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Impact MetroWest Regional Overview

Summary of Key Trends

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Prepared for:

The Foundation for MetroWest

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IMPACT METROWEST

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Introduction

The Foundation for MetroWest engaged the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) in December 2018 to develop a community indicators website and conduct a stakeholder engagement process for the MetroWest region of Massachusetts. Both efforts were intended to inform community efforts and grantmaking, while also building a strong resource for donors, nonprofits and community members to better understand the region's strengths and challenges, and to create solutions.

The website compiles 59 indicators and analysis to help community leaders and the public use quantitative data to better understand their region. The engagement process is an important qualitative complement to the website, providing nuance, context and themes that are difficult to capture with numbers and statistics alone.

ImpactMetroWest.org launched in January 2020 and was updated in May 2022 with refreshed data and new indicators including health insurance coverage and economic indicators related to equity and inclusion (business ownership and professionals in the workforce). Indicator categories for the website are Children & Families, Community Life, Demographics & Diversity, Economy & Workforce, Education, Financial Security and Racial Equity.

Regional Overview

Pandemic Impacts Reverberate

The COVID pandemic has had profound effects on economic security, education, housing stability and mental health, throughout the nation and in our region. In the MetroWest region, we see higher unemployment and student absenteeism in our data. However, much of the available data don't paint a clear picture of the near-term pandemic effects. For example, the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau spans 2016-2020. By including 4 pre-pandemic years, it understates the impact of the pandemic.

The surge of unemployment in 2020 (mirrored statewide and nationwide) pushed unemployment rates above 2009 recessionary rates and nearly three times above their 2019 level. While businesses and hiring nationwide have rebounded in 2021, the full data for MetroWest beyond 2020 is not yet available. Likewise, rates of student absenteeism, after being largely flat for more than a decade, jumped significantly in 2021, undoubtedly due to the pandemic and complications around remote learning.

Where there are noticeable spikes that are likely attributable to pandemic-related conditions, it is at times unclear whether these represent temporary trends or a "new

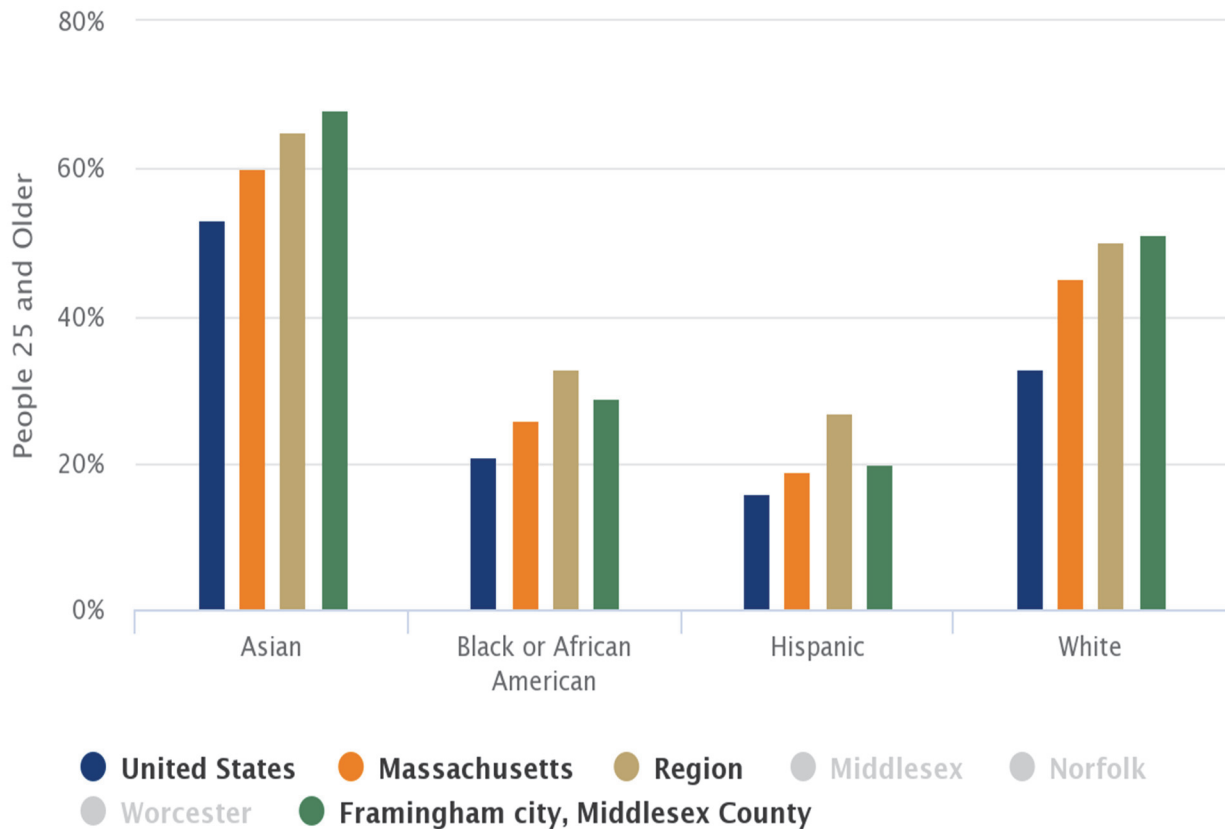
normal” in the presence of continuing COVID outbreaks. Additional years of data will be needed to provide perspective on these questions.

