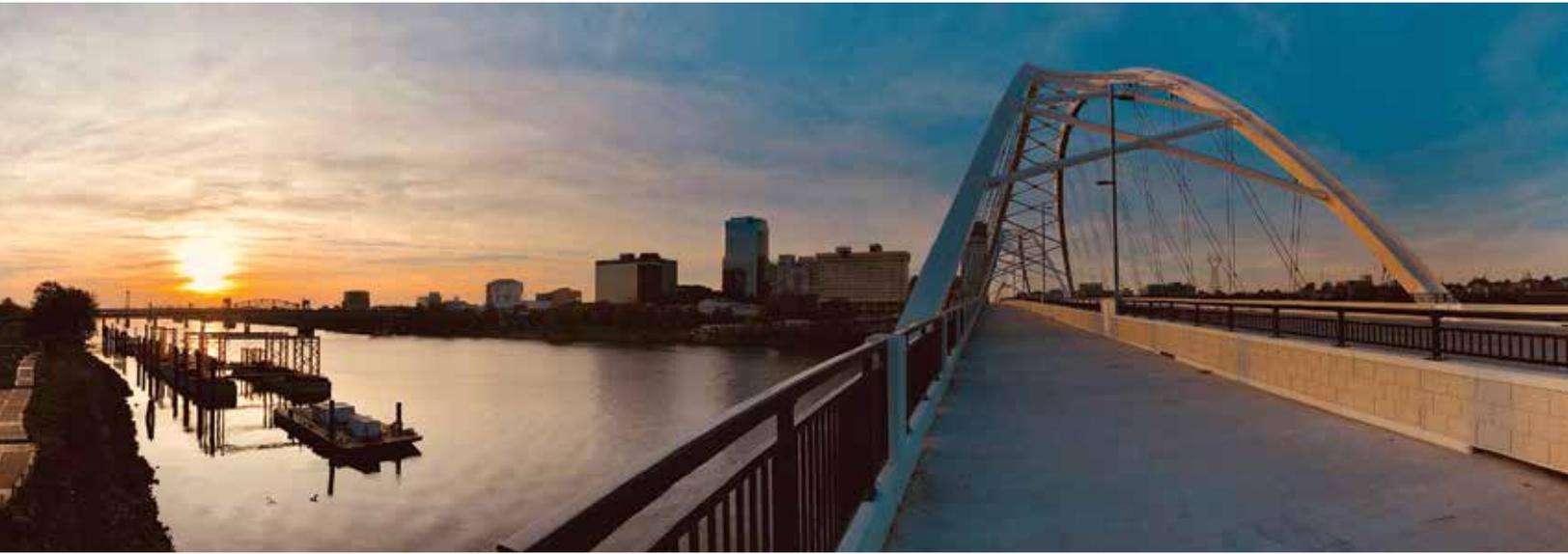


EXPANDING QUALITY:

ACCESS TO HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS
IN PULASKI COUNTY, ARKANSAS



Strengthening
nonprofits and
the communiti
they serve.

Sharing a mission of change

ABOUT IFF

IFF, the largest nonprofit community development financial institution (CDFI) in the Midwest, provides comprehensive community development services across the region through capital solutions, real estate consulting and development, and action-oriented research for nonprofits and institutions serving low-income communities. As part of IFF's mission to strengthen nonprofits and the communities they serve, IFF Research & Evaluation conducts analyses to facilitate strategic planning and resource allocation for states, municipalities, districts, schools, foundations, and nonprofits throughout the country. Over the course of nearly fifteen years of involvement in K-12 school improvement, IFF Research & Evaluation has developed a signature approach to assessing need in public education.

IFF's needs assessment methodology is distinctive for its spatial analysis of performing capacity at the neighborhood level. Its school studies are also driven by careful examination of the contextual factors that influence the public school landscape. Decision-makers have utilized insights from IFF's education research to inform strategic initiatives such as investments in districts and schools, reallocation or sale of vacant school buildings, facilities planning and site selection, identification of schools for potential turnarounds or as sources of best practices, solicitations and selection criteria for charter schools, and targeted communication regarding public school options.

IFF's education needs assessments evolved out of a partnership with the leadership of Chicago Public Schools. In 2003, the district sought to identify neighborhoods to prioritize for the location of new performing schools. IFF's research enhanced the district's ability to target its school improvement efforts and led to a better distribution of K-12 options for families. IFF's needs assessments have evolved and been adapted to guide policy and practice in many other cities, including Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, St. Louis, and Washington, DC. IFF has also completed statewide analyses of public school access in Illinois and Indiana and needs assessments for early care and education throughout the Midwest.

EXPANDING QUALITY:

ACCESS TO HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS
IN PULASKI COUNTY, ARKANSAS

November 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

At IFF, we believe every child deserves the opportunity to attend a good school in his or her neighborhood and, with hard data and a local focus, we aim to provide stakeholders with the tools to achieve that aspiration. To that end, IFF was commissioned to conduct a needs assessment for K-12 public education in Pulaski County, Arkansas with the *objective of measuring student accessibility to high-performing public schools in their neighborhood*. The study will seek to equip local school leaders, public officials, philanthropy, and other stakeholders to make data-informed decisions at the county level to improve school performance and, subsequently, student outcomes.

In this study, IFF evaluated the access to quality public education at the neighborhood level for the 2016-2017 school year by comparing student enrollment at high-performing public schools (i.e. supply) to the population of students enrolled in public schools (i.e. demand). These estimates informed both the *service gap*, or the number of students without access to a high-performing school (i.e. demand less supply), as well as the *service level*, or the percent of students with access to a high-performing school (i.e. supply divided by demand). IFF determined “high-performing” or “high-quality” schools based on those that were A-rated or B-rated by the Arkansas Department of Education’s (ADE) statewide rating tool. Additionally, this study exclusively focuses on public schools and categorizes schools by governance types and grade span.

In addition, IFF completed spatial analyses to supplement the core needs assessment by examining various student demographic characteristics, the actual vs. expected performance-based value add provided by school districts

in the county compared to statewide peers, and the rate at which students exercise school choice in the county.

KEY FINDINGS

Service Gap & Service Level

- Only 25% of students in Pulaski County had access to high-performing K-12 public schools in the 2016-2017 school year.
- To ensure that every child in the county has access to a high-performing school, over 40,000 additional seats are required at high-performing public schools.
- The K-12 service gap was closely aligned with race, as school zones identified as high need areas and those with significant African American student populations overlapped.

High-Need Areas

- 42% of the K-12 service gap was concentrated in the eleven school zones identified as high-need areas and only 12% of students living in these neighborhoods are currently enrolled in high-performing public schools.
- In high-need areas, access to high-performing schools varied greatly by grade span. Specifically, access was the lowest among middle school students with a service level of just 9% and highest among elementary school students with a service level of 15%.
- Less than 3% of public schools in the high-need areas are rated as high-performing.
- The high-need areas with the largest service gap in the county are listed below:

-
- o Jacksonville - Wards 1 and 2
 - o Jacksonville - Wards 3 and 4
 - o Pulaski County Special (PCSSD) - Woodson, Wrightsville
 - o Little Rock - SD Election Zone 6, East
 - o Little Rock - SD Election Zone 7, East
 - o Pulaski County Special (PCSSD) - Sherwood Ward 2
 - o North Little Rock - Levy
 - o Little Rock - SD Election Zone 7, Central
 - o Little Rock - SD Election Zone 2, East
 - o Pulaski County Special (PCSSD) - Sherwood Ward 4
 - o Pulaski County Special (PCSSD) - Sherwood Wards 1 and 3

School Performance

- Only 30% of K-12 public schools in Pulaski County (specifically 32 individual school campuses) were rated as high-performing by the ADE.
- 55% of charter schools and 38% of magnet schools were A-rated or B-rated. In contrast, 80% of the traditional public schools received a C-rating or lower.
- Little Rock school district is home to half of all public schools in the study but just 35% of all low performing schools were located in this district.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prioritize high-need areas for targeted school improvement activities.

- Almost half of the service gap is concentrated in just 11 high-need areas out of a total of 35 schools zones reviewed in this study. Therefore, by focusing additional resources in these high priority areas, especially in the more densely populated North Little Rock & Little Rock districts, Pulaski County can achieve greater impact by reaching more students while taking steps to minimize this gap.
- Create individual strategic plans for each high-need area to address specific challenges and establish tangible plans of action to improve school performance.

Develop tiered approach to improve low-performing public schools.

- Evaluate challenges facing C-rated schools on the cusp of becoming high-performing learning environments and offer tailored resources to improve performance, such as after-school tutoring, enhanced technology integration, and additional staffing support, based on need.
- Explore innovative interventions, such as collaborations between local district and charter schools, to improve low-performing public schools.
- Address the lowest performing schools (i.e. D-rated or F-rated) by determining if an improvement plan is a viable option. If not, consider annexation, consolidation or reconstitution of the school in line with the state's Academic Distress Possible Actions.

