

Faithful and Strategic Engagement in Metropolitan Richmond

Facilitator's Workbook

Purpose

The purpose of this workbook is to enable you as a facilitator to lead a four-part conversation with members of your faith community who are interested in one, learning more about metropolitan Richmond; and two, reflecting upon how your community can respond in a faithful, strategic, and relevant way to the region's most pressing needs. What follows is the audio script for each of the four modules. This script will prompt you to pause the video at certain points to enable discussion among participants. We suggest you view each module before leading the discussion.

Introduction

In his lecture, "The Five Essential Questions in Life," James Ryan suggests that when we ask "I wonder if," we envision new possibilities for our future. In this four-part conversation, we begin by asking: what if all the people of good will in metropolitan Richmond aligned their monetary donations and volunteer efforts to address our region's most pressing problems? What would that take? What would that look like? Could we more rapidly, broadly, and effectively empower lives and transform neighborhoods? And what if communities of faith were to play a key role in this effort?

Through shared learning and discussion, faith communities can: one, develop a deeper understanding of the region's most pressing human needs; two, reflect upon their giving patterns and volunteer efforts; three, gain practical tips for working with nonprofits and volunteers; four, make connections between works of mercy and the pursuit of justice; and five, strengthen our collaborative engagement in transforming RVA.

Module One: The Region We Seek to Serve

"God loves human beings. God loves the world—not ideal human beings but people as they are, not an ideal world but the real world." Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Couldn’t we at least agree . . .” is another essential question that James Ryan suggests we ask. Couldn’t we at least agree that most human beings—perhaps all—want an opportunity in life. They want the opportunity to thrive, succeed, take chances, realize their potential, demonstrate their worth, contribute. Human beings want—need—more than one opportunity. In other words, one mistake should not and cannot close the door to future opportunities.

And people want some say so—choice—about how they can pursue those opportunities. If we can agree on the basic human yearnings of choice and opportunity, then the question before us is: what are the essential elements in any community that enable meaningful opportunity?

Pause Video

Discussion Question: What are the characteristics of a community that enable residents to pursue their potential, to thrive?

Resume Video

A community of opportunity is a community that boasts attractive, sustainable, affordable housing—both rental and owner occupied. These houses line safe streets. The children and adults in these homes have access to affordable healthcare and healthy foods. The children attend high performing public schools—pre-K, K-12, and beyond.

The adults hold jobs that pay wages that enable them to meet their needs and the needs of their loved ones. The jobs, the schools, and the houses are connected by a multi-modal public transportation system that reaches deeply and broadly throughout the region. And woven throughout all of this is a rich tapestry of natural, recreational, and cultural amenities that are accessible and affordable to all.

Simply put, a community of opportunity is a community in which the circumstances of one’s birth do not irrevocably set the trajectory of one’s life.

In a community of opportunity, the conditions exist that provide each person with the chance to flourish. Is metropolitan Richmond a community of opportunity for everyone? No.

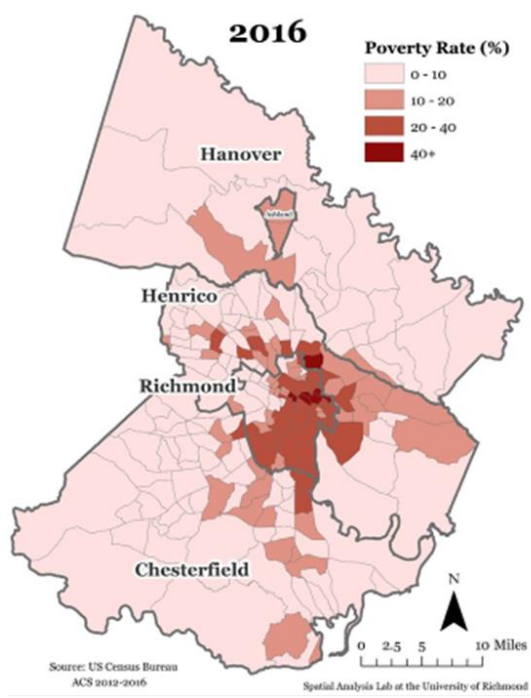
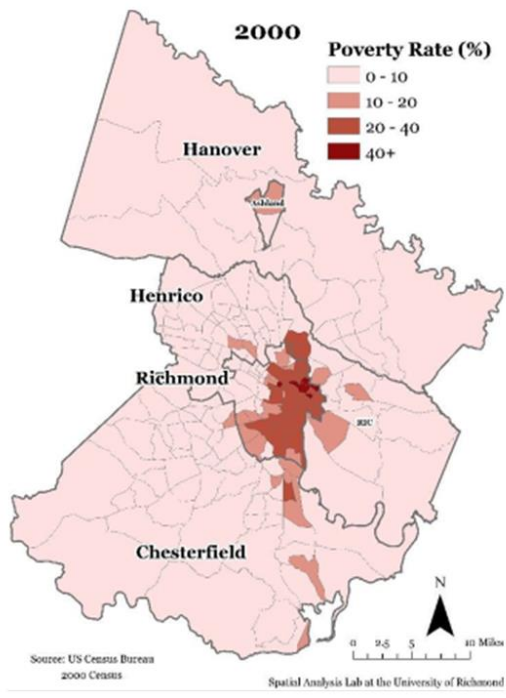
Parenting magazine rates us as the 6th best city for families, but 40% of our city's children live in poverty. Almost 35% of the region's households pay too much for housing. We're known internationally as a foodie destination, yet 22% of city residents are unsure how they'll secure their next meal. Our region is home to some of the best public schools in the country. But in Henrico County, over 9,000 children (almost 20% of all students) attend unaccredited or partially accredited schools; in the City of Richmond, that number is 11,141 (45% of all students). We're the 44th largest metropolitan area in the country, and yet our transit system ranks us 92nd out of the top 100 metros in terms of transit connectivity.

