



Neighborhoods, Community Development, and Student Attendance

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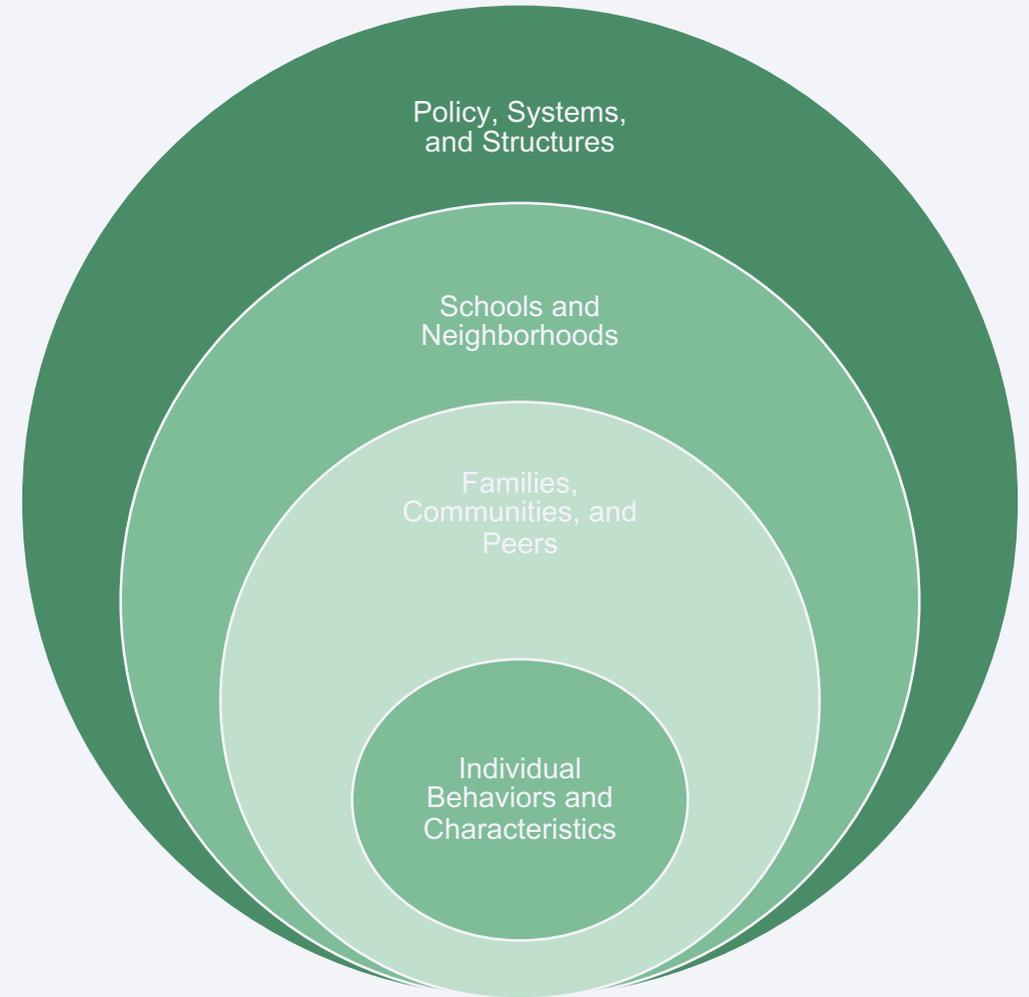
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Agenda

- Chronic absenteeism as outcome and indicator
- Neighborhood factors contributing to chronic absenteeism
- How community development, advocacy, and funders can help
- Next steps

How We Conceptualize Ed Policy Problems in Detroit

- The most pervasive problems of student enrollment, engagement, and attendance must be understood *ecologically*.
- This means that problems that seem like those of individual behavior or resources likely have roots in systems, policies, communities, and relationships.
- Our work seeks to uncover those root causes and work with our partners to develop research- and community-informed policy solutions, using continuous improvement methods.



Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology (volume 1): Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 793–828). John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Neighborhoods Matter for Educational Access

- Despite widespread school choice options, where a child lives shapes where they go to school
 - Families of all incomes prefer a school close to home
 - Resource constraints limit how far low-income children can travel to school
- Where a child lives also shapes their ability to get to school once enrolled
 - Access to public and school transportation is inequitable
 - Childcare and other family needs are not evenly distributed
 - Social networks have different resources
 - Neighborhood safety concerns

Chronic Absenteeism as Outcome and Indicator

Chronic Absenteeism

What is it?

