



**HAMPDEN COUNTY**  
**WORKFORCE BOARD, Inc.**

# **Strategic Plan**

**July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2026**

**MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc., is the region's primary planner, intermediary and convener to address workforce development issues. Our only business is workforce development. In partnership with government, business, labor, and education and training providers, we coordinate, fund and oversee the publicly funded workforce development system in Hampden County.**

*Your connection to talent sourcing and innovative workforce development solutions*

**[www.masshirehcwb.com](http://www.masshirehcwb.com)**



## HAMPDEN COUNTY WORKFORCE BOARD, Inc.

Dear Friends,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the Strategic Plan of the MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc. (MHHCWB) covering the time period of July 1, 2023-June 30, 2026. Talent attraction, development, and retention is today's economic imperative, and will significantly impact the competitiveness of the region and the Commonwealth in the future. Our FY2024-2026 Strategic Plan embodies the basic principles of our enabling federal legislation, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and continues our aggressive and thoughtful agenda to ensure that all our residents are prepared to access career pathways that lead to economic self-sufficiency, and that our regional companies have the skilled workforce they need to grow their business, create wealth opportunities for their companies and employees, and grow the regional economy.

The Strategic Plan reflects MHHCWB's commitment to use labor market data to inform decision-making, strengthen regional cluster development, create innovative workforce development practices and programs, accelerate job creation by developing career pathways for all Hampden County residents, and enhance the quality of life and social fabric of our communities. We believe the workforce development eco-system in Hampden County is arguably the strongest in the State, and is well positioned to implement workforce development programming that will drive economic expansion and re-employment.

The Plan's Strategic Priorities and Goals reflect the MHHCWB's values, beliefs, and purpose, and are grounded in the principles of equity, diversity, and access. Our business and industry partners, MassHire One Stop Career Center Operators, and training and educational providers share these principles and are committed to working with us in finding the best way forward. This work is not easy. It will require our continued commitment and engagement, leveraging of shared resources, and willingness to be innovative and take prudent risks.

We invite you to read the FY2024-2026 Strategic Plan, join us in the exciting work ahead, and follow our progress on [www.masshirehwcw.com](http://www.masshirehwcw.com).

Patricia Samra, MHHCWB, Inc. Chair  
VP HR Operations & Total Rewards  
Baystate Health

David M. Cruise, President & CEO  
MassHire Hampden County Workforce  
Board, Inc.



## HAMPDEN COUNTY WORKFORCE BOARD, Inc.

MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc. is a business-led, 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation that engages its members from business, education, labor and community-based agencies to set public policies that will build a better workforce. Our only business is workforce development.

In partnership with government, business, labor, and education and training providers, we coordinate, fund and oversee the publicly funded workforce development and job placement programs in Hampden County.

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**President & CEO:** David M. Cruise

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**A complete list of MHHCWB Board Members can be found at:**  
<https://masshirehcb.com/about-mhcb/membership-committees/>

**For a listing of MHHCWB Staff, please go to:**  
<https://masshirehcb.com/professional-staff/>

# **Strategic Plan**

## **July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2026**

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**HAMPDEN COUNTY**  
**WORKFORCE BOARD, Inc.**

## ***FY2024-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

In the Commonwealth and in our Region, there is increased recognition of the importance of workforce development for overall economic development. MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc. is the region's primary planner, intermediary and convener to address workforce development issues. Our only business is workforce development. In partnership with government, business, labor, and education and training providers, we coordinate, fund and oversee the publicly funded workforce development system in Hampden County.

The FY2024-2026 **Strategic Plan** presents a framework and an array of implementable and measurable approaches that will respond to documented Supply Gaps in priority and other critical industries and occupations; even as those change as a result of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This framework will facilitate the development of sector-based career pathways, suggest strategies to scale up innovative education and training programs, accelerate community engagement and organizational capacity building, and establish a coordinated plan to secure alternative public and private sector investment in the workforce development system.

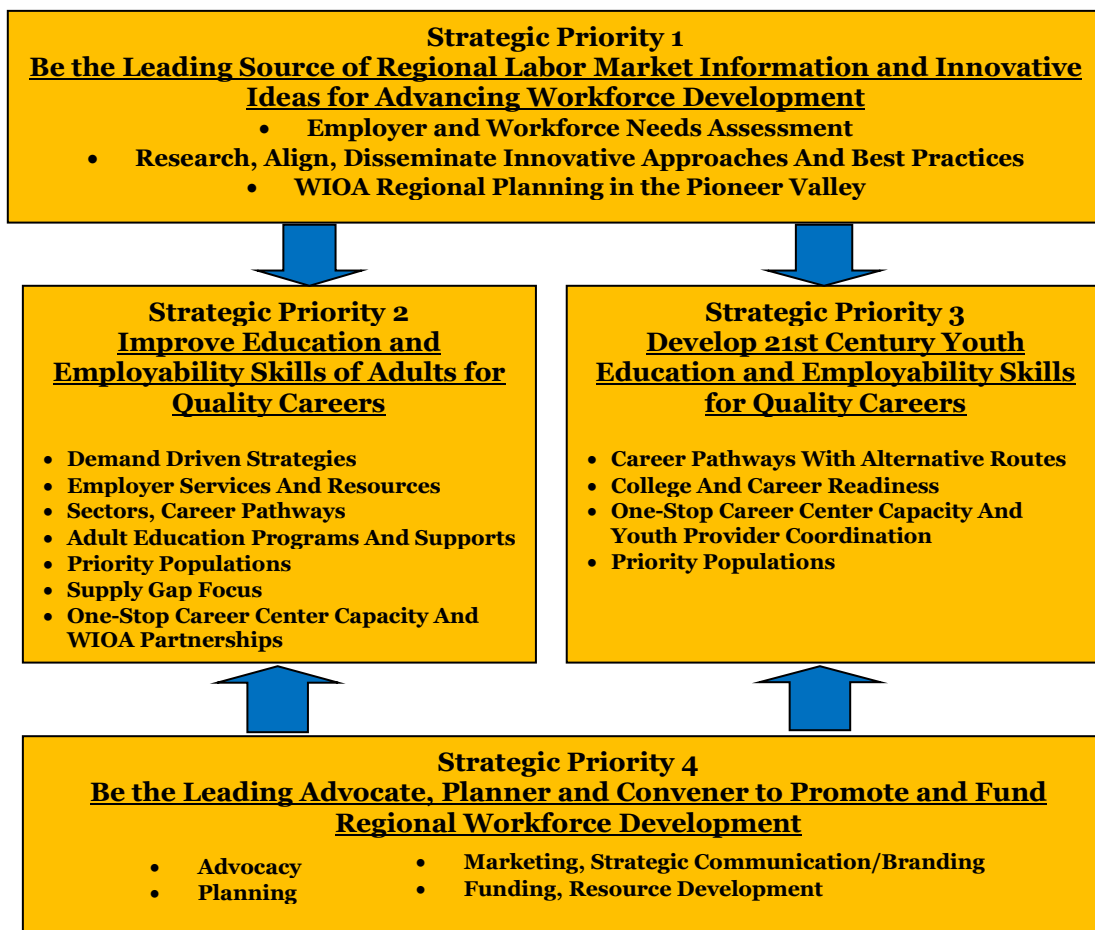
MassHire, as the statewide brand for MA Workforce Boards and Career Centers, seeks to accomplish our mission of creating and sustaining powerful connections between business and jobseekers through a statewide network of employment professionals through living the values of Collaboration, Reliability, Ingenuity, and Respect. These values are integrated throughout the FY2024-2026 **Strategic Plan**.

The Plan also integrates key aspects and elements of our Pioneer Valley Regional Plan Labor Market Blueprint, as approved by the Governor's Workforce Skills Cabinet, to ensure alignment of strategies as they relate to the goals as outlined. Read more at our website: <http://masshirehchw.com/massachusetts-regional-workforce-development-planning/>.

The Plan sharpens MHHCWB's focus on using public and private investment to accelerate job creation and retention by strengthening the partnership between cluster-based industry sectors and our MassHire One-Stop Career Centers that will result in self-sustaining employment and career advancement opportunities for all individuals, in particular our County's growing minority populations. Up-skilling the region's incumbent workforce and engaging in strategic tactics to support the re-employment of those individuals permanently separated from the labor force as a result of COVID-19 is critical to ensuring that our companies retain their competitiveness in the global economy.

The Plan responds to mandates under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for demand-driven strategies in coordination with employers and required core partners. Over the life of the Plan, MHHCWB will also expand such approaches to cluster/sector deployment strategies in new and emerging industry sectors.

MHHCWB's activities and initiatives will focus on building and sustaining a coordinated, integrated, and effective workforce delivery eco-system that meets the workforce needs and requirements of business and industry, and results in self-sustaining employment and career advancement opportunities for all individuals. We will ensure that youth, especially minority youth and youth disconnected from both work and school, are prepared for careers, college, and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



MHHCWB has developed a **Strategic Plan Scoreboard** and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure our progress toward meeting Strategic Priorities and Goals. The Scoreboard will inform strategic thinking, drive tactical implementation of Plan Goals and Strategies, and keep us mission centered.

MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc. welcomes you to join us in implementing our Strategic Plan and encourages you to visit [www.masshirehwcwb.com](http://www.masshirehwcwb.com) to share in this exciting journey.

## ***FY2024-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN***

### ***I. Our Vision and Mission***

MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc. (MHHCWB) is the region's primary planner, intermediary and convener to address workforce development issues. Established by Federal and State legislation, the MHHCWB is a business-led, 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation that engages its members from business, education, labor and community-based agencies to set public policies that will build a better workforce.

MHHCWB's only business is workforce development. In partnership with government, business, labor, and education and training providers, we coordinate, fund and oversee the publicly funded workforce development and job placement programs in Hampden County. MHHCWB's public workforce development system serves 15,000 to 20,000 job seekers annually plus about 2,500 youth through a number of programs. MHHCWB has an annual budget of between \$12M-\$15M, currently comprised of Federal (56%), State (43%), and Private (1%) funds.

MHHCWB is constantly researching regional labor market data, analyzing business' workforce needs and priorities, and developing appropriate strategic partnerships with employers and training providers to meet those needs. Through the region's One-Stop Career Centers: MassHire Springfield Career Center and MassHire Holyoke Career Center, we are the "voice" of the regional labor market. We have real-time information on job seekers, employment openings, labor supply and demand, and local hiring trends and projections.