These conditions contribute to vast, damaging disparities. The distance between Gilpin Court and Westover Hills is 5.7 miles; the difference in life expectancy is 20 years . . . 5.7 miles, 20 years. If this is unacceptable, then how can we help? "How we help matters as much as that we do help," notes James Ryan. "If you ask how can I help, you are asking with humility for direction. And you are recognizing that others are experts in their own lives and they will likely help you as much as you help them." That is this spirit in which this work is offered: people of faith can help address the challenges of our region. They can do so strategically, and in ways that respect the inherent dignity and worth of each person they encounter.

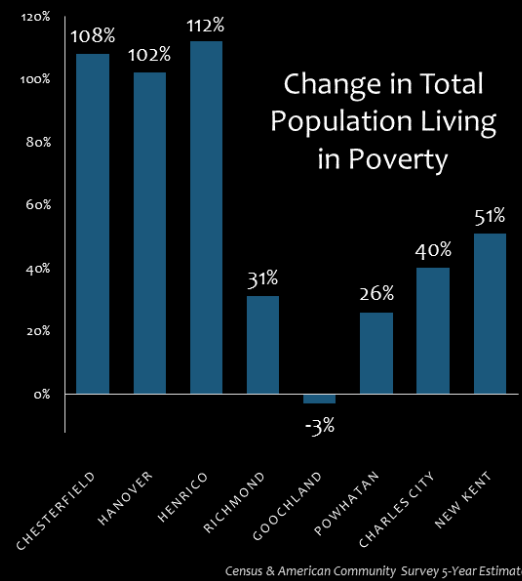
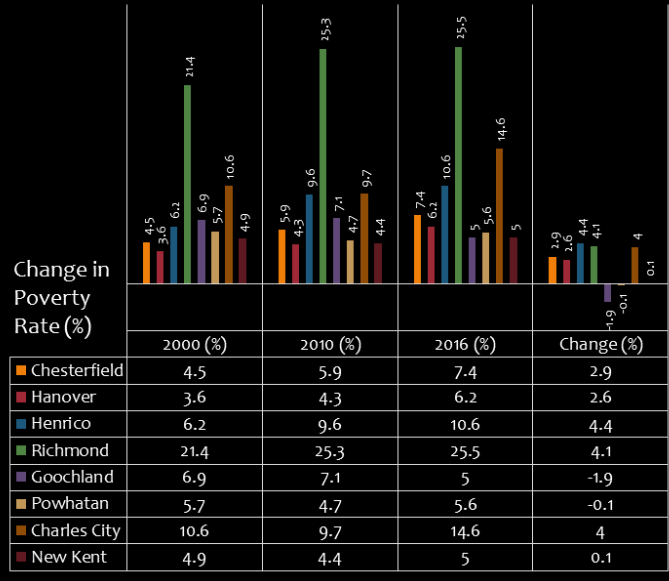
Where are we in metro Richmond?

Poverty

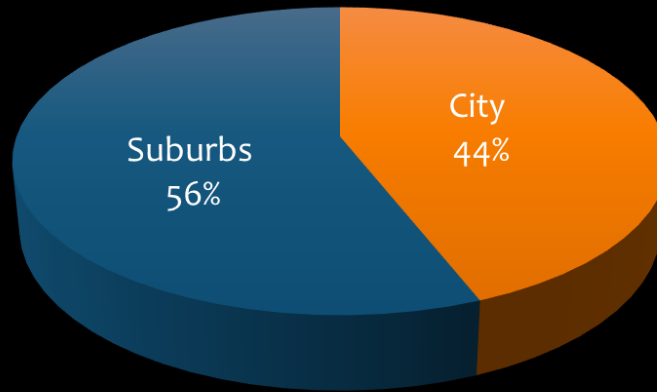
Poverty is porous; it knows no jurisdictional boundaries. As the following graphics illustrate, during the first sixteen years of this century, the rate of poverty grew rapidly in Hanover, Henrico and Chesterfield. In metropolitan Richmond, impoverished people are more likely to reside in a county rather than the city. While this trend is difficult for many to accept and bespeaks numerous challenges for the suburban jurisdictions, it offers opportunities for progress as well. Challenges that have confronted the City of Richmond for decades are now shared by the counties; solutions and the efforts to enact solutions can be shared as well.



