanic, any race	13.1%
Two or more races	10.9%
White	7.6%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5.7%

Percentage of each group that are opportunity youth.
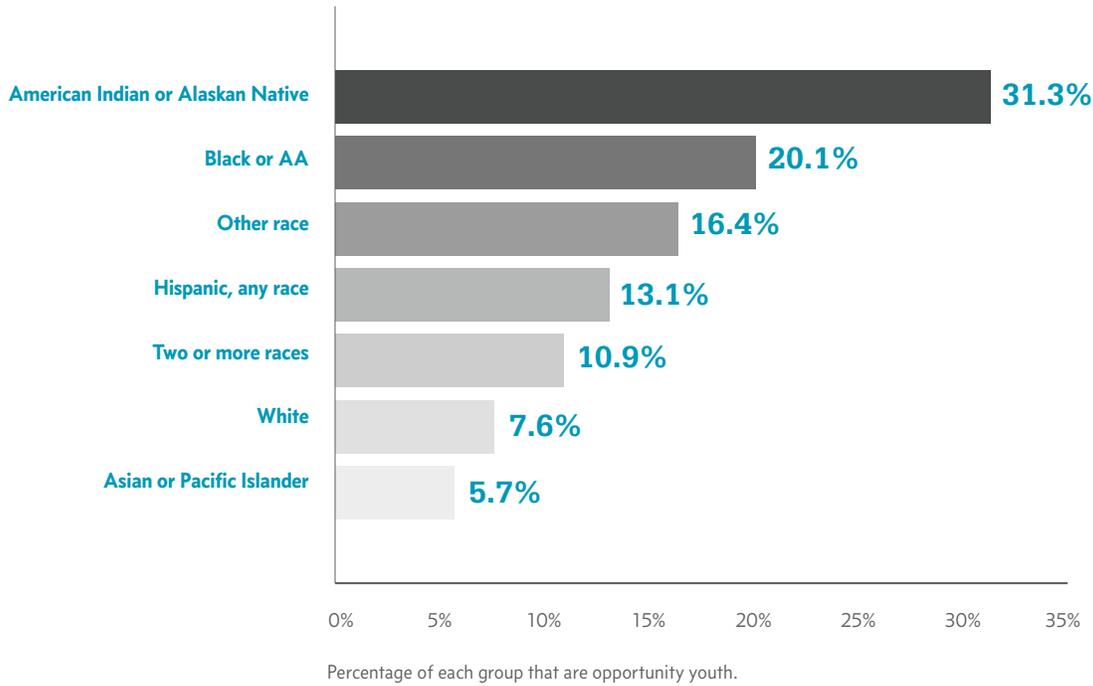
In Figure 8, we illustrate the equity outcomes by race/ethnic group among the hundreds of thousands of opportunity youth across the OYF network. As can be seen, American Indian/Alaskan Native youth are disproportionately represented among opportunity youth. Nearly one-third of American Indian/Alaskan Native 16 to 24 year-olds are opportunity youth; they are about four times more likely than White youth to be disconnected. Black/African American youth, too, are disproportionately disconnected. They are almost four times more likely to be disconnected as Asian or Pacific Islander youth, with one in five disconnected across the OYF communities.

These data illustrate the importance of investigating youth disconnection among subgroups, and diving deeper into disparities within each segmented disconnection rate to determine which groups may face greater challenges at various points along the education-to-career continuum. As part of its efforts to advance equity, FCS has provided each OYF community with its own equity outcomes— including disaggregated outcomes by race, ethnicity, age, gender, and income level, among others—to target strategies to address inequities in youth disconnection.

PUTTING THESE METRICS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OY MOVEMENT

Tracking OY within a community is an essential step to ensuring that our systems are serving young people and setting them up for success, as disconnection better describes our systems than it does the youth they fail to serve. Although disconnection rates tell a critical part of the "story" of a community's youth, these measures represent only one aspect of what must be a multi-pronged approach to enhancing youth outcomes community wide.

