

In the United States, 1.3 million children are identified as homeless by the Department of Education.<sup>1</sup> In addition to homeless children, many children are experiencing housing instability and at risk of becoming homeless. Housing insecurity can include falling behind on rent and making multiple unplanned moves,<sup>2</sup> which not only impacts a child's schooling but is also associated with increased risk of health problems. One-third of U.S. children live in households with a high housing cost burden, defined as spending more than 30 percent of the household's monthly income on housing.<sup>3</sup>

When families experience housing insecurity, children are more likely to miss school and fall behind academically, increasing the risk of students dropping out or opting out of higher education. Education is the stepping stone to breaking the poverty cycle and achieving a stable and economically secure future. In fact, a study found that individuals who first experienced homelessness or housing insecurity as a child were more likely to encounter barriers to adulthood employment due to lower educational attainment than those who never experienced homelessness.<sup>4</sup>

We need a comprehensive approach to addressing homelessness and housing insecurity that involves collaboration between public systems that are serving children and youth. This includes partnerships between housing authorities, school districts and other community partners to support the academic success of students experiencing homelessness, while also assisting families in finding permanent housing.<sup>5</sup>

The Affordable Housing and Educational Achievement Demonstration (AHEAD) Act would support communities in testing out partnerships through funding demonstration projects. School districts, with local housing authorities, could apply through a competitive process for planning and implementation grants administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education.

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Homeless Education, "Federal Data Summary School Years 2013-14 to 2015-16: Education for Homeless Children and Youth." December 2017,

<https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/data-comp-1314-1516.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Baldari, Cara, "New HUD Proposals Are the Wrong Direction for Children," Blog, First Focus. 2018, <https://goo.gl/onUd4J>.

<sup>3</sup> Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center "Children living in households with a high housing cost burden." Last visited May 16, 2018, <https://goo.gl/nKnbxz>.

<sup>4</sup> Cobb-Clark, Deborah A., and Zhu, Anna, "Childhood Homelessness and Adult Employment: The Role of Education, Incarceration, and Welfare Receipt." SSRN Electronic Journal, 2015, <ftp.iza.org/dp9250.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, *Bringing Education Home: Housing Authorities and Learning Initiatives*, <http://www.clpha.org/uploads/Publications/BringingEducationHome.pdf>.

For example, a new pilot program in Santa Rosa, Florida has already seen improved school attendance and increased work hours among its participants.<sup>6</sup> Through case management provided by the school district, participating families receive assistance with day-to-day problems with the goal of helping families reach self-sufficiency, all while helping parents more involved in their children's schooling.<sup>7</sup>

In Washington state, the Tacoma Housing Authority formed its Education Project in partnership with McCarver Elementary School, where 99.5 percent of students are living in poverty. In its first year, the program used housing assistance to help 49 families with 76 children who attended the school and were homeless or housing insecure.<sup>8</sup> To receive assistance, parents had to keep their children enrolled at McCarver, promise to be actively involved in their children's education, and develop an individual plan for their own education and employment. After one year, the program helped stabilize housing for all 49 families, demonstrated academic and behavioral progress for students, and brought net gains for parents through educational attainment and income increases.<sup>9</sup>

In order to break the cycle of multi-generational homelessness and poverty in the U.S., we need to systems serving children, youth and families to work together to break down barriers to stable housing and educational attainment.

Housing-school partnership programs like the ones found in Florida and Washington have seen some success, but are limited in their reach and scope due to serious resource and funding limitations. The AHEAD Act would provide critical support for states to plan and test out innovative partnerships between public housing agencies and school systems.

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<sup>6</sup> SchoolHouse Connection, Housing Is, and Council of Large Public Housing Authorities "Strategies for Success: Partnering with Housing Authorities." Webinar Recording, April 25, 2018, <https://goo.gl/AVgbVR>.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Kevin, "Grant Will Help House Homeless Santa Rosa Students" Pensacola News Journal, February 14, 2017, <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/santa-rosa/2017/02/14/grant-help-house-homeless-santa-rosa-students/97895578/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. "Bringing Education Home: Housing Authorities and Learning Initiatives"

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.