Policymakers at the state and local levels are now making decisions about how to spend an influx of federal COVID recovery aid. These choices will be crucial in charting MetroWest’s path to recovery and increased equity.

In general, the data available from national and state sources show that many parts of the MetroWest region have continued to thrive with an extremely well-educated workforce, growing diversity and much wealth. Unaffordable housing, challenges getting around if you don’t have a car, and rising economic inequality continue to be problems. Striking data points include:

- Median household income continues to rebound above year 2000 levels, after losing some ground during the 2009 recession. However, there are notable disparities by race and ethnicity, with African Americans in MetroWest earning just two-thirds of the regional white median household income, while Hispanics earn only 60% of the white median income.
- Economic indicators reflect society’s disparities: More than 80% of businesses were owned by whites in 2017 (the latest year available), and 47% of white workers had professional jobs, compared to 37% of African American and just 4% of Hispanic workers in 2016-20.
- The ratio of median home value to median income in the region is 4.5, 28% higher than the nation’s 3.5. In Framingham, where poverty is higher, the ratio is even worse at 5.1.
- Opioid-related overdoses have grown from 235 in 2007 to over 700 in 2020, though that was down from more than 850 in 2016.
- The region’s workforce is extremely well-educated, with 51% of adults having at least a bachelor’s degree, up from 39% in 2000 and far above the national rate of 33%. However, those rates are much lower among people of color, 36% for African American residents of the region and 28% of Hispanic residents, reflecting the disparities in educational opportunity that are widespread in our country.

