



# Greater Capital Region Community Profile

## Regional Overview

June, 2009

Prepared for:  
**United Way of the Greater Capital Region**



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## SUMMARY

The Greater Capital Region Community Profile measures the well-being of the five-county region surrounding New York State's capital in four critical areas: basic needs, family supports, financial stability and literacy. Community Profiles are a data-driven way of taking the pulse of a community over a range of topics and number of years. This project answers questions such as:

- How many children in the region are living in poverty?
- What is the median home value in the region?
- How do test scores in the region compare with the state?
- What is the state of the region's economy? How does that compare to the state and nation?

The web-based Community Profile covers the Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady and Schoharie counties of New York State and can be found at: [www.unitedwaygcr.org/communityprofile](http://www.unitedwaygcr.org/communityprofile). It includes 73 indicators organized under the four areas of basic needs, family supports, financial stability and literacy. Each indicator includes a description of the indicator, a brief analysis of trends, charts displaying trends over time, and tables providing data for each county in the Greater Capital Region.

This Regional Overview summarizes the key trends across all four topics.

The project was sponsored by the United Way of the Greater Capital Region. Communities across the nation and world are turning to indicator projects like this one to assess their regions, quantify strengths and challenges, determine priorities and launch community-wide discussions about improving their quality of life.



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## **Staff Team**

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# A PORTRAIT OF THE COMMUNITY

The Greater Capital Region has numerous strengths, including a vibrant technology economy, relatively low rates of poverty and high incomes, and the stability that comes from being the home of state government. The region's schools are generally outperforming the state, and violent crime is lower than the state or national levels. Unlike much of Upstate, the region has added population, growing 3% from 2000 to 2007.

But the region's benefits are not enjoyed by all its residents, and the numbers in some areas call for a closer look and a community discussion. Poverty is much higher among racial and ethnic minorities; nearly a third of the region's children are growing up in single-parent households; and rates of child abuse, foster care admissions and juvenile delinquency intakes are higher than state levels.

## BASIC NEEDS

A community's quality of life first rests on the ability of its residents to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and other essentials. In this section, we examine 18 indicators of financial well-being, such as poverty, income, home value and housing affordability, and we break down these measures for various racial and ethnic groups. We also consider family structure through a look at the number of children raised by single parents.

### Household Resources

Financial security gives families and individuals a stable foundation in the community and peace of mind. Overall, residents of the Greater Capital Region are better off than residents of the state and nation, having lower poverty rates and higher income. But the region also has wider disparities among racial and ethnic groups on several measures than does the state or nation.

- The region's overall poverty rate of 10.5% is below state and national levels but has been rising. The same is true of the child poverty rate of 14%.
- Poverty is far higher among black and Hispanic residents and their children. Roughly a third of black residents in Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady counties live in poverty, compared to 9% of white residents in those counties. Poverty is even more prevalent among Hispanics in Schenectady and Rensselaer counties, at about 40%.



- Poverty rates are highest among black and Hispanic children, with close to half living in poverty. (The rate was slightly better for Hispanic children in Albany County at 30%.)
- Nearly a third of children in the region live in single-parent households, and this proportion has grown faster in the region than at state and national levels.
- Nearly three-quarters of black children are in single-parent households, compared to about half of Hispanic children and children of two or more races. By contrast, 22% of white children and 9% of Asian children are raised by single parents.
- Median household income in the region is higher than state and national levels at almost \$55,000, but it has declined slightly since 1990 after adjusting for inflation.
- Incomes are highest among white and Asian households and lowest among black and Hispanic households, roughly consistent with state and national disparities.
- About 12% of residents in the region receive the Earned Income Tax Credit, aimed at helping the working poor. This rate is up slightly but remains well below the state level of 17%.

## Adequate and Affordable Housing

Housing is not only a critical need but also a major financial investment for both renters and homeowners. The stability of neighborhoods, communities and the nation as a whole is strongly tied to the health of the housing market and the maintenance of home values. And in almost every community, affordable housing is an important part of stabilizing the lives of low-income families and their children.

