

## The Road to Literacy

### How Data and Research Led Baltimore's Promise to Focus on Literacy Initiatives

#### Introduction

Baltimore's Promise has committed to a long-term focus on literacy for young people from birth to age 24, with a priority on older youth literacy and a goal of population-level change for Baltimore City's young people. Specifically, Baltimore's Promise will dedicate over \$30 million of funding in the next ten years to support two strategies: Out-of-School Time and Early Childhood Family Literacy. These initiatives were developed through years of data-driven research, analysis, and strategic planning. This report documents the key findings and data that led to Baltimore's Promise's commitment to literacy.

#### Post-Secondary Pathways Report

In 2017, Baltimore's Promise published a research brief, *Gaining Traction after High School Graduation: Understanding the Post-Secondary Pathways for Baltimore's Youth*. Conducted by researchers at the Baltimore Education Research Consortium and the Institute for Education Policy at Johns Hopkins University, the report examined the paths taken by members of Baltimore City Public Schools' high school class of 2009 at two stages: in the fall after high school graduation and six years after graduation. The complete report can be found [here](#). The report's Key Findings include the following.

More than one in four graduates were *opportunity youth*, meaning they neither enrolled in college nor entered the workforce in the semester after graduating from college.



**The high school class of 2009 had 4,280 graduates.**

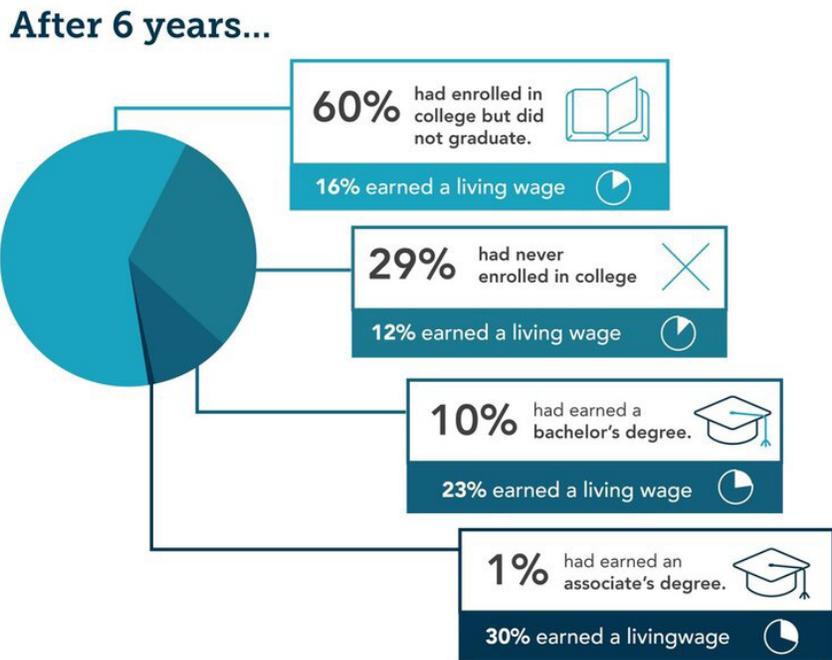
**29%**  
enrolled in a  
**4-year college**