Bachelor's Degree or Higher, by Race/Ethnicity



Demographics & Diversity

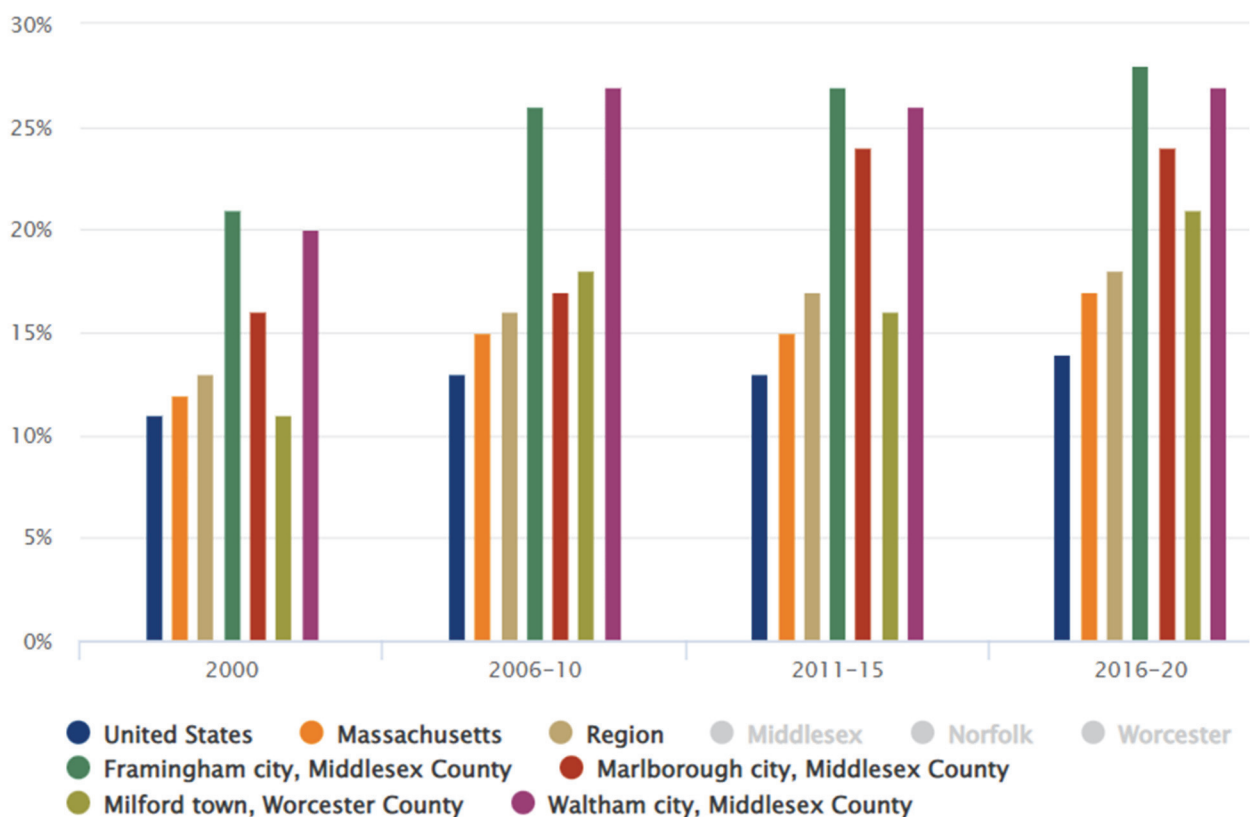
The MetroWest region is home to more than 3 million residents, with small but fast-growing minority groups, a high proportion of foreign-born residents in some local areas, and an overall aging population. Demographic trends are important to understand because they impact the economy, health care needs and outcomes, what services government and nonprofits provide, and many other local and national concerns.

"MetroWest" is not a formal set of government boundaries, but a name adopted for a set of communities lying west of Boston. Different groups have their own definitions of what is included, but our definition of MetroWest encompasses 39 cities and towns: Acton, Ashland, Bedford, Bellingham, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Dedham, Dover, Framingham, Franklin, Groton, Harvard, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, Marlborough, Maynard, Medfield, Medway, Milford, Millis, Natick, Needham, Sherborn, Southborough, Stow, Sudbury, Walpole, Waltham, Wayland, Wellesley, Westborough, Westford, Weston, and Westwood.

Though Framingham, with 73,000 people, and Waltham, with 63,000, are the largest localities in MetroWest, they are not the fastest growing: Hopkinton and Ashland all grew more than 25% between 2000 and 2020.

Waltham, Framingham, Lexington and Westborough are all centers of diversity and immigration, with foreign-born residents making up between 27-28% of the population. Immigration is a driver of population growth and the diversity of these communities likely reflects a welcoming climate while also pointing to the need to continue to engage diverse populations in local government and decision-making.

