

The Town of Brookline Disparity Report Working Group DRAFT November 9, 2021

Executive Summary

In November 2020 Brookline Town Meeting voted for the Town of Brookline to prepare a Report on the Disparities within the Brookline community to better identify equity gaps in basic needs, and access barriers to services and programs that Brookline residents are facing. A working group composed of community members and representatives from various Brookline organizations, led by the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations, has spent the last year collaborating with other Town Departments and community organizations to prepare a Report on ways to repair and comprehensively address the disparities in Brookline. The full Disparity Report below reflects qualitative and quantitative data that was available within the municipality and community organizations within Brookline. This Report identifies and defines the disparities that exist in Brookline's programming, resources, and services among traditionally underrepresented groups, and includes recommendations on fiscal allocations to the Town Budget, as well as concrete actions that should be taken by the Town to address and remedy those Disparities.

Many of the disparities that the Working Group examined are systemic in nature and are interconnected and interdependent in many ways. The Working Group has identified 5 key overarching recommendations based on the key findings and narratives that are addressed in the following full Report. All recommendations are designed to ensure that Brookline becomes a Town where no disparities or discrimination occurs on basis of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, veteran status, age, citizenship status, or spoken language. It is also suggested that all recommendations should be implemented and designed using the overarching principles of Universal Design Concepts (see definition starting on page 48).

Overarching KEY Recommendations

- 1) A Town-wide commitment to addressing systemic barriers and redesigning the systems themselves to fix current disparities and prevent future ones.
 - Specific recommended actions: favorable action on relevant WAs that ensure and increase community access to all town activities, including language access, and access to hybrid and virtual meetings.

2) The creation of a Town of Brookline Social Services department as a means to create synergies and coordination of community and State resources.

Recommended roles of this department would be to:

- establish clear SMART outcome goals for all disparity measures, and a regular processes for analyzing the effectiveness of existing and new programs;
- ensure that this assessment of Town disparities is re-conducted at a minimum of every three years, and updated annually with any significant changes to program offerings, including tracking how many recommendations have been implemented and funded.

3) Equity and engagement of *all* residents and community members is essential to mitigate disparities, especially the engagement of those residents that are experiencing the disparities. The Town needs to prioritize equitable communication for all Town services, government, and events.

- Specific recommendations include:
 - commit to re-assessment of townwide communications by each department;
 - user experience study of Town website and payment sites and BrookOnlin;
 - Inclusion of those experiencing the service disparities in discussions/decision-making about the network of services;
 - re-assessment of data collection and inter-agency sharing practices;
 - a publicly available anonymized data portal.

4) Ensure that *all* community members have access to all aspects of public safety; including emergency response, mental health services, and proactive and preventative health programs.

- Specific recommendations include:
 - support the recent recommendation of the Select Board to create a parallel, unarmed public-health-based emergency response service;
 - provide Town resources to the Brookline Center and related organizations to expand their clinical mental health program;
 - expand the existing wellness check program for all at-risk residents;
 - ensure that all students and all residents have access to social workers;
 - provide support for unhoused community members, and those at risk of losing housing;

- proactive and preventative health programs such as blood pressure clinics, access to COVID testing, vaccination, and other healthcare needs.
- 5) Commit to finding ways to make Brookline more affordable (housing, education, employment, childcare) which would improve the overall quality of life of all residents. Ensure Brookline's educational and childcare programs expand and adapt with the needs of a growing and more diverse population.
- Specific recommendations:
 - consider zoning reform and related efforts to increase housing affordability;
 - reconsider rent control;
 - make application assistance available to residents who are applying for housing assistance and/or employment (build on existing Brookline Center and social worker programs);
 - ensure that childcare, after-school programs, and electives/regular curriculum courses including advanced placement are affordable for all.

Over the next several months, the Working Group will actively be seeking community input on disparities in Brookline, and feedback of the content and recommendations of this draft Report through community forums, presentations to community groups, and through the Disparity Report Survey that can be found here: <https://www.brooklinema.gov/1898/Disparity-Report>. The Final Disparity Report is expected to be finalized in February 2022, in advance of review of the Town budget and warrant articles for the Spring Town Meeting in May 2022.

If you have any questions about the Disparity Report or would like to provide feedback or learn more about the Working Group and the process of compiling this Report, please contact Caitlin Starr, MPH, CDE at 617-730-2345 or at cstarr@brooklinema.gov.

Background

The Disparity Report was undertaken as a result of a Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 32 that was passed on Day 5 of the November 17, 2020 Special Town Meeting. The Warrant Article urged the Town to reconcile gaps and disparities through direct budgeting by identifying the unmet needs of the traditionally underrepresented communities in Brookline; primarily residents of color, low income residents, residents with disabilities, and aging residents. To identify these needs, the Town needed to gather data from the various social and community organizations as well as groups that specifically serve these groups of residents, and establish a baseline of services currently available, as well as the gaps in services needed but currently unavailable.

This Disparity Report is the result of that effort, and reflects both the qualitative and quantitative data that was available within the municipality and community organizations of Brookline. This report reflects the intent to identify the Disparities that exist in Brookline's programming, resources, and services among these traditionally underrepresented groups, and ultimately includes recommendations on fiscal allocations to the Town Budget, as well as concrete actions that need to be taken by the Town to address and remedy those Disparities.

A working group comprised of the Assistant Director in the Brookline Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations, Brookline's ADA Coordinator, representatives from the Commission for Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations, Brookline Housing Authority, Steps to Success, Mutual Aid Brookline, the Senior Center, and other Brookline community groups was formed. For the purposes of this report, they identified and defined fourteen Disparity Measures to evaluate. The full Disparity Report will look at the following measures:

- access to technology
- access to food,
- access and availability to Covid-19 testing and vaccination,
- education,
- employment,
- housing status and affordability,
- health disparities,
- mental health disorders and substance use disorders,
- quality of life measures,
- access to adequate transportation,
- Public Safety services,
- language access,
- childcare,
- Universal Design concept.

Report Measures: Definitions, Data and Findings, and Recommendations

Technology Access

Technology Access is defined as access to broadband internet (BIA), access to a functioning computer, and access to a functioning cell phone. Access to the internet and adequate technology devices is critical for individuals, families, and communities to conduct the basic functions of living, learning, working, and playing in a healthy manner. The American Medical Association has identified and defined six different social determinants of health. These include access to the healthcare system, economic stability, education, food, community and social context, neighborhood and physical environment, and information. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that a lack of BIA affects each of these social determinants, as well as another domain that has become increasingly important - access to credible information. In order to access BIA, people must have the appropriate devices, such as a functioning computer and/or cell phone, as well as some training on how to use the devices and their common functions, such as email, video calling, and setting up telehealth appointments.¹ Our society is quickly moving to more online and remote operations including job searches/applications, filing for unemployment benefits, attending school and work, and accessing healthcare. It is imperative that all residents have the technology access to fully participate in all of these services and opportunities.

According to the Brookline Housing Authority (BHA) approximately 984 households are living in properties owned and managed by the housing authority. Roughly half of households live in elderly/disabled properties, and the other households in family properties. With respect to data on Internet connectivity, a phone and paper mail survey on technology was conducted by a third party at the BHA's elderly properties. (Figure 1). Attempts were made to contact all residents of these properties by phone, and the response rate was roughly 50% of the BHA elderly households. Surveys of BHA families with children have found near-universal access to broadband internet, with varying levels of affordability.

¹ Benda, N. C., Veinot, T. C., Sieck, C. J., & Ancker, J. S. (2020). Broadband internet access is a social determinant of health! In *American Journal of Public Health* (Vol. 110, Issue 8, pp. 1123–1125). American Public Health Association Inc. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305784>

Kickham

3/25 (12%) no technology devices	3/25 (12%) no wifi or internet connection	2/25 (8%) have interest for new devices	2/25 (8%) agreed with virtual activities	5/25 (20%) agreed with outdoor activities
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7/26 (27%) no technology devices	8/26 (31%) no wifi or internet connection	1/26 (4%) have interest for new devices	3/26 (11.5%) agreed with virtual activities	7/26 (27%) agreed with outdoor activities
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Morse

12/40 (30%) no technology devices	13/40 (32.5%) no wifi or internet connection	1/40 (2.5%) have interest for new devices	8/40 (20%) agreed with virtual activities	9/40 (22.5%) agreed with outdoor activities
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Figure 1. Data from Phone Survey of 3 BHA Elderly Properties

The Brookline Housing Authority currently provides a high speed internet hook up in all units through Discount RCN, Comcast, and Starry Internet service for residents of public housing at the monthly rate of \$10-\$15/month. BHA also offers Internet access in community rooms or designated family learning centers. However, due to redevelopment activity and COVID precautions, communal Internet access continues to be limited. To support expanded access, the Brookline Housing Authority contracted with Starry Internet to provide prequalified access to the discounted “Starry Connect” program which provides streamlined access to affordable Internet service. Through the federally funded “Emergency Broadband Benefit” (EBB) program, BHA residents may qualify for up to \$50/month Internet service free of charge through the duration of the pandemic. BHA has used a variety of outreach strategies to inform and assist residents about available resources.

The Brookline Public Library (BPL) provides several resources and services that assist with overcoming barriers to accessing technology. The BPL offers free wifi for the public. While the Library buildings were not open to the public due to COVID-19 for some time, the wifi was still up and running, and there were signs posted outside the Library letting the public know that they were in range. The Library reported approximately 500 uses of the Library public wifi network in an 8 week period from December 2020-Feb 2021. BPL also offers Hotspots for checkout. They have a total of 30 Sprint Pocket WiFi units that may be checked out for two weeks, and are requestable for pickup at the owning library. Each unit has an unlimited data plan and

should work wherever Sprint has network coverage. There have been 84 circulations of these Hotspots this fiscal year. As far as access to computers and other hardware, the Library has Chromebooks available for 2-week checkouts (with or without a wifi hotspot). A Chromebook is a simple laptop computer that lets you browse the internet, participate in web conferences/video meetings, and do word processing as long as you have a wifi connection. As of the beginning of February 2021, the Library had checked out 24 Chromebooks since they started offering them in November 2020. In non-pandemic times, the Library offers in-library desktop use to any member of the public, and doesn't require a library card. The Library also has iPads available for two week checkouts. The Library also offers printing services to the community. In non-pandemic times, people can come into the library and print: \$0.15 / page black and white, or \$0.40 / page color. On Tuesday, February 16, 2021, the Library began an email-to-print service where residents can print 15 free pages of black and white printing per person per day. The Library does not have fax machines at any of the three locations, although patrons can utilize photocopiers with scanning capability. Lastly, the Library shared with the Working Group that there are reference librarians who can offer assistance with library resources (plus basic computer/internet skills) Monday - Thursday, 9 a.m. - 9 p.m., Friday - Saturday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. These reference services are currently available by phone, chat, or email. In non-pandemic times, they also offer one-on-one in person appointments with a librarian for longer, more in-depth questions.

The Brookline Office of Emergency Management At the beginning of COVID-19, the Emergency Management team realized the need of seniors and adults with disabilities living alone who were now isolated at home with no access to the community at large, leaving a large population of the Brookline community in need of food, medicine, and other essentials. Those seniors and adults with disabilities living alone that had previously relied on access to the internet or computers at the Library or residential community rooms, no longer had those resources at their disposal. In February 2021, the Brookline Office of Emergency Management applied for grant funding for technology for Brookline's senior residents to help fund the "Tech Buddies Program" in the amount of \$40,000. The Tech Buddies Program's objective is to provide internet access, devices, and education and training on how to use the devices to Brookline seniors and adults with disabilities in need. At the time of the grant proposal, the initial funding was anticipated to be used to procure approximately 100 Samsung Tab A Tablets, and to pay for internet access for seniors or adults with disabilities living alone who do not have the resources. Funds were granted and the program engaged community partners to assist in identifying seniors and high school students who would serve as the Senior's support system, and who would develop and share visual tutorials. They created flyers in multiple languages (currently, English, Russian, Chinese, and Spanish) and did not put definitive criteria for the program on their flyer in

the hopes of encouraging people to not self-select out of the program. Their points-of-contact took down information on a Google Form designed to determine initial eligibility and volunteers verified information and sought income information when necessary. If they did not qualify for Tech Buddies the resident was given information about other programs they may qualify for.

Data regarding program participants is as follows (as of November 3, 2021):

Number of people who have applied : 61

Number of people who qualified: 45

of the 45:

- 23 need both tablet **and** internet
- 18 need only a tablet
- 4 need only internet access

Delivery:

- 14 tablets have been delivered,
 - 1 resident refused to accept the tablet from the volunteer
- 4 are in process
- 1 participant needing just a tablet has not been contacted yet and that resident pre-qualified on 11/2/2021 which was yesterday

Demographic data provided:

- 40.4% of respondents live at BHA
- 57.1% of respondents not living at BHA are on a public assistance program
- 66.7% not living at BHA or on a public assistance program are at (or below) the 200% poverty level.

The program is currently working with Comcast to provide free internet access for a year to those residents that have qualified. This contact has been vetted and the necessary codes should be delivered within the next week. Finding volunteers to deliver the tablets to the residents has proven difficult due to many interested volunteers being high school students and fears around COVID-19. While the immediate need for more support services for seniors surrounding access to technology was exacerbated by the pandemic, the need for a program such as this is long-term.

Recommendations:

- Provide additional annual funding to allow for sustainable support of the “Tech Buddies” program.
- Assist the Brookline Library with community communications about the resources available, and increase utilization of those resources.
- Provide communications in several languages and identify Town support to ensure that residents in need have access to federal programs such as Lifeline and the Emergency Broadband Benefit.
- Continue to publicize virtual Town meetings as broadly as possible to enable increased public participation and communication.
- Ensure that post COVID-19, in-person meeting rooms throughout the Town have the proper technology and tools to allow for simultaneous remote access participation.

Availability and Access of COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination

Defined as the Brookline community access to COVID-19 testing, as well as equitable distribution of the vaccine as it becomes available. BIPOC communities have been the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, yet they are being vaccinated in the lowest numbers. Statewide, as of January 28th, only 2.6% of people vaccinated identified as Latinx, and 3.3% identified as Black, while 40% of those vaccinated identify as white.² Approximately 12.3% of Massachusetts residents identify as Latinx, 7.3% identify as Black, 7.1% as Asian, and 1.8% as multi-racial, while 71.2% identify as white. As of November 2nd, only 63% of Massachusetts residents identified as Black and only 61% of residents identified as Latinx have received one dose of the vaccine, compared to 72% of residents who identified as white, 74% of residents who identified as Asian, and >95% of residents who identified as multiracial.³ Editor’s note: the high percentage of residents who identify as multiracial may reflect an underestimation of total multiracial residents by the Commonwealth and by the counties in which they reside, as well as an increased ability to choose multiple races in recent surveys and the 2020 Census. As data collection standards change, these shifts should be noted alongside historical data. Ideally, future surveys and data collection will include the ability to view data from each race/ethnicity (as the Commonwealth data do now) but

² Lee, R. (2021, February 1). *The Big 3: Ensuring equity in COVID-19 vaccine distribution* | News | Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/ensuring-equity-in-covid-19-vaccine-distribution/>

³ “Weekly COVID-19 Vaccination Report.” Massachusetts Department of Public Health COVID-19 Dashboard, Thursday, November 4, 2021.

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/weekly-covid-19-vaccination-report-november-4-2021/download>.

also view how many multiracial respondents are also identified as that race/ethnicity (not currently available from the Commonwealth but recently available from the Census).

The above percentages clearly illustrate a slower timeline for vaccination of Black and Latinx populations statewide. One of the largest barriers to an equitable vaccine distribution is the fact that the majority of appointments are accessed online or on the phone, meaning those who do not have access to BIA, or a functional computer/phone have a more difficult time scheduling appointments. Other barriers to both an equitable rollout of the vaccine, as well as COVID-19 testing, are access to the information in an individual's primary language, access to transportation to an appointment, as well as access to insurance and resources. Creating an equitable vaccine distribution and testing access would prevent the further widening of health disparities.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health releases weekly COVID vaccination updates by municipality and by zip code. These data are accurate for zip codes 02445 and 02446, but there appear to be some irregularities with the data for zip code 02467, which is shared with neighboring Boston and Newton but is not recorded as an overlapping zip code in the cover sheet for the available data. As of November 2nd, 2021, 26,290 Brookline residents identifying as white received at least one dose (23,730 fully vaccinated), compared to 2,255 residents identifying as Latinx (1,904 fully vaccinated), 1,232 residents identifying as Black (1,105 fully vaccinated), 6,627 residents identifying as Asian (6,065 fully vaccinated), and 1,641 residents identifying as multiracial (1,547 fully vaccinated).⁴ While these data are often reported as percentages of total populations by race, the DPH uses a different and higher population estimate than the 2020 Census population estimate for Brookline, which likely results in underreporting of vaccination percentages. Using the 2020 Census population estimate of 63,191, the following are the at least one dose vaccination percentages for Brookline residents: 26,290/42,233 residents identifying as white (62.2%), 2,255/4,272 residents identifying as Latinx (52.7%), 1,232/2,069 residents identifying as Black (59.5%), 6,627/12,124 residents identifying as Asian (54.6%), and 1,641/5,346 residents identifying as multiracial (30.7%). The DPH dataset grossly underestimates the number of Brookline residents who identify as multiracial, using a presumably older figure of 2,487 compared to the 2020 Census figure of 5,346. This bears out the potential data bias mentioned above in relation to statewide vaccination data.

