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**Jewish Federation**<sup>®</sup>  
OF GREATER METROWEST NJ

2020 Greater MetroWest NJ  
**Jewish Community Study**

**Key  
Findings**

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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

The Cohen Center is also the home of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI). Established in 2005, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze sociodemographic data on the Jewish community.

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Dear Greater MetroWest Community,

On behalf of Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ, we are pleased to present the results of our 2020 Jewish Community Study.

As Federation approaches its centennial in 2023, the study provides a snapshot of a strong and vibrant Jewish community that continues to evolve. The data yielded by the study will help us prepare for the challenges and opportunities that will present themselves in the coming years.

How large is our community? Where does our population live? How do we engage in Jewish life and connect with the Jewish community? What are the needs of our community members, from the youngest to the oldest? How many of us live in poverty or have unmet financial needs? How do we connect to Israel? This study answers these and many other questions that are relevant to the present and future of our community.

Federation engaged the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (Cohen Center) at Brandeis University, a renowned multi-disciplinary research institute dedicated to the study of American Jewry and religious and cultural identity. The Cohen Center provided a skilled research team led by principal researcher, Dr. Janet Aronson, who used the most advanced techniques to create a high-quality survey and generate reliable and relevant findings.

Thank you to the Federation Board of Trustees for their foresight and strategic vision to fund this study and their understanding of how important this data and analysis will be to the future of our community. We are also grateful to the Federation Executive Committee for serving as thought partners during the study process, and to the members of the Federation professional staff who moved this project forward.

We now begin the process of assisting the community in realizing the benefits that the study is intended to achieve. We look forward to the wide range of discussions, insights, and initiatives that will emerge from our collective review of the information and help guide us into the next decade.

Sincerely,



David Saginaw  
President



Sheryl Pearlstein  
Chair, Community Study



Dov Ben-Shimon  
Executive VP/CEO

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Brandeis

### CMJS/SSRI

#### Study Directors

Janet Krasner Aronson  
Matthew Boxer  
Leonard Saxe

#### Community Studies

##### Research Team

Harry Aaronson  
Matthew A. Brookner  
Eliana Chapman  
Matthew Feinberg  
Raquel Magidin de Kramer  
Daniel Mangoubi  
Adam Martin  
Daniel Nussbaum  
Eleora Pasternack

##### Editing

Deborah Grant  
Masha Lokshin  
Ilana Friedman

##### Study Support

Allyson Birger  
Molly Kazan  
Lia Dankowicz  
Hannah Taylor

##### American Jewish Population Project

Elizabeth Tighe  
Daniel Parmer

##### University of New Hampshire Call Center

Zachary Azem  
Sean McKinley  
Robert Durant

## Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ

### Jewish Federation of GMW NJ Leadership

David Saginaw, President  
Scott Krieger, Immediate  
Past President  
Sheryl Pearlstein, Chair,  
Community Study

### Executive Committee

Jody Hurwitz Caplan  
Stacey Davis  
Rebecca Gold  
Michael Goldberg  
David Hyman  
Michele Landau  
Peter Langerman  
Steven D. Levy  
Jonathan Liss  
Debbie Rovner  
Zev Scherl  
Joan Schiffer Levinson

### Community Study Steering Committee

Rebecca Berman  
Stephanie Bonder  
Ronald Brandt  
Susie Bruch  
Lisa Buber  
Leslie Dannin Rosenthal  
Sue Dreier Wishnow  
Caren Ford  
Amy Ganz Sadeghi  
Mark Glajchen  
Ellen Goldner  
Lisa Gutkin  
Jeremy Halpern  
Robert Heizler

Deborah Jacob  
Stephen Kepniss  
Jodi Kiste  
Robert Kuchner  
Eta Levenson  
Melanie Levitan  
Ruth Margolin  
Maxine Murnick  
Scott Newman  
Ken Peskin  
Gerri Rothfleisch  
Brian Saltzman  
David Silverstein

