Aligning Housing and Education

Evidence of Promising Practices and Structural Challenges

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Long before the COVID-19 pandemic brought school into every child's home, awareness of how housing matters for educational outcomes was growing. At the federal level, this awareness has led to policy alliances, such as partnerships that involve the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the US Department of Education and federal advocacy campaigns with champions from both housing and education organizations. In communities across the US, this awareness has led to an increase in the number of programs that combine housing and education elements. Collective impact efforts are also seeking ways to bring housing expertise into efforts to improve equity in children's educational achievements and long-term success. Likewise, subsidized housing providers are seeking ways to support their residents' educational attainment. This brief aims to inform national and local decisionmakers about promising practices and structural challenges related to equity in both housing and education.

In 2019 and early 2020, to support work by Enterprise Community Partners, the Urban Institute conducted research to identify and learn about housing and education collaborations that serve low-income renters. We selected 10 initiatives that represented public and private housing and education collaborations but varied in population served, geographic location, scale, and goals (see box 1). We then reviewed the literature on the intersection of housing and education outcomes.

Children perform better academically when they have a roof over their heads and their basic needs—including housing, food, and clothing—are met, but more than 17 million children in the US live in low-income households that do not have money for other necessities after paying for housing.[1]

Although research suggests that housing can support educational success, the links in the housing and education systems often foster inequity. The nation's housing and education systems were designed to promote segregation and racially inequitable outcomes, and the policies to counteract these forces have not succeeded. Similar levels of segregation and disparities continue (Reardon and Owens 2014). School segregation is a problem because it goes hand in hand with marginalization and resource disparities. As a result, low-income students perform better in economically integrated schools (Reardon et al. 2019; Schwartz 2010), and students of all races perform better over their lifetimes when they attend well-resourced, racially integrated schools with early education support (Johnson 2019). Housing and school policies can impede or advance economic and racial equity, and the current structure of the systems segregates students and generates differential access and outcomes (Rothstein 2017; Ryan 2010).

The mounting evidence of housing's importance for educational outcomes has fueled cross-sector partnerships in which both sectors contribute resources and expertise in response to an immediate opportunity. For example, community space in multifamily housing may host after-school programs that offer homework help or other enrichment activities. Partnerships often focus on a program or initiative, without realigning the systems to generate more equitable results. Examples of and evidence on sustained partnerships and policies remain limited, especially at the system level.

This brief highlights aspects of housing that affect educational outcomes, the links between the education and housing systems, and examples from our scan of housing and education partnerships. Drawing from in-depth interviews with practitioners, we point to programmatic strategies that can narrow educational opportunity gaps. We describe how initiatives simplify the process of obtaining housing and educational supports, reduce the trade-offs that families make to achieve housing security and educational opportunity, and educate housing providers about the influence they can have on education.

We then discuss the structural challenges that housing and education partnerships face. Our analysis of the housing and education literature both supports such partnerships and highlights structural impediments to closing opportunity gaps and attaining equity. These challenges include mismatches in decisionmaking authority, difficulties aligning success measures across the two systems, and limitations in organizational capacity, such as gaps in funding and evaluation capacity.

Finally, we identify solutions and opportunities for systems alignment. Both the housing and education systems grapple with structures that—independently and collectively—perpetuate inequitable access and outcomes. Partnerships between housing and education providers can narrow opportunity gaps, but the bigger goal of closing opportunity gaps and achieving equity calls for reorienting the systems. Based on the available evidence, we recommend that housing and education systems partner on mutually reinforcing supports for students experiencing or at risk of housing insecurity and pursue joint success measures and aligned decisionmaking that can spark new initiatives.

BOX 1

Housing and Education Partnerships as a Pathway to Economic Mobility

This brief is part of a larger body of work that is funded by the Ballmer Group and Enterprise Community Partners and highlights cross-sector partnerships between the housing and education systems as a pathway for addressing the root causes of generational poverty. To highlight emerging cross-sector partnerships, the Urban Institute selected 10 initiatives (described below) that represent public and private housing and education collaborations but vary in population served, geographic location, scale, and goals. We then conducted interviews with backbone and partner groups, including housing providers, educators, collective impact organizations and resource centers, technical assistance providers, and a state agency. Our research explored motivations for initiating partnerships, leadership structure, funding and sustainability, systems change efforts, data use and outcomes tracking, and cycles of continuous improvement. These emerging partnerships are also highlighted in *Advancing Mobility from Poverty: A Toolkit for Housing and Education Partnerships*, which offers resources and examples for people looking to engage in similar collaborations.

- **Bringing School Home in Boulder, Colorado,** brings together high-quality, affordable, service-enriched housing and educational opportunities for the whole family and ensures a single point of entry for families in crisis. Boulder Housing Partners and the "I Have a Dream" Foundation serve as the backbone agencies, coordinating with the Emergency Family Assistance Association on intake and service provision.

- **The College Housing Assistance Program in Tacoma, Washington,** provides housing subsidies for 250 formerly homeless or near-homeless students at Tacoma Community College and the University of Washington Tacoma. The backbone agency is Tacoma Housing Authority, and higher education partners, along with Graduate Tacoma, provide education navigation services and other supports for students in the program.

- The **Early Childhood Initiative in Summit County, Ohio**, follows the concept that early childhood investments will yield long-term financial, health, and social-emotional benefits. Programming—including home visitation programs and high-quality preschool—serves 300 to 350 children younger than 5 whose families live in housing owned or administered by the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority, which serves as the backbone agency.

- **Foster Care to College in Pennsylvania** brings together stakeholders from across the state to address barriers to postsecondary success for foster youth by disseminating research and advancing policy change. The backbone agency—the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research—also provides technical assistance to colleges and universities on how to better serve homeless and foster youth by addressing their unique needs.

- **Homework Starts with Home in Minnesota** is a collaboration between the backbone agency—the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness—and local partnerships among school districts, local governments, and nonprofit organizations that offer rental subsidies and supportive services to reduce housing instability and chronic absenteeism and increase student achievement.

