

STATE OF THE COUNTY REPORT 2022



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MEMBERS OF BERKSHIRE LEADERSHIP IMPACT COUNCIL

DATA TEAM

Jake Eberwein, Education Consultant
Carrie Holland, Mill Town
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Mark Maloy, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission
Brenda Petell, Berkshire United Way
Mark Pettus, Berkshire Health Systems
Tim Wilmot, Berkshire Taconic
Community Foundation
Candace Winkler, Berkshire United Way

MARKETING TEAM

Laura Brennan, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission
Karrie Buratto, Berkshire United Way
Justin Burke, Berkshire Taconic
Community Foundation
Emily Gabriel, Mill Town
Carrie Holland, Mill Town
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Mark Maloy, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission

SECTOR LEADS

ECONOMY

Laura Brennan, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission
A.J. Enchill, Berkshire Black Economic
Council and Senator Hinds' Office
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire

EDUCATION

Jake Eberwein, Education Consultant
Mark Maloy, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission

ENVIRONMENT

Mackenzie Greer, Berkshire Natural
Resources Council
Jenny Hansell, Berkshire Natural
Resources Council
Melissa Provencher, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission

HEALTH

Laura Kittross, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission
Mark Pettus, Berkshire Health Systems

HOUSING

Patricia Mullins, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission
Elton Odgen, Berkshire Housing
Development Corporation
Eileen Peltier, Berkshire Housing
Development Corporation

GOVERNMENT

Bryan House, Berkshire County District
Attorney's Office
Thomas Matuszko, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Jennifer Kimball, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission
Maya Richards, BRIDGE
Karen Vogel, Berkshire United Way

TRANSPORTATION

Justin Gilmore, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission
Francisca Heming, MassDOT
Thomas Matuszko, Berkshire Regional
Planning Commission

FUNDERS

Berkshire Bank
Berkshire Community College
Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation
Berkshire United Way
Greylock Federal Credit Union
Mill Town
US Economic Development Administration

PARTICIPANTS IN THE SECTOR MEETINGS

Over 100 individuals and
community organizations



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THROUGHOUT THE LAST TWO YEARS, stakeholders in Berkshire County have worked to identify indicators to track how our region is performing across eight sectors: Economy, Education, Environment, Government, Health, Housing, Social Environment, and Transportation. These indicators highlight the region's successes and challenges. A revamped BerkshireBenchmarks.org website highlights these indicators.

As you review the data, please bear in mind that it often takes several years for sources to release data at a county or municipal level. This delay means that the information presented in this report is the latest data available as of April 1, 2022. Many of the data sets presented in the report do not reflect the actual impact of economic, educational, and social disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the coming years, as more data is released, Berkshire Benchmarks will be able to measure how the pandemic impacted our region and monitor how the region recovers from it.

While not overlooking the impact of the pandemic, this report demonstrates that our region has seen numerous successes over the last few years. These successes include an increase in income, a decrease in poverty and unemployment, a healthier environment, and increased stability of the young adult population. As a region, the region can and must celebrate our successes. Many individuals and organizations have contributed to these positive developments. These efforts need to continue to ensure our future success.

Yet the region also faces challenges. Our children struggled academically during the pandemic. Housing is getting less affordable to many low and middle-income residents. Behavioral health challenges are getting worse, and there is an increase in reports of families in distress. Many of the indicators show disparities in the county when looking at the data by race and ethnicity. The region must work together to address these problems. Berkshire County can become a healthier, more equitable, and more welcoming community by working together.

This report intends to provide the data and trends and help identify the region's successes and challenges. The intent of this report is not to provide solutions. These must come through the same collective, collaborative community effort that has fueled our successes to date.

After reading this report, go to BerkshireBenchmarks.org, explore the data in more detail, and review it by municipality and population subgroups. When doing so, please consider how the data presented impacts you, your organization, and your community and how the data will inform and support our shared work of promoting prosperity and quality of life in the Berkshires.

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REGIONAL INDICATORS

WHY INDICATORS?

In January 2018, the Berkshire Leadership Impact Council (BLIC) convened leaders from organizations throughout the county to discuss future collaboration, communication, and county-wide action. One outcome of this convening was the desire to use indicators to help BLIC understand what was going on in the region and give the council direction for its efforts.

In late 2019, BLIC decided to use existing resources to develop the indicators. Berkshire Benchmarks, an initiative of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, has been around since the late 2000s and is known as the go-to source for data on the region. Updating Berkshire Benchmarks to promote regional indicators and continue to be a source for data made the most sense.

WHAT IS AN INDICATOR?

Indicators are numeric tools that help communities understand the health and vitality of their communities, alert them to problems, and help them recognize what to do to fix those problems. Indicators reflect the values and priorities of a region, guide the development of priorities and agendas, and can lead to consensus-driven change.

DEVELOPMENT OF INDICATORS

In 2021, Berkshire Benchmarks designated eight sectors and began researching potential indicators for these sectors. Through conversation and research, it quickly became apparent that quantitative indicators, such as median household income or educational

attainment, only go so far in understanding the unique situation of individuals. This understanding led to a desire to include both qualitative and quantitative indicators.

The Berkshire Benchmarks team then asked BLIC, BRPC, and community members to lead the development of indicators for each sector. The first task for sector leaders was to assemble a team of people with diverse backgrounds who have an interest in the sector. The sectors each aimed for at least 10 team members, with some sectors having over 20.

With teams assembled, each sector began meeting to discuss what was important to the region when they thought about their sector. The teams then reviewed a broad list of potential indicators. They narrowed the list down to around 10 indicators based on what they viewed as important to the region. The teams also discussed what was missing from the list and recommended additional quantitative indicators to investigate. The teams then thought about what type of information was missing and how to get answers through a community survey.

BRPC compiled the data for the chosen indicators and presented it to the teams for their review. The teams had the opportunity to add or remove indicators based on what the data revealed.

The indicators were then prioritized, with 3-4 indicators designated as key indicators in each sector. The Berkshire Benchmarks website focuses on these key indicators. They are also the focus of this State of the County report.

Meanwhile, survey questions from all the sectors were compiled, refined, and organized.

THE SECTORS



Economy



Education



Environment



Government



Health



Housing



Social
Environment



Transportation



General
Demographics

The teams reviewed this refined list, made further modifications, and added or deleted questions to better understand life in the region. BRPC hired survey designers to review the questions, update the nomenclature for current trends, and simplify the language to make it easier to understand.

Berkshire Benchmarks distributed the survey to the public in January 2022 through email, social media, newspapers, and a direct mailing to every mailbox in the county. Over 3,000 people completed the survey, with a representative distribution throughout the municipalities and by age, race, and income levels. Interspersed throughout this report are the results from the survey.

DATA

Throughout this process, there was data that participants asked about but, for several reasons, could not get included in Berkshire Benchmarks or not at the desired level of detail. All of the data presented in this report and the Berkshire Benchmarks website are from reputable and publicly available data sources published online. Many sources do not collect data at a scale below the county level or subgroup data.

One of the primary data sources used in Berkshire Benchmarks is the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). Due to the small size of Berkshire County and its municipalities, Berkshire Benchmarks uses the five-year estimates data. The ACS uses a small population sample and therefore has a margin of error associated with each data point. With smaller geographies and subsets of the population, the margin of error can be relatively large, making the data unusable. Much of the ACS data presented in this report and on the website is available at the national, state, county, and municipal levels for the entire population. However, when looking at subgroups, the data is not usable at the municipal level due to the substantial margin of error. The ACS and several other data

sources are only samples and are not absolute. Users should look more at the trends than the actual numbers.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic started just as the process of updating Berkshire Benchmarks began. The pandemic caused delays in data releases and changes in available data. It also highlighted the difficulty in obtaining timely data. While some data is released every month, most data sources take several years before they release data. The data is beginning to show the impact of the pandemic on the region, but it will take several more years to see the full effect.

USING THIS REPORT

Throughout the report, you will find the key indicators chosen by the sector teams and other indicators that show an interesting trend worth noting. The data presented in the report only reflects the county population. A few indicators throughout the report will show a county map to highlight the variability at the municipal level. More municipal-level data and maps are available online. While the report discusses disparities among subgroups, the charts provided in the report are for the total population and not for any subgroups. Readers can access the Berkshire Benchmarks website (www.BerkshireBenchmakrs.org) to view subgroup data.

For each sector, you will find a grid of the key indicators and arrows indicating the direction of the trend. The arrow's color will demonstrate whether the trend is positive, negative, or neutral.

TREND ARROW		TREND COLOR	
Increasing	↑	Positive	■
No Change	↔	Neutral	■
Decreasing	↓	Negative	■

A green downward arrow indicates that a decrease for that indicator is positive. A red upward arrow indicates that the increase for that indicator is negative.

“I love the Berkshires for so many reasons. The combination of small New England towns, each unique in their own way, and the amenities of the two cities make the Berkshires a truly great place to live and work.”

—SURVEY RESPONDENT





ECONOMY

SUMMARY

The economic indicators show a mix of trends. Overall, there are improvements in both income levels and income inequality but decreases in employment rates. The region is falling further behind the state regarding income. After several years of modest growth, Berkshire County's GDP fell during the pandemic. This drop was primarily due to impacts on tourism-focused industries, which play a large part in our overall economy. For people of color, especially the Black population, income is falling further behind the White population. This trend of racial disparities carries throughout the report. Further details on each of the below indicators are available online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org.

KEY INDICATOR	TREND
Households Making Greater than \$75,000/year	↑
Employment by Sector	↓
Income Inequality	↓
Income by Educational Attainment	↓
OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE	TREND
Gross Domestic Product	↓
Median Household Income	↑
Unemployment	↓

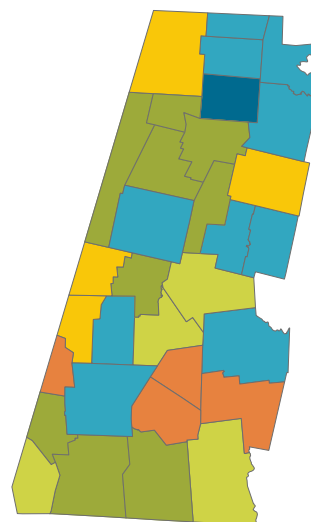
“I had to work several jobs most of my life here in the Berkshires just to make ends meet... aka the Berkshire shuffle.”

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

KEY INDICATORS

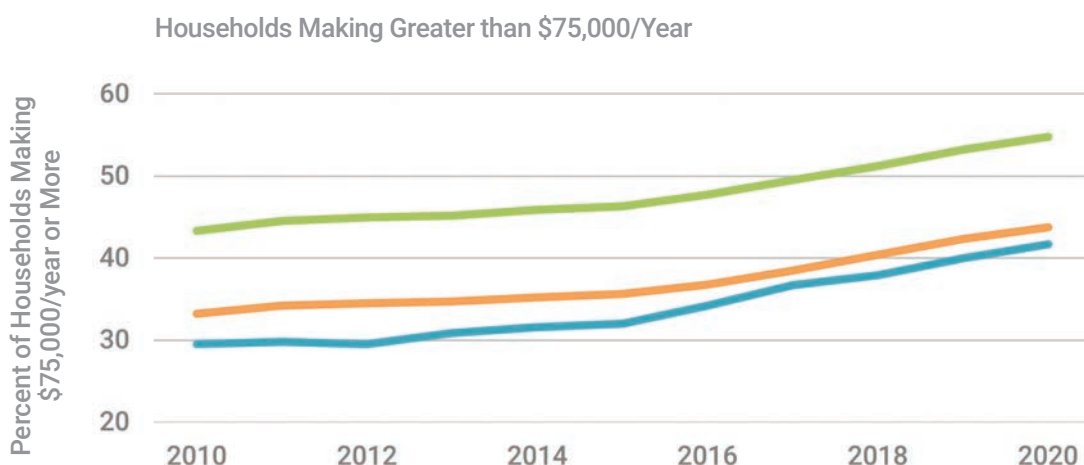
HOUSEHOLDS MAKING GREATER THAN \$75,000/YEAR

In 2017, Massachusetts had a median household income (MHI) of approximately \$75,000 per year. Berkshire County's MHI was only \$55,190. The Economic Prosperity Impact Council set a goal for Berkshire County to reach the state level. Increasing our MHI would improve our competitiveness with other regions and lift more people out of poverty. As seen in the chart below, the number and percentage of households making over \$75,000 per year in the county have increased each year at the same rate as the state and nation. One in two White households make over \$75,000, but only one in four Black households meet that threshold. Additionally, when looking at the percentage at the municipal level, municipalities with the most qualifying households tend to be located south of Pittsfield.



Percent of Households making > \$75,000

- < 30%
- 30% – 45%
- 45% – 50%
- 50% – 55%
- 55% – 60%
- > 60%



GEOGRAPHY

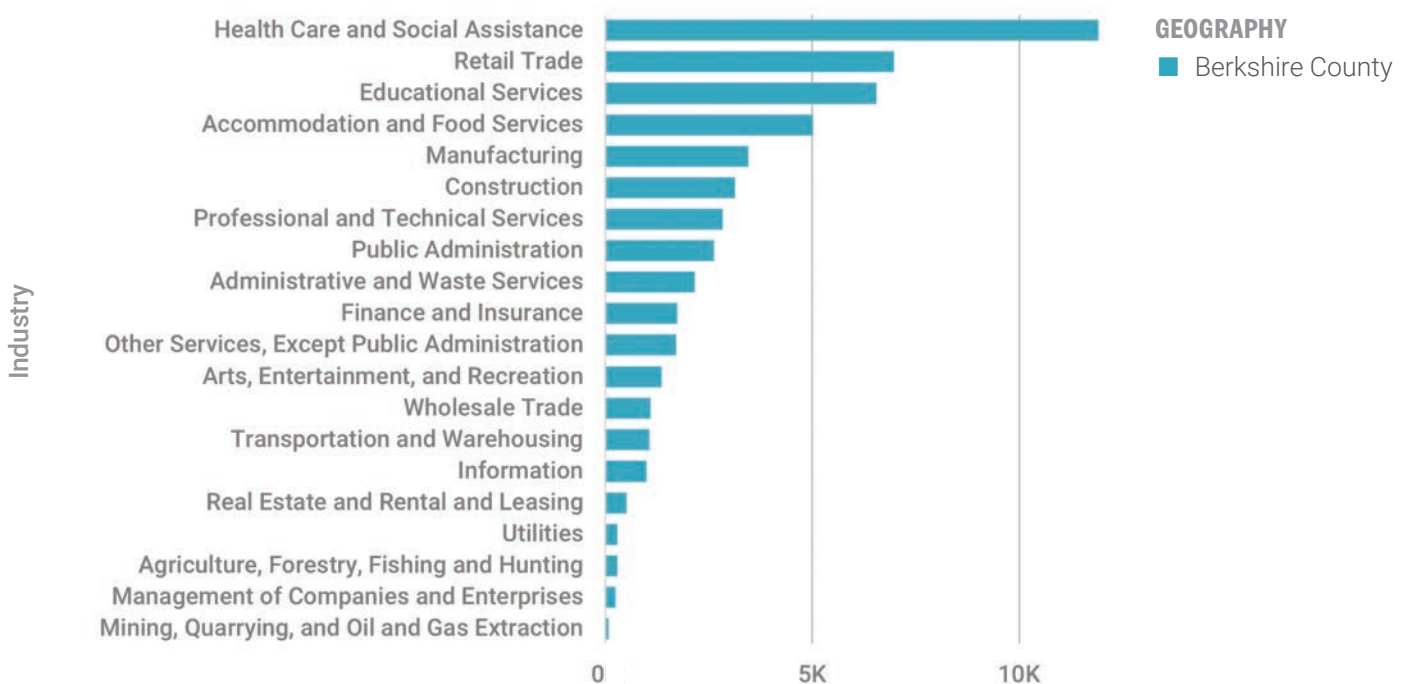
- Berkshire County
- Massachusetts
- United States

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE, TABLE B19001, B-H

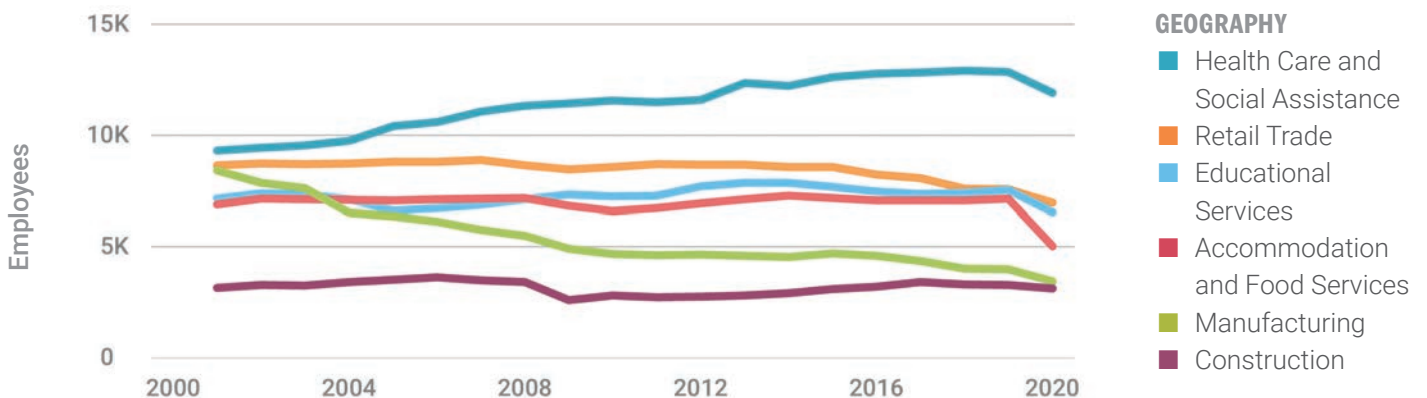
EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR

Health care and social assistance continues to be the largest employment sector in Berkshire County. As was common across most sectors, employment in health care and social assistance declined in 2020 after years of increases due to the pandemic's effects on the workforce. Other sectors that saw significant declines include accommodation and food services; arts, entertainment, and recreation; education; and retail trade. Manufacturing has continued to experience a decline, furthering the decline it has seen over the last few decades. A few industries showed a slight increase in employment, but not significantly. These combined sectoral changes reflect the overall decline in employment levels in the county.

Employment by Sector – 2020



Employment Over Time for Largest Sectors

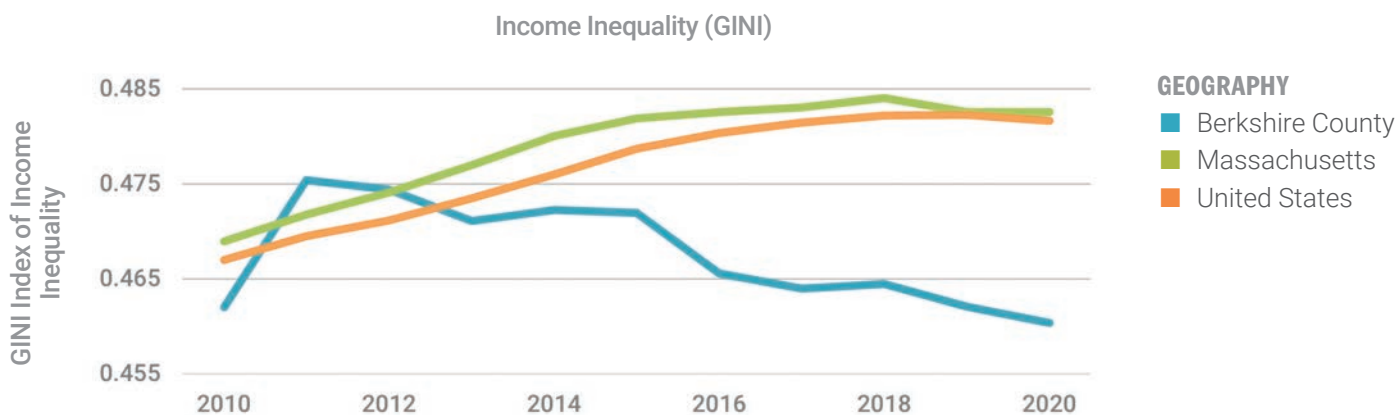


SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE [HTTPS://LMI.DUA.EOL.MASS.GOV/LMI/LABORFORCEANDUNEMPLOYMENT](https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/LABORFORCEANDUNEMPLOYMENT)

INCOME INEQUALITY (GINI)

The GINI coefficient is the idea of a perfectly equal income distribution throughout a region. A 0 indicates perfect equality (where everyone receives an equal share), while a 1 indicates perfect inequality (where only one recipient or group receives all the income.)

