



# Playspace Equity for Baltimore Kids

Using Data to Understand and Address Community Infrastructure Needs

**Isaac D. Castillo**

Senior Advisor – Learning and Evaluation

**Colleen Coyne**

Senior Analyst – Evidence and Insights

Baltimore Data Week

July 18, 2022



# Who is KABOOM!?

KABOOM! is the national nonprofit that works to end playspace inequity for good.

We define playspace inequity as a lack of access to, and a sense of belonging in, quality playspaces due to the effects of systemic racism in communities across the country.



# What do we do?

We identify where places to play are needed most and partner with kids, community members and a diverse range of partners to build kid-designed playspaces that spark joy and foster a sense of belonging.

Our community-centered approach ensures that all KABOOM! playspaces reflect the needs and wants of the community, feel safe and welcoming, and create positive impact for years to come.

**17,000+**

playspaces built  
or improved

**1.5M**

volunteers engaged

**11.5M**

kids with new  
opportunities  
to play





# Transforming Play Landscape

## OUR BOLD GOAL:

Achieve playspace equity in the United States so that every child can experience the same benefits & have access to the same opportunities to thrive that playspaces provide.





# Why Do Playspaces Matter?

Decades of research show that play promotes physical, social, and emotional health, builds resilience, and enhances learning.

- Addition of play structures to previously empty playgrounds is linked to increases in physically active play.
- Lack of quality parks and places to play near where kids live is correlated with lower levels of physical activity, particularly in kids of color and kids from communities with lower socio-economic status.
- Active play has the potential to contribute to children's daily physical activity needs as well as to the development of fundamental motor skills.





# Root Causes of Playspace Inequity

It is critical that we address the root cause of inequitable access to quality playspaces:

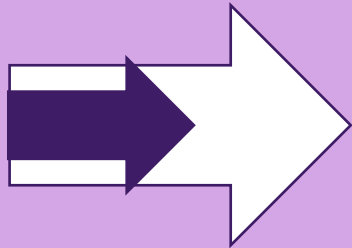
**inequity stemming from systemic racism.**

Across the nation, communities of color disproportionately lack access to quality playspaces where they live and learn.



# Today, inequities still exist, as kids of color are denied the childhood right to access quality, safe playspaces.

KABOOM! and our research partners at North Carolina State University recently completed a literature review that found:



Disparities in access and **quality of playspaces could result from historical and contemporary forms of systemic racism**, such as racially discriminatory land use and housing policies.



Lower socio-economic status (SES), racial and ethnic minorities, and rural populations appear to have **more limited access to playspaces** compared to higher SES, non-Hispanic white, and urban groups.



In some communities, access distance to playspaces is equitable, but the **quality of facilities and amenities within playspaces is inequitable** and restricts opportunities for play.



# Mapping the Data





# Data to Inform Playspace Decisions

*With this data, we can.....*

- Identify and prioritize areas where historic disinvestment led to low playspace access and quality.
- Partner with organizations that can help address playspace inequity within priority areas.
- Develop a shared action plan with partners to ensure playspaces are accessible and well-maintained over an extended period of time.

