

### RESEARCH BRIEF

## Effects of housing subsidies and community social support on school attendance

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

*The importance of place-based programming to improve child outcomes has long been emphasized in the academic and non-profit sectors. Place-based programs support individuals and the larger community, capitalizing on evidence that children and families do better when living in strong, supportive communities. This project examined the relationship between community-level social supports and student school attendance in two place-based programs.*

### BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The importance of place-based programming to improve child outcomes has long been emphasized in the academic and non-profit sectors. Place-based programs capitalize on evidence that children and families do better when living in strong, supportive communities (Maholmes, 2014). Unfortunately, for families experiencing homelessness or housing instability, leveraging the resources of a supportive community can be difficult (Shinn & Khadduri, 2020). Policy initiatives, such as the Homework Starts with Home (HSWH) program funded by the state of Minnesota, can function to stabilize housing for families, but subsidies alone may fall short in integrating families into supportive community structures.



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**WRAP-AROUND SERVICES THAT HELP INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES ACCESS COMMUNITY RESOURCES HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO BE BENEFICIAL FOR YOUTH WHO ARE HOMELESS OR EXPERIENCING HOUSING INSTABILITY. THERE IS LIMITED DATA, HOWEVER ON WRAP-AROUND MODELS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.**  
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Wrap-around services that help individuals and families access community resources have been shown to be beneficial for youth who are homeless or experiencing housing instability (Smith Ramey et al., 2021). There is limited data, however, on the effect of wrap-around models and academic achievement. This project aimed to fill this gap by examining the interaction between rental assistance and community-level social supports and how they may impact student attendance, which is closely related to academic achievement (Gottfried, 2010).

Beginning in 2014 the state of Minnesota implemented a pilot program to provide rental assistance through grants to programs serving families at risk of homelessness with a school-aged child. Two of the initial programs were located in the Twin Cities, largely administered through two Promise Neighborhood organizations (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) with federal funding to provide additional social support to the neighborhoods they reside in.

To understand the impact of state-led rental assistance with neighborhood-level social supports on student achievement we answered the following questions:

- 1. Is school attendance associated with additional neighborhood supports for youth in families receiving rental assistance?**
- 2. How do rental assistance and additional neighborhood social supports impact student attendance over time?**



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## METHODS

*This study used an integrated approach to administrative data to evaluate student attendance in a group of students whose families were enrolled in the HSWH pilot rental assistance program and in a demographically matched group of comparison students not in the program. Regression analyses assessed the effects of housing and community support on student attendance from 2013 - 2017.*

Through Minn-LInK, data from the Minnesota Department of Education Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System for students in Kindergarten - 8th grade were integrated with rental assistance data from the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and shelter data from the Minnesota Homeless Management Information System using a probabilistic matching process via LinkPlus (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

The analysis involved two aims: First, multi-level regression models were used to understand the effects of the HSWH pilot on student attendance in the pilot (n=423), controlling for sex and race/ethnicity in each school year from 2013 - 2017 and longitudinally during the same period. Second, similar analyses were run for three samples, including 1) students whose families were enrolled in the rental assistance program and attended Promise Neighborhood schools (n=87); 2) students whose families were *not* enrolled in the rental assistance program and did *not* attend Promise

Neighborhood schools at the beginning of the rental assistance program (n=145); and 3) students whose families were enrolled in the rental assistance program but did *not* attend Promise Neighborhood schools at the beginning of the rental assistance program (n=132). An analysis of students attending Promise Neighborhood schools but whose families were not in the rental assistance program was planned but not completed due to small sample size (n=14). Demographic characteristics of the study sample are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study sample**

	Aim 1 (n = 425)	Group 1 (n = 87)	Aim 2 Group 2 (n = 145)	Group 3 (n = 132)
<b>Female</b>	204	39	69	63
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
American Indian or Alaskan Native	12	0	4	1
Asian or Pacific Islander	11	1	4	3
Hispanic	35	4	6	2
Black, not of Hispanic Origin	327	80	126	121
White, not of Hispanic Origin	40	2	5	5
Received Rental Assistance	100%	100%	0%	0%
Attended PN School at Pilot Start	58%	100%	0%	0%
Ever Attended PN School	58%	100%	4%	33%

*Note: School enrollment at the beginning of the rental assistance pilot was used to assign groups. As a result, some students in Aim 2, groups 2 and 3 attended a Promise Neighborhood school at some point during the study period.*

