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DATAWISE WORKING PAPER

Housing Affordability and Student Retention in Grand Rapids Public Schools

Preliminary findings for GRPS
and Housing Kent from literature
and secondary data

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Housing Kent 

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Executive Summary

The Housing Kent team led by President Eureka People asked the DataWise team to provide a preliminary analysis of potential causal pathways between the disposition of closing GRPS school buildings and the availability of affordable housing, with a particular focus on strategies that might improve retention for the district and improve housing options for students and their families.

Challenging problem: scarce affordable housing for the majority of GRPS families

Before evaluating potential responses, we sketch the nature of the challenge: GRPS households are disadvantaged and affordable housing is scarce.

1. Most GRPS students' families have low incomes. In Fall 2022, 76.8% of GRPS students were "economically disadvantaged"; for schools in the 49507 ZIP code, the figure was 90.4%. *See Table 1 on page 7 and related map in Figure 1 on page 8.*
2. Renters with children include a majority (54%) of single-adult-led households with elevated sensitivity to housing affordability, most of whose children are likely to be GRPS students. 42.7% of Grand Rapids households with children are renters, but that figure is 73.5% for single-adult-led households. *See Figure 2 and related text on page 9.*
3. Grand Rapids has high rates of cost-burdened households paying more than 30% of household income for housing:
32.3% of households with children;
57.6% of renter households with children;
70.6% of renter single-adult-led households with children.
See Figure 3 on page 10.
4. A 2019 housing study recommended large increases in affordable housing in Kent County, recommending creation of over 11,000 new affordable units. *See Figure 4 on page 11.*
5. In the same 2019 study, just 8,535 rental units in Grand Rapids ZIP codes were available to rent at less than 50% of Approximate Median Household Income, and just 3,057 of those had at least two bedrooms. Subtracting the estimated 6,114 student beds available in those units from total estimated demand for 10,714 student beds leaves a shortfall of 4,600 beds. *See Table 2 on page 13.*

Housing affordability likely affects at least several thousand GRPS students and seems significant enough to merit further consideration as a strategic priority for the district.

Response strategies

Housing Kent has adopted a **Housing Policy Framework**¹ that focuses on four strategies. GRPS has opportunity and reason to address all four through action and advocacy, but we are focused here primarily on **Strategy I. Create and preserve dedicated affordable housing units.**

Strategy A: adaptive re-use of closed school buildings

In evaluating the feasibility of direct provision of affordable housing by GRPS, we find it plausible that the shortfall of affordable housing is large enough that it may materially affect the ability of economically disadvantaged households to remain enrolled in GRPS schools:

1. Our literature review found substantial publication activity about adaptive re-use of old buildings, including schools. The practice is active, widespread, and the subject of considerable advocacy and feasibility-study activity. *See the **Appendix** section headed “Adaptive re-use of buildings” beginning on page 20.*
2. Using confidential building-level data from GRPS and Plante Moran CRESA, we created a rough estimate of how many 750-square-foot affordable housing units might “fit” (without any consideration of actual design feasibility) into half the building area of each building, starting with those ranked lowest by Plante Moran CRESA. Strictly for illustration, suppose the 11 lowest-ranked properties were closed. There would hypothetically be space for 398 units and 796 beds for children, 17% of the 4,600-bed shortfall identified above. *See **Table 3** on page 16.*

Strategy B: support policy changes to increase equity and retention

On the second hypothesis of general improvement in student retention through increased affordable housing, we find it necessary to depend on inference.

1. We note a general lack of literature and data directly addressing linkages between affordable housing availability and student retention. However, literature about student mobility offers ample circumstantial evidence for a **theory of change**. In short, poor availability of affordable housing causes housing instability; adult household leaders move frequently, increasing student mobility; mobility in turn undermines academic performance and ultimately makes educating more difficult for schools and teachers. *See the **Appendix** section headed “Schools and student retention” beginning on page 21.*
2. GRPS could endeavor to field test the theory of change by advocating affordable-housing-friendly policies and monitoring their specific effects on student mobility and in-district

¹ Housing Kent Housing Policy Framework hosted on Google Drive, <https://bit.ly/housing-kent-policy-framework>.

retention. The national organization Local Housing Solutions offers a “Housing and Education”² brief that recommends support for the following broad policies:

- a. Support dedicated affordable housing or tenant-based housing subsidies.
- b. Invest in tenant protections [to help prevent loss of housing for students].
- c. Allow children to remain in their same schools [even after a housing change that would previously have forced them to change schools].

Strategy C: collaborate across sectors to improve homeownership prospects for teachers of color

The relationship between student retention and affordable housing is a systemic, “wicked” problem requiring coordinated effort on multiple levers of change. Housing Kent itself is an outgrowth of the collective impact method of cross-sector collaboration, which endeavors to reduce siloing between organizations and sectors and to align strategies to improve the quality of life in Kent County.

1. Our brief literature review finds plentiful recent literature about cross-sector collaboration, including signs of increasing focus on collaboration between education and housing. The literature includes a description of a cross-sector program now in progress that offers multiyear rental subsidies to tenants who keep their children in a particular school. *See the Appendix section headed “Cross-sector collaboration” starting on page 22.*
2. Housing Kent aligns with the KConnect collective impact network in its strategy to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of teachers in Kent County. The effort to recruit more teachers of color could align neatly with Housing Kent’s **Strategy III. Help households access and afford private-market homes**. GRPS could serve its teachers by adopting policies and practices that increase the availability and affordability of homes, especially as part of a cross-sector effort to recruit, train, retain, and promote teachers of color at GRPS and countywide.

² Local Policy Solutions “Housing and Education” online policy brief, <https://localhousingsolutions.org/bridge/housing-and-education/>

Problem: affordable housing is scarce for GRPS families

GRPS schoolchildren and their families are majority low-income

GRPS schools face the familiar challenge of confronting economic disadvantage, as multiple layers of biased socioeconomic filters have concentrated low-income families of color in the City of Grand Rapids and consequently in the public schools.

The rightmost column of **Table 1** shows that 10,714 economically disadvantaged students comprised 76.8% of the district’s students, as reported to the state Department of Education for fall 2022. The figure exceeds 90% in the 49507 ZIP code.

