

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

Community Learning Research Fellows

Center for Hartford Engagement and Research

2013

Zoned Out: How Residential Zoning Policy and Housing Are Linked to Schooling in Connecticut

Fionnuala Darby-Hudgens

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/clrf>

Recommended Citation

Darby-Hudgens, Fionnuala, "Zoned Out: How Residential Zoning Policy and Housing Are Linked to Schooling in Connecticut" (2013). *Community Learning Research Fellows*. 71.
<https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/clrf/71>

Zoned Out: How Residential Zoning Policy and Housing Are Linked to Schooling in Connecticut

Fionnuala Darby-Hudgens

Professor Jack Dougherty, Faculty Advisor Connecticut Fair Housing Center, Community Partner

Abstract

In Connecticut, the majority of low-income children, unlike their higher income peers, are enrolled in the poorest performing public schools, which leads to economically segregated school district populations. These observations raise important questions about the external barriers that prevent economic diversity in Connecticut's schools. The study identifies housing policy, specifically restrictive zoning practices, as an external barrier, raising the questions: Does restrictive zoning correlate with the cost of homeownership? Is residential zoning policy associated with school district performance? Employing a cross-sectional, quantitative approach, this study examines the consequences of housing policy on public school district performance. Data are collected on municipal-level zoning ordinances for 166 municipalities in Connecticut and on statewide-standardized exam scores by school district. The findings suggest that restrictive residential zoning practices that limit the development of economically diverse housing correlate with school district performance: in general, the less restrictive the municipal zoning practice, the lower the school district performance on state exams. These findings recognize a housing policy that contributes to the economic segregation of Connecticut public schools and arguably to the significant difference in performance among public schools.

Introduction

Governor Malloy declared 2012 to be the "Era of Education Reform" for Connecticut's public schools. The Governor's goal to reform Connecticut education is impressive. However, his five-point plan addresses only the internal structure of the school environment. It ignores the external inequalities that exist in terms of school choice and opportunity, namely how residential location can affect educational opportunity for many Connecticut students. One possible mechanism through which location and school performance are linked is the exclusionary housing and zoning practices used by many Connecticut towns.

Connecticut is home to the largest achievement gap in the nation. The achievement gap between low and non low-income students is a consequence of the economic segregation present in Connecticut's schools. Finding relationships between housing, zoning, and schooling will help us understand the extreme economic segregation present in Connecticut's public schools. The objective of this research is to identify an external barrier to ending the isolation of Connecticut's low-income students, and closing the achievement gap between low-income and non low-income students.

