

January 23, 2020 Public Comments
Dana Chambers

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the upcoming Douglas MacArthur Modernization, the potential co-location of public facilities on the new school site, and engaging the community on these topics.

My name is Dana Chambers:

- I'm a MacArthur parent, and a resident of the MacArthur neighborhood.
- I also co-chair the committee supporting the successful dual occupancy of Patrick Henry during the MacArthur rebuild
- Professionally, I am an education consultant who supports states and districts on how to attract, support, and retain effective educators, particularly in hard to staff schools.

Item 1. Request for clear & timely communication on co-location

I recognize that the co-location of public facilities is an important priority for the city as we continue to grow and have limited space - if done appropriately with stakeholder input, co-location can provide important resources to a community.

However, the last minute timing and lack of clarity in the co-location proposals shared by the city so far has made it challenging for the public to provide meaningful comment, and is eroding trust between the public and the district.

If the city has serious interest in co-locating facilities on the MacArthur campus, a specific proposal should be made that indicates the nature of the facilities (for example, a rec center, library services, or affordable housing), the scale of these facilities, and the research that has been done that supports location of these facilities on school grounds, including alternative sites that were considered.

The community should have this detailed information in writing for at least several days before requesting public comment, and be able to ask clarifying questions in person or in writing.

Item 2. Research and best practices on housing incentives to recruit and retain teachers.

I would also like to speak specifically to the recent information the city and district shared regarding the possibility of co-locating workforce or affordable housing on the MacArthur campus, recognizing that this proposal is still in the very early stages.

The city indicated that of particular interest could be providing affordable housing to teachers that is located above the school.

It is important to note that there is little to no research that substantiates affordable housing as an effective means to recruit and retain teachers, and that district support of these policies is largely anecdotal. I included in my written comments an EdWeek [article](#) that summarizes some of this research.

Beyond what the research says, of key interest is the distinction between teachers needing or wanting affordable housing, and whether teachers would want to live above the school they teach in or above any school in the district.

Given local housing prices, many teachers may struggle to afford living in Alexandria. However, housing incentives are just one of [many types of incentives](#) that a district can consider in strengthening how they recruit and retain teachers - including performance pay, teacher leadership incentives, tuition reimbursement, scholarships, loans, and overall salary increases.

It would be essential to engage teachers directly on this question before investing in this housing -- there are potential privacy, noise, and vermin considerations that teachers may wish to consider before deciding to live above the school in which they teach.

ACPS and the city should commit to surveying current and aspiring teachers on this topic and publicly sharing the results before co-locating affordable housing on any school campus. The survey should distinguish between interest in affordable housing generally vs. housing on a school campus, and should also solicit feedback on other types of incentives and the relative value of each in increasing recruitment and retention.

Finally, it will be important for the city to share the research they have done to compare co-location of affordable housing on a school campus to other alternatives - for example, working with developers on affordable housing set-asides; providing housing stipends for teachers; or HUD programs like the Teacher Next Door program. The city may also consider reaching out to the City of Miami, who [piloted](#) a similar co-location program in 2018, to understand what they learned from the pilot.

In summary, I strongly encourage the school board to require that before any co-location plans are confirmed, that the city and the district:

- 1) Provide specific and transparent co-location proposals to the public to solicit timely and meaningful comment
- 2) Survey and interview current and aspiring teachers to confirm their interest in affordable housing on a school campus, and explore other types of incentives
- 3) Publicly share the research findings from the city's exploration of co-location options, the strengths and drawbacks of co-location for each facility type, and the alternatives considered

Background Article

Does It Make Sense to Offer Housing Perks for Teachers?

Some question whether providing housing for teachers is sound public policy

Retrieved from:

<https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/01/24/does-it-make-sense-to-offer-housing.html>

By Liana Loewus

January 23, 2018

It sounds like a common-sense recruitment strategy: Since teachers are thought to be underpaid, help them out with housing.

A growing number of districts are using housing incentives as a way to try to attract and retain K-12 educators—building teacher complexes with below-market rental rates, giving teachers living stipends, or offering discounts on home rentals and purchases.

And yet it turns out there's little proof that offering housing incentives actually makes for good K-12 policy. Few researchers have looked at teacher-housing programs closely, and advocates for those policies have tended to rely on anecdotal evidence or tangential research about compensation to make their case.

"Unfortunately, there hasn't been any rigorous evaluation of housing incentives to determine if they are in fact effective at recruiting and retaining teachers," said Anne Podolsky, a researcher and policy analyst at the Learning Policy Institute, a nonprofit education research organization.

Among the only national data points on how well such subsidies work comes from a 2012-13 survey administered by the U.S. Department of Education's research arm, and it doesn't make a convincing argument for them. Nearly 55 percent of former teachers who said they would consider returning to the classroom said housing incentives would be "not at all important" in influencing that decision.

But the lore around the need for housing incentives prevails, with proponents saying teachers are happier and communities are stronger when educators can afford to live near where they work.

"We always have waiting lists for the housing complex. We know it continues to be an asset," said Jennifer Dericco, the public-information officer for California's Santa Clara Unified school district, which has 70 below-market apartments that teachers can rent. Housing is a form of compensation, some advocates point out, which research has shown affects whether teachers stay in the profession.

Even many teachers, though, say that districts should go straight to increasing salaries.

"Ultimately, if teachers were paid adequately for the value they give society, we wouldn't have to have programs to subsidize their housing," said Michael Hickey, the president of United Teachers of Santa Clara.

