

DETROIT PARTNERSHIP FOR
EDUCATION EQUITY
& RESEARCH

Corktown Residents' Perceptions of their Neighborhood

June
2025

Sarah Winchell Lenhoff
Huriya Jabbar
DeMarcus Jenkins
Kara Finnigan
Daniela Luengo
Jeremy Singer

Corktown Residents' Perceptions of their Neighborhood

INTRODUCTION

Corktown is a neighborhood just west of downtown Detroit with a mix of historic residential homes, apartment buildings, and significant commercial and cultural amenities. The neighborhood was founded by Irish immigrants in the mid-1800s who escaped the potato famine. Maltese and Mexican immigrants began moving to Corktown in the early 20th Century, with Black residents migrating to the area in the mid-20th Century. Despite resident resistance, in the 1950s and 60s, the neighborhood was characterized as a "slum" and industrial projects and highway construction were approved, leading to mass demolition of many of Corktown's historic homes and eventually displacement of many of the neighborhood's Mexican families (Gallagher, 2018). In 1985, an affordable housing complex called Clement Kern Gardens (CKG) was built to serve seniors and families using Section 8 housing vouchers (Reindl, 2024).

Corktown has long been a key connection point for many Detroiters, with Tiger's Stadium opening in 1912 and Michigan Central Station opening in 1914. Tiger's Stadium was demolished in 2009 and redeveloped into a youth recreation center and baseball field called the Corner Ballpark in 2018, while Michigan Central was abandoned in 1988 and redeveloped by the Ford Motor Company and reopened as a mixed-use historic site in 2024. These redevelopments contributed to rapid changes in the population, economic opportunities, and housing prices in the neighborhood (Gallagher, 2018; Powers, 2024).

The neighborhood, including both historic and North Corktown, is now among the most racially and economically diverse in Detroit, with 62% of residents identifying as Black, 24% as White, 9% as Hispanic, and 5% as Multiracial or other races/ethnicities. In addition, about 44% of resi-

DETROIT PEER

dent households earn less than \$35,000 per year, while 22% earn more than \$100,000. In part due to growing inequality and concerns that gentrification would push lower-income residents out of the neighborhood, the City of Detroit partnered with CKG and other community organizations to apply for a Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI) grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. They were awarded the \$30 million grant in 2021 and are in the midst of a six-year effort to redevelop CKG into a mixed-income residential community and build new mixed-income housing throughout the neighborhood. A new mixed-income apartment building at the Corner Ballpark, Left Field, has already opened as part of the initiative

The Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research (Detroit PEER) is part of a research collaborative with scholars from the University of Southern California, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Michigan studying the implementation of the Corktown CNI and its impact on residents' educational opportunities and experiences, as part of our increasing focus on children's neighborhoods alongside their educational experiences. This report presents a closer look at Corktown residents' perceptions of their neighborhood using data from 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 Corktown children and their families. (See our report "Neighborhood Satisfaction and Implications for Detroit Schoolchildren" for citywide results.)

KEY FINDINGS:

- A large majority of Corktown residents (64%) believed their neighborhood quality of life was improving, compared to just 39% in the city overall.
- Corktown residents indicated strong connections with their neighbors, with a larger percentage saying neighbors got along and trusted each other than residents in other areas of the city.

DETROIT PEER

- Most Corktown residents were satisfied with their neighborhood overall, but were less satisfied with child care, schools, and affordable housing available in the neighborhood.
- Like residents in other parts of the city, Corktown parents of school-aged children were happy with the schools their children attended, whether they were in Corktown or not.

