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Housing Opportunity and Educational Achievement

It is clear that homebuyers with children place tremendous value on the quality of neighborhood public schools. According to NAR's Profile of Homebuyers and Sellers, half of all homebuyers with children said that school quality was a deciding factor in their home purchase. Access to good schools is essential for supporting positive educational and economic outcomes for children. However, not all families have equal access to stable, affordable housing in neighborhoods with high-quality public schools.

Why Housing Opportunity is Important to Education

Where a child lives plays a tremendously important role in predicting the quality of the school he/she attends and his/her educational opportunities and achievement. There is a substantial body of research that has documented the link between having access to affordable, stable housing in high-quality neighborhoods with positive outcomes for children and families.¹

Data from around the country shows that African American students are significantly more likely than white students to live in school districts or zones with concentrations of minority students, high poverty rates and low test scores.²

¹ For example, Brennan, Maya, Lisa Sturtevant and Patrick Reed. 2014. The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Education. Washington DC: National Housing Conference.
² Cunningham, Mary and Graham MacDonald. 2012. Housing as a Platform for Improving Education Outcomes Among Low Income Children. Washington DC: Urban Institute.

Many schools remain segregated along racial and economic lines largely because many neighborhoods are segregated. Persistent neighborhood segregation reflects the enduring impacts of 20th century policies that were explicitly intended to keep minorities out of white neighborhoods.³

Consequently, there remain significant differences in access to housing in neighborhoods with high-quality schools. A study of housing markets across the country found that homes cost an average of 2.4 times as much near a public school with good test scores compared to a low-scoring public school.⁴ The fact that home prices are higher in neighborhoods with quality public schools is a testament to the value that families place on high-quality educational opportunities. Those who can afford to move to housing in a higher-quality school district often do, leaving those who cannot afford that housing stuck in schools that do not offer the same opportunities.

³ Rothstein, Richard. 2013. Why Our Schools are Segregated. *Faces of Poverty* 70(8): 50-55.

⁴ Rothwell, Jonathan. 2012. Housing Costs, Zoning and Access to High-Scoring Schools. Washington DC: Brookings Institution. Online <https://www.brookings.edu/research/housing-costs-zoning-and-access-to-high-scoring-schools/>

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What the REALTOR® Community Can do to Help Improve Kids' Educational Outcomes

Housing is a critical platform for educational success. As the REALTOR® community continues to advocate and support fair housing and housing opportunity for all, individual REALTORS® and local associations can be part of the effort to help ensure that all families have access to stable and affordable housing in neighborhoods with good schools.

First, REALTORS® should take steps to avoid racial steering. REALTORS® are often asked about school quality when working with a buyer. Since a school usually reflects the demographics of a neighborhood and school quality is often measured simply by test scores, discussion of schools and choosing homes to show a buyer based on school quality can lead to unethical and illegal steering based on race or national origin. Conversations about school quality can actually be “code” for race. A reference to a “school with low test scores”, for example, may be either explicitly or implicitly used to characterize the school and the neighborhood as predominantly low-income or minority.⁵ Online home search tools, expanded education databases and more integrated data sharing has made it easier for homebuyers to see characteristics of schools, including not only test scores but also the economic and racial composition of the student body.⁶ All of this information is a benefit to consumers, but REALTORS® need to be sure not to rely on this information to direct someone to or away from particular neighborhoods.⁷

Second, REALTORS® and local associations can support local policies that promote affordable housing options in neighborhoods with good schools. Many urban, suburban

and rural communities have in place zoning ordinances, land use policies and other regulations that make it difficult, if not impossible, to build lower-cost housing, such as small single-family homes, townhomes, duplexes, and apartments. The real estate community can be an important voice in promoting local actions that create a diversity of housing options in neighborhoods with high-quality schools.

Third, REALTOR® associations can support and advocate for policies that improve all schools, especially those in communities with concentrations of low- and moderate-income families. A local association can work with school administrators and parent organizations to promote the positive characteristics of schools to the community at large and the home buying public. Increasingly, more nuanced information about schools and school districts is being made available to help homebuyers and others fully understand schools' attributes. The Quad City Area REALTOR® Association on the Illinois—Iowa border is one example of a local association working with educators and others on a more complete set of school information. REALTORS® will increasingly be able to refer buyers to alternative resources, so buyers can have information in addition to the widely available test score rankings of schools.

Conclusion

Access to quality education is critically important for the success of children from all backgrounds. Issues related to school access and school quality are fair housing issues since where a family lives is a significant determinant of the quality of school children will attend. There are many ways a local association or individual REALTORS® can

⁵ Zub, Nicole. 2016. School Quality and Property Values: Perpetuating Housing Segregation? Law Street. October 26, 2016. Online <https://lawstreetmedia.com/issues/law-and-politics/school-quality-vs-property-values-2/>

⁶ Zub (2016)

⁷ Crawford, Jim. 2017. Housing Discrimination since the 1960s: What Have We Learned from Paired Testing Research? Washington DC: Urban Institute.

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help all children have greater access to schools that support their growth and development. Being aware of how school quality affects neighborhood choice will help REALTORS® avoid actions and words that steer buyers illegally. Fair housing training programs can be customized to reference the fair housing impact of local market issues related to schools. Local associations can also engage in their communities to address school issues that impact REALTORS® and the customers they serve.

For more information, resources and to get involved, visit www.FairHousing.realtor