



Healthy communities produce healthy youth. Such communities value youth involvement, provide multiple supports for families, offer opportunities for prosocial youth involvement, and share positive behavioral expectations. Youth living in communities that share a vision for positive youth development are more likely to grow into healthy adults and make positive contributions to society. This report and its parent publication, *The State of Connecticut Youth 2003*,* were produced to summarize the most current data on youth well-being in Connecticut. We hope these reports will stimulate a dialog about how to best create healthy communities for youth in our state, as well as how to measure our progress toward this important goal.

On average, Connecticut youth fare quite well compared with teens in other parts of the nation. For instance, Connecticut ranked 6th in the nation on child well-being in a 2003 KidsCount report. Connecticut also had the 3rd lowest child poverty rate, the 4th lowest teen violent death rate, and the 7th lowest teen birth and dropout rates that same year. However, this report demonstrates that such averages mask important disparities between Connecticut's most affluent communities and its less affluent towns and cities.

Unfortunately, few data are available on positive factors affecting youth in Connecticut. Most of the facts included in this report depict negative youth behaviors, rather than positive ones. Nonetheless, what information is available suggests that many Connecticut teens have positive factors in their lives:

- Over 80% of teens feel very close to their parents/guardians.²
- More than 80% of youth also feel safe in their neighborhoods.²
- Approximately 40% of youth volunteer their time each week.²

On the other hand, current data also reveal important challenges for positive youth development in Connecticut:

- Two thirds of teens say their parents are not involved in their schools.²
- More than half of teens are alone for an hour or more each day.²
- 80% of youth in one city believe their communities do not value youth.⁵
- Nearly 90% of teens do not have an adult (other than a parent or teacher) who they can talk to about their problems.²

* *The full-length report, The State of Connecticut's Youth 2003, is available online at <http://www.ctkidslink.org>*

A Profile of Connecticut's Youth

Number of youth ages 12-17 ⁷	274,000
High school poverty ⁸	16%
Cumulative high school dropout rate ⁸	11%
Reading at grade level (in grade 8) ⁸	66%
Will attend a 4-year college ⁸	60%
Will be employed or in the military ⁸	17%
Passing President's physical fitness test ⁸	34%
Smoked in past month ¹	35%
Used alcohol in past month ¹	50%
Used marijuana in past month ¹	26%
Carried a weapon in past month ¹	14%
Was in a physical fight in past year ¹	33%
Attempted suicide in past year ¹	8%
Teen birth rate ⁹	31/1,000
Preventable teen deaths ¹³	39/100,000
Juvenile violent crime arrest rate ¹⁰	319/100,000

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The “Two Connecticut’s”

The overall well-being of Connecticut’s youth varies dramatically between the state’s affluent suburbs and less affluent communities. This trend, which also affects younger and older residents of the state, has led to the idea that there are really “two Connecticut’s.”

The State Department of Education’s Educational Reference Group, or ERG, classifications provide a helpful model for comparing Connecticut youth by sociodemographics.* School districts in the ERG A classification are the most affluent in the state, while those in ERG I include the state’s poorest cities.

Disparities in Youth Risk Factors

	ERG A	ERG I	STATEWIDE
HIGH SCHOOL POVERTY	2%	46%	16%
HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS CUMULATIVE	2%	23%	11%
READING AT GRADE LEVEL EIGHTH GRADE CMT	89%	32%	66%
JUVENILE VIOLENT CRIME ARRESTS PER 100,000 YOUTH AGES 10-17	44	608	319
TEEN BIRTH RATE BIRTHS PER 1000 FEMALES AGES 15-19	2	73	31

Sources: Connecticut Departments of Education, Public Health, and Public Safety.

Youth living in lower income communities are often exposed to greater risks compared with their more affluent ERG A counterparts, according to the table above. Of particular note, teens living in Connecticut’s poorest communities are:

- 12 times more likely to drop out of school.⁸
- 14 times more likely to be arrested for violence.¹⁰
- 37 times more likely to become a teen mother.⁹

Not all disparities in youth indicators favor Connecticut’s more affluent youth. While teens living in the state’s poorest communities are more likely to engage in some high risk behaviors, teens with greater financial resources are more likely to use alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana.

