



To: Board of Commissioners

From: Jenn Ramirez Robson, Director of Resident Services

Date: September 14, 2015

Re: **Study Session - KCHA Education Initiatives**

At the September meeting, the Board of Commissioners will have the opportunity to participate in a study session on the topic of KCHA's Education Initiatives. This study session is intended to provide the Board with a broad understanding of the principal elements of the initiatives, including rapidly rehousing homeless families, providing access to high quality schools, aligning home, neighborhood and schools for success, strengthening classroom stability, and improving the quality of youth programs.

Staff will provide an overview of the history and evolution of the initiative, a summary of the progress to date, and information on ongoing challenges. Commissioner Welch will then lead the Board in a discussion on trends related to education in the region and strategic questions for the Board to consider for the next three to five years.

Why Focus on Education?

More than 20,000 children sleep in KCHA-supported housing each night. Their first language may be English, Ukrainian, Somali, or one of more than 20 other languages. They may be born in the United States or newly arrived as either a refugee or immigrant. Whatever their background, these children live in very low-income households with parents who have low levels of education. Very few connect with any formal early learning opportunities. As a result of these risk factors, KCHA youth face a significant achievement gap compared to their peers. This gap starts as early as kindergarten, widens through elementary school, and leads to low rates of high school completion, resulting in reduced opportunities later in life. The initial student data generated through our partnerships with our school districts indicates that a significant number of our students are at risk of not graduating high school. This supports both the importance and the magnitude of this challenge.

KCHA's Education Initiatives seek to eliminate this achievement gap and support the long-term success of these families. KCHA and its partners are working together to address the specific needs of the children we serve. We are also

learning as we go, identifying evidence-based programs and policies that can be adopted and scaled to serve the diverse needs of our families.

What are KCHA's Strategies Around Education?

Access to High Quality Schools

Research on educational outcomes indicates that a child's neighborhood strongly influences his or her educational success. Through a variety of strategies, including two-tier payment standards, property acquisitions, targeted project-basing of Section 8 subsidies and development partnerships, KCHA is broadening regional housing and education choice for families. The Community Choice Program, a mobility counseling initiative, is testing what types of services and supports work best in helping families move to and thrive in opportunity neighborhoods.

Rapidly Rehousing Homeless Families

Homelessness disrupts a child's academic progress and has long-term impacts on child and family outcomes. KCHA's Student Family Stability Initiative, or SFSI, is a rapid rehousing pilot that leverages the connections that schools have with students to identify families who are homeless, doubled-up, or couch surfing. The Initiative provides rental assistance, counseling, and employment connections to stabilize families, ensure continuity of school attendance, and reduce school district transportation costs.

Aligning Home, Neighborhood And Schools For Success

KCHA's Place-based Initiatives in Bellevue, Kent, and White Center coordinate housing policies and resources with families, community-based service providers, and schools. Cross-sector teams analyze the assets and challenges of each community, collectively determine goals, and create multi-year action plans. Focusing on family engagement, early learning, and after-school and summer programming, these teams are building cradle-to-career support for educational success in some of King County's poorest communities.

Strengthening Classroom Stability

Attendance and classroom stability are critical elements for student success. Significant absences significantly increase the likelihood that students will fail to graduate. Changing classrooms in the middle of the school year disrupts learning for the student who is moving and the entire classroom. Schools in low-income neighborhoods typically experience both significant absentee rates classroom turn-over throughout the year. KCHA is testing communication strategies and policy approaches that motivate regular school attendance and encourage families to move within their school neighborhood or to postpone moves until after the school year.

Youth Program Quality

KCHA has made significant capital investments in community facilities to support programs in our residential properties. Early after-school programs essentially served as drop-in centers, with the primary goal of providing a safe place for kids while their parents were at work. Today, KCHA contracts with six youth program providers that serve 15 KCHA communities. Starting in 2015, KCHA began working with youth program providers to ensure that the sites incorporate high quality programming more rigorously focused on improving the academic and life outcomes for children and youth served by these programs.