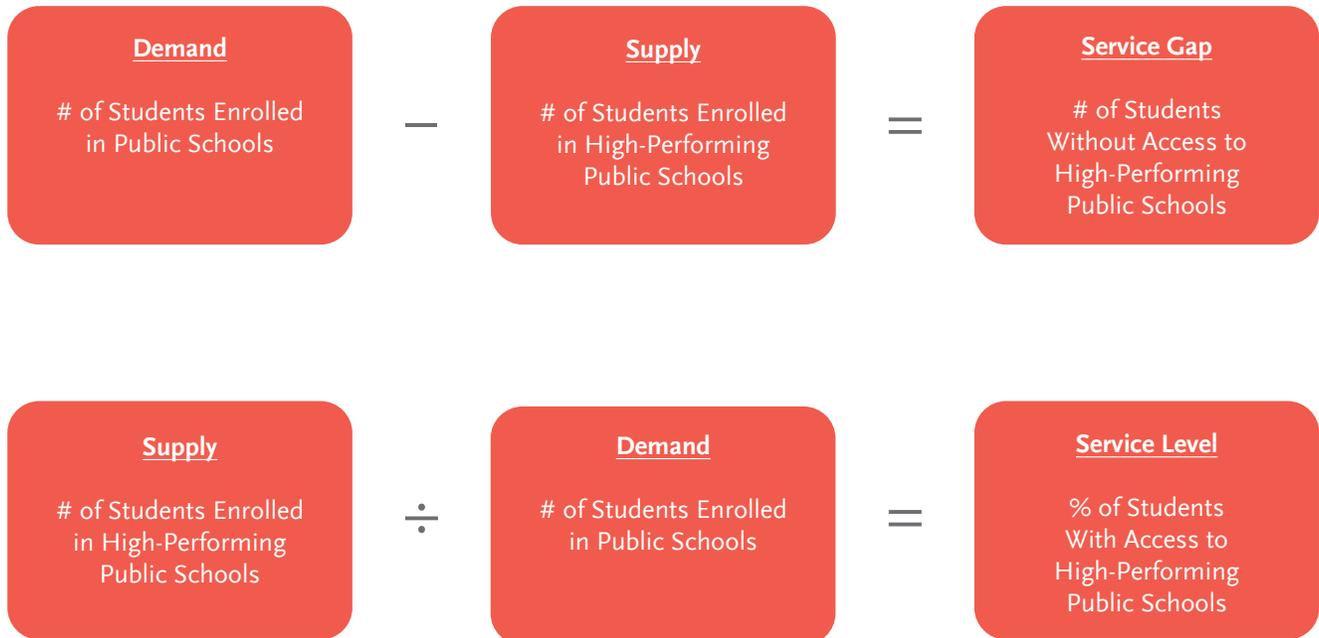
Coordinate strategic planning for K-12 public education across governing bodies.

- Identify opportunities to enhance engagement across the various school governing bodies, such as traditional school district boards, charter school leadership, and other government agencies, within Pulaski County and establish concrete mechanisms and forums for ongoing collaboration.
- As a result, better coordination across governing bodies can lead to:
 - o A shared understanding and unified response to school performance challenges,
 - o Minimal redundancies in school improvement efforts,
 - o Streamlined enrollment strategies to fill vacant seats in high-performing schools,
 - o A forum to share best practices and lessons learned, and
 - o Enhanced integration of available data across educational entities.

Utilize study to inform the implementation of the State of Arkansas' ESSA Plan.

- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will go into effect during the 2018-2019 school year and aims to provide opportunity for all students by increasing school standards and teacher quality, defining measures of accountability and emphasizing school improvement efforts.
- Key findings related to low-performing schools, especially in Pulaski County's high-need areas, can better target school improvement efforts, as the ESSA Plan mandates greater flexibility in identifying the lowest performing schools in need of intervention and determining necessary improvement actions.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT



METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

At its core, this study uses the supply-and-demand needs assessment approach that IFF has applied in many geographies to measure access to quality K-12 education. **The basic methodology calculates the number of students accessing high-performing public schools and compares it to the total number of students participating in the public school system.** Accordingly, in this needs assessment, supply is the total capacity at high-performing public schools, which is measured by the number of students enrolled at a high-performing public school in Pulaski County. While demand is the total number of students enrolled in the county's public schools (i.e. district, magnet and charter).

Once supply and demand are calculated, the service gap and service level are computed at the neighborhood level by combining all K-12 grade spans: elementary (grades K-5),

middle (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12).

The **service gap** is the number of students without access to a high-performing school (i.e. the difference between demand and supply). The service gap quantifies students currently enrolled at low-performing schools in need of seats at high-performing schools.

Similarly, the **service level** is the percent of students with access to a high-performing school (i.e. the quotient of supply over demand). The service level quantifies the percent of students enrolled at a high-performing school. A composite ranking is then created from the average of each neighborhood's individual school rankings by service gap. The **highest-need areas** will have the highest composite ranks and, therefore, the largest service gap as measured by the number of students lacking access to high-performing schools in the county.

Chart 1: Pulaski County School Performance Ratings, 2016–2017

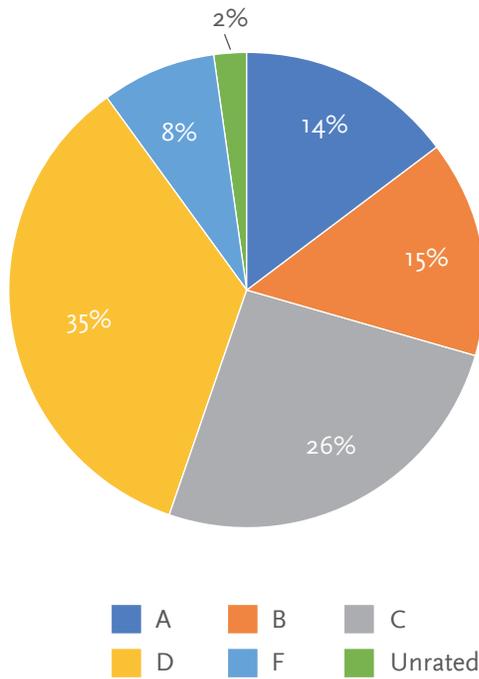
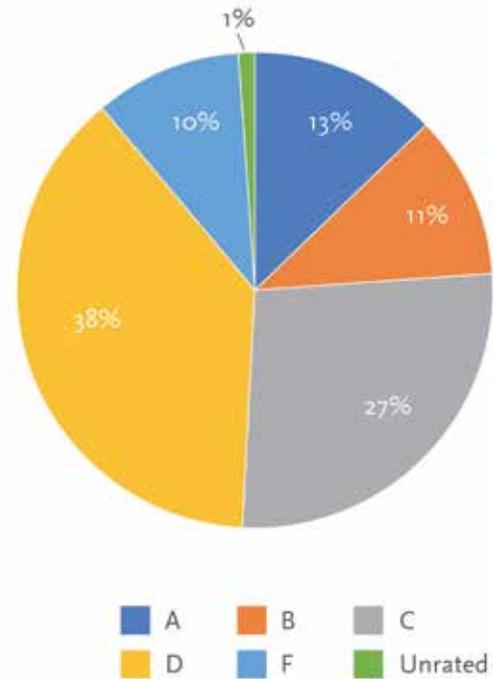


Chart 2: Pulaski County School Performance Rating by Student Enrollment, 2016–2017



SCHOOL PERFORMANCE RATING

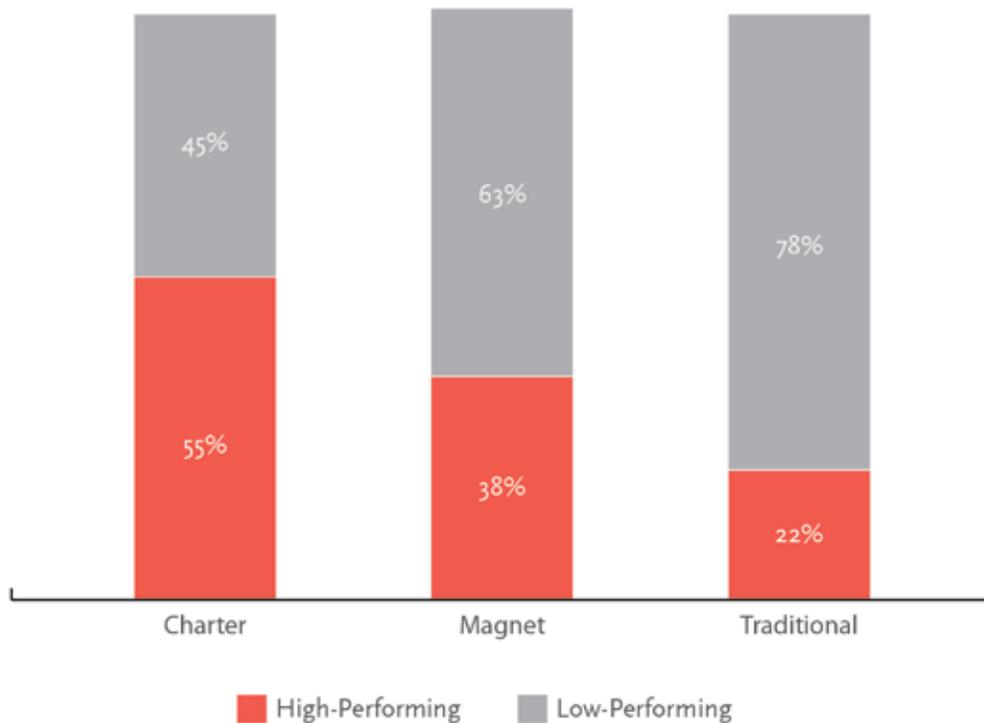
The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) annually publishes a Performance Report rating public schools on a scale of A to F based on data collected on test performance, teacher qualification, retention, discipline, etc.¹ For the purpose of this study, ***IFF categorized high-performing schools as those that were A-rated or B-rated by the state’s 2017 Performance Report.***

