

SECTION IV.

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

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This section examines the extent to which members of protected classes experience disparities in access to opportunity measured by access to healthy neighborhoods, education, employment, and transportation. The analysis includes HUD opportunity indicators, local and regional needs assessment and other quality of life reports, and findings from the community engagement process. Community engagement participants shared their experiences and perspectives related to indicators of healthy neighborhoods and measures of access to opportunity, including quality schools, transportation and employment. The analysis also incorporated key findings from pertinent local studies, including the 2019 CAN Dashboard, the 2019 Williamson County Community Health Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER), the 2017 Central Health Demographic Report, and the 2015 Southeast Georgetown Needs Assessment.

HUD Opportunity Indicators

HUD provides several “opportunity indices” to assess and measure access to opportunity in a variety of areas, including education, poverty, transportation, and employment. The opportunity indices allow comparison of data indicators by race and ethnicity, for households below the poverty line, between jurisdictions, and for the region overall. They are also a good starting point for the opportunity analysis, identifying areas that should be examined in more detail.

HUD indices were available for all jurisdictions covered in this study with the exception of Georgetown, for which HUD does not report data.¹

The HUD opportunity tables—specifically the following six indices in the tables—were the starting point for this Access to Opportunity analysis.

To interpret these indices, use the following rule: a higher number is always a better outcome. The indices should be thought of as an “opportunity score”, rather than a percentage.

¹ Data for Travis and Williamson counties include all parts of each county that are not direct recipients of HUD funding, therefore including the populations of Austin, Pflugerville, and Round Rock. These balance-of-county areas are referred to as “CDBG Service Areas” in this report.

The indices include the:

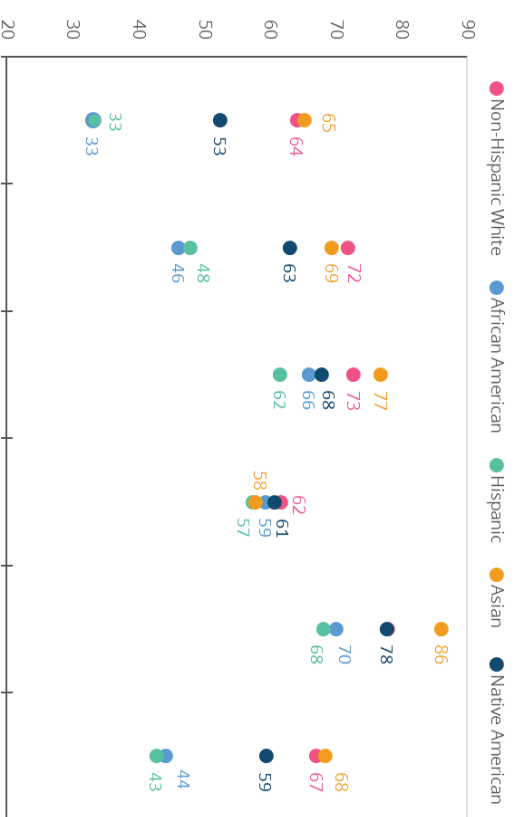
- **Low Poverty Index.** This index measures neighborhood exposure to poverty, with proximity to low poverty areas considered to be an advantage. Higher index scores suggest better access to economically strong (i.e. low poverty) neighborhoods.
- **School Proficiency Index.** This index measures neighborhood access to elementary schools with high levels of academic proficiency within 1.5 miles. Proficiency is measured by 4th grade scores on state-administered math and science tests. HUD uses elementary school scores only for this index because they are typically more reflective of school quality and access at the neighborhood level. Middle and high schools draw from larger boundaries and, especially in high school, have more transportation options.
- **Labor Market Engagement Index.** This index measures the employability of neighborhood residents based on unemployment, labor force participation, and educational attainment. Higher index scores suggest residents are more engaged in the labor market.
- **Jobs Proximity Index.** The jobs proximity index indicates how close residents live to major employment centers. The higher the index, the greater the access to nearby employment centers for residents in the area.
- **Transit Index.** The transit index measures use of public transit by low income families that rent. The higher the index, the more likely that residents in the area are frequent users of public transportation.
- **Low Cost Transportation Index.** This index measures the cost of transportation, based on estimates of the transportation costs for low income families that rent. Higher index values suggest more affordable transportation.

Low poverty index. Figures IV-1a and IV-1b present the values of the low poverty index for each jurisdiction by race and ethnicity. The panel on the left shows the index for the total community population, while the panel on the right is restricted to residents with incomes below the poverty level. As shown, in all communities except Pflugerville, access to low poverty neighborhoods varies by race and ethnicity. The disparity in access is most striking in the City of Austin, where non-Hispanic White and Asian residents are nearly twice as likely to live in low poverty neighborhoods than African American and Hispanic households. Disparities by race and ethnicity persist and, in the case of Williamson County, widen, even when the population is limited to only those households below the poverty line. This means that, in Travis County, for example, non-Hispanic White residents in poverty are more likely to live in low poverty neighborhoods than Asian, African American, Hispanic and Native American residents who are also in poverty.

**Figure IV-1a.
Low Poverty Index,
Total Population**

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

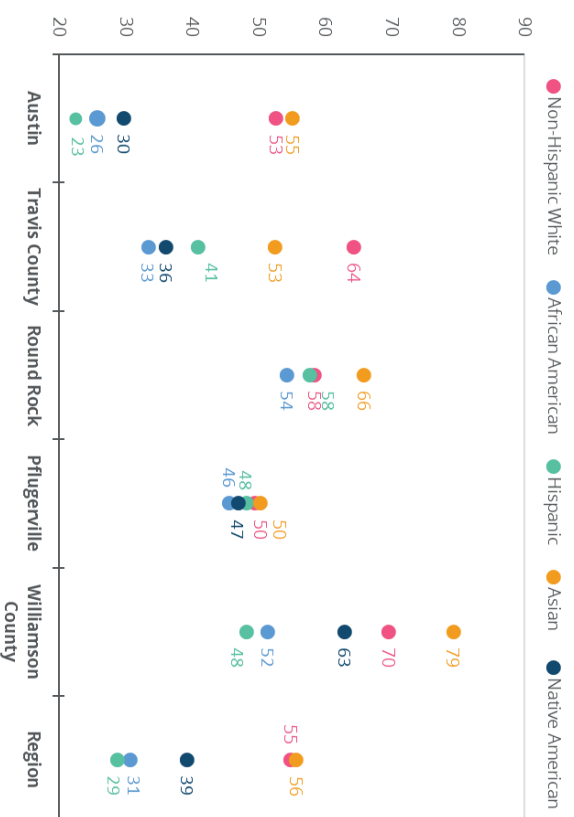
Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Low Poverty Index.



**Figure IV-1b.
Low Poverty Index,
Population Below
the Poverty Line**

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Low Poverty Index.



School proficiency index.

Figures IV-2a and IV-2b present the values of the school proficiency index for each jurisdiction by race and ethnicity. Similar to the low poverty index, there are disparities in access to proficient schools by race and ethnicity, and the difference in access varies by community. On average, Pflugerville residents are somewhat less likely to have access to proficient schools, but there are not meaningful differences by race or ethnicity, although the access gap does widen somewhat among residents in poverty. Access to proficient schools for Native American residents in poverty drops significantly in all communities, compared to access for the total population. Hispanic and African American residents in Austin and Travis County are much less likely to have access to proficient schools than non-Hispanic White and Asian residents.

Figure IV-2a.
School Proficiency Index, Total Population

Note:
Higher scores indicate greater likelihood of access to proficient schools.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, School Proficiency Index.

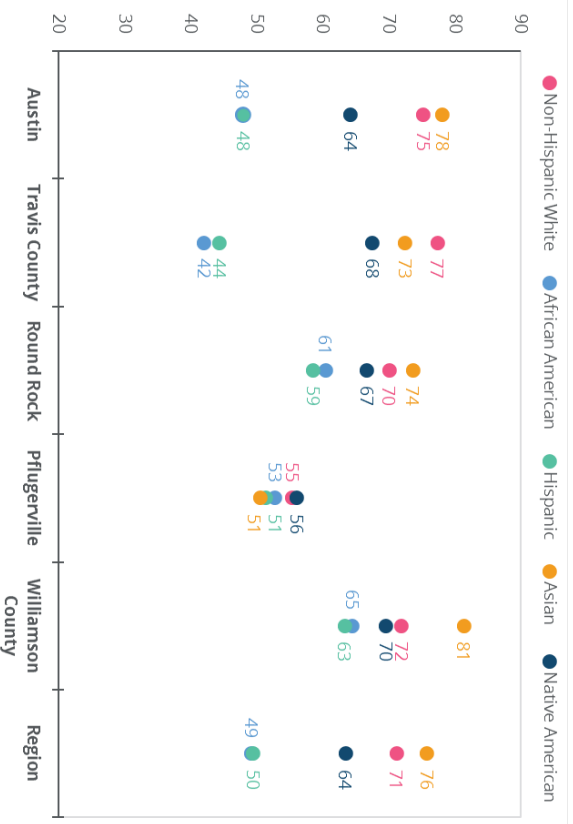
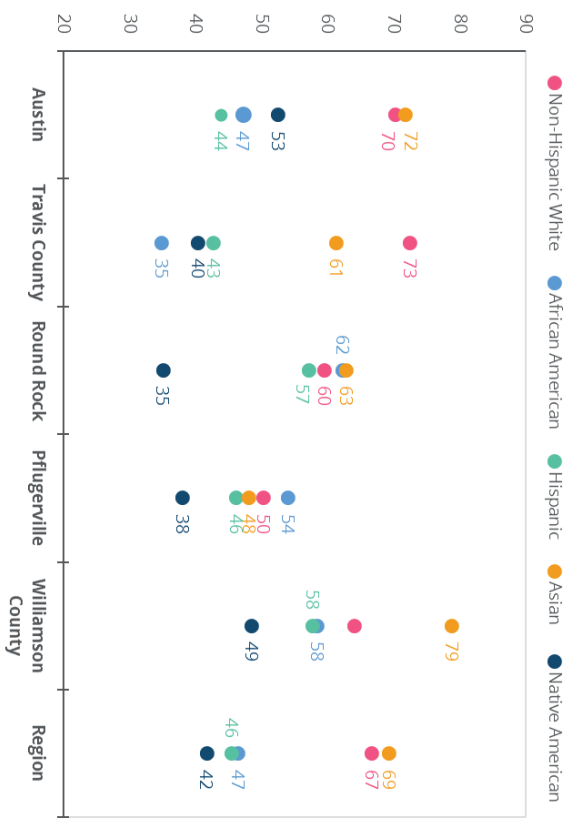


Figure IV-2b.
School Proficiency Index, Population Below the Poverty Line

Note:
Higher scores indicate greater likelihood of access to proficient schools.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, School Proficiency Index.



Labor market engagement index.

Figures IV-3a and IV-3b present the values of the labor market engagement index for each jurisdiction by race and ethnicity. Pflugerville residents' likelihood of labor engagement is relatively high and does not vary much by race or ethnicity; the same is true in Round Rock, but with slightly lower likelihood of labor market engagement by Hispanic residents and slightly higher among Asian residents. Among the total population, African American and Hispanic residents are least likely to be in the labor market, and the disparity is especially pronounced in Austin, Travis County, and to a lesser extent in Williamson County.

Figure IV-3a.

Labor Market Engagement Index, Total Population

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Labor Market Engagement Index



Figure IV-3b.

Labor Market Engagement Index, Population Below the Poverty Line

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Labor Market Engagement Index



Job proximity index. Figures IV-4a and IV-4b present the values of the job proximity index for each jurisdiction by race and ethnicity. Not surprisingly, Austin residents overall are more likely to have access to major employment centers than other residents, but there are disparities within Austin by race and ethnicity, although not as sizeable as in previous indicators. The odds of living near major employment centers is fairly similar for residents of Travis County, Round Rock, Pflugerville, and Williamson County, and differences by race and ethnicity are not significant. However, when looking just at residents in poverty, Native American residents of Travis County, Pflugerville, and Williamson County have much lower access to employment centers, but much higher access in Round Rock. Disparities by race and ethnicity also widened among the lowest income populations in Williamson County.

Figure IV-4a.
Job Proximity Index, Total Population

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Job Proximity Index.

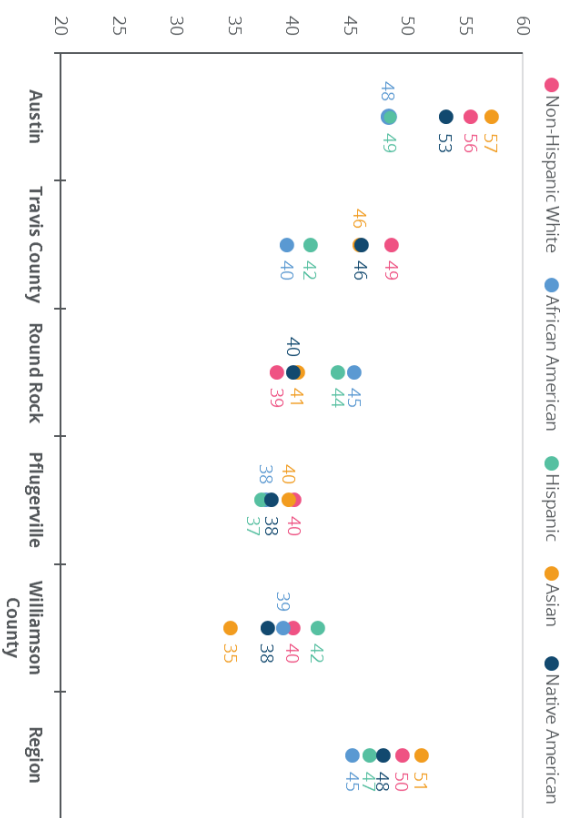


Figure IV-4b.
Job Proximity Index, Population Below the Poverty Line

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Job Proximity Index.



Transit index. Figures IV-5a and IV-5b present the values of the transit index for each jurisdiction by race and ethnicity. The likelihood of transit use is highest in Austin and there are no meaningful differences by race or ethnicity within the jurisdictions. When examined for residents in poverty, the transit index values shift somewhat, but the general patterns of likelihood of transit use remain. That Austin's scores are highest is not surprising, since Austin has the most well-developed transit system in the region.

Figure IV-5a. Transit Index, Total Population

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Transit Index.

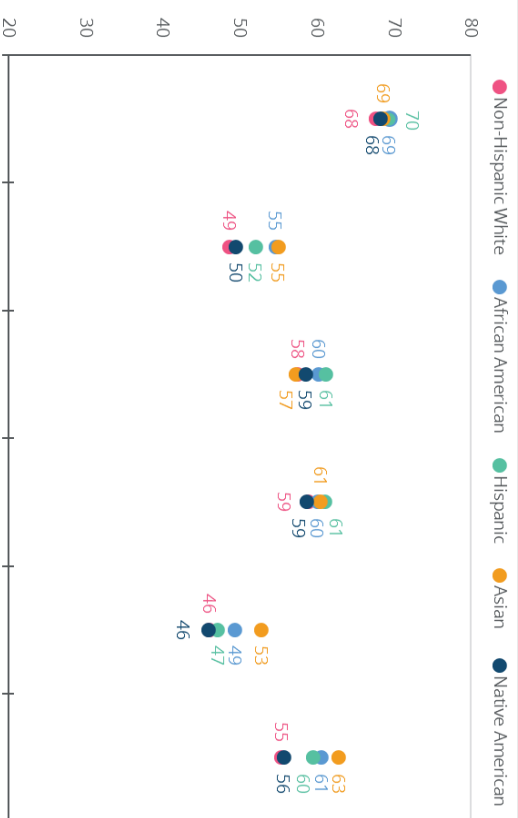
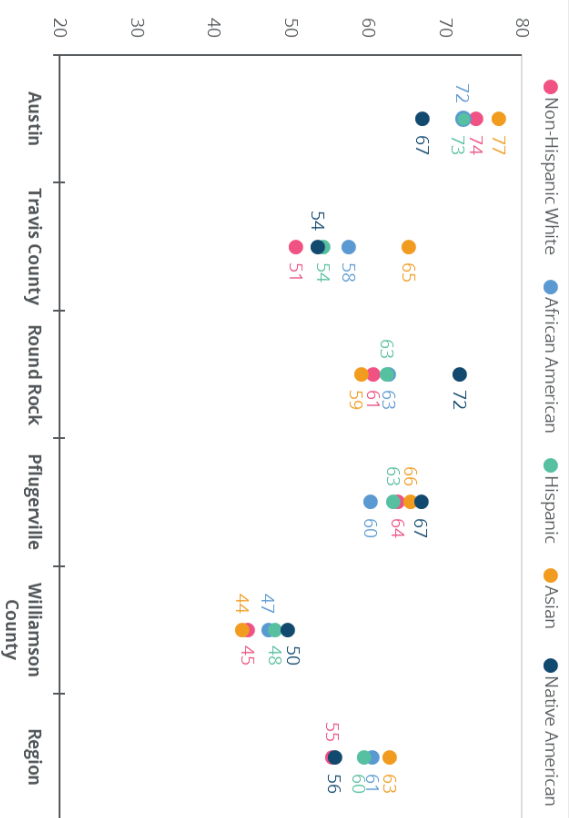


Figure IV-5b. Transit Index, Population Below the Poverty Line

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Transit Index.



Low cost transportation index

Figures IV-6a and 6b present the values of the low cost transportation index for each jurisdiction by race and ethnicity. Low cost transportation index scores vary by jurisdiction but there are not meaningful differences by race or ethnicity with respect to access to low cost transportation for the total population. When examined through the lens of poverty, scores for Native American residents of Travis County fall and rise for Asian residents. In Round Rock, Native American's likelihood of accessing low cost transportation increases compared to other residents in poverty; in other communities, scores changed only slightly.

Figure IV-6a.

Low Cost Transportation Index, Total Population

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Low Cost Transportation Index.