Table 1 Economically disadvantaged schoolchildren in GRPS as of Fall 2022

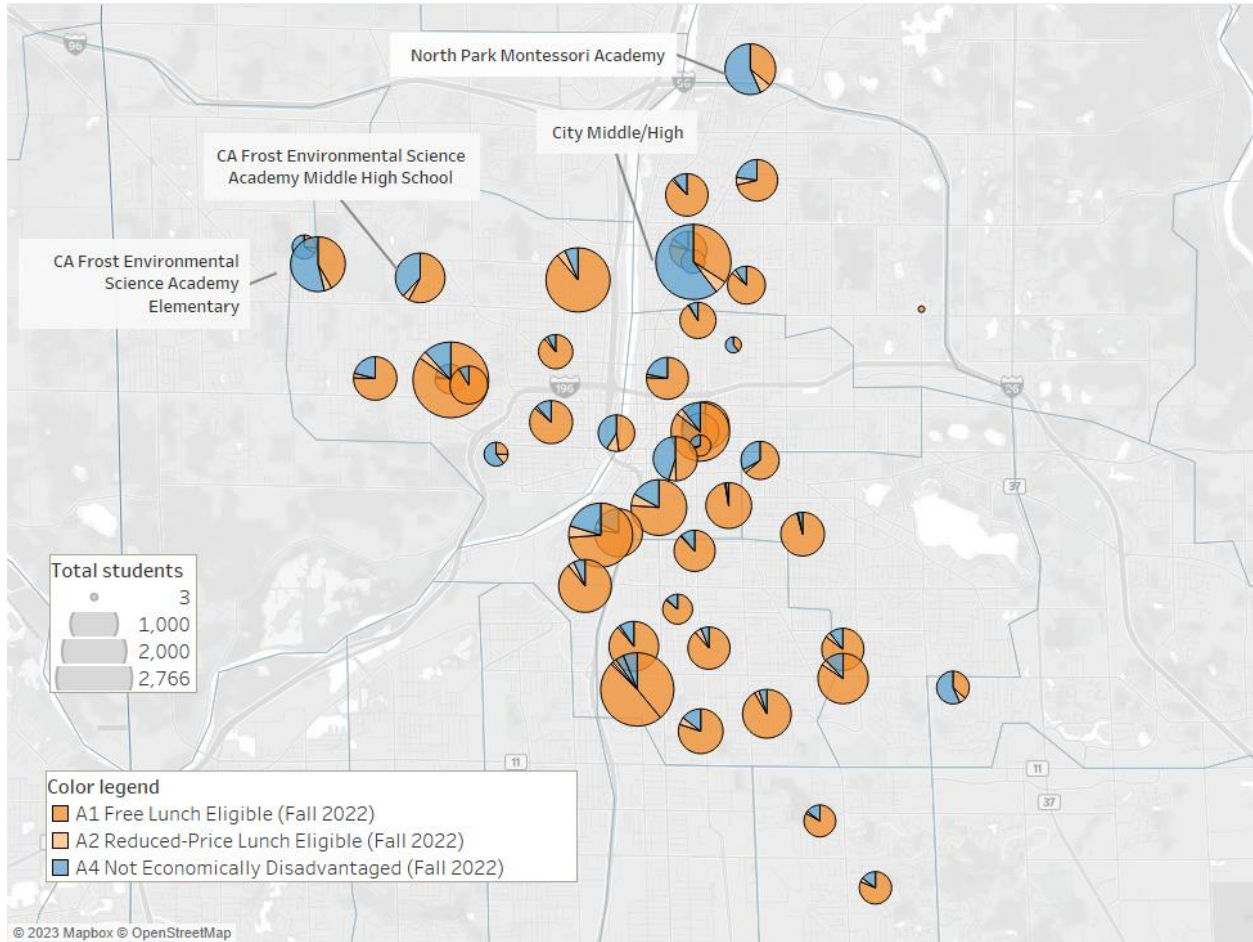
	Entity Physical ZIP										Grand Total
	49503	49504	49505	49506	49507	49508	49525	49534	49546	N/A	
A1 Free Lunch Eligible (Fall 2022)	2,944	2,639	1,017	896	2,113	206	135	16	48	135	10,149
A2 Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible (Fall 2022)	168	143	88	32	72	8	28	4	9	13	565
A3 Total Economically Disadvantaged (Fall 2022)	3,112	2,782	1,105	928	2,185	214	163	20	57	148	10,714
A4 Not Economically Disadvantaged (Fall 2022)	792	772	712	142	233	37	213	40	75	214	3,230
A5 Total Count (Fall 2022)	3,904	3,554	1,817	1,070	2,418	251	376	60	132	362	13,944
A6 % Economically Disadvantaged (A3 / A5)	79.7%	78.3%	60.8%	86.7%	90.4%	85.3%	43.4%	33.3%	43.2%	40.9%	76.8%

Source: DataWise analysis of MISchoolData.org [Economically Disadvantaged Counts](#) data for GRPS as of Fall 2022.

Data on affordable housing will be added to this table in **Table 2** on page 13 below.

Figure 1 maps the same GRPS schools from **Table 1**, with pie charts showing the economically disadvantaged proportion of students at each school; larger pies have more students. The minority of students that are not disadvantaged are concentrated on the north side of town, at City Middle/High, C. F. Frost Elementary and Middle High, and North Park Montessori Academy.

Figure 1 Map of GRPS schools with pie-chart shares of economically disadvantaged students

