

what funders need to know

December 2013

EDUCATION

Educational Outcomes and the Relationship to Housing

Education and Housing

A connection between education and housing was acknowledged through the establishment of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, federal legislation that established the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY). This program requires states to take action to ensure that homeless children and youth have equal access to the same public education as all other children and youth. The analysis of the relationship between stable housing and educational outcomes, which prompted the legislation, revealed the following barriers to education posed by the absence of a stable housing environment:

- For homeless students, frequent moves are the most significant barrier to academic success.
- Frequent moves disrupt students and teachers. Students on the move need extra time and attention to get caught up, causing teachers to spend more time with those students.
- Students who are unable to find stable shelter have difficulty meeting state or district mandates regarding the number of days they must attend school to stay enrolled.
- Often, the slow transfer of student records, along with differing course requirements from school to school, complicates the accrual of sufficient credits for homeless students to be promoted and receive a high school diploma.

How Big Is the Problem?

Nationally, the incidence of homelessness and housing instability is growing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reports that family homelessness increased 20 percent in just 3 years, from 473,541 families in 2007 to 567,334 in 2010. Today, among homeless students identified by schools, 65 percent are “doubled-up,” meaning they live in overcrowded conditions; 21 percent are living in homeless shelters; 7 percent are living in hotels or motels; and 7 percent are unsheltered, sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. In addition, nearly 2 million children are living in homes going through foreclosure, potentially putting their residential stability at risk.

In the Greater Washington region, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments’ Point in Time Survey for 2013 found 11,547 homeless persons, 3,247 of whom are children under the age of 18. However, this number does not include children of families who are “doubled-up.”

A Growing Body of Research

Current research shows that stable, quality housing has value beyond the provision of shelter by improving school performance, diminishing health problems for children and adults, and decreasing psychological stress. In addition, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s *How Housing Matters* research initiative is exploring whether and how having a decent, stable, and affordable home leads to strong families, positive educational outcomes, and vibrant communities.

“Children in stable housing where they move less frequently are more likely to do better on reading and math tests and less likely to drop out of school than children who move regularly.”

Connecting Housing with Health and Education: A Brighter Future for America’s Children, Center for Housing Policy

Better Housing, Better Learners

The single largest annual expenditure made by local jurisdictions is for education. Communities place high value on quality education for children and the resources needed for their success. If research tells us that a stable, safe home environment plays a significant role in a child's ability to learn, it makes sense to leverage education dollars with equally significant investments in creating affordable, mixed-income neighborhoods. These 'communities of opportunity' are places where low- and moderate-income families can find stability, and where children are more likely to have access to strong schools.

This is the conclusion drawn by Dr. Heather Schwartz in her report, "Housing Policy is School Policy." Her paper, released in 2010, examined the factors that influenced academic achievement for elementary school students in public housing in Montgomery County, Maryland, and made the case that children living in low-poverty, mixed-income neighborhoods achieve greater academic success than those children in high-poverty neighborhoods even though their schools received additional educational resources. There was a clear connection between economic integration and academic achievement.

Many nonprofit housing developers provide supportive services for adults and children who live in their developments. These services sharpen study skills and provide a safe, nurturing place to learn. Programs include after-school sessions for elementary students, evening tutoring for teens, and academic summer camps to combat learning loss.

The results of these programs are impressive. Pre-schoolers are well prepared for kindergarten; grade school students register improvements in reading - meeting or exceeding their grade level; and teens are more likely to achieve higher grade point averages and go on to college.

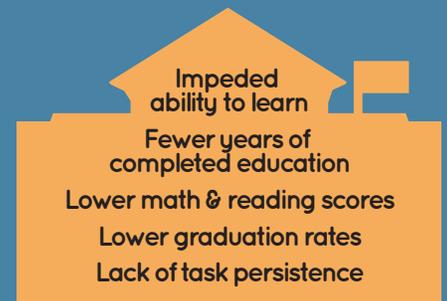
Increasingly, we see that housing is the platform that improves educational outcomes for low- and moderate-income children. As such, public policy and financial resources should leverage investments in education with equally adequate investments in housing to maximize a child's ability to learn and succeed.

"Among the various possibilities tested, poor housing quality was the most consistent and strongest predictor of emotional and behavioral problems in low income children and youth. It also had a sizable association with school performance among older youth."

Poor Quality Housing Is Tied to Children's Emotional and Behavioral Problems, MacArthur Foundation, August 2013



can contribute to



Sources

The 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2011

Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the 2013 Point-in-Time Count of Homeless Persons in the Metropolitan Washington Region, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, 2013

Housing as a Platform for Improving Education Outcomes Among Low Income Children, Urban Institute, May 2012

Housing Policy is School Policy, The Century Foundation, 2010

The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Education: A Research Summary, Center for Housing Policy, May 2011

Poor Quality Housing Is Tied to Children's Emotional and Behavioral Problems, MacArthur Foundation, August 2013

What Funders Can Do

- Support effective advocacy campaigns that promote mixed-income neighborhoods through the adoption of inclusionary zoning policies. Continued and increased financial support from the philanthropic community for even small advocacy efforts can yield millions of dollars in public investment and policy changes.
- Invest in programs that provide supportive services for residents in affordable housing communities.
- Work with colleagues to align giving toward services that support low-income and otherwise vulnerable households.
- Utilize endowments to make program-related investments (PRIs), which are loans and equity investments that foundations can make at below-market rates that have a direct charitable purpose. PRIs can provide much needed capital for housing developers, as well as a return on investment for foundations. In some circumstances they can be even more effective than traditional grants.
- Build awareness of the connection between education and housing by sharing this information with colleagues and members of your board.