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## Youth unemployment stings south suburbs far worse than north

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Disturbing unemployment trends among Chicago youth are mirrored in some Cook County suburbs, including a stark north-south divide.

Nearly 40 percent of black 20- to 24-year-olds were both out of school and out of work in Cook County in 2014, compared with 15 percent of Hispanics and 8 percent of whites in those age groups, according to a report released Tuesday by the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The numbers are particularly troubling for young black men, 45 percent of whom were neither working nor in school in Cook County, compared to with 17.7 percent of Latino men and 9.1 percent of white men, the report found.

That's far worse than the national average of 32.1 percent for black men in that age group, as well as what was found in New York City, Los Angeles County and Harris County, which includes Houston, according to the report.

The statistics echo Chicago data released in January by the institute that showed 47 percent of black men in their early 20s are neither in school nor working.

The report was prepared for a hearing Tuesday before the Cook County Board's Workforce, Housing and Community Development Committee that will include testimony by young people.

Cook County Commissioner Bridget Gainer, D-Chicago, said she called for the hearing because she was struck by the January report for Chicago that showed the areas with highest youth unemployment also were experiencing the most violence.

The intent is to get the information in front of county lawmakers as they plan their next budget and to get an update on the summer jobs plan from the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, which administers federal funds



Johnathan Allen, 24, from left, David Elam, 25, and Antonio Monix, 23, testify at a hearing on youth unemployment hosted by the Chicago Urban League on Jan. 25, 2016. (Zbigniew Bzdak / Chicago Tribune)

for such programs.

"This has been a very difficult year for us in Chicago, and as we approach the summer, are we adequately prepared to provide jobs for young people?" she said. "We'd rather (look at) that in March than July."

Karin Norington-Reaves, CEO of the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, told the commissioners that her organization's funding "allows us to barely make a dent."

The partnership's current budget is just under \$60 million, about half of it federal funding and the rest from private donors and foundations. She said there are about 200,000 disconnected youth in Chicago and it costs about \$4,500 to serve each young person, services that include preparing youth for jobs.

The federal money is limited to year-round programming, so the partnership does not have a large-scale summer program, Norington-Reaves said.

The One Summer Chicago program administered by the city expects to employ about 25,000 young people this summer, said Mary Ellen Messner, deputy commissioner of youth services at the city's Department

of Family and Support Services. There were 66,000 applicants last year.

The department, which has 163 private employer partners, has also applied for a \$2 million federal grant to put 300 more out-of-work and out-of-school youth into summer jobs, with the intent it would become year-round employment, Messner said.

Like in Chicago, Cook County youth unemployment statistics show great disparities between communities to the north and south.

A cluster of suburbs in southern Cook County had the greatest concentration of out-of-work youth, with Harvey, Markham, Hazel Crest, Sauk Village and Ford Heights showing joblessness rates of over 60 percent for 20- to 24-year-olds.

By contrast, a cluster of northwest suburbs showed low joblessness rates of 30 percent or less among 20 to 24-year-olds, including Palatine, Inverness, Schaumburg, Arlington Heights, Elk Grove Village, Streamwood, Hoffman Estates, Mount Prospect and Wheeling.

The joblessness rate includes people who may be in school.

Joblessness is concentrated in “economically abandoned sectors of Cook County resulting from deindustrialization,” the authors write in the report, and reflect “the long-term impacts of 40 years of economic decisions by portions of the private sector seeking to be more competitive in the global market.”

The hardest-hit areas seem to be those that most relied on manufacturing jobs, study co-author Teresa Cordova said.

“The strategy of bringing back jobs is also bringing back these areas that have really suffered as manufacturing left,” she said.

While Cook County’s black youth showed the worst employment rates compared with blacks in the other localities in the study, Latinos and whites fared better in Cook County than the comparison regions.

For example, 12 percent of Latino 20- to 24-year-olds in Cook County were out of school and out of work, better than the 15.2 percent national average for Latinos, 19 percent in New York City and 14 percent in both Los Angeles and Harris County.

Cordova said further study needs to look at the types of jobs and incomes people are getting, as previous research has shown Latinos make up a lot of the working poor.

In addition to summer jobs, the report points to criminal justice reform, apprenticeships, incentives to bring anchor employment centers to disinvested neighborhoods, and small business incubators within neighborhoods as strategies to combat youth unemployment.

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*An earlier version of this article included incorrect jobless percentages in the second paragraph. The figures have been corrected.*

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