KANSAS CITY METRO AREA

State(s): Missouri and Kansas
Census Designation: Kansas City, MO-KS

The Kansas City metropolitan area has a well-documented history of segregation, and a couple of the major segregation strategies discussed in this report were refined in Kansas City. The area spans two states (Missouri and Kansas), with the two districts bearing the city's name—Kansas City Unified in Kansas (also known as Kansas City Kansas Public Schools) and Kansas City 33 in Missouri—separated by a street that is also the state border. These two districts serve about 10 percent of the metro area's students but roughly 30 percent of its Black and Hispanic students (who are roughly equal in number across the area).

As a result of this concentration of Black and Hispanic students in a small number of districts, between-district segregation in the Kansas City area is extremely high, and total segregation is driven mostly by the separation of students between districts, rather than between schools within districts (Table 3). This happened by design.

Kansas City 33 (Kansas City, Missouri) was segregated internally from its founding immediately after the Civil War. Moreover, prior to the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954, there were essentially no secondary schools for Black students to attend anywhere in the area except for Lincoln High School in Kansas City (and elementary school options were extremely limited as well). This forced Black families with children into the city.

The composition map for the area surrounding Kansas City is presented in Figure 17. Note that, in this map, the red border running north to south represents both district and state borders, with Kansas to the west/south and Missouri to the east/north (the curvy northern portion of the state/district border is the Missouri River). The between-district segregation around Kansas City is immediately apparent in the map, with large shares of Black/Hispanic students in the two Kansas City districts and a handful of suburbs to the south of each, with the rest of the districts serving mostly white students.

The higher (assessed) risk C- and D-graded HOLC zones are located mostly within Kansas City Unified and Kansas City 33, which, again, serve almost one in three of the area's Black and Hispanic students. Conversely, a large share of the lower-risk A/B HOLC zones are found spanning the state/district boundary between the southwest area of the Kansas City 33 district (MO) and the Shawnee Mission district (KS). This area reflects the legacy of Kansas City developer J. C. Nichols. Nichols began developing his "Country Club District" in the early 1900s as a model for developers in other U.S. cities to build beautiful residential refuges for families seeking an alternative to crowded urban neighborhoods. Yet his legacy today is defined by blatant discrimination. Nichols was among the pioneers in using zoning and especially covenants (between homeowners and homeowners associations, which Nichols was also a pioneer in seeing the discriminatory uses of) to ensure that only white families would be allowed to buy homes in his suburban oases (Gotham 2002c; Stevens 2018). He was also instrumental in creating the FHA (Weiss 1987). Subsequent exclusionary zoning and blockbusting reinforced these racial boundaries.