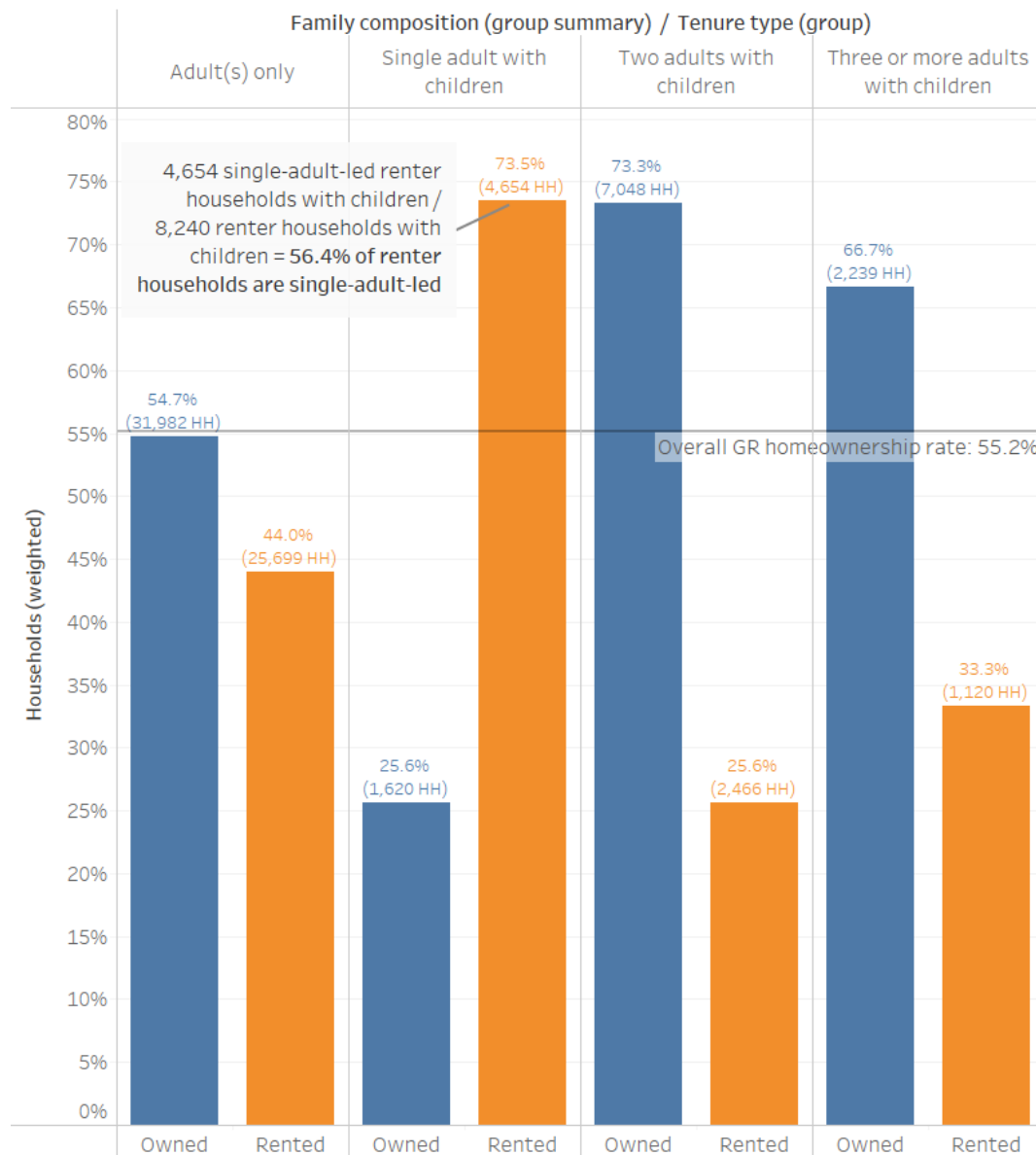


Source: DataWise analysis of MISchoolData.org [Economically Disadvantaged Counts](#) data for GRPS as of Fall 2022.

Single-parent families form the majority of renters with children

According to 2021 5-year estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS), the overall homeownership rate in Kent County, Michigan is 69.8%. As shown in **Figure 2**, the estimated homeownership rate for Grand Rapids is 55.2%, while 43.6% of Grand Rapids households are renters, and another 1.2% pay no rent. But 73.5% of single adult-led households with children in GR are renters; the population-weighted 2021 estimate is 4,654 households, 56.4% of the 8,240 renter households with children. These households are likely to be especially vulnerable, and most of their children are likely to be GRPS students.

Figure 2 Housing tenure type by family composition for ACS respondents in Grand Rapids



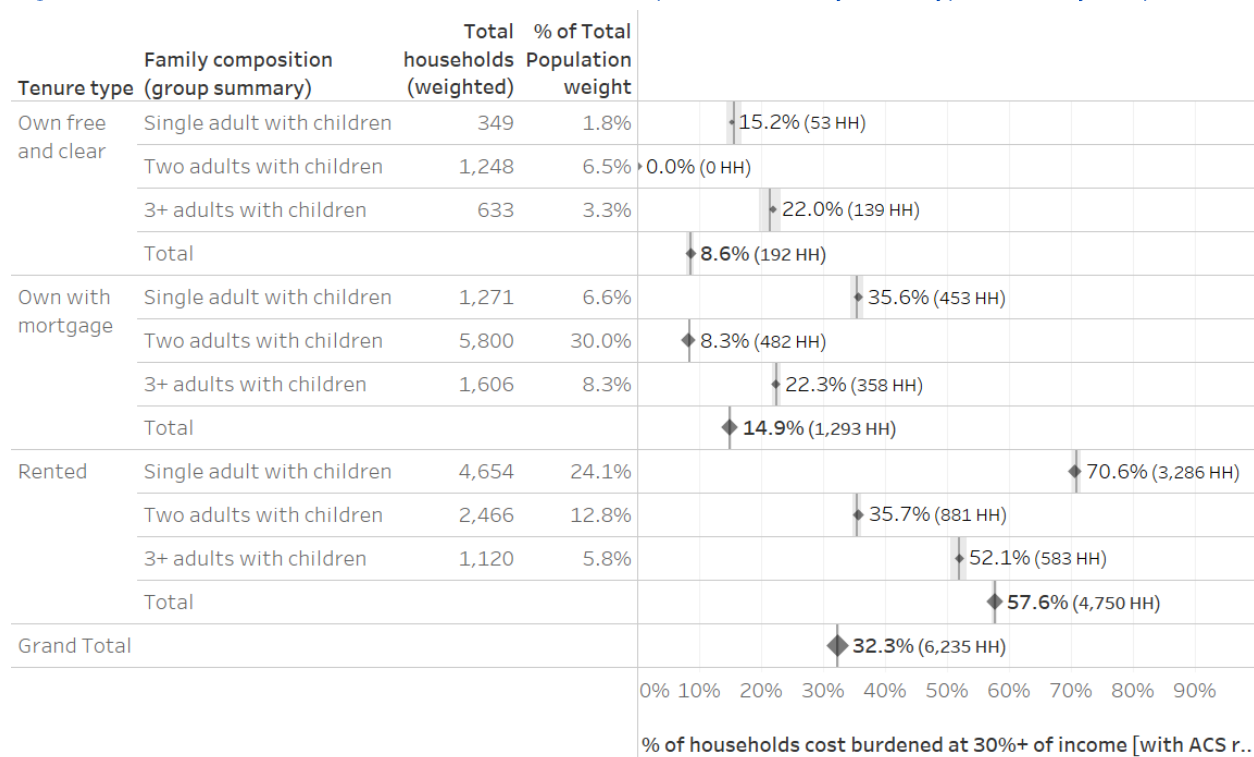
Source: DataWise analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample data for the "Kent County (Central) – Grand Rapids City Area" Public Use Microsample Area (PUMA). For simplicity, 161 households with children (population-weighted) who reported occupying their housing units without payment are hidden, but they are not excluded from calculations.

