

Chapter 7: Youth

In the second decade of life, children become teenagers and begin to prepare for adulthood. The elements of that transition are well-known from the child development literature. The teenager must develop cognitively, by learning to read, write and solve problems. The teenager must develop emotionally, by learning to delay gratification and empathize with others. And the teenager must develop socially, by learning to engage with peers and adults.

The stakes are high. Teenagers who develop cognitively, emotionally and socially are more likely to achieve their full potential as adults. They will become the next generation of leaders, hard workers, good parents and active citizens. Teenagers who fail along one or more of these dimensions will fall short of their potential. They may join a gang, develop a drug habit, become a teen parent, drop out of school, or engage in some other destructive habit that slams the door shut on the bright future they might have achieved.

Many experts and policy makers are increasingly focusing on a group of teenagers dubbed “disconnected youth.” As defined in this book, disconnected youth are individuals ages 16-19 who are not in school and not in the workforce. They are discouraged jobseekers, not merely unemployed at a point in time, but are not actively looking. They are also high school dropouts. As a result, disconnected youth will probably not develop the work skills and literacy thresholds needed in the labor market, and are therefore severely at risk for repeated failures and stunted growth in adulthood.

Many of the indicators in this chapter focus on potential risk factors for disconnection. Some show improvement over time. The incidence of binge drinking has declined over the past several years, as has the use of addictive drugs. Fewer kids are in juvenile detention and correctional facilities, and fewer kids are being adjudicated Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS). The number of youths arrested for both property crimes and violent crimes dropped by one-third from 1995 to 2001 and has continued to decline through 2004.

Yet the number of teenagers ages 16-19 defined as “disconnected” has not improved over the last five years and has actually risen slightly from 73,000 in 2002 to 87,000 in 2004. Growth in the number of disconnected youth despite improvements in other indicators suggests that simply improving individual programs and policies may be insufficient.

Disconnection is not only a problem for teenagers. New York, like many other states, runs a number of programs that focus on discrete problems of troubled youths: a foster care system for kids with family problems, a juvenile justice system for kids who break the law, an educational system that tries to help kids on the verge of dropping out. Yet the 80,000+ teenagers who have lost their connection to the educational and work worlds are whole people. Experts in youth development now urge states to integrate systems that deal with youth. New York’s systems are still sharply fragmented, so that programs that should be pathways to success—such as the foster care, education and mental health systems—have become pathways to failure for a vast number of youth.

The cost of New York’s fragmented system can be glimpsed in the absence of any real information on who these “disconnected youth” are and what interventions might make a difference in their lives. New York lacks measurement systems that would track youth over time and across programs. In addition, New York does not track indicators that would show the development of positive youth behaviors and effective interventions.

New York set a course for change in its 1997 publication *New York Youth—The Key to Our Economic and Social Future: A Blueprint for State and Local Action*. New York’s state agencies and partners have begun the hard work of incorporating youth development concepts into programs across the state, devising such indicators, and developing creative means to integrate funding resources across systems. New York is one of four states featured by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices for having made strides in developing and implementing youth development policies and programs.

FINDINGS

Student binge-drinking dropped significantly over the past decade, but is still common. The share of all students reporting binge-drinking (5 drinks of alcohol within a 2-hour period) dropped by one-third between 1995 and 2005, from 31% to 21%. Yet in 2005, roughly 188,000 students reported at least one episode of binge-drinking over the past 30 days. More than 215,000 reported riding in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.

