

Youth in the USA

Framework for Growing Up in the United States



Expertise

ijAB

Introduction

The United States have an effect on our everyday lives like hardly any other country, whether it is through political debates, global tech trends, or just a new blockbuster that is hitting the big screen. There is ongoing interest in the country, especially amongst German youth. For students, the USA remain one of the most popular destinations for long-term exchanges. Therefore, learning and understanding this nation is imperative.

On behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, IJAB has been working to intensify U.S.-German-cooperation since 2021. We want to give youth service professionals and youth the opportunity to learn more about the framework and system that young U.S.-Americans grow up in.

The following script provides an insight into the field of youth policy and youth work in a system that can be difficult to navigate due to the size of the country, its federal structure, and its diversity. Readers will learn why the philanthropic sector is so important in the U.S., understand the importance of educational institutions in youth work, and learn how structural racism continues to affect the social mobility of children and youth today. It might even help those active in transatlantic exchange to better understand U.S.-American partners or to look for new partners in the right place.

The information and insights presented here were written by a U.S.-citizen and edited by IJAB. They offer a mere glimpse into youth policy and youth work in the U.S. and we are happy to receive comments and suggestions.

**Elena Neu, Natali Petala-Weber,
Cathrin Piesche and Julia Weber**

IJAB NEWSLETTER

Subscribe now

ijab.de/angebote-fuer-die-praxis/newsletter

Table of contents

Introduction	2	Education	
General Information about the United States	4	The Secondary School System	35
Framework for Growing Up as a Youth in the U.S.		Demographics within the U.S. Educational System	37
Defining Youth	9	Special Types of Schools Within the U.S. Education System	37
Demographic Shift	10	U.S. School Academics	38
Different Realities Create Different Outcomes	10	Other School Aspects	39
Youth Situated Within Their Communities	11	Influences on the U.S. Education System	41
LGBTQIA+	13	School Reflections	42
Youth With Disabilities	13	Career and Employment	
Driving	14	Transition into Employment	45
Family and Marriage	14	Rules and Regulation for Youth Employment	47
Pop Culture, Digitalization and Media	14	Youth Unemployment	48
Mental Health	15	International Education and Work for Youth	
Guns and Violence	16	United States Government Programs for International Youth Education	51
Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs	16	Other Programs	52
Youth Homelessness	17	Further Information	
Framework and Structures in the Field of Youth Policy		Relevant Policy Groups and Organizations	54
Stakeholders in Youth Policy	19	Philanthropy	54
Topics in the Area of Children and Youth	21	Imprint	56
Youth Participation / Youth Councils	23		
A Small Sampling of Youth Policy by State	24		
Working with Youth in the United States	26		
Topics in the Area of Children and Youth			
Civic Education	29		
Extracurricular Activities and Youth Development	30		
Volunteer Opportunities for Post-Secondary Youth	31		
Post-Secondary Volunteer Opportunities	32		
Political Advocacy Youth Volunteering	32		

General Information about the United States

The United States is a diverse country with a population of slightly under 335 million people between 50 different states. While English is the most predominantly spoken language, Spanish is also spoken by approximately 13 % of the population. Additionally, there are over a million speakers each of Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, and Korean.



Population:	334,998,398
Capital:	Washington D. C.
Other large cities:	New York City, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Boston, Philadelphia, Seattle
Spoken Languages:	English only 78.2 %, Spanish 13.4 %, Chinese 1.1 %, other 7.3 % (2017 est.)
Per Capita Income:	USD 62,600
Life Expectancy:	80,43 years
Population Growth Rate:	0,7 %
Administrative system:	Constitutional Federal Republic
President:	Joseph R. Biden (2020-2024)
Religions:	Protestant 46.5 %, Roman Catholic 20.8 %, Jewish 1.9 %, Church of Jesus Christ 1.6 %, other Christian 0.9 %, Muslim 0.9 %, Jehovah's Witness 0.8 %, Buddhist 0.7 %, Hindu 0.7 %, other 1.8 %, unaffiliated 22.8 %

The government is a **constitutional federal republic** with three branches of government. These branches include:

- » The **executive branch** for the president, their cabinet, and federal agencies
- » The **legislative branch** which entails a bicameral Congress with the Senate (2 seats for each state for a total of 100 seats) and the House of representatives (435 seats based on population)
- » The **judicial branch** for the **Supreme Court** and other federal courts.

Highest **level of education** of the population age 25 and older:

- » 8.9 % had less than a high school diploma or equivalent.
- » 27.9 % had high school graduate as their highest level of school completed.
- » 14.9 % had completed some college but not a degree.
- » 10.5 % had an associate degree as their highest level of school completed.
- » 23.5 % had a bachelor's degree as their highest degree.
- » 14.4 % had completed an advanced degree.

The United States is also **ageing**, with its older population expected to more than double over the next two decades. By the year 2050, people who are 65 years of age and older will outnumber those who are 18 and younger. The expectations of this younger generation continue to change the social fabric of the nation.

Population Age Ranges (2020 est.):

- » 0-14 years: 18.46 %
(male 31,374,555 / female 30,034,371)
- » 15-24 years: 12.91 %
(male 21,931,368 / female 21,006,463)
- » 25-54 years: 38.92 %
(male 64,893,670 / female 64,564,565)
- » 55-64 years: 12.86 %
(male 20,690,736 / female 22,091,808)
- » 65 years and over: 16.85 %
(male 25,014,147 / female 31,037,419)

The United States continues to see unprecedented multiracial population growth while seeing a decline in its white population (by 8.6 % since 2010) for the first time in the nation's history. These changes are having a tremendous impact on the country, from the overall political rhetoric expressed in the country to where people live and grow their families. There have been consequences to these developments as well, with the labor force reductions resulting in supply chain issues, not to mention the negative impacts on social safety net.

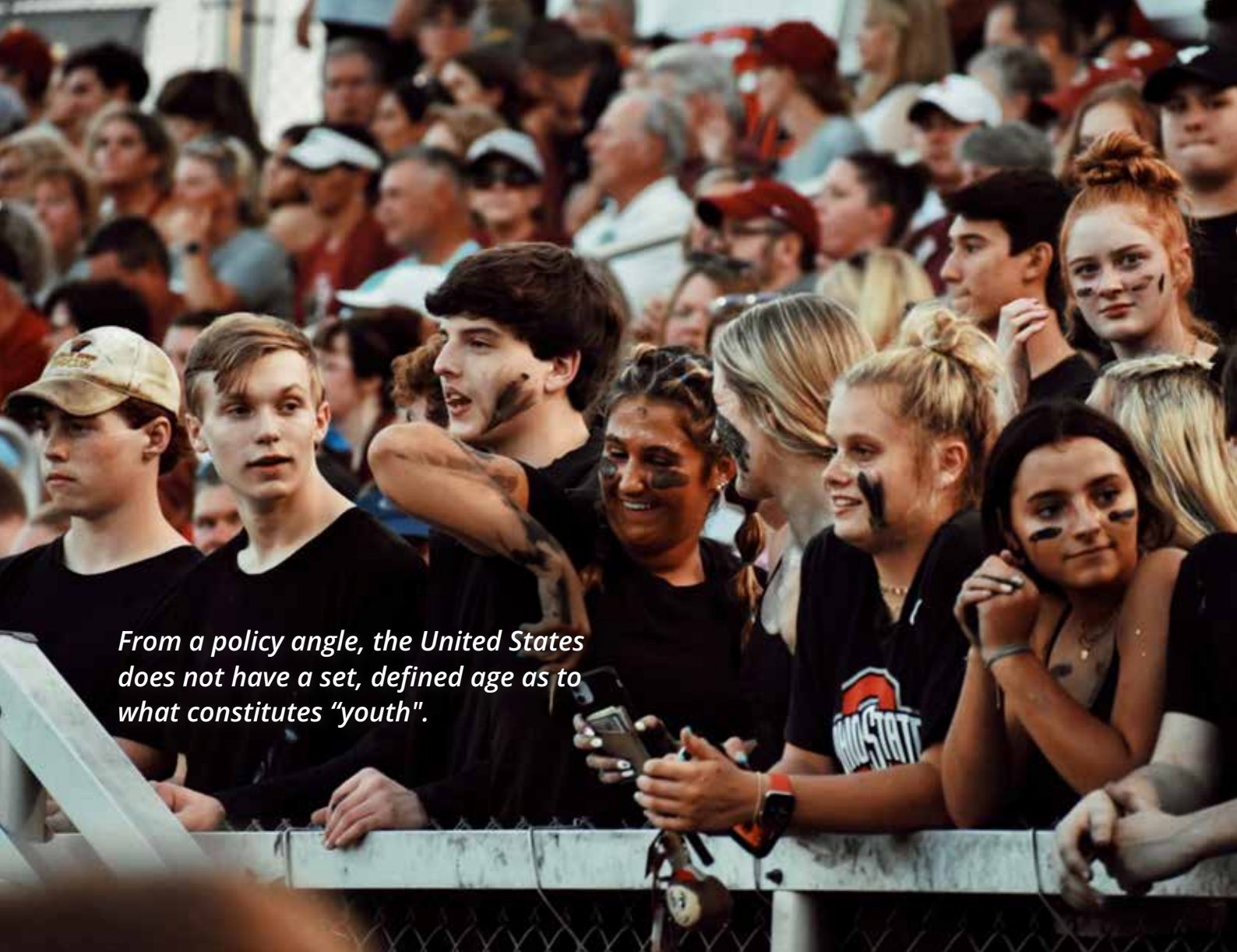
Racial Demographic Breakdown:

- » White: 57.8 %
- » Hispanic: 18.7 %
- » Black: 12.4 %
- » Asian: 6 %



Framework for Growing Up as a Youth in the U.S.

The life of a young person in the U.S. is defined as much by their geographic location as it is by their family's socioeconomic situation. Everything from the quality of their education, to the extracurricular opportunities that they are able to participate in is impacted. Further, racism, classism, and sexism from the past and present continues to have a tremendous impact on a student's future success as an adult.



From a policy angle, the United States does not have a set, defined age as to what constitutes "youth".

A young person growing up in one neighborhood, state, or region of the United States will therefore have more or fewer opportunities as a result. The experience of a youth who is Black in the U.S. South, for instance will vary tremendously from a White youth on the U.S. West Coast. Research has shown that these realities can be broken down along many variables, from healthcare and life expectancy to career success and socio-economic outcomes.

While many young people tend to live with their immediate family, some may also live in less traditional living situations, including with grandparents or other family members. In urban areas, there tends to be more racial and ethnic diversity in schools and communities that allows young people to engage with people from different backgrounds while in rural areas, there tends to be less diversity. While it was ruled that racial segregation among schools and other public spaces is illegal in 1954, with the Brown vs. Board of Education

Supreme Court Decision, many schools in the United States continue to be deeply segregated by race. This is because where a student goes to public schools is dependent upon their zip code and the property taxes that are paid within that zip code, which is correlated to how much money a family earns and their race.