⁴ "Weekly COVID-19 Municipality Vaccination Report – November 4, 2021." Massachusetts Department of Public Health. See <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-vaccination-data-and-updates#weekly-covid-19-municipality-vaccination-data> for the latest data (updated on Thursdays by 5pm).

Future reports from the Massachusetts DPH and Brookline's Department of Public Health must take into account the changing racial and ethnic makeup of our Town and accommodate the more than 8% of our population who identify as multiracial in order to provide accurate data. These data biases are not limited to race and ethnicity, although the biggest changes in data collection in recent years have been in this area. Age breakdowns of populations are not yet publicly available on the municipal level from the 2020 Census but it would be helpful to go through vaccination data with updated population-by-age numbers. Data collection of sex variables is very quickly becoming a new area of change (including the recent introduction of a third sex as an official federal identifier and increasing opportunities to recognize people who identify as non-binary, which need to be showcased in dataset cover sheets and to be highlighted as gaps in historical data which only included binary options), and recent surveys at times offer data collection of gender and sexuality data as well, which should be examined as potential variables particularly in relation to the availability of and access to public health.

The Brookline Health Department provided COVID-19 case data that has been collected from March 2020- October 2021. It was noted that approximately 90% of Brookline cases have known Race/Ethnicity data available. Figure 2. and Figure 3. show that the proportion of burden has had a greater impact on the BIPOC community in Brookline.

The Brookline Department of Public Health partnered with mPathy LLC to open a COVID-19 testing site at the Health Department, located at 11 Pierce Street that was open from November 2020 until it closed on March 4, 2021. Subsidies for symptomatic and uninsured residents were available via CARES funding after December 2020. From December 2020 to the site's closing in March, six residents utilized the subsidy program. The subsidy program did not continue when the site closed, leaving uninsured residents no local free options for testing. The testing site was reportedly closed because the CARES Act funding used to operate the site was depleted, and the number of tests being administered daily were dropping significantly. Over the four months that the testing site was operating, clinic staff administered more than 9,700 tests and identified 385 positive cases.

As of February 22, 2021, the Brookline Health Department was currently waiting for vaccines to be made available, and acknowledged that the State was currently prioritizing larger vaccination sites, but was working with the Brookline Housing Authority and the Office of Emergency Management to develop a vaccination plan for Brookline's most vulnerable populations. The State had approved on-site clinics at BHA Senior Housing, and these three were collaborating to ensure a smooth and

equitable rollout. The Working Group would like to include a comprehensive update on Brookline’s vaccination rollout in the Final Disparity Report.

Brookline COVID-19 Case Count by Race as of October 24, 2021	
Race	Count
Asian	247
Black African American	111
Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	1
Other	871
Unknown	298
White	1627
Total	3155

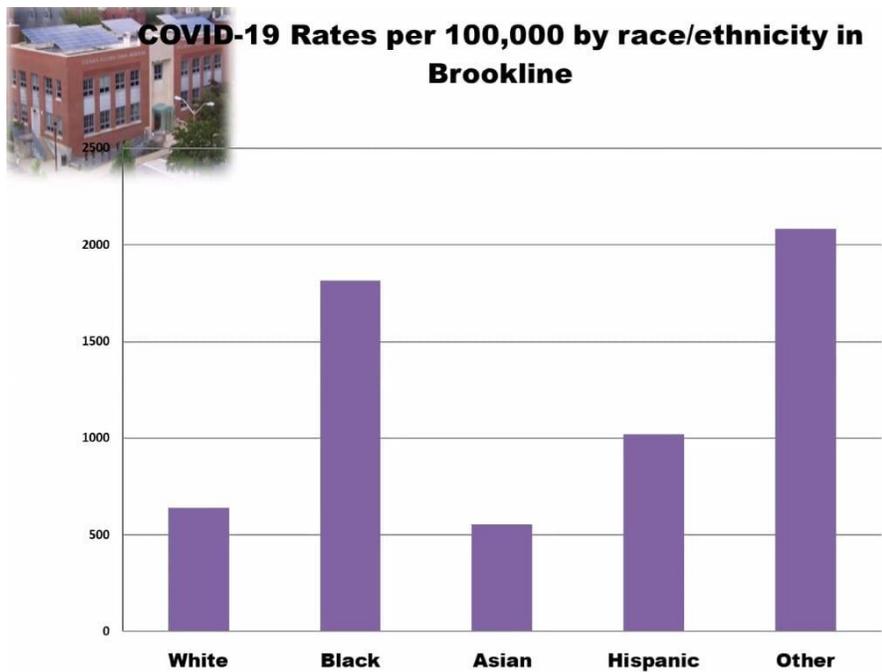


Figure 2 and 3. COVID-19 Cases by Race and Rates per 100,000 in Brookline provided by Brookline Department of Health

The Office of Emergency Management reported 300 calls a week at the call center over a four week period from mid January to mid February. As of Feb 22, 2021 7,500 residents had filled out a google form indicating their eligibility for COVID-19 vaccination priorities (over 75, over 65, comorbidities, etc). Town staff periodically follow up with residents on the list to let them know of vaccine appointment availability and support. The Office of Emergency Management has also collaborated with the Senior Center, the Town ADA Coordinator, and others to identify and create a list of homebound individuals in Brookline.

Recommendations:

- Understanding from the State and the Town to consider and prioritize transportation access to mass vaccination sites. While the Executive Office of Health and Human Services is now covering transportation costs for MassHealth recipients that can not easily get to a vaccination site, the process is not necessarily simple as consumers still need to request and receive a P-1 reference number. Designated Town staff should be able to assist members of our community through the process and offer other resources or alternatives for residents who are not insured. These opportunities should be widely disseminated through Town channels (press release, social media, local newspapers).
- After the Brookline testing site was closed with almost no warning, Brookline residents were facing barriers to testing. The three alternatives that were provided require referrals to get tested, which may be another barrier for some residents. The Department of Public Health should put together a more comprehensive list of testing sites that residents can access without insurance or referrals, as well as indicating the cost to get tested at the site and if they offer a subsidy. This information should be available in multiple languages and shared widely.
- More widely publicize the weekly Moderna COVID vaccine availability and future COVID vaccine clinics such as the one on November 14th. Use digital and print means to ensure all Brookline residents are receiving the latest COVID testing and vaccine information.
- Ensure that all data are considered in relation to the latest Census and population numbers, particularly in relation to race/ethnicity, age, and sex.
- Publish monthly updates of Brookline public health data (including COVID data) on a publicly viewable health dashboard.
- Begin planning for homebound vaccine booster distribution for all homebound residents that received vaccination beginning in April 2021.

Food Access

Food Access is defined as the ability of individual Brookline residents to have access to affordable food, and to the resources for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet, including food choice and culturally-appropriate foods. Lack of such access has both healthcare and social costs. When people are facing food insecurity, they are often forced to eat whatever food is most affordable and available to them, and when that food insecurity affects households with children, it can have negative long-term impacts on the children. These children are more likely to have diminished physical and mental health, longer recovery periods when sick, higher hospitalization rates, and greater incidences of developmental and educational delays when compared to children in households with stable food access.⁵ Food insecurity also impacts Brookline's growing senior population, many of whom make use of the Senior Center pantry, the main Brookline Food Pantry, and Mutual Aid Brookline. All Brookline residents and employees have the right to stable, nutritious, and culturally-appropriate food access, including delivery services that take into account cost, COVID precautions, and mobility issues.

As of March 2021 The Brookline Food Pantry is run at three locations, four days a week. They are staffed primarily by volunteers, and donations, as well as by three paid staff. Prior to the pandemic, between 150-175 families were served each week. Since March 2020, they have been serving between 600-700 families a week. In March of 2020, the Brookline Food Pantry also implemented a food delivery service for seniors and residents with health concerns. There are 170 families in this program, with the option of getting weekly or biweekly deliveries. As of March 2021, they are making between 120-130 deliveries a week. The current food cost for the Pantry is four times higher than it was in 2019. They have been able to address this increase with Federal grants, virtual fundraising, and additional donors. As of March 2021, there is no proof of eligibility required; families in need are initially asked why they are in need of food access the first time they come to the food pantry, and then are given an ID Card for future visits.

Brookline Thrives is a volunteer-run organization that provides free weekend food packs to public school students in need. During the pandemic, with the help of school staff, Thrives has been able to continue in-school delivery of food to their existing partner schools - Lincoln, FRR, Pierce and BEEP. Bags are available to both cohort A and B students, as well as full-time students. Thrives has made bags available district-wide by distributing food at all remote school meal sites on Friday afternoons.

⁵ Murthy, V. H. (2016). Food Insecurity. *Public Health Reports*, 131(5), 655–657. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033354916664154>

Locations are: BHA High St Vets, BHA 22 High St, BHA Egmont, BHS, Pierce, Baker and FRR. Thrives distributes an average of just over 500 bags per week. 14% of bags are for students with food allergies or other dietary restrictions. Bags have been modified this year to provide additional snacks (2 per day for 7 days), to make up for snacks students are not receiving at school. Thrives distribution is more than double that of the last school year (2019-2020), and food costs are about 2.5 times higher than they were in 2019-20. Thrives does not collect demographic or economic information for those receiving their bags. Field observation indicates that participating families are a mix of ethnicities and races, and national data indicates that food insecurity is not tied solely to low-income families.

The Food Pantry has identified some areas and populations that continue to be underserved. High School students are not picking up Thrive bags, and do not go to the Pantry. Thrive bags are not necessarily ideal for older teens, and they are currently working with Brookline High School and the Teen Center to open “mini pantries”. The Food Pantry would also like to continue its outreach to Brookline Housing Authority residents, and the Brookline community at large, in a variety of languages.

The Brookline Public School - Food Services reports providing 280,000 meals (breakfast and lunch) to families in the district over the last school year, both in school and at the mobile sites. The district has seen a 3% increase in ‘free and reduced meals’ eligibility in the 2020-2021 school year. This is compared to a typical annual increase of approximately .5%. This increase is likely due to families not having to prove eligibility status because of the USDA waiver allowing all students in the district to have access to free food. Free and reduced meals eligibility also opens up access to extra or additional funding, such as Pandemic -EBT⁶. BPS acknowledged the need for more outreach to get families to apply in order to get the additional benefits, and it encourages families to sign up for SNAP. The School district will be continuing to provide all students with free meals through June 30, 2021. The Disparity Report Working group intends to include an update on the continuation of free lunches through the Food Services Administration in the Final Disparity Report in February 2022.

Springwell is a private, non-profit organization that has been creating, managing, and coordinating comprehensive services to seniors, individuals with disabilities and those who provide care, guided by a commitment to an individual’s right to live independently in the community⁷. Springwell provides congregate and home-delivered meals to residents of Brookline Housing Authority senior properties and other qualified

⁶ <https://www.map-ebt.org/> The *Pandemic - Electronic Benefits Transfer* (P-EBT) Program was created in Spring 2020 to provide funds for families to buy food while schools were closed due to COVID-19. More P-EBT funds are being issued for the 2020-2021 school year.

⁷ <https://springwell.com/about-us/>

residents of Brookline. Springwell provided 17,340 home-delivered and take-home meals to BHA residents, continuing without interruption throughout the pandemic.

Mutual Aid Brookline has been serving Brookline on a completely volunteer basis since March 2020. MAB regularly provides full grocery subsidies to more than 40 Brookline households, and provides shopping and delivery services for up to 20 additional households.

The need for contactless delivery is not addressed by the existing Town services in Brookline, but between MAB and the Food Pantry, more than 200 Brookline households are receiving food deliveries, and that does not account for other members of the Brookline community who use Springwell and other meal delivery services.

Along with specific grocery lists chosen by each household, MAB will subsidize items that are not covered by the Department of Transitional Assistance’s Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card or pantry offerings, including important items such as medications, snacks for all age levels, holiday treats and birthday cake, and cleaning supplies. Brookline needs to centralize these services, and prioritize not only equitable access to nutritious foods, but to food choice, and culturally-specific foods.

Monthly Delivery Subsidies with Key Events

Peaks: Holidays 2020, Start of Gift Card Pilot 2021

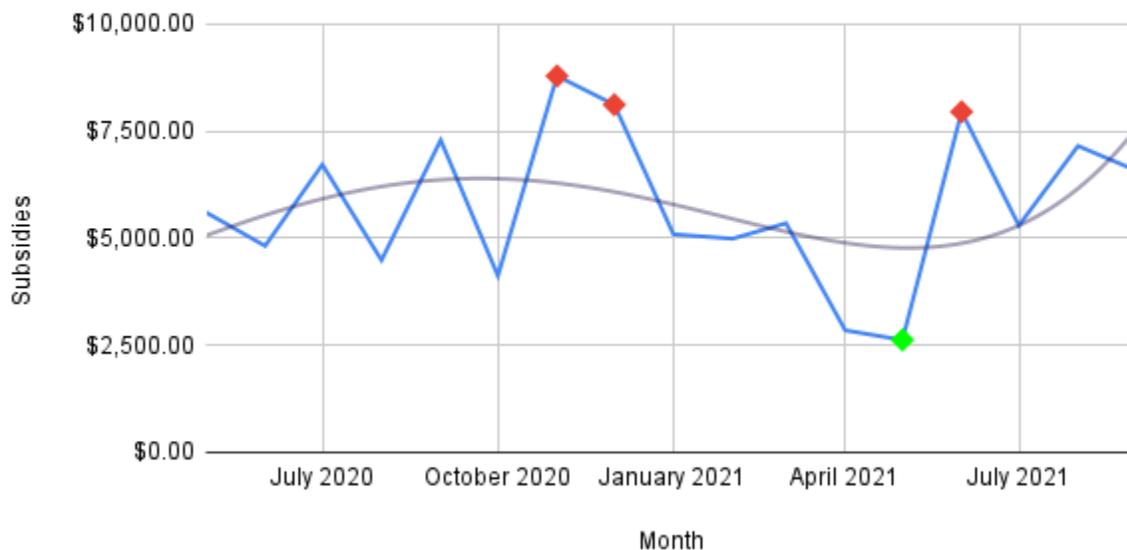


Figure 4. While late spring and early summer 2021 saw a decrease in delivery requests, once the grocery gift card pilot program began in June 2021, demand once again spiked.

Gift Cards vs. Date



Figure 5. The gift card pilot program, starting in June 2021, has only grown in popularity.

Subsidies* vs. Date (May 2020 to September 2021)

*Limited After 09/07/21 Due to Lack of Funds

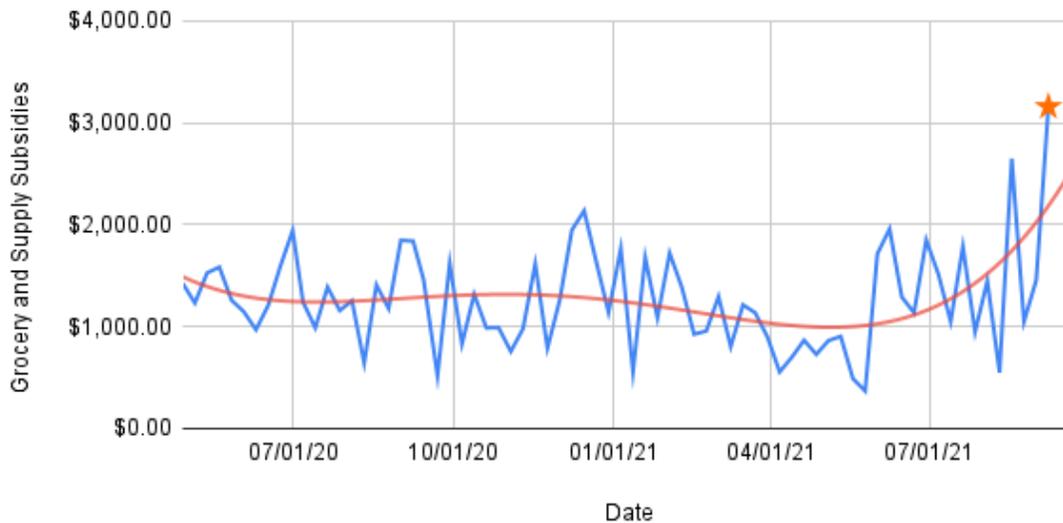


Figure 6. MAB began limiting subsidies to \$100 per 1-2 person household and \$200 per 3-4 person household per two weeks in September 2021. The grocery delivery program is currently on a waitlist system as MAB fundraises to respond to higher demand for gift cards.

