



TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

**TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY'S
EFFORT TO ENROLL ITS STUDENTS
IN WASHINGTON STATE'S
COLLEGE BOUND SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
DURING
SCHOOL YEARS 2008-09 THROUGH 2010-11:**

**An Assessment of a Public Housing Authority's Ability to
Promote Education**

October 25, 2011

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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, fulfill other requirements, and gain admission to a college or technical school then 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 whose families participate 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, funded in large part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

This report assesses THA's efforts from school year 2008-2009 through 2010-2011 to help enroll the students of its assisted households in the CBS program. This report also considers how THA can continue to support this effort based on the results to this point. 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. Importantly, 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 either year. 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. At the beginning of the program, nearly half of Washington State's children were missing this valuable opportunity simply because they failed to sign up.

THA's enrollment efforts were part of an energetic, widely collaborative, and effective city-wide collaborative – The Tacoma College Support Network (TCSN). TCSN is led by the Tacoma Public School (TPS) district and the College Success Foundation, and over 40 community partners. A key priority of TCSN has been to enroll all eligible students in the CBS. As a result of those efforts, the City of Tacoma has had the highest enrollment rate in the state since the inception of the scholarship. 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 the CBS paperwork, in several ways. Paperwork is what THA already does with these families every year. It has simply added 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, provider of housing assistance, and provider of human services. This influence is especially available since it has staff who speak the various non-English languages of its customer families.

The estimated results of THA's efforts in collaboration with our partners over these three years have been quite positive. In 2008-2009 eighty-three percent (83%) of THA's students enrolled, and in 2009-2010 approximately ninety-one percent (91%) enrolled. By the end of school year 2010-2011, enrollments were close to 100% for THA and the district overall. This compares to 75% statewide. The following table shows these data

for all three years. Due to student movement in and out of school districts, it will never be possible to achieve exactly 100% enrollment, but current results indicate that nearly all eligible students in Tacoma schools are signing up for the scholarship.

8th Graders Enrolled* in the Washington State College Bound Scholarship Program			
	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Washington State	55%	68%	75%
Tacoma Public Schools	77%	90%	Approx. 100%
THA	83%	91%	Approx. 100%

**All numbers are estimates*

THA cannot tell whether its families enrolled in response to THA's efforts, the efforts of other city partners, or a combination of the two. However, since the enrollment rate for THA families exceeded the district as a whole for the first two years of the effort, THA's efforts may have been determinative for many families.

This enrollment effort is part of THA's Education Project. That project seeks to find out if and how a public housing authority can do two things: improve school outcomes for the children whose families participate in its housing programs and improve the outcomes for the schools serving its neighborhoods. The project will then seek to embed efforts useful for these purposes into THA's normal program operations.

The positive results of THA's CBS enrollment efforts fortify the view that THA, and other public housing authorities, can have a positive influence on school outcomes at relatively little effort and expense.

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**, school success is part of the transformation THA seeks to encourage among the families it serves, and their children. It increases the chance that the children's lives will be self-sufficient and meaningful. Also, educational outcomes are a useful proxy for other important outcomes that are harder to measure. For example, THA helps parents improve their parenting skills, overcome domestic violence, and address drug or alcohol affliction. These efforts are important, but measuring their effect is hard. Their effect, however, can show in the improving school outcomes for children in those households. A family is likely doing well on these other metrics if its children are reading on grade level.

Second, THA develops real estate. The financial and social success of its developments requires successful neighborhood schools.

Third, public schools are not succeeding as they must. They need help. THA seeks to do its part. THA is not a parent. It is not a school. Yet, other than the school district and the public assistance office, THA serves more low-income children than any other organization in the city. This suggests that THA has a role to play and an influence to exercise. THA's Education Project seeks to find it out and incorporate it into THA's operations.

