

# Switching Social Contexts: Housing Mobility, Neighborhoods and Educational Outcomes

Stefanie DeLuca, Ph.D.  
Johns Hopkins University  
Department of Sociology  
December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007

# Logic of Housing Mobility: How Better Neighborhoods Affect Schooling

- Adults in better neighborhoods are good role models
- More affluent neighborhoods mean higher quality schools
- Youth see viable employment opportunities and payoff to schooling
- Parents find work
- Parents can focus less on safety, more on children's needs

# What Does Research Show?

- High SES neighbors positively influence the educational outcomes of younger children (IQ, verbal ability, reading)
- Youth in racially segregated poor neighborhoods have higher school dropout, drug use and teenage childbearing rates
- Students perform better in middle-class schools than in high-poverty schools
- School socioeconomic status is the most important predictor of achievement, after family background
- School SES has as much impact on the achievement growth of high school students as a student's individual economic status
- Low-income students in more-affluent schools score at levels a year and a half more advanced than low-income students in high-poverty schools

# Schooling and Racial Composition: Studies

- Desegregation case studies
- Comparisons of minority student performance in different kinds of schools
- Comparisons of the effects of racial composition on the outcomes of white and black children

# Schooling and Racial Composition: Findings

- African American student achievement is higher when they attend less segregated schools (especially in earlier grades)
- Graduates of desegregated schools:
  - Experience more comfort & tolerance of interracial settings in later life
  - Dropout of high school at lower rates
  - Are more likely to attend college and have higher earnings
- White students are not harmed by attending school with black students
- Studies vary over time
  - Earlier studies based on policies meant to reduce segregation levels
  - Later studies based on school level racial composition
- Context or Family Background?

# Housing Mobility Programs

	GAUTREAUX	MTO
Site	Chicago	Chicago, NY, Boston, LA, Baltimore
Origin	Lawsuit	Federally funded demonstration
Number	7000	1729 Exp; 1209 Sect 8; 1310 Controls=4248
Criteria and Moves	<=30% African American residents in tract—ASSIGNED UNIT	<=10% poverty rate; CHOICE WITHIN TRACT
Distance from origin	suburb movers avg=25 miles; city movers=7 miles	5-10 miles
Follow Up	Up to 20 years	4-7 Interim, plus Qualitative studies

# Schooling and Racial Composition: Mobility Studies

- **Gautreaux**

- Suburban movers more likely to graduate HS, go to college, take higher level courses in high school than city movers