While MAB has streamlined its system and reduced their total number of biweekly deliveries by asking clients to consolidate their orders to every two weeks, weekly subsidies remained fairly constant until the early summer of 2021 (low) and the fall of 2021 (high). The need for grocery subsidies has not diminished; , rather during September and October 2021, it has substantially increased. This corresponds to families' loss of the federal unemployment boost, as well as the expenses required during the return-to-school period. Despite MAB's grocery gift card program, begun in June 2021, as well as the wider knowledge of the MAB gift cards due to the cash-drop program of September and October 2021, food insecurity still exists in Brookline.

The 1525 deliveries and the \$105,150.54 distributed by MAB (as of October 26th, 2021) have allowed volunteers to shop for neighbors with their own grocery lists, complete with substitution preferences and special requests. The grocery gift card program, begun in June 2021, allows neighbors to receive deliveries of grocery gift cards and do their own grocery shopping. Paid services such as Instacart and Peapod can schedule a week or more out, depending on demand: MAB's volunteers can schedule within three to five days, and within 24 hours for emergency out-of-food or out-of-medication situations. MAB collates anonymized data including subsidy amounts, neighborhoods, BHA housing, elderly and disabled housing, and number of repeat clients, all of which are visible in MAB's Deliveries by the Numbers spreadsheet and weekly fact sheets.⁸

Brookline's current systems are inadequate to support the estimated 12.3% of our residents living below the federal poverty line in 2019, and the more than 26% of our residents who are living below three times that level - a level research suggests is the estimated cost of living in Brookline.^{9,10} A recent Feeding America report singled out Norfolk County as having the highest increase of child food insecurity in the country.¹¹

⁸ MAB Deliveries by the Numbers, updated weekly on Tuesdays:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19KP7KfW41NXIYXx0tVCWjfdUTdFv5jDsiF7D5W-z83I/edit?usp=sharing>. To join the weekly delivery fact sheet list, please email mutualaidbrookline.delivery@gmail.com.

⁹ ACS 2019

(<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=brookline&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1701&hidePreview=false>).

¹⁰ BCF report for cost of living

(<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b2920ad5b409b6a11fdc538/t/5c6d69b89140b752b96b9578/1550674362498/Understanding+Brookline-A+Report+on+Poverty.pdf>); Boston-based Crittenton Women's Union has developed an Economic Independence Index to get a more realistic estimate of the cost of living in Massachusetts. For Norfolk County (which includes Brookline), the calculator estimates a minimum required income of \$76,152 for two adults with one pre-school age child and one school-age child.) and ACS 2019 for percent of 300% above fed poverty line.

¹¹ Feeding America, 163% increase in child food insecurity in Norfolk County

(https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief_Local%20Impact_10.2020_0.pdf)

Food justice is food equity: our BIPOC community members are more likely to be food insecure.¹²

In June of 2021 The Brookline Department of Health and Human Services was awarded \$43,000 in grant funds from the Kresge Foundation to address food insecurity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic for low-income residents, seniors and veterans. The program “Eat Your Fruit and Veggies” offered vouchers to eligible residents to utilize at participating Farmers’ Market vendors. \$2,000 was awarded to the Farmer’s Market to cover additional operation costs and \$30,000 was allocated to go towards Brookline Farmers’ Market vouchers to be handed out to residents. The program began in August and was scheduled to run through October, however the Community Health Division has extended the program to run through the final 3 weeks of the Farmers’ Market. The program registration occurred at a total of 11 locations:

- BHA sites: 61 Park St., 22 High St., 224 High St., 50 Pleasant St., 190 Harvard St., Trustman/ Egmont.
- 99 Kent St.,
- Village Way,
- Town Hall,
- Health Department,
- And at the Farmers’ Market for multiple weeks to register and distribute vouchers on site.

As of October 31, 2021 there were 478 separate households located throughout Brookline that have registered. 331 households of one to two people received one coupon book (\$40). 147 households of three or more have received two coupon books (\$80). As of mid-October, 21 vendors submitted invoices totaling \$16,000. The BDHHS projects that vendors will submit an additional \$8,000 in invoices through November 4, 2021. Because there are still unused coupons out in the community, the program coordinators plan to offer special bonus coupons during the last two weeks of the market (November 11 and 18).

Recommendations

- A designated Town social services/human services staff person dedicated to addressing food insecurity and ensuring continuity and sustainability of local food resources.
 - Quarterly communication with Brookline’s low-income residents, senior residents, and other vulnerable residents to assess and ensure that they are receiving adequate services and that gaps in

¹² ACS 2019: 25% of Black households in Brookline use SNAP/EBT, compared to 4% of white households, despite Black households making up 3% of the population and white households making up 75%.

need are being addressed. This would enable the Town to have a comprehensive map of the food insecurities in Brookline.

- Development of a comprehensive, centralized resource, available in several languages, made easily accessible both electronically and in print;
- Emphasize the continued need for alternative means of acquiring food, deliveries, curbside pickup, etc., and provide incentives to local businesses to provide these services;
- Encourage community partnerships such as the local 'restaurant pantry meals program' pilot, and an expansion of the grocery gift card program through the Brookline Center;
- Town commitment of non-emergency funds to the Brookline Food Pantry.
- Establish community gardens and awareness campaigns around gardening and nutritional food access;
- Emulate several other neighborhoods, and continue the Brookline Farmers Market outside throughout the Winter season;
Collaborate with community organizations and businesses to operate and stock community fridges.

Mental Health and Behavioral Health

Mental health is defined as a person's well-being with regard to their psychological and emotional health. In the United States, only 43% of people with a mental illness receive some form of treatment. Due to a multitude of factors people of color, low income individuals, and individuals in the LGBTQIA+ community are more likely to have poor mental health. These factors include: accessibility of high quality mental health care, cultural stigma surrounding mental health and mental health care, discrimination, and lack of awareness about mental health and mental health options and treatments. There are three common types of treatment options: outpatient, inpatient, and prescription. In order to better diagnose and treat people, we need to work to remove the barriers to care that exist. These barriers include the ones stated above, as well as language barriers between doctor and patient, lack of insurance/underinsurance, lack of culturally diverse providers, as well as a lack of trust and confidence in the healthcare system.

The Brookline Center for Community Mental Health provides access to mental health care and community-based programs and services. According to a 2020 Board Report, the Brookline Center delivered approximately 42,000 hours of care for close to 4,000 people, including more than 1,500 children in 2020. The Center receives an average of 2,250 calls each year, resulting in 1,800 individuals going through the intake

process and beginning care. In particular, the Center cares for underserved individuals with low incomes (75 percent of clients at the Center live in low or middle-income households), limited care access, and serious mental illness¹³. The Center reported a 21% increase in services this past year, whereas in past years it has been closer to 5%.

Currently the Brookline Center for Community Health has a little over 25% of staff identifying as BIPOC. Some of the Center's employees are also able to provide translation in Spanish, Mandarin, and Haitian Creole. However, providing care in other languages continues to be a major barrier in the field. The Center has limited demographic data for its clients, but is hoping to expand its data collection to determine areas of need that are not being appropriately met. The Center also is continuing to expand services as outpatient needs increase. Currently, new clients are facing an average wait time of 2 to 6 months, depending on insurance coverage and the need for urgent care. The Brookline Center serves everyone in the community, regardless of ability to pay. By offering sliding-scale payments, and assisting with insurance needs if applicable, the Center does its best to ensure that people have access to programs and services that they have the right to access. The Center is anticipating the rollout of the new State Roadmap for Behavioral Health Reform,¹⁴ and will be adding concurring substance use programming in the next 6 months. By providing more funding to allow providers to offer urgent access, the Center is hoping to see mental health resources strengthened across the State, however, there is still a long way to go to adequately provide culturally competent treatment and better serve traditionally underrepresented residents.

The Brookline Housing Authority has a nearly 30- year collaboration with Brookline Center for Community Mental Health to support residents through service coordination and clinical services. This program has created the opportunity to provide necessary resources and a safety net to residents to help ensure tenancy preservation and well-being. In a time of stagnant funding for public housing, the housing authority has been filling a longstanding funding/access gap for social work support for hundreds of residents. Identifying other sources of support for this partnership would enable the BHA to leverage limited funds and expand access for all residents in need.

The Brookline Senior Center remains highly involved in providing mental health services and resources for the aging Brookline community. Social work clinicians are available to the 60+ community through the Senior Center. Pre-pandemic, this included home visits; now these appointments are either virtual or at the Center. The Senior Center has collaborative partnerships - with the Brookline Center, Brookline Housing

¹³ The Brookline Center for Community Mental Health, 2020 Report

¹⁴ Massachusetts Roadmap to Behavioral Health Reform:
<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/roadmap-for-behavioral-health-reform>

Authority, the Chinese Golden Age Center, Springwell, the Brookline Hoarding Task Force, and the LGBT Aging Project in Fenway- to expand the resources and clinical services for Brookline's vulnerable elders. The Brookline Senior Center does not provide emergency mental health services, and its services are only available during normal business hours.

The Brookline Health Department In partnership with Brookline Public Schools, Brookline's Prevention and Intervention Programs for Youth, a division of the Brookline Department of Public Health and Human Services, provides wellness programming via three distinct but interconnected initiatives: B-SAPP (Brookline Substance Abuse Prevention Program), B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network), and Peer Leadership. These groups engage multiple sectors of the community representing the diversity of Brookline (students, parents, school, mental health, and public health professionals) to promote evidence-based strategies for building resilience and emotional wellbeing, foster positive teen relationships and mental health, and reduce the incidence of alcohol, marijuana, nicotine, and other drug use among Brookline Youth.

In April 2021, this program reported an increase in need as schools began to open part time, and are anticipating an increased wave of need with only limited resources to address it. There are currently 4 special workers and approximately 1800 cases. Current program services attempt to address the disparity and gap in services provided to students during transitions, such as after graduation and over the summer. It was also reported that every three years, a Healthy Brookline Survey is given to all students from 7th to 12th Grade, and they are currently in the process of circulating the survey and encouraging responses. The goal of the survey is to identify who is at risk, and how to best target available budget resources. The most recent report was anticipated to be published for review in Summer 2021. The Working Group anticipates including the results of this report in the Final Disparity Report.

Based on a report from Steps to Success (STS) in February 2021 there were 259 Steps to Success students in Elementary through High School. Figure 7 shows the comparison of demographics of Steps to Success students as compared to the entirety of the district of Brookline Public Schools.

Demographics (2019-2020)	STS	PSB District
IEP	48%	16%
Medical Alert	40%	22%
Economically Disadvantaged	63%	9%
Free/Reduced Lunch	79%	11%
Students of Color	87%	47%

Figure 7. 2019/20 Demographics of STS compared to PSB District

The health, economic and social emotional effects throughout Steps to Success, Inc. has been reported as:

- 10% of either STS Students or their household member contracted Covid (as reported to STS staff)
- 5 of 7 full-time STS Program Advisors contracted Covid
- 40% of BHA families have been behind in rent & requested assistance
- \$16,000 in student/family support (through STS Inc) have been given out to families from March 2020 - April 2021 through gift cards & student support scholarships
- Many STS Parents/Caregivers report heightened emotional stress within the family dynamic

Through participation data of the Fall 2020 programming it was reported that

- Of the STS students NOT participating in afterschool programs during SY20-21:
 - 55% of these students are not engaged with STS at all
 - 40% have excessive school absences
 - 29% are experiencing health struggles in the family
 - 64% are experiencing financial struggles in the family
 - Only 12% are doing well academically

Lastly, Steps to Success demonstrated the need for a STS-Specific Social Worker due to the facts that:

- 48% of BHS STS students (20/21 SY) have an assigned social worker
- 115 Elementary STS Students could equate to a potential STS Social Worker caseload of 55 cases
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) coaching support for elementary teachers working with STS students is needed

- With the addition of an STS Social Worker, STS Elementary Advisors could start advising younger grades for earlier intervention
- Greater resources for earlier intervention & Social Emotional learning could help to lower the financial impact that the district spends on special education
- Social Emotional Learning/Support is Equity Work

Recommendations:

- Prioritize the need for comprehensive and wrap-around social services;
- Invest in better mental health resources for Brookline residents;
- Centralized Town resource for social, mental, and behavioral services;
- Increase the clinicians and funding available in the Public Schools;
- Address the clear need for a Steps to Success Social Worker;
- Utilize parks/exercise as positive mental health campaigns/awareness.

Language Access

Language access is achieved when individuals with Limited English Proficiency are able to communicate with Town employees, educators, and community members, and actively participate in community programs, services, and activities. The availability of translations and use of interpreters ensures access to all community members, and allows important conversations to be inclusive. According to 2019 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 30% of Brookline residents are foreign-born. An estimated 5,661 Brookline residents - or about 10 % of the population - speak English “less than very well”, (*i.e.*, are limited English proficient (LEP)). These include over 3,400 residents who primarily speak an Asian language (over 6% of residents), and nearly 1,200 who speak an Indo-European language (about 2% of residents). An estimated 7% of Brookline residents have a disability, some of which would be hearing or visual impairments. (U.S. Census Bureau, [Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: Table DP02 Brookline town, Norfolk County, Massachusetts](#))

Mutual Aid Brookline’s language access team works to ensure that all community members can fully participate in Mutual Aid. Language access volunteers speak with community members via phone, text, and email, and translate written materials into many languages, as well as promote in-language MAB outreach. The language access team are all volunteers, and they are currently able to provide access in 25 languages. MAB reports that a majority of the language requests are for Spanish, Mandarin, Russian, Japanese, Korean, and Portuguese.

Brookline Adult and Community Education (BA&CE) offers an English as a Second Language Program that includes introductory to advanced English classes.

Each class is 24 sessions, and tuition is \$540.00. BA&CE also partners with Brookline Chinese School on its ESL Programming. The Director of BA&CE reported that the challenge tends to be outreach, and classes are usually marketed through word-of-mouth. The BA&CE also offers financial literacy classes throughout the year, though these are not currently offered in other languages. If there is a specific request or need for language access, Brookline Adult and Community Education will utilize the Office of English Learner Education within Brookline Public Schools. Brookline Adult and Community Education does offer small discounts and scholarships or financial aid. School and Town of Brookline Employees receive a 20 percent discount on course fees, and partial tuition remission is available to those in need of scholarship assistance. Disabled veterans, persons on Social Security Disability (SSDI), or receiving AFDC also receive a 25 percent discount on course fees upon presenting a letter of verification or veterans' identification. Individuals over 65 receive a 25 percent discount on courses.

Brookline Public Schools The Office of English Learner Education (ELE) provides services to more than 850 students in grades PK-12 whose primary language is not English, and who are not yet proficient in English. The program provides support at each school, with services focused on children's English language acquisition, literacy development, and academic achievement.

There are currently over 50 languages spoken in the Brookline district. The top 10 languages spoken by families in the district are reported as Mandarin and Cantonese, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Russian, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Hebrew, and Haitian Creole. All interpretation requests, as well as translation of documents, are handled through the ELE Office. District-wide notices are almost always translated through one of the several independent contractors; however, if there is a time-sensitive notice, Google Translate, or comparable AI is used. The Office has access to 100+ dial in languages. All language services are paid for by the district. There are several families with ASL interpretation needs, and the Office typically fills those requests through the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing¹⁵. MCDHH requires one to two weeks of notice to provide an ASL interpreter.

Parents are informed of their right to request translations and interpreters when they register their children in the Brookline Public Schools system; however, the district recognizes its responsibility to make translations available to all families who need it. The Office also works with the English Learner Parent Advisory Council, which is open to parents/guardians of English learners (ELs) in Brookline. The purpose of the ELPAC is to promote and support the success of ELs. ELPACs are intended by law to advise the district and schools regarding matters that impact English learners, including

¹⁵ <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-commission-for-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing>

language acquisition programs, educational opportunities for ELs, and improvement plans as they relate to ELs. The district's annual allotted budget for language access is roughly 70-85K a year, and the ELE Office reports always meeting and usually exceeding that budget. The actual need is roughly 100+K. The ELE Office reports 445 total requests from July 1st 2020 through May 1st 2021.

The Brookline Library currently employs staff with a collective ability to provide in person translations in 17 spoken languages as well as ASL. There are two TOEFL certified English Language Learners on staff who provide 1-on-1 assistance and education, and an EL Book Club, as well as group classes. Through the pandemic, these resources and programs have been modified for a virtual platform. The Library reports an overwhelming number of patrons whose primary language is Mandarin or Cantonese, and the Library has 10 out of 94 staff that are fluent in one or both to assist these patrons. The BPL has made a deliberate effort to provide resources the community needs. The Library has just replaced all Youth Services Signs at the Main Library; this signage is now in the top five languages utilized at the Library; Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish. The Library Director is looking to expand signage throughout the Library system. The BPL also noted that the website is fully translatable.

