



# STUDENT EXIT FROM DETROIT





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## **RESEARCH NOTE**

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## **WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU**

This report provides an overview of student exit, mobility, and absenteeism in Detroit. Our future reports will go deeper into these issues to explore questions that community members need answered to contribute to educational improvement in Detroit. We will provide our interpretation of this research, based on data, studies from other cities, and the historical and contemporary Detroit context. But we are not the only experts. Detroit students, parents, educators, and advocates are in the best position to help us understand what our findings mean and how to act on them in policy and practice. To that end, we want to hear from you. Please go to <http://tinyurl.com/WSU-education-research-survey> to give us your feedback.

## **REFERENCE FOR THIS REPORT**

Lenhoff, S. W., Pogodzinski, B., Singer, J., & Cook, W. (2019). Student Exit, Mobility, and Attendance in Detroit. Retrieved from Wayne State University website: [go.wayne.edu/DetEdResearch](http://go.wayne.edu/DetEdResearch)

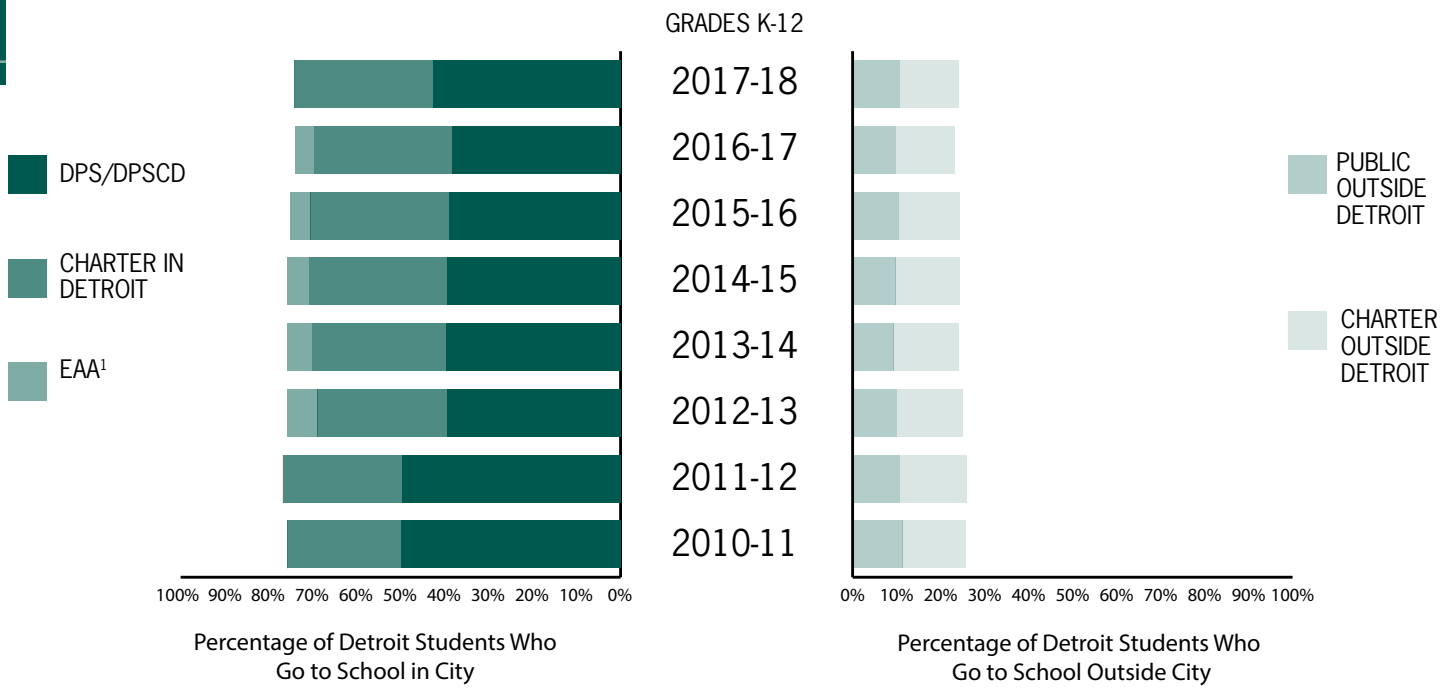


In 2017-18, nearly 26,000 Detroit children - a quarter of the students who live here - attended a traditional public school or charter school in the suburbs. According to Senate Fiscal Agency estimates, that means that upwards of \$205 million of state school funding is following students into other charter and traditional public school districts every year, rather than supporting DPSCD and Detroit charter schools (“Per-pupil foundation allowance ten-year history for schools: FYs 2009-10 through 2018-19 (estimated),” 2018). This creates challenges for local Detroit schools, when fewer than 85,000 K-12 children attend school in a city built for 2 million people. Fixed costs cannot keep up with decreasing enrollments, and the city’s school infrastructure is suffering. In 2018, DPSCD estimated it would take \$500 million just to bring buildings up to current standards. In addition, these high rates of exit suggest that many Detroit families have not found a school in the city that suits their needs, a worrisome trend at a time when city officials hope to entice new residents and retain current families in the city.

Keeping more students in the city for school would bring a host of benefits to the education system, local communities, and students themselves. While previous research has shown that attending a traditional public school outside a residential district does not significantly impact achievement positively or negatively (Cowen & Creed, 2017), there is ample reason to believe that leaving Detroit for school may have negative consequences for students. Research shows that students who attend school farther away or who do not have access to school bus transportation are more likely to be chronically absent (Gottfried, 2017), which has negative consequences for