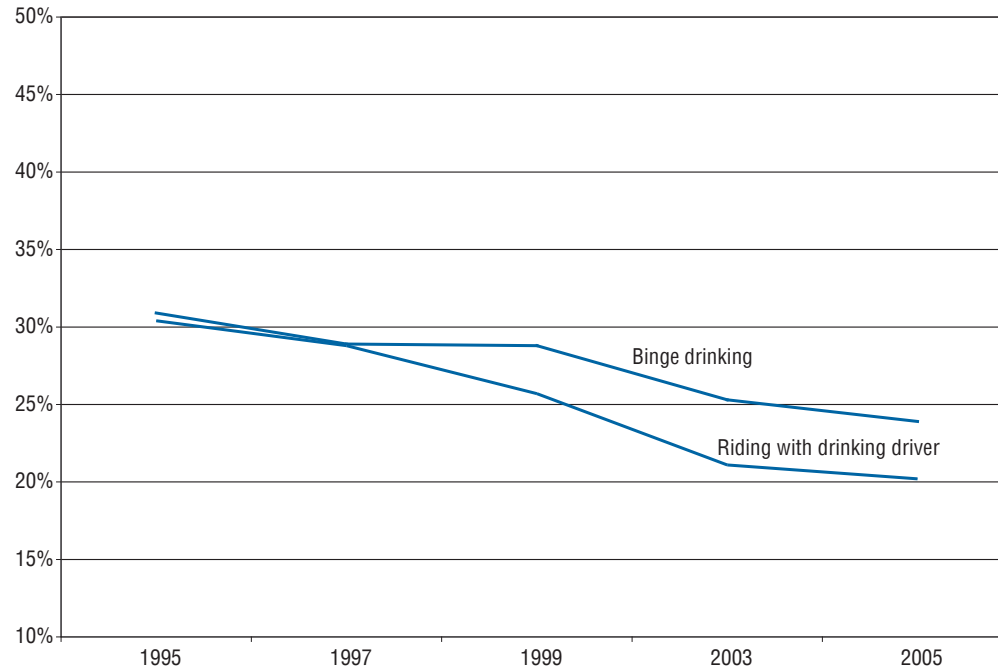
About 7% of New York students in grades 9 through 12 reported being threatened or injured with a weapon during the past year. One out of eight students reported being in a physical fight on school property in the past year, 5% carried a weapon onto school property during the 30 days preceding the survey, and 5% reported avoiding school at some point in the 30 days preceding the survey.

Three out of ten children and youth entering runaway and homeless youth programs report having already been served in another setting. About 29% of clients admitted to runaway and homeless youth programs in 2004—over 3,000 children and youth—reported having already been served in foster care, mental health, juvenile justice or other programs, yet nonetheless fell between the cracks and became homeless. The prior history of another 39% (4,700) was not reported, but many of these youth are likely to have a similar background.

The number of youth under the age of 21 residing in juvenile detention and correctional facilities dropped 12% between 1997 and 2003. As of 2003, New York had 4,300 juveniles residing in juvenile detention and correctional facilities. 51% are Black and 19% are Hispanic. 63% were convicted of non-violent, low-level crimes. 60% are identified as needing substance abuse treatment; 46% as needing mental health services.

In 2004, one out of eleven youth (9%) were considered “disconnected youth,” defined as not employed and not enrolled in school. These 87,000 youth, ages 16-19, are at high risk of negative outcomes as adults. Individuals most likely to become disconnected are high school dropouts, those in the juvenile justice system, unmarried young mothers, and young people in or formerly in foster care.

Student Reporting Risky Drinking-Related Behavior



Definition: Chart indicates the share of public high school students in New York State who have reported ingesting five drinks of alcohol within a two-hour period during the past 30 days and the percent of public high school students who have reported being present in an automobile with a driver who had ingested alcohol prior to driving. No data was reported for 2001.

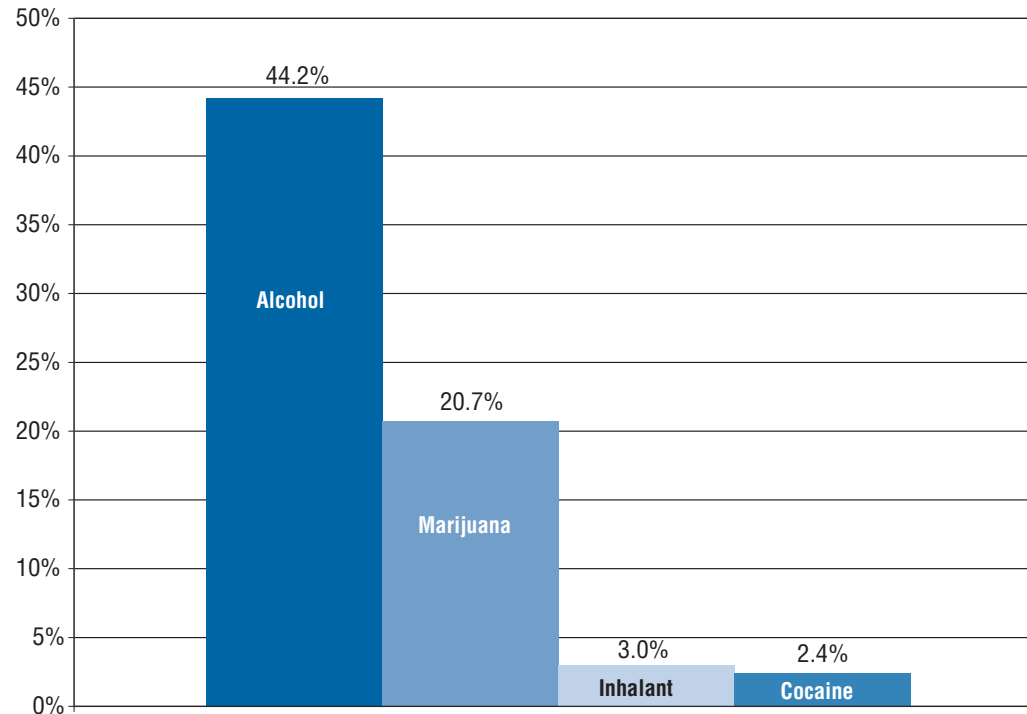
Significance: The share of students reporting risky drinking-related behaviors has dropped—from about 31% to 21% for riding with a drinking driver and from 32% to 24% for binge drinking. Yet nearly a quarter of young New Yorkers continue to engage in behaviors that could be fatal or have serious life-long implications. In 2004-05,