### Jewish Federation of GMW NJ Professional Leadership

Dov Ben-Shimon, Executive Vice  
President / CEO  
Amy Wagner Biloan, Chief Community  
Engagement Officer  
Robert Lichtman, Chief Jewish Learning  
Officer  
Benjamin Mann, Chief Planning Officer  
Lauren A. Silverstein, Chief Impact  
Officer  
Jessica Mehlman, Associate VP, Impact  
and Planning, JFNA

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America Research Benchmarking  
Project, with support from the Harry  
and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation

### Dedication

With gratitude to those who have come  
before us, and in hopes that these  
learnings will lead our community to a  
strong future ahead of us. *L'dor Va'dor.*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction.....2
- Key Findings.....3
  - Overview .....3
  - Geography .....4
  - Jewish children.....4
  - Jewish engagement.....5
  - Philanthropy and Volunteering .....6
  - Israel .....7
  - Community Connections .....7
  - Finances .....8
  - Senior Adults.....9
  - Health and Disabilities.....10

# INTRODUCTION

The 2020 Greater MetroWest Jewish Community Study, conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University, employed innovative state-of-the-art methods to create a comprehensive portrait of the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the Jewish community in Greater MetroWest New Jersey (GMW). The principal goal of this study is to highlight data and findings that will be useful for the Greater MetroWest Jewish Federation and other community organizations and funders for communal planning. This study is intended to promote an understanding of the community and to aid strategic planning, program development, and policies to support and enhance Jewish life.

The study overview report<sup>1</sup> serves as an introduction to all of the topic reports. It provides key findings, terminology, and a summary of the methodology used in the study.

This report summarizes the key findings of the study. Related reports cover:

- Geography and residence
- Community connections
- Finances
- Israel
- Jewish children
- Jewish engagement
- Philanthropy/Volunteering
- Seniors/Health and disability

The present study provides a portrait of the Greater MetroWest Jewish community as it was in the fall of 2020, six months into the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 3,295 eligible households completed surveys between October 1 and December 11, 2020. The response rate for the primary sample, which was designed to be representative of the entire community, was 33.4% (AAPOR RR4<sup>2</sup>).

In this report, data for comparisons to all US Jews are drawn from the Pew Research Center report, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> View at <<https://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/community-studies/greater-metrowest-nj-report.html>>

<sup>2</sup> American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) is a professional organization that sets standards for survey research.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020” (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2021). <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>

# KEY FINDINGS

## Overview

- As of 2020, there are 56,800 Jewish households in Greater MetroWest. These households include 155,000 individuals, of whom 122,300 are Jewish.
- Approximately 7.6% households in the Greater MetroWest catchment area include at least one Jewish adult.
- Of the 96,900 Jewish adults in Greater MetroWest, 83,400 are Jews by religion. Another 7,200 Jewish adults are Jews of no religion and 5,100 are Jews of multiple religions.
- Greater MetroWest Jewish community members skew slightly older than that of the US Jewish community as a whole. The mean age of local Jewish adults is 53, and the median age is 56; nationally, the median age of Jewish adults is 49. Including children in the analysis lowers the mean age. The mean age of all Greater MetroWest Jewish individuals is 44, and the median is 50.
- Greater MetroWest Jewish households include families with children under age 18 (30%) and married or cohabiting couples without children at home (29%). Seventy-four percent of Jewish households include a married or cohabiting couple, living with or without children.
- Nearly two-in-five (38%) Jewish adults in Greater MetroWest have no denomination and identify either as secular/cultural Jews or as “just Jewish.” Among all US Jews, 32% do not identify with a specific denomination.
- Among Jewish adults in the Greater MetroWest Jewish community who affiliate with a denomination, the largest share affiliate with the Reform movement (32%), followed by the Conservative movement (22%). Four percent of Jewish adults are Orthodox, and 4% identify with another denomination.
- Among Jewish adults in Greater MetroWest who are married or partnered, 66% are inmarried, and 33% are intermarried. Among all US Jews who are married, 58% are inmarried and 42% are intermarried.<sup>4</sup> Among married couples, 51% are inmarried and 49% are intermarried.
- Elements of diversity:
  - Five percent of Jewish adults were raised in a Russian-speaking home.
  - Six percent of Jewish adults are Israeli citizens.
  - Four percent of Jewish adults in Greater MetroWest identify as LGBTQ, and 9% of Jewish households have a member who identifies as LGBTQ (who may or may not be Jewish).
  - Two percent of Jewish adults identify as a race other than white, and 6% of Jewish adults identify as being of Hispanic or Latino origin. However, most of these individuals do not

