

On the Brink: Homelessness a Reality in the South Bronx

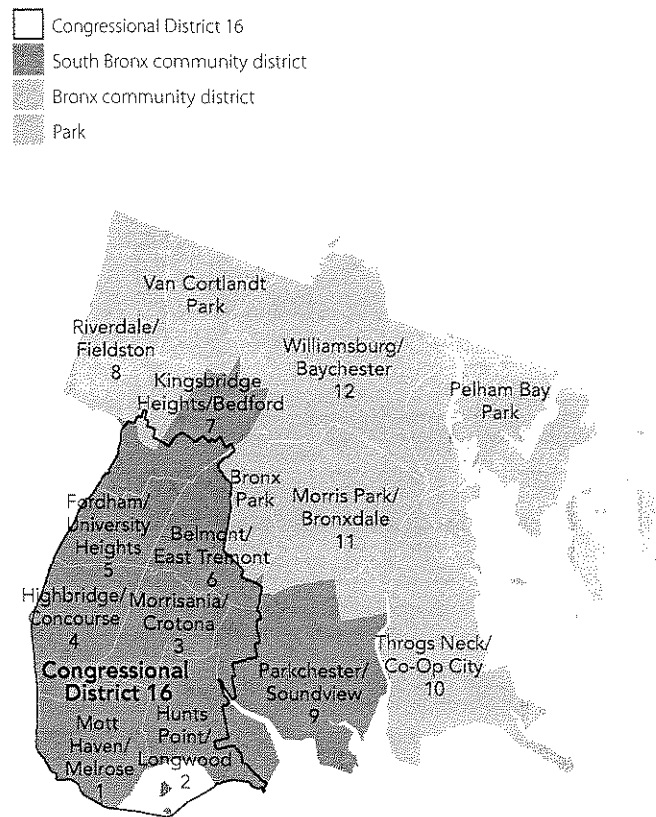
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a National Survey policy report from ICPH

In a time of budget cuts, it is critical to examine public opinions and demographics of some of New York City's poorest areas. According to the second installment in a series of New York City (NYC) public opinion polls conducted by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH), respondents living in the Bronx had higher rates of perceived risk of homelessness (table 1). The ICPH NYC public opinion poll also examined racial and ethnic differences, finding that Hispanic and black New Yorkers experienced greater perceived risk of homelessness than their white and Asian counterparts (table 1).¹ With more than one-third (37.0%) of all family shelter applicants coming from the Bronx and nearly all (92.8%) either black (52.8%) or Hispanic (40.0%), families in the Bronx are experiencing homelessness at higher rates than families in other boroughs.² Given that 2.8% of all Bronx families and 11.3% of those living in poverty applied for shelter in 2010 and that these households have the highest rates of perceived risk of homelessness, the Bronx—specifically the South Bronx (Congressional District 16)—is the epicenter of severe poverty in New York City (figure 1).³

Factors contributing to persistent and severe poverty in the South Bronx are interrelated. Lower levels of educational attainment lead to high unemployment rates and less annual earnings, with families unable to afford basic expenses. Therefore, a majority of South Bronx renters are cost-burdened and have poor access to healthy foods and early care and education services. These overlapping risk factors are detrimental to children. Low access to proper nutrition and early childhood development programs make it difficult for low-income children to climb out of poverty, leaving them vulnerable for a lifetime.

Figure 1
 SOUTH BRONX CONGRESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY DISTRICTS



For this analysis, the South Bronx is defined as Congressional District 16 and encompasses community districts 1–6, and portions of community districts 7 and 9.

Table 1

NYC Public Opinion Poll Responses (by residence and race or ethnicity)	New York City	Bronx	Hispanic*	Black*	White*	Asian*
Worried about becoming homeless	27.8%	46.9%	44.4%	32.6%	12.9%	17.6%

*Race and ethnicity data represent New York City.
 Source: Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, *Failures and Solutions: New Yorkers' Views on Homelessness*, July 2011.