- The **Housing and Education (HousED)** initiative, through the Partnership for Children and Youth, works with housing agencies, educators, community members, and government agencies to improve the accessibility and quality of educational supports in public and affordable housing communities. HousED recently expanded from working in communities in California to providing technical assistance in cities across the country.

- **Impact KCK in Wyandotte County, Kansas,** offers wraparound services for homeless and unstably housed students and their families. Each week, the backbone agency, Avenue of Life, leads "Impact Wednesday," which brings together providers of services such as health care to

meet with families, with the goal of reducing student homelessness and increasing graduation rates. Impact KCK also offers classes on personal finances, renters' rights and responsibilities, and trauma-care parenting.

- **Project Hope in Boston** aims to alleviate poverty and empower families through case management, adult education programs, family shelter and housing navigation services, workforce development, and child care and small business trainings. The organization's housing services department partners with schools and other agencies through a local collaborative that coordinates to identify homeless students and deliver services.

- **Purpose Built Communities** works with leaders from across the country to help establish holistic approaches to address poverty and other challenges that distressed communities face. Purpose Built Communities supports local lead organizations to develop and refurbish high-quality, mixed income housing; improve the surrounding infrastructure; foster an early learning-to-high school educational pipeline; and promote community wellness and health.

- **Star-C in Atlanta** partners with community-based organizations, school districts, and private landlords who own or manage apartment complexes near low-performing schools to keep rents low and provide after-school programs, a community garden, and health care services.

Aspects of Housing That Affect Educational Outcomes

When housing is safe and high-quality, stable and affordable, and located in well-resourced, low-poverty neighborhoods, children tend to do better in school, parents report improved mental health, and the whole family benefits. Researchers have identified four interconnected elements[2] of housing as foundational to improving educational outcomes among low-income children: affordability, stability, housing quality, and neighborhood quality (Brennan, Reed, and Sturtevant 2014; Cunningham and MacDonald 2012; Newman 2008). Also known as the "housing bundle," these elements create and support conditions that affect children's success both in and outside the classroom.

The research summaries below describe how affordability, stability, housing quality, and neighborhood quality play out in the lives of children and their families.

Housing Affordability

Housing affordability helps households meet their basic needs, which in turn helps children's mental health and academic performance. When a household spends no more than 30 percent of its income on rent, it is less likely to be forced into making difficult trade-offs such as having to choose between paying for food, clothing, or medical care and other vital necessities (Newman and Holupka 2015).[3] Households have more money to spend on basic needs and enrichment activities for their children, and overall familial stress decreases. In addition, housing affordability affects children's academic performance: children in rent-burdened households are held back in school more often and are more likely to have behavioral problems than children in households that are not rent-burdened (Aratani et al. 2011).

Residential Stability

Residential stability creates a stable environment for children to learn and grow, reducing the likelihood of chronic absenteeism and toxic stress. Among children, homelessness is associated with an increased likelihood of mental and physical health problems, as well as lower passing rates in core academic subjects (Cutuli et al. 2013; Fischer 2015). Homeless students are also more likely to be chronically absent and to receive disciplinary action than children with stable homes (Ray et al. 2017).

Children who are not homeless but experience a high number of residential moves—particularly when the moves are unwanted, such as through formal or informal evictions—also tend to have worse outcomes than their peers who do not experience residential instability, because residential mobility is often tied to school mobility (Cunningham and MacDonald 2012). Students who change schools frequently have been found to be a year or more behind in reading and math (Cunningham and MacDonald 2012; Grigg 2012). Residential stability also creates a sense of belonging among children and their parents, who have better mental health outcomes than those who experience homelessness or frequent moves (Walton and Cohen 2007).

Housing Quality and Crowding

Housing quality, including both physical conditions and the density of residents within the home, has been linked to children's health. Housing defects such as lead paint, broken facilities, exposed wiring, holes, mold or mildew, and pests contribute to high rates of elevated blood lead levels, asthma, worse sleep quality, and other negative health outcomes among inhabitants of all ages (Chambers, Pichardo, and Rosenbaum 2016; Howell, Harris, and Popkin 2005; Williamson et al. 1997). When children are physically healthy, they are more likely to attend school consistently—a key indicator of educational success—and show improved attentiveness compared with their less healthy peers (Cunningham and MacDonald 2012). Low-quality housing has also been tied to lower kindergarten readiness scores (Coulton et al. 2016).

Poor housing quality also takes a toll on children's mental well-being: children living in substandard housing have higher rates of helplessness and worse overall psychological health than their peers (Rollings et al. 2017). When children have limited space to do their homework or otherwise live in close quarters with others, their health and academic performances suffer (Fischer 2015; Saegert and Evans 2003). Crowded living conditions have been associated with lower test scores, repeated grades, and decreased graduation rate (Conley 2001; Fischer 2015; Goux and Maurin 2005; Lopoo and London 2016).

Neighborhood Quality

When children live in safe neighborhoods with access to resources, they are more likely to experience positive development and growth at home and school. Neighborhood exposure to violence in particular is a key disrupter of a child's academic progress (Browning et al. 2008; Harding 2003). Proximity to homicides has been tied to lower cognitive test scores among young people, and neighborhood violence

has been found to account for almost half the association between neighborhood disadvantage and high school graduation (Harding 2003).

In recent years, studies have found a close association between the neighborhood in which a child grows up and his or her long-term outcomes, including access to opportunity and economic mobility. A child's neighborhood directly correlates with educational attainment and earnings as an adult (Chetty and Hendren 2018). In neighborhoods that have faced public and private disinvestment, the neighborhood's marginalization may harm longtime residents through both educational and income opportunity gaps that appear across generations (Sharkey 2013). Although low-income neighborhoods have been found to have stronger levels of social integration than those that are more affluent, living in a safe and well-resourced neighborhood is a strong indicator of long-term success (Keene, Bader, and Ailshire 2013).

Access to the Housing Bundle

Both renters and low-income homeowners face difficulties in accessing their preferred housing bundle or even a minimally acceptable one. When few habitable homes are available or access to a particular school matters, households may select housing that is out of their affordability range and find themselves struggling each month. In addition, renters have less control over affordability over time than homeowners do. Annual rent increases are common, while homeowners with fixed-rate mortgages face more predictable costs until a home needs major repairs.

