

## 5. EDUCATION

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### **VISION**

Education in Bloomington will continue to be a pillar of the community, enriching our culture and economic competitiveness.

A good education system is the bedrock of our community. A major factor in consideration of a community for potential residential and business locations is the quality of educational opportunities available to its residents. The Bloomington-Normal area public schools have a great reputation of providing a high quality education. This image has and continues to serve the community well.

The community is also home to two universities and two community colleges providing higher education for over 25,000 students. The quality educational opportunities found within the City have attracted many new residents and businesses.

There is a wide range of educational opportunities available for people of all ages in the Bloomington area. However, the ever-changing needs of the educa-

tion system and the funding challenges faced by the public schools and universities do pose a threat to the quality and sustainability of our public education system.

The City of Bloomington is served primarily by two public school districts, Bloomington School District 87 and McLean County Unit District 5, along with private schools. The City of Bloomington's older established neighborhoods are primarily served by the Bloomington School District 87. This district is surrounded and landlocked by the Unit 5. The majority of growth in the City since the 1970s was located in Unit 5. The opportunities and challenges presented by this situation are unique and should be addressed contextually.

Over 60% of District 87's revenue source is based on property taxes. The property values and the health of the established older neighborhoods are critical for the long term sustainability of the district. In addition, due to changes in education policy and practice, funding and other challenges, schools are continually evolving. The average size of the newer school sites is much bigger compared to just a few decades ago, with students

increasingly being transported to the school site. Walkable neighborhood schools are becoming a rarity in the newer areas. The goal to achieve a multi-modal community, as outlined in the neighborhoods section, cannot be achieved without the City working closely with the

school districts and understanding their needs. Tools such as school land dedication/fee-in-lieu policies can be very useful to achieve compact walkable neighborhoods in emerging areas while meeting the needs of the school districts.

The City and the broader

## Average Difference in Reading Standardized Test Scores between 90<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Income Percentile Families

The achievement gap between high- and low-income students is at an all-time high

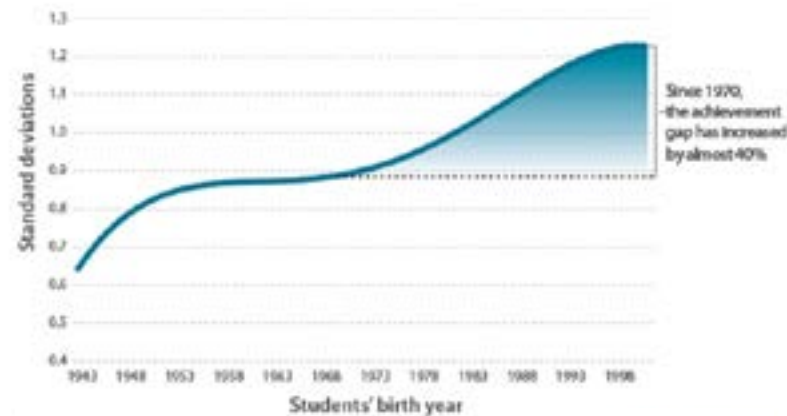


Figure 5-1. Source: SNS White Paper: Supporting the Education Imperative: The Role of Community Development



“Aimed at providing comprehensive, critical support to children and families and reweaving the very fabric of community life, the HCZ® Project began as a one-block pilot in the 1990s. With bold ambition, careful planning, and a strong infrastructure, we set out to address not just some, but all of the issues children and families were facing within a finite geographic area: crumbling apartments, rampant drug use, failing schools, violent crime, and chronic health problems.

Building on the success of this early initiative, we launched a 10-year strategic plan in 2000, steadily and systematically expanding the depth and breadth of our programming to encompass 24 blocks, then 60 blocks, and ultimately 97 blocks. Today, the Children's Zone® serves more than 12,000 youth and nearly 9,500 adults and our organization as a whole serves over 13,700 youth and 13,200 adults.

With 70% of children in the Zone engaged in our pipeline of programs each year and thousands of youth well on their way to achieving the ultimate goal of college graduation, we have not only reached the tipping point, but also have become a national model and thought leader in the fields of education, youth and community development, and the fight against poverty.”

