

Choice Neighborhoods

monthly news about transforming housing, people, & neighborhoods

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GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Atlanta's Education Model Raises Student Outcomes

As part of its Choice Neighborhoods program, Atlanta Housing (AH) partnered with Atlanta Public Schools (APS) and other education service providers to provide a holistic education model focused on meeting the needs of each individual student, offering tutoring and mentoring support, as well as wraparound services designed to reach beyond educational basics.



To date, a total of 120 students from AH's Choice Neighborhood have successfully participated in the full education program, including tutoring and mentoring. Of the forty-seven student participants from the 2022/2023 school year cohort, 100% of seniors graduated; improvements were measured in attendance, behavior, and academic metrics. This resulted in a 90% pass rate for elementary/middle school, a 100% pass rate for high school in English/Language Arts, a 95% pass rate for elementary/middle school, and 83% pass rate for high school in Math.

Key Components

When Atlanta received their FY 2014/15 Choice Neighborhoods grant, the target housing site was vacant, and residents had been relocated across the city nearly seven years earlier. Choice Neighborhoods youth needed educational supports but were also attending schools all over the city. In response, Atlanta designed an education model that would reach families where they were at, connect to the schools they were in, and focus on supporting their individualized needs and goals.

To support students, AH's education model is managed by the Senior Case Manager (education focused), employed by AH, who works directly with students and their families to identify their needs and coordinate supports. The model also includes an APS Liaison, employed by APS, who works directly with students' teachers and school staff. This APS

Liaison shares student data using parental consent forms and through a data sharing agreement with AH. Additionally, the primary AH case manager assigned to each family helps provide wraparound services.

Intentional Roles that Reflect a Holistic Approach

The staffing structure, with representation from both the housing authority and the school district, facilitates cross-communication and promotes a more holistic approach to addressing individual student needs.

- AH's Senior Case Manager is responsible for overseeing day-to-day operations; administering family/student surveys; communicating with families and advocating for them; making connections to community and school resources; obtaining signatures for parental consent forms to access and use students' learning data; meeting with the APS Liaison to discuss individual students' needs and addressing gaps in services; and meeting with the broader education team to review and respond to students' progress.
- All families in the program are assigned a primary Case Manager and are provided with wraparound services that meet the students' and family's household needs. Both the Case Manager and the Senior Case Manager host frequent, sometimes even daily, student, parental, and family check-ins.
- APS Liaison collects and monitors APS students' data (academics, attendance, and behavior); monitors high risk students on a weekly or even daily basis; coordinates with school professionals including teachers and graduation coaches; examines attendance data; meets with the education team to discuss family needs and student data; shares information on school resources and helps match students to in-school services.

Atlanta's model originally included a third role, a Project Director (contracted) through the United Way of Atlanta (Curry Davis Consulting) who helped launch the program. The Project Director interviewed potential tutoring and mentoring vendors, made recommendations for new vendors, managed student referrals to resources, assessed students' progress, and convened a monthly Education Collaborative to share resources, best practices, and trainings. Initially having this third role involved in the program development contributed immensely to establishing a solid, well-functioning program.

Regular Information Sharing within the Program Team

Another factor contributing to Atlanta's success is the regular and ongoing communication and information sharing among the team. The APS Liaison regularly monitors student data (academics, attendance, and behavior) from both the school and parents. She updates the team with individual student progress either during the Weekly Progress Meetings with the Case Management Team, or on an ad hoc basis, to address a student's particular circumstances. In addition, Care Coordination Meetings are held bi-weekly, during which the Senior Case Manager and the APS Liaison coordinate efforts further and discuss student needs, identify program gaps, areas for improvement, and develop and implement education plans.