student achievement and socio-emotional outcomes (Gottfried, 2014). In addition, many students who attend school outside Detroit do not stay, either because of the hardships of getting to school, being “pushed out” of suburban schools, or other issues (Cowen, Creed, & Keesler, 2015). This movement back and forth contributes to student mobility, which also has negative consequences for students. Finally, the loss of students from community schools can wreak havoc on local infrastructure and services. Without students, schools are more likely to close, leaving resident students scrambling to find schools that are farther away from home.



**Figure 1:** Student Enrollment in Detroit and Suburban Schools (2010-11 to 2017-18)



## METHODOLOGY

For this analysis, our sample included the 100,288 K-12 children who lived in Detroit in 2017-18 and attended a public school anywhere in the tri-county area. Using student-level data on demographics, residential census block, and school, we estimated the odds that a student attended a school outside Detroit in 2017-18. We modeled a series of logistic regressions with the outcome as “attended school outside Detroit.” In the first model, we estimated the association between student demographics, grade level, and concentration of schools with attending a school outside Detroit. Concentration was measured by calculating the number of schools with a student’s grade level in a 2.5 mile radius from a K-8 student’s home and a 3.5 mile radius from a high school student’s home. We analyzed concentration of schools in Detroit and outside of Detroit. In the second model, we added two neighborhood characteristics – the percentage of residential vacancies and the number of violent crimes. In our final model, we swapped the neighborhood characteristics with variables indicating whether the student had moved the previous year and whether the student had exited Detroit for school the previous year. We present our results as odds ratios, which represent the change in the odds that a student would exit based on a one-standard-deviation increase in the predictor. As shown in Figure 3, odds ratios above 1.0 indicate that the odds of attending a school outside of Detroit are higher, while odds ratios below 1.0 indicate lower odds of attending a school

<sup>1</sup> The Education Achievement Authority (EAA) was a state-run school district that took over some of the lowest performing schools in the state in 2012-13. It was disbanded after the 2016-17 school year.



**Table 1:** Districts Outside Detroit that Enrolled the Largest Number of Detroit Students

District Name	Number of Detroit Students Enrolled
School District of the City of Oak Park	2,476
Chandler Park Academy	1,695
Bradford Academy	1,034
Advanced Technology Academy	1,006
School District of the City of River Rouge	846
Washington-Parks Academy	695
Conner Creek Academy East	617
Crescent Academy	606
School District of the City of Hazel Park	589

outside Detroit. Full results of our models can be found in the technical appendix.