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<sup>4</sup> National data based on marriages only, not partners.

consider themselves to be a person of color; just 1% of Jewish adults identify as a person of color.

## Geography

- The largest share of Jewish households are located in Essex County (38%), followed by East Morris (25%), Western GMW (19%), and Union County (18%).
- Essex County includes the largest share of Jewish households with children (35%) and Western GMW has the largest share of couples without children (43%).
- Seventy-two percent of GMW Jewish households have lived in the area for 20 years or more, and 11% moved to the area within the past five years. Nearly two-in-five Jewish households (39%) of have lived at their current address for at least 20 years.
- Twenty-two percent of GMW Jewish households have plans to move from their current address within the next three years. Among these households, 18% plan to stay in Greater MetroWest, including 1% who plan to stay in the same town. The most common reason for moving is for a more affordable cost of living (39%).
- All regions of GMW have a similar share of well-off Jewish households, between 17% and 19%, but East Morris has a smaller share of financially struggling Jewish households.
- Union County includes the largest share of Orthodox adults (10%), followed by Essex (4%). Essex County, however, also has the largest share of Jewish adults with no specific denomination (41%), a similar share to that in Western GMW (39%).
- Newcomers to GMW, those living in the area for less than five years, are strongly engaged in Jewish life, with 27% of newcomers in the Immersed category, compared to 13% of Jewish adults who have lived in GMW for at least 20 years.
- In the regions where overall Jewish engagement is strongest, so too are feelings of connections to the local Jewish community. About one-in-four Jewish adults in Essex and Union Counties feel very connected to the local Jewish community, compared to 13% and 9% in East Morris and Western GMW respectively.
- Because many newcomers are highly engaged in Jewish life, their connections to the local Jewish community are stronger than the long-time residents. Only 17% of newcomers feel completely disconnected from the local Jewish community, compared to 33% of longer-term residents.
- Jewish households in Essex include the largest share of Federation donors and the largest share of those who are familiar with Federation.
- While Jewish households with newcomers donate to Jewish organizations at the same rate as Jewish households with long-term residents, Jewish households with newcomers are less likely to donate to Federation.

## Jewish children

- Approximately 29,700 children live in Jewish households in GMW. An estimated 25,400 of these children are considered Jewish by their parents (86%), including 19,200 who are considered Jewish only (65%) and 6,200 who are considered Jewish and another religion (21%). There are

4,300 children in GMW Jewish households who are not considered Jewish by their parents. This group includes children with no religion (9%) and those with a religion other than Judaism (5%).

- Just under half of Jewish children (45%) are being raised by inmarried parents, and a similar share are being raised by intermarried parents. About 8% of Jewish children are being raised by single parents.
- Among GMW's Jewish children, 30% of preschool-age Jewish children were enrolled in a Jewish preschool in the 2020-21 academic year; 20% of K-12 Jewish children were enrolled in a Jewish part-time school, such as a Hebrew school, religious school, or Sunday school, and 7% of K-12 Jewish children were enrolled in a Jewish day school or yeshiva.
- K-12 Jewish school enrollment is significantly higher among the age-eligible Jewish households of Essex County, compared to Jewish households in other regions.
- Schedule and location are the most common reasons cited for choosing both Jewish and non-Jewish preschools.
- Cost is the primary reason for not enrolling children in Jewish day schools or *yeshivot*. However, among Jewish households who had at least one child in day school, the vast majority agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (36%) that their children's day school education is a good value, given the cost.
- Among Jewish households that had at least one child in day school and moved to the area within the past ten years, about half agreed (21%) or strongly agreed (30%) that GMW day school and yeshiva options were a reason to move to the area.
- Eighteen percent of age-eligible Jewish children enrolled in Jewish overnight camp, and 8% of age-eligible Jewish children enrolled in a Jewish day camp in 2019 or 2020.
- Among Jewish households with a child who attended Jewish overnight camp in summer 2019 or 2020, 48% were very likely to send a child to camp in summer 2021, but 44% were not at all likely to do so. In contrast, among households with no child in camp in 2019 or 2020, 85% said they were not at all likely to send their child to camp in 2021.
- Inmarried households participate in PJ Library at a significantly higher rate (39%) than intermarried households (22%).