Key findings related to school performance in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- Approximately **29% of general education public schools were A-rated or B-rated thus considered high-performing** in this study (Graph 1). Similarly, just 24% of K-12 students in the county are enrolled at a high-performing public school (Graph 2).
- Traditional public schools are the most common school type in the county comprising over 70% of schools yet only 20% of them are considered high-performing (Graph 3).
- Charter and magnet public school types make up the remaining 30% of public school types and have

¹ <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/public-school-accountability/school-performance/report-card>

Chart 3: Pulaski County School Performance Rating by School Type, 2016–2017

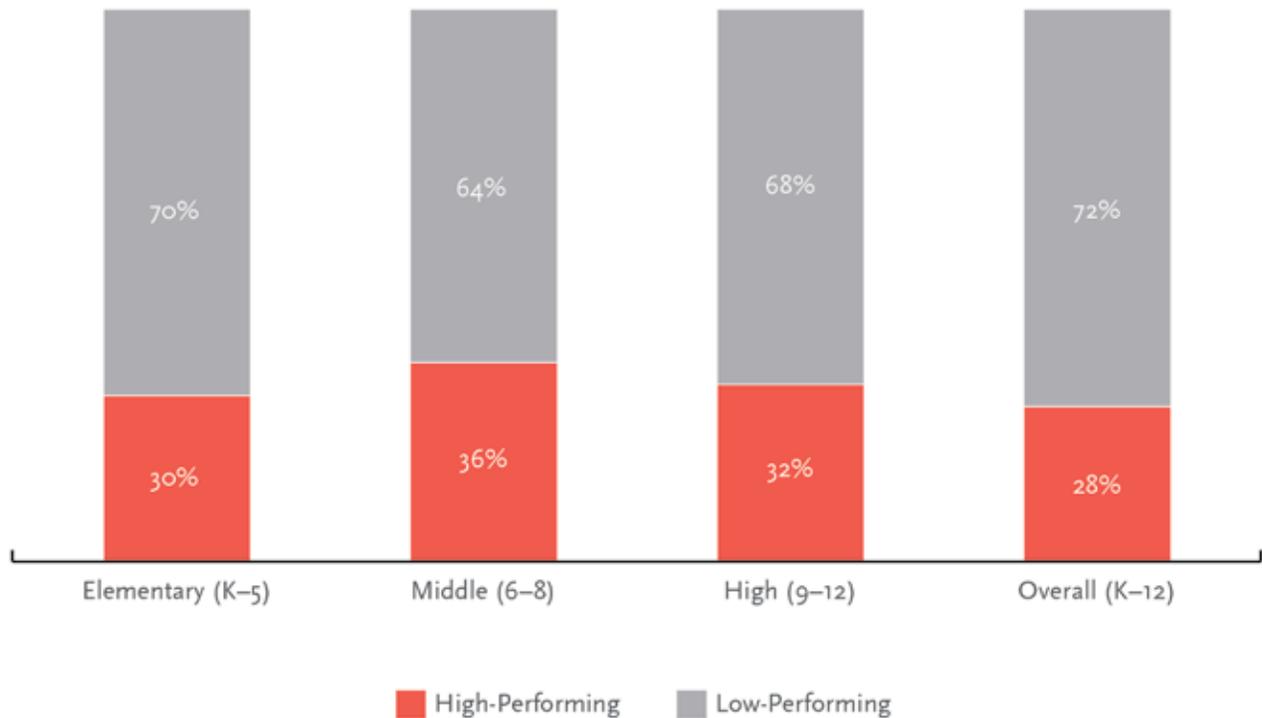


higher rates of high-performing schools compared to traditional public schools (Graph 3).

- Overall, ***a majority of public schools lack high-performance ratings whether analyzed by individual grade span or K-12 in aggregate.*** In terms of total volume, elementary schools have the most high-performing schools with 22 campuses. Yet, when normalized by individual grade span, middle schools have the greatest percent at 35% of high performing schools (Graph 4).

**SECTION
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Chart 4: Pulaski County School Performance Rating by Grade Span, 2016–2017



STUDY AREA DEVELOPMENT

For this analysis, the areas of study were derived from the local school district board election zone boundaries in 2016-2017. Through this study, they are referred to as “school zones”. Pulaski County includes four main schools districts: Little Rock, North Little Rock, Jacksonville and Pulaski County Special (PCSSD). Overall, there were 35 school zones in Pulaski County.

Additionally, the maps included in this report spatially distribute demand and supply into neighborhoods and attendance boundaries in proportion to the population of enrolled students. For traditional district schools with an

assigned attendance boundary, each school’s enrollment is distributed spatially throughout the boundary.

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Map 1: Pulaski County Study Areas

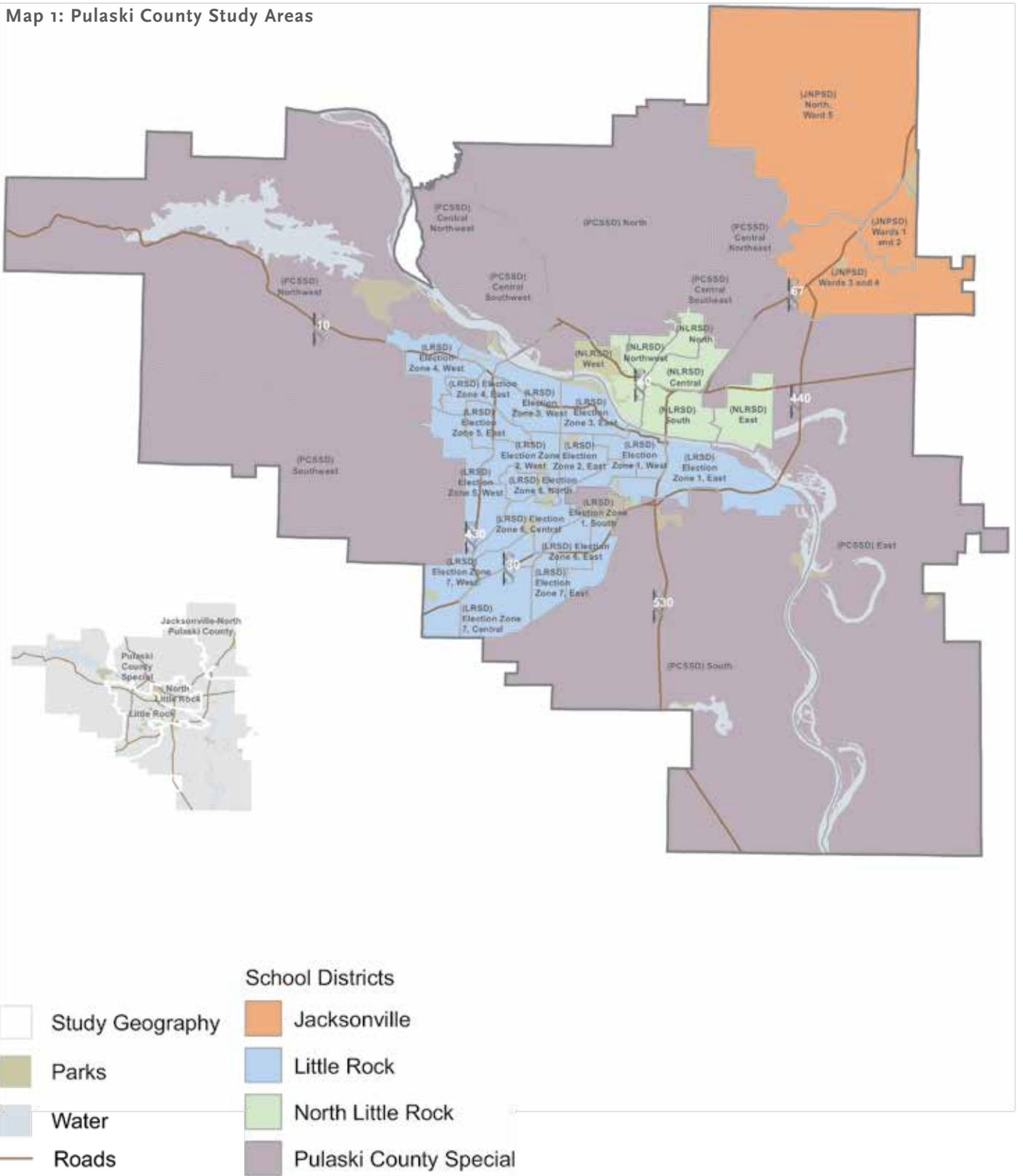


Table 1: Pulaski County Student Enrollment by Grade Span and School Type, 2016–2017

