2020 Capital Kids Report

Current Data and Recent Trends in the Well-being of Children and Youth in the Greater Washington Region
About Venture Philanthropy Partners

Venture Philanthropy Partners (VPP) is a philanthropic investment organization that aligns resources and actions to make the future brighter for young people in Greater Washington. It invests resources, expertise, and time in collaborations and nonprofits to help more young people succeed in school, college, or their career. VPP has invested more than $110 million in nonprofits and networks in Greater Washington since 2000. Our mission is to lead positive systemic change that builds a better future for vulnerable youth in Greater Washington. We envision a future where all young people have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to the productivity, health, and well-being of Greater Washington.

Learn more at www.vppartners.org
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Introduction

The Greater Washington region is a political power center, a market for economic development, and a diverse multicultural landscape. It is also home to 1.6 million children and young people, who represent one-third of the region’s population. Yet few places in America have such great disparities in young people’s health, education, family income and wealth, and opportunity.

Far too many children in Greater Washington are being left behind. While the overall economy in the Greater Washington region has improved over the past decade, large pockets of children and youth experience worsening conditions, including growing poverty disparities deeply embedded in race and ethnicity and income disparities by family structure.

When economic opportunities benefit only some members of the community, economic growth is restricted because the skills and talents of whole groups of residents are excluded, and individual community members struggle to achieve what they want in life. Conversely, when opportunities are inclusive, productivity and living standards rise for all residents. More inclusive opportunities result in growth in tax receipts, which in turn fuels social, educational, and economic structures that attract employers and employees.

The persistent disparities in youth and child outcomes should motivate the region’s leaders to pursue new approaches. At the same time, local leadership should recognize the robust and vibrant foundation that the region’s burgeoning racial and ethnic diversity provides. As in every community across America, every child in Greater Washington has an intrinsic right to thrive, and the future of the region depends on our collective ability to help young people from all backgrounds successfully transition to adulthood.

This report provides a broad overview of how children and youth (birth through age 24) are faring on many key indicators of well-being across the nine jurisdictions that comprise the Greater Washington region: the cities of Alexandria and Falls Church, Arlington County, Prince William County, Fairfax County, and Loudoun County in Virginia; Montgomery County and Prince George’s County in Maryland; and Washington, D.C.

We frame this report around three themes that shape the developmental paths for the region’s youth: first, growing levels of diversity and income disparities; second, education, which is core to opportunity; and, third, factors beyond education that contribute to children’s well-being and long-term prospects.

Diversity and Disparities.

Few metro areas are as diverse—in terms of race, ethnic origin, and national origin—as Greater Washington. Recent immigration trends are remaking the social fabric of the region, with children of immigrants accounting for nearly half of the area’s children. As the region becomes more diverse, it is increasingly important to examine whether young people from different backgrounds thrive and progress at similar rates. In many cases, we find that groups that have experienced long histories of racial discrimination, such as...
INTRODUCTION

Beyond the Classroom.

A flourishing childhood and an adequate preparation for adulthood are multifaceted. A child’s ability to learn is hindered if that child is not healthy and safe. Well-being must be viewed from a wholistic perspective, in which health, social, emotional, and academic development are interdependent. An agenda to support children and youth must address all aspects of development.

This report provides robust data on how well children and youth in the Greater Washington area have fared since the beginning of the decade. The information in this report can be used by policymakers and public and private funders to help them make decisions about how to fund and target services, and to do this work with finite resources. Program practitioners can use the report to better understand the needs of the young people they serve and the communities in which they live. Finally, researchers can use the report to provide contextual information for studies they are conducting in the region or to identify areas for further study. Residents and activists can use the report to strengthen advocacy efforts in response to the complex challenges that exist regionally.

Black and Hispanic children, fare less well. Due to their smaller numbers in many jurisdictions within the Greater Washington area, many data sources from which we draw for this report tell an incomplete story about the status and recent progress of children from American Indian and Asian backgrounds. We know from national data, however, that the outcomes of children from these two groups are also influenced by the history of discrimination in the United States and, for Asian children, by their immigration or refugee status and national origin (for them or their family).

Education.

Schooling is widely considered an equalizer that rewards hard work and achievement and opens doors for economic prosperity. Yet the evidence shows that, in certain respects, such a narrative is more myth than reality. Many students are not gaining the competencies schools intend to foster, as schools rarely are designed to meet the needs of all students and infrequently offer rigorous and relevant learning experiences that prepare students for postsecondary success. In fact, too many young people have only a tenuous connection with schooling; for some, that connection is nonexistent. Those left behind are too often also the victims of intergenerational poverty and structural racism.
The Capital Kids Report: 
2012 and 2020

The first Capital Kids Report, released in 2012, examined trends for children and youth over a timeframe that included the Great Recession and its near-term aftermath. Greater Washington suffered less from the economic downturn than many other regions of the country and recovered more quickly. Nevertheless, the recession’s effects on the region’s children and their families—especially Black children and their families—are still evident. More problematically, research suggests that the effects of such severe downturns may persist into adulthood, limiting children’s economic prospects.

The 2020 Capital Kids Report updates these earlier findings and examines recent trends to understand how children in Greater Washington have fared since the end of the Great Recession, and what the data imply for their future well-being.

This report highlights key themes that arose from our analysis of more than 100 indicators on the backgrounds and well-being of children in the Greater Washington area. A forthcoming Technical Appendix will provide a more comprehensive summary of findings across all of these indicators.

This report uses U.S. Census Bureau terminology for racial and ethnic groups.

Much of our data in the report are drawn from the Census, so we adopt the labels the U.S. Census Bureau uses to designate race (White, Black, Asian, American Indian, and other) and ethnic groups (Hispanic, non-Hispanic), with a few small exceptions. We also capitalize and shorten all racial and ethnic group labels for the purposes of consistency and simplicity. We recognize that for each racial and ethnic group, individuals vary in their preferences for how they are referenced (Hispanic, Latino, or Latinx, for instance, or a label that specifies one’s national origin). Hispanic origin is distinguished from race in the Census as individuals can self-identify as Hispanic or non-Hispanic as well as a racial group. Furthermore, in this report, the White population consists of only non-Hispanic White individuals, which is consistent with the Census designations.
The effect of structural racism on outcomes for children and youth in Greater Washington

The legacy of racism and its current expressions reverberate in many of the indicators in this report. Greater Washington has a long history of systemic and institutional racism that have established the foundations of regional disparities. The frequent associations between race/ethnicity and measures of well-being for children, families, and communities are rooted in patterns of limited or complete lack of access to resources and opportunities. In turn, unequal access reflects centuries of policies and practices that are the foundation of structural inequality and discrimination.