Missing 10% or more of enrolled school days, or about 18 days in a regular 180-day school year.

Why does it matter?

- Chronic absenteeism is both a proxy indicator for youth wellness and a contributing factor to future youth success in school.
- How much school Detroit children miss tells us important information about how well their families and communities are doing. It also points toward what schools and social services may need to do to support them.



Detroit has the highest chronic absence rate of any major U.S. city (2015-16)

Source: Civil Rights Data Collection. Latest national data available are from 2015-16.

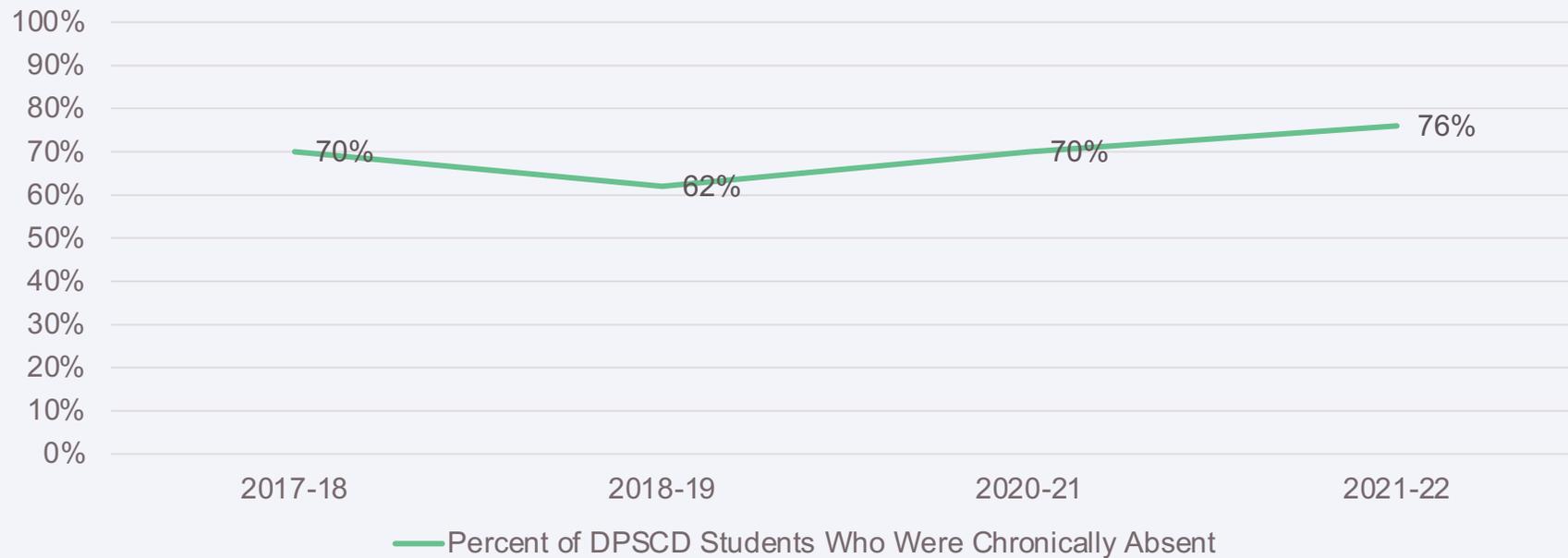
City	Percent Chronically Absent
Detroit	48%
Milwaukee	38%
Philadelphia	32%
Washington	31%
Baltimore	30%
Columbus	29%
Louisville	27%
Tucson	26%
Denver	26%
Chicago	25%
Portland	23%
Albuquerque	22%
Seattle	21%
Jacksonville	21%
Las Vegas	21%

Student Attendance and Academic Outcomes

- 67% of students who live in Detroit were chronically absent in 21-22
 - 76% of Detroit students in DPSCD
 - 60% of Detroit students in non-DPSCD schools
- Chronic absenteeism is a better predictor of 3rd grade reading performance than demographics like race or qualifying for free/reduced price lunch
- Being chronically absent lowers expected reading test scores on the M-STEP by about 9 points (about a quarter of the difference between proficient and eligible for retention under previous law).

