

2013

STATE OF THE PEOPLE
for the Pioneer Valley



2013
STATE OF THE PEOPLE:
FOR THE PIONEER VALLEY

January 2013
Reprinted - May 2013

Prepared By:

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Regional Information & Policy Center

60 Congress Street - Floor 1
Springfield, MA 01104-3419

413 781-6045
Fax: 413 732-2593

www.pvpc.org



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Cooley Dickinson Hospital



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development, writing, and production of this report would have been impossible without the diligence of our numerous partners. The leaders of our eight partner organizations each shaped the conversation that led to this report, determined what should be added, changed, or removed since the previous version of the report, and developed a strategy for widely sharing and disseminating this information. In fact, as with the previous report, the demand for creating a new version of this report and the vision of what it would include originated with our partners.

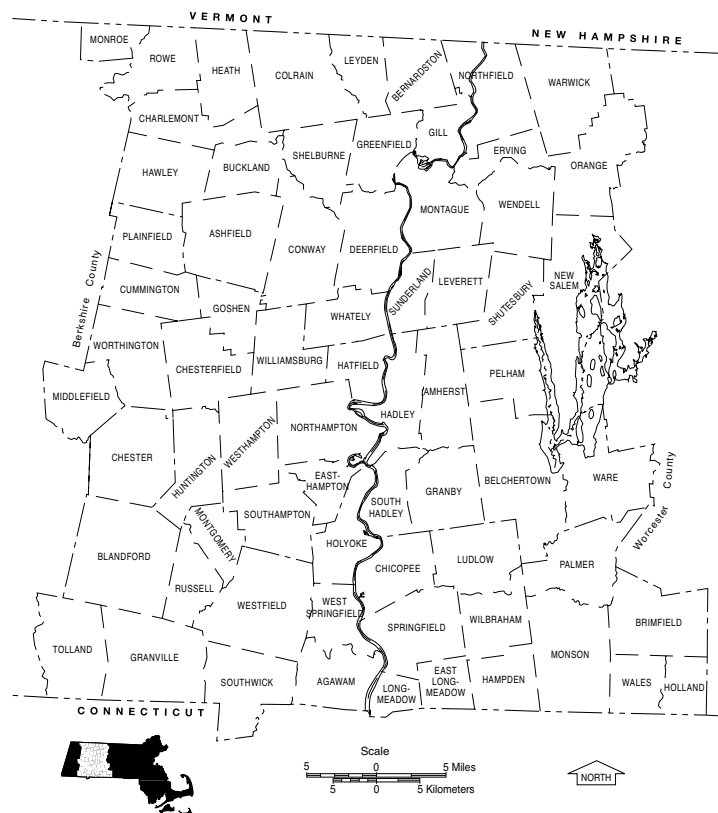
A wide range of individuals from these organizations repeatedly gave valuable time to an extensive process that reduced the list of possible indicators from more than 150 to those included herein. The following individuals, and the organizations they represent, deserve special mention for their time and commitment.

Ron Ancrum, Community Foundation of Western Mass
Jessica Atwood, Franklin Regional Council of Governments
Jim Ayres, United Way of Hampshire County
Jayne Bernhard-Armington, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Tim Brennan, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Ward Caswell, Beveridge Family Foundation, Inc.
Sylvia de Haas Phillips, United Way of Pioneer Valley
Michael DiChiara, United Way of Pioneer Valley
Kent W. Faerber, Community Foundation of Western Mass
Sally Fuller, Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation
Molly Goren-Watts, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Gail Gramarossa, Western Mass Center for Healthy Communities
Jeff Harness, Cooley Dickinson Hospital
Sonja Larson, United Way of Hampshire County
Nancy Reiche, Community Foundation of Western Mass
Marilyn Richards, United Way of Hampshire County
Dora Robinson, United Way of Pioneer Valley
Frank Robinson, Partners for a Healthier Community
Mary Walachy, Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation

Finally, interns Michael Antonellis, Mark Berube, Elissa Holmes, Ahmed Ismail, and Russell Pandres, all graduate students at the University of Massachusetts, and Michael Sheehan, graduate student at Portland State University, as well as PVPC staff Kyle Shiel and Todd Zukowski, all deserve special mention for their excellent work in data analysis, writing, and GIS mapping for this report.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PIONEER VALLEY

