

# Untapped Potential: Engaging all Connecticut Youth

## Frequently Asked Questions | July 2017

On September 19, 2016, Barbara Dalio and the Dalio Foundation released an independent report, *Untapped Potential: Engaging all Connecticut Youth*, highlighting the needs and potential of Connecticut's disengaged and disconnected youth. The Foundation funded the research and creation of the report to gather a deeper understanding of the needs of these young people, and to galvanize and empower communities to support them. The Foundation commissioned Parthenon-EY Education Practice to conduct the study. The findings and recommendations in the report are Parthenon-EY's; they were given complete independence to determine the report's conclusions. The Foundation has made the report available to the general public in hopes that sharing the research openly will help forge new partnerships committed to improving life opportunities and educational outcomes for all youth.

### **What is the purpose of the report?**

The Dalio Foundation's purpose in commissioning the report is threefold: (1) to inform the general public about the urgent need to reach and re-engage youth who are disengaged or disconnected from school in Connecticut; (2) to identify patterns in the educational experiences of disengaged and disconnected youth that can help shape potential solutions; and (3) to galvanize leaders and citizens to support all young people in graduating from high school ready for the future.

### **How does the report define disengaged and disconnected youth?**

A young person is *disengaged* if he or she is enrolled in a public school but exhibits at least one of the following signs of disengagement: weak attendance (a student having an attendance rate of 85% or less); academic challenges (a student failing two or more courses in a single school year); or behavior challenges (a student with two or more suspensions in a year, or a student who is incarcerated or expelled). A young person is *disconnected* if he or she has dropped out of high school yet is still of school age (21 years old or younger) and does not have a GED or credit diploma. Please read pages 8-9 of the report to learn more about the specific definitions and criteria.

### **What new insights does the report offer?**

The study began with a desire to understand a single question with broad ramifications: What would it take to help disengaged and disconnected youth in Connecticut graduate from high school ready for the future? The report sheds new light on critical questions: Who are the disengaged and disconnected youth in Connecticut? Where and when are these students falling off track? How well are they performing today? What can we do to better meet their needs? What are the opportunities and potential benefits for the state?

### **How many disengaged and disconnected youth are in Connecticut?**

During the 2014-15 school year, there were approximately 39,000 high school-aged youth who were either disengaged in school or disconnected from school in Connecticut – a figure that is equivalent to 22% of high school enrollment in the state. Of the 39,000 youth, 25,000 were disengaged and 14,000 were disconnected from high school.

### **How widespread is this issue?**

While there are high concentrations of disengaged and disconnected youth in certain urban centers, disengaged and disconnected youth can be found in nearly every community – urban, suburban, and rural. In fact, there are 113 school systems in Connecticut (roughly two-thirds of all districts in the state) that are home to at least 50 disengaged or disconnected youth. When more than one in five high school students in the state are disengaged or disconnected, it is

reflective of a structural challenge in Connecticut high schools; this is not an issue that is limited to a particular student group, geographic region, or handful of schools. Please see page 13 of the report for a specific breakdown by town of residence.

### **Why is this a high-stakes issue for Connecticut?**

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, students disconnecting from high school could still expect to find a job and career that would support them and their families. Today those jobs are in short supply. Across the nation, young adults without a high school diploma, and even those with a diploma who don't proceed to any post-secondary education, have a diminishing chance of finding stable employment. Those who do find work see their wages falling further behind those of their peers with post-secondary degrees. Connecticut's once-thriving industrial cities – now among the state's most impoverished areas – stand as evidence of the same forces at work in the state. Beyond the consequences for individual youth, continued failure to meet the needs of disengaged and disconnected youth is strongly linked to a wide range of statewide civic and social challenges, including: public health, racial equity, economic development, the school-to-prison pipeline, and fiscal sustainability. To learn more, please read Section 1 of the report.

### **Left unaddressed, what is the economic cost for the state?**

The annual fiscal impact of high school dropouts on the state budget – in terms of lost revenue and additional expenses – is more than \$900 million.

### **Is it too late to change the odds for disengaged or disconnected high school-aged youth?**

No. It is never too late to reach and re-engage our young people. Now, we have more visibility around particular points in time in a student's progression through high school when schools and community partners can make the greatest difference. We now know the first and second years of high school shape students' pathways and can put them on a trajectory toward success. With effective support, even students who enter ninth grade with risk factors can earn a high school diploma and be prepared for college. To learn more, please read Section 3 of the report.

### **When we meet the needs of all youth, what are the potential benefits for the state?**

Helping disengaged and disconnected youth achieve success and realize their full potential would spark a virtuous cycle as a whole. This would result in: stronger schools, higher employment, fewer individuals becoming involved with incarceration or addiction, healthier and more prosperous communities, and more rapid and sustainable economic growth.

