



A Platform To **LEARN**

How Housing Programs Can Support the Educational Needs of Children Living in Publicly Supported Homes

Research Spotlight Fall 2019

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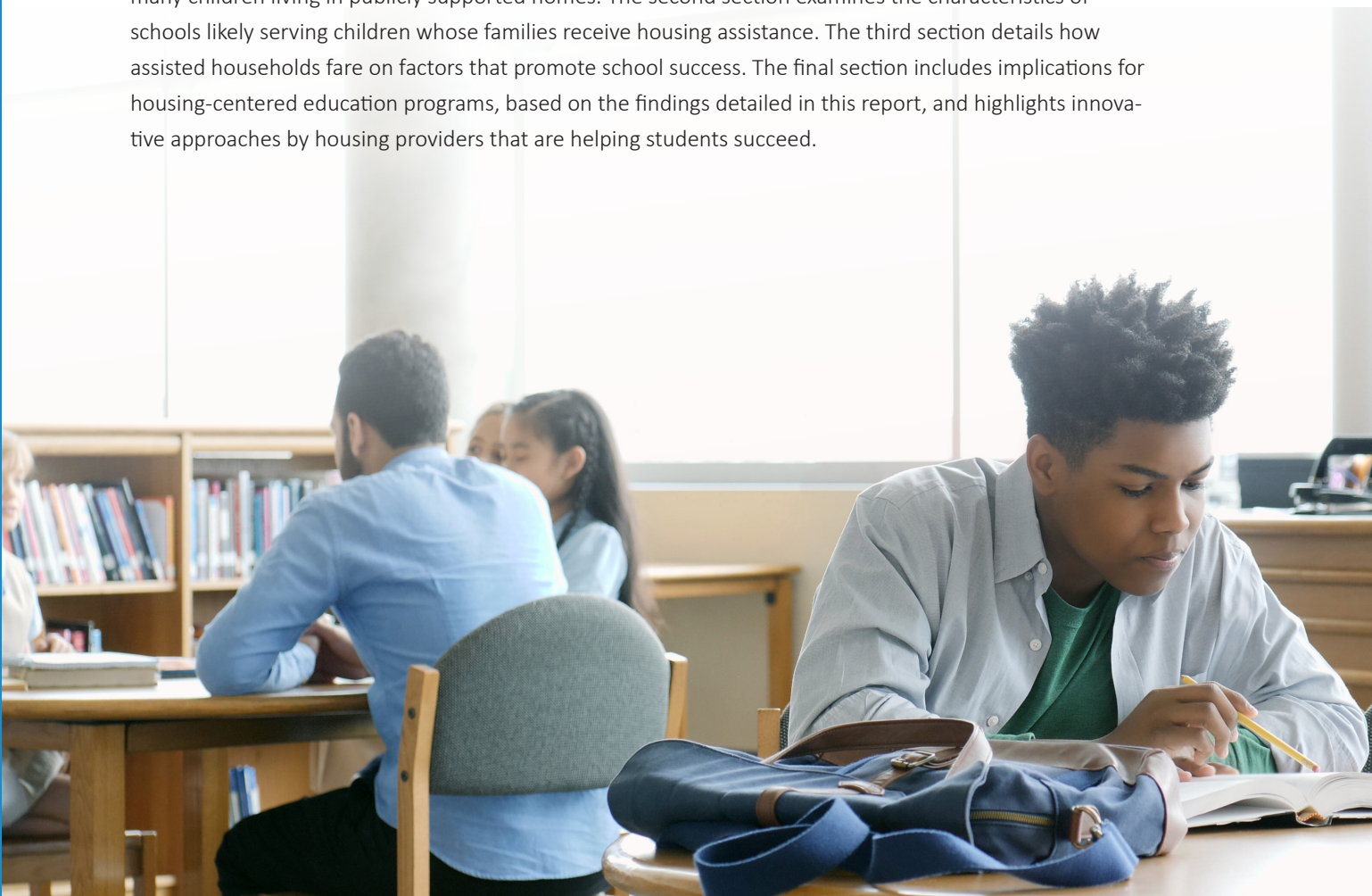
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INTRODUCTION

More than one-third of low-income U.S. children live in a home that is made affordable through a federal housing assistance program such as public housing, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) rental assistance programs, or the Housing Choice Voucher program¹. These programs most frequently serve seniors and individuals living with disabilities in addition to families with children². Thirty-four percent of households served by these programs include a child under 18³.

Adults who seek out and subsequently enter these programs tend to be among the nation's most disadvantaged⁴—those who are a step behind their low-income peers because they face additional challenges or have experienced significant life setbacks. This scenario is similar for children living in publicly supported homes, who face more barriers to achieving their educational goals than their peers, on average⁵. Yet housing can serve as a platform to meet the needs of families receiving housing assistance by centralizing services and addressing multiple challenges like poor health, housing instability, and education simultaneously⁶. Evidence shows that a safe, stable, affordable home can help children improve school performance and eventual earnings⁷. As a result, many housing providers and educators are leveraging housing to help children thrive in school and beyond⁸.

