New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee

Action Plan

Reconnecting Disconnected Youth

April 27, 2026

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NEW MEXICO LEGISLATIVE FINANCE COMMITTEE

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TOP TAKEAWAY

New Mexico has higher-than-average rates of youth ages 16 to 24 who are not in school, working, or in training. The state should begin by setting a goal of reaching the national average. In addition to greater student retention in high school, this report outlines four strategies to reduce youth disconnection: improving recruitment, referrals, and retention; targeting existing programs to disconnected youth; expanding evidence-based models; and strengthening coordination, oversight, and performance management.

THE ISSUE

New Mexico has approximately 32 thousand youth ages 16 to 24 who are not in school, working, or in training ("disconnected youth"). Participation in education and employment helps young people build skills, earn income, and establish pathways to long-term stability. Youth who are disconnected are more likely to experience criminal justice involvement, behavioral health challenges, have lower earnings later in life, and report worse health outcomes. Each disconnected young person is estimated to cost the state approximately $19 thousand annually in lost tax revenue. Disconnection is more common among certain populations, including those in rural areas, those with prior involvement in the child welfare or justice systems, and those experiencing housing instability.

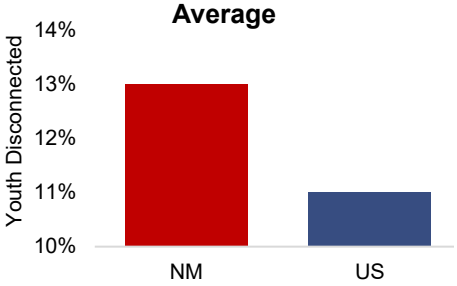
KEY FINDINGS

- Approximately 32 thousand youth are neither working nor in school, costing the state an estimated $623 million annually.
- New Mexico's youth disconnection rate exceeds the national average, indicating substantial room for improvement relative to peer states.
- Disconnected youth are not consistently reached or retained by existing education and workforce programs, limiting their impact.
- Many programs are not systematically targeted to disconnected youth, and the use and scaling of evidence-based models is inconsistent.
- The state lacks a coordinated, accountable structure responsible for reducing youth disconnection and tracking progress across agencies.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Public Education Department should require school districts to establish a referral process for students who drop out, including connecting students to at least one support program.
- The Workforce Solutions Department should establish targets to increase enrollment of out-of-school youth in programs and ensure services are reaching young people who are not currently in education or employment.
- For programs that serve disconnected youth, agencies should require monitoring of employment, education, and earning outcomes.
- The state should expand programs with demonstrated effectiveness, including integrated education and training.
- The Office of the Governor should establish a cross-agency coordinating body focused on disconnected youth with shared goals and regular outcome reporting.

Chart 1. Connecting 3,200 More Youth to School or Jobs Would Get New Mexico to the National Average



Source: Census Data 2023 one-year estimate

LFC Action Plans set goals and recommend actions and strategies—often across agencies, to address a persistent performance or policy challenge.

The Issue: Approximately 32 Thousand Young People in New Mexico are not in School or Working, Costing an Estimated $623 million Annually.

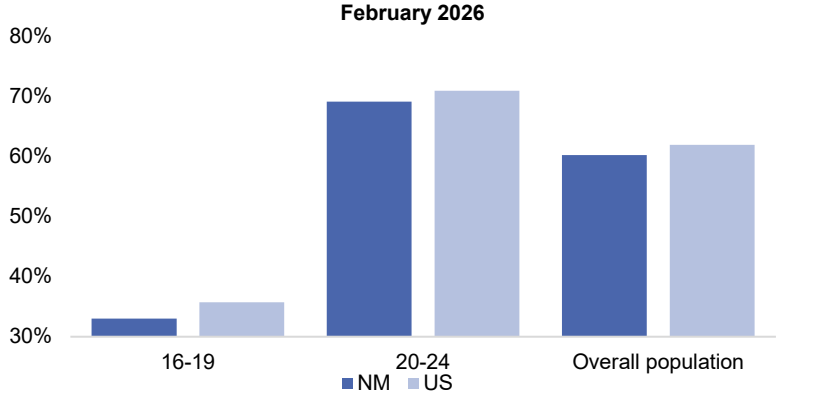
Young people disconnected from school, work, and training miss critical opportunities to build skills, assets, and family income—with negative consequences not only for individuals but for the state as a whole. New Mexico's labor force participation rate falls below the national average, and economic development depends on having a skilled workforce with pathways to stable employment. According to data from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, New Mexico's labor force participation rate was 57.6 percent in December 2025, compared with 62.5 percent nationally.[i] Closing this gap would require around 100 thousand additional workers, based on applying the roughly 5-percentage-point difference to the state's working-age population. At approximately 32 thousand individuals, disconnected youth represent a substantial share of this gap and a key opportunity to strengthen the state's workforce. Labor force participation is also crucial to reducing New Mexico's higher-than-average poverty rate.

Definition of "Disconnected" or "Opportunity" Youth

For the purposes of this report, disconnected youth (also referred to as opportunity youth) are defined as individuals ages 16 to 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor employed in the formal labor market. These young people are disengaged from education and work but are not currently involved in the criminal or juvenile justice systems. Youth under the age of 16 are excluded from this definition because they remain within the state's compulsory school attendance requirements; their disengagement represents a different legal and policy issue (truancy) rather than postsecondary or workforce disengagement.

Some U.S. studies use the term "NEET" (not in employment, education, or training) to describe this population.

Chart 2. Labor Force Participation
February 2026



Sources: DOL, WSD

Understanding who is disconnected and how to reengage them is critical to raising personal incomes and strengthening New Mexico's long-term economic prosperity. A 2026 Workforce Solutions Department survey of individuals not in the labor force found that most young people said they could reconnect with work or school with appropriate support.

Focus of This Report: Reengaging Disconnected Youth

While prevention and early warning are critical, this report focuses mostly on young people who are already disconnected (not in school, job training, or working), because they are least visible to public systems and face the steepest barriers to reentry. At-risk and prevention strategies are referenced where they affect the size and flow of the disconnected population, but the recommendations are designed primarily to strengthen identification, engagement, and reconnection pathways for youth who have already fallen out of school, work, or training.

Reconnecting youth ages 16 to 24 who are not in school, working, or in training is a critical challenge for New Mexico and states across the nation.

According to a 2024 report by the Social Science Research Council, nationally, 4.3 million young people, or 10.9 percent of all youth in this age range, are currently disconnected from both education and employment. This represents a recovery from the pandemic spike, when the national rate reached 12 percent in 2020, but the nation has not yet returned to the pre-pandemic level of 10.7 percent in 2019. Over the past decade, the national trend has shown progress, with the disconnection rate falling 22.7 percent between 2012 and 2023. However, this broad improvement masks persistent inequities.

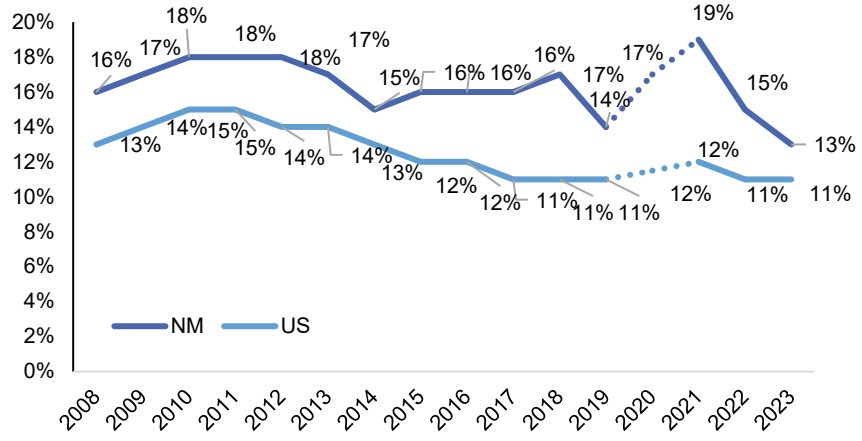
The late teens and early twenties—a developmental period known as emerging adulthood—is when young people develop critical capabilities for adult life: knowledge and credentials, social skills and networks, emotional regulation, and the ability to envision and plan for their futures. Research demonstrates that disconnection during this formative period casts a long shadow: By their 30s, people who were disconnected youth earn $38.4 thousand less per year, are 45 percent less likely to own a home, 42 percent less likely to be employed, and 52 percent less likely to report good health than those who remained connected.[ii]

People who were disconnected as youth:

- **Earn $38.4 thousand** less per year,
- **Are 45 percent** less likely to own a home,
- **Are 42 percent** less likely to be employed, and
- **Are 52 percent** less likely to report good health than those who remained connected.

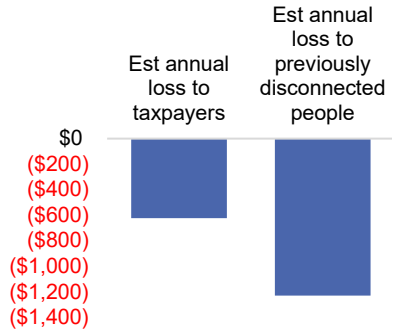
Source: Measure of America

Chart 3. Percentage of Youth Ages 16-24 Not in School and Not Working
2008-2023



Source: Annie E Casey using US Census data, 2008–2023

Chart 4. Cost of Youth Disconnection to Taxpayers and Individual Personal Income
(in millions)



Source: *Public Health Reports* and Measure of America

Youth disconnection is a contributing factor to New Mexico's low workforce participation rate and can have life-long negative impacts on well-being. Early work experience helps individuals develop skills essential for future careers; disconnected youth are less likely to participate

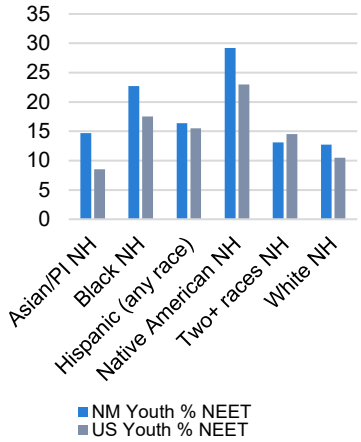
in the labor force in the future.[iii] Those who are disconnected from school, work, and training are also likely to face a higher risk of increased drug use, higher risk of mental and behavioral health challenges, lower educational attainment, and increased justice involvement.[iv] [v]

Youth disconnection is costing taxpayers up to $623 million annually, while these youth could be collectively losing up to $1.2 billion in earnings annually. National research highlights the substantial costs of youth disconnection for both taxpayers and individuals. Applied to New Mexico, an estimated 32 thousand disconnected youth results in over half a billion dollars in lost annual tax revenue. Each disconnected youth costs taxpayers an estimated $19.5 thousand a year in 2025 dollars. According to Measure of America, those who were disconnected in their teens and early 20s earn approximately $38.4 thousand less per year in their 30s than their continuously connected peers.[vi]

Youth disconnection in New Mexico varies substantially by race and ethnicity, but differences by sex are less pronounced. An estimated 13 percent of New Mexico youth are disconnected statewide (2023 one-year estimate), compared with approximately 11 percent to 12 percent nationally. Using five-year averages that allow for disaggregation by race and ethnicity, rates are highest among non-Hispanic Native American youth (29.2 percent), followed by Black non-Hispanic youth (22.7 percent). Hispanic youth, who comprise the largest share of New Mexico's youth population, have a disconnection rate of 16.4 percent—near the statewide average but higher than the national Hispanic rate—representing approximately 22,907 youth not in school, work, or training. In contrast, White non-Hispanic youth have a lower disconnection rate of 12.7 percent, or about 7,588 youth.

Disconnection rates in New Mexico vary by sex, though these gaps are smaller than racial disparities. Overall, female youth exhibit a higher disconnection rate (17.6 percent) than male youth (15.7 percent).[1] This pattern is evident across most racial and ethnic groups, though the magnitude of the difference varies. While male labor force participation in New Mexico lags the national average, a 2024 LFC evaluation found that female participation has increased and, in some cases, meets or exceeds national levels. National research consistently finds that pregnancy, early parenthood, and unpaid caregiving responsibilities are major drivers of youth disconnection among young women, suggesting that higher disconnection rates among female youth may reflect structural caregiving burdens rather than lower attachment to education, work, or training.

Chart 5. Disconnected Youth by Race/Ethnicity, NM vs. US (2019-2023)



Note: PI = Pacific Islander; NH = Non-Hispanic, NEET=not in education, employment or training. Data from 5-year-averages; demographic information by race/ethnicity is not available for 1-year data. Analysis applies Measure of America methodology: persons ages 16–24 (PWGTP).

Source: American Community Survey 2019-2023

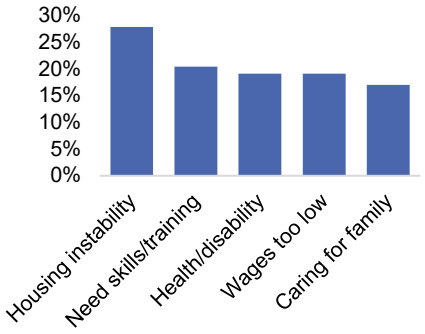
Interpreting Native Youth Disconnection Rates

Conventional definitions of disconnected youth may not capture the realities of Native youth, whose education, work, caregiving, and cultural responsibilities often occur outside formal school and wage-employment systems. According to national Native-led economic research, interpreting disconnection rates for Native youth requires caution and cultural context because participation in traditional economies, community roles, or tribal programs may not be reflected in administrative or survey-based measures.

