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HOUSING AND SCHOOLS: THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT FOR EDUCATORS AND EDUCATION ADVOCATES



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**HOUSING AND SCHOOL POLICIES HAVE
A STRONG RECIPROCAL EFFECT ON
PATTERNS OF RACIAL AND ECONOMIC
SEGREGATION, WHICH MAKES IT
ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR EDUCATORS
AND EDUCATION ADVOCATES WHO
UNDERSTAND THE BENEFITS OF SCHOOL
INTEGRATION TO BECOME INVOLVED IN
HOUSING AND LAND USE POLICY.**

WHY THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HOUSING AND EDUCATION POLICY ARE IMPORTANT

Housing and land use policies have a significant effect on schools, and since these policies are usually decided at the state and local level, educators and education advocates have the opportunity to play a significant role. Housing and land use policies can affect enrollment trends, concentrations of poverty and school diversity, school funding, stability of enrollment vs. “churning” of students, and ability of students to complete their homework and focus during the school day. Likewise, school policies can have profound impacts on housing patterns, especially in relation to residential choices and housing costs for families with school-aged children. Housing and school policies have a strong reciprocal effect on patterns of racial and economic segregation, which makes it especially important for educators and education advocates



who understand the benefits of school integration¹ to become involved in housing and land use policy. This policy brief aims to enhance educator, school leader, parent, and education advocate understanding of the dynamics of the housing-schools relationship and their effectiveness as advocates in their local communities.

HOW HOUSING AFFECTS SCHOOLS AND VICE VERSA

Most educators understand the basic impacts of housing on schools. Segregated neighborhoods with large concentrations of poor children generally lead to segregated schools, which can lead to greater demands on teachers and schools, and diminished local property tax resources to pay for these additional needs. Housing instability and evictions increase children's stress, affect their ability to do homework and

¹ The myriad benefits of school integration on academic achievement, long term educational outcomes, and decreased levels of racial prejudice, are well summarized in a recent research brief from the National Coalition on School Diversity, "The Complementary Benefits of Racial and Socioeconomic Diversity in Schools" (March 2017) [school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf](https://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf)

concentrate in school, and frequent family moves lead to harmful churning in elementary school classrooms.


School and school district boundary lines themselves can have a big impact on housing patterns. When higher income families opt out of diverse school districts for "higher performing" school districts, it increases income segregation in a region, pushes up the housing prices in the "higher rated" towns, and makes it harder for the district they leave to make ends meet. Much of the income separation that is happening is fueled by websites that rank school quality based on overall test scores, which are primarily a function of family income—thus turning the school rating system into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Realtors can also be part of the problem, when they market communities to families based on one-dimensional indicators of "school quality."

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION WITH HOUSING AGENCIES FOR EDUCATORS AND EDUCATION ADVOCATES

The benefits for educators and education advocates of working together with housing officials and housing coalitions include the possibility of reducing student turnover and churning by keeping children in the same school attendance zone; ensuring that students with high housing insecurity and at risk of homelessness have more stable housing; addressing declining enrollment by bringing more housing for young children into the local school district; and increasing student diversity in high-income school districts while reducing segregation and poverty concentration in lower income districts.

A good example of collaboration happened in 2014-15 in Richmond, Virginia, where local school leaders pulled together meetings of local superintendents and school board members, along with staff of the local housing authority, city housing department, and the state education department. The primary focus of the meetings was to find ways to reduce the severe segregation across schools and districts. The Richmond experience is also a good model for

SCHOOL AND SCHOOL DISTRICT BOUNDARY LINES THEMSELVES CAN HAVE A BIG IMPACT ON HOUSING PATTERNS.



cross-sector collaboration in general, which might be further improved with educator participation or input. These meetings led to a series of recommendations for working together on an ongoing basis, including the proposed creation of a new governing agency responsible for bridging the school-housing worlds; targeted development resources to revitalize communities surrounding low-performing schools to attract middle-income families to the area; development of a joint planning process between housing authorities and schools in redevelopment of older public housing communities; and standardized metrics that track over time the progress in deconcentrating poverty and increasing residential and school diversity.

