

Baltimore **OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS**

A MARYLANDCAN RESEARCH REPORT



Baltimore **OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS**

A celebration of poverty-defying
public school seats and how to create
tens of thousands more

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Baltimore OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS

E Opportunity Elementary School

M Opportunity Middle School

E "On-the-Cusp" Elementary School

M "On-the-Cusp" Middle School

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Preface

Dear Friend of Baltimore's Children,

Leadership guru Peter Drucker once wrote, "A person can perform only from strength. One cannot build performance on weaknesses."¹ Our country is full of weaknesses when it comes to leading children from low-income households to achieve at the same levels as wealthier children. But in Baltimore, there are also strengths that can be built upon, and that is where our study begins.

Through my work with MarylandCAN, I often find myself engaged in arguments that are impossible to win. Residents outside of Baltimore question why changes to state education policy are necessary when Maryland schools are often so highly rated. Conversely, Baltimore residents often question the need to spend time trying to change education policies at the state level when the city itself has so many problems. Residents across the state recognize that the Baltimore City public school system has made significant progress, but there is a persistent need to fix the many schools that are still struggling.

Facing such difficult and conflicting questions, my colleagues at 50CAN and I decided to look more closely at the data on student performance. We wondered how many public schools in Baltimore are truly leading children from low-income families to repeatedly outperform overall state proficiency rates. After all, the fact that Maryland schools are so celebrated only matters to children from low-income Baltimore families if they can benefit from that reality.

We set out to answer some important questions. Which schools are delivering a high-quality education to children from low-income households in Baltimore? How are they finding success? And how can we build on that success so that more children can receive the same high-quality education?

As you will see, in Baltimore City there are seven public elementary school programs and one public middle school program that are repeatedly leading children from low-income families to outperform overall state proficiency rates. We have identified these as "Opportunity Schools." The success of these schools is no easy feat. In general, the disappointing correlation between socioeconomic status and achievement on standardized tests is strong and persistent. But in these eight programs, Baltimore has enormous strengths that policymakers can learn from and build on.

¹ Peter F. Drucker, "Managing Oneself," *Harvard Business Review: The Magazine* (2005), accessed April 11, 2014, <http://hbr.org/2005/01/managing-oneself/ar/1>.



This report is meant to celebrate these schools and to document their best practices. It is also meant to boost performance throughout the school system based on lessons that can be learned from the strengths of these schools and their principals. Currently, only seven percent of students from low-income Baltimore families attend schools that are repeatedly leading them to outperform overall state proficiency rates. We will show that with the right policy investments, this number can grow to 50 percent by 2022. The 50 percent mark is significant, as it represents a tipping point after which the majority of students from low-income households in Baltimore will receive a high-quality education.

When I worked in Baltimore City public schools as a teacher and school leader, I observed that a quality leader often made the difference between a high-performing school and one that was not. What we found in our research is that this is very likely true. Our report showcases eight such leaders in Baltimore and hopes to build on their success.

I hope you will find this report as inspiring and motivating as I do. I look forward to working with you to help create Opportunity School seats for all of Baltimore's children.

Sincerely,

Jason Botel
Executive Director, MarylandCAN

Introduction and summary

The socioeconomic achievement gap has been called “a stubborn fact of schooling in the United States.”² It is taken for granted that students from low-income households will perform worse in school than their peers from higher-income families, and decades of data highlight the persistent correlation between achievement and income.³

Yet schools across the country, and right here in Baltimore, are proving that with the right leadership, the link between poverty and lower academic achievement can be broken. Strong principals and effective teachers can propel traditionally disadvantaged students to the highest levels of success.

In this report, MarylandCAN: The Maryland Campaign for Achievement Now showcases public schools in Baltimore City that are doing just that. We call these schools “Opportunity Schools” because they afford students from low-income households, as well as students from higher-income households, the opportunity to succeed.

Our mission in shining a light on this inspiring group of schools is twofold. First and foremost, we want to celebrate their tremendous success. We believe these schools are beacons that prove what is possible in Baltimore. We hope to jumpstart a conversation in Baltimore and across Maryland about what it will take to increase access to a high-quality education for children from low-income families. Maryland schools are often celebrated as some of the best in the nation, but very few children in Baltimore have access to a truly high-caliber school.

Second, we hope to show that smart investments in the right policies can dramatically increase the number of Opportunity Schools in Baltimore. Specifically, we believe that strategic policy improvements can boost the percentage of students with access to an Opportunity School from seven percent to 50 percent by 2022.

We started by talking to principals of Opportunity Schools and On-the-Cusp schools (schools that nearly met the Opportunity School criteria). We asked them to share their in-school best practices and their policy recommendations for school system and state officials, and we paid special attention to practices and recommendations identified by multiple school leaders. The following were the five most widely cited in-school best practices:

² Sean F. Reardon and Joseph P. Robinson, “Patterns and Trends in Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Academic Achievement Gaps,” in *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*, eds. Helen F. Ladd and Edward B. Fiske (New York: Routledge, 2008), 497.

³ “NAEP Data Explorer (Long Term Trend),” National Center for Education Statistics, accessed March 25, 2014, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ltrdata/>.

1. Use data to differentiate instruction and to provide regular intervention and enrichment for students,
2. Encourage teacher collaboration and peer feedback,
3. Establish high academic and behavioral expectations,
4. Hire and retain effective teachers, and
5. Give teachers autonomy and flexibility in the classroom.

In the report, we provide details of how the Opportunity Schools and On-the-Cusp Schools implement these practices.

We also listened to school leaders' policy recommendations and developed five policy solutions that we believe can place 50 percent of students from Baltimore's low-income households in Opportunity Schools by 2022. In order to accomplish this goal, we recommend that Baltimore City Public Schools:

1. Expand the reach of Opportunity School principals by giving them a larger role in selecting, training and mentoring new principals,
2. Give principals more autonomy in exchange for greater accountability,
3. Increase the number of social workers in schools,
4. Support school efforts to develop local partnerships that increase the number of part-time reading interventionists in schools, and
5. Recruit operators from around the country with a proven track record of success with children from low-income households to operate schools in Baltimore.

We conclude the report with a clear roadmap to creating enough Opportunity School seats to serve at least 50 percent of students from low-income Baltimore families within eight years.

Baltimore's Opportunity Schools



In our search to identify Baltimore's Opportunity Schools, we sought to define what it means to repeatedly break the link between income and achievement. After careful consideration, we arrived at the following definition.⁴ An Opportunity School is:

1. A public elementary, middle or high school program that has no entrance criteria, and
2. An elementary or middle school where students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals outperformed overall state proficiency rates on the Maryland School Assessment in at least half of tested grades in both reading and math in both 2012 and 2013, or
3. A high school where students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals outperformed overall state proficiency rates on the Maryland High School Assessment in both English and Algebra in both 2012 and 2013.

Below is the list of schools that meet these criteria. In the subsequent pages, we feature each school and reveal more about the principals who are repeatedly leading students from low-income households to outperform overall state proficiency rates.

⁴ We acknowledge that beyond student performance on standardized assessments, there are several other factors that contribute to school quality. We believe, however, that our definition identifies schools that measurably provide children from low-income households the opportunity to overcome the normal correlation between socioeconomic status and performance on standardized tests. In other words, given the statewide data that is and is not available, we believe that our definition shows which Baltimore City school programs are providing children from low-income households a high-quality education.

Elementary School Programs

Principal

Zip Code

Cecil Elementary School

Ms. Roxanne Forr

21218

The Empowerment Academy,
operated by Empowerment Center Inc.[†]

Ms. Carolyn Smith

21216

Hamilton Elementary/Middle School

Dr. Patricia Otway-Drummond

21214

Liberty Elementary School[‡]

Mr. Joseph Manko

21207

Medfield Heights Elementary School

Mr. R. Anthony Japzon (former),
Ms. Amber Kilcoyne (managing
assistant principal)

21211

The Mount Washington School

Ms. Sue Torr (former)

21209

Tunbridge Public Charter School,
operated by Afya Baltimore Inc.^{†‡}

Ms. Lydia Lemon (former),
Ms. Sheila Adams (managing as-
sistant principal)

21212

Middle School Programs

Principal

Zip Code

Thomas Johnson Elementary/
Middle School

Mr. James Dendinger

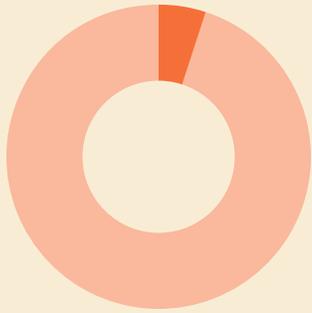
21230

[†] Public charter school

[‡] Participates in the Baltimore City Community School Initiative

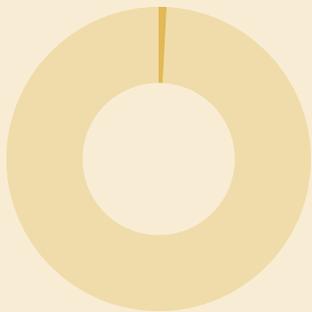
NOTE We reference elementary, middle or high school "programs" instead of "elementary, middle or high schools" because, for the purposes of this report, we studied each program separately, even when multiple programs are part of the same school.

Baltimore City public schools, FARMS students



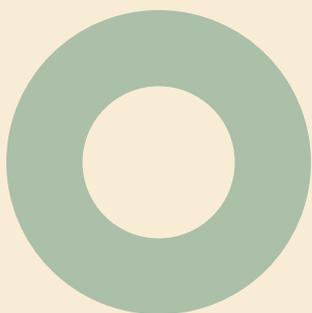
Grades PK-5
39,105 FARMS students

1,820
are in Opportunity Elementary Schools



Grades 6-8
14,671 FARMS students

115
are in Opportunity Middle Schools



Grades 9-12
17,558 FARMS students

0
are in Opportunity High Schools

Cecil

Elementary School

Principal: Ms. Roxanne Forr

Principal Forr has spent 28 years at Cecil Elementary. After graduating from Slippery Rock University with a degree in elementary education, Ms. Forr joined Cecil as a teacher, fulfilling a goal she set for herself as a child. She loved the classroom so much that she did not plan on becoming an administrator. But her passion and dedication positioned her as a natural leader for Cecil, and strong leaders that came before her invested time and effort in developing her as a leader. After serving as an assistant principal and earning a degree in school administration from Johns Hopkins University, Ms. Forr stepped into the principal role.

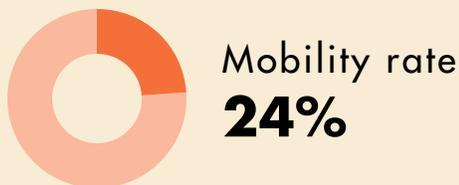
“Cecil teachers don’t close their doors. They give and receive critical feedback to each other and conduct observations of and demonstration lessons for other teachers.”

