



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Aligning Local Housing and Schools Policy
For Successful Schools in Strong Neighborhoods



HOUSING VIRGINIA

INFORM | CONNECT | UNLOCK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION		3
GETTING STARTED		15
PHASE ONE	Organize, Recruit Leaders, and Initiate Process	19
PHASE TWO	Frame the Issues and Launch the Conversation	26
PHASE THREE	Widen the Circle and Share Recommendations	33
PHASE FOUR	What Comes Next: Sustaining the Housing-Schools Connection	35
REFERENCES		35
GLOSSARY		36

INTRODUCTION

One of the first questions Realtors® typically hear from potential home buyers is, “What school district is this house in?” A family ready to buy a new home often narrows their search to selected school districts.

In response to that demand, home values in sought-after districts of high performing schools rise to levels that exclude all but the more affluent families, and quality public schools become a privilege. Neighborhoods where people live less by choice than by economic necessity become known for struggling schools that offer little promise of greater opportunity.

After family and school factors, “...Neighborhood conditions [explain] a smaller, but third-largest portion of student performance.”

From Reconnecting Schools and Neighborhoods: An introduction to school-centered community revitalization¹

At Housing Virginia, we see value in focusing on the interdependence of schools and neighborhoods. The academic achievements of individual students and the cumulative performance of their schools have as much to do with the neighborhoods, homes, and families beyond the school building as with the teachers, curriculum, resources, and environment within it. Likewise, for neighborhoods to thrive and have wide appeal, they must provide schools that demonstrate success and earn parents’ confidence and trust.



Yet around the country and here in Virginia, we have habitually acclaimed individual schools and whole systems that “succeed” or blamed those that “fail”. We accept that good neighborhoods have highly ranked schools and that failing schools are in bad neighborhoods.

5 Ways Socioeconomically Diverse Neighborhoods can Impact Schools²:

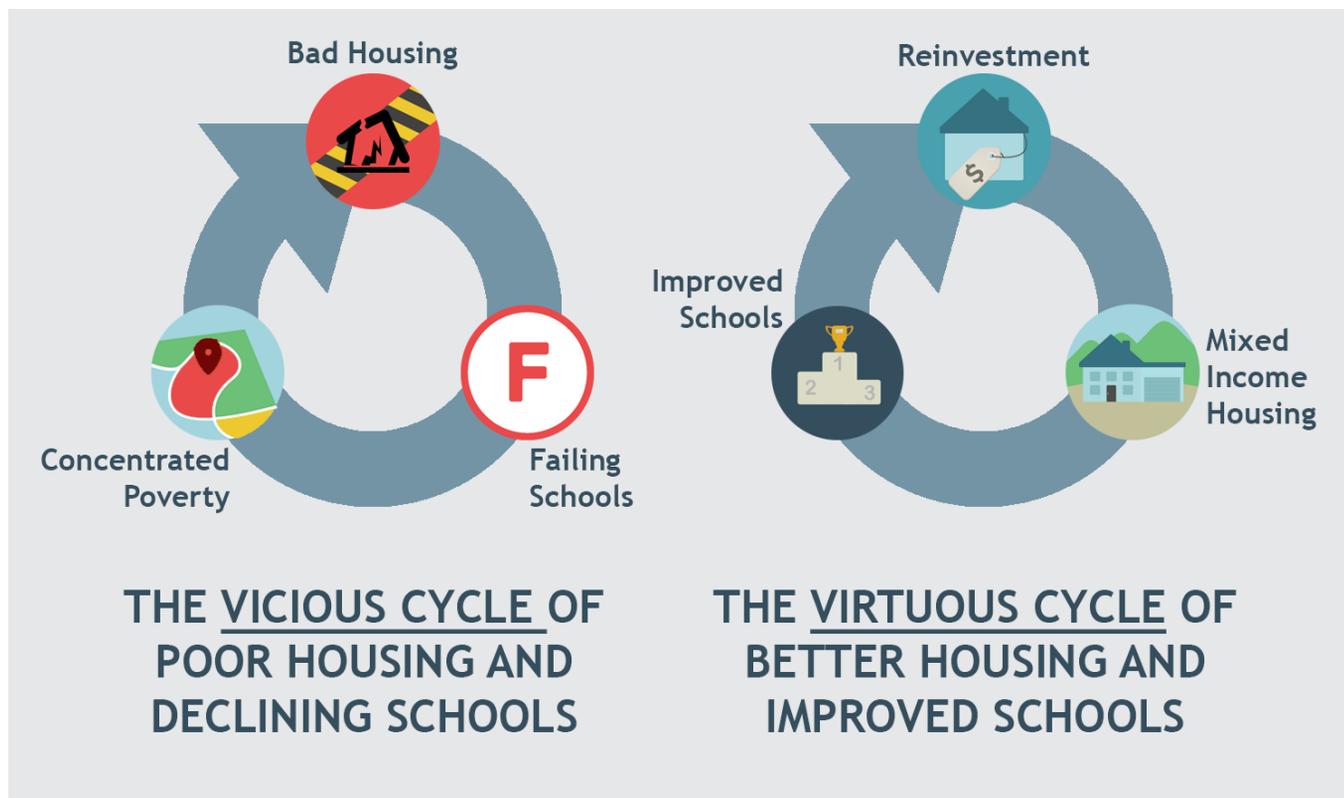
1. Improved teacher quality and lower turnover
2. Safer, more stable school environment
3. Increased parent involvement and commitment
4. More positive teacher-student interactions with higher expectations
5. Positively reinforcing peer interactions



The stratified pattern of struggling students in low-performing schools within stressed, impoverished neighborhoods of low opportunity is intensifying and spreading.

