

Background:

Texas has nearly 500,000 youth and young adults (YYA) who are not in school and do not have full-time jobs: higher than the national average of YYA who are not in school nor working.¹ To be able to successfully transition to adulthood, YYA need the education and skills necessary to obtain jobs that can support them and their families.

In 2024 Congress renewed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The renewal replaced the term “out-of-school youth” with “opportunity youth” and did not define “opportunity youth.” Opportunity Youth (OY) is a term used to generally describe young people ages 16 -26 who are not in school and are unemployed. States must codify their own definition of OY to fully leverage resources from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Furthermore, young people face even more barriers to entering the workforce or higher education. The estimated rate of college students experiencing homelessness in Texas is higher than the national average, and the rising cost of child care creates obstacles for parenting young people to maintain jobs or go to school.

Snapshot: Young Adult Workforce in Texas

- Texas has about 500,000 youth and young adults that are not in school and do not have full time jobs. That’s 2.3% higher than the national average.¹
- Approximately 43% of rural K-12 students are considered low income. Texas has the most rural students in the country.²
- Roughly 11% of undergraduate students in Texas have experienced homelessness within the past year. That’s higher than the national average of 8%.³
- The average annual infant care cost for an infant in Texas is \$9,324. That’s 7.8% more than the average cost for tuition at a Texas four-year public university.⁴

In 2024, TNOYS hosted listening sessions across Texas with YYA who have lived experiences of foster care, juvenile justice, opportunity youth, homelessness or are at risk of these experiences, as well as the professionals that work with them. When asked what could have been done to better support them, a common response from participants was a desire for workforce opportunities that specifically serve youth and young adults. We frequently heard that WIOA funding can be difficult to access and these resources are unavailable to service providers in Texas, especially in rural areas. Finally, we heard that there are deep barriers to youth and young adults going into the workforce, especially in rural Texas.

TNOYS Recommendation:

- Define “opportunity youth” in statute to help support youth and young adults aged 16–26 who are disconnected from school and work, helping them achieve long-term, gainful employment.
- Provide for a liaison on college campuses to connect students experiencing homelessness to resources and housing.
- Increase childcare scholarships to enable pregnant and parenting YYA to access jobs and education.

1 Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. Opportunity Youth in Texas: Identifying and Reengaging the State’s Disconnected Young People. 2019.

<https://www.dallasfed.org/cd/pubs/2019/19youth/part2>

2 Rosser, Win. Bush School of Government, Texas A&M University. Postsecondary Completion in Rural Texas: A Statewide Overview. 2014.

<https://bush.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Postsecondary-Completion-in-Rural-Texas.pdf>

3 The Hope Center. #realcollege:Basic Needs insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic. 2021.

https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/RC2020_InstRpt_Temple%20University_0.pdf

4 Economic Policy Institute. The Cost of Childcare in Texas. Access 01/31/2025. <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/TX>