

A Frayed Connection:

Joblessness among Teens in Chicago

Executive Summary

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- Since the end of the economic expansion of the 1990s, the fraction of teens that work has plunged, declining to the lowest level in the post-World War II period. The employment to population ratio of the nation's teens (aged 16-19) fell to 26% in 2010; half of what it was during most of the post-WWII period.
- In Illinois, the teen employment to population ratio declined dramatically. During the 1998-2000 period, half of all teen residents of Illinois were at work. By the 2011-2013 period, the share of teens with a job plunged to just 27.6 percent.
- Teen residents of Chicago have little access to employment opportunities. Even during the full-employment period of 1998-2000, fewer than one-in-three Chicago teens worked. By 2011-2013, just 13 percent of the teen residents of Chicago had a job.
- Like most major cities in the nation, the employment to population ratio of teens in Chicago fell quite substantially during the Great Recession. Sadly, the decline in employment rates among teens in the city has continued during the period of recovery from the recession.
- Employment rates of Chicago's male teens are now below those of females; the economic recession appears to have had a disproportionate adverse impact on the employment prospects of male teen residents of Chicago.
- Black teen employment rates in Chicago have reached historically low levels, just one in ten black teen residents of the city had a job on average during 2012-2013—nine out of ten black teens in the city did not work.

- The level of household income appears to be closely linked to the chance of employment among teens. In Chicago, we found a strong positive relationship between household annual income and teen employment rates. The likelihood that a Chicago teen had a job increased considerably with household income. Only 11 percent of teens who lived in a Chicago household with annual income below \$20,000 were employed in 2012-13, compared to 30 percent of their counterparts from households with incomes between \$100,000 and \$150,000.
- A large proportion of teens and young adult residents of Chicago are disconnected from school and work—two activities in which most young persons are engaged; activities that are thought to aid in their growth and development as productive members of society with the behavioral skills, attitudes, and proficiencies necessary for labor market success. We found that nearly one-fifth (18%) of Chicago’s 16- to 24-year old civilian residents are disconnected from school and work—not enrolled in school and not working.
- Disconnection rates vary sharply by race-ethnicity in Chicago with the highest disconnection rate among Black 16- to 24-year old residents of the city; 28 percent followed by 16 percent among the city’s Hispanic youth and just 9 percent among non-Hispanic White youth. The disconnection rate is stunningly high for young adult black men in Chicago. One half of 20- to 24-year old black male residents of the city are not working and not enrolled in school.