



# TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

## TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY'S EDUCATION PROJECT

(Last Revised November 16, 2015)

### 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 low-income students.

THA seeks these outcomes for three reasons. **First**, THA's mission is to help people succeed not just as tenants but also as "parents, students, wage earners and builders of assets who can live without assistance." THA wants families to come to its housing and prosper. In this way, it wants their time with THA to be transforming and temporary. It wants this especially for their children. This requires school success.



**Second**, THA is a real estate and community developer. It seeks to make its neighborhoods "attractive places to live, work, attend school, shop and play" and to help its city be a place that low-income people experience that is "safe, vibrant, prosperous, attractive and just." This too requires successful neighborhood schools.

**Third**, public schools face challenges that low-income children bring to the classroom. Schools cannot meet these challenges without help. THA seeks to do its part.

The Education Project seeks to spend a housing dollar, not only to house families, but also to promote their children's school success and the success of schools that serve low-income children. When it works it is a very good use of a housing dollar. THA began this effort surmising that it can influence school outcomes. This surmise arose from some facts that are true for most housing authorities and their communities. They are true in Tacoma:

- Except for the school district and the public assistance agency, THA serves more low-income children than any other organization in Tacoma. It houses about 1 of 7 Tacoma public school students and about 1 of 4.5 low-income students.
- In serving families, THA is deep into their lives, as landlord, provider of highly regulated rental assistance, and provider of supportive services. This gives THA an influence over their behavior and choices.
- THA owns communities that can be staging grounds for educational initiatives.
- THA resources can lever reforms and investments from school districts and others.

THA undertakes this effort in full partnership with Tacoma Public Schools (TPS), Tacoma Community College, other service providers, and funders. The results should be interesting to other public housing authorities, school districts and educational institutions. To learn more about THA's Education Project go to [www.tacomahousing.org](http://www.tacomahousing.org).

## SOME ELEMENTS OF THA'S EDUCATION PROJECT

There are many elements to THA's Education Project. Some are underway. Others are in planning. Here is a short description of some of them:

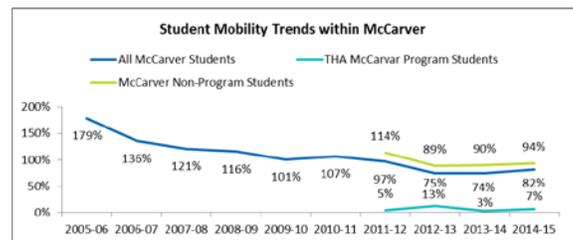
### 2.1 McCarver Elementary School Housing Assistance Program (*underway*)

The student population of McCarver Elementary School is among the poorest in the Tacoma. It has more homeless students than any other elementary school in the region, possibly the state. From 2005 and 2011, McCarver's student population had a turnover rate ranging each year between 101% and 179%. This results from homelessness, deep poverty and the accompanying family challenges.



The McCarver Housing Assistance Program has five parts. (1) *Housing*: To help stabilize the school, THA provides rental assistance to 50 homeless McCarver families with children enrolled in kindergarten, first or second grade. In 2011-12 the 85 children in these households comprised 20% of the school. As originally designed, this assistance started paying most of the rent, and tapered to zero after 5 years. (2) *Parental Commitments*: The Project asks participating parents to keep their children at McCarver, participate actively in their children's schooling, and invest in their own education and employment prospects. (3) *Supportive Services*: THA and its partners provide services to help parents fulfill their commitments. (4) *TPS Investment*: TPS invested the considerable resources to bring the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program to McCarver. (5) *Program Evaluation*: A third party evaluator tracks an array of program and participant outcomes.

The outcomes from the first four years of the project (2011-2015) are promising. The school's annual mobility rate declined from 114% prior to THA's initiative down to 82% at the end of year 4. Reading scores for cohort children went up by 33 % in the first year, nearly three times faster than comparable cohorts. In the second and third year, the cohort children retained those gains, performing above all other children at the school. By the end of year 4 cohort students were performing at levels comparable to all students across the district. The average earned income of the cohort families doubled. (Although the median income did not change, reflecting challenges of disability, trauma and addiction facing about a third of the families.)



These encouraging results allow THA and TPS to turn the program into a permanent offering at McCarver and, beginning in 2016, to expand the program to other elementary schools in Tacoma with ruinous student transient rates due to homelessness and housing instability.

**2.2 THA’s College Bound Scholarship Enrollment Project (underway)**

THA seeks to sign up all of its 8<sup>th</sup> graders each year in Washington State’s College Bound Scholarship Program (CBS). CBS is a promise the state has made to every low-income child in the state: if he or she graduates from high school, with at least a 2.0 G.P.A., stays out of serious trouble and enrolls in a post-secondary program, the state will ensure that tuition is affordable. There is a catch. The student and his or her parent/guardian must sign up for the program by the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. When the program began, for lack of that signature, nearly half the state’s eligible children missed this chance. THA started by adding the CBS application to the forms families fill out yearly as participants in its housing programs. Within 3 years THA reached 100% sign up rate. Recently, THA has folded its efforts into an aggressive district-wide program that now enrolls virtually all Tacoma’s eligible 8<sup>th</sup> graders yearly.

Students Enrolled in the Washington State College Bound Scholarship Program by the End of Eighth Grade*					
	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
<b>THA</b>	83%	91%	Approx. 100%	Approx. 100%	<b>Approx. 100%</b>
<b>Tacoma Public Schools</b>	77%	90%	Approx. 100%	Approx. 100%	<b>Approx. 100%</b>
<b>Washington State</b>	55%	68%	75%	77%	<b>81%</b>

**2.3 Children’s Savings Account Program for Students of New Salishan (underway)**

Children’s Savings Accounts (CSAs) are long-term asset-building accounts for education purposes after high school. These accounts can start as early as birth. When low to moderate-income students have such accounts they are more likely to succeed in school and enroll in college than their peers without such accounts.

In the fall of 2015 THA launched its CSA Program for children who live in or attend school in the community of Salishan. Salishan is THA’s largest community. It is a HOPE VI redevelopment. It is a brand new neighborhood of renters and homeowners. It has an elementary school, a middle school, a regional primary health clinic, parks and other community features all on an award winning design.



THA CSA’s program is designed to help Salishan students, and their families, aspire to college, prepare for it, pay for it and feel they belong when they go. It will get unbanked families banked, with financial skills. It will knit the region’s most diverse neighborhood together by eliciting and enlisting its shared hope and expectation that its children will graduate from high school and go to college. THA’s CSA Program has these parts:

*Elementary School Stage:* When a Salishan student enrolls in elementary school, THA will open a savings account in his or her name. THA will be the account custodian. THA will make an initial \$50 deposit into the account. THA will match

the family's deposit into the account up to \$400 per year. This match will continue through 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Middle School through High School Stage:* When students reach 6<sup>th</sup> grade the student and a counselor will devise a plan from then until graduation and enrollment in college, with milestones along the way. *E.g.:* improved attendance; improved Grade Point Average; enrolling in the College Bound Scholarship Program; taking the PSAT, SAT and ACT; taking college preparatory courses; applying to college; filling out the FAFSA; getting into college; graduating from high school, and starting college. Upon the student reaching each milestone, THA will deposit more money into the account up to \$700 per year.



The program's contributions to those accounts will be available to the student only if and when he or she completes the journey and enrolls in a qualified education or training program after high school and then only for the costs of attendance. These costs include the non-tuition costs, particularly housing.

*Program Evaluation:* THA has contracted with the Urban Institute to track and evaluate an array of performance measures, both middle term and long term.

#### **2.4 Tacoma Community College Housing Project** (*underway*)

Tacoma Community College (TCC) is the largest post-secondary institution in the Tacoma region. In contrast to students in other schools, TCC's students are lower income, more likely to be working, more likely to be parents and more likely to be the first in their family to attend college. A notable number are homeless.

In September 2014, THA and TCC launched an innovative pilot program to house up to 25 homeless TCC students and their dependents during their TCC enrollment. As a condition of the assistance, students must make adequate academic progress toward a degree. The assistance lasts until graduation or 3 years, whichever occurs first.

In the program's first year the cohort of students' average age was 35, 10 years older than the average age among all TCC students, and 82% of the participating students are parents. With only a year of data, outcomes are preliminary, but promising:

- **95%** (21 out of 22) of participating students remain enrolled; in comparison, of the 146 eligible applicants the program could not serve, only **24%** (35 out of 146) remain enrolled;
- The GPA of the participating students is **3.05** while the average GPA of all TCC students, homeless or housed, is **2.96**.

These one-year outcomes are sufficiently encouraging to allow THA and TCC to consider the program's expansion.

**2.5 Educational Services in THA Communities** *(underway and in planning)*

THA communities can be a good staging ground for important educational services. Like other services, educational services are more effective if they are part of the visible, walking landscape. 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. Other educational services at THA properties include or will include:



- Head Start program at THA’s new Bay Terrace property.
- THA’s summer lunch and literacy program in three public housing sites
- Computer labs at all family communities, with tutoring.
- Mentoring and tutoring programs provided by community partners.
  
- Salishan Core will have a child care provider, and programming to take a youth or adult further in their education or training.

**2.6 Campaign of Expectations** *(underway and in planning)*

School success depends in part on what students feel people expect of them. A community can be a useful source of expectations. 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:

- THA’s College Bound Scholarship Enrollment Project for all THA children
- educational expectations imbedded into individual case management plans
- free books program at all THA properties and offices
  
- celebrate graduations from elementary school, middle school and high school, and college send-offs.

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## 2.7 Data Collection and Performance Measures

THA tracks performance measures to assess its Education Project. THA's data sharing agreement with the Tacoma Public School District is critical for this purpose. This allows THA and the school district to track education outcomes of various populations, including all THA students, THA students in discrete THA communities or programs, THA students attending particular schools, and THA students by cohorts reflecting the time they spend in THA housing programs. The data system will compare them with populations of non-THA students in Tacoma.

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