

DETROIT PARTNERSHIP FOR
EDUCATION EQUITY
& RESEARCH

Neighborhood Satisfaction and Implications for Detroit Schoolchildren

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Neighborhoods Satisfaction and Implications for Detroit Schoolchildren

INTRODUCTION

An abundance of research shows that the neighborhoods in which children grow up has a substantial impact on their educational and lifetime outcomes (Chetty et al., 2018, 2024; Harding et al., 2010; Wodtke et al., 2011). Therefore, the success of Detroit schoolchildren depends not only on their schools but also the conditions that their families face in their neighborhoods and communities.

The Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research (Detroit PEER) is increasing its focus on children's neighborhoods alongside their educational experiences. As a first step, we partnered with the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study and our colleagues at the University of Southern California, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Michigan to conduct a representative survey of Detroit residents during the summer of 2023. (Additional methodological details can be found in the appendix.) This research brief uses the survey results to provide a baseline assessment of the neighborhood conditions affecting Detroit children and their families, from perceptions of improvement to social cohesion to satisfaction.

KEY FINDINGS:

- More Detroit residents reported that the quality of life in their neighborhood is improving rather than declining. Population increases, along with business openings and physical improvements, may underlie these perceptions.
- Detroit residents are mixed on the level of cohesion and connectedness they feel with their neighbors.

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- Most Detroit parents feel their child received an excellent education and that their children’s schools are welcoming and safe.
- Most Detroit residents are satisfied with their neighborhoods overall, though fewer are satisfied with the housing, childcare, schools, employment opportunities, and transit in their neighborhoods.

These results show that the quality of life for Detroit residents has been improving, though there are several areas where Detroiters across the city hope to see more progress. From parental employment to affordable housing, from safety to childcare and schools, continuing to improve these neighborhood conditions and opportunities will be critical for the educational success and lifetime outcomes of Detroit’s youth.

DETROIT CONTEXT FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

In the 2022-23 school year, about 111,000 school-aged children lived in Detroit. Of those, 41% attended a school in the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), 27% attended a Detroit charter school; and 25% attended a public or charter school outside of Detroit. (We estimate that about 9% of school-aged children enrolled in a private school. We lack data to estimate participation in homeschooling.) As shown in Table 1, the number of school-aged children in the city has decreased over the past decade, as has the share of students attending a public or charter school in the city.

Table 1: Detroit Schoolchildren Enrollment Over Time

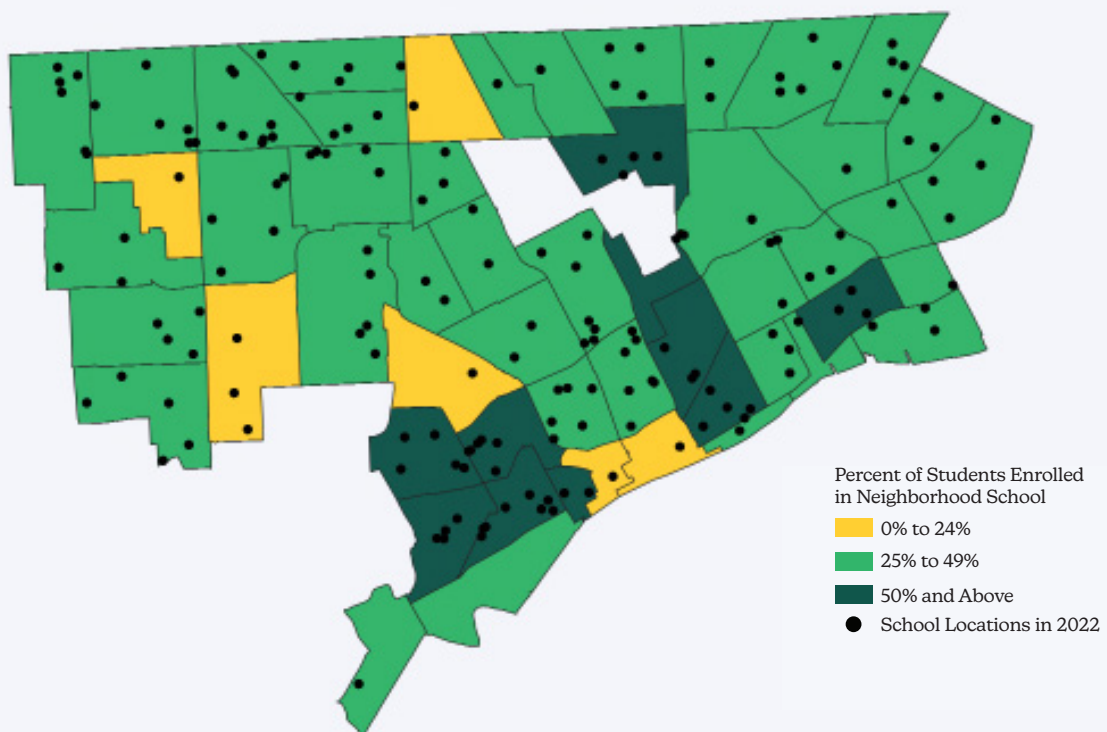
| | 2013-2014 | 2022-2023 |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Detroit public schools | 52,760 (44%) | 45,653 (41%) |
| Detroit charter | 34,367 (29%) | 29,596 (27%) |
| Suburban public or charter | 23,175 (19%) | 28,004 (25%) |
| Private school | 8,726 (7%) | 7,839 (7%) |
| Total | 119,028 (100%) | 111,092 (100%) |