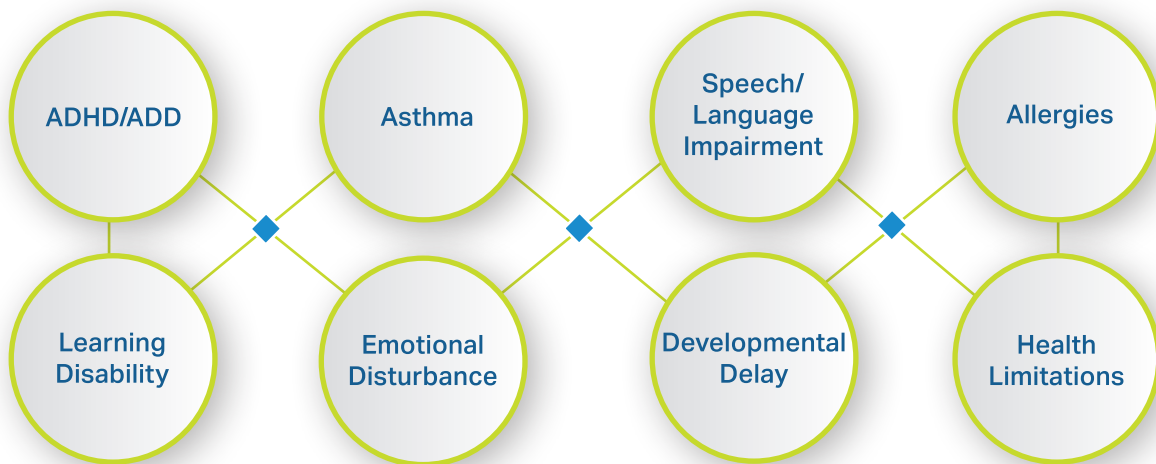
This report details some of the educational challenges faced by children living in publicly supported homes as well as the innovative programs that are helping them overcome barriers to educational achievement. The first section outlines the learning needs and likely impediments to academic achievement faced by many children living in publicly supported homes. The second section examines the characteristics of schools likely serving children whose families receive housing assistance. The third section details how assisted households fare on factors that promote school success. The final section includes implications for housing-centered education programs, based on the findings detailed in this report, and highlights innovative approaches by housing providers that are helping students succeed.



OUTLINING LEARNING NEEDS

Many children whose families receive housing assistance face additional challenges that make success in a conventional school environment uncertain and render typical schoolwork more difficult. Conditions like Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), developmental delays, and health problems that can complicate schooling are reported more frequently among children living in publicly supported homes than among their low-income peers. Though some of these conditions have a genetic component, the impact of poverty and environmental stressors can exacerbate or present as these conditions, making them more common among children whose families have sought housing assistance as a means to stabilize their lives.

Housing Assistance Serves Our Most Vulnerable Children: Conditions Reported More Frequently Among Children Whose Families Sought Out and Obtained Housing Assistance



PAHRC tabulations of the American Housing Survey 2017, National Health Interview Survey 2018, and the Parent and Family Involvement Survey 2016.

Learning Disabilities and Developmental Delays

Children whose families have sought out homes made affordable through federal housing assistance programs report a higher frequency of learning disabilities and developmental delays than the general population⁹ and their low-income unassisted peers. Assisted children over the age of two report having ADD and ADHD at higher rates than children living in unassisted households earning below 150 percent of the poverty-level¹⁰. Twenty-eight percent of voucher-assisted school-aged children reported having ADD compared to 14 percent of unassisted children living in households earning below \$40,000¹¹. Thirty-nine percent of voucher-assisted school-aged children reported having ADD, autism, or Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) compared to 25 percent of all school-aged children and 28 percent of unassisted school-aged children living in renter households earning under \$40,000¹². While such conditions are largely genetic, the stress and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) associated with poverty have been known to exacerbate and or present as these problems, leading to higher rates of these conditions reported among those living in poverty¹³. Furthermore, since families seeking out housing assistance are often among those living in poverty with the greatest challenges, their children struggle with these conditions at the highest rates.

More broadly, 19 percent of voucher-assisted school-age children reported a learning disability compared to seven percent of unassisted school-aged children living in renter households earning under \$40,000¹⁴. Voucher-assisted school-aged children were also four times more likely to report a developmental delay than their peers, with 16 percent of assisted children reporting with such a delay compared to four percent of unassisted school-aged children living in renter households earning under \$40,000¹⁵. Children whose parents selected into housing voucher programs were also more likely to report emotional disturbances; 15 percent compared to four percent of their unassisted peers living in renter households earning below \$40,000¹⁶. Additionally, voucher-assisted children reported more frequently having a speech or language impairment (18 percent) compared to unassisted children living in renter households earning below \$40,000 (nine percent)¹⁷. These challenges make learning in a traditional classroom more difficult, especially if the school has limited resources to provide supports like paraprofessionals in the classroom, special education teachers, or individualized education programs (IEPs). Children with special needs may also have fewer preschool options and may have experienced more school disruptions, placing them at a disadvantage in preparing for elementary school¹⁸.