The Pioneer Valley encompasses 69 cities and towns in the Connecticut River Valley of western Massachusetts, an area framed on the west by the Berkshires and on the east by the central uplands and the Quabbin Reservoir. In 2011, an estimated 693,000 people, or 10.5 percent of Massachusetts' population, lived in the 1,904-square-mile region, which includes the fourth largest metropolitan area in New England. With a diverse economic base, renowned academic institutions, and a wealth of natural resources, the Pioneer Valley is a unique and special place in which to live and work. The Connecticut River, its fertile agricultural valley, and the foothills of the Berkshire mountains wrap the region in scenic beauty and recreational opportunities. Residents live in downtown areas, suburban neighborhoods, quiet villages, historic communities, and rural homesteads. People work in downtown offices in Springfield, the region's cultural and economic center; in industrial plants and factories in Holyoke and Chicopee, the first planned industrial communities in the nation; in academic halls in Amherst, Northampton, and South Hadley, home to distinguished colleges and the state flagship university; in the corn, tobacco and vegetable fields of Hadley and throughout the region, where families have worked the land for generations, and whose harvest is processed into value-added products by local specialty food businesses; in distribution centers in Westfield, near the crossroads of two interstate highways; at outdoor recreation attractions in Franklin County, where over 75 percent of the land remains forested; and by a world renowned candle manufacturer and store, which attracts over a million visitors annually. The Pioneer Valley is a region of contrasts, a meeting ground for many cultures, and, above all, the place we call home.



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STATE OF THE PEOPLE

WHY THE STATE OF THE PEOPLE?

In 2003, the first iteration of the State of the People report was developed through collaboration with a number of regional foundations of the Pioneer Valley. At the time, a number of groups were engaged, or shared an interest, in using data as a basis for informed decision making. Notably, the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation, the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, the Hampshire Community United Way, and the United Way of Pioneer Valley were, for a variety of purposes, exploring opportunities to use data to better inform their work as funders of a wide range of projects throughout the region. While much of the data reports and indicators at the time focused more heavily on the economy and infrastructure of the region, this report focused more directly on how we, the people of the Pioneer Valley, are faring.

Since the publication of this first report, the State of the People has been used widely, and interest in using data to drive strategy and funding decisions has only increased. In 2011, it became clear that an update of this report would be of great use to many, providing fresh data and evaluation as well as a re-examination of what needs to be measured. Many of the same partners, as well as some new ones, came together again to produce this new report.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

We have multiple goals for this report. First, we believe that it will provide valuable and accessible information for decision makers working to improve the quality of life in the Pioneer Valley. More broadly however, we expect that report will inspire citizens of the region, like you, to shape the future of our communities to benefit both current and future generations. Finally, we hope that this report serves as an opening, or a beginning, to additional dialogue, planning, information gathering, and action. All of our partners in this process conceive of this report as a first step towards the kind of knowledge they want to develop to inform their work, but they all realize that informed decision making and effective change making will require much more than the pages of a single report. While these are achievable goals, they are also long-term goals. As with our first State of the People report in 2003, we anticipate that this will become a catalyst for discussions throughout our Valley about what we can do to make the place we call home even better.

WHERE DO YOU COME IN?

In developing this report, we focused on specific issues that we believe are important to the lives of people in the Pioneer Valley. The list of indicators was developed in what can only be described as a subjective manner, and we realize that our indicators are not necessarily the same indicators you would choose. You may find yourself wanting to amend our indicators, striking those you consider comparatively unimportant, and writing in your own where you believe something important was overlooked. We value your opinions and encourage you to call or write with feedback, responses, and suggestions. We hope that your reactions will instigate a broad discussion among citizens articulating what they love most about the Pioneer Valley and what they wish for its future.

ABOUT THE REPORT

Any examination of quality of life is complex and imprecise, even more so when trying to use numbers to describe things that are valued differently by different people. There are a variety of approaches for measuring and categorizing indicators. Nevertheless, choosing a method is necessary to perform an analysis and to present findings. We have categorized the indicators in this report into eight major subject areas of related indicators. These subject areas reflect both groups of people and issues of importance to them.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH – examines issues affecting children including health, family status, and poverty.

ELDERLY – focuses on the quality of life and the quality of care for our elderly population.

EDUCATION – explores educational opportunities and outcomes across a range of educational levels, from early education through college.

HEALTH AND SAFETY – analyzes issues of physical and mental health as well a

ECONOMIC SECURITY – reviews basic economic issues affecting Pioneer Valle

HOUSING – investigates the true cost and availability of housing in the Pioneer Valley.

CIVICS, ARTS, AND RECREATION – examines the opportunity for and participation in civics, arts, and recreation activities.

ENVIRONMENT – assesses progress in pollution reduction and environmentally friendly transportation options.

Most indicators in this report are presented in two formats. First, a graph illustrates the regional and statewide trends over time. This provides an understanding of whether the region is doing better or worse than in the past and whether or not the region is doing better or worse than the state as a whole. Second, a map shows the most recent year's data for every municipality in the region. This map allows for comparisons from one community to another to identify areas of progress or concern. In the case of some indicators, the available data limited our ability to provide both a trend graph and a municipal map for an indicator.