Standard housing practices in the US also give renters limited opportunities for stability. Leases commonly end after 12 months. Unless a home is in one of the few areas that require "just cause" for a landlord to decline to offer a tenant a renewal, a renter may be forced into an unexpected and unwanted move. Renters also face instability as a result of unaffordable housing: renters may be forced to move if rent increases price them out of their apartments or if already unaffordable rents become unsustainable because of loss of income or other financial strains such as medical bills. In 2016, courts issued nearly 900,000 eviction judgments in the US.[4]

Housing quality poses intense challenges for both low-income homeowners and renters, who may choose a substandard home if affordable options are limited. Low-income homeowners may further experience deteriorating housing conditions if home repair needs accumulate faster than the home equity that could be used to pay repair bills. Renters who live in hazardous conditions, meanwhile, may be reluctant to call code enforcement because it could result in retaliation by their landlord or condemnation of the property by code enforcement officials.

Homeowners' opposition to rental housing, especially subsidized rental housing, is common and limits renters' neighborhood and home options. Homeowners and the neighborhood associations that serve them[5] often support exclusionary zoning practices that prohibit multifamily housing development and oppose the construction of subsidized housing. For example, a recent study of affordable housing developers in New York found that nearly half faced community opposition "frequently" or "almost

always," and just over a quarter faced opposition that escalated to at least one legal challenge against their developments (Scally and Tighe 2015).

After the Fair Housing Act of 1968 outlawed discrimination against renters or homebuyers on the basis of race, economic exclusion became a proxy for racial exclusion (Rothstein 2017). Because of racial disparities in homeownership, policies that exclude renters, such as zoning that limits rental housing development, perpetuate racial segregation. Furthermore, inequitable resource allocation among neighborhoods has often resulted in disinvestment and disproportionate hazards for children in neighborhoods with more residents of color.[6]

Housing and Education as Mutually Reinforcing Systems

The US housing and education systems work together to restrict the opportunities the government does or does not offer to students based on race and income. (We briefly describe the housing and education systems in box 2.) Where children live determines the set of public schools they may attend, yet school programs and funding vary among residential areas in ways that can affect school quality. As a result, differences between schools (or school districts) influence residential real estate demand within a school's or district's boundaries.

Housing Costs Include Implicit Tuition Costs

In an early study of parents' willingness to pay for public school access, Sandra Black (1999) found that parents will pay 2.5 percent more for a home to have access to a school with 5 percent higher test scores. During the housing bubble of the 2000s, homebuyers who prioritized school quality paid more than buyers with other priorities (Insler and Swope 2016). Similarly, an analysis of more than 4,000 residential moves in the US over a 13-year period found links between improved school quality and increased home prices in the school's zip code (Goldstein and Hastings 2019). In other words, the price of buying a home includes implicit tuition for nearby or zoned public schools. The price of renting may also include implicit tuition if willingness to pay is based on the need for public school access for a child or youth in the household.

Research on the aspects of school quality that affect home prices suggests that homebuyers will pay more for higher standardized test scores, a lower student-teacher ratio, and higher per-student spending (Brasington 1999). When public schools with these characteristics effectively cost more to attend, students with fewer economic advantages at home will get fewer educational advantages at school. Meanwhile, parents unable to afford higher home prices or rents may overextend their budget and end up with less stable housing to get access to the school they want for their children.[7]

In metropolitan areas with more income inequality, the implicit tuition for a desirable public school is higher than in metropolitan areas where the residents are more economically similar. Homebuyers in areas with more income inequality also spend a larger share of household income to obtain a home near a desirable school. Such schools had higher standardized test scores and fewer low-income families

(Goldstein and Hastings 2019). Other research has documented that test scores more greatly affect perceptions of school quality than measures of a school's effectiveness (Abdulkadiroglu et al. 2017). In other words, parents select for their children's peers rather than their children's teachers.

Racial Preferences for Schools Affect Neighborhoods, and Vice Versa

The racial composition of the school affects perceptions of school quality. Studies have found that a higher share of Black and Latinx students in a school reduces its perceived quality and the home price premium that buyers will pay (Clapp, Nanda, and Ross 2008; Goyette, Farrie, and Freely 2012). Many homebuyers, especially white homebuyers, believe they will get a strong school by choosing a majority-white school. Research assessing school choice by Black parents who enrolled their children in schools with a majority-Black student body, however, found that some parents value a majority-Black school to provide their children with a supportive environment and avoid racial discrimination in majority-white schools (Lewis and Danzig 2010). The study did not assess Black parents' school preferences more broadly, the school-related decisionmaking of non-Black parents of color, or whether parents of color pay a home price premium to attain their school preferences.

A history of government-enforced exclusion and segregation in both housing markets and schools led all three branches of the federal government to act to end racial segregation, yet established patterns of segregation by race and income remain decades later.[8] When income, skin color, or ethnicity leads to differential access to residential neighborhoods, differential access to public schools and school districts follows. Meanwhile, private school formation and enrollment patterns suggest that parents with means will exit public school systems to avoid integration (Clotfelter 2004).

BOX 2

Access to the Education and Housing Systems as a Low-Income Renter

Despite their points of intersection, the housing and education systems function differently. Elementary and secondary education is compulsory and available for free in every state, and 22 states recognize education as a right.[a] In contrast, neither the federal government nor any state provides universal housing assistance despite an affordability crisis for renters nationwide, and just one state recognizes a right to emergency shelter.[b] For a more comprehensive overview of the housing and education systems, see *Advancing Mobility from Poverty: A Toolkit for Housing and Education Partnerships*.

Housing system. Housing is typically defined as affordable when it costs no more than 30 percent of a household's income. Whether from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development or other sources, public subsidies reduce rents to improve or achieve affordability for a subset of low-income households. Subsidies may be directed to housing developers in exchange for limiting rents, to rental property owners in exchange for their basing rents on residents' incomes, or to households to enable affordability in the private rental market. Under certain market and policy conditions, nonprofit or for-profit owners may offer affordable rents without a subsidy. Subsidies from the Department of Housing and Urban Development enable affordability for around 2.8 million households, approximately 1 of every 5 households that both need and are eligible for assistance (Kingsley 2017).

