

Impact MetroWest Regional Overview

Summary of Key Trends

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The Foundation for MetroWest

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
Introduction	1
Regional Overview	1
Demographics & Diversity	2
Economy & Workforce	4
Financial Security.....	5
Children & Families.....	7
Community Life	8
Education.....	10

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 April 2024 with refreshed data. Indicator categories for the website are Children & Families, Community Life, Demographics & Diversity, Economy & Workforce, Education, Financial Security and Racial Equity.

Regional Overview

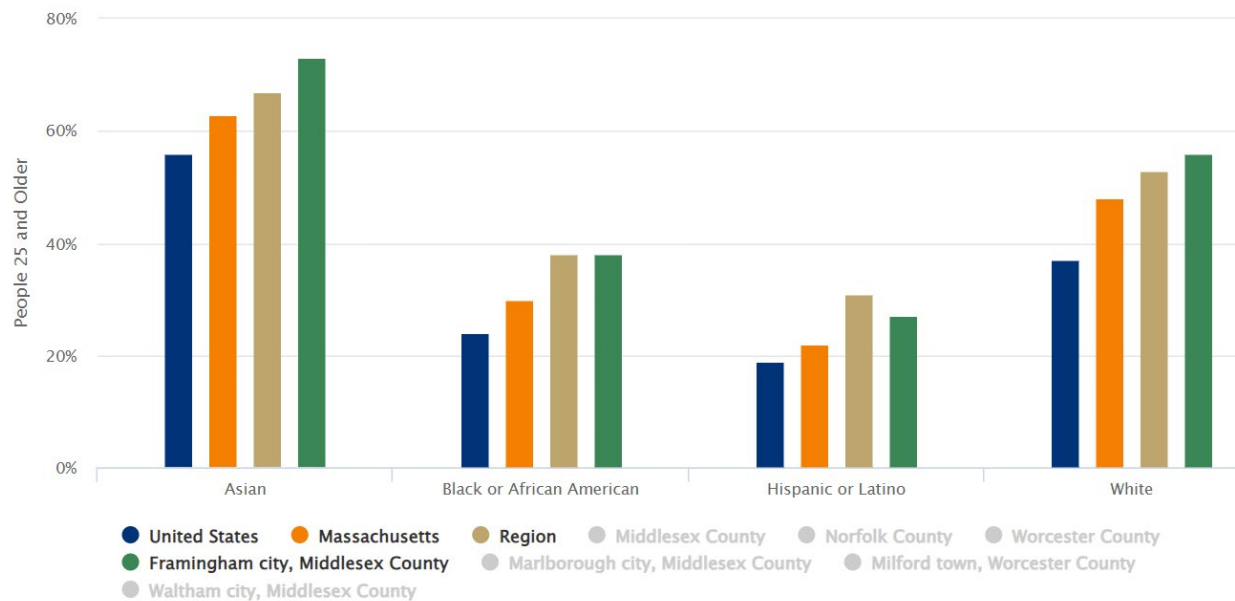
The MetroWest region is bouncing back from the Covid-19 pandemic, with decreasing unemployment rates and increasing total jobs. At the same time, as inflation continues to raise the cost of living across the nation, residents of MetroWest face increasing costs of homeownership and rent and an increasing number of households are receiving public assistance. Economic inequality among racial and ethnic groups persists. The following sections will explore each indicator category in more detail, however, some striking data points include:

- Median household income continues to rise, however, there are notable disparities by race and ethnicity, with African Americans in MetroWest earning just over 70% of the regional White median household income and Latinos earning 67%.
- The ratio of median home value to median income in the region is 4.7 (a ratio of 2-3 is considered affordable), higher than the nation's ratio of 3.8. Housing was even more unaffordable for Hispanic and African American homeowners with ratio of 5.7 and 4.7 respectively compared to 4.1 for White homeowners.
- The cost of other basic needs such as groceries has also increased and has disproportionately burdened some groups. For example, 25% of Hispanic households and 22% of African American Households participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program compared to 10% of Asian and 8% of White households.
- Other economic indicators also reflect society's disparities: More than 80% of businesses were owned by Whites in 2017 (the latest year available), and 44% of White workers had

professional jobs, compared to just 30% of African American and 23% of Latino workers in 2018-22.

