



**LEARNING FROM VOUCHER FAMILIES: CLOSE
UPS OF THE SEARCH AND RELOCATION
PROCESS IN MOBILE & BALTIMORE**

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Why Are Voucher Families Concentrated in Poor, Segregated Areas?

- Cost and Fair Market Rent Limits
 - Some low poverty areas are off limits
- Discrimination
- Families' choose to move & choose neighborhoods
- Families make fully informed choices & choose from full set of known options
- Preferences for social network proximity and racial composition drive neighborhood choices



TALKING TO FAMILIES!

Field work with Low income African American parents w/children <18



- 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 Interviews, Home Visits, Interim Calls
- Mobile, AL and Baltimore, MD (N=127)
- High poverty segregated neighborhoods, housing type mix
 - Public Housing, Voucher Holders, Project Based, Unassisted Renters
- Focus on residential biographies, mobility, family dynamics, finances, school choices

Reactive Mobility

- Unit Failure and Time Crunch
 - Fires, vermin , weather
 - Housing problems: Plumbing, electric, mold
 - Section 8 inspections
- Landlord Practices
 - Bad upkeep, ‘patching’ instead of fixing
 - Selling out from under, foreclosure, expiration of HUD contracts
- Family Instability
 - Double ups (transitional stays)
 - Domestic violence, sexual abuse, substance use
- “Voluntary Moves”
 - Often in response to violence or forces outside of their control



Unit Failure

[O]ur whole ceiling came in on us. In my daughter's room, every time it would rain, it would leak and we would tell the landlord, like, "Please come fix it!" We would go to home depot and try to get things to fix it, still wouldn't work. Luckily [my daughter] was gone for the weekend and boom! And it all fell down.

We had no heat. And I had just had my daughter. She was two weeks old. No heat. When he came and fixed it, a wire caught on fire inside of there, you know how sometimes you're supposed to put that black tape and stuff in there? And he rigged it up, it was smoking in there... you know how a firecracker looks when you light it? That's how it was doing. I got so scared I grabbed her and ran out the door... I didn't know it was going to explode. I didn't have no shoes on or nothing.



Reactive Time Crunch

That house was only a six-month stay as well. Because they had to come out and re-inspect. .. Where you couldn't turn the stove all the way off. Cause if you did, the pilot would go out. Not only that, you have your bathroom, the toilets, everything just leaking around. And it just was a house that should have never passed.

(But you had to take it?)

I HAD to take it because I only had ten days left on my voucher...the landlord wouldn't come and make the repairs that he had promised...They came out and they did another inspection, and they found that it should have never passed again, and I would have to move.

When you find a house, you give them the address, they'll put a hold on your voucher while they do their inspection and stuff. If it fails inspection then they'll lift your voucher again and let you go for another house, up until that timeframe runs out. My timeframe ran out and I couldn't find a house that would pass inspection.

(Really? So how many houses did you look at?)

Oh, about 20...they inspected them and none of them passed for different reasons.

Landlords

- Reactive time crunch and housing quality issues intersect with landlord practices
- Landlords sell units out from under families
- Families do not want to complain about bad landlords for fear of a new inspection and more moving
- A number of our families took matters into their own hands to repair their units when landlords would not respond

Molly: We came out here and looked at the house. It was awful. The carpet was flooded, it had a bad odor, lots of bugs in it. But I looked through the house, it's a nice house, it had 4 bedrooms, two baths and I told him I wanted it. What I did is I had a social worker and he had brought some children, they were volunteers, they came in here and pulled all the carpet up.

Interviewer: So the landlord provided that for you? Or you had to pay for that?

Molly: No, he put down new carpet. But he wasn't putting down everything . That screen there, that was 250. I put it in the front and in the back. But they ended up getting another man that was over fixing up the apartment. He put me in a new air conditioner system, he was really nice. But the first people [property manager], they wanted to give me back my \$500 deposit, they told me they were fixing nothing. I had to do it all.



Housing Search



I went down to the [Baltimore] Housing Department and I got a book that said which houses in the city were available. And I was having a bad leak in the house so it was like really messing things up really bad.. So I looked through the book for someplace that was available like right away and I came across this, which wasn't too far... So that's how I chose this place here.

