



The State of Low-Income Students in Polk County

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	Page
The Impact of Affordable Housing on Education	3
Des Moines Public Schools	7
Metro Area/Suburbs	14
Solutions Across the United States	17
Solutions in Polk County	22
Conclusion	24

Executive Summary

This report examines the current state of low-income students in Polk County, Iowa. In understanding that child mobility and stress/environment factors negatively impact these underprivileged students, we look at housing as a platform to improve educational outcomes among these low-income students. By analyzing the school and neighborhood demographics, test scores, and mobility rates of students in the Des Moines Public School District, the need for more accommodation and investment will become apparent.

In this analysis, it becomes evident that there is a significant achievement gap between students who qualify for Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (F/R PL) and those who do not. As this trend is evident across the country, it is also of great concern in Polk County. F/R PL designation is an accurate way to assess what children are in need, as is the mobility rate of public schools. This report looks into the mobility rates and F/R PL status of students in the Des Moines School District, concluding that a high percentage of one of these variables usually correlates with a high percentage of the other. Additionally, the schools with high rates of mobility and F/R PL qualified students often have lower test scores on annual standardized tests, and a higher percentage of students who participate in the English Language Learners (ELL) program. By looking into the demographics of these low-income neighborhoods and schools in comparison to the demographics of middle- to high- income neighborhoods and schools, a portrait of these low-income students is presented.

In addition to the achievement gap found to be present in the Des Moines Public Schools, there is a significant difference in academic performance between the Des Moines district and the surrounding suburban school districts. We look into the academic performance and demographic comparison of the three largest districts in Polk County: Des Moines Public Schools, Ankeny Community School District, and West Des Moines Community School District. The majority of DMPS students are people of color, while the demographics of students in the neighboring districts of West Des Moines and Ankeny ranges from 67 percent to 90 percent white.

In comparing the demographics of Polk County to these districts, it is apparent that a large amount of the minority population is concentrated in the Des Moines district. Additionally, 67 percent of students in Des Moines qualify for F/R PL, while 27 percent of students in West Des Moines qualify, and only 12 percent in Ankeny. These demographics are reflected in standardized testing scores, as West Des Moines and Ankeny have much higher proficiency ratings than Des Moines. With these statistics in mind, inclusionary zoning is then discussed as a possible solution to this prevalent problem.

The inclusionary zoning policy proposed is pulled from a study of Montgomery County, Maryland, which is home to one of the largest public school systems in the United States. In addition to the inclusionary zoning policy, they also have made great strides in investing in their underprivileged schools. They have designated their schools into two zones – “red” and “green”. The designation of “red-zone” schools has proven to provide focus on underprivileged students with positive outcomes. Using the model provided by Montgomery County, the Des Moines elementary schools are then designated as “red-zone” or “green-zone”. Possible investments to these schools include phasing in full-day kindergarten, adding 100 hours of professional development for staff, including ninety-minute blocks for literacy curriculum and sixty minute-blocks for mathematics in first and second grade, and class size reductions in kindergarten through third grade classrooms.

In addition to Montgomery County, the programs of Tacoma, Washington and Saint Paul, Minnesota are examined. These programs highly value self-reliance among the families who participate, and aid the families in the forms of rental assistance, homeownership classes, and help families work towards job and financial growth. In 2014, The Tacoma Housing Authority measured a decline of mobility from 114 percent to 75 percent at McCarver Elementary School over the course of three years of program implementation. Additionally, more parents were employed and the overall mobility of the district was reduced. The East Side Housing Opportunity Program in Saint Paul, Minnesota focused on addressing issues of rental housing quality, affordability, availability, and landlord and tenant issues, in efforts to reduce overall mobility in Johnson Elementary School. This program states that the key components to assess a family’s self-reliance are: housing, employment, income, education, childcare, and physical and mental health needs. 6-month assessments of these factors showed improvement parental employment, adequacy of income, food and shelter, and a higher percentage of clients spending less than 30% of their income on housing. By working families towards self-reliance, students are able to come home to a more stable environment that has the opportunity to improve their educational outcomes. Through these studies, it becomes evident that working towards self-reliance is incredibly important in making a family stable, and student stability is imperative for educational achievement.

While great strides have been made across the country to address this pressing issue, steps have been taken in Des Moines to better the situation of low-income students. Programs provided by The Children & Family Urban Movement give the underprivileged students a safe place to be outside of school hours, and encourage them to place great value in their education and well being. In addition to this, Stable Families DSM (Home, INC) works to help low-income households develop budgeting skills, learn housing responsibilities, work on personal goals, and ensure that children attend school. The expansion and implementation of these helpful programs across additional schools in Des Moines could provide low-income students with more opportunities to obtain educational success and advancement.

In conclusion, a solution to the achievement gap between low- and middle- to high- income students in Polk County must be comprised of academic, housing, and policy approaches in order to be successful. The schools districts of Polk County must also have a strong commitment to creating an optimal education for low-income students, and must obtain a higher level of cultural proficiency in order to do so. By pushing for more inclusionary zoning policies, a stronger commitment to low-income students, and a higher lever of cultural proficiency, Polk County will be able to give these students the equality of opportunity to receive an optimal education.

The Impact of Affordable Housing on Education

An optimal educational environment for K-12 students provides not only demographic diversity, but also supports and values all students' needs. Education is essential to the individual in attaining higher incomes, better labor market performance, increased participation in civil society, and better health (Rothwell, 2012). Additionally, education is important to the community, as it is increasingly recognized as an important contributor to regional and national prosperity, providing economic development that leads to higher living standards and a more vibrant and trustworthy society (Rothwell, 2012). Unfortunately, not all students have the equal opportunity for an optimal education. When students are not educated up to their potential, the workforce of potential investors, research, civic leaders, and skilled laborers is significantly diminished. Providing low-income students access to high-quality education is essential to the development of cities and states throughout the United States.

Across the country it is becoming evident that there is a significant achievement gap between those students who qualify for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch (F/R PL) and those who do not. This designation is the best indicator of students and families that are in poverty. The achievement gap that is present around the country serves as an indicator that children of families in poverty are not having their needs properly supported, making it hard for them to obtain educational achievement. Fortunately, the status of inclusion in our schools can be documented and assessed through test scores on annual exams, such as the Iowa Assessments. These scores show there is a significant gap in proficiency between students who qualify for F/R PL and those who do not in the Des Moines Public Schools along with other districts in Polk County.

To qualify for F/R PL, a family must meet the Department of Agriculture guidelines, which are adjusted on an annual basis. These guidelines are obtained by multiplying the year 2015 Federal income poverty guidelines by 1.30 and 1.85 (Iowa Department of Education). By doing this they are able to produce a maximum annual income level that varies upon household size – ranging from \$21,775 for a 1-person household, to \$75,647 for an 8-person household. Iowa families who qualify for this program are making significantly less than median income (*"Iowa School Breakfast and Lunch Program"*). According to the 2014 Census, the median income per capita in Polk County, Iowa is \$30,683 and \$59,844 per family (U.S Census Bureau). In the 2015-16 school year, 74.8% of students in the Des Moines Independent Community School District qualified for F/R PL (Des Moines Public Schools). With an increasing amount of students qualifying for this service, it is time to begin examining ways in which the schools and district may adjust to ensure inclusion across all demographic boundaries by addressing the impacts mobility, stress, environment, and a negative "housing bundle" on academic performance and educational attainment.

Both residential mobility and school mobility prove to have a profound impact on children's education. Residential mobility is defined as moving to a new home, with or without changing schools, while school mobility is defined as changing schools with or without changing residences. Many recent studies have shown that children who change schools often during critical periods such as kindergarten and high school are more likely to experience declines in educational achievement (Brennan, 2011). The disruption of instruction that occurs between schools moves not only impacts students' educational achievement, but also their personal life and the development of personal relationships. In addition to these disruptions, it is hard for teachers to work effectively in an environment filled with highly mobile students. A study of Chicago schools proved that teachers were "unable to gauge the effect of their instruction" in schools with a high rate of mobility (U.S. Census Bureau). Teachers at schools with low mobility rates are able to teach new curriculum at a faster rate than those at schools with high mobility rates, because lessons become much more review-oriented when students are facing learning disruptions. Affordable housing can have a positive impact on this issue by making families more stable, and less mobile. The Center for Housing Policy declares that "by helping families meet the expenses of owning or renting a home, affordable housing can play an important role in improving families' stability" by "reducing the likelihood that they will be forced to move as a result of eviction, foreclosure, rent increases, or other financial struggles" (U.S. Census Bureau).

Studies of the Des Moines Public Schools show that schools with a high mobility rate not only have lower standardized testing scores, but also have a higher percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch. It is apparent that schools with high rates of mobility are made up of more F/R PL students than those with low rates of mobility. High mobility can be attributed to issues of housing quality, residential stability, availability of affordable housing, and neighborhood location. When housing quality is optimal, it has a positive impact on the student's health and attendance rates. Living in a comfortable and stress-free environment makes it easier to stay focused and complete homework assignments. Unfortunately, families living in poverty do not often live in these stress-free environments. While households move for many reasons, low-income households often move from one apartment to the next in a process of "churning", while looking for a more affordable unit (Cunningham, 2012). Low-income families are also more mobile after missing payments, when they often face eviction. Affordable housing can reduce stress in these families and provide comfortable environments while helping families work towards residential stability.