Note: Public and charter school enrollment data come from the administrative records maintained by Michigan’s Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). Private school data are estimates based on data from the American Community Survey.

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The high degree of school choice, alongside a long history of school closures in the city, has weakened the link between Detroit's neighborhoods and schools over time (Green et al., 2019; Kang, 2020; Lenhoff et al., 2020; Singer, 2020). Only about one in three Detroit students attends a public school in their neighborhood (i.e., their assigned DPSCD school, a school within their official neighborhood boundaries, or a school within 1 mile of their home). This low level of neighborhood-based school enrollment is consistent across most of the city, though neighborhood school enrollment rates are higher in Southwest Detroit and a string of neighborhoods on the near-east side than other parts of the city (Figure 1). The rate of neighborhood-based school enrollment in Detroit in 2022-23 (33%) is lower than it was a decade ago (39%).

Figure 1: Percent of Detroit Students Enrolled in a Nearby School by Neighborhood, 2022

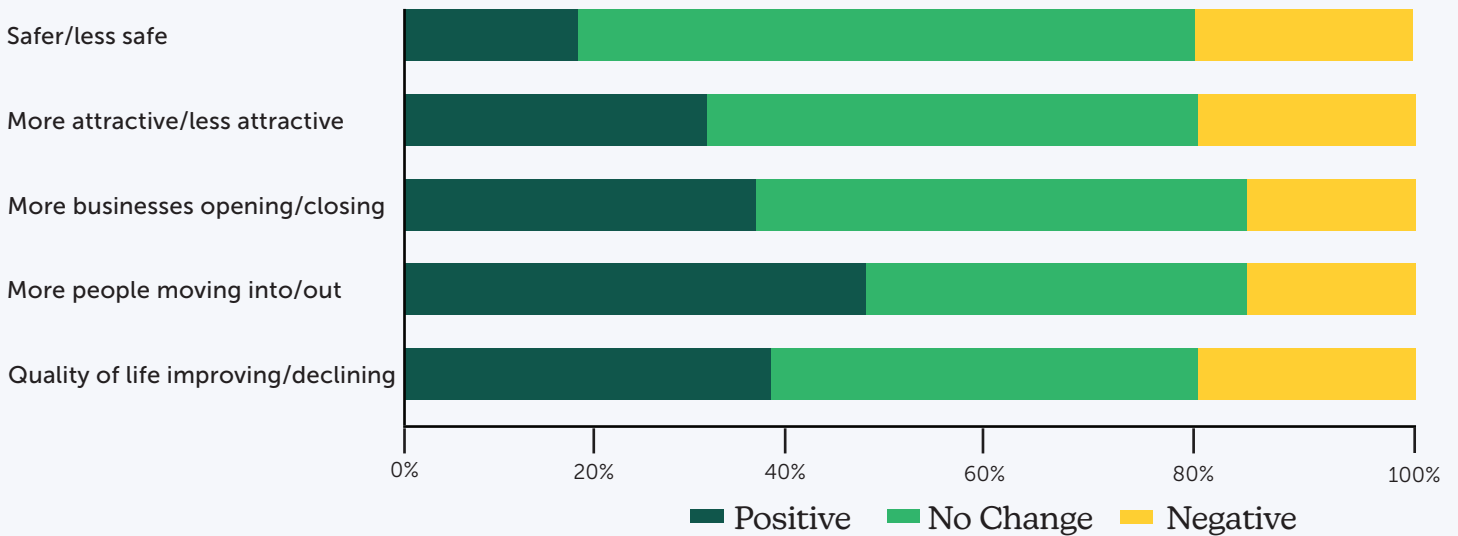


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PERCEPTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

We asked our survey respondents to report whether they perceived the quality of life in their neighborhood to be improving or declining over the past year (Figure 2). A plurality (42%) of respondents reported that quality of life in their neighborhood had not changed over the past year (i.e., they selected “staying the same”). Still, more than twice as many respondents said that the quality of life in their neighborhood was improving (39%) rather than declining (19%).