**23%**  
enrolled in a  
**2-year college**

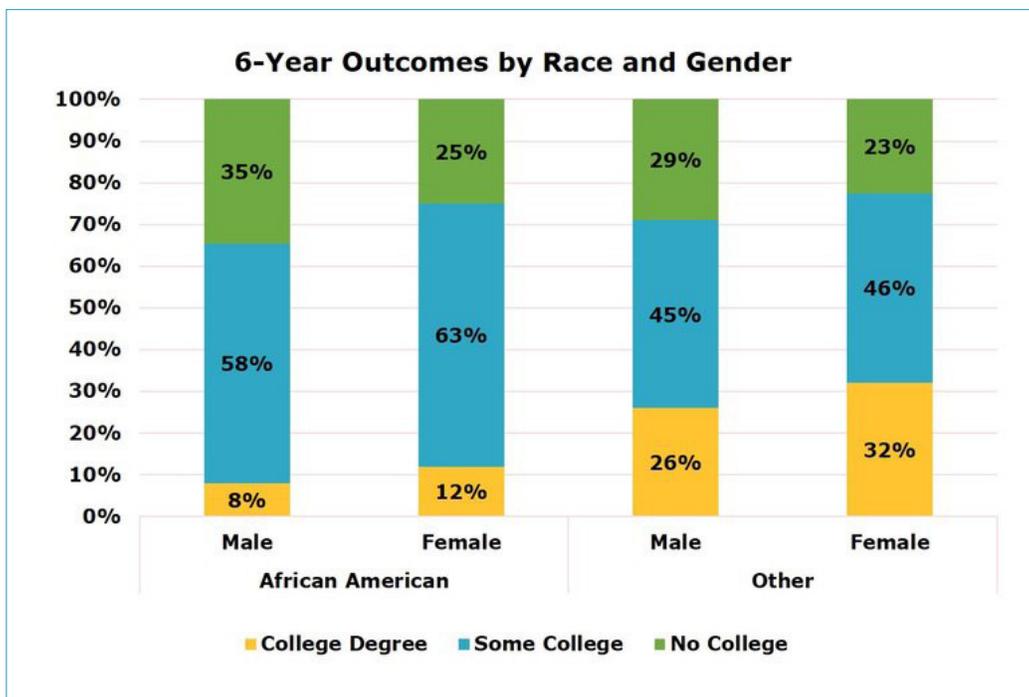
**22%**  
went directly into  
**the workforce**

**26%**  
did not enroll in college  
and did not appear to be  
in the Maryland workforce

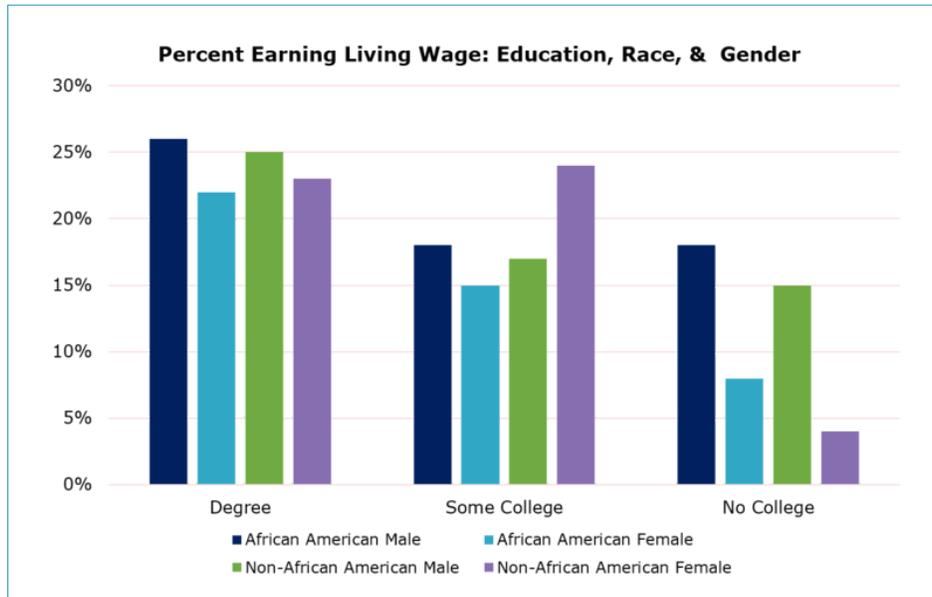
Among *opportunity youth*, their median earnings by 2017 were only around \$11,000 per year. Only 10% of 2009 City Schools graduates earned a four-year degree.



