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Schoolyards Count

- Significant public health research points to the importance of the built environment in promoting physical activity
- Large volume of international studies that assess playground opportunities and measure kids' motion using accelerometers, observation – better playgrounds mean more active children
- Schoolyards also important for students' environmental learning, and social-emotional development through play

Our questions

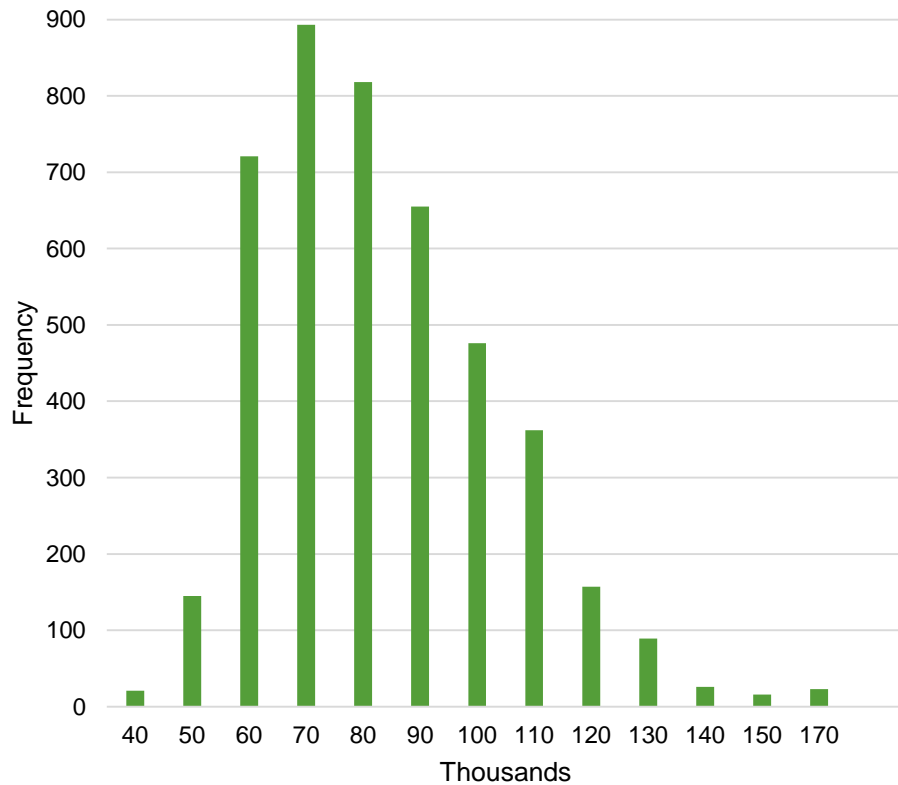
- How do Ontario's playgrounds measure up?
- How much variation is there in playground quality across Ontario?
- What might be drivers of these variations?
 - Income?
 - Public policy? At what level?