The way our society has treated certain groups over time has limited their opportunities. Discriminatory policies and practices in areas such as housing, schooling, and transportation have left a legacy of disparities that persist across all of society. For example, measures of socioeconomic status, such as income, wealth, educational achievement, and employment, vary across racial and ethnic groups and genders. Persistent disparities are also reflected in patterns of intergenerational economic mobility. Thus, when we call attention in this report to differences on various indicators by race/ethnicity or by gender or family structure, we are not implying that these outcomes are caused by these identities, but rather that they capture the effects of this social and historical context.

We believe that all youth can succeed regardless of their racial identity, and that racial identity does not imply or create an inherent deficit of capability.
Growing Diversity and Income Inequality

Greater Washington is increasingly diverse, but increasingly inequitable.

Over the past decade, the Greater Washington region has grown increasingly racially and ethnically diverse and today is one of the most diverse areas in the nation. Hispanic children are the fastest-growing population of children in the region and nationally, and the population of children and youth from Asian backgrounds is also growing in Greater Washington. Additionally, an increasing number of children are born to parents who are immigrants. In most regional jurisdictions, no single racial or ethnic group makes up a majority of the child population, and the mix of races and ethnicities is still changing within jurisdictions.

The region as a whole has a strong economy and a median income that far exceeds the national average. Yet the gap between rich and poor has been widening for many years nationally, and the gap is especially large in the District of Columbia. Despite the area’s general prosperity, the trends in child poverty in the region have not been as positive as they have been nationwide, particularly in some jurisdictions. The region’s families with children have not experienced consistent improvement in their median income, with some areas experiencing stagnant or increasing rates of child poverty. Black and Hispanic children, in particular, are not benefiting proportionally from the growth and prosperity that the region has experienced since the end of the Great Recession.

The population of young people in the Greater Washington region is becoming more diverse, with Hispanic children and youth leading the growth among racial and ethnic groups.

While White children still constitute the single largest category (36 to 39 percent) within each age group, the region has become more diverse over the past decade, reflecting, in particular, recent immigration trends (see Figure 1).

For the region as a whole:

- Hispanic children are the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group: In 2017, Hispanic children represented 22 percent of the region’s children and youth, an increase of 3 percentage points since 2010.
- The population of children from Asian backgrounds is also growing: In 2017, Asian children represented 11 percent of the region’s children, an increase of 2 percentage points since 2010.
An increasing number of children have at least one parent who is an immigrant: In 2017, this group represented 47 percent of the region's children (versus 25 percent nationwide), up from 41 percent in 2010.

The proportions of both Black and White children in the region have declined: In 2017, 36 percent of the region's children were White, while 28 percent were Black—decreases of 4 and 2 percentage points, respectively, since 2010.

No one racial or ethnic category accounts for the majority of the child population: The majority (71 percent) of the region's children belong to groups other than White. Among the under-15 population (today's young teens and tomorrow's young adults), White children account for just over one third (35 percent), compared to a nationwide estimate of 50 percent.

Racial/ethnic patterns among children and youth differ across the region’s nine jurisdictions.

- In the District of Columbia and Arlington County, White children and youth comprise a growing share of the child and youth population.
- In the District of Columbia, the majority of children and youth are Black in all but two age groups:
  - Forty-five percent of 20- to 24-year-old young adults were Black in 2017, up from 41 percent in 2010, but still under half the District’s population.
  - Forty-nine percent of the District of Columbia’s youngest children (birth to age 4) were Black in 2017, compared to 57 percent in 2010.
- In every jurisdiction, Black children and youth are making up a declining share of the child and youth population, especially in Alexandria, Prince George’s County, and the District of Columbia.
- While they do not comprise the majority of children and youth in any jurisdiction, Hispanic children account for the second-largest category in many age groups in Falls Church city and in Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William, and Montgomery counties.
- Additionally, the proportion of children who have at least one parent who is an immigrant varies considerably across jurisdictions (see Figure 2). For example:
  - In Alexandria, Fairfax County, and Montgomery County, more than half of children have at least one immigrant parent (54, 54, and 52 percent, respectively).
  - The share of children with at least one immigrant parent is considerably lower in the District of Columbia (28 percent) and Falls Church (21 percent).

While the child poverty rate across jurisdictions is generally lower in Greater Washington than the national average, it varies widely across jurisdictions and subgroups, ranging from one in 50 children in Loudoun County to one in four children in the District of Columbia.

Greater Washington is a region of contrasts: It has high concentrations of wealth and prosperity, as well as 61,000 children who live in poverty. Some children, particularly Black and Hispanic children, are not benefiting as much as others from the region’s recent growth and prosperity.

Most jurisdictions fall below the national average for children living in poverty (18 percent), but Alexandria and the District of Columbia exceed the national average (see Figure 3). While child poverty decreased by 4 percentage points overall in the United States in the post-recession period from 2010 to 2017, child poverty levels have not consistently fallen across jurisdictions in the Greater Washington area.

Hispanic children are the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group.
FIGURE 2

Percentage children of immigrants, by jurisdiction, 2010 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County, VA</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax County, VA</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
<td></td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudoun County, VA</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince William County, VA</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County, MD</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George’s County, MD</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Washington</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, since 2010:

- Child poverty increased most steeply in Alexandria, rising from below the national average in 2010 (14 percent) to well above it (25 percent) in 2017.

- Arlington County saw the largest drop, a decline from 14 percent in 2010 to 3 percent in 2017.

- In the District of Columbia, the rate decreased from 30 percent in 2010 to 26 percent in 2015, where it remained through 2017.

- In other Greater Washington area jurisdictions (Fairfax County, Falls Church city, Loudoun County, Montgomery County, Prince George’s County, and Prince William County), poverty rates fluctuated slightly, increasing or decreasing by 1 to 3 percentage points between 2010, 2015, and 2017.

- Child poverty also varied by racial and ethnic group within each jurisdiction. Changes in the poverty rates for Hispanic children varied across jurisdictions (see Table 1):
  - From 2013 to 2017, the poverty rate among Hispanic children increased from 18 to 30 percent in Alexandria.
  - Smaller increases (of less than 2 percent) in child poverty for Hispanic children were found in Montgomery County and Prince William County.
  - In Arlington County, the percentage of Hispanic children in poverty decreased from 27 percent in 2013 to 23 percent in 2017.
  - In Loudoun County, the poverty rate for Hispanic children decreased from 12 percent to 8 percent from 2013 to 2017.
The percentage of Black children in Greater Washington affected by poverty differs from national trends. Nationally, the poverty rate for Black children declined from 39 percent in 2013 to 33 percent in 2017. By contrast, the poverty rate for Black children in all Greater Washington jurisdictions barely budged, remaining the same or ticking up slightly.

- For example, in Alexandria, poverty among Black children was 31 percent in 2013 and 32 percent in 2017.
- In the District of Columbia, the poverty rate for Black children was 40 percent in 2013 and 39 percent in 2017.

In most jurisdictions, the poverty rate for White children fell or stayed the same during this timeframe.

In a few jurisdictions, the poverty rate for White children increased:
- The poverty rate among White children increased from 10 to 15 percent in Alexandria.
- The rate also increased for White children in Fairfax County, from 6 percent to 8 percent.