Research Questions

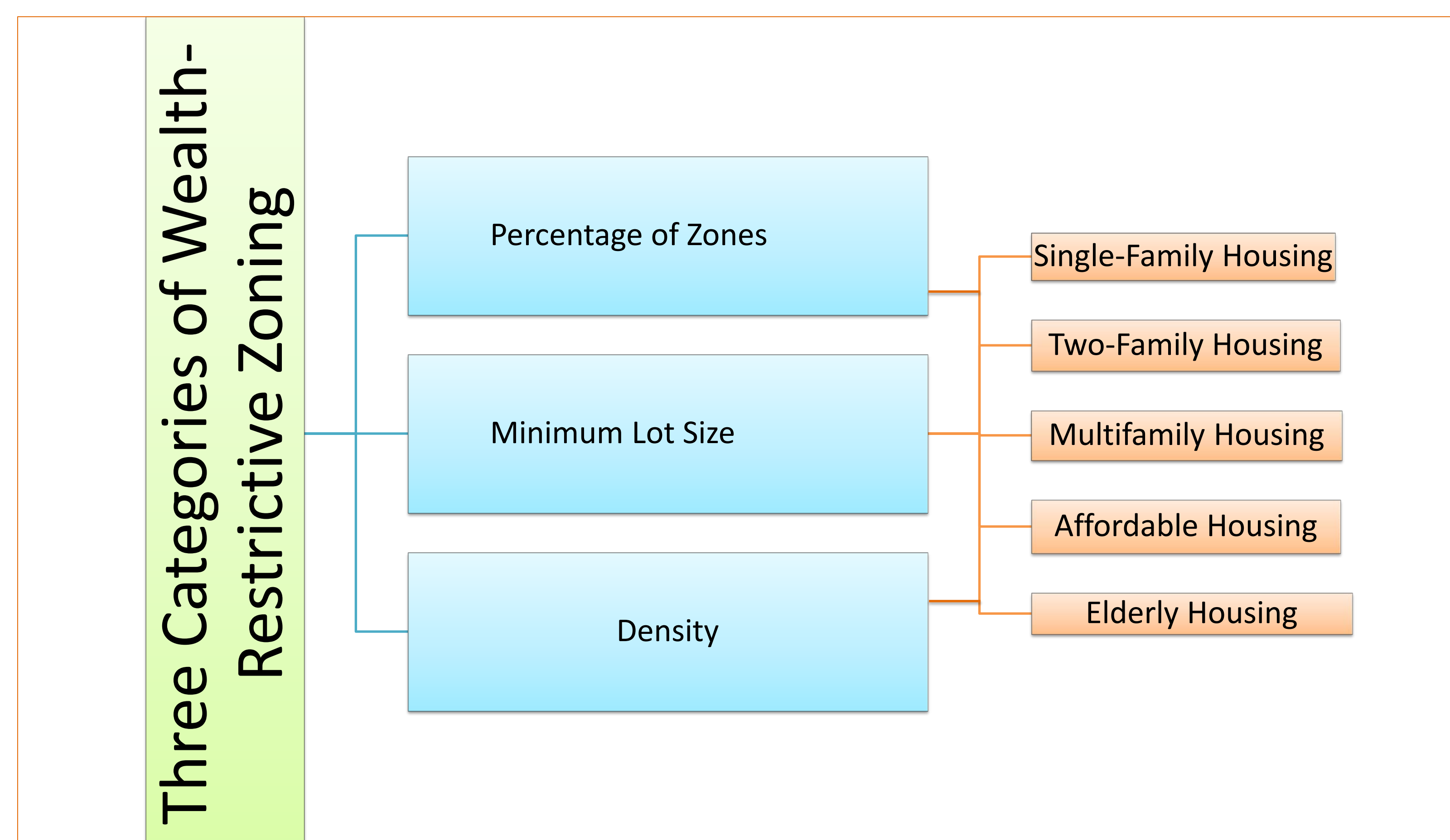
Does wealth-restrictive zoning correlate with the cost of home ownership?

Is wealth-restrictive zoning associated with school district performance?