— Principal Forr

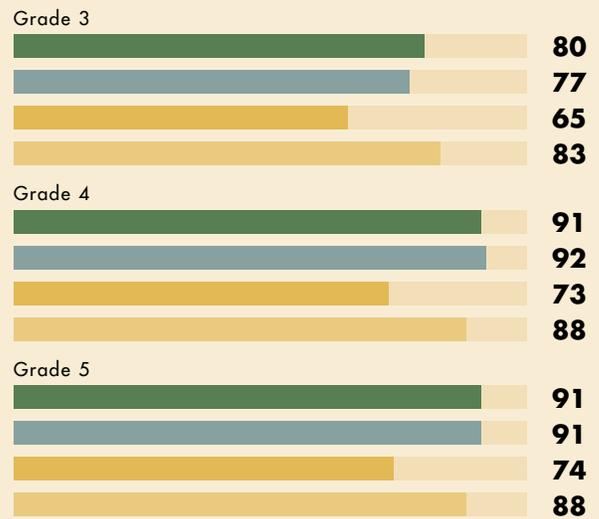


Demographics (2013)

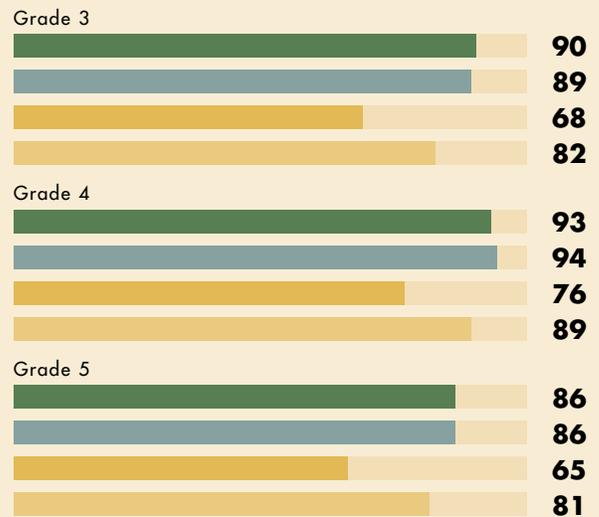
381 Students



Proficiency rates — Reading (2013)



Proficiency rates — Math (2013)



■ FARMS
 ■ All
 ■ BCPSS all
 ■ MD all

The Empowerment Academy

(Elementary Program)

Charter operator: Empowerment Center Inc.

Principal: Ms. Carolyn Smith

After graduating from the University of Maryland, College Park with a bachelor's degree in elementary education, Principal Smith secured her first position as a teacher at Collington Square Elementary/Middle School where she taught in grades three through six. Next she moved to School 122 (now Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School) to work as a reading teacher, which led her to enroll at Johns Hopkins University to earn a master's degree in reading instruction. Later, after becoming certified in administration through Loyola University Maryland, Principal Smith began supervising teacher clusters. The next move in her distinguished career brought Principal Smith to the Maryland State Department of Education, where she stayed for two years before moving back to the Baltimore area to serve in central administration for Baltimore County Public Schools. She supervised the county's northwest region in a principal support role before catching the principal bug herself. Principal Smith was hired as principal of Carroll Manor Elementary School, becoming the first African American professional in the building, and went on to serve for 12 years as principal of three Baltimore County schools. She finally completed the circle back to Baltimore City when she became founding principal at The Empowerment Academy, where she has served for the past 11 years.



“Teachers have autonomy to pick and choose strategies. You can’t say, ‘X graphic organizer is the only one.’”

— Principal Smith

Demographics

Elementary program (2013)

167 Students



FARMS
80%



African American
99%

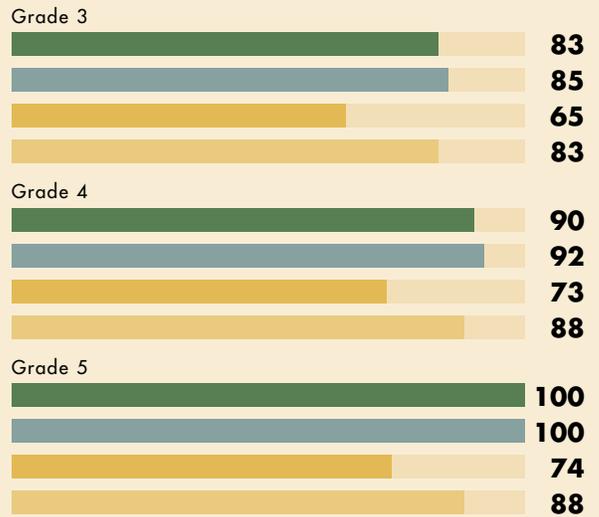


Special education
6%

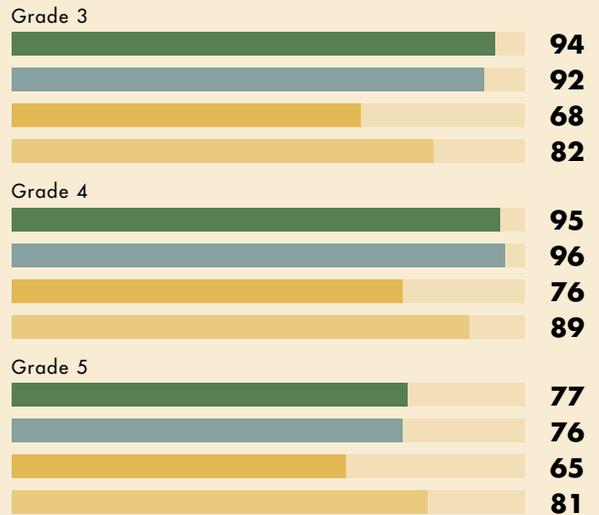


Mobility rate
10%

Proficiency rates — Reading (2013)



Proficiency rates — Math (2013)



FARMS All BCPSS all MD all

Hamilton

Elementary/Middle School

(Elementary program)

Principal: Dr. Patricia Otway-Drummond

Dr. Otway-Drummond came to school leadership through New Leaders for New Schools, completing her residency year at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School before securing her current position as principal of Hamilton Elementary/Middle School. Previously, she earned a bachelor's degree in English at the University of Florida and taught high school English in Broward County. Dr. Otway-Drummond also worked as an academic coach in Georgia, holds a master's degree in teaching from Florida International University and earned a doctorate in conflict analysis from Nova Southeastern University.

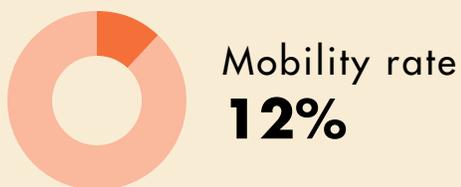
"We give teachers autonomy."

— Dr. Otway-Drummond

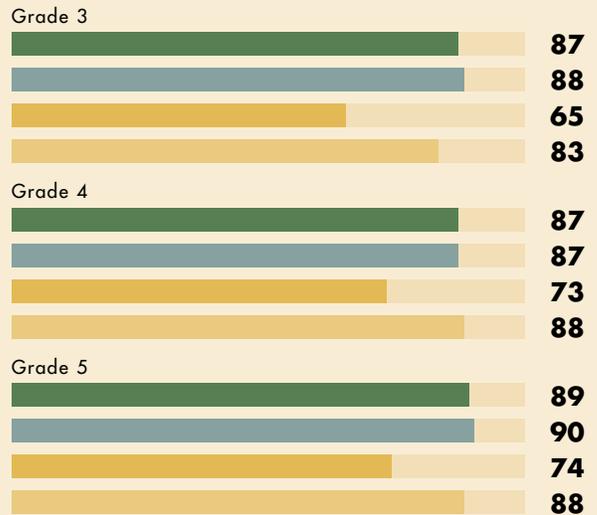


Demographics
Elementary program (2013)

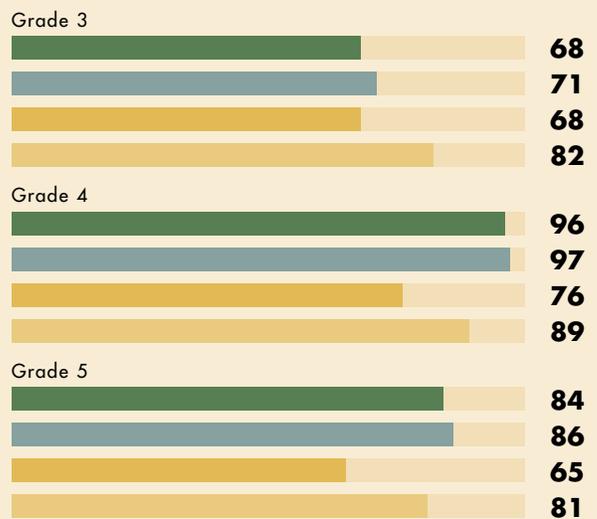
444 Students



Proficiency rates — Reading (2013)



Proficiency rates — Math (2013)



■ FARMS
 ■ All
 ■ BCPS all
 ■ MD all

Liberty

Elementary School

A Community School with coordinating partner Child First Authority

Principal: Mr. Joseph Manko

Principal Manko began his career teaching sixth- and seventh-grade social studies as a Teach For America corps member in Baltimore. He spent a total of seven years in the classroom (three at Booker T. Washington Middle School and four at Rosemont Elementary/Middle School) and in the process achieved National Board Certification. Mr. Manko then joined New Leaders for New Schools, completing his residency year at Hilton Elementary before taking on his current position as principal of Liberty Elementary School. He has served at Liberty for four years. Principal Manko is a Fulbright Scholar, America Achieves Fellow and adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University and Towson University.



“We provide one hour of reading intervention per day to more than 25 percent of students in groups of no more than eight students.”