Evidence shows that children living in publicly supported homes are receiving some support from their schools. Fifty-eight percent of voucher-assisted school-age children with learning disabilities reported that they were enrolled in special education courses compared to 30 percent of unassisted with learning disabilities children living in renter households earning below \$40,000¹⁹. Although, difficulties have been noted across schools in creating and successfully implementing IEPs²⁰.

Health Limitations

Children living in homes made affordable through U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rental assistance programs also report higher rates of chronic health conditions than the general population, which can make learning more difficult²¹. Thirty-two percent of voucher-assisted school-aged children also reported a general disability compared to 20 percent of unassisted children living in renter households earning less than \$40,000²². Assisted children also reported higher rates of asthma than all children²³ and their low-income peers. Twenty percent of assisted children reported having asthma compared to 14 percent of unassisted children living in renter households earning below 200 percent of the poverty line²⁴. Assisted households with children reported slightly more frequently than their peers earning below 150 percent of the poverty line seeing signs of cockroaches and bathroom mold daily in the past year, both of which are asthma triggers²⁵. Assisted school-aged children also reported food allergies at a higher rate than did unassisted peers in households earning below 150 percent of the poverty line²⁶. Conditions like allergies and asthma add new concerns to the typical school day and can lead to school absences and missed classes. Indeed, children living in assisted households reported missing an average of four days of school due to illness or injury compared to three days for all children whose parents are renting²⁷.

Environmental Stressors

A safe, healthy environment is an important support for successful learning. Living in poverty-stricken neighborhoods or those experiencing higher rates of violence can have a negative impact on mental health and well-being, subsequently limiting school performance²⁸. While many properties housing assisted families are located in safe, decent neighborhoods, some buildings historically have been built in less desirable communities. Fewer assisted households with children rated their neighborhood as a '10,' or the highest rating, when rating their neighborhood as a place to live compared to unassisted renters with children earning incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line²⁹. They also agreed that their neighborhood had 'a lot' of petty and serious crime at a higher rate than their unassisted low-income peers³⁰. In 2018, 71 percent of assisted project-based units were located in neighborhoods with poverty rates above the typical area neighborhood³¹. At the same time, households with housing vouchers tend to live in areas with higher concentrations of poverty³². These trends stem from a long history of federal housing policy linked to racial segregation, neighborhood disinvestment, and the concentration of poverty³³. While there are housing programs that address both mobility to higher opportunity neighborhoods and place-based strategies to improve neighborhood quality, without a strong tax-base to support neighborhood needs, many neighborhoods lack the investment to help residents thrive.

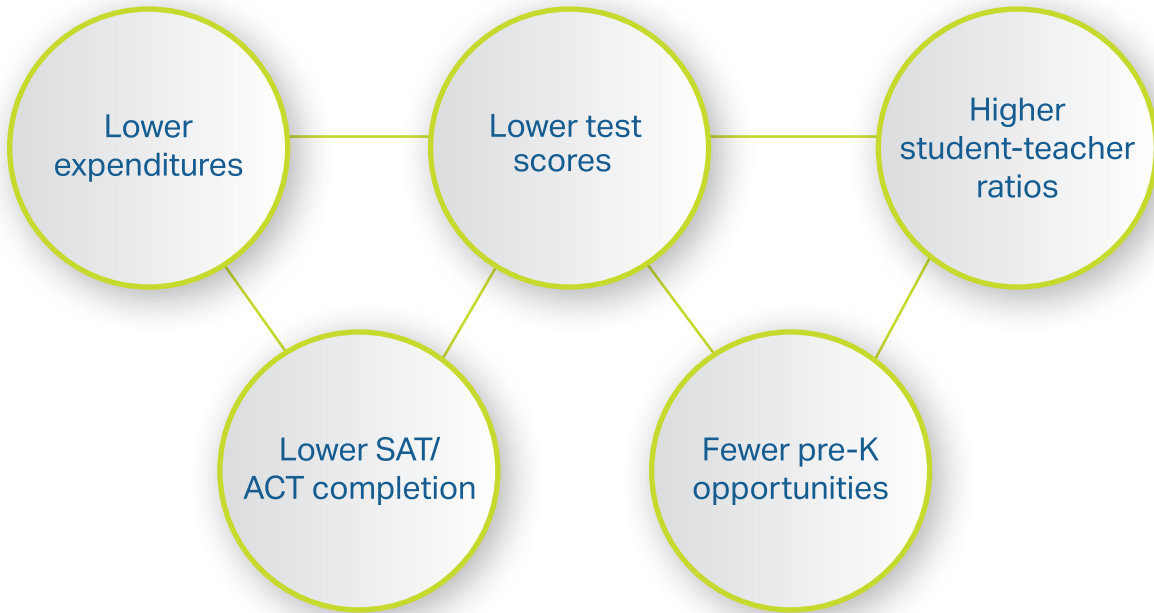
These challenges can make it more difficult for children whose families have sought out housing assistance to thrive in school.