approximately 188,000 students reported having engaged in binge-drinking and 215,000 reported having ridden with a drinking driver.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) has found that each day 13,000 children and teens take their first drink. Children and teens who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent than those who do not drink before the age of 21.²³ One out of four underage drinkers meets clinical criteria for alcohol abuse and addiction.²⁴

Source: 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC surveys students in grades 9-12 every two years.

Current Substance Use by Students in Grades 9-12



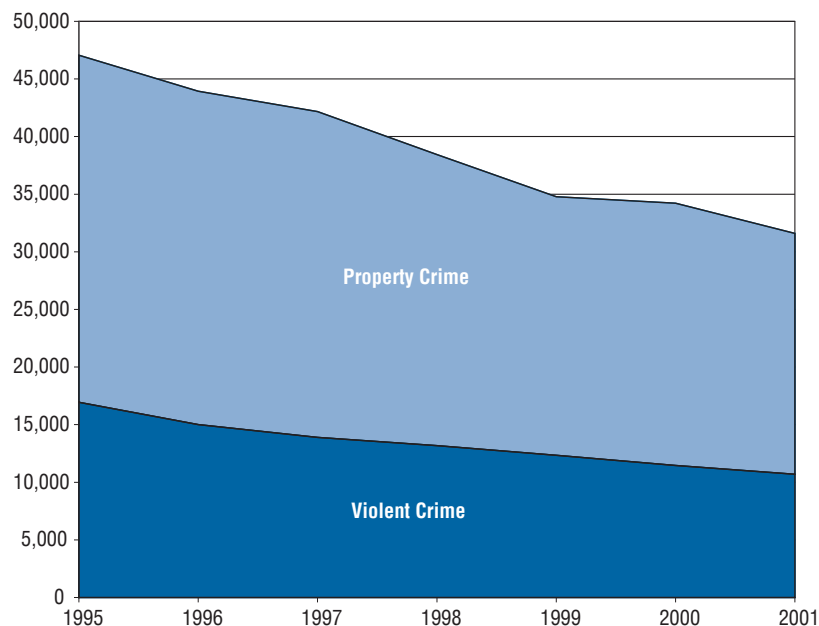
Definition: This chart indicates students’ use of alcohol and other dangerous and illegal substances. Current substance use is defined as having had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days and/or used marijuana, an inhalant, or cocaine one or more times, during the past 30 days. Inhalant use includes sniffing glue, breathing the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaling any paints or sprays to get high. Cocaine use includes using any form of cocaine.

Significance: Use of illegal substances can lead to later alcohol and drug problems, especially if begun at an early age. Approximately 44% of all New York students report having used alcohol in the last 30 days (396,000 in 2003), 21% report having used marijuana (186,000),

4% report having used an inhalant (27,000) and 2% report having used cocaine (21,000). Since 1999, there has been a steady decrease in use of these substances by both male and female high school students. National rates are similar for alcohol and marijuana use, and slightly higher (4%) for cocaine use. In 2005, one out of four high school students reported having had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13 and 6% tried marijuana for the first time before age 13.

Source: 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC surveys students in grades 9-12 every two years.

Youth Arrests



Definition: This chart tracks annual arrests for crimes committed by youth in New York State, 17 years of age and younger. Violent crimes include murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Property crimes include burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. 2001 is the last year New York City reported arrest data for youth to the state.