The housing system is fragmented. Private markets deliver most of the nation's housing under various federal, state, and local regulations related to factors that include discrimination, habitability, and occupancy. Multiple federal, state, and local programs support the creation or operation of subsidized rental housing, although a few major federal programs provide most of the nation's rental subsidies. The most common federal programs are public housing, the Housing Choice Voucher Program, project-based Section 8 rental assistance, and the low-income housing tax credit.[c] Numerous organizations administer federal housing programs, including continuums of care, local housing departments, public housing agencies, state housing finance agencies, and state departments of housing. In addition, renters facing an affordability crisis may obtain short-term eviction prevention assistance from a continuum of care or a social service department.

Education system. Children in the US have access to free public education from roughly age 5 to 18. Public education is generally administered at the state and local level. States policies determine who must attend and what students should learn and know; they also set accountability frameworks, teacher credentials and compensation, and school choice policies. In addition, states decide whether to select curricula, offer districts options to choose from, or let districts decide which curricula to use. The federal government supplements state and local efforts, particularly for vulnerable students, and works to increase innovation and access to information about evidence-based education policies and practices.

Public education is paid for through federal, state, and local funding. During the 2015–16 school year, 47 percent of revenue for all primary and secondary education came from state sources, 45 percent came from local sources, and 8 percent came from federal sources.[d]

All school districts have policies to determine which schools students can enroll in. Some enrollment policies are based entirely on place of residence. (We refer to public schools that use student addresses as the basis for enrollment eligibility as "traditional public schools" or "neighborhood schools.") Other enrollment policies offer families choices when enrolling children in school. "School choice" refers to any arrangement that allows parents to decide between two or more publicly funded schools and comes in various forms.[e] School choice enables students to attend a traditional public school other than the one their residential area is assigned to, a magnet program, or a public charter school. Alternatively, school choice may allow parents to choose a private school and pay for all or part of the cost through a publicly funded voucher or tax credit. School choice policies partially decouple places of residence from school assignment; however, they are not universal, and school district boundaries and school commutes lead to a strong continued connection.

[a] Trish Brennan-Gac, "Educational Rights in the States," *Human Rights Magazine*, April 1, 2014, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/2014_vol_40/vol_40_no_2_civil_rights/educational_rights_states/.

[b] "Massachusetts Family Homelessness System | City of Ideas," Boston Foundation, February 22, 2017, https://www.tbf.org/old-blog/2017/february/massachusetts-family-homelessness-system.

[c] For more information about public housing and the Housing Choice Voucher Program, see "HUD's Public Housing Program," US Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.hud.gov/topics/rental_assistance/phprog; and "Housing Choice Vouchers Fact Sheet," US Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/about/fact_sheet.

[d] "Table 235.10. Revenues for Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Source of Funds: Selected Years, 1919–20 through 2015–16," National Center for Education Statistics, September 2018, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_235.10.asp?current=yes.

[e] For more information, see National Working Commission on Choice in K–12 Education 2003.

Homeowners Disproportionately Influence Local Housing and School Policy

Common residential planning and permitting practices can amplify exclusionary patterns. Local officials often operate under the principle that the community knows best. To obtain community input, they host public meetings and offer other opportunities to comment. However, participation in community meetings is associated with one's sense of belonging in a community (Talò, Mannarini, and Rochira 2014). A history of landownership, wealth, and whiteness as signals of belonging may contribute to disproportionate participation in such forums by white and wealthy people. Patterns of government explicitly and implicitly protecting white homeowners while excluding people of color and marginalizing renters may further affect the representativeness of public comments. Research on participation in planning and zoning meetings in the Boston area, for example, found that meeting commenters were substantially less likely than voters in their towns to support new housing—just 15 percent of meeting commenters favored new housing, while a majority of voters supported it on a ballot initiative. The commenters were also disproportionately homeowners and/or white (Einstein, Palmer, and Glick 2019).

In addition to the likelihood of higher participation levels because of a greater sense of belonging in a community, homeowners can boost their property values when demand is high by keeping housing options limited. Property owners with access to a high-demand public school know demand from prospective buyers and renters will be high, and supply limitations inflate the prices prospective residents will pay. Residents who rent their homes and nonresidents who work or use services in a neighborhood also have a stake in housing plans and school quality but would not expect a financial windfall from exclusion.

Single-System Solutions Often Maintain the Status Quo

Federal and state agencies involved in education and housing espouse goals that include equal opportunity, but the systems' design can exacerbate inequities rather than address opportunity gaps. A shared history of racial and economic exclusion disproportionately benefits white and affluent children. Efforts to undo inequities in the systems face barriers when vocal stakeholders benefit from inequality. Recent examinations of key historical housing and education policies suggest that policies and practices to improve equity in one sector were often undermined by policies and practices in the other sector to maintain the status quo (Johnson 2019; Rothstein 2017). The systems may also undermine their own equity efforts. For example, a housing finance agency may prioritize school quality when funding new housing developments for people with low incomes but face equity barriers such as the high cost of land in a high-demand residential area, negative community feedback at planning meetings, redrawn school boundaries, or differential educational opportunities within the school. The systems' design reinforces the value of property owners' investments in the housing system rather than the public benefits of a well-housed and well-educated populace, with uneven roles for private actors and governments at the federal, state, and local level.

Because of these exclusionary structures, families with low levels of wealth grapple with intense barriers when navigating the systems to maximize their children's educational opportunities. The search for a healthy neighborhood, decent home, and high-quality school often forces compromises in which

families with low levels of wealth give up one or more of these goals. Seeking educational opportunity, families of color, regardless of their wealth, may find themselves with few clearly beneficial choices because neighborhoods with access to high-performing schools are often majority-white enclaves where children of color face overpolicing and other biases (Keene and Padilla 2010). These compromises can be disempowering and isolating, undermining prospects for educational achievement and upward mobility. And, as mentioned above, some families may opt out of majority-white schools and neighborhoods to avoid these negative consequences (Lewis and Danzig 2010).