Pandemic Exacerbated Chronic Absence in Detroit Schools

Percent of DPSCD Students Who Were Chronically Absent



Source: CEPI State Longitudinal Data System

Note. We have omitted 2019-20 because the school year was interrupted, and schools did not report attendance for the last two months of school.

Neighborhood Factors Contributing to Absenteeism

Myths about Why Students Miss so Much School in Detroit

- Detroit parents and students don't care about school
- Detroit parents and students don't know the importance of strong attendance
- Detroit families make poor choices about where to enroll in school
- Detroit schools are not putting in enough effort to increase attendance

Why Students Miss so Much School in Detroit

- Poverty creates difficult tradeoffs for families
- Students do not have access to well-resourced neighborhood schools
- 1/3 of Detroit families don't own a car.
- Half of Detroit-serving schools offer no transportation for Detroit students
- Housing instability
- Neighborhoods perceived as unsafe, unwalkable

Parents value education, want their children in school, and face difficult tradeoffs

“I let every job I work at, I let them know my kids will always come first. I can’t sacrifice my kids and their education nor their happiness for a job that will replace me in a heartbeat...

– *Parent of moderately chronically absent student*

“I have a pretty good relationship with the people I work with, so they understand about me being a single parent ...I get off at 7:00 in the evening. The children get out of school at 2:40. They just allow me time to leave and go pick up my children and come back to work.”

– *Parent of severely chronically absent student*

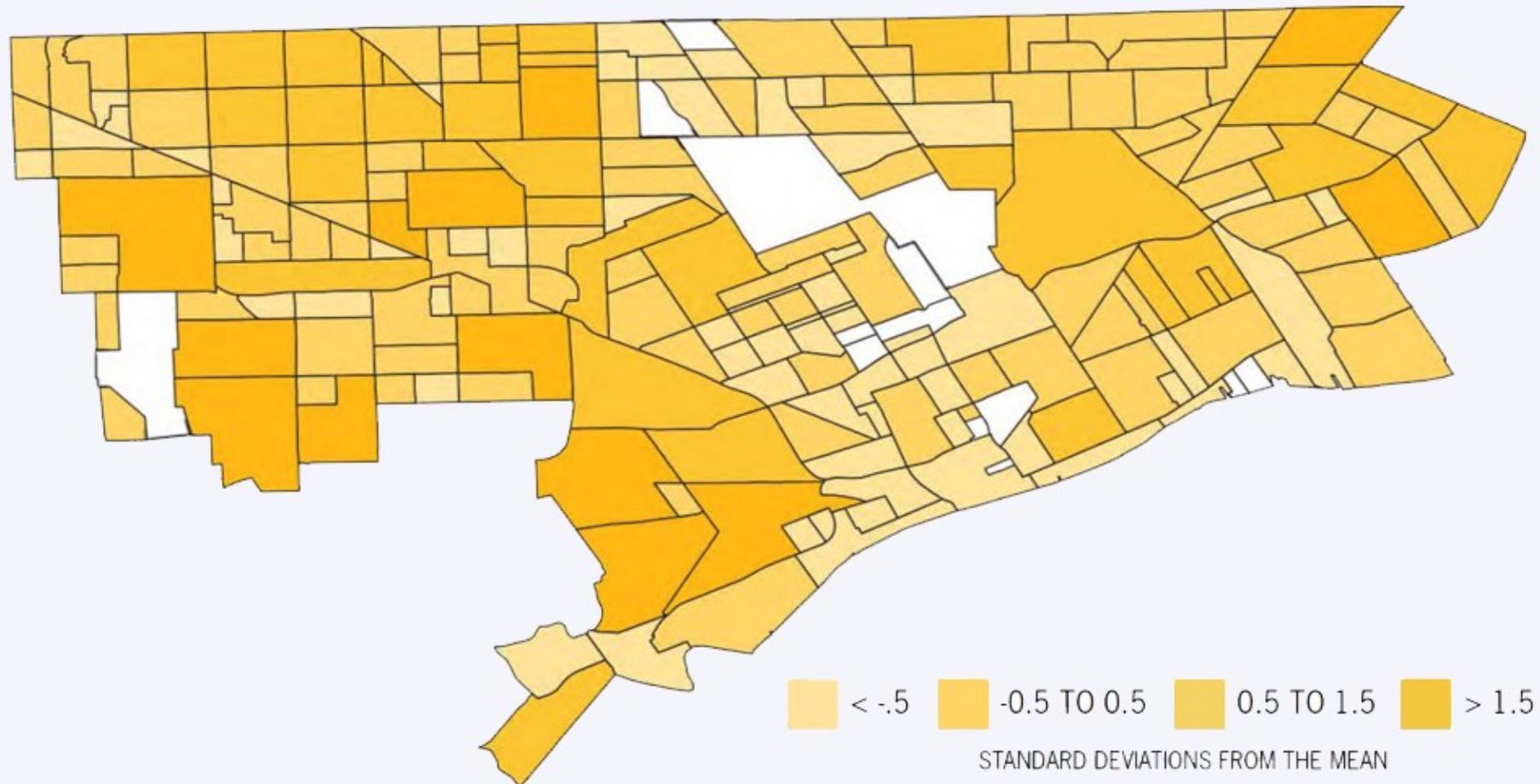
“I’m not happy about it and it’s nothing to do with him, but I hate that he’s missed out on learning...it’s really not fair to him because I have my education, I tell him all the time there’s so much that he has to learn and there’s a lot of things that his teachers could teach them that I can’t.”