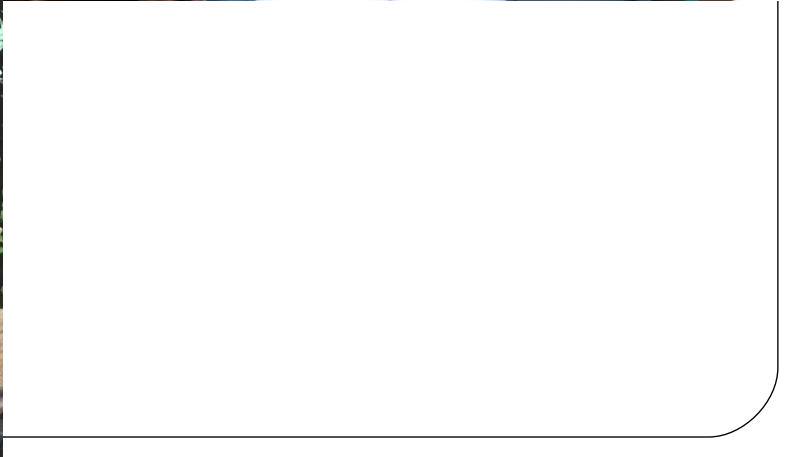
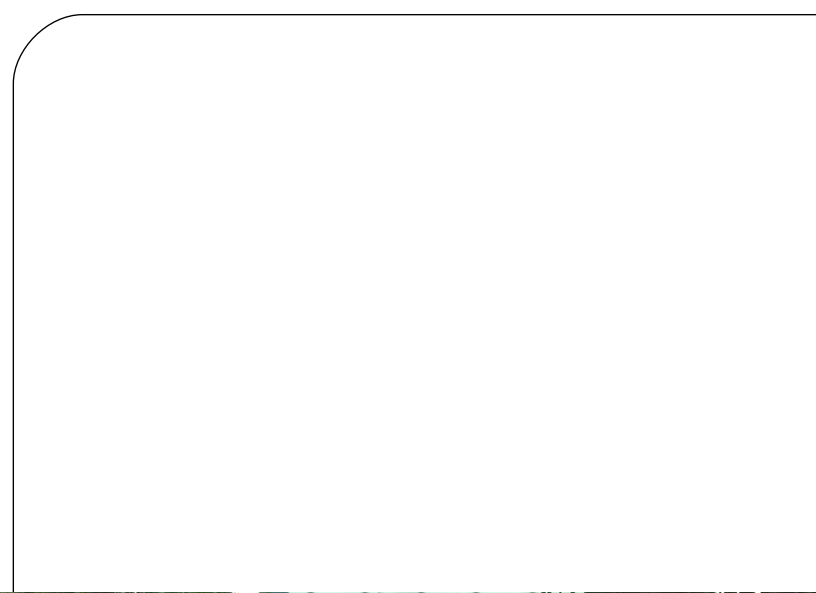
(Was this the first unit you looked at?)

The first unit from out of the book at Section 8.

Housing Search

- Section 8 List in Mobile
 - 191 properties
 - Many already leased
 - Only 7 in low poverty areas
- Some families don't believe you can rent something that's NOT on the list
- Housing "Search" Replaced by Social Networks
 - Referrals to land/slumlords from family and friends
 - No counseling at PHA
- Families Choose Units, Not Neighborhoods
- Fair Market Rent and Cost
 - Leads some families to trade-off quality of neighborhood for unit cost (bigger bang for buck in poor areas)
 - Families don't even get that far, or don't know those areas





Trade-Offs: Neighborhood Quality and Housing Cost



I: Why would you move?

R: More room, that's the only reason because I love the area, I love the people, which I don't know too many of them out here besides the ones that I work with. So that's all the good part. I would love to stay in this community right here, but it's hard to get a three-bedroom out here in this area.

I thought about renting [in the private market] at first but I knew for a fact, anywhere I would have inquired big enough to hold me and my family would have run me at least 700 dollars a month or more.

Strategic Retreat



I really don't let them play in the street or in the yard or anything like that. I don't trust it. I know last year my daughter wanted to go outside and I was about to let her go and on the next corner three people got shot right there in broad daylight. So ever since...I don't let her go outside.

I'm to myself...I don't want you comin in and knock on my door, can you borrow this, nothin, cause I don't borrow nothin from you.

I love my little place, but I don't like the environment and I tell my children...It's not where you live, it's how you live. You know, we don't live outside, we live in here...

Low Expectations and Survival Skills



I lived here my whole life so I've basically know the good neighborhoods and the bad neighborhoods. I would definitely not want to live here not knowing anything about Baltimore. This is a high crime area. I would be concerned for her safety. So I definitely would tell her no, not to do it...I can handle it because I'm from here and I've been here my whole life.

