



Youth Disconnection in New Jersey

WHAT IT IS. WHY IT MATTERS. WHAT WE CAN DO.

Disconnected Youth are young people — typically ages 16–24 — who are not enrolled in school **and** not participating in the workforce.

Often called “**Opportunity Youth**”, these young people are navigating barriers that have interrupted their educational and career pathways. This is most often the outcome of unmet needs and system gaps.

Youth disconnection:

- Reduces lifetime earning potential and economic mobility
- Increases the likelihood of justice system involvement
- Is closely linked to housing instability and economic insecurity
- Carries long-term public costs for communities and the state
- Disproportionately impacts young people of color, youth with disabilities, youth in foster care, and youth involved in the justice system

What We Can Do to Prevent Youth Disconnection

Youth disconnection is preventable when schools, agencies, and communities act early and work together. Effective prevention includes:

- Early identification systems that flag chronic absenteeism, credit deficiency, and other indicators that a student may be at risk of disconnection.
- Positive school climate and restorative practices that keep students feeling connected.
- Intervention and referrals systems that connect students with academic and/or social emotional supports.
- Integrated student supports, including mental health, housing stability, and family engagement.
- Flexible pathways to graduation, including alternative, credit recovery, and re-engagement options.
- Cross-agency coordination between education, child welfare, workforce, and justice systems.
- Youth voice in decision-making to ensure policies reflect lived experience.

Every student has a pathway. Early and consistent support changes life outcomes. By identifying risk early, building relationships, and connecting students to the resources they need, we can ensure every young person stays on a path toward education, employment, and long-term success.

For more information, visit [Disconnection Prevention](#) or email StayEngagedNJ@doe.nj.gov