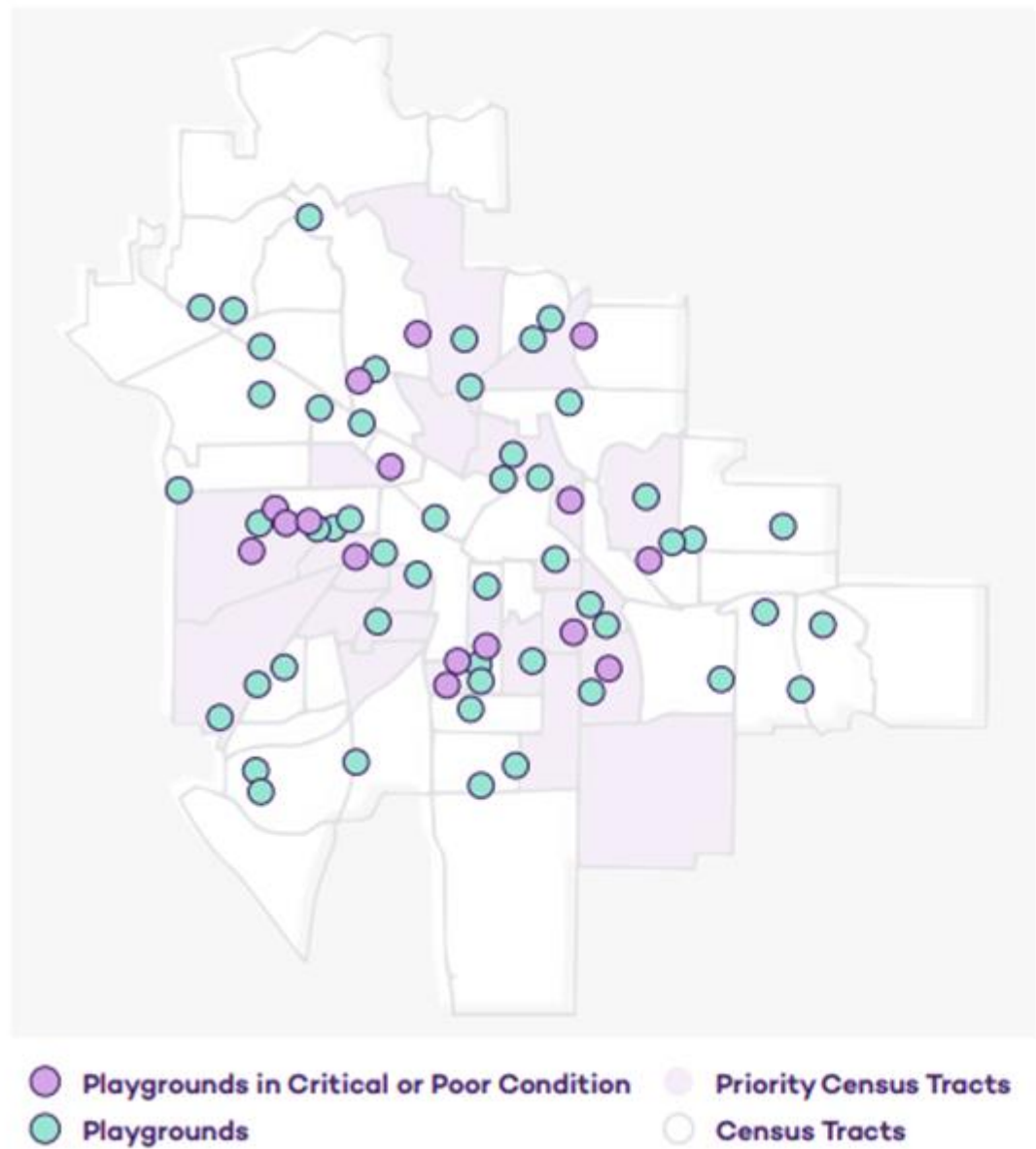


# Playspace Mapping Approach

- Locate the playspaces. What is **access** to playspaces like in a community?
- Overlay **community demographic** data. Who lives near playspaces?
- Determine **quality**. What is the physical condition of the playspace, including safety, size and play value?
- Examine **sense of belonging**. Does the current playspace reflect the communities needs and wants?