- Opioid-related overdoses have grown 237% since 2007 to over 870 in 2022, the highest in the last 15 years.
- The region's workforce is extremely well-educated, with 53% of adults having at least a bachelor's degree, up from 45% in 2008-12 and far above the national rate of 34%. However, those rates are much lower among people of color: 38% for African American and 31% of Latino residents.

Bachelor's Degree or Higher, by Race/Ethnicity, 2018-22



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.

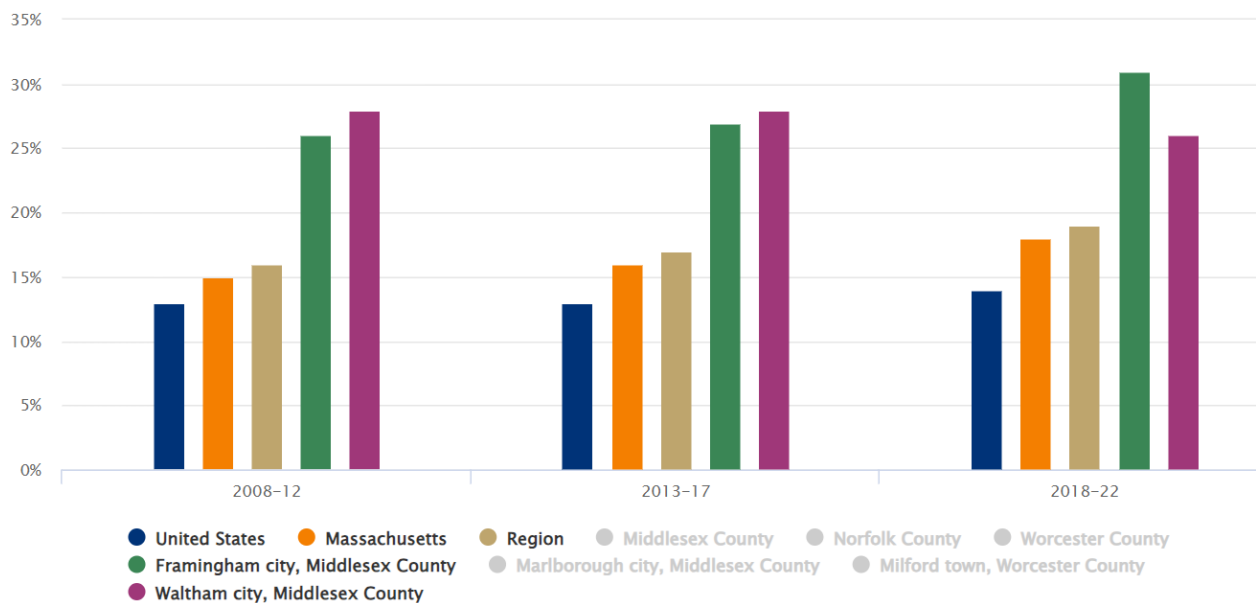
"MetroWest" is not a formal set of government boundaries, but a name adopted for a set of communities lying west of Boston. Different groups have their own definitions of what is 29-33% of the population. Immigration is a driver of population growth, and the diversity of these communities likely reflects a welcoming climate while also pointing to the need to continue to engage diverse populations in local government and decision-making. 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 71,000 people, and Waltham, with 64,000, are the largest localities in MetroWest, they are not the fastest growing: Hopkinton grew more than 25% between 2010 and 2022, followed by Westborough at 17.7% growth.