Figure 5-2. Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Model

## GUIDING THEMES

- Bloomington will continue to be a magnet for families by investing in its public school system. Public schools will strive to become more balanced socioeconomically.
- Beyond providing educational opportunities, our colleges and universities, in partnership with the community, will enrich our culture and boost our economic competitiveness.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- Bloomington is a highly-educated community. Forty-four percent of the population 25 years and older have attained a bachelor's degree or higher and 92.9 percent are high school graduates.
- K-12 public education is provided by two public school districts.
  - 1) **District 87** is surrounded by Unit 5 and primarily serves 5,697 students in the established older neighborhoods of the City. There are six elementary Schools, one junior high and one high school. District 87 also has a pre-K program. At 61.0 percent, property taxes make up the District's primary revenue source followed by 17.1 percent state revenue.
  - 2) **Unit 5** boundaries extend beyond the City limits of Bloomington. A majority of the newer areas in the City (approximately 15.52 square miles or 57%) are served by Unit 5. There are 16 elementary schools (five serve Bloomington alone), four junior high schools, two high schools and one pre-K. Nearly 54 percent of district's revenue comes from the property taxes followed by about 35 percent from the state.
- There are eight parochial schools and a pre-K run by Hearland Headstart that also serve Bloomington students.
- The four higher education institutions in the Bloomington-Normal area cater to nearly 25,000 students. Illinois State University (~20,000); Illinois Wesleyan University (~2,000); Heartland Community College (~3,500); and Lincoln College (~500).

community must work closely with the school districts and universities to ensure the current quality education that leads to a steady stream in the talent pipeline and overall economic prosperity.

## BRIDGING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

School districts will continue to employ a number of strategies within the schools to improve student achievement. Factors that influence achievement within the schools include smaller class sizes, increased spending per pupil and improved teaching practices.

However, there is an increasing body of literature<sup>1</sup> stemming from a social experiment in Harlem (see Figure 5-2) describing how efforts within the school are not enough to decrease the achievement gap. Factors such as poverty, housing, food security, family stability and the overall neighborhood context affect student achievement. Figure 5-1 shows how the gap in achievement is at an all-time high between high and low income students.

This literature also suggests that the achievement gap can be closed more in the early years than later. Figure 5-3 is a snapshot of the

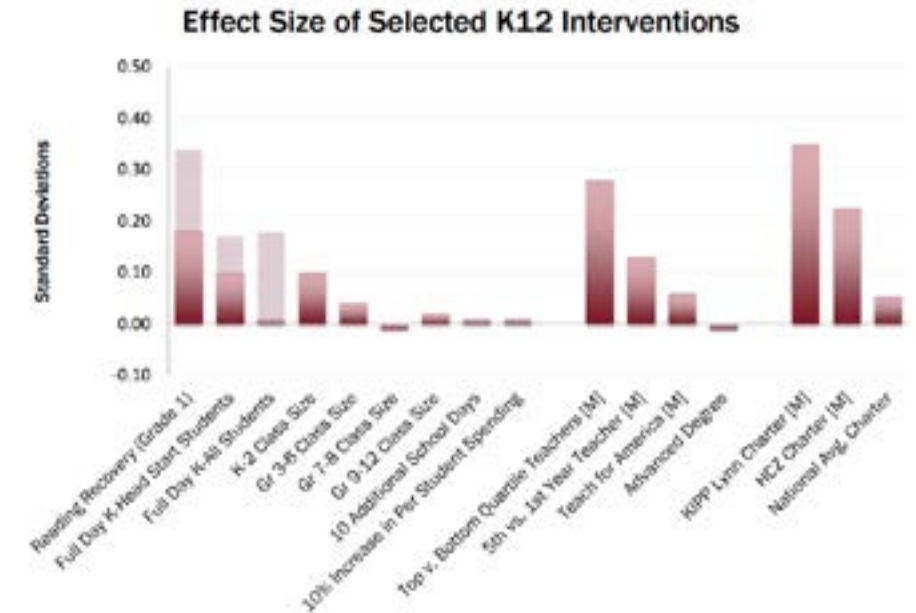


Figure 5-3.

Source: SNS White Paper: Supporting the Education Imperative: The Role of Community Development

effect of select intervention programs outside the school. Figure 5-6 highlights the effects of select socioeconomic factors on academic achievement as measured by test scores in Bloomington elementary schools in both school districts. As is evident from this map, the students attending the schools on the West Side, or the Regeneration area as defined in the neighborhood chapter, are performing at a lower level than their peers.

It is absolutely critical that the City, the school districts, and

the community take a holistic approach to addressing neighborhood and school issues, particularly in the Regeneration area.