– *Parent of severely chronically absent student*

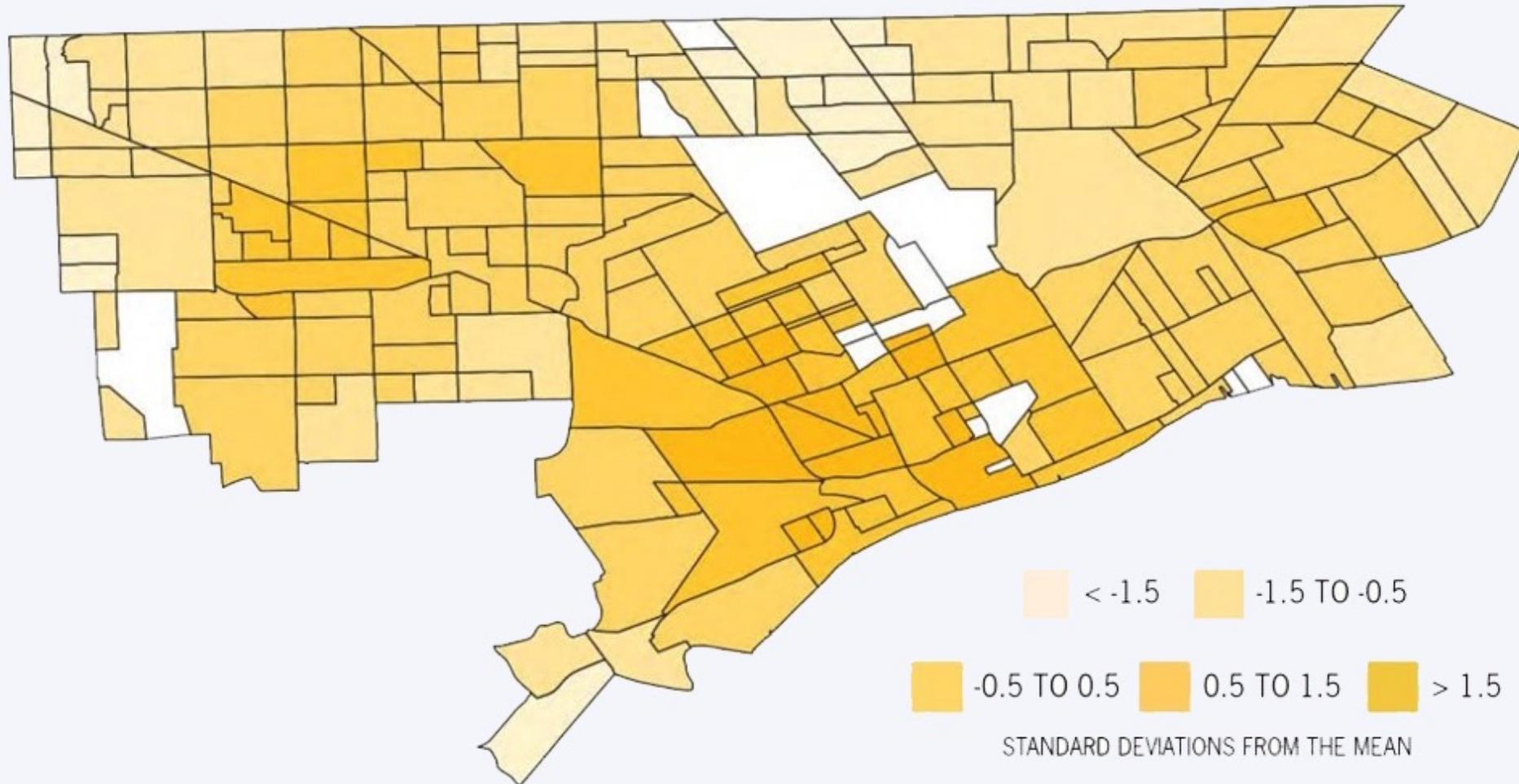
Detroit has the most challenging structural and environmental conditions for student attendance