The rate of White children in poverty almost doubled (from 5.1 to 9.2 percent) in Prince George’s County.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alexandria, VA</th>
<th>Arlington County, VA</th>
<th>Fairfax County, VA</th>
<th>Falls Church, VA</th>
<th>Loudoun County, VA</th>
<th>Prince William County, VA</th>
<th>Montgomery County, MD</th>
<th>Prince George’s County, MD</th>
<th>Washington, D.C.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2013</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2017</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* * Data not available. Source: Data from KidsCount Data Center 2013-17. Note: VA county estimates are based on 5-year estimates. D.C., MD, and national estimates is based on 1-year estimates. Data is to be interpreted with caution because of inconsistencies across years in use of race categories.
While median income for families with children rose for the region overall, it has not risen equally in all jurisdictions and has fallen among single mother-headed households. While median incomes have increased within the region as a whole, the median income of families with children has not increased steadily region-wide.

- In five jurisdictions (Loudoun and Prince George's counties, and Alexandria, Falls Church, and the District of Columbia), median incomes have increased since 2010.
- In Arlington, Fairfax, Montgomery, and Prince William counties, median incomes either stayed the same or fell.

Family structure has become more diverse in the United States over the last several decades, with increases in single-parent families and families headed by cohabiting parents. This is true for families at all income levels and across racial and ethnic groups. At the same time, the costs of raising children increasingly require two incomes, especially in areas like Greater Washington that have high costs of living.

- In most jurisdictions, families headed by married couples had median incomes that ranged from two to four times the median incomes for families headed by single mothers, on average (see Figure 4).
- The largest income gap between families headed by married couples and single mothers was in the District of Columbia, where families headed by married couples ($187,764) benefited from median incomes that were eight times that of families headed by single mothers ($23,528), on average.

In most of the jurisdictions across Greater Washington, median incomes for families headed by single mothers fell from 2010 to 2017 (see Table 2). By contrast, in most jurisdictions, median incomes increased for families headed by married couples or single fathers. Research finds that single fathers have higher incomes, on average, compared to single mothers. It is possible that the slower economic progress by single mothers signals a lack of access to opportunities for lower-income families more broadly.

- In the District of Columbia, median income in single mother-headed families decreased from $25,780 to $23,528; by contrast, median income among families headed by married couples increased from $169,913 to $187,764.
- Similar patterns were found in Loudoun County, where median income for families headed by single mothers decreased from $75,264 to $72,607, while income for families headed by married couples increased from $157,963 to $174,728 during the same timeframe.
- The only jurisdiction in which median incomes for families headed by single mothers increased was Arlington. In 2010, the median income of families headed by single mothers was $35,760. By 2017, the median income had increased to $72,083.
FIGURE 4
Median income for married couple- and single mother-headed households, by jurisdiction, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>2017 Married Couple</th>
<th>2017 Single Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>$121,574</td>
<td>$34,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County, VA</td>
<td>$201,184</td>
<td>$72,083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax County, VA</td>
<td>$151,956</td>
<td>$49,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
<td>$198,352</td>
<td>$46,477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudoun County, VA</td>
<td>$174,728</td>
<td>$72,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince William County, VA</td>
<td>$150,478</td>
<td>$42,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County, MD</td>
<td>$112,194</td>
<td>$46,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George's County, MD</td>
<td>$124,120</td>
<td>$50,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>$187,764</td>
<td>$23,528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Child Trends’ calculations from 2010, and 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimates; Falls Church Data from 2006-2010 and 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

TABLE 2
Median income of families with own children under 18, by family type, 2010 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>$124,739</td>
<td>$35,726</td>
<td>$38,013</td>
<td>$121,574</td>
<td>$110,439</td>
<td>$34,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County, VA</td>
<td>$151,470</td>
<td>$112,875</td>
<td>$157,670</td>
<td>$201,184</td>
<td>$104,463</td>
<td>$72,083</td>
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<td>Fairfax County, VA</td>
<td>$155,067</td>
<td>$73,197</td>
<td>$78,796</td>
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<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
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<td>$75,264</td>
<td>$198,352</td>
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<td>Loudoun County, VA</td>
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<td>$136,821</td>
<td>$50,936</td>
<td>$174,728</td>
<td>$68,676</td>
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<td>Prince William County, VA</td>
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<td>$50,628</td>
<td>$124,120</td>
<td>$61,659</td>
<td>$46,082</td>
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<td>Montgomery County, MD</td>
<td>$150,836</td>
<td>$41,002</td>
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<td>$47,358</td>
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<td>Prince George's County, MD</td>
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<td>$25,780</td>
<td>$112,194</td>
<td>$48,850</td>
<td>$23,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>$169,913</td>
<td>$48,850</td>
<td>$26,061</td>
<td>$187,764</td>
<td>$39,401</td>
<td>$27,894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

U.S. | $87,054 | $39,401 | $26,061 | $96,057 | $42,500 | $27,894 |

* * Data not available. Note: Estimates are in 2017 dollars. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 and 2017 American Community Survey; Falls Church, VA data is based on 5-year estimates from the 2006-2010 and 2013-2017 American Community Survey.
Greater Washington is leaving many children behind.

While high-quality education is lauded as an equalizer that leads to increased economic prosperity in adulthood, many schools and school districts struggle to provide children with this foundation for success. Many of the Greater Washington region’s students are not gaining the competencies schools intend to foster. The data show that many young people have a tenuous or nonexistent connection with school. From early childhood through early adulthood, educational outcomes vary across jurisdictions, resulting in a mixed report card for the region on how well the education system is preparing young people for the future. Poverty and discrimination—often longstanding—also contribute to disparate outcomes by family income and race/ethnicity.

Brain science and developmental studies confirm that education begins long before children start formal schooling. During the first years of life, one million neural connections per second form in the young brain. Investments that communities and families make in these early years of life can have long-term positive effects on a young person’s development. The Greater Washington area has taken important strides to increase access to early care and learning; however, there is insufficient data on the quality of these environments and learning experiences. The available data suggest that a sizable proportion of young children are not ready for school.

Most students in the region complete high school, which is a fundamental milestone but no longer a sufficient requirement for most employment opportunities. The high school credential has become less valuable over time as the nation’s economy has changed. Adults who have a postsecondary degree earn substantially more over the course of their lifetime compared to those with a high school diploma.

The current generation of children and youth ages 0 to 24 is the most racially and ethnically diverse in recent history—both nationally and in the Greater Washington area. Ensuring greater access to and success in postsecondary education for Black and Hispanic students—and for academically struggling students—will be necessary if Greater Washington’s children and youth, regardless of their background, are to benefit from the region’s prosperity and growth.

Public pre-K enrollment is up by more than 10,000 children region-wide, driven largely by increased numbers in the District of Columbia and four other jurisdictions.