Brookline Housing Authority reports that an estimated 15% of BHA residents speak a language other than English in the home. The most common languages among BHA residents are Russian, Mandarin, and Spanish. The Brookline Housing Authority utilizes phone interpretation services in addition to a linguistically diverse staff. Residential Services has provided multilingual support in its programming, including most recently computer literacy. BHA partners with the Brookline Public Library as well as with Women Thriving, Inc. to provide connections and support for residents of diverse backgrounds.

Brookline Council on Aging/Senior Center reports a majority of older adults served through the Senior Center speak a language other than English, and are served in Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian, and Spanish. However, there are a great number of other language preferences, such as Korean and Farsi. The Council on Aging utilizes the Chinese Golden Age Center for translation and interpretation services for its older Chinese community. The Senior Center receives grant funding from the Brookline Community Foundation to provide translations and outreach to older adults. There are currently three part-time, not-benefited positions supported by this funding, and staff speak Russian, Spanish, and Mandarin. Pre-COVID, the Senior Center offered Social Language Classes, and it was a very well-attended program. Finally, written material is translated by professional services; however, there is no money in the budget for

translation services, and the Council on Aging Director has made this need known to the Town Administration.

To the Working Groups' knowledge, the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations as well as the Brookline Police Department do utilize the Language Line, a private company that provides on-demand and onsite language interpretation and document translation services worldwide for law enforcement, healthcare organizations, legal courts, schools, and businesses in over 240 languages. However, there is no uniform or comprehensive plan across Town Departments to ensure that residents have appropriate language access.

Recommendations:

- Perform a four-point analysis of Language needs in Brookline and develop a Language Access Policy;
- Hire a Language Access Coordinator for the Town. This position would be responsible for completing regular Language Audits of all residents as well as Town employees, and would be a resource for Town Depts. to ensure that all notices, agendas, and public documents are available in multiple languages. This position would also be a resource for residents who need to interface with the Town in a language other than English;
- ASL Interpreters contracted for the Town;
- Language Access should be a line item on each Dept's budget. For reference, the BPS budget for Language Access is roughly \$100,000;
- Better marketing on how to request or access language service through the Town;
- Each Town Department ensures PDFs posted to the website are OCR (Optical Character Recognition) so that attached PDFs can be translated;
- BrookOnline should be made easily translatable;
- Human Resources assist in creating a volunteer list of Town employees interested in serving as interpreters as needed;

Transportation Accessibility:

Access to transportation measures the ease of access to both transport facilities, and the ease of moving around one's built environment using all modes of transportation, and considering all types of individual mobility. Transportation is a basic, but necessary need to access services and opportunities outside of the home; including but not limited to healthcare, school, work, food, and social engagements.

Many households throughout the United States lack safe, convenient, and reliable access to transportation. Barriers to accessing transportation may be cost and other resources, availability of public transit in an area, or a lack of accessible and safe micro mobility paths and options.

In Brookline, according to ACS 2019 5 year data, 33% of residents rely on their own car, 30% rely on public transportation, 6% utilize a bicycle, 17% primarily walk and about 14% rely on carpool or other modes of transportation. The average commute time to work for Brookline residents is 29.8 minutes¹⁶

The Brookline Department of Public Works-Transportation Division helps to ensure multiple means of safe and alternative transportation options throughout the Town of Brookline for all residents. The primary means of transportation throughout the Town of Brookline is the “T” with both the C and D lines running through Brookline, as well as multiple bus routes. The MBTA does have a Youth Pass program that provides discounted passes based on income and age. These passes are distributed by the municipalities in which the youth live. There is also a MBTA Senior Pass Program that is managed by the MBTA; however seniors are required to go downtown to physically acquire this pass. The Transportation Division is hoping to work with the MBTA to make the Senior Pass more accessible by making it similar to the Youth Pass that is managed by the municipalities.

Another more recent means of transportation includes the Blue Bike Program. This is a program publicly owned by Brookline. Similar to the MBTA, Blue Bikes offers an income eligibility program. Included in this income-eligibility program are free 60 minute rides. The cost is \$50 a year or \$5 per 30 days of riding. There is no annual commitment; however, after 30 days, the program will renew itself if you ride again. This takes the burden off the rider to remember to cancel a subscription, or to needlessly pay for a program they are no longer using. They are also interested in looking into accessible bikes, trikes or scooters that could be beneficial for people with disabilities. There is also a hope that Brookline will look into partnering with Transportation Network Companies to provide subsidized rides, and enhance mobility for transportation-disadvantaged populations such as older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals.

The Pedestrian Advisory Committee’s mission is to encourage, plan for, and advocate for pedestrian access within the Town of Brookline. It advises the Transportation Board on matters related to pedestrians for commuting, general mobility and pleasure, with an emphasis on safety and access. They have and continue to

¹⁶ <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US2509210-brookline-ma/#commute>

address and advocate on issues such as sidewalk accessibility, street crossings, and the importance of street lighting. Overgrown hedges and tree roots can cause hazards on the sidewalk, making it particularly difficult for people with mobility devices, strollers, or with visual impairments to safely use the sidewalk, often forcing them into the road where it is much more dangerous. Crosswalks can also be very dangerous for both the driver and the pedestrian. Making the crosswalks safer and more accessible for all residents would include ensuring the crosswalk is at an accessible curb cut, painted, has the proper wayfinding markers, and by installing accessible push buttons for the deaf and hard of hearing and individuals with low vision. This also relates to the issue of street lighting: when there is inadequate lighting, problems on the sidewalk become a hazardous tripping issue, especially during the winter months.

The Transportation Resources, Information, Planning and Partnership for Seniors (TRIPPS) program of Brookline began in 2015 in Brookline and Newton, Massachusetts, with the underlying concept that most seniors need individualized, personal support as they transition to aging in place. “The goal of TRIPPS has always been to reduce isolation and loneliness in the senior population—the majority of whom have relied for most of their lives on driving as their primary means of getting around. We know that when driving becomes difficult or impossible for older adults who have been dependent on driving, their community connections dissolve and their social lives slowly fade”¹⁷.

According to TRIPPS Brookline Coordinator, currently, older adults are using all modes of transportation. In past years there was a long-standing taxi discount in place for older adults and low-and medium-income residents in Brookline, however, as of June 2021, this program is no longer available. The Senior Center has partnered with Lyft and the National Council on Aging to pilot a Brookline Lyft Program that provides discount Lyft rides for Seniors. As of June of 2021, there were 90 participants in the program. There is also a dispatch service for Lyft and Uber called GoGo Grandparent. This program orders and monitors rides on the older persons behalf. The program provides a phone number where you can request different services such as rides or food or grocery delivery. The Senior Center also offers applications for the Senior MBTA Pass which can be filled out in the Spring and the Fall and the Senior Center provides volunteers to help with the application process. Through the Community Transit Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, TRIPPS is able to provide a van and bus for non-emergency medical services for seniors from the Senior Center. There are currently two vehicles, one that seats 20, and another that seats 13.

Transportation is the primary barrier for residents who utilize the Senior Center, and cost is a major concern. Providing transportation for residents is very expensive,

¹⁷ <https://trippsmass.org/about-us/>

and it was shared with the Working Group that often, there is funding for startup programs, but no support forthcoming for its maintenance and sustainability or long term success. TRIPPS maintains a comprehensive Resource Guide to transportation options available to seniors. The 1st edition was published in 2016 and the most recent edition is the 5th edition released in March 2019¹⁸.

The Brookline Public Schools provide free bussing for students K-8, for students who live more than 1.5 miles from school, as well as for students with special needs, and students who use the federal school lunch program. As of June 2021, there are around 150-180 K-8 grade students that are using the bussing provided by the district. Bussing for High School students costs approximately \$400 a year per student. Brookline High School provides students with student MBTA passes that they can reload. But the biggest issue facing Brookline schools at the moment is after-school transportation; as of June of 2021, Heath Elementary School is the only school to provide after-school transportation.

The Brookline Commission on Disability also advocates and works to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to transportation, and the ability to get around the town as needed. Lack of transportation determines whether or not people with disabilities have the ability to leave their homes, and it is a huge determinant of both their mental and physical health. In Brookline there is currently a conflicting need between increased bike lanes and existing accessible parking next to the sidewalk. Members of the Brookline Commission on Disability stated that if the Town starts removing accessible parking next to sidewalks, it will make it difficult for people with disabilities who must put a ramp on the sidewalk in order to get out of their car and access a residence, business, or office building. As it stands now, accessible parking must be within 200 feet of a business, and bike lanes have the potential to eliminate this. Similarly to the Pedestrian Advisory Committee, there is also a major concern among the Commission for Disability about the safety of sidewalks. There have been multiple instances of people in wheelchairs getting hit by cars because they were forced off the sidewalk by tree roots pushing up the cement or uncut hedges, making the sidewalk impassable.

In Brookline, and in fifty eight other cities and towns within the greater Boston area, the RIDE is supposed to be a reliable source of transportation for people with disabilities, but unfortunately, that is not always the case. The RIDE costs \$3.35/one way in Local ADA areas, and in Premium non-ADA areas, it increases to \$5.60/one way, and operates with similar operating hours to the MBTA; generally from 5AM to

¹⁸  resource-guide-brookline-newton-v5.pdf

1AM¹⁹. There is very little flexibility when it comes to the RIDE: it requires an appointment at least 24 hours in advance. This means people who utilize this paratransit option have to plan their daily needs and activities at least 24 hours in advance. There is also a 20-minute window before/after the selected pickup time, which makes the timing of the RIDE even more unpredictable. In addition to the inflexibility and unpredictability of scheduling transportation with the RIDE, it is also expensive. Further, the RIDE vehicles themselves can be physically uncomfortable for people with disabilities, and has led some to avoid this mode of transportation altogether.

The MBTA Green Line, which is the primary MBTA line running through Brookline, does provide accessible sites at some stations, but the Brookline Commission on Disability members, and members of the wider disability community, report accessibility can be hit or miss, and not every bus stop has a place where people can safely wait out of elements. Reportedly, as of June of 2021, there are not supposed to be two non-accessible T cars put together. There are currently TAP Passes for people with disabilities, and free passes for people who are blind or have low vision.

Commission members, and the Town ADA Coordinator, also report that low-vision or blind residents in Brookline have sometimes ended up in the middle of the tracks due to the lack of proper wayfinding indicators, as mentioned by the Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

A representative from the Bicycle Advisory Committee noted that they are working on creating better bicycle accommodations for the Town, including a Town Green Routes Bicycle Network Plan²⁰ that will be revisited and updated every few years. The plan also notes that for bicycling to become a truly “safe and viable form of transportation within and across town for persons of all ages and abilities, it is also important to continue improving existing bicycle accommodations, especially on busy streets.”

Mutual Aid Brookline reports that they have delivered groceries to 42 households over the last 6 months, from January 2021 to June 2021. Out of these households, 23 are able to pay the cost without a subsidy, but need assistance with physically getting to and from the store due to lack of adequate transportation. Nineteen of these

¹⁹ <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/the-ride>

²⁰

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/13807/2018-Revised-Green-Routes-Master-Network-Plan-and-Map-PDF?bidId=>

households are subsidized clients, but many people in the community do not know that this type of resource exists, and there needs to be more comprehensive publicity.

Recommendations

- Recognize all modes of transportation in future redesign projects;
- Increase safety and use of sidewalks and crosswalks with well- painted markings;
- Pedestrian friendly lighting as new projects are being developed;
- An accessible public Town bus or vehicle (through Vets, ODICR, or Senior Center);
- Increased bus service to South Brookline;
- Ensure new Fisher Hill low-income senior housing is linked to adequate transportation;
- Increased funding for the Senior Center and the TRIPPS program to make transportation programs sustainable.

Employment

Access to employment opportunities may be defined by both the availability of job opportunities, as well as the ease of reaching and accessing the work space. Access to employment impacts economic opportunities for the individual, as well as the economic success of the community. As of 2019, the median household income for Brookline is \$117,326²¹. 12.3% of the Brookline population lives below the poverty line²². Figure 8, below, shows racial demographics for residents living below the poverty line, as well as the proportion of Brookline residents, by age and gender, living below the poverty line. The largest demographic living in poverty are Males 18 - 24, followed by Females 18 - 24, and then Females 25 - 34. In 2019, full-time Male employees in all of Massachusetts made 1.33 times more than their Female counterparts, and the highest paid race or ethnicity of employed residents of Massachusetts were Asian or Asian American²³. Figure 9 shows age and race based wage disparities in the 5 most common occupations in Massachusetts. Lastly, as of 2019, the Brookline economy employs roughly 32.7K people²⁴.

²¹ Brookline|MA Data USA <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/brookline-ma/>

²² Brookline|MA Data USA <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/brookline-ma/>

²³ Brookline|MA Data USA <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/brookline-ma/#economy>

²⁴ Brookline|MA Data USA <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/brookline-ma/>

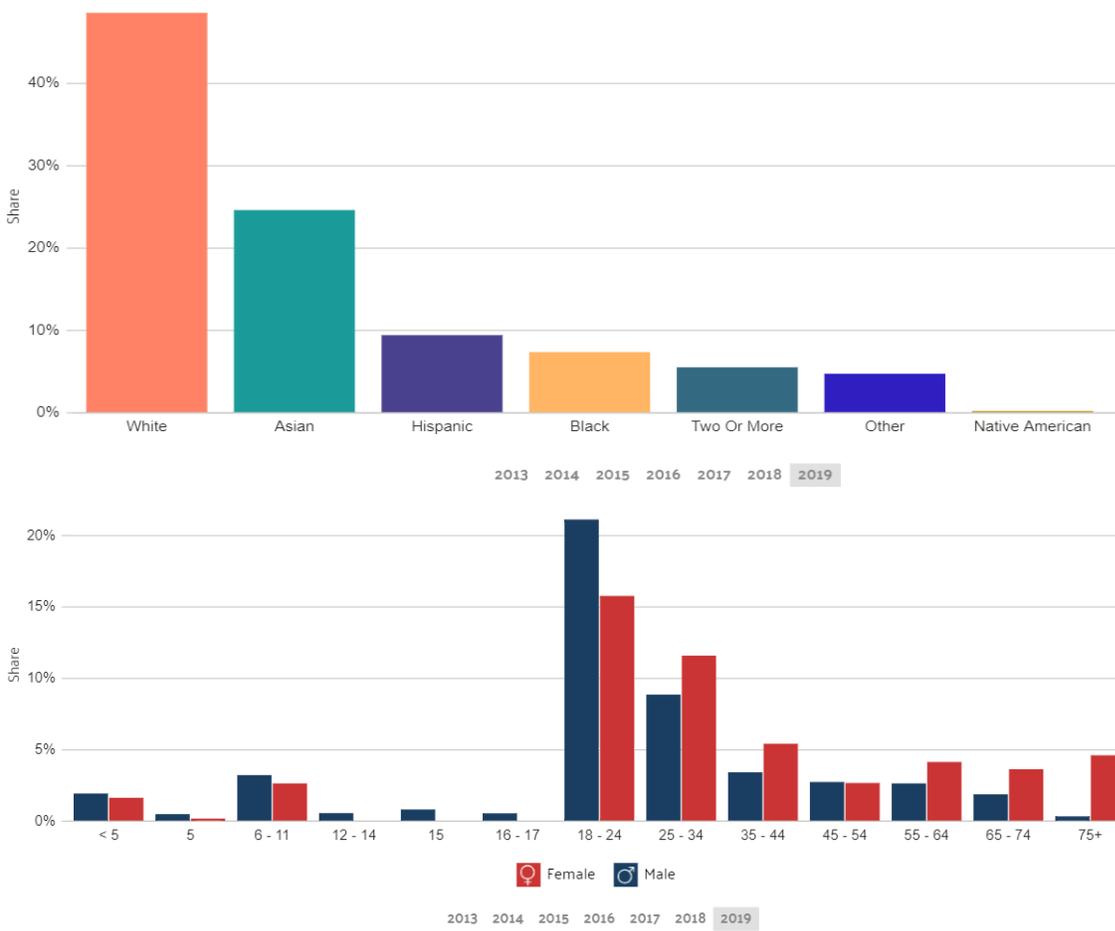
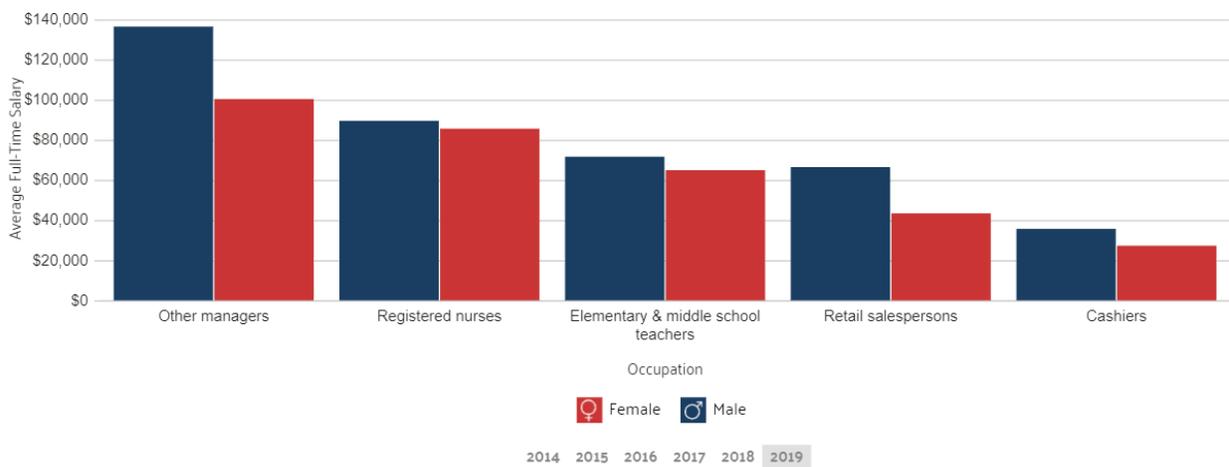