MHHCWB continues to embrace a commitment to its fundamental values and to those embedded in the State's MassHire Workforce System. Collaborative leadership, innovation, being data driven, with an absolute commitment to equity, diversity, and access serve as the foundation of our Vision and Mission.

#### **VISION**

***Hampden County residents have access to and are prepared for high quality career employment opportunities at family-sustaining wages that accelerate business growth, ensure continued economic development, and strengthen our communities.***

#### **MISSION**

***MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board leads a dynamic, efficient and integrated workforce development system that plans, coordinates and oversees the growth and effective use of public and private investment in workforce development initiatives for quality careers. MHHCWB provides leadership in creating and sustaining strategic alliances that provide access to education, training, and career opportunities for all workers while ensuring a skilled workforce for all employers.***



The following **Sections II through IV** provide population, demographics, and labor market data that informs and supports the development of the Strategic Priorities, Goals and Strategies of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. In addition, post-pandemic analysis of industry, occupational and career development trends will inform our strategic thinking and planning on which sector strategies offer quality career pathways to our target populations and will guide us in our training investments and resource allocations.

## II. Hampden County Population and Demographics

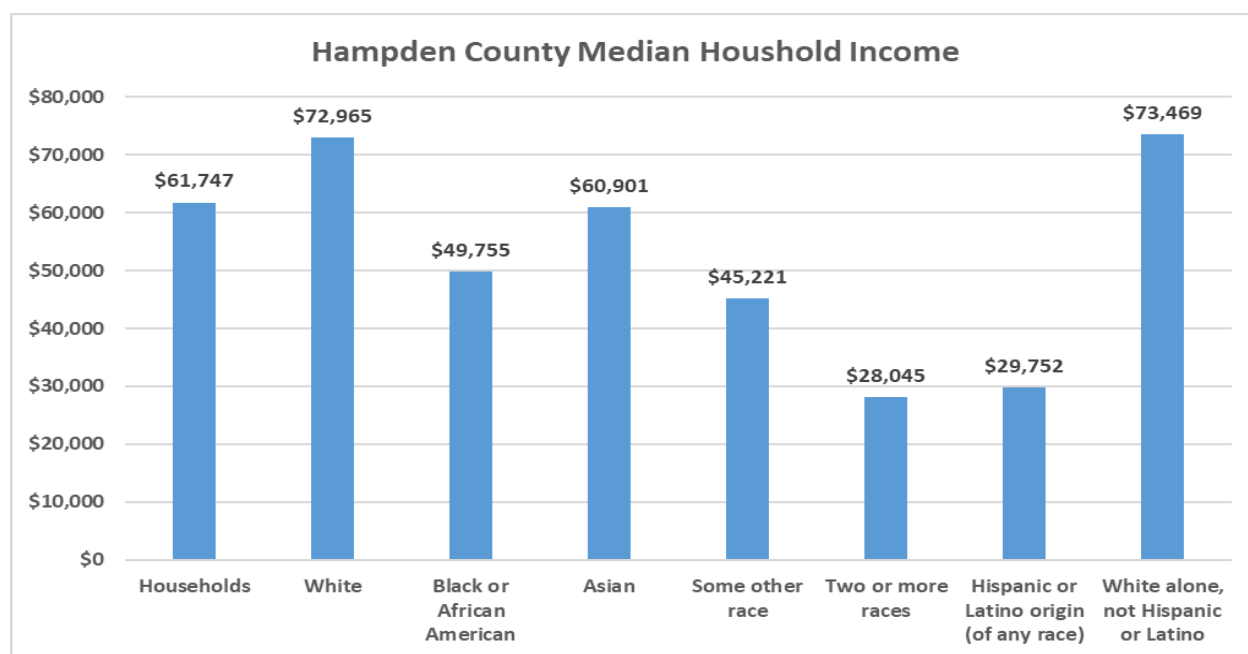
- ✚ The region's 2022 population decreased by 6,099 (1.3%) since 2017.
- ✚ The region's population is projected to decrease by 8,929 (1.9%) between 2022 and 2027.
- ✚ Median household income for the region in 2021 was \$61,700. The highest median household income by race was the White population at \$72,900 followed by Asians at \$60,900 and Black or African Americans at \$49,700.
- ✚ The lowest median household income were the Two or More Races category at \$28,000 and Hispanic or Latino at \$29,700.

**Figure 1 Hampden County Population Demographic Table**

<p><b>461,453</b> POPULATION (2022)</p> <p>Population <b>decreased</b> by 6,099 over the last 5 years and <b>projected to decrease</b> by 8,929 over the next 5 years.</p>	<p><b>221,754</b> TOTAL REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT (2022)</p> <p>Jobs <b>decreased</b> by 3,684 over the last 5 years, but are <b>projected to grow</b> by 20,228 over the next 5 years.</p>	<p><b>\$61,700</b> MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2021)</p> <p>Median household income is \$27,898 <b>below the</b> Massachusetts median household income of \$89,645.</p>
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Source: Lightcast Q4 2022 Economy Overview-Hampden County Data Set February 2023; US Census Bureau S1903 Median Income In The Past 12 Months (In 2021 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)

**Figure 2 Hampden County Median Household Income by Ethnicity & Race**

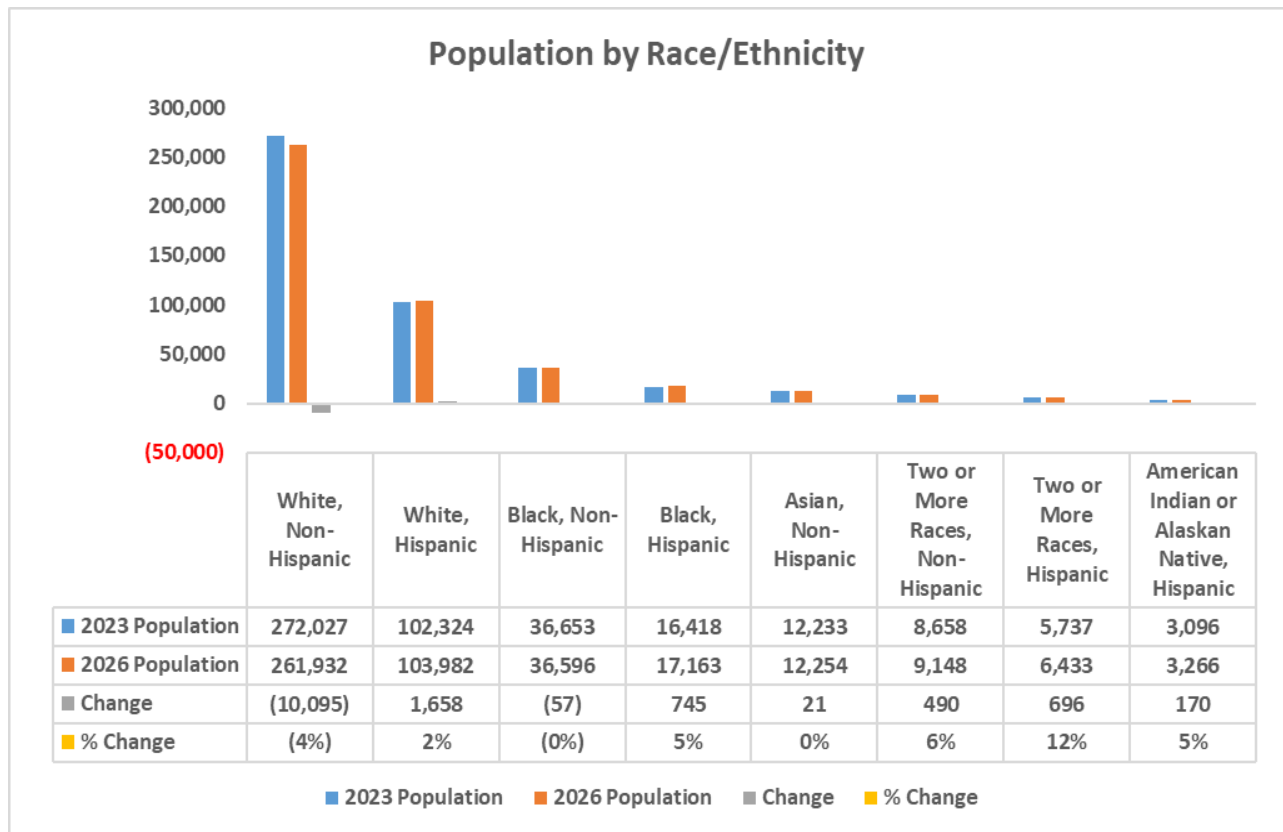


Source: American Community Survey ACSST1Y2021 Table S1903

## A. Population Race and Ethnicity

- Figure 3 indicates that from 2023–2026 the largest projected population growth will be in the White-Hispanic population with an estimated growth of 1,658 (2%) individuals.
- The Black Non-Hispanic projected population will remain constant, while the White Non-Hispanic population will decline by 10,095 (4%) individuals.

