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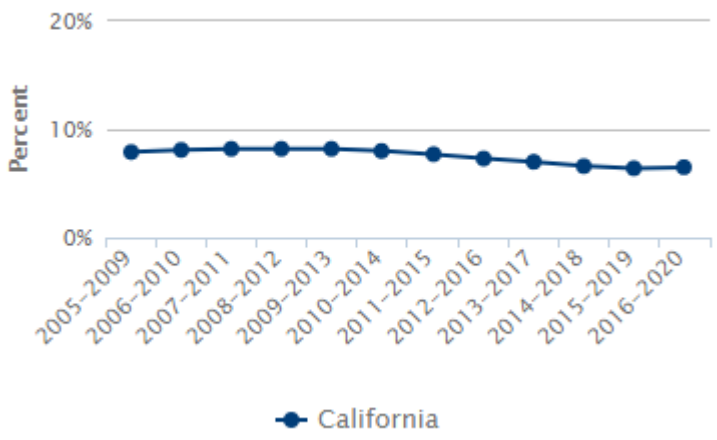
Disconnected Youth in California

Percentage of Teens Ages 16-19 Not in School and Not Working: 2024

Locations	Percent
United States	6.7%
California	6.6%
Alameda County	5.8%
Contra Costa County	6.9%
Fresno County	8.3%
Kern County	13.2%
Los Angeles County	6.1%
Orange County	4.9%
Riverside County	7.5%
Sacramento County	8.1%
San Bernardino County	9.4%
San Diego County	5.0%
Santa Clara County	3.4%

Definition: Estimated percentage of teens ages 16-19 who are neither employed nor enrolled in school (e.g., in 2024, 6.6% of California teens ages 16-19 were not in school and not working).
Data Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey summary files and public use microdata (Sept. 2026).

Percentage of Teens Ages 16-19 Not in School and Not Working



Definition: Estimated percentage of teens ages 16-19 who are neither employed nor enrolled in school (e.g., in 2016-2020, 6.5% of California teens ages 16-19 were not in school and not working).
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (Aug. 2022).

What It Is

Kidsdata.org reports the estimated percentage of youth ages 16-19 who are neither employed (full or part time) nor enrolled in school (full or part time). Data are available for:

- Counties and county groups, as single-year estimates
- Cities, school districts, and counties with at least 10,000 residents, as 5-year estimates
- Legislative districts, as 5-year estimates

Why This Topic Is Important

Millions of youth and young adults in America are neither in school nor working. These young people—often referred to as 'disconnected youth' or 'opportunity youth'—are more likely to face long-term challenges in adulthood, including poor physical and mental health, lower incomes, and unemployment. Because engagement in school or the workforce is critical for the transition from adolescence to adulthood, detachment from those settings—especially long-term detachment—can impede development of the knowledge and skills needed to thrive as self-sufficient adults.

The effects also extend beyond the individual. A nation with a skilled workforce is better prepared to compete in today's global economy, making youth disconnection in the U.S. a serious social and economic concern. Considering both direct costs (such as public assistance and incarceration) and indirect costs (such as lost earnings and tax revenue), the burden of disconnected youth on taxpayers has been estimated as high as $93 billion annually. Research also shows that investments in reconnecting these young people yield substantial economic gains; for example, it is estimated that every dollar spent on connecting youth to jobs or education yields a five-dollar return.

Factors that place older teens at increased risk for becoming disengaged from school and work include living in poverty, experiencing unstable housing or homelessness, having a disability, being involved in the foster care or criminal justice systems, and becoming a parent, among others. Statewide and nationally, African American/black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic/Latino youth are more likely than their white and Asian/Pacific Islander peers to be disconnected from work and school, as are youth from rural areas when compared with those in urban and suburban areas.

How Children Are Faring

In 2024, the estimated share of disconnected youth—teens ages 16-19 who are neither employed at least part time nor enrolled in school at least part time—was 6.7% in the U.S. and 6.6% in California. Santa Clara County's percentage of disconnected youth (3.4%) was around half the statewide average; Kern County's (13.2%) was around double.

Five-year rates of youth disconnection in California have followed national trends closely for more than a decade, declining steadily beginning in 2010-2014, then reversing in 2016-2020.

At the local level, the percentage of youth disconnected from work and school varies widely, with 2016-2020 estimates for regions with data ranging from 1.7% to 12.2% across counties and from 0.1% to 17.3% across school districts.

View references for this text and additional research on this topic:
https://charts.kidsdata.org/topic/87/disconnected-youth/summary