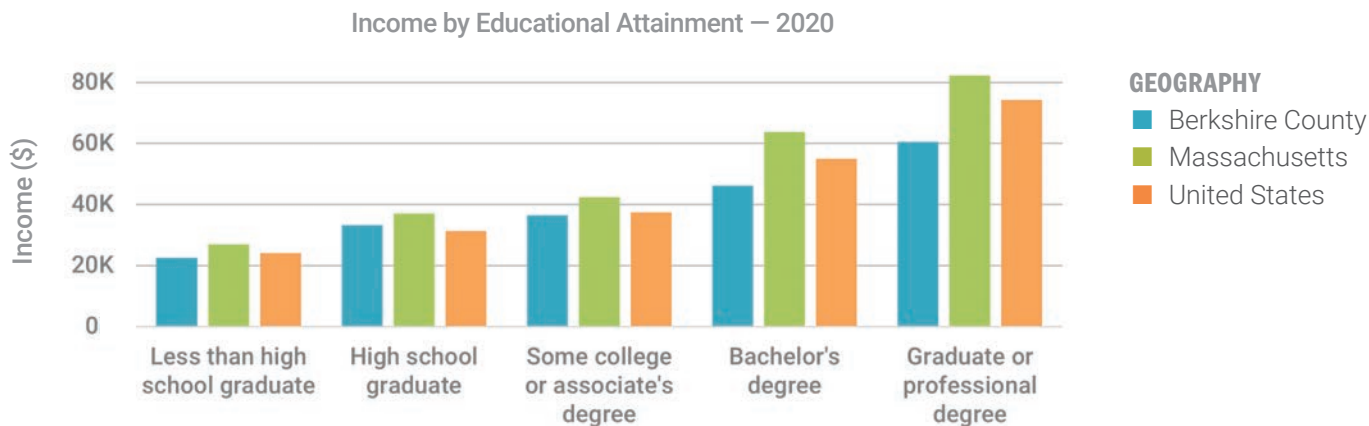
Berkshire County's GINI has improved over the last few years and is below the state and nation, indicating more equitable income distribution. Although the county is improving its income inequality, several municipalities are seeing increases in their GINI and have more inequality in income distribution. It is also important to note that while there is a comparatively more equal income distribution in the Berkshires relative to Massachusetts, this may be a function of the inequitable income distribution between Western and Eastern Massachusetts.



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE, TABLE B19083

INCOME BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Berkshire County residents' incomes at all educational levels are behind the state. Moreover, as educational attainment increases, corresponding income falls behind the nation. The county has also not kept pace with the state's and nation's income increases. For an individual with a Bachelor's degree, county residents have seen a 2% increase in the last decade, unadjusted for inflation. In contrast, U.S. residents with the same educational attainment have seen a 16% increase, and state residents have seen a 21% increase. As the county falls further behind, it will be harder to attract and retain employees.

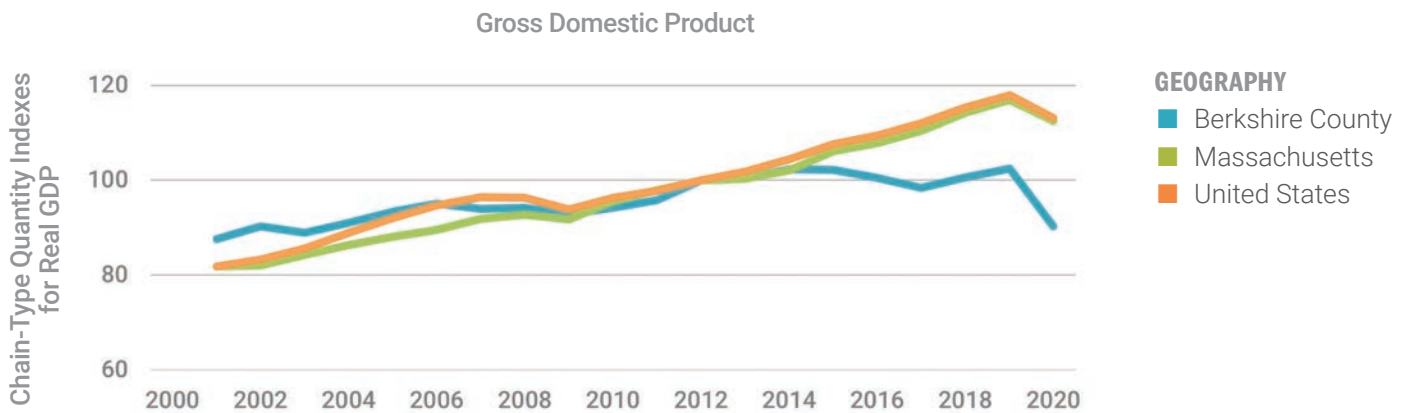


SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE (2016-2020), TABLE B20004

OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

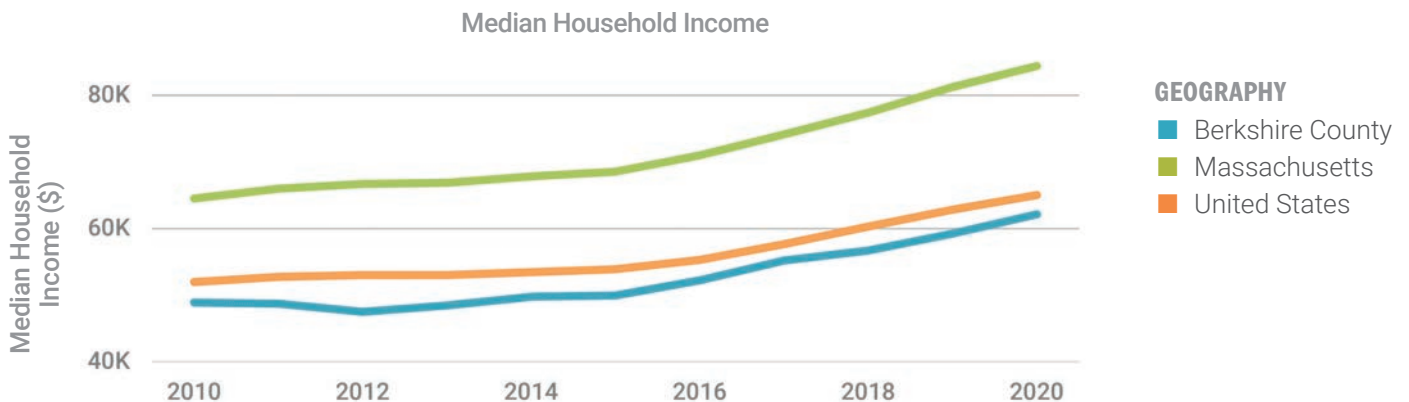
The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Berkshire County has historically grown slower than that of the state and nation. In 2020, the GDP for the county shrank due to the pandemic. The state and nation also saw declines in 2020 but to lesser degrees. The 2020 GDP for Berkshire County was the lowest since 2003. This decline is primarily due to the inclusion of tourism-related sectors within our GDP, which the pandemic heavily impacted through closures and restrictions.



SOURCE: BUREAU OF ECONOMIC ANALYSIS [HTTPS://WWW.BEA.GOV/DATA/GDP/GDP-COUNTY-METRO-AND-OTHER-AREAS](https://www.bea.gov/data/gdp/gdp-county-metro-and-other-areas)

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Median household income (MHI) in Berkshire County continues to increase but is below the nation and significantly below the state. Of particular note is the MHI by subgroups. The Black population has the lowest MHI of all races at \$27,683. In contrast, the White population has an MHI of \$63,651. Owners and renters also show a similar contrast, with owners having an MHI of \$76,934 while renters have an MHI of \$33,976.

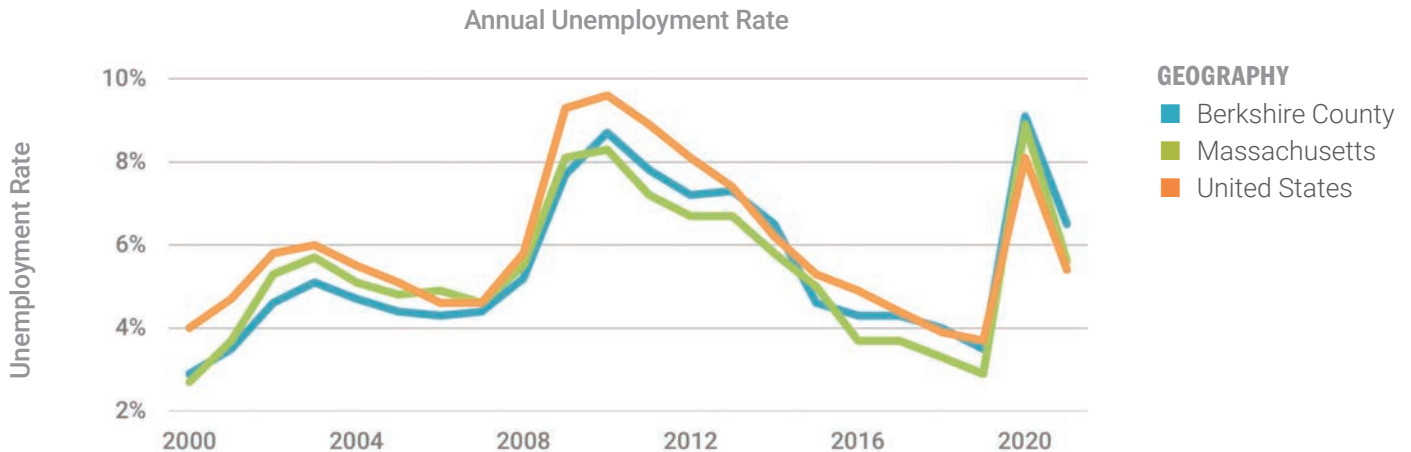


SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE (2016-2020), TABLE B25119



UNEMPLOYMENT

The 2021 unemployment rate of 6.5% for Berkshire County has fallen since the 2020 peak (9.1%). However, the county lags behind the state and nation, which have fallen to 5.5%.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE [HTTPS://LMI.DUA.EOL.MASS.GOV/LMI/EMPLOYMENTANDWAGES#](https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/employmentandwages#)

SURVEY QUESTIONS

SAVING FOR RETIREMENT

One out of four survey respondents can save as much as they want for retirement. Two out of four respondents who are not already retired can save for retirement, but not as much as they would like. The remaining one out of four cannot save for retirement or have not yet thought about saving for retirement. One out of two respondents making less than \$35,000/year cannot save for retirement or even think about saving.

AVAILABLE SAVINGS FOR LIVING EXPENSES

One out of four survey respondents has more than two years of living expenses saved for retirement. However, two out of four respondents have less than six months, with 15% having no savings. Among respondents making less than \$35,000, one out of two has no savings or less than two months of savings.

ABILITY TO AFFORD A HEALTHY, BALANCED DIET

One out of two survey respondents reports that they can always afford a healthy, balanced diet for themselves and their families. However, one in 10 can rarely or never afford enough healthy food.

FULL TIME VS. PART-TIME WORK

Two out of three survey respondents who work part-time would prefer a full-time job. As income rises, the percentage that want a full-time job decreases.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

Six out of 10 survey respondents feel financially secure all or most of the time. Two out of 10 rarely or never feel financially secure. As expected, as income levels decrease, financial security decreases.

SOURCES OF INCOME

Six out of 10 survey respondents rely on income from a primary job. At the same time, one in four also have a side job or rely on social security, retirement /pensions, or investments. One in 10 rely on support from their family. As incomes decrease, fewer respondents have primary job income, investment income, and retirement/pensions. More respondents with lower income have social security, side jobs, and support from family members. People of color tend to have a higher percentage of side jobs, regardless of income.





EDUCATION

SUMMARY

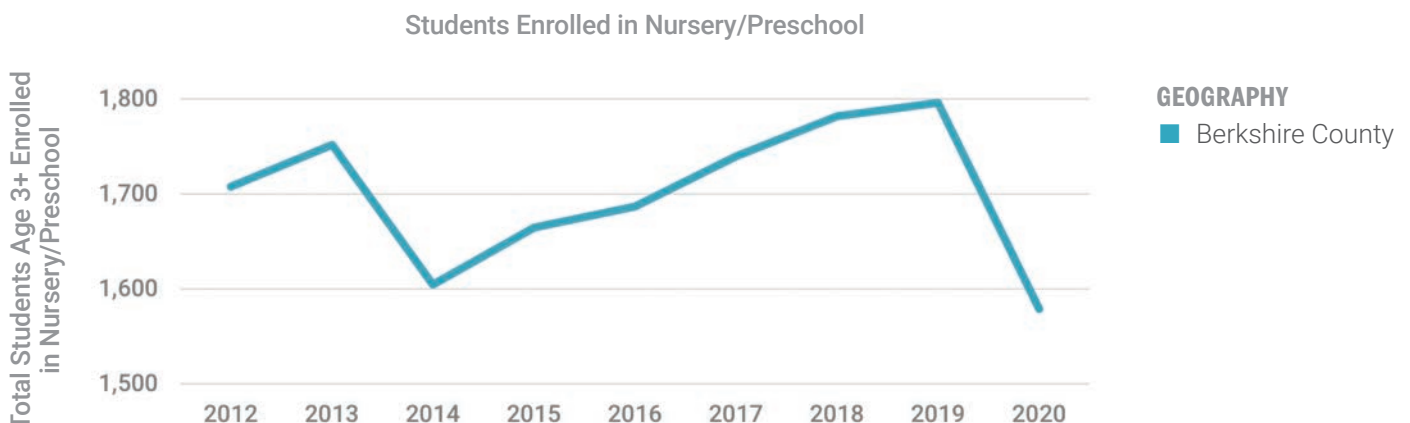
The pandemic disrupted our youth's education, shown by the decrease in reading and math proficiency and early education enrollment. Graduation rates have continued to increase, while the percentage going to college has decreased with a corresponding increase in the number going to work. Further details on each of the below indicators are available online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org.

KEY INDICATOR	TREND
Early Education Enrollment	↓
3rd Grade Reading Proficiency	↓
Graduation Rate	↑
Plans for High School Graduates	↓
OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE	TREND
8th Grade Math Proficiency	↓
Total School Enrollment	↓

KEY INDICATORS

EARLY EDUCATION ENROLLMENT

Early education enrollment is the number of children age 3+ enrolled in nursery/preschool. Over the last several years, the county saw a slight increase due to more districts offering Pre-K; however, a decline in 2020 occurred due to the pandemic.

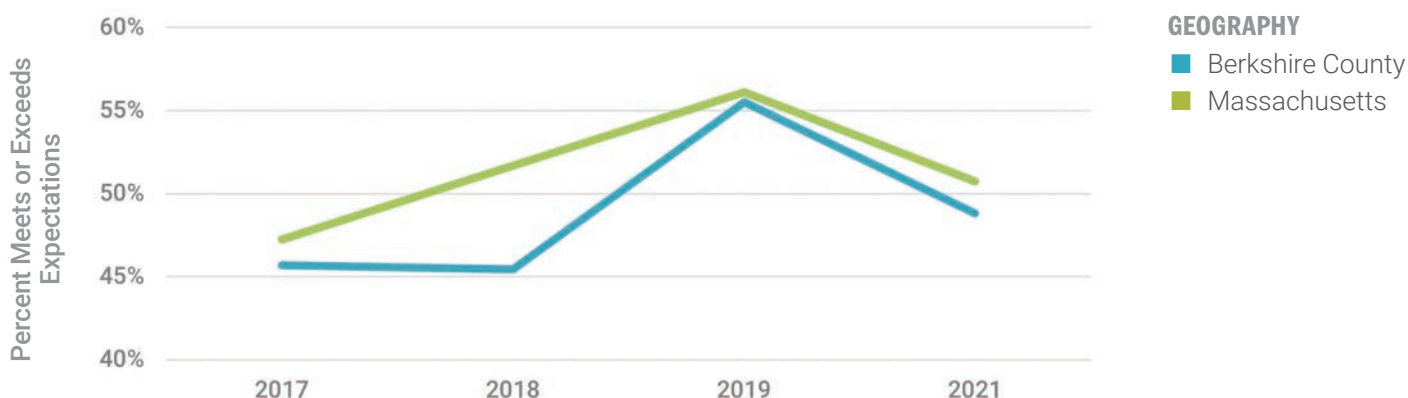


SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE, TABLE B14007, B-1

3rd GRADE READING PROFICIENCY

Reading proficiency among 3rd graders saw a slight decrease county-wide in 2021, likely due to disruptions caused by the pandemic and the reliance on remote and hybrid classes. Districts throughout the county vary greatly, with some significantly above average and some significantly below average. While performing worse than local peers, high-needs and economically disadvantaged students outperform similar students in the rest of the state. Due to small population sizes in many districts, Berkshire Benchmarks is not reporting proficiency for students of color. Still, in districts with large enough populations to report results, achievement among students of color was lower than among the White population.

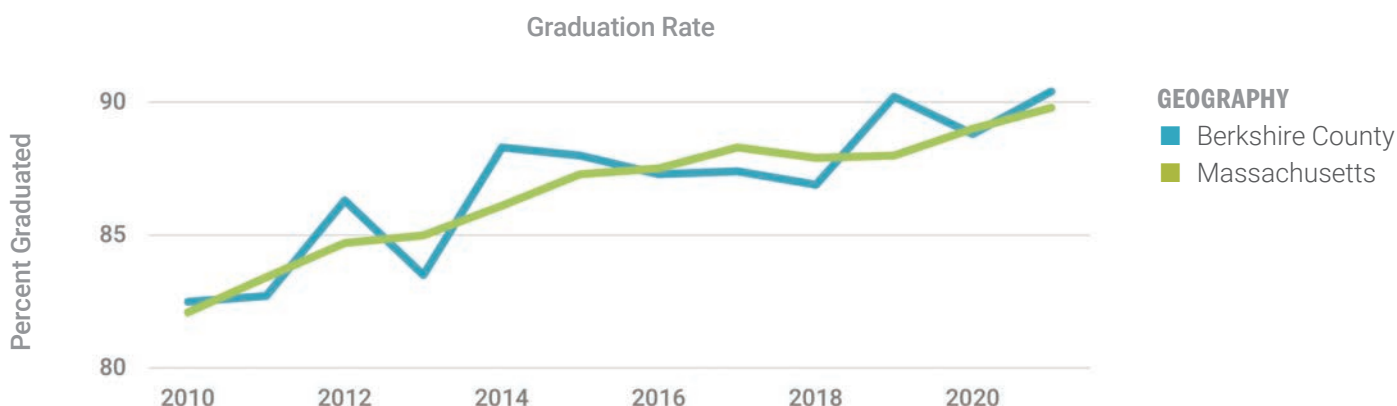
Percent of 3rd Grade students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on NextGen MCAS English Test



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION [HTTPS://PROFILES.DOE.MASS.EDU/STATE_REPORT/#ASSESSMENT%20AND%20ACCOUNTABILITY](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/#assessment%20and%20accountability)

GRADUATION RATE

The graduation rate among Berkshire County students continues a trend over the last decade of a slow but steady increase. The county is consistent with the state.



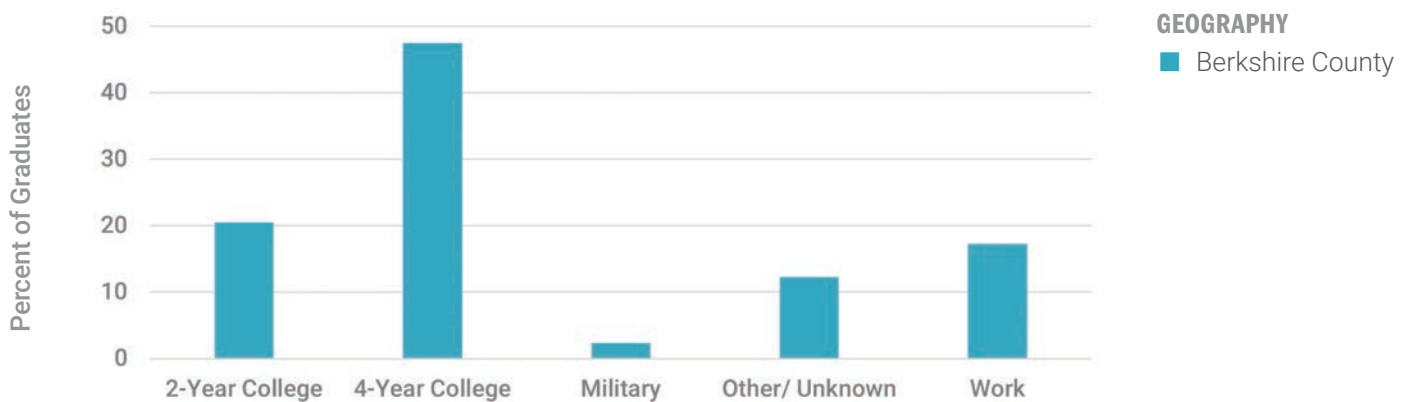
SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION [HTTPS://PROFILES.DOE.MASS.EDU/STATE_REPORT/#ASSESSMENT%20AND%20ACCOUNTABILITY](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/#assessment%20and%20accountability)



PLANS FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

Two out of three high school graduates in Berkshire County plan to go to college, with the majority planning to go to a four-year school. The percentage going to college is 6% less than the state, with the state also sending a higher percentage to four-year schools. Interestingly, only two out of three that go to college will obtain a degree within six years. Additionally, one in five graduates plans to go directly to work, which is higher than the state and has doubled over the last 10 years.