Lexington, Framingham, and Westborough are all centers of diversity and immigration, with foreign-born residents making up between

Share of Residents who are Foreign-Born, 2018-22



The region's population overall has grown 7.8% since 2010, similar to the national rate of growth (7.9%) and above the state rate (6.6%). Growth was fastest among Asian residents (46%), African Americans (25%) and Latinos (43%), though the region as a whole remained majority White (75%).

Overall, 19% of the region's population was foreign-born and 25% spoke a foreign language at home – both on par with the state rates and higher than the national rates and up since 2008-12.

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 31% from 2008-12 to 2018-22, 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 8% nationally but increased by 13% in MetroWest.

The percentage of residents over 65 living alone is 38%, consistent with state and national rates.

Economy & Workforce

MetroWest recovered well from the 2008-09 recession, declining from a peak of 7.5% unemployment to a rate under 3% in 2019. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic spiked 2020 unemployment rates to 8.3%, however, in 2022 the rate has dropped 5 percentage points to 3.3%, less than the statewide and nationwide rates.

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 2022 were Professional and Business Services, with 21% of jobs, followed by Trade, Transportation and Utilities (15%), Health Care and Social Assistance (12%), Financial Activities (11%), and Government, at 8%. 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 and Health Care and Social Assistance. In other sectors, MetroWest is similar to Massachusetts as a whole.

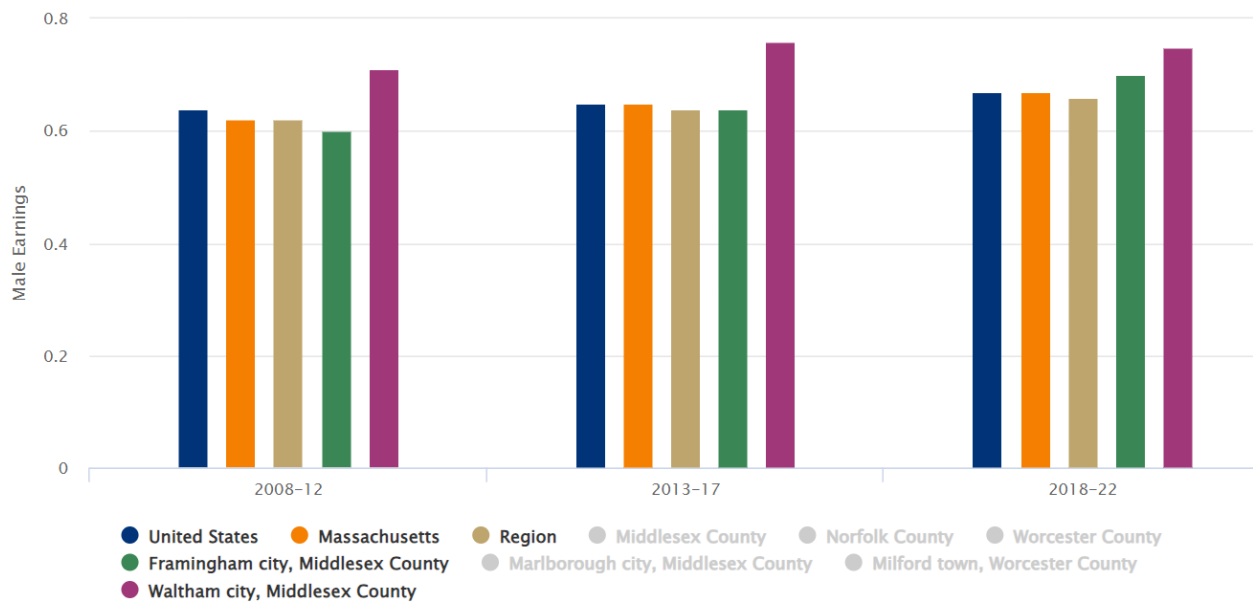
Among large sectors, MetroWest has seen the greatest growth since 2001 in the Financial Activities (79%), Healthcare and Social Assistance (47%) and Professional and Business Services (39%) sectors.

