

# *Community Wide Strategic Planning and Needs Assessment*



***Worcester Community Action Council, Inc.  
Head Start and Early Head Start  
Southern Worcester County, Massachusetts  
2022***

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PURPOSE

Worcester Community Action Council (WCAC) Head Start/Early Head Start has developed the *2022 Community Wide Strategic Planning and Needs Assessment* to identify the strengths, challenges, and barriers to self-sufficiency of those living in poverty, specifically in southern Worcester County, Massachusetts. The Community Assessment process examines the capabilities of community members, partner agencies and organizations while identifying services and solutions that support and nurture families and children. The Assessment is intended for the design of future program plans to meet community needs; to build on the current strengths and resources of the community; and to assist in reducing identified barriers to self-sufficiency for families living in poverty.

Worcester Community Action Council Head Start/Early Head Start conducts a comprehensive Community Assessment during each five-year period, and annually reviews and updates the Assessment to reflect significant changes in southern Worcester County. The quantitative and qualitative data gleaned from the Assessment is used to make informed decisions which may include, but will not be limited to:

- Determination of long- and short-range program goals, objectives, and priorities;
- Types of services most needed for families living in poverty;
- Geographic areas to be served by the program, if additional funding is available, or if limitations in the amount of resources make it impossible to serve the entire service area;
- Location of Head Start and Early Head Start center-based/home-based services; and
- Criteria that defines the special populations of children who will be given priority for recruitment and selection for program services.

## METHODOLOGY

### HSPPS 1302.11

#### *Determining Community Strengths, Needs and Resources*

- ◆ The number of eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age children and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages they speak.
- ◆ Children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, and children with disabilities, including types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to children by community agencies;
- ◆ The education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being;
- ◆ Typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children;
- ◆ Other child development, child care centers, and family child care programs that serve typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children;
- ◆ Other child development, child care centers, and family child care programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and approximate number of eligible children served;
- ◆ Resources that are available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families; and
- ◆ Strengths of the community.

The 2022 *Community Wide Strategic Planning and Needs Assessment* has been developed per the requirements of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS).

HSPPS Standard 1302.11 *Determining Community Strengths, Needs and Resources* (right) outlines the information that must be included and analyzed about each grantee's Head Start and Early Head Start funded area.

Methods utilized for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data information included:

- EHS/Head Start Family Surveys
- Community Agency Surveys
- Local, state and federal data resources
- WCAC data systems
- American Community Survey estimates\*

\*The American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing survey by the U.S. Census Bureau. Every year, the Census Bureau contacts over 3.5 million households across the country to participate in the ACS. It includes basic short-form questions along with detailed questions about population and housing characteristics. The ACS is designed to provide communities with reliable and timely social, economic, housing, and demographic every year, revolutionizing the way we use statistics to understand our communities.<sup>1</sup>

## DATA SUMMARY

Through the Community Assessment process, both strengths and challenges were identified. Below is a summary of demographic information and data trends that most impact those living in poverty in southern Worcester County. For detailed information regarding any statistic, refer to the narrative.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

- According to the 2020 Decennial Census, the total population of Worcester County is 862,111 – an increase of 3.8% from the 2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates. The 2020 estimated population of WCAC's HS/EHS funded service area is 178,185 – an increase of 4.9% from 2010.
- Between 2010 and 2020, Holden at 14.8%, Boylston at 11.3%, and Webster at 6.9% saw the greatest population growth, compared to 8% in Worcester County and 7.4% in Massachusetts (MA).
- According to the 2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates, 65.3% of the Worcester County population is over the age of 20. The 0-5-year-old group made up 5.3% of the population.
- The 2020 racial composition of Worcester County is 73.5% White; 5.6% Black/African-American; 5.4% Asian; 0.3% Native American or Alaskan Native; 6.4% Other; and 8.7% two or more races.
- The 2020 Hispanic/Latinx population in Worcester County is 13%, compared to MA at 12.6%. The largest Hispanic/Latinx populations in the funded service area are in Southbridge at 36.1%, Webster at 17.6%, and Dudley at 12.4%.
- According to the 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, 80.3% of the population in Worcester County, ages 5 years and older, speaks English; 8.5% speaks Spanish; 6.2% speaks Indo-European languages; 3.1% speaks Asian languages; and 1.9% speaks other languages.
- Southbridge at 25%, Webster at 10%, and West Boylston at 9.5% have the highest percentages of the population in the funded area who speak Spanish at home. Millbury has the highest percentage of Indo-European language speakers at 7.8%.

### ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

- The 2022 minimum wage in MA is \$14.25 per hour, 50.8% higher than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25. Minimum wage will increase to \$15 per hour by January 2023. In Worcester County, the required living wage annual income before taxes for a single adult and one child is \$68,396 or \$32.88 per hour. A single adult with one child earning minimum wage makes only 43.3% of the living wage, or \$29,640 annually.
- According to the latest labor market information from the MA Department of Unemployment Assistance, the unemployment rate for Worcester County and the state have dropped to 3.7% and 3.4%, respectively, coming close to pre-pandemic unemployment numbers of 3.6% and 3.5%.

- Of family households, the median household income is \$74,679 for Worcester County, lower than MA's median income of \$81,215. The following town/cities had the lowest median household income in the funded service area: Southbridge at \$51,270; Warren at \$61,653; and Webster at \$62,653.

## HOUSING

- Households are considered cost burdened if their housing costs exceed 30% of their household income. According to the 2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates, Worcester County's rate of cost burdened renter households is 43.4% and the rate of cost burdened owned households is 30.5%.
- Fair Market Rent is determined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The 2022 FMR for a modest two-bedroom apartment in the Worcester area is \$1,491 per month and is very high compared to the national average. Compared to the rest of MA, the Worcester FMR area is more expensive than 55% of the state.
- In 2021 the FMR for a two-bedroom apartment was \$1,450 per month; the 2022 FMR is an increase of 2.38%.
- The National Low-Income Coalition's 2021 "Out of Reach" report compares rent and wages nationally and by state. MA has the third highest housing wage nationally. At minimum wage (when it was \$13.50 per hour in 2021), a person would have to work 107 hours per week to afford a two-bedroom apartment or have 2.7 full-time jobs at minimum wage.

## HOMELESSNESS

- According to the HUD's 2021 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, nearly half of all people experiencing sheltered homelessness were in four states: New York (23% or 76,051 people), California (16% or 51,429 people), MA (4% or 13,944 people), and Florida (4% or 13,393 people). MA is the fifth highest state with shelter beds at 4% or 18,186 beds.
- Half of all people experiencing sheltered homelessness as part of a family with children were in New York, California, and Massachusetts. For the largest absolute decrease in sheltered family homelessness from 2020 to 2021, MA was the second with 2,055 fewer people.

## EDUCATION

- According to the 2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates, Worcester County's population age 25 and older with a graduate degree including equivalency is 28.2%, slightly higher than MA's rate of 23.9%.
- Those in Worcester County with a high school graduate degree or higher was highest among White alone, not Hispanic or Latinx, at 94.5% which is just slightly below MA's rate of 94.8% for the same population. The Hispanic or Latinx population is the lowest percentage of people with a high school degree or higher in Worcester County at 75.6%.

## **DISABILITIES**

- According to the 2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates, 0.5% or 231 children under the age of 5 have a disability in Worcester County, and 0.7% or 8,818 under the age of 5 have a disability in MA.

## **EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE: BIRTH TO FIVE**

- There are 203 Center-Based enrollment slots for HS/EHS.
- Early Head Start (home-based) and Head Start are the only no-cost early childhood options provided to low-income parents within WCAC's funded area, except for children with special needs who are enrolled at no cost in the local public schools. All other early childhood options require that parents pay a fee for infants, toddlers, or preschoolers to attend; pre-kindergarten programs at local public schools often charge a sliding-scale fee. The lack of center-based Early Head Start and affordable child care makes it difficult for low-income families to work without child care subsidies, especially for parents of infants and toddlers.
- Child care costs throughout southern Worcester County vary. Infant care ranges from \$175-\$395 per week; toddler care ranges from \$145-\$295; preschool ranges from \$140-\$315; and school age care ranges from \$100-\$250. Without a child care subsidy, the costs of child care are typically prohibitive to families living at or near the poverty level.

## **CHILD WELFARE**

- According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center, in 2019 there were 24,989 confirmed incidents of maltreatment for children under the age of 18; there were 8,617 confirmed incidents for children ages 0 to 4, the highest among all age groups.
- Among confirmed incidents of maltreatment by race and Hispanic or Latinx origin in MA, in 2019 the highest group was among White alone, not Hispanic or Latinx, children at 35% or 8,661; the second highest was among Hispanic or Latinx at 33% or 8,227.

## **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

- According to Kids Count Data Center, in 2019 there were 69,117 births in Massachusetts.
- In Worcester County in 2017 (latest data available), there were 197 babies with low birth weight or 8.0%; the state's total low birth weight was 5,261 babies or 7.4%.
- In MA in 2019, there were 6,945 preterm births or 10%.

## **FOOD AND NUTRITION**

- In the funded service area, there is a WIC clinic in Southbridge, Webster, Brookfield, and Millbury.
- According to the US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, in October 2021 there were 22,015 women participating in the Women, Infants, & Children (WIC) program, and 111,582 total participants.



- According to Feeding America's 2020 Report, the United States child food insecurity rate is 15.2% or 11,174,000. In MA from 2018 to 2020, there were 172,000 children (12%) living in households that were food insecure at some point during the year.
- MA has the second lowest child food insecurity rate at 10.1% or 38,760.
- In Worcester County, there are 15,380 food insecure children with a child food insecurity rate of 8.8%.
- As of December 2020, there were 46,769 Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) participants in Worcester County.

## TRANSPORTATION

- According to the 2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates, 9.3% (29,374) of all households in Worcester County do not have a vehicle.
- 94,622 households have one vehicle available and 128,393 have two vehicles available.

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- According to a MA Department of Public Health report released in November 2021, in the first nine months of 2021 there were 1,211 confirmed opioid-related overdose deaths along with an estimated additional 362 to 411 deaths, yielding 1,613 total confirmed and estimated opioid-related overdose deaths. This is an estimated 21% more than the first nine months of 2020.

## KEY FINDINGS

Worcester County has several community issues which impact individuals and families living in poverty, including lack of quality child care and before/after school care; the cost of utilities; and the need for jobs with sustainable wages, affordable housing, and reliable transportation. These issues are often intertwined, meaning that families must overcome several challenges and remove a multitude of barriers to move toward self-sufficiency.

According to the 2021 Head Start and Early Head Start Family Survey, the top challenges facing our families are paying for utilities, budgeting money, affordable housing, and the child's behavior. Additional areas of concern include a self or family member with depression, supporting a child with disabilities, finding a job, access to food, infant/toddler and preschool care, after school care, internet and computer access, transportation, banking services, health insurance, phone service, and physical/verbal abuse. For example, when choosing to what extent an issue is, or is not, a challenge for their family, 46.9% of respondents said paying for utilities such as electricity, water, and heat was somewhat of a challenge; additionally, 40.6% said managing and budgeting money was somewhat of a challenge.

The program conducted a Parent Technology Survey with 61 total responses in 2021 which provided insight into the technological availability in homes. The survey found 39% of families either do not have or were unsure whether they had a WIFI signal strong enough to support the number of users in their home. In addition, 34% do not have enough devices for the number of children homeschooling; 25% were homeschooling another child; and 61% had not received equipment from the public school.

WCAC serves children in the areas with greatest need and highest populations in Southern Worcester County, particularly Southbridge at 32.9% poverty (376 children under age 5); Spencer at 19.4% (19 children under age 5); and Webster at 20.2% poverty (115 children under age 5).

<b>Town/City</b>	<b>Total Children Under 5</b>	<b>Estimated Children Under 5 in Poverty</b>	
<b>Dudley</b>	380	4.5%	17
<b>East Brookfield</b>	159	6.9%	11
<b>Leicester</b>	466	4.3%	20
<b>Millbury</b>	667	2.5%	17
<b>Oxford</b>	312	0.0%	0
<b>Spencer</b>	98	19.4%	19
<b>Southbridge</b>	1,142	32.9%	376
<b>Webster</b>	568	20.2%	115

*Source: 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates Table S1071*

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### ABOUT WCAC

Founded in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty, Worcester Community Action Council (WCAC) is one of 1,000 community action agencies across the U.S. and 23 in Massachusetts created to address disparities throughout the nation.

Our values of advancing equitable access, elevating all voices, and partnering with people are embedded in the role we play as the federally designated anti-poverty agency for Central and South-Central Massachusetts. WCAC embodies service to the community through our Mission: *Helping people move to economic self-sufficiency through programs, partnerships, and advocacy. Our vision is to break the cycle of poverty one neighbor at a time.* Through safety-net services and asset building solutions, WCAC creates economic mobility opportunities for tens of thousands of people annually through programs such as energy assistance, early education and care, financial empowerment, positive youth development, and career pathways.

The Early Education and Care programs include WCAC's Head Start, Early Head Start (EHS), and Healthy Families of Southern Worcester County (HFSWC) programs. WCAC's Head Start program serves 203 preschool children in a center-based option and 60 EHS children in a home-based option in Southern Worcester County. The Head Start centers are located in Southbridge and Webster, two of the highest communities of need in the area. Most recently, the Southbridge location has begun implementing teachings from the ReadyGO program, a social-emotional learning program intended to teach teachers how to provide more trauma-informed care to their children. The goal of ReadyGO is to begin implementing teachings of social-emotional learning into the Head Start curriculum to help provide educators with trauma-informed to foster emotional development. WCAC began offering HFSWC in 1984 and serves 17 towns. The program partners with first-time parents to provide coaching and support services at no cost. HFSWC helps parents of any age, but the average age of clients is 23 to 26 years old with some clients as young as 15 years old. Services are provided from pregnancy through a child's third birthday.

Home Heating Assistance and Energy Efficiency include several complementary programs which reduce energy burden of income-eligible households by providing payment assistance and increasing energy efficiency while ensuring the health and safety of clients.

JEC provides space for low-income, disconnected youth to explore and develop their potential with high school equivalency education, work readiness training, career pathway programming, and employment programs. Taking into consideration numerous systemic obstacles, individualized attention is given to each participant.

WCAC's Asset Development initiatives are designed to support and empower clients financially. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, which began 18 years ago, coordinates IRS-certified volunteers to prepare income tax returns for low-income wage earners, thereby saving them the cost of commercial tax preparation, and, most importantly, to provide these tax filers with opportunities to open savings accounts, repair damaged credit histories, understand their personal financial situation through coaching, and begin to build assets. The Bank On Worcester County program works with unbanked and underbanked households to achieve financial security. The Agency has also recently made great strides in creating the Resiliency Center which addresses needs of low-income families through a holistic client-centered approach and streamlined access to community resources to ease the complexity of navigating through often siloed systems. WCAC is also using EMPATH's evidence-based Mobility Mentoring curriculum to educate staff on a curriculum to rethink casework. Through motivational interviewing, goal setting, using the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency, recognition, and trauma-informed education, participants will be taught the skills they need to set short-term goals to make long-term aspirations a reality.

WCAC is one of 23 Community Action Agencies in Massachusetts. Community Action Agencies, also known as Community Action Programs, are private, non-profit human service and advocacy organizations that were established by Congress and the President in 1964 to fight poverty by opening the doors to self-sufficiency. Since its inception as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Community Action Agencies have helped low-income Americans escape poverty and achieve economic security. Through programs such as Head Start, job training, housing, food banks, energy assistance, and financial education, Community Action Agencies tailor services to meet the needs of the individuals and communities they serve. The agencies put a human face on poverty, advocate for those who do not have a voice, and provide opportunities. Today there are more than 1,000 Community Action Agencies in existence, working in every state in the United States.

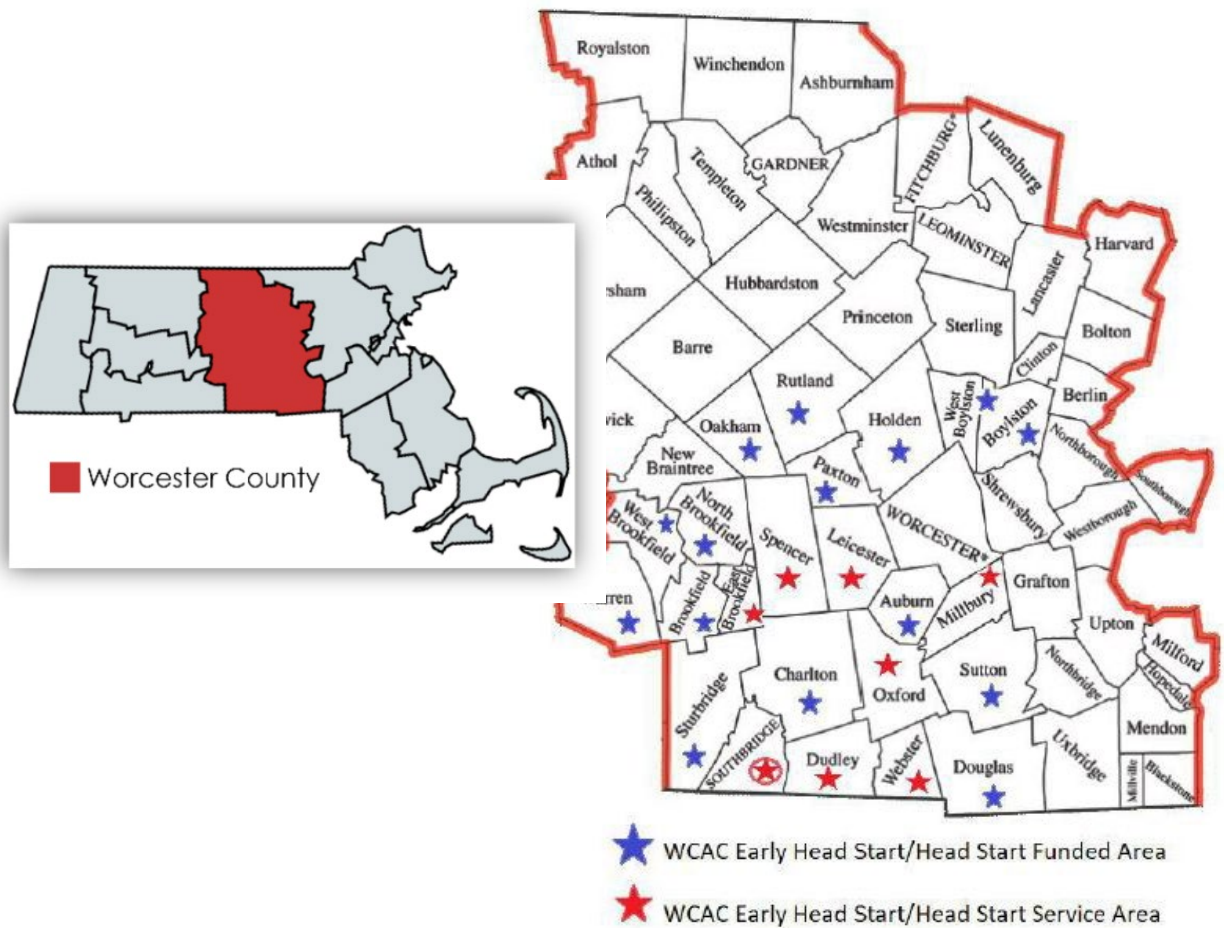
## **GEOGRAPHY AND LOCATION**

WCAC receives federal funding to operate the Head Start and Early Head Start grants in southern Worcester County, one of 14 counties in Central Massachusetts. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is the most populous state in the New England region of the northeastern United States. Massachusetts is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the states of Connecticut and Rhode Island to the south, New Hampshire and Vermont to the north, and New York to the west. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is home to over 6.8 million residents.

