



# How Housing is Advancing Educational Outcomes:

The Scope of Educational  
Services Offered by  
Public Housing Agencies



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A report by the *Housing Is* Initiative in  
partnership with the Public and Affordable  
Housing Research Corporation

## Introduction

**E**ducation is a critical factor in helping families move up the economic ladder, and housing can play a key role in educational success. Research has shown that housing stability is a key component in achieving positive educational outcomes. Housing insecurity—characterized by frequent moves or episodes of homelessness—leads to poor school attendance, contributes to high student turnover in already struggling schools, and causes emotional distress that prevents children from engaging with schoolwork.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, housing location and other place-based factors often dictate which schools children attend, the external education resources available to bolster in-school learning such as tutoring, and opportunities for learning skills that improve success in obtaining gainful employment.

Fragmented service delivery systems and siloed policymaking often fail to address the needs of low-income individuals and families holistically, resulting in limited outcomes and costly inefficiencies. Combining housing with educational services is a key example of how collaboration and holistic service coordination can help families prosper. The Council of Large Public Housing Authorities' (CLPHA) *Housing Is* initiative is based on the premise that systems can better meet needs and improve life outcomes when they work together. Collaboration across systems and sectors—through shared goals and focused resources—strengthens our collective ability to serve low-income individuals and families effectively and efficiently.

To better understand how the housing and education sectors are working together to more holistically serve families and promote cross-sector collaboration, *Housing Is* partnered with the Public and Affordable Housing Research Corporation (PAHRC) to study the educational activities offered by and the partnerships of housing agencies across the United States. Systematically identifying these efforts helps build a knowledge base about aligning systems and engaging in cross-sector collaboration to add to the field of study, as well as provide ideas for next steps and continued research.

## Methodology

To identify the current state of educational service provision by housing agencies and establish a baseline, *Housing Is* and PAHRC conducted a survey asking U.S. public housing agencies about educational services offered to their residents. The survey was promoted over a 10-month period from November 2016 to August 2017, including targeted emails, advertisements in industry newsletters, social media posts, and outreach at industry conferences. Nearly 10 percent (342) of all housing agencies administering public housing and voucher programs (3,825) answered the survey<sup>2</sup>. Survey responses were geographically representative of this group of housing agencies, though slightly under-represented agencies in the Southeast. Agencies with less than 500 units were also under-represented, despite tailored efforts to encourage their participation<sup>3</sup>. Some housing agencies may have chosen not to respond to the survey because they do not provide educational services. Agencies offering both public housing and voucher programs also responded at a higher rate than agencies administering public housing or voucher programs only. This trend might be attributable to size, as larger agencies are more likely to offer both public housing and vouchers than smaller agencies. The survey data were then weighted for non-response by agency size to reflect the size distribution of all agencies administering federal rental assistance programs for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