Methods

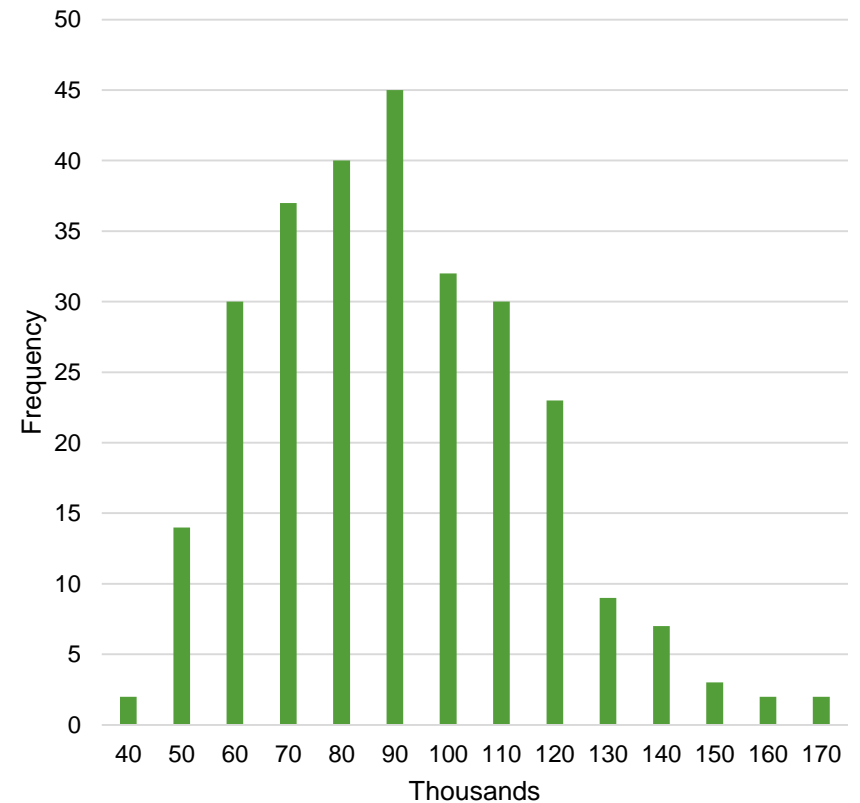
- Used validated SPEEDY audit tool, adapted with authors to include new emphasis on environmental opportunities
- Median income per school data from Ministry of Ed, calculations based on 2016 census
- Initial data collection – ‘citizen science’ – asked people to audit their own schoolyard ($n = \sim 110$)
- Second round of data collection in target municipalities – hired students to get representative samples of schools in Toronto (GTA), Ottawa (East), Brantford (SW), and Sudbury (North) – minimum of 30 schools
- Total: ~ 250 of Ontario’s 5000 schools
 - 70% elementary schools, 30% secondary schools across Ontario (consistent proportion in each target city; roughly 30% SEC)