ASSESSING SCHOOL QUALITY

Some Schools Serving Assisted Children Have Low Resources and Experience Poor Performance:

Outcomes Reported by Schools Likely Serving at Least 1/3 of All US Project-based Assisted Units



PAHRC tabulation of the American Community Survey 2015, National Housing Preservation Database 2017, Parent and Family Involvement Survey 2017, National Center for Educational Statistics Common Core Data 2013-2014, US Department of Education Civil Rights Data 2013-2014, HUD School Proficiency Index 2017.

School Quality

Schools attended by many assisted children may exhibit poorer performance compared to the typical school. For example, in a study of 50 metropolitan areas, schools likely supporting households assisted through the Housing Choice Voucher Program, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, and public housing exhibited lower test scores than 66 percent of schools³⁴. More broadly, 56 percent of all project-based assisted units in the US were located in neighborhoods that had an educational opportunity score below the area median³⁵. Yet ten percent of units were located in areas in the top quintile of area schools in terms of educational opportunity, demonstrating that some children living in publicly supported homes do have access to a high quality education.

Not surprisingly, voucher-assisted children report attending their school of choice less frequently than their low-income unassisted peers. Seventy-four percent of unassisted school-aged children whose parents who earn below 150 percent of the poverty line noted that their school was their first choice compared to 57 percent of voucher-assisted school-aged children, as reported by their parents³⁶. Voucher-assisted school-aged children also reported more frequently than their low-income unassisted peers that they were somewhat dissatisfied with their school: 14 percent to six percent, respectively³⁷. Fewer project-based and voucher-assisted households with children considered their neighborhood school to be good, 82 percent compared to households with children earning below 150 percent of the poverty line, 86%³⁸. While school choice is a possibility for some students, this process is often difficult to navigate and may not ensure children a spot in their desired school.

School Resources

Many schools likely serving assisted children lack the resources they need to offer a full set of educational tools to their students, especially children with special needs who may need additional supports to thrive. Thirty-nine percent of project-based units were located in neighborhoods where the spending per student was below the area median³⁹. In addition to potentially fewer resources, 37 percent of project-based units were located in neighborhoods where schools had higher student-teacher ratios than the typical area school⁴⁰. Smaller classes and lower student-teacher ratios are associated with greater performance due to the additional attention teachers can provide to each student⁴¹. Schools that serve predominantly low-income students are often also resource-constrained for supports such as school social workers and librarians. Without these resources, many students, especially those with special needs, will find it more difficult to meet their educational goals.