Data & Methods

Zoning Policy

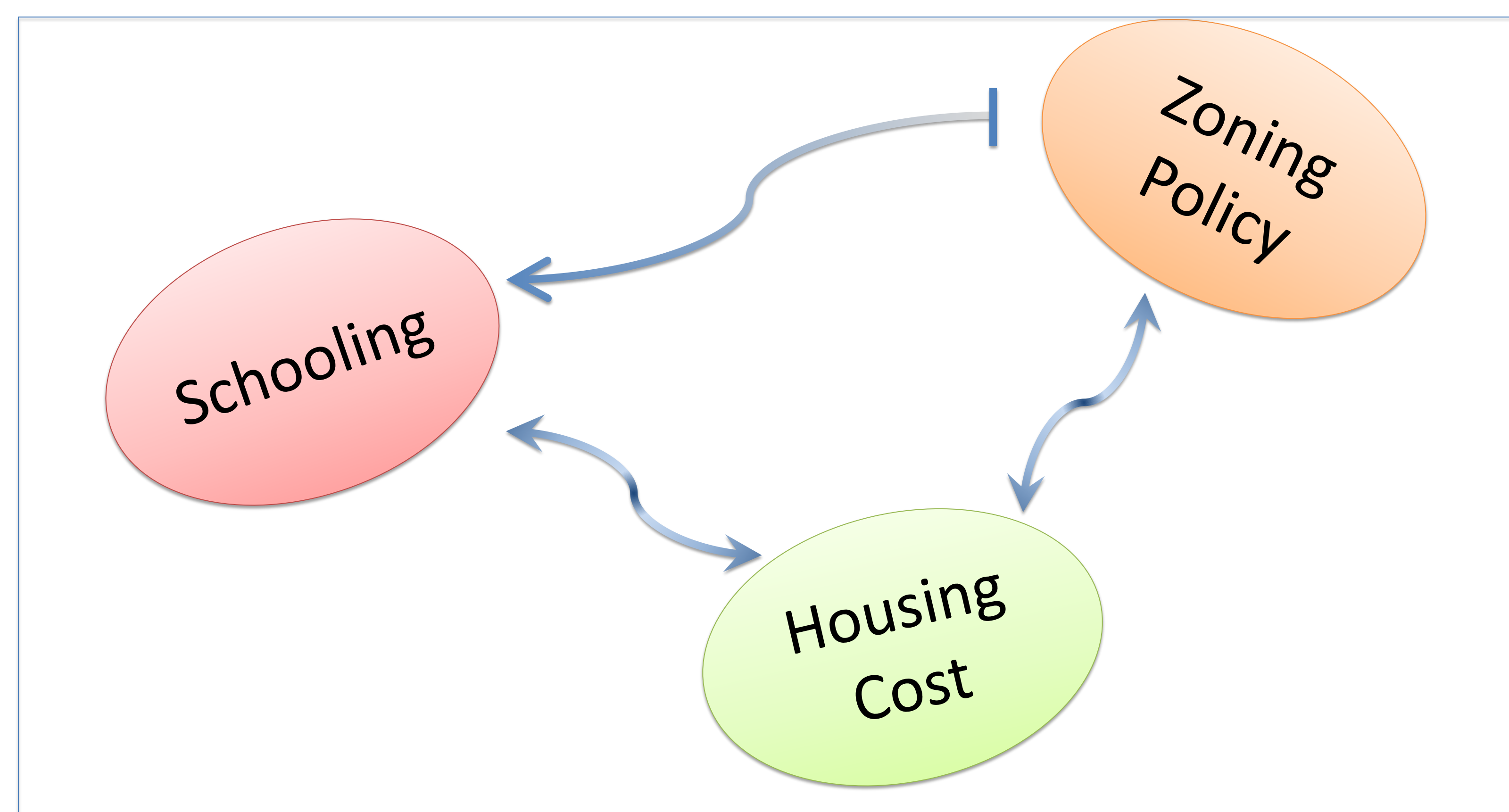
Three common zoning practices are used to measure Connecticut residential zoning policy: the percentages of zones allowing for a specific type of housing; minimum lot size restrictions; and the maximum density restrictions. All three variables are then subdivided by restrictions placed on specific types of housing: single-family housing, two-family housing, multifamily housing, affordable housing, and elderly housing.