Building Relationships and Tailoring Responses

Atlanta's success also relies on the staff's dedication to uncovering the detail behind APS data and *why* a particular student may be struggling. This starts with relationship building, coupled with ongoing communication with the students and their families. It includes identifying and responding to not only the students' academic needs, but also other factors that could impact learning like food

insecurity, health issues, and transportation challenges. The following are examples of how Atlanta puts these steps into action:

- Case Management staff employ patience, empathy, and a listening ear in conversations with families, which enables them to delve into the family's perspective and underlying factors behind academic performance. For example, during one student's regular check-ins in which the family was encouraged to lead the conversation, Case Management staff discovered significant transportation issues were impacting the student's school attendance, and, negatively affecting the student's grades. In response, the Senior Case Manager identified resources through APS and Choice Neighborhood funds, to resolve the transportation issue and enabled the student to return to school and boost academics.
- In addition to providing "triage support" for their family's non-academic needs, the Atlanta Team also takes the time to understand their students' passions and has begun to strategically collaborate with their tutors and mentors to integrate them into the students' tutoring plan. Including other activities such as sports, summer camps, or other extracurricular activities into the education plan serves to promote a higher level of student motivation and engagement.
- The APS Liaison regularly visits the schools and works directly with the counselors, teachers, graduation coaches, social workers who know the students rather than with just administration staff who might not be familiar with student's background.
- Atlanta's approach to working with parents focuses on ensuring they understand their rights, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) parental consent form and data sharing agreement, as well as the importance of being heard. Promoting the idea that the parent is the advocate, and the Case Manager is there to support the parent and their decisions, teaches the parent how to advocate for their child and reinforces positive communication.
- Atlanta created a "hot list" to track high-risk students. The list, which contains information on students with less than 70% average in a class, less than 80% attendance, or one or more behavioral referrals, is monitored weekly and daily, as needed, by the Case Manager and the Senior Case Manager. Other high-risk factors, such as a family in transition or with a sick family member, are also monitored and families may be checked in on more frequently.

Rigorous Vetting and Selection Process for OST Tutors and Education Providers

Another key component driving Atlanta's program's success is the relevance and quality of their tutors and educational partners. The pool of providers, initially assembled based on information collected from the program's original family survey, was vetted and handpicked by the Education Team and CN leadership. In their selection process, they identified tutoring and mentoring programs city-wide to accommodate the scattered locations of the original Choice Neighborhoods families. This list of providers is maintained based on ongoing student and family needs and interests. All partners have established pre and post-tests aligned with Atlanta's program milestones and success metrics; demonstrate innovative approaches to learning; and focus on personal connections with the students to promote increased student motivation and engagement.

Advice for Other Grantees

In reflecting on their successes, Atlanta has the following advice for grantees wanting to establish a similar education model:

- *Create an organization in which all participants are continuously understood, heard, and respected.* First, recognize the needs of the families and participants and listen to the staff on the frontlines. Share information upwards to leadership; identify any service gaps and build relationships that foster healthy collaboration and mutually beneficial partnerships; and promote strong communication – through meetings, retreats, and regular check-ins.
- *Focus on relationship building:* Leverage and build on existing relationships to strengthen your program. Tap into *key* players from both the school district and across the city and focus on those who will be your champions and advocate for you. Consider strategic cross-hiring to bolster relationships and advocates for the program.
- *Prepare for program future sustainability:* Consider implementing an employee “buddy system” with front line staff as well as leadership in which both parties fully understand and can replicate the others' roles; host trainings and informal information sharing sessions; and regularly share data reporting requirements as they evolve for institutionalizing knowledge and future program sustainability.



Moving Forward

Atlanta is well underway with construction of the fourth and final stage of their \$30 million FY14/15 Choice Neighborhoods grant to revitalize University Homes public housing development, the grant for which Atlanta established their education model. All phases will result in 479 rental units, including 229 replacement units, 103 affordable units, 147 market rate units, and the project also includes a Homeownership component. Choice Neighborhoods funds supported living wage employment opportunities in partnership with the Urban League of Greater Atlanta, access to health services in partnership with Morehouse School of Medicine; the rehabilitation of Roosevelt Hall, a historic community center onsite that is now a bustling anchor of the community; and streetscaping and placemaking improvements.

Moving forward, Atlanta plans to continue its education model onsite at Roosevelt Hall. AH also plans to replicate its education model for its recently awarded \$40 million FY22 Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant to redevelop the vacant Bowen Homes public housing site into a mixed-income, mixed-use community and a thriving neighborhood with new amenities, parks and trails, and green infrastructure. In addition, Atlanta is transitioning to a new Educational Lead, Communities in Schools of Atlanta, which will provide an extra layer of in-school interventions for students with academic or behavioral challenges. For additional information on Atlanta's education model, please see the recent CLPHA [recording](#) and the Choice Neighborhoods [Education Toolkit](#) (see pages 21-25).



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