School Type	Count of Schools	Student Enrollment				
		Elementary (K-5)	Middle (6-8)	High (9-12)	Overall (K-12)	% Total by School Type
Public	114	27,137	12,162	15,553	54,852	84%
Traditional	75	21,396	8,480	11,758	41,634	64%
Magnet	10	2,241	1,467	1,943	5,651	9%
Charter	24	3,427	2,167	1,774	7,368	11%
Special Education*	5	73	48	761	199	0%
% of Total by Grade Span		49%	22%	28%	100%	
Private ^x	21	*	*	*	8,611	13%
Home School ^x	*	*	*	*	1,892	3%
Total	135	27,137	12,162	15,553	65,355	100%

* Data unavailable at this level of detail

^x Excluded from Needs Assessment Analysis

PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

The unit of analysis for this needs assessment is the school – not the individual student. Therefore, the methodology uses school-level data to make determinations about educational quality and access at the school zone and county levels. This study exclusively focuses on public schools and categorizes schools by school governance type (i.e. traditional, magnet, charter) and grade span (i.e. Elementary – Grades K-5, Middle – Grades 6-8, High – Grades 9-12). Subsequently, special education, home school and private schools were considered out of the scope for the study.

Key findings related to public school enrollment in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- ***Pulaski County enrolled nearly 55,000 students in its public schools***, representing over 84% of the students in the county.
- In terms of school governance type, most students were enrolled at traditional public schools while approximately 20% of students were enrolled at a magnet or charter school.
- Additionally, almost half of all public school students in the county were enrolled in elementary schools at 49% of the school-age population. Furthermore, 28% of students were enrolled at high schools and 22% of students were enrolled at middle schools according to available data.

Table 2: K–12 Supply & Demand by Grade Span, Pulaski County, 2016–2017

Grade Span	High-Performing Schools	Demand	Supply	Service Gap	Service Level	Percent of Countywide Gap
Elementary (K-5)	22	26,557	8,532	18,025	32%	45%
Middle (6-8)	10	11,971	2,516	9,455	21%	23%
High (9-12)	6	15,031	2,243	12,788	15%	32%
Overall (K-12)	32*	53,559*	13,291	40,268	25%	100%

*Count of high-performing schools do not total due to certain schools overlapping the established grade spans.

x Total demand varies slightly from total public school enrollment due to inability to geocode all student addresses for the needs assessment analysis.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS

In the 2016-2017 school year, 135 individual school campuses were in operation within the Pulaski County boundaries including public, private and home school governance types. Of these 135 schools, 109, or 81% of the total, were included in the analysis of supply and demand based on their school governance type (i.e. private, home school, and special education schools were excluded). **Furthermore, just 32 of the 109 schools were rated as high-performing offering just over 13,000 high-quality seats to K – 12 students (Table 2).**

Overall, of the approximately 55,000 students attending public schools in the county, **only one in every four students was accessing a high-performing K-12 school during the 2016-2017 school year.** Accordingly, over 40,000 students lacked access to high-performing public schools. Specifically, 18,000 elementary school students were not enrolled in high-performing public schools representing almost half of the county-wide service gap at 45% of the total (Table 2). Additionally, high school students had the lowest level of access in the county to

high-performing schools. Only one in every seven, or 15%, of high school students was enrolled in a high-performing public school during the 2016-2017 school year, compared to 21% of middle school students and 32% of elementary school students (Table 2).

The highest-need areas represent school zones where the service gap, or the number of students lacking access to high-performing public schools, is the greatest. In the 2016-2017 school year, **42% of the service gap in the county was concentrated in the eleven highest-need areas (Table 3).** In contrast to the county overall, **middle school students in the highest need areas had the lowest access to high-performing schools.** Specifically, only 9% of middle school students were enrolled in high-performing public schools in the eleven highest-need areas, compared to 11% of high school students and 15% of elementary school students. Overall, **across the highest-need areas, just 12% of students were enrolled in public schools rated as high-performing by the ADE (Table 3).**

Among the eleven highest-need areas, the individual service levels ranged from 24% to just 5% of students

Table 3: K–12 Supply & Demand by Grade Span, Highest-Need Areas, 2016–2017

Grade Span	High-Performing Schools	Demand	Supply	Service Gap	Service Level	Percent of Countywide Gap
Elementary (K-5)	2	9,409	1,365	8,044	15%	20%
Middle (6-8)	1	4,356	407	3,949	9%	10%
High School (9-12)	1	5,601	600	5,001	11%	12%
Overall (K-12)	4	19,366	2,372	16,994	12%	42%

Table 4: K–12 Supply & Demand, Highest-Need Areas, 2016–2017

Rank	School Zone	Demand	Supply	Service Gap	Service Level
1	Jacksonville - Wards 1 and 2	1,841	88	1,753	5%
2	Jacksonville - Wards 3 and 4	1,766	82	1,684	5%
3	PCSSD - Woodson, Wrightsville	1,809	144	1,665	8%
4	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 6, East	1,726	141	1,585	8%
5	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 7, East	1,784	223	1,561	13%
6	PCSSD - Sherwood Ward 2	1,699	207	1,492	12%
7	North Little Rock - Levy	1,795	314	1,481	17%
8	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 7, Central	1,652	176	1,476	11%
9	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 2, East	1,750	275	1,475	16%
10	PCSSD - Sherwood Ward 4	1,695	278	1,417	16%
11	PCSSD - Sherwood Wards 1 and 3	1,849	444	1,405	24%
Total		19,366	2,372	16,994	12%

enrolled in high-performing K-12 public schools in the county. The ***largest service gap existed in Jacksonville Wards 1–4*** where only 170 out of over 3,600 students were enrolled in high-performing K-12 schools. (Table 4). Lastly, all school zones are prioritized by their service gap to understand neighborhood-level need for high-performing schools. (Table 5).

Service Gap (Grade K–12)

The service gap, or the number of students without access to a high-performing school (i.e. the difference between demand and supply), varied greatly across the county’s public schools included in this analysis.

Key findings related to the K-12 service gap in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- Jacksonville-North Pulaski County and the eastern edge of the Pulaski County Special districts contained the most high-need areas representing the largest service gaps, as designated by the darkest blue shaded areas on the map.
- The western school zones of the Pulaski County Special district represent the lower priority neighborhoods with smaller service gaps, as designated by the lightest blue shaded areas on the map.
- Of the five school zones included in the largely urban North Little Rock district, only Levy was identified as a high-need area with a service gap of 1,481 students lacking access to high-performing schools.

Service Level (Grades K–12)

The highest-need areas are the sections of the county where the most students cannot access a high-performing school, yet they are not the only areas where a substantial share of students require access to higher quality public schools. For this reason, the service level – the percentage of students currently accessing high-performing schools – is helpful context alongside the service gap.

Key findings related to the K-12 service level in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- Service levels were the lowest on the east side of the county as a whole where 25% or less of students accessed high-performing public schools in the 2016-2017 school year. These light green school zones mainly include schools located in the Jacksonville-North, North Little Rock and the east side of the Pulaski County Special districts.
- At least 75% of students in the dark green school districts in the northwest zone of Pulaski County Special district were enrolled in high-performing public schools.