Public pre-kindergarten (pre-K) can promote children’s learning and, when offered for a full day, can also support parental employment.
country, more school districts are attempting to expand publicly funded pre-K programs to serve all children residing in the area.\textsuperscript{7,8} In the District of Columbia, much progress has already been made toward the goal of universal access to pre-K. In Virginia and Maryland, eligibility for such programs is still restricted to families who are economically disadvantaged.\textsuperscript{16,17}

- From 2011 to 2019, the number of children enrolled in public pre-K programs in the Greater Washington area increased from 19,456 to 30,198.

- In 2010, children in the District of Columbia made up just over half of the region's public pre-K population (at 9,897). By 2017, they represented a smaller proportion, at about 40 percent (12,866).

- Besides the District of Columbia, other areas experiencing public pre-K enrollment increases of more than 1,000 children included Fairfax County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and Prince William County. More than 90 percent of the children enrolled in public pre-K come from these five (out of nine) jurisdictions within the Greater Washington area.

In addition to pre-K, many young children are in nonparental child care. High-quality child care can provide many of the benefits of pre-K and, in many cases, may be better suited to parents' employment schedules. Participation in these programs varies based on factors such as the cost of care relative to one's family income, other indicators of access (such as the convenience and quality of providers), and preferences to use parental care for young children.\textsuperscript{18}
In 2017, 75,470 children ages 3 and 4 in the Greater Washington area were enrolled in some kind of public or private early care and education program.

Areas with the highest proportions of preschool-age children participating in early care and education programs in 2017 included (see Figure 5):
- Falls Church, at 88 percent
- District of Columbia, at 73 percent
- Arlington County, at 71 percent

Multiple jurisdictions experienced declines in the percentage and number of 3- and 4-year-old children in these programs from 2010 to 2017, including Fairfax County, Loudoun County, Prince George’s County, and Prince William County.

Another important indicator of children’s access to early care and education is the availability of licensed providers relative to the early childhood population (birth through age 5). Notably, these data are not available for the Virginia jurisdictions of the Greater Washington area. In 2018, licensed center-based capacity to care for young children in local Maryland jurisdictions and the District of Columbia varied:
- In Montgomery County, it was 50.8 percent.
- In the District of Columbia, it was 39.2 percent.
- In Prince George’s County, it was 35.5 percent.

Across the Greater Washington region, too few children are adequately prepared for kindergarten.

To take full advantage of the opportunities offered in school, children need basic social and emotional skills, cognitive and language skills, motor and other physical skills, and a foundation of good health, including adequate sleep and nutrition.  

Readiness is a two-way street: Schools must be ready to meet the diverse needs and experiences of children and their families. Young children who are not adequately prepared for school can fall further behind their peers, jeopardizing their longer-term academic success, unless their needs are identified and they are given extra support.

While no nationally adopted measure of kindergarten readiness exists, many states and communities have implemented their own assessments. These vary in their comprehensiveness, format, and alignment with developmental principles, and their results are used for a variety of purposes. Data show that anywhere from 20 to 60 percent of young children are not ready for kindergarten.

Due to the diversity of measures used, kindergarten readiness data cannot be compared across jurisdictions, but the following jurisdictional results are notable:

- In Falls Church, the majority of children (82 percent) enter kindergarten ready for school.
- In other jurisdictions for which data are available, a much smaller portion of children are ready for kindergarten:
  - In Loudoun County, 67 percent of children are deemed ready for kindergarten.
  - A little more than half the children in Alexandria (56 percent) meet the criteria for readiness.
  - Fewer than half the children assessed in Prince George’s County (39 percent) were considered ready for kindergarten.
Reflecting the child population, schools in the region are becoming more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse.

Across the region, public school enrollment has increased, with Hispanic students accounting for much of the growth. The proportion of students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) is also increasing region-wide.

- Since the 2010-2011 school year, public school enrollment in Greater Washington overall (K-12, as of 2018-2019) increased by about 95,000 (14 percent).
  - The greatest growth occurred in Alexandria, where enrollment is up by one third.

- Hispanic students account for an increasing percentage of total enrollments in every Greater Washington jurisdiction, except for Arlington County (where Hispanic students are nevertheless more than one in four [28.1 percent] of all students).
  - The Hispanic student population increased by more than 13 percentage points in Prince George’s County, jumping from 21 to 34 percent.
  - In several jurisdictions, the Hispanic student population increased by more than 5 percentage points: Alexandria (30.7 to 36.2 percent), Montgomery County (25.3 to 30.8 percent), Prince William County (28.6 to 34.4 percent), and the District of Columbia (13 to 18.1 percent).

- Percentages of ELLs increased in most jurisdictions since the 2010-2011 school year (see Figure 6).
  - In Alexandria, almost one in three children (30.5 percent) are ELLs. This is up from 21.9 percent in the 2010-2011 school year.
  - Sizable increases in the ELL student population were also found in Prince George’s County, where it increased from 11.5 to 19.5 percent.
  - The ELL student population also increased in Montgomery County from 13.3 to 17.7 percent during this timeframe.
  - Similarly, ELL student population increased in Loudoun County to 11.1 percent, up from 7.6 percent in the 2010-2011 school year.
Chronic absenteeism is lower than the national average in several jurisdictions of the Greater Washington area, but it remains a serious problem in a few others, especially among high school students.

Chronic absenteeism describes students who miss ten percent (18 days or more) of the school year. Students who do not consistently attend school are not able to reap the benefits of education, social relationships and, in some cases, food provided on-site. Poor school attendance is an early warning indicator that a student may not perform well and may not graduate from high school. The reasons for chronic absenteeism are varied and result from individual, family, and community-wide challenges at home or in school, such as fears about safety. Schools are increasingly recognizing the need to develop multifaceted strategies to address chronic absenteeism in their buildings. These include efforts to improve school climate and address factors that young people might be experiencing, such as homelessness, that can make it more difficult for them to attend school regularly.
In two of the largest jurisdictions, Prince George’s County and the District of Columbia, the percentage of K-8 students who are chronically absent exceeds the national average of 14 percent (see Figure 7).

Among high school students, rates of chronic absenteeism are high in the following jurisdictions:

- District of Columbia (54.9 percent)
- Montgomery County (27.1 percent)
- Prince William County (23.3 percent)
- Prince George’s County (33.5 percent)

In most other parts of the Greater Washington area, the rates of chronic absenteeism fall below the national average.

Despite increasing school enrollment across the region, a sizable percentage and number of school-age children in the Greater Washington area are not enrolled in school. Current data are not robust enough to explain their absence.

For a small proportion of the area’s school-age children and youth, school enrollment cannot be determined, raising concerns that institutional or personal barriers, faulty data, or some combination of these factors may be to blame.

According to Census Bureau estimates, as of 2017, more than 17,000 children in Greater Washington ages 5 to 14 are not enrolled in school, an increase of 2,000 since 2010. In addition, nearly 28,000 adolescents ages 15 to 19 are not in school.

