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Matt DelConte

Sushil Trivedi

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Who Chooses?

Which Hartford students are likely to apply to a different public school operated by the City?

Matt DelConte '12 and Sushil Trivedi '12

Faculty Advisors: Professor Diane Zannoni and Professor Jack Dougherty

Community Partner: Achieve Hartford!

Abstract

Hartford has the lowest student achievement test scores in the State of Connecticut, which is also the state with the highest achievement gap. Since 2008 Hartford students have had the choice to apply to a variety of schools, including Hartford public neighborhood schools, Hartford public interdistrict magnet schools, and suburban Open Choice schools. The rationale for open choice is primarily to allow parents to choose better performing schools, driving out the lower performing schools, thus improving the achievement level of Hartford students. In our research we attempt to answer: "Which Hartford students were more likely to exercise choice?" We use data on all Hartford Public School students grades 3-8. We expect to find students making applications to higher performing schools. We found, however, that very few students who are currently attending a HPS apply to another HP neighborhood school. Of these applications, 30% was to Achievement First, the only HP district school with a high achievement score. Movement to this high performing school was almost exclusively from the north end, where the school is located. Virtually no applications came from the south end of Hartford.

Introduction

The research question we are pursuing is: Which Hartford students are more (or less) likely to submit an application to a different public school operated by the City?

Our research question is prompted by views that public school choice accomplishes two goals:

- Increased racial integration between city and suburban districts
- Greater school accountability

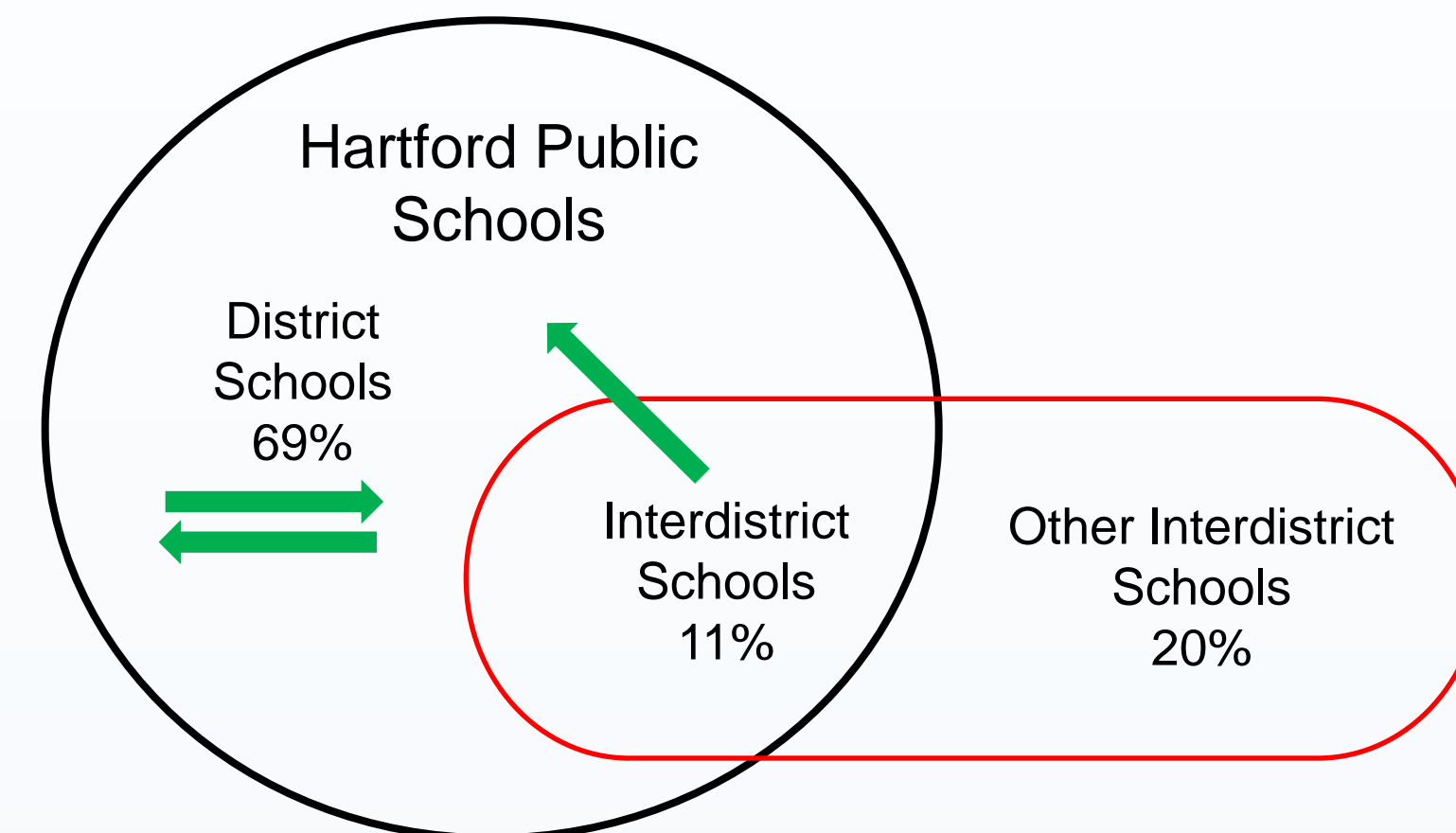
- Do choosers differ by student-level demographic, achievement, and choice application characteristics?
- Is there a tradeoff between school achievement and distance from home?