Map 3: Service Level in Pulaski County, Grade K-12

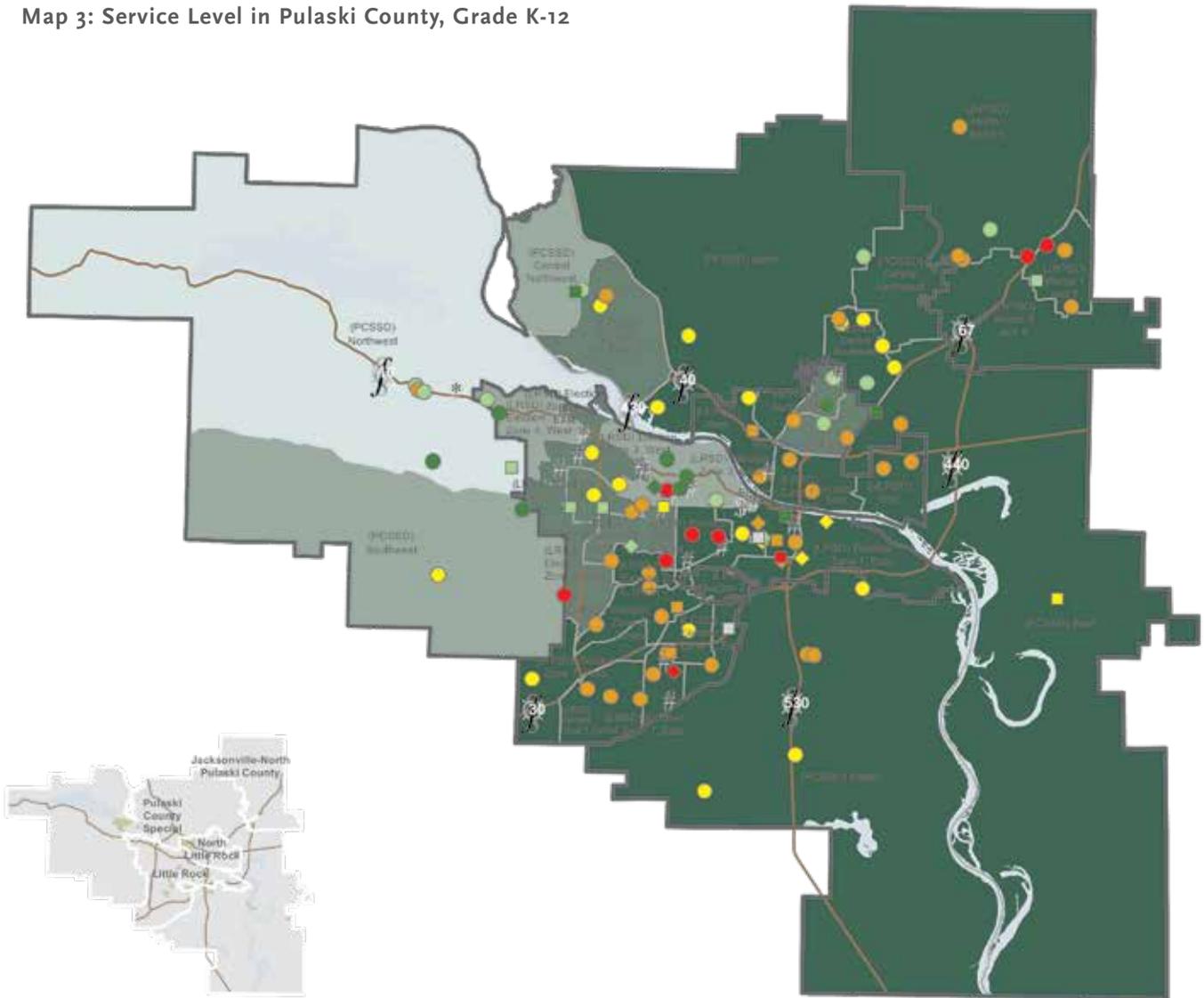


Table 5: K–12 Supply & Demand, All Schools Zones by Priority Ranking, 2016–2017

Rank	Prioritization	School Zone	Demand	Supply	Service Gap	Service Level
1	High Need	Jacksonville - Wards 1 and 2	1,841	88	1,753	5%
2	High Need	Jacksonville - Wards 3 and 4	1,766	82	1,684	5%
3	High Need	PCSSD - Woodson, Wrightsville	1,809	144	1,665	8%
4	High Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 6, East	1,726	141	1,585	8%
5	High Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 7, East	1,784	223	1,561	13%
6	High Need	PCSSD - Sherwood Ward 2	1,699	207	1,492	12%
7	High Need	North Little Rock - Levy	1,795	314	1,481	17%
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10	High Need	PCSSD - Sherwood Ward 4	1,695	278	1,417	16%
11	High Need	PCSSD - Sherwood Wards 1 and 3	1,849	444	1,405	24%
12	Mid-High Need	North Little Rock - Rose City	1,466	73	1,393	5%
13	Mid-High Need	PCSSD - Gibson, Robinson Air-field	1,716	379	1,337	22%
14	Mid-High Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 2, West	1,818	486	1,332	27%
15	Mid-High Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 6, Central	1,594	337	1,257	21%
16	Mid-High Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 1, East	1,395	158	1,237	11%
17	Mid-High Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 7, West	1,564	343	1,221	22%
18	Mid-High Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 1, West	1,478	265	1,213	18%
19	Mid-High Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 1, South	1,333	138	1,195	10%
20	Mid-High Need	North Little Rock - Melrose, Sherman Park	1,267	93	1,174	7%
21	Mid-High Need	Jacksonville - North, Ward 5	1,501	369	1,132	25%

Rank	Prioritization	School Zone	Demand	Supply	Service Gap	Service Level
22	Mid-Low Need	North Little Rock - Scenic Hill, Burns Park	1,207	79	1,128	7%
23	Mid-Low Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 6, North	1,400	277	1,123	20%
24	Mid-Low Need	PCSSD - Maumelle East	1,517	426	1,091	28%
25	Mid-Low Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 5, East	1,414	405	1,009	29%
26	Mid-Low Need	North Little Rock - Lakewood	1,522	583	939	38%
27	Mid-Low Need	PCSSD - Maumelle West	1,802	928	874	51%
28	Mid-Low Need	North Little Rock - Indian Hill	1,393	569	824	41%
29	Mid-Low Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 4, East	1,167	393	774	34%
30	Mid-Low Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 5, West	1,430	674	756	47%
31	Low Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 3, West	1,209	618	591	51%
32	Low Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 3, East	1,219	684	535	56%
33	Low Need	PCSSD - Martindale	1,282	748	534	58%
34	Low Need	Little Rock - SD Election Zone 4, West	1,266	947	319	75%
35	Low Need	PCSSD - Lake Maumelle	1,233	947	286	77%
Total			53,559	13,291	40,268	25%

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Analyses of student density, poverty levels and race in this section of the report help to clarify and dive deeper into trends related to the K-12 service gap in Pulaski County. Therefore, local stakeholders should review the following demographic-based maps alongside other key findings in this report to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the state of K-12 education as well as use this information to inform future policy and programmatic decision-making.

DENSITY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

Student density serves as a key determinant for prioritizing school improvement efforts, as it helps to localize where the greatest potential for impact may occur in a given area. In this study, density is measured by the number of students enrolled in public schools per square mile.

Key findings related to student density in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- The largely urban districts of North Little Rock and Little Rock had the highest rates of public school student density ranging from 149 to 778 students per square mile.
- The surrounding districts in the more rural areas of the county were less dense with up to 22 students per square mile in most of Pulaski County Special and the north ward of Jacksonville.
- The rural school zones in the north (PCSSD-North) and east (PCSSD-East & PCSSD-South) sides of Pulaski County Special also contained the highest-need areas in terms of service gap. In contrast, the western edge

(PCSSD-Northwest & PCSSD-Southwest) of Pulaski County Special also has a low student population density, but the service gap was minimal and service level was high.