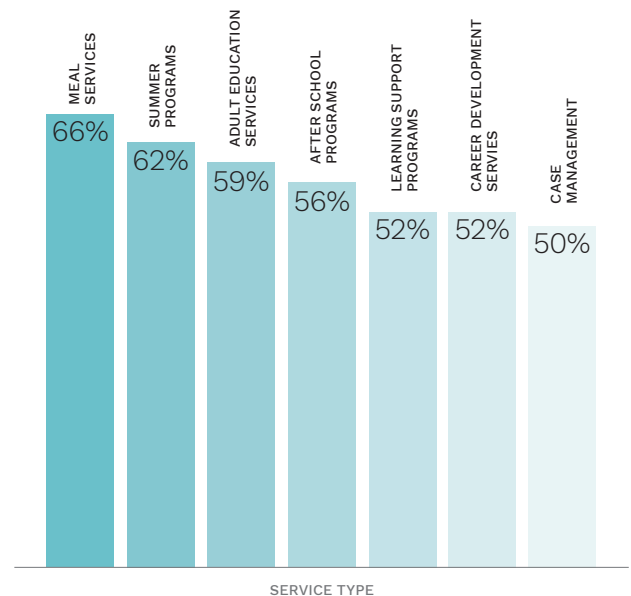


## Availability and Types of Services Provided

One-half of housing agencies that completed the survey reported providing some type of educational service to their residents directly or through a partner. The most common services provided were meal services (66%), summer programs (62%), adult education services (59%), after school programs (56%), learning support programs (52%), career development services (52%), and case management (50%). These common programs were offered by more than 50 percent of all housing agencies that reported providing services. Examples include the Summer Meals Program offered through the US Department of Agriculture and summer learning programs, such as The Housing Authority of the City of Austin's summer STEM program for youth.

Both large and small housing agencies reported offering educational services to residents. All housing agencies surveyed with 10,000 or more units reported providing some type of educational service to their residents, compared to 37% of housing agencies with 500 units or fewer. The programs provided also varied by agency size. The most common services offered by more than half of housing agencies with fewer than 500 units providing educational services include meal programs, adult education,

**Most Common Types of Educational Services offered by Housing Agencies**



learning support programs, and summer programs. Meanwhile, more than half of housing agencies with 10,000 units or more that offer services reported offering after school programs, summer programs, career development services, case management, parenting classes, mentoring, college prep, early learning, and internet connectivity support, in addition to those listed above.

Research shows the critical importance of providing educational services: After-school and summer learning programs can fill the invaluable role of providing essential services—such as a safe and supervised environment, academically enriching activities, healthy snacks and meals, and caring and supportive mentors—to children and families most in need of support. African-American and Hispanic students face greater barriers participating in extracurricular activities than white students.<sup>4</sup> These programs provide access to academic enrichment that helps close racial and economic achievement gaps through increased attendance, homework completion, and engagement in school; these indicators ultimately lead to rising test scores and graduation rates. Two-thirds of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities, which like other out-of-school learning programs also address food insecurity.<sup>5</sup> As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college. Low-income children begin school with lower achievement scores, despite progressing at about the same rate as their peers during the school year. These children are disadvantaged without education during the summer. At best, they can maintain their progress over the summer, but they often fall behind. In contrast, more economically advantaged children continue to build skills steadily over the summer months due to more expansive opportunities (e.g. going to the library or engaging in a variety of enrichment experiences including museum visits and field trips).

Looking at the ages served by educational programs, housing agencies most commonly reported serving adults over 25 (75%), followed by school aged youth 5-15 (72%). However, many also reported providing services for older youth and young children under five. Likewise, nearly two-thirds of housing agencies that

### Age Groups Benefiting from Educational Opportunities

AGES SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR	PERCENT OFFERING (OF AGENCIES OFFERING SERVICES)
Ages 0-5	47%
Ages 5-15	72%
Ages 16-24	64%
Ages 25+	75%

provide educational services have services available for residents aged 16-24. Nearly half of housing agencies, provide services for children ages 0-5.

Over two-in-five of housing agencies that provide educational services offer these services to residents at all their properties. Co-locating the provision of disparate supportive services can increase program participation rates as costs associated with traveling and childcare decrease.

### Challenges to Providing Services

While challenges reported by housing agencies providing services to residents differed by agency size, the most common challenge reported was a lack of resident interest (77%) followed by funding (68%). Larger agencies with 10,000 or more units that offer educational services reported facing more challenges providing services compared to smaller agencies with less than 500 units. Large agencies reported that funding (92%), staffing constraints (76%), lack of resident interest (64%), inadequate service locations (48%), limited data capacity to guide decision-making (48%), and challenges related to working with collaboration partners (48%), were the most common difficulties they faced in providing educational services to residents.