- These numbers could include some children who stay away from public institutions to avoid harassment or apprehension due their immigrant status.
- Students who are not enrolled in school may also include those who have dropped out of school, high school graduates who have not yet continued their education, and those in institutional care. Youth enrolled in “vocational, technical, or business school” and non-publicly funded GED programs are also reported as “not enrolled in school.”
- In 2017, across jurisdictions, 2 to 5 percent of children ages 5 to 14 were not enrolled in school (see Figure 8). In most jurisdictions, the percentages of children ages 5 to 14 who were not enrolled in school changed very little from 2010 to 2017.
**FIGURE 7**

Percentage of students who are chronically absent, SY 2017-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>K-5th</th>
<th>6-8th</th>
<th>9-12th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County, VA</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax County, VA</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudoun County, VA</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County, MD</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George's County, MD</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Chronic absenteeism is a term used to describe students who miss 10 percent (18 days) or more of the school year.

Source: District of Columbia Enrollment Audit Data, Office of the State Superintendent of Education; Kids Count Data Center; Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Department of Planning; Maryland Open Data Portal; Virginia Department of Education.

**FIGURE 8**

Percentage of children ages 5-14 years not enrolled in school, by jurisdiction, 2010 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County, VA</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax County, VA</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudoun County, VA</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County, MD</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George’s County, MD</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince William County, VA</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Child Trends’ calculations from 2010, and 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimates; Falls Church data from 2006-2010 and 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
Across the region, there are large gaps in math and reading proficiency levels across racial and ethnic groups; in some Virginia jurisdictions, gaps in reading proficiency levels have widened over time.

For several decades, consistent with federal guidance, states have used a handful of standardized assessments that define which students are proficient in a given subject area. Each state determines the content covered in their assessments, and how score cut-offs define “proficiency.” Virginia used its homegrown Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment, while the District of Columbia and Maryland used the test developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

In Virginia, after the standardized assessments for reading and math were changed in the 2011-2012 school year and became more challenging, the percentage of students who met proficiency on assessments across all racial and ethnic groups dropped substantially. However, proficiency levels dropped more rapidly and rebounded more slowly for Black and Hispanic students.

For example, in Alexandria, the gap in reading proficiency between White and Black eighth-grade students doubled since the 2010-2011 school year, jumping from 11 percentage points in 2010-2011 to 22.4 percentage points in 2018-2019 (see Figure 9 for 2017-2018 school year).

### FIGURE 9

**Gap in reading proficiency between Black and White 8th graders, SY 2010-11 and 2017-18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County, VA</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax County, VA</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudoun County, VA</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County, MD</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George’s County, MD</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince William County, VA</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: D.C. State Report Cards, Office of the State Superintendent of Education; Maryland Department of Education; Virginia Department of Education.

Note: The achievement gap illustrated here is calculated by subtracting the percentage of Black students who were proficient in reading from the percentage of White students who were proficient in reading. Proficiency levels and scores should not be compared across jurisdictions; the calculations are based on D.C., MD and VA assessments, which are not comparable.
In 2010-2011, 94 percent of White eighth graders scored at proficient levels in reading; 83 percent of Black eighth-grade students scored at proficient levels that year, representing an 11 percentage-point gap.

In 2018-2019, 87.5 percent of White eighth-grade students scored at proficient levels in reading; 65.1 percent of Black eighth-grade students scored at proficient levels that year, representing a 22.4 percentage point gap.

Similarly, the eighth-grade reading proficiency gap doubled in Fairfax County during 2017-18 school year, increasing from 9 to 20 percentage points.

After the introduction of the PARCC in Maryland and the District of Columbia in 2015, test score differences across racial and ethnic groups in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties and in the District were much larger than those found in the Virginia jurisdictions.

The gaps in the percentage of students who meet proficiency levels on assessments are largest in the District of Columbia, ranging upwards of 60 percentage points between White students and Black/Hispanic students for some subjects and grades. For example, in the 2018-2019 school year, fourth-grade reading assessments found that a little over one quarter of Black students (27 percent) met proficiency levels, compared to 85 percent of White students.

This trend holds in eighth-grade reading as well, with 30 percent of Black students attaining proficiency compared to 90 percent of White students in the District of Columbia.

However, from 2014-2015 to 2017-2018, the racial and ethnic gaps in PARCC scores in Montgomery County, Prince George’s County, and the District fluctuated and varied by subject and grade but persisted over time.

This comparison of average proficiency levels masks the fact that some of the racial and ethnic achievement gaps might be explained by differences in income, school quality, and other factors. Both nationally and within the Greater Washington area, gaps in test scores by racial and ethnic groups are rooted in structural and historical racism and inequality, particularly in the areas of schooling and housing.

“...gaps in test scores by racial and ethnic groups are rooted in structural and historical racism and inequality...”
Young people in the Greater Washington area have fairly high ninth-grade promotion rates, graduation rates, and postsecondary participation rates.

Ninth graders who successfully progress to the next grade on time are more likely to graduate from high school.\textsuperscript{36,37} 

- The District of Columbia has the lowest ninth-grade promotion rate (the percentage of ninth graders who successfully promote to the 10th grade) in the area, at 75 percent (see Figure 10).

- In most jurisdictions in Virginia, ninth-grade promotion rates were between 90 percent and 100 percent.

On-time graduation is measured by the percentage of students who complete high school within four years.\textsuperscript{38} Among students who do not graduate on time, some may re-enroll in another grade; some may participate in other education options, such as earning a GED, earning community college credits, or pursuing an industry recognized certification; and others may simply drop out.

- High school graduation rates range from 68.2 percent (District of Columbia) to 100 percent in Falls Church, but controversies linger as to the accuracy of these data in some jurisdictions.\textsuperscript{39,40}

Enrolling in postsecondary education is a critical marker of progress toward obtaining a high-quality job,\textsuperscript{41} and it often benefits one’s academic and personal development as well. However, even if students enroll in postsecondary education, they face a number of challenges that frequently prevent them from obtaining a postsecondary degree.\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure10}
\caption{Ninth-grade promotion rate, by jurisdiction, SY 2017-18}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item Alexandria, VA: 90%
\item Arlington County, VA: 99%
\item Fairfax County, VA: 98%
\item Falls Church, VA: 100%
\item Loudoun County, VA: 99%
\item Prince William County, VA: 95%
\item Montgomery County, MD: 88%
\item Prince George’s County, MD: 83%
\item Washington, D.C.: 75%
\end{itemize}

Other reasons include involvement in the criminal justice system, family responsibilities (including parenthood and pregnancy), or chronic disabilities. Communities that do not address barriers that young people might face in their efforts to gain employment or continue their schooling will not benefit from the contributions that these young people have the potential to offer.43

Today, many youth and young adults follow paths other than enrolling in full- or part-time postsecondary education immediately after high school. Instead, they may obtain full- or part-time work (including training, internships, apprenticeships, or military service), or experience brief unemployment before reaching a level of financial stability.