Immediately after the *Brown* decision, Kansas City (on the Missouri side) replaced its racial school attendance zones with neighborhood attendance zones. For the next 20 years, the school board shifted these borders frequently, but Troost Avenue, a major commercial road running north/south parallel and near to the border with Kansas, was a persistent dividing line between the city's white and Black populations; it was sometimes called the "Troost Wall." Between 1950 and 1970, due in no small part to predatory "blockbusting," the white population east of Troost declined rapidly, replaced by an equal number of Black residents (Gotham 2002b).
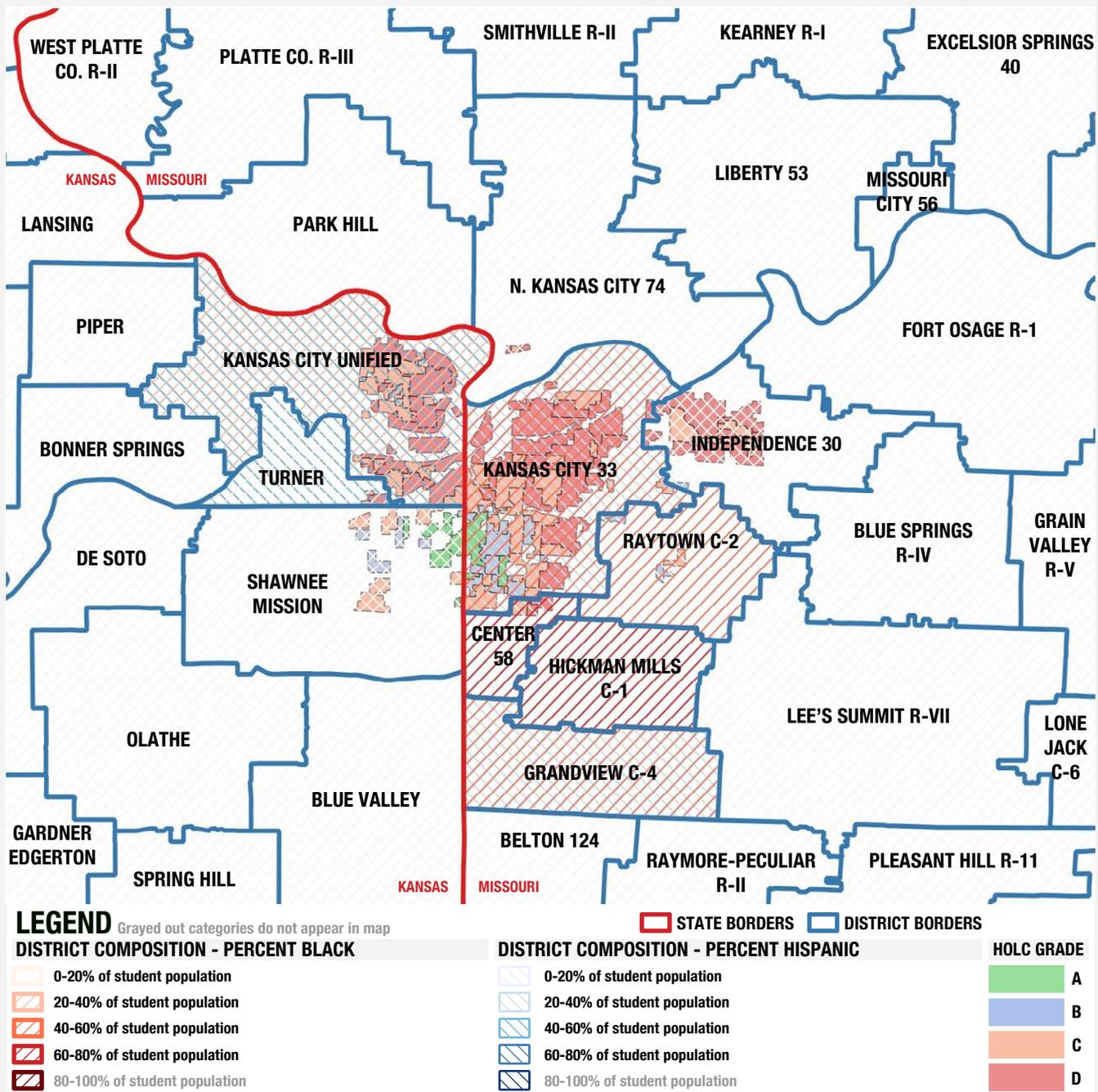
The impact on the Kansas City area of racially restrictive covenants, which were crafted and enforced throughout much of the 20th century, including the decades prior to the FHA loan program, are quite evident in other areas of the map. In addition to

Shawnee Mission and Blue Valley, the rest of Johnson County (on the Kansas side of the red border in the southern portion of the map) includes De Soto, Gardner, Olathe, and Spring Hill. These districts, like Shawnee Mission, serve overwhelmingly white student populations, and this is no accident. According to professor Kevin Fox Gotham, 148 of 154 subdivisions built in Johnson County until 1947 included racial restrictions, or 96 percent of subdivisions covering 97 percent of the county's acreage. The last restrictive covenants were recorded in the county in 1962, 14 years after they were deemed unenforceable in the *Shelley* decision (Gotham 2000b). And Johnson County (KS) schools remain remarkably white