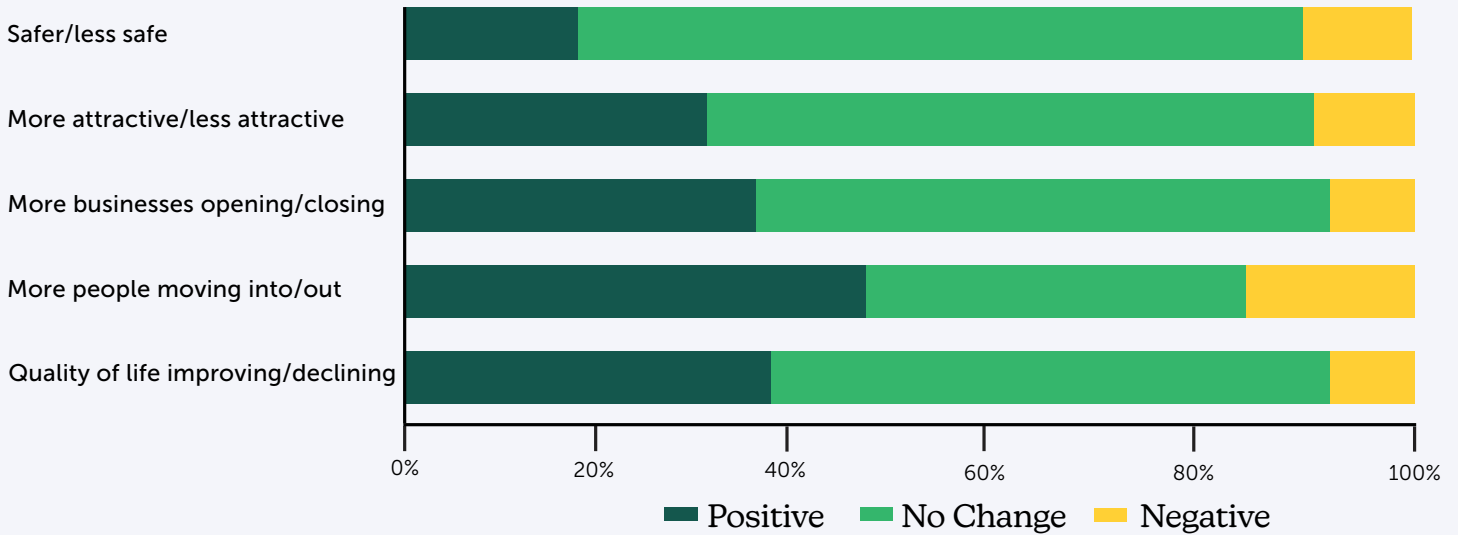
These results indicate high levels of satisfaction and social cohesion in Corktown, suggesting that, although residents would like some things to improve, many of them were happy with the way things were when we surveyed them in Summer 2023. With the implementation of CNI, the reopening of Michigan Central, and significant commercial and residential development in the neighborhood, it will be important to continue to track how residents are experiencing these changes and their impact on the educational and economic opportunities of young people and families.

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 1). A clear majority of Corktown residents reported that the quality of life in their neighborhood was improving (64%), with only a small share of respondents (7%) reporting that quality of life was declining (Figure 1). A larger share of Corktown residents have a positive perception of neighborhood improvement compared to residents in the rest of the city (39% improving and 42% no change; see Lenhoff et al., 2025).

DETROIT PEER

Figure 1: Corktown Residents' Perceptions of Neighborhood Change, Summer 2023



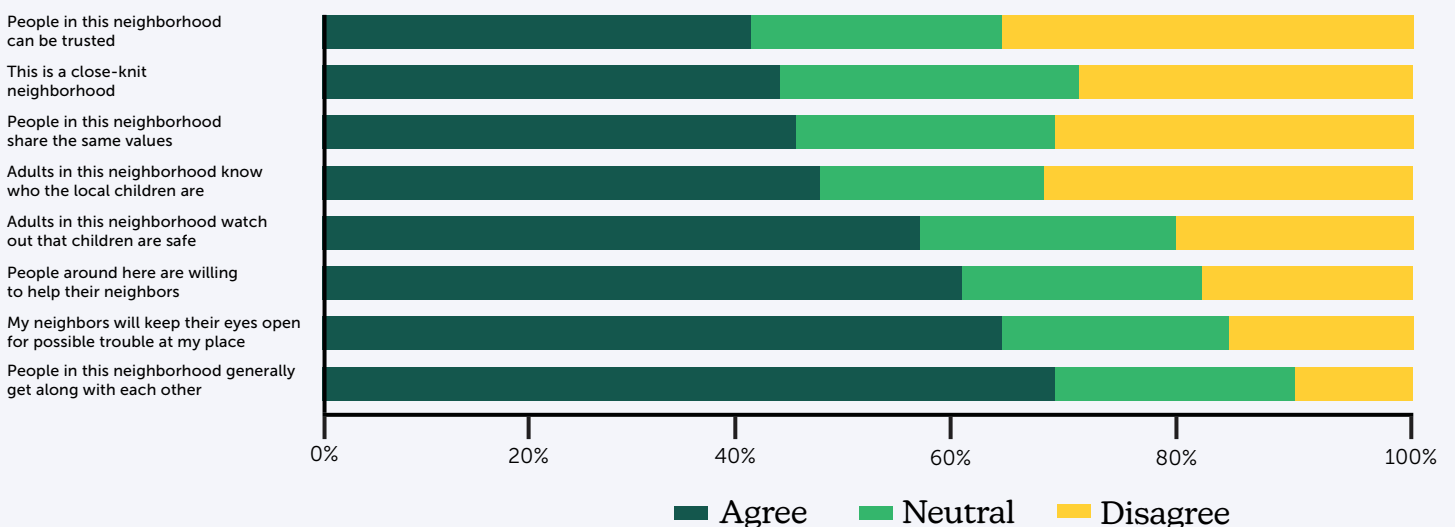
We also asked about perceptions of more specific neighborhood changes, which offer some clues about what changes might underlie perceptions of neighborhood improvement (Figure 1). A large majority of Corktown residents reported that they perceived more people to be moving into their neighborhood (71%) rather than moving out or no change; that more businesses were opening (67%) rather than closing or no change; and that the neighborhood was becoming more attractive (60%) rather than less attractive or no change. Indeed, a substantially larger share of Corktown residents reported these positive perceptions of population change, business activity, and neighborhood attractiveness, compared to residents in the rest of the city. For neighborhood safety, however, a large majority reported no change (72%), largely mirroring perceptions of neighborhood safety among Detroit residents citywide (Lenhoff et al., 2025).