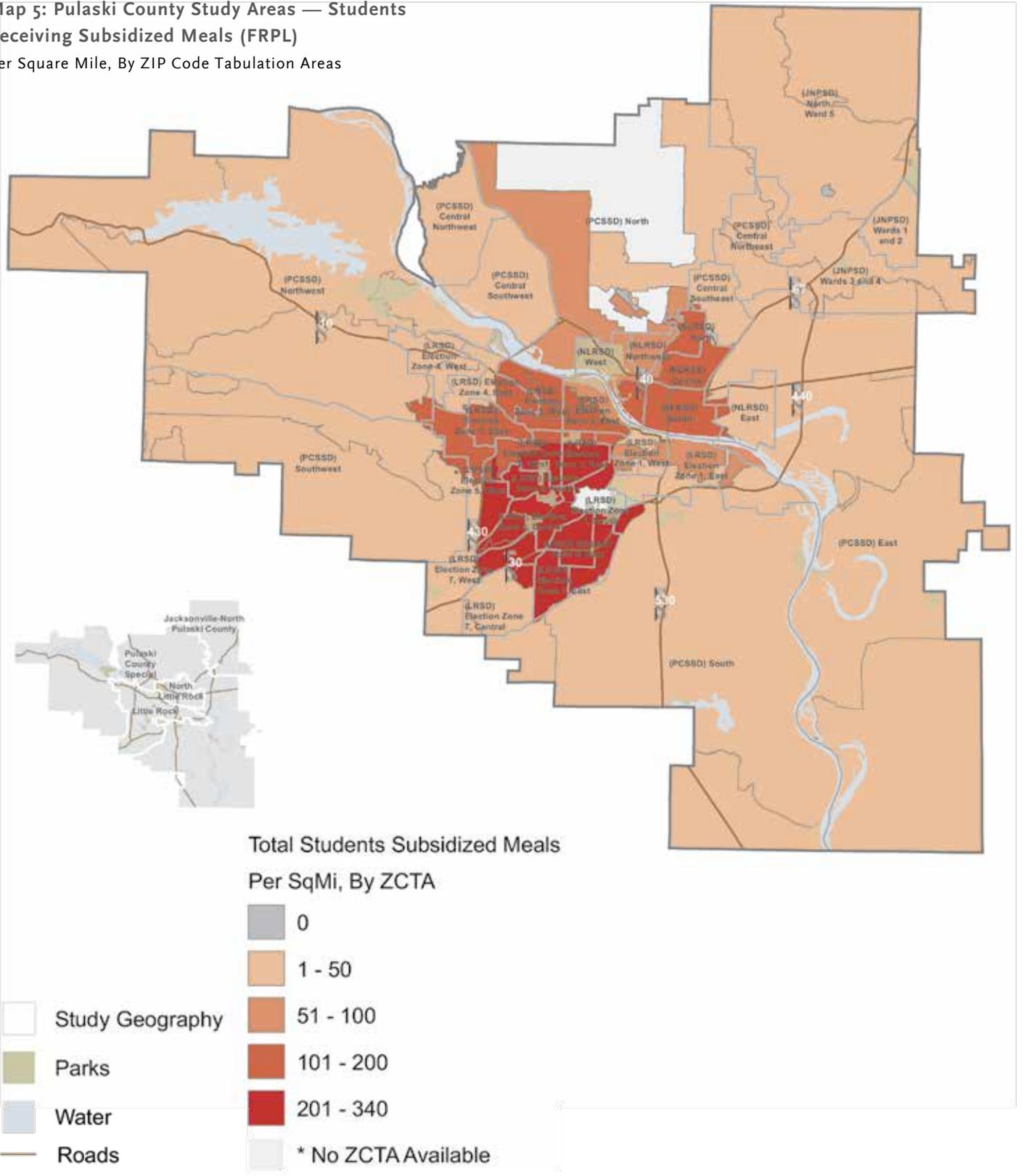
POVERTY LEVEL

According to the American Community Survey (ACS), approximately 18% of Pulaski County residents lived below the poverty level in 2017. This poverty rate is closely aligned with the 19% statewide poverty rate yet greater than the federal poverty rate of 15%. To estimate the poverty level, this study examines the density of enrolled students per square mile that are eligible for subsidized meals, or free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), during the 2016-2017 school year.

Key findings related to the poverty level in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- Public school students living below 185% of the federal poverty level and, therefore, eligible for FRPL were largely concentrated in the southern portion of the Little Rock district with density ranges of 201 to 340 students per square mile.
- The less dense districts surrounding Little Rock and North Little Rock experienced a smaller density of students eligible for subsidized meals. However, these districts were still home to students eligible for FRPL on a total student basis specifically in Jacksonville-North.
- The more densely populated Jacksonville-North district contained a lower density of enrolled students eligible for FRPL but also experienced high service gaps.

Map 5: Pulaski County Study Areas — Students Receiving Subsidized Meals (FRPL) Per Square Mile, By ZIP Code Tabulation Areas



RACE

White residents in Pulaski County comprised 58% of the total population while African Americans made up 35%. Other races, including American Indians, Asians, and Hispanics, made up the remaining 7% of the county's population. As it pertains to this study, the K-12 service gap was closely aligned with race, as school zones identified as high need areas and those with significant African American student populations overlapped.

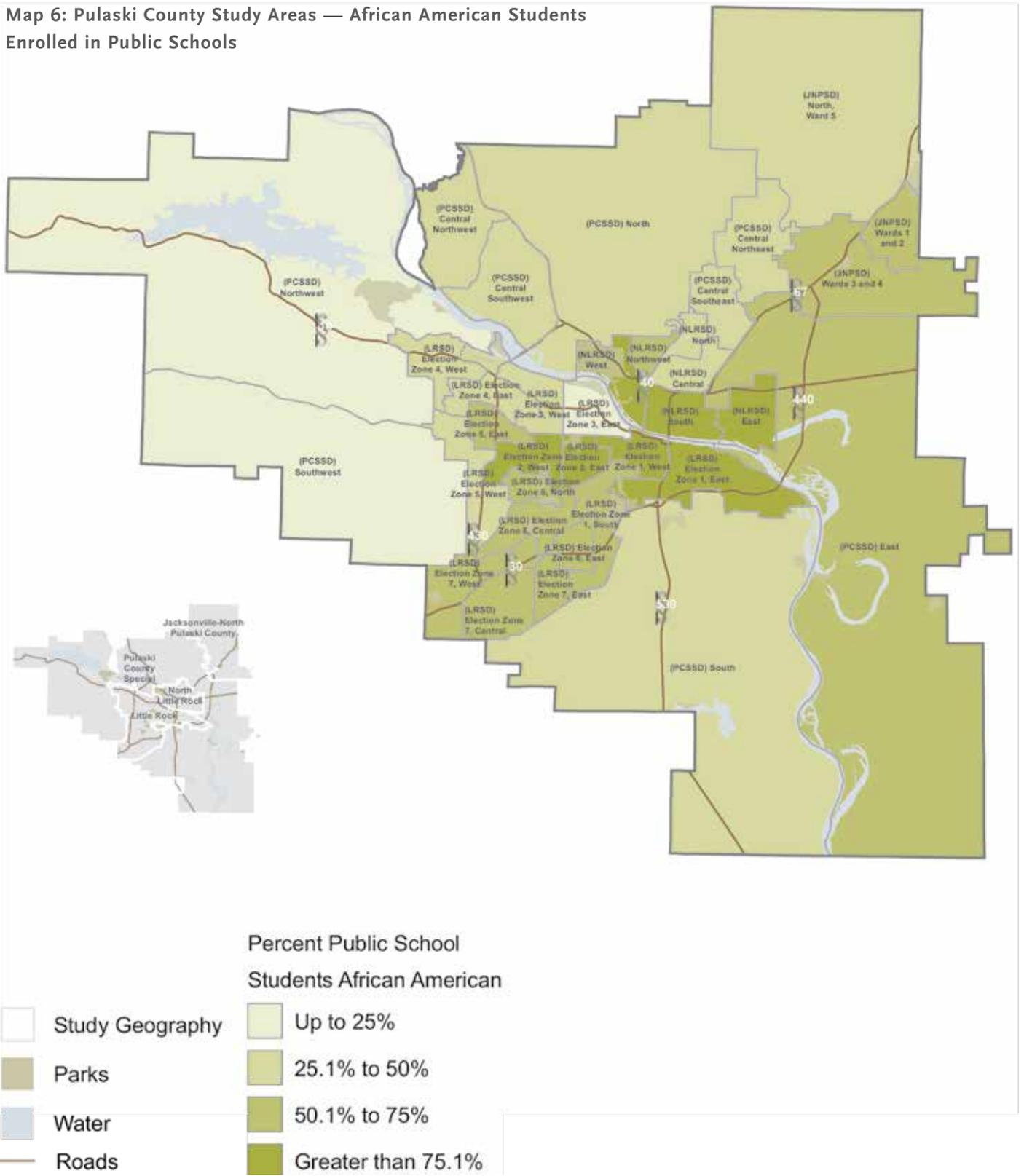
Key findings related to African American public school student enrollment in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- African American students were primarily enrolled in the more populated, urban school zones, as they made up more than half of the population in Little Rock and North Little Rock districts.
- Specifically, the school zones on the southern edge of the Little Rock district contained a high percentage of African American students yet only contained two schools rated as either A or B by the state. Accordingly, four of these school zones were identified as high-need areas.
- School zones along the western edge (PCSSD-Northwest & PCSSD-Southwest) of Pulaski County Special district that contained a majority of white students experienced service levels of 50% or greater and five of the seven public schools located there were high-performing.
- However, other less populated, and predominately white school zones in north Pulaski County Special (PCSSD-North) experienced some of the lowest service levels and greatest service gaps.

Key findings related to white public school student enrollment in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- White students were concentrated in the less dense, northern area of the county, where Pulaski County Special and Jacksonville-North contained 75% or more white students in public schools.

Map 6: Pulaski County Study Areas — African American Students Enrolled in Public Schools



DISTRICT VALUE-ADDED ANALYSIS

Variable	Detail
Per-Pupil Spending (adjusted)	Adjusted using the Comparable Wage Index (CWI), which is commonly used to address labor market impacts, such as cost of living and local amenities.
Enrollment, Number of Students	Factored in to control for variations between school districts.
Free & Reduce Lunch Program (FRLP), % Students Enrolled	May require specialized and/or cost-intensive resources to adequately serve population. Weighted based on district enrollment and controlled for in model.
English Language Learners (ELL), % Students Enrolled	
Special Education Participants (SPED) % Students Enrolled	

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

Similar in concept to a Return on Investment (ROI) Analysis, the District Valued-Added Analysis ***examined five key variables to predict expected school performance in a given district based on Arkansas statewide trends.***

These variables were built into a statistical model to assess school performance across a variety of factors for a normalized comparison across the county and at the state level. Specifically, IFF identified the following variables to inform this analysis as well as highlighted key insights for inclusion of that specific variable into the analysis.

