

**AIR Equity Initiative** 

# **Integration and Equity 2.0**

## New and Reinvigorated Approaches to School Integration

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS



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## Supporting School Integration Through the Federal Housing Choice Voucher Program

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Our largest low-income housing program, the Housing Choice Voucher program, was originally conceived as an experiment to give families the ability to move to a privately owned apartment in a community of their choice in contrast to traditional public housing and other place-based federal subsidized housing, where acceptance of federal housing assistance was generally conditioned on acceptance of a specific, usually segregated, neighborhood and its local zoned school. However, for most of the voucher program's 50-year history, the promise of community choice has not been fulfilled. The housing voucher program has often steered families into higher poverty neighborhoods,<sup>2</sup> and further research has shown that the program exposes children to low-performing, higher poverty elementary schools at a rate similar to what we have seen with other major (place-based) low-income housing programs.<sup>3</sup>

Although these outcomes are largely influenced by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rules and public housing authority (PHA) administrative policies,<sup>4</sup> they are not inevitable. "Housing mobility programs," developed originally as part of remedial orders in public housing desegregation cases,<sup>5</sup> have shown great potential to assist families who want to move to safer, lower poverty neighborhoods through a combination of intensive counseling, housing search assistance, landlord outreach and incentives, and voucher policy adjustments. The continuing emergence of research showing significant health, educational, and economic benefits for children who move to low-poverty neighborhoods<sup>6</sup> has led to increased funding for housing mobility by federal, state, and local governments. Housing mobility programs have now expanded to at least 20 metropolitan areas,<sup>7</sup> and in the past 5 years, Congress has allocated \$75 million to support housing mobility services,<sup>8</sup> and several states fund their own mobility programs.<sup>9</sup> Most of the federal funds have gone to build the Community Choice Demonstration in eight cities,<sup>10</sup> and an additional \$25 million is being disbursed

in 2023 through a competitive grants program to fund up to 30 additional programs.<sup>11</sup> These programs have been bolstered by broader reforms to the Housing Choice Voucher program that support greater choice and mobility, including a 2016 Small Area Fair Market Rent (SAFMR) rule that has given families the potential to access higher cost rentals in previously inaccessible neighborhoods and communities.<sup>12</sup>

Housing mobility programs have a significant, but underutilized, potential to support school integration by providing access to high-performing, low-poverty schools for low-income children of color. In this sense, housing mobility programs are like interdistrict (city-to-suburb) school integration programs, except that the entire family moves to the suburban school district and the children become resident students in the town. With continuing restrictions on race-based methods for achieving voluntary school integration, <sup>13</sup> and growing uncertainty about the effects of the 2023 affirmative action cases on K–12 education, <sup>14</sup> housing mobility programs may become an increasingly important part of the solution to interdistrict school segregation.

Although many housing mobility programs incorporate measures of school performance in the definition of targeted low-poverty "opportunity areas," and low-income children in mobility programs often move to lower poverty schools,<sup>15</sup> school integration per se has not been an explicit goal of most programs. The goal of this paper is to explore how to incorporate school integration more explicitly into the design of housing mobility programs, both at the front end, in the selection of schools and school districts and in the pre-move counseling process, and then after the move, in the post-move counseling process to help families and children successfully transition to their new communities and schools. This exploration is based, in part, on prior and ongoing work with mobility programs in Texas, Ohio, Maryland, New York, and California, with the goal of developing a practice model for housing mobility programs across the country.