— Principal Manko

Demographics (2013)

374 Students



FARMS
93%



African American
99%

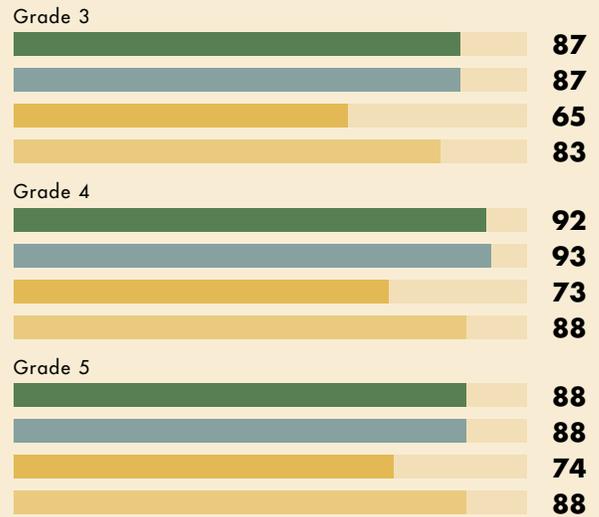


Special education
18%

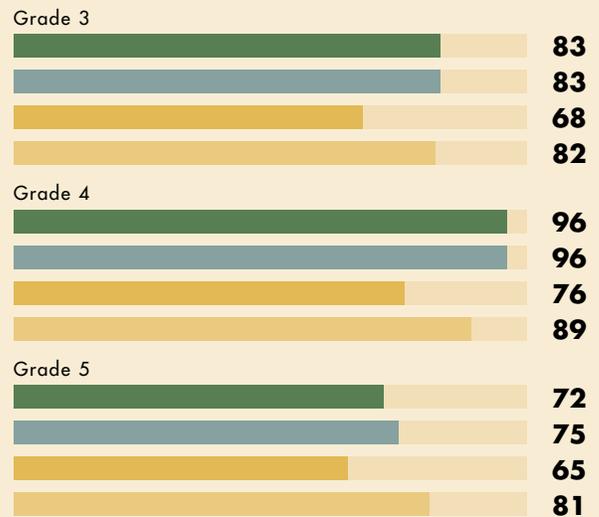


Mobility rate
28%

Proficiency rates — Reading (2013)



Proficiency rates — Math (2013)



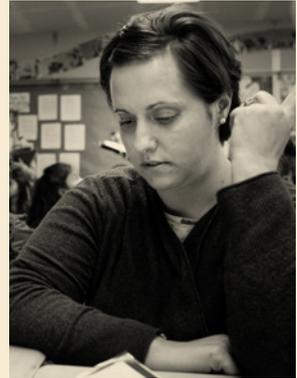
FARMS All BCPSS all MD all

Medfield Heights

Elementary School

Managing Assistant Principal: Ms. Amber Kilcoyne

Ms. Kilcoyne began her teaching career in Baltimore at Brehms Lane Elementary School under Ed Cozzolino, whom she calls “the Jedi Master of Principals.” She taught second grade for three years before becoming a librarian. With the strong support of her principal, she leveraged three years as head librarian to change her school’s culture for the better, dramatically boosting students’ interest in books. This experience got her hooked on improving school instructional programs and inspired her to go into school administration. She enrolled at the College of Notre Dame in Maryland and earned dual certification in library media science and administration. Next, she moved to Belmont Elementary School and served as a facilitator, working closely with students with behavioral issues and running the Student Support Team. Three years ago, Medfield Heights hired Ms. Kilcoyne as a support teacher and encouraged her to become an assistant principal from the outset. She moved into the assistant principal role in the summer of 2013 and became managing assistant principal in November 2013. Managing Assistant Principal Kilcoyne also holds a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Phoenix.



“We assign intervention teachers to outlier groups. This was developed in order to reduce emotional stress to those students while learning to read.” – Managing Assistant Principal Kilcoyne

Demographics (2013)

411 Students



FARMS
60%



African American
28%

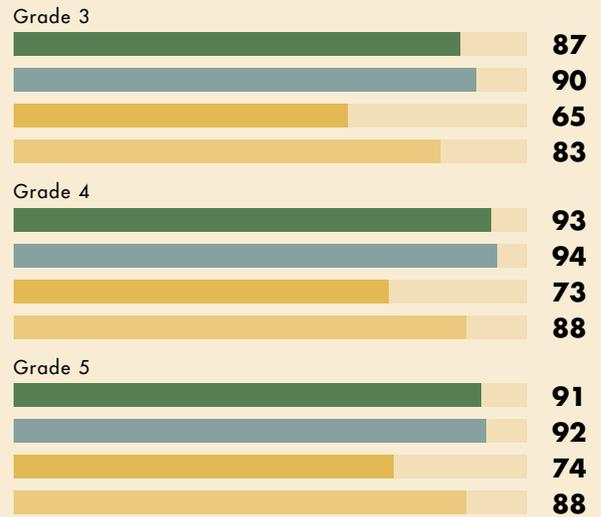


Special education
12%

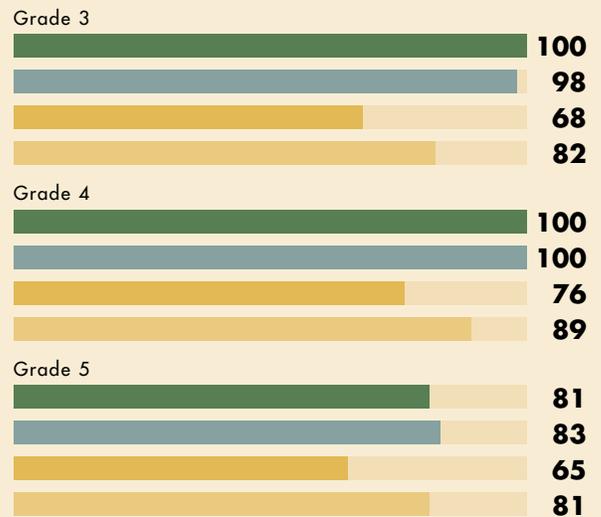


Mobility rate
19%

Proficiency rates — Reading (2013)



Proficiency rates — Math (2013)



■ FARMS
 ■ All
 ■ BCPSS all
 ■ MD all

The Mount Washington School

(Elementary program)

Principal: Ms. Sue Torr

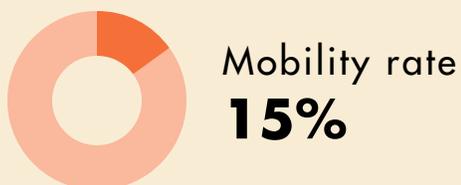
Ms. Torr served as principal of The Mount Washington School from July 2008 through February 2014. She has over 25 years of experience as a Maryland educator with experience in directing program initiatives and support services to maximize teaching and learning, as well as a proven record demonstrating a firm commitment to students, resulting in accelerated achievement. She has served students, grades pre-K to 12, as Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Reading in Anne Arundel Public Schools, Coordinator of Curriculum at the Maryland State Department of Education and as principal of two large elementary schools. Ms. Torr also served as an adjunct instructor at Johns Hopkins University for aspiring school administrators and on the Chief Academic Officer's Advisory Committee. She holds a bachelor's degree in education from Bethany College in West Virginia and a master's degree in education from Loyola College. In addition to her work in schools, Ms. Torr serves on the Board of Directors for two organizations focused on helping the homeless in the Baltimore community, Doorstep Organization and the Helping Up Mission.



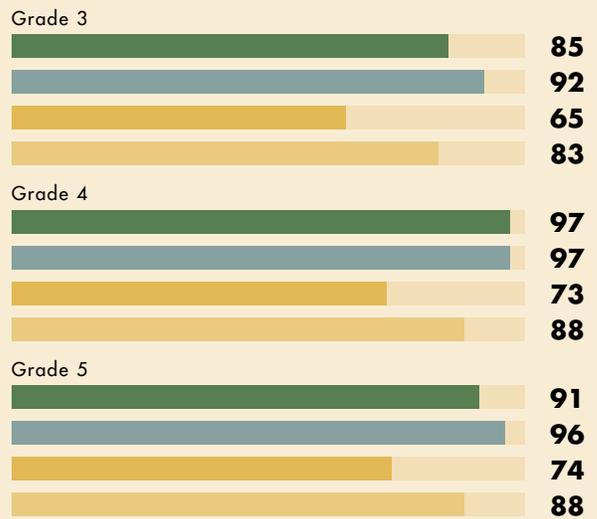
“We address the whole child when thinking about regular intervention or enrichment for students. We use the systems designed by the district such as the Student Support Team to address varying needs of students, and we invite parents to be involved with solutions and keep them informed of their child’s progress. Extra-curricular activities such as clubs and sports are offered to help foster a high level of engagement in the school.” – Principal Torr

Demographics
Elementary program (2013)

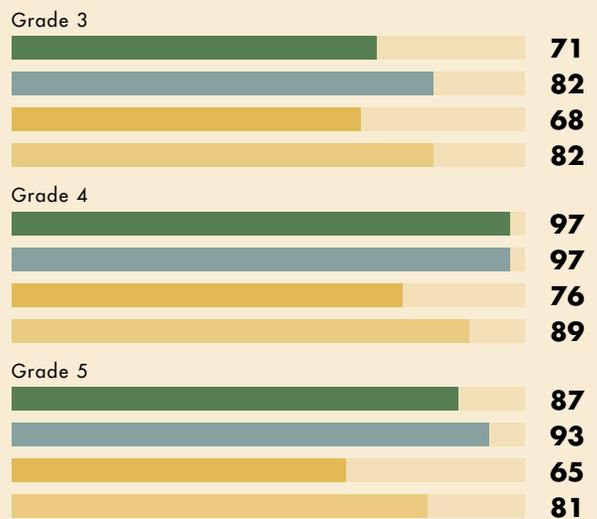
413 Students



Proficiency rates — Reading (2013)



Proficiency rates — Math (2013)



■ FARMS ■ All ■ BCPS all ■ MD all

Tunbridge

Public Charter School

A Community School with coordinating partner The Y of Central Maryland

Charter operator: Afya Baltimore Inc.

Managing Assistant Principal: Ms. Sheila Adams

A week after graduating from Westminster College (Pennsylvania) with a bachelor's degree in elementary education, Sheila Adams received a job offer from George Washington Elementary School in Baltimore. She spent ten years at George Washington, during which time her principal encouraged her to participate in leadership roles and began influencing her leadership practices. In 1999, eight years into her teaching experience, Ms. Adams earned a master's degree in education with a concentration in curriculum and instruction from Loyola University Maryland. Realizing she had a passion for teaching literacy, she then took a job coaching teachers with a local non-profit organization. At this nonprofit, Ms. Adams reconnected with her first assistant principal from George Washington, Lydia Lemon. Ms. Lemon was working to open Tunbridge Public Charter School, where she served as principal from its opening in 2010 until this year. She offered Ms. Adams a spot on the Tunbridge founding team as the Director of Teaching and Learning. After working alongside Ms. Lemon in the day-to-day operations of the school, Ms. Adams's next step, becoming managing assistant principal of Tunbridge, "seemed a natural progression of my work." After earning additional post-master's credits in school administration and receiving significant mentorship from Ms. Lemon, Ms. Adams took the reins at Tunbridge. She tells us, "What led me to school leadership probably has more to do with what we have created at Tunbridge than it does with anything else."

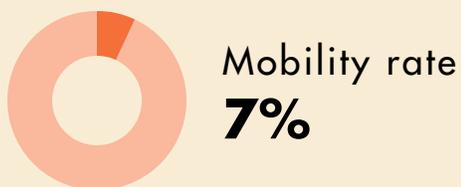
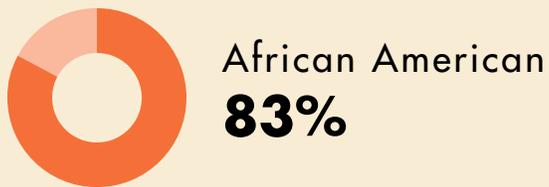
"We establish school-wide behavioral expectations and a discipline plan with input and buy-in from all teachers."