# Prioritized Communities for Playspace Investment



## INSIGHTS FROM PLAYSPACE MAPPING

**70%** of playgrounds in poor or critical condition where located in communities with a higher concentration of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents per capita than the rest of the city

More than **80%** of the playgrounds that were removed between 2016 and 2021 were located in primarily BIPOC communities

**80%** of the new playgrounds built between 2016 and 2021 were located communities with less BIPOC residents per capita than the city at large

# Playspace Mapping Case Study





# Mapping Playspace Inequity in Baltimore

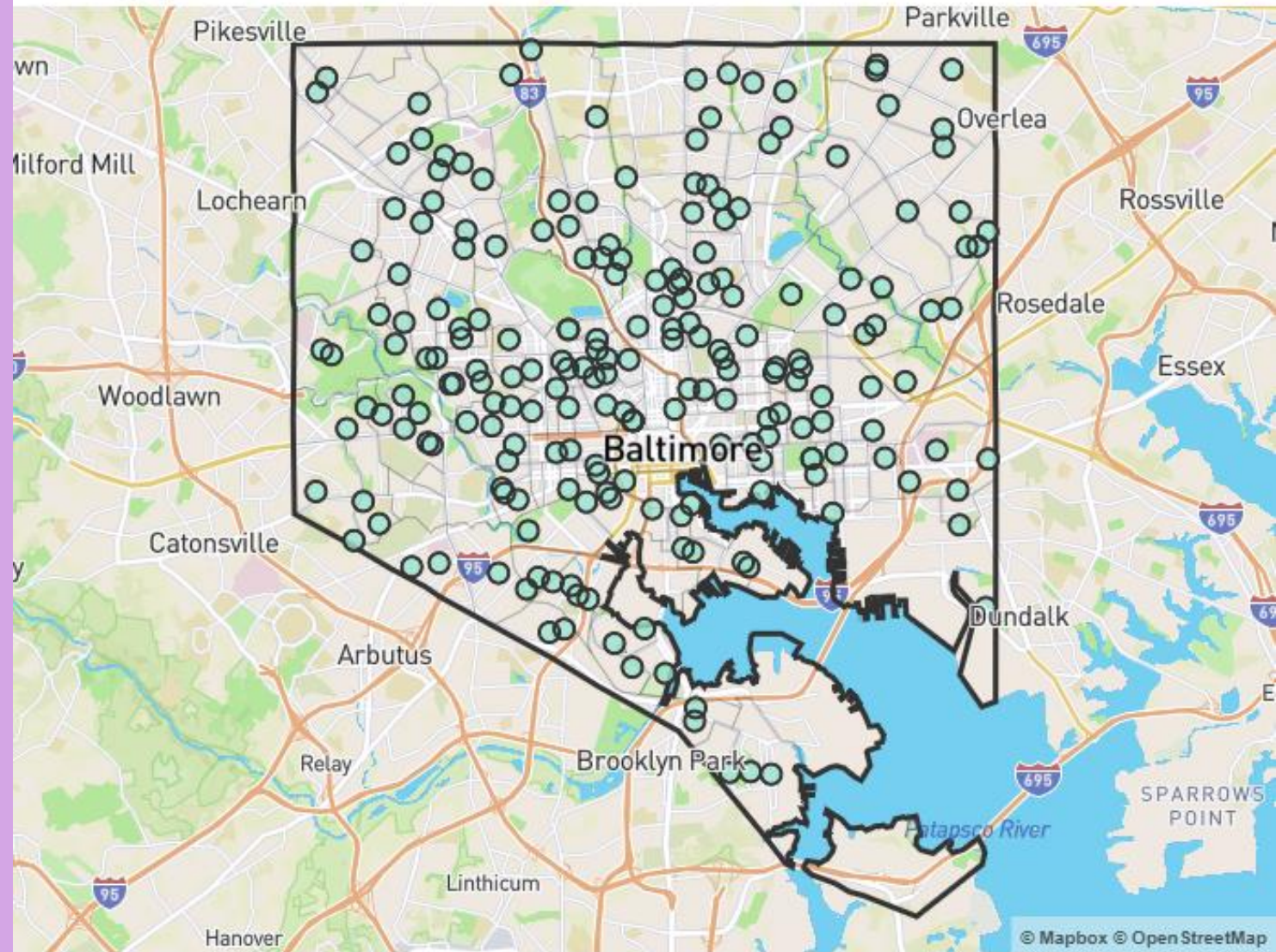
**KABOOM! partnered with Baltimore City Recreation and Parks and Baltimore City Public Schools to identify census tracts experiencing playspace inequity.**