Footnote 1 "Return on Investment: Evidence-based Options to Improve Statewide Outcomes." Washington State Institute for Public Policy. "A Dozen Economic Facts About K-12 Education." Hamilton Project. Will Dobbie, Roland Fryer, Jr. "Are High-quality Schools Enough to Close the Achievement Gap? Evidence from a Social Experiment in Harlem." NBER Working Paper Series, 2009. Lisa Sanbonmatsu, Jeffrey R. Kling, Greg J. Duncan, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn "Neighborhoods and Academic Achievement: Results from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment." NBER Working Paper Series, 2006.

## EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

With over forty-four percent of all adults over 25 years of age with a bachelor's degree or higher, Bloomington is a highly educated community. As shown in Figure 5-4, college education leads to higher earnings and lower unemployment rates which correlate with the higher median incomes and lower unemployment rate of the Bloomington-Normal area. This figure also highlights the relationship between higher education and poverty. In the 21st century economy that is predominantly driven by knowledge and innovation, our ability to compete for future growth and overall economic competitiveness hinge on our ability to attract and retain an educated workforce.

While the City recognizes this and supports the workforce development efforts of the Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council (EDC), there is a gap in the quality of and access to education and workforce training, particularly for low income youth and minority groups. This was clear during the outreach process as well as from the 2014 United Way's community assessments. Bridging

this gap requires a focus on improving educational attainment at all levels and for all students. The goals and objectives listed in this chapter address some ways in which the City, in partnership with EDC, higher education institutions, school districts and not-for-profit organizations, can help bridge the gap and match the skills of the local workforce to the local employment



needs in the area. This chapter recognizes the interdependencies of education, economic development and neighborhoods (see Figure 5-5). It identifies several opportunities for the City and other community partners to help achieve the most from our investment in education.

The implementation of this chapter will not be without its challenges.

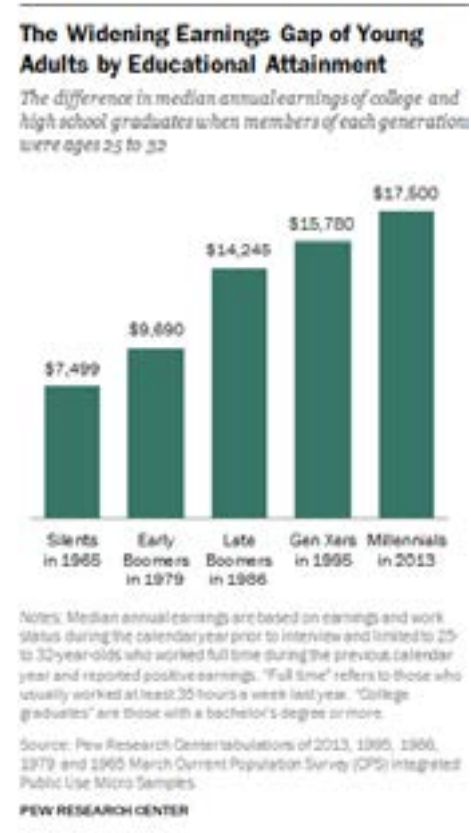


Figure 5-4.  
Source: PEW Research Center

- This comprehensive planning process is the first attempt to identify a role for the City and the broader community to bridge the academic achievement gap. While there were and continue to be numerous not-for-profit organizations that work on programs, such as after school programs, city governments have not made education their priority. There is unexplored territory in this new collaborative approach.
- With two public school districts

servicing Bloomington, one landlocked by the other, the issue of merging these two school districts comes up frequently. This politically sensitive question was on the referendum in the 1990s and was passed by District 87 voters with Unit 5 voters against the merger at that time. However, with the change in economic times, a similar referendum question may have a different outcome now or in the future.