While the percentage of opportunity youth across the region is relatively low and did not change significantly from 2010 to 2017, individual jurisdictions have seen their percentages change markedly.

- In the Greater Washington area overall, 5.5 percent of all youth ages 16 through 19 (approximately 13,000) were neither enrolled in school nor employed or in the labor force in 2017.

Data used to measure college enrollment in the Greater Washington region include the number of students who graduated from high school in 2016 and enrolled in a postsecondary education institution within 16 months of graduation.

- Overall, 83 percent of 2016 high school graduates in the Greater Washington area enrolled in college or other postsecondary institutions.

- Across jurisdictions, between 72 and 93 percent of high school students enrolled in college or other postsecondary institutions within 16 months of graduation.

Relatively few young people in the Greater Washington region are not in school and not working.

Some young people—commonly referred to as “opportunity youth”—are neither in school nor employed, leaving them disconnected from the paths likely to lead to economic self-sufficiency. Reasons for young people's disconnection from the labor market and schooling may include lack of access to opportunities and resources that would enable them to be engaged in school or work.

- In the Greater Washington area overall, 5.5 percent of all youth ages 16 through 19 (approximately 13,000) were neither enrolled in school nor employed or in the labor force in 2017.
This is fairly similar to the percentage of opportunity youth (5.7 percent) in the area in 2010. These relatively small rates may be due to the region’s strong economy, as well as the large number of educational institutions.

From 2010 to 2017, the following areas experienced increases in the percentage of opportunity youth (see Figure 11):

- In Arlington, the percent of opportunity youth has more than doubled from 4.0 to 8.8 percent.
- The percent of opportunity youth in Falls Church has more than tripled from 3.9 to 14.3 percent.
- Smaller increases were found in two counties:
  - In Fairfax County, the percent of opportunity youth increased from 2.8 to 3.9 percent.
  - In Loudoun County, the percent of opportunity youth increased from 2.2 to 2.5 percent.
- During the same timeframe, the percentage of opportunity youth slightly decreased (by 0.4 to 2.2 percentage points) in other area jurisdictions, including Alexandria, Montgomery County, Prince George’s County, Prince William County, and the District of Columbia.
Beyond the Classroom: Greater Washington Can Do More to Help Young People Flourish

Data on child well-being beyond measures of education are sparse for the Greater Washington region.

The well-being of children and youth is multi-dimensional. While strong educational preparation is a necessary ingredient for success, young people also need good physical health, social and emotional well-being, safety, and stability in order to thrive.

Across the region, available data identify several areas of progress and highlight groups of children and youth at risk of poor outcomes. For some issues, such as improving healthy birth outcomes, aggregate data may obscure substantial inequities across racial and ethnic groups. At the same time, data on some key indicators are missing, preventing us from providing a full portrait of child and youth well-being region-wide (see box at the end of the section).

Region-wide, more children have health insurance than in 2009.

Health insurance coverage is associated with children getting more timely care and with enhanced well-being in other dimensions of their development.\(^4\) Rising rates of insurance in the region are consistent with national trends following implementation of the Affordable Care Act.\(^5\)

- Across all jurisdictions for which multi-year data were available rates of uninsured children decreased from 2009 to 2017 (see Figure 12). This translates to about 23,000 more area children and youth with health insurance coverage in 2017 compared to 2009.
- The percentage of children without health insurance in 2017 ranged from 1 percent (District of Columbia) to 8 percent (Montgomery County).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County, MD</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County, VA</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudoun County, VA</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George’s County, MD</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax County, VA</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince William County, VA</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 and 2017 Small Area Health Insurance Estimates.
Overall, rates of low birthweight and infant mortality are down, but disparities by race and ethnicity persist.

Growth and development are rapid in the early years of a child’s life, and development builds on itself, underscoring the critical importance of a healthy start to life. Key indicators of a poor start include low birthweight and infant mortality status. On both measures, while the region shows encouraging progress, there are race-based disparities in birth outcomes. In particular, research shows that health care delivered to Black mothers and their infants is likely to be of poorer quality than the care provided to White mothers and infants.46

- As of 2016, in the Greater Washington region as a whole, the rate of low birthweight live births (less than 2500 grams) was 7.6 percent—down from 8.2 percent in 2010.

- The percentage of low birthweight live births varied within the District from 7 percent in Wards 2, 3, and 6 to 14 percent in Wards 7 and 8, with an average of 10.2 percent (see Figure 13).47

- Low birthweight live births in the District were most prevalent for Black mothers (13 percent), occurring at almost double the rates for other racial and ethnic groups (7 percent for White and 8 percent for Hispanic mothers).

- In Prince George’s County, which has the second-highest percentage of low birthweight births in the Greater Washington region (9.7 percent overall), Black mothers (12.1 percent) had higher rates of low birthweight live births than White mothers (6 percent) and Hispanic mothers (7 percent).

**FIGURE 13**
Percentage of infants with low birthweight, by D.C. Ward, 2016

- Ward 1: 9%
- Ward 2: 7%
- Ward 3: 7%
- Ward 4: 9%
- Ward 5: 11%
- Ward 6: 7%
- Ward 7: 14%
- Ward 8: 14%
- Washington, D.C.: 10%

Sources: D.C. Department of Health, and Neighborhood Info D.C. at the Urban Institute
Similar patterns are found for infant mortality across the Greater Washington region.

- Rates of infant mortality across the jurisdictions followed similar patterns as low birth weight, except in Fairfax County; there, the rate for White infants (3.8 deaths per 1,000 live births) is closer to the rate for Black infants (4.5 deaths per 1,000 live births).

- In Prince George’s County, the infant mortality rate for Black infants (12 deaths per 1,000 live births) is more than double the rate for Hispanic infants (5 deaths per 1,000 live births).

- Infant mortality for White infants is highest in Loudoun County, where the rate is 4.7 deaths per 1,000 live births; however, the rate for Black infants is almost double at 8.6 deaths per 1,000 live births.

- Arlington County has the region’s largest racial difference between White and Black infant mortality, with a rate of 12.3 for Black infants and 1.0 for White infants.

- In Alexandria, the mortality rates for Black infants is 8.0 compared to 1.3 for White infants.

- Rates of infant mortality in the District of Columbia for Black infants (11.5 deaths per 1,000 live births) are five times higher than for White infants (2.6 deaths per 1,000 live births).

- Rates of infant mortality are down in all District of Columbia wards, although Wards 1, 5, 7, and 8 are still above the national average for 2016 (5.87 percent; see Figure 14).  

- Rates of infant mortality are four times higher in Ward 7 and over six times higher in Ward 8 than in Ward 2. Wards 7 and 8 are vastly different from Ward 2 in their socioeconomic composition.

Sources: D.C. Department of Health, and Neighborhood Info D.C. at the Urban Institute
Smaller percentages of parents report reading to their young children and sharing family meals together than in past years.