Sample broadly comparable to Ontario

Provincial



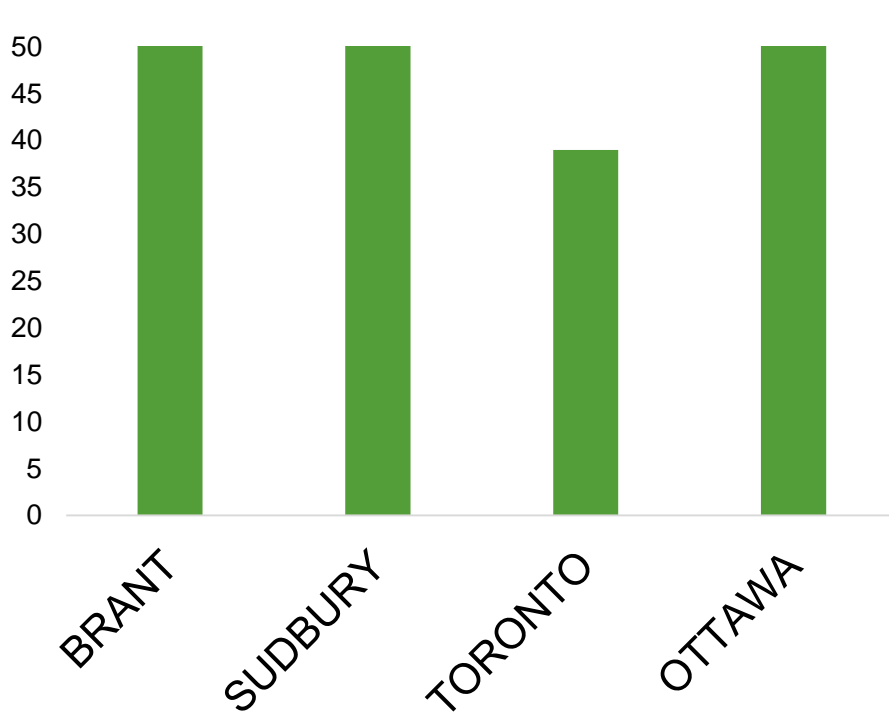
Sample



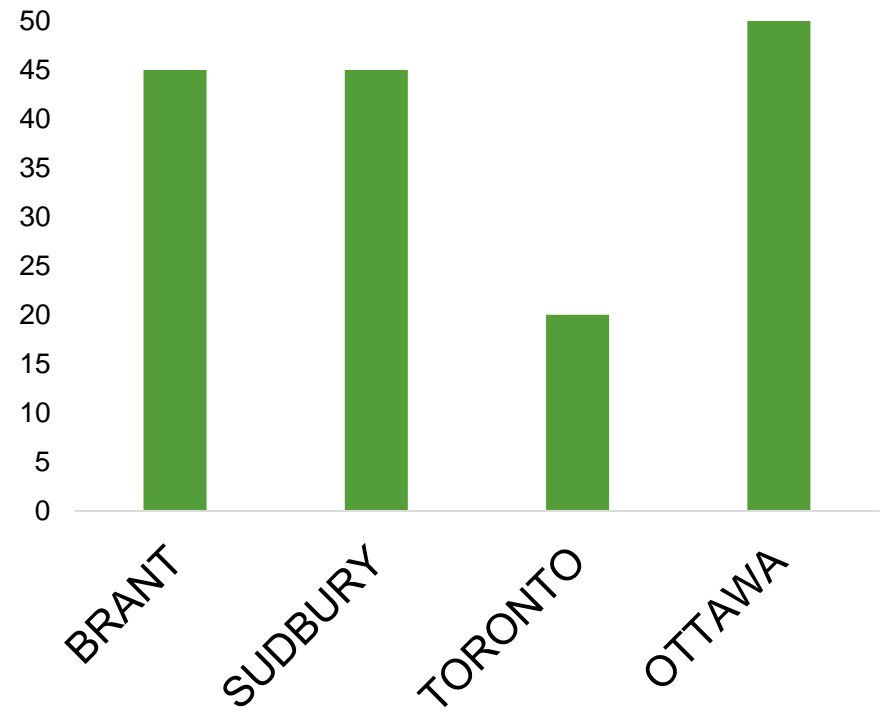
HUGE variation across all themes

e.g. active transportation