DETROIT PEER

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 2). Across several different questions, Corktown residents reported strong levels of social cohesion and connectedness. A clear majority reported that people in their neighborhood generally get along (72%), are willing to help each other (66%), keep an eye on their homes when one is away (61%), and watch out for children’s safety in the neighborhood (58%). In addition, 52% said that people in the neighborhood trust each other; and a plurality said that their neighborhood is close-knit (48%) and people in their neighborhood share the same values (47%). While not all Corktown residents feel positively about all of these aspects of their neighborhood, the results suggest positive levels of social cohesion and connectedness. These responses from Corktown residents are largely similar to responses from other parts of the city, with a few modest exceptions (Lenhoff et al., 2025).

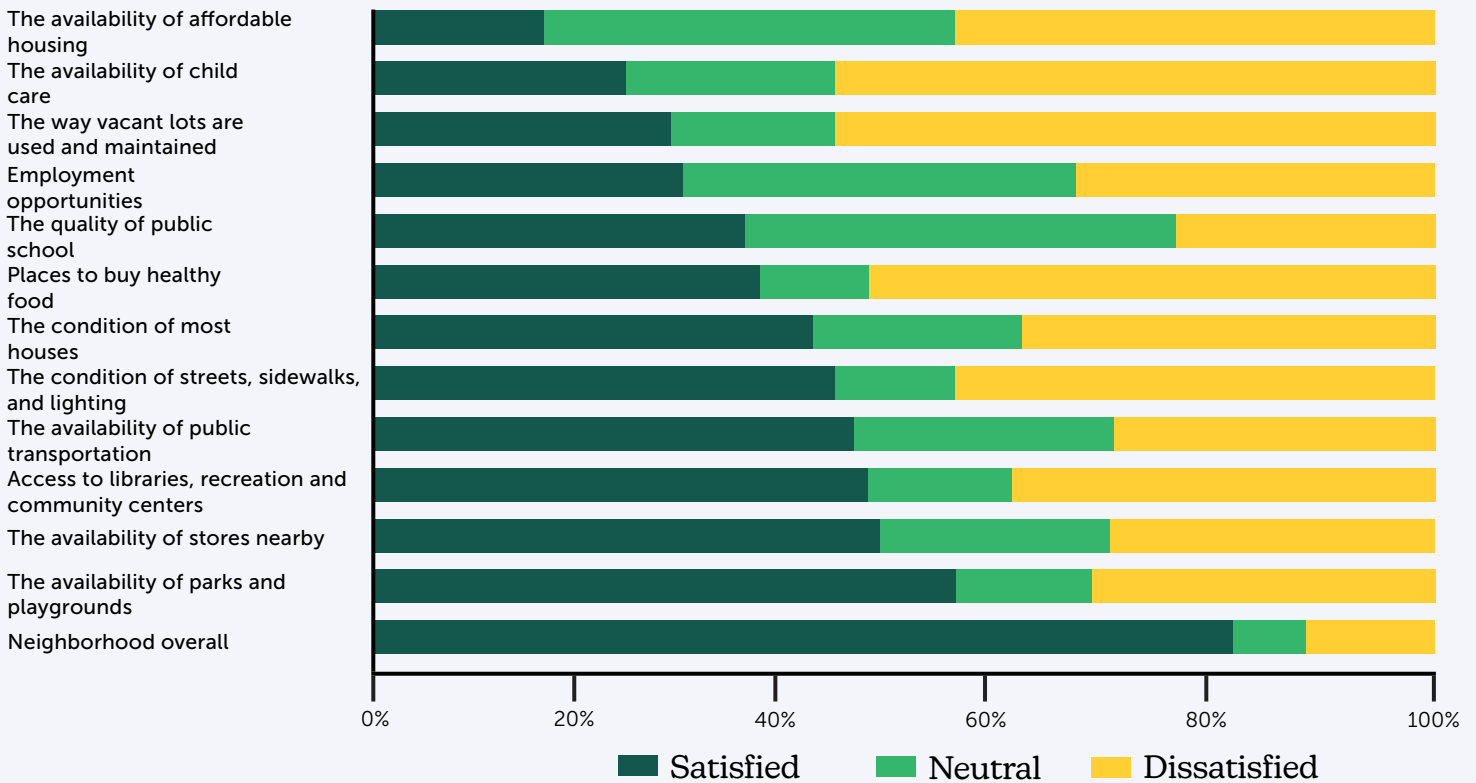
Figure 2: Corktown Residents’ Perceptions of Neighborhood Social Cohesion, Summer 2023