To begin to address this challenge, we must think about how improving our neighborhoods will also improve our schools. We are locked in a mutually reinforcing cycle where poor neighborhoods contribute to poor schools and underperforming schools discourage families from choosing to live in an area where the housing market subsequently declines.

But the reverse is also true: comprehensive improvements to neighborhoods *and* schools will support and sustain both. To be clear, we understand that housing and community development policy is just *one* of many strategies to improve schools. But it is one that is frequently ignored.



Despite our understanding of this relationship and evidence urging us to act on it, our entrenched approach to education and housing/community development rarely unites the policy and planning of the two worlds. Too often educators and community developers do not even talk to each other, much less plan together and coordinate strategies. This guidebook represents an effort to begin this dialogue.

What We Know

Stable, thriving urban and suburban neighborhoods tend to have certain positive qualities in common, what economists call the “housing bundle” - all the components that embody what we call *home*.

The most fundamental is the affordability of quality housing, whether owned or rented.

Repeated research reviews over the past ten years suggest a strong correlation between housing and improved educational outcomes.

The Center for Housing Policy (the research arm of the National Housing Conference) finds that access to affordable housing is a significant contributor to a student’s academic performance.³



How Housing Quality & Stability Affects Children

Better Housing Quality

- Positively affects children's safety/health outcomes
- Leads to better school attendance rates and improved attentiveness
- Stress-free environment to complete homework



Better Residential Stability

- Uninterrupted school year
- Avoid disruptions caused by unplanned move
- Fewer school changes that leave kids behind academically



Better Affordable Housing

- Provides families with financial security
- Improves housing quality and stability
- Leads to better school and health outcomes for children



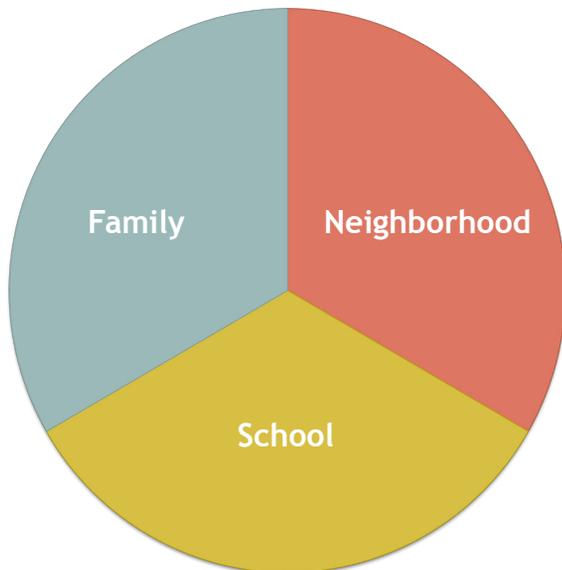
Better Neighborhood Location

- Improves household access to high-performing schools
- Community norms & values, day care availability and safety all contribute to improved school performance



*Based on "Housing as a Platform for Improving Education Outcomes among Low-Income Children" (The Urban Institute, May 2012)

Research demonstrates that "in-school factors account for only a third or less of the variation of test scores" between affluent and low-income students in the United States with a child's family and the neighborhood in which they live equally contributing to educational outcomes.



The socioeconomic achievement gap has widened by 30 to 40 percent in the last half century, paralleled since 2000 by an increase in areas of concentrated poverty in our communities.

More than 16 million American children are growing up in impoverished households, half of them in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty where 30 percent or more of households are at or below the federal poverty line.

The achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their counterparts in more affluent neighborhoods and schools may be worse than the most commonly relied upon measure has led us to believe.

Federal education laws, now enshrined in the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA), require states to report National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores separately for children identified as economically disadvantaged based on their eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL). The difference between those children's scores and the scores of children who are not eligible for subsidized meals defines "the achievement gap".



Yet recent research from the University of Michigan suggests that this default metric is concealing a much greater vulnerability for the smaller percentage of 8th grade students *who had met FRL criteria every year beginning in kindergarten.*

In Michigan these "persistently disadvantaged" students were about three grade levels behind their solidly middle class and affluent peers, compared to a two-grade level gap for all FRL-eligible 8th graders.

According to national data, children consistently FRL-eligible throughout elementary and middle school began kindergarten in households with incomes less than half that of their peers who ultimately were only occasionally FRL-eligible.⁴

In other words, the poorest of the poor are even further behind academically than students from families closer to the middle class periphery.

