

# Open Communities Alliance

Embracing diversity to strengthen Connecticut



## Public Hearing Testimony on the 2014 Action Plan February 2014

My name is Noah Lindell, and I am a member of the Legislative Advocacy Clinic at Yale Law School, representing the Open Communities Alliance.<sup>1</sup> My comments center on the connection between housing diversity and educational opportunity. This link is extremely important, but rarely discussed. The Alliance recommends that the Department make access to quality education an explicit goal in the 2014-15 Action Plan and ensure that this priority is reflected in its program application criteria.

The state's five-year Consolidated Plan envisions "that Connecticut's communities will be vibrant, safe, clean, and diverse places for people to live, work, and *raise a family* [emphasis added]..."<sup>2</sup> Access to a quality education is an essential part of this vision. Most Connecticut children go to school near where they live, which means that housing location determines school demographics. The Consolidated Plan rightly wants housing developments to be located "in close proximity" to schools—though it should also specify that those schools should be of high quality.<sup>3</sup>

This is important because, as the Consolidated Plan itself recognizes, housing policy does not exist in a bubble. "Housing development," the plan acknowledges, "is linked to Connecticut's other public policy areas which include education. . . . Historically governments have viewed and addressed each of these areas independent of each other. In the real world these areas are not independent. They are interconnected and interdependent."<sup>4</sup> This passage is exactly right. Housing policy and education policy are inextricably linked. The 2014-15 Action Plan can better reflect this reality.

How are housing and education linked? Through a simple formula: a lack of integrated housing, plus neighborhood attendance zones, plus an education system funded through property taxes, yields struggling, under-resourced schools. These three factors in combination lead to minority-concentrated, often poorly funded, schools in high-poverty areas. Today, Connecticut students who live in public housing are nearly four times more likely than Connecticut students overall to

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<sup>2</sup> *State of Connecticut: 2010-15 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development*, Submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development by the State of Connecticut (July 16, 2010), [http://www.ct.gov/doh/lib/doh/housing\\_plans/2010-15\\_cp\\_-\\_hud\\_approved.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/doh/lib/doh/housing_plans/2010-15_cp_-_hud_approved.pdf), 148.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

attend schools that perform in the bottom ten percent statewide.<sup>5</sup> Perceived school quality also affects people's choice of where to live, and demographics act as a signal of school quality to many homebuyers. A high percentage of disadvantaged students in the schools often gets equated with poor school quality in many homebuyers' eyes, making it unlikely that more affluent people will want to move to high-poverty neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup> This continues the trend of racial and socioeconomic isolation in housing.

Schools that more fully reflect the racial and economic diversity of the state, on the other hand, create more opportunities to interact with diverse classmates. Such schools tend to generate better long-term outcomes for students. More diversity leads to better educational and occupational attainment for low-income students and students of color, while also improving—or at least not negatively affecting—the performance of white students. In fact, in a Montgomery County study (discussed in greater detail below), low-income children who moved to mixed income school districts reduced the achievement gap by half over a five to seven year period.<sup>7</sup> Students, white and minority alike, who attend diverse schools are more likely to attend and graduate from racially diverse colleges, develop more interracial friendships, and work in diverse workplaces. They have lower levels of prejudice, exhibit less criminal behavior, and greater civic participation. They are also more likely to move into diverse neighborhoods, continuing the race-positive cycle.<sup>8</sup>