## Jewish engagement

- To understand the diversity of Jewish engagement in Greater MetroWest, the report describes five categories of Jewish engagement based on patterns of participation in ritual, communal, personal, and home-based Jewish life. The five patterns differ in terms of prevalent types of Jewish behaviors and in the degree of participation in those behaviors. Fourteen percent of Jewish adults are in the Immersed group and participate in all aspects of Jewish life; 15% of Jewish adults in the Involved group have a high level of participation in ritual and communal activities. Over one quarter of Jewish adults (27%) are in the Personal group and primarily participate in individual rather than communal activities. Another quarter of Jewish adults (27%) are in the Familial group and primarily participate in home-based holidays like the Passover seder and Hanukkah. The remaining 16% of Jewish adults are in the Minimally Involved group

and participate in Jewish life occasionally if at all. These groups are unique to the Greater MetroWest Jewish community and were developed specifically for this study.

- Jewish engagement is higher among Jewish households with children, compared to other households. Jewish engagement is lower among single-adult households without children.
- Jewish engagement is higher in Jewish households with an inmarried couple, compared to households with intermarried couples or with single adults.
- Jewish engagement is higher in Essex and Union counties. Jewish households in Essex and Union are more likely to be members of a synagogue, however, they are not more likely to attend religious services than households in other regions.
- Twenty-nine percent of Jewish households belong to a synagogue or congregation of any type. Twenty-five percent of Jewish households pay dues to a local “brick-and-mortar” synagogue.
- Financial status is not associated with higher levels of overall Jewish engagement. Wealthier Jewish households are more likely to be synagogue members than those that are less well off. Wealthier Jewish households are slightly more likely to attend High Holiday services. Other than High Holiday service attendance, however, there is no difference in service attendance between Jewish households of different financial statuses.
- Of the Jewish adults who attended High Holiday services in 2020, about two-in-five would prefer a combination of in-person and online services in the future.
- A larger share of Jewish adults in the Immersed and Involved engagement groups were raised by two Jewish parents, compared to Jewish adults in the other engagement groups.
- Jewish education in childhood is associated with Jewish engagement as an adult. Sixty-three percent of Greater MetroWest Jewish adults had some Jewish education as children.
- Three quarters of Jewish adults in Greater MetroWest feel that being Jewish is very much a matter of culture, with smaller shares feeling that being Jewish is a matter of ethnicity, community, and religion.

## Philanthropy and Volunteering

- About two thirds of GMW households donated to Jewish organizations in the past year. About one-in-five Jewish households (19%) donated only to non-Jewish causes, and 13% made no charitable donations.
- Among Jewish households that donated to any Jewish organization, more than one third donated to a synagogue (aside from dues).
- Among Jewish households that donated to any Jewish organization, 16% donated to Federation. This represents 10% of all GMW Jewish households.
- Other than the youngest age group, Jewish households of all ages donated to Jewish organizations at roughly equal rates. However, older households were more likely to donate to Federation. The youngest age groups made the fewest donations of any type.
- A larger share of Essex Jewish households donated to Federation. Western GMW includes the smallest share of Federation donors. Long-time Jewish residents are more likely to be Federation donors than are newcomers.