[1] The 13 percent overall rate cited earlier reflects a one-year estimate, whereas the rates by sex and ethnicity are based on five-year estimates, which provide greater reliability for subgroup analysis.

Data from a March 2026 Workforce Solutions Department (WSD) survey shows that disconnected youth face overlapping barriers but could work with supports. In the statewide sample of 230 New Mexico respondents aged 18 to 24—primarily recruited through online and phone-based methods with financial incentives—respondents reported multiple, overlapping reasons for not being in the workplace, selecting an average of about two barriers each. The most frequently cited were housing instability, lack of skills or training, health and disability, and low wages of available jobs. Many respondents (189 or 82 percent of survey respondents) indicated they could work if provided adequate support. This distinction highlights the difference between individuals who are unable to work and those who are willing but face remediable barriers. Responses suggest many are unaware of available education, training, and employment opportunities. In addition, reports of informal or "gig" work suggest that traditional employment measures may understate economic activity among this population. (See Appendix A for additional survey data.)

Chart 6. Top Reasons Youth Are Not Looking for a Job



Source: LFC analysis of WSD data

Census data indicates that disconnection is concentrated in a small number of areas. The highest concentrations are found in western New Mexico, particularly around Gallup and Shiprock (29.9 percent), as well as in parts of the Northeast and Eastern regions of the state (18.3 percent). Rates are also elevated in the South Valley of Albuquerque (17.9 percent). In these areas, estimated disconnection rates exceed 17 percent, higher than the statewide average of 13 percent.[2] Bernalillo, Doña Ana, San Juan, and McKinley counties have the highest numbers of disconnected youth, representing roughly 56 percent of the disconnected youth in the state. Taking into consideration the number of youth by county should help guide resource allocation. Ensuring strong services in these counties can more effectively improve youth connection. Some of these areas also have high overall unemployment. (See Appendix B for the state and county maps.)

New Mexico has a slightly higher rate of special education identification than the nation

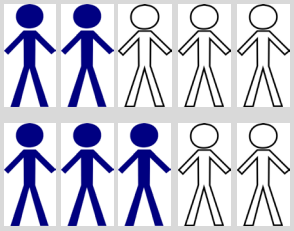
In the 2024-25 school year, 19 percent of students were participating in special education, 4 percent higher than the national average. Five percent of these have higher-acuity needs. While some require significant support to be employed, this is unlikely to be the majority.

Note: Special education inclusion removed gifted.
Source: LFC analysis of PED data, National Center for Education Statistics

In FY26, New Mexico had $88.6 million available for programs serving disconnected youth, including youth employment and education, across multiple departments.

In FY26, New Mexico appropriated at least $88.6 million in funding to six agencies to address youth needs spanning the education, health and human services, and workforce arenas. If these programs served only youth disconnected from education or employment (excluding Public Education Department programs), the state could serve roughly 44 percent of all disconnected youth. However, these programs are not exclusively targeted to disconnected youth.

56 percent of disconnected youth live in Bernalillo, Doña Ana, San Juan, and McKinley counties.



Note: County analysis from 2021, based on 2019 data.
Source: Measure of America

[2] Data extracted from Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs), which are non-overlapping, geographic areas containing no fewer than 100,000 people each. While these estimates derived from US Census American Community Survey data and modeled at the tract level are a useful indicator of geographic concentration, they should be interpreted with caution due to sampling variability and small-area estimation limits.

Table 1. Funding for Select Programs Related to Disconnected Youth

Agency	Program	Funding	Estimated Number Served	Estimated Cost per participant	Year
CYFD	Youth Mentorship and Family Services (Juvenile Justice)	$2,500,000	560	$4,464	FY26
CYFD	Fostering Connections (Foster services)	$1,819,716	285	$6,385	FY26
EMNRD	Youth Conservation Corps (YCC)	$6,133,900	707	$8,676	FY26
WSD	Pre-Apprenticeship Opportunity Program (POP)	$1,200,000	600	$2,000	FY26
WSD	Intensive outreach to out-of-school, at-risk youth	$500,000	375	$1,333	FY26
WSD	Be Pro Be Proud	$2,000,000	3,736*	$535	FY26
WSD	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth	$7,019,693	1,300	$5,400	FY25
PED	CTE, including innovation zones and summer internships	$38,500,000	~51,000	$755	FY26
PED	Chronic absenteeism	$6,200,000	All PED students	$21	FY26
HED	Workforce training and certificates	$22,700,000	6,700	$3,388	FY26
Total		**$88,573,309**			

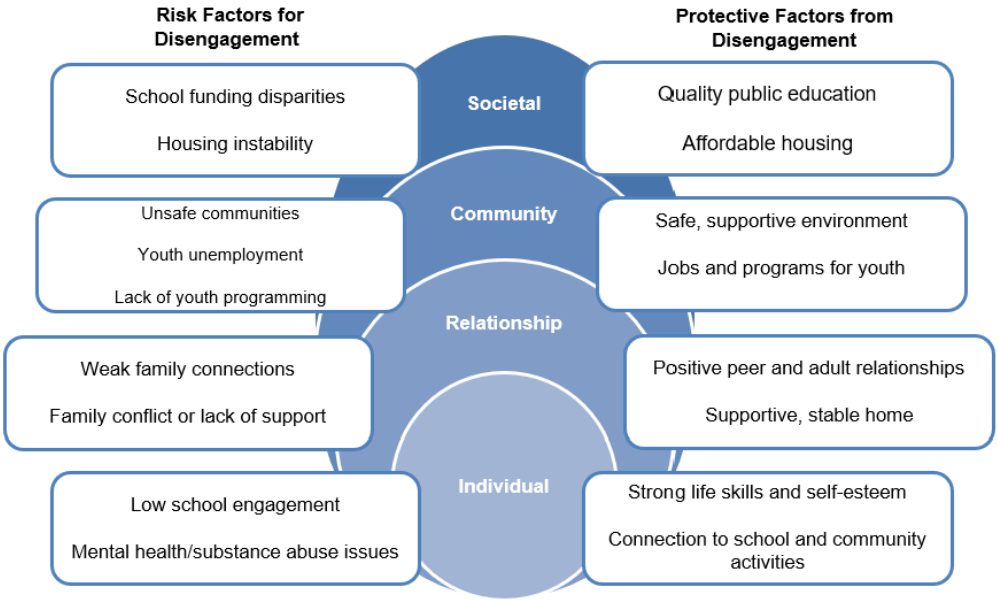
Note: CYFD= Children, Youth, and Families Department, EMNRD= Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, WSD= Workforce Solutions Department, PED= Public Education Department, HED= Higher Education Department. Funding includes operational budgets. WIOA Youth funding comes from a DOL 2025 program year estimate. Be Pro Be Proud participation estimated from averaging the total over 3 years.
Sources: HB2 and DOL

Alongside state and federal programs, community-based organizations and tribal governments operate some of New Mexico's largest youth engagement and workforce development efforts. YouthWorks, mostly funded by federal money with some state money, reaches roughly 200 young people annually with paid training, certifications, and wraparound supports. Job Corps, which is entirely federally funded, has centers in Albuquerque and Roswell serving approximately 500 participants annually in residential learning environments (See box on page 18). Tribal governments run some of the largest youth employment programs, including the Navajo Nation Summer Youth Employment Program, which serves roughly 2,000 youth each year. Other tribal programs serve hundreds of young people, including the Eight Northern Pueblos Council and the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project. Together, these form a foundation for an eventual statewide re-engagement system, even as they currently operate in fragmented ways. (See Appendix C for a full list.)

Contributing Factors to Youth Disconnection and Potential Solutions

Youth disconnection nationally and in New Mexico reflects the interaction of individual, relational, community, and societal risk factors, rather than a single cause. National and state-level evidence indicates that behavioral health needs, housing instability, system involvement, and economic hardship are strongly associated with periods of disconnection from education and employment. New Mexico may face elevated risk due to comparatively high rates of poverty, behavioral health challenges, and justice system involvement. While the number of youth affected by any single factor may be relatively small, these risks often overlap, and youth experiencing multiple challenges are significantly more likely to become disconnected.

Figure 1. Causes and Protective Factors Related to Youth Disconnection



Source: New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department; Kemple and Willner; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine; Dworsky et al.; National Academies of Sciences; Engineering and Medicine; US Government Accountability Office

Housing instability and homelessness are linked to youth disconnection in New Mexico. State planning documents consistently identify housing instability as a primary barrier to school and employment among transition-age youth.[vii] Similarly, national research finds that homelessness is associated with interrupted education, reduced labor force attachment, and increased risk of prolonged disengagement.[viii]

Youth involved with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems face elevated risks of disconnection, particularly during key transition periods. Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) reports indicate that the roughly 50 youth aging out of foster care annually experience higher rates of housing instability, unmet behavioral health needs, and disrupted educational pathways, all of which weaken attachment to school and work.[ix] CYFD does not track disconnected status directly, but the populations served through transition-age and independent living programs closely overlap with the disconnected youth population.

Justice system involvement is associated with school disruption, suspension or expulsion, delayed credential attainment, and weakened labor force attachment, with New Mexico data showing persistent racial and ethnic disparities in system contact and ongoing challenges related to reentry and reintegration. In New Mexico, approximately 7,600 youth (FY24) are referred to the juvenile justice system annually, but fewer than 100 are committed to a secure facility, indicating most youth remain in the community and require coordinated education, workforce, and other supports. While state justice data does not include longitudinal education and employment outcomes, national research shows that justice-involved youth experience lower rates of postsecondary enrollment and employment than their peers,[x] suggesting this population is overrepresented among disconnected youth.

New Mexico and national research identify several protective factors that reduce the risk of youth disconnection. Stable housing, access to quality education, and the availability of youth employment and reengagement programs are associated with stronger attachment to school and work, particularly for transition-age youth and young adults facing economic or family instability.[xi] Supportive relationships with adults and peers, safe and stable home environments, and access to behavioral health services further mitigate the risk of disengagement, especially for youth with prior foster care or juvenile justice contact. Coordinated support across housing, education, workforce, and behavioral health systems—paired with positive adult connections—are central to preventing and reversing youth disconnection.

Both youth and the Economic Development Department identify lack of training as a barrier to employment

Employers report that entry-level workers often need baseline skills or training before they can be hired, while youth themselves recognize that many jobs require credentials or prior experience. In addition, for those under the age of 18, hiring involves additional federal requirements, which can increase administrative burden for employers. Together, these factors limit employment opportunities for young people, particularly those without prior training or work experience.

Sources: WSD Labor Force Participation survey 2026, NM EDD 2023 updated state plan

Setting a Goal: New Mexico Should Reduce Youth Disconnection by 10 Percent Over the Next Three Years

As a starting point, reconnecting 3,200 young people—a 10 percent reduction—would bring New Mexico to the national average for youth disconnection and generate an estimated $62.3 million in saved taxpayer costs and $120 million in personal earnings. Beyond reducing long-term social and fiscal costs, this shift would expand the state's talent pipeline, increase labor force participation, strengthen local economies, and improve lifetime earnings and well-being.

Reducing the number of disconnected youth by 3,200 (10 percent) could yield approximately $62.3 million in additional annual state tax revenue.

Setting a goal helps reach targets.

Setting goals and creating a strategic plan can lead to improved organizational performance.[xii] This strategy may be particularly effective when the goal is both ambitious and made public. Goal setting is a key component of StateStat, a process originally established in Baltimore and now adopted by multiple states to increase government accountability and success through using data and evidence. The model consists of four steps: setting goals, establishing accountability mechanisms, targeting actions, and tracking progress through a shared set of metrics. Implementation will require coordinated action across state agencies, regular monitoring of county-level data, and consistent reporting on progress toward established targets.

Goal-Setting in StateStat

The model consists of four steps:

1. Setting goals,
2. Establishing accountability mechanisms,
3. Targeting actions, and
4. Tracking progress through a shared set of metrics.

Source: O'Malley, 2019

Aligning economic development efforts and support with counties that have high rates and numbers of disconnected youth could increase youth engagement, while strengthening the state's overall economic growth. The Northwest and Northeast regions of the state have high rates of youth disconnection. Job growth data shows Bernalillo, Doña Ana, and Sandoval counties had the largest employment increases since 2019, with Los Alamos and Sandoval Counties having the largest percent increases in job creation. Through the Local Economic Development Act program (LEDA) and the Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP), the state invests to increase job creation, with more than 50 percent of the jobs created and fiscal investment in Bernalillo County. Better aligning these economic development investments with regions and populations experiencing high levels of youth disconnection—such as through targeted training pipelines, local partnerships, and recruitment strategies—could help connect more young people to employment while maximizing the return on state investments.

Action Plan: To Reduce Youth Disconnection, the State Needs to Establish a Habit of Accountability and Increase Targeted Evidence-Based Services

In addition to student retention in high school, New Mexico can reach the initial goal of reducing the number of disconnected youth by 3,200 by doing four things the state is not currently doing:

1. More effective recruitment of disconnected youth to programs;
2. Focusing existing programs on the currently disconnected population;
3. Expanding evidence-based programs; and
4. Building a system of accountability with performance monitoring and a dedicated structure.