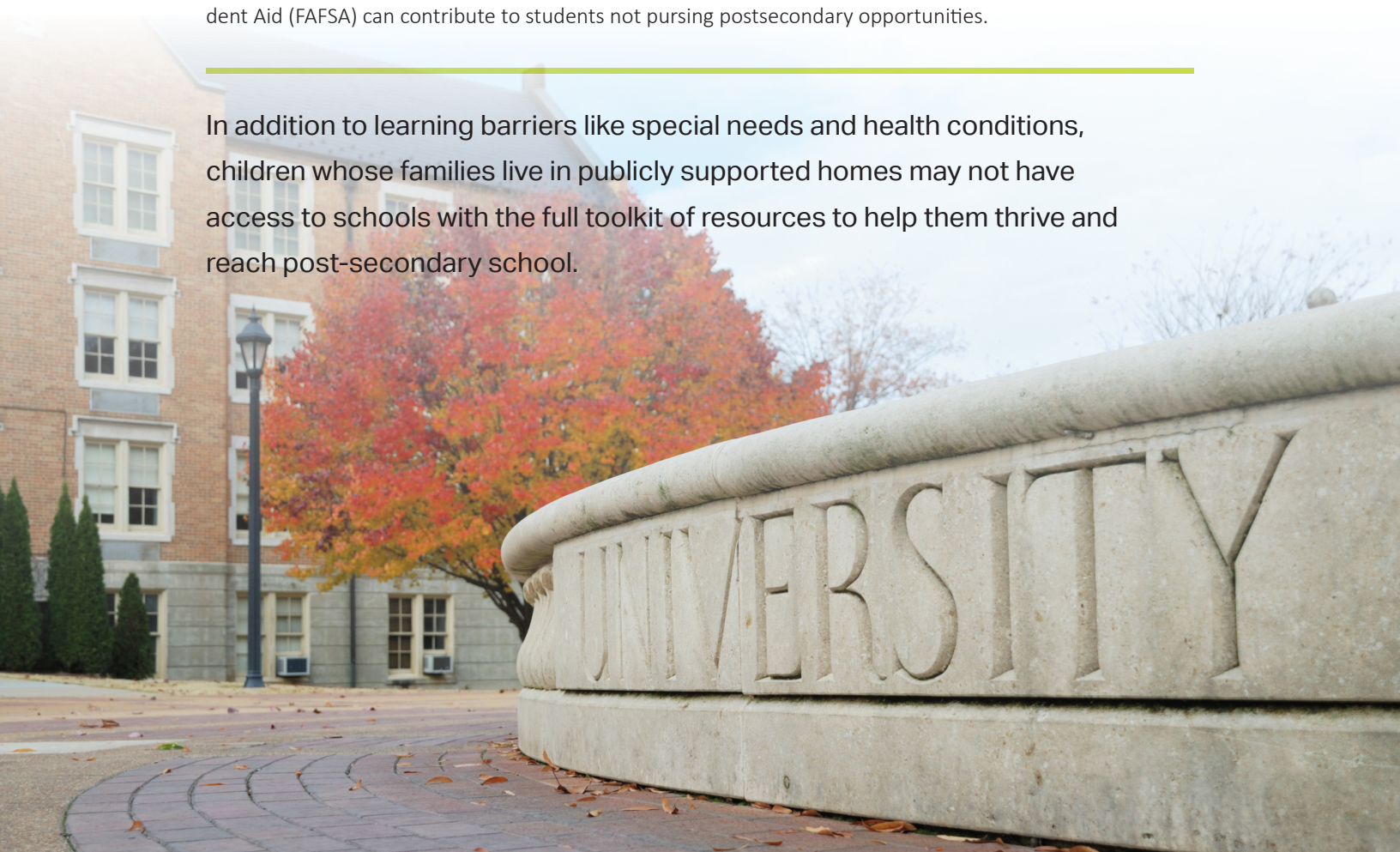
Early Education

Pre-K attendance has been linked to higher test scores and better school performance in older children who attended early education programs⁴². Forty-three percent of project-based assisted units were located in neighborhoods where the reported rate of school attendance among children three to five years old was below the typical rate of the surrounding area⁴³. These figures suggest that many assisted children may not have the opportunity to attend pre-K. While there are early education programs like Head Start, which reach many low-income children, spots are limited and transportation is often a barrier for low-income parents.

College Readiness

Secondary schools serving children living in project-based assisted units may also have fewer students preparing for college. Forty-eight percent of project-based units were located in neighborhoods where schools had lower SAT or ACT completion rates than the area median despite these exams being free for students participating the federal free lunch program. Schools with a higher percentage of students in poverty are also less likely to offer advanced placement (AP) courses and other advanced math and science classes. Sixty-four percent of project-based units were located in neighborhoods where the percentage of individuals over age 25 with a high school diploma or greater was lower than the area median and 57 percent were located in neighborhoods with the percentage of adults over 25 with college degrees was below the area median⁴⁴. This implies that children living in publicly supported homes may not have access to schools that are fully equipping their students for college⁴⁵. Additionally, lack of resources, such as guidance counselors, or information on and access to the technology needed to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can contribute to students not pursuing postsecondary opportunities.

In addition to learning barriers like special needs and health conditions, children whose families live in publicly supported homes may not have access to schools with the full toolkit of resources to help them thrive and reach post-secondary school.



PROMOTING SCHOOL SUCCESS

Despite the challenges their children face, parents across all income levels have fairly similar expectations for their children. Regardless of income level, most parents anticipate that their child will graduate high school and go on to attend college or more. More than one-third of voucher-assisted children's parents anticipated their school-aged child would earn a graduate degree and two-thirds of assisted school-aged children had parents who expected them to earn at least a two-year degree⁴⁶. This section details factors that support school success for children and how assisted households with children fare on these factors.

Factors that Promote School Success:

Comparison of Reported Rates of Assisted Households with Children vs. Their Low-income Peers

Ahead or on-par

Parental involvement

Developmental supports (food program participation, healthcare)

School attendance

Likely Behind

Parental educational attainment

Internet and computer access

Developmental supports (food security, eyeglasses)

Enrichment activities

PAHRC tabulation of Parent and Family Involvement Survey 2017, American Housing Survey 2015, Panel Survey of Income Dynamics 2017, National Health Interview Study 2018.



Parental Involvement and Education

Parents play an important role in their child’s education; parental involvement in school is often associated with higher academic performance among children⁴⁷. Assisted parents tend to be just as, or more, involved in their children’s education than their peers and invest similar levels of time in their child’s education compared to higher income families⁴⁸. For example, voucher-assisted children reported more frequently that their parents attended a meeting with a teacher than did the parents of their unassisted school-aged peers living in households earning below \$40,000⁴⁹. They also reported their parents reading a story to and working on a project with them at a higher rate than the parents of their low-income peers⁵⁰. Stable, affordable housing creates physical security and eases mental stressors which can free up parents’ time to engage more with their children’s learning.

Yet parents receiving housing assistance can still face challenges helping their children or meeting with teachers. For example, many assisted low-income individuals work in industries with unpredictable work schedules and are caretakers for their children, elderly, or disabled family members, making scheduling difficult and time scarce.⁵² Additionally, children tend to reach similar levels of educational attainment as their parents⁵³. Rates of educational attainment are lower, on average, for assisted adults compared to their low-income peers⁵⁴. This trend may put their children at a disadvantage in setting attainment goals based on parental achievement or possibly getting help with advanced schoolwork or the college application process⁵⁵.

School Attendance and Discipline

Attendance is a critical factor in school performance. Yet children experiencing instability related to poverty tend to miss more school in total (absences for illness plus other reasons) than their peers not experiencing these issues⁵⁶. Evidence shows that stable housing helps children living in publicly supported homes attain similar attendance rates as their unassisted higher-income peers, while low-income unassisted children report more total absences⁵⁷.