Population Living in Poverty in the Region (2000 – 2016)



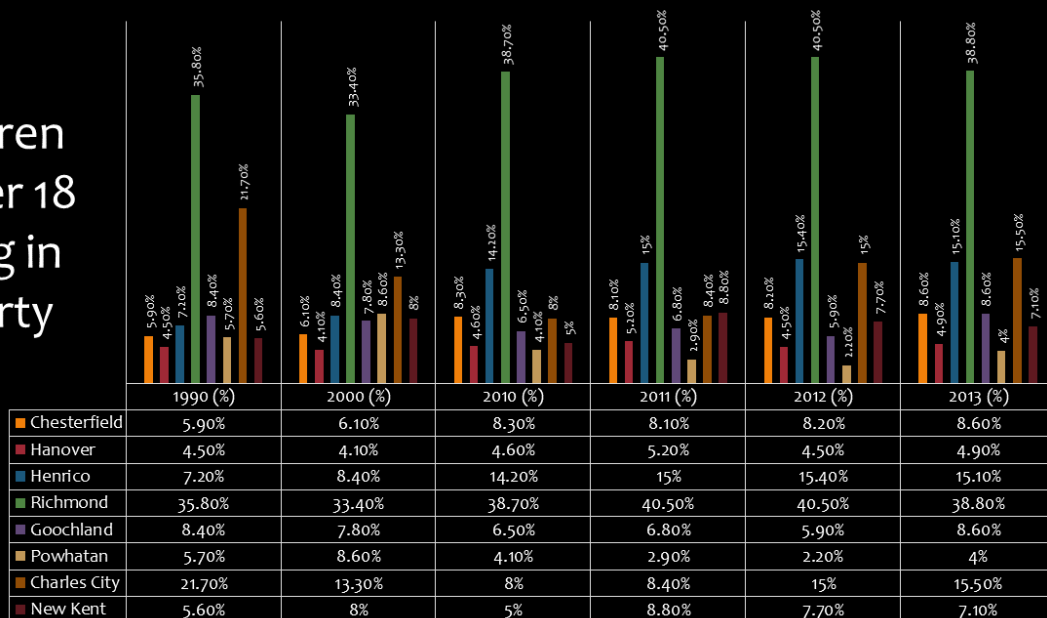
Number of People Living in Poverty



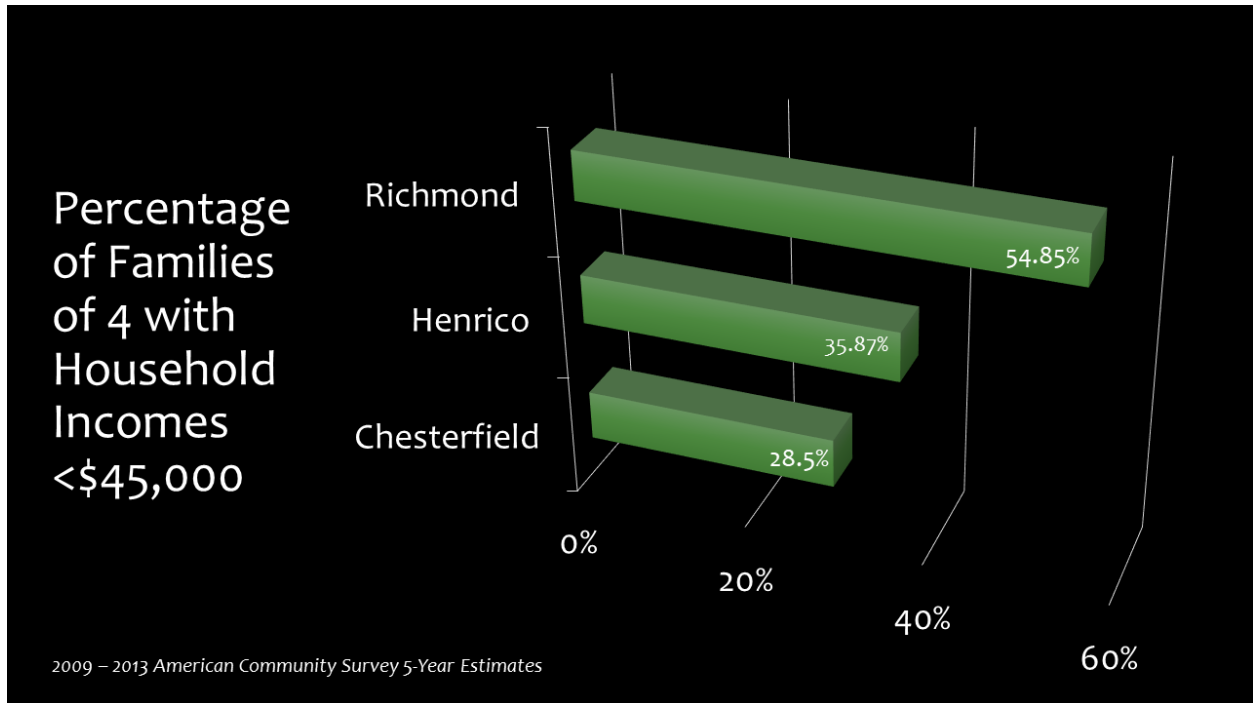
2009 – 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The number of children living in poverty and the concentration of poverty have direct and dire consequences for the region’s schools. Children who live in families earning less than \$45,000 annually qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Children Under 18 Living in Poverty



2009 – 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Affordable Housing

Just as poverty is a regional challenge, so too is the lack of affordable housing. In each jurisdiction, almost one third of all households are housing cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing costs (rent or mortgage plus utilities). Over 55,000 households in the region spend more than 50% of their gross monthly income on housing. Having to devote this much income to housing leaves very little income for life’s other necessities—food, clothing, medicine. There is no money left at the end of the month to save for a child’s education or for retirement.

Thousands of our neighbors are one car break down, one unexpected medical bill, etc., away from falling behind on their rent or mortgage; they live day to day on a financial ledge. And fiscal stress leads to emotional stress which leads to compromised physical health.