But Connecticut has been going in the wrong direction, creating a vicious cycle instead of a positive one. Two-thirds of Connecticut's minority residents now live in only 15 of the state's 169 towns. Connecticut's major metropolitan areas are some of the most racially segregated in the nation.<sup>9</sup> The vast majority of Connecticut residents in federal family public housing are in disproportionately impoverished areas (89%) and disproportionately minority areas (86%) of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ingrid Gould Ellen, *Federally-Assisted Housing and Access to Schools: Analysis of Connecticut*, Presentation to the Impediments to Fair Housing Task Force, Connecticut State Legislature (January 8, 2014), [http://www.cga.ct.gov/pd/FairHousing/Docs/CT\\_taskforce\\_jan8\\_SM.pptx](http://www.cga.ct.gov/pd/FairHousing/Docs/CT_taskforce_jan8_SM.pptx), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Kristie J. R. Phillips, Robert J. Rodosky, Marco A. Muñoz, and Elisabeth S. Larsen, "Integrated Schools, Integrated Futures? A Case Study of School Desegregation in Jefferson County, Kentucky," in *From the Courtroom to the Classroom: The Shifting Landscape of School Desegregation*, ed. Claire E. Smrekar and Ellen B. Goldring (2009), 239–70; Jennifer Jellison Holme, *Buying Homes, Buying Schools: School Choice and the Social Construction of School Quality*, 72 HARV. EDUC. REV. 117 (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Heather Schwartz, *Housing Policy is School Policy: Economically Integrative Housing Promotes Academic Success in Montgomery County, Maryland*, The Century Foundation (2010), <http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-Schwartz.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard D. Kahlenberg and Halley Potter, *Diverse Charter Schools: Can Racial and Socioeconomic Integration Promote Better Outcomes for Students?*, The Century Foundation (May 2012), [http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/Diverse\\_Charter\\_Schools.pdf](http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/Diverse_Charter_Schools.pdf); Rucker C. Johnson, *Long-Run Impacts of School Desegregation & School Quality on Adult Attainments*, NBER Working Paper 16664 (January 2011), [http://www.nber.org/papers/w16664.pdf?new\\_window=1](http://www.nber.org/papers/w16664.pdf?new_window=1); Roslyn Arlin Mickelson and Martha Bottia, *Integrated Education and Mathematics Outcomes: A Synthesis of Social Science Research*, 88 N. CAR. L. REV. 993 (2010); Michal Kurlaender & John Yun, *Fifty Years After Brown: New Evidence of the Impact of School Racial Composition on Student Outcomes*, 6(1) INT'L J. EDUC. RES. POL'Y & PRAC. 51 (2005); Janet Ward Schofield and Leslie R.M. Hausmann, *The Conundrum of School Desegregation: Positive Student Outcomes and Waning Support*, 66 U. PITT. L. REV. 83 (2004); Amy Stuart Wells and Robert L. Crain, *Perpetuation Theory and the Long-Term Effects of School Desegregation*, 64 REV. OF ED. RES. 531 (1994).

<sup>9</sup> Erin Kemple, *Connecticut Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice: Executive Summary*, Presentation to the Impediments to Fair Housing Task Force, Connecticut State Legislature (December 4, 2013), <http://www.cga.ct.gov/pd/FairHousing/Tmy/Connecticut%20Analysis%20of%20Impediments%20to%20Fair%20Housing%20Choice.pdf>, 31, 33-34.

state.<sup>10</sup> Households in LIHTC-funded buildings are similarly concentrated, with 73% in areas that are disproportionately minority-heavy and impoverished.<sup>11</sup>

Over the last several years, Connecticut's placements of housing subsidies, far from reversing this trend, have actually exacerbated it. Over the past decade, Connecticut has been funding the building of multi-family affordable housing units mostly in areas that are already minority-concentrated, while heavily white areas have been losing these units.<sup>12</sup> The majority-minority areas also tend to be areas of concentrated poverty.<sup>13</sup> The Alliance recognizes that the new Department of Housing is making efforts to increase higher opportunity placements, and hopes that these efforts will continue.

This housing segregation directly affects the composition of the schools Connecticut students attend (see Table 1 below). For Connecticut households overall, the nearest school has a median poverty rate of only 21%, as measured by free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) recipients.<sup>14</sup> For poor households in Connecticut, on the other hand, the median poverty rate of the nearest school is about three and a half times higher (73%). For housing voucher recipients, the median poverty rate of the nearest school is 77%, and for those in public housing in Connecticut, it's 82%.<sup>15</sup> Things are a bit better for those living in newer LIHTC-funded buildings: the median poverty rate of the nearest school is 56%. But this is still nearly three times higher than for Connecticut households overall. Children of families getting housing assistance are in schools with much higher levels of poverty than are other children in Connecticut.

Connecticut's biggest cities showcase the same inequity as the state as a whole (see Table 1).