I think I can handle it more so because I have been to the dark side

This is one of the worst neighborhoods in Mobile, Stefanie. You only safe here because you with me.

What Holds Back Mobility

- Housing quality, landlords, family dynamics all lead to reactive mobility
 - Moving under these conditions limits choices
 - Even voluntary mobility subject to forces outside of their control
- Aspects of housing policy create instability and churning
 - Failed inspections and landlord responses
 - Housing search w limited time and limited information creates 'pinball' effect for families back and forth between units in high poverty areas
 - The PHA 'list' channels families into poor segregated neighborhoods
- Lack of information and long-term exposure to high poverty areas leads families to develop coping strategies and low expectations
 - They largely accept the inevitability & universality of danger and low quality housing & neighborhoods
 - Keep children in the house, keep to themselves
 - Families focus on units, not neighborhoods or schools

What to Do?

- ◉ Extend search time for families who expend effort to search in low poverty areas
- ◉ Reward Portability to Low Poverty Areas
- ◉ Reward Counseling Efforts to Deconcentrate Poverty
- ◉ Keep “Opportunity” List
 - ◉ Choice architecture change; create default options in areas with better schools
 - ◉ Thompson program does this and families move to much higher opportunity areas



Baltimore Thompson Program



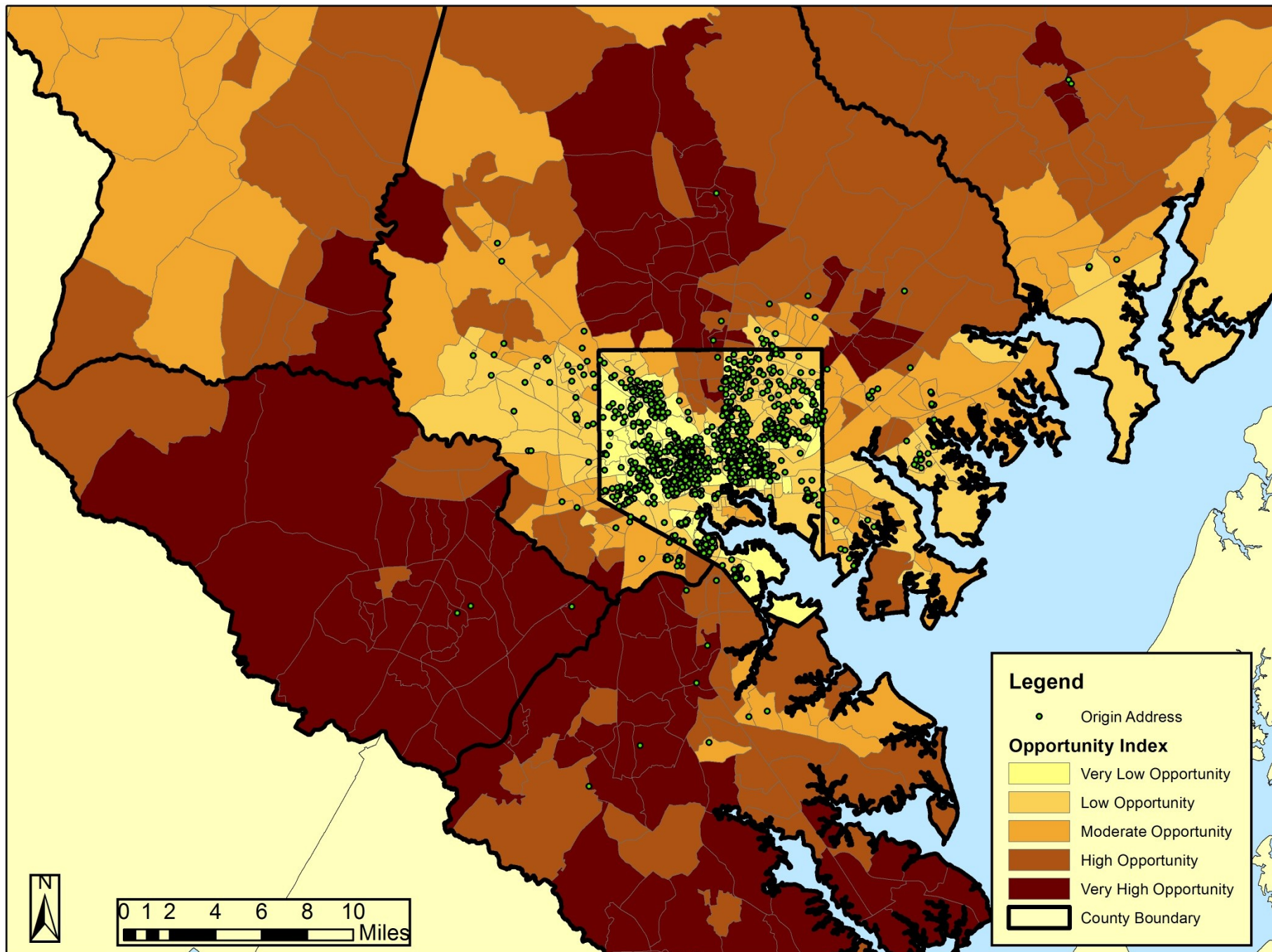
- 1995 class action lawsuit
 - Housing desegregation remedy
- Current and former public housing families
- Voucher to move to a census tract that is
 - <=10% Poverty
 - <=30% African-American
 - <=5% sub housing
- Choice within tract, with housing counseling