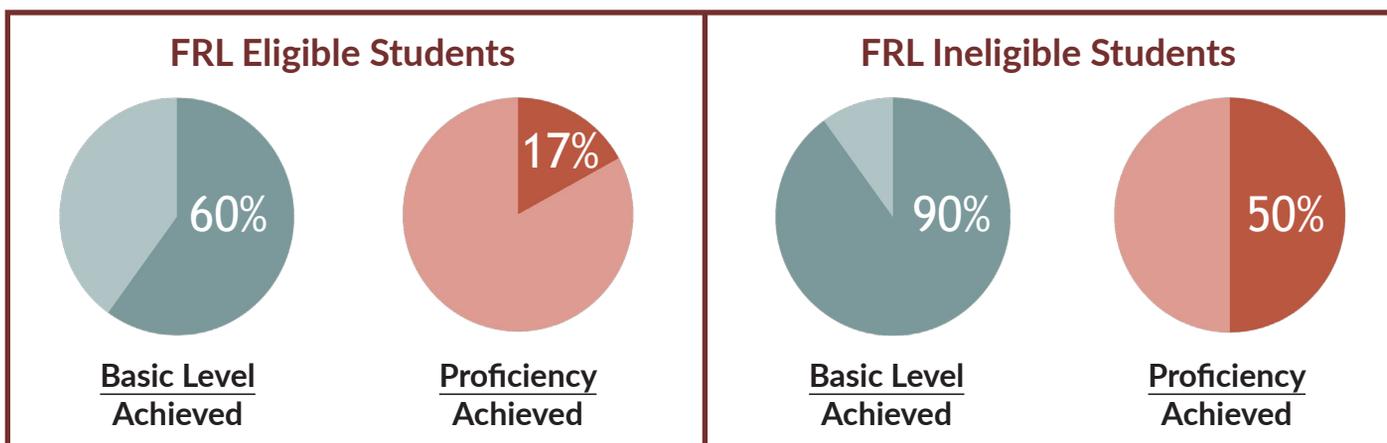


In 2015, approximately 40 percent of Virginia’s 8th grade students taking the NAEP were identified as “economically disadvantaged” based on FRL eligibility.

About 60 percent of them reached the *basic* level in both reading and math compared to almost 90 percent of their wealthier, FRL- ineligible peers.



Only 17 percent of them achieved *proficiency* in math and reading compared to an average of 50 percent of ineligible students.⁵ Data on Virginia’s “persistently disadvantaged” students comparable to that used in the Michigan study is not available, but Virginia’s substantial achievement gap is likely also even more of a gulf for our own poorest of the poor.



While neither the Michigan study nor our own data reveal anything about the neighborhoods economically disadvantaged families live in, we may speculate that “persistently disadvantaged” students from families with consistently very low incomes over many years are more likely to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and attend schools of low socioeconomic diversity.

The performance of schools serving impoverished urban neighborhoods validate the strong correlation between areas of concentrated poverty and low academic performance as represented by Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) scores, graduation rates, and school accreditation status.

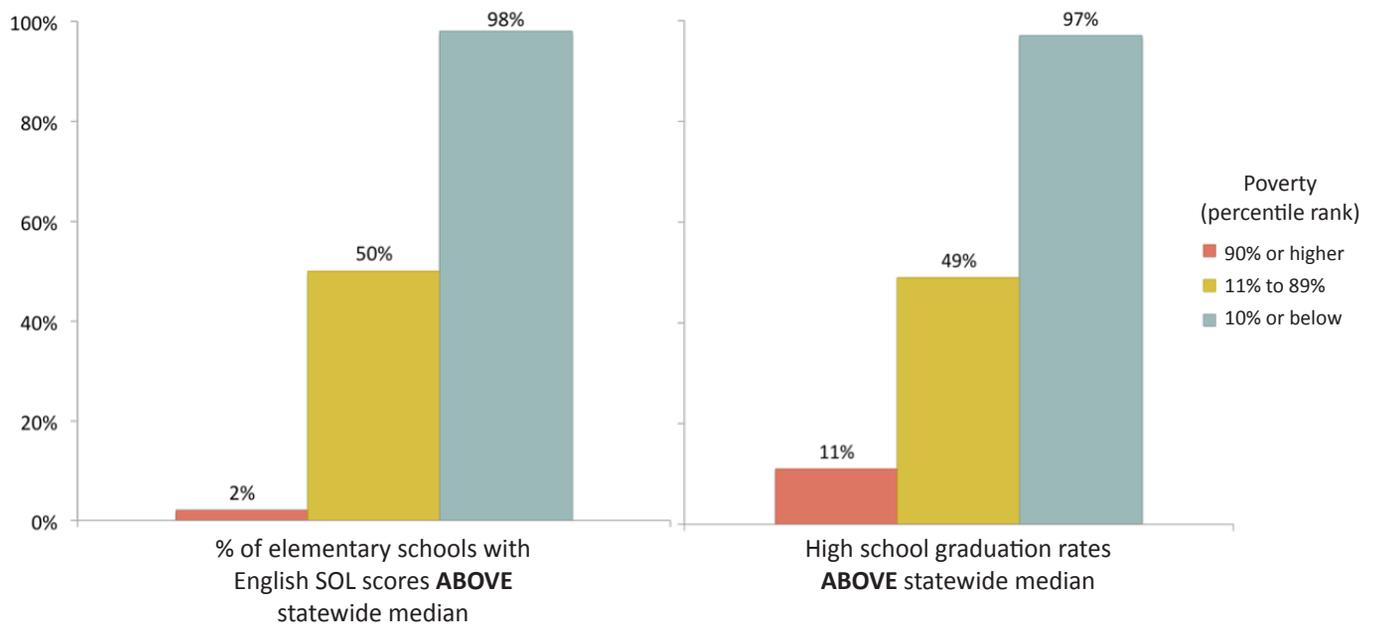
Virginia's highest poverty schools rarely make it above the state median for math and English exams, have lower graduation rates, and are less likely to be fully accredited than schools with greater socioeconomic diversity.⁶

In 2014, 15.9 % of children in Virginia were living in poverty. This was a 7% increase from 2013.

In 2014, 33 percent -- 624,000 children -- came from families burdened by housing costs that consumed more than 30 percent of their monthly pre-tax income.