Indicators in this section show housing options are strong in the Greater Capital Region with a relatively high rate of homeownership, stable home values and a good supply of affordable housing. There are, however, stark disparities among racial and ethnic groups. Housing is less affordable and owning a home is more out of reach for black and Hispanic residents.

- The region's homeownership rate is up slightly and on par with the nation at 67%. However, rates among black, Hispanic and multiracial residents are generally closer to one-third (Saratoga County is an exception, with higher rates for all races and ethnicities).
- Home values in the region have risen only slightly since 1990, and the median value of about \$170,000 was below the state and national



median values. But with home values plummeting in various parts of the nation, this relative stability is probably a positive.

- Housing is more affordable in the region than in the state or nation, but not for all. Among black, Hispanic and multiracial homeowners, the ratio of home value to income is above the cutoff considered affordable.
- A similar disparity exists among renters, though it is not as pronounced. Median rent is below the threshold considered affordable for all groups, but comes close to the threshold for black renters.

## FAMILY SUPPORTS

Healthy communities are built on a foundation of healthy families. In Family Supports, we summarize selected trends affecting children, youth and adults. Family Supports reports 17 indicators, ranging from direct measures of family stability such as child abuse and foster care rates to factors influencing the well-being of families such as health care and crime.

### Healthy Start for Children

Economic success and social stability are strongly influenced by conditions affecting our children, particularly in the early years of life. The Greater Capital Region has a mixed record in this area, performing better on some measures than the state as a whole and worse on others. On the positive side:

- The region has a higher level of early prenatal care than the state level, with 79% of mothers beginning care in the first trimester of pregnancy. However, the state rate has been growing and is closing the gap with the region, while the regional level has slipped slightly from 82% in 1998.
- A lower proportion of babies in the region are born with low birth weights, an indicator that reflects the quality of prenatal care and the health behaviors of expectant mothers. But the difference is slight, and both the state and the region have experienced increases over that time frame.

On other indicators, however, the region fares more poorly than the state.

- The infant mortality rate is 27% higher than the state rate. The rates are far higher in Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady than in Saratoga or Schoharie, a trend that may reflect poorer health care among the urban poor.



- The region has a slightly higher rate of children identified with high blood lead levels, averaging 2.8% over the last 11 years (of children under 6 tested), compared to the state (excluding New York City). Both the regional and state percentages have been falling since 1996; however, not all children are tested for lead exposure.

The region does not meet Healthy People 2010 targets for early prenatal care, low birth-weight babies, or infant mortality rates.

## Risks Facing Youth

Children confront many challenges as they grow into adulthood. Caring communities create and maintain an effective support structure for youth. The Greater Capital Region is underperforming the state on these measures:

- The region's child abuse rate is rising, up 24% since 2000, and higher than the state rate by about 36%. Rates of child abuse or neglect from 2000 to 2007 are higher than state rates for every county except Saratoga.
- Foster care admissions are 25% higher than the state rate. As with child abuse, average rates from 2000 to 2007 are higher than state rates for every county but Saratoga.
- The rate of children in the region entering the juvenile delinquency system as "intakes" is almost 50% higher than the state rate (with New York City excluded). Intake rates are particularly high in the counties of Albany and Schenectady.

A bright spot, however, is a relatively low rate of teen pregnancy. The region's teen pregnancy rate is about 38% lower than the state's and has been falling (down 32% from 1997).

## Community Health

Health status influences a range of other indicators of personal and family well-being, including children's success in school, adults' performance in the work place and family financial stability.

The region has mixed results on these health measures. On the positive side, a lower proportion of people in the Greater Capital Region lack health insurance (9% in 2005), compared with the state (13%) and nation (15%). On other measures:

- The number of people in the region living with HIV or AIDS has been increasing. The rate of people living with AIDS increased 50% in the region since 2000 and followed a trend line very similar to the state's.