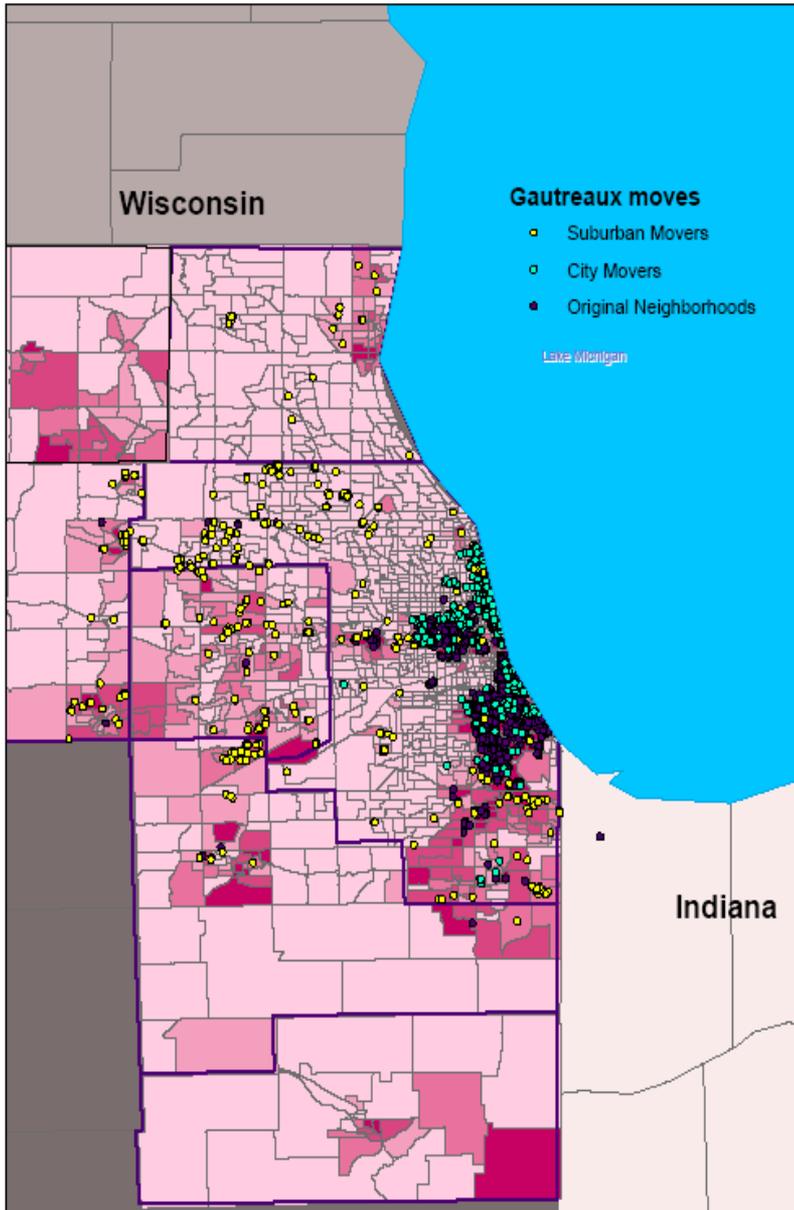
- **MTO**

- Experimental vs Control: Almost no effects on test scores, behaviors, grades, dropout

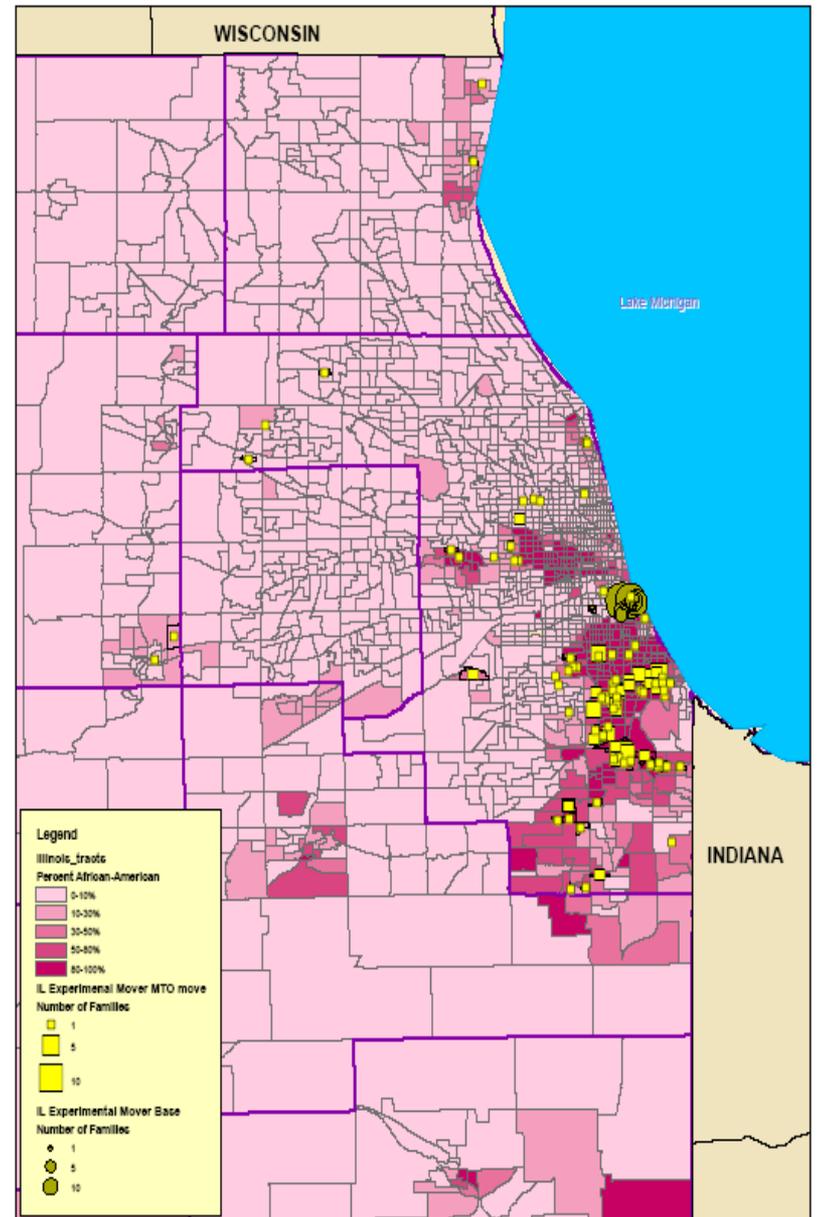
# Why Differences for MTO vs. Earlier Studies?