### STUDENT EXIT FROM DETROIT

Since at least as far back as 2010-11, about a quarter of public school students who lived in Detroit attended school in the suburbs (see Figure 1). In 2017-18, 11% of Detroit students enrolled in a traditional district (e.g., Oak Park or River Rouge) and 14% enrolled in a charter school district outside the city (e.g., Chandler Park Academy or Bradford Academy). Table 1 shows the districts outside Detroit that enrolled the largest number of Detroit students.

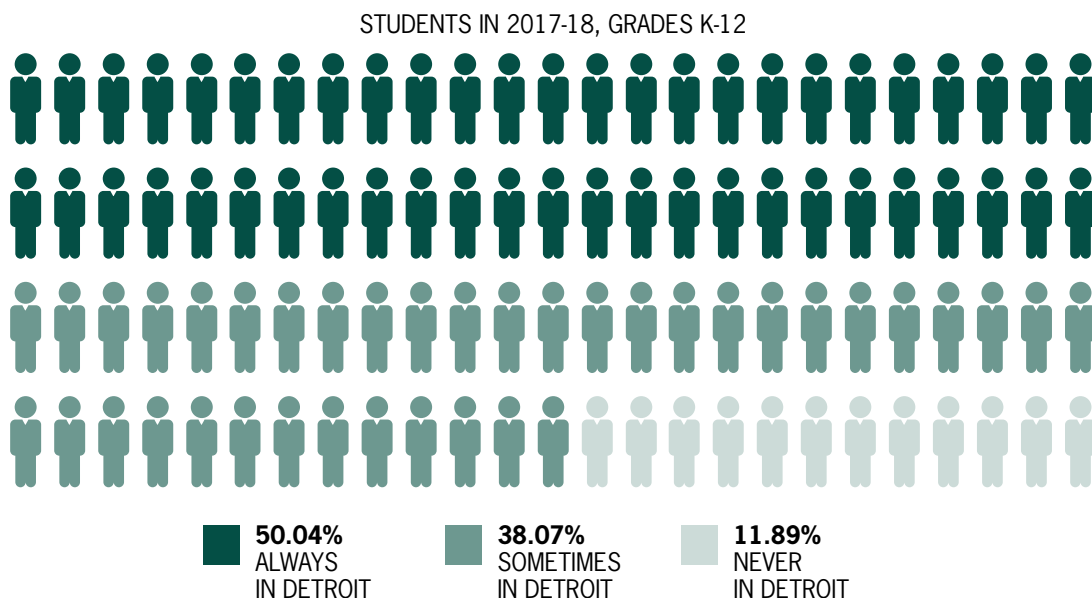
More than half of the students who went to school outside Detroit in 2017-18 had attended a city school in a previous year, and about 33% of students who went to school in Detroit had previously attended school elsewhere. This suggests that many families are switching between city and suburban schools over time. In fact, just 11% of the students who went to school in the suburbs in 2017-18 had never enrolled in a city school (see Figure 2).

Ninth grade is an important year for movement into and out of city schools. About 6% of ninth graders switched from a Detroit school to a suburban school

<p>ABOUT</p> <p><b>6%</b></p> <p><b>OF NINTH GRADERS</b></p> <p>SWITCHED <b>FROM</b> A DETROIT SCHOOL <b>TO</b> A SUBURBAN SCHOOL BETWEEN EIGHTH AND NINTH GRADES,</p>	<p>WHILE</p> <p><b>14%</b></p> <p><b>OF NINTH GRADERS</b></p> <p>SWITCHED <b>FROM</b> A SUBURBAN SCHOOL <b>TO</b> A DETROIT SCHOOL.</p>
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**Figure 2:** Percentage of Detroit Students Who Were Always, Sometimes, or Never Enrolled in a City School



between eighth and ninth grades, while 14% of ninth graders switched from a suburban school to a Detroit school. This suggests that the transition to high school may be an important time in students' lives, where more or higher quality school options could motivate families to stay in the city for school. As we show in our mobility analysis, once students are in tenth grade, they are much less likely to switch schools. Therefore, our research suggests that, if students enroll in a city school for ninth grade, no matter where they enrolled previously, they are likely to remain in a city school until graduation.