Hypothesis

With the integration of open school choice in Hartford under Sheff vs. O'Neill, students will apply to higher performing schools than their current school.

Data and Methodology

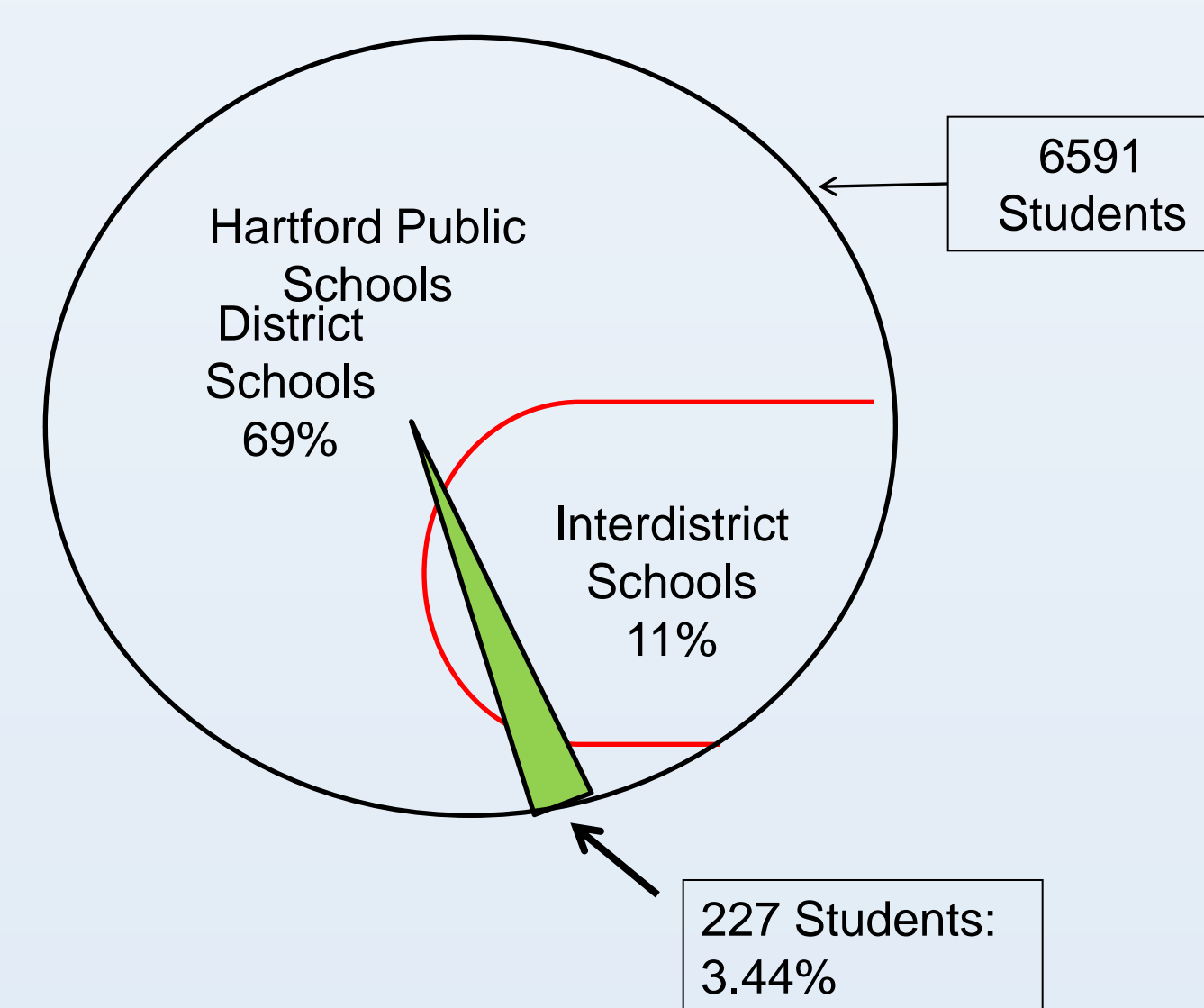
Percent of Hartford Students Attending Different School Choice Options: Data Constraints



