

November 24, 2008

## Children Who Live in Public Housing Suffer in School, Study Says

By [MANNY FERNANDEZ](#)

New York City children who live in public housing perform worse in school than students who live in other types of housing, according to a study by [New York University](#) researchers.

The study, which is being released on Monday, found that students living in public housing are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to graduate in four years than those who do not live in public housing.

It also showed that fifth graders living in public housing did worse on standardized math and reading tests than fifth graders who lived elsewhere. Researchers found this disparity in fifth-grade test scores even when comparing students at the same school who shared similar demographics, like race, gender and poverty status.

The report is the first large-scale study of the academic performance of children growing up in the city's 343 public housing complexes, researchers said. They suggest that those children face social and economic hurdles at home that affect their success in the classroom and illustrate the often-overlooked role that housing can play in education. The report was done by the university's [Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy](#) and its [Institute for Education and Social Policy](#).

About 112,000 children ages 5 to 18 live in buildings managed by the city's public housing agency, the [New York City Housing Authority](#). The agency, the city's biggest landlord, maintains 178,000 apartments, providing low-rent housing subsidized by the federal government to low- and moderate-income families.

The study is based on city public schools data from the 2002-3 academic year, including student demographics and test scores as well as teacher and school characteristics. It does not provide a definitive reason why the two types of students perform so differently, but it offers possible explanations.

The researchers suggest that public housing's culture of poverty offers young people few role models to stress the importance of education, limits their resources and exposes them to crime or widespread peer pressure from those not doing well in school. Another possible reason is that families who live in public housing may differ from other poor families in ways that are hard to measure.

"'We don't know' is the short answer," said Vicki Been, director of the Furman Center and an N.Y.U. law professor. "We don't have the data that would enable us to pin it down."

Howard Marder, a spokesman for the Housing Authority, said in a statement that the agency had "serious

concerns and reservations” about the study. “Although the study may highlight an area in need of further research, the study that was conducted was limited, dated and incomplete,” he said.

About 44 percent of public housing families are considered to be what the Housing Authority calls “working families,” meaning they earn income from employment. The average income of working families is \$34,277. Housing experts say the high percentage of working families has helped the agency create a stable living environment at many of its complexes and is one of the reasons why concentrations of public housing have failed in other cities but succeeded in New York.

But there is still a large number of public housing residents who are unemployed, disabled or receive public assistance. Of the 112,000 children ages 5 to 18, roughly 95 percent are black or Hispanic, and 56 percent live below the federal poverty level. Many households are headed by single mothers.

Though crime has decreased from decades past, violence, drug-dealing and gang activity still plague many developments. In March, a 9-year-old girl was wounded when a bullet went through her apartment window at the [Langston Hughes](#) Apartments in Brownsville, Brooklyn. A video made by young men at the St. Nicholas Houses in Harlem — posted on YouTube and recently removed — showed a young man in a stairway, holding an old-fashioned revolver.

Diamond Malachi said she was 11 years old when she and a friend walked into a store near her apartment at the Breukelen Houses in Brooklyn and gunfire erupted outside. Her friend was shot, but Diamond was in the back of the store and escaped unharmed.

“Everything that happens outside of school I zone it out,” said Diamond, who is now 14 and a freshman at the [Green School: An Academy for Environmental Careers](#), a new public high school in Brooklyn. “I don’t have to, but I choose to, just to get that off my mind.”

Kyasia Kingsberry, 14, lives in the Louis H. Pink Houses in Brooklyn. She said she has a friend who lives in the complex who dropped out of high school last year because of problems at home and at school, and knows several other Pink Houses youths who have also dropped out.

Kyasia and Diamond are exceptions: They have not done poorly in school but have excelled, in part because of their involvement in a free after-school program run by [Groundwork](#), a nonprofit group in East New York, Brooklyn.

Kyasia, a freshman at the [Academy for Young Writers](#) in Brooklyn, said dropping out was not an option. “I don’t want to disappoint my mother, but most of all I don’t want to disappoint myself,” she said.

The N.Y.U. report found stark differences in the schools attended by Housing Authority residents and non-Housing Authority residents. The average elementary school attended by children living in public housing had fewer white students, more poor students and performed lower on standardized math and reading exams than the average school attended by students who do not live in public housing.

For [Joel I. Klein](#), the schools chancellor, the report touches on a population that he knows well: Mr. Klein grew up in public housing, at the Woodside Houses in Queens.

Andrew Jacob, a spokesman for the city’s Department of Education, said officials there will review the

study. He said that student test scores had gone up significantly since the 2002-3 academic year and that the study appeared to highlight the larger national issue of the achievement gap between poor black and Hispanic students and their wealthier white and Asian counterparts.

“We’ve seen an upward trend across the city in test scores, and the gap between black and Hispanic students and their white and Asian peers has narrowed,” Mr. Jacob said. “What the chancellor is focused on is making sure that every student, wherever he or she lives in the city, has the opportunity to get an excellent education.”

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