**Figure 3 Population by Race/Ethnicity with 2023-2026 Growth Projections**

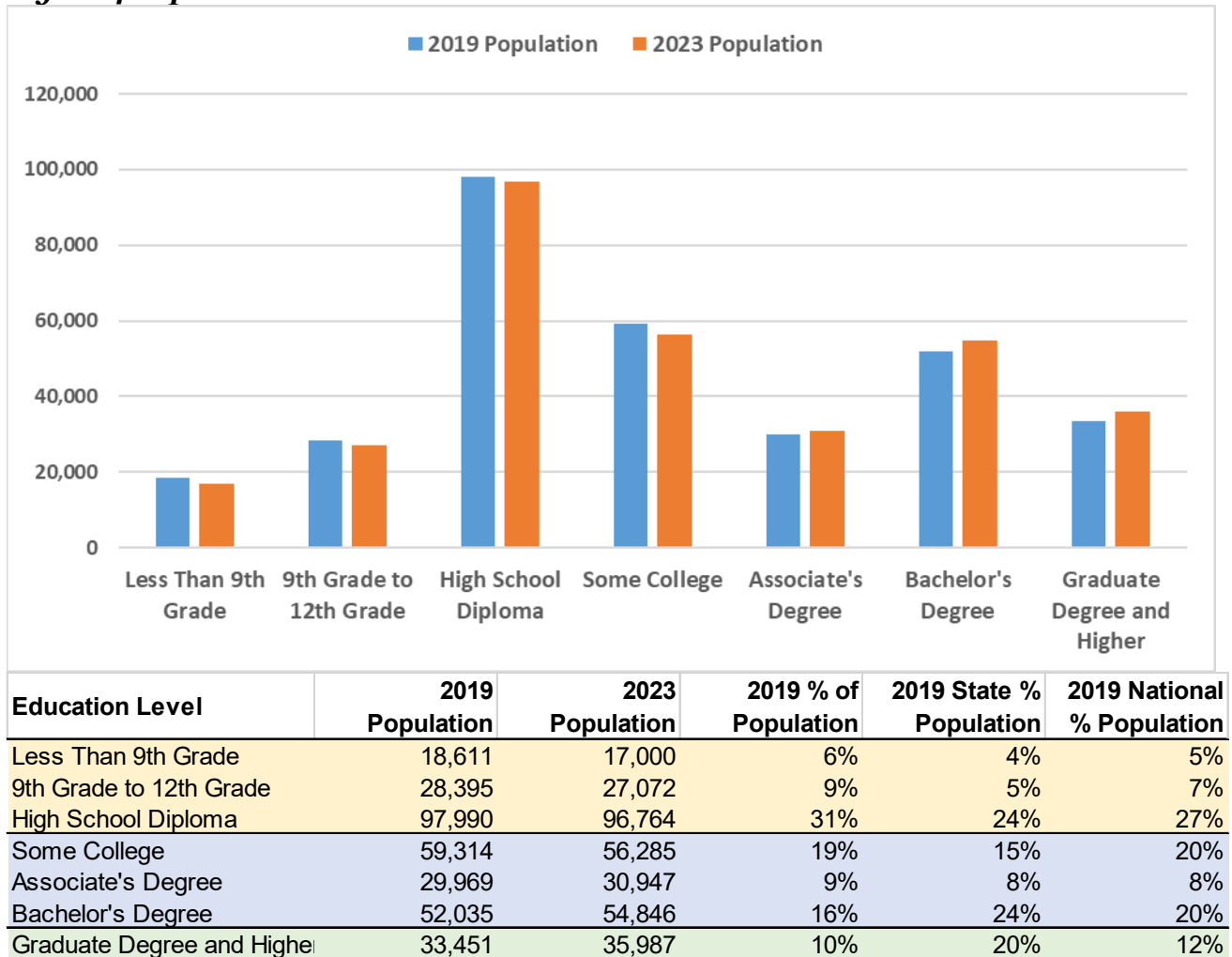


Source: Lightcast Q4 2022 Economy Overview-Hampden County Data Set February 2023

## B. Educational Attainment

- ✚ Educational Attainment data in Figure 4 indicates that in 2019, 16% of Hampden County residents possessed a Bachelor's Degree, which was 8% **below** the MA average of 24%, but 4% above the national average of 20%.
- ✚ The region outpaced the State for attainment at all other educational levels with the exception of Graduate Degrees and Higher.

**Figure 4 Population Educational Attainment**



Source: Lightcast Q1 2023 Data Set April 2023 Educational Attainment Snapshot

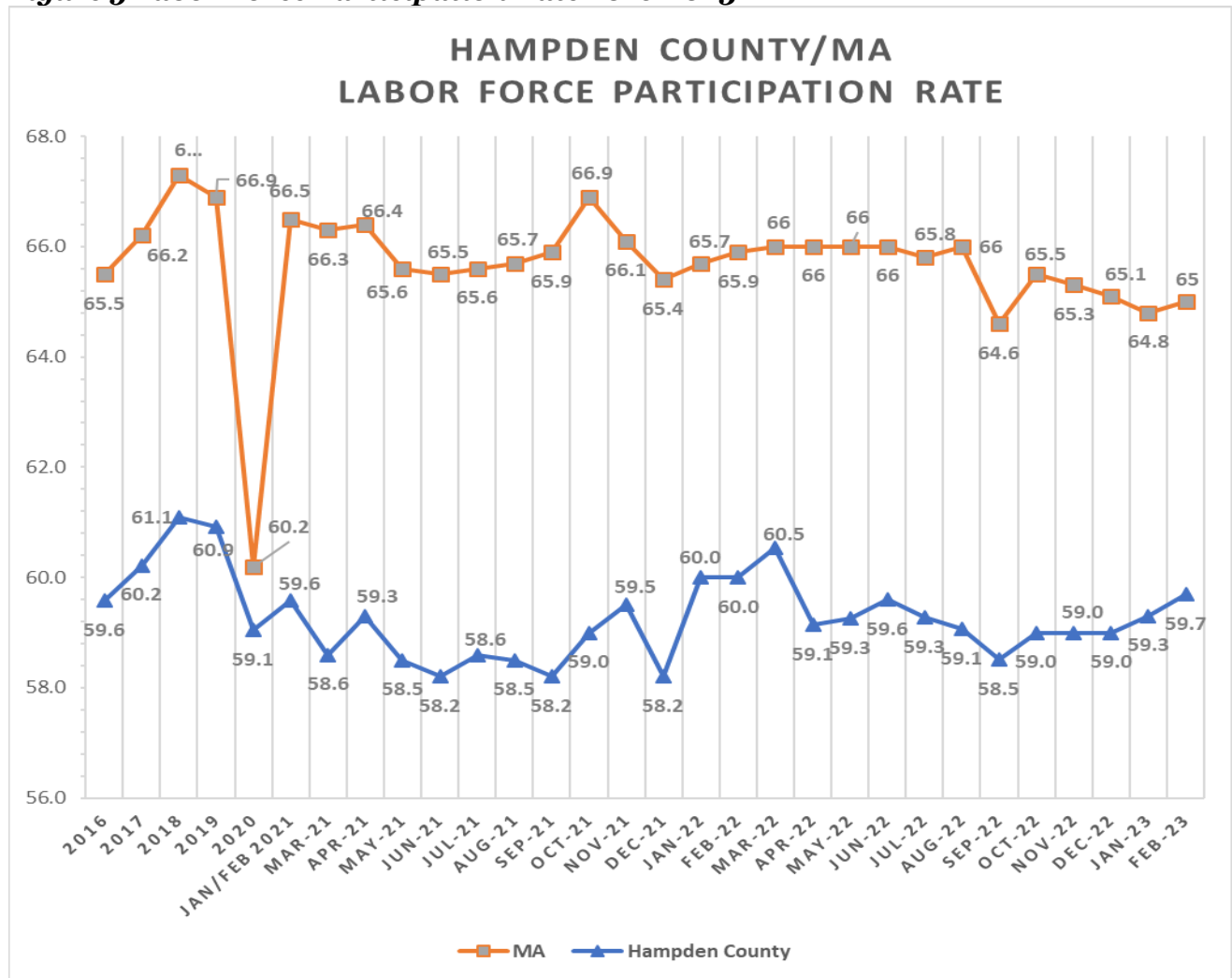
### III. Workforce Indicators and Projections

#### A. Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) Trends

The **Labor Force Participation Rate** is an estimate of an economy's active workforce. The formula is the number of people ages 16 and older who are employed or actively seeking employment, divided by the total non-institutionalized, civilian working-age population.

- ✚ The Massachusetts Labor Force Participation Rate has rebounded from a pandemic impacted low of 60.2% in January 2021 to a February 2023 level of 65.0%. (Figure 5)
- ✚ The Hampden County LFPR similarly rebounded, although more slowly, from a pandemic impacted low of 59.1 % in January 2021 to a February 2023 level of 59.7%.
- ✚ Hampden County, like MA, continues to transition up and down within 1% of 59% with a high of 60.5% in April 2022.
- ✚ Hampden County continues the monthly pre-pandemic trend of trailing the MA LFPR by 5%-6% points.

**Figure 5 Labor Force Participation Rate 2016-2023**

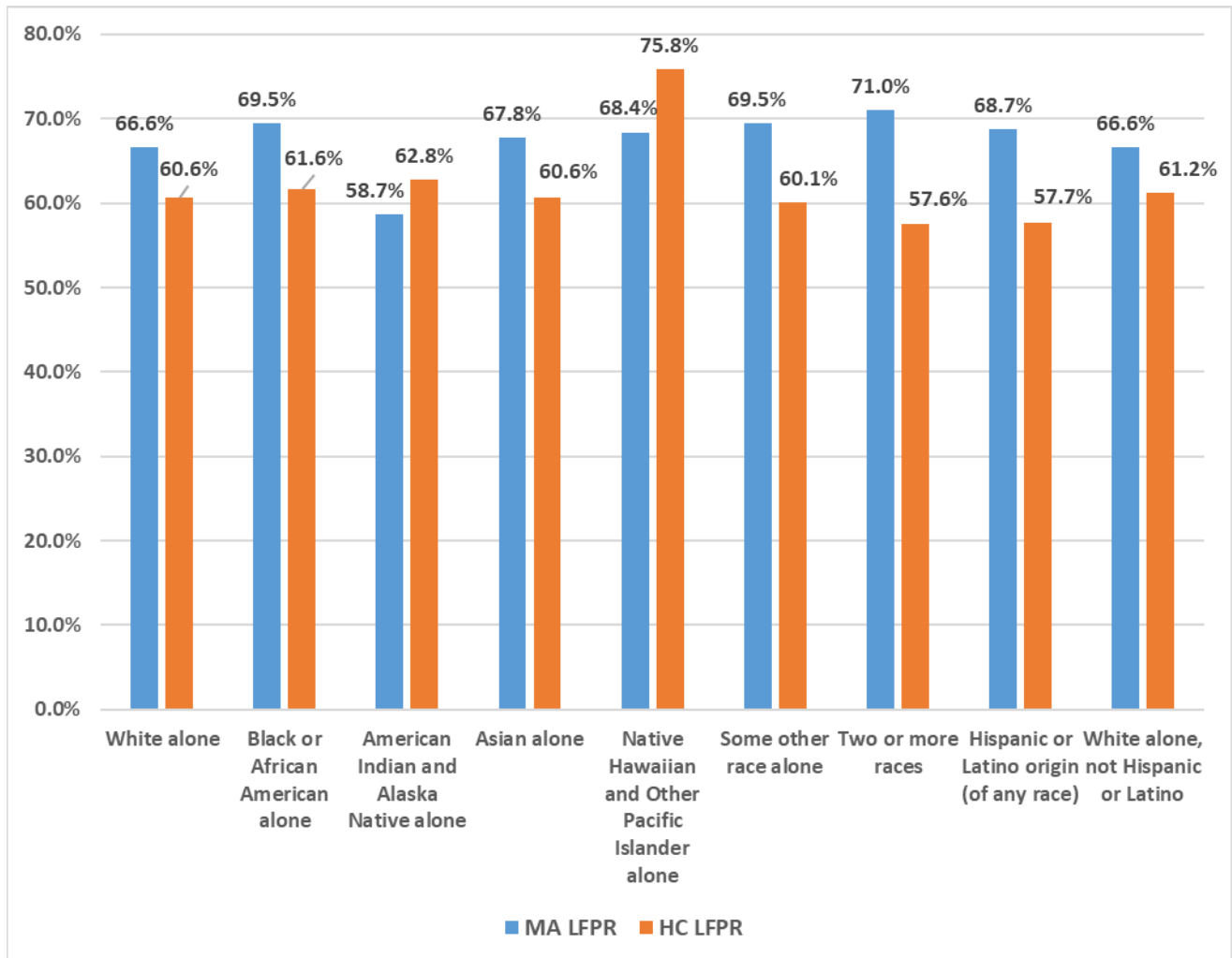


Sources: US Census Bureau DP05 Demographic and Housing Estimates and MA EOLWD Labor Force & Unemployment data

