

Opportunity Youth in North Carolina



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Who Are Opportunity Youth?

Teens and young adults ages 16 to 24 who are neither in **school** nor **working**

“**Opportunity youth** often face hardships, but they also report having feelings of responsibility for their futures, having educational and career goals, and being optimistic about achieving their goals.”

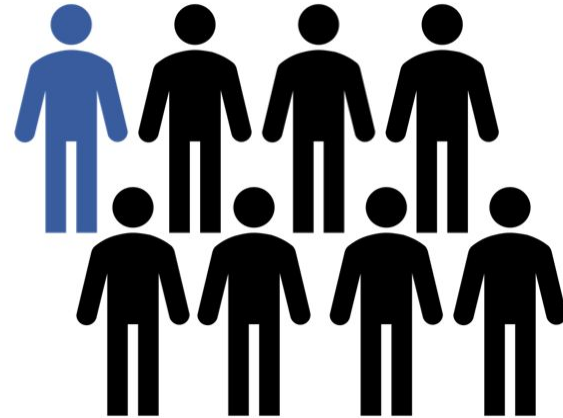
– *Youth.Gov*

155,000

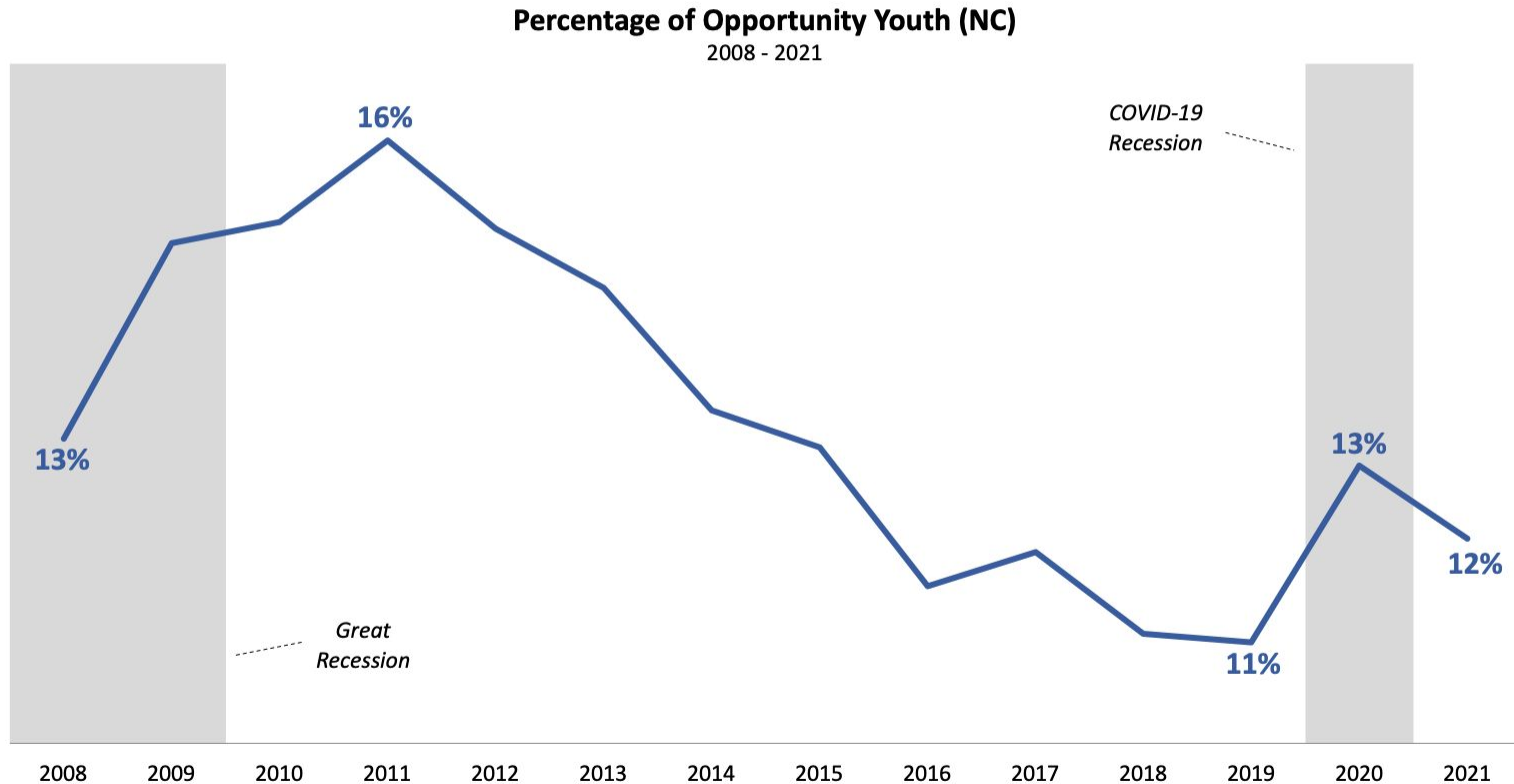
NC 16–24-year-olds neither in school nor working in 2021

