



RESEARCH REPORT

Developing Housing and Education Partnerships

Lessons from the Field

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Introduction

Schools and youth-serving organizations often struggle to better meet the needs of low-income students and to connect them to resources that can stabilize their lives and strengthen their academic competencies. Assisted-housing providers, including housing authorities, are in a unique position to support educators, low-income students, and their caregivers outside the school day. By partnering with schools and school districts, housing providers can help address challenges outside school that can become barriers to learning—such as housing instability, truancy, and health problems. Their roles as developers and landlords create opportunities to connect housing and education. As developers, housing authorities can build or repurpose facilities and bring education supports closer to assisted-housing developments. As landlords, housing authorities can expand on-site resources and change the quid pro quo for housing assistance; if a housing authority wants to use its leases to require school attendance or education planning for young residents, it can. Housing authorities can also facilitate connections with schools and school districts through data sharing.

The housing field is exploring creative approaches and promising practices to further link housing and education services. The Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA) is a membership association that represents 70 of the nation's largest public housing authorities. To help meet its members' desire to support educational outcomes for low-income students, CLPHA kicked off an education initiative in 2013. The initiative started with CLPHA's "Bringing Education Home" report (Council of Large Public Housing Authorities 2012), which scanned promising practices of members that were leveraging their role as housing providers to help boost academic achievement for children in assisted housing. Today, CLPHA is providing technical assistance and field-building support to practitioners, conducting policy advocacy on Capitol Hill, and entering partnerships with other national organizations to advance meaningful and sustainable partnerships between the housing and education sectors.

As part of that effort, and with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, CLPHA enlisted the Urban Institute to develop a set of case studies to document and describe housing and education partnerships in three diverse settings: Akron, Ohio; New Haven, Connecticut; and Vancouver, Washington. Each case study highlights key elements that shape and strengthen the partnership. This report summarizes the innovative approaches and promising practices that emerged from the three sites.

Background on Housing and Education Partnerships

Research consistently shows the detrimental effects of poverty on a range of child well-being outcomes, including their educational attainment. The mechanisms for those effects are diverse but include the negative impacts of housing and school instability, exposure to violence and poor neighborhood conditions, and deprivation of basic needs (Reardon 2011). At a time of increasing child poverty rates—as demonstrated in schools with greater numbers of low-income students than ever before (Suits, Barba, and Dunn 2015)—both the housing and education sectors are grappling with how best to help low-income children and their families navigate the array of challenges they may face at home and at school, and with how to do more with fewer resources.

Housing providers are currently exploring the role they can play in improving outcomes for children living in assisted-housing units—overall and for educational outcomes in particular. The theory is that assisted-housing providers have a unique opportunity to improve children’s well-being and outcomes by connecting them to services and bringing opportunities right into their homes and neighborhoods.¹ Housing authorities are acutely aware that although housing itself is a critical component of family stability, housing paired with smart, targeted strategies for helping children succeed in other settings—most notably school—could help families disrupt the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The scale of the opportunity is significant. Housing authorities provide stable, affordable housing for more than 1.2 million households across the country through public housing, including more than 850,000 children.²

Schools have some nonacademic resources to help address challenges that can negatively impact academic outcomes for poor children, including free and reduced-price meals, transportation assistance, and additional support services and programs. However, teachers and school administrators have limited time and resources to address the array of problems that students may face at home and in their neighborhoods. By combining resources—both financial and in terms of their direct connections to families and students—schools and housing authorities can potentially have a greater effect on low-income students’ lives.

Study Sites and Partnerships

Akron, Ohio

Akron is Ohio's fifth-largest city, with an estimated population of 198,100. The Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) manages 9,900 available assisted-housing units: 4,300 public housing units, 5,000 housing choice vouchers, and 600 other affordable units, totaling. AMHA is not a Moving to Work (MTW) agency (see box 1). Akron Public Schools (APS) has approximately 22,000 students enrolled. Of those students, 86 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals (Akron Public Schools 2013). The majority of AMHA-assisted students attend schools within APS.

Akron's housing and education partnership has been developing along two tracks. The first, the Early Childhood Initiative (ECI), is a set of programs and supports offered to young children living in AMHA developments and their families. The second, the Reach Opportunity Center at Summit Lake, is a community-based education resource center that is owned and operated by AMHA and APS. The relationship between AMHA and APS is bolstered by two collaborative, collective impact initiatives in Summit County. The first, the Summit Education Initiative (SEI) is a Cradle to Career alliance that helps Summit County identify major educational challenges, track progress, facilitate collaborations to address educational challenges, and develop programs that address barriers to education. The second is First Things First, a county-sponsored collective impact initiative focused exclusively on young children from birth to age 5.