Figure 2. Action Plan to Reduce Youth Disconnection

Set a Goal
Reduce youth disconnection by 10% in 3 years

Create a Habit of Accountability
- Monitor data regularly
- Establish a disconnected youth accountability group
- Share data across agencies

Take Targeted Action
- Improve recruitment and referrals
- Prioritize disconnected and at-risk youth in programs
- Prioritize and expand promising and evidence-based programs
- Adopt best practices to improve Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program performance

Keep a Scorecard
- Number of disconnected youth
- Impact of state programs
- Number of young people in workforce training and employment programs who were disconnected or at-risk

Source: Adapted from O'Malley, 2019

Table 2. Targeted Expansion of Programs to Serve Disconnected Youth

	Program	Current # DY Served	Expansion target	Total DY Participants
HED	Integrated Education and Training (IET)	Unknown	1,000	Unknown
HED	Non-credit Workforce Certificate Programs	610	100-200	710-810
WSD	WIOA Youth	28*	975	~1,000
WSD	Pre-apprenticeships (POP)	Unknown	300	300
WSD	Jobs for America's Graduates	375	125	500
PED	Drop-out Reduction	Unknown	500	Unknown
PED	Summer Employment	Unknown	300	Unknown
EMNRD	Youth Conservation Corps	Unknown	100	Unknown
TOTAL			**3,400-3,500**	

*HED= Higher Education Department. WSD= Workforce Solutions Department, PED= Public Education Department, EMNRD= Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department. Funding includes operational budgets. WSD reports serving 481 persons under the broad federal definition of out-of-school youth (previous offenders, homeless, foster, and not in school) over the period from FY2019-FY2025; the 28-person figure only reflects the number of youth that New Mexico's Workforce Boards track as not in school.

Sources: WSD, HED, PED, LFC Files

Disconnected youth require strategic recruitment and retention.

Young people who are not working or in school can be difficult to find, recruit, and retain in programs; as a result, preventing disconnection by keeping youth in school is one of the most effective strategies. Beyond that, state programs should adopt national best practices for engaging youth, including offering flexible services that align with youth schedules. For those who drop out of school, helping schools and communities work together on referrals could increase access to needed supports. These school and community connections could be strengthened by a unified closed-loop referral system that tracks referrals from initial request through final outcome, ensuring feedback is provided to the referring body. Finally, direct marketing based on predictive analytics, currently used in limited ways, may offer an additional strategy for identifying disconnected youth.

Almost half of the youth survey respondents not currently engaged in the labor force did not attend or complete high school; keeping students in school through graduation may help reduce future disconnection. According to WSD's 2026 survey of those not in the labor force, 44 percent reported not attending high school, or leaving before graduation. In the 2024-2025 school year, almost 5,500 students in grades seven through 12th dropped out. A high school diploma or equivalent is required for most high-paying jobs. LFC has written multiple reports on dropout prevention, recommending that districts with a high number of students at-risk create dropout plans, report ninth-grade retention rates, and ensure strong early warning systems to identify students at risk of dropping out.

In school year 2024-2025 almost 5,500 students in grades 7-12 dropped out, and 44 percent of the disconnected young people surveyed by WSD did not attend or did not complete high school, suggesting dropping out is a significant contributing factor to youth disconnection in the state.

Some states require students dropping out of high school to complete an exit process, which includes referrals to community services. Alabama schools are required to complete a form that includes the reason the student is leaving school and the location to which the school referred the student for services. While the priority should be keeping youth enrolled in school, for those who drop out, ensuring that they know where to go and how to connect with programs is essential for reengagement. If schools can connect them with community programs, it may be easier for them to participate in these services, and it can create a safety net as they exit school. Under New Mexico's Attendance for Success Act, when students are chronically or excessively absent (missing more than 10 percent or 20 percent of school days, respectively), school districts may refer students to community providers, but this is not required (See Appendix D). Helping connect these students to continuing education, training, or services may reduce the risk of disconnection. Beyond high school, preventing disconnection will require stronger supports within higher education systems. New Mexico performs poorly on key postsecondary metrics: the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reports a six-year college completion rate of 48.3 percent in New Mexico, third lowest nationally and 13 percentage points below the U.S. average. Previous LFC analysis found that only 71 percent of

Table 3. Other State Examples of Required Referrals for Schools Dropping Out of the Public School System

State	Required Referral
AL	Requires schools complete a referral form that includes the reason the student is leaving school and the location to which the school referred the student for services
MA	Requires schools to provide a list of community resources
AK	Requires school districts to refer youth aged 15 to 19 who drop out to the Alaska Military Youth Academy

Source: AK, AL, MA education departments

first-time, full-time students were retained into their second year. Community colleges and universities have different structures to intervene when students need assistance and should ensure referrals to other services prior to student withdrawal.

Predictive modeling and targeted outreach can be used to increase enrollment of young adults in public programs. Michigan partnered with CollegeAPP, a private firm that uses data modeling and targeted marketing, to identify individuals ages 21 to 25 who had not attended college and recruit them into Reconnect, a tuition-free community college program expanded through a one-time appropriation. Following this partnership, 12.3 thousand additional students enrolled—more than doubling prior participation.

Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) currently uses CollegeAPP at an annual cost of $25 thousand to identify potential students in the Albuquerque metropolitan area based on age, income, employment status, and prior education. This tool enables more targeted outreach to individuals who could benefit from education, training, or employment services. New Mexico could expand this approach by partnering with CollegeAPP or a similar vendor—through higher education institutions or the Workforce Solutions Department—to identify young adults with low income and limited postsecondary attainment and connect them to workforce training and education programs. Alternatively, once fully functional, the longitudinal data system run by the Higher Education Department could provide a way to monitor disconnection from programs.

Other states have strong co-enrollment structures that allow specific assistance programs to refer youth across programs. North Dakota receives roughly 10 percent of its federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth clients from other agency programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Basic Employment. New Mexico does not track this data at the agency level. Strengthening the referral system could prevent additional youth from fully disconnecting before receiving services.

New Mexico's education and training programs could also partner with Medicaid and SNAP to increase participation among youth disconnected from school and work. An estimated 42,106 youth ages 16 to 24 are enrolled in Medicaid and 5,629 in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), creating an opportunity for the Health Care Authority (HCA) and WSD to connect low-income youth to programs that increase earnings. However, neither Medicaid nor SNAP tracks outbound referrals to WSD at the system level, and WSD does not track these referrals across agencies; instead, they are recorded in case files, limiting visibility into outcomes. WSD received funding to support Medicaid and SNAP work requirements and, therefore, interagency communication regarding program referrals and performance will be necessary.

Higher Education Institutions Use Inconsistent Retention Strategies and Lack Clear Reengagement Pathways for Students Who Leave

Community colleges and four-year institutions vary in approaches to retention and reengagement. At Central New Mexico Community College (CNM), an early alert system allows faculty to flag struggling students, but it primarily supports internal interventions and does not consistently connect students to external education or workforce options. At Southeast New Mexico College, students are required to meet with academic advisors prior to withdrawing, and those who stop attending are contacted by advisors or coordinators.

At the University of New Mexico (UNM), a broader set of supports—such as financial aid, advising, and behavioral health services—focus on preventing dropout, but there is no formal process to track or reconnect with students who leave before completing a credential.

Across institutions, efforts are largely focused on retention rather than ensuring continuity across education and workforce systems.

Sources: CNM, UNM, SENMC

The Federal WIOA Program

In 2014, the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was established to align workforce development with industry needs, improve access to training and education, and foster accountability through performance measures.

WIOA services are divided across four titles, serving different populations:

- Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, administered by local workforce development boards.
- Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy, administered by the Higher Education Department.
- Title III (Wagner-Peyser) basic career services run by WSD; and
- Title IV, the Rehabilitation Act, run by Vocational Rehabilitation, multiple agencies, including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Public Education Department.

Source: LFC files

New Mexico is investing in closed-loop referral platforms that can connect youth to employment, training, and supportive services, but it will want to ensure communication across platforms. In 2024, HCA partnered with FindHelp to launch YesNM Connect, designed to streamline access to social and health services. FindHelp is a national online platform that allows users and providers to search for, refer to, and track connections to local social services, such as food, housing, and financial assistance. In 2025, HCA received $9 million to support patient navigation and system implementation. As of fall 2025, FindHelp reports over 220 thousand users, 730 thousand searches, and 3,100 programs statewide, covering food, housing, transportation, and financial assistance. While the contract requires the system to be accessible across all 33 counties, 22 tribal communities, health centers, and partner agencies, its effectiveness in connecting individuals to employment and training remains unclear.

While HCA programs enroll over 42 thousand low-income young people, current systems do not track how many were referred to workforce programs or whether those individuals ultimately enrolled.

WSD is developing a closed-loop referral system to capture this information, but it will require interoperability with HCA's systems to effectively identify, refer, and track outcomes for this population.

WSD received $2 million to develop a real-time case management system intended to function as another closed-loop referral platform. As of February 2026, WSD's system is not yet operational. The development of two separate systems raises concerns about duplication. Aligning or consolidating these systems could improve efficiency and better support individuals with overlapping needs. The state should ensure interoperability between HCA and WSD systems and track referrals and service receipt across agencies.

Federal best practices on recruitment include using referral partners and intensive community outreach. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Labor examined how states adjusted their WIOA-funded youth programs to comply with 2014 WIOA changes, including a requirement that more funding be directed to youth who are not in school or working. The Department of Labor (DOL) report highlights five strategies states used to recruit and retain youth in WIOA Youth programs. WIOA providers and other state entities serving disconnected youth can use these strategies to better engage this population.

Table 4. Best Practice Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Out-of-School Youth

Strategy	Description	In NM?
Recruitment		
Use of new referral partners	Engaging with probation and parole, courts, police, and sheriff's departments; organizations serving youth in or aging out of foster care; homeless resource centers; housing agencies; dropout and adult education programs; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and SNAP employment and training programs; programs for parenting youth; and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	Yes
Intensive community outreach	Working with churches, laundromats, and other places where youth congregate, going door-to-door	Yes
Reduced outreach to in-school youth	Spending less time with high school and community college partners	No
Use of social and traditional media	LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Spanish-language radio, billboards, etc.	Yes
Other approaches	Shifting outreach to later in the day or in the evenings; altering enrollment processes, such as by providing one-on-one support to complete the process	Not fully
Retention		
Hands-on case management	Addressing causes of disconnection, addressing causes, & service coordination	Yes
Provision of supportive services	Providing childcare, transportation assistance and other services to help young people remove barriers	Yes
Use of social and traditional media	LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Spanish-language radio, billboards, etc.	Unknown
Provision of incentives	Providing cash or other rewards to individuals when they meet specific goals	Yes

Source: US DOL

To recruit and retain youth, programs need to work with community organizations, ensure flexibility to reduce barriers, and demonstrate program value. Strong community relationships are essential when attempting to recruit youth who are not working or in school into programs, but relying on community partners alone is often insufficient.[xiii] [xiv] Programs should also be flexible because many youth may have difficulty meeting strict schedules or eligibility requirements. In addition, programs need to demonstrate value quickly, for example, by helping participants secure a job or high school equivalency certificate or by providing payments for participation. Establishing value may also include addressing immediate barriers, such as housing and food needs, and offering incentives tied to key milestones.

Initial engagement practices are critical to retention. Evidence favors relational intake processes that prioritize listening and youth-defined goals over immediate enrollment or compliance requirements. Programs that allow for pauses, restarts, and nonlinear participation—and that offer flexibility in schedules, timelines, and the sequencing of education and employment—are more likely to sustain engagement among youth facing housing instability, health challenges, or family responsibilities. While state programs feature some of these components, they are not consistently applied. For instance, some programs provide incentives, but not all programs do so.

Youth centers can help young people engage in programs but need to operate with a youth-friendly approach, including setting hours that align with youth schedules. In Albuquerque, New Day and Youth Development Inc. (YDI) operate youth centers that adopted national best practices emphasizing accessible, low-barrier entry points for disconnected youth. In Connecticut, youth centers are used to enroll young people in WIOA Youth programs and are open during evenings and weekends. Beyond longer hours, adding flexibility to how and when youth attend training or school may also increase uptake and retention. University High School in Roswell recently opted to allow students to leave early or start late to accommodate employment or childcare obligations, after which excessive absenteeism dropped by 24 percentage points, and attendance increased by 10 percentage points; however, this improvement may also be attributed to other community school factors.

Figure 3. Youth Center at YDI in Albuquerque

Source: LFC files

Programs need to actively engage youth who are not working or in school.

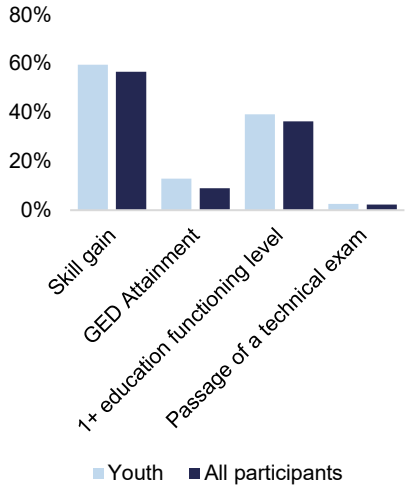
New Mexico operates several youth-serving programs that could reduce disconnection, but many do not prioritize serving disconnected youth or track whether participants are working or in school. Targeting services toward disconnected youth and strengthening data collection would improve program impact. Prevention services for those most at risk, as well as a stronger referral system, could lead to even more youth being served.