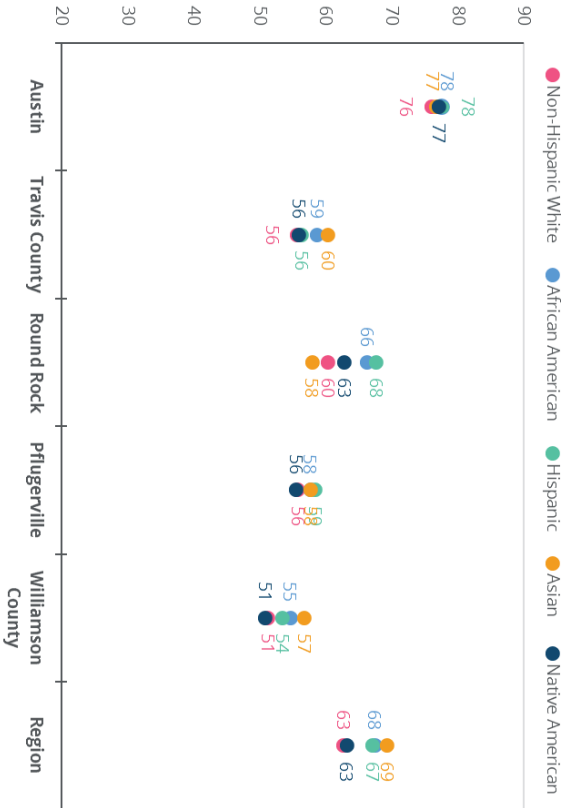


Figure IV-6b.

Low Cost Transportation Index, Population Below the Poverty Line

Note:
Higher numbers indicate greater access to high poverty neighborhoods.

Source:
Root Policy Research from the HUD AFFH-T Table 12, Opportunity Indicators by Race and Ethnicity, Low Cost Transportation Index.

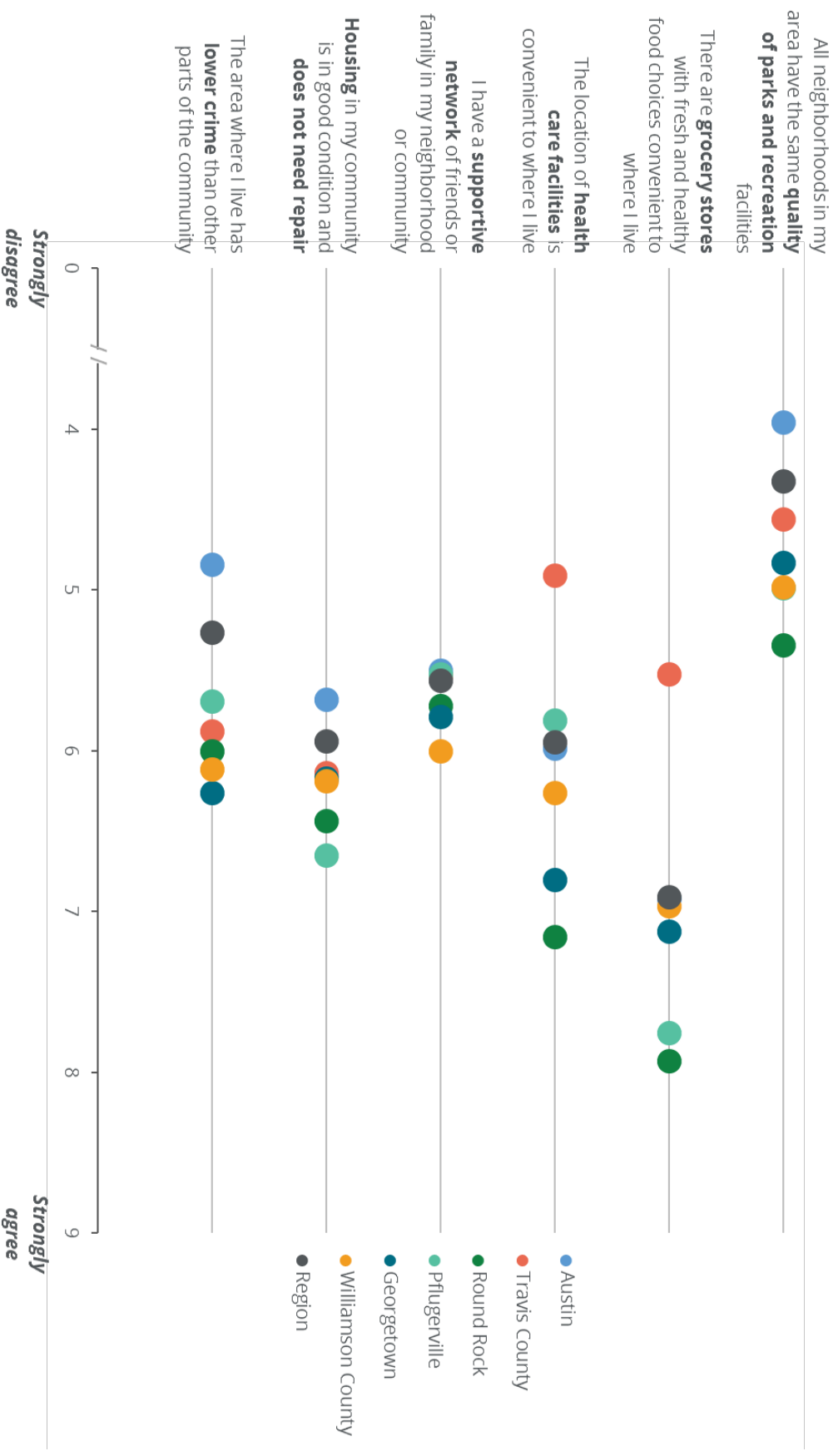


Healthy Neighborhoods

This section discusses findings from local studies of community and neighborhood health as well as results from the community engagement process with a focus on disparities in access to opportunity for members of protected classes.

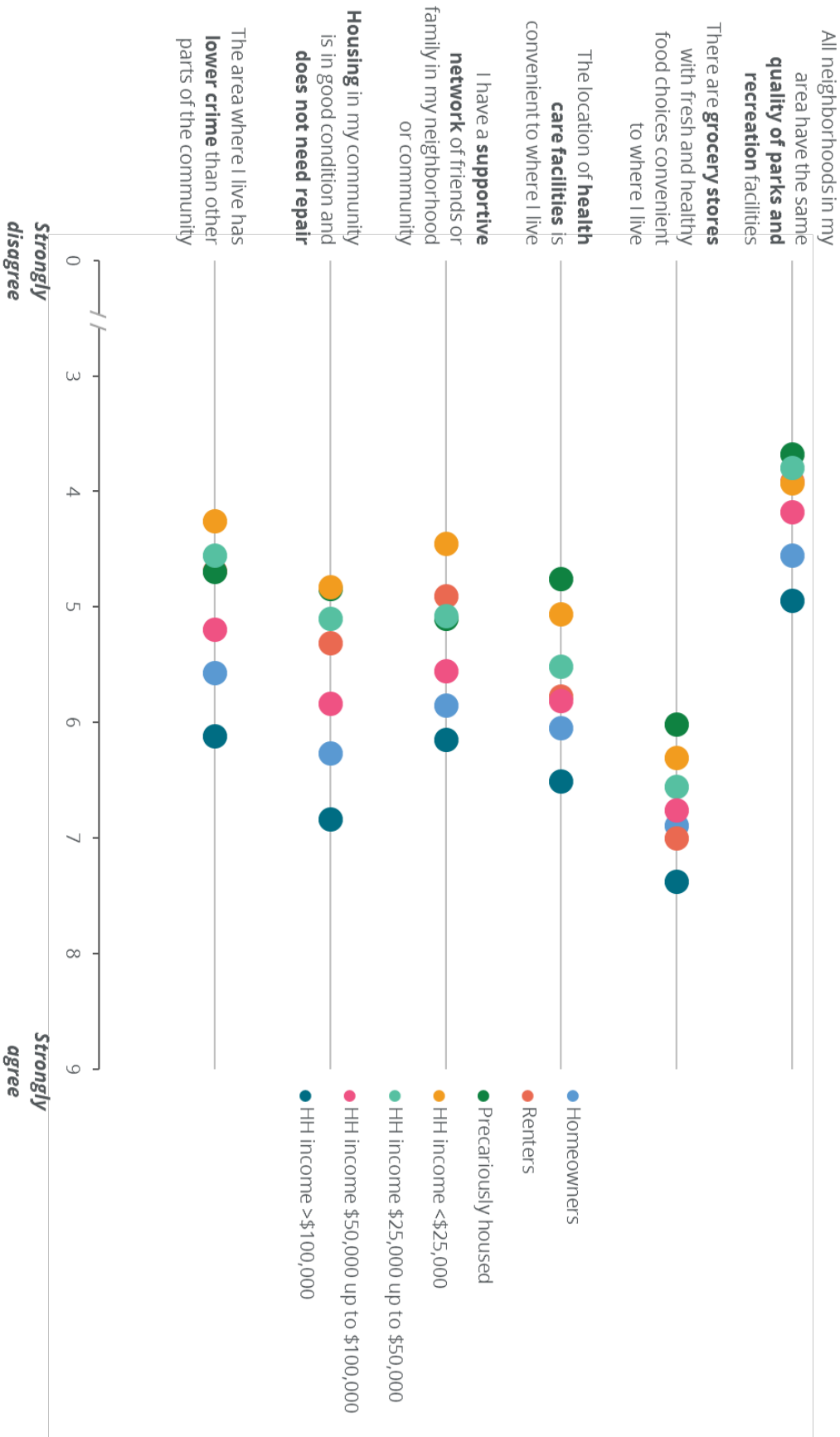
Healthy neighborhood indicators. Respondents to the 2018 Central Texas Fair Housing Survey indicated their level of agreement with a series of healthy neighborhood indicators. Figures IV-7 through IV-9 present average ratings by jurisdiction, housing tenure (renter or owner), income, and for members of selected protected classes. Healthy neighborhood indicators measured in the resident survey include the relative quality of parks and recreation facilities among neighborhoods, convenient access to grocery stores and health care facilities, having a supportive network of friends or family, neighborhood housing condition, and crime. In addition to these indicators of healthy neighborhoods, focus group participants discussed the quality of public infrastructure in their neighborhood.

Figure IV-7.
Resident Perspectives on Healthy Neighborhood Indicators, by Jurisdiction and Selected Characteristics



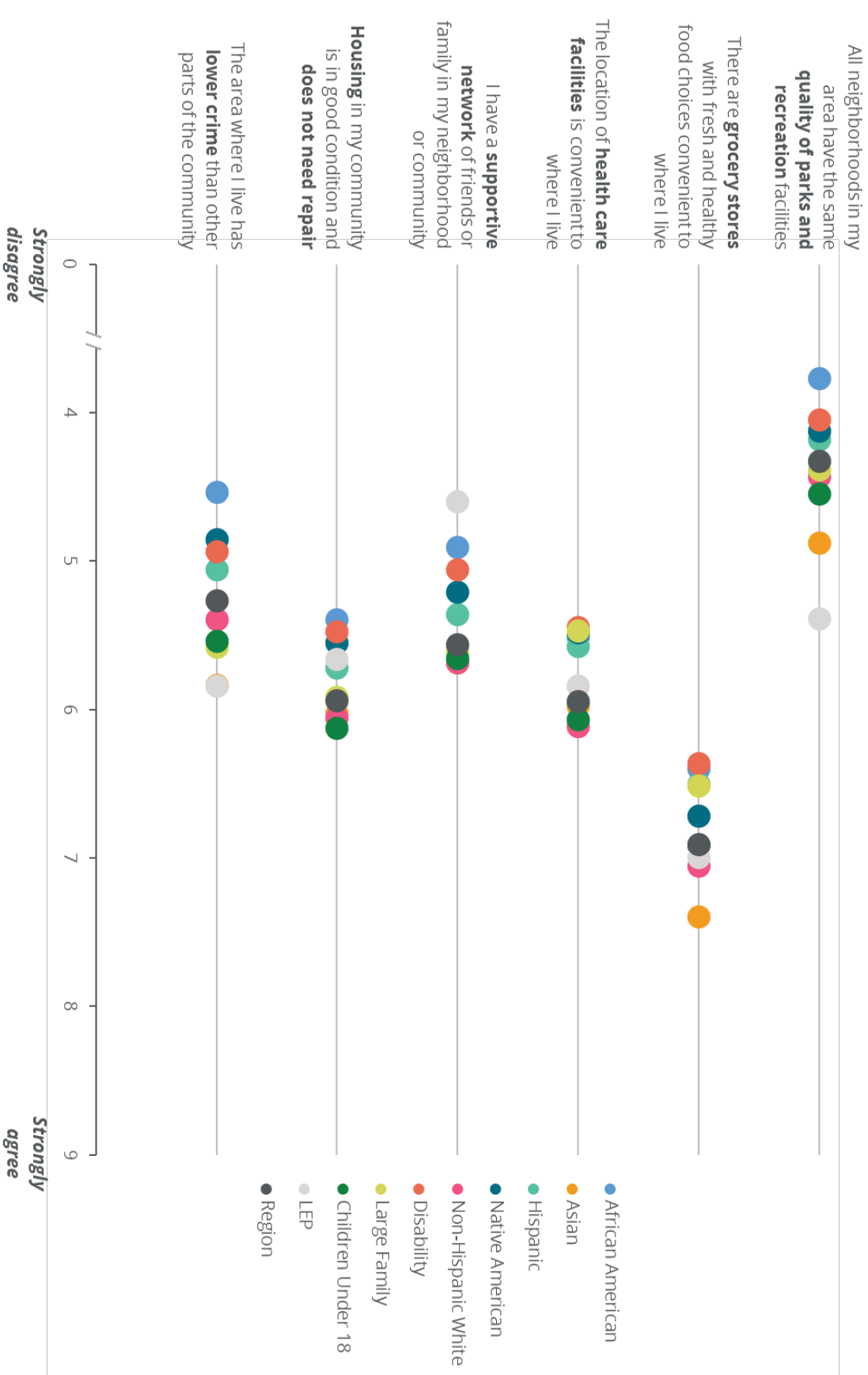
Source: Root Policy Research from the 2018 Central Texas Fair Housing Survey.

Figure IV-8.
Resident Perspectives on Healthy Neighborhood Indicators, by Tenure and Income



Source: Root Policy Research from the 2018 Central Texas Fair Housing Survey.

Figure IV-9. Resident Perspectives on Healthy Neighborhood Indicators, by Selected Protected Classes



Source: Root Policy Research from the 2018 Central Texas Fair Housing Survey.

Quality of parks and recreation facilities. Regionally, residents somewhat disagree with the statement that *all neighborhoods in my area have the same quality of parks and recreation facilities*. Austin residents were least likely to agree, and Round Rock residents were most likely to agree. Agreement with this statement varied little by housing situation and income, with homeowners and high income households being somewhat more likely to think park and recreation facility quality is the same throughout their community. With the exception of respondents with LEP, members of protected classes had similar opinions of the quality of park and recreation facilities across their community; in general, their disagreement with the indicator suggests that they, like residents across the region, perceive differences in park and recreation facility quality in their community.

Participants in a focus group with Hispanic residents of Austin and Round Rock discussed the disparities they observe in the location of parks across Austin and the differences in the quality of maintenance and park facilities. *“Parks that look ‘trashy’ in Austin are parks in minority neighborhoods.” (North Austin/Round Rock focus group participant)* In this discussion, participants shared their perception that when funding for parks and recreation is tight, services are reduced in minority neighborhoods. For example, participants shared that when the City’s swimming pools were understaffed with lifeguards, only pools on the east side of Austin were closed; the west side pools remained open. In contrast, participants living in Round Rock thought that the parks and recreation facilities in Round Rock tended to be well maintained and resourced across the city.

In a Spanish language focus group, most of the participants lived in South Austin; they felt their neighborhoods’ lacked recreation amenities found in other neighborhoods.

- *“There are no parks where children can play in south Austin—need a park near William Cannon and Stassney. A pool would be wonderful, but trees, shade and a kids playground is needed.” (Spanish language focus group participant)*
- *“It’s unfair that being from south Austin, if I want to swim in a pool, I have to travel north or west. If the north and west have a pool, the south should too.” (Spanish language focus group participant)*

Refugee focus group participants living near Horace Elementary school discussed the difficulty their family experiences when an adult has to stop working during school breaks, especially summer break, because there are no summer programs for school-age children available, or that they can afford.

Convenient access to grocery stores. Access to fresh and healthy food options, especially convenient access to grocery stores, is another healthy neighborhood indicator evaluated by resident survey participants. Round Rock and Pflugerville residents are most likely to agree that *there are grocery stores with fresh and healthy food choices convenient to where I live* and Travis County residents are most likely to disagree.

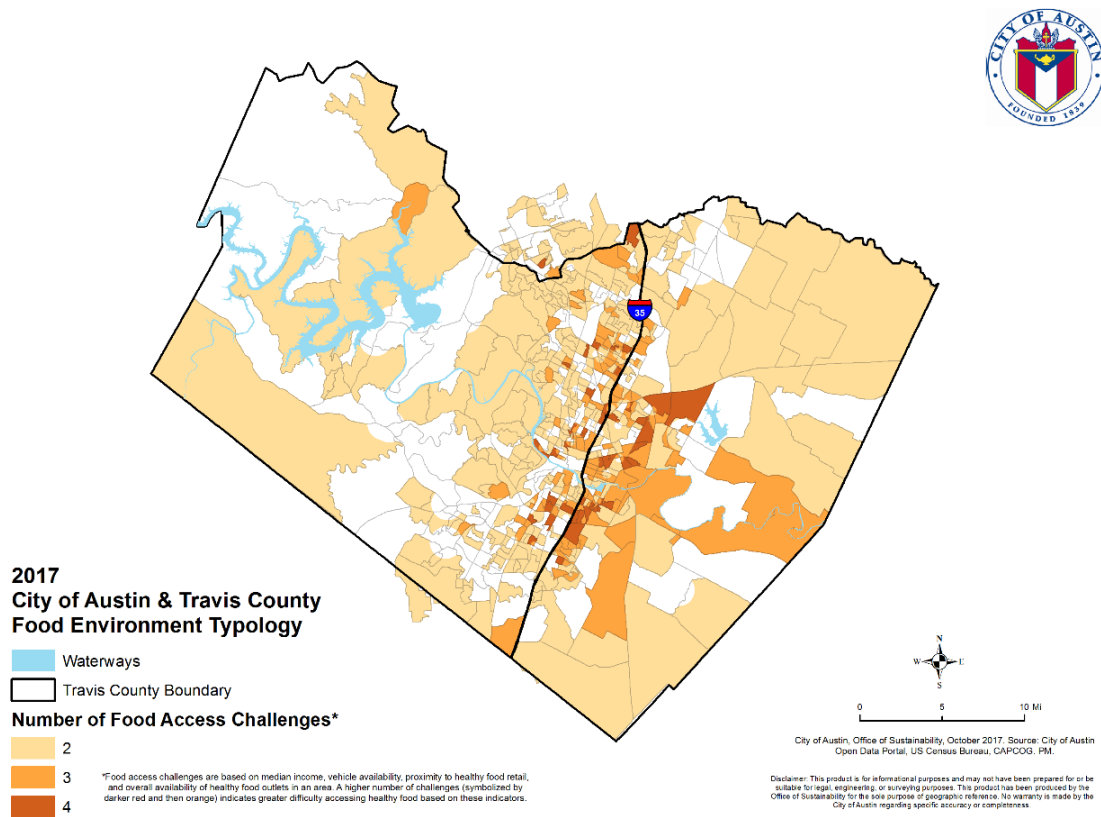
There is less variation in agreement with this indicator when examined by housing situation and income. Similarly, there is little variation among members of protected classes.

