



Virginia Association Emphasizes Link Between Good Schools and Good Communities—November 2014

It makes good sense, and on June 18th of this year, it happened for the first time ever: "Connecting the Dots Between Where Kids Live and Where They Learn," a forum coordinated by Housing Virginia, brought together Virginia educators, housing experts, business leaders, public officials, and private citizens with the goal of exploring the connection between housing and education policy. The groundbreaking event was co-sponsored by the Virginia Association of REALTORS®, a leading stakeholder of Housing Virginia, a statewide organization dedicated to affordable housing.

The day-long symposium at Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs featured expert plenary speakers and breakout sessions addressing topics ranging from Local Best Practices: Aligning Housing Policy and Education Policy, to Housing Instability and Homelessness: How it Affects Education. The complete program, along with related articles and information, is posted at the Housing Virginia website: <http://housingvirginia.org/symposium.aspx>

Bob Adams, executive director of Housing Virginia, notes that the forum would not have happened without the \$4,000 in grant support it received from the National Association of REALTORS®. He explains that there are several VAR members on the Housing Virginia board, and applying to NAR for a Housing Opportunity Grant to support the event was an idea that emerged during a board meeting.

Nearly 200 people attended "Connecting the Dots," about 20 of them REALTORS®. "This issue is one that REALTORS® face very day," says Adams. "Many homebuyers have school performance very high on their list of what makes a home desirable. The goal of this forum was to begin to help both 'housers' and educators understand that their worlds are interconnected. Things we do to improve housing and neighborhoods will have a positive impact on schools. The flip side is also true - things we do to improve school performance will also increase housing desirability and value."

Bradley J. Boland, VAR's 2014 President, agrees. "I often say that REALTORS® serve as ambassadors for their communities. Our members are required to know and understand the working dynamics of an area...particularly when they are helping someone buy into that area. Through NAR, we are able to leverage much needed funds and support to engage members of the community and our elected officials in issues that matter not just to REALTORS®, but to the community as a whole," he notes. "Those relationships keep our members current on issues facing our communities. In return, our members are better prepared to better represent their clients."

As the response to the forum was overwhelmingly positive, Adams adds that Housing Virginia will be continuing the dialogue at the local level over the coming year, which he expects will attract ongoing participation from individual REALTORS®. "REALTORS® have been strong partners with Housing Virginia since it was formed 10 years ago, because they clearly see the value in raising awareness of the importance of affordable



housing in our communities. The commitment and support of REALTORS® and their organizations is invaluable to our cause."

To learn more about how the Virginia REALTORS® are investing in the development of sound housing and education policy, contact Martin Johnson, Chief of Policy and Advocacy at the Virginia Association of REALTORS®, at martin@varealtor.com or 804.249.5708.



Nearly 200 people attended the forum



Jeanne Jehl

Senior Consultant, Annie E. Casey Foundation



Maurice Jones

Secretary of Commerce & Trade, Commonwealth of Virginia



The forum included plenary speakers and breakout sessions.