Mobility is driven upward when families move between renter-occupied units. Homeowners are not as likely to move suddenly, as they do not have the flexibility to do so. Not surprisingly, the DMPS schools that have high mobility rates in correlation with a high concentration of renter-occupied units have lower levels of academic achievement, as measured by the Iowa Assessments. These annual assessments show the extremity of the achievement gap between highly mobile and lowly mobile elementary schools. On average, there is an achievement gap of 54% between the most and least mobile schools in DMPS. This is measured by how many students tested into the "proficient" category in the subjects of Reading, Science, and Math on the annual exam. The extent of this gap, which is prevalent between many schools in DMPS, will be discussed in detail later in this report.

Many homes that are affordable to low-income households expose children to an environment filled with inadequate conditions that are proven to increase stress. This pertains to the physical quality of the household as well as the neighborhood attributes. These factors can be described as a “housing bundle”. Sandra Newman describes the housing bundle to include “attributes of the neighborhood surrounding the dwelling, the characteristics of neighbors, and the amenities and services available in the community” (HUD). Newman was able to break apart this bundle by focusing on the household (dwelling) in five key areas: housing quality, crowding, affordability, subsidized housing, and homeownership (Newman, 2008). These factors, in addition to school quality, crime rates, and neighborhood demographics have the possibility to affect outcomes in physical, emotional, and mental health; family, social, and physical environment; economic circumstances; and cognitive performance (Kerbow, 1996).

Families who spend more than 30 percent of household income on rent are considered rent burdened. 80 percent of low-income families, who are under 200% of federal poverty threshold, spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent (Aratani, 2012). Unfortunately for children in these households, this burden impacts their well-being. Material hardship such as lack of shelter, medical care, food, and clothing, impacts a child’s physical and mental health. When families only spend 30 percent of their income on rent, material hardship can be decreased from the increase in financial resources available for these necessities that are essential to children’s development (Addy, Aratani, Chau. Wright, 2012). Family stress from parental hardship, marital strain, and ineffective parenting can have an extremely negative impact on children’s development. Family stress can be caused by many unstable behaviors such as family violence, family member substance abuse, and mental illness (Aratani, 2012). When children have to worry about having enough food and having a safe place to stay, their behavior and health is impacted, making behavior problems among adolescents more prominent (Aratani, 2012). In addition to the situation within the household, the neighborhood environment also contributes to the health of the child. A good neighborhood environment is safe enough for children to play outdoors, clean and free from toxic materials, quiet, has trash removal and adequate street cleaning, libraries, and medical facilities nearby (Kutty, 2008). Unfortunately, many high-poverty neighborhoods do not have these amenities, which contributes to bad health for children.

Children must have the opportunity to grow in a healthy environment, but they must also exercise healthy behaviors. Parental supervision plays an important role in the development of these behaviors for young children, meaning a low level of parental supervision makes a child more likely to exercise unhealthy behaviors. Parents also have the opportunity to set an example for a child by practicing healthy behaviors such as regular exercise, seeking fresh air, personal sanitations, not smoking, eating healthy foods, and getting sufficient amounts of sleep (Kutty, 2008). However, when a household is rent burdened, parents often have to work longer hours in order to have enough money for rent and other necessities. Because of this, the children of low-income families may lack the supervision and motivation to practice these behaviors.

The Urban Institute’s “What Works Collaborative” has done extensive research regarding inadequate learning outcomes among low-income children. Their essay “Housing as a Platform for Improving Education Outcomes among Low-Income Children”, addresses many issues including: the current state of housing in the United States, the current

state of education for low-income children, housing as a platform to improved education outcomes for children, and what the research says about the impact of housing on school outcomes. The achievement gap previously mentioned between students who qualify for F/R PL and those who do not is examined in this report. According to findings from the National Center for Education Statistics, 4th and 8th grade students across the nation who qualify for F/R PL score roughly 9 to 12 percent lower on average on tests of reading and math (Cunningham, 2012). Unfortunately, this information affirms the presence of the achievement gap between income levels. The research in the WWC report is taken a step further by comparing test scores from early childhood evaluations to high school drop out rates. The dropout rate for students that come from low-income families (8.7%) is over four times greater than the dropout rate for students that come from upper-income families (2%). (Chapman, 2010). In comparison, the average low-income student scores around the 30th percentile on the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study reading assessment, while upper-income students score in the 70th percentile (Lacour, 2011). While there is still much more research to be done on the complexity of this correlation, these numbers make it apparent that the state of low-income students across the nation is not optimal, and in need of attention.

When addressing housing as a platform to improved education outcomes for children, the What Works Collaborative revisits the idea of the “housing bundle”, as defined by Sandra Newman. While focusing on housing quality, residential stability, housing affordability, and neighborhood location, this research was able to observe how these four mechanisms interact with each other to affect school outcomes. Positive influences on school outcomes include: Housing affordability, housing quality, safety, physical & mental health. However, all of these factors are influenced by both personal characteristics (income, race, family size, etc.) and factors that affect housing (housing market, housing model, services, etc.) (Newman, 2008). Before understanding how these factors interact, it is important to first understand the definitions of housing quality and residential stability in this context. Housing quality refers to the safety and health outcomes of household residents, and is often affected by housing affordability. Positive housing quality can lead to positive school outcomes such as improved attendance rates and attentiveness (Newman, 2008). This happens when the quality of the housing unit comfortably accommodates all members of the household and provides a stress-free environment for students (Newman, 2008). Residential stability refers to maintaining a stable home, and avoiding disruptions throughout the school year. With the uninterrupted school year that residential stability provides, students are less likely to face school changes that cause them to fall behind academically.

Affordable housing positively impacts both housing quality and residential stability, as it can provide families with financial security. The improvements to housing quality and residential stability provided by financial security lead to better school outcomes (Newman, 2008). Housing affordability is typically defined as devoting 30% of income to housing. When families spend 30% of their income on housing, they have more money to spend on other household needs such as groceries and school supplies. When families find themselves in housing that is not reasonably affordable, families may be forced to cut back on necessities such as food or medical care. Additionally, students may struggle from the additional stress that this puts on the household. When in an insecure household, it is more likely for a family to fall behind on rent payments, increasing the risk of hardships

such as food insecurity (Bailey, 2015). When the monthly cost of housing and utilities is greater than 30% of a household's monthly income, the housing is considered unaffordable according to the United States Housing Act of 1937 (Bailey, 2015). These households are considered to be cost-burdened, and households spending more than 50% of their monthly income on housing are considered severely cost-burdened (Bailey, 2015).

Des Moines Public Schools

In light of the research done by the Urban Institute, Center for Housing Policy, and Sandra Newman, it is time to take a critical eye to the state of low-income students in Polk County, IA. While there are nine school districts in Polk County, the Des Moines Independent Community School District has the largest overall student population and proves to be the most diverse. In the 2015-16 school year, 32,582 students were enrolled in the district (Des Moines Public Schools). The demographics of these students are represented in figure 1.

DMPS STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS 2015-16

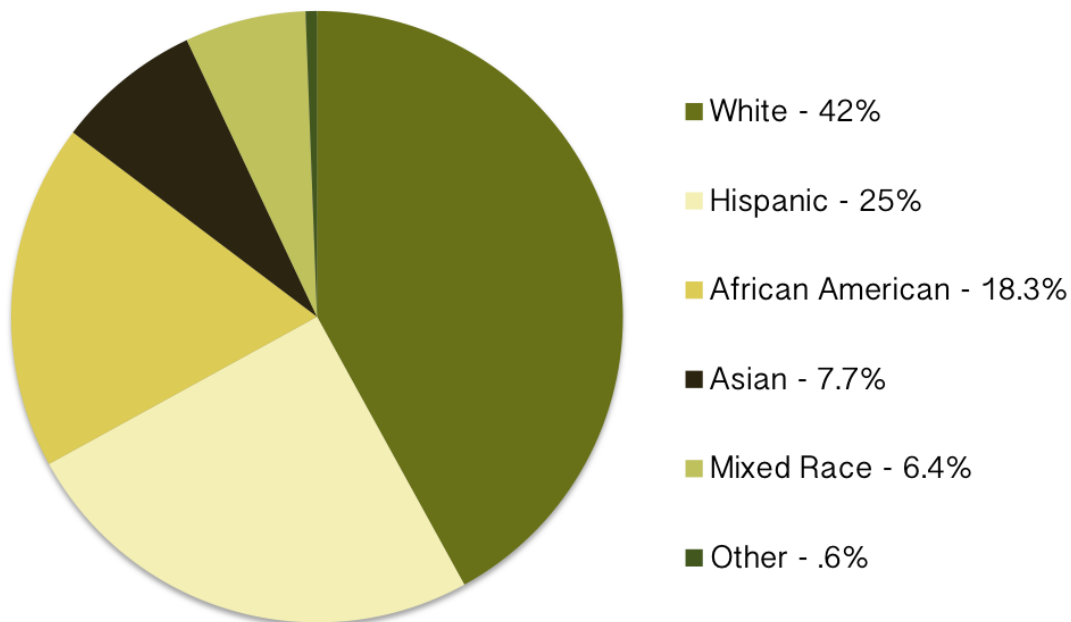


Figure 1. Demographics of Des Moines Public Schools students. Source: Des Moines Public Schools - Facts & Figures

The Des Moines Public Schools represent students of diverse racial and economic backgrounds in 38 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, 5 high schools, and 10 additional special schools/programs (Des Moines Public Schools). Of the students enrolled in these schools, 74.8% qualify for F/R PL (Des Moines Public Schools). With almost 75% of students in the district at this disadvantage, it is important that every student receives equal opportunity to attain academic achievement. As previously discussed, affordable housing has the opportunity to play a significant role in the lives of these students, and can impact their level of academic achievement.