**Here is what we did.....**



# Where are Baltimore's Playgrounds Located?

All Playspaces Across Baltimore Schools and Parks



- ALL Baltimore Playground Locations
- Baltimore, MD
- Census Tracts inside Baltimore, MD

Sources: CDC BRFSS PLACES; CDC NCHS USALEEP; US Census ACS 5-year

# Playspace Assessment

- KABOOM! worked with Baltimore City Schools to conduct a playspace quality assessment, identifying school playgrounds that needed to be replaced or modernized.
- Recreation and Parks Department provided KABOOM! with recent quality data for playgrounds, which we analyzed to identify priority playgrounds for replacement.

**215 playspaces in Baltimore City parks and schools were assessed in 2022.**





# Assessing Playspace Quality

## Example Assessment Questions:

- Condition of playground components (slides, swings, stairs, etc.)
- Condition of fencing around site
- Condition of surfacing under/around play components

## Scale:

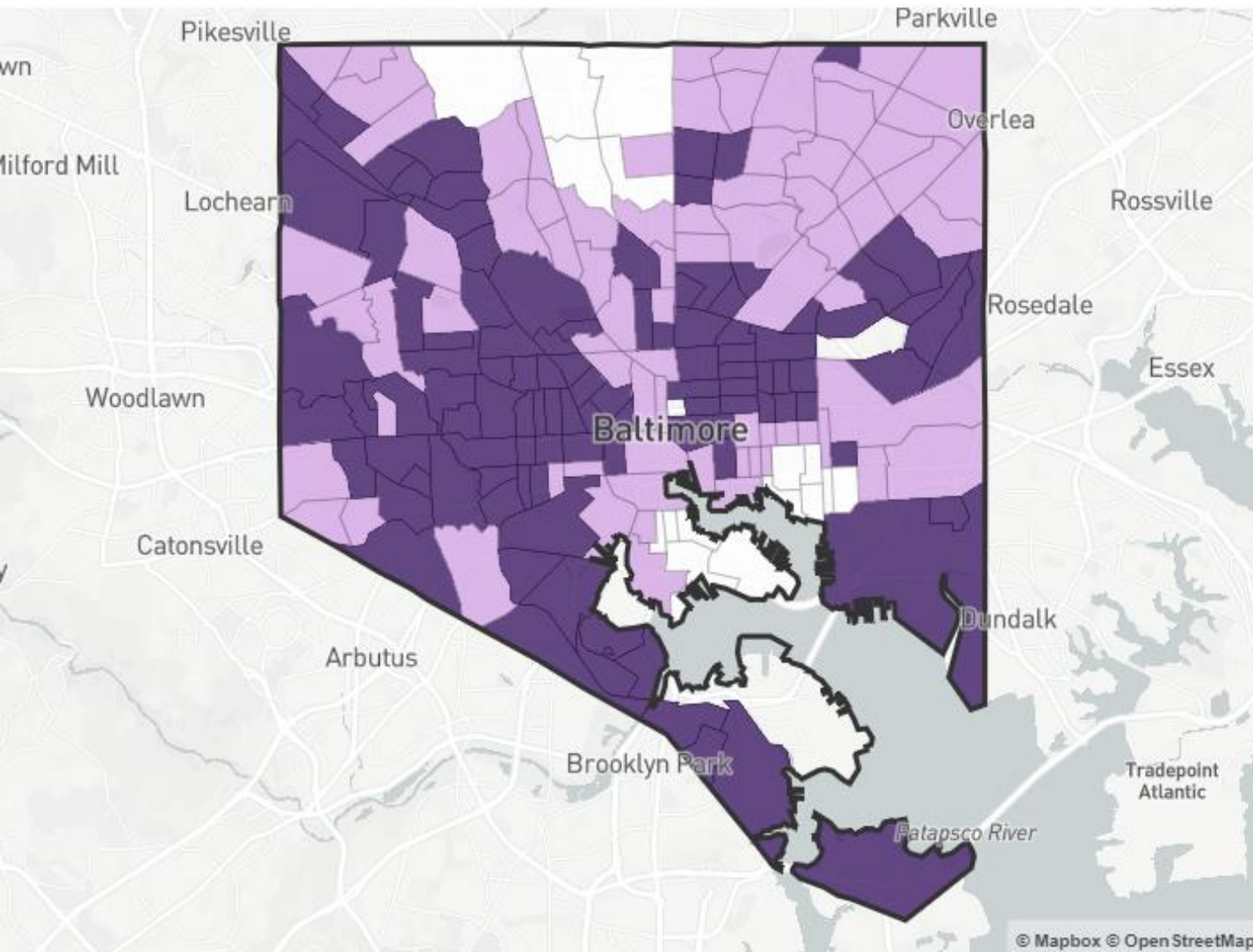
- **1: Unacceptable**; extremely dangerous and/or broken to the point of being unusable
- **2: Borderline**; could be dangerous or is damaged and lacking some usability
- **3: Acceptable**; minor flaws or cosmetic problems but not dangerous or unusable
- **4: Good**; no problems
- **n/a: Not applicable**; not present; or unable to tell