— Managing Assistant Principal Adams

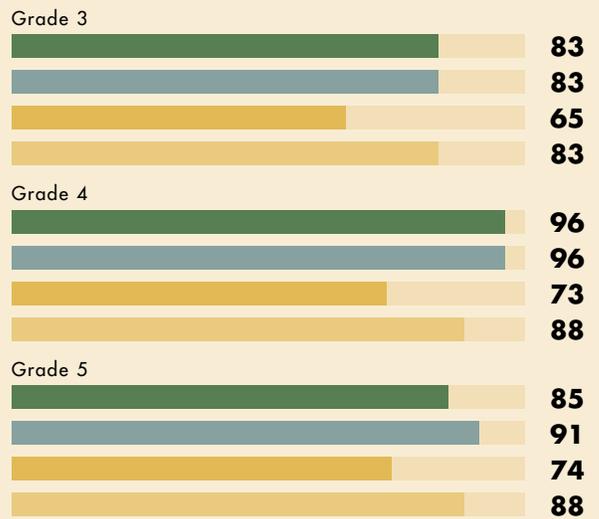


Demographics
(2013)

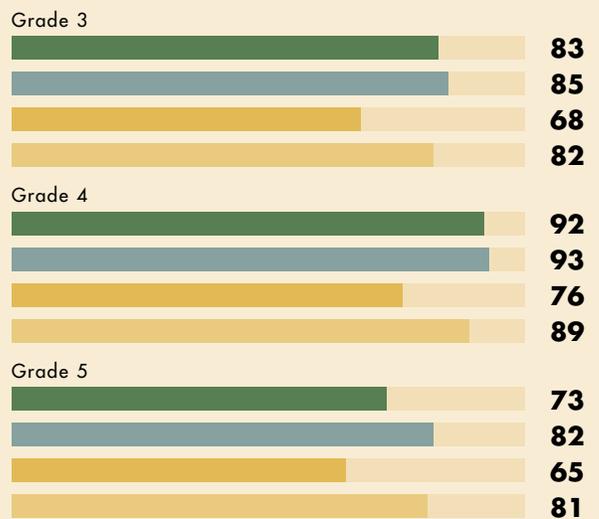
304 Students



Proficiency rates — Reading (2013)



Proficiency rates — Math (2013)



■ FARMS ■ All ■ BCPS all ■ MD all

Thomas Johnson

Elementary/Middle School

(Middle school program)

Principal: Mr. James Dendinger

Principal Dendinger earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in school psychology from Bowling Green State University. After college, he secured his first teaching job at Baltimore's William H. Lemmel Middle School, where he spent four years teaching self-contained special education while completing a graduate certificate in administration at Johns Hopkins University. Next, Mr. Dendinger moved to Booker T. Washington Middle School to become an assistant principal, staying for four years before heading to Roland Park Elementary/Middle School where he served as an assistant principal for two years. Six years ago, Mr. Dendinger was hired into his current position at the helm of Thomas Johnson Elementary/Middle School. Principal Dendinger notes that he has gained valuable experience from working in a diverse array of schools.

“We maintain high expectations for learning, behavior, and instruction. These expectations are communicated to all of our stakeholders, and teachers establish clear routines and procedures which result in a positive learning environment.”

— Principal Dendinger



Demographics

Middle school program (2013)

131 Students



FARMS
88%



African American
39%

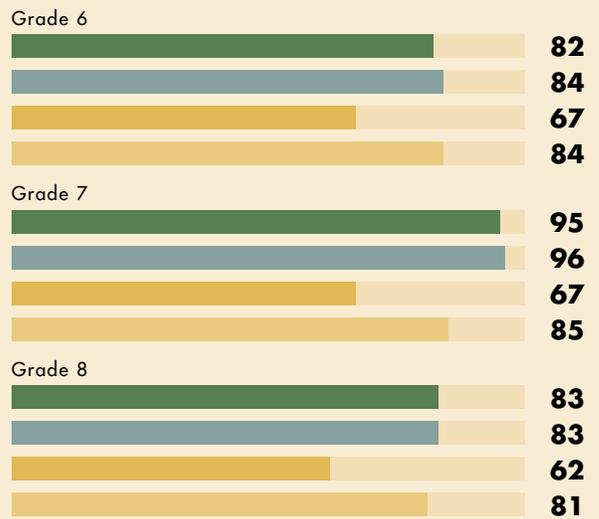


Special education
18%

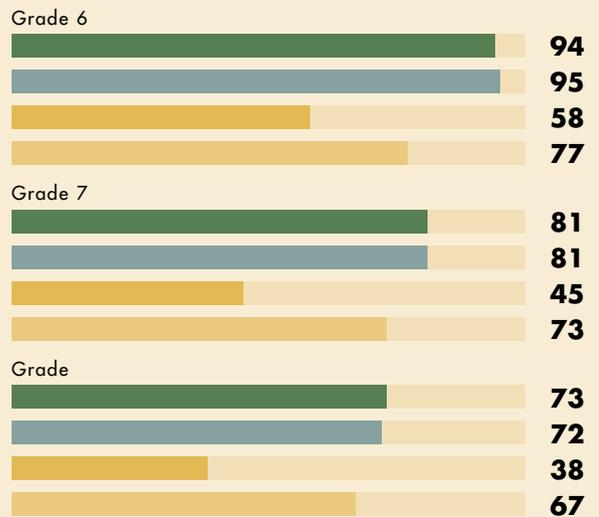


Mobility rate
18%

Proficiency rates — Reading (2013)



Proficiency rates — Math (2013)



■ FARMS
 ■ All
 ■ BCPSS all
 ■ MD all

Baltimore's On-the-Cusp Schools

2

MarylandCAN set the bar for Opportunity Schools high enough to justify our claim that they repeatedly break the link between income and achievement. Still, many Baltimore City public schools just missed the cutoff, falling short in only one subject or in one year. We believe it is important to recognize these schools, learn from their success and understand from their leaders what they need to become Opportunity Schools.

We have designated the next group of schools as On-the-Cusp Schools. After careful consideration, we arrived at the following definition. An On-the-Cusp School is:

1. A public elementary, middle or high school program that has no entrance criteria, and
2. An elementary or middle school where students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals outperformed overall state proficiency rates on the Maryland School Assessment in at least half of tested grades in either reading or math in both 2012 and 2013, or
3. A high school where students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals outperformed overall state proficiency rates on the Maryland High School Assessment in either English or Algebra in both 2012 and 2013.

Elementary School Programs	Principal	Zip Code	Opportunity Subject	Students	Demographics
Armistead Gardens Elementary/Middle School [‡]	Mr. Mark Bongiovanni	21205	Math	478	FARMS: 92% SPED: 16% Mobility: 23%
Govans Elementary School	Ms. Linda Taylor	21212	Math	358	FARMS: 89% SPED: 20% Mobility: 35%
Hampden Elementary/Middle School	Dr. Judith Thomas	21211	Math	255	FARMS: 78% SPED: 10% Mobility: 25%
Hilton Elementary School [‡]	Ms. Danielle Henson	21216	Math	403	FARMS: 90% SPED: 16% Mobility: 24%
Leith Walk Elementary School	Ms. Edna Greer	21239	Reading	938	FARMS: 79% SPED: 10% Mobility: 20%
Mount Royal Elementary/Middle School	Mr. Job Grotsky	21217	Math	359	FARMS: 91% SPED: 15% Mobility: 27%
Roland Park Elementary/Middle School	Mr. Nicholas D'Ambrosio	21210	Reading	682	FARMS: 16% SPED: 5% Mobility: 12%
Thomas Johnson Elementary/Middle School	Mr. James Dendinger	21230	Math	367	FARMS: 58% SPED: 15% Mobility: 8%

[‡] Participates in the Baltimore City Community School Initiative

Middle School Programs	Principal	Zip Code	Opportunity Subject	Students	Demographics
Armistead Gardens Elementary/Middle School [‡]	Mr. Mark Bongiovanni	21205	Math	130	FARMS: 92% SPED: 13% Mobility: 17%
Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women [†]	Ms. Maureen Colburn (ED)	21201	Reading	331	FARMS: 73% SPED: <5% Mobility: 5%
The Empowerment Academy, operated by Empowerment Center Inc. [†]	Ms. Carolyn Smith	21216	Math	70	FARMS: 77% SPED: 7% Mobility: 9%
KIPP Ujima Village Academy, operated by KIPP Baltimore Inc. ^{†5}	Mr. Michael Lucas	21209	Math	342	FARMS: 81% SPED: 14% Mobility: 6%
Midtown Academy, operated by Midtown Academy Inc. [†]	Ms. Kathleen O'Hanlon	21217	Math	58	FARMS: 71% SPED: 11% Mobility: <5%
Patterson Park Public Charter School, operated by Patterson Park Public Charter School Inc. ^{†‡}	Dr. Charles Kramer	21224	Math	152	FARMS: 86% SPED: 11% Mobility: <5%
The Crossroads School, operated by Living Classrooms Foundation [†]	Mr. Scott Raymond (VP of Education)	21231	Math	158	FARMS: 89% SPED: 14% Mobility: 8%

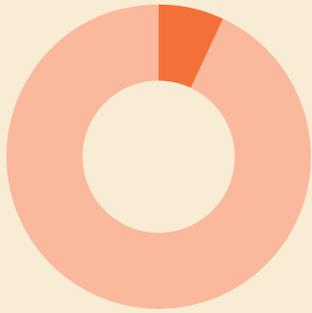
[†] Public charter school

[‡] Participates in the Baltimore City Community School Initiative

⁵ MarylandCAN Executive Director Jason Botel served as principal of KIPP Ujima Village Academy from 2002 to 2006 and as executive director of KIPP Baltimore from 2006 to 2013, during which time he oversaw KIPP Ujima Village Academy, KIPP Harmony Academy (from 2009 to 2013)

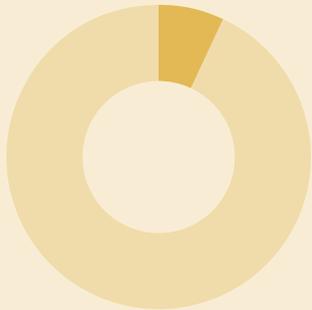
and the KIPP Through College program. He currently serves on the board of KIPP Baltimore. Jason's affiliation with KIPP in no way influenced KIPP's inclusion in this report; schools made the list based solely on their state assessment proficiency rates using the criteria outlined above.

Baltimore City public schools, FARMS students



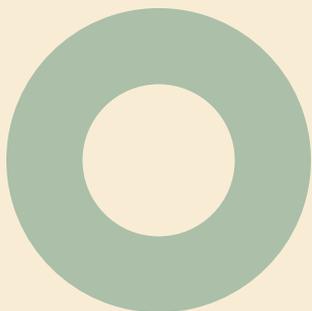
Grades PK-5
39,105 FARMS students

2,716
are in On-the-Cusp Elementary Schools



Grades 6-8
14,671 FARMS students

1,003
are in On-the-Cusp Middle Schools



Grades 9-12
17,558 FARMS students

0
are in On-the-Cusp High Schools

In-school best practices

After identifying the Opportunity Schools and On-the-Cusp Schools, MarylandCAN reached out to the principal or operator of each school. We asked them which in-school best practices they use to lead their students to success. We received responses from each Opportunity School leader and from 11 of the 14 On-the-Cusp School leaders. Below are the five in-school best practices that were each independently suggested by at least five Opportunity School or On-the-Cusp School leaders.