The achievement gap in the DMPS between students who qualify for F/R PL and those who do not can be observed through annual reports of Iowa Assessment test scores, which are accessible to the public on the DMPS website: www.dmschools.org. These scores illustrate significant gaps in proficiency in subjects of reading, science and math. Additionally, there are a remarkably low percentage of F/R PL students who tested into the “advanced” category across these subjects in comparison to those who do not qualify for F/R PL. See figure 2 for the 2013-14 scores of F/R PL students, and figure 3 for the scores of non-F/R PL students in DMPS.

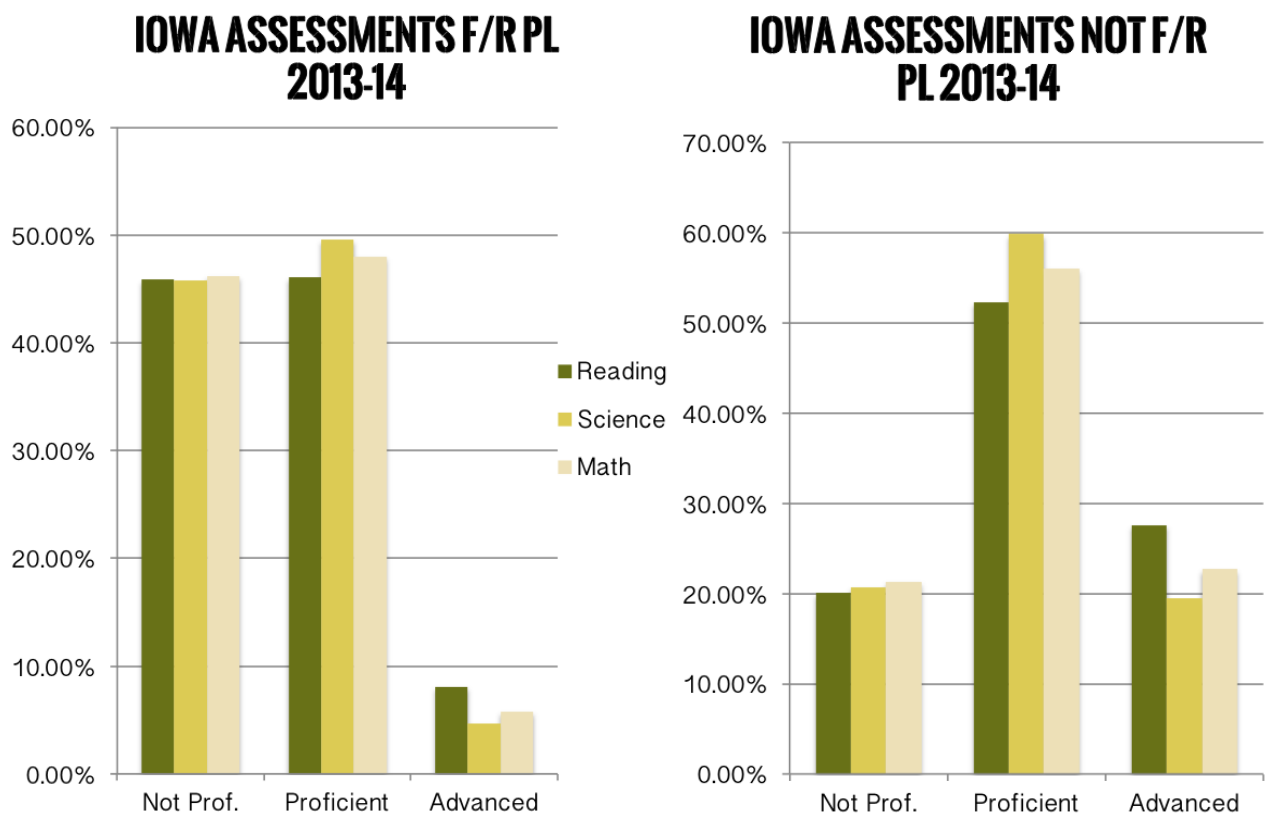


Figure 2 & 3. 2013-14 DMPS Iowa Assessment Scores: F/R PL. Source: Des Moines Public Schools

In the 2013-14 school year, over twice the amount of F/R PL scored as “not proficient” in reading, science, and math. It is also worth noting that students who do not qualify for F/R PL have advanced reading scores approximately three times higher than those of students who qualify for the program. Not only is there a significant achievement gap in proficiency, but also in the advanced level.

The Brookings Institute reports that the housing cost gap between high and low-scoring schools drives economic segregations across school districts, leading to a high test score and achievement gap between low-income students and middle/high income students (Cunningham, 2012). In this report, Housing Costs, Zoning and Access to High-Scoring Schools: Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA metro area, access to Des Moines's schools is analyzed and ranked. This analysis shows that 46% of low-income students in Des Moines would have to move outside of their zip code in order to achieve equal distribution. Additionally, housing costs near high-scoring elementary schools are 1.8 times higher than those near low-scoring schools, and the average middle/high-income student attends a school that ranks 28 percentage points higher on state standardized exams (Iowa Assessments) than the average school of a low-income student (Cunningham 2012).

Student mobility has profound impacts on student learning outcomes. This is very apparent when looking at test scores between Des Moines K-12 schools and comparing those scores to mobility rates and students who qualify for F/R PL. The most dramatic result comes when comparing the three most mobile and the three least mobile DMPS elementary schools. These results prove to be the most dramatic because the elementary schools have the smallest school zoning boundaries, making the schools much more neighborhood-oriented. When schools are compromised of students from unstable and highly mobile homes and neighborhoods, they are disadvantaged in comparison to students who come from a stable and safe environment.

Illustrated in figure 4 is the mobility rate and percent of students qualifying for F/R PL in the three most mobile, and least mobile, elementary schools in the district. Edmunds, Moulton, and River Woods Elementary schools are the three most mobile schools. In addition to high mobility, over 75% of students qualify for F/R PL. Phillips, Jefferson, and the Downtown School have the lowest rates of mobility and a lower percentage of students who qualify for the lunch program. However, it is important to understand that every school in the Des Moines district is different, and these differences have an impact on the rate of student mobility. Despite having a low mobility rate at 5.27%, Phillips Traditional School is located in a lower-income neighborhood. Phillips retains students by providing a disciplined environment that encourages students to concentrate on their studies. Additionally, Phillips is the only school in the Des Moines metro area to offer the Core Knowledge Sequence - a national program that "outlines specific content for elementary students in the areas of language arts, American and world civilization, American and world geography, science, mathematics, visual arts, and music" (Phillips Traditional School). As it is one of only 700 schools in the nation to offer this program, parents value their student's enrollment at Phillips. This commitment keeps mobility low while the intense curriculum keeps test scores high.

While there is a stark contrast between these six schools regarding mobility and minority status, there is a significant and concerning difference in their standardized test scores. The percent of students meeting the "proficient" standard in these exams is illustrated in Figure 5. This shows that the three schools with low mobility have increasingly higher test scores than the three highly mobile schools. While this fact alone is not surprising, the degree to which it is exemplified is astonishing. For example, while only 30% of students at Edmunds Elementary test proficient in reading, nearly 90% of students test into this category at Jefferson Elementary School

DMPS ELEMENTARY MOBILITY-F/R PL

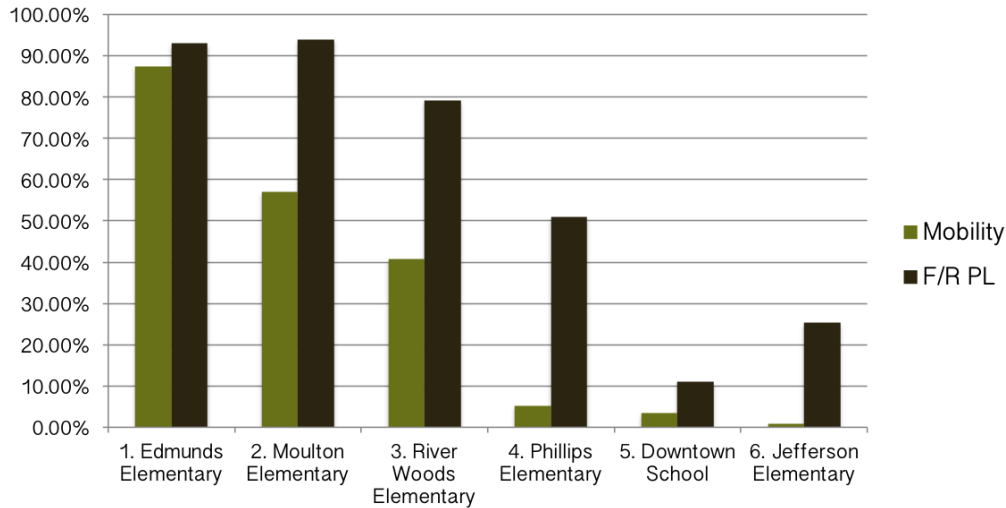


Figure 4. Mobility Rate and F/R PL Eligibility of Des Moines students. Source: Des Moines Public Schools