### Assessing School Quality and Inclusion in Selecting Target Opportunity Areas

As noted above, many mobility programs incorporate school performance data as part of a broader geographic analysis of opportunity that includes data on neighborhood poverty, access to employment, transit access, and health-related factors. These "opportunity maps" generally define targeted areas eligible for landlord incentives and individualized housing search assistance. The Child Opportunity Index,<sup>16</sup> which is one nationally available mapping tool, weights school performance heavily. On Long Island, the state housing department uses its own two-factor index of "well-resourced areas" originally developed for siting Low Income Housing Tax Credit developments, where the eligible areas are low-poverty census tracts zoned to an elementary local school exceeding the 50th percentile of school performance on state tests.<sup>17</sup> In assisting the launch of the Long Island program, we also modeled a more detailed "High Opportunity Index" for school districts with six indicators identified as determinants of education outcomes in education literature.<sup>18</sup>

School performance data have sometimes been criticized as the primary metric to evaluate school quality, largely because it reflects student demographics, and also because of its tendency to promote self-segregation of more affluent families in "higher performing" districts.<sup>19</sup> However, because school performance is so closely tied to family income, high-performing schools are a useful initial screening tool for housing mobility programs seeking to help families with children move to areas with lower poverty schools.<sup>20</sup> Once these lower poverty schools are identified, additional performance indicators—like year-to-year growth and performance of subgroups—can be assessed.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond these important contributors to academic achievement, it is also crucial to assess school climate in the school districts that receive children in housing mobility programs. Will children and their parents feel welcome in their new schools, and will they reap the benefits of interacting with children from different backgrounds? This question is closely related to growing concerns about school climate and student mental health,<sup>22</sup> and it also comes out of Professor Raj Chetty et al.'s new research on social capital and the importance of cross-class friendships for long-term economic mobility for low-income children.<sup>23</sup>

To get at this question in the context of interdistrict school integration programs, the National Coalition on School Diversity recently developed a prototype "interdistrict integration assessment tool," which includes nine focus areas that are crucial for successful integration programs, including enrollment, diverse staff, curriculum and instruction, behavior support, family engagement, belonging, access, closing gaps, and student supports.<sup>24</sup> This tool could be adapted for use in housing mobility programs to help families with vouchers make informed choices about which school districts will best meet their children's needs.

Another approach to assessing inclusivity in receiving school districts uses Professor Chetty's social capital study directly. In an impressive display of "big data" research, Chetty and his team have mapped the prevalence of cross-class friendships down to the county, town, and even high school level.<sup>25</sup> Although these data are retrospective (based on who young adults were "friends with" in high school), community and school culture are presumed to be somewhat stable over time. We have looked at these data in the context of the Making Moves program on Long Island, where 127 separate school districts are spread over a two-county area.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to using these more nuanced approaches to identify target areas for mobility programs, each of these analyses can also be built into the initial orientation program for families entering the housing mobility program and then incorporated into the individualized pre-move counseling process that helps families define their goals before embarking on the housing search process. Focus groups and peer-to-peer engagement with families with housing vouchers who have already moved into new school districts can also be helpful in supporting both knowledge and successful transitions into new schools.

#### The Importance of Post-Move Counseling and Support

Moving to a lower poverty community and school system is obviously only the first step, and high-performing housing mobility programs pay a great deal of attention to ensuring that each family has a successful transition and can sustain its move over time. This "post-move counseling" process generally involves maintaining contact with the family at regular intervals and troubleshooting any issues that come up with the landlord or in the school or community. Long-running programs in Texas and Maryland have paid particular attention to children's experiences in their new schools. For example, at the Inclusive Communities Project (ICP) in Dallas, staff have sometimes helped families register their children in the new district and accompanied families to meetings at the school where concerns have arisen. ICP also has a number of questions relating to school experiences in its regular post-move survey, which helps to identify schools and school districts that are particularly positive for their clients' children (or districts that need intervention). The Baltimore housing mobility program, in addition to routine post-move check-ins and annual client surveys, has in the past experimented with separate focus groups of parents and teens (led by educators) to assess their experiences in their new communities and schools. The Baltimore program also tries to

assist families with costs associated with school sports or extracurricular activities, and it sponsors some students in integrated summer camp programs.<sup>27</sup> These models are highly replicable and should be studied further, refined with input from educators, and disseminated widely as housing mobility programs expand.