In some metropolitan areas, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) could be possible conveners

for cross-sector and cross-jurisdiction discussions. Some states (like New York and Connecticut) also have regional education service centers that could be helpful partners. A respected regional non-profit or university-based center (as in Richmond) could also bring parties together, possibly with the support of the state housing and education departments.

In the last year of the

Obama Administration, the Secretaries of Housing and Education (and Transportation) similarly called on state and local housing and education leaders to work together to further fair housing and school integration.

“As the Secretaries of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Transportation, we recognize that a growing body of research supports the benefits of socioeconomic and racial diversity in schools and communities, and that such diversity can help establish access points for opportunity and mobility...Today, our agencies

are calling on local education, transportation, and housing leaders to work together on issues at the intersection of our respective missions in helping to guarantee full access of opportunity across the country. Our goals are to identify impediments to accessing opportunity; to coordinate efforts to address these issues and to provide broad-reaching benefits; and to ensure that every child and family is provided with transportation, housing, and education tools that promote economic mobility. The new process in which communities are engaging under the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule (AFFH rule) from HUD provides an opportunity for cross-agency collaboration and strong community involvement. We urge you to take full advantage of the community participation process of the AFFH rule, so that regional planning promotes economic mobility and equal access to the many benefits provided by affordable housing, great schools, and reliable transportation.”

NEXT STEPS

First, it is important to learn more about federal housing policy, your state’s land use and zoning laws, and find out what housing authorities cover your metropolitan area. On the next page we have included some basic information, and you can get more details on the Poverty & Race Research Action Council website at www.prrac.org. We also recommend connecting with your state housing coalition to see if they have begun to think about the relationship between housing and education policy. If you are ready to start organizing in your local community, we recommend a guide put together by Housing Virginia, based on their successful efforts in Richmond, titled [Community Conversations: Aligning Local Housing and Schools Policy for Successful Schools in Strong Neighborhoods](http://www.housingvirginia.org/housing-schools), www.housingvirginia.org/housing-schools

KEY HOUSING TERMS AND PROGRAMS— WHAT EDUCATORS SHOULD KNOW

Housing Choice Vouchers

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program (originally called “Section 8”) is the largest low-income housing program in the U.S., with over two million participating families. The program allows families to go into the private market and rent apartments that are within the “Fair Market Rent” limits, usually calculated at the average rent for the area. The family pays roughly 30% of their monthly income for rent, and the local public housing authority (PHA) pays the remainder using federal funds. Here are some important things educators and education advocates should know:

- ✓ **Families with HCVs are usually more stable in their housing** – and less likely to make frequent moves and change schools. It is valuable to connect with the local PHA to talk about the importance of taking into consideration where children are attending school, and to prioritize staying in their current school for families who decide to relocate nearby. If school assignment is determined primarily by geography, the PHA should be given a school assignment zone map.
- ✓ **HCVs can also help families move to low poverty communities and school districts** – which research has shown can be highly beneficial, even if it involves changing schools. These “mobility moves” are particularly beneficial when the family moves when the child is young, and remains in the new school and

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community. To ensure that this happens, PHAs need to adopt higher “payment standards” or “Small Area Fair Market Rents” so that families can afford apartments in higher priced school zones. This kind of change is at the discretion of the local PHA, so local residents and education leaders should make their views known to the PHA board members.

- ✓ **“Local preferences”** – are provisions in the HCV waiting list that favor some groups over others. Educators and education advocates should be aware of some of the issues here and advocate for fairer systems. For example, if local preferences for homeless individuals or veterans are too strong, they can sharply reduce the chances for families with young children from getting into the program. And if there is a local residency preference in a predominantly white community, this can have a discriminatory effect and prevent the local school district from becoming more diverse. Again, these preferences are at the discretion of the local PHA, and local citizens and educators should speak up about the importance of stable housing for young children, and the value of diversity in the community’s schools.
- ✓ **“Source of income discrimination”** – refers to the practice of some landlords to reject families because they have federal housing assistance (or other forms of government support). Eight states and dozens of cities and towns have adopted laws prohibiting source of income discrimination. If your community is not one of



these places, you can advocate for these protections that will help provide stable housing for families with vouchers in a community and school district of their choice.