DMPS ELEMENTARY IOWA ASSESMENT PROFICIENCY

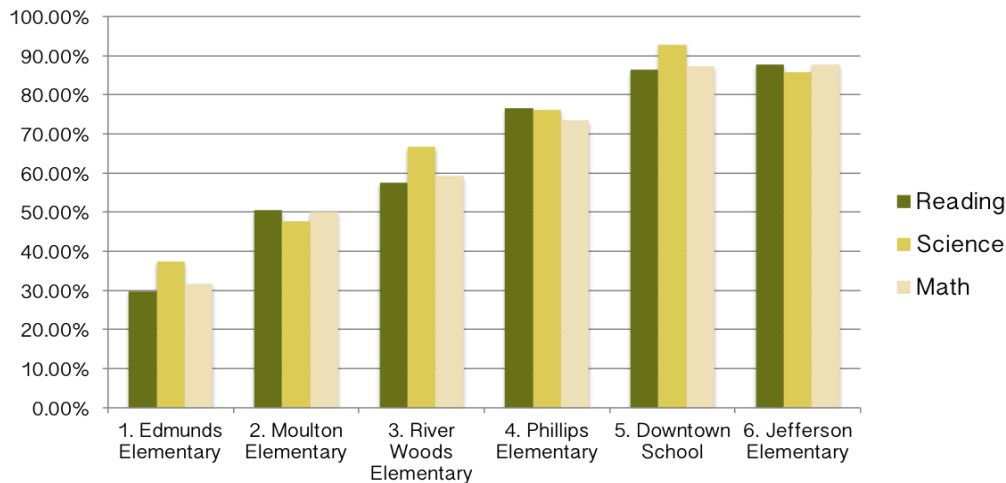


Figure 5. Iowa Assessment Proficiency in Des Moines. Source: Des Moines Public Schools

When looking at reading proficiency it is important to note that many students across the district are enrolled in English Language Learners (ELL) programs. With over 100 languages spoken across the district, there are more than 6,100 ELL students (Des Moines Public Schools). The ELL program strives for achievement in English language objectives in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while promoting pride in students' cultural and linguistic identities.¹⁴ Returning to the reading gap between elementary students at Edmunds Elementary School and Jefferson Elementary School. At Edmunds Elementary, ELL students make up 52.89% of total enrollment. While over half of the students at Edmunds are working to learn English, no students at Jefferson Elementary are English Language Learners (Des Moines Public Schools). With this considered, it makes more sense that only 30% of students at Edmunds test proficiently in reading in comparison to 90% at Jefferson. With 87.44% mobility, 93% of students qualifying for F/R PL, and 52.89% of students participating in ELL, Edmunds faces many more challenges than Jefferson, though the schools are only four miles apart.

DMPS ELEMENTARY ELL - READING PROFICIENCY

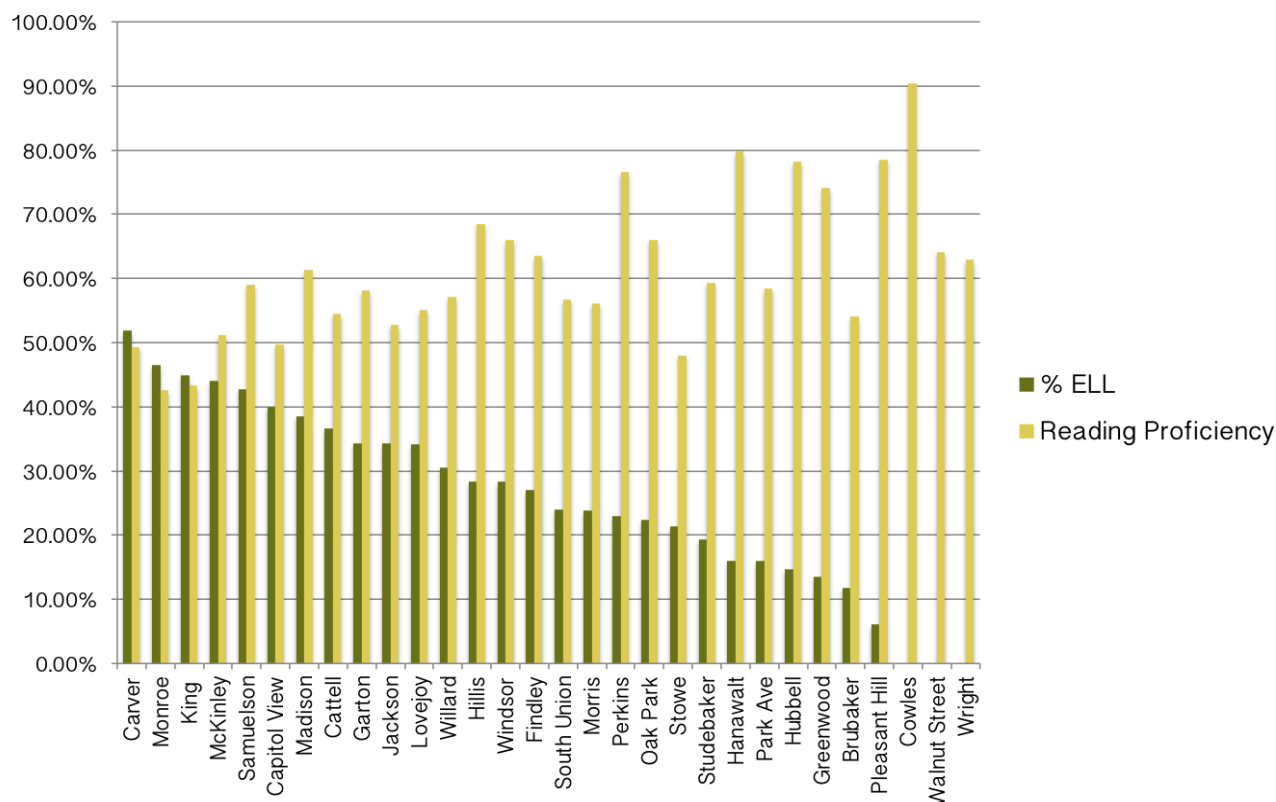


Figure 6. Des Moines English Language Learners, Iowa Assessment Reading Proficiency. Source: Des Moines Public Schools

As you can see in figure 6 above, there is a vast difference among schools in the Des Moines District when it comes to ELL enrollment. There is a strong correlation between high numbers of ELL students and low proficiency in reading, as students who are not fluent in English struggle to keep up with their classmates. The ELL program is becoming increasingly prevalent in Des Moines Public Schools; the ELL population in the district has grown by more than 500% over the course of 25 years (Des Moines Public Schools). In 1990, Des Moines was home to less than 1,000 ELL students. In the 2013-14 school year, over 5,800 ELL students attended Des Moines schools (Des Moines Public Schools). Additionally, ELL student in Des Moines Schools constitute roughly 23% of the statewide ELL student population. With over 5,800 ELL students enrolled in 2013-14, this program is displaying a steady increase in enrollment making the need for student equality imperative to the future success of the Des Moines Public School District.

Attendance areas prove to be an accurate source to look into how neighborhood environment can shape a child's education because of their small sizes. When looking into the neighborhood environment of these students, it is helpful to return to the housing bundle. Sandra Newman breaks up the household by assessing: housing quality, crowding, affordability, subsidized housing, and homeownership. In addition to neighborhood characteristics such as school quality, crime rates, and neighborhood demographics, these are important areas of study when considering the state of low-income students. Now knowing that low-income minority students in Des Moines are at an academic disadvantage, proven by achievement gaps in standardized test scores, it is time to assess the housing bundles of DMPS students divided by elementary school

zones. This is possible by looking at the homeownership of the households along with the demographics in the attendance areas of the three most and least mobile elementary schools in the district.

Homeownership proves to have a positive impact on children’s learning outcomes, as growing up in an owned home positively influences short- and long-term success (Newman, 2008). In school zones where the mobility rate is low, such as Jefferson and Phillips, more households lived in owned rather than rented units. In school zones where the mobility is high, such as Moulton and Edmunds, more households rent units than own. Newman points out that owned homes tend to cluster in common neighborhoods, creating a more stable student population resulting in low student turnover and a higher-quality school environment (Newman, 2008). When comparing the number of owner and renter occupied units in between these four schools; the numbers create a mirror image reflecting the inequality between these zones. This can be seen in figure 8, below.