Highest Poverty Schools Rarely Exceed State Median English SOL Test Scores and Have Lower Graduation Rates (2012-13 School Year)

Source: JLARC staff analysis of data from Virginia Department of Education



Students who attend racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are more likely:

- ✓ To achieve higher test scores and better grades
- ✓ To graduate from high school
- ✓ To attend and graduate from college



Students from these low-opportunity neighborhoods miss more days of school and are more likely to change schools during a school year than their more well-off peers,⁵ a symptom of the household instability that itself is a side effect of lack of quality, affordable housing in mixed-income neighborhoods.

Efforts to disrupt the trend of impoverished children falling further behind as their families become increasingly marginalized in low-opportunity neighborhoods are beginning to yield results that should not surprise us.

Low-income students attending socioeconomically integrated schools within mixed-income neighborhoods fare far better than their peers in schools with a greater proportion of impoverished students within areas of concentrated poverty.

Studies have found a well-defined link between student outcomes and their school's socioeconomic make-up, even when controlling for other factors, using more detailed socioeconomic measures, or comparing students randomly assigned to schools.⁷



Reversing the Trend

We cannot achieve the goal of improving educational opportunities and outcomes with quick - but not necessarily *lasting* - fixes that target schools while neglecting the neighborhoods they mirror.

Nor will we foster vibrant, desirable neighborhoods with ambitious redevelopment initiatives that leave schools and education decision-makers out of the planning.

Only by working together to invest our time, creativity, and resources in thoughtfully coordinated and complementary strategies that treat schools and neighborhoods as the mutually reinforcing system they are will we fulfill the promise of public education and strong, stable neighborhoods for all Virginia's children.

Many jurisdictions here and in other states have implemented their own initiatives and models that aim to do just that, and we can learn from them.



The Role of the Community Conversation

In 2014 Housing Virginia launched an initiative to focus on the nexus of housing and schools with two consecutive years of symposia that brought together hundreds of educators, housing and community development professionals, and community leaders to explore the crucial connection between strengthening neighborhoods and improving educational outcomes.

The next logical step was to bring the discussion and problem-solving home to the local level where most decisions shaping schools and neighborhoods are made in Virginia.



Virginia Delegate Betsy Carr (D-69th District) speaks with community leader and panelist Pastor Don Coleman (Richmond City School Board Chair, 2015) at the 2015 Housing & Schools Symposium

Communities large and small use different conversation models to respond to challenges and work through change without becoming hopelessly mired in conflict. The issues may be broad or narrow, typical or unique.

In the case of adversity-plagued schools and neighborhoods in populous cities and suburbs, the causes and consequences are nearly universal, but their uniquely historical, cultural, economic, and political factors rule out a one size fits all approach even for jurisdictions within the same region.

That's why Housing Virginia wants to equip jurisdictions with the tools and resources to decide for themselves how best to shape a dialogue that eliminates the artificial barrier between education and community development and to engage in planning for better schools and neighborhoods together.

What a Community Conversation is... and What it isn't

The goal of a community conversation is to find common ground, forge partnerships, and recommend policy strategies based on shared aspirations, best practices, and a commitment to innovation.

It is not a bull session, political debate, forum, free-for-all, or a sales pitch for any agenda. It is a structured and guided process designed to bring together community leaders usually not found in the same room, diffuse divisiveness, and inject fresh thinking into long-standing problems.

In this case, it is *not* a meeting about schools or one about community planning, but rather an opportunity to knit those two together and re-view possible solutions. These solutions are both short term and long term, transformative and incremental, easy to implement and challenging.

A menu of alternatives allows participants to find the right mix for their community and the pace of change that is realistic.



GETTING STARTED

Housing Virginia recommends holding a series of community conversations, each building on those before it, over the course of a year.

It may be helpful to plan according to a quarterly schedule of activities such as the simplified chart below. You can expand on this and continually adjust in response to circumstances as they arise.

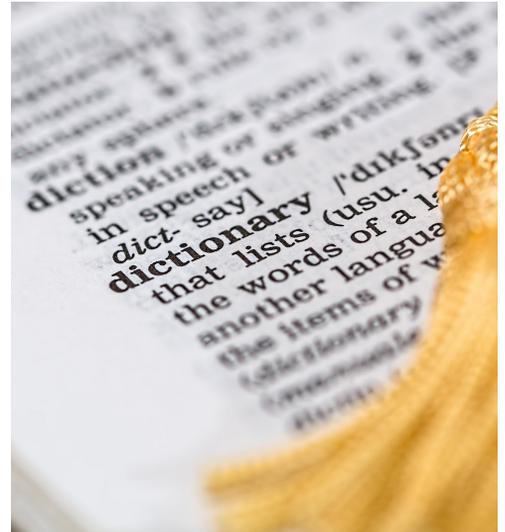
ACTIVITIES	1 ST QUARTER	2 ND QUARTER	3 RD QUARTER	4 TH QUARTER
Organization/leadership development				
Data collection				
Messaging/communication				
Data analysis, findings				
Introductory meetings				
Review options/best practices				
Advanced meetings				
Develop recommendations				

What's Your Story?

The importance of message framing and getting the language right

It's impossible to overstate the importance of language and communication style to the success of a community conversation on this topic. Schools and neighborhood development can be a highly emotional issue for parents, teachers, and other community members. Strike the wrong note in an invitation or opening presentation and you risk losing the people you most need to reach.

Public relations professionals refer to this as developing the right “frame” to present an approach to an issue, and its first step is to simply consider the perspectives and perceptions of others.



