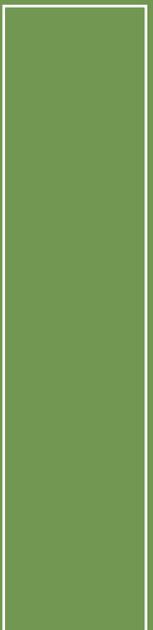


# THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING ON EDUCATION:

## A Research Summary



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This summary is based on *The Positive Impacts of Affordable Housing on Education* by Jeffrey Lubell and Maya Brennan. It was published by the Center for Housing Policy in 2007. The full review, as well as annotated bibliographies of key research studies, are available at [www.nhc.org/housing/intersections](http://www.nhc.org/housing/intersections) or [www.enterprisecommunity.org](http://www.enterprisecommunity.org).



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Cover photos by (from top right clockwise) Mike Elliott, Harry Connolly, Harry Connolly, Mike Elliott and Jackson Smith.

# THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING ON EDUCATION:

## A Research Summary

By Maya Brennan<sup>1</sup>

A growing body of research suggests that stable, affordable housing may provide children with enhanced opportunities for educational success. Schools and teachers certainly bear principal responsibility for children's education, and they should both be held to the highest possible standards. Nevertheless, research shows that a supportive and stable home environment can complement the efforts of educators, leading to better student achievement.

The Center for Housing Policy recently reviewed the academic literature on the various ways in which the production, rehabilitation or other provisions of affordable housing may lead to improved education outcomes for children.<sup>2</sup> Based on this review, we identified seven promising hypotheses regarding the positive contribution of affordable housing to education, which we have summarized in this publication.



Harry Connolly



David Harp



Harry Connolly

## 1. Stable, affordable housing may reduce the frequency of unwanted moves that lead children to change schools and disrupt educational instruction.

An extensive body of research documents the separate and combined impacts of two different types of moves on children's education: residential mobility (moving to a new home, with or

without changing schools) and school mobility (changing schools, with or without changing residences). Numerous studies document that children who change schools frequently experience declines in educational achievement. The studies also confirm the negative impact of residential moves – especially multiple moves, moving during key educational time periods and moves by nonintact families.<sup>3</sup> Potential explanations for the negative impacts of residential moves include disruptions in children's instruction caused by changing schools, stress caused by the move, disruptions of peer networks (for older children) and interference with the development of close, personal relationships (for younger children). In schools with high rates of student mobility, the detrimental impact of moving extends beyond the highly mobile students to

their teachers and stable classmates – perhaps because the highly mobile students require a disproportionate share of teacher attention and school resources. For example, a study of schools in Chicago found that in the most mobile schools, teachers are unable to gauge the effect of their instruction, lessons become review-oriented and the curricular pace slows so that by fifth grade, the curriculum at highly mobile schools is a year behind the stable schools.<sup>4</sup>

Helping families afford the costs of owning or renting a stable, affordable home improves their stability and reduces the likelihood they will have to move as a result of eviction, rent increases or other financial struggles.



Harry Connolly



David Harp

## 2. Some affordable housing strategies may help families move to communities that have stronger school systems or are more supportive of education.



Harry Connolly

While frequent moves appear to have a negative impact on educational achievement, moves to better school systems (or to communities that offer stronger support for education) may have an independent positive impact on educational achievement.<sup>5</sup> Research on families impacted by the Gautreaux litigation in Chicago, for example, found that moves from inner-city urban areas to suburban neighborhoods led to positive educational improvements over the long term.<sup>6</sup> Although the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) research demonstration could not confirm this finding, the researchers suggest this may be due to (a) the

evaluation occurring too soon for long-term effects to emerge, (b) many children in the Moving to Opportunity demonstration staying in the same school or a comparable school even after moving or (c) families staying in lower-poverty neighborhoods for only a short time before returning to neighborhoods essentially similar to the ones in which they started.<sup>7</sup>

Some forms of housing assistance – particularly housing voucher programs with a “mobility” counseling component and the construction of affordable developments in strong neighborhoods – are specifically designed to help families access neighborhoods of opportunity, which can include neighborhoods with strong schools. Even housing subsidies not specifically intended to move families to lower-poverty or more integrated neighborhoods can positively impact children’s education. A recent study found that children in low-income households that receive Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers live in better neighborhoods and are less likely to miss school than other low-income children.<sup>8</sup> When well-located, other types of affordable housing developments may have similar impacts.