Indicators included within each category – as well as the categories themselves – were selected through a collaborative and subjective process involving eight community organizations. From June 2011 through March 2012, individuals from our partner organizations gathered about six times in person and also as participated in many phone and email conversations to discuss the pros and cons of particular indicators and to elect which indicators to keep and which to eliminate. PVPC attempted, as much as possible, to abstain from the actual decision making, wanting a report that was designed by our partners rather than ourselves. PVPC's role in the selection process was to provide guidance, based on experience with past indicator projects, to direct the selection process. To this end, certain essential principles were observed:

1. We looked for indicators that spoke most directly to the present or future quality or condition of individuals' lives. In general, we left out indicators that highlight larger realities, such as the size of the region's labor force, even though they have an impact on individual circumstances.
2. We restricted the number of indicators to a number thought manageable both for those writing and those reading this report. In some cases, we reduced the number of indicators by eliminating a perfectly valid indicator that was partially or wholly represented by another.
3. We included those indicators that provided reliable data that would be updated in the future. For example, data that was developed through a survey or research study was generally excluded unless it was a survey or study that we felt sure would be repeated in the future.

RATING THE INDICATORS

Following methods from the State of the People report from 2003, we have used a detailed rating system to evaluate the condition of the region with respect to each indicator and category. Using letter ratings, each indicator is rated based on the following scale.

A Very positive trend

B Positive trend

C Neutral trend

D Negative trend

F Very negative trend

The **A** and **F** ratings are used sparingly in this report and only when an indicator reveals particularly dramatic information.

As with the selection of indicators, choosing how to assign ratings is a subjective process. When determining the rating, we weighted the following factors from most to least important:

1. The Pioneer Valley's trend over time.
2. The Pioneer Valley relative to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a whole.
3. The equity between communities measured by:
 - A) The breadth of the gap between high- and low-rated communities within the Pioneer Valley.
 - B) How closely most communities clustered to each other.

(i.e. Are most communities about the same with a few major outliers, or are there major gaps between large groups of communities?)

This ordering is based on the logic that, if we believe that our region is doing better now than in the recent past, that finding is more important than if we are doing better than Massachusetts as a whole. Finally, equity was weighted more heavily in this report than the 2003 edition, acknowledging that if we care about raising all boats in our community, then gaps in well-being between groups of people or communities must affect how we evaluate the well being of our region as a whole. The town-to-town comparisons are the least important for purposes of this report because we want to encourage residents of the Pioneer Valley to view themselves as residents of a region that thrives or declines together.

After ratings were assigned to each individual indicator, they were averaged within each category to produce an overall rating by taking an average of all of the grades for each category. The purpose of these ratings is neither to scold nor to applaud, but to provide an honest assessment of how the Pioneer Valley is doing in providing a high quality of life for all our residents. You will notice that exactly half of the trends measured fall within the neutral category, and while ten indicators show positive or very positive trends, there is much room to grow to ensure that our region is excelling in all of the areas we agree are important to a health community. Going forward, it is imperative that we be honest and build on our strengths while tackling our weaknesses. We hope that you will join us on this journey.


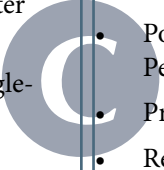
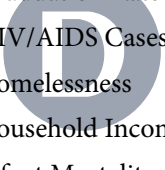

THE STATE OF THE PIONEER VALLEY’S PEOPLE – A SUMMARY

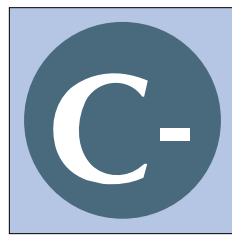
The State of the Pioneer Valley’s People is good, but not perfect. Particularly positive are trends in the area of the Environment, as well as many components related to civics, arts, and recreation in the region. Furthermore, several education indicators are rapidly improving, as are some indicators related to our physical health and safety. Otherwise, many trends are neutral, not getting significantly worse, but not increasing the ways we would like to see. Of particular concern is the area of economic security, as well as a number of the health indicators which it seems compounding factors might have more influence over, including mental health, diabetes, HIV/AIDS cases, and obesity.

Of note, it is important to acknowledge that many poor grades are particularly reflective of inequities between communities within the region. Where trends are often positive or neutral for the region as a whole, there are large gaps between the highest and lowest performing communities. While a challenging image to accept, we felt it was important to acknowledge the inequities in our communities and evaluate our current success by accounting for these cases fully.

To find both good and bad is expected: a report claiming that the state of our region’s people was all good or all bad would be, we believe, a poor and dishonest document. We have, in our region, both positives to build on and negatives to address. It is the purpose of this report to highlight both with an optimistic eye on the future.