The message an audience receives depends as much on their individual beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences as on the speaker's intent and meaning. If you give careful consideration to the language you use and the response it may provoke, you will be more likely to successfully deliver a message with its intended meaning intact.

Decide early the story you want to tell and how to tell it. All your communication throughout the process should be consistent with that story's framework. Housing Virginia may be able to provide support from public relations/communications professionals for this part of the process.

Some tips for message framing:

- Appeal to universal values
- Avoid insider jargon
- Steer clear of language with negative connotations
- Acknowledge challenges without any implication of fault
- Choose language that is inclusive, not alienating or potentially offensive
- Re-evaluate commonly used terms and consider alternatives
- Ask yourself: what is my intended meaning and does my way of expressing it convey that meaning? Does it imply anything else?

The Tools You Need

Housing Virginia will provide its local community conversation partners with a demographic picture of their jurisdiction - not just its current state, but how things are changing. Relevant data and geographic mapping deliver compelling images that combine measures of educational attainment and socioeconomic well-being.

Community conversation partners will receive a standard package of data and maps that includes:

NEIGHBORHOODS / HOUSING

- Distribution of assisted housing overlaid with proximity to high opportunity schools
- Changes in median home values
- % of households that are cost-burdened
- Indicators of housing quality
- % of households at or below federal poverty line
- % of households with income below \$45,000
- Changes in areas of concentrated poverty
- Changes in rental/ownership patterns

SCHOOLS

- School demographics
- Absenteeism rates
- Suspension rates

Percentage of students...

- Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch for all elementary schools
- Proficient/advanced proficient 3rd grade reading and math
- Enrolled in AP high school courses
- Taking SAT/ACT
- Graduating on time



SOLs: A blunt instrument we can't ignore

Virginia's Standards of Learning and standardized tests in general do not have a big fan following. Most everyone agrees that some form of testing is an unavoidable component of evaluating academic achievement but that the tests themselves are flawed. Efforts to reform testing and changes in test administration inevitably create challenges in comparing scores over time.

Housing Virginia recognizes those limitations and knows that SOL scores are not a mirror held up to any child or school. Yet they play a critical role: parents with options consider SOL scores and accreditation status when considering where to move or whether to enroll their child in a public school, and SOL scores are a factor in federal accountability that identifies Priority, Focus, and Reward schools.⁸ We include SOL scores in our demographic mapping, but we include many other education-based measures to round out the picture.

PHASE ONE

Organize, Recruit Leaders, and Initiate Process

Begin as you mean to go on and don't be in a hurry to hold a community conversation before you're ready.

Take the time to determine your goals for a community conversation and how best to achieve them.

During PHASE ONE, you will:

1. Form a working group
2. Identify goals and core issues
3. Develop format for conversations
4. Recruit participants
5. Finalize schedule
6. Prepare for meetings

Who is at the Table?

Who is involved in the start of the conversation is a key strategic consideration. While the very term "community conversation" may seem to imply the broadest participation, it is not to be confused with a public forum.



You will want to structure your community conversation to encourage focused attention on your goal: gaining a better understanding of how schools and neighborhoods mutually influence one another and developing community-based strategies for nurturing both.

And you will want to make sure your participants include the most engaged leaders who share this goal.

1. FORM YOUR STEERING COMMITTEE

Or “leadership team”, “planning committee”, “working group”, or something catchier. This is a small, highly capable group of three to five people already motivated by a shared commitment to address the interdependence of schools and neighborhoods.

The working group’s role is to plan and implement the community conversation with support from others as needed.

- The group must be large enough to avoid undue burden on one or two individuals, yet nimble enough to make decisions efficiently
- This is not the place to introduce a person who may be confrontational or divisive within the community or who is running for elected office or planning to do so - engagement with public officials is for later in the process
- Go beyond the “usual suspects” to bring new energy to the planning work
- Strive for broad representation from the business, nonprofit, faith, housing, and education sectors



2. IDENTIFY GOALS AND CORE ISSUES, FINE-TUNE YOUR MESSAGE

In order to plan and conduct a community conversation that advances and articulates understanding of your community's unique strengths and challenges, you will need to clarify and hone what is up for discussion. You also will want to craft message guidelines to ensure consistency throughout your community conversation process.

If this becomes a stumbling block, or your community is experiencing notable conflict around these issues, Housing Virginia can recommend resources for assistance with message framing.

In addition:

- Review minutes or notes and reports from any previous public meetings on education and community revitalization. If the issue has been subject to prior debate and activity, be sure you thoroughly understand what has already happened before beginning a new process.
- Examine agendas from past planning commission and board of supervisors meetings for relevant items and review minutes for public comment, discussion, and decisions (in the case of large or high profile projects, the information likely will be familiar to working group members)
- Consider the concerns and problems consistently rising to the surface in the local media and other venues
- Evaluate the evidence - formal and anecdotal - for dominant themes
- Identify broad, key issue areas to focus on. Some of these should be school-focused and some neighborhood / housing-focused. The tendency will be for the group to default to a traditional “schools” discussion, which you will want to balance with strong housing / community development participation.



3. DEVELOP FORMAT FOR CONVERSATIONS

Housing Virginia envisions a series of conversations that progress in scale while sharpening in focus. Beginning with a small group having a broad dialogue, each conversation expands the circle of participants and hones in on specific solutions for their community.



There is no rigid, prescribed model to replicate because communities need the flexibility to respond to external events and unpredictable reactions to the conversation process that may slow down or accelerate the pace or warrant mid-course adjustments.