The highest percentages of students who exit the city for school live on the borders of the city and in the northwest. Many of the students in these areas live closer to suburban schools than they do city schools. This is indicative of both suburban school locations and, in some communities, a lack of access to Detroit schools near where they live. In fact, one recurring pattern we found in our research is that students have inequitable access to schools near their homes. Students with higher concentrations of schools in Detroit near their homes were less likely to have attended a school outside the city.

Comparing Brightmoor and Brush Park is an illustrative example of this problem. On one hand, just 66 students lived in Brush Park in fall 2017. Yet, these 66 students had, on average, 16.18 schools within their residential radius<sup>1</sup> (see

<sup>1</sup> Residential radius is defined as within 2.5 miles from a K-8 student's home and within 3.5 miles from a high school student's home.



**Figure 3:** Neighborhood Comparison of Ratio of Students to Schools

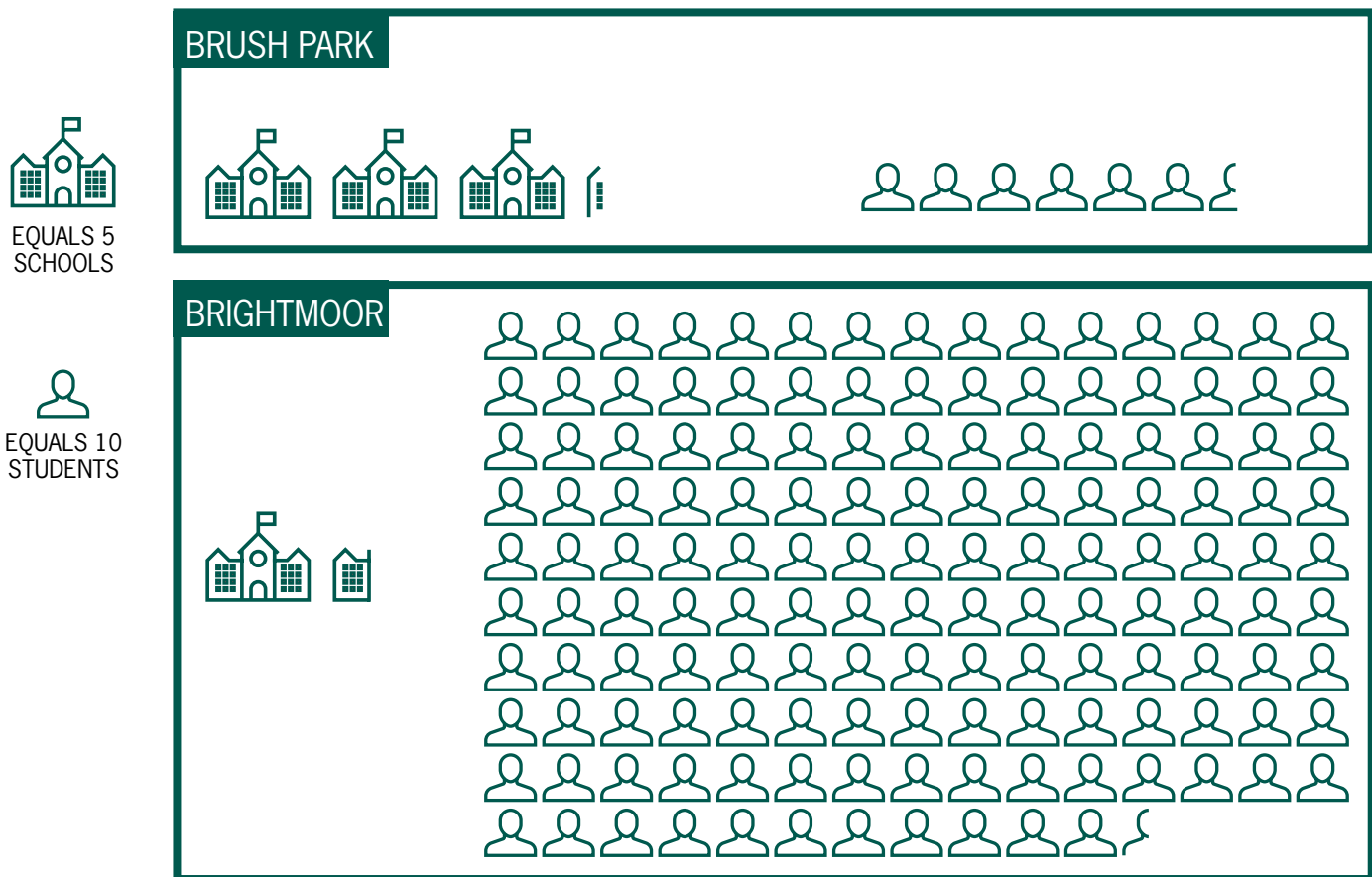


Figure 3). On the other hand, there were 1,463 students living in Brightmoor in fall 2017, but these students had an average of 5.39 schools within their residential radius. The maps in Figures 4 and 5 illustrate what our data tell us - there are more schools where fewer students live, and the fewest schools where most students live. Twenty-one percent of the students who lived in Brightmoor attended school outside the city in 2017-18.

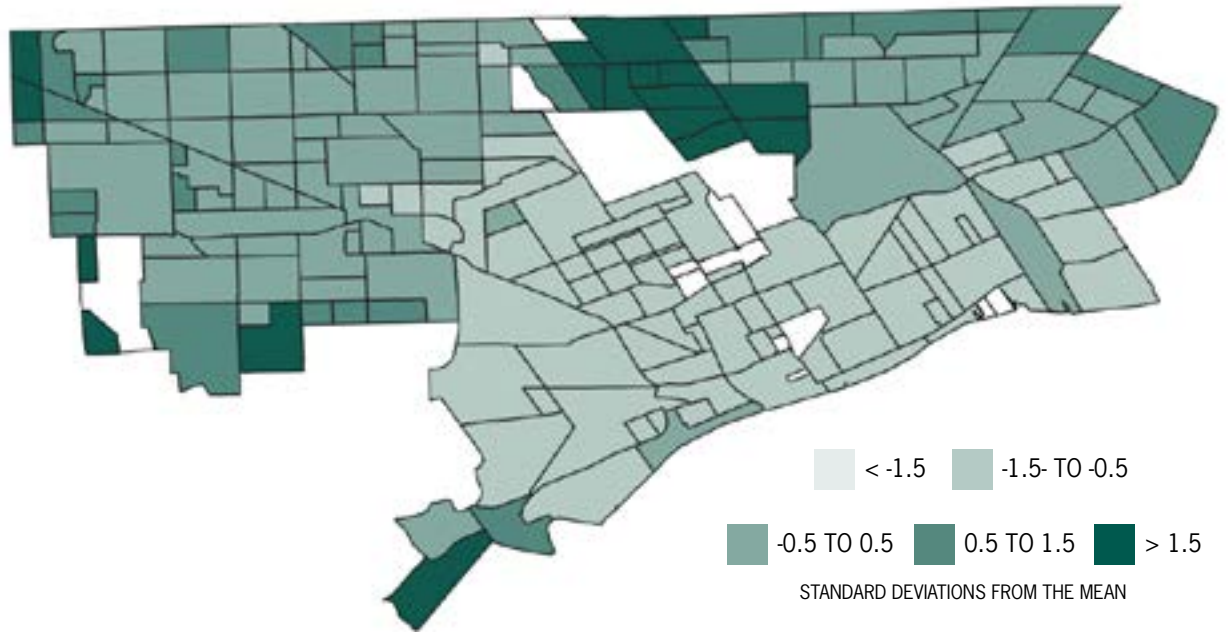
Students who exited lived in neighborhoods where, on average, about 35% of students went to school outside the city. This suggests that student exiting is clustered by neighborhood and may be influenced by peers. That is, if many students in the same neighborhood attended school outside Detroit, that may influence others in the neighborhood to do the same.