Figure 5-5. Multi-directional relationship between education/workforce training, economic development, and neighborhoods. Source: MCRPC

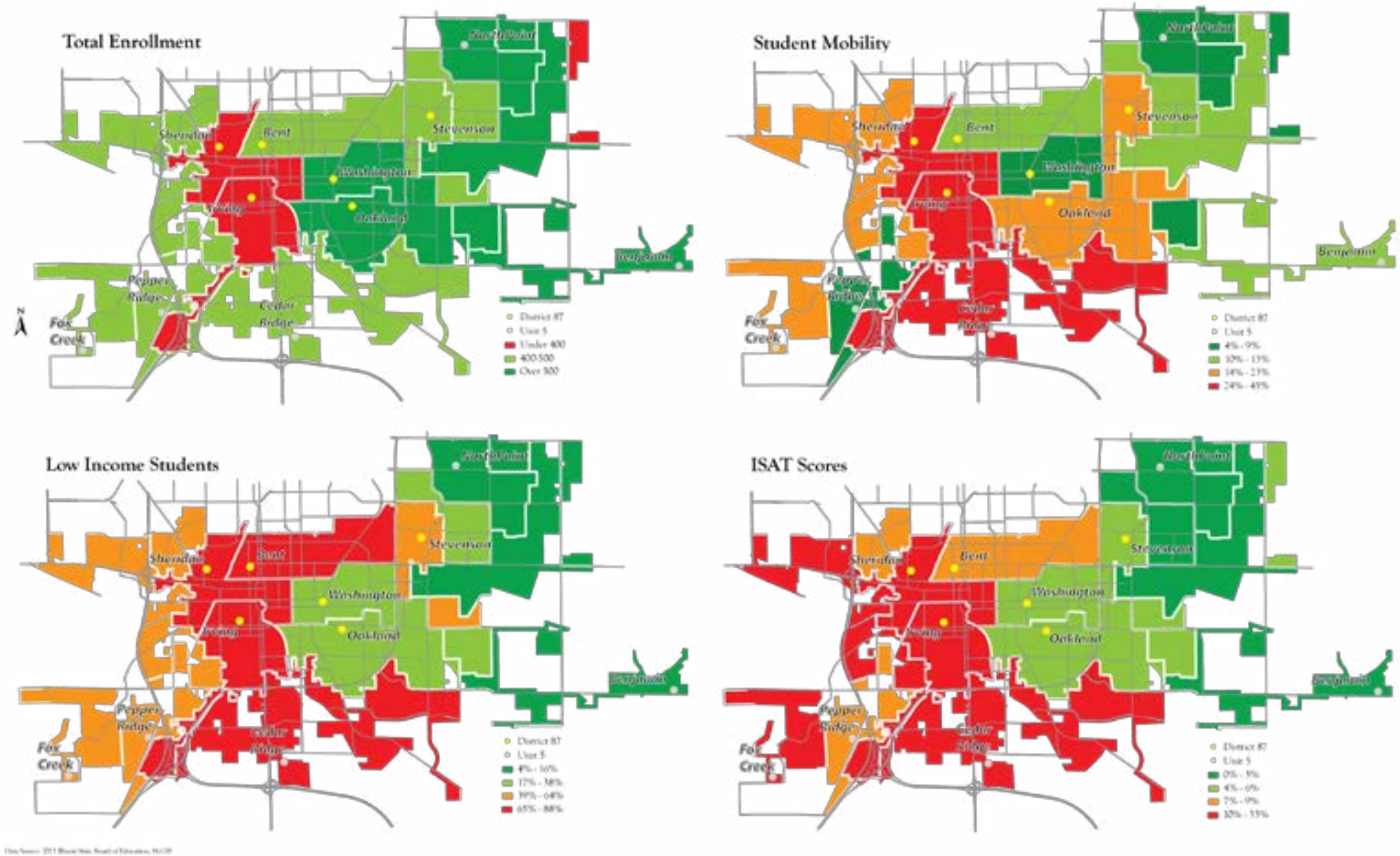


Figure 5-6. Socioeconomic Factors and Academic Achievement in Bloomington Elementary Schools

## EDU-1. Increased coordination between the City and the school districts to maintain high quality educational opportunities equitably for all students within the City.

### EDU-1.1 Implement and maintain mechanisms to coordinate comprehensive planning between the City and the schools.

#### METRICS

- # of collaborative capital improvement projects between the City and the School Districts ↑
- # of students walking/biking ↑
- Truancy rates ↓
- Graduation rate ↑
- A comprehensive walking/biking audit for all the schools
- Funding for improving sidewalks and bike routes ↑
- Mileage of sidewalks with a rating of 5 or better ↑
- Established school land dedication/fee-in-lieu

EDU-1.1a Annually scheduled meeting between the City and the school districts' leadership to discuss policy level issues of mutual concern. *Regional Office of Education, short/ongoing*

EDU-1.1b Regularly scheduled meetings to discuss growth and development issues, population and student projections to ensure the plans of the school districts and the City are compatible with each other. This can be achieved by having representatives from the school districts at the intergovernmental staff meetings. *MCRPC, short*