Basic format for each community conversation:



1. An **introductory presentation** to all participants that buttresses school-neighborhood policy / planning alignment and explains the community conversation framework



2. **Small group discussion** led by facilitators / conversation leaders - allow participants to air concerns, ask questions, and find common ground before moving on to evaluation of possible strategies



3. **Concluding summary** and next steps with all participants to inform the agenda for the next meeting

4. IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS AND RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS



Be sure to reach beyond “the usual suspects” for an inclusive process that represents a true cross-section of your community.

- Have members of the working group individually list key stakeholders and recommend participants
- Together agree on key stakeholders and compile a list of participants to invite (and who is the best person to make the invitation, which may be someone outside of the core working group)
- Develop a script to consistently describe the community conversation and its value
- Invite people personally and follow up to confirm participation
- While you will want to include elected and appointed government bodies (i.e., Board of Supervisors or City Council, Planning Commission) you will need to consider limitations on their meetings and possibly identify one representative member with an alternate (such as the chair)

5. CHOOSE LOCATION AND ARRANGE MEETINGS

The location of a community conversation is an influential factor on participation and effectiveness. It needs to be accessible, welcoming, and comfortable (in every sense). Most essentially, it should be a neutral space that is not associated with a specific stakeholder.

Locations should be:

- Centrally located
- Widely perceived as part of the community
- Low to no cost
- Accessible by public transportation to a large group
- Served by ample parking
- Able to accommodate a presentation to a large group
- Equipped with spaces that allow for small group meetings without becoming too noisy or distracting

PREFERRED



Public libraries



Community centers



Places of worship



Recreation centers



Businesses



Other community institutions

NOT RECOMMENDED



Government buildings



Schools



Private clubs



Hotels & conference centers

6. PREPARE FOR MEETING(S)



Develop presentation with resources from Housing Virginia (See Phase Two)



Organize materials (sign-in sheets, nametags, copies of handouts, clipboards if space does not include tables, pens and pencils, flip charts and markers, instructions for small group facilitators)



Recruit your small group leaders. They do not have to be trained facilitators, but some experience guiding group discussions is a plus. Great listeners able to maintain objectivity and a schedule are ideal.



Anticipate and arrange for all “housekeeping” details



Confirm participant RSVPs



Send meeting details and directions at least two weeks in advance with a follow-up two to three days prior to the scheduled conversation

PHASE TWO

Frame the Issues and Launch the Conversation

1. REGISTRATION

Decide small discussion group assignments in advance based on confirmed participants.

As much as possible, balance groups with individuals representing different perspectives and give consideration to individual personalities and dynamics to the extent that your working group is aware of them.

- To facilitate an efficient and timely start, have more than one volunteer handle registration
- Make sure participants sign in and provide contact information
- Provide participants with their small group assignments and any materials they need for small groups
- Make sure that small group meeting areas are easy to find and conspicuously labeled



Assign tables ahead of time with numbered stickers on participants' name tags for quick and easy group assignments

2. PLENARY PRESENTATION



Both housing developers and members of the local School Board speaking on a plenary panel discussion

The introductory presentation should be brief and focus on the key elements of this new strategy for linking school performance with neighborhood / housing vitality.

One approach would be to have an educator and a community development practitioner share the presentation. This is a role(s) for your working group's most experienced and engaging public speakers who can energize and inspire participants. Carefully manage time devoted to questions and stay on track.

Housing Virginia will provide a template for a standard presentation that will include:

- An overview of how schools and neighborhoods influence each other
- The educational benefits of mixed-income neighborhoods
- Up-to-date statistics on the economic and educational well-being of children in the community
- Data and mapping specific to your jurisdiction that shows community and educational status as well as trends
- Examples of promising or successful initiatives in other communities

Your presenter will also want to cover:

- An explanation of the purpose and process of the community conversation
- Ground rules for small group discussions
- Clear expectations of how information gathered will be shared and used

3. SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

We recommend you assign to each small group a conversation leader whose role is to steer the discussion without participating in it. Small groups may include independent exercises, working in pairs, and sharing information with the group.

How you structure this process and what tools you use will be up to you, but you will want to go after this kind of information:

1. Shared values
2. Community and school strengths
3. Obstacles and challenges
4. Community and school needs
5. Review and rank possible strategies



Here are some examples of guiding questions:

1. What are the top three reasons you live in this city/county?
2. What influenced your choice of neighborhood?
3. How would you describe your city/county to a newcomer?
4. Would you say your city/county is more or less stratified than 5 years ago, or about the same?
5. Do you feel that your neighborhood reflects the demographics of your city/county?
6. If you have school-aged children and any of them are in public schools, what are your reasons for enrolling in our public schools?
7. If your children have never attended your public schools, what influenced that decision?
8. If you have a child that was enrolled in public school, but you have since chosen to home-school or enroll in private school, what contributed to that decision?

Your work group will develop a matrix of policy options to consider and discuss during the community conversations. The options in the matrix will include both short- and long- term strategies that are school- or neighborhood-focused and others that combine strategies. The following is an example of such a matrix.

Please note that this is just one example of a set of policy matrices. Each community should develop their own strategies that fit best within their local context. This is by no means an exhaustive list of policies from which to choose. In fact, Housing Virginia encourages participants to research and include relevant policies beyond those listed here.