In summary, THA's Education Project seeks to test **three** propositions:

- **that** THA, in where and how it provides housing and supportive services to needy families, can improve school outcomes for their children and improve outcomes for the schools that serve its communities;
- **that** THA should find out the effective ways to do this;

- **that** THA should then embed these strategies into its normal program operations as part of the appropriate mission of an alert and engaged public housing authority.

The results of this effort should be interesting to other public housing authorities and school districts.

THA's Education Project has 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 state expectations may be more effective when targeted to discrete groups of families linked by a positive, common interest or a positive, common community. THA's residential communities can serve this purpose. The community of New Salishan is an example. THA will seek ways to assert the expectation, for example, that "All Salishan children shall read at grade level." Our Free Books Program, through which we distribute hundreds of free books to our residents each year, is a big part of this initiative.
- *Community Facilities*
THA's housing communities have meeting spaces and facilities useful to stage education programs such as Head Start programs, computer labs and classes. These facilities provide a good chance to provide services to a targeted community within walking distance. THA makes these facilities available to the school district and other educational organizations.
- *Link Housing and School Effort*
THA can link its housing assistance to educational services provided by the school district and other organizations. THA can target its housing resources on families whom the school district or other educational organizations identify as being in circumstances where the housing assistance would determine a child's school success or the success of a school. If housing can leverage effective educational services and good school outcomes, it is a very good use of a housing dollar.
- *Coordinated Supportive Services*
THA provides significant human services. It seeks to effectively link these efforts with those of the school district and others educational partners.

Helping students enroll in the CBS serves all of these purposes. To learn more about THA's Education Project, go to www.tacomahousing.org/education.

3. THE WASHINGTON STATE 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 or technical school tuition at public institution rates to low income Washington State students who meet certain requirements. The legislature created the CBS program to encourage the students and their families to believe that college is financially possible for them despite their low-income. The program seeks to do this by making 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*
There is an important additional requirement. 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 eighth graders are eligible to do this. 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 by doing well in school.

Yet, at the beginning of the program nearly half of the state's children were disqualified from the scholarship assistance simply because they had failed to sign up.

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

4.1 Goals and Results

In any year, approximately six hundred (600) 7th and 8th graders live in housing that the THA owns or for which their families receive a rental subsidy from THA’s Housing choice Voucher (Section 8) program. THA seeks to have all of them enrolled in the CBS Program by the end of their eighth grade school year. Additional students live in homes their families own at New Salishan, THA’s largest community. 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 chart below shows the estimated enrollment rates for students in THA housing and housing programs for 2009-2010 through 2010-2011. The chart also compares those rates with the estimated 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 for the first two years THA’s enrollment rates were higher than the school district’s and significantly higher than the state-wide population of students. THA and the district now are at approximately 100% with the state not far behind. These are the results for 8th graders only since they have been the focus of enrollment efforts. Seventh graders have another year to sign up.

8th Graders Enrolled* in the Washington State College Bound Scholarship Program			
	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Washington State	55%	68%	75%
Tacoma Public Schools	77%	90%	Approx. 100%
THA	83%	91%	Approx. 100%

**All numbers are estimates*

Based upon these quite positive results, the HEC Board has recognized THA as a leader in the state in promoting and supporting the College Bound Scholarship Program.

These numbers are estimates. Exact counts of enrolled students are not possible due to students who do not permit the release of their name, students who sign up but are no longer eligible at the time the data are released, and student movement within the district's and THA's population. However, the HEC Board, TPS, and THA agree that these estimates are as close as we can come to the actual count. This count was updated on October 21, 2011 with the latest information from the HEC Board.

THA cannot tell whether its families enrolled in response to THA's efforts or in response to efforts of other city partners, especially given the very high rate at which Tacoma students now sign up. Of the 367 letters THA sent out to our families in December of 2009, the school district could only identify 16 that were returned to them with a THA return envelope. Most students would have signed up through their school, done it online, or sent the form directly to the HEC Board. They may have done so because they received the application or encouragement from THA during their annual recertification or application for housing. It is hard to know. However, since the enrollment rate for THA families significantly exceeded those for the city in the first two years, THA's efforts may have been determinative for many families in both years. The HEC Board and our other partners in Tacoma have offered the view that THA's efforts were a critical part of the success the City has achieved.