The rate of people living with HIV increased more modestly, about 13% since 2000, but is about 20% higher than the state rate. State figures for this measure do not include New York City or prisoners. The rising figures reflect, at least in part, the fact that new treatments are making it possible for people with HIV and AIDS to live longer.

- More people in the region, as compared with the state, are seeking treatment for drug and alcohol problems (on a per-capita basis). On average, the rate of alcohol and drug-treatment admissions in the region is about 36% than in the state from 2000 to 2007.
- Most counties in the region had a higher proportion of overweight or obese residents in 2003 (the latest year available) than the state or nation. Albany County was a notable exception, with lower rates of both overweight and obese residents. All the counties, however, were above Healthy People 2010 targets.

## Public Safety

A sense of personal safety contributes to well-being directly and also influences the ability of community members to participate in the economy and obtain needed services.

The region's violent crime rate has been largely steady since 2000 and is lower than the state and nation. However, the rate of reported domestic violence in the region has consistently been almost twice as high as the state's (with New York City excluded).

## FINANCIAL STABILITY

Economic and social conditions in the Greater Capital Region influence the ability of residents to meet their basic needs, achieve financial independence, and improve their own lives and those of their families. An effective economy brings greater overall prosperity to the region and provides expanding opportunity to all of its citizens.

## Economic Base of Greater Capital Region

It is hardly surprising that the economy of New York's Greater Capital Region is unusually dependent on government employment. Government comprised 20% of total regional employment in 2006 (the most recent year available from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis, the most comprehensive measure). About one in four jobs in Albany County are in the public sector, the highest ratio in the region. In the state and nation, the public sector employs 14% and 13%, respectively, of the total workforce. Thus the Capital Region's government sector is about 1.4 times that of the state when measured by employment.



Economic growth over the past ten years has helped diversify the region's economy. The most notable change has been the rise of "Tech Valley," led by the State University at Albany's Center for Advanced Thin Film Technology and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's (RPI) Center for Advanced Interconnect Science and Technology. Corporate investment from IBM, International Sematech and Tokyo Electron has spurred additional growth, including The Foundry Company, a chip fab under construction by Advanced Micro Devices.

On the strength of these public and private sector investments, the share of employment in technology occupations increased by 50% from 2000 to 2007, a much faster pace than either the state or nation. By 2007, the share of employment in high tech jobs in the region was about one-third higher. Outside the microelectronics sphere, high technology manufacturing has been well represented in the Greater Capital Region, particularly in several General Electric locations plus numerous research and development facilities

The definition of "high tech" occupation used by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics is relatively narrow—even in the region, it only applies to about 4% of the total employed. By other indicators, however, the foundation for a knowledge-based economy is strong. Only 10% of the region's adults lack a high school diploma, much lower than state and nation's 16%. The region contains more than a dozen diverse higher education institutions, with the largest being the State University of New York at Albany, RPI, Empire State College and the College of St. Rose.

## Competitive Workforce

Historically, the job market in the Greater Capital Region has been stronger than either the state or nation.

- For the ten years ending 2008, the unemployment rate for the region averaged 4.0%, about one-third less the 5.3% experienced by New York State and also well below the nation's 5.1%.

As the economy slid into recession in late 2008, the Capital Region's advantage narrowed.

- The unemployment rate for the Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metropolitan Statistical Area (the Albany MSA, encompassing Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady and Schoharie counties) rose from an average of 5.4% for the last quarter of 2008 to 7.3% in the first quarter of 2009. Statewide unemployment stood at 6.2% for the last quarter of 2008 and rose to 8.0 by the first quarter of 2009.



- The number of jobs in the Albany MSA fell by about 2% in the year ending March 2009, with Manufacturing, Construction and Information all losing more than 4% of jobs through the period. Only the Education and Health Services sector added jobs, about 1%.
- The Albany MSA's employment loss was comparable to the statewide experience. New York City and Long Island lost relatively more jobs—just over 2%—while Rochester and Utica-Rome lost less than 0.5%. No NYS metro added jobs over the year.