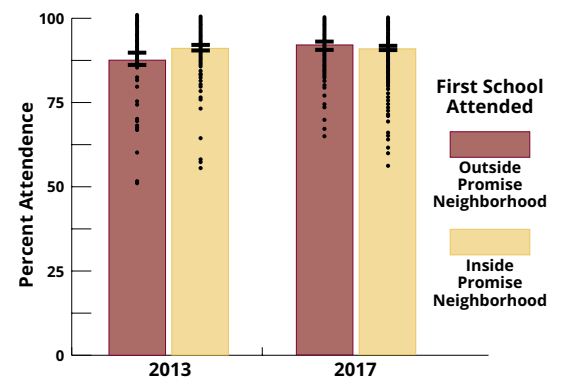
## FINDINGS

*Students who attended Promise Neighborhood schools exhibited higher school attendance than students attending schools outside these neighborhoods in 2013 and 2014. Receiving rental assistance was also associated with higher student attendance: students attending schools outside the Promise Neighborhoods and whose families received housing support showed significant improvement in school attendance over time.*

### Aim 1: Student attendance associated with Promise Neighborhood School enrollment in the HSWH pilot

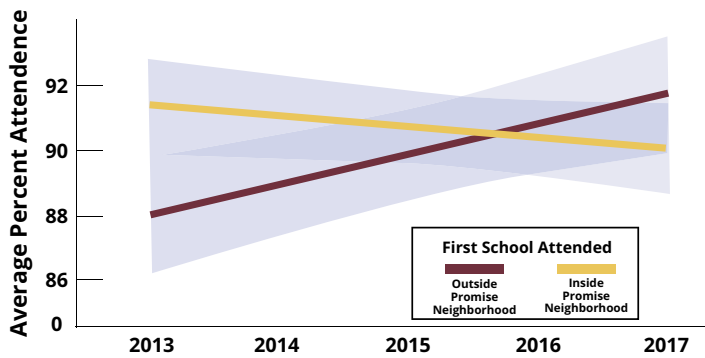
The first set of analyses investigated attendance rates for those children whose families participated in the HSWH pilot rental assistance program. Among these students, some attended schools within the Promise Neighborhoods in St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN while others attended schools outside of these neighborhoods. Linear regression results indicated that students enrolled in Promise Neighborhood schools attended school at a higher rate than students not enrolled in Promise Neighborhood schools in 2013 and 2014 (91% vs 87%,  $t(134.25) = -1.96, p = 0.05$ ; and 92% vs. 88%,  $t(135.47) = -2.17, p = 0.03$ , respectively). There were no differences between the groups in the subsequent three years, however. Figure 1 includes representative visualizations of these effects in the 2013 and 2017 school years.

**Figure 1. Percent Attendance by School Location in 2013 and 2017**



*Note: Black dots represent individual data points and error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error from the mean.*

**Figure 2. Average Percent Attendance by First School Attended**



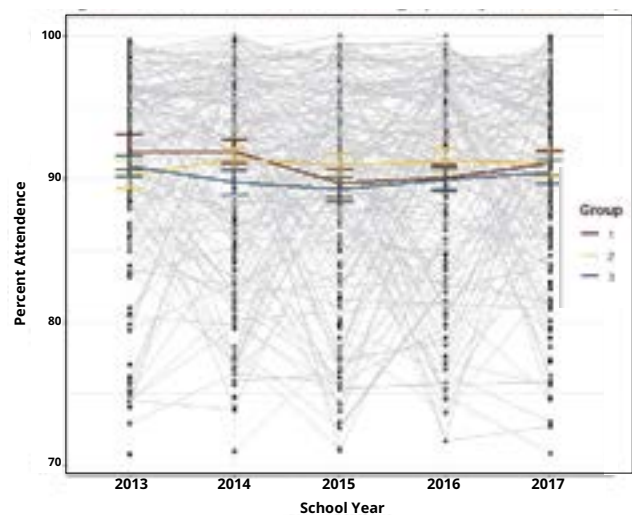
Note: Gray shaded regions indicate a 95% confidence interval.

When assessed across all years of the study, a significant interaction emerged between school year and Promise Neighborhood school attendance (interaction term estimate = 0.012, 95% CI = [-0.020, -0.005]; Figure 2). This model indicated that students whose families were receiving rental assistance and were enrolled in Promise Neighborhood schools at the beginning of the study maintained their attendance rates from 2013 to 2017 (simple slope estimate = -0.0033, 95% CI = [-0.0074, 0.0001]). In contrast, students whose families were receiving rental assistance but were not attending Promise Neighborhood schools showed significant improvement in school attendance from 2013 to 2017 on the order of approximately 1% increase in attendance per year (simple slope estimate = 0.0092, 95% CI = [0.0029, 0.0155]). At this rate and assuming a standard 165-day school year, students whose families received rental assistance but did not attend Promise Neighborhood schools were estimated to attend 1.52 days more each year from 2013 - 2017. These results reveal that receiving rental assistance (but not attending a Promise Neighborhood school) is associated with increasing school attendance, while attending a school within a Promise Neighborhood is associated with maintaining high, stable school attendance in students experiencing homelessness or housing instability. These results further suggest that rental assistance may be especially beneficial for students that do not attend schools located within neighborhoods that offer additional, formalized social supports. While there does not appear to be an additive effect of receiving rental assistance and attending school in a neighborhood with formalized social support, such an effect may emerge in future research investigating student attendance over a longer period following rental assistance receipt. Nonetheless, the pattern of results reported here suggest that increasing neighborhood social supports and providing rental assistance can maintain and/or improve school attendance among students experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

