School Readiness and Early Grade Success in Atlanta:
Are Children in the Greater Atlanta Area Ready to Learn?

Michael J. Rich
Moshe Haspel

February 2010

neighborhood nexus

EMORY UNIVERSITY | Office of University-Community Partnerships

Contents

I. Introduction and Overview

An extensive research literature in the social sciences, psychology, and neuroscience shows that the period from pregnancy through third grade is critical for enhancing the life chances of children.[1] As Lisbeth Schorr and Vicky Marchand recently pointed out "a healthy birth and early, everyday nurturing and learning from parents and other caregivers have a powerful effect on life trajectories, especially for children growing up with multiple risk factors."[2] They add that "third grade increasingly is acknowledged as a critical point in children's education, because achievement at that age reflects what happened to the children between birth and third grade (individually and as a population) and predicts what may happen next—academically, socially, and economically."[3]

Several recent reports have compiled a list of indicators useful for tracking the well-being of children and families and the communities in which they live.[4] Increasingly, approaches to improving the life chances of children have embraced a comprehensive strategy that seeks to simultaneously strengthen families, improve the services and support systems available to children and families, and do so with a place-based focus that also seeks to improve the neighborhoods in which they live. While there is growing recognition across the country of the efficacy of a comprehensive, collaborative, community-based approach to improving the well-being of children and families, a major impediment has been the lack of usable knowledge at the neighborhood level to guide the design of such initiatives and provide feedback on the results of these initiatives. Although there are numerous indicators of child and family well being widely available at the national, state, and county levels, few of those indicators are readily accessible at the neighborhood (or census tract) level, making it much more difficult for policy makers and practitioners to more precisely identify need and target resources to the neediest neighborhoods.[5]

---

[1] Summaries of this research can be found in Lisbeth B. Schorr and Vicky Marchand, *Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade* (Pathways Mapping Initiative, June 2007), *Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative*, Prepared by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Initiative for the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, February 2005; and Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Philips, eds., *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2000)

[2] Schoor and Marchand, *Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade*, p. O-6.

[3] Ibid., p. O-8

[4] See, for example, Brett V. Brown, ed., *Key Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2008); Schorr and Marchand, *Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade*; *Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative*.

[5] For an overview of neighborhood-based indicators of child and family well-being see Charles Bruner, *School Readiness Resource Guide and Toolkit: Using Neighborhood Data to Spur Action* (Washington, D.C.: National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership and Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, December 2006); and Claudia Coulton, "Using Community-Level Indicators of Children's Well-Being in Comprehensive Community Initiatives," In J. Connell, A. Kubisch, L. Schorr, & C. Weiss, eds., *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives: Concepts, Methods and Contexts* (173-199). Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

Neighborhood Nexus, in collaboration with the Urban Institute's National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, participated in a cross-site project designed to support data-driven policy advocacy around children's issues in major American cities.[6] The key objectives of the initiative are to strengthen and expand policy advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged children and families in low-income urban neighborhoods by:

- Promoting collaboration on policy advocacy among data intermediaries, funders, and advocates at the local level;

- Encouraging state and local level coordination on data-driven advocacy designed to impact state and local policy;

- Supporting joint policy research and advocacy across cities and states designed to impact federal policy.

As part of our work on this project we consulted with many state and local agencies and child advocacy organizations (including the Georgia Kids Count grantee) to identify the key issues affecting children and families with a special emphasis on those issues pertaining to early learning and early grade success in elementary school, typically through grade 3. We were especially interested in identifying existing data collection and reporting practices, particularly those that brought data down to the neighborhood level.

One of the initial findings based on our systems scan of agencies and organizations engaged in early child learning, school readiness, and early grade success is that despite an extensive set of data and indicators, many of them focused on the Ready Child Equation, it is very rare to find data available for these indicators below the county level. For example, from our conversations with officials at the Georgia Kids Count initiative we learned that none of the Kids Count data was reported below the county level and only one of their data sources (birth file from the Georgia Division of Public Health) contained individual records that would permit geocoding and then aggregation at the neighborhood level. Though most of the other Georgia Kids Count data sources were administrative files obtained from state agencies, the data received was aggregated to the county level. Thus, for planning and analysis below the county level, those interested in early child learning, school readiness, and school success must rely on data reported for non-congruent sub-county areas, such as health planning districts, school districts, or individual schools.
 In addition to the inability to examine data at the neighborhood level, our systems scan also revealed the lack of a central data repository with a comprehensive inventory of data elements across policy domains pertaining to the Ready Child Equation (Ready Families, Ready Early Childhood Services, Ready Health Services, Ready Schools, Ready Communities). The most comprehensive one-stop data base is the one maintained by the Georgia Family Connection Partnership (Georgia's Kids Count grantee), which actually is a link to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Center.

In this report we use readily available state and local data to compare the relative need at the neighborhood level in the city of Atlanta, and suburban Fulton and DeKalb counties. With more time and resources, a more extensive list of indicators could be compiled and analyzed for neighborhoods

---

[6] In addition to Atlanta, the other participating cities include Chattanooga, Cleveland, Denver, Indianapolis, Memphis, Miami, Milwaukee, and Providence.

in the greater Atlanta area (and beyond). Our purpose was not to be exhaustive, but instead to illustrate how extending data on child and family well-being to the neighborhood level can better inform policymakers, practitioners, and advocates about the challenges and opportunities for improving the life chances of low-income children in the greater Atlanta area.

We organize our data presentation around the "Ready Child Equation," developed by the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, which was created to monitor and track the most important determinants of school readiness. According to the report, "early childhood leaders at the state and national level agree that efforts to improve school readiness must address three interrelated components: (1) Children's readiness for school; (2) school's readiness for children; and (3) the capacity of families and communities to provide developmental opportunities for their young children." [7]

The report used this view of the factors needed to promote successful school readiness to develop the "Ready Child Equation," which provided more detail on what it takes to get children ready to learn. The equation includes:

- **Ready Families**, which describes the children's family context and home environment;

- **Ready Communities**, which describes the community resources and supports available to families with young children;

- **Ready Services**, which describes the availability, quality and affordability of proven programs that influence child development and school readiness;

- **Ready Schools**, which describes critical elements of schools that influence child development and school success.

Defining Vulnerability

While certainly all children should have an opportunity to lead a successful life, our focus in this report is on vulnerable children and their families. As Schorr and Marchand point out, "poor and minority children have the odds stacked against them even before they enter school. Before kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of children from the highest socioeconomic group are 60 percentage points higher that hose of children from the lowest." The implications of this gap, according to Schorr and Marchand, is that "children who score poorly in cognitive and non-cognitive skills before entering kindergarten are likely to do less well in school and more likely to become teen parents, to engage in crime, and to be unemployed as adults." [8]

To provide a foundation for assessing the readiness of neighborhoods in the greater Atlanta area to prepare children for learning, and to determine how the various Ready Child Equation factors vary by neighborhood context, we utilized the child-raising vulnerability index developed by the Child and

---

[7] *Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative*, Prepared by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Initiative for the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, February 2005, p. 12. Of the 17 participating states, only 3 (Arkansas, Kentucky, and Virginia) were from the South.

[8] Schorr and Marchand, *Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade*, p. 0-6.

Family Policy Center.[9] This overall index of child-raising vulnerability is based on 10 indicators derived from the decennial census that are highly predictive of a child's growth and success. These indicators are:

Social factors:

1. Percent single-parent families
2. Percent of adults with limited English proficiency
3. Percent of youth ages 16-19 not in school and not in the labor force

Educational factors:

4. Percent of adults (age 25+) with no high school degree
5. Percent of adults (age 25+) college degree or higher

Economic factors:

6. Percent of families with children with income below poverty
7. Percent of households on public assistance
8. Percent of households with wage income

Wealth factors:

9. Percent of households with interest, rent, or dividend income
10. Percent owner-occupied housing

We followed the procedure developed by the Child and Family Policy Center and used 2000 census data to calculate the child-raising vulnerability index for the census tracts in DeKalb and Fulton counties. The index was calculated as follows: census tracts that are at least one standard deviation from the mean in a negative direction for any indicator are scored as vulnerable on that indicator. A composite vulnerability index with an overall score of 0-10 was then created using the sum of the number of indicators upon which each census tract was scored as vulnerable.

Figure 1 shows the spatial distribution of child-raising vulnerability in the city of Atlanta and Fulton and DeKalb counties. Of the 29 census tracts with a child-raising vulnerability score of 6 or higher, all but one of these census tracts are located inside the city of Atlanta. The one tract outside Atlanta is located in the southeastern corner of the city of East Point. All five of the most vulnerable census tracts, those with a vulnerability score of 9 or higher, are located inside the city of Atlanta. They include three census tracts in NPU V (one each in the Capitol Homes, Mechanicsville, and Pittsburgh neighborhoods), one tract in NPU T (Atlanta University neighborhood), and one in NPU Y (Chosewood Park).

About one-third of the overall population in Fulton and DeKalb counties lives in census tracts with at least one child-raising vulnerability factor and 12 percent of the overall population (2008 estimate) lives in census tracts with at least three child-raising vulnerability factors (Table 1). Overall,

---

[9] Charles Bruner with Michelle Stover Wright, Syed Noor Tirmizi, and the School Readiness, Culture, and Language Working Group of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Village Building and School Readiness: Closing Opportunity Gaps in a Diverse Society* (Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center and State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, Resource Brief/January 2007).

the share of children in 2008 living in neighborhoods with at least one child-raising vulnerability factor is about the same as the overall population (37.9% v. 36.1%). The share of children living in census tracts with three or more vulnerability factors represents an even larger share of the child population than is the case for the general population (14.6% v. 12.1%).

The concentration of children living in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerability is even more pronounced when the distribution of children by neighborhood type is examined separately for the city of Atlanta, and suburban Fulton and DeKalb Counties. As Table 2 shows, more than half (50.2%, 2008 census estimates) of all children in the city of Atlanta live in a census tract with a moderate (21.9%) or high (28.2%) number of child-raising vulnerability factors. The share of children in the city of Atlanta living in the most vulnerable census tracts is nearly twice as great as the share of the overall population living in these census tracts (28.2% vs. 17.6%).

Figure 1
Child-Raising Vulnerability for Fulton and DeKalb County Census Tracts.
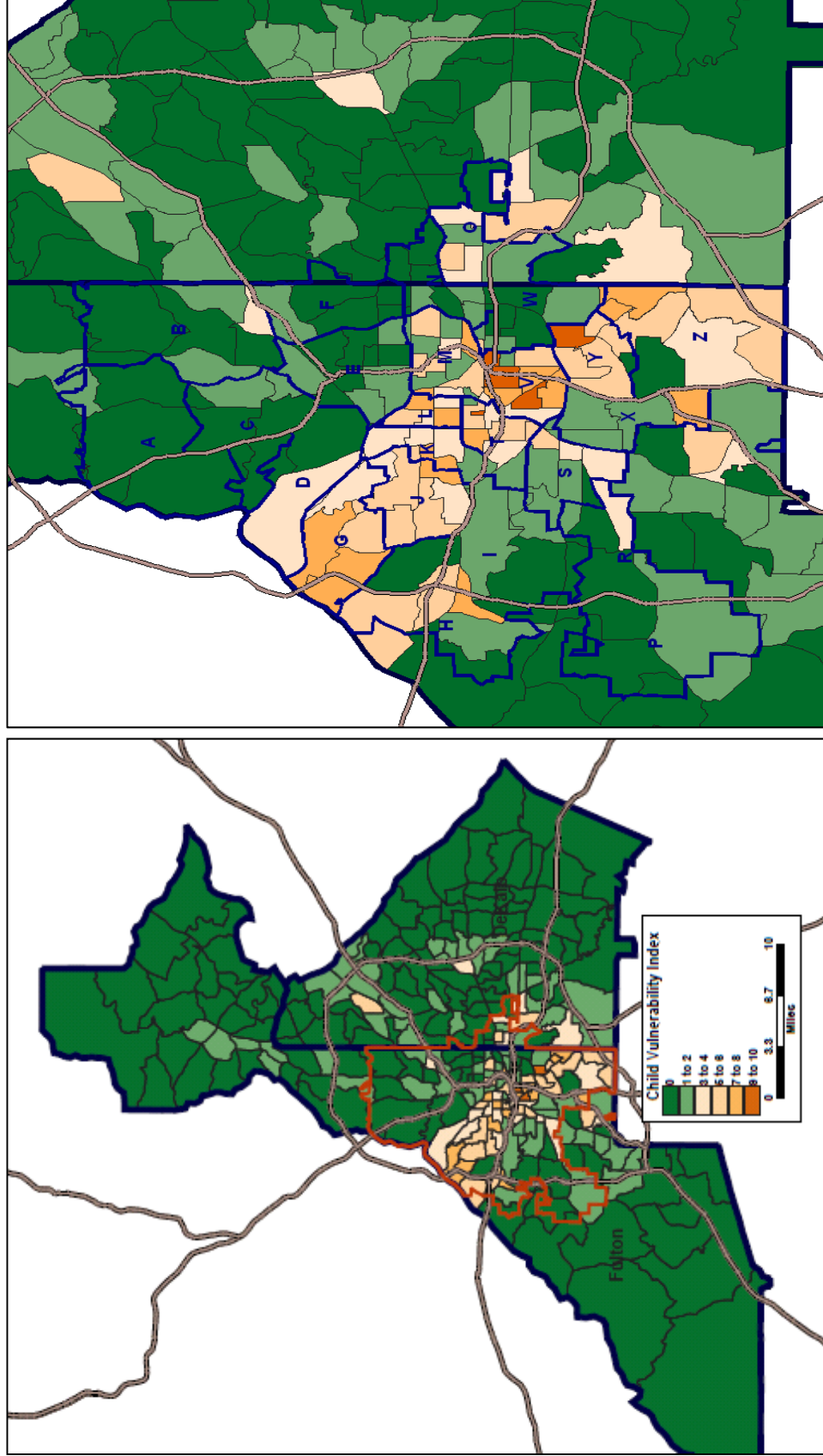
Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Child Population in Fulton and DeKalb Counties by Extent of Child-Raising Vulnerability, 2000-2008

Item	All tracts	No. of Vulnerability Factors			
		None	1-2	3-5	6-10
Census Tracts					
Number	282	150	70	33	29
Percent	100.0	53.2	24.8	11.7	10.3
Population					
2000 (1.5 million)	100.0	61.7	25.4	7.3	5.6
2008 (1.8 million)	100.0	63.9	24.0	6.9	5.2
% population change, 2000-2008	18.4	22.7	12.0	12.0	9.6
Children, under age 18					
2000 (362,451)	100.0	62.1	22.2	7.5	8.3
2008 (413,910)	100.0	64.2	21.1	7.2	7.6
% population change, 2000-2008	14.2	18.0	8.6	9.6	4.5
Children, under age 5					
2000 (103,674)	100.0	60.8	23.5	7.5	8.2
2008 (121,184)	100.0	62.0	22.6	7.4	8.0
% population change, 2000-2008	16.9	19.1	12.4	15.5	14.7

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Child Population in Fulton and DeKalb Counties by Area and Extent of Child-Raising Vulnerability, 2008

Item	All tracts	No. of Vulnerability Factors			
		None	1-2	3-5	6-10
Total Population					
City of Atlanta					
Number of census tracts	118	33	30	27	28
Percentage of total population	100.0	34.0	28.5	19.9	17.6
Suburban Fulton County					
Number of census tracts	59	43	14	1	1
Percentage of total population	100.0	80.5	18.3	0.1	1.0
Suburban DeKalb County					
Number of census tracts	105	74	26	5	--
Percentage of total population	100.0	71.2	25.5	3.4	--
Total—Fulton and DeKalb Counties					
Number of census tracts	282	150	70	33	29
Percentage of total population	100.0	63.9	24.0	6.9	5.2
Children, under age 18					
Fulton and DeKalb Counties	100.0	64.2	21.1	7.2	7.6
City of Atlanta	100.0	27.3	22.7	21.9	28.2
Suburban Fulton County	100.0	81.9	16.4	0.1	1.5
Suburban DeKalb County	100.0	71.7	24.1	4.2	0.0
Children, under age 5					
Fulton and DeKalb Counties	100.0	62.0	22.6	7.4	8.0
City of Atlanta	100.0	27.0	22.4	21.7	28.9
Suburban Fulton County	100.0	79.2	18.9	0.2	1.8
Suburban DeKalb County	100.0	69.8	25.8	4.4	0.0

II. Ready Families

"A stable, secure, nurturing relationship with one competent, caring adult is the most important factor in helping young children to be ready for school, succeed in school, and overcome later obstacles. When adults read to young children and engage them in rich conversations, children develop larger vocabularies, learn to read more easily, and grow stronger emotionally.