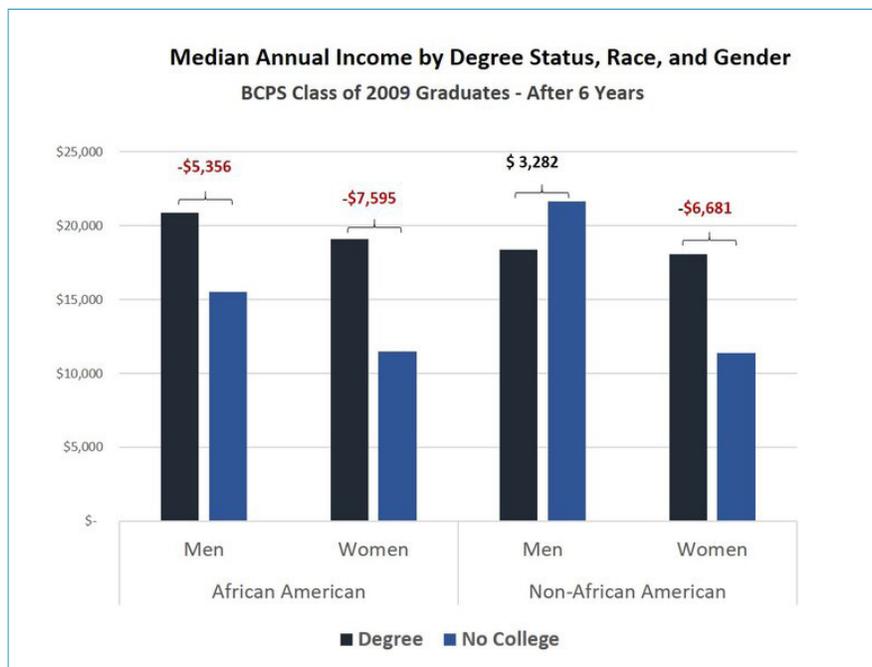
There are large gaps in degree completion between African American and white graduates. Only 8% of African American men who graduate from Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) had obtained a degree after six years, compared to 26% of non-African American male graduates.



The proportion of Baltimore City Public Schools 2009 graduates who earned a living wage was low for all groups. Median annual income for all City Schools graduates—regardless of degree attainment—was low relative to peers nationwide. College graduates earned a median annual income around \$19,300, while City Schools graduates who never entered college earned around \$13,400 per year.



Pay gaps between graduates who did and did not obtain college degrees are especially steep for African American/Black men and women.



Were they not disconnected from participation in the workforce, the 200 *opportunity youth* from the class of 2009 could have generated an additional \$3.4 million in tax revenue that could have contributed to education and other public programs.

## Grads2Careers & Summer Remediation

Born out of data from the Gaining Traction pathways report and from discussions within Baltimore Promise's High School Graduation and Career Readiness Workgroups, the Grads2Careers demonstration model was initiated in 2018. Grads2Careers (G2C) is a collaborative initiative between Baltimore's Promise, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED), and Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) that works to ensure that young adults can access employment opportunities in the city and overcome barriers that may stand in their way. Specifically, G2C connects recent graduates to occupational skills training programs that prepare them for jobs on a career track in high-growth sectors.

Early during the first cycle of G2C, assessments of participants' reading and math skills showed that a significant number of potential participants did not meet the academic eligibility requirements for the training programs — typically middle school-level proficiency in reading and math. In response, program staff added a summer remediation component to the initiative to better meet the needs of participants.

Data from the first summer remediation were encouraging: the median grade-level proficiency of participants in reading and math increased by 1.4 grade levels in reading and 0.9 grade levels in math. Summer remediation and centralized testing are now main components of Grads2Careers as the initiative heads into its fourth cycle.