New Haven, Connecticut

New Haven is Connecticut's second-largest city, with a population just over 130,000. Elm City Communities (ECC), formerly known as the Housing Authority of New Haven or HANH, offers 2,607 public housing units and 4,479 housing choice vouchers, totaling 7,086 available assisted-housing units. ECC is an MTW agency. The New Haven Public School (NHPS) district serves more than 20,000 students. About one-third of students in the city attend magnet and charter schools through lottery-based school choice. ECC students attend every school within NHPS as a result of school choice.

Initiated in 2014, Elm City Believes is New Haven's housing and education partnership for students of all ages living in ECC assisted housing. Elm City Believes seeks to close the achievement gap between

HANH students and other NHPS students by providing supplementary wraparound educational support services. Although Elm City Believes contributes to a larger school reform effort that was already under way within NHPS, it is a distinct initiative led by the housing authority to serve ECC students in (a) NHPS kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) public schools, (b) New Haven’s early childhood programs, (c) regional magnet and charter schools; and young adults pursuing their GED equivalency certificate.

Vancouver, Washington

Vancouver is Washington’s fourth-largest city with an estimated population of more than 167,000. The Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA) offers 2,391 housing choice vouchers and 302 public housing units, totaling 2,693 available assisted-housing units. VHA is an MTW agency. The Vancouver Public School (VPS) District serves almost 23,000 children, with more than one-half of VPS students eligible for free or reduced-price meals in the 2012–13 academic year. VHA-assisted students may attend schools in any of Clark County’s 11 school districts, which compose Washington state’s Educational Service District (ESD) 112, through VHA’s tenant-based voucher program.

The housing authority and school district partnership in Vancouver focuses on reducing chronic absenteeism and instability in students’ lives. The partnership is based on the premise that VHA and VPS are liaisons between the low-income families they serve and the array of resources those families may need to achieve economic and academic success. VHA’s partnership with VPS complements other initiatives to support academic performance and attendance that are centered at VHA’s largest public housing community, the Skyline Crest Campus of Learners. Resident services staff members based at Skyline Crest provide VHA families and youths with access to early childhood education programming, after-school services and support for K–12 students, and initiatives focused on encouraging school attendance.

Methods

CLPHA selected the three sites to represent the geographic, philosophical, and programmatic diversity of its membership. Data collection for the case studies began in July 2014. Two researchers assigned to each site reviewed internal and public documents about the city, the housing authority, and the school district. The research team also designed interview protocols and conducted in-person and telephone interviews with key stakeholders involved in each of the partnerships. The protocols and topics covered

during the interviews were standardized across the three sites, covering the partnership's history, goals, intended beneficiaries, programs and services, challenges, and next steps. In-person interviews were typically conducted in the offices of key stakeholders and lasted about an hour. Interviewers took comprehensive notes during each interview and recorded selected interviews when the respondent consented. Between August 2014 and December 2015, a total of 42 interviews were conducted with public housing authority and school or school district staff members and leadership, as well as with funders and key organizational partners from local government and the nonprofit or social service sectors.

Key Elements of Partnerships

Housing and education partnerships are based on the premise that partners can potentially have a greater impact on students' lives by combining their resources. In some localities, sophisticated collaborations of diverse organizations are working together to address social problems that are complex, enduring, and cannot be solved by a single organization acting alone. For example, Cradle to Career Councils are intended to integrate education efforts across early learning, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools to focus on children's educational success across the early life course. Similarly, Promise Neighborhoods are school-centered, neighborhood-based initiatives patterned after the Harlem Children's Zone, which is one of the earliest and most well-known collaborative initiatives for education.

The study of collaborative structures leading to collective impact has been around for decades, but the term *collective impact* has been well articulated by the consultancy FSG in recent years. By FSG's definition, collective impact requires five key elements: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone organization (Kania and Kramer 2011). Although those five elements may be considered essential for establishing a collective impact initiative, housing authorities and school districts may desire a bit more flexibility in establishing the structure of their own collaborative work.

To that end, we identified seven key elements that have shaped and strengthened the housing and education partnerships in one or more of the sites we observed. They include shared goals and joint strategies, effective leaders and staff members, partnerships with strong service providers, flexible funding sources, promising programs and services, data for decisionmaking, and systems and protocols for coordination (see figure 1). Although no single element is essential, each one can strengthen and deepen a partnership in important ways.