How Program Works

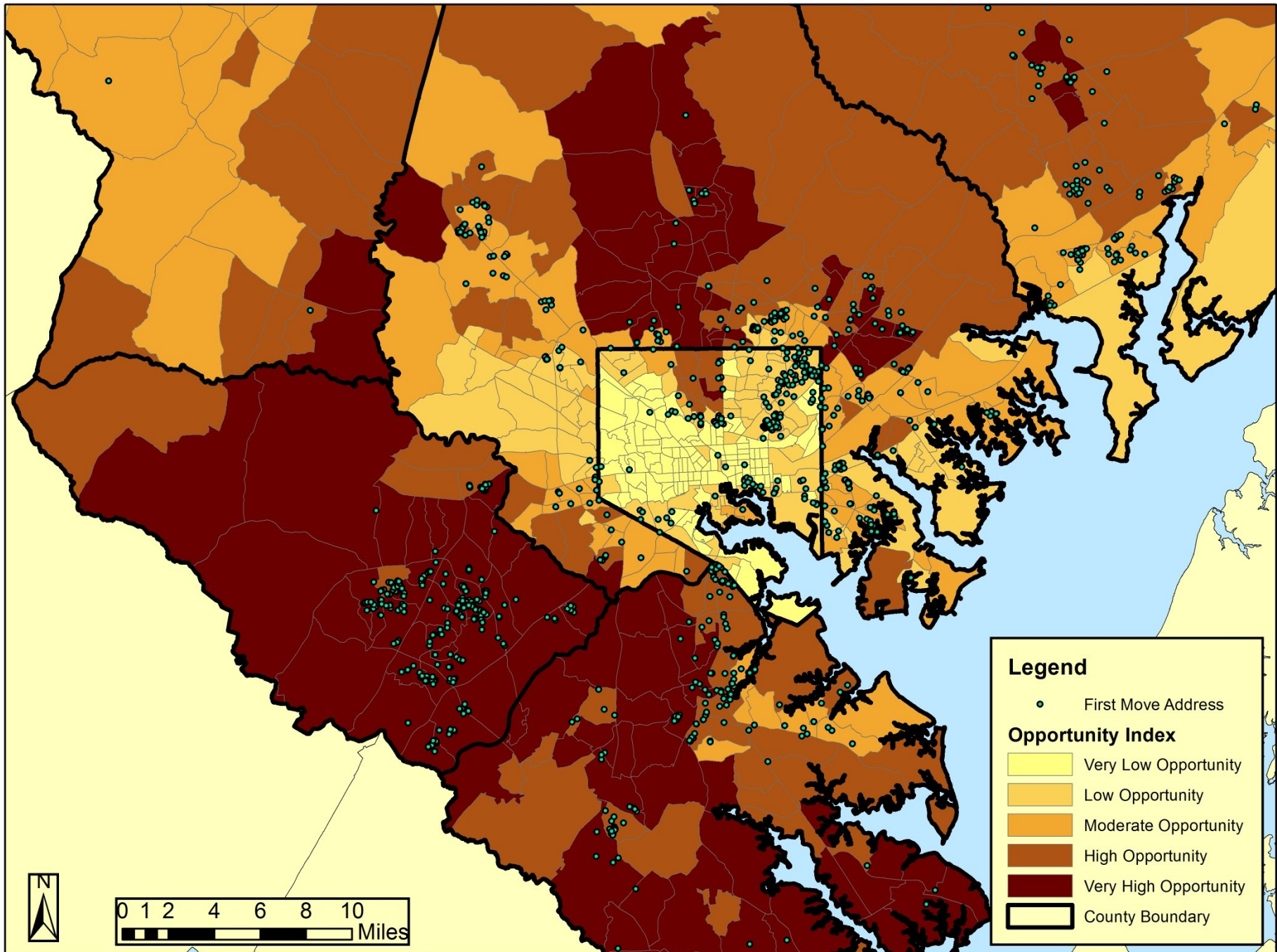
- Pre-Move Counseling
 - Credit counseling, family needs referrals
 - Move readiness & preparation for private rental market
 - Suburban neighborhood tours & education about housing options
- Landlord Outreach in Suburban Neighborhoods
- Post-Placement Counseling
 - Multiple visits within first year to make sure families are adjusting
- Second Move Counseling
- Counseling on School Choices in New Neighborhoods
 - Parents are shown how schools compare across neighborhoods
 - Staff work with parents to negotiate new school settings