The state should prioritize adult education and credential funding for youth ages 16 to 24, particularly those who are not employed, who currently make up about 27 percent of participants. While adult education should remain available to all eligible interested adults, HED data shows larger impacts for younger individuals, indicating benefits to earlier intervention. However, HED does not track longer-term outcomes related to employment or wages. Current participation skews older—the average age of short-term credential recipients is 35—and demand exceeds capacity, with average waiting lists of 55 potential students across 26 programs (about 1,400 individuals). To improve outcomes, HED should expand adult education by serving an additional 1,000 youth through integrated education and training, an evidence-based model discussed later in this report. Serving an additional 1,000 youth could cost close to $3.5 million; but the state could reduce this cost partly by moving some regular adult education slots to integrated education and training. Expansion will require recruiting and retaining instructors, particularly in rural areas where salaries may lag the public school system (See Appendix F.)

Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), which enrolls over 700 youth annually, could better prioritize disconnected youth or those most at risk of disconnection in its program selection. The primarily state-funded program, which serves youth ages 14–24, does not track whether participants were in school prior to enrollment, limiting the state's ability to assess whether services reach those most in need. In FY25, YCC served approximately 700 youth, 57 percent of whom were under 18; however, only 13 percent reported plans to return to school or pursue a high school equivalency certificate. This suggests the program may be serving youth not connected to traditional education, who may require additional supports.

Currently, at most 9.7 percent of WIOA Youth participants are out-of-school youth, but with approximately $21.5 million in funding across FY24-FY28, it has the capacity to reach a larger share. The federal WIOA Youth program administered by WSD requires that 75 percent of funding go to out-of-school youth programming (See Appendix E for the definition of out-of-school youth, which also includes individuals who are unhoused or previous offenders). From 2019 to 2025, New Mexico served 4,991 unique youth in this program, but only 481 were classified as out-of-school under federal definitions: 28 were not enrolled in school, 261 were homeless, and another 193 were previous offenders. New Mexico has the

Chart 7. Outcomes For Adult Education
FY25



Note: Reported outcomes are for all adult education, not just integrated education and training.
Source: HED

Table 5. YCC Participating Youth Age Ranges and Plans After YCC

Age Ranges	After YCC
14-15: 21%	Middle, High School, GED: 13%
16-17: 36%	Community College: 24%
18-19: 24%	4-year college: 4%
20+: 19%	Trade or vocational school: 7%
	Military or other: 25%
	Job (includes part-time): 27%

Source: YCC annual report 2025

Table 6. Number of Youth Not in School and Enrolled in WIOA by Year, 2019-2024

Year	Number youth not in school	Number enrolled in WIOA Youth
2019	1	1,116
2020	6	1,335
2021	8	1,714
2022	5	1,421
2023	6	1,281
2024	2	unreliable

Note: This is not the official WIOA definition of out-of-school, but rather the actual number of youth not attending school. WSD did not report whether these youth were in training prior to enrollment in WIOA. Number enrolled includes duplicates across program years.
Source: WSD and DOL data

opportunity and obligation to ensure more young people not in school receive WIOA Youth services. If the state met its expected service levels for out-of-school youth, WIOA Youth would provide services to an additional 975 people annually.

WSD does not target its Pre-Apprenticeship Opportunity Program (POP) or its Be Pro Be Proud program to disconnected youth, creating an opportunity to better target services. In 2024, the governor vetoed language for pre-apprenticeships that would target the program to young adults who were disconnected or at-risk of becoming disconnected. Currently, WSD does not track whether participants in programs, including POP, are in school or employed prior to participation, limiting the state's ability to assess whether these programs are reaching disconnected youth. Collecting this information would allow WSD to better target and evaluate participation among high-risk youth. Because WSD does not track this information, it cannot target programs to the youth most at risk or most in need of these programs. If half of all pre-apprentice slots were allocated to disconnected youth, the state could serve an additional 300 disconnected youth annually. While WSD appears to be targeting high-need areas—eight of the 10 zip codes with the most participants are in counties with above-average disconnection rates—improved monitoring is needed.

Table 7. Pre-Apprenticeship Participants by Location and Disconnection Rate, FY23-FY25

City	Zip Code	Number Enrolled	DY Rate
Clayton	88415	34	37.7%
Lovington	88260	46	17.1%
Carlsbad	88220	46	15.9%
Deming	88030	84	28.6%
Las Vegas	87701	35	11.1%
Taos	87571	58	16.9%
Rancho de Taos	87557	30	16.9%
Espanola	87532	32	17.6%
Gallup	87301	48	34.2%
Albuquerque	87121	50	12.5%

Note: DY= disconnected youth. County rates are from 2019, the most recent analysis by Measure of America.

Source: WSD and Measure of America

WSD also cannot report whether individuals engaging with the Be Pro Be Proud mobile workforce outreach program—a traveling exhibit that promotes careers in the skilled trades—are disconnected because it collects only email addresses and not participant-level education or employment status. Available data indicates the program is reaching fewer Native American individuals (6 percent compared with 11.8 percent of the population) and fewer individuals with disabilities (1 percent compared with 19 percent of students enrolled in special education) than the state averages for the overall population. While there may be challenges with collecting this data, reporting who uses these services and whether they are employed or in school would help WSD understand which programs affect different groups and whether programs are serving their intended populations. Data-sharing agreements across agencies, discussed later in this report, could help address this effort.

New Mexico will need to prioritize evidence-based programs for training and employment and ensure these programs achieve expected results.

Nationally, research identifies specific interventions proven to help improve outcomes for youth, but research on youth who are disconnected is more limited. New Mexico providers implement several interventions deemed effective by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In addition to discrete programs, best-practice strategies—such as integrated education and training—have been shown to improve outcomes and should be further expanded by HED. Expanding, evaluating, and prioritizing these approaches will likely reduce the number of youth not in

school or employment. Other programs, such as workforce certificate programs run by community colleges, seem promising and may be expanded, subject to more rigorous evaluation.

New Mexico tracks completion of integrated education and training, a recognized best practice, but needs to increase youth participation and monitor longer-term outcomes. Integrating education and training can increase credential attainment and may increase short-term employment and earnings.[xv] The Higher Education Department (HED) provides an integrated education and training (IET) model and has served between 123 and 309 youth each year since FY22. IET combines basic education with job training in a single, occupation-focused program and is a recognized best practice for improving credential attainment and short-term employment outcomes.

Most youth in adult education programs participate in traditional instruction that is not integrated with employment training (55 percent in FY25). In 2025, HED received $10 million in nonrecurring funding for IET, in addition to $2 million annually for three years beginning in 2024 through state government results and opportunity (GRO) pilot program funding.

In 2025, HED reported a 100 percent completion rate for IET but did not track longer-term outcomes, such as employment, earnings, or career progression. HED also reported stronger short-term outcomes for youth participants compared with the broader adult education population. While IET is considered a national best practice, at least one state found no significant long-term impacts on educational attainment, career-track employment, or earnings after three years. To ensure expected returns, HED should monitor longer-term outcomes, potentially through a randomized control trial, and consider prioritizing expansion of IET within adult education programs.

Higher education institutions offer non-credit workforce certificate programs, a promising practice that the state could expand if evaluation continues to show positive effects. In 2024, the Legislature appropriated $60 million to the HED to implement and evaluate short-term credential programs. HED distributed funds to higher education institutions, which surveyed students to assess program impacts. Six hundred ten respondents aged 16-24 who were not previously in school or working reported enrolling in community college credential programs. Of the 294 respondents who answered employment outcome questions, 128 (44 percent) reported being employed at the time of certificate completion. While response rates were limited, these results provide preliminary evidence of the program's impact. HED could strengthen future analysis by incorporating administrative data and adding a comparison group. If these analyses show positive effects, the state should expand these certificate programs.

Integrated Education and Training (IET) in New Mexico

New Mexico IET programs must lead to in-demand careers that offer a living wage and result in industry-recognized credentials or entry into career pathways. Popular fields include:

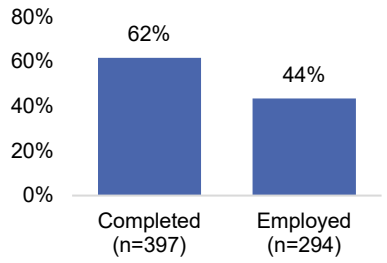
- Healthcare (certified nursing assistant, EMT)
- Skilled trades (welding, construction certifications)
- Commercial driving (CDL)

Participants may earn:

- A single industry-recognized credential,
- Stackable credentials (e.g., CPR + first aid + OSHA), or
- Direct entry into apprenticeship or career

Source: NM HED

Chart 8. Outcomes from GRO Certificate Funding for Disconnected Youth Participants
2025-2026



Note: data from survey responses. Includes all NMICC institutions except CCC, MCC, and SENMC. DACC is included.

Source: NMICC

New Mexico operates at least four programs shown, based on national research, to improve outcomes for disconnected youth. In 2022, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contracted with the research nonprofit organizations MDRC and Child Trends to catalog effective programs for youth disconnected from education or employment. Research indicates that many of these programs improve employment and training outcomes, particularly when they combine work or training with supportive services.[xvi] [xvii] YouthBuild and Youth ChalleNGe operate in New Mexico and have been shown nationally to improve educational and employment outcomes; however, state-specific results are not available. The state should strengthen monitoring of existing programs to better assess their impact and could expand implementation of proven models once their effectiveness in New Mexico is established (see Appendix G).[xviii]

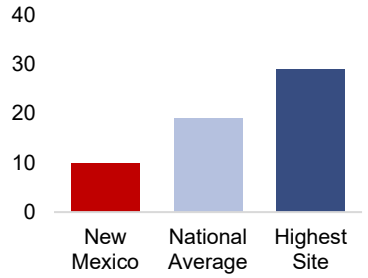
Increased outcome monitoring for Youth ChalleNGe could reduce the number of disconnected youth. Youth ChalleNGe is a mostly federally funded program operated in a military structure, integrating education and training for at-risk youth. Youth ChalleNGe can serve up to 200 youth annually in New Mexico and shows positive outcomes, but a 2025 RAND research report found the program in New Mexico provides fewer academic hours than the national average among Youth ChalleNGe programs (10 versus 19 per week), which may contribute to lower high school equivalency attainment (60 percent versus around 72 percent nationally). Despite a high number of applicants, not all who apply enroll, and completion falls short of targets, suggesting room to expand participation. The state should increase enrollment and instructional hours to improve outcomes and maximize returns, with future funding increases tied to performance.

Youth ChalleNGe is a quasi-military residential program for at-risk youth ages 16-18 who dropped out of or were expelled from school. The National Guard program provides academic instruction, job and life skills training, physical fitness, leadership development, community service, and one-on-one mentoring.

YouthBuild provides low-income young people ages 16–24 who did not complete high school with hands-on vocational training, educational services, case management, counseling, community service, and leadership development opportunities.

Source: US Dept. Health and Human Services

Chart 9. Youth ChalleNGe Academic Instruction Hours
2023



Note: See Appendix H for data by site.
Source: RAND

New Mexico's federally funded Job Corps was slated for closure, with the federal government citing poor performance and a low return on investment as reasons to reduce funding.

Job Corps operates in both Albuquerque and Roswell and is fully federally funded. The program provides free education and training to low-income young people aged 16 to 24 in a community or residential setting. While recent New Mexico data show limited outcomes, previous national research found Job Corps led to increased education and earnings, especially for youth over 20. When the federal funding bill was signed in Fall 2025, Job Corps became fully funded through program year 2026.

Job Corps Cost per Enrollee and Graduation Rates, US versus NM, 2023

	NM	US
Average Cost per enrollee	$56,961	$49,770
Graduation Rate (WIOA definition)	33.4%	39%
Average Annualized Earnings	$16,810	$16,695

Note: Green shading indicates above the national average and red indicates below the national average.

Source: US DOL

The out-of-school component of Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), funded by WSD, will need rigorous evaluation. JAG is a national program serving at-risk youth and is identified as a promising model by Results for America. In 2025, WSD received $500 thousand to support intensive case management for out-of-school and at-risk youth and used these funds to contract with JAG. A 2019 national evaluation found that 40 percent of participants earned a high school credential, and 76 percent were employed or in school six months after participation; however, the absence of a control group limits conclusions about the program's causal impact.

JAG served over 375 students in the 2024-2025 program year, reporting a 100 percent graduation rate. This is the first fiscal year JAG has served out-of-school youth in New Mexico, reaching 174 participants as of January 2026, with a goal of 50 percent earning a high school credential. To assess effectiveness for disconnected youth, WSD and JAG-NM should implement more rigorous outcome tracking and evaluation. Funding JAG as a GRO pilot could support this effort; serving 500 youth would cost approximately $650 thousand annually.

Targeting proven summer employment and career technical education programs to youth at the highest risk of disconnection can improve outcomes and prevent disengagement. Summer employment programs have been shown to improve youth development and reduce justice system involvement. The Public Education Department (PED) funded summer internships with $4.5 million in FY24 and served approximately 2,700 students in FY25. Prioritizing these programs for youth at greatest risk could help reduce disconnection, but this is not a current strategy.

Career and technical education (CTE) is associated with positive outcomes when implemented effectively and targeted toward vulnerable youth, improving academic achievement, graduation rates, and career readiness.[xixxx] In FY25, approximately 51 thousand New Mexico students participated in CTE, and unhoused students who took CTE courses graduated at a rate of 93 percent—30 percentage points higher than their non-participant peers. For FY27, the state has made significant investments in these strategies, including $750 thousand for NM GRADS (Graduation, Reality and Dual-Role Skills), a school-based program that supports pregnant and parenting students; $10 million for summer high school internships; $35 million for evidence-based CTE and work-based learning; and $21.6 million for CTE innovation zones over three years.