Significance: In 2001 (the last year for which New York City data were available), 31,591 youth arrests were made, a 33% decline from 1995. The actual number of crimes is likely to be higher as this chart only depicts those crimes for which an arrest was made. Violent crime arrests declined 37% while property crime arrests declined 31% during that period. The decline in the rest of state continued from 2001-2004 with the number of arrests declining 8%.

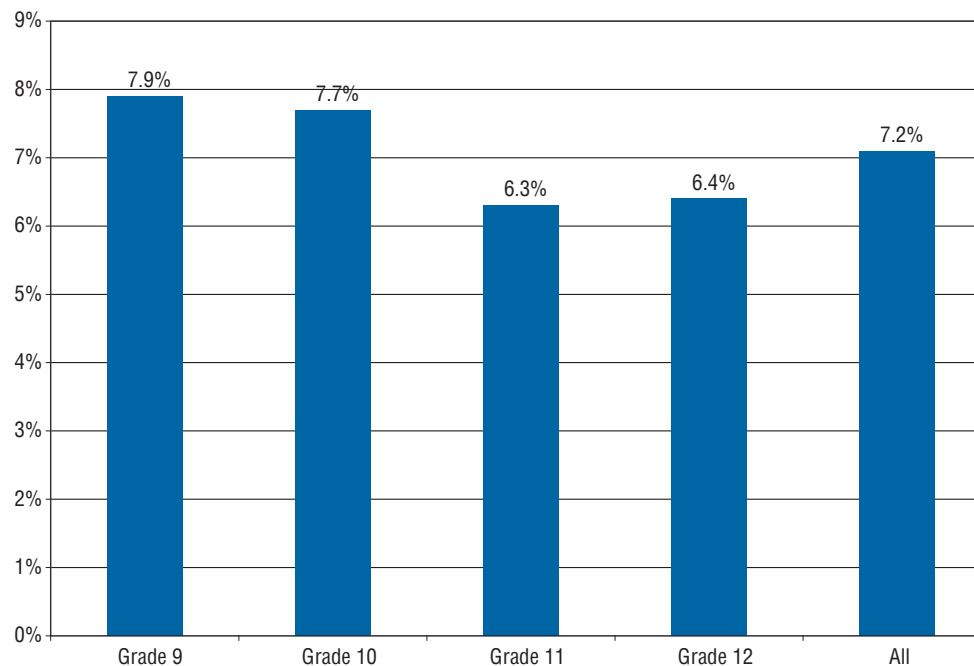
Several factors could explain the sharp decline in youth arrests from 1995 to 2001. General crime rates dropped, a well-known phenomenon

attributed variously to improved policing tactics, increased public safety staffing and declining unemployment rates. Teenagers in particular gained more access to the job market, as the unemployment rate for 16 to 19-year-olds dropped from 21% in 1997 to 14% in 2001. In addition, the state has changed its data collection methodologies over the years.

The youth arrest indicator is critically important for understanding the magnitude of the “disconnected youth” issue in New York State. Despite declining arrest rates throughout the 1990s, more than 30,000 youth were arrested in 2001. These youth are at high risk of dropping out of the educational system and failing to sustain steady employment.

Source: Division of Criminal Justice Services, Uniform Crime Reporting System, February 2006.

Students Threatened or Injured with a Weapon During the Past Year by Grade



Definition: This chart shows the share of public high school students in grades 9-12 who report having been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property one or more times during the past 12 months.

Significance: Approximately 7% of all New York public high school students, more than 64,000 youths, reported being threatened or injured with a weapon in 2005. Younger students, males and youths of color were more likely to report being threatened or injured. Less serious attacks, such as harassment, property damage, or bullying are not included in this data.