Disparities in Substance Use, Grades 9-10

	ERG A	ERG I	STATEWIDE GPIY SAMPLE
USED CIGARETTES IN PAST MONTH	20%	17%	24%
USED ALCOHOL IN PAST MONTH	50%	35%	46%
USED MARIJUANA IN PAST MONTH	23%	17%	22%

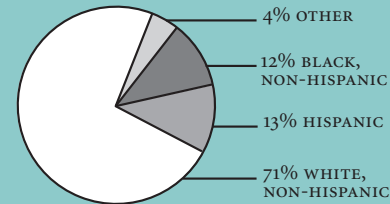
Source: GPIY 2000

* For details on Educational Reference Groups and how they were developed, please see <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/ssp/terms.pdf>

Demographics

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are 274,000 youth ages 12 to 17 years living in Connecticut.⁷

Connecticut Youth by Race



Source: U.S. Census 2000

Almost 10% of Connecticut youth (12-17 years) live in families with income below poverty level.* Half of these live in families with income below 50% of the poverty level. Overall, nearly one fourth of youth in the state live in families with incomes below economic sufficiency (on average, twice the federal poverty level).⁷ Youth poverty rates vary markedly by town in Connecticut, from 0% in 14 Connecticut town to more than 20% in the following cities: New London (22%), New Britain (23%), Bridgeport (25%), New Haven (30%) and Hartford (39%).⁷

Another measure of poverty is school poverty, or the proportion of students who are eligible for free or reduced price meals. Approximately 22% of middle school students and 16% of high school students in Connecticut are eligible to receive free or reduced price meals at school because their families earn below 185% of the federal poverty level.⁸

More than one quarter of Connecticut youth live in single parent households. This characteristic also varies widely by town, from 9% in Monroe and New Fairfield, to more than 50% in New London, Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven.⁷

Approximately 12,000 Connecticut youth (16-19 years) are “disconnected,” that is, they are neither working nor in school.

This figure is important, as it indicates that 7% of our youth are “detached from both of the core activities that usually occupy teenagers during this period,” and therefore are at risk of poor outcomes and risky behaviors (America’s Children, 2003).

The proportion of youth who are disconnected in Connecticut ranges by both geographic location and race/ethnicity.⁷

- 20% of Hartford youth are disconnected, compared with 0% of youth living in 30 Connecticut towns.⁷
- In 2000, 4% of white non-Hispanic youth were disconnected, compared with 13% of black non-Hispanic youth and 18% of Hispanic youth.⁷

* The federal poverty guideline for a family of three is \$14,630 and for a family of four is \$17,650 (2001).

Education

Academic achievement creates opportunities for youth, increasing their chances of attending college and achieving financial success as an adult. On the other hand, academic failure can lead to dropping out of school, which is associated with unemployment, poverty and criminal activity.

Youth attending schools in different Connecticut communities do not have equal chances for academic success. Those attending schools in the state's poorest towns (ERG I) are less likely to pass state competency tests and attend college, and more likely to drop out or be retained (held-back) than their counterparts in more affluent (ERG A) school districts.

Disparities in Educational Outcomes

	ERG A	ERG I	STATEWIDE
8TH GRADERS MEETING STATE GOALS IN READING (C.M.T.)	89%	32%	66%
10TH GRADERS MEETING STATE GOALS IN READING (C.A.P.T.)	75%	20%	45%
RETENTION RATE GRADES 9-12	1%	13%	5%
CUMULATIVE DROPOUT RATE	2%	23%	11%
HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS THAT WILL ATTEND 4-YEAR COLLEGE	87%	42%	60%

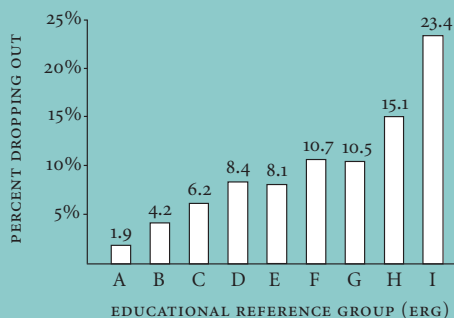
Source: Connecticut Department of Education.