### Linking Interdistrict School Integration Programs With Regional Housing Mobility Programs

Many thousands of children have participated in the interdistrict school integration programs in Boston, Hartford, St. Louis, and other cities—and many of those children are in families with housing choice vouchers, or families who are eligible for the program. But little has been done to connect these programs until recently. After years of effort, the Connecticut legislature finally passed a small pilot program in 2021, allocating 20 state-funded housing vouchers to families participating in the city-tosuburb Open Choice school integration program.<sup>28</sup> The basic concept of this pilot is to identify income-eligible families in the Open Choice program and offer them the opportunity to move to the town where their children are attending school, thus making them resident children of the suburban school district and opening up an additional seat for another Hartford student in the Open Choice program. The Hartford-based Open Communities Alliance, which advocated for the new program and is working to implement it, used a similar theory in a 2017 lawsuit to restore an important housing voucher rule suspended by the Trump administration.<sup>29</sup> The Open Communities Alliance also hopes to canvass families in the Open Choice program to determine who is already participating in the federal voucher program and to refer those families to targeted housing mobility services if they are interested in making a residential move to the school district their children attend. If successful, this concept could be brought to other regions operating interdistrict school integration programs.

#### **Conclusion: The Future of Housing Mobility and School Integration**

The current expansion of housing mobility programs in more cities and metropolitan areas represents a significant opening to increase school integration through housing policy and to incorporate school integration considerations directly into housing mobility practice. As noted above, eight new programs are currently launching under HUD's Community Choice Demonstration, and an additional Notice of Funding Availability for \$25 million in competitive grants for housing mobility services was announced in June 2023.<sup>30</sup> In addition, HUD is in the process of reinstating the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule, which will force many PHAs to confront the high levels of concentration in their Housing Choice Voucher programs and develop proposed solutions.<sup>31</sup> Housing mobility is expected to be at the top of the agenda for many of these agencies in their AFFH plans.<sup>32</sup>

There are a number of ways to build on the potential synergy between housing mobility and school integration over the next few years—both in terms of further research and the development and dissemination of best practice models. A survey of existing housing mobility programs, building on past surveys,<sup>33</sup> will help determine the extent to which school metrics and school district engagement are part of mobility program structure, and a set of model pre- and post-move counseling tools focused on improving children's integration into their new school communities will help program staff prioritize school integration as an intrinsic goal of mobility practice. Improved assessment of school climate-including further development of the interdistrict integration assessment tool—will help ensure that children are entering schools with inclusive environments and supportive leadership. For the upcoming renewal of the AFFH planning process, training and guidance will be needed for local jurisdictions and PHAs to effectively engage school districts and school district leaders.<sup>34</sup> The Connecticut housing voucher school integration pilot program is also worthy of further expansion, study, and replication as a potential model for other states. Finally, it will be essential to actively include the voices and experiences of families and children who have overcome challenges to move successfully from high-poverty neighborhoods and schools to more diverse and lower poverty environments.<sup>35</sup>

### APPENDIX 1.4: Examples of Mapping School Districts for Mobility Programs in Cleveland and Long Island

#### Figure 1.4.A-1. Initial Map of Well-Resourced Areas in Cleveland Region Overlaid With School District Boundaries

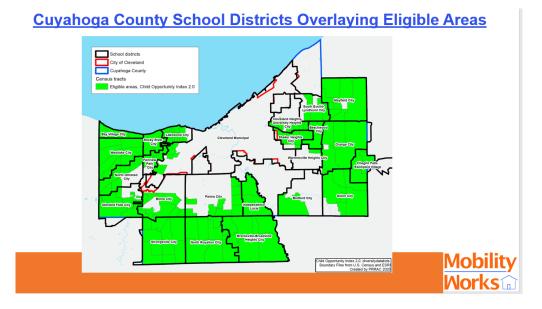
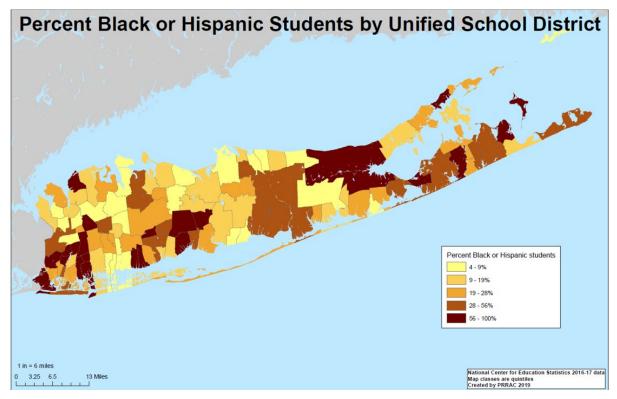