What Are Some of the Challenges?

Measurement of outcomes involves significant tracking over prolonged periods to evaluate success. KCHA has been able to establish data-sharing agreements with three school districts partners where KCHA supports a significant number of students; 10 percent of students in Kent School District, 9 percent in Highline Public Schools, and 4 percent in Bellevue School District. However, even in other districts where we have a sizable number of students that could arguably also benefit from similar partnerships, it would take significant staff time and resources to expand this tracking and evaluation.

Data tracking and measurement is not the only challenge to scaling up this work. As we begin to see improved outcomes in our three place-based education initiative areas, KCHA is being asked to expand the work to new communities. While this development is positive, it is not feasible to scale the efforts that are currently in place in Bellevue, Kent, and White Center without a significantly different funding model.

These initial education initiatives have also been designed around specific housing sites where there is, in effect, a “captive market” of a group of residents who receive these services in one place that happens to be near their home. In contrast to these place-based strategies, it is a challenge to effectively connect with and serve students and families in the tenant-based Housing Choice Voucher program given their widespread distribution throughout King County.

There is also an ongoing tension between self-sufficiency goals that involve moving households off of subsidized housing programs and the “cradle to career” approach where families and children benefit from long term access to affordable housing, stable communities and high quality programming.

What are Some of the Opportunities for Future Expansion?

In light of recent studies demonstrating the importance of neighborhood quality and the U.S. Supreme Court ruling earlier this year on the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Act, there has been an increased push to create greater access to higher opportunity areas, including cities on the Eastside, utilizing such

tools at source of income discrimination statutes, combining Section 8 subsidies with local incentive zoning or tax exemption programs and project-basing Section 8 units in new developments. While KCHA currently houses 24 percent of families with children in high or very high opportunity communities, KCHA Commissioners recently set a goal of increasing this to 30 percent by the end of 2020.

The initial two-year pilot period for the rapid re-housing Student Family Stability Initiative (SFSI) came to a close at the end of August. Based on the evaluation currently underway, KCHA may move forward on the stretch goal set by Commissioners to increase the number of homeless families served through the SFSI program from 96 re-housed by the end of 2015 to 500 families re-housed annually by the end of 2020.

There is a growing focus on public education at both the State and local level. Significant new funding is anticipated to flow to school districts as a result of the McCleary lawsuit. Locally, Seattle and school districts in south King County have organized a collaborative effort (the Roadmap Project) to support improved academic outcomes. KCHA is a partner in these efforts. Significant foundation support (Gates and Seattle Foundation) is being provided and the Federal government has awarded the consortium a \$40 million Race to the Top grant, a portion of which is being directed to schools with significant KCHA student populations.

In addition, KCHA has entered into a five year partnership with the Gates Foundation to explore new ways in which housing authorities and school districts can work together to improve educational outcomes for extremely low income students. The Foundation has awarded initial funding to KCHA and its school district partners in Bellevue, Highline and Kent, and has committed up to a total of \$3.5 million to KCHA and its partners to support these initiatives over five years.

The early promise of partnerships such as our work with area school districts has prompted national systems alignment efforts. Earlier this year, the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA) held a national Affordable Housing and Education Summit. As a result of the summit, a group that consisted of summit participants and the Council of Great City Schools released an Affordable Housing and Education Action Agenda with the goal of achieving greater cooperation between housing and education systems to better serve low-income students. One of the objectives of this advocacy work is to generate sustainable support and funding for local collaborations.

In November, King County voters will have the opportunity to consider the “Best Starts for Kids” levy to support additional investment in early childhood development as well as strategies focused on children and youth aged five through twenty-four. A small portion will also be invested in community-level strategies through the expansion and sustainability of the partnership between King County and The Seattle Foundation on Communities of Opportunity (COO).