## Meeting Community Needs

With a poverty rate almost 30% lower than the state's rate, residents of the region depend less on various forms of public support than do residents of other regions in New York State. The total value of assistance from government programs grew over the decade, however.

- The share of the population receiving cash assistance in the Capital Region is about half of that in New York State, 14 per 1,000 residents vs. 28 per 1,000 residents statewide. Nonetheless, there is wide variation within the region. About 21 per 1,000 Rensselaer County residents receive cash assistance. By contrast, in Saratoga County only two of every thousand residents are public assistance recipients.
- Like the state as a whole, the share of the population receiving public assistance has been steadily decreasing in Albany County while Schenectady and Rensselaer counties have seen increases, leaving the region essentially unchanged.
- Similarly, a lower share of Greater Capital Region residents receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) than in the state as a whole, 21 per 1,000 residents in the region vs. 34 per 1,000 statewide. Food stamp usage grew by about one-half in both the region and the state, although the rate remains significantly lower than the state's.
- Participation in the Medicaid health insurance program, however, has grown substantially in the region, rising 37% since 2000. Enrollment in the region (12%) remains lower than the state (21%).
- The total value of assistance from governmental programs (cash assistance, Medicaid, food stamps and unemployment insurance) rose about one-fifth from 2000 to 2006 (adjusted for inflation). This rate of increase is comparable to that experienced in the state and the nation.



## LITERACY

A quality education system builds the foundation for a community's future and offers its children the chance for productive and happy lives. In this section, we review 18 indicators of educational performance, including attendance and suspension rates, test scores, and graduation and dropout rates.

### Learning Environment

The school climate affects the ability of all students to learn, so high rates of truancy or misbehavior can harm more than just the students engaging in those behaviors. In the Greater Capital Region, attendance rates are high: 95% for elementary students and 94% for secondary students in 2007, beating the state numbers. However, the region has also had slightly higher suspension rates than the state, rising to more than 7% of students suspended at least one day in 2007.

### Academic Achievement

Test scores are an imperfect measure of student learning, but they are important because they are one of the only ways a community can gauge how well its students are doing compared to other communities and to the state as a whole. Performance on the state's math and English exams are an indication of student learning in these fundamental and critical subjects.

Overall, student performance in the region is above state levels, but the performance of low-income students and racial minorities tends to be significantly lower. This disparity generally mirrors the state, and on many of the state tests, low-income and minority student performance has been rising.

- Regional student performance was higher than the state level for math and English exams at both the fourth- and eighth-grade levels.
- Nonetheless, significant numbers of students in the region did not meet state standards in 2008: 40% of eighth-graders did not pass the English exam, 26% of eighth-graders did not pass the math exam and 25% of fourth-graders did not pass the English exam.
- The scores of black and Hispanic students are particularly troubling, with pass rates on the eighth-grade exams below 30% in some counties. The gap was similar between low-income students and all other students, with passing rates for low-income students roughly 20 to 40 points lower.



- However, both low-income students and racial minorities have shown significant gains in the last several years, almost across the board. Prominent examples include a doubling in Saratoga County of the proportion of black students passing the fourth-grade math exam between 2002 and 2007 to 81% and an increase among black students in Schenectady County passing the fourth-grade English exam from 30% in 2002 to 46% in 2007.

## Educational Outcomes

The culmination of an effective K-12 education is high school graduation. While graduates have opportunities to continue their education and secure well-paying jobs, dropouts face a difficult job market and are more likely to end up unemployed and dependent upon public assistance.

In the Greater Capital Region, 79% of the class of 2007 graduated, 8% dropped out, and 2% transferred to General Educational Development (GED) programs (the remaining students either earned special education diplomas or were still in school). This compares favorably to the state, which had a graduation rate of 70% and a dropout rate of 11% for the class of 2007. (These numbers include students tracked from 9th grade on.)

The state has begun to track students beyond the fourth year of high school to see how many additional students graduate after five or six years of high school. In the Greater Capital Region, the graduation rate increased four points for the class of 2005, reaching 81%. However, the dropout rate also increased, from 11% to 13%.