The following table shows the ratings assigned to each indicator as a summary of our overall findings. There are both positive and negative trends, as well as a number of indicators that could go either way in the future

Positive	Neutral		Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bike Paths Water Quality (CSOs) Green Communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to Recreational Space and Open Space Arts, Culture and Humanities Nonprofit Expenditures Attainment of Higher Education Average Commute Time Child Abuse and Neglect Children in Foster Care Children in Single-Parent Families Crime English Proficiency in 10th Grade (MCAS) Environmentally Friendly Transportation Healthy Air Quality Days Home Ownership Housing Cost Burden Income Equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library Attendance Math Proficiency in 8th Grade (MCAS) Math Proficiency in 10th Grade (MCAS) Nonprofit Support Nutrition Population 65+ With Access to a Car Population 65+ Who Live Alone Poverty Rates For People 65+ Premature Mortality Reading Proficiency in 3rd Grade (MCAS) Student Mobility Subsidized Housing Availability Substance Abuse Teenage Mothers Tobacco Use Voter Registration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asthma Childhood Asthma Diabetes Early Education Enrollment Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Food Deserts Foreclosures Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Grandparents Responsible for Grandchildren High School Graduation Rate HIV/AIDS Cases Homelessness Household Income Infant Mortality Life Expectancy Mental Health Obesity Population 65+ Who Remain Engaged in the Workforce Poverty Prenatal Care Support for Artists Unemployment Very Low Birth Weight Babies 
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 



RATING

A VERY POSITIVE TREND
B POSITIVE TREND
C NEUTRAL TREND
D NEGATIVE TREND
F VERY NEGATIVE TREND

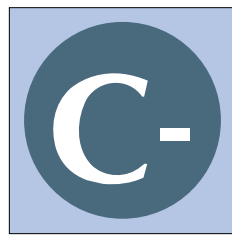
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The importance of children and youth to our region—to any region— cannot be overstated. Attempting to capture the current state of the Pioneer Valley’s children and youth is an effective way to assess the health and vitality of the region. Children’s health, their family situations, and their economic circumstances are indicators that are valuable both for what they say in the present and for what they predict in the future. If our children are not healthy today, we cannot expect the life expectancy of our region’s people to continue increasing tomorrow. Similarly, children growing up in difficult family or economic circumstances are less likely to be economically successful in adulthood, and run the risk of perpetuating the same obstacles they faced as a child with their own families. To stop this cycle and create a more positive future for the Pioneer Valley, indicators in the following areas have been crafted: prenatal care, very low birth weight babies, infant mortality, school prevalence of asthma, teenage mothers, children in foster care, children in single-parent families, child abuse and neglect, free and reduced-price school lunch enrollment, and juvenile violent crime.

Decreases have been made in the number of juvenile crime cases, teenage mothers, and child abuse and neglect cases; however other areas that measure youth health, including issues surrounding healthy births such as adequate prenatal care and the percent of births to very low birth weight babies, show neutral or negative trends. Also, while the data does show significant progress in the rates of juvenile crime, we know throughout the Valley there is extremely poor equity between individual communities in regards to this indicator.



Indicator	Summary	Rating
Prenatal Care	The percentage of mothers using prenatal care adequately remains stable, but well below that of Statewide rates. Equity between communities is poor.	D+
Very Low Birth Weight Babies	The percent of babies born with very low birth weights has fluctuated, but increased in recent years to well above Massachusetts rates. Equity is good amongst most communities, but poor between highest and lowest performing communities.	D
Infant Mortality	Rates of infant mortality are higher than they were a decade ago, and have been higher than Massachusetts rates all but two of those years. Equity is poor between most communities and the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is very large.	D-
Childhood Asthma	Rates of childhood asthma have increased slightly in recent years and remain well above those Statewide. Equity is good amongst most communities, but poor between highest and lowest performing communities.	D+
Teenage Mothers	The percent of all births to teenage mothers has improved in recent years. While rates remain higher than for Massachusetts, the gap is narrowing. Equity is good amongst most communities, but poor between highest and lowest performing communities.	C+
Children in Foster Care	The percent of children in foster care has been stable in the Pioneer Valley, but continues to be nearly twice as high as the rate statewide. Equity is generally good amongst most communities, but poor between highest and lowest performing communities.	C-
Children in Single-Parent Families	The percent of all children in single-parent families continues to be much higher than rates statewide and have been increasing slightly in the last decade. Equity is good amongst many communities, but poor between highest and lowest performing communities.	C-
Child Abuse and Neglect	The rate of childhood abuse and neglect cases has declined significantly in recent years, and begun to close the gap with state rates, but is still significantly higher. Equity is good amongst many communities, but poor between highest and lowest performing communities.	C+
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	The percent of children enrolled in free and reduced price lunch is 10% higher in the region than statewide, and rates continue to rise. While equity is good amongst many communities, there is a huge gap between the highest and lowest performing communities.	D
Juvenile Violent Crime	The number of juvenile crime arrests continues to decrease and is below the rate statewide.	B-