Table 2

Economic Indicators (by residence and race or ethnicity)				
	Poverty rate	Unemployment rate	Median household income	Less than high school education
New York City	18.6%	8.2%	\$50,173	21.0%
Hispanic	27.4%	10.2%	\$34,467	38.0%
Black	21.3%	11.4%	\$39,927	20.9%
White	13.4%	6.2%	\$62,517	14.9%
Asian	17.5%	6.7%	\$53,173	24.8%
Bronx	27.9%	11.1%	\$33,794	31.3%
Hispanic	34.6%	11.6%	\$27,331	41.9%
Black	25.1%	12.4%	\$35,866	24.4%
White	20.4%	9.4%	\$40,591	28.0%
Asian	21.6%	6.5%	\$48,466	23.4%
South Bronx	39.2%	13.9%	\$23,073	41.2%
Hispanic	41.1%	13.4%	\$21,607	48.3%
Black	36.2%	15.7%	\$26,366	30.2%
White	39.0%	14.4%	\$19,522	47.7%
Asian	34.8%	6.8%	\$31,659	28.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2009 American Survey 5-year Estimates.

The data represented are pooled between 2005 and 2009 to increase accuracy.

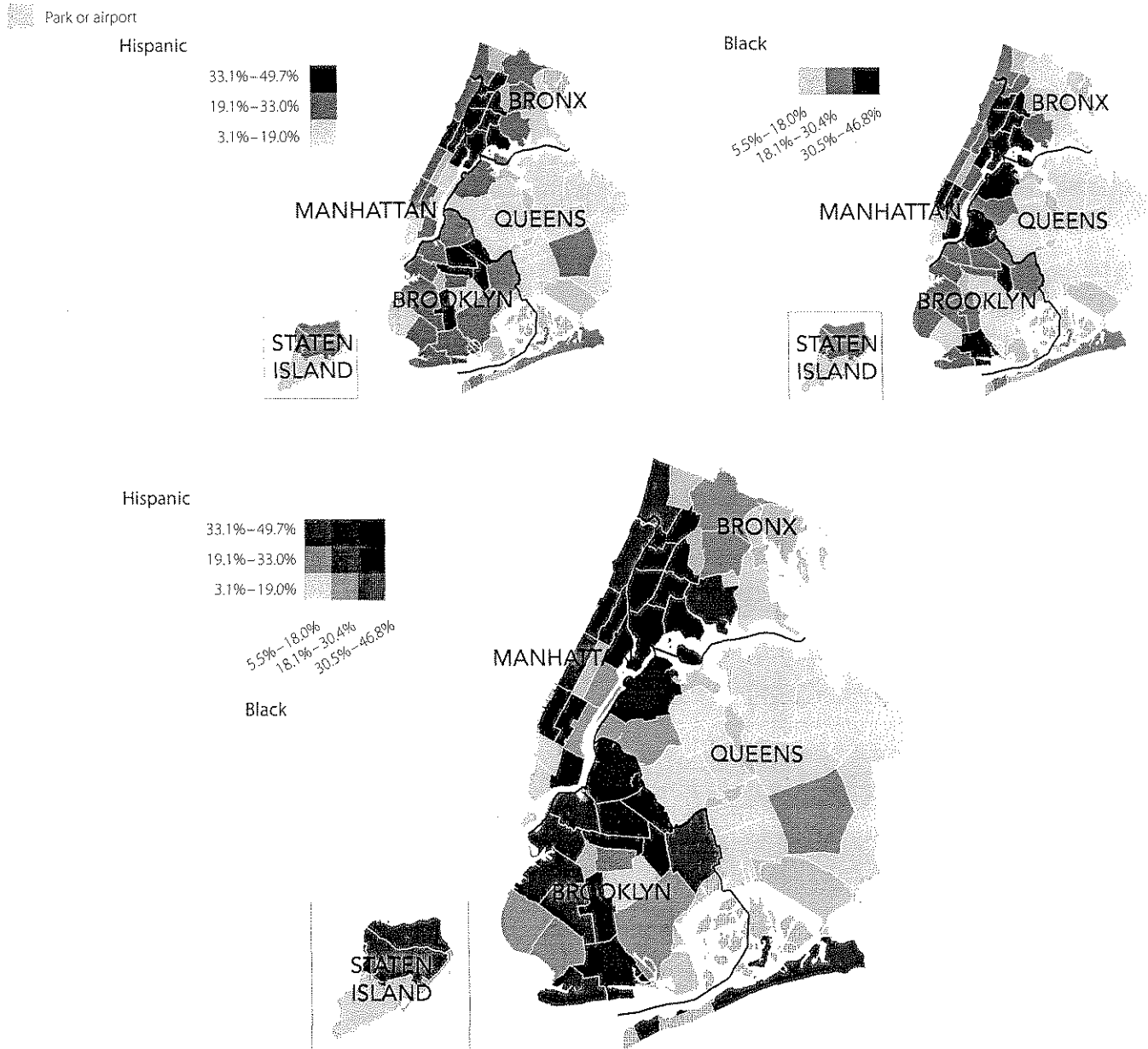
An analysis of data from the 2005–2009 *American Community Survey 5-year Estimates* finds that the perceptions of poll respondents reflect economic and social trends in New York City. Compared to residents citywide, persons living in the Bronx have higher rates of poverty (27.9%, versus 18.6%), unemployment (11.1%, as opposed to 8.2%), and earn the least annually (with a median household income of \$33,794, compared to \$50,173) (table 2). Similarly to the ICPH NYC public opinion poll, racial and ethnic disparities also exist, with black and Hispanic Bronx residents more likely to live in poverty and be unemployed than their white and Asian counterparts (figure 2 and figure 3). In the South Bronx, 39.2% of residents are poor and 13.9% are unemployed. When compared to other blacks and Hispanics citywide, those living in community districts in the South Bronx have some of the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in New York City.⁴

