

# Why Housing Matters for Education

Solutions for Working Families  
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Solving problems, guiding decisions – worldwide



## Theoretical case for why good quality, affordable housing matters for education is strong

- Affordable housing relieves stress on families, so parents have more time and energy to help children succeed
- Housing that is not crowded makes it possible for children to do homework and to go to school ready to learn
- Well-located housing gives children access to good schools
- Affordable housing reduces housing moves which require changing schools in the middle of the year

## But so far limited empirical support for the effect of affordable housing on children's school performance

- In the Moving to Opportunity Demonstration, children in families that moved to neighborhoods where less than 10 percent of people are poor did no better in school than control group families who stayed in distressed public housing (based on parent reports and direct testing)
- In a study of housing vouchers used by welfare families:
  - crowding decreased
  - budget stress from high rent burdens was reduced
  - families moved less frequently
  - but children did no better in school than children in control group families who did not use vouchers (based on parent reports)
- A new study of alternatives for homeless families will look at this issue again, this time for children who have been in emergency shelter for at least seven days and then get stable, affordable housing
  - This is a group particularly vulnerable to high rates of school mobility associated with residential instability

## Research evidence is well summarized in Center for Housing Policy Publications

- “Framing the Issues,” Jeffrey Lubell and Maya Brennan, summarizes the hypotheses and the literature. See the Center’s website for this and other documents.
- Sandra Newman, “Does Housing Matter for Poor Families,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, autumn 2008, summarizes the literature on how housing matters for various aspects of family well-being, including the well-being of children.

## Poor quality of schools may be why we have so little evidence that affordable housing improves school performance

- The children of MTO families generally stayed in schools in the same jurisdiction, and their schools were not superior to the schools control group families attended.
- Families using vouchers in the Welfare to Work Voucher demonstration moved to neighborhoods that were only slightly better than neighborhoods where those without vouchers lived. Almost certainly the quality of the schools was no different.

## So the issue is how to improve housing and schools simultaneously

- Working with Enterprise Community Partners, Abt Associates studied efforts by organizations committed to a neighborhood to make school improvement a fundamental part of neighborhood change
- Built on earlier work supported by the Ford Foundation and HUD
- Papers are on Enterprise Website

# What does it take to create a good elementary school or turn around a low-performing school?

- Strong and autonomous school leadership
- A good, research-based curriculum
- A strong external entity able to provide resources and stewardship to the school
- Good quality early childhood education available to families who send their children to the school
- Can be charters or traditional public schools: depends on local circumstances

## What else might help in creating and sustaining a good school?

- For multifamily housing, partnership between housing managers and school staff to address family issues
- After school programs embedded in multifamily housing developments
  - Promising idea, because attendance is better than at programs located at schools
- Social services for adults provided at the school. However:
  - May distract from focus on quality of instruction
  - May identify school as low-income, discourage upwardly mobile families from attending

# External sponsors of school improvement

- Set goals for the school's performance or performance improvement
- Marshall additional resources needed to support the school's performance
- Monitor change
- Preserve the core vision for the school over time
- External sponsor can be a foundation, a housing developer, a university, a corporation: any organization with resources, political influence, and a long-term commitment to the school

# Recommendations for Action

- Build school improvement into housing redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization
  - HUD's Choice Communities
  - LIHTC Qualified Allocation Plans
  - Local plans for neighborhoods
- Further demonstrate and evaluate external sponsorship of school creation and improvement
  - Federally funded demonstration
  - Pilot projects at the state or local level