EDU-1.1c The City and the school districts shall continue to engage in joint planning for capital projects. (ex: parks, sports fields and libraries). This can also be achieved by having representatives from the school districts at the intergovernmental staff meetings. *City of Bloomington, short/ongoing*

EDU-1.1d Identify and remove the barriers for children to walk or bike to school. The first step for such a project will be to conduct a thorough walking and biking audit for all the schools. A comprehensive database of identified barriers for each school is an important step for working towards their removal. *McLean County Wellness Coalition, short-medium*

EDU-1.1e Encourage and enhance the ability of children and families to walk and bike to school through programs such as safe routes to school. *McLean County Wellness Coalition, ongoing*

EDU-1.1f School districts are encouraged to share data on the school enrollments on an annual basis with the City. The City should consider the effects of development on the schools during their development review process. *MCRPC, short*

EDU-1.1g Assist in the exploration of the merits/demerits of merging the schools districts serving Bloomington. *Regional Office of Education, short-medium*

EDU-1.1h Establish a baseline evaluation of school facilities to identify issues and future needs. *MCRPC, short*

EDU-1.1i Identify and remove barriers contributing to truancy. *Regional Office of Education, ongoing*

EDU-1.1j Enhance the civic engagement programs for K-12. *MCRPC, ongoing*

EDU-1.1k Ensure appropriate school land dedications or "fee-in-lieu" of sufficient size to meet future needs. *City of Bloomington, short*

#### PARTNER AGENCIES

District 87, Unit 5, City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, Other school districts in McLean County, McLean County, United Way, BPD, Juvenile Justice System, DA's office, School Resource Officers, Promise Council, Developers; Connect Transit; MCRPC

## EDU-1.2 The City will partner with District 87 to revitalize the established neighborhoods in the core of the City.

### METRICS

- Rental vacancy rates ↓
- Home ownership in Regeneration and Preservation areas ↑
- Equalized assessed value in District 87 ↑
- Population aged 0-18 in Regeneration and Preservation areas ↑
- High school graduation rates ↑
- Academic achievement gap between high and low-income students as measured by test scores, such as MAP ↑
- # of community schools in Regeneration and Preservation areas ↑
- Attendance rates ↑

### PARTNER AGENCIES

District 87, neighborhood organizations, Comcast, Unit 5, developers, BNRA, MCCA, YMCA, Habitat for Humanity, not-for-profit organizations particularly those working with education issues such as United Way and Boys and Girls Club.

EDU-1.2a Investigate the feasibility of community schools as a mechanism to revitalize the neighborhoods in the designated Regeneration and Preservation areas. *United Way, short-medium*

EDU-1.2b Establish a mechanism to coordinate the redevelopment efforts in the Regeneration and the Preservation areas between the City and District 87. *City of Bloomington, short/ongoing*

EDU-1.2c Build upon the availability, use, and attainment of technology for low-income neighborhoods to address the digital divide issues. *City of Bloomington, short-medium*

EDU-1.2d Continue to make Regeneration and Preservation areas attractive to families with young children. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

EDU-1.2e The City and school districts should coordinate when considering altering an existing school location to build upon the opportunity to redevelop the subject site and surrounding neighborhood. *City of Bloomington, long*

**A community school** is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources such as health and social services, youth and community development to foster improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.

The coalition for community schools says “Most people think of schools today as serving a single purpose where teachers teach and students learn. Community schools are more akin to smart phones. Schools and communities connect, collaborate, and create. Children and families have an array of supports from community partners right at their school. Communities and schools leverage their shared physical and human assets to help kids succeed.”

Fairview Elementary School, Normal, is a successful local example of a community school. It is a partnership between the school, Baby Fold, United Way, the community and families. The funding of this program is provided by the United Way of McLean County.



Figure 5-7. Source: The Pantagraph

In recognition that the educational outcomes of children are heavily influenced by many social and neighborhood factors beyond the control of schools, the Department of Education established the Promise Neighborhood Fund for the improvement of education. These funds are granted to communities to ensure all children and youth growing up in designated Promise Neighborhoods have access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career.