Grand Rapids households with children are disproportionately cost-burdened

The American Community Survey asks annual samples of hundreds of Grand Rapids residents about their income and their housing costs. Cost-burdened households are those whose housing costs exceed 30% of their household income; first mortgage payments for homeowners and rent (less utilities, if included) for tenants.

Figure 3 displays the percent cost-burdened for each type of household by tenure and family composition.³ As shown in the rightmost column, 32.3% of Grand Rapids households with children are cost-burdened (6,235 households total). The cost-burdened share more than doubles to 70.6% for the 24.1% who are single-parent renters (3,286 households, over half of the cost-burdened population).

Figure 3 Percent cost-burdened households in the Grand Rapids ACS PUMA by tenure type and family composition



Source: DataWise analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample data for the "Kent County (Central) – Grand Rapids City Area" Public Use Microsample Area (PUMA).

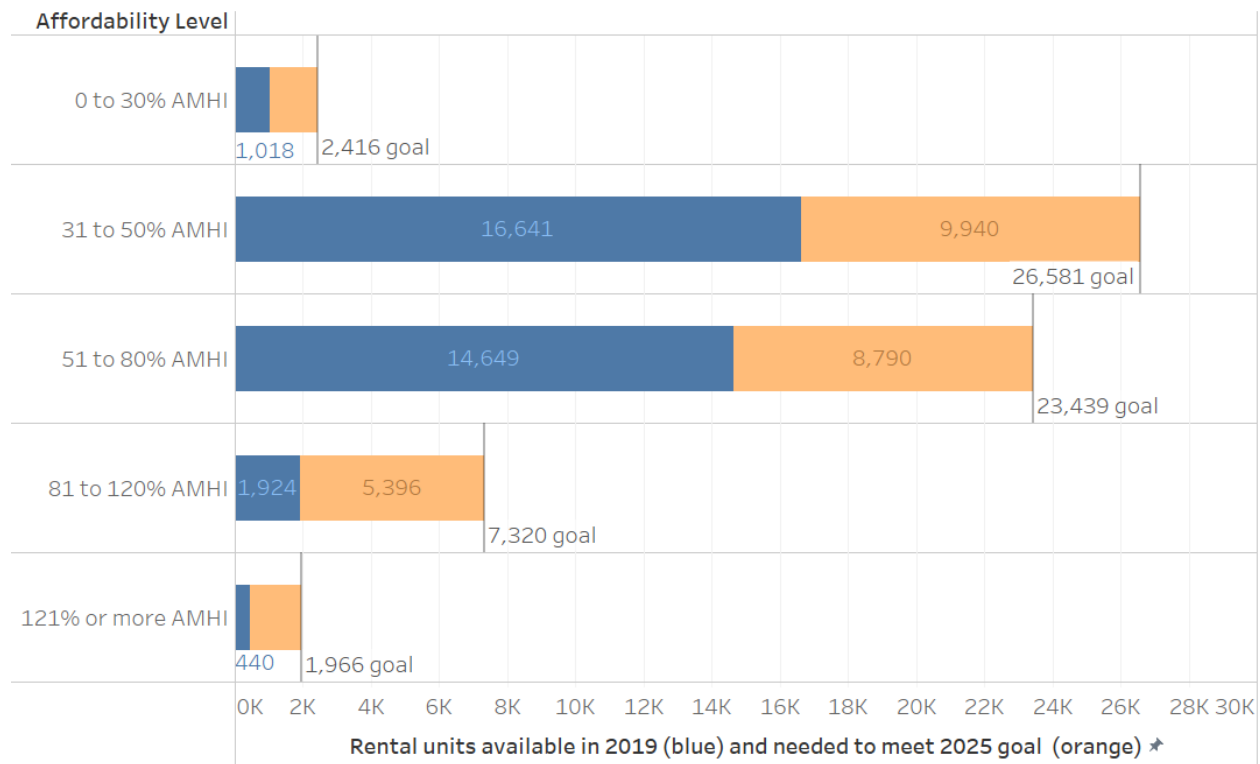
³ We've excluded households with no children, and we've simplified by hiding (but not excluding from the totals) the very small share of households who occupy a unit without payment or ownership.

Generally, much more affordable housing is needed in Kent County

In 2019, Bowen National Research collected data on rental properties on behalf of the City of Grand Rapids and Housing NEXT.⁴ **Figure 4** displays numbers for all of Kent County, showing the actual units available in 2019 and the number of units recommended to be built by 2025. The 2019 study recommended building almost 1,400 units targeted to 30% or less of Area Median Household Income (AMHI)⁵, more than doubling the 1,018 then available, and another 9,940 units at 50% or less of AMHI, a 60% increase by 2025. Note that Housing Kent regards these goals as minimal; the baseline treats cost-burdened households as adequately housed, a situation that reflects generations of inequity that should also be addressed when setting goals.

Figure 4 Kent County rental units: 2019 actual units, 2025 goals, and units needed to meet a minimal goal

Rental units: **Actual 2019** and **needed to meet 2025 goals**



⁴ Updated data from a 2022 wave of the same study should be available to us soon.

⁵ The Bowen study identified \$24,000 as 30% of Area Median Household Income (AMHI); this names a custom convenience metric for the study that approximates multiple complex government sources for area median income (see page VIII-I). Bowen treated a high of \$600 monthly rent (in 2019 dollars) as the affordability ceiling for the lowest category (see table on page II-13). \$600 in rent would be 30% of income for a household earning \$2,000 monthly or \$24,000 annually; \$24,000 is 30% of an \$80,000/year AMHI. For comparison, the Median Family Income (MFI) calculated by HUD for the Grand Rapids-Wyoming area was \$76,600 (https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2019/select_Geography.odn).