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 3). More than 80% of Corktown respondents said that they were satisfied with their neighborhood as a place to live overall. This is substantially higher than the 61% of residents elsewhere in the city who reported being satisfied with their neighborhood overall (Lenhoff et al., 2025).

Figure 3: Corktown Residents' Satisfaction with Neighborhood Characteristics, Summer 2023



DETROIT PEER

Fewer Corktown respondents reported satisfaction when asked about specifics. About half of respondents were satisfied with the availability of parks and playgrounds and the condition of most houses in the neighborhood. In addition, just under half of respondents were satisfied with public transportation; the condition of streets, sidewalks, and lighting; access to public facilities (e.g., libraries, recreation centers); and places to buy healthy food. These results were similar to responses from residents in other parts of the city (Lenhoff et al., 2025).

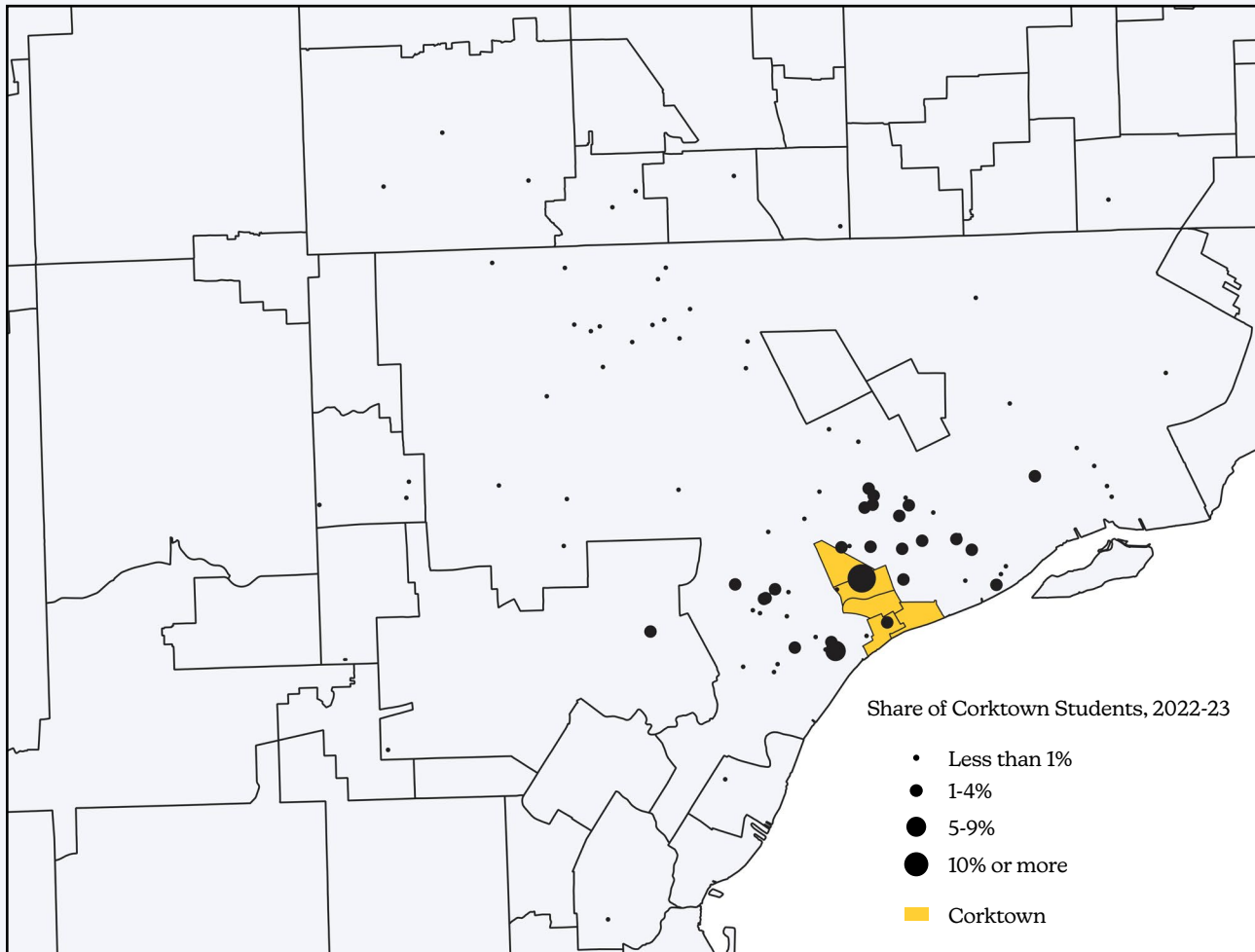