Figure 8. 2019 Residents by racial demographic, age, and gender living below the poverty line



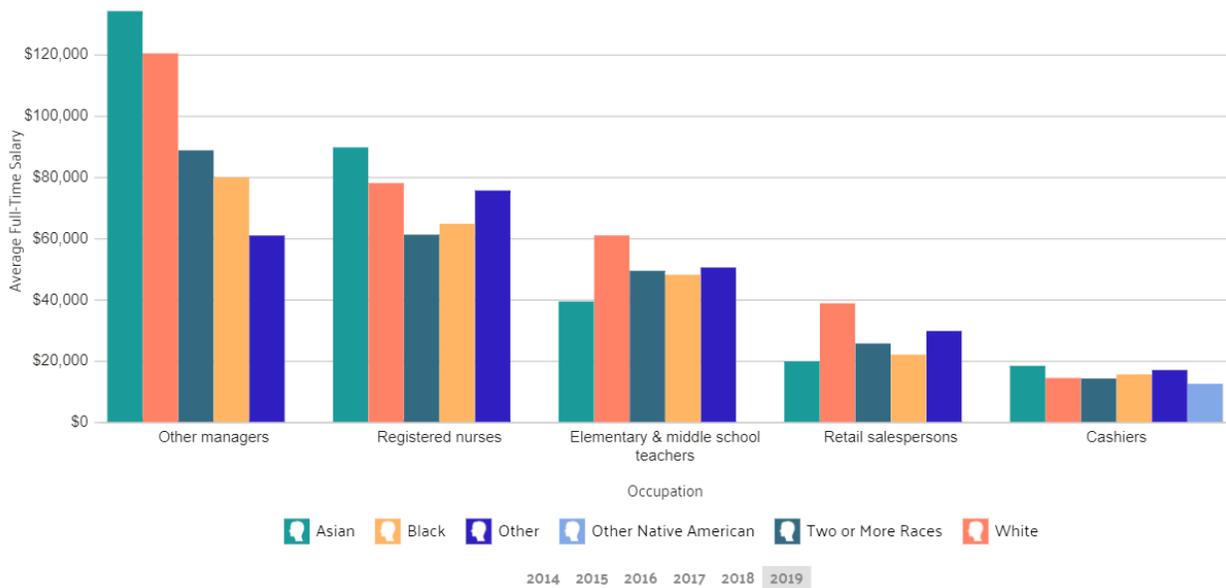


Figure 9. 2019 Wage Disparities by Age and Race

The Town of Brookline Human Resources Office supports employees during the entire employment process for the Town, from working with Department Heads to post job openings, to onboarding new employees, through sick leaves and preparing for retirement, and everything in between. They work with managers in every Department to address the needs of its workers as well as discipline when necessary in order to create a safe and productive work environment for all employees. There are currently 7 staff members working in the Human Resource office. Human Resources has been assisting with the hiring of employees for different jobs across departments in the Town, and has prioritized implementing strategies to ensure a more diverse workforce.

Based on a January 2020 Equal Employment Opportunity Report (Figure 10), there were a total of 696 full time employees working for the Town of Brookline. Based on reporting, 28% of those employees were female, 79% were White, 9% Black or African American, 5% Asian or Asian American, 5% Hispanic/Latinx and 1% Other.

Jan-20		Sex			EEO Race				
Departments	Total	M	F		W	B	A	H	O
					74.5%	7.2%	7.0%	9.6%	
	Target								
TOWN TOTAL	696	502	194		550	62	35	44	5
		72%	28%		79%	9%	5%	6%	1%

Figure 10. January 2020 EEO Full Time totals

HR did acknowledge the fact that Mid-management professionals tend to be predominantly white, and it provided the Working Group with a Spring 2021 Hiring Report, dated April 13, 2021 that reported new hires on boarded from January 2021 through the end of March 2021 (a 3 month period). There were 12 new hires across 7 Departments; 5 females and 7 males, of which 3 were hired as Mid Managers (Buildings, DICR, Health), 2 individuals were hired as E911 Operators, 2 hired as MEOs, 2 hired in the Golf Division of the Recreation Department, and various other positions across the Town such as an EEC Teacher, Planner, and a Parks and Open Space Director. Figure 11 depicts the Racial Demographics of the new hires.

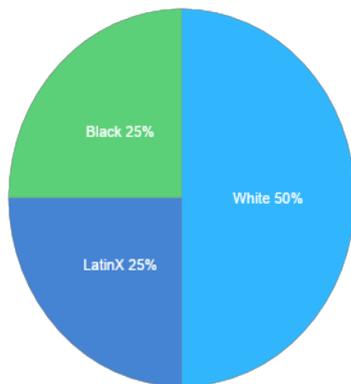


Figure 11. Racial Demographics of New Hires (1/3/21-3/31/21)

Highlights that HR shared were:

- 3 Mid-Manager positions filled by LatinX and Black individuals;
- Addition of Latinx Zoning Coordinator/Planner;
- Stronger use of the Diversity Jobs recruiting tool

Human Resources also commented on the impact COVID-19 has had in the workplace. and the added challenge of hiring due to the fact that people have been less willing to

relocate, making it more difficult to find qualified candidates and build and maintain diversity.

Several resources the Brookline Human Resources Office would like to be able to offer are resources such as mentorship programs, and more robust and equitable internship opportunities that enable individuals to develop informal and formal social networks that can help in terms of promotions and future job searches. The Director of Human Resources and the Assistant Director in the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations would like to collaborate to explore Employee Resource Groups, similar to those being offered in other municipalities. These Employee Resource Groups would give Town of Brookline employees the space and ability to create their own community groups as a way to engage and support one another.

As we are all aware, COVID-19 moved most work online, and as things have begun to open up, more employees are going back to work in person. Most Town of Brookline employees were given a chance to participate in a pilot “Work from Home” program beginning in September 2021. Over the summer, interested employees were given a form to fill out if they wished to continue online work for a maximum of three days a week. The form allows the employee to state what work can be done at home, and what has to be done in person, as well as propose their schedule. Employees can do up to 3 days online, and must do at least 2 days in person. On remote days, employees must be less than two hours away from Brookline, and cannot be responsible for any dependents, in case they are asked to come into the office in person. Applications and schedules will be approved by both HR and the Department Head. Departments have been alerted to the need for a slower integration back to the office in order to protect the mental health of employees.

Bunker Hill Community College is the largest community college in Massachusetts, as well the second most affordable college in Boston, and in all of Massachusetts. The current enrollment, as of May 2021, is around 10,000 students, down a little from previous years. Bunker Hill has one of the most diverse student populations, and an average student age of 26. They offer over 125 degrees and certificates, as well as workforce development. They work to give students as much experience as possible, and to get students into the workforce as soon as possible after getting their degree/certification.

They have a program called the Learn and Earn Program. This program is a paid internship program strictly for Bunker Hill students. Partners make internships specifically for Bunker Hill students to prevent unfair competition from students from BU and Northeastern who have more school experience; students from Bunker Hill tend to

have more life experience. One of BHCC's largest partners is the Isabella Gardner Museum, but Bunker Hill partners with many different non-profits, small businesses and startups in the area. Most of the funding for this program comes from the family foundations, and includes \$18 an hour, and a travel stipend. In some cases, Bunker Hill pays some of the stipend and the partner organization pays as well.

To get the most qualified candidates into internships, Bunker Hill uses a hands-on recruiting approach in order to eliminate self-selecting bias. This means they reach out to students who have taken classes relevant to the jobs being offered. This approach lends itself to creating a more diverse workforce that reflects the student body, and has resulted in an increase in the number of students and organizations participating.

The Town of Brookline Recreation Department employs 198 part-time employees and 28 full-time employees. In partnership with Steps to Success, it has created a summer camp internship program, and to increase diversity and help as many people as possible, it has also been partnering and working with as many other organizations as possible. For example, it sponsors a program for shoveling snow and raking leaves around the community: Individuals can register for the program as either a shoveler/raker, or as a resident who needs the service. The program is administered through the school districts, with the resident and the shoveler/raker reaching agreement on how much the resident will pay the shoveler/raker for their services.

The Town of Brookline Council on Aging/Senior Center specializes in employment for older adults. They are working to fight ageism and discrimination in the workforce. They also provide workshops for people who are looking for employment, post job announcements, help with resume building, and teach job seekers how to reenter the workforce.

There are also federally funded programs that provide stipends for low-income people looking for work. There was also a CDBG grant of \$20,000-\$25,000 that provided job opportunities at the Senior Center: it was very popular, but unfortunately is no longer being funded.

The American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) has started to roll out its funding, to be focused on communities who were disproportionately affected by COVID, and a case can certainly be made that older Americans fall into that category. Some of the biggest issues senior citizens face is being forced out of work due to the pandemic, and then needing to reenter the workforce because they are running out of retirement money.

Women Thriving, Inc. is a Brookline based non-profit that has been in existence for 10 years. The organization is focused on learning, leadership development, and community building for women who face economic, social, and racial inequities. It offers a range of workshops for women, and was able to move those workshops online during the pandemic, enabling it to continue to engage with its members. During the pandemic, it offered 46 different workshops, consisting of a small group with two facilitators, each lasting 4-6 weeks.

In the past few years, Women Thriving, Inc. has started to do more work on language development, including English conversation and reading. It has also offered 8-week employment programs to prepare women for employment. It provided assistance during the job search process, helped with resume building, and helped to find training for certain jobs.

During the Coronavirus Pandemic, many women had to leave the workforce because of online school and the lack of childcare options. Now that the economy is opening up, and children are back in school, they will be reentering the workforce, but finding employment may be more difficult than it was previously. Women Thriving is considering the launch of a new program to address this growing issue. A few years ago, it tried to establish a women's employment network to connect local women who have the requisite skills with local employers looking to hire employees, but the program was unable to attract the needed funding.

The Brookline Chamber of Commerce provides opportunities for networking and advocacy, but is not affiliated with the US Chamber of Commerce. It embraces the entire Brookline business community. When the Covid-19 Pandemic hit, all of its workshops went online, and it was able to help businesses adapt to the changing requirements. This was especially critical for the restaurant industry which had to quickly adapt to the new COVID-19 restrictions. It also has a website focused on the many wonderful businesses which exist in Brookline (DiscoverBrookline.com).

The ADA Coordinator/Commission for Disability notes that there are very few resources available in Brookline for people with disabilities. If someone with a disability has more than \$2000 in their bank account, they no longer qualify for SSI, creating a cycle of poverty for people with disabilities. There are also 'Able Accounts' for people who were diagnosed with a disability as a child, and medical trusts, but these programs can be very complicated. As of 2012, fewer than 20% of people with disabilities were employed. This may be due to the stigmas which exist toward those with disabilities, or to the many barriers to accessing employment that exist.

The Brookline Housing Authority has provided direct employment support to residents for nearly two decades. Beginning in 2021, the Brookline Housing Authority launched the Self Sufficiency Program (SSP) to provide economic mobility coaching for state public housing residents. Other BHA and low-income residents may also receive assistance with resumes, cover letters, job search, and education/training programs. Given the wide range of individuals and interests, the program takes an individualized approach to assisting each resident. The BHA posts employment and other opportunities on listserv and regular newsletters.

It is important to note that during COVID, the work requirement for federal housing was suspended, but with the reopening of the economy, this requirement will soon be reinstated, and residents will need support to re-enter the workforce. A range of workshops, and office hours will be offered to provide as much support as possible during this transition.

Mutual Aid Brookline has been offsetting costs during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is offering a child care program costing \$18 an hour to address the lack of child care exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It also refers people to employment opportunities, and sends out a weekly newsletter to about 900 people, and will be promoting the benefits of subscribing and getting the information available.

Teen Employment

The Brookline Teen Center believes strongly that teen employment is “equally about economic mobility as it is about development”. Among other things, the Brookline Teen Center aims to be a safe place for youth as they transition into adulthood; the goal is to be a space to learn life skills, to have opportunities for employment, and to be guided in building character, and seeing themselves as contributing and responsible adults. The Teen Center strives to give teens opportunities that foster both autonomy and the importance of structure. Due to COVID, the Teen Center had to suspend its Youthscapers program; however, with new funding, they hope to bring it back as a year- long program with special seasonal offerings. This past year, the Teen Center held its first Virtual Dream Summit, and in the Spring of 2022, it hopes to hold the Dream Summit in person.

Steps to Success is an independent, non-profit school program that serves students enrolled in Brookline’s public schools from low income families. Steps to Success’ long-term goal is that its graduates from Brookline High School will each have a post-secondary plan of their own choosing that maximizes their opportunities, and that they will enroll in and complete that plan, whether it be college, other post-secondary education, or another pathway to a successful future.

In 2020, all Internship Programming was virtual for 2020, and in 2021, it pivoted back to full-time in-person. In 2020, 35 students participated in the Summer Connections program (for rising 8th and 9th graders).

- 100% of students successfully completed the program with a 98% overall attendance rate;
- 76% felt their comfort level and/or ability increased re: Being on camera during virtual meetings;
- 76% felt their comfort level and/or ability increased re: Time management/ organizational skills;
- 74% felt their comfort level and/or ability increased re: Talking about social justice topics;
- 70% felt their comfort level and/or ability increased re: Speaking/sharing during virtual meetings;
- When asked where they see themselves after high school, 88% said college, university, graduate school, etc.

In 2020, 29 students participated in Work Connections, a program for rising 10th graders through College Freshmen.

- 97% of students attended weekly career chats with professionals;
- 97% of students attended virtual meetings consistently;
- 97% of students were able to successfully adapt to various formats and engage with numerous guests and peers;
- 97% of students were considered successful completers of this program;
- 88% of participants moved through their Conover online assignments at a rate which was expected, showing mastery of each topic as they progressed.

Recommendations

- Create a Brookline Jobs Board/Annual Job Fair (for all Brookline based employers);
- Create a Town-wide Teen Employment initiative including a funded position based in the Teen Center to run a Teen Jobs Hotline/Jobs Board and connect with employers throughout Brookline and Boston;
- Assist with providing sustainable funding for Teen Center Youthscapers Program;
- Town of Brookline to increase the pay for internships to make these opportunities equitable;
- Actively advocate for more accessible workspaces in Brookline;
- ODICR/HR collaborate to set up Employee Resource groups;

- Create the expectation that large businesses in Brookline will do outreach to Brookline residents for job opportunities;
- Town of Brookline allow for more remote employment opportunities to encourage qualified candidates to apply for positions;
- Increase the Social Worker program at the Library so it offers open hours so anyone can show up and get assistance with forms, applications, resumes, etc.

Education (Access and Achievement)

Education is one of the most important social determinants of health access to quality education can lead to higher employment rates, different career aspirations, and increase social mobility.²⁵ Research indicates that school conditions contribute more to socioeconomic status differences in learning rates than family characteristics.²⁶ In 2014, the high school dropout rate among persons 16–24 years old was highest in low-income families (11.6 percent) as compared to high-income families (2.8 percent).²⁷ Those from higher social-socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be more successful in developing career aspirations, and are generally better prepared for the world of work because of access to resources such as career offices, guidance counselors, better schools, high level “social actors,” and familial experience with higher education.²⁸ Given its centrality to future success, it is imperative that Brookline focus on increasing the educational resources that lead to better outcomes for low-socioeconomic households.

Steps to Success is an independent, non-profit school program that serves students enrolled in Brookline’s public schools from low-income families. As of 2020-2021, Steps to Success currently serves 238 students in 4th-12th grade, and 70 in college (308 students total). 77% of current CSI (College Success Initiative) Steps students are first generation college students, and currently 93% students are on track to graduate within 4-6 years. Below is data regarding Out of School Time for students in Steps to Success from 4th to 12th grade.