### **What can educators and schools do to support disengaged and disconnected youth?**

When schools and programs are effectively reaching disengaged and disconnected youth, they demonstrate personalization, relationships, and connections. The report also suggests employing both preventative and recuperative approaches. To learn more, please read Section 4 of the report.

### **How can everyone support educators and schools in engaging all Connecticut youth?**

The report suggests ways for stakeholders to work together to support Connecticut's educators and public schools. Specifically, the report discusses stronger practice in schools, improved systems that support disengaged and disconnected youth, and a coordinated research agenda to better understand the sources of student challenges and potential strategies to more effectively support our young people. To learn more, please read Section 5 of the report. Also, we encourage you to support Connecticut's educators and schools through [www.donorschoose.org/ctopportunityproject](http://www.donorschoose.org/ctopportunityproject).

## **What is the Dalio Foundation?**

Based in Connecticut, the Dalio Foundation was founded in 2003 as a family foundation led by Ray and Barbara Dalio. The Foundation's giving is intended to support the diverse philanthropic passions of each member of the Dalio family. Barbara leads the Foundation's public education work. She is deeply committed to improving the wellbeing of students in Connecticut through collaboration and shared learning. Learn more at the Foundation's website: [www.daliofoundation.org](http://www.daliofoundation.org).

## **What does the Dalio Foundation intend to do in response to the report?**

Barbara Dalio and the Dalio Foundation aspire to work with all stakeholders to help put all youth on a path to success, and to achieve greater equity and prosperity across the state. As part of this effort, the Foundation has helped to initiate the Connecticut Opportunity Project, a collaborative endeavor to unleash the tremendous untapped potential of young people who are disengaged or disconnected from high schools in Connecticut. Through the Opportunity Project, educators, non-profit leaders, youth counselors, mentors, mayors, and young people have joined together to develop innovative solutions to improve the life opportunities and educational outcomes of youth in Connecticut. To learn more about the Opportunity Project, please visit: [www.ctopportunityproject.org](http://www.ctopportunityproject.org).

## **What is Parthenon-EY's Education Practice?**

The Parthenon-EY Education Practice has a long track record of providing strategic planning and implementation support for public sector and not-for-profit education organizations in the United States and around the world. Parthenon-EY has worked with state departments and ministries of education, school districts, colleges and universities, school networks, foundations, and non-profits from early childhood through K-12, post-secondary, and adult education. In the past 10 years, Parthenon-EY has completed more than 1,000 education projects in over 80 countries, including working with nearly 40 U.S. urban school districts and state departments of education. Their approach demonstrates a commitment to help their clients use data to develop strategies to improve student outcomes. Learn more at Parthenon-EY's website: [www.parthenon.ey.com](http://www.parthenon.ey.com).

## **Why was Parthenon-EY chosen to lead this work?**

Parthenon-EY's Education Practice is a leader in education consulting and was selected by the Dalio Foundation based on its track record leading similar and successful work with public school systems across the country. Parthenon-EY's focus on disengaged and disconnected youth began more than a decade ago with support for the Multiple Pathways to Graduation strategy created by the New York City Department of Education, and has included similar work in Boston, Chicago, Washington, D.C. and other cities. Parthenon-EY's past work has led to meaningful changes that have improved outcomes for disengaged and disconnected youth.

## **Where did the data come from to conduct this analysis?**

In accordance with all federal and local laws and regulations governing student privacy, Parthenon-EY and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) entered into a data-sharing agreement for the purpose of conducting this analysis to better understand the needs and experiences of young people across the state. The CSDE provided Parthenon-EY with anonymized student-level information for students enrolled in Connecticut public schools between 2011-12 and 2014-15. Throughout this process, Parthenon-EY has maintained complete anonymity and confidentiality of all student information, and has complied with all federal and local laws and regulations governing student privacy.

## **Who was involved in creating this report?**

Parthenon-EY collaborated with diverse stakeholders and organizations in Connecticut in the creation of this report to solicit their input, ideas, and reactions. Parthenon-EY met with more than 150 individuals from across the state whose work focuses on disengaged and disconnected youth in some capacity. They visited schools and met with educators and students in several communities; and they met with leaders from over 50 Connecticut-based community organizations and foundations. The report cites many examples of promising practices observed by Parthenon-EY while touring Connecticut's public schools and communities.

## **How can I get involved in helping to support and empower disengaged and disconnected youth?**

We ask readers to share *Untapped Potential* with others who may be interested in learning about the challenges facing many of Connecticut's youth and, more importantly, their tremendous potential. The report is intended to serve as an invitation for all stakeholders to come together to support and empower our young people. For those who seek to become more actively involved in solutions, we encourage you to learn more about the Connecticut Opportunity Project by visiting its website: [www.ctopportunityproject.org](http://www.ctopportunityproject.org). We also encourage you to support Connecticut's educators and schools through [www.donorschoose.org/ctopportunityproject](http://www.donorschoose.org/ctopportunityproject).