

ParlaMi di Scuola

Educational Inequalities, School Transition, and Dropout Risk in Milan

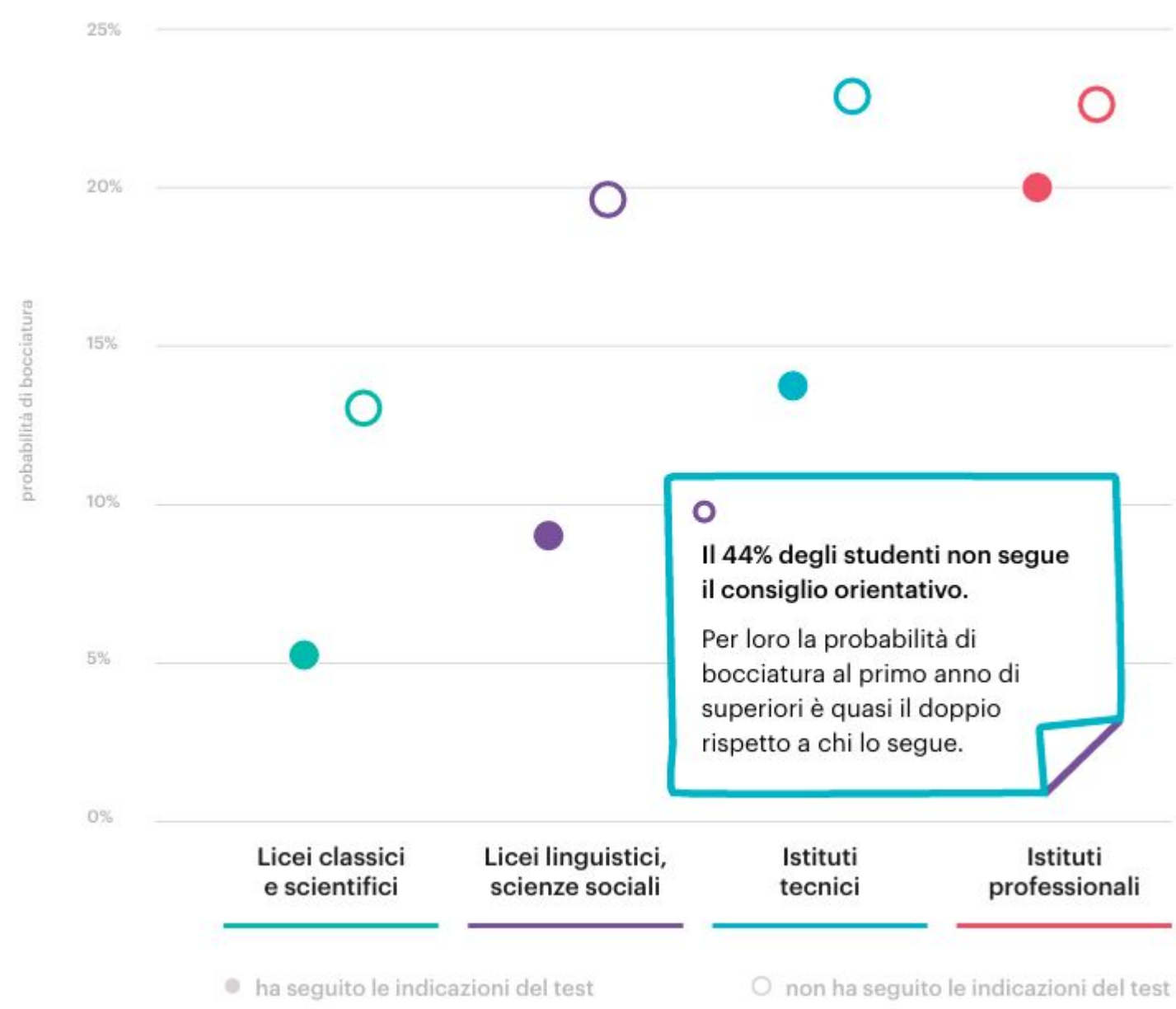
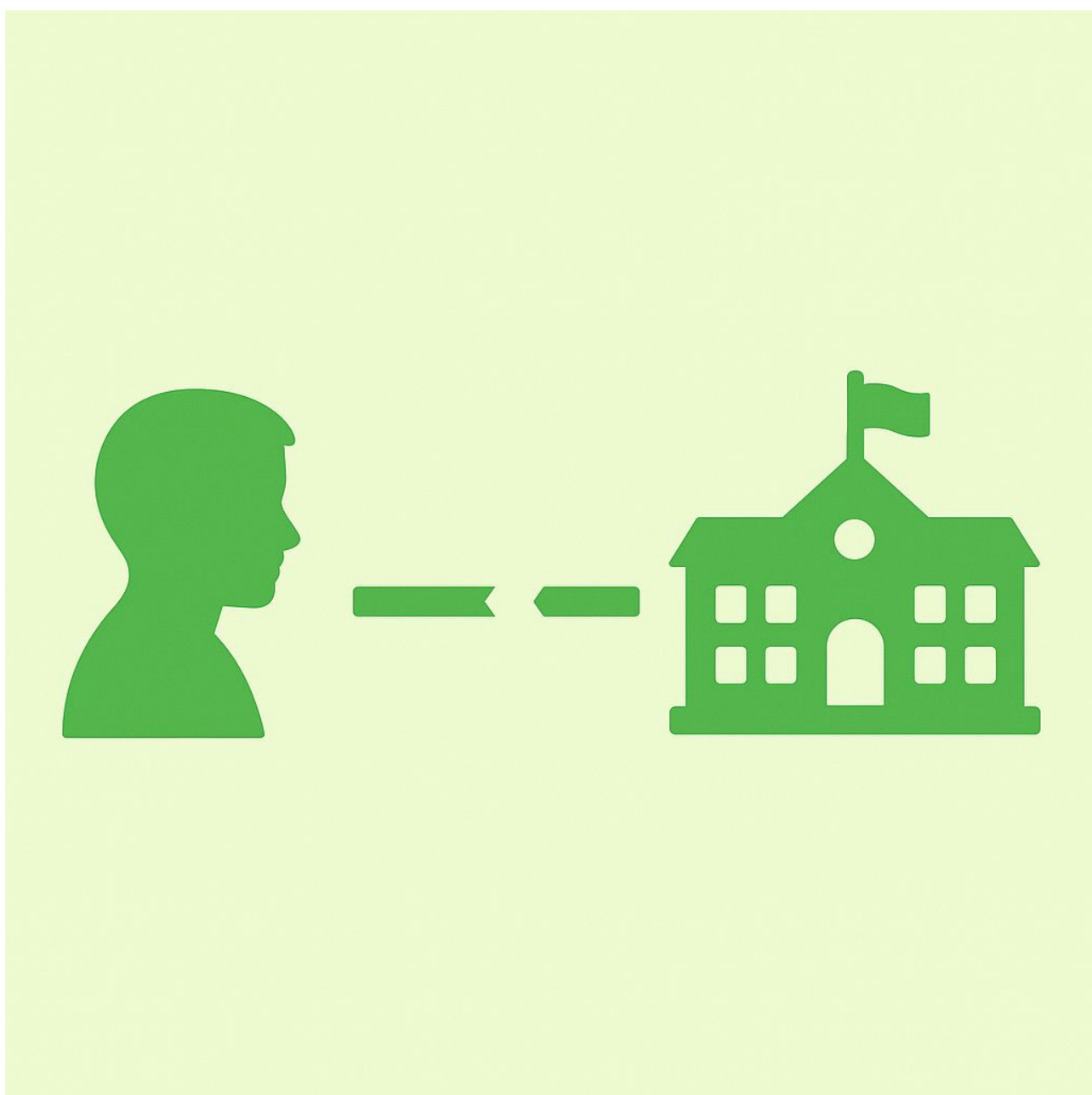