- AY 2019/2020 (“typical” year for reference): 73% (82/112) of eligible Steps 4th-8th grade students participated in after school programming;
- AY 2020/21: 55% (52/95) of eligible Steps 4th-8th grade students participated in after school programming;

²⁵ <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education>

²⁶ <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education>

²⁷ <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education>

²⁸ <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education>

- o Of the STS 4th-8th grade students NOT participating in Steps after school programs during the 2020/21 school year:
 - 55% of these students are not engaged with STS at all;
 - 40% have excessive school absences;
 - 29% are experiencing health struggles in the family;
 - 64% are experiencing financial struggles in the family;
 - Only 12% of 6th-8th graders are doing well academically (well defined as no grades below C).
- Camps
 - o 2019 (“typical” year for reference), 57 Steps 4th-8th graders went to camp;
 - o 2020, 38 Steps students went to camp;
- Graduation rates for STS Students over the last 4 years
 - o Class of 2021:
 - BHS Grad-83%
 - College/Vocational/Gap Year Program Matriculation-70%
 - o Class of 2020:
 - BHS grad-89%,
 - College/Vocational/Gap Year Program Matriculation-88%;
 - o Class of 2019:
 - BHS grad-96%,
 - College/Vocational/Gap Year Program Matriculation-68%;
 - o Class of 2018:
 - BHS grad-95%,
 - College/Vocational/Gap Year Program Matriculation-78%.

Brookline Public Schools: According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Brookline Public School District comprises 13 schools, serving grades PreK to 12th grade. In the 2020-2021 school year, there were 6,891 students enrolled in Brookline Public Schools. Figure 12 and Figure 13 depict student racial and ethnic demographics, as well as other specific population data²⁹. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, a student is ‘high needs’ if they are designated as either low-income (prior to School Year 2015), economically disadvantaged (starting in School Year 2015), or an English Language Learner (ELL), or former ELL, or a student with disabilities. A former ELL student is a student not currently an ELL, but who had been at some point in the two previous academic years.

²⁹ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2020-2021
<https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavId=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=00460000&orgtypecode=5>

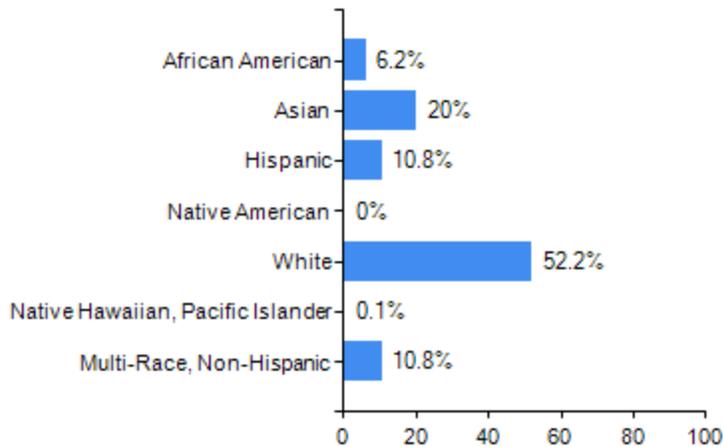


Figure 12. 2020-2021 BPS Racial Demographics

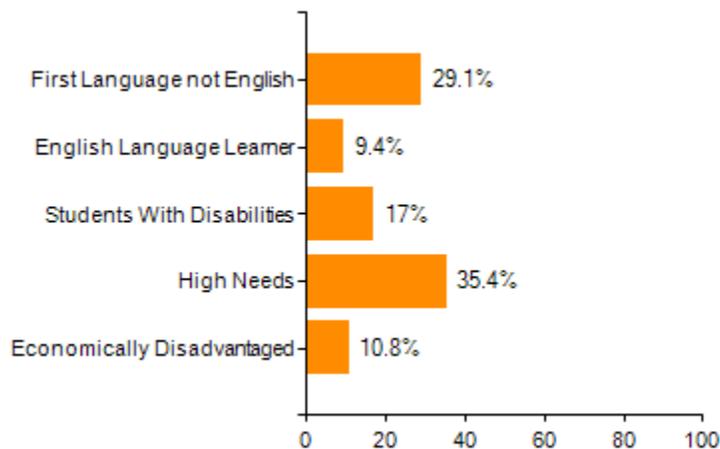


Figure 13. 2020-2021 BPS Specific Population data

In the 2019-2020 school year, 52% of graduates planned to attend a 4 year private college; 30.2% planned to attend a 4 year public college; 2.5% planned to attend a 2 year college; 1.5% planned to join the workforce; 1.1% planned to join the military; 1.5% had “other” plans; and 10.1% were unknown.

Figure 14 (below) shows the 2020 4-year Graduation Rate for the 488 students in the cohort from Brookline High School. Figure 15 (below) explores dropout rates for 2019-2020 for all Grades 09-12.

4 Year Graduation Rate (2020)							
Student Group	# in Cohort	% Graduated	% Still in School	% Non-Grad Completers	% H.S. Equiv.	% Dropped Out	% Permanently Excluded
All Students	488	94.5	3.7	0.0	0.8	1.0	0.0
Male	254	94.1	3.5	0.0	0.4	2.0	0.0
Female	231	94.8	3.9	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0
EL	29	89.7	6.9	0.0	3.4	0.0	0.0
Econ. Disadvantaged	80	83.8	10.0	0.0	1.3	5.0	0.0
Foster Care	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
High needs	174	86.8	10.3	0.0	0.6	2.3	0.0
Homeless	4	=	=	=	=	=	=
Students w/ disabilities	112	82.1	15.2	0.0	0.0	2.7	0.0
Afr. Amer./Black	39	87.2	12.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Asian	88	95.5	2.3	0.0	1.1	1.1	0.0
Hispanic/Latino	50	94.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
White	263	95.1	3.0	0.0	0.8	1.1	0.0
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
Multi-race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	48	95.8	2.1	0.0	2.1	0.0	0.0

Figure 14. 4 year graduation Rate (2020)

Student Group	# Enrolled Grades 09 through 12	# Dropout All Grades	% Dropout All Grades	% Dropout Grade 09	% Dropout Grade 10	% Dropout Grade 11	% Dropout Grade 12
All Students	2,064	4	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.6
High Needs	609	2	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4
Economically Disadvantaged	219	2	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7
LEP English language learner	53	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Students with disabilities	337	1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2
African American/Black	162	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Asian	340	1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
Hispanic or Latino	233	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	201	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2						
White	1,126	3	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.8
Female	1,011	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Male	1,044	4	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.4	1.2

Figure 15. Dropout rates in 2019-2020

Recommendations

- Comprehensive publicity of financial aid availability for standardized testing, sports and after-school activities with added costs, and electives with added costs;
- School Committee or PSB committee to analyze recent MCAS disparities data *in connection with* other school disparities data to ensure a holistic approach to addressing educational disparities within Brookline

Public Safety Services

Public safety involves protecting communities from crimes, disasters, and other potential dangers and threats, as well as implementing prevention programming to ensure safe and thriving communities. These are our law enforcement officers, emergency responders, firefighters, and social workers. Their role is to prevent danger and protect the wellbeing of all residents, communities, and organizations. Perceptions of, and implementation of public safety and public safety policies have far-reaching impacts on community health.

In the United States, studies have shown that marginalized populations are inequitably impacted by law enforcement action and violence. People of color accounted for more than 50% of years of life lost due to legal intervention in 2016, but account for just under 40% of the U.S. population.³⁰ In 2016, Black and Native American individuals were more than two and three times (respectively) as likely to be killed by law enforcement as white individuals.³¹ Black and Latinx individuals are more likely to be stopped and arrested, and to experience nonfatal violence by law enforcement.³² This can then be linked to adverse consequences, such as increased mental health concerns, and disproportionate rates of incarceration and sentencing³³.

Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence is another important aspect of Public Safety that specifically disproportionately impacts women. Domestic abuse is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner

³⁰

<https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2019/01/29/aw-enforcement-violence>

³¹

<https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2019/01/29/aw-enforcement-violence>

³²

<https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2019/01/29/aw-enforcement-violence>

³³ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/un-report-on-racial-disparities/>

against another³⁴. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, financial and educational control, digital or technology control, and all forms of emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, in Massachusetts 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner. On a typical day, local domestic violence hotlines receive approximately 19,159 calls, approximately 13 calls every minute. In 2019, there were 28 domestic violence homicides in Massachusetts. Abusers' access to firearms increases the risk of intimate partner femicide at least five-fold. When firearms have been used in the most severe abuse incident, the risk increases 41-fold. 65% of all murder-suicides involve an intimate partner and 96% of the victims of these crimes are female³⁵.

According to the Brookline Police Department there were 76 cases of domestic violence in 2019 and 81 in 2020. In 2020 there were 81 restraining or harassment orders filed and so far 92 orders have been obtained in 2021. Domestic and intimate partner violence cases in Brookline fluctuates, in years prior there have been closer to 125 cases. These statistics do not include the numerous phone calls to the department on what to do about leaving an abusive situation, advice and coordination with DCF and the school system to ensure safety of children. Domestic abuse in Brookline, as elsewhere, affects individuals of all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. The Brookline Police Department did note that they have not had a Domestic Violence case where a firearm was involved in recent years.

In Brookline, the public discussion has begun to move toward reimagining public safety, or reforming the current system and reallocating some of the money to mental health services, youth development, affordable housing, and other systemic disparities. After reviewing the substantial amount of work and data collected by both the Task Force to Reimagine Public Safety and the Committee for Police Reform in their individual Final Reports^{36 37}, as well as engaging several stakeholders in conversations around Public Safety, the Disparity Report Working Group makes the following recommendations.

³⁴ https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/ncadv_massachusetts_fact_sheet_2020.pdf

³⁵ https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/ncadv_massachusetts_fact_sheet_2020.pdf

³⁶ https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/23619/Task-Force-Final-Report-22621_1P

³⁷

https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/24343/Reforms-Committee-Final-Report_41221_2P

Recommendations:

- Create a Resource list of various agencies that provide wellness checks that include alternatives to Police;
- The Town of Brookline should create a Social Services Office and/or a point person in Brookline who can provide a holistic overview of town-wide available resources. This role would provide an alternative to utilizing 911 for non emergency services, and would be able to provide more long-term safety resources for individuals needing to connect with appropriate services;
- Increasing access to public bathrooms to make Brookline a more equitable and welcoming community;
- Increase town-wide Emergency Preparedness by utilizing a wider campaign to ensure all residents opt in to the new Emergency Alert System, as well as make an effort to ensure all residents have access to supplies (Disaster Kits) and resources in case of an emergency;
- Explore utilizing civilian traffic enforcement to ensure a more equitable and flexible structure as well as increased employment opportunities.

Housing Status and Affordability

Safe and continuous housing is a public health issue. Research has concluded that when people —both adults and children alike—experience housing instability or homelessness, their prospects for future educational attainment, employment growth, health stability, and family preservation are significantly reduced.³⁸ While non-Hispanic Black persons represent 13% of the total population, they are 21.7% of the renters experiencing the worst-case housing needs defined in HUD’s report.³⁹ Similarly, Hispanic persons are 16% of the population, but represent 25.3% of renters with worst-case housing needs.⁴⁰ This data is consistent with data regarding racial disparities in experiences of homelessness: for example, 40% of people counted as experiencing homelessness in the January 2018 Point-in-Time count were African American.⁴¹ A stable home provides an opportunity for improved outcomes around employment, health, and education.⁴² Housing affordability and stability in communities will not be solved without action; local leaders can take steps now to both improve current conditions, and generate the information that will be needed to achieve longer lasting and larger-scale solutions.

³⁸ https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing-Affordability-and-Stability-Brief.pdf

³⁹ https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing-Affordability-and-Stability-Brief.pdf

⁴⁰ https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing-Affordability-and-Stability-Brief.pdf

⁴¹ https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing-Affordability-and-Stability-Brief.pdf

⁴² https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing-Affordability-and-Stability-Brief.pdf

Housing Advisory Board and other Community Organization Stakeholders

Stakeholders representing the Housing Advisory Board, Building a Better Brookline, and Brookline for Everyone shared data regarding housing affordability and current housing statistics of Brookline residents. About 7,300 (29%) of Brookline residents have low or moderate income. In 2019, 48.9% of Brookline residents owned their home, and 51.1% of Brookline residents rent. In 2021, the average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment in Brookline is \$2,200. Based on 2020 data, 86% of renters pay extra for utilities. 47% of renters in Brookline spend more than 30% of their income on housing, while 23% spend more than 50% of their income on housing. Waiting lists for subsidized units are often 2-10 years long, and the median sales price of a home in Brookline has increased from:

- Single family -- \$1.4M in 2014 to \$2.2M in 2020
- Condominium -- \$620,000 in 2014 to \$925,000 in 2020

Low, moderate, and even middle income families can no longer afford to live in Brookline, as shown in Figure 16⁴³.

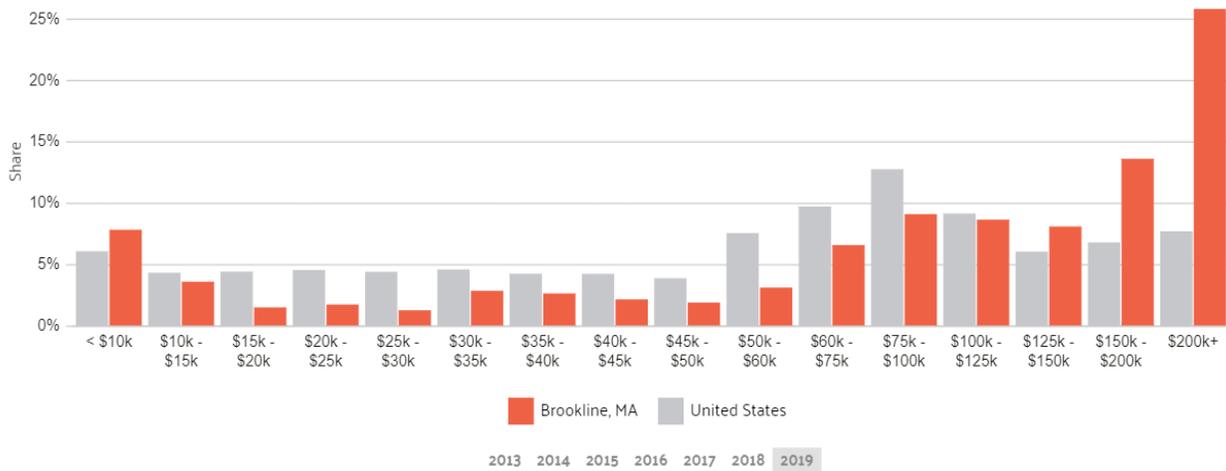


Figure 16. 2019 Income in Brookline vs. average in the US

As far as production or availability of housing in Brookline, the lack of enough housing continues to force prices up, and is causing people and jobs to leave Massachusetts for places where housing is more naturally affordable. According to the Census Bureau, from 2011 through 2018, Boston permitted 24,953 units, the vast majority in mid-size and larger buildings, whereas Brookline permitted 274 units, nearly half in single family homes. Brookline has approximately 8.5% the population of Boston, but permitted only about 1-2% as many new units for that seven year period. An additional 252 were permitted in 2019, and ore units (about 800) are in the pipeline,

⁴³ <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/brookline-ma/>

but not nearly enough to meet the need, and Brookline is still behind in producing its fair share of housing for the region.

Brookline Housing Authority noted that there is a barrier for individuals currently living in public housing to move out of the public housing system as well as barriers to actually utilizing Section 8 vouchers in Brookline. In total, there are approximately 1,100 vouchers. About 649 of these vouchers are “mobile vouchers” not tied to a specific property. Only 26.7% of these vouchers issued through the Brookline Housing Authority are utilized in Brookline. The rest are used throughout the Commonwealth where there are local Fair Market Rents (FMR), as opposed to Brookline’s Small Area FMR. The Brookline Housing Authority has also recently gained 75 new mainstream vouchers for households in which the head of household has a disability and is under the age of 55.

The Brookline Housing Authority also experiences barriers to funding for re-development and providing for renovations in order to maintain the current housing stock in good repair for its residents. The BHA’s Executive Director addressed the systemic need for zoning reform to increase a range of affordable housing in Brookline. In this discussion of zoning reform and housing, the ADA Coordinator emphasized the need to consider access in the planning stages of any new housing that is developed.

The Town of Brookline’s Senior Housing Planner also emphasized the need of additional resources in Brookline to support the high level of need outlined in the Housing Market Analysis and Overview of the June 2020 Town of Brookline Consolidated Plan.⁴⁴ Every five years, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires the Town of Brookline to create a Consolidated Plan as part of the entitlement funding process for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The Con Plan serves as the roadmap for the use of CDBG funds over a five year period. CDBG funds are allocated to address housing and community development needs primarily benefiting low- to moderate-income families or individuals. The Town of Brookline is also currently developing a Housing Production Plan with the primary objective to encourage and incentivize further affordable and market-rate housing production and to retain and improve the existing affordable housing stock. On October 12, 2021 the staff-led working group kicked off this project with the consultant team (Barrett Planning Group, Community Circle, Dodson & Flinker, and Language Connections). The first phase of work includes creating a community engagement plan and completing targeted community interviews to better document housing needs in Brookline. Additional information will be added to the webpage⁴⁵ as

⁴⁴ [Town of Brookline FFYs 2020-2024 COnsolidated Plan](#)

⁴⁵ <https://www.brooklinema.gov/1299/Housing-Production-Plan>

the project proceeds, including information about public forums beginning in January 2022. The work is anticipated to be completed by the summer of 2022.