Considering Complementary Metrics

Disconnection rates must be part of a comprehensive approach to using data to understand youth within a community and to direct programs, services, and supports for those youth. In addition to tracking youth disconnection, the *quality* of connection points should also be considered. The experience of youth who are at risk of disconnection, or who are often connected but require additional services and supports—such as youth in foster care or involved in the juvenile justice system—must also be paid attention to. Tracking youth disconnection does not mean that communities should ignore the quality of education in their communities, or high school graduation rates. In addition to disconnection, we recommend communities also monitor, share, discuss, and learn from the following complementary measures:

- The percentage of high school students who are "on track" to graduate

- High school quality

- High school graduation rates

- Postsecondary enrollment rates

- Postsecondary completion rates

- Employment rates

- Job quality and income levels

The Role of Partner-level Data

While these four primary measures describe the state of opportunity youth, they don't *explain* what's behind the data. Collaboratives and communities should use partner data—including information from school districts, child welfare agencies, juvenile justice agencies, employers and workforce partners, and nonprofit service providers—to more deeply understand the needs of youth in the community and those who engage with a number of systems within the community. Partners can provide real-time data on service provision and the effectiveness of various strategies and interventions to monitor short-term outcomes and ensure that efforts are on the right track. Additionally, collaboratives should engage partners, *including youth*, to understand root causes of youth disconnection and develop strategies to engage and re-connect opportunity youth.

CONCLUSION

For communities, collaboratives, and partners focused on decreasing the number of opportunity youth, using a clear and consistent metric for communicating about the state of OY, and tracking their reconnection to education and employment pathways, is paramount. The measures described in this Brief outline an effective approach for capturing a more nuanced understanding of the extent that opportunity youth are disconnected from specific points along the education-to-career continuum. These measures use the best available data to consistently compare youth disconnection (and connection) across communities and over time. By using these measures, and standardizing how communities talk about youth disconnection, communities can focus efforts to reconnect opportunity youth and better articulate their vision for opportunity youth.

Moving forward, communities participating in the OYF will continue to explore how they can build their data capacity to use The OYF Common Measures—as part of a broader data use strategy outlined in the OYF Data Use Framework—to target and assess the impact of their work. We hope that those engaged in the opportunity youth movement—partners, community leaders, policymakers, and funders—benefit from this more nuanced approach to tracking opportunity youth outcomes and that, ultimately, these data help increase connections across the education-to-career continuum.

COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION GUIDE

The measures discussed in this brief are helpful for identifying the needs of youth in their community. They can be used to identify, prioritize, and address areas of youth disconnection. The measures do not explain what's behind these numbers. Collaboratives are encouraged to work with one another and the youth in their communities to understand the root causes of youth disconnection, and to understand the contextual factors that may affect these rates.

Because community context varies, exploring these numbers in the context of the community and the unique circumstances and demographics within the community is important. Below, we offer questions and considerations to help collaboratives develop a better understanding of the youth disconnection rates in their communities.

Questions about the data overall

1. What surprised you about the disconnection rates within your community?
2. Which disconnection rate is the highest in your community? What might be affecting this relatively high rate?

Questions about the high school disconnection rate

3. How can data from local schools complement data about the high school disconnection rate?

   a. Are there schools, feeder patterns, or districts where high school disconnection is the greatest?
   b. What preventative and re-engagement efforts are currently underway to reduce high school disconnection?

Questions about the postsecondary disconnection rate

4. What contextual factors might affect the community's postsecondary disconnection rate?
5. Does your community attract a large number of college students from outside the region? If so, how might that affect your postsecondary disconnection rate?

Questions about the workforce disconnection rate

6. How does the workforce disconnection rate compare to the community's unemployment rate? To what extent is workforce disconnection reflective of employment trends across the community?
7. Young people included in the workforce disconnection rate have postsecondary credentials. Are there unique barriers to employment among population subgroups that might explain why some have higher workforce disconnection rates than others?

Questions about equitable outcomes

8. What racial/ethnic groups are least connected at various points along the education-to-career continuum? What factors might be affecting the disconnection of these youth?