

Research and Evaluation Brief

Facts, figures, and insights for workforce development practice and policy

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A Snapshot of Massachusetts Youth

The Center for Labor Market Studies has used the recently released Census 2000 data files to construct a set of schooling, poverty, and employment profiles of the state's teenage population (16-19) at the time of the 2000 Census. At that time, the estimated number of 16-19 year old teenagers in Massachusetts was just under 334,000. Of this group, 197,170 or 59% were enrolled in junior high or high school, another 87,400 or 26% were enrolled in a post-secondary educational institution, and 49,000 or 15% were out of school.

Of the not enrolled teenage population, 20,000, or 6%, did not hold either a high school diploma or a GED certificate, well below the near 10% of the nation as a whole. This group of teens and young adults lacking diplomas has faced severe difficulties in state labor markets in recent years, and nationally, the

current reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act is likely to lead to a renewed emphasis on providing workforce development services to the nation's young adult dropouts.

The economic well-being of teens' families varied tremendously at the time of the 2000 Census, with one of every eight teenagers in Massachusetts being poor, and somewhat more than one in four being members of low income families (low-income is defined as those families

REPORT FOCUS

A Profile of the Teenage Population in Massachusetts by their School Enrollment, Family Poverty, and Employment Status at the Time of the 2000 Census: Implications for Future Youth Workforce Development Policy

DISTRIBUTION OF 16-19 YEAR OLDS IN MASSACHUSETTS BY THEIR SCHOOL ENROLLMENT STATUS - SPRING 2000

Enrollment Status	(A) Number	(B) Percent
Enrolled in High School or Junior High	197,170	59.0%
Enrolled in College	87,416	26.2%
Not Enrolled in School	49,109	14.7%
- High School Dropout	20,099	6.0%
- High School Graduate	27,709	8.3%
Total	333,695	100.0%

Note: Subtotals for the not enrolled exclude those youth who were institutionalized at the time of the Census. There were 1,301 such youth in 2000.

Source: 2000 Census of Population and Housing, PUMS files, tabulations by authors

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living at less than twice the federal poverty level). At the same time, just under 47% of the state's teens were living in families with incomes four or more times the poverty line.

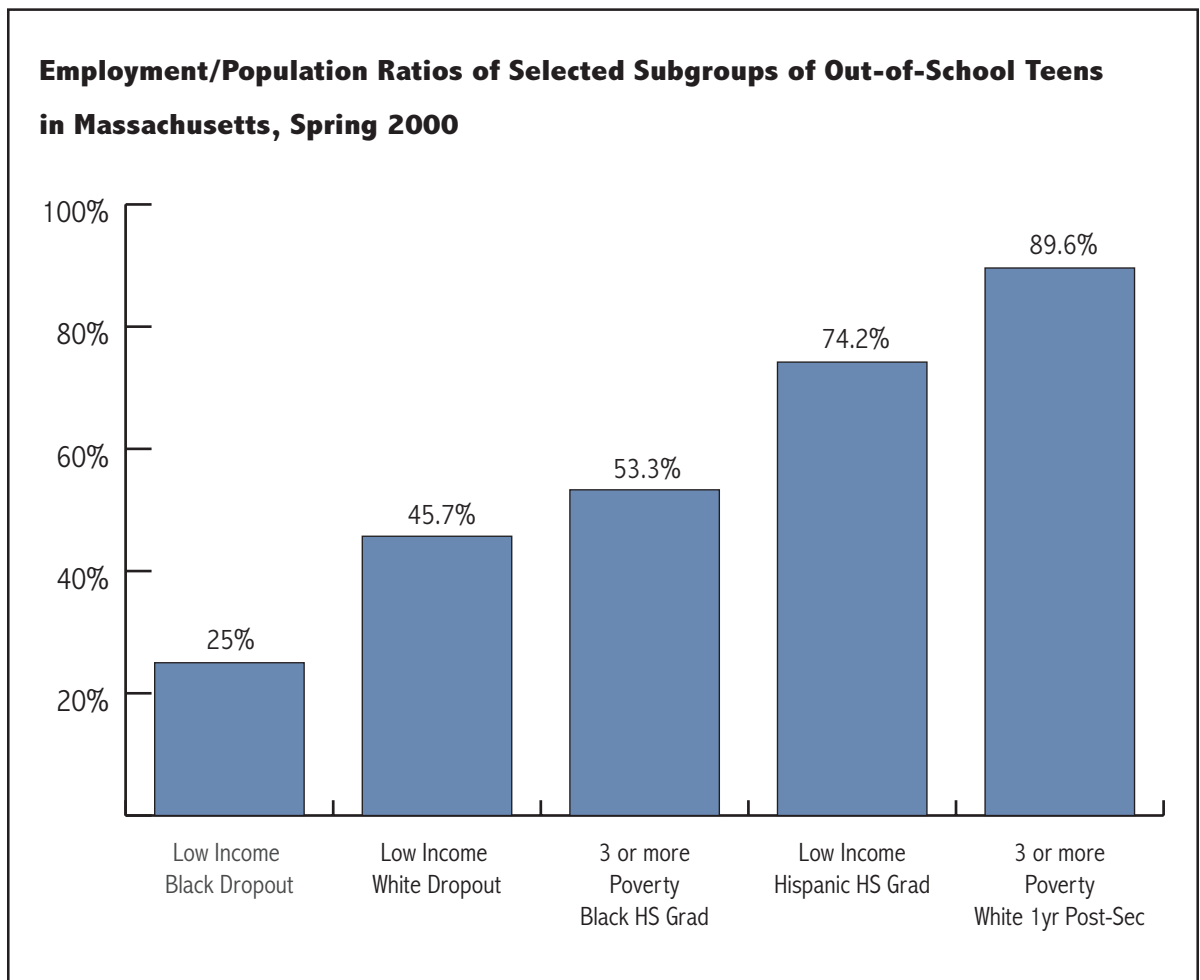
High School Students

The employment rate of high school students, which at that time was 43%, varied considerably by their family income position. Only 28% of poor high school youth worked versus 31% of those in families with incomes between one and two times the poverty line and 45 to 47% of those in more affluent families. The employment rate of all "low income" students was only 29.5% versus an employment rate of nearly 47% for those youth with family incomes two or more times the poverty line. While these teen employment patterns for Massachusetts are similar to those for the nation as a whole in recent years, they are

troubling based on national longitudinal research, which has shown that early work experience in high school can help facilitate the transition from school to work and keep economically disadvantaged youth in high school.