Worcester County is in Central Massachusetts, 50 miles southwest of Boston. The county is bordered by Cheshire and Hillsborough counties in New Hampshire to the north/northeast; by Middlesex County, MA to the east/northeast; Norfolk County to the east/southeast; Providence

County, RI to the south/southeast; Windham and Tolland counties in CT to the south/southwest; and Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties in MA to the west/southwest/northwest.

Worcester County has a total area of 1,579 square miles, of which 68 square miles are water. The largest city and county seat is Worcester, Massachusetts.



## HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START

Head Start is a federally funded program that began in 1965 and is based on the premise that all children share certain needs and can benefit from a comprehensive developmental program designed to meet those needs. WCAC administers the federal Head Start and EHS grants in southern Worcester County, providing part-day and full-day/full-year center-based Head Start services to 203 children ages 3-5, and EHS home-based services to 60 expectant mothers and infants, toddlers, and their families.

**WCAC's Head Start service area**  
is defined by the U.S. Department  
of Health and Human Services:

### Head Start

- Auburn
- Boylston
- Brookfield
- Charlton
- Douglas
- **Dudley\***
- **East Brookfield\***
- Holden
- **Leicester\***
- **Millbury\***
- Oakham
- **Oxford\***
- North Brookfield
- Paxton
- Rutland
- **Spencer\***
- **Southbridge\***
- Sturbridge
- Sutton
- Warren
- **Webster\***
- West Boylston
- West Brookfield

### Early Head Start

- **Dudley\***
- **East Brookfield\***
- **Millbury\***
- **Oxford\***
- **Southbridge\***
- **Spencer\***
- **Webster\***

\* - Targeted Service Area

Ninety-minute, weekly home visits and bi-monthly socializations are provided to Early Head Start families. Children from low-income households or on public assistance, as well as those in foster care or experiencing homelessness are given priority for enrollment. Head Start and EHS support children's growth and development in a positive learning environment through services, including:

**Early learning:** Children's readiness for school and beyond is fostered through individualized learning experiences. Through relationships with adults, play, and planned and spontaneous instruction, children grow in many aspects of development. Children progress in gaining social skills and emotional well-being, along with language/literacy learning, and concept development.

**Health:** Each child's perceptual, motor, and physical development is supported to permit them to fully explore and function in their environment. Children receive health and developmental screenings, nutritious meals, oral health, and mental health support. Programs connect families with medical, dental, and mental health providers to ensure that children are receiving the services they need.

**Family well-being:** Parents and families are supported in achieving their own goals, such as housing stability, continued education, and financial security. Programs support and strengthen parent-child relationships and

engage families around children's learning and development.

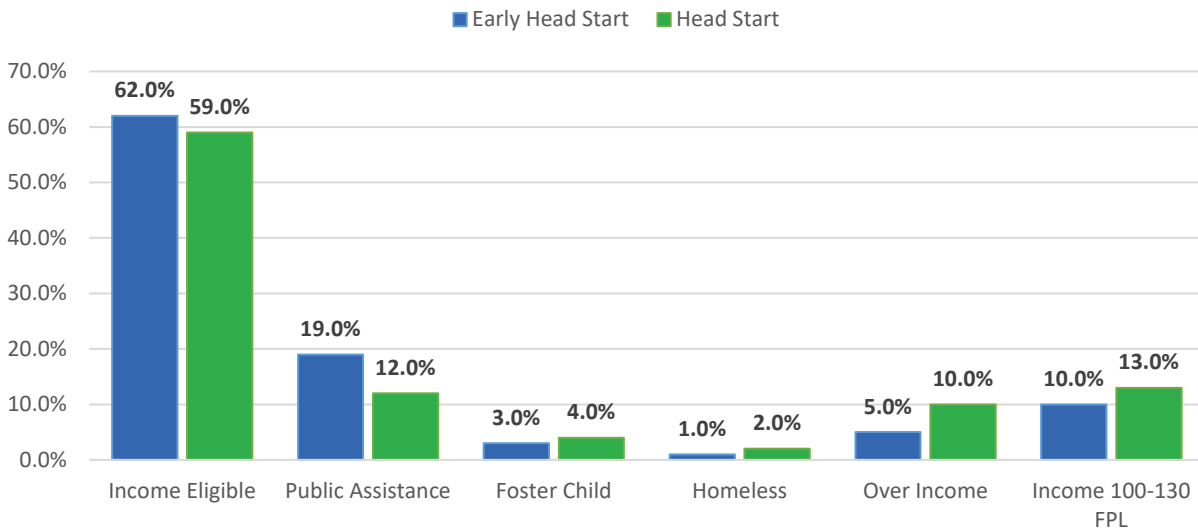
## ELIGIBILITY

The Head Start program provides center-based services to 203 children and families at its Southbridge and Webster locations. Targeted recruitment and selection are focused on the towns of Dudley, Leicester, Millbury, Oxford, Southbridge, East Brookfield, Spencer and Webster.

WCAC provides home-based services to 60 infants and toddlers with targeted recruitment and selection focused on the towns of Dudley, East Brookfield, Millbury, Oxford, Southbridge, Spencer and Webster. Socializations are held a minimum of 24 times per year at WCAC's site in Southbridge.

### Enrollment by Eligibility

Source: 2019-2020 PIR



During PY2019-2020, EHS children at WCAC were eligible for enrollment as follows: 62% Income Eligible; 19% receiving Public Assistance; 3% in Foster Care; 1% experiencing Homelessness; 5% from families considered Over Income; and 10% with family income between 100 and 130% of the federal poverty line.

During PY2019-2020, HS children were eligible for enrollment as follows: 59% Income Eligible; 12% receiving Public Assistance; 4% in Foster Care; 2% experiencing Homelessness; 10% from families considered Over Income; and 13% with family income between 100 and 130% of the federal poverty line.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### POPULATION AND GROWTH

As of 2020, the total population of Worcester County was estimated at 862,111, an increase of 8% from 2010. The 2020 estimated population of WCAC's HS/EHS funded service area was 178,185, an increase of 4.9% from 2010. Between 2010 and 2020, Holden at 14.8%, Boylston at 11.3%, Webster at 6.9%, and Southbridge at 6.1% saw the greatest population growth, compared to 8% in Worcester County and 7.4% in Massachusetts.

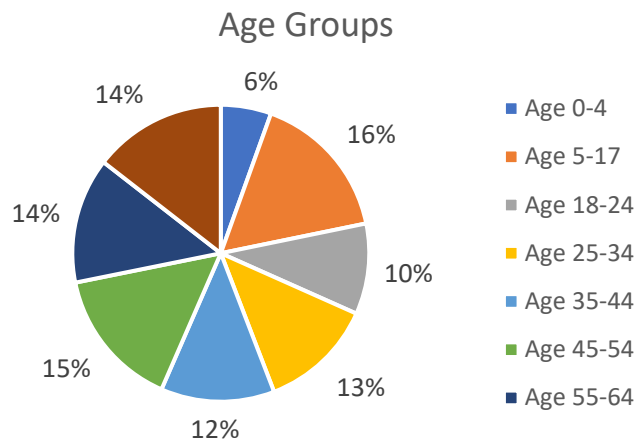
#### 2010-2020 Population Estimates

Source: 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census, Table P1

Location	2010 Population	2020 Population	Pop. Change 2010-2020
Auburn	16,188	16,889	4.3%
Boylston	4,355	4,849	11.3%
Brookfield	833	824	-1.1%
Charlton	12,981	13,315	2.6%
Douglas	8,471	8,983	6.0%
<b>Dudley</b>	<b>11,390</b>	<b>11,921</b>	<b>4.7%</b>
<b>East Brookfield</b>	<b>1,323</b>	<b>1,292</b>	<b>-2.3%</b>
Holden	17,346	19,905	14.8%
<b>Leicester</b>	<b>10,970</b>	<b>11,087</b>	<b>1.1%</b>
<b>Millbury</b>	<b>13,261</b>	<b>13,831</b>	<b>4.3%</b>
North Brookfield	2,265	2,256	-0.4%
Oakham	1,902	1,851	-2.7%
<b>Oxford</b>	<b>6,103</b>	<b>5,928</b>	<b>-2.9%</b>
Paxton	4,806	5,004	4.1%
Rutland	2,111	2,179	3.2%
<b>Southbridge</b>	<b>16,719</b>	<b>17,740</b>	<b>6.1%</b>
<b>Spencer</b>	<b>5,700</b>	<b>5,810</b>	<b>1.9%</b>
Sturbridge	2,253	2,385	5.9%
Sutton	8,963	9,357	4.4%
Warren	1,405	1,333	-5.1%
<b>Webster</b>	<b>11,412</b>	<b>12,194</b>	<b>6.9%</b>
West Boylston	7,669	7,877	2.7%
West Brookfield	1,413	1,375	-2.7%
<b>TOTAL HS/EHS SERVICE AREA</b>	<b>169,839</b>	<b>178,185</b>	<b>4.9%</b>
<b>Worcester County</b>	<b>798,552</b>	<b>862,111</b>	<b>8.0%</b>
<b>*Massachusetts</b>	<b>6,547,629</b>	<b>7,029,917</b>	<b>7.4%</b>
<b>*United States</b>	<b>308,745,538</b>	<b>331,449,281</b>	<b>7.4%</b>



## AGE



As of 2018, 78.2% of the Worcester County population was over the age of 18. The 0-4-year-old group made up 5.5% of the population.

## RACE AND ETHNICITY

In 2019, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the racial composition of Massachusetts to be 78.1% White; 7.6% African American; 6.6% Asian; 0.2% Native American; 0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 4.2% Other; and 3.3% Multiple Races. The 2019 racial composition of Worcester County was estimated at 83.7% White; 5% African American; 4.9% Asian; 0.3% Native American; 0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 3.2% Other; and 2.9% multiple races.

The 2019 Hispanic population in Worcester County was estimated at 11.8%, compared to Massachusetts at 11.8%. The largest Latino populations are in the southern part of the county in Southbridge (32.9%) and West Boylston (12.3%).

The population in both Worcester County and Massachusetts has grown, heavily due to immigration. In the last 10 years, newcomers from other countries into Worcester County totaled nearly 22,000 from 85 countries.<sup>2</sup> In comparison, more than 11,000 native residents moved out of the county. Immigrants arrived from a variety of countries including Iraq, Bhutan, Burma, Somalia, Vietnam, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, and South American populations.

During PY2019-2020, Head Start enrolled children of the following races and ethnicities: non-Hispanic: 0.7% American Indian or Alaskan Native; 0% Asian; 1.5% Black or African American; 0% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; 11.2% White; 9% Biracial/Multi-racial; and 77.6% other. For Hispanic/Latino races and ethnicities: 1.2% American Indian or Alaskan Native; 1.2% Asian; 3.7% Black or African American; 0% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; 80.2% White; 2.5% Biracial/Multi-racial; and 11.1% other.

## Population by Race

*Source: 2020 Decennial Census, Table P1*

Location	White	Black African American	Asian	Native American Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	Other	Multiple Races
Auburn	86.7%	1.9%	3.3%	0.1%	0.0%	1.9%	6.1%
Boylston	87.3%	0.6%	5.2%	0.2%	0.0%	1.5%	5.2%
Brookfield	92.7%	0.1%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%	6.2%
Charlton	91.7%	1.0%	1.1%	0.2%	0.0%	1.1%	4.9%
Douglas	91.9%	0.7%	0.9%	0.1%	0.0%	1.2%	5.1%
<b>Dudley</b>	87.4%	2.3%	1.3%	0.2%	0.0%	2.9%	5.9%
<b>East Brookfield</b>	91.2%	0.5%	1.7%	0.1%	0.0%	1.5%	5.1%
Holden	87.7%	2.1%	3.5%	0.2%	0.0%	1.4%	5.2%
<b>Leicester</b>	83.1%	3.7%	2.3%	0.3%	0.0%	3.4%	7.3%
<b>Millbury</b>	86.3%	2.6%	3.2%	0.1%	0.0%	1.6%	6.0%
North Brookfield	91.4%	0.6%	0.6%	0.4%	0.0%	1.5%	5.6%
Oakham	91.6%	1.2%	0.9%	0.2%	0.1%	0.5%	5.6%
<b>Oxford</b>	90.5%	1.1%	0.9%	0.1%	0.1%	1.9%	5.5%
Paxton	85.7%	3.8%	1.5%	0.2%	0.0%	3.1%	5.7%
Rutland	88.9%	1.7%	1.8%	0.1%	0.1%	2.1%	5.3%
<b>Southbridge</b>	64.1%	2.8%	1.8%	0.6%	0.0%	16.2%	14.4%
<b>Spencer</b>	83.7%	2.7%	1.0%	0.4%	0.1%	3.8%	8.3%
Sturbridge	87.0%	1.7%	2.2%	0.0%	0.3%	2.3%	6.5%
Sutton	92.0%	0.9%	1.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.8%	5.1%
Warren	89.0%	0.9%	0.7%	0.1%	0.0%	2.1%	7.3%
<b>Webster</b>	75.4%	5.4%	1.9%	0.5%	0.0%	7.5%	9.3%
West Boylston	86.7%	3.7%	1.9%	0.1%	0.0%	2.3%	5.3%
West Brookfield	92.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	5.8%
<b>Worcester County</b>	73.6%	5.6%	5.4%	0.3%	0.0%	6.4%	8.7%
<b>Massachusetts</b>	69.6%	7.0%	7.2%	0.3%	0.0%	7.1%	8.7%

## Population by Ethnicity

Source: 2020 Decennial Census, Table P2

Location	Hispanic (Absolute)	Hispanic (Percent)	Non-Hispanic (Absolute)	Non- Hispanic (Percent)
Auburn	891	5.3%	15,998	94.7%
Boylston	148	3.1%	4,701	96.9%
Brookfield	33	4.0%	791	96.0%
Charlton	539	4.0%	12,776	96.0%
Douglas	284	3.2%	8,699	96.8%
<b>Dudley</b>	<b>1,483</b>	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>10,438</b>	<b>87.6%</b>
<b>East Brookfield</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>4.6%</b>	<b>1,233</b>	<b>95.4%</b>
Holden	831	4.2%	19,074	95.8%
<b>Leicester</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>7.3%</b>	<b>10,276</b>	<b>92.7%</b>
<b>Millbury</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>4.6%</b>	<b>13,199</b>	<b>95.4%</b>
North Brookfield	91	4.0%	2,165	96.0%
Oakham	70	3.8%	1,781	96.2%
<b>Oxford</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>5,626</b>	<b>94.9%</b>
Paxton	303	6.1%	4,701	93.9%
Rutland	89	4.1%	2,090	95.9%
<b>Southbridge</b>	<b>6,409</b>	<b>36.1%</b>	<b>11,331</b>	<b>63.9%</b>
<b>Spencer</b>	<b>626</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>5,184</b>	<b>89.2%</b>
Sturbridge	122	5.1%	2,263	94.9%
Sutton	253	2.7%	9,104	97.3%
Warren	71	5.3%	1,262	94.7%
<b>Webster</b>	<b>2,146</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>10,048</b>	<b>82.4%</b>
West Boylston	583	7.4%	7,294	92.6%
West Brookfield	41	3.0%	1,334	97.0%
<b>TOTAL HS/EHS SERVICE AREA</b>	<b>16,817</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>161,368</b>	<b>90.6%</b>
<b>Worcester County</b>	<b>111,902</b>	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>750,209</b>	<b>87.0%</b>
<b>*Massachusetts</b>	<b>887,685</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>6,142,232</b>	<b>87.4%</b>
<b>*United States</b>	<b>62,080,044</b>	<b>18.7%</b>	<b>269,369,237</b>	<b>81.3%</b>

## PRIMARY LANGUAGE

As of 2019, 80.3% of the population in Worcester County, ages 5 years and over, speaks English; 8.5% speaks Spanish; 6.2% speaks Indo-European languages; 3.1% speaks Asian languages; and 1.9% speaks other languages. There are over a hundred languages spoken in the area due to the increase in immigrants from around the world in the past decade. Many residents who speak other languages are comfortable speaking English, but are “linguistically isolated,” meaning they

do not speak English very well or live in households in which no one is comfortable speaking English.

Southbridge (25%), Webster (10%), and West Boylston (9.5%) have the highest percentages of population who speak Spanish at home. Millbury has the highest percentage of Indo-European language speakers at 7.8%. During PY2019-2020, Head Start families spoke the following primary languages: 69% English; 26% Spanish; 4% Middle Eastern and South Asian; and 1% unspecified.