- 8368 Students in Hartford Schools, Grades 3-8
- Student Level Data: Student demographics, home address, and student achievement scores
- School Level Data: Student body demographics, address, school achievement scores
- Applications to City district schools

Population of Choosers

Percent of Hartford Students Attending Different School Choice Options: Our Slice of the Pie

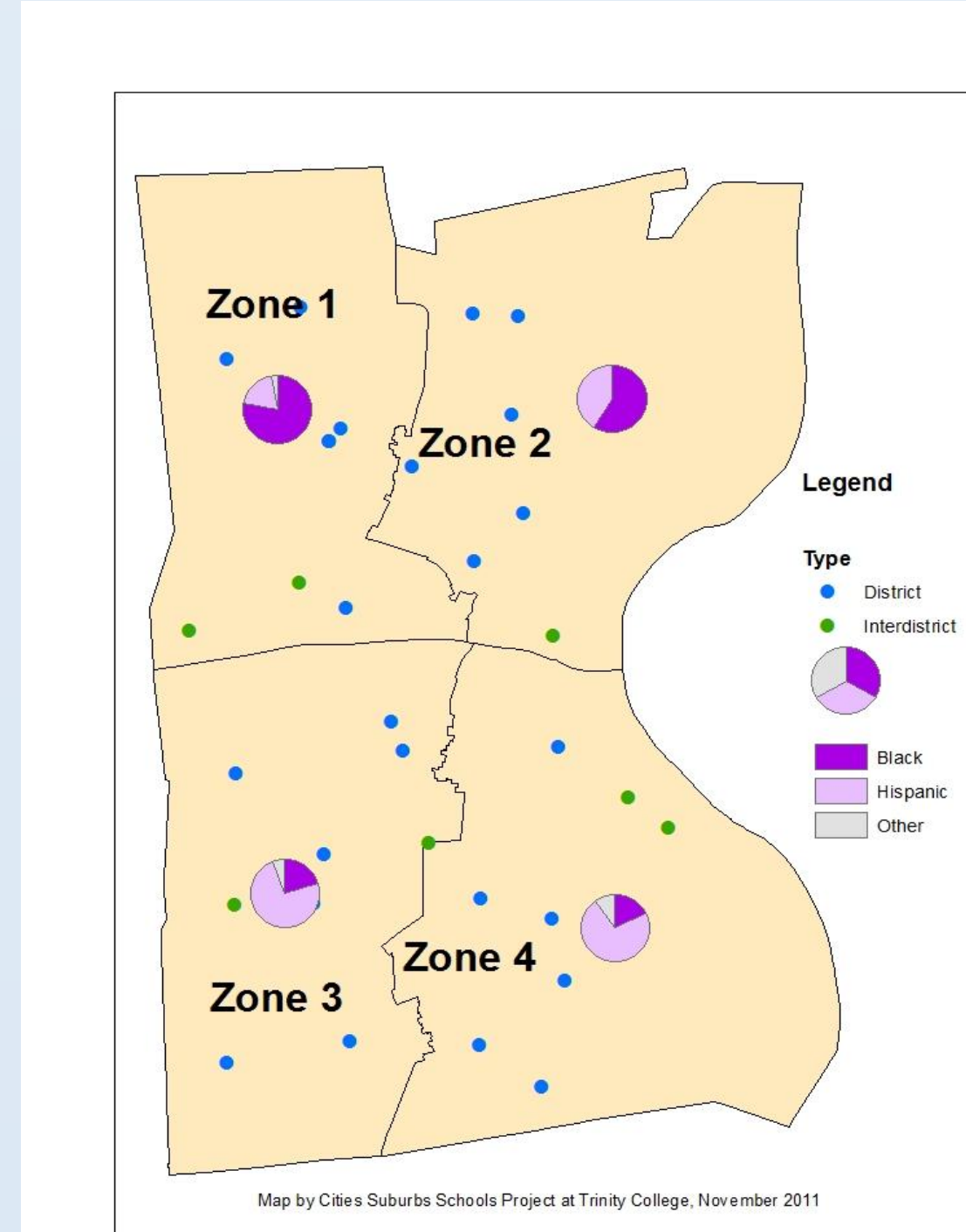


Data and Methodology

Distribution of the Hartford Public Schools in the 4 School Zones

North End
Zone 1: 78% Black, 19% Hispanic
Zone 2: 58% Black, 41% Hispanic

South End
Zone 3: 20% Black, 74% Hispanic
Zone 4: 18% Black, 72% Hispanic



The Pool: Those students who are currently enrolled in a Hartford Public School in grades 3-7 and are not in final grade level