Figure 17

SCHOOL DISTRICT STUDENT RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION MAP, KANSAS CITY METRO AREA, 2018

LEGEND Grayed out categories do not appear in map

STATE BORDERS · DISTRICT BORDERS

DISTRICT COMPOSITION - PERCENT BLACK
- 0-20% of student population
- 20-40% of student population
- 40-60% of student population
- 60-80% of student population
- 80-100% of student population

DISTRICT COMPOSITION - PERCENT HISPANIC
- 0-20% of student population
- 20-40% of student population
- 40-60% of student population
- 60-80% of student population
- 80-100% of student population

HOLC GRADE
- A
- B
- C
- D

To improve visibility of HOLC zones, map does not include entire metro area. See Box 1 for information on measures.

compared with school districts both to the east across the single street that separates Kansas and Missouri and to the north across 47th Street (which divides Johnson County from its northern neighbor, Wyandotte, Kansas, home to Kansas City Unified).

Similarly, north of the river in Clay County, Missouri (the northern area of the map in Figure 17), we find the heavily white districts of Excelsior Springs, Liberty, and North Kansas City. Approximately 87 percent of Clay County acreage was covered by restrictive covenants, while 74 percent of new subdivisions in Platte County (home to the mostly white districts Park Hill, Platte, and West Platte in the map) were covenanted. The legacy of these private agreements, which restricted access of minority families to these areas, is clear even 60-80 years later (Gotham 2000b).

In fact, as recently as November 2021, there is reporting of homeowners finding covenants signed many decades ago, which are "in effect" today. One example from Prairie Village (Kansas), which is located in the Shawnee Mission district and was developed in the 1940s by J. C. Nichols, reads: "None of said land may be conveyed to, used, owned, or occupied by negroes as owners or tenants" (Thompson et al. 2021).

The Independence 30 district, to the east of Kansas City 33, stands out as an exception in the map. The district was also home to several relatively large C- and D-graded HOLC neighborhoods, but it serves a majority white student population today (roughly 57 percent in 2018). This may have been due in part to the migration of white families from the city to the suburbs, or at least to the non-C/D-graded areas of Independence (Euston 2020), though note that the white share of students in the Independence 30 district declined from about 74 percent in 1989 to 55 percent in 2019 (that is, a fair amount of the racial/ethnic compositional change is more recent).

Blockbusting was also a major factor in creating the current distribution of students by race and ethnicity even outside of the city. The neighborhoods to the south and east of Kansas City 33 (e.g., the Center 58, Hickman Mills, and Raytown districts) were for decades largely white areas, but they became more diverse and some majority-Black from the 1970s through the 1990s. The Center 58 School District

was carved out of the Kansas City city limits in 1956 following the *Brown* decision, originally serving a largely middle-class Jewish population (which was also excluded from access to many Kansas subdivisions). But large portions of these districts were, during the 1970s and 1980s, aggressively blockbusted. White people moved to the Kansas side or north of the river and out further to Lee's Summit, leaving Center, Hickman Mills, and Raytown with the substantial Black populations denoted in the map (Gotham 2002a).

The Kansas City area's funding map, presented in Figure 18, shows how the pattern of both neighborhood poverty and funding adequacy corresponds quite well with the HOLC zones (and, thus, with the racial compositions depicted in Figure 17).

Once again, the C- and D-graded HOLC zones, the vast majority of which are located in Kansas City Unified, Kansas City 33, and Independence, are today home to high-poverty neighborhoods. Moreover, two of these three districts—Kansas City Unified and Kansas 33—exhibit massive negative funding gaps (around -$8,000 per pupil), while in the third (Independence), spending is barely adequate.

The five other districts serving majority Black/Hispanic populations—Center 58, Grandview, Hickman Mills, and Raytown to the south of Kansas 33 on the Missouri side of the border, and Turner to the west of Kansas City Unified on the Kansas side—are also funded below estimated adequate levels. In contrast, funding is generally adequate—and school neighborhood poverty generally lower—in most of the remaining surrounding suburbs, including the majority-white districts to the north, east, and southeast of the city in Missouri, as well as those to the southwest of the city in Kansas (e.g., Shawnee Mission, Blue Valley).