The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) recently launched Summer ChalleNGe to provide middle schoolers in low-income areas with a six-week summer program that balances classroom academics with experiential learning and life skills development. The program operated at three Albuquerque middle schools and, in summer 2025, served 102 students at a cost of approximately $2,446 per student. DMA reports a 58 percent increase in reading and an average 78 percent reduction in absenteeism after program completion. However, the program should be

Figure 5. Services and Outcome Goals for JAG Out-of-School

Source: JAG-NM

Preventing disconnection is more effective and less costly than reconnection.

Disconnected youth often show warning signs years before disengaging, including grade repetition, chronic absenteeism, failing core classes, or involvement with the juvenile justice system. By the time they disconnect, these challenges have compounded, making it significantly more difficult to return to education or secure stable employment.

more rigorously evaluated with inclusion of a control group, and the state should track student improvements and expand the program contingent on positive outcomes.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) offers services to youth through its pre-employment transition services and Project SEARCH.

DVR receives WIOA Title IV funding to support employment services for people with disabilities. The agency allocates 15 percent of its WIOA funds to pre-employment transition services for youth ages 14-21, serving almost 1,600 individuals in FY24, although most of its WIOA participants are older than 21. DVR exceeded its WIOA performance targets in FY24, with 40 percent credential attainment, 43 percent employed four quarters after exit, and median earnings at $5,417 per quarter. Funding for pre-employment transition services was almost $2.7 million in FY25, and DVR has spent $1.5 million so far in FY26.

DVR also operates Project SEARCH, an evidence-based school-to-work internship model for youth with developmental disabilities between the ages 18 and 22. The program includes individuals from DVR, a local business, the school district, and the Health Care Authority. From 2014-2024, over 120 Project SEARCH graduates were found to be working more than 16 hours per week, earning at least minimum wage. DVR recently expanded Project SEARCH to more rural communities such as Shiprock and Deming, serving 47 individuals in the first nine months of FY26, more than in all of FY25.

Source: SRC and DVR

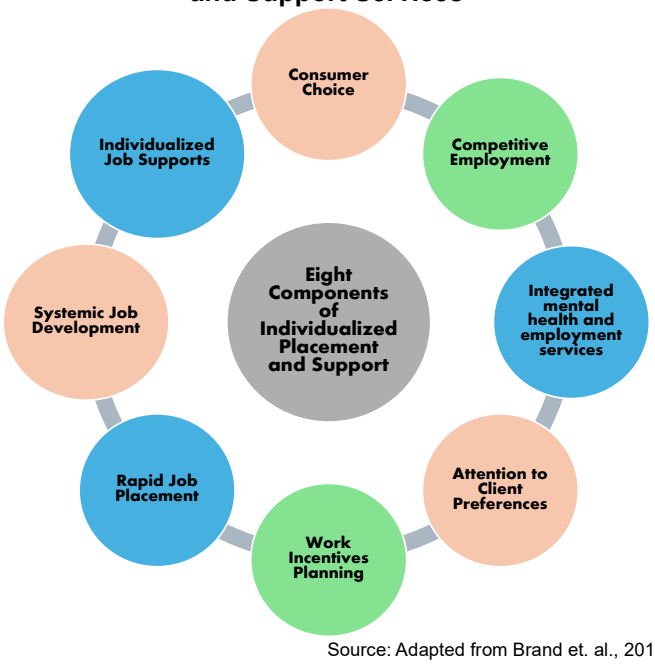
Behavioral health and wraparound supports can create an on-ramp for youth who are not ready to engage in employment and training.

Effective programs for disconnected youth combine education and training with case management and supports that address individual barriers.[xxi] Some may need access to behavioral health and related services, housing, or transportation prior to participation in employment and training.

The individual placement and support (IPS) model, commonly used for individuals with mental health challenges, has been shown to improve employment outcomes.[xxii] IPS provides individualized, employment-focused supports and emphasizes job placement alongside ongoing assistance. A meta-review found youth (ages 18 to 30) in IPS were more likely to be employed and remain employed longer than those not receiving services.[xxiii] [xxiv]

Many New Mexico programs serving youth incorporate trauma-informed case management, but other components shown to improve outcomes in evidence-based models are not consistently incorporated, including coordinated care across medical and social services and the integration of behavioral health with employment and training

Figure 6. Components of Individualized Placement and Support Services



Source: Adapted from Brand et. al., 2016

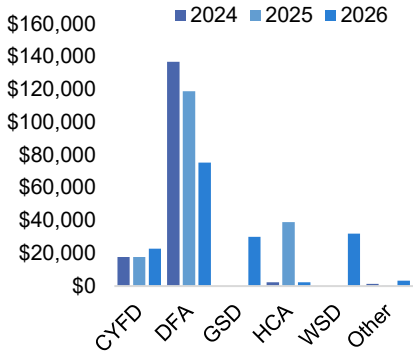
programs. Strengthening connections among mental health services, education, training, and employment pathways could improve participation and outcomes for youth.

Even as the state has appropriated over $500 million for housing in the last three years, housing remains an identified need. Youth who are disconnected are more likely to have housing instability. According to the 2026 WSD survey of those not currently participating in the labor force, 7 percent of respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 were experiencing homelessness, much higher than the 0.16 percent for the overall 18 to 24 population in New Mexico. Housing was the most selected barrier and solution regarding entry into the labor force.

The state and federal government fund multiple housing programs for youth through the Mortgage Finance Authority, the Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD), and WSD. Over the last three legislative sessions, the state appropriated more than $500 million for housing. Some providers of employment and training also help with housing, such as Youth Development Inc., which created over 100 housing stability plans for individuals in FY25. CYFD spent $4.6 million in FY25 on transitional housing services, serving 120 youth. Forty-five individuals are currently waiting for transitional housing from CYFD. As multiple agencies are responsible for housing assistance, the state will need a clear understanding of where and how money is being spent and if it is working to reduce housing instability. WSD is currently assessing the state's youth housing assistance programs through a $2 million federal grant, which is supplemented by a housing appropriation from the government results and opportunity (GRO) fund. The assessment will review the state's data and evaluation of youth housing, as well as its training and assessment processes for providing youth housing assistance. Subsequent appropriations and policy decisions should be informed by the assessment's findings, due in spring 2027.

Transportation was highlighted as a need in the WSD survey, and ride-sharing may be a solution for some. WSD's 2026 survey of those not participating in the workforce found transportation tied for the third most frequently reported solution (18 percent, 41 responses) and the second most needed accommodation for disability (38 percent, 16 responses). Those unable to access services frequently cite limited public transportation: routes that do not reach needed destinations, schedules that do not align with work or program hours, and travel times that are prohibitively long. While the state has begun to address these gaps through programs such as Ride United, operated by United Way of North Central New Mexico in partnership with Santa Fe County, these efforts remain limited in scale. Expanding and targeting transportation solutions, particularly for rural youth, will be important to improve access to education, training, and employment opportunities.

Chart 10. Housing-Related Appropriations
2024-2026 (in thousands)



Note: DFA= Department of Finance and Administration, GSD=General Services Division. Fund transfer and programs for seniors not included.

Source: HB2, 2024-2026

In March 2026, Albuquerque opened a $17 million transitional living facility for unhoused youth.

The facility serves youth ages 18 to 24 and provides housing, case management, and life skills training. Currently, the facility can house 41 youth and will be able to house 91 after the planned subsequent phases are complete.

The city has contracted with Youth Development Inc. (YDI) for $2.3 million to provide these services. Because YDI is also the central and northern workforce boards' WIOA Youth provider, there is an opportunity to connect these youth to workforce training.

Source: ABQ Journal

As one of the largest youth workforce programs in the state, WIOA Youth requires stronger outcome monitoring, greater flexibility, and structured technical assistance to improve performance.

WIOA is a federal law that authorizes workforce development funding. While only one component of the state's youth-serving ecosystem, WIOA Youth is the largest dedicated federal funding stream focused on employment and credential attainment for disconnected youth. Although the program could be serving over 1,000 youth who are not employed or in school, it is not predominantly serving them. Furthermore, performance in New Mexico has lagged the nation according to most performance metrics. The state should consider adopting strategies used by high-performing states, such as short-term performance monitoring and greater coordination.

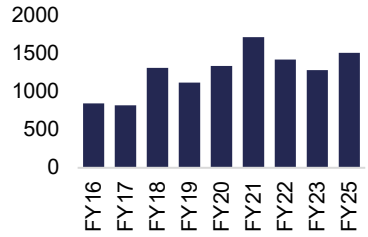
Enrollment in the WIOA Youth program in FY25 was the highest since 2021, but it could serve more disconnected youth. WIOA Youth, with an enrollment of roughly 1,500 in FY25, targets out-of-school youth, those with a history of foster care involvement, pregnant or parenting youth, and unhoused youth. If the program focused solely on disconnected youth, it could potentially serve around 4 percent of the 32 thousand disconnected youth in New Mexico. As discussed earlier, WIOA Youth only served 28 youth not enrolled in school from 2019 to 2025.

Because it includes standardized performance metrics and an established statewide infrastructure, WIOA Youth performance provides a practical, measurable starting point for improving system-level outcomes.

Most employment metrics for WIOA Youth in New Mexico lag the national average. In 2023, New Mexico's WIOA Youth employment rate two quarters after exit was 71.8 percent, slightly below the national rate, and declined to 69.6 percent after four quarters. This decline contrasts with the national trend, where employment rates typically increase over time. In contrast, New Mexico's median earnings exceeded both the national median and federal performance targets in 2023. This improvement warrants continued monitoring and may be partly associated with the state's minimum wage increase implemented in January 2023.

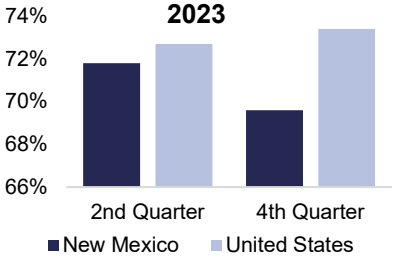
New Mexico's WIOA Youth program had higher rates of youth receiving training but lower rates of youth receiving a credential than the national average. While training rates have hovered around 20 percent in New Mexico in the last several years, credential completion rates have been more consistent, between 40 percent and 50 percent; however, national rates remain around 60 percent.

Chart 11. Enrollment in WIOA Youth Programs in New Mexico



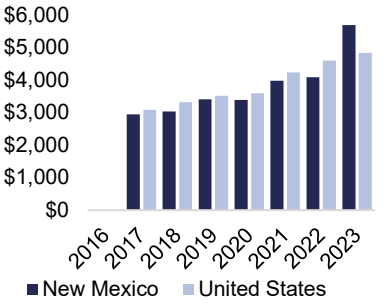
Note: FY24 data omitted due to the year being a potential outlier. These numbers include youth enrolled across multiple years.
Source: WSD

Chart 12. WIOA Youth Employment Rates in 2023



Source: US DOL

Chart 13. WIOA Youth Median Earnings per Quarter



Source: US DOL

States that have strong WIOA Youth performance in employment and earnings share common features, including real-time outcome monitoring, structured technical assistance, cross-agency data integration, and flexibility to serve highly disconnected youth. In 2023, Connecticut and North Dakota ranked in the top five across at least four of the six federal outcome metrics. North Dakota had the highest median earnings for those who completed the WIOA Youth program at $7,793 per quarter, though the state typically has incomes near the national average. Connecticut ranked first in the nation for degree completion and third for employment one year after enrollment in WIOA Youth. These consistently high rankings demonstrate that state administration of program funds likely impacts program outcomes.

Table 8. State Rankings for WIOA Youth Outcomes
(lower is better)

	CT	ND	NM
Median Earnings	28	1	9
Employment 2Q	4	2	37
Employment 4Q	3	2	43
Credential Attainment Rate	1	44	51
Received Training	4	2	21
Measurable Skill Gain	5	12	31

Note: Green shading indicates rankings above the national average, grey indicates rankings around the national average, and red indicates scores below the national average.

Source: USDOL

Best Practices from High-Performing States

North Dakota monitors employment, training, and earnings outcomes and requires providers to report interim client outcomes (Appendix I). By closely monitoring clients, the state can quickly adjust when outcomes do not meet expectations, rather than waiting until the end of a quarter.

Rather than relying solely on federal WIOA metrics, Connecticut uses its longitudinal data system to track outcomes for newly disconnected youth one year after high school exit, disaggregated by economic need and involvement in behavioral health, child welfare, and justice systems. This approach allows the state to identify which subpopulations face the highest risk of disconnection and adjust policy accordingly. Connecticut also pairs data monitoring with structured technical assistance, including regular board meetings, case-specific problem solving, and a statewide WIOA manual to standardize practices.

New Mexico could utilize WIOA Youth waiver authority to introduce greater flexibility in serving high-barrier youth, a strategy used by other states. Under WIOA, states may request waivers related to youth expenditure requirements, service sequencing, transfer authority, and administrative provisions. Many states, including Connecticut, California, Texas, Illinois, Florida, Ohio, Colorado, and Washington, have used youth-related waivers to rebalance service strategies, stabilize provider capacity, expand work-based learning models, and adapt to funding or enrollment disruptions.

While waivers do not change federal performance accountability requirements, they do provide flexibility in how services are structured prior to program exit. Some states have used out-of-school youth waivers to support longer pre-employment stabilization periods through more flexible expenditure definitions.