- Focus on the poorest families
- Housing only intervention
- Moves to Opportunity?
  - Neighborhood poverty levels changed, racial composition did not
- School districts did not usually change
- School quality did not usually change

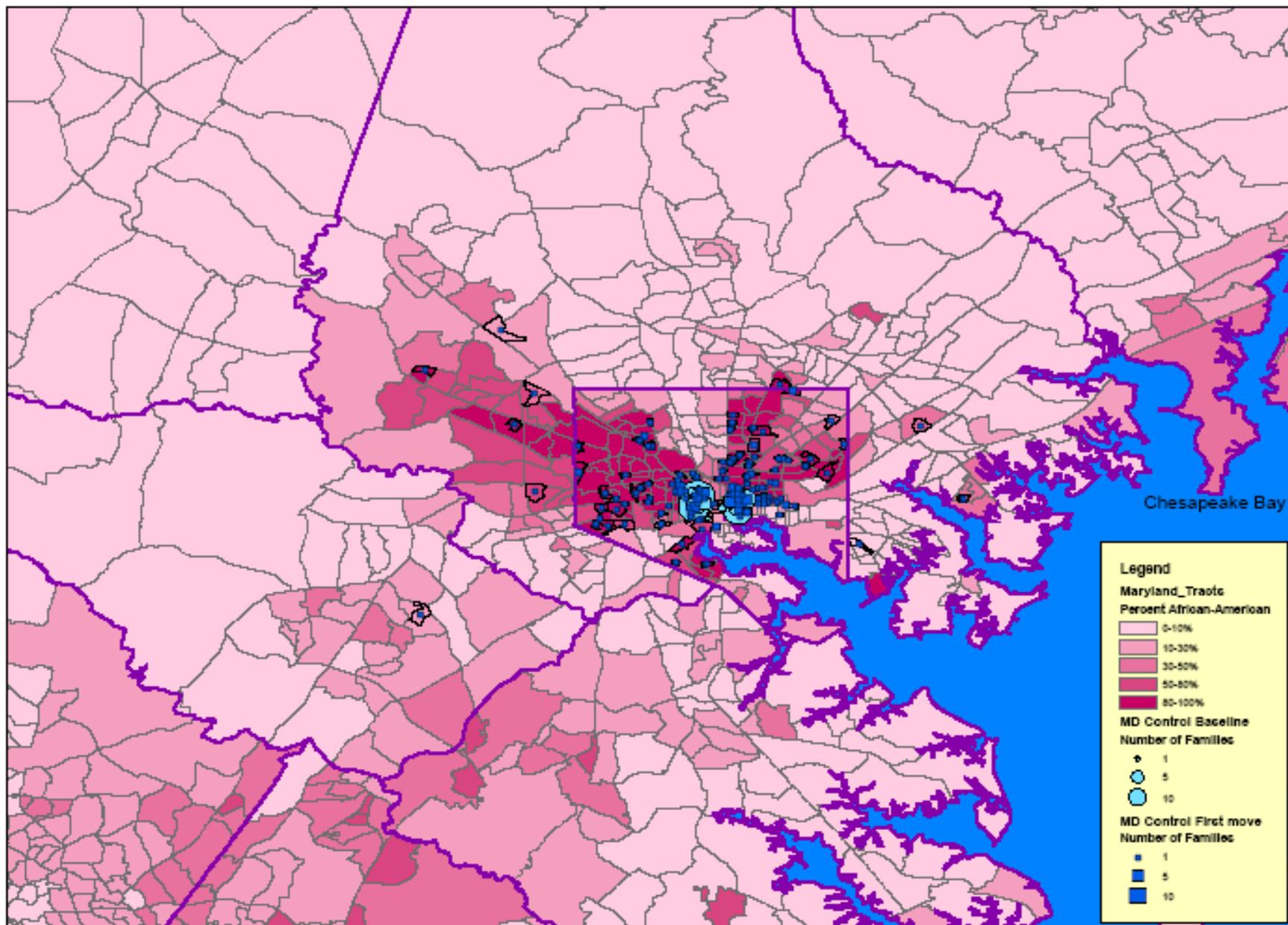
# Chicago Gautreaux Placement Locations



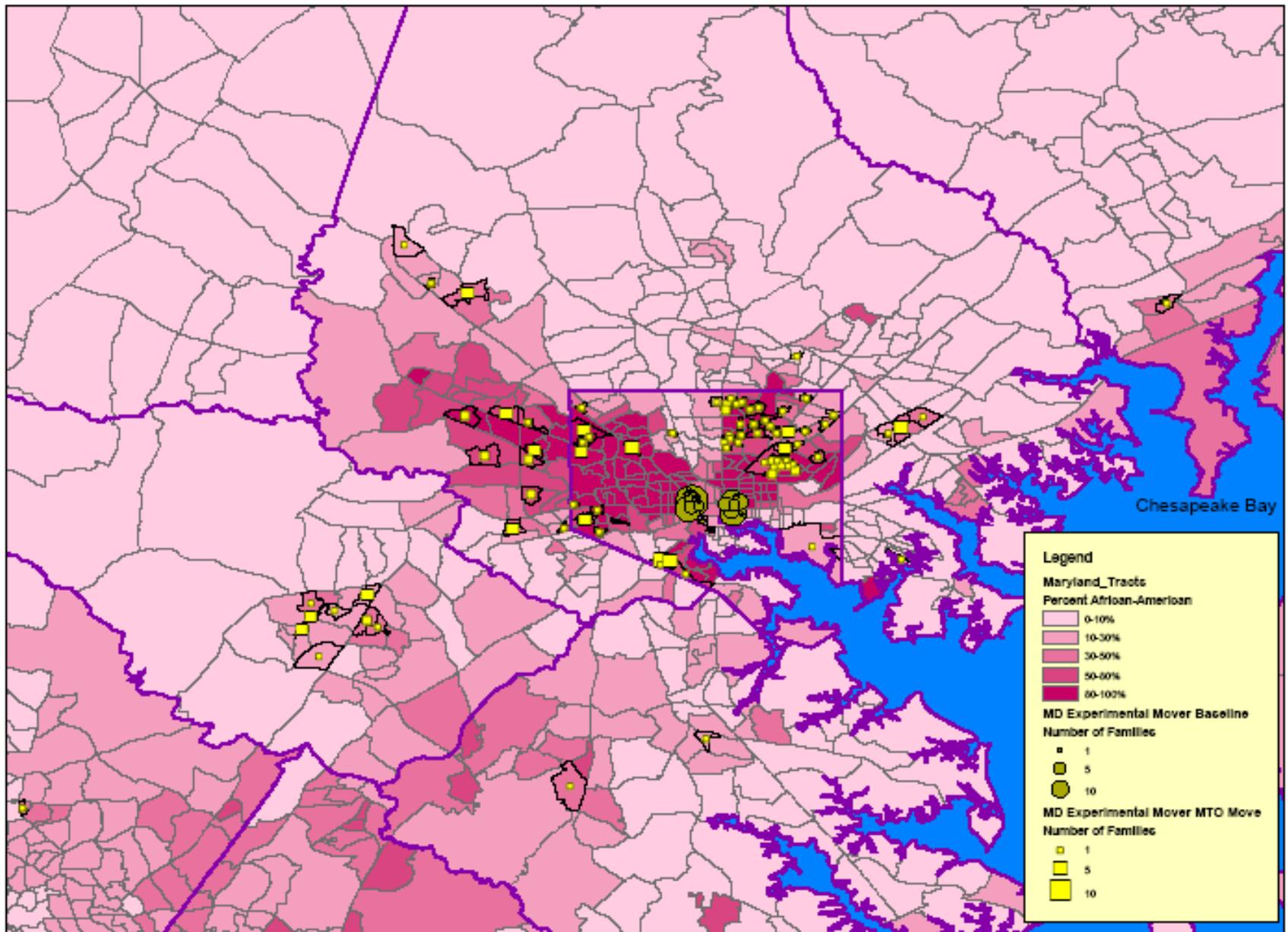
# Chicago MTO Experimental Mover Baseline and Firstmove Locations