Defining Youth

From a policy angle, the United States does not have a set, defined age as to what constitutes "youth," but an official definition generally revolves around the notion of a "youth" constituting anyone under the age of twenty-five, from a theoretical standpoint at least. Within the United States, an individual is officially considered to be an adult at the age of eighteen. Further, ages fourteen and under are considered early adolescents, while adolescents themselves are those between the ages of fourteen to eighteen, and early adulthood is considered ages eighteen to twenty-four. This distinction



is important, as the United States has historically struggled to contextualize direct interventions that are particular for this age group.

Adolescents in the United States have special legal protections afforded to them surrounding a variety of angles including labor, education, alcohol consumption, healthcare, and so forth. The rights afforded to them are divided between federal, state, and local jurisdictions. Upon reaching the age of eighteen, a person is considered to be an adult and therefore loses many of these special considerations and protections.

Demographic Shift

The realities of racism, classism, and sexism in the United States persist despite the country changing tremendously each day. The U.S.'s population is now aging at an unprecedented level and the rapidly aging population (*Baby Boomers*) is increasingly becoming more dependent on the younger generation – a younger generation that is more diverse than any other the United States has ever seen. Thus, the U.S. is faced with a prevailing challenge – how to promote equality with an aging population that continues to own many of the resources that are needed to create a brighter future for everyone. There tends to be tensions between the *Baby Boomer* population and youth, with the older population not able to fully understand the extent of the challenges that young people face today in addition to youth feeling misunder-

stood by them. Because the cost of living and attending college has gone up drastically, it is not always possible for the current generation of young people to follow the same path that their parents or other older relatives completed.

Different Realities Create Different Outcomes

Youth in the United States face different realities and life outcomes depending on variables as disparate as the zip code that they were born in, to whether or not they attend a city or county school. City schools are located in more urban centers while county schools are typically in the suburbs connected to the outskirts of these cities or in smaller towns. Often times, whether or not a person is successful in the United States is reliant as much on whether or not they were born within the right circumstances as it is upon their innate ability. This is a reality faced by many youth around the world, but the hypocrisy is amplified within the United States because of the relative financial wealth of the country and, subsequently, the collective efforts by government and society to try and mitigate the consequences of a system that can make or break a person based off of many factors outside of their control.

According to official Census U.S. poverty measures, 11.6 million children (or 1 in 7) – which would equate to 16% of all kids in the United States – were living in poverty in

2020. This total has increased by more than one million children since 2019 and is likely even higher due to the last effects of the COVID pandemic. Poverty levels vary across the United States, with Mississippi having the highest percentage at nearly 30% of its children in poverty. These poverty rates are disproportionately high for children of color. Nationwide, Black (28%), Indigenous peoples of America (25%) and Latino (23%) youth are more likely to grow up poor when compared to their non-Hispanic white (10%) and Asian American and Pacific Islanders (9%) peers.

As a result, many youth in the United States, especially those who grow up in lower-income urban or rural communities will often be focused on trying to break familial cycles of poverty and avoiding a criminal justice system that disproportionately affects poor young people, Black young people, and young people of color. Education can often be seen as a way to break these cycles and to have

a decent career. Alternatively, some youth in these demographics may not be so concerned with school and may be more focused on jobs that they have outside of school so that they can make money for themselves and their families. For those youth who grow up in higher-income communities, being college-bound and trying to get into the best university possible is instilled from late middle school to early high school and onward. Youth in higher-income schools and communities will often try to get good grades, be very involved in extracurricular activities, volunteering, and leadership positions in order to be competitive for their college applications.

Youth Situated Within Their Communities

Young people in the United States are very connected to their social peer groups while attending school. The friend groups that they develop in school and in extra-



curricular activities can become a strong support network. Sometimes students stay in cliques of the same group of friends, while other students may have several different groups of friends. Like most youth around the world, they are often friends with people on the same sports team or in the same extracurricular clubs as them because of their shared interests. They also develop friend groups from spaces outside of their school such as their church, recreational sports leagues outside of school, their neighborhoods, and other social clubs.

While the level of community and school resources can vary based on socio-economic demographics, across the board the culture of extracurricular activities such as sports, music, arts, and academic clubs tends to be very strong in the United States. Many students play some form of sport from a young age either through their school or an external recreational league. Soccer, football, and basketball are the most popular sports among young people, but they can also participate in track and field, cross country, field hockey, lacrosse,

baseball, and other sports. The practice time and games for sports tend to happen right after the school day and on weekends. In some school communities, particularly in lower-income parts of the South, sports such as football and basketball are sometimes seen as a way out of poverty and low-income students can be very motivated to do well in order to obtain sports scholarships to college. However, the proportion of students that hold this aspiration compared with the number of young people who actually receive college scholarships for sports is extremely low, with only 2 % of high school athletes being awarded scholarships to compete at the collegiate level according to the *National Collegiate Athletic Association*. Other clubs that youth focus on include band, theater, visual arts, newspaper, student council, Model United Nations, and other more academic or arts-oriented clubs which also tend to happen right after the school day and meet anywhere from once a week to every weekday after school. Depending on the school, some students are able to participate in multiple clubs and explore sports, arts and/or more academic-oriented clubs concurrently.



Students attend their school day typically from around eight or nine in the morning until three or four in the afternoon. From there, students can stay after school for sports or other extracurricular activity clubs, and then go home via school bus, public transportation, or their parents/other family members picking them up from school. In New York City and other large cities, it is not uncommon for high school students to take public transportation such as the subway to school. However, in many areas, especially more suburban and rural areas, most students take a school bus to get to and from school. Students in higher socio-economic classes may have their own car to drive to and from school after they get their license from the age of 16 and onward.

While some young people in the United States are very focused on their personal and family lives, as well as their career paths and extracurricular activities, there are many young people in the United States who engage in activism for racial, economic, gender and environmental justice. There are several youth-led advocacy groups such as the *Sunrise Movement* that focus on environmental justice and *March for our Lives*, which focuses on gun control where young people can engage in political causes. The role and activism of these organizations has grown substantially over the last ten years. Some high schools and universities have local chapters of political advocacy groups that allow young people to engage in pushing for a more just United States to eliminate the inequities that exist by race, class, gender, sexuality, and more.

LGBTQIA+

There are approximately two million young people between the ages of thirteen to seventeen that identify as LGBTQIA+ in the United States, which constitutes 10% of the youth population. In more recent years, there has been more acceptance towards LGBTQIA+ youth from their peers. However, there has also been recent state and local-level movement from mostly conservative state legislatures to target the ability of these young people to live their lives freely. LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely than their heterosexual peers to experience negative health and life outcomes due to bullying and a lack of support for their mental and physical health. Increasingly federal and local policies are acknowledging and focusing on the experiences and needs of LGBTQIA+ youth. Numerous national advocacy groups and other organizations are also giving greater attention to LGBTQIA+ youth in their work. The *Trevor Project* is the largest non-profit



organization in the United States that focuses on suicide prevention and crisis intervention for LGBTQIA+ youth. However, the work of organizations like this and the policy advancements for LGBTQIA+ youth have come after hard fought legal fights and are constantly under threat.

Youth With Disabilities

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), enacted in 1975, mandates that children and youth ages three to twenty-one with disabilities be provided a free and appropriate public school education. The resources that youth are afforded is broken down by federal, state, and local school district. The most commonly used tool to help guide students in this category is the *Individual Education Plan* (IEP), which lays out the special education methods, instruction, supports, and services that a special needs student requires. Further, the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability provides a range of assessments that can help with the transition from school to employment. In addition to their focus on career planning, these resources recognize unique challenges faced by youth with disabilities.



Driving

Young people can learn to drive in the United States around the age of 16. The access to public transportation in the U.S. is less sophisticated than in many other countries. Larger cities such as New York City and Chicago have more robust public transportation systems, but many Americans need access to a car to get around. This is especially the case in more rural areas, where teens are oftentimes reliant on vehicles to get around to their various extracurricular activities in high school – thus exposing themselves and the general public to increased driving danger due to their relative immaturity and lack of experience.

Family and Marriage

The notion of a family continues to shift and change in the United States. Nearly every other marriage will end in divorce and the amount of single mothers in the U.S. has never been higher. Young people are not as interested in the concept of marriage anymore as well, and are fine with cohabitation with their partner(s) instead of committing their future to someone else. Further, with the legalization of marriage for LGBTQIA+ people, who and what constitutes a set of parents has been permanently altered and the idea of a traditional family has no particular definition, as a result. Young people can grow up in a variety of familial household situations that are different from traditional nuclear families.

Pop Culture, Digitalization and Media

Youth in the U.S. have a significant influence on popular culture. Everything from TV and music to the latest fashion is often dictated by the trends and experience of young people. Social media has become a very integral part of the lives of young people in the United States. 90% of teens ages thirteen to seventeen have used social media and 75% have reported that they have at least one active social media profile. YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram were the most popular social media platforms as of 2018, though in recent years TikTok has also become extremely popular. As of 2018, 95% of teens in the United States own their own smartphone and 45% of teens have said that they are online on a constant basis. As of 2021, 63% of youth between the ages of twelve and seventeen used TikTok on a weekly basis, compared to 57% on Instagram. A majority of U.S. youth also have access to a gaming console in their homes, though boys are more likely to play video games than girls (95% versus 83%).

The use of social media has elevated the consumerism and need for approval among one's peers that is typical of young people. However, social media has also become a tool for young people to engage with and share their concerns about social justice issues. Many trends for young people focus on elevating issues of racial, gender, and environmental justice. With the proliferation of the internet, their impact is felt throughout society, from changing the fabric of the country's economic system to forcing and influencing political movements, the

youth of today have more power than ever in shaping America's pop culture. Many young people use social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter in order to both discuss and shape pop culture, while also discussing social justice issues that they care about. Young people with large followings can gain sponsorships from brands and many young people use this as an opportunity to highlight social justice issues that are important to them.

While there are benefits to this, including being able to stay connected to friends, sharing art or other work, promoting social justice activism, and self-expression, there are also many negative mental health effects of social media. Social media has been a place where some young people have experienced cyber-bullying from peers at school or have been exposed to harmful and violent content. There are also privacy concerns and concerns around others obtaining their personal information. Overall, there are mixed opinions among young people regarding whether social media has a positive, neutral, or negative effect on their lives. Their peers on racial, economic, gender and environmental justice, as well as organize protests or other forms of activism.