Importantly, it appears that the geographic gap in academic achievement increases from middle school to high school.

In 2000, middle school students were 50% more likely to report having a B average if they lived in an ERG A suburb than if they lived in an ERG I small city—in high school, this difference increased to more than 80%.²

Race and ethnicity also affect a teen's chances of academic success in Connecticut. In 2001, the annual dropout rate for black students was more than twice that for white students; for Hispanic students, the dropout rate was nearly four times higher than for white students.

Cumulative Dropout Rate by Educational Reference Group



Source: Connecticut Department of Education.

Youth Spirit Awards

Each year, Connecticut Voices for Children honors youth for their resilience in the face of challenge and for their continued commitment to community. Here are a few words from these remarkable youth.

“Being part of the Fresh Start program has allowed me to grow and change as a person....I also learned how to take care of my own needs....and I fell in love with the person that I am today.”

Thikra Musmaker, Hartford
2002 Youth Spirit Award Winner

“If a child has to learn how to be an adult at a very early age, like me, then his childhood [can be] destroyed and problems can arise that never needed to be there....All youth, no matter what age, need attention.”

Mark Lawrence Radtke, Prospect
2002 Youth Spirit Award Winner

“If an obstacle can be fixed, find a solution. If others can't be fixed, accept them and work around them. But remember that you are very valuable, and there is someone out there who needs you.”

Sarah P. Loebelson, Greenwich
2002 Youth Spirit Award Winner



Pictured above is Tinikia Cooke of New Haven (on left) accepting the Youth Spirit Award from Darlene Dunbar, the State Commissioner of DCF, in 2003.

Tinikia bounced from foster home to foster home beginning at the age of seven and then became a ward of the State of the Connecticut. Now 17 years old, she lives life according to the three R's—resolve, resilience and reform—and they predict an incredible future for her. She has a commitment to work in public policy and government administration and has already proven herself to be a strong leader and advocate.

Health and Safety

Drugs and Alcohol

Connecticut teens are using drugs and alcohol at younger ages today than a decade ago. In 2000, the average age of initiation of “gateway” substances (cigarettes, marijuana and alcohol) occurred between 11 and 12 years.

Age of Intiation of Substances

	AVERAGE AGE OF FIRST USE
MARIJUANA	12.4 YEARS
ALCOHOL	11.3 YEARS
CIGARETTES	11.1 YEARS

Source: GPIY 2000

Of the Connecticut high school students surveyed by the CT Department of Public Health,¹

- 15% report smoking nearly every day.
- 53% report drinking alcohol in the past month.
- 28% report binge drinking (having five or more alcoholic drinks in a row) in the past month.
- 28% are current users of marijuana.
- 45% have tried marijuana at least once during their lives.

Sexual Behavior

In 2000, 31 out of every 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in Connecticut had a baby. Nearly 3,300 children were born to Connecticut girls aged 15 to 19 years that year—another 66 children were born to younger girls. The teen birth rate varies widely by race and ethnicity in the state.

Teen Birth Rate for Females Ages 15-19

	BIRTHS PER 1,000 FEMALES
STATE AVERAGE	31
WHITE	14
BLACK	62
HISPANIC	90

Source: Connecticut Department of Public Health

Of the Connecticut high school students surveyed by the CT Department of Public Health,¹

- 7% have either been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant.
- 30% are sexually active (had sexual intercourse in the past month).
- 9% had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13.

Mental Health, Depression, and Suicide

Suicide is the third highest cause of death among Connecticut teens aged 15-19 years.

- Girls are twice as likely as boys to attempt suicide, but much less likely to complete a suicide. 84% of teen suicide victims in Connecticut are boys, who tend to use more lethal means of suicide than girls, such as firearms.¹³
- 15% of students in grades 7-10 report feeling sad most of the time.²

Injury, Violence, and Delinquency

While injury, violence and delinquency are on the decline in Connecticut, as throughout the nation, they remain important problems affecting the well-being of our youth. Some key facts:

- 4% and 6% of students in grades 7-10 report being arrested in the past year.²
- 3% of middle school students and 4% of high school students report bringing weapons to school in the past year.²
- 24% of middle school students and 30% of high school students in Connecticut have shoplifted in the past year.²
- Hospital admissions for unintentional injuries have declined by approximately one third in the past five years.¹³
- From 1995 to 1999, boys were 7 times more likely than girls to be admitted to the hospital for an assault-related injury and 8 times more likely to die by homicide.¹³

Youth Involvement in Violent Behavior, Grades 9-12

	% OF STUDENTS
WEAPON CARRYING PAST 30 DAYS	16%
PHYSICAL FIGHTING PAST 12 MONTHS	33%
INJURED IN PHYSICAL FIGHT PAST 12 MONTHS	5%
PHYSICAL DATING VIOLENCE PAST 12 MONTHS	13%

Source: YRBS 1999

Adequate Exercise

A key factor in health is adequate exercise. Indicators of whether Connecticut youth are exercising enough include self-reports, obesity, and results from the President’s Physical Fitness Test, which includes four components designed to measure strength, flexibility and stamina.

- More than 90% of Connecticut 7th-10th graders report taking part in sports or exercise each week.²
- Nearly one tenth of high school students in the state are obese, including 11% of young men and 7% of young women.¹
- 34% of Connecticut students passed all four components of the President’s Physical Fitness Test in 2001-2002.⁸
- Students in ERG A were more likely to pass than those in ERG I (40% versus 29%).⁸

Social and Emotional Development

The structure of the American family is changing, and so are the needs of American youth. Today, 72% of Connecticut youth have both parents, or their single parent, in the workforce.⁷ Youth spend 40% of their waking hours outside of school and need positive supports and opportunities for involvement in their communities.

Relationships with Parents

Parental involvement in teens' lives tends to decline as youth enter middle and high school and develop increased independence. 64% of middle school students and 67% of high school students say their parents are not involved in their school.²

On the other hand, the vast majority of teens in middle and high school feel very close to their parents and report that their parents know where they are when they are away from home.²

Relationships with Parents	GRADES	GRADES
	7-8	9-10
PARENT KNOWS WHERE THEY ARE WHEN AWAY FROM HOME	91%	88%
FEEL VERY CLOSE TO PARENTS	88%	81%
ENJOY SPENDING TIME WITH PARENTS	82%	75%
SHARE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS WITH A PARENT	59%	53%
TALK TO PARENTS ABOUT PROBLEMS (ALWAYS OR OFTEN)	32%	25%
SPEND MORE THAN 1 HR ALONE DAILY	49%	63%

Source: GPIY 2000

Other Adult Role Models

Teens who have an adult in their lives (other than a parent or teacher) who they feel cares about them are more likely to be resilient—to be successful despite facing risks and challenges.

- 11% of Connecticut 7th-10th graders say they have an adult other than a parent or teacher who they can talk to when they have a problem.²
- 67% of middle school students and 63% of high school students believe that the people in their neighborhoods look out for each other.²

Peer Influence

Peers have an increasingly important influence in teens' lives as they enter adolescence. Association with positive peers is linked to positive youth behavior, while association with antisocial peers is linked to high risk behavior. Unfortunately, many

Connecticut teens have friends who participate in antisocial behaviors, such as drug use, alcohol use and violence.

On the other hand, many also have friends who are involved in positive activities, including:

- 53% of students in grades 7-11 say that most or all of their friends participate in after-school activities.³
- 12% say that their friends volunteer.³

Negative Peer Influence

IN THE PAST YEAR, ONE OR MORE OF MY FRIENDS...	GRADES	GRADES
	7-8	9-10
CARRIED A WEAPON	17%	20%
GOT ARRESTED	17%	28%
SOLD ILLEGAL DRUGS	9%	27%
IN GENERAL, A FEW OR MORE OF MY CLOSE FRIENDS...		
SMOKE CIGARETTES	38%	64%
USE ALCOHOL	41%	75%
USE MARIJUANA	24%	57%

Source: GPIY 2000

Positive Activities

Many Connecticut youth take part in one or more activities that promote positive youth development.

- More than half of middle and high school students attend religious services each week.²
- Nearly half of middle and high school students spend one or more hours each week in music programs.²
- More than one third of middle and high students spend one or more hours each week doing volunteer work.²

Students in affluent towns are more likely those in inner cities to take part in some positive activities, such as music and sports programs.

