

# Vibrant Neighborhoods, Successful Schools

*What the Federal  
Government Can Do  
to Foster Both*

MARGERY AUSTIN TURNER AND  
ALAN BERUBE

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## Vibrant Neighborhoods, Successful Schools

**EVERY PARENT RECOGNIZES THE IN-**extricable connections between where we live and the quality of our children’s education. In fact, for many families, the composition and quality of local public schools are primary factors in choosing a neighborhood and investing in a house or apartment. Families who can afford to choose where to live avoid communities where schools perform poorly, thereby fueling higher rents and property values in communities with highly regarded schools. In turn, local property values determine how much a jurisdiction can spend on teachers and school facilities. And as a consequence, schools in communities where low-cost housing is clustered often suffer from insufficient funding, obsolete facilities, and overextended teachers struggling to serve concentrations of needy students.

Public policies have helped shape today’s disparities in neighborhood affordability and school quality, although programs focused on affordable housing rarely take public schools into account and school officials typically assume that they have no influence over housing patterns. But policymakers can do better. By strategically addressing the connections between schools and housing, they can trigger positive feedback that enhances neighborhood vitality, improves school quality, and promotes equity and opportunity for families and their children. Most of these policies will be local, but the federal government has a role to play: deploying its considerable resources and leadership to encourage and support local innovation.

This paper focuses on four principles regarding the vitality and performance of schools and communities,

discussing opportunities for constructive policy interventions, summarizing what we know about their likely effectiveness, and recommending next steps for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Education (DoED).

1. Low-income children benefit from the resources and learning environment available at schools that also serve middle- and higher-income families.
2. Even in settings where most students are poor, schools can succeed with the right resources and accountability.
3. Kids perform better in school if they don’t change schools frequently, and schools perform better when they have lower turnover.
4. Kids do better in school when they are healthy, well-nourished, and arrive at school ready to learn.

### **Low-Income Children Benefit from the Resources and Learning Environment Available at Schools That Also Serve Middle- and Higher-Income Families**

All children have the potential to learn and succeed in school, even if their families are poor or their parents are poorly educated. However, the challenges of teaching and learning grow when many children in a classroom are poor, with parents who are poorly educated and struggling to find and keep jobs (Rothstein 2004). Research shows that (other things being equal) low-income children do better when they attend schools with middle- and upper-income children

than when they attend schools where most of their classmates are poor.<sup>1</sup> School resources, parent expectations, and student readiness all contribute to the learning environment in “middle class” schools.

## Understanding Today's Challenges

In many communities, housing patterns concentrate low-income families spatially and interact with school boundaries and assignment policies so some schools serve student populations that are largely poor while others exclusively serve middle- and upper-income students.<sup>2</sup> Lower-cost housing options are disproportionately located in central cities. And within cities, affordable housing is often clustered in a few neighborhoods. Historically, federally subsidized housing has reinforced these patterns, contributing to the spatial concentration of poor families (especially the minority poor) and to high rates of student poverty in neighborhood schools (Katz and Turner 2008).

High rates of student poverty, residential instability, neighborhood crime and distress, aging facilities, and limited fiscal capacity all undermine the performance of public schools in poor neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> And the poor performance of these schools discourages middle- and upper-income families from living in low-income communities. Young families often move away from central-city neighborhoods when their kids reach school age, and neighborhoods with poorly performing schools have difficulty attracting families who have other choices about where to live (Bayer, Ferreira, and McMillan 2004). Thus, school performance reinforces and perpetuates residential patterns, fueling a vicious cycle of poverty concentration, racial segregation, and neighborhood distress.

The flip side of this problem is the scarcity of affordable housing in neighborhoods served by high-performing schools. Zoning and land use regulations restrict the production of lower-cost and subsidized housing in many suburban jurisdictions (Katz and Turner 2008). Great schools fuel demand for homes in these communities, pushing prices and rents up even further (Kane, Staiger, and Samms 2003). And the high property values that result yield ample tax revenues to fund teacher salaries, supplemental programs, building maintenance, and new school construction.

## Opportunities for Constructive Policymaking

Local policymakers and practitioners have a number of tools at their disposal to give low-income children access to schools that also serve middle- and upper-income students. They can coordinate investments in housing and school improvements to promote more income mixing in poor neighborhoods. They can expand affordable housing options in nonpoor neighborhoods with good schools. And they can help low-income students living in distressed neighborhoods attend high-performing schools elsewhere. All three of these strategies have been tested on a limited scale and appear to offer promise.

**Coordinate investments in housing and school improvements to promote income mixing.** In a handful of cities, local stakeholders have created successful elementary schools in conjunction with the redevelopment of severely distressed public housing and the introduction of new homes and apartments pegged to higher income levels. Prominent examples include a new public school sponsored by Georgia Tech and a charter school sponsored by a neighborhood-based foundation in public housing redevelopment projects in Atlanta; a reconstituted public school sponsored by a major developer in conjunction with public housing redevelopment in St. Louis; and a public school sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania in the distressed neighborhood adjacent to its campus (Khadduri et al. 2003).

These and other examples demonstrate that it is possible to create effective, mixed-income schools in previously poor neighborhoods, attract nonpoor families, and improve school quality for the neediest children. But there is no single strategy for success: local initiatives must be tailored to address neighborhood needs, housing market conditions, and institutional realities. Key ingredients include installing new school leadership and staff, offering high-quality content (including attractive magnet programs and evidence-based curricula), engaging parents, attracting nonpoor families *with children*<sup>4</sup> to live in the neighborhood and attend school there, and ensuring that the needs of poor children (including those who lived in the neighborhood before) are effectively met (Khadduri, Schwartz, and Turnham 2007, 2008a; Abravanel, Smith, and Cove 2007; Orfield and Gumus-Dawes 2008).