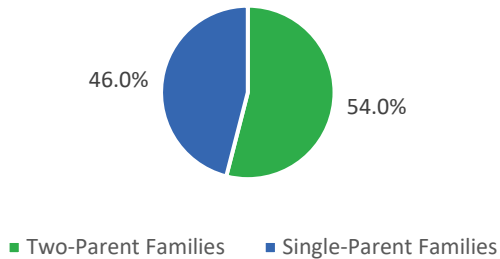
### Language Spoken at Home Ages 5 and Over

*Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2015-2019, Table S1601*

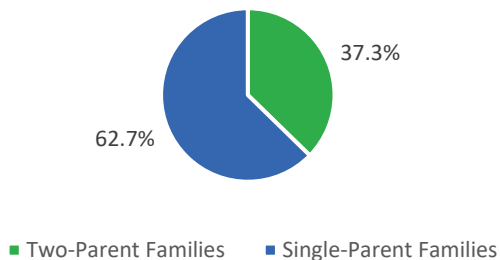
Location	English	Spanish	Indo-European	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other
Auburn	92.3%	2.1%	4.0%	0.9%	0.8%
Boylston	90.2%	4.7%	3.3%	0.9%	0.9%
Brookfield	96.0%	0.8%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Charlton	92.5%	3.4%	3.3%	0.4%	0.5%
Douglas	94.7%	3.0%	1.1%	1.2%	0.0%
<b>Dudley</b>	87.7%	2.2%	5.7%	2.9%	1.5%
<b>East Brookfield</b>	94.7%	4.0%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Holden	91.0%	2.5%	4.9%	1.3%	0.3%
<b>Leicester</b>	92.6%	1.8%	4.7%	0.3%	0.6%
<b>Millbury</b>	89.6%	1.0%	7.8%	0.7%	0.9%
North Brookfield	96.4%	1.2%	1.2%	0.5%	0.7%
Oakham	98.3%	0.8%	0.4%	0.2%	0.3%
<b>Oxford</b>	87.1%	4.5%	6.9%	1.3%	0.2%
Paxton	84.8%	2.4%	5.8%	1.8%	5.2%
Rutland	88.7%	2.4%	1.4%	3.9%	3.6%
<b>Southbridge</b>	71.4%	25.0%	2.9%	0.2%	0.5%
<b>Spencer</b>	93.1%	3.0%	1.2%	2.8%	0.0%
Sturbridge	90.7%	3.9%	3.0%	1.7%	0.7%
Sutton	93.4%	1.5%	3.6%	1.3%	0.3%
Warren	97.1%	0.0%	1.6%	1.3%	0.0%
<b>Webster</b>	82.1%	10.0%	5.6%	0.9%	1.5%
West Boylston	83.9%	9.5%	4.0%	0.8%	1.8%
West Brookfield	98.0%	0.4%	1.4%	0.0%	0.2%
<b>Worcester County</b>	80.3%	8.5%	6.2%	3.1%	1.9%
<b>Massachusetts</b>	76.2%	9.1%	9.0%	4.3%	1.4%

## FAMILY STRUCTURE

**PY2019-2020 EHS Family Structure**



**PY2019-2020 EHS Family Structure**



According to 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, 29.7% of children under age 18 in Worcester County were in single parent households. As [defined](#) by the U.S. Census Bureau, a family household is any housing unit in which the householder is living with one or more individuals related to him or her by birth, marriage, or adoption.<sup>3</sup>

During PY2020-2021, 54% of Early Head Start families were two-parent households and 46% were single-parent families. Of Head Start families, 37.3% were two-parent households and 62.5% were single-parent households. There were 3 Head Start families where the parent/guardian figures are grandparents, 3 were foster

parents, and 2 were other types of guardians. For Early Head Start, there were 3 families with foster parent(s) not including relatives. Incarceration, substance abuse and other family issues are a large factor in the increase in relative caregivers for children across Worcester County and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

## ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

### EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRY

According to the Living Wage Calculator created by Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in 2020 the current minimum wage in Massachusetts is \$13.50 per hour, 53.7% higher than the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25. Minimum wage will go up in steps to reach \$15 per hour by January 2023. In Worcester County, the living wage necessary to support a single adult and one child is \$34.87 an hour, or \$72,529 annually, according to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.<sup>4</sup> Living wage is the hourly rate that an individual must earn to adequately support their family and cover day-to-day expenses, if they are the sole provider and are working full-time (2080 hours per year). A single adult with one child that is earning minimum wage makes only 36.6% (\$26,520 annually) of what is needed to live in Worcester County.

	1 ADULT				2 ADULTS (1 WORKING)				2 ADULTS (BOTH WORKING)			
	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Living Wage	\$15.03	\$32.88	\$43.35	\$57.08	\$22.97	\$27.60	\$31.02	\$33.68	\$11.49	\$17.78	\$23.47	\$28.77
Poverty Wage	\$6.13	\$8.29	\$10.44	\$12.60	\$8.29	\$10.44	\$12.60	\$14.75	\$4.14	\$5.22	\$6.30	\$7.38
Minimum Wage	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75	\$12.75

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce has identified three distinct growth sectors presenting significant opportunities for job creation across the Greater Worcester Region in the past decade: Manufacturing; Education and Healthcare; and Professional, Scientific and Technical.<sup>5</sup> While there are job opportunities throughout the county, many adults must commute to the Worcester or Boston areas or to Connecticut for employment.

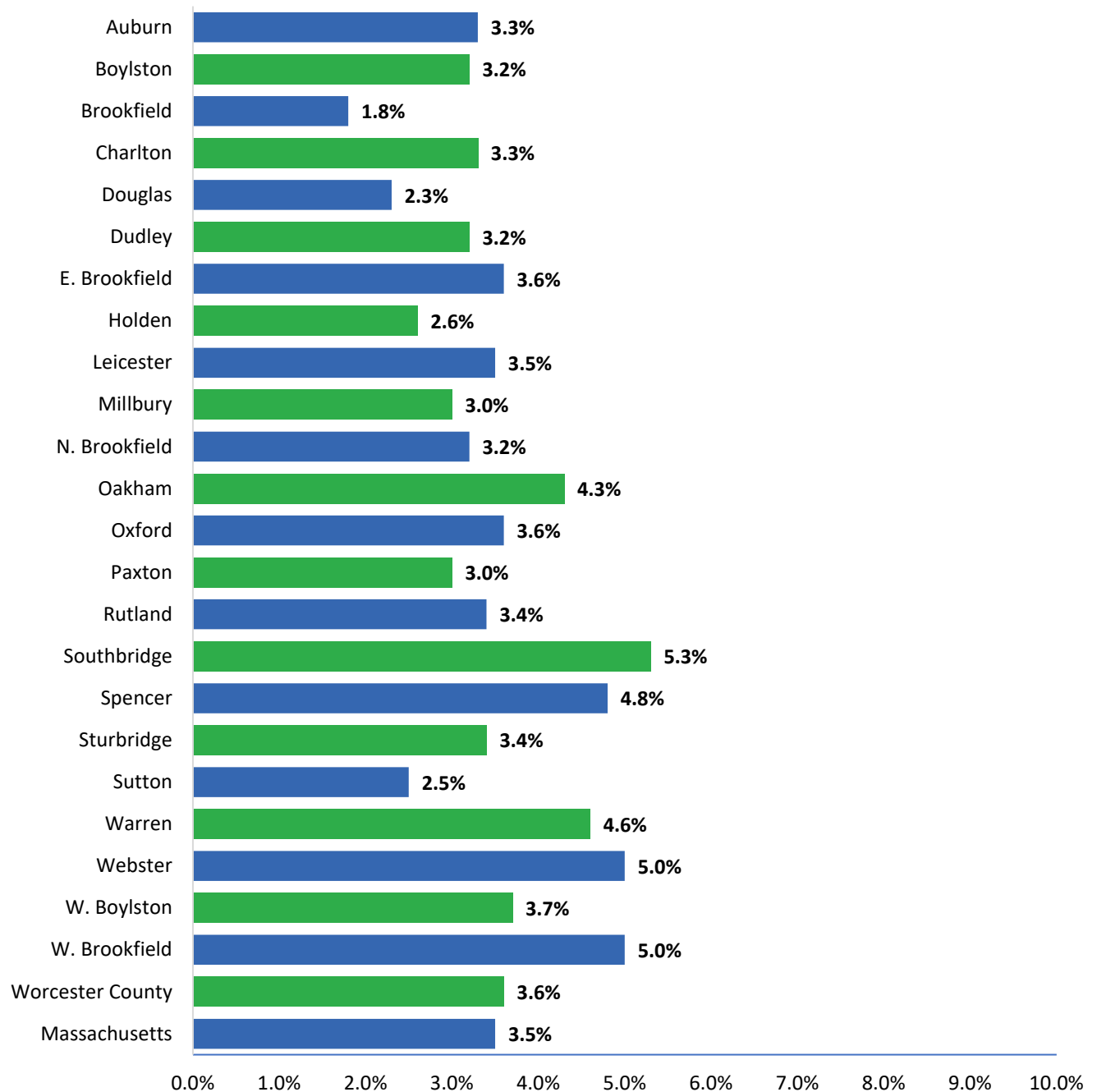
The COVID-19 outbreak coincided with a large spike in unemployment for Worcester County, jumping from 3.0% in March 2020 to 15.4% in April. The most recent data from the MA Department of Unemployment Assistance's Labor Market Information indicates the unemployment rates for the area served have dropped down close to pre-pandemic levels. As of December 2021, the highest unemployment rates for the service area are Southbridge at 5.3%, Webster and West Brookfield both at 5%, and Spencer at 4.8%. These are higher than the state rate of 3.5% and Worcester County rate of 3.6%. Notably, this data does not include those who have given up looking for work due to the lack of jobs, jobs with livable wages, and/or jobs for which they are not qualified.

"Unemployment" refers to the proportion of people in the labor force who are not working, according to the Department of Labor's official definition. People may be *available for work* in

the sense of wanting a job but would not be considered in the labor force if they do not have a job and are not actively looking for one. To be considered as part of the labor force, a person must either have a job or have looked for work in the last 4 weeks.

### Unemployment, Not Seasonally Adjusted

Source: MA Department of Unemployment Assistance - December 2021

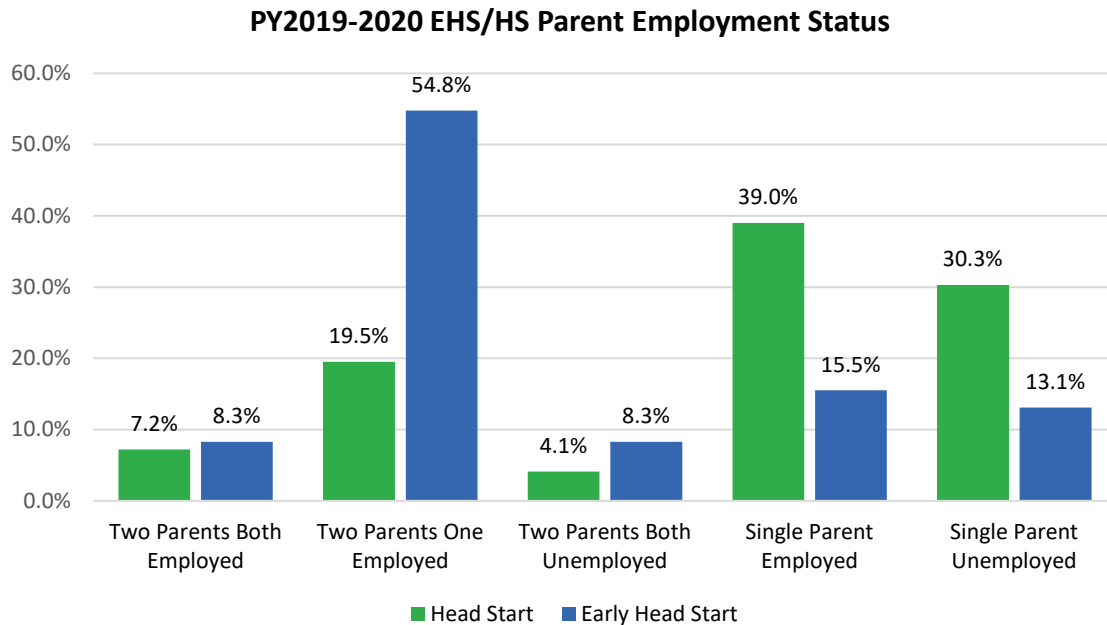


## Top Employers in WCAC Service Area

Source: MA Labor Market Information

Employer Name	Location	Industry	Employees
Commerce Insurance	Webster	Insurance	1,000-4,999
IPG Photonics Corp	Oxford	Manufacturing	1,000-4,999
MAPFRE USA Corp	Webster	Insurance	1,000-4,999
County Jail	West Boylston	Government	500-999
Flexcon Co Inc	Spencer	Manufacturing	500-999
R H White Co Inc	Auburn	Construction	500-999
American Optical Co	Southbridge	Health Care Services	250-499
Arc-Southern Worcester County	Southbridge		250-499
Dexter Russell Inc	Southbridge	Manufacturing	250-499
Gentex Optics Inc	Dudley	Manufacturing	250-499
Masonic Health System	Charlton	Health Care Services	250-499
Millyard Industrial Properties	Charlton	Industrial Properties	250-499
OFS Fitel LLC	Sturbridge	Manufacturing	250-499
United Lens Co	Southbridge	Manufacturing	250-499
Vibram Corp	North Brookfield	Manufacturing	250-499
Walmart Supercenter	Leicester	Retail	250-499
Webster First Federal Credit Union	Webster	Banking Services	250-499
Worcester Envelope Co	Auburn	Printing/Mailing	250-499





During PY2019-2020, 8.3% of EHS two-parent families had both parents employed; 54.8% of two-parent families had one parent employed and 8.3% of families had both parents unemployed. In single-parent homes, 15.5% of EHS parents were employed and 13.1% of parents were unemployed. During PY2019-2020, 7.2% of Head Start two-parent families had both parents employed; 19.5% of two-parent families had one parent employed and 4.1% of families had both parents unemployed. In single-parent homes, 39% of Head Start parents were employed and 30.3% of parents were unemployed.

## INCOME

Of family households, the median household income is \$74,679 for Worcester County, which is lower than Massachusetts' median income of \$81,215. The following town/cities had the lowest median household income in the funded service area:

- Southbridge at \$51,270;
- Warren at \$61,653; and
- Webster at \$62,653.

### Estimated Mean/Median Household Income

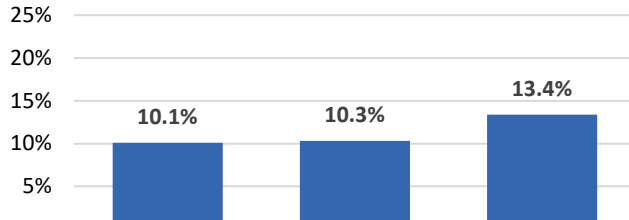
Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2015-2019 Table S1902 and Table S1903

Location	Total Households	Average (Mean) Household Income	Median Household Income
Auburn	6,672	\$102,773	\$84,740
Boylston	1,799	\$123,414	\$97,591
Brookfield	1,404	\$88,908	\$70,338
Charlton	5,064	\$112,247	\$101,111
Douglas	3,234	\$117,784	\$99,943
<b>Dudley</b>	3,905	\$91,824	\$69,071
<b>East Brookfield</b>	795	\$88,456	\$82,946
Holden	7,046	\$128,089	\$108,964
<b>Leicester</b>	4,070	\$101,086	\$88,505
<b>Millbury</b>	5,275	\$108,804	\$85,781
North Brookfield	1,841	\$94,450	\$78,750
Oakham	688	\$101,685	\$88,571
<b>Oxford</b>	5,200	\$89,780	\$76,373
Paxton	1,499	\$137,122	\$120,469
Rutland	2,885	\$117,618	\$107,928
<b>Southbridge</b>	6,813	\$64,448	\$51,270
<b>Spencer</b>	4,883	\$82,456	\$72,821
Sturbridge	3,619	\$105,811	\$81,875
Sutton	3,426	\$130,706	\$104,911
Warren	1,859	\$82,640	\$61,653
<b>Webster</b>	6,946	\$76,051	\$62,281
West Boylston	2,336	\$112,007	\$88,906
West Brookfield	1,510	\$85,135	\$70,255
<b>Worcester County</b>	309,951	\$94,304	\$74,679
<b>Massachusetts</b>	2,617,497	\$111,498	\$81,215

## POVERTY

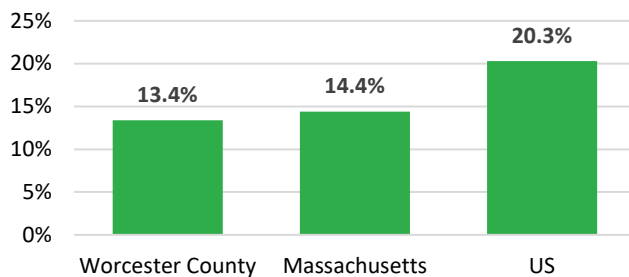
### General Population in Poverty

Source: ACS, 2015-2019, Table S1701



### Children Under 5 in Poverty

Source: ACS, 2015-2019, Table S1701



According to the ACS 5 Year Estimates for 2015-2019, it was estimated that Worcester County's general population was experiencing a poverty rate of 10.1%, just slightly lower than Massachusetts's poverty rate of 10.3% and lower than the nation's poverty rate of 13.4%.<sup>7</sup> The poverty rate of children under the age of 5 in Worcester County was 13.4%, lower than Massachusetts' poverty rate of 14.4% and the nation's poverty rate of 20.3%.

### Population in Poverty by Race

Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2015-2019, Table S1701

Location	White	Black African American	Asian	Native American Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	Other	Multiple Races
Worcester County	9.0%	16.0%	11.0%	21.0%	5.7%	22.6%	17.7%
Massachusetts	8.3%	18.7%	12.9%	22.3%	12.8%	23.8%	16.4%
United States	11.1%	23.0%	10.9%	24.9%	17.5%	21.0%	16.7%

### Population in Poverty by Ethnicity

Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2015-2019, Table S1701

Location	Hispanic Population	Percent Hispanic in Poverty	Non-Hispanic Population	Percent Non-Hispanic in Poverty
Worcester County	23,242	25.4%	44,683	7.3%
Massachusetts	192,189	24.5%	325,385	6.9%
United States	11,256,244	19.6%	18,525,349	9.6%

### Estimated Children under Five in Poverty by Age Group

Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2015-2019, Table S1701

Location	Total Children Under 5	Total Children Under 5 Below Poverty Level	Percent Children Under 5 Below Poverty Level
Auburn	606	31	5.1%
Boylston	181	8	4.4%
Brookfield	156	0	0.0%
Charlton	751	0	0.0%
Douglas	363	51	14.0%
<b>Dudley</b>	380	17	4.5%
<b>East Brookfield</b>	191	29	13.6%
Holden	924	61	6.6%
<b>Leicester</b>	466	20	4.3%
<b>Millbury</b>	667	17	2.5%
North Brookfield	359	0	0.0%
Oakham	39	0	0.0%
<b>Oxford</b>	698	0	0.0%
Paxton	235	0	0.0%
Rutland	521	46	8.8%
<b>Southbridge</b>	1,142	376	32.9%
<b>Spencer</b>	387	19	4.9%
Sturbridge	545	86	15.8%
Sutton	410	0	0.0%
Warren	437	45	10.3%
<b>Webster</b>	828	115	13.9%
West Boylston	290	59	20.3%
West Brookfield	96	0	0.0%
<b>WCAC Service Area</b>	10,672	980	9.2%
<b>Worcester County</b>	43,475	5,828	13.4%
<b>Massachusetts</b>	354,939	51,135	14.4%

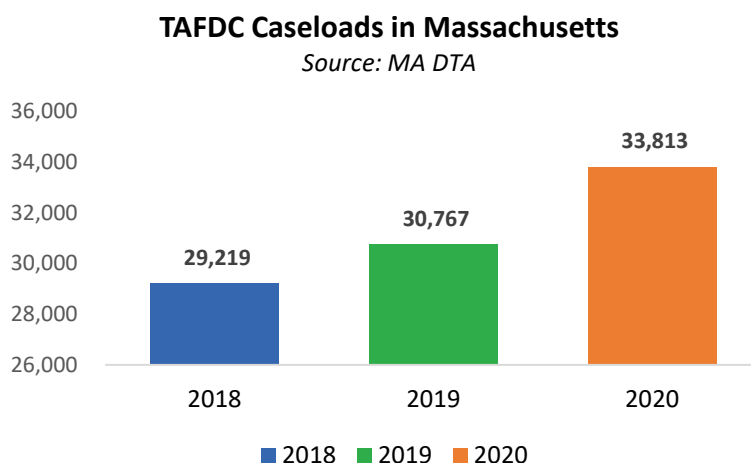
As of 2019, the highest poverty rates for children under age 5 were found in the following towns: Southbridge at 32.9%; West Boylston at 20.3%; Spencer at 15.8%; Douglas at 14.0%; and Webster at 13.9%. The highest total number of children under age 5, living in poverty, were in Southbridge at 376; Webster at 115; Sturbridge at 86; Holden at 61; and West Boylston at 59. The total number of children under 5 in WCAC's funded area was 10,672 with approximately 980 or 9.2% living below poverty.

## FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

### TAFDC

Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) is a state and federally funded program administered by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). TAFDC provides cash assistance to families with children and expectant women in the last 120 days of pregnancy who have little or no assets or income. An applicant must: live in MA; be a U.S. citizen or legal immigrant; be responsible for a child under the age of 18 or 19 or be an expectant pregnant woman with no children (child expected to be born within 120 days of application); and meet income and asset guidelines.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state approved a Fiscal Year 2021 General Appropriations Act that increased the benefit level for TAFDC effective January 1, 2021 to June 30, 2021. As a result, 26,745 households that were receiving TAFDC saw an increase to their monthly benefit amounts. This may have impacted households' benefit levels for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and could impact eligibility for other public assistance programs benefits. In addition, the TAFDC work program requirement was suspended in March 2020 for all households that were not already exempt, and the 24-month time limit was also suspended for all TAFDC families due to widespread closure of businesses, schools, and child care centers.<sup>8</sup>

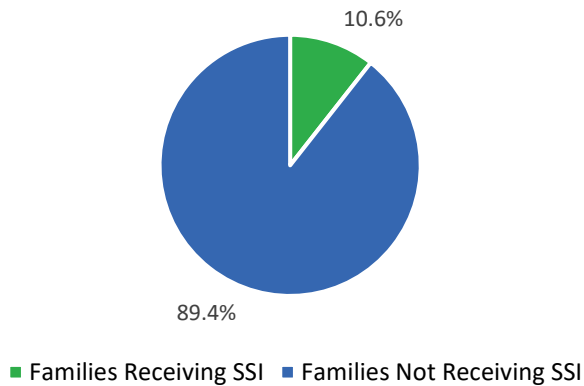


The number of MA children receiving TAFDC increased from 30,767 households in 2019 to 33,813 in May 2020, comprised of 98,6557 recipients.

During PY2019-2020, there were 23 Head Start families receiving any cash benefits or other services under the Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

### PY2019-2020 EHS/HS Families Receiving SSI

Source: PIR



### SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INSURANCE

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) pays monthly benefits to people with limited Income and resources, including those who are disabled, blind, or age 65 or older.<sup>9</sup> Children who are disabled may also get SSI. The monthly maximum federal amounts for SSI are \$794 for an eligible individual; \$1,191 for an eligible couple; and \$397 for an essential person. Of enrolled families in HS and EHS, 10.6% received SSI benefits during PY2019-2020.

## HOUSING

Cost burdened households are those where housing costs exceed 30% of total household income. Data (below) includes the cost of monthly housing expenses for both owners and renters. As of 2019, it is estimated 31.4% of Worcester County occupied housing units paid 30% or more of their household income on monthly housing costs.<sup>10</sup> For renters, it is estimated 46.6% paid 30% or more of their household income.

### Cost Burdened Occupied Housing Units

Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2015-2019, Table S2503

Location	Total Occupied Housing Units	Number of Cost Burdened Households	Percent of Cost Burdened Households
Worcester County	309,951	97,185	31.4%
Massachusetts	2,617,497	894,165	34.1%
United States	120,756,048	37,249,770	30.7%

### Cost Burdened Renter-Occupied Housing Units

Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2015-2019, Table S2503

Location	Total Renter-Occupied Housing Units	Number of Cost Burdened Renter Households	Percent of Cost Burdened Renter Households
Worcester County	309,951	48,200	44.6%
Massachusetts	2,617,497	459,710	46.6%
United States	120,756,048	20,002,910	45.9%

The National Low-Income Coalition’s 2020 “Out of Reach” report released on July 14, 2020, compares rents and wages nationally and by state. The report found even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic millions of workers were struggling to afford homes.<sup>11</sup> Massachusetts has the third highest housing wage nationally.<sup>12</sup> In 2019, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom home was \$1,202 per month; in 2020, the FMR increased by 16.3% to \$1,398 per month. The 2021 FMR for a modest two-bedroom apartment in the Worcester area is \$1,450 per month; an increase from 2020 to 2021 of 3.72%.<sup>13</sup> The Worcester area is more expensive than 55% of the state.

A household would need to earn \$26.88 per hour (\$44,000 annually) to afford a two-bedroom apartment or work 84 hours per week at minimum wage. The average renter in the Worcester area earns \$14.12 per hour and needs to work 76 hours to afford a two-bedroom apartment.

### Fair Market Rent

*Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition*

Location	Zero Bedroom	One Bedroom	Two Bedroom	Three Bedroom	Housing Wage for Two Bedroom	Hours of Work Per Week at Minimum Wage to afford Two Bedroom
Worcester County	\$1,013	\$1,100	\$1,398	\$1,742	\$26.88	84

## HOMELESSNESS

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s 2019 Point in Time Homeless Count, 1,593 people in the City of Worcester and Worcester County experienced homelessness. There were 967 in emergency shelters; 457 in transitional shelters; and 169 were unsheltered. The total number of children under the age of 18 decreased from 669 in 2018 to 576 in 2019.

While the statistics give an overview of homelessness across Worcester County, they do not reflect individuals and families who are doubled up with other families due to insufficient finances. WCAC recognizes families who are homeless per the McKinney Vento Act. During PY2019-2020, WCAC served 1 EHS family and 5 Head Start families who were experiencing homelessness.

## EDUCATION

The 2019 statistic of residents age 25 and older without a H.S. diploma in Worcester County is 9.3%, the same as Massachusetts and lower than the U.S. (12%).<sup>14</sup> Fourteen% of African-Americans and 15% of Asians do not have high school diplomas, compared to Whites at 8.2%. Of Latinos, 7.6% in Worcester County do not have high school diplomas.

### Education Levels for Population 25 Years and Over

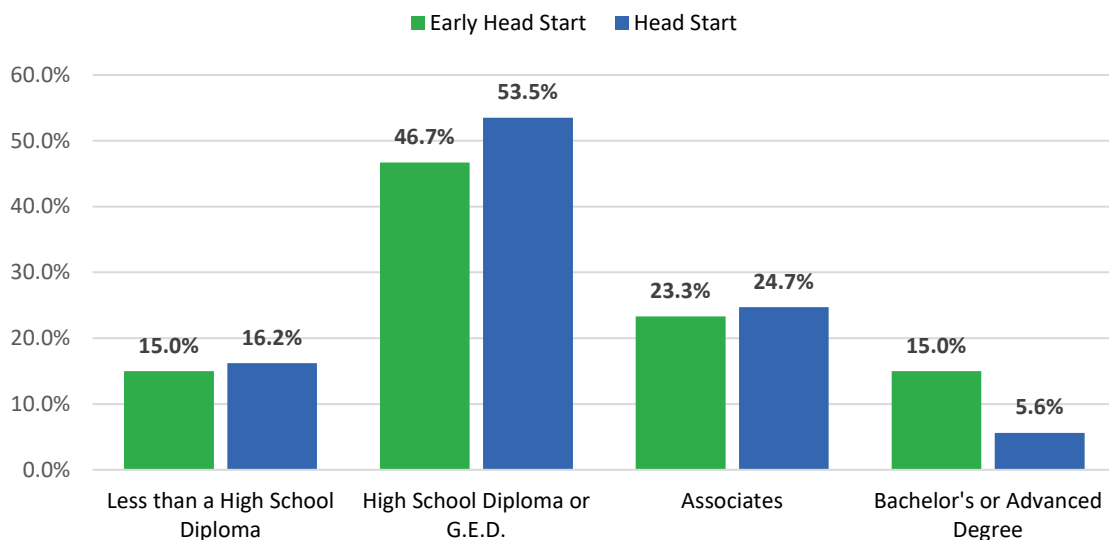
Source: ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2015-2019, Table S1501

Location	Population Age 25+	No High School Diploma	High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency)	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Worcester County	568,517	9.3%	27.8%	9.1%	22.0%	36.4%
Massachusetts	4,781,683	9.3%	24.0%	7.6%	24.1%	43.7%
United States	220,622,076	12.0%	27.0%	8.5%	19.8%	32.1%

In 2019, 36.4% of Worcester County's population had a bachelor's or advanced degree, lower than the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at 43.7%.

### PY2019-2020 Level of Education of EHS/HS Parents

Source: PIR





During PY2019-2020, just 15% of EHS parents and 16.2% of Head Start parents had less than a high school diploma; 46.7% of EHS parents and 53.5% of Head Start parents had their High School Diploma or high school equivalency, such as the G.E.D. Of EHS parents, 23.3% had an Associate degree and 15% had a bachelor's or advanced degree. Of Head Start parents, 24.7% had an Associate degree and 5.6% had a bachelor's or advanced degree.

## DISABILITIES

The MA Department of Public Health administers the statewide system of Early Intervention (EI) services (infants/toddlers). EI services are designed to meet the developmental needs of each child and the family, related to enhancing the child's development. Each city and town in the Commonwealth have at least one EI program. Children who are experiencing a developmental delay or disability and have been evaluated by a multidisciplinary team as having a significant delay are eligible for early intervention services.

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services are designed for young children ages 3-5 with disabilities who need specially designed instruction or related services and whose disability(ies) causes the children to be unable to participate in typical preschool activities. School districts are required by law to ensure that developmentally appropriate ESCE programs and services are available.

As of 2019, 6.6% of children under age 18 in Worcester County had disabilities, compared to 6.5% in Massachusetts. The age group over 75 years of age had the highest percentage of the population with disabilities at 46.4%.

During 2019-2020, there were 692 children ages 3-5 with diagnosed disabilities throughout the funded service area.<sup>15</sup> During PY2019-2020, EHS served 36 children (59%) with Individual Family Service Plans (IFSPs), and HS served 22 children (11%) with an Individual Education Program.

### Students Ages 3-5 with IEPs, 2019-2020

*Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

District Name	Ages 3-5 with IEPs
Auburn	37
Berlin-Boylston	20
Brookfield	12
<b>Dudley-Charlton</b>	82
Douglas	19
<b>Leicester</b>	33
<b>Millbury</b>	35
North Brookfield	15

Quabbin Regional (Oakham)	48
<b>Southbridge</b>	45
Tantasqua Regional (Sturbridge)	0
<b>Spencer-East Brookfield</b>	37
Sutton	27
Quaboag Regional (Warren/West Brookfield	26
Wachusett Regional	112
<b>Webster</b>	45
West Boylston	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>620</b>

**Central Region Children from Birth to One Year Old in Massachusetts who Receive EI Services**  
**State Target: 2.79%**

*Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health – Early Intervention Services*

Agency	Meets or Exceeds State Target	Program %	Diff from State Target
Community Healthlink Lipton Early Intervention Program	No	2.30%	-0.50%
Criterion Middlesex Early Intervention Program	Yes	4.00%	1.20%
Criterion Valley Early Intervention Program	Yes	5.80%	3.00%
Criterion Wachusett Early Intervention Program	Yes	4.20%	1.40%
Criterion Worcester Early Intervention Program	Yes	5.10%	2.30%
Kennedy Donovan Center Early Intervention Program/South Central	Yes	5.40%	2.60%
Minute Man Arc Early Intervention Program	Yes	2.80%	0.00%
Pernet Early Intervention Program	Yes	5.10%	2.30%
South Bay Community Services, Early Childhood/Framingham	Yes	4.00%	1.20%
South Bay Community Services, Early Childhood/Worcester	Yes	5.10%	2.30%
Thom Marlborough Area Early Intervention Program	Yes	4.60%	1.90%
Thom Worcester Area Early Intervention Program	Yes	5.10%	2.30%

During 2018-2019, 3,574 infants and toddlers under the age of one (5.05%) in Massachusetts had an IFSP for early intervention services. The national average for all states during this time was 1.25%. Nationally, Massachusetts continues to serve one of the highest percentages of children less than one year of age.

**Central Region Children from Birth to Three Years Old  
in Massachusetts Who Receive EI Services  
State Target: 5.90%**

*Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health – Early Intervention Services*

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Meets or Exceeds State Target</b>	<b>Program %</b>	<b>Diff from State Target</b>
Community Healthlink Lipton Early Intervention Program	No	5.80%	-0.10%
Criterion Middlesex Early Intervention Program	Yes	9.20%	3.30%
Criterion Valley Early Intervention Program	Yes	10.20%	4.30%
Criterion Wachusett Early Intervention Program	Yes	9.20%	3.30%
Criterion Worcester Early Intervention Program	Yes	10.60%	4.70%
Kennedy Donovan Center Early Intervention Program/South Central	Yes	9.60%	3.70%
Minute Man Arc Early Intervention Program	Yes	8.90%	3.00%
Pernet Early Intervention Program	Yes	10.60%	4.70%
South Bay Community Services, Early Childhood/Framingham	Yes	9.20%	3.30%
South Bay Community Services, Early Childhood/Worcester	Yes	10.60%	4.70%
Thom Marlborough Area Early Intervention Program	Yes	12.20%	6.30%
Thom Worcester Area Early Intervention Program	Yes	10.60%	4.70%

During 2018-2019, 21,558 infants and toddlers under the age of three (10.05%) in Massachusetts had an IFSP for early intervention services. The national average for all states during this time was 3.48%. Nationally, Massachusetts continues to serve one of the highest percentages of children from birth to three years of age.

The Central Kennedy Donovan Center Early Intervention Program/South Central (serving Southbridge, Charlton, Sturbridge, Webster, Dudley, Oxford, Spencer, Warren and the Brookfield's in WCAC's funded service area) served 9.60% of children ages birth to three from July 2018 to June 2019, compared to the state target of 5.90%.

## EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE: BIRTH – FIVE

### PRE-KINDERGARTEN

Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) provides funding to improve the quality of preschool programs for children from the age of two years nine months until they are kindergarten eligible. Schools and school districts at risk of or determined to be under-performing are given funding preference; these include those which have been identified for improvement, corrective action, or districts with a high percentage of students scoring in levels 1 and 2 on the MCAS exams. Low-income communities are also given preference. For the 2020-2021 school year, as of January 29, 2021, there were 759 Pre-K enrollment slots across WCAC's funded area in Southern Worcester County.<sup>16</sup>

#### Pre-K Enrollment Funding 2020-2021

##### Southern Worcester County (WCAC EHS/Head Start Grant Area)

School District	School	City/Town	Pre-K Enrollment
Auburn	Auburn Integrated PreK-Senior High	Auburn	66
Berlin-Boylston	Boylston Elementary	Boylston	22
Brookfield	Brookfield Elementary	Brookfield	12
Dudley-Charlton	Charlton Elementary	Charlton	42
Dudley-Charlton	Mason Road School	Dudley	31
Douglas	Douglas Primary School	Douglas	31
Spencer-East Brookfield	East Brookfield Elementary	Brookfield	47
Wachusett Regional	Early Childhood Center	Holden/Paxton/Rutland	93
Leicester	Leicester Integrated Preschool	Leicester	33
Millbury	Elmwood Street	Millbury	55
North Brookfield	North Brookfield Elementary	North Brookfield	23
Quabbin Regional	Hardwick Elementary	Gilbertville	33
Quabbin Regional	Ruggles Lane	Barre	36
Southbridge	Eastford Road School	Southbridge	53
Sturbridge	Burgess Elementary	Sturbridge	40
Sutton	Sutton Early Learning	Sutton	36
Quaboag Regional	Warren Elementary	Warren	23
Quaboag Regional	West Brookfield Elementary	West Brookfield	14
Webster	Park Avenue Elementary	Warren	43
West Boylston	Major Edwards Elementary	West Boylston	26
<b>Total Pre-K Enrollment Slots:</b>			<b>759</b>

## CHILD CARE

There are a reported 1,508 Family Child Care (FCC) enrollment slots in WCAC's funded area and 740 FCC enrollment slots within WCAC's targeted service area. There are a reported 1,716 Center-Based enrollment slots (ages 0-5) in WCAC's funded area and 631 Center-Based enrollment slots (ages 0-5) within WCAC's targeted service area.

### Child Care and Capacity

Source: [Child Care Search \(force.com\)](http://ChildCareSearch.force.com)

LOCATION	CENTER-BASED CARE					FAMILY CHILD CARE (FCC)	
	INFANT CAPACITY	TODDLER CAPACITY	PRESCHOOL CAPACITY	TOTAL CAPACITY	TOTAL CHILD CARE PROGRAMS	FCC CAPACITY	TOTAL FCC HOMES
Auburn	30	53	126	209	8	154	20
Boylston	11	29	101	141	5	70	9
Brookfield	3	0	57	60	4	72	9
Charlton	7	0	130	137	3	126	15
Douglas	0	0	0	0	2	20	3
<b>Dudley</b>	7	18	0	25	2	144	18
<b>East Brookfield</b>	0	0	0	0	0	14	2
Holden	35	9	129	173	11	60	8
<b>Leicester</b>	0	0	60	60	2	14	2
<b>Millbury</b>	21	27	37	85	2	84	11
Oakham	0	0	17	17	1	0	0
<b>Oxford</b>	0	0	0	0	0	176	22
North Brookfield	0	0	0	0	1	14	2
Paxton	7	9	38	54	2	24	3
Rutland	0	0	45	45	5	72	9
<b>Spencer</b>	0	0	10	10	2	80	11
<b>Southbridge</b>	7	27	191	225	1	138	17
Sturbridge	0	9	20	29	3	32	4
Sutton	7	9	67	83	3	28	4
Warren	0	0	0	0	0	16	2
<b>Webster</b>	0	45	181	226	2	90	11
West Boylston	7	18	101	126	4	64	8
West Brookfield	3	0	8	11	1	16	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>1,318</b>	<b>1,716</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>1,508</b>	<b>192</b>

*Note: Does not include school age (5 yr-14 yr). Child Care Centers that serve groups of infant toddler, toddler preschool, preschool SA, or multi-age group are included in Total Child Care Programs but not in separate categories of infant, toddler, or preschool.*

In southern Worcester County, there are several early childhood options, with only EHS, Head Start, and Healthy Families provided to parents at no cost:

- Early Head Start (home-based) and Head Start programs (offered by WCAC),
- Home Based programs, such as Healthy Families (offered by WCAC),
- Home Based programs, such as Healthy Families (offered by WCAC),
- Family child care for up to 10 children in a family home,
- Private, center-based early education and child care programs, and
- Private and public-school pre-kindergarten classrooms.