Many new parents (especially in high-risk families) are hampered in their parenting by lack of time, resources, and supportive environments. Nonetheless, many can be helped to develop responsive, nurturing parent-child relationships, and many can be helped to expand their own literacy skills. Services that respond to family risk factors, especially parents' economic security and neighborhood stability, also enhance parents' capacity to support their children's healthy development."

Lisbeth Schorr and Vicky Marchand
Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade

In this section we examine the distribution of children across census tracts in the city of Atlanta and suburban Fulton and DeKalb Counties by the level of child-raising vulnerability for three indicators that tap the Ready Families component of the Ready Child Equation. These include: 1) the percentage of children living in single-parent families, 2), the percentage of births to mothers with less than a 12th grade education, and 3) the percentage of births to teen mothers.

As Schorr and Marchand point out, "families with two married parents provide a more stable home environment, have fewer material hardships (such as insufficient food, inadequate housing, or lack of utility services), and live fewer years in poverty than single-parent families. Conversely, children born to unmarried mothers in single-parent households are likely to have lower educational attainment than their counterparts in dual-parent households."[10] They also point out that research shows that teenage mothers are more likely to have lower quality birth outcomes (low-birth-weight babies, smoke or consume alcohol during pregnancy), which increase a child's risk for a variety of health and developmental problems, more likely to have unstable relationships, and more likely to have lower levels of educational attainment, which also elevate the likelihood that children born to teen mothers will have poorer outcomes over their life trajectories.[11]

---

[10] Schorr and Marchand, p. 3-20.

[11] Ibid., pp. 1-10-1-11.

9

Single-Parent Families. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of children in single-parent families, based on the 2000 decennial census, by the child-raising vulnerability of census tracts for the city of Atlanta, and for suburban Fulton and DeKalb counties. The data clearly show that the neighborhood context for children in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerability are dramatically different from those in census tracts with no or low levels of child-raising vulnerability. The figure shows that about eight out of ten children in census tracts with the highest levels of child-raising vulnerability reside in single-parent families. The figure also shows that across all of the geographic subdivisions, as the number of child-raising vulnerability factors decline, so too does the proportion of children living in single-parent families.

Figure 2.
Family Context by Neighborhood Type and Area.

*Percent of children in single-parent families, 2000*
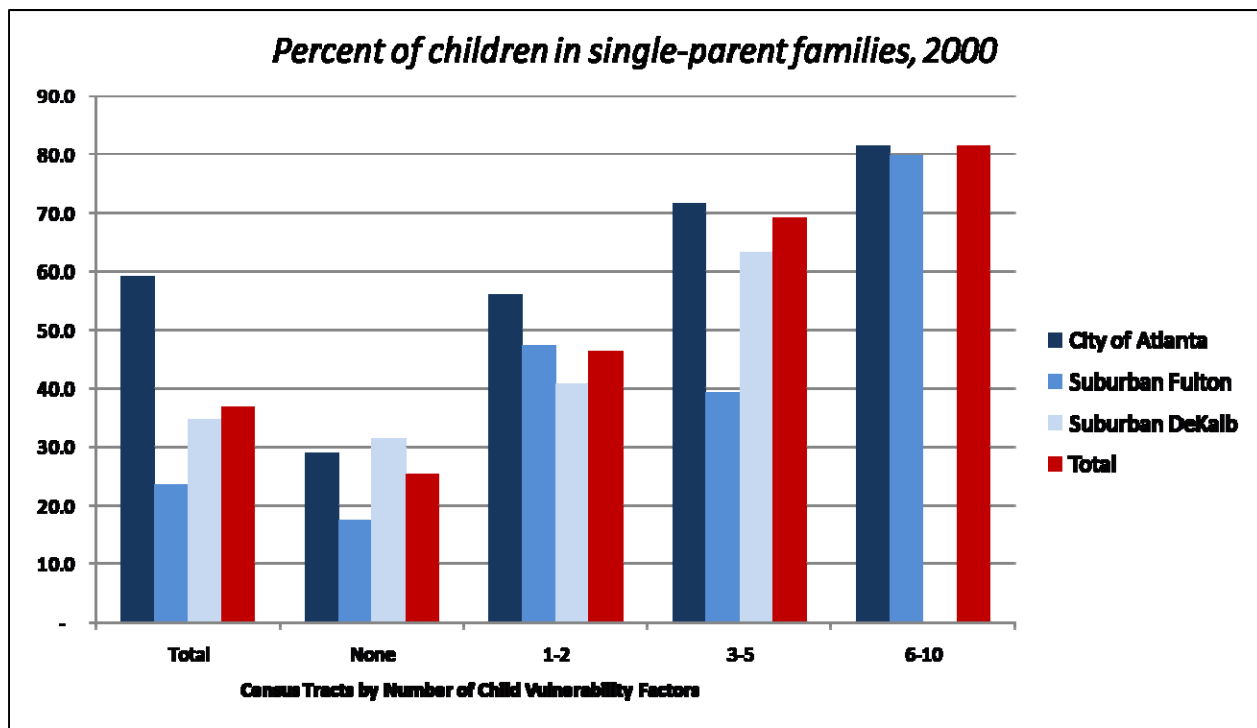
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 2000.

Births to Mother's with Less than 12 Years of Education. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the percentage of births to mothers with low educational attainment, based on analysis of cumulative data between 2000 and 2006 obtained from the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, by the child-raising vulnerability of census tracts for the city of Atlanta, and for suburban Fulton and DeKalb counties. Once again the data clearly show that the neighborhood context for children in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerability are dramatically different from those in census tracts with no or low levels of child-raising vulnerability. The figure shows that the percentage of births to mothers with less than a high

school degree was more than four times higher in census tracts with moderate or high levels of child-raising vulnerability than was the case in census tracts with no child-raising vulnerability factors. Also, as before, as the level of child-raising vulnerability declines, so too does the proportion of births born to mothers with low educational attainment. Also, across all groups of census tracts with at least one child-raising vulnerability factor, the percentage of births to mothers with low educational attainment was higher in suburban Fulton and DeKalb Counties than in the city of Atlanta.

Figure 3.
Percentage of births to mothers with less than 12 years of education, 2000-2006
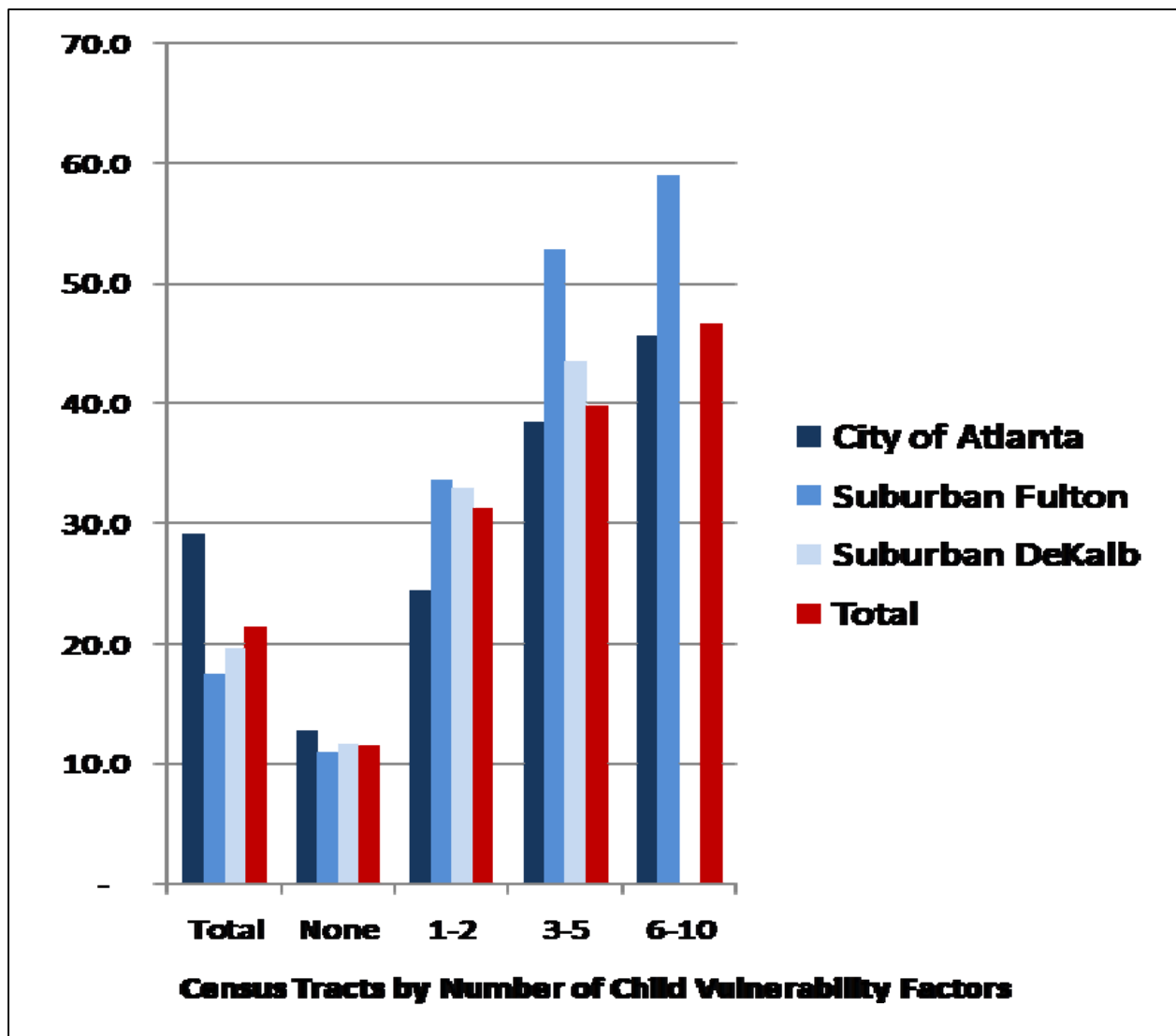
Source: Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health

Births to Teens. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the percentage of births to teens, based on analysis of cumulative data between 2000 and 2006 obtained from the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, by the child-raising vulnerability of census tracts for the city of Atlanta, and for suburban Fulton and DeKalb counties. Similar to the pattern for single-parent families and births to mothers with low educational attainment, the neighborhood context for children in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerability is dramatically different in terms of births to teens from those in census tracts with no or low levels of child-raising vulnerability. More than one in five births in census tracts with high child-raising vulnerability are born to teen mothers, which is about three times the rate reported for births in census tracts with no child-raising vulnerabilities. The percentage of births to teens is slightly higher in the city of Atlanta than in suburban Fulton or DeKalb counties for each level of child-raising vulnerability for tracts with at least one vulnerability factor.