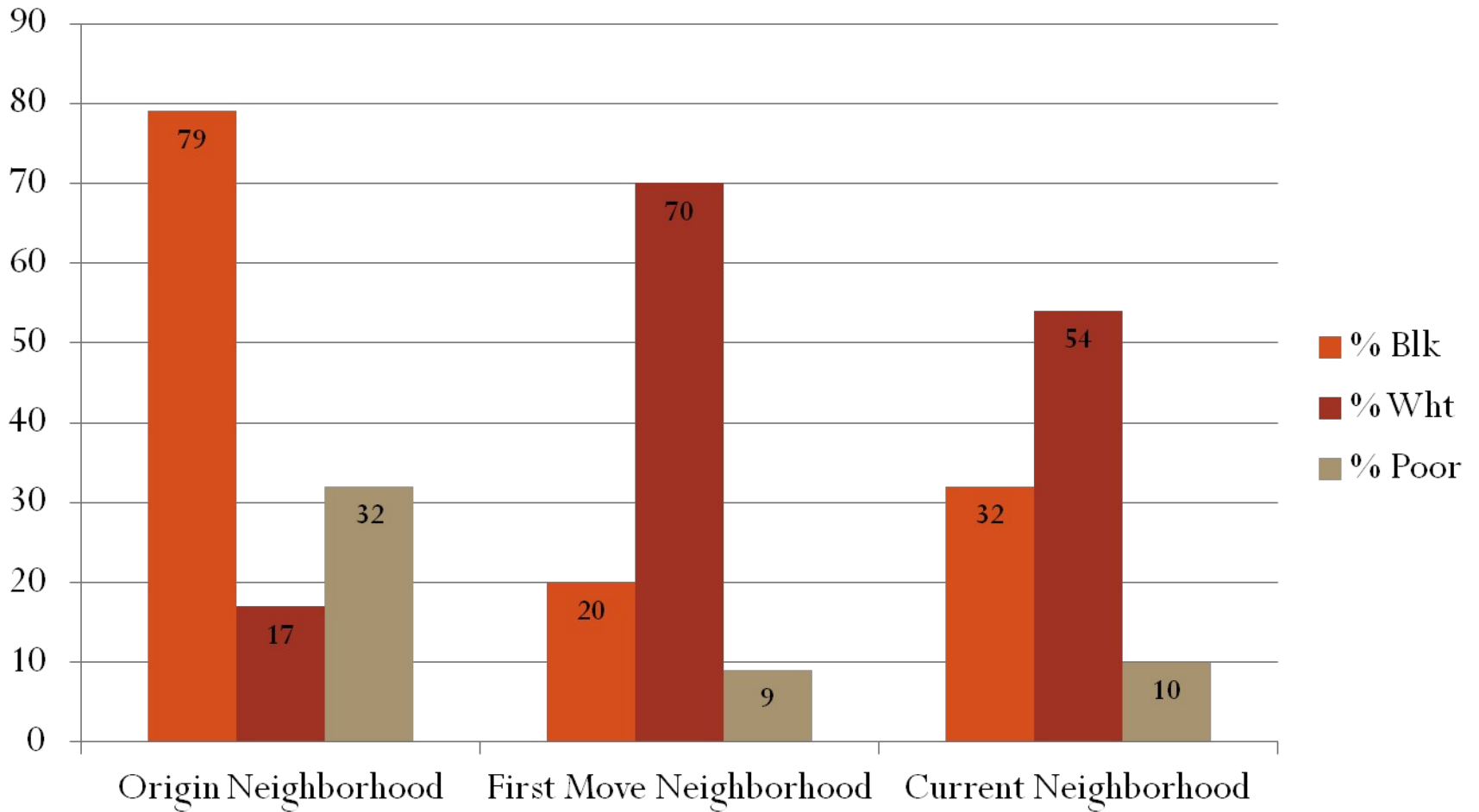
Baltimore Mobility Program: Origin Address