Housing as a Partner for Education Systems

If a stronger housing bundle can improve educational outcomes yet the alignment of housing and education systems advances inequity, what are state and local stakeholders doing to close the opportunity gaps? Our interviews with leadership and program staff of housing and education partnerships reveal that collaborations often employ programmatic solutions to strengthen educational outcomes for students not well-served by the housing and education systems. Some initiatives improve access to housing and educational supports through in-depth case management or educational programs at a subsidized rental development or reduce the trade-offs between housing and education that many families face. Others are designed to help housing providers understand and own their role in educational opportunity. Several of the initiatives in our research combine these strategies.

Streamlining Access to Housing and Educational Supports

Children spend most of their time at home or school, so a supportive environment in either place can increase the chances that a child will have positive educational outcomes. However, housing and education systems are both complex, and it can be difficult for families in need to get resources. Just as some schools have adopted a community school model and provide on-site services beyond education, some subsidized housing providers offer supports to help residents meet their nonhousing needs. Case management, resident services, and on-site programming, for example, can facilitate success across housing and educational outcomes.

CASE MANAGEMENT FOR RESIDENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

Case management—which may involve one-on-one service coordination and navigation, coaching, mentoring, and/or goal setting and tracking with individuals and families—is a key feature of many housing and education collaborations. The metrics that initiatives use to track client progress vary, as does their use of data to inform counseling and coaching. However, case management is the backbone of many initiatives. In Boulder, Colorado, for example, the Emergency Family Assistance Association partners with Boulder Housing Partners to provide three months of intensive case management to families entering the **Bringing School Home** initiative, a collaboration between public and nonprofit organizations that brings together high-quality, affordable housing and educational opportunities for the whole family. The Emergency Family Assistance Association administers the Colorado Family Support Assessment when households move in, and they use it to identify, set, and work toward goals

related to housing stability, income, or children's educational attainment. Families can extend the case management or transition to "lighter-touch" check-ins with Boulder Housing Partners staff members after three months. In this case, the Emergency Family Assistance Association and Boulder Housing Partners case management supports families as they transition to stable housing.

RESIDENT SERVICES AND ON-SITE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Many housing providers are developing partnerships with after-school programs, school districts, and other service providers to ensure that vulnerable children receive supplemental educational supports. Some housing authorities (and nonprofit and for-profit housing providers) have resident services staff who connect community members with education-related services and bring additional resources on site. **Star-C**, an Atlanta-based nonprofit organization that partners with private landlords to provide affordable housing and supportive services, has a service coordinator at each property. The coordinator runs an after-school program for children living in the community, and Star-C coordinates with schools to monitor student test scores. The coordinator lives at the property and acts as a resource for residents and a link to health care and other services and benefits.

Other housing providers are providing space for day care and educational and other assistance programs, further integrating services into the housing community. In Ohio, the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority runs the **Early Childhood Initiative**, which consists of high-quality early childhood programming and home visiting for residents of housing authority properties. The authority opened the Reach Opportunity Center with US Department of Housing and Urban Development funding in 2014; it houses cradle-to-career educational programming for service providers and residents in the community.

Reducing Trade-Offs between Housing Costs and High-Quality Education

Several partnerships use programs to eliminate or reduce the trade-offs that students make between adequate housing and high-quality education. Most strategies start with a housing subsidy for groups of students at high risk of housing instability or homelessness, allowing students to live in better-quality, more stable, or more affordable homes that are closer to school. This section examines programs focused on housing-insecure college students, homeless or housing-insecure families of K–12 students, and current or former foster care youth. Although some initiatives have secured additional funding to serve those groups, many are using existing organizational resources and adjusting policies when possible to prioritize people and families with special needs.

HOUSING-INSECURE COLLEGE STUDENTS

In Tacoma, Washington, homeless and unstably housed community college students struggle to remain enrolled and make timely progress toward earning a degree. Students facing housing instability may need to take time off, attend part time, or drop out to prioritize basic needs. To address this group's unique housing needs, the Tacoma Housing Authority created the **College Housing Assistance Program** with Tacoma Community College. Through this partnership, the housing authority provides housing subsidies for 250 formerly homeless or near-homeless students at the community college (and now the

University of Washington Tacoma). Graduate Tacoma, a StriveTogether network member, covers move-in expenses for students moving into a new development that the housing authority acquired for this program. The collaboration's higher-education partners provide education navigation services and other supports. An evaluation of the initiative found that students who received housing vouchers had higher grade point averages and were more likely to remain enrolled and make progress toward degree completion after two years than their nonassisted peers (Tacoma Housing Authority 2019).

HOMELESS AND HOUSING-INSECURE K–12 STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

In Minnesota, unstably housed students—including those whose families move frequently, are homeless, or are at risk of experiencing homelessness—are less likely to attend school regularly and are more likely to perform worse academically than those who are stably housed. **Homework Starts with Home** combines the benefits of housing, education, and human services agencies at the state level so that local, community-based organizations such as housing and redevelopment agencies can use grants to address housing needs, thereby improving academic outcomes for unstably housed students.[9] By targeting housing vouchers to unstably housed families with school-age children, Homework Starts with Home aims to reduce family homelessness and student transience and absenteeism.

Like Homework Starts with Home, Avenue of Life in Kansas City, Kansas, works with local partners to offer wraparound services for homeless and unstably housed students, with the goal of increasing high school graduation rates and stabilizing families. The effort, **Impact KCK**, is designed to support the families of students experiencing homelessness before public benefits are available to them. Navigators employed by Avenue of Life connect families to a robust network of service providers to ensure that immediate needs such as housing, food, and health care are met. "Impact Wednesday," a weekly event hosted by Avenue of Life, brings together service providers to meet with families and provide courses on employment, finance, trauma-care parenting, and mental health.