### **FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EXIT**

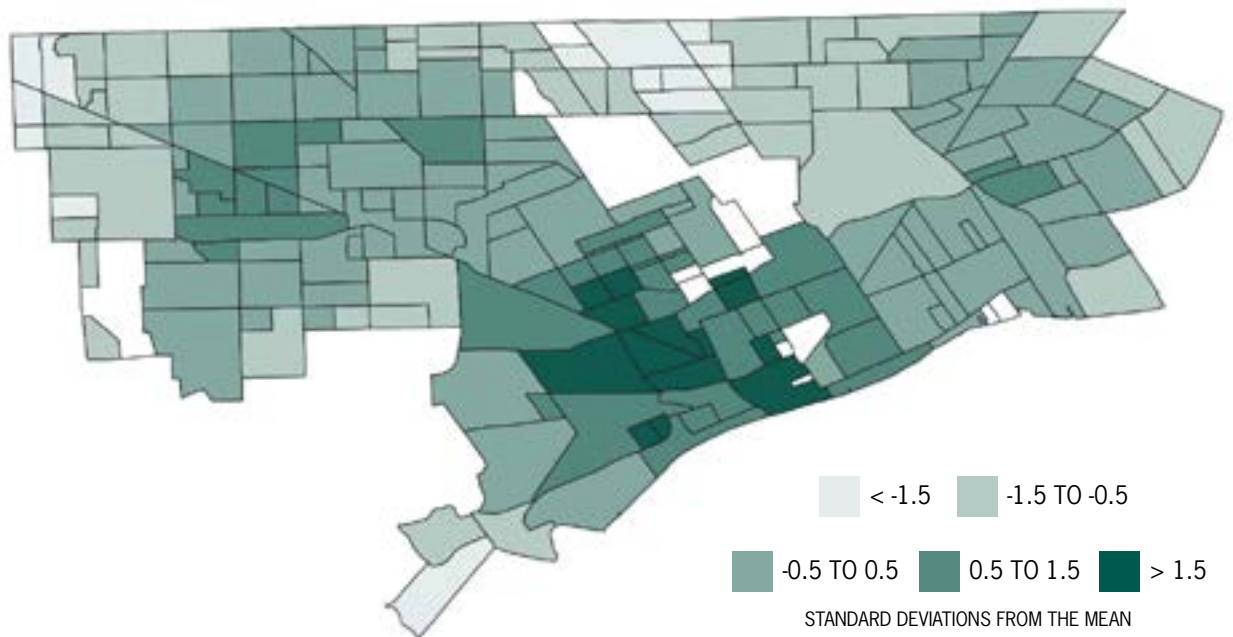
The neighborhoods with the highest numbers and rates of exit were those to the northeast of Hamtramck (e.g., Buffalo, Banglatown, and North Campau) and those bordering Dearborn (e.g., Warren Ave Community and Warrendale). These neighborhoods were also demographically different than most of the city,