Figure 4
Percentage of Births to Teens, 2000-2006
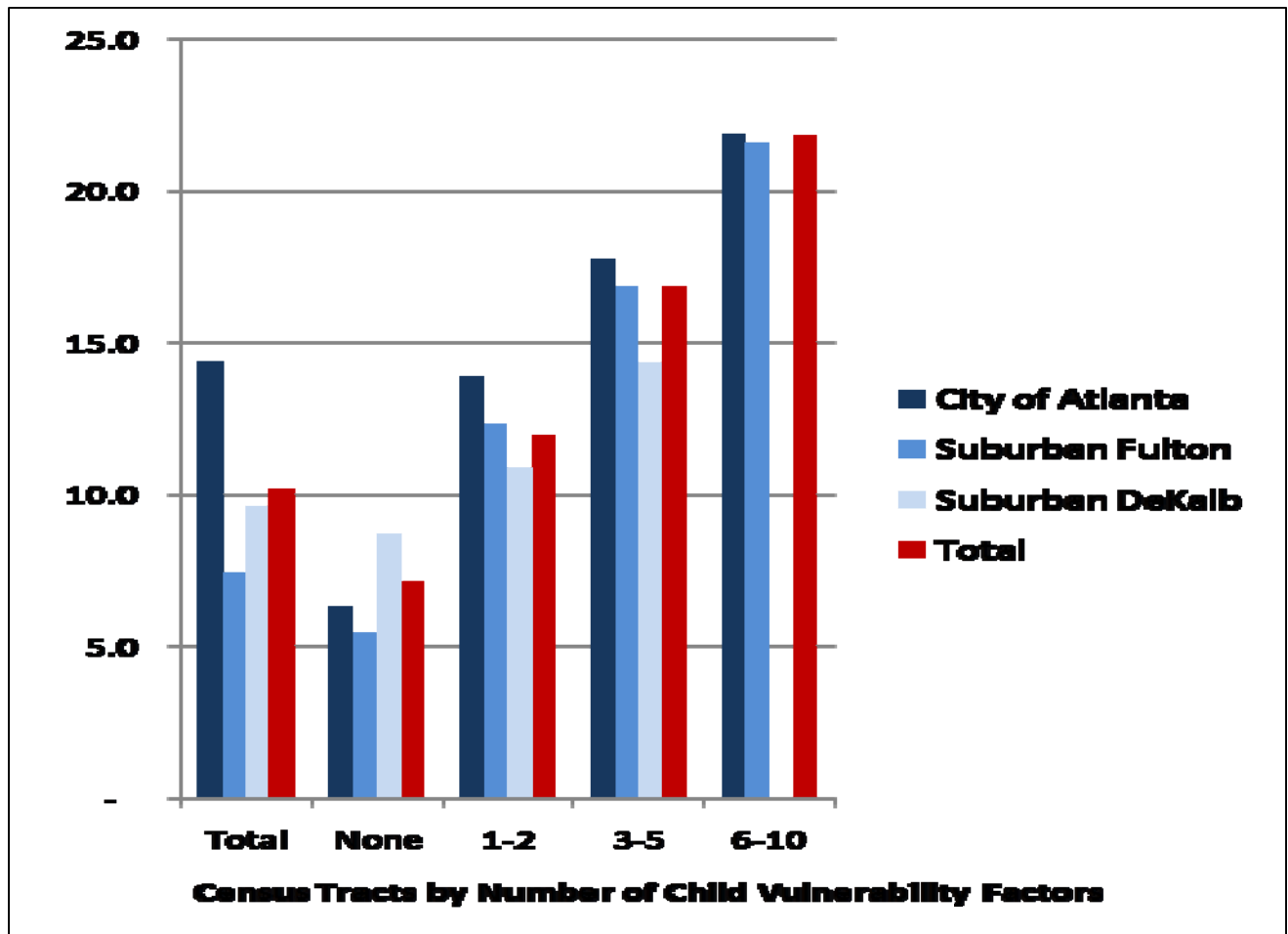
III. Ready Communities

Research shows that child outcomes dramatically improve when children grow up in neighborhoods that are safe, stable, and nurturing. Schorr and Marchand note that "greater neighborhood safety, stability and supportiveness can reduce exposure to the violence that puts children at higher risk for psychiatric problems, aggression, emotional distress, immature behavior, and poor school performance."[12] They also note that distressed neighborhoods can impede the abilities of parents to provide good parenting as they can easily become preoccupied with the stress and fear that often c accompanies neighborhoods noted for crime and drug selling. In addition, such neighborhoods may also diminish the likelihood that parents utilize neighborhood resources such as parks, libraries, and programs for children, and also weaken social networks and levels of resident interaction. On the other hand, research shows that neighborhoods with high levels of residential stability and social capital, as manifest in strong community associations, high levels of civic engagement, home ownership, and longer residential tenure, tend to have better outcomes for children and families.

In this section, we examine the distribution of various community characteristics by the level of child-raising vulnerability for census tracts in Fulton and DeKalb Counties. Our measures of Ready Communities include the percentage of children below poverty, as derived from the 2000 decennial census, perhaps one of the strongest proxies of many of the community characteristics linked with positive outcomes for children and families noted in the opening paragraph. In addition, because many Atlanta neighborhoods have undergone dramatic transformation since the 2000 census, we also examine several more recent indicators of community well-being derived from state and local administrative agencies and from proprietary data vendors. These indicators include the number of children receiving Food Stamps (2008), the number of residential foreclosure filings (2003-2008), and for census tracts in the city of Atlanta, a composite neighborhood conditions index (2005-2008) that captures both the level of relative need as well as the direction of neighborhood change, based on four indicators: violent crime, Food Stamp recipients, mortgage foreclosure filings, and the number of subsidized housing units.

Child Poverty. Figure 5 shows the distribution of the percentage of children below poverty, based on analysis of the 2000 decennial census for the city of Atlanta, and for suburban Fulton and DeKalb counties. The orange-shaded census tracts represent tracts with at least 20 percent of the children below poverty with the darker shaded areas representing census tracts with higher percentages of children below poverty. The vast majority of census tracts with the highest child poverty rates (40% or higher) are located in the city of Atlanta; only 10 of the 52 tracts (19%) with child poverty rates of at least 40 percent are located outside the city of Atlanta. Two are in DeKalb County, four are in Fulton County, two are in Cobb County, and one is in Carroll County, and one in Spalding County. In addition, all but five of the census tracts with the highest child poverty rates in Fulton and DeKalb counties are also located in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerability (census tracts outlined in blue).

---

[12] P. 3-23

Figure 5.
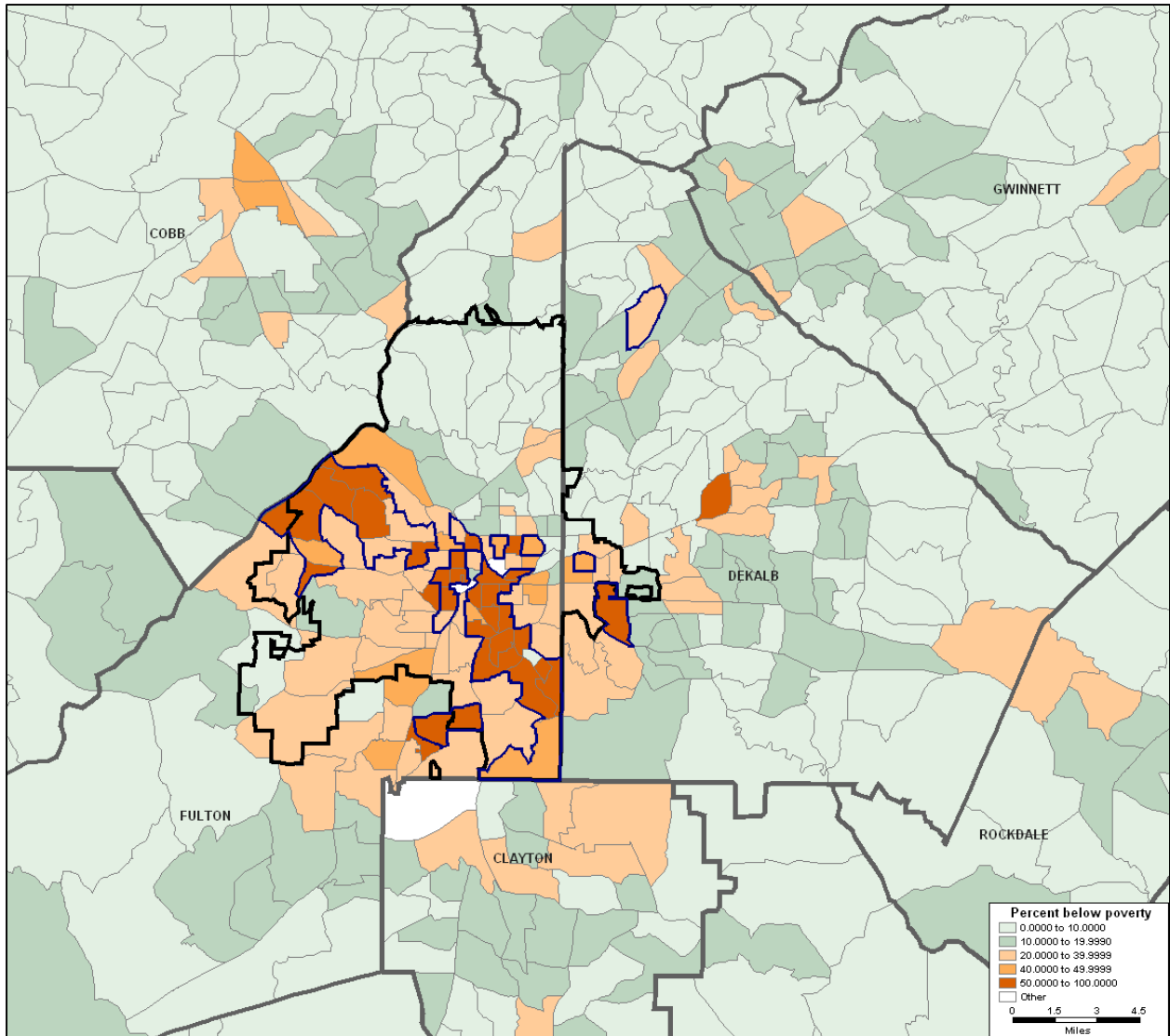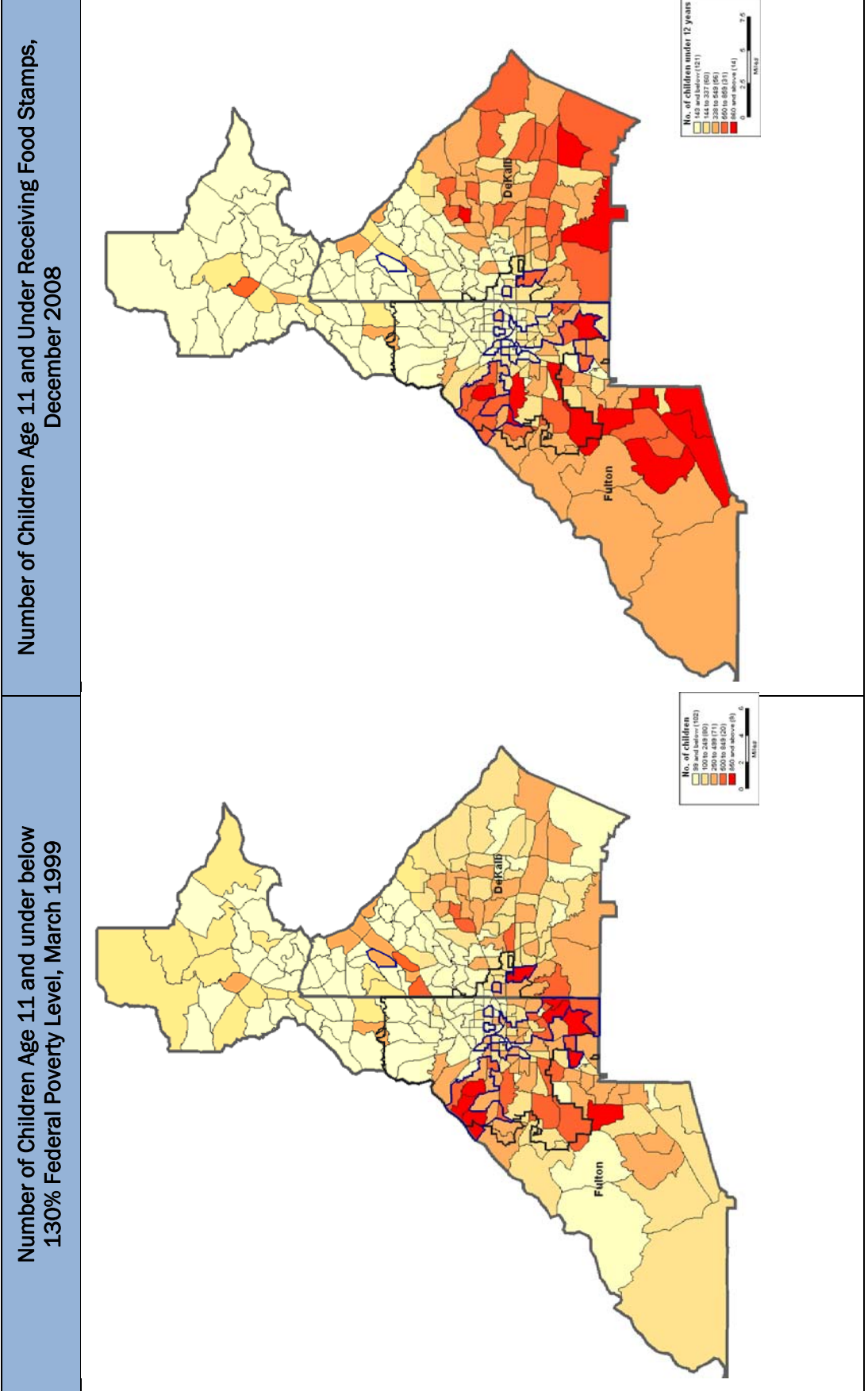**Percentage of Children Below Poverty, 1999**

Table 3 breaks down the distribution of low income children in each geographic area by the child-raising vulnerability groups. Overall, more than one in four children (27%) in Fulton and DeKalb counties live in a census tract with at least six child-raising vulnerabilities. In the city of Atlanta, half of all children live in such areas. If one expands the definition of low-income children to include those children living in households with income up to 185 percent of the poverty level, low-income children remain concentrated in census tracts with the highest levels of child-raising vulnerability, though the share of children living in those census tracts dropped slightly (from 27% to 19% overall, from 50% to 43% in the city of Atlanta, and from 8% to 5% in suburban Fulton County).

Table 3.

Ready Community Characteristics by Neighborhood Type

Item	All tracts	No. of Vulnerability Factors			
		None	1-2	3-5	6-10
Children in Poverty					
Fulton and DeKalb Counties	100.0	28.5	27.6	16.7	27.2
City of Atlanta	100.0	10.7	16.4	23.1	49.8
Suburban Fulton County	100.0	46.0	45.9	0.7	7.5
Suburban DeKalb County	100.0	49.1	36.7	14.3	--
Children below 185% poverty level					
Fulton and DeKalb Counties	100.0	36.9	29.5	14.5	19.1
City of Atlanta	100.0	13.2	19.1	24.9	42.7
Suburban Fulton County	100.0	52.8	41.8	0.5	4.9
Suburban DeKalb County	100.0	55.3	34.9	9.8	--
Mortgage Foreclosure Filings (2003-2008)					
Fulton and DeKalb Counties	100.0	59.7	20.3	11.3	8.7
City of Atlanta	100.0	38.1	28.8	16.9	16.2
Suburban Fulton County	100.0	83.1	14.7	0.5	1.7
Suburban DeKalb County	100.0	80.8	16.0	3.2	--

   Food Stamps. As noted earlier, relying on data from the 2000 census to describe current conditions in the greater Atlanta area may not be a reliable indicator of household need given the dynamics of change in many Atlanta area neighborhoods over the past decade. Therefore, we use a reasonable proxy for low-income, Food Stamp participation, as federal guidelines require most Food Stamp households to have gross incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. Figure 6 shows the distribution of the number of Food Stamps households with children age 11 or under, based on analysis of recipient data for December 2008 obtained from the Georgia Department of Human Services. These data were then geocoded and aggregated to census tracts for the city of Atlanta, and for suburban Fulton and DeKalb counties. For comparative purposes, the left panel of

Figure 6.
Spatial Distribution of Low-Income Children in Fulton and DeKalb Counties, 1999 - 2008.