CURRENT OR FORMER FOSTER CARE YOUTH

Young people who are in foster care or have aged out of the system experience high rates of homelessness and housing instability (Dworsky et al. 2012). The **Foster Care to College** initiative—led by the University of Pennsylvania's Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research—aims to disrupt this cycle by helping higher education institutions in Pennsylvania open their doors to young people in or exiting foster care. The Field Center provides technical assistance to higher education institutions. During these engagements, the Field Center works with schools to identify gaps in their programming and barriers to increasing student supports and helps develop strategies for overcoming barriers. As a result, some institutions have created policies that allow students to stay in dorms year-round. Some colleges, such as West Chester University, have established scholarship funds to pay for housing and emergency costs for young people who have aged out of foster care. By supporting the housing needs of students from foster care, Foster Care to College and participating colleges aim to increase the college graduation rates and economic prosperity of this group.

Helping Housing Providers Own Their Role in Educational Opportunity

Many housing providers are not aware of the role they play in helping or hindering student success. In California—and, more recently, several cities across the country—the **Housing and Education (HousED)** initiative educates and trains housing agencies to develop and implement high-quality educational programming for children in their communities. Nonprofit housing providers such as Mercy Housing, MidPen Housing, and Eden Housing have participated and continue to provide after-school programs with broad educational enrichment opportunities across their sites. HousED encourages housing providers to think critically about program quality and has created tools to help them assess and improve their offerings. **Star-C** partners with and educates private landlords on the relationship between stable housing and academic success and offers after-school programming in large apartment communities in Atlanta. Star-C has also hosted workshops on the connections between housing and education and the benefits of the Star-C model for landlords and residents.

Primary Challenges for Housing and Education Initiatives

Programmatic initiatives that combine housing and education supports have improved educational access and outcomes, but substantial challenges remain. Few programs have expanded to replication or scale. Potentially fruitful collaborations may never launch or scale up because of gaps in alignment between the housing and education systems or in organizational capacity. The challenges discussed below—including mismatches in decisionmaking authority, difficulty aligning success measures, and gaps in funding and evaluation capacity—must be addressed for partnerships to have a sustained impact.

Mismatches in Decisionmaking Authority

Although the interdependence of the housing and education systems creates opportunities for alignment toward equity, the systems have stark structural differences. Housing policy generally happens through zoning, building, and occupancy regulations at the local level, with the federal government delivering rental assistance and setting fair housing standards. States can be highly involved in housing policy, minimally involved, or somewhere in between. In contrast, education policies are generally set at the state level (although the federal government provides some funding to supplement resources for the education of low-income children).

Aligning systems at parallel levels of government is challenging. Because residential zoning and school district lines are usually set by different levels of government, aligning the two toward educational equity would require a multijurisdictional collaboration or action at the state level. Unless this mismatch is reconciled, efforts to build joint efforts will be hampered. In addition, differences in incentives and operating structures in the systems create problems for decisionmakers and implementers seeking to make small- or large-scale impacts. For example, success measures for schools emphasize year-over-year results, while housing policymakers may incentivize moves by low-income

families that could temporarily disrupt children's educational trajectory but lead to gains several years into the future.

When similarly positioned decisionmakers can identify mutually beneficial program opportunities, initiatives can move beyond individual programs toward a systems-level change. Some states are trying to address misalignment by implementing state-level housing and education policies that override local jurisdictions' less inclusive practices, including exclusionary zoning laws or school integration guidelines (Haberle and Tegeler 2019). For example, Minnesota's Homework Starts with Home was established at the state level. Because the program was written into the state budget and a Department of Education staff member was embedded in the state housing finance agency, the initiative is uniquely positioned to reconcile the housing and education systems from the top down. Homework Starts with Home pulls the systems up to the same "level" and distributes resources to communities for implementation plans designed at the local level. In addition to addressing systems-level mismatch, the Homework Starts with Home model creates a precedent for collaboration and alignment that could spark local-level opportunities.

Difficulty Aligning Measures of Shared Success

Some housing and education partnerships have agreed on joint goals, but few are working toward the same measurable outcomes. In many cases, systems for measuring progress toward goals and outcomes are not aligned: while the education system emphasizes year-over-year growth in factors such as test scores, the housing system tracks technical indicators such as compliance with housing codes or quality standards. The housing system, however, may think of its educational success measures as ones with longer time horizons, such as the quality of nearby schools and the social or environmental conditions in neighborhoods where subsidies are used.

Developing and effectively executing a joint measure of impact require partners to trust one another and invest significant amounts of time and resources. Also, data-sharing limitations and privacy concerns may contribute to siloed priorities across systems, as partners may be unable to measure and track certain outcomes because of restrictions on data use.

However, the housing and education systems can more readily align around some measures. Kindergarten readiness, for example, is directly affected by housing quality and is a common education metric. In partnering with Summit Education Initiative—a nonprofit organization that collects and analyzes educational data from agencies, schools, and organizations across Summit County, Ohio—the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority has adjusted its Early Childhood Initiative model and curriculum to improve kindergarten readiness. To all children enrolled in the Early Childhood Initiative, Summit Education Initiative administers a transition skills summary, an assessment used to determine kindergarten readiness. The results are shared with both parents and Early Childhood Initiative staff members, and Summit Education Initiative proposes interventions to support children between preschool and kindergarten. In 2013, the Early Childhood Initiative implemented a data-driven improvement plan for its programs and continues to rely on the assessment to inform program effectiveness and impact.

When housing and education partners align success measures, they tend to select metrics that reflect the needs and goals of their target population. Although some programs focus on course performance and test scores among students, others focus on whole-family goals such as enrollment in public benefit programs and housing stability. The College Housing Assistance Program in Tacoma, Washington, provides rental assistance and case management to housing-insecure college students. Tacoma Community College uses grade point averages and rates of transfer, retention, and graduation as metrics to track individual- and program-level successes. Other programs—such as **Project Hope**, a multiservice referral agency that serves low-income families in the Boston metropolitan area—use more individualized metrics. Project Hope helps families reach housing and economic stability, as well as increased social capital and self-efficacy. With a case manager's help, Project Hope's clients identify and set their own goals and targets, such as furthering their own or their children's education.

