

Labor Analysis of the Youth Workforce in Greater Lowell

Profile Highlights

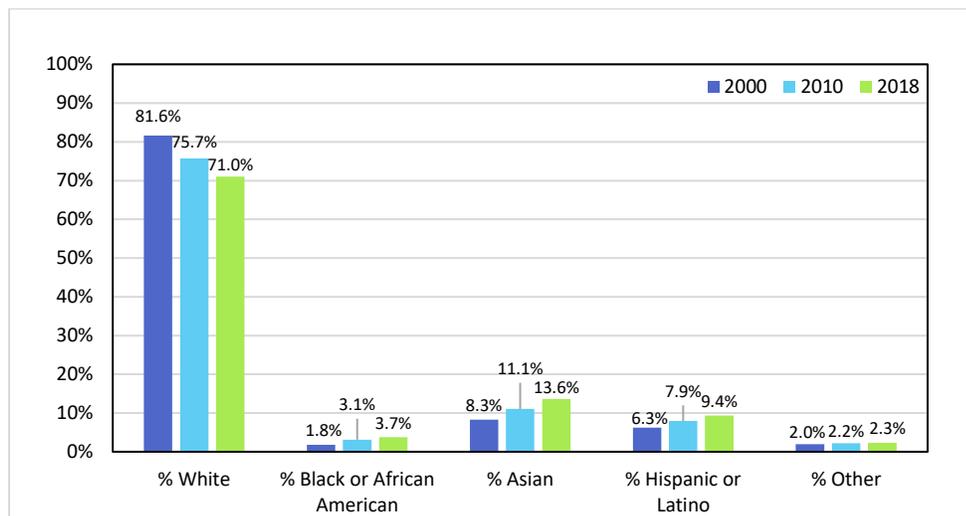
Eight communities comprise the Greater Lowell Workforce Development Area: Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, and Westford. Together the communities have a total population of 291,458 people, which is 4.3% of the total population of Massachusetts.

Approximately 2/3 of the region's people of color and nearly half (46%) of the youth population live in the City of Lowell. Several of the key economic and workforce challenges in Greater Lowell are closely tied to the urban core of the region.

1) Greater Lowell became more racially and ethnically diverse

Overall, from 2000 to 2018 the population in Greater Lowell became more racially and ethnically diverse. In 2000, nearly 82% of Greater Lowell was white, compared to 71% today.

Figure 1: Population Share of Greater Lowell by Race and Ethnicity, 2000, 2010 and 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2006-2010 ACS 5-Year Estimates; IPUMS NHGIS, 2000, 5% Sample

2) Greater Lowell's increase in diversity was mainly due to immigration

Over the course of 18 years, Greater Lowell's overall population became more diverse. The increase in diversity was mainly due to immigration. It could also be due to both employment and education opportunities. Lowell's immigrant population has been making up a larger share of the region each year.

In Greater Lowell from 2010 to 2018, 54% of the population increase was contributed to immigration, and for the City of Lowell it was 91% of the population increase.



Table 1: Share of Nativity Greater Lowell, 2000, 2010 and 2018

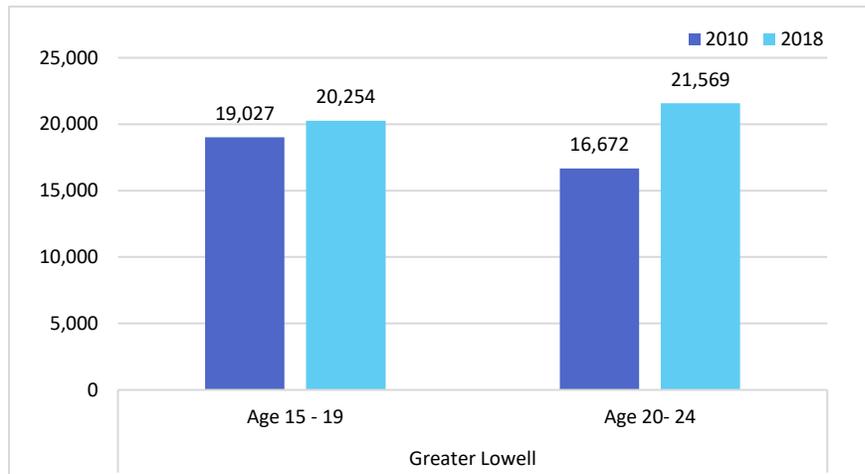
Year	Native Born	Foreign Born
2000	87.7%	12.3%
2010	85.3%	14.7%
2018	82.6%	17.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2006-2010 ACS 5-Year Estimates; IPUMS NHGIS, 2000, 5% Sample