Figure 2: Detroit Residents’ Perceptions of Neighborhood Change, Summer 2023



We also asked about perceptions of more specific neighborhood changes: Did more people move in or out? Did more businesses open or close? Has the neighborhood’s physical appearance become more attractive or less? Has the neighborhood become safer or less safe? The responses offer some clues about what changes might underlie perceptions of neighborhood improvement (Figure 2). A plurality of respondents said that they perceived more people to be moving into their neighborhood (47%), rather than no change (37%) or more people moving out (16%). Detroit residents mostly feel their neighborhood population is increasing or stable, which may be driving some Detroiters’ perceptions of neighborhood improvement.

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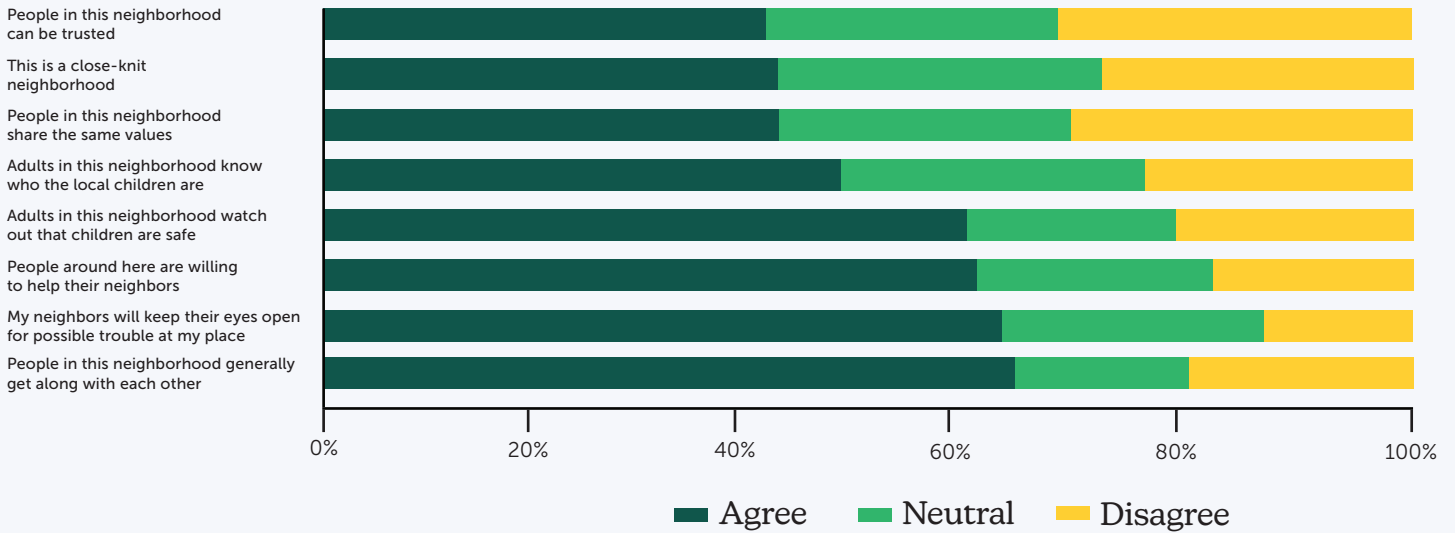
For both business openings and neighborhood attractiveness, a plurality of respondents reported no change. Again, however, more respondents said that more businesses were opening rather than closing (38% vs. 16%) and that their neighborhood was becoming more physically attractive rather than less (32% vs. 19%). For safety, the majority of respondents (63%) reported no change in neighborhood safety, with similar shares of respondents saying that their neighborhood was either safer (18%) or less safe (19%) than a year ago. Thus, new businesses and physical improvements might also be contributing to some residents' positive assessments of their neighborhoods, while increased safety may be less salient to perceptions of neighborhood improvement.

NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIAL COHESION AND CONNECTEDNESS

We also asked survey respondents about the level of social cohesion and connectedness that they perceived in their neighborhoods (Figure 3). Across several different questions, respondents reported strong levels of social cohesion and connectedness. A clear majority reported that people in their neighborhood generally get along (68%), keep an eye on their homes when one is away (67%), are willing to help each other (65%), and watch out for children's safety in the neighborhood (63%). In addition, 50% said that adults in the neighborhood know the local children; and a plurality said that people in their neighborhood share the same values (46%), that their neighborhood is close-knit (46%), and that their neighbors can be trusted (44%). While not all Detroit residents feel positively about all of these aspects of their neighborhood, the results suggest positive levels of social cohesion and connectedness.

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Figure 3: Detroit Residents’ Perceptions of Neighborhood Social Cohesion, Summer 2023

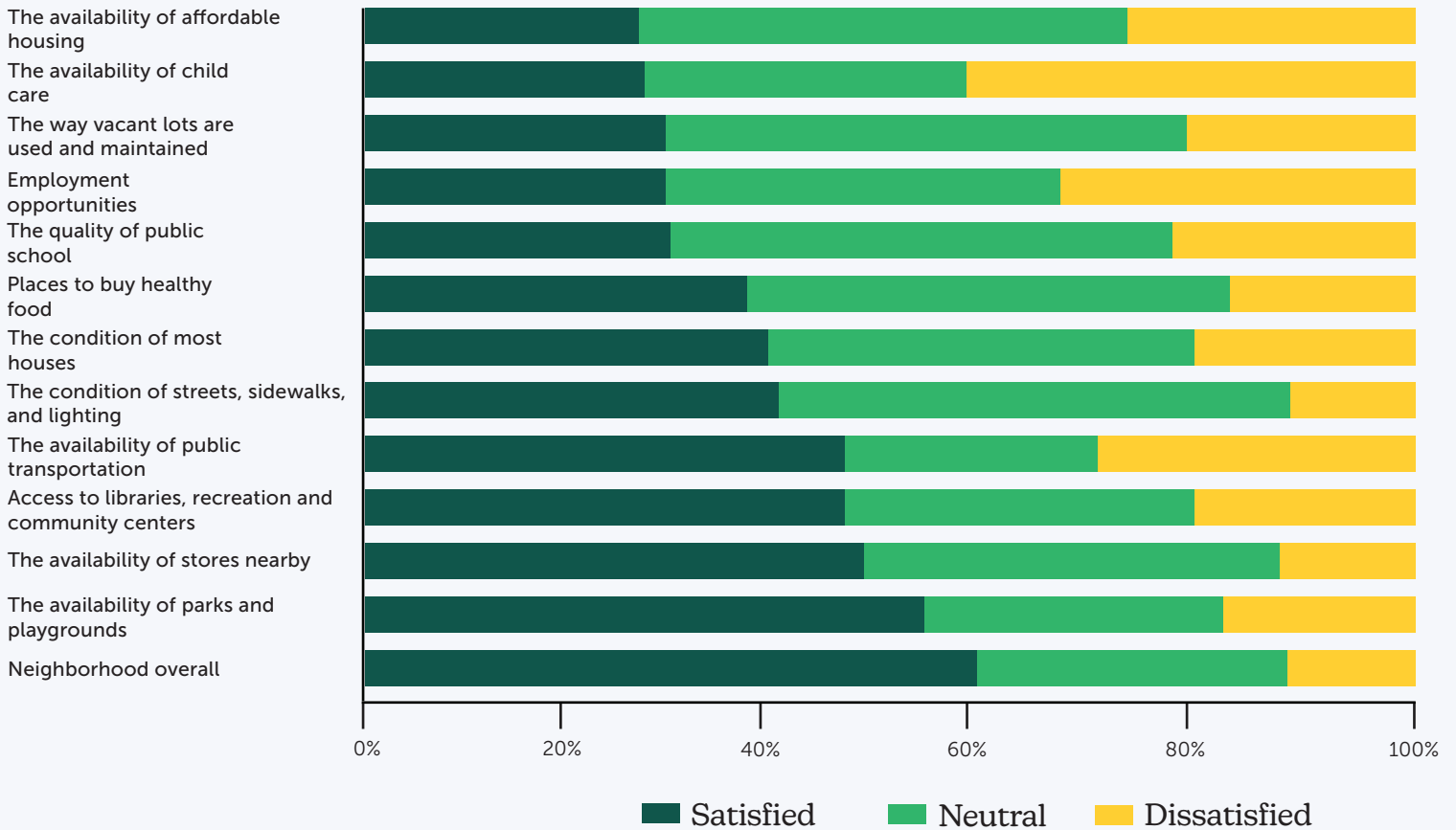


NEIGHBORHOOD SATISFACTION

In addition, our survey included questions about Detroit residents’ satisfaction with their neighborhoods overall and with specific resources and opportunities available in their neighborhoods (Figure 4). A clear majority of respondents said that they were either very satisfied (15%), mostly satisfied (22%), or somewhat satisfied (24%) with their neighborhood as a place to live overall, though fewer respondents reported satisfaction when asked about specifics. Most respondents were satisfied with the availability of parks and playgrounds, the availability of stores to shop regularly, access to public facilities (e.g., libraries, recreation centers), and public transportation. At the same time, more respondents were dissatisfied than satisfied with the condition of streets, houses, and vacant lots; places to buy healthy food; the quality of public schools; and the availability of employment opportunities, affordable housing, and childcare. A plurality of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with places to buy healthy food (47%), the quality of public schools overall (47%), the availability of affordable housing (48%), and the way vacant lots are used and maintained (49%). These results highlight that while some Detroit residents are satisfied with the resources and opportunities in their neighborhoods, most are ambivalent or even dissatisfied.

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Figure 4: Detroit Residents’ Satisfaction with Neighborhood Characteristics, Summer 2023