In focus groups, discussion of access to grocery stores or locations residents consider to be “food deserts” was often based on the resident’s transportation situation. Those who are transit dependent or walking to buy food are more likely to express difficulty reaching grocery stores for shopping. Examples include:

- Participants in an African American focus group identified two area areas they considered to be food deserts— Del Valle—*“it’s 17 miles to a grocery store”* and Austin Colony along FM 969 and MLK.
- Participants in a Hispanic focus group discussed the importance of safe, walkable access to a grocery store, and that this is not available in many areas. Similarly, participants living in Round Rock shared that in some Round Rock neighborhoods, good shopping and other resources are available, but a lack of sidewalks makes it dangerous to walk.
- In the experience of participants in an East Williamson County stakeholder focus group, access to grocery stores and fresh food is *“impossible for those who don’t drive. There is one HEB in the area. Nutrition is a concern for seniors.”*
- Participants in a housing stakeholder focus group thought it was disingenuous for tax credit developments in eastern Travis County to tout amenities like CVS as a grocery store, and noted that these properties also lack transportation options and are not close to quality public schools.

The City of Austin classified neighborhoods based on the number of Food Access Challenges experienced by local residents, as measured by an index comprised of median income, and proximity to food retail and overall availability of healthy food outlets. As shown in Figure IV-10, many of the neighborhoods with a greater number of food access challenges are located along the I-35 corridor and in east and south Austin. In addition to access to healthy foods, not all households are able to afford the food they need—the CAN dashboard reports that 17 percent of Travis County households were food insecure in 2014, a slightly higher proportion than found in 2010 (16%)

Figure IV-10.
Food Environment Typology



Source: City of Austin.

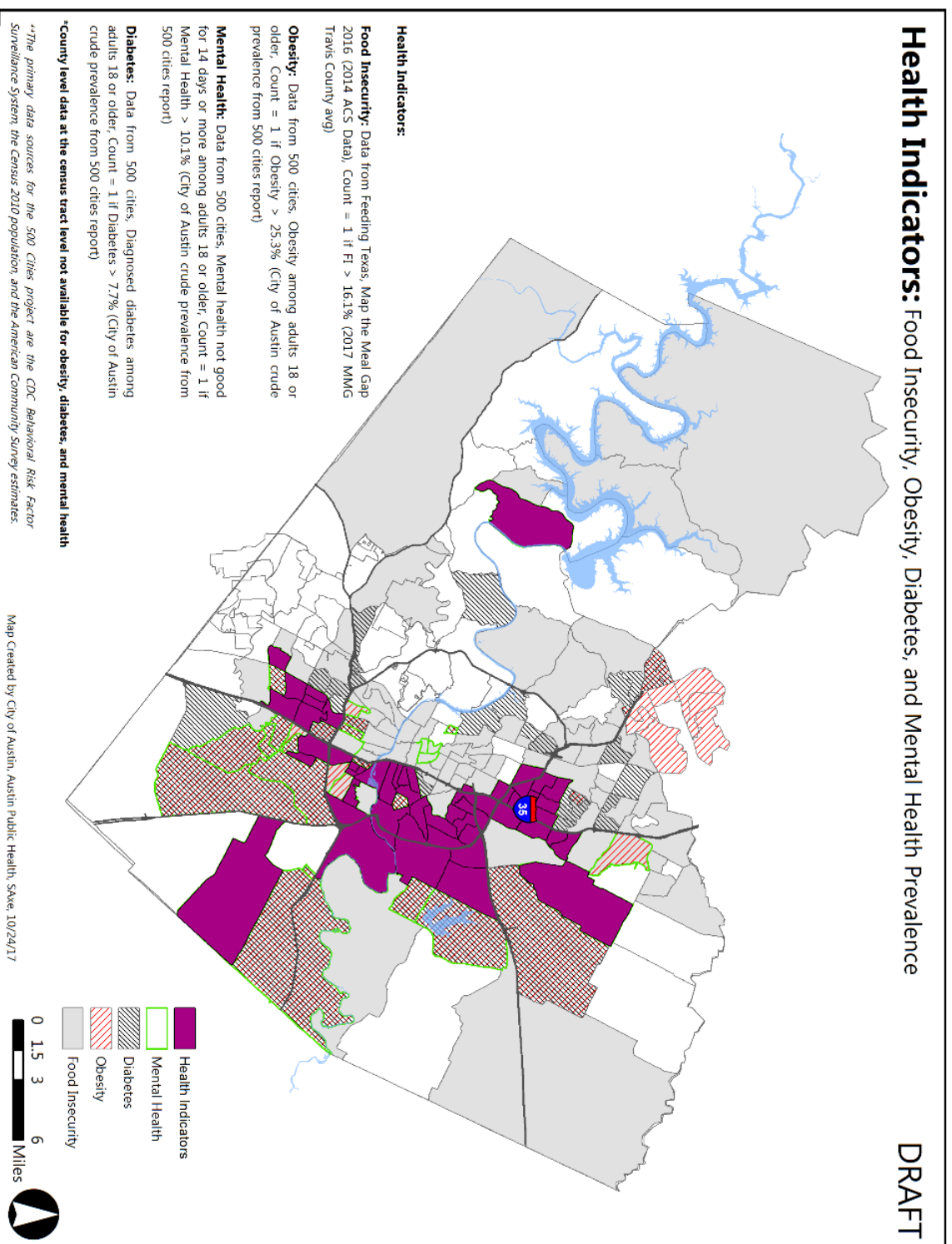
Figure IV-11 maps Travis County neighborhoods with disparities in health indicators including food insecurity and the prevalence of obesity, diabetes, and mental health difficulties. Neighborhoods shaded in purple are those with disparities in health indicators. As shown, many are concentrated in East Austin and South Austin. The CAN dashboard found disparities in health outcomes for African American and Hispanic residents of Austin and Travis County; African Americans are over-represented among residents who smoke, are obese, and report poor health. Hispanics are twice as likely to be uninsured, and the CAN Dashboard attributes this disparity to the eligibility requirements of the Affordable Care Act—undocumented residents are not eligible.

Figure IV-11.
Health
Indicators

Source:
City of Austin.

Health Indicators: Food Insecurity, Obesity, Diabetes, and Mental Health Prevalence

DRAFT



Convenient access to health care facilities. Round Rock and Georgetown residents are most likely to agree that *the location of health care facilities is convenient to where I live*; Travis County residents are least likely to agree. Precariously housed and households with incomes less than \$25,000 are least likely to agree that health care facilities are convenient to where they live while homeowners and higher income households are more likely to agree. When considered by protected class, there is very little variation on this measure.

Supportive network of friends or family. Homeowners and higher income households are somewhat more likely than renters and low income households to agree that they have *a supportive network of friends or family in my neighborhood or community*. There is no appreciable difference in this indicator by jurisdiction. Among members of protected classes, residents with LEP are more likely to disagree with the statement.

For some residents, the supportive network of friends and family is amplified by access to community gathering spaces, such as the Asian American Resource Center (AARC). In a focus group with Asian Indian older adults, participants discussed the importance of the AARC's programming to their social and emotional health. *"For South Asians, quality of life is tied to food and the types of food choices that are offered by Meals on Wheels or other senior food services are limiting. That's why the Asian American Resource Center congregant meal program is so important, because the food served is food they can eat. Meals on Wheels doesn't work because it is not culturally competent food. In the Indian community, food is SO DIFFERENT from other cultures, the choice is not there for seniors."*

Housing condition. In focus groups both residents and stakeholders discussed the condition issues residents with little choice in housing—either due to poverty or other barriers to housing—experience. Participants described the choice between living in unsafe or hazardous conditions or being homeless; these residents chose the less desirable housing. Participants in a reentry focus group described significant safety and housing quality issues common to the few neighborhoods available to people with a criminal history. Multiple individuals reported that even these housing options are being eliminated as they become seen as more desirable and neighborhoods become gentrified. The East Riverside neighborhood was given as an example of this phenomenon. In neighborhoods with fewer safety issues and better-quality housing, participants reported being turned away due to the reliance on a "most qualified" rather than "first qualified" application approval process. One couple reported that they submitted five different applications and were denied for all, even though they were certain they had been the first to apply to a given apartment/home.

Stakeholders in Williamson County consider housing conditions, especially a need for weatherization, to be a significant concern. These participants described homeowners and well-intentioned landlords who are reticent to make quality of life improvements—including accessibility modifications like a ramp—to their properties out of fear of property tax increases.

- *"There is a 92 year old lady whose home is falling down. She lives in Taylor in the home she grew up in. She moved here to care for her mother who lived to 106. The home is still in her mother's name. She's stuck in this house. When we approached her about helping her fix her house, she said no. She can't do that because she wouldn't be able to pay the property taxes."*

Crime and safety. Compared to survey respondents from other jurisdictions, Austin residents are more likely to disagree that the neighborhood where they live is safer than other places. Low income households are less likely than higher income households to consider their neighborhood as having less crime, as are African American and Hispanic residents, and residents with a disability. CAN's 2017 dashboard finds that the crime rate in Austin and Travis County has fallen since 2011.

In a focus group with Hispanic residents, participants said that their South Austin neighborhood feels less safe and believe that the police patrol the area where their building is located less frequently. Some think police response times have gotten slower.

A homeowner in the Georgian Acres neighborhood (by I-25 in North Austin) describes it as *"high crime, lots of hookers, but only one actual shooting since we moved in, and that shooting was domestic. The walkability isn't great, but it's close to highways. The neighborhood doesn't have a park, and it's not really safe or comfortable to walk in."* (North Austin/Round Rock Hispanic focus group)

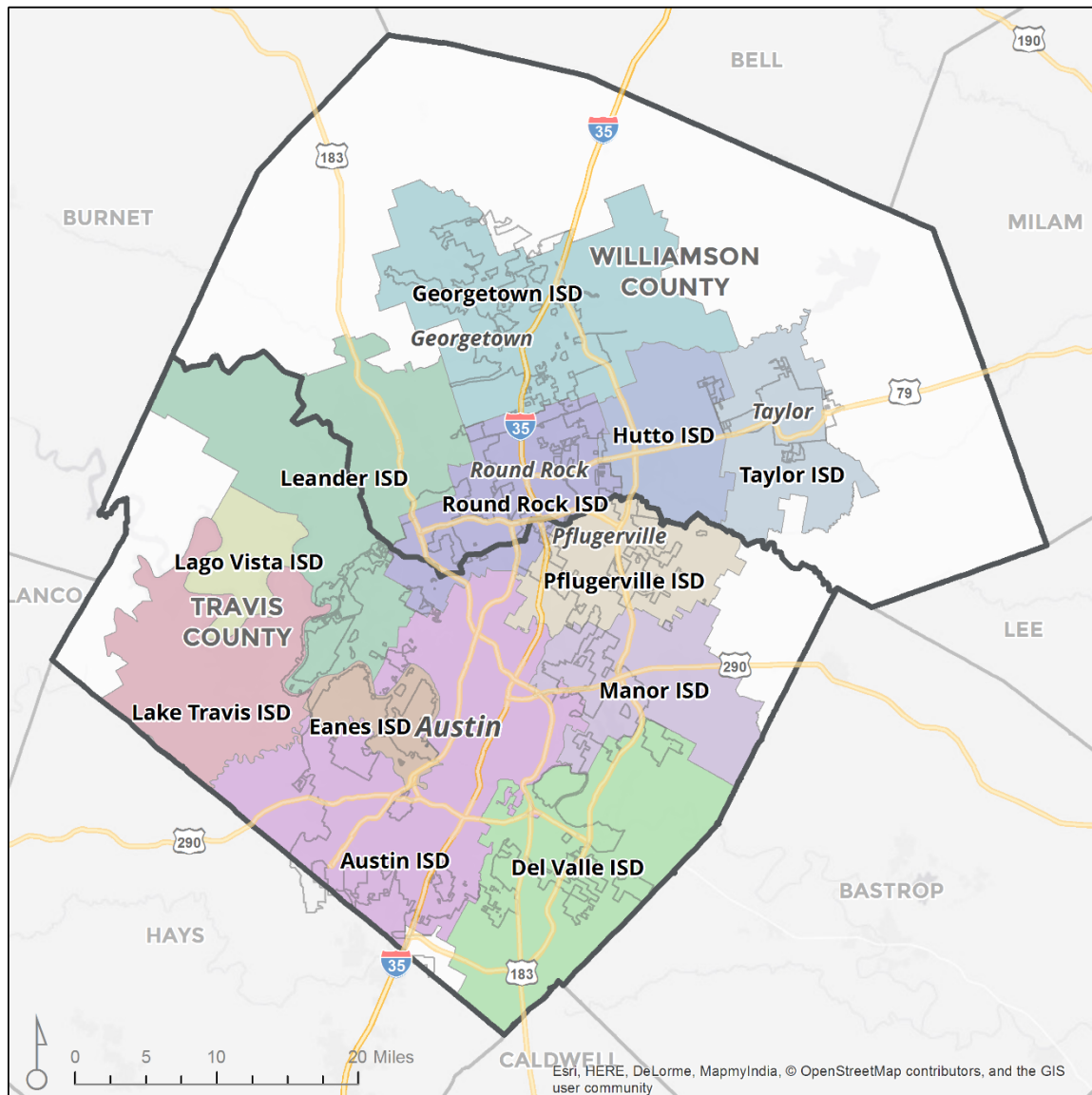
Participants in a disability focus group described the neighborhood surrounding the Mary Lee Foundation campus (primarily serving residents with intellectual disabilities) as "rocky" due to the high numbers of homeless and others loitering around the building. Other residents with disabilities living in low income apartments reported similar difficulty with feeling unsafe due to people living or loitering outside their buildings. *"They make it so you can't go outside because it isn't safe."* (Disability focus group participant)

Education

This section discusses educational opportunities in the Central Texas region. The section primarily focuses on equity in K-12 education, which was the primary concern of residents and stakeholders who participated in the AI.

Twelve school districts operate in the region, as shown in the map below.

Figure IV-12.
School Districts within Participating Jurisdictions



Source: Texas Education Association.

The residents participating in focus groups and surveys for the AI held strong—and sometimes very different views—about school quality.

Nearly universal is the sentiment that finding housing near quality schools is very challenging: Survey respondents ranked access to quality schools lower than any other opportunity indicator, as shown in Figures IV-19 through IV-21. This was consistent across jurisdictions, for all household types, and across resident race and ethnicity, and familial and disability status. Small exceptions exist for high income, LEP, and Asian households. LEP households, especially, view access to quality schools more favorably than other household groups.

The idea that where one lives dictates educational outcomes is strong in the region. The language on many school district websites reinforces this notion and, in some cases, could be interpreted as exclusionary. For example, Pflugerville ISD, states that “Even as the District grows and the demographics change towards that of an urban district, PfISD has maintained a small town feel with a focus on supportive relationships”—suggesting that urban-type growth could disrupt the school community. Round Rock ISD and Georgetown ISD websites both contain quarterly reports on home values, planned development, and out-of-district transfers. It is acknowledged that parents and district officials want the best for their children and schools and this information may be helpful for school planning, yet the nature of this type of communication can also facilitate Not-In-My-Backyard syndrome.

School choice. The process of being assigned to a school in the Central Texas region is similar across districts and is mostly based on home address. Choosing a school outside of an assigned boundary or district is generally an exception and, based on a review of district websites, can be a complicated process.

- School choice in Austin ISD is largely driven by residential address, although there are some options for attending specialized or charter schools. The Austin ISD website advises parents that “It is strongly recommended that you call the Office of Student Services...if purchasing a residence at an address in order for your child(ren) to attend a specific school.” In some cases, programming needs result in school reassignments.
- Hutto ISD allows registration from an out-of-district parent if the grandparent, who lives in the district, is the afterschool caregiver.
- Pflugerville ISD does not accept out-of-district students; students must live within district boundaries, which do encompass more than city boundaries, including a small part of the City of Austin.
- Round Rock ISD allows out-of-district transfers for district employees and high school juniors “who have met...attendance, behavior, and academic expectations.”
- Georgetown ISD schools are closed to out-of-district transfer requests. Students within the district are required to attend the school zoned for their residence address. Intra-district transfers can be denied for reasons that are likely to discourage working parents from applying for transfers: parents or guardians must provide transportation and a transfer cannot be related to a situation of “academic difficulty.” Children of employees of ISD who live outside of the district must attend the school where their parents teach.
- The districts on the west side of the region—where many of the TEA “A”-graded schools are found—do not accept out-of-district transfers. These districts have relatively small boundaries within which some of the highest priced housing in the region is located.

In the rare cases where districts allow cross-district applications, the districts require that space must be available at transfer schools for the transfer to take place. Because

high performing schools are mostly oversubscribed, the opportunity to transfer is more likely in schools with low to moderate grades. In Hutto, for example, all of the elementary schools—which are largely “B” grade schools—are closed and not allowing transfers.

Disparities and school choice. Expanding school choice is a solution to equalizing educational access and has been successful in Denver Public Schools (DPS), which has demonstrated decreases in highly segregated schools since their open choice program, called SchoolChoice, began. According to DPS, before SchoolChoice launched, 42 percent of students attended schools that were more than 90 percent Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) or less than 10 percent FRL; by 2016, this had decreased to 30 percent.² In fact, all school districts in the State of Colorado must have some form of open choice system to comply with state law.³ DPS’ has been studied most extensively because the school district has historically been segregated by income, race, and ethnicity.