A number of respondents (11) provided additional details, which suggest that lack of resident interest might be driven by barriers that prevent residents from easily accessing services, such as access to transportation and childcare. Further, the differences in resident interest in educational services between small and larger housing agencies could indicate that smaller agencies need more resources to identify services that meet residents' needs. While 83% of small housing agencies offering services reported

**Over two-in-five of housing agencies that provide educational services offer these services to residents at all their properties.**

lack of resident interest as a challenge to providing services, the survey results do not make clear if this is because of disinterest in participation or an inability to participate.

Housing agencies that responded to the survey noting that they do not currently provide educational services reported staffing constraints—including skills, capacity, and flexibility—as the greatest impediment to service provision (74%), followed by funding (65%). This challenge might be reduced if a partner organization could provide expertise and staffing.

## Partnerships

Eighty-nine percent of housing agencies providing services noted that they provided some services through a partnership. The most common education service-partnerships were between housing agencies and nonprofits or other community organizations (83%), followed by school districts (48%) and universities (46%). A few respondents also noted that they partnered with businesses such as banks, tutoring companies, tech companies, or local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB). In partnering with universities, many housing agencies can provide case management and program evaluation by students or staff. The Denver Housing Authority and the Chicago Housing Authority, for example, both utilize the expertise of local universities to deliver educational programs. Partnerships allow housing agencies to provide more services at no or lower cost, as well as eliminate the necessity to develop additional expertise among housing authority staff or hire new personnel.

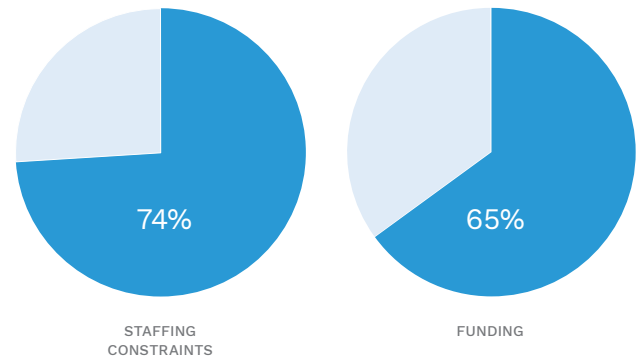
Of the respondents that were unable to offer services, 14% noted they were currently exploring a partnership to provide services and 17% reported previously exploring a partnership to provide services. Additional resources for cross-sector collaboration and partnership engagement may be needed for the remaining half of respondents that reported not providing services, including the 66% of the agencies not offering educational services and have not yet explored a partnership.

## Implications

This study confirms that many housing agencies are providing educational services to their residents in addition to housing assistance. The report shows that educational services are seen as a resident need by housing agencies across the country. In particular, adult education and programs that supplement in-school learning for children and youth are seen as key needs for families receiving housing assistance and are offered most frequently. Further research is needed to determine if these commonly provided services are more reflections of resident need or more so the reflections of the type of partners available in an

### Greatest Challenges to Providing Educational Services

FOR AGENCIES NOT CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN SERVICE PROVISION



## From the Field

Nearly four years ago, the Durham Housing Authority (DHA) discovered that many of their residents were not utilizing a program offered by a nonprofit partner to provide childcare. Staff knew this was a need, but there had been a disconnect and residents were assigned to childcare across town. A transportation barrier made it difficult for residents to access the childcare. After speaking with residents, DHA increased participation by securing slots in a program closer to their housing and participation increased. Examples like this suggest that housing agencies can boost resident engagement by eliminating barriers to accessing services by providing transportation or offering them on-site. Moreover, involving residents in the planning process has been shown to uncover such barriers and boost engagement.



agency’s service area. Understanding the link between resident demographics in their agency, available partners, and resident needs may be helpful to housing agencies hoping to expand the services offered to their residents.

Responses from smaller agencies show they provide educational services to their residents, although less commonly than their larger peers overall. This trend indicates that more resources may be needed to help smaller agencies connect with local partners. The smaller the local area, the more partners may be needed to successfully execute any service offerings.