## Aim 2: Effects of additional social support and housing subsidies in the HSWH pilot and demographically matched groups

The second set of analyses examining student attendance included a larger group of students than the first and included students whose families were participating in the pilot rental assistance program as well as those that were not participating. In the larger sample including these demographically matched students, the effects of attending a Promise Neighborhood school were again not a significant predictor of school attendance from 2013 to 2017 (fixed effect estimate = 0.006, 95% CI = [-0.008, 0.020]). Attendance rates for the three groups described in the methods section above (i.e., rental assistance with Promise Neighborhood school [group 1], no rental assistance or Promise Neighborhood school [group 2], rental assistance without Promise Neighborhood school [group 3]) were examined longitudinally. Results showed no difference in school attendance among groups (group 1 vs. group 2: fixed effect estimate = -0.01, 95% CI = [-0.029, 0.008]; group 1 vs. group 3: fixed effect estimate = -0.02, 95% CI = [-0.037, 0.001]; group 2 vs. group 3: fixed effect estimate = -0.01, 95% CI = [-0.025, 0.009]; see Figure 3). While these results indicate little effect on student attendance during the early years of the pilot rental assistance program, for demographically matched groups, there are important contextual factors that may influence the results. Most notably, student attendance may not change immediately upon a family's entrance into a rental assistance program and some of the included students had only received the rental assistance in the last year of the study period. Follow-up analyses focused on the years after 2017 are needed to determine whether student attendance increases significantly following multiple years of stable housing.

**Figure 3. Longitudinal Attendance Patterns in Demographically Matched Groups**



Note. Percent attendance from 2013 to 2017 in three groups of students: 1) students whose families were enrolled in the rental assistance program and attended Promise Neighborhood schools at the beginning of the rental assistance program (N = 87); 2) students whose families were not enrolled in the rental assistance program and did not attend Promise Neighborhood schools at the beginning of the rental assistance program (N = 145); and 3) students whose families were enrolled in the rental assistance program but did not attend Promise Neighborhood schools at the beginning of the rental assistance program (N = 132). Black dots represent percent attendance for individual students each year, light gray lines depict individual attendance trajectories, and error bars represent one standard error from the mean.

## Conclusion

Results suggest that neighborhood supports and rental assistance may promote school attendance. Among families receiving state-funded rental assistance, students who attended Promise Neighborhood schools showed stable attendance while those who did not attend Promise Neighborhood schools had initially lower but increasing attendance rates, reaching levels similar to Promise Neighborhood students over time. In the short term, rental assistance plus neighborhood supports did not boost attendance beyond either one alone. Follow-up analyses comparing the student attendance of three demographically matched groups, including students from families not receiving housing support, did not reveal differences in school attendance.

Several important factors may contribute to this pattern of results.

Only students in grades K – 8 were included due to the concentration of elementary and middle schools in the Promise Neighborhoods in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Improved housing stability may have more impact on high school students who are responsible for making their own way to school. Another consideration for younger children is the impact of transitioning into new housing. Students whose families enrolled in rental assistance may have experienced a housing transition into new housing, requiring time to adjust to a new environment. These kinds of transitions, in the context of other stressors, are known to be impactful for children (Morris et al., 2017) and may affect caregiver’s capacity to transport students to school. A final point concerns the small sample size of students attending Promise Neighborhood schools but whose families were not receiving rental assistance. Place-based programs, like the Promise Neighborhoods, are well-positioned to identify families that qualify for housing subsidies and other supports. Only 14 students whose families may have qualified for the rental assistance did not benefit from the program, resulting in unbalanced sample sizes and removal of these students. However, this may also indicate that subsidies coordinated by place-based organizations are well-positioned to identify and help students and families who will benefit from rental assistance programs.

## LIMITATIONS

*The observational period used in this study may not provide enough time to observe change in student attendance following rental assistance receipt, particularly for families receiving assistance later in the observational window. In addition, while the current study relied on demographically matched groups, other variables such as school climate, parent health, and other hazards associated with homelessness may impact student attendance and require further investigation.*

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