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Motivation

- Milan has a solid secondary school system, yet educational inequalities remain stark across neighborhoods.
- Middle school years are decisive to prevent early dropout
 - Dropout risks are salient as early as in middle school years: in 2016, 0.8% of middle school students dropped out of the system. When considering students with a migrant background or who experienced previous grade failures, dropout rates in middle school rise to 3.3% and 5.1%, respectively (MIUR 2017)
 - Middle-to-High school transition is equally important: analyses of Ministry of Education data (Fondazione Agnelli, 2021) show that students who disregard recommendations and opt for more demanding tracks face substantially higher failure risk, particularly those from fragile backgrounds. Conversely, teachers may underestimate the potential of disadvantaged students (Alesina et al., 2024). Complementary evidence (Carlana, La Ferrara & Pinotti, 2022) indicates that counseling, mentoring, and family engagement improve outcomes for immigrant and low-SES students.
- Anti-dropout programs, family background, teachers' expectations, and access to information shape students' choices and trajectories



Source: Fondazione Agnelli based on Arianna data, Rapporto Scuola Media 2021

Objectives

- Establish a detailed, longitudinal data infrastructure to monitor inclusion and educational outcomes
- Map and analyze dropout prevention and educational initiatives in Milan's middle schools
- Evaluate interventions that foster dialogue and informed decision-making in high school transition
- Inform local and national policy with evidence on effective tools to reduce inequality in educational trajectories