Open enrollment regulations work best when these other factors are in place to strengthen choice options:

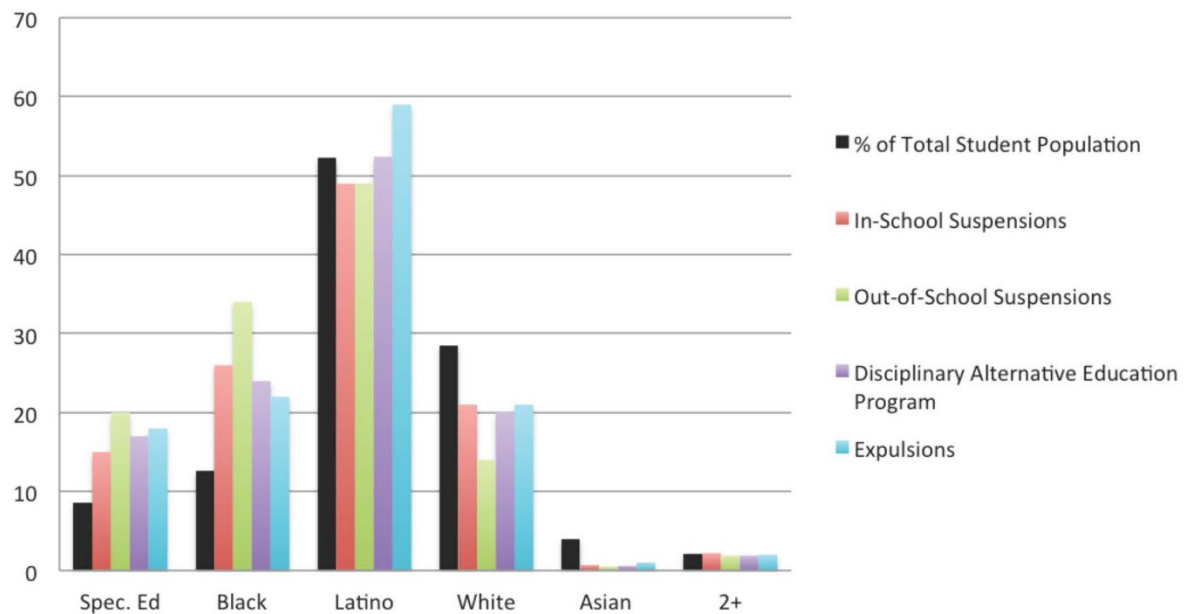
- Resources are available to allow the number of “quality seats”—admission in high quality schools or specialized programs within schools—to adjust with demand. Demand is created quickly, by population growth and family interest in schools and school districts. Supply is created much more slowly and can be limited by physical space in schools, inability to hire quality teachers, learning curves in implementation of curricula, and school funding.
- Low income families have adequate transportation options. Conflicts with work schedules, bus schedules that don’t align with school schedules (and limit participation in sports and other activities), expense of transportation, and lack of public transportation discounts for low income kids can significantly limit their access.
- Affordable housing near quality schools is available for both families and teachers working on those schools.

Disparity in discipline within schools. In Texas, as in many states, African American, Latino, and special needs children face more school suspensions, disciplinary actions, and expulsions relative to their share of the student population than Non-Hispanic, White and Asian children. This situation disrupts the educational environment of many students and, in the case of suspensions and expulsions, can place children in more vulnerable or harmful environments (e.g., if the home environment is unsafe or unsupervised).

² <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/09/19/integrating-schools-in-a-gentrifying-city-through-choice/>

³ Colorado’s Public School of Choice law allows students to enroll at schools in state districts for which they are not zoned (C.R.S. 22-36-101).

Figure IV-13.
Texas Discipline Rates 2016-2017



Source: Texas Appleseed, *Justice Starts at Home: Understanding Racial & Economic Justice through the Lens of the Zip Code*, 2018 Poverty Law Conference, September 7, 2018.

Disparity in school quality. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) maintains academic and financial accountability reports for all schools in the state; these cover both charter and non-charter public schools. TEA school “grades” from 2017 were used for a locational analysis of schools by grades served and quality.⁴ This analysis appears in the figures that follow:

- Figure IV-14 shows the location of A and B graded elementary schools. “A” schools are mostly located in neighborhoods on the western and northern portion of the region, with “B” schools more centrally located.
- Figure IV-15 shows the location of C through F graded elementary schools, which follow a similar distribution pattern as “B” schools. None appear in the western portion of the region.
- Figure IV-16 and IV-17 show the location middle and high schools by TEA grade, which follow similar patterns to elementary schools.

⁴ We recognize that the TEA grading system does not capture all aspects of school quality; however, the TEA data provide an indicator of how households define neighborhoods of choice.

Figure IV-14.
Elementary School Grades, A – B, 2017

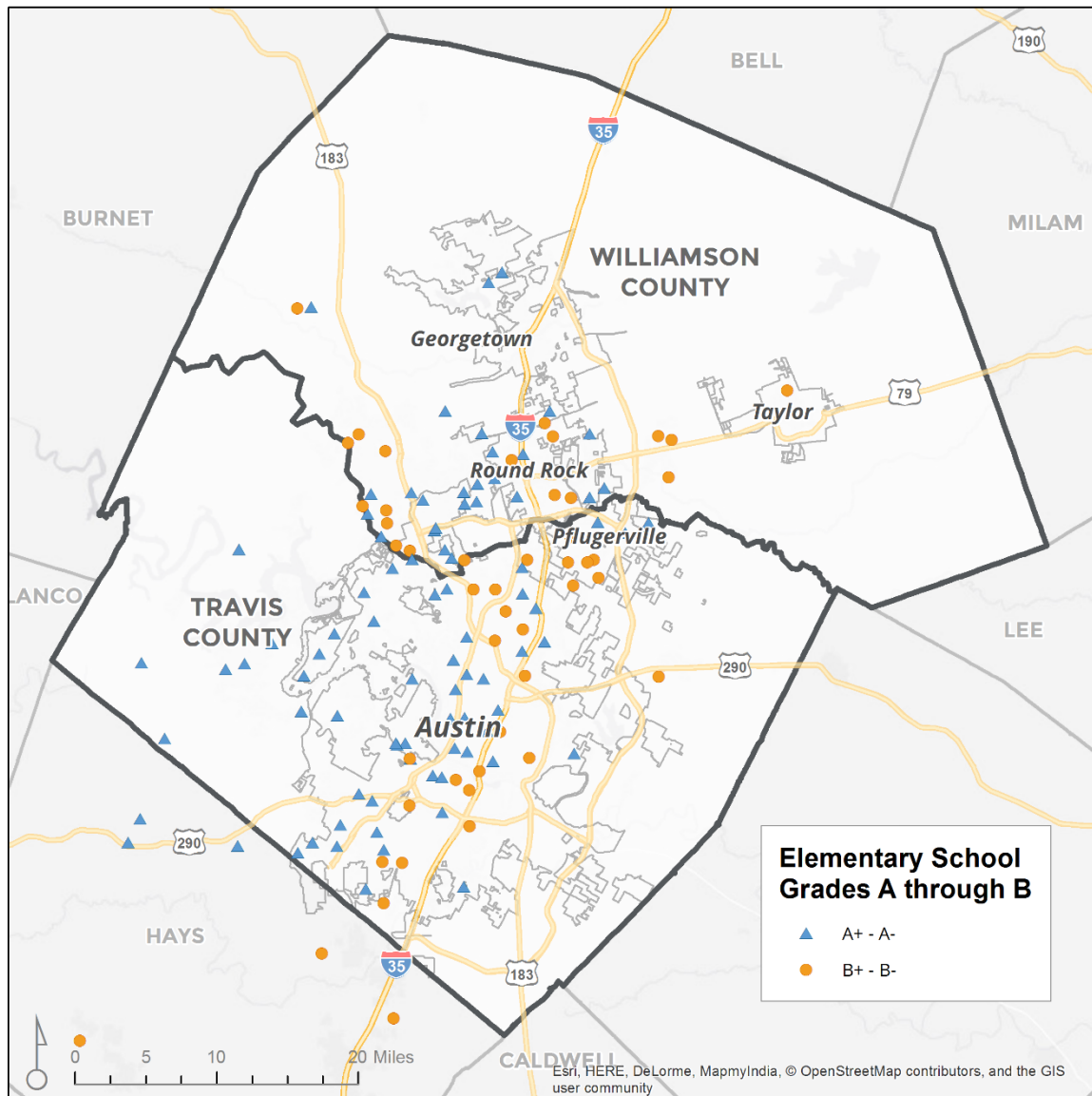


Figure IV-15.
Elementary School Grades, C – F, 2017

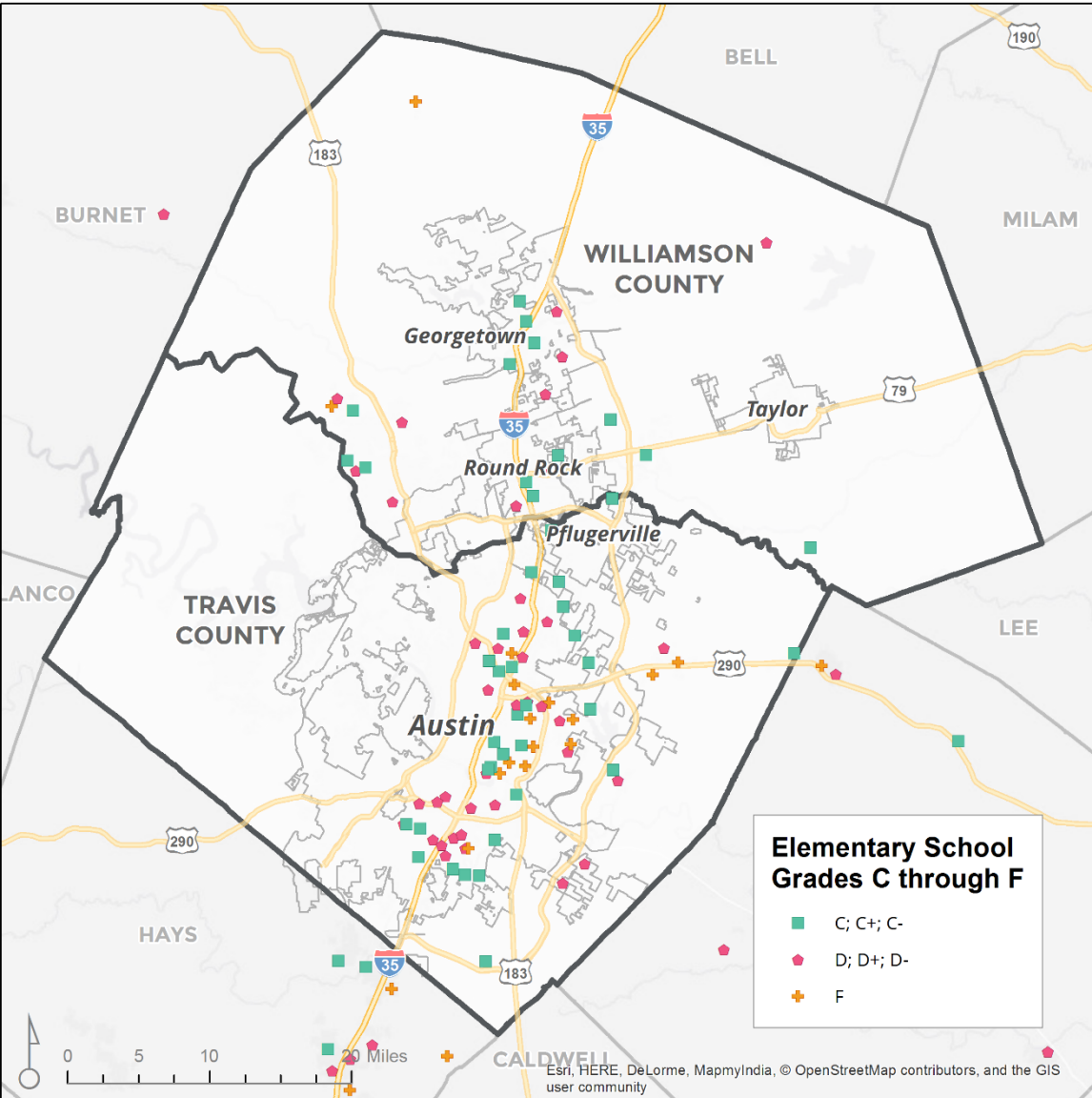
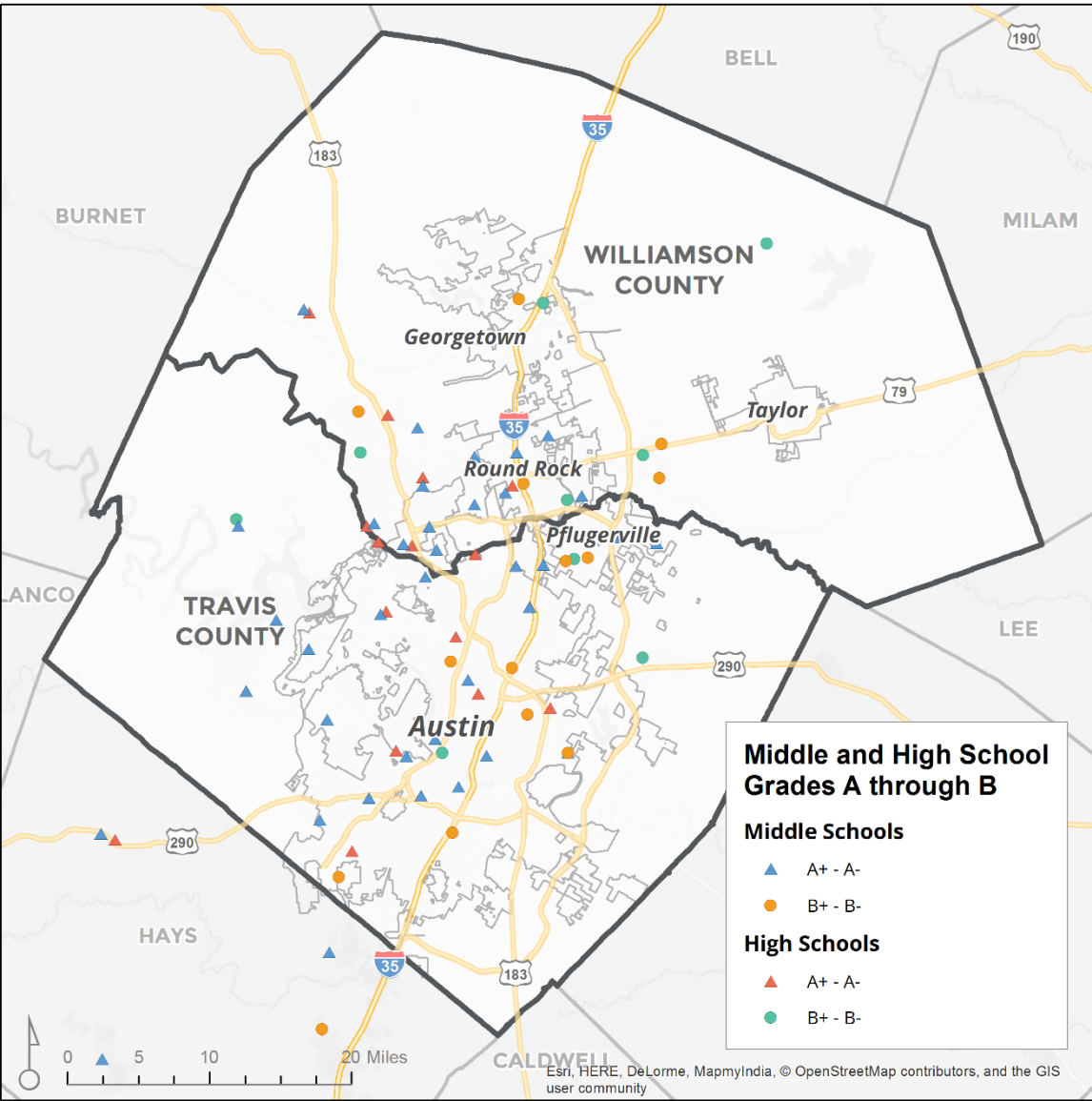
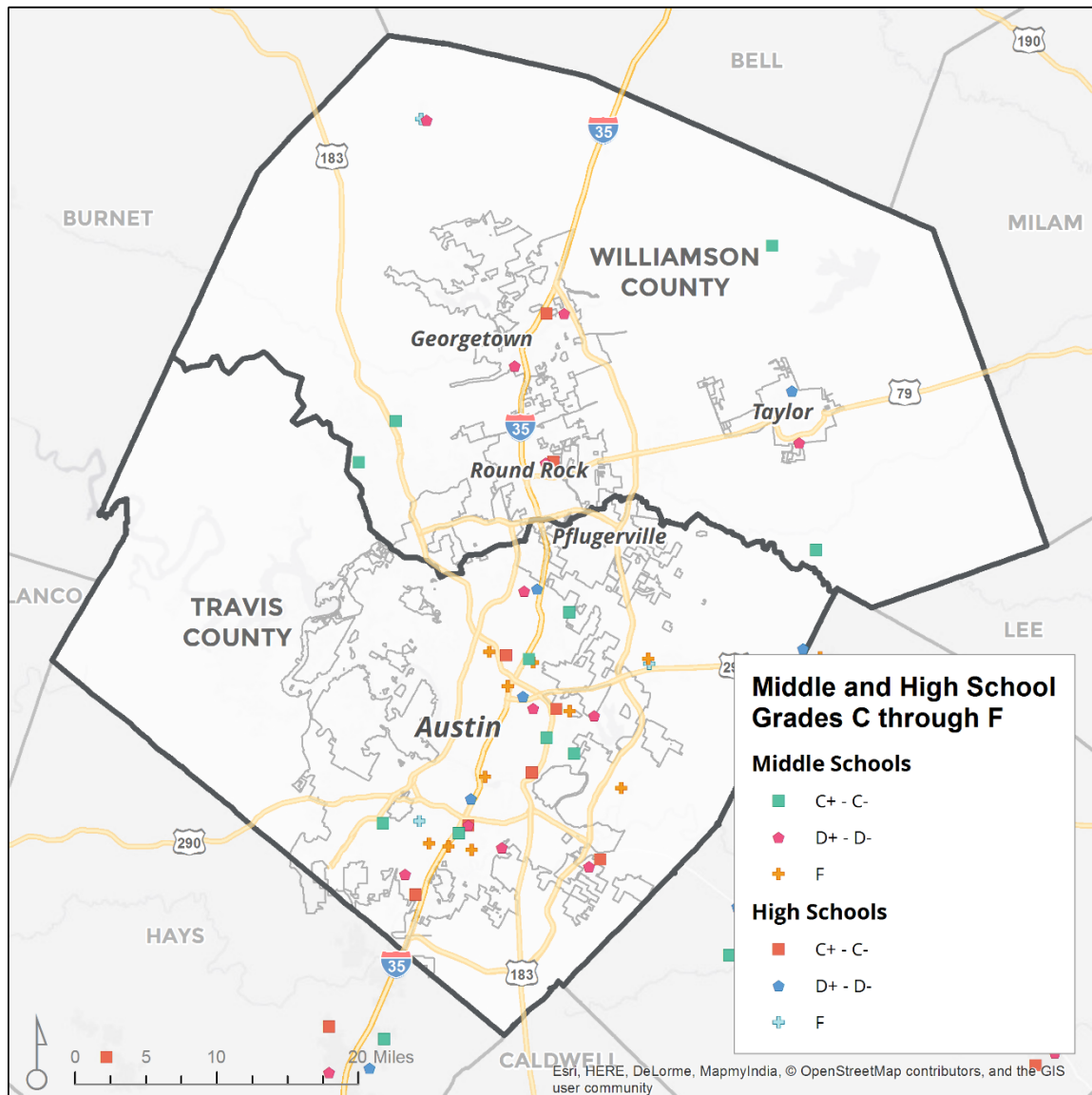


Figure IV-16.
Middle and High School Grades, A – B, 2017



Source: Texas Education Agency.

