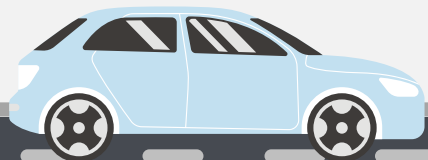


THE ROAD TO UNDERSTANDING & AIDING NORTH CAROLINA OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

As defined by Carolina Across 100, opportunity youth are “people 16-24-year-olds who are not working and not in school.”

12% of NC 16-24-year-olds are opportunity youth

Uncovering the challenges plaguing youth and developing effective methods to solve them becomes vital in achieving the goal to decrease this number to 9% by 2030.



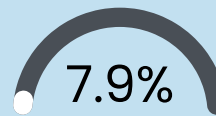
RURAL EDUCATION

Despite 42.3% of North Carolina schools classified as rural, these education systems continue to be underserved.

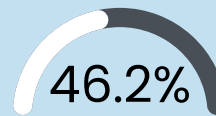
College readiness indicators place NC as the **#2 state** most in need of rural education reform.

According to the 2018-19 "Why Rural Matters" NC Report:

7.9% of rural juniors and seniors passed at least one AP exam



46.2% of rural juniors and seniors took the SAT or ACT



Investing in rural education is investing in opportunity youth.

With limited access to counselors, inadequate resources, and approximately one-in-five students facing poverty, students feel unprepared to pursue college and the job market.

URBAN EDUCATION

Urban populations in North Carolina continue to grow in diversity on all measures. Yet, many schools are still separated in terms of race and income.

This impact results in inequalities across school systems that increase the chances of students becoming opportunity youth while underserving students from the beginning.



Providence High School

- 93 Overall Performance Grade
- 6.1% Economically Disadvantaged Students
- Academic growth exceeded

Harding University High School

- 40 Overall Performance Grade
- 47.9% Economically Disadvantaged Students
- Academic growth not met

Despite these schools being 30 minutes from each other and each in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system, they have drastically different statistics from the 2021-22 school year.

COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

As schools are not just for learning but meals, counseling services, and technological support, virtual learning had a tremendous nationwide impact on the conditions youth faced.

Low-income students, English learners, those in foster care, and students with disabilities were particularly at risk for inaccessible learning services (EdNC).



These conditions mean opportunity youth will have a harder time becoming connected post-pandemic and previously connected youth are more likely to become disconnected.

Many college-aged students abandoned their post-secondary plans during the pandemic while those who graduated went into a job market that had no room for them.

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that the number of immediate fall enrollments **decreased 6.8%** between Fall 2019 and Fall 2020

YOUTH WELL-BEING

The Pew Research Center found that **55% of rural and 53% of urban** residents with a bachelor's degree or more felt primarily optimistic about their life.

When compared to their counterparts who only had some college experience or less, only **39% of rural and 36% of urban** residents reported having optimistic feelings about their life.



With unemployment and a lack of educational attainment associated with depression, anxiety, and isolation (EdNC), aiding opportunity youth can help decrease this statistic.

EdNC further reports that conditions such as social exclusion, limited education, and lack of work experience might affect opportunity youth into adulthood.

By studying and aiding opportunity youth, their self-sufficiency, mental health, relationship quality, and family formation can improve.

HOW TO AID OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Now that you have learned about opportunity youth and the obstacles they face, you are probably wondering how to help.

- While it can be hard to make changes on an individual scale, getting in contact with organizations who are actively bridging the gap between youth can be a great place to start. In North Carolina, projects such as Carolina Across 100 and ncIMPACT are addressing and aiding opportunity youth.
- Mentorship programs with local schools are a method to directly engage with students who are vulnerable to becoming opportunity youth. This act could also involve starting your own club or project that connects youth in underserved areas.
- Speaking with or writing lawmakers and politicians on the importance of opportunity youth and underserved populations and communities.