## CHILD CARE COSTS AND ASSISTANCE

Early Head Start (home-based) and Head Start are the only no-cost early childhood options provided to low-income parents within WCAC's funded area, except for children with special needs who are enrolled at no cost in the local public schools. All other early childhood options require that parents pay a fee for infants, toddlers, or preschoolers to attend; pre-kindergarten programs at local public schools often charge a sliding-scale fee. The lack of center-based Early Head Start and affordable child care makes it difficult for low-income families to work without child care subsidies, especially for parents of infants and toddlers.

Child care costs throughout southern Worcester County vary. Infant care ranges from \$175-\$395 per week; toddler care ranges from \$145-\$295; preschool ranges from \$140-\$315; and school age care ranges from \$100-\$250. Without child care subsidy, the costs of child care are typically prohibitive to families living at or near the poverty level.

The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care helps eligible low-income families find and pay for child care. Eligibility of low-income status is based on State Medium Income. The family's household income must be at or below 50% of the state median income (SMI) when first considered for funding. If a parent or child has a documented disability or special need, the household income must be at or below 85% of the SMI when first considered.

All parents/guardians in the household must also meet certain activity requirements. They must be working, looking for a job (for up to 8 weeks), or be enrolled in school for at least 20 hours per week. If the parent/guardian or child has a diagnosed and documented special need, the family may qualify. Most families pay a co-payment determined on a sliding fee scale for child care. However, families may be placed on a waiting list for financial assistance if funding is not immediately available.

Of the 64 child care centers within WCAC's EHS/Head Start funded area, only 5 (7.8%) accept EEC vouchers. Of the 192 Family Child Care Homes within WCAC's EHS/Head Start funded area, 81 (42.2%) accept EEC vouchers.

### Child Care Centers/Family Child Care (FCC) Homes Accepting Child Care Subsidy

Source: [Child Care Search \(force.com\)](http://force.com)

LOCATION	Child Care Centers Accepting Subsidy	FCC Accepting Subsidy
Auburn	1	5
Boylston	0	4
Brookfield	0	5
Charlton	1	7
Douglas	0	0
<b>Dudley</b>	0	8
<b>East Brookfield</b>	0	1
Holden	0	1
<b>Leicester</b>	0	1
<b>Millbury</b>	1	0
Oakham	0	0
<b>Oxford</b>	1	15
North Brookfield	0	1
Paxton	0	0
Rutland	0	0
<b>Spencer</b>	0	4
<b>Southbridge</b>	0	12
Sturbridge	0	2
Sutton	0	1
Warren	0	1
<b>Webster</b>	1	7
West Boylston	0	4
West Brookfield	0	2
<b>Service Area</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>81</b>

*Note: Above chart does not include Head Start.*

## CHILD WELFARE

### CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

#### Confirmed Incidents of Maltreatment in Massachusetts

Source: Kids Count Data Center

Age Group	Data Type	2016	2017	2018
0-4	Number	12,280	9,300	9,265
	Percent	38%	37%	36%
5-10	Number	10,906	8,497	8,718
	Percent	34%	34%	34%
11-13	Number	4,189	3,382	3,750
	Percent	13%	13%	15%
14-17	Number	4,649	3,880	4,037
	Percent	15%	15%	16%
Less than 18	Number	32,024	25,059	25,770
	Percent	100%	100%	100%

In 2018, there were a total of 25,770 confirmed incidents of child maltreatment, compared to 25,059 in 2017 and 32,024 in 2016. Of child victims under age eighteen in 2018, 36% were non-Hispanic White; 12% were Black; 32% were Hispanic/Latino; and 13% had no known race. Of child victims, 36% (9,265) of all victims during 2018 were ages birth to four years old.

#### Confirmed Incidents of Maltreatment by Race and Hispanic Origin in Massachusetts

Source: Kids Count Data Center

Race Group	Data Type	2016	2017	2018
Hispanic or Latino	Number	8,895	7,702	8,337
	Percent	28%	31%	32%
Non-Hispanic American Indian	Number	42	23	27
	Percent	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%
Non-Hispanic Asian/Non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian	Number	426	318	321
	Percent	1%	1%	1%
Non-Hispanic Black	Number	3,471	3,027	3,076
	Percent	11%	12%	12%
Non-Hispanic multiple race groups	Number	1,190	1,145	1,214
	Percent	4%	5%	5%
Non-Hispanic White	Number	11,334	8,741	9,353



	Percent	35%	35%	36%
Race unknown	Number	6,668	4,103	3,444
	Percent	21%	16%	13%
<b>Total</b>	Number	32,026	25,059	25,772
	Percent	100%	100%	100%

## SUBSTITUTE CARE

Substitute care is the temporary placement of children outside of their homes due to abuse, neglect or dependency and can include foster care, home-of-relative care, group home or institution. Placing a child in substitute care is not intended as a permanent living arrangement, but to protect the child with the goal of returning the child home. In Massachusetts, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) first tries to place children with relatives. When placing children with relatives is not possible, children are placed in foster care.

### FY2020 Age Group Distribution for Children and Young Adults in Placement

*Source: MA DCF Annual Report – Fiscal Year 2020*

Age Group	Number of Children (ages 0-5) in Placement	Percentage of Children (ages 0-5) in Placement
0-2	1,687	20%
3-5	1,427	17%
6-11	2,402	29%
12-17	2,898	34%
<b>Total in Placement Fiscal Year End</b>	<b>8,414</b>	<b>100%</b>

Children under the age of six years old accounted for 37% of children ages 0 to 17 in placement for FY2020. For children 0-5 in a DCF open case, 21.2%, or 3,114 out of 14,665, were in an out-of-home placement. Of children ages 0-17 who were in placement at the end of FY2020, 94% had a permanency plan goal that met the federal standard for permanency, excluding Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) and unspecified. APPLA is when DCF maintains care and custody of the youth and arranges a living situation in which the youth is expected to remain until adulthood and is considered only when other options, such as reunification, relative placement, adoption, or legal guardianship, have been ruled out. During PY2019-2020, WCAC served 3 EHS children and 13 HS children who were in foster care at some point during the program.

### Permanency Plan Distribution for Children (0-17) in Placement

Source: MA DCF Annual Report – Fiscal Year 2020

Permanency Plan	Number of Children (ages 0-17) in Placement	Percentage of Children (ages 0-17) in Placement
Family Reunification	3,128	37%
Adoption	3,244	39%
Guardianship	761	9%
Stabilize Intact Family	536	6%
Permanent Care with Kin	274	3%
87APPLA	384	5%
Unspecified as of report run date	87	1%
<b>Total in Placement Fiscal Year End</b>	<b>8,414</b>	<b>100%</b>

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

### HEALTH INSURANCE

Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provide no cost or low-cost health coverage for eligible children in Massachusetts who might not otherwise have insurance. These programs provide health coverage for children so that they can get routine check-ups, immunizations, and dental care to keep them healthy. In Massachusetts, Medicaid and CHIP are combined into one program called MassHealth. Free or low-cost health insurance is available. The program provides health insurance to uninsured children and teens who are not eligible for or enrolled in Medical Assistance. CHIP is available for families whose income is above 133% of the federal poverty level.

According to the state's most recent numbers, Medicaid enrollment in Massachusetts is 1,368,519. CHIP enrollment in Massachusetts is 188,390. CHIP is paid for with state and federal funds. In January 2018, Congress passed reauthorization of CHIP, renewing the program for an additional six years.

Massachusetts   September 2020	
Total Medicaid and CHIP Enrollment	1,663,220
• Medicaid Enrollment	1,470,883
• CHIP Enrollment	192,337
Total Medicaid Child and CHIP Enrollment	690,645

Source: [medicaid.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masshealth-enrollment)

As of 2019, it was estimated that just 1.1% (585) of children under age of 6 and 1.1% (1,521) of children ages 6 to 18 in Worcester County were without health insurance.<sup>17</sup>

### OBESITY

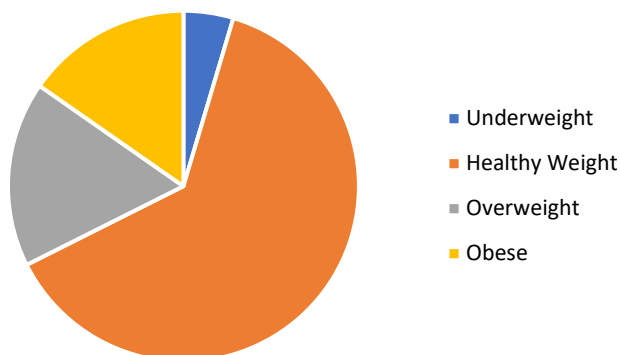
Overweight is defined as a Body Mass Index (BMI) at or above the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile and below the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for children and teens of the same age and gender.<sup>18</sup> Obesity is defined as a BMI at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for children and teens of the same age and gender.

In Massachusetts, obesity rates declined among 2- to 4-year-olds enrolled in WIC from 17.1% in 2010 to 16.4% in 2016; a ranking of 7 out of 51 for this age group among all states and the District of Columbia.<sup>19</sup> From 2018-2019, 11.8% of youth ages 10 to 17 in MA were obese; a ranking of 41 out of 51 for this age group among all states and the District of Columbia.

Massachusetts has the fourth lowest adult obesity rate in the nation, according to *The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America* released September 2020. Massachusetts's adult obesity rate is currently 25.2%, up from 15.3% in 2000 and from 10.1% in 1990. According to the latest data available, in 2016 Worcester County's adult obesity rate was 27%, slightly higher than Massachusetts' rate of 25%.<sup>20</sup>

### Body Mass Index (BMI) WCAC Head Start Children

Source: PIR



Of enrolled Head Start during PY2019-2020, 63% of children had a healthy weight. Of the remaining children, 4.6% of children were underweight; 17.1% were overweight; and 15.3% were obese.

Children enrolled in the Head Start program are evaluated on a host of health outcomes on a regular basis throughout the school year. Just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the program reported 63% of enrolled

children were at a healthy weight, with just 15.3% falling into the category of obese. During the pandemic when the centers were forced to close for several months for virtual homeschooling, there was a clear negative impact on our children. Upon return to classrooms, the most recent evaluation of the children revealed a dramatic elevation in the number of children falling into the obese category to 35% - a 19.7% increase - with under half (45.4%), falling into the healthy weight category.

## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

One in five U.S. adults (51.5 million in 2019) lives with a mental illness and estimates show that only 44.8% of adults received mental health services in the past year.<sup>21</sup> Mental illness can have devastating effects on children and families in Massachusetts, particularly when individuals go undiagnosed or untreated.

While those in Worcester County have access to mental health providers, the ratio of mental health providers is 200 to 1, or about 4,154 providers for all of Worcester County, which is less than the Massachusetts rate of 160 to 1. Fewer mental health providers result in longer waiting periods for mental health services.

## BIRTH CHARACTERISTICS

In 2017 (most recent data published), 8,513 babies were born in Worcester County.<sup>22</sup> Across WCAC Early Head Start and Head Start's total funded area there were 1,956 babies born; of these, 904 babies were born within the program's current service area. Based on these statistics, and the 39.2% of births to MA mothers whose prenatal care was financed through a public program in 2017, there are an estimated 810 pregnant women eligible for Early Head Start services within WCAC's funded area.

Following are the highest percentages of babies with low birthrates (under 5.5 lbs.): 10.1% in Leicester; 7.8% in Sturbridge; 7.7% in Dudley and 7.5% in Webster.

In 2017, there were 125 preterm births (under 37 weeks of gestation) in WCAC's total funded area.

In 2017, there were 24 births to teens between 15-19 years of age in WCAC's total funded area. There were a total of 270 teen births in Worcester County.

### Birth Characteristics: 2017

Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, November 2019 Report, 2017 data. Table 17, Table 18

Location	Occurrence Births*	Number of Births	Low Birthweight (Less than 5.5 lbs.)	Preterm (<37 weeks gestation)	Teen Births (15-19 years)
Auburn	3	150	--	9	--
Boylston	0	44	--	--	0
Brookfield	0	29	--	--	--
Charlton	0	109	--	8	--
Douglas	0	69	--	--	--
<b>Dudley</b>	0	78	6 (7.7%)	8	0
<b>East Brookfield</b>	0	24	--	--	0
Holden	2	201	14 (7.0%)	20	0
<b>Leicester</b>	1	89	9 (10.1%)	11	--
<b>Millbury</b>	2	126	7 (5.6%)	10	0
North Brookfield	0	49	--	5	--
Oakham	0	14	0 (0.0%)	0	0
<b>Oxford</b>	3	117	5 (4.3%)	--	0
Paxton	0	36	--	--	0
Rutland	1	67	5 (7.5%)	5	--

<b>Southbridge</b>	156	190	12 (6.3%)	12	14
<b>Spencer</b>	2	96	6 (6.3%)	9	--
Sturbridge	1	90	7 (7.8%)	8	--
Sutton	3	78	--	6	--
Warren	0	36	--	--	--
<b>Webster</b>	0	184	14 (7.6%)	14	10
West Boylston	0	52	--	--	--
West Brookfield	0	28	--	0	--
<b>Total Funded Area</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>1,956</b>	<b>85 (4.3%)</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Service Area</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>59 (6.5%)</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Worcester County</b>	<b>8,344</b>	<b>8,513</b>	<b>586 (6.9%)</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>270</b>

*\*: Births occurring in a geographical place regardless of the residency of the mother.*

*Note for -- : Due to small numbers (n=1-4), exact count not provided.*

Following are 2017 birth statistics from Massachusetts' most recent November 2019 published report:

- In 2016, there were 70,704 births to Massachusetts resident mothers, a decline of 0.9% from 71,319 in 2016 and a decline of 23.5% since 1990.
- Between 2016 and 2017, the number of births to White Non-Hispanic and Asian Non-Hispanic mothers decreased by 3.4% and 4.6%, respectively, while the number of births to Black Non-Hispanic and Hispanic mothers increased by 2.2% and 3.2%, respectively.
- In 2017, the MA teen birth rate decreased for the tenth year in a row. The teen birth rate was 22.0 births per 1,000 women age 15-19 in 2007, compared to 8.1 births per 1,000 women age 15-19 in 2017, representing a significant decrease. Between 2016 and 2017, births to mothers less than 20 years old decreased for all races/ethnicities besides American Indian Non-Hispanic. However, disparities persisted, and the percentage of teen births to Hispanic women remained over five times higher than the percentage of teen births to White Non-Hispanic women.
- For the fourth year in a row, the percentage of low birthweight infants (less than 5.5 pounds) remained unchanged at 7.5%.
- Between 2016 and 2017, the percentage of preterm births (births occurring at less than 37 weeks of gestation) increased slightly from 8.7% to 8.9%. The percentage of White Non-Hispanic and Black Non-Hispanic preterm births remained the same at 8.0% and 11.2%, respectively. However, this percentage increased for Asian Non-Hispanics from 7.5% to 8.3% and for Hispanics from 9.6% to 10.0%.

- Between 2016 and 2017, the percentage of births to mothers who received adequate prenatal care in MA dropped from 82.3% to 80.5%. In 2017, the percentage of births with adequate prenatal care was higher among those with private insurance (87.0%) than public insurance (73.5%).

## FOOD AND NUTRITION

### FOOD INSECURITY

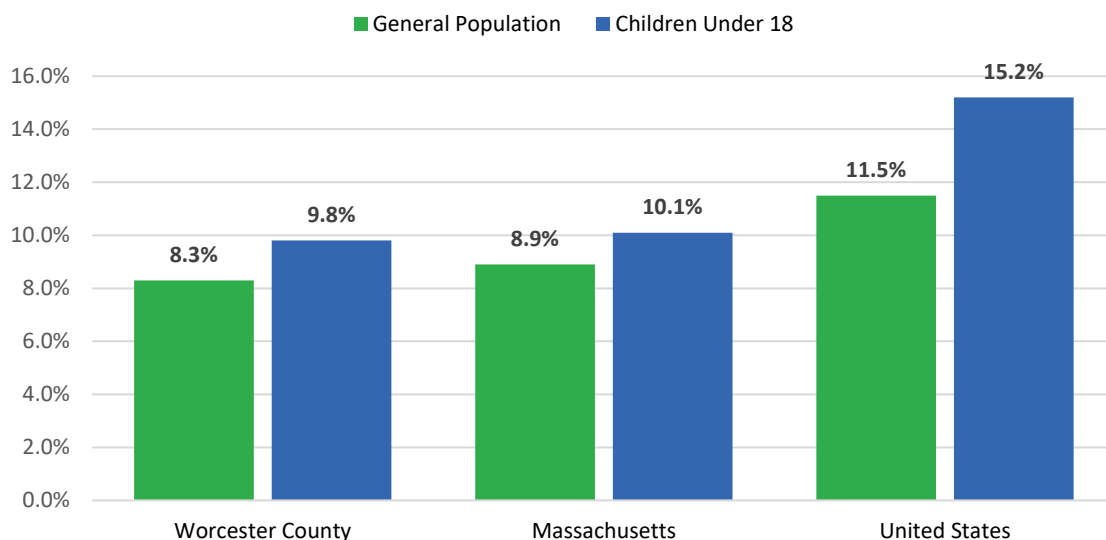
Food insecurity refers to the USDA's measure of lack of access to a sufficient amount of food for an active, healthy life for household members, and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. Food insecurity may reflect a household's need to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 42 million people may experience food insecurity, including a potential 13 million children; before the pandemic, more than 10 million children lived in food-insecure households. The pandemic has most impacted families who were already facing hunger or one paycheck away from facing hunger. Just in Worcester County, the food insecurity rate in 2018 was 8.3% compared to the 2020 projected overall food insecurity rate due to COVID-19 of 13.4%.<sup>23</sup>

According to Feeding America, 617,380 people (1 in 11 people) are struggling with hunger, of which 138,760 are children (1 in 10).<sup>24</sup>

#### Population with Food Insecurity

Source: Feeding America: Map the Meal Gap 2018 Report <sup>25</sup>





## SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

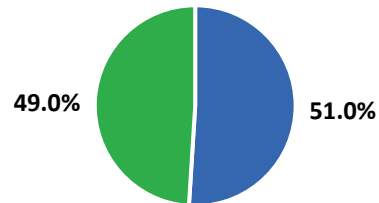
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program helps low-income individuals and families buy healthy, nutritious food. Funded by the federal government and administered by the state's Department of Transitional Assistance, monthly benefits depend upon household size, income and expenses.

During 2017 (most recent data available), it was reported that 38,858 in the funded service area received SNAP benefits; this was an increase of 100% from 2016.<sup>26</sup>

### 2019-2020 EHS/HS Families Receiving SNAP

Source: PIR

■ Not Receiving SNAP ■ Receiving SNAP



During PY 2019-2020, 27 Early Head Start families received SNAP and 58 families received WIC services. Children enrolled in the Head Start program receive a nutritious breakfast, lunch, and healthy snack daily. These meals are prepared by the Southbridge Public Schools and Webster Public Schools, districts in which the centers are located, and meet all standards required by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding appropriate caloric, fiber, protein, and sugar content.

