

Using Regional Coalitions to Address Socioeconomic Isolation: *The Creation of the Nebraska Learning Community Agreement*

Jennifer Jellison Holme, Assistant Professor
Sarah Diem & Katherine Mansfield, Doctoral
Students

University of Texas at Austin

The Learning Community Legislation (2008)

1. Sets up an inter-district desegregation plan by socioeconomic status without a court order
2. Involves all districts across an entire metro and applies to all of those 11 districts
3. Creates a tax-sharing plan to fund the program and to equalize revenue
4. Establishes regional educational governing body with powers to administer inter-district desegregation, to levy taxes & fund school construction (include construction of magnet schools)

What I'll Cover Today:

1. History of the Plan
2. Outline of the Legislation
3. Forging Regional Solutions in Education: What Lessons Can Be Drawn?
4. Challenges and Threats to Implementation

1. History of the Plan

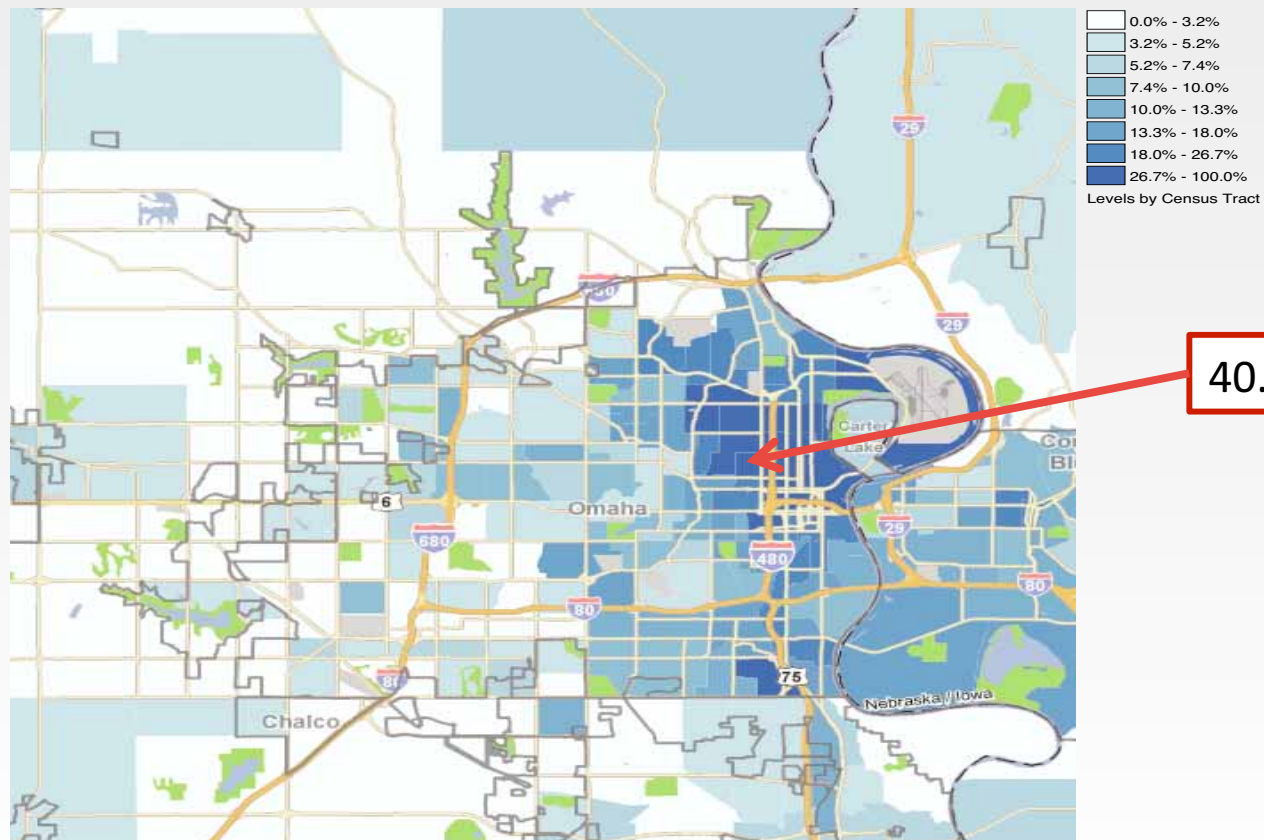
- Early part of 20th century: most school districts enrolled diverse students by race and class
- 1940s & 1950s suburban housing boom
- Laws varied on ability of cities to expand boundaries and “capture” new growth
- Many cities boundaries did not expand –or met w/resistance: Families moving to homogeneous communities & w/separate school systems
- Urban school systems left w/growing share of poverty, declining resources & waning political support