For decades, on the Missouri side of the border in Kansas City, schools benefited from a significant infusion of additional revenue to finance desegregation remedies, but those remedies were significantly curtailed by the Supreme Court's *Missouri v. Jenkins* decision in 1995 (*Missouri v. Jenkins* 1995). Over the decade that followed, court oversight was dissolved altogether (*Jenkins v. School Dist. of Kan. City, Mo.* 2003). Much of the remedy
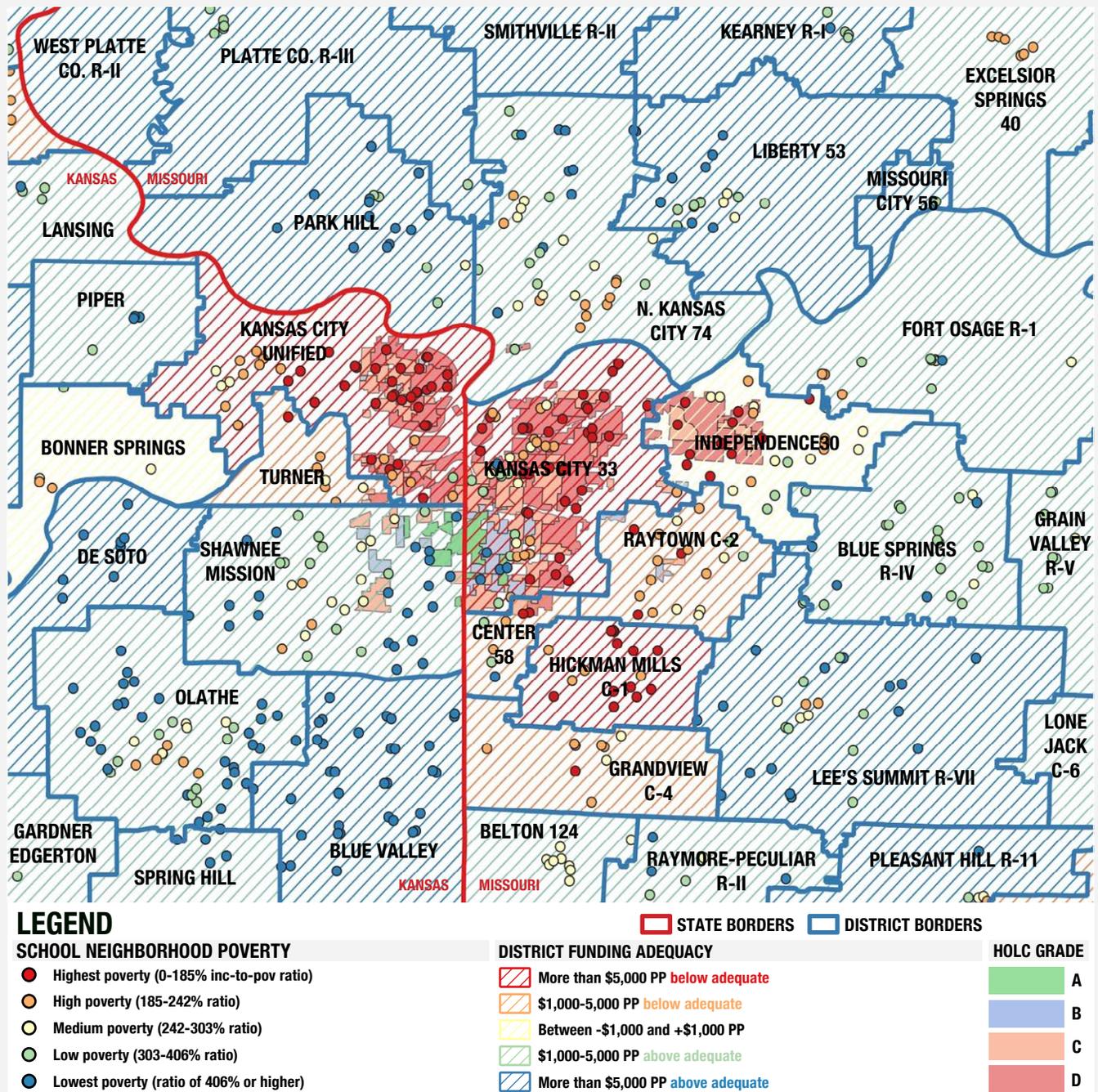
funding had actually come from a significant increase to local property taxes in Kansas City 33, which continued to have a relatively strong tax base (largely because of Nichols' Country Club District and Country Club Plaza in its southwest area, along with other commercial development). But, over time and lacking court oversight, that temporary burst in funding faded (Green and Baker 2006).