Specifically, we may lack as many as 4,600 affordable beds for GRPS students

More robust and up-to-date estimates will require more complex analysis, but we have devised a rough placeholder indicator for the affordable housing shortfall as it affects economically disadvantaged GRPS students. We asked this question:

How many additional affordable rental units with at least two bedrooms would be needed to house every economically disadvantaged student at two beds to a room?

Table 2 answers this question for the district by using the 2019 Bowen study data. The table expands directly on the previous analysis from **Table 1** on page 7. As shown in the rightmost column, out of 17,844 rental housing units (row B1), just 8,535 (B2) charged rental rates below 50% of AMHI, and just 3,057 of those units had at least two bedrooms (B3). At two beds per second bedroom, those units provide an estimated 6,114 affordable beds (row B4) for students. Subtracting that number from the 10,714 economically disadvantaged students leaves a total shortfall of 4,600 affordable beds.⁶ The calculated shortfall is concentrated in the 49503, 49504, and 49507 ZIP codes.⁷

⁶ Our preliminary analysis makes some big simplifying assumptions. First, we assume students need a dedicated bedroom in which to study and sleep, so affordable studio and one-bedroom units don't meet the need; second, we assume two beds to a bedroom. Second, "affordable" is defined as rent less than 50 percent of Area Median Household Income (AMHI) as shown in the 2019 Bowen National Research study of rental properties in Kent County (a 2022 study is complete, but the data was not yet available for independent analysis at the time of writing). Third, the analysis assumes that disadvantaged students' families have little enough access to home ownership that rental housing is the primary mode of affordable housing. Fourth and finally, we treat the school's ZIP code as a proxy for the area its students live in (or would prefer to live in). See the next footnote for an example of the kind of error this can introduce.

⁷ Since we are using ZIP Code as an approximation, the apparent surplus of affordable beds in 49534 on the western edge of the city includes affordable units in rental properties that are not located within the Grand Rapids city limits.

Table 2 Economically disadvantaged schoolchildren in GRPS by ZIP Code as of Fall 2022

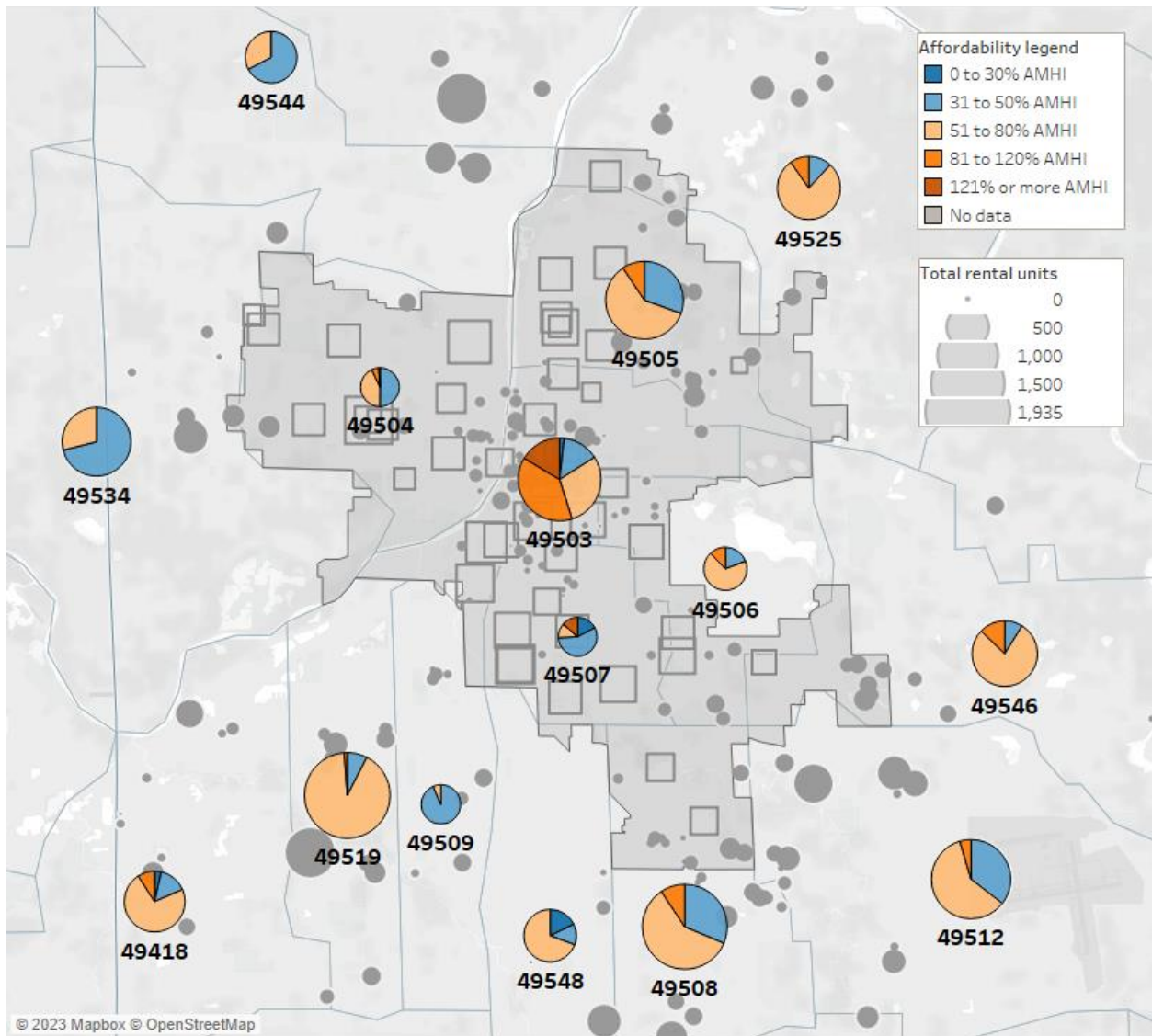
	Entity Physical ZIP										Grand Total
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A3 Total Economically Disadvantaged (Fall 2022)	3,112	2,782	1,105	928	2,185	214	163	20	57	148	10,714
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A5 Total Count (Fall 2022)	3,904	3,554	1,817	1,070	2,418	251	376	60	132	362	13,944
A6 % Economically Disadvantaged (A3 / A5)	79.7%	78.3%	60.8%	86.7%	90.4%	85.3%	43.4%	33.3%	43.2%	40.9%	76.8%
B1 Units (total) per Bowen National Research (2019)	3,941	1,282	2,365	811	915	3,276	1,827	1,791	1,636		17,844
B2 Units with rent under 50% AMHI (2019)	1,261	899	935	368	637	1,812	671	1,419	533		8,535
B3 Units with rent under 50% AMHI and 2+BR (2019)	290	194	487	93	288	596	124	885	100		3,057
B4 Affordable beds avail. @ 2 per 2nd BR (B3 * 2)	580	388	974	186	576	1,192	248	1,770	200		6,114
B5 Affordable bed shortfall (A3 - B4)	2,532	2,394	131	742	1,609	-978	-85	-1,750	-143		4,600

Source: DataWise analysis of MISchoolData.org [Economically Disadvantaged Counts](#) data for GRPS as of Fall 2022 and Bowen National Research study of Kent County rental properties as of 2019.