This correlation is attributed to stability and security. When a child is in a stable environment, they are more likely to succeed in school, as they do not have the added

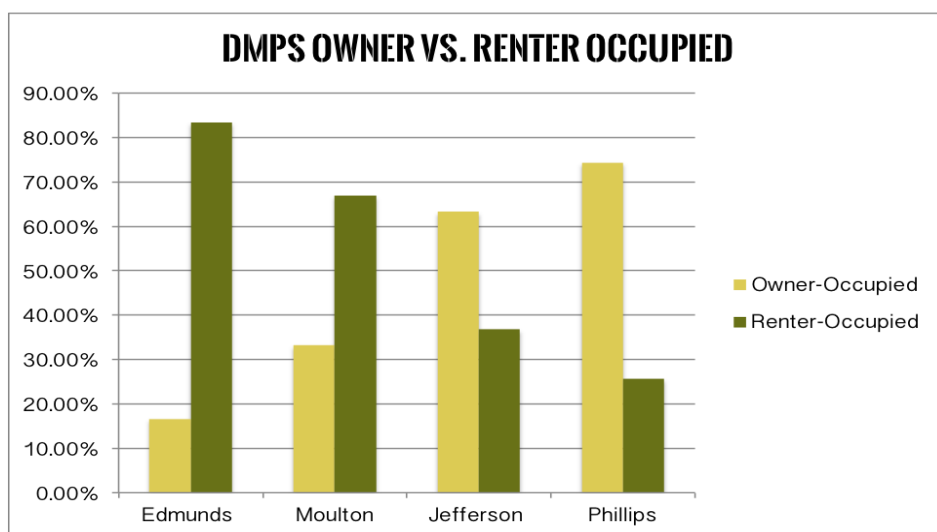


Figure 7. Owner vs. Renter Occupied Homes in DMPS. Source: U.S. Census Bureau FactFinder

stress that moving, changing schools, and making new friends creates. This holds true for households in owned homes, public housing, and stable rental homes. Newman suggests “the beneficial effects of homeownership and public housing arise because both offer better housing quality, which, in turn, has positive impacts on children.” (Newman, 2008). The Annie E. Casey Foundation provides great research about the importance of childhood education – and has an extensive report about the development in the first eight years of a child’s life. They state that in order to be successful in school and life, children must be well-developed and on track in the areas of: cognitive knowledge and skills, social and emotional development, engagement in school, and physical well-being by the age of 8 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation). The stress of constant moves and an unstable household, in correlation with other negative household factors, can greatly diminish achievement in these areas.

In addition to affordability and homeownership, neighborhood demographics are an important part of the housing bundle to be examined when considering school outcomes

for low-income students. The neighborhood one lives in largely determines families' access to quality schools (HUD). As previously discussed, income levels and median house value are important in assessing the state of the neighborhood, along with race. Census tract information was used to study the racial demographics of these neighborhoods. In the three most and least mobile elementary school zones in the Des Moines district, a majority of residents are white with the exception of the neighborhood surrounding Moulton Elementary, in which 36.05% of residents are white (U.S. Census Bureau). However, the demographics of the student population do not reflect this. For example, in the three most mobile attendance areas, Edmunds, Moulton, and River Woods, 36-62% of residents are white. However, in looking at the school demographics, only between 7-25% of the student population is white. Comparatively, between 76-83% of students at the Downtown School, Jefferson, and Phillips identify as white, which is more similar to the demographics of their respective attendance areas (Des Moines Public Schools). The data below has been collected from the U.S. Census Bureau and Civil Rights Data Commission, and examines the demographics of the neighborhoods and student population in the three most and least mobile schools in the Des Moines district.

Nearhood Demographics

	Edmunds	Moulton	River Woods	Jefferson	Downtown	Phillips
White	62%	36%	52%	79%	84%	79%
African American	16%	24%	13%	15%	8%	5%
Other	9%	14%	12%	3%	5%	5%
Two or More Races	3%	6%	5%	2%	1%	3%
Hispanic or Latino	10%	20%	19%	2%	3%	8%

Student Demographics

	Edmunds	Moulton	River Woods	Jefferson	Downtown	Phillips
White	7%	14%	25%	83%	77%	80%
African American	68%	47%	18%	3%	5%	2%
Other	5%	7%	11%	3%	5%	2%
Two or More Races	6%	6%	7%	4%	5%	3%
Hispanic or Latino	15%	27%	39%	7%	9%	13%

Metro Area/Suburbs

The Des Moines Public School District is the largest in Polk County with 32,582 students, representing the 210,330 people who live in the city of Des Moines. However, the city of Des Moines accounts for less than half of the population of Polk County. Polk County, Iowa has a population of 467,711, and is much less diverse as a whole than the city of Des Moines. In regards to race, 86.2% of the Polk County population is White, 6.7% African American, and 8.2% Latino (U.S. Census Bureau). In Des Moines, 76.4% of the population is White, 10.2% African American, and 12.0% Latino (U.S. Census Bureau). Des Moines also has a higher rate of foreign-born persons, persons who speak a language other than English at home, and has significantly less educational attainment than the average in Polk County. While the County is home to 20 cities, minority and low-income population are concentrated in the capitol. In examining the demographics of the largest school districts in the County, it becomes evident that there is not an equal balance of minority and low-income families and students across Polk County, creating an inequality of opportunity.

The two largest school districts in the cities surrounding Des Moines are the West Des Moines Community School District and the Ankeny Community School District. Both districts are home to approximately 9,100 students, making them 1/4th of the size of the Des Moines Public School District (Civil Rights Data Collection). Furthermore, there are stark contrasts between racial demographics, English proficiency, and number of students who qualify for F/R PL. Below is a chart displaying the district enrollment, by race, of the three largest school districts in Polk County as well as the percentage of students who are limited in English proficiency and the percentage of those who qualify for F/R PL.

Demographics: Des Moines, West Des Moines, Ankeny

District Enrollment	Des Moines	West Des Moines	Ankeny
White	42%	67%	90%
African American	18%	7%	2%
Hispanic	25%	13%	5%
Other	8%	8%	1%
Two or More Races	6%	5%	2%
Limited English Proficiency	16%	7%	1%
F/R PL	12%	27%	12%

The data in this chart shows that Des Moines is the most diverse school district in the county by extreme margins. This is the case because of the concentration of these populations in the Des Moines area. Furthermore, when looking into the academic performance between these three school districts, 4th, 8th, and 11th grade students in West Des Moines score an average of 23% more proficient than Des Moines students on annual assessments of reading, math, and science. Ankeny students widen that gap, as an average of 29% of students score more proficient than Des Moines students. The complete scores are listed below.

In comparing the statistics of these school districts, it is worth noting that both the West Des Moines and Ankeny School Districts have substantially less information available to the public, making thorough analysis difficult. The Des Moines Public Schools provide access to annual school improvement plans, progress reports, graduation rates, Iowa Assessment scores, ACT scores, dropout data, enrollment reports, F/R PL, and student mobility rates. Additionally, a Tableau map provides more specific information about every school in the district, including annual Iowa Assessment scores, and percent of students who qualify for F/R PL, ELL, and special education. While the West Des Moines and Ankeny districts provide Iowa School Report Cards, improvement plans, and student achievement reports, they do not provide as much demographic information about the students who attend the district. Ankeny has demographic information about the district as a whole, but lacks the detailed information provided by Des Moines about the individual schools. The West Des Moines Community School District does not provide any student demographic information on its website, www.wdmcs.org. Neither West Des Moines nor Ankeny has mobility information available to the public.

Iowa Assessment Proficiency			
4th Grade	DMPS	WDM	ANKENY
Reading	61%	80%	89%
Math	62%	85%	91%
Science	63%	90%	92%
8th Grade			
Reading	58%	83%	88%
Math	62%	85%	91%
Science	70%	92%	94%
11th Grade			
Reading	61%	81%	93%
Math	63%	88%	93%
Science	61%	80%	89%

Zoning can have a great impact on low-income students; while restrictive zoning often segregates neighborhoods by income levels, inclusionary zoning gives low-income families the opportunity to find a unit in a more affluent neighborhood. Restrictive zoning leads to segregation in many neighborhoods by preventing the construction of low-cost housing (Hertz, 2014). With zoning laws that only allow single-family homes to be built instead of apartments, low-income families who do not have the funds to purchase a home are often stuck in more poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Additionally, some zoning laws restrict the total amount of housing that can exist in any given area. The effect of this is best described by Daniel Hertz of

the Washington Post: “Imagine, for example, if there were a law that only 1,000 cars could be sold per year in all of New York. Those 1,000 cars would go to whoever could pay the most money for them, and chances are you and everyone you know would be out of luck.” (Hertz, 2014). Unfortunately, low-income families are often out of luck, as restrictive zoning raises housing prices in suburbs and city neighborhoods across the country. One solution to this ever-important issue is inclusionary zoning (IZ). IZ is “an affordable housing tool that links the production of affordable housing to the production of market-rate housing” (Furman Center, 2008). These policies either require or encourage developers to make a certain percentage of new residential housing units affordable to low- or moderate-income residents. For example, the District of Columbia has a mandatory IZ program that “applies to developments that build a certain number of new units or expand the space of existing developments by a certain size.” (Tatian, 2014). The affordability of these units is permanent. The program requires portions of the units to be priced for households at 50-80 percent of area median income, and developers must meet design guidelines in minimum size requirements (Furman Center, 2008). Additionally, the number of IZ units cannot be more than the number of market rate units and cannot be concentrated in one area (Furman Center, 2008). Making the program mandatory allows for affordable housing in neighborhoods that may be too expensive to build or preserve affordable housing. While the mandatory IZ program in D.C. has been successful, there is a vast amount of diversity between the structure and goals of IZ programs across the country.

In addition to development of economic and racial integration, supporters of IZ programs claim the program is more also fiscally sustainable than traditional housing programs, as it requires less direct public subsidy (Furman Center, 2008). Critics of IZ argue that these programs may constrict the development of market-rate housing, constraining the supply of housing and consequentially driving housing prices up. However, as time goes on the need for more affordable housing increases.