As a more recent—and particularly blatant—example of building new school funding inequities on past racial discrimination, in 2005, Kansas state Sen. John Vratil would successfully advance a change to the Kansas school funding formula that provided

Figure 18

SCHOOL DISTRICT FUNDING ADEQUACY MAP, KANSAS CITY METRO AREA, 2018

LEGEND

STATE BORDERS **DISTRICT BORDERS**

SCHOOL NEIGHBORHOOD POVERTY
- 🔴 Highest poverty (0-185% inc-to-pov ratio)
- 🟠 High poverty (185-242% ratio)
- 🟡 Medium poverty (242-303% ratio)
- 🟢 Low poverty (303-406% ratio)
- 🔵 Lowest poverty (ratio of 406% or higher)

DISTRICT FUNDING ADEQUACY
- More than $5,000 PP below adequate
- $1,000-5,000 PP below adequate
- Between -$1,000 and +$1,000 PP
- $1,000-5,000 PP above adequate
- More than $5,000 PP above adequate

HOLC GRADE
- A
- B
- C
- D

To improve visibility of HOLC zones, map does not include entire metro area. See Box 1 for information on measures.
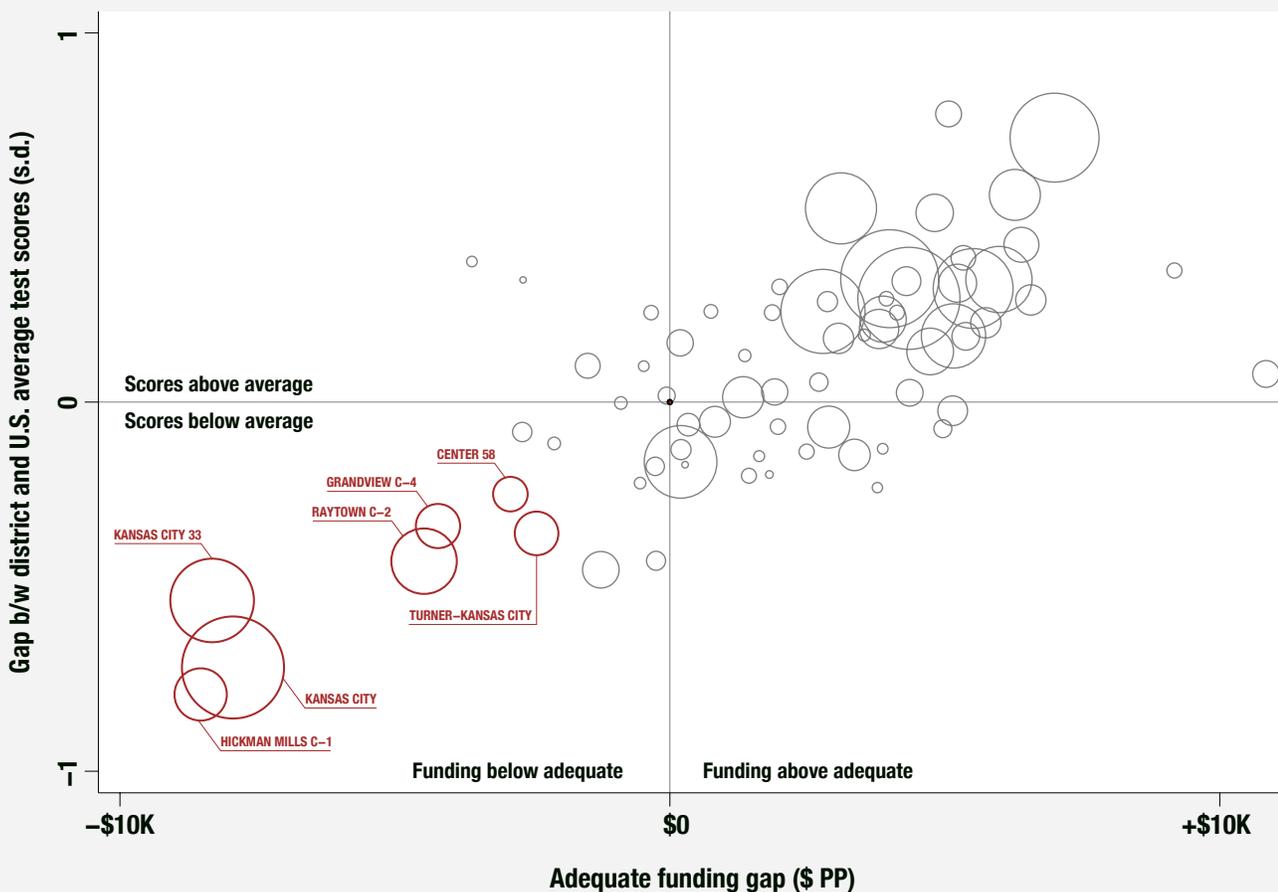
additional taxing authority to raise additional local revenues in districts that had higher-priced housing. These additional funds were characterized as "cost of living adjustments" (Ortega 2005). They were implemented almost exclusively in white areas. Figure 19 presents a scatterplot of the relationship between funding gaps and testing outcome gaps for

districts in the Kansas City metropolitan area in 2018, including those on both sides of the state line.

In the entire Kansas City metro area, which consists of 75 districts in two states, there is not a single majority-Black and -Hispanic district in the upper right quadrant (spending above estimated adequate levels and average test scores exceeding the U.S. mean).

Figure 19

STUDENT OUTCOME GAPS BY ADEQUATE FUNDING GAPS, KANSAS CITY METRO AREA DISTRICTS, 2018