The federal government can and should actively encourage local efforts to link housing and neighborhood revitalization investments with investments in school quality. Specifically:

- When HUD awards funding for the redevelopment of federally subsidized housing developments, it should give priority to proposals that include actionable plans for improving the schools that children living in these developments attend. The commitment of local school officials to the implementation of these plans should be carefully assessed as a factor in the selection process.
- When DoED awards funding for improvements in school facilities, it should give priority to school districts that are actively involved in projects linking mixed-income housing redevelopment with school improvements.
- HUD and DoED should jointly plan and provide technical assistance to local housing and school officials engaged in federally funded projects linking housing redevelopment with school improvements. This technical assistance should draw upon evidence from research to date.
- HUD and DoED should launch a rigorous demonstration initiative in which they jointly select and fund local initiatives in low-income neighborhoods with high concentrations of federally subsidized housing and poor-performing public elementary schools. This initiative would be explicitly designed to attract middle- and upper-income families with children to the target neighborhood and its elementary school, improve school outcomes for all children living in the target neighborhood, and preserve housing affordability for the neighborhood's original residents.

**Expand affordable housing options in non-poor neighborhoods.** Housing policy offers a number of tools for expanding the availability of housing affordable to low-income families in nonpoor communities. Federally funded housing vouchers provide an ideal mechanism, by allowing low-income families to rent homes and apartments of their choice and supplementing what they can afford to spend. Housing voucher recipients are much less likely than public housing families to live in high-poverty neighborhoods, and when vouchers are accompanied by effective housing search assistance and counseling, they allow very low income families to move to low-

poverty neighborhoods. To date, however, voucher programs have not focused explicitly on the quality of schools serving the neighborhoods where recipients live, and evidence from the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration indicates that low-income children moving to low-poverty neighborhoods do not necessarily gain access to a high-performing school or experience improved educational outcomes (Turner and Briggs 2008).<sup>5</sup>

Further, in many communities with high-performing schools, moderately priced rental housing (where voucher recipients could locate) is in short supply. Therefore, expanding access to these communities requires that local agencies build or buy housing units that can be made available to low- and moderate-income families. Unfortunately, building (or even buying) affordable housing in nonpoor neighborhoods often generates community opposition, fueled by prejudice and by fears about crime and declining property values. Rigorous research evidence indicates that these fears are misplaced; when affordable housing is widely scattered and properly managed, it has no adverse effects on otherwise healthy neighborhoods (Galster et al. 2003). Massachusetts has directly addressed some community concerns about affordable housing by providing supplemental funding to school districts to offset the costs of additional students generated by new rental housing construction (Rollins 2006).

Montgomery County, Maryland, is a leading example of a suburban jurisdiction that has systematically and successfully invested in affordable housing that is integrated into affluent neighborhoods throughout the county. For more than 30 years, the county has required that all new housing developments of more than 20 units include a modest share (12 to 15 percent) of moderately priced units and has given its local housing authority the right to purchase some of these units and operate them as public housing. Over 40 years, this inclusionary zoning program has produced about 12,500 units of moderate-cost for-sale and rental housing in the county's affluent subdivisions, of which 700 are scattered-site public housing apartments rented to very low income families.<sup>6</sup>

The federal government should create strong incentives for local jurisdictions to expand affordable housing opportunities in nonpoor communities, and it should more explicitly target these incentives to

communities served by high-performing schools with very low rates of poverty. Specifically:

- HUD should strengthen incentives for local housing agencies to help Housing Choice Voucher recipients move to neighborhoods served by high-performing public schools. A first step would be to assist local housing agencies in identifying such neighborhoods throughout their metropolitan areas and require them to report on the number and share of voucher recipients locating in these neighborhoods.
- More broadly, through public housing replacement, the HOME and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) programs, and new initiatives, HUD should strengthen incentives for localities to expand affordable housing options in low-poverty communities served by high-performing schools.
- When HUD allocates funding to renovate and preserve public housing developments or privately owned subsidized developments, it should give priority to projects located in neighborhoods served by high-performing public schools.
- HUD should publicize successful examples of inclusionary zoning and dispersed affordable housing development and provide models for state and local legislation and program design.
- DoED and HUD should launch a demonstration initiative that targets failing elementary schools and provides housing vouchers to eligible families of children attending these schools on the condition that they move to neighborhoods served by high-performing schools (and enroll their children in these schools).

**Enable children living in distressed neighborhoods to attend high-quality schools elsewhere.** A third strategy for breaking the stubborn link between distressed neighborhoods and failing schools is to enable low-income children to attend high-performing public schools even if their families cannot afford housing in the neighborhoods where these schools are located. Magnet schools, charter schools, and public school choice policies all provide mechanisms for families to send their children to schools outside their neighborhood enrollment areas. Research on school enrollment patterns in the District of Columbia indicates that elementary school-age children who travel relatively long distances from

home attend schools with slightly higher test scores than those who remain close to home, but data are not yet available to determine whether these children achieve greater educational success (Turner et al. 2006). For example, research on Chicago public school choice lotteries finds limited impacts on achievement for poor kids who won the opportunity to attend magnet high schools (Temkin 2005).