# What does an Unacceptable Playground look like?



## Areas With Lower Median Household Income



□ Baltimore, MD

Median Household Income



Sources: US Census ACS 5-year

# Prioritizing Areas Using Income

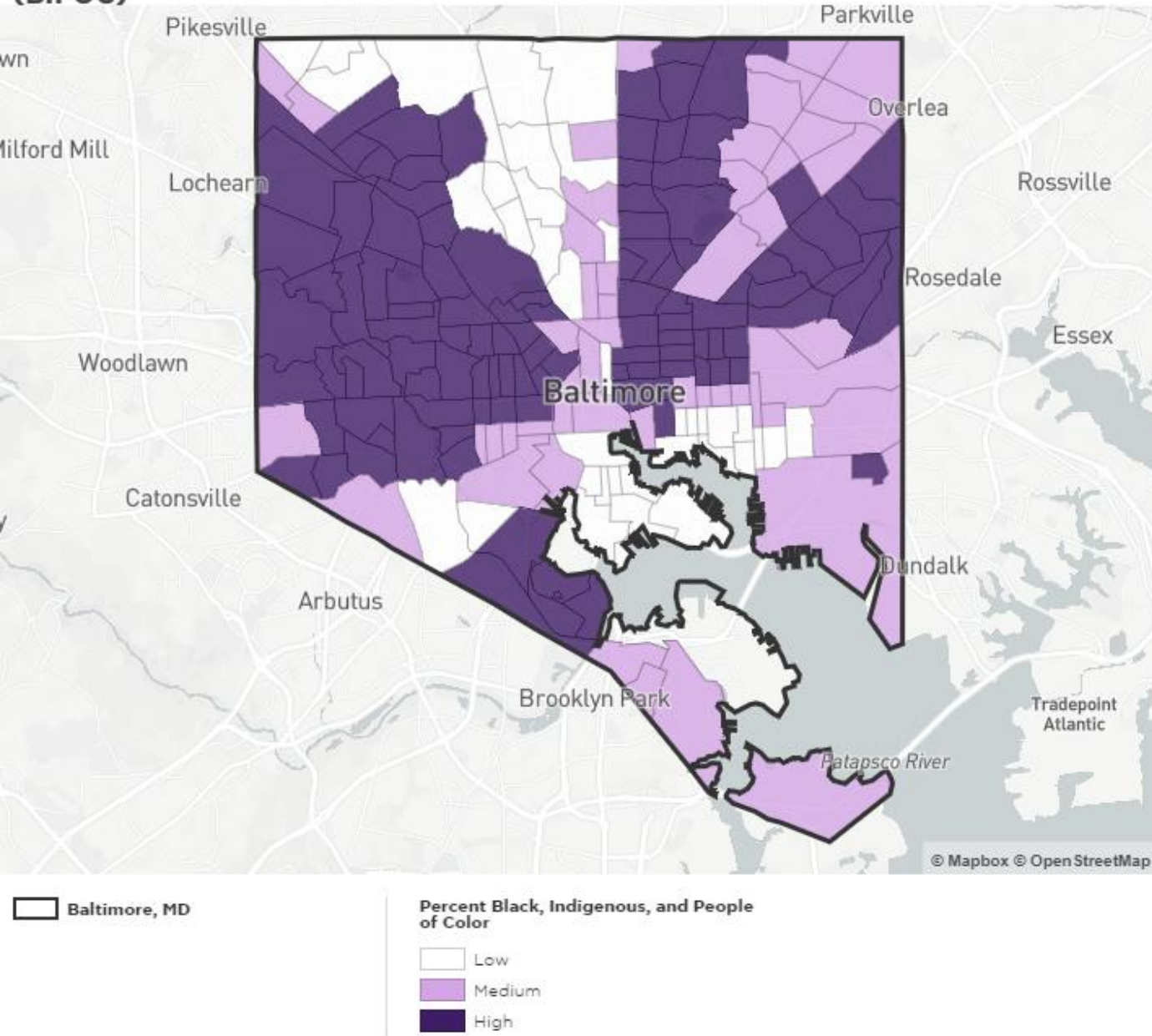
KABOOM! used data from the American Community Survey to identify census tracts in Baltimore City with low Median Household Income- equal to or less than 80% of the area median income.