Percent of Households by Cost Burden



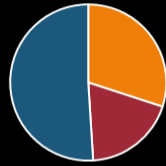
From the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech

Total Number of Cost Burdened Households in the Region

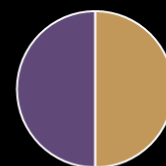
Approximately 35% of all households in the Richmond region are cost burdened



130,600
Households with
Cost Burden >30%



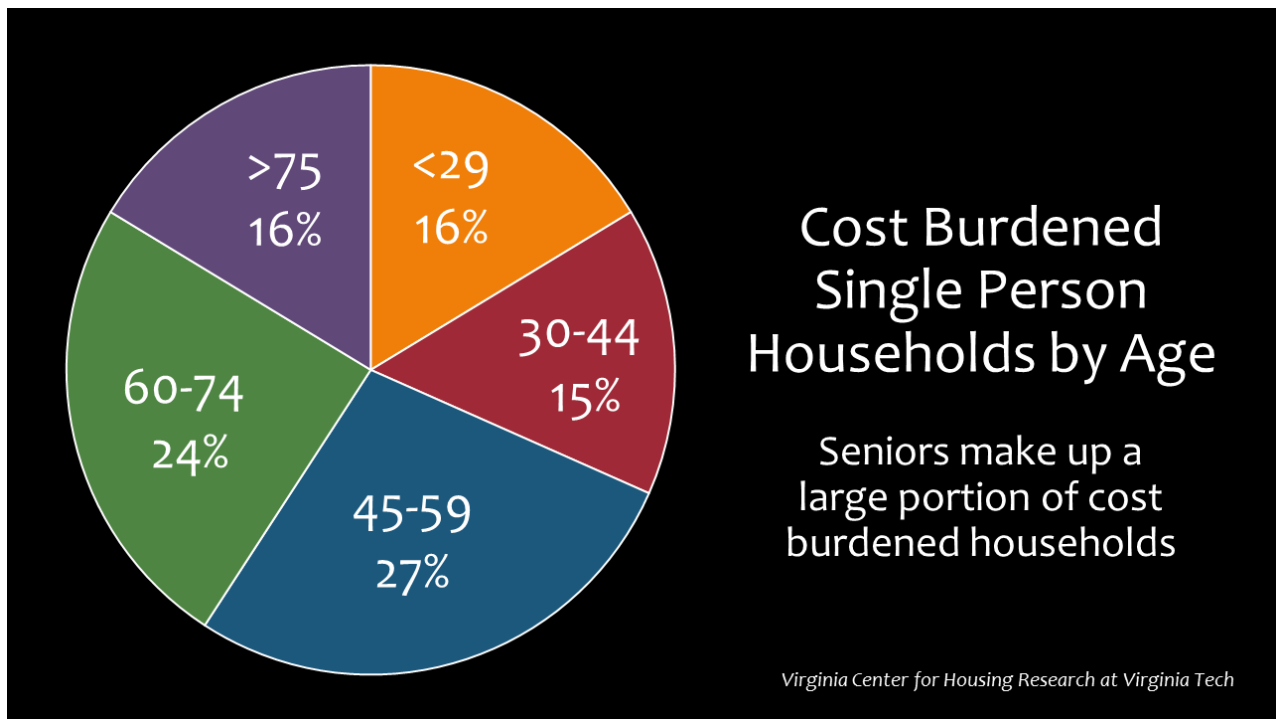
74,900
Households with
Cost Burden 30-49%



55,700
Households with
Cost Burden >50%

Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech

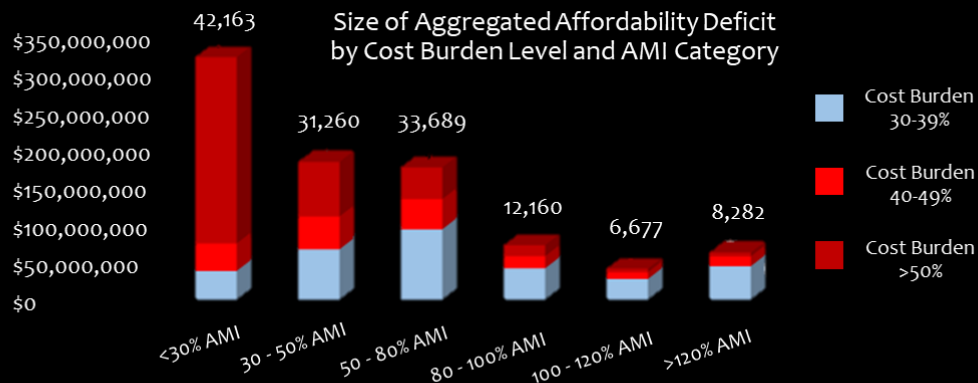
Thousands of seniors in our region struggle to find and keep stable, affordable housing. A full 40% of the single person households that are cost burdened are people 60 years or older. It is one thing to be financially stretched in one's 20s, before reaching peak earning years. But when someone is fiscally stressed at the age of 60 and beyond, that's not temporary; that's a way of life.



Finally, our affordable housing challenges negatively impact our region's economic health and competitiveness. The annual difference between what residents of our region can afford to pay for housing and what they actually spend is \$862 million. That's millions of dollars that do not flow into our regional economy, millions of spending capacity that would generate the need for thousands of jobs. We all suffer when our neighbors suffer.