The biggest decline among major sectors was in Manufacturing, where jobs fell 36%. Some smaller sectors had large gains or declines: Agriculture, with 0.2% of total jobs, grew 26% since 2001, and Education, with 6% of all jobs, grew 27%. Trends in MetroWest were broadly similar to statewide and national trends, excepting for higher growth in Agriculture and lower growth in Education and Natural Resources and Mining.

Yearly salaries in MetroWest averaged \$91,800 in 2022. The highest-paid sectors in the region were Information (\$170,000), Professional and Business Services (\$139,000), Manufacturing (\$114,000), and Financial Activities (\$119,000). The lowest-paid sector was Leisure and Hospitality (\$34,000). 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 2018-22, women in the MetroWest region earned 66 cents for every dollar earned by men (a female-to-male earnings ratio of 0.66). This ratio was up 6% from 62 cents in 2008-12.

Female to Male Earnings Ratio



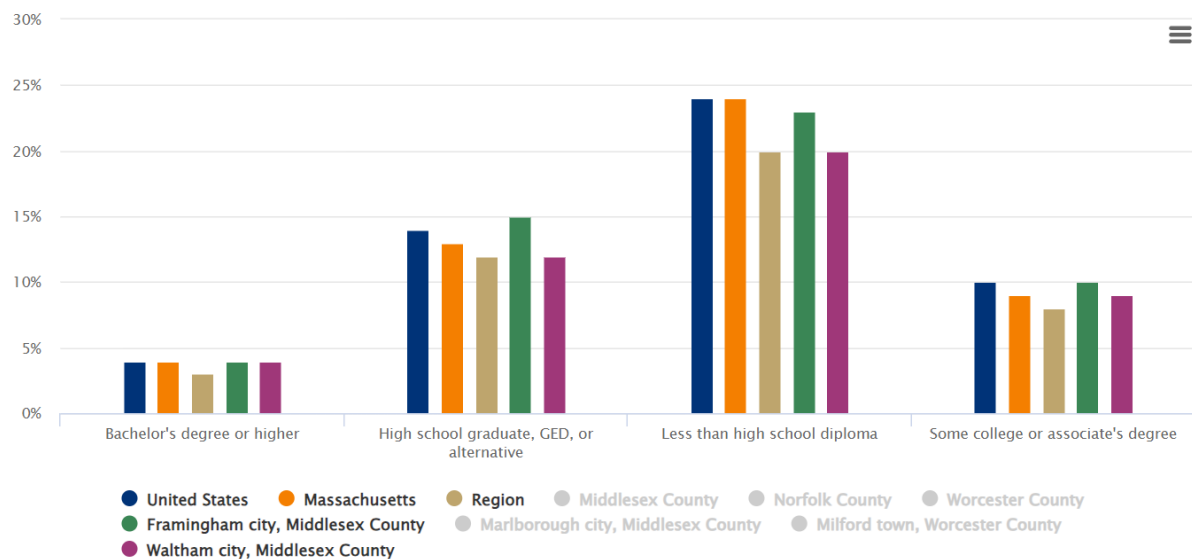
MetroWest has significant disparities in racial/ethnic rates of business ownership. In 2017, the most recent year for the data, 80% of the region's businesses were owned by white owners, approximately 8% were owned by Asian owners, with just under 2% owned by Hispanic owners and 1% owned by African American owners. These disparities parallel similar state and national disparities in ownership.

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 Worcester (10%) and rates are higher among Hispanic (17%) 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.

People Living in Poverty, by Education Level



Others living above the poverty threshold struggle to make ends meet. While the overall median household income in MetroWest was \$110,000 in 2018-22, median incomes for Hispanic and African American households were substantially lower at \$74,000 and \$79,000.

