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Reading Eagle: Bill Uhrich | Friends, from left, Elva Rivera, Mavel Torres, Sand Rodriguez and Noraida Jimenez enjoy fellowship during lunch at the Hispanic Center, Fifth and Washington streets. Photo by Bill Uhrich 7/3/2019

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# Latinos now make up 23 percent of the Berks County population, new census numbers show

**2018 estimates also show the median age continues to rise, as the number of young people dwindles.**

WRITTEN BY [ADAM RICHTER \(/APPS/PBCS.DLL/PERSONALIA?ID=70\)](#)

READING, PA —

For nine years — as long as he's been running the place — Mike Toledo has seen Lorenza Pacheco at the Daniel Torres Hispanic Center of Greater Reading.

She's a regular at the center's Casa de la Amistad, a gathering place for senior citizens to eat, pick up groceries and spend time with one another.

"I've got so many friends here," Pacheco said Wednesday as she and dozens of others socialized during lunchtime at the center.

Pacheco, a Puerto Rico native who came to Reading by way of New Jersey, is representative of two demographic trends in Berks County over the last nine years:

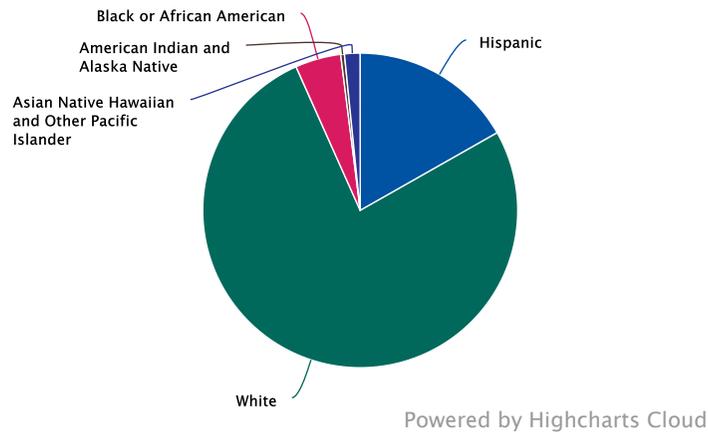
The county is getting older and more Latino.

The U.S. Census Bureau in June released new details about its 2018 population estimates. They show that while the county's overall population grew 2.1% from 2010 to 2018, Berks' Latino population over that time grew 42%.

Statewide, the Latino population grew 36.7% between 2010 and 2018. Latinos now make up 8% of the Pennsylvania population, and 23% of the population in Berks County.

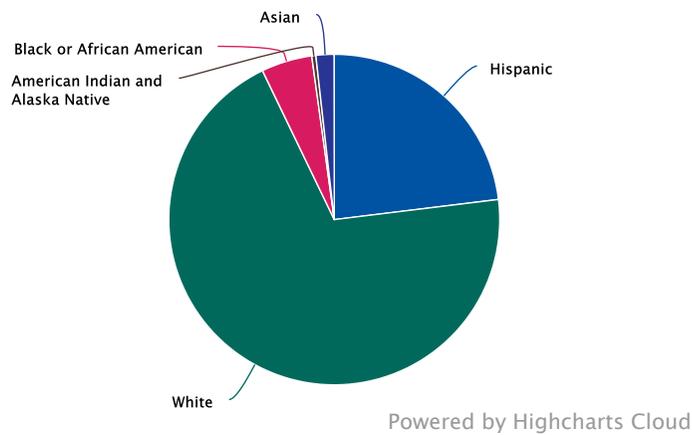
## Berks County population by race/ethnicity, 2010

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau



## Berks County population by race/ethnicity, 2018

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau



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This doesn't come as a surprise to Michael Golembiewski, a transportation planner with Berks County who regularly studies U.S. Census Bureau data.

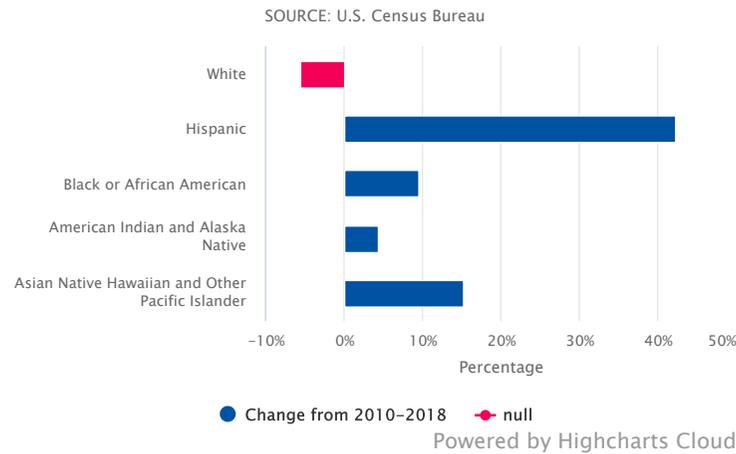
"We've known the county has been growing more diverse," he said in an interview Tuesday.

Population estimates for 2018 were released in late June. They show the age and race breakdowns for counties in the United States. Berks County's expanding diversity was also reflected in the 9.46% increase in the black population and a more than 14% climb in the county's Asian-Americans.