Mental Health

Mental health and the many challenges associated have been a leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes for young people in the United States, with up to one in

five children ages three to seventeen in the U.S. having a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder. Additionally, from 2009 to 2019, the share of youth in U.S. high schools who reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness was reported to be about one in three students. Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real and widespread. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic began, an increasing amount of young people struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide — and these rates have steadily grown over the past decade. This can be attributed to social media use, bullying in schools, eating disorders and body image issues, discrimination-based trauma and more. In December of 2021, the United States surgeon general issued an advisory about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health for youth due to how much it has altered their experiences and habits at home, school, and socially. This is particularly true for demographics of youth who were already vulnerable, including youth with disabilities, ethnic and racial minorities, LGBTQIA+ youth, low-income youth, youth in immigrant households, along with youth in the juvenile justice system. However, despite the increase of mental health challenges, young people in the current generation have been much more open about these challenges among their peers and mental health issues have increasingly become less taboo. Social media has become a way to share tools for managing mental health issues and promoting lifestyle changes that can help young people with these issues.



Guns and Violence

In order to purchase a shotgun, rifle, or ammunition for a gun, in the United States one must be eighteen years of age. For any other types of firearms and ammunition, one must be twenty-one years old. The U.S. is prone to violence and particularly gun violence. We see this manifest itself in a variety of ways throughout U.S. society, and many of these outcomes directly impact youth. Some youth are affected by one of their parents being incarcerated (if not themselves) due to gun violence, which is often exacerbated by the easy access of firearms. There is often a high probability that youth will be directly impacted by this gun violence. As such, youth in the U.S. must confront and grapple with the impacts of the culture of guns in ways that other youth in developed economies do not have to worry about. Due to the increased economic strain associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, urban centers have especially seen rates of criminality increase, with a significant portion of this surge being tied back to youth.

Additionally, urban schools are more likely to have police officers in their schools, as well as have students to

go through metal detectors and other forms of security in order to enter their school before the school day begins. It is important to note that violence also occurs in schools as well. School shootings have become a regular occurrence in the United States. While terrifying for both students, educators, parents, and communities, there are still polarizing debates about gun rights and school safety. Since 2018, there have been 119 school shootings in the United States. Student and parent advocacy groups are working to push for legislation that would increase gun control in the hopes that it will lower the rate of school shootings.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs

In the United States, the culture of alcohol is quite different from the culture of alcohol in many European countries and it is forbidden for younger people to drink. While the age when young people are allowed to drink alcohol in many countries in Europe is typically between 16 and 18, in the United States, one must be 21 years old in order to legally consume and purchase alcohol. In order to purchase cigarettes or other forms of tobacco, one must be 18 years old. While some high school stu-



dents still find ways to drink and smoke tobacco, it is not until college that it becomes much more common for young people to drink and smoke. However, increasingly, vaporizers (vapes) with flavored tobacco have become very popular for young people.

Drug usage is common among young people in the United States. Everything from prescribed medications to marijuana and cocaine are becoming commonly used drugs. With the legalization of marijuana in many U.S. states, coupled with the increased availability of vapes in stores, marijuana is the en vogue drug of choice. However, there are many in-school and community programs that work to educate youth on the negative impacts of drug abuse.

Youth Homelessness

Each year, there are over four million youth and young adults who experience homelessness, of which nearly one million are unaccompanied minors. This means that they are officially not part of a family or accompanied by a parent or guardian. On any given night, over forty thousand unaccompanied youth ages thirteen to twenty-five are homeless. Many factors increase a young person's odds of experiencing homelessness. Demographic risk factors for becoming homeless include whether they are Hispanic or Black, are parenting a child, but are unmarried; or classified as LGBTQIA+. In particular, gay youth are more than twice the risk of being homeless than their cisgender or heterosexual peers.

Youth homelessness is more common in low-income areas. The resources available for young homeless people vary by city and state. New York and California, for example, tends to have more shelters and resources for young people in this situation than places such as Louisiana. The resources towards youth homelessness are dependent upon how many government public services and non-profit organizations are in that particular area.



Each year, there are over four million youth and young adults who experience homelessness.

Framework and Structures in the Field of Youth Policy

The challenges of youth policy in the United States are derived from the lack of public and social services at the federal level compared to other countries, particularly countries in Europe. As a result of this, different states, cities, towns, and local communities have varied levels of programming and support for youth.



For the lack of a holistic youth policy agenda, programs for youth in the United States rely on a wide range of different policies and funding streams. This means that there can be inconsistency related to what resources youth have access to and depends heavily on where they live. Youth on the east and west coast are likely to have more opportunities than their peers in the South or South-West.

Additionally, the history and continuation of racism, classism, and sexism within the United States has a profound impact on youth upward mobility. Amidst this, local community groups and youth activism continuously work to level the playing field and provide enriching opportunities for young people throughout the United States

Stakeholders in Youth Policy

There is no set federal agency on youth and in the United States. Instead, Youth is a cross-departmental issue, meaning various ministries in the United States also offer programs targeting youth, e.g. the U.S. Department of Labor or the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Thus, there is no uniform national youth policy in this form. Therefore, there is no holistic youth policy agenda.

This is partly due to the federal constitution of the USA, which assigns different powers to the federal government and the states. The strong decentralization of political power is typical of U.S. politics. Consequently, state governments and local districts have extensive powers.

Youth welfare traditionally falls under state jurisdiction and each of the 50 states and approximately 3,000 counties have their own complex systems in place. As a result, policies and practices at national, state, and local level are often very different in terms of funding and focus. By providing public funding and federal programs, the federal government can, however, still influence state policy and set specific youth policy priorities.

At the federal level, the *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services* has the highest budget allocated to youth programming. The Department is the government's primary agency for planning, funding, and coordinating federal youth services. The affiliated *Administration for Children and Families* (ACF) is responsible for federal programs that provide economic and social support to families, children, individuals, and communities, as well as foster care and adoption services for children with special needs. ACF administers more than 60 programs with a budget of more than USD 60 billion, making it the second largest agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. The *Office of Regional Operations*,

a subdivision of ACF also acts as the interface between the Department and local governments with a total of 10 statewide regional offices. These regional offices are responsible for implementing federal programs locally. Areas of focus for the *Office of Families and Youth Services*, which is also part of the ACF, include preventing youth homelessness, teen pregnancy, and domestic violence.

The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP) has representatives from twenty-one federal agencies including the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Labor. This federal agency has many initiatives including programming on the prevention of underage drinking, fostering upward mobility for "opportunity youth" (low-income or at-risk young people), bullying prevention, working with the children of incarcerated parents, and more. On their website youth.gov, IWGYP offers several tools and resources to help youth-serving organizations, cities or counties plan, implement and participate in programs for youth. They also provide news around youth policy, funding opportunities and new programs. Currently they provide information on

29 topics that may affect youth, such as bullying in schools, out-of-school youth work, substance use, sex/gender identity, mental health, juvenile delinquency, and community engagement.

The majority of youth engagement, policy initiatives, and programming takes place at the state and local level and within a student's school community or through non-profit organizations. For example, several national organizations have local chapters that work with youth in ways that are specific to their local contexts. The *Boys and Girls Club of America* has programming that aims to ensure that young people can reach their full potential. This includes promoting high school graduation, engaging Black, Latino, and female youth in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), building leadership skills, promoting mental and emotional health and wellness, and many other initiatives. *Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America* is another national organization with local





chapters throughout the United States that facilitates mentor relationships with young people. The *Children's Defense Fund* is a non-profit organization that has seven state offices across the United States that works to alleviate child poverty, promote early childhood education, prevent gun violence among young people, and promote rehabilitative services for young people who enter the juvenile justice system. In addition to these national organizations with local chapters, individual places have smaller more localized non-profit organizations that promote services and initiatives for young people.

The U.S. has a long tradition of addressing social issues through the philanthropic sector rather than the government (bottom-up vs. top-down). This affects national youth networks and associations as there is reluctance to organize in central umbrella. As a result, there are only a few truly central youth organizations in the U.S., but an almost innumerable number of small grassroots organizations and initiatives addressing youth.

Topics in the Area of Children and Youth

There are many organizations working to provide an even playing ground for youth from all backgrounds. While there are some government departments that promote youth policy priorities, these departments tend to have strong partnerships with non-profit and philanthropic entities. States are typically wholly autonomous in how they implement and execute their various child and youth policy programs, but the federal government is able to especially ensure the constitutional rights of program participants and has been known to impose fines and to sue states over derelict or poorly funded programming. Further, the philanthropic and business industries increasingly are having an impact on how these programs function and, through the power of their own funding, are able to also have influence on state policies in a more indirect way. Typically, funding works through whatever granting institution sends funds to the states and the state entities are then able to make decisions on how they would like to disburse funds – typically via organizations applying for the funds.

Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is an intentional, pro-social, approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive. It recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths, and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths. PYD has its origins in the field of prevention. In the past, prevention efforts typically focused on single problems before they surfaced in youth, such as teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency. There is now a belief that particular interventions that promote positive asset building and consider young people as a resource is a better strategy. As a result, the youth development field began examining the role of resiliency – the protective factors in a young person's environment – and how these factors could influence one's ability to overcome adversity. PYD is a pre-emptive way of recognizing the worth of youth and empowering them to take more ownership over their life outcomes.

Opportunity Youth

While there are various national priorities that the government implements, one important initiative is the focus on opportunity youth. Young people who are between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four and who are not engaged in either school or the workforce are considered "opportunity youth" by the federal government. There are around five million young people in the United States that fall into this category. There have been several federal initiatives that have been developed in order to re-engage this group of young people in work and/or education. The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) was developed by the *Department of Labor* and the *Department of Education* to develop workforce and education oriented programs. The *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families* (TANF) program was developed by the *Department of Health and Human Services* to give cash assistance to families with children under the age of eighteen who are financially struggling. The *United States Department of Agriculture* has developed the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP) to help the families that receive financial support for food from the government to receive job search and vocational training. Finally, the *Federal Pell* grant program gives need-based grants to low-income undergraduate students with the goal of promoting more accessibility for university education. These federal programs have been

created with the intention of fostering upward mobility among *opportunity youth*.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and DREAM Act

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a federal immigration program created by the Department of Homeland Security in 2012 for youth who entered the United States illegally as children with their parents. DACA allows these children to obtain work permits and thus avoid deportation by the government. It also allows them to attend college in the state where they live. However, the law does not provide a path to U.S. citizenship. It was preceded by the DREAM Act, a bill intended to do just that. It was first introduced in 2001 under former President Barack Obama but repeatedly failed in Congress. During the Trump administration, DACA measures were suspended until further notice. There are ongoing efforts under the Biden Administration to bring the program back to life. Further, measures to protect so-called *Dreamers* continue to be a topic of political debate.

Bullying Prevention

The *United States Department of Health and Human Services* has conducted research and compiled resources with the goal of preventing bullying among young people. This department defines bullying as unwanted aggressive behavior among school-aged children where there is a real or perceived power imbalance. They classify bullying into three categories: verbal, social, and physical. With the increase of the use of social media, phones, computers, and other digital devices among young people, cyberbullying has increasingly become a larger problem. This can entail sending harmful, mean, or false content about someone else on social media or with others in a way that causes embarrassment or humiliation. While the federal government has acknowledged and compiled resources on these problems, there is no federal law that addresses these problems and each state has addressed this differently. The majority of states and territories have both law and policy that addresses bullying while nine states and territories only have laws. There is a range regarding how bullying prevention is implemented from putting in place these laws and policies, to requiring districts and schools to develop their own regulations.

