

Effects of Housing Subsidies and Community Social Support on School Attendance

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we were interested in understanding how place-based programs, like the federal Promise Neighborhoods in St. Paul and Minneapolis, and state-provided housing support impact student school attendance. We took an integrated approach to administrative data to evaluate student attendance for students whose families were enrolled in the Homework Starts with Home pilot rental assistance program and those who were not. We also made comparisons between students who attended Promise Neighborhood schools and those that attended schools outside the Promise Neighborhoods. Results suggest that receiving rental assistance was associated with higher student attendance as was attending a Promise Neighborhood school in the 2013 school year. Our results suggest that both neighborhood supports and rental assistance may promote school attendance.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This study found that both neighborhood supports and state-provided subsidies can have a positive impact on student attendance among youth who were identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness. How might each of these factors improve student attendance individually? How might they interact to improve student attendance? In what ways can you provide or support some of these attendance-improving factors in your own work?
2. This study intended to include students whose families may have benefitted from the Homework Starts with Home pilot rental assistance programs but were not enrolled in the program. However, very few students of this kind were identified and were omitted from analysis as a result—why do you think so few students of this kind were present in the data? How might this influence the way you would advise rental-assistance programs to distribute their funds?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. This study focused on a state-led rental assistance program and the role of additional neighborhood supports on student attendance, suggesting that both factors were associated with improved attendance. How could these two areas of focus—state subsidy and neighborhood programs—be combined to amplify these positive effects? What barriers to these kinds of state and local interactions exist? In what ways might local or state policies be developed or changed to better meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness?
2. In what ways do you and your colleagues work to promote school attendance among youth in your communities? Are there alternative strategies supported by the findings in this research brief that your organization could implement? How could your organization better meet the needs of school-aged children and youth experiencing homelessness?
3. What community- and system-level supports for student attendance does your organization provide? In what ways can you better provide these kind of supports in your current role? In what ways could you or your organization expand the ways in which you think about and support student attendance and achievement?