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. Those efforts included the following:

- *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 over 30 other organizations to create the Tacoma College Support Network (TCSN). This network became the key leadership group for the CBS program in Tacoma. Its leaders meet monthly to develop strategies to maximize the sign-ups. (Appendix B lists Network members.) This community effort mobilizes schools, administrators, and counselors to assure that students have the information and opportunities to sign up.

Every spring from 2008 through 2011, TPS, the College Success Foundation, TCSN, 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. (Other communities are now staging similar events.) Due to the high level of commitment of all the Tacoma middle schools, sign up events will be held at individual schools from the 2011-2012 school year.

In April of 2011, THA participated with the College Success Foundation and other community partners in *College Bound Saturday* at the University of Washington-Tacoma. This event focused on supporting students already signed up and their parents to assure the students will be eligible for the scholarship upon graduation. Over 200 students and parents attended. *College Bound Saturday* will be held again in spring, 2012.

- *THA In-house Support for CBS Applications*
In addition, THA supported CBS enrollment through several in-house efforts. Most importantly, THA added the CBS enrollment paperwork to the paperwork that THA must process each year with the families participating in its housing programs. Throughout the year, THA's Leasing and Occupancy Specialists provided CBS applications and information on the scholarship as they met with families for the annual review that THA conducts for housing purposes. In this way, families could sign up for the CBS when they conducted their normal business with THA.
- *THA Letter to Its Families and Other Offers of Information*
In both 2008 and 2009, 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 or 8th grader. THA sent letters and applications translated into the language that households had identified as their primary language. Appendix B is a copy of the 2009 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 to apply for the CBS 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 or income, but THA sent the letter just in case the family included such students. THA purposefully overestimated the number of families with 7th or 8th graders to avoid missing anyone.

In addition, THA made CBS brochures and applications available at its housing sites and offices. THA's community newsletters ran several articles on the scholarship, and its AmeriCorps volunteer at THA community computer labs helped students to sign up online.

- *Direct and Personal Contact with Families*
In the spring of 2009, 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 yet enrolled in the CBS. THA representatives then visited those families. For this purpose it contracted with Ms. Colleen Philbrook, a very experienced educational advisor and advocate who had worked as a College Preparatory Advisor for the College Success Foundation. (She now leads the efforts of TPS to serve homeless students.) She had extensive expertise in effectively advising students and families about college and college preparation. THA's multi-lingual staff was at Ms. Philbrook's disposal for home 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.

5. ONGOING CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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 among families who are resistant to other efforts. 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.
 - Similarly, education rules prevent the TPS District and the HEC Board from sharing identifying family information with THA unless the 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 list 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 is asking 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. As of the date of this report THA has permissions covering over 1,000 Section 8 students. This number will continue to grow. At some point, it should allow THA to send TPS a more complete list of THA's students in the eligible age range and allow TPS to tell THA with increasing accuracy which THA students have signed up for the scholarship.

5.2 College Preparation

THA realizes that enrolling in the CBS is only one step toward college or post graduate schooling or training. 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 support for events such as *College Bound Saturday*, the 2010 Race and Pedagogy Youth Summit, and the broad college bound efforts of the Tacoma College Support Network is part of THA's response to this critical need.

5.3 Recommendations for 2011-2012 and Beyond

The City of Tacoma's excellent citywide success in enrolling approximately 100% of eligible students in the CBS suggests that THA's efforts can now take a role more subordinate to the efforts of the School District.

- THA will continue to embed the CBS paperwork into its own paperwork that it must do annually with the families who participate in its housing programs.
- Its staff, in annual and other periodic contacts with families, will continue to urge them to sign up for the CBS.
- THA will continue to make CBS information available at its housing sites, computer labs, and offices and in its various newsletters.
- THA's AmeriCorps staff at its community computer labs will continue to help students sign up online.
- THA's Manager of Educational Programs will continue to serve on the event planning committee of the Tacoma College Support Network. For example, he was instrumental in gaining a \$10,000 grant in 2010 for this group to support college bound students. This grant was renewed for 2011-2012.

- THA will continue to participate in community planning and events such as *College Bound Saturday*.

In addition THA will continue to encourage families to provide the data releases described in section 5.1 above. Should enrollment in TPS fall below 100% in future years, THA will analyze these results and respond to patterns in the data.

6. CONCLUSION

The results from THA's enrollment efforts from 2008 through 2011 suggest that the enrollment efforts are worthwhile. THA should continue this support while refining its efforts for efficiency and effectiveness.

Doing so is an important part of THA's 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.

The purpose of THA's Education Project is to find out if and how a public housing authority can influence educational outcomes in a positive way and otherwise effectively support worthwhile educational goals. The CBS enrollment success strongly suggests that THA can be influential in those ways and at relatively little expense and effort. In particular, it was easy to add the CBS paperwork to the paperwork THA already processes with families. This success encourages THA to pursue the other elements of its Education Project.

THA is grateful for the leadership of the Tacoma School District and the other members of the Tacoma College Support Network. Appendix A lists the members as of October, 2011. 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.

APPENDIX A: COLLEGE BOUND SCHOLARSHIP RESOURCES


- **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
- **Membership of the Tacoma College Support Network** (October 2011)
 - Adelante Media Group
 - Allen Renaissance
 - Associated Ministries of Tacoma Pierce County
 - Bates Technical College
 - Black Education Strategy Roundtable
 - Centro Latino
 - College Success Foundation
 - Department of Social and Health Services
 - Evergreen State College Tacoma
 - Executive Council for a Greater Tacoma
 - Foster Enterprise
 - Girl Scouts of Western Washington
 - Gonyea Boys and Girls Club
 - Greater Tacoma Community Foundation
 - Higher Education Coordinating Board
 - Metropolitan Development Council
 - Northwest Leadership Foundation / Act Six and Proyecto Mole
 - Pacific Lutheran University
 - Palmer Scholars
 - Peace Community Center
 - Pierce College
 - Pierce County AIDS Foundation
 - Resources for Education and Career Help (REACH) Tacoma
 - Seattle Pacific University
 - Stand for Children
 - Tacoma 360
 - Tacoma Community College
 - Tacoma Housing Authority
 - Tacoma Public Schools
 - Tacoma Sunrise Rotary
 - Tacoma Urban League
 - United Way of Pierce County
 - University of Puget Sound
 - University of Washington Tacoma
 - WashBoard.org
 - Washington College Access Network
 - Workforce Central
 - YMCA of Pierce County and Kitsap Counties



TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

Michael Mirra
Executive Director

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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December 15, 2009

Dear Friends:

I write to tell you about a state of Washington program to help eligible low-income families pay for college. It is exciting. It is valuable. To qualify, however, the student and his or her parent or guardian must sign up during seventh or eighth grade and before the deadline. The deadline is June 30th during eighth grade. The Tacoma Housing Authority wants to help you sign up so you do not miss this important chance for your children.

The program is called the College Bound Scholarship Program. It will help pay tuition at public and private colleges in Washington, including community or technical colleges. I enclose a brochure that describes how to qualify.

I also enclose an application. If you have a student in the 7th or 8th grade, we ask that you:

- Complete the application
- Make sure a parent or guardian signs it.
- Make sure your student signs it
- Make sure that you return the signed application to Tacoma Public Schools using the enclosed stamped envelope or by taking it to your school's counselor.

You can get more applications and more information at <http://www.hecb.wa.gov/collegebound>. You can even sign up there on line.

Please remember: 8th graders must sign up by the end of this school year to be in the program.

We look forward to the day when your child will go to college!

Cordially,

TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

Michael Mirra
Executive Director