



TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

**ENROLLING TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY'S
STUDENTS IN WASHINGTON STATE'S
COLLEGE BOUND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM:
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST YEAR'S EFFORT
2008-2009**

November 10, 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In 2008, the Washington State Legislature created the College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program. The CBS program promises low-income Washington State students that if they graduate from a Washington state high school, apply to college, and fulfill other requirements, the state will make it financially possible for them to attend. This promise is very valuable. The Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) has resolved to help enroll as many as possible of the eligible students who live in its housing programs. Doing so is an important part of THA's general efforts to help the children its houses succeed in school. These efforts are part of THA's ongoing Education Project.

This report assesses THA's effort in the 2008-2009 school year to help enroll the students of its assisted households. This report also considers how THA can improve its efforts in following years. This report begins by noting why this effort is important.

To qualify for the CBS, students must graduate from high school with at least a 2.0 cumulative grade point average, be financially eligible, and have no felonies on their record. They and their parents must also sign up for the CBS program by the end of their eighth (8th) grade. Seventh and eighth graders are eligible to sign up in any year. (For 2008-2009 only, which was the first full year of the program, the state allowed ninth graders to sign up.) In other words, students and their parents must do this bit of paperwork correctly and on time to benefit from this valuable promise of college tuition.

THA's efforts were part of an energetic, widely collaborative and effective city-wide effort led by the Tacoma Public School (TPS) district to enroll all eligible students. That effort distinguished Tacoma with the highest enrollment rate in the state. THA's efforts focused on the families living in its properties or receiving rental assistance from its Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8). THA is well situated to help these families with paperwork, in several ways. Paperwork is what THA already does with these families every year. It can add the CBS paperwork to these encounters. Also, THA has other occasions when it engages families for discussions that can easily include the importance of signing up for the CBS program. Finally, THA has some influence arising from its role as landlord, property manager and provider of human services. This influence may be especially available since its staff speak the various non-English languages of its customer families.

THA has one year of experience with its efforts to help enroll students in the CBS Program. The estimated results of those efforts in 2008-2009 were quite positive. Eighty-three (83%) of THA's students enrolled during the 2008-2009 school year. This surpasses the enrollment rate for both the city (77%) and the state (46%).

7 th , 8 th and 9 th Graders Enrolled in the Washington State College Bound Scholarship Program 2008-2009			
	Number Eligible	Number Signed Up	Percent
Washington State	91,304	41,994	46%
Tacoma Public Schools	2,298	1,764	77%
THA Residents	804	670	83%
<i>All numbers are estimates</i>			

THA cannot tell whether its families enrolled in response to THA’s efforts or the efforts of other city partners. However, since the enrollment rate for THA families exceeds those for the city THA’s efforts may have been determinative for some families.

Improving the enrollment rate among THA families in subsequent years will require the following additional efforts:

- better data exchanges among THA, the Tacoma Public School District (TPS) and the Washington State Higher Educating Coordinating (HEC) Board;
- continued regular communication with THA families about CBS;
- better incorporation of CBS paperwork and discussion into THA’s regular contact with its families.

THA is pleased to join the Tacoma Public School District and other partners in this effort.

2. TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY’S EDUCATION PROJECT

The school success of the children that THA houses is an important part of the strategic goals THA has chosen for its work. THA’s vision statement imagines a future where “everyone has an affordable, safe and nurturing home, where neighborhoods are attractive places to live, work, attend school, shop and play, and where everyone has the support they need to succeed as parents, **students**, wage earners and neighbors.” THA Vision Statement (December 17, 2008)(emphasis added). THA’s mission statement and strategic objectives state that “THA will provide high quality housing and supportive services. Its supportive services will help people succeed as residents, neighbors, parents, **students**, and wage earners who can live without assistance.” THA Strategic Objectives (December 17, 2008)(emphasis added).

This focus on education is part of THA's overall view of its housing and service programs. THA wants its housing to be a transforming experience for families so they can prosper and become less reliant on the assistance. THA wants this especially for the children it houses. For this reason, the educational outcomes of these children are part of the performance measures THA will use to assess its own performance.

THA's focus on education serves three purposes. **First**, good educational outcomes have their own value. A child should succeed in school because a good education offers better financial prospects in life, and a more meaningful life.