The federal government should encourage local information gathering and experimentation on strategies for helping poor children attend high-performing schools. Specifically:

- DoED should provide resources and protocols to local data intermediaries to supplement existing information in mandated school “report cards” with other indicators of quality for all public (traditional and charter) schools, including “value added” measures.
- DoED should publicize successful examples of local enrollment policies that enable (and encourage) low-income families to send their children to high-performing schools.

### **Even in Settings Where Most Students Are Poor, Schools Can Succeed with the Right Resources and Accountability**

Although concentrated poverty creates serious challenges for teaching and learning, school systems must not give up on the schools that serve poor neighborhoods. Examples of individual high-performing schools demonstrate that it is possible to provide quality education even when many students are poor and the surrounding neighborhood is distressed. Key contributors to success include the quality of the teaching staff and autonomy and accountability for the school principal.

### **Understanding Today's Challenges**

As discussed above, a significant body of research evidence points to the positive impacts of attending mixed-income schools on low-income student performance. Thus, affordable housing and school choice policies should, wherever possible, enhance options for students from poor households to attend mixed-income schools. In the near term, however, many



low-income children will continue to live in high-poverty neighborhoods and to attend schools that primarily serve poor children. The limited supply of mixed-income schools in some cities constrains efforts to help low-income children access such schools, even when they move to better neighborhoods (Jacob 2004). In districts where mixed-income schools do exist, they may lie at a significant distance from low-income communities, imposing travel burdens on younger students from those neighborhoods. In addition, the deep poverty exhibited by many areas with concentrations of subsidized housing diminishes the near-term prospects that housing or school redevelopment efforts will produce a truly mixed-income student body.

Therefore, policymakers should also consider targeted interventions to improve existing school options in high-poverty neighborhoods, including those with concentrations of subsidized housing. The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which requires restructuring when schools fail to meet adequate yearly progress goals for five consecutive years, creates growing urgency for effective strategies. A disproportionate number of schools in restructuring is located in urban school districts and serves poor and minority students (Government Accountability Office [GAO] 2007).

One central challenge for schools in poor neighborhoods is attracting and retaining good teachers. The preponderance of recent research strongly suggests that the quality of classroom instruction is the most important in-school factor for explaining student achievement levels (Gordon, Kane, and Staiger 2006). However, schools with high concentrations of poor and minority students are disproportionately staffed by teachers who are inexperienced and uncertified, teaching subjects they have not been prepared to teach (Clotfelter et al. 2007). Attracting and retaining highly effective teachers at schools serving high-poverty neighborhoods can be very challenging. High rates of student mobility and absenteeism, student behavior problems, and the added social welfare roles that teachers and administrators often assume at these schools discourage teachers and principals (Jacob 2007; Lupton 2004). The combination of teachers' preference for proximity to home, good working conditions, and high-performing schools leads to the greatest turnover of teaching staff in the schools that can least afford it.

## Opportunities for Constructive Policymaking

Despite the undeniable challenges, local school systems can improve the quality of schools that currently serve low-income communities while they work to promote greater income-mixing in both neighborhoods and schools.<sup>7</sup> Key priorities include attracting and retaining high-quality teachers and principals and establishing new schools where staff enjoy the independence necessary to innovate but are held accountable for the results. Federal policy can and should encourage and support local jurisdictions to make these targeted investments, monitor their effectiveness, and build on models of success.

### **Attract and retain high-quality personnel.**

Existing federal programs recognize the importance of staffing high-poverty schools with highly motivated, highly effective teachers who can help close the achievement gap between low-income minority students and their counterparts from higher-income families and districts. The Department of Education's Teacher Incentive Fund supports state and local programs for performance-based compensation systems for teachers and principals, especially those in high-need schools. The Fund has supported hundreds of collaborations between school districts and nonprofit organizations that provide training and professional development for personnel at high-poverty schools and that increase the pipeline of talented individuals seeking to work in those settings.

For example, in Guilford County, North Carolina (home to the cities of Greensboro and Winston-Salem), the Fund supported the development of an incentive pay program designed to attract and retain highly qualified personnel in schools with above-average levels of student poverty, high rates of teacher turnover, and below-average levels of student performance (Rowland 2008). An initial evaluation found that schools where the program was implemented experienced reductions in teacher and principal turnover, increases in classes taught by highly qualified teachers, and better student performance on state exams (SERVE Center 2008). An earlier, much-touted initiative in Chattanooga, Tennessee, used pay incentives and intensive professional development for teachers to successfully reduce turnover and raise student test scores at eight low-performing elementary schools (Silva 2008). Evidence suggests that

these types of programs can improve teachers' performance, though they must be carefully implemented and outcomes measured rigorously (Lavy 2007).

The federal government also provides direct and indirect (via student loan forgiveness) support to Teach for America, a national corps of recent college graduates who commit to teach at least two years in high-need schools. Teach for America members have positive impacts on student achievement relative to other teachers at the secondary level, especially in math and science (Xu, Hannaway, and Taylor 2009).

Finally, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 (ARRA) provides new resources to states to upgrade their data systems to permit more "value-added" measures of teacher performance, which will help states and districts to achieve an "equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need," as required in another section of the act.

The federal government should build on these initiatives, targeting supports and incentives to schools serving high-poverty and distressed neighborhoods, including those with concentrations of subsidized housing:

- DoED should give added consideration to applications for competitive grants to attract and retain high-quality personnel (such as the Teacher Incentive Fund) that closely involve local housing agencies in planning and implementation, and should target resources to schools serving high proportions of disadvantaged students.
- HUD and DoED should jointly support research examining the state of schools in high-poverty neighborhoods with concentrations of subsidized housing, including evidence on the qualifications and effectiveness of their personnel.