Share of Residents who are Foreign-Born



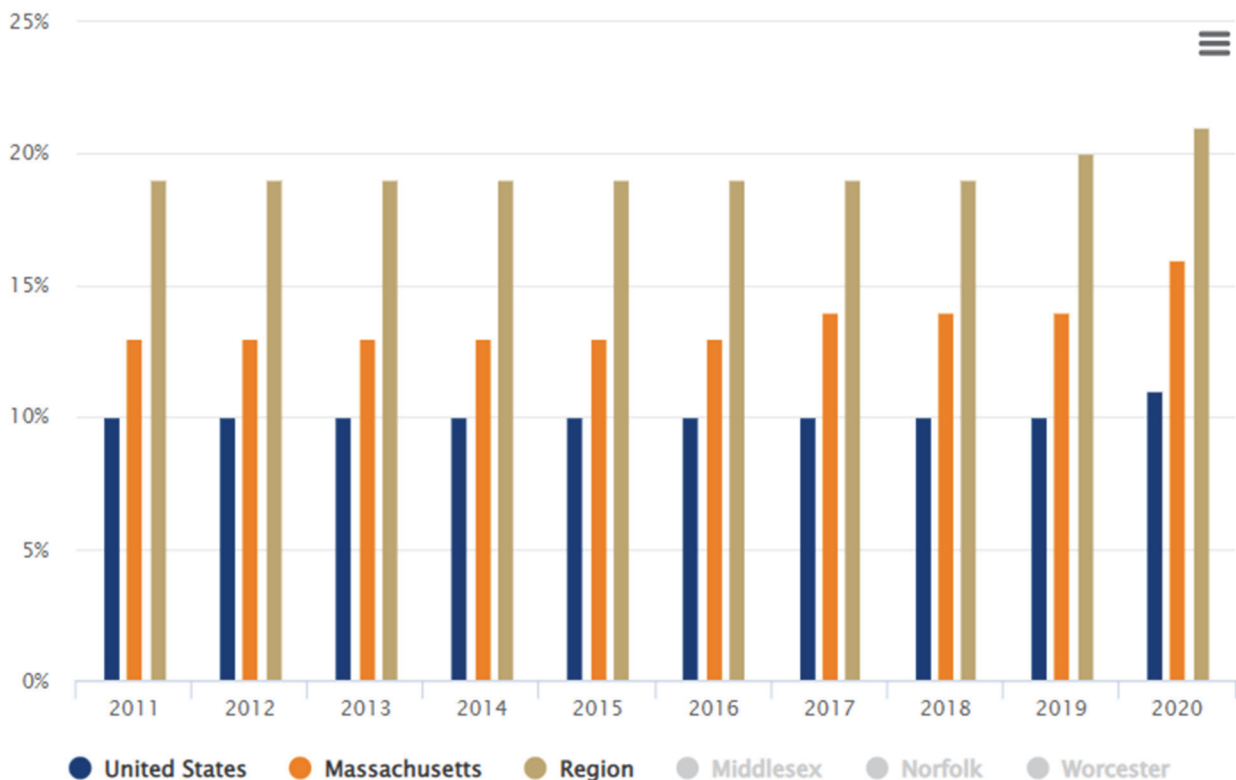
The region's population overall has grown 10% since 2000, similar to the state but below the national rate of growth (16%). Growth was fastest among Asian residents (118%), African Americans (95%) and Hispanics (101%), though the region as a whole remained majority white (74%). Overall, 18% of the region's population was foreign-born and 24% spoke a foreign language at home – both a bit higher than state and national rates and up since 2000.

Like the state and nation, the region's population is aging, with the fastest growing group being people ages 60-84. This group increased in size by 43% from 2000 to 2016-20, illustrating the need for robust social and health related support services for aging residents to live in their homes or have access to affordable alternatives and care. The population between 20 and 39 has increased by 9% nationally, but only increased by 1% in MetroWest. The percentage of residents over 65 living alone is 38%, consistent with state and national rates.