Educational attainment is much lower in the Bronx and the South Bronx than New York City as a whole. Sixty percent (60.1%) of persons living in the Bronx have at most attained a high school education or equivalent, with one-third (31.3%) of residents lacking a high school diploma or GED (versus 21.0% citywide). Hispanics have the least education; 41.9% of Hispanics in the Bronx and 48.3% in the South Bronx have less than a high school diploma or equivalent. Within the South Bronx, nearly half (48.3%) of all persons living in community districts 1 and 2 have less than a high school education.⁵

According to the ICPH NYC public opinion poll, 56.0% of those worried about becoming homeless also have difficulty meeting basic living expenses, compared to 13.6% of New Yorkers who do not perceive themselves as at risk.⁶ To assess the cost of living for families, expenses can be calculated as a percentage of income (table 3). The median family income for the Bronx is \$38,320 per year or \$3,193.33 per month. The estimated cost of housing, food, child care, and transportation alone is \$3,664.80 monthly, 114.8% of income. For many families living in the Bronx, affording these basic necessities without government assistance is not feasible. In areas of the South Bronx where the median family income (\$26,308) is even lower than the borough average, financial stability is even further out of reach.⁷

Housing costs are a burden for the roughly eighty percent (78.4%) of residents who rent an apartment in the Bronx. The median gross rent in the Bronx is \$885. Over half (54.7%) of all (families and individuals) renter-occupied households are cost-burdened (spending 30% or more of income on housing expenses), with nearly one-third (31.6%) of Bronx residents severely cost-burdened (spending 50% or more of income on housing expenses) (figure 4).⁸ A lack of affordable housing has been cited as one of the primary reasons for homelessness among households with children.⁹ Very low-income families are more likely to be severely cost-burdened.¹⁰ The shortfall of affordable housing for these low-income households, in conjunction with additional interrelated indicators of poverty, leaves

Figure 2
PERCENT OF PERSONS IN POVERTY*
 (by race or ethnicity and community district)