1 *Use data to differentiate instruction and to provide regular intervention and enrichment for students.*

Teachers keep track of their students' individual strengths, areas for improvement and progress toward content mastery using formative assessments, homework, checks for understanding and other tools to track student progress. They analyze data to determine instructional next steps, often with the support of collaborating teachers, coaches and principals. At Thomas Johnson Elementary/Middle School, for example, Principal Dendinger reports, "Grade level teams meet weekly to analyze data, assess student progress and plan for flexible small group instruction."

While teachers use data to plan instructional next steps and tailor their lessons to student needs, principals also employ strategic scheduling to provide small-group or one-on-one intervention and enrichment for students. Under the leadership of Managing Assistant Principal Kilcoyne, Medfield Heights Elementary School students participate in a daily "reading power hour" during which students are grouped by reading level and receive personalized support. At Liberty Elementary School, Principal Manko ensures that many of his students receive an hour of small group intervention each day. Principal Smith employs a 'push-in' intervention model at The Empowerment Academy, utilizing the Title I resource teacher, special educator and tutors to provide individualized support to students in the classroom, while degreed paraprofessionals pull students out of the classroom to work on reading and math.

"Grade level teams meet weekly to analyze data, assess student progress and plan for flexible small group instruction."



2 *Encourage teacher collaboration and peer feedback.*

Principals designate time for teacher collaboration, including common planning periods that provide opportunities for instructional brainstorming and feedback. In some schools, teachers participate in Professional Cycles of Learning that provide additional opportunities for peer observation and feedback. In many cases, the atmosphere of collaboration extends to activities beyond school walls. At The Empowerment Academy, for example, Principal Smith notes, “When teachers get back from [professional] conferences, they have to share the information with their peers.”

“When teachers get back from [professional] conferences, they have to share the information with their peers.”

3 *Establish high academic and behavioral expectations.*

The first step to establishing high expectations is consistently communicating high expectations to all parties: administrators, teachers, students and parents. Getting input and buy-in from teachers and administrators is also critical. Once expectations are set, it is essential that students are held accountable through concrete consequences (positive and negative) and that implementation of such consequences is consistent. Some schools, for example, use behavior incentive plans that provide rewards for exceptional behavior.

“At BLSYW, it’s cool to be smart.”

When it comes to academics, it is important to reduce distractions so that students can focus on their work. Attention to detail, like keeping a clean and organized building, helps create an environment conducive to learning.

Finally, adults should always model the character traits they want to see from students. Ms. Maureen Colburn, Executive Director of the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women, says, “At BLSYW, it’s cool to be smart.”

4 *Hire and retain effective teachers.*

Principal Lucas of KIPP Ujima Village Academy shares that, “The biggest factor for all kids, but especially kids growing up in poverty, is great teachers in every grade level.” To hire effective teachers, a rigorous screening and interview process is essential. At The Mount Washington School, Principal Torr uses an interview panel that includes administrators, teachers and parents to ensure candidates are a good fit. Principal Kramer at Patterson Park Public Charter School also uses a panel interview and requires candidates to model a lesson before the panelists (or to submit a video lesson). Principals also note that hiring teachers with solid content knowledge who are passionate about their subject areas is very important.

Once effective teachers are in the classroom, it is critical to give them support and encouragement. Many schools use mentor teachers to guide less experienced teachers and to successfully induct new teachers into the school culture. In general, principals should ask their effective teachers what they need to continue thriving in the classroom and work to support those needs.

5 *Give teachers autonomy and flexibility in the classroom.*

Opportunity School principals give teachers the autonomy they need to pick instructional strategies that work best for their students. When it comes to implementing the curriculum, principals give teachers flexibility to meet individual student needs and enhance the curriculum. Principal Dendinger reports that at Thomas Johnson Elementary/Middle School, “While our teachers follow the Common Core [aligned] curriculum, they are encouraged to use their skills, experience and expertise to enhance the content of the curriculum.”

It is also important to provide teachers the foundational support they need to make good decisions when granted autonomy and flexibility. For example, principals focus professional development on instructional strategies, and teachers coach each other on how to become better at implementing those strategies.

“The biggest factor for all kids, but especially kids growing up in poverty, is great teachers in every grade level.”

“While our teachers follow the Common Core [aligned] curriculum, they are encouraged to use their skills, experience and expertise to enhance the content of the curriculum.”

Policy recommendations

4

The previous section highlighted the most common in-school best practices used by Opportunity School and On-the Cusp School leaders that they believe are necessary to achieve success for students from low-income households. Several of these practices, along with others in the Appendix, are solidly grounded in research. For example, using data to drive instruction,⁶ setting high academic and behavioral expectations for all students⁷ and hiring and retaining effective teachers⁸ have each been tied to higher student achievement.

Still, it is difficult, if not impossible, for school systems to mandate the successful adoption of such practices. It takes a great leader to sway the culture of an organization toward higher expectations, a great manager to recruit and retain effective employees, and great operational skills to successfully execute data-driven instructional practices that genuinely personalize student learning. The real common denominator underlying school success, in other words, is an effective leader. Researchers have called the influence of effective principals the “ripple effect,” referring to the central role effective principals play in creating the conditions necessary for school-wide success.⁹ However, studies have also shown that just as there is significant variability in teacher effectiveness, so is there a wide spectrum of principal effectiveness.¹⁰

With this in mind, we asked Opportunity School and On-the-Cusp School leaders to propose school system or state policy recommendations to help grow the number of effective principals and schools that are leading students from low-income families to achieve at high levels. Each of the first four recommendations below was independently suggested by at least three principals. Our fifth and final recommendation stems from our belief that to dramatically increase the number of Opportunity School seats in Baltimore, especially at the high school level, the school system must work with state policymakers to recruit organizations who already operate schools performing at the Opportunity School level in other states to open schools in Baltimore. Our conclusion, and indeed conviction, is that if Baltimore City Public Schools and the state of Maryland invest in the policies outlined below, Baltimore can ensure that 50 percent of children from low-income households are in Opportunity School seats by 2022.

6 Will Dobbie and Roland G. Fryer, Jr., “Getting Beneath the Veil of Effective Schools: Evidence from New York City,” National Bureau of Economic Research (2011), accessed March 17, 2014, http://www.nyccharterschools.org/sites/default/files/resources/effective_schools_fryer.pdf.

7 Ibid.

8 Eric A. Hanushek and Steven G. Rivkin, “Generalizations about Using Value-Added Measures of Teacher Quality,” *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings* 100 (2010): 267-271, accessed March 27, 2014, [http://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%2BRivkin%202010%20AER%20100\(2\).pdf](http://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%2BRivkin%202010%20AER%20100(2).pdf).

9 Matthew Clifford, Ellen Behrstock-Sherratt, and Jenni Fetters, “The Ripple Effect: A Synthesis of Research on Principal Influence to Inform Performance Evaluation Design,” *American Institutes for Research* (2012), page 7, accessed March 21, 2014, http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/1707_The_Ripple_Effect_d8_Online_0.pdf.

10 Gregory F. Branch, Eric A. Hanushek, and Steven G. Rivkin, “Estimating the Effect of Leaders on Public Sector Productivity: The Case of School Principals,” *National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research* (2012), accessed March 21, 2014, http://www.caldercenter.org/upload/CALDER-WorkingPaper-32_FINAL.pdf.

The real common denominator underlying school success, in other words, is an effective leader.

1 *Expand the reach of Opportunity School principals by giving them a larger role in selecting, training and mentoring new principals.*

Opportunity School leaders agree that the school system can expand the reach of its most effective principals by giving them a larger role in cultivating new principals and developing current principals. Specifically, the school system should give Opportunity School principals a formal role in approving new principal hires, such as serving on a selection panel made up of Opportunity School principals. Opportunity School principals should also be placed in mentoring relationships with new and current principals and replace or lead the school system's Network Teams that support schools.

This recommendation should not require a significant amount of new school system resources. We heard from several Opportunity School principals that many central office services do not add significant value to schools and that redirecting those funds to school leaders could improve their effectiveness and give them extra bandwidth to help cultivate and develop other principals.

2 *Give principals more autonomy in exchange for greater accountability.*

Another popular suggestion we heard from school leaders is that effective principals deserve more autonomy over budgets, personnel and curriculum. Research confirms that a principal's impact on student achievement stems mainly from his or her ability to effectively manage an organization.¹¹ If the most important management decisions are taken out of principals' hands, we cannot reasonably expect them to effectively manage their organizations. Principals need autonomy, for example, to develop and retain their best teachers. In a recent survey of large urban school districts, two-thirds of principals said they do not have the necessary flexibility and autonomy to ensure that they keep their most effective teachers.¹² School system requirements like forced teacher placement stand in the way.¹³

Those who follow Baltimore City Public Schools from an outside perspective may think that this recommendation has already been implemented. Unfortunately, what we heard from the principals, and what we see, is that while the school system may have made efforts to give principals more autonomy, in practice autonomy remains extremely limited.

11 Jason Grissom and Susanna Loeb, "Triangulating Principal Effectiveness: How Perspectives of Parents, Teachers, and Assistant Principals Identify the Central Importance of Managerial Skills," National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (2009), accessed March 21, 2014, <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/1001443-Triangulating-Principal-Effectiveness.pdf>.

12 TNTP, "The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America's Urban Schools," (New York: TNTP, 2012), page 20, accessed March 19, 2014, http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_Irreplaceables_2012.pdf.

13 *Ibid.*, page 21.



In some instances, principals have less autonomy over areas in which they are experts and more autonomy over areas in which they are not experts. While the Baltimore City Public Schools Fair Student Funding policy ostensibly gives principals more autonomy over their budgets, this autonomy is constrained by the amount of funding that remains under the discretion of the central office. It is also constrained by the number of positions principals have to fill according to state and school system policy, the rising costs (which are almost completely out of their control) of compensating staff members and the collective bargaining agreements that prescribe the types of positions that principals can fill and prevent innovation or graduated systems of leadership development for their teachers.

Another example of intended autonomy that is hindered in practice involves curriculum and instruction. Principals have been told that they can use their Fair Student Funding to adopt the curriculum and instructional practices that they choose, but the central office continues to have a Teaching and Learning Department that generates curricular materials that are not requested and in many cases not used by principals. The money used for that department could be distributed to the schools themselves to fuel more autonomy or could be used collectively by principals to drive the kinds of curricular materials they feel their students need.

As the school system gives principals more control over the aspects of schooling that impact student achievement, it should also consider centralizing certain functions that are tangential to the success of students and that are not within the expertise of principals, such as campus grounds keeping. This will free principals to focus on what they know best and what matters most for their students' success.

Finally, autonomy should not come without conditions. A principal must demonstrate his or her successful judgment and discretion to lead children to achieve at high levels. If his or her results prove otherwise, the school system should implement professional development requirements to help the principal improve. For example, the principal might spend another year or two working as an assistant or resident principal under an effective principal before being given another principal position and being granted the autonomy that comes with that position again.

With the proper mix of greater autonomy and accountability described here, highly effective principals will be better equipped to grow the number of high-quality seats in their schools and better serve all of Baltimore's children.