## Labor Force Participation Rate by Race and Ethnicity

- The LFPR by race and ethnicity for Hampden County detailed in Figure 6, tracks on the same aggregated values shown in Figure 5 for the same time period (2017-2021).
- Figure 6 provides a disaggregated snapshot of the LFPR finished the five-year sample period to evaluate and analyze variances in the labor force participation rate.

**Figure 6 Labor Force Participation Rate by Race and Ethnicity**



Source: 2021 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates dataset ACSST5Y2021

## Youth Labor Force Participation Rate (Ages 16-24)

Figure 6 below shows the LFPRs for the Youth Labor Force broken out by the 16-19 and 20-24 age groups.

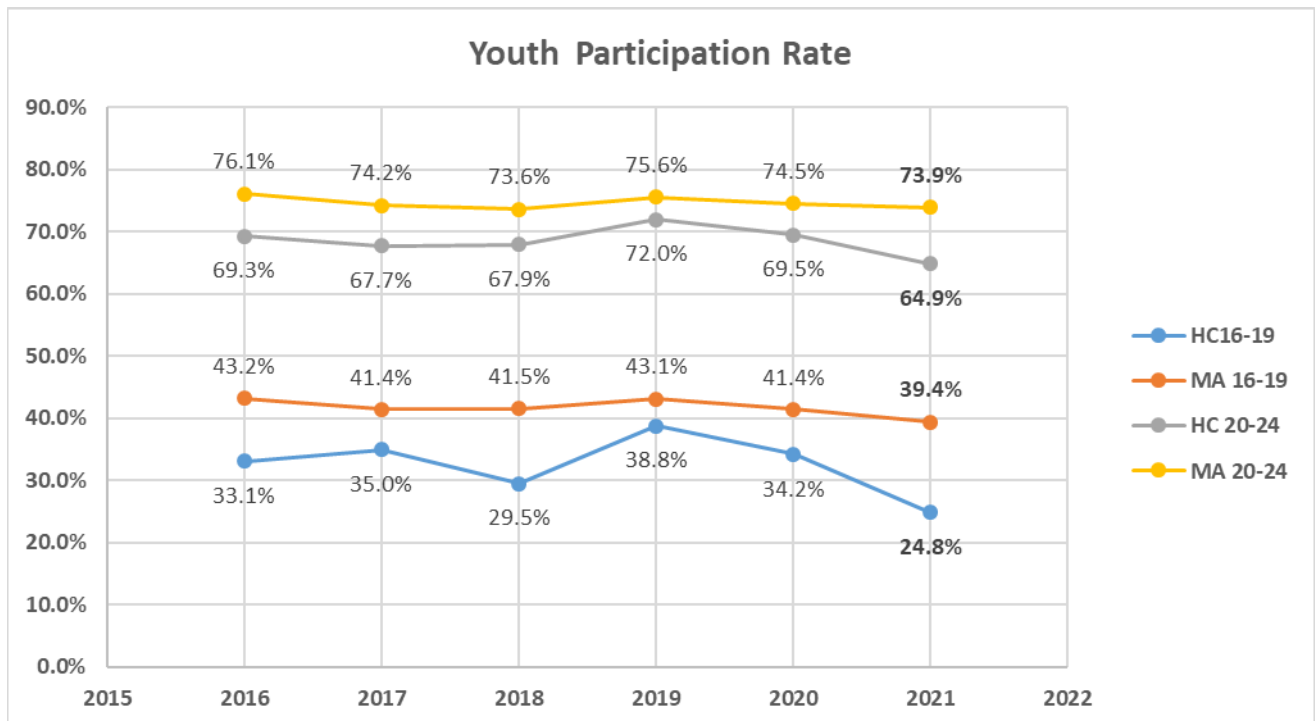
### Ages 16-19

- ✚ The Hampden County LFPR for youth ages 16-18 declined from 38.8% in 2019, to 24.8% in 2021, a decrease of 14%.
- ✚ MA Youth LFPR declined from 43.1% in 2019, to 39.4% in 2021, a decrease of 3.7%, far less than the 14% decrease in Hampden County.

### Age 20-24

- ✚ The Hampden County LFPR for youth ages 20-24 declined from 72.0% in 2019 to 64.9% in 2021, a significant decrease of 7.1%.
- ✚ MA Youth LFPR declined from 75.6% in 2019 to 73.9% in 2021, a decrease of 1.7%, far less than the 7.1% decrease in Hampden County.

**Figure 7 Youth Labor Force Participation Rate**



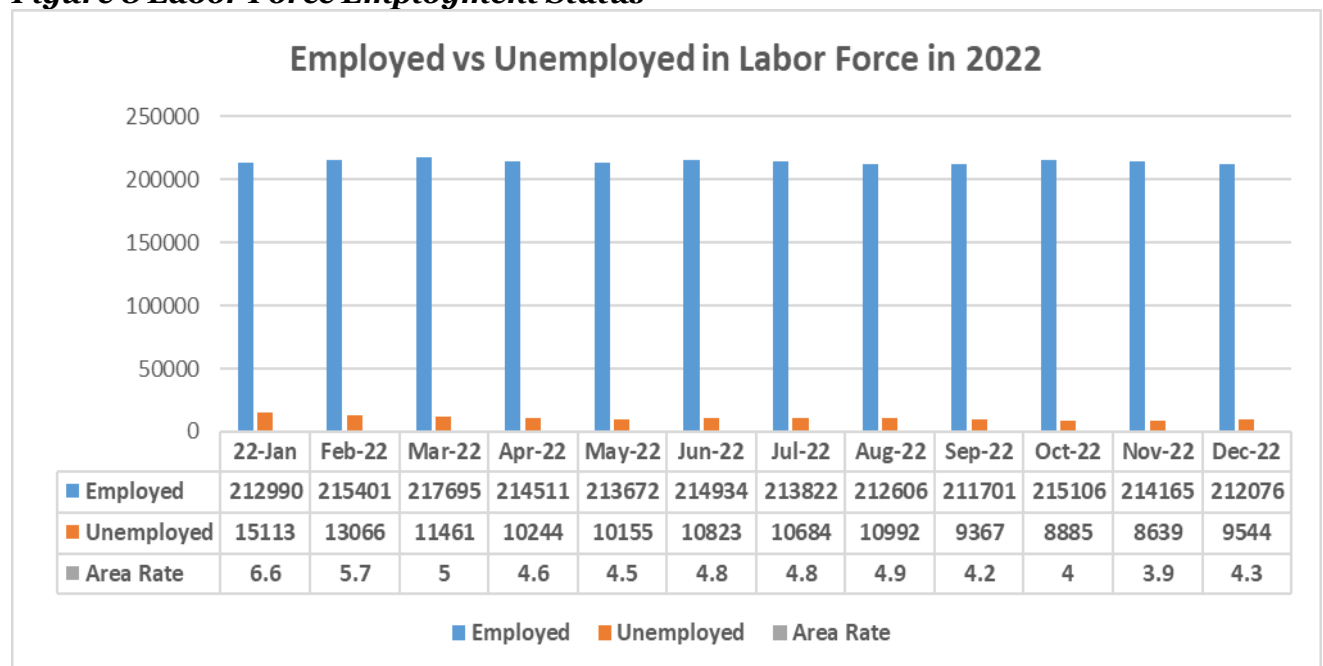
Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables- ACSST5Y2021

## Hampden County Employment and Unemployment- CY 2022

Figures 8- 11 summarize CY 2022 Hampden County Employment and Unemployment data.

