

Grade-Level Reading

The Campaign for
GRADE-LEVEL
READING

Housing Authorities Stepping Up for Children

From Massachusetts to California and Florida to Washington State, housing authorities are joining a nationwide movement to promote early reading and put young children on the path to success.

More than 1 million children from birth to age 8 are housed by the nation's 3,200 housing authorities. These children often start school with such a reading deficit that they have little hope of achieving proficiency by the end of third grade, a key predictor of high school graduation.

By embracing grade-level reading as a goal of the supportive services they provide, housing authorities are showing that they can break the cycle of hopelessness.

Today, more than 20 housing authorities are part of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and



3,200 HOUSING AUTHORITIES nationwide serve low-income families and children

its Network of 152 local coalitions, working to ensure that low-income children arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed, attend school regularly in the early grades and keep learning through the summer.

"We're not just bricks and mortar," says Preston Prince, NAHRO president and CEO/executive director of the Fresno Housing Authority. "Children need additional help to be successful."

"These housing authorities are demonstrating that they can make a world of difference," notes Ralph Smith, managing director of the GLR Campaign.

Atlanta family enjoying an early autumn walk to school and work.

WHAT HOUSING AUTHORITIES CAN DO

- > **provide** space for early learning, after-school and summer programs
- > **host** back-to-school picnics and hang door knockers to remind families when school starts
- > **create** parenting programs that teach how to build vocabularies and develop early reading skills
- > **partner** with local elementary schools to coordinate programs and services for families
- > **open** a satellite library at your housing site to give families access to books and computers
- > **work** with homeless families to provide a stable environment for children to learn
- > **avoid** moving housing choice voucher families in the middle of the year
- > **eliminate** mold and other asthma triggers that contribute to school absenteeism
- > **provide** summer food programs to ensure that children are eating well when school is out

Los Angeles: Libraries for Young Learners

Whether kids are rich or poor, learning should start early and the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles doesn't want its youngest residents left behind. That's why leaders of the authority, known as HACLA, created a nonprofit organization in 2009 known as Kids Progress Inc. (KPI) to ensure that high-risk children receive the supportive services they need to thrive.

Working with the Los Angeles Public Library, KPI opened its first community library in 2012 at the Ramona Gardens public housing complex and another satellite library site last year at Estrada Courts.

The libraries expose preschool children to reading and encourage and educate parents about the importance of reading and talking to their young children. Few of the families living at the two complexes own many books or have access to computers or the Internet.

HACLA also recently entered into a data-sharing agreement with the Los Angeles Unified School District, allowing the housing authority to track grades, test scores and attendance of young people.

HACLA, one of the nation's leading housing authorities and one of the oldest, maintains 75,000 affordable housing units.



"We're not just bricks and mortar. Children need additional help to be successful and the environment of where a child lives has a major impact on how they do in school."

— Preston Prince, NAHRO President and CEO/Executive Director of the Fresno Housing Authority

Fresno: Sharing Data to Target Support

A nonprofit set up to assist families served by the Fresno Housing Authority is making grade-level reading a key goal in its bid to improve opportunities for low-income children and families.

The Fresno Housing Education Corps works to improve academic achievement by sharing data with local school districts, extending education beyond the classroom and engaging parents in their children's education.

When the Fresno community and the Fresno Housing Authority embraced the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading two years ago, the Education Corps became an important partner in the local coalition. Nearly half of the 50,000 people served by the housing authority, either with vouchers or in complexes, are under age 18. About 6,200 are under age 5.

The data sharing being developed with five school districts will tell housing officials where absenteeism

is a problem and where groups of students are falling behind.

Families are now being asked to sign waivers that will enable the use of student data to develop individualized services to families. Families at the pilot site, which houses over 350 families and 800 children, are responding very positively.

The Education Corps also supports early reading with after-school tutoring, summer learning and enrollment assistance in preschool and kindergarten transition programs.

1,000,000+

children from birth to age 8 are served by housing authorities

Oakland: An Emphasis on Attendance

The Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) uses education as a tool to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and transform OHA communities. Through its Education Initiative, OHA supports the goals of having children attend school on time every day, enroll in kindergarten, read at grade level by

the third grade and graduate from high school with plans for college or a career.

The Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) and OHA agreed to share demographic and attendance information on the more than 5,700 students they share to achieve two primary objectives: 1) increased attendance of OHA youth and 2) increased involvement by parents and caregivers in the children's education.

In 2011, a pilot project called the Family Education and Achievement

Project was launched in seven partner schools, offering comprehensive supportive services such as transportation assistance, food and clothing to eligible OHA families with chronically absent children.

At the same time, OHA created a "Parent Ambassador" program, training OHA families to serve as role models, sources of information and trusted peers promoting academic achievement, attendance and parent engagement.



FOR DECADES we have endured a failed policy model for housing, health, employment and education for low-income families and neighborhoods that has separated each area into an unintegrated silo with no coordinated solution for the systemic problems that have crippled whole cities, neighborhoods and families.

Eric Johnson
Executive Director
Oakland Housing Authority

1,150,000

FAMILIES WITH 2.5 MILLION PEOPLE
LIVE IN PUBLIC HOUSING UNITS

Tacoma: School Helps Stabilize Homeless Families

When you're homeless, it's tough helping your child succeed in school. And when you have an elementary school in your city that catches a large number of homeless students, it's not likely to do well.

A unique program in Tacoma, Washington, that partners the Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) and the city's school system is demonstrating that you don't have to accept that status quo. The program is stabilizing the student population at the elementary school, boosting the reading skills and academic performance of previously homeless kids, involving parents in their kids' education and doubling the mean

earned income of the participating families.

Known as the McCarver Elementary School Special Housing Program, THA is providing up to five years of rental support to 50 previously homeless families with a child in kindergarten, first or second grade. In exchange for the financial support, the families agree to keep their children enrolled at McCarver, to get involved in school activities and to work on their own career and financial growth.

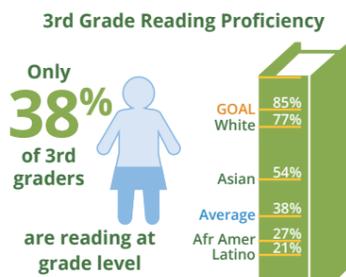
The McCarver program is just one part of a big education push by THA, a full partner in the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

Oakland Reads 2020: Aiming for 85% of Students Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade

READING SUCCESS SUPPORTED BY SCHOOL READINESS, ATTENDANCE, SUMMER LEARNING, & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



Reading Success



32% of 3rd graders are English learners: this is almost 1,000 students that need to be brought to proficiency.

70% of fluent bilingual 3rd graders are reading at grade level



School Readiness

Only 54% of children enter OUSD with early literacy skills.



Attendance

Chronically absent 3rd graders are

3x

less likely to read at grade level.



3rd graders with ONE OR MORE SUSPENSIONS are

50%

less likely

to READ AT GRADE LEVEL than students with no suspensions



AFRICAN AMERICAN 3rd graders are **3x** more likely to be CHRONICALLY ABSENT AND SUSPENDED once or more.

Summer Learning

Students served:



Family Engagement

A School Quality Review process rated 20 elementary schools on FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:



"At the Oakland Housing Authority, we believe that we are essential in improving educational outcomes for children and youth to end the cycle of poverty and increase lifetime earning potential; improving health outcomes for our families; and improving workforce development and job training services that could bring real opportunity to our families."

Eric Johnson Executive Director Oakland Housing Authority

Source of data for all except Summer Learning: Oakland Unified School District 2012-13

Springfield: An Early Reading Platform

As a housing court judge in Massachusetts, William H. Abrashkin saw plenty of children from public housing complexes cycling through his court. When he became executive director of the Springfield Housing Authority (SHA), he resolved to break that cycle.

Partnering with the Irene E. & George A. Davis Family Foundation and the regional employment/workforce board, SHA in 2009 launched Talk/Read/Succeed! The initiative aims to ensure that more children learn to read proficiently by the end of third grade. The Davis Foundation is an active participant in the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

"We were living in the midst of a slow-motion disaster, losing successive generations of young people. Figuring out how to break this cycle was an idea whose time had come."

— William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director of the Springfield Housing Authority

For SHA, the work starts with giving parents and caregivers the knowledge to build young vocabularies and manage any behavioral or mental health problems. It includes providing space for early learning programs and after-school tutoring. It also provides quality summer learning programs, which were unavailable for 80 percent of SHA children at the program's inception.

Eventually, the program led to partnerships with the elementary schools that serve many of the students from the public housing complexes. School and housing officials work together to provide the services for students and families. Public housing tenants became more engaged and, in some cases, parent leaders.