This need began to surface substantially in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. In this decision, the Supreme Court declared, “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” (United States Courts) Following this decision, states began to desegregate schools. In the aftermath of this decision, not only did some states resist desegregation, but white families began to leave school districts where segregation might force them to share schools with black families (Hertz, 2008). As these families fled to the suburbs, a movement often referred to as “White Flight”, black families remained in the inner city, as they could not afford a home in the suburbs because of zoning regulations that restricted low-income units. Unfortunately, this situation has created repercussions that have lasted for over 60 years. In looking at the demographics of the three largest school districts in Polk County, Des Moines, West Des Moines, and Ankeny, it is apparent that these repercussions have had a negative impact on the low-income students of Polk County. It is now time to analyze the solutions to this issue that have been implemented across the United States in order to address what must be done to provide an equal education to all low-income students in Polk County.

Solutions Across the United States

The education gap that is present between low- and middle to high-income students in Polk County is seen throughout many school districts across the United States. Since this is a multi-faceted issue, it is necessary to take a multi-faceted approach in solving it. In recent years, many studies have been performed in efforts to find a versatile and effective solution. Studies performed in Montgomery County, Maryland, Tacoma, Washington, and Saint Paul, Minnesota give valuable insight to the trials and tribulations that arise when confronting equality of education.

Montgomery County, Maryland

Montgomery County, Maryland, is home to one of the most acclaimed large public school systems in the United States. This suburban school district is outside of Washington D.C., and a majority of its students belong to racial minority groups, with an increasing share of low-income population (Schwartz, 2010). However, nine out of ten Montgomery students graduate each year, and two-thirds of the district's high school students take at least one Advanced Placement course (Schwartz, 2010). The county has been recognized for their educational reforms that intend to close racial and economic achievement gaps (Schwartz, 2010). The districts in Polk County have much to learn from the developments, reforms, and achievements displayed in Montgomery County.

There are 114 elementary schools in the Montgomery County School District; F/R PL participation rates ranging from 1 to 72 percent. (There are 39 elementary schools in the Des Moines Public School District, with 0-93 percent of students qualifying for F/R PL.) The Montgomery County district began investing in its most disadvantaged elementary schools after studies began to reveal that students demographic characteristics and academic performance in third grade proves as a good indicator of how they will develop and participate throughout their academic careers (Schwartz, 2010). To begin the process of revitalizing the schools most in need, they first had to come up with a method to designate what schools were more disadvantages, taking poverty levels and location into account. Dividing the schools into two categories, "red zone" and "green zone", the district began to look into what differentiated these schools. While there was no clear delineation, red zone schools had higher subsidized meal rates, and more African Americans on average than green zone schools.¹⁹ After studying the designated schools, the district began to make extra investments in red zone schools such as: phasing in full-day kindergarten, 100 more hours of professional development for staff, specialized instruction for high-needs students, including ninety-minute blocks for literacy curriculum and sixty-minute blocks for mathematics in first and second grade, and class size reductions in kindergarten through third grade (Schwartz, 2010).

The Des Moines Public Schools have a substantially lower student population than that of Montgomery County, making it easier to designate between "red" and "green" zone elementary schools in the district. The percent of mobility, number of F/R PL students, and neighborhood demographics are all taken into account when designating these schools, along with standardized test scores. As the three most and least mobile schools in the

Des Moines district have been highlighted, it is fairly easy to see that Edmunds, Moulton, and River Woods Elementary schools qualify as “red zone” while Phillips, Jefferson, and Downtown Elementary schools qualify as “green zone”. Below is a list of designated red and green zone elementary schools in the Des Moines Public School District, as determined by the mobility and F/R PL data from the 2013-14 school year.

RED ZONE	Mobility	F/R PL
Capitol View	36%	93%
Carver	23%	95%
Cattell	31%	82%
Edmunds	87%	98%
Findley	12%	92%
Garton	24%	82%
Howe	33%	85%
King	39%	96%
Lovejoy	37%	86%
Madison	31%	82%
Monroe	30%	88%
Morris	30%	n/a
Moulton	57%	92%
Oak Park	32%	81%
River Woods	41%	78%
South Union	32%	78%
Stowe	31%	80%
Willard	34%	97%

GREEN ZONE	Mobility	F/R PL
Brubaker	28%	73%
Cowles	6%	16%
Downtown	3%	13%
Greenwood	18%	56%
Hanawalt	23%	40%
Hillis	25%	63%
Hubbell	13%	39%
Jackson	30%	74%
Jefferson	1%	21%
Park Avenue	23%	74%
Perkins	15%	57%
Phillips	5%	52%
Pleasant Hill	17%	48%
Samuelson	26%	66%
Studebaker	22%	70%
Walnut Street	13%	73%
Windsor	22%	69%
Wright	20%	64%

All red zone designated schools have a mobility rate over the district average of 26.86% or over 75% of students qualifying for F/R PL. In most cases, these schools have an above average mobility rate along with over 75% of students qualifying for F/R PL. After designation, the average mobility of DMPS “red zone” schools is 36% with an average of 87% of students qualifying for F/R PL. Comparatively, the average of DMPS “green zone” schools is 17%, and an average of 54% of students qualify for F/R PL. With the schools designated, the needs of the individual schools can be evaluated in order to begin an improvement plan. Montgomery County schools used inclusionary zoning and invested in the education of red zone students through 3rd grade to improve their outcomes.

Montgomery County found great success in their inclusionary zoning program, which is the oldest and largest in the nation. Inclusionary zoning is a policy that requires real estate developers to set aside a portion of the homes they build to be rented or sold at below-market prices (Schwartz, 2010). This is a program that has proven to have great success across the nation in high-cost housing markets in California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York City, among other cities. However, it is difficult to get many suburban neighborhoods and school districts, along with real estate developers, to agree to build low-income units. Part of Montgomery County's zoning policy allows the local public housing authority to purchase one-third of the inclusionary zoning homes within each subdivision to create federally subsidized public housing (Schwartz, 2010). This allows for households that earn incomes below the poverty line to live in affluent neighborhoods and allows for children to go to school with students whose families do not live in poverty (Schwartz, 2010). This form of inclusion integrates the schools in an effective way, and gives low-income students greater opportunity to learn. The result of this zoning policy has produced over 12,000 moderately priced homes in the county since 1976 (Schwartz, 2010). As described above, the schools in the Des Moines Public School District are not using this form of inclusion as a path to integration, as the neighborhood bundle of many low-income students does not provide them with the tools they need to succeed.

Montgomery County studied children who lived in public housing, provided through the laws of inclusionary zoning, who were given the opportunity to go to low-poverty ("green zone") schools over a span of seven years and compared their math scores to that of their counterparts in high-poverty ("red zone") schools. This study found that over time, low-income students in low-poverty schools began to show statistically significant differences in achievement when compared to low-income students in moderate- to high-poverty schools (Schwartz, 2010). At the beginning of the study, the average child in public housing was outperformed by the typical Montgomery County student by roughly 17 points; by the end of the study that gap was limited to eight points for students who attended green zone schools. In red zone schools, low-income students scored an average of nine points lower than their average classmates and the proportion of classmates who were gifted and talented was fourteen percentage points lower than the rate of their average classmates (Schwartz, 2010). This study applied to reading scores produced the same results on a smaller scale; a peak in achievement after the fifth year for green zone students, while the red zone students remained at a constant (Schwartz, 2010).

It is apparent that the practice of inclusionary zoning has positively impacted the Montgomery County School District by giving more low-income children access to high performing schools. Additionally, their investments in disadvantaged ("red zone") schools give more support to students through third grade, giving them a better educational foundation to build on in the years to come. The combination of these two efforts has created a strong district that has been commended for its excellence among urban school districts.

Tacoma, Washington - McCarver Elementary

The education gap between low-income and moderate- to high-income students warranted a different response from the Tacoma Housing Authority in Tacoma, Washington. In Tacoma, McCarver Elementary school students have among the highest mobility rate

in the city, high poverty rates, and low levels of student achievement. After the Housing Authority looked into this issue, they found that the high mobility rate is greatly attributed to families struggling to find affordable housing (Moore, 2016). In light of this, the Tacoma Housing Authority began the “McCarver Elementary School Special Housing Program” in efforts to, “1) influence educational outcomes for children living in THA communities and to strategically leverage resources to 2) achieve positive changes in neighborhood schools” (Moore, 2016). In order to do this, THA pledged to provide rental assistance for up to five years to 50 eligible McCarver families with students in kindergarten, 1st, or 2nd grade (Moore, 2016). To receive assistance, families must actively participate in their child’s education, create a family improvement plan geared towards self-sufficiency, and agree to keep students at McCarver Elementary for five years. A portion of the family improvement plan is structured so that, starting at \$25/month the first year and increasing 20% each year, parents incrementally assume greater responsibility for rental payments (Moore, 2016).

More specifically, in order for families to receive assistance from the McCarver Elementary School Special Housing Program, parents were asked to agree to five conditions:

- 1. Keep their child enrolled in McCarver;**
- 2. Be very involved with McCarver and their child’s education;**
- 3. Work diligently on their own job and financial growth;**
- 4. Work diligently with THA staff to accomplish these goals; &**
- 5. Allow THA, Tacoma Public Schools, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and THA’s community partners to share individually identifiable information about the family and the child’s progress in school. (Moore, 2016)**

In addition to these conditions, the family (group of people related by blood, marriage, adoption, or affinity that lives together in a stable family relationship) must be homeless or at serious risk of homelessness to qualify for assistance from this program, and make no greater than 30% of the Tacoma median income.²¹ The Housing Authority sought out to collect data on the “(i) educational outcomes of the participating children; (ii) the educational outcomes of McCarver School in the aggregate; and (iii) the employment and educational progress of participating parents” (Moore, 2016).