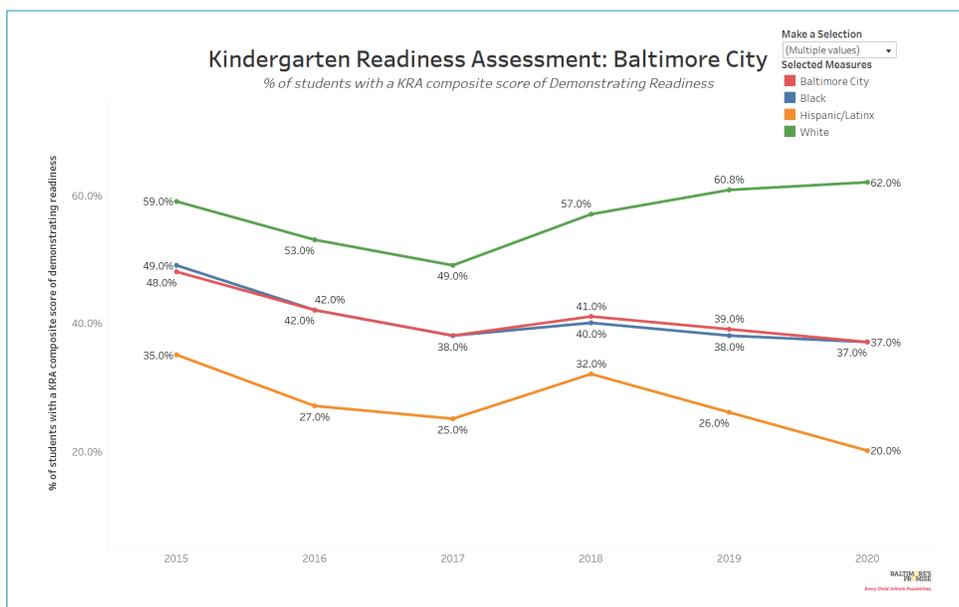
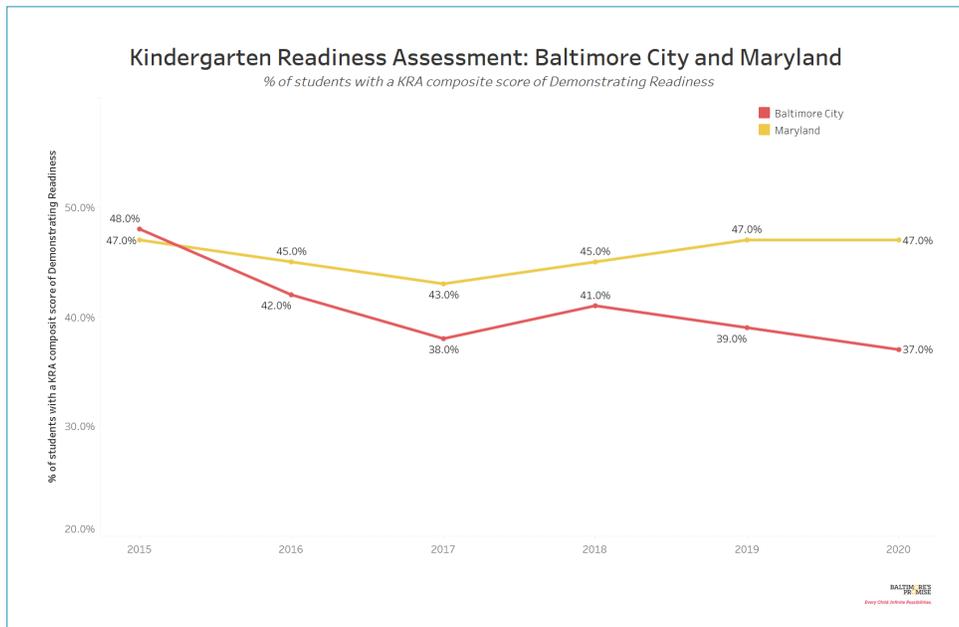


## Literacy Data from City Schools and the Baltimore’s Promise Scorecard

Baltimore’s Promise has also regularly collected and visualized education data in its Baltimore Youth Data Scorecard, which can be found [here](#).