- In CY 2022, monthly **Employment** in Hampden County averaged 214,057, ranging from a high of 217,695 in March to a low of 211,701 in September. (Figure 8)
- In CY 2022, monthly **Unemployment** in Hampden County averaged 4.8%, ranging from a high of 6.6% in January to a low of 3.9 % in November.(Figure 10)
- In CY 2022, monthly **Unemployment** in Massachusetts averaged 3.5%, ranging from a high of 5.0% in January to a low of 3.0 % in October.(Figure 10)
- In CY 2021, Youth Unemployment in Hampden County, in both the 16-19 and 20-24 age groups averaged 18.3 % as compared to the Massachusetts average of 11.8%- a significant disparity. (Figure 11)

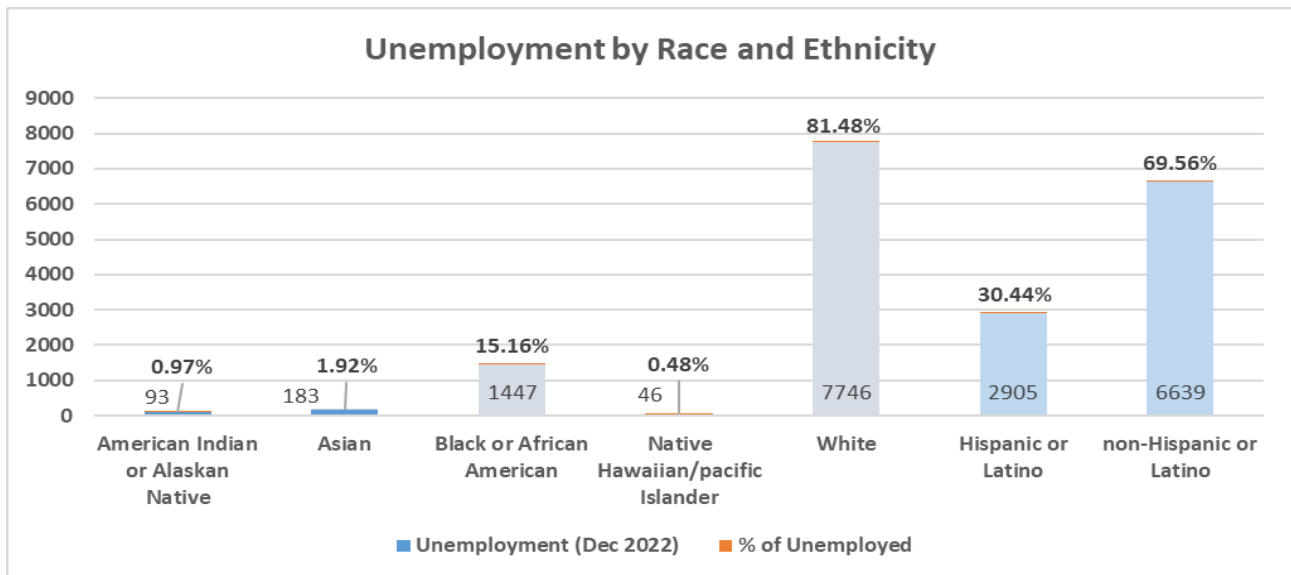
**Figure 8 Labor Force Employment Status**



Source: MA EOLWD Labor Force and Unemployment Data Period Jan-Dec 2022

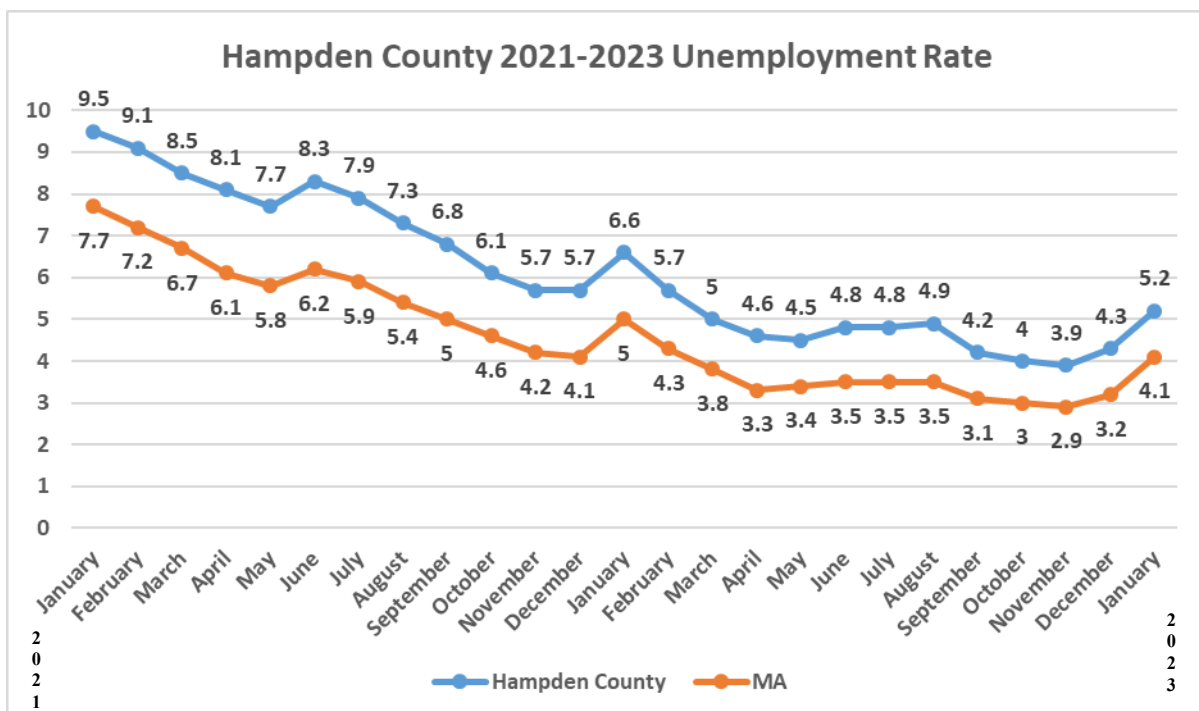
Figure 9, based on a different data source, displays unemployment numbers and percentages by race and ethnicity.

**Figure 9 Total Unemployed and Percentage of Residents by Race and Ethnicity**



Source: Lightcast Q4 2022 Data Set extracted February 2023

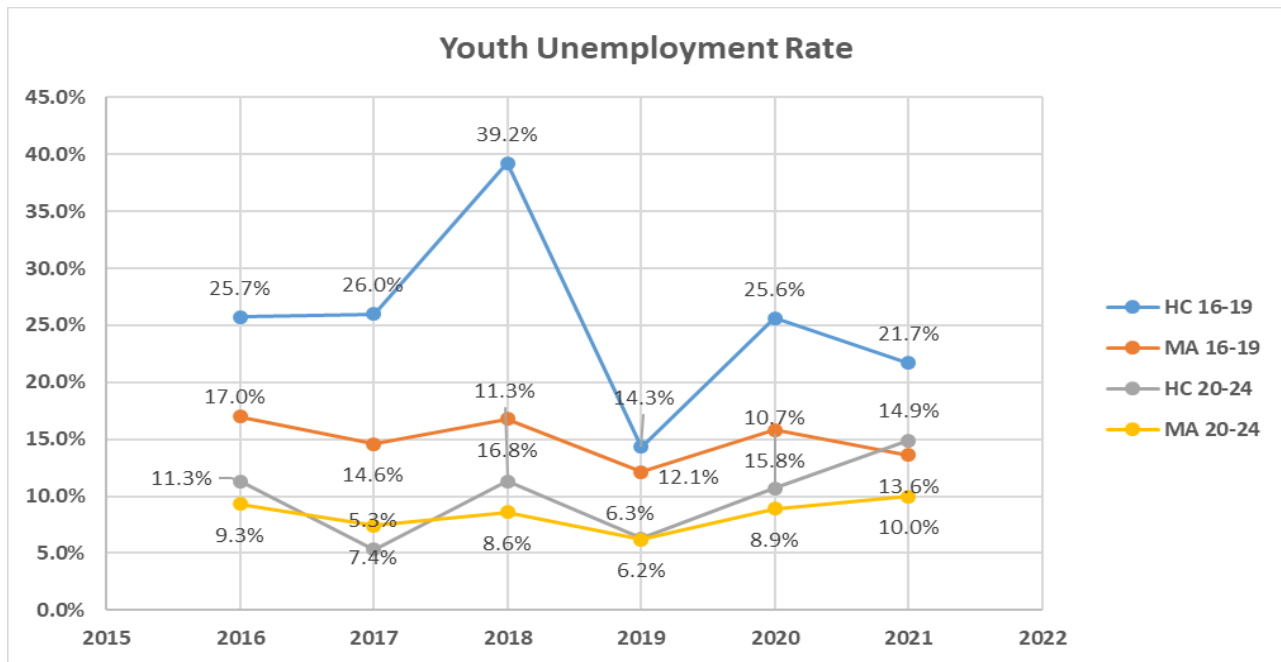
**Figure 10 Unemployment Trends**



Source: MA Department of Economic Research 2-21-23



**Figure 11 Youth Unemployment Rate**



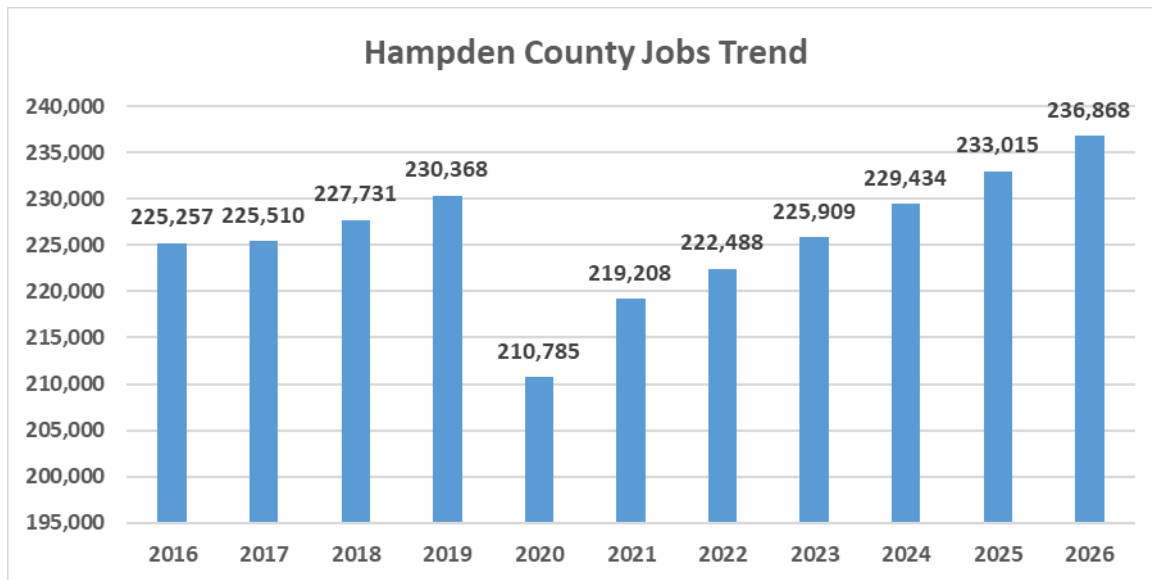
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables- ACSST5Y2021

#### **IV. Employment Trends and Priority and Critical Industry and Occupations Projections**

The labor market data presented in Figures 12-15 significantly informed the development of the Strategic Priorities, Goals and Strategies of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. This post-pandemic analysis of industry, occupational and career development trends will also inform our strategic thinking and planning on which sector strategies offer quality career pathways to our target populations and will guide us in our training investments and resource allocations