RATING

A VERY POSITIVE TREND
B POSITIVE TREND
C NEUTRAL TREND
D NEGATIVE TREND
F VERY NEGATIVE TREND

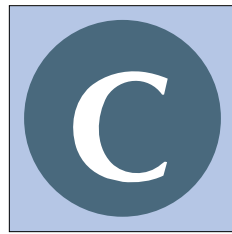
ELDERLY

The aging “Baby Boomer” population is causing a demographic shift across the nation as the proportion of the elderly population increases. Maintaining and improving the quality of life for the older people in the community is essential as we live longer. Demand for health and senior services will continue to increase, creating both staff and infrastructure needs as well as economic opportunities. Understanding trends related to the elderly population through a variety of indicators such as living situations, economic security, and access to transportation will allow for better planning, care, and quality of living for our senior citizens. Alternatively, if we cannot care for our elderly citizens we may see out-migration as the elderly choose to retire in other locations. This may lead to lower rates for volunteerism, public participation, and a reduced wealth of knowledge, as the elderly tend to be the largest age demographic to engage in volunteering and local issues.

The Pioneer Valley is nearly on par with statewide rates for much of this category and has neutral ratings for many indicators including poverty rates, population who live alone, and access to cars. One area where the Pioneer Valley struggles is of grandparents who are responsible for grandchildren as the regional rate is significantly higher than that statewide and continues to increase. The life expectancy of the Pioneer Valley is a full year lower than the state average and a high degree of inequity between communities is prevalent. The percentage of elderly population who are choosing to remain in the workforce has been growing significantly in the past ten years; this may be due to an increasing life expectancy and augmented by the recent recession.



Indicator	Summary	Rating
Poverty Rates For People 65+	Poverty rates for people over 65 have been stable, increasing slightly over two decades. Equity between most communities is very good, but it is poor between the highest and lowest performing communities.	C
Population 65+ Who remain Engaged in the Workforce	The percent of workers who remain in the labor force over age 65 has nearly doubled over a decade, but remains slightly below the statewide rate. Many communities have similar rates, but there is a wide gap between highest and lowest performing communities.	D+
Grandparents Responsible for Grandchildren	The percent of grandparents who are responsible for raising their grandchildren continues to rise and is much higher than that statewide. Equity is very good amongst most communities, but very poor between the lowest and highest performing communities.	D
Population 65+Who Live Alone	The percent of people over 65 who live alone is generally stable and similar to that of the state. Equity is poor between most communities.	C-
Population 65+ With Access to a Car	The percent of people over 65 who have access to a car continues to increase slowly, and is slightly higher than the Massachusetts rate. However, equity is very poor amongst most communities.	C-
Life Expectancy	Growth in life expectancy has been relatively stagnant in recent years and is more than a year lower than that statewide.	D+



RATING

A VERY POSITIVE TREND
B POSITIVE TREND
C NEUTRAL TREND
D NEGATIVE TREND
F VERY NEGATIVE TREND

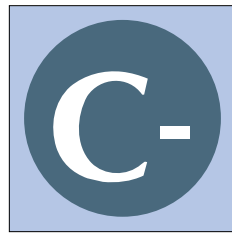
EDUCATION

Education is of increasing importance to the present and future of all demographics in the Pioneer Valley. Not only must we ensure educational opportunities are provided from an early age and continue well into adulthood, but the opportunities must be of the highest quality in order to ensure sustainable economic and social progress. Accordingly, this section exposes the region's progress in early education enrollment, educational attainment, high school graduation rates, and ninth grade retention rates. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is one of the most common ways to quantitatively measure educational achievement from elementary school through the tenth grade. Here we have used third grade scores to estimate reading proficiency, eighth grade scores to estimate math proficiency, and comprehensive tenth grade scores to estimate overall achievement. Student mobility, or the measure of how many students enter and leave the district within a given year, indicates whether or not our classrooms provide stable space for education.

Within the Pioneer Valley, there has been great progress in improving MCAS test scores for all grades observed, with 8th grade math scores making the most gains. While some subjects and grades are still below state averages, the gap is slowly narrowing. Ninth grade retention rates have also improved significantly while state rates remain higher. Unfortunately, the high school graduation rates still remain lower than the state. Student mobility rates have been neutral, while the attainment of higher education remains lower than state levels but has seen improvement in recent years.