Number of Children Age 11 and under below 130% Federal Poverty Level, March 1999	Number of Children Age 11 and Under Receiving Food Stamps, December 2008

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 2000

Source: Georgia Department of Human Resources

Figure 6 also shows the distribution of the number of children age 11 and under in families with income below 130 percent of the federal poverty line from the 2000 census. Figure 6 clearly shows that the distribution of low-income children has dramatically shifted in Fulton and DeKalb Counties over the past decade. Much of southern and eastern DeKalb County currently has large concentrations of households with low-income children, as measured by participation in the federal Food Stamps program, whereas these same areas had relatively low concentrations of low-income children (below 130% federal poverty line) based on the 2000 census. A similar pattern holds for southern Fulton County, particularly southeastern Fulton County.

Vulnerable Neighborhoods and the Foreclosure Crisis.   For much of the past decade, the number of home mortgage foreclosures have risen dramatically in the greater Atlanta area. According to one recent analysis, nearly half (42%) of all mortgage foreclosure filings issued in the 13-county metropolitan Atlanta area during calendar year 2008 were filed on properties located in Fulton (17,858) or DeKalb (13,182) counties.[13] As Table 3 shows, however, mortgage foreclosure filings during calendar years 2003-2008 were not particularly concentrated in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerabilities. Overall, only about one out of five foreclosure filings in Fulton and DeKalb counties during this period were located in census tracts with at least three child-raising vulnerabilities; less than one out of ten foreclosure filings were located in census tracts with six or more child-raising vulnerabilities. In the city of Atlanta, foreclosure filings were somewhat more concentrated in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerability (33% in Atlanta vs. 20% overall in Fulton and DeKalb counties) whereas the concentrations in vulnerable census tracts in suburban Fulton (2%) and DeKalb (3%) counties were considerably lower. In both suburban Fulton and DeKalb counties the vast majority of mortgage foreclosure filings (80% or more) during the period 2003-2008 were located in census tracts with no child-raising vulnerabilities.
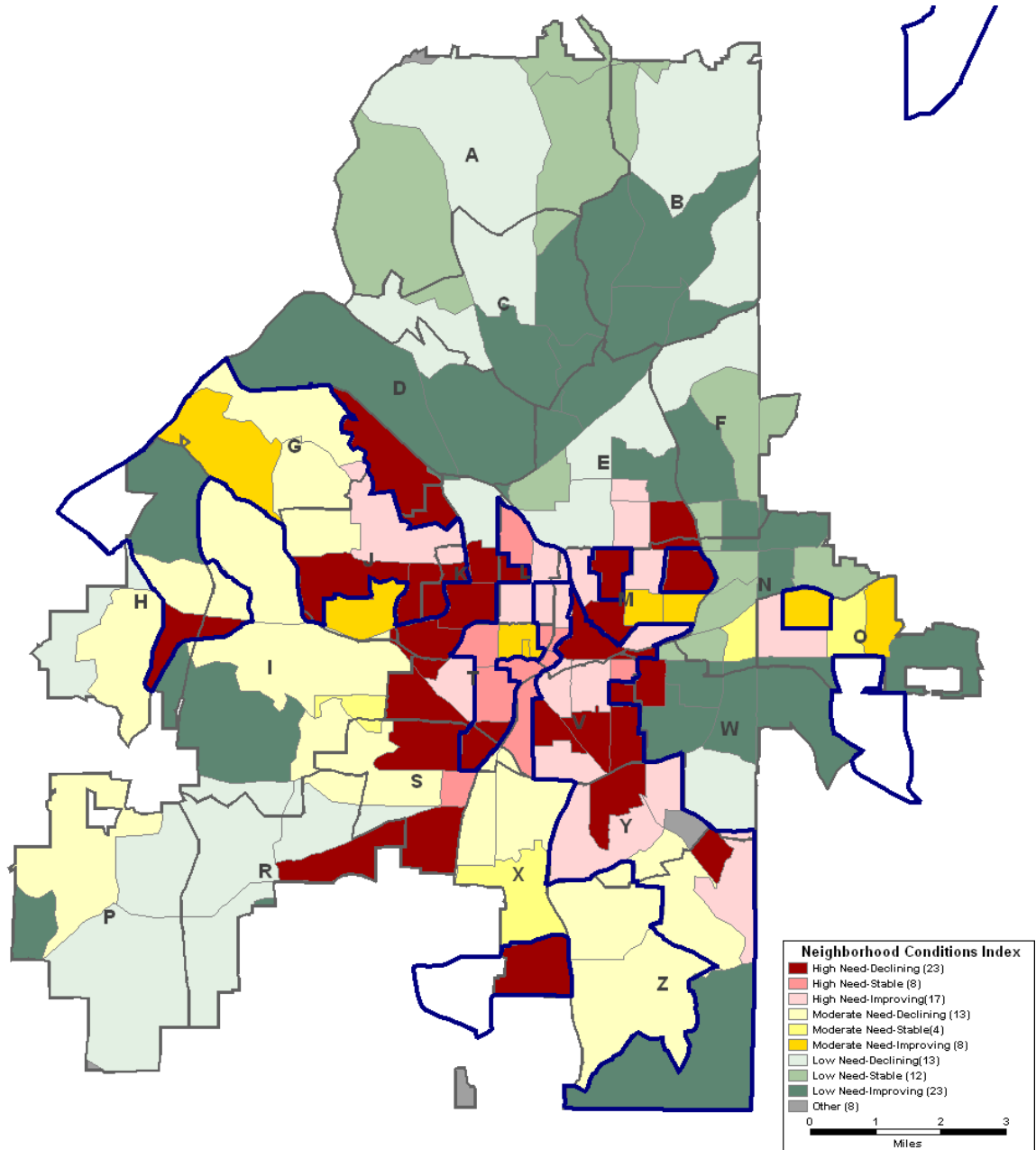
Child-Raising Vulnerabilities and Neighborhood Conditions. In order to gain some perspective on contemporary neighborhood conditions in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerabilities, as measured by indicators drawn from the 2000 census, Figure 7 shows the distribution of census tracts in the city of Atlanta based on a composite measure of neighborhood conditions during the period 2005-2008 based on an index of four factors derived from local data. These include: (1) the number of violent crimes; (2) the number of food stamp households; (3) the number of foreclosure filings; and (4) the number of subsidized housing units, as measured by the number of tenant-based and project-based housing vouchers. The index is a combination of both the level of relative need in a census tract as well as the trajectory (direction of change) of that census tract during the period 2005-2008. Combining both the level of need and direction of change yields a composite index with nine values:

---

[13] See Michael J. Rich, Michael Carnathan, and Dan Immergluck, "Addressing the Foreclosure Crisis: Action-Oriented Research in Metropolitan Atlanta," Report prepared for the Urban Institute National Neighborhood Indicators Project and Fannie Mae. Atlanta, GA: Neighborhood Nexus and Emory University, Office of University-Community Partnerships, May 2009.

1. **High Need-Declining**. Ranks in the two neediest quintiles based on 2008 measures and ranks in the two lowest quintiles regarding trajectory of change.

2. **High Need-Stable**. Ranks in the two neediest quintiles based on 2008 measures and ranks in the middle quintile regarding trajectory of change.

3. **High Need-Improving**. Ranks in the two neediest quintiles based on 2008 measures and ranks in the two highest quintiles regarding trajectory of change.

4. **Moderate Need-Declining**. Ranks in the middle quintile based on 2008 measures and ranks in the two lowest quintiles regarding trajectory of change.

5. **Moderate Need-Stable**. Ranks in the middle quintile based on 2008 measures and ranks in the middle quintile regarding trajectory of change.

6. **Moderate Need-Improving**. Ranks in the middle quintile based on 2008 measures and ranks in the two highest quintiles regarding trajectory of change.

7. **Low Need-Declining**. Ranks in the two best-off quintiles based on 2008 measures and ranks in the two lowest quintiles regarding trajectory of change.

8. **Low Need-Stable**. Ranks in the two best-off quintiles based on 2008 measures and ranks in the middle quintile regarding trajectory of change.

9. **Low Need-Improving**. Ranks in the two best-off quintiles based on 2008 measures and ranks in the two highest quintiles regarding trajectory of change.

   As Figure 7 shows, nearly all of the high need-declining census tracts (dark red), based on 2005-2008 data, are located in the census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerabilities (outlined in blue) as derived from the 2000 census. The vast majority of the census tracts that were classified as moderately or highly vulnerable based on the number of child-raising vulnerabilities were also classified into one of the three high need categories (shades of red) based on the composite neighborhood conditions index. Only three census tracts in the moderate or high child-raising vulnerability category were also categorized into one of the three low need census tracts (shades of green) based on the neighborhood conditions index.

Figure 7. Neighborhood Conditions Index.

Neighborhood Conditions Index
- High Need-Declining (23)
- High Need-Stable (8)
- High Need-Improving(17)
- Moderate Need-Declining (13)
- Moderate Need-Stable(4)
- Moderate Need-Improving (8)
- Low Need-Declining(13)
- Low Need-Stable (12)
- Low Need-Improving (23)
- Other (8)

0   1   2   3
Miles

IV. Ready Health Services

As Schorr and Marchand point out, research shows that healthy births are a very important prerequisite for positive child outcomes. They note that "women who have access to high-quality, affordable prenatal care have healthier babies with fewer physical obstacles that would prevent them from being ready for school." They add that "a lack of prenatal care is linked to poor child outcomes, including low birth-weight, which puts babies at high risk for poor health and developmental outcomes." They also note that "prenatal drug or alcohol exposure can place the fetus at risk for a variety of negative outcomes."[14]

In this section, we examine the distribution of various outcomes linked to Ready Health services by the level of child-raising vulnerability for census tracts in Fulton and DeKalb Counties. Our measures of Ready Health services are based on the Healthy Start Index, a composite measure of birth outcomes developed by the Georgia Division of Public Health. The Healthy Start Index represents the percentage of infants weighing 2,500 grams or more born to mothers who received prenatal care in the first trimester and did not drink alcohol or smoke during pregnancy. Our analysis is based on the percentage of births in Fulton and DeKalb county census tracts during calendar years 2000 through 2006 that were considered Healthy Start births.

Healthy Start Births. Figure 8 shows the strong spatial effects of the distribution of Healthy Start births in the greater Atlanta region. The areas with the deepest blue shading, generally located in the northern most sections of the city of Atlanta, the northern suburbs (Cobb County, North Fulton, Gwinnett County), and large sections of DeKalb County, and those areas where the vast majority of births (75% and higher) are Healthy Start births. On the other hand, large sections of the city of Atlanta, including Northwest Atlanta and most of central and southeast Atlanta, had the lowest percentages of Healthy Start births. Also, a large section of Fulton County south of the city of Atlanta also had very low percentages of Healthy Start births. In many of these areas, inside and outside the city, less than half of all births were considered Healthy Start births.

Figure 9 zooms in more tightly on the city of Atlanta and shows that nearly all of the census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerability were also the census tracts that generally had the lowest rates of Healthy Start births over the period 2000-2006. The average rate for Healthy Start births for all census tracts in Fulton and DeKalb County was 69 percent, and only 7 of the 62 census tracts (11%) with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerability had a Healthy Start birth rate above this average.

The data show fairly convincingly that birth outcomes decline sharply as the risk of child-raising vulnerability increases. As shown in Figure 10, this pattern holds for all tracts in Fulton and DeKalb County and also is maintained for each of the three subareas examined in this report: the city of Atlanta, suburban Fulton County, and suburban DeKalb County. In the city of Atlanta, 73 percent of all births over the period 2000-2006 were Healthy Start births in city census tracts with no child-raising vulnerabilities whereas only about half (52%) of the births in census tracts with six or more child-raising vulnerabilities were Healthy Start births. In suburban Fulton County census tracts the gap was even higher: 78 percent in tracts with no vulnerabilities versus 46 percent in those census tracts with the highest levels of child-raising vulnerability.

---

[14] Schorr and Marchand, p. 1-10.

Figure 8
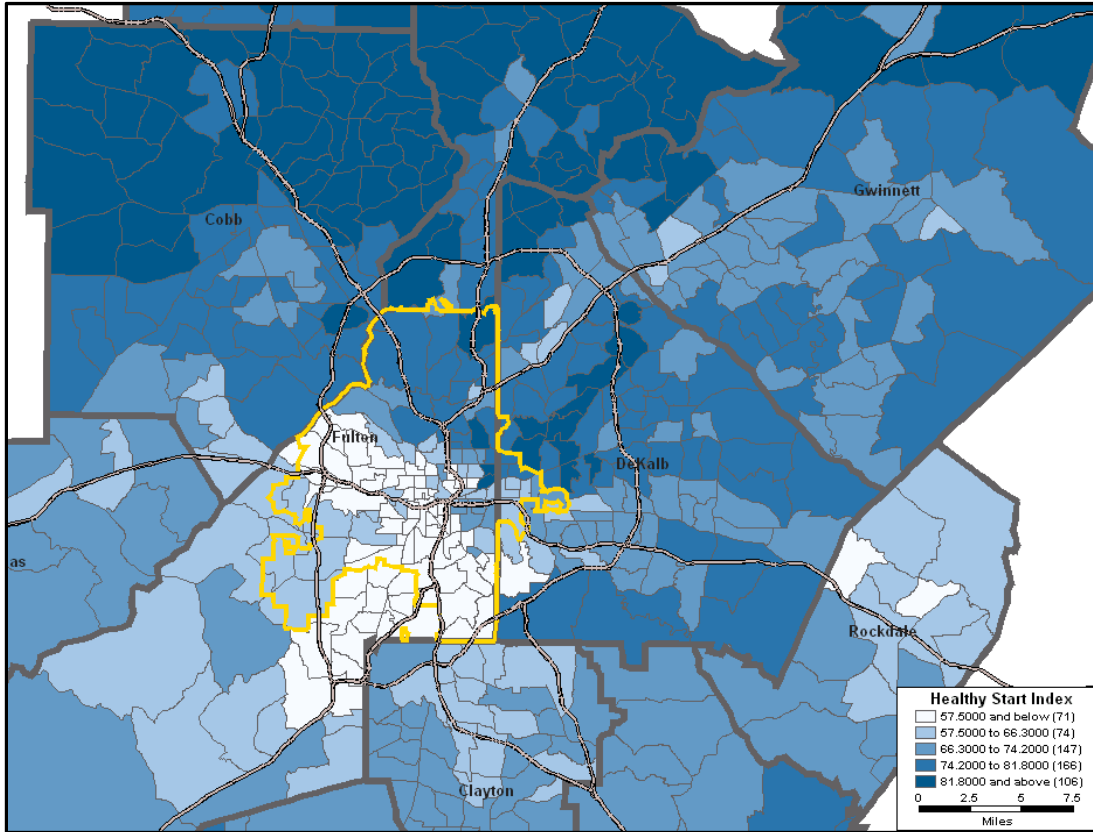**Healthy Start Index by Census Tract**