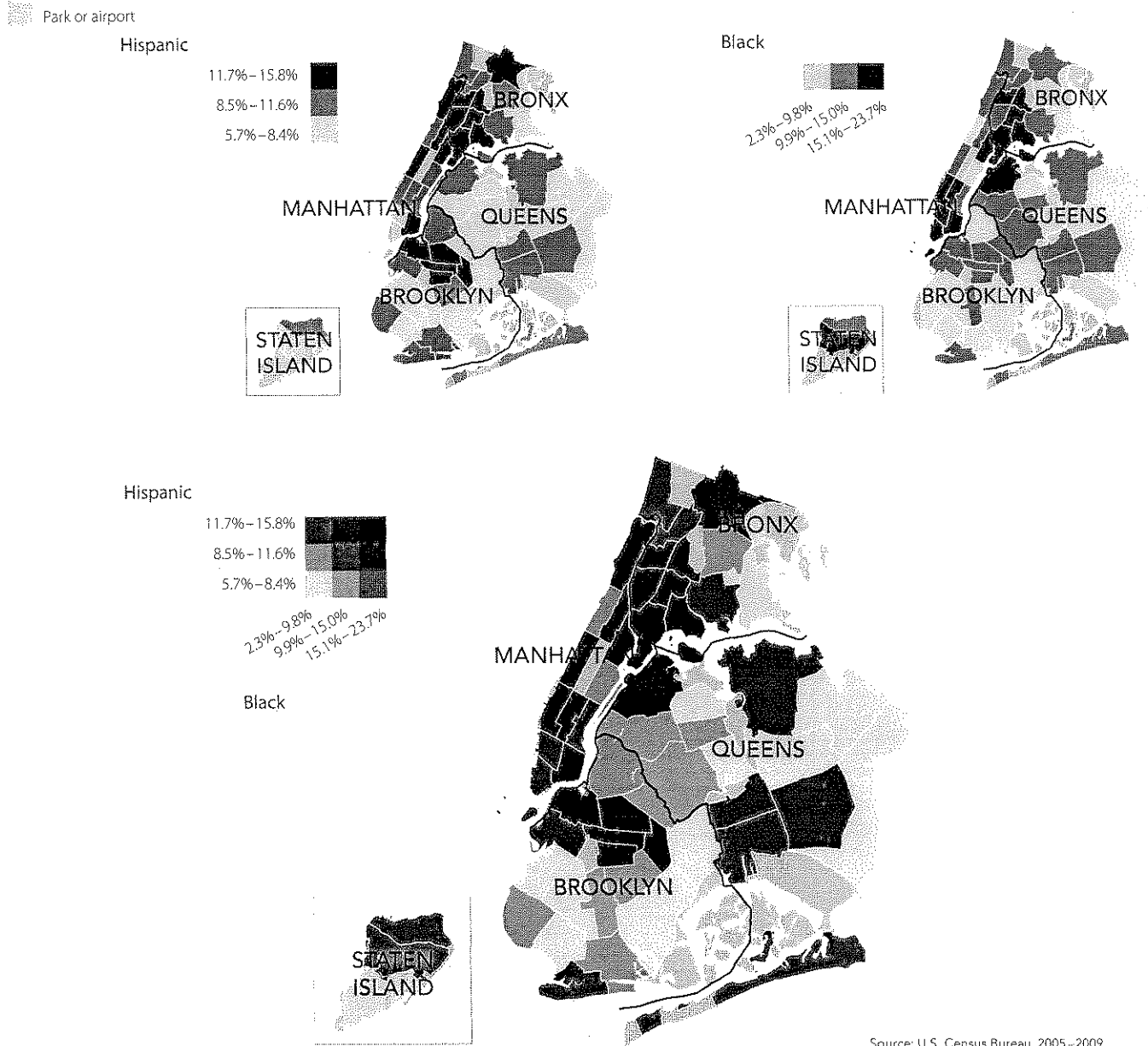


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2009 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

*The two separate maps shown above are superimposed on a single map to demonstrate the interrelationship between Hispanics and blacks living in poverty. The darker hues signify a higher percentage of persons living in poverty, with blue representing Hispanics and red representing blacks. Dark purple community districts have the greatest concentration of both Hispanics and blacks living in poverty, thereby indicating a positive relationship, while the gray areas have the least amount of poor Hispanics and blacks. Blue community districts have a high number of Hispanics and a low number of blacks, and red community districts have a high number of blacks and a low number of Hispanics in poverty.

There are over 1.3 million persons living in the Bronx; over half (51.2%) are Hispanic and 34.0% are black. The data represented are pooled between 2005 and 2009 to increase accuracy.

Figure 3
PERCENT OF UNEMPLOYED PERSONS*
 (by race or ethnicity and community district)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2009
 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

*The two separate maps shown above are superimposed on a single map to demonstrate the interrelationship between unemployed Hispanics and unemployed blacks. The darker hues signify a higher percentage of unemployed persons, with blue representing Hispanics and red representing blacks. Dark purple community districts have the greatest amount of unemployed Hispanics and blacks residents, thereby indicating a positive relationship, while the gray areas have the least amount of unemployed Hispanics and blacks. Blue indicates a high number of unemployed Hispanics and a low number of unemployed blacks and red signifies a high number of unemployed blacks and a low number of unemployed Hispanics.