Baltimore Mobility Program: First Move Address

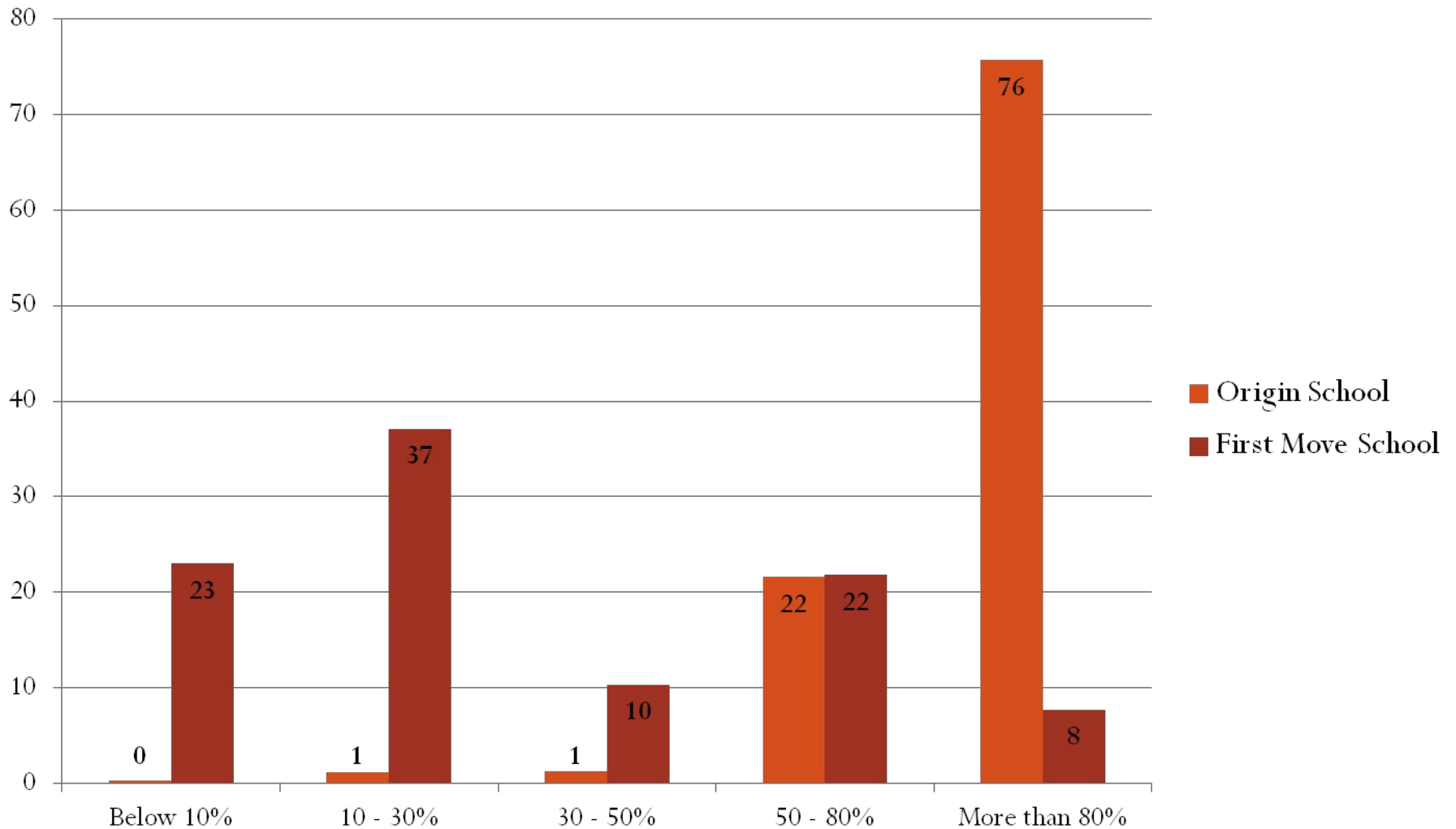