3 *Increase the number of social workers in schools.*

We heard loud and clear that there is a need and an opportunity to increase the number of social workers in schools. These social workers will give principals the support they need to help students from low-income families succeed academically in spite of the trauma that many endure as a result of the challenges their families face. Public schools in Baltimore City are fortunate to have in their vicinity several excellent institutions of higher education that train social workers, so we can be confident that there is a sufficient supply of high-quality social workers in the area. In addition, this recommendation need not cost the school system an inordinate amount of money given that third-party service providers can bill Medicaid for the cost of services rendered to any Medicaid-eligible student.

4 *Support school efforts to develop local partnerships that increase the number of part-time reading interventionists in schools.*

Several Opportunity School leaders suggested that students would benefit from extra one-on-one or small group reading intervention at their schools. In fact, some schools already partner with local universities, nonprofit organizations and foundations to recruit and employ part-time reading interventionists. We recommend that the central office support the development of such partnerships in more schools across the school system. For example, the central office might devote a small source of funding, paid into by each school, to assist in estab-



lishing a pool of qualified part-time interventionists provided by local organizations. Principals could then hire interventionists directly from this pool. It would be important that principals have the autonomy to select the interventionists they think would be most effective with their students and to dismiss interventionists that they felt were not effective.

Many organizations can provide part-time reading interventionists at minimal cost. For example, schools of education at local universities may provide aspiring educators the opportunity to serve as reading interventionists for a modest stipend and/or academic credit. University students would also benefit from the clinical experience of serving in this capacity. Local nonprofits may also recruit retirees to serve as part-time reading interventionists, either for a small stipend or on a volunteer basis. By setting aside a small source of funding for partnership development, the school system can help foster such ideas and turn them into reality.

5 *Recruit operators from around the country with a proven track record of success with children from low-income households to operate schools in Baltimore.*

Reaching the 50 percent Opportunity School target by 2022 will require significant improvements in the city's public schools, and we believe that more leadership opportunities for Baltimore's best principals, expanded principal autonomy, more social workers in schools and the development of more community partnerships will together start the school system on the path to meeting this ambitious target. Still, it is unrealistic to expect the school system to go it alone. The school system and state must work together to create the conditions necessary for proven Opportunity Schools from other cities to expand into Baltimore.

This partnership is especially critical given the dearth of Opportunity and On-the-Cusp High Schools. We need to confront the sobering fact that there is not a single nonselective public high school in Baltimore that meets even the On-the-Cusp criteria, much less the criteria to be designated an Opportunity School.

And it is not for want of trying. Many years ago, under the leadership of CEO Carmen Russo, Baltimore City Public Schools introduced a high school reform called Innovation High Schools. The high schools were relatively small in size, were allowed certain autonomies and had different areas of focus. Today, almost all of the Innovation High Schools have either closed due to poor performance or have converted to a different model (traditional public school or public charter school), and not one is an Opportunity or On-the-Cusp School. More recently, former Baltimore City Public Schools CEO Dr. Andres Alonso introduced a model of schools that included both middle and high school grades called Transformation Schools. As with the Innovation High Schools, almost all the Transformation Schools have closed or will close at the end of this school year due to poor performance, or have converted to a different model. Again, not one is an Opportunity or On-the-Cusp School.

To build performance on the strengths of other successful high schools, Baltimore needs to look outside of the city to what has worked in other parts of the country. Fortunately, there are several school operators in other states who have opened high schools that have repeatedly led children from low-income households to outperform overall state proficiency rates. These charter management organizations lead entire networks of schools that meet the Opportunity School criteria.

Most, if not all, of these networks would attribute their success in large part to the autonomy afforded to them in the states where they operate. They feel strongly that without control of their own budgets, personnel, curriculum and policy decisions, these schools would not be leading students from low-income households to perform at such high levels.

We have personally reached out to several of these network operators, and many have expressed interest in considering expansion into Baltimore if the right policies are put into place. We plan to follow up on this report with a full proposal for a new “Opportunity Academy” law that would make these new policies a reality. In the meantime, we have outlined below the basic principles of a law that would be necessary to attract new Opportunity Academy operators to Baltimore:

1. The law gives Opportunity Academy operators full legal and fiscal autonomy and requires an independent governing board to govern each operator organization.
2. The law exempts Opportunity Academies from state and local laws and regulations, except those dealing with student safety and health, civil rights, special education and compliance with federal laws and regulations.
3. The law makes all Opportunity Academy employees, including principals and teachers, employees of the operator. As such, Opportunity Academy employees will not be subjected to any existing school system’s collective bargaining agreements.
4. The law specifies a funding formula that gives Opportunity Academies equal access to all student funding and requires that Opportunity Academies also have equal access to available school facilities and facility funding.

The roadmap

5

Seven percent of students from low-income Baltimore households (5,131 of 71,334) are presently enrolled in Opportunity Schools and entrance-criteria schools meeting the Opportunity School performance criteria. We believe that if implemented, the policies detailed in this report can grow that number to 50 percent of students from low-income families in the next eight years.

The Maryland Department of Planning projects that Baltimore City public school enrollment will reach 85,890 students by 2022.¹⁴ If the percentage of students from low-income households remains steady at the current 84.9 percent,¹⁵ then the city must make available 36,460 Opportunity School seats to meet the 50 percent target in 2022. To demonstrate the feasibility of this goal, we have created a roadmap to crossing the 36,460-seat threshold. The full roadmap is located in Appendix B, and a graphical version is below.

If the school system implements our policy recommendations for the 2014–2015 school year, each Opportunity School principal should have the capacity to begin mentoring and training two other principals annually. We believe that this mentorship and training, as well as more autonomy, social workers and reading interventionists, will lead at least one-third of mentored principals to become Opportunity School principals each year (e.g., if 21 non-Opportunity School principals are mentored, seven will become Opportunity School principals). To provide a check on this, we also assume that each year, one out of ten Opportunity School principals will leave their current positions. Under these conditions, the school system can expect to have 113 Opportunity School principals developed and trained by the 2021–22 school year, accounting for 27,302 Opportunity School seats.¹⁶

As the school system fosters development of new Opportunity School seats, we also recommend that, in the 2015 legislative session, the General Assembly pass a Baltimore-specific Opportunity Academy law that will attract operators who have met our criteria in other states to start and operate Opportunity Academies in Baltimore. If five new Opportunity Academies open in 2016–2017, two additional Opportunity Academies open each year thereafter and each Opportunity Academy adds one new grade per year (reaching a total of four grades per school), then Opportunity Academies could account for 6,000 new Opportunity School seats by the 2021–2022 school year.¹⁷ We believe that many of these new operators will open Opportunity Academy high schools, the area of greatest need in Baltimore.

¹⁴ “Public School Enrollment Projections,” Maryland Department of Planning (2013), page 61, accessed April 16, 2014, http://planning.maryland.gov/msdc/School_Enrollment/SchoolEnrollmentProjection_2013_for_View.pdf.

¹⁵ This estimate is likely too high given that FARMs rates were higher in 2013 than they were in 2008, before the Great Recession. We expect the FARMs rate to drop as the economy improves. Projections were not available, however, so we used the most recent figures available.

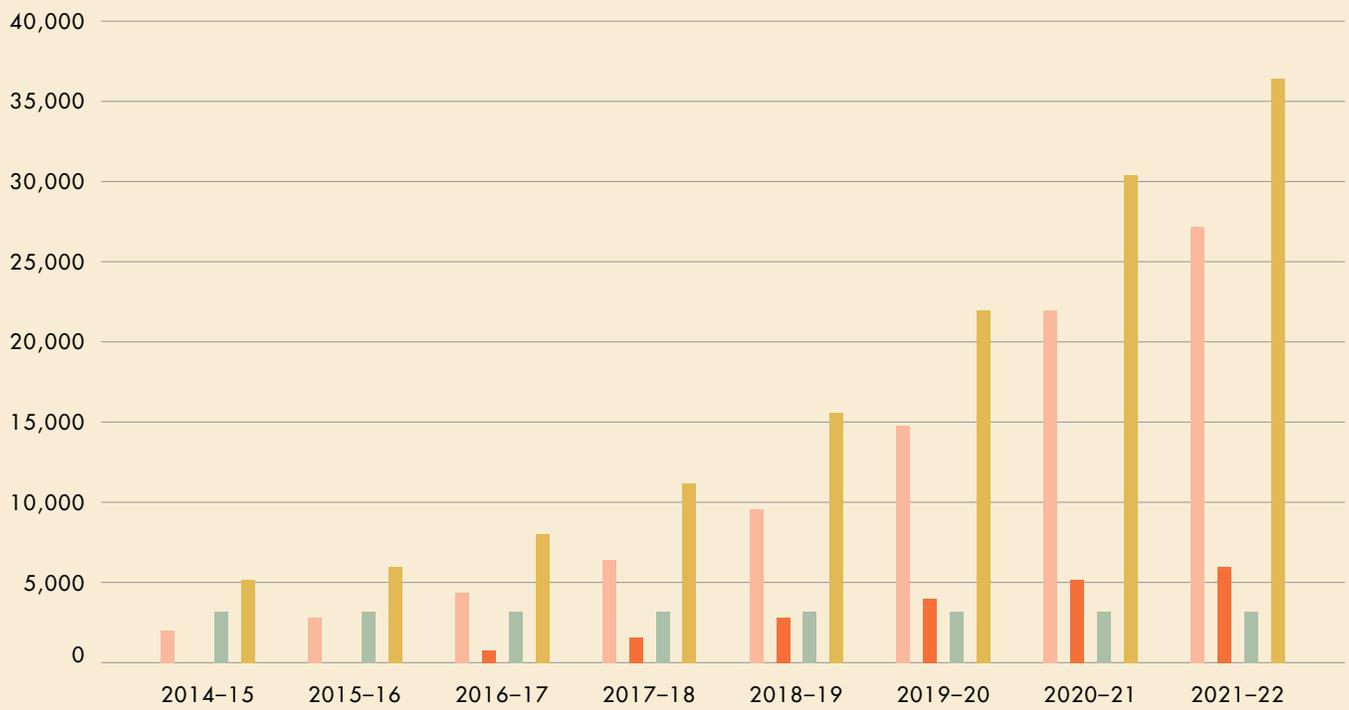
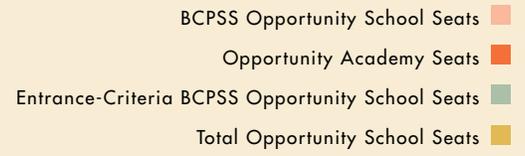
¹⁶ This assumes each newly developed Opportunity School principal creates 242 additional Opportunity School seats (242 is the current average number of students from low-income households enrolled in each Opportunity School program).

¹⁷ This assumes that Opportunity Academies enroll 125 students from low-income households per grade level.



If the number of Baltimore entrance-criteria seats meeting the Opportunity School criteria remains constant at 3,196, then the roadmap shows that the city will cross the 36,460-seat threshold in the 2021–2022 school year, reaching 36,498 Opportunity School seats. The graph below shows how this progression takes place so that the city can provide a majority of its students from low-income households the opportunity to receive a high-quality education.