New Mexico's recent expansions of youth-focused initiatives—including pre-apprenticeship programs, work-based learning partnerships, and youth apprenticeship pathways—have been supported through state appropriations and competitive grants rather than negotiated federal waiver flexibility. The absence of youth-specific waiver strategies in New Mexico has limited the flexibility that other states use to sequence services

A Public-Private Partnership to Connect Youth to Employment

In Seattle, the city and county partnered with businesses to create a model that connects young people first to education and case management and then to WIOA-funded job search and placement services. This approach supports longer-term education and employment goals and has been associated with increased high school equivalency certificate attainment, higher rates of unsubsidized employment, improved college readiness, and successful transitions to postsecondary education. New Mexico could pilot a similar public-private partnership to assess whether aligning education, case management, and WIOA services produces comparable outcomes.

Source: Seattle King County P3 Pilot Report

differently, intervene earlier, or better accommodate high-barrier populations.

Table 9. WIOA Youth Waiver Policy Options versus Current New Mexico Approach

Policy Area	Current NM Approach	Potential Strategy	Potential Effect on Youth Disconnection
20 Percent Work Experience Requirement	Spending required at federal threshold.	Seek flexibility in calculation or sequencing work experience expenditures.	Longer stabilization or education before job placement expectations.
Supportive Services During Follow-Up	Limited flexibility; services constrained by statutory design.	Request authority to extend supportive services during post-exit stabilization periods.	Supports job retention and reducing re-disconnection.
Transfer Authority / Funding Stability	Standard federal transfer rules; formula-driven allocations.	Expand transfer flexibility to stabilize youth infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.	Reduces provider volatility and service gaps.
Administrative / Eligibility Flexibility	Standard documentation and enrollment requirements.	Streamline intake/documentation procedures.	Reduces referral drop-off for justice-involved or highly mobile youth.
Performance Target Flexibility	Operates under federal primary indicators only.	Negotiate adjusted targets or pilot supplemental state metrics for high-barrier youth.	Reduces perceived disincentives to enrolling youth requiring extended stabilization.
75 Percent Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Requirement	Full compliance; majority of youth funds must serve OSY.	Request flexibility to pilot blended early-intervention models (e.g., 50/50).	Earlier engagement of chronically absent or near-dropout youth before full disconnection.

Note: WSD reports applying for a 50/50 flexibility waiver for WIOA Youth and other waivers that would increase support for in-school youth.

Source: LFC files

The state needs a structure accountable for reducing the number of disconnected youth.

A handful of states have begun organizing more intentional, cross-agency responses to disconnected or high-need youth populations. Some states house coordination in broad, cabinet-level bodies that align education, workforce, human services, and related systems. Arizona's Talent Ready Workforce Cabinet and Kentucky's Education and Workforce Collaborative operate at a statewide level to set priorities, align funding, and coordinate implementation across systems. Maine and Massachusetts use their Children's Cabinets to convene agency leadership and set statewide strategy for youth outcomes, including connection to education and employment. In these models, disconnected youth are addressed as part of a broader child protection or workforce agenda.

Other states pair these structures with targeted youth-focused subgroups or initiatives. Maryland established the Youth Resource Coordinating Council within its Children's Cabinet to coordinate services, monitor data, and improve outcomes for higher-need youth across systems. Delaware has used a cross-sector working group to translate youth workforce priorities into specific actions, including expanding internships and apprenticeships for out-of-school youth and individuals with disabilities.

New Mexico has elements of these approaches in place. The state maintains a Children's Cabinet that brings together agencies around shared outcomes for children and families, including goals related to education, health, and transition to adulthood. The group provides a structure for cross-agency coordination, outcome tracking, and alignment of policy and budget priorities. However, its focus is centered on early childhood, public schools, and family stability, and it does not explicitly target or organize services around disconnected youth ages 16 to 24.

As a result, while some programs touch transition-age youth, the state does not currently have a governance structure specifically responsible for identifying, reengaging, and tracking outcomes for this population. The state operates numerous youth-serving programs across agencies and providers, but disconnection is defined and addressed differently across systems based on statutory authority and program eligibility. This fragmentation limits the state's ability to set shared goals, track outcomes, and ensure accountability for this population. In 2025, the Texas Legislature introduced a bill to create a shared definition of "opportunity youth" or disconnected youth. New Mexico could do something similar to help create cohesion among youth-serving organizations.

Figure 7. Various State Agencies and Groups Serving Youth

Source: CYFD, WSD, PED, HED, EMNRD, LANL Foundation

Case Study: New Mexico Forum for Youth in Community (NMFYC, 2003–2012)

New Mexico operated a statewide youth coordination effort, NMFYC, established in 2003 as a public-private partnership to align state agencies and communities. The forum organized its work across seven domains—such as youth engagement, training, organizational and leadership development, resource development, and policy alignment—and served as a statewide intermediary, convening partners, building capacity, and advancing policy.

The forum helped build statewide infrastructure for youth engagement and coordination, including the New Mexico Youth Alliance, a legislatively supported youth advisory body that engaged young people in policymaking and informed state agencies such as CYFD, PED, and Department of Health. The forum also played a role in mobilizing cross-agency and philanthropic partnerships, supporting after-school and youth development initiatives, and elevating youth voice in statewide policy discussions.

Despite this infrastructure, the forum ceased operations in 2012.

Sources: LFC Files

A designated coordinating entity should be responsible for convening partners, maintaining shared metrics, monitoring progress toward statewide goals, and reporting outcomes to policymakers. Because youth disconnection spans multiple agencies, this structure should be housed in the Governor's Office, which has the cross-agency authority necessary to align strategies and ensure accountability. The existing Children's Cabinet could provide alignment and visibility at the executive level, but the primary responsibility for implementation and outcomes would rest with a group convened for this population, or with a subcommittee of the Children's Cabinet. Addressing youth disconnection requires coordinated action across multiple systems that currently operate largely independently, including education, workforce, economic development, human services, and community-based services.

National research shows that effective youth reengagement strategies incorporate young people's perspectives through meaningful participation. Young adults who experience disconnection often have direct insight into the barriers that led to disengagement and the supports that facilitate reconnection. Meaningful youth involvement in planning and goal setting can strengthen program effectiveness and engagement. The coordination structure should therefore incorporate youth participation in its governance and implementation.

Some states incorporate youth voice and lived experience into system design and implementation through structured input processes, recognizing that disconnected youth often engage systems differently than traditional participants. Within New Mexico, WSD housing system improvement initiatives and some workforce boards are already incorporating youth with lived experience of housing instability into assessment design, training development, and system improvement efforts, providing a potential model for broader youth engagement in system design.

Collecting short- and long-term outcome metrics will allow policymakers to determine the full impact of programs for disconnected youth. Most of the above programs do not regularly report outcomes. For instance, performance measures for employment services, pre-apprenticeships, and Be Pro Be Proud were not included, and these programs have not reported outcome performance measures in LFC reports of nonrecurring appropriations. Including these programs in performance monitoring and tracking their impact—particularly for youth who are not working or in school—would improve understanding of program effectiveness. LFC analysis of adult education programs similarly found that while completion rates are tracked, post-program employment and earnings outcomes are not. Tracking and making outcome data available is critical to determining how to improve adult education. An accountability structure would provide a forum for reviewing these results and identifying strategies to improve youth engagement and training.

Features of an Effective Cross-Agency Coordination System

- A shared statewide definition and goal: Participating agencies should set measurable targets for reducing disconnection and increasing reengagement.
- Shared indicators and tracking progress: A limited set of cross-system indicators—such as youth reengaged annually, educational attainment and sustained participation—should be tracked across agencies.
- A coordinated cross-system implementation, where different entities contribute to different components of reengagement.
- Data integration and system visibility.

Best Practices for Meaningful Youth Participation

- Include youth in decision-making, not just advisory roles;
- Ensure representation from highly impacted groups (e.g., Native youth, youth with disabilities, youth in foster care, justice-involved youth, LGBT+ youth, and youth experiencing housing instability);
- Provide compensation for time and expertise;
- Use accessible formats (timing, location, virtual options);
- Build on existing youth groups; avoid duplication;
- Create clear pathways for input to influence action;
- Support ongoing engagement, not one-time input.

Sources: Annie E. Casey Foundation (2021); U.S. Department of Labor ETA guidance; Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Forum; Forum for Youth Investment.

Cross-agency data-sharing agreements can improve the state's ability to track youth disconnection and measure reengagement outcomes. As mentioned, agencies track participation and program outputs, but longitudinal outcome tracking across systems remains limited, and tracking this information would allow for better decision-making. Currently, there is no unified state framework linking high school exit, postsecondary enrollment, workforce participation, and wage outcomes, though recent memoranda of understanding between higher education institutions and WSD to track post-completion outcomes represent a step toward improved alignment. LFC evaluations have identified siloed operations and limited cross-program tracking across workforce and education systems.

Cross-agency data matching is feasible—WSD has matched unemployment insurance claimants with other public benefit recipients—but this approach has not been extended to disconnected youth in education and workforce systems. The state has also invested significant resources in developing a statewide longitudinal data system intended to track education and workforce outcomes. However, after more than $16 million in funding and several years of development, the state cannot determine how many youth who exit high school become disconnected, which reengagement programs produce the largest skill gains and earnings growth, or what approaches are most effective for youth.

Action Plan Strategies

To recruit and retain youth:

- The Public Education Department should require school districts to establish a referral process for students who drop out, including connecting students to at least one designated education, workforce, or support program within a defined period, and tracking referral outcomes.
- Higher education institutions should follow best practices for student retention and ensure that students are connected to at least one alternative education, training, or employment opportunity prior to withdrawal.
- The Workforce Solutions Department should incorporate youth-centered service requirements into contracts and performance measures for community-based providers serving youth. These could include flexible scheduling, drop-in access, evening and weekend availability, and low-barrier enrollment.
- The Workforce Solutions Department and the Health Care Authority should require participating programs to use a closed-loop referral system to document internal and cross-agency referrals, confirm service uptake, and report outcomes. Agencies should establish standardized metrics, set performance targets for referral completion, and regularly review results to improve cross-agency coordination.
- The Workforce Solutions Department or Higher Education Department should explore partnerships with CollegeAPP or a similar predictive analytics and marketing provider to identify young adults with low incomes and limited postsecondary attainment and proactively recruit them into education and workforce training programs.

To serve the targeted population:

- The Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department should better prioritize serving youth who are not in school or employed in the Youth Conservation Corps program.
- The Higher Education Department should expand integrated education and training opportunities targeted to youth, set a goal of serving at least 1,000 additional young people, and report on enrollment, completion, and employment outcomes.
- The Workforce Solutions Department should establish performance targets to increase enrollment of out-of-school youth in WIOA programs and ensure services reach disconnected youth. The department should track participation by target population and align funding and contracting accordingly.
- The Workforce Solutions Department should collect and report data on disconnected youth participation across its programs, including pre-apprenticeships and Be Pro Be Proud, and use this data to assess access, identify gaps, and improve targeting of services.

To prioritize and expand programs shown to work:

- The Legislature should consider appropriating funding from the government results and opportunity (GRO) Fund for an outcomes evaluation of out-of-school youth participating in the Jobs for America's Graduates program, to be administered by the Workforce Solutions Department.
- The Public Education Department and school districts should set targets and track participation to increase access to career and technical education and summer youth employment programs for at-risk youth, including requiring districts to report participation by subgroup and increasing enrollment among identified at-risk students.
- The Department of Military Affairs should increase instructional hours and enrollment within the Youth ChalleNGe program, and consider expanding funding when the program meets its federal graduation targets.
- The Department of Military Affairs should rigorously evaluate its Summer Challenge program.

To support youth to be able to engage in employment and training programs:

- The Legislature, the Children, Youth and Families Department, and the Workforce Solutions Department should ensure future appropriation and policy changes to youth housing are informed by the youth homelessness system improvement grant report due May 2027.
- The Workforce Solutions Department and regional Workforce Boards should pilot free transportation options, including ride-sharing, for reengagement program participants and report on utilization and outcomes to evaluate effectiveness.

To improve WIOA Youth performance:

- The Workforce Solutions Department should submit a WIOA Youth waiver package to the U.S. Department of Labor to increase flexibility in serving high-barrier youth. This should (1) include expanded flexibility in work experience expenditures to enable providers to prioritize stabilization and readiness and (2) seek authority to extend supportive services after completion to improve job retention. The department should pilot these in select regions and report annually on participation, retention, and employment outcomes for high-barrier youth populations.

To ensure a cross-agency accountability structure:

- For programs that serve disconnected youth, agencies, including the departments of Workforce Solutions, Children, Youth and Families, Public Education, and Higher Education, should require monitoring of employment, education, and earning outcomes. If agencies do not collect outcomes data by fiscal year 2027, the Legislature should consider reducing funding for these programs in fiscal year 2028.
- The Office of the Governor should establish a cross-agency coordinating body focused on disconnected youth to align strategy, improve accountability, and guide implementation across education, workforce, and human services systems. The group should include key state agencies, behavioral health stakeholders, and community partners, and incorporate meaningful youth participation, including youth with disabilities, Native American youth, rural youth, and youth with foster care experience. The body should be supported by a clear accountability framework with defined roles, shared goals, and regular reporting on outcomes.
- The Health Care Authority and the departments of Workforce Solutions, Higher Education, Children, Youth and Families, and Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources should establish data-sharing agreements for data interoperability across programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Youth Conservation Corps, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Appendix A. Selected Survey Responses from WSD Labor Force Participation Survey

Please select up to 5 reasons you are not currently looking for a job.