Choosers: Those students who made applications to a city district school

Non-Choosers: Those students who did not apply

Results

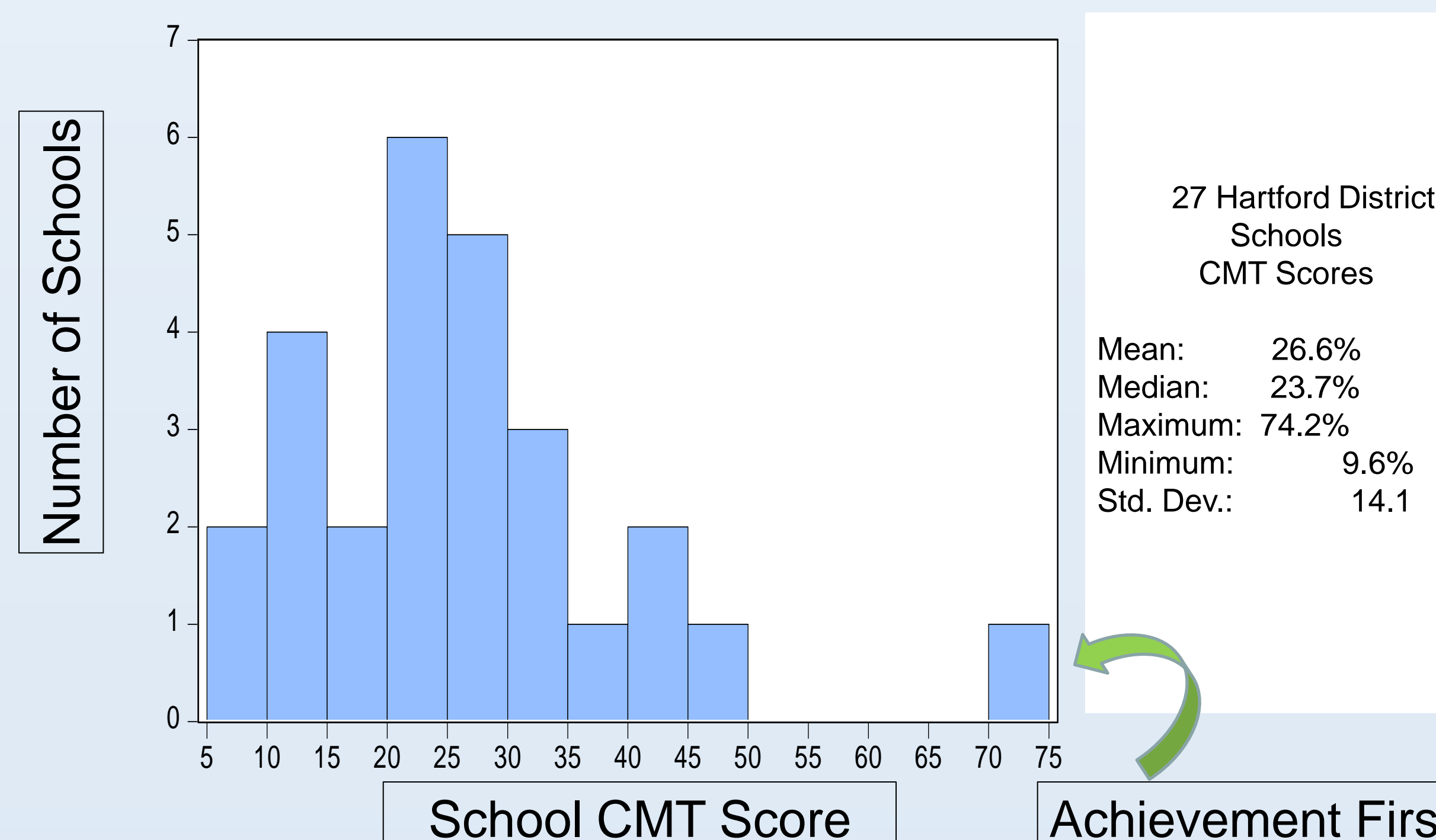
The Pool, Choosers, and Non-Choosers: Spring 2010

	The Pool	Non Choosers	Choosers
	6591	6364	227
% male students	51.1	51.2	47.6
% English language learners	19.1	19.3	13.2
% special education students	13.4	13.5	11.0
% Black students	37.6	37.2	47.1
% Hispanic students	56.8	57.0	50.7
%white	4.0	4.1	1.3
av composite level student score	2.7	2.7	2.6
av of students' school CMT Goal score	28.1	28.2	27.5
distance of current school from residence (miles)	.69 (.39)	.69 (.39)	.81 (.52)
distance of chosen school from residence (miles)	NA	NA	1.15 (.90)
% grade 3	20.2	20.4	14.1
% grade 4	19.9	19.5	31.7
% grade 5	20.8	20.8	19.4
% grade 6	19.2	19.3	18.1
% grade 7	19.9	20.1	16.7
% residence zone 1	17.7	17.3	28.2
% residence zone 2	20.2	19.9	29.0
% residence zone 3	38.7	39.1	27.3
% residence zone 4	23.4	23.7	15.4

* Rows highlighted in yellow are statistically significant

Results

Distribution of % of Students Who Met the State Average on the Connecticut State Mastery Test, Across 27 Hartford District Public Schools