1. History of the Plan

- Began with an 1891 statute = as the city boundaries grow, so does the school district (for large urban districts)
- As Omaha population grew, city annexed land, Omaha Public Schools grew
- City of Omaha's annexation met with growing resistance in the late 1960s
- As Omaha City expanded, Omaha Public schools stopped growing from 1970s-2000s
- By 2000, Omaha Public Schools facing multiple challenges:
 - Suburban flight and growing poverty
 - Inter-district option enrollment
 - Economic development packages
 - Increasing needs and demands, finance structure that hand-tied them

DataPlace

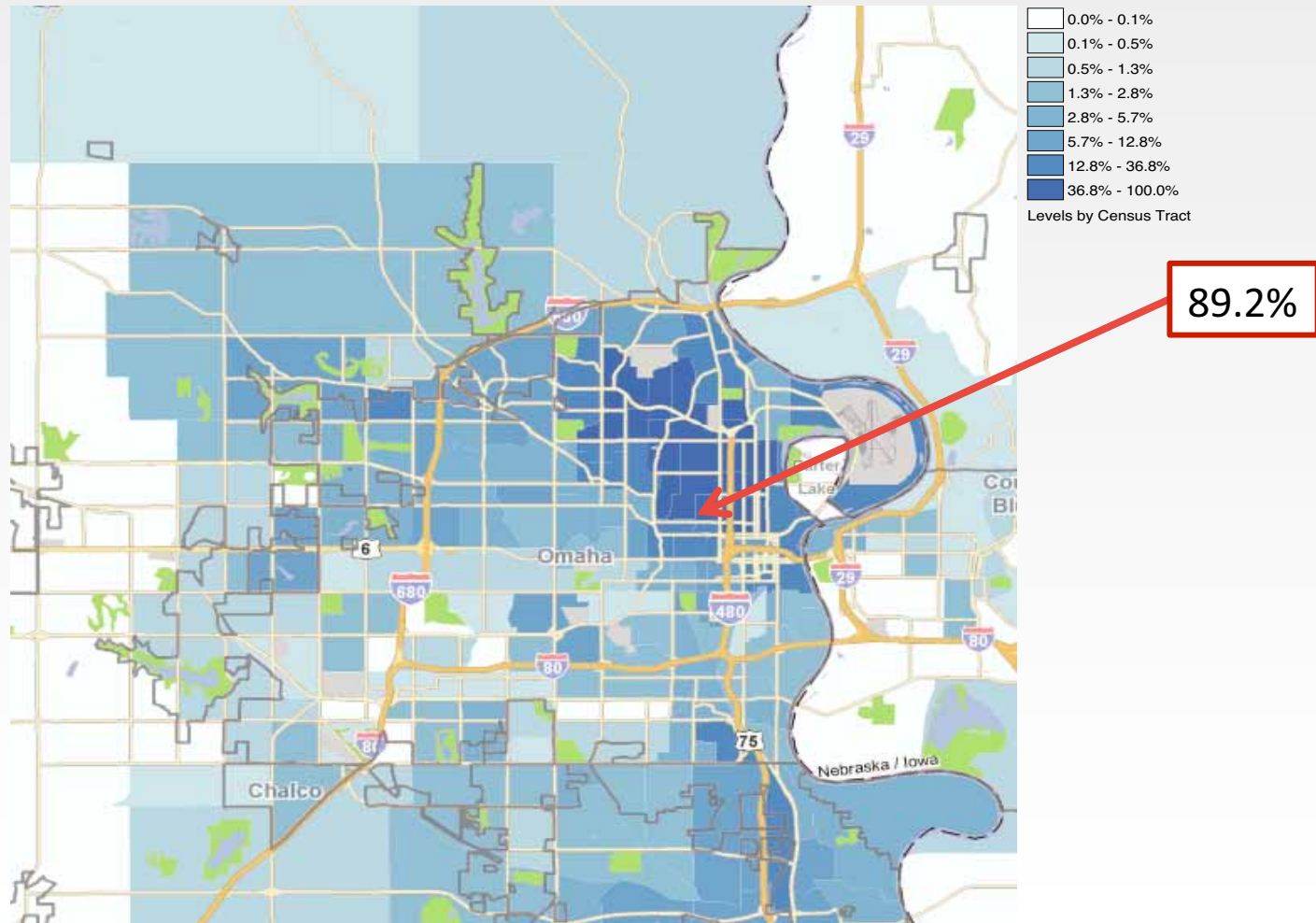
Map of Poverty rate2000 in Omaha, NE



(c) 2009 KnowledgePlex, Inc. Printed from DataPlace -- www.dataplace.org

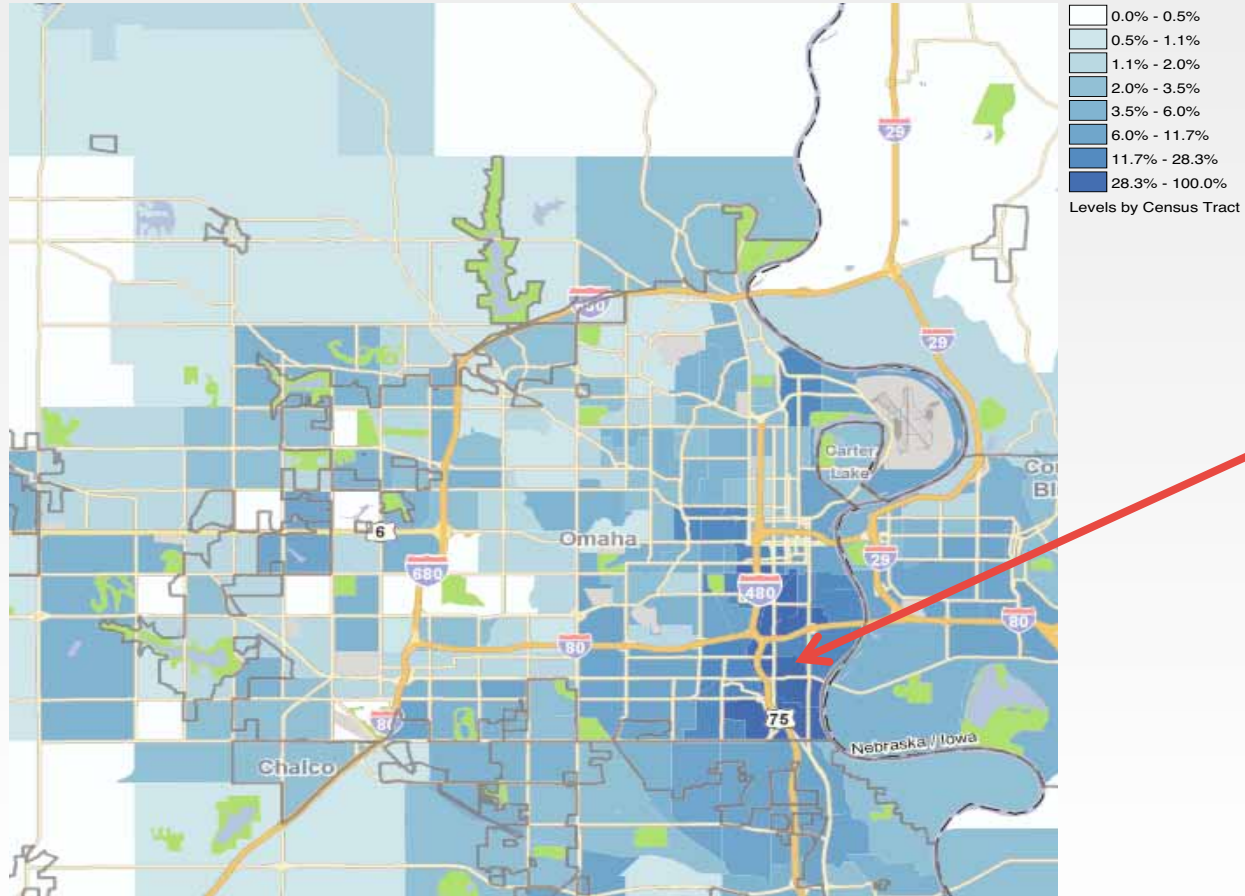
DataPlace

Map of Pct. non-Hispanic Black/African American alone population 2000 in Omaha, NE