Plans for High School Graduates – 2021



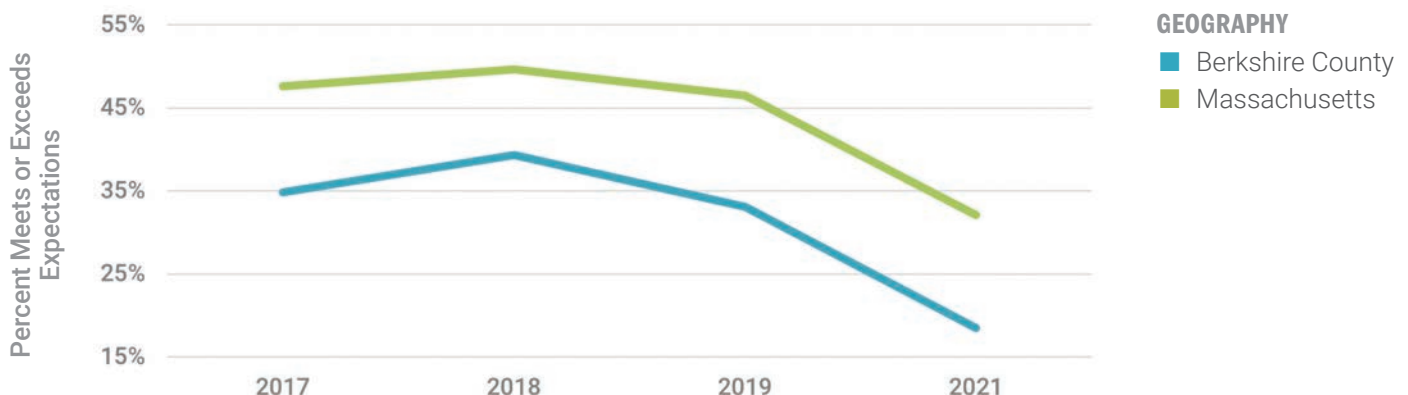
SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION 2021 [HTTPS://PROFILES.DOE.MASS.EDU/STATE_REPORT/#ASSESSMENT%20AND%20ACCOUNTABILITY](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/#ASSESSMENT%20AND%20ACCOUNTABILITY)

OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE

8th GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY

The percentage of eighth-grade students who meet or exceed expectations in math is far below the state average, and in 2021 was almost half the state average. Districts throughout the county vary greatly, with some significantly above average and some significantly below average.

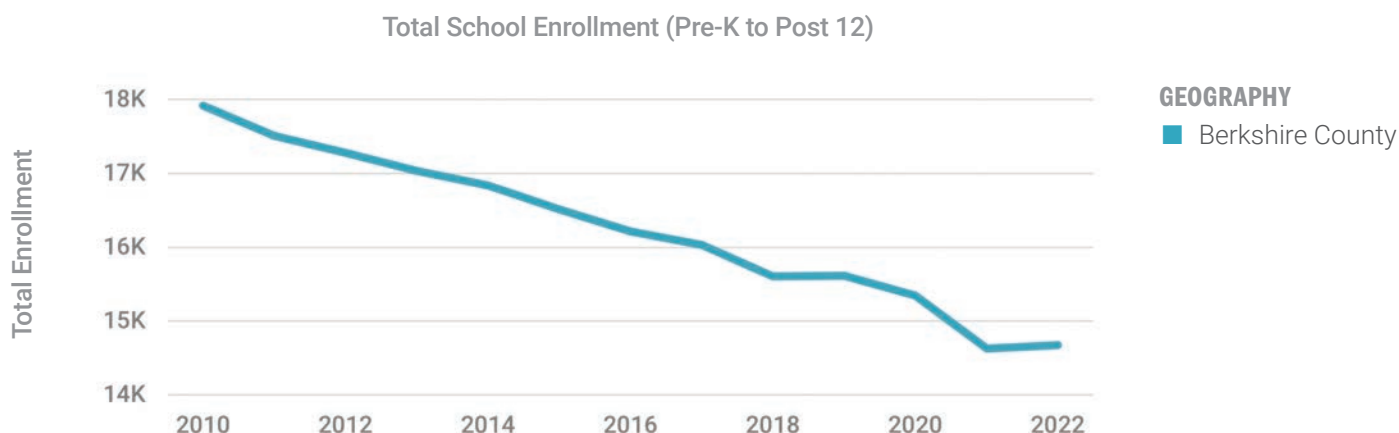
Percent of 8th Grade Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on NextGen MCAS Math Test



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION [HTTPS://PROFILES.DOE.MASS.EDU/STATE_REPORT/#ASSESSMENT%20AND%20ACCOUNTABILITY](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/#ASSESSMENT%20AND%20ACCOUNTABILITY)

TOTAL SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Public school enrollment (Pre-K to post 12) has consistently declined over the last two decades. The enrollment in 2022 was stable from 2021; however, this may be due to the pandemic. Another year or two of data will determine if the pandemic impacted the long-term trends in enrollment.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION [HTTPS://PROFILES.DOE.MASS.EDU/STATE_REPORT/#ASSESSMENT%20AND%20ACCOUNTABILITY](https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/#ASSESSMENT%20AND%20ACCOUNTABILITY)

SURVEY QUESTIONS

SCHOOL SUPPORTED YOUR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One out of two survey respondents who graduated in the last 10 years from a Berkshire County school felt their school supported them. Only one in 10 felt somewhat or not supported. People of color felt less supported than their White peers.

ADULTS NOTICED WHEN YOU WERE DOING A GOOD JOB

Three out of four survey respondents who graduated in the last 10 years from a Berkshire County school said adults noticed when they were doing a good job. As incomes drop, the percent of respondents who reported adults noticed them doing a good job went down.

IMAGINED A LIFE POST-HIGH SCHOOL IN THE BERKSHIRES

Only one out of three survey respondents always imagined they would live in the Berkshires after high school, but another half sometimes envisioned it. Over one in five rarely or never imagined living in the county after they graduated.

PREPARED FOR COLLEGE, CAREER, MILITARY, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

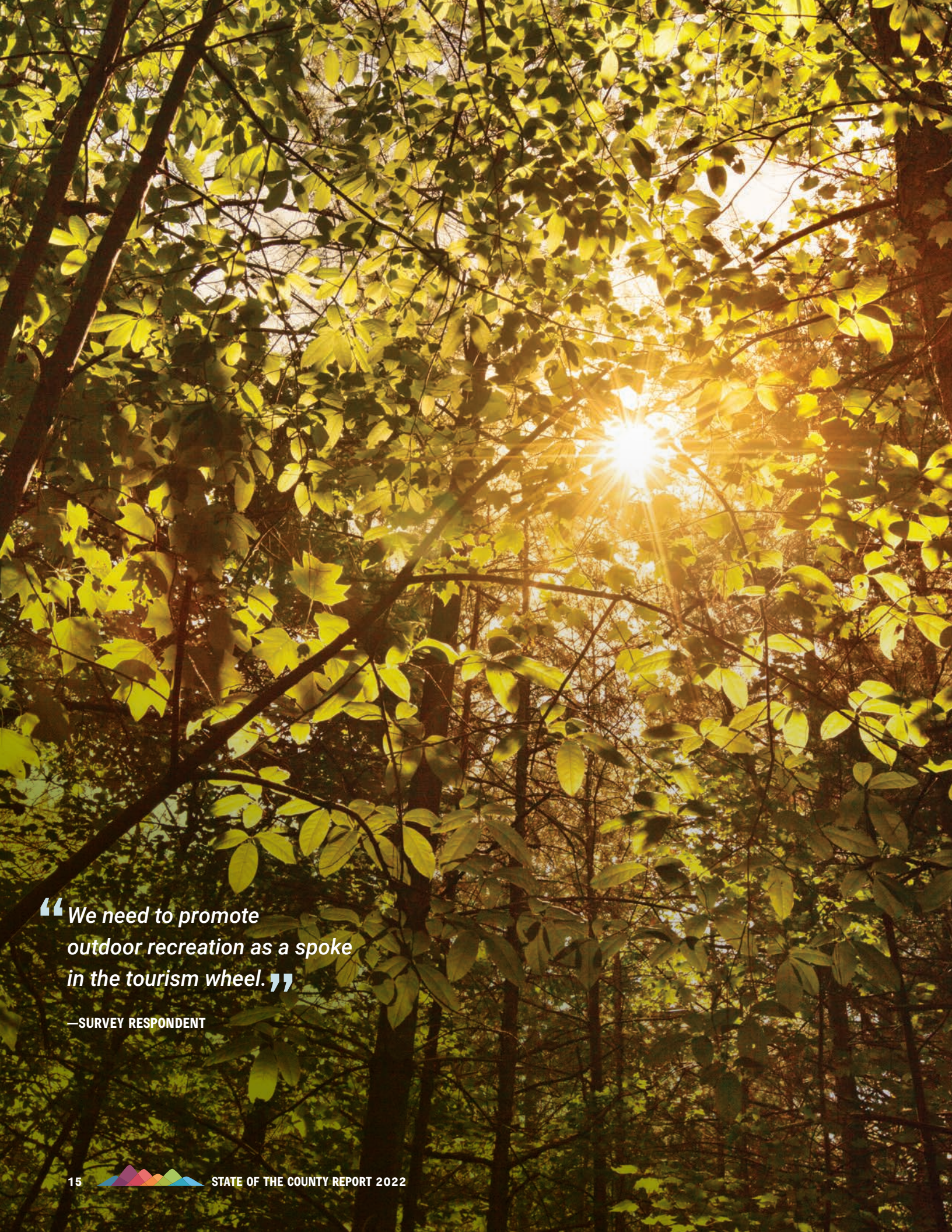
Survey respondents who graduated in the last 10 years from a Berkshire County school felt well prepared for college, career, military, and community service. Respondents felt prepared the most for college. Lower-income respondents and people of color reported feeling less ready across all endeavors.

OPPORTUNITIES TO PREPARE FOR LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Two out of three recent graduates reported internships, college counseling, dual enrollment classes, career education, and vocational education were available. However, at least 10-15% more students could have participated in the experiences available.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

When asked about getting the most out of their high school education, only one in four survey respondents who graduated in the last 10 years from a Berkshire County school reported that they had no issues. One out of three said family issues at home and one out of four said health issues had significant impacts on their ability to get the most out of school.



*“We need to promote
outdoor recreation as a spoke
in the tourism wheel.”*

—SURVEY RESPONDENT



ENVIRONMENT

SUMMARY

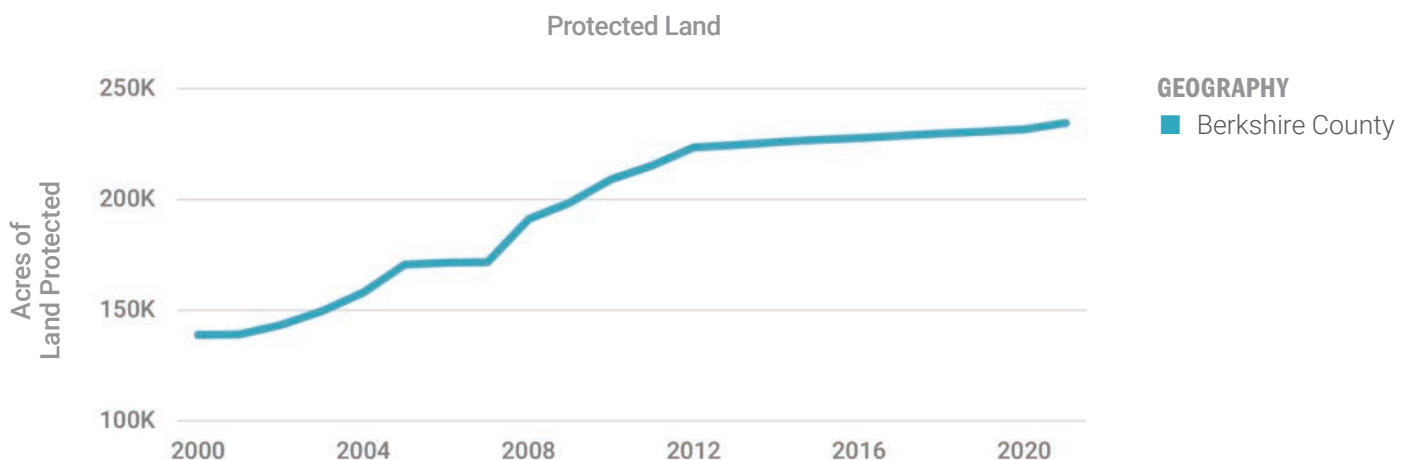
The environmental indicators show a high-quality environment, with improving air quality, high access to open space, increasing protection of land, and an increase in the acres of cropland. The survey, however, indicates that while the White population feels welcome in open spaces, people of color report feeling less welcome. There is also less knowledge about recreational opportunities and less interest in helping the environment reported by people of color. Further details on each of the below indicators are available online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org.

KEY INDICATOR	TREND
Protected Land	↑
Access to Open Space	NA
Agricultural Land and Farms	↑ ↓
OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE	TREND
Air Quality	↓

KEY INDICATORS

PROTECTED LAND

The acreage of protected land has been increasing over the last 20 years. Approximately one out of every three acres in the county is protected from development.

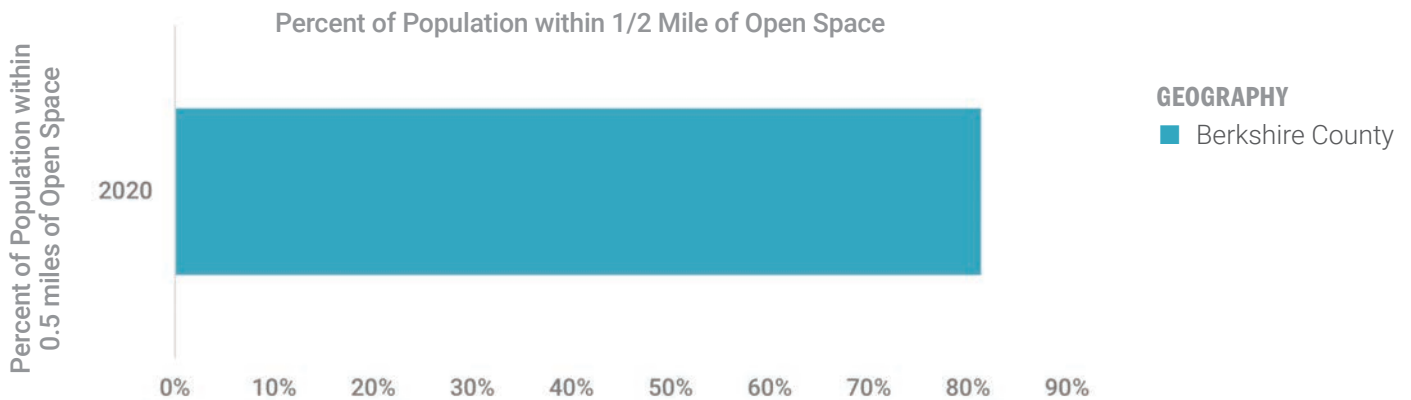


SOURCE: BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION, MASSGIS



ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE

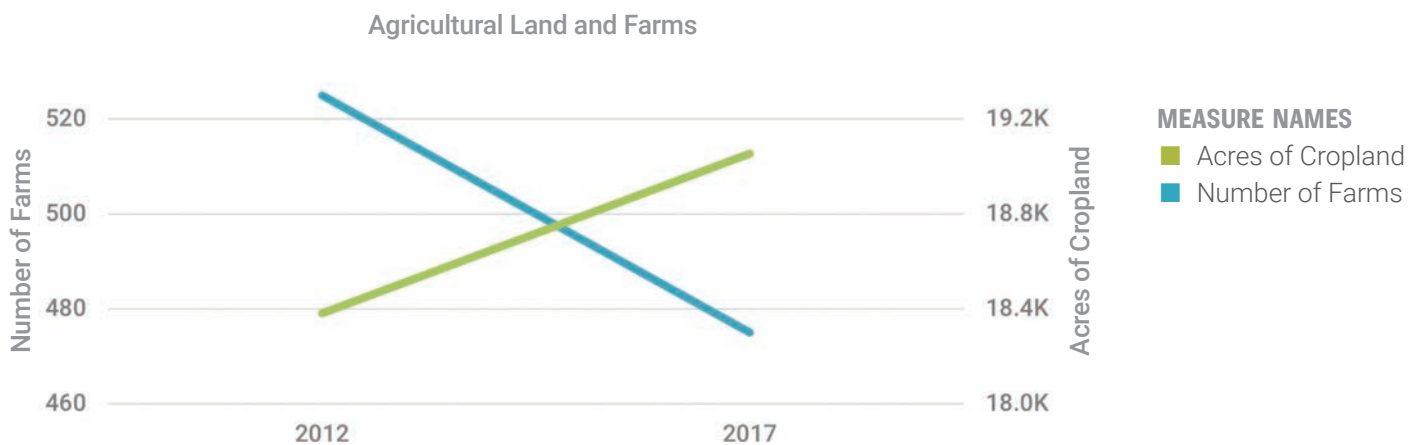
Four out of five people live within one-half of a mile of an access point to outdoor recreation. Access points are outdoor assets, such as trailheads, boat launches, athletic fields, playgrounds, or picnic areas. Considering the region's rural nature, this appears to be a high percentage. This year is the first time measuring this indicator, so trend data is unavailable.



SOURCE: BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OPEN SPACE DATA, U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY POPULATION DATA

AGRICULTURAL LAND AND FARMS

Over the last decade, Berkshire County lost one out of 10 farms. However, the amount of cropland has increased, indicating that each farmer is cultivating more acreage.

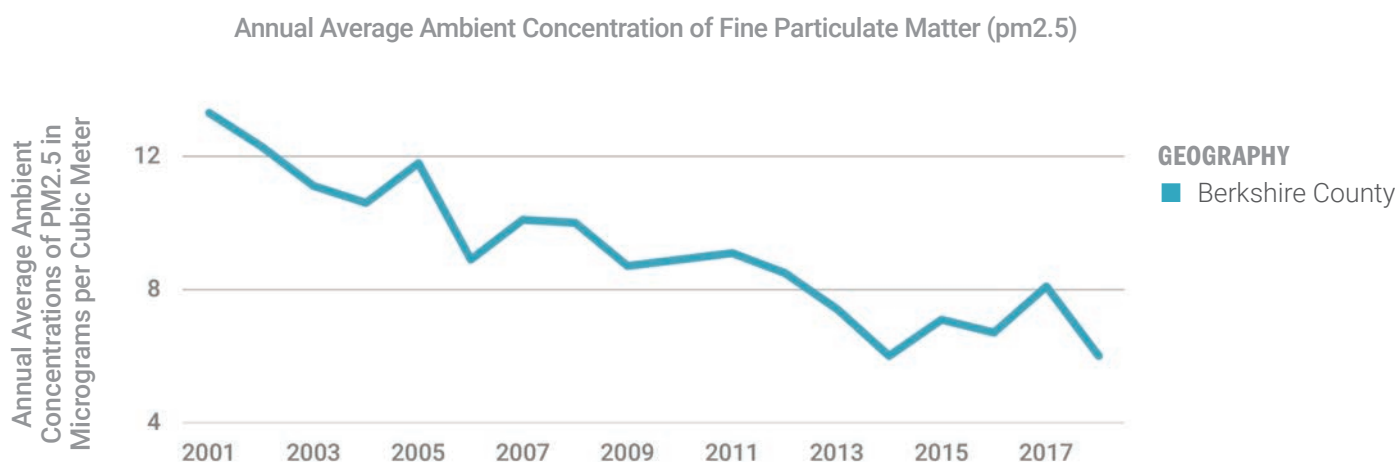


SOURCE: US CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE [HTTPS://WWW.NASS.USDA.GOV/AGCENSUS](https://www.nass.usda.gov/agcensus)

OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE

AIR QUALITY

The air quality in Berkshire County has been improving over the last 20 years, with the annual average ambient concentration of fine particulate matter (pm2.5) decreasing by over half. pm2.5 are tiny particles in the air that, when elevated, reduce visibility and cause the air to appear hazy. They are a concern for people's health and irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs.