The Brookline Center Representatives from the Brookline Center discussed the work that the Center does around tenancy preservation to help people stay housed. Through partnerships with the Brookline Housing Authority, the Council on Aging, and the Health Department the Center can provide preventative measures to respond and support residents when they are having difficulties related to housing. The Brookline Center also assists with residents' immediate needs by responding to crises and emergencies: it offers homelessness prevention programs and case management; it assists residents to navigate court processes; to search for appropriate housing; and it provides direct (emergency) financial assistance through the Safety Net Fund. The Safety Net has seen an increase in needs, nearly doubling from 2020-2021, specifically to support housing needs. The Center reported that there was a small drop off in the Summer of 2021; however, as of September 2021, they are starting to see the need climb again as extra federal and state benefits are being removed. Figure 17 below, shows the comparison of needs between FY 2020 and FY 2021, and Figure 18 shows the requests by type received at the Center since January 2021.

	<u>FY 2020</u>	<u>FY 2021</u>	<u>% increase</u>
<u>Total Inquiries</u>	<u>686</u>	<u>1143</u>	<u>67%</u>
<u>Total Cases Served</u>	<u>416</u>	<u>790</u>	<u>90%</u>
<u>Total Assistance Given</u>	<u>\$213,514.63</u>	<u>\$470,261.83</u>	<u>120%</u>
<u>Total Housing Assistance</u>	<u>\$142,779.32</u>	<u>\$327,307.11</u>	<u>129%</u>

Figure 17. Safety Net Data Comparison from FY 2020 to FY 2021

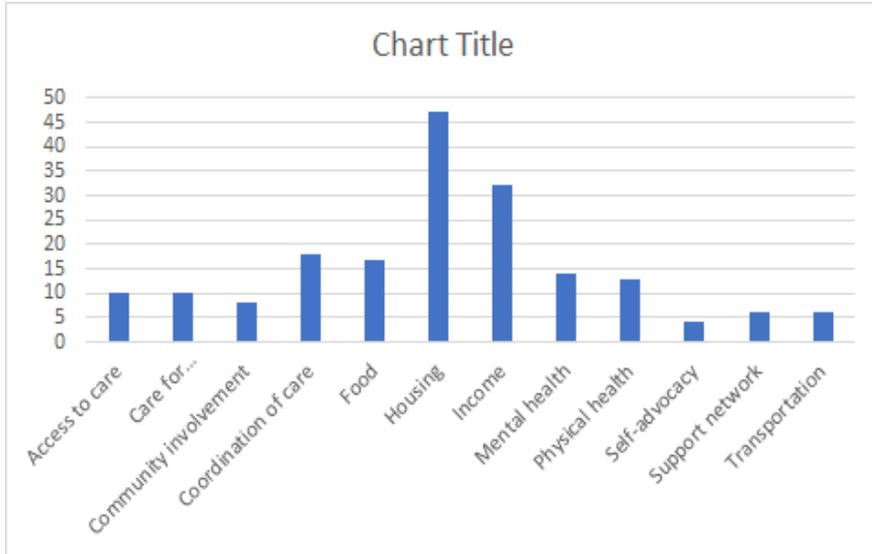


Figure 18. Brookline Center requests for assistance by service type from January - September 2021

The Senior Center provided a narrative chronicling the reality of many seniors as they try to stay in their home, be they renters or homeowners, and of the related difficulties this struggle poses in their ability to meet their other needs. There are two small scale programs that the Director of the Senior Center shared, although there is a waiting list for both:

1. A Property Tax Relief Program, limited to 35 participants, that offers \$1500.00 off the households property tax;
2. A Renters Relief Program, limited to 10 participants, that offers a \$1000 stipend for rent by working at the Senior Center.

Mutual Aid Brookline reported a recent spike in their food assistance program, as well as 328 applications for their Fall Cash Drop program that gave \$300 per household over four random-selection cycles (grant-funded via the Brookline Community Foundation and Brookline Hub). 55 applicants received a \$300 cash drop.

Recommendations:

- Consider Zoning Reform that would allow density bonuses for increased inclusionary units (affordable to low to middle income households);
- Reconsider rent control as a Town measure to stabilize the proportion of income Brookline residents spend on monthly rent;
- Open a Town fund or match Brookline Center funds for use towards rent for residents who are at risk of eviction;

- Assist in providing funding to Brookline Housing Authority to renovate state public housing kitchens and convert to all electric appliances. This would reduce instances of asthma, reduce fire safety issues, improve greenhouse gas emission output, and allow Brookline’s neediest families to have a modern and appropriate set of appliances to cook healthy food (helping to mitigate nutrition and health disparities).
- While the Brookline Housing Authority does provide refrigerators in all federal public housing units, further funding for refrigerators could help to update (and reduce greenhouse gas emissions) for a host of older refrigerators or households that were asked prior to 2020 to locate their own refrigerator.

Universal Design Concept

Universal Design (UD) is defined as an approach to building barrier-free physical, learning, and work environments so that they are usable by all people in a community, regardless of age, size, or ability. Universal access also includes design concepts applicable in education and communication.

Universal Design is an approach to design that increases the potential for a better quality of life for everyone. It is a design process that enables and empowers a diverse population by centering design principles that address the needs of the most marginalized communities, understanding that in meeting the needs of those communities, they will be improving human performance, health and wellness, and social participation of all of us⁴⁶. UD creates products, systems, and environments that are usable by as many people as possible, regardless of age, ability or situation. Other terms for Universal Design used around the world include Design for All, Inclusive Design, Design for the Margins, and Barrier-Free Design. Although UD terminology and meanings differ from one country to another, the common goal of social inclusion transcends national laws, policies, and practices.

Universal design is not a trend in design. Rather the UD approach is grounded in the understanding that the broad range of human ability is ordinary, not special. Universal design addresses barriers faced by people with disabilities, older people, children, and other populations that are typically overlooked in the design process. UD reduces stigma, and provides benefits for all users. For example: building entrances without stairs equally assists someone who moves furniture, pushes a baby stroller, or uses a wheelchair. UD can increase usability of an environment or product without

⁴⁶ <http://universaldesign.com/what-is-ud/>

considerably increasing its cost by reducing the need for design modifications later when abilities or circumstances change.

The competitive and global nature of modern business, the flourishing communications technology industry, the international disability movement, and the rapidly growing aging and disabled populations all over the world are driving the increasing demand for more universally usable products, environments, and services.

Universal design is not a synonym for accessibility standards. The UD process differs from one complying with accessibility standards by integrating accessible features throughout the overall design - literally from its earliest phases through completion. This difference in process is important because integrating these features during every phase results in better design. Additionally, it prevents the stigmatization often associated with accessible features that have been added on late in the design process or as a modification after it is complete. Universal design also differs from accessibility requirements in that accessibility requirements are usually prescriptive whereas universal design is performance based. Universal design does not have minimum requirements but instead addresses usability issues of all potential users.

The seven principles of universal design established by the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State were developed to guide the design of any product, service, or environment⁴⁷.

- Equitable use: The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities;
- Flexibility in use: The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities;
- Simple and intuitive: Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level;
- Perceptible information: The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities;
- Tolerance for error: The design minimizes hazards, and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions;
- Low physical effort: The design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue;

⁴⁷ Universal Design: Process, Principles, and Applications:
<https://www.washington.edu/doit/universal-design-process-principles-and-applications>

- Size and space for approach and use: The design provides appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

When approaching an issue the more principles of Universal Design that can be applied, the more accessible and inclusive the solution will be for all involved. In the case of Brookline, UD can be applied to physical environments, to how the Town communicates with its residents, businesses, and visitors, as well as approaches that can address elements of all of the disparities mentioned in this report.

The Brookline Information and Technology Department identified key barriers that the Department faces that prohibits universal access to both content as well as to physical technology. The first barrier is that Town content is spread across Departments and not unified; IT has developed standards for all documents that are shared on the website to ensure they are readable by screen readers, translatable for those with language access needs, as well as easily downloadable, etc. However, there is not enough education and training across all Departments and there are not enough resources for compliance oversight. IT staff also identified that there is no standard for instructional spaces across the schools that indicates the need and density of technology items such as printers, computers and tablets. IT has been attempting to take an inventory since 2017 on what devices are in the schools and where they are, and this has been very difficult; there is no clear leadership or dedicated role to have and maintain such an inventory.

The Brookline Recreation Department has a Recreation Therapy Division that provides evidence-based recreation opportunities for individuals with disabilities, injuries, or illnesses, aged youth to adult. Some programs provide specialized instruction, while others are inclusive for people of all abilities. The Recreation Therapy Division reported that 120 residents are served through adaptive programming and that a majority of those served are individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. They also shared that running true inclusive collaborative programming has been a challenge and that they would like to see more crossover programming for residents who participate in the Recreation Therapy Programs to have the opportunity to actively participate in programming with their non-disabled peers.

The Brookline Building Department shared background information with the group about the regulatory divisions of the Building Department regarding enforcing State regulations for a variety of building codes. In regards to standard ADA Access the Architectural Access Board (AAB) develops and enforces regulations designed to make public buildings accessible to, functional for, and safe for use by persons

with disabilities in Massachusetts. AAB regulations, which are listed as Section 521 of the Code of Massachusetts Regulations, apply to all buildings and facilities in the Commonwealth that are open to members of the public including but not limited to, retail establishments, hotels and motels, multiple dwellings, educational facilities, medical facilities, detention facilities, places of worship, restaurants, and transportation facilities⁴⁸. There are triggers of Section 521 for new and existing buildings dependent on several factors, and cost and renovations thresholds of the specific project or building. The Building Department acknowledged that they can not impose access demands without code behind it and there is currently no incentive to go above and beyond the minimum code requirements to ensure access. Even meeting the minimum requirement can be a financial burden for some businesses.

The Planning and Community Development Department does offer a Facade Loan Program that seeks to reduce the financial burden to businesses and property owners considering investing in storefront improvements. Interested applicants can apply for up to \$10,000 in a 0% interest rate loan. Funds are dispersed once the project is completed. A nominal administration fee is due upon approval of the loan and loans are repaid annually in four equal installments. The Facade Loan Program is not heavily utilized. According to the Economic Development and Long Term Planning Division of the Brookline Planning and Community Development Department there were zero applications for the Facade Loan Program in 2019 and one application in 2021. This application was a COVID-19 related facade improvement; a restaurant application for folding/accordion windows to create a more open storefront environment. No applications have been submitted to address an access improvement in several years.

The Working Group also discussed what Universal Design might look like in practice for the Town of Brookline in regards to Civic Engagement and the importance of all public meetings being fully accessible to all residents. A civic engagement experience that addresses the 7 principles of being equitable, flexible, simple and intuitive, clearly communicated, requires low physical effort, and provides size and space for different approaches and use could look like a hybrid meeting that has a set beginning and end times, allows users to communicate verbally, in writing, and in multiple languages, with clear expectations as to the purpose and goal of the meeting, and any next steps that need to be taken. The meeting would also be recorded and played back at the convenience of the user if they are not able to make the meeting as scheduled, and questions or suggestions could be submitted for a set amount of time before, during, and after the meeting.

⁴⁸ <https://www.mass.gov/lists/521-cmr-2006-edition>

Recommendations:

- Review Section 521 with the Building Department and explore if there is an opportunity to lower thresholds in Brookline for incentive based bonuses.
- Create a grant fund that businesses and other property owners could draw on to make universal design more financially accessible.
- Ensure visibility of the Universal Design Concept by raising awareness of the fact that Universal Design would positively impact all residents throughout the various life stages.
- Creation of Best Practices for Accessible Communication and Programmatic Access documents and training across departments
- Prioritization of Town Improvement Projects based on what would make the Town more universally accessible for the greatest number of residents

Health Disparities

Health is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity⁴⁹. Public Health is “what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy⁵⁰.” Public Health prevents epidemics and the spread of disease and injuries, promotes and encourages healthy behavior, responds to disasters, and assures the quality and accessibility of health services.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), health disparities are preventable differences in the burden of diseases, injuries, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations. Health disparities are directly related to the historical and current unequal distribution of social, political, economic, and environmental resources. It is an inequity that is faced by populations depending on factors and identities such as race or ethnicity, gender, education or income, age, disability, geographic location (e.g., rural or urban), or sexual orientation. The health of a population is being disproportionately affected, this has been cited and proven true that many factors in a person’s environment directly impact their livelihood. It is imperative that this inequity is addressed in order to counteract the cycle of poor health. Seeking treatment, proper care, or even just avoiding the factor that caused you poor health in the first place, is

⁴⁹ WHO, 1998.

<https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution#:~:text=World%20Health%20Assembly%20%C2%BB&text=Health%20is%20a%20state%20of,absence%20of%20disease%20or%20infirmity.>

⁵⁰ (IOM, 1988:1).

more difficult to obtain and access without the proper resources. As a result, addressing health disparities is an important priority to address in Brookline.

The Brookline Health Department provided the Disparity Report Working Group with flu clinic data from the October 24, 2021 Flu Clinic, as well as data of COVID-19 deaths in Brookline by race/ethnicity through October 24, 2021. Both datasets are available below. The Disparity Report Working group anticipates collecting further data regarding the overall health of Brookline residents and identifying disparities in collaboration with the Health Department to include in the Final Report in February 2022.

Brookline Flu Clinic Data	10/24/2021
Vaccine Type	Influenza
Ethnicity	Total Doses
White	252
Asian	169
Hispanic or Latino of any race	41
Multiethnic	14
Unknown	13
Black or African American	5

Figure 19. Brookline Flu Clinic (10/24/21) Data by racial demographic provided by Brookline Department of Health

Brookline COVID-19 Death by Race as of October 24, 2021	
<i>Race</i>	<i>Count</i>
<i>Asian</i>	25
<i>Black African American</i>	1
<i>Other</i>	1
<i>Unknown</i>	9
<i>White</i>	66
Total	102

Figure 20. Brookline COVID-19 Death by Race provided by Brookline Department of Health

Recommendations

- Publicly available anonymized health data
- Staffing and funding for proactive and preventative health programs such as blood pressure clinics, nursing programs, diabetes care
- Ensure care for all members of the community, including at-risk populations such as veterans

Access to Childcare

In the United States, there is no universal child care, and this leads to many challenges for working families. Child care is seen as a political issue in the United States, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the issues, highlighting the dire need to address this crisis. According to one study of over 1,000 U.S. adults with dependents under 18 in the household, since March 2020, 28% of women with kids under 18 in the household have temporarily or permanently left the workforce to become a primary caregiver to children, compared to 10% of men⁵¹. A TIME source indicates that since February 2020, women have lost 5.4 million jobs and accounted for 55% of jobs lost, with an unemployment rate higher than their white male counterparts. In December alone, women lost 140,000 net jobs, with Black and Latina women hit hardest, according to an analysis of Bureau of Labor statistics from the National Women’s Law Center⁵². The cost of child care is often the main reason women leave

⁵¹ <https://time.com/nextadvisor/in-the-news/women-in-the-workplace/>

⁵² <https://time.com/nextadvisor/in-the-news/women-in-the-workplace/>

the workplace; about 55% of families report spending at least \$10,000 a year on child care, according to data collected on Care.com.⁵³ There are no safety nets for women in the United States; the burden of disproportionality falls on them.

The Brookline Early Education Program (BEEP) is a high quality, early childhood program that is part of the Brookline Public Schools system, serving students aged 2.9 to 5.0 years old, who present with and without identified special education needs. Within the student population they also support financially vulnerable Brookline students who would not be able to access early childhood education without financial assistance. BEEP also offers extended day programs at 5 sites. In FY21, there are 24 classrooms and 9 extended day programs with a current enrollment of 296 students as of Nov 2021. BEEP follows the Brookline Public School calendar and runs from 8 to 12:15pm 5 days a week and tuition for the half day program is approximately \$11,000. Tuition including Extended Day programming can be between \$17,000 and \$22,000 a year.

Most BEEP classrooms are “inclusive classrooms” that have approximately 16 students total, each including 3 or 4 students with identified needs. BEEP has a commitment to support at need and at risk populations. AY 2021-2022 the general fund is supporting 42 students (covering the cost of tuition). The BEEP Program at Lynch currently has the highest proportion of students with financial needs. There is currently a waitlist of at least 25 families that have moved into Town that are eligible for tuition assistance. BEEP is currently only for Brookline residents and they do not have a Materials Fee for Town Staff to enroll their PreK aged children.

