



## **PHA GUIDE TO PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS: PROMOTING HOUSING STABILITY AND BETTER OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES**

### **Background**

Schools play important roles in the lives of children and their families, and in creating strong and healthy communities. Schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) also have obligations to identify and provide some assistance to students who are experiencing homelessness. Such assistance includes transportation to allow students to continue to attend the same school even if they are staying in shelters or in other arrangements that may be far from where they were living when they enrolled in school.

HUD also strongly encourages collaboration among homeless assistance programs and schools, and requires that each project that receives HUD funding through the Continuum of Care must appropriately coordinate with schools and community agencies to enroll children and youth in school, and to ensure that the children and youth receive all required and necessary educational services.

Students from families experiencing a housing crisis or homelessness are understandably often struggling with and distracted by the challenges their families are facing. Teachers find it difficult to support student learning when some children do not attend school consistently, are staying in shelters without a quiet place to do homework, and/or may be moving between schools as their families try to secure or maintain stable housing.

PHAs and schools can collaborate to identify and assist children whose families are experiencing homelessness and to support housing stability for low-income families who live in public and assisted housing. By working together to prevent and end homelessness for families, schools and PHAs can strengthen communities and improve educational outcomes for students. This benefits not only the children whose families are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, but it also improves the educational environment for all students.

PHAs that have established a [waiting list preference](#) for homeless families can use partnerships with schools to help identify families who qualify for a local preference. By working together, schools and PHAs can connect homeless families to housing assistance.

Some innovative PHAs are partnering with schools to develop targeted initiatives to improve housing stability in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. These neighborhoods often include many residents of public and assisted housing, as well as a significant number of families experiencing housing instability or homelessness. A partnership between a PHA and a school can help to reduce the high rate of turnover in classrooms, by reducing the number of students who move in and out of schools because their families are experiencing crises that result in homelessness or frequent moves.

Some PHAs are collaborating with schools and other community resources to support comprehensive, place-based approaches to revitalizing neighborhoods and improving outcomes for children and their families. Some of these efforts are supported through program initiatives such as HUD's Choice Neighborhoods initiative and the US Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods.

These program initiatives take a comprehensive approach to improving neighborhoods and schools that serve large numbers of families living in poverty, and they include a focus on coordinating the delivery of services and supports families need to maintain stable housing, address other needs, and pursue opportunity. PHAs participating in these place-based revitalization efforts are strongly encouraged to adopt policies and program strategies that minimize the risks that families will be displaced or lose housing assistance, in order to prevent homelessness for current residents.

## Implementation Tips

HUD and US Department of Education programs operate under the requirements of different federal laws, and they use different criteria or definitions of homelessness for purposes of determining eligibility for assistance.

These differences can create confusion or misunderstanding when PHAs, schools, and other homeless assistance programs seek to collaborate. It is important to take time for partners to find common ground, develop shared language and values, and agree on priorities and strategies for assisting students and families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

## Where Can PHAs Do This?

All PHAs can develop such partnerships.

## Who Can PHAs Assist?

Families with children at risk of experiencing homelessness.

## Additional Resources

- USICH and the Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development produced a joint webinar called, [Opening Doors Together: Strategies for Integrating Education and Housing Services](#). Webinar participants discussed ways in which HUD Continuum of Care

providers, educators, school social workers, and school homeless liaisons can build relationships and link educational support services and homeless services.

- [The McCarver Elementary School Special Housing Program](#) is a joint effort by the Tacoma Housing Authority and McCarver Elementary School, with support from Pierce County, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and other community partners, to link rental housing assistance to a commitment to educational success for families experiencing homelessness. The program seeks to improve housing stability for families with children and improve the school's ability to provide quality for all students by reducing student turnover. See also the [THA McCarver Special Housing Program 2012 Evaluation Report](#).

### Examples

- In Harris County, Texas, the PHA and the Texas Homeless Education Office and local schools are partnering to assess and identify families who experiencing homelessness and in need of permanent housing. The **Harris County Housing Authority** has a preference for 100 Housing Choice Vouchers to go to homeless families with school-aged children. Additional case management support for these families is provided by Northwest Assistance Ministries. The Texas Homeless Education Office and Texas Homeless Network encourage collaboration through a variety of strategies including the Texas Interagency Council on Homelessness, a newsletter, annual conference, and regular cross-training to facilitate the development of shared commitments to preventing and ending homelessness for children in the state.
- In Tacoma, Washington, the Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) partners with the Tacoma Public Schools and 30 nonprofit organizations to stabilize and improve McCarver Elementary School in Tacoma's poorest neighborhood. As a result of extensive homelessness and poverty among the families of enrolled children, the student annual transient rate at McCarver has ranged between 100 percent and 179 percent, with accompanying poor school performance. THA's McCarver Elementary School Housing Program, using THA's Moving to Work authority, is providing housing assistance to stabilize 50 homeless families whose 76 children constitute about 20% of McCarver's enrollment. Participating parents commit to keep their children at McCarver, to do what a child's school success requires of parents, and to invest in their own education and employment prospects, with the help of extensive support. The school district has also committed to extensive investments in curriculum reform for the entire school. Third party evaluation paid for by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation monitors numerous performance measures. More information about this program is included within a [profile in the USICH Solutions Database](#).