Study highlights wide gap in youth opportunity between cities and towns in Connecticut

*Report identifies income, residential segregation, housing stability, and school discipline as key factors*

NEW HAVEN – Every child deserves ample opportunities to achieve their full potential. In a new study mapping opportunities and outcomes for older youth across the state, Connecticut Voices for Children finds great disparities between towns. In the report, the “Connecticut Youth Opportunity Atlas,” the authors analyze town-by-town data to map outcomes related to opportunity such as teen birth rates and academic achievement. This analysis helps to explain the key factors that set the stage for youth opportunity within communities. Additionally, by examining outliers among otherwise similar communities, they identify successful policies and practices to improve these youth outcomes.

The report finds significant disparities in communities across Connecticut based on demographic factors, including population density, residential segregation, and average income. Youth growing up in dense, low-income areas and areas with segregated populations of racial minorities are more likely to struggle, while youth growing up in wealthier rural and suburban areas with predominantly white residents have more positive outcomes. These community characteristics correlate with factors that may negatively impact youth throughout their lives: teen birth rates, youth disconnection, and juvenile arrests.

The analysis also sheds light on specific factors driving these disparities. For example, housing stability predicts lower teen birth rates and high school dropouts being more likely to find employment. Suspension rates predict juvenile arrests and youth disconnection (youth dropping out of school and being unable to find employment).

“The report provides more—and sometimes unexpected—details on which towns have positive youth outcomes despite commonly held expectations,” says Dr. Lauren Ruth, Youth Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children and one of the study’s main authors. “We see that opportunity is not just a matter of wealthy suburbs and challenged cities, but of a complex web of factors related to family stability and school policy.”

Several towns have better outcomes than would be expected from their community demographic factors, having adopted policies and best practices across multiple agencies and institutions to improve youth outcomes. “We see positive outliers – New Haven has made great strides on limiting exclusionary school discipline, while New London has adopted very effective programs to reduce teen pregnancies,” says
Alexandra Ricks, Associate Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices. “Targeted local interventions have the potential to be very influential tools to expand youth opportunity.”


About Connecticut Voices for Children:

Connecticut Voices for Children is a research-based policy think tank based in New Haven, Connecticut. Our Mission is to promote the well-being of all of Connecticut’s young people and their families by advocating for strategic public investments and wise public policies. To achieve these objectives, Connecticut Voices for Children produces high quality research and analysis, promotes citizen education, advocates for policy change at the state and local level and works to develop the next generation of leaders.