Figure 1.4.A-2. Excerpt From Long Island Maps of Well-Resourced Areas, Housing Authority Jurisdiction, and School District Boundaries







#### Notes

- 1. The author would like to acknowledge a number of important partners in this work who have helped develop the insights in this paper, and who will be instrumental in developing these ideas for more widespread use in practice: Shamira Lawrence of the Inclusive Communities Project in Dallas; Jeanmarie Buffet with the Community Development Corporation of Long Island; Erin Boggs and staff at the Open Communities Alliance in Connecticut; Brian Knudsen, senior research associate at PRRAC; and the staff and board members of Mobility Works, a technical assistance collaborative that includes PRRAC, the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership, Housing Choice Partners (Chicago), and the Inclusive Communities Project. Thanks also to Nina Todd, PRRAC policy fellow, for her helpful research assistance.
- Mazzara, A., & Knudsen, B. (2019). Where families with children use housing vouchers: A comparative look at the 50 largest metropolitan areas. PRRAC. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/where families use vouchers 2019.pdf
- Gould Ellen, I., & Horn, K. (2018). Housing and educational opportunity: Characteristics of local schools near families with federal housing assistance. PRRAC. <u>http://www.prrac.org/pdf/HousingLocationSchools2018.pdf</u>
- 4. Tegeler, P. (2020). *Housing choice voucher reform: A primer for 2021 and beyond*. PRRAC. <u>http://www.prrac.org/pdf/housing-choice-voucher-reform-agenda.pdf</u>
- 5. For example, Gautreaux v. HUD (Chicago), Walker v. HUD (Dallas), and Thompson v. HUD (Baltimore).
- 6. For an excellent short summary of the research, see Fedorowicz, M., & Brennan, M. (2020). As HUD prepares a new demonstration, what do we know about housing mobility and kids' outcomes? Urban Institute. <u>https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/hud-prepares-new-demonstration-what-do-we-know-about-housing-mobility-and-kids-outcomes</u>
- 7. PRRAC & Mobility Works. (2022). *Housing mobility programs in the U.S. 2022*. https://www.prrac.org/pdf/prracHousingMobilitySurvey2022.pdf
- 8. This total includes \$25 million in the 2019 and 2020 federal budgets, respectively, for the Community Choice Demonstration (formerly called the Housing Mobility Demonstration), currently funding programs in eight regions, and an additional \$25 million in the 2022 budget for Housing Mobility Services, to be allocated through a competitive grants program in 2023.
- 9. States supporting housing mobility programs include Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey.
- 10. HUD. (n.d.). *Housing Choice Voucher mobility demonstration*. <u>https://www.hud.gov/program\_offices/public\_indian\_housing/programs/hcv/communitychoicedemo</u>