- In the Bridgeport metropolitan area, the school nearest to the average household with kids has a median of only 24% FRPL students. For Bridgeport households in public housing, however, the story could not be more different. In the school nearest to each of those households, nearly all of the students are on free or reduced price lunch (99%). The numbers are the same for those getting Housing Choice Vouchers.<sup>16</sup>
- The same pattern holds in the Hartford metropolitan area. The school nearest to each household with kids has a median of 17% FRPL students. Among those in public housing, though, the nearest school has a median of 71% FRPL students. The numbers are even higher for those getting housing vouchers (82%).<sup>17</sup>
- In New Haven, for all households with kids, the median poverty level at the nearest school is 34%. But for those in public housing, the nearest school has a median of 78% FRPL students. For those with housing vouchers, the nearest school has a median of three-quarters of its students on free or reduced-price lunch.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 46.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 45.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 44.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 57.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen, *Federally-Assisted Housing*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 9.

**Table 1: Median Poverty Rate of Nearest School, as Measured by Percentage of Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) Recipients**

	Statewide	Bridgeport	Hartford	New Haven
All Households (All households with children for city data)	21%	24%	17%	34%
Poor Households	73%	99%	79%	71%
Housing Choice Voucher Recipients	77%	99%	82%	75%
Households in Public Housing	82%	99%	71%	78%
LIHTC-Funded Buildings	56%	99%	73%	78%

Unfortunately, Connecticut students who live in low-income or minority-concentrated areas lack the educational opportunity that other students in the state enjoy. Connecticut households receiving housing assistance live near lower-performing schools than do non-assisted households (see Table 2 below).<sup>19</sup> Approximately one-quarter of children in LIHTC-funded buildings live closest to schools that are in the bottom 10% statewide.<sup>20</sup> Over 35% of those in Housing Choice Voucher housing live closest to a school that is in the bottom 10% in the state academically, as do more than 36% of those in public housing. In contrast, only 9.8% of Connecticut children overall attend these low-performing schools.<sup>21</sup> This may be in part because Connecticut has built much of its subsidized housing in places that are already concentrated areas of poverty.

**Table 2: Percentage of Children Going to Schools that Perform in the Bottom 10% Statewide**

	Connecticut Statewide
All Children	9.8%
Children in LIHTC-Funded Buildings	26%
Children in Housing Choice Voucher Housing	35%
Children in Public Housing	36%

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

The story in Connecticut is not all bad, however. The integration of the Hartford school district, spurred by the *Sheff v. O’Neill* decision, shows that diverse schools can help to benefit students from disadvantaged areas (see Table 3 below). Only 46% of Hartford-resident third graders in the low-income, high-minority Hartford city schools are proficient in reading, and only 54% are proficient in math. But nearly three-quarters of Hartford-resident third graders in the district’s more diverse CREC-run magnet schools are proficient in reading, and 78% are proficient in math. Hartford’s choice magnet schools are also doing better than the city public schools: 59% of Hartford-resident third graders in those schools are proficient in reading, and 66% are proficient in math.<sup>22</sup>

The difference between Hartford’s racially diverse schools and minority-concentrated schools only grows as students get older. By tenth grade, even fewer students are performing up to par in the Hartford city schools: only 38% are proficient in reading, and only 30% in math. But in the more integrated CREC magnet schools, around double the percentage of Hartford students are proficient (68% in reading and 63% in math). The Hartford-run magnet schools are doing even better by the tenth grade: 75% of students are proficient in reading, and 65% in math. The more diverse magnet schools are performing better than the low-income, high-minority city schools at every tested grade level.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that school integration is not the only factor contributing to these results. The composition of the schools—including the quality of the teachers—may differ, and more motivated parents are more likely to move their children to the magnet schools. However, Hartford’s experience is consistent with other research and shows us that more integrated schools can contribute to better academic results, especially for the disadvantaged students in those schools. Fostering greater diversity in housing across Connecticut can help narrow the state’s achievement gap, providing greater opportunity for all of Connecticut’s youth.