Public housing redevelopment

Most federal “public housing” developments were built in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and many developments are still in need of significant upgrades (and in some cases, demolition and replacement). If the public housing authority in your school district is considering redevelopment of any of their public housing developments, this will have huge impacts on the local public


schools, and coordination with the school district is essential. A major issue is where the children will be sent to school if they are relocated (and how to avoid overcrowding in the receiving schools, and ensuring continuity of education and not losing track of students). Educators should also pay attention to what will happen to the local school—and whether it can also be redeveloped and improved during the public housing redevelopment period. Families may also have the right to request relocation to an apartment in a lower poverty school zone or school district, or a right to return eventually to the redeveloped community, depending on the type of redevelopment program. Some of the programs that are currently being used

for public housing redevelopment include “HOPE VI,” “Choice Neighborhoods,” and the “Rental Assistance Demonstration” or “RAD.” The RAD program creates especially valuable rights for families with children, because one year after the redevelopment repairs and upgrades are completed, all families in the development have the option to request a portable Housing Choice Voucher and move to a different neighborhood or community if that is their choice.

Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)

The federal LIHTC program provides funds to state Housing Finance Agencies to distribute to private developers to build low-income housing. The program has the capacity to provide stable housing for families with young children, but too often, LIHTC apartments for families with children are built in the poorest, most segregated parts of the state, and to the extent that developments are built in higher income areas, these are often restricted to elderly housing. It is important for educators to advocate with





their state legislatures for more LIHTC housing for families with children, and for a better distribution of family LIHTC developments, so that children can have access to lower poverty, higher performing schools. A few state LIHTC plans (known as “Qualified Allocation Plans” or QAPs) prioritize the placement of LIHTC family projects near high-performing public schools, which is a best practice that more states should be encouraged to adopt.

Affirmative marketing

If a higher income town allows the development of multifamily housing suitable for families with children, it is very important that the developer use “affirmative marketing” to recruit families from low-income communities outside the school district—including families with Housing Choice Vouchers. This is crucial to harnessing the benefits of diversity for the town’s schools.

Exclusionary zoning

Everyone understands the negative impact of exclusionary zoning on a community’s neighborhoods and schools. A town that keeps out low cost housing is contributing to racial and income segregation in their region, and restricting residential and educational options for families in nearby lower income communities. Educators living and working in higher income communities should speak up in support of affordable

housing proposals in their communities, stressing the value of racial and economic integration for all students in the town. Exclusionary zoning (including discriminatory restrictions on apartment bedroom size) is also highly detrimental in school districts with declining enrollment—these towns should be recruiting more families with young children, and affordable housing is one of the best ways to do this.

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Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH)

The requirement to “affirmatively further fair housing” was part of the original Fair Housing Act in 1968. It requires all cities, states, counties, and PHAs receiving HUD funds to do more than simply refrain from discriminating—rather, jurisdictions are required to take affirmative steps to reduce segregation and racial disparities across neighborhoods. In 2015, the Obama Administration adopted a new AFFH rule, which includes a detailed process for cities and towns to identify fair housing issues and goals for reducing segregation and neighborhood disparities. Although the Trump Administration has temporarily suspended the rule, many jurisdictions are still going forward with the process, either through the AFFH rule itself, or through the old fair housing planning process (called the “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing” or “AI”). Importantly, the AFFH process includes an analysis of education issues, and equality of access to proficient schools. To better understand the fair housing issues facing your city, town, or county, it is valuable to review their most recent AI (or AFFH plan, if the jurisdiction did one recently) and find out when the next planning process is expected to take place—these plans will benefit greatly from the participation of educators and education advocates.

For more information about the housing-schools connection, including links to planning tools, visit prrac.org/housing-school-nexus



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