In addition, more Corktown respondents were dissatisfied than satisfied with the availability of stores nearby to regularly shop; the way vacant lots are maintained; the quality of public schools; and the availability of employment opportunities, affordable housing, and childcare. Notably, fewer Corktown residents than residents elsewhere in the city were satisfied with the quality of neighborhood schools (24% vs. 32%) and access to childcare (14% vs. 28%). Thus, while Corktown residents are satisfied overall with their neighborhood, many are ambivalent or even dissatisfied with the specific resources and opportunities available to them, especially related to childcare and schools.

SCHOOL SATISFACTION

It is important to note that, as in many other neighborhoods in Detroit, students in Corktown are dispersed across many different public schools. About 17% of Corktown students attend Burton International Academy—the nearest K-8 public school. The school with the next-highest share of Corktown students (7%) is Earhart Elementary-Middle School, located nearby in Southwest Detroit. In total, the approximately 400 public school children in Corktown attend nearly 100 different schools. As shown in Figure 4, these schools are spread across the city.

DETROIT PEER

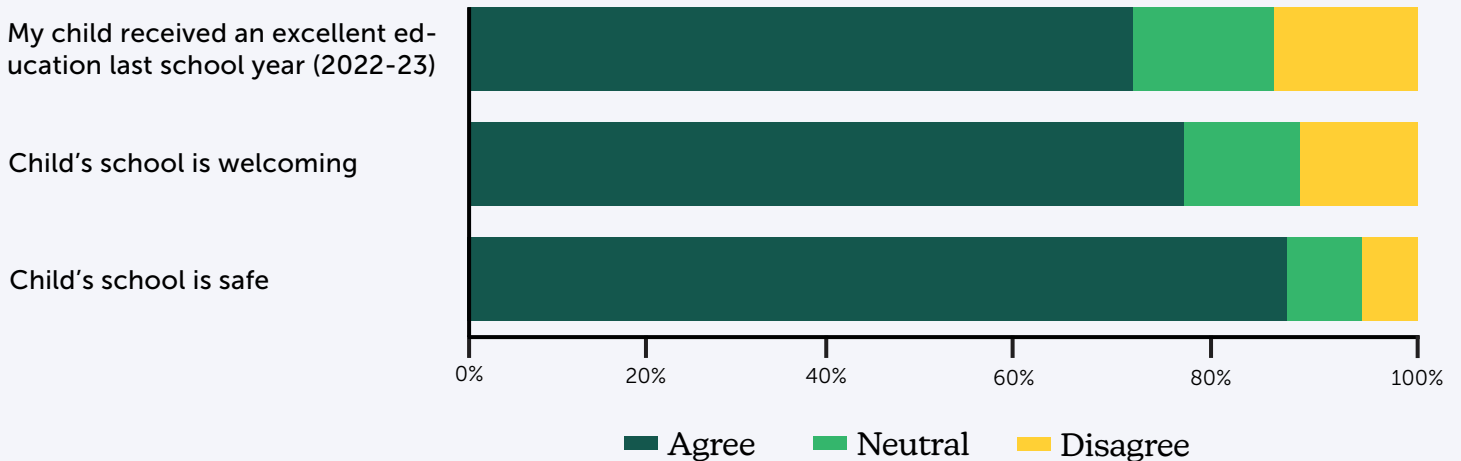
Figure 4: Corktown Student Enrollment, 2022-23