SOURCE: CDC ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING NETWORK [HTTPS://EPHTRACKING.CDC.GOV/DATAEXPLORER/INDEX.HTML?C=11&I=30&M=1#/](https://ephtracking.cdc.gov/DataExplorer/Index.html?C=11&I=30&M=1#/)

SURVEY QUESTIONS

WELCOME IN OUTDOOR SPACES

Two out of three respondents feel very welcome in outdoor spaces, while one in three feels somewhat welcome. Respondents of color felt less welcome than the White population.

LIMITS TO YOUR ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Half of the survey respondents do not feel limited in their ability to participate in outdoor recreation. However, one out of five respondents feels they are limited because they need someone to go with, lack knowledge about these activities, or have safety concerns. For people of color, the percentage of respondents feeling limited increases for all reasons.

HELPING THE ENVIRONMENT

Three out of four survey respondents use energy-efficient appliances or recycle. Over half of respondents think about what they consume, eat locally grown foods, or have a

natural chemical-free lawn. One out of four respondents has a fuel-efficient or electric vehicle and invests in or uses renewable energy. The highest-rated choices drop by 10% for lower-income respondents and 15-25% for people of color.

STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Survey respondents said investing in renewable energy and increasing conservation education is important. Increasing access to sustainable ways to use the land and increasing opportunities to be in the natural environment are also important.

OBTAIN LOCALLY GROWN FOOD

Five out of 10 survey respondents can always or often obtain locally grown food. Meanwhile, four out of 10 respondents can never or only occasionally obtain locally grown food. Part of this is due to the financial cost of locally grown food. However, it is also due to the seasonality of our local products.



GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY

The government sector is focused primarily on local municipal finance. Municipal budgets have been increasing. The primary source of revenue is local property taxes, which have had to absorb the majority of the budget increases. In contrast, state revenue has seen a substantial decrease as a percent of revenue. Municipalities increase their budgets close to the levy limit each year and are slowly approaching the levy ceiling. Several communities are within 90% of the ceiling. Further details on each of the below indicators are available online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org.

Survey respondents reported they felt represented by their local leaders and generally trusted law enforcement, lawyers, courts, and the district attorney. Among low-income and people of color, there is a need for better representation and earning increased trust.

KEY INDICATOR	TREND
Average Single-Family Property Tax Bill	↑
Municipal Budget by Sector	NA
Municipal Revenue by Source	↓
Ratio of Local Property Tax Bill to Per Capita Income	↔
OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE	TREND
Percent of Levy Limit and Ceiling	↔ ↓

“Small town governments need to find better ways to listen to those living in town, not to potential businesses that the people don’t want.”

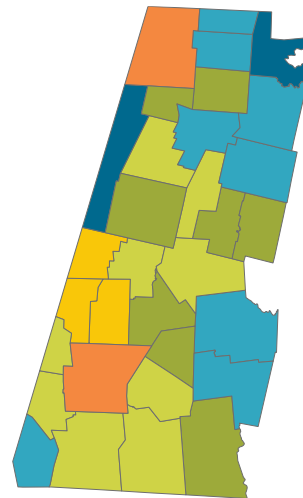
—SURVEY RESPONDENT



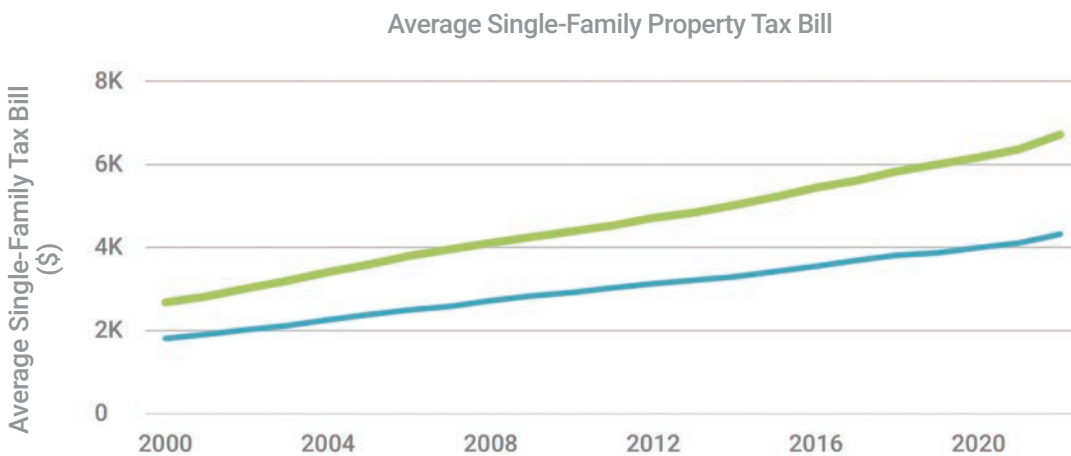
KEY INDICATORS

AVERAGE SINGLE-FAMILY PROPERTY TAX BILL

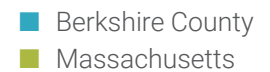
The average single-family tax bill has increased by 137% since 2000, less than the statewide average of 150%. The state is also 55% higher than the county average. The more urban communities, which tend to offer more services, and wealthier communities tend to have a higher tax bill than the rural or less wealthy communities.



Average Single Family Tax Bill



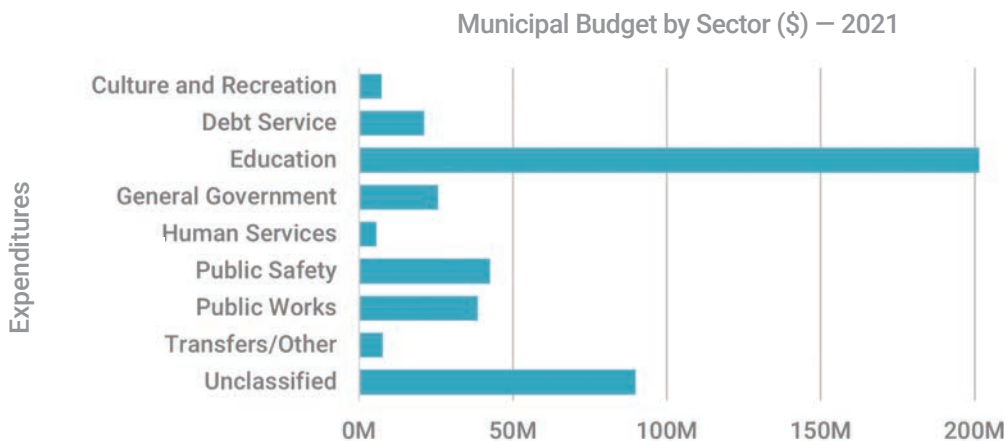
GEOGRAPHY



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/MUNICIPAL-DATABANK-DATA-ANALYTICS-INCLUDING-CHERRY-SHEETS](https://www.mass.gov/municipal-databank-data-analytics-including-cherry-sheets)

MUNICIPAL BUDGET BY SECTOR

The aggregate municipal budget for the cities and towns in Berkshire County has gone up 60% since 2004. Education accounts for the largest sector of the budget at 46%.



GEOGRAPHY

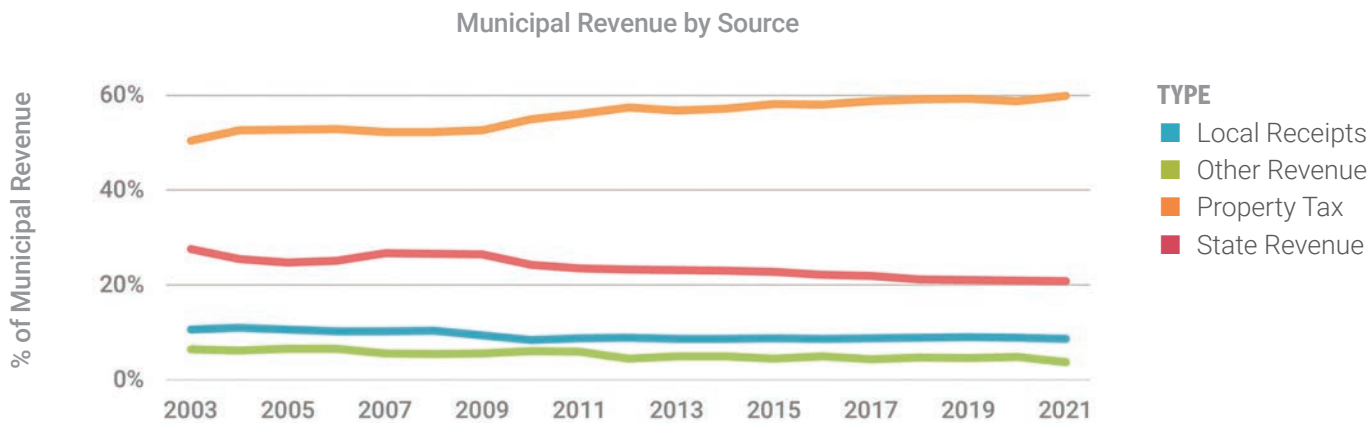


SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/MUNICIPAL-DATABANK-DATA-ANALYTICS-INCLUDING-CHERRY-SHEETS](https://www.mass.gov/municipal-databank-data-analytics-including-cherry-sheets)



MUNICIPAL REVENUE BY SOURCE

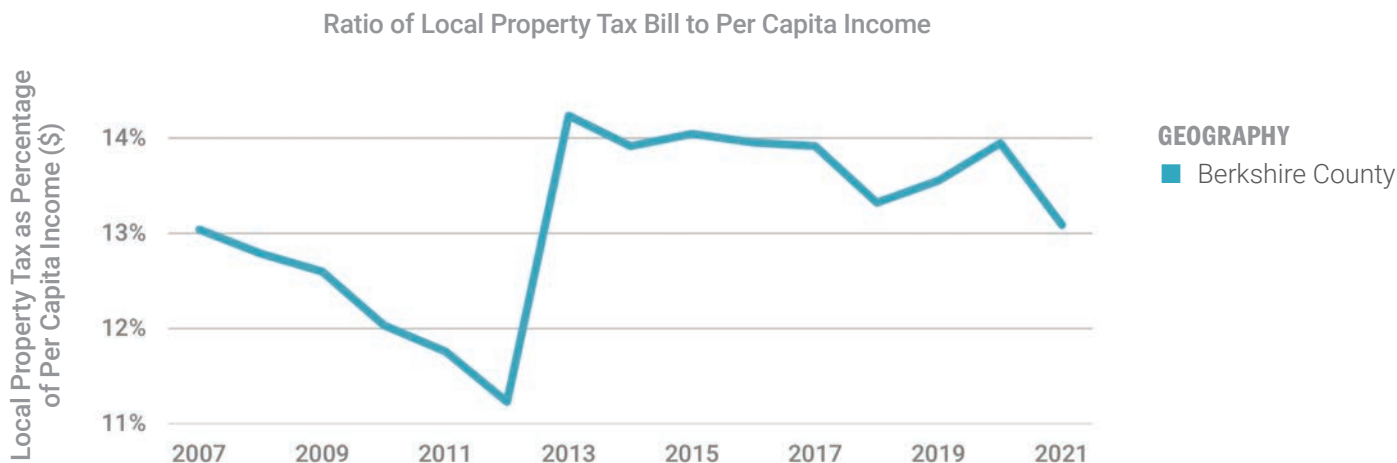
Municipalities in Berkshire County have seen a consistently increased share in property taxes. In contrast, state revenue, local receipts, and other revenue have reduced shares. State revenue has the largest variability for a municipality, ranging from 1% to over 45%.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/MUNICIPAL-DATABANK-DATA-ANALYTICS-INCLUDING-CHERRY-SHEETS](https://www.mass.gov/municipal-databank-data-analytics-including-cherry-sheets)

RATIO OF LOCAL PROPERTY TAX BILL TO PER CAPITA INCOME (TAX BURDEN)

The ratio of local property tax to per capita income for Berkshire County has remained relatively stable over the last decade, around 14%. There is significant variability among the municipalities on what percentage they ask residents to pay, ranging from 5.7% to 19.1% of their income.

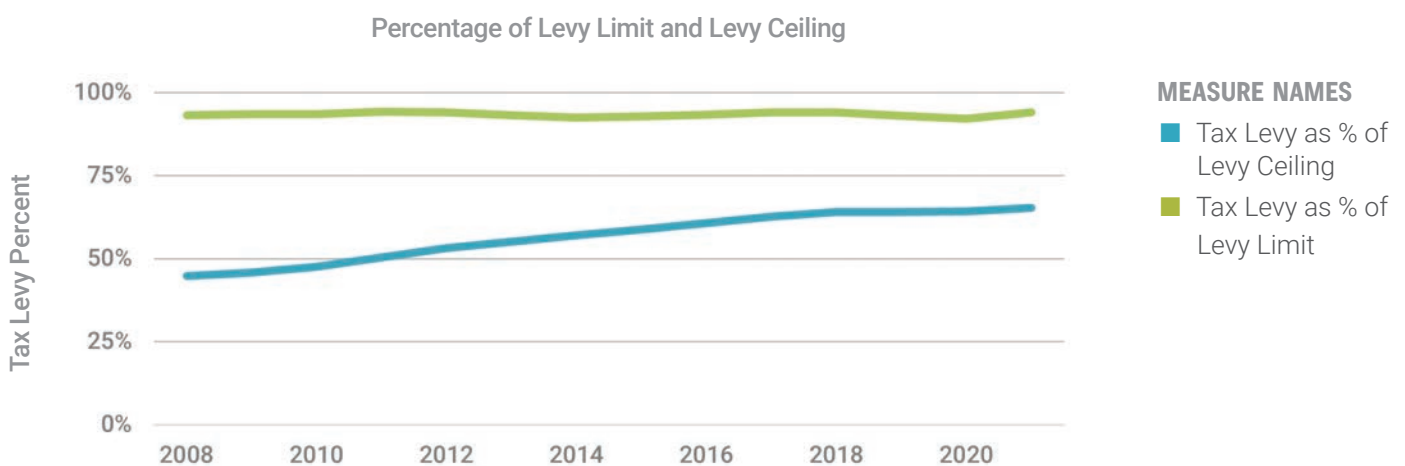


SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/MUNICIPAL-DATABANK-DATA-ANALYTICS-INCLUDING-CHERRY-SHEETS](https://www.mass.gov/municipal-databank-data-analytics-including-cherry-sheets)

OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE

PERCENTAGE OF LEVY LIMIT AND CEILING

The levy ceiling is the maximum amount a community can raise and is 2.5% of the assessed value within that town. The levy limit is the maximum amount a community can raise in a single year without a levy override. Berkshire County is consistently at a levy limit of slightly over 90%, which means the region is using most, but not all, of our tax capacity in a given year. The percentage of the levy ceiling has been going up. This increase indicates that assessed values are not rising as fast as the levy.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/MUNICIPAL-DATABANK-DATA-ANALYTICS-INCLUDING-CHERRY-SHEETS](https://www.mass.gov/municipal-databank-data-analytics-including-cherry-sheets)

SURVEY QUESTIONS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTS YOUR BELIEFS AND VALUES

Two out of three survey respondents feel that their local government represents them very well or moderately well. As income increases, responses indicate a feeling of better representation. The percentage that feels government represents them very or moderately well drops by 20% for respondents of color.


LOCAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Three out of four survey respondents are satisfied with law enforcement, with two out of three satisfied with the courts and corrections and three out of five satisfied with the

district attorney. Higher-income respondents tended to have higher satisfaction with law enforcement, courts, and corrections and lower satisfaction with the district attorney. People of color responded with lower satisfaction with law enforcement and courts and higher satisfaction with the district attorney.

INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

One out of two survey respondents is satisfied with the level of investment in roads, renewable energy, and broadband. Two out of three are satisfied with the investment in water and sewer. Broadband had the highest level of dissatisfaction.



*“I feel that we have aging
healthcare providers with less
young providers available
when they retire.”*

—SURVEY RESPONDENT



HEALTH

SUMMARY

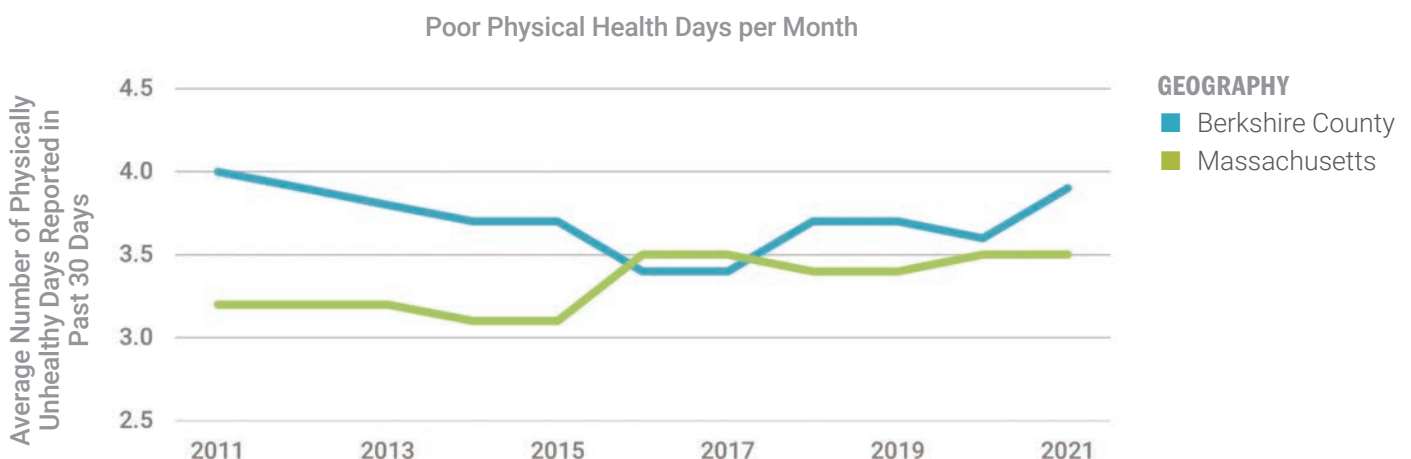
Berkshire County has seen improvements in some aspects of health but has seen health worsen overall. Preventable hospital stays and emergency hospital visits for asthma have improved. Meanwhile, the increase in poor mental health days and premature death may be related to the increase in excessive drinking and substance misuse. Further details on each of the below indicators are available online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org.

KEY INDICATOR	TREND
Poor Physical Health Days	↔
Poor Mental Health Days	↑
Excessive Drinking	↑
Premature Death	↑
Substance Misuse	↑
OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE	TREND
Asthma	↓
Diabetes	↑
Preventable Hospital Stays	↓

KEY INDICATORS

POOR PHYSICAL HEALTH DAYS

The average resident reports they are physically unhealthy four days a year. This average has remained relatively stable over the last decade. The county is consistently above the state average.