1 in 8

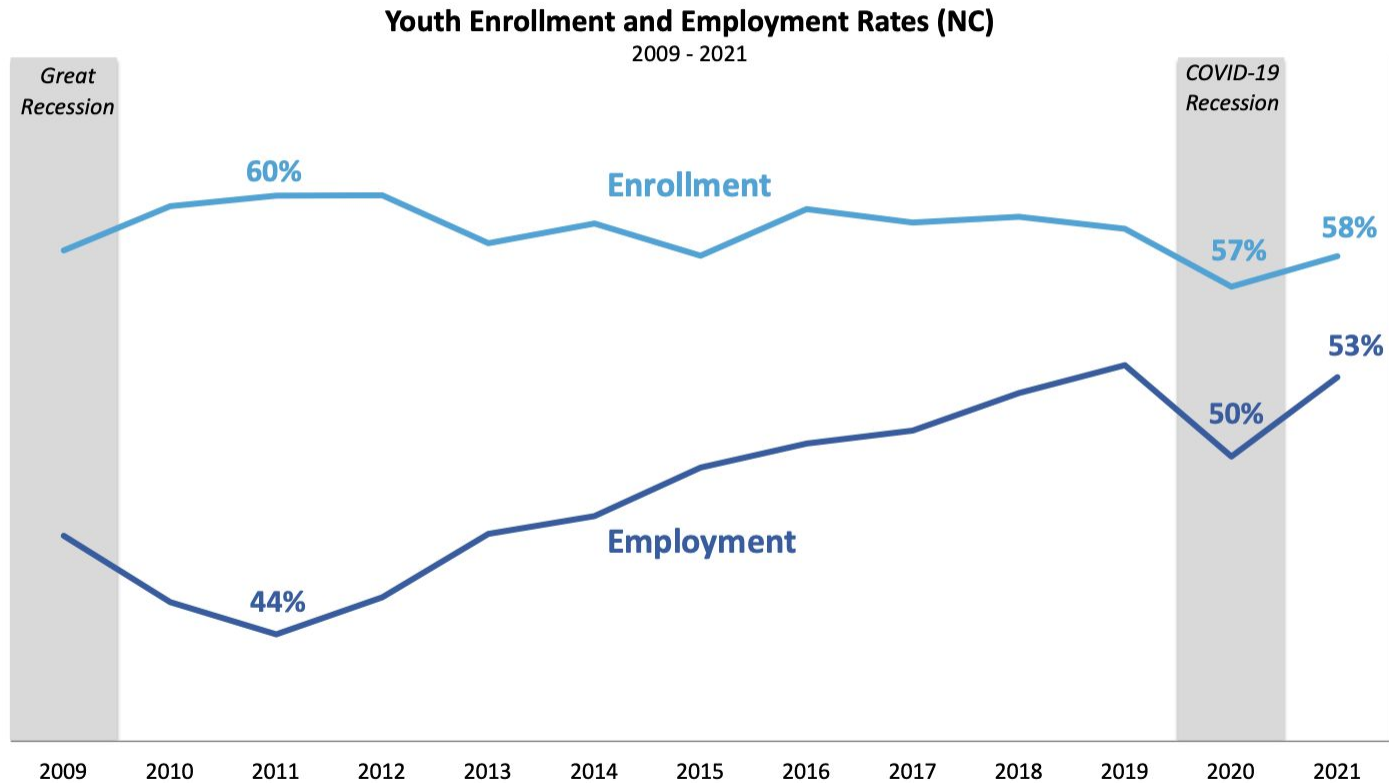
NC youth



A Decade of Progress and COVID-19 Disruption

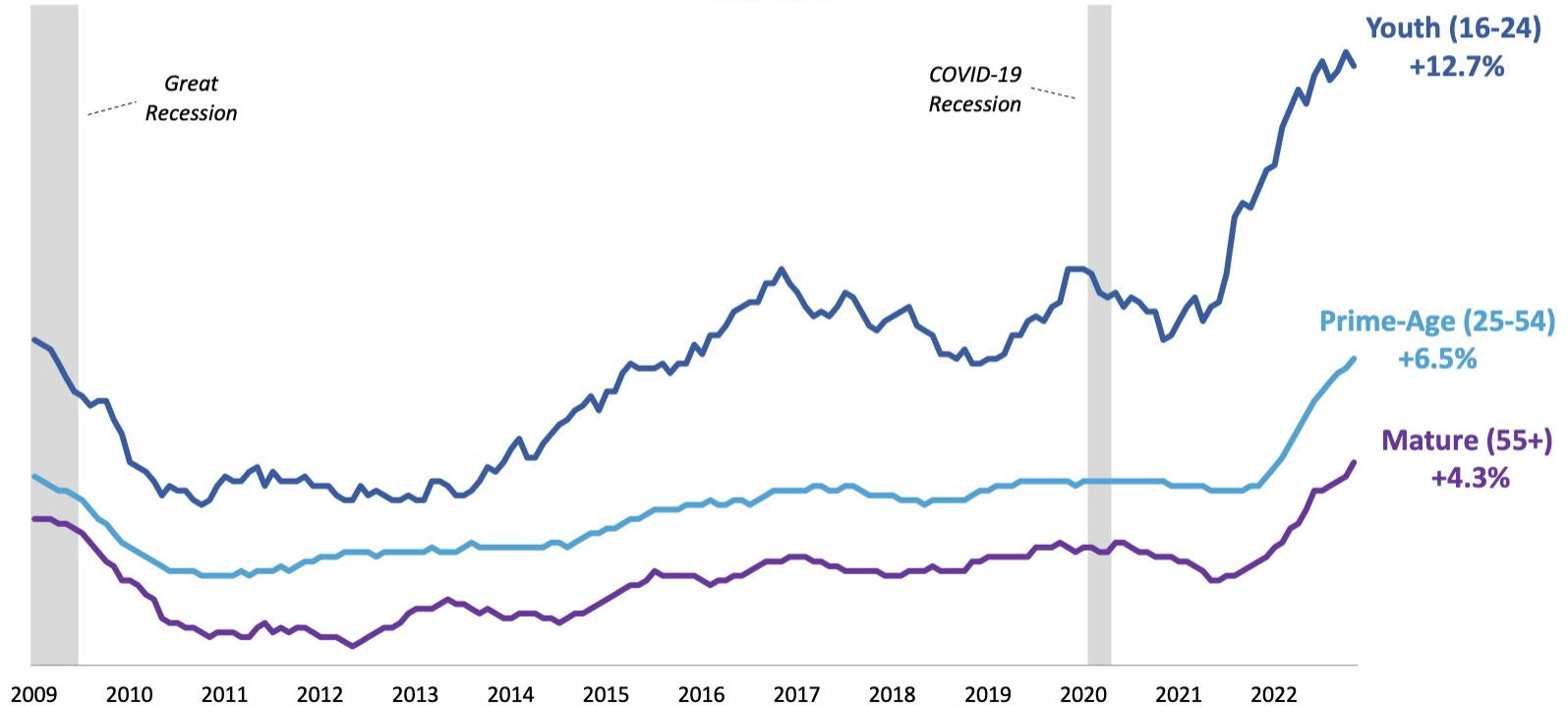


Employment-Driven Youth Connection



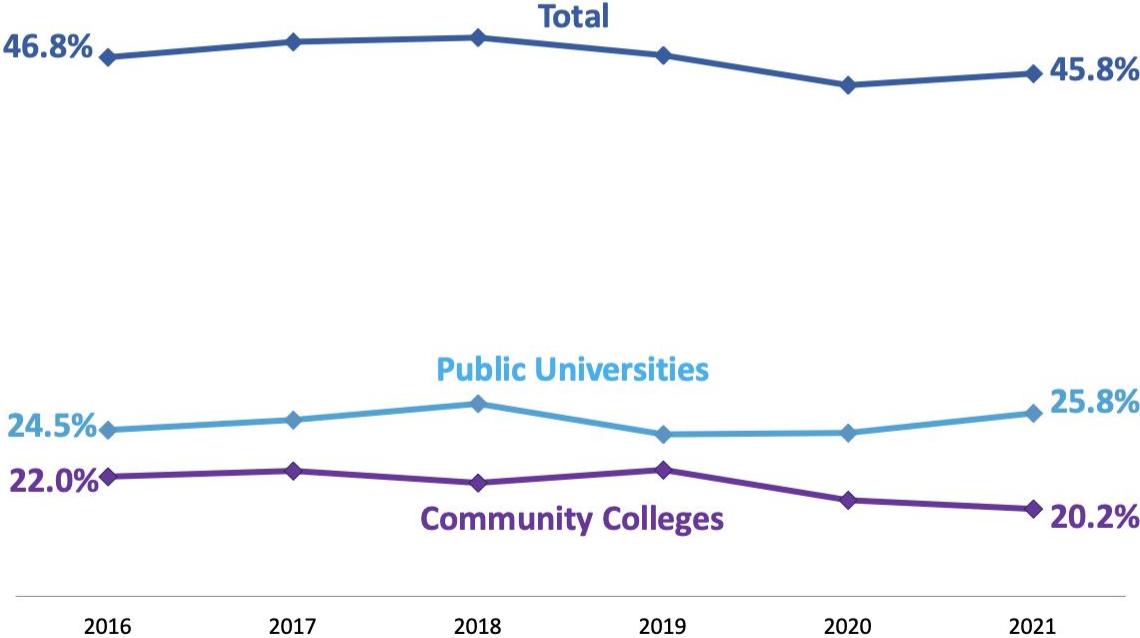
Young Workers See Biggest Wage Gains

12-Month Moving Averages of Median Wage Growth
2009 - 2021



Declining Immediate College-Going Rates

Percentage of Public High School Graduating Cohort Enrolled
(Fall Semester After Graduation)
2016-2021



Opportunity Youth Takeaways

COVID-19 increased disconnection, but there was a **quick rebound** by 2021

- The **rapid economic recovery** contrasted with the post-Great Recession period
- **Fast wage growth** fueled **employment opportunities** for youth

Education challenges remain but present an opportunity

- **Long-term career readiness** remains forefront in the post-pandemic era
- **Work-based learning** alongside more traditional education routes

Community action and **social capital** are critical for opportunity youth engagement

Thank you!

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