Economy & Workforce

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate in MetroWest was 7.9% in 2020 – compared to state and national rates of 8.9% and 8.1%, respectively. This is nearly triple the pre-pandemic rate of 2.7%. As the economy reopens and hiring tightens, it remains to be seen what the longer-term trend of unemployment will be.

Share of Jobs Considered High-Tech



Notably, MetroWest is doing well as a regional center of high-tech jobs. High-tech jobs are not only seen as the future of employment, but tend to command higher salaries and benefits. In 2020, 21% of jobs in the region were considered high-tech,

clearly higher than both the state (16%) and national (11%) rates. Middlesex is home to the majority of these jobs.

The share of jobs by sector is a key indicator of the structure of the economy in a region. The largest sectors in MetroWest in 2020 were Professional and Business Services, with 21% of jobs, followed by Trade, Transportation and Utilities (15%), Health Care and Social Assistance (13%), Financial Activities (10%), and Government (9%). Compared to the state as a whole and the nation, MetroWest has a higher proportion of jobs in Professional and Business Services and a lower proportion in Leisure and Hospitality and in Government. In other sectors, MetroWest is similar to Massachusetts as a whole.

Among large sectors, MetroWest has seen the greatest growth in the Financial Activities (42%), Healthcare and Social Assistance (40%) and Professional and Business Services (30%) sectors.

The biggest decline among major sectors was in Manufacturing, where jobs fell 38%. Some smaller sectors had large gains or declines: Agriculture, with 0.2% of total jobs, grew 23% since 2001, and Education, with 6% of all jobs, grew 27%. Trends in MetroWest were very similar to statewide and national trends.

Yearly salaries in MetroWest averaged \$86,000 in 2020. The highest-paid sectors in the region were Information (\$141,000), Professional and Business Services (\$133,000), Manufacturing (\$108,000), and Financial Activities (\$110,000). The lowest-paid sector was Leisure and Hospitality (\$30,000). This was similar to the state and nation, where the Financial Activities and Information sectors were the two highest earning sectors.

In MetroWest, as in the state and nation, women's earnings tended to lag men's earnings. In 2016-20, women in the MetroWest region earned a median income of \$36,854, or 66 cents for every dollar earned by males (a female to male earnings ratio of 0.66). This ratio was up 12% from 58 cents in 2000.

Financial Security

While in many ways, MetroWest is a high-income region with much wealth, people in areas throughout the region struggle to make ends meet. The high cost of living, extremely expensive housing and myriad difficulties with transportation combine to put a financially secure lifestyle out of reach for many residents of MetroWest.