Figure IV-17.
Middle and High School Grades, C – F, 2017



Source: Texas Education Agency.

The table on the following page presents the results of an analysis of school “grade” data and student body diversity. For all elementary, middle, high, and charter schools in all districts represented in the region, schools were aggregated by grade and the race and ethnicity of the student body. The bottom two rows for each compare the racial and ethnic representation of “A” and “F” schools with the racial and ethnic representation of all schools—noting where children are over- and underrepresented. The data show that:

- Children identifying as White are consistently overrepresented in the highest quality schools (as measured by an “A” grade) and underrepresented in failing schools. This effect is greatest for elementary and high schools—which are often the largest drivers of housing choice and, thus, differential pricing.
- African American children are equally represented in charter schools and most significantly overrepresented in failing high schools.
- Asian children are consistently overrepresented in “A” schools and underrepresented in “F” schools.
- Hispanic children have the largest disparities in school quality. In elementary schools, Hispanic children make up 27 percent of children in “A” schools and 75 percent in “F” schools despite comprising 50 percent of all elementary school children. These disparities are consistent across school types.

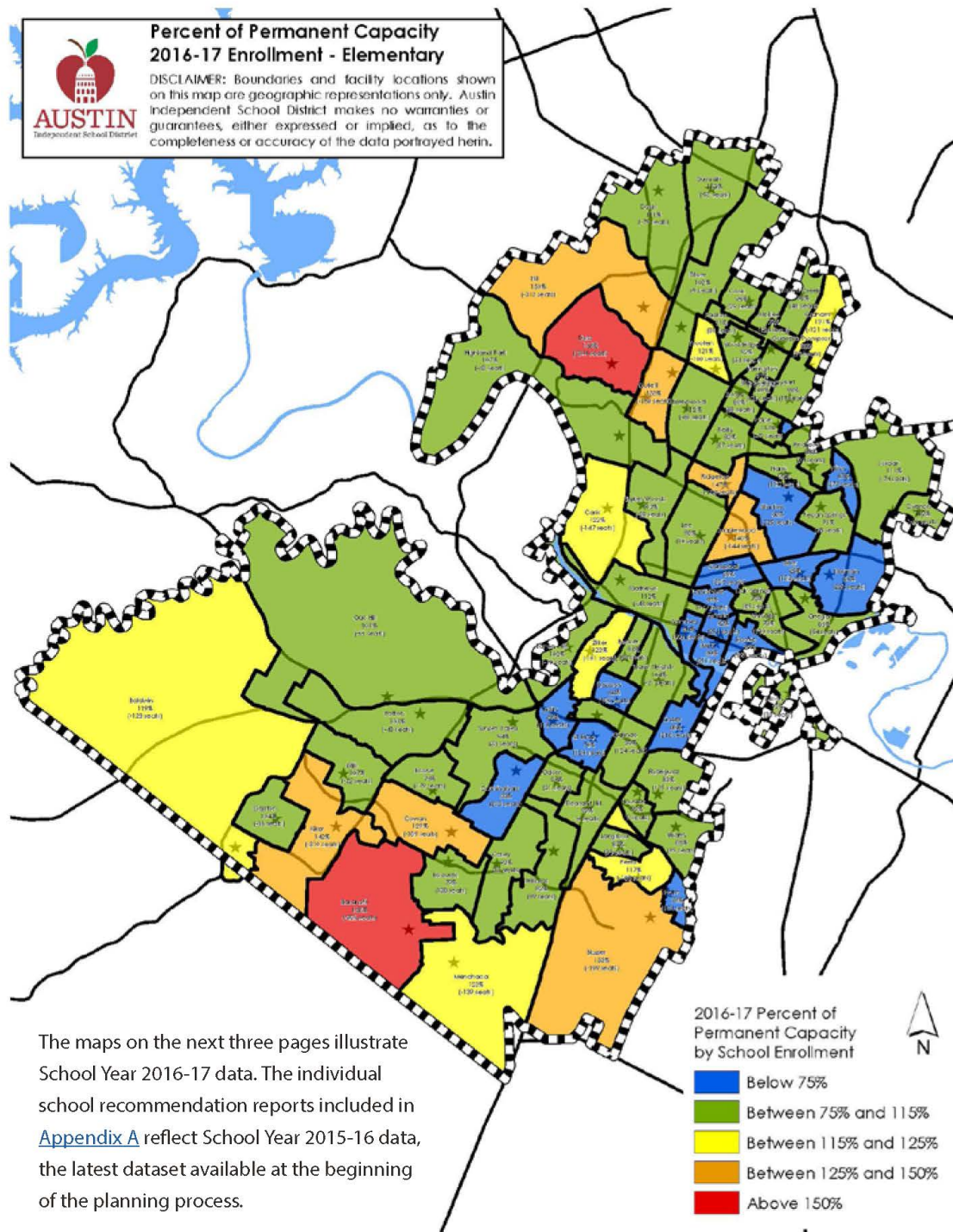
Figure IV-18.
Race and Ethnicity of Students by Schools in Central Texas Region and
Performance Grade, 2017

	Student Race or Ethnicity			
	White	African American	Asian	Hispanic
Elementary Schools				
School Grade				
A+ to A-	56%	4%	12%	27%
B+ to B-	36%	9%	5%	50%
C+ to C-	24%	9%	2%	64%
D+ to D-	21%	8%	2%	70%
F	15%	10%	0%	75%
All Schools	36%	7%	6%	50%
<i>Over or (Under)representation in A schools</i>	20%	-3%	6%	-23%
<i>Over or (Under)representation in F schools</i>	-21%	3%	-6%	25%
Middle Schools				
School Grade				
A+ to A-	54%	6%	11%	29%
B+ to B-	35%	9%	4%	52%
C+ to C-	34%	6%	2%	58%
D+ to D-	21%	9%	2%	68%
F	14%	11%	1%	74%
All Schools	39%	7%	6%	48%
<i>Over or (Under)representation in A schools</i>	15%	-1%	5%	-19%
<i>Over or (Under)representation in F schools</i>	-25%	4%	-5%	26%
High Schools				
School Grade				
A+ to A-	58%	6%	9%	27%
B+ to B-	41%	11%	3%	45%
C+ to C-	31%	8%	2%	59%
D+ to D-	22%	10%	3%	65%
F	16%	15%	1%	67%
All Schools	41%	8%	5%	45%
<i>Over or (Under)representation in A schools</i>	17%	-2%	4%	-18%
<i>Over or (Under)representation in F schools</i>	-25%	7%	-4%	22%
Charter Schools (Elementary, Middle, High)				
School Grade				
A+ to A-	37%	9%	18%	36%
B+ to B-	6%	8%	5%	81%
C+ to C-	18%	11%	2%	69%
D+ to D-	17%	6%	2%	75%
F	22%	9%	2%	67%
All Schools	25%	9%	10%	57%
<i>Over or (Under)representation in A schools</i>	12%	0%	8%	-21%
<i>Over or (Under)representation in F schools</i>	-3%	0%	-8%	10%

Source: Texas Education Agency and Root Policy Research

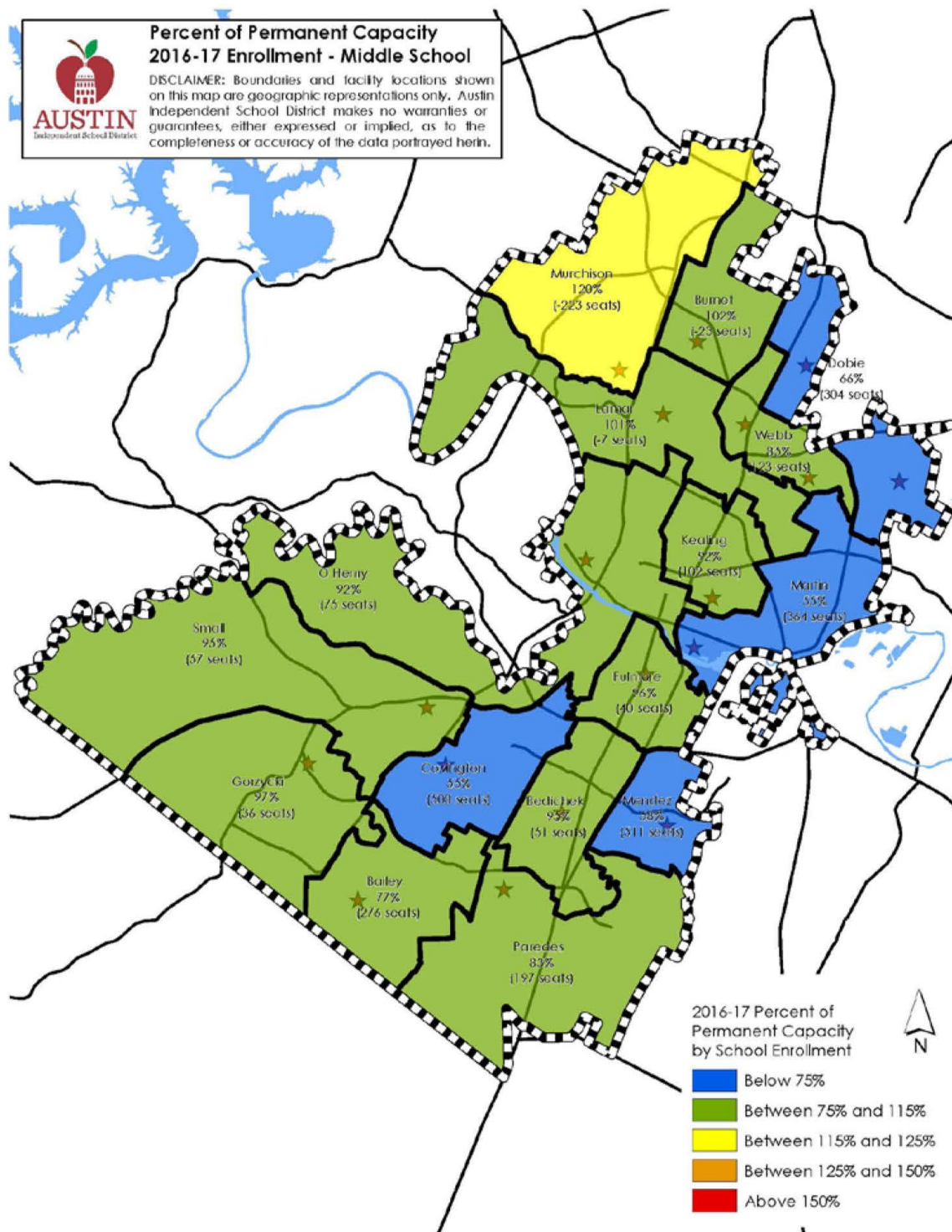
The following maps show, for Austin ISD only, enrollment capacity by school by location. In general, those that are overcapacity (and closed to choice-in students) are in higher priced neighborhoods and are higher performing.

Figure IV-19.
Percent of Permanent Capacity, 2016-17 Enrollment – Elementary



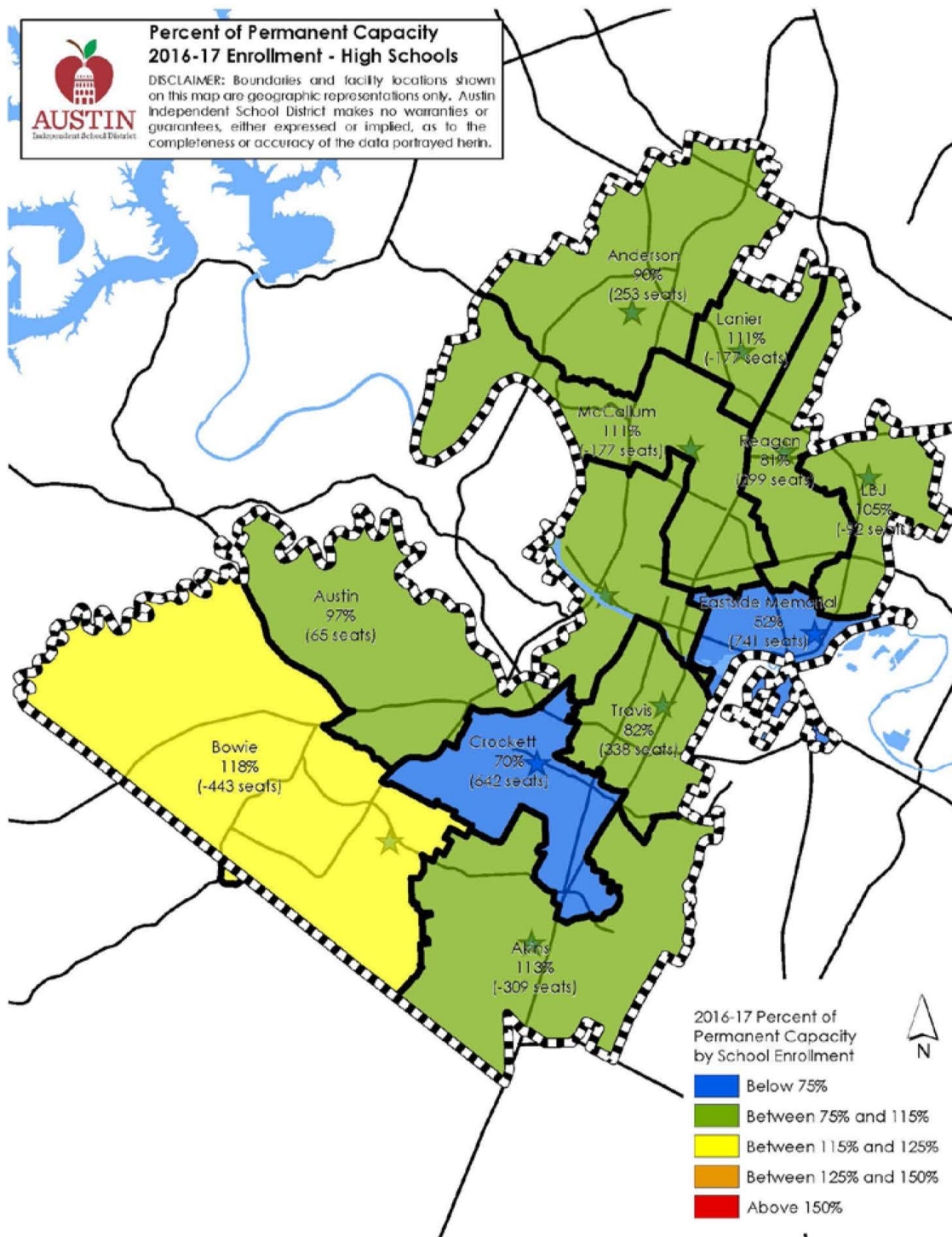
Source: Austin Independent School District, *Facility Master Plan Update*, 2017.

Figure IV-20.
Percent of Permanent Capacity, 2016-17 Enrollment – Middle School



Source: Austin Independent School District, *Facility Master Plan Update*, 2017.

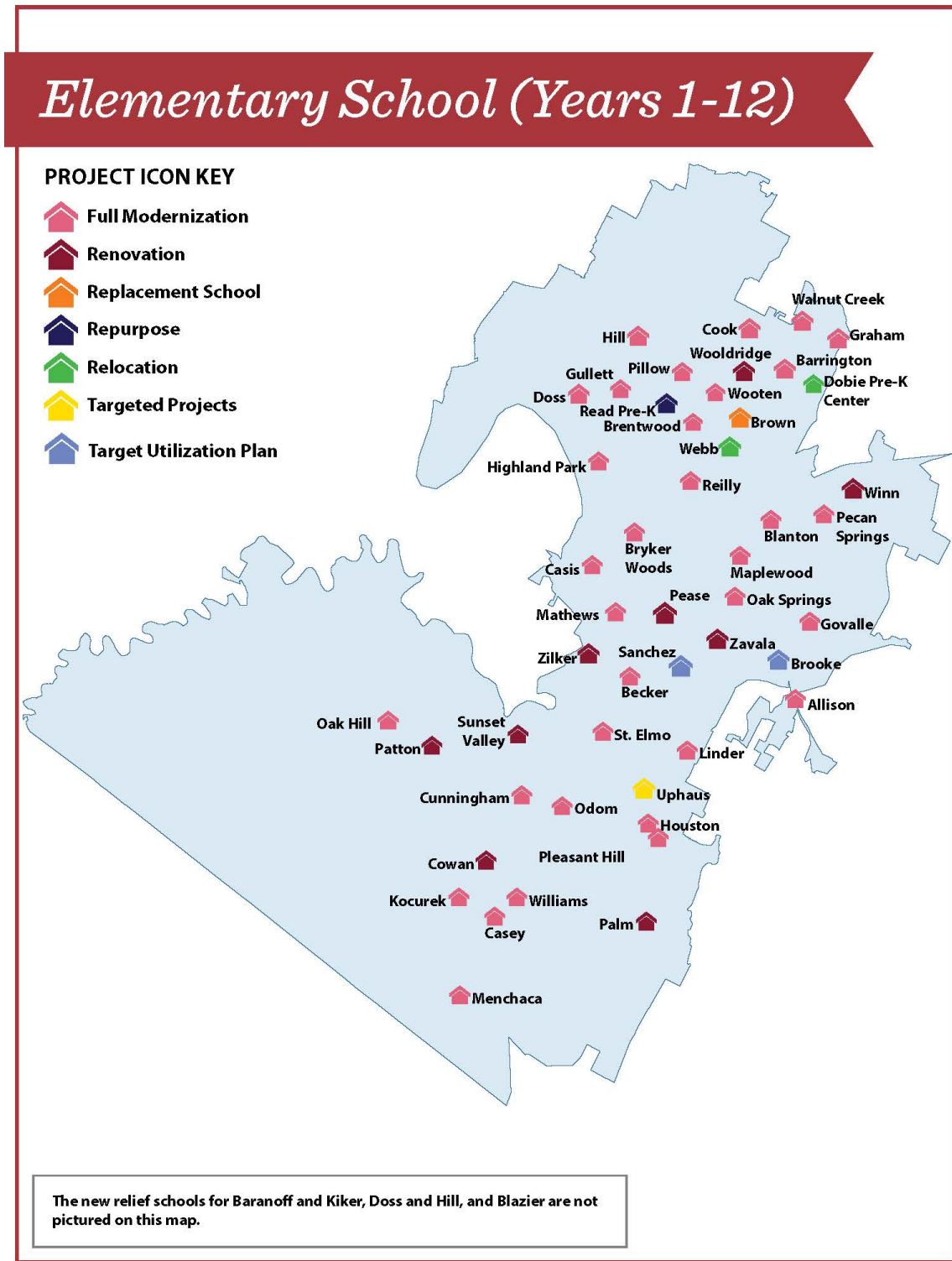
Figure IV-21.
Percent of Permanent Capacity, 2016-17 Enrollment – High School



Source: Austin Independent School District, *Facility Master Plan Update*, 2017.