In 2021 in MetroWest, to reach the living wage level and be able to pay for necessities, including housing and food, without outside assistance, a family of four with two earners must make a total of \$134,200, and a family of three with one earner must make a total of \$121,700, certainly out of reach for many of our residents.

Federal food assistance is needed at a high level among some populations. In 2018-22, 25% of Hispanic residents and 22% of African Americans participated in the federal SNAP program, higher than Asian (10%) and White (8%) residents.

And people of color in MetroWest (as well as the state and nation) have less access to financial services. In 2017, 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 2018-22, the homeownership rate in the MetroWest region was 64%, exceeding the state rate but lower than the national rate. However, while rates were 69% among Whites and 60% among Asians, they were 36% for African Americans and Hispanics.

Owning a home is simply out of reach for many residents of MetroWest. The ratio of home value to median income was 4.7 in 2018-22, well above the 2-3 range considered affordable. It is even higher in some communities, including Lincoln and Waltham, where the ratio was 7.5 and 6, respectively. Homes were more unaffordable for Latinos (with a ratio of 5.7), African Americans (4.7) and Asians (4.5) than for Whites (4.1).

Rent, too, is unaffordable in some communities, including Westwood, Maynard & Lincoln, which all had rates over 45%, above the 30% considered affordable. People of color in MetroWest paid a larger proportion of their income on rent: 30% for African Americans and 34% for Hispanics, compared to 26% for Asian Americans and 28% for whites.

Homelessness is a growing concern in MetroWest. While the rate has declined from a high in 2014, it was up 25% since 2008, with 4,950 homeless people counted during the annual tally in January in 2022.

Children & Families

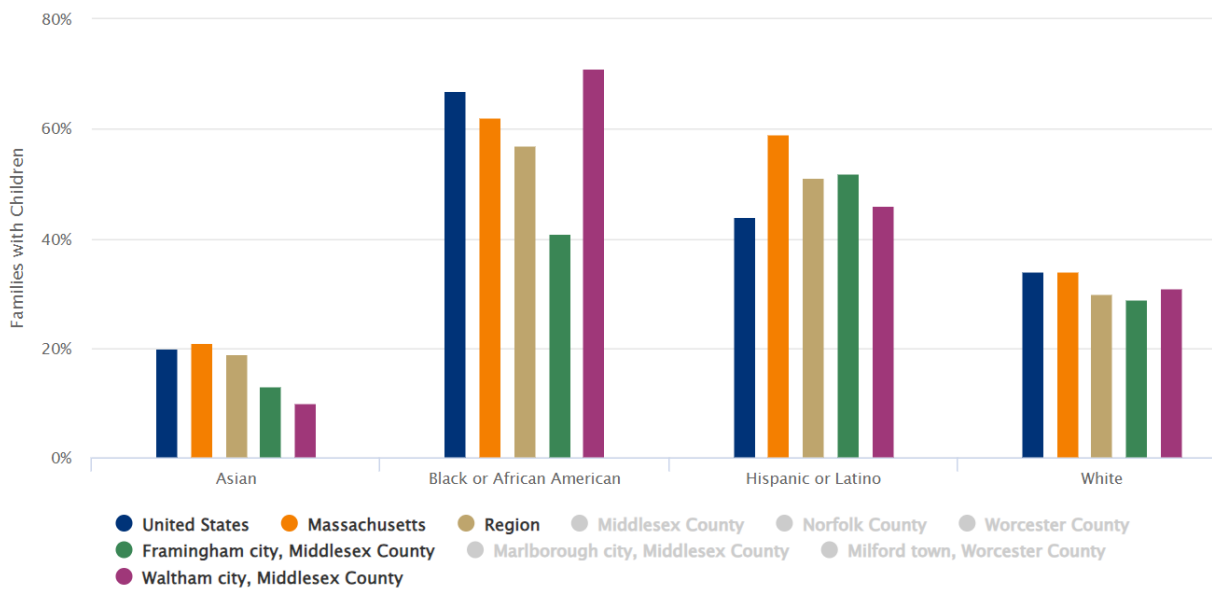
After a slow increase over the course of two decades, the child poverty rate in the MetroWest region has returned to a low last seen in the year 2000. It remains 50% below the state level and less than half the rate of the national level. Despite this achievement, significant racial and ethnic disparities continue to be evident, 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 2018-22, about 52,600 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 15% child poverty rate in Framingham. Across the region, poverty rates were much higher among Hispanic (20%) and African American (16%) children than among white (6%) and Asian (7%) children.