- Although well-off Jewish households have the highest **rate** of donation to Federation, they do not constitute the majority of Federation donors because they represent only 17% of all households. The largest **share** of Federation donors described their financial situation as having “enough” money, despite a significantly lower rate of giving.
- Nearly three quarters of all Jewish adults reported they are familiar with Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ.
- About one-in-three GMW Jewish adults gave Federation a positive rating, with 11% describing it as excellent and 23% as good.
- Among Jewish households that made any donations, 61% said that one of the primary reasons was their interest in a particular cause. Just over half of Jewish households (53%) said they donated because the organization benefited them or someone close to them.
- Nearly half of Jewish adults selected human service needs as a top philanthropic cause. Other top causes include social justice, environment and climate, and health care and research.
- One-in-five Jewish adults (21%) reported that they volunteered with or served in a leadership role in a Jewish organization in GMW in the past year.

## Israel

- About one-in-three Jewish adults (34%) feel very connected to Israel. Most Jewish adults feel some level of connection to Israel; only 11% of Jewish adults feel no connection to Israel
- Among the Jewish adults in the Personal engagement group, half feel very connected to Israel. Although those in the Personal group do not engage in many aspects of Jewish life to the degree that those in the Involved and Immersed groups do, it is clear that Israel is a particular area of interest.
- A majority of Jewish adults have been to Israel at least once, and 22% have been to Israel at least four times or have lived there. More than one-in-three Jewish adults (37%) have never been to Israel.
- A larger share of younger Jewish adults in GMW have been to Israel than older adults. About 40% of Jewish adults under age 50 have been to Israel multiple times or have lived there.
- Travel to Israel and feeling of connection to Israel are correlated. Fifty-eight percent of Jewish adults who have been to Israel multiple times feel very connected to Israel, compared to 17% of Jewish adults who have never been to Israel.
- Four-in-ten Jewish adults ages 40 and under (41%) have been on a Birthright Israel trip. In addition, three-in-ten Jewish households (30%) include a Birthright Israel participant or a parent of a participant.
- One-in-five Jewish adults (22%) consider Israel to be one of the top three causes they care about most.

## Community Connections

- Just over two thirds (68%) of Jewish adults feel some level of connection to a local Jewish community, and 17% feel strongly connected.

- The majority of Jewish adults in GMW (80%) reported that they are at least somewhat satisfied with their current level of connection to the GMW Jewish community, and about one-in-five Jewish adults (18%) said they are completely satisfied.
- One third of Jewish adults (34%) who do not feel at all connected to a local Jewish community are not satisfied with their level of connection.
- Feelings of connection to a local Jewish community are stronger among Jewish households with greater financial stability, Jewish households in Essex and Union counties, and Jewish households that include inmarried couples.
- Nearly two-in-three Jewish adults in the Immersed engagement group feel very connected to a local Jewish community, compared to only 1% of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group.
- Jewish adults in the Immersed engagement group and those who are financially well-off are most satisfied with their current level of connection to the local Jewish community.
- Almost all GMW Jewish adults report that at least some of their closest friends are Jewish, including 4% who say that all of their closest friends are Jewish, 31% say that most are, and 27% say that about half are Jewish.
- The COVID-19 crisis and lack of interesting activities are the most common limiting factors in developing connections with the GMW Jewish community.
- More than half of Jewish adults participated in Jewish activities in the past year, whether in person or online.
- Four percent of Jewish households belong to a JCC or Jewish Y in GMW. Membership is higher in Essex and Union counties, where the buildings are located.
- Older Jewish adults are much more likely to belong to Jewish organizations, formal and informal, compared to younger Jews.
- Jewish adults who feel strongly connected to the Jewish community are more likely to belong to local Jewish organizations.
- Most Jewish adults in GMW use the internet or social media to learn about Jewish programs. Nearly one quarter of Jewish adults report reading print editions of Jewish media, such as the *New Jersey Jewish News*.
- Jewish adults in GMW are very concerned about antisemitism. While nearly everyone is at least a little concerned about antisemitism around the world and across the United States, fewer Jewish adults feel very concerned about antisemitism in GMW. Seventeen percent of Jewish adults reported personally experiencing antisemitism in the past year.