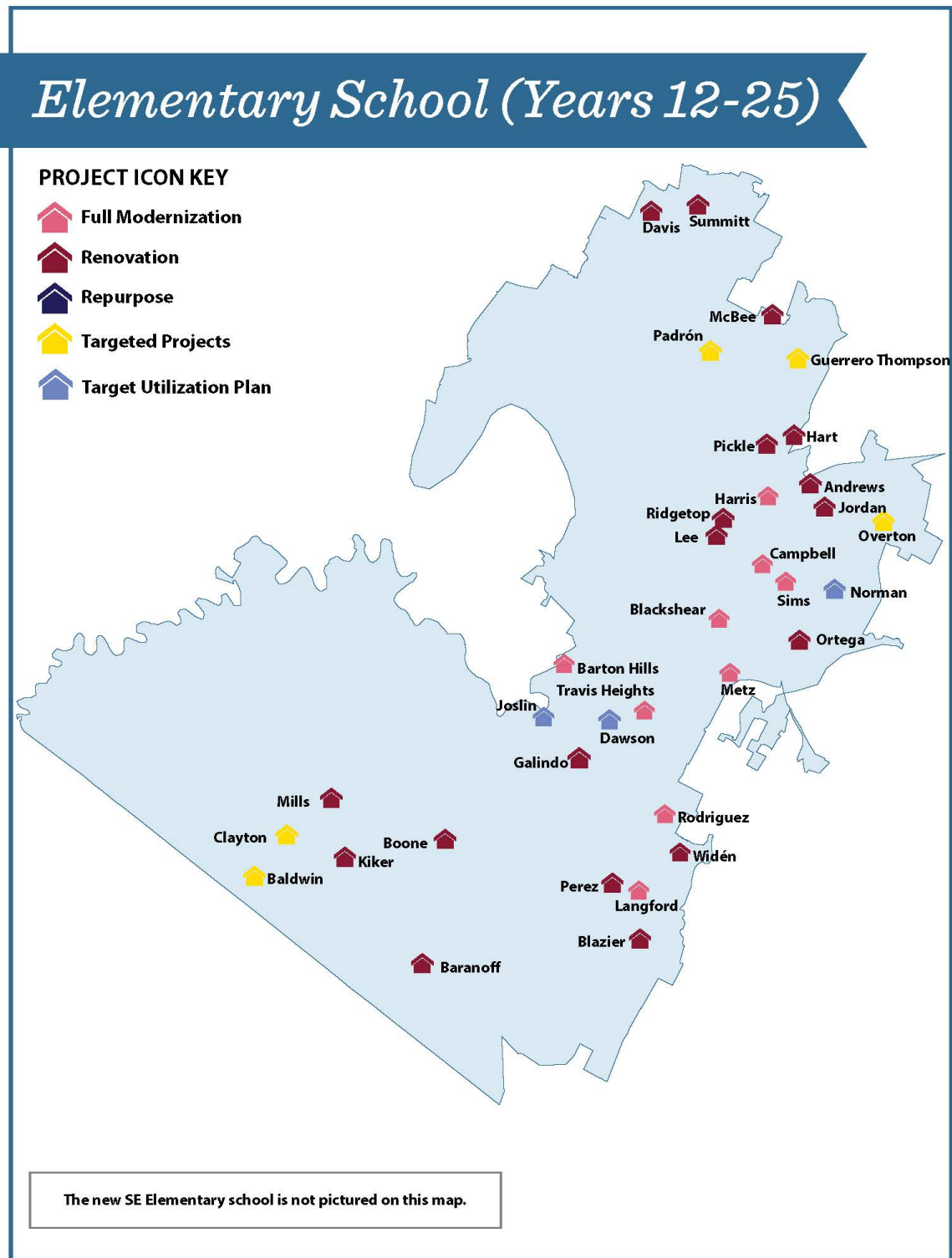
The next four maps show Austin ISD's school facility improvement plans by timeframe, school level, and location. The schools with the most immediate and comprehensive improvements are located throughout the city, with many in relatively affordable areas and in areas with open capacity, which could benefit lower and moderate income students.

Figure IV-22.
Facility Master Plan Update Recommendations – Elementary Schools
(Years 1-12)



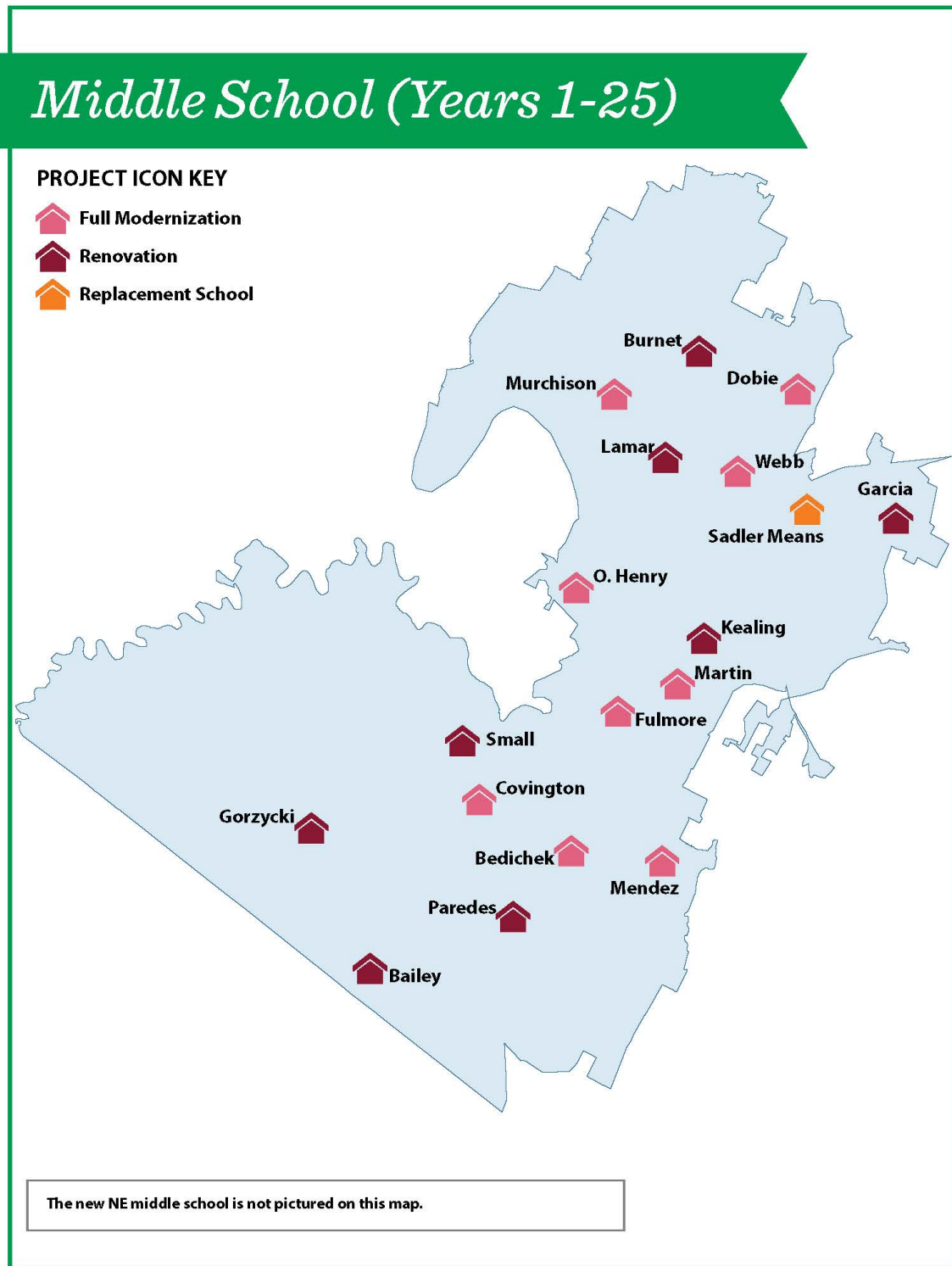
Source: Austin Independent School District, *Facility Master Plan Update*, 2017.

Figure IV-23.
Facility Master Plan Update Recommendations – Elementary Schools
(Years 12-25)



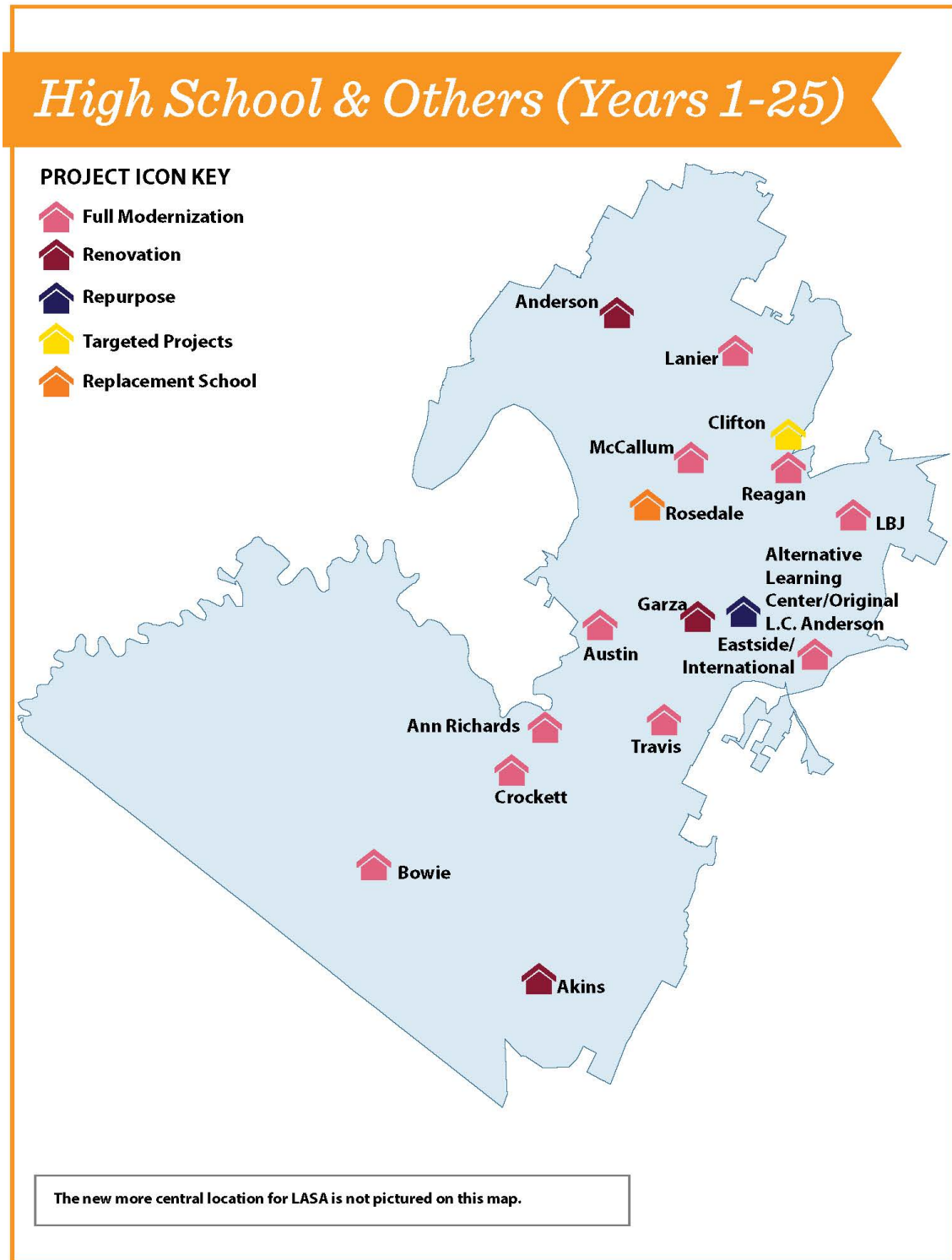
Source: Austin Independent School District, *Facility Master Plan Update*, 2017.

Figure IV-24.
Facility Master Plan Update Recommendations – Middle Schools (Years 1-25)



Source: Austin Independent School District, *Facility Master Plan Update*, 2017.

Figure IV-25.
Facility Master Plan Update Recommendations – High Schools and Others
(Years 1-25)



Source: Austin Independent School District, *Facility Master Plan Update*, 2017.

Resident perceptions on school quality. Residents who participated in community meetings and focus groups for the AI were asked about school quality in their neighborhoods and the region.

Residents living in suburban areas generally perceive their schools as being strong. African Americans with young children—many of whom had been raised and attended schools in East Austin—living Round Rock, Pflugerville, and Manor said they partially chose those areas for the schools, both quality and diversity of the student body.

“The schools in Pflugerville are very good. The district just opened a fourth high school in Pflugerville.” (Pflugerville interview participant)

Nearly all participants in an Asian Indian focus group report being satisfied with the quality of schools in their neighborhood; school quality was the primary factor they considered when picking where to live. Most of these participants live in north Austin, Travis County, and Round Rock.

Some residents observe differences in suburban schools, depending on the school district.

In a focus group with Hispanic residents of North Austin and Round Rock, participants’ perceptions of local schools were mixed. Overall, these residents perceive Round Rock schools to be of higher quality than Austin ISD, but noted disparities within districts, observing that some Austin public schools are segregated and that predominantly White schools are better resourced than majority minority schools. *“The best schools are ‘closed campus’ where you can’t get into them. (can’t transfer in)” (North Austin/Round Rock Hispanic focus group participant)*

Schools on the west side of Round Rock are perceived as more segregated and have fewer resources than other Round Rock schools. This is considered a “very low income community” and participants wondered why the differences in schools are allowed to persist. *“It must take someone to actually go to all the schools and **see** the differences.” (North Austin/Round Rock Hispanic focus group participant)*

Sentiment about schools located in Austin ISD varied. Hispanic residents perceive Austin schools as being lower quality for both the educational environment and teacher qualifications.

Attendees of a Spanish language focus group and a focus group with LEP refugees expressed high levels of satisfaction with Austin ISD schools. These participants live in south Austin and the Montopolis, neighborhood, southwest Travis County, north Austin, and northwest Travis County.

“Those with kids like the schools...[we] have heard the schools are good, safe.” (Spanish language focus group participant)

“My son likes his high school. He feels welcome and included. No problems.” (Refugee from the Middle East)

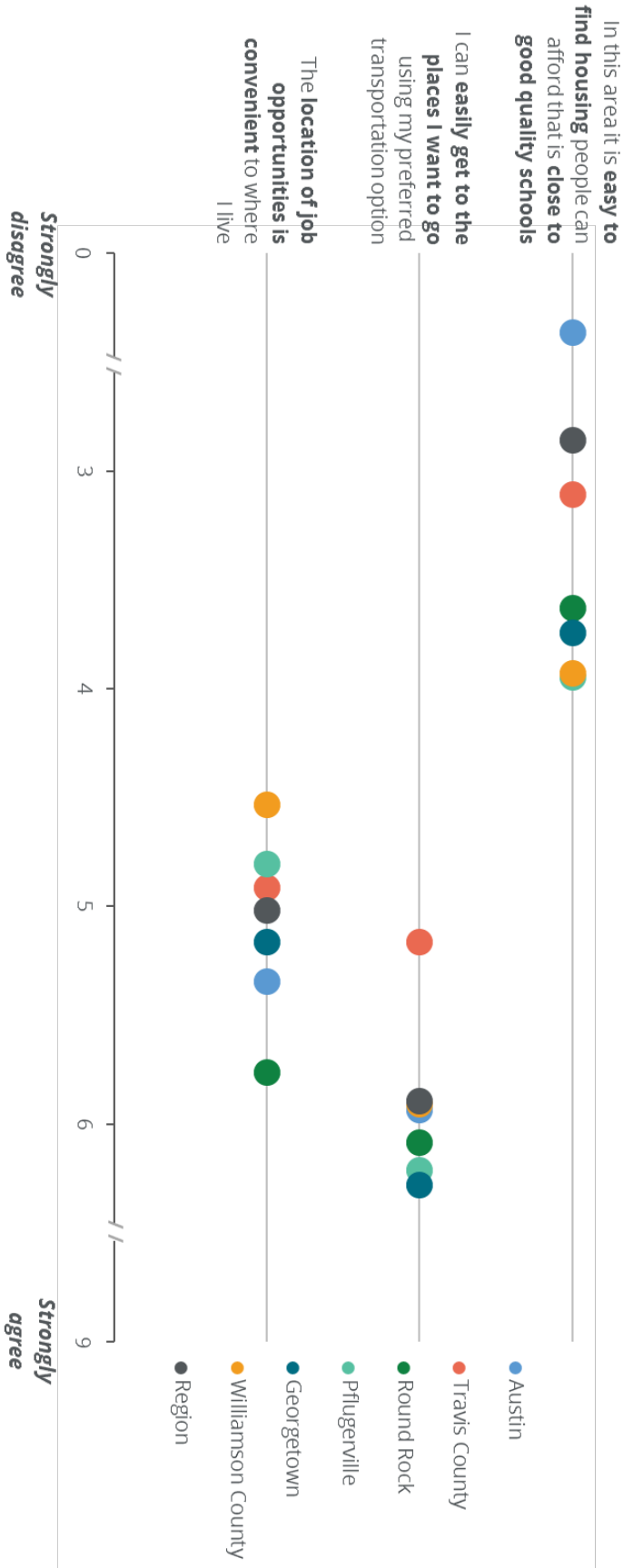
A single mom said that, with her Section 8 voucher, she was eventually able to move to a neighborhood with a high quality school, although it is located outside of the city in which she works which presents transportation challenges. This particular school requires that every child has a computer but does not provide resources to obtain a computer.