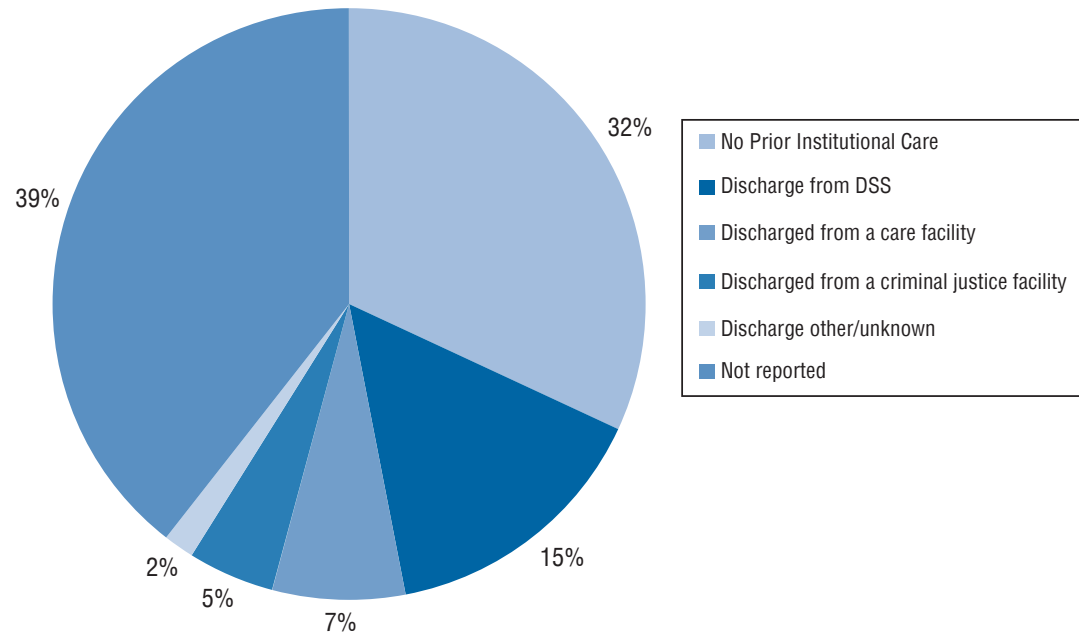
Additional 2005 data indicates that one out of eight students surveyed reported being in a physical fight on school property one or more times

in the past 12 months, 5% carried a weapon onto school property at some point in the past 30 days, and 5% avoided school at some point in the past 30 days because they felt unsafe. 23% of students reported having their property damaged during the past year.

Students are most vulnerable in the 9th and 10th grades, the same years that research shows the highest incidence of school dropout occurs. This suggests that developing strategies targeting 9th and 10th grade students could enhance academic performance, improve safety and reduce dropout rates.

Source: 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC surveys students in grades 9-12 every two years.

Youth in Out-of-Home Placement Prior to Admission to Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs



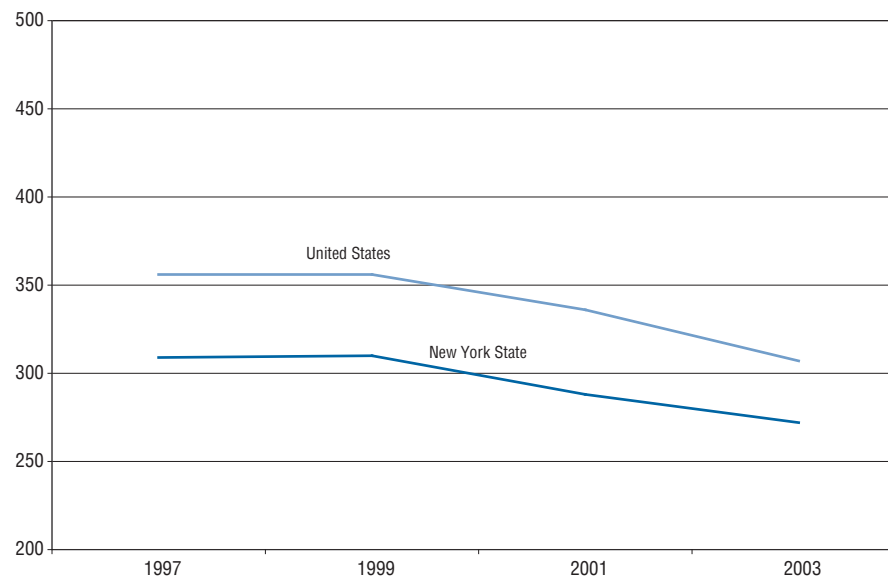
Definition: This chart shows the number of youth under 21 who received out-of-home placement (placement in some form of institutional or foster care setting) during the 12 months prior to admission into runaway and homeless youth programs. Data pertain only to children and youth served by programs from whom this data is collected. Some youth may have received more than one type of service.

Significance: More than 12,000 children and youth were referred to runaway and homeless programs in 2004. These programs, to some extent, exist to assist those children and youth whose situation has not been stabilized by other services.