% of schools with adjacent roads over 40 kmh



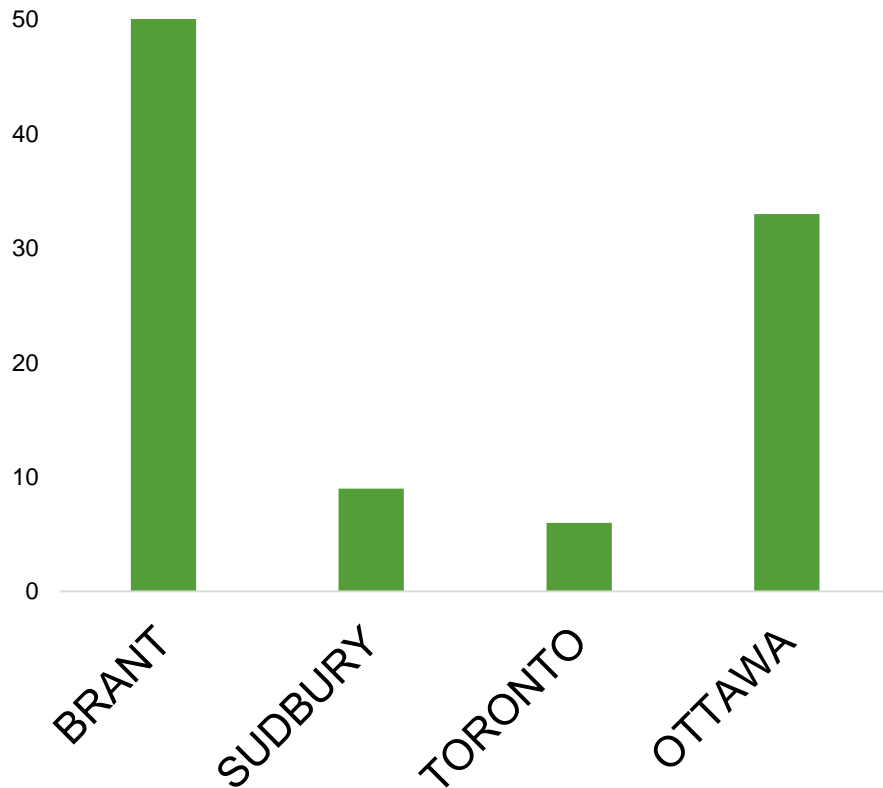
% of schools accessible by bike lane



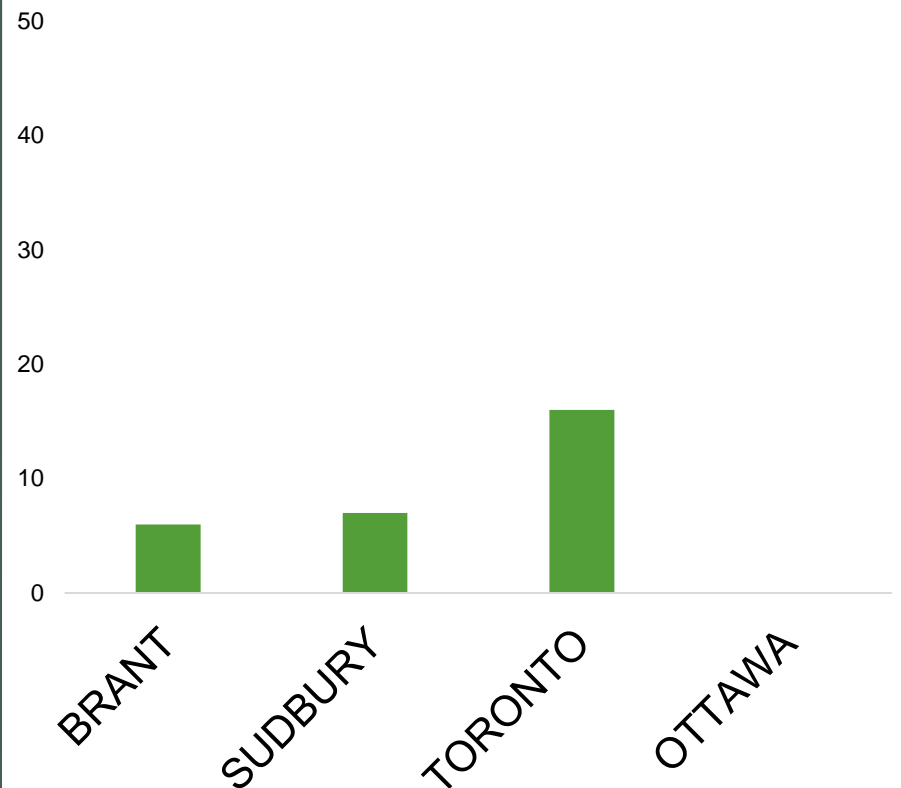
Play structures and sports facilities (1)