Emotional distress related to poverty also interrupts school progress⁵⁸. Students of color and those with learning disabilities can also experience more frequent disciplinary actions, since many under-resourced schools lack the tools to train teachers and do not have a diverse staff⁵⁹. As a result, assisted students are more likely than their low-income unassisted peers to experience a disciplinary action like detention or suspension that could keep them from attending class. For example, 21 percent of voucher-assisted school-age children reported experienced an out of school suspension compared to 12 percent of unassisted school-aged children living in renter households that earn below \$40,000⁶⁰.

Developmental Supports

Developmental supports like healthy nutrition, dental and eye care, and preventative healthcare promote education by encouraging healthy bodies that can focus on learning⁶¹. However, providing these supports

is more challenging for low-income families, who have less disposable income and may depend on federal programs to provide access to these resources. Eighty-five percent of assisted households with children participate in both the federal free lunch and breakfast programs compared to 74 percent of their unassisted peers with children earning below 150 percent of the poverty line, although both groups would likely qualify⁶¹. Likewise, 84 percent of assisted households with children use SNAP or a related nutrition assistance program compared to 56 percent of unassisted households with children earning below 150 percent of the poverty line⁶³. These programs are important supports to keep children attentive throughout the school day as 14 percent of assisted households compared to 9 percent of unassisted households earning below 200 percent of the poverty line with children were worried about running out of food⁶⁴.

A recent study by HUD found that access to healthcare, medication, well child care, mental health care, and dental care were similar for HUD-assisted households and unassisted higher income children⁶⁵. However, HUD-assisted children reported using the emergency room more frequently than their higher income counterparts. They also reported difficulty affording eyeglasses more frequently than their higher income peers.

Internet Access

In many schools, home internet access and a computer are essential for completing assignments, participating in enrichment activities that boost learning outcomes, and receiving communications from school. Yet only 62 percent of assisted households with children have access to a computer, compared to 82 percent of U.S. households with children⁶⁶. An earlier HUD study found that 43 percent of HUD-assisted households had an internet subscription and 44 percent had access to a computer compared to 69 percent of unassisted renters with internet and 80 percent with a computer⁶⁷. This well-documented ‘digital divide’ can have a negative impact on school performance⁶⁸. For instance, 24 percent of low-income households said they were unable to complete homework due to lack of a reliable internet connection or computer⁶⁹.

Enrichment Activities

Afterschool, summer, and other enrichment programs can help address the “summer slide,” offer additional supports, and supplement in-school learning⁷⁰. However, low-income children often miss out on these experiences likely due to the cost and the difficulties in managing transportation or the summer schedules of working parents⁷¹. High-income families spend seven times more, on average, on enrichment activities for their children than do low-income families⁷². These activities include after-school sports, arts and culture activities, private lessons, and more. Lack of access to these experiences can further the education gap for low-income children, such as those living in homes assisted by public supported programs.

While a stable home and access to federal programs help position children living in publicly supported homes to do better in school compared to their low-income unassisted peers, many key supports that encourage academic success still may not be available to these children.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE HOUSING-CENTERED EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS

Based on the challenges outlined in this report, this section details how housing-centered programs can complement the work of educators and support positive educational outcomes for assisted children. Effective housing-centered activities address the most common barriers demonstrated by children whose families have sought housing assistance and target the factors known to most significantly increase positive educational outcomes. Key needs include learning disabilities and special education, chronic illnesses, lack of access to fully resourced-schools, and the need for educational supports like internet access, healthy food, and enrichment opportunities. To this end, many housing providers have created innovative programs with education partners to help their students thrive. Links to resources for implementing successful programs, like the Partnership for Children and Youth’s “Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in Public and Affordable Housing⁷³,” can be found in the citations section of this report and via the information clearing-house www.HousingIs.org⁷⁴.



Designing Programs to Address Key Barriers

Since assisted children may be more likely to have learning disabilities and developmental delays and are subjected more frequently to external stressors, housing-centered programs that are designed to address these needs should have the most meaningful difference on assisted student outcomes as a whole. Standard tutoring or afterschool programs may help students who are already poised to succeed in school, but may overlook those who need non-typical support. Assisted children with learning challenges may not be receiving the help they need at school and



the typical assisted parent may not be trained to provide this support at home. Steps such as low staff-student ratios, quiet spaces, modified activities, adapted spaces, and strategies and materials tailored to meet the special needs of the children attending the program can help non-typical students succeed⁷⁵.

Denver Housing Authority's (DHA) Bridge program is designed to address the social and emotional needs of students in addition to providing academic support. Social-emotional learning instruction can be as important as traditional lessons in promoting academic progress, especially for special needs students who may have more difficulty picking up these skills on their own. This component, known as Second Step, teaches students behavioral skills that help improve school performance⁷⁶. Students who participate in the Bridge program have shown higher rates of school attendance, lower rates of school discipline, and higher scores in math and science than DHA students who do not participate in Bridge.