**Table 3: Student Proficiency Rates in Hartford Schools**

	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Math	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math
Hartford City Schools	46%	54%	38%	30%
CREC Magnet Schools	73%	78%	68%	63%
Hartford Magnet Schools	59%	66%	75%	65%

<sup>22</sup> Jacqueline Thomas, *State report: Students in desegregated schools test higher*, The Connecticut Mirror (Sept. 12, 2013), <http://ctmirror.org/state-report-students-in-desegregated-schools-test-higher/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

Even though the 2013-14 Action Plan does not specifically discuss education and the educational effects of housing location, there are several ways in which the 2013-14 Action Plan can better acknowledge and take account of this link:

1. The “Overarching Goals” section of the 2013-14 Action Plan does not mention access to educational opportunities, though it mentions the goal of creating access to economic opportunities for adults.<sup>24</sup> **Access to a quality education should be an explicit goal** of Connecticut’s housing policies, and this should be reflected both in the “Overarching Goals” section and in the application criteria for housing grant programs. Applicants should receive bonus points *specifically* if their proposals would expand access to high-performing schools for Low- and Moderate-Income families.
2. The 2013-14 Action Plan discusses giving priority for SC/CDGB and HOME development applications to communities with greater need. This makes intuitive sense. However, if impoverished areas—which already have seen the largest growth in recent public housing developments—also receive priority in funding for the SC/CDBG and HOME programs, then we will continue to see disadvantaged Connecticut residents remaining in these impoverished areas. If more funding can go toward **housing developments in higher opportunity areas**, we may be able to achieve greater income and racial/ethnic diversity in our towns and small cities and thereby open greater educational opportunity to more of Connecticut’s poor and minority children.
3. The Department should encourage **mobility counseling** to help people from low-income areas figure out how to move into wealthier or more diverse areas (and where to move). Mobility counseling could include tours of new communities, aid with rental applications, and landlord/tenant mediation, where necessary. Education should also factor into mobility counseling. The most recent briefing materials handed out by the mobility counseling subcontractors, which were reviewed by the Alliance, do not include schools as a factor that clients should consider when determining where to live. Providing information on school performance is crucial.
4. The Department should also have **more interaction** with the Connecticut Department of Education. The plan should seek to foster more discussion about the link between housing and education, breaking down the silos within which we usually view these interconnected issues.

These sorts of policies have already worked in other states. One prominent example is Montgomery County, Maryland. The county has run an inclusionary zoning (IZ) policy since 1976, which requires all developers to set aside up to 15% of their units for rental or sale at below-market prices. More than 12,000 such units have been built in the county since the IZ policy came into effect. Most importantly, the policy gives the public Housing Opportunity Commission the right to purchase up to one-third of the IZ units to use as federally subsidized public housing. This policy was very successful in enabling low-income families to move into—and send their children to school in—affluent neighborhoods.

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<sup>24</sup> *State of Connecticut: 2013-14 Action Plan for Housing and Community Development*, Submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development by the State of Connecticut (2013), 61-62.

The Montgomery County housing authority has purchased over 700 housing units, which are in the attendance zones of nearly every elementary school in the county. Because the county randomly assigns households to these apartments, and since the county mostly uses neighborhood attendance zones, children are essentially randomly assigned to their elementary schools. This has allowed social scientists to conduct the equivalent of a randomized controlled trial of these children's performance.

The researchers found that children in public housing who attended schools with fewer than 20% FRPL students performed far better than those who attended higher-poverty schools. After seven years of being in one of these more advantaged schools, children in public housing were able to cut the achievement gap with their well-off peers by half in math and one-third in reading. The researchers also found that children benefitted academically just from living in low-poverty neighborhoods.<sup>25</sup>

Montgomery County's experience shows that housing integration policies can, in fact, increase educational opportunity for low-income children. Connecticut does not have counties, so it cannot do exactly what Montgomery County did. But the state must work to integrate public housing into more affluent areas, through the changes outlined above or through other similar methods. Doing so would allow low-income students to experience the academic benefits of attending low-poverty schools.

With Connecticut's increasing minority population and higher average age, the state's current housing patterns have to change. If not, Connecticut will have an undereducated workforce that may not be able to support the aging populace. This state's economic future depends on recognizing the link between housing and education. So, too, does the fate of Connecticut's children. The Department's Action Plan must do more to act on a simple fact: housing policy is education policy.

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<sup>25</sup> Schwartz, *Housing Policy is School Policy*, 4-8.