

Identifying “Neighborhood School Zones” Utilizing Community-based Indicators

Introduction

Throughout the United States, educational outcomes for many public school students, particularly minority students living in large U.S. cities, are unacceptably low. By most traditional measures of academic success such as standardized test scores, graduation rates and college completion rates, urban schools have continued to under-perform compared to their private- and sub-urban- school counterparts.

In response, there have been a variety of responses to the issue of educational inequity. Since 1955, there has been an increasing push towards the use of market-based mechanism to improve school improvement. Much of this reform is based on enhancing parents’ and families’ access to information about given schools’ performance. Traditional factors in “determining parents’ criteria [for] selecting the suitable public school to enroll their children include... location, distance, school facilities, school academic performance, extra-curricular and school environment.” For many, the emphasis on *improved school* solutions divorces the realities of neighborhoods and places which students experience everyday traveling to and fro. As such, many of the new reform efforts seek to capitalize on “the obvious synergies between school improvement and neighborhood revitalization”.

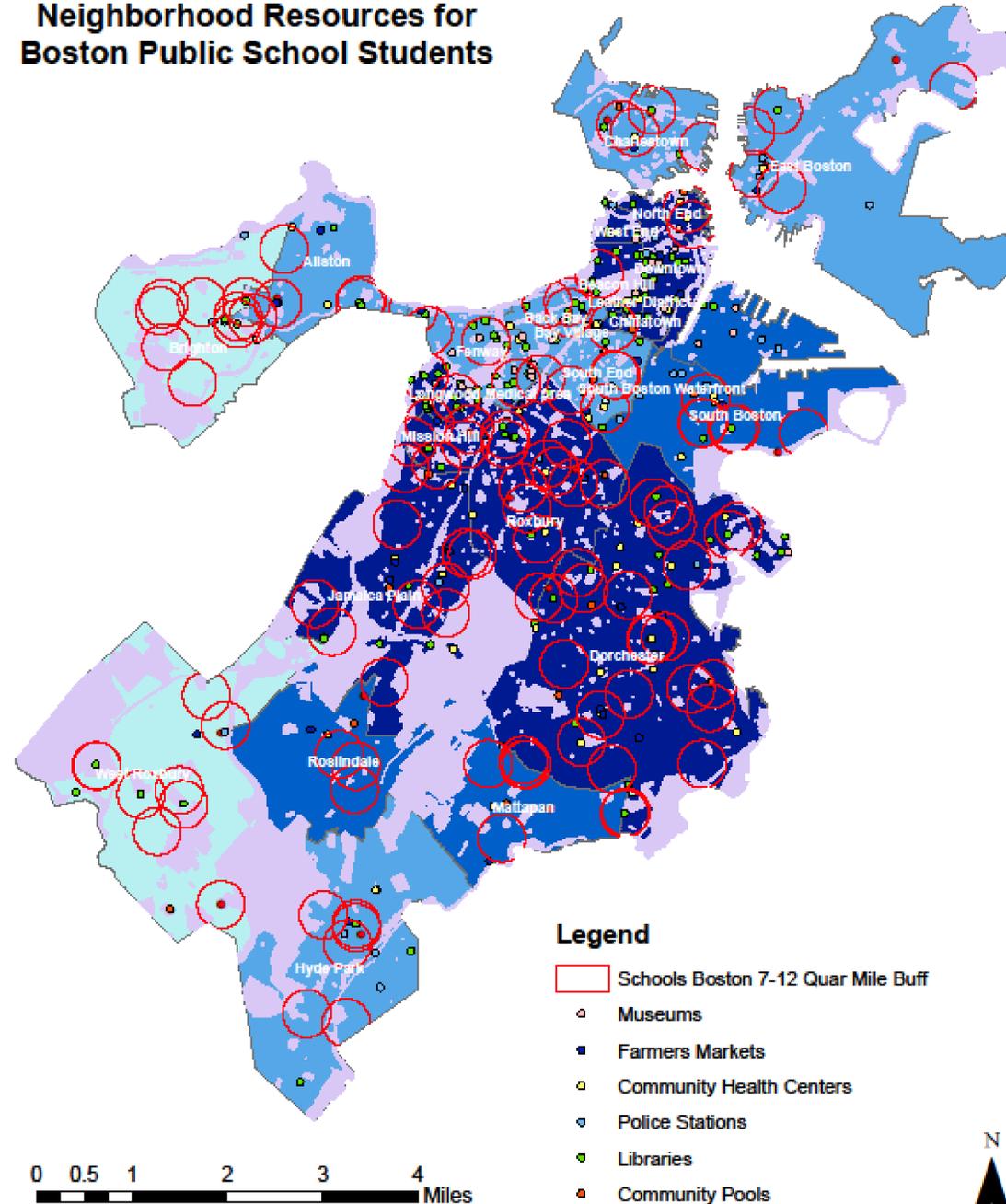
The Boston Public School’s new assignment system has placed a focus on “neighborhood schools,” supporting students attending schools in their communities. While this is a laudable effort, in principal, it also means that “students living in the city’s [most] segregated and impoverished neighborhoods will often lose access to better schools in other neighborhoods and that the students in more affluent neighborhoods will have an unchallenged right to those schools.”

Approach

Traditionally, “the factors influencing [school] choice tend to produce a reasonably common set of criteria considered important by many parents.” Many of these are “internal factors” such as discipline, a wide choice of subjects, [strong test] results, and able, caring teachers... While these internal characteristics of schools have been well-documented and discussed, this project seeks to outline and examine the characteristics of “school neighborhood” for Boston Public School students. School neighborhoods are defined through a composite set of indicators and infrastructure for areas immediately surrounding schools. This builds on the work of the Urban Institute and many others’ understanding that “where children live plays a central role in determining their life chances.”

This project touches lightly on the important work of understanding the complex, “multiple dimensions of the broader community” as selection criteria for parents and families related to school choice.

Neighborhood Resources for Boston Public School Students



Cartographer: Marc H. Germain, UEP-232 Introduction to GIS
Urban + Environmental Planning + Policy
Date: December 12, 2014
Data Sources: MassGIS, City of Boston Data Portal, Boston Public Schools, Boston Police Department
Projection: NAD_1983_StatePlane_Massachusetts_Mainland_FIPS_2001 (Meters)