3) Greater Lowell’s total youth population increased and dramatically increased for 20-to-24-year-old youth.

Greater Lowell’s population in 2018, the latest year in which comprehensive data is available, has grown by 7.4 percent since 2010. Taking a closer look at the growth among older teenagers and people in their early 20s, 15-to-19-year-olds grew by 6.5 percent and 20-to-24-year-olds increased by a whopping 29.4 percent. The increase in young adults in the region is certainly partly driven by growth of UMass Lowell.

Figure 2: Youth Population of Greater Lowell



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2006-2010 ACS 5-Year Estimates

4) The young adult population in Greater Lowell is more diverse than the total population.

The young adult population in Greater Lowell, and Massachusetts overall, is more diverse than the total population. In Greater Lowell, people of color make up 29 percent of the total population, but 33 percent of the population in the 15-to-24-year-old demographic. This difference stands out even more at the state level, as approximately 28 percent of the Massachusetts population are people of color, compared to nearly 35 percent of the 15-to-24-year-olds in the state.

5) Youth labor participation rate is linked to affluent communities.

Among the cities in the Greater Lowell Workforce area, it appears that more affluent populations are more likely to have higher labor force participation rates. For example, the town of Dracut presents notably higher rates of labor force participation within the 20-24 age cohort at 87.7 percent, while Tyngsborough’s 16-19 age cohort reigns at 58.9 percent, both of which are more affluent communities.¹ Comparatively, the City of Lowell has a 43.1 percent rate for the 16-19 cohort and a 70.2 percent rate for the 20-24 cohort, trending at a slightly lower rate than the county and the state as a whole. This is consistent with research the Donahue Institute conducted with the Boston Private Industry Council in 2016 that showed a clear connection between household income and labor market engagement for young workers in Massachusetts.²

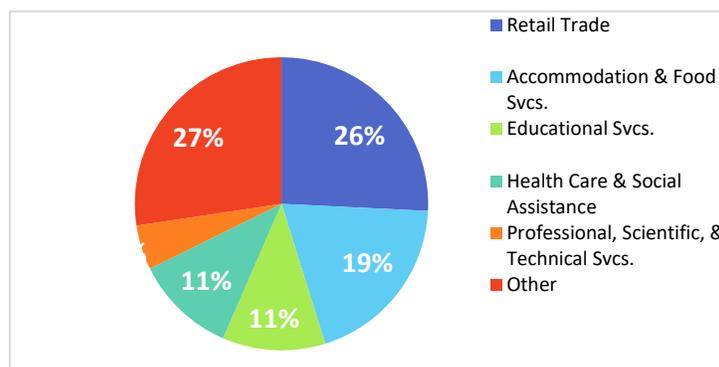
6) Overall disconnected youth declined in Greater Lowell, however, disconnected rate for Latinx and Black is much higher.

The disconnected rates with Latinx and Black youths are significantly higher (generally two times higher) than their White and Asian peers. This trend is particularly pronounced in Greater Lowell with the disconnected rate for Latinx teens and young adults standing at 12 percent, three times higher than white youths in the region. Similarly, in Greater Lowell, Black/African American youths have a disconnected rate of eight percent, twice that of whites in the region. Importantly, the disconnected rates for Latinx and Black youths for Greater Lowell is higher than the state averages for similar youths statewide.

7) Youth employed predominantly by the food and accommodation industry.

Over half of all youth workers in Greater Lowell work in either retail trade or accommodation and food services. This makes these industries a good fit for workers or youth needing to balance a work schedule against other responsibilities, such as school.