We then overlaid these census tracts with...





## Areas With Higher Percentages of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)



# Prioritizing Areas Using BIPOC Population

KABOOM! also used American Community Survey data to identify census tracts in Baltimore City with large percentages of BIPOC residents.

When combined with the median income data, we identified several census tracts that should be prioritized to address inequity.



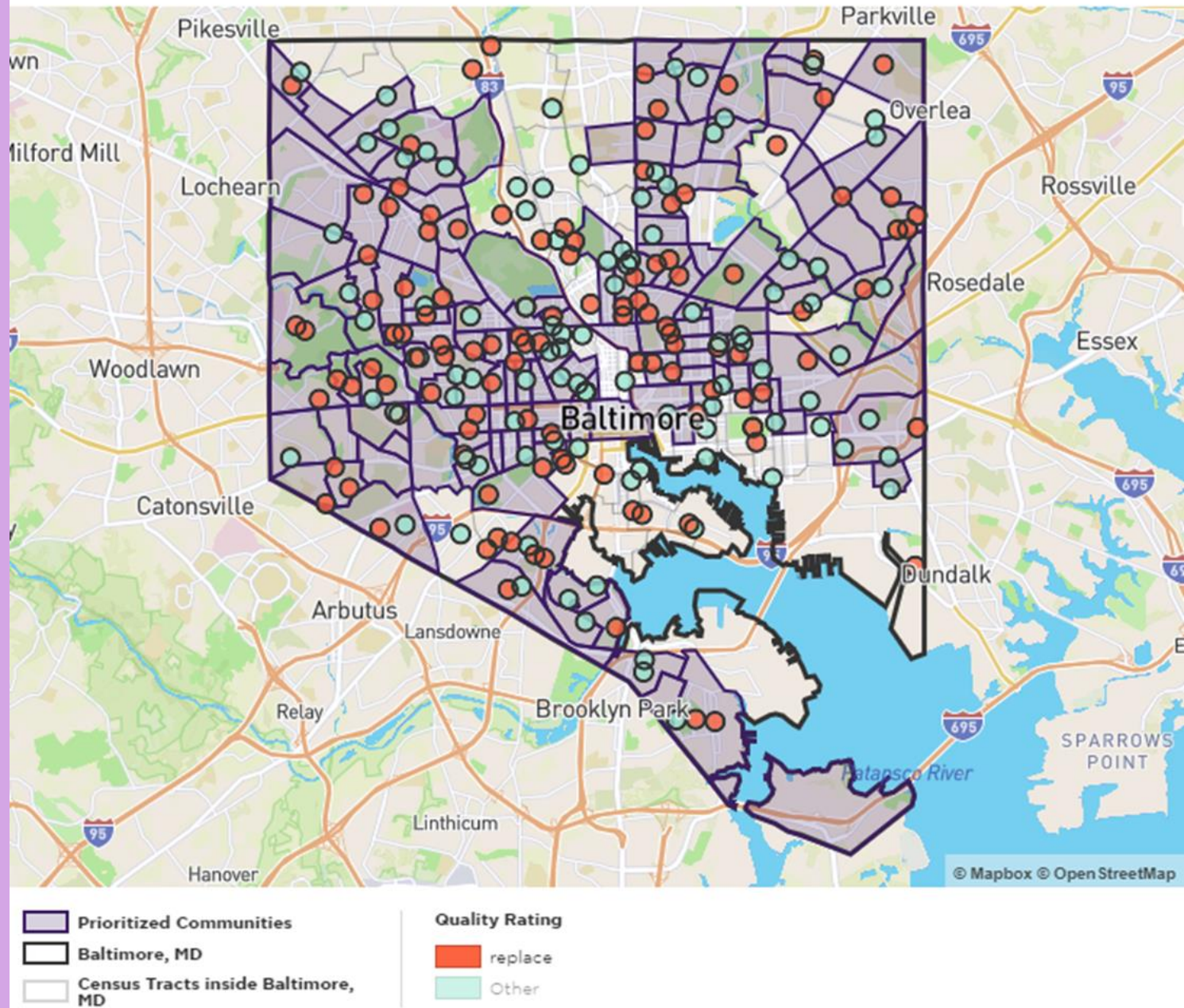
# Mapping Playspace Quality

Using household income and percentage of BIPOC population, we identified priority census tracts.

We mapped the locations of all 215 playspaces that were assessed – and indicated the playspaces that needed to be replaced (in poor condition).