FIG. 1-A EXAMPLE POLICY MATRIX FOR EDUCATION

SHORT TERM EDUCATION	LONG TERM EDUCATION
Develop and support new regional magnet schools and/or magnet schools within divisions	Develop and support a system of regional magnet schools
Develop and support voluntary diversity and equity plans within demographically changing school divisions	Develop and support voluntary regional diversity and equity education plan
Pilot inter-district transfer program with diversity and equity priorities	Develop and sustain inter-district transfer program with diversity and equity priorities
Support school closure and zoning processes that include diversity and equity as guiding principles and priorities	
Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) advocacy - add diversity to accountability framework, integration as a Title I intervention	

FIG. 1-B EXAMPLE POLICY MATRIX FOR HOUSING

SHORT TERM HOUSING	LONG TERM HOUSING
<p>Additional vouchers for Moving to Opportunity in communities where concentrations of poverty exist. Create strategies to target high opportunity school attendance zones by using measures such as HUD’s Proficiency Index.</p>	<p>Expand housing mobility programs - target families with young children and help them move to higher opportunity schools. Add schools as part of the metric.</p> <p>Provide more counseling and support services to high poverty families that move to communities of opportunity.</p>
<p>Provide state tax credits to private landlords in high performing school zones that will accept housing vouchers.</p>	<p>Build a “good schools” preference into the awards system for affordable housing programs such as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC). Build stronger connections between LIHTC and Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) strategies. State allocation plan (QAP) for tax credits should provide a high priority for locating new family development in school districts or zones that have low poverty and good performance. General presumption against awarding credits to housing in high poverty areas unless there is a broad-based plan for community improvement and mixed income housing.</p>
<p>Provide “case management” support to voucher families with children who are seeking to relocate to high performing school districts.</p>	<p>Implement Inclusionary Housing Policies in suburban communities that encourage and facilitate the production of affordable housing. Examples are affordable dwelling unit (ADU) ordinances, proactive zoning for affordable housing, establishing affordability targets, etc.</p>
<p>Create a state level work group to follow up on the joint letter from HUD, DOT and DOE on policy coordination.</p>	<p>Strengthen state comp plan requirements - especially with regard to the “affordable housing” component.</p>
<p>Use AFFH HUD data to assess and track progress in jurisdictions meeting goals to deconcentrate poverty / create affordable housing in low poverty communities. Create a scorecard / rating by locality.</p>	

FIG. 1-C EXAMPLE POLICY MATRIX FOR JOINT POLICIES

SHORT TERM EDUCATION <u>AND</u> HOUSING	LONG TERM EDUCATION <u>AND</u> HOUSING
Pilot collaborative structures for school and housing officials to work together (e.g., creation of executive offices/departments, task forces or commissions, appoint local housing official to sit on school boards and vice versa, regional planning commissions, quarterly exchanges). Implement at both local and regional levels.	Create a new governing agency or position responsible for helping to bridge school-housing worlds. Bring resources and expertise together. Help communities be proactive and engage in processes related to new schools/development and zoning/housing development earlier. Such efforts should be at both the local and regional scale.
Set regional and local goals for diversity in schools and housing.	Build plans for HUD’s Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) requirement that ties new housing opportunity and quality schools together.
State and local school organizations should consider housing patterns in their decisions about school construction and location of new schools. Housing entities at state and local levels should be thinking intentionally about where schools are located and what kinds of schools they are when making housing program decisions.	Target housing and community development resources to the revitalization of communities surrounding low performing schools - attract middle income families back to these neighborhoods.
Discussion of school boundary lines should take into account residential patterns of race and poverty.	Develop and implement best practices for coordination and joint planning between housing authorities and schools in the redevelopment of older public housing communities.
Create a subcabinet work group in Virginia for the Secretary of Commerce and Trade and the Secretary of Education - including DHCD, VHDA and DOE (expand Children’s Cabinet Working Group) to develop state strategies.	Target some state housing resources to the redevelopment of older public housing and other existing affordable housing when combined with school improvement strategies.
	Create a new state housing tax credit that is tied to schools (i.e., affordable housing in communities of opportunity and market rate housing in revitalization areas)

4. CLOSING

Bring discussion groups back together for the conclusion to your conversation.

- Have each small group leader *briefly* summarize their discussion
- Explain clearly your next steps and what participants can expect according to your timeline
- Welcome any follow-up questions or comments and make sure to provide your preferred contact name and method
- Thank your participants and acknowledge their investment of time and energy and their commitment to your community
- Within a few days follow up with an e-mail to all participants and ask for feedback which you may use to fine-tune remaining conversations



PHASE THREE

Widen the Circle and Share Recommendations

Synthesizing the results of your conversations into a bundle of recommendations has two parts: building community support and delivering to local decision-makers. Skipping or skimping on the first step will limit or even eliminate the effectiveness of the second step. Without the favor of citizens who will be most directly impacted - parents and neighbors - your proposals will lack credibility.

Putting the results of your community conversation into the hands and before the eyes of local decision-makers moves your process into the arena of action. How you present your recommendations and in what form will influence the attention they receive and the role your steering committee and the new movement for schools and neighborhoods takes in your locality.

Now is the time for broad public engagement. Hold meetings that are open to the public and/or arrange for agenda time at PTA and neighborhood/civic association meetings. Use these occasions to make your case.

After each community conversation, take the time to organize and store all original materials. Being used to telling the story of your process will be important.

Suggestions for preparing recommendations:

1. Do not use a single lengthy, text-heavy report
2. Consider multiple formats (i.e., one-page summary, slide set, full report)
3. Make the evaluation of strategies the centerpiece of your results
4. Emphasize those policy best practices that have support from all areas of your jurisdiction, but do not omit any apparent neighborhood-specific preferences
5. Synthesize and condense themes as accurately and succinctly as possible. Do not leave summarizing of concerns or comments to just one member of your committee, and have others review any summaries. Consider including all verbatim comments in an appendix or noting that they are available.