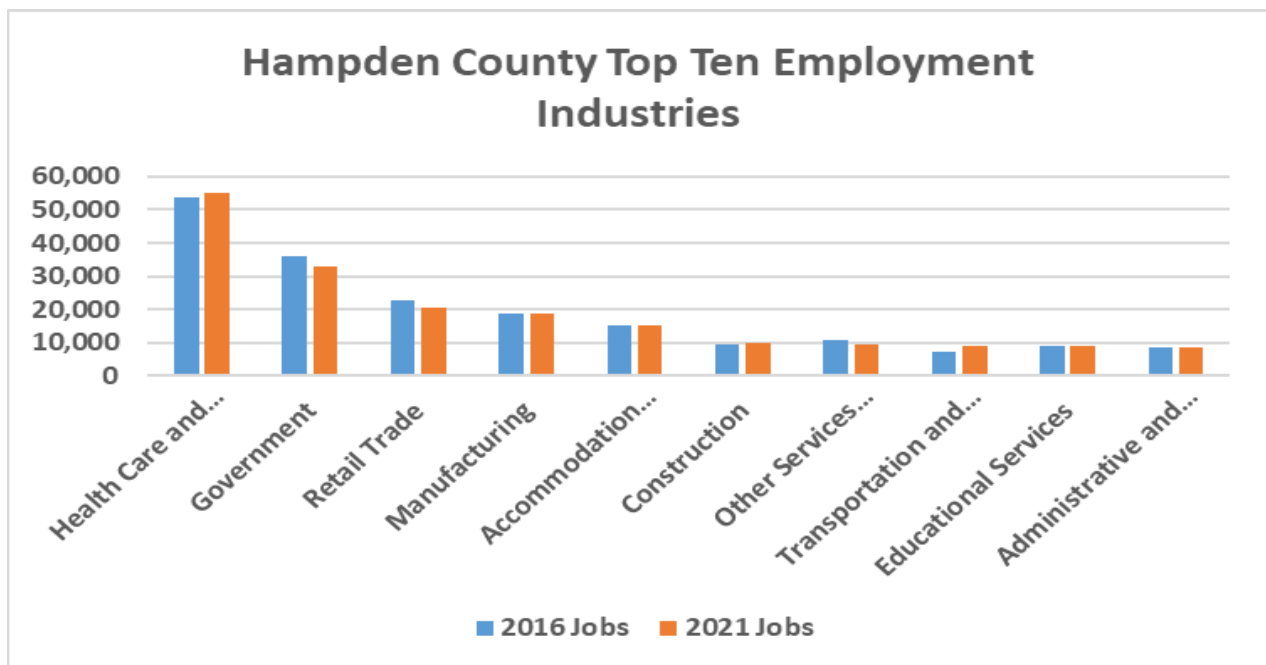
- ✚ From March 2020- height of the COVID pandemic- to February 2023, employment has increased from 210,785 to 225,909 (6.7%).
- ✚ From 2023 to 2026, employment is projected to increase from 225,909 to 236,868. (4.7%) (Figure 12).
- ✚ The Regional Blueprint priority industries and two of the critical industries- accommodations & food services and professional-scientific and technical services show a positive projected 2021-2026 growth rate ranging from 1.8% in manufacturing to 14% in healthcare and social assistance. (Figures 13-15)
- ✚ The average growth rate among the five Blueprint priority and other critical industries is 9.4%.
- ✚ MHHCWB will be attentive to the emergence of *new occupational groupings* that provide opportunities for job creation, employee upskilling, and career pathway development.

**Figure 12 Jobs Trend**



Source: Lightcast Q4 2022 Data Set February 2023

**Figure 13 Hampden County Top Ten Employment Industries**



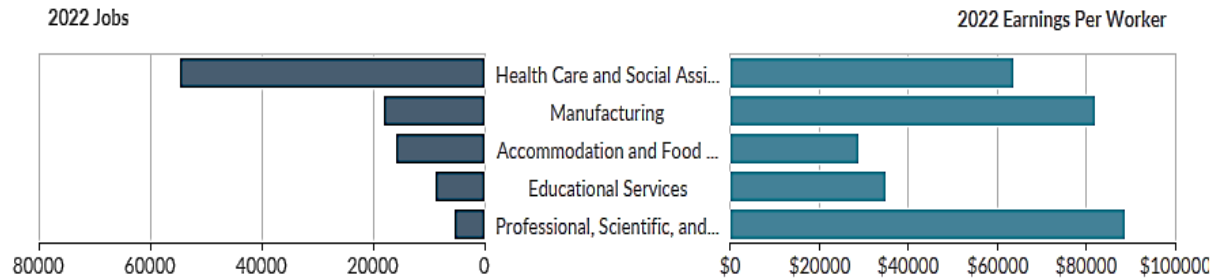
Source: Lightcast Industry Tables Extracted 2-28-2023

## Figure 14 Priority Industries Jobs, Earnings and Growth Projections

Comparing 5 Industries in Hampden County, MA

Industry Group Jobs and Earnings Comparison

■ ■ ■



Group	2022 Jobs	2026 Jobs	Earnings Per Worker	Payrolled Business Locations
Health Care and Social Assistance	54,789	62,568	\$63,663	10,702
Manufacturing	18,373	18,708	\$81,927	524
Accommodation and Food Services	16,161	18,680	\$28,906	857
Educational Services	8,983	10,042	\$35,186	183
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	5,500	5,723	\$88,601	919

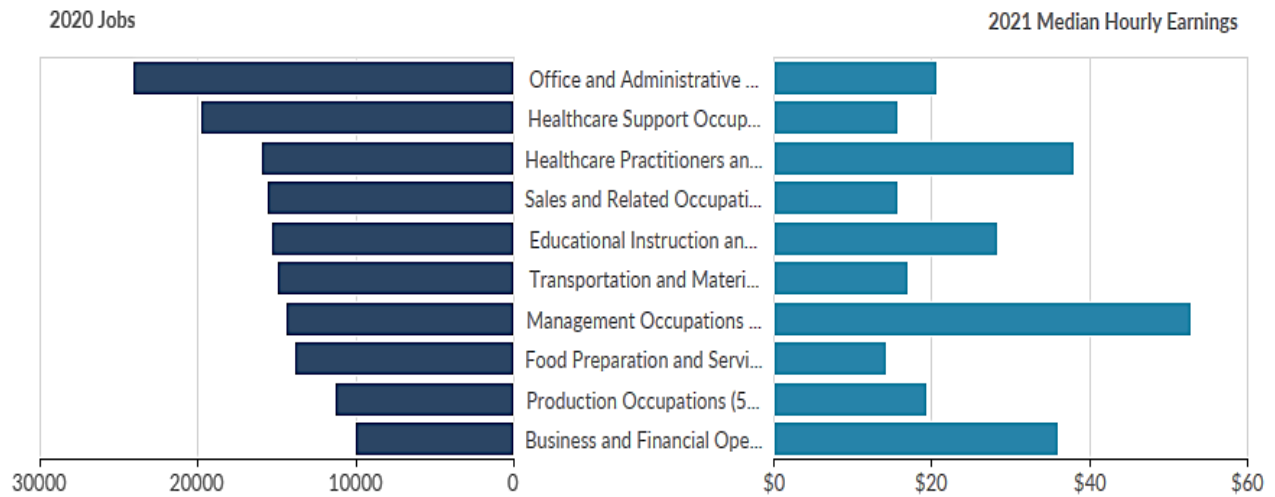
Source: Lightcast Compare Industries Table February 2023

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**Figure 15 Priority Occupations Jobs, Earnings and Growth Projections**

Largest Occupations

■■■



Occupation	2020 Jobs	2026 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2020-2026)	% Change	2021 Median Hourly Earnings
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	24,112	25,192	1,080	4%	\$20.63
Healthcare Support Occupations	19,873	25,551	5,678	29%	\$15.79
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	16,004	18,327	2,323	15%	\$38.08
Sales and Related Occupations	15,676	16,817	1,141	7%	\$15.79
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	15,401	17,349	1,948	13%	\$28.42
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	15,033	17,153	2,120	14%	\$17.05
Management Occupations	14,454	17,383	2,929	20%	\$52.92
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	13,938	17,699	3,761	27%	\$14.25
Production Occupations	11,376	11,869	493	4%	\$19.35
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	10,023	11,153	1,130	11%	\$36.11

Source: Lightcast Highest Ranked Occupations Report; Extracted 2-28-2023

For additional labor market data, including job posting analytics and Regional Planning statistics, please go to the following links on the MHHCWB website:

<http://masshirecwb.com/hampden-countylabormarketinformation/>  
<http://masshirecwb.com/massachusetts-regional-workforce-development-planning/>

## ***V. Identifying the Major Challenges***

MHHCWB and its partner's must assess the following challenges in order to sustain long-term job creation, drive regional economic development, and increase business and industry competitiveness:

- The long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on future workforce planning, systemic organization, service delivery models to both businesses and job seekers, and resource allocation.
- The hiring demands and occupational requirements of regional industries that are in a growth phase.
- The career pathway goals of the workforce that is looking to transition to a different industry or occupation.
- An aging workforce, decline in younger workers, and stagnant population growth will require short-term solutions, long-term planning, and predictable financial resources.
- Mitigating barriers to securing and retaining employment for the region's unemployed, particularly disconnected youth.
- Low literacy rates and widening digital literacy gaps are affecting significant numbers of adult job seekers and creating barriers to improving the regional labor force participation rate.
- Community college graduation rates are impacted by high numbers of first year students requiring developmental courses resulting in many students not persisting to earning an Associate degree or Certificate.

In order to address these challenges and systemic threats, the FY2024-2026 Strategic Plan includes building our constituent and stakeholder base to increase support for workforce development as an essential tool to accelerate job growth and economic recovery.

## ***VI. Emerging and Sustained Trends, Assets and Opportunities***

There is increased recognition in the Commonwealth and in our region of the importance of workforce development for overall economic development. MHHCWB will work closely with the regional and municipal economic development entities to implement an integrated system for gathering and reporting workforce demand needs and skills requirements to better match jobseekers with employers resulting in a reduction in the skills gap ratio in priority occupations in the region.



In its role as a workforce intermediary, MHHCWB will convene employers, business and industry associations, labor unions, economic development agencies, educational institutions and workforce development entities to develop collaborative, coordinated, practical and measurable solutions to workforce development issues.