Racial Segregation Index for Greater Metro Area		Violent Crime per 1,000 People		Poverty Rate (%)		Unemployment Rate (%)	
1. Milwaukee	69.42	1. Detroit	19.9	1. Detroit	37.90	1. Detroit	19.80
2. Detroit	68.42	2. Milwaukee	14.85	2. Fresno	28.40	2. Philadelphia	11.30
3. New York	63.66	3. Baltimore	13.39	3. Milwaukee	27.40	3. Fresno	11.10
4. Chicago	62.57	4. Indianapolis	12.55	4. Philadelphia	25.80	4. Baltimore	10.00
5. Philadelphia	61.56	5. Washington D.C.	11.85	5. Tucson	24.10	5. Chicago	9.90
Percentage of Adults with Asthma (%)		Residential Vacancy Rate (%)		Population Change (%) 1970-2010		Average Monthly Temperature (°F)	
1. Detroit	14.00	1. Detroit	27.00	1. Detroit	19.80	1. Denver	46.48
2. Baltimore	12.30	2. Baltimore	18.00	2. Philadelphia	11.30	2. Milwaukee	46.67
3. Louisville	12.30	3. Chicago	14.00	3. Fresno	11.10	3. Detroit	49.03
4. Philadelphia	11.60	4. Houston	13.00	4. Baltimore	10.00	4. Chicago	49.56
5. Boston	11.40	5. Indianapolis	13.00	5. Chicago	9.90	5. Boston	50.42