Youth Involved with the Juvenile Justice System

Some children and youth become involved with the juvenile justice system because they are accused of committing a delinquent or criminal act. Other youth come into

contact with the system for status offenses – actions that are illegal only because of a youth’s age – such as truancy, underage drinking, and running away from home. Not all of these cases, however, are formally processed through the courts. During a single year, over two million youth under the age of eighteen are arrested in the United States. Once a young person enters the juvenile justice system, it is very hard for them to be able to access jobs and college education and it takes a very heavy toll on a young person’s mental and physical health. Additionally, the criminalization of young people to enter the juvenile justice system disproportionately affects Black youth and young people of color.

There have been efforts to try to make more rehabilitative programming for young people in the criminal justice system, including through youth court and restorative justice. In youth court, a young person’s student peers serve as the attorneys, jurors, and clerks in the court, allowing them to learn more about the court system, while also administering sentences that they believe are fair such as formal apologies or community service. There has also been increased efforts to promote restorative justice programming for young people in the juvenile justice system. Restorative justice promotes an active dialogue between the victim and the offender and a supportive space where everyone can collectively decide how best to proceed in a way that promotes accountability without criminalizing a young person.

D.A.R.E.

Another important program for young people throughout the *United States is the Drug Abuse Resistance Education* program (D.A.R.E). This program brings facilitators into schools to teach about substance abuse and addiction prevention. The organization has a set curriculum for elementary, middle, and high school students. There are over 1,700 D.A.R.E programs throughout the United States where facilitators work with schools to teach their curriculum on safety, substance abuse, conflict management, opioids, nicotine, mental health, and much more.

Youth Participation / Youth Councils

A Youth Council is a group of young people working toward the common purpose of developing their individual leadership skills to strengthen communities through volunteer service and increased communication with municipal leaders, such as Mayors. Youth develop and lead initiatives with the support of adult mentors. A *Mayor’s Youth Council* is more than just a service club because members also determine to train and involve their peers in service leadership. Youth Councils also provide valuable insight on issues affecting young people and the community at large. They can represent cities, commu-





nities, regions, schools, organizations, and states. Each Council typically has fifteen to twenty-five members.

Youth Councils work to coordinate, advise, and activate peers and elders in issues affecting young people. The Council acts as a positive, influential, and energetic voice in affecting policies, and solutions to local problems. Youth Councils are found in many segments of society. To be successful, a Youth Council must be carefully thought out in everything from its purpose to its role in city government, to its membership. Every city is unique and the Youth Council must be tailored to fit a community's needs.

Young people, who are typically in high school, are allowed to join the Youth Councils. Further, because the Youth Councils are usually tied to municipal leaders, they are required to reside in the city or town where they reside. Youth who are selected to join the Youth Council also usually must maintain a certain grade point average, for those still in school, and come to the Council through recommendations from school and community leaders.

Youth Councils typically provide ongoing and direct input on government policies and practices that may affect

young people at the local level. Council members are expected to advocate on these issues and initiatives and recommend avenues by which to improve the issue – such as with reference to school safety, anti-discrimination or raising funds for a new soccer field. They also act as a communication link between the local government and the young people of their community. Finally, they promote and recognize the abilities, accomplishments, and contributions of young people in their communities, and organize and participate in service-learning projects that benefit a community.

A Small Sampling of Youth Policy by State

While every state has different levels and extents of youth policy and programming, a few states will show the range of youth policy that can exist by state. In general, social policies are implemented at the state and local government level, as opposed to the national level.

Individual cities and towns, as well as localized non-profit organizations can often fill the gap of youth support and programming when it does not exist at the state or federal level.

New York

New York State has very strong social services compared to many states within the United States. In terms of youth policy, the *New York State Office of Children and Family Services* works to promote youth and family well-being. The programming of this office works to promote equal access to quality services, individualized treatment that respects gender and sexual orientation, and cultural, physical, social, emotional and linguistic needs, and care in environments to promote healthy development. The state works with other communities to provide funding for more localized, non-profit youth development programs, runaway and homeless youth programs, scholarships and financial aid for studying, support for youth in foster care, and other enrichment services. There are also state programs that provide support for the college admissions and financial aid processes for youth.

Louisiana

Louisiana has fewer state government youth programs. *Louisiana Youth for Excellence (LYFE)* is one initiative that promotes positive youth development and builds awareness of consequences for at-risk behaviors with vulnerable youth. This includes children in foster care, children in poverty, and children in juvenile detention centers.

The state of *Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice* also works with youth who have entered the juvenile justice system. There is programming in the *Office of Juvenile Justice* that focuses on harm reduction associated with the negative impacts of drug use. Additionally, this office makes recommendations for treatment for young people in this system. However, the emphasis is on more punitive programs as opposed to restorative justice, financial resources and scholarships, and well-being programs. This demonstrates the stark difference in priorities that exist from state to state.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin, in the Mid-West of the United States, demonstrates another set of priorities that can exist at the state level. Wisconsin has worked to promote a community-based juvenile justice system that puts resources towards youth counseling, assessment and treatment, community service, and teen court. There is also a *Bureau of Refugee Programs* that helps with refugee resettlement in the state of Wisconsin that includes interpretation and translation, transportation, mental and physical health services, and employment services. There are also state programs that support foster children, as well as policy to support Native American tribes and families through the *Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act*.



Working with Youth in the United States

For people who are interested in working with youth in the United States, there are several different career trajectories depending on one's interest. These include teaching or school administration, social work, working in education policy, and working in public-interest law in the juvenile justice system. Additionally, one of the more common ways to engage with youth work is to work at a non-profit organization that focuses on young people. As previously mentioned, while there are several national youth-focused organizations, there may also be very local organizations that focus on the needs of a particular community in a city, town, or state.

Teaching and School Administration

There are several ways that one can go into the field of teaching. A person can study education during their undergraduate education and do student teaching college. This is the more traditional way to go into the field of education. A person will choose what level (elementary, middle, or high school) they would like to teach, as well as the subject. There are also third-party teacher training programs that someone can do after college. In order to do these programs, one does not necessarily have to focus on education during their undergraduate degree. These programs include teaching fellows programs such as D.C. or *New York Teaching Fellows, Relay, and Teach for America*. In these programs, people are only expected to teach for between two to four years, though some end up staying in the field of education for much longer. In order to go into school administration, one typically needs some experience teaching and a master's degree in school administration or organizational leadership. However, there can be exceptions where a person works their way upon within their school or school system after a long period of teaching.

Social Work

Another professional path to working with youth is to become a social worker. Social workers may work directly in schools, hospitals, state or federal agencies, or at community organizations. They often help with the mental health and logistical challenges that a young person may be facing due to problems with their home or personal life. While it is possible to become a social worker with a bachelor's degree in social work, a person interested in this profession often will need a master's degree in order to obtain a position. After obtaining the proper degree, a person must get licensed by their state. Youth social

workers tend to focus on supporting adolescents, though depending on the circumstance may have to work with the whole family.

Juvenile Justice Law

Another path of youth work is to work in the juvenile justice system. This work deals mostly with at-risk youth and young people who have committed a crime but are too young to be tried as adults. In order to become a juvenile justice attorney and to work on behalf of a young person who enters the juvenile justice system, one must get a bachelor's degree, followed by a law degree. This can be an emotionally challenging career path with long hours and little pay but it is very important work given the violence within the juvenile and criminal justice system in the United States. Increasingly, some states and communities have implemented restorative justice, teen court, and other programming to make a young person's experience in this system more restorative and less traumatizing. One can also become a juvenile probation or correctional officer, as well as a juvenile counselor to work with young people in this system.

Non-Profit Work Focused on Youth

Non-profit organizations play a large role in paths for youth work and there are non-profit organizations that exist for just about every cause. This includes promoting access to coding classes, civic education, international education, college and test prep, healthy food and urban gardening, LGBTQIA+ support, arts and music education, and much more. While there are national and state level non-profit organizations, non-profit organizations are often created at the local level when a community sees a gap in what the state is able to offer. Typically, these organizations are funded by local grassroots community funders, grants from foundations, the city or the state, as well as through corporate social responsibility partnerships. This demonstrates the role that private and third-party entities can have in youth work.





Topics in the Area of Children and Youth



Civic Education

The state of civic education and civic engagement in the United States has significant room for improvement. A study from the *Annenberg Public Policy Center* found that only one in four Americans were able to name the four branches of government. Further, a 2019 study noted that only 17% of people trust government officials in Washington D.C. to do the right thing. Civic education for young people typically takes place in the form of a social studies course a youth takes during secondary education. There is a large discrepancy among the states on how much civics education is required, with some states not offering civics courses at all. Nine states and the District of Columbia require one full academic year of civics education. Thirty-one states require half of a year and ten states do not require civics education courses at all. The curriculum of these courses tend to focus on rote memorization of knowledge about the Constitution and Bill of Rights and how the U.S. government functions. There could be more opportunity for the curriculum to focus more directly on youth engagement in local political issues. To fill the gap that exists in schools for civics education, there are non-profits throughout the country that work to train teachers and create curriculum to strengthen civics education.

At the national level, two non-profits that have had a large influence in this space are Generation Citizen and Learning for Justice.

Generation Citizen

Generation Citizen has taught *action civics* to 30,000 middle and high school students. The organization is very youth centered and helps to learn about the root causes of community problems and work on issues directly affecting them and their communities through a semester-long course. Youth learn engagement tactics and present their issue and how to work on making it better to their class. The majority of those who participate in this program believe that they are able to make a difference in their community after having participated in the program.

Learning for Justice

Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) is an organization that provides free social-justice oriented curricula to teachers. The organization has many different forms of media that one can use including films, magazines, and online materials. The organization also provides professional development for teachers on civics education. Learning for Justice has curricula on race and ethnicity, religion, ability, economic class, immigration, gender and sexual identity, bullying and bias, and

rights and activism. The organization also funds school, classroom, and district level civic engagement projects. It is a very popular resource for teachers all across the United States.

Extracurricular Activities and Youth Development

Arts education and extracurricular activities such as sports, band, student council have long been an important aspect of a youth's experience in the United States. Research has demonstrated that participation in extracurricular activities makes the attitudes of youth more favorable towards especially school because of the interpersonal bonds that they develop with peers and adults – these extracurricular activities play a positive role in the self-esteem of young people. Additionally, youth participation in extracurricular activities has shown to have positive effects on their academic outcomes and fosters motivation for academic success and self-efficacy. It is very common for youth to participate in these types of activities after school. These activities can range from sports such as baseball, soccer, American football, volleyball, track and field, and other sports, to performing arts such as band and theatre, to more academically-focused activities such as student council, newspaper, yearbook club, debate, and model United Nations. Additionally, young people may also participate in these kinds of activities in local organizations in their neighborhood.