Limited Funding and Evaluation Capacity

Weak or unreliable funding is a primary barrier to scaling up or sustaining effective cross-sector innovations. Practitioners seeking alignment between the housing and education systems may face low funding or be dependent on unsustainable funding, such as philanthropic support or temporary support for a demonstration program (instead of receiving ongoing funding via annual budgets, for example). For several initiatives featured in this brief, individual donations and foundation grants, which are not self-sustaining, are the largest sources of operations funding. Initiatives that receive federal funding, such as those led by public housing authorities, also have challenges, such as navigating the limitations on the use of public dollars.

Funding challenges often limit staff capacity to track outcomes and assess program results, which can also be a barrier to sustaining or scaling up programs. Although some partnerships share student-level data to inform programming, most housing and education initiatives have yet to establish comprehensive data sharing. Most anchor partners aspire to use and share data with their partners but are often delayed because of challenges surrounding the use of confidential data and staff capacity to manage ongoing data-sharing practices. Without rigorous data to support a solid evidence base of best practices, partnerships tend to remain individual innovative efforts, rather than replicating and scaling up those efforts.

System-Level Challenges and Solutions

Both the housing and education systems have developed theories and policies to overcome their built-in inequities. However, the underlying connection between high housing costs and sought-after schools will perpetuate educational inequity unless substantial factors in the systems shift.

From the housing system, various tools have sought to improve access to relatively high-cost neighborhoods, reduce residential segregation, and steward resources to reach more housing-insecure households. However, perpetually insufficient funding for federal rental subsidies means that many income-eligible students come to class bearing the burden of material hardship and threats to their

residential stability. The likelihood of such burdens may be higher when families stretch their budgets to afford to live near a high-performing school. The housing system cannot close educational opportunity gaps as long as rental subsidies are difficult to come by.

Although access to rental subsidies is necessary for families to afford housing near high-demand public schools, rental subsidies on their own may not connect families with a public education of decent quality. The evidence suggests that this primarily reflects a lack of options for using rental subsidies in such neighborhoods, rather than parental preferences. On average, families who participate in any of the four largest federal rental subsidy programs are more likely than unassisted households below the federal poverty level to live near schools whose test scores rank in the bottom 10 percent for their state. Among the four subsidy programs, participants in the three place-based programs were more likely to live near low-performing schools than participants in the tenant-based housing voucher program because of policies that placed subsidized housing in low-demand areas and underinvested in the education of low-income children (Ellen and Horn 2012).

Housing vouchers enable recipients to access the private rental market and choose both their home and neighborhood. Various mobility programs have used vouchers to enable or encourage families to move into areas with higher-performing schools or exclusionary housing markets. These factors could make vouchers more suited than other forms of rental subsidy to help families pay the implicit public school tuition and clear the hurdles of community opposition. However, rules related to subsidy use and discrimination against households with rental subsidies limit whether and where a household can use its voucher (Cunningham et al. 2018).

From the education system, school choice policies seek to give families access to a wider array of public schools and thereby promote equity. The rationale for school choice emphasizes giving low-income households an alternative to underperforming neighborhood schools. Whether through charter schools, magnet schools, or districtwide choice, school choice policies may reduce the implicit public school tuition a homebuyer will pay (Schwartz, Voicu, and Horn 2014). In areas where more residents exercise school choice, families are less likely to move to have access to a high-performing school (Goldstein and Hastings 2019). However, the enactment of school choice policies may foster gentrification and displacement of low-income residents of color. College-educated white households are 22 percent more likely to gentrify neighborhoods that have expanded school choice policies (Pearman and Swain 2017). School choice may also place new burdens on low-income families. Students who opt to attend schools outside their neighborhood can have long commutes, especially if they use public transit (Chingos and Blagg 2017).

Meanwhile, drawing new school boundaries could generate economic and racial integration. Research suggests, however, that the barriers to achieving this goal are significant. Desegregation through boundary changes has happened through court orders, but white residents' racist beliefs can thwart those efforts (Monarrez 2019). The opposition to redrawing school boundaries can be both explicitly and implicitly racist.[10] Homeowner families who speak against redrawing boundaries regularly say their home purchase earned them the right to enroll in specific neighborhood schools.[11] Opponents also express concerns that enhanced opportunities for other children may come at a cost to their own,

that new school boundaries will disrupt their children's school relationships, and that new boundaries will lengthen commutes.[12] Successful examples of redrawing school boundaries to improve equity are an exception rather than the rule.

Furthermore, addressing educational inequity through education policies alone ignores the persistent link between housing and education. School quality and performance play a significant role in the decisionmaking process of prospective homebuyers: the housing market reflects these considerations, and housing prices mirror the reputation of the traditionally zoned public schools in the surrounding area. The research is unclear about the feasibility of improving school quality without kick-starting a series of changes that result in higher effective public school tuition from affluent homebuyers.[13] Announcements of new school investments that lead to new housing demand are an example of this phenomenon in action. Evidence gaps exist in our understanding of ways to ensure that all children receive a high-quality education within a system that depends on funding through property taxes, as well as school choice policies that do not always tilt the scales toward equity.

Recommendations for Aligning Housing and Education

As the housing and education fields increasingly recognize their interconnections, programmatic initiatives will likely grow. Such efforts are important for buttressing students' opportunities today, but a complementary system-level realignment is needed to generate educational equity by race and social class. Aligned use of policy tools such as federal rental assistance, fair housing laws, and school enrollment policies could shift the housing and education systems toward more equitable educational opportunities for students of color and/or students from low-income households.

Based on the evidence and resources available today, we recommend that housing and education systems take the following steps **to narrow opportunity gaps for students in the short term**:

1. Partner on mutually reinforcing supports for students experiencing or at risk of housing insecurity. Senior leadership at education and housing agencies can direct their teams to prioritize collective action to support students' needs, while family liaisons and other direct service staff members can coordinate to identify immediate opportunities to improve students' opportunities to succeed. Collective impact efforts like StriveTogether and Promise Neighborhoods create opportunities to assess the needs of students and develop cross-sector program and policy solutions to address them.