All Playspaces Across Baltimore Schools and Parks



Sources: CDC BRFSS PLACES; CDC NCHS USALEEP; US Census ACS 5-year

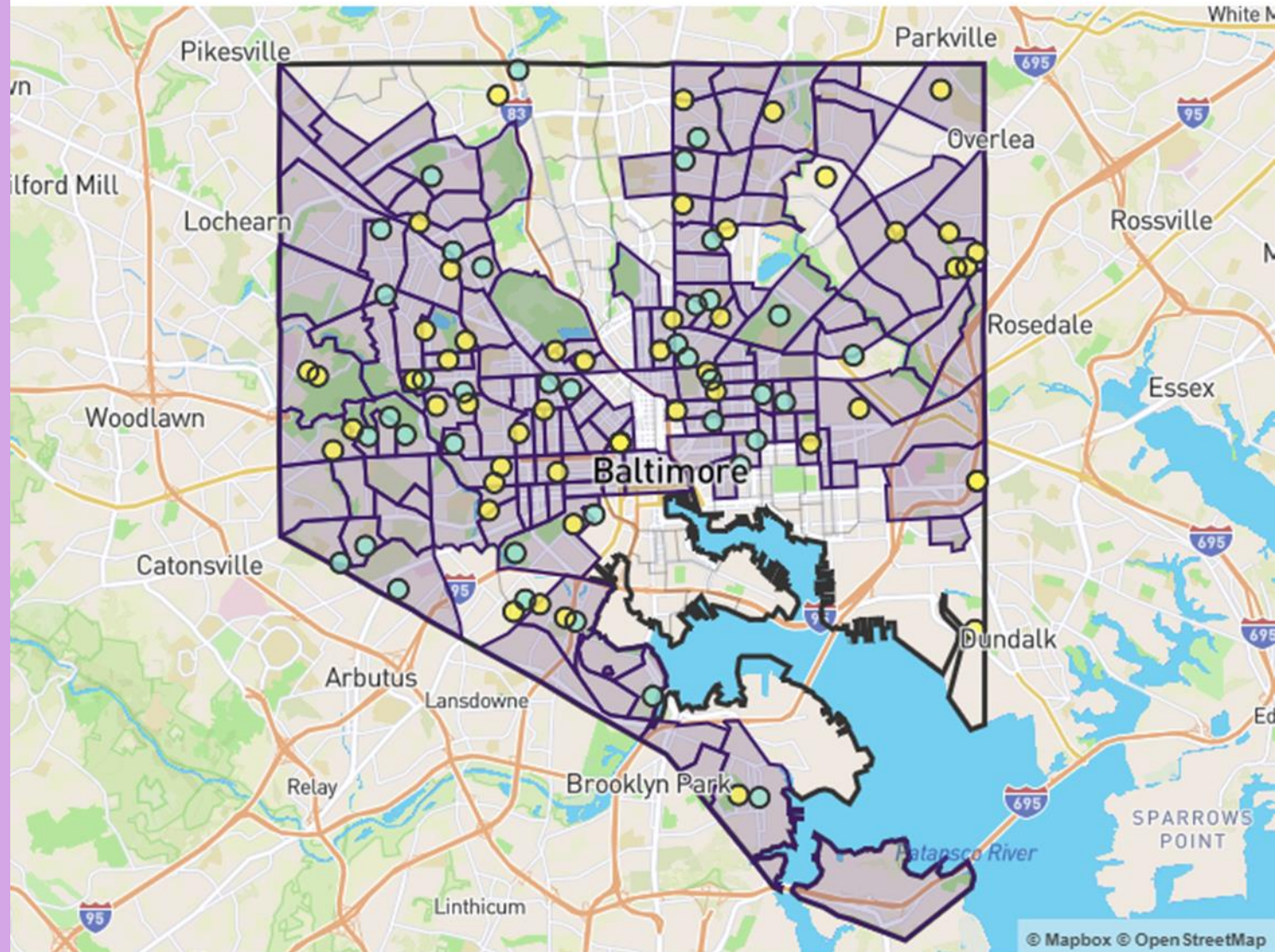





# Prioritizing Playspaces

This map shows all prioritized playspaces for replacement. With color coding on existing funding status.

There are a few playspaces outside the priority census tracts – these were identified as priority playspaces by City Schools.

Prioritized Communities for Playspace Investment



 Prioritized Communities  
 Baltimore, MD  
 Census Tracts inside Baltimore, MD

**Status**  
 Funded through Other Source  
 Need Funding

Sources: CDC BRFSS PLACES; CDC NCHS USALEEP; US Census ACS 5-year



# Solving Playspace Inequity in Baltimore

Using data from Baltimore City Public Schools ,and the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks (BCRP), KABOOM! assessed and mapped 215 playspaces across Baltimore City.

99

Playgrounds prioritized for replacement based on quality and equity data

37

Playground replacements already funded through public dollars since the launch of 25 in 5 Initiative in Baltimore

62

Playgrounds still in need of immediate replacement



# Transforming Playspaces



before



after



# Thank you!

**Kaboom.org**  
**@kaboom**

**Colleen Coyne**  
**CCoyne@kaboom.org**

**Isaac D. Castillo**  
**ICastillo@kaboom.org**