Indicator	Summary	Rating
Early Education Enrollment	Enrollment in early education has been decreasing in recent years at the same time statewide rates have increased. Less than half of children 3-5 are enrolled. Equity is neutral between most communities but poor between highest and lowest performing communities.	D-
Reading Proficiency in 3rd Grade (MCAS)	MCAS 3rd grade reading scores have increased slightly but remain almost 10% below Massachusetts rates. Equity is poor between most communities.	C-
Math Proficiency in 8th Grade (MCAS)	MCAS 8th grade math scores have increased about 10% in 5 years, and just surpassed rates statewide. Equity amongst most communities is poor, however the gap between highest and lowest performing communities is not as large as some other indicators.	C+
English Proficiency in 10th Grade (MCAS)	MCAS 10th grade English scores have increased nearly 20% in 5 years. Rates remain below those statewide but the gap is closing. Equity amongst most communities is poor, however the gap between highest and lowest performing communities is not as large as some other indicators.	C+
Math Proficiency in 10th Grade (MCAS)	MCAS 10th grade math scores have increased about 10% in 5 years, but are consistently lower than Massachusetts rates. Equity between most communities is very poor.	C
High School Graduation Rate	High school graduation rates remain stable, but consistently below those statewide. Equity between communities was poor with very wide gaps between the highest and lowest performing communities.	D+
Attainment of Higher Education	Attainment of higher education has increased slightly in recent years, but remains significantly below Massachusetts rates and the gap is increasing. Equity is good between many communities but poor between the highest and lowest performing communities.	C
Ninth Grade Retention	Ninth grade retention rates have dropped significantly in the last few years, while Massachusetts rates have increased. Equity between most communities was very good, but the gap between highest and lowest performing communities was large.	B
Student Mobility	Student mobility rates have remained stable and are basically equal to those statewide. Equity amongst most communities is poor, however the gap between highest and lowest performing communities is not as large as some other indicators.	C



RATING

A VERY POSITIVE TREND
B POSITIVE TREND
C NEUTRAL TREND
D NEGATIVE TREND
F VERY NEGATIVE TREND

HEALTH AND SAFETY

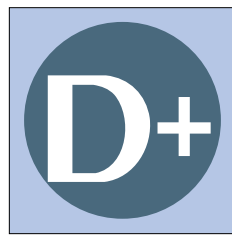
The health and safety of our community affects us on personal, local, and regional scales, speaking to our quality of life, physical and mental well-being, and our ability to take care of ourselves and our neighbors. Due to a variety of factors including nearly universal health insurance coverage and world-class health institutions, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is one of the leading states across the nation when it comes to the health of its citizens. Health and safety indicators range from those that point to instances of systemic failure or, in the case of the Pioneer Valley, success, as in the extremely low rates of uninsured residents. Other indicators point to places where a widespread behavioral shift is needed, such as substance abuse or diabetes rates. The rate of HIV/AIDS, asthma, and premature mortality all touch on systemic problems and individual behaviors that affect the health and safety of the region. Crime rates tell us about how safe we, and our visitors, are in our community.

Only five years after the percentage of the population without health insurance reached an all-time high in 2005 there have been enormous strides in the reducing this number with the 2006 Massachusetts Health Care Reform Law. The occurrence of premature mortality for our region has been falling between 2000 and 2008 and the number of persons admitted to substance abuse programs has been declining although the region's rate is still above that statewide. While the prevalence of HIV/AIDS has risen, it appears that this number will be leveling off and this increase may be due to enhanced efforts of HIV/AIDS testing. One area of concern is the number of asthma related hospitalizations, which has increased 70% since 2000. This rate has also been consistently above the state average and does not appear to be slowing its growth rate. Asthma incidents can be influenced by several factors, perhaps the biggest among them being airborne environmental contaminants.

Note: Since there is only one indicator related to crime in this section, the grade for crime rates was counted twice when calculating the Health and Safety overall grade.



Indicator	Summary	Rating
Premature Mortality	The rate of premature deaths has decreased slightly over the last few years, but remains consistently above that of the state. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	C
Health Insurance Coverage	The percent of people who are uninsured has dropped significantly in the last ten years, and is close to that statewide. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	B-
Nutrition	Consumption of fruits and vegetables remains mostly stagnant with a slight decrease. Trends are generally in line with those throughout Massachusetts.	C
Tobacco Use	Tobacco use has decreased nearly 10% in the last ten years, but remains slightly above statewide rates. Equity between most communities is neutral, but poor between those that are highest and lowest performing.	C+
Substance Abuse	Substance abuse has decreased slightly in the last ten years, and while statewide rates are lower, the gap has been narrowed. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	C+
Mental Health	Mental health hospitalizations have remained steady, increasing slightly in the last few years. Rates are consistently higher than those for Massachusetts. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	D+
Crime	Crime rates have been decreasing in recent years after significant increases, but still remain above rates statewide. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	C+
Asthma	Asthma rates for all ages have increased steadily over the last eight years and remain consistently above the Massachusetts rate. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	D
Diabetes	Diabetes related hospitalizations have increased significantly in the last decade, though trends remain in line with those statewide. Equity between most communities is poor.	D-
HIV/AIDS Cases	The number of HIV/AIDS cases in the community has gradually risen throughout the decade, with trends in line with those statewide. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	D+
Obesity	Obesity rates have increased almost 10% in seven years, though the gap with the state has been narrowing recently.	D+
Oral Health	Rate of dental visits have been increasing slightly over the last decade, remaining just below rates statewide.	B-



RATING

A VERY POSITIVE TREND
B POSITIVE TREND
C NEUTRAL TREND
D NEGATIVE TREND
F VERY NEGATIVE TREND

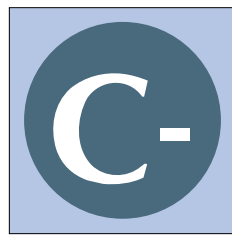
ECONOMIC SECURITY

Perhaps less personal than health and safety, but no less important, is the economic security of the region's residents. This section focuses on financial security: household income, income equality, poverty rates, unemployment rates, and presence of food deserts (lack of access to affordable healthy food, according to the USDA). These indicators measure the health and vitality of the region—without financial security, people cannot afford to pay for their basic needs, contribute a strong tax base to invest in their community (safety, education, infrastructure), or help support a thriving local economy.