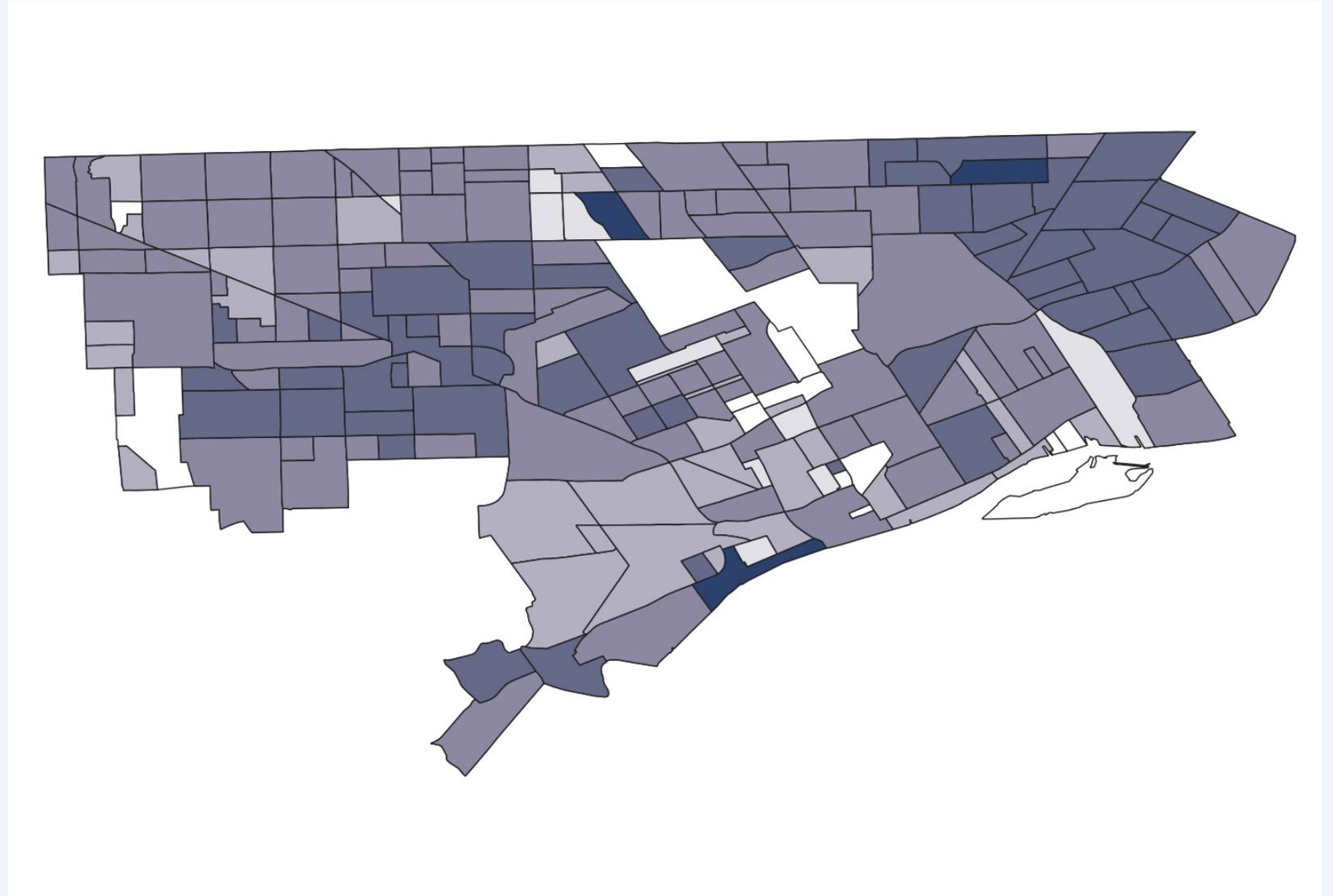
School-aged children live across Detroit, with highest concentrations in Southwest, Westside, and Eastside



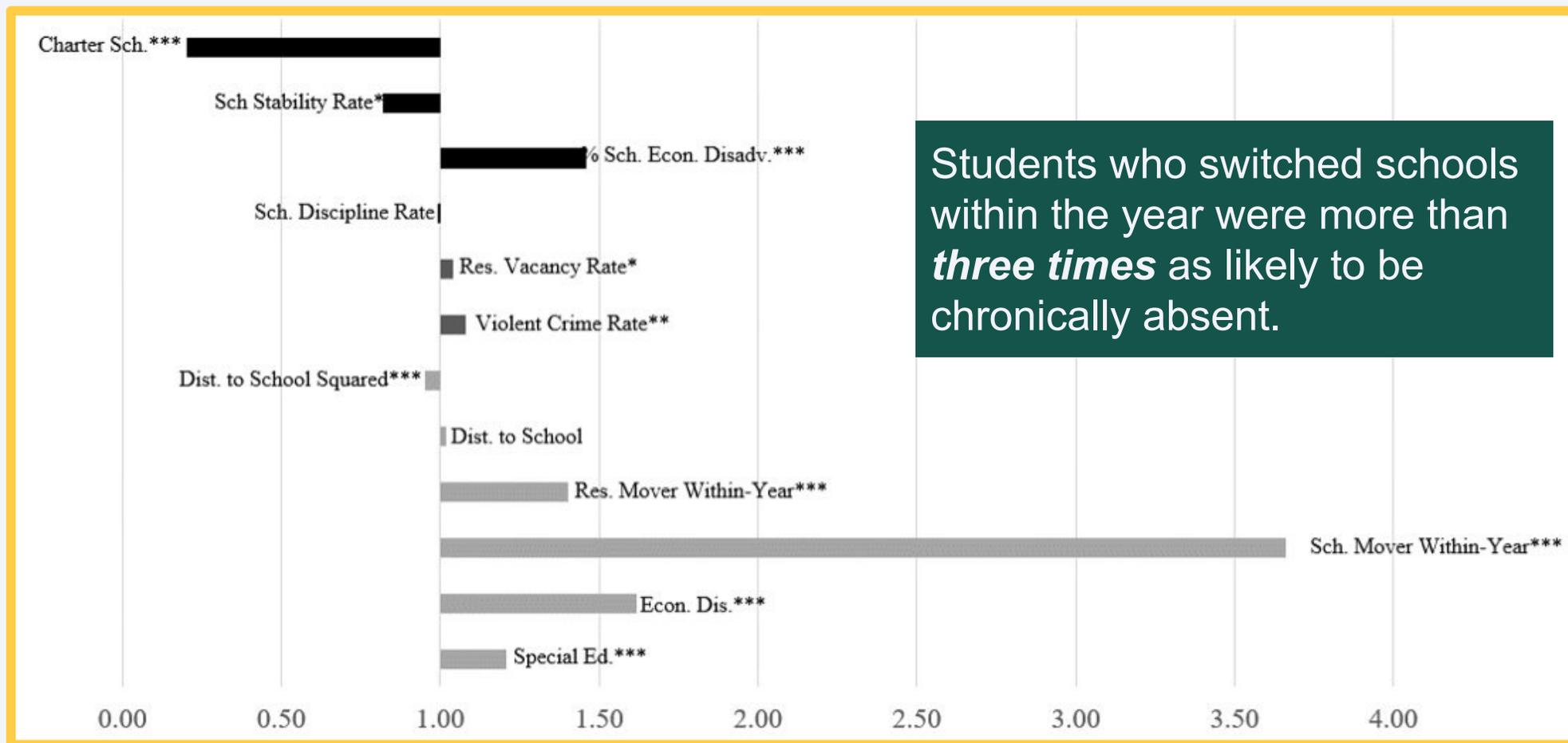
Yet, schools are concentrated downtown, leading to inequitable access to schools close to home