Figure 9
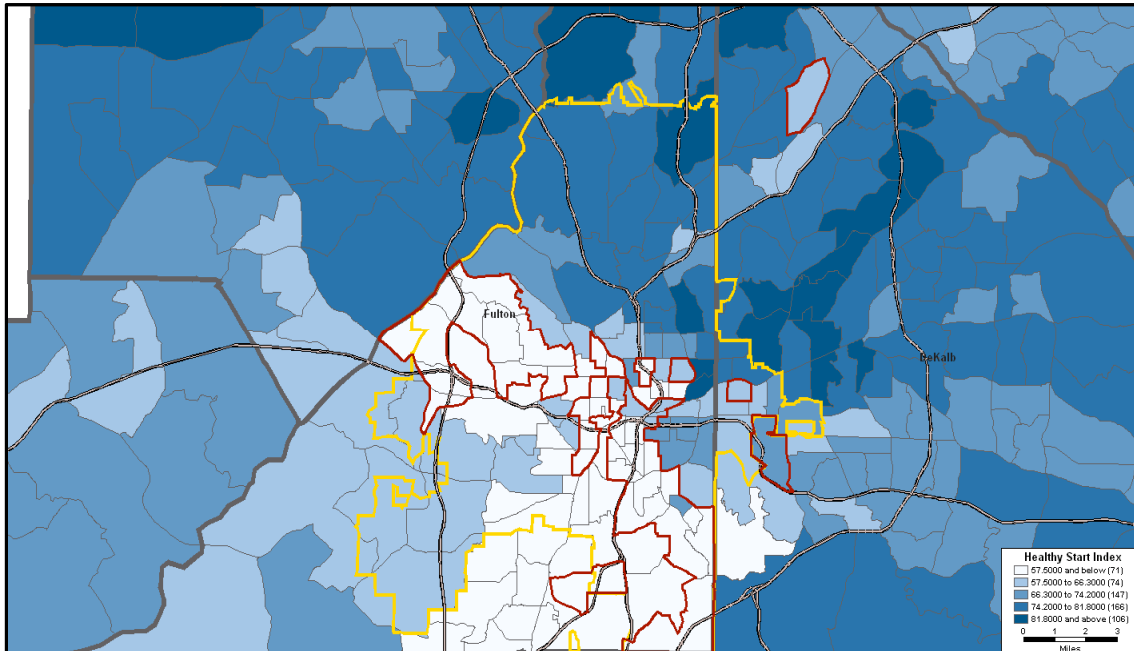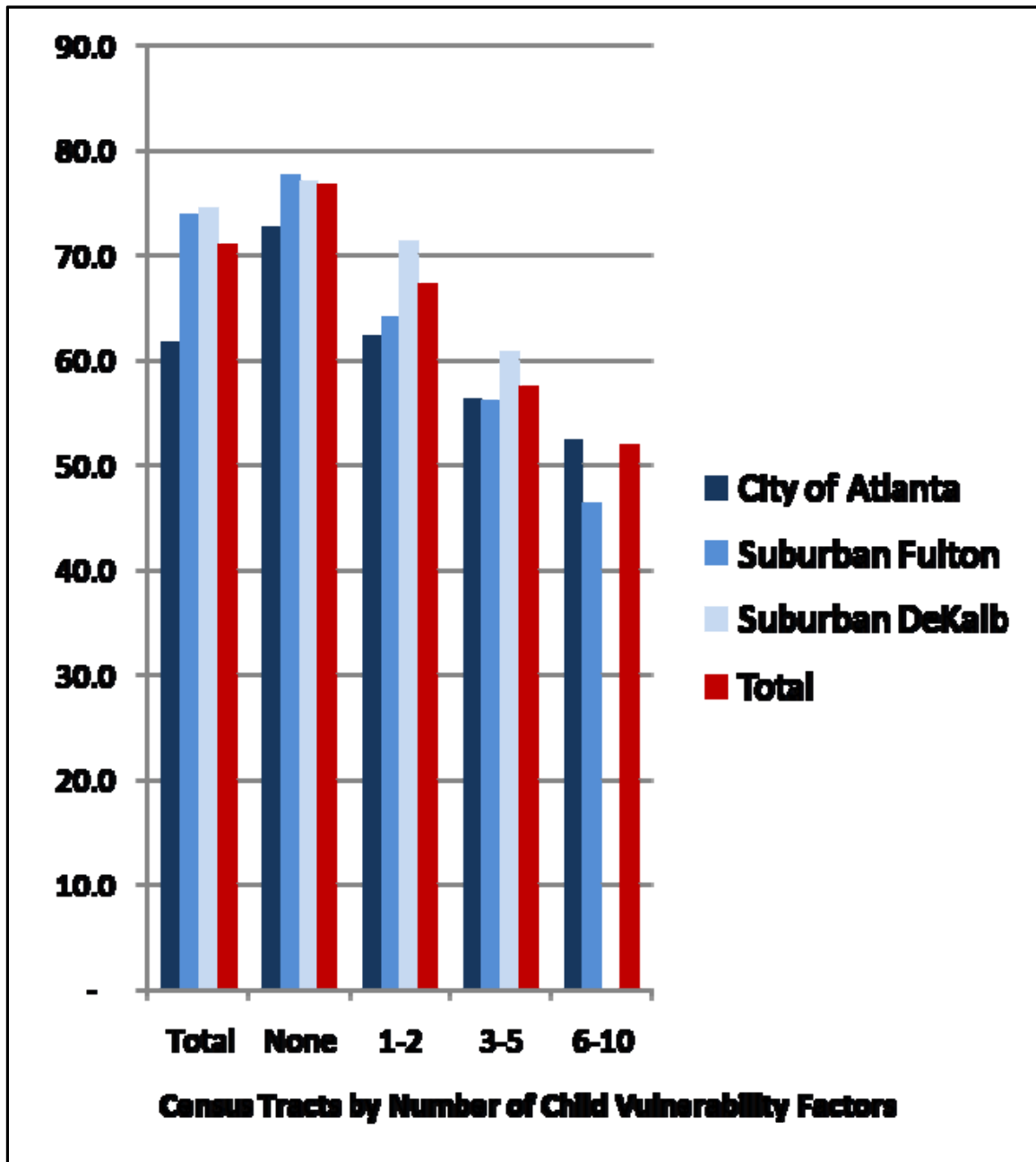**Healthy Start Index and Vulnerable Neighborhoods**

Figure 10.

Healthy Start Index, 2000-2006 by Vulnerable Neighborhoods.

V. Ready Early Care & Education Services

One of the most critical components of the Ready Child Equation is Ready Early Care and Education Services. As Schorr and Marchand note, "high-quality child care that promotes social, emotional, and cognitive development is an essential component of any strategy to promote school readiness and school success. Because young children develop so rapidly between birth and school entry, many of the skills, abilities, and dispositions that go into school readiness and later success are learned in child care and early education programs."[15] They also add that "participation in preschool may close as much as half of the gap in children's developmental proficiencies among socio-economic and ethnic groups, a disparity that is firmly established at entry to kindergarten."[16]

In this section we present data obtained from the Georgia Department of Early Learning on child care and early learning facilities in the greater Atlanta area, examining how the availability, quality, and capacity of services varies by the extent of child-raising vulnerability. In our analysis, we examine child care (child care learning centers, group day care homes, and family day care homes), Head Start, and Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) programs. Our data is from 2008.

Child Care. The mix of child care options available varies by type of neighborhood. As Figure 11 shows, nearly nine out ten (89%) available child care slots in census tracts in the city of Atlanta with no child-raising vulnerabilities are provided by child care learning centers. About eight percent of the child care slots in those neighborhoods are available through Pre-K program sites. By contrast, in neighborhoods with the greatest child-raising vulnerabilities (6 or more factors), only three out of four child care slots are provided by child care learning centers and about one out of four slots (23%) are provided by Pre-K programs.

Figure 12 shows the geographic distribution of child care learning centers and child care group day homes in Fulton and DeKalb Counties. The figure suggests a denser clustering of dots in the census tracts with no child-raising vulnerabilities (darkest green) or relatively few (1-2) vulnerabilities (lighter green) and a somewhat sparser distribution of dots in census tracts with greater child-raising vulnerabilities. That pattern is confirmed in Figure 13, which shows that the number of children in the city of Atlanta under age five per child care and Pre-K slot is about twice as great in census tracts with moderate to high levels of child-raising vulnerabilities (6 or more) than in census tracts with no or few vulnerabilities. A similar pattern holds for suburban Fulton County census tracts, though the disparities between high and low vulnerability census tracts are not as great.

Research also shows that the quality of child care and early learning experiences matters. Schorr and Marchand note that "the impact that child care quality has on later outcomes is greater for children with multiple risk factors, who are also the children with the greatest probability of being enrolled in poor-quality programs."[17] One measure of child care quality is whether a child care center has been certified as meeting national standards of quality provided by organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for child care centers and the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) for family child care providers.

---

[15] P 4-18.

[16] Ibid., p. 4-21.

[17] P. 4-19

Table 4 shows that young children in census tracts in Fulton and DeKalb Counties with higher levels of child-raising vulnerabilities generally have less access to accredited child care providers. In the city of Atlanta, for example, although a higher percentage of child care centers in neighborhoods with the highest levels of child-raising vulnerabilities meet national quality standards, there are fewer such centers than in better-off neighborhoods, and as a result, there are far more children under age 5 per accredited center in the most vulnerable neighborhoods (817) than in census tracts with no child-raising vulnerabilities (560). Thus, confirming Schorr and Marchand's observation, children in Atlanta's most vulnerable neighborhoods have a higher probability of being served by poor-quality programs.

Types of Child Care Programs in Georgia

Family Day Care Home
A program that operates in a private residential home less than 24 hours per day. It provides care for 3 children, but no more than 6, under the age of 18 for pay.

Group Day Care Home
A program operated by a person, society, agency, corporation, institution, or group that receives pay for group care. It provides care for 7 to 18 children under eighteen years of age for less than 24 hours per day.

Child Care Learning Centers
A program operated by a person, society, agency, corporation, institution, or group that receives pay for group care. It provides care for 19 or more children under eighteen years of age for less than 24 hours per day.

Informal Care Providers
Informal providers may be relatives or non-relatives who provide child care services. They are referred to as "Informal" providers because they are limited in the number of children for pay based on the relationship and are not required to be licensed or registered with Bright from the Start. The parent must be receiving subsidized child care assistance and the informal provider must be enrolled with the Department of Family and Children Services.

Source: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

Figure 11.
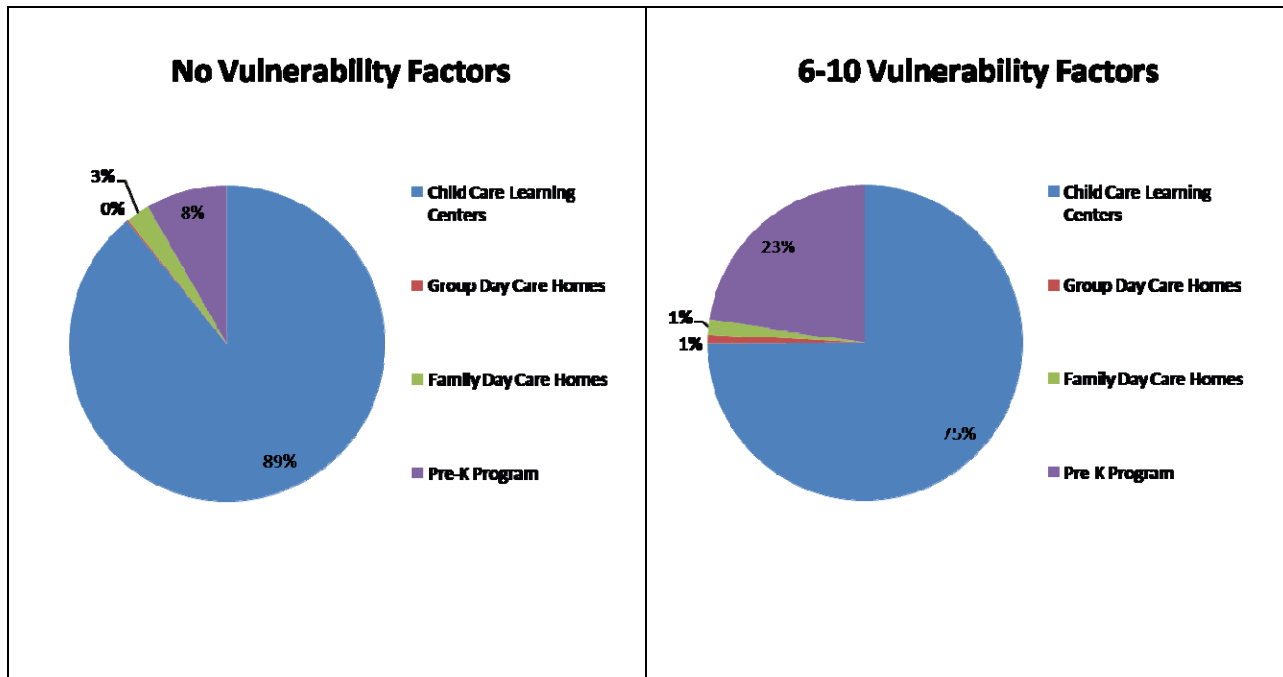**Distribution of Child Care and Pre-K Slots in the City of Atlanta by Type of Neighborhood**