## ***Key Drivers of Workforce Development***

### ***Federal Level***

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) continues to support the advancement of best practices that support adult and youth career pathway development, robust industry and sector partnerships, the provision of work-based learning opportunities, particularly in Registered Apprenticeships, and an increased focus on the attainment of industry-recognized certificates and credentials linked to in-demand occupations. The most recent MA WIOA State Plan and other multiple resources related to WIOA implementation can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/workforce-innovation-opportunity-act-wioa>.

WIOA has provided MHHCWB with opportunities to partner with the following required "Core Partners" in the delivery of services through our One-Stop Career Center System:

-  Adult Education and Family Literacy
-  MA Rehabilitation Commission

***The Goals and Strategies embedded in our Strategic Priorities detail how we envision implementing these partnerships in Hampden County to serve shared customers: job seekers, youth and employers.***

### ***State Level***

The most recent MA WIOA State Plan, and other multiple resources related to WIOA implementation, can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/workforce-innovation-opportunity-act-wioa>.

The Governor's Workforce Skills Cabinet (WSC), a partnership between three executive branches of the Commonwealth: the Executive Offices of Labor and Workforce Development, Education, and Housing and Economic Development is driving WIOA Regional Planning, now in the fifth year of implementation.

### ***Regional Level (Region 2: Pioneer Valley)***

As part of WIOA Regional Planning, MHHCWB partnered with the MassHire Franklin/ Hampshire Workforce Board, regional representatives from the three executive offices, as well as from the Transportation sector. The data-driven, industry-informed ***Pioneer Valley Regional Labor Market Blueprint***, developed as part of WIOA regional planning, is driving state funding decision-making for regional and local investments in workforce development and continues to present unique opportunities moving forward.

### ***Hampden County***

In Hampden County, MHHCWB is currently engaged in the following initiatives that will continue as part of the new Strategic Plan's Strategic Priorities, Goals and Strategies:

- MHHCWB's industry cluster deployment strategy in advanced manufacturing, healthcare and social assistance, educational services, financial and business services, and hospitality and tourism, will clearly align with regional economic development approaches to business expansion and to the Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint.
- MHHCWB will focus on the cross-industry need for STEM occupations, which are continuously changing. MHHCWB will work closely with the Pioneer Valley STEM NET managed by Westfield State University.
- The ***Healthcare Workforce Partnership of Western MA***, an innovative initiative managed and led by MHHCWB, is sustained by the participating healthcare providers and educational institutions to support the region's healthcare workforce. The work will align with the Massachusetts Nursing Council on Workforce Sustainability (NCWS) initiative, which is part of a statewide effort to respond to the nursing shortages in Massachusetts. MHHCWB will focus on, and invest in, inter-professional education and practice strategies to fill nursing and other healthcare employment needs as well as new emerging employment opportunities in behavioral health.
- MHHCWB's Five-Year Manufacturing Plan (2019-2023) will continue to guide the delivery of high quality training that will respond to the manufacturing companies need for both entry-level employees and the upskilling of their incumbent production workers.

- MHHCWB, in collaboration with Springfield Technical Community College and Holyoke Community College, will continue to work with the One-Stop Career Centers, education institutions, community-based organizations, economic development and tourism partners to assist with on-going applicant outreach, recruitment, assessment and skills development of job seekers for the regions priority and critical occupations.
- MHHCWB will continue to work with the Economic Development Council of Western MA/ Springfield Works and its partners to address the “Cliff Effects” challenge, the career development requirements and barriers of low-income residents, and the workforce needs of regional employers.
- MHHCWB will continue to be a leader and the “primary operator” in selected state-wide workforce development initiatives, funded on the state level by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, Department of Transitional Assistance, Department of Housing and Community Development, and the MassHire Department of Career Services, and on the federal level through numerous US Department of Labor (DOL) National Dislocated Worker and other DOL grants.
- MHHCWB will lead Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship initiatives to create a collaborative ecosystem to provide apprentices with high quality training through customized related technical instruction that enhances employer-specific Work Process competencies.
- MHHCWB and its educational partners will continue to strengthen and expand high-quality career-education pathway opportunities for high school students to earn postsecondary college credits and/or industry-recognized credentials through participation in expanded Chapter 74 programs, Early College, and Innovation Career Pathway Designation programming.
- MHHCWB will continue to collaborate with regional initiatives to support entrepreneurial start-up companies that will affect the workforce landscape over the next three years.

## ***VII. Updating the Strategic Plan***

The FY2024-2026 Strategic Plan builds off MHHCWB’s first Strategic Plan of 2001, and subsequent Strategic Plan updates. This Strategic Plan update process included the following actions:

- Research methods to create structured career pathways along the workforce development continuum of life-long learning and sector strategies aligned with those pathways.
- Update current demographic and industry and occupational labor market data, trends and projections.
- Align the Strategic Plan to the Massachusetts WIOA State Plan, the Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint, and other new areas of focus as directed by the Governor’s Workforce Skills Cabinet.
- Continue our commitment to improving the following components of our workforce development system:
  - Convening key stakeholders for presentations/briefings on workforce issues and best practices.
  - Enhancing communication with external partners to facilitate alignment of workforce development initiatives.
  - Increasing involvement in policy development at the State level.
  - Accelerating business involvement and co-investment.
  - Expanding approaches to cluster deployment strategies in new and emerging sectors.
  - Enhancing our engagement in municipal economic development.
  - Focusing on collaborative leadership as an essential strategy for successful community engagement and organizational capacity building.

A particular focus of the Strategic Plan is to ensure that our workforce delivery system supports success at vulnerable transition points, and that the FY 2024-2026 Strategic Plan continues MHHCWB's commitment to developing a continuum of strategies that address the following segments of the workforce:

- ***The Emerging Workforce-*** In-school and out-of-school youth, particularly at-risk youth and young adults, aged 14-25, who are or will be the newest entrants into the workplace, and are in most need of education, career guidance, job readiness skills, and support services.
- ***The Transitional Workforce-*** Unemployed/underemployed workers, including ex-offenders, disconnected older youth, new immigrants, and under-represented populations who need retraining and job search assistance to access new career opportunities.
- ***The Incumbent Workforce-*** Employed workers who need additional education and targeted technical training to retain their jobs and advance along a career pathway.



## ***VIII. Strategic Plan: Strategic Priorities, Objectives and Strategies***

The Strategic Priorities in the Strategic Plan are rooted in a Core Value embedded in MHHCWB's Mission statement. Each Core Value is described as a preface to each Strategic Priority. MHHCWB has developed a **Strategic Plan Scoreboard** and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure our progress toward meeting our Strategic Priorities and Goals. The KPIs will inform strategic thinking, drive tactical implementation of Plan Goals and Strategies, and keep us mission centered.

### **Core Value 1: We Must Be Data Driven.**

MHHCWB must have real time, reliable information about employer needs with a particular focus on developing workforce data on small and medium sized enterprises (SME) on the demand side, and on the available workforce supply and future pipeline of workers. We must be proficient in analyzing and using data to inform and implement best practices and develop innovative, research-based programming. . We must measure outcomes, results and the return on investment in all workforce development interventions in order to secure on-going support for and investment in the workforce development delivery system.

### **Strategic Priority 1: Be the Leading Source of Regional Labor Market Information and Innovative Ideas for Advancing Workforce Development**

**Goal A)** Provide accurate and timely information on current and future employer hiring and training needs and the readiness of the regional workforce to fill those needs based on state, regional and local data reports and use of job analytics tools.

**Strategy A1)** Continue to provide labor market supply and demand data and analysis for WIOA Regional Planning that provides updates to the Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint.

**Strategy A2)** Obtain local area data through the convening of sector companies, business and industry associations, labor unions, planning and economic development agencies, institutions of higher education, and State and other research entities.

**Strategy A3)** Analyze data, prepare reports that focus on the occupational skills that are common across priority and other critical industries, and disseminate key findings using multiple channels, including MHHCWB's website.

**Goal B)** Align resources with identified labor market demand and job seeker needs.

**Strategy B1)** Use timely data to prioritize and allocate resources for adult and youth programs and career center services.

**Strategy B2)** Periodically validate the deployment of resources based on workforce trends and labor market research to ensure they are meeting employer demands and needs.

**Goal C)** Design, implement, and disseminate data driven innovative practices that will improve the workforce development system.

**Strategy C1)** Research, disseminate and recommend promising practices based on supporting data research.

**Strategy C2)** Scale up, increase and/or improve excellent programs, practices and service delivery models.

## ***Core Value 2: We Must Be Employer Demand-Driven To Upskill Our Workforce At All Levels***

We must focus on job creation and retention efforts and on increased access for our growing minority populations, longer-term unemployed, and other targeted/priority populations in line with the MA State WIOA Plan. To achieve this in a post-COVID-19 environment and culture, we must strengthen the partnership and connectivity between our priority industry sectors, One-Stop Career Centers and WIOA Core Partners and their shared customers so that efforts will result in self-sustaining employment and career advancement opportunities for all individuals, while meeting the demands of our regions employers.

MHHCWB must focus on “up-skilling” the workforce at all levels. This includes individuals with basic literacy needs as well as individuals possessing some post-secondary education who can improve their economic self-sufficiency by attaining an Associate Degree, Certificate, industry recognized credential, or work-based competencies through On-The-Job Training or Registered Apprenticeships. We must also focus on the incumbent workforce who requires advanced training to access jobs along a career pathway continuum. We must provide the highest level of education, training, employment, career management services and supports to ensure that families obtain and retain employment with family-sustaining wages.

## **Strategic Priority 2: Improve Education and Employability Skills of Adults for Quality Careers**

**Goal A)** Coordinate education, workforce and business services across MassHire Hampden County One-Stop Career Centers (Career Centers) and partner agencies to improve outcomes for job seekers and businesses.

**Strategy A1)** Maintain and enhance the partnership between our Career Centers and local partners serving job seekers and businesses that develops a shared vision for an integrated regional workforce development system through the Career Center WIOA Core Partner MOU. Link to current MOU: <https://masshirehwcwb.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Hampden-County-WIOA-MOU-FY22-Fully-Executed-Final.pdf>

**Strategy A2)** Increase capacity and support for MH OSCCs as the hubs of the workforce development system through increased alignment of partner agencies’ resources and services.