Yet almost three in ten (29%) entrants reported having been placed in some form of institutional care in the prior year, including in the mental health, foster care and the juvenile justice systems. 61% of those youth receiving prior institutional care were served within 30 days of admission to a runaway or homeless program. The fact that so many troubled youth fell through these safety nets suggests—for a variety of complex reasons—that these programs are not adequately meeting the needs of all their clients. Many of those children and youth whose prior institutional history was not reported are likely to share a similar background.

Source: NYS Office of Child and Family Services, Runaway and Homeless Youth Annual Report, 2002-04.

Persons Under Age 21 Residing in Juvenile Detention and Correctional Facilities



Definition: The rate is the number of offenders ages 10-20 residing in juvenile detention and correctional facilities per 100,000 juveniles. Figures include those under age 21 who had been 1) charged with or convicted of an offense, 2) assigned a bed in a facility that can hold accused or convicted juvenile offenders, and 3) placed in the facility because of the offense. However, juveniles held in adult prisons or jails or in facilities licensed by the State Office of Mental Health or the State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services for drug or mental health treatment are excluded.

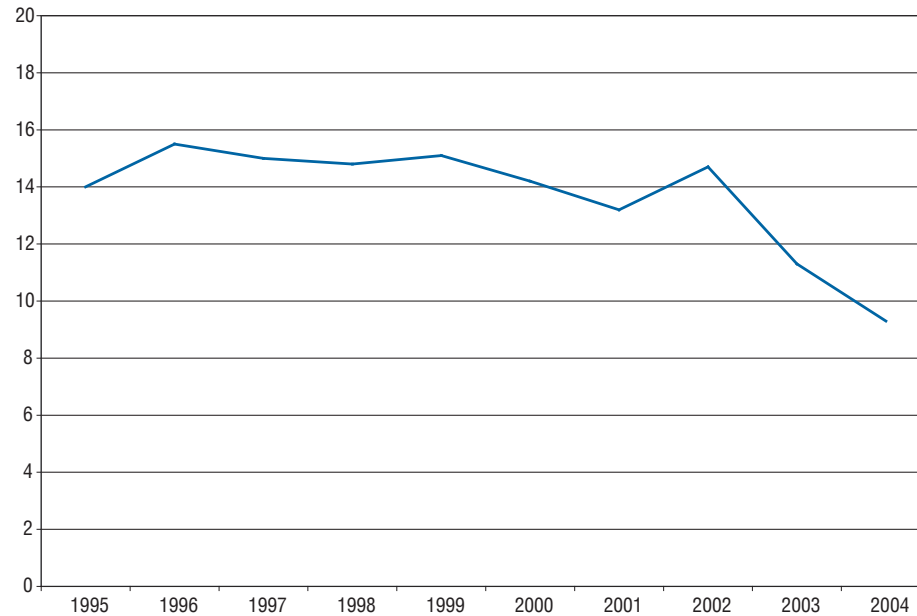
Significance: The residential placement rate in New York dropped 12% between 1997 and 2003 and remains far below the national average. Yet New York still has 4,300 juveniles in residence, more than all but four states. 51% of these juveniles are Black and 19% Hispanic. Almost two-thirds (63%) of young people entering juvenile facilities in 2002 were convicted of non-violent offenses. Approximately 60%

were identified as needing treatment for substance abuse and 46% as needing mental health services. In 2002, the State Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) spent \$150 million to operate the state's juvenile facilities and \$1 million to provide after-care services to the 2,360 children released from its facilities.

"The cost of placing a youth in an OCFS-run facility," reports the New York City Independent Budget Office, "is approximately \$150,000 for a typical 12-month sentence.... Re-arrest rates are commonly 75 percent within three years of release."²⁵ Juveniles entering programs which offer alternatives to incarceration are much less likely to be rearrested later.

Source: Sickmund, Melissa, Sladky, T.J., and Kang, Wei, (2005) "Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook. <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/cjrp/>.

Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) Cases



Definition: This chart depicts Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) cases opened for services between 1995 and 2004 expressed as a rate of PINS cases per 1,000 youth ages 10-17. Some variance in the data occurs year to year due to underreporting on the part of a few individual counties.

Complaints were filed for these juveniles by parents, school officials, and others seeking the formal intervention of family court because of non-criminal misconduct such as truancy, incorrigibility, ungovernability or habitual disobedience.