Mental and behavioral health practitioners often have resources to help students with special needs gain access to learning supports at school. Likewise, they can help students who have experienced emotional distress build coping skills and resiliency. As a result, mental and behavioral health providers are critical partners to students and their parents living in publicly supported housing.

The Housing Authority of San Bernardino County partners with the county's Department of Behavioral Health in its No Child Left Unsheltered program. The program, aimed at families with children experiencing homelessness, provides housing and multiple services for children and parents. The Department of Behavioral Health provides clinical therapy services and case management. Research on program outcomes finds that by stabilizing the family through a menu of services plus housing, children subsequently experienced improved school performance⁷⁷.

Environmental health issues and safety are also concerns for assisted students that can impeded learning. Many housing providers are using HUD guidance through the Healthy Homes⁷⁸ program on environmental hazards, such as mold and lead-based paint, to help provide relief from asthma and allergy triggers at home. Other industry resources, like the Breath Easy Homes built by Seattle Housing Authority, have also proven effective at reducing symptoms⁷⁹. Children suffering from asthma living in these homes experienced 63 percent more symptom-free days and a 66 percent reduction in the need for urgent medical care⁸⁰. Likewise, many housing providers are implementing safety measures through environmental design, such as creating boundaries like fencing or landscaping, increasing surveillance, and controlling access to shared spaces⁸¹.

Connecting Families to Food, Healthcare, and Other Supports

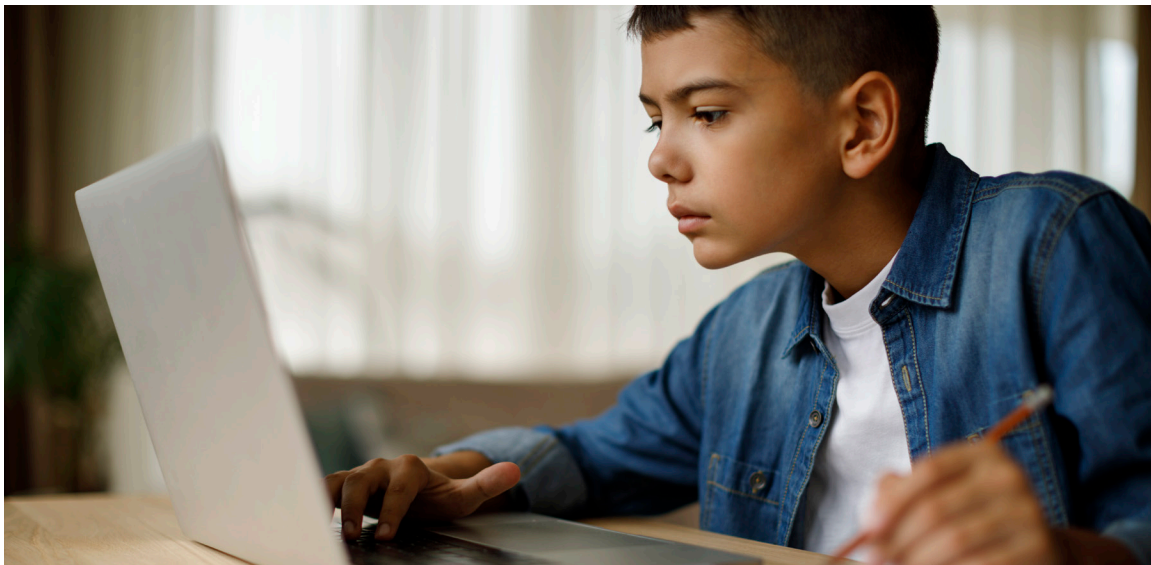
Food security is a significant issue for many assisted families. While most assisted students likely participate in free lunch and breakfast programs, they may need nutritious options in the evening or during school breaks. Food pantries, community gardens, and summer meal programs can help address this need. And while surveys indicate assisted children have access to healthcare, they may need opportunities for related supports like eyeglasses and alternative options for emergency care. Bringing these health partners onsite or even co-locating clinics may help provide additional access points.

Involving Parents

Another key step is talking with the parents of students living in assisted properties about their expectations for their children and the main barriers to their success. While many parents living in assisted housing are involved in their children's schooling, housing-centered programs can help make their involvement easier by providing new opportunities and connecting parents to additional resources that will help them continue to make a difference in their child's schooling experience⁸². Reading programs and materials, family homework help, family events and contests, and parenting classes can all help parents increase their child's academic success. Moreover, challenges facing assisted children like learning disabilities and low-resourced schools can be difficult for parents to navigate. Having school officials and programs come onsite to housing developments or near where voucher holders live can also greatly increase involvement because it reduces transportation barriers and reduces discomfort in settings where parents may feel like 'outsiders.'

Akron Housing Authority's (AHA) Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) seeks to empower parents in building their preschool children's school readiness and positioning these children for success in school and beyond⁸³. The program includes three components: family events, parent training via home visits by an early education specialist, and a mothers' support group. The program, based on the Parents as Teachers Model, teaches parents about early childhood development and how to prepare children for school. It also offers fun events and learning activities to engage the whole family as well as a group for moms to talk with other moms. In this way, AHA is able to link housing to educational preparedness and prepare parents to be more engaged in their children's schooling. To date, the program has served nearly 3,000 children.