Overall, our region's economic security is not as strong rates statewide. The median household income is a mere 78% of the Massachusetts rate, and unemployment rates have been slightly higher within the region as well, rising along with state and national rates during the recent economic downturn. On a positive note, the Pioneer Valley has higher rates of income equality between households and this continues to improve in recent years.



Indicator	Summary	Rating
Household Income	Median household income has been stable, but consistently much lower than that statewide, with the gap increasing. Equity is poor amongst most communities.	D+
Income Equality	Income equality is stable, and consistently better than Massachusetts rates. Many communities within the region have much better income equality than others.	C+
Poverty	Poverty rates are consistently higher than those statewide, and the gap continues to increase. While most communities within the region have similar rates, there is poor equity between the highest and lowest performing communities.	D
Family Economic Self-Sufficiency	Rates of family economic self-sufficiency are lower within the region than statewide. Equity between most communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is poor.	D
Unemployment	Unemployment rates rose significantly within the last few years, and were slightly higher than those for Massachusetts. Equity was neutral amongst most communities, but poor for the highest and lowest within the region.	D+
Food Deserts	The percentage of the population living in a food desert was higher than that statewide, but concentrated in a few areas. Equity was good amongst most communities but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities was large.	D+



RATING

A VERY POSITIVE TREND
B POSITIVE TREND
C NEUTRAL TREND
D NEGATIVE TREND
F VERY NEGATIVE TREND

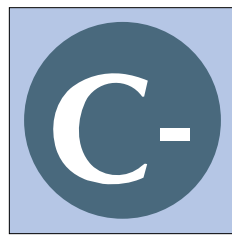
HOUSING

Housing is a basic need for the entire region, for individual residents as well as the economic and social vitality of the region as a whole. Truly a component of economic security, having safe and affordable homes is at the root of building strong, stable, and vibrant communities. The ability to own a home in an area establishes roots encouraging people to become invested in their community. Investing in a community positively impacts many aspects of the locality including the environment, economy, education, and health. Housing is also the most common method of creating personal wealth; it can be transferred to following generations, effectively improving succeeding generations' standard of living. Minimizing commute time is important to the sustainability of the region and to better understand any spatial mismatches between centers of employment and housing availability. The variety of indicators that have been collected such as homeownership, foreclosure rates, and the percentage of residents who are housing cost burdened help determine the availability of housing stock and ability to afford and maintain housing by residents of all socio-economic statuses.

Overall, the situation of our region's housing is mixed. Housing cost burden, home ownership, and subsidized housing availability trends have been neutral. The housing affordability ratio shows a positive trend. At the same time, the Pioneer Valley was clearly not spared from the housing and economic crisis that occurred nationally in recent years as foreclosures and homelessness have been on the rise.



Indicator	Summary	Rating
Housing Affordability	The housing affordability ratio is consistently higher than that statewide. Equity is poor between many communities and particularly bad between the highest and lowest performing communities.	B-
Housing Cost Burden	The portion of residents who are housing cost burdened is slightly lower than it was 10 years ago, while rates statewide have climbed almost 10%. Equity between most communities is neutral but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is high.	C+
Home Ownership	Home ownership rates have been stable for twenty years, and remain slightly above rates statewide. Equity between most communities is poor.	C-
Subsidized Housing Availability	The percent of communities with at least 10% of their housing units subsidized remains above statewide rates, but has been stagnant over the last nine years. Equity is good between most communities but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	C
Foreclosures	Foreclosure rates have increased significantly in recent years, following state and national trends. Equity is good amongst many communities but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	D+
Homelessness	The rate of homelessness has increased significantly in recent years, and reached rates much higher than those for Massachusetts.	D-



RATING

A VERY POSITIVE TREND
B POSITIVE TREND
C NEUTRAL TREND
D NEGATIVE TREND
F VERY NEGATIVE TREND

CIVICS, ARTS AND RECREATION

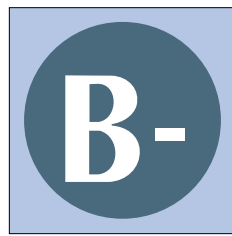
Civics, arts, and recreation indicators address what many people intuitively think of as quality of life. The presence of a vibrant arts community or the availability of high-quality public libraries are the sometimes intangible elements of a community that make it home. Data to measure these qualities is sometimes difficult to find, but we have attempted to share indicators that speak to these aspects, which are so important to community life. In addition to arts and libraries, the overall presence and support of nonprofit organizations, municipal spending on culture and recreation, and engagement in the political process are important measures of civic involvement, arts, and recreation.