DataPlace

Map of Pct. Hispanic/Latino population 2000 in Omaha, NE



57.7%

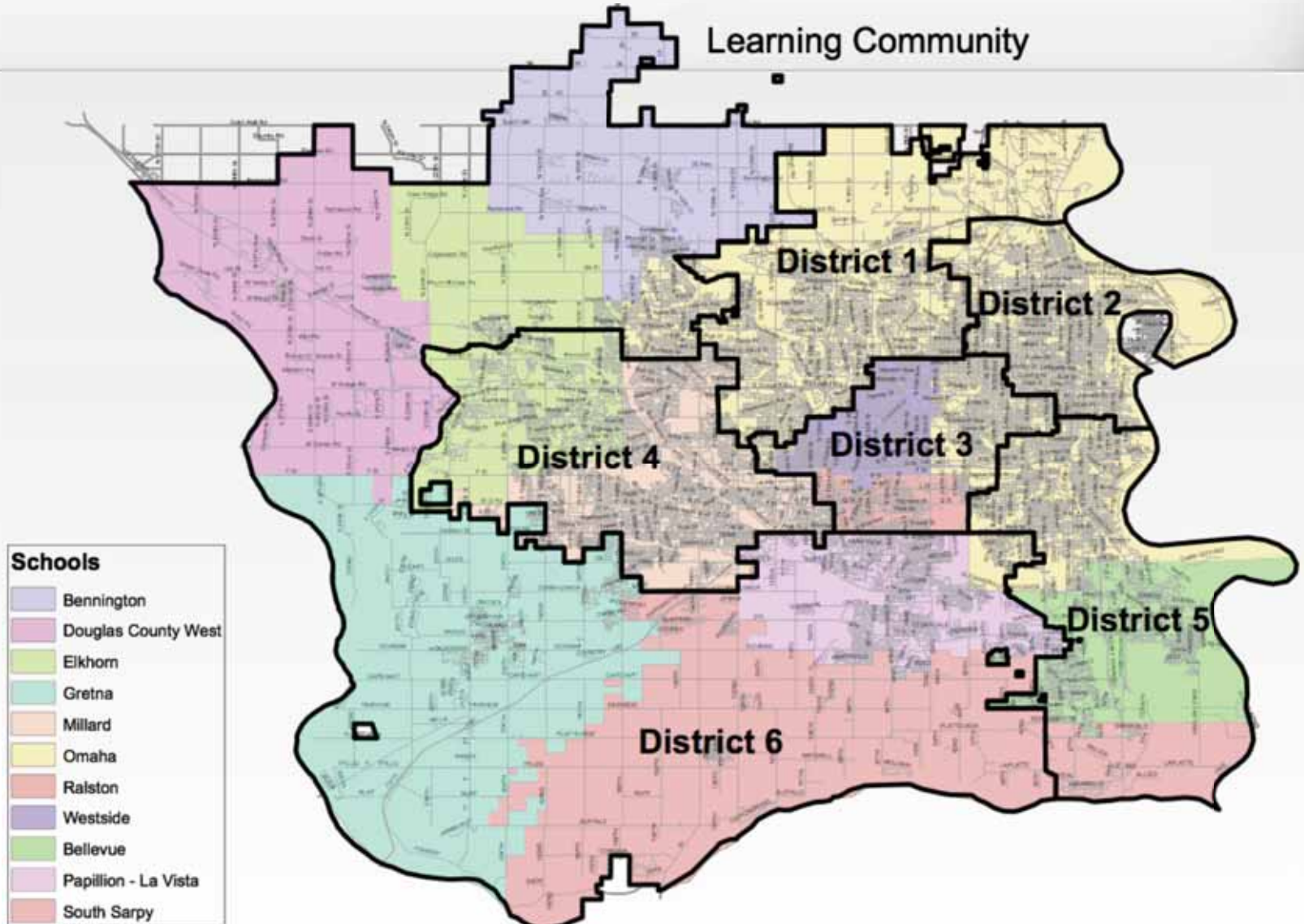
1. History of the LC

- OPS had filed a school finance lawsuit
- Technical cleanup bill eliminating the 1891 right to expand in late 2004
- After leg session was over, OPS board met and asserted its right to expand to capture schools w/in city of Omaha's boundaries (25 suburban schools)
- Turned to legislature = Original concept of the LC w/frozen boundaries, metro-wide cooperation & tax sharing and integration.
- Political barrier to passage = compromise splitting up OPS into racially identifiable districts (LB 1024, April of 2006).
- Omaha less recognized for the solution that emerged

2. Outline of the Legislation

1. Regional Governance: the Learning Community Coordinating Council

Learning Community



2. Outline of the Legislation

1. Regional Governance: the Learning Community Coordinating Council
2. Tax Sharing and a Common Levy: starting in 09/10 and fully implemented by 2012/2013.
3. School integration:
 - Focus schools: no attendance area, inter-district school w/unique curriculum
 - Magnet schools: home attendance area w/portion reserved for outside area to enhance diversity
 - Focus School or Magnet School Pathway: Across metro-area: coordinated curricula and participation of member districts w/matriculation rights
4. Elementary Learning Centers

3. Forging Regional Solutions: What Lessons can be Drawn?

- Path-breaking legislation:
 - Desegregation applies to all districts,
 - Not just two-way but cross-district (pathways)
 - Governing council with authority to administer plan and levy taxes & has a revenue source that is stable and built into tax code.
- Finance through tax sharing:
 - Increases resources available w/o compromising local control over tax rates
 - Promotes more cooperative and efficient land use and development
 - Off-sets needs for states to design formulas to cope with different contexts.

3. Forging Regional Solutions in Education: What Lessons Can Be Drawn?

1. Framing the Problem: The Media's Role
2. Superintendent Leadership and Collaboration
3. Creating Interest Convergence: The Common Levy
4. Advancing Regional Equity While Preserving Local Control
5. Community Advocacy: Philanthropy, Civil Rights Groups, & Business Leaders
6. Accountability to Compliment Equity

4. Challenges Moving Forward

1. Common Levy and Funding Cuts
2. Legislator Turnover
3. Superintendent Turnover
4. Lack of Consensus about Desegregation/Diversity Goals
5. Weaknesses in the Desegregation Provision
 - No targets, timelines or sanctions
 - SES-based alone
 - Transportation
6. No Child Left Behind

Questions and Comments:

Jennifer Jellison Holme, Assistant Professor

Katherine Mansfield & Sarah Diem, Doctoral Students

University of Texas at Austin, Educational Policy and Planning Program

(512) 475-9398 jholme@mail.utexas.edu

Final report will be posted on CCHIRJ website in late February/early March