Employment rates among high school students also varied widely across major race-ethnic groups, with employment rates highest for White, non-Hispanics (46%) and for teens in mixed races (50%). In all but one race-ethnic group, teens from low-income families were less likely to work than their more affluent counterparts. However, even among low-income youth, employment rates of teens also varied markedly by race-ethnic group. Only one of every five low-income Hispanic youth worked as did fewer than one in four low-income Black high school students. On the upper end, 36 of every 100 low income, White students were employed and 45% of those of mixed race.

Figure 1



DISTRIBUTION OF 16-19 YEAR OLDS IN MASSACHUSETTS BY FAMILY INCOME RELATIVE TO THE POVERTY LINE, SPRING 2000

Family Income	(A) Number	(B) Percent
Poor (at or below federal poverty level)	35,271	12.5%
1-2 x poverty level	36,789	13.0%
2-3 x poverty level	36,843	13.1%
3-4 x poverty level	41,144	14.6%
4 or more x poverty level	131,75	46.8%

Note: Findings apply only to those youth not living in college dormitories, fraternities, or institutions, such as jails, prisons, hospitals.

There were nearly 48,000 16-19 year old out-of-school youth in the non-institutional population of the state at the time of the 2000 Census. Of this group, 42% lacked a high school diploma/GED certificate, 50% held a regular high school diploma or a GED, but had completed no years of post-secondary schooling, and 8% had completed at least one year of college.

Massachusetts ranked 44th lowest among the 50 states and D.C., faring comparatively well in holding down the number of young adults who fail to receive a high school diploma or GED, but the estimated 6.6% dropout incidence among teens, however, is not the true measure of the fraction of teens who will ultimately leave school without obtaining a regular high school diploma. Some enrolled at the time of the Census will leave high school without obtaining a diploma, and a number of those 16-19 year olds with a high school diploma/GED did not possess a regular high school diploma. National research has consistently shown that GED holders do not fare as well as regular high school graduates in either the labor market or the post-secondary educational arena.

Slightly more than one-fifth of all out-of-school youth were members of poor families and 41% were low-income youth. At the upper end of the distribution, slightly more than 30% lived in families with incomes that were four or more times the poverty line. The out-of-school youth in the lower income groups were far more likely to be school dropouts than their peers in higher income groups. Nearly 6 of every 10 out-of-school poor youth were school dropouts. In contrast, fewer than one-third of the out-of-school youth living in families with incomes three or more times the poverty level were school dropouts.

Out of School Youth

At the time of the Census, nearly 64 of every 100 out-of-school teens in the state were employed, either part-time or full-time. The employment rates of these out-of-school youth, however, varied quite substantially across educational attainment, race-ethnic, and family income subgroups. Only 48% of school dropouts were employed versus 74% of high school graduates and 82 % of those youth completing at least one year of post-secondary schooling. Poor dropouts fared even less well. Only 41 of every 100 poor dropouts were employed.

Employment rates of these out-of-school teens also varied quite widely across race-ethnic groups. Only 40% of Black, out-of-school youth held a job as did only 54% of Hispanic youth. In comparison,

Nearly 6 of every 10 out-of-school poor youth were school dropouts. In contrast, fewer than one-third of the out-of-school youth living in families with incomes three or more times the poverty level were school dropouts.

nearly 69 of every 100 White, non-Hispanic youth and 73 % of Asian youth were working at the time of the 2000 Census. Among both Blacks and Hispanics, those youth who completed more years of schooling were much more likely to be employed. For example, among Blacks, the differences were extraordinarily large. Only 13% of Black

school dropouts were employed versus 52% of Black high school graduates and 83% of those with at least one year of post-secondary schooling.

Only 41 of every 100 poor dropouts were able to obtain some type of employment.

The employment rates of these out-of-school youth also were strongly associated with their family income backgrounds . While 48% of poor, out-of-school youth held a job, 64% of those with incomes between one and three times the poverty line did so as did 70 to 77% of their peers with family incomes three or more times higher than the poverty line.

The likelihood of an out-of-school teen being employed in Massachusetts at the time of the 2000 Census was strongly associated with his/her educational attain-

ment, race-ethnic characteristics, and family income background. To illustrate the highly diverse range of these employment rates, we estimated the share of out-of-school youth in five separate educational/race/income subgroups who were employed (see Figure 1). These employment rates ranged from a low of 25% for low income, Black dropouts to 46% for low income white dropouts to 74% for low income, Hispanic high school graduates to a high of nearly 90% for white youth completing at least one year of post-secondary schooling and living in families with incomes three or more times the poverty line.

Workforce Development Implications

There is a clear need to bolster the system's ability to attract and retain more out-of-school males, especially Blacks and Hispanics, and to assess the effectiveness of alternative educational, employment, and training strategies in boosting the employability and earnings of the Commonwealth's low income, out-of-school youth. The existing knowledge base on what works for these out-of-school youth is unfortunately limited.

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