On our survey, we 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 (2022-23) school year, whether the school was welcoming to them (the parent/guardian), and whether the school was safe. For all three questions, a clear majority of respondents agreed, at similar levels to respondents citywide (Lenhoff et al., 2025). Therefore, while most Corktown residents may be dissatisfied with the quality of schools in their neighborhood, most Corktown parents feel that their children’s schools, which are geographically dispersed across the city, provide an excellent, safe, and welcoming education., provide an excellent education and that the schools are welcoming and safe.

DETROIT PEER

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



CONCLUSION

Like much of Detroit, Corktown is facing competing pressures: to increase the population and encourage economic development on one hand, and to maintain community cohesion, stability, and affordability for long-time residents on the other. These pressures have racial and economic implications, with Black, immigrant, and lower-income residents bearing the brunt of rising costs as neighborhoods seek to attract new residents and businesses. Families with children are particularly vulnerable, as they often earn lower incomes, have larger household expenses, and must consider the educational needs and opportunities available to them in and around their neighborhoods. Schools are important neighborhood institutions, and they may also see changes in demographics, student needs, and resources available as neighborhoods change around them. The Corktown CNI represents a concerted effort by the City of Detroit to continue supporting economic growth while mitigating the potential negative effects of new development on lower-income residents, particularly families with children (Reindl, 2024). Our research in the coming years, including follow-up surveys and interviews with parents and children in Corktown, will explore how these changes are affecting families' educational and economic opportunities, their satisfaction with their neighborhood, and their overall well-being. In doing so, we hope to document the possibilities for equitable urban redevelopment in places like Corktown and beyond.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Michelle Taylor, Julia Blok, and Whitney Miller for research assistance.

This report 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 and Wayne State University. More information on DMACS survey funding, methodology, and results can be found at detroitssurvey.umich.edu.

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.

DETROIT PEER

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.

REFERENCES

Gallagher, J. (2018, July 9). Here's what you might not know about Corktown's history. *Detroit Free Press*. <https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/john-gallagher/2018/07/09/detroit-corktown-history/745668002/>

Lenhoff, S. W., Jabbar, H., Jenkins, D., Finnigan, K. S., & Singer, J. (2025). Neighborhood Satisfaction and Implications for Detroit Schoolchildren. *Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research, Wayne State University*. <https://detroitpeer.org/research>

Powers, S. (2024, June 3). Michigan Central Station reopening to public after six-year renovation. *CBS News Detroit*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/detroit/news/michigan-central-station-reopens-to-public-after-six-year-renovation/>

Reindl, J. C. (2024, July 31). Demo, redevelopment ahead for Corktown's Clement Kern

Gardens housing project. *Detroit Free Press*. <https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2024/07/31/clement-kern-gardens-housing-project-detroit-corktown-demolition-redevelopment/74601751007/>

DETROIT PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION EQUITY & RESEARCH

Special thanks to our funders:

The Kresge Foundation
The Skillman Foundation

For citations, please use:

Lenhoff, S. W., Jabbar, H., Jenkins, D., Finnigan, K. S., Luengo-Aravena, D., & Singer, J. (2025). Corktown residents' perceptions of their neighborhood. Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research, Wayne State University.
<https://detroitpeer.org/research/>

For more information:

<https://detroitpeer.org/>

Research note:

This research result used data structured and maintained by the MERI-Michigan Education Data Center (MEDC). MEDC data are modified for analysis purposes using rules governed by MEDC and are not identical to those data collected and maintained by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and/or Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). Results, information, and opinions solely represent the analysis, information, and opinions of the author and are not endorsed by, or reflect the views or positions of, grantors, MDE, and CEPI, or any employee thereof.