### SNAP Participation

Source: Kids Count, Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center

Location	June 2018	June 2019	June 2020
Auburn	949	1,007	1,212
Boylston	95	113	175
Brookfield	299	348	396
Charlton	721	746	886
Douglas	375	372	506
<b>Dudley</b>	941	948	1,153
<b>East Brookfield</b>	125	130	174
Holden	485	558	766
<b>Leicester</b>	850	911	1,216
<b>Millbury</b>	956	1,054	1,236
North Brookfield	473	462	561
Oakham	91	113	136
<b>Oxford</b>	1,170	1,135	1,405
Paxton	120	135	175

Rutland	302	310	422
<b>Southbridge</b>	4,972	4,562	5,479
<b>Spencer</b>	1,415	1,493	1,785
Sturbridge	612	511	701
Sutton	286	252	399
Warren	593	669	824
<b>Webster</b>	3,159	3,224	3,889
West Boylston	342	355	465
West Brookfield	317	320	444
<b>Total Funded Area</b>	<b>19,648</b>	<b>19,728</b>	<b>24,405</b>
<b>Service Area</b>	<b>13,588</b>	<b>13,457</b>	<b>16,337</b>

## WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)

WIC (Women, Infants and Children) is a nutrition program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and administered locally in southern Worcester County. WIC promotes bettering the health and well-being of low-income women and young children. The program provides education on making nutritious choices, building positive eating habits, and improving health. Furthermore, WIC provides eligible participants with food vouchers to be used at participating vendors and grocery stores.

WIC serves expectant women; infants to children 5 years of age; women who have given birth within the last 6 months; and women who are breastfeeding children under 12 months of age. Fathers, grandparents, and foster parents who are the legal guardian of a child under age five may apply for WIC on their behalf. Eligible recipients must be residents of Massachusetts, have a nutritional need, and have a gross household income that does not exceed 185% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines.

### MA WIC Enrollment by City/Town in 2018

*Source: Mass.gov Select WIC Program Data, 2018*

Location	Eligible	Enrolled	Participation Rate
Auburn	241	98	40.7%
Boylston	30	11	36.7%
Brookfield	58	31	53.4%
Charlton	249	108	43.4%
Douglas	110	54	49.1%
<b>Dudley</b>	236	100	42.4%

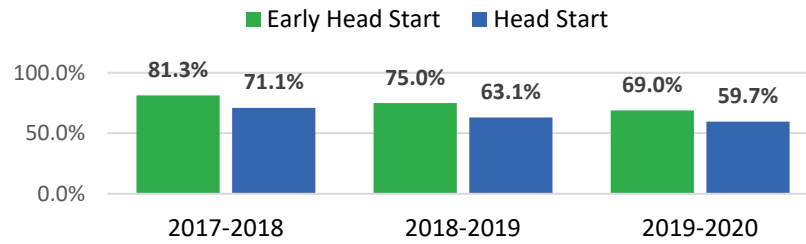
<b>East Brookfield</b>	47	35	74.5%
Holden	163	61	37.4%
<b>Leicester</b>	243	123	50.6%
<b>Millbury</b>	227	119	52.4%
North Brookfield	110	58	52.7%
Oakham	15	0	0%
<b>Oxford</b>	254	129	50.8%
Paxton	32	13	40.6%
Rutland	99	40	40.4%
<b>Southbridge</b>	1,090	709	65.0%
<b>Spencer</b>	363	158	43.5%
Sturbridge	123	56	45.5%
Sutton	116	53	45.7%
Warren	161	84	52.2%
<b>Webster</b>	740	429	58.0%
West Boylston	71	34	50.7%
West Brookfield	63	28	44.4%
<b>Total Funded Area</b>	<b>4,841</b>	<b>2,531</b>	<b>46.5%</b>
<b>Service Area</b>	<b>3,200</b>	<b>1,802</b>	<b>46.5%</b>
<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>207,249</b>	<b>113,169</b>	<b>54.6%</b>

In FY2020, nearly 185,000 unique individuals accessed WIC in Massachusetts, which has 31 local programs operating over 114 sites statewide. About 43% of babies born in Massachusetts accessed the program in 2018. Due to the pandemic, WIC enacted several waivers to ease access, allowing the following:

- All WIC certification/recertification appointments able to be conducted by phone
- Staff to issue special formula to existing participants without renewal documentation
- Staff to collect medical approval from providers by phone
- A single staff person to conduct all components of the WIC certification and benefit issuance without requiring reporting or additional quality assurance activities
- Relax mandatory minimum requirements at the retailer to deal with potential food shortages
- Authorized self-checkout lanes at Walmart, Shaw's, Star Market, and Price Rite
- Increased nutrition education material available on website and WICShopper app
- Expansion of WICSmart online education

### WCAC Early Head Start/Head Start Children Receiving WIC Services

Source: PIR



During the 2019-2020 program year, 69% of enrolled Early Head Start children and 59.7% of Head Start children received WIC Services.

## TRANSPORTATION

According to the 2019 ACS Five-Year Estimates, 16.2% of all households in Southbridge and 13.7% of all households in Webster do not have a vehicle. This is higher than the Worcester County average number of households without a vehicle of 9.2% and the state average of 12.4% (2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates). When possible, families walk to nearby locations, rely on friends and family with a vehicle for transportation, or use public transportation.

Transportation is an ongoing challenge for families living in Southern Worcester County. Public transportation is available; however, limited routes and hours of transportation make it difficult for families to travel using public transportation, particularly when traveling with young children. With frequent stops and the need to transfer routes, it can sometimes take 1-3 hours for a person to reach a destination using public transit. In August 2020, the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) began a new shuttle service in Southbridge, Dudley, and Webster made possible by MassDOT's Workforce Transportation Grant Program to expand service to the workforce population. This has been a much-needed addition to the area; however, the routes stop operations between 5:45-6:45 PM and runs Monday through Friday with no services on the weekend. In addition, Head Start does not offer bussing for families and children.

The WRTA provides transportation in Worcester and surrounding communities with regular fixed route bus service and paratransit service to seniors and people with disabilities. Areas served by WRTA fixed route service include:

- Auburn
- Brookfield
- Charlton
- Dudley
- East Brookfield
- Leicester
- Millbury
- Oxford
- Shrewsbury
- Southbridge
- Spencer
- Webster
- West Boylston
- Worcester

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Prescription painkillers, heroin, fentanyl, and other unspecified opioid-related overdose deaths have increased to alarming rates in Worcester County. In 2010, 79 people died from drug overdoses. By 2020, drug overdose deaths rose to 16,195 people, increasing by an astounding 20,400% in 10 years.<sup>27</sup>

The Central MA Opioid Task Force brings together government leaders, law enforcement, health-care professionals, educators, substance-abuse experts, families in need of addiction services and community members to respond to the growing problems of opioid addiction and overdose deaths. Its mission is to work together to help reduce opioid and heroin addiction and prevent overdose deaths in Central Massachusetts. Key Task Force goals are to prevent overdose deaths; to ensure that addiction is treated as a disease and get help and treatment for those addicted; to raise awareness of the growing opioid and heroin problem; and to support investigations and prosecution of opiate and opioid-related crimes.

### Number of Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths 2017-2020

*Source: MA Department of Public Health, May 2021*

Location	2017	2018	2019	2020
Auburn	1	1	0	1
Boylston	0	0	0	0
Brookfield	2	1	0	1
Charlton	3	0	0	2
Douglas	1	1	2	0
<b>Dudley</b>	1	3	0	0
<b>East Brookfield</b>	0	0	0	0
Holden	0	1	2	1
<b>Leicester</b>	2	2	1	2
<b>Millbury</b>	2	3	4	3
North Brookfield	1	0	1	0
Oakham	0	0	0	0
<b>Oxford</b>	1	0	4	6
Paxton	0	0	1	2
Rutland	0	1	1	1
<b>Southbridge</b>	7	9	13	12
<b>Spencer</b>	1	1	2	2
Sturbridge	3	0	0	1
Sutton	0	2	1	1

Warren	0	1	2	2
<b>Webster</b>	9	9	11	6
West Boylston	2	1	1	0
West Brookfield	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Funded Area</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Service Area</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Worcester County</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>280</b>
<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>1,999</b>	<b>2,005</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>2,103</b>

In 2020, a total of 43 opioid-related deaths occurred in WCAC's funded service area, just one less than 2019 and a 19.4% increase since 2017. In the funded service area, locations with the highest opioid-related deaths in 2020 included: Southbridge (12), Oxford (6), Webster (6), and Millbury (3).

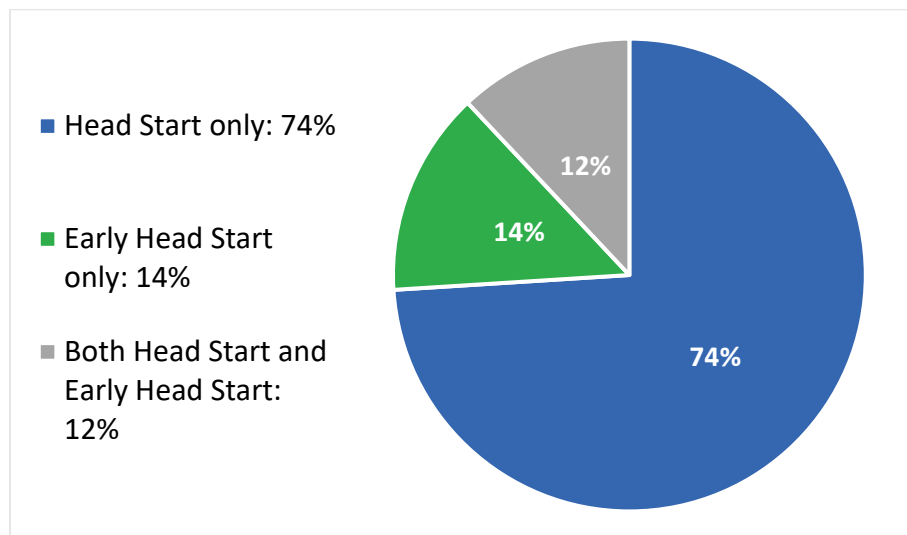
## SURVEYS

### FAMILY SURVEY

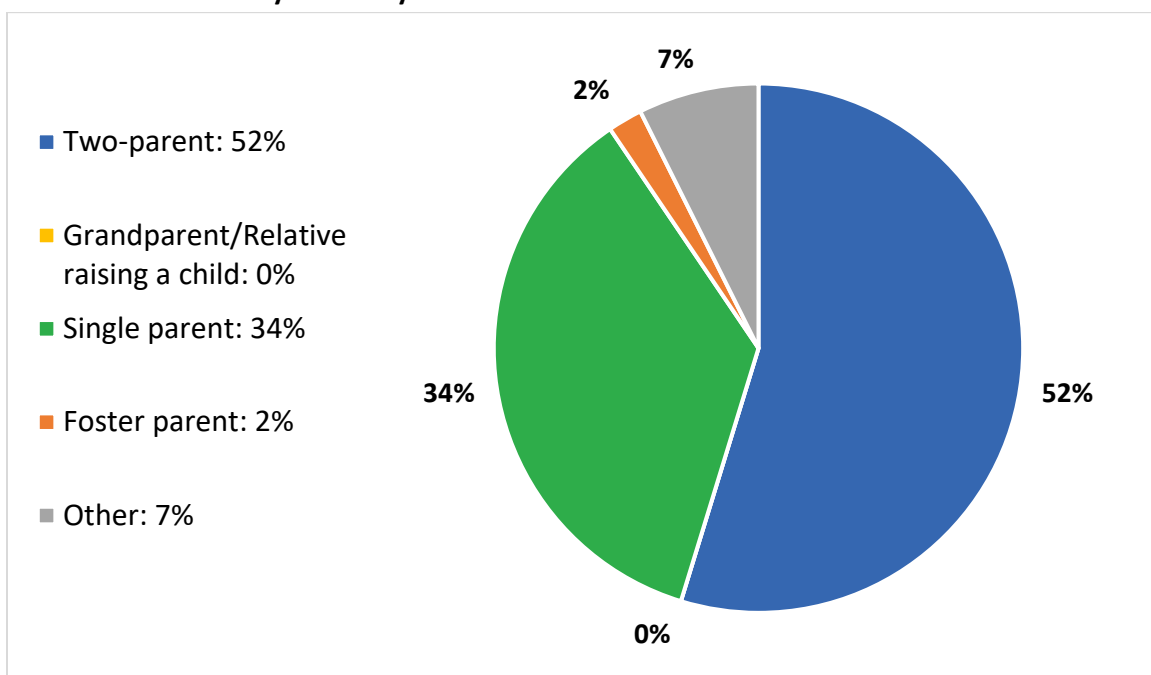
As part of the Community Assessment process, a survey was given to EHS and Head Start families. The following are combined results from the English (92 responses), Spanish (19 responses), Haitian Creole (3 responses), and Arabic (2 responses) surveys; A total of 116 families responded, many who have multiple children enrolled in the program.

*Note: not all surveys were completely filled out.*

#### 1. In what program is your child or children enrolled?

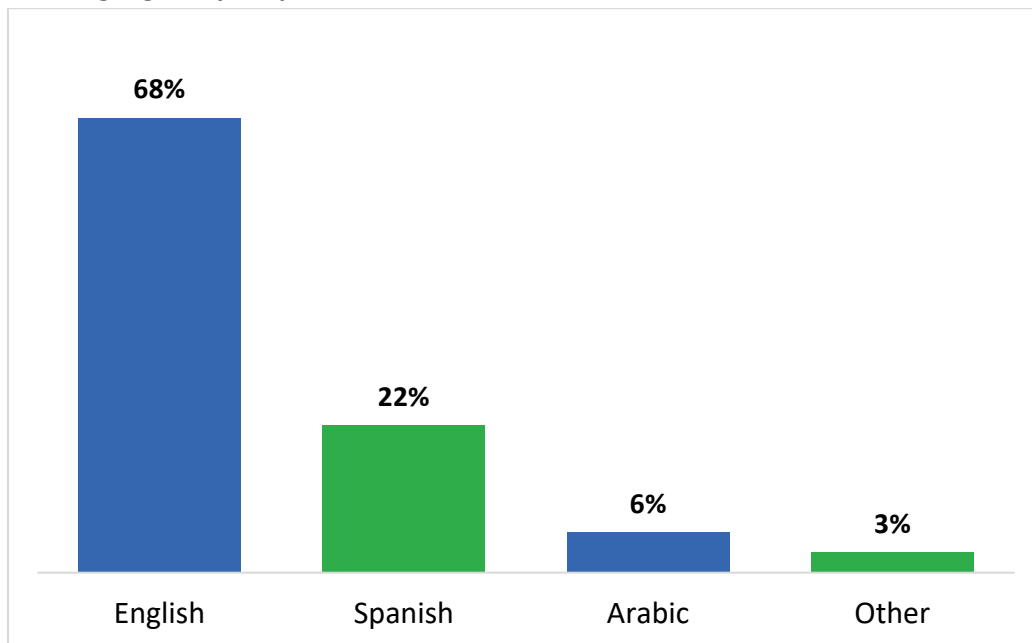


#### 2. Which best describes your family?

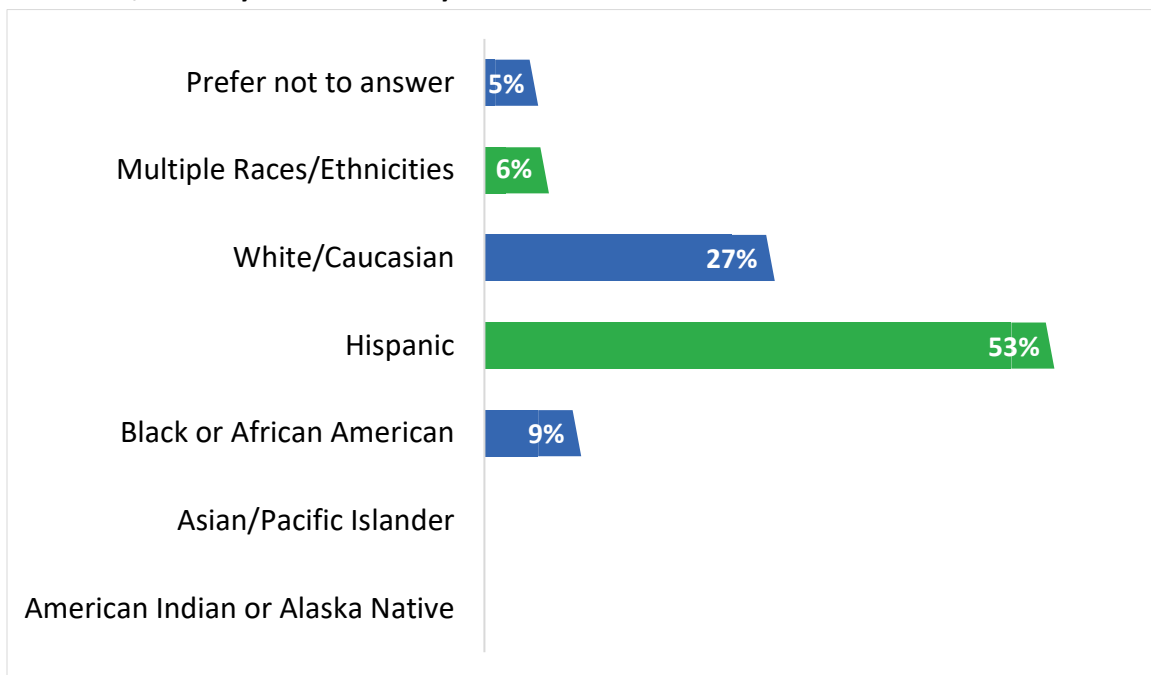




**3. In which language do you speak most often?**



**4. What race/ethnicity best describes you?**



5. Please choose to what extent each issue is, or is not, a challenge for your family:

Affordable and Safe Housing		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 87	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	63	72%
Somewhat of a Challenge	16	18%
Major Challenge	8	9%

Finding a job		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	57	67%
Somewhat of a Challenge	20	24%
Major Challenge	8	9%

Paying for Utilities (electricity, water, and heat)		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	29	34%
<i>Somewhat of a Challenge</i>	45	53%
Major Challenge	11	13%

Managing/budgeting money		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	42	49%
Somewhat of a Challenge	37	44%
Major Challenge	6	7%

Access to banking services		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	73	86%
Somewhat of a Challenge	9	11%
Major Challenge	3	4%

Access to affordable health care		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 80	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	75	94%
Somewhat of a Challenge	4	5%
Major Challenge	1	1%

Drug/alcohol abuse in my home		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	82	96%
Somewhat of a Challenge	1	1%
Major Challenge	2	2%

Access to inpatient addiction treatment		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 84	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	82	98%
Somewhat of a Challenge	0	0%
Major Challenge	2	2%