For example, some neighborhoods or regions have recreational leagues for sports where students from several different schools may join teams. Additionally, youth can participate in after-school programming at YMCAs, as well as more localized non-profit organization centers.

YMCA

In the United States, there are many *Young Men's Christian Associations* (YMCAs, or Ys) that work with young people and have youth development programming. In total, there are 2,700 separate YMCA organizations and 10,000 branches that receive substantial financial support via charitable donations. The programming of YMCAs can vary depending on the local chapter but many have early childhood learning programming and childcare, leadership and academic enrichment programs, and sports and recreational programs for young people. These organizations are considered very important community centers throughout the United States and have been pivotal in providing meals and other social services during difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America

The *Boy Scouts of America* works with youth ages five to twenty-one. The mission of the organization is to develop character, citizenship, personal fitness, and leadership. There are seven ranks that youth work up to through participating in community service and outdoor activities. The *Girl Scouts of America* is for youth ages



seven to eighteen. Youth in the *Girl Scouts* participate in outdoor activities, as well, and also have workshops on first-aid training, arts, and more recently STEM competencies. Young people who are members of the Boy or Girl Scouts tend to be members throughout the entirety of their youth and have a lot of spirit around their participation in the organizations.

4-H

4-H is an organization that works with youth throughout the United States through partnering with public universities all over the country. This program works with youth in urban, rural, and suburban areas. Through this program, students receive mentorship and complete a project that is relevant to their interests. They also gain leadership experience. The priorities that 4-H encourages youth to address are community health inequities, civil discourse, and advocating for equity and inclusion for all.

Volunteer Opportunities for Post-Secondary Youth

There are many organizations that youth participate in for volunteer work. These can include secular non-profits, faith-based organizations, government volunteer programs and organizations that are more direct political advocacy. Youth can participate in volunteer activities as an extracurricular activity and some students also take a gap year to do one to two years of volunteer work after high school.

Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit that works in all fifty states in the United States, as well as in many other countries. This organization focuses primarily on promoting livable housing for people and has initiatives around home construction, making homes livable for the elderly, neighborhood revitalization, and disaster response. Students in either high school or college are able to start a student-led campus chapter of *Habitat for Humanity*. When they have organized a campus-chapter, they are able to set up volunteer opportunities in their local communities, educate their school and community on issues related to housing and the organization, help with fundraising to support more housing in their local communi-



ty, and meet with community officials to discuss issues and legislation around housing. These chapters exist at high schools and universities all throughout the United States and this organization has become very well-known and respected on issues of housing.

American Red Cross

The *American Red Cross* is a larger organization with chapters throughout the United States that focuses on disaster and crisis relief. This includes supporting disaster relief after hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, wildfires and other disasters, hosting opportunities for blood donation, health and safety courses, delivering international aid, and supporting military families. The *American Red Cross* has also helped to support communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are two ways that youth can engage with volunteer work at the *American Red Cross*. First, they can start or join a local Red Cross club within their school. Additionally, if they are in college, they are able to intern with the *American Red Cross*. The opportunities for student volunteers can range from direct disaster relief work, to communications support, to fundraising.

Humane Society

The *Humane Society* is a national organization that focuses on animal welfare and sheltering. Youth must be sixteen years of age or older in order to volunteer with the *Humane Society* and there are several different types of programs in which they can participate. These include individual service projects such as hosting a fundraiser or craft-making of toys for animals, as well as volunteering shifts for students entering their tenth grade year along with recent high school graduates. Student volunteers can care for animals that will soon be in new homes, help



customers who are interested in adopting animals, and shadowing the animal care and veterinary services staff at the Humane Society. The *Humane Society* also offers education programming and workshops for students of all ages with programs ranging from animal storytelling for young children to exploration of animal-related careers for secondary students.

Key Club

The Key Club is a club specifically for high school students to participate in local community service projects and develop leadership skills. It is the high school branch of the *Kiwanis International service club*. While it is an international organization, the community service projects are facilitated by a particular school's faculty leader of the key club. The type of volunteering or service work that students participate in is at the discretion of the faculty advisor and the project can have a range of focuses including supporting elderly people in one's local community, environmental projects, initiatives related to poverty alleviation, and tutoring.

Post-Secondary Volunteer Opportunities

It is not as common for students to take a gap year for volunteer or service programs in the United States as it is in other countries. However, some students choose to do this before starting their university education either domestically or abroad. Additionally, many universities have a culture of clubs and extracurricular activities, including volunteer and service-oriented activities.

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps is a program that was created by the federal government that is associated with the *Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)*. The goal of *AmeriCorps* is to encourage citizens to volunteer while working on projects with localized nonprofits and organizations that address poverty, environmental issues, and education. Through these programs, a person receives a small stipend and sometimes housing and if they are volunteering full-time, they must complete 1,700 hours of service within a ten-month period. If they are volunteering part-time, they must complete between 300 and 900 hours of service. Once a person has completed their service, they are eligible for a USD 6,095 for full time or USD 3,042 education award for part-time that they can use towards tuition for college or graduate school, as well as for student loans.

Political Advocacy Youth Volunteering

During middle school and high school, youth are able to get involved with volunteering through local organizations. Some schools build partnerships with organizations so that they can create a club or an avenue for their students to get involved with volunteering. These organizations can vary, but there are also some national organizations with local chapters that many students throughout the United States volunteer with. In addition to clubs and school-based organizations with which students participate, there are also several youth-based political advocacy organizations that have grown significantly over the years. These include the *Sierra Club Student Coalition*, the *Sunrise Movement*, and *March for our Lives*.

The Sierra Club

The *Sierra Club Student Coalition* was founded in 1991 and is a network of young people ages fourteen to thirty-five who have been organizing for climate, racial, and economic justice within the United States. The *Sierra Club Student Coalition* has Sprog, an intensive leadership and training program that teaches young people across the United States how to engage with political activism and organizing. It also hosts the *Climate Justice Academy*, a nine-week organizing fellowship for young people who then work on projects in their local communities related to climate justice. There are also popular education initiatives, as well as campaigns to promote investment in a Green New Deal and Black liberation from systemic anti-Black racism.

Sunrise Movement

The *Sunrise Movement* is another political advocacy organization for young people that advocates for climate justice in the United States that was founded in 2017. While it was initially created with the goal of pushing elected officials to support renewable energy, the scope of their initiatives and influence has grown substantially since its founding. Their campaigns have included advocating for a Green New Deal, a new government *Civilian Climate Corps* program, a just transition away from fossil

fuels that promotes good jobs, and supporting progressive political campaigns at the local and national level. Their national organization has four divisions focused on organizing, communications, partnerships along with politics, and operations. Additionally, they have over 400 local hubs in all fifty states.

March for Our Lives

March for Our Lives was an initiative that began in 2018 after a school shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, that killed seventeen people and injured another seventeen. On March 24th, 2018, the students organized a larger demonstration in Washington D.C. along with other cities around the U.S. to advocate for gun-control legislation. This demonstration included students from the Parkland school, as well as survivors from other school shootings around the United States, speaking out about their experience. The demonstration received significant public and celebrity support as well as funding. Since then, the group of students have participated in significant political advocacy with the goal of eliminating gun violence. Their policy priorities include eliminating the cultural glorification of guns, armed supremacy, political apathy and corruption, poverty, and the mental health crisis within the United States.



Education

Education is often mistakenly seen as a federal government-led aspect of society, but it is actually almost completely controlled by the states – and in particular local school districts and counties.



The powers that differentiate and enumerate whether the federal or state level has adjudicating control has been legislated over centuries, and is typically decided by the power of the purse – or in other words, by what the federal government will or will not fund at the local level. Basically, if the federal government comes up with a rule and states decide not to follow it, the federal government can deny an appropriation (not pay their annual budget) at their discretion. In trying to understand this complex relationship, it is helpful to think of it in this way – the federal government typically only gets involved in education when there are constitutional rights at risk. This means if there are any policies impacting a student or teacher’s constitutional protections, the federal government will typically intervene. It especially seeks to ensure that there is equal access to education. So while education is not a constitutional right, for the federal government it is deemed important enough to warrant constitutional protections.

The Secondary School System

Within K-12 education, there are 130,930 public schools, with 87,498 of the schools being elementary schools, 26,727 middle schools, 15,804 high schools, and 901 other types of schools.

In the USA, the school system is not graded according to performance levels (as in Germany, for example), but all young people attend a uniform type of school. The performance levels of individual students are determined in high school by the choice and completion of subjects and courses of different levels of difficulty and by corresponding grades.

The culture and level of resources of schools varies greatly depending on the type of school and the location, including city, suburban, town, or rural schools. Further, socioeconomic conditions within the communities that schools are located play a significant role in the experience of school youth. The four largest school districts in the United States are New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami-Dade, which are all city or urban school districts. As of the 2018-2019 school year, the national graduation rate from high school is 89%. However, this rate can vary greatly between schools, districts, and states. Additionally, the average student to teacher ratio in a class is sixteen students assigned to one teacher, but this can also vary depending on the challenges faced by the school. Districts with fewer resources tend to have schools with much larger class sizes. In the U.S. South, it is common to see classrooms with twenty-two to twenty-five students per class. Schools and districts with fewer resources tend to have much larger class sizes,

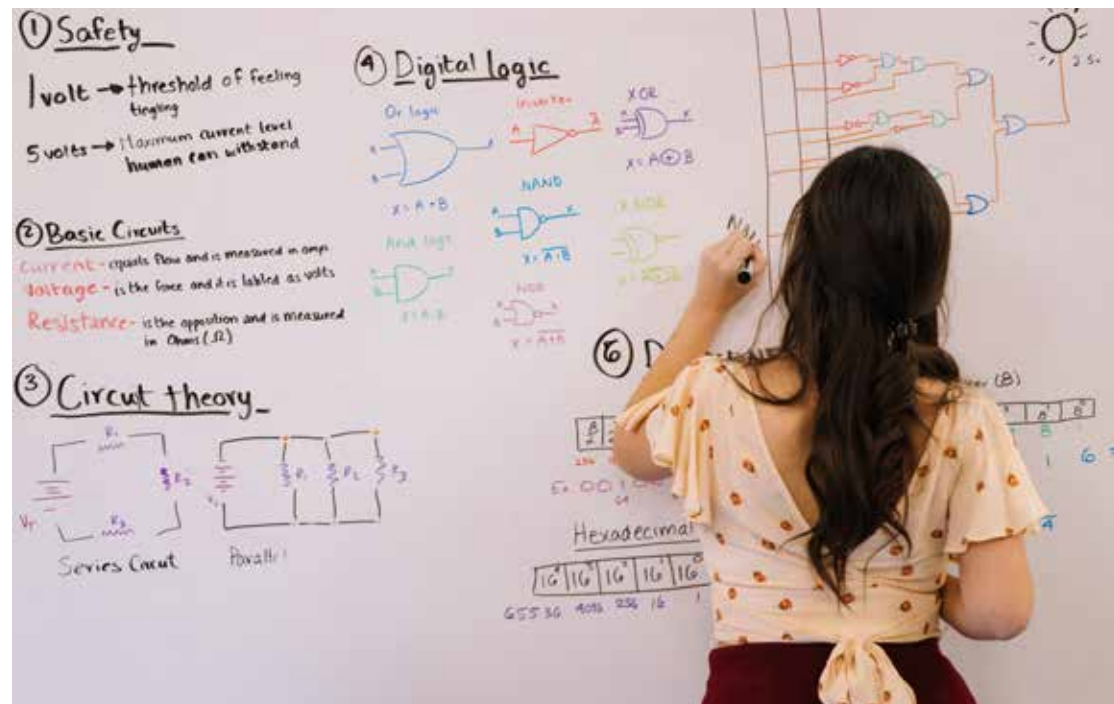
making it more difficult to receive the type of instruction and attention from teachers needed to thrive.