Percent of students who are chronically absent by neighborhood



Students Facing Residential and School Instability are Much More likely to be Chronically Absent



We estimate that at least 16% of Detroit students were housing unstable in 2021-22, but schools only identified 4%

	Pct. Students Homeless or Housing Unstable	Pct. Students Identified as Homeless by District
All	16%	4%
<i>DPSCD</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>5%</i>
<i>Charter</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>2%</i>

Source: Detroit PEER representative survey of Detroit students (January 2022) and 2021-22 administrative data from DPSCD and participating charter schools

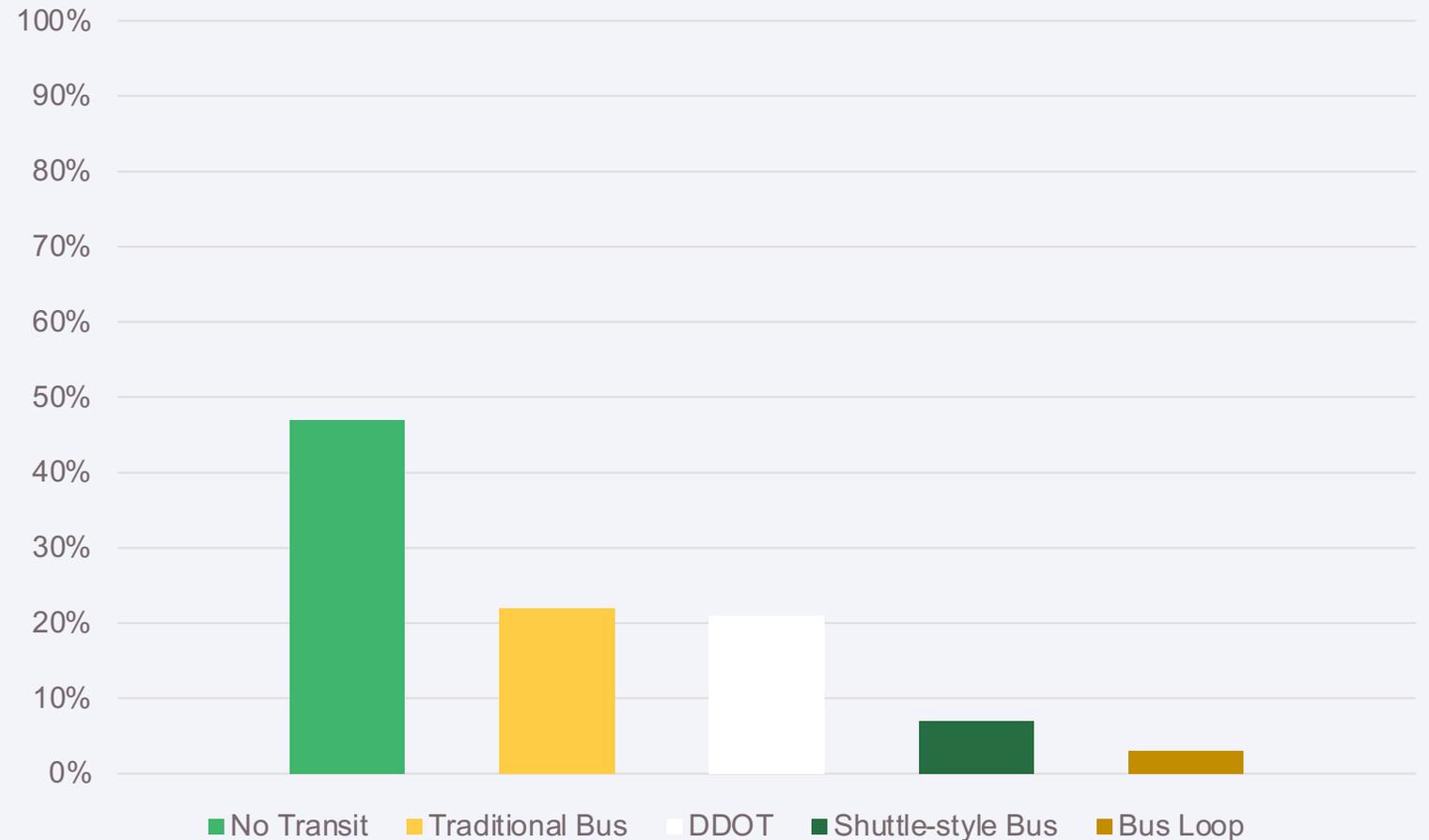
How Students Get to School is Associated with their Attendance