#### **Support the development of new schools.**

Many parents living in poor neighborhoods with concentrations of subsidized housing are choosing to send their children to new schools, some of which lie outside the traditional public system.<sup>8</sup> Though charter schools vary widely in their effectiveness, some of the highest performing schools serving very low income neighborhoods are charters. Many are run by well-known national and regional charter management organizations, such as the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and Achievement First. Some are locally designed and operate in districts that have

adopted a "portfolio" strategy for educational provision, such as New Orleans.<sup>9</sup> These schools, most of which focus on the elementary- and middle-school levels, tend to have longer school days and school years, and they employ a more "paternalistic" approach to their students' development in order to close achievement gaps. The schools operate nearly exclusively in inner-city communities, serving student populations that are overwhelmingly low-income and minority. They tend to employ teachers and administrators that come from specialized, non-traditional training programs like Teach for America, New Leaders for New Schools, and The New Teacher Project (Whitman 2008). Though rigorous research on the effects of these school models remains limited, an early evaluation of KIPP schools in the San Francisco Bay Area finds that their students make greater progress on reading and mathematics than students elsewhere in their districts (Woodworth et al. 2008).

The restructuring of many high-poverty urban schools under NCLB may increase the demand for new and significantly reconstituted schools in those neighborhoods. However, new schools, especially charter schools, often face important barriers to entry. The most obvious are state and local policies such as caps or moratoria on the creation of such schools. More subtle are obstacles such as zoning policies or start-up capital constraints that make it difficult for these providers to find acceptable facilities (Mead and Rotherham 2008).

Here again, the federal government can play a key enabling role for expanding new school options in low-income communities. The Department of Education operates a program that provides credit enhancements, often to nonprofit intermediary organizations that work across multiple states and school districts to help charter schools leverage other needed funding to acquire, build, renovate, or lease academic facilities. Specialized nonprofit lenders, such as the Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF), have leveraged these dollars to help successful charter management organizations expand their operations in low-income communities (IFF 2008). The Department of Education has also overseen the Qualified Zone Academy Bond program, which through 2004 provided tax credits on bonds issued to finance repairs, renovations, and other investments in charter schools serving low-income areas; ARRA provides new funding for the

program in 2009 and 2010. ARRA also initiates a new \$650 million program, the “Invest in What Works and Innovation” Fund, which the secretary of education may use to stimulate the expansion of effective schools in high-need areas.

Again, the federal government can and should target its support for the creation of successful new schools to neighborhoods of poverty and distress, including those with large numbers of federally subsidized housing units:

- HUD should target public and assisted housing redevelopment resources, such as those available under HOPE VI and the proposed Choice Neighborhoods initiative, to neighborhoods served by schools that receive DoED support to increase the supply of highly effective teachers and principals, or to expand the availability of new schools operated by high-performance charter school networks.
- HUD should clearly articulate and publicize successful examples of how CDBG resources can be used to improve public school facilities in high-poverty neighborhoods.
- DoED should target some of its ARRA funding to distressed neighborhoods with high concentrations of public and assisted housing.
- HUD and DoED should collaborate to publicize successful models of new school development that lead to improved student achievement at schools serving neighborhoods with high concentrations of subsidized housing.

### **Kids Perform Better in School If They Don't Change Schools Frequently, and Schools Perform Better When They Have Lower Turnover**

A growing body of rigorous research finds that high levels of student mobility undermine educational outcomes, not only for individual students but also for the schools they attend (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin 2004). When children transfer between schools, especially in the middle of an academic year, they experience changes in curriculum or teaching methods and they have to make new friends and cope with an unfamiliar social environment. Consequently, children who change schools achieve lower educational outcomes than those who remain in place, especially

when these moves are within (rather than between) school districts (Xu, Hannaway, and D'Souza 2009). Schools that experience high levels of turnover during the academic year suffer, because teachers may have to repeat lessons already covered and both teachers and students have to continually adjust to newly arriving students and a changing classroom mix. And when students change schools frequently, parents are less likely to get involved in the classroom or the parent-teacher association, and schools miss out on the benefits of active parental involvement.

### **Understanding Today's Challenges**

Although some children may change schools even though they still live at the same address, residential moves likely explain a substantial share of school enrollment changes (Kerbow 1996; Rumberger et al. 1999). For low-income families, high housing costs contribute to residential instability. Families whose rents are unaffordable are more likely to pay their rent late or miss payments, to face eviction, or to move in order to avoid eviction or find a cheaper place to live. Families sometimes double up temporarily with relatives or friends, moving frequently as they wear out their welcome, and even experiencing periods of homelessness (Rice and Sard 2009). And when housing markets are hot, landlords may terminate leases or encourage tenants to leave so they can upgrade their properties or convert them to condominiums (Belsky and Drew 2008).

The foreclosure crisis is increasing levels of involuntary mobility, among middle- and upper-income families as well as the poor, and among homeowners as well as renters. Millions of children are likely to be affected (Lovell and Isaacs 2008). Too little is known about where families move and how they fare following a foreclosure, but all the available evidence suggests that the insecurity, stress, financial hardship, and relocation they are likely to experience will undermine the well-being and educational success of their children (Lovell and Isaacs 2008). Renters, who can be evicted even though they are current on their rent payments and completely unaware that their landlord faces foreclosure, probably face the highest risk of homelessness (Cunningham 2009). And in communities hit hardest by foreclosures, neighborhood schools may experience unprecedented levels of turnover (McFarland and McGahan 2008).