The grant application identifies the purpose of Promise Neighborhoods as: to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in our most distressed communities, and to transform those communities by:

1. Identifying and increasing the capacity of eligible entities that are focused on achieving results for children and youth throughout an entire neighborhood;
2. Building a complete continuum of cradle-to-career solutions of both educational programs and family and community supports, with great schools at the center;
3. Integrating programs and breaking down agency “silos” so that solutions are implemented effectively and efficiently across agencies;
4. Developing the local infrastructure of

systems and resources needed to sustain and scale up proven, effective solutions across the broader region beyond the initial neighborhood; and

5. Learning about the overall impact of the Promise Neighborhoods program and about the relationship between particular strategies in Promise Neighborhoods and student outcomes, including through a rigorous evaluation of the program.

Locally, designating the Regeneration Area as a Promise Neighborhood will not only bring much needed focus and attention to the social and neighborhood aspects that contribute negatively to the educational achievement of the students in that area but also help streamline various ongoing efforts to bring about a positive change in education.



Figure 5-8. Promise Neighborhood Model



### EDU-1.3 The City shall coordinate with the Unit 5 School District, which serves the outlying areas of the City, to meet the demand placed on schools from new development.

#### METRICS

- New public school facilities consistent with the Comprehensive Plan ↑
- Established school land dedication/fee-in-lieu

EDU-1.3a New public school facilities should be coordinated with the City to ensure availability of necessary services and infrastructure compatible and consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. *City of Bloomington, long*

#### PARTNER AGENCIES

Unit 5, Developers

#### School Land Dedication/Fee-in-Lieu

In recognition that there is a direct impact on schools due to development, many communities adopt a school land dedication or fee-in-lieu ordinances to meet the infrastructure demands placed upon the City and the school districts to adequately serve new residential development. In such ordinances, the sub-divider of new residential lots or the developer of existing undeveloped residential lots and new multi-family residential dwelling units for which building permits are issued shall provide public school sites or fees in lieu thereof to reasonably serve the proposed subdivision or residential development.

The City, in consultation with the school district, decides if the sub-divider shall dedicate land or provide cash in lieu thereof and the location of the land to be dedicated.

The school districts adopt a methodology which incorporates school needs and school population and results in a formula which indicates the average number of people living in single-family detached homes, single-family attached homes, and multi-family homes. This methodology further incorporates analysis performed by the school district relating to construction costs of school facilities and the relationship of those costs to the individual students. The amount of land to be dedicated and the size of development is set forth in the methodology.

Locally, the Town of Normal adopted a school land dedication/fee-in-lieu ordinance nearly a decade ago. The City of Bloomington and Town of Normal both have a parkland dedication/fee-in-lieu ordinances along these same lines to fulfill the open space and recreational needs of new developments.

#### Promise Council

Promise Council is a collection of caring individuals who work to connect community resources to the specific needs of students as identified by teachers and staff at local schools. These councils exist to remove barriers to learning and give all children the opportunity they deserve to achieve success through education.

In Bloomington, Pepper Ridge Elementary School was the first to have a Promise Council, in 2008. Since then, many schools in the Bloomington-Normal area have established Promise Councils. Currently there are Promise Councils at Cedar Ridge Elementary, Fox Creek Elementary and Bloomington Junior High providing the things children need outside the classroom to succeed, such as food, clothing, and mentoring.



Pepper Ridge Promise Council

## EDU-2. Provide life-long skills and learning opportunities for all by investing in excellent schools, colleges and continuous education.

### EDU-2.1 Coordinate with area high schools and higher education institutions to develop and nurture a skilled workforce in the community.

#### METRICS

- # of workforce training programs ↑
- Participation in workforce training programs ↑
- Labor force participation rate ↑
- Percentage of population with higher education ↑
- Percentage of youth not enrolled in school or in labor force ↓

#### PARTNER AGENCIES

Local business, major employers, universities, community colleges, other education sector non-profits, McLean County Compact, City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, McLean County, MCRPC, EDC, YMCA

EDU-2.1a Work closely with the area universities to expand workforce training and educational programs to meet the needs of the current and the targeted industries. *EDC, ongoing*

EDU-2.1b Work with the local universities to expand their training programs and research capabilities to ensure the students are receiving training in emerging employment sectors. *EDC, ongoing*

EDU-2.1c Initiate a program to provide counseling to students about the post-high school educational opportunities such as vocational training or higher education options within the community. *School districts, short*

EDU-2.1d Create a culture of entrepreneurship through effective coordination between educational institutions and local businesses. *EDC, short*

EDU-2.1e Continue to support programs that address education issues such as “Cradle to Career” spearheaded by McLean County United Way. *United Way, ongoing*

#### Internships

A strong, highly skilled workforce is one of the basic pillars of local economic development. Cities around the nation are acknowledging that a skilled workforce is one of the strongest incentives for businesses to locate in a city where there is a constant stream of talent in the pipeline. Job opportunities exist in the Bloomington-Normal area. It is critical for us as a community to bridge any gap in skills, if they exist.