These estimates are imprecise and are not necessarily conservative, especially in excluding studio and one-bedroom units and new units built since 2019. But skeptics should note that our method is conservative at least in the sense that it completely ignores potential competition for available affordable beds from all other potential tenants, including households without children, households whose children attend non-GRPS schools, and GRPS students who are not economically disadvantaged.

Figure 5 maps the same 2019 rental unit data by affordability level and ZIP code as shown in **Table 2**. The relative diameter of each pie chart represents the total number of rental units in that ZIP code, while the colored wedges indicate affordability level, with blue wedges representing units below 50% of Area Median Household Income (AMHI). Affordable housing forms almost three-quarters of the units in the 49507 ZIP, but there were only 915 units there in 2019. Affordable units below 30% AMHI (dark blue) were all but nonexistent anywhere else, and affordable units are a minority of units in other ZIP codes except 49504, where they were about half. Meanwhile, affordable units from 31 to 50% of AMHI are found in greater quantity in the ZIP codes around the periphery outside Grand Rapids.

Figure 5 Map of 2019 rental housing units by affordability level and ZIP code



Response strategies

How might GRPS and its wider community respond to the apparent shortage of affordable housing in Grand Rapids? We suggest consideration of three potential strategies:

- A. Explore adaptive re-use of GRPS-owned closed school buildings as affordable housing projects, possibly addressing 5 to 10% of the estimated shortfall in affordable student beds.
- B. Consider policies GRPS could implement itself or advocate at the local, state, and federal levels that would improve long-term housing affordability for low-income households with children.
- C. Engage in cross-sector collaboration with Housing Kent and KConnect to recruit, train, retain, and promote teachers of color, partly by improving teacher access to homeownership.

Strategy A: consider adaptive re-use of unused school buildings

A direct strategy to address affordable housing would be to repurpose closed GRPS school buildings as affordable housing units. Adaptive re-use is the subject of substantial publishing activity. The **Appendix** beginning on page 20 presents a very brief and preliminary literature review.

Table 3 on the next page leverages building data supplied by Plante Moran CRESA and GRPS under a confidential data-sharing agreement. The rightmost column of the table offers a rough approximation of how many 750-square-foot affordable housing units⁸ might be created by repurposing 50% of the total building area of each facility. Buildings are sorted in the table in descending order by Plante Moran CRESA's ranking.

The first row of **Table 3** indicates that Innovation Central High has the lowest ranking from Plante Moran CRESA, occupies 5.1 acres, shelters over 235,000 square feet indoors, and had just 62 affordable two-bedroom rental units available within a mile radius in 2019. The last column of the table calculates that, supposing half of that building area could practically be converted to 750-square-foot units, Innovation Central could provide up to 156 affordable two-bedroom units. That's 312 beds for children and 6.8% of the estimated shortfall we estimated in **Table 2** on page 13.

In an illustrative but unlikely multi-building scenario, suppose the first eleven (that is, the lowest ranked) buildings from **Table 3** were all closed and slated for adaptive re-use as affordable housing. Our rough approximation yields 398 new housing units with almost 800 beds for students—about 17% of the 4,600-bed shortfall we estimated in **Table 2** on page 13.

⁸ Simple analysis of the 2019 Bowen National Research study data reveals that average affordable two-bedroom units in Kent County (at 31 to 50% AMHI) ranged between 740 and 760 square feet.

Table 3 Rough approximation of affordable housing units from adaptive re-use of GRPS buildings

Adaptive re-use feasible units scenario

Schools are sorted descending by Plante Moran CRESA ranking (ascending by total score)

**ROUGH APPROXIMATION: The preliminary analysis shown in the rightmost column assumes 50% of each building's area can be repurposed as 750 sq. ft. affordable units.*