Residential moves are not the only explanation for high rates of student mobility. When schools perform poorly, parents are more likely to move their kids from school to school in an effort to find better educational settings (Filardo et al. 2008). As a consequence, poor-performing schools in low-income neighborhoods often experience especially high rates of turnover—both because of residential instability and because of parental dissatisfaction—further undermining educational outcomes. Here again, housing and school factors combine to fuel a mutually reinforcing downward spiral for students and the larger community.

### Opportunities for Constructive Policymaking

Local housing and school officials can and should work together to reduce student mobility stemming both from residential instability and from other factors. Officials can expand and target housing assistance resources to help low-income families find stable housing and move less frequently. They can adjust school enrollment procedures so children do not necessarily have to change schools when their families move. When substandard housing projects are renovated or replaced, the relocation of residents can be planned and phased to minimize school disruption. And local school systems can inform and advise parents to help them make informed school choices and then stick with them.

**Provide housing assistance to reduce residential instability.** Research shows that families with housing vouchers move less frequently and are less likely to experience episodes of homelessness than unassisted families at the same income level (Wood, Turnham, and Mills 2008).<sup>10</sup> In the past, special allocations of housing vouchers have been targeted to families leaving the welfare rolls and to families in the child welfare system. In addition, some communities provide short-term assistance to families at risk of eviction, to prevent homelessness. The effectiveness of these short-term prevention efforts has not yet been rigorously evaluated. Finally, a handful of states and localities is now requiring banks that foreclose on rental properties to allow renters to remain in place, and Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are experimenting with programs that

allow foreclosed owners to remain in their homes as renters rather than being forced to move.

The federal government has expanded funding for homelessness prevention programs as part of the economic recovery package, but it could target additional resources to help reduce unwanted moves among low-income families and enable children to stay in the same schools.<sup>11</sup> Specifically:

- HUD could allocate a portion of any new Housing Choice Vouchers to jurisdictions with high rates of residential instability, including communities hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis. In fact, HUD could go farther, setting aside a pool of housing vouchers specifically for low-income families with school-age children who would otherwise have to leave a good school because their housing has become unaffordable or because they face foreclosure.
- HUD could encourage local jurisdictions to use their HOME block grants and/or homeless funds to provide temporary housing assistance to enable at-risk renter families with school-age children to remain in their homes, providing examples of promising local programs and conducting research to assess the cost-effectiveness of these models.
- HUD could encourage local housing authorities and homeless programs to identify neighborhoods where the foreclosure crisis is likely to force high rates of residential mobility and to target assistance to enable eligible families with school-age children to remain in their homes.
- HUD should encourage lending institutions to allow families to remain as renters in foreclosed properties, working with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to develop workable procedures.

**Allow children whose families move to remain in the same school.** Policies vary across the country regarding school transfers for children whose families move to a new neighborhood within the same school district. Some districts require children to transfer immediately, but others offer more flexibility, at least through the end of the school year (Filardo et al. 2008). When families move between school districts, their children almost always have to change schools.

- DoED should gather more systematic information about local transfer policies and encourage school



districts to implement flexible rules, particularly for families forced to move because of foreclosure.

**Minimize school changes in housing redevelopment projects.** Over the past 15 years, local housing authorities have renovated or replaced many of the country's most severely distressed public housing developments. These projects have required the relocation of families with children, sometimes emptying whole elementary schools over a very short time. Increasingly, public housing officials have recognized the need to coordinate the planning for these large-scale relocation efforts with local school officials, and to schedule relocation for the summer months. When local housing and school officials work together, they can not only prepare for the impact on schools, but also minimize the disruption for students. For example, Atlanta's housing authority (working with Enterprise Community Partners) successfully coordinated the HOPE VI relocation in the Mechanicsville neighborhood with the Atlanta Public Schools (Khadduri, Schwartz, and Turnham 2008b).

- HUD should require competitively awarded housing redevelopment projects to show how they will coordinate relocation and reoccupancy plans with local school systems.

**Help parents from poor neighborhoods make lasting school choices.** Local school systems can and should use school choice options to enable children from neighborhoods served by poor performing schools transfer to better schools. But in doing so, they should also encourage school stability. In other words, families need help choosing the right schools for their children and then sticking with these choices so their children can benefit fully. For example, school systems can identify and provide counseling assistance to families making frequent school switches, provide school choice assistance and counseling on building relationships with schools to families receiving city housing assistance, or launch a public education campaign about the advantages of making a good school choice and sticking with it (Filardo et al. 2008).

The federal government should encourage local information gathering and experimentation on strategies to promote school stability. Specifically:

- DoED should publicize successful examples of local counseling programs that help families make and then sustain good school choices.

## **Kids Do Better in School When They Are Healthy, Well-Nourished, and Arrive at School Ready to Learn**

How well kids do academically reflects far more than what happens within the classroom. Children who come to school hungry or poorly nourished, who suffer from chronic illnesses, or who missed out on preschool enrichment opportunities all face learning challenges. The out-of-school environment in poor neighborhoods often contributes to these problems, affecting kids' performance as students and undermining in-school efforts to improve educational outcomes (Rothstein et al. 2008).