Internships, both college and high school, create a pathway for students to engage with the local employers and increase their knowledge of the kinds of opportunities available in the community after graduation while bridging the gap between academic knowledge and real world needs. Internships also add great value to the organization and its ability to expand its talent pipeline. Internships give businesses the opportunity to see interns in action, test their thinking, check for talent fit and assess their personal and professional connection to the team and workplace. Internships are a great tool to retain young talent in the organization and in the community.



**Urban Alliance** is a successful city-wide high school internship program geared towards under-resourced youth to prepare them for a life of self-sufficiency. It usually starts small, follows a strategic vision and scales up based on what works. In Washington, D.C. the program began with only a few seniors at a single high school in 1996, it has since grown into a citywide initiative that has reached over 12,000 students and has been replicated in three other metro areas: Baltimore, Chicago and Northern Virginia. Students are employed part-time during the school year and work from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, they receive life-skills training and participate in job readiness workshops. During the summer, they work full-time and attend financial literacy workshops on Fridays. All internships are paid and students who perform well may receive raises if their employers approve.

## EDU-2.2 Identify and address existing industry gaps to help alleviate the potential workforce shortages.

### METRICS

- # of workforce certification programs ↑
- # of workforce program graduates ↑
- # and type of internships available in McLean County ↑
- # and affordability of educational after-school programs ↑

EDU-2.2a Initiate a broader conversation between the public agencies, school districts, local universities, and the private sector to address employment in Bloomington. *EDC, ongoing*

EDU-2.2b Continue partnership with EDC to promote the work readiness of city residents and the development of skills that correspond to emerging opportunities with employers that offer jobs. *City of Bloomington, ongoing*

EDU-2.2c Work with the EDC, McLean County Chamber of Commerce and other private entities to create internship and summer job programs for college and high school students to help retain them in the area. *EDC, short*

EDU-2.2d The City and school districts shall actively support after school programs that focus on educational enrichment and skills. *School districts, ongoing*

### PARTNER AGENCIES

EDC, MCC, Major employers, Universities, Community colleges, Business community, School Districts, YMCA, United Way, Local businesses

### StriveTogether

StriveTogether is a framework of civic infrastructure that helps to support individuals from cradle to career. The tool can help communities identify who they are serving now and help them think strategically about where they want to focus their efforts in the future. Typically, StriveTogether partnerships are more than collaborations or partnerships. Their vision is to have a collective impact by:

1. **Shared Community Vision:** All participants have a shared vision for change, as well as a common understanding of the problem and how they will work collectively to solve it.
2. **Evidence Based Decision Making:** Partnerships make decisions based on local data that shows areas of need and promising practices that are already working for children.
3. **Collaborative Action:** Community members come together to use data to collectively move outcomes.
4. **Investment and Sustainability:** Partnerships initiate or redirect resources (time, talent and treasure) toward data-based practices on an ongoing basis, and engages the community to ensure long-term sustainability.

### A Cradle to Career Vision for Education



Locally, United Way of McLean County is investigating this model to help improve the high school graduation rates in McLean County.

## EDU-2.3 Strengthen job training programs for low-skilled workers.

### METRICS

- # of workforce transition programs ↑
- # participating in workforce training programs in general, particularly vulnerable populations ↑
- Participation in vocational training ↑
- Unemployment rate for population 1) without high school diploma; 2) without higher education ↓
- # of jobs located in the Regeneration area ↑

EDU-2.3a Target workforce development programs and services for unrepresented and under-represented groups, such as low-income youth and adults, people of color, women, individuals with disabilities and the homeless. *McLean County Compact, short*

EDU-2.3b Partner with existing organizations such as LABYRINTH that provide training in “soft skills,” vocational skills, daycare, and other services that enable people to enter the workforce and earn a living wage. *EDC, short*

EDU-2.3c Work to develop transition programs that help workers transition into higher paying jobs. *EDC, medium*

EDU-2.3d Ensure training, services, and jobs are accessible to and located near those with the greatest need. *City of Bloomington, long*