**Strategy A3)** Enhance customer flow models for priority populations represented by partner organizations including services available to each population and methods for referring shared customers between partner agencies.

**Strategy A4)** Follow established common performance metrics to track outcomes of job seekers and business customers, including shared customers across all partner agencies, as specified in the Career Centers’ Charters.

**Goal B)** Increase capacity of Career Center Operators and partner agency staff to deliver quality services to job seekers and businesses.

**Strategy B1)** Disseminate key data, information, promising practices and innovative approaches that will inform and enhance staff capabilities.

**Strategy B2)** In partnership with Career Center Operators, continue to implement the MHHCWB Employer Engagement and Reemployment Frameworks that provide a strategic direction to deliver Employer Services to a wide range of businesses.

**Strategy B3)** Ensure that *Hampden County Business Solutions* provides integrated and coordinated business services and job matching services to employers in accordance with the MHHCWB Employer Engagement and Reemployment Frameworks, as detailed in the Charters between each MH One Stop Career Center Operator and MHHCWB.

**Strategy B4)** Coordinate with the Career Center Operators in the implementation of the *Talent Bank*, which serves to identify job-ready customers and actively matches them with employers. Ensure that the Talent Bank serves all job seekers and is consistent with the demand driven requirements of WIOA, and the policies and protocols of the Massachusetts-based public workforce system.

**Strategy B5)** Utilize innovative and coordinated local and regional marketing and recruitment strategies, including electronic and social media to increase job seeker flow to the Career Centers.

**Strategy B6)** Deepen relationships with community based organizations, social service providers, and community based behavioral health entities to facilitate client access to support services, including child care, housing, behavioral health, and transportation that will mitigate barriers to obtaining and retaining employment.

**Strategy B7)** Expand utilization of existing and new assessment tools to better match worker skills sets to a viable career plan (e.g., WorkKeys, WorkKeys Curriculum, Bennett Mechanical, ONET etc.).

**Goal C)** Develop sector-based career pathways to fill the identified gaps between employer needs in demand occupations and the supply of qualified workers.

**Strategy C1)** Scale up innovative occupational education and training programs, especially sector-based and cross-sector skill-based strategies for in-demand occupations along those pathways; including implementing and tracking the strategies outlined in the Pioneer Valley Regional Plan, the MHHCWB's Western MA Nursing Collaborative Strategic Plan and in the West Region Five-Year Manufacturing Plan.

**Strategy C2)** Align resources to design, develop and register Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship Programs in non-traditional industries, and develop strategies designed to diversify the populations who have traditionally been under-represented in apprenticeable occupations.

**Strategy C3)** Increase the use of WIOA Individual Training Accounts (ITA) as a key training and upskilling component to accelerate job creation for adults and dislocated workers.

**Strategy C4)** Identify *new and emerging* occupational classifications that align with regional priority and other critical industries, and allocate resources to support the implementation of quality education and training programs.

**Goal D)** Provide guidance to ACLS funded Adult Education programs to embed occupational related programming into their curriculum that will enhance adult learners' ability to successfully transition to employment or post-secondary education.

**Strategy D1)** Promote program adoption of career pathways outlined in the WIOA State Plan for seamless system of education and workforce services, and alignment with regional employment needs identified in Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint.

**Strategy D2)** Support collaboration and connectivity between MassHire Hampden County Career Centers and Adult Education programs to jointly advance learners, including learners who are shared customers, to the next step in their education, training, and employment.

***Core Value 3: Youth Employability Development is Essential To Our Future Workforce.***

MHHCWB must support the development of youth employability skills early and often along the continuum. We must ensure that youth are ready for college, careers and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by promoting the development of STEM skills and the attainment of a common core of skills such as effective communications, critical thinking, problem solving, entrepreneurial thinking, and interpersonal relations. Special attention must be placed on at-risk youth, especially minority youth and youth disconnected from work and school. We will continue to provide youth with opportunities for self-development, self-expression, passion for a particular discipline, combating negative or harmful living conditions, defining positive role models and recognizing young people's capacity to grow. Finally, we must collaborate with education and community-based youth providers to build a coordinated, integrated and effective workforce delivery eco-system.

**Strategic Priority 3: Develop 21st Century Youth Education and Employability Skills for Quality Careers**

**Goal A)** Prepare youth for college and careers.

**Strategy A1)** Continue to work towards common indicators of workplace readiness across industries through the MH OSCC WIOA Core Partner MOU and/or the MOU between all youth-serving programs/ agencies funded through the MHHCWB and at the MassHire One-Stop Career Centers.

**Strategy A2)** Continue to build out a career pathway framework applicable across all sectors that describes how to advance youth along the career continuum, included in MOUs above.

**Strategy A3)** Design, advocate for and support educational and Pre-K-12 curriculum development and programming that integrates 21<sup>st</sup> century skill development and contextualized learning along a career pathway continuum. Support all current and new Chapter 74, Early College, and Innovation Career Pathway Designation programming.

**Strategy A4)** Support drop-out prevention and recovery interventions, including alternative educational career pathways, which provide and align available community support services to youth and out-of-school time programming to stem learning loss; particularly to youth identified as vulnerable based on early warning indicators.

**Strategy A5)** Represent MHHCWB's strategic vision on advisory groups for Pre-K-12 curriculum development, and act as the intermediary to accelerate the design and implementation of sector-based career pathway programs in the Pioneer Valley Regional Blueprint Priority and other Critical Industries and Occupations.

**Goal B)** Increase the capacity and support of One-Stop Career Centers and all youth service delivery agencies to meet the employability needs of youth, particularly out-of-school and unemployed youth and young adults aged 16-25.

**Strategy B1)** Enhance programs focused on placing youth into employment positions aligned with the MHHCWB's industry sector strategies, particularly in our Pioneer Valley Regional Blueprint Priority and other Critical Industries and Occupations.

**Strategy B2)** Expand youth work readiness programs, including internships and work experiences in sector-based in-demand occupations with career advancement opportunities.

**Strategy B3)** Increase coordination and alignment among the youth-serving entities, e.g., schools, CBO/FBOs, MHHCWB youth vendors, and others to ensure youth successfully transition to the next level of their career pathway.

**Strategy B4)** Increase ability to serve youth with disabilities to improve the job placement rates through the use of career pathway strategies that prepare and support them for employment success.

**Goal C)** Increase employer engagement to provide youth with work-based learning and career advancement opportunities.

**Strategy C1)** Develop business "champions" to advocate for and support increased program capacity and expanded industry commitment to provide youth with work-based learning opportunities, particularly for paid internships.

**Strategy C2)** Accelerate private sector employer engagement in all current and new Chapter 74, Early College, and Innovation Career Pathway Designation programming.

***Core Value 4: Engagement In Collaborative Leadership At All Levels Is Essential To Success.***

MHHCWB must find new and better ways to engage in collaborative leadership that generates investments and shared accountability for results. Scaling up workforce development programming will require new shared approaches and joint funding from both public and private sectors. We must promote the essential connection between workforce development, education, and economic development that will strengthen the social fabric of the community and improve the quality of life throughout the region. Investment in the skills of the workforce is an economic necessity, and will be critical to our efforts to reemploy our residents and restore our economy in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Investments in Pre-K-12 and higher education are crucial, but workforce-training investments are equally critical. MHHCWB must identify new and creative investment strategies for workforce development to accelerate job creation and provide long-term sustainable economic growth.

**Strategic Priority 4: Be the Leading Advocate, Planner and Convener to Promote and Fund Regional Workforce Development**

**Goal A)** Communicate, market, and support the critical importance of workforce development to our regional economy.

**Strategy A1)** Identify and promote work at MHHCWB and both MassHire Career Centers that aligns with the MassHire values of Collaboration, Respect, Reliability, and Ingenuity and

recognize individuals, as well as internal and cross-agency teams, that advance MassHire values in ways that improve system performance and outcomes.

**Strategy A2)** Continue to educate and inform key stakeholders about the regional workforce development eco-system and workforce development challenges and opportunities going forward.

**Goal B)** Align MHHCWB's regional workforce development Strategic Priorities with the strategic plans of key economic development entities and educational institutions.

**Strategy B1)** Continue WIOA Regional Planning with the Franklin/Hampshire workforce region to accelerate strategic planning efforts to address critical workforce development issues by convening business, labor, education and workforce development stakeholders.

**Strategy B2)** Ensure objectives and strategies in Strategic Priorities 2 and 3 are reflected in other regional partners' Strategic Plans.

**Strategy B3)** Work with key stakeholders in our regions, particularly in our Gateway Cities, to promote and implement regionally based workforce development initiatives.

**Strategy B4)** Work with the Pioneer Valley Regional Market Maker to align employer and job seeker upskilling needs and increase the use of available state, ARPA or other federal funding.

**Goal C)** Educate and engage state and federal legislators on the need for increased funding and support for workforce development programs, including programs and services targeted to young adults (16-25).

**Strategy C1)** Facilitate and convene legislative briefings, events and forums on specific workforce development issues.

**Strategy C2)** Identify State budget line items related to workforce development that are key priorities for funding, educate MHHCWB Board members, and engage them in targeted legislative advocacy initiatives.

**Goal D)** Leverage increased partner co-investment and secure alternative public and private sector investment in the workforce development system.

**Strategy D1)** Increase leveraged resources from partners/stakeholders.

**Strategy D2)** Identify MHHCWB Mission-focused funding from philanthropic entities.

**Strategy D3)** Identify and obtain private sector funding aligned with MHHCWB's Mission.

**Strategy D4)** Support increased investment and resources for our regional One-Stop Career Centers.

## ***IX. Measuring Progress***

MHHCWB understands that these Strategic Priorities are ambitious and broad in scope. We will prioritize which strategies we will move forward with in FY 2024 and build on that over the next three years.

MHHCWB has developed a **Strategic Plan Scoreboard** and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure our progress toward meeting our Strategic Priorities and Goals. We believe that the KPIs will inform strategic thinking, drive tactical implementation of Plan Goals and Strategies, and keep us mission centered. We will work closely with the Strategic Planning Committee of the MHHCWB Board of Directors to identify future trends, opportunities' and challenges that affect the fidelity of our Mission.

For more information on our FY 2024-2026 Strategic Plan, and to view the Strategic Plan Scoreboard visit our website at: <http://masshirehwcw.com/about-mhhcwb/strategic-plan/>





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