- Riding the school bus in K is associated with better attendance.¹
- Increased commuting time leads to decreased attendance.²
- In Michigan (outside of Detroit), school bus eligibility is associated with a 0.5% to 1% increase in attendance.³
- Yet, there is limited research on the actual mode of transportation students use and how that is related to attendance in choice environments.

¹ Gottfried (2017); ² Blagg et al. (2018); ³ Edwards (in press).

47% of Detroit students attend a school with no transportation for general education students

Bus Type Offered to Detroit Students in DPSCD and Detroit Charters



75% of students are driven to school daily by their parent; 79% never walk or bike

Type of transportation in AM	Daily	Weekly	Several times per month	Less Often	Never
You drove your car	0.75	0.05	0.02	0.05	0.12
You drove someone else's car	0.16	0.04	0.04	0.11	0.66
Someone else drove	0.11	0.07	0.05	0.17	0.60
School bus	0.12	0.03	0.02	0.06	0.76
Public bus (DDOT)	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.90
Walk or bike	0.07	0.02	0.03	0.09	0.79
Taxi or rideshare	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.10	0.84

Neighborhood Infrastructure for Getting to School is Weak

- Safety
 - Parents worry about safely walking or biking to school
 - Among students who lived 0.25 miles away from school or less, 44% never walked or biked to school. Among students who lived 0.5 miles away from school or less, 53% never walked or biked
- Social Networks
 - Lack of social cohesion in neighborhoods means that parents have few reliable back-ups when things go wrong
- Neighborhood School Divestment
 - Because of the decline in the neighborhood school, few neighbors attend the same school
 - As one example, there are about 500 public school students who live in Corktown. They attend 97 different public schools, with only a quarter attending the neighborhood school.

How Community Development, Advocacy, and Funders Can Help

Measures to Consider

- The average number of K-12 schools within walking/biking distance of residents
- The concentration of students within schools in the neighborhood
- The percentage of resident students who are chronically absent
- Economic connectedness within the neighborhood

Investments to Consider

- Neighborhood safety initiatives, such as complete sidewalks, working streetlights, signs indicating that children are in the neighborhood
- Investments in social connectedness so that families can get to know each other, make schooling decisions together, and rely on each other for back-up
- Community schools initiatives, where the neighborhood school becomes a hub for the whole community, including health services, job training, etc.

Thank you!

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