Schooling and Housing

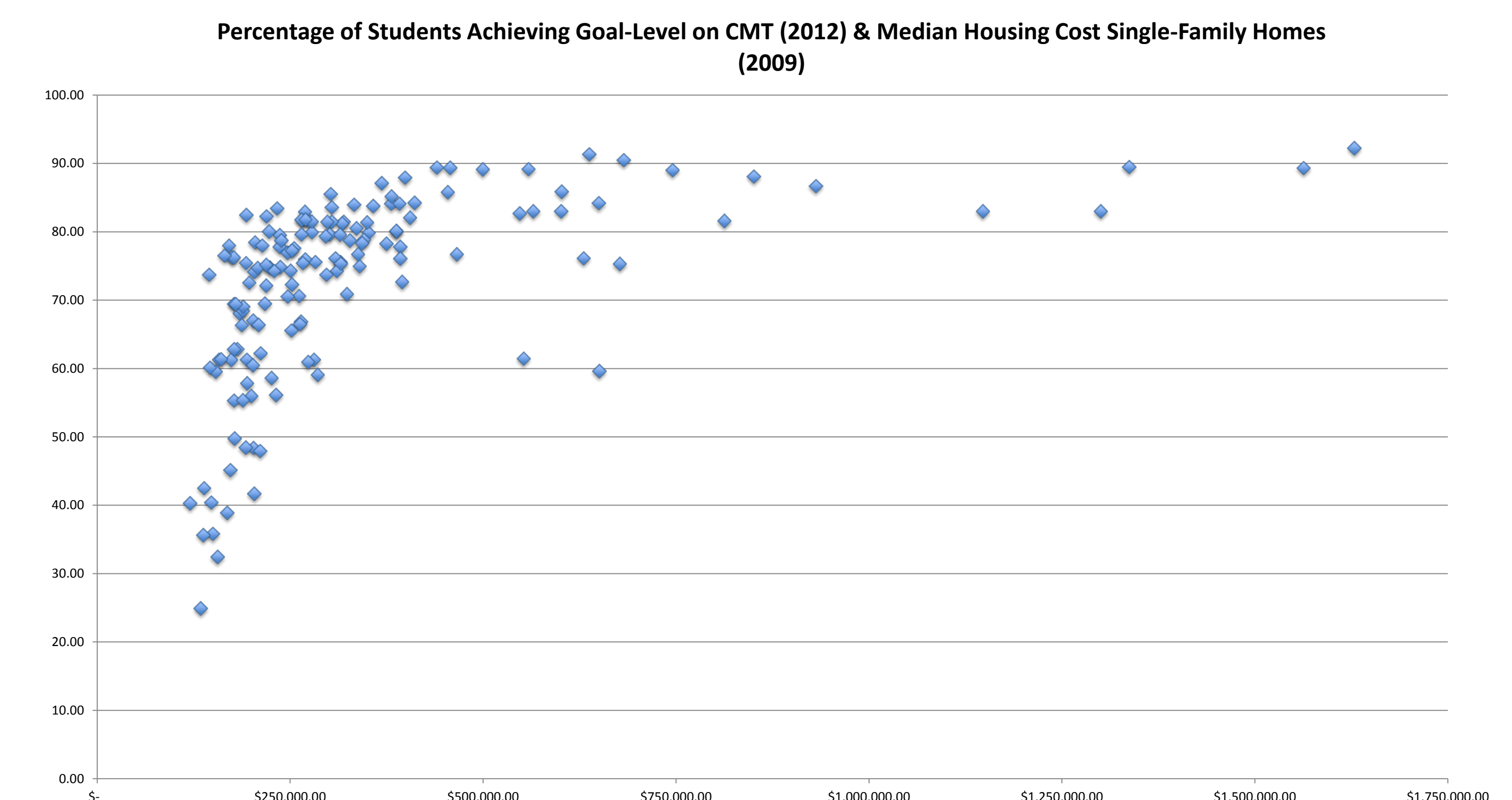
- Schooling performance is measured using Connecticut Mastery Test scores.
- Housing cost is measured by the median price of single-family home sales in 2009, for each municipality in CT.

Finding Relationships Between Housing, Zoning, And Schooling



Findings

Relationship Between Housing Cost and Schooling



Wealth-Restrictive Zoning and CMT Achievement Correlations

Statistically significant relationships are found between wealth-restrictive zoning variables that affect multifamily and two-family development and schooling performance. All correlations found are negative; suggesting that as wealth-restrictive zoning becomes less restrictive to two-family and multifamily development schooling performance decreases.

	Correlation	Percentage of Students at Goal Level on CMT
Percentage of the Total Number of Zones that Allow for Two-family Housing	-.175*	162
Percentage of the Total Number of Zones that Allow for Multifamily Housing	-.225**	162
Two-Family: Maximum Number of Units per/Acre Permitted	-.351**	90
Multifamily: Maximum Number of Units per/Acre Permitted	-.323**	119

Conclusion & Future Research

This study provides noteworthy claims about housing, zoning, and schooling individually, and the relationships between these institutions in Connecticut. The preliminary findings confirm the existing literature which underscores large student achievement and housing wealth gaps across the state of CT. The findings additionally explain how zoning is exclusionary to various housing types, with the most wealth-restrictive zoning applied to two-family, multifamily and affordable housing. Most importantly, the study provides extensive evidence that statistically significant relationships exist between housing, zoning, and schooling. It is imperative that this research is continued to test whether more concrete causal relationships exist between housing, zoning, and schooling which go beyond the preliminary findings offered here.