At a high level, these variables seek to measure both student need and school spending at a district-level to compare actual performance outcomes to expectations at public schools. Subsequently, these districts were ranked on a 7-point scale ranging from “very low” to “very high” based on the calculated value-add in school performance provided.

DISTRICT VALUE-ADDED ANALYSIS

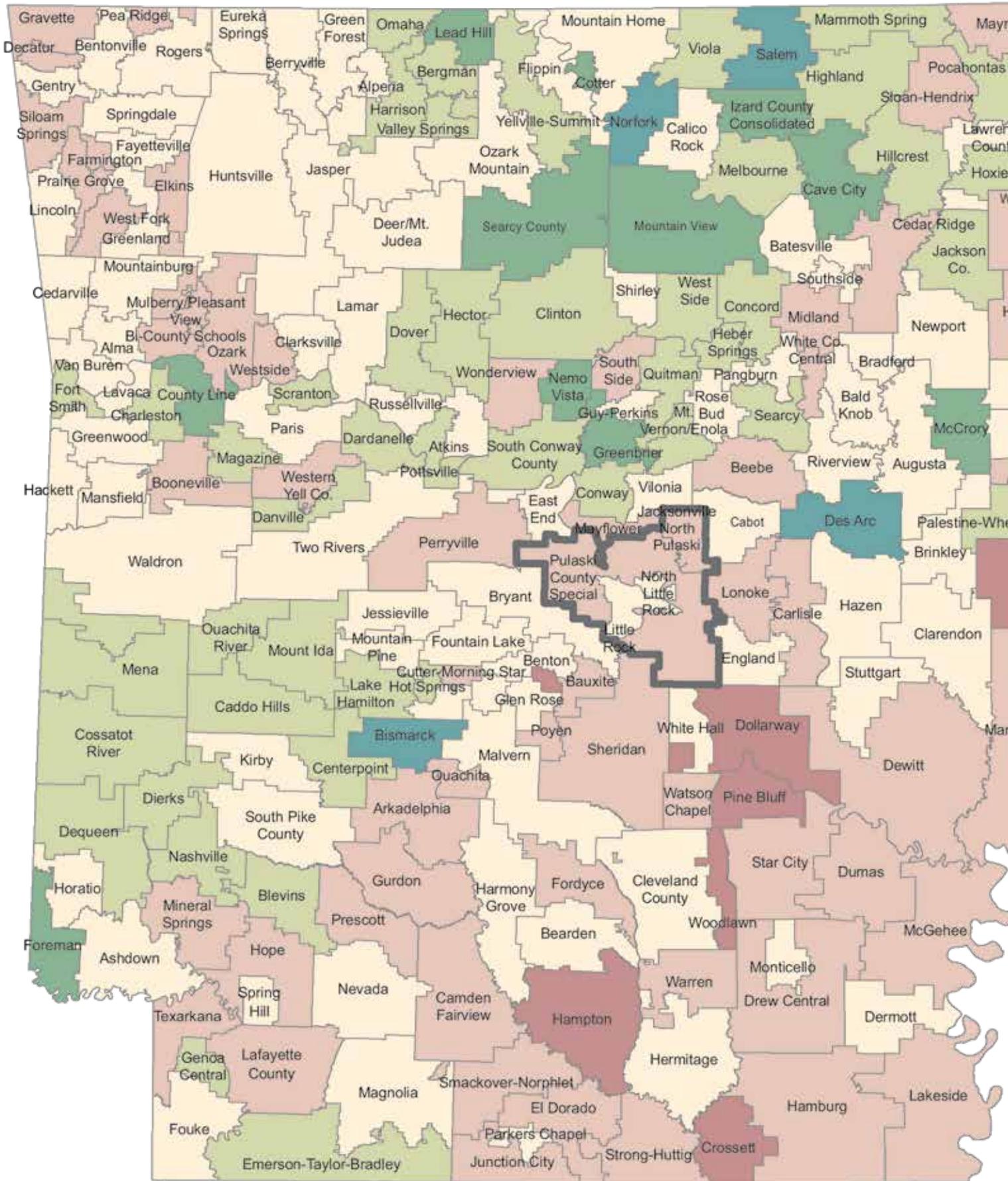
As demonstrated in the preceding sections of this report, school performance varies greatly across urban and rural, income, and racial divides within Pulaski County. To more holistically compare how school districts performed, ***this analysis helps to determine which districts are doing better (or worse) than their neighbors at serving public school students based on expected state-wide trends.***

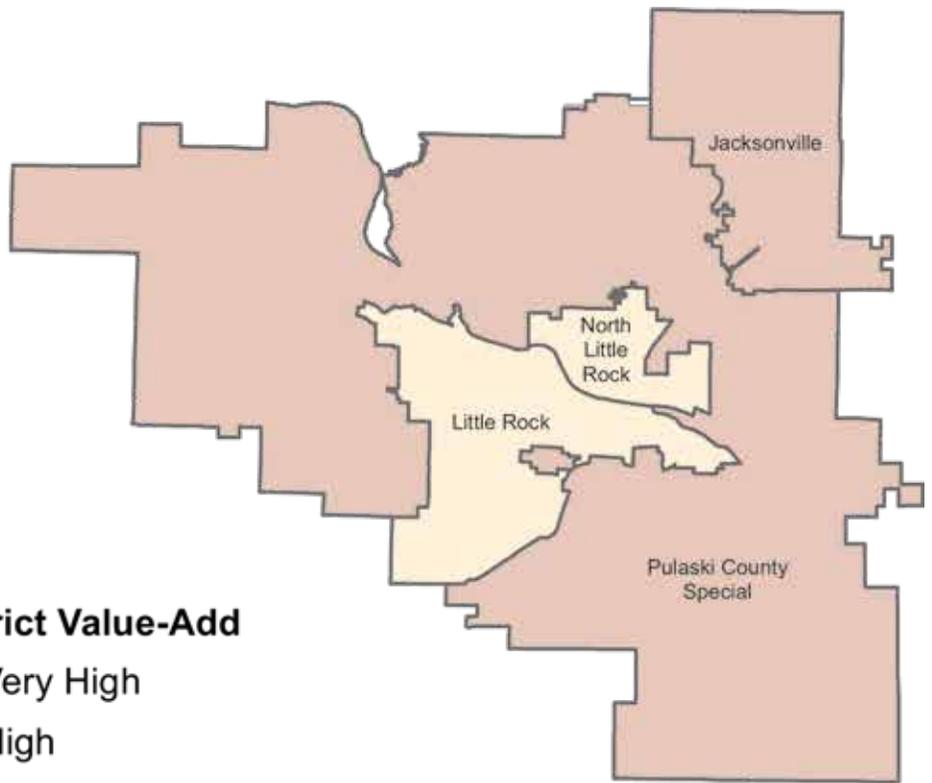
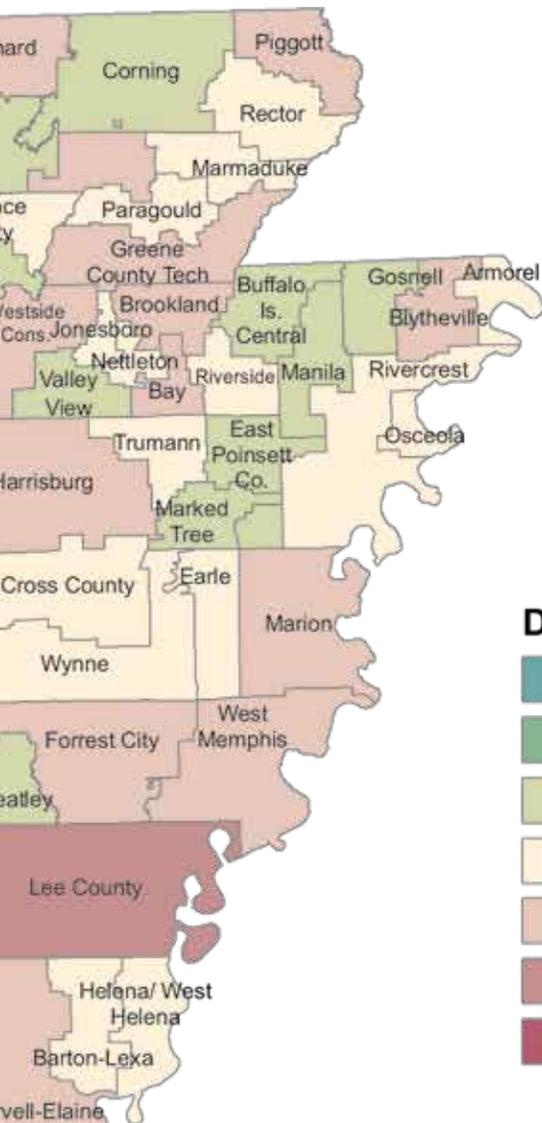
Key findings related to value-added analysis in Pulaski County are highlighted below:

- Compared to statewide peers, Pulaski County provided a medium to very low value to its students compared to expectations as it relates to student needs and per pupil spending.
- Charter schools with smaller enrollments had lower value-add ratings compared to the County’s traditional school districts with larger enrollments annually across grades K-12.