- PRRAC. (2022). Mobility Works praises inclusion of \$25 million for housing mobility services in bipartisan FY 2022 omnibus spending bill. <u>https://www.prrac.org/mobility-works-praises-inclusion-of-</u> <u>25-million-for-housing-mobility-services-in-bipartisan-fy-2022-omnibus-spending-bill/</u>
- 12. The SAFMR rule, Establishing a More Effective Fair Market Rent System, 81 F.R. 80567 (November 16, 2016), replaced regionwide rent caps based on the 40th percentile of metropolitan rents with ZIP code–based rents at the 40th percentile in 24 metropolitan areas. In other parts of the country, adoption of SAFMRs was voluntary, and many public housing agencies (PHAs) have adopted these higher rent caps in more expensive, higher opportunity neighborhoods and communities. Other potential program reforms to expand families' ability to access high-performing, less-segregated schools may include changes to the way that HUD evaluates PHA performance, and streamlining movement of vouchers across PHA jurisdictional lines. See generally Tegeler, P. (2020). *Housing choice voucher reform: A primer for 2021 and beyond*. PRRAC. <a href="http://www.prrac.org/pdf/housing-choice-voucher-reform-agenda.pdf">http://www.prrac.org/pdf/housing-choice-voucher-reform-agenda.pdf</a>
- 13. See Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District 1, 551 U.S. 701 (2007).
- 14. See, for example, Starr, S. B. (in press). The magnet-school wars and the future of colorblindness. *Stanford Law Review*, *76*(1).
- 15. DeLuca, S., Rhodes, A., & Garboden, P. M. E. (2016). *The power of place: How housing policy can boost educational opportunity*. Abell Foundation. <u>https://abell.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ed-power-place31516.pdf</u>
- 16. Developed by researchers at Brandeis University, the Child Opportunity Index uses multiple indicators associated with child well-being and economic mobility to construct a national geographic database. The index has been used by several housing mobility programs in the United States. <u>Child</u> <u>Opportunity Index (COI) | diversitydatakids.org</u>
- 17. New York State Homes and Community Renewal. (n.d.). *Map*. <u>https://nyshcr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=b0ca4a8432104bb4ac71fb576ee</u> <u>51175</u>
- 18. The indicators, in a paper prepared for us by Olivia Ildefonso (PhD, CUNY 2021), include per-pupil spending, graduation rate, dropout rate, percentage of economically disadvantaged (poverty rate), percentage receiving an advanced Regent's diploma, and mean classroom size. This index was not used to select areas of opportunity, but it was shared with counseling staff.
- 19. See Hasan, S., & Kumar, A. (2019, December 5). *Digitization and divergence: Online school ratings and segregation in America*. <u>https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\_id=3265316</u>
- 20. There is a strong body of evidence that low-income children benefit from attending lower poverty schools. See Ayscue, J., Frankenberg, E., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2017). *The complementary benefits of racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools*. National Coalition on School Diversity. https://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf

- 21. The GreatSchools app now helpfully tracks year-to-year growth and the performance of racial and ethnic subgroups. See Barnum, M. (2020, September 24). *GreatSchools overhauls ratings in bid to reduce link with race and poverty*. <u>https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/9/24/21453357/greatschools-overhauls-ratings-reduce-link-race-poverty</u>
- See American Civil Liberties Union. (2021, July 29). ACLU comment on school climate and discipline (in response to DOE Request for Information ED-2021-OCR-0068). <u>https://www.aclu.org/letter/aclu-comment-school-climate-and-discipline</u>. See also Aspen Institute. (n.d.). From a nation at risk to a nation at hope. <u>https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606337.pdf</u>; and Pennsylvania State University. (2018). School climate and social and emotional learning: The integration of two approaches. <u>https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/School-Climate-and-Social-and-Emotional-Learning-Integrative-Approach-January-2018.pdf</u>
- Chetty, R., Jackson, M. O., Kuchler, T., Stroebel, J., Hiller, A., Oppenheimer, S., & The Opportunity Insights Team. (2022, August). Social capital and economic mobility. *Opportunity Insights*. <u>https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/socialcapital\_nontech.pdf</u>
- 24. A prototype of the tool is available at <a href="https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18Nk5me7CJmbTTzOvOHpZ2ywOUPV4UTkZwP\_2cN8YjuE/edit#gid=0">https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18Nk5me7CJmbTTzOvOHpZ2ywOUPV4UTkZwP\_2cN8YjuE/edit#gid=0</a>
- 25. See Opportunity Insights. (n.d.). Social capital atlas. [designed and developed by Darkhorse Analytics]. <u>https://socialcapital.org/?dimension=EconomicConnectednessIndividual&dim1=EconomicConnectednessIndividual&dim2=CohesivenessClustering&dim3=CivicEngagementVolunteeringRates&geoLevel =hs&selectedId=362706005839</u>
- 26. Community Development Corporation of Long Island (CDCLI). (2023). *Making Moves program*. <u>https://www.cdcli.org/programs/making-moves/</u>. See Enterprise. (2022). *A review of the New York State Housing Mobility pilot: Lessons from Buffalo, Long Island, and New York City*. <u>https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/prrac-review-of-ny-state-housing-mobility-pilot.pdf</u>
- 27. The Baltimore mobility program was recently described as a "de facto" school integration program in a profile published by The Century Foundation. (2021). *Bridges Collaborative member spotlight: A new model for combating housing segregation post-pandemic.* <u>https://tcf.org/content/commentary/bridges-spotlight-new-model-combating-housing-segregation-post-pandemic/</u>
- 28. State of Connecticut House Special Act No. 21-26, *An Act Establishing the Open Choice Vouchers Pilot Program* (approved July 12, 2021). <u>https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/act/Sa/pdf/2021SA-00026-R00HB-06436-SA.PDF</u>