FIGURE 1

Seven Key Elements of Housing and Education Partnerships



Shared Goals and Joint Strategies

Although the housing and education sectors share common clients, by definition they have different goals, strategies, and funding sources. When housing and education professionals work together, an initial step toward an effective partnership is to identify and embrace common goals and then to articulate specific strategies to address them. Often, creating agreements, such as memoranda of understanding or a joint theory of change, is a way to formalize or express those common goals and specific strategies.

A theory of change requires partners to outline their goals, along with measureable outcomes, and identify strategies to address them. Although some well-meaning efforts have implicit theories of change that are based on assumptions about goals and strategies, they may lack the definition or focus that is needed to achieve success. If the theory of change is not made explicit, aligning their goals and strategies, measuring progress, and achieving the desired effect will become difficult for partners.

Although each of the case study sites has developed a partnership based on mutual respect and commitment to collaboration around shared goals, those partnerships are often still developing explicit theories of change and formalizing how they will work together.

New Haven’s Elm City Believes initiative has the following broad underlying theory: “If HANH leverages smart housing policy to advance academic outcomes for student residents, then HANH will see success among New Haven’s young people through increased high-school graduation,

postsecondary completion, and employment attainment” (HANH 2014, 10). ECC and NHPS are working on a shared statement of goals to articulate how each partner will work to achieve agreed-upon goals.

In Vancouver, both VHA and VPS are motivated to interrupt the cycle of poverty by better preparing students for economic success. To that end, both VPS and VHA have identified school attendance as a key outcome and are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with each other and with local community partners about how best to address chronic absenteeism. VHA is tracking student attendance and engaging with parents at the Skyline Crest public housing development about the importance of consistent school attendance. VPS and VHA are working together toward entering a data-sharing agreement (DSA) that would allow VPS to support VHA’s efforts with attendance data for all VHA students, and both are working with a third partner to identify families for the pilot Stable Housing Voucher Program.

In Akron, ECI promotes most of the early care and education goals established at the county level by First Things First. About 10 percent of the county’s children from birth to age 5 live in AMHA developments, so AMHA is an essential partner in the county’s collective impact effort. Likewise, Summit Education Initiative goals and strategies inform and inspire the Reach Opportunity Center’s goals and strategies. Programming offered at the Reach Opportunity Center is aligned with SEI so that investments made by AMHA and its partners will have an effect on established SEI outcomes.

Effective Leaders and Staff Members

Working across systems requires forging new and uncertain paths. Strong and effective leadership is essential to translating ideas into action, coordinating investments and service strategies, and supporting greater coordination among stakeholders. Some housing authorities and school district partnerships also hire staff to manage and deploy services. From managers to service providers to (in two cases) VISTA volunteers, the case studies provided examples of expanded internal capacity to manage and run programs.

Leaders

Each of the case study sites had high-level institutional leaders who engaged with partners about new initiatives, set priorities, pursued joint funding, and fostered a culture of collaboration between the housing authority and the school district. In Vancouver, VHA’s executive director and VPS’s

superintendent are both proponents of the partnership. In New Haven, the executive director launched the partnership by hiring a well-known and respected local education leader to head the initiative. She also worked to change the culture of the housing authority by educating staff members about the initiative and adopting education as central to its mission. Similarly, Akron's director of strategic engagement pursues partnerships and funding locally and nationally.

Managers

Each of the sites has professional managers who are responsible for planning and implementing joint initiatives, allocating internal resources, identifying external partners and resources, and coordinating services. In Vancouver and Akron, the director of resident services at the housing authority works in that capacity, and the director in Vancouver regularly engages with directors of family engagement and strategic partnerships at the school district. Akron's Reach Opportunity Center and Early Childhood Initiative each have managers who are exclusively responsible for day-to-day operations.

ECC hired a local education leader as special assistant for education policy to manage New Haven's school-based partnerships and parent-support networks, negotiate DSAs, and provide some direct case management. To extend its capacity to address chronic absenteeism, ECC also hired a student engagement officer.

Service Providers

At the housing and school sites, the initiatives depend on knowledgeable, friendly, culturally sensitive field staff members and service providers.