	Count	%
Housing instability	64	28%
Lack of skills/training	47	20%
Health/disability	44	19%
Wages too low	44	19%
Caring for family	39	17%
No jobs nearby	37	16%
Unable to get a job reference	28	12%
Concern about losing benefits	24	10%
Taking a break from job search due to limited progress	22	10%
Prefer not to work	22	10%
Do not feel safe applying for jobs	18	8%
Limited / no access to reliable transportation	17	7%
Discrimination	17	7%
Limited / no access to reliable childcare	16	7%
Limited / no access to the internet	13	6%
Do not need to earn money or expenses are covered by somebody else	13	6%
Language barriers	12	5%
Challenges with paperwork	9	4%
Limited / no access to a computer	10	4%
Unable to fill out a job application	10	4%
Criminal record	4	2%
Unable to pass employer required drug tests	3	1%
Other	2	1%

Did you prefer gig work to more traditional types of employment with a formal employer? Note that gig work can include freelance and cash-only work, and traditional employment can be part-or-full time.

Base (N):	Count 170	%
Yes	147	86%
No	23	14%

If you had sufficient support to pursue part- or full-time work, would you be able to start working?

Base (N):	Count 230	%
Yes	189	82%
No	37	16%
Unsure	4	2%

If a suitable job became available, when could you start?

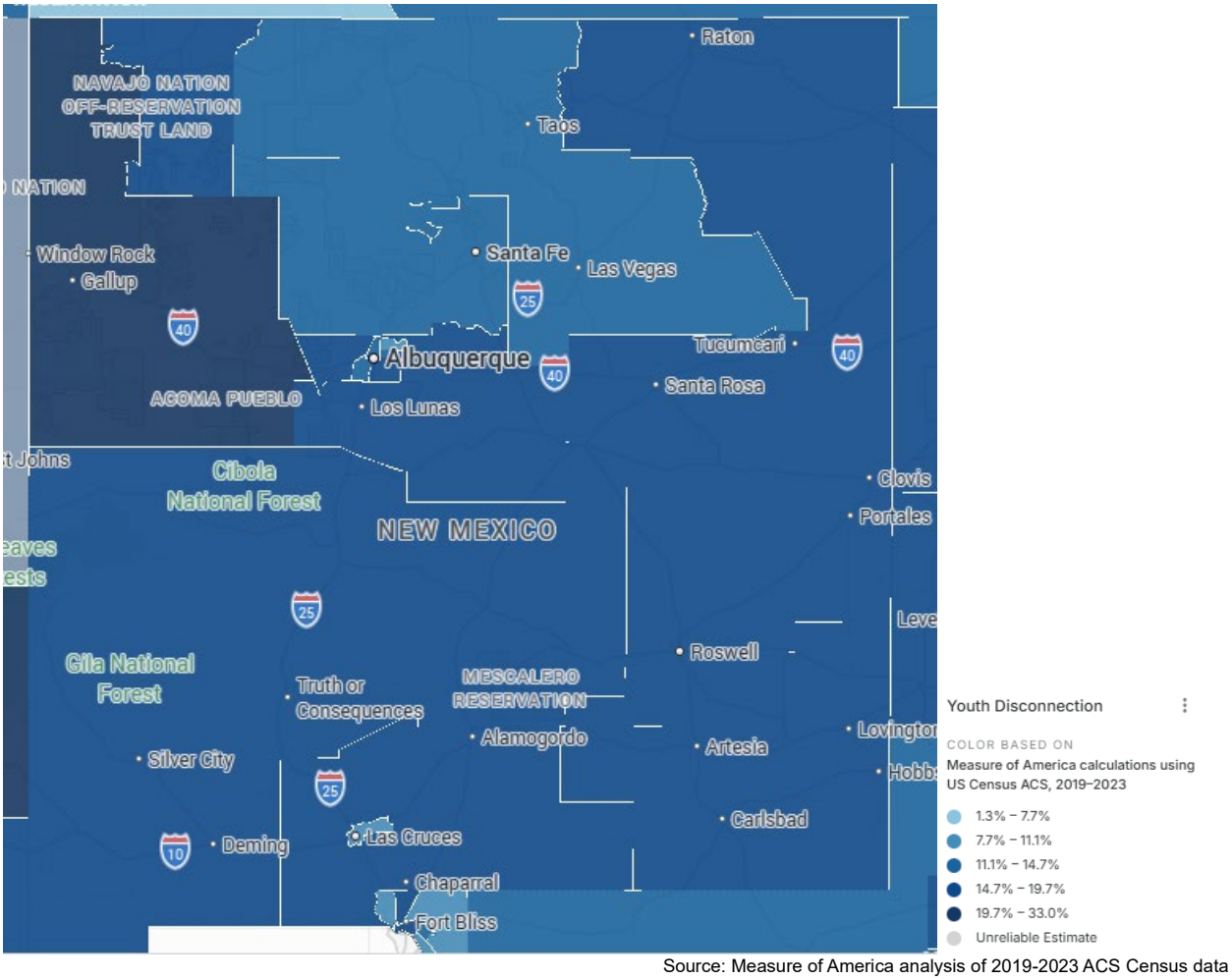
Base (N):	Count 193	%
Immediately	71	37%
Within 1 month	44	23%
1–3 months	48	25%
4–6 months	25	13%
After 6 months	5	3%

What is the minimum hourly wage you would consider for a job?

Base (N):	Count 28	%
<$12.00	2	7%
$12.00–$14.99	4	14%
$15.00–$17.99	11	39%
$18.00–$20.99	7	25%
$21.00–$24.99	3	11%
$25.00+	1	4%
Not sure	0	0%

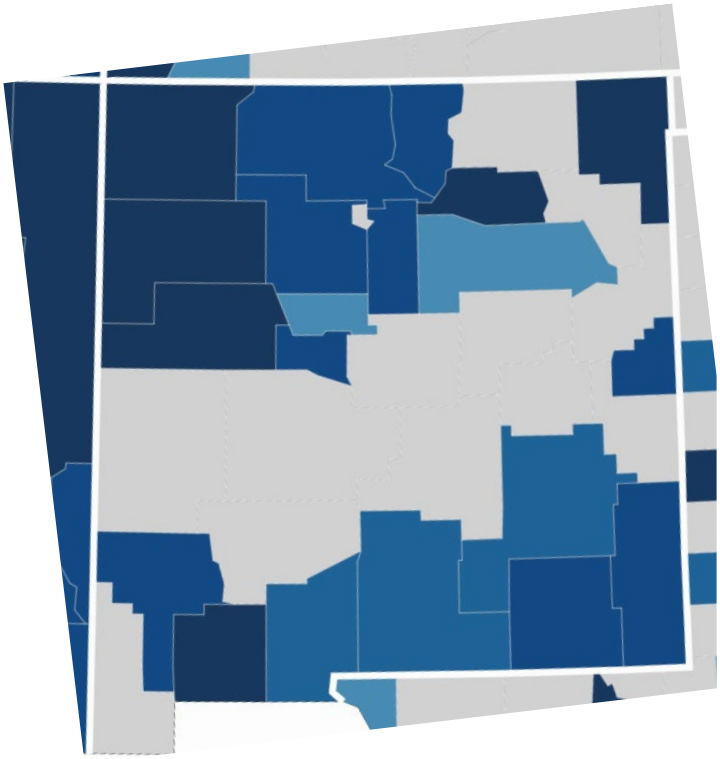
Appendix B. Map of Youth Disconnection Rates by Geographic Region and County, New Mexico, 2019–2023, 2019

Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) are non-overlapping, statistical geographic areas that partition each state or equivalent entity into geographic areas containing no fewer than 100,000 people each.



Source: Measure of America analysis of 2019-2023 ACS Census data

Disconnected Youth by County, 2019



County	DY rate	Number
Bernalillo County	13%	9,900
Doña Ana County	13%	5,100
San Juan County	23%	3,400
McKinley County	34%	3,200
Sandoval County	16%	2,400
Santa Fe County	17%	2,400
Valencia County	20%	1,800
Lea County	17%	1,600
Otero County	15%	1,300
Chaves County	15%	1,200
Curry County	16%	1,200
Eddy County	16%	1,100
Luna County	29%	800
Rio Arriba County	18%	800
Cibola County	22%	700
Grant County	18%	500
Taos County	17%	500
San Miguel County	11%	400
Mora County	69%	200
Union County	38%	100
Catron County	too small to est	
Colfax County	too small to est	
De Baca County	too small to est	
Guadalupe County	too small to est	
Harding County	too small to est	
Hidalgo County	too small to est	
Lincoln County	too small to est	
Los Alamos County	too small to est	
Quay County	too small to est	
Roosevelt County	too small to est	
Sierra County	too small to est	
Socorro County	too small to est	
Torrance County	too small to est	
Total		38,600

Note: These data were last updated by Measure of America in 2021 using 2019 data. Those counties in gray were not reported, given their small population size.

Source: Measure of America

Appendix C. List of Programs that Could Serve Disconnected Youth in New Mexico

Program / Initiative	Type	Target Population	Core Focus	Participants	Funding Source(s)	Program Cost	Region
YouthBuild (Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Farmington, Rio Arriba, historically Española – YouthWorks)	Paid + Credential	16–24; Bernalillo County	HSE/GED; construction pre-apprenticeship; NCCER & OSHA credentials; paid work experience building affordable housing	≈100 / yr	U.S. DOL YouthBuild grant; City of Albuquerque; YDI	$1.2M (est.)	Central NM; Northwest NM
WIOA Youth Program (WSD)	Paid + Credential	14–24 (in- & out-of-school)	Paid work experience, OJT, industry credentials	1,421 (FY23)	U.S. DOL Title I Youth Formula ($7.8M FY23)	$7.8M (FY23)	Statewide
Career Link / Wage Subsidy (TANF)	Paid Subsidized Work	16+; low-income TANF-eligible	Temporary paid placements	46 (FY23)	TANF block grant via HSD & WSD	$0.3M (FY23)	Statewide
Pre-Apprenticeship & Be Pro Be Proud Mobile Lab	Trades Exposure / Career Tech	High-school students	Pre-apprenticeship training, mobile trades lab	3,736*	State GF ($1.2M + $2M request)	$3.2M (FY25 request)	Statewide
LANL Foundation – Northern NM Youth Fund	Pooled Funding / WBL Pilot	13–29; Northern counties	Work-based learning, CTE, leadership development	~100 (2024 pilot)	LANL Foundation + NMDWS $500k + Tribal/Federal partners	$0.5M (FY24)	Northern NM
Registered Apprenticeship System (WSD)	Paid Apprenticeship	16+; Statewide	Paid OJT + industry credentials	~2,500 (all ages); 76 youth completers (FY25)	U.S. DOL Apprenticeship grants + State funds	$5.0M (FY24)	Statewide
PED Summer Enrichment Internship Program	Internship + Career Exploration	HS students (9–12)	6-week paid internships	≈2,300 (FY23)	State GF + ESS ER COVID relief	$4.5M (FY23)	Statewide
CTE Programs (PED)	Education to Employment Pathway	HS students (9–12)	CTE courses + dual credit + work-based learning	>30,000 (2023–24)	State CTE fund + Federal Perkins V grant	$20.0M (FY23 est.)	Statewide
New Mexico Interns (WSD)	Internship Broker Platform	College & career-age youth	Paid internships through employer connections		NMDWS general fund + employer match	$0.3M (est.)	Statewide
Job Corps Centers (Albuquerque & Roswell)	Residential Training	16–24; Statewide	GED + industry credentials + stipends	~500 capacity total	U.S. DOL Job Corps	$20.0M (est.)	Statewide
GEAR UP NM (HED)	College Prep / Support Services	7–12 low-income students	Tutoring, college visits, career exploration	~10,000 (FY23)	U.S. DOE GEAR UP grant via NMHED	$3.0M (FY23 grant)	Statewide
Navajo Nation Summer Youth Employment Program	Tribal Employment / Internship	14–24; Navajo Nation	Paid 6–8 week summer placements	≈2,000 (2023)	WIOA Sec.166 Indian & Native American Program	$2.0M (FY23)	NW NM / Navajo Nation

Note: Participation estimates reflect the most recent year with verifiable data. Participation estimates reflect the most recent year with verifiable data. Be Pro Be Proud is an average of the total enrollment from FY23-FY25

Sources: New Mexico Workforce Solutions Department; New Mexico Public Education Department; New Mexico Higher Education Department; U.S. Department of Labor; U.S. Department of Education; LANL Foundation; Navajo Nation; LFC analysis. [C-1-21]

Appendix D. Excerpt of the Attendance for Success Act

22-12A-11. Progressive interventions for absent, chronically absent, and excessively absent students.

A. A public school shall provide interventions for students who are missing school, depending on the number of absences. The process for notification and interventions is:

(1) for a student who has been identified as in need of individualized prevention, the attendance team shall:

(a) for an elementary student, talk to the parent and inform the parent of the student's attendance history, the impact of student absences on student academic outcomes, the interventions or services available to the student or family and the consequences of further absences, which may include referral to the children, youth and families department for excessive absenteeism; and

(b) for a middle or high school student, talk to the parent and the student about the student's attendance history and the impact of student absences on student academic outcomes, interventions or services available to the student or family and the consequences of further absences, which may include referral to the children, youth and families department for excessive absenteeism;

(2) for a student who has been identified as in need of early intervention, the attendance team shall notify the parent in writing by mail or personal service on the parent of the student's absenteeism. The notice shall include a date, time, and place for the parent to meet with the public school to develop intervention strategies that focus on keeping the student in an educational setting. The attendance team shall be convened to establish a specific intervention plan for the student that includes establishing weekly progress monitoring and a contract for attendance; and

(3) for a student who has been identified as in need of intensive support, the attendance team shall:

(a) give written notice to the parent, including a date, time, and place for the parent to meet with the school principal and the attendance team;

(b) establish nonpunitive consequences at the school level;

(c) identify appropriate specialized supports that may be needed to help the student address the underlying causes of excessive absenteeism; and

(d) apprise the student and the parent of the consequences of further absences.