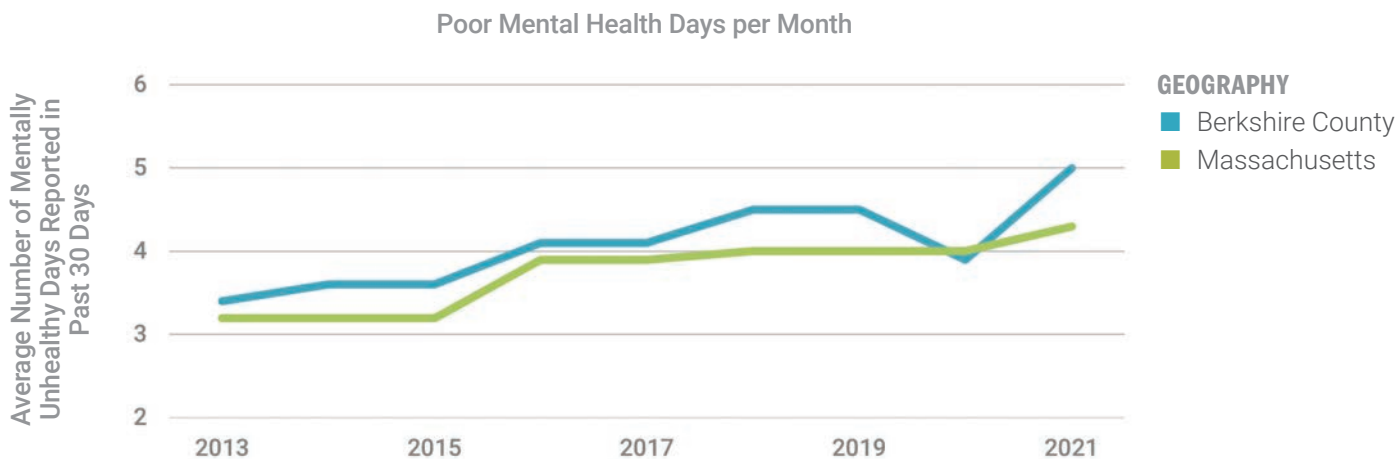


SOURCE: COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS [HTTPS://WWW.COUNTYHEALTHRANKINGS.ORG/](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/)



POOR MENTAL HEALTH DAYS

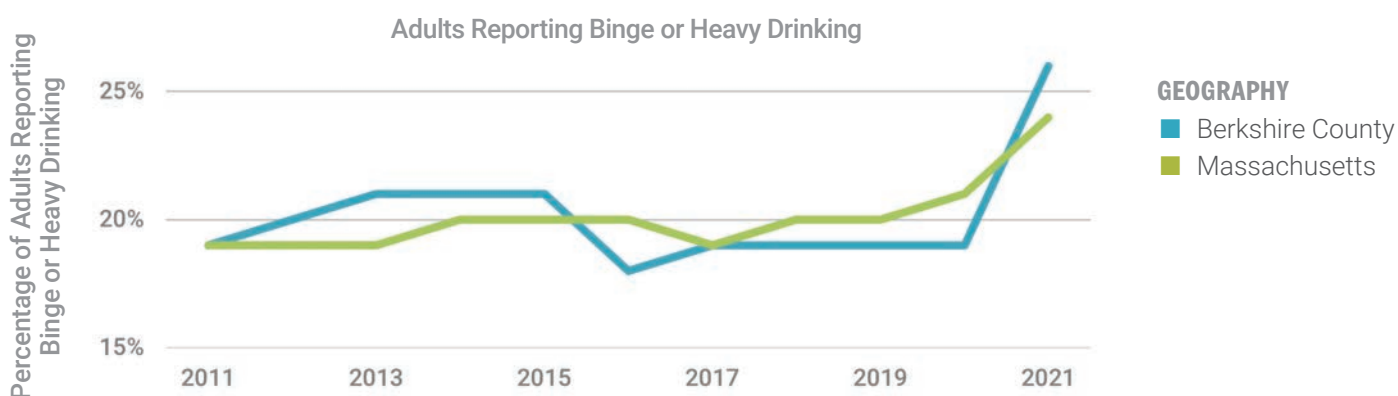
The average resident in the region reports they are mentally unhealthy five days a year. The number of days has increased by 1.5 days in the last decade. The state has also seen an increase but is below the region.



SOURCE: COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS [HTTPS://WWW.COUNTYHEALTHRANKINGS.ORG/](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/)

EXCESSIVE DRINKING

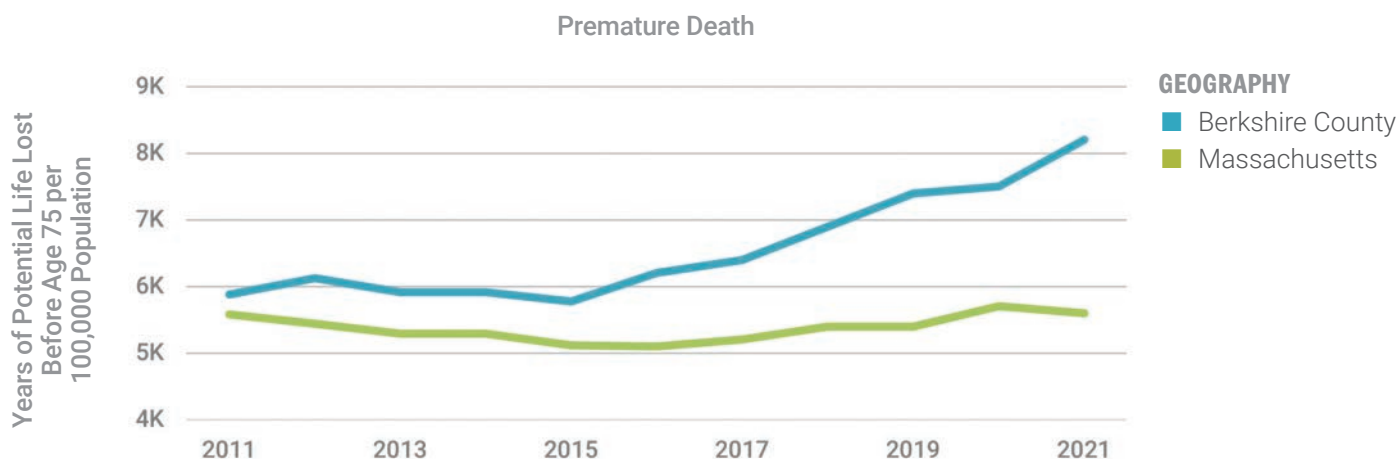
County residents report that almost one in four adults binge drink or are heavy drinkers. The pandemic has affected this ratio, which has increased from one in five adults.



[HTTPS://WWW.COUNTYHEALTHRANKINGS.ORG/](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/)

PREMATURE DEATH

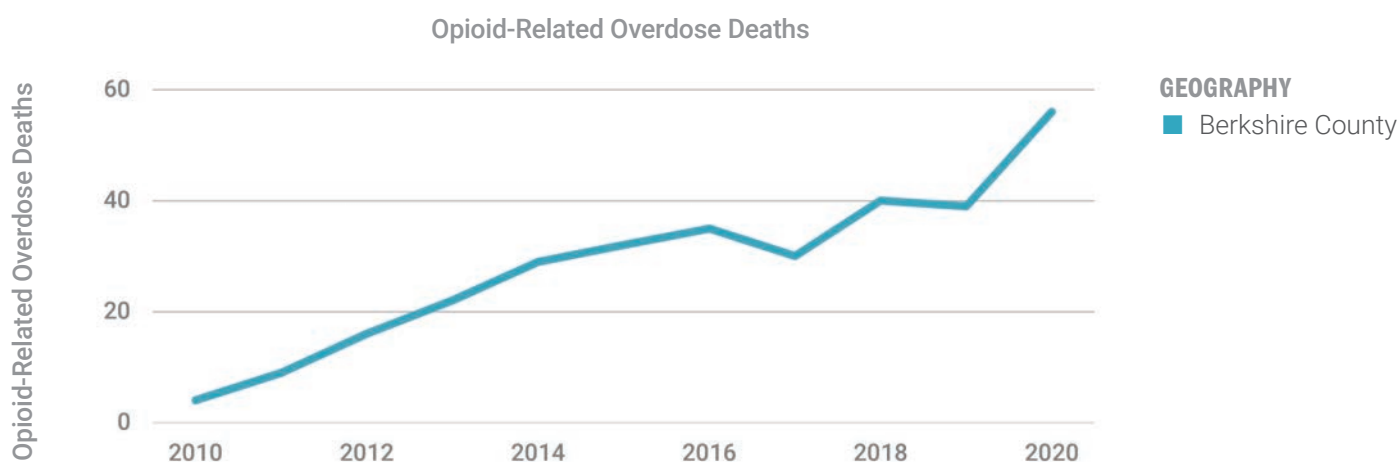
The county has seen a significant increase in premature deaths over the last decade. The county loses over 8,000 years of potential life before age 75 for every 100,000 people, significantly higher than the state average of 6,000 years. This indicator shows the region was similar to the state through 2015 when it started to increase.



SOURCE: COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS [HTTPS://WWW.COUNTYHEALTHRANKINGS.ORG/](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/)

SUBSTANCE MISUSE

The number of opioid-related deaths in Berkshire County has continued to increase. The county has seen a 1,300% increase over the last decade, rising from four to 56 a year.

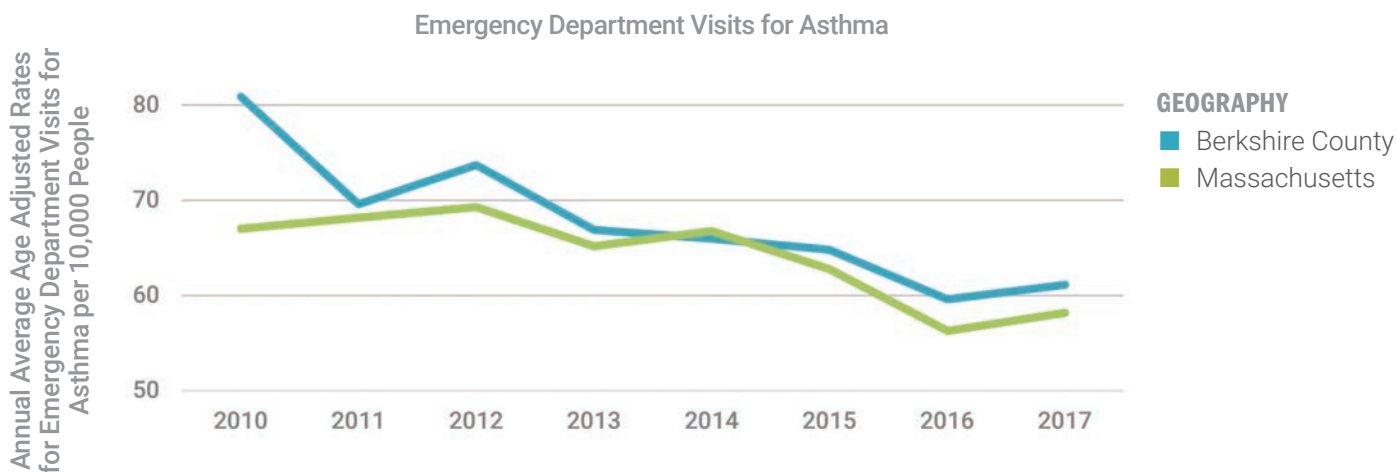


SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/LISTS/CURRENT-OPIOID-STATISTICS](https://www.mass.gov/lists/current-opioid-statistics)

OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE

ASTHMA

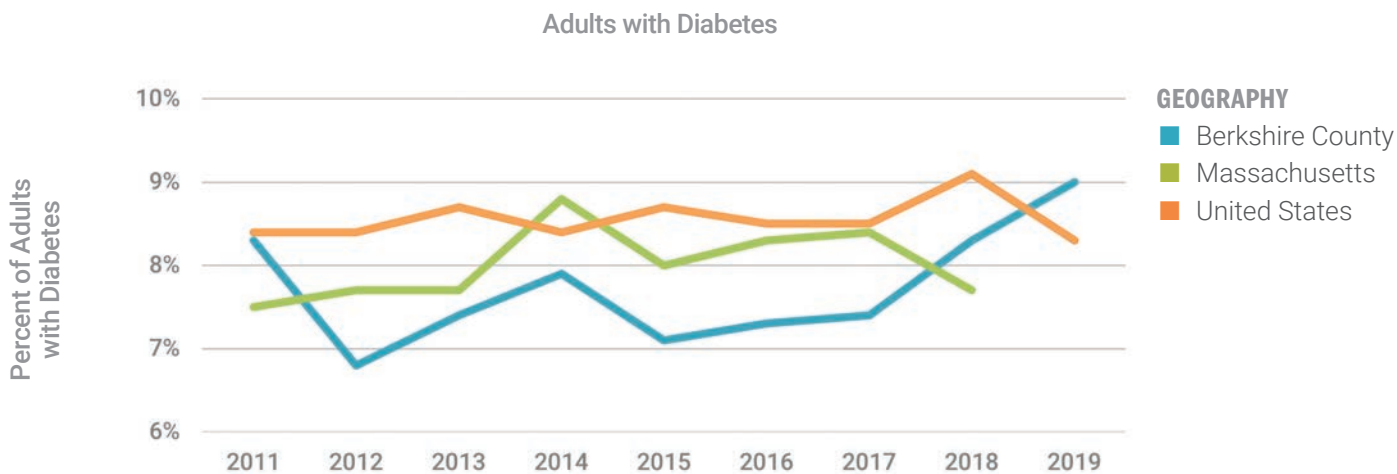
The number of emergency department visits for asthma has significantly declined over the last decade; however, the county remains slightly above the state average. The improving air quality that the region is experiencing, shown in the environment sector, may be influencing this decline.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH [HTTPS://MATRACKING.EHS.STATE.MA.US/HEALTH-DATA/ASTHMA/INDEX.HTML](https://matracking.ehs.state.ma.us/health-data/asthma/index.html)

DIABETES

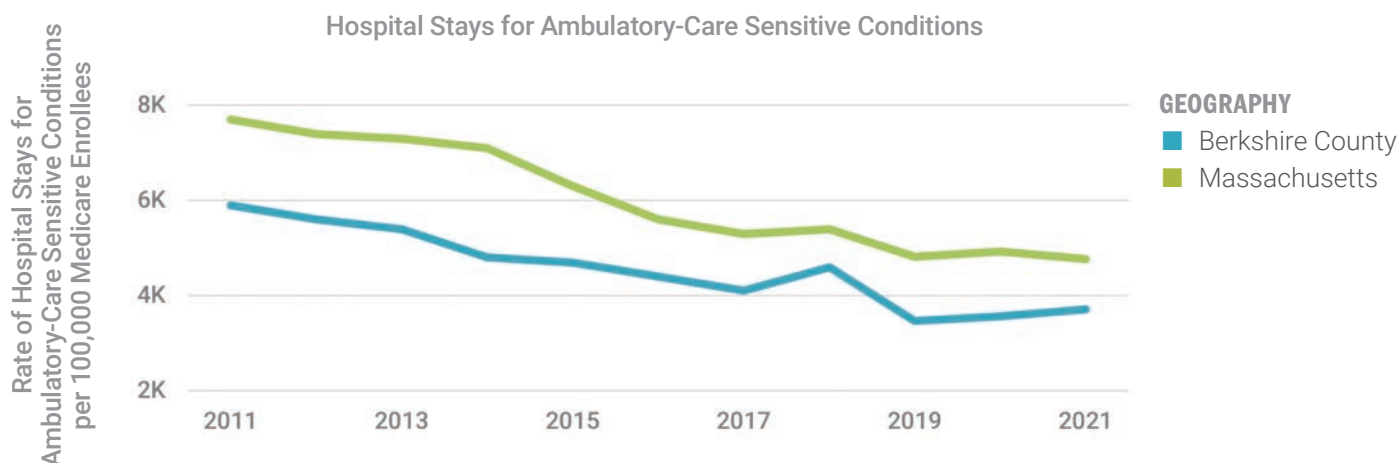
The percentage of adults with diabetes in Berkshire County has steadily increased since 2012. It had consistently been below the state and nation but now exceeds both.



SOURCE: CDC DIABETES ATLAS [HTTPS://GIS.CDC.GOV/GRASP/DIABETES/DIABETESATLAS.HTML](https://gis.cdc.gov/grasp/diabetes/diabetesatlas.html)

PREVENTABLE HOSPITAL STAYS

The number of preventable stays has dropped by half in Berkshire County. The rate of hospital stays for ambulatory-care sensitive conditions among Medicare enrollees has fallen from six per 100 to three per 100 enrollees. The state has a rate of five per 100 enrollees.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/LISTS/CURRENT-OPIOD-STATISTICS](https://www.mass.gov/lists/current-opioid-statistics)

SURVEY QUESTIONS

ACCESSING HEALTH CARE

One out of two survey respondents reported a lack of trusted, available medical health care providers. One out of three respondents says there is a lack of accessible options or a lack of trusted and available mental health providers. One out of four respondents does not have the finances or the health insurance needed to get the care they need. For people of color, all of the percentages go up.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

The majority of survey respondents reported that their physical health is above average. Physical health is said to improve as income increases.

MENTAL HEALTH

The majority of survey respondents reported that their mental health is above average. Mental health is said to improve as income increases.



HOUSING

SUMMARY

One of the more noticeable impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has been increased home prices. The true impact of the pandemic on housing will take several years to determine as the data is several years behind. Many of the chosen indicators may not accurately reflect the reality of what people looking for housing are currently experiencing.

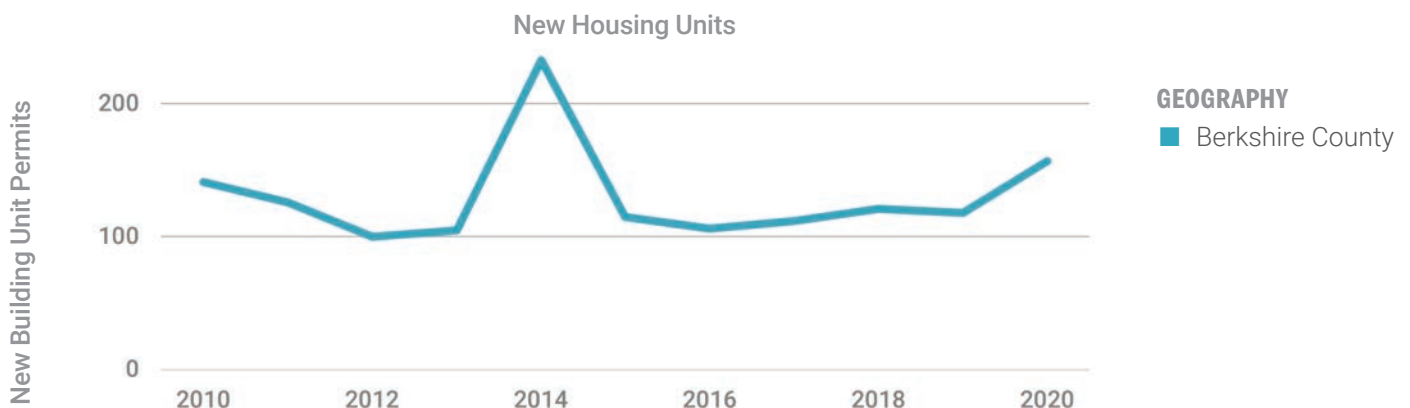
Housing, especially when combined with transportation, is unaffordable to many residents. While the region is seeing new housing being built, there are not enough new homes. Many of these units are for higher-income and second homeowners.

KEY INDICATOR	TREND
New Housing Units	↑
Affordability Gap	↓ ↑
Owners and Renters Spending 30% or More of Household Income on Housing	↔ ↓
Housing and Transportation Cost as a Percentage of Income	NA
Housing Supply by Percent of Median Income	↔
OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE	TREND
Foreclosures	↓
Home Costs as a Percentage of Income	↓

KEY INDICATORS

NEW HOUSING UNITS

The number of new housing unit permits has increased over the last few years, likely due to increased income, decreased mortgage rates, and the continued influx of second homeowners. The significant spike in 2014 was due to a large affordable housing complex in Williamstown that was permitted.



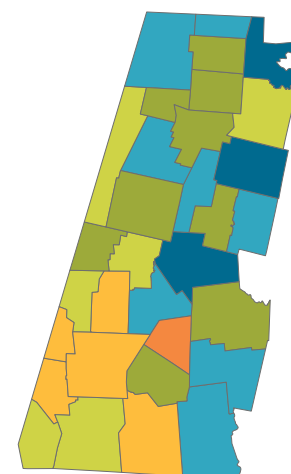
SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU [HTTPS://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/CONSTRUCTION/BPS/](https://www.census.gov/construction/bps/)

AFFORDABILITY GAP

Housing affordability compares the current gross rent or median sales price and the affordable rent and ownership price determined by average wage. The difference is the affordability own or rent gap. A positive number indicates residents have more money than needed to pay for rent. In contrast, a negative number indicates a shortage of money.