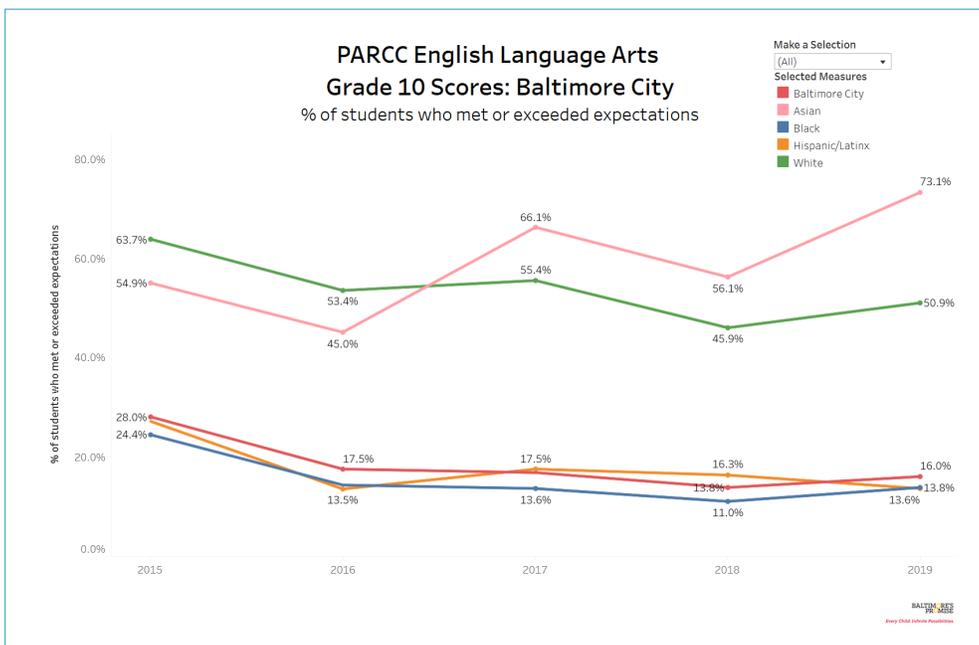
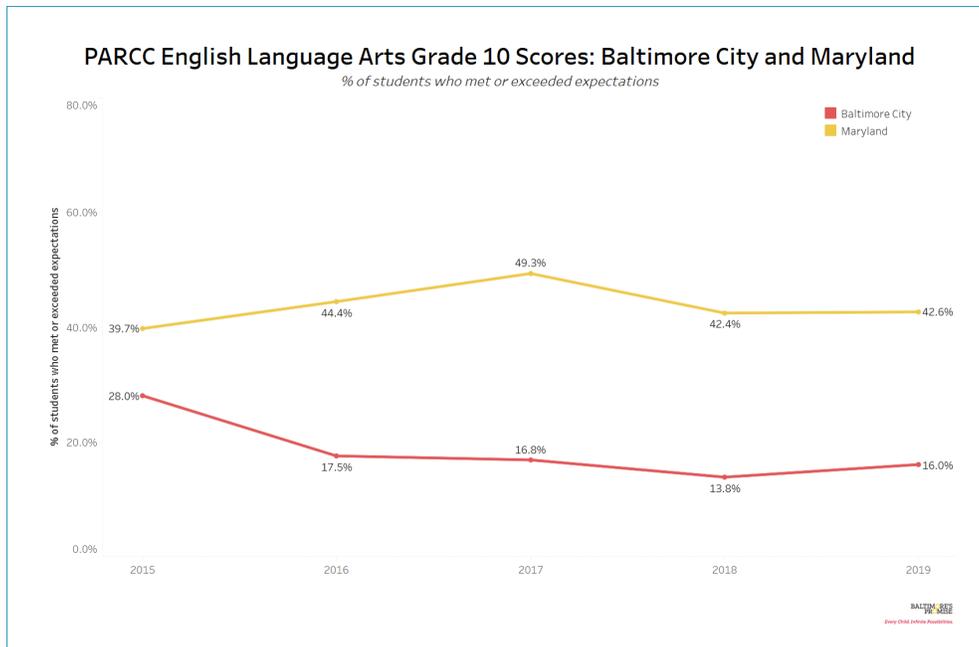
### Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

Kindergarten Readiness is a key benchmark on the Cradle-to-Career continuum. As such, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is an indicator tracked by Baltimore’s Promise that is directly related to both long term reading proficiency and overall child wellbeing. The charts below, presented and visualized on the [Baltimore Youth Data Scorecard](#), show that Baltimore City’s young people do not perform as well as the rest of the state in the KRA assessment. When this information is disaggregated, Black and Hispanic/Latinx youth have the weakest performance and show a downward trend in kindergarten readiness from 2015-2020 as measured by the KRA.