In New Haven, Elm City Believes supports a coordinator for the Connecticut Center for the Creative Arts and Technology after-school programming. Other ECC staff members take on a number of roles that contribute to Elm City Believes, including managing youth leadership councils; running learning labs on site; and staffing back-to-school fairs, neighborhood barbecues, and transportation for students to after-school activities.

In Vancouver, the school district employs Family-Community Resource Center coordinators, who identify eligible families and refer them for the Stable Housing Voucher Program. Staff members providing the VHA resident services oversee the youth activities and Family Plan supports that take place at the Skyline site in Vancouver. VHA also hires residents as part-time early learning advocates to

manage the early childhood development efforts. The housing authority, school district, and mental health agency in Vancouver is jointly hosting an AmeriCorps VISTA member for a year to focus on all three organizations' priorities related to chronic absenteeism. The VISTA member, who has been housed at VPS since February 2015, will work with all three organizations to identify best practices for improving school attendance and increasing awareness about attendance-related issues.

Akron's on-site programming is delivered primarily by service providers, with the exception of a VISTA member at the Reach Center, who works with families in Summit Lake.

Partnerships with Strong Service Providers

Many housing and education initiatives do not have an adequate budget to hire staff members. In many cases, housing authorities leverage existing efforts to support their education initiatives. For some, partnerships with local service providers stem from their existing resident services efforts. An education initiative can extend their network from those that primarily serve adults to those that serve children as well.

In Vancouver, VHA and VPS work closely with local organizations that have expertise that they need to achieve their goals. For example, Clark County Council for the Homeless (CFTH) became a key partner when VHA and VPS launched the Stable Housing Voucher Program pilot because of CFTH's experience in housing high-need families with limited rental history, poor credit, and other challenges that may limit their ability to find private market-rental housing without additional assistance. Likewise, the Boys & Girls Club of Southwest Washington brings after-school programming and other services to youths in the Skyline neighborhood, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Southwest Washington is helping VHA and VPS address chronic absenteeism.

In New Haven, ECC relies on the expertise of service providers to carry out some of its Elm City Believes programming. Some service providers are colocated in ECC developments but do not directly coordinate with ECC, whereas others do collaborate with ECC on such activities as ECC recruiting, chaperoning, and supervising students for summer and after-school programs.

Broader, multisector collaborations have created opportunities for housing authorities and school districts to expand their reach by partnering with more stakeholders. Housing and education partnerships are bolstered by the existence of supporting organizations and networks, such as the Summit Education Initiative and First Things First, from which Akron benefits. Likewise, VHS and VPS

benefit from participating in the Healthy Living Collaborative of Southwest Washington, the region's multisector coalition to address poverty and health disparities.

Flexible Funding Sources

Housing authorities need to make important tradeoffs between funding for housing subsidies and maintenance and funding for supportive services. Recently, housing authorities have invested in supportive services, including education supports, which are based on the premise that youths who are successful in school are less likely to be housing authority clients in the future.

The Vancouver and New Haven housing authorities take advantage of funding flexibility afforded by their MTW designation (see box 1), which allows them to redirect or repurpose funding for voucher, public housing, or capital funds toward services and to make programmatic reforms.

State and federal funding have also been leveraged for housing and education efforts at those sites. New Haven's partnership is supported in part by an antitruancy grant from the state of Connecticut. Construction of Akron's Reach Center was funded with a \$4 million grant from HUD's Capital Fund Education and Training Community Facilities Program.

Philanthropic funding is another important source of support. Philanthropic support is a key factor at the Vancouver site, where funding from the Community Foundation for Southwest Washington is being used to support Skyline program offerings and joint efforts between VHA and the Boys & Girls Club of Southwest Washington. Likewise, Akron's philanthropic community has been extremely generous in this area. The Akron Community Foundation, Gar Foundation, and United Way of Summit County have all made significant contributions to ECI. To date, ECC has provided financial support for Elm City Believes, but ECC is developing a fundraising strategy that will incorporate public, corporate, and philanthropic funding to scale up its school partnerships and establish learning labs in each housing development.

AMHA and VHA have both established 501(c)(3) nonprofits to create more flexibility for fundraising. Akron's nonprofit subsidiary, Building for Tomorrow, has been essential to support early childhood services without MTW authority. Vancouver's Bridgeview Housing provides development and resident support services for VHA and will eventually oversee all of VHA's resident services. ECC, too, may establish a 501(c)(3) to create more flexibility for fundraising.