- 29. See Open Communities Alliance v. Carson, <u>https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/Filed-OCA-v.-Carson-complaint.pdf</u>. In that case, one of the plaintiffs, Crystal Carter, lived in Hartford but had several children attending school in the suburban town of Simsbury. The new HUD rule had raised voucher rent caps high enough to enable the family to move to the town, but then the rule was suspended. After Open Communities Alliance won the case, Crystal and her family were able to move to a home in Simsbury (the author was a co-counsel in the case).
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2023, June 1). HUD makes
  \$25 million in funding available to public housing authorities to help families get access to better housing; schools. [Press release HUD No. 23-108]. https://www.hud.gov/press/press\_releases\_media\_advisories/hud\_no\_23\_108
- 31. Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (proposed rule), 88 F.R. 8516 (February 9, 2023). The reinstated AFFH rule—like the original 2015 rule—is also expected to encourage PHAs and jurisdictions to confer and collaborate with their local school districts.
- 32. See Kye, P., Haberle, M., & Tegeler, P. (with Williams, R., Thrope, D., Simmons, B., Walz, K., & Milwit, L.). (2021). Public housing authorities and the New California AFFH law: How to spot key fair housing issues and set goals. PRRAC & NHLP. <u>https://prrac.org/pdf/affh-for-ca-phas.pdf</u> (discussing strategies for PHAs to comply with the AFFH requirement, which was adopted as a state law in California after the Trump administration suspended the federal version).
- 33. See PRRAC & Mobility Works. (2022, December). Housing mobility programs in the U.S. 2022. Housing Mobility Programs in the U.S. 2022 (PRRAC and Mobility Works, Dec 2022) -HousingMobility.org
- 34. See, for example, Tegeler, P., Knudsen, B., Kye, P., Mouton, M., Lawson, Jr., H., Orfield, M., Stancil, W., Gross, E., Owen, C., Kahlenberg, R., Potter, H., Burris, M., Lallinger, S., Bierbaum, A. H., & Jellison Holme, J. (2021, October 27). *Meaningful collaboration between housing and education agencies in the implementation of AFFH (PRRAC et al., September 2021)*. [letter of housing–schools working group to HUD and the Department of Education]. <u>https://www.prrac.org/schools-affh-rule-letter-09-13-21/</u>
- 35. See Mumphery, D. (2021, July). *Genuine engagement with housing choice voucher families*. Mobility Works & PRRAC. <u>http://www.prrac.org/pdf/genuine-engagement-with-hcv-families.pdf</u>