An online survey of district recruiters administered by *Education Week*'s TopSchoolJobs website found that about two-thirds of respondents had never received questions or requests from job applicants about benefits related to teacher housing. Just 10 percent said their district offered any such benefits. (About 150 job recruiters answered the November 2017 survey, which was not nationally representative.)

Districts Say Housing Works

Santa Clara was among the first districts to target teacher housing as a way of curbing turnover. Located in the heart of Silicon Valley, the school system began building its [Casa Del Maestro complex](#) on district-owned land in 2002 to help retain teachers in the increasingly expensive technology hub. The district sold nearly \$7 million in bonds to finance the effort, and those are being paid back with the tenants' rent, which costs about \$1,200 to \$1,900 per month. (Rent for a one-bedroom in the area generally runs closer to \$2,500.)

"Anecdotally, the feedback from staff is they really value being able to live amongst peers in ... similar professions and a similar mode of life," said Dericco. "They enjoy being able to

afford to live where their students and families do."

The district doesn't track data on the residents anymore because it has no trouble filling housing spots. But officials say early outcomes showed teachers living in the complex had less attrition than other teachers in the district.

The Dare County school system in Nags Head, N.C., a beach-resort community, [built two affordable housing complexes for teachers](#) with 36 total units. The district says the initiative, which began in 2009 and was financed in part by interest-free loans from a local credit union, has helped recruit teachers for high-needs subjects such as foreign languages and special education.

"I can definitely tell you it is working. It's not just a recruitment tool; it's also a retention tool," said Elisabeth Silverthorne, the executive director of the Dare Education Foundation, a nonprofit that works with the school system and administers the housing program.

The area has plenty of vacation homes but less year-round housing that's affordable. The two-bedroom apartments cost \$750 a month (about 20 percent below market rate), which enables teachers to live close by the schools where they teach.

While many teacher-housing programs are focused on making expensive areas affordable, a program in Newark, N.J., sprung up for different reasons: in part, to entice teachers to help revitalize what was viewed as a less coveted area of the city. The [Teachers Village development](#), financed by private investors and tax credits, has luxury apartments that teachers can rent at discounted rates, restaurants, shopping, and three charter schools. (Some, though not all, of the teachers living there work in those schools.)

"Newark has its own reputation that precedes it, and Teachers Village helps people feel comfortable living here," said Jared Taillefer, executive director of the Great Oaks Charter Schools, which has a campus there. "Having a place where people can live and work and be a community is a novel idea and helps us attract great teachers from all over the country."

But teacher-housing efforts, which are often subsidized at least partly by federal and state funds and tax credits, can run into problems.

In Los Angeles, for instance, the district used federal subsidies to build below-market rental units geared toward teachers. But the initiative didn't end up helping teachers: It turned out they made too much money to qualify for the low-income-housing credits. Lower-paid district workers, including bus drivers and cafeteria workers, now live in the complexes.

Last year, the [California legislature passed a law](#) that allows districts to use local, state, and federal affordable-housing funds and tax credits for residences designated only for teachers and school employees. The bill cites the teacher shortage as a reason for the change, and says that having teachers live near their schools "ensures stability, community involvement, and stronger ties between teachers, their students, and their families."

A [critique of the bill in The American Prospect](#), a liberal public policy magazine, says this will end up hurting the most impoverished families—a group that's disproportionately black and Hispanic. That's because the law doesn't ramp up the funding for affordable housing, only

expands the eligibility for it.

"It's realistic to worry that this new law will facilitate the transfer of resources away from poor people of color to (oft-struggling) middle-class white professionals," Rachel M. Cohen wrote in the magazine.

The programs in which districts build housing, many say, are also simply not scaleable.

Santa Clara's complex has 70 units, and the waitlist has 68 people on it. The district has no plans to expand the program.

"We have teachers who've been on the waiting list for years," said Hickey, the union leader. And some worry that privately funded teacher-housing initiatives end up benefiting companies rather than actually helping teachers. For instance, some [mortgage-assistance programs help teachers with a down payment](#), but require reimbursement after several years or a percentage of the profit in return when the home is sold. It's a "venture capital group trying to find a way to make money off a situation that's wholly unjust in the first place," Hickey said.

A Piece of the Puzzle

In districts with chronic teacher shortages, Podolsky of the Learning Policy Institute said, housing incentives should be one piece of the puzzle. Schools also need to address issues related to working conditions and school leadership in order to get teachers to stay.

"Housing incentives are a start but they would definitely have to be combined with other investments in schools and teachers," she said.

A small group of activists in the Bay Area started a nonprofit to push for a different solution: using federal funds to give all public school teachers a basic housing allowance, akin to what people in the military receive.

The stipends would be based on the market rates where teachers are living, said Azalea Renfield, the founder and CEO of [United Educators Association for Affordable Housing](#). Districts and policymakers "keep thinking building [teacher complexes] is the way to go, ... but it isn't scaleable and it isn't sustainable," she said. "We need something that's overarching."

That kind of solution is far off and, many will argue, cost-prohibitive. There are about twice as many public school teachers in the United States as there are active service members. Affordable-housing advocates say increasing government assistance is the way to go—but that it's best to think more broadly. "Teachers are a deserving group. There are many other deserving folks," said Ethan Handelman, the acting CEO of the National Housing Conference. "Good policy options are helping people with affordability of housing regardless of their profession."

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