EDU-2.3e Continue to link job creation for unemployed and underemployed residents to community job training programs such as Career Link. *EDC, ongoing*

### PARTNER AGENCIES

YWCA, MARC First, Youth Build, LifeCIL, Multicultural Leadership Program, School districts, BACC Program, Community colleges and Universities, Major employers, Neighborhood organizations, PATH, DOORS

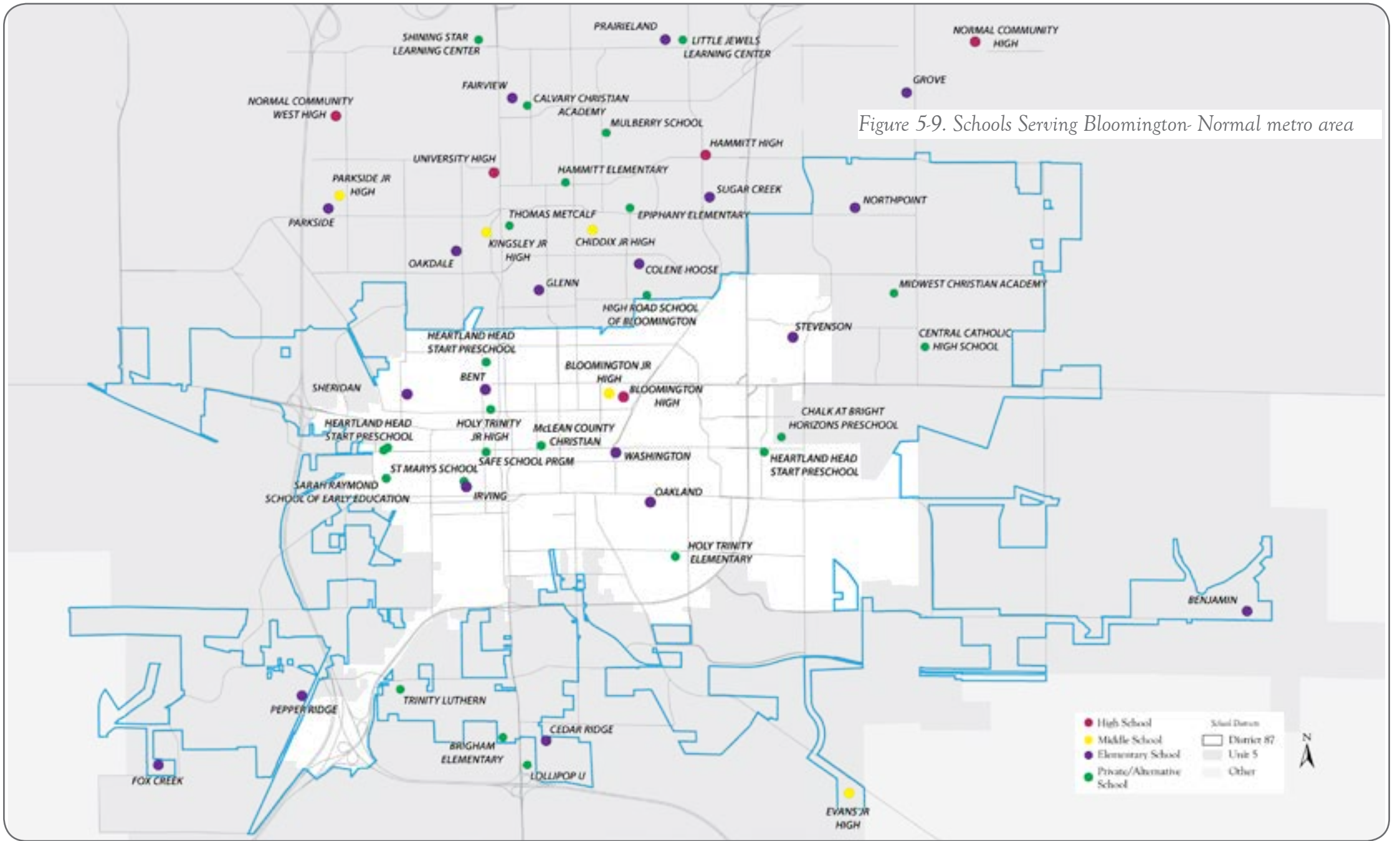


Figure 5.9. Schools Serving Bloomington- Normal metro area