Compulsory education laws require youth to attend a public or state-accredited private school for a certain amount of years depending on the state. There are certain exceptions wherein a student does not have to be in an actual school, such as a student being homeschooled. Each state also has a unique mandate for when children must begin school and how old they must be before dropping out. Typically, youth must start school by the age of six and remain enrolled until they are at least sixteen. These laws were put in place not only to improve literacy rates but also to discourage the widespread abuse of child labor practices rampant during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While there are different mechanisms by which youth can persist through the education system, with various options to leave upon reaching the age of sixteen, society places a premium on acquiring a high school diploma – achieved by completing the twelfth grade and graduating. Many states offer work release permits that allow students to work limited hours outside of the school during normal school hours – via co-ops, internships, and apprenticeships, but the expectation to achieve a high school diploma is always there.

In general, the education system in the United States is very decentralized with every state and district within each state having different systems and standards. A typical course load for a U.S. high school student over their four years consists of four years of math and English, three years of science and history, and two years of a foreign language or physical education. There is also an option of pursuing computer or health studies.

Because each state has a different set of graduation and, therefore, curriculum standards, it is not possible to particularly say what an exact protocol would be throughout the United States. In general, the national standard is that students at a bare minimum will learn proficiencies in the areas of mathematical reasoning, language arts, social studies, and science. These subject areas are also reflected and covered on the *General Equivalency Degree* (GED), the alternative to the high school diploma. Many states require the completion of at least two semesters worth of language study, but in general this tendency is reflective of an admission requirement of post-baccalaureate institutions and, increasingly, schools are no longer requiring students to learn a language in high school. For those students who do undertake a language, the Romanic languages tend to be the most studied with nearly 70% of all foreign language classes being comprised





of Spanish or French. Chinese, German, and Latin are the only other world languages that account for more than 5% of the courses offered to secondary school students. German as a second language has trended in a negative direction since the year 2000.

Demographics within the U.S. Educational System

There were 49 million public school students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve in Fall 2020. It is also important to note that many school districts remain quite segregated by race and class within the United States. This is despite the fact that the country, as a whole, continues to become more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. As of 2020, the racial breakdown of the student population in U.S. high schools was the following:

- » 22.6 million White students
- » 13.8 million Hispanic students
- » 7.4 million Black students
- » 2.7 million Asian students
- » 2.2 million students of two or more races
- » 0.5 million Indigenous peoples of America / Alaska Native students
- » 0.2 million Pacific Islander students

Special Types of Schools Within the U.S. Education System

Magnet Schools

Magnet schools typically have a selective admissions process and require students to have prior skills and experiences in the special subjects that they will be focusing on. In addition to the typical curriculum of a public school, magnet schools also have a set curriculum for the program in which a student will specialize. This means that they would have more dedicated time during their school day for art, music, technology or the magnet program in which they are participating.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools that are privately managed, not exclusively under the care of a local school district. These schools receive some public funds, but typically receive private funding as well. While they must adhere to state standards to some extent, they also have the ability to create their own curriculum and systems that do not have to adhere to all of the same rules of public schools. For the most part, students are admitted into charter schools through a lottery system. Advocates of charter schools say that it gives parents more choice on the type of school that they would like to attend and the quality of education that their child can receive, particularly if the student lives in a neighborhood where the quality of their traditional public school is not very strong. However, there are also many critics of charter schools who believe that it privatizes a facet of American society that should be a public service and incentivizes not putting resources into making traditional public neighborhood schools stronger.

Private Schools

Youth also have the option to attend private schools which can be very costly for parents. There are religious private schools, the majority of which are Catholic or other forms of Christian or parochial schools. There are also private schools with particular pedagogical approaches such as Montessori schools. Additionally, there are boarding schools where students live where they go to school and away from home. Thirteen states and the District of Columbia (Washington D.C.) have school voucher programs. These programs give families state money in order for a student to attend a private school if their neighborhood school is not of strong quality. Much like charter schools, while advocates of these programs say that it gives parents more choice and options for their students, others argue that it takes resources away from the public schools that could potentially make the school better.

Home School

Another option for parents who do not want their students to attend public or private schools is homeschooling. As of 2021, 5% of students in the United States were homeschooled. This entails students being educated individually by their parents or a private teacher that comes to their home, instead of attending a school in their community. When students are home-schooled, their parents or teacher can follow the curriculum that they would learn in school, or they may choose to have students learn other subjects, such as music or art, which may not be offered at their local school. There are a variety of reasons why parents may choose to homeschool their child, including the desire to provide a very particular form of academic, moral, or religious instruction,

a concern for the social environment that a school may be offering, and the need to accommodate for special needs or medical conditions. Some parents believe they will be able to provide their child with a more rigorous or personalized education through homeschooling. However, one drawback is that it limits student exposure to being around their peers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more parents have opted to homeschool their child than ever before.

U.S. School Academics

Youth in the United States are also able to explore various academic and extracurricular interests. Unlike many school systems in Europe, college-bound students do not necessarily need to figure out their career path until college and can explore different disciplines in both high school and college. As such, there can be less pressure on young people to know exactly what their career path will be early on. Youth in college may not declare their major (college specialization) until their second year of college and can take different classes to help them decide what they would like to pursue. This allows youth some flexibility to figure out their career path and explore many different options.

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)

In an ever-changing, increasingly complex world, it is more important than ever that youth are prepared to bring knowledge and skills to solve problems, make sense of information, and know how to gather and evaluate evidence to make decisions. Pursuing this specialized type of education helps foster the type of people with skillsets needed to do the work of the future. These are the kinds of skills that youth develop in science, technology, engineering, and math, including computer science — disciplines collectively known as STEM. Future leaders and workers must understand and solve some of the complex challenges of today and tomorrow through STEM. A policy focus on STEM education is believed to meet the demands of the dynamic and evolving workforce, building youths' skills, content knowledge, and literacy in STEM fields.

Vo-Tech

Vocational-Technical Schools, or as they are usually called, vo-tech, is a type of trade school within U.S. high schools. Traditionally they have had several objectives, including providing youth with general employability skills and preparing them to enter employment in spe-





cific occupations. In more recent years, however, the goals of vocational education have expanded to include preparing youth for entry-level work as well as to help foster career advancement and entry into further education and training. For instance, educators have been called upon to integrate academic and vocational education. Most public U.S. high school students participate in vocational education. At one point in time, nearly all public high school graduates (97%) completed at least one vocational education course, and 87% completed at least one occupationally specific course. With the proliferation of postsecondary education in the United States, coupled with concerns around low-income youth of color being tracked into non-academic programs, however, these rates have gone down.

Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment

The Advanced Placement program offers students the opportunity to take college-level courses and exams in high school and earn college credit, advanced placement, or both at many colleges and universities in the U.S. and around the world. By earning college credit in high school and skipping introductory courses in college, youth are able to save time and money as they work toward a college degree. Similarly, dual enrollment refers to students being enrolled concurrently in two academic programs (high school and college), which allows them to earn introductory college credit. While these programs allow students to reduce their future college course load, it is telling that usually only higher socioeconomic students are able to enroll in these courses.

English Language Learners

Youth who do not speak English as a native language are referred to as *English Language Learners* (ELLs or ESL – English as a Second Language). As of 2021, there are approximately five million students in public schools in the United States who are English Language Learners. These youth can participate in language assistance programs to help ensure that they acquire the needed English proficiency while also meeting the academic content and scholastic standards that all students are expected to meet before graduating. It is hoped through participation in these types of programs that a young person's English language proficiency will improve while also further connecting them to the American society. This ultimately leads to improved educational outcomes.

Other School Aspects

Student Clubs

While there are no particular high school committees wherein students have voting power and, therein, autonomy on a school level, there are student councils where students can vote on class representatives. There are also extracurricular student clubs, such as *Fellowship of Christian Athletes* (religious athletic society) and *Delta Phi Alpha* (German National Honor Society) that offer a variety of activities that may or may not be organized by school officials. For school subjects, students can also form Math or History Clubs as well and branch off into academic competitive groups such as Debate Club or Sci-



ence Club. Finally, students can form clubs within their respective sports, band, drama, etc. teams as well.

School Holidays

Like most aspects of general education in the U.S., each state decides when students will have their holidays. So, while the school calendar dates in the United States can be somewhat similar such as Summer or Christmas break, many states celebrate completely different days, such as schools in the north celebrating *Columbus/Indigenous People's Day* or schools in the south celebrating *Mardi Gras* Holidays. The activities that youth engage in during these holidays vary tremendously and are often dependent on the socio-economic background of their family. Some students go on family trips and vacations, while other students are doing overtime at work. Further,

Summer Camps and study abroad trips are similarly often dependent on a youth's income background, though there are often scholarships available as well. Wealthier schools typically have the resources required to organize trips abroad, but typically trips abroad are organized by private organizations.

Social Services

Almost all high schools in the United States offer at least one social service to students. Approximately 20% of these youth nationwide received at least one social service during their time in school. Typically, low-income, high-poverty, schools were more likely than higher income schools to offer students at least one social service because of the higher incidence of socio-economic challenges. Further, larger schools were more likely than



small schools to be able to offer students at least one social service; and more city and suburban schools than rural schools offered students at least one social service. The most common type of social service offered to students was for general and mental health services or assistance to address material needs such as transportation, shelter, or clothing.

Influences on the U.S. Education System

While religion does not play a direct role within education in the United States, the political environment in the United States does have a tremendous impact on what is offered to students regarding topics ranging from sex education (abstinence vs. comprehensive) to how the world was created (creation vs. evolution). So while there

is no official, constitutionally mandated role for religion, because these topics are taught at the state's discretion, religion does impact the educational experience of youth in the United States.

