



Tow Youth Justice Institute Applauds Dalio Report on Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis

Background

The recently released Dalio Report, *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis, Getting Young people back on track* is a reality check about youth who are disconnected or at risk of becoming disconnected. The factors used to define at risk and disconnected young people are largely the same factors focused on for juvenile justice reform of youth up to the age of 18. "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." The goal of their report is to provide insights to the systems that touch our youth. "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." In addition, the Dalio report highlights the socio-economic impact on the State of Connecticut.

Data from the Connecticut Judicial Branch show the complexities of the juvenile justice system and youth population. More than three years after the COVID-19 pandemic began, annual delinquency referrals remain lower than pre-pandemic periods. This is important to note as the effects of the pandemic are still being felt in schools, access to services and other vital supports. Reductions in referral volume have averaged 6% per year since 2013. Misdemeanor referrals have had a 56% reduction from 2013 to 2022.

Delinquent Referrals Involving Motor Vehicle Theft has gone up however, Juvenile Probation Supervisors flag court referrals as being motor vehicle theft-involved at the time of case handling, as well as whether the youth was a driver or passenger. In 2023, there has been an increase in auto-theft related charges for passengers in auto-theft arrest events. While the number of court referrals has increased for all ages of passenger, there have been increases in the proportion of passenger referrals for 13/14 years old youth. Those ages account for 30% of passenger referrals in 2023, compared to 23% in 2021 and 2022. The number of court referrals for drivers of stolen vehicles has remained somewhat even with prior quarters.

This issue brief offers the highlights in the report from our perspective, however, much of this brief is a direct recitation of their report in an effort to avoid unintended misrepresentation of data and facts.

At-Risk and Disconnected Young People Defined

There is a distinction between disconnection and being at-risk of disconnection. Their report looks at young people ages 14 – 26.

At-risk

Factors for at-risk of disconnection include:

- Out of school suspensions and expulsions
- Acting out behaviors in school previously referred to the courts
- Reentry
- Chronic absenteeism
- Student mobility

If high school students are at-risk of not graduating, they are more likely to become disconnected. The at-risk 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

Those aged 14-26 are those who are not engaged in prosocial institutions and/or not on-track for gainful employment. These young people fall into two sub-populations.

Moderately disconnected:

- High school diploma holders who are neither employed nor in postsecondary and high school non-graduates who are employed

Severely disconnected young people are:

- those not employed,
- those not having attained a high school diploma/equivalent
- and/or those who are incarcerated

On track

There is one more population reviewed in the report. On track young people aged 14–26 are those who are engaged in prosocial institutions and on-track for gainful employment. Although this is positive, there is a need for concern which is highlighted below.

By the Numbers

The Dalio report discusses the fact that there is a population of young people who are on track for a successful future. There is a need for concern in this population highlighted in the Connecticut State Department of Education's new the 2022-23 Next Generation Accountability System released this summer.

Although the Postsecondary Readiness rate is increasing, the rate of young people on track for high school graduation - an early indication of on-time high school graduation – is declining. Despite improvements in math and science, academic achievement still trails pre-pandemic levels. For the first time, the four-year graduation rate declined from 89.6 percent to 88.9 percent.

	<u>2017-18</u>	<u>2018-19</u>	<u>2021-22</u>	<u>2022-23</u>
Postsecondary Readiness	44.8%	42.6%	43.5%	44.3%

	<u>2017-18</u>	<u>2018-19</u>	<u>2021-22</u>	<u>2022-23</u>
On-track to High School Graduation	87.5%	88.0%	82.7%	82.4%

The Dalio report highlights that in 2022, one in five of Connecticut's young people were either at-risk or disconnected and have either dropped out of school or are in danger of dropping out and, 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."

Some other key points to note:

- One in three CT high school students are at risk of not graduating largely driven by a 97% increase in absenteeism from 2017 – 2022. 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.
- 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.
- 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."

The third point 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."

There are also key data points on disparities that need to be addressed.

- 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.
- 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.
 - ◇ 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.
 - ◇ 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.
- 29% of young men are disconnected versus 20% of young women, indicating heightened risk of disconnection dependent on sex.
- 15% 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).
- 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.
- 44% percent of young people who ever attended a high-poverty school during high school end up disconnected, illustrating the acute detrimental effect exposure to poverty can have on outcomes.
- Student behavior incidents, defined as whether a student has been suspended one or more times and/or expelled which are linked to lower math and reading achievement, probability that the student will be arrested in the future, failure to advance to the next grade level, and lower graduation rates.
- 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.

The impact and socioeconomic factors

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 and opportunities to further hone the analysis moving forward

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.

Areas of Inquiry and Our Support

While we support all of the areas of inquiry the Dalio Foundation has identified, of the 20 areas of inquiry, we are especially interested in 1 – 8 relating to the justice system and 17 – 20 in particularly vulnerable groups.

- Explore improvements to supporting students when they enter/leave a district
- Evaluate potential improvements to alternative and special education systems
- Consider elevating opportunities to strengthen school climate and culture
- Explore expansions to project-based and career pathway learning in schools
- Scale effective efforts to identify and support young people at-risk of justice involvement or violence
- Explore opportunities to continue making the evidence-based case for alternatives to justice system involvement
- Evaluate the most critical supports for reentry young people to mitigate recidivism

- Investigate feasibility and impact of adult justice system reform
- Investigate prevention and support strategies for young people experiencing homelessness
- Examine the transition in and out of child welfare
- Explore ways to support undocumented young people
- Consider ways to support LGBTQ+ young people

Conclusion

The Dalio Report, *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis, Getting Young people back on track*, is a comprehensive report that everyone should read. All aspects of the community should rally around their recommendations as the implications of not taking action will affect everyone in Connecticut, but especially our youth and their future. It bears repeating: "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."

References

- Connecticut State Department of Education's new the 2022-23 Next Generation Accountability System
- *Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis, Getting Young people back on track*, Dalio Education
- JJPOC Nov. 16th 2023 presentation: JJPOC Pulse-Check: A high-level look at the trend of Juvenile Justice in the State of Connecticut https://www.cga.ct.gov/app/taskforce.asp?TF=20141215_Juvenile%20Justice%20Policy%20and%20Over-sight%20Committee

The Tow Youth Justice Institute is a university, state and private partnership established to lead the way in juvenile justice reform through collaborative planning, training, research and advocacy.

Please visit our website at towyouth.newhaven.edu and follow us on social media [@towyouth](#) or call 203-932-7361 with questions or for more information.



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