**Figure 4:** Percentage of Detroit Students Who Attended School in the Suburbs by Neighborhood



**Figure 5:** Average Number of Detroit Schools in Student Residential Radius by Neighborhood

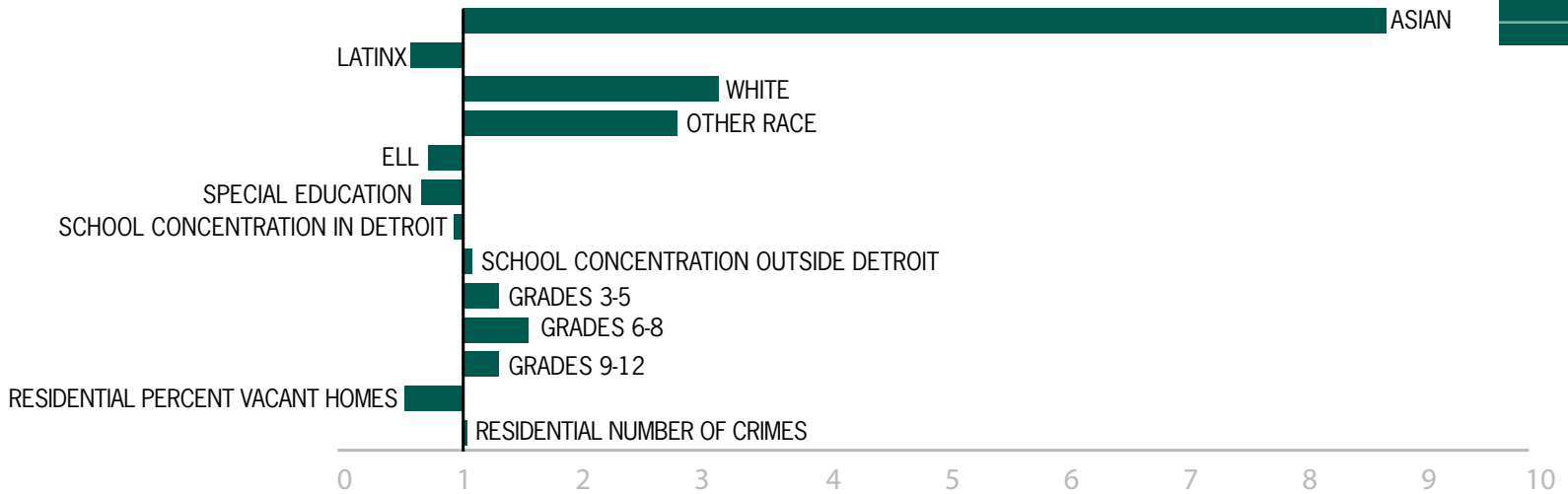


with disproportionately more Asian and White/Arabic students. Across all our analyses, Asian, White, and Other Race students had higher odds of exit, and Latinx students had lower odds of exit, than Black students. Economically disadvantaged students had slightly higher odds of exit, but only when controlling for residential mobility and prior year exit.





**Figure 6:** Odds Ratios for Attending a School Outside Detroit



**Note:** This is a graphical representation of the odds ratios for exiting Detroit for school in 2017-18. Only the statistically significant variables ( $p < 0.001$ ) from Model 2 are displayed. Full regression output for Models 1, 2, and 3 can be found in the technical appendix. Race variables are in comparison to Black students.

Students with higher numbers of schools in their residential radius that were in Detroit had lower odds of exit, while students with higher numbers of schools in their residential radius outside Detroit had higher odds of exit. When looking at the residential neighborhood models, we found that students who lived in neighborhoods with more housing vacancies were less likely to leave, perhaps because of compounding factors related to poverty. Students who lived in neighborhoods with more crimes, however, were more likely to have attended school outside the city. This pattern may reflect families’ concerns over safety if their children were to attend school in their neighborhoods.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS



- Most students who attended school outside Detroit had attended school in the city in a previous year.
- More than 20% of ninth graders either entered or exited the city between 8th and 9th grades.
- Students who had higher numbers of schools in their residential radius in Detroit had lower odds of attending school outside the city.
- Neighborhood conditions, such as vacancies and crime, may influence families’ decisions to leave the city for school.



## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

These initial takeaways indicate potential policy implications that community members, school leaders, and government officials may want to consider:

- Many families move in and out of Detroit schools over time, indicating that recruitment and retention strategies may be effective at bringing families back to the city and retaining them. These strategies might include measures to improve neighborhood safety.
- When deciding where to open new schools or close buildings, it's important to consider areas of the city that have high numbers of students but lower numbers of schools accessible to them.
- Many families make big changes when their students move from 8th to 9th grade. School leaders may want to take advantage of this time by creating more high quality high schools in more areas of the city, actively recruiting 8th graders to return to the city for high school, or developing clearer feeder patterns from 8th grade to city high schools.



## FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study revealed broad patterns in exit from Detroit in the most recent school year, but it also inspired more questions about why and to what ends Detroit students attend school in the suburbs. Our future research may address the following:

- How do Detroit students perform academically over time after enrolling in a suburban school?
- What are the qualities of the schools Detroit students attend outside the city?
- What factors contribute to students switching between city and suburban schools over time?
- Is there a relationship between student exit and residential exit from the city?