multi-component play structures

% of schools with **none**

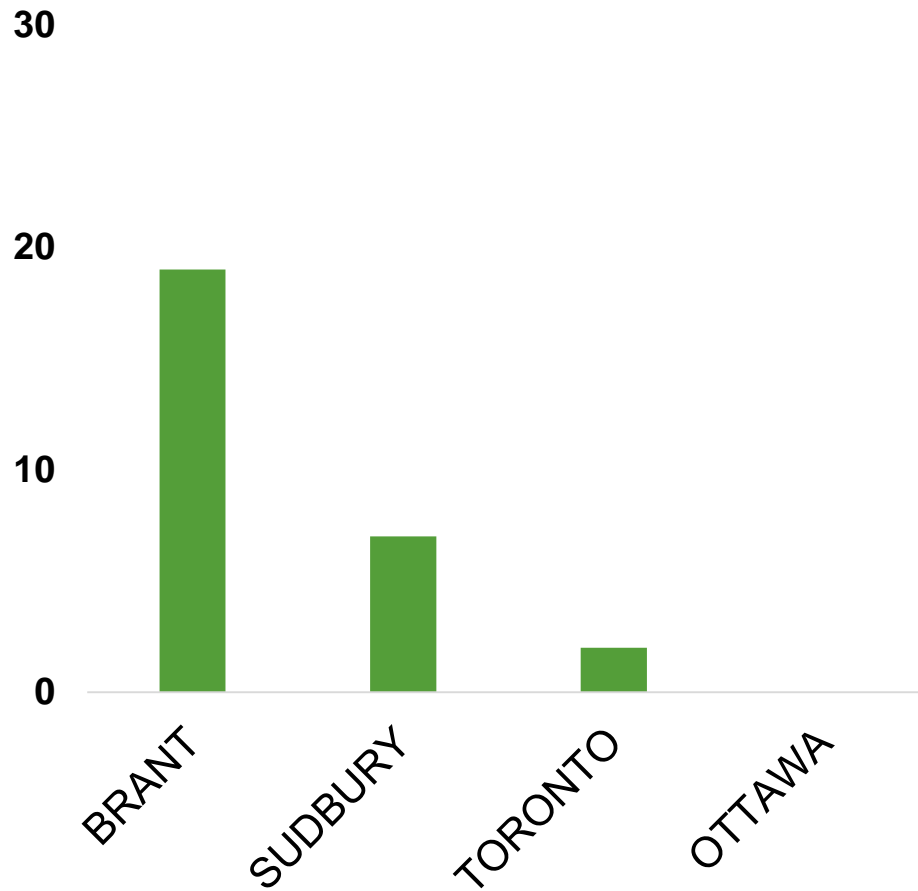


% of schools with **3+**

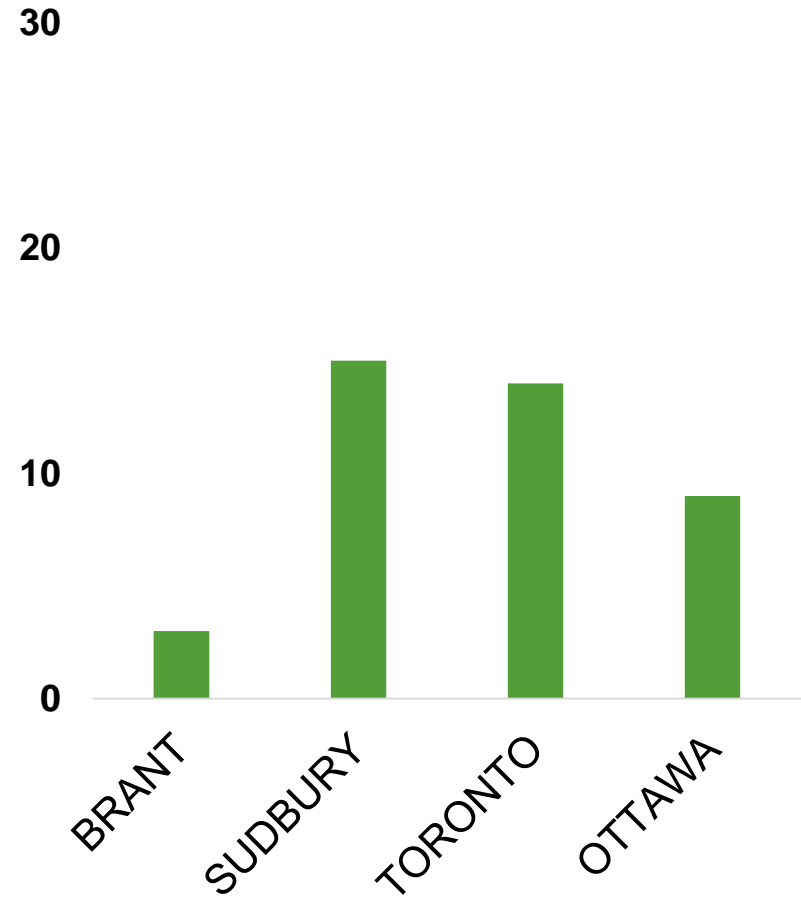


Playing fields

% of schools with none



% of schools with 3+



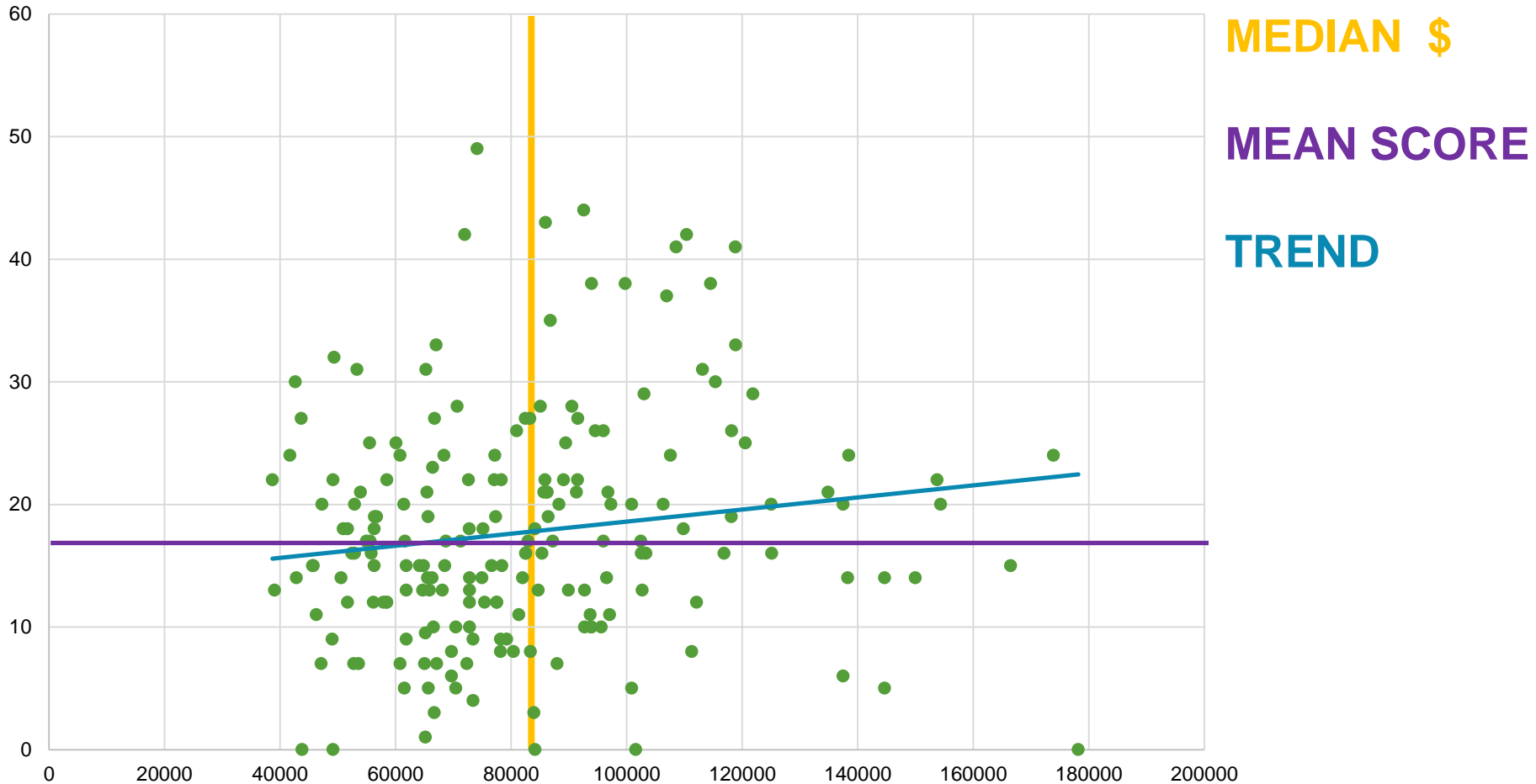
Green opportunities: uneven!

Across Ontario:

- 33% of schoolyards with cultivated gardens **or** wildlife-promoting spaces (e.g. no-mow areas, butterfly gardens)
- 15% of schoolyards with more than 20% of play area paved
 - 9% of schoolyards with more than 40% of play area paved
- 55% of schoolyards with outdoor classrooms

What drives variation? Family income?

Physical activity suitability score by median household income



What drives variation: Policy?

- Product of action by multiple levels of government:
 - Provincial funding formula – broad grant to school boards, few limits on fundraising
 - School boards – budget decisions, planning resources and expertise
 - Municipal governments (e.g. active transportation, tree-planting)
 - Individual schools – staff priorities, parent resources
- Variation appears depend on total resources in the community – even with a consistent funding formula

What's next?

Policy: Should we have minimum standards for schoolyards in Ontario?

- Access to greenery – grass, trees, gardens
- Diverse play settings – should **any** schools have almost no facilities for kids to play?

Research: What might explain the relationship between family income and schoolyard quality?

- Fundraising? Advocacy? Grants or matching funds?

School-level engagement: Do you want to take a second look at your schoolyard? Audit tool is still available on website.

Thank you!

www.ophea.net/schoolyardscount

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