### **Understanding Today's Challenges**

Low-income neighborhoods, including those with concentrations of public and assisted housing, often exhibit environmental hazards that negatively affect children's health and development (Quercia and Bates 2002). Research suggests that the continued prevalence of lead paint and asbestos in older homes; elevated levels of mold, roaches, and rodents; and the resulting higher incidence and severity of asthma among poor children in these neighborhoods may reduce kids' school readiness and academic achievement. Similarly, the absence of full-service grocery stores in many low-income neighborhoods limits residents' access to healthful, reasonably priced food and may increase obesity in young children and contribute to iron deficiencies, which have been linked to poor performance in school (Currie 2005; Federal Reserve System and Brookings Institution 2008). In addition, unaffordable housing costs borne by unsubsidized renters may reduce family expenditures on food and lead to poor nutrition and lower child weights (Meyers et al. 2005).

Schools themselves account for a substantial portion of low-income children's diets via the free and reduced-price school lunch and breakfast programs. But those meals—while supplying the required nutritional content—often exceed the federal government's own guidelines for fat and sodium intake (Gordon and Fox 2007).

Finally, poor neighborhoods and subsidized housing developments often lack early learning options that prepare kids to succeed in school, as well as

resources to support housing personnel focused on the local learning environment for children.

## Opportunities for Constructive Policymaking

Targeted investments in housing and neighborhoods can help address deficits that undermine children's health and readiness to learn, helping to create conditions that enable schools to be more successful. Specifically, neighborhood investments can remove environmental hazards in the housing stock, attract quality grocery stores and preschool programs, and link investments in family support services with school and housing investments. In addition, children's nutrition can be enhanced through improvements in school lunch and breakfast programs and by expanded housing assistance, which would enable poor families to spend more for food. Federal policymakers can provide leadership, incentives, and guidance to state and local officials and nonprofit organizations to help them improve out-of-school environmental influences on children's health and academic performance.

### Remove environmental hazards in housing.

A substantial share of the low-cost housing stock, including portions of HUD's public and assisted housing inventory, still exhibits severe problems with lead paint, mold, rodents, and inadequate maintenance (Popkin et al. 2002). Even modest investments in improving home environments can reduce children's exposure to environmental hazards that create or exacerbate health problems, thereby improving their readiness to learn. The Harlem Children's Zone's Asthma Initiative, for instance, works with families in its area to not only screen children for symptoms, but also help eliminate asthma triggers in the home environment, by supplying dust covers and air filters and providing pest management services (Harlem Children's Zone 2005).<sup>12</sup>

- HUD should target its investments in "healthy homes" and lead hazard control to developments and authorities that serve significant numbers of families with young children, who might benefit the most academically from such improvements.
- HUD and DoED, together with the EPA, should assess whether environmentally unhealthy home and school environments may contribute to low student achievement in the nation's most troubled

schools, and then target remediation investments to these communities.

### Use neighborhood revitalization investments to attract healthy amenities.

Federal investments can help address the lack of healthful food options in low-income communities, and limited local access to high-quality child care and health care facilities, thereby strengthening K–12 investments. Organizations such as The Reinvestment Fund in Philadelphia have used the federal new markets tax credit (NMTC), which supports community development organizations engaged in commercial and retail development in low-income areas, to attract supermarkets to underserved areas (TRF 2006). They and many other community development financial institutions (CDFIs), such as Northern California's Low Income Investment Fund, have used the NMTC and other support from the Treasury Department's CDFI Fund to finance capital projects for early childhood centers in low-income neighborhoods. HUD's CDBG program represents another source of federal support for youth-related services and facilities in low-income areas (Torrico and Flynn-Khan 2008).

- HUD and DoED should collaborate to map existing federal investments in neighborhood revitalization, and use the information to build on local initiatives in their housing redevelopment and school reform efforts.
- HUD should encourage applicants for its place-based initiatives—like Choice Neighborhoods—to assess and address needs for these services.

### Improve kids' nutrition through in-school programs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) operates the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, which subsidize meals for millions of students in low-income communities. According to the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine, a growing number of schools are going above and beyond USDA nutritional guidelines to serve their students healthier lunches (PCRM 2008). Schools and districts adopting the most innovative approaches, however, are typically located outside the poorest neighborhoods and cities (USDA 2005), where healthier food options are already more available and resource pressures are lower. Additional federal leadership could promote the spread of higher-quality school meals, and better overall eating habits, to students in low-income communities.

- HUD, DoED, and USDA should explore a partnership to improve the nutritional value of school breakfasts and lunches, with specific attention to schools serving low-income communities that lack fresh, reasonably priced nearby food shopping.

**Expand budget relief for poor families through housing vouchers.** A lack of affordable housing places tremendous pressure on family budgets and can reduce spending on nutritious foods. Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) is fairly high among families with children, which helps to offset some, though not all, of their typical food cost burdens (Wolkwitz 2008). However, in 2005 more than half of all renters paid more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs in the nation's 118 largest metropolitan areas (Katz and Turner 2008). Housing vouchers remain an effective, targeted way to help alleviate housing-cost burdens for low-income renters. Several recommendations in this report suggest ways that the voucher program could more effectively improve children's academic performance. Yet the program also deserves significantly greater general support than it has received recently. Expanded support would help make up a portion of the gap between rising rents and stagnant incomes that many renters face, and it would expand the portion of their limited budgets available for nutritious food.

- HUD should seek to expand the availability of housing vouchers for low-income families with children and commission new research on the links between childhood nutrition levels and receipt of housing assistance.