Region's Annual Affordable Housing Deficit \$862 million

An average of \$6,422 per cost-burdened household

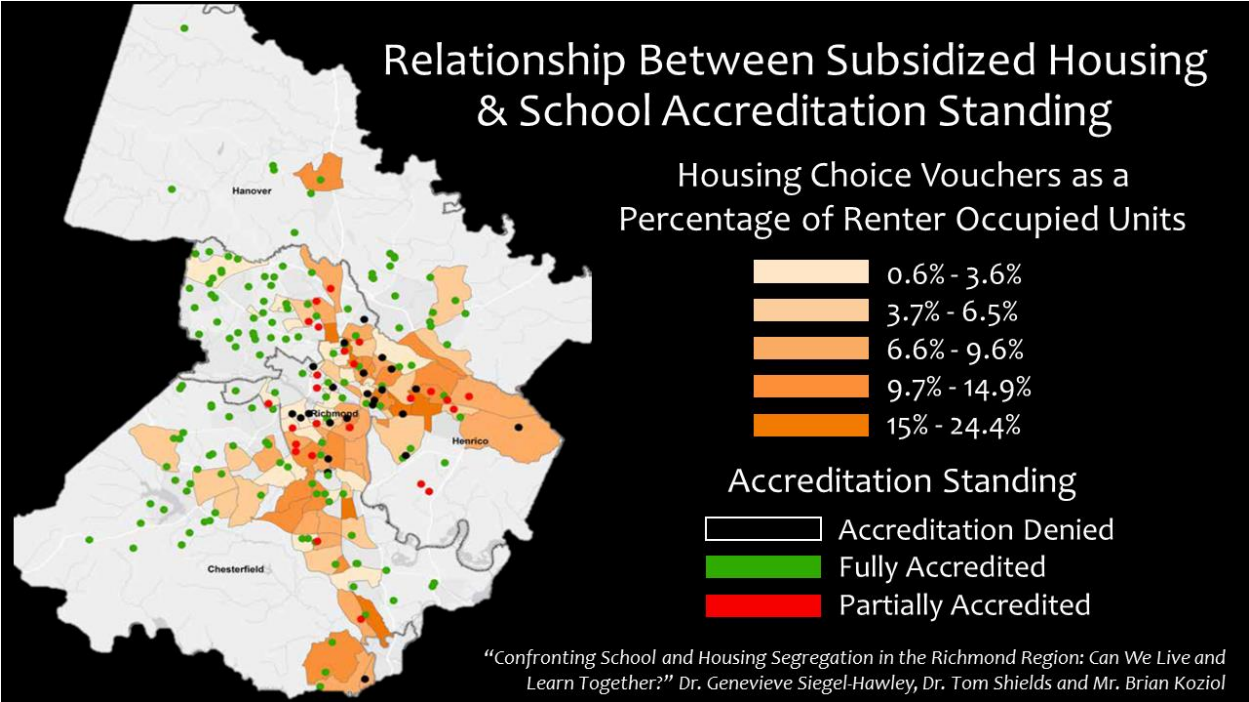
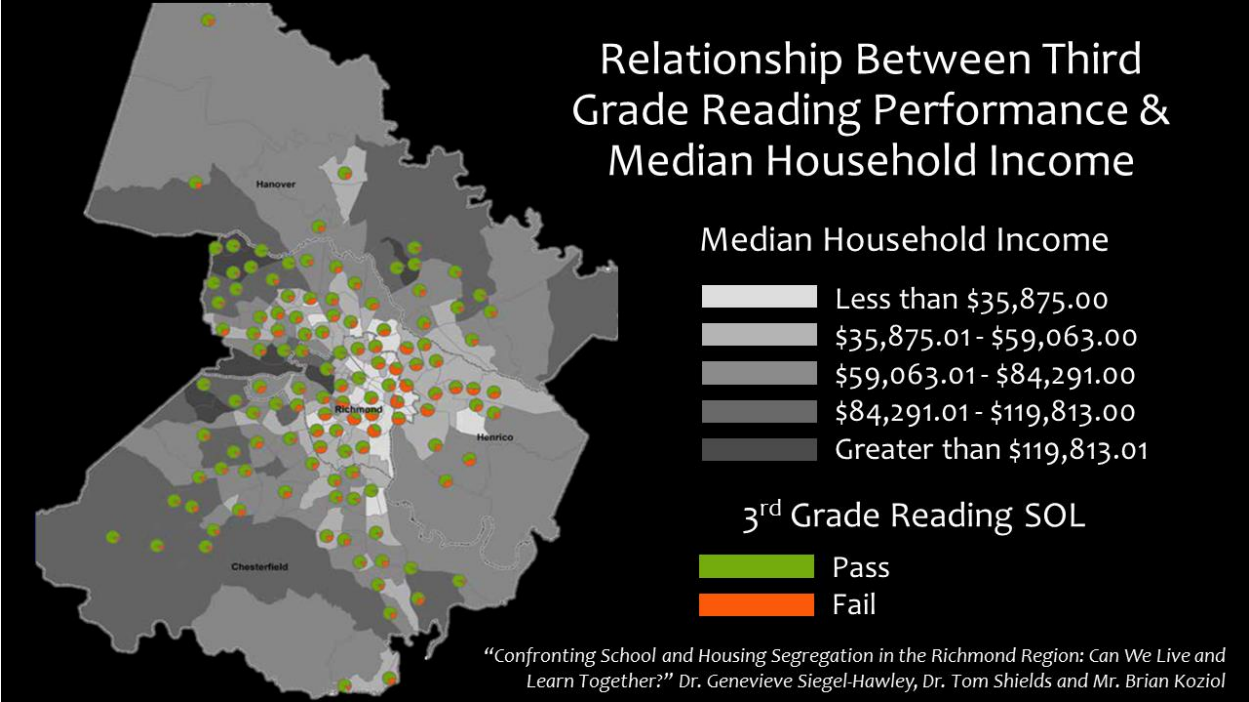