The budgets for those initiatives are relatively modest for the breadth of activities they support. AMHA's ECI budget for 2015 is approximately \$460,000, and the Reach Center's annual budget is \$247,000 (for a total of \$707,000 across the two components in Akron). New Haven's annual budget is \$360,000, and Vancouver's budget—without staff expenses—is \$238,000.

BOX 1

Moving to Work

MTW is a US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) demonstration program that provides designated public housing authorities (PHAs) greater flexibility to make administrative and programmatic reforms. As of October 2014, HUD had conferred MTW status to 39 PHAs, two of which (New Haven and Vancouver) are profiled in this report. MTW authorizes the use of HUD funding otherwise earmarked for voucher, public housing, or capital funds to invest in programs and services to promote employment and self-sufficiency for households in the public housing and voucher programs. Thus, although MTW status is not a requirement for PHAs interested in educational partnerships, it does provide advantages for funding educational services and implementing policies to promote academic success.

Elm City Communities uses its MTW flexibility to invest some of its HUD funds for the resident services staff, including a full-time education policy adviser, as well as to provide learning labs in each of its family developments. If ECC were not an MTW site, its education initiative would need to focus on connecting residents to existing community-based resources, rather than offer them on site. Similarly, the Vancouver Housing Authority has been able to use its MTW flexibility to launch and fund the majority of its education initiatives, including scholarships for qualifying high school seniors and stipends for its early learning advocates.

Promising Programs and Services

Housing authorities with MTW authority, Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Grants, or Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) Grants often have a resident services department with a coordinator who connects residents to available resources at the neighborhood, city, or county level. The case studies provide examples of housing and education partnerships with enhanced programming and services in the following areas:

Homelessness

Vancouver was the only site profiled to have instituted policies specifically aimed at improving educational opportunities for homeless students. To ensure that homeless children and their families find and stay in stable housing, Vancouver initiated the Stable Housing Voucher Program, a special voucher program to serve families with children who are from one of two VPS schools and who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. A \$400 voucher is available for 36 months for up to 10 families. In exchange, the families work with the VHA staff to move toward self-sufficiency and with the VPS staff on school engagement plans for the children.

Early Learning

The Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) in Akron focuses exclusively on early learning and development with programs that seek to inform, empower, support, and address the mental health needs of parents of young children. Among the programs implemented by ECI is the Parents as Teachers™ program, an evidence-based home-visiting program. At the RISE & STARS Community Center at the Skyline site in Vancouver, early learning advocates design and conduct resident outreach to encourage participation in early learning activities. The center also provides classroom space for the Early Childhood Assistance Program, Washington state's public preschool program. In return, children from the Skyline community are given priority for slots in the program. Elm City Believes supports early childhood learning by increasing supports for families with young children so they enroll their children in Head Start and other early childhood programs.

Family Engagement

At the Skyline site in Vancouver, residents work with the VHA resident services staff to develop annual Family Plans. The plan, which is part of the assisted-housing lease agreement, requires that families submit school attendance information for students annually. The information, submitted to the VHA staff in the form of report cards or school attendance reports, is used to document and understand school attendance patterns for children and to discuss them with caretakers. In New Haven, parent support networks (see box 2) facilitate meetings for small groups of ECC parents monthly for a year to expand their capacity to support their children as students. Akron also conducts outreach and provides programming to parents of young children so they can do more to improve their children's developmental and academic abilities. Akron also has a VISTA member who focuses on maintaining an

ongoing relationship between APS and AMHA. As a member of the APS family engagement team, she organizes events for APS staff to present on important APS issues to staff and residents at AMHA.

BOX 2

Parent Support Networks in New Haven, Connecticut

Parent support networks are year-long programs that emphasize the importance of parental engagement and empowerment in improving educational outcomes for students. Two groups of 10 to 15 parents meet every other month for information sharing and skill building that can help their children succeed academically and to discuss how ECC can better engage and communicate with them. Guest speakers and trainings equip parents to navigate the school system and prepare their students for the school year by educating them on Common Core standards and by holding question-and-answer meetings with NHPS teachers. Other workshops help families financially prepare for college, with presentations on the New Haven Promise Scholarship program, discussions on how to save for college, and assistance in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Each session ends with relevant handouts, such as “Tips for Having the Best Parent–Teacher Conference Possible” or “Tips for Getting your Child in Summer Programs,” and an evaluation form. The networks also aim to develop parental involvement by encouraging them to serve in leadership roles within their schools and throughout the district. In addition to organizing formal workshops and trainings, parent support networks hold barbecues and more informal gatherings where parents can collaborate and commune. Anecdotal evidence indicates that a key element of those networks’ success is the opportunity for parents to encourage each other and problem-solve among themselves to provide better academic support for their children.