Second, good educational outcomes are a useful proxy for other important child welfare indicators that are harder to measure. The ability of parents to provide love, care and good parenting, food and safety, and an adequately orderly household, for example, are important. THA spends considerable money and time helping families address those needs and other challenges such as domestic violence, mental illness, or drug or alcohol affliction. This work is important, yet results are hard to measure. However, they all have to be going pretty well for a child to read on grade level. In this way, reading levels help to indicate something about the other factors.

Third, THA seeks generally to help families and Tacoma Public Schools perform their primary responsibility for educating children. Educating the city's children is an effort that will require all parts of the community. THA seeks to do its share. Although THA is neither a parent nor an educational institution, it can have a positive influence to exercise over the educational prospects of the children it houses. It is the goal of the THA's Education Project to do that. This project will have the following elements:

- *Community Expectations of School Success*
One way to get improved school outcomes from children is to expect them and to let the children know about the expectations. The community has a role in stating these expectations. Any such effort to raise expectations may be more effective when targeted to discrete groups of families linked by a positive, common interest or a positive, common community. Our residential communities can serve this purpose. New Salishan is an example. THA will seek ways to assert the expectation, for example, that "All Salishan children shall read at grade level."
- *Community Facilities*
THA's housing communities has meeting spaces and facilities useful to stage education programs. These facilities provide a good chance to provide services to a targeted community within walking distance.
- *Link Housing and School Effort*
THA can link its housing assistance to families whom the school district or other educational organizations, such as the College Success Foundation, identify as being in circumstances where the housing assistance would determine a child's school success. If housing can leverage good school outcomes, it is a very good use of a housing dollar.
- *Coordinated Supportive Services*
THA provides significant human services. Perhaps we can more effectively link our efforts with those of the school district and others.

Helping students enroll in the CBS serves all of these purposes.

3. THE COLLEGE BOUND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

In 2008, the Washington State Legislature created the Washington College Bound Scholarship Program (CBS). CBS is a state-wide program that guarantees free college tuition at public institution rates to low income Washington State students who meet certain requirements. The legislature created the CBS program both to encourage the students and their families to believe that college is possible for them despite their families' low-income, and to make it possible.

3.1 What Does the College Bound Scholarship Pay For?

The CBS pays tuition and mandatory fees at public college rates to the extent the tuition is not covered by state or federal financial aid, plus \$500 each year for books. A student can use the scholarship at a Washington public community, technical, or four-year college, an approved, accredited independent private college or university, or at a public or private career school. It is renewable for up to four years.

3.2 Who Is Eligible for the College Bound Scholarship?

The following criteria determine which students are eligible for the CBS program:

- *Low-Income or Otherwise in Need*
The student or his family must meet any of the following indications of financial need at the time of enrollment and upon graduation from high school:
 - ~ income of the family must be under income limits;
 - ~ student is eligible for or receives free or reduced price lunch;
 - ~ student's families receives TANF benefits; OR
 - ~ student is in foster care.
- *Graduate from a Washington State high school or home school*
The student must graduate from a Washington State high school or home school.
- *Grade Point Average*
The student must graduate from high school or home school with a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.0.
- *Be a Good Citizen and Stay out of Trouble*
The student must show good citizenship and not commit any felony.
- *Apply for Financial Aid*
The student must submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) during their senior year of high school.

- *Gain Admittance to an Eligible College*
The student must gain admittance to a Washington public community, technical, or four-year college, an approved, accredited independent private college or university, or a public or private career school.
- *Enroll in the CBS*
In addition, and critically for THA's efforts, students and their parents must fill out, sign and file an application for the CBS program before the end of the 8th grade school year. Each year, seventh and eight graders are eligible to do this. During the 2008-2009 school year only, which was the program's first full year, ninth graders were also allowed to sign up.

The purpose of this enrollment requirement by the 8th grade is to get the student and the family thinking early that college is possible and to encourage them to prepare.

4. THA's EFFORTS TO ENROLL STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGE BOUND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

4.1 Goals and Results

During the 2008-2009 school year, approximately eight hundred (800) 7th, 8th and 9th graders lived in housing that the THA owned or that received a rental subsidy from THA's Housing choice Voucher (Section 8) program. As a goal, THA sought to have all of them enrolled in the CBS Program by the end of the school year. Additional students lived in homes their families own at New Salishan. THA included them in the enrollment effort. However, THA does not know their number and for that reason could not include them in the count of results.

The following chart shows the estimated enrollment numbers and rates of students in THA housing and compares those with the estimated numbers and rates within the Tacoma Public School district and within Washington State. This information is derived from data provided by the Washington State Higher Education Coordinating (HEC) Board. These numbers are estimates because of the difficulty in getting aggregate data from the state that is compiled from information that is confidential for each individual student. The next section discusses these data challenges in more detail.

The estimated results show that THA's enrollment rates are higher than the school district's and significantly higher than the state-wide population of students.

7th, 8th and 9th Graders Enrolled in the Washington State College Bound Scholarship Program: 2008-2009			
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Based upon these results, the HEC Board has recognized THA as a leader in the state in promoting and supporting the College Bound Scholarship Program.

4.2 How THA Promoted Enrollment in the CBS Program Among its Students

THA's efforts to encourage CBS enrollment were part of an impressive, larger community effort led by TPS and others organizations. THA cannot tell whether any of its students enrolled because of THA's own efforts or in response to the community effort. The higher percentage of enrollment among THA students over the school district's overall enrollment rate suggests that THA's efforts had some positive effect.

- *Community Efforts*

THA's students had the advantage of concerted community efforts that appear to have been among the most energetic in the state. The Tacoma Public School district led these efforts. It built a partnership with the College Success Foundation and other organizations to create the Tacoma

College Support Network. This network became the key leadership group for the CBS program in Tacoma. Its leaders met monthly to develop strategies to maximize the sign-ups. (*See* section 7.2, below, for Network members.) This community effort mobilized schools, administrators and counselors to assure students had the information and opportunities to sign up.

In the spring of 2008 and 2009, TPS, the College Success Foundation, Metropolitan Development Council, Tacoma Community College and others staged the *Tacoma is College Bound* event. Hundreds of eligible students and their families attended. It was a very good chance for them to receive answers to all their questions about the CBS and to sign up on the spot. Translators, entertainment, and food were provided.

- *THA Letter to Its Families*
At the end of the 2008, THA consulted its data on the family composition and ages of family members of all families living in its properties or participating in its rental assistance programs. As part of its administration of those properties and program, THA collects this data. Using this information, THA sent a letter to every family that might have a 7th, 8th or 9th grader. THA sent letters and applications translated into Cambodian, Vietnamese and Russian to households that identified these as their primary language. *See* Appendix for a copy of the letter. The letter enclosed a brochure from the state with detailed information about the CBS and a CBS application. The letter and the brochure explained that the family must fill out the application and return it to the student's school counselor. THA also sent letters to all families living in the single family homes of New Salishan. THA did not have any data indicating if those families had students of the appropriate age, but THA sent the letter just in case the family included such students. In all THA sent out 1,211 letters. THA purposefully overestimated the number of families with 7th, 8th or 9th graders to avoid missing anyone.
- *Direct and Personal Contact with Families' Educational Case Manager*
THA arranged with TPS and Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for an exchange of data that allowed THA to determine which of its families had not enrolled in the CBS by the Spring of 2009. THA then undertook to directly contact each one. For this purpose it contracted with Ms. Colleen Philbrook, a former College Preparatory Advisor at Foss High School for the College Success Foundation. Ms. Philbrook has extensive expertise in effectively advising students and families about college and college preparation. THA's multi-lingual staff were at Ms. Philbrook's disposal for visits to families. THA case workers also contacted families and facilitated the collection of forms. Ms. Philbrook and the THA caseworkers conducted home visits with 54 households at New Salishan.

- *Resident Meetings in THA Properties*
THA also sought to convene meetings of residents at New Salishan to promote the CBS program. THA was prepared to answer information and help families fill out the application. THA held four meetings. Two were offered during daytime hours and two during evening hours. However, attendance at these meetings was very low.

5. CHALLENGES AND TECHNIQUES TO TRY IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS

THA had good success with its efforts for school year 2008-2009. It will repeat its efforts in each subsequent year and will hope to do still better. It will retain its goal of enrolling all eligible students living in its housing or housing programs. Nevertheless, THA's efforts face some challenges. THA will try some different techniques to overcome them, listed below. Ms. Philbrook included many of these suggestions in her May 31, 2009 report to THA.