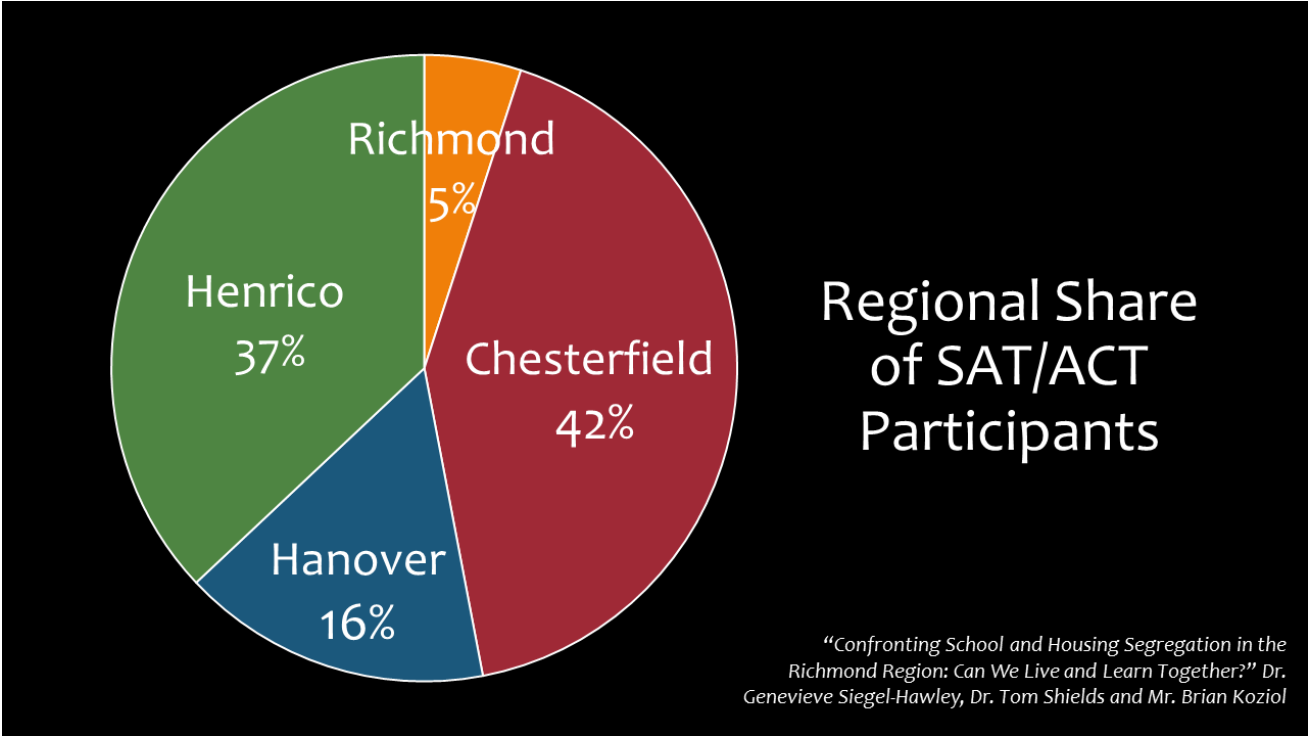
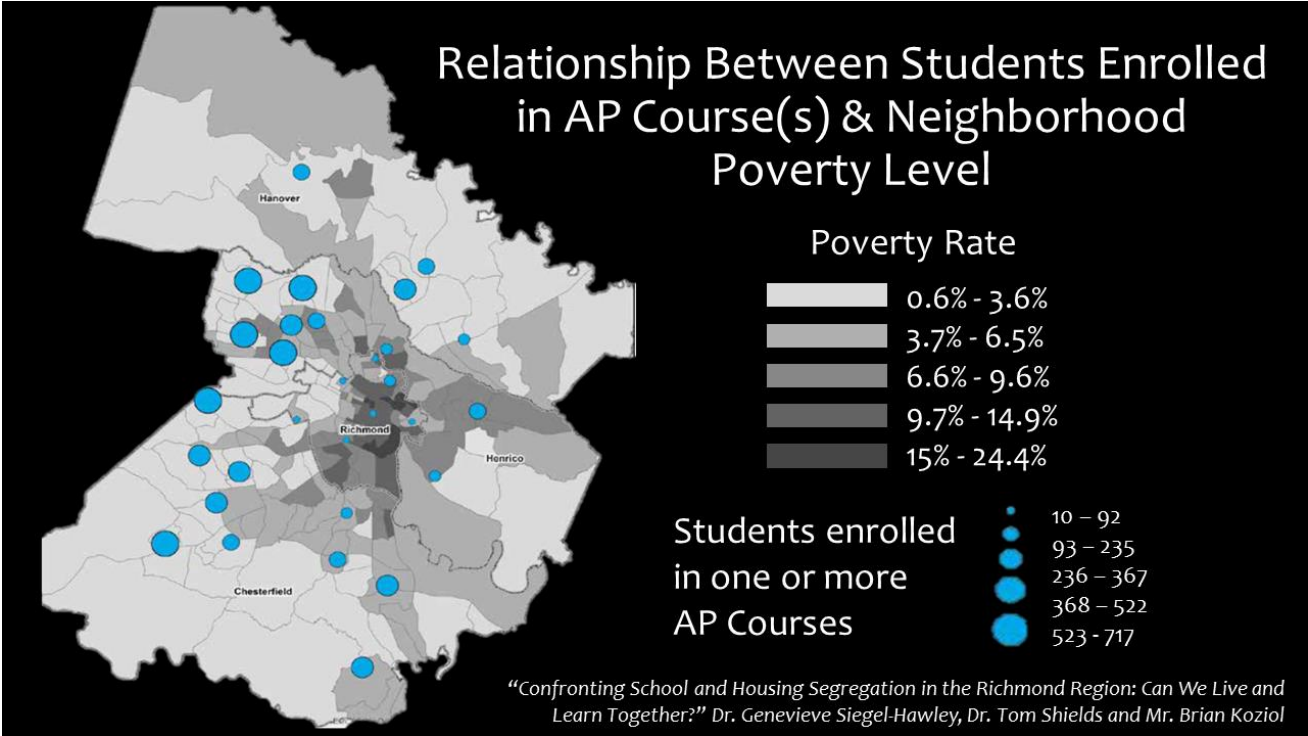
Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech

Educational Inequities

In 2017 researchers from the University of Richmond, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Housing Opportunities Made Equal released a report that offered an analysis not of educational outcomes but of educational opportunities in the region. As reflected in the following graphics from the report, “Confronting School and Housing Segregation in the Richmond Region—Can We Live and Learn Together” makes it clear that low-income persons of color are far more likely to attend unaccredited schools, schools in which a majority of students are failing third grade reading SOLs, and high schools with far fewer Advanced Placement class options.

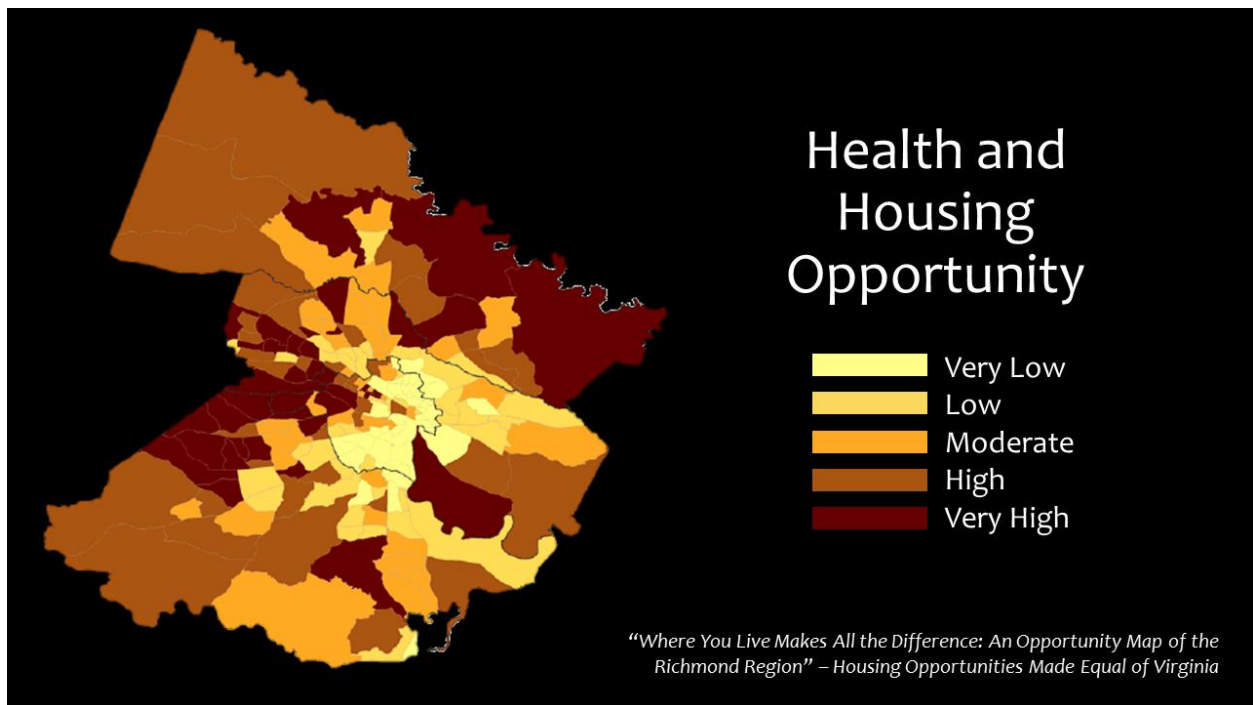
These systemic inequities cast long shadows. To give just one example: because Advanced Placement classes are a key driver of GPA and GPAs are a critical factor in college admissions, and a college education can prove profoundly influential for future employment and the creation of networks that open avenues to other opportunities, educational inequity perpetuates the cycle of fewer employment choices, financial stress, and makes it staggeringly difficult to climb the wealth building ladder out of poverty.