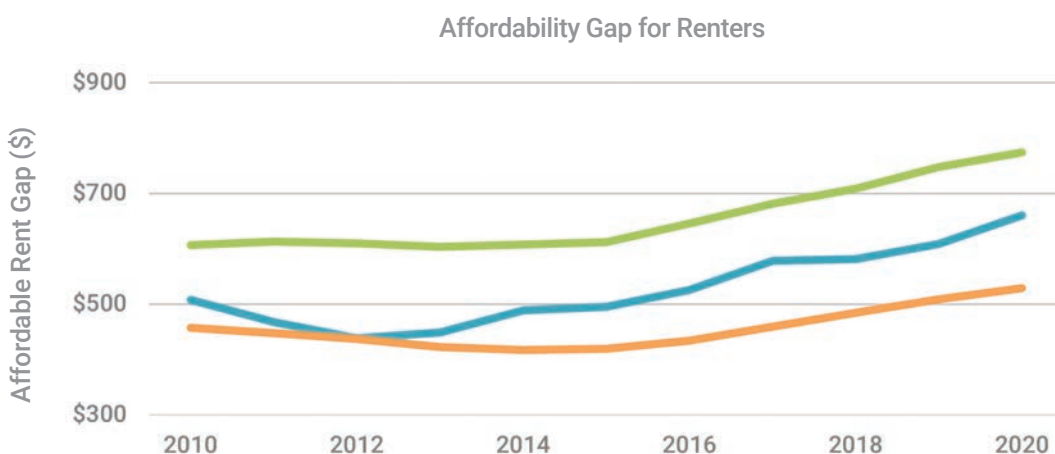
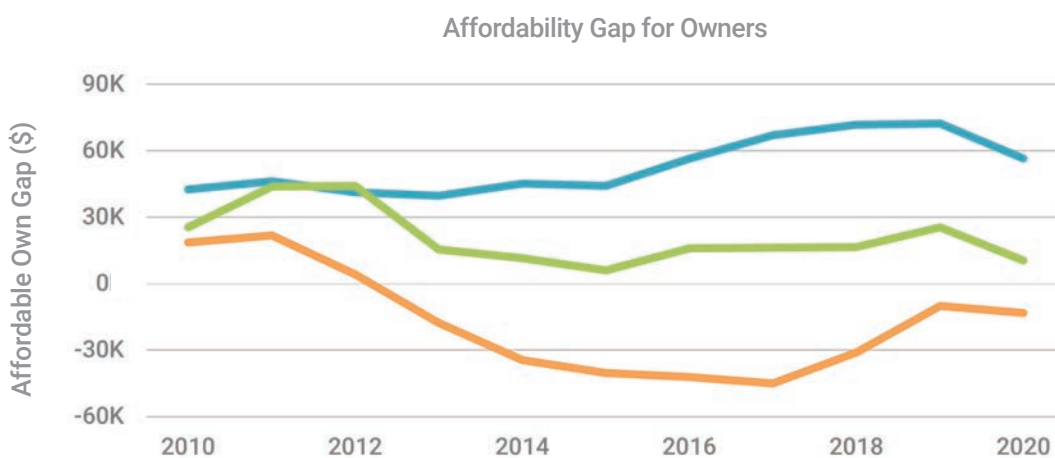
According to the data, rental housing is affordable in Berkshire County and is more affordable than in the state. Note that this data depicts the current rent paid, not the current asking price for a new renter. Anecdotal information indicates that rental prices have increased significantly during the pandemic, and rent is now unaffordable for most renters in the region. The data should show the affordable gap decreases, making rent less affordable over the next few years.

Owner affordability is also more affordable than the state. Several communities in the southwestern portion of the county are not affordable for homeownership. Additionally, these numbers represent median household incomes. It is well known that lower- and middle-income populations in the county have trouble finding affordable housing. Over the next few years, the data should show the affordable gap decreases, making housing less affordable due to the rise in home prices.



Affordability Own Gap

- > -\$500,000
- \$100,000 – -\$500,000
- \$0 – \$100,000
- \$0 – \$100
- \$100 – \$200,000
- > \$200,000



GEOGRAPHY

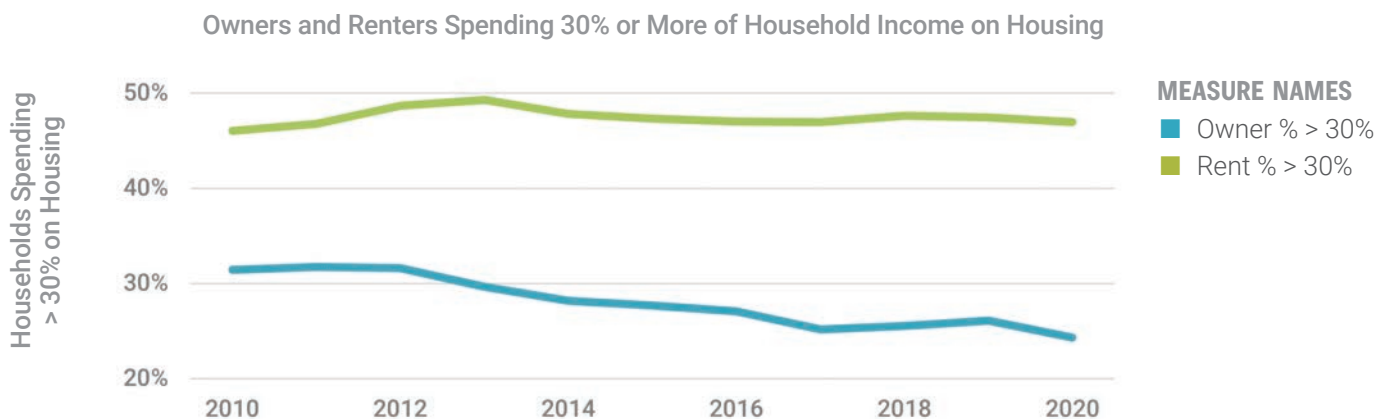
- Berkshire County
- Massachusetts
- United States

SOURCE: [HTTPS://FRED.STLOUISFED.ORG/SERIES/MSPUS#0](https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MSPUS#0), US CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY DP-04, MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ES-202



OWNERS AND RENTERS SPENDING 30% OR MORE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME ON HOUSING

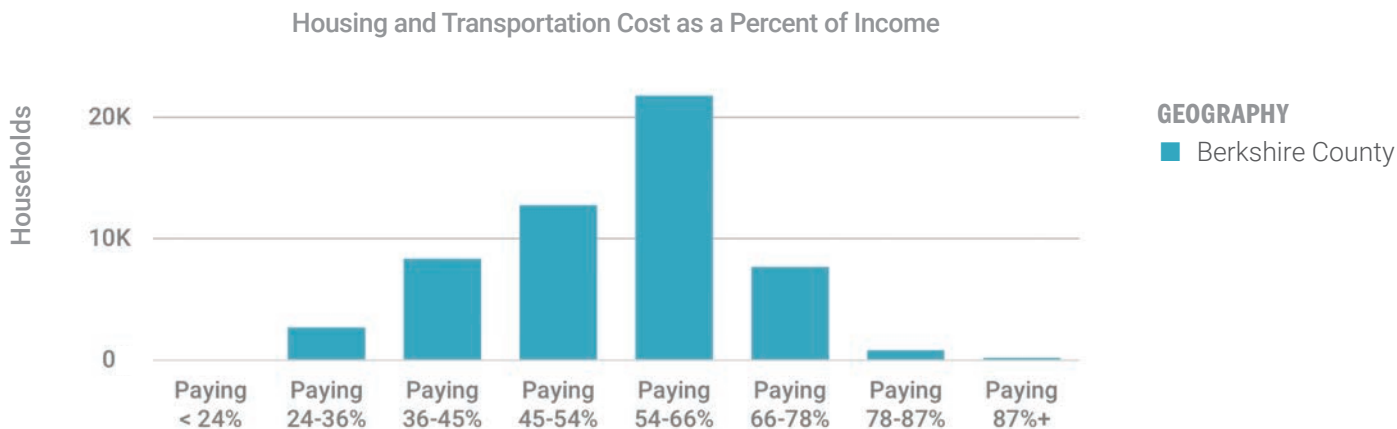
The percentage of renters spending more than 30% of their income on housing has stayed constant over the last decade, while owners spending more than 30% has decreased. A household that spends more than 30% of its income is considered housing burdened. A more significant percentage of renters are burdened than owners. Note that this data does not reflect owners who purchased a house during the pandemic and may be paying a higher percentage of their income due to higher sales prices.



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE, TABLES B25091, B25095, B25070

HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION COST AS A PERCENTAGE OF INCOME

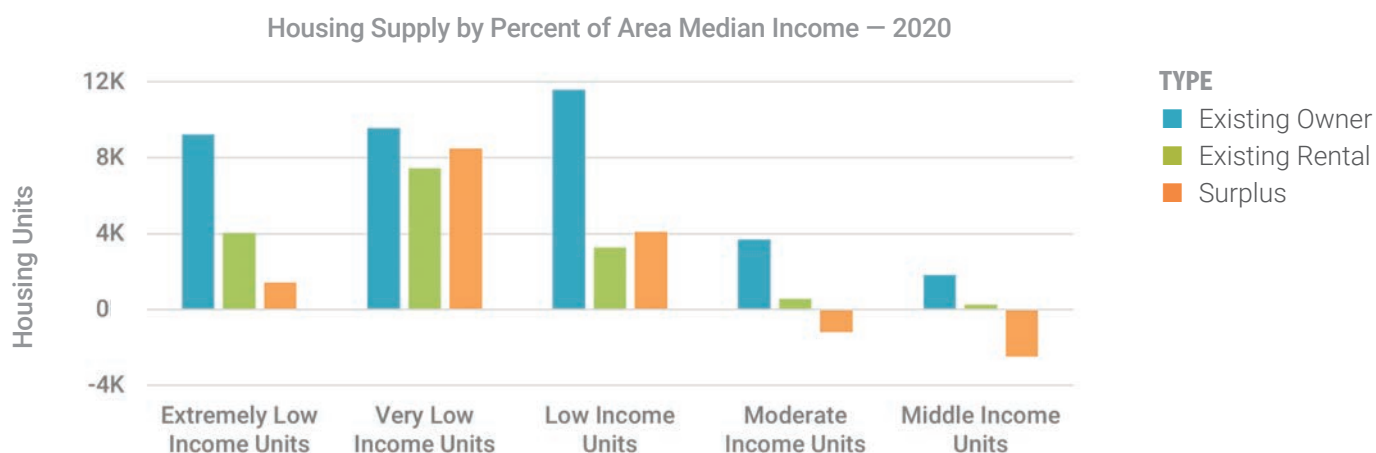
The average household in Berkshire County pays over half of its income to housing and transportation. An area that averages more than 45% is considered unaffordable. Four out of five households in Berkshire County pay over 45% of its income towards housing and transportation. This percentage is one of the highest in the state. Only one year of data is available, so no trend analysis is available for this indicator.



SOURCE: H+T AFFORDABILITY INDEX [HTTPS://HTAINDEX.CNT.ORG/MAP/](https://htaindex.cnt.org/map/)

HOUSING SUPPLY BY PERCENT OF MEDIAN INCOME

The number of affordable units by income range determines what housing types are needed to support the region's residents. This chart shows there are enough housing units for the low-income population, but a shortage for the moderate and middle-income populations. The number of surplus units for the lower-income residents has increased. In contrast, the deficit for the moderate and middle-income residents has increased. Anecdotally, many companies report challenges recruiting professionals to the area due to the lack of middle-income housing. This chart does not reflect the quality or geographic distribution of the housing. In addition, this chart does not reflect the dramatic increase in sales prices the county has experienced during the pandemic.

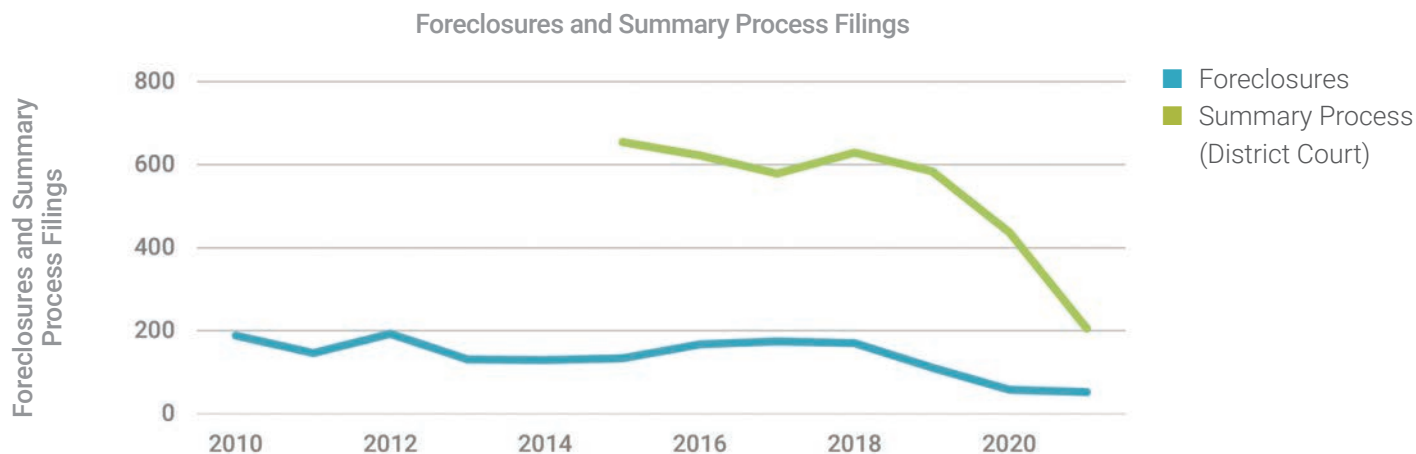


SOURCE: US CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE (2016-2020), TABLES B25063, B25087, B19001, BRPC CALCULATIONS

OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE

FORECLOSURES

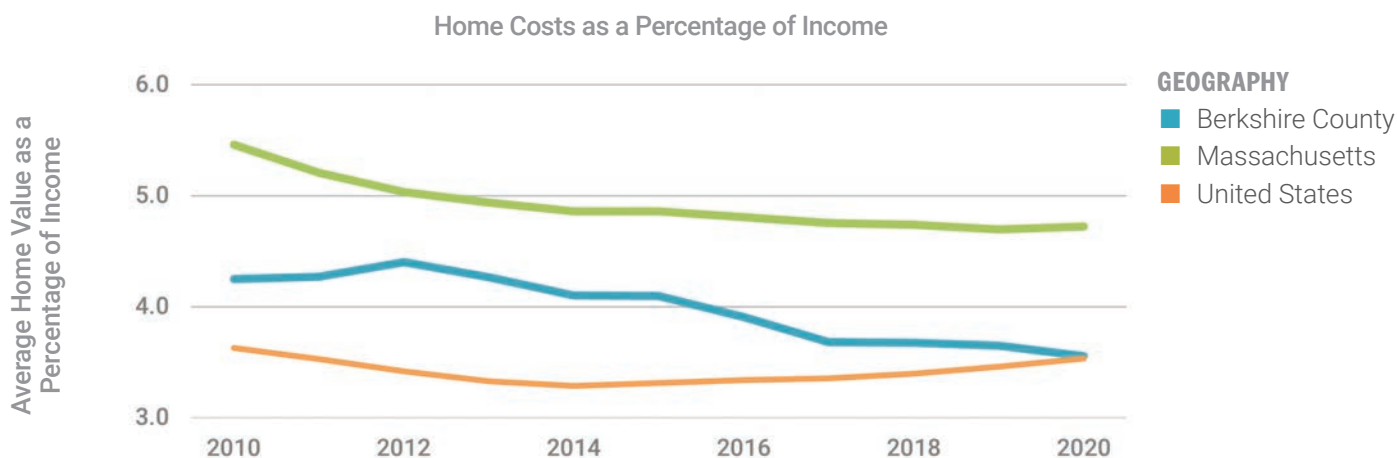
The number of foreclosures and summary process filings (evictions) has decreased significantly over the last two years, mainly due to moratoriums placed on them due to the pandemic. Foreclosures and summary process filings are both expected to increase in 2022.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS REGISTRY OF DEEDS [HTTPS://WWW.MASSLANDRECORDS.COM](https://www.masslandrecords.com) MASSACHUSETTS COURTS [HTTPS://PUBLIC.TABLEAU.COM/APP/PROFILE/DRAP4687/VIZ/MASSACHUSETTS-TRIAL-COURT-SUMMARY-PROCESS-EXECUTIONS-ISSUED/EXECUTIONS-ISSD-BY-WEEK-MONTH](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/massachusetts-trial-court-summary-process-executions-issued/executions-issd-by-week-month)

HOME COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF INCOME

Home costs as a percentage of income in Berkshire County have been declining, as has the state percentage. In contrast, the national percentage has increased and now matches the county percentage. This data does not reflect the increase in home value seen during the pandemic.



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE, TABLE B25119, DP04

SURVEY QUESTIONS

FINDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

One out of two survey respondents were able to find housing they could afford within six months, with the remaining one out of two taking between six and 12 months or more than a year. Lower-income respondents and people of color say it takes longer to find housing.

COMMUTE LENGTH

Two out of three survey respondents are satisfied with the length of their commute, with only 4% being very dissatisfied. Lower-income respondents and people of color report higher dissatisfaction with their commute length.

HOUSING MEETING NEEDS

Two out of three survey respondents feel their current housing meets their needs, with only one in 10 respondents feeling it does not meet their needs. As income goes down, housing is less likely to meet the needs of the respondents. One in four respondents of color reports that their housing does not meet their needs.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

Three out of four survey respondents feel very safe in their neighborhood, with only one in 20 reporting they do not feel safe. Income impacts the sense of security, with lower-income respondents reporting feeling less safe. Only four in 10 respondents of color feel very safe in their neighborhood, with another four in 10 feeling somewhat safe.

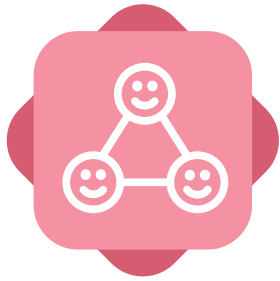
STAYING WHERE YOU CURRENTLY LIVE

Four out of 10 survey respondents think they will stay at least 10 years in their current residence, while four out of 10 feel they will stay at least the next three years. Lower-income respondents are more likely to move within the next three years. Higher-income respondents are more likely to stay more than 10 years. Most people of color who responded reported that they would remain in their current residence for only one to five years.

“There is a tremendous gap in income between many longtime residents and second homeowners. This has resulted in a substantial rise in home prices, often making it impossible for long-time residents to stay in their homes and live in their towns.”

—SURVEY RESPONDENT





SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

SUMMARY

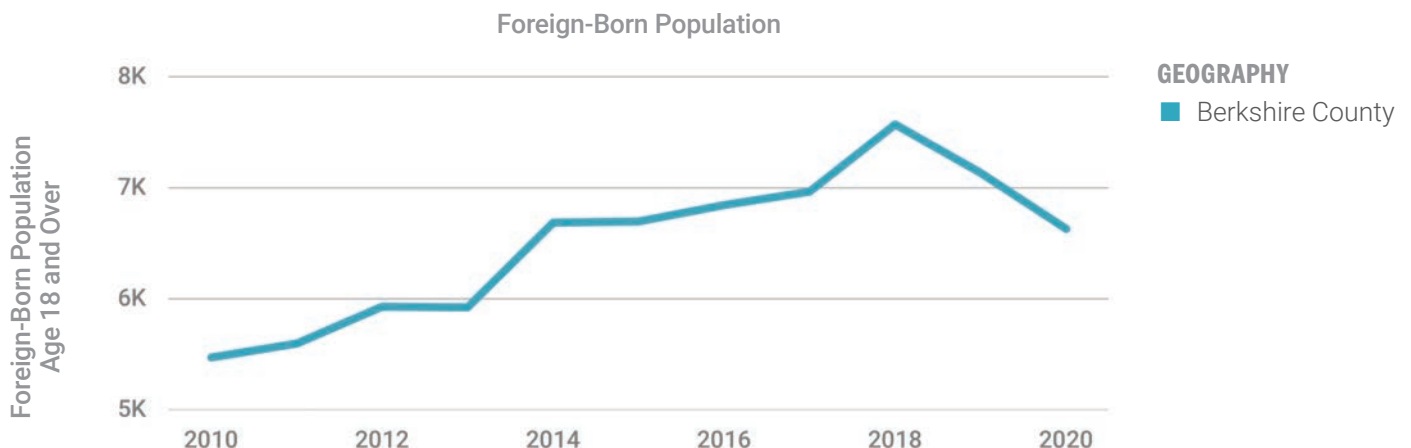
The social environment indicators show a decrease in poverty and residential segregation but increased restraining orders and children requiring assistance filings. As more data comes in from the pandemic, these indicators may worsen. Further details on each of the below indicators are available online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org.