Harry Connolly

### 3. Affordable housing can reduce overcrowding and other sources of housing-related stress that lead to poor educational outcomes by allowing families to afford decent-quality homes of their own.



Harry Connolly

A number of studies have found that overcrowding is associated with low educational achievement. For example, a study in New York City found that children living in crowded conditions are less likely to graduate from high school than their peers.<sup>9</sup> A national study also found that children growing up in crowded housing complete fewer years of education.<sup>10</sup> One potential explanation is that crowded living conditions may be associated with noise and chaos that interfere with children's studies; alternatively, the problem may simply be that kids have no place to sit down and do homework. By helping families afford decent, quality homes

of their own, affordable housing can improve children's educational achievement by reducing overcrowding.<sup>11</sup> Access to decent, affordable housing also can reduce the likelihood that families live in substandard housing, which appears also to be correlated with poor educational achievement.<sup>12</sup>

### 4. Well-constructed, maintained and managed affordable housing can help families address or escape housing-related health hazards (e.g., lead poisoning and asthma) that adversely impact learning.

Studies show that the exposure of children to lead – a dangerous neurotoxin – through poorly contained lead paint in older homes can lead to developmental and educational deficits.<sup>13</sup>

Poor housing conditions – notably, the persistent presence of cockroaches, pesticides and mold – also contribute to the incidence of asthma, which reduces educational attainment by causing kids to miss school. Affordable housing programs can help address these hazards by: funding housing rehabilitation



Mike Elliott

activities (such as the replacement of windows in older homes) that reduce hazards, improving the management and maintenance of older homes, helping families move to healthier homes and funding the construction of new homes that provide a healthier living environment.

**5. Affordable housing developments may function as a platform for educational improvements by providing a forum for residential-based afterschool programs or, more broadly, by anchoring a holistic community development process that includes new or improved schools.**

A number of affordable housing developments use their natural community as a means of providing resident services, such as afterschool programs, on the premises. High-quality afterschool programs appear to have a positive impact on children's educational achievement,<sup>14</sup> and residential-based afterschool programs have a number of potential advantages over school-based programs. First, they reduce transportation problems by eliminating the need to make special transportation arrangements for participating children who might otherwise miss their bus home. Second, in high-crime areas, they may alleviate parents' concerns about their children's safety by providing a safe place and reducing the need to travel outside of the home. Third, by being more convenient for parents, they may increase participation.



Harry Connolly

More broadly, as the HOPE VI public housing revitalization program has shown, the development of affordable housing can serve as an anchor for more holistic community development efforts that include new or improved schools. A number of HOPE VI redevelopment projects and similar community revitalization efforts have included the construction of new schools, leading to enhanced benefits for children and the community.<sup>15</sup> In Atlanta, for example, the redevelopment of East Lake Meadows was coordinated with the creation of a new charter school in the community. Most students now meet or exceed academic standards.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Homeownership may provide a platform for helping children do better in schools.



Harry Connolly

A number of studies have shown that the children of homeowners do better in school. For example, one study found that, for children living in owned homes rather than rental units, math achievement scores are up to 9 percent higher, reading achievement is up to 7 percent higher and behavioral problems are 1 to 3 percent lower.<sup>17</sup> Other studies have found that children of homeowners stay in school longer or have higher high-school graduation rates than their peers living in rented homes.<sup>18</sup> It is possible that the benefits of homeownership are concentrated among certain types of households.

For example, one study found a connection between homeownership and educational achievement among the children of households with incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line, but not for higher-income families.<sup>19</sup> While the precise reason

for these findings is not entirely clear, the benefit of homeownership for children may be due largely to the fact that homeowners tend to be more residentially stable than renters.<sup>20</sup> To the extent that enhanced stability largely explains the impact of homeownership on education, it is possible that particularly stable forms of affordable rental housing may provide similar benefits. However, to the extent that a neighborhood has poor quality schools or other adverse conditions, homeownership and other forms of residentially stable housing in that neighborhood may have a negative effect by locking families into a poor-quality neighborhood.

## 7. Affordable housing may support children’s educational achievement by reducing homelessness among families with children.

Children who experience homelessness face numerous educational barriers, including difficulties accessing preschool and Head Start programs and obtaining personal records necessary for enrollment. Given their difficulties accessing the public education system, it is no surprise that homeless children are more likely than their low-income peers to drop out of school, repeat a grade, perform poorly on tests and in the classroom and suffer from learning disabilities and behavior problems.<sup>21</sup>

By helping children avoid the disruptions associated with homelessness, affordable housing can help improve their educational achievement.



