Report authors

Sara Goldrick-Rab  Senior Fellow, Education Northwest
Christine Baker-Smith  Research Director, National League of Cities
Sarah A. Cordes  Associate Professor, Temple University
Kallie Clark  Senior Research Data Analyst, University of California, San Francisco
Nine years of partnership – thank you!

Tacoma Community College
Tacoma Housing Authority
The Kresge Foundation
Arnold Ventures
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Association of Community College Trustees
Evaluation, Research, and Assessment Solutions
M. Davis and Company
The problem

- Community college costs ~$15K per year, *after* financial aid
- Housing insecurity affects ~50% of students; homelessness affects 8%
- Colleges and states are beginning to respond, but they lack evidence to:
  - Understand the likely return on investment
  - Inform program development
  - Drive funding
The College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP)

- Partnership between **Tacoma Community College** and **Tacoma Housing Authority**
- Established 2014
- Offered a housing choice voucher
  - Subsidized rent for the private market (~$450 discount on ~$1K rent)
  - Based on household size
  - Time limited
  - Had to be enrolled at Tacoma Community College or the University of Washington Tacoma
Eligibility

**Homeless**
- Living in an emergency shelter or transitional housing facility
- Client of a case management program serving homeless people

**Near-Homeless**
- Unable to meet basic housing expenses, which could result in housing loss
- Residing in a motel/hotel
- Couch surfing
- Evicted
- Recent history of serious housing instability
- Victim of domestic violence
- Facing discharge from a public institution (e.g., incarceration, hospital) without a housing plan
Eligibility

• Been at college for at least one term
• Taking six or more credits
• To get a voucher, also had to meet Tacoma Housing Authority criteria:
  • Proof of residency
  • Background check
  • Income level confirmed

Filing a FAFSA and meeting satisfactory academic progress requirements were continuation criteria, not eligibility criteria
Program bureaucracy

1. Completion of the CHAP application
   At this point the student becomes an applicant.

2. Admission to the program
   At this point the student becomes a participant.

3. Completion of the HUD application

4. Attendance at a CHAP program information session/orientation and receives a voucher.

5. Housing search

6. Housing identification/leasing up.
   At this point a student becomes housed.
Roles and responsibilities

College handles
• Outreach
• Intake
• College navigational support

Housing authority handles
• Orientation
• Housing vouchers

Unclear who handles
• Housing search support navigation
• Issues with landlords
• Other duties as assigned
Evaluation framework

Evaluation outcome domains

- Academic performance and attainment
- Housing stability
- Employment and earnings
- Use of public benefits
- Health and use of publicly funded health services
- Interactions with the criminal justice system
Evaluation questions

1. How often did students in the program lease up?
2. Did the program reduce use of homelessness services?
3. Did the program increase academic success, including graduation rates?
4. Did the program affect employment, public benefits, health and health services, and criminal justice?
5. How did leasing up relate to those outcomes?
Evaluation design

Data came from
- Washington State Department of Social and Human Services
- Tacoma Community College and Tacoma Housing Authority
- Student surveys
Evaluation design

• Longitudinal – six cohorts of students across winter, spring, fall
• Implementation study
• Descriptive outcomes for homeless students
• Program impacts for near-homeless students
  • Outcomes of students admitted to the program compared to students not admitted due to the limited number of vouchers
COVID-19 pandemic

• Hit one year after the last student cohort began the program
• Could affect later outcomes
• SNAP expanded during the pandemic, Tacoma implemented eviction moratoriums, etc.
• Academic data collection continued until 2022, post-pandemic
Why students applied

• Causes of housing challenges:
  • New to the area
  • Family crisis
  • Loss of income
  • Medical challenges

• Most homeless students found the program via staff recommendations; near-homeless students found it via posters/flyers
## Applicant characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All students</th>
<th>Average age</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless</strong></td>
<td>30% vs 70%</td>
<td>30 vs 33</td>
<td>63% vs 75%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Near-homeless</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Had dependents</th>
<th>Black</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless</strong></td>
<td>44% vs 41%</td>
<td>40% vs 54%</td>
<td>32% vs 18%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Near-homeless</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Other races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless</strong></td>
<td>29% vs 34%</td>
<td>33% vs 38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Near-homeless</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Housing challenges

• Tight housing market
• Availability near students’ jobs, child care providers, and/or schools
• Insufficient income to meet landlord requirements
• Landlord discrimination
• Significant amount of paperwork required
• Difficulty conducting housing searches
• Costs: security deposits, moving costs, etc.
The program housed just 1 in 4 participants
More often housed

- Students with higher GPAs
- Students receiving public assistance
- Students with children
- Women

- There is mixed evidence on racial disparities; some indication that Black students were housed less often
Program participation improved students’ well-being, even if they weren’t housed

- More likely to obtain emergency housing services (e.g., motels)
- More likely to get support from TANF and SNAP
- More likely to be food secure

Food security by program participation
Program participation improved students’ well-being, even if they weren’t housed

- More likely to secure employment
- Mixed evidence on use of health services
- Some possible decline in felonies, arrests, charges
No clear program impacts on college outcomes

- Upward trends over time for homeless students
- No clear improvements for near-homeless students in credits earned, grades, or graduation levels
- This does not mean that the program targeted students who are unlikely to succeed. The vast majority (2/3) did well in college!
Housed students had much higher graduation rates

- Homeless students:
  - Didn’t receive housing: 28%
  - Housed: 43%
- Near-homeless students:
  - Didn’t receive housing: 45%
  - Housed: 57%

National graduation rate: 35%

8–12 percentage points lower for homeless students
Limitations

• Small sample of students
• A single, unevenly implemented program
• Severe housing shortage in the community
• Pandemic may have impacted the results
• With more time to finish school, it’s possible even more students will succeed
Lessons learned

• Homeless and housing-insecure students have plenty of potential to succeed in college—and when housed, graduation rates are much higher.

• Both housing and navigational support hold promise for improving students’ financial stability, health, and well-being.
  • Housing is a good way to address food insecurity.
  • It is possible to greatly increase the use of SNAP and TANF among students.
Lessons learned

• Connecting students with housing requires more than simply offering vouchers
  • Place-based housing may be more effective
  • Housing + support is likely important

• Basic needs partnerships need resources, time, attention, and strong MOUs
Lessons learned

• Evaluation is critical:
  • Simply observing high rates of academic success doesn’t mean the program caused the outcomes
  • Evaluation may surface other student benefits
  • It’s critical to avoid premature conclusions on efficacy

• Integrated statewide data systems are enormously helpful for seeing how programs affect the whole student
Facilitating whole student success

- What would it look like if we understood our role as professors, staff members, and administrators in this way?
- What if this were the lens for examining the return on investment for community colleges?
Panelists

Ivan Harrell
President, Tacoma Community College

Sheila Edwards Lange
Chancellor, University of Washington Tacoma

Christine Baker-Smith
Director of Research, National League of Cities
Thank you!

Contact
Sara Goldrick-Rab | sara.goldrick-rab_sf@ednw.org

Read full report here