The population of non-Hispanic whites, by contrast, fell 5.62% — from 321,186 in 2010 to 303,148 in 2018.

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## Berks County population change by race/ethnicity, 2010–2018



Toledo, the executive director of the Hispanic Center, a nonprofit that provides services to the Latino community in Berks County, said the county's Latino growth does not surprise him one bit.

"There are a lot of Latino families that have been here for decades," Toledo said.

The area's low cost of living and opportunities for employment have made it attractive for people who want to move here, Toledo said, noting that "the Reading area is a place that's comfortable for that kind of growth."

Toledo was quick to add that the Latino population is, like the larger population in Berks, quite diverse. Included in that group are entrepreneurs, college students, and people working in the ever-growing health fields.

Golembiewski noted that Berks is not alone in its Latino surge.

"Overall, the Latino population in Southeastern Pennsylvania is growing," he said.

The increasing diversity could help alleviate another demographic trend in Berks County.

## Getting older

The census numbers also show that the median age in Berks County has crept up to 39.8. In 2010, it was 39.1.

Golembiewski said the county will examine what this aging population needs, and how the county will meet those needs. Issues include housing, social services, public transit and others.

It also means that demand for large houses is likely on the decline, he said.

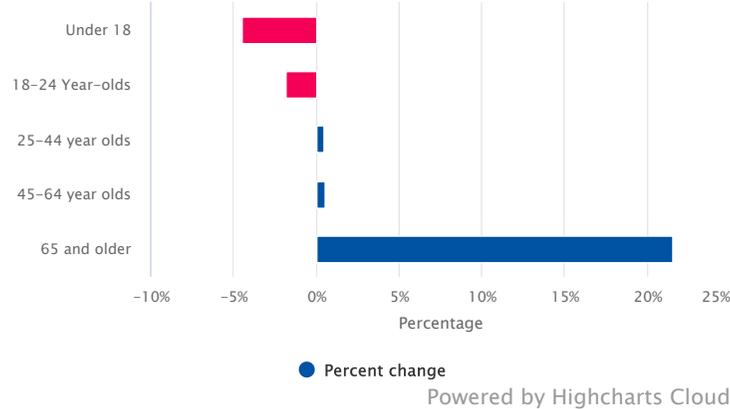
"The days of the big houses on the 1- or 2-acre lots, I think, are over," Golembiewski said.

It's not just that the senior population is going up; the under-18 population is also shrinking.

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## Berks County population change by age group, 2010-2018

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau



Nationally, people are waiting longer to have children, and they're having fewer of them.

Another question is: What can be done to drive that median age down?

Golembiewski said some features in the county can help: proximity to outdoor activities like hiking and biking trails; the increasing number of restaurants and downtown shopping areas in West Reading, Kutztown and elsewhere; and the building of a medical school in Wyomissing.

That, combined with the increasing diversity of Berks, has the potential to drive down the median age, Golembiewski said.

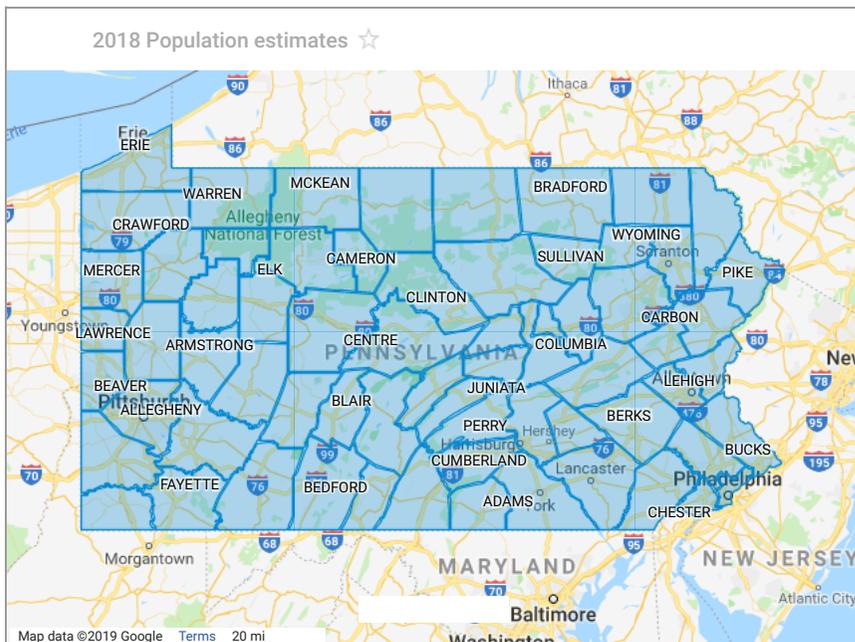
Toledo echoed that argument. He said the Latino demographic is among the youngest, noting that the Muhlenberg School District is nearly 50% Latino.

Toledo praises Berks as part of the "great American salad bowl" — a place where each ethnic group brings its own sense of identity to add flavor to the area as a whole.

"We try to share how important diversity is for the growth of our community," Toledo said.

## County population by race/ethnicity

Click or tap on a county in the map below to see its 2018 population estimate, as well as a breakdown by race/ethnicity.



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