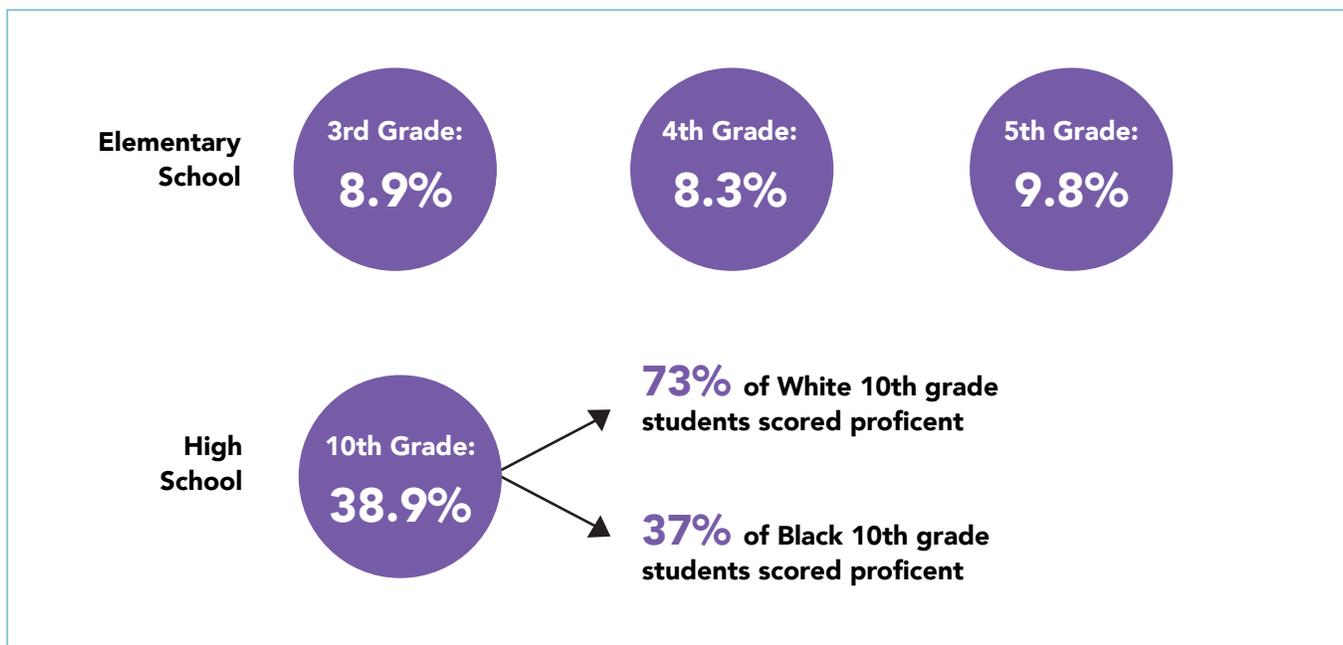
## PARCC ELA Grade 10

The PARCC exam was a standardized, subject-based academic proficiency test given by all public schools in Maryland until Fall 2020, when Maryland shifted to a new assessment. The charts below reflect the percent of Baltimore City 10th graders who met or exceeded ELA proficiency requirements of the PARCC. 16% of Baltimore City 10th graders are considered proficient, compared to 42.6% of the entire state. When the Baltimore City data is disaggregated, it shows that Black and Hispanic/Latinx young people have the weakest proficiency and also shows a downward trend in proficiency from 2015-2019.



## Proficiency Rates on Fall 2021 MCAP ELA Tests

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Maryland students did not take a standardized test for the 2019-2020 school year. Assessments for the 2020-2021 school year were shortened and administered in the Fall of 2021. According to the Fall 2021 MCAP results, less than 10% of Baltimore City 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders scored proficient on the English Language Arts test, while just under 39% of 10th graders scored proficient on the English Language Arts test. Large gaps between racial and ethnicity groups remain. For example, in the 10th grade in Baltimore City schools, 73% of White students scored proficient on the Fall 2021 ELA test, compared to less than 37% of Black or African American students. Because the MCAP and PARCC assessments are two different tests, results from each test should not be compared to one another.



## Literacy Data Walks

In the winter of 2020, Baltimore's Promise hosted Literacy Data Walks with over 150 youth in Baltimore City Public Schools to gather their feedback about why Baltimore's literacy levels were so low.

### Key Findings:

- Many students have test fatigue or do not see a connection between doing well on tests and better outcomes in life, leading some to not take tests seriously.
- School instruction needs to be more related to students' lives, dreams, and future job pursuits.
- Negative school climate and poor adult-student relationships hinder the learning environment.
- Youth need more high-quality programming outside of school.
- Students want more small-group or one-on-one learning opportunities.
- Students and their families need more supports to navigate the challenges of life outside of school-buildings.