B. The school principal shall consult with a student's teacher and initiate meetings with the teacher, the student, and the parent if the alleged cause of absence from class is teacher-student incompatibility.

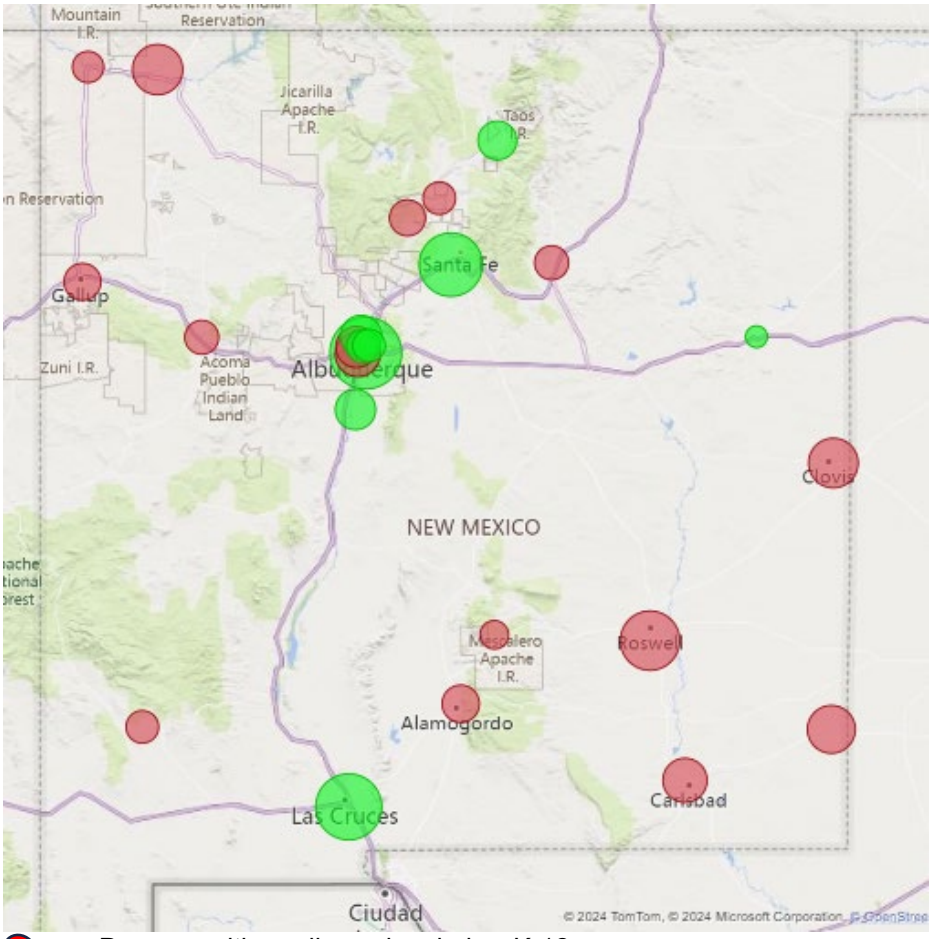
Appendix E. WIOA Youth Out-of-School Definitions

WIOA Youth programs are required to serve out-of-school youth, defined as an individual who is:

1. Not attending any school;
2. Not younger than 16 or older than 24 *and* one or more of the following
   a. A youth within the age of compulsory school attendance, but has not attended school for at least the most recent school year calendar quarter;
   b. A recipient of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent who is a low-income individual and is either basic skills deficient or an English language learner;
   c. An offender;
   d. A homeless individual or a runaway;
   e. An individual in foster care or who has aged out of the foster care system or who has attained 16 years of age and left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption, a child eligible for assistance under sec. 477 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 677), or in an out-of-home placement;
   f. An individual who is pregnant or parenting;
   g. An individual with a disability; or
   h. A low-income individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or hold employment.

Source: DOL

Appendix F. Salaries of Adult Education Teachers



Program with median salary below K-12
Program with median salary above K-12

Source: HED presentation

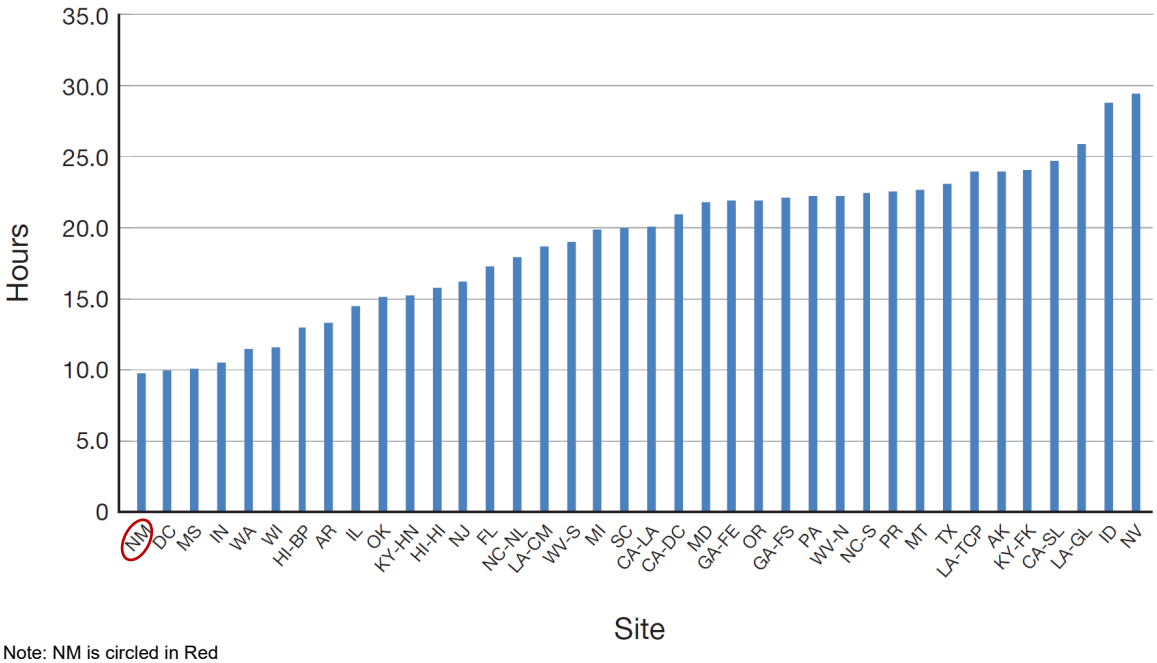
Appendix G. Interventions Shown to Improve Outcomes for Disconnected Youth

Evaluation	Program Description	Outcomes	In NM?
National Guard Youth ChalleNGe	ChalleNGe is a three-phase 17-month program: 1. the pre-ChalleNGe phase (2 weeks), 2. the residential phase (20 weeks), and 3. the post-residential phase (1 year). ChalleNGe uses its setting, mix of activities, and the relationships it tries to create with youth—along with the education and training —to promote positive change in the youth.	Improved HS dip/GED, higher earnings, college credit, and more months employed. Impacts were sustained 3 years, with some evidence that older participants benefited more.	Yes, Roswell, Albuquerque
Job Corps	The program helps young people ages 16 through 24 1. complete high school, 2. train them for meaningful careers, and 3. assist them with obtaining employment. Students receive room and board while they learn skills in specific training areas for up to three years. Job Corps also provides transitional support services, such as help finding employment, housing, childcare, and transportation.	Participation led to increased schooling, GED and vocational attainment, earnings and reduced arrests and convictions. Job Corps led to longer-gains in years 5 to 9 for students 20-24.	Yes, ABQ + Roswell open while lawsuit is unresolved
Seattle-King County Partnership	Allowing youth to: 1. re-engage first in state-funded GED program and case management, 2. provide youth with access to federally-funded employment services (WIOA), 3. simultaneously provide youth with extensive support/ wraparound services to aid in youth persistence and attainment of long-term education and employment goals.	Increased high school diploma /GED attainment, unsubsidized employment, college readiness, completing job readiness training, and transfer to post-secondary institution.	No
Year UP's Professional Training Corp	Compared to the core program, PTC targets a similar population and provide similar services over two six-month phases—learning and development and internships. Local staff recruit and screen applicants who are motivated and face life challenges manageable with the supports the program provides.	Increased college enrollment, employment to quarter 4, and earnings through quarter 4.	No
Youth Villages	YVLifeSet has individualized case management services and several other components provided by independent living programs. Key elements of the manualized program include comprehensive assessments; treatment planning that prioritizes the youth's expressed needs and goals; weekly one-on-one meetings between the youth and their worker; group social activities; educational and vocational coordination; and referrals to other services.	Positive impacts on employment and earnings, housing instability, economic hardship, and health and safety.	No
YouthBuild Pathways/Social Innovation Fund	YouthBuild is a program that attempts to improve prospects for less-educated young people. The program provides hands-on, construction-related, or other vocational training, educational services, case management, counseling, service to the community, and leadership-development opportunities, to low-income young people ages 16 to 24 who did not complete high school.	Increased GED attainment, enrollment in post-secondary education, employment, first year earnings and civic engagement. For those involved with the justice system, evidence of reduced recidivism and improved educational outcomes.	Yes, Albuquerque, Roswell, Santa Fe, Farmington
Youth Transition Demonstration Evaluation	Program for youth with disabilities. Includes work-based experiences, youth empowerment, family supports, system linkages, and benefits counseling.	Increased employment and income across some but not all sites.	
Youth ChalleNGe+ Job ChalleNGe (JC) program	Job ChalleNGe is an extension of the Youth ChalleNGe implemented by the National Guard, with program sites funded in partnership with the Department of Labor. Job ChalleNGe focuses on career readiness and technical education through a 5.5-month residential program for recent graduates of the Youth ChalleNGe who are under the age of 21. Job ChalleNGe partners with local community colleges and technical schools to provide hands-on training to attain certifications, employability and mentorship.	Increased involvement in a productive activity 14 months after, Relative to just YC, JC participants had lower rates of CJ involvement and higher rates of enrollment in college and higher certification attainment.	Unknown if Roswell program includes job challenge

Note: Three other interventions, Pathways to Postsecondary Success, CUNY Fatherhood Academy and Project Rise had promising results but did not include a comparison group in their analyses and were therefore not included in this research summary.

Source: ASPE Evidence Gap Map Reconnecting Youth | Youth.gov

Appendix H. Weekly Academic Instruction Hours, by Youth ChalleNGe Site, 2023



Note: NM is circled in Red

Source: RAND

Appendix I. North Dakota's WIOA Youth Short-Term Training Monitoring Form

NORTH Dakota | Job Service
Be Legendary.

CLASSROOM TRAINING & SHORT-TERM PREVOCATIONAL MONITORING
JOB SERVICE NORTH DAKOTA
WORKFORCE PROGRAMS
SFN 16764 (R.10-2025)

Participants Last Name	First Name	Middle Initial
Training Site	Start Date	Planned End Date

Activity Type		Contact
☐Classroom Occupation	☐ Prevocational	☐Initial
☐Other	☐4 weeks or longer	☐Subsequent

Course of Study

PARTICIPANT CONTACT	YES	NO
How many credit hours (if applicable) are you taking during the current quarter / semester?		
Have you missed any class time?	☐	☐
If "YES," please explain.		
Before starting the training or soon thereafter, were you told by the training facility what to expect in terms of attendance or other requirements?	☐	☐
Were you told what you would learn?	☐	☐
Were you told who to contact for help with problems?	☐	☐
Were you told what the grievance and discrimination complaint procedures were?	☐	☐
If any response was "NO," please explain.		
What kind of help is available if you fail a test, have trouble with class work, or have difficulty with an instructor?		
Who do you go to if you have a problem with a class or attendance?		
Do you have any problems, such as health, financial, or training related, which may affect your ability to successfully complete this course? **	☐	☐
If "YES," please explain.		
Has your projected completion date changed?	☐	☐
If "YES," please explain.		
Have you had any changes in your finances that may or may not change assistance from Job Service North Dakota?	☐	☐
If "YES," please explain.		
How do you feel you are currently doing in the program?		
Do you feel you have been treated the same as other individuals in this training?		
Do you have any other issues that need to be discussed?	☐	☐
If "YES," please explain.		
The information I have provided on this form is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.		

Participant Signature	Date

**Job Service North Dakota is collecting this information to assist you with your employment plan. Your name will never be associated with a disability. Responding to questions regarding health or disability issues is voluntary.

TRAINING SITE CONTACT	YES	NO
Name of Instructor(s) / Staff		
Is student's participation satisfactory?	☐	☐
Describe at least one hard skill the student has learned (i.e., taking blood pressure, pre-trip inspection, proper set up of machines, etc,) **1.** **2.** **3.**		
Instructor(s) / Staff Comments		
Training Site Contact Signature	Date	
JSND CONTACT STAFF ONLY		
Corrective Action Recommended		
General Comment Section		
I certify that the monitoring visit was completed in accordance with Job Service North Dakota policies and procedures and findings are based on review of records and interviews conducted during the monitoring visit. (This section should be completed by Job Service).		
JSND Signature	Date	

Job Service North Dakota is an equal opportunity employer/program provider.
Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Appendix J. Selected Citations

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