2. Leverage multifamily housing, such as apartment communities, as partners for educational supports. Mission-driven affordable housing providers can assist school systems and educational support organizations in offering educational enrichment, providing high-speed internet for distance learning, and distributing school materials and announcements. Meanwhile, teachers and school administrators can encourage student- and family-level connections between members of the school community who live in the same complex.

3. Pursue joint success measures and aligned decisionmaking that can spark new initiatives. Superintendents and housing authority directors can establish a joint vision and call on their executive teams to back up that vision with common metrics for regular assessment and program or policy adjustments.

4. Create equity committees through schools or parent-teacher associations or other methods to identify and elevate ideas from low-income renter families. School administrators and educational equity advocates can acknowledge that disparities in school engagement are often rooted in discriminatory treatment and othering of families by race, income, and housing status. By acknowledging the culpability of systems in pushing families away from participation, school officials and equity advocates can then build new pathways, such as equity committees, that ensure that the families who have the most at stake in educational equity are leading the creation of solutions.

To achieve equity and close opportunity gaps produced by the housing and education systems in the longer term, we recommend taking the following steps:

1. Housing providers and advocates can commit to ongoing joint advocacy for equitable education system changes, such as meeting with state education departments and local education agencies about redrafting funding formulas and enrollment policies to break the link with home prices and anticipated property value gains.

2. School system executives and education advocates can commit to ongoing joint advocacy to eliminate housing insecurity, such as championing federal policy changes that would ensure rental assistance for all families who qualify.

3. Local education equity organizations and advocates can participate in local housing and planning meetings to seek more rental opportunities in every school district.

4. Housing and education advocates can jointly approach state elected officials to seek policy changes that reduce the ability of localities to enforce residential exclusion, such as seeking land use overrides to generate more multifamily housing in exclusionary communities and adopting housing voucher antidiscrimination laws (often referred to as source of income protections).

More fundamental changes also merit consideration. Although substantial uncertainty exists around an entirely restructured local school funding system, decoupling the self-perpetuating link between property values, school funding, and school reputation could be a powerful shift toward equity.

Conclusion

This brief reflects a scan of literature and practice, not a comprehensive assessment. During this scan, we identified insights about programmatic initiatives and system-level approaches to achieve educational equity. These insights informed the recommendations above. As the field moves beyond recognizing the benefits of cross-sector alignment to implementing comprehensive programs and

systems-level efforts, greater attention is needed to address the inequities embedded within housing and education—both separately and in collaboration. The systems' inequities are deeply rooted in a foundation of racism and other aspects of social class divisions that pervade life in the US. The housing and education systems are aligned by design to segregate people and disinvest in the institutions either run by or for people of color. This brief seeks to identify ways to shift that alignment toward equity, a process that calls for both new thinking and a deep commitment to antiracism.

Although significant partnership-level gains have been made across housing and education and local initiatives have enriched the lives of low-income children through programs, systems-level alignment faces substantial hurdles. Policy tools within both the housing and education systems can overcome these challenges if sufficient political will exists to bring them to scale. Further research is needed to identify and assess more fundamental ways to disentangle the negative effects of the current structure of the housing and education systems. The next phase of research must also position racial and social equity at its center, which will continue to spur similar efforts at the program and systems levels.

Notes

1 "Children in Low-Income Households with a High Housing Cost Burden in the United States," Kids Count Data Center, updated January 2020, https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/71-children-in-low-income-households-with-a-high-housing-cost-burden?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38/any/376,377.

2 Also known as "dimensions" (Cunningham and MacDonald 2012).

3 Households putting more than 30 percent of their earnings toward rent are considered cost burdened. Also, see Susan J. Popkin and Lisa Dubay, "Can Housing Assistance Help Protect Children from Hunger?" *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, February 2, 2014, https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/can-housing-assistance-help-protect-children-hunger.

4 See "How Many People Are Evicted Nationwide?" on "Help & FAQ," Eviction Lab, accessed April 16, 2020, https://evictionlab.org/help-faq/#us-stats.

5 See Ruef and Kwon 2016.

6 Fadumo M. Abdi, and Kristine Andrews, "Redlining Has Left Many Communities of Color Exposed to Lead," Child Trends, February 13, 2018, https://www.childtrends.org/redlining-left-many-communities-color-exposed-lead.

7 For more information, see Meschede and Taylor 2017.

8 For more information on the lingering patterns of segregation by race and income in the US, see Rucker Johnson's *Children of the Dream: Why School Integration Works*, Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, and James Ryan's *Five Miles Away, a World Apart: One City, Two Schools, and the Story of Educational Opportunity in Modern America*.

9 One Homework Starts with Home grantee, Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood, received a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant in 2010, and another, Northside Achievement Zone, received a Promise Neighborhoods implementation grant in 2011.

10 See Dana Goldstein, "Where Civility Is a Motto, a School Integration Fight Turns Bitter," *New York Times*, November 12, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/12/us/howard-county-school-redistricting.html.

11 Sunil Dasgupta, "Opinion: Focus on Process to Get School Redistricting Right," Maryland Matters, December 17, 2019, https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/12/17/opinion-focus-on-process-to-get-school-redistricting-right/.

12 See Kristin Danley-Greiner, "Parent Files Injunction to Stop Redistricting in Howard Schools," Patch, December 16, 2019, https://patch.com/maryland/columbia/parent-files-injunction-stop-redistricting-howard-schools; and Donna St. George, "Controversial Redistricting Plan Adopted in Maryland School System," *Washington Post*, November 22, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/controversial-redistricting-plan-adopted-in-maryland-school-system/2019/11/21/f4fe3fa6-0b11-11ea-8397-a955cd542d00_story.html.

13 This hypothesis merits research to assess its validity. The observed association that school quality improvements may increase the implicit tuition for that school rather than improving the quality of schools accessible to low-income and often Black households is based on examples in practice such as the Penn Alexander School in Philadelphia and City Garden Montessori School in St. Louis, as well as evidence-based theories from prior housing/school changes.

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