Figure 3: Employment Status by Industry, 2018



¹ <https://massachusetts.hometownlocator.com/cities/listcitiesalpha,alpha,a.cfm>

² https://www.bostonpic.org/assets/resources/PIC_Report-Youth_Labor_Force-Nov2016-FINAL.pdf



8) COVID-19 has impacted younger workers dramatically and younger workers are more likely to be among the unemployed.

Unemployment claims were catastrophic across all age cohorts in the workforce, but were disproportionately concentrated among younger workers when compared to the distribution of claims by age from one year ago. Claimants in Greater Lowell aged 25-34 experienced the greatest year-over-year increase in the quantity of unemployment claims, from 455 in May 2019 to 5,940 in May 2020 compared to all other age cohorts. However, younger claimants observed the highest percent change across all other age groups during the same period. For filers aged 16-19, there were only seven claims reported in May 2019 and 803 reported in May 2020. Likewise, for those aged 20-24, there were 87 claims reported in May 2019 and 3,154 reported in May 2020.

This suggests that younger workers were more likely to be among the unemployed during the pandemic than what would typically be expected and underscores the devastating impact that COVID-19 is having on youth employment in the Greater Lowell area.

Key Takeaways

As young people face an increasing set of challenges in the current economy, MassHire Greater Lowell may need to plan to offer nontraditional support systems and continue to be flexible in its program offerings and trainings, as the ongoing pandemic demands it. There is a need for continued youth programming focused on the following areas:

1) There is a need to attract and assist more young adults in their early 20s.

The Greater Lowell Youth population continues to grow. Taking a closer look at the growth among older teenagers and people in their early 20s, 15-to-19-year-olds grew by 6.5 percent and 20-to-24-year-olds increased by a whopping 29.4 percent.

While there appear to be many programs in place to help teenagers who have dropped out of high school or are looking for career paths that do not require a four-year college degree, it has been difficult for MassHire Greater Lowell to attract young adults in their early 20s who may be looking to begin their careers. Traditional resume building and networking workshops tend to attract older professionals, who are more advanced in their careers, and have been laid off or may be looking for a career change.

2) A need to outreach to and provide supplemental support to the Latinx and Black youth population.

The young adult population in Greater Lowell is more diverse than the total population. In Greater Lowell, the people of color make up 29 percent of the total population, but comprise 33 percent of the population in the 15-to-24-year-old demographic. While diversity continues to increase there is a trend of significantly higher disconnected rates with Latinx and Black youths (generally two times higher) than their white and Asian peers.



The data highlights an important workforce development and public policy issue in the region – that labor market engagement for Latinx and Black youths lag behind that of their white and Asian peers in the region. Further, while it is typical that Latinx and Black youths lag behind white and Asians statewide in labor market engagement, these same youths in Greater Lowell experience higher levels of disconnection compared to their racial and ethnic statewide. In short, young Latinx and Black youths in Greater Lowell represent a disproportionate amount of the “opportunity youth” in the region and state. Addressing this disparity may necessitate programs that aim to engage young people in these particular groups and offer additional support.

3) A need for flexible programming to address the devastating impact that COVID-19 is having on the youth employment in Greater Lowell.

The industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic are service-related industries – in retail trade and accommodation and food and services. Many of the occupations in these industries tend to have lower wages, and workers skew younger, and are disproportionately female.

Although many industries were hit by the pandemic, MassHire may want to consider expanding partnerships with area businesses in order to preserve internship opportunities, as economists are still unsure when exactly Massachusetts could recover from the current economic crisis.

Other areas to address because of COVID is needing to pivot and provide online programming. As many office jobs continue to remain online, MassHire may need to pivot to help young people starting their careers with online networking events, grants for driver’s education lessons, assisting them in getting the technology they need to be successful online, and encouraging employers to offer internships to young people who still need to learn soft skills, despite the ongoing pandemic. The current climate and focus on remote work may also mean that MassHire could provide online training and education for young people about the regional labor market, requirements for specific career paths, and labor rights.