Out-of-School Time

To complement or supplement the learning that students do in school, housing authorities can offer enriching activities after school and during the summer. In Vancouver, that programming has been offered for about a decade at the RISE & STARS Community Center. Activities include art, homework time and assistance, computer access, tutoring, and volunteer-led recreational activities for younger children in the early afternoon and for older teens in the early evening. In New Haven, the services are offered for all school-age children and include offerings from the Boys & Girls Club, homework help and

tutoring for middle and high school students, and on-site learning labs with computers. ECC also partners with the Connecticut Center for Arts and Technology to provide summer and after-school art activities for ECC youths who are struggling in school, in the hope that the amenities and art projects will be transformative for them.

Absenteeism and Attendance

In Vancouver, the housing authority, school district, and mental health organization applied jointly for an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer who will work with local stakeholders to increase awareness about school attendance and identify attendance-promoting activities, including those that can address mental illness among students and their caretakers. To tackle the same issues, ECC has hired a full-time student engagement officer who—in collaboration with school counselors, the police, and service partners—works to identify chronically absent students and to overcome challenges that prevent them from regularly attending class.

Postsecondary Preparation

ECC high school students may attend College Week, which runs for five days during winter break, to make youths aware of postsecondary opportunities and to provide information about the college application process and scholarships. ECC also offers opportunities through New Haven Promise, an ongoing effort to make students aware of college preparation, apprenticeships and training, leadership, and volunteer opportunities. A similar program in Vancouver has enrolled 25 students in a college information and preparatory course that offers \$100 incentives for participation.

Case Management

New Haven was the only site profiled to have instituted case management and supports for students in ECC units. At select elementary, middle, and high schools, the program identifies the needs of students and provides individualized case management and increased supports. Supports include homework help and tutoring, attendance assistance, technology assistance, whole family evaluations, mental health supports for students and family, after-school enrichment, and parent engagement.

Data for Decisionmaking

Housing authorities and school districts collect extensive administrative data about their clients. Through the annual or biannual recertification process, housing authorities receive updated information about household size and composition, income, benefit receipt, and geographic location. Likewise, school districts keep student data on attendance, performance, and disciplinary actions. Data sharing is a critical component in planning and implementing a successful partnership, and funders place a premium on grantees' abilities to collect and use data to assess program effectiveness. However, data-sharing agreements (DSAs) can require significant investment on the part of housing authority and school district partners (see box 3).

The most restrictive DSA gives partners access to anonymized data that allow them to identify the overlap of students in assisted-housing attending local schools and to produce aggregated data on academic outcomes, such as attendance, disciplinary actions, standardized test scores, and grades. Partners also enter DSAs that give them access to the academic records of individual students, thereby allowing partners to regularly monitor students' academic performance. Those agreements can be either opt in (students' parents must sign a consent form to authorize the data sharing) or opt out (partners have access to all records unless the students' parents decide not to provide access).

In Vancouver, a DSA is being negotiated that will allow VPS to send aggregate attendance data to VHA so VHA can better understand the problem of absenteeism in its student population. A DSA that would allow VPS to provide individual student-level data may be pursued in the future.

In New Haven, a DSA provided NHPS with the legal authority to permit ECC to complete a one-time merge of student data and housing authority administrative data. The result of the merge allowed ECC to identify the population served by both systems, which schools they attend, grades, test scores, attendance rates, and suspensions. The data revealed that 30 percent of NHPS students live in ECC units. ECC has been able to use the data to understand the academic and behavioral challenges of students and to communicate with partners about those issues. For example, the data merge revealed widespread absenteeism among ECC youths, which helped ECC receive an antitrust grant from the state of Connecticut.

ECC has also executed DSAs with local charter and magnet schools to regularly receive data about ECC students who attend those schools. It also has an agreement to receive school data from NHPS for students whose parents sign a consent form. In New Haven, that method has proven to be difficult because of the large number of families and the amount of follow-up required to receive the signed consent form, but the method has sufficed as a substitute until the district-level agreement is signed.

The ECC staff is using those data to provide coordinated case management with the schools to ensure that students are attending class, are addressing behavioral challenges, and remain on track to graduate.