There are over 1.3 million persons living in the Bronx; over half (51.2%) are Hispanic and 34.0% are black. The data represented are pooled between 2005 and 2009 to increase accuracy.

Table 3

Monthly Expenses as a Percentage of Family Income (by residence)			
	Monthly cost	Percent of median Bronx family monthly income (\$3,193.33)	Percent of median South Bronx family monthly income (\$2,192.33)
Rent ¹¹	\$1,359.00	42.6%	62.0%
Food ¹²	\$741.00	23.2%	33.8%
Child care ¹³	\$1,460.80	45.7%	66.6%
Transportation ¹⁴	\$104.00	3.3%	4.7%
Total	\$3,664.80	114.8%	167.2%

These estimates are based on a household comprised of a single parent and two children. In the Bronx, the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,359 (includes rent and utilities). Food costs are estimated at \$741 per month using the U.S. Department of Agriculture Low-Cost Food Plan and Council for Community and Economic Research's Cost of Living Index. Consistent with New York's state market-rate child care survey, full-time child care for one preschooler (a child between ages 3 and 5) is \$43.40 per day and part-time child care for a school-aged child (between the ages 6 and 12) is \$23.00 dollars per day in the Bronx. Additionally, with over half (56.5%) of all employed Bronx residents using public transportation to commute to work, the cost of transportation (\$104 for one monthly unlimited MetroCard) was factored into total monthly costs. Additional costs such as health care, taxes, or miscellaneous expenses (including clothing, personal and household items, and recreation) and tax credits are not included.

severely cost-burdened families more at risk of becoming homeless. Persons in the Bronx are also overcrowded (living in housing units with more than one occupant per room) at higher rates. Roughly ten percent (10.4%) of Bronx residents are living in overcrowded housing situations, compared to 7.8% residents citywide.¹⁵

The affordability gap between income and rent creates further financial struggle for families, via its association with higher rates of food insecurity.¹⁶ In 2010, one-third (32.7%) of persons living in the South Bronx reported that they did not have enough money to buy food at some point in the past twelve months. Although the number of residents experiencing food insecurity has dropped slightly (from 36.9% in 2008), the rate in the South Bronx is greater than any other congressional district in the country and nearly twice the national average (of 18.0%).¹⁷ The percent of Bronx residents (29%) receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits increased 37% since 2007; however, two out of five (39%) persons in 2010 expressed concern about needing food assistance in the upcoming year.¹⁸

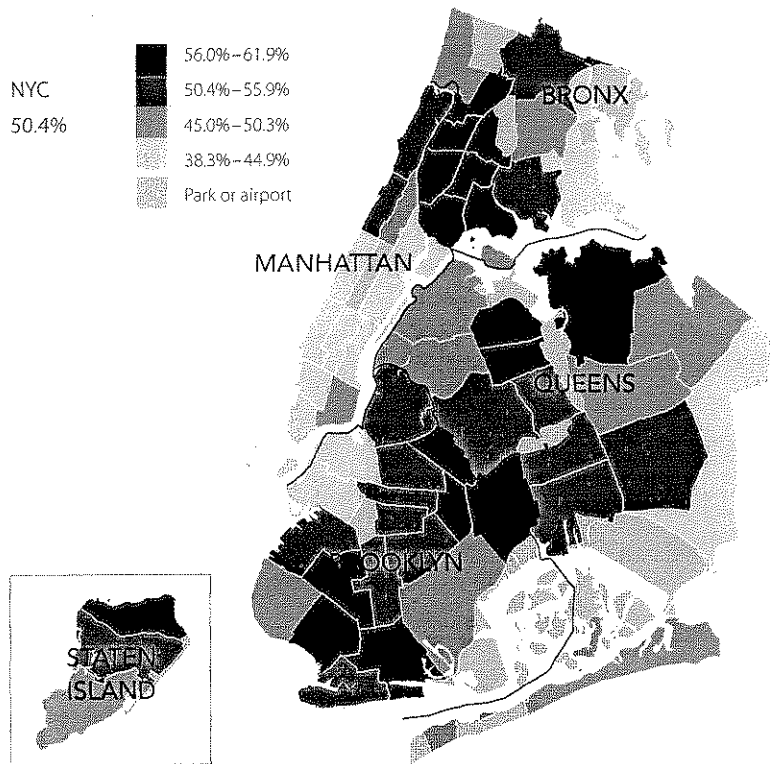
Counterintuitively, food insecurity has been associated with an increased risk of obesity.¹⁹ The Bronx has the highest rate of obesity in New York City. A lack of accessibility to healthy, affordable food may account for this trend. In 2008, the City found that nine out of 12 community districts in the Bronx had too few supermarkets and 40% of residents had difficulty finding fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables in their borough, forcing some families and individuals to turn to less healthy, more inexpensive options. As a result, residents are more at risk for diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.²⁰ With the borough's high rates of poverty (27.9%) and unemployment (11.1%), unexpected health care costs connected to inadequate