The McCarver Elementary School Special Housing Program has been up and running since 2011. In 2014, The Housing Authority released a Year Three Findings report about the progress of the housing program. The most substantial finding in this report is that the school’s student mobility rate declines from 114% in 2011 to 75% in 2014 (Leon, 2015). Families also experienced increases in household income, employment, education and job training in the first three years of the Program; upon entering, 7 of 61 were employed with an average monthly household income of \$790. In August 2014, 29 of 48 parents held stable jobs, with a monthly income averaging at \$1,340 (Moore, 2016).

The program at McCarver was implemented not only to help families maintain a stable and secure environment, but also to create a more positive educational outcome for children that come from households in need of assistance. The Year Three Findings report is encouraging in this regard, showing a 10-point increase in McCarver Housing Program

students who met the state reading standard (Moore, 2016). While not all students were able to reach the level of their peers across the District, many were able to perform at rates similar to peers in their own school, which is considered to be indicative of success (Moore, 2016). While there were significant gains made in reading achievement, only 14% of Program students met the state math score standard in the second year, as compared to 28% in the first (Moore, 2016).

A program survey was distributed to parents and teachers in order to assess the success of the THA-McCarver Program. These surveys yielded insightful results about the expectations and results of the program. Teachers rated the various aspects of the program as helpful though the Program as a whole was rated low, while parents proved to be highly satisfied with the program, reporting great benefits (Moore, 2016). Results from the 2014 teacher assessments show that a majority of teachers either agree or strongly agree that “The program is helping identify the non-academic needs of students”, “The program is helping find solutions to the non-academic needs of students”, “The program is helping parents identify their needs and goals”, and “The parents of my students who are in the program have improved their parenting skills during this schools year” (Moore, 2016). While teachers see these positive influences, they believe that there needs to be improved communication about the goals and methods of the program by increasing teacher-caseworker-parent collaboration (Moore, 2016). While there is much room for improvement, more families are making strides toward financial independence, as they are learning how to manage money more effectively in order to be able to pay their portion of rent (Moore, 2016).

The THA-McCarver program was successful in reducing mobility among program students, in turn reducing McCarver’s overall mobility rate. Additionally, this reduces the mobility rate for all elementary schools throughout the district, as the mobility rates for the schools to which students may have transferred is also reduced (Moore, 2016). This finding is significant, as it shows that a valued investment in just one school can positively impact the district. Initial findings such as this make the case for the implementation of similar programs, or the distribution of this program to other schools in the Tacoma district.

Saint Paul, Minnesota - East Side Housing Opportunity Program

In Saint Paul, Minnesota, the East Side Housing Opportunity Program (EHOP) works to increase housing stability for families with children enrolled in John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary School. The program has partnered with school staff, neighbors, landlords, and community agencies since 2002 to help families find and maintain decent, safe, and affordable housing (Mohr, 2008). EHOP works to reduce mobility of families who rent by addressing issues of rental housing quality, affordability, availability, and landlord and tenant issues (Mohr, 2008). The program does this by developing Family Housing Plans, providing rental subsidies through the Housing Trust Fund, and providing a Life Skills Education Program that provides homeownership education and classes that support family and housing stability (Mohr, 2008). Life Skills classes are open to all families in the community, with a variety of topics including safety and self-defense, anger management, home fix-up, summer activities for kids, simply good eating, among many other valuable and influential topics.

EHOP works very hard to push families towards self-reliance. The key components

to assess a family's self-reliance are: housing, employment, income, education, and childcare, along with physical and mental health needs (Mohr, 2008). These components are assessed through an assessment that staff complete with the families involved in the program every six months. The results from these assessments show overall improvements since the introduction of the program. These results showed that; A higher percentage of clients able to work were employed, clients showed improvement in the adequacy of their income for food and shelter, a higher percentage met the guideline of spending less than 30% of their income on housing, and overall improvements were seen in the adequacy of clients' education to meet their employment needs (Mohr, 2008). 78% of participants lived in rental housing when first starting the program, the remaining 22% homeless (Mohr, 2008). All participants were living in rental housing at the time of the last six-month assessment, with 78% in subsidized housing and 22% in market-rate housing (Mohr, 2008). Housing affordability improved, as the percentage of families spending more than half of their income on housing went from 57% to 13%, and the percentage meeting the guideline of less than 30% of income spent on housing went from 35% to 70% from the first to last assessment (Mohr, 2008).

EHOP places great value in student stability, making it a primary goal to "increase the number of students who stay at Johnson throughout the school year (and year to year) (Mohr, 2008). Saint Paul Public Schools measure stability in a very different way than Des Moines Public Schools. While DMPS measures students transferring in and out of school (mobility), SPPS measures the number of students enrolled at the school 160 days or more during the school year (stability index). With a goal of 91 percent by the end of 2007, Johnson Elementary fell short with 82.5 percent in the 2006-07 school year (Mohr, 2008). In the past six years, the average stability rate for all elementary schools in the district went from 90 percent to 91 percent, making Johnson Elementary well below average. EHOP staff points out that fluctuations in the employment and housing market make some situations difficult to solve through program services (Mohr, 2008). Unstable or unaffordable housing markets often force underprivileged families to move out of a city or state in order to be closer to, and receive support from, family members (Mohr, 2008).

The East Side Housing Opportunity Program provides great support in helping families work towards a state of self-reliance. Evaluations show that families involved in the program saw significant improvement in housing, employment, and income. Unfortunately, there was not as much success in stabilizing students. The evaluation of this program makes it clear that working towards self-reliance is incredibly important in making a family stable. With this being said, it is evident that more investment is needed in the schools in order to see the same success for student stability.

Solutions in Polk County

While there is much to learn from the strides made in Montgomery County, Tacoma, and Saint Paul, Des Moines is home to many organizations that recognize the issue of education inequality, and are working diligently to lend a helpful hand. The Children & Family Urban Movement and Stable Families DSM work to let children live up to their full potential.

Children & Family Urban Movement

The Children & Family Urban Movement is a non-profit organization that strives “to create a community that supports the potential of children, youth, and families through educational success, healthy living, and community engagement.” (Children Family Urban Movement). This is accomplished by offering a variety of K-5 programs to students at Moulton Elementary School. Breakfast Club, The Haven, and Awesome Days are all programs that work towards CFUMs mission of supporting children through educational success, healthy living, and community engagement in different ways. Moulton Elementary School is the second most mobile school in DMPS, with 96% of students qualifying for F/R PL (Des Moines Public Schools). Additionally, 46.8% of the student population is black, 26.7% Hispanic, and 13.8% white (Civil Right Data Collection). Moulton serves children from Pre-School to 5th grade, with the staff working to create “an environment that is safe, secure, and that nurtures the whole child at this critical time in their development” (Moulton Extended Learning Center). Moulton is one of two schools in the Des Moines Public School District that are partners in the ISU 4U program. This program promotes college going to children in Moulton and King Elementary Schools, incentivizing the students who complete fifth grade with tuition awards to Iowa State University. This program helps to make a college education more attainable for these students. In addition to the many programs provided by the Children & Family Urban Movement, Moulton has made many strides to increase the educational attainment and outcomes for students.

Breakfast Club is a year-round morning breakfast program, serving an average of 80 children during the school year and 60 students during the summer, that is open 6:00-8:30AM (Children Family Urban Movement). General activities of the program include physical activity such as jump roping and hula hooping, along with mentally engaging activities such as board games, drawing, reading, and homework help (Children Family Urban Movement). It is important to give children a positive start to the day in a safe and consistent environment with a nutritious meal and engaging activities. Unfortunately, many working families cannot afford before-school care, as Metro Kids Care in the Des Moines Public School District can cost up to \$140/week (Des Moines Public Schools). CFUM also provides activities during school breaks at Moulton in the summer (5 weeks), fall (3 weeks), and spring (2 weeks).

The Haven is a notable program provided by CFUM, as it is focused on “literacy and leadership and building the skills, attitudes, knowledge, and experience that prepares students for the present and the future”. It is an after school program offered at Moulton that teaches and encourage them to excel in academically, while providing them with a safe place to spend the after school hours. In addition to promoting academic achievement, The Haven also promotes the mutual respect of all races, cultures, and religions in an open and comfortable environment. The program is proven to have a positive impact on its students, as data from the 2011-12 school year showed 80% of The Haven students were reading at grade level, while only 50% of all Moulton students were reading at grade level (Children Family Urban Movement). The programs provided by the Children and Family Urban Movement serve as a fantastic model, exemplifying the profound effects that extra care can have on low-income students.

Stable Families DSM

In 2012, HOME Inc. introduced the Stable Families Program in efforts to help low-

income households develop budgeting skills, learn housing responsibilities, work on personal goals, and ensure that children attend school. The program targets extremely low-income families who are at risk of homelessness and have children enrolled in a DMPS school. After receiving a referral from school counselors, homeless shelters, legal aid, partner landlords and human service agencies, HOME Inc. conducts an assessment to determine the family's needs. Eligible families are below 30% of Area Median Income (\$22,450 for a family of 4), have young children enrolled in DMPS, and are at risk of losing their housing (HOME Inc.). To assist families in a financial crisis, HOME Inc. provides financial assistance for past due rent or utility bills to help families avoid eviction, termination, or utility disconnection (HOME Inc.). A program update reports that "families referred to the program are almost always at least 1.5 months behind in rent and have past due utility bills. Initial assistance is general around \$1,500 to keep the family in their current housing situation" (HOME Inc.). This update also states that a majority of program participants are single-mother families and that often have low paying jobs with little to no benefits.