BOX 3

Data Sharing for Decisionmaking

Sharing and linking student-level data is one way that housing authorities can work with schools or school districts to understand student needs and performance and to attempt to assess the role of housing assistance in academic outcomes. However, negotiating data-sharing agreements—ensuring that individual privacy is protected, understanding privacy rules, establishing data-sharing protocols, and analyzing linked individual-level data—can be challenging. Two basic questions often emerge for public housing authorities (PHAs) considering DSAs.

First, to what extent do PHAs have the legal authority to share and link individual-level client data to monitor programs, improve services, or carry out evaluation or research? And under what circumstances must parents or households consent to data sharing? Education data are governed by the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act, which has been revised nearly a dozen times since its initial 1974 iteration and which provides some clarity to educators about the issues. In contrast, HUD data are governed primarily by the Federal Privacy Act of 1974 and have not received similar federal-level attention that outlines how data may be shared and used. As a result, decisions about how data may be shared are often made by individual PHAs and their partners, on a case-by-case basis. Concerns about adequate privacy protections and a lack of resources to clarify data privacy issues may slow or deter some PHAs from pursuing DSAs with school districts, researchers, or other service partners. Among the housing authorities profiled in this study, one has an agreement in place (New Haven), and one is in the process of entering into a limited agreement (Vancouver). The Summit County Education Initiative, a third-party intermediary, facilitates the data sharing between partners in Akron. In addition to VHA, other PHAs in the Pacific Northwest have already entered into agreements related to specific initiatives or to assessing student performance. HUD recently launched a new data-sharing protocol governing requests for data to be used for research, which may present additional opportunities for local PHAs or school districts to access federal-level data to explore educational outcomes for students in assisted housing.

In Akron, data sharing between AMHA and APS is made possible by the Summit Education Initiative, which has data-sharing agreements with AMHA and each public school district in Summit County that allow SEI to track outcomes for all students.

At Skyline in Vancouver, the lease agreement requires that families submit attendance information for students annually. The data are collected in the form of report cards or school attendance reports. However, the differences in reports across schools make the data in this format difficult to work with. Currently, the VHA staff is using available data to document and understand attendance patterns, including chronic absenteeism among VHA students.

Systems and Protocols for Coordination

Regular communication facilitates collaboration between partners. Meetings provide opportunities to develop a shared understanding of partners' goals and their strategies. Meetings also create a venue for raising and addressing problems. However, meetings are not the only way for partners to share information, particularly when they are doing their work in relative proximity. In fact, when partners or services are housed in the same location, proximity facilitates more informal in-person meetings and sharing of information and resources. Among the sites profiled, informal discussions in social settings, at housing developments, and on the phone often keep partners connected.

Communication

New Haven's ECC staff members meet weekly to provide updates on programming and to address challenges that arise; additional meetings are scheduled as needed. The advisory board for Akron's ECI meets regularly, thus creating an opportunity for partners to reflect and plan. The Vancouver team does not have a regular meeting for the VHA and VPA partnership but has opportunities to meet informally at community engagements and Healthy Living Collaborative meetings. Likewise, Akron partners find opportunities to meet at SEI and First Things First meetings. Additionally, AMHA has an early childhood advisory board that meets quarterly and a Reach Opportunity Center collaborative that meets regularly. In working on the implementation of the Stable Housing Voucher Program pilot, VHA, VPA, and the Clark County Council for the Homeless established a standing meeting to address the unique challenges of launching the program.

Colocation

Each of the housing authorities brings services on site that are intended to enrich the educational opportunities of their residents. That approach is critical in New Haven, where students attend schools all over the city and often do not have the opportunity to access services outside the school day. In addition to the programs and services that Akron and Vancouver offer to assisted-housing residents at their properties, each of the sites has developed a community hub to host and foster the activities. AMHA's Reach Opportunity Center (highlighted in box 4), which is jointly owned by AMHA and APS, hosts events, activities, programs, and classes. Likewise, Vancouver's Skyline Campus of Learners is a community-based resource center that hosts a number of education-related programs, including classroom space for a state-funded preschool program, where children from the Skyline community are given priority for slots.

Colocation of executives and administrators can also foster partnerships. In Vancouver, the Clark County Council for the Homeless, a partner in the Stable Housing Voucher Program and other efforts, is colocated at VHA, with whom it shares office space and other resources. The proximity to each other facilitates communication and collaboration.