Figure 12
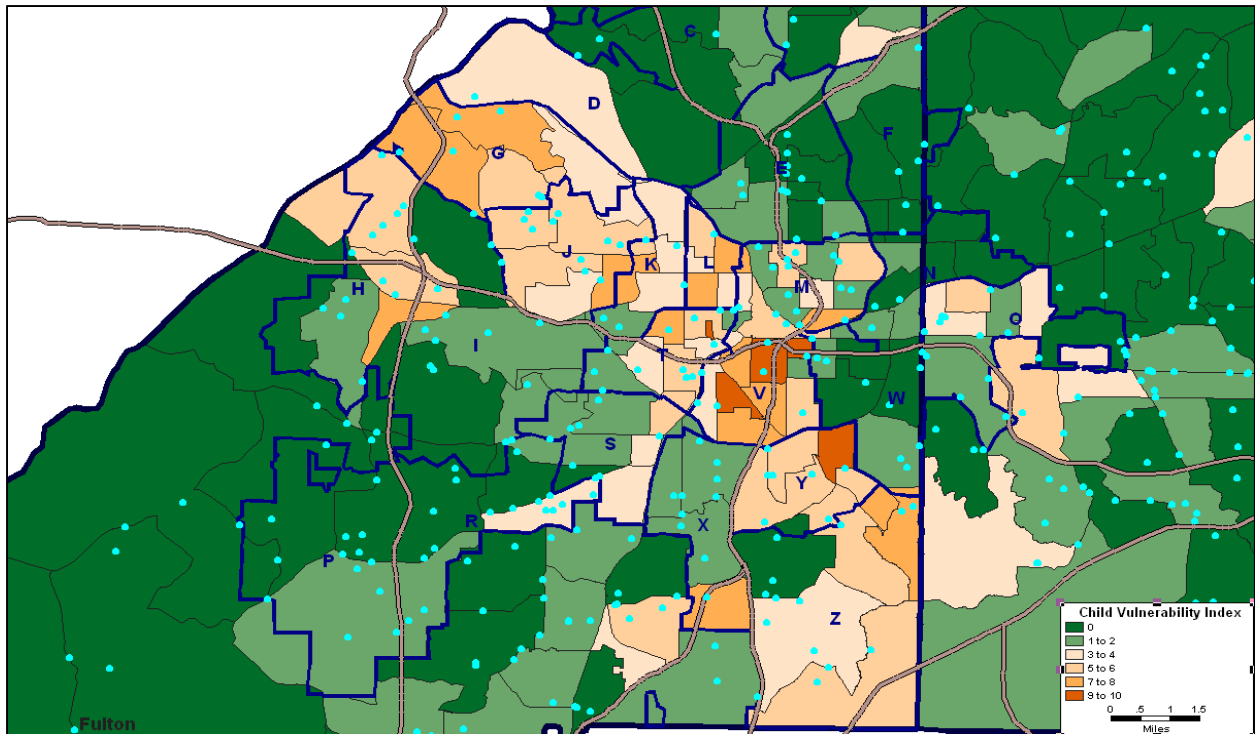**Distribution of Child Care and Group Day Care Homes in Fulton and DeKalb Counties**

Figure 13

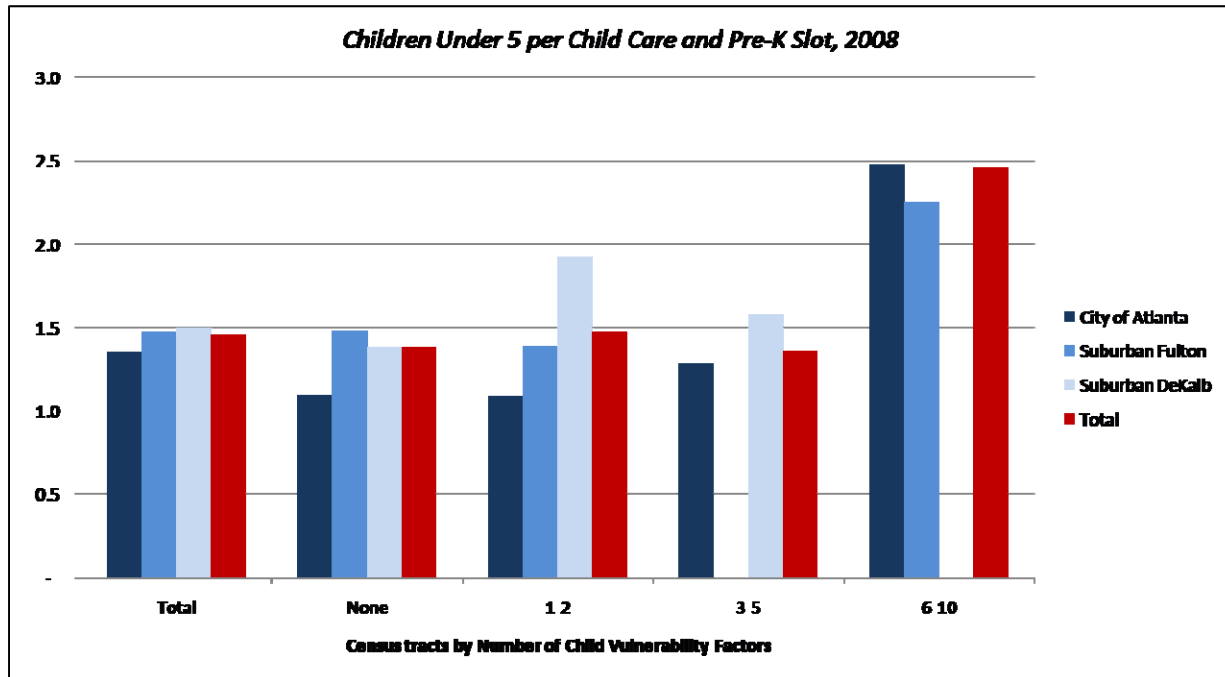**Slots in Child Care Learning Centers, Group Day Care Homes, and Pre-K Programs by Type of Neighborhood**

Children Under 5 per Child Care and Pre-K Slot, 2008

Census tracts by Number of Child Vulnerability Factors

Legend: City of Atlanta, Suburban Fulton, Suburban DeKalb, Total

Table 4

Distribution of Accredited Child Care Centers by Type of Neighborhood

	All Census Tracts	No Vulnerability Factors	1-2 Vulnerability Factors	3-5 Vulnerability Factors	6-10 Vulnerability Factors
City of Atlanta					
No. of child care centers	170	50	53	37	30
Percent of child care centers accredited	31	30	28	30	37
Percent of all accredited centers	100	29	29	21	21
Children aged 0-4 per accredited center	597	560	463	612	817
Suburban Fulton County					
No. of child care centers	162	128	32	0	2
Percent of child care centers accredited	20	21	16	--	0
Percent of all accredited centers	100	84	16	--	0
Children aged 0-4 per accredited center	1253	1176	1512	--	--
Suburban DeKalb County					
No. of child care centers	217	156	52	9	--
Percent of child care centers accredited	18	19	12	33	--
Percent of all accredited centers	100	77	15	8	--
Children aged 0-4 per accredited center	1283	1164	2151	731	--
Fulton and DeKalb Counties (w/ Atlanta)					
No. of child care centers	549	334	137	46	32
Percent of child care centers accredited	22	22	19	30	34
Percent of all accredited centers	100	59	21	11	9
Children aged 0-4 per accredited center	985	1043	1054	642	882

Pre-Kindergarten. In 1995, Georgia became the first state in the country to offer a free pre-kindergarten program to all four-year old children who wanted to participate regardless of family income. The program, one of two educational programs funded by proceeds from the Georgia Lottery, began in 1992 as initiative targeted to at-risk children. The Georgia Pre-K program is a full day (6.5 hour) program, offered five days a week, 180 days a year. Pre-K services are provided by a variety of organizations including public and private schools, vocational technical institutes, public and private colleges, non-profit and for-profit child care learning centers, and Head Start sites, among others. According to the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, which administers the Pre-K program, "the school readiness goals of the Pre-K program provide appropriate preschool experiences emphasizing growth in language and literacy, math concepts, science, social studies, arts, physical development, and social and emotional competence."[18] During the 2007-2008 school year, about 76,000 children were served through approximately 2,000 Pre-K sites. More than half of participating children were served by a private provider (56%) and Pre-K programs administered by public schools served about 43 percent of participating children.[19]

Although Georgia's Pre-K program is a "universal access" program in that the program is provided free of charge to all four-year olds, the program is not necessarily universally accessible to all children. As shown in this section, many neighborhoods do not have a Pre-K program provider or the demand for Pre-K services, as manifest in the number of four-year old children far exceeds the available capacity of existing Pre-K providers. Figure 14 shows the geographic distribution of Pre-K program sites in Fulton and DeKalb Counties, which suggests a reasonably balanced coverage of Pre-K sites across census tracts with high and low levels of child-raising vulnerability. In the city of Atlanta, for example, census tracts with moderate (3-5 factors) and high (6 or more) levels of child-raising vulnerability have about 52 percent of the city's age 4 population, 47 percent of the city's Pre-K program sites, and 50 percent of the Pre-K slots. This distribution yields slightly higher numbers of four year olds per available Pre-K slots in the neighborhoods with the greatest child-raising vulnerability (1.9) than in neighborhoods with moderate (1.5) or low (1.2) child-raising vulnerability (Figure 15). Neighborhoods with no child-raising vulnerability (2.2), however, have the highest ratio of four-year olds per Pre-K slot.

---

[18] Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, "Pre-K Program Components," available at http://decal.ga.gov/Prek/ProgramComponents.aspx, accessed on February 23, 2010.

[19] Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, "About Pre-K, Current Facts," available at http://decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/FactSheet.pdf, accessed on February 23, 2010.

Figure 14

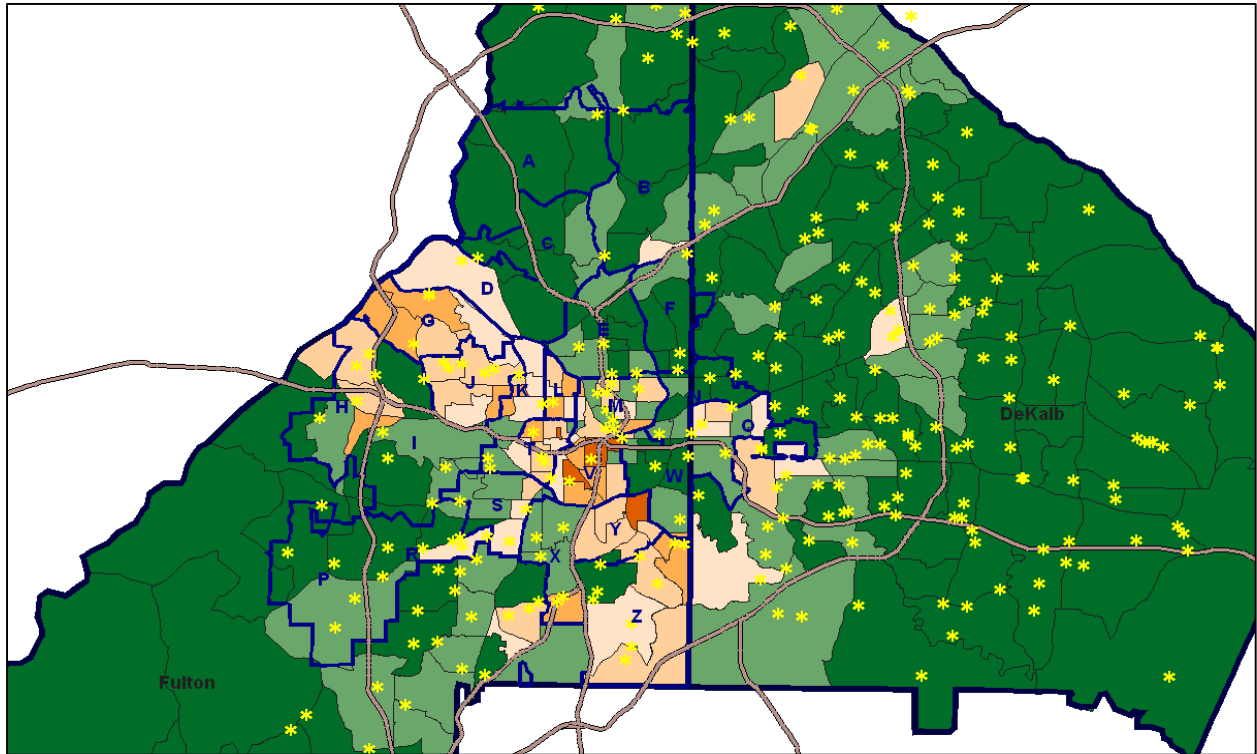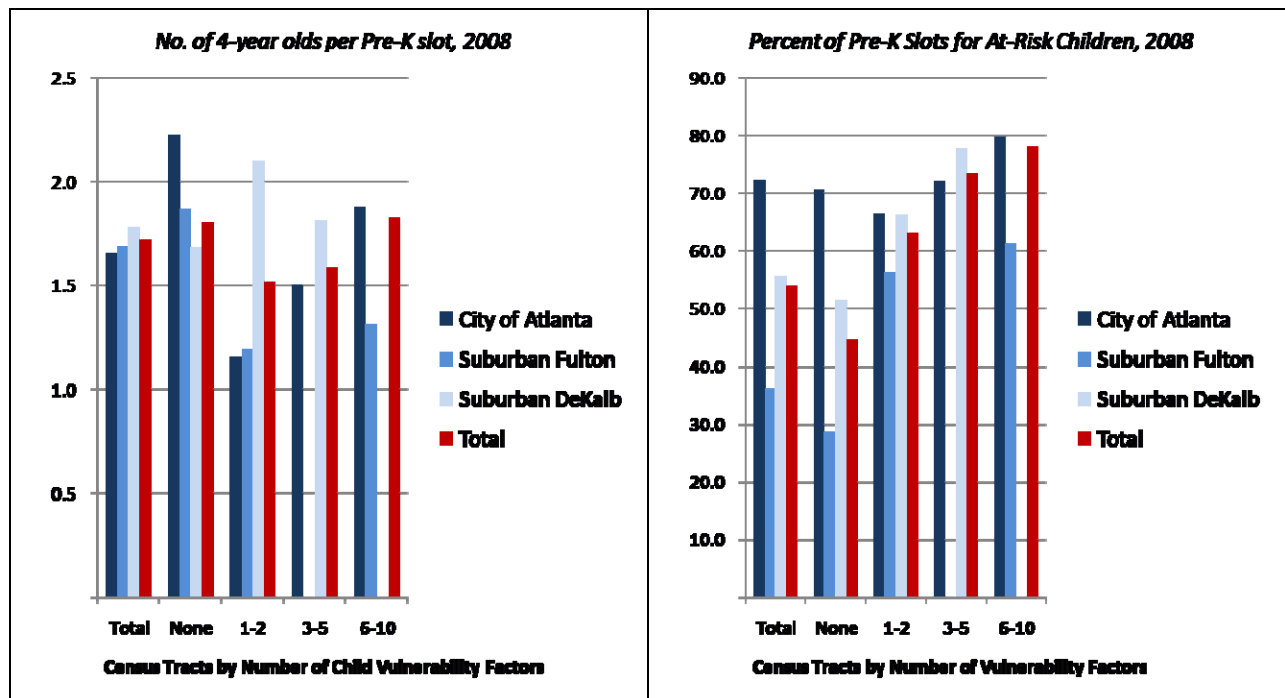**Geographic Distribution of Pre-Kindergarten Sites**

Figure 15

Distribution of Pre-Kindergarten Slots by Type of Neighborhood.