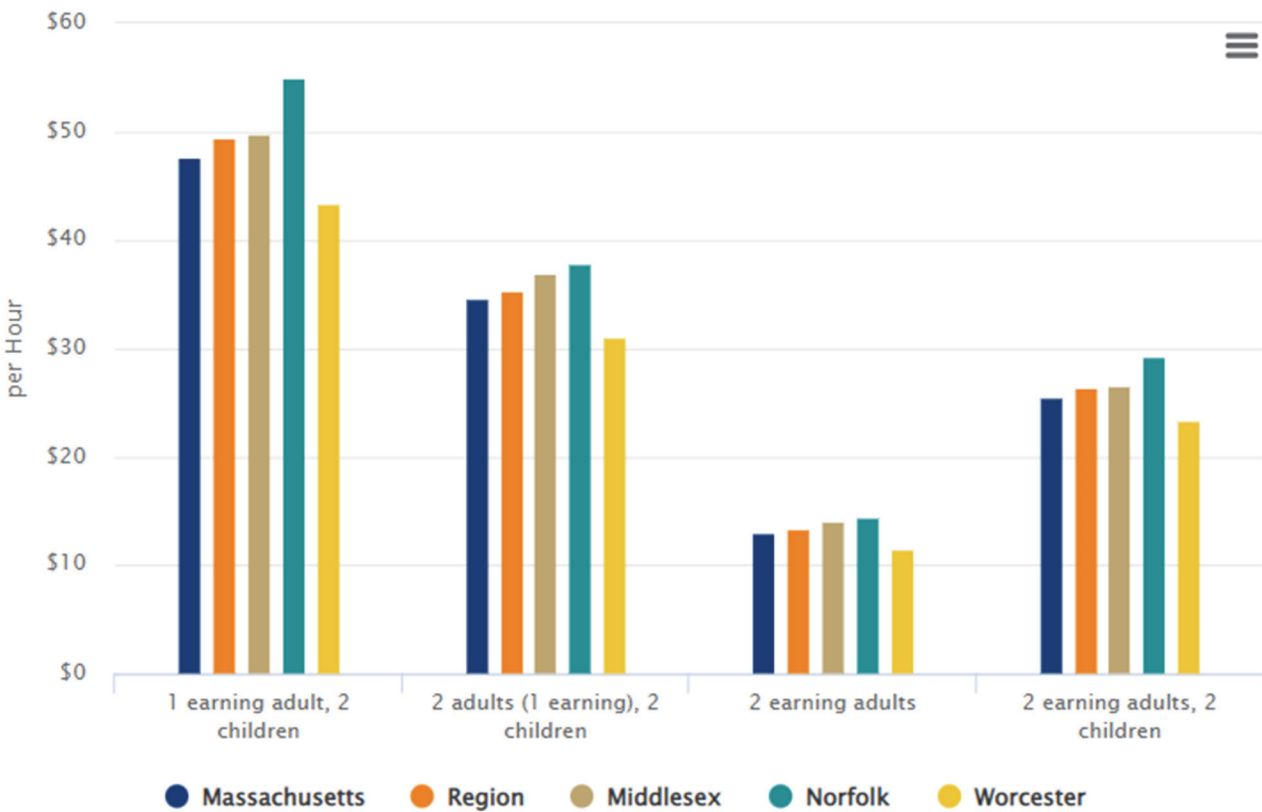
While the region's overall poverty rate of 8% is below the state and nation, rates are higher in both Framingham (8%) and Waltham and Milford (9%) and rates are higher among Hispanic (19%) and African American (14%) residents. Education matters: while

20% of residents without a high school diploma had incomes at or below the poverty level, just 3% of those with at least a bachelor’s degree did.

And others living above the poverty threshold struggle to make ends meet. While the overall median household income in MetroWest was \$97,700 in 2016-20, median incomes for Hispanic and African American households were substantially lower at \$60,000 and \$66,000.

A living wage in MetroWest requires \$110,200 for a family of four with two earners or \$102,700 for a family of three with one earner, certainly out of reach for many of our residents.

Living Wage Hourly Rates, by Varying Family Types



Federal food assistance is needed at a high level among some populations. In 2016-20, 24% of Hispanic residents and 18% of African Americans participated in the federal SNAP program, higher than Asian (8%) and white (7%) residents.

And people of color in MetroWest (as well as the state and nation) have less access to financial services. Unbanked or underbanked rates in the three MetroWest counties are roughly 30-40% among Hispanic and African Americans.

Homeownership is an important factor for neighborhood stability and civic participation and, in 2016-20, the homeownership rate in the MetroWest region was 65%, exceeding both the state and national rates. However, while rates were 69% among whites and 58% among Asians, they were 35% for African Americans and 34% for Hispanics.

Owning a home is simply out of reach for many residents of MetroWest. The ratio of home value to median income was 4.5 in 2016-20, well above the 2-3 range considered affordable. It is even higher in some communities, including Lincoln and Weston, where the ratio was 7.0 and 6.2, respectively. Rent, too, is unaffordable in some communities, including Medfield, Needham & Dedham, which all had rates over 40%, above the 30% considered affordable.