nutrition can create additional stressors for families already struggling to make ends meet.²¹

Quality child care is a necessity for working families, particularly for single-parent families. For low-income families, there are a number of free or low-cost child care options, including the City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS), Division of Child Care and Head Start-funded group child care centers, family child care networks, Head Start programs, and child care vouchers. In New York City, 66% of all ACS early care and education services are concentrated in neighborhoods where more than 60% of low-income families with children reside. However, there are discrepancies in the availability of services in New York's poorest communities. Sixty-five percent of children living in the Bronx are from low-income families, but only 29% of children are receiving early care and education services. In the Fordham/Bronx Park neighborhood, there are only enough Head Start slots for 9% of eligible three- to four-year-olds, compared to the community district of East Harlem in Manhattan, which can serve 88% of eligible children. With the greatest enrollment rate (100%) citywide, the Bronx exhibits a high level of need for additional services.²²

When families are unable to make ends meet, children's well-being and futures are compromised. In 2009, nearly one-third (31%) of families in the New York City shelter system were currently involved or had past history with the City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS), Division of Child Protection and one-third (34%) of ACS cases cited homelessness as the primary reason for ACS-involvement.²³ Community districts in the South

Figure 4
PERCENT OF COST-BURDENED RENTERS
(by community district)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2009 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

The data represented are pooled between 2005 and 2009 to increase accuracy.



Bronx are among neighborhoods with the highest rates of foster care placements and abused and/or neglected children in New York City.²⁴ The South Bronx also has the highest rate of food insecurity in the nation and as a result, children are more at risk for negative health outcomes. The prevalence of obesity is high in the South Bronx; 47% of Head Start children, 39% of public school elementary children, and 38% of public high school students are obese or overweight.²⁵ Limited capacity for affordable, quality early care and education services offered in low-income communities in the Bronx leaves children vulnerable to developmental and cognitive delays. Furthermore, roughly half (49%) of all children under the age of 18 living in the South Bronx are living in poverty, compared to 27% of children citywide.²⁶

Responses from the ICPH NYC public opinion poll and 2005–2009 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates indicate that persons residing in the South Bronx—particularly black and Hispanic residents—exhibit high rates of interrelated indica-

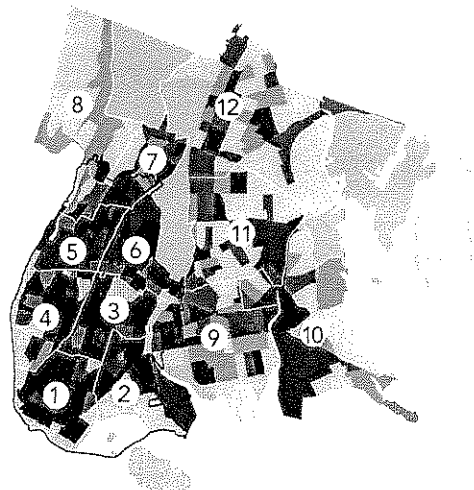
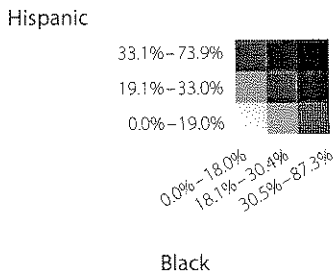
tors of severe poverty and are the most at risk of becoming homeless. The New York City Council, in partnership with the City's Department of Education and Department of Small Business Services, recently launched the *Bridge to Tomorrow* pilot program, which will connect individuals without a high school diploma to GED preparation classes or other adult education courses.²⁷ Parents' limited education, in conjunction with high unemployment rates, indicate a need for educational services and vocational training programs, such as the *Bridge to Tomorrow* initiative, in these communities. In addition, linking families to mainstream benefits—including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, SNAP, and other forms of public assistance—is critical to prevent their homelessness. Shelters systematically screening families for benefit eligibility and assessing their individualized needs can streamline access to mainstream services. Additionally, better coordination between shelters and City agencies could not only help families navigate a complex system of assistance, but also help families maintain benefits once they are enrolled in programs. A lack of accessible, healthy food options is another obstacle for families, although the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has recognized this issue and is currently working to promote healthier lifestyles in South Bronx neighborhoods through the *City's Healthy Bodega Initiative*.