Children thrive on the time they spend interacting with the people closest to them. Two traditional indicators of family time together that benefit children’s development—reading to young children and sharing meals as a family—suggest that some families may struggle to spend time together. This may reflect parents’ long or nontraditional work hours, lengthy commutes, or lack of awareness that these activities are important to their children’s development. A child’s experience of being read to promotes not only early literacy, but also positive social and emotional development.50

Trends in parents reading to their children region-wide include:

- Forty-two percent of parents in the Greater Washington region report reading to their young children (birth through age 5) every day, higher than the 38 percent of parents nationally who report reading to their children. This high level of reading in the region may be attributed to parents’ high levels of education, and to local efforts to promote reading.

- Nevertheless, the percentage of parents in the region reading to their children declined across most jurisdictions from 2007 to 2017. This decline mirrors a national trend during the same timeframe; in 2007, 48 percent of parents reported reading to their young children, but by 2017, this number had decreased to 38 percent.

- Large decreases of 10 to 15 percentage points in family members reading daily to young children were found across most jurisdictions.

- The largest decrease was found in Fairfax County. In 2007, 56 percent of young children had a family member who read to them each day, but the rate dropped to 41 percent by 2017.

- By contrast, in the District of Columbia, 49 percent of young children had a family member who read to them each day in 2007, a rate that increased to 52 percent by 2017.
Sharing family meals is associated with many benefits. Research has shown that children who frequently eat meals with their family members are more likely to succeed academically, avoid risky behaviors (including substance abuse), maintain positive family relationships, and develop healthier nutrition habits.\textsuperscript{5,152}

- Nationally, 43 percent of parents reported in 2017 that their families share daily meals together, a rate that is higher than that seen in the Greater Washington region (see Figure 15).
- In the Greater Washington region in 2017, 39 percent of children shared meals with family members every day, down from 43 percent in 2007.
- The largest drop was in the District of Columbia, where in 2017, 40 percent of parents reported having family meals every day, down from 48 percent in 2007.
- In both Fairfax County and in Alexandria City, 41 percent of parents reported having family meals every day in 2017, down from 44 percent in 2007.
- Loudoun County was the only location in the area where a decrease was not found. In both 2007 and in 2017, 41 percent of families in Loudoun County shared meals together.

**FIGURE 15**

Percentage of children ages 0-17 whose family eat a meal together every day of the week, 2007 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington County, VA</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax County, VA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falls Church, VA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudoun County, VA</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County, MD</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George’s County, MD</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince William County, VA</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limited data on adolescents’ health-related behaviors suggest declines in substance use, but also in physical activity.

Much of the data on adolescents’ health-related behaviors are limited to two jurisdictions in the region: Washington, D.C. and Fairfax County. These are the only two local jurisdictions included in the federal Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). We report the data for these two locales but strongly recommend against drawing region-wide conclusions.

More youth use alcohol than any other age-restricted or illegal substance. In addition to the health damage caused by alcohol itself, other types of risky behavior, such as drug use and unprotected sex, are associated with teens’ heavy drinking. Among U.S. teens, binge drinking, or consuming multiple drinks in rapid succession (“drinking to get drunk”), is a common type of alcohol use.53

Binge drinking appears to have declined since 2011 in the District of Columbia and in Fairfax County. While data on binge drinking and a few other risk behaviors are only available in these two jurisdictions within the Greater Washington area, statewide data also reflect declines in Maryland and Virginia.

- In Fairfax County, the number of students reporting any binge drinking in the past 30 days dropped from 11 to 7 percent from 2010 to 2017.
- In the District of Columbia, reports of binge drinking dropped from 13 to 8 percent.

- Even larger decreases were found in the percentage of high school students who reported having one drink on at least one day in the past 30 days.
  - In the District of Columbia, high schoolers who reported drinking decreased from 33 percent in 2011 to 21 percent in 2017.
  - In Fairfax County, the percentage of high schoolers who reported drinking decreased from 21 percent in 2010 to 15 percent in 2017.

Youth tobacco use has undergone substantial changes in recent years with an increased use in e-cigarettes (vaping) as compared to conventional cigarettes.54 Unfortunately, many young people took up the habit before recently discovered links between the use of e-cigarettes and severe, acute health problems became known.55,56 Nevertheless, most smokers still begin using tobacco in their teens, and many become addicted to nicotine, which is a potent toxin available in many forms. Although some vaping products are nicotine-free, the data available on their use unfortunately do not distinguish between those that contain nicotine and those that do not. Many such products combine nicotine with flavorings that may cause some young users to believe the products are less harmful than they actually are.57

As is noted above, young people today are considerably more likely to use e-cigarettes (vaping) than to smoke conventional cigarettes. This is true for the two Greater Washington area jurisdictions for which YRBS data are available. However, rates of smoking e-cigarettes and conventional cigarettes are down overall, despite an increase in smoking e-cigarettes in Fairfax County.
In 2017, 11 percent of high school students in the District of Columbia reported that they had used an electronic vaping product within the past 30 days (see Figure 16).

In the same timeframe, 10 percent of high school students in Fairfax County reported that they had used an electronic vaping product within the past 30 days.

By contrast, only 2 percent of Fairfax County students and 8 percent of District of Columbia students reported smoking cigarettes in the past 30 days.

From 2010 to 2017, rates of cigarette smoking decreased across all racial and ethnic groups in Fairfax County and the District of Columbia.

- In Fairfax County, the highest rates of smoking were reported for Hispanic students, at 4 percent; the lowest were for Asian students, at 1 percent.

Neuroscience research has found that significant brain development is ongoing in adolescence and young adulthood, raising concerns about marijuana use by youth. Evidence indicates that marijuana use may impair cognitive functioning, as well as emotional self-regulation, contributing to risky behaviors.  

In Fairfax County, 10 percent of high schoolers reported recent marijuana use in 2017.

In the same year in the District of Columbia, 33 percent of high school students reported recent marijuana use.

Maintaining regular physical activity is important to maintaining a healthy weight, preventing chronic health conditions, and promoting other positive health outcomes.

The two jurisdictions reporting these data experienced a slight decline in the percentage of high school students who were physically active for at least 60 minutes per day on at least five days in the past week.

- From 2010 to 2017, the percentage of high school students in Fairfax County who reported engaging in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day on at least five days in the past week decreased from 43 to 40 percent.

- In the District of Columbia, the percentage of students who reported engaging in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day on at least five days during the past week decreased from 28 in 2011 to 26 percent in 2017.
Participation in out-of-school-time activities and community service or volunteer projects is high across the region.