Whether a young person is in school or working also is an indicator of future success. In 2018-22, 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 2018-22, 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 (57%) and Hispanic families (51%), followed by white (30%) and Asian (19%) families. Rates were higher for all racial and ethnic groups at the state level.

Single-Parent Families by Race/Ethnicity, 2018-22



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 2021, MetroWest women initiated prenatal care in the first trimester at modestly higher rates than Massachusetts as a whole, but at significantly better rates than the nation as a whole. Rates varied by race and ethnicity: early prenatal care was initiated in 78% of births to Black or African American mothers, 80% of Hispanic or Latina births, 89% of Asian and 88% of white births. These differences mirrored racial and ethnic disparities at the state and national level. These rates have increased slightly except for Hispanic or Latina Mother's since 2016.

Domestic violence has uniquely negative effects on victims and families. There were 2.8 reported victims per 1,000 residents in the region in 2022, or 8,800 reported victims. While this represents an increase from 1.7 per 1,000 in 2000, it also represents a steady decline from a high of 3.7 per 1,000 in 2010. The region's 2022 rate was lower than Massachusetts' rate (4.6). The rate was highest in Marlborough (7.6) and lowest in Medfield and Weston (0.5). Often, domestic violence still goes unreported.

Community Life

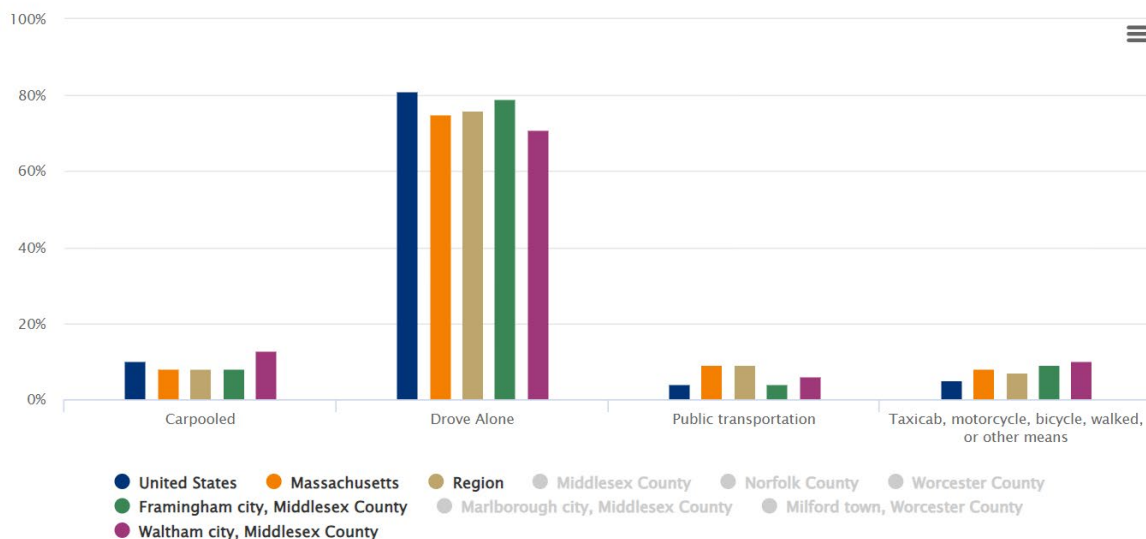
Quality of life encompasses a wide range of attributes – here, we examine factors including the arts, transportation, public safety, and civic engagement. In MetroWest, challenges in these areas include drug addiction and transportation difficulties, while a growing arts sector, protected open spaces 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. Fatal overdoses in MetroWest have tripled since 2012 to a rate of 27

deaths per 100,000 residents in 2022, paralleling a tripling of the statewide drug rate (from 11 to 34 per 100,000).