"We can't afford a computer and my son's school requires one...so he needs to go to the library to do his homework. The library is not close to my home and I work in the city, so it is hard for us to get him to the library and complete his homework every night." (Resident in affordable housing focus group)

Some parents perceive Georgetown as not being inclusive or accommodating the needs of children. Participants in a focus group with African American and Hispanic residents of Georgetown described public schools that have been *"quietly but intentionally"* segregated and that the *"quality is not equitable."* From the participants' perspective, LEP students are treated poorly. A Spanish speaking parent reported getting a letter sent home with her children informing her they were speaking Spanish at school. *"The school 'score cards' make it look like we can't learn, but they don't give us the same resources."*

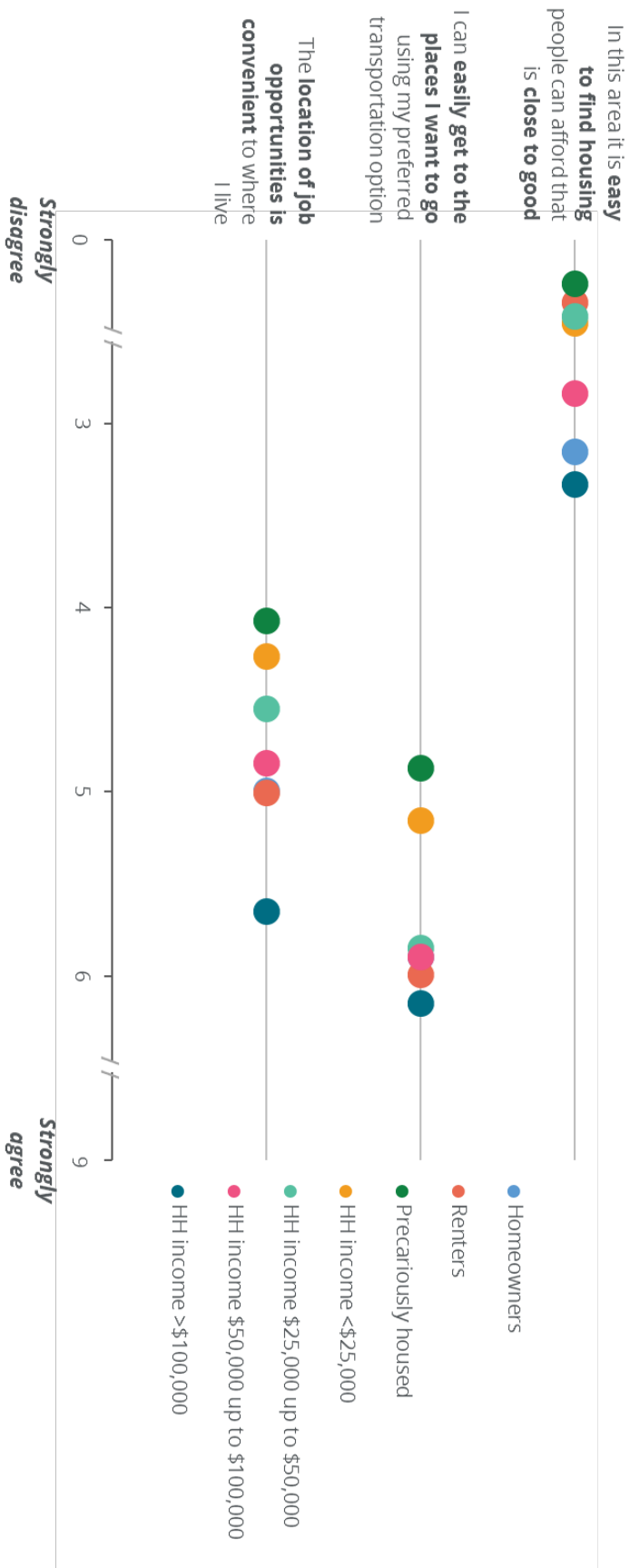
Figures IV-26 through IV-28 present resident perceptions of their access to quality schools, employment opportunities, and transportation. As noted previously, the perception that it is very difficult to find housing that a family can afford close to good quality public schools is nearly universal across jurisdictions and demographic groups.

Figure IV-26.
Access to Quality Schools, Transportation and Employment, Jurisdiction and Selected Characteristics



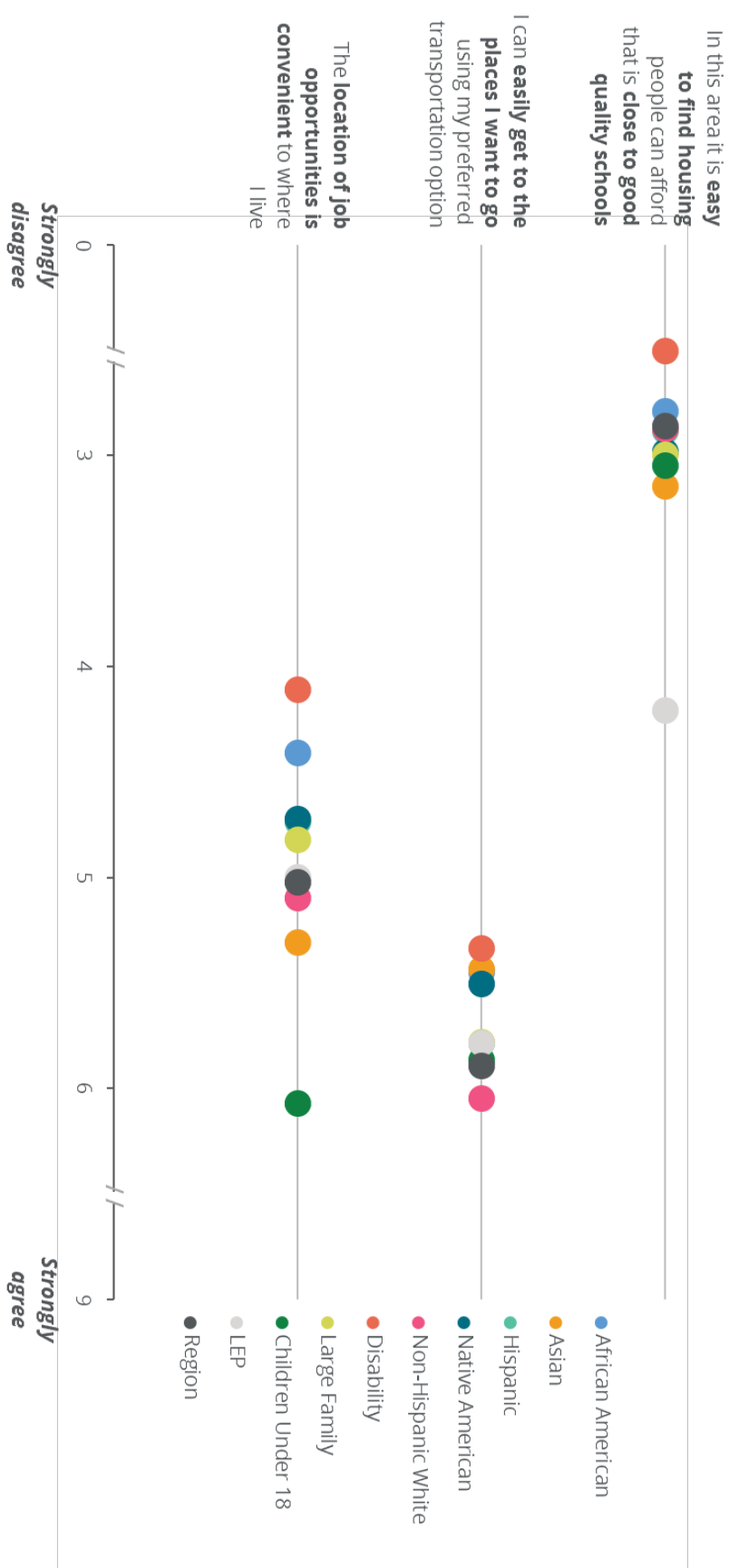
Source: Root Policy Research from the 2018 Central Texas Fair Housing Survey.

Figure IV-27.
Access to Quality Schools, Transportation and Employment, Tenure and Income



Source: Root Policy Research from the 2018 Central Texas Fair Housing Survey.

Figure IV-28.
Access to Quality Schools, Transportation and Employment, Selected Protected Classes



Source: Root Policy Research from the 2018 Central Texas Fair Housing Survey.

Transportation and Mobility

“As housing near the urban core of the region becomes increasingly expensive, more and more workers are moving to suburban and rural communities, where housing is more affordable. However, this creates transportation congestion, long commutes, and sprawling land development pressures in the region. These outcomes, in turn, increase environmental and resiliency vulnerabilities.”⁵

Nearly all discussions about housing choice and access to opportunity included discussions about transportation. Transportation issues—traffic congestion, bus routes and availability of bus service— are a pressing concern to residents throughout the region. As described in previous sections, more and more households are expanding their housing search—driving to affordability—changing the transportation dynamics in the region. Community engagement participants living in areas not currently served by fixed route transit—in parts of Round Rock, Taylor, Travis County, and unincorporated Williamson County—discussed the challenges they or their employees or colleagues experience when trying to get to the places they need to go without a car. Residents who do have access to a personal vehicle discussed the impact of increasing congestion on their commutes.

Commuter focus group participants who work in Austin but live elsewhere spend 20 to 45 minutes getting to work and noted that their commute times are getting longer. None consider the bus a reasonable alternative to commuting by car. In focus groups around the region, commuters pointed to a lack of meaningful regional transit planning and investment as the primary reason why commuting by bus is not a practical alternative to driving.

- *“If I have to be on a schedule, I won’t take the bus. The only time we’ve ridden the train is with our kids. Not to go anywhere, but for the fun of riding the train.” (North Austin/Round Rock Hispanic focus group participant)*

The biggest challenge mentioned by participants in an African American focus group was traffic. Attendees described traffic as “terrible,” “horrible.” They need it to be more predictable, so they can make it to their jobs on time. For many suburban areas, *“there is only one way in and one way out.”*

Participants in the behavioral health and recovery focus group primarily live in Williamson County. They described transportation access as essential and a huge barrier for those living in places not served by CapMetro. *“It’s how you get to the resources that you need to stay stable. People get pushed out of the neighborhoods with bus service, then they can’t get to services, then they’re back to being homeless and back to addiction.”*

Focus group participants living in Pflugerville, Taylor, and unincorporated Travis and Williamson Counties believe there is a significant need for bus service in these

⁵ CAPCOG’s 2018 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, http://www.capcog.org/documents/economicdevelopment/Reports/2018_CEDS_Update_-_Full_Update_and_Plan.pdf

communities, both for regional commuting to employment in Austin as well as transportation within the community.

- *“There’s a need for a rideshare or call and ride program for Williamson County. There’s affordable housing there, but you can’t get to services or work.” (Behavioral Health and Recovery Focus group Participant)*
- *“Transportation is a huge issue. It makes it really difficult for employers to keep employees. If an employee doesn’t have a reliable car, they won’t make it to work.” (Pflugerville interview participant)*
- *“If people don’t drive, they’re out of luck.” (East Williamson County stakeholder focus group participant)*

Available transit services. The public transportation system in the Central Texas region includes Capital Metro (CapMetro), CARTS, and the city of Round Rock. Figures IV-29 through IV-31 map the CapMetro, CARTS and Round Rock service areas. The maps show the areas with some access to public transit, but not the routes or frequency of service.

Figure IV-29.
Capital Metro Service Area

Source:
Travis County Transit Development Plan, 2018.

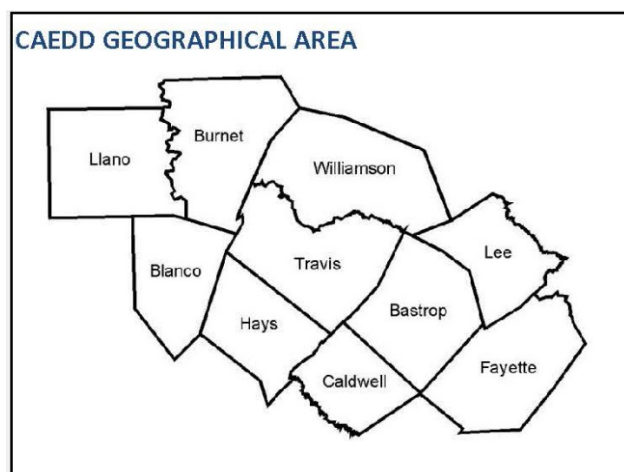


Figure IV-30.
CARTS Service Area

Source:
CARTS.

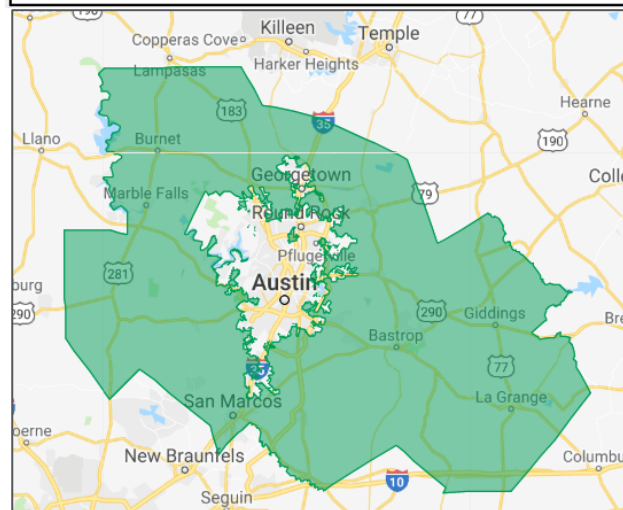
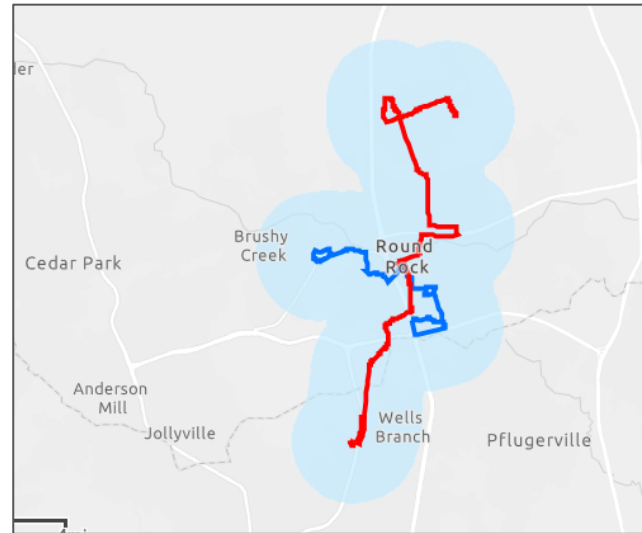


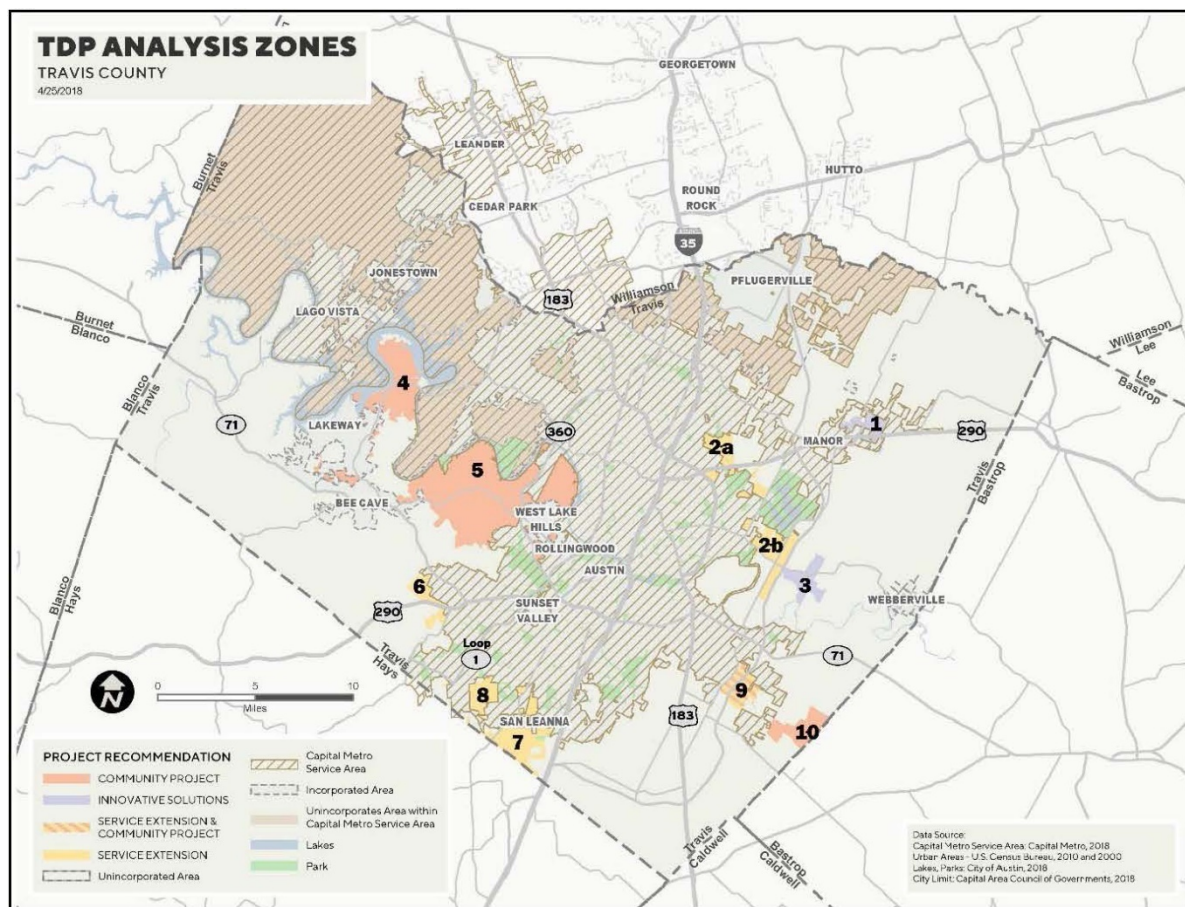
Figure IV-31.
Round Rock Service Area

Source:
City of Round Rock.