Opportunity School Seats Roadmap



Conclusion

Opportunity School leaders from across Baltimore are proving that income and achievement are not inextricably linked. Students from low-income Baltimore families can receive a high-quality education. Throughout the process of writing this report, we have been constantly inspired by the principals, their faculty, their staff, and, most of all, by the students themselves.

Still, there is truth in numbers. There are far too many students from low-income Baltimore families who do not receive the education they deserve. That is why MarylandCAN recommends five policy changes that can change Baltimore for the better. We believe that with these policy investments in place—better utilization of Opportunity School principals, more autonomy for effective principals, more social workers in schools, support for partnerships that increase the number of reading interventionists in schools and a new law that attracts more Opportunity School operators, especially high school operators, to Baltimore—there will be a day in the future when Baltimore can proudly claim the mantle of providing a high-quality education for all of its students.

Principal Interview Responses

Best Practices at Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools

Use data to differentiate instruction and to provide regular intervention and enrichment for students.

Encourage teacher collaboration and peer feedback.

Establish high academic and behavioral expectations for students.

Hire and retain effective teachers.

Schools Citing Practice

EMPOWERMENT
LIBERTY
MEDFIELD HEIGHTS
TUNBRIDGE
THOMAS JOHNSON
BLSYW
CROSSROADS
KIPP
MIDTOWN
MOUNT WASHINGTON
ROLAND PARK

CECIL
EMPOWERMENT
TUNBRIDGE
THOMAS JOHNSON
BLSYW
MOUNT ROYAL

THOMAS JOHNSON
KIPP
BLSYW
MIDTOWN
TUNBRIDGE
MOUNT WASHINGTON

THOMAS JOHNSON
PATTERSON PARK
KIPP
BLSYW
MOUNT WASHINGTON

Best Practices at Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools (continued)

Give teachers autonomy and flexibility in the classroom.

Provide good professional development for teachers (one school suggested developing university partnerships for professional development).

Establish a strong and consistent school culture, including structure and routines that don't change from year to year, consistency of vision and follow-through on commitments.

Focus on family engagement and cultivating strong family partnerships (e.g., hold parent workshops on academic topics, promote a strong PTO).

Focus on teacher retention generally (one school suggested giving teachers roles in decision-making processes to promote school cohesiveness).

Extend the reach of effective teachers to more students (e.g., effective teachers mentor other teachers).

Maintain a lean administrative structure and spend as little money as possible on administration.

Frequently visit rooms, observe teachers, and give teachers feedback.

Maintain an intensive focus on reading and foundational skills that students need to master to access higher level material.

Offer robust wrap-around services.

Schools Citing Practice

EMPOWERMENT
HAMILTON
THOMAS JOHNSON
BLSYW
MOUNT WASHINGTON

EMPOWERMENT
THOMAS JOHNSON
GOVANS

LIBERTY
THOMAS JOHNSON
MIDTOWN

TUNBRIDGE
THOMAS JOHNSON
MIDTOWN

THOMAS JOHNSON
GOVANS
MIDTOWN

CECIL
LIBERTY

CECIL
LIBERTY

CECIL
LEITH WALK

MEDFIELD HEIGHTS
CROSSROADS

HAMILTON
LIBERTY

Best Practices at Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools (continued)

Schools Citing Practice

Keep class sizes small.

EMPOWERMENT
BLSYW

Use teacher “looping” in consecutive grades (teachers follow students from one grade to next to maintain consistency).

KIPP
MOUNT ROYAL

Hire teachers who fit the culture and philosophy of the school.

EMPOWERMENT
MIDTOWN

Give students challenging homework assignments and try to get parents involved in homework.

LEITH WALK
MIDTOWN

Give effective teachers more responsibility and opportunities for advancement.

CECIL

Give teachers the materials and supplies they need in their classroom.

CECIL

Always support the school’s teachers.

LEITH WALK

Develop community partnerships that allow students to receive more individualized attention (e.g., retired educator tutors and university tutors).

GOVANS

Develop evidence-based student interventions through the Student Support Team (e.g., Read Naturally, Foundations, and Build Up/Spiral Up).

MEDFIELD HEIGHTS

Hire principals who focus on teaching and learning.

CROSSROADS

Ensure administrators are responsive and accessible to teachers, students and parents.

HAMILTON

Use a co-teaching classroom model to promote full inclusion of special education students.

MEDFIELD HEIGHTS

Ensure socioeconomic diversity across classrooms.

ROLAND PARK

Best Practices at Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools (continued)

Raise additional funds for the school (e.g., PTO fundraising, annual fund, alumni giving).

Engage students with a “whole child” approach to education (e.g., student-centered programming, proactive management, mediation and building relationships between students and teachers).

Work to minimize student mobility.

Maximize cost-effectiveness of the school budget (e.g., hire parents to assist in classrooms and contract with high-quality third-party programs).

Use evidence-based curriculum and instructional strategies.

Implement a gifted and talented curriculum for students who need it.

Provide students many extracurricular activity options.

Teach reading and vocabulary in a consistent way.

Give students recognition for accomplishments (e.g., after each marking period, give each student a certificate for what they are best in).

Hire and develop quality support staff (e.g., IEP Chair, special educators, school psychologists, ISTs, and mentor teachers); make sure they are versed in research-based interventions, technology applications for education, and recent trends in educational research, and that they share the same vision of the instructional leader/administrator.

Schools Citing Practice

ROLAND PARK

PATTERSON PARK

PATTERSON PARK

LIBERTY

EMPOWERMENT

MOUNT ROYAL

LEITH WALK

LEITH WALK

LEITH WALK

MEDFIELD HEIGHTS

**BCPSS Policy Recommendations
from Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools**

**Number
of Schools
Recommending
each Policy***

Reduce spending on central administration and send more money to schools.
Support school efforts to develop local partnerships that increase the number of part-time reading interventionists in schools.

4

Give principals and teachers more autonomy if they're getting results for students.
Utilize Opportunity School principals to develop new principals and mentor current principals.
Increase the number of mental health professionals in schools.

3

Reform the Network Team model (one school suggested allowing Opportunity School principals to run the Network Teams; one school suggested eliminating Network Teams altogether).
Increase the rigor of the teacher hiring process to ensure we select the best candidates (one school suggested requiring candidates to submit a video of a sample lesson; one school suggested asking candidates more probing questions that get to their beliefs on whether all kids can achieve and what they will contribute to student achievement).

2

Promote a culture of teacher accountability that allows ineffective teachers to be dismissed.
Improve grassroots communication with parents to educate them on the importance of attendance.
Implement policies to hold parents accountable for student attendance.
Improve the rigor of the charter school authorizing process (e.g., require charter applicant to have a track record of leading schools to success).
Centralize functions like landscaping and building cleaning so principals don't have to spend time on them; principals can use the new time to mentor other principals.
Increase the student population of existing Opportunity Schools, including through the 21st Century Buildings initiative, as much as possible.

1

**BCPSS Policy Recommendations
from Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools
(continued)**

**Number
of Schools
Recommending
each Policy***

Provide more support for new teachers (e.g., require mentor teachers for new teachers, place an experienced teacher in new teachers’ rooms for the first week of school).

Require mentors for new principals (in their first two years); mentors should be retired effective principals and should coach new principals 2–4 times per month.

Give principals opportunities to go to job fairs to recruit and select teachers.

Keep schools small (e.g., 300 students).

Don’t allow teachers to know which students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (so their expectations aren’t biased).

Give more resources to under-enrolled schools so they can improve and stabilize their student populations.

Provide more funding for special education students who need self-contained instruction.

Provide more funding for extra staff.

Do more to support teachers generally.

Minimize teacher turnover (e.g., require longer commitments from teachers).

Do more to cultivate school leaders from within schools.

Place surplus teachers in lowest performing schools; dismiss them after one year if their performance isn’t satisfactory.

Improve the system for student data entry and analysis.

Serve more nutritious food to students.

Develop policies that allow schools to productively deal with student behavior issues (e.g., require parents to come to the school when there is a behavior problem).

Charter schools should be provided the same materials as other city schools at no additional cost (e.g., the school system does not currently provide Agile Mind to charter schools).

Set flexible enough performance parameters to allow charter schools to be successful, and financially support those that are successful.

Utilize successful charter schools to help improve other charter schools.

1

BCPSS and/or State Policy Recommendations from Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools

Number of Schools Recommending each Policy*

Institute a more equitable school funding formula (e.g., weighted student-based funding, money follows the child policy).

3

Provide salary incentives to encourage effective teachers to teach in hard-to-staff schools (e.g., high-poverty schools).
Expand school choice; parents in low-income communities deserve to choose where their child goes to school.
In general, institute more policies that make the teaching profession more attractive to enter and more sustainable to continue. The model teacher position in Baltimore is a good start, as are alternative pathways to teaching and residency programs like the Urban Teacher Center, but we need more.
Improve evaluations for out-of-classroom teachers and teachers working with small groups; it is difficult to fairly and effectively evaluate this important group under the current evaluation model.
Improve technology infrastructure in schools (hardware and internet), so schools can deliver 21st century instruction.

1

State Policy Recommendations from Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools

Number of Schools Recommending each Policy*

Require education schools to increase selectivity and rigor and close education schools that are not preparing teachers well.
Offer incentives for talented undergraduates to enter the teaching profession (e.g., loan forgiveness).

1

Recommendations to increase the number of Opportunity Middle and High Schools

Number of Schools Recommending each Policy*

Minimize student mobility; promote the stability of the student population (one school suggested accepting no new students after a cutoff date).

2

- Retain effective teachers.
- Hold students to high expectations.**
- Improve wrap-around services and increase the number of psychologists and social workers.
- Increase the number of after-school programs.**
- Engender character and leadership in students (e.g., require character lessons and guidance classes once per week).
- Reduce class sizes.**
- Maintain block scheduling.

1

* We cite numeric totals instead of school names because we promised leaders that their names would remain confidential, allowing them to feel comfortable speaking honestly and openly.

Opportunity School Seats Roadmap Calculations

If Baltimore City Public Schools and the Maryland General Assembly enact the five policy recommendations in this report, we project that Opportunity School seats will increase according to the following trajectory:

Opportunity School seats in Baltimore

	Number of BCPSS Opportunity School principals at beginning of year	Number of other BCPSS principals at beginning of year	Number of BCPSS principals being developed by BCPSS Opportunity School principals	Development success rate	Newly developed BCPSS Opportunity School principals by end of year	Annual BCPSS Opportunity School principal attrition rate	Number of BCPSS Opportunity School seats at beginning of year	Number of Opportunity Academy seats	Number of entrance-criteria BCPSS Opportunity School seats	TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS
RATE				33,3%		10%				
2014–2015	8	186	16		5		1935	0	3196	5131
2015–2016	12	182	24		8		2902	0	3196	6098
2016–2017	18	176	36		12		4354	625	3196	8175
2017–2018	27	167	54		18		6531	1500	3196	11227
2018–2019	40	154	81		27		9796	2625	3196	15617
2019–2020	61	133	121		40		14694	4000	3196	21890
2020–2021	91	103	103		34		22041	5000	3196	30237
2021–2022	113	81	81		27		27302	6000	3196	36498

Growth pattern of each Opportunity Academy

YEAR	Number of grades per school	Number of FARMS students per grade	Total FARMS students
1	1	125	125
2	2	125	250
3	3	125	375
4	4	125	500
5	4	125	500
6	4	125	500

NOTE: We do not mean to suggest that every Opportunity Academy would grow according precisely to these numbers, but based on our understanding of the schools outside Maryland that are performing at the Opportunity School level, we think this growth pattern closely matches the way most Opportunity Academies would likely grow.