Launched in 2006, the project targets three NYC neighborhoods by working with small corner stores to stock and distribute healthy foods and engaging residents in nutritional awareness programs.²⁸ South Bronx communities also have limited access to early care and education services. East Harlem and the Fordham/Bronx Park neighborhood have the same proportion of low-income children (68.1% and 68.9%, respectively); however, East Harlem has 1,296 Head Start slots for eligible three- to four-year olds, while Fordham/Bronx Park has the capacity to serve 366 children.²⁹ Given severe budget restraints and proposed cuts to City-subsidized child care, it is crucial to at least preserve the number slots currently available to low-income families.³⁰ However, additional Head Start slots and ACS-funded services are needed to serve a greater percentage of eligible children in South Bronx communities. In light of these overlapping risk factors in the South Bronx, New York City has an obligation to coordinate and target assistance and homelessness prevention efforts to benefit families with the greatest need for services.

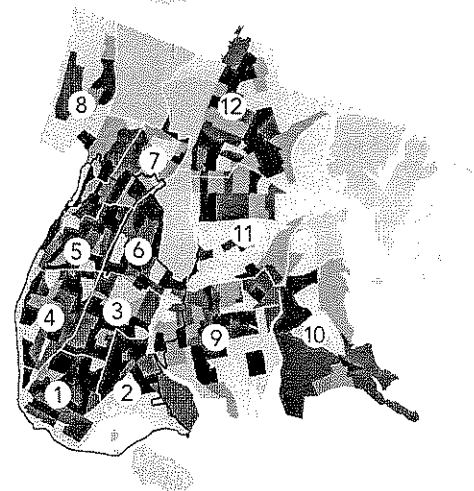
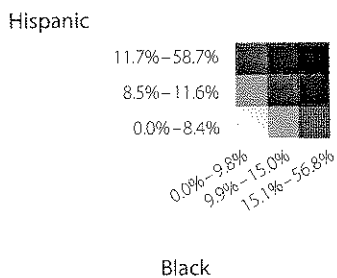
Appendix: Bronx

 Park
 Congressional District 16
 Community districts are numbered and delineated in white.

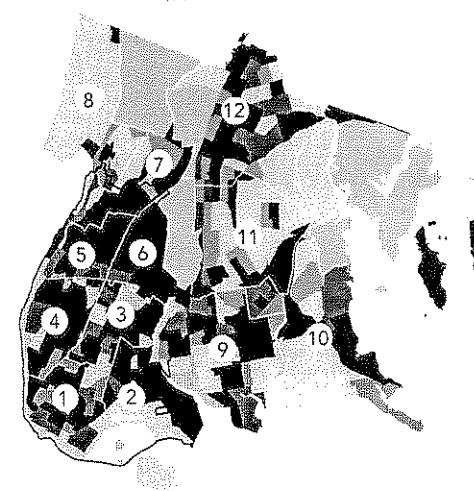
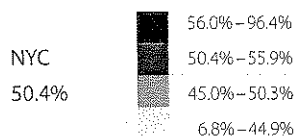
PERCENT OF PERSONS IN POVERTY
(by race or ethnicity and census tract)



PERCENT OF UNEMPLOYED PERSONS
(by race or ethnicity and census tract)



PERCENT OF COST-BURDENED RENTERS
(by census tract)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2009 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

Endnotes

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The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH) is an independent nonprofit research organization based in New York City. ICPH studies the impact of poverty on family and child well-being and generates research that will enhance public policies and programs affecting poor or homeless children and their families. Specifically, ICPH examines the condition of extreme poverty in the United States and its effect on educational attainment, housing, employment, child welfare, domestic violence, and family wellness. Please visit our Web site for more information: www.ICPHusa.org.

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