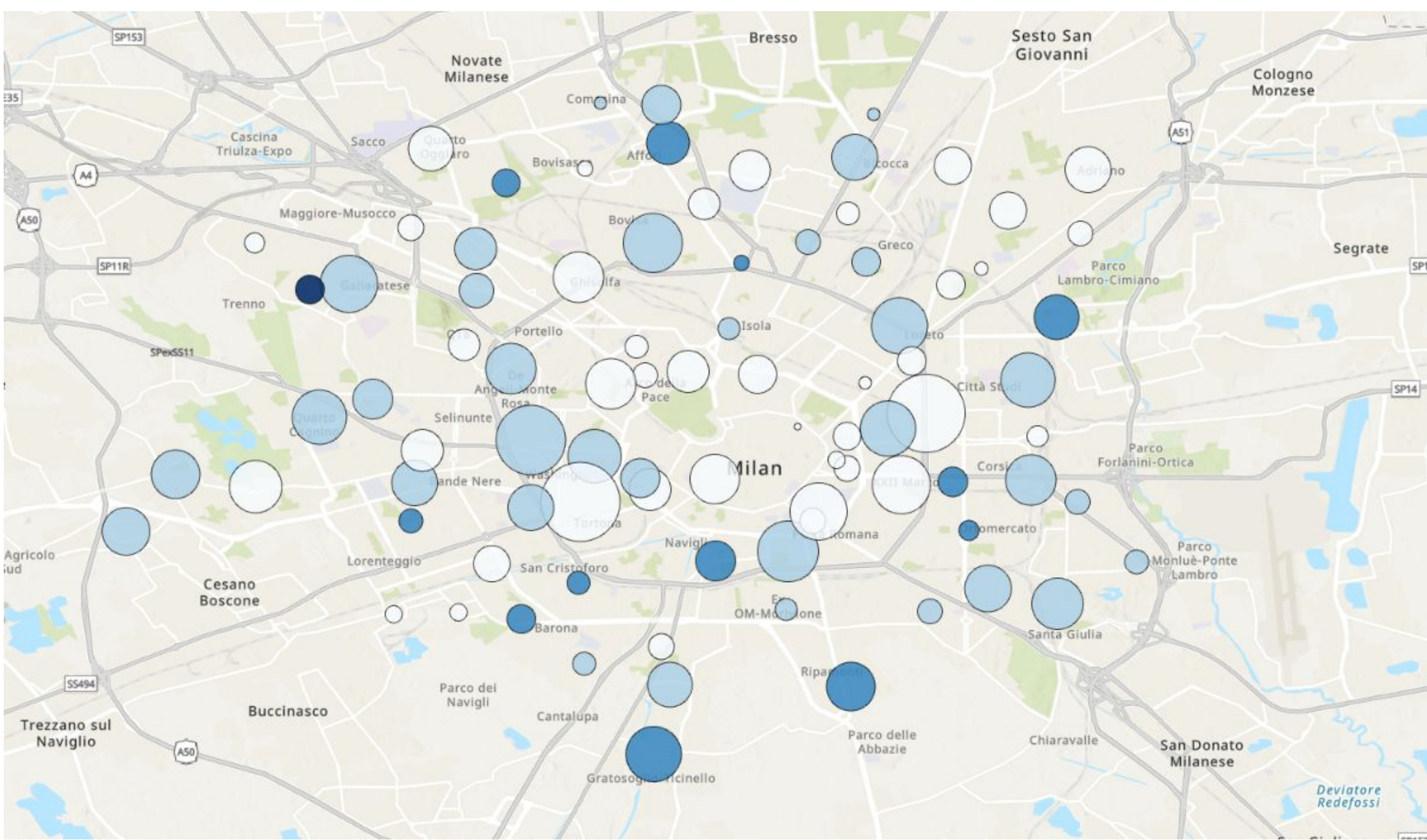


Figure 1: Middle schools in the Milan area by student population (dot size) and participation in dropout prevention programs (darker shade for participation in more programs)

Intervention

- Longitudinal data collection in 15 middle schools (2025–2028)
 - Surveys for students, teachers, and parents twice a year.
 - Additional focus on students participating in dropout prevention programs
 - Integration of administrative data on school performance and orientation outcomes.
- Randomized information-sharing treatment among misaligned, i.e., when student's, parents' and teachers' expectations diverge
 - Alignment chart shares student, parent, and teacher preferences ahead of orientation meetings
 - Suggested discussion starters to improve communication among actors
 - Hypothesis: transparency and dialogue → better alignment → fewer mismatches → better educational outcomes
- Cross-randomized newsletter providing comparative data on high-school curricula, promotion rates, and post-secondary outcomes.

STUDENTE	GENITORE	INSEGNANTE
Liceo	Liceo	Istituto tecnico
Scienze Umane	Scientifico	Meccanica, mecatronica ed energia

Design and evaluation

- Methodology: Randomized Controlled Trial + Surveys + administrative data + school location
- Short-term outcomes:
 - Middle school graduation, determinants of dropout risks, effective tools in dropout preventions
 - Alignment among students, parents, and teachers
 - Choice in high-school track
- Long-term outcomes:
 - High school trajectory: grade retention, track change, dropout
- Secondary outcomes:
 - Teacher recommendations, knowledge of high school options, reported satisfaction and confidence with educational decisions

Expected contribution

- Quantify the causal effect of structured information-sharing on educational choices and early academic performance
- Identify whether teacher-parent-student alignment mitigates under- or over-placement within high school tracks
- Generate scalable evidence for municipal-level dropout prevention policies