There have been rising political tensions within education across the United States regarding various aspects of the history of the U.S. and its emerging reality. In 2021, there was tremendous tension regarding the usage of critical race theory (CRT) in the classroom. On one side, the events of especially the last decade have increased public awareness regarding issues such as housing segregation, the impacts of criminal justice policy, and the legacy of enslavement on Black Americans. CRT, which is an academic concept that is more than forty years old in reality, became one prism through which society tried to make sense of these historic inequities. The core idea behind the theory is that race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies. CRT posits that racism is part of everyday life, so people – white or nonwhite – who don't intend to be racist can nevertheless make choices that fuel racism. Critics on the other side claim that the CRT advocates discriminating against white people in order to achieve equity.

In another area of rising tension, at the start of the 2022 school year, school officials in states across the country began banning books about gay and trans experiences, in addition to removing LGBTQIA+ affirming posters and flags and disbanding gay-straight alliance (GSA) clubs. In school districts throughout the nation, students have attacked their queer classmates, while state lawmakers have filed hundreds of anti-LGBTQIA+ bills with many seeking to redefine lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students' places in U.S. schools. In the majority of cases, conservative school officials, lawmakers and parents say LGBTQIA+ issues do not belong in school because they are political and not age-appropriate for students. Conversely, queer youth and their families, along with LGBTQIA+ and allies, say that they feel they are being erased from the U.S. education system.

School Reflections

Reflections from high schools in New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans has a very unique school system within the United States both because of the effects of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 on the school system and the unique culture of the city. After Hurricane Katrina, the school system has become increasingly privatized with independent charter management organizations managing schools instead of a traditional public school system. Like many urban school systems, many youth live in communities where gun violence is prevalent, and they are more often concerned with avoiding being caught up in violence and breaking the cycle of poverty than being able to focus on school itself. Because of the nature of the charter school system in New Orleans, youth do not necessarily attend their neighborhood school and can be bused to an area on the other side of the city to attend school, which has major implications on their community socialization and sense of home. This

means that every school has students from all different parts of the city.

In addition, the New Orleans school system places more emphasis on music and arts, as well as sports, compared to others around the country. Music, particularly marching and brass band, are a very important part of the culture and youth can find genuine pathways to become professional musicians – in many ways reminiscent of a musical pathway in Europe. Many of the youth in New Orleans end up working right after high school and the majority of students who attend college in New Orleans will attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). While being in the band or other performing unit is perceived as “nerdy” or “uncool” in other parts of the United States, in New Orleans, people think of the band members as the “cooler” young people. Many young people in New Orleans schools also try to pursue sports scholarships for American football and basketball. The academic standards vary by state and Louisiana, like many states in the south of the United States, tends to



have lower academic standards with the standardized tests consisting of more basic content compared to states like New York, Maryland, California, and Virginia. This, of course, has tremendous impact on their life outcomes and potential.

Reflections from high schools in the Bronx of New York City

New York City has one of the strongest urban school systems in the country and is a city where teachers are paid a higher salary than average, which has positive impacts on the youth of the city. However, New York City also has a very segregated school system. There are several international high schools in the Bronx, a borough or area in the New York City school system, that has a lot of students from all over the world. The majority of these students are first-generation Americans or recently arrived immigrants. This means that the students are learning English and have a background in a variety of different languages and cultures. These schools are very diligent about making sure that all cultures and religions are honored and take Islamic and Jewish holidays into account more so than other school districts. New York City and State has a lot of programs to support students financially with college and students have the opportunity to visit colleges throughout the state where they are able to get financial aid during their junior and senior year. Many of these students are focused on being the person in their family that can create a better life after their parents or other family members have immigrated to the United States. These schools also tend to have fewer sports and music offerings than high schools in the south and more academic and cultural extracurricular clubs for students. Many schools in the Bronx of New York City, as well as other boroughs of New York City have a very diverse student population overall.

General Teacher's Perspective

A teacher can easily lose hope as they begin their day. In the classroom, they can be confronted with the reality of trying to educate a child who is two or three grades below the grade level where they are supposed to be in terms of academic capabilities. They are also concurrently trying to keep the child motivated who is highly intelligent and bright, but may also face a learning disability that they cannot get psychological treatment for. The only thing that unites all of their students is that each is impacted by poverty, because they teach at a Title I school, which is a designation for schools with the highest amount of poverty. They won't necessarily be able to have enough food to eat during the day if they don't

attend school. If they miss their school bus, they won't be able to get to school because their single parent is stuck at work and can't take off to bring them to school. All the while, the administrative demands of a school district are increasing every year. High stakes testing demands that teachers teach towards the test and not for general education. If classroom scores don't meet a certain threshold, a teacher faces being fired – even if there aren't enough pencils to give the students to write with for the day. It is not uncommon for teachers to move onto a different profession after 3-5 years because of the increasing role of testing and administrative tasks they must complete that take away from teaching. It is also not uncommon for teachers in Title I schools to become burned out by the workload and lack of support and resources.

Career and Employment

There are many pathways youth can follow post-graduation and regardless of situation, each youth is trying to find the decision that is right for them. Attending college after high school is not for everyone. Some youth choose to take a year or two off before continuing their education, while others jump right into the workforce.



Finding a job is often a challenge for youth in the United States. Young people must determine what careers are available, what their actual interests are, and what skills they have or need to develop within an employment system that is often not easy to navigate. Many tools and resources that allow young people to explore job opportunities come from the education system. However, there are also youth-focused non-profit organizations that work with schools or other community organizations to provide youth with employment resources.

The U.S. Department of Labor sponsors two resources that help youth identify potential career pathways. One of them is *Career One-Stop*, which is a website that provides a range of career-exploration help such as up-to-date information on job salary and benefit information along with related education and training opportunities. The website also has job search tools, resumes, and interview resources, in addition to people and local institutions to help jobseekers virtually. Further, the *Department of Labor* runs the *American Job Centers (AJCs)*, also known as *OneStop Centers*, which provide job referrals, counseling, and other supportive

services to help with both job search and location of local training and education resources and opportunities.

Transition into Employment

Youth in the United States are usually able to explore various academic and extracurricular interests while in school. In college, they may not declare their major until their second year of college and can take different classes to help them decide what they would like to pursue. This allows youth some flexibility to figure out their career path.

Students who pursue vocational career paths have less flexibility and receive a more specialized training that directs them into one specific career trajectory. However, there is generally less rigidity in the education system in regard to youth having a set path compared to other countries.

Overall, youth pursue careers in teaching and education, nursing and medicine, law, film, graphic design, computer science, engineering, service and hospitality, and more. Howe-



ver, there have been challenges with the job-market for youth in the United States. For those who pursue some post-secondary education, their earning potential is increased and tends to be much higher than those who do not, but all too often employers feel as if these inexperienced individuals have to prove their worth. As such, many youths increasingly attain jobs for which they may be overqualified and underpaid.

Some of the most popular vocational pathways include healthcare particularly nursing and other ancillary health services, heavy industry in manufacturing, and increasingly in transportation and logistics. The popular fields are typically heavily influenced by the pay on offer and is also impacted by the ease for students to connect to on-ramps into the career fields. For those students who do not pursue a vocational or higher education path, some of the more popular jobs include going into retail services as a cashier or stocker, working in the food industry as a waitress or in fast food, or assorted fields such as a gas station attendant or delivery driver. Unfortunately, there does not tend to be many support for students entering these areas, which commonly results in these low-income jobs becoming careers for many adults in the United States – fueling much of the inequitable realities so many face.

GED

The alternative for approximately 15% of the students who do not graduate, achieving a General Equivalency Degree (GED) is also possible, but society does not look as favorably on individuals with this type of finishing degree. Acquiring a GED is different for each state – some have unique requirements regarding which subtests (areas of study) a person has to pass along with the requisite passing score. Also, the length of time required to learn for the test can range from three months to a year, but not all states require a course of study. Ultimately, it all leads to a student taking the GED exam, which can be retaken as many times as an individual desires. Increasingly, many states are also attaching Career Readiness assessments to the GED process – which helps these students transition into jobs and careers.

Apprenticeship

Youth apprenticeships are work-based learning programs designed for high school students, but all youth can participate. While some consider the certificates offered by apprenticeship programs as a type of new 4-year degree, the United States does not have an official certificate that serves as an alternative to college, though there is a lot of energy around trying to change that reality. Apprenticeships generally incorporate the key elements of the standard apprenticeship model, including paid workplace experience and related technical instruction. These apprenticeship programs are typically for youth between the ages of sixteen to twenty-four and combine academic and technical classroom instruction with work experience through the program. It provides

the foundation for youth to choose among multiple pathways – to enroll in college, begin full-time employment, or a combination. Youth apprenticeships provide opportunities for youth to experience, and gain skills in, a real work environment as well. Simultaneously, they give businesses a chance to inspire and develop a new generation of talent.

Military

Youth can opt to join the military at the age of seventeen. Within the United States military, one can choose or be accepted into the following branches: the Army, the Marine Corps, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard. In order to become a member of the military, a young person must take the *Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery* (ASVAB) exam. The results that one receives on this exam, as well as one's physical fitness, education level, and eyesight will help determine the type of job and branch where a person will be placed. If a person has been on active duty in the military for at least two years, they are eligible for financial support for tuition and other educational expenses through the *Montgomery GI Bill*. As such, the military can often be a potential professional pathway for youth in poverty who would like to find a way to finance their education, travel, and make their way up the socioeconomic ladder.

Student Debt

More than half of High-School graduates go on to attend University or College. Currently, many young people must take out student loans in order to attend college because the costs are so high which is not something that many of their parent's generation had to do. Student loan borrowers in the United States owe a collective USD 1.75 trillion in federal and private student loan debt as of April 2022. Forty-three million Americans have student loan debt — which is one in eight Americans (13%). Those ages twenty-five to thirty-four are the most likely to hold student loan debt, but the greatest amount is owed by those thirty-five to forty-nine — which is more than USD 600 billion. Among all borrowers, women typically borrow more for college compared with men (and attain more degrees). And Black students borrow more often and greater amounts compared with all other races and ethnicities, according to federal data.

Rules and Regulation for Youth Employment

There is no federal law nor mandate regarding work permits for youth, but child labor laws and rules limit how many hours adolescent youth can work in a day, along with when a youth can work, and in which jobs a youth can work. These rules vary depending on the youth's age and states also have different rules and regulations.

Employers are allowed to pay a minimum wage of USD 4.25 an hour to employees who are under twenty years of age during the first ninety consecutive calendar days after initial employment. While the law contains certain protections for these youth employees and also prohibits employers from displacing any current employee in order to hire someone at the youth minimum wage, very few are willing to work for such low wages.





Youth commonly hold minimum wage jobs and because this wage has been stuck at USD 7.25 per hour in many states, there is not much economic mobility for them without higher education. The higher end of the minimum wage in states such as California, Washington, and Oregon is between USD 13.50 and USD 15.00/hour. For the *Baby Boomer* generation, it was more feasible to be able to live on the minimum wage, while it is not a livable wage for young people today. This shift has created a dynamic of misunderstanding between generations that has resulted in many political battles.