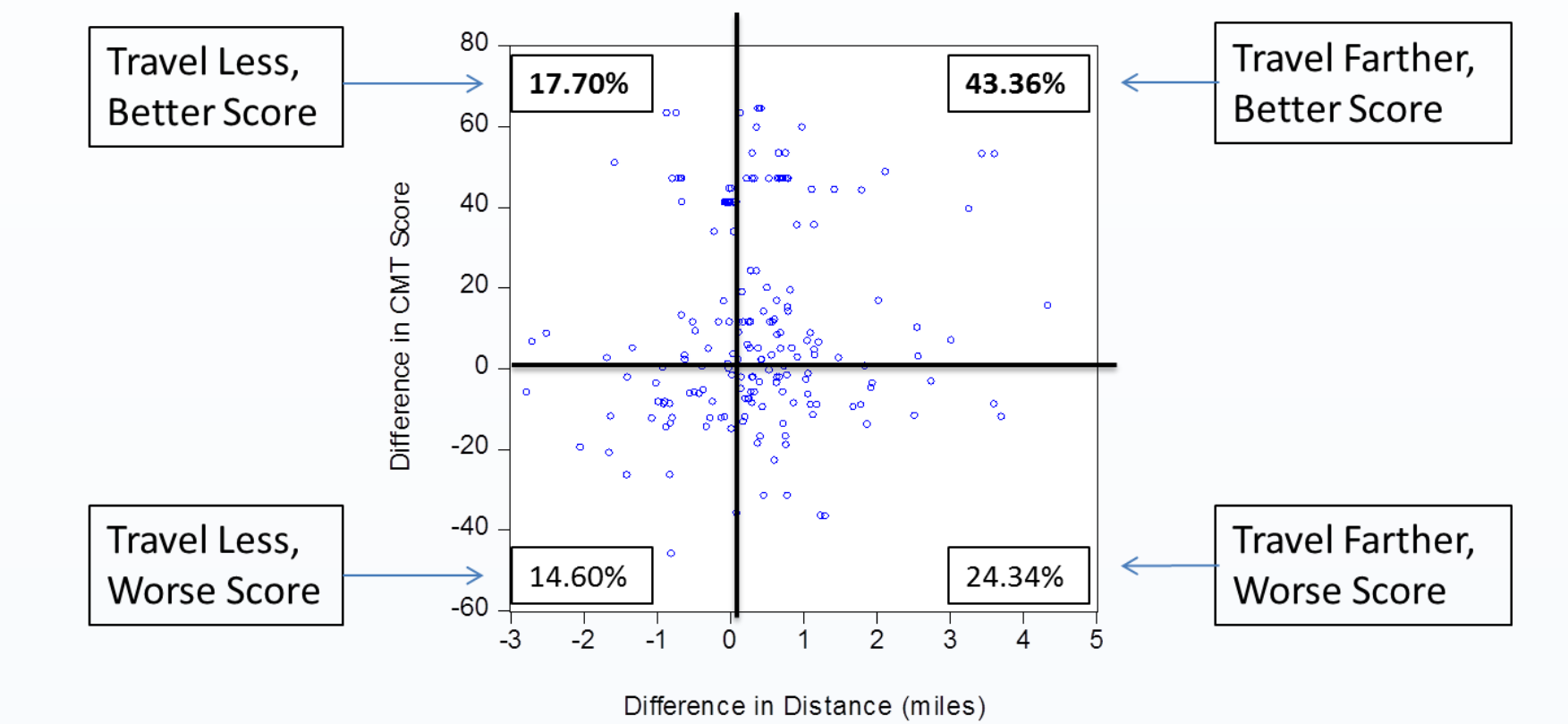


Possible Reasons for Not Choosing

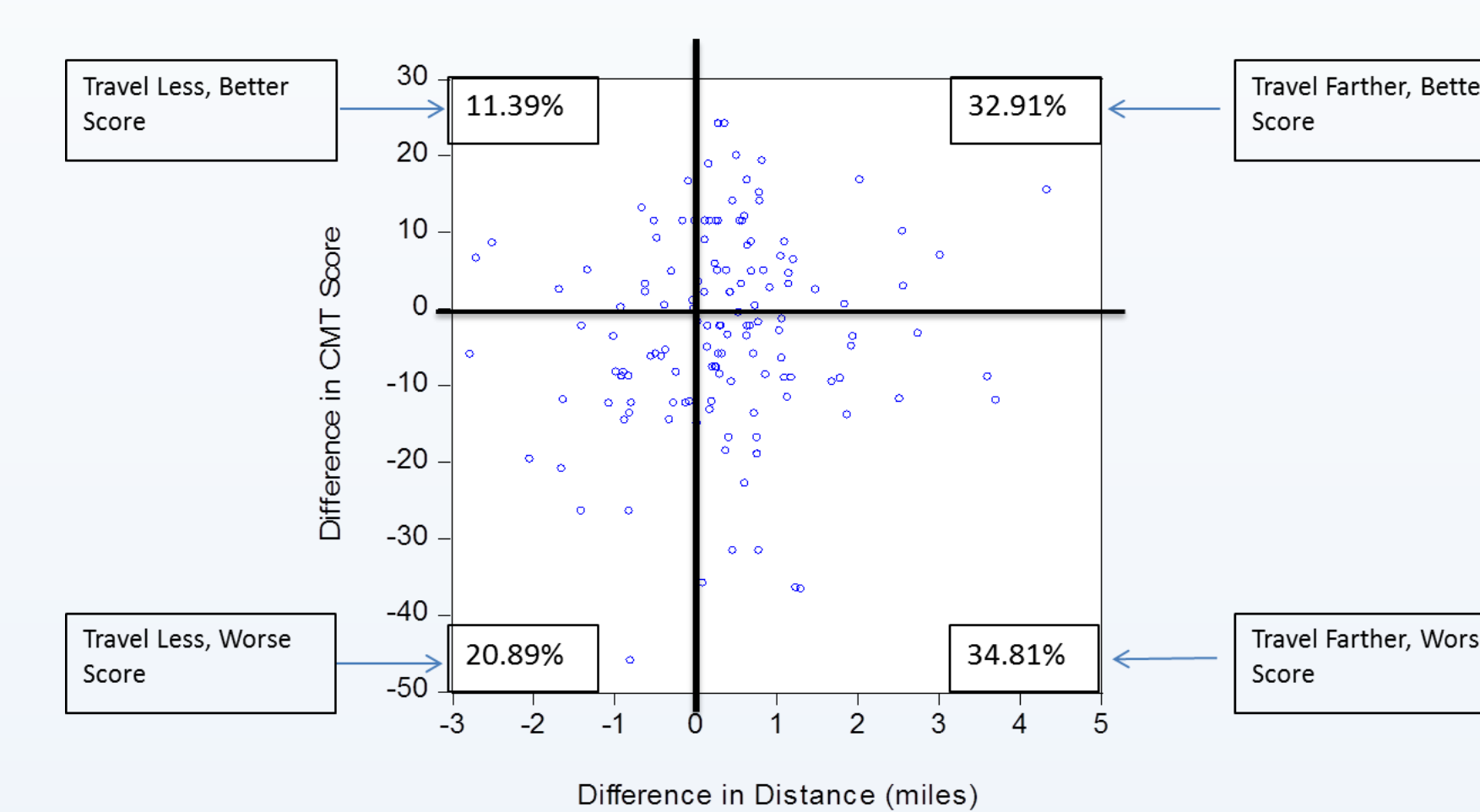
1. Preference for neighborhood school
2. Preference for child to not be in the racial minority in the school
3. Lack of transportation
4. Others...