The study also notes that housing agencies often depend on partners to provide educational services and for many agencies not providing services, such partnerships have not been realized. Additional research is needed to understand what makes a successful partnership and why a partnership may not have proceeded. Toolkits and best practices for collaboration like those offered by *Housing Is* should be helpful in providing additional resources and promoting further cross-sector collaboration.

The study also uncovers new information about the challenges agencies face in providing educational services to residents. The most commonly cited challenge was lack of resident interest. As such, additional resources might be needed for agencies to more effectively reduce barriers to resident participation, as well as strategies for conducting resident needs assessments and for “marketing” services to residents to boost participation.

Interestingly, the study also notes that larger agencies providing services reported higher incidences of staffing constraints compared to smaller agencies. These agencies also report providing services on-site more often. Further research on how some housing agencies are weaving educational services into the core activities of the housing agency would shed additional light on this finding. As agencies continue to more holistically serve residents, agencies may change or create new staffing duties.

## Key Findings

Half of housing agencies are providing some type of educational service to their residents.



The most commonly provided services are meal services, summer programs, adult education, after school programs, learning support, career development, and case management.



44% of agencies providing services offer them at all of their properties.



The most commonly served age group is adults aged 25 and older, followed by school-aged children between ages 5-15. However, over half of agencies are also serving youth ages 16-24 and nearly half are serving young children under 5.



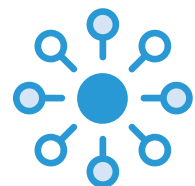
The most common challenge for agencies reporting that they do not provide services is staffing constraints, followed by lack of funding.



The most common challenge for agencies currently providing services is a lack of resident interest, followed by funding.



89% of organizations providing services noted that they provided some services through a partnership. The most common partnerships were with non-profits or other community organizations, followed by school districts and universities.





## Conclusion

**C**onnecting housing and education is essential for improving educational outcomes and boosting the economic mobility of low-income families. Until now, we did not have a large-scale understanding of the extent of participation in these efforts by housing agencies as well as the hurdles to involvement. This study finds that housing agencies are indeed offering housing-based educational services, often through partnerships. It also notes some important challenges in providing these services, like resident interest and access. This research also identifies future avenues for study to help us better promote cross-sector collaboration and understand its success. In particular, further outcome research is needed to explore the role educational services play in lifting families out of poverty by investigating which types of services and service delivery pathways are most effective. Learning more about the participants in these services and the role these services play to supplement more traditional avenues of education would be helpful in better tailoring services to resident need. Similarly, investigating the barriers to resident engagement and establishing best practices for boosting involvement would foster improved success. Finally, determining and providing more information on how housing agencies are funding housing-education initiatives would encourage other housing agencies to offer such programs and scale-up current efforts. We hope this study helps to spur additional exploration of cross-sector collaboration and the success of these efforts.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Cunningham, M. & MacDonald, G. May 2012.

“Housing as a Platform for Improving Education Outcomes among Low-Income Children.” Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

<sup>2</sup>Eight affordable housing providers answered the survey, although for comparability, their results have been omitted from this report. Responses for 11 housing agencies were also excluded because they were unable to be weighted due to missing information on housing agency size.

<sup>3</sup>Smaller agencies were specially worded emails encouraging them to provide information about barriers to providing these services.

<sup>4</sup>Afterschool Alliance. July 2013. The Importance of Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs in AfricanAmerican and Hispanic Communities. Issue Brief No. 9

<sup>5</sup>Afterschool Alliance. June 2010. Summer: A Season When Learning is Essential. Issue Brief No. 43.

<sup>6</sup>Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Olson, L. S. April 2007. Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72.

<sup>7</sup>Large agencies are classified as agencies with 10,000 or more public housing or HCVs. Medium large agencies have 3,000-9,999 units, medium agencies have 500-2,999 units, and small agencies have less than 500 units.



## HOUSING IS

Building Partnerships. Improving Lives.

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