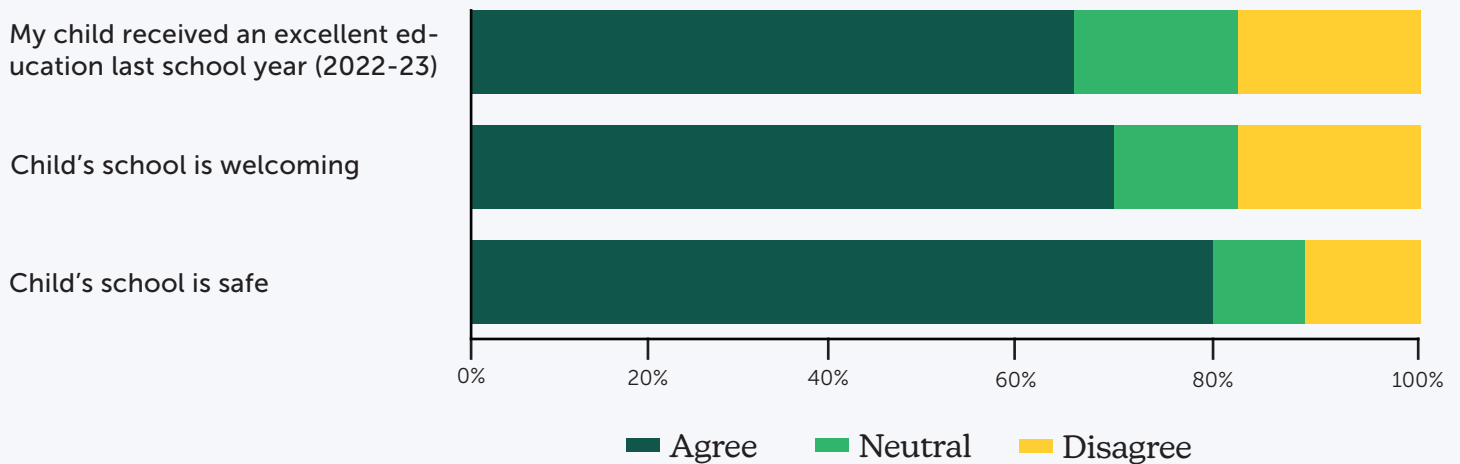


SCHOOL SATISFACTION

Finally, our survey also included three questions related to school satisfaction, which were asked only to survey participants with school-aged children in their household (Figure 5). Specifically, we asked respondents to think about the school attended by their youngest school-aged child (i.e., 5 years old or older). We asked whether their child received an excellent education during the prior school year (2022-23), whether the school was welcoming to them, and whether the school was safe. For all three questions, a clear majority of respondents agreed. Therefore, while the plurality of Detroiters may be dissatisfied with the overall quality of schools in their neighborhood, most Detroit parents view their children’s schools as welcoming, safe, and providing a good education.

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Figure 5: Detroit Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Schools, Summer 2023



CONCLUSION

Most Detroit residents are satisfied with their neighborhoods in general. Yet, on the conditions that matter most for families with school-aged children—from childcare access to housing affordability and employment opportunities—Detroit residents are considerably less satisfied. These conditions may negatively impact the developmental and educational experiences of children in Detroit and may pose a challenge to the city's goals of increasing its population. As the city and its partners work toward increasing the share of middle-class families in Detroit and invest in economic development in key neighborhoods, they should consider incorporating a plan to strengthen the connection between neighborhoods and neighborhood schools, involving the community-based organizations, businesses, and residents in those neighborhoods. Indeed, parents of all different backgrounds prefer schools close to home (Singer, 2024). In addition, going to school in your neighborhood can support regular school attendance, strengthen community cohesion, and create opportunities to build social support networks between neighbors. Our future research will examine efforts to strengthen neighborhood-based educational and economic opportunity in Detroit, starting with investments in affordable and mixed-income housing in Corktown.

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APPENDIX

The Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS) is a panel survey of Detroit residents launched in 2016. The original panel of respondents was drawn from an address-based probability sample of all occupied Detroit households. In subsequent years, the panel has been refreshed through additional address-based sampling. Their 17th survey wave included a sample refreshment. DMACS sent survey invitations to 2,873 previously-enrolled panelists and 5,000 invitations to a randomly selected address-based refreshment sample of Detroit households. This refreshment included an oversample of households in majority Hispanic Census Block Groups. Surveys were self-administered online or interviewer-administered via telephone between June 22, 2023 and August 29, 2023. The results include 2,501 Detroit residents who completed the survey. DMACS obtained an overall response rate of 34% (using AAPOR Response Rate 1); 68.3% for existing panelists and 12.9% for new panelists.

The results reflect weighted responses. Survey weights were calculated in two stages. In the first stage, DMACS used the technique of post-stratification to account for differential selection probabilities including oversamples in predominantly Latino block groups and neighborhoods that were targets of the Strategic Neighborhood Fund, a public/private community development initiative. In the second stage, DMACS applied raking to adjust the weights to match the estimated distributions on gender, age, race, education, and income based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 1-year estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS). [Click here for more on the weighting approach.](#) The margin of sampling error for a random sample survey of this size would be +/- 2.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level; the actual margin of sampling error varies by statistic due in part to the complex sample design.

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This report also analyzes data collected as part of the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS), a University of Michigan initiative that regularly surveys a broad, representative group of Detroit residents about their communities, including their expectations, perceptions, priorities, and aspirations. Core support for DMACS data collection is provided by: the Kresge Foundation, the Knight Foundation, The Ballmer Group, Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan, and Michigan CEAL: Communities Conquering COVID (MICEAL) (NIH grant 1 OT2 HL 156812). Additional funding for the survey data analyzed in this report was provided by Invest Detroit, Wayne State University, the University of Texas, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Michigan. More information on DMACS survey funding, methodology, and results can be found at detroitssurvey.umich.edu.

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