Mike Elliott



Harry Connolly

### Some Tentative Hypotheses

In addition to the more developed hypotheses summarized above, two additional hypotheses merit further exploration. First, affordable housing may facilitate greater parental involvement in their children’s education by reducing parental stress and the need to hold multiple jobs. Second, the development and rehabilitation of affordable housing in distressed neighborhoods may contribute to community revitalization efforts that lead to increases in community support for education. Although some anecdotal evidence and logical reasoning support these hypotheses, additional research is needed to assess their validity.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Maya Brennan is a research associate at the Center for Housing Policy.

<sup>2</sup> This summary is based on the following literature review: Lubell, Jeffrey and Maya Brennan. 2007. *The Positive Impacts of Affordable Housing on Education*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Housing Policy. The full review, as well as annotated bibliographies of key research studies, are available for download at [www.nhc.org/housing/intersections](http://www.nhc.org/housing/intersections) or [www.enterprisecommunity.org](http://www.enterprisecommunity.org).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the literature on this hypothesis, see The Center for Housing Policy's full literature review on this topic or see Scanlon, Edward and Kevin Devine. 2001. Residential Mobility and Youth Well-Being: Research, Policy, and Practice Issues. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 28(1): 119-138; Vandivere, Sharon, Elizabeth C. Hair, Christina Theokas, Kevin Cleveland, Michelle McNamara, and Astrid Atienza. 2006. *How Housing Affects Child Well-Being*. Coral Gables, FL: Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. [www.fundersnetwork.org/usr\\_doc/Housing\\_and\\_Child\\_Well\\_Being.pdf](http://www.fundersnetwork.org/usr_doc/Housing_and_Child_Well_Being.pdf) (accessed May 21, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Kerbow, David. October 1996. Patterns of Urban Student Mobility and Local School Reform Technical Report. University of Chicago Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, Report No. 5.

<sup>5</sup> See The Center for Housing Policy's full literature review on housing and education.

<sup>6</sup> Rosenbaum, James E. 1995. Changing the Geography of Opportunity by Expanding Residential Choice: Lessons from the *Gautreaux* Program. *Housing Policy Debate* 6(1): 231-269.

<sup>7</sup> Orr, Larry, Judith D. Feins, Robin Jacob, Erik Beecroft, Lisa Sanbonmatsu, Lawrence F. Katz, Jeffrey B. Leibman, and Jeffrey R. Kling. 2003. *Moving to Opportunity Interim Impacts Evaluation*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>8</sup> Mills, Gregory Daniel Gubits, Larry Orr, David Long, Judie Feins, Bulbul Kaul, Michelle Wood, Amy Jones & Associates, Cloudburst Consulting, and QED Group LLC. 2006. *Effects of Housing Vouchers on Welfare Families*. Prepared by Abt Associates Inc. for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The study also found, however, that the children of families that received vouchers were more likely to repeat a grade, perhaps because of the stronger standards of the children's new schools.

<sup>9</sup> Braconi, Frank. 2001. Housing and Schooling. *The Urban Prospect*. New York, N.Y.: Citizen's Housing and Planning Council.

<sup>10</sup> Conley, Dalton. 2001. A Room with a View or a Room of One's Own? Housing and Social Stratification. *Sociological Forum* 16(2): 263-280.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Mills et al. 2006. *Effects of Housing Vouchers on Welfare Families*; which found that housing vouchers led a reduction in the incidence of crowding.

<sup>12</sup> See Braconi. 2001. Housing and Schooling; Evans, Gary W., Heidi Saltzman, and Jana L. Cooperman. 2001. Housing Quality and Children's Socioemotional Health. *Environment and Behavior*, 33(3): 389-399.

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- <sup>19</sup> Harkness, Joseph and Sandra Newman. 2003. Differential Effects of Homeownership on Children from Higher- and Lower-Income Families. *Journal of Housing Research* 14(1): 1-19.
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- <sup>21</sup> See Jozefowicz-Simbeni, Debra M.H. and Nathaniel Israel. 2006. Services to Homeless Students and Families: The McKinney-Vento Act and Its Implications for School Social Work Practice. *Children & Schools* 28(1): 37-44. Ernst, Greg and Maria Foscarinis. November/December 1995. Education of Homeless Children: Barriers, Remedies, and Litigation Strategies. *Clearinghouse Review*, 754-759; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. 2000. *Separate and Unequal: A Report on Educational Barriers for Homeless Children and Youth*. Washington, D.C.: Author.



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