BOX 4

The Reach Opportunity Center of Summit Lake in Akron, Ohio

The Reach Opportunity Center is a community-based education resource center that is owned and operated by Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) and Akron Public School (APS) District. It is located near Summit Lake in Akron, a community with 249 public housing units. Reach provides services for Akron residents across the developmental continuum, from cradle to career. Completed in 2014, the facility provides dedicated space for two Head Start, two Early Head Start, and two APS kindergarten classrooms. Adult education classes and other community resources sponsored by partner organizations are also hosted at Reach. The Reach Opportunity Center is envisaged as a hub for early childhood and adult services, programming, and events in Akron. Funding for the Reach Center came from AMHA, APS, and a \$4 million grant to the AMHA from HUD's Capital Fund Education and Training Community Facilities Program.

Summary of Findings and Next Steps

The evidence from Akron, New Haven, and Vancouver case studies suggests that housing and education partnerships and programs are well under way, that the partnerships are pursuing a variety of goals, and that they are using a number of different approaches for a wide range of families.

Key Findings

Following is a summary of key findings:

1. Housing authorities have access to parents and children—and they are motivated to improve educational outcomes.
2. Housing authorities are using their partnerships with school districts to develop a variety of interventions, including enhancement of service coordination efforts, new programs and services, and collection of data about their school-age clients.
3. Each site has launched a range of programs and strategies that serve residents across the developmental continuum, from early childhood to post-secondary school age and family engagement. Akron’s focus is primarily on early learning, but family engagement is a major part of the programming. New Haven, in contrast, offers case management, learning labs, and activities for school-age children outside school time.
4. The annual budgets were modest, considering the number and range of offerings at all three sites. New Haven and Vancouver are housing authorities with MTW authority, which allows them to use some of their funding for housing subsidies to support services. New Haven has received state support for antitruancy efforts, and Akron has received federal support from HUD for construction of the Reach Center. Akron and Vancouver have also received philanthropic support.
5. City, county, and regional conditions influence the work. For example, Connecticut’s school choice policies mean that ECC, the housing authority, has multiple school partnerships to foster. Likewise, the collective impact efforts of Summit County and the Healthy Living Collaborative of Southwest Washington work to support the efforts of Akron and Vancouver, respectively, by convening potential partners and developing data-sharing capacity.
6. All three brought services on site, demonstrating the role of housing as a “platform” for education. Two sites also launched community-level strategies that are intended to create enriched places—or hubs—with programs and services for local residents. The Skyline Campus of Learners in Vancouver and the Reach Opportunity Center in Akron are important examples of housing authorities bringing service providers, programs, and even kindergarten classrooms (in the case of Akron only) to the housing development.

Next Steps

The following are areas in which housing authorities, CLPHA, HUD, state and local governments, and the business and philanthropic communities can offer support to housing authorities:

1. Create opportunities to share promising practices across housing providers by bringing housing providers together, hosting webinars, and otherwise distributing information. CLPHA's 2015 education summit created such opportunities. CLPHA also facilitates an education working group and hosts membership meetings three times a year, which provide ample opportunity for its members to share ideas.
2. Build an evidence base for emerging approaches so that housing providers and school districts know which promising practices are actually evidence-based practices. That effort should include deciding which types of problems are best solved by housing authorities.
3. Identify funding sources to support existing and future education efforts. Dedicated funding sources are critical for partners to plan strategically and sustain their efforts over time.
4. Provide technical assistance to housing authorities for services that are outside their area of expertise. Those services may include strategic planning, legal counsel, data sharing and analysis, and education policymaking.
5. Advocate for federal policies that support housing providers' education efforts. Areas may include such efforts as New Haven's MTW plan for a teacher-in-residence program or New Haven's request that Internet access be considered an allowable utility cost.

CLPHA and its members are not alone in their effort. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other philanthropies are investing in the area of housing and education—in both research and technical assistance. Despite those investments, a great deal remains to do and to learn. Housing authorities with partnerships, such as the sites described herein, have been very enterprising—testing ideas, identifying partners, and building relationships—without extensive support. They have paved the way for other housing providers and school districts that want to launch their own partnerships. However, they will need support to grow and sustain their work. And other housing authorities should not have to reinvent the wheel if and when they undertake education initiatives.

Notes

1. Some assisted-housing providers also help families get to neighborhoods where they can take advantage of higher-performing schools.
2. US Department of Housing and Urban Development, “HUD’s Public Housing Programs,” accessed February 18, 2015, http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/rental_assistance/phprog. See also Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, “Public Housing Residents,” accessed February 18, 2015, <http://clpha.org/publichousingresidents>.

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About the Author



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