Self or family member with depression		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 83	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	62	75%
Somewhat of a Challenge	17	20%
Major Challenge	4	5%

Support for my child with disabilities		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 84	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	75	89%
Somewhat of a Challenge	6	7%
Major Challenge	3	4%

Gangs/violence in my neighborhood		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 84	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	77	92%
Somewhat of a Challenge	4	5%
Major Challenge	3	4%

Having enough food to feed my family		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	75	88%
Somewhat of a Challenge	7	8%
Major Challenge	3	4%

Quality child care for my infant/toddler		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 84	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	71	85%
Somewhat of a Challenge	9	11%
Major Challenge	4	5%

Quality child care for my preschooler		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 84	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	74	88%
Somewhat of a Challenge	6	7%
Major Challenge	4	5%

Before and after school care		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	51	60%
Somewhat of a Challenge	27	32%
Major Challenge	7	8%

My child's behavior		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	56	66%
Somewhat of a Challenge	24	28%
Major Challenge	5	6%

Access to phone service/internet/ computer		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	73	86%
Somewhat of a Challenge	10	12%
Major Challenge	2	2%

Physical or verbal abuse at home		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	83	98%
Somewhat of a Challenge	0	0%
Major Challenge	2	2%

Access to public transportation		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	73	86%
Somewhat of a Challenge	10	12%
Major Challenge	2	2%

Adult education options (college, GED)		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 85	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	63	74%
Somewhat of a Challenge	18	21%
Major Challenge	4	5%

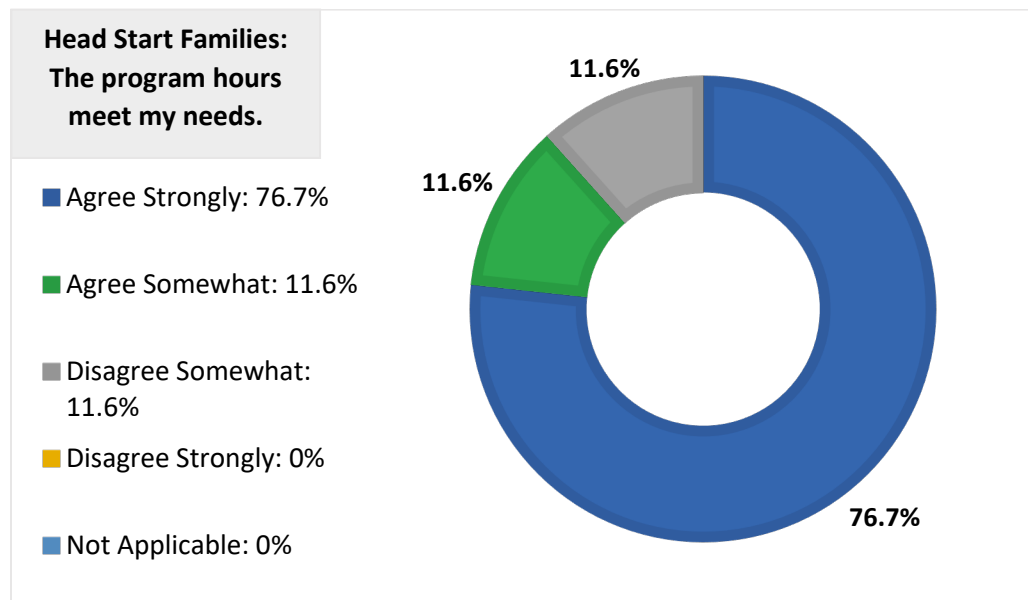
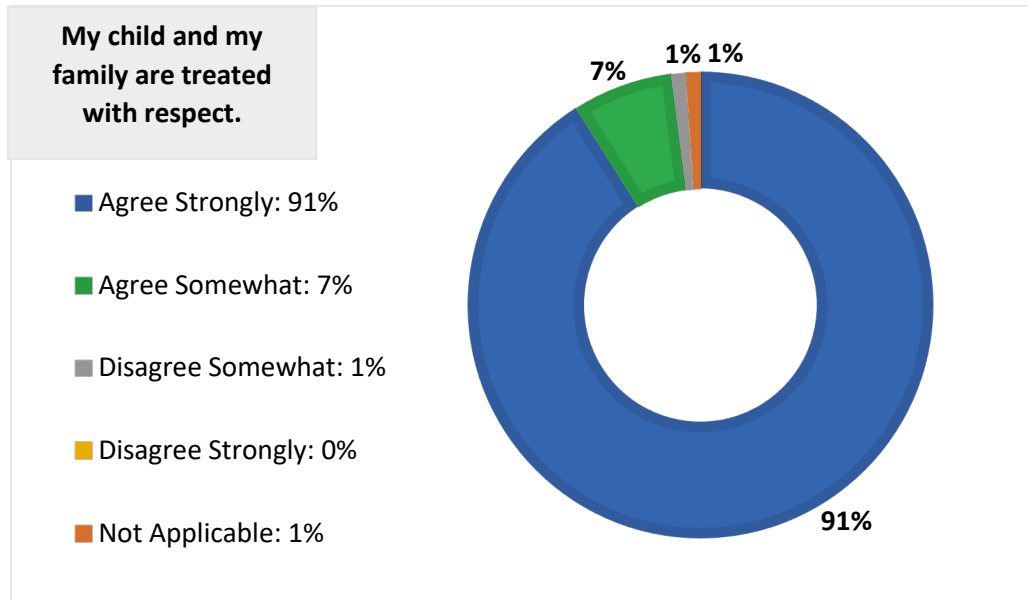
Family member in jail		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 15	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	<b>14</b>	<b>93%</b>
Somewhat of a Challenge	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
Major Challenge	<b>1</b>	<b>7%</b>

Language translation services		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 89	
<i>Not a Challenge</i>	<b>75</b>	<b>84%</b>
Somewhat of a Challenge	<b>10</b>	<b>11%</b>
Major Challenge	<b>4</b>	<b>4%</b>

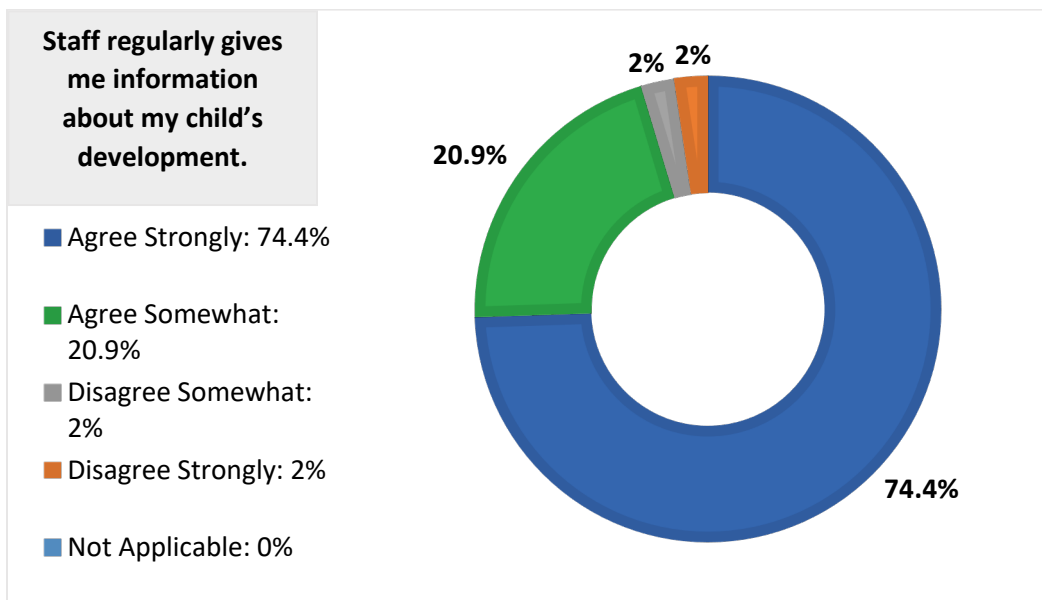
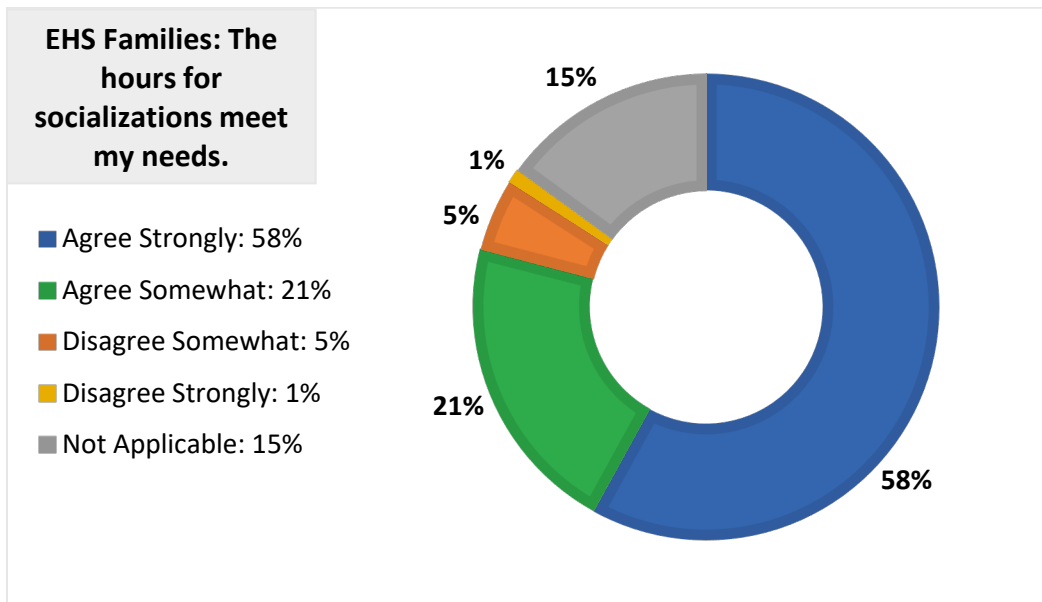
6. Which of the following are the 3 MOST challenging for your family? Please choose only 3.

ANSWER CHOICES	TOTAL RESPONSES: 193	
Affordable housing	18	9%
Finding a job	21	11%
Utilities	37	19%
Managing/Budgeting money	20	10%
Access to banking services	1	1%
Affordable health care	2	1%
Drug/Alcohol abuse in my home	0	0%
Access to addiction treatment	2	1%
Depression	0	0%
Child with disabilities	46	40%
Gangs/Violence	4	3%
Adequate food	1	1%
Quality care for infant/toddler	2	1%
Quality care for preschooler	2	1%
Before and after school care	23	12%
My child's behavior	14	7%
Phone service/Computer/Internet	3	2%
Physical/Verbal abuse	0	0%
Access to public transportation	3	2%
Adult education options (college, GED)	9	5%
Family member in jail	0	0%
Language translation	6	3%
Other	14	7%

7. Regarding your experience at Head Start/Early Head Start, please choose to what extent you agree or disagree:



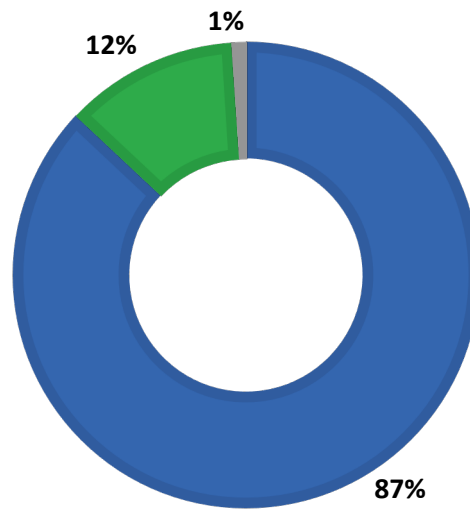
**(CONT.) Regarding your experience at Head Start/Early Head Start, please choose to what extent you agree or disagree:**



**(CONT.) Regarding your experience at Head Start/Early Head Start, please choose to what extent you agree or disagree:**

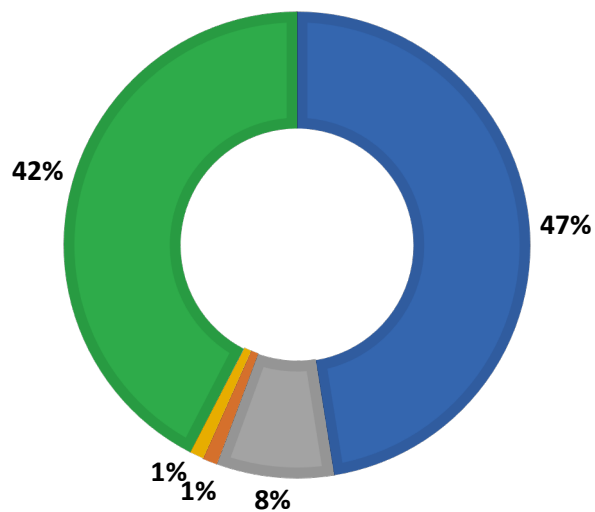
**I am satisfied in my child's growth and progress in learning.**

- Agree Strongly: 87%
- Agree Somewhat: 12%
- Disagree Somewhat: 0%
- Disagree Strongly: 1%
- Not Applicable: 0%



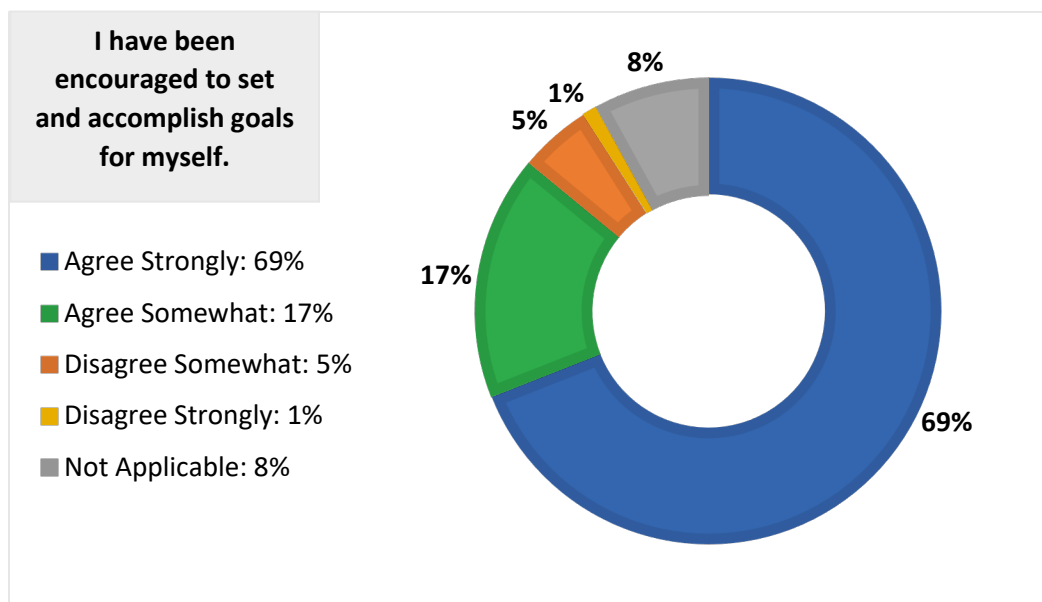
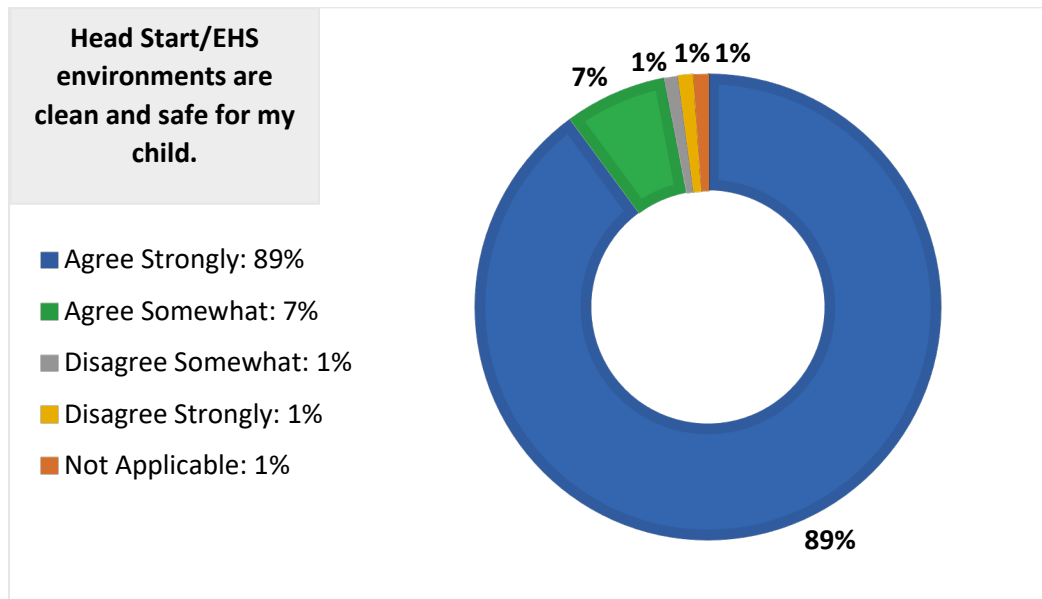
**Head Start/EHS supports my child's disability.**

- Agree Strongly: 47%
- Agree Somewhat: 8%
- Disagree Somewhat: 1%
- Disagree Strongly: 1%
- Not Applicable: 42%