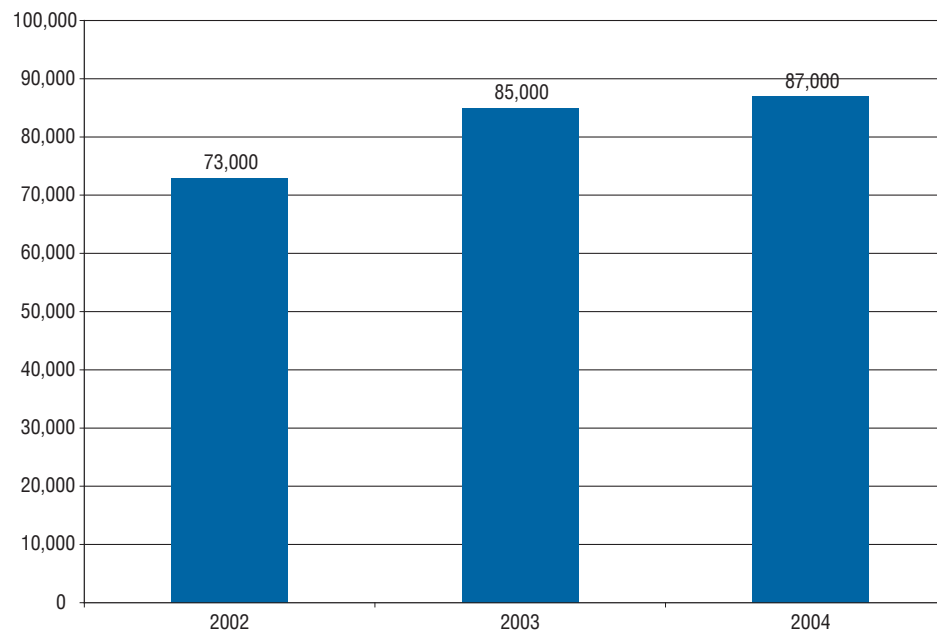
Significance: The number of PINS cases opened by local probation departments is the best official indicator of the level of non-criminal misconduct considered sufficiently serious to warrant the family court’s intervention. Many families or schools file PINS petitions because it is perceived as the only way to get services for youth.

The PINS rate has fallen sharply in recent years, from a rate of 15 per 1,000 in 1999 to 9 per 1,000 in 2004. The 2002 increase occurred at least in part due to legislation raising the age of youth for whom a PINS petition could be filed from 16 to 18. Additional 2003 data shows a considerable variation in the PINS rate across New York State, from 6.5 per 1,000 in New York City to 15 in the rest of state. The rest of state rate varies from a low below 10 per 1,000 to a high above 30 per 1,000.

New York State has placed an emphasis on identifying youth at risk and engaging them and their families in services. In 2005, a new law mandates pre-PINS diversion activities that should lead to further reductions in cases opened for PINS. Evaluations are needed to find out whether these diversion programs are working.

Source: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Bureau of Justice Research and Information.

Disconnected Youth in New York State



Definition: This chart depicts teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 who are not enrolled in school (full or part-time) and not employed (full or part-time).

Significance: Young people neither in school nor engaged in the work world have increasingly been described as “disconnected” and identified as the teenage population most at risk of poor outcomes in adulthood. In 2004, there were 87,000 youth ages 16-19 in New York State meeting the “disconnected youth” criteria, accounting for 9% of our state’s young people in that age range.

More detailed data on disconnected youth is not available at the state level. However, a 2005 study by the Community Service Society (CSS) examined in considerable detail the population of disconnected youth in New York City.²⁶ CSS found that the disconnected rate for females dropped sharply between 1995 and 2002, while the disconnected rate for males declined gently until 2000 and then began rising dramatically. In addition, the disconnected rate for Blacks and

Hispanics are double those of Whites. Note that the CSS definition differs from that of Kids Count, the source for this study. CSS focuses on a wider age range (16-24) and excludes unemployed youth who are actively looking for work.

Groups at high risk of becoming disconnected are high school dropouts, those in the juvenile justice system, unmarried young mothers, and young people who are currently in, or who recently left, the foster care system.²⁷ Many disconnected youth have been involved in foster care, juvenile justice, substance abuse, mental health or other formal service delivery systems, yet the outcomes for these youth appear to have been negative. Youth who are disconnected are more likely to earn lower wages later in their lives and to engage in destructive behaviors.

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count State-Level Data Online, www.kidscount.org.

Data source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.