Opportunity Academy seats in Baltimore

YEAR	Number of Opportunity Academies in first year	Number of Opportunity Academies in second year	Number of Opportunity Academies in third year	Number of Opportunity Academies in fourth year	Number of Opportunity Academies in fifth year	Number of Opportunity Academies in sixth year	TOTAL number of Opportunity Academy seats
2016–2017	5	0	0	0	0	0	625
2017–2018	2	5	0	0	0	0	1500
2018–2019	2	2	5	0	0	0	2625
2019–2020	2	2	2	5	0	0	4000
2020–2021	2	2	2	2	5	0	5000
2021–2022	2	2	2	2	2	5	6000

Methodology

Defining Opportunity Schools

Throughout this report, we have emphasized our goal of celebrating Baltimore schools that are repeatedly breaking the link between income and achievement by leading students from low-income households to achieve at high levels. We recognize, however, that it is possible to define “repeatedly breaking the link” and “achieve at high levels” in a number of ways.

In settling on a definition, we sought to offer an intuitive set of criteria and to set the bar high enough that we feel comfortable claiming any schools that meet our criteria are truly defying the odds for students from low-income households. Our criteria meet these objectives.

The overall state proficiency rate is high, but not insurmountable. The statewide proficiency gap between students from low-income households and others is eight percentage points in fourth grade reading and approaching 20 percentage points in eighth grade math.¹⁸

In addition, requiring that schools meet this threshold in at least half of tested grades and in both core subjects ensures that students are consistently receiving a high-quality education. Requiring schools to replicate success over multiple years suggests that their success is not just a function of statistical noise or one particularly motivated or high-skilled cohort of students.

For reasons related to this last concern, we decided to omit entrance-criteria schools from the Opportunity and On-the-Cusp lists, despite several making the cut. Entrance-criteria schools are any that require a minimum level of prior student performance or a specific student talent for admission. Although there are many high-performing students from low-income households in these schools, and they deserve recognition for their success, it would be difficult to attribute that success to the school alone, given that the school conditioned acceptance on a particularly high, pre-existing level of skill or achievement.

Finally, we also made a decision to treat combined elementary/middle schools as two separate schools. This decision ensured that each school received an equal opportunity to meet the criteria.

¹⁸ “Maryland State Assessments,” Maryland Report Card, accessed March 27, 2014, <http://mdreportcard.org/Assessments.aspx?K=99AAAA#MSAgrade4all>.

Data sources

Proficiency rates used to evaluate Opportunity and On-the-Cusp status were taken from the 2013 Maryland Report Card website and cross-referenced with data housed on the Baltimore City Public Schools Achievement and Accountability Office website. Demographic data was taken from the 2013 Maryland Report Card website, with the exception of special education rates for The Empowerment Academy's middle school program and Midtown Academy's middle school program, which were obtained through a state data request and represent school-wide special education percentages (rather than middle school program-specific percentages, which were unavailable due to censored data). Each school's total student enrollment, percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and percentage of special education students were found in the "Students Receiving Special Services" section on each school's page at mdreportcard.org. The percentage of students in each racial/ethnic category was calculated using numbers from the "Demographics Data Summary" section. Mobility rates were located in the "Student Mobility" section.

It should also be noted that principals provided their own biographical information.

Checking for other factors that explain Opportunity School success

During the course of drafting this report, we asked other local nonprofits and community members to provide feedback on our methodology. Many questioned whether there are other factors that might explain Opportunity Schools' success with students from low-income households aside from strong leadership, great teachers and best practices. In other words, are there any advantages afforded to Opportunity Schools that other schools are not afforded?

Although we were unable to control for every extraneous factor affecting student achievement, we did seek to analyze data to address specific concerns. For example, we checked to see if Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools enroll a disproportionately small number of special education students. We found that they do not. Of the eight Opportunity Schools, five had special education populations, as a percentage of the total student population, within two percentage points of the school system average in 2013. Of the remaining three schools, one had a percentage of special education students that was substantially higher than the school system average, while two had

lower percentages of special education students. Among On-the-Cusp Elementary Schools, in a majority of schools (five of eight) the percentage of special education students is higher than the school system average. On-the-Cusp Middle Schools are the only possible outlier. In each On-the-Cusp Middle School the percentage of special education students is lower than the school system average. However, when compared to the state average, we found that three of the seven On-the-Cusp Middle Schools had a higher percentage of special education students than the state average, and another two were within two percentage points. Weighed together, this evidence suggests that Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools do not systematically enroll fewer special education students, and in fact, many enroll more than average.

We also checked Opportunity and On-the-Cusp student mobility rates. Here, we found that only one school has a higher mobility rate than the school system average, although several others are close to the average. This data is only of limited utility, however. While low mobility rates are certainly good for a school, it is likely that the causation goes both ways: families and students choose not to leave a school, even when they have other options, because the school is high-performing. In other words, the lower mobility rates found in Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools are just as likely to be an effect of their success as a cause.

Third, we compared teacher experience levels in Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools to the school system average to see if that is a factor. We found that Opportunity Schools, but not On-the-Cusp Schools, employ significantly more experienced faculty than the school system average. However, we know from the research literature that after the first few years in the classroom, increases in experience level do not necessarily equate to increases in effectiveness.¹⁹ As with student mobility, we believe that higher teacher experience levels are just as likely an effect of Opportunity School success as they are a cause. Effective and experienced teachers are drawn to work, and stay, in high-performing schools. We attribute this phenomenon not only to the perceived high quality of these schools, but also to the focus that their principals put on developing and empowering their teachers. This focus, in turn, helps lead teachers to get great results for their students.

Lastly, we requested city data on the percentage of students in each school qualifying for free lunch versus the percentage qualifying for reduced-price lunch; the percentage of students in each school who were fully kindergarten ready according to the Maryland Model

¹⁹ Jennifer King Rice, "The Impact of Teacher Experience: Examining the Evidence and Policy Implications," National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (2010), accessed April 17, 2014, <http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/1001455-impactteacherexperience.pdf>.

for School Readiness; and for middle schools, the percentage of students who attended each of their various feeder elementary schools. This data would help answer questions on the academic preparedness of students in Opportunity and On-the-Cusp Schools prior to their enrollment at those schools. However, the data was not available in time to include in this report.

Why are there so few Opportunity Middle and High Schools?

Our methodology uncovered only one Opportunity Middle School and no Opportunity High Schools. Middle schools found better representation among On-the-Cusp Schools, but again, no high schools made the list. Are Baltimore's elementary schools just better schools than Baltimore's middle and high schools?

This is a difficult question to answer and many of the principals we interviewed had their own perspectives on this issue. One thing we know is that a significant number of particularly high-achieving middle and high school students are choosing to attend entrance-criteria schools. As a result, nonselective middle and high schools are starting with student bodies that are, on the whole, lower-achieving than the student bodies that elementary schools enroll. One middle school and four high schools (Hamilton Elementary/ Middle School's middle school program, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Baltimore City College, Paul Laurence Dunbar High School and Western High School) met the Opportunity School criteria but were omitted because of entrance criteria. These four high schools alone enroll 17 percent of high school students from low-income households in Baltimore.

Two additional programs (the middle school program at Roland Park Elementary/Middle School and Baltimore School for the Arts) met the On-the-Cusp threshold, but were also left out due to entrance criteria.

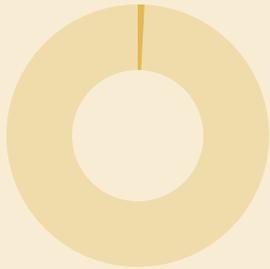
There is also a systemic explanation for the deficit of Opportunity Middle and High Schools. There are simply too few Opportunity Elementary Schools preparing students to succeed in later grades. The dearth of high-quality elementary schools is one possible reason why national data shows that achievement gaps grow across age groups. In math, for example, the socioeconomic achievement gap among 13-year-olds is larger than the same gap among nine-year-olds. While the best secondary programs, like those in our On-the-Cusp category, can overcome these initial achievement gaps, most struggle to do so. This gap is why we recommend making policy changes that would allow Baltimore to recruit new secondary school operators to the city with proven track records of overcoming achievement gaps.²⁰

²⁰ "NAEP Data Explorer (Long Term Trend)," National Center for Education Statistics, accessed March 25, 2014, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ltrdata/>.

Baltimore City public schools, FARMS students

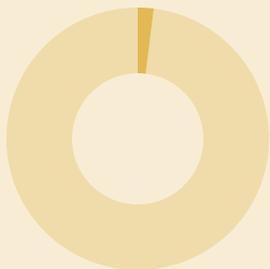
Grades 6–8

14,671 FARMS students



205

are in entrance-criteria middle schools that meet Opportunity School criteria

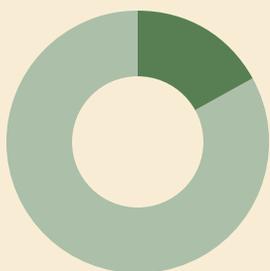


279

are in entrance-criteria middle schools that meet On-the-Cusp School criteria

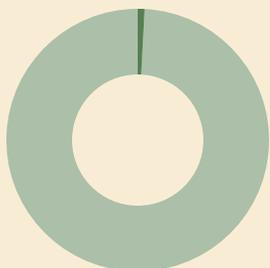
Grades 9–12

17,558 FARMS students



2,991

are in entrance-criteria middle schools that meet Opportunity School criteria



106

are in entrance-criteria middle schools that meet On-the-Cusp School criteria

Glossary

Community School

A school taking part in the Baltimore City Community School Initiative, which creates a network of partnerships between each participating school and other community resources that promote student achievement and family and community well-being.

FARMS

Qualifying for free or reduced-price school meals.

Mobility Rate

The percentage of students who transferred to the school or withdrew from the school in 2013.

SPED

Special education.

Students from low-income households/families

Students who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals based on family income.

About MarylandCAN

Maryland's achievement gap—the persistent and significant disparity between the academic achievement of low-income and minority children and their white, middle-class peers—is the most urgent social and economic problem facing our state. We have one of the country's largest achievement gaps between our haves and have-nots, and each and every one of us is paying the price for our failing public schools. But Maryland, like the entire nation, was built on the promise of universal education. Public schools are the cornerstone of our democracy. Our future is inextricably linked to the education of our children—all of them. MarylandCAN is building a new movement of concerned citizens advocating to fundamentally reform our public schools through smart public policies. We will not rest until every Maryland child, regardless of race, ethnicity or class, has access to a great public school.

www.marylandcan.org