## Finances

- The largest share of GMW Jewish households described their standard of living as “have enough money” (41%).
- Nearly one-in-five Jewish households (17%) described themselves as unable to make ends meet or just managing to make ends meet. The same share of Jewish households (17%) described themselves as well-off. Over the past three years, half of financially struggling households (50%) were unable to afford necessities.

- Two thirds (68%) of GMW Jewish households reported that their financial situation is about the same now as it was just before the COVID-19 crisis.
- Financially struggling Jewish households were hit hardest by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of employment.
- Among all GMW Jewish adults, only 3% were unemployed and looking for work at the time of the survey. However, 23% experienced a pay or hours cut, furlough, closed business, or job loss since the start of the pandemic.
- Fifteen percent of GMW Jewish households changed their Jewish life in some way due to financial constraints. A significantly greater proportion of struggling Jewish households (32%) made changes to their Jewish life due to financial constraints, with 19% reducing their donations to Jewish causes. Among struggling Jewish households that were synagogue members, 9% needed financial assistance to maintain their synagogue memberships. Very few Jewish households suspended their synagogue memberships.
- Younger Jewish households as well as Jewish households without a married/partnered couple are less likely to be well-off than other households. Couples without children have the highest standard of living.
- All regions of GMW have a similar share of well-off households, between 17% and 19%, but East Morris has a smaller share of struggling households.
- Well-off Jewish adults feel a stronger sense of connection to the local Jewish community (25% very connected), compared to the groups with less secure finances (13% very connected).
- Jewish charitable giving is prevalent in GMW regardless of financial situation, but Federation giving is highest among well-off Jewish households.

## Senior Adults

- There are 28,200 Jewish adults ages 65+ living in Greater MetroWest. Thirty-eight percent of Jewish senior adults are under age 70, and 21% are ages 80 or older.
- Just over half of Jewish households in which seniors live include a married/partnered couple without children, and seniors living alone account for about one third (34%) of senior Jewish households.
- Eight percent of senior Jewish households are located in an assisted living facility, nursing home, or independent senior living building or community. An additional 13% of Jewish seniors are considering moving to some type of senior living residence within the next five years.
- The financial well-being of Jewish seniors is similar to that of all GMW Jewish households. However, Jewish seniors reported significantly fewer financial worries, compared to other Jewish households in GMW.
- All age groups have similar shares of Jewish adults who are in the Immersed engagement group. However, one third (32%) of Jewish adults ages 65-74 fall in the Minimally Involved group, a larger share than among younger and older adults.

## Health and Disabilities

- Nearly one-in-five GMW Jewish households includes someone who has a chronic health issue, special need, or disability that limits work, school, or activities. Chronic illness is the most common health issue followed by physical disability. Older Jewish adults have significantly higher rates of health issues, special need, or disability.
- Seventeen percent of GMW Jewish households include someone who provides or manages the care of a close relative or friend on a regular basis (aside from routine childcare). Two thirds of these Jewish households provide or manage the care for a parent or in-law.
- Among Jewish households in which someone has a health issue or disability, half indicated that Jewish organizations are not at all accommodating to their health condition.
- Of Jewish households that require a service for a health issue, special need, or disability, 9% sought and received services from Jewish-sponsored organizations. The majority of these households (89%) did not seek services from Jewish organizations.

# 2020 Greater MetroWest NJ Jewish Community Study

 (973) 929-3198

 [info@jfedgmw.org](mailto:info@jfedgmw.org)

 @jfedgmw

 @jfedgmw

 @JewishGMW

 [jfedgmw.org](http://jfedgmw.org)

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**Headquarters:**  
901 Route 10, Whippany, New Jersey 07981

**Regional Office:**  
1391 Martine Avenue, Scotch Plains, New Jersey 07076

(973) 929-3000 • Fax: (973) 884-7361