Head Start. Head Start is the nation's oldest program promoting school readiness among low-income children. Its origins date to President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, where Head Start became the centerpiece of a comprehensive effort to reduce poverty in America by giving low-income children a "head start" so that, in the words of President Johnson, they would be "ready to take their places beside their more fortunate classmates in regular school." As the president noted in his announcement that Head Start would be expanded from a summer program to a full-year program, the intent of the program was to ensure that poor children avoided the "road to that wasteland of ignorance in which the children of the poor grow up and become the parents of the poor."[20] The mission of Head Start, therefore, is to promote "school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families."[21]

Figure 16 shows the geographic distribution of Head Start centers in Fulton and DeKalb Counties tends to be concentrated in the census tracts with the highest levels of child-raising vulnerabilities. Most of the Head Start centers (denoted by a red square) can be found in census tracts with three or more child-raising vulnerability factors (census tracts in various shades of orange). Indeed, more than half of all Head Start centers in the city of Atlanta (58%) are located in census tracts with moderate (3-5 vulnerability factors) to high (6 or more) levels of child-raising vulnerability. However, as Figure 17 illustrates, while neighborhoods with higher levels of child-raising vulnerability have a greater share of Head Start programs, they also have a greater share of poor children under age 5, and thus, the ratios of poor children to Head Start site are generally much greater in the most vulnerable neighborhoods than is the case for neighborhoods with fewer child-raising vulnerability factors.

---

[20] Quoted in Edward Zigler and Susan Muenchow, Head Start: The Inside Story of America's Most Successful Educational Experiment (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 54.

[21] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, "Mission." Available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/, accessed February 23, 2010.

Figure 16

Geographic Distribution of Head Start Centers in Fulton and DeKalb Counties.

Figure 17.

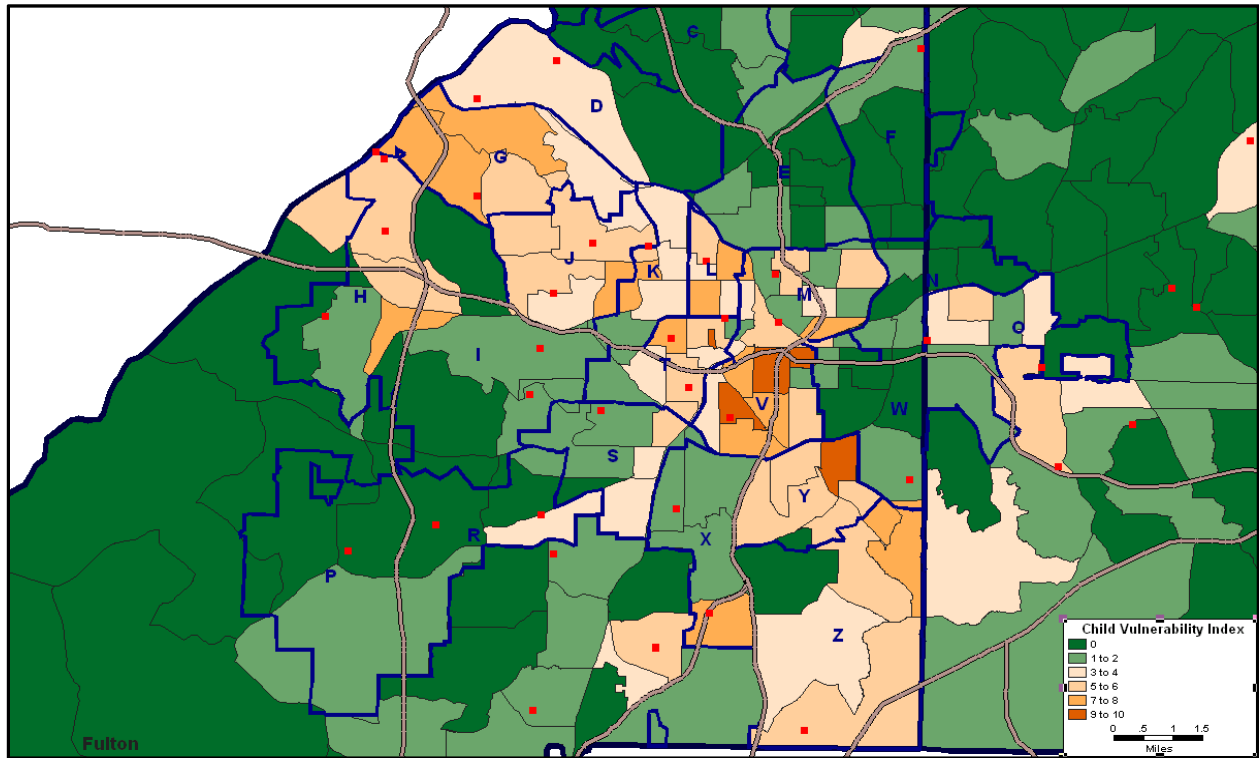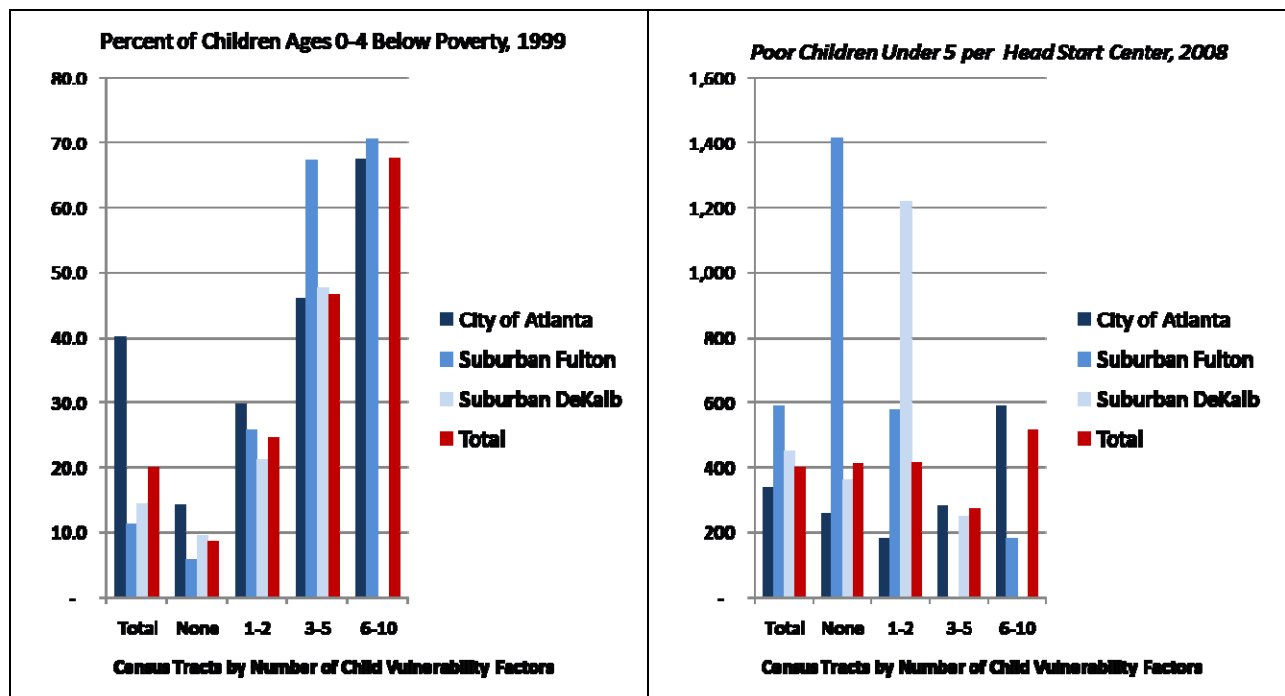**Access to Head Start Programs by Type of Neighborhood.**

VI. Ready Schools

> Getting teaching and learning right in the first place—i.e., during the preschool and early school years—"is the most obvious way to give students what they will need to prosper in the classroom. Otherwise, every intervention afterward becomes remedial—expensive, difficult, bruising to children"
>
> G.I. Maeroff (2006)[22]

The last element of the Ready Child Equation is Ready Schools. Elementary schools play a critical role in shaping the future life chances and opportunities of children. First, elementary schools increasingly are seen as critical agents in fostering the transition of children from child care, pre-school, and early learning programs to kindergarten. As the National School Readiness Initiative noted, "a smooth transition into kindergarten forms the basis for later academic achievement and success. When transitions are well-planned, children have fewer adjustment problems and more continuous developmental progress."[23] Second, Bruner and associates point out, "The early elementary years (K-3) are viewed as critical to children's long-term educational success, with reading by the end of third grade a sentinel measure of future academic achievement."[24]

In this section we examine the distribution of third-grade reading scores on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests in the public elementary schools in the greater Atlanta area. For each elementary school, we calculated the percentage of third-grade students that met or exceeded the state standards on the CRCT over the four-year period beginning with school year 2003-2004 and ending with school year 2006-2007. The data for this analysis were obtained from the Georgia Department of Education. We also examine the number of years over the five-year period beginning in school year 2003-2004 and ending in 2007-2008 that public elementary schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.[25] Our data for this analysis was obtained from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

---

[22] G.I. Maeroff, *Building Blocks: Making Children Successful in the Early Years of School*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2006. Quoted in Schorr and Marchand, p. 6-11.

[23] *Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative—A 17 State Partnership* (David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation and the Ford Foundation, February 2005), p. 33.

[24] Bruner et al, *Village Building and School Readiness*, p. 32.

[25] The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires state education agencies to establish statewide standards for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on academic standards and assessments and student achievement, and includes sanctions for local public education agencies and schools that consistently fail to meet AYP. In Georgia, these standards are structured and assessed in part through the Criterion Referenced Competency Test, administered by the Georgia Department of Education. Schools that fail to meet AYP for two consecutive years must begin to take corrective action, including offering alternative enrollment opportunities for students in their attendance zone; schools that fail to met AYP for four consecutive years must choose corrective strategies from those listed in the NCLB act, five consecutive years of failing to met AYP requires the creation of a school restructuring plan, and a sixth consecutive year mandates the implementation of the restructuring plan. See U.S. Department of Education, No Child Left Behind Accountability and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), National Title I Directors Conference, 2003, accessed at http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/ayp203/edlite-index.html, accessed February 3, 2010.

Third Grade Reading Test Scores. Figure 18 shows the geographic distribution of public elementary schools in the greater Atlanta area overlaid on a census tract-based map of the region displaying tract-level median family income from the 2000 census. The tracts that are colored a deeper shade of green represent census tracts with higher median family income. The dots on the map represent the public schools and each dot is color coded based on the percentage of third grade students meeting or exceeding the state standard for reading. The schools are grouped into quintiles based on their reading scores; with green dots representing schools with higher rates of passage and red dots illustrating schools with lower rates of passage. Yellow dots represent schools in the middle quintile. The data show a very strong relationship between median family income and student achievement. In general, schools located in higher income census tracts tend to have higher test scores whereas schools located in the census tracts with lower median family income generally have test scores that fall in the lower two quintiles.

Figure 19 presents a closer look at the relationship between income and student achievement in the areas with the highest child-raising vulnerability (areas outlined in red). As the figure shows, the vast majority of the public elementary schools in the neighborhoods with the greatest child-raising vulnerability (6 or more factors) fall in the lower two quintiles in terms of their third grade reading test scores. Overall, the mean percentage of third grade students meeting or exceeding the state reading standard over the five-year period examined was 78 percent; six schools had scores of 70 percent or lower.

Adequate Yearly Progress. Figure 20 displays the geographic distribution of public schools in the greater Atlanta region showing their AYP status over the five-year period 2004-2008. Overall, the vast majority (366 of 476 schools, 77%) of public elementary schools met AYP in at least four of the five years examined; about one out of five schools (21%) attained AYP in two or fewer years during this five-year period. With the exception of Atlanta, the figure shows that most of the schools that attained AYP for the fewest number of years over the period examined tend to be located in census tracts that have lower median family income. As seen in Figure 21, the vast majority of schools located in the most vulnerable census tracts met AYP for at least four of the five years examined.

Figure 18.