Youth Unemployment

Today, young Americans ages sixteen to twenty-four are experiencing unemployment rates that are at least twice the national average. As of February 2022, the youth unemployment rate was slightly over 8%. Youth unemploy-

ment has been a persistent and growing problem in the United States for decades, reaching a more than fifty-year high in the wake of the Great Recession in 2007 and 2008. Youth are often unable to find full-time positions or opportunities that match their skills or draw on their formal job training or education. The U.S. employment system also struggles to integrate younger generations into the workforce with paid opportunities. Internships are common for youth, especially those pursuing undergraduate studies, which limits both the type of youth able to participate (higher income) and where students are able to intern (typically office, high skill).

Earn and learn programs such as apprenticeships are not as readily available in the U.S. as they are in Europe. Additionally, many young people must take out student loans in order to attend college. This increases the financial burden associated with attending college and trying



to find a job after college. If they are able to find a job, many entry-level jobs do not pay young people enough to be able to live and to pay back their student loans.

Youth unemployment in general tends to ebb and flow as the economy shifts, just as the general labor market does, but in general young people in the United States always have a higher unemployment rate. Generally, the youth population in the United States has a large portion of individuals who are neither working nor actively looking for work because they are in some sort of school or training program. Therefore, the national unemployment rate for this group is often higher because young people have little to no labor market experience, and frequently lack the relevant skills to do the types of in demand jobs the economy asks for. Businesses also face higher costs of investment in more seasoned employees and lower costs of termination with younger workers,

which results in young people being the first to go if a company is trying to reduce their labor costs. It should be said, however that this reality is changing with the changing demographics facing much of the world, but especially in the United States. Young people opting out of, or exiting the labor force, is an issue of concern, particularly when they do not go on to undertake some form of training or other productive activity that a retiring generation of workers is no longer able to do.

International Education and Work for Youth

There are several organizations and government programs that allow students to live and study abroad during their secondary education. Students typically do not have opportunities to study abroad until they are in high school and the majority of programs are short-term travel programs that last between five to fourteen days.



However, there are a handful of programs that allow high school students to spend a semester or year abroad. These programs can be costly for families and tend to be most accessible to students whose families have the financial ability to pay for the exchange trips. Otherwise, schools may subsidize the programs for students or support students and families with fundraising initiatives. There is a larger number of university study abroad program options and some students spend a semester or academic year abroad during college. However, these programs can also be costly and less accessible for low-income students.

United States Government Programs for International Youth Education

In addition to study abroad service providers and non-profit organizations, the United States government has two programs to encourage students to study abroad in high school. These programs are the *National Security Language Initiative for Youth* (NSLI-Y) and *YES Abroad*.

National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y)

National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) is a United States government program that provides intensive language study abroad for high school students, particularly for languages that are in the national security interest of the United States. NSLI-Y offers programs for Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Korean, Farsi, Russian, and Turkish. These programs can take place during the course of an academic year for eight to ten months or during the summer for six to seven weeks. Students must go through a rigorous application process in order to participate in this program.

Yes Abroad

YES Abroad is a program administered by the federal government that gives high school students and recent high school graduates the ability to spend an academic year abroad in Muslim majority countries. Students live with a host family and attend a local school and have a full immersion experience during their year. They are meant to teach the people in their host-country about life in the United States.

The program is extremely competitive, and the *YES Abroad* program pays for airfare, room and board, tuition, and other expenses.

Other Programs

EF Educational Tours

EF Educational Tours was founded in 1965 and is a common choice for teachers to work with for educational trips abroad. EF has programs in 114 countries and teachers can choose a tour that aligns with their academic curriculum in these countries. This can include programs on art history, French or Spanish language and culture, and nature and ecosystem oriented tours. These

programs can take place in one country or several countries. EF also has service-learning programs where students can travel abroad to do volunteer work.

The Experiment in International Living

The *Experiment* is another very popular program for international education among American youth. It is administered by *World Learning* and was founded in 1932. The *Experiment* offers thirty high school summer abroad programs in twenty-six countries with programming on language and culture, peacebuilding, ecology, marine biology, and other political or social justice oriented themes. Students apply to the individual program that they are interested in and attend the program with stu-



dents from schools all over the country. Typically, these programs last for approximately one month during the summer. The *Experiment* also offers low-income students scholarship opportunities to participate in these programs to make them more accessible.

The Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE)

The *Council on International Educational Exchange* (CIEE) is an international education program that has both university and high school study abroad programs. CIEE was founded in 1947 and has programs in over forty countries. At the high school level, they have four-week long summer programs focused on arts, culture, language, sustainability, along with other topics. CIEE also offers full semester long programming for high school students where students can enroll in a high school abroad for one trimester, one semester, or two semesters for a full academic year. Lastly, CIEE offers gap year programming abroad where students can live abroad before starting their university education.

Envoys

Envoys is a student travel program that works with predominantly private upper-class high schools. Through this program, teachers decide what type of curriculum and travel experience either abroad or domestically that they would like the students to have and *Envoys* creates the program customized for the school, teachers, and students. *Envoys* programs typically last between five and ten days and can take place during the school year or during the summer. These programs have topics such as civil rights and Black liberation, sustainability and ecology, and immigration.

Global Kids

Global Kids is an educational non-profit based in New York City and Washington D.C. The organization facilitates global education and leadership development programs for students in low-income high schools. While much of the programming takes place in their partner schools, *Global Kids* also has facilitated international travel experiences with students for conferences and events to Costa Rica, Morocco, South Africa, Japan, Peru, and several other countries.

One World Now

One World Now is an international education non-profit based in Seattle, Washington. The organization hosts after-school programming for cultural and language learning, particularly for languages that the United States government deem as “high-need” languages such as Korean, Arabic, and Chinese. They also host short-term travel programs for students to Morocco, South Korea, Tunisia, Russia, and China. *One World Now* works only with students in the Seattle Public School system and works to promote language and international education to low-income students.



Further Information

Relevant Policy Groups and Organizations

Children's Bureau

Children's Bureau – The Children's Bureau partners with federal, state, tribal and local agencies to improve the overall health and well-being of our nation's youth and families. The Bureau uses its annual budget of almost USD 8 billion, to provide support and guidance for programs. They participate in a variety of projects that seek better health outcomes.

Court Appointed Special Advocates/Guardians ad Litem

Court Appointed Special Advocates/Guardians ad Litem – The National CASA/GAL Association, together with state and local member programs, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so every child who has experienced abuse or neglect can be safe, have a permanent home, and the opportunity to thrive. CASA/GAL volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for children's best interests. They stay with each case until it is closed and the child is in a safe, permanent home. They serve children from birth through the age defined by state statute as the limit to youth remaining in care.

Health and Human Services

Health and Human Services – The Division of Children and Youth Policy focuses on policies related to the well-being of children and youth. Projects range from quick-turnaround policy analyses to large-scale experimental studies, and major policy initiatives. Key areas include early childhood, early care and education, home visiting,

youth development and risky behaviors, parenting and family support, child welfare and foster care, linkages with physical and mental health, methods for evaluating what works, and strategies for improving research and data in these areas.

National League of Cities

National League of Cities – The NLC serves as a national coordinator of youth councils and helps grow both the breadth and depth of youth programming. Their mission is to help youth participate in community service and charity. The NLC also helps to develop and coordinate events, programs, and products that celebrate young people, and that enable them to help others. They also often collaborate with other institutional partners, especially cities looking to build a new council. Finally, the NLC estimates there are over 400 youth councils within the United States.

Philanthropy

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Annie E. Casey Foundation – The Annie E. Casey Foundation is devoted to developing a brighter future for millions of children and young people with respect to their educational, economic, social and health outcomes. Their work focuses on strengthening families, building stronger communities, and ensuring access to opportunity, because children, youth and young adults need all three to succeed. They advance research and solutions to overcome the barriers to success, help communities demonstrate what works and influence decision makers to invest in strategies based on solid evidence.



Children's Defense Fund

Children's Defense Fund – The Children's Defense Fund champions policies and programs to improve the odds for America's children. They focus their advocacy on the whole child because of the belief that children don't come in pieces. They seek to end child poverty, give every child a healthy start, a quality early childhood experience, a level education playing field, and safe families and communities free from violence – with special attention to children involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Jack Kent Cooke Foundation

Jack Kent Cooke Foundation – The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation is the largest scholarship provider in the United States and is dedicated to advancing the education of exceptionally promising youth who have financial need. It is a private, independent, foundation that offers some of the largest scholarships in the U.S., comprehensive counseling and other support services to youth from eighth grade to graduate school. Since 2000 it has awarded over USD 175 million in scholarships to nearly 2,300 students and more than USD 97 million in grants to organizations that serve outstanding low-income students.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

W.K. Kellogg Foundation – The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 to “administer funds for the promotion of the welfare, comfort, health, education, feeding, clothing, sheltering and safeguarding of children and youth, directly or indirectly, without regard to sex, race, creed or nationality.” The Foundation helps set po-

licy that promotes the health, happiness, and well-being of children. The Foundation has large footprints in Michigan, New Mexico, and Mississippi.

Imprint

Published by:



International Youth Service of the
Federal Republic of Germany

Godesberger Allee 142–148
D-53175 Bonn

Tel.: +49 (0)228-95 06-0
E-Mail: usa@ijab.de
Internet: www.ijab.de

Responsible:

Daniel Poli

Author:

Deeneaus Polk

Editors:

Elena Neu, Natali Petala-Weber,
Cathrin Piesche, Julia Weber

Layout:

blickpunkt x, Köln

Photo credits:

All photos used in this publication were obtained from the platform unsplash.com. Individual credits:
Cover: Monika Kozub; S. 5: Siora Photography; S. 7: Pin Adventure Map; S. 9: Kevin Lanceplaine; S. 11: Leah Hetteberg; S. 12: Sam Balye; S. 13: Andrea Tummons; S. 14: Sharon McCutcheon; S. 15: Yomex Owo; S. 16: Rick L; S. 17: Elliott Reyna; S. 18: Heather Mount; S. 19: Nathan Dumlao; S. 21: Louis Velazquez; S. 22: Mackenzie Cruz; S. 23: Christina@wocintechchat.com; S. 25: Barney Yau; S. 26: Joe Montanari; S. 27: Joao Francisco; S. 29: National Cancer Institute; S. 31: Julian Wan; S. 32: Mael BALLAND; S. 33: Desola Lanre-Ologun; S. 34: The Tampa Bay Estuary Program; S. 35: Alex Radelich; S. 37: Clarissa Watson; S. 38 Steven Abraham; S. 39 und 40: Jeswin Thomas; S. 41: Riley McCullough; S. 42: Aiden Craver; S. 44: Kenny Eliason; S. 47: Jeswin Thomas; S. 48: Saulo Mohana; S. 49: Andre Hunter; S. 50-51: Marcel Heil; S. 53: Johan Van Wambeke; S. 54: Megan Mierle; S. 57: NASA.

October 2022

Funded by:



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth

