



Bringing School Home



Betsey Martens, E.D.
Boulder Housing Partners
4800 Broadway
Boulder, CO 80304

August 26, 2016

Research Advisory Committee
Moving-to-Work (MTW) Demonstration Program Expansion
451 Seventh Street SW
Washington, DC 20410
Via email to MTWAdvisoryCommittee@hud.gov

Dear Committee members:

As someone who, like you, is a lifelong advocate for and practitioner in public housing, and as the Executive Director of an MTW agency in Boulder, I write on behalf of our emerging national movement, Bringing School Home, to urge you to include an education initiative – using public housing as a springboard for public-education success – as a key component in selecting the next housing authorities to be included in the MTW expansion.

Bringing School Home is an idea whose time is now

This initiative is applicable to every family-style public housing property in America, and as you will see from this brief letter, Bringing School Home has:

- A proven model for success, with demonstrated results going back just short of two decades.
- An 'open source franchise kit' approach to replicating the experimental success throughout the country.
- A national recognized advisory group that includes some of the industry's housing leaders like Michael Mirra, Preston Prince, Rod Solomon, Cynthia Parker, Nancy Andrews, and Sister Lilian Murphy.
- Strong buy-in from colleagues in the public housing community, with more than 25 PHAs keenly interested in adding Bringing School Home initiatives, or in adapting the education initiatives they already have.

For the last half a year, I have spoken at dozens of audiences in multiple settings, including the national MTW conference, and each time I have done so, the audience response has been excited and heartwarming. What BHS is talking about is what housing authorities are either already doing and haven't had a framework to understand it, or want to do. MTW is the ideal vehicle for enabling them to do it.

Public housing must be a platform out of poverty, and education is its up-spring

Aside from providing quality housing for families who cannot afford it in the marketplace, public housing can be, and indeed must be, the place where we as Americans break the multi-generational cycle of poverty. That's a cornerstone of MTW: inviting PHAs to rethink not only their systems and practices as housing authorities, but their role in the broader urban social-support ecosystem to create dynamics that give low income families opportunity. Breaking the cycle of poverty begins with children and their parents, and it happens when the children are motivated to learn, are supported in learning, and are able to learn and to use their learning and education to achieve.

More than 3,300,000 children live in public housing, and the overwhelming majority of them get their schooling in the public system; indeed, in some of our markets, more than half the matriculating children in public schools come from public housing. Yet 91% of a child's life from birth through age 18 happens outside school – at home, afternoons, weekends, evenings, and summer – and what the child learns by observation in that 91% time can dilute, undermine, or even destroy what the school system can do in its 9%.

As public housing officials, we know this already. A NAHRO survey found more than 690 authorities already offering education programs. MTW can focus that raw grass-roots energy into something that is a national movement.

Bringing School Home has found a way to mobilize the 91% of home time, placing both the child and his/ her parents at the center of and in control of their child's education

A little over a year ago, I joined with the Affordable Housing Institute, a global non-profit consultancy, as an AHI Fellow, to test the viability, replicability, and national-expansion appeal of what we have been doing in Boulder, in concert with the I Have A Dream Foundation. In that year we have proven the concept. (See attached materials.) Now we are moving to take the learning, dubbed Bringing School Home, into an evidence-based toolkit to enable PHAs to transform the way that public schools reach and educate their public-housing children.

The BSH performance is compelling:

- 86% of BSH students graduate from high school, versus 63% in their peer group.
- 92% of BSH high-school graduates have gone on to secondary education – often the first in their family to do so – versus 39% in a peer group.

Bringing School Home fits squarely within your RAC mandate

As you know, MTW “is a demonstration program for public housing authorities that provides them the opportunity to design and test innovative, locally-designed strategies that increase housing choices for low-income families, use federal dollars more efficiently, and help residents find employment and become self-sufficient.”

You have the privilege of recommending MTW expansion selection criteria that in your collective judgment advance public housing across nine areas:

1. Increasing moves of low-income families to high-opportunity neighborhoods.
2. Improving education outcomes through housing partnerships.
3. Using administrative flexibilities to reduce costs and improve operations, governance, and financial management.
4. Structuring alternative rent-setting methods.
5. Streamlining admissions and/or occupancy policies (i.e., work requirements, time limits, wait-list preference alterations).
6. Cultivating supportive or sponsor-based housing policies.
7. Developing strategies to better utilize project-based vouchers.
8. Improving the health and well-being of elderly and disabled residents.
9. Achieving the goal of ending homelessness for families, veterans, youth, and the chronically homeless.

Bringing School Home will directly help you achieve Items 1, 2, 5, and 9. We have already incorporated these elements into Boulder’s, and others’, Bringing School Home playbook:

- We have a preference on move-in for families that will enroll their young children in Bringing School Home. We’re already doing this in Boulder and the results, and the parents’ enthusiasm for the combined program, are nothing short of heartwarming and inspiring.
- We make sure that leases don’t end during the school year.
- We tie school attendance to housing assistance.
- We will arrange that when a family moves in to a Boulder property, the family also automatically get a free library card.

Being in MTW has been liberating. Being motivated to Bring School Home within MTW has been revolutionary. Boulder and the other 38 MTW authorities to date have built a solid base of administrative efficiencies; we have rethought what it means to be a public housing authority and now see ourselves as public-benefit entrepreneurs. And we've collectively done a lot of thinking and a lot of innovating about rent reform and term limits.

These achievements, important as they are, are the signature of the first wave. Now, during this expansion, it's time to set our collective sights higher. MTW's next leap must be not simply to make our dollars go further doing what public housing has always done, but to enable public housing to use MTW flexibility to partner with community-serving agencies to make an investment in the next generation of Americans.

Given the opportunity, evidence-based models like Bringing School Home that prove an investment in children can begin to reshape the demand curve for public housing. Reducing the demand curve will be far cheaper than trying to add more to the supply. Education must be part of that. Bringing School Home isn't the only way to make education work within public housing, but it's a way – and we want your help to make it possible for other housing authorities to do what we've done and to help them and us take it even further.

Please include education initiatives as a key selection criterion for expanding MTW.

Very truly yours,



Betsey Martens
Executive Director, Boulder Housing Partners
Fellow, Affordable Housing Institute
President Emeritus, NAHRO

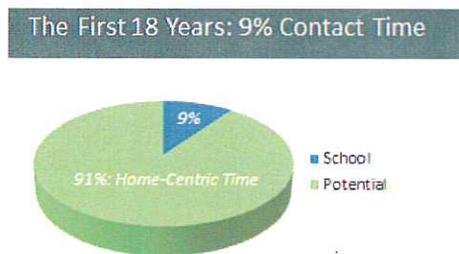
Bringing School Home is a national research demonstration program focused on closing the achievement gap for low-income children by:

1. Using housing as the platform to an expanded learning partnership with school districts and community partners; bringing learning as a guest into the home and into the community;
2. Using housing policy to create a housing-based and community-accepted expectation of learning and of success; and
3. Buttressing that expectation with a seamless and persistent system of supports that refuses to let a child fail.

Bringing School Home is based on a simple premise and long practice:

The Premise:

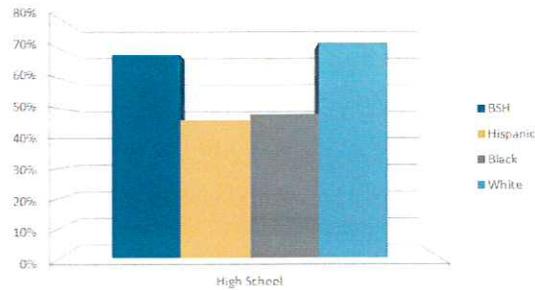
Housing is critical to creating successful outcomes for low-income children given public schools' limited contact time in the first eighteen years of a child's life (only 9%); what may be done within the 9% portion can be undone within the 91% for very low-income children whose lives can be characterized by constant moving, poor quality environments and sleep disturbances/ disruptions, all of which undermine cognition and emotional well-being. All of this 91% is home-centric: housing quality, location, stability, and affordability have enormous impact on measurable in-school performance.



The Practice:

Test-site partnerships stretching back almost two decades between the I Have a Dream Foundation (IHDF) and the public housing authorities of New York City and Boulder, Colorado have shown for scores of students that housing authorities can be the nexus for a comprehensive, consistent, and sustainable education model that brings all the disparate pieces of child and family support together in one program: stable housing, early intervention, pre-school education, academic support, high expectations, student mentorship, parent engagement, strong community foundation and post-secondary funding.

High School Graduation Rates NYC



Bringing School Home believes that public housing can be a 'home base' for education in which parents are the ultimate teachers and the community brings resources into a new formula.

This research effort will prove that affordable housing policy can transform the effectiveness of education and open a vast new field of potential innovations between schools and educators on one side and affordable and public housing practitioners on the other.

During 2016, with a combination of additional research sites and broader academic and practitioner outreach and analysis, we will:

1. Understand what is working and why in Boulder and New York City.
2. Determine how to bring each program to scale; and expand into new cities.
3. Determine what are the most promising policy and practice innovations related to housing and education.

Contact:

Betsey Martens
Exec Dir, Boulder Housing
Fellow, Affordable Housing Institute
martensb@boulderhousing.org