Percent of Third Grade Students Meeting or Exceeding Reading CRCT, 2004-2007, Public Elementary Schools in the Greater Atlanta Area
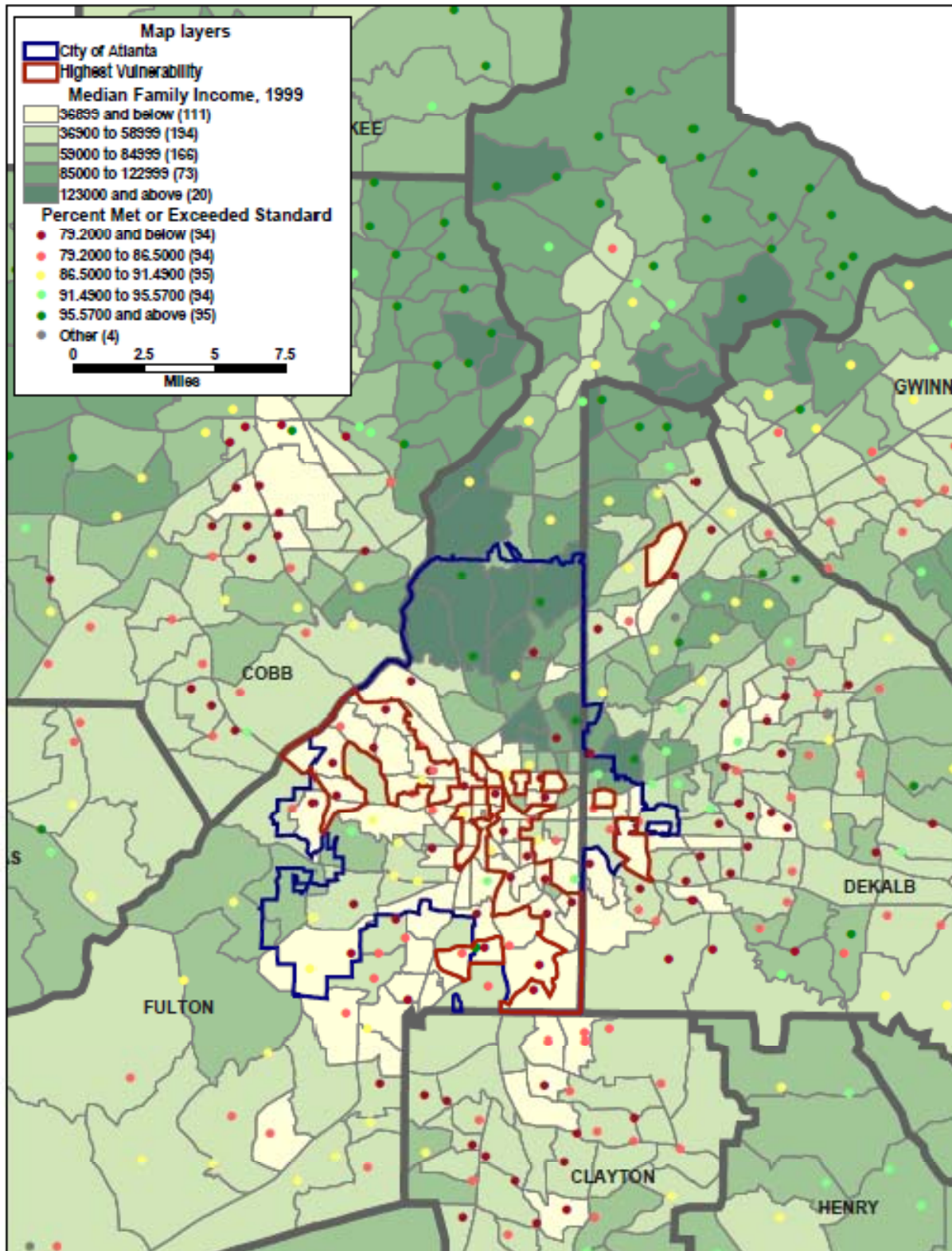
Figure 19
Percent of Third Grade Students Meeting or Exceeding Reading CRCT, 2004-2007, Public Elementary Schools in the Greater Atlanta Area Located in Areas with Highest Child-Raising Vulnerability
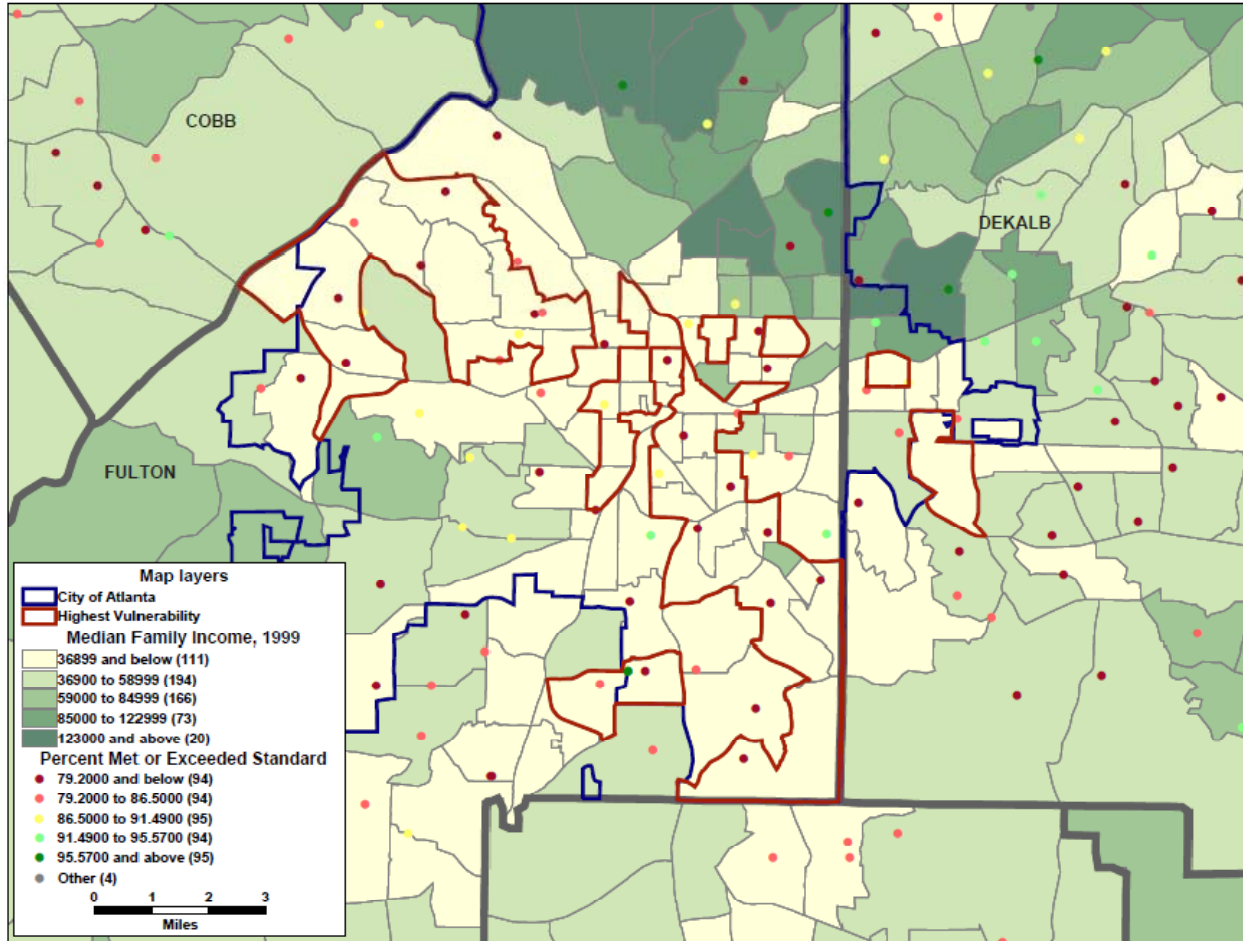
Figure 20

Adequate Yearly Progress in Public Elementary Schools in the Greater Atlanta Area, Consecutive Years in AYP, 2008
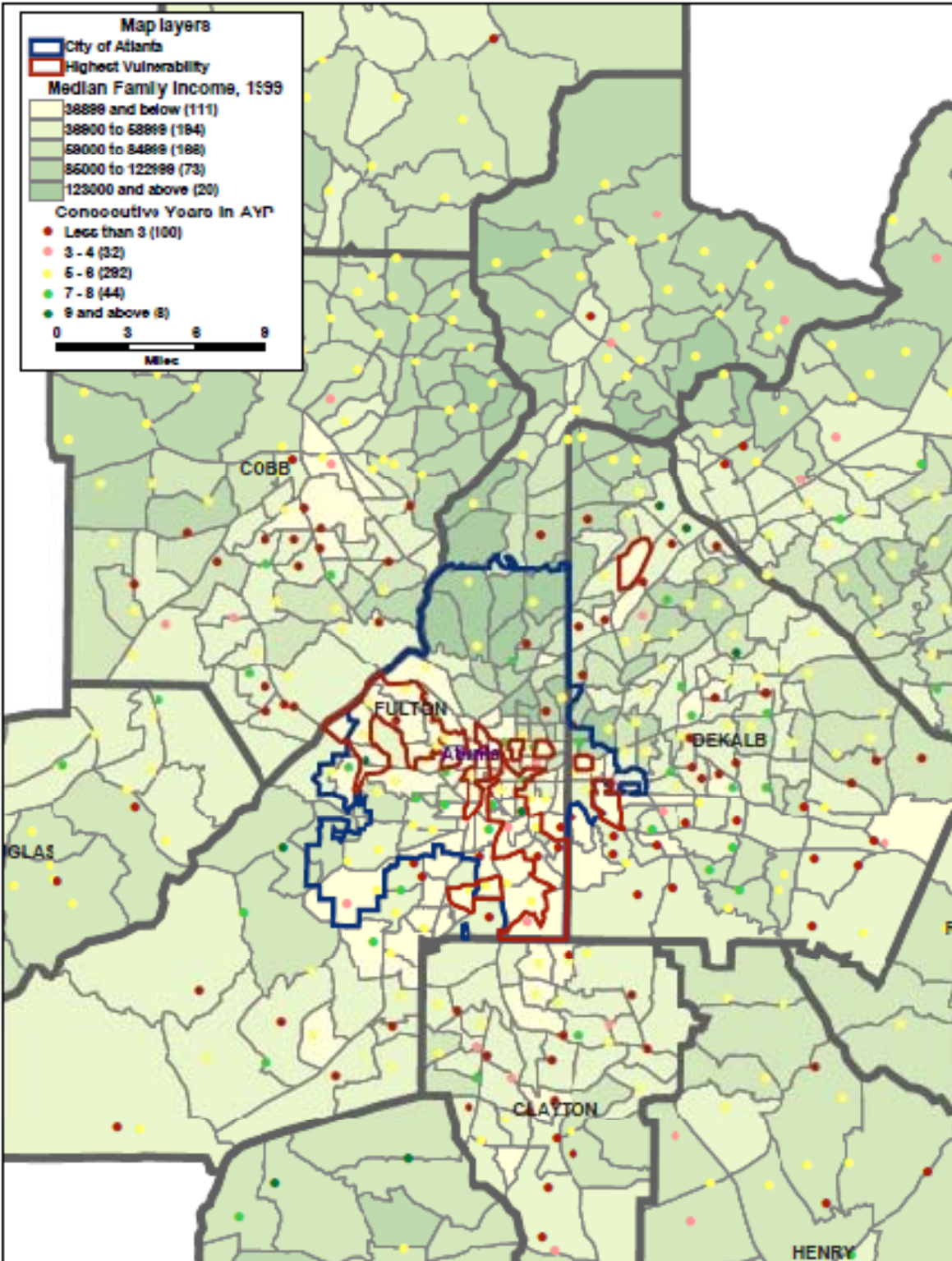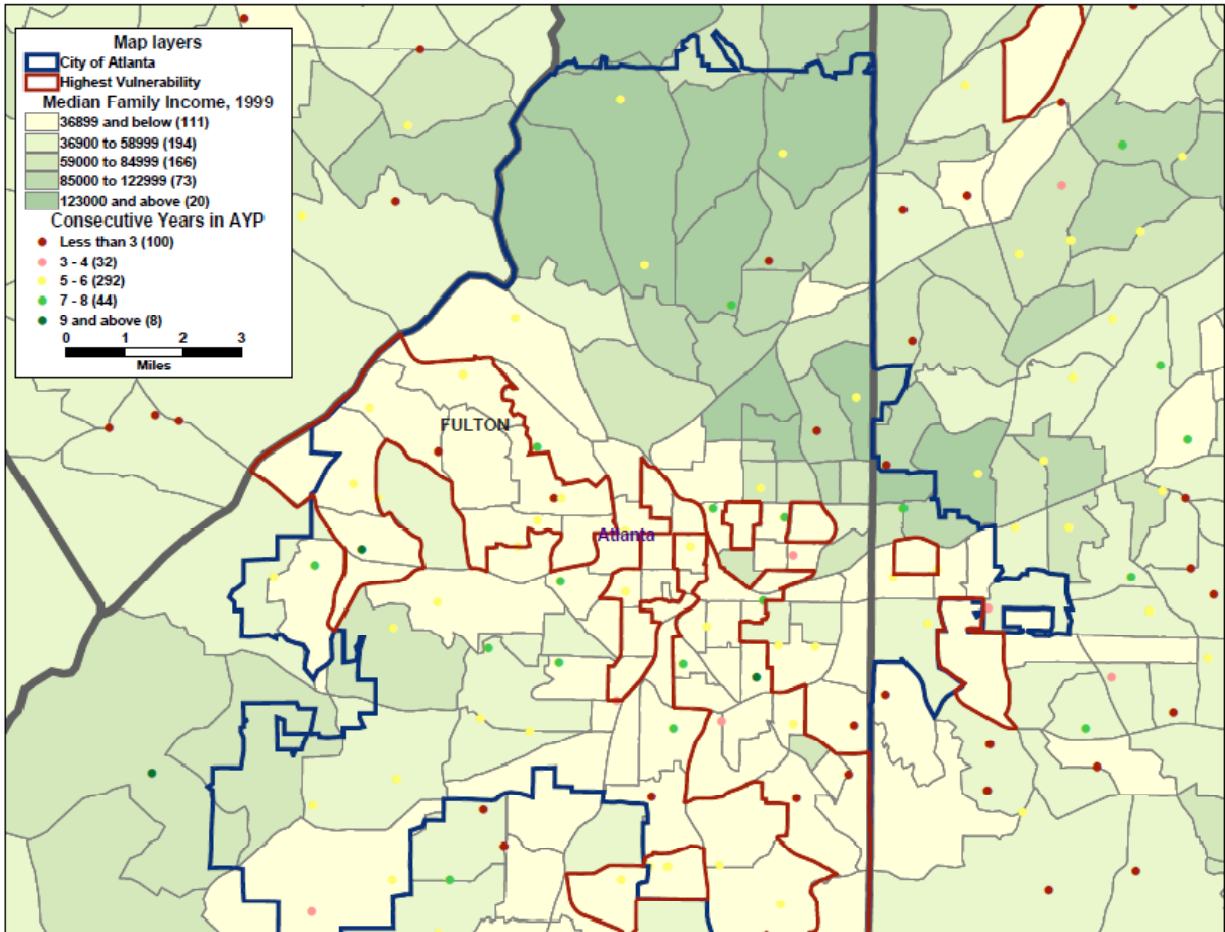
Figure 21

Adequate Yearly Progress in Public Elementary Schools in the Greater Atlanta Area Located in Areas with Highest Child-Raising Vulnerability

Consecutive Years in AYP, 2008

VII. Conclusion

The major finding of this analysis is that there are cumulative disparities concentrated in the census tracts in the greater Atlanta area with the greatest number of child-raising vulnerability factors. Children are more likely to be born at-risk in these neighborhoods and less likely to get ahead through early education and schooling. The analysis showed that the most vulnerable neighborhoods had the lowest percentages of Healthy Start births and there were substantially more children per child care and other early learning program slots than was the case in neighborhoods with fewer child-raising vulnerabilities. The data also showed that once in school, children in the most vulnerable neighborhoods were more likely to attend schools where student achievement levels were lower. Third grade reading scores, for example, were substantially lower in the elementary schools in the neighborhoods with greater child-raising vulnerability than was the case for schools in neighborhoods with less vulnerability.

The data analysis and mapping included in this report speak directly to the importance of a place-based strategy for increasing opportunities for children in vulnerable neighborhoods. The analysis consistently showed that the greatest challenges and barriers to opportunity for children, particularly low-income children, were clustered in specific geographic areas, and generally these neighborhoods were the ones with the greatest child-raising vulnerability. While there are many examples in the greater Atlanta area of community-based, collaborative efforts to assist children and families, greater coordination and integration of these efforts will likely lead to a more seamless continuum of services yielding better outcomes for children, families, and neighborhoods.

Finally, it is important to note in the greater Atlanta area we have only just begun to tap the potential of using a data-driven strategy for informing investments, program design, and evaluation to increase the effectiveness of programs and strategies that serve at-risk children and their families. Greater utilization of data analysis and mapping of neighborhood-based indicators of maternal and child health, early child learning, school readiness, and early grade success will require a collaborative effort on the part of state and local government agencies, nonprofit service providers, practitioners, policy makers, and researchers.