Homelessness is a growing concern in MetroWest. While the rate has declined a bit from a high in 2014, it was up 23% since 2007, with 4,900 homeless people counted during the annual tally in January in 2020.

Children & Families

Rates of child poverty in 2020 are identical to the rates in 2000, having climbed slightly and then declined again in the interim. These rates are higher among children of color and in some local areas. While, as a whole, MetroWest children are in some ways better off than the children across the state and nation, the data show that there are deep racial and ethnic disparities, which reflect current and historic differences in socioeconomic status and access to resources, as well as public policies with discriminatory or inequitable outcomes. Poverty, domestic violence and single-parent families are all conditions that can impact children's ability to thrive, and in our region, children have different burdens to bear depending in part on where they live.

Socioeconomic status also plays a critical role in shaping a child's future. Children raised in poverty are at higher risk for various health and social problems, including difficulty in school, which can diminish their chances for successful adult lives. In 2016-20, about 51,600 children in MetroWest were living in poverty, or 8% of all children under 18. While in some communities in our region very few children are living in poverty, other areas have especially high rates, such as the 16% child poverty rate in Milford. Across the region, poverty rates were much higher among Hispanic (24%) and African American (18%) children than among white (7%) and Asian (7%) children.

Whether a young person is in school or working also is an indicator of future success. In 2016-20, 4% of MetroWest youth between the ages of 16 and 19 were not in school nor working, similar to the state rate and less than the national rate of 7%.

Children in single-parent families are far more likely to grow up in low-income households than those living with two parents. In 2016-20, 25% of families with children under 18 in the MetroWest region were headed by one parent, well below the national rate of 34% and the statewide rate of 32%. In MetroWest, the share was highest among Black or African American (56%) and Hispanic families (52%), followed by white (29%) and Asian (18%) families. Rates were higher for all racial and ethnic groups at the state level.

A healthy pregnancy is one of the earliest factors that shapes a child's future. Early, high-quality prenatal care can improve chances that pregnancy results in a healthy, full-term baby. In 2020, MetroWest women initiated prenatal care in the first trimester at slightly higher rates than Massachusetts as a whole. Rates varied by race and ethnicity: Prenatal care was initiated in 76% of births to Black or African American mothers, 83% of Hispanic or Latina births, 88% of Asian and 89% of white births. These differences mirrored racial and ethnic disparities at the state and national level. There has been little progress on narrowing these gaps at the regional level since 2012.

Domestic violence has uniquely negative effects on victims and families. Domestic violence has increased from 1.7 reported victims per 1,000 residents in the region in 2000 to 2.4 in 2020, or just over 7,500 reported victims. The region's 2020 rate was lower than Massachusetts' rate (3.8). The rate was highest in Marlborough (5.3) and lowest in Weston (0.4). Often, domestic violence still goes unreported.

Community Life

Quality of life encompasses a wide range of attributes – here, we examine factors including the arts, transportation, public safety, and civic engagement. In MetroWest, challenges in these areas include drug addiction and transportation difficulties, while a growing arts sector, protected open spaces and falling crime rates are areas of strength.

Drug-related deaths are not only an individual tragedy, but also profoundly affect surviving relatives and friends. Overdoses in MetroWest have skyrocketed more than 180% since 2007 to a rate of 23 deaths per 100,000 residents in 2020, a bit lower than the state rate of 30.

Getting around MetroWest poses daily challenges for many residents. About 1 in 10 residents in 2016-20 reported having no access to a vehicle, making it difficult to get to work and access a variety of other resources. Commuting to work continues to be done mainly by car, though the share of residents driving alone to work fell slightly since 2000 to 75% in 2016-20 as public transit, biking and walking all increased slightly.

Arts and cultural institutions attract visitors and investment, contributing to the vitality of a region. In 2020, MetroWest had somewhat fewer establishments in the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation sector (5.1 per 10,000 residents) than the state as a whole (5.7), but the regional sector has grown since 2000.