Disparities in Protective Factors, Grades 7-8

	ERG A	ERG I
	SUBURB	CITY
PARTICIPATE IN MUSIC BAND, CHOIR, ORCHESTRA, OR PLAYING AN INSTRUMENT	70%	28%
PARTICIPATE IN SPORTS EXERCISE, WORK OUT, OR PLAY SPORTS MORE THAN 2 HOURS A WEEK	80%	44%
FEEL SAFE AT SCHOOL	92%	61%
PARENT INVOLVED IN SCHOOL	46%	25%

Source: GPIY 2000

How can we invest in Connecticut's youth?

The young people of Connecticut are among our most valuable resources. Yet their creativity, energy, and vitality are often untapped assets in our communities. All too often, we see their struggles and deficits rather than their successes and strengths. To ensure the success of teens across Connecticut communities, we need to know what is important to them, what their attitudes and perspectives are, and what risks



and challenges they face. This *Profile of Connecticut's Youth* represents a first step toward gaining an understanding of teens in our state. We hope this report will stimulate a discussion about how to continue to support positive youth development with accurate, timely and reliable information on youth well-being in Connecticut.

Most parents want something more for their children than simply avoiding serious problems. They want children who are happy and emotionally healthy, who have positive relationships with other people, and who contribute to the community. While parents hold these desires for their individual children, our collective aspirations for youth appear limited to avoiding problems. There is surprisingly little focus in the research literature, in popular discussions, and in policy making on how to promote positive youth development. The trends we track, the data we collect, the programs we fund, and the media images we see focus largely on problem behaviors by adolescents.

Child Trends Research Brief
*Preventing Problems vs. Promoting the Positive:
What do We Want for Our Children?*
Moore KA, Halle TG, May 2000

Resources

1. 1997 and 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, CT Department of Public Health (YRBS)
2. 1997 and 2000 Governor's Prevention Initiative for Youth Surveys, CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (GPIY)
3. 1996 Voice of Connecticut Youth Survey, CT Department of Public Health
4. 1996, 1998 and 2000 Social and Health Assessment, New Haven Public Schools
5. 2001 Greater Bridgeport Profiles of Youth Survey, RYASAP
6. 2002 Waterbury Middle School Survey, Waterbury Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative
7. 2000 Census, US Bureau of the Census
8. 2001-2002 Strategic School Profiles, CT Department of Education
9. 2000 Vital Statistics, CT Department of Public Health
10. 2001 Uniform Crime Reports, CT Department of Public Safety
11. 2002 and 2003 Kids Count Data Books, Annie E. Casey Foundation
12. A Tale of Two Connecticut's: Kids Count Data Book 2002-2003, CT Association for Human Services
13. 1995-1999 Childhood Injury Statistics, CT Childhood Injury Prevention Center, CT Children's Medical Center

For more information on these sources, please refer to *The State of Connecticut's Youth 2003*, available online at http://info.med.yale.edu/childstdy/CTvoices/kidslink/kidslink2/reports/PDFs/youthpaper_0817_final.pdf

Note on Methodology

While the State of Connecticut routinely collects data on some indicators of youth well-being, the richest information available on youth in the state, such as their attitudes and behaviors, comes from surveys. Unfortunately, the most recent statewide, representative survey of Connecticut youth was conducted more than 5 years ago, in 1997.

In order to provide more current data on youth attitudes and behaviors, this report also draws on more current, but not necessarily representative, sources:

1. A statewide survey by DMHAS (based on risk and protective factors as researched by Hawkins and Catalano), given in 1997 and 2000. The 2000 survey was not considered a representative sample of the whole state.
2. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (designed by the Centers for Disease Control and administered by the State Department of Public Health), given in 1997 and 1999. The 1999 survey was not considered representative of the state. The YRBS was also administered in the spring of 2003, but the results were not available at the time of this report. In addition, this survey asks very few questions about positive youth development.

We hope that this report will stimulate interest in promoting positive youth development in Connecticut, and in supporting increased monitoring of the well-being of our youth through routine, statewide surveys.