



TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

THA's Education Project: A Summary

October 24, 2011

1. PURPOSE OF THA'S EDUCATION PROJECT AND PROPOSITIONS TO TEST

THA's Education Project has two main purposes:

- It seeks to help the children it houses succeed in school.
- It seeks to promote the success of the schools serving THA's communities.

THA seeks these outcomes for three reasons.

First, THA's strategic mission is to help people succeed not just as tenants but as "parents, students and wage earners." THA wants families to come to its housing and prosper. In this way, it wants its housing programs to be transformational for families. It wants this especially for the children. School success is part of this transformation.

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.

2. ELEMENTS OF THA's EDUCATION PROJECT

THA may have influence over educational outcomes in several ways. **First**, THA provides valuable housing assistance and supportive services to families. Providing this assistance intrudes THA into the details of these families' affairs. This positions THA to ask not only what families need for their success but to expect that they will do what their success requires of them. **Second**, THA also owns extensive communities that can host educational initiatives focused on resident populations. **Third**, THA can use its resources strategically to leverage services and changes from the school district. THA will explore how to use this influence in the following ways:

2.1 McCarver Elementary School Project



McCarver Elementary serves Tacoma's poorest population. It has the largest populations of homeless students in the district. As a result, it has the highest annual turnover rate of students. This rate has ranged in recent years up to 179%. (In 2010-2011 its turnover rate was 100%.)

To stabilize the school, THA will provide rental assistance and individualized case management to 50 McCarver families. The children of these families constitute about 20% of the school's students. THA's partners will provide enriched services for the children and families and extensive support for the parent's own educational and economic success. This rental assistance and support will last up to five years. The Program has expectations of both the parents and the School District. The parents must commit to keep their children enrolled at McCarver. They must commit to participate actively in their children's schooling. They must commit to an individual family plan geared to make the family self-sufficient when the assistance ends. The School District has warmly embraced this initiative. It has committed to important curriculum enrichment for all students at McCarver. This enrichment will include an investment to bring the Primary Years International Baccalaureate Program to McCarver. A robust data and evaluation element will track a variety of outcomes for students in the Project and for the school as a whole.

2.2 Educational Services in THA Communities

THA communities can be a good staging ground for important educational services. Like other services, educational services are more effective if they are available as a part of the local, walking neighborhood. THA's communities offer that chance. For example, THA's community of New Salishan has Lister, Roosevelt and Blix elementary schools and First Creek Middle School either within its borders, next door or just down the street.

New Salishan: Lister Elementary School



Other educational services will include:

- The Salishan Core will have a public library, a child care provider, and programming designed to take a youth or adult wherever they are in their educational and training and push them further.



- THA’s summer lunch and literacy program in three public housing sites
- Head Start at our Hillside Terrace property
- Computer labs at all family communities with tutoring.
- Mentoring and tutoring programs provided by community partners

2.3 Campaign of Expectations that Children Will Succeed in School

School success depends in part on what students feel people expect of them. A community can be a useful source of expectation. This is most likely in a discrete community of families that already identifies itself in positive ways. THA’s housing communities provide that chance. For example, THA will seek to embed the expectation in New Salishan that its children shall read on grade level and graduate from high school. This campaign of expectations will include the following efforts:

- Each year, THA seeks to enroll every eligible THA student for Washington State’s College Bound Scholarship Program. Its results over three years of effort have been notable. This has required relatively little effort. In general, THA simply incorporated the College Bound Scholarship application into its own yearly paperwork that it requires of all its assisted families.

| 8 th 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*

- Make sure every THA student has a library card
- Incorporate educational expectations into THA’s individual case management plans for its service families
- Public educational campaigns and events, *e.g.*:
 - ~ “Reach Out and Read” program at THA offices
 - ~ “Lights On for Study” campaign
 - ~ “Show Me the Math” campaign
 - ~ Read Across America on Dr. Seuss Day
 - ~ Free Books Program at all public housing sites
- Celebrate graduations from elementary school, middle school and high school, and college send-offs.

2.4 Matching Housing Assistance with Schools and Educational Programs

THA seeks to match its housing assistance in ways that leverage school performance or educational resources. It will do this by making its housing resources available for its educational partners.

2.5 Other Related Activities

- Children’s Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)
- Girl Scout Troops in THA communities
- Community gardening for families and children
- Community art (*e.g.*, Turkey Dragon project)
- Support community events such as Eastside Clean Sweep

- THA as a full partner to other organizations, *e.g.*, Tacoma Public Schools, Tacoma Head Start, First 5 Fundamentals, College Success Foundation, The Tacoma College Support Network, NAACP, MDC, and Tacoma 360.

2.6 Siting of THA’s new Multi-Family Communities to Match School Needs

In Tacoma, families with school age children are moving out of the north and west end of the city to the east or south. Many are moving out of town. This is happening because housing is not affordable for low-income young families. In this way, Tacoma may be on the same trajectory as Seattle, Portland and San Francisco. As a result, Tacoma has elementary schools in the wrong places. Some are under capacity and others are overcapacity.

THA can help if it can build its multifamily developments in the north and west part of town. This will help the School District in three ways:

- It will help to fill up schools that are partially empty
- It will help to economically integrate those schools
- It will help to racially integrate those schools.

For these reasons, THA seeks to coordinate its development with the School District.

2.7 Data Collection and Performance Measures

THA has chosen performance measures to assess educational outcomes. It has established a data system with the Tacoma School District to track outcomes for THA students. This system will track and display outcomes and trends by several factors, including THA’s population of students as a whole, THA students in discrete communities or programs, THA students attending particular schools, and THA students by cohorts reflecting the time they have spent in THA housing or housing programs. It will also compare THA’s students with non-THA low-income students in Tacoma.