Strategic Considerations:

1. Be sure to follow up each community conversation with communication to participants. Keep them updated on your progress and share your recommendations with all participants at the same time you release them formally.
2. Decide the best approach to take with elected officials. If you decide to present your recommendations to your Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, and School Board as an agenda item at a work session or a regular meeting, you will need to arrange for this in advance.
3. Consider what other key groups are appropriate for a formal presentation, such as your local Chamber of Commerce and Realtors® Association.



Preparing for media attention and expanded communications

Your steering committee should consider the following:

1. When is the right time to publicly announce results and recommendations?
2. Who is the best spokesperson to consistently serve as your public representative and contact?
3. What traditional media outlets (local, regional) will you target?
4. Will you employ social media?
5. What are your key messages and supporting evidence?
6. How will you respond - or *not* respond - to criticism or attacks?



As a part of this process you will need to create and distribute talking points that summarize your core message.

PHASE FOUR

What Comes Next: Sustaining the Housing-Schools Connection

A community conversation is not an end in itself; if it is successful, it is just the beginning as inertia turns to momentum. To plan for progress:



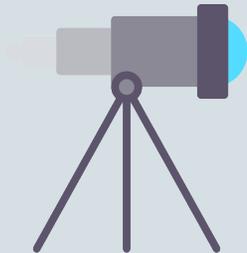
Listen to all responses of your findings and be sure you understand them clearly.



Don't dismiss doubts or differing opinions, welcome critics to the ongoing conversation



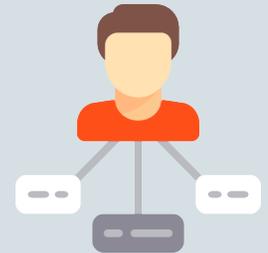
Perservere and take action on what is achievable in the short-term



Develop a game plan for mid-term and long-term objectives



Continue to meet regularly as a steering committee



Nurture new stakeholder relationships



Respond as a steering committee to community issues and proposals as they arise

The ultimate goal is to enact changes in policies for both education and community development. Every process will lead to a different strategy.

But the key is to sustain forward momentum - whether incremental opportunities to seize low-hanging fruit or transformational change - and to always develop a clear set of next steps and a time frame for action.

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GLOSSARY

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) Rule

The AFFH Final Rule includes a requirement for certain HUD grantees (Public Housing Authorities and Community Development Block Grant Consolidated Planning agencies) to conduct an Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH) planning process. The AFH planning process will help communities analyze challenges to fair housing choice and establish their own goals and priorities to address the fair housing barriers in their community.

Affordable Housing

In general, housing for which the occupant(s) is/are paying no more than 30 percent of his or her gross income for housing costs, including utilities.

Children's Cabinet of Virginia

Established in 2014 by Governor McAuliffe, the Children's Cabinet aims to eradicate the achievement gap in schools in high poverty communities, improve early childhood care and education, increase access to basic needs (housing, healthcare, proper nutrition), improve outcomes for youth transitioning into and out of Virginia's juvenile justice, mental health, and foster care systems, and increase workforce opportunities for parents.

Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA)

This 2015 bipartisan measure reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students. The previous version of the law, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, was enacted in 2002.

Extremely Low-Income Household

Households with incomes below 30 percent of the area median income.

Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

A measure of income issued every year by the Department of Health and Human Services. Federal poverty levels are used to determine eligibility for certain programs and benefits. In 2016, the FPL for a family of 4 is \$24,300.

Focus School

A Focus School is a Title I school that has room for improvement in areas that are specific to the school, in terms of either very low graduation rates or very wide in-school or statewide proficiency gaps.

Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL)

A student from a household with an income at or below 130 percent of the poverty income threshold is eligible for free lunch. A student from a household with an income between 130 percent and up to 185 percent of the poverty threshold is eligible for reduced price lunch under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

High-Opportunity Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods with variables indicative of high opportunity, such as the availability of sustainable employment, high-performing schools, a safe environment, and safe neighborhoods.

Low-Income Household

Households whose combined income does not exceed 80 percent of the median family income for the area.

Low-Opportunity Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods with variables indicative of impediments to opportunity, such as high neighborhood poverty, poorly performing schools, high crime rates, and high unemployment rates.

Mixed-Income Development

A type of development that includes families at various income levels. Mixed-income developments are intended to promote de-concentration of poverty and give lower-income households access to improved amenities.

Moving to Opportunity (for Fair Housing) Program

MTO is a 10-year HUD research demonstration that combines tenant-based rental assistance with housing counseling to help very low-income families move from poverty-stricken urban areas to low-poverty neighborhoods.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

The largest nationally representative and continuing assessment in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history, and in Technology and Engineering Literacy (TEL).

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions.

Priority School

A Priority school is a school that has been identified as among the lowest-performing five percent of Title I schools in the state over a number of years, or any non-Title I school that would otherwise have met the same criteria.

Reward School

A Reward School is a school with outstanding student achievement or growth over a number of years in terms of performance or progress over a number of years.

School Proficiency Index

The HUD School Proficiency Index uses school-level data on the performance of fourth grade students on state exams to describe which neighborhoods have high-performing elementary schools and which are near lower performing elementary schools.

Very Low-Income Household

Households whose incomes do not exceed 50 percent of the median area income for the area.



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