**Promote expanded early learning opportunities in neighborhoods with federally subsidized housing.** The Department of Education operates several grant programs for states and localities to support high-quality early learning opportunities for low-income children, especially those in low-income communities. President Obama's fiscal year 2010 DoED budget envisions a greatly expanded federal focus on early childhood education, proposing several new and expanded programs including Title I Early Childhood Grants, an Early Learning Challenge Fund, Early Reading First, and planning grants for Promise Neighborhoods (Berube 2009). Research indicates that one existing program,

Early Reading First, enhances classroom practices and quality, and has a positive impact on some child learning outcomes (U.S. Department of Education 2007). Such programs could provide a further important spur to neighborhood revitalization by improving children's school readiness, and thus local school performance.

- HUD and DoED should jointly assess existing federal support for early learning in high-poverty neighborhoods served by federally subsidized housing and examine experiences from previous early childhood investments made alongside investments in housing redevelopment.
- DoED should consider granting preference to state and local applicants for early learning funds that propose to target those programs to areas benefiting from other federal housing and neighborhood revitalization investments.

**Provide supplemental resources to local officials to integrate educational and human services investments with housing investments.** More local officials are undertaking housing redevelopment projects with an eye toward improving educational outcomes for very young children and K–12 students alike. For instance, the city of San Francisco and the San Francisco Housing Authority are working jointly with local educational, human services, and workforce agencies to advance economic opportunities for residents of public housing scheduled for redevelopment, and to integrate redevelopment plans with school facilities and reform plans.<sup>13</sup> While HUD's HOPE VI program funded community and supportive services alongside its larger-scale capital expenditures, that funding was time-limited and delivered through housing authorities, which are often not the best providers of such services locally. In addition to providing more sustainable resources to support those local integrative activities, the federal government can provide model leadership for local actors by collaborating across agency lines to enhance flexibility in federal workforce and human services funds that affect families in housing targeted for redevelopment.

- HUD and DoED should provide sufficient resources in their Choice Neighborhoods and Promise Neighborhoods programs to support planning and delivery of human services targeted to families with children in public and assisted

housing, and HUD and DoED should allow multiple types of agencies to coordinate the use of those funds.

- HUD should develop a partnership with the departments of Health and Human Services and Labor to provide broader family support services and employment strategies for residents of public and assisted housing, including greatly enhanced flexibility to coordinate the use of multiple federal funding streams for individual families, such as foster care, child welfare, TANF, and workforce training.

## Conclusion

This paper identifies four principles linking school quality with housing affordability and neighborhood quality, and highlights important policy opportunities for the federal departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development. In many areas, HUD and DoED can ensure that their respective interventions (HUD on housing and neighborhoods, DoED on schools) yield better outcomes for both housing and education. But in addition, HUD and

DoED can work jointly to coordinate their investments, thereby making federal housing and school policies true complements. The table below summarizes the recommendations from the previous sections, categorized by the agency or agencies that would carry them out.

Each of these recommendations would work within the current administrative geographies of housing and school policies. Typically, local governments such as cities, towns, and counties are ultimately responsible for the detailed design and implementation of these policies. But most families are not governed by these jurisdictional boundaries when they make key decisions around housing, jobs, and schools. Instead, families make those choices largely in a *metropolitan* context, balancing multiple priorities to select the community that works best. Unfortunately, the hyper-localization of U.S. education policy has contributed greatly to the concentrations of poverty and wealth evident in American communities today and the dearth of high-performing schools in many city school districts (Bischoff 2008).

There are early signs that the new leadership at HUD may embrace and encourage approaches that

HUD should	DoED should	HUD and DoED should jointly
<b>Enable low-income children to benefit from schools serving middle-income students</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Prioritize housing redevelopment proposals that include actionable school improvement plans with commitment of local school officials</li> <li>■ Strengthen incentives for local housing agencies to help voucher holders access neighborhoods with high-performing schools</li> <li>■ Strengthen incentives for localities to expand affordable housing options in low-poverty communities served by high-performing schools</li> <li>■ Prioritize housing renovation and preservation funding for projects in neighborhoods served by high-performing schools</li> <li>■ Publish successful examples of inclusionary housing development and provide models for legislation and program design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Target facilities improvement funds to districts that link mixed-income housing projects with school improvements</li> <li>■ Provide resources to local data intermediaries to supplement existing data on public school report cards</li> <li>■ Publicize successful examples of local enrollment policies that enable low-income families to send their children to high-performing schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide technical assistance to housing and school officials engaged in federally funded projects that marry housing redevelopment with school improvements</li> <li>■ Launch a demonstration in neighborhoods with concentrations of HUD housing and low-performing elementary schools to boost student economic diversity, improve school outcomes for all children, and preserve housing affordability</li> <li>■ Launch a demonstration to provide housing vouchers to families in neighborhoods served by failing elementary schools; require relocation to neighborhoods served by high-performing schools</li> </ul>