Results

Relationship Between Distance and School CMT Score: Among 227 Choosers



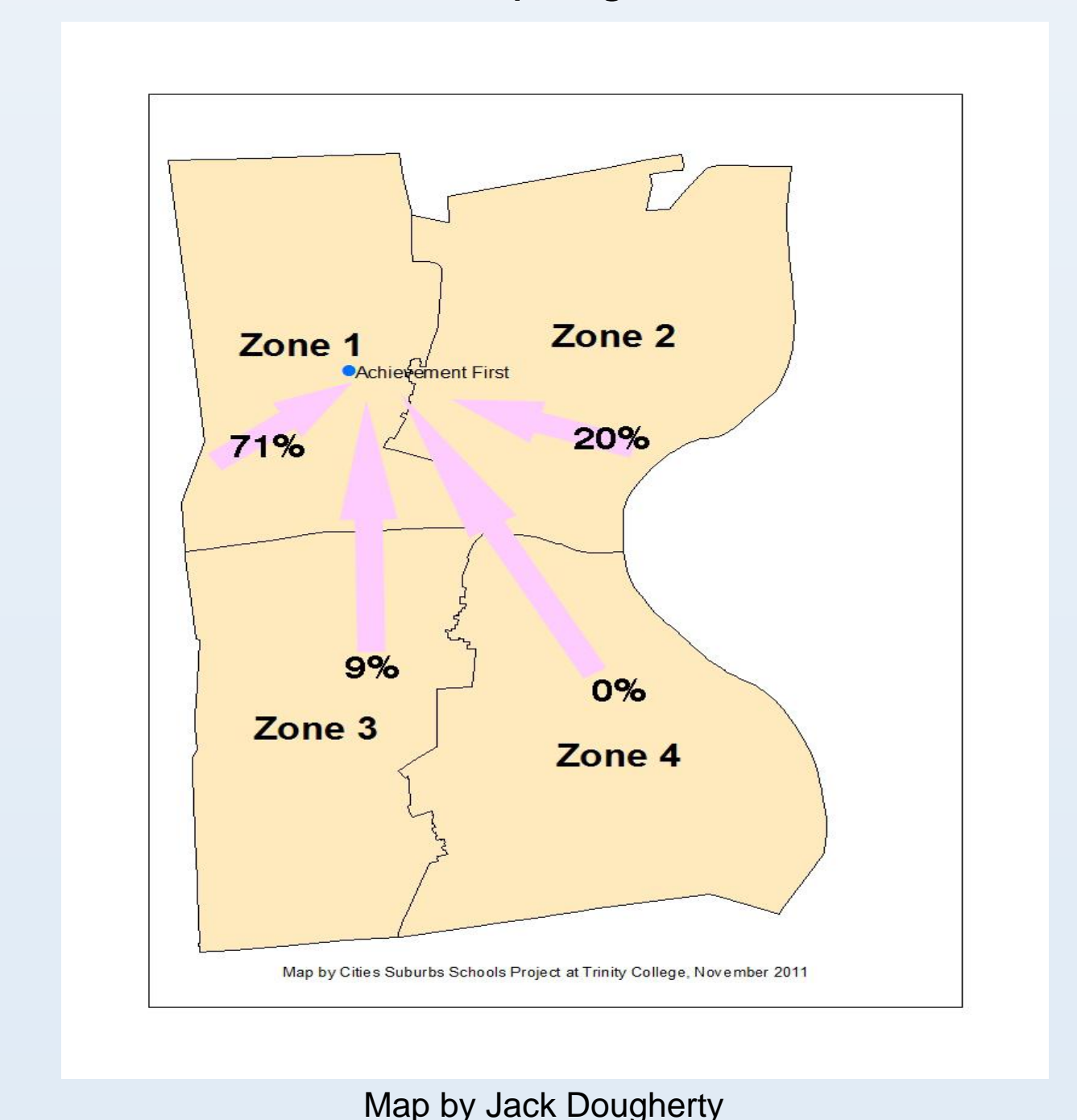
Relationship Between Distance and School CMT Score: Among the 159 Choosers Who Did NOT Apply to Achievement First



As shown by the first scatter plot above, 43% of students were willing to travel farther for a better performing school. However, when Achievement First is not included only 33% made this choice and in fact, 35% applied to travel farther to a lower performing school.

Results

Source of the Applications to Achievement First Hartford Academy by Zone: Spring 2010



Conclusion

1. Very few students make applications to the district schools run by the City
2. Of those who do, a majority applied to a higher performing school
3. Nearly 1/3 applied to the highest performing school in the City, Achievement First Academy; however, students were not willing to cross geographic or racial boundaries

Acknowledgements

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