Red markers with labels are majority–Black/Hispanic districts

Data source: School Finance Indicators Database; Stanford Education Data Archive

Note: Markers weighted by student enrollment. Outcome gaps (y-axis) are the difference in average math and reading scores (in standard deviations) between each district and the U.S. average. Funding gaps (x-axis) are the difference between actual spending per pupil and estimated spending required to achieve national average test scores.

All fall in the lower left quadrant (inadequate funding and below-average student outcomes).

These seven districts all serve Black/Hispanic student shares that are at least 20 percentage points higher than the overall metro area's percentage (i.e., Black and Hispanic students are disproportionately concentrated in these districts). In all but two of them (Raytown and Turner), the gap is larger than 40 percentage points. There are precisely three other districts in the metro area serving students that are disproportionately Black/Hispanic, and the gap is less than five percentage points in all three.

This reflects the extremely strong level of between-district segregation that we saw in Table 3—these seven districts, which serve about 19 percent of the area's students, are home to almost half its Black and Hispanic students. And they are also the least adequately funded districts in the area.

A Kansas City postscript: In the spring of 2021, after years of public protest, monuments to J. C. Nichols were removed from Kansas City's Country Club Plaza, with much media coverage and fanfare (Mahoney 2020).

This section is from the report, **"Segregation and School Funding: How Housing Discrimination Reproduces Unequal Inequality**," available at: http://shankerinstitute.org/segfunding