HUD should	DoED should	HUD and DoED should jointly
<b>Improve school options in high-poverty neighborhoods</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Target housing redevelopment funds to neighborhoods served by successful magnet or charter schools or schools that receive DoEd support to increase the supply of highly effective teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Give added consideration to applications for competitive grants that involve local housing agencies in planning and implementation</li> <li>■ Target ARRA funding to distressed neighborhoods with high concentrations of public and assisted housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support research on the state of schools in neighborhoods with concentrations of subsidized housing, including evidence on personnel qualifications and effectiveness</li> <li>■ Publicize successful models of new school development that lead to improved student achievement in neighborhoods with high concentrations of HUD housing</li> </ul>
<b>Reduce housing instability and school turnover</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Allocate housing vouchers to jurisdictions with high rates of housing instability or reserve vouchers for families with school-age children to enable them to stay at good schools</li> <li>■ Advise local agencies on how to target housing assistance to reduce family residential instability caused by foreclosures</li> <li>■ Assemble and publicize information on state and local rules that permit families to remain as renters in foreclosed properties</li> <li>■ Require housing redevelopment projects to show how they will coordinate relocation and redevelopment plans with local school systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Research local policies on school transfer, and encourage districts to implement flexible rules, especially for families facing involuntary moves</li> <li>■ Publicize successful examples of local counseling programs that help families make and sustain good school choices</li> </ul>	
<b>Enhance child health, nutrition, and school readiness to improve academic performance</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Target “healthy homes” and lead hazard control investments to developments housing large numbers of families with young children</li> <li>■ Encourage applicants for place-based initiatives to assess and address needs for these services</li> <li>■ Research the links between childhood nutrition and receipt of housing assistance</li> <li>■ Partner with HHS/Labor to broaden family services and employment strategies for residents of public and assisted housing; enhance funding flexibility to enable coordinated support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Grant preference to early learning program applicants that target areas benefiting from other federal housing and neighborhood revitalization investments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Assess whether environmental health of homes (and with EPA, schools) contributes to low student achievement in highly troubled schools</li> <li>■ Map neighborhood revitalization investments, and use information to target further housing redevelopment and school reform efforts</li> <li>■ With USDA, explore partnership to improve nutritional value of school meals in low-income communities lacking accessible food shopping</li> <li>■ Assess federal support for early learning in neighborhoods with concentrations of subsidized housing; examine outcomes of past early childhood and housing redevelopment investments</li> <li>■ Provide sufficient resources in neighborhood initiatives to enable planning/delivery of human services to families with children, and allow multiple agencies to coordinate use of funds</li> </ul>

enhance interjurisdictional collaboration, which by lessening social segregation could produce more integrated schools in the long run.<sup>14</sup> Although DoED is perhaps less far along in this line of thinking, it might begin to explore the potential for establishing “magnet” schools (middle or high schools) in central cities that can serve students from across the metropolitan area. Such schools could begin to break down the deeply ingrained, yet economically artificial, jurisdictional barriers that separate nearby communities and give students from truly diverse socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity to attend

a high-performing, region-wide school. Short of steps such as encouraging district consolidation, supporting pilot high schools that allow for some inter-district enrollment could spur the growth of more economically integrated schools of choice in central cities (Kahlenberg 2001).

Meanwhile, HUD and DoED have numerous opportunities to work individually and jointly to ensure that low-income housing and neighborhood policies strengthen local schools, and that school improvement policies redound to the benefit of low-income communities.

## Notes

1. Heather Schwartz, “Do Poor Children Benefit Academically from Economic Integration in Schools and Neighborhoods? Evidence from an Affluent Suburb’s Affordable Housing Lotteries” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2009).
2. The geographic concentration of poverty and of affordable housing is largely a consequence of racial discrimination and segregation, practiced over decades by both public and private institutions. Thus, most high-poverty communities are also predominantly minority (Jargowsky 1998).
3. Neighborhood distress and student poverty alone should not excuse poor school performance, and as discussed in the next section, schools can succeed even in settings where most students are poor.
4. Mixed-income neighborhoods do not guarantee mixed-income schools. Higher-income newcomers to previously poor neighborhoods may be childless or may send their children to private schools or other schools outside the neighborhood (Ellen, Schwartz, and Stiefel 2008).
5. Children participating in the earlier Gautreaux initiative changed schools and achieved significant school gains.
6. Data obtained from Housing Opportunity Commission and the Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs, “Number of MPDUs Produced Since 1976,” [http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dhctmpl.asp?url=/content/dhca/housing/housing\\_P/mpdu/Number\\_of\\_MPDUs\\_Produced.asp](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dhctmpl.asp?url=/content/dhca/housing/housing_P/mpdu/Number_of_MPDUs_Produced.asp).
7. As discussed, investments in out-of-school amenities and services can also enhance school outcomes in poor communities, by promoting health and school readiness among children.
8. Even after accounting for differences in location and size, public charter schools enroll higher shares of students who are minorities and from low-income families (Gross and Pochop 2008).
9. Paul Tough, “A Teachable Moment,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2008.
10. Comparable evidence is not available to determine whether the same is true for families living in subsidized housing projects.
11. It is critical, however, that housing subsidies *not* be used to effectively trap low-income families in neighborhoods served by poor-performing schools. As discussed later in this section, low-income parents may need help choosing the right school (and neighborhood) and then sticking with that decision over time to garner the benefits of stability.
12. The EPA operates several programs designed to improve environmental quality in schools; see [www.epa.gov/schools](http://www.epa.gov/schools).
13. See San Francisco Housing Authority, “HOPE SF: Rebuilding Public Housing and Restoring Opportunity for Its Residents,” <http://www.sfha.org/hopesf/index.htm>.
14. For instance, the second, competitive round of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program awards additional points to applications that demonstrate consistency with “an established comprehensive, regional, or multi-jurisdictional plan” (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2009a). HUD and DOT have also announced a partnership to enhance coordinated metropolitan-wide planning to integrate the application of federal housing and transportation funding (U.S. Department of Transportation, “HUD and DOT Partnership: Sustainable Communities,” press release DOT 32-09, March 18, 2009). HUD’s proposal in the fiscal year 2010 budget for a \$150 million Sustainable Communities Initiative could, if adopted, also increase the availability of housing accessible to low- and moderate-income families in mixed-income, transit-accessible locations (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2009b).





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