Case managers are assigned to help a family plan to overcome the barriers that have caused the threat to their housing. In addition to learning budgeting skills and housing responsibilities, the caseworker also assists the family in applying for mainstream benefits that may help them find a stable home. Since its 2012 inception, Stable Families has assisted 78 families with a total of 240 children (HOME Inc.). While the Stable Families Program is much different than the programs offered by the Children and Family Urban Movement, they both work towards improving outcomes for low-poverty children in Des Moines. These are both important approaches to take in efforts to provide equality for all public school students, and provide them with the opportunity to excel among their peers.

Conclusions

A solution to the achievement gap between low- and middle- to high-income students in Des Moines must be comprised of academic, housing, and policy approaches in order to be successful. In addition to a multi-faceted approach, there must also be a strong commitment to create an optimal education of low-income students. The Children & Family Urban Movement does a fantastic job of reinforcing healthy habits for children and encouraging academic achievement, while Stable Families DSM helps parents work towards self-sufficiency by developing budgeting skills and learning housing responsibilities. The same level of commitment and outreach must be tapped into in order to push for more inclusionary zoning policies, a stronger commitment to low-income students, and a higher level of cultural proficiency across the Polk County.

Commitment to Low-Income Students

After looking over the many sets of data regarding the state of low-income students in the Des Moines Public School district, it is evident that the needs of these students are not being satisfied. When comparing the data of Des Moines students to those in Ankeny and West Des Moines, this becomes even more apparent. The presence of the achievement gap between low- and middle- to high- income students is present around

the country, and it is time for a greater commitment in Polk County to fight this unfortunate trend. Recognizing and acknowledging the problem in its entirety is the first step to solving it. Students who are victim to this gap need extra attention to catch up with their peers and begin to see advances in educational achievement. In the Des Moines Public School District, it is important for the schools with the highest concentration of low-income students to be recognized and prioritized, as they were in the Montgomery County School District. Investing in schools with high minority populations from Kindergarten to 3rd grade will give students a better foundation for their academic careers. In order to do this, there must be a strong commitment from the community and the school district to the equal education of low-income students.

However, this commitment cannot be limited to the Des Moines Public School District. As previously discussed, there is not an equal distribution of minority students in the districts surrounding Des Moines. There needs to be an equal commitment to low-income students in Ankeny and West Des Moines. The data supports the extreme gap between these three school districts, and the need for change. While the Des Moines district needs to focus on reinvesting resources to children in difficult situations, Ankeny and West Des Moines must work to understand the importance of this issue and the importance of inclusion.

Policy Approaches

Housing policy has the opportunity to positively impact low-income households by providing more safe, stable, and affordable places to live throughout the county and the country. Subsidized housing and inclusionary zoning provide families with a greater number of options, as well as more stable options. This is extremely important for households with young children, as their educational outcomes are at stake. As previously discussed, schools with a high rate of mobility tend to have a great amount of the student population qualifying for F/R PL.

Subsidized housing reduces mobility by increasing the availability of affordable housing for families with young children, and has the potential to reduce housing insecurity and improve the well being of low-income households (Bailey, 2015). Housing subsidies provide financial assistance to make housing more affordable to low-income families, giving them higher odds of housing security and lower odds of food insecurity (Bailey, 2015). Research in the April 2015 Housing Policy Debate journal concludes that “if subsidized units are made available to an additional 5% of the eligible population, the odds of overcrowding decrease by 26% and the odds of families making multiple moves decrease by 31%” (Bailey, 2015). Though these families may not be able to afford a home, if they are able to stay in a home that is affordable and the rent will not rise dramatically, there will be a positive impact on the education and mobility of low-income students.

Subsidized housing programs include public housing, project-based Section 8 housing, and Section 8 housing choice vouchers. Public housing is a project-based subsidy, meaning the subsidy stays with the unit, which creates rental units for low-income households and is publicly owned and managed (Housing Link, 2006). Most public housing units cost 30 percent of the households adjusted gross income, and some units have a low, fixed rent amount (Housing Link, 2006). Housing choice vouchers are provided by the federal government in order to assist very low-income families, and is provided on

behalf of the family or individual (HUD). Project-based Section 8 housing is very similar to public housing, as the subsidy stays with the unit and the cost is the same. However, project-based Section 8 housing units are privately owned and managed for low-income households (Housing Link, 2006). These project-based subsidies provide a variety of housing styles and amenities, and lend themselves to stability as the subsidy stays with the unit. Section 8 housing choice vouchers are government-funded and help low-income households pay the rent on private, market-rate units (Housing Link, 2006). Unlike public housing and project-based Section 8 housing, this is a tenant-based subsidy and costs 30 to 40 percent of a household's adjusted gross income (Housing Link, 2006). This program allows a renter to choose the apartment he/she wants, and sometimes lets the renter keep the subsidy if he/she should decide to move to a new unit. Unfortunately, all of the subsidies described above have long waiting lists, which has a negative effect on families in need. Though the programs are very beneficial to low-income families when implemented, the high demand and low supply of affordable housing units makes it difficult to efficiently find a solution for each family.

Inclusionary zoning provides a solution to the issue of supply and demand for affordable housing. As previously discussed, the IZ program in Montgomery County, Maryland, proves to be an excellent example of successful implementation of IZ. Being the oldest IZ program in the country, Montgomery County allows the local public housing authority to purchase one-third of the inclusionary zoning homes within each subdivision to create federally subsidized public housing (Schwartz, 2010). Additionally, the program requires real estate developers to set aside a portion of newly developed homes to be rented or sold at below-market prices (Schwartz, 2010). The outcomes of this program have proven that the children in these homes, whether they be public housing or below-market private developments, who attend the most-advantaged schools in Montgomery County outperformed children in low-income housing who attend the districts least-advantaged schools. In giving more students equal access to opportunity, academic performance is increased. Being placed in more affluent neighborhoods, students experienced more residential stability, which improved their academic outcomes (Schwartz, 2010).

To successfully implement IZ, bylaws often contain incentives for developers such as density bonuses, expedited permitting, and cost offsets (Commonwealth of Massachusetts). Cost offsets may include tax breaks, parking space reductions, and fee reductions (Commonwealth of Massachusetts). Additionally, it is common for IZ bylaws to contain a unit threshold. The unit threshold may state that if a developer plans to build a fixed amount of units (ex. 12 or more), they must include low-income units. As there are many variations of IZ policies across the U.S., it is up to the local community, administration, developers, and financiers to construct a program that is fit to best benefit a region. By expanding housing opportunities, job and business opportunities are increased and, as shown in Montgomery County, educational outcomes are improved for low-income students.

Cultural Proficiency

In addition to valuing inclusion from a policy standpoint, school staff must be culturally proficient in order to understand and address the issues that plague low-income

students. The Des Moines Public School District Board held a work session and discussion during their July 12th meeting about cultural proficiency. The PowerPoint presentation used in this session is available to the public through the DMPS website. This presentation is an admirable step towards inclusion, and should set an example for surrounding districts.

There are five essential elements for the standards of individual behavior and organizational practices to achieve cultural proficiency. Cultural proficiency is “an approach for creating an organizational climate that is diverse, inclusive, healthy, and productive” that “gives the leaders of an organization tools and language for addressing all aspects of diversity.” (Des Moines Public Schools). Additionally, it addresses the “policies and practices of an organization and the values and behaviors of individuals” (Des Moines Public Schools). One must assess culture, value diversity, manage the dynamics of difference, adapt to diversity, and institutionalize cultural knowledge. To assess culture, cultural groups must be identified as present in the system. Additionally, it must be understood that culture is everywhere and varies between and within cultures. Every group has different needs, identities, and experiences. To accept different cultures as present in the system, the cultures must be understood and respected. Developing an appreciation for these differences creates a value in diversity. In a diverse environment, staff must learn to respond appropriately to issues and manage the dynamics of difference (Des Moines Public Schools). In order to adapt to diversity, staff must change and adopt new policies and practices that support diversity and inclusion, and work to institutionalize cultural knowledge.

As stated in the beginning of this report, an optimal educational environment for K-12 students provides not only demographic diversity, but also supports and values all students’ needs. Equality of education for all students is important for local, regional, and national prosperity. After observing the achievement gap between students who qualify for F/R PL and their upper-income peers in the Des Moines Public Elementary Schools, the significance of this growing issue becomes very clear. The difference in student demographic amongst the three largest districts in Polk County, Des Moines, West Des Moines, and Ankeny, exemplifies the need for inclusion and acceptance. Due to the low test scores of minority students, schools with high rates of mobility, and lack of diversity throughout the suburban districts, the state of low-income students in Polk County is not optimal. By capitalizing on the strides made in Des Moines by the Children & Family Urban Movement and Stable Families, providing more housing opportunities through improved and expanded housing policy, and working towards cultural proficiency in schools across Polk County, low-income students will have a greater opportunity to obtain an optimal education.

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