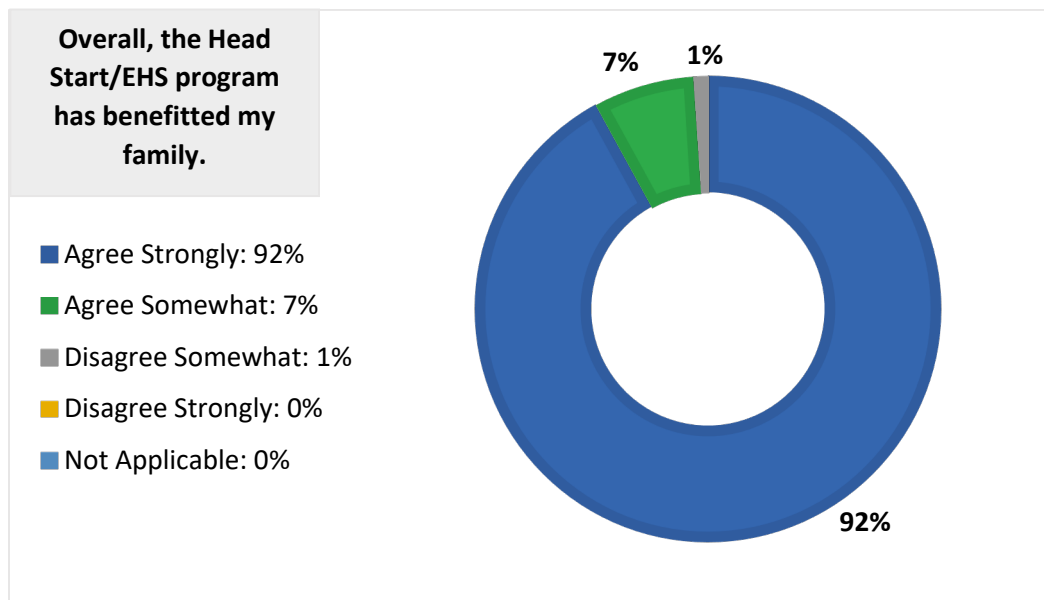
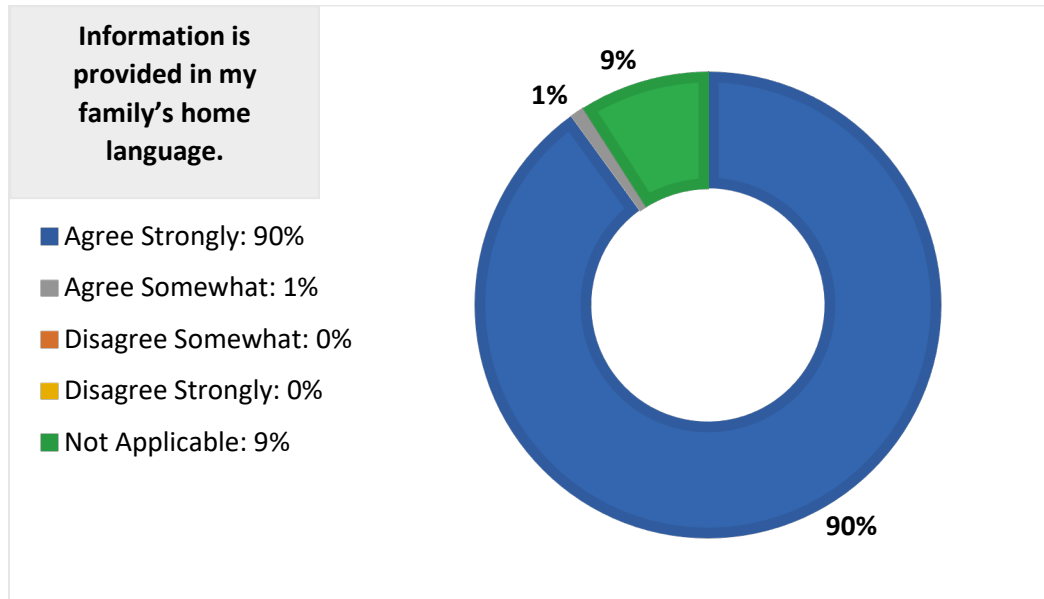




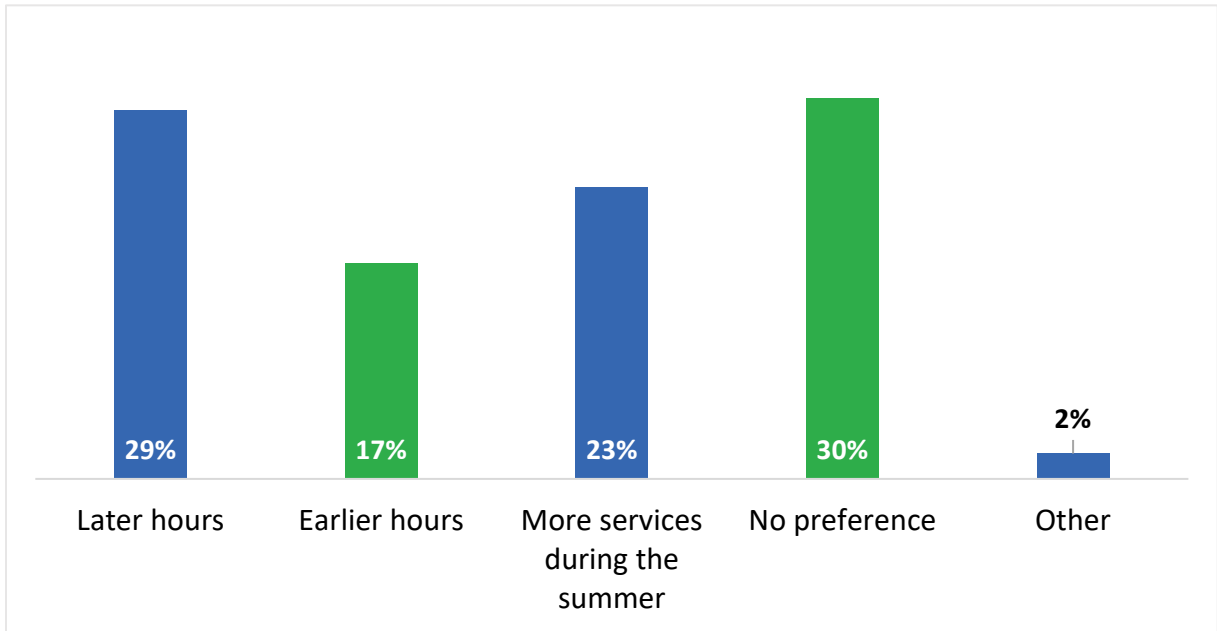
**(CONT.)** Regarding your experience at Head Start/Early Head Start, please choose to what extent you agree or disagree:



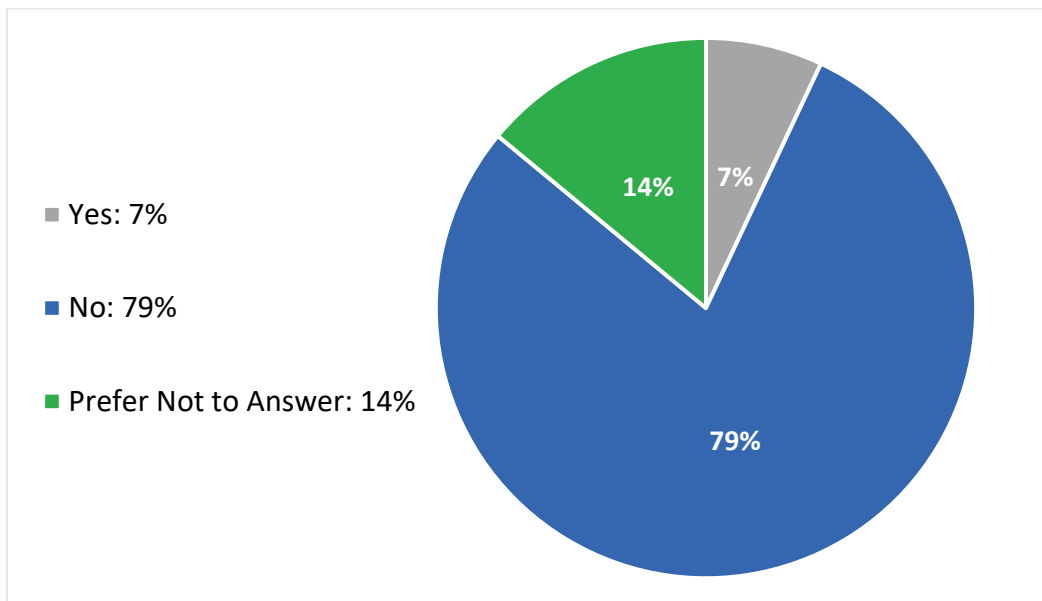
**(CONT.)** Regarding your experience at Head Start/Early Head Start, please choose to what extent you agree or disagree:



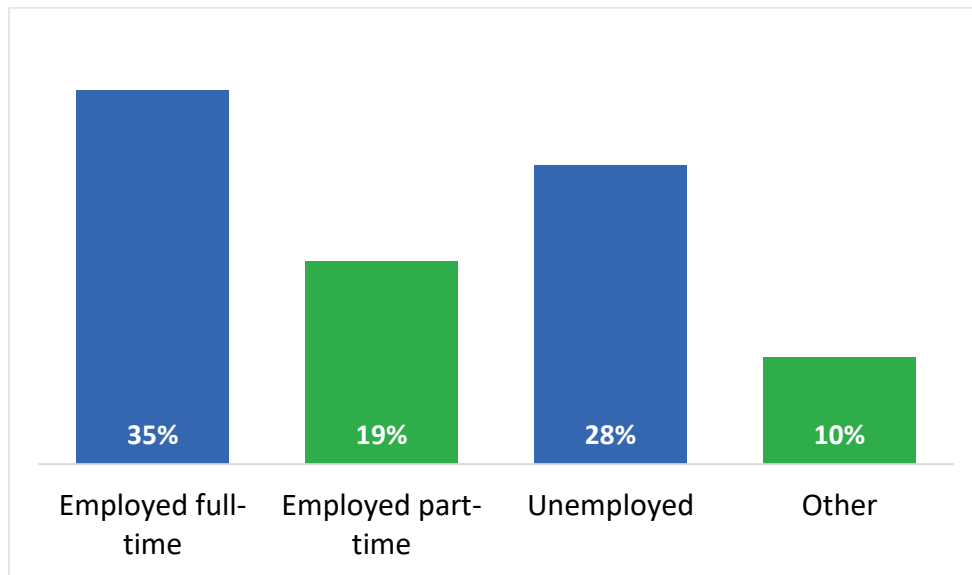
8. If it was possible, which program hour options would you like Head Start/Early Head Start to offer? Select all that apply.



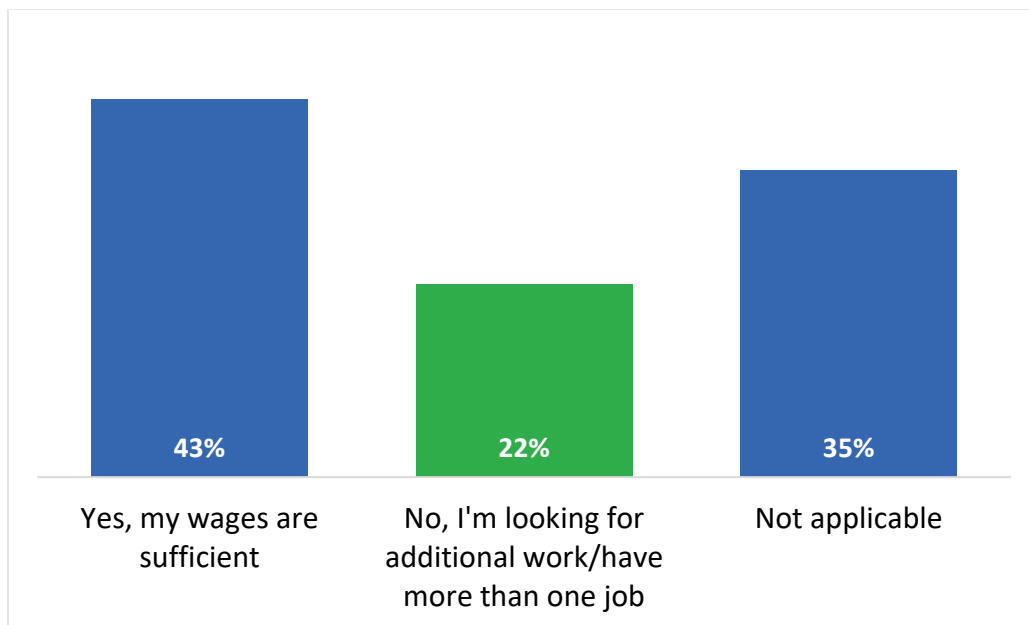
9. Has anyone in your family been affected (past or present) by the opioid crisis in the community?



**10. Including yourself, what is the current employment status of the adult member(s) in your household? Check all that apply.**



**11. If you are working, are your wages sufficient?**



12. If you are not working, what barriers are preventing you from working? Check all that apply.

ANSWER CHOICES	TOTAL RESPONSES: 116	
Fear of COVID-19	9	8%
If I earn more money, I will lose public benefits	9	8%
No reliable transportation	5	4%
No work-appropriate clothing	1	1%
Wages are too low	6	5%
Job training	1	1%
<i>Childcare</i>	22	19%
Need help finding a job	6	5%
No access to a computer to apply for a job	0	0%
Not applicable	46	40%
Other	4	3%

**13. How concerned are you about each of the following impacts of COVID-19?**

Your Own Health		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 76	
Not at all	13	17%
Somewhat	21	28%
Very	22	29%
Extremely	20	26%

Somebody else's health (e.g, family or relative)		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 84	
Not at all	9	11%
Somewhat	27	32%
Very	23	27%
Extremely	25	30%

Your child's health		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 86	
Not at all	10	12%
Somewhat	17	20%
Very	24	28%
Extremely	35	41%

Maintaining social ties		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 95	
Not at all	21	22%
Somewhat	33	35%
Very	19	20%
Extremely	22	23%

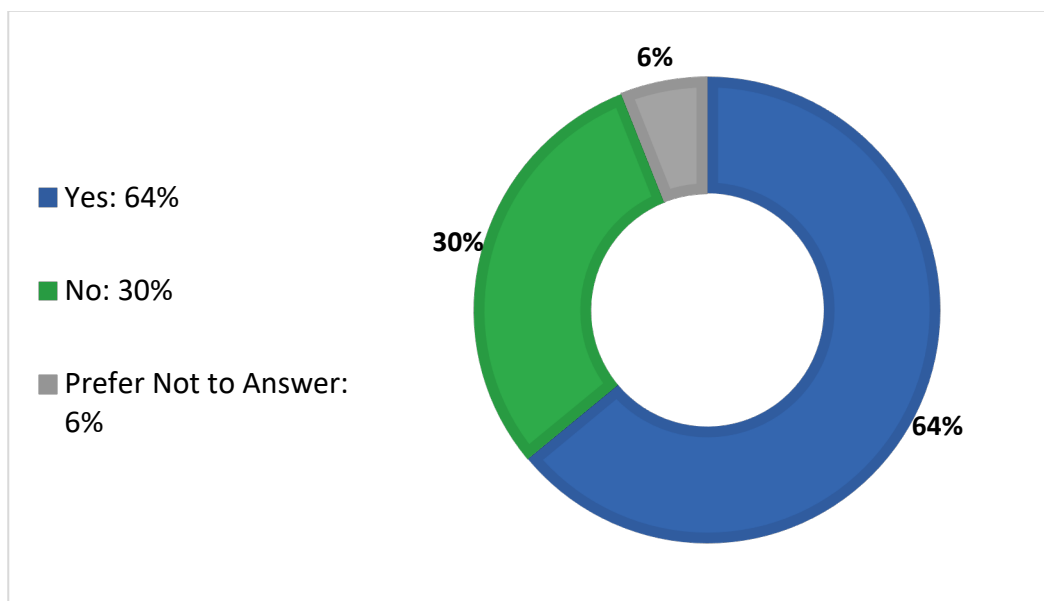
Impact of interrupted education		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 86	
Not at all	15	17%
Somewhat	23	27%
Very	26	30%
Extremely	22	26%

Ability to meet financial obligations		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 86	
Not at all	18	21%
Somewhat	35	41%
Very	17	20%
Extremely	16	19%

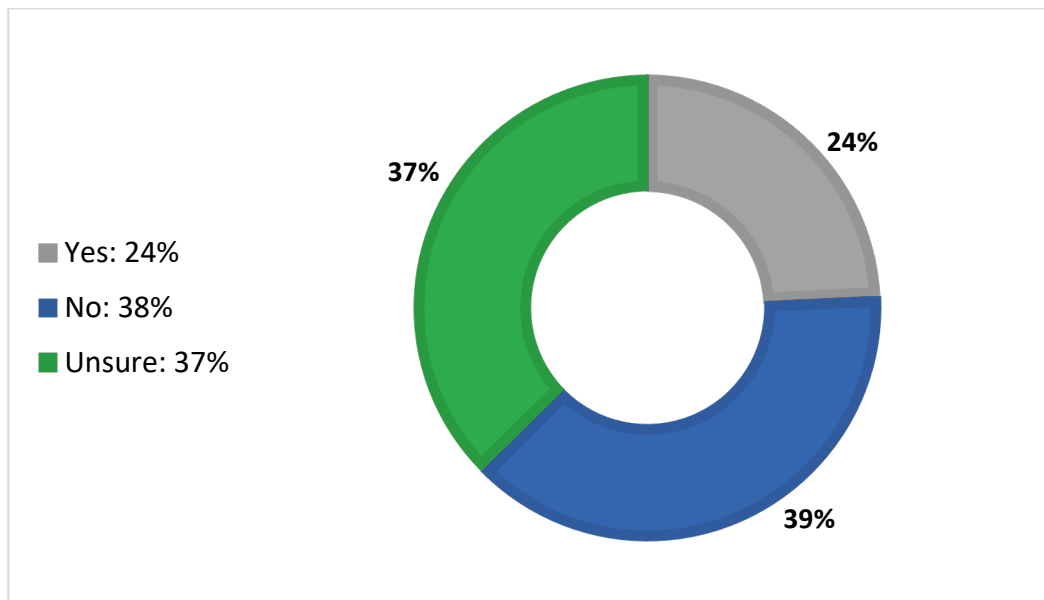
Household stress from confinement		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 96	
Not at all	29	30%
Somewhat	33	34%
Very	14	15%
Extremely	20	21%

Violence in the home		
Answer Choices	Total Responses: 86	
Not at all	83	97%
Somewhat	1	1%
Very	1	1%
Extremely	1	1%

**14. Have you received the COVID-19 vaccine?**



**15. In the future when it becomes available for children under the age of 5, would you like your child to receive the COVID-19 vaccine?**



**16. What do you like MOST about your neighborhood/community?**

“Tranquility”

“There are many services/resources and someone is always willing to help.”

“It’s quiet and safe.”

“The opportunity to have my preschool aged child into a Head Start, being able to socialize and get prepared for the next chapter in his life. The welcomeness the school provides feels very safe and comfortable.”

**17. Is there anything else you’d like to share about your experience with Worcester Community Action Council?**

“I really like how they treat the children and their families. I understand that the services and activities are now limited due to COVID, but I like the kindness and treatment of personnel.”

“Everyone has been friendly and helpful.”

“My son is enjoying the Head Start Program as much as his sisters did years ago.”

“I enjoy my Early Head Start worker. She is always on point, and she is very knowledgeable and friendly.”



## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

For a complete listing of current community resource information, visit [www.mass211.org](http://www.mass211.org).

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- <sup>24</sup> Feeding America – Hunger in Massachusetts, [feedingamerica.org](https://www.feedingamerica.org)
- <sup>25</sup> Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, Child Food Insecurity in the United States, [map.feedingamerica.org](https://www.map.feedingamerica.org)
- <sup>26</sup> Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation by City and Town in Massachusetts, [datacenter.kidscount.org](https://datacenter.kidscount.org)
- <sup>27</sup> MA Department of Public Health, Number of Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths, All Intent by County, MA Residents: 2010-2020, Posted May 2021, [mass.gov/doc](https://www.mass.gov/doc)