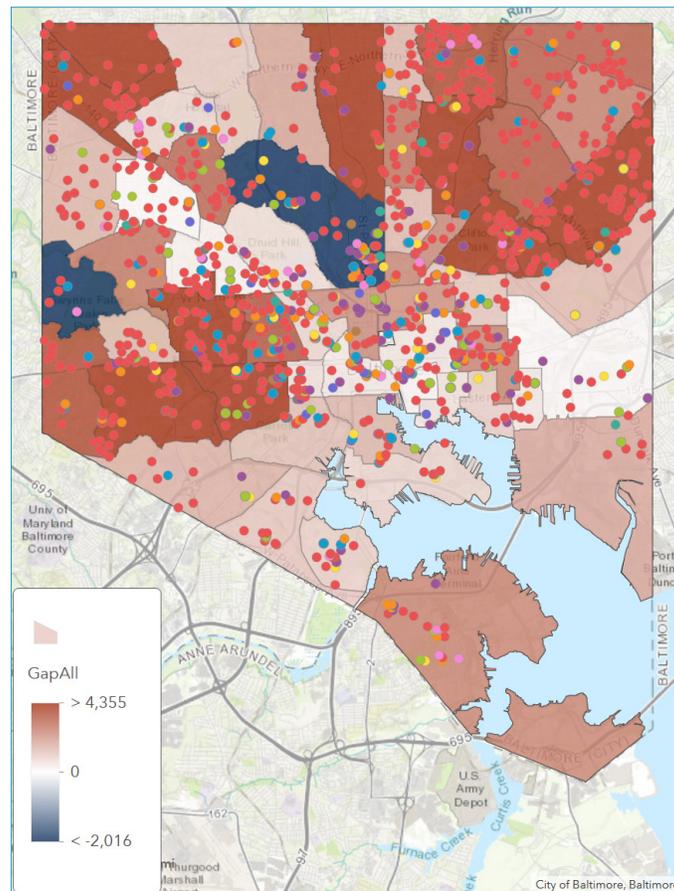
## Baltimore City Youth Opportunities Landscape (BCYOL)

In June 2021, Baltimore's Promise released the Baltimore City Youth Opportunities Landscape report, which can be found [here](#). The report is a collaborative public effort, facilitated by Baltimore's Promise, to centralize, aggregate, map, and analyze the youth opportunities available to young people ages 0 to 24.

In this first phase of the initiative, we catalogued 2,086 programs and 92,604 opportunities for Baltimore City youth.



Analyzing the geographic data, we found only three neighborhoods where there were more opportunities than the youth population there: Dickeyville/Franklintown, Medfield/Hampden/Woodberry/Remington, and Greater Charles Village/Barclay. All other neighborhoods have opportunity gaps.



## Literacy Research Report

In summer 2020, Baltimore's Promise released a Request for Proposals for the creation of a National Landscape Analysis of Evidence Based Literacy Interventions and Supports. The contract was awarded to LeadAbility, LLC., which completed a final report, Advancing Academic Literacy and Numeracy Learning for Older Youth, Young Adults, & Families in Baltimore. The 160-page final report comprehensively reviews literacy strategies, and the system-level supports needed to maintain them.

### Key findings for Advancing Academic Literacies for Older Youth and Young Adult Learners include:

- Systems that support academic literacy development of older youth and adult learners in Baltimore should focus on:
  - Collaborative strategic planning and visioning
  - Continuity of services and supports across grades K-12 and adult systems/programming
  - Literacy resource identification, access, and acquisition
- The authors recommend four practices for programs supporting the academic literacy development of older youth and adult learners in Baltimore:
  - Primacy of individualized assessment
  - Requirement of targeted, differentiated learning
  - Strategies for increasing motivation, persistence, and retention
  - Utility of wrap-around models

### Key findings for Advancing Intergenerational Family Literacy include:

- Systems that support intergenerational family literacy in Baltimore should focus on:
  - Collaborative strategic planning and visioning
  - Continuity of services and supports across government agencies (health, education, library) and community-based programming
  - Literacy resource identification, access, and acquisition
- The authors recommend four practices for programs (or networks of programs) supporting the intergenerational family literacy development in Baltimore:
  - Primacy of individualized, family-driven assessment
  - Prerequisite of parent-child interactive literacy activities and parent education/advocacy
  - Strategies for increasing motivation, persistence, and retention
  - Utility of wrap-around models