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Report paints dismal picture of youth joblessness in Chicago

By Greg Hinz

You just have to drive around and keep your eyes open to learn that the lack of jobs is particularly clobbering kids in certain neighborhoods, most of them African-American areas of the South and West sides.

A new report released today by the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois does a pretty good job of putting the numbers together. (You can read the full report at the end of this story.) For instance, only 15 percent of African-Americans ages 16 to 19 in Chicago are employed. Roughly 3 in 10 black young adults in the Chicago area lack either a high school diploma or a job, and are not in school trying to get either.

So, it's a bad situation, with a huge social cost: an estimated \$9.5 billion lost in projected tax revenue alone.

Nonetheless, there are real signs of progress. In some key ways, both young blacks and Latinos here are doing better overall than nationally. The progress tends to be in the 16-to-19 cohort, and it tends to be focused among women, not men.

To put that a different way, where the system really falls apart is in reaching young black men immediately after their school years.

Some specifics:

Among Chicagoans 16 to 19, a higher share of blacks and Latinos are either in school or at work with a high school diploma here than elsewhere in the country. Cook County also is somewhat better off than the rest of the country. That perhaps suggests local public schools indeed are doing a better job of curbing dropout rates among teenagers.

But that changes in the next age group, 20 to 24. While Latinos here still are much better off than their peers nationally, that's not true among African-Americans. In fact, they're somewhat worse off.

How come? A look at other data over recent



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decades provides some clues.

Between 1960 and 2015, blacks in both Cook County and Chicago proper gained ground relative to whites, slashing the share of teens who were neither working nor in school. But that was much more prevalent among women than men. For instance, among black women in that period here, the number who were neither employed nor in school dropped from 34.8 percent in 1960 to around 10 percent by 2015. But among men, the decline was a modest: 22 percent vs. 15.9 percent.

And that progress largely vanishes among 20- to 24-year-olds, with blacks losing ground relative to whites and Latinos, especially but not totally among men.

That tells me that jobs are hard to get even for the kids who stick it out in high school and get their diploma. Indeed, the Great Cities folks point to a heavy concentration of most jobs in the central area of the city, which requires a long commute from many South and West side neighborhoods, and to the lingering impact of the last recession.

One reason for optimism: The raw numbers of young adults we're talking about who are neither employed nor in school aren't that large in absolute terms—perhaps 26,000

combined in the city and county together. In a country that creates 200,000 jobs nationally a month, that's a solvable problem.

The report was prepared for the Alternative Schools Network.

For the full report, *The High Costs for Out of School and Jobless Youth in Chicago and Cook County*, by the University of Illinois at Chicago Great Cities Institute [click here](#).