5.1 Data Sharing Challenges and Some Solutions

THA's direct contact with families who have not yet signed up for the CBS program is probably the most effective technique to spur enrollment. However, two challenges make it hard to identify which students have not yet signed up for the scholarship.

- Federal housing rules prevent THA from identifying individual families to the school district or the HEC Board and asking whether their students have enrolled in the CBS. To do this, THA would need the written permission of the individual families. In lieu of this permission, THA and TPS agreed on a limited exchange of data. THA shared only the addresses of families living in its public housing communities, although not the names of the families or the students. TPS then matched these addresses with those in its data base of students of the appropriate grades. This is time consuming. Also, accurate data can be difficult to get because of differences in how addresses are written. In addition, THA cannot release the addresses of Section 8 voucher families because, unlike public housing units, these addresses are not public information.
- The TPS District and the HEC Board can share identifying individual family information with THA only if parents check a box on the back of the sign up form allowing the HEC Board to do so. Many parents do not check the box. Therefore, the lists of enrolled students the HEC Board provides to THA under represents the number of students who have signed up. This makes it inefficient for THA to contact all THA families that do not appear on the list.

Techniques to resolve the data sharing challenges:

- To resolve the confidentiality issue, THA will ask its assisted families for written permission, using a form for this purpose, to allow THA to give and receive limited data with the TPS and HEC. HUD has approved this

release as long as it is clear to the families that such a release is voluntary and a refusal to grant permission does not affect a family's housing assistance. TPS is presently reviewing the proposal. This will allow THA to send TPS a list of all of THA's students in the eligible age range and allow TPS to tell THA which students had signed up for the scholarship.

- THA will work with the HEC Board to change the CBS sign up form so it encourages parents to let the Board share their data with the school district.

5.2 Better THA Processes

THA will incorporate the following enrollment efforts into its regular annual processes:

- THA will send letters, along with a brochure and CBS application, to THA families informing them about the CBS and encouraging them to sign up. As the data sharing with TPS and the HEC Board improves, these letters could go to just families that have not yet signed up. Until then, THA will continue to overestimate those families that have the appropriate aged children.
- THA leasing staff meets every year with all assisted families. The purpose of these meetings is to review the families' eligibility for their housing assistance and to fill out the appropriate paperwork. THA will now include the following in these annual discussions: (1) CBS forms and information; (2) the data release form.
- THA case management staff will also include CBS enrollment in the individual case plans for client families.
- THA regularly publishes various newsletters to its client families. It will include regular mention of CBS in those newsletters.
- THA will continue to communicate the importance of the CBS Program and building college readiness skills with families through newsletters and community meetings, including information on relevant resources.
- THA will continue to have representation on the Tacoma College Support Network;
- THA will continue to participate in future *Tacoma is College Bound* events and encourage THA families to attend.
- THA will include CBS discussion and enrollment efforts in its other educational activities, such as after-school tutoring and computer labs.

5.3 College Preparation

THA realizes that enrolling in the CBS is only one step toward college. A student must also do well in school and take the appropriate classes that would prepare him or her for college. Helping a family and a student prepare in these and other ways must be the focus of other efforts. THA's part in those efforts is not yet clear.

6. CONCLUSION

The results from THA's enrollment efforts for the 2008-2009 school year suggest that the efforts are worthwhile. THA plans to make them yearly. Doing so is an important part of its Education Project, which in turn serves its strategic mission of helping the children it houses succeed in school. In this way, and others, THA seeks to do its part in helping all children do well in school.

THA is grateful for the leadership of the Tacoma School District and the other members of the Tacoma College Support Network. The next section lists the members. The efforts of these fine organizations have distinguished Tacoma among all other Washington State communities in the highest percentage of students enrolled in the College Bound Scholarship Program.

7. COLLEGE BOUND SCHOLARSHIP RESOURCES

7.1 How Can Families Get More Information about the College Bound Scholarship?

The most up-to-date information is always at the website of the HEC Board.
www.hecb.wa.gov/paying/waaidprgm/CollegeBoundScholarship.asp

7.2 Membership of the Tacoma College Support Network

Allen Renaissance
College Success Foundation
Metropolitan Development Council
Northwest Leadership Foundation
Palmer Scholars
Peace Community Center
Tacoma Housing Authority
Tacoma Public Schools
United Way of Tacoma
Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board

Appendix: THA Letter to Families, January 10, 2009.