Responding to changing transportation needs. Agencies with responsibility for transportation planning and service delivery are either updating their approach to transit or have recently completed changes to routes and services. In 2016, Austin voters approved \$720 million in bonds for transportation and mobility improvements along several key corridors. The City of Austin is developing the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) which updates the city's 1995 transportation plan. Through the community engagement process, the ASMP team found that residents from across the socioeconomic and demographic spectrum expressed preference for scenarios that emphasized investment in transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects in key corridors and centers of activity. The Travis County Transit Development Plan prioritizes efficiently enhancing and expanding transit availability in the unincorporated areas of the county through Mobility on Demand pilot projects, community based solutions involving coordination between CARTS and nonprofits, and potential Service Extension Projects of CapMetro bus routes.

Figure IV-32.
Travis County Transit Development Plan Project Recommendations



Source: Travis County Transit Development Plan, 2018.

Resident perspectives on changing transportation needs. Many of the refugees who participated in focus groups would prefer to travel by bus, but those living in unincorporated Travis County have to share a car or get rides from family or coworkers because their neighborhood (Oak Hill) does not have bus services. *"All refugees take public transportation."* Focus group participants describe their ease with using buses because they have experience; the only challenge is getting bus passes. Several noted that the cost of the bus is high, especially for larger families.

Participants in an African American focus group do not feel that investment in public transit benefits them (*"what is so special about Metrorail?"*) and are skeptical that they could function without a car. They would love better and more predictable transit service (example, Manor to South Austin).

Asian Indian focus group participants thought that a call and ride service for seniors that would help them get to the AARC, grocery store, airport, cultural events—even in the evenings—*"would be amazing."*

CapMetro ReMap 2018. During the AI study period, CapMetro implemented a significant change to its services; the change is known as ReMap. CapMetro’s changes consolidated bus routes through a reimagining of the bus network into a “grid” network, similar to recent updates made in Houston.⁶ The new system is intended to have greater frequency along existing routes, increasing the number of routes that receive service every 15 minutes, seven days per week, from six to 14.⁷ As a result, many routes were modified, removed, and added. In total, CapMetro believes most of its prior routes have replacement routes to cover prior service—some with a slightly greater walk to transit. However, two routes were removed without replacements, including the 122 “Four Points Limited” route and the 970 “AMD/Lantana Campus” route.⁸ The overall impact is 120,000 extra hours of bus service per year, an approximately 10 percent increase.⁹ During the community engagement process for the ReMap, residents raised equity concerns about the proposed changes. A study by Farm&City found that the ReMap would increase access to high frequency transit for low income and non-White populations. As part of its FTA compliance process, CapMetro’s Title VI analysis found that the proposed changes did have a disparate impact on minority populations, but concluded that those adverse impacts had been mitigated by other service changes or improvements in the system.¹⁰

Specific concerns raised by residents in the ReMap process include:

- A loss of access to St. David’s North Austin Medical Center. CapMetro has stated that this route was modified due to low usage on that portion of the route.¹¹
- Perception of reduced service to minority residents in East Austin.
- Longer walks to bus stops given Austin’s lack of suitable sidewalks and safe pedestrian access.¹²
- General inconvenience and accessibility challenges along discontinued routes, including the 20/21 and others.

Figure IV-33 presents a protest flyer created by residents to draw attention to what they believed were inequities in the ReMap route changes.

⁶ <https://medium.com/austin-metro-journal/why-you-should-be-bullish-on-cap-remap-32f165707fbf>

⁷ <https://www.mystatesman.com/news/local/cap-metro-riders-brace-for-bus-system-overhaul-that-arrives-sunday/L59PjLSciYkbLDOP7RPCKO/>

⁸ <https://www.capmetro.org/remap-summary/#/>

⁹ <https://www.mystatesman.com/news/local/cap-metro-riders-brace-for-bus-system-overhaul-that-arrives-sunday/L59PjLSciYkbLDOP7RPCKO/>

¹⁰ https://www.capmetro.org/uploadedFiles/New2016/Public_Involvement/Board_Meetings/November-2017_Board-Meeting-Agenda-Packet.pdf, p. 148. See summary of findings and full report beginning on page 30 of the November 2017 Board Meeting Agenda Packet, linked to above.

¹¹ <https://capmetroblog.com/2018/05/30/cap-remap-explainer-faq-edition/>

¹² <https://medium.com/austin-metro-journal/why-you-should-be-bullish-on-cap-remap-32f165707fbf>

Figure IV-33.
CapREMap Protest
Flyer

Source:

AI Community engagement participant.

STOP

FTA Input Deadline: **May 24, 2018**

CAPREMAP

Attn: Lawyers
All Bus Riders, Allies
File Federal Injunction!

Transportation Discrimination ☹️

Take a stand: Stop CapMetro's Plantation Plan

White Millennials	UT/Mueller: 15-30 min	Minorities/Low-Income	North Lamar Transit Center
MORE FREQUENT		Infrequent	1 parked bus: 383
MORE RELIABLE		Unreliable: 40-60 min	-Now 4 park; 9 run
BETTER CONNECTED		DISCONNECTED service	
Better Rail Connection: 466-Kramer/7 Domain riders/hr		St. David's Hospital-North 20 riders/hr: 240-Eliminated!	
MORE Frequent Local & Express Buses + MetroRail		More frequent chances to get FIRED...	
15 min: 335-Mueller to Mopac (New east-west)		60 min: 323/New 339 (US Post Office, UPS)	
15 min/7 days: 333-William Canon (CM Kitchen)		40 min: 243/392 (No public input; No Peak)	
30 min: 333/Convict Hill-ACC (2.9 riders/Troxclair)		243-Wells Branch: Segregates minorities Northeast	
30 min: 345-45th/Hyde Park (New east-west)		—No east-west: 392 transfer to Arboretum	
30 min: 105-New Peak, 5th St (CM Ann Kitchen)		—325: No Walmart-Northcross to Norwood	
30 min: 30-Barton Creek (27 Eanes students)		*Every bus north of NLTC requires transfer	
30 min: 238-Westgate (\$1.8M: 10.3 riders/hr)		vs. 392 (15.3 riders, \$916K); 3-mile Parmer walk!	

Email Federal Transit Administration Today!

Lynn.Hayes@dot.gov (Cc: robert.patrick@dot.gov)
FTA Region 6 Administrator

Deadline: May 24, 2018

No shelter!
½-mile walk
Rain, Hot: 100°
Cold days ☹️

Negative Impact

Who: Minorities, low-income
What: More transfers-WAIT!
When: Sun/June 3, 2018
Where: Northeast Austin
Why? CapMetro improved Rail and buses for Whites!

Take Action/Speak Now! Questions: apluswriters@gmail.com

Today thru May 24, 2018: Copy flyer. Ask members/friends/bus riders to email/fax FTA Form from church, meetings, phone!
May 9, 2018/Wed: Speak@CapMetro Finance Mtg 10AM or Operations Mtg 12:30PM; Location: 2910 E. 5th St
May 21, 2018/Noon: Protest at CapMetro's Next Regular Meeting: Suspend Funding; Redraw Cap ReMap

Wheelchairs/Walkers/Canes Elders and Blanton Kids
Walk to 51st or Manor Rd
300-Rogge: Eliminated

DEMAND FTA:
Suspend Funding
Make CapMetro
Redraw Maps!

Focus group participants who are transit dependent discussed the impact of the recent CapMetro route changes. All of these participants described lost routes, increased time spent on buses, increased distance to walk or roll to bus stops, and a perception that the routes were changed to benefit white collar commuters at the expense of low income residents. *"They took the buses away from the poor."* (Domestic violence survivor focus group) One mother of four leaves SafePlace at 5:30 a.m. to take the first of three buses to get one son to Ortega school and then two other buses to take her other kids to school. None of the participants who use transit described positive impacts on the changes. This is likely due to the nature of the changes, which deemphasized local routes and prioritized high frequency transit. A transportation planning stakeholder familiar with the process characterized the ReMap process as focusing resources to reduce congestion by making transit more convenient for commuting, at a cost of reducing resources for local neighborhood oriented trips.

Examples of how the CapReMap changes negatively impacted transit dependent populations include¹³:

- *“SafePlace used to have access to seven buses, now there are only three and each of the three only goes west.”*
- Participants in a reentry focus group repeatedly brought up the impact of bus route changes implemented by Capital Metro during the Cap ReMap process. One man reported that his bus now stops running at 9pm, requiring him to walk a long distance in a dangerous area to get home from work. Participants also reported that Cap Remap has created difficulties for folks living on the outer edges of the Austin region. Individuals have been pushed to the outskirts of the city due to rising housing costs, gentrification, social stigma against individuals with criminal records, etc. but now fewer bus lines are available to help those individuals get to work in Austin.
- One man reported that after Cap Remap, it now takes an extra forty minutes to cross town near Rundberg.
- An LGBTQ focus group participant described the difficulty of using the bus due to long distances between bus stops (sometimes a mile or more) and lack of sidewalks between stops.
- Participants in an Asian Indian focus group said that the ReMap changes and other route changes in the past three years resulted in the Asian American Resource Center no longer being served by bus routes. As a result, these Indian seniors are often isolated in their children’s homes.

Disparities in cost of car insurance. A 2015 study by the Consumer Federation of America¹⁴ found that major insurance companies charge 70 percent more in majority African American ZIP codes than in predominantly white ZIP codes for basic liability-only car insurance policies. The disparities were found in both urban and rural areas as well as in upper middle income neighborhoods:

- In urban areas—\$1,797 average in African American neighborhoods compared to \$1,126 in predominantly white neighborhoods;
- In rural areas—the disparity narrows, but is still significant—\$669 vs. \$542; and
- In upper middle income ZIP codes, the average cost in predominantly African American ZIP codes is \$2,113 vs. \$717—194 percent higher.

¹³ Focus groups for the AI were held in August and September 2018.

¹⁴ https://consumerfed.org/press_release/major-auto-insurers-charge-good-drivers-70-more-in-african-american-zip-codes-than-in-white-zips/

Employment

Access to employment opportunities varies geographically, and, as discussed previously, many residents commute significant distances from their homes to work. Figures IV-34 and IV-35 demonstrate the number of jobs in the Austin-Round Rock metropolitan areas and comparison MSAs and the number of jobs reachable at different commute lengths.

Figure IV-34.
Number of
Jobs
Reachable by
Number of
Minutes, 2017

Source:
Access Across America:
Transit 2017, University of
Minnesota Accessibility
Observatory.

	10 minutes	20 minutes	30 minutes	60 minutes	Employment
Austin	479	3,125	11,444	81,826	917,901
Charlotte	412	2,342	7,682	55,578	877,360
Denver	820	6,136	20,665	180,478	1,356,387
Kansas City	351	2,094	6,864	47,330	1,023,563
Minneapolis	558	4,455	18,029	146,905	1,794,806
Nashville	283	1,595	5,380	34,390	801,589
Sacramento	478	2,969	9,430	72,932	915,759
San Antonio	328	2,326	9,306	86,468	986,091
San Jose	654	5,173	19,254	203,107	909,053

Figure IV-35.
Rank of Accessibility by Metro
Area, 2017

Source:
Access Across America: Transit 2017, University of
Minnesota Accessibility Observatory.

	Weighted Average	10-minute commute	30-minute commute
Austin	#22	#21	#20
Charlotte	#34	#28	#32
Denver	#10	#9	#10
Kansas City	#40	#38	#39
Minneapolis	#13	#17	#13
Nashville	#43	#44	#43
Sacramento	#28	#22	#28
San Antonio	#26	#31	#29
San Jose	#9	#15	#12

Finding and keeping a job is not a concern for most residents who participated in the community engagement process, with one notable exception. Refugees referred to finding employment as a challenge, and that their prospects improved if they had someone—a friend, a case manager, or advocate—to vouch for them. A transgender refugee focus group participant shared that he had no difficulty getting his first job because his name matched his paperwork, but when he changed his name, his name and gender no longer matched his visa paperwork, making it difficult to find employment until his visa update process is completed. The typical job a refugee has pays \$10 to \$11/hour, equating to a rent payment of less than \$500 per month. Many jobs are found through partnerships at hotels. The refugees have held jobs in their countries as teachers and electronic manufacturing. They would be happy to do anything with their hands: security guard, computer technician, auto mechanics. It is unusual for clients to find jobs that meet their qualifications. Language barriers are significant.

Stakeholders with organizations providing services to refugees noted that the cost of (re)training is a significant barrier for refugees looking to improve their employment prospects. Resources are not readily available to pay for programs as well as the lost income of the family member participating in training. Some certifications cost \$1,200 to \$4,000. In their experience, the Goodwill Excel program successfully helps refugees gain employment.

East Williamson County stakeholder focus group participants:

- There are a lot of jobs, and high demand for workers skilled in the trades.
- Career Life Ministries is offering an 18 month certification program for trades.
- A CNA program offered in Bartlett filled in one day.
- High demand for skills training and employed need skilled workers.
- “These aren’t people who want to go to a college campus, but they will go for certificates that can get them working in highly paid jobs quickly.”

Residents living in Williamson County discussed the skill mismatch between high paying employment opportunities available in Austin (high tech, professional white collar) and the more blue collar county residents.

- *“The high paying jobs in the Austin area are in computers and technology. Husband is a welder and there is no work for him here, so he lives and works in Port Arthur and comes home on the weekends.” (Pflugerville intercept interview participant)*

Technology barriers. In focus groups with refugees and groups that included LEP residents, at least one participant in each group shared that they did not know how to use the Internet to complete tasks like planning a bus trip, job searching and submitting online applications, and finding ESL and other classes. When asked if they’d prefer to receive information in a different format, all responded that they would prefer to learn how to use the Internet.

Infrastructure and Services

In addition to the healthy neighborhood indicators and indicators of access to opportunity, focus group participants discussed their perspectives on public investment in infrastructure and other services in their neighborhood.

Georgetown resident and stakeholder perspectives. In a focus group with Georgetown African American and Hispanic residents, participants described their experiences with housing discrimination. This included:

- City investment displacing minorities instead of benefitting them;

- Selective enforcement of parking rules in front of minority-occupied homes;
- Locating the county jail in a low income minority neighborhood. *“They put things in our neighborhoods to jeopardize our way of life—escaped criminals run through our neighborhoods.”*

The Georgetown stakeholder focus group acknowledged that public investment has been conducted in a way that infringes on minority neighborhoods instead of contributes to them; they feel the city doesn’t include the voice of the people.

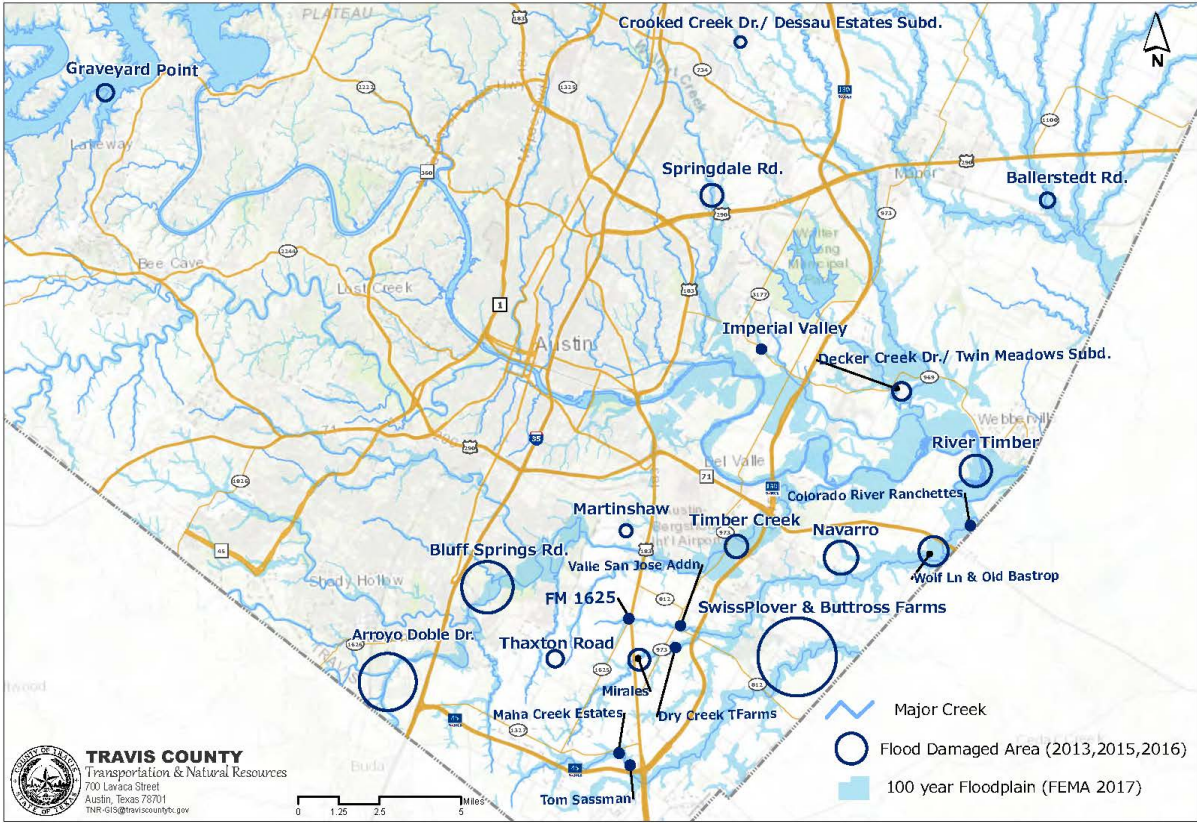
Flooding. Participants in the East Williamson County stakeholder focus groups raised flooding as an infrastructure concern in the county.

- Flooding is an issue in Taylor and East Williamson County. Some concern that new housing construction in the area will exacerbate flooding issues.
- The parts of Taylor that are prone to flooding are where the last of the affordable housing is located and that is also an area with more of a minority population.
- The people in those neighborhoods can’t get homeowners’ insurance because they’re in a flood zone.

FEMA is currently revising the floodplain boundaries in parts of Williamson County. The public comment period on the revised map changes closed in November 2018.

Flooding is also an issue in Travis County. As shown in Figure IV-36, floods in 2013, 2015, and 2016 resulted in floods in a number of southcentral Travis County areas.

Figure IV-36.
Flood Damaged Areas in Travis County



Source: Travis County.