Preschool And Kindergarten Accessibility In Somerville, MA

INTRODUCTION

The city of Somerville is home to more than 75,000 people. According to the US census, 14.8% of Somerville residents were under the poverty line by the end of 2011 (compared to 10.7% of all people in Massachusetts). People who are raised in poverty, face increased likelihood of being below the poverty line as adults. This disparity between outcomes for children from low-income families and their peers from higher income families is commonly referred to as the achievement gap.

Studies have shown that high-quality preschool programs have the potential to close this achievement gap by improving economic and educational outcomes for children born into poverty. There are roughly 3,500 children in Somerville, who come from many different socioeconomic backgrounds, and as a result have many different levels of access to high-quality early childhood education.

METHODS

In order to determine the accessibility of preschool and Kindergarten programs in Somerville, seven social, economic, and spatial factors were taken into consideration. The factors examined included the existing schools in Somerville, the status of the school as public, private, or charter, the public bus routes and stops, the location of public housing developments, the percent of non-English speaking households in census block, the percent of low-income families by census block, and the percent of people under 18 years of age by census block. The public housing development layer was derived from address information given on the Somerville Housing Authority website, under the "Family & Individual Housing" section. All other layers were found on MassGIS.

This project aims to determine the accessibility of Somerville’s existing preschool and Kindergarten programs for families living in poverty in the city of Somerville. Poverty is found more in some communities than others; for example non-English speaking immigrants, communities of color, women (specifically single mothers), and undocumented people are more likely to be living in poverty. Poverty is also correlated with restricted mobility, and increased dependence on public transportation. For these reasons, accessibility of a school was defined along terms of proximity to public housing for families, proximity to bus stops, and situation near or within communities that are more likely to experience poverty. If the accessibility problems that exist within the Somerville preschool and Kindergarten can be identified and solved, then children in Somerville will face less risk of continued poverty over several generations.

PROJECT RESULTS

According to this model, the most accessible school that provides preschool and Kindergarten programming is the Arthur D. Healey School in the Ten Hills neighborhood of East Somerville. This was the only school within 1,000 feet of family public housing, and, although it is not within 500 feet of a bus stop, it is only 150 feet beyond the buffer. Fifty-eight percent of households in the census block are non-English speaking and 51% of households are low-income. Importantly, the Healey is located in the census block that has the most children in Somerville by nearly 300 children. The next most child-populous census block is adjacent, and is also served by the Healey School.

A school that is somewhat inaccessible to families in poverty in Somerville is the West Somerville Neighborhood School. Despite being a public school, which is important, the West Somerville Neighborhood School is located in a census block that only has 50 people under the age of 18. It is not within 500 feet of a bus stop and it is more than 1,000 feet from the nearest public housing development (Clarendon Hill). The St. Catherine of Genoa School is even less accessible low-income families due to its status as a private school. The St. Catherine School is outside of both the bus and public housing buffer. Families in poverty rely on financial aid and private busing to access private education institutions like this one.

CONCLUSIONS & SUGGESTIONS

The results of this project indicate that there are some schools that are accessible to Somerville’s low-income families. The Healey is a heartening example of a school offering preschool and Kindergarten services in the right place at the right time. However, it is apparent that some schools in Somerville offer preschool and Kindergarten programming that is inaccessible. More research could be done to see what the individual fixes are that less accessible schools probably employ. Schools like the West Somerville Neighborhood School could employ a small scale bus service for their smallest students to fix proximity issues. Schools like the St. Catherine of Genoa School, which fail to help low-income families for multiple reasons require more complicated solutions.

REFERENCES

Cartographer: Miles Grover
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Illustrations by Dr. Seuss from “Oh The Places You’ll Go” and “Horton Hears A Who”