Map 7: Value-Add by District

Based on AY 2016-17 Demographics, Spending, and Performance





District Value-Add



Type	Name	Enrollment	Size	Avg. Score	Student Needs	Spending Level	Value-Add
Traditional	Little Rock	22,759	Very Large	66.5	High	Medium-High	Medium
	Pulaski County Special	12,199	Very Large	68.1	Medium-High	High	Medium-Low
	North Little Rock	8,405	Very Large	66.2	Medium-High	Medium	Medium
	Jacksonville North Pulaski	3,927	Large	61.3	Medium-High	Medium	Medium-Low
Charter	Lisa Academy	2,041	Medium	76.2	Medium-Low	Medium-Low	Medium
	Estem	1,462	Medium	80.2	Low	Medium	Medium
	Academics Plus	1,099	Medium	78.5	Low	Medium-Low	Medium
	Jacksonville Lighthouse	979	Medium	67.8	Medium	Medium-Low	Medium-Low
	Little Rock Preparatory Academy	411	Small	65.9	Medium	Medium-Low	Medium
	Exalt Academy	307	Small	56.7	Medium-High	Medium-Low	Low
	Capitol City Lighthouse	266	Small	61.6	Medium-Low	Medium	Medium-Low
	Quest Middle School	192	Small	72.6	Medium-Low	Medium-Low	Very Low
	Covenant Keepers	180	Small	65.9	High	Medium	Medium
	Siatech Little Rock Charter	171	Small		Medium-Low	Very High	
	Rockledge Montessori	151	Small	53.6	Low	Medium	Very Low
	Premier High School	109	Small		Medium-Low	Medium	

SCHOOL CHOICE ANALYSIS

Chart 5: Students Exercising School Choice by School District, Pulaski County, Grades K–12, 2016–2017

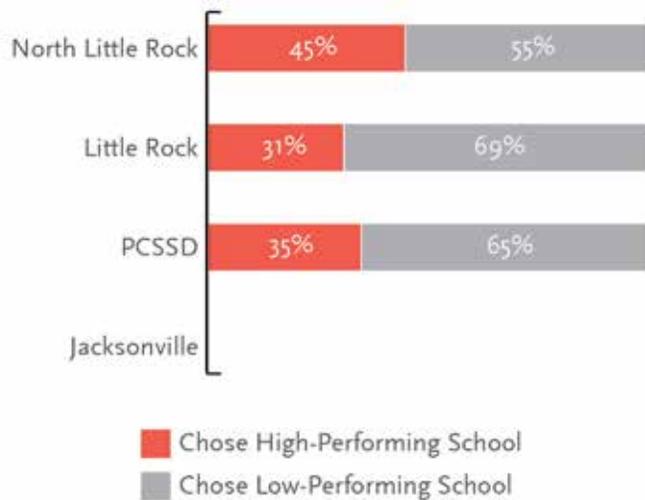
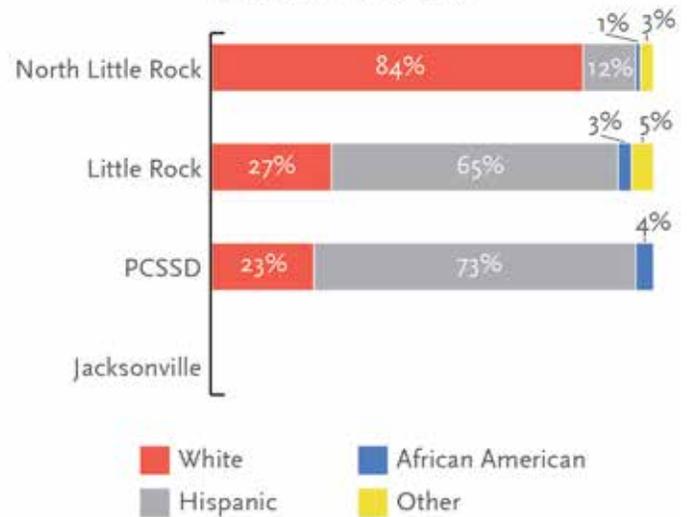


Chart 6: School Choice Activities by School District and Race, Grades K–12, 2016–2017



School choice has tremendous equity implications for a community, as students with more resources are oftentimes better equipped to take advantage of higher quality learning environments. To identify trends in school choice within Pulaski County, this study examined rates of school choice at the district-level as well as the racial composition of students exercising this right.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The School Choice Analysis seeks to identify occurrences and subsequent demographic trends related to students who exercised school choice by opting out of their assigned school to attend another school (that is assumedly higher-performing) either within or outside of their home district. The Arkansas Department of Education provided de-identified student data for the 2016-2017 school year with variables denoting whether a student transferred to a

school either within or outside of their home district and whether that transfer resulted in attendance at a higher-performing school.

FINDINGS

Though 70% of public schools were rated as low-performing, **less than 1% of K-12 students exercised school choice** during the 2016-2017 school year. Furthermore, the breakout of school choice split fairly evenly across grade spans with these activities occurring 41% in Elementary Schools, 33% in High Schools, and 26% in Middle Schools. At the district-level, students exercising school choice are concentrated in the North Little Rock, Little Rock and Pulaski County Special districts with no record of students exercising school choice in Jacksonville-North. In all three districts, **less than 45% of students who exercised school choice ended up at a high-performing school** (Graph 5).

In terms of racial differences, **60% of Pulaski County students who exercised school choice were white while 35% were African American** (Graph 6). This lends potential support to racial equity concerns in that nearly twice as many white students compared to African American students in the county took advantage of school choice. Also, a majority, or 96%, of all students exercising school choice activities were in the more densely populated Little Rock and North Little Rock districts.

CONCLUSION

In order to identify school zones where improvement efforts are needed, the findings in this report focus on student need, as assessed by the service gap and service level, as well as school performance ratings alongside overlapping demographic factors. The recommendations draw on best practices in K-12 public education as well as the unique location-based considerations at play in Pulaski County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prioritize high-need areas for targeted school improvement activities.

- Almost half of the service gap is concentrated in just eleven high-need areas out of a total of thirty-five schools zones reviewed in this study. Therefore, by focusing additional resources in these high priority areas, especially in the more densely populated North Little Rock & Little Rock districts, Pulaski County can achieve greater impact by reaching more students while taking steps to minimize this gap.
- Create individual strategic plans for each high-need area to address specific challenges and establish tangible plans of action to improve school performance.

Develop tiered approach to improve low-performing public schools.

- Evaluate challenges facing C-rated schools on the cusp of becoming high-performing learning environments and offer tailored resources to improve performance, such as after-school tutoring, enhanced technology integration, and additional staffing support, based on need.
- Explore innovative interventions, such as

collaborations between local district and charter schools, to improve low-performing public schools.

- Address the lowest performing schools (i.e. D-rated or F-rated) by determining if an improvement plan is a viable option. If not, consider annexation, consolidation or reconstitution of the school in line with the state's Academic Distress Possible Actions.

Coordinate strategic planning for K-12 public education across governing bodies

- Identify opportunities to enhance engagement across the various school governing bodies, such as traditional school district boards, charter school leadership, and other government agencies, within Pulaski County and establish concrete mechanisms and forums for ongoing collaboration.
- As a result, better coordination across governing bodies can lead to:
 - o A shared understanding and unified response to school performance challenges,
 - o Minimal redundancies in school improvement efforts,
 - o Streamlined enrollment strategies to fill vacant seats in high-performing schools,
 - o A forum to share best practices and lessons learned, and
 - o Enhanced integration of available data across educational entities.

Utilize study to inform the implementation of the State of Arkansas' ESSA Plan

- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will go into effect during the 2018-2019 school year and aims to

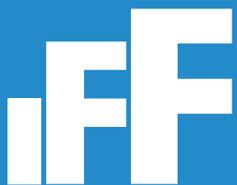
provide opportunity for all students by increasing school standards and teacher quality, defining measures of accountability and emphasizing school improvement efforts.

- Key findings related to low-performing schools, especially in Pulaski County's high-need areas, can better target school improvement efforts, as the ESSA Plan mandates greater flexibility in identifying the lowest performing schools in need of intervention and determining necessary improvement actions.

APPENDIX: DATA SOURCES

The various data sources that IFF used to inform this study are summarized below.

- U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2015 5-Year Estimates
- ESRI, Population Estimates 2016
- Arkansas Department of Education, Student and School Data, 2016–2017
- University of Arkansas, Office of Education Policy, State Demographics, 2007–2018



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