Entity Official Name	Ranking / Scoring	Total Scores ±	Age of Facility	Utilization %	Cost to improve (per sf)	Acres	Building Size (sf)	Total units 2+BR and < 50% AMHI within 1 mile (2019)	Adaptive re-use units*
Innovation Central High	58	235	1910	44	\$139	5.1	235,350	62	156
Alexander School	56	240	1975		\$432	3.1	15,570	8	10
Kensington Elementary School	56	240	1925		\$381	4.6	25,710	33	17
Congress Elementary	54	258	1920	55	\$216	4.4	33,664	8	22
Grand Rapids Montessori Academy	54	258	1918	62	\$170	1.9	35,425	54	23
Aberdeen Elementary	51	262	1929	42	\$142	8.8	46,322	48	30
Ken-O-Sha Park Elementary	51	262	1964	21	\$139	5.5	83,679	158	55
SouthEast Academic Center	51	262	1975		\$167	3.6	41,841	3	27
FRANKLIN CAMPUS ELEMENTARY	49	267						0	
Riverside Middle School	49	267	1956	25	\$190	12.2	88,380	0	58
East Leonard Elementary	45	271	1957	49	\$143	6.7	33,983	73	22
FRANKLIN CAMPUS - CENTRAL OFFICE	45	271	1915		\$309	8.7	57,890	0	38
ROOSEVELT CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER	45	271						0	
Westwood Middle School	45	271	1960	25	\$144	9.6	89,180	18	59
City Middle/High	42	276	1923	63	\$44	9.7	366,407	73	244
Mulick Park Elementary School	42	276	1953	69	\$223	4.0	36,698	97	24
Stocking Elementary	42	276	1923	30	\$188	3.7	36,949	30	24
North Park Elementary School	40	280						0	
Southeast Career Pathways	40	280	1967	24	\$191	2.9	34,730	247	23
FRANKLIN CAMPUS - EARLY CHILDHOOD SP...	37	285						0	
Grand Rapids Montessori Middle/High	37	285	1918	58	\$44	6.8	203,492	62	135
Union High School	37	285	1967	64	\$63	59.0	269,264	18	179
Palmer School	35	289	1954	49	\$96	2.9	38,400	73	25
Straight School	35	289	1975		\$158	1.0	27,441	30	18
Buchanan Elementary	29	294	1962	61	\$37	4.3	47,663	65	31
Burton Elementary	29	294	1920	56	\$44	6.8	203,492	32	135
Kent Hills Elementary	29	294	1954	35	\$128	15.0	54,493	208	36
SERVICE BUILDING	29	294	1963		\$191	17.8	63,280	0	42
Sherwood Global Studies Academy	29	294	1969	24	\$159	14.8	56,967	216	37
Southwest Community Campus	29	294	1915	63	\$79	2.3	100,118	235	66
Dickinson Academy	25	298	1921	54	\$62	3.2	55,740	67	37
FRANKLIN CAMPUS - 4H	25	298	1930		\$252		13,720	0	9
FRANKLIN CAMPUS - LIBRARY/DATA CENTE...	25	298						0	
Harrison Park Academy	25	298	1925	55	\$58	17.8	192,650	49	128
Coit Creative Arts Academy	42	303	1880	46	\$74	2.5	62,556	159	41
KEC Oakleigh (Leased to KISD)	21	303	1958		\$244	14.5	27,390	18	18
Ottawa Hills High School	21	303	1960	23	\$53	36.9	339,710	109	226
Grand Rapids University Preparatory Acad...	19	307	2013	44	\$52	2.7	55,825	348	37
Ridgemoor Park Montessori	19	307	1972	73	\$76	8.4	34,612	13	23
Brookside Elementary	17	312	1954	66	\$174	35.2	38,201	32	25
CA Frost Environmental Science Academy E...	17	312	1959	73	\$104	13.0	58,676	0	39
GRPS University	16	316	1965		\$97	34.7	126,450	244	84
Burton Middle School	15	321	1926	66	\$44	6.8	203,492	32	135
Shawmut Hills School	13	325	1955	67	\$157	20.0	40,649	164	27
Houseman Field	13	325			\$15	9.6	13,157	8	8
NUTRITION CENTER	12	330	1970		\$95	1.6	32,160	0	21
Martin Luther King Leadership Academy	9	334	2006	55	\$78	3.8	55,122	129	36
Southwest Middle/High - Academia Bilingue	9	334	2018	33	\$189	3.7	41,841	263	27
Briggs Field	9	334			\$80	6.3	2,500	0	1
Alger Middle School	7	339	2006	49	\$67	12.2	89,235	36	59
Sibley School	7	339	2006	44	\$69	8.0	67,005	30	44
Gerald R. Ford Academic Center	6	348	2007	75	\$65	8.9	85,749	346	57
North Park Montessori Academy	5	352	3867	185	\$347	26.0	61,474	0	40
Cesar E. Chavez Elementary	4	357	2007	65	\$54	3.4	62,170	97	41
Blandford School	3	379	4004	117	\$384	90.3	13,542	0	8
Grand Rapids Public Museum High	1	384	2018	139	\$32	0.5	32,590	258	21
John Ball Park Zoo School	1	384	2009	79	\$0	100.7	6,617	0	4

Source: DataWise analysis of confidential GRPS and Plante Moran CRESA data

Strategy B: policy change to increase equity and retention

On the second hypothesis of general improvement in student retention through increased affordable housing, we find it necessary to depend on inference.

3. We note a general lack of literature and data directly addressing linkages between affordable housing availability and student retention. However, literature about student mobility offers ample circumstantial evidence for a **theory of change**. In short, poor availability of affordable housing causes housing instability; adult household leaders move frequently, increasing student mobility; mobility in turn undermines academic performance and ultimately makes educating more difficult for schools and teachers. *See the **Appendix** section headed “Schools and student retention” beginning on page 21.*
4. GRPS could endeavor to reduce student mobility by advocating affordable-housing-friendly policies. For example, the national organization Local Housing Solutions offers a “Housing and Education”⁹ brief that recommends the following policy advocacy:
 - a. Support dedicated affordable housing or tenant-based housing subsidies.
 - b. Invest in tenant protections [to help prevent loss of housing for students].
 - c. Allow children to remain in their same schools [even after a housing change that would previously have forced them to change schools].

Strategy C: cross-sector collaboration

The relationship between student retention and affordable housing is a systemic, “wicked” problem requiring coordinated effort on multiple levers of change. Housing Kent itself is an outgrowth of the collective impact method of cross-sector collaboration, which endeavors to reduce siloing between organizations and sectors and to align strategies to improve the quality of life in Kent County.

3. Our brief literature review finds plentiful recent literature about cross-sector collaboration, including signs of increasing focus on collaboration between education and housing. The literature includes a description of a cross-sector program now in progress that offers multiyear rental subsidies to tenants who keep their children in a particular school. *See the **Appendix** section headed “Cross-sector collaboration” starting on page 22.*
4. Housing Kent aligns with the KConnect collective impact network in its strategy to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of teachers in Kent County. The effort to recruit more teachers of color could align neatly with Housing Kent’s **Strategy III. Help households access and afford private-market homes**. GRPS could serve its teachers by adopting policies and practices that

⁹ Local Policy Solutions “Housing and Education” online policy brief, <https://localhousingsolutions.org/bridge/housing-and-education/>

increase the availability and affordability of homes, especially as part of a cross-sector effort to recruit, train, retain, and promote teachers of color at GRPS and countywide.

Conclusion and recommended next steps

This preliminary analysis suggests that there is at least some merit in further consideration of the potential effects of GRPS facilities on housing affordability, directly and indirectly.

Next steps for each of the three strategies could include:

- A. GRPS can work with Housing Kent and Progressive AE to conduct an expert design charette, refining feasibility estimates of the adaptability of specific GRPS facilities that are closed or closing soon.
- B. GRPS could work with Housing Kent to design a comprehensive policy package to incorporate housing affordability permanently into systemwide and school-specific operations and planning.
- C. GRPS could deepen its work with Housing Kent and KConnect by considering how to improve homeownership prospects for teachers of color as part of efforts to recruit, train, retain, and promote a more diverse teacher talent pool.

