

A Long Island Briefing

What Every Long Islander Should Know

By: Nancy Rauch Douzinas
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How is Long Island doing? Well, our economy continues to grow but shows signs of weakness. Our population continues to diversify, age and lose young adults as housing affordability weakens. We have high quality health care, but not everyone has access to it. And, our students excel except in areas of concentrated poverty.

Those are the major conclusions of the 2007 *Long Island Index*, a survey that measures where we are as a region, maps our progress toward overcoming difficulties and obtaining shared goals, and compares ours to the performance of other regions in the nation. Released January 26, the latest Index is intended to supply good information, presented in a neutral manner to move public policy.

Economically, Long Island remains strong; however there are clouds on the horizon. While average wages are growing, they are doing so at a slower rate than the national average. Small businesses are proliferating. Eighty-eight percent of Long Island firms have fewer than 30 employees and more small businesses are on the way. Two causes for concern are the fact that Long Island is experiencing the greatest growth in the lowest paying jobs and that our businesses receive almost no venture capital or federal research and development funds.

Housing costs are a major challenge. Fully 21 percent of the Island's population reports having a very difficult time meeting their rent or mortgage payments – up by seven percent just since 2003. Our population is older and more diversified than ever before.

Long Islanders continue to enjoy excellent medical services but the top care is not available to every constituency. For example, Long Islanders have very different health risks depending on economic factors and the community where they live. A remarkable 43 percent of inpatient health care is paid by Medicare.

The 2007 *Long Island Index* gave high marks to the region's students, but economic opportunity defined how pupils performed. Long Island students far surpass statewide results in completing Regents Diploma requirements (86% for Long Island contrasted to 69% across New York State) and in graduation rates (90% regionally versus 80 percent statewide). However the difference in graduation rates between low-poverty and high-poverty communities is 20 percent. Interestingly, the gap between low poverty and high poverty schools is declining for the 4th Grade English Language Arts examination, while it is increasing for the 8th Grade Mathematics test. There are schools in areas of concentrated poverty where more than half the students receive free lunch and students with Limited English Proficiency are growing markedly in high-poverty schools.

The *Long Island Index* has been produced annually since 2004. It measures indicators affecting the economy, environment, education and quality-of-life issue on Long Island to establish a sense of direction on the major aspects of Long Island life. The complete findings of *Index 2007* is available on the website, www.longislandindex.org.

The *Long Island Index* is a program of the Rauch Foundation, based in Garden City.

Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation, and convener of the Long Island Index.. The Index provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit www.longislandindex.org.

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