Facilitating Home Computer and Internet Access



Given the likelihood that assisted children do not have access to internet service and a computer, finding ways to connect students to the internet and provide adequate technology can be an important role for housing providers. Successfully connecting assisted students to their online assignments and allowing parents to access school parent portals and email reminders can help boost academic performance and ensure that assisted students are not missing out on tools available to other children.

For example, some housing providers bundle internet as a utility available to residents. Others are partnering with local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to offer discounted services for low-income families⁸⁴. Connect Home, a HUD program linking ISPs, local businesses, and public housing providers to bring internet service and computer hardware to residents of HUD-assisted properties, has provided resources and guidance to housing agencies seeking to connect their residents⁸⁵. This program has expanded via Connect Home

USA, which provides a suite of digital inclusion resources⁸⁶. Onsite computer labs and mobile hotspots are another way for housing providers to help students access the internet. Local businesses and nonprofits may be helpful partners in providing free computers, mobile hot spots, and digital literacy training to assisted households, which has been noted as a key factor in encouraging successful internet use⁸⁷.

Housing Authority of Kansas City (HAKC) served as an original pilot site for Connect Home. As a result of connecting 1,200 residents to the internet through the program, HAKC residents reported improvements in accessing homework, healthcare data, and job applications as well as reduced travel to libraries and other access points, and reductions in costs related to internet subscriptions⁸⁸. In this way, HAKC is supporting a wide variety of resident needs including education and helping them to save time and money through internet access.

Offering Onsite Education Programs and Enrichment Activities

Since most of children's time is spent at home, onsite learning programs are a good way to supplement learning at school and bridge educational gaps. Many housing providers offer afterschool homework help and tutoring, art and drama programs, recreation opportunities, and other enrichment activities to reinforce and expand on what is offered during the school day and to build social skills. Partners can vary from teachers at local schools and education-related nonprofits to recreation organizations, sports clubs, or museums. Offering enrichment activities allows assisted children to keep up with their peers and benefit from alternative learning environments.

Norwalk Housing Authority created the Bridge to College and Careers program to help its students improve school success and reach their educational goals. The program incorporates learning centers at four of its family properties, which provide homework help, tutoring, character development, and life-skill-building activities, and other enrichment activities to children in grades six through twelve. As a result, children are able to build their literacy and STEM skills as well as gain access to new educational opportunities and resources.

Engaging with Local Schools

While this report reflects national trends regarding some of the key barriers keeping assisted children from succeeding more in school, assisted students' needs may vary across the country. Talking with local school(s) to identify shared students' biggest obstacles is a key step in creating housing-centered educational programs. School partnerships help make school and home more seamless and are addressing issues like

attendance, academic performance, and parental involvement. While school partnerships can be complex, there are resources for housing providers to help navigate issues like setting common goals, monitoring progress, getting funding, and data sharing⁸⁹.

Fresno Housing Authority (FHA) has partnered with several school districts to connect parents to their children's schooling progress. The agency links parents to the central school district's parent portal and encourages them to access the school's parenting programs. Fresno staff and partners also provide support to parents who have students within the educational system, connecting them to school contacts and resources. By creating a home-linked touchpoint and partnering with their students' schools, FHA is able to layer educational support on top of housing assistance.

CONCLUSION

Safe, affordable housing can be a platform to help children succeed in school. Yet children whose parents seek out and obtain housing assistance face additional barriers to educational achievement. Housing-centered education programs created to supplement the efforts of educators can help even more assisted children succeed when designed to address these barriers.

Looking at national data, children whose parents have sought out and obtained housing assistance experience higher rates of learning disabilities and other conditions like ADD and developmental delays that make academic achievement more difficult. They also experience more health issues such as asthma and allergies. Environmental and other stressors may also impede school progress more frequently for assisted children than their low-income peers. Typical programs designed to boost educational outcomes may not be designed to address these issues. Housing providers can work with parents, nonprofits, and local schools to assess the biggest barriers for their children and build related programming for their families with the help of education partners. Similarly, schools and other educational organizations should broker partnerships with housing providers to achieve the joint goal of improving education outcomes for low-income students. Housing-centered education efforts can help fill the gaps left by under-resourced schools, provide additional enrichment opportunities, and make navigating academic success easier for low-income families experiencing multiple life challenges.

Housing agencies are indeed finding innovative ways to improve educational outcomes for their students. Some examples include partnering with local schools, boosting parental engagement, providing internet access and devices, connecting families to healthcare and other developmental supports, addressing health and safety concerns, and offering enrichment activities. As the evidence of the impact of these programs grows, resources and avenues to facilitate connections between housing and education should be expanded both in the education and housing policy arenas as well as in the philanthropic community. These efforts will improve academic success for our most vulnerable students and help them thrive in school and beyond.

ENDNOTES

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Note that this survey is not designed to be statistically representative of the population of voucher-assisted children. Comparisons are between children in this survey.
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A young boy with a dark blue backpack and a red mesh pocket is walking past a yellow school bus. The background is slightly blurred, showing the bus and other people. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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