Getting around MetroWest poses daily challenges for many residents. About 1 in 10 households in 2018-22 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 2008-12 to 76% in 2018-22 as public transit remained the same, and biking and walking both increased slightly.

Means of Transportation to Work, 2018-22



Arts and cultural institutions attract visitors and investment, contributing to the vitality of a region. In 2022, MetroWest had somewhat fewer establishments in the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation sector (5.5 per 10,000 residents) than the state as a whole (5.7), but the regional sector has grown since 2008.

Today, internet access is a crucial indicator to assess quality of life. In 2018-22, 93% of households in MetroWest had access to the Internet, slightly above the state rate of 91%.

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. 46% of MetroWest voted in the 2022 midterm elections and 68% in the 2020 presidential elections, both slightly higher than the statewide rate. Turnout in MetroWest in 2020 was higher than at the national level (62%).

In 2021, MetroWest residents contributed 1.9% of income, or over \$5 billion, to charity, up 0.1% from 2011 and the same as the statewide rate.

Crime detracts from the quality of life and fortunately it is decreasing in MetroWest. There were 6.7 crimes per 1,000 MetroWest residents in 2022, lower than the statewide rate of 11 and down 12% since 2013.

Incarceration rates vary widely across racial and ethnic groups both in MetroWest and throughout the state. In 2018, the last year the data was available, 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. As well, the COVID-19 pandemic had significant negative impacts on student metrics across groups that continue to linger.

Consider:

- Third-grade reading proficiency in 2023 – which is critical to overall academic success – was at 66% among Asian students, 56% among white students, and just 32% and 23% among Black or African American students and Hispanic or Latino students, respectively. These represent significant declines for all groups of students since 2019. Proficiency rates were lowest in Framingham (27%), Marlborough (29%), Milford (25%) and Waltham (33%) – most of which have more diverse and more disadvantaged student bodies.
- Eighth-grade math proficiency in 2023 was at 76% among Asian students, 50% among white students, and 21% and 20% among African American and Latino students, respectively. Among individual school districts, these rates were lowest in the Christa McAuliffe Charter school (18%), Marlborough and Boston school districts (24%), Framingham, Hudson, and Milford (all at 25%) and Foxborough (27%). Rates for all groups in MetroWest were slightly higher than those at the state level, but the region’s racial and ethnic disparities were similar to Massachusetts as a whole. All student groups saw drops of 5 percentage points or more since 2019.
- High school graduation rates in 2022 were 89% among African American students and 83% among Latino students, lower than the rates for Asian students and white students (96% and 94%, respectively).
- A majority (53%) of adults in MetroWest hold at least a bachelor’s degree in 2018-2022, up from 45% in 2008-2012 and far above the national rate of 34%. Yet, much lower shares of people of color have bachelor’s or higher degrees: 38% of African American residents of the region and 31% 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 also have lower rates of acceptance for Black (16%) and Latino (18%) students, as compared to white (23%) and Asian (21%) 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 2022, 46% 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, 78%, were enrolled in public prekindergarten programs.

School attendance also is critical to students' ability to develop key skills and their future success in school. The pandemic caused a spike in student absenteeism which has not yet subsided. In 2023, 19% of students were chronically absent in MetroWest, below the state rate (22%). Beyond Boston, with the highest rate at 39%, rates were highest in Framingham (33%), Marlborough (31%), Dedham (28%), and Milford (27%), and lowest in Weston (5%).