Many of today’s young people recognize the value of engaging in activities that strengthen their social, emotional, and physical skills, and that contribute to their communities. Fairly consistently across the region, about eight in 10 youth participate in one or more out-of-school activities, and nearly two thirds are involved regularly in community service.\(^\text{59}\)

Out-of-school-time (OST) programming can be offered before school, after school, and during the summer for school-age children and teens. Such programs provide important opportunities for young people to learn and play in a safe and supervised environment. Well-designed and managed OST programs can also promote important health benefits and social and personal skills,\(^\text{60}\) and can even improve academic achievement.\(^\text{61,62}\)

- In 2017, 83 percent of children ages 6 to 17 in the Greater Washington area participated in one or more organized activities out of school, a slight decline from 85 percent in 2007 (see Table 3).
- Small decreases (of 1 percentage point) in OST participation were found in Prince George’s County and Prince William County.
- Small increases (of 1 percentage point) in OST participation were found in Arlington County and in Alexandria.
- Larger decreases from 2007 to 2017 were found in OST participation the following jurisdictions:
  - District of Columbia (81 to 77 percent)
  - Fairfax County (84 to 79 percent)
  - Loudoun County (92 to 85 percent)
  - Montgomery County (87 to 82 percent)
Youth who participate in voluntary service are more likely to develop leadership skills, effective decision making skills, and a sense of belonging and purpose.\(^\text{63,64}\) All school districts in the region require a community service component as a graduation requirement.\(^\text{65,66,67}\)

- From 2007 to 2017, community service participation among 12- to 17-year-olds in the Greater Washington area increased by 20 percentage points, from 41 to 61 percent (see Figure 17).
- The highest rates of service by adolescents were reported in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties, at 62.1 percent in both localities.
- The lowest rate of service reported was in Falls Church, at 60.2 percent.
TABLE 3

Children ages 6-17 who participated in one or more organized activities outside of school in the past year, 2007 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alexandria, VA</th>
<th>Arlington County, VA</th>
<th>Fairfax County, VA</th>
<th>Falls Church, VA</th>
<th>Loudoun County, VA</th>
<th>Prince William County, VA</th>
<th>Montgomery County, MD</th>
<th>Prince George's County, MD</th>
<th>Washington, D.C.</th>
<th>Greater Washington</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>85%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"-" Data not available. *Greater Washington region total does not include Falls Church, VA. Source: Child Trends’ synthetic estimates based on data from the 2007, 2012, and 2017 National Survey of Children’s Health, and the one-year estimates from American Community Survey for the corresponding years across all jurisdictions, and we used five-year estimates for Falls Church.

FIGURE 17

Percentage of children ages 12-17 involved in community service a few times per month or more, 2007 and 2017

Data collection challenges

The Greater Washington region is a unique geographic area—an aggregation of counties and cities that are linked economically and culturally, yet governed independently.

Comparable data for all jurisdictions, as well as data on a wider range of indicators, would facilitate region-wide planning and action to promote the well-being of all young people in the Greater Washington region.

Regrettably, such robust, region-wide data are lacking for Greater Washington's children and youth, particularly for nonacademic indicators. For several important topic areas, including infant development, behavioral health, and postsecondary education, we were unable to locate data that met conventional standards for consistency of measurement across jurisdictions, disaggregation by important subgroups, or timely reporting.

An additional challenge is identifying an appropriate context for comparing the region's data with those of other metro areas. In some cases, we use national data for this purpose, but we hesitate to hold up any other metro region as a likely peer. The cultural and historical characteristics of the Greater Washington region are sufficiently distinctive to raise cautions about making such comparisons.
Conclusion

Young people will lead our society into the future, regardless of what adults do to either support or hinder them. That future will be brighter if our communities rise to the challenges of nurturing, guiding, equipping, and engaging all young people to succeed.

The Greater Washington region rebounded from the Great Recession and moved into a period of growth and prosperity, but the region’s children have not benefited equally. Research suggests that the recession had more negative and lasting effects on those who have experienced intergenerational poverty and discriminatory policies, the consequences of which reverberate throughout society. Both nationally and in many schools and districts within the Greater Washington area, de facto residential and school segregation, both by income and race, continue to be a reality. As a result, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and low-income students of all races are more likely to attend lower-resourced and lower-performing schools. Similarly, unequal access to preventative and comprehensive health care contribute to differential outcomes in infant mortality rates.

Much work remains to improve prospects for all of the region’s children and youth. The path to progress will not be short or easy. However, history suggests that progress is possible and that gaps in achievement, income, health, and other areas can be narrowed or eliminated.

Leaders across the region may want to examine, for example, how current policies and practices related to housing, transportation, schools, and businesses perpetuate historical inequities. We strongly encourage regional and local leaders to explore ways to ensure that children from all backgrounds—especially low-income students; immigrants; and Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian children—are equally prepared to succeed. To the extent that Greater Washington’s current and future leaders bridge these gaps and broaden participation in a prosperous, inclusive community, they will have proven lessons to share with other metro areas that seek to enhance the quality of life for their own young people.
Endnotes


17 Austermuhle, M. (2019). Maryland is Set to Expand Free Pre-K, But It's Going to Take a While. Retrieved from https://wamu.org/story/19/04/09/maryland-is-set-to-expand-free-pre-k-but-its-going-to-take-a-while/


19 Children’s access to early care and education, particularly the availability of licensed providers, is an important issue. Licenses for early care vary by jurisdiction and state, but they often include guidelines for training and education of staff, safety, nutrition and food served to the children, and classroom size (among many other things). Licensing does not necessarily guarantee quality, but it does set a precedent of a minimum requirement for centers and other locations of care and education. Licensure is often a requirement for programs to expand their services and access new funding streams. (About the National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved from: https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/licensing/about). Some studies show that states with more stringent licensing requirements had more programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). But the relationship between licensure practices leading to improved quality is not well understood in the literature. Maxwell, K., & Starr, R. (March, 2019). *The Role of Licensing in Supporting Quality Practices in Early Care and Education*. OPRE Research Brief, 2019-31. Retrieved from: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/cceepra_licensing_and_quality_brief_508.pdf


27 To identify students that require additional supports to improve proficiency in the English language, different nomenclature is used across the region. The Virginia Department of Education and the District of Columbia State Superintendent of Education use “English Language Learners” and the Maryland Department of Education identifies students eligible for “Limited English Proficient Programs” or students who have “English as Second Language.”


49 Note this is calculated using three-year averages.


59 Access to quality out-of-school time programs and other enrichment activities is widely dependent on family income (Moore, K.A., Murphey, D., Bandy, T., Cooper, M (March, 2014). Participation in Out-of-School Time Activities and Programs. Child Trends Research Brief, 2014-13. Retrieved from: https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014-13OutofSchoolActivities1.pdf). Families in low-income areas have fewer opportunities and limited access to programs for their communities. Also, low-income families spend significantly less on these opportunities than their high-income counterparts, because of financial limitations. The growing divide in opportunity and access has been documented and has also been called "the activity gap" and is particularly exacerbated in the summer (e.g. McCombs, J., Whitaker, A., & Yoo, P. (2017). The value of out-of-school time programs. RAND Corporation).


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- Latin American Youth Center
- Liberty’s Promise
- The SEED School of Washington, D.C.
- Teach For America, D.C.
- Urban Alliance, D.C.

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