Today, internet access is a crucial indicator to assess quality of life. In 2016-20, 91% of households in MetroWest had access to the Internet, slightly above the state rate of 88%.

Voting participation and charitable giving are two indicators that speak to levels of civic engagement. In MetroWest, voter participation has increased overall since 2000 in both midterm and presidential elections: 68% of MetroWest voted in the 2020 presidential elections and 52% in the 2018 midterm elections, both slightly higher than the statewide rate. Turnout in MetroWest in 2020 was moderately higher than at the national level (62%).

In 2019, MetroWest residents contributed 1.7% of income, or just under \$3.3 billion, to charity, down from 2.2% from 2017 and similar to the statewide rate.

Crime detracts from the quality of life and fortunately it is decreasing in MetroWest. There were 6.5 crimes per 1,000 MetroWest residents in 2020, significantly lower than the statewide rate of 10.2 and down 27% since 2012.

Incarceration rates vary widely across racial and ethnic groups both in MetroWest and throughout the state. In 2018, the incarceration rate for Hispanic or Latino residents in MetroWest was 4 times higher than that of white residents; among African American residents, the rate was 5 times higher than among white residents.

Education

Education is a point of pride for the MetroWest region, which has high overall elementary reading scores and high school graduation rates, as well as an extremely well-educated adult population and strong, varied educational institutions, including Wellesley College, Bentley University, Framingham State University and Massachusetts Bay Community College.

But the educational benefits of the region do not pertain to all in MetroWest – all educational metrics are lower for economically disadvantaged students and adults of color. The reasons for such disparities are complex and have historical roots, including inequitable access to high-quality schools.

Consider:

- Third-grade reading proficiency in 2019 – which is critical to overall academic success – was at 76% among Asian students, 67% among white students, and just 43% and 38% among Black or African American students and Hispanic or Latino students, respectively. In Framingham, just 22% of economically disadvantaged students and 27% of Hispanic or Latino students achieved proficiency, while 59% of students identified as not economically disadvantaged achieved proficiency. Progress is being made, as proficiency rates increased by 8 to 10 percentage points for almost all groups over the course of two years from 2017.
- Eighth-grade math proficiency in 2019 was at 81% among Asian students, 58% among white students, and 27% and 25% among African American and Latino students, respectively. In Framingham, just 20% of economically disadvantaged students and 18% of Latino students achieved proficiency. These rates have declined slightly year-over-year.
- High school graduation rates in 2021 are 89% among African American students and 83% among Latino students, lower than the rates for Asian students and white students (97% and 93%, respectively).
- A majority (51%) of adults in MetroWest hold at least a bachelor’s degree, up from 39% in 2000 and far above the national rate of 33%. Yet, much lower shares of people of color have bachelor’s or higher degrees: 36% of African American residents of the region and 28% of Hispanic residents.
 - This degree stratification is reflected in admission rates for public colleges and universities in MetroWest: these are not only becoming more selective in admissions but have lower rates of acceptance for Black (16%) and Latino (19%) students, as compared to white (22%) and Asian (23%) students.

Prekindergarten helps prepare children both socially and academically for school and can be especially important in preparing low-income children for kindergarten. In MetroWest in 2020, 49% of 4-year-olds were enrolled in public or private prekindergarten programs, up from 37% in 2002 and about level with the state rate. The vast majority of these children, or 77%, were enrolled in public prekindergarten programs.

School attendance also is critical to students’ ability to develop key skills and their future success in school. In 2021, 14% of students were chronically absent in MetroWest, below the state rate (18%). Rates were highest in Wayland (35%), Milford (27%), Maynard and Marlborough (26%), and lowest (2%) in Wellesley. A significant year-over-year jump in chronic absenteeism in 2021 as compared to 2020 and previous years, shared by the state and every school district, is undoubtedly related to the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, 2021 results should be interpreted with care.