In 2020-2021 BEEP had a reduced enrollment due to COVID-19 precautions and Figure 21 shows the demographic and specific population rates of enrolled BEEP/Pre-K students⁵⁴. These reduced COVID-19 numbers do not depict BEEP’s typical year.

⁵³ <https://time.com/nextadvisor/in-the-news/women-in-the-workplace/>

⁵⁴ <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00460000&orgtypecode=5&>

Student Group	Total PK Enrolled	# Student Group Enrolled	% Student Group Enrolled
All Students	153	153	100.0
Female	153	70	45.8
High Needs	153	59	38.6
Male	153	83	54.2
Economically Disadvantaged	153	18	11.8
LEP English language learner	153	19	12.4
Students with disabilities	153	37	24.2
African American/Black	153	9	5.9
Asian	153	37	24.2
Hispanic or Latino	153	17	11.1
Multi-race, non-Hispanic or Latino	153	20	13.1
White	153	70	45.8

Figure 21. 2020-2021 Reduced BEEP Enrollment Demographic/Population Data from DESE

BEEP’s Principle and Early Childcare Coordinator shared with the Working Group information about BEEP currently no longer accepting vouchers. Vouchers are administered through the Department of Early Education and Childcare (EEC) and the money comes from the Federal Government. In 2018, the distribution of vouchers

changed; all license exempt programs (such as BEEP) had to meet the same requirements as EEC licensed organizations. BEEP tried to work with the various stakeholders so that they could find ways to meet these requirements, but ultimately due to multiple factors as of September 30, 2021, BEEP is no longer accepting vouchers. BEEP reported 4-6 families utilizing vouchers previously. The BEEP Early Childcare Coordinator worked with Extended Day partners so that these families could utilize the vouchers during the extended day hours and continue to access full childcare. One partner, BEEP on Clark, is accepting vouchers for the Extended Day program.

BEEP is hopeful for a fully inclusive PreK and is working to position itself with the School Committee, Superintendent and EEC to expand Universal PreK and offer full day programs to more students and in particular, those in need of financial resources and support. Studies have shown the long term benefits that early education can have on an individual's overall social, emotional, and financial success over their lifespan. Negative impacts of a child not having access to early education can also be seen and supports this kind of universal and inclusive programming. Lastly, the Working Group learned that Pre-COVID if private childcare centers have contracted slots with EEC, or otherwise accept funds from the Commonwealth, they cannot offer other financial resources, such as sliding scale tuition, scholarships, employee discounts, etc. During COVID-19 there was a moratorium on this regulation and Early Childcare providers believe that this should be advocated for to continue in order to allow child care centers to have contracted slots and offer other resources.

ParentChild+ is a National Early Learning/Early Literacy program that connects families facing significant obstacles including poverty, low literacy, limited education, language barriers and homelessness with necessary resources⁵⁵. ParentChild+ Brookline offers a two-year home visiting, risk prevention program for low-to-moderate income, culturally diverse families with young children living in Brookline. The program models for parents how a child learns through play. The focus of ParentChild+ is to prepare young children to enter school “ready to learn.” Home visitors meet with ParentChild+ families for 30 minute sessions twice weekly for a two year period using high quality books and toys that are given as gifts to the family to keep. Parents experience the joy and value of reading, talking and playing with their children and discover their role as their children’s first and most important teachers. All visits take place in the home environment and are scheduled at a time that is mutually convenient to the family and home visitor, so that moms and dads who are working, in school, or in a training program can participate. This two year program serves 20 families a year and there is a waitlist and tremendous need in the Brookline community.

⁵⁵ <https://www.parentchildplus.org/our-work/#work-with>

Funding for ParentChild+ is mostly through the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) Grant awarded by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care and is approximately \$120,000 annually. This past year they did apply for expansion funding for increased hours and increased salaries per hour through EEC, however they did not receive the extra funding.

The Brookline Recreation Department (BREC) has offered a low/affordable cost-After School Program for several years. In the last 5 years, the program has doubled in size due to the pronounced need of the community. In 2018, the After School Program increased from 20 students to 40 students and has added more intentional components to the curriculum. At 40 seats, the program still fills up quickly, as does the waitlist. The Recreation Department would like to be able to increase the number of students that can participate in the After School Program, however due to funding and a lack of physical space to run the program, the current limit will remain at 40. The Brookline Recreation Center does accept vouchers for the After School Program; however the amount they can accept differs annually based on revenue from other programs and services.

BREC does have a Scholarship Fund that can be used to support families in need of additional financial resources, however, due to the fact that this is a revolving fund and not a part of the Recreation Department's annual operating budget, this fund is not guaranteed. The Recreation Department would like to see these funds available annually in not only their general operating funds, but across all Departments to assist in reducing systemic barriers to Town programs and services for residents with low income.

Lastly, the Recreation Department did acknowledge that prior to COVID-19 they ran a Recreation Activities for Teens Club (RAFT) that was a year round club for teens in Grades 6-8. Yearly membership was a \$10 fee that entitled the student to admission for each event or special trip. Students would receive monthly newsletters with information about upcoming trips and special events. Unfortunately, this program was halted due to the pandemic, but the Recreation Department is hopeful to have the funding to enable them to restart it in FY23.

The Brookline SEPAC (Special Education Advisory Committee) is a volunteer group of parents and other interested parties charged with advising Brookline's School Committee and Public Schools Administration about issues affecting students with disabilities and their families. They also support families by sharing information, providing education, promoting disability awareness, connecting people with resources, and promoting parent to parent connections.

In preparation for this Report, SEPAC distributed a 7 question survey to its membership via the organization's social media sites and newsletter. They requested input be provided only in relation to a child with a disability, that people respond whether they did or did not have adequate child care, and requested information on family members aged 3-22. They provided an email address for people to submit narrative responses. The survey remained open for five days. They received 35 survey responses and 1 narrative. This is a small sample size with potential for sample bias. The survey was open for a short time and was advertised only to known members. SEPAC is not a 501c3 and has no ability to raise funds and therefore used a free Survey Monkey account which limited the number and type of questions we could ask. The account would only allow respondents to take the survey once. Narrative instructions were provided that requested people with more than one child with a disability take the survey on different devices to allow them to provide input for every child. Because of the need to maintain the confidentiality of minor children, they did not ask families to identify the type of disability their children have.

80% of responses concerned school aged children with children aged 6-11 being the largest demographic at 49%. It should be noted that parents of older children and young adults identified a need for supervised care in this survey. 77% of respondents identified they do **not** have adequate child care for their child with a disability. Of the same sample, 84% **do** have adequate child care for a non-disabled child. 69% identified the need to provide child care for a child with a disability at home. Only 33% of respondents were able to place their disabled children in a group setting. 39% have child care being provided by a family member.

The barriers to access to child care appear different than those for non-disabled children. Physical barriers were not identified as a significant factor (8.5%) while the need for specialized behavioral support (54%) was. 54% of respondents cited a significant increase in cost as a barrier. It should be noted that while half the respondents qualify for subsidized home based services that could provide the specialized supports needed, only 35% said those services can be provided in a group child care setting.

Based on this quantitative data as well as qualitative narratives collected in the community, the SEPAC co-chair shared the following:

- children with disabilities have significantly greater difficulty accessing child care in Brookline than their typically developing peers
- a child with a disability is more likely to have care provided in a home than a group setting. This isolates them from exposure to typically developing peers and

prevents typically developing children from having meaningful interactions with persons with disabilities.

- there is a substantial increase in cost associated with obtaining child care for a child with a disability (setting, provider, increased level of care, etc.) than for a typically developing child
- the barriers to obtaining adequate child care for children with disabilities are different than those being experienced by typically developing children
- there is a population of older children with disabilities who require continued adult supervision whose needs are not being met.
- It is necessary to recognize the impact that lack of adequate childcare, due to some of these barriers, has on the family. It is often the female caregiver that leaves the workforce in order to properly provide childcare.

The Chair of the Brookline Commission for Women (BCW) reiterated that the female identifying member of the household is often the adult that the burden of childcare falls heavily on if the household is not able to afford the rising costs of childcare. This disproportionate burden is a gender specific disparity that requires attention and action. The BCW also raised the barrier of private childcare options in Brookline not accepting vouchers, leaving Brookline families with vouchers to have to use them elsewhere in order to access affordable childcare and raised the question of how do we create a Brookline in which vouchers can be utilized? Lastly, the Chair also mentioned that the Commission has found through their engagement with the community that walkability to childcare is a barrier, as well as the lack of robust afterschool programming for middle aged students; there is a gap in services available for those that have aged out of the younger programs but are not yet in highschool.

Based on available information from the website and information from the Director, the Brookline Teen Center did launch an inaugural middle school enrichment program for the 2021-2022 academic year, designed to address the program gaps for middle school aged teens in Brookline⁵⁶. The program runs five days a week from 2:30 to 6pm and provides students with a snack, homework support, social collaboration, and enrichment in areas of interest. Due to the pandemic and the fact that this is a new pilot program, this year there were slots available for 40 kids. The Teen Center partnered with METCO and gave 20 slots to their program. The program is currently at capacity, but there is a waitlist available depending on what days the family is requesting. Participants may sign up to attend the program either 3 days a week or 5 days a week. The cost for 3 days a week is \$350 a month and the cost for 5 days a week is \$425 a month. Financial aid is available for those who qualify and documentation is required to be considered for a financial scholarship. More funding would allow the Teen Center to bring on more staff to support a greater number of teens and utilize the downstairs

⁵⁶ <https://www.brooklineteencenter.org/middle-schoolers>

space for high school needs. Future funding is also necessary to ensure this pilot program is sustainable.

Steps to Success has also identified the lack of affordable and available after school options, specifically for Steps to Success families, from the Kindergarten to 3rd Grade age ranges as well as identified the disparate impact that this gap in service has on the older siblings in the household; leading to increased social and emotional isolation from peers as well as lower reading comprehension. Steps to Success has applied for an Early Education license and is waiting to be approved for vouchers so that they can offer a Kindergarten through 3rd after school program. The group also discussed the administrative work needed to assist both the families and the organizations with applying for and processing vouchers for childcare and the need for increased staff in order to make these processes smooth and efficient.

It was also shared with the Working Group the difficulty and stress of Early Education Childcare paperwork on both the organization accepting them, and more importantly the families needing to apply for them. It was suggested for the Disparity Report Working Group to possibly consider alternatives of implementing more localized Brookline based programs for childcare financial assistance.

Recommendations:

- Expand publicly accessible programs down to K-8 for out-of-school-time;
- The Town of Brookline should provide a fully-funded Pre-K/BEEP;
- Identify and create an updated and centralized list of Childcare Options in Brookline as well as easily accessible guidance on how to identify eligibility and access available resources;
- Provide expansion funding for ParentChild+

Quality of Life Measures

Quality of life measures refers to material and physical well-being, relationships with other people, community and civic activity, personal development, social fulfillment, and access to green space and recreation. Each of these categories can be broken down into smaller scale items that include, health and personal safety, relationships with parents, siblings, and other relatives, activities related to local or national government, creativity and personal expression, and active and passive recreational activities. These are measures that can help us to assess the burden of physical and mental health problems that are not disease specific. They can be used to quantify the perceived physical and mental health disparities among population subgroups on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, education, income, and place of residence.

Each of the previous disparity measures that we have discussed for the purposes of this report all impact the Quality of Life of Brookline residents. Each recommendation culminates in improving the overall quality of life in Brookline; whether it be through addressing housing, access to food, technology and transportation, or providing necessary language access and designing spaces and communication to ensure participation of all.

The Brookline Senior Center shared that Brookline is the 1st New England city or town to be included in the World Health Organization's international network of "Age Friendly Communities" by the World Health Organization in December of 2012 and the Senior Center, the Council on Aging, Age Friendly Committee, and Brookline Community Aging Network (BCAN) each provide programs, services and information for older residents that helps them remain engaged in the life of the community, and advocates to continue to make Brookline an even better community to age in place. It is imperative to ensure all programs are affordable, inclusive, accessible, and cover a wide range of topics with plenty of opportunity for residents to get involved. One specific initiative that was discussed was the Age Friendly Business Campaign that was developed by BCAN to enlist businesses to go out of their way to ensure they are "age or dementia" friendly⁵⁷. One aspect of this that was discussed at length was the accessibility of public restrooms and the increased demand and community need for specific services post pandemic, such as greater access to food delivery.

The Brookline Parks and Open Space Division informed the Working Group that public restrooms are available at larger parks, such as Skyline, Harry Downes, Brookline Reservoir, Amory Park and Fisher Hill and that the annual Capital Improvement Project process always includes upkeep maintenance and reconstruction of park spaces to ongoing maintenance dollars. Public restrooms were closed during COVID-19, however, they are now all reopened. The challenge for including public restrooms at some of the smaller neighborhood parks is typically space; some of these parks are just too small, however, including access to more Town public restrooms can be incorporated into the design review process. The Division Director was also willing to put together a map of Brookline's parks with indications of where there were current public restrooms. A recommendation was made to also consider making more Town maintained public restrooms available with adult sized changing tables for residents in need; currently the only facility in Town with this accommodation is the Evelyn Kirrane Aquatics Center.

The Working Group also addressed the accessibility of Brookline Parks for residents of all abilities and while the Brookline Avenue Playground is one of the only

⁵⁷ Brookline Age Friendly Businesses https://www.brooklinecan.org/age_friendly_business.html

fully inclusive and accessible playgrounds in Brookline currently, most parks are ADA accessible with continued redesign and maintenance to ensure accessibility. However, it was noted that as in other areas of the built environment, true accessibility and inclusion, often means going beyond the limited standard. The Division Director shared that the Cypress Playground (currently under construction) is going to be one of the largest inclusive playgrounds in New England once completed. The Working Group intends to include a list of accessible, inclusive, and no barriers playgrounds from Parks and Open Spaces in the Final Disparity Report in February 2022.

Several other issues and potential areas of improvements were raised by community members and organizational leaders. One topic of discussion was the possibility of integrating modern accessible fitness equipment appropriate for all ages, but specifically the aging population, into future redesigns of park spaces to encourage increased and mixed use of Brookline's outdoor spaces. Another important topic was the need to strongly consider the need for alternative modes of transportation to parks and open community spaces that are less walkable or accessible by public transportation. The need to consider community transportation from both an accessible and sustainable point of view should be a priority, as this Working Group has discussed several times before.

A representative from the Brookline Asian American Family Network (BAAFN) Steering Committee joined the Working Group discussion to provide important perspectives throughout the entire discussion and also specifically brought to the forefront of the conversation the importance of language access being an asset to residents' quality of life, in particular the limited English proficiency community. Limited English Proficient (LEP) residents are approximately 10% of the Brookline population and language access is a priority to ensure that all residents have equal and inclusive opportunities to engage in the community as well as government programs and services. The BAAFN representative shared powerful narratives of discrimination here in Brookline and elsewhere based on language proficiency and national origin and addressed the gap in how the Town of Brookline serves and respects all residents. The BAAFN representative strongly encouraged support and favorable action on WA 15 at the upcoming November 2021 Town Meeting.

The Working Group and community representatives also discussed the importance of community engagement and communication in considering quality of life. How can we, as a community, ensure that there are clear and transparent ways for people to be involved, connected, and actively a part of equitable decision making? The Town of Brookline has a Community Engagement Plan that is currently being implemented across Town Departments and the Working Group intends to include an

evaluation of the ongoing process in the Final Disparity Report in February 2021 to better evaluate how it is being implemented and address potential ways to further invest in community engagement and clearly define how to best expand engagement throughout Town. Centralized communication has also been identified as a need in several key disparities throughout the Report. It is important to note that Communication is not Engagement. Communication is a way to get important information and available services, programs, or opportunities out into the community whereas successful Engagement will lead to a decision being altered or changed in some way based on the engagement. The Town of Brookline does not currently have a centralized method of communication to share all information across Departments to the community or to potential stakeholders. Addressing this need may address some of the existing disparities identified in the Report.

Finally, the lack of a centralized Community Center in Brookline was also addressed. Representatives felt it is imperative to provide a common area for diverse community members to safely interact, share knowledge and culture, and increase recreation and learning opportunities for all residents across the lifespan. A Community Center could bridge equity needs with community interests while intersecting the Brookline community as a whole. Part of the community experience and quality of life is the ability to gather and a space such as this would maximize that opportunity and ability. The Working Group discussed finding under utilized Brookline spaces that could be reimaged into a new Community Center space.

Recommendations:

- Increase the availability and accessibility of public restrooms located at various Town facilities.
- Ensure equitable access and communication with Town government and resources for renters and new residents.
- Partnership with DPW Transportation Division, Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations, Parks and Open Spaces, Senior Center, Brookline Recreation and other important stakeholders to design and implement a Community Transportation option to less accessible town spaces and programs.
- Invest in a development process for a Brookline Community Center.
- Invest in Language Access and support WA 15 at the upcoming Town Meeting in November 2021.
- Invest in, re-asses, and formalize a Town of Brookline Communication Plan