Appendix: Brief literature review of adaptive re-use of school buildings to address affordable housing and student retention

Introduction

Communities continue to face problems with housing availability, particularly affordable housing options, while other institutions, such as schools and churches, have increasingly become vacant buildings in recent years. In addition, public school closures provoke concerns within communities and contribute to negative perceptions of the school system itself. Lytton (2011) argues that school systems need to consider the unintended impact of school closures, such as one-time expenditures related to school closure, departure of students from public schools, and indirect and community impacts. Lytton (2011) highlights that “shuttering a school can therefore have widespread and lingering consequences for a neighbourhood, often falling disproportionately on poorer communities. Areas without good schools do not readily attract young families, and closing schools can decrease nearby property values” (p. 3). In a relevant case study, an analysis of Ontario newspaper coverage of school closures between 2010 and 2015 pointed to the negative framing of the issue, with attention to concerns about the impact on neighborhood cohesion and social capital (Cranston, 2017).

A potential solution to increase student retention in schools is to capitalize on real estate that could be developed for affordable housing to serve the community’s housing needs, reduce student mobility across schools (i.e. district or school retention), and promote the positive image of the school. Adaptive re-use of school buildings could continue to serve the community through the provision of affordable housing units.

While there is extensive literature on the concept of adaptive re-use of buildings, some of which focuses specifically on school buildings, our thorough search found no literature that specifically connected the idea of adaptive reuse of school buildings with the development of affordable housing *and* the impact of affordable housing unit availability on student retention in schools.

Adaptive re-use of buildings

When considering adaptive re-use of buildings, extensive literature considers the concept and promotes the practice (Harrison, 2018; Hsiang-Wen Li & Tsung-Chieh Tsai, 2017; Kee, 2014; Simons et al., 2016; Spector, 2003; Stas, 2007; Walk-Morris, 2021). The research tends to focus on both the availability of unused and abandoned buildings as well as the need for housing units, particularly in urban spaces. For example, in the book *Retired, Rehabbed, Reborn: The Adaptive Reuse of America’s Derelict Religious Buildings and Schools*, Harrison (2018) highlights societal trends that have led to the propensity of abandoned religious and school buildings. Harrison (2018) considers the practical feasibility of adaptive re-use and presents a framework for “winning community approval.”

Others focus instead on the need for housing units in urban spaces. In an editorial article, Walk-Morris (2021) presents an argument that adaptive reuse can help solve the housing crisis, even though barriers, such as zoning ordinances, need to be overcome for adaptive re-use to work. Hsiang-Wen Li & Tsung-Chieh Tsai (2017) and Kee (2014) present theoretical frameworks for a sustainable methodology for urban revitalization and adaptive re-use to respond to increasing urbanization in Hong Kong and in Taiwan.

Schools and student retention

Research points to a clear link between housing and student success and identifies residential instability as being linked to student mobility—that is, when a student changes schools due to reasons other than moving to the next grade level. Student mobility has been linked to lower academic achievement as well as negative social and behavioral outcomes (Rumberger, 2002).

Research also indicates a clear link between safe, stable, and affordable housing and student success (Housing, 2017). Access to affordable housing likely increases a family's disposable income, which often leads to better educational outcomes and achievement for children (Dahl & Lochner, 2012; Duncan et al., 2011; Newman & Holupka, 2016). Affordable housing further benefits children by increasing the odds of stability, which then provides another protective factor against student mobility (i.e., changing schools or school districts) (Brennan, 2011; Wood et al., 2009).

Several studies specifically demonstrate the link between student mobility and poverty-driven residential instability, finding residential change to be the primary driver of student mobility (Martin, 2004; Schafft, 2006). Schafft (2006) looked specifically at the push-pull factors related to housing, finding that for the mobile families in the sample, residential moves were “a direct consequence of the inability to attain safe, adequate, and affordable housing” (p.225), as opposed to being voluntary and opportunity-driven. In a study on foreclosure and student mobility, Been et al. (2011) found that children experiencing foreclosure were more likely than their peers to switch schools, echoing the findings of Schafft (2006). Poverty is also a major predictor of student mobility (Calibuso & Winsler, 2021; Martin, 2004).

Due to the relationship between housing instability and school transitions, studies suggest that reducing housing “push” factors could reduce student mobility, increasing student retention in schools. In a review of literature and public policies, Crowley (2003) argues that housing-based strategies, including investment in low-income housing, are central to reducing school mobility. Crowley (2003) suggests that “helping poor families, in particular those with school age children, increase their residential stability will have direct bearing on their school stability and potentially on their school performance” (p.35). Similarly, Martin (2004) argues that preventing student mobility must focus on increasing economic and housing stability.

However, little research could be found linking affordable housing availability to public school district retention specifically. The study on foreclosure and mobility by Been et al. (2011) found that while foreclosure increased student mobility overall, it actually *decreased* the likelihood of a student leaving the school district altogether. They found that “white and non-poor families

were more likely to exit the school system than black and poor students, which suggests that these exits are more likely to be affirmative moves made by households with means to choose other alternatives” (Been et al., 2011, p. 4). These findings may suggest that studies examining the causes of student mobility *in general* may not be completely relevant to the question of why students leave public school districts entirely.

Cross-sector collaboration

Communities increasingly turn to cross-sector collaborations as a useful way to address complex problems such as housing or education reform. Research has demonstrated the positive impacts of cross-sector collaboration on community outcomes as well as on organizational capacity (Ackerman-Barger et al., 2020; Bryson et al., 2006; Costello et al., 2022; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Nowell & Foster-fishman, 2011).

Specifically, many communities use the Collective Impact model, defined in a review by Kania and Kramer (2011) as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (p. 36). Supporters of Collective Impact argue that complex problems can only be solved by coalitions that engage multiple sectors (Kania and Kramer, 2011).

Some studies specifically draw attention to collaborations between the housing and education sectors, pointing to the ways in which stable and affordable housing can encourage student success and strengthen schools. A pilot program at McCarver Elementary in Tacoma, Washington aimed at lowering the school’s high turnover rate offers a helpful example of a cross-sector collaboration between housing and education (Johnson & Milner, n.d.). The program offered five years of rental assistance to families on the condition that they keep their children enrolled at McCarver for that period, along with several other conditional agreements aimed at ensuring student and family success. While a thorough evaluation of the program has not been conducted, reporting by the Assisted Housing Initiative offers anecdotal evidence of the profoundly positive impact this program has had (Johnson & Milner, n.d.).

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