Origin, First Move, Current Neighborhood



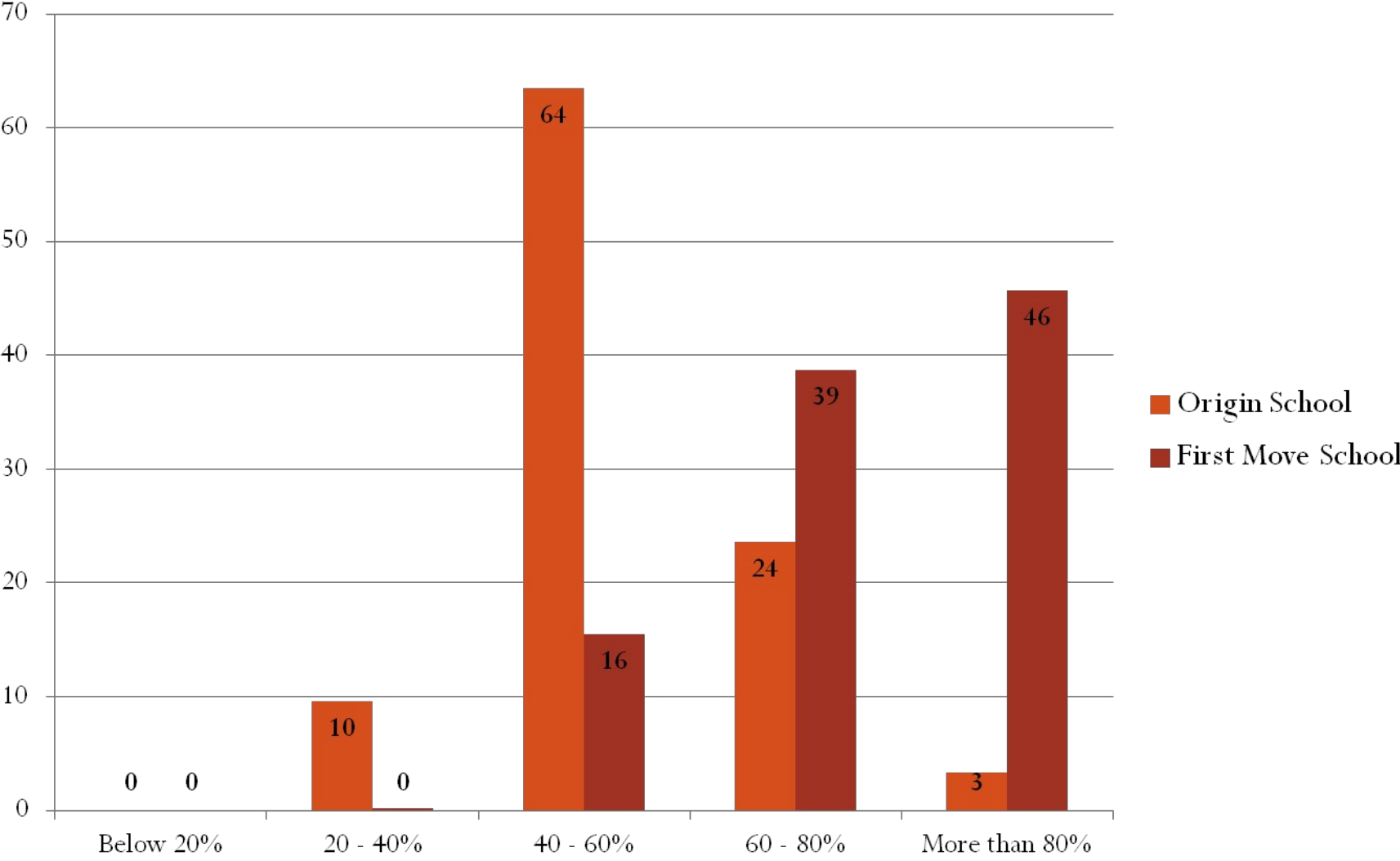
Local Elementary School:

Percent of Student Body Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch



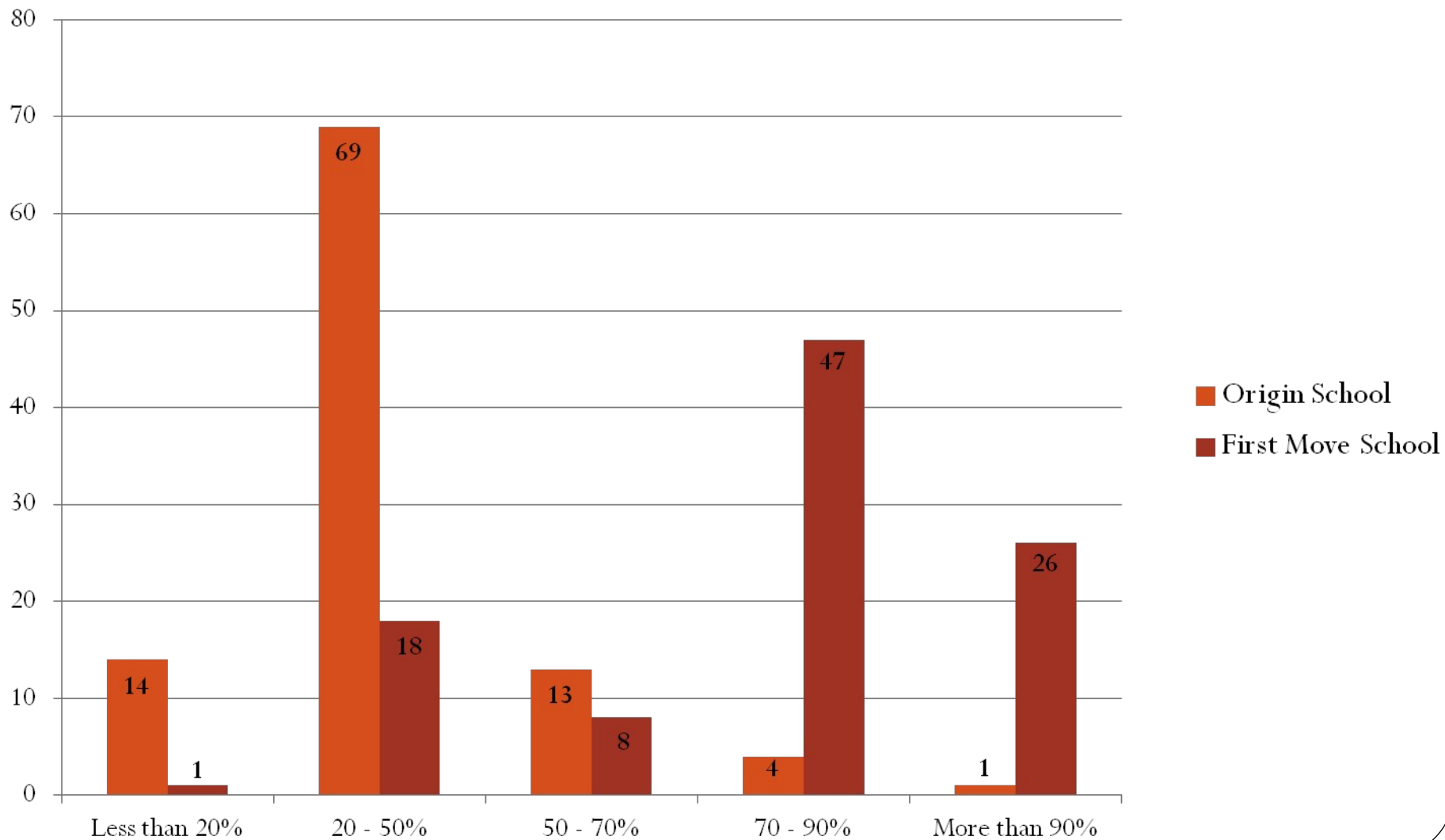
Local Elementary School:

Percent of Student Body Proficient in Reading



Local Elementary School:

Percent of Classes taught by Qualified Teachers



Sample and Design

- **Ethnographic Interview Study (N=150)**
 - 125 Families from Baltimore City, Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Harford, Howard, Carroll Counties
 - 25 “Not Yet” Mover Families
 - Parent, child interviews (9-14, 15-19 yrs old)
 - Repeat Follow Up into School Year
- **Longitudinal School Outcomes Study**
 - Over 3000 children moved with Thompson
 - Records on all schools attended 2003-2011
 - Comparisons with peers in original city schools, new county schools
 - Quasi-experimental design for causal inference