KEY INDICATOR	TREND
Immigration	↓
People in Poverty	↓
Restraining Orders	↑
Residential Segregation	↓
OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE	TREND
Child Requiring Assistance Filings	↑
Geographic Mobility	↑

KEY INDICATORS

IMMIGRATION

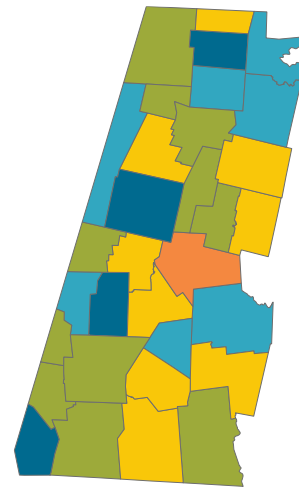
After years of increases, the number of county residents born in another country has dropped over the last two years. The reason for this decline is unknown at this time. It could be due to politics, the pandemic, the passing of older immigrants, or a combination of these and other reasons. Since the immigrant community has been one of our primary sources of population growth, it will be important to monitor this in the coming years.



SOURCE: US CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE, TABLES B05003

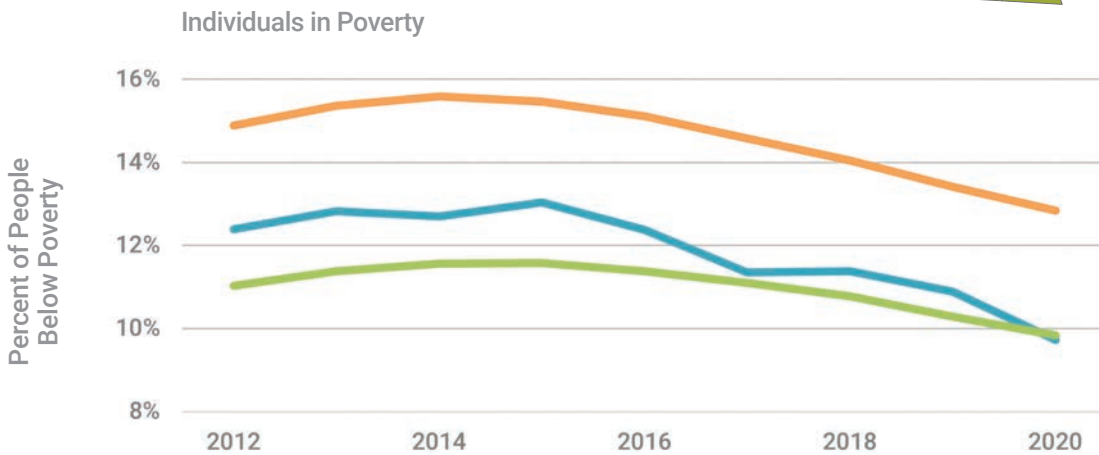
PEOPLE IN POVERTY

The percentage of people in poverty has decreased over the last five years. Only one in 10 people in the county are now in poverty. The county is at the same percentage as the state and significantly lower than the nation. Poverty is evident throughout the county, with higher percentages in rural communities, but higher numbers in urban communities. This data is mainly from before the pandemic, so the impact of the pandemic on poverty is not yet known.



Percent Individuals Below Poverty

- < 2.5%
- 2.5% – 5%
- 5% – 10%
- 10% – 12.5%
- > 12.5%



SOURCE: US CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE, TABLE S1701

GEOGRAPHY

- Berkshire County
- Massachusetts
- United States

RESTRAINING ORDERS

The number of restraining orders in Berkshire County has been steadily rising since 2015. It has increased by over 20% or 200 charges. It was still below the peak in 2012. This indicator will be important to watch over the coming years.

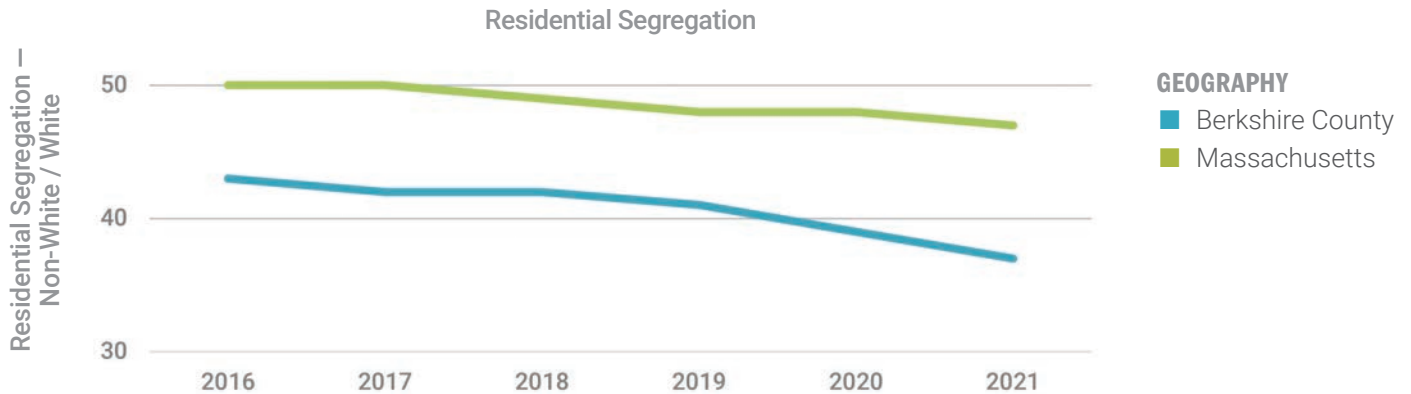


SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/LISTS/DCF-COMMONLY-REQUESTED-DOCUMENTS#ANNUAL-DATA-PROFILES](https://www.mass.gov/lists/dcf-commonly-requested-documents#annual-data-profiles)



RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

Residential segregation is an index of dissimilarity, where higher values indicate greater residential segregation between people of color and White county residents. This measure looks at how many residents need to move to create an equal distribution of people of color throughout the county. The index ranges from 0 (complete integration) to 100 (complete segregation). Residential segregation has been declining in Berkshire County and is significantly lower than in the state. This lower rate is likely due to the county's smaller population of people of color.

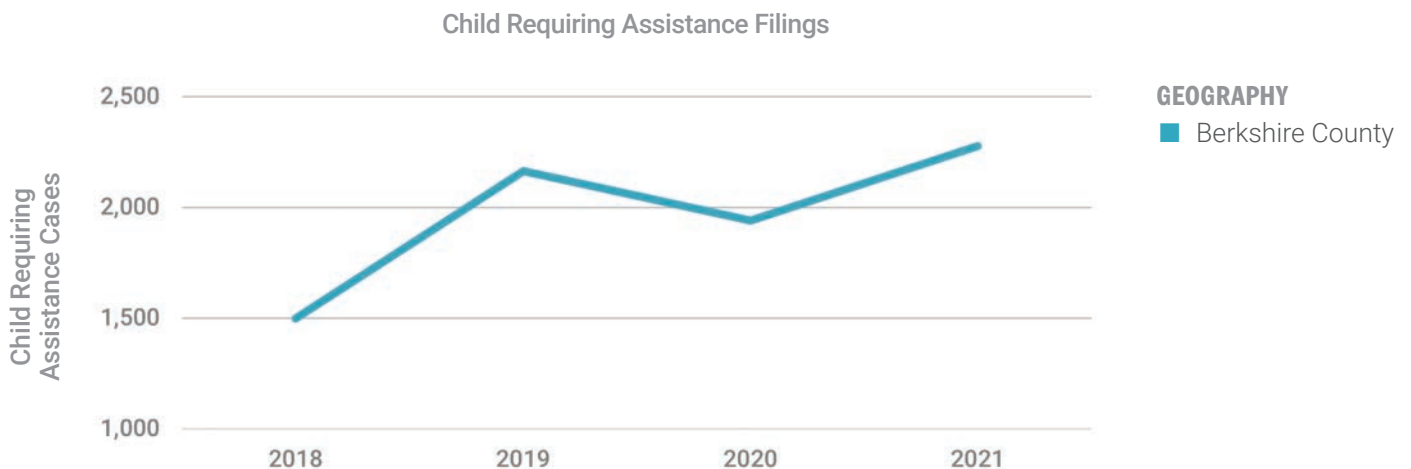


SOURCE: COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS [HTTPS://WWW.COUNTYHEALTHRANKINGS.ORG/](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/)

OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE

CHILD REQUIRING ASSISTANCE CASES

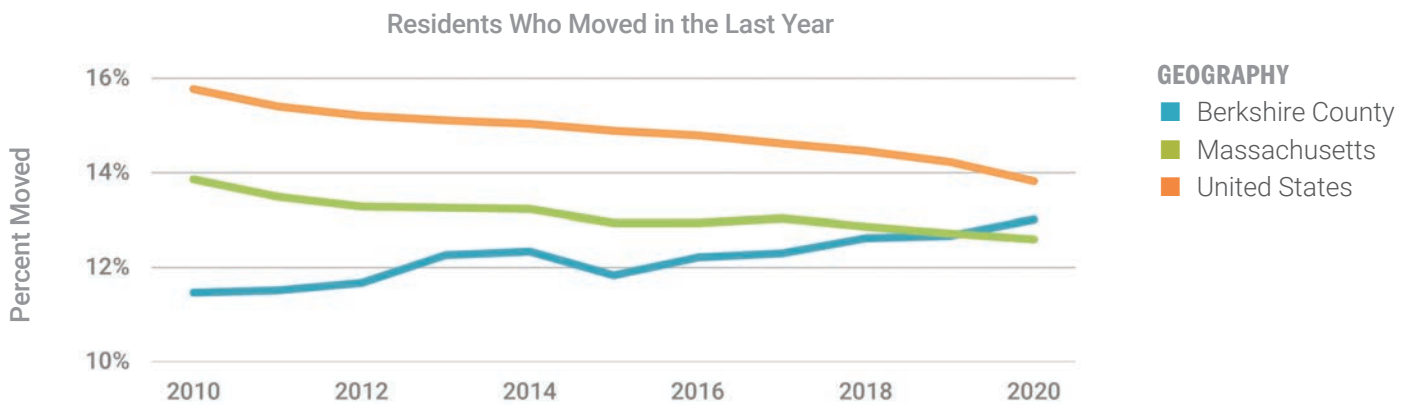
The number of child requiring assistance (CRA) cases in Berkshire County has steadily increased since 2018, going up 52% in three years. A CRA is when a parent, guardian, or school official asks the court to help supervise a child. This will be an important indicator to watch over the coming years.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES [HTTPS://WWW.MASS.GOV/LISTS/DCF-COMMONLY-REQUEST-ED-DOCUMENTS#ANNUAL-DATA-PROFILES](https://www.mass.gov/lists/dcf-commonly-requested-documents#annual-data-profiles)

GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY

The percentage of residents who moved in the last year has increased in the county over the last decade. This increase is counter to the state and nation, which have seen decreases in the percent of people moving in a year. The county has historically had a lower rate but now exceeds the state. This data does not incorporate most of the migration occurring during the pandemic.



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE (2016-2020), TABLE B07003

SURVEY QUESTIONS

RESOURCES AND SERVICES MEETING THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

Survey respondents felt most services and resources served the community somewhat or very well. Areas that do not serve residents well include homeless shelters (31%), public housing (28%), and childcare (26%). Other areas to improve include healthcare, job training, rehabilitation housing, services for people with disabilities, and child protective services.

WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Four out of five survey respondents overall feel welcome in the community. As income decreases, respondents feel less welcome, dropping to half. People of color feel welcome at a lower rate, with only two in five feeling welcome.

CONNECTED AND CARED FOR WITH THE COMMUNITY

Overall, survey respondents felt connected and cared for within their community, but one in 10 respondents did not. This percentage goes up if you are a person of color.

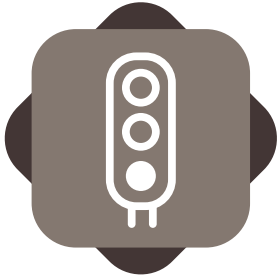
DISCRIMINATED AGAINST IN THE COMMUNITY

One out of two survey respondents does not feel discrimination. However, slightly more discrimination occurs based on income levels, age, and gender. Higher-income respondents report less widespread discrimination than lower-income. People of color responded that they experience more discrimination among all categories, especially related to race or national origin, income, and gender.

SAFE AROUND POLICE OFFICERS

Two out of three survey respondents stated they felt safe around police officers. As income goes down, the feeling of safety decreases, with half of the respondents who make less than \$35,000 feeling unsafe. Only one in four higher-income respondents reported feeling not safe or only somewhat safe. For people of color, feeling safe around police officers drops even more. Two out of three feel not at all or only somewhat safe, and only one in three feel safe or very safe.





TRANSPORTATION

SUMMARY

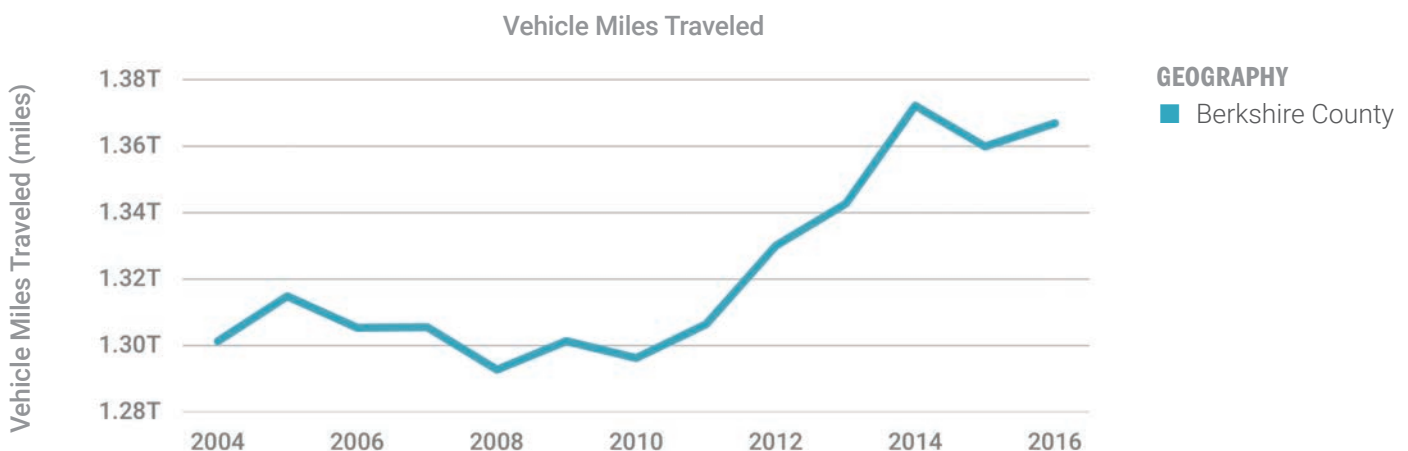
The transportation indicators depict a car-centric area with limited transit options. The Berkshire Regional Transit Authorities (BRTA) ridership declined slightly before the pandemic, and commuters overwhelmingly use personal automobiles. Survey respondents report it can be challenging to get where they need to go, especially those with low incomes. There is demand for more bicycle paths and rideshare options. There is also a demand for improvements in safety for bicyclists and walkers. Further details on each of the below indicators are available online at BerkshireBenchmarks.org

KEY INDICATOR	TREND
Vehicle Miles Traveled	↑
BRTA Ridership	↓
Means of Transportation to Work	↔
Vehicle Fatalities	↓
OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE	TREND
Miles of Off-Road Bikepath	↑

KEY INDICATORS

VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED

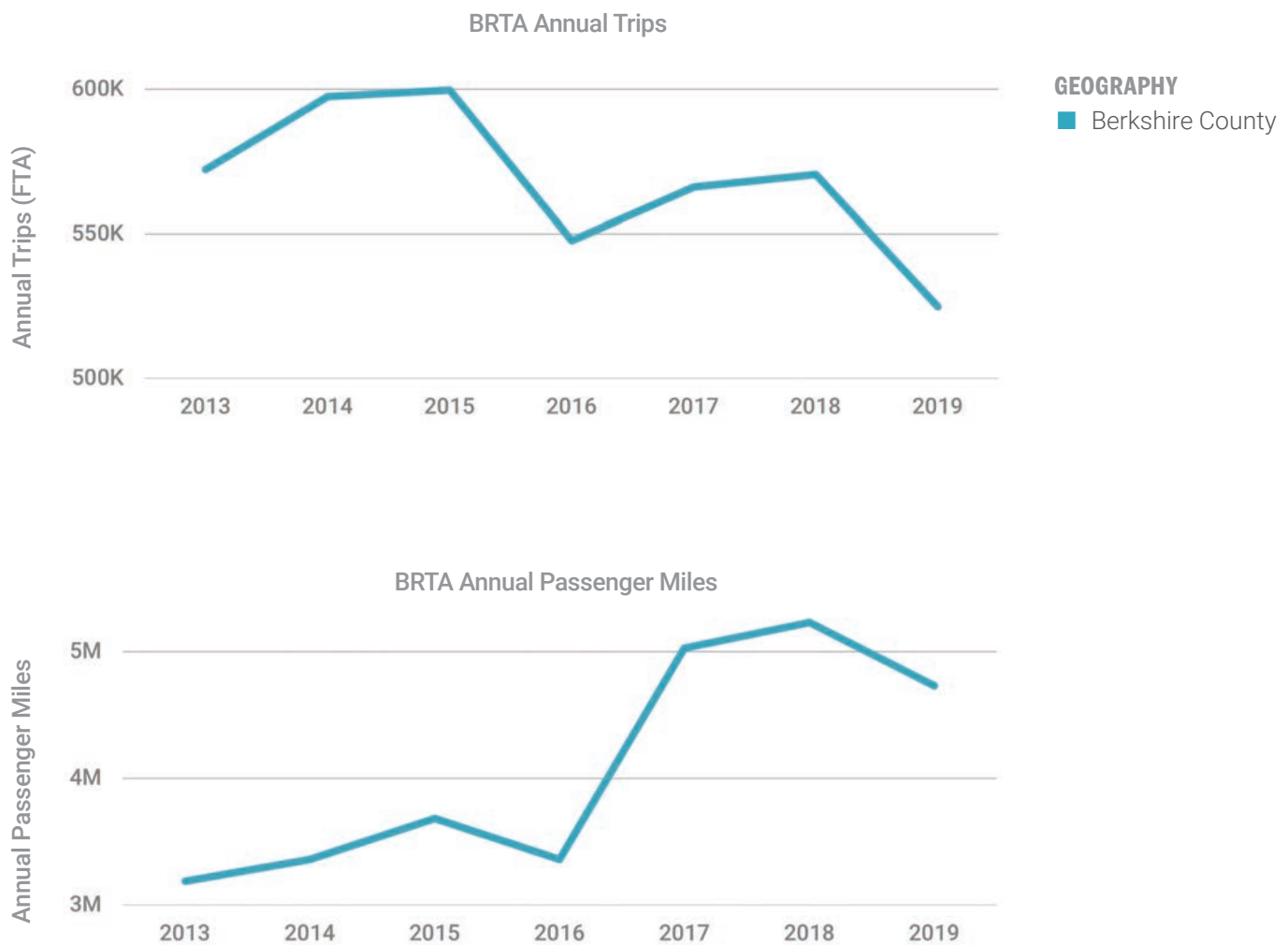
Vehicle miles traveled in Berkshire County have slowly increased over the last decade. This data is several years old and does not reflect the decrease caused by the pandemic.