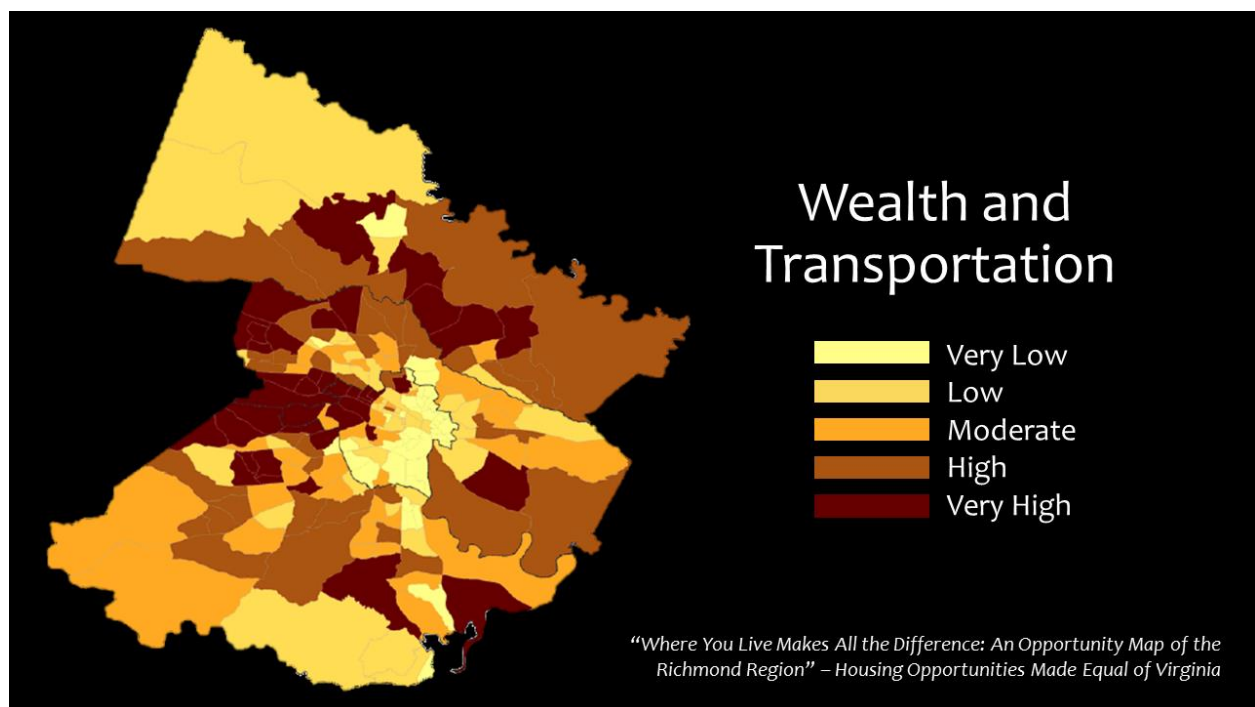


In “Where You Live Makes All the Difference: Access to Opportunity in the Richmond Region” HOME (Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia) mapped 22 social-economic variables to paint a picture of opportunity—or the lack thereof—in the region. As the report notes, the neighborhoods classified as “very low opportunity” are home to “the majority of the African-American population of the region. These are the same neighborhoods that have the lowest educational attainment outcomes, highest rates of foreclosure, greatest rates of poverty, and lowest rates of homeownership in the entire region.”

In reviewing health outcomes, HOME examined socio-economic variables such as visits to the family doctor or dentist in the last 12 months; households carrying medical/hospital or accident insurance; households using prescriptions drugs for high blood pressure and asthma. A large swath of the City’s southside, the City’s East End, and central Henrico have low opportunity neighborhoods, with the high opportunity neighborhoods concentrated in the City’s west end and the western reaches of the suburban jurisdictions.



The same pattern holds true when it comes to transportation and housing as a key component of household wealth. HOME measured: homeownership rates; median house value; median household income; poverty rates; the percentage of population on public assistance; bus stops per census tracts; and the percentage of workers with a commute time of 45 minutes or greater. Reliable, affordable transportation options equal greater mobility; and greater mobility equals greater locational, educational, and vocational choice and opportunity.



While these challenges may appear daunting, true progress is being made. As a region, we continue to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. Chesterfield, Henrico, and the City of Richmond are each dedicating new staff positions and additional dollars to address housing needs. Creative efforts are underway to transform vacant city lots into vegetable gardens and urban orchards. School systems are recognizing the need to provide greater support in the areas of ESL (English as a Second Language) students, trauma informed care, and connecting students and their families to a variety of community benefits and supports. Work is underway to increase

the number of teens and adults earning certifications that will act as onramps to high-wage employment opportunities. And our regional transportation system has gained significant ground—with the launch of the Bus Rapid Transit system and the expansion of bus service/hours of operation in Henrico, connecting housing and jobs along the Broad Street corridor, all the way to Short Pump.

Facilitator's Note: Capture responses to questions on a flip chart.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What is your reaction to the data? Does it surprise you? How does it make you feel about the region you call home?**
- 2. What is your reaction to the clear correlation between race, poverty, and low opportunity neighborhoods?**
- 3. Does the data raise any questions for you? Are there issues you want to learn more about?**