The Pioneer Valley has a long standing reputation as a cultural center due to several arts, humanities, and civics programs within institutions of higher education, as well as over 163 non-profits, a prevalent community of politically engaged citizens, and an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities. Trends have been steady, but neutral for voter registration, library attendance, and prevalence, expenditures, and support of non-profit organizations within the region. Positively, communities have increased their spending on culture and recreation. Unfortunately, the number of artist awards per capita, have seen recent decreases within the region.



Photo: Caterpillar, Eric Carle Museum by Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism

Indicator	Summary	Rating
Library Attendance	Library attendance per capita is slightly higher than it was 10 years ago, with some decreases in the last few years. While rates have generally been higher than those of Massachusetts, they dropped below the state rate in 2010. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is high.	C
Culture and Recreation Spending	Culture and recreation spending has increased significantly in the last 10 years, and is now in line with Massachusetts rates, though the pace appears to be slowing. Equity between many communities is good, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is high.	B-
Voter Registration	Voter registration rates have been consistent and in line with the state throughout the last 10 years. Equity between most communities is poor.	C-
Arts, Culture and Humanities Nonprofit Expenditures	Arts, culture, and humanities spending has been consistent over the last 9 years, but remains less than half of Massachusetts rates. Equity is good across most communities, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is high.	C-
Nonprofit Support	Per capita public contributions to non-profit organizations have been erratic over the last nine years. Rates surpassed those statewide, and then dropped to about half in 2010.	C-
Support for Artists	Artist awards granted per capita have decreased significantly through the last 10 years. While rates were above those statewide for much of the decade, they dropped below Massachusetts in 2010.	D-



RATING

A VERY POSITIVE TREND
B POSITIVE TREND
C NEUTRAL TREND
D NEGATIVE TREND
F VERY NEGATIVE TREND

ENVIRONMENT

It is unlikely there is a factor that influences the region's long-term health and quality of life more than the environment. Air quality, water quality, recreational open space, and waste disposal all affect residents' physical well-being, economic condition, long-term livelihood, and capacity to enjoy their surroundings. Efforts to improve our air and water quality have made significant strides in recent years through the Connecticut River clean up, but there is still much that can be done to recover from years of pollution. A variety of indicators including recycling rates, average commute times, and the number of miles of bike paths help us gauge our progress in building a more sustainable region. By reducing our day-to-day impact and cleaning up previous pollution, our efforts will be realized through an improved quality of life for us today and for future generations tomorrow.

Observing the various environmental indicators we can see the environment is one category where the Pioneer Valley is making the greatest improvements. Most environmental indicators show a positive trend for the region and are better than the state average. The most significant positive indicators show large increases in the number of miles of bike paths, decreases in combined sewer overflows, as well as the proportion of our communities designated "Green Communities" increasing much faster than rates statewide. Trends have remained neutral for average commute times, access to recreational and open space, and the percent of days with healthy air quality.



Indicator	Summary	Rating
Environmentally Friendly Transportation	The percent of commuters using environmentally friendly transportation options has increased significantly in the last 10 years. However rates remain well below the rates of Massachusetts, and growth has not kept pace with that statewide. Equity is good amongst many communities but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	C+
Bike Paths	The number of miles of bike paths increased more than 450% in 9 years, and nearly doubled in the most recent 4 years.	A
Healthy Air Quality Days	The percent of days with healthy air quality has been generally stable over the last 10 years, with an increase of less than 1% since 1999.	C
Average Commute Time	Average commute times have increased slightly in recent years, but remain well below averages for Massachusetts. Equity between most communities is poor.	C
Recycling Rate	Recycling rates have increased slightly in recent years, and consistently remain above Massachusetts rates. Equity for most communities is neutral, but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is high.	B-
Green Communities	The percent of all municipalities that are designated Green Communities more than doubled between 2010 and 2011. Rates continue to be higher than those statewide.	A
Access to Recreational Space and Open Space	Access to recreational and open space has remained stable for over three decades. Rates have consistently been higher than those for Massachusetts, and have remained high as state rates have dropped. Equity between most communities is poor.	C
Water Quality (CSOs)	The number of combined sewer overflows has seen a steady decrease over the last ten years. Equity is good amongst most communities but the gap between the highest and lowest performing communities is large.	A-

To view a PDF of the full State of the People report including written descriptions, long term trend graphs, and municipal comparison maps for each data indicator, go to:

<http://www.pvpc.org/stateofthepeople>