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

BRTA RIDERSHIP

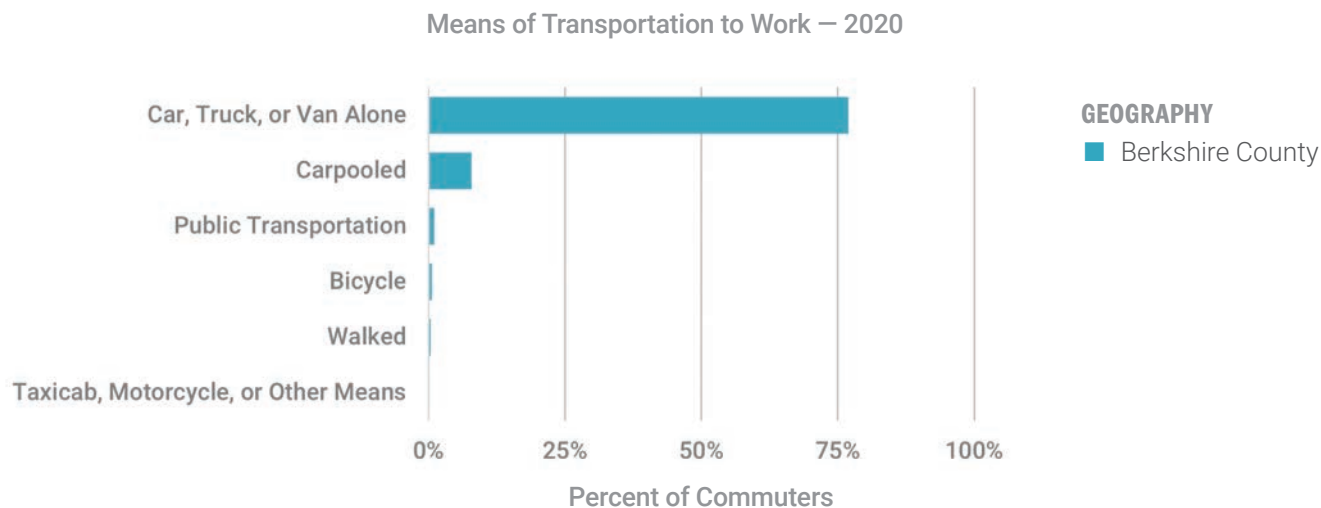
The number of annual trips provided by the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority has slightly decreased since its high in 2015, but is relatively stable. However, the annual passenger miles have increased significantly in that same time frame. This difference indicates that people are taking fewer but longer trips on the bus. These numbers predate the pandemic, which has caused significant declines in both trips and miles.



SOURCE: FEDERAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY [HTTPS://WWW7.FTA.DOT.GOV/NTD/TRANSIT-AGENCY-PROFILES/BERKSHIRE-REGIONAL-TRANSIT-AUTHORITY](https://www7.fta.dot.gov/NTD/TRANSIT-AGENCY-PROFILES/BERKSHIRE-REGIONAL-TRANSIT-AUTHORITY)

MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION TO WORK

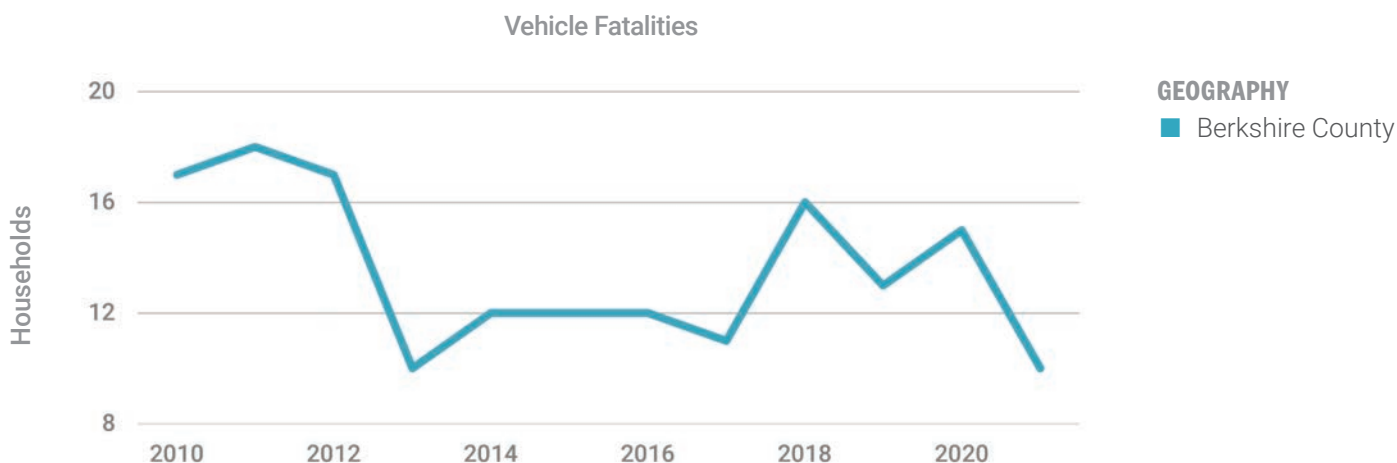
Three out of four workers who commuted to work in 2020 traveled via their personal vehicle. This percentage has stayed consistent for years and is the same as the nation and slightly above the state. This reliance on personal vehicles is due to the rural nature of the county and the limited public transit.



SOURCE: US CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE (2016-2020), TABLE B08006

VEHICLE FATALITIES

The number of fatalities caused by vehicles in Berkshire County varies each year. Still, the trend has remained relatively stable over the last eight years, but substantially less than the number of deaths in the early 2010s.

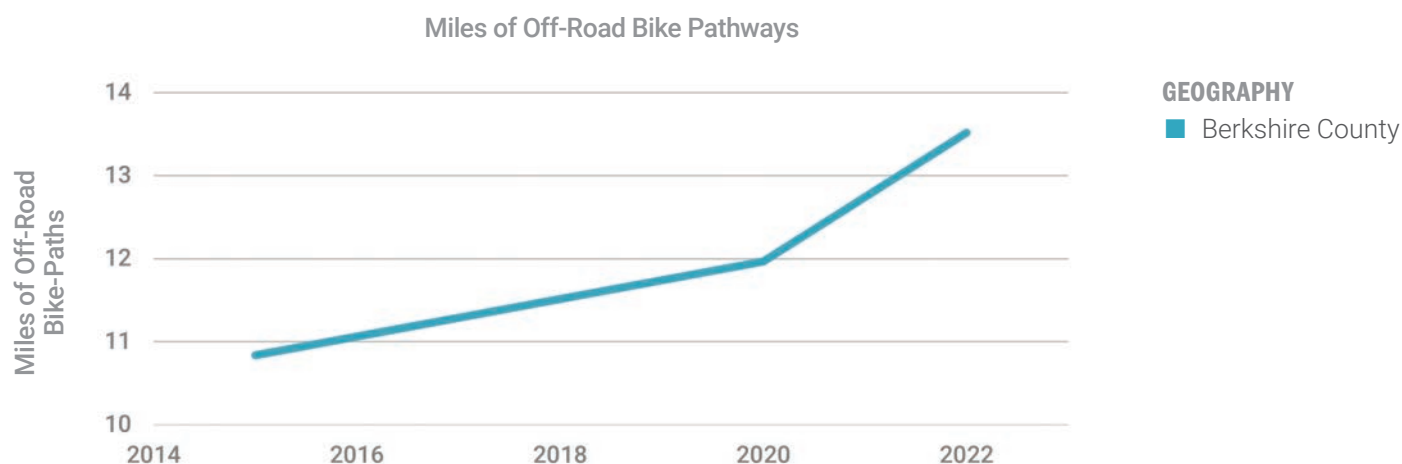


SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION [HTTPS://APPS.IMPACT.DOT.STATE.MA.US/CDP/DASHBOARD-VIEW/39](https://apps.impact.dot.state.ma.us/cdp/dashboard-view/39)

OTHER INDICATORS OF NOTE

MILES OF OFF-ROAD BIKEPATHS

The miles of off-road bike paths have slowly increased over the last decade. Recent expansions in 2022 include Great Barrington, Pittsfield, and Williamstown.



SOURCE: BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

SURVEY QUESTIONS

ABILITY TO TRAVEL WHERE YOU NEED TO BE

Two out of three survey respondents can always get where they need to be. Approximately one in 10 respondents can rarely or only sometimes get where they need to be. As income decreases, the percent of respondents who can always get to where they need drops to four in 10. For people of color, the percentage that can always get where they need drops to three in 10.

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS SAFETY

Almost all survey respondents said they feel very or somewhat safe as a driver. Only one in two respondents feel safe as a bicyclist or motorcyclist. Three in four respondents said they felt somewhat safe or very safe as pedestrians.

TRANSPORTATION ACCESS AND USAGE

Almost all survey respondents had access to cars and walking, with two out of three respondents having access to bicycles, public buses, and taxis. Cars and walking have high usage (nine out of 10 respondents). Buses, taxis, and rideshare usage dropped significantly to around two out of 10. Walking, bicycles and rideshare all had the highest demand for more access, with public buses slightly lower. As income decreases, there is less usage of personal cars and higher use of carpooling, buses, rideshares, and taxis. Carpools, buses, rideshare, and taxi use increase for people of color.



GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

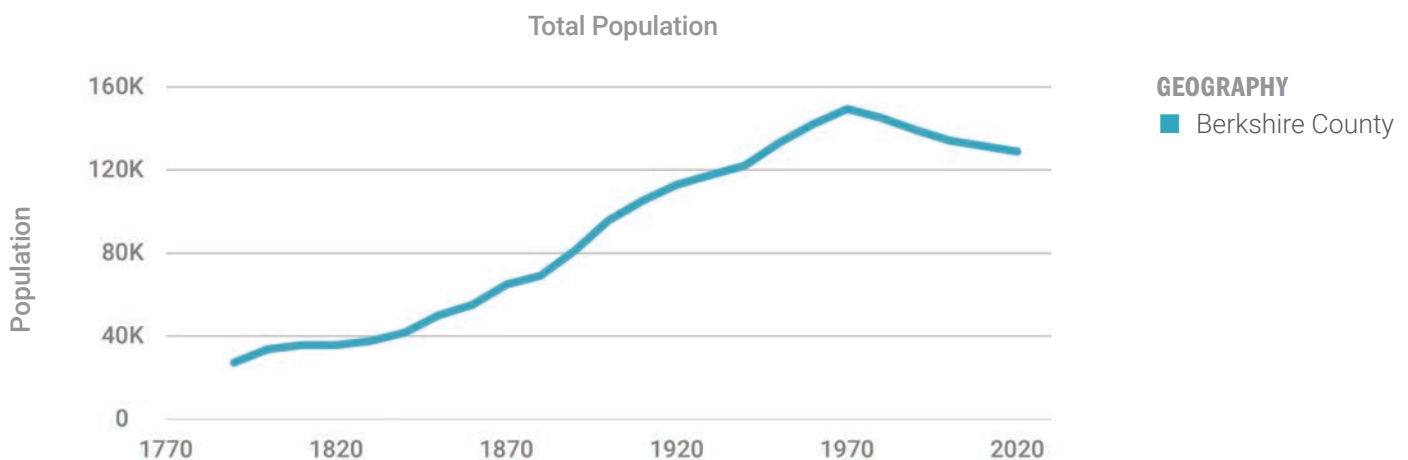
SUMMARY

Berkshire County is becoming a more diverse area, with an aging population and a stable working-age population aged 25-44. The county has seen its population loss slow to its lowest rate since its decline began in the 1970s.

INDICATORS

TOTAL POPULATION

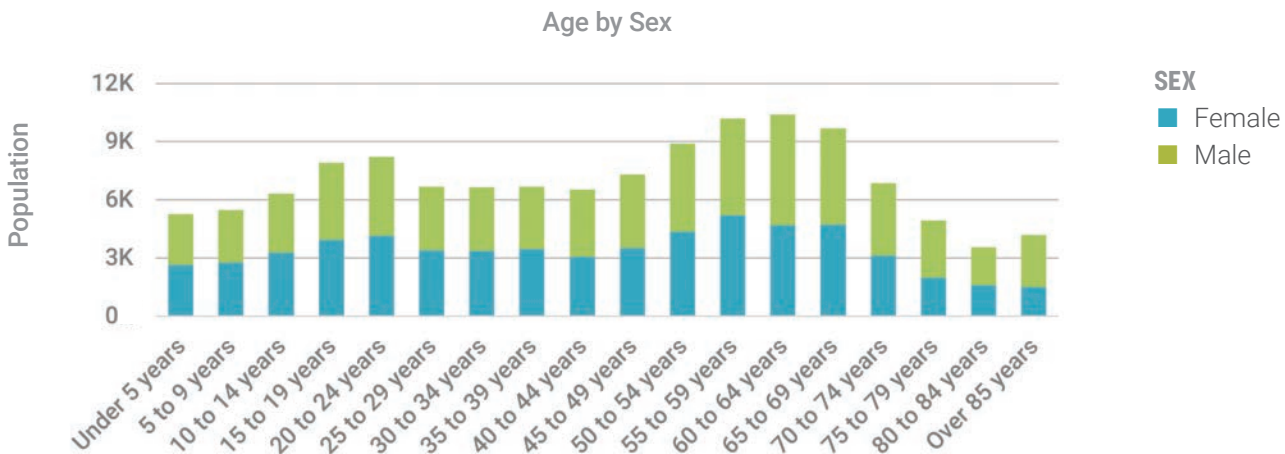
The year-round residential population for Berkshire County has shown a decline since its peak in 1970; however, the rate of decline has slowed, with the county losing only one in 50 people since 2010.



SOURCE: US DECENNIAL CENSUS

AGE

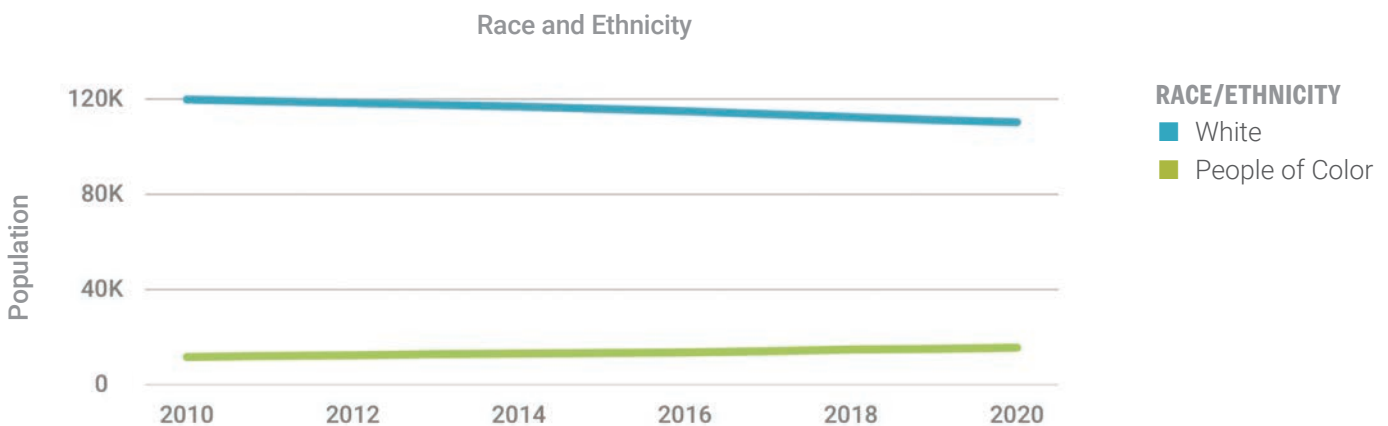
The county has an older population centered around people born from 1946 to 1964, known as baby boomers. After years of decline, the young and middle-aged adults (25-44) have stabilized. The bump in 15- to 24-year-olds is due to the region being a net importer of college students.



SOURCE: US CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGES, TABLE B01001

RACE/ETHNICITY

The racial diversity of Berkshire County continues to increase, especially among the Hispanic or Latino population. The number and percentage of the population considered White alone has dropped by 10,000 people since 2010.



SOURCE: US CENSUS AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR AVERAGE, TABLE B03002

CONCLUSION

“There are more people here trying to do good than harm. We are still a place where cars pulled over with their hazard lights on is a reason to stop and check to make sure everything is alright.”

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

Several noteworthy trends show up in reviewing the comprehensive set of indicators. These positive and negative trends present a picture of the region that is a great place to live, yet one with challenges.

Income has been steadily rising, as shown in increases in median household income and households making over \$75,000. The region is seeing a decrease in unemployment from the pandemic high and a decrease in individuals and families in poverty. These improvements are worth celebrating, but there are also challenges. The region's more educated residents are getting paid substantially less than their counterparts in the rest of the state and across the nation. Additionally, they have seen very little increase in their wages over the last decade. People of color, especially the Black population, get paid substantially less than the White population, with the Black population having seen a decrease in income over the last decade. Addressing the disparities among the populations and the competitiveness of jobs requiring higher educational attainment is critical to improving the local economy.

The region's education sector has faced many challenges over the last two years of the pandemic, with decreases in early childhood enrollment, students assessment results, the percentage of high school graduates planning to go to college, and total public school enrollments. Many of these challenges will correct themselves as things return to normal, but long-term monitoring is needed.

The environment is improving with increased total protected lands, particularly in designated sensitive areas. The air quality in the region is improving as well. There are sites in the county that may not see these improvements, but the overall environment has improved.

Local municipalities continue to rely more on local property taxes, and several municipalities are approaching their levy ceiling. The increase in property values due to the pandemic should alleviate concerns about approaching the ceiling for many communities.

The region's overall health is declining, with most indicators moving negatively. The region's increases in substance misuse, excessive drinking, and poor mental health days indicate a mental health problem. This problems compounded by an increase in premature death is concerning. The region needs to monitor these indicators closely moving forward.

Due to the pandemic, housing prices have increased significantly over the last two years. Some data indicates a deficiency of moderate- and middle-income housing in the region and a reduced owner affordability gap. Still, most of the data does not yet show the difficulty many residents have in finding affordable housing. Over the coming years, as more data is released, housing affordability will be crucial to monitor.

One area of particular concern is the steady rise in abuse within families. The region continues to see an increase in restraining orders and child requiring assistance filings, indicating that family life for many Berkshire residents is not easy.

One trend seen throughout the region is racial inequities. Median household income, poverty rates, educational attainment, and homeownership show a disparity between the Black and White populations. The survey shows a less welcoming community for people of color across many areas.

One of the biggest concerns for the region over the last decade has been the loss of young adults in the region. Attracting and retaining young adults has been the focus of extensive efforts, and they appear to be working. The population is seeing a stable population among 25-44-year-olds. Still, the region must continue to work to attract young adults to the region. Our population will continue to decline over the coming decades as the baby boom population ages, but the losses will not be as extensive due to the stable young and middle-aged population.



APPENDIX

List of Indicators on BerkshireBenchmarks.org

ECONOMY

- Employment by sector
- Households making greater than \$75,000/year
- Income by educational attainment
- Income inequality (GINI)
- Females age 18-64 that are employed
- Gross domestic product
- Median household income
- Population in income brackets
- Self-employed
- Unemployment

EDUCATION

- 3rd-grade reading proficiency
- Early education enrollment
- Graduation rate
- Plans for high school graduates
- 8th-grade math proficiency
- Advanced course completion rate
- Degree attained within six years of graduating
- Educational attainment
- Per pupil funding
- Public school pre-K enrollment
- Student to teacher ratio
- Total school enrollment

ENVIRONMENT

- Access to open space
- Agricultural land and farms
- Protected land
- Conservation framework land protected
- Air quality
- Extreme precipitation days
- Number of weeks with mild drought or worse
- Percent of land developed
- Renewable energy generation

GOVERNMENT

- Average single-family property tax bill
- Municipal budget by sector
- Ratio of local property tax bill to per capita income (tax burden)
- Municipal revenue by source
- Municipal debt services as % of operating revenue, EQV
- Municipal stabilization fund as % of budget
- Percentage of levy ceiling and levy limit
- Voter participation rate

HEALTH

- Excessive drinking
- Poor mental health days
- Poor physical health days
- Premature death
- Substance misuse
- Adults with diabetes
- Emergency department visits for asthma
- Hepatitis C reported events
- Life expectancy
- Preventable hospital stays
- Suicide rate

HOUSING

- Affordability gap
- Housing and transportation cost as a percent of income
- Housing supply by percent of area median income
- New housing units
- Owners and renters spending 30% or more of household income on housing
- Foreclosures
- Home costs as a percentage of income

- Homeownership rate
- Households by area median income
- Median year built
- Second homes

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

- Immigration
- People in poverty
- Residential segregation
- Restraining orders
- Child requiring assistance filings
- Families in poverty
- Food deserts
- Food insecurity rate
- Geographic mobility
- People age 65+ living alone

TRANSPORTATION

- BRTA ridership
- Means of transportation to work
- Vehicle fatalities
- Vehicle miles traveled
- Average commute time
- Chapter 90 aid
- Households without a vehicle
- Miles of off-road bike pathways
- Pedestrian fatalities
- Percent of bridges structurally deficient

GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

- Age
- Births and deaths
- Migration
- Race & ethnicity
- Total population





Berkshire Benchmarks is a program of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

1 FENN STREET, SUITE 201 | PITTSFIELD, MA 01201 | (413) 442-1521

www.BerkshireBenchmarks.org