# Baltimore MTO Control Baseline and First Move



# Baltimore MTO Experimental Mover Baseline and Voucher Move



# Why Didn't MTO Lead to Better Schools or Education Outcomes?

- Resistance to switching schools
- Poor information, low expectations
- Beliefs about education
- Decoupling school quality and school choice

# Parent Beliefs About Schooling

“That school is crazy. I have to pray for her, it’s like I send my child to hell every day and then I expect her to get good grades and learn. But it’s up to the individual ‘cause she could separate herself from that and she could get what she needs...unfortunately Northeast which is right here, probably no better because it’s not the school, it’s the people.”

“I just don’t care for that school much, but it all depends on how the children make it. If you go up there and you’re willing to learn, then you’re gonna learn. If you ain’t willin to do nothin, then you’re gonna do nothin.”

# Decoupling School Quality and School Choice

“He had a great teacher last year, Miss Worth. She’d always say to each child, no matter if they were bad or good, “My Little Miracle! You’re my Miracle! I want you to do better tomorrow.” She’d hugged each child as they pass by her. That’s great! You don’t find many teachers, not even parents that can do that!”

“And I was like oh my God what is going on in this school? I am not sending my child there...but then the security beefed up around there and I said okay they getting it together. So it’s kind of mild now. Fights and it was like there was no control in the school. Oh it was terrible.”

# Instability in Multiple Contexts

- Children often switch primary caregivers and are shuffled to different homes in a week
  - Mom works in the city, grandma lives in the suburbs
  - Leads to different sets of behavioral/discipline standards
  - Disruption of routines
- Children often switch schools
  - Second moves lead to unwanted school transfers
  - Schooling decisions sometimes come after housing decisions

# Many Parents Did Seek Better Schooling

"I specifically sent Samantha to Cameron. I did not want her to go to Liberty. My girlfriend's son got kilt up there...I had to lie and use their grandmother address to have them to go to a good school."

"I knew my child could do better and I knew if I didn't get her out there she wasn't gonna make it...I don't care how bad you want your child to learn. If it's a lot of commotion going on in every place, they cant learn anything. So, I had to take my child out of that school, it's like a bunch of animals with no control, that's how they act."

# Parents Positive About County Schools

"What made me stay here in Howard County is the school system... if they see a student that's standing out... they push that student and they push em hard. They make sure that they get what's out there for them, and that's something they're doing for her."

"in county schools, the classrooms are not overcrowded. The teachers are willing to work with you and help you and tutor you after school, before school. They were more concerned than the teachers in city public schools. So I would prefer any child to go to a county school... They're there to help you in the county schools."

"Her grades are like 100 percent better....That's like a total 990 degree turn from the school she was attending. So you know it wasn't the child, had to be what was going on in the school."

# One Example...

"When Jada went to Andrew it was like a relief...Her academics – they became more stronger when she went to Andrew. She is thinking a lot sharper than she was compared to the city and I could see the difference in her work, her study habits...I could see the change in her because when we first came here, like a little struggle.

After while she would be in her room and she would have her reading assignments laid out. One time she had to prepare a presentation and she really took her time and did research and put together her little paragraphs and speeches. Jada her comprehension level has gone up, she speaks a whole lot better compared to when we were down in the city. It's a difference– it's definitely an improvement and I owe it to the school and the environment."

# Improving Links Between Housing Programs & Education: Information

- Parents need to learn about school choices and understand the benefits of different programs
  - “Informed” Choice Set
  - Increase expectation
- Parents need to understand the benefits of changing schools

# Improving Links Between Housing Programs & Education: Second Moves

- Assist or Preventing Second Moves
  - Small shocks can lead families to relocate and children to switch schools
  - Parents need to consider school stability when deciding about new housing
- Promoting Stability Between Home and School Location
  - Critical to understand the nature of caregiving arrangements and where children attend school
  - Interdistrict attendance is common